Intersections in Early Irish and Japanese Nature Poetry: Seasons and Place Names*

MELLISA PASCALE

Trinity College Dublin

This article examines similar poetic conventions in Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry. The first section focuses on associations of the seasons, used in both literatures to explore phases in human experiences, cycles of leadership, and rituals both societal and personal. The second section examines the use of *dindṡenchas* in Early Irish poetry and a comparable device, the utamakura, in Japanese poetry. *Dindṡenchas* and utamakura add historical and literary depth to nature poetry.

Keywords: Early Irish poetry, Japanese poetry, Japanese waka, Japanese haiku, nature poetry, seasonal poetry, *dindṡenchas*, place names

1. Introduction

This article studies thematic and conventional similarities between Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry, taking a close view of seasons and place names. Scholars like Kuno Meyer (1913: xiii) and James Carney (1985: xx) have previously mentioned a superficial likeness between these bodies of literature. At a glance, the poetry of Early Ireland and Japan share a meticulous sensibility about portraying the environment; the brevity of the Japanese haiku necessitates succinct and understated imagery, tools also used in Early Irish poetry about nature. This article will examine how those similarities run deeper, assessing what shared customs can be found in Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry and what meaning is generated by those customs. In this comparative study, a selection of Irish poetry from the ninth through the eleventh centuries is considered alongside Japanese waka and haiku by Nōin (988–c.1050s), Sugawara no Takasue no Musume (1008–c.1060),[1] and Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694). An overview of the selected poems and the editions referenced in this article will be briefly given.

Examined poems from Ireland include: *Scél lem dúib* ('I have tidings for you') (Murphy 1956: 160, 161); *Cétemain, cain cucht* ('May-day, fair aspect') (Murphy 1956: 156–159); *Dom-ḟarcai fidbaide fál* ('A hedge of trees overlooks

* Many thanks to Dr. Christina Cleary for her insights and contributions to this article and to Dr. Mícheál Hoyne for his valuable feedback on these chapters of my master's thesis.

1 We do not know her real name; this literally means 'daughter of Sugawara no Takasue.'

me') (Murphy 1956: 4, 5); *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé* ('It would be pleasant, O Son of my God') (Murphy 1956: 66–69); *A Marbáin, a díthrubaig* ('Hermit Marbán') (Murphy 1956: 10–19); and *Fuit, fuid* ('Cold, cold!') from *Úath Beinne Étair* (Meyer 1890: 130–134).[2] Additionally included are the poems on the four seasons from *Aígidecht Athairni* (Meyer 1914: 2–9). Of subject matter, these poems explore landscapes of woodland and sea, changing seasons, wildlife such as birds, and human interactions with those spaces, climates, and creatures.

From Japan, this article analyses select works from two early writers: poems by Nōin, translated by Meredith McKinney in *Travels with a Writing Brush* (2019), and poems by Sugawara no Takasue no Musume from her diary *Sarashina Nikki*, translated by Sonja Arntzen and Itō Moriyuki (2014). Both Nōin and Takasue no Musume use waka, a poetic form consisting of five lines with syllable counts of five, seven, five, seven, and seven.[3] Waka was a popular form of poetry during Japan's Heian period, the eighth- to twelfth-century era when the capital was in Heian-kyō (called 'the Capital' in Heian literature; modern-day Kyōto). This period is known for its literary boom, which took place chiefly in the Capital, the most renowned work of the time being Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*. Circulating during the early eleventh century, the novel follows protagonist Hikaru Genji from childhood to death, as he navigates courtly life in the Capital with family, companions, and lovers. Like many works of the time, *The Tale of Genji* is constructed by prose and poetry. Takasue no Musume was a fan of the Shining Genji and mentions the novel in her diary.

McKinney characterizes Nōin as a 'non-monastic Buddhist monk' (2019: 76), or rather, a religious person who preferred movement overland rather than remaining fixed in a house of worship. Thus, with an acute awareness of life on the move, Nōin's poems explore significant places with past literary or historical associations, the beauty of changing seasons, and the flora and fauna of the natural world. Contemporaneous with Nōin, Takasue no Musume's *Sarashina Nikki* (*nikki* means 'diary') is a literary journal including a hybrid prose and verse account of the author's life in the Capital, her travels overland, and her pilgrimages. The diary's poems often punctuate the author's encounters with nature during her journeys, expanding emotion by drawing from poetic traditions surrounding the use of place names and seasons.

The poems from Japan additionally include a selection of haiku by Matsuo Bashō, a seventeenth-century poet and famous haiku master, and his companion Sora. A haiku consists of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Though

2 Portions of *Fuit, fuid* appear in another Early Irish poem, *Fuit co bráth*. See Meyer 1903: 18–19.

3 Nobuyuki Yuasa provides an excellent overview of the waka technique and its history, including its influence on the later haiku form, in his introduction to *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* (Bashō 1966: 9–19).

Bashō is removed in time from the earlier era of Japanese nature writing, he is known for evoking it in certain conventions, such as his use of seasonal motifs and place names. This article is not the first to draw Bashō into discussions about literature of the medieval period; Robert Hass notes Bashō's place as a 'late medieval poet,' (1994: x), and Seamus Heaney draws a direct comparison between the Early Irish poem *Int én bec* and Bashō's haiku about a frog (1982: 25). As such, it is worth examining Bashō as an early poet. References are to the English edition by Nobuyuki Yuasa in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* (1966).

This comparative article will use English translations, working a bit with the original Irish but not with the original Japanese. The reader will know that each translator's interpretative skills must influence the English rendering of these poems; for the Japanese poems, I have had to put an extra layer of trust in those decisions. For instance, while a haiku is traditionally three lines, Yuasa notes difficulties in preserving this form in translation and uses four (Bashō 1966: 48–49). Another translation of Bashō's travel journal, such as the lovely edition by Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu (2004), may use three lines and seventeen syllables, possessing its own adaption of word choice and syntax to accommodate the preservation of form.

