

A medieval Irish dialogue between Priscian and Donatus on the categories of questions

Deborah Hayden

THE STRUCTURING of didactic and literary works in question-and-answer format was a practice so widespread during the medieval period that it is difficult to pinpoint a written genre altogether uninfluenced by it.¹ In an Irish context we find evidence, in everything from pithy maxims to highly wrought literary creations cast in an enigmatic dialogue form, that scholars perceived the act of asking questions to be an essential tool for identifying the many twists and turns on the arduous road to wisdom, and for distinguishing between apprentice and accomplished sage in the realm of intellectual endeavour. We might think, for example, of the maxim ascribed to the seventh-century grammarian Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, according to which ‘assiduous questioning’ (*adsiduitas interrogandi*) was counted as one of the four keys of wisdom (*claves sapientiae*).² At the opposite end of this spectrum lie vernacular compositions such as the tenth-century *Immacallam in dá Thúarad* (‘The colloquy of the two sages’), in which a cryptic contest of esoteric knowledge is presented in the form of an interrogatory exchange between master and pupil. In the latter case, the act of asking questions and

¹I am grateful to Liam Breatnach and Gordon Ó Riain for reading a draft of this paper and for offering many helpful comments and corrections. I alone bear full responsibility for any errors or shortcomings that may remain.

²On the text and its analogues, see Law (1991: 117 §216): *VIRGILIUS: Industria legendi et adsiduitas interrogandi et contemptus diuitiarum et honorificatio doctorum quattuor claves sunt sapientiae*, ‘Diligent reading, assiduous questioning, contempt of riches, and veneration of the learned are the four keys of wisdom.’ For a summary of previous scholarship on Virgilius Maro Grammaticus and arguments in favour of his Irish associations, see Herren 1995 and 1979.

receiving answers to them does not merely serve as a convenient didactic device, but is seen to be integral to the structure of the text as a whole.³

Much of the interest in arranging literary compositions in this way is no doubt rooted in the propaedeutic discipline of *grammatica*, the foundational subject of a liberal arts education that was concerned with teaching the systematic principles of correct speech and the art of interpreting authoritative writers.⁴ The study of *grammatica* gave rise to countless didactic tracts modelled on the basic question-and-answer style of Donatus' famous *Artes*, which held an important place in the development of linguistic learning throughout early medieval Europe.⁵ The influence of Donatus' works is reflected, for example, in the Carolingian scholar Alcuin's treatise *De grammatica*, a treatment of elementary grammatical doctrine that takes the form of a dialogue between the scholar himself and two of his young students.⁶ Medieval Ireland was no exception to these wider pedagogical trends, of course, and it is thus unsurprising to find meta-theoretical musings about the importance of questioning to the learning process embedded in Irish vernacular works composed specifically for the purpose of teaching linguistic precepts.⁷ An example of this is the didactic composition on grammatical rules, attributed to the fourteenth-century poet Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, which opens with an echo of Virgilius Maro's gnomic advice:

Madh fiarfaightheach badh feasach;
glic an éigse ilchleasach;
solas an cleas-sa ad-chluinidh,
doras feasa fiarfaighidh.

'The many-skilled poets will be wise and clever / if they be given to questioning; / clear is this skill of which you hear: / enquiry is the door to knowledge' (Ó Cuív 1973: 140).⁸

³The tenth-century date of the *Immacallam* was tentatively proposed by Stokes (1905b: 5) (in the preface to his edition of the text). For a recent discussion of this composition and its analogues, see Wright (2013).

⁴For a comprehensive discussion of *grammatica* in the late antique early medieval periods, see Irvine (1994).

⁵For an edition of Donatus' work and a study of its later transmission, see Holtz (1981).

⁶For Alcuin's text, see Migne (1849–55: vol. 101, cols. 849–902), parts of which are translated by Copeland and Sluiter (2009: 272–87). For further discussion of the work, see Irvine (1994: 317–25).

⁷On the reception of Donatus' texts in early medieval Ireland, see Holtz (1981: 264–71).

⁸The poem is published in full by McKenna (1947: 66 (text) and 71 (trans.)). See further references to this poem at pp. ix, 10, 166 and 196 in the present volume.

A similar sentiment is expressed in the dictum *tosach éolais imchomarc*, ‘inquiry is the beginning of knowledge’, which is preserved in a collection of Irish maxims dating to the eighth or ninth century and attributed to king Aldfrith of Northumbria (Ireland 1999: 76–7). The present discussion is concerned with exploring a particular technical usage of the term *imchomarc*, which has the basic meaning of ‘interrogating’ or ‘questioning’, in some hitherto unpublished passages of commentary associated with the vernacular grammatical compilation known as *Auraicept na nÉces* (‘The Scholars’ Primer’). In addition to shedding new light on the manuscript transmission and contents of that text, the material to be examined here offers some fresh insight into the theoretical perception of the verbal arts of the *trivium*—namely grammar, rhetoric and dialectic—as well as into the relationship between grammatical and legal learning in early medieval Ireland.

A TRACT ON THE ‘DIVISIONS OF *IMCHOMARC*’

The essential meaning of the stem *arc-* that forms the root of the term *imchomarc* appears to be ‘ask’ or ‘request’. Examples of the simplex form are rare, although compounds with the prepositions *com-*, *aith-*, *imb-com*, *frith-com* and *to-com* are well attested.⁹ Proinsias Mac Cana (2004: 23–4) observed that the verbal noun form *imchomarc*, in which the prepositional prefixes *com-* and *imm-* have added a sense of reciprocity to the meaning of the stem, acquired a technical usage in the context of early praise poetry as a noun meaning ‘address, greeting’, perhaps because it served as ‘a conventional way to begin a poem which the poet himself was not on hand to present in person.’¹⁰ That the term *imchomarc* also occurs frequently in medieval sources with its primary sense of ‘interrogating, inquiring, questioning’, however, is evidenced by several of the citations included in *DIL* under both the form *imchomarc* and its corresponding verb *imm-comaire*.¹¹ This meaning is apparent, for example, from the use of the term in the second quatrain of the eleventh-century poem on various Christian themes known as *Dúan in choicat cest* (‘Poem of the fifty questions’):

⁹*LEIA* s.v. *arc-*; see also *DIL* s.v. *arcu* ‘I beseech’.

¹⁰Mac Cana notes that this meaning seems to have been associated in particular with the verbal noun form *imchomarc* rather than with the general forms of the verb *imm-comaire*, perhaps because ‘it was the verbal noun form that featured in the formulaic phrasing of salutation or greeting delivered through an envoy (and in which the notion of “asking for” someone is tantamount to wishing him well).’ He also compares this usage with the Welsh term *ymgyfarch*, which is often found with the meaning of ‘greeting’ or ‘address’.

¹¹*DIL* s.v. *imm-comaire*; see also s.v. *comaircid*.

Iarfaigter lib coíca cest
do chláir Temra cen tairmesc,
cipé for talmáin na tor
dia dá i nndán a fúaslocod.

Fír ocus ní brég in bág
a comann crichid comlán:
sochaidi fágbas a brat
icon coícat imchomarc.

‘Ask, without restraint, fifty questions on the plain of Tara, whoever on the multitudinous earth be destined to solve them. // The contest, from a complete, perfect union, is true, not a lie: a host loses its cloak at the fifty questions’ (Wright 2013: 214–15).¹²

The word *imchomarc* and related forms were also employed in reference to grammatical concepts. For example, the adjectival derivative *imchomairsnech* is used substantivally to denote an ‘interrogative’ in a lengthy excursus on the meaning of the word *cid* in the law tract *Uraicecht Becc*, and this sense is also attested in the commentary to some versions of *Auraicept na nÉces*.¹³ Similarly, both passive and verbal noun forms of the term serve to elucidate a definition of the Latin interrogative pronouns *quis*, *qualis*, *talis* and *quantus* in a gloss from the St Gall copy of Priscian’s *Institutiones Grammaticae*:

Ergo ‘quis’ et ‘qualis’ et ‘talis’ et ‘quantus’...quae sunt...‘redditiua’ [...], *gl.* .i. érréthcha airindí asrenat frecrae dond immchomurc .i. dofúasailcet animmchomarc immechomarcar tri quis 7 qualis 7 quantus.

