

## THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND THE SUNBEAM THROUGH GLASS

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One of the most striking metaphors of medieval and later religious literature is that comparing the Virgin Mary to the glass of a window through which light is shining. As the glass remains perfect and unscathed when light passes through it, we are told, so Mary's virginity remains perfect and unscathed when she conceived and gave birth to her son Jesus.

This image has been discussed on various occasions for poetry and devotional writing in Latin, French, German, and Spanish. But there is still room for a survey that would include some of the vernaculars of the British Isles (English, Welsh, and Irish), and take account of recent research on the early medieval Latin origins of the image. What appears below is part of a longer study written with three particular objectives.

1. To review the origins of this theme and establish whether it is in fact patristic (as some have claimed) or of later date.

2. To analyse the ways the theme is used in various languages. Most of the English examples below, for example, refer to Christ's Nativity though these have regularly and erroneously been described by their editors as references to the Annunciation. All the known Welsh examples, on the other hand, refer to the Annunciation. The image also occurs in the context of the Resurrection, where it makes a direct comparison between the way Christ rose from the dead and the way he was born.

3. To show that the metaphor has been used in the religious art and literature of Western Europe more widely than has been appreciated.

On the last it should be said at once that the material presented in this article is far from complete, and that is hoped what appears here will lead to the identification of further examples, not only in the language mentioned below (Greek, Latin, French, Provençal, Spanish, Italian, English, German, Dutch, Swedish, Welsh and Irish), but in, for example, Portuguese, Catalan, Icelandic, Czech, Polish, Hungarian and Serbo-Croat. Any scholar with access to the appropriate libraries could add to what appears here.<sup>1</sup>

1.- Julio Rodríguez-Puertolas, *Fray Iñigo de Mendoza y sus Coplas de Vita Christi* (Madrid, 1968), 533-36, gives a detailed summary of Spanish material. Cf. also Anselm Salzer, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters* (Linz, 1886-94; repr. Darmstadt, 1967), 71-74; Heinrich Becker, *Die Auffassung der Jungfrau Maria in der altfranzösischen Literatur* (Göttingen,

Besides literary examples, the metaphor of the sunbeam through glass also occurs in liturgy and art. It thereby links cultural entities as diverse as medieval English drama, the *Sarum Breviary*, Robert Herrick, Chrétien de Troyes, French spiritual writing of the seventeenth century, the Infante don Juan Manuel, St John of the Cross, Calderón, German Anabaptism, Van Eyck, the *Très riches Heures* of the duc de Berry, the poems of Ieuan ap Rhydderch of Lanbadarn Odwyn and Genau'r-glyn in Ceredigion, and Muircheatach ó Ceallaigh, Bishop of Clonfert in Ireland from 1378 to 1394. Perhaps few Marian images as distinctive as the sunbeam through glass have had a more unexpected range.

It should be emphasized that almost all the Middle English examples of the image of sunbeam through glass refer more or less clearly to Christ's birth and not his conception. But this fact has been grasped by few Anglicists, who have been misled by the instances in art, despite the explicit statements in St Thomas Aquinas and others to the way Mary reminded a perfect virgin even after Christ's birth, the baby having, as it were, passed through his mother's body as if his body were immaterial. This idea is fundamental to what seems to be the earliest example of the motif of the sunbeam through glass in English (earlier 13C), in a translation of the hymn *Stabat iuxta Christi crucem* on a stray leaf (in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 169\* [S. C. 99951]) from St. Werburgh's Abbey, Chester. The poem likens Christ's resurrection to his birth:

For, so gleam glidis thurt the glass,  
of thi bodi born he was,  
and thurt the hoale thurch he gload.<sup>2</sup>

"For he was born of your body and passed through the intact coffin as light passes through glass"

It is remarkable that the comparison of Mary's unspotted virginity to the coffin of Christ's resurrection -that the Blessed Virgin's body was left as intact when Christ was born as Christ's coffin was when he rose from the dead- is not found in our other examples.