The next section focuses on associations of the seasons, used in Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry to examine phases in human experiences, cycles of leadership, and rituals of both societal and personal matters. The final section discusses the use of *dindṡenchas* in Early Irish poetry and a comparable device, the utamakura, in Japanese poetry. *Dindṡenchas* and utamakura support nature poetry by adding historical and literary depth.

2. Associations of the Seasons

Seasonal associations are an important custom in Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry. In Japanese haiku, including a seasonal element is so traditional that it is defined in two literary devices: the kigo and the kidai. Haruo Shirane, in *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, describes the kigo as a word signifying season and the kidai as a seasonal topic containing symbolic overtones (2012: 177). In *The Essential Haiku*, Robert Hass describes the kigo as containing both functions and does not mention the kidai (1994: xii–xiii). These twin customs, of using season both to ground a poem in time and to amplify poetic meaning by building on the season's associations, have deep roots in Japanese poetry, appearing long before they were named. Although Early Irish nature poetry does not possess a formal device like the kigo or kidai, seasonal associations form a crucial aspect of this literature. Both use seasons to meditate on patterns in human experiences, authority, and ritual.

2.1. 'Religious thought'

As a cyclical process, seasons can be associated with recurring human experiences, sometimes tying in theological considerations but, more often, leaving questions of such design open. Take experiences like sadness and departure, depicted in this autumn waka by Nōin: 'Melancholy / in the deepening night / Shiogama Bay / rippled by the wind / of a snipe's quick wingbeat' (McKinney 2019: 78). The seasonal cues are subtle, but they exist in the images of the snipe, wind, and the mention of 'melancholy'. Shiogama Bay is on the northeastern shore of Japan's main island, Honshu, close to Hokkaido. Latham's snipe, the species in Japan, migrate south from Hokkaido in early autumn and back to Japan in spring.[4] As the wind is a kigo for autumn, and melancholy or sadness are associations for poetry about this season (Shirane 2012: 40–44), it can be surmised that Nōin is witnessing the autumn migration as the snipes depart Hokkaido. Departure itself is also an autumn association; in the following haiku by Bashō (1966: 142), a more explicit image of departure is supported by another scene from nature: 'As firmly cemented clam-shells / Fall apart in autumn, / So I must take to the road again, / Farewell, my friends.' In these poems, Nōin and Bashō make full use of their respective settings, using seasonal elements to magnify the experience of departure.

Similarly, Early Irish nature poetry also relies on seasonal associations, constructed through patterns from the natural world and their corresponding meanings. Note that, while seasonal associations are prominent in both literatures, the specific associations of a particular season may differ. Nōin and Bashō find departure in autumn, but Amorgen, the speaker in the below poem from the Middle Irish tale *Aígidecht Athairni*, possesses a separate experience with the season:

R[aithe] fō foiss fogomur
feidm and [for cech] ōenduine
la tóeb na llā lāngarit.
Lóig brecca [a broin]d osseilt
dītnit rūadgaiss raithnigi
…
Draigin drissi delgnacha
fri tōeb in lāir leithlessi,
lān do mess trom tairnith [ ].
Tuittit cnōi cuill cāinmessa
do robilib rāth.

4 Before the nineteenth-century Meiji period, Japan used the lunisolar calendar. Those seasonal dates by today's Gregorian calendar are: Winter (7 November–3 February), Spring (4 February–4 May), Summer (5 May–6 August), Autumn (7 August–6 November) (Shirane 2012: 9–10).

> ‘A good stay-at-home season is autumn,
> then there is work to be done for everyone
> throughout the all too short days.
> Speckled fawns from the midst of the deer-herd,—
> the red stalks of the bracken afford a shelter (to them)
> …
> Spiked thorn-bushes (grow)
> by the site of a half-ruined fort :
> the weight of a heavy harvest bows them down.
> Hazelnuts of the fairest crop
> drop from the great trees of forts.’
>
> (Meyer 1914: 2, 3)

Amorgen supports his declaration that autumn is for *foss* (which Meyer translates as ‘stay-at-home’ but which literally means ‘rest’[5]) with descriptions of how the flora *dítnid* (‘shelters’) fauna as well as the abundance of *mess* (‘harvest’; also ‘mast,’ the fruit and nuts of trees[6]). These point to a sense of gathering in place, protection, and plenty, opposites to themes of departure. But though these nature poems from Early Ireland and Japan home in on different images, for both, autumn arrives with a perceptive awareness of important patterns in human experiences. Without season, the customs so beautifully carried in these poems would not be able to achieve their full effect.

That effect, it should be noted, is chiefly driven by a sense of lived experience, rather than something akin to mood or feeling, although these devices certainly play a supporting role. Herbert Plutschow, writing about the Japanese travel diary (often punctuated by nature poetry as the traveller moves across the landscape) notes season’s significance for ‘the mood of the travel account and its poetry’ (1982: 6); McKinney, discussing Nōin’s technique in portraying autumn, praises how ‘landscape and mood merge’ (2019: 76). Interestingly, though, to Hass, the word ‘mood’ doesn’t fully convey the effect achieved by seasonal associations, and he instead calls the elicited effect ‘religious thought’ (1994: xiii–xiv). In ‘Early Gaelic Nature Poetry Revisited,’ Thomas Owen Clancy presents a similar point; while addressing the notion that readers might recognize a particular ‘feeling’ in an Early Irish poem about nature, Clancy notes his reluctance to use the word ‘feeling’ in describing that effect (2014: 11).[7] Hass’ religious thought comes to mind here. We have faith in the seasons in that the leaves will fall in autumn, and the sun will have a shorter journey across the sky in the winter. Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry also expresses a kind of faith in the seasons, in a lyrical

5 eDIL 2019, *s.v. foss, fos*, https://dil.ie/24107.

6 eDIL 2019, *s.v. mes(s)*, https://dil.ie/32022.

7 Thank you to the Library of the School of Celtic Studies at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies for providing access to the article by Clancy (2014).

sense. With representations of the seasons, certain associations and meanings arrive, making prominent the patterns of human experiences.

