NEOPLATONIC THOUGHT IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND: THE EVIDENCE OF SCÉLA NA ESÉRGI

Abstract (Summary)
[...] I will examine briefly the overarching Neoplatonic structure of the text; then I will explore in more detail some specific instances of Neoplatonic concepts being transposed from Latin into the vernacular. In other words, the text moves from purification (in the removal of bodily imperfections that will occur at the resurrection) to illumination (in heaven) to union (with other righteous souls and ultimately with God). In the marginal and supralinear notes in the Bodleian manuscript demonstrate a concern with language, grammar, and etymology, which could represent the transitional stage between the expression in Latin of the types of ideas mentioned above by Plato, his commentators, and John Scottus Eriugena on the one hand, and the expression in Irish of similar philosophical concepts on the other, as Irish scholars developed a vernacular vocabulary to express the complex philosophical and theological ideas of the twelfth century.

Full Text
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Seek na esérgi is a Middle Irish sermon on universal resurrection, extant only in the late eleventh- or early twelfth-century vernacular manuscript Lebor na hUidre) The first half of the text, with its focus on the materiality of resurrection and, in particular, its discussion of exceptional cases - miscarried foetuses, conjoined twins, those with congenital deformities, and so on - locates it within a literary genre that was common throughout medieval Christendom. Thus, even at its most basic level, the text is a witness to Ireland's extensive engagement with non-Irish textual culture in the Middle Ages. It has, however, been largely overlooked by scholars, and the characterization of Scéla na esérgi as 'not particularly original nor particularly Irish', and by extension undeserving of attention, epitomizes scholarly approaches (or the lack thereof) to the text. I would dispute this characterization by McNamara on both counts, and the purpose of the present study is to demonstrate that, while the text can certainly be read within a wider generic tradition, it is also a highly original composition. I suggest that one of the most important aspects of the text's originality is the author's manipulation of the Irish language to express complex concepts deriving from Latin theological and philosophical discourse. Indeed, the complexity of Scéla na esérgi is most impressively revealed in the author's use of the language and philosophy of Christian Neoplatonism, and it is this aspect of the text that will form the primary focus of my study. First, I will examine briefly the overarching Neoplatonic structure of the text; then I will explore in more detail some specific instances of Neoplatonic concepts being transposed from Latin into the vernacular. I end by discussing the implications for our understanding of Ireland's engagement with European intellectual culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Structure

Structurally, Scéla na esérgi takes the form of a Neoplatonic ascent from matter to form to the divine (see Figure 1). It is within this overarching structure that smaller thematic units emerge. The text begins with a formulaic hortatory opening, which serves to inform the audience that the theme of the text is the universal resurrection at Judgement Day. It is immediately clear that, although the author's primary concern is with those destined for heaven, he is interested in their imperfections and irregularities. The author begins with irregular deaths: those who have drowned, or been destroyed by fire, or consumed by animals. From here, he moves to miscarried foetuses. The foetus is a bridge between the irregular death (it has not experienced life outside the uterus) and the subsequent theme, the irregular body (the foetus finds itself embothed in a manner that does not resemble the ideal human 'form', in the likeness of which mankind will be resurrected). The theme of irregular bothes encompasses a discussion of the deformed, midgets, and the obese. The climax of this section is the discussion of the wounds of the martyrs; the most perfect physical imperfection.

Next the author sets up the theme of man as a microcosm of the universe, and this is an aspect of the text
that I will address in more detail below. At this point, the author curbs his philosophical speculation and expresses the importance of scriptural orthodoxy, before beginning a new section of the text which deals with the retention of gender differences following the Resurrection. Raising the issue of gender differences leads the author to weigh up the arguments for the physicality of the resurrected body. Specifically, he attempts to resolve satisfactorily the doctrine of physical resurrection with the Pauline notion of the 'spiritual' resurrection. This thsputatio on material and spiritual notions of resurrection is the point at which ScéL. na esérgi moves away from the issues of physicality which have dominated the first half of the text, toward the spiritual concerns which dominate the second.

In the second half of the text, the author examines the emotions and means of communication between the righteous in their various stations in heaven, and then turns to the relationship between the righteous and God. The very nature of God is such that he is unknowable and indescribable; therefore the text elucidates not God himself, but rather how the righteous experience God. Immediatly, the author proceeds to an image of the pains of hell. To great rhetorical effect, he metaphorically flings us from the face of God to the depths of hell, and this is the first point at which the fate of the damned has been explored. The author cleverly leads the audience into the position of awaiting the conclusion of this text: that is, his explication of the concept of the 'first resurrection' of the righteous and the 'second resurrection' of all men, and an explanation of how that first resurrection can be attained.4 Before concluding, the author is careful to include tangible 'proofs' of the resurrection in the birth of animals and the renewal of plants each year. The text ends in a formulaic manner, with a summary of the events of Judgement Day, a reminder of the pains of hell, and an exhortation to the audience to strive to be among those worthy of the 'first resurrection'.

