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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

'This uers is ful wel iwroght':  
Satire, Religion and Confession  
in the Kildare Poems from BL MS Harley 913

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## ABSTRACT

BL MS Harley 913, an Anglo-Irish manuscript that can be found in the British Library, is well-known because of containing a set of anonymous poems that have come to our days with the name of 'Kildare poems'. This B. A. Thesis aims to bring to light this set of poems by providing a detailed study of them being treated individually. For this purpose, I have used a new classification of the poems in which I have grouped them taking into account their thematic. With this process, my contribution to the research of these poems and their importance for the Irish world is demonstrated.

Keywords: BL MS Harley 913, Anglo-Irish, Kildare poems, new classification, thematic, critical reading.

BL MS Harley 913, un manuscrito que podemos encontrar en la Biblioteca Británica, es conocido por contener en su interior un conjunto de poemas anónimos que han llegado hasta nuestro días con el nombre de 'Kildare poems'. El propósito de este trabajo de fin de grado es sacar a la luz este conjunto de poemas proporcionando un estudio detallado sobre ellos siendo tratados individualmente. Para ello, me he servido de una nueva clasificación en la que he agrupado dichos poemas teniendo en cuenta su temática. Con este proceso, queda demostrada mi contribución en la investigación de estos poemas y su importancia para el mundo irlandés.

Palabras clave: BL MS Harley 913, anglo-irlandesa, Kildare poems, nueva clasificación, temática, análisis crítico.



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## **Introduction**

This B. A. Thesis seeks to bring to light the first known poems to have been composed in English in Ireland during the fourteenth century, a total of seventeen texts that give evidence to the existence of English literature in Ireland at this very early stage. The poems being mostly unknown, with this work I hope to contribute to expanding the knowledge of the beginnings of Anglo-Irish literature.

The author of the so-called Kildare poems is still unknown, but there are clear evidences that prove his relation with both the Irish culture and people. He produced a miscellaneous set of poetry with a mostly religious content that clearly hints at the poet's profession.

Mostly neglected by scholars over the years, we do not have a great amount of studies analyzing them as a whole. What we do have are critical analyses of specific poems. One of the poems that has been studied the most is "The Land of Cokaygne". Scholars like Brenda Garrett in her article "England, Colonialism, and 'The Land of Cokaygne'" (2004) have analyzed over the years this controversial poem without reaching a certain conclusion as to its origins, meaning, etc. The whole set is discussed in Benito D'Angelo and Luke M. Ciampi's "English Franciscan Poetry Before Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400)" (1983) as part of the wider context of the Franciscan literary productions in the late Middle Ages.

With my paper, I intend to complement the existing studies by pursuing new objectives, such as introducing readers to the manuscript where the poems are preserved, providing possible dates of its creation; contextualizing the poems not only historically and socially, but also in the Franciscan context; and providing a close reading of the poems.

These general objectives dictate the organization of our paper's content into two main sections. The opening section, "Contextual framework of the Kildare poems" deals with the background information of the poems. It contains details about the manuscript, the historical context of Ireland during the late medieval period, and information regarding the importance of the Franciscans during that period. "Analysis of the Kildare

poems" comprehends the critical analysis of the seventeen poems on the basis of their grouping into three main blocks. The rationale behind this grouping is basically thematic. Every single poem is analyzed in as much detail as the others, and the links that can be established between them are emphasized, as well as those that connect them to the period in which they were written.

## Contextual framework of the Kildare poems

### 1.1. BL MS Harley 913: The manuscript

One of the most important and remarkable milestones in the Irish cultural history is the British Library MS Harley 913, which contains what are commonly known as 'the Kildare poems', named after the county of Kildare, in the south-west of Dublin, where they are believed to have been penned.

The manuscript is said to have been compiled during the late Middle Ages, in the fourteenth century. More specifically, some authors such as Alan J. Fletcher dare to narrow down the dates of the poems' composition, maintaining that they were written in a very short period of only about four years, between 1338 and 1342, although there is not enough evidence to prove it. Thorlac Turville-Petre, editor of the 2015 edition of the manuscript for the Early English Text Society, also holds that "the manuscript was written during the 1330s" (xxi). Although he considers more precise dates, he does not dare to fix on one.

There are clear hints of the Irish origin of the poems in the manuscript. Turville-Petre alleges the evidence found in two of them: the explicit allusion to "the building of the town wall in New Ross in 1265", which can be found in a poem not included in our set, "The Walling of New Ross"; and the celebration of the slaughter of the O'Connors by Pers of Bermingham in 1305, in the poem "Pers of Bermingham" (cf. xix).

The Franciscan origin of the manuscript is often posited. At the end of the thirteenth century, the Franciscans "took over the form and the music of [popular secular songs] and substituted religious subject-matter for the secular, at first in Latin, and later, before the middle of the XIV century, in the vernacular" (Robbins 1938: 239). Poetry was used as propaganda. However, this primary intention then became something secondary, and there appeared songs with religious as well as secular themes. During the first half of the fourteenth century, the Franciscans were very much present in the Irish society. At that time, lyrics were commonly composed for teaching purposes

by friars, generally Franciscans (Robbins 1940: 230-38). Most of them appeared before the Black Death reached Ireland in 1348.

Authors like Neil Cartlidge ensure that "there is a long-established and well-grounded consensus that MS Harley 913 is a 'Franciscan' collection" (34); Turville-Petre affirms in *Poems from MS Harley 913* that the manuscript is a Franciscan creation especially due to the great quantity of Latin texts of Franciscan interest that can be found in it, such as an extract of a life of St Francis, or "an enumeration of Franciscan custodies and houses across the world, beginning with Irish houses and ending with a boast about their comparative number in Ireland" (xix). In addition, Cynthia A. Rogers supports this conviction upholding that "the manuscript contains a list of the Franciscan custodies, as well as having items that mention Kildare, Waterford, and New Ross (all towns with Franciscan houses)" (9).

A. M. and P. J. Lucas also maintain the belief that the author of the Kildare poems was a Franciscan on account of his name being given at the end of one of the poems. Turville-Petre also supports this conviction, as "the author of one of the English poems names himself as 'frere michel kyldare'" (13). In her edition of the poems, Angela Lucas says that she clearly sees the mentality and concerns of a Franciscan represented in the poems (21-24).

As for the issue of a single or multiple authorship of the manuscript, A. M. and P. J. Lucas, supporting Michael Benskin, firmly hold the idea that MS Harley 913 was written by a single scribe claiming that the changes in handwriting are caused by external factors: "the size of the handwriting varies according to the exigencies of space available [...] and the scribe wrote more than one script or style of handwriting, sometimes writing more carefully, sometimes more currently" (288).