2.2. Changing seasons

In the following winter poems, voiced by a lady of the Heian-period court and a warrior of the Fenian Cycle, a multi-layered approach to the portrayal of seasonal changes engages with ideas of greater design and, ultimately, leadership. In the first layer, the poets employ minute details about their winter environments, both pivoting on the image of 'frost' or 'cold' on the wings of birds. The second layer expresses an outlook on winter concerning its transition to or from the other seasons, with one looking forward to the ice melting and the appearance of spring, and the other looking back to summer. The third layer further expands on these seasonal motifs, displaying the speakers' prowess in philosophical and scientific understandings of cycles in life and nature.

First, we will look at two waka by Takasue no Musume, from her diary *Sarashina Nikki*. As a lady of the court, she reminisces with her colleagues about the princess they once attended to, who has passed away. Takasue no Musume receives a waka from one of the other ladies commemorating their heart-to-heart, and she responds with her own: 'The ice that formed / on that clear, cold night rests / unmelted on my sleeves. / All through the winter's night, / I weep aloud remembering it.' After a brief prose passage introducing a scene change, Takasue no Musume lingers on her grief while gazing at water birds: 'They are just like me, / awake until dawn, sleeping / fitfully on the water, / struggling to brush away / the frost on their wings.' (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 168, 170)

In the first waka, ice on sleeves evokes the image of wiping away tears, which then freeze in the chill winter air. In the second waka, the frost on the birds' wings recalls those icy sleeves, deep and unmoving sentiments waiting to be unfrozen and released. Yet it is sympathy, more so than sadness, which shines in this second waka (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 169). Takasue no Musume relates to the plight of other living beings in winter, namely, the water birds. As Shirane notes, the poet's identification with the natural world as the seasons unleash their elements is an established poetic technique (2012: 29). Equally vital in these waka is the subtle look ahead to a change in season. The reader senses her impatience at the slow turn of the seasons and her grief: birds cannot yet 'brush away the frost,' and her icy sleeves remain 'unmelted'. Writing about portrayals of winter (and summer) in the Heian period, which possessed weather extremes, emphasis might be placed on the 'loss' or 'anticipation' of the neighbouring seasons (Shirane 2012: 45). For Takasue no Musume, the springtime melt seems far away, but it is not forgotten.

What seasonal poems such as these can accomplish is the creation of authority in the speaker. Takasue no Musume, examining her grief and the grief of those around her, emerges as a steady voice harnessing empathy and the metaphor of changing seasons to guide the reader, and perhaps also her colleagues, through philosophical musings on death. Whereas Takasue no Musume's authority comes from her role as narrator, for Finn mac Cumaill, leader of the *Fianna* and the speaker of the below ninth-century Irish poem *Scél lem dúib* ('I have tidings for you'),[8] that authority goes hand in hand with his role as a superior.

In Early Irish poetry, good land is linked to a competent leader, and one would have to understand how changing seasons affect processes like agriculture to lead effectively. While Finn may not possess the power to bring about a milder winter, his understanding of the season, as displayed below, demonstrates his value as a leader qualified to guide others through these fluctuating elements. Maria Tymoczko (in discussing *Cétemain, cain cucht*, a summer poem voiced by Finn) argues that Finn displays a knowledge of the environment that is also a kind of power, calling this 'supernatural vision' (1983: 33). Ulrike Roider, writing about her comparative study of Irish and Hindu literature, goes further, suggesting that Irish seasonal poems were perhaps 'religious,' as positive portrayals of seasons could be connected to the 'rightfulness' of a ruler to lead (2010: 188).

In *Scél lem dúib*, Finn introduces winter by declaring the loss of a season past: *snigid gaim / ro fáith sam* ('winter pours / summer has gone')[9] (Murphy 1956: 160, 161). The poem continues to describe winter with great detail: the sun's low and brief travels through the sky, the red colour of the bracken, and a goose's call. To conclude, *ro gab úacht / etti én / aigre ré / é mo scél* ('Cold has seized / the wings of birds / season of ice / these are my tidings.'). As Takasue no Musume does, Finn calls upon minute but meaningful details about winter, such as the birds' wings, to deliver his *scél* ('tidings; story; news'). These details then engage with a higher layer, considering winter in the context of seasonal cycles and noting the departure of summer. Both Takasue no Musume and Finn use seasonal associations, and more specifically, the change of season, to underscore their respective roles in a shifting environment. Takasue no Musume, engaging with other ladies of the court, relies on empathy and subtle hopefulness about the future to usher the way forward. Finn's role as a leader is established in the Fenian Cycle, and his understanding of the natural world and its cycles in *Scél lem dúib* supports his status as the leader of the *Fianna*.

It's worth noting that in Japanese poetry, this trope about the land and the leader depends on not only poetic technique but also poetic anthologizing, embracing the imperial seat in the Capital. Readers of Early Japanese poetry will notice that spring and autumn dominate seasonal references. In Japan, winter and

8 An attribution to Finn mac Cumaill in Rawlinson B 502 indicates that Finn, the hero of the Fenian Cycle, voices *Scél lem dúib*. (CODECS, https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Scél_lem_dúib)

9 Meyer translates this as 'winter snows' (1903: 14–15).

summer exhibit excessively high and low temperatures and dangerous weather patterns. In Heian-period poetry, composed by members of the aristocratic class and separated from professions like farming, where seasonal patterns would have been experienced more closely, depictions of winter and summer did not necessarily reflect the full impact of the seasons' severity. Poets instead highlighted the departure or approach of one of the gentler seasons, autumn or spring, as Takasue no Musume does in her above waka. When anthologies were produced in the Capital, it was custom to favour spring and autumn poetry, which displayed a peaceful climate alongside peaceful rule (Shirane 2012: 9–13).