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1905), 21, and Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972), 101, 258-59. At time of going to press I have been unable to see the major study of Icelandic Marian poetry by Hans Schottman, *Die isländische Mariendichtung* (München, 1973).

2.- *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* [=CB XIII], ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1932), 10. Cf. Gray, 101; the recent edition in *Medieval English Songs*, ed. E. J. Dobson and F. L. Harrison (London, 1979); and for Mary's womb and Christ's grave, Yrjö Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine* (London, 1958), 240-42. The poem is 3216.5 in Carleton Brown and R. H. Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York, 1943) and its *Supplement* by R. H. Robbins and J. L. Cutler (Lexington, Kentucky, 1965)

Another example from the thirteenth century (or early fourteenth) occurs in London, British Library, MS Harley 2253, a celebrated collection of English and Anglo-Norman lyrics (many on love) from Herefordshire. The manuscript has links with the aristocratic Mortimer family and with Adam de Orleton, Bishop of Hereford. In one poem the poet, feeling remorse for previous attacks on woman, thinks of the Blessed Virgin who bore Jesus.

In hire lyht on ledeth lyf,  
ant shon thourh hire semly syde.  
Thourh hyre side he shon  
ase sonne doth thourh the glas;  
wommon nes wicked non  
seththe he ybore was.<sup>3</sup>

"He lives born of her, and shone through her fair side. He shone though her side as sun does through glass; no woman has been wicked since he was born."

The language of the poet is not the language of midwifery. But the comments of some editors on these lines are still clearly inaccurate. Carleton Brown says that the image of Christ entering the Virgin's womb like the sun shining through glass is "a stock figure in patristic homiletic literature"; whether it is really patristic is considered below, but in any case the context here is of Christ's being born and not of his being conceived. G. L. Brook similarly misunderstands the image as one referring to Christ's conception and not his birth. (The last two lines of the stanza quoted above are, apparently, not ironic.)

The same idea occurs in a Marian poem written about 1325, perhaps by William of Shoreham parish priest of Chart, in Kent.

As the sunne taketh hire pas  
Withoutè breche thorghout that glas,  
Thy maidenhod unwemmed it was  
For bere of thynè childe.<sup>4</sup>

"Just as the sun passes without causing damage through glass, your virginity was unspotted by hearing of your child."

The translation of *breche* by 'interruption' in *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse* misses the point, as the other examples quoted here

3.- *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. G. L. Brook (Manchester, 1948), 35; cf. *CB XIII*, 141; *Index* 3874.

4.- *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse*, ed. Celia and Kenneth Sisam (Oxford, 1970), 166; cf. *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* [=CB XIV], ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1952, 49, and *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R. T. Davies (London, 1963), 105, 377; *Index* 2107.

show, since the poets are interested, not in the light, but in the glass and what happened (or did not happen) to it, i.e. in the miracle concerning the Blessed Virgin. There also seems to be no special reason why *bere* should here be translated 'gestation' (as Carleton Brown and the Sisams understand it) rather than 'giving birth'.

Another, later fourteenth-century example of the theme occurs from a poem on the BVM's five joys incorporated into a Göttingen University manuscript of the poem *Cursor Mundi*:

The tother joy I wat it was,  
As sunnè shinès thoru the glas  
Swa art thou, levedy, wemlas  
And ay sal be.  
Levedy, for that swetè joy, thou rew on me.<sup>5</sup>

What is said here differs slightly from what appears elsewhere. The second (*tother*) joy the poet claims to know is of the Virgin's being spotless (*wemlas*) or free from sin, rather than that of her perpetual virginity. However, the context must still be that of Christ's Nativity, since we have here already had the first joy of the Annunciation, while the third joy of the Epiphany follows after.<sup>6</sup>

A final fourteenth-century English example of Christ's birth and the sunbeam image comes from Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. 4. 32, in an acrostic poem to the blessed Virgin based on the "Ave Maria":

God is he that iboren was,  
Withoute eurich senful likinge,  
Of the, ase sonne thorgh glas  
Schineth withoute ani brekinge.<sup>7</sup>

The popularity of the theme in the fifteenth century is testified by a muddle in a carol on the Magi, where the phrase is a meaningless tag.

