Signs and Wonders: Exploring Aspects of Ritual and Narrative Representations of Magic in Medieval Ireland

Emer Kavanagh

PhD Degree
Maynooth University
Department of Early Irish (Séan Ghaeilge)

February 2024

Head of Department Dr Deborah Hayden
Supervisor Dr Deborah Hayden

This thesis has been prepared in accordance with the PhD regulations of Maynooth University and is subject to copyright. For more information see PhD regulations (December 2022)

Contents

Abstract **4**
Acknowledgments **6**
Introduction **1**
Research Aims and Structure 5
Chapter 1: Keywords and Phrases **8**
Magic 8
Miracles versus Magic 16
Charms 18
Words of Power 22
Textual Amulets and Talismans 24
Cursing and Satire 27
Love Magic 28
Conclusions 29
Chapter 2: Representations of Magic in Hagiographical Texts **31**
Religious Texts as a Mirror on Society 32
Druids in the Irish Textual Tradition 39
The Moses of the Irish 43
The Mary of the Gaels 61
Women and Magic in Irish Textual Tradition 61
Brigit of Kildare 63
Conclusion 71
Chapter 3: Magic, Medicine and Healing in Medieval Ireland **74**
Early European Charming Traditions 80
Magic and Medicine 85
The Old Irish Charms 91
Later Medieval Charms 103
Text 1: NLI MS G 11, p. 393a1-19. 104
Text 2: simples and cures for blood staunching, NLI MS G 11 p.393a20–b11. 112
Text 3: NLI MS G11, p. 393b12–19 114
Text 4: NLI MS G11, p. 393b20–31 120
Text 5: NLI MS G11, p. 394b24–31 122
Conclusion 128
Chapter 4: Cursing and Satire in Medieval Ireland **130**
The Social and Legal Contexts of Satire 133
Trefhocal 144
Glam Dícenn 149
Clerical Cursing Rituals 159

Adamnán's Cursing Ritual 164
Clerical Cursing in Hagiographical Sources 168
Cursing in the Annals 177
Conclusions 181
Chapter 5: Love Magic in Medieval Ireland 183
Love Magic and Marriage in the Early Middle Ages 184
Irish Penitential Sources 192
Love Magic in Hagiographical Sources 199
Love Magic in Medieval Irish Legal Texts 211
Serglige Con Culainn and Love Magic 213
Conclusion 218
Chapter 6: Aspects of Ritual Performance and Belief 220
What is a Ritual? 222
The Use of Space in Ritual Performances 227
Ritual and Time 235
The Use of Sound in Medieval Irish Ritual Performance 240
The Visual Elements of Rituals 254
Conclusion 258
CONCLUSION 262
Appendix 269
Text One: Dublin, NLI MS G11, p. 393a1–19: 269
Text Two: Dublin, NLI MS G11, p. 393a20–b11: 272
Text Three: Dublin, NLI MS G11, p. 393b12–19: 275
Text Four: Dublin, NLI MS G11, p. 393b20–31: 278
Text Five: Dublin, NLI MS G11p. 394 b (24 – 31) 279
Bibliography 280

Abstract

This thesis explores literary narratives, legal frameworks, medical practices, and ritual performances in order to shed light on the complex connections between ritual forms of magic, public perception, and the authorisation granted by the public for the performance of magical rituals. The research is presented through six chapters, each of which examines a magical practice through select texts.

Chapter 1 lays out the keywords and phrases that will be used throughout the rest of the thesis, and defines them in such a way that the work that follows is easier to read. This includes defining such terms as ‘magic’ itself, as well as ‘charm’, ‘love magic’, and ‘curse’ so that they are reduced to neutral terms, with modern or cultural biases removed from them. Chapter 2, then, examines some representations of miracles and magic in hagiographical texts by looking at events in the *Tripartite Life* of St Patrick through the lens of similar events in the life of Moses. This is set alongside a discussion of miracles in the Lives of St Brigit, with particular regard to how they reflect social and gender norms of the period, while also reflecting charming practices that will be seen in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 turns to the genre of medical texts to explore the concept of miraculous healing. Specific examples are taken from a previously unpublished collection of blood-staunching remedies from Dublin, National Library of Ireland MS G11; a full transcription and translation of these remedies is provided in the Appendix. Chapter 4 explores the practice of satire as imprecation in early Ireland. The codes and procedures relating to the *filid* and the practice of satire are discussed, as well as the clerical form of ritual cursing, which explicitly endorsed and permitted the practice of this style of ‘word-magic’ in society.

Chapter 5 draws on evidence from select texts to explore how magical practices might be directed at inducing love or affection in another individual. This material is set against the wider background of representations of magic in Carolingian writings on the

divorce of King Lothar and Queen Theutberga. Chapter 6, then, draws on ritual theory to consider the possible psychological and emotional aspects of these performances on their audiences.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to a number of people and organisations for their help with this project.

The Department of Early Irish Studies of Maynooth University has welcomed and encouraged me in this project. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Deborah Hayden, for all of her enthusiasm and kindness during the course of this thesis, and the many drafts and conversations we had about them. Her energy and diligence has been matched only by her kindness and generosity of time. Professor David Stifter was kind enough to have many different conversations about charms and magic, and even set aside a semester of his Old Irish seminars to examine the nine charms written in that language. My thanks is extended to everyone who joined in those sessions and let me work out my thoughts and theories on those texts. Many thanks also to Dr Siobhán Barratt, who helped Deborah and I work through some very tricky medical language, which would end up helping enormously with my subsequent translations. Finally, many thanks to Dr Elizabeth Boyle, who pushed me to continue with my education and undertake a PhD in the first place: thank you for your friendship and belief in me, and you were correct: Deborah was the perfect supervisor for me.

This thesis would not have been possible without the IRC's Government of Ireland scholarship. Thanks again to Deborah and David for looking over drafts of that application too.

Many thanks to Professor John Carey and, again, David Stifter, who acted as my internal and external examiners. Their feedback was thoughtful, insightful, and extraordinarily useful. I honestly could not have had better examiners.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my friends and colleagues in the Maynooth University Art and Humanities Institute, where the research lab has been my home for the last few years, particularly Professor Tom O'Connor and Ann Donoghue.

To the rest of the Core Four, Alan Waldren, Charles Piecyk, and Dr Truc Nguyen: I'm so glad I have been on this journey with you all, and I'm grateful for your friendship. And I'm very grateful for Alan lending me his dog, Max, as a stress reliever. Further thanks to Sian Cowman, Dylan Bailey, Tiago Silva, Lydia Hursh, River Attwood Tabor, Nada Ní Chuirrín, Conall Ó Fátharta, and of course Dr Paul Markey.

Special thanks to my family: my mother, Irene, my brother, Paul, and my sister, D. D, your unwavering belief and sincere faith in me has been a constant source of comfort. Paul, your willingness to get drunk and watch terrible TV with me has been a constant source of stress relief. Mam, thanks for all the financial and emotional support. To Rudy and Rocky: Good Boys who are gone now, but always missed. And of course, Molly the Cat. I began this with you all here, but I'm glad I got to be there at the end for all of you. I'm glad I got to hold you as you passed peacefully from this world. Freddie Purrcury has a lot to live up to.

Finally, to my father, Christy, who, when I was sixteen years old, confidently predicted that I would get a doctorate in Early Irish Studies after studying in Maynooth. I really wish you could be here to read this. I know you would be proud.

Introduction

While much has been written about 'magic' in medieval Europe – the ideological and philosophical concepts behind belief and practice; earlier, long-standing traditions continued, yet changed by new religious practices; and influences from the spread of ideas and knowledge from other cultures and countries – surprisingly little has been written in relation to Ireland. As Williams has noted, 'the analysis of the Celtic supernatural – potentially spectacularly rich – is one area among many that have lain in neglect.'[1] While the narrative material from Ireland has long been noted as containing many elements of magic, as well as portrayals of magic users both pagan and Christian, analyses of magic have been under-represented in the scholarship thus far. This thesis offers an examination of magic and ritual as attested in the extant textual evidence from medieval Ireland, including evidence that dates from the early to late medieval periods. It sets out four case studies that include hagiographical accounts of saints as magic users; the use of charms in medical practices; love magic; and the imprecatory rituals of clerical cursing and satire. Although there are many different types of magic and magical users across many different types of textual genres, this study has limited its interest to the types of magic rituals that ordinary people were most likely to engage with or witness during their lives.

The study seeks to explore in particular how magic users were portrayed in narrative tales that were produced during the medieval period; which magical rituals people would have had a chance to witness personally; and how these ritual performances would have both informed and affected their audience. Love magic has been excepted from the performance aspect because, while there is some textual information regarding this practice in both church

[1] Williams', 'Magic in Celtic Lands', p. 123.

and secular literature, and descriptions of its symptoms and effects feature in narrative tales, there is very little information given regarding how it was performed, compared to the other magical practices selected for this thesis.

The scholarship for the study of magic in medieval Ireland is unfortunately still at an early stage. Much of the existing scholarship deals with single texts or small samples of texts of a similar genre.[2] While efforts have been made to place such texts into a wider context, many have chosen to treat them in isolation.[3] This can be frustrating, as such analyses give a snap-shot view of magical practices rather than a more comprehensive overview of how Ireland and the Irish material fits into a much broader perspective, or even within its own social culture and legal system. This thesis attempts to fill one of the gaps in the scholarship by taking a select number of magical practices and placing them within their Irish context as well as a wider European one. It also provides the first-ever transcription and translation of a page of blood-staunching cures from a medical handbook, Dublin, National Library of Ireland MS G 11 (G 11 hereafter), thus adding to the existing corpus of texts available for study while drawing attention to the way that ideas about 'magic' could take several different forms even within the space of a single manuscript page.

Although it may be trite to state it here, it is still nonetheless true that the medieval period was a time of change from its very beginning to its very end. With the advent of Christianity and its adoption as a main religion in the West, the church had to find its place in western countries; figure out how to synchronise with those same communities and their traditions; and attempt to create unified and cohesive teachings and reactions to situations that arose throughout the period. Ireland was no different. There as elsewhere, saints were represented as examples of Christians *par excellence* and cast as counterparts to specific

[2] See Borsje, 'European and American Scholarship', pp. 5–15; and Williams, 'Magic in Celtic Lands', pp. 123–35 for in-depth discussions regarding the current gaps in the scholarship.
[3] See Borsje, 'European and American Scholarship', pp. 3–10 for a summary of the studies that have been done on surveys, clusters, and individual charm texts.

biblical figures, while native gods such as the Túatha Dé Danann were examined and attempts were made to try to synthesise them into new Christian categories and chronologies.[4] Exactly which native practices could be adapted into this new Christian framework, such as healing charms and some associated rituals, had to be examined. Where such practices went too far against Christian teachings, such as love magic intended to separate lawful and Christian marriages, new forms had to be considered that definitely adhered to, and worked for, Christianity.

In addition to this smaller, more intimate style of magical practice, ritualised expressions also began to be developed. In Ireland, the most widely known kind of learned ritual magic was imprecatory in nature, with two distinct forms being recorded in the textual evidence from the early part of the period and remaining in use until after the Anglo-Norman Conquest: that of clerical cursing, endorsed by the church, and the practice of satire, endorsed by the legal system of the time. While ordinary people engaged with saints through hagiography and tales about their lives and would most probably come into contact with both healing charms and love magic, the learned rituals of imprecation were designed to be performed in public, to draw attention to the target and draw down public censure on them. Thus, there was a possibility that anyone, including secular non-elites, could witness such rituals during the course of their life, regardless of how rare or common they were.

The corpus of Irish material is huge, scattered throughout various manuscripts, and many sources that portray magic have not yet been examined, translated, or analysed. Thus, this thesis could not cover all types of magical practices or texts. By drawing together textual evidence and narrative accounts of the popular and learned magic traditions named above, however, the present study will examine how some aspects of magic were presented to a general audience. It places the selected magical practices against the same practices as they

[4] See Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* for an in-depth study of the Túatha Dé Danann.

were carried out in other European countries, in order to see whether or not Ireland reacted to the dichotomy of Christian ideologies and older traditions in the same way as other European countries did. It also examines how imprecatory rituals became embedded into the legal system, and how they were used as valid procedures that were regulated by the legal system they supplemented. Finally, it looks at the performance of healing charms, cursing and satire through ritual theory, examining the emotional and psychological impact these rituals may have had on the ordinary people who observed them. In doing so, it aims to find some common threads that run through these popular practices, and which allowed them to remain in use within Irish society for so long.

Research Aims and Structure

This thesis aims to answer several interrelated questions. How did the representation of magic affect or impact perception of such practices? What types of rituals would people have come into contact with during the course of their daily lives? How were these rituals performed, and how much of an impact did they have on the people who witnessed them, particularly those who were from the outside of the institutions that created or used them? The research aims to examine these rituals individually and comparatively, as well as to explore how the writers of the period portrayed and presented magic and magic users in different types of sources. In doing so, it aims to highlight the intersections of the sources, as well as the wider intellectual community in which they were produced.

Chapter 1 of this thesis examines the keywords and terminology that will be used throughout the work. Defining and characterising words relating to magic is acknowledged to be difficult, due to unique problems that arise regarding the long history of magic and magical activity, combined with personal, social and cultural meanings that have been placed on words such as ‘charm’, ‘magic’ and ‘spell’. This chapter explains how the work will be treating these words and phrases, while laying out the characteristics and definitions that will be used throughout the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 of this thesis sets out a brief examination of how educated people wrote about magic throughout the medieval period in Europe, paying particular attention as to how these texts would go on to influence conceptions of magic in the Early Modern period. It then presents the first case study, which examines some representations of miracles and magic in select hagiographical texts. The first text looked at is the *Tripartite Life* of St Patrick, with particular attention paid to similar events in the life of Moses, the Biblical figure to whom Patrick was most frequently compared. This is set alongside a discussion of healing miracles

in the Lives of St Brigit, focusing on how they reflected social and gender norms of the period.

Chapter 3 then turns to the genre of medical texts to explore the ideological concepts surrounding the miraculous healing noted in the first chapter. It begins by examining a number of charms written in the Old Irish language, comparing them to similar charm texts from the Old English tradition. This provides a background for looking at some of the charms and textual amulets preserved in medical manuscripts written during the later Middle Ages, some of which may draw on earlier traditions. Specific examples are taken from a previously unpublished collection of blood-staunching charms from NLI MS G11, an Irish medical compendium that dates to the fifteenth century. A full transcription and a translation of these remedies are provided in the Appendix. This material forms the basis for a discussion of how ideas about magic and ritual reflected the prevailing medical theories of the day, and how charms fit into contemporary medical practice.

In Chapter 4, evidence regarding the practice of love magic is drawn from hagiographical, legal, penitential and narrative texts to explore some concerns about how magic, and some of the remedies discussed in Chapter 3, might be directed at inducing love or affection in another individual, and how love magic could be used to separate couples in recognised or legal unions. This material is set against the wider background of representations of this type of magic in Carolingian writings on the divorce of King Lothar and Queen Theutberga, again pointing to a relationship between Ireland and wider European traditions.

In Chapter 5, the theme of 'word magic', which emerges from several examples in the previous sections, is looked at in a fuller way. This is done by exploring the institutional practices of imprecatory rituals. After briefly examining the evidence for the use of curse tablets in the Roman-period of Gaul, the discussion then moves to Ireland, and the practice of

satire as imprecation that was so ubiquitous in this country. The codes and procedures relating to the *filid* and the practice of satire are discussed, as well as the clerical form of ritual cursing, which explicitly endorsed and permitted the practice of this kind of ‘word magic’ in society. The chapter also looks at how these rituals were portrayed in narrative texts.

Chapter 6 of the thesis, the final chapter, then examines some of the magical rituals discussed in the preceding case studies through the lens of ritual theory, in order to consider some of the possible psychological and emotional aspects that these performances had on their audiences. The research provides an examination of how ritual forms of magic were presented to the public, and how the public, in turn, granted permission for its extensive use in social institutions throughout the period.

The conclusion then aims to show that, by unravelling the layers of narrative tales and of historical, legal, penitential and medical texts, information can be found that highlights the intricate dynamics that shaped the perception and authorisation of magic, offering insights into the cultural and social underpinnings of such practices in medieval Ireland. It also offers some suggestions as to what kind of future research is needed on the subject of magic and belief in medieval Ireland.

Chapter 1: Keywords and Phrases

This chapter aims to define some of the keywords and phrases that will be used throughout this thesis. This is necessary as many of the terms, familiar with modern readers, may have taken on negative or other meanings and connotations over the centuries. Thus, while a medieval person may have one image in their head about what a druid or magician is, this image will be different from how a modern person envisions the same figures. Take the figure of the *líaig,* or 'leech'.[5] *Líaig* is the correct word to use for a medieval medical practitioner, but the translation 'leech' has taken on negative connotations over the centuries, and now denotes a quack, or an untrained doctor who relies too heavily on non-medical or non-scientific cures. In order to remove the modern implications of the word 'leech', the thesis will refer to the medieval *líaig* as a 'medical practitioner' or simply 'practitioner'. Other changes are laid out in this chapter, along with the definitions the thesis will be using throughout the rest of the work.

MAGIC

One of the first difficulties when engaging in research regarding magic is defining what 'magic' is. The Oxford English Dictionary, for example, defines magic as 'The use of ritual activities which are intended to influence the course of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge; sorcery, witchcraft.' While this definition certainly fits all of the practices selected for this study, it is also broad enough to become a catch-all for various rituals and practices, while reflecting our modern view and the current definition of 'magic'. It is not, however, the definition used by

---

[5] eDIL s.v. 1 líaig or dil.ie/30125.

medieval scholars – those who recorded these ritual practices – and much of the magic selected for this study likewise does not fit the medieval definition, and was not considered 'magic' by them. Therefore, it is necessary to begin this study by highlighting keywords and concepts, such as 'magic', and creating precise definitions and terms for the case studies presented here.

Typically, magic is seen as ancient, cultural, and distinct from modern religions and science. The word itself comes to us from the Old Persian word *maguš*, where its meaning is uncertain. It is first recorded on the Behistun Inscription, a relief containing the written record of the rise of King Darius the Great, recorded in three cuneiform languages including Old Persian.[6] Believed to have been authored by Darius, the Inscription contains a figure called 'Gaumata the Magian', who took control of the kingdoms of Persia and Media through trickery and was supposedly slain by Darius and his followers. Although the meaning behind the use of the word *magian* on the Behistun inscription is now lost, it evolved into the word *maga-,* which became a title given to the priests of the Zoroastrian religion and other religions of early Persia. From *maguš/magi* we get the Greek *magos* ('magician'), and from thence the Latin *magus.* By this time, other practices such as alchemy, astrology and other esoteric learning became a part of the definition, and even during the height of the pre-Christian Roman Empire the word 'magic' had become 'a term of condemnation, and fierce efforts had been made to bury all its trappings and practitioners in a deep sea of oblivion'.[7] However, each society that adopted the word 'magic' has adapted it into their own language and imbued it with their own meanings. This has continued throughout the generations. A modern Irish person, on being asked to define 'magic', may well describe practices and ideologies completely differently from those placed on the word by a medieval Irish person.

[6] See Olmstead, 'Darius and his Behistun Inscription', for an account and analysis of the events and history depicted in the Inscription (available online at http://www.jstor.com/stable/3088120; accessed 03/01/2023).
[7] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 3.

In the same way, someone from the beginning of the medieval period may describe 'magic' in terms wholly different from that of a person from the middle of the period, and again from someone at the beginning of the Early Modern period.

It might be wise to begin first with the scholars who were recording these practices and examine how they classified and defined magic. As writing and education were the domain of the Church during the Middle Ages, it is safe to say that, whether the author was a member of the legal profession, the Church, or even a medical practitioner,[8] they had received at least part of their education through the Church. In cases where texts were produced in religious scriptoria, it is probably also safe to say that theses scribes were actively religious. Through their education, scribes and members of religious sites would certainly have had access to a wide range of material on a broad range of subjects, from the basic grammars that held the rules of Latin and Irish; to the etymologies that were created and added to, displaying the skill of medieval scholars; to the specific texts needed should they take their education and return to their hereditary professions, such as the poetic and medical families, and specialise in that art alone.

The textual material produced by Irish intellectuals during this period was extraordinary in its scope, and displays an impressive range of influence from all over the Continent, as well as cultures closer to home in the Insular world. The material they produced includes canons, penitentials, saints' Lives, treatises on the calendar, computistic and astrological texts and glossaries and etymologies, all of which hint at the 'precocious intellectual fecundity' of the early Church in Ireland.[9] In addition to the production of their own texts and ideas, the early Irish Church eagerly imported texts from other countries and intellectual centers, often translating them into Irish and preserving them for posterity. John

[8] eDIL s.v. 1 líaig or dil.ie/30125.
[9] Carey, *King of Mysteries,* p. 13.

Carey has noted that ‘in many cases texts survive only because they were copied in Ireland – this is one reason for the great contribution which Irish scholars made, particularly in the ninth century, to preserving the literature of antiquity.’[10]

Irish religious scholars also eagerly tackled questions relating to theology, belief, and the natural world around them, often contributing unique and distinctive ideas and texts to the discourse, such as *On the Miracles of Scripture,* a seventh-century text written in an Irish context but falsely attributed to St Augustine of Hippo. In the text, Pseudo-Augustine attempts to explain the miracles performed in the Bible through the lens of nature and the natural qualities contained in all things. He took Genesis 2: 1–3 as his beginning point: that God finished all of Creation in six days, and that it was perfect. Therefore, anything that happened after that had to somehow conform with natural law. Otherwise, if God were to create something new, the implication was that Creation was not perfectly made during the six days or that God was not all-knowing enough to foresee the need for new creations down the line. As God was all-knowing, and Creation was perfect, it was thus necessary to formulate a logical reasoning that was capable of explaining miracles and other wonders – such as where snakes were created from wooden staves and water could turn into blood – that was in line with theological beliefs.

Pseudo-Augustine was not alone in his tackling of this question, and his subsequent ideas were not original to him, but his arguments were methodical and well-written and help with the question of how medieval audiences viewed the ritual practices that will be discussed in this study. Pseudo-Augustine championed the idea that all of God’s creations had virtues or qualities within them that God had hidden from mortal men, but that He could unlock if necessary. In this way, Pseudo-Augustine suggested that the Burning Bush that

[10] Carey (trans.), *King of Mysteries*, p. 22. On the preservation and transmission of learned material by Irish scholars during the early Middle Ages, see also Sharpe, ‘Books from Ireland’.

spoke to Moses had not been created on the spot by God, but existed in some other form. His suggestion was that it was a bush that existed on a spiritual plane of existence, brought forth at that moment and revealed to Moses. If it was not this, then it could also be a real and corporeal plant that, as Pseudo-Augustine had heard of in anecdotes, did not, by its very nature, become consumed by fire.[11] Rather, fire purified it. Indeed, St Jerome had described such a plant, identifying it as *amianton,* which is now believed to be a reference to asbestos.[12] Regardless of which it was, spiritual plant or real substance, Pseudo-Augustine was firm in his belief that God had not created the bush when Moses saw it, but that it had been created during the six days of Creation, and its nature was revealed by God at the correct time. In this way, practices that could be classified as 'magic' under our modern definition could be justified as non-magical to a medieval audience, and accepted as simply another part of Creation, albeit one that was hidden to the majority of people.

However, some aspects of magical practice were rejected by the early Church fathers. For example, Isidore of Seville wrote about the use of ligatures in prohibited medicine, saying that *quae ars medicorum condemnat, sive in praecantationibus, sive in characteribus, vel in quibuscumque rebus suspendendis atque ligandis* ('the art of physicians condemns these, whether used with incantations, or magical characters, or whatever is hung or bound to a person').[13] Ligatures were objects, such as holy texts or spells, that were attached to the body and used for healing or protective purposes. As with the Church in general, the early fathers were not a monolith, and others promoted the use of such ligatures. An example is the real Augustine of Hippo, who also spoke about magic, condemning many 'magical' practices while explaining others through the same lens of nature that Pseudo-Augustine used. For

---

[11] Carey (trans.), *King of Mysteries,* p. 57.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies,* VIII.ix.30 (ed. Lindsay, *Etymologiae,* I, p. 328; trans. Barney *et al.*, *Etymologies*, p. 182).

example, while Augustine was against the use of charms and ligatures in medical practice, he accepted that herbs could be used in cures, as they too contained hidden virtues that could be unlocked through God. In *De Doctrina Christiana,* for example, he makes the point that herbal mixtures could be used in healing, although Christians should avoid superstitious practices such as hanging herbs around the neck or tying them to the body. However, he also conceded that if an object used as a ligature or amulet was 'efficacious by virtue of its own nature', it could be used unrestrictedly, and that even if the reason for the efficacy of the cure was not known, Christians could still use it as 'the intention for which it is used is important so far as concerns the cure of alleviation of bodies'.[14] In this way, we can see that Augustine left some room for practices that could be considered 'magic', and thus harmful, as well as those that relied on hidden virtues, as long as the intention behind the user was good.

St Ambrose also promoted some amulets and wrote about how his own brother, when using the Host as a protective amulet, survived a shipwreck.[15] Gregory of Tours wore amulets, as did Charlemagne, who wore an amulet said to be made from a piece of the true cross and hair from the Virgin Mary.[16] While not all clergy agreed with such practices, it is clear that their use and acceptance derived from personal beliefs and depended on the individual wearer. It clearly helped if the amulet was made from, or included, symbolism or imagery from the Christian faith.

The same can also be said of the use of charms in medical healing. The concept of 'divine medicine', whereby Jesus, and later his saints, could bring about physical and spiritual healing simultaneously, led to a view of healing that encompassed both the body and the soul. Indeed, the extant corpus of medical books we have from all over Europe during the medieval period demonstrates the level of interconnectedness contemporary medical

[14] Book II, Chapter 29, through Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 301.
[15] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 302.
[16] Ibid., p. 304.

practitioners conceived the world as having. Further, in some philosophies God was also seen as a doctor, having created all life and being responsible for sickness, health and death. Suffering, then, was necessary for the restoration of physical health, just as suffering through penance was necessary for the health of the soul. God had not left his creations defenceless in this philosophy, and 'the heart of medicine in the Augustinian-Christian view of nature was a recognition of God as ultimately responsible for all phenomena within nature and affecting humankind.'[17] Therefore, the healing power of herbs and other ingredients that were botanical, biological, or even mineral in nature, came from God, and if a person knew their virtue, or the innate quality God had given to them, it was acceptable to use them. As everything had this kind of quality, including words, charms could also be considered as acceptable for use.

In this way, the hidden virtues of ingredients such as herbs, stones, and animal byproducts could be utilised for such professional practices as medicine, where they found a home in medical curatives as well as charming practices. However, there remained some debate regarding what was acceptable and what was 'magic' and therefore unacceptable. While the use of herbs and minerals could conceivably be tolerated, other practices, such as the use of amulets mentioned above, were seen by some Church theologians as 'nothing short of idolatry, if not outright diabolical magic'.[18] However, the textual sources of the period reveal a complex relationship between such items as textual amulets and the Church, and these types of ligatures continued to be used throughout the period.[19] Indeed, one of the charms selected for the current study, taken from NLI MS G 11, includes directions on how to create a textual amulet as part of its ritual actions, and explains how certain letters should be written on a page before being attached to the body. This is important, as NLI MS G 11

[17] Jolly, *Popular Religion,* p. 91. See also Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* 'Introduction', for more on *Christus Medicus* metaphor in an Irish context.
[18] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 21.
[19] Textual amulets will be discussed more fully below.

appears to have been a handbook used by a practicing medical doctor, indicating that the fifteenth-century physician who created the book, Donchad Ó Bolgaidi, viewed textual amulets as useful enough to record in his own medical compendium.

Augustine, however, was against the use of such amulets, even though he had left space for herbals and the use of lapidaries in healing. Indeed, Augustine included amulets with 'useless pagan signs such as *characteres* – magic symbols written in strange scripts of non-Christian origin'.[20] Such amulets were denounced by Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana,* and condemned as demonic in nature.[21] While miracles of healing could happen through the use of saints' relics, Augustine argued that objects such as textual amulets, which predated Christianity and were used in older religious traditions, were pagan in nature and therefore either fraudulent or worked through demonic intervention rather than the divine.[22] Further, their use was seen as a display of devotion to a man-made object rather than something that relied on faith, with Augustine contending that it was better to engage in sincere displays of Christian devotion through prayer, which was of course a practice that was sanctioned by the Church.

'Magic', then, to a medieval scholar at least, was not necessarily anything that relied on the 'occult' (meaning 'hidden') to work its power. In this way, practices such as divination, scrying, hydromancy, the use of auguries and entrails, and other rituals that claimed, for example, to tell the future or unveil hidden knowledge, were censured, as their power was believed to derive from demonic entities who used their God-given knowledge to trick or deceive humans. Objects such as talismans and textual amulets, which had already strayed onto the side of suspicion, were outright condemned as instruments of the devil, and it was claimed that they were material evidence of devil-pacts and represented an alliance

[20] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 31.
[21] Ibid., p. 32. See also Gordon, '*Charactêres* between Antiquity and Renaissance'.
[22] See Wycherley, *The Cult of Relics* for a more in-depth analysis of the use of relics in healing rituals.

between the wearer and the devil.[23] This concern regarding demonic and satanic influence in some forms of ritual practices would eventually give rise to the later witch trials of the Early Modern period and beyond, following a shift in how scholars and authorities defined 'magic'. In the Early Modern period, this shift in definition would see earlier practices that were accepted by the Church, such as medical charms, social charms, and fertility rituals, being rejected as 'magic' and condemned alongside ritual practices that were certainly intended to be demonic in nature.[24]

MIRACLES VERSUS MAGIC

To a medieval scholar, then, miracles would certainly not count as 'magic'. Indeed, biblical and hagiographical authors often cast non-Christian magic users in opposition to saints, just as modern scholars have cast 'magic' in opposition to religion. After all, miracles came directly from God, even if they were worked through the intervention of, or by request from, a saint. Even when discussing claims from contemporary druids regarding the ability of earlier druids to change shape and fly like birds, Pseudo-Augustine states that God was the agent of such changes of the human form.[25] Even the miracle of Jesus and St Peter walking on water could be explained this way, with Pseudo-Augustine suggesting that God either made their mortal bodies light enough to do so, citing 1 Thessalonians 4: 17 as justification;[26] or that the nature of the water they walked on was changed from liquid to solid by God, citing ice as evidence of that element's occult ability to change its nature naturally.[27]

[23] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 120.
[24] See Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft', pp. 960–90 for an in-depth examination of how this change occurred.
[25] Carey, *King of Mysteries,* p. 58.
[26] 1 Thess. 4: 16: 'Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord.' Thus, if God can raise people into the air at the time of the Resurrection, then He can do so at any time he likes and it is through this ability that Jesus and Peter perhaps gained the ability to be lighter than water and walk upon it.
[27] Carey, *King of Mysteries,* p. 69.