‘Therefore *quis* and *qualis* and *talis* and *quantus*...which are... redditives [...], *gl.* i.e. redditives, because they render an answer to the question, that is, they resolve the question which is asked by *quis* and *qualis* and *quantus*’ (Stokes and Strachan 1901–3: II 76, 27a2).

An even more striking grammatical context for the use of the term *imchomarc* is provided by a section of *Auraicept na nÉces* headed *do ernailibh in*

¹²For the poem in its entirety, see Meyer (1903) and Tristram (1985: 285–93). For the figurative use of the word *brat* ‘cloak, mantle, cover’ here, see *DIL* s.v. *bratt* (B 165.26 ff.).

¹³For *Uraicecht Becc*, see for example *CIH* 634.3–8 and 1591.2–7; for the *Auraicept*, see Calder (1917: 195 ll. 3041–2).

imchomairc ('on the divisions of *imchomarc*').¹⁴ This material was edited and translated by George Calder in 1917 as part of his edition of the so-called 'Short Text' version of the *Auraicept*, which was based principally on copies of the text found in the Book of Ballymote and two other roughly contemporary manuscripts (Calder 1917: xiii). As Rudolf Thurneysen observed in his review of Calder's work, however, the text published under the title *Auraicept na nÉces* can in fact be understood as a series of twelve separate tracts, not all of which occur in both published versions of the text, or indeed in other unpublished manuscript witnesses (Thurneysen 1928: 281). Although it has been argued that the earliest core of the compilation dates to the Old Irish period (ca 700–900), the addition of its extensive body of glossing and commentary seems to have continued well into the Middle Irish period (ca 900–1200), and possibly even later than this (Ahlqvist 1983: 31–6). At some point during this process of accretion, the medieval copyists of the *Auraicept* drew a distinction between the so-called 'main body' (*corp*) of the text, consisting of four separate books (the first four tracts in Thurneysen's division), and the related linguistic material which followed this in different manuscript witnesses.¹⁵ The section concerned with the 'divisions of *imchomarc*' is the eighth in the series of tracts edited by Calder, as distinguished by Thurneysen; it is immediately preceded in the compilation by tracts on declensional forms for masculine, feminine and neuter nouns, and is followed by prose and verse material relating to stylistic faults and correctives. Thurneysen (1928: 288) had little to say about this part of the compilation save that it consisted of 'eine nicht sehr klare Spezifizierung von allem, wonach man in der (lateinischen) Sprachlehre fragt.' Calder (1917: 146, note on ll. 1920–5) seems to have been similarly baffled by parts of the section in question, noting that some of its contents appeared to be corrupt.

A few further remarks about the manuscript transmission of this material can be added to these observations in light of the revised list of *Auraicept* witnesses compiled more recently by Anders Ahlqvist (1983: 22–32). First, it is noteworthy that the passage headed *do ernailibh in imchomairc* does not occur in the longer recension of the *Auraicept*, which was edited but not translated by Calder; nor is it found in the witness from the Book of Uí Maine, which Ahlqvist (1983: 22–6) identified as belonging to a third recension of the compilation, intermediate between the two versions edited by Calder. The tract was also omitted from the Book of Lecan witness, which otherwise

¹⁴An edition of the full tract is currently underway by the author.

¹⁵See Calder (1917: 126, line 1636) which states *conige seo corp ind Auraicepta* 'thus far the body of the Primer'.

seems to belong to Calder's 'Short Text' recension, and in another manuscript it has been placed in a slightly different order in relation to the other tracts found at the end of the compilation.¹⁶

Drawing on Ahlqvist's catalogue, I have identified a total of six copies of the tract on the 'divisions of *imchomarc*', which can be divided into two distinct recensions. These are summarised as follows using the sigla introduced by Ahlqvist:

- B:** RIA MS 23 P 12 (536), fol. 179r (*ca* 1391): 'Book of Ballymote'
E: NLS Adv. MS 72. 1. 1 (Gaelic I), fol. 25r (*ca* 1425): 'John Beaton's Broad Book'
T: TCD MS H 4. 22 (1363), pp. 209–10 (s. xvi?)¹⁷
D₃: TCD MS E 3. 3 (1432), p. 24 (s. xvi)
- G:** TCD MS H 2. 15b (1317), pp. 207–8 (machine nos. 133–4) (s. xvi)¹⁸
H₂: TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), pp. 420–2 (s. xvi)

The first four of the witnesses listed here correspond very closely on a textual level, and are all associated with the shorter version of the *Auraicept* compilation edited by Calder. These copies can be contrasted with the final two witnesses, G and H₂, which bear a closer textual relationship to each other than they do to the other copies; unfortunately, however, G breaks off mid-text about a quarter of the way through the tract as it stands in H₂, and the scribe has left the remainder of the page blank. H₂, on the other hand, contains substantial additional material after the point at which G ends, but—in contrast to all other copies of the text—it does not form part of the larger compilation as we know it from Calder's edition. Indeed, the H₂ witness was not even identified as part of the *Auraicept* by the cataloguers of the H 3. 18 manuscript, perhaps because it is largely surrounded by texts of a legal

¹⁶This last manuscript is in TCD MS E 3. 3 (1432), in the portion referred to by Ahlqvist (1983: 23 and 29) as 'Fragment D₃'. On this witness, see Hayden (2011: 23–30).

¹⁷For a discussion of this copy, see Hayden (2014b).

¹⁸Ó Muraíle (1996: 81) has argued that the copy of the *Auraicept* in H 2. 15b was written mostly in the hand of Dubhaltach Mór Mac Fhir Bhisigh. This scholar was probably active during the latter half of the sixteenth century, given that he was responsible for copying a part of O'Davoren's Glossary into BL MS Egerton 88, written under the supervision of Domhnall Ua Duibh Dá Bhoireann at the famous Clann Aodhagáin law school in Park, Co. Galway, in 1569 (*ibid.*, 45). However, the latter part of the *Auraicept* in H 2. 15b also contains the work of other hands, along with corrections and insertions by Dubhaltach Mór's grandson, Dubhaltach (Óg) Mac Fhir Bhisigh. Our (fragmentary) text is found at the very end of this compilation, the last page of which (machine no. 134) Ó Muraíle states 'is in a strange hand' (p. 81).

nature and does not coincide with other material recognised as belonging to the grammatical compilation.¹⁹ It was only with the publication of Ahlqvist's revised catalogue of *Auraicept* witnesses that this copy was identified as a 'fragment' of the *Auraicept* (Ahlqvist 1983: 24).

In view of the above remarks, one might argue that it is more useful to think of the tract on the 'divisions of *imchomarc*' in terms of what Thomas Charles-Edwards (2014: 100–1) has referred to, in relation to early Irish legal material, as a 'satellite-text': or in other words, a tract which in origin may have circulated separately from the main body of *Auraicept* material, but was added to a dossier that included that text as its main item by a later compiler. The H₂ version of the tract on *imchomarc* is of particular significance for present purposes, since several of the passages to be discussed here are only found in this version of the text, and have therefore never before been published. In the excerpts from that witness given below, bold typeface indicates material that is found in both recensions of the text (and thus in the edition produced by Calder), while normal typeface indicates glosses that are specific to the H₂ version (and, in some cases, also found in the incomplete witness G).

In order to provide some contextual background for a discussion of commentary in the H₂ witness, I have reproduced below Calder's edition and translation of the tract's shorter recension, which is based on B, E and T:²⁰

Incipit do ernailibh in imchomairc in so sis.

Atat da aithfeghad for imchomarc .i. imchomarc iar n-inni thoirmi
 7 imchomarc iar n-airbhirt nan-airbirenn bith. Atat ceithre ernaili
 fair .i. meit 7 inni 7 inchosc 7 aicnead. Imcomarc iar n-inni thoirne:
 Atat ocht fothoirnde fair 7 ceithri primthoirnde na n-ocht fothoirnd.
 It he gabair fona iv primthoirndib conid ocht primthoirnde
 samlaid, cenmota comacomul 7 comfhilltighe 7 comshuidhighe
 .i. comacomul ceilli 7 ceneóil 7 cetfaidhi cuirp 7 anma 7 folaidh
 7 airmhi 7 aicenta. Is e int aicned hisin adasramed uili. Is e in

¹⁹The section in question is briefly described in the catalogue with the heading 'Grammatical, of questions between Priscian and Donat' (Abbott and Gwynn 1921: 149). The text is preceded by an acephalous and incomplete copy of *Crith Gablach*, and followed by a glossary of citations drawn from *Bretha Nemed Dédenach* (Breatnach 2005: 41–2).