The abovementioned Turville-Petre supports this claim, but opens up the scope to include other "marginal hands", as he calls them, who "added notes in the margins and at the top of the page" (xiv). What is more, he further claims that the type of writing, the font used, the status of each of the poems, and the color of each writing, suggest the possibility that "the scribe compiled the manuscript over quite a long period of time" (xiii).

The aforementioned A. M. and P. J. Lucas show us how the manuscript contents were organized in a total of sixty-four folios disposed in nine quires (289 -291). More detailed information about the collation of the manuscript and the distribution of our poems into the different quires is provided by Thorlac Turville-Petre (xvii) and Cynthia A. Rogers (22-25).

These poems were written in a variety of English known as Hiberno-English, and some of them partly in Latin. The language used "is fairly unremarkable by Middle English standards but shows a certain amount of phonological interference from Irish", according to Raymond Hickey (4). However, I am not going to discuss this linguistic aspect in this B.A. Thesis, as it exceeds the objectives of this work.

It is known from *Singing from the Book* by Cynthia A. Rogers, that "the manuscript has been rebound at least twice: once sometime after Sir James Ware copied materials out of it in 1608 and again after it came into the British Museum in 1753" (19). Turville-Petre provides a deadline for the binding of this book: the year 1877 (xiii).

The editions of MS Harley 913 available to scholars are two. The first one is *Anglo-Irish Poems of the Middle Ages*, Angela M. Lucas's edition and Modern English translation published in 1996. More recent in time is Thorlac Turville-Petre's *Poems from BL MS Harley 913 'The Kildare Manuscript'* (2015), which does not provide a translation but adds useful textual notes, glossaries, and indexes.

## 1.2. Franciscans in Ireland during the medieval period.

Given the existing consensus about the Franciscan origin of our manuscript, a brief insight into their presence in medieval Ireland may be a good starting point.

The Franciscans were originally known as Order of Friars Minor. However, the Order has come to our days simply as 'the Franciscans'. What this minor order did was to encourage religion from the point of view of the most disadvantaged. One instance of what St. Francis wanted to do was his advice to avoid "private libraries no matter how small, whereas those intended for the community at large were to be in conformity with the vow of poverty" (Scudder 93).

The Franciscan order arose at the beginning of the thirteenth century, more specifically in 1209, according to Jordan of Giano's *Chronica* of 1262, and it appeared at the same time as "the growth and expansion of cities in Western Europe" (Robson 1). What St. Francis did was first to preach in Italy, his native country, and after that he did the same around the entire world. For this reason, it could be said, in agreement with that stated by Scudder, that "his Order spread swiftly over Europe" (97) until 1224 when "the General Chapter held at the Portiuncula decided to send friars to England" (Watt 69). The belief that the first Franciscans were sent to England in 1224 is supported by Victor G. Green in *The Franciscans in Medieval English Life (1224-1348)*: "it was in the year 1224 that the first Franciscans came to England" (7). The Order is believed to have reached Ireland before 1230, an idea which is also upheld by Turville-Petre, who states that "the Franciscan Order arrived in Ireland by 1231" (xxxvii). The link between the insular Franciscans is made by Watt, who informs us that "the first mendicants to come to Ireland were English and the first houses were established in Dublin and Drogheda" (60).

The mission of these Franciscans was mainly to preach, and "their organization was directed to ministering to people neglected by the parish clergy" (Robbins 1940: 231-32). However, it is important to remember that they were not only preachers but also "contemplatives, philosophers and ascetics, craftsmen and artists, theologians and musicians, missionaries and scientists, historians and mystics, poets and artisans." (Robson 2). What is more, one of their greatest contributions to the world, one through

which they became important, was "their outstanding contribution to the process of textualisation of English from the late thirteenth century onwards." (Kehnel 91).

During the first half of the fourteenth century, according to the aforementioned Watt, there were in Ireland a total of eighty-five houses of friars, of which thirty-three belonged to the Franciscans (cf. 60). However, as this order expanded very rapidly, before the change of century "they had 84 houses on the British Isles" (Kehnel 93). Taking into account the data provided by Robson, the Franciscans were prospering in Ireland: at the beginning of the second half of the thirteenth century, more specifically, in the 1260s, "there were already about 18 earlier foundations" (33), and at the end of this same century, in the 1290s, there was a considerable increase of Franciscan houses, a total of "4 custodies and 25 friaries in the province" (34). Something that needs to be highlighted is that during the 1250s, the friary at Kildare had already been founded by William de Vescy and Gerald Fitzmaurice (cf. Turville-Petre xxxviii).

Many speculations are made with regard to the person in charge of leading the Franciscans in Ireland, i.e. Priest Richard, "a priest and preacher, and first of the brethren to preach to the people north of the Alps" (Watt 69). He is further described by the aforementioned Watt as:

an eminently qualified person to bear primary responsibility for the introduction of *religio seraphica* - that unique blending of humility, simplicity and poverty in the imitation of Christ - into a country which in times distant and recent has been so receptive of the Franciscan spirit. Seven houses were established in the period of his ministership in Ireland. (70)

It is surmised that Priest Richard had come to Ireland around 1230 and had become one of the first leaders of the Minor Order in 1231. What is more, "he is supposed to have been chosen as provincial before there were Franciscan houses in the country of his destination" (Watt 70-71) following the Dominican pattern. Franciscan monasteries were established in large and small cities, and prominent Franciscans were elected as bishops, though less often in the Irish-speaking areas. In the Anglo-Irish sees, we find Geoffrey Cusack as Bishop of Meath in 1253-1254, and Nicholas Cusack as Bishop of Kildare in 1279-1299 (Watt 73). It is in Kildare that we place the author of the poems that are the object of interest in this B.A. Thesis.

Nicholas Cusack worked as a bishop for twenty years and belonged to an Anglo-Irish family. In 1268 he joined the Order and eleven years afterwards he started as bishop. One of his most important contributions to the Franciscan order was the warning that there would be a dispute that, at the same time, would entail the division of the Franciscans. It is important to highlight that, thanks to him, "we get perhaps the earliest hint of the coming storm which was to split the Franciscan province into two hostile factions" (Fitzmaurice and Little xxii).

As he was bishop of Kildare for twenty years, it is very likely that he was in contact with the majority of the Irish Franciscans of the second half of the thirteenth century. Among the Franciscans that had connections with Nicholas Cusack directly or indirectly, we can find Michael of Kildare at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the author of the poems that are discussed in this work.