The structure of Scéla na esérgi is complex and multifaceted. In addition to the structural ascent, from matter to form to God, there is a movement from the exterior to the interior, from the physical to the spiritual. The structure of Scéla na esérgi functions as a contemplative ascent to the vision of God. The text's structure embodies the Neoplatonic concepts on which the text is based. The author moves from matter to form to a fleeting experience of God, before the audience is transported to the depths of hell. In other words, the text moves from purification (in the removal of bodily imperfections that will occur at the resurrection) to illumination (in heaven) to union (with other righteous souls and ultimately with God).5 The vocabulary that the author uses to articulate these profound concepts is of fundamental importance if we are to understand how Neoplatonic thought was understood in medieval Ireland.

Medieval philosophy in the vernacular

The influence of Latin vocabulary on the author's Irish prose is obvious and extensive. By analysing some of the most complex words in the text we can begin to see the multiple layers of meaning which operate throughout Scéla na esérgi. Examining specific examples of complex philosophical terminology in the text, we can interrogate the author's vernacular philosophical vocabulary in more depth, beginning here with dilged. Thomas Charles-Edward's investigation of this term highlighted instances in Old Irish glosses and scholia where the word was used to translate the Latin terms ratio, intellectus, sententia, and dictum.6 All of these Latin words have had an impact on our author's understanding of the semantic possibilities of dilged, particularly ratio, in the way that Anselm of Canterbury, for example, uses the term to mean 'ontological necessity', 'a situation which compels things to be or act in a certain way'.7 The concept which underlies the author's use of the term dilged throughout Scéla na esérgi is the Platonic 'idea' or 'form'. This is indicated by the first appearance of dilged in the text. The author is discussing the fate of miscarried foetuses, midgets, and people who lack limbs. He states that, at the final resurrection, these people will have their 'proper' height and their missing limbs restored to them, and foetuses will be resurrected as adults:

úair ni techtaidsium intib féin sin iar ndligud nemaicsidi 7 inclidii a n-aicnid céin co ro techtsat iar n-adbar nach iar méit chorpdaí. (Lines 25 56-8)

(since that is something which they have in themselves in respect of die invisible and undisclosed form of their own nature, although they did not have it in respect of matter, or in respect of bodily stature.)

In Christian Neoplatonism, existence is divided into three principles: God, 'form' or 'idea', and matter. Humans, as they exist in our physical reality, as matter, are imperfect representations of the 'idea' or concept 'man'. Thus, as matter, foetuses might die before they attain life outside the womb, men may have genetic growth disorders, or be born without legs or arms, and yet there also exists separately the 'idea' man, which corresponds to how man would appear if his nature were to be fully realized. It is to this 'idea' that our author refers when he states that men possess the correct height or the correct limbs, 'iar ndligud nemaicsidi 7 inclii a n-aicn' (in respect of the invisible and undisclosed form of their own nature), i.e. it exists in their 'idea' although it does not exist in matter (adbar).

In the second and third instances of dilged in the text, we can see this idea developing beyond a simple referencing of basic Neoplatonic principles. The author is discussing whether particles will only be resurrected as themselves - for example hair resurrected as hair, and nails as nails - or whether man will be melted down and forged anew. He states that God may shape the bodies of the resurrected from whatever material pleases him:

... amai ro chunntaig diai in céttustin na ndúl na curpu dermara den nemaicside 7 den diligud nemchorpetha ro techtsat co hinchtidhe intib na dúi dia ro tusmidea na cu[ir]p sin. (Lines 2598-600)

(.... as he had fashioned then in the primal creation of all the elements the vast bodies from the invisible form and from the incorporeal form which the elements out of which those bodies were generated possessed latent within them.)
God 'fashions' (cumtaigid) humans from the elements and the 'form' or 'idea' which exists within those elements; therefore, the act of creation itself is confined to the cétístítu (the primal creation)8 and thereafter God acts in the manner of a divine sculptor - an extension of Augustine's metaphor of the physical resurrection being like the recasting of a statue9 - to make man from primal matter and 'idea'. The Augustinian motif of God as artist or craftsmen occurs elsewhere in Scéla na esérgi. Later in the discussion of whether hair will be resurrected as hair, and nails as nails, or whether men will be recast like statues, the author refers to the 'elathain diasneti inde cnai diadai' (line 2588; 'indescribable art of divine intelligence'), which he compares to the 'eladain inde cnai doémnai' (lines 25 9 if.; 'art of human intelligence') in purifying gold. God's skill will be employed in condensing and compressing the