²⁰Several aspects of Calder's translation of this passage would merit further discussion and improvement, but as it serves here chiefly to provide a general context for my analysis of passages in the H₂ version of this material, I have for present purposes simply reproduced the text and translation as they stand in his edition.

met co fester in met no in laighet bis isin focul. Is i in inni co fester in inni uilc no maithiusa bis fond focul. Is e int inchosc co fester coich indsci, in indsci no in rann indsci. Masa rann indsci cate defir eter raind 7 indsci. Maso indsci coich in indsci, in ferindsci no in baninndsci no in deimindsci. Maso banindsci .i. indsci banda, *ut est, nutrix* .i. muimech lasin Laitneoir, int uili gne feminda dachuisin dar beolo duine is *nutricis* in cenel sin, ar is *nutrix* is bhuimeach doaib uili. Maso ferindsci .i. indsci ferdha, *ut est, pater* .i. athair lasin Laitneoir, int uile gne mascul 7 femin 7 neodair dochuisin dar beolu nduine is *pater* is athair doib uili .i. Dia Uilichumhachtach, Athair na n-uili dhula. Maso dhemindsci .i. indsci dimbeoaighthi, *ut est, caelum* .i. neam lasin Laitneoir, int uile gne neoturda dochuisin dar beolo nduine is o nim ainmnigter. Is inni in cetna diall 7 diall tanaiste 7 tres diall 7 ceithreamad diall 7 cuiced diall 7 rann 7 res 7 rece. [I]ssi in [res in] primthorand. Is i in rece in fothorand. In fhothorand i sen, atat cethri ranna fuirri .i. seacht n-airm 7 seacht n-acenta 7 secht ndescena a dheiscin iar ceill 7 iar ceniul 7 iar nguth 7 iar mbreithir 7 iar labradh. Is do comachomol in gotha 7 na breithri sin 7 labartha asait ernaili imchomairc. Finit.

‘Incipit to the divisions of analysis is this below.

There are two views of analysis, that is, analysis according to the meaning it denotes and analysis according to the method which it uses. There are four divisions of it, to wit, size, quality, denotation, and accent. Analysis according to the quality which it signifies: There are eight subordinate parts in it, and four primary parts of the eight subordinate parts. These are included under the four primary parts, so that thus there are eight primary parts, besides conjunction, derivatives, and compounds, to wit, conjunction of sense and species, perceptions of body, soul, substance, number, and accent. That is the accent in which they have all been reckoned. That is the size, that the size or smallness which is in the word might be known. That is the quality, that it might be known whether it is a quality of evil or good that underlies the word. That is the denotation, that it might be known of what *innsce* it is, whether gender or part of speech. If it be a part of speech, what is the difference between part and speech. If it be gender, what is the gender? masculine, feminine, or neuter gender? If it

be feminine gender, to wit, female gender, *ut est, nutrix*, nurse, with the Latinist, the whole female species that passes over human lips, that genus belongs to *nutrix*, for *nutrix* is nurse to them all. If it be masculine gender, that is, male gender, *ut est, pater*, father, with the Latinist, the whole species of masculine, feminine, and neuter that passes over human lips, it is *pater* that is father to them all, that is, Almighty God, Father of all the elements. If it be neuter gender, that is, lifeless gender, *ut est, caelum*, heaven, with the Latinist, the whole neuter species that passes over human lips is named from *nem*, heaven. Quality is the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth declensions, and *rann*, verse, and *res*, tale (?), and *rece*. *Res* is the first division. *Rece* is the subdivision. In that subdivision there are four parts, to wit, seven numbers, seven accents, and seven aspects, its aspects according to sense, species, voice, verb and language. It is for conjunction of the voice, and that word, and language that the divisions of analysis grow. *Finit'* (Calder 1917: 144–9, ll. 1893–926).

The opening to all six copies of this passage thus states that there are two 'views' or 'considerations' (*aithfégad*)²¹ associated with the term *imchomarc* (translated by Calder as 'analysis'): namely *imchomarc* 'according to meaning' (*iar n-inni*) and *imchomarc* 'according to use' or 'application' (*iar n-airbhir*). The words *inne* 'essence, quality, meaning' and *airbert* 'act of using, practising; application' are contrasted elsewhere in exegetical glosses, often as part of a trio of terms that also includes *bunad* 'origin', the last of which typically serves to link the vernacular word subject to analysis with a Greek or Latin form. The use of *inne* and *airbert* in these contexts would repay further scrutiny, but they frequently seem to have been employed as references to the semantic content of a word on the one hand and its written form or oral usage on the other.²² When applied to the word *imchomarc*, moreover, these two analytical categories are further divided into parts and sub-parts. The first (*imchomarc iar n-inni thoirni*) includes aspects such as *comfhilltighe* 'derivatives, inflections', *comshuidhighe* 'compounds', *folad* 'substance' and *áirem* 'number', while the

²¹See *DIL* s.v. *aithfégad* which suggests 'points of view' for this attestation. A significant number of the examples given in *DIL* are derived from legal commentary.

²²See for example Calder (1917: 42–3, ll. 571–2 = 194–5, ll. 3028–31; 56–7, ll. 762–3 = 211, ll. 3551–4); *CIH* 344.28–31 (introduction to the *Senchas Már*). Binchy (1976: 26) has noted that the *aigne airberta* (elsewhere called *aigne airechta*) is the name for an advocate who 'may plead in court in all cases involving the ordinary law, but only up to a certain stage in the proceedings called *astad airberta*'. On this figure, see also Breatnach 1990: 10–13.

second (*imchomarc iar n-airbhirt*) includes *méit* ‘size’, *inne* ‘quality’, *inchosc* ‘denotation’ and *aicnead* ‘accent’ or ‘nature’.²³ The significance of these various sub-classes cannot be treated in full here, and it is not clear that they were fully understood by the medieval copyists themselves, but it is worth noting that several of them closely resemble categories of definition commonly employed in medieval Latin grammatical texts, such as inflection, gender, number, compound formations, substance and accent. For example, the terms *inchosc* ‘denotation’, *inne* ‘quality’, *méit* ‘size’ and *aicned* ‘nature (?)’ clearly echo Latin *quis*, *qualis*, *quantus* and *talis* respectively; as we have seen, these are the terms cited by Priscian as interrogative pronouns that ‘render an answer to the question’ (*asrenat frecreae dond immchomurc*).²⁴

It may have been by virtue of this grammatical association that Calder (1917: 144, n. on ll. 1893–1926) pointed to Priscian’s *Partitiones* or ‘parsing grammar’ as a source for the passage on *imchomarc* as a whole (for the Latin text, see Keil *et al.* 1855–80: III 457–515). Priscian’s work presents a minute metrical and grammatical analysis of the first line of verse in each of the twelve books of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, structured in a question-and-answer format; it was little known in the early medieval period, but was re-introduced into Carolingian circles around AD 800 (Law 2003: 86–7 and 148). The grammarian typically begins each analytical exercise by asking to what part of speech (*pars orationis*) a word belongs, and then proceeds to dissect the word further by posing a series of questions and answers aimed at establishing its properties, i.e. whether a given noun is proper or common, primitive or derived, etc. Calder’s identification of the *Partitiones* as a possible source for the passage on the categories of *imchomarc* in the *Auraicept* rests on a rather small corpus of evidence, however, such as Priscian’s analysis the words *omnipotens* and *nutrix*, which are also invoked as examples of masculine and feminine gender in the Irish text (Calder 1917: 146, n. on ll. 1911 and 1914).

