

THE VISION OF MAC CON GLINNE

Robin Flower called this tale, "an amazing composition...Mac Con Glinne, it will be seen, is an example of the type of truant scholar, the *scholaris vagans* of European literature, the happy-go-lucky vagabond who goes singing and swaggering through the Middle Ages until he finds his highest expression and final justification in François Villon" (1947, pp. 75-6). Indeed, this eleventh-century composition is an amazing tale. Its hero is Mac Con Glinne, who, at the beginning of the tale, is a clerical scholar or student at Armagh. Dissatisfied with the life of a poor student, he decides to take up poetry. His success in that profession is explained by his nickname, Anér or Aniér, meaning that, because of his powers of praise and satire, he could not be refused whatever he desired.

As Jackson points out in his edition of the work (1990), there are two major themes governing the story. The first is the widely-known practice of curing a tape worm by starving the victim and then drawing out the worm by holding food in front of the victim's open mouth. The second is the voyage to the otherworldly land of plenty. The otherworld is often depicted in early Irish and Welsh literature as a land reached by sea voyage, and the literature abounds in descriptions of the particular beauty and sumptuous provisions of such a place. In our story both of these themes are parodied: the tape worm turns out to be the devil (demon of gluttony) and the otherworld is depicted as a place made entirely of foods, mostly milk products and fatty meats.

Jackson also discusses in some detail the elements that are specifically mocked by the author. He makes fun of monks, especially of the monastery at Cork, the chief monastery of Munster. He is blasphemous in claiming that the angels are all waiting for him, and that his position in Heaven is assured. He parodies the sacraments, the use of relics and religious amulets, even the Passion of Christ. The literary methods of the monastic scribes are mocked, e.g., opening the story with reference to the four things required of compositions, a device originally reserved for ecclesiastical literature of a very serious kind. Then there is the gross exaggeration that one expects to find in the heroic sagas, such as the Ulster Cycle tales. Genealogical lore is parodied brilliantly in the recitation of Manchín's pedigree. And so on.

Whatever of the identity of Mac Con Glinne, Cathal mac Finguine is an historical figure, king of Munster from 721-742; see "The Battle of Allen."

Bibliography: Flower 1947; Jackson 1990; Meyer 1892

The Vision of Mac Con Glinne

The four things that are asked of every literary composition are asked of this one as well, to wit: the place, the person, the time, and the reason for it. The place was Cork City in Munster, and the person was Anér Mac Con Glinne of the Eoganachta of Glennamain. It was composed in the time of Cathal mac Finguine son of Cú cen Gairm or Cú cen Máthair. The reason it was composed was to expel the demon of gluttony that was in Cathal's gullet.

How the demon came to be

Cathal mac Finguine was a great warrior-prince who ruled Munster. He was hungry as a dog and could eat like a horse. Satan, the demon of gluttony in his throat, used to consume all of Cathal's food. A pig, an ox, a good-sized bullock, sixty loaves of the best wheat, a vat of new ale, and thirty eggs from grown hens – that was for starters, along with side dishes, until his main meal was ready for him. As for the main meal, there isn't room enough to enumerate it all.

The reason the demon of gluttony dwelt in Cathal's gullet was because Cathal fell in love, sight unseen, with Lígach daughter of Mael Dúin, the king of Ailech, and sister of Fergal son of Mael Dúin, another king of Ailech who was Ireland's defender against Cathal at that time. This is clear from the contention of the two hags who exchanged these verses in Achad Úr:

There in the North
Across the rocks, is Mael Dúin's son
Beyond the Barrow,
Though he rustles, he won't remain.

He will! He will! (said the hag from the south)
And be grateful to get out!
I swear by my father,
If Cathal comes, Fergal won't get cows!

Lígach daughter of Mael Dúin would send nuts and apples and other goodies to Cathal out of love and affection for him. Fergal heard about that and summoned his sister to him. He promised he would bless her for telling the truth but curse her if she lied to him. His sister said that, whatever of her love for Cathal, she feared her brother's curse, so she told him the whole story.

Her brother told her to bring him some apples. Then he summoned scholars and promised them great rewards if they would put spells on those treats in order to destroy Cathal mac Finguine. So the scholars infused those tasty things with magic and spells and gave them to Fergal, who sent servants to bring them to Cathal. The servants urged him, in the name of the eight elements of the world, to wit, the sun and moon, fresh water and salt, heaven and earth, day and night, to eat the apples, since it was out of love and affection that they were sent from Lígach daughter of Mael Duin.

So Cathal ate the apples, and they turned into magical creatures in his guts, and those creatures in turn gathered together and grew into a single beast which became the demon of gluttony. And the reason that demon of gluttony was created to dwell in the gullet of Cathal mac Finguine was to destroy the men of Munster in a year and a half, and it's likely it would destroy all of Ireland in another half year.

Mac Con Glinne introduced

I have heard of an eight-some tonight,
In Armagh, after midnight;
I swear with all my might,
Their other names are not so nice.

Comgán was called 'Son of Two Arts,'
Famous on the trail of quarry;
Noble Critán was called Mac Rustaing,
Women passed his grave a-farting.

'Black of Two Tribes,' a famous handle,
The name of Stéle's son;
'Dark Raven'; the fair 'Hag of Beare';
'Rough one of Oak,' Mac Samáin's burden.

'Non-refusal' Mac Con Glinne's name,
From the banks of sweet-surfaced Bann;
'Little man,' 'Little woman,' bellows for slaughter,
Father and mother of Marbán 'dead man.'

My King, King of heavenly glory,
Brings victory in battle to hosts,
That one may not die, Son of modest Mary,
These eight, gathered together, I have heard.

One of these eight, Anér Mac Con Glinne, was a famous scholar with a great deal of knowledge. The reason he was called Anér is because he used to either satirize or praise folks. A good name, too, for there was never before him nor will there be after him anyone whose praise or satire was more troublesome. So that's why he was called Anér or 'Non-refusal,' because no one could refuse him.

A great desire seized this scholar: to take to poetry and abandon learning, for learning made for a wretched life. He thought about where he should go to practice poetry first, and he decided to visit Cathal mac Finguine, who was on royal circuit at Iveagh in Cork. The scholar had heard of the quality and quantity of dairy products to be found there, and he had a passion for such foods.

Now all this occurred to the scholar one Friday evening in Roscommon, where he was engaged in learning. He sold what little wealth he had for two loaves of wheat bread and a piece of streaky bacon, which he put into his book bag. That evening, he made a pair of pointed, leather shoes for himself from brown hide folded seven times.

He rose early the next morning. He put on his tunic, hitched it up over his buttocks, then his white cloak, tucked up in folds and secured by an iron brooch. He threw his book bag over his shoulder, grabbed his well-balanced staff (five hands long in each direction) by the middle in his right hand, and went clockwise around the graveyard. He bade his teacher — that is, his tutor, farewell, and a copy of the gospels is hung around his neck for good luck. He set out on his journey and travelled across Connaught, to Slieve Aughty, then to Limerick, Carn Fheradaig, Berna Trí Carpat, Slieve Caín, Fir Fhéne (called Fermoy these days), past

Móin Mór, and came to rest a little before vespers in a Cork guest house. All the way from Roscommon to Cork on Saturday.

This is how the guest house, standing open before him, looked. It was a day of three things: wind, snow, and water standing in the doorway. There wasn't a piece of thatch or trace of ash that hadn't been swept past the other door, under the benches and beds and along the walls of the royal house. The blanket there was rolled up on the bed, full of lice and fleas. And no wonder, for it was never aired in the sun by day nor taken up at night, because it was never out of use long enough for that to happen. The bathtub had water from the night before in it, and the heating-stones were lying beside the door.

The scholar found no one who would attend to him and wash his feet. He kicked off his sandals and put his feet into the fetid water. Then he rinsed his sandals in it. He hung up his book bag on his staff, against the wall, hung up his sandals, took hold of the blanket and wrapped it around his legs. But the lice and fleas nibbling at his legs were as numerous as the sands of the sea or the sparks from a fire or the dew on a May morning or the stars in the sky, and he grew weary. No one came to enquire about him or to see to his needs.

So he took down his book bag and got out his psalter and began chanting the psalms. The scholars and books of Cork say that the sound of his voice was heard for a thousand paces beyond the city, singing the psalms in their spiritual mysteries, in hymns of praise, commemorations, in categories, with pauses and choral singing, groups of ten, with *paternosters* and canticles and hymns at the end of each group of fifty psalms. Every man in Cork no doubt thought that those sounds were coming from his next-door neighbor's house. What caused that was the primal guilt, his original sin, his own obviously working ill-luck, so that Mac Con Glinne was kept from food and drink and a bath until everyone in Cork had gone to bed.

After he had gone to bed, Manchín, the abbot of Cork, said, "Lad, have we any guests tonight?"

"No," replied the servant.

"I saw someone," said another servant, "boldly and impatiently crossing the green a little before vespers a while back."

"We should find out who he is," said Manchín, "and bring him his food." Mac Con Glinne was reluctant to retrace his steps for his food, and besides it was a terrible night.