The fourteenth-century Irish tale *Altram tigi dá meadar* ('The Fosterage of the House of Two Vessels')[28] may be an expression of a similar line of reasoning by a later medieval author. In the tale, which is set in Ireland's pre-Christian past and concerns the Túatha Dé Danann, the character of Manannán mac Lir gives Aengus, son of the Dagda, a *sén* ('incantation, charm')[29] that would force Aengus's foster-father to be ejected from his house. The spell cannot be resisted as it is the same phrase God used to eject Satan and his followers from Heaven. As Williams has noted, 'We have a situation, therefore, in which the overking of a race of magically augmented pagans is in possession of the irresistibly powerful word of God.'[30] Williams argues that this is a reflection of theological concerns regarding magic as 'inappropriate knowledge of secrets of God', with the power being perverted by lesser beings as they use it for the purpose of personal gain and to better their own situation.[31] Read this way, the author presents Manannán as a pagan magic user who knows about God and, by extension, has some knowledge of the Faith, but who either does not fully understand what that means, or simply does not care and is willing to misappropriate God's power for his friend's aggrandisement.

This idea is also promoted by Augustine in *City of God,* wherein he acknowledges the similarity between saints' miracles and the magic produced by practitioners. Similar to how Manannán gained divine knowledge but used it inappropriately, Augustine argued that intent also played a part in distinguishing between good Christian practices and bad magical practices. As mentioned above, although Augustine saw textual amulets and talismans as evidence of bad practices that erred into idolatry, he still left space for the use of herbs and minerals due to their hidden virtues and said that if something was efficacious, then 'the

---

[28] Lilian (ed. and trans.), *Altram Tige Dá Medar* and Dobbs (ed. and trans.), *Altromh Tighi da Medar.*
[29] eDIL s.v. 1 sén or dil.ie/37092. See also Hambro, 'The Religious Significance' for a discussion of the *sén* and *soladh* in the tale.
[30] Williams, 'Magic in Celtic Lands', pp. 130–1.
[31] Ibid., p. 131.

intention for which it is used is important so far as concerns the cure of alleviation of bodies'.[32] He also argued that the intent of people who used charms and objects mattered too. Magicians, he contended, worked in private, hidden from all, and thus were to be viewed with suspicion at the very least, if not hostility. Good Christians were transparent and worked in public for the public good. Bad Christians, however, were those who took the signs and trappings of public ritual displays and hid their bad intentions behind them.[33] Therefore, while the use of the word 'magic' to describe miracles is not accurate to a medieval definition of the word, it is also not wholly inaccurate either, and is a useful way to explore how medieval scholars and societies believed in the ability of a supernatural agent – God – to directly intervene in their lives and help them, while avoiding misuse of their own theological beliefs.

For the current study, then, 'magic' will be defined as a ritual practice, physical action, or verbal speech-act that derives its power to affect the physical world, or the target person, from a supernatural agent. Supernatural agents include God, and will include the idea that He can change the basic nature of His creations through hidden virtues.

CHARMS

Other terms and keywords that will be used throughout this study also deserve attention. As with the word 'magic', many of these words have a modern definition that differs from how a medieval scholar would have understood that term. One such term is 'charm'. The world 'charm' comes from the Latin word *carmen,* which was generally used to denote a verbal action or phrase, but which came to mean a spoken incantation or prayer. In modern English,

[32] See p. 13 above; also Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 301.
[33] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 33.

‘charm’ does not have a single meaning.[34] It can still refer to a verbal incantation or speech act designed to enact positive magic, but it can also be a physical object, such as a small amulet which can be found on bracelets or necklaces, that are used to bring good luck to the wearer. It can also be an attribute a person intrinsically has, which delights or attracts others.

The historical *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (eDIL) translates a number of words into English as ‘charm’. However, within the manuscripts themselves, such texts are clearly titled using various words such as as *obaid, oráid, echtrach,* and *éle,* indicating that, to the scribes who compiled these collections and the people who created them, these terms may have meant something more specific than simply ‘charm’. They do not seem to be interchangeable, or generic, titles.[35] For example, *obaid* charms can exist within sections that also contain charms labelled as *ortha, oráid* and *éle,* as in NLI MS G 11, where the majority of the charms titled *obaid* are grouped together on the page, clearly labelled and distinguished from those other titles, but contained within the same cluster of charms and curative texts. Unfortunately, categorizing and translating such titles in a less-broad way has been difficult. For example, the words *ortha* and *oráid* derive from the Latin *oratio,* which can be translated as ‘speech’, as well as ‘prayer’, ‘worship’, ‘oration’ and ‘eloquence’.[36] eDIL defines *ortha* as ‘a prayer, esp. a formal or memorized one, whether recited or sung’.[37] The entry for *oráit* defines that word as ‘a prayer’, ‘speech’, and ‘oration’.[38] From this, we should be able to deduce that *ortha* and *oráid* were ‘charms’ in the sense that they were speech-acts, most probably words to be recited aloud as an incantation.

[34] For examples of how even contemporary medieval medical men struggled to define the words connected to ‘charm’ and ‘magic’, see Lea Olsan, ‘Charms and Prayers’, pp. 347–51.
[35] Jacqueline Borsje (‘A Spell Called Éle’) has argued, for example, that *éle* charms specifically functioned as a charm for curing poison.
[36] https://www.latin-is-simple.com/en/vocabulary/search/?q=oratio (accessed on 14/02/2023).
[37] eDIL s.v. 1 ortha or dil.ie/34038 (accessed on 14/02/2023).
[38] eDIL s.v. oráit or dil.ie/33938 (accessed on 14/02/2023).

However, these charms all contain similarities and, for the most part, share a similar structure. This structure is also shared by more scientific, or rational, cures that do not contain verbal incantations as the main source of their healing. Regarding these 'rational' cures, I refer to the types of cures that rely on herbal or animal-based ingredients for the basis of their healing. That 'magic' and 'medicine' can appear side-by-side in medieval manuscripts may seem strange to us, but it appears that many scribes and medical practitioners of the Middle Ages saw no problem with recording rational curatives alongside those that relied on more supernatural elements. These manuscripts appear to be pragmatic nature: anything that was perceived as effectively healing the patient was viewed as valid, and could thus be included in remedy books such as NLI MS G 11. The presence of such 'magical' texts within these manuscripts attest to their popularity as an alternative form of medicine, and to their use throughout the period.[39]

To medieval Irish medical practitioners, and to those practitioners working in the Insular world and across Europe, charms were simply another part of their medical arsenal, albeit one that relied on faith and belief to work, rather than science. In the case of Ireland, a large body of medical texts still exists, but unfortunately many of these texts remain untouched by modern scholarship, with very few editions or collections of such texts having been made. Because of this, and coupled with the fact that charm texts were recorded alongside rational cures, it can be difficult to locate them within the manuscripts. While some catalogue descriptions, such as the one created for NLI MS G 11 by Nessa Ní Shéaghdha,[40] make note of where the charm texts have been recorded, a great deal simply note that this or that page contains curative texts, without elaborating on whether or not they are rational remedies or charms.

[39] Indeed, beyond the period as well. See, for example, Ilona Tuomi's work on the enduring appeal of the *Caput Christi* charm, which has survived into the present day (Tuomi, 'Nine Hundred Years').
[40] Available online at https://www.isos.dias.ie/NLI/NLI_MS_G_11.html.

For the purpose of this study, therefore, the word 'charm' will refer to any curative text that used spoken incantations and/or performative rituals, which relied on an outside or supernatural agency as a form of healing. However, there are further distinctions that must be made regarding the vocabulary used in the medieval Irish charming tradition. For the most part, these will be based on the terminology and ideology used by contemporary medieval doctors and those that compiled the material of the medical texts used by such healers. For example, terms such as *experimenta* and *empirica* were used to categorise the healing that derived from sources outside of scholastic and Galenic medicine. Even within those two categories there are further sub-categories, such as *mirabile* and *miraculum,* which must also be briefly explored. Additionally, it will be necessary to further examine the physical aspect of 'charms', in the shape of textual amulets, as this form of healing device also appears in the case study.

Olsan describes *experimenta* as healing that 'worked without relation to natural causes that were explicable, and therefore treatable, according to the principles of Galenic medicine.'[41] Such cures were generally accepted, as they conformed to the principles of the *formae speciales* ideology of medicine. This was the belief that curative substances could contain extra, although hidden, effects that required the observation and experience of a qualified person to identify them, just as Pseudo-Augustine, among others, had argued.[42] As medieval medicine relied heavily on older authorities, for example Pliny and Galen, *experimenta* identified by accepted masters of medicine tended to be acknowledged and recorded by medieval scribes. Olsan further states that as 'as cures of the type called *experimenta* were unique by definition and followed no general laws, they were commonly authenticated in academic writings as 'proven' or 'tested' or 'seen'.'[43] These phrases of

---

[41] Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers', p. 348.
[42] Datson and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, p. 127; see also Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers', p. 348.
[43] Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers', p. 348.

authentication are typically called 'efficacy statements' and appear at the end of the charm. In the samples taken from NLI MS G11, the efficacy statement most commonly used is *et íccaid,* or 'and it heals'[44].

Words of Power

As mentioned above, all things were believed to have been imbued with a secret or hidden power. That also included words, as well as material and tangible objects. After all, God had brought all of Creation into being through the use of a speech-act, demonstrating that words held power, and that certain words were powerful indeed. The idea of words as power can be seen throughout biblical tradition: in addition to God's initial speech-act, Jesus was known as the Word made flesh, and it is another speech-act used in the Mass that brings about the miracle of transubstantiation, the process through which the wine and Host are transformed into the Body and Blood of the Redeemer.[45]

Words, whether written or spoken, were the driving force of power in the types of magic discussed in this thesis. Prayers, as we will see, could be chanted aloud and used to direct curses towards enemies of the Church, while the specilised *bérla na filed,* or 'language of the poets', could be used to deliver a satire that would bring a different type of curse on its target. Even charms derive part, if not all, of their power from words. Some charms, such as one found in Royal Irish Academy MS 24 B 3, titled *Ar cuthach* ('against rage/madness') made words of power their primary ingredient to be ingested.[46] In this charm, certain letters, rather than words, were to be written in a cup, with the name of the patient written between each letter. A mixture made from the bark of the poplar tree and reeds was to be poured on

[44] See Jones, 'Formula and Formulation' for an in-depth examination of efficacy statements.
[45] Hindley, *Textual Magic,* p. 43.
[46] See Hayden, 'King of the Waters', particularly p. 175 for an edition and translation of this charm.

top of the inscription and, after seven days, probably to allow time for the ink or paper to dissolve into the liquid, the patient was to drink the liquid over the next nine days.

The liquid, made from natural ingredients, may have been efficacious itslef, but it is clear from the text that the scribe or medical practitioner clearly believed that the words of power were an equally important ingredient of the draught. God's grace, which delivered the healing, was present in the hidden meaning of the letters. This grace was imbued in the ink that wrote the words, and then in turn in the liquid that dissolved them. This transferal of power is present throughout charming traditions all over the world, and is similar to the logic behind 'relic water', a healing drink that is created through contact between water and a saint's relic.[47] Sometimes, this could be a part of a relic that has dissolved in the water, similar to the letters in the charm from RIA MS 24 B 3, but could also mean a relic that had, for example, been washed or dipped in water: the water absorbed the saint's power and was transferred to the patient instead.

With regard to the verbal incantations and speech acts that form the source of power in such charm texts, this study will follow Borsje and use the phrase 'words of power', which she describes as follows:

> 'Words of power fall into the category of speech acts […] if we compare a speech act (such as the passing of a death sentence) with a speech act performed by the uttering of words of power (such as a curse) we note a difference. When a judge condemns a person to death, a complete judicial-administrative human apparatus exists to take care that those words come true. In the case of a curse, it is believed that the words

[47] Hindley, *Textual Magic,* pp. 52–4.

> themselves and/or supernatural entities (whether or not explicitly mentioned) as invisible agents cause the words to come true.'[48]

Or, put more succinctly: 'words of power are a form of religious ritual performative language'.[49]

TEXTUAL AMULETS AND TALISMANS

While charms can certainly be verbal and oral, there are other forms of 'magical' texts that are not, but which still fall under the umbrella of 'charm'. We must give these texts some consideration. Words of power that were committed to paper and attached to the body, for example, frequently appear in charm clusters, as is the case with one of the selections from NLI MS G11 that forms the basis of Chapter 3. Scholars such as Don C. Skemer refer to these as 'textual amulets', and distinguish them from verbal charms as, in many cases, the words of power or other written elements of textual amulets have 'never functioned as speech acts'.[50] As such, for the purpose of this study, such texts will be called textual amulets. Skemer's most succinct definition of the term 'textual amulet' is that they are 'generally brief apotropaic texts, handwritten or mechanically printed on separate sheets, rolls and scraps of parchment, paper or other flexible writing supports of various dimensions', which were then worn around the neck or otherwise attached to the body.[51] The purpose of such objects was similar to the spoken charm, in that the wearer hoped the amulet would inspire healing, bring protection, or incur specific blessings.

[48] Borsje, 'Medieval Irish Spells', p. 36.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 10.
[51] Ibid., p. 1.

The word 'amulet' comes from the Latin *amuletum,* which in turn is derived from the Arabic *hamalet,* defined by Skemer as 'an object, not necessarily textual, worn on the body, especially around the neck, as a "preservative" against a host of afflictions.'[52] However, the word *amuletum* fell into disuse during the medieval period.[53] Where written accounts of the use of textual amulets exist, they seem to be in agreement: that they were used in a beneficial way to prevent sickness while protecting against evil, usually through divine intervention.[54] The word 'talisman', which in modern language is sometimes used as a synonym for 'amulet', derives from the Greek *telesma,* a religious rite, or ceremony.[55] Talismans, which were often inscribed with symbols taken from astrological or planetary sources, are distinct from textual amulets. Talismans tended to be used for specific purposes, rather than general health, unlike the textual amulet. Skemer differentiates between amulets and talismans as 'the former protects and the latter brings luck'.[56] Although there may be some overlap between talismans and amulets, amulets do not feature in this study beyond this explanation.

The only word eDIL records as meaning 'amulet', specifically in the context of charming, is *echtrach*.[57] It is an uncertain word, though, and there is only one recorded attestation of it so far, in Bodleian MS Laud 615, p. 102, where it appears to be the name of a certain type of prayer or charm. It also seems to denote a speech-act rather than an amulet proper, as the directions given for it in this context specify that one should 'chant' it. Although I have come across a number of textual amulets during the course of my research,

[52] Ibid., p. 6.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 6.
[55] Ibid. p. 9.
[56] Ibid.
[57] eDIL s.v. echtrach? dil.ie/19564; see also Meyer, 'Mitteilungen'.

all of them have been signaled as such by the word *scríb(a)* – 'write', as can be seen from an example on p. 393 of NLI MS G 11.[58]

As with charms, the most important aspect of the textual amulet was the words used to invoke the result the wearer required. During the medieval period, for the most part these words were drawn from within the Christian faith, and often included 'scriptural quotations, divine names, common prayers, liturgical formulas, Christian legends and apocrypha, narrative charms, magical seals and symbols, and other textual elements.'[59] While the rituals for the creation of textual amulets, or enacting of charms, were markedly different, with one relying on speech-acts while the other derived from writing the words on a physical object, the speech-acts of charms could also be repurposed and used in textual amulets, while the texts used in the creation of textual amulets, where they were recorded in manuscripts, could likewise be used as speech-acts in verbal charms.[60] This implies considerable flexibility between the two disciplines, perhaps dependent on the discretions, or even the literacy levels, of the practitioner. A healer that relied for his craft on *empirica,* which relied on experimentation and observable results that could be experienced personally, may have learned to read but not necessarily to write, and would thus be unable to complete the creation of a textual amulet. For the purpose of this study, then, wherever a charm refers to the writing of words which are then attached to the body, the term 'textual amulet' will be used.

There are, of course, differences between textual amulets and charms proper, in that one relies on a verbal act while the other is a physical object. However, there can be overlap. Verbal acts could be used as the words of power inscribed on a textual amulet, and vice versa. Additionally, it was common for prayers to be used in both contexts. Typically, in charms that

[58] See Appendix, p. 279.
[59] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 1.
[60] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 9.

were specified to be textual amulets, the act of writing the words of power was part of the performance of the ritual, just as the act of speaking them aloud was a similar aspect of ritual.[61] There are also other non-verbal charm texts that instruct the charmer to make specific physical actions or steps, such as inscribing words of power on an object that will not create a textual amulet, for example on the Host or, as is illustrated in Chapter 3 of this study, on a weapon; or walking around a clearly defined perimeter such as a field or a church. These types of charms will be called 'charming rituals' in the context of the present study. Although textual amulets and charming rituals may not include a speech-act such as the recitation of an incantation or prayer, nonetheless they can 'be read as "texts" with just as much meaning as printed words'.[62] However, we must be aware that these are modern terms, and may not necessarily accurately reflect how the scribes of such collections understood or viewed their texts. Additionally, even with employing these definitions to charms, we must recognise that they are English-language terms, while the charms used for the basis of Chapter 3 were written in Early Modern Irish.

CURSING AND SATIRE

This study also examines two forms of imprecatory rituals that were performed during the medieval period in Ireland. These are the rituals of clerical cursing and poetic satire. Although there are a few different types of satire named in various written sources, including legal texts and glossaries, they will be spoken about in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, it is simply necessary to define exactly what is meant by 'curse'. As with the other words discussed so far, there are more than a single meaning for the word 'curse'. It can be a blasphemous or coarse uttering, or a solemn speech act that is designed to call on a

[61] Hindley, *Textual Magic,* pp. 17–19.
[62] Jolly, *Popular Religion*, p. 23.

supernatural force in order to punish or harm someone. It is the second definition that this study is concerned with, as both clerical cursing and poetic satire were two impressive public displays of ritual performance designed for social censure of a high-ranking target.

While both rituals were intended for similar ends – to reinforce legal and social obligations owed to either the clerics or the poet in question – both involved two distinct styles of speech acts. While poetic satire was intended to conform to specific guidelines laid out in the written record, created by the poet and tailored towards the target and addressing the specific obligation or payment that was owed, clerical cursing drew its speech act from the Book of Psalms, using those psalms that have been termed 'maledictory'. As with the relevant forms of satire, these psalms will be examined more fully in Chapter 4

Love Magic

It is too easy to describe love magic simply as a 'magical rather than direct activity designed to win a desired sex object'.[63] However, doing so cuts much of the nuance out, as the desire for sex was not always the reason for the casting of love magic. In this study, 'love magic' refers to a number of different ritual practices designed to address a spectrum of conditions related to romantic relationships. The current study includes instances where the magic was intended to bring two people together, divide two people from a romantic relationship, as well as fertility and impotency magic. In this way, it is not just concerned with those spells that purport to help the caster of the spell gain sexual affection, but also includes spells that were cast by those who were motivated by jealousy or reproductive desire.

It is important to note here that, while obstetrics charms and charms for healthy menstrual flows could, conceivably, be included in 'love magic', as they relate to reproductive health, for the purpose of this study they will be examined in relation to medical

[63] Rosenblatt, 'Communication in the Practice of Love Magic', p. 482.

charms. Although women were, of course, the target and probably the procurers of such charms, the fact that the scribe of NLI MS G 11 has included a large selection of such charms in his medical handbook indicates that he, at least, saw them in terms of medicine rather than social or relationship magic. Additionally, while it is tempting to believe that such spells were the domain of female ancillary medical workers, such as wise women or midwives, the scribe of NLI MS G 11 was both male and a doctor, indicating that they too were expected to have an understanding of, and the ability to work, such specialised 'female'-oriented charms.

Conclusions

There are a number of common threads running through the types of magic that have been selected for this study, both through the conceptual definitions given in this current chapter and in their medieval Irish forms and context. Each type of magic relies on a supernatural agent to enact its power. Whether it is through unlocking hidden virtues or qualities, or using prayers and other speech acts in order to affect reality, each ritual is performed in the belief that an 'occult', or hidden, power that lies beyond the natural world is capable of being invoked and used to achieve the caster's ends. Additionally, each type of magic selected includes a vocal aspect, which can include Christian prayers and appeals to biblical figures and other authorities. Although the evidence for love magic is scant, and rarely includes a description of the type of ritual performance it entails, we will see that the Christian response to pre-existing forms of love magic certainly included the recitation of Christian prayers.

Despite the varied and seemingly disparate nature of the styles of magic selected, each one depends on the intention of the caster and can be characterised as restorative. While curses are intended to punish or harm the target, they too held a restorative purpose in their Irish form and context. They existed as a part of the legal system, designed to 'heal' the social hierarchy and restore it to its status quo, while ensuring that the social institutions of the

Church and the professional poets retained agency over its own members and worked within the existing legal system. In the expanded definition given in the current chapter, even love magic can be said to have had some a restorative aspect, specifically in instances where the ritual was intended to rejoin a couple or reignite love and fidelity between two people in an established relationship. Medical charms were, of course, intended to heal, but the view of medicine within a medieval Christian framework did not limit itself to the purely physical, but intended to heal the spiritual health of the patient too.

The concept of hidden virtues or inherent properties that can be changed through supernatural intervention is mentioned in the definition of magic. This idea underpins the other definitions as well, suggesting that charms, curses, and love magic all operate on the basis of a belief that supernatural forces can alter the natural properties or states of beings and objects. Thus, the common threads between magic, charms, curses and love magic suggests a worldview wherein supernatural agents are invoked to influence the physical world and personal circumstances, through speech-acts and ritual performances. Each type of magic is defined by its intent—whether to heal, harm, or affect romantic and reproductive aspects of life. Despite their different purposes, they share a reliance on occult powers to bring about desired changes, reflecting a belief in the malleability of reality through hidden virtues that can be accessed by rituals, verbal incantations and belief.

Chapter 2: Representations of Magic in Hagiographical Texts

This chapter will focus on representations of saints and non-Christian magic users from Irish hagiographical texts, with emphasis on the portrayals of saints Patrick and Brigit. The main texts drawn on for this chapter will be Muirchú's *Vita Sanctii Patricii* and, to a lesser extent, The *Tripartite Life* of Patrick*,* a work that draws heavily on the earlier work by Muirchú, and the *Life of Brigit* from the Book of Lismore, which in turn draws on a seventh-century vita by Cogitosus and the *Vita Prima Brigitae.* Through these sources, this chapter aims to examine how hagiographical authors represented magic and those who had access to it. Although saints were not referred to as magicians, sorcerers, or magic users, as argued in Chapter 1,[64] this examination will still include them as 'it should be noted that the difference between a marvellous feat that is a miracle and one that is a work of magic inheres in the morality of the actor and the character of the agent.'[65] While using the word 'magic' to describe miracles may be inaccurate to a medieval mind, it is a good way for this study to explore how medieval people had a belief in how a supernatural agent – God in this case – could directly intervene and help them. Therefore, as both saintly and pagan characters are portrayed as producing marvellous feats, 'magic' will be the umbrella term used in reference to the phenomena and wonders they produce, regardless of from where their power is perceived as being derived.

This chapter begins with a consideration of how narrative texts could be used to inform society of certain ideals and social norms, before looking at how druids were represented in medieval Irish texts. It then turns to look at the figure of Patrick, particularly with episodes of his life that bear comparison with the life of Moses as represented in the

[64] See this thesis, pp. 11–12, and pp. 16–18.
[65] Hansen, 'The Complementarity of Science and Magic', p. 133.

Books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Some representations of Patrick engaging in legal procedures will also be looked at. The third part of the chapter then turns to consider select episodes from the Lives of St Brigit, particularly some of the miracles she is depicted as performing. Additionally, the representation of characters that are explicitly portrayed as pagan magic users in both saints' lives will be examined.

RELIGIOUS TEXTS AS A MIRROR ON SOCIETY

Narrative texts, including the genre of hagiography, serve to reflect, inform and uphold societal norms. While the medieval Irish legal corpus presents an idealised view of how medieval Irish society should be, the narrative tales produced during the same period reflect certain aspects of that society, while informing its intended audience about other aspects and upholding the normative behavior and social structure it reflected. Literature does not exist in a vacuum. While it may exaggerate certain aspects of everyday life, it is still influenced by the events and realities of the world around it. Narrative texts all give some information about the society they were produced for as well as providing a fictional story for entertainment. Through these texts, augmented by the legal texts and material culture, scholars have been able to build a picture of subjects as diverse as high-status feasting; the type of feasting and fasting that took place in ecclesiastic centers; and the types of food the non-elites could have expected to enjoy.[66]

Medieval tales were often produced to inform the audience of certain realities, expectations and obligations owed both to them and from them towards others. For example, many of the tales regarding Cú Chulainn have been shown to highlight specific legal codes and social reforms from the period. Thus, it has been argued that the episode from *Aided*

[66] For example, Warner, 'The Irish Early Medieval Feasting House'; Harney, 'Fasting and Feasting on Irish Church Sites'; and Peters, '"He is Not Entitled to Butter"'.

Derbforgaill where Cú Chulainn sucks a stone from Derbforgaill's side, accidentally ingesting her blood and leaving him unwilling to sleep with her, may be a reflection of the consanguinity laws that forbade incestuous relationships.[67] *Aided Aonfir Aífe* shows society how disastrous it could be for a man to produce children outside of a legitimate, regulated sexual union. Finally, the story of how Sétanta got the name Cú Chulainn shows the type of penalties one could expect to pay and perform should one enter a neighbour's land and kill their dog.[68] These examples demonstrate how the medieval Irish scholars who composed such tales could use them to explain legal points in a way that ordinary people could recognise and understand.

In relation to magic, the power of written texts to inform and reinforce social norms can clearly be seen in how the image of magic was written about and disseminated in European countries through the Middle Ages, culminating in the harmful stereotype that fueled the witch trials in the Early Modern period. Where once exceptions had been made for medical practitioners and other charming traditions, those same activities became intertwined with the ritual activity of the learned classes, who had developed their own system of magic, often based on pre-existing Christian rituals.[69]

While the medieval period certainly fostered and developed interesting ideas regarding magic, this was done through the development of the growing Christian intellectual tradition that had been rooted in Greek and Roman learning. As such, pagan concepts were beginning to be synthesised into Christian frameworks, and elements that had been seen previously as neutral, or even benign, were interpreted through a lens of Christianity and often recategorised. For example, while the use of magic was prohibited in Rome, *daimones*

---

[67] Marstrander (ed. and trans.), 'The Deaths of Lugaid and Derbforgaill', pp. 201–8. See also Ó hUiginn, 'Marriage, Law and *Tochmarc Emire'* and Toner, 'Desire and Divorce in *Serglige Con Culainn*' for deeper analyses of consanguinity laws and *Aided Derbforgaill*.
[68] Breatnach, 'Law and Literature', pp. 234–5.
[69] Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft', p. 966.

had been seen as neutral supernatural spirits that a magic practitioner could call on to help with the working of spells and rituals. Under Christianity they became demons. While in earlier traditions they had been interpreted as 'lower-level divine figures that mediated between humans and the higher gods',[70] in Christianity they were always harmful and evil, and sought to work against God while leading Christians astray from salvation.[71]

Although the process of Christianisation and conversion differed from within the Roman Empire to those areas outside of it, the synthesising of native elements with Christianity also took place in Ireland. We can see this, for example, in the colophon to Version A of the narrative tale *Serglige Con Culainn* in the manuscript known as *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin, RIA MS 23 E 25), where the scribe explicitly identifies the Túatha Dé Dannan, or *aés Síde,* as demons:

> *Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, ⁊ ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib ⁊ co taisféntais aíbniusa ⁊ díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde ⁊ áes síde.*

> 'This is the vision of ruin shown to Cú Chulainn by the people of the fairy mounds. So great was the demonic power before Christianity, and such was its extent, that the demons would fight physically with men and would show festivities and wonders to them, as though they were lasting. In this way they were believed in. So that it is by means of these visions that the unlearned name "fairy mounds" and "people of the fairy mounds".'[72]

[70] Janowitz, 'Demons and Witchcraft in the Early Church', p. 36.
[71] Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft', p. 963.
[72] Mills, 'Demons of the Air', p. 1.

Carey has noted that this type of statement has been repeated elsewhere in texts that would have been known in medieval Ireland. For example, the Hiberno-Latin *Liber de ordine creaturarum,* dated to the second half of the seventh century, contains a similar sentiment and borrowed heavily from Isidore of Seville's *De differentiis*.[73] Recension C of *Lebor Gabala Érenn,* from the *Book of Lecan* (Dublin, RIA MS 23 P 2)*,* contains a similar observation from the scribe that stated that there was a belief that the Túatha Dé had been expelled from Heaven alongside Lucifer.[74] This echoes the tale *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill,* which is also recorded in *Lebor na hUidre,* although it has been dated through its language to the second half of the ninth century.[75] In this tale, Tuán states that *Acht ba dóich leo bith din longis dodeochaid de nim dóib* ('But they thought it likely that they [the Túatha Dé] are some of the exiles who came to them from Heaven'). However, *Scél na Fír Flatha,* which dates to the latter half of the Middle Irish period (c. 900–1200), stated that such visions were the work of the divine, rather than the demonic.[76]

Carey has argued that such notes from the compilers and redactors of these texts are 'reflecting the intellectual orientation of [their] own period, indicating that conversation regarding native elements and their place in a Christianised Ireland was active, and continued for quite some time.[77] In this way, we can see that, while the redactor of at least the A Version of *Serglige Con Culainn* was interested in the Otherworld, he also displayed contemporary fears regarding some aspects of the supernatural that interested him. This can also be seen by other colophons that show how other writers and redactors were engaging with the same

[73] Carey, 'The Use of Tradition', pp. 78–9.
[74] Mills, 'Demons of the Air', p. 4.
[75] Ibid., p. 23–4.
[76] Carey, 'The Use of Tradition', p 79.
[77] Ibid.

questions. Through such scribal notes, we can see how medieval Irish thinkers sought to understand native narrative traditions while reconciling them with their Christian beliefs.