Calder’s suggestion may be strengthened somewhat, however, by noting that the introductory heading of the longer (unpublished) H₂ witness equates the ‘types of *imchomarc*’ with *ocht ranna na hinsce*, or ‘the eight parts of speech’:

Earnail imcomarc and sō .i. *ocht randa na hindsci arna n-aithfēgad tré aicentaib na n-ūdar, ðir nī fagar fregra na fīarfaiigi acht ó cheachtar dīb sin do ní dá ticc tar bēol duine.*

²³The term *aicned* is translated by Calder as ‘accent’ (see above, p. 74), but may also have been interpreted as the word meaning ‘inherent quality, essence, nature’: see *DIL* s.v. 1 *aicned*, 2 *aicned* and *aicend*.

²⁴See above, p. 70.

‘**Division of questions (*imchomarc*) here**, i.e. the eight parts of speech after they have been considered through the minds of authorities, for an answer to any inquiry (*fiarfaige*) which comes across the mouth of a person is only found from one of those.’²⁵

This heading is followed in turn by a list of the parts of speech in both Latin and Irish within the body of the tract, seemingly indicating an association in the glossator’s mind between the act of asking questions and the grammatical practice of parsing.²⁶ Nevertheless, while these parallels may suggest some affinity with Priscian’s grammatical text, it is noteworthy that individual words are not analysed in the tract on *imchomarc* in the same way that they are in the Latin grammarian’s work; the former instead largely enumerates the various analytical categories themselves without applying them to any specific text.

A second source-identification by Calder may shed some more light on the nature of our passage, however. In a note on the very last line of the tract, the editor drew attention to Isidore’s definition of the term *oratio* (‘utterance’) in his *Etymologiae* (II 18). Within a wider discussion of rhetoric and dialectic, Isidore explains that the grammatical constituents of an *oratio* are the word, phrase, clause, and sentence, and specifies that *periodos autem longior esse non debet quam ut uno spiritu proferatur* ‘a sentence should not be longer than what may be delivered in one breath’ (ed. Lindsay 1911; trans. Barney *et al.* 2006: 75).²⁷ The concluding sentence of our text explains that the categories of *imchomarc* arise from the union of voice (*guth*), word (*briathar*), and utterance, or the act of speaking (*labairt*) (Calder 1917: 148, n. on line 1925.) This description itself echoes the references, made repeatedly in the tract’s enumeration of gender categories as well as in the heading of the H₂ witness, to language that passes ‘across the mouth of a person’ (*tar bēol duine*). Calder’s comparison with Isidore does not, of course, indicate a direct correspondence between the two sources, but the physical image invoked in the vernacular text of words that move across the mouth of a person would suggest that the tract on the ‘divisions of *imchomarc*’ may have been understood, at least in part, as having to do with the act of producing speech.

²⁵TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 420 (heading).

²⁶TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 420, ll. 13–24.

²⁷This may be what underlies doctrine in medieval Irish legal texts relating to the number of ‘breathings’ (*anála*) permitted in the testimony of various classes of person, on which see Stacey (2007: 76–7).

Two contextual points are worth noting in this regard. First is that the reference to *guth* and *briathar* in the final line of the tract's shorter recension is resonant of other medieval Irish pedagogical texts concerned with the physiology of the voice, parts of which clearly draw on elements of classical rhetorical tradition. For example, the section of the eighth-century law-text *Bretha Nemed Dédenach* entitled *Dlíged Sésa a hUraicept na Mac Sésa* ('Order of higher knowledge from the primer for students of higher knowledge') treats of the interaction between voice, sound and word, defining *guth* as something that is located 'inside the mouth' (*i mbél*), and describing it as the *máthair bhréithre*, or 'mother of the *briathar*', which is in turn located outside of the mouth (Corthals 2007: 127–47 and Poppe 2016; for a discussion of Latin analogues for this text, see Kelly 2002). The Latin rhetorical associations of *Dlíged Sésa* are evidenced in part by the fact that, when stating that the three parts of the *guth* 'voice' are *mēd*, *sonairte* γ *maoithe* 'size, strength and softness', the tract cites the pseudo-Ciceronian rhetorical text *Ad Herennium* on the three parts of the *figura vocis* 'form of the voice'. These are *magnitudo* 'strength' or 'dynamic'; *firmitudo* 'articulation (of individual words)' and *mollitudo*—the last literally meaning 'softness' or 'flexibility', but interpreted by one scholar as the 'general tone of the utterance', i.e. conversational, persuasive or admonitory (Tranter 1997: 13–14; cf. Corthals 2007: 137).

There is also other evidence to suggest that the glossators of the *Auraicept* would have been familiar with the Latin grammarians' definition of the term *oratio*, in both its general sense of 'speech, discourse, language' and its more technical linguistic meaning of 'a clause expressing a complete meaning'. Elsewhere in the compilation, for example, Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae* is cited as follows:

ut Priscianus dixit: Oratio est or[di]natio congrua[m] dictionum perfectam [que] sententiam demonstrans .i. ata in innsci ordugud comimaircide na n-epert faillsiges in ceil[I] foirbthi (Calder 1917: 44, ll. 589–92 = 198, ll. 3141–4; cf. Keil *et al.* 1855–80: II 53).

'As Priscian says: *oratio* is the appropriate order of words expressing a complete thought, that is, there is in speech the appropriate order of words which shows the complete meaning' (my translation).

The reference to 'complete meaning' (Lat. *sententia perfecta*, Ir. *ciall foirbthi*) as a necessary component of an *oratio* may be significant here. Isidore emphasises this aspect of the term *oratio* somewhat more in the first book of his *Etymologiae* (I v. 3) where, in reiterating the well-worn definition of

grammatica as the ‘knowledge of speaking correctly’ and ‘the origin and foundation of liberal letters’ (*grammatica est scientia recte loquendi, et origo et fundamentum liberalium litterarum*) he states that ‘oratory (*oratio*) is the joining of words with sense’ (*est autem oratio contextus verborum cum sensu*):

Oratio dicta quasi oris ratio. Nam orare est loqui et dicere. Est autem oratio contextus verborum cum sensu. Contextus autem sine sensu non est oratio, quia non est oris ratio. Oratio autem plena est sensu, voce et littera (Lindsay 1911).

“‘Oratory’ (*oratio*) is so called as if it were ‘method of speech’ (*oris ratio*), for ‘to orate’ (*orare*) is to speak and to say. Oratory is the joining of words with sense. But a joining without sense is not oratory, because then there is no method in the speaking. Oratory is made up of sense, voice and letters’ (Barney *et al.* 2006: 42).

In light of the evidence outlined thus far, it might be tentatively argued that the two ‘views’ of the word *imchomarc* cited at the beginning of our tract—namely *inne* ‘quality, essence’ and *airbert* ‘use, practice, application’—constitute an oblique reference to the Latin grammarians’ definition of *oratio* as a linguistic concept that comprises both meaning (*sensus*), i.e. the semantic analysis of words, and method or procedure (*ratio*), i.e. the system of rules which govern their use in a written or performative context. At the very least, the fact that glosses found in both recensions of the tract on the ‘divisions of *imchomarc*’ suggest some familiarity with Priscian’s *Partitiones* text, while the longer recension explicitly refers to the eight parts of speech understood to comprise an *oratio*, indicates that the understanding of *oratio* in the wider sense of ‘speech’ or ‘utterance’ is here closely intertwined with the elementary grammatical process of parsing a sentence. These observations may also inform the placement of the passage on the categories of *imchomarc* within the *Auraicept*-compilation as a whole. As has been noted above, the tract is preceded in the compilation chiefly by material concerned with sounds, syllables, gender, metrical units, accents and declension, and followed by doctrine on stylistic faults and correctives. This arrangement in many ways parallels that of Donatus’ *Ars Maior*, in which the first book is concerned chiefly with letters, syllables, metrical feet and accents; the second with the definition of *oratio* and the parts of speech; and the third with barbarisms, solecisms, metrical faults and tropes.

The rhetorical context of the tract on the two types of *imchomarc* is, as I will attempt to demonstrate in what follows, a more noticeable characteristic

of commentary preserved exclusively in the longer H₂ witness. The remainder of this discussion will focus on a few specific aspects of that commentary that shed light on both the nature and interpretation of this material by medieval scholars, as well as on its relationship to early Irish legal texts.