They brought his provisions out to him, and this is what it was: a small bowlful of oatmeal porridge made with whey water from the church, two embers of fire in the middle of a wisp of seed husks of oat, and two pieces of undried peat. The servant came to the door of the guest house. Fear and terror seized him at the prospect of the darkened structure standing wide open. He didn't know whether anyone was inside or not. As he put his foot across the threshold he called out, "is anyone here?"

"Someone is," answered Mac Con Glinne.

"It is breaking taboo to arrange this house for just one person."

"If its taboos have ever been broken, they've been broken tonight; they were destined to be broken, and it is I who have done it."

"Come forward and have your meal," said the servant.

"I swear," he replied, "since I have been kept waiting until now, I will not come forward until I know what you've brought me."

The lad put the two embers in the middle of the wisp of oat husks into the hearth and added another wisp taken from the bed. He arranged the two pieces of fresh peat around them, blew on the ember until the wisp caught, and presented him with his meal.

Ut dixit Mac Con Glinne:

Lad! (Mac Con Glinne said,
Let's trade verses;
You sing some lines about bread,
And I'll do the same for the spread.

Cork with its sweet bells,
Its sand is hungry
And its soil is sandy;
It grows no food at all.

Unless a famine should happen,
Never would I indulge
In a bowl of the porridge of Cork,
A bowl full of Cork porridge,

Take back this piece of bread
Over which you just now prayed;
For him who would eat it, woe!

And that's my story, my boy.

The scholars memorized the stanzas, for their minds were sharp.

They returned with the food to where Manchín was, and they recited the stanzas to him. "Hmm," said Manchín, "smart-alecky words are the work of a boy. And little boys will be singing those verses unless the one who composed them is punished."

"What are you going to do?" said the servant.

"I'm going to go to the culprit, strip his clothes from him, take whips and sticks to him until his skin and his flesh are split and torn off his bones – but his bones won't be broken. After that, soak him in the muddy waters of the river Lee, then put him over there in the guest house without any covers." (And, of course, there was nothing there anyway except the blanket, with fleas and lice as thick as the dew of a May morning!)

"Lock him in the house until morning so he can't escape, so that my judgment regarding him and the judgment of the monks of Cork can be implemented before the Lord and before St. Barre, whom I serve. There is no sentence for him but hanging, for the sake of my honor, St. Barre's, and the church."

That's how it was done then, and it's there that his primal guilt, his original sin, his own obvious sin came against him. As you shall see, his clothes were stripped from him and he was beaten and whipped and put into the River Lee until he had more than enough of its muddy waters. Then he spent the night in the guest house.

Manchín rose early the next morning and summoned the monks of Cork to the guest house. It is opened for them and they go in and rest on the benches and beds. "Well, you wretch," said Manchín, "you were wrong to mock the church last night."

"The church folk were no better," replied Mac Con Glinne, "not giving me food, and I but a party of one!"

"You were not without food, as long as you got even a small loaf or a drink of whey water in the church. There are three things that one ought not to complain about in the church: fresh fruit, new ale, and the Saturday evening meal. For even though there's little on Saturday evening, the next day we have psalm singing, then the bell, preaching, celebrating mass, and satisfying the needy. Saturday evening's lack is made up on Sunday and Sunday evening. You complained too soon."

"We confess," said Mac Con Glinne, "that we have been humbled and have done more than enough of atoning for it."

"But I swear before the Lord and St Barre," said Manchín, "that you'll not satirize again! Take him away," he said to the monks, "and let him be hanged on the green for the honor of St. Barre and the church, and my own honor as well."

"O Cleric!" exclaimed Mac Con Glinne, "don't hang me! Let a fair and just judgment be pronounced on me rather than hang me." So they set about bringing judgment on Mac Con Glinne. Manchín began to prosecute him, and each of the monks of Cork in turn did the same. But though they had a great amount of learning and knowledge and teaching, they did not find any passage in legal argument by which they might hang him.

But regardless of the law, they brought him to Ráthín Mac nAeda, a green on the south side of Cork. "Grant me a favor, Manchín and you monks!" cried Mac Con Glinne.

"What, to spare you?" asked Manchín.

"No, not that," said Mac Con Glinne, "though I'd be happy if that came of it."

"Speak!" said Manchín.

"Not until I have sureties for it," said Mac Con Glinne. Sureties, strong guarantors, and bonds were placed upon the monks of Cork for the fulfilment of the favor, and he bound those guarantors.

"Now speak," said Manchín, "what do you ask?"

"All right," said Anér, "I wish to consume a portion of the Host which is in my book bag before I die, for one should not go on a trip without receiving communion. Bring my book bag to me." It is brought, and he opens it and takes out two wheaten loaves and a piece of cured bacon. Duly and lawfully, he breaks off a tenth of each of the loaves and cuts a tenth of bacon. "Here's a tithe, you monks," he said. "If we knew someone more deserving or poorer than another, we'd give the tithe to him."

The poor who were present rose up when they saw the tithe and held out their hands. Mac Con Glinne looked them over, then said, "By God, I'm not sure whether any of you need this tithe more than I do! None of you travelled more than I did today, all the way from Roscommon to Cork. I didn't eat a bite or drink a drop after I arrived, and I consumed nothing on the way. When I arrived I didn't find the

welcome due a rightful guest, rather I found misery and insult, you curs, robbers, dogshit, you monks of Cork! My clothes were torn from me, I was beaten and whipped, dunked in the Lee, I was dealt with most unjustly and given no true justice. As God is my witness," he continued, "there's one thing the Devil won't charge me with when I go down there, and that's giving this tithe to you, for you don't deserve it." So that was the first bit he ate, the tithe, and then he ate the rest – the two loaves and piece of bacon. Then he raised his hands and gave thanks to God.

"Take me to the Lee now," said Mac Con Glinne. With men to secure and guard him, he is brought toward the Lee. When he reached the well called Bithlán or 'Ever-full', he removed his white cloak and laid it down. He lay on his back on it, the book bag under him for support. He stuck his finger through the ring of his brooch and, passing it over his head, dipped the point of the brooch into the well. As the drops of water trickled down the point he would hold it over his mouth.

"The trick's on you, you curs, thieves, you monks of Cork! When I was in my cell at the monastery, I used to hoard whatever scraps of food would come my way over a five or six day period, then eat them in a single night and drink my fill of water afterwards. That would last me for several days without anything else, and it didn't bother me. I'll last several days on what I ate just now, several days doing penance, and a few more days drinking water. I swear to God and St. Barre, whom I serve, that none of the monks of Cork, high or low, will leave the place where they are now, but will all die in a single night, Manchín above all, die and go to Hell. I am sure to go to Heaven, and I will be in the presence of God, on whom there is neither end nor decay."

That harangue was conveyed to the monks of Cork, and they convened a hasty council. This is what was decided: to bless Mac Con Glinne if he should go humbly to his hanging, or to guard him with a company of nine men until he died where he was so they could then hang him. That was told to Mac Con Glinne. "It's a dog-decision" (i.e., it is the decision of a cur, or the one by whom the decision was given is a cur), "but anyway, whatever may come of it, I will go humbly, just as our Master Jesus Christ went to his passion." He turned himself in to the monks, and that was during the time of vespers.

"Manchín, a favor!" said the monks.

"In God's name, what favor?" asked Manchín.

"To delay hanging this wretch till morning. We haven't rung the bells, haven't preached or said Mass, haven't fed the poor. And let us not go the entire Sunday without feeding ourselves! Grant us respite till morning?"

"I assure you," said Manchín, "that I'll grant no delay; the day of the crime, that shall be the day of the punishment."

Alas! Then and there Mac Con Glinne is taken to Wood of the Foxes. With people guarding him, he is given an axe. He cuts down his own passion tree and carries it on his back to the Cork green, where he himself set it up in the ground. Vespers being over, their only thought was to hang him right then. "A favor, Manchín and you monks!" cried Mac Con Glinne.

"I swear you'll get no favors from us!" replied Manchín.

"I'm not asking for a reprieve, for if I were it wouldn't be given of your own free will, you curs, thieves, dogshit, ignorant brutes, you know – you shifty, blundering, hang-dog monks of Cork! No, what I want is to fill up on fat, juicy foods and delicious, intoxicating, sweet drinks, with beautiful, lightweight, thin, dry clothes on me to keep out both cold and heat, and feast for a fortnight before I die."

"I swear you won't get that," said Manchín. "But the day is done; it's Sunday and people are asking for a respite for you. Still, what clothing you have will be stripped from you and you will be bound to that pillar over there, and tomorrow there will be preliminary torture before the main event." So that was done; his few clothes were removed from him, he was tied to the pillar with ropes and cords.

