

The Butter

Tadhg Dall Ó Huigínn, late 16th century

I myself got good butter from a woman
The good butter if it be good
I don't think it came from a cow
Whatever its origin, it destroyed me.

There was a beard sprouting from it,
Bad health to the fellow's beard
A juice from it as venomous as poison
It was tallow with a sour draught taste.

It was speckled, it was grey
It was not from a milch goat
It was no gift of butter
When we had to look at it every day.

Its long lock was like a horse's mane
Alas, no knives were found to crop it
He who partook of it has long been sick
The good butter that was in our hut.

A wrapping cloth (was placed) around the sour grease
Like a shroud taken from a corpse
It was disgusting to the eye
To look at the rag from the amount of its foulness.

There was a strong stench from that fellow
That choked and stupified us
We imagined it to be multicoloured
Covered by a branching crest of fungus.

It had never seen the salt
The salt never saw it except at a distance
Its memory does not leave us in health
White butter bluer than coal.

There was grease in it, and not only that
But every other bit was of wax
Little butter did I eat after it
The fleshy butter I received.

Two sons

Laoiseach Mac an Bháird, late 16th century

You follow foreign ways
and shave your thick-curved head:
O slender fist, my choice!
you are no good son of Donnchadh.

If you were, you would not yield
your hair to a foreign fashion
- the fairest feature in Fódla's land -
and your head done up in a crown.

Little you think of your yellow hair,
but that other detests their locks
and going cropped in the foreign way.
Your manners are little like.

He loved no foreign ways,
our ladies' darling, Eogan Bán,
nor bent his will to the stranger,
but took to the wilds instead.

Eogan Bán thinks little of your views.
He would give his britches gladly
and accept a rag for a cloak
and ask no coat nor hose.

He hates the jewelled spur on his boot
at the narrow of his foot,
or stockings in the foreign style,
nor allows their locks upon him.

A blunt rapier wouldn't kill a fly
holds no charm for Donnchadh's son,
nor a bodkin weighing at his rump
as he climbs to the gathering place.

Little his wish for a gold cloak
or a high Holland collar;
a golden bangle would only annoy
or a satin scarf to the heel.

He has no thought for a feather bed
but would rather lie on rushes,
more at ease - Donnchadh's good son -
in a rough-wattled hut than a tower top.

Throng of horse in the mouth of a gap,
foot-soldiers' fight, the hard fray,
are some of Donnchadh's son's delights,
and looking for fight with the foreigner.

You are not like Eogan Bán.
They laugh as you step to the mounting block.
A pity you cannot see your fault,
as you follow foreign ways.