GRAMMAR, RHETORIC AND LEGAL PROCEDURE

A salient feature of the H₂ witness on the two categories of *imchomarc* is a series of glosses, added at various places throughout the text, which refer to three distinct authorities (*ugdaráis*) associated with the act of questioning. The first example of this occurs in the opening of the tract:

Atáitt dā earnail ar imchomharc. *ernail* .i. rand; *comarc* .i. comartha na *trī* sūad do cumaiscedar fan focul .i. saī ga *fiafraige* 7 saī ga *fregra* 7 saī aga *breithemnugu*, 7 is imcomarc cid *ænfer* *fiarfaigus* dā n-éisi (?).²⁸ **Eodh ón imchomarc iar n-oirbirt et imchomarc iar n-inde tóirne** .i. rinn tachalta na foghloma. **Imcomarc iar n-oirbirt** .i. smūained aicned na sūad nō ára n-airbertnaiter *bith*.

‘There are two divisions of questions. *Ernail* ‘division’, i.e. *rand* ‘part’; *comarc* ‘indication’, i.e. the mark of the three sages who got involved with (lit. ‘were mixed under’) the word,²⁹ i.e. a sage asking it, and a sage answering it, and a sage pronouncing judgement on it, and it is a question (*imchomarc*) even if it is a single man who asks in their absence (?) **That is, a question according to use and a question according to the meaning it denotes**, i.e. the point of excavation of learning. **A question according to use**, i.e. the sages’ contemplation of natures, or with regard to which they are used.³⁰

Here we are presented not only with two interlocutors who carry out the roles of asker and answerer in the questioning process, but also with a third individual who is said to pronounce judgement over them. If my interpretation

²⁸The expansion in the manuscript is unclear here.

²⁹The glossator’s use of *comartha* ‘sign, mark, symbol’ suggests that he understood *comarc* in the sense of ‘signal, indication’; however *DIL* s.v. *comarc*, notes that the term is often confused by metathesis with *comrac* (verbal noun of *con-ricc*), ‘meeting, encounter, opposition’. The original gloss may therefore have been intended to refer to the ‘meeting’ of the three authorities.

³⁰TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 420.1–4.

of this passage is correct, it is then also specified that the act of questioning (*imchomarc*) can also be carried out by a single individual without the participation of any other party—possibly an allusion to the kind of ‘analysis’ involved in parsing a sentence. A trio of individuals is again referred to in the H_2 witness, however, within a list of the seven types of *fégad* ‘views’ or ‘specifications’ that are associated with the category of *imchomarc iar n-airbhirt* ‘questioning according to use’. The last of these is said to be ‘nature’ (*aicned*), which is claimed to be the basis of every acquired skill or art (*ealadha*):

Fégad ó aicned na t[r]í n-údar 7 ó aicned na persann dā ndēntur in t-imcomharc, ūair is aicned in cétní ór tinnscetuil na uile ealadha, conad aire sin as ubdurās cach aicned fir.

‘Specification from the nature of the three authorities and from the nature of the people to whom the question (*imchomarc*) is posed, for nature is the first thing from which every composition has begun, so that that is why every true nature is an authority.’³¹

Subsequent to this, a gloss on the subject of the ‘three plural interrogatives’ (*trí imchomhairsnig ilair*), which clearly echoes the commentary on this topic found in other texts,³² again mentions an authority who asks questions, an authority who answers them, and an authority who pronounces judgement on the first two. A physical setting for this process is also envisaged by the glossator:

Trí imchomhairsnig ilair, ūair is ūathad trī fíarfaige in ubduráis fíarfaighis 7 trī frecardha in ūdair fregras 7 is illda rādh in ūdair brethemhnaigis ar imchomarc in ūdair. 7 in t-imcomarcsa uodéin cā histadh forsa tora, ūair atāit trī histad ann: istad tidnaicech .i. tidnacal na cesta aicin tí tidhnaigis an t-imcomarc. Istad toirismech .i. acan tí ara curthar acan tí gá toirisinn an t-imcomharc. Istad imfrectharach eturu dīb līnaibh .i. in ubdair fethes ūdarās in imchomaire .i. uíss na brethem dōibh.

‘Three plural interrogatives, for the three askings of the authority who asks and the three answers of the authority who answers are

³¹TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 421.13–15.

³²See above, p. 70.

singular, and the speech of the authority who delivers a judgement on the question of the authority is plural. And the question itself, what is the place to which it will come, for three places exist: the delivering place, ^{i.e. delivering of the question}, of the person who delivers the question. A stopping place ^{i.e. for the person to whom it is put} of the person with whom the question comes to rest. A place of exchange between both of them, i.e. of the authority who watches over the authority of the question, i.e. who is a judge for them.³³

The H₂ glossator's emphasis on the involvement of three individuals in the act of questioning finds an obvious parallel in early Irish texts concerned with legal argumentation. Although we have little direct information about the stages of curial procedure in medieval Irish sources, we do find an articulation of the process of hearing a case in the H 3. 18 recension of *Cóic Conara Fugill*, a text that describes the five 'paths' or procedural options that litigants together with their advocates can select depending on the nature of their case (Stacey 2007: 64–5).³⁴ There it is stated that *tagra* ('pleading') is followed by *fregra* ('answer, rejoinder'), which is in turn followed by *breth* 'judgement':

[...] ré ria toga, toga ria n-arach, arach ria tagra, tagra ria fregra, fregra ria mbreith, breth ria forus, forus ria forba [...]

'[...] time before agreement, agreement before guarantee, guarantee before pleading, pleading before rejoinder, rejoinder before judgement, judgement before promulgation, promulgation before conclusion' (Thurneysen 1926: 30; my translation).

On the basis of this passage, D. A. Binchy (1976: 30) identified the eight stages in the hearing of a case as follows:

(1) The fixing of a time for the hearing, (2) the selection of the proper 'path' (type of action) by the plaintiff's counsel, (3) the giving of security (the nature of which varies with each 'path'), (4) pleading,

³³TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 421.28–32.

³⁴The H 3. 18 version of *Cóic Conara Fugill* has been tentatively dated to around the eleventh century: see Kelly 1988: 250, and Archan 2007: 129 n 34. For an earlier edition, see Thurneysen 1926. For another source on the curial process, see Kelly 1986.

(5) rejoinder, (6) judgement, (7) *forus*, which Thurneysen translates ‘Geltenderklärung’, and we may render by ‘promulgation’ or ‘pronouncement’ by the *brithem* [...] (8) conclusion.

The scenario presented in our text would thus seem to reflect stages 4–6 in this process, i.e. one individual asks a question, a second responds, and a third pronounces judgement.

It is noteworthy that the version of *Cóic Conara Fugill* found in H 3. 18 also contains a number of glosses which seem to be derived from the *Auraicept*, attesting to the use of that text in the legal schools, and perhaps even to familiarity with the strand of the *Auraicept*’s textual tradition that is represented by the H₂ copy of the tract on the ‘divisions of *imchomarc*’. For example, Archan has drawn attention to the tendency for the glossators of the law text to classify various aspects of the procedural process into groups of eight by comparison with the eight parts of speech, such as the enumeration of eight stages of a hearing cited above (Archan 2007: 96–102). Elsewhere, its glossator lists the eight things that a lawyer should do to prepare a case, and then sets out various instructions relating to the performance of the hearing, such as avoidance of speaking too loudly or too softly. Particularly reminiscent of the tract on the ‘divisions of *imchomarc*’ is the fact that clarity or precision of discourse is identified in the commentary to *Cóic Conara Fugill* as an oratorical virtue based on the use of the eight parts of speech:

Cia lin d’ernailib gleides cach fechem do beth lais † do denam riana fechemnus? .Nī. a ocht. Cadeat? Esradh ⁊ urathmeadh ⁊ aithfegad, comlabrad (?) ⁊ comet, indaithmech ⁊ imagallaim ⁊ aisneis; ⁊ gurub do frimhur feicheman riana feichemnus donither sin, ⁊ gurb iar suidhi doibh donither; ⁊ is amhla dognither .i. gin toll .i. im roairdi, gin togaeis .i. gin gæis a tai, im roisli, cen tuisel .i. don conair fora chele, go rellugud ruighles .i. co rellad rodiles do tabairt dó forsna foclaibh iarna cantain dó tri ocht rannaib na hindscene. ⁊ iss iad-so iat. nomen, pronomen, uerbum, aduerbium, participium, coniungcio, preprocicio interieccio (Archan 2007: 320–1 = *CIH* 1028.13–21).