The monks returned to their house, Manchín to the abbot's residence. The poor and guests were fed by them, and they themselves ate too. The scholar, who had been sent by the Lord God to rescue Cathal Mac Finguine and the Munstermen and Mog's Half, the southern half of Ireland, as well, was left fasting at the pillar. He was given no justice. At midnight, an angel of the Lord came to him at the pillar and began to reveal a vision to him. When the angel was on the pillar-stone, it was too hot for Mac Con Glinne. When he was away on the ridge, it was quite tolerable. That's where 'Angel's Ridge' at the green of Cork comes from, that was never a morning without dew. When the night was done, the angel left him. Mac Con Glinne then composed a little introduction that would be appropriate for relating the vision that had

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been revealed to him. He worked solidly on that introduction to his vision until morning.

The monks' assembly bell sounded early that morning, and they went straight off to the pillar. "Well, you wretch," said Manchín "how are you today?"

"Fine," said Mac Con Glinne, "if I am allowed to relate a brief word to you, a vision I had last night. If I am given a respite I'll relate the vision."

"I swear," said Manchín, "if Adam's progeny were under my sway, they wouldn't give you a single night or day of respite. Nor will I."

"We swear," said the community, "that though it may anger you, he will be given a respite so that he might tell his vision. Afterwards, do whatever you want with him."

Manchín's pedigree in food

So then Mac Con Glinne traced Manchín's pedigree, on the food side, back to Adam:

A blessing on us, O cleric,
O famed fount of intellect,
son of Honey-bag,
son of Grease, son of Lard,

son of Oatmeal, son of Broth,
son of Fruit, bright, dappled and juicy,
son of Cream, thick and smooth,
son of Buttermilk, son of Butter,

son of Beer, best of drinks,
son of Bragget, sweet beer,
son of Leek, leafy and green,
son of Bacon, son of Butter,

son of Sausage, plump and stuffed,
son of Fresh-milk, very pure,
son of Mast, son of Produce,
son of Grease, son of Juice,

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son of Lard, son of Kidney,
son of Shortribs, son of Shoulder,
son of Sausage, all sizzly,
son of Thigh, son of Gruel,

son of Butt, son of Cheek,
son of Cartilage, sleek,
son of Gulp, son of Sip,
son of Back, son of Belly,

son of Drink, curdled and thin,
son of Cheese, not yet pressed,
son of Fish from Inber Indsén,
son of Sweet-curds, son of Cheese,

son of Wine, son of Mead,
son of Ale, son of Meat,
son of Wheat, hard and harsh,
son of Tripe, son of Paunch.

son of Gruel, bright and clear,
made from sheep's milk pure,
son of Stew, thick and tender,
piping hot with steaming vapor.

son of Oatmeal, thick and lumpy,
son of Oat-bran, so lovely
son of Thin-soup, sprouted,
with some blackberries added.

son of Kale, smooth tips only,
son of Belly, white and soft,
son of Nutmeat, thick and chewy,
son of Abel, Adam's son.

Good your fine food pedigree,
sweet to the tongue like honey,

O firm and steady of step –
thanks to your pointed staff.

“You can’t hurt me with that, Mac Con Glinne,” said Manchín. “You think nothing of insulting me and the Church in composing a pedigree of food for me such as has never been composed for anyone before me or ever will be till the end of time!”

“It’s not an insult at all, O cleric,” said Mac Con Glinne, “it’s a vision that was revealed to me last night – that was the preface to it. It’s not an unbecoming vision, and if I am given a delay and respite I will tell the rest of it.” Again, Manchín said that he would grant no delay. But Mac Con Glinne proceeded to tell the vision anyway, and they say that what follows here is what the angel revealed to him. *Ut dixit:*

The vision that I saw,
a wondrous revelation, I tell
in the presence of all.
A little boat of fatty suet
in the port of Lake New-milk,
Above the sea of the smooth world.

We went into the galley
and bravely took the path
across the billowing sea;
we pulled in strong strokes
o’er the great, heaving sea
so that fish and dulse went flying,
and gravel the color of honey.

Handsome the encampment we found,
with its ramparts all of custard,
there, at lake’s edge beyond;
fresh butter the causeway’s construction,
inside a rampart of pure wheat
fenced with a palisade of bacon.

Cheerful and pleasant the arrangement
of the strong and well-built house,

to which afterwards we went;
the door itself was of dried meat,
the threshold dried bread,
and its walls were soft cheese.

Smooth columns of aged cheese,
and joists of juicy bacon
arrayed alternately each;
lovely beams of old curds,
holding up the house,
and white posts of fresh curds.

A well of wine just behind,
and rivers of beer and bragget,
every full pool tasty and fine;
a sea of malt to make fine ale,
at the brink of a well of whey,
flows across its middle.

A lake of kale so juicy,
with greasy lard afloat on top
was between it and the sea;
it was ridged around by a butter dyke
cloaked in the lard of a boar
around the wall outside.

A fragrant apple orchard,
boughs topped in pink blossoms,
between it and the hill, upward;
a lush patch of fresh veggies,
just of leeks and of carrots,
behind, at the back of the house.

A worthy and intelligent host
were around a fire inside –
red-haired, strong and vigorous youths;
seven chains, inscribed with a hex,
from cheeses and intestines,

hung about their necks.

I saw this fellow, their leader,
wrapped in a mantle of corned beef,
and his wife noble and dear;
I saw the steward, the server,
at the cooking spit of the cauldron
with his flesh-fork over his shoulder.

Noble Cathal mac Finguine:
happy is he who has minstrelsy,
telling tales of exotic delicacies;
good the work of a single hour,
and pleasant indeed to tell
of sailing around in a galley
over the sea of Lake New-milk.

Then he told the entire vision in the presence of the monks of Cork to the very end, though this is not it here. The virtues of the vision were revealed to Manchín. "Well, you wretch," he said, "go find Cathal mac Finguine and tell him the vision, for it has been revealed to me that the evil that is in Cathal will be healed through that vision."

"What will you pay me to do that?" asked .

"Not much," replied Manchín, "how about leaving you alive – body and soul?"

"I don't care about that. The windows of heaven are open to me, and all the righteous, from Adam and his son Abel to the righteous of the present day who have gone to the kingdom of Heaven just now, are singing as one on behalf of my soul until I get to Heaven. The nine grades of Heaven, including Cherubim and Seraphim, are awaiting my soul. And I don't care if Cathal mac Finguine and the men of Munster and Mog's Half of Ireland, the monks of Cork, and, above all, Manchín, die and go to Hell in a single evening. I myself shall be in the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

"What payment do you ask?" queried the monks of Cork.

"I don't ask for much," said Mac Con Glinne, "just the little cloak which the clergy of Mog's Half of Ireland were denied and which they fasted a single night to obtain: Manchín's hooded cloak."

"That's not much to you," answered Manchín, "but it's a big thing to me. I tell you this," he continued, "I swear before God and St. Barre that if I possessed all of Cork and its monastic lands, it would be easier for me to do without it all than without that cloak alone."

"It's a pity you won't give it," said the monks, "because saving Cathal and Mog's Half is worth more than that hood."

"All right," said Manchín, "I'll give it on the following condition; and I never have and never will grant a request I find more difficult. I'll give it into the custody of the bishop of Cork to give in turn to the scholar – if he helps Cathal mac Finguine." So it was given into the custody of the bishop of Cork. The monks of Cork delivered the hood, and it was left in the bishop's hands.

"Go now and find Cathal!" ordered Manchín.

"Where is he?" asked Mac Con Glinne.

"Not difficult," replied Manchín, "he's in the house of Pichán son of Mael Finn, king of Iveagh, at Dun Coba on the boundary of Iveagh and Corco Laígde. Go there tonight." Mac Con Glinne started out in all haste, boldly and without delay. He hiked up his five-pleated cloak and tied it around his shoulders. Then he tied his shirt up over his rear end and darted across the green like that, headed for the house of Pichán son of Mael Finn, at Dun Coba on the boundary of Iveagh and Corco Laígde. He sped on his way. When he reached the special assembly hall where the company was gathering, he paused to put on an ill-fitting hooded cloak and garment. The upper parts were too short and the lower parts were too long. In that get-up, he began to perform like a buffoon for the company in the hall, things unbecoming a person of his station: lampooning, farting, versifying. It was said that never before or afterwards was there anyone more accomplished in the arts of lampooning.

As he was engaged in these activities in Pichán's house, Pichán said to him, "though your act is very funny, O son of learning, it doesn't cheer me up."

"What's got you down?" asked Mac Con Glinne.

"Don't you know, scholar?" replied Pichán. "Cathal mac Finguine and the nobles of Munster are coming here tonight, and though the great host of Munster is concern enough for me, Cathal himself is an even greater problem. He's hard enough when it comes to appetizers, harder yet for the starter course, and even harder for the main course."

That main course requires a bushel of oats, a bushel of crab apples, and a bushel of bread made from the finest flour."

"What would you give me if I keep him away from you from now till the same time tomorrow so that those problems won't be visited on you or on your people?" asked Mac Con Glinne.

"I'd give you a gold bracelet and a Welsh pony!" rejoined Pichán.

"By God," exclaimed Mac Con Glinne, "you'll have to do better than that!"