Thus, after the final resurrection, the folud ('substance') of man will be nemthrúalnid (incorruptible') and the aicned ('nature' or 'essence') of man will be spírtállt (spiritual'). But what, exactly, does the author mean by 'substance' and 'nature?'

Understanding the author's conception of folud and aicned is vital to understanding his conception of the ontological status of man. He argues that man will be resurrected in accordance with his aicned. As seen earlier, the author follows Augustine in stating that midgets will be resurrected with a 'proper' height, miscarried foetuses will be resurrected as adults, and those lacking limbs will have them restored. He states that this is according to their aicned. Those of excess weight will be resurrected 'i mëit diechtaign 7 i mëit mesardal a folaid 7 a n-aicnid thlis' (lines 25 61 f.; 'in the correct and moderate size of their substance and proper nature'). Aicned has the meaning of 'inherent quality, nature, essence'. The author's use of aicned relates to the idea of 'form', as expressed with diged, but it also contrasts and complements the use of folud. Folud 'can hardly be rendered by a single word. It denotes that which constitutes the essence of a thing; in the case of words, the ideas they denote; in contracts, the objects or liabilities to which they refer; in the case of lords and clients, the essence of their relationship.'10 Foludwas the Irish word used to gloss Latin substantia in the St Gall Priscian.11 Embothed in foluths the idea that a word cannot be separated from its meaning; a concept of which the author was no doubt aware. Indeed, the use of folud in Scéla na esérgi contrathcts Daniel Binchy's assertion that 'outside the Old Irish glosses, folud never means substantia as a philosophical term'.12 Thus we can see the author using the vocabulary established in the tralition of the Old Irish glosses with a philosophical sophistication hitherto unidentified by scholars. The phrase 'a folaid' in the passage quoted above means both 'of their material' and 'of their substance'; that is, it encompasses both the physiçality of the resurrected body, but also the metaphysical substance of that body: the physical man and the concept 'man'. Complementing the use in the text of aicned, meaning 'nature, essence', we see that the author is concerned not just with the physical nature of resurrection, as a superficial reading of the first half of the text might suggest, but he is at all times aware of the metaphysical properties which combine with the physical to make man: a man is not a man without both body and nature, substance and essence.

For our author, the ideal representation of the 'form' (dliged) man is the incarnate Christ. At Judgement Day, mankind will be resurrected 'iar cosmaillius áesi 7 deiil Crist' (lines 2543f; 'accorntng to the likeness of the age and form of Christ'), that is, 'i n-aís tricháigí' (line 25 50; 'at the age of thirty').13 Because Christ is the 'form', and men can only be imperfect manifestations of that 'form', men will be resurrected 'iar cosmaillius 7 iar n-aicniud na n-amser 7 na ferand i rogenantaí' (lines 25 5 if; 'in accordance with the likeness and the nature of the times and the lands in which they were bom'). Despite the universality of 'form', there will still be individuation in human physicality and in human nature. The idea that men will be resurrected close to the 'form' of Christ is influenced by the Pauline belief that man was created in the image of God on the Thuilllud phene 7 todermana dona hlúdat o ro forodaim-sium na crechta sin (dines 2570-3)

(following that example of the body of the Lord which has in it after resurrection the impressions of the wounds that he suffered at the hands of the Jews, to demonstrate his complete humility to the heavenly Father, and, moreover, to merit pain and torture for the Jews, from whom he suffered those wounds.) The umalóit of Christ (borrowed into Irish from Latin humiliatatem and used to render that term in Irish) emphasizes his humanity, but the bringing low of the son of God also serves to increase the punishment of the Jews. This anti-Semitic rhetoric may be formulaic, or it may in fact have a more specific intellectual context, that is, the Jewish objections to the Incarnation which gave rise to Anselm of Canterbury's Cur Deus homo. As R. W Southern stated, 'the Jewish question was this: how can the Incarnation, with all its indignity of human misery, insult, and shameful death, be reconciled with God's supreme dignity and unchangeable stability'14 The author of Scéla na esérgi, we might argue, addresses this by stating that, although the death of Christ suffered at the hands of the Jews was indeed an example of umalóit (humilatatem), it was also foribhte, 'perfect'. In religious contexts, foribhte can also have the meaning 'holy'.15 Thus the humbling of Christ was 'holy' and 'perfect'. This echoes Anselm 's argument that the
divine humiliation at the Crucifixion was the only fitting means of redemption.16