Nōin is one such poet whose work was anthologized, having an autumn waka in *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*, a late Heian-period anthology compiled in the Capital by waka master Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241). Whether or not a poet's work was successfully anthologized, a literary tradition was born: autumn and spring reign supreme in Japanese nature poetry, and spring, in particular, is best experienced in the emperor's Capital. On a journey, Nōin wrote in his personal collection, 'Here on this far shore / watching the salt kilns' / drifts of smoke / my heart recalls the blossoms / that fill the flowery Capital' (McKinney 2019: 80). Blossoms perhaps require no introduction; plum and cherry blossoms are hallmarks of springtime scenes in Japanese art and literature. From a distance, Nōin pines for spring in the Capital and perceives echoes of the blossoms' delicacy in smoke plumes, images of transience. Like the seasons, leaders come and go, each leaving their mark on the literal landscape and the literary one. Early Irish and Japanese nature poets forged literary links between seasons and sovereignty as twin rulers over the land.

2.3. Social and private rituals

Thus far we have seen how seasonal associations in Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry represent cycles in human experiences and leadership. This last section on the seasons will consider rituals, as they are displayed in poems about summer. Rituals can be public or private, as well as 'official' in, say, a religious sense. The suite of seasonal poems in *Aígidecht Athairni* seems to portray a ritual surrounding seasons, livestock, and human activities.

In *Aígidecht Athairni*, the opening prose depicts the poet Athirne Áilgessach visiting his foster son, Amorgen. Whenever Athirne goes to depart, Amorgen persuades him to stay through verse: autumn (which was discussed in Section 2.1) is *foss* ('a good stay-at-home season'); the winter landscape is *dub* ('dark'), *garg* ('fierce'), and punctuated by *fīaich fola forderge* ('ravens of dark-red blood');[10] the springtime scenery is *aigide* ('icy') and haunted by dangerous creatures such as *cúana* ('wolf-packs'). It is not until summer that Athirne receives a positive forecast. Amorgen depicts a safe and comforting climate, describing features of the summer landscape as *sádail* ('peaceful') and *clithach* ('sheltering'). The tale

10 Or 'somewhat red, ruddy' (eDIL 2019, *s.v. foderg*, https://dil.ie/22597)

concludes with Athirne's refusing various meat courses for a summer farewell meal — bull, calf, sheep — before settling on the pig. (Meyer 1914: 2–7)

In each of these interactions, Athirne and Amorgen seem to be honouring a social or interpersonal custom as a guest or a host, the guest offering to depart and the host offering hospitality. Roider suggests that these seasonal poems contain the remnants of a pagan ritual connecting the turn of the seasons with animal sacrifice (2010: 188). Whether born of pagan customs or social ones, the ritual displayed is based on a sharp knowledge of the seasons fit for certain activities, like harvest and setting out.

The word 'ritual' may be associated with organized, public traditions, but rituals come in all shapes and sizes, including private ones. According to Shirane, several of Japan's seasonal festivals 'were initially court or public ceremonies, while others, such as changing to summer clothes (*koromogae*), were observed at home' (2012: 153). An example of this 'home' ritual can be observed in a haiku by Sora, the companion of Bashō, who wrote: 'Rid of my hair, / I came to Mount Kurokami, / On the day we put on / Clean summer clothes' (Bashō 1966: 100–101).

Sora donning his summer attire is part of a widespread ritual carried out in private. The mention of Mount Kurokami is also a telling detail, for in the prose passage preceding Sora's haiku, Bashō describes Mount Kurokami as 'brilliantly white with snow in spite of its name, which means black hair' — a fitting introduction for a haiku that mentions its author's shaved head. The associations of both a seasonal ritual and the mountain join together to illustrate a feeling of coolness in this summer poem. This depiction of coolness in summer relates to the rulership traditions discussed in Section 2.2; if not emphasizing autumn or spring, poetry set in summer or winter may have highlighted milder conditions to produce a positive environment. For example, though heat was not excluded from depictions of summer, it was more common for poets to highlight cooler patches, such as crisp evening air or relieving rainstorms (Shirane 2012: 12–13). The ritual of donning summer attire supports this haiku's imagery of a clean slate in a cool summer, demonstrating a private custom while engaging with literary ones.

Though not all seasonal customs may be identical between these two bodies of literature, some do contain very similar meanings. Let's conclude by looking at the song of the cuckoo at the beginning of summer. On an early summer morning, Takasue no Musume pens a waka on the vocal exchange of nearby cuckoos, or hototogisu: 'To whom could I show this? / Whom could I have listen to this? / The mountain dwelling, / this moment of daybreak, and / this singing back and forth' (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 200). The appearance of the hototogisu in the Fourth Month, which was the first month of summer in Heian-period Japan, heralded the start of the season (Shirane 2012: 38). The cuckoo's voice seems to serve the same function in the ninth-century poem *Cétemain, cain cucht* ('May-day, fair aspect')...*Gairid cuí chrúaid den / is fo-chen sam saír* ('The hardy vigorous cuckoo calls / Welcome to noble summer') (Murphy 1956: 156–157). In another ninth-century poem, *Dom-ḟarcai fidbaide fál* ('A hedge of trees overlooks me') (Murphy 1956: 4, 5), the anonymous speaker is also serenaded by a *coí* ('cuckoo') and a *lon* ('blackbird'). One wonders if the cuckoo is a summer association;[11] Lauran Toorians additionally makes the argument that blackbirds, now abundant, were once harder to find and that a blackbird's voice in Early Irish poetry might be a metaphor for a reclusive monk (2011: 87–90).[12] At the cuckoo's call, the speakers of both poems seem to express delight over the birds' return and what it may mark, namely, the return of summer and that season's deeper associations. In welding seasonal details to faithful meanings, Early Irish and Japanese nature poets grant readers access to a precise lyrical language for discussing cyclical experiences and rituals.