"All right," said Pichán, "I'll also give you a white sheep from every house and every sheepfold from Carn to Cork."

"I'll take it," said Mac Con Glinne, "provided I have kings, hospitallers, poets, and satirists as guarantors for the deliverance of the payment and so that it all might arrive in its entirety. The kings are for enforcing the fee, and the hospitallers for maintaining me in food and drink and caring for me while I'm enforcing the payment. If I am cheated out of my fees, then poets to satirize and lampoon them, and satirists to spread the word publicly and to sing against you, your children, and your people, unless my fee is paid." And he laid that legal obligation upon his guarantors.

The arrival of Cathal mac Finguine

Cathal mac Finguine arrived with the troops and mounted men of Munster, and they sat down on the benches, beds, and couches. Gentle, nubile maidens bathed the feet of the companies and hosts and attended to them. Cathal mac Finguine did not allow a single lace of his shoes to be untied while he was busy with both hands stuffing his mouth full of the apples that were lying in profusion on the tablecloth. Mac Con Glinne was there on the other side of the room, and he began smacking his lips, but Cathal took no notice. Mac Con Glinne bounded up, like one possessed, and leapt as if goosed by the war goddess, with a warrior's leap, across the room. There was a huge block, used to test the strength of warriors, who used to drive spears and rivets into it and sharpen the points and edges of their weapons on it. That stone had been the grave marker of a warrior. Mac Con Glinne hoisted it onto his back and took it to where he had been sitting on the couch. He put one end of it on his knee and the upper part of it into his mouth, and began chewing away at it. The learned and the elders, as well as the books of Cork, say

that there was no one, either near the fort, in the middle of it, or outside, who did not hear the noise of his teeth grinding against the stone, smooth though it was.

That got Cathal's attention. "What makes you behave so strangely, O son of learning?" he asked.

"Two things," replied Mac Con Glinne. "Cathal, truly handsome son of Finguine, high king of great Mog's Half, arch-defender of Ireland against the descendants of Conn the Hundred-fighter, a man ordained by the Lord God, noble warrior of the fine race of fierce Eoganachta of Glennamain by paternal inheritance: it grieves me to see him eating anything alone. And if there should be folk from distant lands here in the house seeking boons or favors, they will complain that my jaw is not bobbing up and down in harmony with your own."

"Good point," said Cathal, and he handed an apple to Mac Con Glinne as he stuffed two or three more into his own mouth. You must know that in the year and a half that this demon had been in his throat, giving that one crab apple to Mac Con Glinne was the only kind deed Cathal mac Finguine had done, and that only because he had argued so strongly for it.

"Two things are better than one in learning!" exclaimed Mac Con Glinne. So Cathal tossed him another apple.

"Number of the Trinity!" called out Mac Con Glinne, and Cathal added one more.

"The four books of the Gospel according to the teachings of Christ!" he went on. Cathal threw him a fourth.

"The five books of Moses, according to the ten commandments of scripture!" He got another one.

"The first digit for reckoning which consists of its parts and of its own components, to wit, the number six – for three is its half and two is its third; give me the sixth!" Cathal flung another apple in his direction.

"The seven things that were prophesied of your God on earth: His conception, birth, baptism, and so on!" He is given another.

"The eight beatitudes of the Gospel, O high king of royal judgments!" Cathal gives him another apple.

"Nine orders of Heaven, O royal warrior of the world!" He gets a ninth.

"The tenth order here on earth, O defender of the province!" Another apple from Cathal.

"The incomplete number of the apostles after the betrayal!" He hands over the apple.

"The complete number of the apostles after the betrayal even though there was betrayal!" He supplies another.

"Perfection of perfections and the complete number – the apostles *and* Christ!" "Enough!" shouted Cathal. "By St. Barre, you'll be eating me if you keep this up!" and he flung the tablecloth with all its apples at Mac Con Glinne. There wasn't a nook or cranny or anywhere on the floor or the couches where there weren't apples. They weren't any closer to Mac Con Glinne than they were to anyone else, but they were farther from Cathal. He was seeing red. One of his eyes leapt backward into his head so that a pet heron couldn't pluck it out. The other eye popped out onto his face and was as big as the egg of a full-grown hen. He leaned back against the wall of the house so hard that not a stud or lath or thatching rod or thatch or post was left in its proper place. Then he sat down.

"Show a little humility, king!" said Mac Con Glinne. "Don't damn me and don't deprive me of Heaven!"

"What made you do that, son of learning?" asked Cathal.

"I had to do it," said Mac Con Glinne, "I had a nasty encounter with the monks of Cork last night, and they made a charge against me. And that's what caused me to do what I did to you."

"Go to, Mac Con Glinne," said Cathal. "By the holy monastery of Emly," he continued, "if it were my custom to kill sons of learning, either you would have had the good sense not to have come or you would never leave here alive!"

The author's digression

We digress here to explain that the reason Cathal would swear by the monastery of Emly is because that's where he used to get his fill of bread made from the finest flour. He'd be there, wrapped in his otter-colored, smooth cloak, with his hard, straight sword in his left hand, consuming portions of food in one monastic cell after another. One day, he went to the cell of a certain student and he got his ration of food from him. He looked at the food. The student kept his eye on the page he was reading. When he reached the end of the page, he stuck out his tongue and turned the page with it. "Why did you do that?" asked Cathal.

"I have very good reason," said the student. "I was sent on a military hosting to distant parts, and for food they gave us a portion of the heel of a loaf of bread that was burned and had ashes in it, was dried out and smoky, so that there was no nutritional value in it at all. We had no bit of bacon or butter or meat, no drink of any kind except muddy water from puddles, so that I was deprived of my strength and vigor, all because of the hosting."

"Alas!" sighed Cathal, 'by St. Barre, as long as I'm alive the clergy will not henceforth go on hostings with me." You see, up till then the clergy of Ireland used to go on hostings with the kings of Ireland, so that Cathal was the first ever to excuse the clergy from hostings. He left his blessing, along with provisions for the pilgrims of Emly and for an abundance of bread of the finest flour. He left even more in the south-western part, because it is there that he always got his fill. End of digression.

"By your kingship, your sovereignty, and the service due you, grant me a small favor before I die!" Mac Con Glinne pleaded.

Cathal summoned Pichán aside, and said to him, "This student is asking a favor of me."

"Grant it," said Pichán.

"All right," agreed Cathal. "Tell me what you want," he said to Mac Con Glinne.

"Not unless there are guarantors to guarantee it," said Mac Con Glinne.

"You'll have them," said Cathal.

"On your sovereign word?" asked Mac Con Glinne.

"You have my word for it; now name your boon."

"It's just this; I had a quarrel with the monks of Cork last night, and they put a curse on me. That's what is causing the misunderstanding between me and you. Because we are kinsmen, I ask that you fast with me against God tonight, in order to free me from the curse of the monks of Cork."

"Don't say it, student!" cried Cathal. "Listen, I'll give you a cow from every courtyard in Munster, an ounce of silver from every tenant, a cloak from every church, a steward to collect it all, and you yourself dining with me while he's out collecting it. Damn! I'd rather

you have everything there is in Munster, North, South, East and West, than me spend an evening without food!"

"And damn me!" Mac Con Glinne responded, "you gave your sovereign word, and a king of Cashel can't go back on it! If everything in Mog's Half were given me I would not accept it. And I have good cause not to, O high warrior and royal champion of all Europe, for my only wealth is in Heaven or the earth, in learning or in poetry. And last but not least, I will go to Hell for ever and ever if you do not free me from the curse of the monks of Cork."

"It will be done for you," sighed Cathal, "and nothing more repugnant than that has ever befallen me and never will till Doomsday." Cathal fasted with him that night, as did all the rest there. And the student closed up the house and settled into a bed beside the door.

After nightfall, Pichán son of Mael Finn arose. "And why does Pichán get up now?" Mac Con Glinne said to him.

"To prepare food for all these people," he replied, "and it were better had it been ready since yesterday."

"Indeed, no," said Mac Con Glinne, "we fasted last evening, and the first thing we do in the morning is preach." So they remained there till morning. However many of them there were, not one of them stirred until it was time to rise on the morrow. Mac Con Glinne got up then and opened the house. He washed his hands, went to his book-bag, took out his psalter, and began to preach to the multitude. The historians, elders, and books of Cork say that there was neither high nor low there who did not shed copious tears listening to the scholar's preaching. When it was over, prayers were offered up for the king, that he might live long and that Munster would enjoy prosperity during his reign. Prayers were also offered up for the land, the people, and the province, as is the custom at the end of a sermon.

"Well, now," said Mac Con Glinne to Cathal, "how goes it today?"

"I swear!" said Cathal, "never worse – and never will be till the end of time!"

"It's no wonder you're in a bad way," said Mac Con Glinne, "because a demon has been devastating and destroying you for a year and a half now, and you haven't fasted a single day or night on your own. But now you have fasted with a shameless, low-life wretch like me."

"What good is that, student?" asked Cathal.