We can, perhaps, also detect an Anselmian influence on the author's conception of heaven. He quotes Psalm lxxxiii, stating 'Mongenair don fajfind attrebait it [teorfegad[sj]u, a Chomdiu, not-molfat 7 not-adamaífriget do grés triasna saegaib sauthainib' (lines 2673-5 ; 'Happy are those who live in your house, O Lord, they will praise you and wonder at you perpetually through the eternal ages').17 But he follows this with a qualification:

Ni ó briathraib immorro nó gothaib corrpaíb seach't dogénat na nóim in molad-sa for Dia, acht o theorefgad spiraitalla 7 o scrútan imnedónach a ndligid 7 a n-intliuchta. (lines 2675-7)

(It is not through speech, however, or through corporeal, external voices that the holy will make this praise of God, but through spiritual, contemplative vision, and by internal investigation of their form and their intellect.)

The idea that praise of God is not through loud words or external voices, but is silent, through the fixing of one's vision in the mind in order to see God, is found in the opening of Anselm's Prologion:

Eia nunc, homuncio, fugve paullumon occupationes tuas, absconde te modicum a tumultuosis cogita tionibus tuis. Abice nunc onerosas curas, et postpone laboriosas distentiones tuas. Vaca aliqua mount deo, et requiesce aliquam in eo. Intra in cubiculum mentis tuae, exclude omnia praeter deum et quae tu iuent ad quaerendum eum, et clauso ostio quae eum. Die nunc, totum cor meum, die nunc deo: Quaero uultum tuum; uultum tuum, domine, requiro.18

(Come now, little man, put aside your business for a while, take refuge for a little from your tumultuous thoughts; cast off your burdensome cares, and let your wearisome distractions wait. Take some leisure for God; rest awhile in Him. Enter into the chamber of your mind; put out everything except God and whatever helps you to seek Him; close the door and seek Him. Say now to God with all your heart: ? seek your face, O Lord, your face do I seek."

Anselm's earthly meditation and Scéla na esérgfs heavenly praise of God share an interiority, a contemplative search for God within the mind, that suggests a similar spiritual framework; however, the author of Scéla na esérgi also has to balance this intimate interior relationship with God (with its origins in Augustinian thought) with his Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchical scheme.

Teorfegad, translated above as 'contemplative vision', occurs twice in Scéla na esérgi, but, according to the Dictionary of the Irish Language, it is not attested elsewhere in medieval Irish literature. Hence we could argue that the author must have felt it necessary to create a new term to explain the concept he is trying to articulate (or even translate) here. It is a compound word formed from two Irish words: teor and fegad. Teoiris both derived from and used elsewhere to gloss the Latin word theoria?9 Theoria itself comes from Greek; its original meaning is 'looking at' or 'beholding', and from there 'contemplation', i.e. beholding something in one's mind. John Cassian, in his Conlationes, uses theôrêtikê to denote a higher form of spiritual knowledge which can only be obtained once practical knowledge has already been mastered. His definition of theôrêtikê is 'quae in contemplatione divinarum rerum et sacratissimorum sensuum cognitione consistit' ('that which consists in the contemplation of divine things and in the understanding of most sacred meanings'),20 which certainly accords with the view of the experience of God described in Scéla na esérgi. John Cassian was, in the words of Louis Gougaud, "le principal agent de propagation" for the idea of theoria, in its contemplative sense, in western Europe.21 Wesdey Follett has discussed the significance of Cassian's thought for a number of early Irish religious texts, particularly in terms of the idea of meditatio theoriae.22 However, it should be noted that theoria also has the meaning of 'theory' or 'idea', which is the sense that Irish teoir h usually used to gloss. The author of Scéla na esérgi has created, therefore, what we might call a 'glossing caique': he has added the word fegad, meaning 'looking at, beholding', in order to emphasize the visual and contemplative reading of teoir, as opposed to the sense of 'theory' or 'idea'.23 He follows teorfgad -with spirit alia, 'spiritual', indicating that this is contemplative vision, one's sight being fixed on God.