3. Dindṡenchas and Utamakura

The *Dindṡenchas* is a corpus of Early Irish verse and prose texts which tell the origins of place names. Theuerkauf identifies three main etymologizing techniques in *dindṡenchas* entries: those from personal names, those from common nouns, and *bélrae n-etarscartha* 'language of separation,' which may make use of either of the aforementioned (2023: 71). In addition to forming a corpus, *dindṡenchas* are found in Early Irish prose tales and poetry, transporting with them their origins and the associations they've gathered in other literary appearances. The earliest manuscript record of the corpus is the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster* (TCD 1339); Ó Muraíle provides a survey of *dindṡenchas* literature (2024: 3–24) and highlights that poets in particular would have been educated in *dindṡenchas* (2024: 5).[13] In discussing *dindṡenchas* in Early Irish poetry, this article will use Edward Gwynn's five-part edition, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* (1903–1935).[14]

In Japanese literature, early writers use a comparable device for place names, the utamakura. An utamakura is a place that has garnered a distinct position in both landscape and literature through historical events, cultural or spiritual

11 In *Anocht sgaoilid na sgola*, a fourteenth or fifteenth-century elegiac poem, the cuckoo persists as a symbol of summer's arrival, signalling the end of school and the start of summer (Bergin 1970: 148 and 280).

12 More could be said about religious reclusion as a recurring motif in Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry.

13 Many thanks to Dr. Nollaig Ó Muraíle and Dr. Marie-Luise Theuerkauf for providing a copy of this chapter from Dr. Theuerkauf's book (2024).

14 This section does not cover places mentioned in the Middle Irish *Acallam na Senórach* (Dooley 2008), which could be an area for further study of shared place name conventions.

significance (for example, Shinto shrines), and literary presence. In Heian-period Japan, it was expected that the writer and audience would recognize an utamakura and its associations in literature, similar to the expectations for Early Irish poets. The term ‘utamakura’ means ‘poem pillow’; explaining this meaning, Edward Kamens describes ‘what the head does on a pillow (“rest,” “nestle”) and what the poet does with place names (“refer,” “rely”)’ (1997: 2). To cushion or support a work of prose or poetry, both utamakura and *dindṡenchas* work by propping up certain images, themes, or origins. When appearing in nature poetry, utamakura and *dindṡenchas* uniquely fuse landscape with literary lore.

3.1. ‘Foggy rain’: Change in natural places

In the below waka from Nōin, we can observe an utamakura in formation, gaining its associations through travel literature. Kiyomi Barrier, which we will also see in a prose passage from Takasue no Musume, was not yet an utamakura in early eleventh-century Japan (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 103), but the seeds of its significance as a border place were being sown.

Nōin imagines his friend, Ōe no Kinyori, travelling to his new post as a provincial governor in Sagami: ‘Perhaps you are / crossing Kiyomi Barrier / thoughts of home / haunting your memory / in the autumn wind’ (McKinney 2019: 78). Arntzen and Moriyuki describe Kiyomi Barrier as ‘a scenic spot with a view of the open sea, the mountains of the Izu Peninsula to the southwest, and Mount Fuji to the northwest’ (2014: 103). In *Sarashina Nikki*, Takasue no Musume also crosses Kiyomi Barrier. Through prose, she engages with a more established utamakura: Mount Fuji. During the Heian period, the poetic image associated with the then-active volcano was smoke (Plutschow 1982: 22). Thus, musing on the smoke from Mount Fuji and the mist from the sea’s waves, both visible from where she stands at the barrier, Takasue no Musume asks, ‘Might smoke be rising to meet smoke?’ (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 102).

As a place overlooking sea and mountain, Kiyomi Barrier offered writers the chance to hover on opposing images while navigating the boundary between. In Nōin’s waka, the autumn wind carries with it ‘thoughts of home’ as the subject travels away; Takasue no Musume engages with images of sea spray and hot smoke. Kiyomi Barrier was gaining associations as a border place, and, when it attained the status of utamakura, its name, imagery, and accompanying associations would have resonated with readers.

Much like utamakura, *dindṡenchas* creates a metaphysical depth in Early Irish literature, layering the Irish landscape with not only rocks and sediment but also history and saga mythology. The Middle Irish poem below beginning *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé* (‘It would be pleasant, O Son of my God’) is voiced by the sixth-century saint Columb Cille, who is speaking as an émigré to Scotland and recalling places from the Irish landscape:

Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé,
(dingnaib réimenn)
ascnam tar tuinn topur ndílenn
dochum nÉirenn;

Go Mag nÉolairg, sech Beinn Foibne,
tar Loch Febail,
airm i cluinfinn cuibdius cubaid
ac na elaib.

'It would be pleasant, O Son of my God, in wondrous voyagings to travel over the deluge-fountained wave to Ireland;

To Mag nÉolairg, by Benevenagh, across Lough Foyle, where I might hear tuneful music from the swans.'

(Murphy 1956: 66–67)

To grasp the full effect of this stanza, we will examine the place names, starting with the *dindṡenchas* of Benn Foibne. In this entry, the speaker relates the tale of Foibne, who, after committing a murder called *dedgair dúr* ('sudden and fell'[15]), is hunted to a peak, where he is killed in retribution. As a result, *a ainm cen doilgi ar daig* ('His name [remains] without sorrow for a warrior') (*Metr. Dinds*. iv 1924: 86–89). This marks an instance of a personal name being used to create a *dindṡenchas*; Theuerkauf notes that the name is often of a person who has committed an offence or is a casualty of it (2023: 74). The other named places, Loch Febail and Mag nÉolairg, are mentioned in *dindṡenchas* entries, though they do not possess entries of their own. Loch Febail is mentioned in Druim Criaich as one of the places over which an army travels (*Metr. Dinds.* iv 1924: 44–45) and in Ailech II as the location of a marked stone (1924: 102–103, 112–113). Mag nÉolairg is mentioned in the *dindṡenchas* of Dún Crimthaind as *grúad maige Eolairg áin* ('the cheek of glorious Mag Eolairg') (*Metr. Dinds.* iii 1913: 120–121) implying a hill or mountain; the index, however, says it is 'the sea between the coast of Co. Derry and the Hebrides' (*Metr. Dinds.* v 1935: 196).