The Irish penitentials constitute another strand of Church writings that also dealt with the belief, or rather superstitions, surrounding folk practices. For example, the *Synodus episcoporum* clearly states that

> *Christianus qui crediderit esse lamiam in saeculo, quae interpraetur striga, anathemazandus quicumque super animam famam istam inposuerit, nec ante in ecclesiam recipiendus quam ut idem creminis quod fecit sua iterum uoce reuocat et sic poenitentiam cum omni diligentia agat.*

> A Christian who believes that there is such a thing in the world as a vampire, that is to say, a witch, is to be anathematized – anyone who puts a living soul under such a reputation; and he must not be received again into the Church before he has undone by his own word that crime that he has committed, and so does penance with all with all diligence.[78]

Although this appears to be a surprisingly progressive view on accusing others of using magic, McNeil and Gamer argue that such beliefs were associated with paganism rather than Christianity, and as such these beliefs were to be condemned by all Christians, and that even accusing another of being a magic user was enough to display a belief in such pagan activities, and thus was worthy of being exiled from the Chrisitan community.[79]

[78] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 56–57.
[79] McNeil and Gamer, *The Penitentials,* pp 39–40.

The idea of paganism still existing in Ireland during this stage of the medieval period is borne out through the early penitential texts. For example, the *Synodus episcoporum,* dated to the seventh century, warns clerics against acting as surety for any *gentili homine* ('gentile man', or pagan)[80] or swearing an oath in the presence of an *aruspicem* (translated by Bieler as 'druid', but roughly meaning a sooth-sayer or divinator, hinting at someone in society who acts as a recognised user of magic, or a religious function outside of the Church).[81] Further, practices such as the eating of some kinds of animal flesh, such as horse meat, are penalised by the penitentials, and may have had their roots in pagan ritual practice.[82]

However, the type of magic used in the traditions of healing, charming, blessings, and textual or talismanic amulets was utilised by many different types of people at all levels of society, including clerics and those who had undertaken education in monastic or clerical centres. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3, the Church fathers had grappled with these types of rituals and attempted to draw a line between where the natural qualities given by God ended and true demonic sorcery began. This is illustrated, for example, by Augustine's writings on the use of herbs. While herbs could be used for healing, how they were used and the intentions of the user also counted. This concern is reflected in the desire to harmonise this style of magic with the learned tradition that was developed by clerics and other educated people. This learned tradition included such practices as astrology, divination and necromancy, also called *nigromantia,* meaning 'black arts'.[83] Isidore of Seville referred to this type of magic as *ex traditione angelorum malorum* ('the instruction of evil angels').[84]

---

[80] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 54–55. The *First Synod of Patrick* has since become known as the *Synodus episcoporum.*
[81] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 56–57.
[82] McNeil and Gamer, *The Penitentials,* p. 40.
[83] Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft', p. 965. The Latin *necromantia*, technically only referring to divination via the dead, and *nigromantia*, meaning the black arts more generally conceived, were used interchangeably in the Middle Ages to mean demonic magic: Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, pp. 4 and 19.
[84] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies,* VIII.ix.3 (ed. Lindsay, *Etymologiae,* I, p. 327; trans. Barney *et al.*, *Etymologies*, p. 181).

Based on Arabic, Greek and Jewish magical texts, these types of practices received much attention from medieval European scholars.

These practices, particularly *nigromantia,* were conducted through complex and detailed rituals that could last for days at a time. They included invocations and summoning formulae that were derived from other learned forms of magic, and were also typically written in Latin.[85] That they were written, and that the language used was Latin, demonstrates that the person compiling or composing such texts was educated and, further, that he was doing so either specifically for himself or for others who had achieved the same level of education as he had. An example of this is *Codex Latinus Monacensis* 849, a fifteenth-century German manuscript also known as the 'Munich Manual of Demonic Magic' or the 'Necromancer's Handbook'.[86] This manuscript contains a number of magical rituals and experiments that range from divination of knowledge to creating illusions and exerting negative effects on the minds of rivals, but lacks any of the texts, such as healing magic or love magic, that were associated with the charming tradition widely used throughout the Christian world.

[85] Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft', p. 966.
[86] Kieckhefer (ed. and trans.), '*Forbidden Rites*'; see pp. 190–346 for the edition of the text.

DRUIDS IN THE IRISH TEXTUAL TRADITION

It would be appropriate now to take some time to discuss the figure of the druid in a little more detail, since this figure is, after all, the one most readily associated with 'magic' in medieval Irish culture. However, the bulk of historical sources for druids, and indeed for the early Celts, are problematic. One problem regarding early sources of information is the origin of the source itself. Although the early Celtic peoples were literate, as evidenced by the inscriptions left behind on various physical objects throughout the Celtic regions,[87] they did not commit any information regarding their hierarchies, political traditions, history, or religious practices to paper. All the early information about these practices comes from sources which, although contemporary or near-contemporary in some cases, still existed outside of the people and culture they were trying to describe. 'The Celts thus became, for the Mediterranean world, the first alien people on their northern border to emerge out of the mists of prehistory with a seemingly coherent identity.'[88] Generalisations, based on limited contact with a handful of 'Celtic' people and thus limited to a few areas – for example, trade, style of hair and clothes, battle style, and perhaps some hasty religious or death rituals carried out after battles or raids – would have been created, disseminated and perpetuated. These generalisations would almost certainly be coloured by natural human fear and prejudices, which can be seen in how Greek and Roman writers framed the Celts as barbarians in opposition to their own cultures.

Julius Caesar, a key source of knowledge regarding Celtic peoples, had his own political reasons for writing about the Gauls. Aided not only by the later commentaries he wrote about his wars, but also by the flood of letters he wrote during his campaigns, he succeeded in turning 'the story of his scattered campaigns into a grand and enduring narrative

[87] Stifter, *Sengoídelc,* pp. 3–9.
[88] Dietler, '"Our Ancestors the Gauls"', p. 585.

of how a vast territory now called "Gaul" was subjected to Roman rule.'[89] Caesar was also the source for much of our information about druids, the most detailed account being found in his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*.[90] The first few books in this work speak of the situation leading into the war and of the war itself. However, druids are not mentioned in this section, which may indicate that they were not powerful enough within Gaulish society to either promote Roman interests or advocate against them. Book 6, however, presents an image of druids as 'the dominant element in Gallic society' and claims that 'backed by the religious sanctions of their decrees, they all but controlled the civil administration of the Gallic states, and [. . .] through their central organization [. . .] they constituted a pan-Gallic organization, the only truly national body.'[91] However, as mentioned above, what was true of one 'Celtic' people may not have been true of another.

In Ireland itself, there is very little physical evidence for druids. For a long time, based on the description of the centrality of druids to Celtic societies, the megalithic tombs and structures of Britain and Ireland were frequently ascribed to druids.[92] For example, cromlechs were widely believed to have been altars used by druids during their religious rituals. They have since been correctly identified as a pre-Celtic type of grave or tomb.[93]

More information about druids during the early part of the medieval period can be found in the textual sources, however. A survey conducted by Slevin has uncovered that, rather than being associated with magic or supernatural practices that were punishable via penance or secular law, druids that survived into the seventh and eighth centuries, and perhaps even into the ninth century, appear to have retained some of their status and overall

[89] Osgood, 'Writing and Conquest', p. 329.
[90] Book 6, Chapters 13–14 and 16–18 describe the druids in relation to Gaulish society. See Long (ed.), *C. Julii Caesaris: Commentarii De Bello Gallico,* pp. 297–303.
[91] DeWitt, 'The Druids and Romanization', p. 322.
[92] McGuinness, '"Druids' Altars', p. 30.
[93] Ibid., p. 43.

respectability, at least in some situations or circumstances.[94] Indeed, the earliest mention of magical practice, in the sixth-century Penitential of Finnian, expressly addresses 'any cleric or woman' who may have led someone astray with magic, rather than addressing druids or a specific, traditional practitioner of magic.[95] Where 'druids' are specifically mentioned, in the seventh-century *Synodus episcoporum*, they are mentioned in a legal capacity, in a section that prohibits Christians from swearing an oath before them.[96] As Slavin notes, 'this statement not only suggests the coexistence of pagans and Christians, it also indicates the participation of a magical practitioner in legal action', as well as evidence that the Church was attempting to limit or prohibit such involvement.[97]

A late seventh-century text, the *Canones Hibernensis,* also includes druids. However, in this instance they are listed alongside other types of people, such as heretics and adulterers, who live outside of the accepted rules of Christianity.[98] The eighth-century *Old Irish Penitential* advocates against the use of *aiphti,* or *epaid* ('charm, spell'). That this is listed under the section for sins associated with anger has led Slavin to suggest that the use of spells themselves may not be entirely prohibited, but rather using them in anger with the intention to cause harm, or using them in secret rather than openly, may have been the crime here.[99]

The secular laws mention druids even less than the penitential texts. *Uraicecht Becc,* dated to the late eighth or early ninth century, lists druids among the *dóernemed* classes ('base-nobles'): professional people who served the *sóernemed,* or 'free-noble', classes.[100] The *dóernemed* include carpenters, smiths, doctors and judges alongside druids, with the text stating that druids have this status due to their ability to create *féth fiada* ('magic mist') and

[94] Slavin, 'Coming to Terms with Druids', p. 1.
[95] Ibid., p. 3; see also Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 78–81, and this thesis, pp. 184–92.
[96] Slavin, 'Coming to Terms with Druids', p. 5. See also Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 56–7.
[97] Slavin, 'Coming to Terms with Druids', p. 5.
[98] Ibid., p. 6; see also Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 160–61.
[99] Slavin, 'Coming to Terms with Druids', p. 7.
[100] Ibid., p. 9.

aisdinecht ('prophecy').[101] Their inclusion in this lists indicates that they still retained some status and level of respectability and responsibility well into the early part of the medieval period in Ireland. However, the eighth-century law-tract on sick-maintenance, *Bretha Crólige,* views them with suspicion and derision, stating that they, along with other classes of dangerous people, including satirists, should not be given sick-maintenance due to their legal status, and should instead be lowered to the status of a *bóaire,* or hospitaller.[102] The *bóaire* was still a free man in medieval Irish society, but of much less status than the *dóernemed* classes. *Bretha Nemed toísech,* which also dates to the eighth century, additionally states that the druid gains his status from his abilities during battle and warfare.[103]

Combined, these texts give a mixed picture: the druid certainly appears to have retained status in the secular laws, probably due to his association with the warrior classes and his abilities during times of warfare, as well as through his ability to prophesise and serve the elite classes. He is thought less of in the Church penitentials, as is to be expected, but in those texts the use of illicit magic is not ascribed to him. Instead, it seems to be directed at anyone who uses magic in secret or to cause harm, particularly in anger. However, taken together, we can see that druids remained in existence well into the medieval period in Ireland, although their power diminishes from legal oath takers serving their community, to providing services to the wealthy and elite of society. Of course, over time the druid's status and class would disappear completely from the non-narrative texts. He would remain a staple of narrative texts though, including hagiographical tales, where he was often represented as a figure that united the pre-Christian past with the new Christian world.[104]

[101] Slavin, 'Coming to Terms with Druids', p. 9.
[102] Ibid., p. 10.
[103] Ibid., p. 11.
[104] Ibid., p. 26.

THE MOSES OF THE IRISH

The purpose of hagiography was to commemorate the saint whose life it related, while providing a Christian ideal: a human who embodied Christianity. Although the saint may have been marked for sainthood by the circumstance of their birth, for example Brigit of Kildare, their actions in the hagiographical sources could provide positive examples of Christianity to everyone. Hagiographical narratives could also, however, be produced to advance the interest of the church(es) connected with the saint for various reasons. For example, Tírechán's *Collectanea* was produced as a way to legitimise Armagh's claims in the midlands and Connacht.[105] It would be easy to say that, in a culture that had a pre-existing corpus of tales, clerics were simply substituted into new tales to take the place of their pagan counterparts, the druids. While it is true that both druids and clerics typically take the role of the 'wise man' in narrative tales and are often depicted as men of power and status derived through their titles, the stories of saints and holy people in the Bible appear to have provided the blueprint and framework for how to present a saint and his or her life story, including the miracles and supernatural events that made up episodes in his tale. In the case of Patrick, the most common biblical point of reference was the figure of Moses.

Henning has argued that the association of Moses and Patrick grew out of a pre-existing literary tradition of Moses in early Ireland.[106] Indeed, it appears as though there was a tradition in Ireland, as in elsewhere throughout the Christian world, whereby many native saints were compared not just to Moses, but the other Biblical figures from the Old Testament. For example, in Ireland, the Latin *Lives* of saints Barre and Berrach compare both saints to Peter, Paul, Andrew and James.[107] Patrick's association with Moses is made clear from the outset of the later *Vita Tripartita,* but also appears in the earlier *Lives* produced by

[105] Maney, 'When Brigit Met Patrick', p. 183.
[106] See Henning, *The Literary Tradition of Moses,* for a fuller survey of Moses in the Irish tradition.
[107] Henning, *The Literary Tradition of Moses*, p. 244.

Muirchú and Tírechán, with Tírechán stating that both men lived until the age of 120,[108] while Muirchú related an episode of Patrick travelling with his companions through a wilderness and providing them with food and drink as Moses did with the Israelites.[109] Additionally, Muirchú wrote about an episode where, when travelling to Armagh, Patrick encountered a similar burning bush to the one with which Moses interacted.[110]

It appears that it was Moses's reputation as a law-giver that helped influence the association with Patrick. Throughout the literature produced in early Ireland concerning Moses, emphasis was placed on him as the person who brought God's laws to the people. Synods and laws were ascribed to Patrick too, thus creating a parallelism that early Church authorities and hagiographers were able to emphasise. By comparing Moses to Patrick, texts such as the *Liber Angeli,*[111] in which Patrick was given primatial rights over the Irish Church by an angel, were able to equate Patrick's authority to Moses's and help any penitential or legal text ascribed to Patrick be accepted among the community. Henning has also argued that medieval Ireland venerated saints that were connected to their own interests, of which the law was one such concern. Thus, Moses's reputation as the giver of God's laws was important to a contemporary audience's view of Patrick.[112]

Some of the more interesting episodes in which we see similarities between Patrick and Moses centre on the types of miracles they performed and the magic users they encountered during their religious duties. Even their symbols of power, the staffs or *bachalls* that they carried, had some kind of divine origin. While Moses was already in possession of his staff before receiving instructions from God, the rod was imbued with extra power that would help display the might of God and the power Moses and his brother Aaron possessed through Him.

[108] Henning, *The Literary Tradition of Moses*, p. 250.
[109] Ibid., p. 248.
[110] Ibid., p. 250.
[111] Dublin, Trinity College MS 52, f.20va–f.22ra, also called The Book of Armagh.
[112] Henning, 'The Tradition of Moses', p. 261.

Patrick, however, was depicted as receiving Jesus's own staff, or at least a staff that came from God, who foretold the coming of Patrick: *Ocus faracaib Día linn condigesta do praicept do Gaedelaib, ocus foráccaib comartha linni .i. abachoill do tabairt duitsiu* ('And God left with us that thou wouldst come to preach to the Gael, and he left a token with us, to wit, his staff, to be given to thee').[113] Patrick turned down the staff, though, preferring to wait until God Himself gave him possession of it: *Coroárdraig dó in Coimdiu hi suidiu, ocus conerbairt fris techt doprocéupt do Góedilaib, ocus cotárat bachaill Isu do; ocus atrubairt ropad fortachtaigthid do hi cech guasacht ocus hi cech écomnart imbíad* ('And there the Lord appeared to him and told him to go and preach to the Gael, and gave him the staff of Jesus, and said that it would be a helper to him in every danger and in every unequal conflict in which he should be').[114]

One of the most famous parts of both stories is how the holy men went against native magicians from a competing religious tradition. The trope of the holy man engaging in magical battles with 'heathen' or 'other' magic users was a very popular literary tradition, and has been used and repeated throughout narrative traditions from all over the world.[115] While Aaron, Moses's brother, was the character who undertook the magical duel in the book of Exodus, it was repeated in a great many saints' Lives, including Peter and Paul against Simon Magus, and Saint Jude, who engaged in a show of prophetic power against two Persian mages.[116] In the Exodus story, Aaron is shown to be capable of confounding the native Egyptian magicians:

[113] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 28–9.
[114] Ibid., pp. 30–1.
[115] It can be found under D1719.1.1 in the Stith Thompson folklore motif index.
[116] See Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts,* pp. 109–112 and Dominican Fathers, *St Jude Thaddeus,* pp. 7–9. The trope has survived until the present day, and was naturally adopted as an integral part of the fantasy genre of fiction. A good example of it can be found in Pratchett's *Equal Rites,* pp. 223–6, where the 'outsider' Granny Weatherwax, a witch, battles the wizard Archchanellor Cutangle.

> So Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharao, and did as the Lord had commanded. And Aaron took the rod before Pharao, and his servants, and it was turned into a serpent. And Pharao called the wise men and the magicians: and they also by Egyptian enchantments and certain secrets did in like manner. And they every one cast down their rods, and they were turned into serpents: but Aaron's rod devoured their rods.[117]

Clearly, while the native magic users can do almost everything Aaron does, and vice versa, Aaron's magic, which stems from God, is presented as the more powerful. While Aaron and the Egyptian magicians are each able to successfully transfigure their staff into a living creature, it is Aaron's snake that claims supremacy by literally subsuming theirs. There is a further implication that God's power is stronger, as Aaron was then the only one who was able to turn his snake back into a staff as the magicians lack the materials (the snakes) necessary to enact that particular spell.

The episode that follows Aaron's first duel with the magicians concerns the ten plagues that God visited on the Egyptians through Moses, and the supremacy of God's power was underscored in the first plague sent, which was the feat of turning the waters of the Nile – the main source of domestic and agricultural water for the local populace – into blood.[118] Interestingly, the Egyptian magicians could also replicate this feat of magical power. However, even though they could replicate it, neither they nor Moses were able to dispel it, as Exodus 7: 25 states that God had to do so Himself at the end of seven days. The inability of the magicians to dispel their own magic is repeated in the account of the second plague, when both Moses and the magicians were capable of summoning an overwhelming number of

[117] Exodus 7: 10–13.
[118] Exodus 7: 17–22.

frogs. However, Pharaoh had to ask Moses to dispel them all, as the magicians did not appear able to do so.

By the time of the third plague, that of insects, the magicians admit that they lack the power and ascribe Moses's power to God, saying 'This is the finger of God.'[119] By the time of the sixth plague, that of boils, they themselves were so afflicted by them 'Neither could the magicians stand before Moses for the boils that were upon them.'[120] It would have been a striking image for anyone who witnessed it or could imagine it when hearing the tale: either the magicians do not appear in front of Moses at all, or they must have sat or lain down before him as they were unable to stand. Thus, they would have physically been forced to look up at the Hebrew man they despised, who represented the people they had enslaved.

The *Tripartite Life* of Patrick also shows that saint in opposition to a pair of native magic users. However, while that episode was no doubt based on the biblical model of Moses and Aaron versus the Egyptian magicians, Patrick appears to have been able to command magic even greater than both the Egyptian and Irish non-Christian magicians, and perhaps even Moses and Aaron themselves. In the first instance of Patrick and the native Irish druids, when mocked and challenged by one of king Lóegaire's druids, Lochru, the saint responded by calling out to God and asking for him to kill the offending druid.[121] In response, God lifted Lochru into the air and dashed him against the ground below him, in a scene clearly derived from the apocryphal *Acts of Peter,* which similarly saw a native magic user dashed to the ground through God's intervention.[122] While the *Acts of the Peter* depict Simon Magus as truly flying or levitating high above Rome under his own power, other versions of the tale, which was hugely popular during the medieval period, saw Simon achieving flight through

[119] Exodus 8: 19.
[120] Exodus 9: 11.
[121] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 44–5.
[122] Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts,* pp. 109–12.

the use of an invisible chariot that was carried by demons.[123] In the episode from the *Tripartite Life*, the druid Lochru was raised by God himself, as well as being dropped by Him. This scene is also present in the earliest *Life* of Patrick, that by Muirchú, which has been dated to the seventh century, and in the Irish tradition the native magic user does not have any ability to create the power of flight. Instead, God is depicted as having the power to do that. Indeed, in the Irish literary tradition, the most consistent depiction of magical flight centres on Otherworldly characters, who achieve it through shape-shifting rather than by keeping their humanoid shape.[124]

The next time Patrick went against Loegaire, following the death of Lochru and Lóegaire's demand for Patrick's death in response, the saint chose discretion over antagonism. He called on God once more and a great darkness, accompanied by an earthquake, fell on the land. The natural calamity that followed forced Lóegaire's army to scatter while attacking one another in the face of a great storm. They abandoned Lóegaire along with his pregnant wife. This reversal of fortune saw Lóegaire lie to Patrick and claim to want peace with the saint, while the storm itself was referred to as *mallacht Patraic* ('Patrick's Curse').[125] The ninth plague visited upon the Egyptians also brought a period of darkness. However, it does not tell us who dispelled this darkness, just that the darkness that had been brought by Moses lasted for three days.[126] In comparison, the *Tripartite Life* does not tell us how long Patrick's darkness lasted for or who dispelled it, instead concentrating on the chaos it brought to Lóegaire's army. While the ten plagues take the form of magic that is distinctly harmful to agriculture and farming practices, including the prolonged period of darkness, the author of the *Tripartite Life* seemed to be more concerned with highlighting

[123] Newton, 'A History of Flying', p. 6.
[124] For example, *Aislinge Óengusa, Serglige Con Culainn,* and *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* all feature Otherworld characters who are able to shape-shift into birds.
[125] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 46–7.
[126] Exodus 10: 21–3.

how disastrous such conditions are to warfare and raiding, and how inclement weather and sudden, violent storms could contribute to breaking an army.

Patrick called the darkness down again shortly after this episode. However, the second time he did so he also enacted a feat of shapeshifting, or at least projecting a different shape for him and his followers into the minds of their enemies as he and his entourage traversed the road to Tara that had been set with ambushes. In the *Tripartite Life,* directly after this episode, is the *Lorica* charm text called 'St Patrick's Breastplate' or 'The Deer's Cry'.[127] Literally meaning 'breastplates', *loricae* are metrical protective prayers that appear to have been 'peculiarly Celtic' in nature.[128] While the listing of body parts was a common feature of early Roman curses, enumerating the body parts as a protective charm appears to have been an innovation that was first developed in Ireland,[129] with the three oldest extant examples of this type of charm being the *Lorica Gildae,* the Leiden *Lorica,* and the Deer's Cry itself. This type of anatomical listing was not just confined to the charm genre either, with early Irish exorcistic prayers also making use of it. An example of such a prayer can be found in the Stowe Missal, alongside a baptismal ritual that also uses the enumeration of body parts as a way to purify the whole body before the baptism proper.[130] The Deer's Cry mentions body parts in a list, but it does not seem to follow the expected enumeration so common to the genre:

> *Críst i cridiu cech duini rodomscrútadar*
>
> *Crist i ngin cech óin rodomlabrathar*

[127] It must be noted that, while the story of Patrick turning himself and his followers into deer is included in Muirchú's seventh-century text, the Deer's Cry was not a part of the original story. It was included by the compiler of the *Tripartite Life.* The text itself probably had a life outside of the tale, however, and became associated with this part of the story later.

[128] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 120.

[129] Ibid., pp. 120–1.

[130] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* pp. 123–4. The exorcistic ritual in the Stowe Missal can be found as part of the baptismal rituals: see ff. 46v–60r.

Críst hi cech rusc nomdercaedar

Críst hi cech clúais rodomchloathar.

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,

Christ in every eye that sees me,

Christ in every ear that hears me.[131]

Instead of protecting the body of the speaker, the Deer's Cry instead lists the body parts of others. Much attention has been paid to lines 42–49 of the charm:

Tocuiriur etrum indiu inna huli nert so

fri cech nert namnas néthrocar fristái dom churp ocus domm anmain

fri tinchetla sáibfháthe

fri dubrechtu gentliuchtae

fri sáibrechtu heretecdae

fri himchellacht nidlachtae

fri brichtu ban 7 gobann 7 druad

fri cech fiss arachuilu corp 7 anmain duini.

I summon today all those powers between me (and these evils),

against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and my soul,

against incantations of false prophets,

[131] Stokes and Strachan (ed. and trans.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus,* II, pp. 357–8. These lines from the charm can be found on pp. 52–3 of *The Tripartite Life.* While the Deer's Cry was attributed to Patrick by the compiler of *The Tripartite Life,* the language of the charm has been dated to the eighth century, significantly later than the dates ascribed to Patrick's Life. See Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 127 for a short discussion of its date.

against black laws of heathenry,

against false laws of heretics,

against craft (?) of idolatry,

against spells of women and smiths and wizards,

against every knowledge [...] man's body and soul.[132]

This not the only time in the *Tripartite Life* that Patrick appears to utilise a native charming tradition. A short episode also includes an account of healing through herbs:

Is annsin tarraid galar setig nalachta Aililla combu comocraib bás di. Roiarfacht Patraic ced rombái. Respondit mulier: 'lus atconnarc isindeír, ocus ní accai hitalmain aleitheit, ocus atbelsa, no atbela ingein fil imbroind, no atbelom diblínaib, mane tomliur inlussin.' Roraidi Patraic frie: 'Cinnas ind lossa?' 'Amal luachair,' ar inben. Bennachais Patraic ind luachair combo folt-chep. Dusromalt inben iarsuidiu ocus ba slán fochetoir; et postmodum peperit filium, et benedixit Patricium. Et dicitur quod Patricius dixit: 'Omnes femine quaecumque de illo holere manducauerint sanae erunt.'

Then disease attacked Ailill's pregnant wife in such wise that death was near unto her. Patrick asked what had befallen her? The woman answered, 'I beheld an herb in the air; and on earth I never saw its equal; and I shall die, or the child that is in my womb will die, or we shall both die, unless I eat that herb.' Patrick said to her: 'What is the semblance of the herb?' 'Like rushes,' said the woman. Patrick blessed the rushes, so that they became a leek. The woman ate it afterwards and was whole at once; and

[132] Stokes and Strachan (eds. and trans.), *Thesaurus Palaeohbernicus,* II, p. 357. These lines can be found in *The Tripartite Life* on pp. 50–1.

> afterwards she brought forth a son and blessed Patrick. And it is said that Patrick declared that 'all women who shall eat of that herb will be whole'.[133]

While the 'herb' in question turned into a leek, it only did so following Patrick's blessing. In this way, we can see that the author presents the knowledge of the correct healing substance as being discovered through God, a sentiment that is echoed in the tale *Cath Maige Tuired* ('The [Second] Battle of Moy Tura'): *Tosárluid Díen Cécht 7 conmesc-side na lube cona fesai a frepthai córi manis-tecaisceth an Spirut íar tain* ('Dían Cécht came to her and mixed the herbs, so that no one knows their proper healing qualities unless the Holy Spirit taught them afterwards.')[134] This is similar to the idea that God had given each of his creations a special, hidden virtue that could be utilised by those with the correct knowledge.[135] This episode may have been based on another episode from Moses's life, found in Exodus 15: 23–25:

> And they came into Mara, and they could not drink the waters of Mara, because they were bitter: whereupon he gave a name also agreeable to the place, calling it Mara, that is, bitterness. And the people murmured against Moses, saying: What shall we drink? But he cried to the Lord, and he shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, they were turned into sweetness. There he appointed him ordinances, and judgments, and there he proved him.

Although once more there is no specific herb mentioned – the Douay-Rheims Bible renders it simply as 'tree', indicating a much bigger plant or perhaps just the bark from a specific tree –

[133] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 200–1.
[134] Grey (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 32–3.
[135] See this thesis, pp. 11–14, for a fuller discussion of this concept.

the plant that Moses used was envisioned as being a purifier of water while adding a sweeter taste to it. While both plants serve different functions, the hidden power of both could only be uncovered through God.

Following the episode of the Deer's Cry in the *Tripartite Life,* Patrick once again faces a native magic user, this time Lucatmáel, who wishes to avenge the death of Lochru. In this episode, Patrick is depicted as using a specifically Christian charm that identifies and seems to neutralise the poison Lucatmáel has added to his cup:

> *Dorat, dino, inti Lucat-mael loimm do nim isinnardig robói for laim Patraic conaccath cid dogenath [Patraic] fris. Rorathaig, dino, Patraic anísin, ocus robennachsidi indairdig, ocus rochoteg ind lind. Roimmpai inlestar iarsin ocus dorochair ass inneim dorat in drai ind. Robennach Patraic doridisi indairdig ocus rosoadh inlind innaaicned choír. Romórad ainm Dé ocus 7 Patraic desin. Issed indso rogab Patraic forsincailech: 'Gaibiu anfis ibiu anfis fri sia úathib ibiu lithu in Christo lesu, amen.' .i. 'ciabeith afis ocund, cenco fil, íbthar inanmum Ísu Crist.'*
>
> So Lucat-moel put a sip of poison into the cup that stood at Patrick's hand, so that he might see what he would do unto it. Patrick observed that, and he blessed the cup, and the liquor curdled. He then inverted the vessel, and out of it fell the poison which the wizard had put into it. Patrick again blessed the cup, and the liquor was turned into its proper nature. God's name and Patrick's was magnified thereby. This is what Patrick recited over the cup: *'Gaibiu anfis ibiu anfis fri sia úathib ibiu lithu in Christo lesu, amen.* That is, 'though we have knowledge of it, though we have not, it shall be quaffed in the name of Jesus Christ.'[136]

[136] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 54–5.