The point that the author is making is significant in our attempt to ascertain an intellectual context in which the text might have been composed. After stating that praise of God is made through fixing one's contemplation on God, the author goes on to say that the saints will also praise God 'o scrútan imnedónach a ndligid 7 a n-intliuchta' (lines 2670f1; "by internal investigation of their form and their intellect"). The author's vocabulary - scrútan from Latin scrutinium, intliucht from Latin intellectus - explicidy equates praise of God with intellectual endeavour. This may reflect the growing belief in eleventh- and twelfthcentury Europe that human salvation could be achieved through knowledge and understanding. Early humanism 'aimed at restoring to fallen mankind, so far as was possible, that perfect system of knowledge, which had been in the possession or within the reach of mankind at the moment of Creation'.24 We might even suggest that, for the author of Scéla na esérgi, perfect knowledge can be equated with dilged, that perfect concept or 'form' of any given thing. The 'perfect system of knowledge', within man's reach at the moment of creation, is like the perfect 'form' of man latent within the elements from which man is created. Certainly our author states that in heaven the saints will continue the task of recovering that perfect state, and perfect knowledge, through constant investigation of themselves and their intellect, and through contemplation of God.

The author sets up a parallel between intellectual vision (terms such as teorfegad and scrútan imnedónach expressing in Irish the idea of the oculus animi, 'the mind's eye') and the beatific vision. It was Augustine of Hippo, in his De Genesi ad litteram, who first categorized modes of vision as corporalis, spiritualis, and intellectus.25 In Scéla na esérgi, vision of God is explicidy stated not to be corporeal, but whether it is
spiritual or intellectual vision that the author is describing is a matter for debate. On the one hand, we have the teotfrogad spírítala, which implies a spiritual vision. However, after stating that praise of God is made through fixing one's vision on God, the author also makes clear that the experience of God in heaven includes 'scrútan inmedónach a ndligid 7 a n-intluchtá: there is an intellectual element to this heavenly vision too. Even in heaven, the faculty of the intellect must be trained in contemplation of the divine.

It is significant both structurally and theologically that the passage which follows the one just discussed, while its subject is the absolute antithesis of the experience of God, that is, the experience of the sinners destined for hell, echoes the language from the previous passage in order to more clearly articulate this opposition. Where the previous passage describes the beatific vision as praise of God 'theorofegad spírítala 7 o scrútan inmedónach a ndligid 7 a n-intluchtá', the following passage states that:

ni thatnéba daño i n-anmannaib na n-ecráibthech dliged intluchtá na tocsen solsi ecnai nó eólais, acht bed fó brón 7 torsi co temei dorchaide a n-anéolais 7 a n-anecnai ar medóin. (lines 2681-4)

(indeed, in the souls of the impious the form of intellect or understanding of illumination, of knowledge, or of wisdom, will not radiate; rather, they will exist in regret and sorrow, with the dark internal stain of their ignorance and inanity within.)

The emphasis on the lack of wisdom or knowledge amongst the sinners (note the use of the antonyms ecnai (knowledge) and ainecnai (ignorance), eólais (wisdom) and aineólais (inanility)) again raises the idea of the beatific vision as an intellectual experience as much as a spiritual one.

A major feature of the intellectual life of twelfth-century Europe was the 'growing sense of the proximity of God and man'.26 This attitude permeates Scéla na esérgi. We have seen that the author emphasizes that man will be resurrected closer to his 'form', which is embodied in the incarnate Christ. Also, the umallóit of Christ serves to emphasize his humanity. The equation of scrutiny of the inner self with praise of God suggests the redemptive powers of the intellect. Indeed, one might argue that man becomes God-like with the investigation of his 'form' whilst God becomes humanized with the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. Thus the proximity between God and man is a recurrent theme in the text. This belief in the capacity of mankind to redeem itself combines with the necessity of divine grace in the conclusion of the homily, where the author urges his listeners or readers to attain the cétesérgi, the 'first resurrection'.

Ind fáirend immorro atragat innosa tria Crist isin chetna esergi i. ind esérgi bis tria alttrigí, atreset daño thall tría Christ i n-eserghi in bethad sudiain, 7 nos-béa leis isin flaitluthain i fcrencecus ind Athair nemda tria bithu na mbetha. Is aind fó fáirend isin chetna esergi i. in Comdu fein o fuaratar na suilchí sin 7 na deg[a]nina. (Lines 2753-8)

(Those, however, who arise now through Christ in the first resurrection, i.e. the resurrection that is through repentance, will also arise there through Christ in the resurrection of eternal life. And He will take them with him into the eternal kingdom, in the presence of the heavenly Father, for ever and ever. It is then that the righteous will receive a very great reward for their virtues and good deeds, i.e. the Lord himself from whom they obtained those virtues and good deeds.)