When place names such as these appear in *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé*, they invoke a sense of communing with the past. Engaging with earlier tales passed down, *dindṡenchas* provide pathways for connection between subject, poet, and reader. The dual ability of a place name to invoke familiarity through its appearance in earlier literature as well as its closeness to contemporary readers plays a key role in nature poetry. As Mac Réamoinn says of *dindṡenchas*, this 'literature in prose and verse has carried these names for a thousand years and more, with each name an echo of ancient memory, or of recent adventure'

15 Or 'zealous' (eDIL 2019, *s.v. dedgair*, https://dil.ie/14996) and 'severe' (eDIL 2019, *s.v. dúr*, https://dil.ie/19263).

(1982: 19). Like an utamakura in Japanese literature, the features of the landscape become temporal as well as spatial, yet still within the reader's grasp.

Naturally, landscapes change, and one wonders how literary place names function through the centuries. Discussing the utamakura, Kamens highlights the 'continuity' that a place name would seemingly provide, preserving a place and its associations through the ages; ultimately, however, he notes that such a static effect could never be fully maintained (2012: 38). Especially for nature poetry, it would be difficult to veil environmental changes. For instance, by Bashō's time, Mount Fuji had gone dormant. So in place of the conventional image of smoke, as was used by Takasue no Musume in the aforementioned passage from Kiyomi Barrier, Bashō uses 'foggy rain' in a haiku about passing Fuji (1966: 51). Thus, nature poets must sometimes find new ways to honour past place name conventions in a shifting landscape. On the other side of the coin, the landscape might remain preserved in the poet's mind while he or she is the fluid element; consider again Columb Cille's separation from Ireland. A sense of longing emerges then for a place lost not because of physical alteration but because of human migration. Although this differs from an utamakura's ability to highlight evolving landscapes, both bodies of poetic literature use place names to explore change and fluidity in natural environments.

3.2. Travelling in place

In the above poems, Nōin and Columb Cille speak as well-travelled individuals. In the next selection of poems, the speakers might also be well-travelled, but they share their poems from places of relative isolation. In *A Marbáin, a díthrubaig* ('Hermit Marbán') (Murphy 1956: 10–11), an Old Irish dialogue poem, the speaker Marbán peppers place names into his description of his *úarboth* ('hut'[16]), which is probably a metaphor for an out-of-doors setting. The poem begins with Gúaire, Marbán's half-brother (Meyer 1901: 9), commenting on Marbán's preference to *feiss i-mmaig, / cenn do raig for lár ochtgaig* ('sleep out of doors / with your head, where the tonsure ends, upon the ground of a fir-grove') (Murphy 1956: 10–11). Marbán's lengthy description forms the meat of the poem, using place names in the quatrain:

> Lengait doim Droma Rolach
> assa sruth róeglan.
> Fodeirc essi Roigne rúad
> Mucruime múad, Móenmag.

> 'The stags of Druim Rolach leap from its stream which flows brightly through the plain. Russet Roigne may be seen from it, goodly Mucruime, and Móenmag'
> (Murphy 1956: 10–11).

16 Also 'hunting booth' (eDIL 2019, s.v. '*úarboth*,' https://dil.ie/42775).

The history of Móenmag and Mucruime, or Mag Mucrime, is given in their respective *dindṡenchas*. In the first:

> Dá dán oc Móen…
> gním berrtha ós braine belaig
> ocus maige a mór-ḟedaib
>
> ‘Two arts had Moen…
> the business of shaving the gap above the fringe
> and [of clearing] a plain of great woods’
> (*Metr. Dinds.* iii 1913: 334–337).

In the *dindṡenchas* of Mag Mucrime, this is evidently also a plain bordered by woodland,

> Ferann réid amréid ria ar,
> fota rolethan roglan,
> clár itát claidib cressa,
> lán do dairib dair-messa.
>
> ‘A land for tillage, smooth and rough alike
> long, wide, and shining;
> a flat country where girded swords are seen,
> full of oak woods laden with oak fruit.
> (*Metr. Dinds.* iii 1913: 382–385).

Berrtha (‘shaving’) and descriptions of open plains perhaps recall Marbán’s tonsure, lending monastic associations and underscoring his earlier characterization as a hermit. While the former entry provides an example of a personal name origin, the latter provides an instance of *bélrae n-etarscartha*, which Theuerkauf says is another *dindṡenchas* etymological technique (2023: 78–79). *Mucrime* seems to come from *mucc* (‘pig’) and *rím* (‘counting, enumerating’), a fitting name for an entry that goes on to describe the famous counting of the pigs as overseen by Medb and Ailill. Mag Mucrime also features in an Old Irish saga, *Cath Maige Mucram*a (‘The Battle of Mag Mucrama’). Thus, Marbán’s mention of Mag Mucrime carries significant literary associations.

The other two place names in *A Marbáin, a díthrubaig*, *Druim Rolach* and *Roigne rúad* (‘Russet Roigne’), do not appear to have *dindṡenchas* entries. Meyer calls *Druim Rolach* ‘Oakridge’[17] (1913: 47); Roigne appears in another poem from the Old Irish period, *It é saigte gona súain* (‘The arrows that murder sleep’) (Murphy 1956: 86–89). In any case, when Marbán says that these places *fodeirc essi* (‘may be seen from it’), the view is a metaphorical one. Through *dindṡenchas*, Marbán is not revealing his exact location so much as describing the vast outside world, which is, of course, exact in its own way. Here *dindṡenchas*

17 eDIL 2019, *s.v. druim(m)*, https://dil.ie/18862; eDIL 2019, *s.v. rail*, https://dil.ie/34748.

become both binoculars and magnifying glass, through which one can explore further landscape features and deeper literature from the comfort of an *úarboth*, whether real or metaphorical.

In the below waka, Takasue no Musume similarly calls upon an utamakura to widen the lens from a place of isolation. To provide some context, this waka appears while the author mourns her dead sister, and the headnote reveals that she is thinking about a nun who resides in the Yoshino Mountains: 'With the snow falling, / even the rare visits of others / must have ceased– / it is a steep path up to the / peaks of the Yoshino Mountains' (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 130). This waka also demonstrates how, in some cases, an utamakura may merge with a specific season (Shirane 2012: 68).