Furthe they wentyn, pas for pas,  
And euer the ster schone on ther fase,  
Lyke as the son dothe throwe the glas,  
And ynto Bedleme they toke ther way.<sup>8</sup>

5.- Sisam, 190-91; cf. CB XIV, 45; *Index* 1029.

6.- On this poem see also my forthcoming article 'The Virgin's Joys and Sorrows', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* xix (1990).

7.- CB XIV, 231; *Index* 1024.

8.- *The Early English Carols*, ed. R. L. Greene (Oxford, 1977), 70; cf. *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century [=CB XV]*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1939), 124; *Index* 1785.

This confusion occurs only in the text in Aberystwyth, Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, MS Brogyntyn 10. The "As bryght as gold withine the glas" as the variant text edited by Greene from London, British Library, Ms Sloane 2593, gives better sense, or less worse sense.

A prose example of the metaphors, perhaps based on the reading from the *Sarum Breviary* discussed in my book study, occurs in a passage on the Blessed Virgin's joys from Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91, the so-called "Thornton Manuscript" of English romances and devotional texts compiled for Robert Thornton of East Newton (near Ampleforth, some 17 miles north of York) some time between 1422 and 1454. The passage, like the breviary, refers both to Christ's conception and his birth:

Als the son schynes thorowe the glasse and lyghtenys the place with Ine & the  
glas es noghte brokyne ne fylide of the sonne whene he schynes, nor whene he  
withdrawes his bemys nor aftire, bot es aye clere and hale: reghte swa, lady,  
whene the godhede schane in thy saule and tuke Manhede of the and was  
borne of the, thou was noghte fylide; bot thou was halowede of his presence  
swa that Mighte neuere be fylede.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the plainness of this is the image in the aureate style of the monk John Lydgate (c. 1370-1492) who elaborates it into his own form of East Anglian Gothic in his *A Balade in Commendation of Our Lady*, where in the context of the Annunciation and Nativity, where, in the context of the Annunciation and Nativity, he compares the Virgin to a vial or small glass bottle,

O glorious viole, O vitre inviolate,  
Of firy Tytan percyd with the lemys,  
Whos vertuous bryghtnesse was in thi brest vibrate  
That all this world enbelissed with his bemys.

and his *Life of Our Lady*:

Right as the sonne persheth thorough the glas,  
Thorough the cristall, byrell or spectacle  
Withoutyn harme, right so by miracle  
Into hir closet the Faders sapience  
Entrede is withoutyn violence.<sup>10</sup>

9.- *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. Carl Horstmann (London, 1895), i. 378. There is a summary of studies on Robert Thornton and his manuscripts in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ed. Ralph Hanna III (Manchester, 1974), 1-4.

10.- John Lydgate, *Poems*, ed. John Norton-Smith (Oxford, 1966), 28, 35. The poems are *Index* 99 and 2574 respectively.

With Lydgate's lines may be compared other lines from medieval English drama, from the play of Christ and the Doctors in *Ludus Coventriae*, a cycle rewritten about 1440, perhaps at Lincoln (and not Conventry, despite the title). The image of sun piercing glass is here again used for Christ's conception, and resembles the image in Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady*, even down to the verbal parallels of the first line, of *harme / hurte, right so / ryght so*, and *entrede / entryd*.