Thus men can take action to attain their own salvation - through repentence, through good works, through virtue - and yet these things are given to men by the grace of God. It is only at this final point in the text that the authence senses any explicit homiletic purpose. Before this, the text has been concerned with philosophical enquiry, with elucidating the technicality of resurrection, and with a humanistic concern for the physical flaws of mankind and the ways in which they will be rectified at Judgement Day.

A recurrent motif in Scéla na esérgi is the relationship between the microcosmic and macrocosmic.27 We can see this clearly in the section of the text which offers 'proofs' of the final resurrection. Here, the author draws on what Armstrong has described as the 'revelatory function of the cosmos':28

A duine iarom, for in t-eacned, demng[et] duit in mirbulse chieva nesa eserghi, na craind dermara, curip na ndaine 7 na n-anmanna archena genit 7 tuimhir dina siliaib dereólaib: tercbala daño na rind iar fúinid: athnugud daño na fé 7 na lúbi 7 chech reta archena dia fil in forbalt 7 in beogud. (Lines 2732-6)

Cindeed, O man', says the wise one, 'let diese attest to you this miracle of the resurrection: the great trees; the bodies of people and of the other creatures that are born and which are generated from the lowly seeds; moreover, the risings of the constellations after setting, the renewal, indeed, of the grass and of the herbs and of every other substance besides in which there is growth and life'.

What is most striking about these 'proofs' of the resurrection is that none of them are resurrections in any spiritual or intellectual sense. Rather, these are cyclical processes of renewal. However, that the author has recourse to evoking the splendour of the universe is consonant with the idea that 'natural processes are the channels through which divine power informs the universe, and hence to study nature is to acknowledge God's grandeur'.29 The text acknowledges the interrelatedness between man, nature, universe, and divine purpose - that is, between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic.30 Gregory of Nyssa argued that man is 'a little world in himself [containing] all the elements which go to complete the universe'.31 This Neoplatonic idea is reflected in Scéla na esérgi in the juxtaposition of statements which demonstrate the fundamental unity of the substance of man with the substance of the universe.32 We saw above that, at the final resurrection, God will be able to remake humans from whatever material he chooses:

amai chumtaiges innosa inna curpu mora dena siliaib dereoalibaib 7 dano amai ro chumtaig thall i cétístzin na
Notes on the creation are read as revelatory proof of the final resurrection of mankind. In the same way that the cycles of renewal in nature were conscripted as eschatological proofs, here the beginning of the world is linked to its end, in a manner which emphasizes the idea of the eschaton as cyclical return, perhaps indicating further the text's debt to Neoplatonic thought.

Conclusions

I have argued that Scéla na esérgi blends a variety of influences from early scholastic philosophy and theology within an overarching Neoplatonic eschatological scheme. From where might our Irish author have developed this combination of philosophical approaches as well as his complex vernacular terminology? Ireland's manifold connections with England and continental Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries provide us with numerous routes of transmission for texts, ideas, and modes of thought throughout this period. More specifically, there are a number of Irish manuscripts dating from the twelfth century which provide us with evidence of the kind of philosophical and grammatical training demonstrated by the author of Scéla na esérgi. For example, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F. 3.15 demonstrates die kind of educational context in which our author could have developed his philosophical sophistication and his ability to express complex concepts in the vernacular. This is a twelfth-century Irish manuscript, mostly in Latin, but with some Irish marginal notes and glosses. The manuscript contains Calcidius' Latin translation of Plato's Timaeus, with commentary, which includes sections of the twelfth-century commentaries on the Timaeus by Bernard of Chartres and William of Conches. It also contains substantial excerpts from books I-IV of John Scottus Eriugena's Periphyseon. This manuscript has been discussed by Pádraig Ó Néil, who concluded that it is evidence of at least one Irishman studying at Chartres - and therefore being exposed to scholastic learning - in the mid-twelfth century.