‘How many things is each advocate permitted to have or to do before his pleading? Not difficult: eight. What are they? Establishing a foundation and calling to mind in advance (?) and specifying; conversation and retention, analysis and dispute and explanation; and so that it is that which is done first by an

advocate before his pleading, and so that it (i.e. pleading) is done after they have sat down; and it is thus that it is done, i.e. without piercing,³⁵ i.e. concerning [a voice that is] too loud; without deception i.e. without a ruse in silence concerning [a voice that is] too soft; without stumbling i.e. from one path to another; with a very faithful (particular?) demonstration, i.e. his giving a very faithful precision to the words after uttering them through the eight parts of speech. And these are the noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, participle, conjunction, preposition and interjection' (my translation).

An equally instructive parallel is the literary *mise-en-scène* of the curial process found in the text *Immathchor nAilella γ Airt*, dated by Johan Corthals to ca 700, which describes a lawsuit on the assignment of twins after their mother had been repudiated by their father. Corthals has observed that, despite the ornate style of *retoiric* in which the text is written, its contents clearly detail the logic of the legal proceedings resulting from this lawsuit, in which the arguments of the mother's legal representative and his opponent are deduced by way of claims and counter-claims, and their exchange is presided over by a judge. He has described the tale as 'quite unparalleled among the texts transmitted to us in *retoiric* and connected with historical material: it is the only one that gives a full account of the different stages of a legal proceeding deriving from a historical case, and thus, it can be regarded as a reflex of a literary genre which in the rhetorical schools of antiquity was called *controversia*' (Corthals 1995: 93). As one of the types of declamation that formed the culminating exercise of a rhetorical education, the *controversia* aimed to furnish students with skills in oral delivery such as would be useful for constructing a legal argument. Given that some of the glosses on the H₂ copy of the tract on the 'divisions of *imchomarc*' suggest that that witness belongs to the same intellectual tradition of legal and rhetorical learning as texts such as *Cóic Conara Fugill* and *Immathchor nAilella γ Airt*, one might surmise that the use of the term *imchomarc* itself might somehow reflect the

³⁵The word *toll* is given in *DIL* as an adjective meaning 'pierced' or 'hollow' and as a noun meaning 'hole, hollow' or 'fault, want' (see s.v. 1 *toll* and 2 *toll* respectively). The adjectival form is used in the list of signs of bad pleading in *Tecosca Cormaic*, which includes *toiched toll telachtach* 'a hollow loose suing' (Meyer 1909b: 42–3 §25.6). The same text also gives *roairde ngotha*, translated by Meyer as 'talking in too loud a voice', as another fault (ibid. 40–1 §22.14). In this context, I take *toll* to be a substantivized adjective meaning 'piercing', since it appears to be equated here with the word *roairdi* 'too loud' or 'too high'.

process of dialectical argumentation or ‘questioning’ that is inherent in such pedagogical exercises.

As the passage on curial procedure from *Cóic Conara Fugill* cited above shows, the principles of oratorical delivery are evidenced in medieval Irish judicial texts not only by the rhetorical language and poetic form of the texts themselves, but also through the articulation of precise instructions for how such speech should be performed (Stacey 2007: 75–7). In this light, it is noteworthy that comparable instructions are laid out in the glosses to the H₂ witness of our tract, where we find a passage of commentary on the virtues and vices of oratorical delivery and the faults to be avoided when pleading a case:

Innsi *immorro* atáit *trī* *būada* *fuirre* *γ trī* *dimbūada*. iss iat na *trī* *būada* .i. *praipse* *γ saīthe* *γ sulbaire*³⁶ .i. *éscaidhiacht* *binnis ráidh* .i. *daingen ubdaráis* .i. *soillsechud* in *duibthir*. Iss iat na *trī* *dimbūada* *rigne* *γ dāeithe* *γ dulbaire* *righe* .i. *leisce frecartha dāeithe* .i. *fregra gan ubdarás*. *Dulbairi dorchatus gin tuicsi ga[?]*. *Secht n-ernail filit for becdān* .i. *debaidh can dān*^{leth amuigh d’eladain} .i. *thre na beith fēn ar bec a eladan* *dul for fūarlach, ferg, dīcumang, fāth re friguin, dīlsi ndegfoghuma, dul gan tarba, tacra can éolus*. *Fer tōcbāla tagra nach beir co bunadh, co mōrann a ferg, co n-īslighinn a ūaill: as follus a brēic fair, co ngāirid sochaidí dó*.

‘Speech moreover, there are three virtues upon it and three vices. The three virtues are i.e. promptness and learning and eloquence i.e. fluency, melodiousness of speech, i.e. a firm foundation of authority i.e. an illuminating of the wilderness. The three vices are prolixity, ignorance and inarticulateness. Prolixity, i.e. unwillingness to respond;³⁷ ignorance, i.e. a response without authority. Inarticulateness, obscurity without understanding [?]. There are seven divisions of lowly skill, i.e. contention without skill^{outside of art, i.e. through its having little art}, resorting to verbosity,³⁸ anger, inability, providing an opportunity for counter-attack, putting aside [?] good learning, a procedure

³⁶The glosses are written above the triad, but the second and third should presumably be in reverse order.

³⁷The sense intended here is presumably that a speaker might take too long to render a definitive answer to a question because he is being circumlocutious or evasive.

³⁸*DIL* s.v. *fūarlach* defines this word as ‘the marshy edge of a lake or river; a sudden flood of rain; a freshet’, and lists two instances of its figurative use. The meaning intended here is not entirely clear to me, but in the context might be understood as a ‘flood’ or ‘rush’ (of words), i.e. verbosity.

without profit, pleading without knowledge. A man who sets in motion a pleading who does not see it through, so that his anger increases, so that his pride diminishes: his falseness is clear on him, so that a host of people laugh at him.³⁹

Much of this advice echoes the kind of maxims that are recorded in early Irish wisdom texts. For example, the ninth-century collection of Irish triads cites the three ‘victories’ (*búada*) of speech as *fosta* ‘steadiness’, *gais* ‘wisdom’ and *gairde* ‘brevity’, while the three ‘hateful things’ (*miscena*) in speech are *rigne* ‘stiffness’, *dlúithe* ‘obscurity’ and *dulbaire* ‘a bad delivery’ (Meyer 1906: 22–5 §§177 and 179). Among the ‘signs of bad pleading’ listed in the contemporary tract *Tecosca Cormaic*, moreover, are *tacra cen foglaimm, cen eólus* ‘pleading without instruction, without knowledge’; *dinsem lebur* ‘despising books’; *cathugud cen chomhartha* ‘contending without proofs’; *ilar n-athise* ‘much abuse’ and *ái lonn lenamnach fota* ‘a violent, stubborn, long-winded arguing’ (Meyer 1909b: 40–3 §§22–6).⁴⁰ We also find similar lists of rhetorical merits and pitfalls in a poetic context, such as the ‘sixteen divisions of poetry’ (*uí. hernailí deg na filideachta*) enumerated at the beginning of an eleventh-century metrical tract that sets out the curriculum of the trainee *file*. The beginning of that text advocates skills such as *imgabail emhiltusa* ‘avoidance of tediousness’ and *soc(h)raide raidh* ‘beauty of speech’ (Thurneysen 1891: 120–2 and Meyer 1908: 262–3; see also Breatnach 2013, especially pp. 101–6). It should be noted, however, that the passage of oratorical instructions given in the H₂ copy of the tract on the ‘divisions of *imchomarc*’ has a distinctly legal focus more akin to the maxims in *Tecosca Cormaic*, as evidenced by the warnings to avoid ‘providing an opportunity for counter-attack’ (*fáth re friguin*) or ‘pleading without knowledge’ (*tacra cen eólus*).