Just as with the knowledge of the leek as a healing agent, the poison is discovered through God's power. Additionally, just as Patrick and his entourage change their shape during the Deer's Cry episode, the liquid similarly changes state so that the poison can easily be removed.[137]

This episode also appears in the older version of Patrick's *Life* by Muirchú. As noted by Carey, there are a number of differences between the earlier and later versions of the story. In Muirchú's text, the episode is presented as a test by the druid, a means to determine whether or not Patrick and his God had the power to recognise that a harmful act had been committed that threated the saint's life. However, by the time of the *Life* known as *Bethu Phatráic,* which was compiled along with other sources to create the *Vita Tripartita,* parts of which have been dated to the ninth century and thus two hundred years after Muirchú's text, the episode had evolved to indicate that Lucatmáet had attempted to murder Patrick. Additionally, no incantation or words of power are supplied in Muirchú's text, while the later version includes a charm that was found to be a part of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már,* and which has been dated linguistically to the tenth or eleventh centuries.[138] As with the Deer's Cry, the charm text appears to have become associated with Patrick in later accounts of his life.

The association of druids with poison is not limited to Patrick's *Lives.* In §133 of *Cath Maige Tuired*, when explaining how Balor's eye became poisonous, the author states *Es de boí inn nem-sin fuirrir .i. druíth a adhar bótar oc fulucht draígechtae. Tánic-seum 7 ruderc tarsan fundéoic, co foulachta íer sin* ('it had that poisonous power for this reason: once his

[137] See Borsje, 'A Spell Called *Éle*', pp. 199–211 for other poison remedies. The Old English *Acrae* charm from Bald's Leechbook also contains Irish as its words of power and functions as a remedy for poison: see Cockayne (ed. and trans.), *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcrafts,* pp. 112–13, and also Meroney, 'Irish in the Old English Charms', pp. 175–7, for his discussion of this charm and its Irish elements.
[138] Carey, 'Tradition, Adaptation and Invention', p. 24.

father's druids were brewing magic. He came and looked over the window, and the fumes of the concoction affected the eye and the venomous power of the brew settled in.')[139] Here, we can see the kind of transferral of power that was important to medieval charming traditions, as the poisonous quality of the druids' magic imbues Balor's eye, giving it its darkly magical properties: *Ní ho(r)scailtie inn sóul acht i rroí catae nammá. Cetrar turcbaud a malaig die shól conu drolum omlithi treina malaig. Slúoach do-n-éceud darsan sól, nín-géptis fri hócco, cie pidis lir il míli* ('The latter had a destructive eye which was never opened except on a battlefield. Four men would raise the lid of the eye by a polished ring in its lid. The host which looked at that eye, even if they were many thousands in number, would offer no resistance to warriors.').[140] In another borrowing from the Bible, Balor is killed by Lug in the same manner as David killed Goliath: *Tócauhar a malae dia deirc Baloir. Fucaird Luc íer sin líic talma dó, co ndechaid an súil triena cend. Conid a slúag bodessin derécacha* ('The lid was raised from Balor's eye. Then Lug cast a sling stone at him which carried the eye through his head, and it was his own host that looked at it.').[141]

The motif of the poisonous eye also occurs in the *Betha Ciaráin Saighre* ('The Life of Ciarán of Saigir'). In this instance, the eye belonged to a king named Cobranus and had the power to kill. However, rather than killing Cobranus by piercing the eye, Ciarán neutralises its power by making Cobranus blind. Clearly, it is the intent behind the look the king gave to a person that enacted the killing power, indicating that Cobranus had some control over it, unlike Balor. This is underscored by the fact that the king repented and dedicated himself to Ciarán, who then restored his sight to him, presumably with the assurance that Cobranus

[139] Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 60–1.
[140] Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 60–1. See also this thesis, pp. 87–9, for a discussion of the theory of 'magical' transfers of power.
[141] Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 60–1; see also 1Sam. 17: 49–50.

would no longer use its power. The author, however, does not make the conditions for the restoration of sight clear.[142]

The episode following Lucatmáel's attempted poisoning of Patrick features an overt display of magical power between the saint and the druid, with Lucatmáel demanding that Patrick join him; he urges: *Denam ferta arbelaib intslúaig isinmaig* ('Let us work miracles before the host in that great plain.')[143] As in the *Apocryphal Acts of Peter* and the duel between Simon Magus and Peter, Patrick's duel against Lucatmáel took place in a public space (the forum versus an open field), both filled with witnesses, and involved the manipulation of nature and natural forces, similar to how the ten plagues of Egypt were centred on harmful natural phenomena. In the first instance, Lucatmáel challenges Patrick to make it snow. While Patrick does not say he cannot do such a thing, he nevertheless declines, stating *Ní hail dam tictain indagaid thoili Dé* ('I have no desire to go against God's will').[144] This tells us that it is likely that the episode is taking place during the time of the year that snow does not habitually fall in Ireland, for it was against God's will for snow to fall at that time. Patrick will not break the laws of nature and go against God. If this is the case, then it is probable that the duel took place in the summer or early autumn, as snow is more likely to fall during the months of November through February and can even fall in May and April. In the summer and early autumn, crops would still be in the ground and the new spring births would still be under a year old, and thus vulnerable. The snow, then, would be disastrous for the local economy and the ordinary people of Ireland, who depended on farming for their livelihood, particularly as Lucatmáel was unable to dispel his own magic and banish the snow for a period of twenty-four hours. Such a freeze would surely have damaged any crops in the ground, and the height of the snow would have buried the grass and perhaps even the younger

[142] See Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye,* pp. 18–23 for her analysis of this tale.
[143] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 54–5.
[144] Ibid.

livestock born the previous spring, thus further damaging the future prospects of the ordinary people who lived under Lóegaire's rule. It was left to Patrick to banish the snow, and he does this once Lucatmáel confirms that he is unable to do so, by blessing the plain (*Robennach Patraic amag uada focethoira arda*, 'Patrick blessed the plain throughout its four quarters').[145] This happens *Is deniu rad [...] la brethir Patraic* ('Quicker than speech, at Patrick's word').[146]

The next competition between Patrick and Lucatmáel invoked two of the elements, fire and water, when Lóegaire challenged them to place their respective holy books into water first and then a fire. This time, it was Lucatmáel who refused to do so, claiming that the God Patrick was dedicated to was a God of water and fire. He deduced this from the fact that Patrick used water to baptise, or dedicate, adherents to God, and presumably from the ardent flames typically associated with the Holy Spirit, not to mention an earlier episode of Patrick lighting a fire at Easter, although this is not stated in the text.[147] Lucatmáel also referred to the first challenge as *iudicium aquae* ('an ordeal by water'), like the human trial by water that would become almost stereotypically associated with witchcraft at a later period. The trial by water from the *Tripartite Life* functioned with similar intentions, with the idea being that God would intervene to change the natural behaviour of the water by saving the books from being destroyed. The flames were also expected to function against their nature and not burn the books, but again Lucatmáel refused to do this as he had no confidence in his god(dess)'s ability to manipulate the elements. Indeed, when a trial by fire does occur later in the episode, Lucatmáel attempts to manipulate events himself in order to try to secure a victory over the Christian God.

---

[145] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 54–5.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

The trial by fire motif shares an important aspect with a part of the story of Moses whereby God manipulated the nature of fire, leaving objects engulfed with flames but ultimately unburned. Exodus 3:2 gives us the detail of the burning bush from which God spoke, with the bush remaining untouched by the fire that surrounded it. In the *Tripartite Life,* Patrick and Lucatmáel build a house and divide it in two, with the druid remaining on one side wearing the raiment of a cleric while a cleric sat in the other side wearing a druid's robe. The house is then set on fire, and the holy men would trust their respective deities to save their representatives. Once more, Lucatmáel is depicted as being less than confident in his god(dess)'s power, and secretly gives instructions that the Christian side be made *crín* ('dry') and thus more likely to burn, while the druid's side was to be made *úr* ('fresh').[148] In its substantival use, *úr* translates to 'the fresh or green part of a tree', which throws off a lot of smoke but does not burn.[149] This may be a more accurate way to translate it in this story, as the house is being built from scratch, and by building it with fresher material on the druidic side, the effect Lucatmáel wanted could be achieved. However, as with the burning bush, God intervenes and changes the intrinsic nature of the fire. The *úr* side of the building burns, killing Lucatmáel while preserving the priestly garb he wears. On the *crín* side, however, the only casualty is the druid's robe, which is reduced to ashes around the nominated cleric without burning him at all.

A surface reading of these episodes certainly underlines the main points that the authors wanted to express: that the magic of the non-Christian was inferior and limited while the miracles worked through the power of God were by far the stronger, and thus the Faith and benefits from it were superior to the competing religious traditions. Not only are Patrick, Moses and Aaron more compassionate and useful to the ordinary people of whom they acted

---

148 eDIL s.v. 2 úr or dil.ie/43210.
149 eDIL s.v. 3 úr or dil.ie/43211.

as representatives, but the heathen kings and their magic users were actively harmful to their own people. Furthermore, while the Egyptian magicians recognised that the power Moses and Aaron wielded was far stronger than theirs, they did not use their influence on Pharaoh even though the plagues were actively destroying the livelihoods of the people, the local economy, and even the basic family unit as the power of Moses's plagues built up to the point where they culminated in the deaths of the first-born sons of Egyptians, a tragedy that struck the ordinary Egyptian people along with their king.

The hubris of the Irish druids similarly saw great snows landing in Ireland during a time of the year when people would not be prepared for it, disrupting the farming season and threatening them in the same way the Egyptians had to suffer. Not only was the power from God the stronger of the two competing systems, but ultimately the heathen magic users posed the greater threat to both their own people and those of God's followers they disliked so much. In the *Tripartite Life*, we are told that the druids had prophesised the coming of Patrick, warning that *nólafedh na rígu ocus na flatha asa rígu ocus nocho scerad na huili arrachta nanídal, ocus nofeidligfed ambéscna ticfed ann tre bithu betha isinn hEirind* ('he would cast the kings and the lords out of their realm, and would destroy all the images of the idols, and that the usage which would come there would abide in Ireland for ever and ever').[150] In the Irish case, then, we can surmise that the druids' reluctance to admit that Christianity and Patrick were stronger than the native tradition was due to the druids not wanting to lose their status and the influence they had through their roles as druids. It was simple human selfishness that saw them actively hurting their own people in an attempt to best Patrick.

There are, however, some differences in the types of miracles Patrick and Moses were producing. Although both are depicted as channelling the power of God, the power Moses

[150] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 32–5.

channelled is ultimately far more destructive than that of Patrick. While the ten plagues hit at the economy of the local populace, destroying their water source, crops, livestock and families and reducing their ability to provide for themselves, in the Patrick stories it is the druid Lucatmáel who disrupts nature in a destructive manner by calling the fall of heavy snow and, later, a prolonged darkness that he similarly cannot dispel for twenty-four hours. The snow and darkness would have meant that the economy was hindered for the local people, many of whom were portrayed as still belonging to the older, non-Christian, system of faith. The ordinary Egyptians who were affected the most by the ten plagues recounted in the biblical narrative are also portrayed as belonging to their native system of faith. However, in the Irish story the miracles Patrick enacted worked for the benefit of all members of the community, regardless of their faith, showing that Patrick had a deeper empathy and willingness to serve the people around him, regardless of their personal faith, than Moses. It also suggests that, while God was destructive to the Egyptians, He too was more empathetic towards the Irish.

The Mary of the Gaels:

Women and Magic in Irish Textual Tradition

It would be remiss not to mention aspects regarding gender and magic at this point. While much study has been devoted to the relationship between magic and gender, the bulk of such scholarship tends to focus on the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, particularly the witch trials that took place throughout Europe and the 'New World' of the Americas. For the medieval period, however, the majority of evidence, including in Ireland, is textual in nature and produced by men who were educated through the Church. As such, the written record reflects their interests rather than the whole gamut of society.

Where we expect to see women in the historical record is in regard to childbirth and female help. There are, of course, midwives during this period, as can be evidenced by the fact that titles exist to describe women who acted in this capacity.[151] There is also an Irish version of the *Trotula*, a collection of three Latin tracts produced in the latter part of the medieval period which are concerned with 'the diseases, medical problems, and cosmetics of women', popularly attributed to a medieval female physician called Trota or Trotula.[152]

Unfortunately, regarding women as physicians, or even as midwives where we would expect them to dominate, the textual evidence is largely silent. As Rider has noted, such textual evidence is largely produced by men, and all evidence and information they give is seen through their eyes.[153] We must also remember that the Church, during this early stage, when many of the 'traditional' practices of today were not yet agreed on, was not the monolith that it would become. Although these texts were produced by those who had at least some clerical education, it is clear that there are variations in interests and concerns from

[151] For example: *an bhean chuidghe* [eDIL s.v. cuitiugad or dil.ie/13743]; *bean on deabhaidh* [eDIL s.v. deuith or dil.ie/14851]; *ben frithailti* [eDIL s.v. fritháilem or dil.ie/24418]; and *mná tuismighe* [eDIL s.v. tuismigid or dil.ie/42420].
[152] Benton, 'Trotula', p. 32. See also Green (ed. and trans.), *Trotula.*
[153] Rider, 'Gender and Magic', p. 345.

country to country, region to region, and even between individuals. For example, the manuscript used here as a case study for the discussion of medicine and charms in Chapter 3, NLI MS G 11, appears to have been the handbook of a working medical practitioner, and as such it is not surprising to find obstetrical charms and remedies in it, particularly those that relate to menstrual regulation. After all, a healthy menstrual cycle means a healthy chance at procreation, and physicians as early as Galen had recognised the importance of healthy menstrual cycles both for real things such as childbirth, and for not-real things, like 'purgation'.[154]

Magic relating to love and sex is also seen as gendered female in some scholarship. However, as mentioned above, and as will be seen in Chapter 5, this gendered dimension may not have existed in the medieval period in Ireland. Certainly, women using magic to cause impotency was a concern for our medieval writers, and the narrative text *Serglige Con Culainn* may reflect this concern.[155] As Rider argues, however, 'it is difficult to write about certain forms of magic as women's magic, because most of the surviving sources were written by men'.[156] Thus, concerns surrounding impotency caused by female magic users may reflect a widespread tradition of such practices, 'although even here accusations may reflect male insecurities and fears of what an angry former girlfriend might do to them rather than the realities of practice.'[157]

[154] Van de Wall, '2000 Years of Menstrual Regulation', p. 186.
[155] See this thesis, pp. 214–8.
[156] Rider, 'Gender and Magic', p. 347.
[157] Ibid.

BRIGIT OF KILDARE

The premier Irish female saint, Brigit, is also depicted as working miracles and, like Patrick and Moses with their use of herbalism, she was not above using popular magic as long as it was a Christian version.[158] Brigit also spent a significant amount of time immersed in a society that had a native, non-Christian religion with an emphasis on magic. While Moses was raised as an Egyptian noble and was, presumably, exposed to that religious system, both Patrick and Brigit were depicted as being enslaved to druids in Ireland during their youths. While Patrick's druid master preferred to burn himself alive along with his treasure,[159] the druid Maithgin recognised Brigit's true nature before she was born and prophesised her importance to Ireland and Christianity, something that is not noticed by any of the non-magic users around her.[160] The ability to recognise the child's greatness was not limited to the pagan druid either, as the Bishop Mél also saw it at once and similarly pronounced a prophesy about her future significance.[161] Clearly, the author of this tale believed that such holy men had the ability to both see beneath the surface of a person to unveil their true nature, and have the eloquence to vocalise it in a prophetic way while revealing truths about the future.

Other Irish narratives reflect this prophetic ability in druids too. For example, the tale *Echtra mac nEchach*, which relates the birth and youth of Níall Noigíallach, shares the literary convention of a respected and educated man recognising the greatness hidden in a baby. However, it may also be the case that *Echtra mac nEchach* borrowed from the earlier Lives of Brigit, particularly in sections regarding her childhood. While *Echtra mac nEchach* has been dated to the eleventh century due to its references to the kings Máelsechlainn mac Domnaill and Brian Bórama, the earliest extant copy of Brigit's life has been dated to the

[158] Brigit is also portrayed as using another form of magic, love magic. See this thesis, pp. 200–3.
[159] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 38–9.
[160] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Lives of the Saints,* pp. 35 and 183.
[161] Ibid.

eighth century, with the contents of its first forty-one sections having an earlier date and having been 'shown to be drawing heavily upon Ailerán's lost mid-seventh-century Latin life.'[162]

Echtra mac nEchach describes Niall as the son of a union between an enslaved woman and a royal father who was removed from his father's house due to the jealousy of the king's legitimate wife, Mongfind. The boy eventually returns to his father's house as an adult and frees his mother from slavery, just as Brigit did.[163] The *Echtra* describes how, when Niall was first born, his mother abandoned him on the green outside of Tara due to her fear of Mongfind. It was there that Niall was discovered by Torna, a man described as *éices*, which could mean 'scholar', 'learned man' or 'sage' and was often used as an equivalent of *fili*.[164]It was Torna who identified the potential for greatness the baby had, pronouncing a prophecy on the spot:

> *Mochean aigidan, bíd he Niall Noegiallach,*
>
> *rusfith ria re tuir.*
>
> *morfaiter maigi, srainfiter geill, firfiter catha*
>
> *taebfhota Temrach, dunadach Femin Muigi, costadach Maenmaigi.*
>
> *airmitnech Alman, airsid Lifi, gluinfind Codail.*
>
> *secht mhliadna fichet fallamnaigis hErenn, ⁊ bid uad hErenn co brath.*

> Welcome, the little guest; he will be Niall of the Nine Hostages,
>
> In his time he will redden a multitude.
>
> Plains will be greatened: hostages will be overthrown: battles will be fought.

[162] McCone, *Pagan Past,* p. 182.
[163] Ibid.
[164] eDIL s.v. éices or dil.ie/19717

> Longside of Tara, host-leader of Magh Femin, custodian of Maen-magh
>
> Revered one of Almain, veteran of Liffey, white-knee of Codai (?).
>
> Seven-and-twenty years he rules Erin, and Erin will be from him for ever.[165]

The eleventh-century writer of the *Echtra* clearly saw fit to portray a *fili* in the same role as that occupied by the druid in hagiographical literature. The *filid,* of course, were highly educated and, in the eyes of the author at least, able to fill the role envisioned by the earlier writers as being filled by druids.

As with other saints, Brigit herself was depicted as being able to work miracles. These have been discussed by Clare Stancliffe, although she limited her analysis to the Life ascribed to Cogitosus, the *Bethu Brigte* and §1–45 of the *Vita Prima*, as her study focused on texts produced in the seventh century. However, Stancliffe has deduced that less than half of Brigit's miracles see her calling on God before they are performed.[166] Further, when compared to seventh-century hagiographic texts produced for the other primary saints of Ireland, Patrick and Columba, Brigit's miracles are far more focused on helping people.[167] Indeed, the majority of Brigit's miracles are focused on the provision of food or livestock to those in need, and on healing people inflicted with illness or disease.[168]

The fact that Brigit does not appeal to God before the bulk of her miracles, when considered alongside the focus on provision and healing in those early texts, has led some scholars to suggest that Brigit could be an example of an euhemerised pagan goddess who has been synchronised into the developing Christian faith and its early textual narratives. This analysis has led to tensions among scholars regarding the reality of the historical Brigit and prompted Séamas Ó Catháin to propose that she be described using the term 'holy woman',

[165] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Echtra mac nEchach,* pp. 192–3.
[166] Maney, 'When Brigit Met Patrick', p. 177, citing Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories'', pp. 87–115.
[167] Maney, 'When Brigit Met Patrick', p. 177.
[168] Ibid., p. 178.

as this conveys her two most distinguishing features of femaleness and holiness, regardless of whether she was a real person or a goddess recast as a saint, without favouring one interpretation over the other.[169]

From the evidence given in the hagiographical tales, there is very little indication that the authors were attempting to synchronise a pagan goddess with a Christian saint. Brigit's miracles may have taken a different form than Patrick's and Columba's, but they still fit within her gender role as a woman in medieval Ireland. Although she was not a married woman with a family, she was still a woman, and it is natural that the authors, who were writing about saints for a number of reasons, should depict her as such. While it was not uncommon for Lives to be produced for reasons of propaganda or to exert influence on land claims or supremacy, saints were also held up as examples of true Christians, and as a woman Brigit seems to have represented a role model for other Christian women. She is steadfast in her faith and performs duties specific to her gender. While the term 'holy woman' may suitably convey her femininity and holiness without favouring a specific side of the debate, to dismiss her as a real person is simply denigrating to the women of the early Church in Ireland. That they were able to attain a high rank is demonstrable in other sources, including the Council of Kells, which decreed that the abbess of Kildare would 'no longer take precedence over the bishops in public assemblies.'[170] There is no reason to believe that Brigit was unable to attain a similarly high rank.

Indeed, Stancliffe's study of miracles in the early hagiographical material showed that Irish authors followed a different trend with saints' Lives than their counterparts in continental Europe. Hagiography developed more fully as a genre in the Greco-Roman world, during the second half of the fourth century.[171] As mentioned above, Stancliffe's study was

---

[169] Cusack, 'Brigid: Goddess, Saint, "Holy Woman"', p. 75, citing Ó Catháin, 'The Festival of Brigit the Holy Woman', pp. 231–60.
[170] Cusack, 'Brigid: Goddess, Saint, "Holy Woman"' p. 87.
[171] Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories', p. 87.

confined to the earliest extant examples we have in the Irish tradition, which can be dated to the seventh century: Muirchú's *Life* of Patrick, Cogitosus's *Life* of Brigit, and Adamnán's *Life* of Columba, along with the first forty-five chapters of the Latin *Life* of Brigit, which has been identified as part of an earlier *Life* that Stancliffe believes was also produced during the same time period. Those who wrote the *Lives* were very aware of the continental tradition, and thus these *Lives* were placed within that tradition. However, the authors did not copy this tradition exactly, and adapted the genre to suit their own culture, society, and even agenda. For example, while it was common for hagiographies to recount miracle stories attributed to the subject of the *Life,* the types of miracles recorded in the earliest Irish examples differ, with a greater volume based on magical 'folklore' style of miracles. As such, there are fewer practical miracles such as healing and exorcisms compared to nature miracles, prophetic visions, and angelic communication or visitations. Devils and demons also feature less in the Irish tradition, while blessings and curses against human enemies, driven by mundane motivations such as greed or religious hatred, abound.[172]

That is not to say that the miracles featured in Irish hagiography were unique: far from it. For example, Rufus's Latin translation of *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* contains a similar trial by fire to that attributed to Patrick, wherein a pagan magic user and a Christian enter a building that was set ablaze, as discussed above.[173] Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* contains an account of a bear herding a holy man's sheep, similar to how Cogitosus describes a boar herding Brigit's sheep, as well as a river changing its course through the power of prayer, again reproduced in Cogitosus.[174] Indeed, such miracles regarding animals changing their nature to serve holy people, along with illusions, angelic visitations and prophesies, not to mention provision miracles that see multitudes fed, and even curses, are all contained in

[172] Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories', p. 90.
[173] See this chapter, p. 58. This episode also appears in Muirchú's earlier *Life* of Patrick.
[174] Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories', p. 91.

the Bible. However, while these motifs feature in religious storytelling more generally, Stancliffe argues that 'the motifs found in fifty continental *Lives,* scattered over two centuries, are nearly all to be found in the seventh-century *Lives* of three Irish saints'.[175] This indicates that, although Ireland may have been late to the hagiography game compared to contemporary European neighbours, they were keen to use as many motifs and Biblical references as they could in their stories, thus creating a very ambitious early tradition.

It must be remembered that the cultural context in which Irish hagiography was produced was very different to the Greco-Roman culture in which iut was first developed. These cultures, which were heavily based on philosophy and law respectively, further influenced continental countries, like Italy and France, which had formed a large part of the Roman Empire. Stancliffe has proposed that Ireland was more based on the druidic religion, which was more open to magic, nature, and the fantastic, creating a completely different baseline for hagiography to develop.[176] This, she has argued, influenced the types of miracles the seventh-century hagiographers used to promote their subjects. This would account for how Irish hagiography shows 'continuity within an established genre, but change within it'.[177] However, as these tales were written after the introduction of Christianity to Ireland, there is no way to determine exactly what was influenced by contemporary culture or by the Bible. For example, cursing became known as a particularly Irish trait, with Gerald of Wales describing Irish clerics as particularly vindictive.[178] Plummer has argued that the depiction of Irish saints as being ready and willing to curse was due to the authors attributing the characteristics of older, native stories regarding druids to the new heroes, saints, but the clerics who wrote these *Lives* were able to cite Biblical examples and Patristic authorities to

[175] Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories', p. 89.
[176] Ibid., p. 92.
[177] Ibid., pp. 88–9.
[178] Bitel, 'Tools for Cursing', p. 5. See also Kudenko, 'In Defense of Irish Saints'.

justify saints acting this way.[179] There is simply no way to know how much was influenced by native storytelling traditions.

Most European hagiography represents bishops of the early Church, such as Patrick, focusing on pastoral issues and caring for their flocks. However, in Ireland, Patrick, the Bishop and Apostle of the island, is typically seen as engaging in actions and miracles that are more aggressive and which ultimately vindicate him and Christianity, and by extension God, over non-Christian kings and magic users. Indeed, Stancliffe has deduced that almost fifteen percent of Patrick's miracles in Muirchú's *Life* are based on vindication, versus only nine percent that helped people. This is in stark contrast to Cogitosus's contemporary *Life* of Brigit, where sixty-six percent of her miracles focus on helping people and none focus on vindication.[180] This, too, differs from continental female hagiography, which typically has a higher percentage of angelic visitations, prophetic visions and encounters with demons. While Brigit was also shown communicating with the divine, only twenty-four percent of her miracles include such things, while no demons visited her and none of her miracles were focused on punishing her enemies. And although Cogitosus tells us that people would visit Brigit to seek healing from her, this is mentioned as an aside, and the only extraordinary 'healing' miracle she was depicted as engaging in was helping to provide a divine abortion.[181]

Cogitosus attributes thirty-two miracles to Brigit, with one taking place outside of her presence and one taking place after her death. Of the thirty she performed herself, five include the detail that they came about after her praying directly to God and asking for his intercession. Twenty-one are depicted as occurring spontaneously or simply coming from within herself. This curious detail, whereby supernatural power comes from within the practitioner rather than being channelled through them from an outside or divine source, is

[179] Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories', p. 92.
[180] Ibid., pp. 95–6.
[181] Connolly and Picard (trans.), 'Content and Value', p. 16.

reminiscent of the 'I' statements identified by Stifter as being characteristic of the Old Irish charms, which are largely contemporary with Cogitosus's *Life.* Indeed, even the two miracles she was not present for bypass God and draw power directly from Brigit herself. In the first, during her lifetime, a group of men are unable to bring a heavy millstone from the top of a mountain down to her church in Kildare. They call on Brigit to guide it down safely, and throw it off a cliff, whereupon it lands safely at the bottom, still intact.[182] In the second, which takes place after her death, a builder who is tasked with renovating the church miscalculated the door size, which leads to the door warping. He then spends a night praying directly to God over Brigit's tomb, but Cogitosus tells us that it was the saint rather than God who fixed the door overnight.[183] The remaining six miracles are ambiguous to an extent, in that Brigit does not pray to God before enacting them, but instead gives her blessing and brings them about that way. However, as the ability to bless comes from God, in this way one could argue that she is channelling His power through her body, which was surely what Cogitosus intended to invoke.

[182] Connolly and Picard (trans.), 'Content and Value', pp. 24–5.
[183] Ibid., pp. 25–6.

Conclusion

Hagiographical literature served as a mirror reflecting an idealised view of medieval Irish society while also acting as a vehicle for informing and upholding societal norms. The medieval Irish legal corpus also presented an aspirational vision of societal structure and conduct, shaping the expectations and obligations of individuals at all levels of society. Narrative tales, including hagiography, offered insights into the complexities of society while simultaneously reinforcing normative behaviour. The reinterpretation of non-Christian elements, such as daimons transforming into malevolent demons, exemplifies the synthesis of different belief systems within the framework of Christianity. The concern over the use of magic, whether for healing or other purposes, led to a theological struggle within the Church to demarcate the boundaries between divinely sanctioned practices and demonic sorcery. The tension between popular magic, often associated with healing and blessings, and learned traditions like astrology and divination underscores the efforts of medieval scholars to reconcile these seemingly divergent practices. In this way, the papal inquisitors of the later Middle Ages, influenced by their understanding of learned magic, laid the groundwork for subsequent Early Modern inquisitorial activities and witch trials.

Hagiography, a literary genre dedicated to the lives of saints, served a dual purpose of commemorating the saint and promoting Christian ideals, and the saints themselves were used as a way of presenting exemplary Christian behaviour to which ordinary people could aspire. These narratives were not only religiously significant but also wielded political influence, as seen in Tírechán's *Collectanea*, which aimed to legitimise claims of specific church territories. The parallels drawn between figures like Patrick and Moses in hagiographical accounts reveal the use of literary devices to emphasise the saintly qualities of these individuals. The confrontation between holy figures and native magicians is a recurring theme, with Patrick depicted as possessing magical abilities surpassing those of non-Christian

magicians and even those of Moses and Aaron from the biblical narratives on which such episodes were based.

Patrick's compassion and belief in his ministry saw him fighting for ordinary Irish people against the destructive power of their own beliefs. His confidence in the people he intended to save moves him further away from the depiction of Moses in the Bible, regardless of how the author of the *Tripartite Life* tried to depict Patrick as the Irish Moses. While Moses initially represented all of the enslaved Hebrews, following the incident with the golden calf in Exodus 32, he ultimately turned on many of them. Verses 7–14 saw Moses pleading with God not to kill the Hebrews, but by verses 26–28 Moses has a change of heart and commands the Levites to slay a good number of his charges, leaving 'about three and twenty thousand' dead.[184] Patrick, however, demonstrated a number of times that he was concerned with saving as many Irish people as possible, even though they had yet to fully Christianise at the time. Thus, the power and influence Patrick wielded was presented in Irish hagiography as being superior to Moses's. As the Irish druids were shown to be capable of dispelling their own magic, albeit after a significant period of time has passed, they too were presented as stronger than their Egyptian counterparts, who could not dispel any magic, even their own.