### **1.3. Historical context in Ireland during the late medieval period.**

In order to have a global perspective of the events that took place in Ireland, together with the Franciscans, during the period in which the poems were written, it is necessary to allude to the most important historical moments. One of the most significant steps of this period was the change from 'lord' to 'king'.

The late medieval period, more specifically, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was a time of changes in the Irish landscape. As T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin define it in *The Course of Irish History* (1967), these two centuries "were an age of renaissance and progress in Ireland" (107).

In the first place it is important to emphasize that until the sixteenth century the term 'king' was not used in Ireland when referring to the person ruling the country. Instead, the person in that position was the so-called 'lord'. Ireland was made up of different small counties and liberties and all of them were ruled by lords. From the thirteenth century on, different kings of England have ruled over Ireland as lords.

The first one was Henry II's son John, who was proclaimed Lord of Ireland in 1177. This lordship came as an offshoot of the Anglo-Norman Invasion of Ireland that had begun in 1169. The Anglo-Normans wanted to take hold of land and ports in Ireland as it was "a land very rich in plunder, and famed for the good temperature of the air, the fruitfulness of the soil, the pleasant and commodious seats for habitation, and safe and large ports and havens lying open for traffic" (Green 96). Somehow, they wanted to feel free from the constraints of the English people. Henry II, afraid of what his Norman subjects were doing - as they were taking the control of Ireland for themselves - and encouraged by Pope Adrian IV - who wanted to rein the Irish Church - went to Ireland in 1171. During the following years not only the English but also the Anglo-Normans went on their attempts to conquer Ireland, the latter with Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, mostly known as Strongbow, as their leader. He is defined by T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin as "a hard bargainer" (127) and he was one of the first Anglo-Normans to have taken part in the invasions.

Henry II was succeeded by his younger son John, who was Lord of Ireland during the first half of the thirteenth century. Through this century, English and Ireland became more influential in the Irish sphere in the sense that the majority of the people who ruled there belonged to the English crown and they used a very strict policy. As A. Norman Jeffares explains, "the role of the English lordship [...] was to keep English law intact. This also included preserving English customs and speech in what was called the land of peace" (7). However, this was very difficult for Irish inhabitants as they wanted to preserve their own customs. During this period, we must not forget the Normans who, little by little were conquering Ireland. The aforementioned T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin explain that "by the year 1250 - within eighty years of the invasion - three quarters of the country had been overrun by the Normans" (137). Despite this fact, "the impetus of the Norman drive in Ireland had begun to slow down by the middle of the thirteenth century" (Moody & Martin 141) and the Norman conquest of all of Ireland never happened. The reason for this appeasement is due, among other things, to the "toughening of native Irish opposition to the Norman power, which manifested itself in a striking way" (*ibidem*) in different battles during the second half of the thirteenth century. Even though the Normans were the first ones to bring war to Ireland, it is important to highlight that they also helped Ireland to improve and progress: they "were the first to give Ireland a centralized administration" and later on, thanks to King John, "an active government [was] established" (Moody & Martin 138).

During the second half of the thirteenth century, Henry III came to power, and he was Lord of Ireland until the last years of the century. He was succeeded by Edward I, Lord of Ireland at the turn of the fourteenth century. Edward II succeeded Edward I until the first half of the fourteenth century. At this time, the conflicts continued for the English, but this time with the Scots rather than with the Normans. Ireland was in the midst of the independence war unleashed by Scotland with England in the last decade of the thirteenth century. The Scots, under Edward Bruce's orders, wanted to "create a kingdom of Ireland" (Moody & Martin 153) with Gaelic roots. However, this goal could never be achieved, and by the middle of the fourteenth century the English government in Ireland decided to pass a number of statutes by which the people of Ireland could not mix with the people of Scotland; it was a race-based decision. These documents were

known as the Statutes of Kilkenny, passed in 1366, and defined by A. Norman Jeffares as

designed to keep the English settlers in Ireland from adopting Irish ways of life: from intermarrying, from concubinage or from the fostering of children, from using the Irish language, from dressing, wearing their hair and riding horses in the Irish fashion, and from maintaining or entertaining Irish minstrels, poets or storytellers. (7)

In the political and civil sphere, the English settlers created the parliament. It was not until the end of the thirteenth century that "it became more representative" (145), as Moody and Martin explain in *The Course of Irish History*, till the end of the fourteenth century when the representatives of the counties "had established their right to be present" (145).

In some of the poems we will see direct and indirect allusions to people from the contemporary society and its government. The poet may refer to a king whose name we are not given, but also to an English gentleman by name; such is the case of John FitzGerald, first earl of Kildare (one of the counties in which Ireland was divided).



## Analysis of the Kildare poems

The seventeen poems of BL MS Harley 913 in medieval English are going to be analyzed in this B.A. Thesis in Angela Lucas's translations in moderns English in *Anglo-Irish Poems of the Middle Ages* (1996), with occasional recourse to Thorlac Turville-Petre's edition of the original texts, published under the title of *Poems from BL MS Harley 913 'The Kildare Manuscript'* (2015). Before we undertake the detailed and individual study of each poem, we offer here a more global view of the whole from the thematic and formal point of view. I will here list the poems in the order and with the title they receive in Thorlac Turville-Petre's edition, followed by Angela Lucas's translations (when applicable). From then on, it is Angela Lucas's titles that I will use.

These are the seventeen poems that I will be discussing below: the first one is titled "The Land of Cokaygne", the next one "Five Evil Things" [Five Hateful Things], the third is named "Satire", the fourth one is "Song of Michael Kildare", our main source of information when trying to decipher the authorship of these poems. Then come "Sarmun" [Sermon] and "Fifteen Signs: 'XV signa ante iudicium' " [Fifteen Signs before Judgement]. The seventh is titled "Seven Sins", the eighth is "Christ on the Cross", and the next one is known as "Fall and Passion". After these we have the remaining seven: "Ten Commandments", "Lullaby" [Lullay], "Song on the Times" [Song of the Times], "Pers of Bermingham" [Piers of Bermingham], "Elde" [Old Age], "Repentance of Love", "Nego" [Denial] and, closing the sequence, "Earth".

The satirical genre predominates with its criticism of the way people live, full of covetousness and pretence and no thought about the others, as the poem called "Five Hateful Things". Besides satire, there is another group of poems that can be clearly distinguished because of their religious theme, as is the case of "Sermon" or "Christ on the Cross". A final, miscellaneous group of poems will be here discussed as 'personal poems'. An instance of the poems that pertain to this last group is "Old Age". In this type of poems, the author has abandoned the satirical-burlesque tone and has sought to further deepen into the meaning of life. In spite of the different themes, all of the poems share the subjective tone that has been used when composing them.

