Irish Satire in it's original language

Modern day satire is defined as a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn (Merriam Webster). Although early Irish satire has the qualities of ridicule and scorn, satire in medieval Ireland goes much farther than the written word, and had an immense impact on the lives of those who lived in contact with satiric poets. Satire in early Ireland inspired fear for one's life, and demanded respect from every member of society. In Robert Elliott's *Satire and Magic,* he writes "Kings, saints, warriors, monks, peasants- all lived in fear of the cutting verses of the ruthless poets" (Elliot 23). Three ways that Irish satire is different from the conventional meaning of satire in our modern culture is its associations with magic, violence and death. Violence and death are intertwined with magic in the sense that words alone can cause physical ailment and even death; According to Elliot, satirists in traditional Irish stories could even kill their foes with their verse-making. This is exemplified even in the etymology of the word satire in early Irish language. The phrase for satire *glám dícínd* has most recently been translated as an "endless, biting attack" (*The Second Battle of Moytura*, trans. Whitley Stokes). This verbal attack of satire is made out to as powerful enough as a weapon, and a skilled enough satirical poet was capable of holding his own in battle:

"'And thou, O Carpre, son of Etain' saith [King] Lugh to his poet, 'what power can you wield in battle?'

" 'Not hard to say,' quoth Carpre. 'I will make a *glám dícínd* on them. And I will satirize them and shame them, so that through the spell of my art they will not resist warriors.'"

Here lies the inextricable nature of violence, magic and death from Irish satire that makes it a completely different being than the satire we've come to know in the modern day. The phrase "the spell of my art" indicates the association of satire with magic, as the action of speaking ill

on another is so powerful it becomes a tangible ailment. Therefore, magic in terms of early Irish satire is henceforth defined as spoken word causing physical ailment and in severe cases, death.

Victims of satire having the potential to die from being satirized is what makes violence also inextricable from this type of satire, in a way completely absent from the modern day definition. This is reflective of a hyper-violent culture in early Ireland, where power and superiority are established through physical impairment and death. Unlike modern satire, in early Ireland it was not enough to verbally disparage another. It means more within the society to physically hurt another person. I would argue the magical element of physical harm through spoken word is fictionally added to these tales in order to feed off of the hyper-violent ideals of the people from that time period and served to elevate the satirists themselves to another level of power. However, hyper-violence is not the only aspect of early Irish culture that becomes apparent at the intersection of violence, magic and death as defining traits of satire. A fixation on the aesthetic form is also revealed through the tale of Nede's seduction by Caier's wife and the tale of Luaine. Both Caier and Luaine die of embarrassment and shame after being satirized, but before their eventual deaths, they grow colored blisters on their faces, respectively named "Stain, Blemish and Defect" and "Shame and Blemish and Disgrace" (Elliot 26-27). The stories of Caier and Luaine not only exemplify both the violent and supernatural elements of this type of satire, but can also serve as a reflection of a greater cultural fixation on aesthetics. The motif of blemishes causing severe, death-inducing shame, specifically blemishes that appear on the face, show the way that physical appearance was highly valued in this early Irish society.