The case of Brigit further highlights the intersection of Christianity with native traditions. Brigit's miracles, often focused on providing aid to people in need, demonstrate a pragmatic and compassionate approach that aligns with her gender role in medieval Irish society. The enigmatic nature of her miracles, the potential pagan origins suggested by some scholars, and the cultural context of medieval Ireland contribute to a complex narrative that defies easy categorisation. The depiction of Brigit in hagiographical texts reveals intriguing aspects of her character and origin. The observation that the majority of Brigit's miracles lack

[184] Exodus 32: 28.

an explicit invocation of God is similar to how contemporary early charm texts invoked healing magic.

In essence, the multifaceted relationship between hagiographical texts and societal norms during the medieval period in Ireland showcases a dynamic process of cultural negotiation and synthesis. The evolution of magical concepts, the strategic use of hagiography for both religious and political ends, and the integration of native practices into Christianity collectively contribute to a rich tapestry of historical and cultural understanding. This complex interplay underscores the importance of analysing medieval literature as an invaluable window into the beliefs, norms, and societal structures of the time. Further, in regard to the type of miracles undertaken by Patrick and Brigit, we can see that Irish saints were perceived as having a desire to work for the community around them, regardless of the community's status, or lack thereof, as non-Christians. This desire to create a healthy community, or to restore health and thus reinforce the desired state of normal, is reflected in other aspects of magic, as will be shown in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3: Magic, Medicine and Healing in Medieval Ireland

This chapter presents the second case study of magic in medieval Ireland, which is the evidence provided by charms and other types of healing texts. Attention is paid to how they fit into prevailing medical theory and charming traditions from other European countries. Societies and cultures throughout history have had traditional ways of healing, including those referred to as 'Celtic'. While the pre-Christian people of Ireland left no written evidence of their medical craft, ample archaeological evidence exists of healing cults, particularly those found in relation to holy wells and other sites of devotion. The physical need for water no doubt helped create the conditions of a hydrolatry aspect to early sacral and settlement sites, and the first people to settle on the island in the Mesolithic period were no different.[185] Indeed, Neolithic depositions have been found in bogs and rivers, as well as other wetlands along Ireland's coasts, and Iron Age votive offerings have been uncovered in holy wells such as St Anne's Well in Randlestown, Co. Meath.[186]

It is believed that many of these early sites became associated with later Christian saints and settlements through the determined workings of the early Church. Where pre-Christian sacred sites already existed, they passed into the hands of the Church in an attempt to supplant the earlier belief system with the newer Christian faith in what appears, from this long remove, to have been a fairly seamless transition. Indeed, it has been argued that the 'early Christian missionaries taught where people already worshipped and folded pagan places of pilgrimage, including holy wells and trees, into the new faith.'[187] Indeed, Patrick is shown as doing exactly this twice in the *Tripartite Life.* In one episode, the saint goes to the

---

[185] Ray, 'Paying the Rounds', p. 416.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.

well of Findmag, where *Atrubad fri Patraic condonóraigtís ingeinti intopur amal dea* ('They told Patrick that the heathens honoured the well as if it were a god.').[188] Patrick commands them to lift the flagstone said to be the grave marker of *alaili fáith marb* ('a certain dead prophet') and proves to them that the grave did not exist, and that the well did not deserve to be known as *rex aquaram* ('the king of waters').[189] In another episode, on finding the daughters of Loegaire beside a well they visited often, the girls are confused by the appearance of the clerics, initially thinking them to be *fir síthe no fantaistsi* ('men of the *side* or spectres') due to their proximity to the well, indicating that it was a pagan site.[190] In this episode, the two girls are taught about God and choose to take the veil in service to him. It ends with their deaths and with Patrick building a church on top of their grave, which lay beside the well; Maney has described this as a 'foundation sacrifice reminiscent of the British Bronze and Iron Ages.'[191] Wycherley, however, interpreted this act as a way for the church to incorporate ancestral land into the church's holdings.[192] As Armagh was Patrick's church, this may suggest that such an act was politically motivated and a way to solidify Armagh's claim to churches outside of its own landholdings.

In this way, sacred spaces remained sacred and central to the local populace, with the supernatural element of a local god or goddess changed to that of a saint or church figure, still capable of hearing the words of the pilgrims who worshipped there, as well as interceding on their behalf to a new higher power. So successful was this transplanting of faiths that sites such as the aforementioned St Anne's Well are still in use today in a Christian context.[193]

---

[188] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 122–3.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid., pp. 100–1.
[191] Maney, 'When Brigit Met Patrick', p. 181.
[192] Wycherley, *The Cult of Relics,* p. 82.
[193] See also Hayden, 'From "The King of the Waters"', for a fuller exploration as to how water was frequently used in the Irish medical tradition.

The concept of a well worshipped as a god by druids and pagans also appears in the *Life of Columba* attributed to Adamnán.[194] The episode states that the druids of the Picts had access to a well that could cause injuries and chronic weakness to those who bathed in or drank from it. Unlike the well in Findmag, Adamnán made it clear that the Pictish well possessed the negative attributes that had been ascribed to it, but only because it had been possessed by demons rather than naturally being endowed with this power. Once Columba had blessed the water and bathed in it, the well took on healing properties instead. However, Adamnán does not tell us if Columba or one of his followers raised a church on the site or if the well remained the focus of pagan worship. The purpose of the site, to cause harm to people, had been utterly removed and its function inverted, if not repurposed, through clerical intervention.

Of course, the repurposing of older sacred sites was not limited to Ireland, but was 'a common (though not universal) missionary practice in the early Middle Ages.'[195] Indeed, Pope Gregory the Great's letter to Abbot Mellitus (c. 601) expresses his vision of this practice in very clear terms, stating:

> *Videlicet quia fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant, sed ipsa quae in eis sunt idola destruantur. Aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur, altaria construantur, reliquiae ponantur, quia si fana eadem bene constructa sunt, necesse est ut a cultu daemonum in obsequium veri Dei debeant commutari, ut dum gens ipsa eadem fana non videt destrui, de corde errorem deponat, et, Deum verum cognoscens ac adorans, ad loca quae consuevit familiarius concurrat.*

[194] See Anderson and Anderson (ed. and trans.), *Adamnan's Life of Columba*.
[195] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* p. 57.

> 'The temples of idols in that nation [Anglo-Saxon Britain] should not be destroyed, but that the idols themselves that are in them should be. Let blessed water be prepared, and sprinkled in these temples, and altars constructed, and relics deposited, since, if these same temples are well built, it is needful that they should be transferred from the worship of idols to the service of the true God; that, when the people themselves see that these temples are not destroyed, they may put away error from their heart, and, knowing and adoring the true God, may have recourse with the more familiarity to the places they have been accustomed to.'[196]

Rather than destroying pagan places of worship, some places that were judged to be well–built and suitable for conversion could be converted into Christian places of worship instead, with the intent that the location and structure would be familiar enough to the local populace that they would feel comfortable enough to return to them. This time, however, the pagan iconography would have been replaced with Christian, and the holy men whose help or comfort they sought would be likewise Christian. It is important to note that this was not a blanket policy, and the conditions that decided whether or not a pre-existing pagan site was suitable for conversion are not known. Such conditions could be related to the size of the site in question, or perhaps who or what had been worshipped there, or even that it was simply left to the discretion of the local clergy. Nor was this the only way of dealing with existing pagan foci. In an earlier letter to King Æthelberht of Wessex, Gregory had advised in that instance to destroy the pagan sites in question.[197]

Gregory also knew that conversion would not be a fast and easy process, noting that *Nam duris mentibus simul omnia abscidere impossibile esse non dubium est,*

[196] Schaff (ed.), *Early Church Fathers,* p. 150.
[197] Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine', p. 11.

quia is qui locum summum ascendere nititur necesse est ut gradibus vel passibus, non autem saltibus elevetur ('it is undoubtedly impossible to cut away everything at once from hard hearts, since one who strives to ascend to the highest place must needs rise by steps or paces, and not by leaps.')[198] In a similar way, he also suggested that festivals that included such pagan devices as animal sacrifice should be repurposed, writing;

> *Et quia debet his etiam hac de re aliqua sollemnitas immutari, ut die dedicationis vel natalitiis sanctorum martyrum, quorum illic reliquiae ponuntur, tabernacula sibi circa easdem ecclesias quae ex fanis commutatae sunt de ramis arborum faciant, et religiosis conviviis sollemnitatem celebrent. Nec diabolo jam animalia immolent, sed ad laudem Dei in esum suum animalia occidant, et donatori omnium de satietate sua gratias referant, ut dum eis aliqua exterius gaudia reservantur, ad interiora gaudia consentire facilius valeant.*

> 'since they are wont to kill many oxen in sacrifice to demons, they should have also some solemnity of this kind in a changed form, so that on the day of dedication, or on the anniversaries of the holy martyrs whose relics are deposited there, they may make for themselves tents of the branches of trees around these temples that have been changed into churches, and celebrate the solemnity with religious feasts. Nor let them any longer sacrifice animals to the devil, but slay animals to the praise of God for their own eating, and return thanks to the Giver of all for their fulness, so that, while some joys are reserved to them outwardly, they may be able the more easily to incline their minds to inward joys.'[199]

[198] Schaff (ed.), *Early Church Fathers,* p. 150.
[199] Ibid.

Thus, rather than dedicating the sacrifice to a pagan god, by moving the feast day to that of a saint or martyr connected with the church, or by appropriating a pagan festival by assigning a saint to it, as with St Brigit of Kildare and the native festival of Imbolc, those who wished to participate could still do so, simply in a different context and with a changed form. Now, instead of sacrificing an animal to a pagan deity, the animal would be killed to provide for a community feast held in honour of a Christian figure.

Similar to how some pagan spaces were consecrated by the Christian church and drawn into the new faith, so too were some native, even pagan practices, such as the use of charms in native traditions of healing. Kieckhefer has suggested that missionaries and other travelling churchmen would make note of the magical charms they encountered, primarily so that others would know what to expect should they travel to the same area, but also so that 'perhaps they would devise Christianised versions of the same formulas.'[200] In this way, for example, we can see the very pagan features of the second Merseburg Charm, which was written in Old High German and recorded in a manuscript from the ninth century, being either replaced, as Wodan and Phol were, or removed entirely, as were the other characters, while the charm's structure and purpose was retained:

Phol ende uuodan uuorun zi holza.
Du uuart demo balderes uolon sin uuoz birenkit. thu
biguol en sinhtgunt, sunna era suister,
thu biguol en friia, uolla era suister,
thu biguol en uuodan, so he uuola conda: sose
benrenki sose bluotrenki sose lidirenki ben zi
bena, bluot zi bluoda,
lid zi geliden, sose gelimida sin.

Phol and Wodan rode into the woods.
Then the lord's [i.e., Phol's] horse sprained its foot. then
Sinhtgunt charmed it, as did Sunna, her sister, then Friia

200 Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* p. 57.

charmed it, as did Volla, her sister,

then Wodan charmed it, as he was well able to do:

be it bone sprain, be it blood sprain, be it limb sprain,

bone to bone, blood to blood, limb to limb,

thus be they joined together.[201]

Compare, then, to a later Scottish version recorded by William Chambers in *Fireside Stories of Scotland* in 1846:

Our Lord rade, his foal's foot slade;

Down he lighted, his foal's foot righted.

Bone to bone, sinew to sinew,

Blood to blood, flesh to flesh:

Heal in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.[202]

Although the section of the text that names Friia, Volla and Wodan's charming efforts has been removed, the incantation 'bone to bone, etc.', has been retained, and Christian elements have been added. This charm was also known in Ireland and makes an appearance in the Middle Irish tale *Cath Maige Tuired*.[203] It was used by Míach, son of the legendary physician Dían Cecht and a physician in his own right, as part of his healing of Nuada of the Silver Hand. The words of power, *Atrérach-sim don láim 7*

[201] Fuller, 'Pagan Charms', p. 162. The charms themselves can be found in the manuscript Cod. 136 f.85a. It must also be noted that the Phol of this charm could already be a reference to Saint Paul.
[202] Grendon, 'Anglo-Saxon Charms', p. 149.
[203] Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired,* based on the copy in London, British Library MS Harley 5280. Although the text is dated by its language to the Middle Irish period, it is believed to have been the work of a later redactor who was drawing on material from an earlier period. See Murphy, 'Notes on *Cath Maige Tuired*', for more information regarding the text and its date.

atbert, ault fre h-alt di 7 féith fre féth ('He went to the hand and said, "joint to joint of it, and sinew to sinew"')[204] are particularly reminiscent of the more Christianised Scottish version mentioned above. Hillers has noted that this charm had 'a wide dissemination throughout the Germanic and Slavic worlds' and was 'clearly associated with Germanic, particularly North Germanic, tradition, and is strongly represented in all parts of what we might call the Viking world'.[205] This, of course, includes Scotland and Ireland, and Hillers has argued that this charm was introduced to Ireland via contact with the Viking world.[206]

By the medieval period there was an extensive corpus of written charming material, with the majority of the extant texts surviving in the over 100 manuscripts written between *ca* 1400 and 1700 that are concerned primarily with medicine. However, as seen with the version of the Merseburg charm recorded as part of *Cath Maige Tuired,* not every manuscript that contained charms was medical in nature, and charms could easily be recorded as part of a narrative text or as marginalia on a disparate page. The language of some medical texts can be dated to much earlier, such as the medico-legal texts *Bretha Déin Chécht* and *Bretha Crólige,* which can be found in the fifteenth-century codex NLI MS G 11.[207] While these texts, written in Old Irish and dated to the seventh century, were no longer in use by the time Donnchadh Ó Bolgaidhi, the scribe of G11, was working, they show that he had access to much older material dating back to several centuries earlier.[208] The medico-legal tracts do not contain much in the way medical procedures, but they do give a glimpse of some aspects concerning the medieval *líaig,*[209] or medical practitioner,

[204] Gray (ed. and trans.) *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 32–3.
[205] Hillers, 'Towards a Typology of European Narrative Charms', p. 93.
[206] Ibid., p. 94. See also Pettit, 'Miach's Healing of Núadu', for his analysis of this episode.
[207] See Binchy (ed.), '*Bretha Déin Chécht*'; and Binchy (ed.), '*Bretha Crólige*'.
[208] Ó Bolgaidhi's signature appears on p. 248b, along with a note recording the death of Domnall Caomhánach mac Murchuma, in 1476.
[209] eDIL s.v. 1 líaig or dil.ie/30125.

and the types of injuries he was expected to be able to heal, as well as information on status and medicine in medieval Ireland.[210]

We know that in medieval Europe the systems of medicine used tended to be based on older learning, with some native traditions augmented by the works of various medical authorities that arose in Antiquity. Some aspects of earlier medical systems were no doubt incompatible with Christian beliefs, but many of the authorities and their works could easily be incorporated into Christian ideology, for example Galen and Hippocrates, with Hippocratic physicians being 'easily turned to a model of Christian medical charity.'[211] The Bible itself was ambiguous with regard to medical traditions, with some figures, such as Luke the Evangelist, earning the epithet 'beloved physician', while the physicians of Mark 5.26 were condemned as expensive and ineffectual. James 5.13–15 seems to describe an early Christian healing ritual involving prayer and the anointing of the sick with oil, while Jesus himself raised the dead through prayers and miracles and healed with a touch of his clothes. Christ as physician, the *Christus medicus* metaphor, healing both body and soul, was a common analogy.[212]

As discussed in Chapter 1, there were aspects of European medical traditions that were rejected by the early Church fathers due to their proximity to prohibited magical activity. These included herb-gathering rituals, the use of ligatures and textual amulets, and talismans among other things. However, as also demonstrated in Chapter 1, some of the early authorities certainly left loopholes that allowed medical practitioners and Christians to seek help through the use of medical charms, many of which relied on words as their healing agent, or even herbs tied to a part of the body, something that Augustine had

[210] See Kelly, 'Medicine and Early Irish Law' for a discussion of medicine and its place in Ireland's legal system.
[211] Conrad *et al., The Western Medical Tradition,* p. 74.
[212] Ibid. See also Arbesmann, 'The Concept of "Christus Medicus" in St Augustine'.

counseled against on the grounds of superstition.[213] Certainly, as we will see, working medical practitioners such as the owner of NLI MS G 11 saw no reason not to include such cures in their collections.

213 See this work, Chapter 1, p. 12–13.

Early medical traditions in Europe, Ireland included, can be difficult to understand from a modern perspective, particularly in an age of scientific enquiry and modern technology, not to mention vigorously tested and highly regulated practices. Early medicine did, however, operate according to a self-contained rational system, although the logic and ideologies informing it were inherently different from ours. The majority of medical practices from early Christian Europe were informed by Classical learning and certain acknowledged authorities. These sources had immense influence and a great deal of prestige, but they were not 'medical' in the strict sense of the word as we would understand it today. For instance, one of the most enduring and influential theories of medieval medicine, mentioned above, was the idea that God had given all substances a '"medical value" … if only the correct ritual and preparation could be found to exploit them.'[214]

One of the central theories contemporary to the Middle Ages was the idea that there were four 'humors', or 'specific bodily fluids essential to the physiological functioning of the organism'.[215] *On the Nature of Man,* one of the texts of the Hippocratic corpus believed to date to the fifth-century BC, which was attributed to Polybus, presented a set of four such humours that would go on to become 'the standard set': blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile.[216] These, then, were ascribed a number of different functions and characteristics as the theory was developed by subsequent physicians and philosophers. Galen, for instance, suggested that phlegm – conceived as any colourless or whitish secretion from the body, with the exception of semen and milk – was most strongly associated with the brain, and could be sweet, salty

[214] Pollington, *Leechcraft,* p. 28.
[215] Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine,* p. 104.
[216] Ibid.

and even acidic, among other qualities; the term 'phlegmatic' subsequently came to refer to an individual who was sluggish or lazy. Bile, then, could make a person bilious, leaving him quick-tempered and aggressive, while melancholia could strike and leave a person dejected or low-spirited.[217]

On the Nature of Man also correlated the four humours with the four seasons, and described 'the hot and the cold, the dry and the wet as the four primary elements or components' that comprised such things as the human body.[218]

Moist Dry

Warm Cold

Blood	Bile
Phlegm	Black bile

Dry and cold were considered as negative attributes, in that cold was the negative of hot and dry was the negative of moisture, both of which were beneficial to health. Blood, however, being warm and moist, 'occupied a special place among the humors.'[219] 'Blood' as conceived of in this theory was not the blood that flowed through the body. This blood was theorised as being a mix of true blood, with smaller amounts of the other humours mixed in, with these others being generated when blood was manufactured.[220] Even Isidore of Seville wrote about the importance of the blood to humoural medicine, stating that health depended on balance between its own nature and the heat and moist of blood, writing, *Sanitas est integritas corporis et temperantia naturae ex calido et humido, quod est sanguis; unde et sanitas dicta est, quasi sanguinis status* ('Health is integrity of

[217] Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine,* p. 105.
[218] Lloyd, 'Hot and Cold, Dry and Wet', p. 92.
[219] Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine,* p. 105.
[220] Ibid.

the body and a balance of its nature with respect to its heat and moisture, which is its blood – hence health (*sanitas*) is so called, as if it were the condition of the blood (*sanguis*)).'[221]

According to this theory, illness occurred when the humours were out of balance and treatment was focused on restoring equilibrium. This could be done by focusing on external factors that were considered able to positively affect the humours themselves. For instance, Galen argued that fevers could be caused by overheating through exposure to the sun among other things, including eating food that had been classified as 'hot'.[222] In humoral theory, this could be combatted by using a treatment that had been classified as 'cold', such as certain other types of food and drink, including medicinal herbs. In this way, the cold of the treatment could be transferred to the heat of the illness, cooling it down and restoring its balance.

Such cures work on the principle of sympathetic transfers of power, which is also a core element of medical charms in the medieval theory, as practitioners were influenced by older authorities such as Galen. The underlying principle of this is what Frazer called the 'secret sympathy',[223] that is, 'magic' that works through a 'symbolic likeness between cause and effect'.[224] For example, a herb or a leaf shaped like a body part or internal organ can, by virtue of its shape, promote healing in the corresponding place, while using the semen or testicles of a strong or fertile animal, like a bull, can promote manliness and fertility in human males. This style of medical thinking was not specific to any one country or culture, and appears to have been a human universal way of thinking. Its growth and evolution during the medieval period was certainly influenced by earlier authorities, including the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder, which remained a

[221] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae,* IV.v.i (ed. Lindsay, I, p. 166; trans. Barney *et al, Etymologies,* p. 109).
[222] Grant, *Galen on Food and Diet,* p. 8.
[223] Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* p. 54.
[224] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* p. 13. See also this thesis, pp. 119–20.

prominent and important source throughout the medieval period.[225] Pliny's *Natural History* recorded the curative properties of animals and effluvia, and a number of these cures appear to rely on hidden, or symbolic, power, in the same vein as sympathetic magic. For example, Pliny wrote that the dirt from the rut of a wheel could heal the bite of a shrew-mouse because the effects of the bite, presumably like the mouse itself, 'will not cross a wheel-rut owing to a sort of natural torpor.'[226] Thus, the laziness of the mouse and its natural disinclination to cross wheel-ruts would transfer through the dirt to the patient.

Within later medical manuscripts, we see that some healing ingredients were chosen specifically due to their relation to the concept of sympathetic magic. For example, parts of animals that were known for a specific attribute, such as speed, strength or ferocity were often used in the hope of enacting a transfer of power to the patient. Additionally, male animals were considered preferable in some cases due to the perception that they were physically stronger, and thus gave the healing a greater potency compared to females of the same species.[227]

One of the best-known ingredients for transfers of power that has been recorded in a number of early English manuscripts is the mandrake plant.[228] Historically, the mandrake was considered as having some magically powerful properties due to its anthropomorphic shape. Indeed, it was considered to be so powerful that a legend regarding the vengeance of the mandrake grew up around it. This legend stated that whoever plucked the mandrake from the ground would be struck dead, and thus the ritual used for its gathering developed. In this ritual, one should tie a rope around the plant and

[225] Chibnall, 'Pliny's Natural History and the Middle Ages', p. 58.
[226] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* p. 22.
[227] Ibid.
[228] For example: British Library, Cotton Vitellius C. III, f.57v; British Library, Sloan MS 1975, f.49r; and British Library, Royal MS 2 B vii, f.120r each contain illustrations and instructions on how to harvest the mandrake plant correctly, as well as the legend of the mandrake plant's vengeance.

attach the other end to a dog. Using food to lure the dog forward, it was thought that the animal would 'pick' the mandrake and thus suffer the vengeance. So prolific was this legend that, in medieval illustrations from Anglo- Saxon and Latin Herbals, the mandrake and the dog are ubiquitous.[229] While the shape of the root itself was the main draw for sympathetic magic, even in the gathering ritual we see a transferal of power: the dog, who probably has very little interest in the healing properties of the mandrake, becomes a stand-in for the healer, and therefore the power of the mandrake's vengeance strikes the dog down as he suffers its wrath.

While the mandrake was not a central feature of the Irish medical tradition, sympathetic transfers of power certainly were, and a good example can be found in a large section of text in Dublin, NLI MS G11 (p. 393a20–b11), which is transcribed and translated in full in the Appendix.[230] The section in question consists of several short remedies for healing the flow of blood. One such cure states that the patient should sleep with the heart or eye of a robin redbreast under their pillow to help staunch blood flow, with the underlying logic probably relating to the redness of the bird's distinctive chest and the removal of the heart, with the ceasing of the bird's heartbeat and blood flow transferring to the patient's wound. I have no suggestion as to why the eye would be a good substitute for the heart, as I am aware of no folklore or myth that connects the eyes of a bird, particularly a robin, to blood flow.

These types of sympathetic transferals of power can be found in all types of charming traditions. Although they gained their authority from older, pre-Christian philosophical and medical ideology, the rationale behind such thinking was adapted into Christian medieval charming traditions too, with Flint arguing that the adoption and

---

[229] Van Arsdall, 'Exploring What Was Understood by "Madragora" in Anglo-Saxon England'; and Van Arsdall *et al,* 'The Mandrake Plant and its Legend'.
[230] See this thesis, p. 274.

adaptation of older native medical charms to conform with the new Christian social setting was something that 'Christianity wanted badly to annex, and annex securely.'[231] As with the reusing of older, pre-Christian sites that were still fit for purpose, it seems that the inclusion of charms in medicine was an acceptable, even desired, practice.

[231] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 324.

THE OLD IRISH CHARMS

To a medieval Irish medical practitioner, and those practitioners in Britain and across Europe, charms were simply another part of the medical arsenal, albeit one that relied on faith and belief to work rather than rational thought. And although a large corpus of material exists for the medieval period, pre-Christian medical practitioners left no curative texts or accounts of their craft. However, a small number of 'magical' charm texts that were written in Old Irish survive that may give a glimpse into Ireland before the production of the extant medical manuscripts.[232] Three such texts have been recorded in the St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek MS 1395. This manuscript, which was bound together from other single leaves and displaced folios in the nineteenth century, contains a decorated leaf with an illustration of St Matthew on one side and four charm texts on the other.[233] These charms are written in Old Irish (600 – 900 AD) and two have been described as containing no 'overtly Christian' elements,[234] while the first in the collection appears to blend earlier native elements with later Christian ones.[235]

Carey has described the first charm as 'the obscurest of the four'.[236] While it certainly contains some Christian elements, such as calling on Christ and the words he spoke during his crucifixion, it also appeals to the figure of Goibniu, the blacksmith of the Túatha Dé Danann. Additionally, the image of Christ on the cross is both powerful and fitting in the context of a spell against a thorn (*Ar nóibbríathraib ro-labrastar Crist assa chroich; díuscart dím a ndelg*: 'By the holy words which Christ spoke from his cross;

[232] Stifter ('Old Irish Healing Charms') suggests that there are seven such charm texts that may show features of a pre-Christian or non-Christian native charming tradition: three from St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek MS 1395; two from Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS D ii, or the 'Stowe Missal'; one from the St Paul im Lavanttal, Stiftsbibliothek MS 86a/1, also known as The Reichenau Primer; and one from Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 16, or the 'Leabhar Breac'.
[233] Farr, 'Reused, Rescued, Recycled', p. 176. See pp. 175–93 of this article for a more detailed description and exploration of the manuscript itself. See also Tuomi, 'Parchment, Praxis and Performance' for a more recent examination of the charms from St Gall MS 1395.
[234] Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* p. 5.
[235] Ibid., p. 6.
[236] Ibid. See pp. 22–3 for his edition and translation of the charm.

remove from me the thorn').[237] Not only was Christ crowned with thorns, but his hands and feet were pierced with metal nails, and his side was pierced by a soldier's spear in order to hasten his death, and so that his passing could easily be confirmed once the blood flow had stopped. As Jesus returned following such penetrations to the body, so too does the charm envision the thorn leaving the patient's body. The inclusion of Goibniu, however, appears to be an appeal to a native authority on the subject, and as the smith *par excellence* of the Túatha Dé it is likely that Goibniu was the original early Irish god of smiths and smithcraft.[238] Further, other textual sources name him as the brother of Dían Cécht, who was the head physician of the Túatha Dé.[239]

Goibniu also appears in a medically related story recorded in *Sanais Cormaic,* in which he causes an uncomfortable and painful abscess on whoever engages in sexual relations with Goibniu's own wife behind his back.[240] The anecdote tells us that Goibniu first created a special spear-shaft that he chanted a spell over, and if he thrust it towards a man who had slept with Goibniu's wife a lump full of puss and blood would be raised on his body. If the man was innocent, he would suffer no such boil.[241] A similar situation can be found in Homer's Odyssey, concerning the Greek god of blacksmiths, Hephaestus, and his similarly unfaithful wife, Aphrodite.[242] That such themes arise around the figures of blacksmiths appears to come from ideas of sexuality and fertility that were associated with the craft since early in human history, and across many different cultures, with the anvil and furnace in particular being reimagined as a womb and agent of rebirth.[243] Although archaeological evidence from pre-Christian Irish contexts is lacking in this regard, Carey argues that such

[237] Tuomi, 'Parchment, Praxis and Performance', p. 63.
[238] Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* p. 32.
[239] For example, some later texts such as *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and the *Lebor Bretnach* group both Dían Cécht and Goibniu together, along with Creidne the brazier and Luchtaine the carpenter, alongside whom Goibniu is depicted as creating weapons for the Túatha Dé in earlier texts.
[240] O'Donovan and Stokes (trans.), *Cormac's Glossary,* p. 123. sv. *Nescoit*.
[241] See Carey, *Magic Metallurgy and Imagination,* pp. 33–4.
[242] Ibid., p. 35.
[243] Ibid.

imaginings became a part of early Irish ideology, noting that one of the later Triads grouped the *nes* of a blacksmith alongside the womb of a woman and the udders of a cow as one of the three rebirths of the world, indicating that the *nes,* identified as a smith's mould or furnace, was linked to similar ideas regarding blacksmithing and fertility.[244]

Another entry in *Sanais Cormaic* links one of the forms of the goddess Brigit with blacksmithing, along with the other goddesses, also named Brigit, who were goddesses of poetry and healing respectively. All three were said to be the daughters of the Dagda and appear to represent different aspects of a triple goddess.[245] The grouping of smithing with healing also recalls the grouping of Goibniu with Día n Cécht in other sources.[246] Just as it is possible that the *filid* as a professional institution may have transmitted older, pre-Christian traditions that were still in use during the medieval period, Carey argues that other professions that had a personal god or goddess, such as blacksmithing, 'retained a sense of having roots in the pagan past, and preserved mythical or legendary lore as well as technical knowledge', which had not been recorded or preserved in textual form during the earlier part of the medieval period.[247] In this way, Carey argues that the lore concerning Goibniu, which is attested in relatively later sources, is much older than the texts they were recorded in, as the hidden lore of the craft was gradually made known to those writing the manuscripts.