Lyke as the sunne doth perysch  
-pierce the glas,  
The glas not hurte of his nature,  
Ryght so the godhed entryd has  
The virgynes wombe and sche mayd pure.<sup>11</sup>

After the above instances, it is a jolt to find the image in the *Noble Numbers* of Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Devon parson and *bon viveur*. Again, the lines refer to Christ's conception, not his birth, and express almost exactly the same thought as the two passages above. But what is there either stiff or formal, or rudimentary, has been worked into something of far greater sophistication.

As Sun-beams pierce the glasse, and streaming in,  
No crack or Schisme leave i' th' subtill skin:  
So the Divine Hand work'd, and break no thred,  
But, in a Mother, kept a maiden-head.<sup>12</sup>

One would like to know Herrick's source. In spite of some verbal resemblances to the two medieval passages, it is more likely to be the pseudo-Agustinian reading from the *Sarum Breviary* beginning 'Solis radius specular penetrat, et soliditatem eius insensibili subtilitate pertransit.' When we turn from English to Welsh, the oldest example of the theme seems to be that in a poem by the fourteenth-century bard Gruffud Fychan ap Gruffud ab Edynfed.

Morwyn vu ueir uwyn o vywn hundy -- gwydyr  
yn gwyw dal mab duw vry  
morwyn gynno hynn kein hy  
mirein wawt morwyn wedy.<sup>13</sup>

11.- *Ludus Coventriae*, ed. K. S. Block (EETS E.S. 120; 1922), 181. Greene, 348, refers to 15 late carols in which the topos occurs, many of them (dating from 1492) by James Ryman, a Canterbury Franciscan. See also Greene xcix for the theme in *Index* 909.

12.- Cited in Gray, 258. See also Robert Herrick, *Poetical Works*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1956).

13.- *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911), col. 1295.

"A virgin was gentle Mary in a bower of glass, fit to receive the son of God on high, a virgin fair and brave before this, and (noble praise) a virgin thereafter."

The verse is unusual in various ways. The metaphor of the glass window, for example, has been metamorphosed here into a reference to an entire bedroom or bower of glass. There is nothing like this elsewhere. The suggestion in Gruffud's lines of the Virgin as a romance heroine in her bower, awaiting a king's son, is also very striking for a Welsh poem. However, it does have parallels in Latin hymns of this date:

Angelus ad virginem  
Subintrans in conclave  
Virginis formidinem  
Demulcens inquit "Ave".

"The angel, secretly entering her chamber, softly overcoming the virgin's fear, says to her, "Hail!"

The "bower" and noble "son" of the Welsh poem also have a parallel in the lyric on the BVM's Five Joys from the Göttingen manuscript quoted above. The English lyric speaks of a "boure" and a messenger from heaven's castle:

Thar thu lay in thi bright boure,  
Levedi, quite als leli floure,  
An angel com fra hevene toure,  
Sant Gabriel,  
And said, "Levedi, ful of blis, ai worth the wel!"<sup>14</sup>

Gruffudd's poem is a religious poem, but like some Middle English religious texts it suggests the world of romance sublimated by aristocratic values. Although other poems by Gruffud Fychan link him with Anglesey, the dates of his career are obscure. John Lloyd-Jones gives his traditional dating to about 1320, but notes evidence, based on Gruffudd's poems to members of the Tudor family of Penmynydd in central Anglesey (the Welsh ancestors of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, and the present royal families of Britain and Spain) to place him after 1373. If this could be accepted he would be a contemporary of the *Pearl* poet, with whom (if in nothing else) he could be compared in his religious refinement.<sup>15</sup>

14.- Gray, 105. This Latin hymn is the one sung by the student Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*: cf. J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and Cambridge* (Oxford, 1974), 31. The aristocratic ambience of poetry and religion in the late fourteenth century is admirably discussed in Gervase Mathew, O. P., *The Court of Richard II* (London, 1968), and J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry* (London, 1971).