The words 'rare visits' and 'steep path' lend a sense of remoteness to the Yoshino Mountains, which are south of the Capital. But this place would not have been remote to the reader; as an utamakura, the Yoshino Mountains were known for their bright blossoms. Writing about place name conventions, the thirteenth-century poet Fujiwara no Tameaki and fifteenth-century poet Shōtetsu each declared that Yoshino should be associated with springtime cherry blossoms; in addition to blossoms, Yoshino was associated with snow (Shirane 2012: 67–68). Possibly, snow continued to fall in early spring, but more likely, delicate flurries of snow were accepted as another image for blossoms, providing a means to unite this utamkaura with its corresponding season, even at a different time of the year.[18] Appearing in other works, the Yoshino Mountains transfer literary associations that strengthen its traditional ones. In *Sarashina Nikki*,[19] Takasue no Musume relies on this utamakura to support her waka, uniting the remoteness felt by the isolated individual with the actual universality of her words.

3.3. Familiarity in small places

Thus far, we have assessed utamakura and *dindṡenchas* for rather sizeable features of a landscape: towering mountains, mountain passes, and wide-open plains. It would be difficult for a poet to miss these, especially when they are established place names. But equally important are the small places in nature that make up local environments. Late in his travel diary, Bashō speeds up his narrative through a series of four haikus that recount his travels from Kanazawa

18 Elsewhere, Takasue no Musume mistakes spring blossoms for snow: 'Gazing at this, / I might think that snow had fallen / out of season, / if it were not for the fragrance / of this orange blossom tree' (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 114).

19 Sarashina is an utamakura. It is associated with Old Forsaken Woman Peak, known for its 'folk belief about an ancient custom of abandoning old women and for being a beautiful place to view the moon' (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 82). Widowed after her husband died from an illness contracted in the same province as Sarashina, Takasue no Musume ties her personal sorrow at his death to larger themes of abandonment, with the moon evoking such ideas as a consistent figure throughout her diary (Arntzen and Moriyuki 2014: 81–88 and 207).

city to a hermitage, back to the road and to — as the headnote simply says — 'the place called Dwarfed Pine': 'Dwarfed Pine is indeed / A gentle name, and gently / The wind brushes through / Bush-clovers and pampas' (1966: 134).

Bashō, crafting movement in his diary, uses this haiku to linger on an important image from his journeying. Expanding on the 'gentle name,' Bashō writes about its calm features, which also happen to be kigo for autumn: 'brushes' of wind, bush-clover, and grasses. Possibly the place holds personal meaning; autumn is associated with departure, which Bashō had been doing quite frequently. McKinney notes that 'those who ventured further afield…clung to the presence of the occasional *utamakura* sites in the landscape they travelled through as to a friend from a distant world, that of the cultured literature of the Capital, met with in the wilds of the literary unknown' (2019: xxi). Bashō perhaps goes a step further, not only tethering to those few utamakura but also applying utamakura conventions to nature's small places. This would have allowed him and other nature poets to further contour nature poetry through place, even if that place initially was unfamiliar to a wider audience.[20]

After all, not only famous places get names. Brian Ó Cuív notes the 'potential' that all place names have for '*dinnshenchas* or place-lore' (1989–1991: 93).[21] Names of local places, though they might not be as recognizable as an established utamakura or *dindṡenchas*, can still cushion nature poetry, perhaps through linguistic clues; Theuerkauf lists derivation from common nouns as a third etymological technique for creating *dindṡenchas* (2023: 75). In the Middle Irish poem *Fuit, fuid* ('Cold, cold!'), found in the tale *Úath Beinne Étair*, famous place names are mentioned — such as Inis Fáil, a name for Ireland derived from a standing stone in Tara — alongside what seem to be more local ones formed from common nouns:

> Ni fagaid coin Coildi Cuan
> sam na suan a n-adhpaid con :
> ni fagann in dreen becc
> dín da net a Letrich Lon.
>
> 'The hounds of Cuan-wood find not
> Rest nor sleep in the dwelling of hounds,
> The little wren cannot find
> Shelter in her nest on Lon-slope.'
>
> (Meyer 1890: 130–133)

20 Takasue no Musume does something similar when, after departing from a stop on her travels, writes back to her host the following waka: 'It matters not where, / I only want to part from / the pathos of dew, / yet I will recall fondly this autumn / on the "plain of short reeds."' Arntzen and Moriyuki posit that 'the plain of short reeds' is the name of her host's private garden (2014: 142 and 143).

21 Thank you to the Team der Fachbibliothek Philologien der Universität Bonn for providing access to the article by Ó Cuív (1989–1991).

The names for these places then reflect their habitats and residents, Coille Cuan being a wood of wolves and Leitir Lon a hillside of blackbirds, or birds. Though a local forest or hill may not possess the same well-known associations as a *dindṡenchas*, names carry meanings, and in nature poetry, that meaning also concerns landscape. Wolves and birds are not interlopers in these lands, rather, they are so present that the land derives its name from them. The reader perceives a sense of familiarity with these creatures, and, because of that, perhaps empathy as well, because they are also at the mercy of winter's wrath.