The possible author, Friar Michael of Kildare, did not hesitate to show his opinion publicly either in the form of a song, a lullaby, a short poem, or a poem of greater extension. This is another of the peculiarities that this set of poems has, since they do not have a uniform length. It is because of this reason that we have poems that are composed by a single stanza, as is the case of poem two "Five Hateful Things", the shortest of the sequence, and poems that consist of a total of sixty stanzas, as for example poem number five "Sermon".

Finally, we can point out other formal features that link the poems: some of them coincide in the number of lines per stanza as is the case of "Satire" and "Lullay" which have six lines, or the case of "Sermon" and "Fall and Passion" which have four lines per stanza. Together with this, there are other poems that coincide in the rhythmic pattern, as is the case of poems one ("The Land of Cokaygne"), eight ("Christ on the Cross"), and sixteen ("Denial") which rhyme in couplets; or the case of "Ten Commandments" and "Song of the Times" with the alternate rhyme ABAB. It is very peculiar to see that the six poems that have four lines in each stanza are the same that contain the same rhyme pattern, ABAB. Furthermore, the presence in the poems of some rhetorical figures such as alliteration and repetition also links them. In the case of both alliteration and repetition, they can be seen in poems such as "Earth" and "Old Age", the latter being one of the most poetical compositions, where the writer wanted to catch the reader's attention by using these devices. Related to this last aspect it is striking that when dealing with alliteration, it is a small number of sounds that are repeated the most: [m], [n] and [i]. There are other figures as well like anaphoric parallelisms, abundantly used by the writer, one of the most clear instances being poem three: "Satire".

## 2.1. Satirical poems

The poems that we have included in this set are: "The Land of Cokaygne", "Five Hateful Things", "Satire" - incidentally, the first three poems in the translation we have used -, "Song of the Times", "Piers of Bermingham", and "Denial". This group of poems can be seen as targeting their satire to specific places as well as to very specific people and events.

"The Land of Cokaygne"

"The Land of Cokaygne" is the first poem in this manuscript as well as one of the most widely analyzed in the whole set. It has not only been the subject of writers, from whom there is a long European tradition of Cokaygne poems, but also of painters like the Dutch Pieter Brueghel. One of his most representative paintings is *Het Luilekkerland* (1566), known as *The Land of Cockaigne* in English, and often translated in Spanish as "El país de jauja", a land of laziness. Our poem is one of the longest in the set of seventeen, as it is made up of a total of one hundred-and-ninety verses organized in seven stanzas.

The most striking characteristic that makes this poem to be considered satirical is the way in which the author describes life in a nonexistent place called Cokaygne, which is compared even with the biblical Earthly Paradise. Moreover, the satirical approach is reinforced by the derogatory use of the image of women in a religious context.

According to A. L. Morton, Cokaygne "describes an earthly and earthy paradise, an island of magical abundance, of eternal youth and eternal summer, of joy, fellowship and peace" (12). With this description of the utopian Cokaygne, what the author of our poem wanted to do probably was to satirize the life led by monks in monasteries to contrast and enhance his own life as a friar. In order to sound more believable, he criticizes a specific group of people who are the Cistercians. He makes reference to them as "white and grey monks" who live in "a very splendid abbey" (51-52; in this and the following pages I will be quoting line numbers from A. Lucas's translation).

Cistercians were supposed to follow the strict Rule of Saint Benedict in which the most important thing was the *ora et labora* maxim to which they devoted their time. Instead of doing their tasks, the monks in Cokaygne live a life of sensual appetites which turns them into hypocrites.

The Bible has been very useful to construct this satire. The author makes use of it whenever he wants to compare the Earthly Paradise to Cokaygne; at the beginning of the poem he mentions two biblical characters, Elijah and Enoch, who are supposed to be staying in the biblical paradise, as being 'desolate' in their isolation. Whilst in that idyllic place there is only "grass and flower" (8) and "there is no food but fruit; there is no hall, lodging nor seat, only water to quench man's thirst" (10-12), in Cokaygne we can find "food and drink without sorrow, anxiety and toil" (17-18) and "There is no thunder there, sleet nor hail, nor any repulsive worm or snail, nor any storm, rain or wind" (39-41).

At the end of the poem, we can perceive a reference to women in a somewhat contemptuous way. As we will see in other poems, the poet uses the image of women, more specifically their buttocks, in order to reinforce the monks' physical desires, however awkward it may seem in a religious context.

In this utopian place where the author places this abbey, we read that "there is not a serpent" (31). There is a legend that says that Saint Patrick was able to release Ireland of serpents forever, thus reinforcing our reference to Ireland as the place where the author sets this poem. This thesis has been frequently studied through the years and there is not yet a clear acceptance of it. In *England, Colonialism, and 'The Land of Cokaygne'*, by Brenda Garrett (2004), we are told about the debate regarding this aspect between writers such as Garbáty, who states that "its target is really an Irish Cistercian monastery on the borderlands between the Irish and English territories", Heuser who thinks that "the poem satirizes the Franciscans and the Carmelites in English Kildare", and Henry who supports that "it is aimed at the Irish Cistercian house in Inislounaght" (9).

## "Five Hateful Things"

As the title denotes, "Five Hateful Things" is a clear instance of a satirical poem. It is very concise, since it contains just one stanza of seven lines created by a quintet and a couplet.

This short poem adopts a personal perspective: in the last couplet we can perceive the first person singular pronoun 'I', stating that these things are the ones that he, personally, hates. So, in a way, we can say that the poet first presents the five things and then he gets involved.

Our inclusion of this poem in the group of satires derives from the possibility that his general criticism towards five different groups of people may be directed to five specific persons: a bishop the poet could have met during his life as a Franciscan; the ruling king of the period in which the poem was created, probably Edward I or his brother and successor Edward II; a young man with whom he may have had troubles; an old silly man; and a woman with whom he could have had an affair, since there are other poems in which he also talks about women in this respect, as "Old Age". However, as there are no records of the poet's life, we can simply make guesses.

Together with this, all the adjectives that the poetic voice has used in order to describe those people are subjective ('imprudent' or 'foolish'), and contradict the positive virtues that the groups he targets are supposed to have: bishops must have a doctrine, kings normally need determination, young men are supposed to be cautious, old men humble, and women virtuous, and even more at that time.

## "Satire"

"Satire", which belongs to the group of longer poems, has a total of one hundred and twenty verses divided in twenty stanzas containing six verses each.

One significant aspect that can be highlighted in this poem is that the author has made use of the rhetorical figure known as 'allusion' making us believe that he is referring to a person he holds in high esteem when, in reality, he is praising himself.