"Not difficult," replied Mac Con Glinne, "since you fasted by yourself with me last night, we can all fast tonight and you yourself can fast until some help comes from God."

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Cathal. "If the first night was hard, the second night will be seven times harder!"

"And don't *you* say that," rejoined Mac Con Glinne, "just be brave." So Cathal and his company fasted that night till after nightfall.

Mac Con Glinne got up then and said to Pichán, "Is Pichán asleep?"

"To tell you the truth," Pichán answered, "if Cathal remains in his present condition till the brink of doom, I will not sleep, nor eat, nor laugh, nor smile."

"Get up, then," commanded Mac Con Glinne, and he asked for bacon fat, tender corned beef, lots of mutton, comb honey, and English salt, on a beautiful, polished platter of white silver, with four perfectly straight spits of white hazel to hold the food. All that he asked for was brought. He put the great big steaks on the spits, and then put on a linen apron and a flat, linen chef's hat. He made a fine fire that had four ridges, four openings, four sections to it – of ash wood, without smoke, fumes, or sparks, and fixed a spit over each of the four sections. He was as swift about the spits and fires as a hind around its first-born fawn, or a doe, or a swallow, or the bare spring wind in the middle of March. He rubbed the honey and the salt into each steak. However big the steaks were, none of them lost enough of their juices to quench a candle, rather all of it sizzled inside.

Pichán divined that the reason the scholar had come was to save Cathal. When the steaks were done, Mac Con Glinne commanded, "Get me some ropes and cords!"

"What do you need them for?" asked Pichán. But it was a question in conscience, a rhetorical question, for it had already been revealed to him. That's where the proverb 'a question in conscience' comes from.

Ropes and cords were brought to him, the strongest the warriors had. They took hold of Cathal, and he was bound like that against the wall of the house. Mac Con Glinne spent a good deal of time securing the ropes with staples and fasteners. When that was done, he came in holding the four spits on high, his white cloak sitting lightly on his

shoulders, and went up to Cathal. He set the spits down on the couch in front of him, sat down, and crossed his legs. He took a knife out of his shirt and cut a hunk of the steak closest to him and dipped it in the honey that was on the white-silver dish. "The lively beast's first!" said Mac Con Glinne as he put the meat into his mouth. That saying has survived. He cut off another piece, dipped it in the honey, and passed it under Cathal's nose before putting it into his own mouth.

"Give us some, student!" Cathal begged.

"I will," said Mac Con Glinne, and he cut a piece of the steak in front of him, dipped it in the honey as before, waved it past Cathal's lips and on into his own mouth.

"How long are you going to keep this up, student?" asked Cathal.

"I'll stop now," said Mac Con Glinne. "But there's this – you've consumed a great amount of excellent and incomparable foods up to now; what little remains I'll eat, and this will just be your 'food from afar.'" Another saying that has survived. Cathal hollered and carried on, and demanded the scholar be killed. But that did not happen.

"Well, now, Cathal," said Mac Con Glinne, "I have been shown a vision, and I hear that you are good at interpreting visions."

"Damn!" shouted Cathal, "If I would interpret anyone's vision, it wouldn't be yours!"

"I swear," said Mac Con Glinne, "that even though you won't, I will tell it to you anyway." So he began to tell his vision, and he did it wafting two or three morsels of food past the mouth of Cathal before he consumed them himself.

The vision proper

A vision I had last night,
that I set out with two or three,
and saw a house brimming and bright
where food was in abundance.

I saw a Fresh-milk lake
in the midst of a bright plain,
and a house bustling and busy apace,
thatched with pats of butter.

As I walked all around it
inspecting its arrangement,
I saw sausages, newly boiled,
used to form its wattle.

The doorposts were of custard,
its terraces butter and curds;
couches of splendid lard,
shields of pliant pressed-cheese.

Men were holding those shields,
of soft, delicious, cheese,
men who'd never wound Gaels,
armed with soft curd spears.

A huge cauldron of gruel –
I thought I could take it on –
leafy, boiled, brownish-white kale,
a copious vessel brimful of milk.

Forty rafters made from rashers,
roof-grid made of gut;
every food a man might ask for,
seemed to me they all were there.

A vision I had.

And he said further:

I had a vision last night,
it was most captivating,
a potent force was shown to me:
the kingship of all of Erin.

I saw this arboreal court
with palisades of bacon;
coarse gravel formed its rampart,
pregnant and rife with cheese.

From pigs' little intestines
 were made its handsome beds;
 pleasant the pillars and beams,
 wonderfully constructed of tripe.

I was shown the vision of wonder
 there before my hearth;
 chessboard and men of butter,
 smooth, dappled, and capped.

May God bless what I utter,
 festivity flawless and gay;
 after I went to Mount Butter
 servants saw to my needs.

A vision.

Though the pain of being two days and a night without food was great for Cathal, an even greater torment was this enumeration of so many wonderful and unusual foods — and none of them for him. Afterwards, Mac Con Glinne began this fable:

The fable

"As I was lying there last night in my comfy, well-made bed with its gilt posts and bronze rails, I heard this voice saying to me, 'Get up, Mac Con Glinne, you wretch!' I didn't answer the voice. And why should I; my bed was so comfortable, my body so relaxed, and I deeply asleep. Then I heard it again: 'Take heed, beware, Mac Con Glinne, that the gravy doesn't drown you!' That is, take caution that the meat-juices don't inundate you. I rose early the next morning and went to the well to wash my hands. I saw this huge apparition coming toward me. 'Well, then,' it said to me. 'Yes, indeed,' I replied. 'Well, now,' continued the apparition, 'It is I who delivered the warning to you last night, about the gravy. But then, warning you was like

a warning to a doomed man,
 mocking a beggar,
 a stone falling against a tree,
 a whisper to a deaf person,

death to one who's depressed,
 putting a charm in a wall,
 putting a rope around sand or charcoal,
 hitting an oak tree with your fists,
 trying to suck honey from the roots of a yew,
 looking for butter in a doghouse,
 a diet of peppercorns,
 seeking wool from a goat,
 shooting an arrow into a stone pillar,
 keeping a mare from farting,
 keeping a licentious woman from being horny,
 holding water in the bottom of a sieve,
 trusting a tied-up dog,
 putting salt on rushes,
 paying a bride-price after intercourse,
 telling a secret to a foolish woman,
 expecting wisdom in a fool,
 exalting a slave,
 giving liquor to the reckless,
 telling a king how to act,
 a body without a head,
 a head without a body,
 a nun at the bell,
 a sinner in a bishop's chair,
 a kingdom without a king,
 sailing a ship without a rudder,
 hauling grain in a basket full of holes,
 spilled milk,
 housekeeping without a woman,
 berries on a hide,
 a vision of judgment day to sinners,
 defamation as compensation for insult,
 giving back without restitution,
 putting seed in bad soil,
 providing for a loose woman,
 serving an evil prince,
 cheating in trade,
 rigging the scales,

going against a judgment,
flouting the gospels,
advising you about food is like advising the Antichrist, Mac Con Glinne!"

[The narrator takes up the fable here:]

"Damn!" said Mac Con Glinne, "That was a very harsh admonition!"

"Why?" asked the apparition.

"Not difficult," replied Mac Con Glinne, "because I don't know where you came from or where you're going or anything about you so that I could interrogate you back or reply."

"Not difficult there, either," said the apparition, "I am Buaramnach mac Elcaib Essamain, 'Loose-bowels son of Fearless Badmouth', out of the fairy mound of food, Sídh Longthe."

"That being the case," said Mac Con Glinne, "I suppose you have many stories and therefore know tales of food and eating. Do you?"

"I do indeed," said the apparition, "but it wouldn't do any good for someone whose capacity for eating didn't measure up to it."

"In what way?" asked Mac Con Glinne.

"Not difficult to say," replied the apparition. "If he didn't have a very broad stomach five hands wide, angular, very long, fourfold full, and four-sided, which would hold twenty-seven eatings and seven drinkings, with a quantity for nine men in each of those drinkings, seven meals and nine snacks, and food for a hundred in each of those eatings and drinkings, and meals and snacks."

"Since I don't have that kind of belly, give me some advice, because you've stimulated my appetite," said Mac Con Glinne.

"I will," said the apparition. "Go to the retreat from which I myself have come, the retreat of Fáithliaig, 'the Divining-Doctor,' and there your appetite for every food your stomach and your heart craves will be satisfied. A place where your teeth will be exercised on the great quantity of unusual foods we have spoken of, where your hunger will vanish and your taste buds will be tickled, a place where your lips will smack from fine drink and fine delicacies, from eating and downing every delicate, tasty, smooth and sweet food your body desires – and you won't feel guilty! But you must go to Fáithliaig and Becnat Bélaide or 'Fattie,' daughter of Mac Baetáin Brass-Longthig, 'Ravenous-eater', his wife.

"The day you arrive at the fort, that's the day their tent of lard will be set up around them on their seemly, compact fields of wheat: the two Fatties, Sausage, and the good lad Little Food-pot, with his cowl of suet around him. You'll be pleased further on the day you arrive at the fort, Mac Con Glinne," continued the apparition, "because that's the day the leaders of the Tribe of Food will be summoned there."