15.- Elizabeth J. Louis Jones and Henry Lewis, *Mynegai i Farddoniaeth y Llawysgrifau* (Caerdydd, 1928), 120; John Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gyrnar Gymraeg*

Also probably of fourteenth-century date is a poem, formerly attributed to Iolo Goch (c. 1320 - c. 1398), beginning "Mair edrych arnaf amerodres" or (in some manuscripts) "Doeth ith etholes Iessu". The poem recites the praises of the Blessed Virgin, calls her the "glass window of heaven" (ffenestr wydrin Nef), and says of the Annunciation:

Yr ysbryd attad genad gynes  
Y vo a chwegair ath veichioges  
Duw o vewn aeth yn dy vynwes  
Mal yr a drwyr gwydr terydr tes.<sup>16</sup>

"The spirit to you, gentle messenger, made you conceive with a sweet word.  
God entered within your breast as sunshine's augers pass through glass."

A third, later, and more allusive passage comes from a poem in praise of the Trinity by Gruffudd Llwyd (fl. c. 1380-1410), a native of Llangadfan, some 14 miles west of Welshpool in mid-Wales. Gruffudd is described in a Cardiff manuscript as Chancellor of Hereford Cathedral; although this appears dubious, his religious poetry still suggests his piety and learning:

Magwyr lân, mygr oleuni,  
Mawr yr ymddengys i mi  
O len lefn hoywedrefn hydraul.  
O wydr hirion belydr haul;  
A'r llen a'r dröell honno  
Yn gyfan achlân ei chlo.  
Haws fu i'r un Duw hyn  
Ym mynwes gwyndw meinwyn  
Anfon ei ysbryd iawnfaeth  
I Fair, fel rhoi mab ar faeth....<sup>17</sup>

"Great does the blessed enclosure appear to me in the smooth neatly-made delicate sheet, the bright radiance in the glass of long beams of sunlight; and the sheet and that turning is complete and entire in its composition. It was easier than this for the one God to send his nurturing spirit into the bosom of a fair slender shapely body, to Mary, like giving a boy to foster."

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(Caerdydd, 1931-63), 289, 571, 593; cf. *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography* [=DWB] (London, 1959), 180-81.

16.- *Gweithiau Iolo Goch*, ed. Charles Ashton (Croesoswallt i.e. Oswestry 1898), 557. *Cywyddau Iolo Goch ac Eraill* [=IGE], ed. Henry Lewis *et al.* (Bangor, 1925), lx, discusses the style, date and authenticity of this poem (cf. *Mynegai*, 220, 222). On *chwegair*, see Lloyd-Jones, 279.

17.- *IGE*<sup>2</sup>, (Caerdydd, 1937), 151. *DWB*, 315-16, outlines Gruffudd's life.



From slightly later in the fifteenth century is a passage from an anonymous Marian poem in the style of Hywel Swardwal (fl. c. 1430-60), a poet associated with Newton in Mid-Wales.

Bu Fair, o'r gair yn ddi-gêl,  
Yn feichiog, o nef uchel.  
Mal yr haul y molir hon  
Drwy ffenestr wydr i'r ffynnon.  
Yr un modd, iawnrhodd arnhog,  
Y daeth Duw at famaeth deg.<sup>18</sup>

"Mary was with child by the word without concealment, from high heaven. She is praised as sunlight reaching the fountain through the glass of a window: just so did God come to the fair foster-mother, a fair gift, a present."

At about the same date the image appears in a Marian poem by Ieuan ap Rhydderch (fl. c. 1430-70), gentleman, owner of estates near Lampeter and Aberystwyth in West Wales, athlete, university graduate, and (elsewhere) a singer of his own praises. A marginal note by some seventeenth-century Protestant on his lines in Bangor, MS Gwynedd 3, showed even those hostile to their spirit could respond to their beauty. Amongst such annotations on the medieval poems in this manuscript as "The vain opinion of the Papists", "A fable", "The ignorance of the times in which this was first written, especially in theology", appears the comment (in Welsh) on this passage, "It would be a pity to lose this poem for the sake of this excellent verse", followed by the lines:

Lumine solari nescit vitrum violari  
Nec vitrum sole, nec puerpera prole.