This is one of the key aspects that make "Satire" a satirical poem. The author makes a constant use of this figure in sentences like "this verse is well made" (5), "certainly he was a learned man who wrote this skilful work" (59-60), "the cleric who made this stanza, without doubt, was awake and did not sleep at all (71-72)", or "the best cleric in this whole town made this verse skilfully" (89-90).

The writer makes a review of the social groups of the place where he was staying at that moment, Kildare being one possibility. This fact of referring to a specific place is not only present in this poem but also in the previous satirical poem, "Five Hateful Things", with the difference that in that poem he only targeted people. In "Satire", it is very interesting that the groups the author targets are normally organized in groups of five: five Saints such as Saint Michael ("Hail, Saint Michael with the long spear! Your wings are beautiful upon your shoulders" 1-2) and Saint Christopher ("Hail, Saint Christopher with your long stake! You bore Our Lord Jesus Christ over the broad lake" 7-8); five religious congregations such as the Dominicans ("Hail, Saint Dominic with your long staff! It is as crooked as an iron hook at the upper end" 19-20) and Carmelites, since the author makes reference to Drogheda, an Irish town where they resided in a monastery established in the thirteenth century ("Hail, you friars with the white copes! You have a house at Drogheda where ropes are made. You are always wandering idly all about the country" 31-33); and nine guilds of workers, such as merchants ("You merchants with your large packages of cloth [...] You give little of it to the miserable poor" 61-64), tailors ("You cut wedge-shaped pieces of cloth frequently to make hoods wrongly" 68), and potters ("You stand at the stall, broadly built, terrible men" 87), among others. It is very interesting that the only group that is excluded from his criticism is one group within the religious congregations: the Franciscans ("Many a stout-hearted beggar follows your company" 28). This makes my primary vision of the affiliation of our writer even more feasible.

The allusion to West Cheap in London at the beginning of the poem - the only place name next to Drogheda's - makes us think that maybe Friar Michael of Kildare had lived in England, or even that he himself was English. At the same time, the allusion reinforces our reading of the poem "Five Hateful Things" in the sense that he may be addressing specific people and moments.

With the constant repetition of the second person pronoun 'you', the narrative voice makes the satire clear towards the different social groups excluding himself from this panorama. Furthermore, he only uses the pronoun 'I' to justify what he is writing.

### "Song of the Times"

The long poem "Song of the Times" comprises a total of one hundred and ninety-eight verses which are grouped in fifty stanzas of four verses each with the exception of the last one which is a couplet.

What makes this poem to be considered clearly a satire is because of its criticism towards injustice. As we have seen in previous satirical poems, the satire is aimed at a specific group of people. In this particular case, the author is exalting 'the law-abiding man' at the expense of the unjust, proud, and covetous that govern the land.

At the beginning of the poem, the author presents us a very negative vision of a land in a very concrete way which portrays the negative aspects of life with sentences such as "this sorrowful life that is ours" (1-2), "hate and anger is very widespread" (5), "this land is false and wicked" (9), and "pride and envy are master" (15). Together with this pessimistic vision (sorrowful life, sin, and the passing of time), covetousness is another aspect that upsets our poet, since this is not the only poem in which he talks about it. In "Song of the Times", these four aspects are related to each other and very likely are targeting two groups: rulers, who are supposed to be those who defend justice; and the church, that does not help to curb such injustices ( "If Holy Church would apply its power and the law of the land apply itself to it, then covetousness and injustice would be put out of the land." 17-20).

In order to illustrate the coalition of the law and covetousness, the writer uses a fable of a lion, a wolf, a fox, and an ass, which occupies more or less half of the poem, and recalls some of Aesop's fables. In "Song of the Times" the ruling king imparts 'injustice' by clearing the false and wicked fox and wolf of all offence on account of their high position, and sentencing the innocent ass to death on account of his humble breed.

All these aspects are reflected in the contraposition between 'the law-abiding man' who must live "in love, in charity and in peace" (146), and the corrupt and all kind of thieves who should live "in misery, suffering, [and] in poverty" (162). It is very likely that when making this contrast, what the author really wanted to express was the difference between the two groups of people who coexisted in Ireland at that time: Englishmen ('those who have control' and take bribes) and the Irish over whom they rule (the 'law-abiding man').

The poem ends with a sermon-like tone, with the poet's criticism of the eagerness of the powerful to accumulate wealth and material goods, when we are all going to die and we will not have any of that. This, as we will see, is one of the favorite themes in the poet's most overtly religious compositions.

### "Piers of Bermingham"

"Piers of Bermingham", one of the longest poems of the Kildare manuscript, is made up of a total of one hundred and thirty-two verses which are grouped in twenty-two stanzas of six short verses each.

Although the thematic and the tone of this poem are different from those in the previous ones, in the sense that here they are more formal and serious, the poem's inclusion in the set of satirical poems is due to the way in which the story of Piers of Bermingham is presented.

In this case, more openly than in the previous poems, we see the poet talking about a specific person and a specific place: Sir Piers of Bermingham and Ireland. This man was a contemporary English lord who had a close relationship with Kildare, since he and his family had a castle there, thus helping us in the belief of our author's belonging to the Franciscan priory of Kildare. Moreover, he is described by Garbáty as an Englishman who, unable to beat his Irish enemies in battle, invited them to dinner on Christmas Day, and massacred them all (quoted in Garrett 146). The poet not only mentions this lord but also other real-life Englishmen - the Earl of Ulster, Sir Edmund de Butler, and Sir John Fitzthomas - who, together with him, felt threatened by the Irish,

whom he also mentions: O'Conchobhair, Gilla Buidhe, and Aedh Mac Maelmordha, historically the victims of Piers of Bermingham's killings.

The year, month and day of Piers of Bermingham's death (April 20, 1308) are presented at the beginning of the poem in the style of the greatest epic poems. This way of presenting someone by giving exact details of his death is done in order to prepare the reader for the extraordinary events that are going to be narrated. We can perceive the satire in this presentation of Piers as a heroic figure ("There was no better knight, nor any of greater excellence that shall rise up, in skin, flesh and bone" 21-24) when in truth his deed was rather cowardly. The author prepares us with the grand opening for something magnificent that never comes, and instead we read about a treacherous killing: "Sir Piers saw them come, he received each one, not one was turned away. Then he caused hoods to be made, not one was refused, but he did them all honour" (115-20). Beheading of his enemies was Piers of Bermingham's method, as we can read in lines 64-65: "For the payment for their beds he took their heads as security", an allusion hidden behind the mysterious 'hoods' of the last part of the poem.