"And what are their names?" asked Mac Con Glinne.

"Not difficult," replied the apparition, "Sloe-ette son of Juicy-smooth-bacon, Loaf-ette son of Fruit-of-dried-meat, Empty-sides son of Sausage, Milkie son of Little-milking, Strong-arm son of Leather-head, and Lard-lover son of Side-of-bacon."

"And what is your own name, may I ask?"

"Wheatie son of Fresh-milkie
son of Juicy-bacon
is my handle;
Honey-coated Butter
the name of him
who totes my bundle.

Sheep-flank
my dog's name,
handsome in action;
my wife is called Suet,
she smiles
at tops of kale.

Sweet-curds is my daughter,
her cooking feats
enliven the hearth;
my son is Corned-beef,
his cloak covers
his big arse.

Vat-o-grease
my wife's maid's name;
in early morning
she sailed over Lake Fresh-milk.

My packhorse is Beef-suet:
outstanding, tender jerky
that urges horses onward;
a saddle of soft cheese
upon his back
protects him from his burden.

When a horse of soft-cheese
is let after him,
his running is speedy:
fat for reins,
food for ribs,
shapely beyond all or any.

A great collar of yummy hard cheese
hangs around his neck,
a halter whose parts
are all of fresh butter.

His bridle with reins of fat
throughout,
saddle-bags of tripe overfilled
with bloody tripe.

Saddle-horn is my horseboy,
a pillar of battle;
who calls him out – no boast –
goes to certain death.

My tunic of stew
around me through and through,
suet slice and tripe
that does not bleed.

“Off to the delightful and wonderful foods, then, Mac Con Glinne!” said the apparition. “You know,

Foods, many and mellow,
juicy cuts of every meat,
dark dishes, reddish-yellow,
faultless, overflowing;
corned beef to fill a fork,
juicy, smooth suets,
and thick joints of pork.

So off with you to the suets and cheeses now!” said the apparition.

“I’m off!” replied Mac Con Glinne, “and put gospels around me.”

“I will, gospels of dry cheese, evenly square,” said the apparition, “and I’ll put my own *paternoster* around you; no one who wears it suffers from either starvation or hunger.” And he intoned:

“Your protection by juicy, smooth bacon, Mac Con Glinne;
your protection by oozing, yellow thick cream;
your protection by a full pot of gruel;
your protection by a caldron of gruel.”

“I swear before the Lord,” said Mac Con Glinne, “I would love to go to that fort so that I could drink my fill of those sweet, filtered old liquors and eat my fill of those vast, wondrous foods.”

“If that would please you, you shall have it,” said the apparition. “Go as I instruct you, and if you go, don’t go astray.”

“How shall I manage that?” asked Mac Con Glinne.

“Not difficult,” said the apparition, “put yourself under the protection and safeguard of the bold and unrivalled warriors, the chieftains of the Tribe of Food, so that the gravy will not destroy you.”

“Well then,” said Mac Con Glinne, “which of the chieftains of the Tribe of Food are most valorous in defence against the heavy waves of gravy?”

“Not difficult,” said the apparition, “lards and cheeses!”

“I’m off, then,” said Mac Con Glinne, “full speed, bounding, and with a high heart! The wind that blows across that land, may it blow past me, provided I keep my face into it. And that’s as it should be, given the heaviness of the malady, the rarity of the remedy, and the longing of the healer. I’m off – swiftly, in haste, impatiently, impetuously, gliding smoothly like a fox slinking past a shepherd, or a commoner jumping a queen in her bed, or a hooded crow heading for dung, or a deer grazing a

field of winter rye in the middle of June. So, I tuck up my shirt over my butt, and my swiftness and agility are such that neither gnat, biting fly, or midge will fly up my arse until I have crossed fields, forests, and wilderness on my way to the lake of that fort.

[Mac Con Glinne takes up the narration again:]

“When I arrived at the lake, I saw before me a small, gravy-soaked boat of corned beef, varnished with lard, with benches of curds, a prow of lard, stern made of butter, sculling-oars of bone marrow, and oars made from sides of old boar-meat. The vessel into which we went was steady, and we rowed across the broad plain of Lake Fresh-milk, over a stormy sea of curdled, thin whey drink, past estuaries of mead, through terrifying, billowing storm-tossed waves of buttermilk, under constant showers of fat, past a forest of dewy meat-juice, past a little spring of greasy liquid, among islands of soft cheese, past tough rocks of suety lard, past headlands of sour curds, past beaches of dry, pressed and dry cheese, until we arrived at an attractive, solid landing spot between Mount Butter, Lake Milk, and Curd’s Peak, at the mouth of the pass to the territory of the Eager-eater folk, in front of the retreat of Fáithliaig, the Divining Doctor. With every oar we dipped into Lake Fresh-milk, we brought up sea-sand of sweet curds.”

(It was there that Mac Con Glinne shouted out these words, “Ho ho! These are not walls to keep me out!”)

On hearing that, Fáithliaig said to his people, “There is a company here coming to you tonight, people, none other than Anér Mac Con Glinne of the Munstermen, a noble satirist lad, with splendid poetry and minstrelsy. We need to attend well to him, for he’s melancholy, wild, swift, frantic, and impatient; he’s eager, a swift eater, greedy, immodest, and ravenous; he’s gentle and true, very easy, a good jester, quick to express gratitude as well as reproach. And that’s proper, too, for he is capable of both satire and praise in the banqueting hall of a mighty, noble, elegant and convivial house.”

“The retreat I was at was magnificent – surrounded by fourteen thousand posts of smooth, cured bacon. The woven blackthorn atop the posts was the greasy, boiled lard of a choice, fine boar, put there to defend against the Butter-pat and Soft-cheese tribes, who were on Lake Fresh-milk and at war with Fáithliaig. The door was made of suet, secured by a sausage bolt. I climbed up out of my boat and went up to the door leading into the porch of the outer entrance to the fort. I took a

loaf of bread made from the leavings of coarse meal which was on my right side, just outside the outer entrance, and delivered a blow to the suet door with the sausage bolt on it. I knocked it in as far as the outer entrance of the fort, and went in to the big, bright, principal enclosure of the formidable fort. I planted my ten bright, pink, pointy fingernails into the door of smooth, cured bacon with the cheese-log bolt, pushed it in, and walked through.

“Then I saw the porter. The young soldier was handsome, and his name was Bacon-man son of Butter-man son of Lard. On his feet he wore shoes of smooth, cured bacon, and above that leggings of stew meat. He had on a tunic of corned beef, a belt of salmon skin around that, topped by a hooded cloak of beef brisket. He had seven chaplets on his head, each of them a circular row of fresh leeks. Seven charms inscribed on entrails hung around his neck, each of those stamped with a seal of cooked lard. He sat astride a horse of bacon, with hoofs of coarse oat bread on legs of butter. The horse had ears of curd, eyes of honey, and his breath blew steams of sour cream from his nostrils; a torrent of bragget blew out of his arse. His tail was of dulse, from which were cut seven handfuls every twenty-four hours. He was equipped with a saddle of lard or corned beef, a halter of heifer hide on his head, a collar made from the spleen of an old neutered ram. A little bell made of soft cheese hung from the collar, its clapper a solid piece of narrow gut. The horseman held a whip with many thongs – thirty superb sausages made from fat, white cows, and every grease-laden drop that dripped from those sausages would be enough for the half-loaf of a priest. He had a soft staff of boiled briar-root; each gravy-laden drop that gushed forth every time he set it on the round would be enough to fill seven vats.”

“Open up for us,” said Mac Con Glinne.

“Come in, you wretch,” said the porter.

“When I entered,” said Mac Con Glinne, “I saw on the left Fáithliaig’s slaves, dressed in hair-shirts of gruel and hairy rags of soft custard, clearing away the manure which was on the causeway of custard, from the outer entry of the greathouse to the outer entry of the fort, using shovels of dry bread. To my right, I saw Fáithliaig himself, wearing gloves of well-marbled rump steak, doing the chores of the house, which was fully covered all around with intestines from floor to ceiling. I went into the kitchen, and there I saw Fáithliaig’s son with a fish hook of lard in his hand, tied to a line made from the marrow of a

deer's shankbone, on a rod of gut thirty hands in length, fishing in a lake of grease. He would pull out a side of bacon or a corned-beef sausage from the greasy lake mixed with honey onto the curd embankment that was beside him in the kitchen. It is in that lake that the son of Fáithliaig was drowned and for whom this famous elegy was composed:

Mac Eogan, famous his fate..., etc.

Anyway, I went into the big house then, and as I crossed the threshold, I saw this pure white mattress of butter. I sat upon it and immediately sank up to the top of my ears in it. It took the work of eight of the strongest men in the house to pull me from it by the crown of my head.

Afterwards, I was taken to the place where Fáithliaig himself was. 'Pray for me! Pray for me!' I begged him.