The passage so praised is:

hoiw Fab Duw aeth yn hyfedr  
i'th fru fair ddawnair ddinydr  
fel haul wybr byw-lwybr baladr  
drwy ffenestr wauad-restr wydr.<sup>19</sup>

18.- *IGE*<sup>2</sup>, 96; cf. *IGE*, lxii-lxiii for dating; Ashton, 552-53, for a comparison with Provençal; and, for a general comment, Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff, 1962), 482. The lines by Peire de Corbian cited by Ashton appear in Francisco J. Oroz Arizcuren, *La lírica religiosa en la literatura provenzal antigua* (Pamplona, 1972), 372. For the curious, tragic career of Ashton himself, a Welsh Jude the Obscure, see *DWB*, 15-16.

19.- *Gwynedd 3*, ed. Ifor Williams (Caerdydd, 1931), 30 and, for marginalia and Latin couplet, vi-vii and 350. The Latin derives from St Anselm's circle. See *Index* 488 in *The Early English Carols*, 34 and 356, and 14102 in Hans Walther, *Proverbia Sententiaeque*

"God's excellent son went most nimbly into your womb, Mary, a word swift and full of grace, like the sun of heaven, a ray's living path, through a glass window in glorious array."

Another instance of the sunbeam through glass metaphor comes from the poetry of Hywell ap Dafydd ab Ieuan ap Rhys (fl. c. 1450-80), family poet to the Earls of Pembroke at Rhaglan, in Gwent.

myned val manay o des  
vn dyw vyn yn dy vynwes  
yn dri gwisgi lle gwasgaf  
drw wydr hayl belydr haf  
ay eni n vab ay enw n fwyn  
ywch wen vair achwi n vorwyn<sup>20</sup>

An example of the sunbeam through glass in medieval Cornish has been very kindly pointed out to the present writer by Dr Brian Murdoch, of Stirling University, in a letter of 9 June 1989. It occurs in a scene from the fifteenth-century miracle play, *Beunans Meriasek*, where Teudar, the pagan King of Cornwall, is putting arguments against the Virgin Birth, and St. Meriadoc (the seventh-century Bishop of Vannes, near the south coast of Brittany), who is on a missionary journey to Cornwall, is refuting them. So Teudar says,

erbyn reson yv in beys,  
heb hays gorryth thymo creys  
bones flogh vyth concevijs  
in breys benen.

"Against reasons it is in the world, withouth a man's seed, believe me, that a child should ever be conceived in a woman's womb."

To which the saint replies,

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*Latinitatis Medii Aevi* (Göttingen, 1963-67). Cf. also *Peniarth 53*, ed. E. Stanton Roberts and Henry Lewis (Caerdydd, 1927), 21, and A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1955-59) for documentation, or the lack of it, on Ieuan's university career.

20.- *Llanstephan MS 6*, ed. E. Stanton Roberts (Cardiff, 1916), 158, with a minor emendation from Lloyd-Jones, 687. For two other international themes in Hywel, see my "Bepai'r ddaear yn bapir", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, xxx (1982-83), 274-77, and "The Number of Christ's Wounds", *ib.*, xxxii (1985), 84-91. The first discusses the topos of the world as paper and sea as ink (found in medieval Spanish, English, Scots and many other languages); the second a motif associated with the German women mystics which occurs in numerous languages, including Cornish, on which last see Brian Murdoch, "Pascon Agan Arluth: the Literary Position of the Cornish Poem of the Passion", *Studi medievali*, xxii (1981), 821-36, especially 830-31.

avel hovle der weder a  
heb y terry del wylsta  
indella crist awartha  
a thuth in breys maria.

"As sun goes through glass without breaking it, as thou seest, so Christ above went into Mary's womb."<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Murdoch suggests that the Latin loanword *concevijs* points (as we might expect) to a learned source for these lines. It is worth perhaps pointing out that the passage refers to Christ's conception, like the Welsh poems and the later English poems, rather than his nativity.