Regarding the narrative voice, it is interesting that this is the only poem written in a heroic tone. While in the rest of the poems we can see descriptions or opinions, in this particular case we have a narrative poem accompanied by the heroic rhetoric that makes this poem to be unique in this set.

"Denial"

"Denial" is one of the shortest poems in the set, consisting of just one stanza made up of twenty-four verses.

This is one of the most satirical poems among those included in this set, and it revolves around the criticism of those intellectuals who, when confronted with someone else's scholarship, say 'Nego' ('I deny') thus avoiding all confrontation of ideas.

As happens with the rest of the poems from the satirical group, we can see that the author is targeting a specific group of people. Even though we do not know the

identity of the people the writer is addressing, he refers to them as the "impoverished man of learning" (6), the "learned man" (17), and finally the "sham scholars" (23). The numerous medieval intellectual and religious controversies (of which the Franciscans were participants) stand in the background of this particular poem. Probably it was directed towards another religious congregation with which the Franciscans coexisted, the Dominicans; or simply intellectuals of the moment; or even other Franciscans from his same congregation. Let us here recall what we mentioned in this respect in page 8 of this B. A. Thesis.

What is more, he makes use of religion probably in order to sound more trustworthy, since the expression 'I deny' was also used in the context of denying Satan. An explicit example that helps us to understand this religious point of view related to Satan is this phrase that is located in the middle of the poem: "Away with 'I deny' out of the place, whosoever wishes to have God's grace. Whoever wishes to fight against the devil, there can 'I deny' take its place properly" (9-12). In it, the author exposes the idea that anyone who wants to go to heaven, should refuse to perform the sins to which the devil incites him. A considerable amount of the poem consists of the repetition of this expression - it is repeated nine times - probably in order to reinforce his religious position.

## 2.2. Religious poems

The different poems that conform this group are: "Song of Michael of Kildare", "Ten Commandments", "Christ on the Cross", "Lullay", "Earth", and four others that we group under the general heading of 'Sermons'. These poems are the best proof that our poet was a religious man.

### "Song of Michael of Kildare"

"Song of Michael of Kildare" provides us with one of the clearest indications of the authorship of the Kildare poems. It pertains to the group of long poems and is composed of a total of one hundred and fifty verses.

The whole poem can be considered as a sample of the Franciscan mentality regarding wealth and poverty. The Franciscans always tried to help the most disadvantaged and this poem reinforces our belief that our author belonged to that Order. The author makes sometimes use of a satirical tone when targeting the prosperous men's infatuation with their material wealth: "Rich man, think carefully, pay careful attention to what you are! You are only a fragile tree attaining seven feet, clothed on the outside with gold and money, the ax is at the root" (51-56). The inevitability of death is recalled, as in so many of the other religious poems, such as "Earth".

As with the fable in "Song of the Times", the author uses here a biblical parable to exemplify his sayings about material wealth: the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). "Christ tells in Holy Scripture" we read in the poem, "that a man of perverse understanding who was rich in this life was buried in the abyss of hell. Then he shall never escape from the sorrowful pit. He must sit deprived in hell, without wine and a loaf of white bread" (91-98).

At the end of the poem, we have the intriguing allusion to his own authorship that encourages further research on this issue: he confesses both his profession ("A friar

minor made this song" 141) and his name ("Lord, bring him - Friar Michael Kildare - to the heavenly stronghold" 143-44).

### "Ten Commandments"

"Ten Commandments" comprises a total of eighty verses which are organized in twenty stanzas of four lines each.

The theme of this poem is clearly religious, as the title anticipates, and the bases to understand it properly are set in the Old Testament. The ten commandments, also known as Decalogue, were presented in the Exodus and then in the Deuteronomy. However, as we will see in the sermons "Fifteen Signs before Judgment" and "Seven sins", the number of items to be treated does not conform to the total that the title announces. In this poem, the poet only speaks about seven out of the ten commandments.

The commandments that everyone should follow so as to be a good Christian according to our poet are: worship one God (34), keep Sunday properly (50), honor father and mother (57), love your neighbour like your own body (65), keep yourself from lechery (67), steal no goods from man (68), and be not a murderer (69). However, this is not the primary order followed in the Holy Bible, so we can suppose that these are the ones that worried our writer the most. The one we find in verse fifty is actually something that Jesus said in one of his sermons and can be found in the New Testament (Matthew 22: 37-39), so it is not one of the ten commandments as such. Moreover, something peculiar is that the second commandment - not to take the name of God in vain -, which is missing in the list provided by the poet, is present in the first part of the poem in the poet's admonishment to his readers not to make oaths and not to speak disparagingly about Jesus Christ: I advise you, beware, that you desist from your great oaths [...] Man is worse than any dog [...] that we should speak slightly of His precious wounds which He suffered for our benefit" (4-12). The three commandments missing from the poem are: "Thou shall not commit adultery", "Thou shall not steal", and "Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his

maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20: 14-17).

The poetic voice in "Ten Commandments" makes use of the imperative, giving it a sermon-like tone where the audience is clearly in the poet's mind, as in "Pay attention, whoever wishes to!" (17).

### "Christ on the Cross"

In Thorlac Turville-Petre's edition we find that "Christ on the Cross" is written both in English verse and in Latin prose, the English stanzas being the translation of the Latin parts. The four stanzas in English verse have variable lengths: sixteen verses the first one, two verses the second, eight verses the third, and sixteen verses for the last one, all of them in rhyming couplets. Interpolated with the stanzas are six prose fragments in Latin that in the translation of A. Lucas have been omitted.

The verse parts can be organized into two sections. In the first part, the writer makes a description of Christ on the cross from the head to the feet, going through the breast, the arms, God's loins, and the nails in his hands and feet. As in "Ten Commandments", the imperative prevails, as in "look at your lord, man" (1), "look at his nails" (11), and "look all the way to his toes" (13). Appealing directly to his audience seems to be a favourite resource on the author's part.

When we move to the second part of the poem, the author has abandoned the descriptive tone and what we have is Christ talking. The poet wants to reinforce with these words how ungrateful man is in relation to the sufferings Christ endured on his behalf.

## "Lullay"

The short poem "Lullay" is composed of a total of thirty-six verses divided in six stanzas, followed by two stanzas of six verses each in Latin, which Angela Lucas does not translate. The Latin stanzas are an incomplete translation of the lullaby.