The kind of appeal to older authorities, or to non-medical authorities who can effect a sympathetic transfer of power to enact healing, seen in the first St Gall charm, is not confined to the Irish tradition. The early English charm popularly known as *Wið færstice* ('Against a sudden stabbing pain'), from the version of the *Lacnunga* found in British Library MS Harley 585, also calls on a mythological smith for help:[248] Although

[244] eDIL s.v. 2 nes(s) or dil.ie/33128. See Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and magination,* pp. 34–6.
[245] O'Donovan and Stokes (trans.), *Cormac's Glossary,* p. 23. s.v. *Brigit*.
[246] Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* p. 42.
[247] Ibid., p. 43.
[248] London, British Library MS Harley 585, ff.175a–176b. The text is available as an edition: see Storms (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Magic,* pp. 140–3. See also pp. 140–51 for his analysis of the charm.

the smith from line 12 is not named, Storms believed that this line referred to the smith Weyland (Vølundr in Norse tradition) from early Germanic mythology, who was as similarly gifted with prodigious, if not supernatural, talent in his craft as Goibniu was.[249] The other six smiths remain unknown, but Storms theorised that they may refer to Weyland again, with his brothers Slagfiðr and Egil, from the *Vølundrkviða*, one of the poems from the Poetic Edda.[250] There may be three other mythological smiths from the early Germanic tradition lost to us, or 'the number six may have been caused by alliteration: *syx smidas sǽton*.'[251] Regardless of the identities of the smiths, the charm is clear that, through the pointed objects they make, they can help cast the sharp points of pain from the patient, much like Goibniu in the St Gall charm.

In the *Wið færstice* incantation, the speaker builds power by boasting of his skill. First, he orders the 'little spear' to leave the patient, then states that he has witnessed the 'mighty women' when they 'betrayed their power'. The wording indicates that, by seeing the women casting their spell, the speaker can counter their action with a spell of his own, by sending it back on them or by expelling it through the power of his words from the patient's body. This, he tells us, will work regardless of whether or not the pain is caused by the shot of gods, elves or hags. However, the phrase 'May the Lord help you' appears to have been added later and is contrary to the boasting tone of the speaker's assurance in his own ability, confidently asserted throughout the rest of the charm. It also shifts the contents of the charm from purely pagan to mildly Christian, perhaps representing a transient stage of the charm's life as the Anglo-Saxon charming tradition underwent Christianisation.

Although Christ on his cross is mentioned in the first charm from St Gall, Stifter

[249] Storms (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, p. 146.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.

has argued that the charm itself comes from an older, native charming tradition. It is his opinion that the Old Irish charm texts show more literary ornamentations than the later charms. Stifter has identified the use of complex forms of alliteration, phrasal syntactical repetition, as well as poetic features such as isocola and the use of *dúnad* as a framing device in the earlier charms written in Old Irish. However, these have not been used in those that date to a later linguistic period. He argues that the literary features of the Old Irish charms are indicative of a charming tradition that is separate to the later texts from the Middle Irish tradition.[252] In the first charm from St Gall, the only part of the charm that does not contain these ornamentations is *Ar nóibbríathraib ro·labrastar Críst assa chr[oich]* ('On account of the holy words that Christ has spoken from his cross'), which is the only reference to Christianity in the charm. It is possible, then, that this line was added at a later date, both to Christianise the charm and make it acceptable in a Christianised society, and no doubt because the imagery it conjured fit so well with the charm's purpose of driving out a thorn.

This stage may also be evident from the second charm in the St Gall manuscript, known by the title *Ar galar fuail* ('Against a disease of the urine'):

Ár gálár fúail

Dum·esurc-sa di(a)n galar fúail-se

du·n-esairc éu ét,

du·n-es[arc]at eúin énlaithi admai ibdach

Fo·certar in sō do grés i maigin hi·tabair th'úal

PreCHNYTϕCAHϖMNYBVC KNAATYONIBVS Finit

[252] Stifter (personal comm., Dec. 2023).

Against a urinary disease

I save myself from this disease of the urine

Like a cattle-goad saves

Like skilful bird-flocks of (magic?) women save

This is always cast into/upon the place where you pass your urine.

PreCHNYTϕCAHϖMNYBVC KNAATYONIBVS Finit.[253]

As with the first charm, this also contains a number of the interesting literary features that Stifter believes to be indicative of an older, native tradition. For example, only the word *galar* ('illness') does not alliterate, while every other word that can alliterate, does. There is also parallelism with the repetition of the verb *do·essuirg* ('to save/rescue')[254] and anaphora with the same verb. The figures and items being appealed to, the cattle-goad and the skillful bird- flocks of witches, also do not belong to a Biblical or liturgical tradition, and it is likely that they refer to an older concept in native Irish tradition. Indeed, the 'harsh … point of Goibniu' from the first charm may be a part of this tradition. Both may also be an allusion to driving the sickness the way one would drive a herd of cattle: firmly and with full control while using the correct implements. In addition, as with the first charm from St Gall, it is the speaker or the healer who is performing the action, rather than God or an intermediary.

The charm is then followed by the instruction to *Fo-certar inso do grés i maigin hi tabair th'úal* ('this is always put in the place in which you make your urine'), and a line in mixed Latin and pidgin Greek: *PreCHNYTϕCAHϖMNYBVC KNAATYONIBVS Finit* (expanded as '*Presinitphsan omnybus knaatyonibus*'; taken from Matt 28:19, the verse

[253] Stifter, pers. comm., Old Irish Seminar, Maynooth University, Spring 2022.
[254] eDIL s.v. *do-essuirg* or dil.ie/17592.

reads '*Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti'* in Latin, and 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' in English.)[255] That it has been recorded as part of a charm that was written on the back of an illustration of St Matthew may not be coincidence.[256] As Carey has pointed out, although the Greek used in the reference to the Gospel of Matthew is in a 'garbled' form, it does use the correct ending for the third plural aorist ending, '-san'.[257] Further, the writer appears to be comfortable inserting the passage into the charm, indicating his familiarity with Bible and his ability to correctly apply it to disparate texts. As with the first charm, this line may be a much later insertion created in a more fully Christian context, added to an earlier text to make it more in line with the current social environment. Indeed, in his paper 'New Readings from the Stowe Missal', Stifter suggested that it was separate from the second charm and stood as a charm by itself.[258] Tuomi has argued, however, that 'it would seem … that it should be read as part of the charm.'[259]

A number of mistakes in the St Gall manuscript suggest that the person[260] who wrote the charms down was copying them from an earlier exemplar. If we compare the version of the third charm on the page, the *Caput Christi* charm, to the version of the *Caput Christi* charm contained in London, British Library, Harley MS 2965 ('The Book of Nunnaminster'), the texts of which have been characterised as 'nearly identical' by Tuomi, there are a number of minim confusions that change the reading of the St Gall version

---

[255] Tuomi, 'Parchment, Praxis and Performance', p. 66. Note that, while Carey includes the Greek line and instruction in his analysis of the text, he excludes it from his edition of the charm in *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* p. 19.
[256] Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* p. 7.
[257] Ibid. Stifter, however, believes that this is an indication that the person who wrote the charm had only a superficial knowledge of Greek letters, as there is no reason for a 3pl. aorist to be in the text (personal comm., Feb. 2024).
[258] This paper was given in Los Angeles in 2012. He has since changed his mind on this aspect of the charm (personal comm., Dec. 2023).
[259] Tuomi, 'Parchment, Praxis and Performance', p. 67.
[260] Or people: Stifter has identified two, perhaps even three, different hands at work on the page.

slightly.[261] For example, *iunctus Iohannis* (‘the joint of St John’, a phrase we would expect to find in a charm that enumerates the parts of the body) is rendered *unctus Iohannis* (‘the messiah of John’) in St Gall, as it is missing a minim from the beginning of the word.[262] Stifter has also highlighted a number of small scribal mistakes that suggest that not only did the copyist copy the charms from an older exemplar, but also that they may have done so with no prior knowledge of the Irish language.[263] This stands in contrast to the charm texts from the Stowe Missal, for example, which contain no scribal mistakes. This has led Stifter to suggest that ‘the owner of the manuscript [the Stowe Missal] must have jotted them down as he encountered them in his practical pastoral duties’.[264]

The Old Irish charms, then, appear to differ in form from the later medieval charms that were written down in a fully Christian context. Not only do they feature more technical literary and poetic features,[265] but the source of power is envisioned as coming from the speaker of the charm, rather than being drawn down from God or channeled through a saint or Christian figure. This is similar to the early English charm discussed above. Although the famous smiths are making a small knife and war-spears to assist the speaker, it is the speaker themself who is conceived of as delivering the healing, through their words and their own skills.

This first-person perspective of healing energy is also found in the six other Old Irish language charms identified by Stifter. Even in the case of the first St Gall charm, which does not contain any of the rhetorical techniques highlighted by Stifter in the lines that mention Christ, power is imagined as coming from the practitioner rather than Christ.

---

[261] Tuomi, ‘The *Caput Christi* Charm’, p. 55.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Stifter, ‘The Old Irish Healing Charms’, delivered in Maynooth, May 2021.
[264] Ibid.
[265] It must be noted that, due to the relatively small number of charm texts that have been published, there is a very small sample number of texts for comparison. Hayden has noted that there may be charms from the middle and later parts of the period that also share the highly technical and ornamental style of the older ones (pers. comm., Jan 2024).

The same is also true of the charm from the *Leabhar Breach,* which likewise contains some Christian elements towards the end of the text. However, in the case of the *Leabhar Breac* charm, it is likely that this element has been added at a later date:

Treile treibeoil: a neim hi naitbir,

a chontan hi coin,

a daig hi n-umie.

Nip on hi nduine.

Treile treibeoil:

Huil chon, huil hilchon, fuil fletha Flithais.

Nip loch, nip c[h]ru,

nip att, nip aillsiu

anni frisi·cuiritber mo éle.

Ad·muiniur teora ingena Flithais.

A naithir, hicc a n-att!

Benaim galar,

benaim crecht,

suidim att,

fris·benaim galar,

ar choin gaibes,

ar delg goines,

ar iarn benas.

Bendacht forin ngalur-sa,

bennacbt forin corp hi-ta,

bennacht forin [n]héle-sea,

bennacbt for[in] cach rod·lá

Matheus, Marcus, Lucas, Hiohannis 7 Pater prius 7 post

A threefold charm for a threefold mouth:

Its poison in a snake,

its rabies in a hound,

its flame in bronze.

May it not be a blemish in a man.

A threefold charm from a threefold mouth:

Blood of a hound,

Blood of many hounds,

Blood of the feast of Flidais.

May it not be a hole,

May it not be a wound,

May it not be a swelling,

May it not be a sore,

On which my charm is cast.

I invoke the three daughters of Flidais.

Snake, heal the swelling!

I smite the sickness,

I smite wounding,

I halt swelling,

I heal sickness,

From the hound which seizes,

From the thorn which pierces,

From the iron which strikes.

A blessing on this sickness,

A blessing on the body in which it is,

A blessing on this charm,

A blessing on whoever casts it.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and an 'Our Father' before and after.[266]

The Latin word *benedictio* was borrowed into Irish as *bendacht* ('blessing') and into Welsh as *bendith,* following the rise of Christianity in those countries.[267] While there may have been a pre-existing system of blessing or magic that called good fortune and luck to a person, for example a ritual or spell that could be performed prior to undertaking a long journey or embarking on a new business venture, by the time Ireland had been fully Christianised it seems that this function had been undertaken by the Church, and the language they used reflects its ecclesiastic nature. The use of *bendacht* in the charm, which creates a syllabic stanza that contrasts to the rest of the charm, indicates that at least this verse, and the following line that calls on the evangelists, were written in a very Christian context. However, the rest of the charm clearly displays the distinct and ornamental literary features, the 'I' statements that have been highlighted by Stifter as belonging to an earlier native tradition, as well as the power of healing coming from the speaker himself rather than a supernatural agent. Additionally, an older authority, the daughters of Flidais, are invoked. As with the Christian elements included in the first and second charms in St Gall, it is probable that the final verse and line were added at a later date.

[266] Carey (ed. and trans.), *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* pp. 25–6.
[267] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 116.

Later Medieval Charms

If those Old Irish charms with no Christian elements relied on the power of the speaker and the words he spoke for healing, the charms recorded from a later, more developed Christian context drew their power from God and the Faith. This could be achieved in a number of ways, from explicitly Christian prayers, the language used for the words of power, and physical actions such as the making of the sign of the cross during specific moments of the healing ritual. Such elements appear in most Christian charming traditions, and Ireland is no different. Indeed, the page from NLI MS G 11 reproduced in this thesis's appendix contains the majority of these features. Medical charms typically took a similar form to non-magical healing texts, in that they had a title, instructions, and an efficacy statement that attested to the healing – or lack thereof – that could be expected, as well as the words of power that were to be spoken. This type of structure clearly indicates that medieval practitioners saw cures and charms as being related to each other, in that they were both valid ways of healing the patient. It also reinforces the idea that charms, although deriving their healing from an outside, or non-scientific, source, were simply a different kind of procedure through which one could accomplish the task of healing. This type of formulaic structure may have been a mnemonic way for the leech to recall a charm or cure easily from memory.[268]

[268] Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', p. 60.

TEXT 1: NLI MS G 11, P. 393A1-19.

Herbs that were thought to hold both mundane and magical properties were called *magiferous* plants and were widely used as part of medieval medical traditions. The first charm on p. 393 of G11 (lines 1–19), titled *Dona leigeasuib nech foires dortad na fola* ('Concerning the cures of a person who heals a flow of blood') demonstrates this, stating that the herb being used, the shepherd's purse, can either be directly applied to the wound that needs to be staunched or simply placed in front of it (*cuir in lusrad fae brāidhid in ti ō silinn an fuil, nō um in mball ō silind an fhuil*; 'place the herbs around the neck of the person from whom the blood flows, or around the limb from which the blood flows').[269] Indeed, the text expressly states that the patient need never see the herb at all (*⁊ mad ailt gan in lusrad d'faicsin do duini, bris co maith é ⁊ cuir fa braided in duine ó silin[n] an fhuil;* 'And if you do not wish a person to see the plants, crush them well, and place [them] in front of the person from whom the blood flows'). This indicates that the herb itself contains the power to staunch blood, and that simply being exposed to its presence is enough to heal a wound. Indeed, an Irish *materia medica* that refers to the shepherd's purse plant states that it can be used in simples and other curative recipes, but also as a material healing object in and of itself:

> *Bursa pastoris:.i. lus an sbarain; fuar tirim sa dara ceim & as cumachtac hi in aigid flux na fola & gach uile flux & is maith hi a n- uinneminntib bristi cuislinni & an bean aga mbi ina braigit ni urcoidiginn flux fola di. A cur a fotragadh & is mait i an aigid na buigeacairi. A cur fo braigid na caerach & ni faicid na mic tire iat. Pudur da denum dan luibh cetna & a cur isna cneadhaib & ni fasann ainmfeoil innta & tirmaig iat. Blat na luibhe so & blath uiole & blath sail cuach & siucra & a mbrisidh trit a ceili & a tobairt da caitim da luct an tseili fola mar ata emotoica pasio & a cosmuili.*

[269] See Appendix, p. 270.

> Bursa pastoris: i.e. shepherd's purse; cold and dry in the second degree; it is powerful against a flux of blood, and against every flux; it is good in ointments for haemorrhage of a vein; a flux of blood will not harm the woman who keeps it at her throat. If put in the bath, it is good against jaundice. If it be put at the throat of sheep, wolves will not see them. If the same herb be made into a powder, and put in the wounds, proud flesh will not develop in them, and it will dry them. The flower of this herb and the flower of violet and the flower of violet (?) and sugar should be pounded together and given to eat to those who spit blood, that is haemoptysis, and such like.[270]

The use of herbs had long been seen as central to the practice of medicine. Isidore of Seville wrote in Book IV, paragr. ix 4 of his *Etymologies* that *Antiquior autem medicina herbis tantum et sucis erat. Talis enim medendi usus coepit, deinde ferro et ceteris medicamentis* ('more ancient medicine was practiced using herbs and potions alone. The practice of healing began by using such things, and later started using the blade and other medications.')[271] However, other Church fathers looked at herbs, and herb gathering, with suspicion. Caesarius of Arles, for example, linked herbs with unlawful users of magic, who used them as abortifacients.[272] Caesarius was not alone in his beliefs. Gregory of Tours, in his *History of the Franks,* also associated herbs with the trappings of magic users, finding two of them plying their trade with herbs, mole's teeth, mice's bones, and bear claws. He stated that, 'seeing all these things were

[270] Dublin, Trinity College MS H 3.22, online at https://celt.ucc.ie/published/G600005/index.html (accessed 09/03/2023). A copy of this *materia medica* can also be found on pp. 1–67 of G 11, but remains untranslated.
[271] Barney *et al.* (trans.), *Etymologies,* p. 113; and Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Eymologiarum,* (online).
[272] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* pp 149–50.

instruments of witchcraft, the bishop ordered them to be thrown into the river'.[273] Even Isidore, who linked herbs to the creation of medicine, was wary of them when they were attached to the body as a ligature, as is the case with the charm discussed here.[274]

Herbs clearly did not disappear from medieval medical practice. This is evidenced by the number of herbals and lapidaries still extant which date to the medieval period, including *Liber de Lapidibus*, an influential versified book of gem-lore written by Marbode of Rennes, which was even translated into Irish.[275] Indeed, the preface of this work states that *Nec dubium cuiquam debet falsumue videri, quin sua gemmis divinitus insita virtus. Ingens herbis virtus data, maxima gemmis* ('Nor should any doubt be seen as false, rather than a virtue divinely implanted in its gems. Great virtue is given to herbs, the greatest to gems').[276] Alongside medical lapidaries, which had been popular since Antiquity and derived from the work of early medical practitioners such as Dioscorides and Galen, there were also astrological and Christian lapidaries, with the last type enjoying a similar level of popularity as the medical ones.[277] However, these categories were assigned by later scholars, while the texts themselves do not make such distinctions. Thus, in a 'Christian lapidary' that discusses, for example, the gemstones on Aaron's breastplate (Exodus 28.17–20), information regarding the stones' magical and medical properties could also be recorded alongside their religious properties.[278]

Herbals were also popular texts during the same period, with Dioscorides' *materia medica* text being hugely influential to the genre.[279] As with lapidaries, a great deal of information is recorded for each entry, including the types of illnesses and injuries the herb

[273] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, p. 248, citing the translation by Dalton, *The History,* ii, 374.
[274] Barney, *et al.* (trans.), *Etymologies,* p. 183.
[275] See Greene (ed. and trans.), 'Lapidaries in Irish', pp. 67–95.
[276] Riddle, 'Lithotherapy in the Middle Ages', p. 39.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Brévart, 'Between Medicine, Magic and Religion', p. 27.
[279] Saliba and Komarof, 'Illustrated Books may be Hazardous', p. 7.

can be used to heal, along with astrological and astronomical information, 'since the position of celestial bodies contributed to the occult properties of a medicinal herb.'[280] The herbals also recorded herbs as agents in food preparation, simples, and other more complex cure recipes, as well as listing which therapeutic attributes were assigned to them individually.[281]

The Church fathers did not outright ban all instances of herbalism then, allowing leeway for those who used them. Augustine, for example, wrote that *Aliud est enim dicere; Si hanc herbam attritis et bibiis, a stomacho dolorem auferet; et alius dicere: Si hanc herbam in collo tuo suspendas, auferes dolorem a stomacho tuo.* ('For it is one thing to say: If you bruise down this herb and drink it, it will remove the pain from your stomach; and another to say: If you hang this herb round your neck, it will remove the pain from your stomach.')[282] As he believed in the idea that God had given a specific virtue to everything he had created, Augustine made an exception depending on the use of the herb or animal byproduct being utilised, stating *Cum ratio cur res sit uirtutis non appareat magni refert animus quo utitur, uel in medendo uel in temperandis corporibus, uel in medicina, uel in argricultura* ('when the reason why a thing is of virtue does not appear, the intention with which it is used is of great importance, at least in healing or in tempering bodies, whether in medicine or in agriculture.')[283] Thus, we can see small loopholes appearing, through which other clergy and Christian medical practitioners could continue to include herbs and other non-botanical remedies in their art.

In this way, the gathering and use of herbs was permitted depending on such factors as how they were being used, where they were gathered from, and how they were gathered. For example, those that grew in or nearby the tombs and graves of saints and other Christian figures were recorded in the writings of Church authorities, indicating their

[280] Silberman, 'Superstitions and Medical Knowledge', p. 87.
[281] Stannard, 'Medieval Herbalism', p. 48.
[282] Green (ed. and trans.), Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana,* Bk II, p. 42.
[283] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 301.

approval of herbs found or consecrated through proximity to Christian symbolism and association. Gregory of Tours, for example, in his *Life of the Fathers,* wrote about a nun named Maretina, who collected grass from the grave of St Gall, replanted it in her own garden, and used it to make healing tea for the sick.[284] Similarly, he also recorded the anecdote regarding a man named Valentinianus, who travelled to the grave of St Gall seeking a cure for his fever. Herbs had been strewn around the grave, and when Valentinianus picked some up and chewed on them, he was cured.[285]

Although they date to an earlier period than the first charm text p. 393 of NLI MS G 11, we can see the influence of these stories on the early English sources too. For example, the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* 'attributes a special power to plants grown upon burial places'.[286] Egbert of York forbade the gathering of herbs while reciting incantations, instead recommending Christian rituals in place of the spoken words of power.[287] Aelfric of Eynsham, who also wrote in opposition of herbs being used as ligatures, wrote *Ne sceal nan man mid galdre wyrte besingan, ac mid Godes wordum hí gebletsian, and swa ðicgan.* ('no- one shall enchant a herb with magic, but with God's word shall bless it and so eat it.')[288] Further, a copy of the *Compendium Medicine* attributed to Gilbertus Anglicus, from Cambridge, Pembroke MS 169, p. 449, contains a recipe in the margins for using herbs to create an amulet for the purpose of conceiving a child.[289] In this marginal text, a man aged twenty or more must gather herbs and extract their juices. However, it skirts the boundary of what was acceptable in the use of herbs, as the juice was then used to create a textual amulet, which was to be worn around the neck of either

[284] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, p. 270.
[285] Ibid., p. 309. See also Hayden, '"King of Waters"', pp. 165–6 for a charm text that calls for the soil of four graveyards. Hayden suggests that the graveyards the soil was to be taken from were near to churches, meaning the soil was similarly understood as being sanctified due to proximity to the remains of saints.
[286] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 270.
[287] Rhode, *The Old English Herbals,* p. 37.
[288] Thorpe (ed. and trans.), *The Anglo-Saxon Homilies: Homilies of Aelfric,* pp. 476–7.
[289] Murray Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals', p. 412.

potential parent during sexual intercourse. The gender of the amulet wearer is then said to influence the gender of the child conceived this way.[290]

The first charm on p. 393 of NLI MS G 11 also includes such a herb gathering ritual, with the instructions given as:

> *ēirig conuice an ínadh a fāsand lus in sparāin ⁊ abair trī hAue Maire ⁊ 3 Paitreacha ar do glūinib ann ⁊ abair an fersa so:*
>
> > *Guidim tū a tigerna innus co fóirid tú in dortad fola so atā ar do banoglach nó ar d'oglach fēin nech do fūaslaigus tre d'fhuil féin.*
>
> *⁊ aca rādh sin duit, buain in lusradh féin* […]

> Concerning the cures of a person who heals a flow of blood: that is, go to the place in which the Shepherd's Purse grows, and say three Ave Marias and three Pater Nosters on your knees there, and say this verse:
>
> > I beseech thee, Oh Lord, that you heal this flow of blood that is on your maidservant, or on your manservant, the one whom you have delivered through your own blood.
>
> And while you are saying that, cut the plant itself […]

Not only are we given two separate and explicitly Christian prayers, that of the Ave Maria and the Pater Noster, to repeat three times over the herbs, but the scribe gives us a prayer addressed to God which is also to be spoken during the gathering of the herb.

The inclusion of such prayers as the Pater Noster in particular is a common feature

[290] Murray Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals', p. 413.

of charms at this period.[291] There are two versions of this prayer recorded in the gospels: a long- form one from Matthew, and a shorter version from Luke. It was, and remains, one of the central prayers used in most Christian denominations, and by around 1000 AD it was firmly entrenched in the Mass, being the first spoken prayer of the Communion cycle, the section of the Mass conducted before the dismissal of the faithful. Although the primary viewership of the mass was reserved for those of the clergy connected to the church, space was made for lay congregations to hear the proceedings, who thus become familiar with the Pater. Indeed, even today the Lord's Prayer is one of the first prayers Christian children learn, often alongside the Sign of the Cross.

The words of power, or 'verse' (*fersa*), as the scribe calls it, is a prayer that includes another direct address to God. As with the Pater, directly addressing God in this way is an acceptable and valid way to pray. Indeed, when giving the Pater to his disciples, Jesus instructs them to pray directly to God, saying; 'Pray then, like this: Our father in heaven, hallowed be thy name'.[292] In doing so, the speaker of the verse is opening a dialogue with God and appealing to him to deliver healing.

The use of such prayers seems to have been a way to imbue the natural healing of the herb with extra power, drawing it from a divine source while consecrating it in a very Christian manner. There is also a public aspect to the herb gathering, as it was done 'in the place in which the shepherd's purse grows' (*in ínadh a fasand lus in sparáin*). While we are not told if this is a place where the herb grows naturally in the wild, or a herb garden planted by the medical practitioner, such spaces are still outdoors and open to anyone who should happen to witness the gathering of the herb. In this case, should the practitioner be seen during the gathering, the verbal repetition of two very Christian

[291] See Arnovick, 'The Power of the Pater Noster', pp. 87–113 for an examination of the use of these prayers in that charming tradition.
[292] Matt. 6: 9.

prayers, plus an extra prayer addressed to God, not only consecrates the herb under Christianity, but signals to any witness that what they are seeing is intended to be Christian in nature. If there was some concern regarding the use of herbs in forbidden magical practices, as the early fathers indicate, the prayers would have identified both the gatherer and his intentions as being Christian, and thus acceptable.

TEXT 2: SIMPLES AND CURES FOR BLOOD STAUNCHING, NLI MS G 11 P.393A20–B11.

I am referring to the second text on the page as 'text two' rather than 'charm two', as it is comprised of a series of instructions on how to create simples or enact cures for blood staunching that do not depend on the recitation of words of power or ritual performances. However, it does contain the instance of sympathetic magic discussed above, wherein the heart or eyes of a robin redbreast must be placed under the pillow of the patient to enact a cure for both blood staunching and lethargy.

The colour of the bird, with its distinctive splash of red across the chest, is probably why it is associated with blood in this text. As for the heart being used, the underlying theory is probably that, as the heart of the bird is still and no longer pumps blood, so this stillness will be transferred to the patient, thus stopping the flow of blood from their injury. The association of the heart of a robin redbreast with sleep can also be found in the Irish translation of the late-medieval medical text known as the *Rosa Anglica,* a copy of the Irish translation of which can be found in Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 20:[293]

> *Item gab craidhi spideoigi uchtdergi, ⁊ cuir fa braigid anti ara mbi an eslainti sin, ⁊ an fad bias and ni coideola.*[196] *Item gab an craidhi cetna ⁊ craidhi ulcachain, ⁊ cuir a nairdi os cindanti ara mbi an eslainti so, ⁊ o teid a cuimne, ⁊ dobeir do hi. Item craidhi na faindle maille mil, ⁊ inti caithes mar sin, furailidh air neithi tanaic ⁊ nach tanaic dindisin fo cetoir.*[294]

[293] It is also recorded in NLI MS G 11, but this version of the text remains untranslated. However, as the sympathetic magic contained in Text 2 is so similar to the version of the *Rosa Anglica* found in MS 23 P 20, it is likely that this section is also included in the version in G 11.
[294] Wulff (ed. and trans.), *Rosa Anglica,* pp. 234–5.

> Item: take the heart of a robin redbreast, and put it round the neck of him who has this disease, and while it remains there he will not sleep. Item: take the same heart, and the heart of an owl, and hang them up above the man on whom is this disease, and who has lost his memory, and it will give it back to him. Item: the heart of a swallow cooked with honey, the which compels him who eats it to tell things that happened, and things that did not happen yet.[295]

My only suggestion as to why the heart of a robin redbreast would cause sleeplessness is that hearts beat constantly, and as such are always 'awake' and working. Perhaps the author of both texts believed that a transfer of power would happen by using a heart to cure lethargy or laziness.

[295] Online at https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T600008/index.html (accessed 09/03/2023).

TEXT 3: NLI MS G11, P. 393B12–19

The second charm proper on the page, titled *Do cosc robair na fola mista* ('For the staunching of the heavy flow of menstrual blood'), lays out the creation of a textual amulet that should be placed on the breasts of the afflicted woman. The letters we are given are: *.p.x.b.c.p.c.a.n.o.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.p.r.d.d.i.d.i.p.m.i.i.i.s.* The text does not specify what the letters stand for, or their significance.[296] Such strings of letters, along with nonce-words, Latinate forms of words, and words from other languages, have often been interpreted by modern scholars as 'gibberish' charms, being read either as meaningless verbal or written elements, as scribal mistakes, or as deliberate attempts by Christian redactors to censure older, more pagan material.[297] These are all valid suggestions, but none of them apply to the string of letters given in the second charm text from p. 393. Skemer has noted that the words of power used to create textual amulets are extremely varied, with some individual amuletic texts taking on a 'centonized' character, in that they were created from a number of different texts, from many different sources that were merged together in order to create a new prayer or charm for the owner.[298] For example, one French amulet from the fourteenth century contains over eighty-seven lines, created from a number of distinct texts that range from birthing and blood-staunching charms, to prayers for protection, along with sections of the gospel.[299] A survey of European textual amulets showed that while many of them based their words of power on Christian teachings and texts, these formulas could also include 'cryptic vowel series (popular in Hebrew charms), combinations of repeated letters and number series of pagan origin' among texts from

[296] There is a possibility that the final letters may stand for *mis* ('month). The significance of those three letters, then, may relate to the condition being cured.
[297] Arthur, 'The Gift of the Gab', pp. 177–9.
[298] Skemer, 'Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion', p. 197.
[299] See Skemer, 'Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion' p. 202 for the dating, and p. 205 for details about the texts included on the roll.

other sources.[300] The string of letters from the second charm on p. 393 of G11 is not limited to vowels, and the rest of the text does not seem to contain any Hebrew elements.[301] However, nor do the letters by themselves necessarily mean that they are pagan in origin.