'In the name of cheese-log!' he exclaimed. 'The ravaged look of your face is horrible! Alas! it is a look of disease. Your hands are yellow, your lips blotchy, your eyes gray. Your sinews have grown weak and have caused your eyes, your flesh, your joints, and your fingernails to swell. The three hags, Want, Death and Hunger, have attacked you with jaws of fierce hunger. An eye that does not bless has turned upon you; a plague of terrible disease has come to you. Indeed, you don't have the look of a well-cared-for, milk-fed calf in the hands of a good cook, nor the look of a well-cared-for piglet, but the look of a lad ill-cared-for and nurtured in gloom.'

"Not surprising," said Mac Con Glinne, "given the severity of my disease, the lack of a cure, and the need of healing."

"Tell me your problem, lad," said Fáithliaig.

"I will then," said Mac Con Glinne. "I am being eaten away by something that makes me despondent and desultory, loving luxury, hating hardship, desire for swift-eating, mincemeats, gnawing meat, downing whitemeats. I so hunger, starve, thirst, and crave my food that I neither taste nor savor what I eat. I experience sullenness, niggardliness, refusing to share, unkindness concerning what I possess, so that I grow weary with myself and am not dear to anyone. I am afflicted by hunger, with its twenty-four divisions, in addition to depression, hunger and thirst, being bold in going for food before anyone else, every food disagreeing with me. What I want is abundant, appetizing, varied foods of the world for my gullet to fulfil my desires, to satisfy my greed. But alas, great is the grief of one who can not have all of these."

"I swear," said Fáithliaig, "'tis a horrible disease, and wretched the one to whom it has come. But it will not be suffered for long, for by your journey to my retreat on this occasion, you will take with you to your house a medicine for healing your malady, and you will be healed always from it."

"What is it?" Mac Con Glinne asked.

"Not hard," said Fáithliaig. "When you go home tonight, go to the well and wash your hands, brush your teeth, and comb your hair neatly. After that, warm yourself by a blazing fire of straight, red oak or of eight pieces of firewood from an ash tree that grows in the foothills where little sparrows shit, in a dry hearth that reaches from high to low so that its heat will warm you, but its flame won't burn you nor its smoke choke you. Spread the hide of a yearling calf, hairy side up, on the north-east side of the fire, and lie with your side against a bright, white bed of special alderwood. Have a woman in attendance who is swift, white-armed, intelligent and cheerful, eloquent, of good people, wearing a necklace, a cloak with a brooch, with a black fringe between the two ends of her cloak, that it may not inflict sorrow upon her. Three fostermothers with her of the same rank as she. Three sparks of love and gaiety in her face, and no worry lines in her forehead. A pleasant and very appropriate aspect; a purple, five-pleated cloak around her, closed by a reddish-gold brooch; a fair, broad face, and bright blue eyes, topped by bluish-black eyebrows. High, pink cheeks. Red thin mouth, white teeth shining like pearls. Smooth, soft, white forearms, smooth snowy sides, pleasant, firm thighs, straight and shapely calves, white, narrow feet; long and graceful fingers with beautiful pink nails — a lovely lady, with a sprightly walk and gait; her speech and conversation sweet as harp-strings, tender and warm. A woman with no fault or disfigurement or blemish on her that the keen of sight and the wary could see, from the top of her head to the tips of her toes.

"Have that woman bring you your three nine portions, Mac Con Glinne, with each portion the size of a full-grown chicken. Cram those portions into your mouth violently so that your eyes roll and your head spins while eating them. And don't forget the eight grains, Mac Con Glinne, wherever you find them: rye, wild oats, beardless wheat, red-wheat, wheat, rough-barley, barley, and oats. Eight loaves from each of those grains, eight spreads on each loaf, and eight condiments on each spread. Every mouthful as big as a young heron.

"Off with you to the little pots of fine, sweet curds, now, Mac Con Glinne!

To the fresh pork, to feasts of fat!
 to ram feasts – or, boiled mutton;
 to the choice, talked-about bits that men contend for – corned
 beef sausage;
 to the delicacies of noble-folk – to mead;
 to consumption's cure – aged, cured bacon;
 to stew-pot's need – sour curds;
 to the wish of unwed women – new milk;
 to a queen's tansy – carrots;
 to a guest's constraint – ale;
 to what gets you through Lent – chicken;
 to a broken brow – butter;
 to a hand against hand – plain bread;
 to a lumpy hearth – pressed cheese;
 to the bubbly belch – new beer;
 to a priest's darling – greasy cabbage soup;
 to the finest and sweetest treasure of all food – porridge with
 milk;
 to the fill of a family's guts – gruel;
 to the double-looped twins – a sheep's intestines;
 to what's fit for a wall – a rack of ribs;
 to the banned bird – salt;
 to the gateway of a gathering – sweet apples;
 to the pearls of a household – chickens' eggs;
 to a tiny breast – a nut."

"When he had enumerated those many foods for me, he proceeded to prescribe for me my drink."

"To chase those foods I listed, Mac Con Glinne, drink a small container, not too big – enough for eighty men, of very thick milk, another of milk not so thick, one of viscous but flowing milk, one of medium thick milk, one of yellow, bubbly milk that you can chew and swallow, one of the stuff that makes the gurgling, bleating sound of a ram as it goes down the gullet, in such a way that the first swallow says to the next one, 'I swear to God, you scumbag, though you come down you'll go right back up, for there's no room in this pantry for both of us bitches.'

"Whatever disease you may get, Mac Con Glinne, 'tis I myself who will cure you – apart from one, and that's the malady of the wise and the well-born, the malady above all maladies, the disease worth everlasting health: diarrhea!"

That's the vision.

The demon of gluttony appears

Because of that tantalizing narration and the enumeration of so many unusual and delightful foods in front of the king, the barbarous creature that dwelt in the innermost innards of Cathal appeared and was licking around the corners of Cathal's mouth. At the time, the student was inside at the big fire. He put each of the steaks on the grill, and then brought them one by one up to the king's mouth. Finally, as one of the steaks was passed before the king's mouth, the accursed creature leapt forward and laid hold of the steak Mac Con Glinne was holding. Mac Con Glinne took the steak, with the creature holding tight, carried it to the hearth, threw it under the cauldron that hung over the fire, and turned the cauldron upside down on it. So that's why a food cauldron is called a 'creature cauldron,' that is, because the gullet creature that was in Cathal's throat ended up under it.

The historians don't agree; they say that the creature went into the throat of the priest's servant, and that the lad was drowned in the water-mill of Dún Caín in front of the residence of Pichán son of Mael Find in Fir Fhéne. But that's not what is in the books of Cork, which say that he was put into the cauldron and was burned up under it. "To God and St. Brigit we give thanks," said Mac Con Glinne as he cupped his right hand over his own mouth and his left over Cathal's mouth. Then he wrapped a linen towel around Cathal's head and led him outside.

"What now?" asked Pichán.

"Easy," said Mac Con Glinne, "bring everybody and everything outside: kings, queens, retinues, herds, flocks, cattle, and all the gold and silver treasures in the fort; bring it all outside." And the learned say that nothing of greater value than a fly's foot was left of the wealth inside the great, central royal dwelling, except the cauldron that was over the demon. The house was closed from the outside, then, and four huge fires were lit throughout the house. When the house was a blazing inferno and fierce conflagration, the demon leapt up to the roof-tree of the royal

dwelling, and the fire could do him no harm. He rested atop the adjacent house.

"Well, now, you Munstermen," said Mac Con Glinne, "there's your friend over there. Close your mouths, so that I may address the miserable, wicked monk.

"So, you wretch, submit to us!"

"All right, I will," replied the Devil, "for I can't not submit; you are a man in God's favor, with a lot of learning, a sharp mind, devoted to service, desirous of goodness, with seven-fold grace from the Holy Spirit. I am a demon by nature, unchangeable, and I will tell you my story. I have been in Cathal's throat destroying Munster and Mog's Half for the past year and a half. Given another year and a half I would destroy all of Ireland. Were it not for the nobility, wisdom, perfection, and innocence of the monks of great Cork of Munster from which you have come to seek me, and the number of their bishops and confessors, and were it not for the integrity of speech and word, honor, and soul of the revered and noble king you rescued, and finally, were it not for your own nobility, integrity, innocence, learning, abundance of knowledge, and poetry, it is in your own throat I'd go, and they'd beat you with dog whips, horse whips, and sticks throughout all of Ireland, and the disease I'd bring you is hunger!"

"And here's the Lord's cross in your face!" replied Mac Con Glinne, and he taunted him three times with the gospels.

"Were it not for St. Brigit, the little fair one from the Curragh of the Liffey, I swear to God, Cathal, that I would have buried you and taken your soul to hell long before this!" And with that he and his hellish host shot off into the air.

"What now, Mac Con Glinne?" asked Pichán.