For our purposes this manuscript demonstrates die kind of educational context in which a text such as Scéla na esérgi might be produced. The marginal and supralinear notes in the Bodleian manuscript demonstrate a concern with language, grammar, and etymology, which could represent the transitional stage between the expression in Latin of the types of ideas mentioned above by Plato, his commentators, and John Scottus Eriugena on the one hand, and the expression in Irish of similar philosophical concepts on the other, as Irish scholars developed a vernacular vocabulary to express the complex philosophical and ideological ideas of the twelfth century. We can see this process in action in the Bodleian manuscript in the instance noted by Pádraig Ó Néil where the scribe translated a supralinear gloss which is from Bernard of Chartres's commentary on the Timaeus, but the scribe translated the gloss into Irish before copying it into his manuscript. This provides an example of the intermediate stage between the reception of these Latin ideas and their use in original works in Irish. Another such manuscript is Florence, Biblioteca Medice Laurentiana, MS Plut. 78.19. This manuscript contains a copy of Boethius' De consolatione Philosophiae along with two Lives of Boethius (one of which is attributed to John Scottus Eriugena) and a metrical tract. Again the manuscript contains glosses in Latin and in Irish which show an interest in syntax and grammar. In his analysis of these glosses Ó Néil remarked that 'it is likely that they reflect an advanced stage in the study of the Consolatio, where teacher (and students) no longer needed to be concerned about vocabulary and basic understanding of the text.

Certainly Scéla na esérgi was written in a context where scholars were fully engaged with continental modes of scholarly discourse. There is no direct evidence that would conclusively link the author of Scéla na esérgi with die scholarly milieu responsible for the Bodleian or Florence manuscripts. Indeed, it seems likely die composition of Scéla na esérgi should be placed several decades before the Bodleian and Florence manuscripts were compiled. However, the rhetorical structure of the text, die audior's use of complex philosophical terminology, as well as his humanistic concern with die individual, and die interrelatedness in die text between God, man, and die universe, suggest that we can place the text firmly within a humanistic and scholastic context, and die Bodleian and Florence manuscripts offer striking precedents for die transmission of scholastic ideas to Ireland. Scholars have previously been able to demonstrate some limited engagement with continental educational trends in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland: the commentaries on Plato in die Bodleian manuscript are one piece of evidence, and die impact of die arithmetical tract De abaco on British Library, Egerton MS. 3323 is another. However, my analysis of Scéla na esérgi shows that this vernacular text is imbued with die Latin vocabulary and Neoplatonic Weltanschauung of die eleventh- and twelfth-century European scholastic thinkers, and, as such, has significant implications for our understanding of Ireland's engagement with trends in medieval European thought.

[Footnote]
1 Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 25, fols 33v-35r; according to die modern foliation. The text is in the hand of die last of die diree scribes who compiled Lebor na hUidre, a scribe known to modern scholarship as H. The diplomatic edition is Lebor na hUidre/Book of the Dun Cow, ed. R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin, 1929), with Scéla na esérgi at pp. 82-8. Other editions and translations of Scéla na esérgi are: Scéla na Esérgi/ A Treatise on the Resurrection, ed. and trans. John O'Beirne Crowe (Dublin, 1865); 'Tidings of the Resurrection', ed. and trans. Whiddy Stokes, Revue Celtique, 25 (1904), 234-59; Miil na mBeach, ed. and trans. Paul Walsh.
The only other Irish attestations of this notion of 'the primal creation', according to the Dictionary of the Irish Language, 7 (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 255-78 (p. 260).


The idea of two resurrections derives from the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation, xx.4£, in which die first resurrection announces the thousand-year reign of the righteous; the second is the moment of universal resurrection. However, in Scéla na esérgi die first resurrection is more metaphorical, representing a moment of spiritual renewal, perhaps influenced by Augustine's rejection of a Literal interpretation of the biblical account. 5 On purification > illumination > union, see Thomas Finan, Modes of vision in St Augustine: De Genesis ad litteram XIT, in The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin, 1992), pp. 141-54 (p. 154).


7 The seminal study is Caroline Walker Bynum, The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336 (New York, 1995).

8 The only other Irish attestations of this notion of 'the primal creation', according to the Dictionary of the Irish Language. Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials, ed. E. G. Quinn et al. (Dublin, 1983), hereafter DIL, are the glosses in Würzburg, Universitätbibliothek M. p. th. f. 12 Codex Paulinus Wirzburgensis; iai: 'isin chtéine toiste' {Thes. Pal, I. 499) and 2ib4: 'ni ó aicned na chéite misten...' (Thes. Pal, I. 633).