From a relatively early stage in the scholarship of charms, such strings of letters were often ignored as nonsense. Grendon, who published the first comprehensive collection of Old English charms, created a category he described as 'gibberish' charms and assigned that label to any charm text he considered as being created from a 'incoherent jumbling of words miscellaneously derived from Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Gaelic, and other tongues'.[302] Indeed, when the next collection of Old English charms was produced by Storms, more 'gibberish' charms were added to Grendon's assortment, and Storms argued that the use of such 'gibberish' was one of the main criteria of charms and a way for scholars to readily identify them.[303] This view of the words of power as nothing more than 'gibberish' lexical elements continued in the study of charm texts until relatively recently, reducing charms to 'the literature of desperation', and the strange speech acts used as words of power as 'anything to enhance the air of mystery and lend authority to the charmer.'[304] The scholarship that followed Grendon's collection, such as the study by Arnovick, has built on this view by suggesting that, although the words of power were 'gibberish', they were not meaningless, and that their difficulty was a way to prove the competency and skill of the charmer. Further, while the 'gibberish' words of power may not have been comprehensible to the patient receiving the charm, or even to

[300] Skemer, 'Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion', p. 197.
[301] The fifth text on p. 393, titled *Ar echmaig* ('Against farcy'), a textual amulet, does include the Hebrew charming inscription AGLA. See pp. 241–7 of this thesis for a fuller exploration of the use of foreign languages in charms.
[302] Grendon, *The Anglo-Saxon Charms,* p. 114.
[303] Arthur, *"Charms", Liturgy and Secret Rites,* p. 172.
[304] Ibid., p. 175.

the speaker, they may have acted as a type of '"spirit code", a language that would have made sense and been understood by the spirits, much like speaking in tongues.'[305]

Reducing the words of power to 'gibberish' downplays the immense skill and level of education such scribes and redactors had achieved. Of course, there are some scribal mistakes in manuscripts as the scribes were still human, and to err is to be human. However, to suggest that every obscure passage of words of power is the result of a scribe copying unknown words from a language unfamiliar to them is to ignore that the manuscripts were produced throughout Europe by people who were, at the very least, bilingual at minimum, and very often working in both Latin and their own native vernacular. Further, there is evidence within the extant manuscripts that those who were writing them were interested in engaging with languages, linguistic codes and language manipulation. For example, the *Vitellius Psalter,* a Gallican psalter that contains interlinear glosses in Old English, also contains a number of agricultural texts that have been classified as charms, because they contain 'gibberish' passages as part of their words of power.[306] However, Jolly has noted that all of the charm texts in this source are related to the texts on computus and prognostics that they follow.[307] Arthur has also noted that two texts concerning the obscuring of words and the creation of ciphers, a riddle, and an exercise in secret writing follow this collection.[308] Thus, we can see that the scribes involved with the production of the *Vitellius Psalter* had the tools they needed to create and understand at least some of the 'gibberish' they were recording.

Such learned engagement with words and letters, along with an interest in obscurantist practices, can also be found in Ireland during the medieval period. As elsewhere in Europe, the *ars grammatica* formed the basis of literacy and education.

---

[305] Arthur, *"Charms", Liturgy and Secret Rites*, p. 176.
[306] The *Vitellius Psalter* forms one of the texts of London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius E xviii.
[307] Jolly, 'Tapping the Power of the Cross', pp. 66–7.
[308] Arthur, *"Charms", Liturgies and Secret Rites,* p. 139.

During the early part of the medieval period, from c. 500–800 AD, scholars and educators were also trying to adapt existing Latin grammars, and in some cases were writing their own, in order to teach non-native students how to learn the level of Latin necessary for their studies.[309] Native vernacular grammars were also being produced as a part of the engagement with linguistic exegesis, including *Auraicept na n-Éces* ('the Scholar's Primer').[310] This was a treatise on the origins and classifications of the Irish language that has been dated to as early as the seventh century and is preserved in various forms in a number of different manuscripts, including the Book of Leinster, the Yellow Book of Lecan, and the Book of Ballymote.[311] The text formed the core of the education of the medieval Irish *fili*, and has been found in manuscripts that contain a number of important legal texts.[312]

Looking again at the string of letters provided by the second charm text of p. 393 of G11, we can see that the letter 'x' is not native to the Irish alphabet. Moreover, this letter is not found in the Ogham alphabet, the earliest extant system of writing in Ireland, while the other letters are. This type of preoccupation with lesser-known grammatical elements can also be found in a charm from a medical remedy book written by Conla mac an Leagha, (fl. 1496– 1512), a member of a medical family of the same name. In this charm, titled *Ar chuthach* ('against rage, fury, madness'; probably epilepsy),[313] the instructions say *rūsc critaich ⁊ gilcaide, berbtur ⁊ doberur a cūa ⁊ scribthur naoi mūti isin cūa, idon b c d ∵ g p t ∵ f k q ∵* ('bark of a poplar tree and of a reed, they are boiled and put into a cup, and nine mute consonants are written in the cup, that is b, c, d – g, p, t – f, k, q'). We can see that the letters used in this charm are explicitly named as *múti,* or

[309] Law, 'The History of Linguistics', p. 112.
[310] Calder (ed. and trans.), *Auraicept na n-Éces.*
[311] Ahlqvist, 'The Native Irish Grammarian', p. 82.
[312] Ahlqvist, 'The History of the Study of Language', pp. 12–13.
[313] See Hayden, 'The Context and Obscure Language of Medical Charms' (forthcoming).

'mutes', and older term for 'obstruent', a grammatical classification of letters. This list appears to have been specifically taken from a grammar based on the works of Priscian, as that grammatical tradition took 'f' as a mute rather than a fricative, as it is today.[314] In this way, we can see that the writers of such charms were using elements of language that were either unknown to those who had not received a similar level of education or were less well known to those outside of the sphere of education the scribes inhabited. While the scribe had not made an attempt to censor the words of power, he had used letters that would be strange and 'magical' to those of his patients who had not received at least the beginning of their education from an ecclesiastical environment.

As mentioned above, sympathetic magic functioned on the logic of transferals of power from one thing to another, as long as there was a common string or similarity between the two targets. Just as the second text on p. 393 of NLI MS G11, that of the simples and cures that included the use of a robin redbreast's heart to staunch blood flow, the second charm text on the page contains elements of this transferal of power through the killing of the animal (specified to be a pig in other variations of the charm[315]). Similar to how the stopped heart of a robin was linked to stopping the pumping of blood and subsequent bleeding of the patient from text two, Charm 2 sees the strength of the menstrual flow transferring to the bleeding animal, eventually drying up once the animal had stopped bleeding. This type of charm operates on the logic of 'contagion', one of the three types of sympathetic magic described by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*.[316] The basis of this thought process is that 'physical contact between the source and the target results in the transfer of some effect or quality (essence) from the source to the target.'[317] This quality or essence can include an illness or disease, on the basis that 'the transfer of

[314] See Hayden, 'The Context and Obscure Language of Medical Charms' (forthcoming).
[315] See Appendix, pp. 276–8 for all versions of this charm uncovered so far.
[316] Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* pp. 49–57.
[317] Nemeroff and Rozin, 'The Making of a Magical Mind', p. 3.

essence establishes a "sympathetic connection" between the target and the source.'[318] In the case of Charm 2, the connection established continues until the animal has fully bled out and the blood flow has stopped. The connection is then closed when the ritual is concluded and the target animal is dead.

The performance of such a ritual would surely be startling to any outside observer, suggesting that this charm, if not medical charms in general, were performed privately and with only the intended patient or perhaps their immediate family present. Indeed, the sacrifice of an animal must surely have raised more eyebrows than the herb-gathering ritual of charm one, which was accompanied by speech acts that identified it firmly as Christian. There are no such speech acts included in the instructions of Charm 2 however, as the mystical letters were to be written down in both parts of the text. I have been able to identify three other versions of this charm, however, with the earliest appearing to be that in Glasgow University Library, Hunter 185 (T.8.17), a manuscript that dates to the fifteenth century (compared to NLI MS G 11, which was written over the latter part of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries). That the charm and its ritual was still being transmitted in the seventeenth century, when it was recorded as part of the medical texts contained in National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 368, speaks to both the longevity and popularity of the charm itself.

[318] Nemeroff and Rozin, 'The Making of a Magical Mind', p. 4.

TEXT 4: NLI MS G11, P. 393B20–31

Text 4, *Ar echmaig* (‘against farcy’), is a veterinary charm designed to cure the condition now called ‘glanders’, which can be life threatening to horses and other animals. It details the creation of a textual amulet that was to be placed over the area where *in péist* (‘the worm’) was located on the animal, almost like an exorcistic ritual, order to *indarbad fa cétóir nó a gabail ría* (‘to drive [it] out/expel [it] at once’). Exorcistic language forms the words of power in the Anglo-Saxon charm *Wið færstice,* discussed above. Throughout this charm, the formula ‘out, (little) spear’ is repeated. It is this phrase, in the imperative, that contains the exorcistic element, and it is with this phrase that the speaker demands or orders the thorn to leave. The phrase builds with intensity, until it is repeated three times in the space of five lines, before the speaker declares that the spear, if it is made from iron and sent by the ‘hags’, will melt on his command, presumably leaving the body in liquid form and without the sharpness that caused the injury in the first place. The thorn is thus reduced to a less harmful state of being.

It is not uncommon for medieval curative texts to treat illness almost as a spiritual attack or demonic possession, similar to how the bacterial infection of glanders was envisioned as a *péist* or worm in Charm 3 on p. 393 of NLI MS G11, and to attempt to drive it out with an exorcistic formula or ritual. Indeed, Grendon included ‘the exorcist’s boast of power’ as one of his general characteristics of charms.[319] In the *Wið færstice* charm there are four times that the speaker uses the phrase ‘out, little spear’. The second time this phrase is used, the text mentions the various smiths the speaker is calling on for practical help with forging weapons against the witches who cast a spell on the patient. As with the narrative charms, discussed below, it could be that the speaker is reinforcing his exorcism with the power of the legendary smiths, or it may be that the writer of the

[319] Grendon, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Charms’, p. 110.

charm is indicating that the powerful smiths also use that phrase, as Grendon suggested.[320] The speaker's power as a charmer is reinforced through the growing intensity of the repetition; his boasting of his ability to identify the negative magic users, and thus diagnose the spell they cast; his boasting of his own intrinsic power; and the linking of the phrase to the legendary smiths.

Although the rest of the page is concerned with blood-staunching, it was not unusual to see veterinary charms such as Charm 3 recorded alongside those that were created for human use, particularly in agrarian societies that depended on livestock as a vital part of its economy. Just as medical charms were seen as a part of human healing, they were likewise used in the healing of animals. The inclusion of such texts in G 11 lends weight to the theory that the book was meant to be used by a practising medical authority who was working among the community.

[320] Grendon, 'The Anglo-Saxon Charms', p. 112.

Text 5: NLI MS G11, p. 394b24–31

Although this charm does not appear on p. 393, it contains an interesting example of a narrative charm, that is, a miniature narrative tale, called a *historiola,* typically about a saint or medical authority that links the patient to the authority or a condition they have cured. In this way, a sort of sympathetic relationship between the patient and the subject of the *historiola* was created, with the intention that the legendary or miraculous healing that had previously taken place could be transferred to, or reenacted on, the current patient.

An example of this style of charm is the first Old Irish charm from St Gall MS 1395 discussed above, which includes the short piece about Christ on his cross and the words he spoke. As mentioned, the charm is against a thorn, and although the *historiola* may have been a later addition to an earlier charm, the intent was the still to heighten or reinforce the power with the extra authority of a famous figure who had undergone a similar healing, in this case Christ himself, specifically through his ordeal with the crown of thorns and various other long, pointed objects. By creating an analogy between the patient and the subject of the *historiola,* a sympathetic transfer of power can occur, with the healing Christ received as part of his resurrection being channeled through the charm and bestowed on the patient instead.

While no narrative charms were recorded on p. 393 of NLI MS G11, examples can be found on pp. 394 and 338 of this manuscript. Both are examples of narrative charms that were popular throughout the Christian world. The charm from p. 394 is an example of the Veronica blood-staunching charm, while the one on p. 338 is a version of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus charm.[321] As with other examples of popular narrative charms, both can be found as part of the charming tradition throughout Europe, with many examples found in

[321] See Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Micael Casey's Medical Transcripts', pp. 43–114, for a more complete discussion of the charm called the 'Seven Sleepers'.

continental Europe and the Western Isles. This paper will examine the Veronica charm of p. 394 in this way.

The Veronica charm is based on an episode recounted in three of the gospels, concerning the healing of a woman who was inflicted with an issue of blood for twelve years. The most detailed account of the tale can be found in Mark 25:34. According to this version, a woman had spent twelve years with a non-specified blood-related issue. When she encountered Jesus on the street, she touched the hem of his clothes and the blood dried up at once, staunching the chronic flow. Although the woman in the story was not named, by the medieval period the figure of Veronica, or *Berenica*, had become attached to it, often explicitly named in the words of power, as is the case in one of the four versions of the charm recorded in the late eighth- or early ninth-century Royal Prayerbook (London, British Library MS Royal 2.A.XX).[322] The Royal Prayerbook is one of four extant early English prayerbooks, along with the Book of Cerne, Harlean Prayerbook, and the Book of Nunnaminster, and contains collections of material devised for private prayer and devotion.[323] The contents of these manuscripts suggest that they were chosen to fit a personal theme of devotion specific to the owner. As it shows an emphasis on texts of comforting and healing miracles and contains a small collection of charms centred on blood-staunching, it would not be surprising if the Royal Prayerbook had belonged to a medical practitioner.[324]

> + *In nomine sanctae trinitatis atque omnium sanctorum ad sanguinem restringendum scribis hoc СОМАРТА ОСОΓМА СТУ/ΓОНТОЕМА ЕКТУТОПО + Beronice. Libera me de sanguinibus deus deus salutis meae CACINCACO*

[322] Kesling, 'The Royal Prayerbook's Blood-Staunching Charms', p. 185.
[323] Ibid., p. 181.
[324] See Kesling, 'The Royal Prayerbook's Blood-Staunching Charms', p. 183 for her description of the manuscript.

YCAPTETE. per dominum iehsum xpistum. Xpriste ad iuua + Xpriste adiuua + Xpriste ad iuua. + Riuos cruoris torridi contacta uestis obstruit fletu rigante supplicis arent fluenta sanguinis Beronice Libera me de sanguinibus deus deus salutis meae. AMICO CAPΔINOPO/ΦIΦIPON IΔPACACIMO fodens magnifice contextu fundauit tumulum usugma domine adiuua.

+ In the name of the Holy Trinity and all of the saints, to draw back blood write this: COMAPTA OCOΓMA CTY/ΓONTOEMA EKTYTOΠO + O Veronica, deliver me from bloods, O God, God of my salvation/health. CACINCACO YCAPTETE. Through the Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ, help + Christ, help + Christ, help + the touch of his clothes blocks the rivers of hot blood, by the moistening weeping of the supplicant the flows of blood dry up. Veronica. Free me from the bloods O God, God of my salvation/health. AMICO CAPDINOPO/ΦIΦIPON IΔPACACIMO. fodens magnifice contextu fundauit tumulum usugma. Lord help.[325]

While the woman from the gospels is unnamed, here we can see that this charm has assigned the name Veronica to her. Although she had initially been referred to by the Greek word *Haemorrhoissa* ('bleeding woman'), by the fourth century the name 'Berenice' or 'Veronica' became attached to her, as evidenced by the *Acta Pilati,* which called her by that name. The *Acta Pilati*, attributed to Nicodemus, claims to be a record of Jesus's trial, as witnessed by the woman Berenice, who claimed to be the same woman who had been healed of her excessive blood-flow.[326] The later texts *Cura Sanitatis Tiberii* and *Vindicta Salvatoris* contain texts that also attribute a painting of Christ to a

[325] Kesling, 'The Royal Prayerbook's Blood-Staunching Chams', p. 185.
[326] Ibid., p. 187–8.

woman named Veronica, in an early version of the story that would grow to become the legend of the Veil of Veronica, a relic said to contain the image of Jesus's face recorded in his own blood.[327]

There are three different versions of the Vernonica charm in the Royal Prayerbook, and while the above variation is the only one in this manuscript to name Berenice/Veronica, they all contain similar words of power.

> *Riuos cruoris toridi. contacta uestis obstruit fletu rigantibus supplicis arent fluenta sanguinis: Per illorum quae siccata dominica labante conluno sta per dominum nostrum.*[328]

> The touch of his clothes blocks the rivers of hot blood, by the moistening weeping of the supplicant the flows of blood dry up. Through her [veins] which were dried by the work of the Lord, I command you to stop. Through our Lord.
>
> *(folio 16v)*

> *+ Crux christi iehsu domini dei nostri ingeritur. mihi. + Riuos cruoris torridi contacta. uestis obstruit. fleturigantis supplices arent. fluenta. sanguinis. Per illorum uenas cui siccato dominico lauante. coniuro sta. Per dominum nostrum iehsum christum filium tuum qui tecum uiuit & regnat. deus in unitate spiritus sancti per omnia.*

> + Cross of our Lord God Jesus Christ is brought into me. + the touch of his clothes

[327] Kesling, 'The Royal Prayerbook's Blood-Staunching Charms', p. 188.
[328] Where Kesling reads *conluno* I suspect *conujuro.*

blocks the rivers of hot blood, by the moistening weeping of the supplicant the flows of blood dry up. Through her veins which were dried by the work of the Lord, I command you to stop. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son who with you, God, lives and reigns in unity with the Holy Spirit for all [times].

(folio 49r–v)[329]

The phrase *Riuos cruoris torridi contacta uestis obstruit fletu rigante supplicis arent fluenta sanguinis* ('the touch of his clothes blocks the rivers of hot blood, by the moistening, weeping of the supplicant, the flows of blood dry up') link all three charms. These words are taken from a poem beginning *A solis ortus cardine* ('From the pivot of the sun's rising'), written in the first half of the fifth century by the poet Sedulius, and recounting the life of Jesus from his birth to his ascension. Although Sedulius only wrote two hymns during his lifetime, they were immensely popular throughout the medieval period, and he was counted as 'one of the four principal authors of hymns', along with Ambrose, Prudentius, and Gregory.[330] *A solis ortus cardine* was particularly popular, with the first seven stanzas being excerpted as a secondary hymn that was sung at Christmas; the following stanzas were then adapted as a hymn to be sung during Epiphany, while lines 65–68 were excerpted and used to create the words of power that were used in many blood staunching charms:

Rivos cruoris torridi

Contacta vestis obstruit,

Fletu rigante supplicis

[329] All translations Kesling, 'The Royal Prayerbook's Blood-Staunching Charms', pp. 184–5.
[330] Springer, 'The Manuscripts of Sedulius', pp. 12–13.

Arent fluenta sanguine

It is also this verse that is used as the words of power for the version of the charm from p. 394 of NLI MS G11, attesting to the popularity of the charm and hymn in medieval Ireland, as well as the spread of the Veronica legend and her association with blood. Both legends associated with Veronica concern blood, specifically stopping it from flowing. In the first, the *Haemorrhoissa* is herself healed of an excessive blood-flow, while in the second Veronica is stopping the blood-flow from Jesus's head, which was crowned with thorns. This double association of blood-staunching had been established by at least the fifth century, as the *Acta Pilati* had been in circulation since the fourth at the least and *A solis ortus cardine* was written in the early decades of the fifth. Thus, by the fifth century Veronica had become an obvious candidate for the type of transfers of power that were core components of Christian *hisoriola* charms. Clearly, these charm texts envisioned the legendary healing of both the *Haemorrhoissa* and Christ himself passing from them and into the patient.

CONCLUSION

As the medieval period progressed, new social developments saw changes being made to charms. In the early part of the period, in both the Irish and Germanic charms the active voice and source of power is the first-person singular, and the power of the charm was channelled through the speaker, or the charmer, themselves. Even the first Old Irish charm from the St Gall collection, which calls on the words Jesus spoke on the cross, contains an active 'I' voice in the words of power, when it states: 'I strike a blow on it which makes it spring out, which makes it spring forward, which drives it out.' Even though both Christ and Goibniu the smith are invoked, the main action of driving out the thorn is perceived as being performed by the power the charmer has. Based on the samples of charm texts that have been edited thus far, by the Middle Irish period it appears that the voice of the words of power became passive, with the power of healing or protecting coming from God, a source of power that exists outside the charmer, but which can be directed by him. In this way, we can see that medicine for the body was also considered medicine for the soul, a sort of 'divine medicine' that follows the examples of Jesus and the saints. In this charming tradition, the healer can heal his patients both physically and spiritually, in the same way that Jesus is often depicted as doing.

Regardless of whether they were from an earlier native tradition or had been composed following the introduction and adoption of Christianity, the fact that such charms could be adapted so easily implies that both the earlier system and the later faith contained a similar world view, in that both conceived of words as having power. In the earlier examples, the power may have come from within the speaker, focused through the words being spoken and finally entering the patient to heal them. However, in Christianity, if God had imbued herbs and minerals with special qualities or virtues, he

may well have done the same to words. In this way, both the early native and later Christian charmers were simply trying to find the correct formula of words to apply to specific illnesses and injuries.

That native lore or names of authorities from native tradition were recorded alongside Christian ones indicates, moreover, that those who were recording them were, at that early stage, quite comfortable in doing so. They may have wanted to add Christian elements to make the texts reflect the new belief system, but they did not remove or censor the older elements. Indeed, they exist comfortably on the page together. Nor were clerics and working physicians fully banned from using the types of magic and rituals the church Fathers had written about at great length, as can be seen with the examples taken from NLI MS G 11, which include a herb-gathering ritual, the use of herbs as ligatures, textual amulets, and rituals that relied on sympathetic magic to work. This level of synthesis and of coexistence can be seen throughout the case studies in this thesis. In the case of love magic, as we shall see in Chapter 4, there was a clear Christian reaction to it and the questions it raised, and a movement to create a Christian style of love magic that adhered more closely to the social framework of medieval Ireland followed. Even in the case of cursing, space was made both in the religious sphere and legal institutions that allowed them to exist comfortably in the society and hierarchy they were created to maintain.

Chapter 4: Cursing and Satire in Medieval Ireland

As with healing and charms, rituals for cursing and imprecation predate the introduction of Christianity to the West and exist in many different cultures across the world. The Insular and continental Celtic people were no different and had evolved their own systems for calling for vengeance. Looking, first, to the tradition of native cursing on continental Europe, it might be noted that the Gaulish evidence demonstrates some interesting features, particularly where the Gauls came into contact with Rome, and can help uncover at least a little of the Roman-Celtic cursing tradition. Curse tablets in a Gaulish context were clearly based on Roman influence, and they and the formulae used on them had their own distinct flavour. These spells took the form of *defixiones*, or ‘binding spells’, the earliest attested forms of which can be described as attempts to stop someone or restrain their harmful behaviour, rather than outright calling for vengeance.[331]

These binding spells eventually developed a more legalistic tone, as though they were calling on a court of deities, or one particular figure, to act as judge and put a halt to whatever situation or behaviour the curser wished to address.[332] This is unsurprising, as many of the curse tablets uncovered appear to have been a way to attempt to use magic and the supernatural to influence legal proceedings.[333] Finally, by the time of Imperial Rome, they had developed a more prayer-like form, becoming what Mees has called ‘judicial prayers’, where a deity is asked to intercede on behalf of the curser.[334] Indeed, Mees has noted that *ara*, the Greek word typically used as ‘curse’, can also mean ‘prayer’, just as with the Latin *precor* (‘pray’), indicating that these curses were intended to act like prayers.[335] It is in this strong

[331] Bernard Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 18.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid., p. 21.
[334] Ibid., p. 13.
[335] Ibid.

and actively evolving Roman tradition of cursing that areas such as Gaulish France would also see cursing traditions develop while adapting to the Roman context.

Although a wealth of such Roman-influenced curse tablets has been found in France, they were not restricted to this area. For example, a tile containing a Latin *defixio* with Celtic forms and names was uncovered in Maar, Germany, in the nineteenth century.[336] It reads 'I bind Artus, son of Dercomagnus, the fucker, Artus Aprilis Celsius the fucker'.[337] Also found in Germany, in Groß-Gerau, was a lead curse tablet asking that the person who stole the cloak of Verio 'should be afflicted by worms, crabs and vermin'.[338] In the 1970s, extensive archaeological work on a Roman shrine to Mercury in Uley, Gloucestershire, England uncovered a surprisingly large number of metal curse tablets.[339] Similarly, over one hundred *defixiones* were uncovered during excavations of the hot spring in Bath, Somerset, which was also the site of a healing cult, this time dedicated to Sulis, the Celtic goddess whose cult was based there.[340]

Ireland, of course, was never a part of the Roman Empire. Although there was certainly contact between pre-Christian Ireland and Rome, it appears that, prior to the adoption of the new religion, cursing in Ireland took a more formal and verbal form, with no curse tablets uncovered in this country during any time period. Unfortunately, due to the lack of textual sources from Ireland during the early periods of the country's history, we can only guess as to how such curses may have looked. Nevertheless, there is ample textual evidence for two different types of cursing rituals from the medieval period in Ireland: that of clerical cursing and poetic satire. While poetic satire may have developed from an earlier, native form of cursing, the same cannot be said for clerical cursing, which appears to have developed

[336] Bernard Mees, *Celtic Curses*, p. 79.
[337] Ibid., p. 109.
[338] Cooley and Salway, *Roman Inscriptions 2006–2010,* p. 242.
[339] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 42.
[340] Ibid. p. 30.

separately as a medieval innovation, with both becoming viable alternative ways to address legal concerns and gain redress. As with healing charms, it was the words that were spoken that were seen to hold power, while the Christian imagery and speech-acts helped place these rituals in a familiar, shared social context.

THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL CONTEXTS OF SATIRE

The *filid* were a class of lay professionals who filled many important social roles. Highly educated, they were repositories of knowledge concerning history, genealogy, and the world around them, capable of placing Irish history into a wider Christian context as well as composing and reciting prose and poetry. Satire was delivered in a regulated and poetic way, and there is evidence that the *filid* consciously drew upon the pagan belief system that Christianity replaced.[341] As Stacey has noted, 'they acknowledge their pagan past, of course, but prefer to emphasise stories like that of Dubhthach, in which a *fili* is the first to profess his reverence for the newly arrived Saint Patrick.'[342] By the seventh century, however, the *filid* were represented in textual sources as 'a distinctive and highly visible professional class',[343] and by the eighth century we can see that their organisational structure was based on Church hierarchy and had been arranged into seven distinct categories to mirror the religious organisation.[344] In addition, by this time, many *filid* would have received at least the basics of their education from the monastic schools. Clearly, the *filid* that emerged following the introduction of Christianity had made a conscious effort to distance themselves from their roots.

While their reinvention and integration into the new Christian milieu was important, what also appears to have been a concern to the *filid* was distinguishing themselves from the 'lesser' poetic orders, such as the bards and professional satirists, who are often listed in textual sources alongside pagans and druids.[345] Exactly how accurate these comparisons are is unknown, but many of the texts seem to be concerned with the misuse of poetic satire,

---

[341] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* pp. 157–71. See also Carey, 'Three Things Required of a Poet', pp. 47–50. For a list of the appropriate meters used in satire, see McLaughlin, 'Meters in *Metterlirsische Verslehren III'*, pp. 121–2.
[342] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 157.
[343] Ibid.
[344] See Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar,* pp. 83–9 for a discussion on the ordering of groups into seven sections, and pp. 85–7 specifically for his argument that this ordering system was first adopted by the Church in Ireland before being subsequently applied to other groupings.
[345] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 159.

reflecting the fear that 'poets of the lesser orders will abuse the power of their voice by engaging in unlawful or unjust satire.'[346] These fears also extend to the lower orders of the *filid* too, indicating that such power was conceptualised as belonging to those of the order who were the most educated and thus capable of wielding it correctly. In this way, we can see that the *filid*'s desire for a new identity and definition, away from their pre-Christian origins, was a necessary part of their rehabilitation and re-acceptance into a new social order. Additionally, as Kelly has argued, 'one of the poet's most important functions is evidently to satirize and praise.'[347] It is true that one of the many functions that *filid* performed was the composition of poems that extolled the virtue of a particular person, usually at the behest of those who could pay for their services. Called 'praise poetry', the purpose of these pieces was to exalt the reputation of the person they were written for, and typically to extol the subject's generosity, wisdom and general prowess, holding them up as an example for all, especially those of a similar position and class.[348] This type of poem was not limited to male kings. A tract referred to by the term *trefhocal*, which can be found in the Book of Leinster (Dublin, Trinity College MS H 2. 18) and the Book of Uí Mhaine (Dublin, RIA MS D ii 1), states that women and clergy can also be the recipients of praise poetry: *tothocht danó .i. amal beit a mbésa corp amlaid moltair cách, .i. molad laích for láech, molad cléirig for cléirech, molad mná for mnaí* ('appropriateness, then, that is, as their ways of life are that everyone be so praised, that is, a layman is to be praised as a layman, a cleric is to be praised as a cleric, a woman is to be praised as a woman').[349] The examples the text gives for clerical and female praise are as follows:

---

[346] Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 161.
[347] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 43.
[348] McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire,* pp. 10–11; see also O'Cathasaigh, 'The Making of a Prince', pp. 148–52 for his analysis of the praise poem *Áed oll fri and n-áne.*
[349] Breatnach, 'Satire and Praise', p. 69.