Apparently aimed at children, what the poet is doing is actually referring to man as God's child. Lullabies are related to the oral tradition because of their simplicity and they have always been used to "help young children relax", as Alice Sterling Honig explains in *The Language of Lullabies* (30). However, in the majority of the cases, they "contain the seed of hidden, repressed violence that is repeated as a reminder of what lies behind the walls of the nursery or the mother's arms", as Irene Gómez-Castellano points out in *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* (1). Having this last definition in mind, we can observe that the hidden and repressed violence of which Gómez-Castellano talks can be here related to the sorrow and grief that living entails. Unlike other creatures like birds and fish, man has to live in anguish all his life because of Adam's fault. The lullaby thus turns into a sad reminder of man's lot in this world.

The 'lulling' atmosphere is created by the repetition of a phrase, a type of 'refrain' that has musicality and is easy to be learned: "Lullay, lullay, little child" (1, 5-6, 10, 16-7, 22, 27, 33).

## "Earth"

With a total of eighty-five verses distributed in fourteen stanzas of six verses each, "Earth" pertains to the group of long poems. It is noteworthy how English stanzas take turns with Latin stanzas, which seem to be direct translations of the English ones.

The religious point of view through which the narrator perceives the world can be observed by focusing mainly on the reiteration of the words 'earth', 'man', and 'dust' which direct us to the same place, that is, death, together with the religious ritual these words involve. However, before analyzing the poem, it is important to highlight that while in the translation into modern English we find this distinction between 'earth' and

'man', in the Middle English stanzas only the word 'earth' is present to make reference to both concepts.

As happens with the other poems, the theme of the passing of time is something that worries our poet. On this occasion, he represents the passing of time with words such as 'earth' - which is repeated through the poem sixty-nine times - and 'tomb', less often repeated but with the same importance. Moreover, the writer resorts to the religious ritual of Ash Wednesday in verses like these: "You were made of the dust of the earth" (5), "Of dust you were created, in dust you must end" (21-22), or "We are all dust, we are destined for the earth" (26).

Death is the main theme in this poem. From beginning to end we have the image of death stalking the author. Since most of the religious and personal poems revolve around this issue, we may think that our author was an elderly person. Moreover, the vision we achieve from the author's point of view is a very negative one since he shows himself as defenseless. This can be perceived in sentences like "Man made of earth falls upon the earth in a very fragile manner" (3-4) or "Man goes about in the world, moving here and there in garments, man goes towards the grave to feed worms" (9-10). In both examples it can also be seen how the author has played with the word 'earth' already mentioned.

The tone of this poem is a little different from that of other poems belonging to this set: it contains a personal perspective since the poet is talking about his personal fears, but there is no presence of the personal pronoun 'I'. Instead, we have the second person pronoun 'you', used to address the reader directly and to make him feel one more man.

## Sermons

Under this sub-category of poems we can find: "Sermon", "Fifteen Signs before Judgment", "Fall and Passion", and "Seven Sins". This set is significant since these poems were normally composed by friars that went begging and preaching on the streets, and this was an essential part of the Franciscan life.

As Rossell Hope Robbins tells us in *The Authors of the Middle English Religious Lyrics*, the sermons that we find from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries share certain characteristics: "they are anonymous", "they were taught with teaching purposes", and "they were made by friars, generally Franciscans" (320-21). The presence of these sermons thus enhances the possibilities that the Kildare poems were written by a Franciscan.

In poem five, "Sermon", we find that earthly properties and riches are the two main aspects on which the author focuses his attention. To do this, the writer refers to some sins such as covetousness and pride, which also come up in other poems such as "Song of the Times" and "Earth".

In poem six, "Fifteen Signs before Judgment", the author discusses the different signs that will signal the arrival of the Final Judgement. The title announces fifteen signs, but the writer only deals with twelve of them: "The stars so bright that you see [...] they will become as black as coal and be dark and dusky of hue" (37, 42-43), "On the seventh day, [...] The trees shall bleed" (97-101), etc. The poet sends the reader to Isaiah's prophecies on the lord's devastation of the Earth as a source for his own predictions.

In poem seven, "Fall and Passion", we can see the author writing about Jesus' death and resurrection (Passion) in a way that links its origins to Adam and Eve's myth of the forbidden apple (Fall).

In poem twelve, "Seven Sins", the author talks about the seven deadly sins. However, as with "Fifteen Signs before Judgment" or "Ten Commandments", the poet does not cover all those he announces. He speaks only of three: pride, covetousness, and envy, either because the rest of the manuscript has disappeared, or because the poem was not completed. This list of sins is supposed to have been created in the sixth century by Saint Gregory the Great, and that would be the starting point for the author of this poem.

Regarding the themes, we can see in almost all the sermons that they deal with some sins that have been the most recurrent ones also in other poems from this collection: pride, covetousness, and envy.

In order to discuss the four poems collectively, I will make use of the "Circumstantial evidences" that Robbins shows us in the abovementioned article. One of them says that

In the course of their sermons they often found it convenient to introduce a little tag in English verse, which could be repeated in the hope that its rhythm and rime would aid the congregation to carry away some good moral or tenet of doctrine. (...) Rimed versions of the *Pater noster* and the *Ave Maria* are popular: it may be that the people repeated them after the preacher. (232)

In this case, at the beginning of the four poems we find that the first sentence is repeated or is very similar in all of them, so it could be true what was said by R. Hope Robbins, that is to say, they were used as a method of catching the attention of the people hearing. An instance of the repeated sentence could be this one from "Fifteen Signs before Judgment": "May the grace of Jesus full of power, through the prayer of Our Blessed Lady, alight among us now, and always guard and save us." (1-4)

The second of Robbins's evidences I want to quote is this: "There are touching little descriptions of the Passion" (232). In particular, there is an entire poem dedicated to the passion of Christ - "Fall and Passion" - in which the author describes the details and how, on the third day, Christ was resurrected. What is more, this is one of the longest sermons, made up of a total of two hundred and sixteen verses grouped in fifty-four stanzas of four verses each; thus the Passion is described in detail.

"There is a large number of moral sayings and proverbs of a gnomic character" (232), claims Robbins. Some of the instances in which we can see this type of proverbs in some of our four sermons are: "Ah, man, remember that there comes an end to this life! Our human nature is of dust and ashes, and we shall return to dust" (9-12) in "Sermon"; "There is no castle nor tower made of lime and stone that ever was or shall be that shall not fall down" (89-92) in "Fifteen Signs before Judgment"; and "This world's wealth is only misery" (16), among others, in "Seven Sins".



### 2.3. Personal poems

The poems that belong to this last set are "Old Age" and "Repentance of Love". In both of them we can find a very personal perspective, close to the confession, in which the poet tells us about his fears regarding death and the sins he has committed in life. All this is done with a satirical and, sometimes, religious overlay reinforcing the topic that the writer wants to talk about.