10 R. Thurneysen, cited in DIL, s.v. 'Folud'.

11 DIL, s.v. 'Folud'.

12 D. A. Binchy, 'Irish history and Irish law: IT, Studia Hibernica, 16 (1976), 7-45 (p. 28).


15 DIL, s.v. 'Forbthe'.

16 Anselm of Canterbury, Cur Deus homo, ed. F. S. Schmitt, Florilegium Patristicum 1 8 (Bonn, 1929); Southern, Saint Anselm, p. 206. See also Gilo, Vita Hugonis Cluniacensis abbatis a 1 20): 'What could they do that was more precious than to imitate Christ, who reigning in heaven received the form of a slave so that by humiliating Himself God raised the lowly condition of our guilt into the light of the new liberty', cited in Giles Constable, Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought (Cambridge, 1995), p. 164.


21 L. Gougaud, 'La 'Theoria" dans la spiritualité médiévale', Revue d'ascétique et de mystique, 3 (1922), 381-9 (p. 393). Gougaud also notes that Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius were important conduits for the transmission of the concept of 'theoria'. Unfortunately Gougaud's argument regarding the role of the Irish in spreading the concept of theoria throughout Europe relies on ideas about the nature of la vie anchorétique' in Irish theology which have since been called into question.

22 Wsedey Follett, Celi Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 36-54.

23 On caiques as a feature of learned Irish language see Russell, 'What was best', p. 438.


25 Finan, 'Modes of vision', p. 141.

26 Southern, Scholastic Humanism, p. 30.

27 Many of the most significant themes in Scéla na esérgi, particularly those pertaining to the intellectual capacity of man, and to the status of man as a microcosm of the universe, are also to be found in the Latin writings attributed to Gilla Pátraic, Bishop of Dublin (d. 1084), particularly his Versus de honore humanae condicionis (Best and Bergin, rev. edn (Dublin, 1975), pp. 49-114 (p. 97).


29 Wsedey Follett, Celi Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 36-54.

30 For the development of this concept in European Literature see Williemien Otten, From Paradise to Paradigm: A Study of Twelfth-Century Humanism (Leiden, 2004).

32 As even the incomplete Timaeus accessible to the Middle Ages makes plain, man is himself a universe, composed of die elements . . . and endowed with a soul which reflects the divine wisdom and is by nature subject to its providential influence': Wedierbee, Tbilosophy, cosmology', p. 25. On 'man as microcosm' in the twelfth century see also Constable, Three Studies, p. 165.

33 On the idea of cyclical and vertical, as opposed to horizontal, views of redemption in early Christian thought see Paul Fredriksen, 'Vie bodies: Paul and Augustine on the resurrection of the flesh', in Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honour of Karlfried Froelich on his Sixieth Birthday, ed. Mark S. Barrow and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1994), pp. 75-87 (pp. 76-80).


35 The manuscript and its contents have been discussed by Paul Edward Dutton, 'The uncovering of the Glosae super Platonem of Bernard of Chartres', Mediaeval Studies, 46 (1984), 192-221; Pádraig P. O Néill, An Irishman at Chartres in the twelfth century: the evidence of Oxford, Bodleian library, MS Auct. F III. 15', Eriu, 48 (1997), 1-35. 36 The gloss at fol. ISV on 'spectulis insolito' is a translation of Bernard's 'sed hic cum uisus iacitur in dextrum latus speculi relabitur in sinistrum, et e converso', which the glossator renders as 'in ruther des isin leith eli in scailth uel e contra' ('the beam of Light from the right [appears] in the left side of the mirror uel e contray. O Néill, An Irishman at Chartres', p. 16.

37 life of Boedius, attrib. Quintus Fabius (fol. ir_v); tract on metres of De consolatio Philosophiae by Lupus of Fermeres (fols iv-3*); Life of Boethius, attrib. John Scottus Eriugena (fol. 3V); De consolatio Philosophiae (fols 4'-47).

38 Pádraig O Néill, 'Irish glosses in a twelfth-century copy of Boethius's Consolatio Philosophiae', Eriu, 5 5 (2005), 1-17 (p. 1 5). For the educational context of these glosses see Karin Margareta Fredborg, 'Speculative grammar', in A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy, ed. Dronke, pp. 1 77-9 5.

39 The date of scribe H is significant in this regard, but has been hotly contested on linguistic and palaeographical grounds. See Tomás O Concheanainn, 'The reviser of Leabhar na hUidhre', Einsge, 1 5 (1973-4), 277-88; Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The interpolator H in Lebor na hUidre', in Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8-12 April 1994, ed. J. P. Mallory and Gerard Stockman (Belfast, 1994), pp. 39-46, and Caoimhin Bretheadnach's review of that volume in Einsge, 29 (1996), 200-8. It is to be hoped that further literary study of H's additions to Lebor na hUidre might shed light on this issue.


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