Utamakura and *dindṡenchas* in nature poetry have the effect of creating depth in a landscape, through such associations as history, culture, and literature, if they are established, or else through the elevation of small spaces that convey setting and remote meanings. That depth provides several access points for readers, who may recognize the associations or find the place itself (or similar features of it) within their own environments. An emotional connection emerges, wrought from the physical and metaphysical woven together and appealing to the reader's knowledge of place. Describing how an utamakura functions in waka poetry, Kamens states that 'it generates a vast textual infrastructure that manages to overarch the span of time and even gives the sense of having brought about time's collapse, so that the past seems to merge indistinguishably with the present' (2012: 39). Such an effect can also be observed with the deployment of *dindṡenchas* in Early Irish nature poetry.[22]

4. Conclusion

In Early Irish and Japanese nature poetry, seasons and place names create a multi-dimensional effect, firstly producing a corporeal landscape and secondly traversing abstract terrain. This latter topography branches out to such themes in ritual, leadership, history, landscape, and literature. This article has deliberately provided a close look at select poems, with the hope that the reader will engage with these ideas in future readings. More could be said about each of these customs or other comparable traditions in these literatures, such as the recurring

22 More could be said about *dindṡenchas* and utamakura in writings about travel. Ó Cuív discusses the role of *dindṡenchas* in the route or itinerary, saying that 'the inclusion of an itinerary may have been designed to display knowledge in one of the branches of learning, namely *dinnshenchas*' (1989–1991: 100). In Heian Japan, prescribed overland routes were part of many journeyings and the resultant literature. At the start of *Sarashina Nikki*, Takasue no Musume is following the Tōkaidō, the route between Kyōto and Tōkyō (Tōkaidō is also the name of the shinkansen, or bullet train, that runs between these cities today). Of the Tōkaidō, whose name comes later in the Edo period, McKinney says that 'a vast corpus of poetry grew up around its many famous *utamakura* sites' (2019: 288). In both literatures, the route, whether designed for a narrative or an actual way, is important for place names in both literatures.

image of the recluse speaker or the use of syllabic meters. Considering these works in conversation with one another opens pathways for further analyses into the literary intersections between Ireland and Japan.

Abbreviations

eDIL	An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language. 2019.
Metr. Dinds.	The Metrical Dindshenchas. E. Gwynn, 1903–1935.

List of References

Arntzen, S. & I. Moriyuki (eds. & trans.) 2014. *The Sarashina Diary: A Woman's Life in Eleventh-Century Japan*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bashō, M. 1966. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*. Nobuyuki Yuasa (trans.) New York: Penguin Books.

Bashō, M. 2004. *Backroads to Far Towns: Bashō's Travel Journal*. Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu (trans.) Buffalo: White Pine Press.

Bergin, O. 1970. *Irish Bardic Poetry*. Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Carney, J. (ed. & trans.) 1985. *Medieval Irish Lyrics with The Irish Bardic Poet*. Dublin: The Dolmen Press.

Clancy, T. O. 2014. 'Early Gaelic nature poetry revisited'. In G. Henley and P. Russell (eds.) with the collaboration of J. F. Eska. *Rhetoric and reality in medieval Celtic literature: Studies in honor of Daniel F. Melia*. Hamilton: Colgate University Press, 8–19.

CODECS: online database and e-resources for Celtic studies, Online: Stichting A. G. van Hamel voor Keltische Studies. https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/.

Dooley, A. & H. Roe (trans.) 1999. *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

eDIL 2019: *An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, based on the Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913–1976) (www.dil.ie 2019). Accessed September 2024.

Gwynn, E. 1903–1935. *The Metrical Dindshenchas*. [*Metr. Dinds.*] Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series, 5 vols. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co.

Hass, R. (ed. & trans.) 1994. *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Bashō, Buson, and Issa*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Heaney, S. 1982. 'The God in the Tree.' In Sean Mac Réamoinn (ed.). *The Pleasures of Gaelic Poetry*. London: Allen Lane, 25–34.

Kamens, E. 1997. *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mac Réamoinn, S. (ed.) 1982. *The Pleasures of Gaelic Poetry*. London: Allen Lane.

McKinney, M. (ed. and trans.) 2019. *Travels with a Writing Brush: Classical Japanese Travel Writing from the Manyōshū to Bashō*. London: Penguin Books.

Meyer, K. (ed. and trans.) 1890. 'Uath Beinne Etair'. *Revue Celtique* 11, 125–134. https://archive.org/details/revueceltique11pari/page/124/mode/2up.

Meyer, K. (ed. and trans.) 1901. *King and Hermit: A Colloquy Between King Guaire of Aidne and His Brother Marbán.* London: David Nutt: Longacre. https://archive.org/details/kinghermitcolloq00londrich/.

Meyer, K. (ed. and trans.) 1903. *Four Old Irish Songs of Summer and Winter.* London: David Nutt: Longacre.

Meyer, K. (ed. and trans.) 1913. *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry*. London: Constable & Company Ltd. 2nd Edition.

Meyer, K. (ed. and trans.) 1914. 'The Guesting of Athirne'. *Ériu* 7, 1–9. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30007312.

Murphy, G. (ed. and trans.) 1998 [originally published 1956]. *Early Irish Lyrics: Eighth to Twelfth Century.* Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Ó Cuív, B. 1989–1991. '*Dinnshenchas*-The Literary Exploitation of Irish Place-names'. *AINM: Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society* 4, 90–106.

Ó Muraíle, N. 2024. '*Dindṡenchas Érenn*: An Overview of Textual Scholarship.' In Marie-Luise Theuerkauf (ed.). *Dublaídi Dindshenchais: Studies on the Medieval Irish Place-Name Tradition*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 3–24.

Plutschow, H. E. 1982. 'Japanese Travel Diaries of the Middle Ages'. *Oriens Extremus* 29 (1/2), 1–136. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24047250.

Roider, U. 2010. 'Early Irish nature poetry on the seasons and its Indo-European cosmological context'. In F. Josephson (ed.). *Celtic language, law and letters: Proceedings of the Tenth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*. Gothenburg: Meijerbergs institut för svensk etymologisk forskning, University of Gothenburg, 181–190.

Shirane, H. 2012. *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Theuerkauf, M. 2024. 'The *Dindṡenchas* in Royal Irish Academy MS D ii 2.' In Marie-Luise Theuerkauf (ed.). *Dublaídi Dindshenchais: Studies on the Medieval Irish Place-Name Tradition*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 89–127.

Theuerkauf, M. 2023. *Dindshenchas Érenn*. Cork: Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures.

Toorians, L. 2011. 'Reclusive blackbirds and a scholarly "white fuller": two notes on Irish "nature poetry."' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 61: 87–90.

Tymoczko, M. 1983. '"Cétamon": Vision in Early Irish Seasonal Poetry'. *Éire: Ireland* 18/4, 17–39.