"Not hard," replied Mac Con Glinne, "fresh milk and fresh butter boiled together with honey as a new concoction for the king." And so it was done. A mixing cauldron big enough to serve a hundred and filled with fully-boiled milk was brought to the king for him alone. And that quaff was the first long drink Cathal had taken since the demon had left him. A feather bed was spread for the king, and musicians and minstrels performed from noon till dusk. Then the king fell into a deep sleep. The other kings slept around Pichán in as dignified and pleasant way as they ever had before. They paid great honor and respect to the scholar that night. The learned (i.e., the historians) say that they slept for three days

and three nights, but the books of Cork say that it was but for a single day.

The king rose in the morning and rubbed his face. The brownish-pink drops of dew on his face were no smaller than sweet-smelling, bright apples. "Where's Mac Con Glinne?" he asked.

"Here," replied Mac Con Glinne.

"Tell us the vision again," said Cathal.

"All right," said Mac Con Glinne.

"However long you may take to tell it today," said Cathal, "it will not seem long to me. Today is not the same as yesterday." And Cathal left favor and blessing on every one who would read and preserve the vision.

"Well," said the kings, "do well now by Mac Con Glinne."

"It shall be done," he replied. "He shall have a cow from every courtyard in Munster, an ounce of silver from every tenant, a cloak from every monastic cell, and a sheep from every house from Carn to Cork besides. And then he shall have the treasure that surpasses that lot, Manchín's hooded cloak."

Just then Roennu Ressamnach the Satirist, his son Cruit-Fhiach or 'Harp-raven' and his daughter Mael Chiar, 'Cropped Black-hair', came into the house and made these verses:

Manchín set out, plainly,
to accuse Mac Con Glinne;
But it was Manchín who was tricked
out of the little cloak he wore.

It was not too much for bright Comgan (said the jester's son),
although he's not of our people,
the glorious cloak I see;
though it be the colors of the raven,
and worth three sevens bondsmails,
from Cathal, king of Munster.

Nor did I think it too much myself,
though it was gold all around,
that he would bring it under his control,
and through pure reason it might be said,

it is to Cathal – and prudently,
the garment went from Manchín.

Then they send a cow from every courtyard, an ounce of silver from every tenant, a cloak from every monastic church, a gold bracelet and a Welsh pony, a white sheep from every house from Carn to Cork, and two thirds of the fee due a mediator in disputes (and another third from the men of Ireland in addition), and a seat beside Cathal forever. All that he got, as we have said.

The virtues of this tale

A tradition of telling and hearing, from one to another, as sages, elders, and historians told it, as it is read and is written in the books of Cork, as the angel of God ordained it for Mac Con Glinne, as Mac Con Glinne related it to Cathal, and to the men of Munster as well. For any one who hears it there will be nothing of sorrow and there will be protection for a year.

There are thirty chief virtues in this story; a few of them will suffice as examples. The married couple to whom this story is told on their wedding night will not separate without offspring; they will want for neither food nor clothing. A new house in which this is the first tale told, no dead will be brought out from it, it will lack neither food nor clothing, fire will not burn it. A king to whom this tale is told prior to battle or conflict will be victorious. This tale should be told at offering drinks, feeding princes, or taking over inherited land. The reward for reciting this tale is a white-speckled, red-eared cow, a shirt of new linen, a cloak of fleecy wool with brooch, from kings and queens, from married couples, from stewards, from princes, to the one who can recite it and tell it to them.

A SATIRE ON RHYS MEIGEN

Dafydd ap Gwilym will receive a fuller introduction in the next section. For now, suffice it to say that he flourished in the fourteenth century, after the loss of Welsh independence and at a time when English and continental influences in Welsh life were at a high level. As we shall see, his poetry reflects to a large extent those external influences. But Dafydd was a product of the Welsh bardic tradition, and he composed in metrical forms he inherited from that tradition and on inherited themes as well. Thus, in addition to the themes for which he is best remembered today, he composed poems of praise to his patrons in the old manner, and even satire.

Satire was a potent weapon in the hands of the Celtic poets; we see instances of this in the narratives that concern Dallán Forgaill, Senchán Torpéist, and the dreaded Athirne. There are fewer instances of it in early Welsh literature, but it is clear from the present case that a sense of the power of satire lasted well into the fourteenth century. The identity of Rhys Meigen is unknown. It is possible, of course, that he was a figment of Dafydd's fertile imagination. But a number of manuscripts refer to the tradition that Dafydd killed Rhys with a satire. The historical note that precedes the satire here is from Peniarth manuscript 49 (late sixteenth, early seventeenth century). The translation is based on the edition of Parry 1952.

Bibliography: Parry 1952

A Satire on Rhys Meigen

Dafydd ap Gwilym composed this satire on Rhys Meigen because Rhys himself composed the following satire on Dafydd's mother and on Dafydd himself:

Stinking liar Dafydd, mangy dog,
Son of many, many fathers;
Just on impulse, I tickled your ma,
Over her ass and in her hole.

The englyn was recited on Christmas day in the court of Llywelyn ap Gwilym Vychan ap Gwilym ap Gwrwared in Deheubarth,

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at dinner. In response, Dafydd composed and recited this poem in Rhys Meigen's presence. And if what they say is true, Rhys fell dead upon hearing it:

- 4 There's a half-mad dolt of many faults,
 Not one of Gwalchmai's folk;
 Dogs after him everywhere,
 He'd get neither gift nor honor.
- 8 Rhys Meigen, blockhead, troublemaker,
 Wherever he goes, a gloomy loser;
 A boob, a mutt, a stray:
 Curdled milk in the month of May.
- 12 Empty, beggarly brute, boasting
 From Teifi to Menai;
 Hoary old dwarf trusted by none,
 Bird-like beak, without granny or son.
- 16 Shamefaced, when he tried seduction
 He never found love, truth be told;
 His songs are wormwood, bitter and vile;
 Face like a leprous ape, he's not my style.
- 20 A grating tongue that wasn't good at words,
 And a flatterer who spewed them out;
 Pure, unadulterated buffoon who sings
 For a meal in his dirty underthings.
- 24 Sneaky, bungling clod, though he'd try to keep up
 With the swift, he couldn't;
 On a shoddy saddle, in every race,
 Every fault mars his pace.
- 28 Lewdest, sickest lover of diseased women;
 Useless with weapons;
 Hateful beggar, shitty cur,
 Legs like a gull, aging whore.

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- 32 Clumsy scrap, his pants strips of coracle skin,
 Contemptible old hide;
 Never could learn strict meter,
 Avoided fierce conflict and battle.
- 36 Filthy, foul versifying hack,
 Frothing, fat-lipped shit,
 A sullen, vain and surly lad
 Amid a host of churning cockroaches.
- 40 Verse like the snarling of an ass-wiggling mutt,
 Slinking, pot-bellied wanderer;
 Cunning beggar, bony,
 Hide like the skin of a boat.
- 44 Dirty-legged, clumsy, baggy pants, scum;
 Blessed the man who'd hang him;
 Sucking begged soup into his belly,
 Tough tomcat poking about nimbly.
- 48 Testy blabberer, drunken, slurring words,
 Grunting like a pig when he vomits;
 Lacking more sense than cockles to a carnivore,
 Wild, ugly, untamed, drained of color.
- 52 Renegade vagrant, irritating parasite,
 Cramming food with a filthy hand;
 Hair the devil himself snips,
 Cowardly cupbearer of minstrel piss.
- 56 Truly a body that needs help—he's no Sir Kay!
 Always late for the fray;
 Sucks on intestine fat,
 Empty skin, gray and flat.
- The dregs of the barrel will suit the creep,
 Wimpy lamb, unfit for a fight;

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60 Big-titted beggar,
 An ape has less hair.

 He sings songs of abuse to all
 Not knowing what he's doing;
64 A mouse who lives in a privy's hole,
 The worst, shittiest dolt of all.

 Rhys Meigen, a noose under a strong tree
 will be your end, old man's hands;
68 Scared and grieved your teeth chatter,
 Wondrous feast of bacon fat, squishy vermin ridden.
 Loose-lipped, foul, friend of puppy puke,
 Rather feast on foul flesh than fine mead.
72 You lust after suet and marrow in the hollow of big bones,
 Cockle-skinned before a drink, by Cyndeyrn!
 The meat-skewer of a head like an iron stanchion is amazing,
 Red butt-holed bell of bards, chalk-white greasy boils.
76 As a soldier, a coward, a wonder in war,
 Faint flicker of fire, he's not a second Dinbyrn.
 Lying, louse-ridden, sly-eyed, shrivelled foetus,
 Shapeless, worthless hulk, like tubs of chopped meat.
80 Uncouth, ignoble, baggy pants, constipated,
 Shrivelled old shadow, skin and bones.
 Your lightless eyes always prying about,
 Vile, vain, pockmarked Rhys, a tomcat in trousers;
84 Licks the vile dregs of vats, bursting, swollen belly,
 Big-bellied trail of shit, no noble he!
 Since you, slimy, woeful-grunting caca-pants, know neither
 Awdl nor englyn, you tightfisted thief,
88 Run away, you croaking, surly, babbling fool,
 Run away, go suck the drinks that others leave!