"Old Age"

"Old Age" falls within the group of long poems, with a total of seventy-eight lines divided in twelve stanzas. The opening and closing stanzas are made up of eight verses each and the remaining nine are made up of six verses. This provides the poem with a thought-out formal pattern that not all the other poems have.

Taking into account the themes of "Old Age", we can clearly see that we are dealing with a personal poem that talks about human beings, focusing basically on two main aspects: a feeling of defeat and the accompanying physical descriptions, both given in a confessional tone.

From the beginning of the poem, the author makes the feeling of defeat clear; when death approaches, we cannot do anything to stop it but wait until our day arrives. The constant repetition of the title through the poem - it is repeated thirteen times - emphasizes the idea of the passing of time and of aging, together with a sense of failure. This poetry of defeat evokes former texts in the English tradition, such as the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem "The Ruin", which is described as a "meditative [poem that] follows the speaker's thoughts" by James F. Doubleday (376). "The Ruin" speaks of decadence as much as "Old Age" does, but in a more elegiac way, since our poem sometimes has certain ironic touches. It can be said that within the content of the personal poems there is not any evolution, that they present the same idea: from beginning to end in "Old Age", the narrative voice presents the image of a man defeated by time and by the bad habits of the past.

The disheartenment that prevails in the poem is strikingly accompanied by a peculiarly explicit vocabulary used to describe the decayed body parts in the second half of the poem. This negative description projected by the author can be seen in instances as "my penis urinates on my shoes" (verse 39), "my head is grey" (verse 41), or "my eyes grow dim" (verse 45). Together with the body parts, the actions also denote lack of body control ('babble', 'pant', or 'dribble'), sorrow ('sob' or 'complain') and typical elderly actions such as coughing, growling, or trembling.

Both the feeling of decay and the physical descriptions are presented in a narrative voice which is very confessional, since the word that predominates is the first person singular pronoun 'I', normally used to talk about feelings and personal opinions. More specifically, it is used fifty-seven times, most of them gathered in the second half of the poem, which can be considered an overuse. At some point at the end of the poem, the writer tells us about his profession. Supposedly, he has been throughout his life a shepherd, an ambiguous term that can refer to his being in the care of animals or his being a preacher. The latter would be the most obvious and suitable choice, taking into account that the possible author, Friar Michael of Kildare, was a Franciscan, as has been explained in previous pages. This reading, however, is qualified by the narrative voice's lament that reproaches the fact that he cannot pay attention to women any more, for they look at younger men, and the frustration that this entails.

### "Repentance of Love"

The poem "Repentance of Love" is made up of twelve lines grouped in three stanzas of four lines each. One of the peculiarities of this poem is the type of rhyme present: it is known as anadiplosis, and makes the first word of each line coincide with the last word of the previous line. Running through all the verses, it is a deliberate attempt on the author's part to connect form and content and thus guide the reader; 'thought', 'give up/cease', 'nothing/worthless', 'sin', 'grief/unhappiness', 'proceed/intent', and 'strive' are the words used to achieve this purpose.

Taking all these words into account, it is easy to group the themes into mainly two, as happens with "Old Age": the feeling of defeat, accompanied by unrequited love and death. It is important to notice that the unrequited love can only be understood taking into account a note in Thorlac Turville-Petre's edition: "I'll strive without (my dear one's) favour until I am dead and buried" (132). In Lucas's translation the clarification is not made.

The shortness of the poem makes it very focused and, from its beginning, we can perceive a sense of defeat as a result of earthly love, which is what has made the protagonist be in this situation of regret. Moreover, the title also emphasizes the theme of the poem with the word 'repentance'. Despite its brevity, it is possible to see an evolution that takes the protagonist from repentance to resigned acceptance and the hope that death will put an end to his predicament. We can understand this thanks to the last words of the poem, where 'earth' is used as a synonym of 'death': "I intend to carry on and strive, [...] until I am brought to the earth" (10-12).

Both in "Old Age" and "Repentance of Love" we can perceive the feeling of failure from the very beginning. Our author is clear that death is the only thing waiting for us. He has struggled against these negative thoughts, but the only thing is to wait for death to put them to an end, since he cannot do anything else.

Both the sense of defeat and of inexorable death are shown in a very confessional tone. As happens with the other personal poem, the main characteristic is that the tone is very subjective, with the author expressing his sorrow in first person singular and the constant repetition of that personal pronoun throughout the poem.



## Conclusions

This B. A. Thesis aimed to contribute to the research on the Kildare poems on account of their interesting status as the first literary texts written in English in Ireland.

In order to achieve this objective, and having described the manuscript that contains the poems (BL MS Harley 913), I have provided a historical contextualization that has allowed me to confirm their Irish origin, given the very specific allusions not only to certain contemporary Irish people and places, but also to historical Irish events, such as those in the poem "Piers of Bermingham". The Franciscan context that I have also depicted is also reflected in the majority of the poems. All of them provide us with either an illustration of the Franciscan ethos ("Song of Michael of Kildare") or a reference to Franciscan-related people and places, as in "The Land of Cokaygne".

My close reading of the satirical poems allows me to conclude that they always focus on specific people, though generally without saying directly their names, as well as on specific places and moments. Normally, we find that through the reference to specific people, places and moments, the poet strongly criticizes the rich and powerful, and sometimes the church. At the same time, the poets praises the disadvantaged, which can be seen reflected in poems such as "Song of the Times".

One of the main obsessions that concern the author of these poems is death, which goes normally hand in hand with the issue of wealth. These two are approached from a religious perspective, so that all those who hear the poet realize that material wealth has no value; he insists that when we die we will not have any of those riches with us. Poems like "Song of Michael of Kildare" and "Earth" are the proof of his obsession on the poet's part. We can also conclude that our writer has a great preacher's eagerness: there is a variety of sermons that make use of different biblical books to convey points of doctrine such as the Seven Deadly Sins ("Seven Sins") or Doomsday ("Fifteen Signs before Judgment").

Finally, we have come across a more personal side of the poet in the subgroup of personal poems, made up of "Old Age" and "Repentance of Love". In them, we can see a poet who is much closer to his audience, and who tells us about all that concerns him,

death being much to the fore. Even though the content of both poems is very personal, it can be concluded that the satirical tone is always present.

As I have been able to verify, this is a forgotten or at least little-known subject on which few studies have been done, and I consider the possibility of further investigation about them. One of the most interesting topics for future research could be the authorship of the poems, since although we have some evidence and suppositions about who the possible author is, we cannot yet say with certainty that it is Friar Michael Kildare who wrote them, or who he is. Confirming that identity would no doubt be a great contribution to the cultural history of Ireland.

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