A DEBATE BETWEEN GRAMMARIANS

With this rhetorical context in mind, we might turn to one final passage of the H₂ witness of the tract on *imchomarc* that provides a striking conceptual bridge between the transmission of several copies of that material as part of a compilation on elementary grammar on the one hand, and the distinctly legal and rhetorical focus of some of the commentary found only in the tract’s longer recension on the other. Near the end of the H₂ witness, the glossator has

³⁹TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 422.4–9.

⁴⁰Compare also the list of sixteen signs of bad pleading at *CIH* 2342.1–6 (ed. and trans. Ireland 1999: 169–73 Appendix 2), as well as the material immediately preceding this (*CIH* 2341.8–27).

brought the process of pedagogical question-and-answer to life by invoking none other than the two most famous Latin grammarians of Late Antiquity, Priscian and Donatus, as contemporary interlocutors:

Imresan 7 *imarbáidh* do-rála iter Preiscen 7 Donait fecht n-āen. Is amlaidh ro bātār .i. filidh fellsamdha dībh .i. Donait 7 filid foirbhthi dīb .i. Prescean. 7 ro īarfaidh in Donait do Prescen crēd is imcomarc and 7 crēd as *fiarfaige* 7 crēd an *deithber* atā iter imcomarc 7 *fiarfaige*, 7 caide dūalgus na cesta riū. Is uime do-nīther *fiarfaide* ar *dhāigin* a hēolusa. Is uime do-berar in t-*imcomarc* ar *dāigin* a fūaslaicthe, ūair nī *himcomarc* muna *fiarfaige* 7 nī *fiarfaige* munab *imcomarc* co tic cāch dībh trī araile. nó ūair tacra ōn tí da-ber in t-*imcomarc*, *freacra* ōn tī *fora curtar* 7 *imfrecartach* dōib dībh līnaibh 7 *imfrecarthach* la Féne *immorro* .i. is ē is *imfrecartach* .i. in tē *freclas* ar *cach uile focul* is *imcomarc*.

‘A contention and a dispute occurred between Priscian and Donatus once upon a time. It is thus that they were, i.e. [one of them was] a wise scholar, i.e. Donatus, and [one of them was] a complete scholar, i.e. Priscian. And Donatus asked Priscian what *imchomarc* ‘questioning’ is, and what *fiarfaige* ‘asking’ is, and what the difference between questioning and asking is, and what the relationship of the problem (*ceist*) is to them. The purpose for which asking (*fiarfaige*) is done is for the sake of acquiring knowledge about it.⁴¹ The purpose for which questioning (*imchomarc*) is brought is for the sake of solving it, for it is not questioning (*imchomarc*) if it is not asking (*fiarfaige*), and it is not asking (*fiarfaige*) if it is not questioning (*imchomarc*), so that each one of them mixes with the other. Or since [it is] a pleading from the person who brings the question (*imchomarc*), an answer from the person to whom it is put, and an arbiter for them both, and an answerer in Irish law moreover, i.e. it is he who is an answerer, i.e. the person who responds to every single word which is a question (*imchomarc*).⁴²

The explicit framing of this passage as a verbal exchange between two individuals again recalls the rhetorical setting involved in pleading a law-case

⁴¹i.e. the *ceist* ‘question, problem, issue’.

⁴²TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), p. 421.32–41.

that is alluded to elsewhere in the glossing to the H₂ witness of our tract. Here, however, the participants in the dialogue are none other than the famous grammarians Priscian and Donatus, whose anachronistic meeting for the purpose of discussing a specific point of definition is noteworthy and, as far as I know, unparalleled elsewhere. Admittedly, what the Irish glossator rather dramatically presents as a ‘contention’ (*imresan*) and ‘dispute’ (*imarbāidh*) between two celebrity linguists of antiquity turns out to be little more than a conversation, in typical question-and-answer form, on the semantic distinction between the words *fiarfaige* and *imchomarc*, both of which have the basic meaning of ‘to ask, question, interrogate’. However, the scholiast then refers to the involvement of a third party in the process, specifying that there is an ‘arbiter for them both’ in Irish law (*imfrecartach dōib dībh līnaibh ⁊ imfrecarthach la Féne immorro*). Thus here again, the commentator can be seen to place grammar firmly within the parameters of traditional or customary law and its practice.

With regard to the semantic distinction between the terms *imchomarc* and *fiarfaige* that is subject to scrutiny in this passage, it is of course possible to argue that the glossator is merely splitting hairs here. A less cynical interpretation would allow, however, that a genuine attempt is being made to convey some kind of technical distinction between two terms of very similar meaning. In light of the rhetorical focus of much of the commentary that precedes this section in the H₂ witness, one might identify a possible source for this doctrine in rhetorical commentary, cited in several widely disseminated classical sources, concerning the distinction between definite questions (*quaestiones finitae*, also known as *causae* ‘causes’ or hypotheses) and indefinite questions (*quaestiones infinitae*, also referred to as ‘propositions’ or ‘theses’). This theme was famously addressed by Quintilian in his treatise *De institutione oratoria* (III 5.5–6; ed. and trans. Russell 2001: II 40–1), a work which was first published around AD 95 but had a profound effect on rhetorical teaching throughout the classical and medieval periods (Murphy 1990). Quintilian explained that a definite question, such as ‘Should Cato marry?’, is one concerned with particular persons or occasions, while an indefinite question makes no such reference to particulars, as in the example ‘should one marry?’ The former (‘should Cato marry?’) elicits an answer of either ‘yes’ or ‘no’, while the latter can only be answered through various forms of argumentation, the thematic structuring of which is provided by rhetorical topics of invention that are the focus of pedagogical exercises in declamation. Significantly, Quintilian also observed that definite and indefinite questions are not mutually exclusive. For example, the indefinite question ‘should one marry?’ is logically prior to the definite one ‘Should Cato marry?’, while

conversely an attempt to answer this definite question might require reference to the more abstract principle (Russell 2001: II 41–7).

In the passage cited above from the H₂ tract on *imchomarc*, the glossator associates the word *ffarfaige* with the act of asking a question for the sake of knowing (*ar dhaigin a heolusa*) the answer to a problem (*ceist*). This might be compared to the definite question of classical rhetoric, which is posed in order to elicit an answer of ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and therefore must attend in some way to context. On the other hand, the Irish commentator associates the word *imchomarc* with the act of asking a question for the sake of ‘solving’ (lit. ‘loosing’ or ‘opening’) a *ceist* (*ar daigin a fuaclaicthe*).⁴³ Like the rhetorician’s indirect question, the latter could refer to the process involved in calling upon various topics of invention to deal with more abstract subjects of argumentation, making no allowance for particular conditions. In other words, the distinction between the terms *eolas* and *fúaslucad* in this context may relate to the process of acquiring an answer directly versus acquiring it through a process of argumentation, the topics for which would need to be learned by the student of rhetoric. Also noteworthy is the H₂ glossator’s statement that each of these two types of question ‘mixes with the other’ (*co tic cach dibh tri araile*), which echoes the premise of classical rhetoric that definite and indefinite questions can be used simultaneously in logical argumentation.

Quintilian’s twofold division of oratorical questions was widely disseminated in sources concerned with rhetoric. For example, in Martianus Capella’s allegorical account of the seven liberal arts, which was frequently copied in Carolingian circles, Lady Rhetorica expounds upon the distinction between limited and unlimited *quaestiones* used in oratorical argumentation.⁴⁴ Isidore also summarises this doctrine within his discussion of rhetoric in the second book of his *Etymologiae* (II, xv, ed. Lindsay 1911; trans. Barney *et al.* 2006: 74), where he begins by stating that *genera quaestionum duo sunt* ‘there are two kinds of questions’: a finite one (called *causa* ‘case’ in Latin) and an infinite one (the *propositum* ‘proposition’). Echoing Quintilian’s explanation that definite and indefinite questions are not mutually exclusive, Isidore specifies in his brief account that *in causa vero certa omnia sunt, unde quasi pars causae est propositum*, ‘in a case (*causa*) everything is particular, whence a proposition is as it were a part of a case’: in other words, general theses may be used as part of the argumentation of a particular case.