When we turn from Britain to Ireland we find an instance, perhaps the oldest in a Celtic language, in the religious poetry attributed to Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh (d. 1244), 'a poet who never was and never will be surpassed', who was buried at Boyle Abbey in the modern Co. Roscommon. If the attribution to him is correct, this Irish example may be even older than the earliest example in English, from Chester, or in Spanish, by Gonzalo Berceo, who was writing at about the same date in La Rioja. Clearly the Irish were not behind the spiritual times.

A Sbiorad Dé fa docht rún  
ní hé do chorp an corp criadh  
Corp Moire rod léig n-a lár  
mar théid tré chlár ngloine an ghrian.

"O spirit of God, steadfast of will, not thine was the body which Mary received within her, as the sun passes through glass."<sup>22</sup>

The poem occurs in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS D ii 1, the so-called "Book of Uí Maine" written about 1394 for Muirheartach ó Ceallaigh, Bishop of Clonfert. (This remote spot, famous for its ecclesiastical ruins, is by the Shannon in the modern Co. Galway.) In his patronage of this manuscript Muirheartach who later became Archbishop of Tuam, can be contrasted with his English episcopal contemporaries, few of whom (after

21.- *Beunans Meriasek*, ed. Whitley Stokes (London, 1872), 48-49. Dr Murdoch directs me to Henry Jenner's remarks on the sunbeam theme in *The Celtic Review*, iv (1907-08), 56. For another Marian theme in Cornish, see 118 in my "The Virgin's Tears of Blood", *Celtica*, (1988), 110-22.

22.- *Dán Dé*, ed. Lambert McKenna, S. J. (Dublin, 1922), 53, 118; cf. viii-ix on ó Dálaigh's career, xv on this theme, and Peter O'Dwyer, O. Carm., *Mary: A History of Devotion in Ireland* (Dublin, 1988), 78-79 on this poem. There is a brief account of the Book of Uí Maine in J. E. Caerwyn Williams and Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa, *Traidisiún Líteartha na nGael* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1979), 113-14. Another poem attributed to Donnchadh Mór ó Dálaigh is discussed in my forthcoming "The Virgin's Joys and Sorrows" cited above.

Leofric of Exeter) took the interest in promoting English poetry that Muircheartach did in promoting Irish.

Fr McKenna links Donnchadh's poem with another beginning "Iomdha sgéal maith ar Mhuire" by Aonghus ó Dálaigh, who seems to have been writing in the Kerry and Co. Cork area in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century. But ó Dálaigh makes no mention of glass.

Táinig Dia na Dhia féine  
Na broinn mar gha ngeil-ghréine  
An uimhir do bhaoi na bruinn  
Gur dhuinigh mar chnaoi i gorobhuing.<sup>23</sup>

The editor translates this, "God in his divinity came to her womb as a bright sunbeam, and became man the while he was in her womb, as a nut in its cover (?)."

Two main points can be made in summing up the evidence from Welsh and Irish. Although the metaphor of sunbeam through glass is almost a spiritual cliché of the Middle Ages, it is used with remarkable variety in these vernaculars. Gruffudd's image of the glass bower is typical of the surprises that can be found, as is the mention of the fountain in the poem in Hywel Swardwal's style. Nor is there anything perfunctory in the way our poets treat it. Ieuan ap Rhydderch, amongst others, seems to use it with particular brio. Insular poets can in this more than hold their own when compared with their confrères of the European Continent,

23.- *Dánta do chum Aonghus Fionn ó Dálaigh*, ed. Lambert McKenna, S. J. (Baile Átha Cliath, 1919), 59, and see also O'Dwyer, 195; on the author, cf. *Nua-Dhunaire*, i, ed. Pádraig de Brún *et al.* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1971), 181.