⁴³See *DIL* s.v. *fúaslaici* (d).

⁴⁴The passage is translated by Copeland and Sluiter (2009: 162–3). On the use of Martianus Capella’s work in Carolingian Europe, see Contreni 2014: 91, and references therein.

A rather more subtle account of this doctrine is given by Boethius in the fourth book of his *De topicis differentiis*, one of two treatises he wrote on Cicero's *Topics*. According to Copeland and Sluiter (2009: 191–2), Boethius' work was 'an important conduit for the Ciceronian theory of the *circumstantiae*, that is, the circumstances or attributes that defined (delimit) the case to be argued and that could serve as topics of rhetorical invention.' This version of the doctrine on two types of questions differs somewhat from other Latin sources, in that Boethius attempts to situate the categories of 'thesis' (equivalent to a *propositum* or infinite question) and 'hypothesis' (equivalent to a *causa* or finite question) within the disciplines of rhetoric and dialectic respectively, while viewing the former as subordinate to the master logic of the latter:

Ostensa enim dialecticæ ac rhetoricæ similitudine ac dissimilitudine, ab ipsarum facultatum necesse est formis etiam locorum qui eisdem facultatibus deserviunt communitates discrepantiasque ducamus. Dialectica facultas igitur thesim tantum considerat. Thesis vero est sine circumstantiis quaestio. Rhetorica vero de hypothesibus, id est de quaestionibus circumstantiarum multitudine inclusis, tractat et disserit. Circumstantiae vero sunt: quis, quid, ubi, quando: cur, quomodo, quibus adminiculis. Rursus dialectica quidem si quando circumstantias, veluti personam factumve aliquod ad disputationem sumit, non principaliter, sed omnem ejus vim ad thesim, de qua disserit transfert. Rhetorica vero si thesim assumpserit, ad hypothesim trahit, et utraque suam quidem materiam tractat, sed alterius assumit, ut proniore in sua materia facultate nitatur. [...] rhetor habet alium praeter adversarium judicem, qui inter utrosque disceptet. Dialectico vero ille fert sententiam, qui adversarius est. Ab adversario enim responsio veluti quaedam sententia subtilitate interrogationis elicitor (Migne 1844–49: vol. 64, cols 1205–6).

'For when the similarity and dissimilarity of dialectic and rhetoric have been shown, we must draw the likenesses and differences of the *Topics* which serve the disciplines from the forms of the disciplines themselves. The dialectical discipline examines the thesis only; a thesis is a question not involved in circumstances. The rhetorical [discipline], on the other hand, investigates and discusses hypotheses, that is, questions hedged in by a multitude of circumstances. Circumstances are who, what, where, when, why, how, by what means. Again, if dialectic ever does admit

circumstances, such as some deed or person, into the disputation, it does not do so for their own sake, but it transfers the whole force of the circumstances to the thesis it is discussing. But if rhetoric takes up a thesis, it draws it into the hypothesis. Each investigates its own material but takes up that of the other so that the matter depends on the discipline more suited to it. [...] the rhetorician has as judge someone other than his opponent, someone who decides between them. But for the dialectician, the one who is the opponent also gives the decision because a reply [which is], as it were, a decision is elicited from the opponent by the cunning of the questioning' (Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 193–4).

In light of the emphasis found throughout the tract on *imchomarc* on the involvement of three individuals in the questioning process, it is perhaps particularly noteworthy that Boethius distinguishes between rhetorical argumentation as a process that involves three individuals—one who pleads, an opponent and a judge—and dialectical argumentation, where only a single opponent serves as both respondent and judge. As shown above, the commentary to the H₂ witness of our text recognises that *imchomarc* 'interrogation' or 'questioning' can be carried out not only by a group of three individuals, but may also involve only a single person; I have already suggested that this may constitute an oblique reference to dialectical argumentation.⁴⁵ The correspondence between the doctrine found in the Latin and vernacular texts is of course not direct, although given that several of Boethius' works circulated amongst Irish scholars in the early medieval period (on which see for example Flower 1916, Ó Néill 1997 and Poppe 1996), it not impossible that his commentary on Cicero's *Topics* might have been known to them as well.

Boethius' interest in the respective arts of rhetoric and dialectic, and their relationship to logical argumentation, may also find an echo in our text through the seemingly peculiar use of Donatus and Priscian, the two most famous grammarians of Late Antiquity, as participants in a dispute on the definition of the two types of oratorical questions. As we have seen in the passage from the H₂ tract on *imchomarc* cited above, Donatus is equated with learned men who are 'wise' or 'philosophical' (*filidh fellsamdha dībh .i. Donait*), while Priscian is associated with those scholars who are 'complete' or 'perfect' (*filed foirbhthi dībh .i. Prescean*). This distinction, along with the fact that Donatus seems to be doing the asking and Priscian the answering in the exchange, may indicate that the glossator was alluding to a perceived distinction in status between the two

⁴⁵See above, p. 81.

grammarians and their respective works. In other words, while their dialogue may simply echo the typical structure of pedagogical question-and-answer exchanges between master and pupil, it could also reflect the long-standing perception that Donatus' work served as a propaedeutic to that of Priscian in the medieval classroom. Donatus' *Artes*, in which grammatical and rhetorical precepts are presented in a more methodical and concise format, was a kind of 'rhetorician's handbook' typically used by medieval students before they attempted to engage with Priscian's comparatively expansive *Institutiones Grammaticae*, which presents a distinctly more theoretical mode of linguistic analysis suited to dialecticians. As Vivien Law has observed (2003: 86), 'whereas Donatus taught children (and their teachers) *what* to think about language, in terms of a basic structure and metalanguage, Priscian taught them *how* to think. His works, and in particular his monumental *Institutiones Grammaticae*, provided theoretical argumentation to take issue with, and a huge corpus of data on which to test the theory.'

Indeed, the enthusiastic use of Priscian's text in the ninth century alongside works concerned more specifically with dialectic, such as Boethius' translations of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, is reflected in the more theoretical speculations about language which characterise the Hiberno-Latin commentaries on Donatus' *Ars Maior* composed during this period, as well as in their vernacular reflex, *Auraicept na nÉces* (Law 1992: 29; see also Poppe 1996). Thus perhaps we can interpret the H₂ compiler's attempt to portray a discussion about the different kinds of oratorical questions as a 'debate' between these two well-known grammarians to be a deliberate allusion to the differing approaches to grammatical analysis that characterised their respective works. Whether this is indeed an echo of Boethius' attempt to subsume rhetoric within the 'master logic of dialectic' is unclear. Nevertheless, his description of rhetoric as a discipline that involves three individuals—questioner, answerer and judge—forms an interesting parallel to a number of the glosses in the H₂ version of the tract on *imchomarc*, including those found in the dialogue passage itself.

CONCLUSION

Several aspects of the H₂ copy of the tract on the 'divisions of *imchomarc*' allow us to situate that text as a testament to the close relationship between grammatical, rhetorical and legal learning in a medieval Irish context. These features include glosses on the parts of speech that combine to form an *oratio*, or meaningful sentence; the presence of similar glosses in the H 3. 18 version of *Cóic Conara Fugill*, a law text on court procedure; doctrine on the oratorical

vices and virtues associated with pleading a case; and the placement of the tract on *imchomarc* in manuscript compilations alongside doctrine on stylistic faults and correctives. The culminating question-and-answer exchange on the meaning of the terms *imchomarc* and *fiarfaige* towards the end of the H₂ witness bears striking similarities, moreover, to the description of definite and indefinite questions in classical rhetorical manuals, a concept that itself formed the basis for doctrine on oratorical topics of invention. Matters of such a fundamentally linguistic nature would of course, find natural advocates in the form of the two most famous grammarians of Late Antiquity, Priscian and Donatus. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, however, the H₂ commentator's resurrection of these two figures with what is clearly a legal and rhetorical context in mind helps to shed light on the nature of the shorter version of the tract on this topic that is transmitted as part of *Auraicept na nÉces*, as well as on the relationship between grammatical study, dialectic, rhetorical theory and legal learning to which that compilation stands as a witness.