Túathal dlúim do déirc Dé dil, húa Conaill, mac Amirgin, húasalescop Inse Fáil, comarba cathrach Ciaráin.

(‘Túathal, an abundance of the charity of dear God, grandson of Conall, son of Amirgen, the noble bishop of the Isle of Fál, successor to the city of Cíarán.’)

Ciall, cruth, cenél cen chairi; gáes, gart, genus co ndruini; cland, compert cen gráin gaili; atát oc Derb Ail uili

(‘Good sense, beauty, [good] family without reproach: wisdom, generosity, purity together with manual dexterity; children, begetting without terror of the womb: Derb Áil has them all.’)[350]

The opposite of this was satire, which poets could use under certain circumstances. Called *áer* in Irish, which translates literally as ‘cutting’ or ‘incising’,[351] satire was considered to be a particularly powerful use of words. The narrative and legal texts present it as being able to raise blemishes on or cause injuries to the subject once it was pronounced correctly. Indeed, there are many depictions of satire being used to cause physical injuries and even death throughout medieval Irish texts. It became so widespread and well-known that it even crept into the canon of other countries, particularly England, where writers such as William Shakespeare remarked on the peculiar Irish ability of ‘rhyming’ to cause death, especially against rodents such as rats, in a clear allusion to satire: ‘I was never so be-rhymed since Pythagoras’ time, that I was an Irish rat, which I can hardly remember.’[352] Similarly,

---

[350] Breatnach, ‘Satire and Praise’, p. 70.
[351] eDIL s.v. *áer* (dil.ie/633). Stifter, however, argues that *áer* simply means ‘satire’, because the explanation of ‘cutting’ only appears in a single etymological gloss (personal comm., Feb. 2024).
[352] Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* Act iii, Scene ii.

playwright Ben Jonson wrote in *The Poetaster*: 'Rhyme them to death, as they do Irish rats'.[353] Even Jonathan Swift made mention of the practice, stating that 'Our very good friend, speaking of the force of poetry, mentions rhyming to death, which (adds he) is said to be done in Ireland'.[354]

The Old Irish legal text *Bretha Nemed Toísech* describes satire as *Ro fóebra fúamann* ('verbal blades') that *fó thuinn tethnatar /ro dúisced fuil /fora grúaide gnúis, / conid fodirc inna rus / ro mbríathraib bith* ('cut beneath his skin, blood has been aroused onto his cheeks [and] face, so that it is evident in his countenance that he has been wounded by words.')[355] It further gives the injunction that *Ni gonae grúaide gaib ansóis* ('you are not to wound cheeks with the spears of unpoetry'),[356] while a Middle Irish commentary on *Uraicecht Becc* also uses words that liken satire to a physical weapon, calling it *renda áer* ('the barbs of satire').[357] While the wording of the description in *Bretha Nemed Toísech* sounds more like making the subject blush furiously in embarrassment, it is clear from the textual evidence, particularly the narrative tales, that satire was considered to be a physical threat that could cause injury and even death.

The belief in the power of satire can be seen in the legal text *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, which states that *enech* ('honour' and 'face') is more vulnerable than the body, and because of this fact people feared the poets and their ability to satirize. As a result, it was one of the roles of the *filid* to enforce the regulation of honour.[358] Breatnach has interpreted this passage as an analogy of the legal condition of a lord taking hostages to enforce a treaty between his *túath* and another: the *filid* regulate honour between nobles by using the threat of satire

[353] Todd, 'On Rhyming Rats to Death', p. 355.
[354] See Todd, 'On Rhyming Rats to Death', pp. 355–66 for a more in-depth discussion of this aspect of satire.
[355] Breatnach, 'Cáin Ónae', p. 42.
[356] Breatnach, 'Satire and Praise', p. 64.
[357] Breatnach, 'Addenda and Corrigenda', p. 190.
[358] Breatnach, 'The Limitations of Satire', p. 122.

against the 'hostage' of a person's *enech*.[359] As McMullen has noted, the nature of the reciprocal relationship between a *fili* and *nemed,* particularly kings, can be characterised as economic, and was expressed through satire and praise poetry.[360] In this way, satire should not be abused. Indeed, *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* outright states that a poet should not satirize or over-praise a subject, as the *fili* depended on the wealth of his patron for his own economic standing.[361] The *fili* should help grow the reputation and honour of his patron and, in turn, he would benefit from the *dúas* ('reward') he received in compensation. It should thus be in the *fili's* own interest to use his considerable power to praise his lord rather than harm him.

Old and Middle Irish texts certainly reflect a fear regarding satire, particularly in the language they use to describe and define it, much of which centres on weaponry and the cutting of a person's body or skin. As mentioned above, *áer,* the word most commonly used for satire, and *rindad,* another common name for satire, are translated as 'to cut', while *Bretha Nemed Toísech* uses the example of verbal blades attacking the subject of the satire.[362] The poem *Tairgidh mo sheachna a Shíol mBriain,* a later example of a poem that threatens satire dating from the sixteenth century, expresses the poet's own firm belief in his power to destroy the subject, the fourth earl of Thomond Donnchadh Ó Briain, through metaphors and analogies of weapons.[363] Indeed, the poet expressly states that through his satire he can negate the good things Ó Briain had done, impede his ability to gain more prosperity, and cause physical injury to his face and body.[364]

The narrative texts focus on satire's physical ability to harm. For example, a commentary on an entry in *Sanas Cormaic* relates the story of the second satire pronounced in Ireland. In the tale, the satire is clearly presented as an unjust satire, and is spoken against

---

[359] Breatnach, 'A Threat of Satire', p. 122.
[360] McMullen, 'Improper Requests and Unjust Satire', p. 206.
[361] Ibid., p. 207.
[362] eDIL s.v. *áer* or dil.ie/633; and eDIL s.v. *rindad* or dil.ie/35322; McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire,* p. 4.
[363] McLaughlin (ed. and trans.), 'A Threat of Satire', pp. 46–53.
[364] Ibid., pp. 50–51, verse 19.

Caíar, the king of Connacht, by his nephew Néide, who was encouraged to do so by Caíar's wife who had fallen in love with Néide.[365] The satire works and Caíar receives a blemish on his face, which means he can no longer rule as king. However, as the satire was unjust, both Néide and Caíar die at the end of the tale. The outcome, although seemingly unjust to king Caíar, is actually in line with other texts regarding satire and kingship. For example, in the *Sechtae* ('Heptads'), the ninth tract of the *Senchas Már,* Heptad XIII names a king who endures unjust satire as one of the seven kings who was no longer entitled to compensation or honour-price.[366] Without an honour-price, a person effectively loses his status, which is exactly what was depicted as having happened to Caíar after he flees from Néide and his false satire. However, as the satire was unjust in the first place, the power of the poem rebounded on Néide too, killing both men.

The type of satire Néide is said to have produced is called a *glám dícenn*, and the tale is also cited in *Uraicecht na Ríar*, a law tract that details the status and organisation of poets, where it is also described as such in a gloss added to that text.[367] eDIL describes a *glám* as 'a species of satire', with the primary meaning being 'satire, a lampoon, a censure' and, interestingly, in light of the discussion below concerning the French clamour and the process of *Clameur de Haro*, with a secondary meaning of 'outcry, clamour'.[368]

Medieval Irish society was hierarchical in nature, with the highest echelon classed as *nemed* ('privileged'). *Nemed* essentially translates to 'sacred' or 'holy' in its most basic meaning.[369] This class was made up of the elites: kings and leaders of *túatha*, lords (*flaithi*), clerics and poets, with these classes of people having been granted special legal privileges.

---

[365] O'Donovan and Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Sanas Cormaic,* p. 87; McLaughlin, 'A Threat of Satire', p. 40. See also Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possessions'.
[366] Breatnach, 'Satire and Praise', p. 65.
[367] Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 115. The ritual for the *glám dícenn* type of satire will be discussed more fully below.
[368] eDIL s.v. 1 *glám* or dil.ie/25963.
[369] eDIL s.v. *neimed* or dil.ie/33032.

For example, the process of distraint, or the legal and formal seizure of property for legal redress, did not apply to them.[370] Conversely, as the highest-ranking members of society, there was nobody a person classed as *nemed* could submit to. Indeed, a ninth-century Irish triad states that it is unwise to act as surety against a king or another class of *nemed* because their *enech* ('honour') was too great for the surety to sue or gain legal redress in the event that the *nemed* defaulted.[371] The early Irish law-text *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* goes as far as to say that *ní cor cor for nemthiu* ('a contract with *nemeds* is not a contract').[372] Additionally, *Tecosca Cormaic* states that one should 'not buy from a high-ranking person'.[373] Presumably, not all contracts with individuals classed as *nemed* were automatically void or invalid, but certainly it would have been difficult to enforce them should the *nemed* renege. Kings, however, could substitute themselves for an *aithech fortha* ('substitute '). Whenever the king broke the law or refused legal responsibility for wrong-doing, the plaintiff could instead initiate the process of distraint against the substitute figure, and gain restitution from them.[374]

As Stacey has shown, legal processes such as distraint involved a certain amount of public performance, which in turn was dependent on the innovative use of time and space, as well as the impact on the audience.[375] Known as *athgabál* ('taking back') in Irish, and presented in a detailed manner in the legal text *Di Cetharṡlicht Athgabála*, distraint was the formal seizure of property and a valid legal process of claiming restitution.[376] It began with the plaintiff giving formal notice to the defendant that the seizure of property would begin after a period of delay. This notice, called *apad*, had to be given early in the morning and in

---

[370] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 9. Indeed, Heptads II, XXV and XXLIII state that anything given to a poet in recompense for his poetry cannot be taken from him by distraint. See Breatnach, 'Satire and Praise', p. 78.
[371] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 9. See also Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland,* pp. 30–1, Triad 235. The Triads are short legal maxims that were used to help scholars remember and recall information quickly. See also Kelly, 'Thinking in Threes', pp. 1–18.
[372] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 162.
[373] Ibid. See also Meyer, *The Instructions of Cormac mac Airt,* pp. 36–7.
[374] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 25.
[375] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* pp. 20–9.
[376] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 177.

front of witnesses. The period of delay, called *anad*, differed depending on the type and severity of crime committed.[377] During *anad*, the defendant was given the opportunity to respond and pay the fine, or perform the obligation, that was owed to the plaintiff. If the defendant refused to do so, the process of distraint proper was set in motion, and the plaintiff was then entitled to enter the defendant's land and begin removing cattle or other valuable livestock until the value of the fine was paid in full.

The distrained livestock were brought to a pound, which could be marked out on either the plaintiff's land or on neutral ground that belonged to neither side of the dispute. The distrained livestock stayed there for a period of time called *díthim* ('delay in pound'). As with *anad*, the defendant could offer to pay the fine or make a pledge to do so during this stage and recover his lost livestock. However, should the period of *díthim* pass with no response from the defendant, the process would continue, entering the final stage, called *lobad* ('decay'). During *lobad*, the livestock would be removed from the pound and become forfeit. This part of the process took place over the number of days it took for the cost of the fine to be recouped. As with the rest of the process, it could have been stopped at any time by the defendant paying, or pledging to pay, the balance owed. However, any livestock removed during *lobad* remained forfeit, but by coming to terms during it the defendant could prevent more losses.

A shorter text on distraint also survives that was edited and translated by Binchy in 1973.[378] This introduces some differences that may have arisen, for example the processes used for distraining a variety of animals, including sheep, horses, domesticated pets such as cats and dogs, and even bees. It also includes instances where the offence being compensated was committed by an animal rather than a person. For example, if a watchdog committed an

---

[377] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 178; see also Binchy, 'Distraint in Irish Law', pp. 38–45 for a more detailed discussion of *anad.*
[378] Binchy, 'A Text on the Forms of Distraint', pp. 72–88.

offence, *apad* was given to its owner before a plank was placed across the dog's food vessel, with the dog remaining unfed until the owner had paid the compensation due. If the owner ignored this and continued to feed his dog, the crime then passed from the category of 'animal trespass' to *duinechin* ('human offence') and the fine was increased to reflect this.[379] The early Irish text on the law of neighbourhood, *Bretha Comaithchesa*, outlines the process in place should livestock or a domestic pet trespass onto or damage a neighbour's property. Should cattle graze on a neighbour's land, the injured party had to 'throw a stone over them three times in the presence of a witness'.[380] After a period of twenty-four hours, if the cattle's owner refused to pay the fine levied, the plaintiff could impound the herd; after this, *díthim* and *lobad* would be enacted and the herd would be forfeit.

In addition to the various types of distraint, the procedure called *troscud* ('fasting') could also be used to pressure a *nemed* or king into submitting to the law and accepting judgement.[381] The legal text *Di Chetharṡlicht Athgabála* contains a short description of the procedure. It appears that the fast took place outside the residence of the *nemed*, with a later commentary stating that it took place from sundown to sunrise, meaning that the plaintiff would forego the main evening meal.[382] Should the *nemed* ignore the plaintiff, it appears that a period of notice was given. After this period of delay, the plaintiff could formally begin the process of distraint against the *nemed* or an *aithech fortha*, if the latter had been supplied by the king. *Troscud* appears to have been the recommended way of securing legal redress against all classes of *nemed*, not just kings, as high-ranking clerics and *filid* also enjoyed a higher honour-price and similar legal privileges.

Of particular interest to the current work are the public and performative aspects of these legal procedures, as well as their use of space and borders. Even Saint Patrick was

---

[379] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 180.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid., p. 182.
[382] Ibid.

portrayed as having engaged in *troscud*. In the episode from the Tripartite Life, the later *Life* created from a number of earlier examplars, an angel tells Patrick that a grant for land that Patrick wanted on Crúachan was not going to be granted to him. The author then states: *Bái iarum Pátraic conolcus menman i Cruachán cen dig, cen biad, o die shathairn initi codia sathairn cásc fochosmailius Móissi maicc Amrai; arroptar cosmaili inilib.* ('Then Patrick abode in Crúachan in much displeasure, without drink, without food, from Shrove Saturday to Easter Saturday, after the manner of Moses son of Amra, for they were alike in many things.')[383] Although the author uses the beginning of the episode as an opportunity to make connections between Moses and Patrick, what follows is a clear description of the *troscud* ritual, as Patrick essentially sits on the land he requested, which is part of God's domain, and fasts until his demands are met.

The angel eventually brings Patrick the news that instead of giving him the land, God is granting him a boon, in that *'Doberausa fi alin ucut,' ol in t-angel, 'de anmannaib apéin, ocus ani rosaig dosuil foramuir.'* ('Thou shalt bring,' saith the angel, 'yon number of souls out of pain, and all that [can fill the space which] thine eye reaches over').[384] Patrick then points out that his eyes cannot see much over the sea, so the angel decides that he can also free as many souls that can fit over the land and sea. Patrick then asks if there is anything else the angel can give him, and the angel agrees to allow seven souls to be taken out of hell every week for Patrick's benefit. Patrick demands that twelve be let go, and the angel agrees and asks Patrick to leave the mountain he had camped on. Patrick, however, refuses to leave and instead demands more blessings and guarantees from God regarding the qualities of the benefits both Patrick and the people of Ireland would receive in return for an insult he had previously received, stating, each time that the angel grants him more, that '*Ní dingéb,' ol*

---

[383] Stokes, (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 114–15.
[384] Ibid., pp. 116–17.

Patraic, 'ol romcraided condomdigdider.' ('I will not get me gone,' said Patrick, 'since I have been tormented, till I am blessed.').[385] What follows is a long list of demands that ends with Patrick gaining the right to judge Irish people himself on the day of judgement, and all Irish people living and dead being consecrated alongside Patrick. It is only when Patrick has gained as much as he can for the people he would be ministering to, and his honour has been restored, that he finally accepts God's blessing and agrees to leave.[386]

Satire, then, appears to have been a similar way for poets to gain legal redress from *nemed*, who otherwise could not be forced into participating in the typical legal procedures. There are narrative tales that certainly show it being used in this manner, such as *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coisse* ('The Stratagem of Uraid mac Coisse'), a Middle Irish tale that recounts the attempt by a fili, Uraird mac Coisse, to gain compensation from king Domnall mac Muirchertaig following an attack on his household by the king's relatives. In the tale, mac Coisse tells the king a story he has created, called *Orcain Cathrach Maíl Milscothaigh* ('The Plundering of Máel Milscothach's Fort'), and through this tale he subtly threatens the king with a satire, as he does not want to accuse the king's relatives directly, bringing danger on himself by upsetting such a powerful person.[387] The threat, coupled with an angelic vision that confirms the truth of mac Coisse's accusation, works, and the poet receives his compensation. Clearly, the threat of satire was enough to make Domnall recognise the injustice that had been done to mac Coisse and make reparation. The inclusion of the angel implies that Church also recognises the legitimacy of the claim.

[385] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Tripartite Life,* pp. 116–17.
[386] Although the mountain in question was Croagh Patrick, so how effective the angel was as an intermediary negotiator is open to interpretation.
[387] Nguyen, *A Critical Edition,* p. 1. See also Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory', pp. 33–45.

TREFHOCAL

Although mac Coisse uses a story to highlight how he was wronged and how the king owed him compensation, the legal texts show that the threat of satire was supposed to formally begin by using a procedure called *trefhocal*. This ritualistic process began by the poet giving 'a period of warning, followed by the period of *trefhocal*, followed by a period during which one may still give a pledge to answer claims, all of which must precede the satire proper.'[388] As with the legal procedures outlined above, the method used was lengthy and designed to give the subject time to respond and come to terms with the poet before the satire was finally pronounced.

The entire process was ritualistic, public, and carefully timed, taking place over a period of thirty days, with each of the three steps lasting for ten days. The first stage was the period of notice, wherein the *fili* announced his intention to compose the satire. During this period, he was also responsible for the construction of a 'rod': a cross-shaped object that would act as a public, visual marker for the rest of the ritual. It was to be constructed as follows:

> *Benair aibghitir oghaim. Blf. 7 aibgitir ua .i. tiasca ai i nainm de; 7 is e a greim-so .i. cros, 7 a cur isin .c. drumaind ar son apaid; doberar ainm cinadh isin drumaind eile, 7 moladh isin cethramad drumaind, 7 in flesc do saidhudh i forba ... don fhilidh.*

> The ogham alphabet is cut, B, L, F, and the alphabet of poetry (?). That is, 'I begin poetry in the name of God', and this is how it takes effect, that is, a cross, and it is put on the first arm as notice, and the name of the offence on the second arm, and the

[388] Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 139.

name of the guilty party on the third arm, and praise on the fourth arm, and the rod is to be set into the ground by the poet.[389]

This visual marker was an important element in the ritual, as we are told that *Ma rosechmaill a fhlesg 7 Dorinda air, is eraic airi uadh* ('If he has by-passed his rod and made a satire, the compensation for satire is due from him').[390]

Once the rod had been created and placed in the ground, the second part of the ritual could begin, that of the *trefhocal*. A *trefhocal* was a specific type of poem, also called a 'speckled poem', that mixed praise with satire in order to act as a warning that full satire was imminent.[391] Translated literally as 'three words' or 'three utterances', the three elements of a *trefhocal* were 'specifying offence, specifying the offender, and praise of the person to whom the warning is directed.'[392] In this way, we can see that the poem was the spoken, aural version of the visual rod, containing all the same information and elements in a longer, verbal, and more detailed way. As with the rest of the satire ritual, and with poetry in general, there were rules that had to be followed. The *trefhocal* poem had to be metrically perfect in order to be considered a true and just *trefhocal*, as can be seen in the surviving examples.[393]

As with the period of notice, the *trefhocal* poem is delivered over a ten-day period, during which the subject can come to terms and halt the process before the eventual satire was pronounced. However, if they chose not to submit and the *trefhocal* was composed and conducted correctly, the final delay of ten days then begins. During this stage, the 'ten days of providing pledges',[394] one assumes that negotiations between the two parties intensified as a

389 Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 139.
390 Ibid.
391 Breatnach, 'The *Trefócal* Tract', p. 2.
392 Ibid.
393 See Meyer (ed.), "Fingen mac Flainn's Gedicht auf die Fir Arddae", pp. 291–301; Meroney (ed. and trans.), 'Studies in Early Irish Satire'; and Calder, *Auraicept*, pp. 150–64 particularly for details of what should not be included in a *trefócal* poem.
394 Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 138.

peaceful resolution was sought. Should this have happened, and both parties came to an agreement, pledges were exchanged between the poet and the subject that indicate the subject's willingness to pay what is owed, and the *fili*, presumably, promised not to pronounce the satire in return. However, during this final period, if there was a possibility that no resolution could be agreed upon, it was likely that the *fili* also used the delay as an opportunity to put the finishing touches on the satire proper, to ensure that it was written to the standards necessary for it to be considered a just satire.

This expectation of metrical, technical and legal perfection indicates 'that lawful satire was the preserve of the high-status learned poets', has been argued above.[395] Indeed, *Bretha Nemed* states that not every poet was allowed to use satire. For example, of the *fochloc*, the lowest order of *filid*, *Uraicecht na Ríar* states that he 'shall satirise no one at all, only a *nemed* shall satirise, he is no *nemed* who does not compose.'[396] The humorous tale *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* ('The Vision of Mac Conglinne') also seems to hint at this, when Mac Conglinne states that he would like poets to satirise anyone who cheats him, but also satirists, separate from poets, to sing the satires the poets had composed.[397] Here, it appears that one type of poet is doing the actual work of composing the satires, while another, possibly even one of the grades of bards rather than a *fili* proper, will be the one who will recite and spread the satire around the country.[398] This seems to indicate that those who cannot compose, or who do not have the training to do so, such as the lowest orders of the *filid* and the bardic orders, were not allowed to write satires themselves. The author of *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* seems to indicate, though, that they could at least recite existing

[395] Breatnach, 'The *Trefocal* Tract', p. 2.
[396] Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 24.
[397] Meyer (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, pp. 45 and 47 for the speech in question; and Preston-Matto (trans.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, p. 27.
[398] See Kelly, *Guide,* p. 47 for a brief explanation of the bards and their grades.

ones. This distinction between the two types of poets is a reflection of the idea that the *filid* themselves had taken steps to differentiate between themselves and other orders of poets.

There appear to have been different ways to compose a satire. Distinctions between the types may have depended on a number of factors, such as the reason for the satire, the status or type of person who was being satirised, or even the grade of *fili* who was doing the composing. Satires from the bardic schools may have been named differently too, to distinguish them from those of the *filid*. For example, *dulsaine*[399] may have referred to a specific type of satire that was composed by a female satirist, as the word is attested as meaning both ‘satire’ and ‘a female satirist’.[400] A number of textual sources suggest that female poets existed. For example, the Annals of Inisfallen record the death of Uallach, daughter of Muinechán, for the year 934, describing her as *banfhili Érenn* (‘the female poet of Ireland’).[401] Additionally, *Sanas Cormaic* contains the tale ‘Prull’, which relates how the legendary poet Senchán Torpéist discovered a *banfhili* living on the Isle of Man, following an unnamed incident that befell her on a poetic circuit and saw her entire retinue wiped out.[402] Although the tale does not give her a first name, she is referred to as ‘the poetess, daughter of Ua Dulsaine’.[403] Although *dulsaine* could be a type of female satirist, it is important to note that the character that bears that surname is not referred to as such in the tale. However, one of the Triads of Ireland reads as follows: *Trí meic beres drús do lannus: tuilfhéth, fidchell, dulsaine* (‘three sons whom folly bears to anger: frowning, ‘wood-sense’,[404] and satire’). If the female poet of the story is named literally as ‘daughter of satire’, it may be implied that she is actually a descendent of someone from the bardic school of poetry, rather than a *filid*.

[399] eDIL s.v. dulsaine or dil.ie/19216.
[400] See Carney, *Poems on the O'Reillys* for an explanation of *dulsaine* as female satirists.
[401] See Kelly, *Guide,* p. 49; see also Clancy, ‘Women Poets’, pp. 43–72.
[402] O'Donovan and Stokes (trans.), *Sanas Chormaic,* pp. 135–139. See also Russell, ‘Poets, Power and Possessions’, pp. 9–45 for a discussion on the tales found in *Sanas Cormaic.*
[403] O'Donovan and Stokes (trans.), *Sanas Cormaic,* p. 137.
[404] eDIL s.v. fidchell or dil.ie/22014. Its inclusion in this Triad is interesting.

However, given that only the top levels of *filid* were legally allowed to compose satires, it is not outside the realm of possibility that she was the daughter of a *nemed* who was renowned for producing satires. That she had been granted a retinue and had undertaken a poetic circuit seems to hint that the author of the tale saw this as acceptable practice, albeit probably rare.

The most common word used for satire was *áer*, which, as noted above, carries the double meaning of 'cutting', as well as describing the actual act of satirizing. *Ailech*, from *ail*, also describes satire, while the word *ail* itself can mean the act of reproaching someone, but is also a type of satire called 'insult'. *Cáintecht* is, again, a word that describes the act of satirizing someone, but derives from the word *cáinte*, meaning satirist, explained in *Sanas Cormaic* as a *cainis .i. cu, ar is cend con forsin cainti, ar is inann dan frisgniat* ('*canis*, a dog, for the satirist has a dog's head in barking, and alike is the profession they follow.')[405] *Cáinte* ('illegal satire', or 'lampooner'), is not listed as a grade of poet in *Uraicecht na Ríar,* indicating that they were a sub-set of poets, distinct from the *filid*, that existed purely to compose or recite satires. Indeed, where the *cáinte* is mentioned in the textual sources, he is treated with the same scorn and contempt given to the female satirist.[406]

In addition to these, there are a number of other words that all carry the meaning of 'a type of satire'. These include *dalbach*, *eisce* ('intention to damage, slay or wound'), *glasgabail* ('some form of satire'), *neimnech* ('name of a poetic composition, satire, lampoon') in its substantive use, and *foraer*, which appears to have been the name given to a satire that exaggerated or was deemed uncalled for, rather than outright illegal.[407]

[405] O'Donovan and Stokes (trans.), *Sanas Cormaic,* p. 31.
[406] Kelly, *Guide,* pp. 50–1.
[407] eDIL s.v. dalbach or dil.ie/14374; eDIL s.v. eisce or dil.ie/19850; eDIL s.v. glasgabail or dil.ie/26012; and eDIL s.v. 1 neimnech or dil.ie/33041. See also McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire,* pp. 6–7 for a description of some of the different forms of satire.

Glam Dícenn

There is evidence for one type of satire that incorporates a public ritual and borders on the supernatural: namely, that of *glám dícenn*. As it is described in *Uraicecht na Ríar,* this type appears to have involved an elaborate ritual:

> *Atáat a secht con-láat cach n-aír*[a]*: i scáth aide caislechtai scoth*[b]*, is treairiut*[c] *i cuairt éscai – aidbsiu in sin*[d]*; aidech n-aicetail*[e] *congain comail*[f]*, corrguinecht*[g]*.*
>
> [a] *.i. caein-luaidhid in nglaim ndigind ⁊ cumthair in ais*
>
> [b] *.i. fo scat sciath cen deilgi fuirre ⁊ barr dluth trom uirre*
>
> [c] *.i. i tri naeibh da-nither i cuairt Reatha easga*
>
> [d] *⁊ ni taidhbhsin gor ab amhluidh sin do ghníthidh*
>
> [e] *.i. cantain in aircetail co nguin a deilbi*
>
> [f] *ig cantain na tuaithi*
>
> [g] *.i. dealbh da-nither da criaidh ⁊ go ndentar a guin ag cantain na glami digeind*
>
> There are seven things which compose[a] any satire: in the shade of a smooth, flowery *ad*[b] in the three periods[c] of the circuit of the moon, that is how it is announced[d]: harmonious reciting[e], magical wounding[f], sorcery[g].
>
> [a] Which initiate well any *glám dícenn*
>
> [b] Under the shade of a whitethorn without any thorns on it, and a dense heavy top on it
>
> [c] In the three nines it is done, in the course of the circuit of the moon
>
> [d] and it is not manifestation until you do it thus

[e] Chanting the composition, together with piercing his likeness

[f] while chanting the charm

[g] a likeness which is made of clay, and it is pierced with thorns while the *glám dícenn* is chanted.[408]

The description given for this performance is completely different from the performance of a *trefhocal*. There is no mention of the creation of a rod, and no mention of any kind of 'speckled' poem being performed prior to the performance of the *glám dícenn* itself. The section also states that there are 'seven things' that make the satire, but only four appear to be listed. Breatnach suggests, however, that the 'three periods in the circuit of the moon' may not constitute a single element of the instructions, but rather might refer to the three periods of delay contained in the *trefhocal* ritual. If we accept his suggestion, there are indeed seven things contained in the list: the hawthorn, three delay periods, the reciting, the wounding and the sorcery. Breatnach suggests further that the second delay is the period during which the *trefhocal* is pronounced, with the satire itself, the *glám dícenn*, contained in the physical performance that takes place once the various ranks of the *filid* have assembled.[409]

Rudolf Thurneysen argues that the *glám dícenn* ritual is performed by one of each of the seven grades of the *filid*, on top of a hill that has a whitethorn tree, before sunrise, when the wind is from the north.[410] Once there, the assembled *filid* stand with their backs towards the tree and, while holding a thorn from that tree, they recite the *glám dícenn* together.[411]

[408] Liam Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar,* pp. 114–5, §24. The word *ad* remains untranslated, and is interpreted by DIL as 'some kind of tree', eDIL s.v. ad or dil.ie/825. I am including the glosses here, as they contain an interesting explanation of the ritual, although they date to much later than the original ritual described.
[409] Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* pp. 138–9.
[410] Ibid., p. 140.
[411] Ibid.

However, as Breatnach has noted, the verse given as an example of *glám dícenn* is a corrupted version of the satire Néide made against Caíar, as detailed in §23 of *Uraicecht na Ríar*, where it is called *áer* ('satire') rather than *glám dícenn*. It is the gloss on §24 of this text that uses the term *glám dícenn* in place of *áer*. A third version, from a text on satire and *glám dícenn*,[412] begins by citing §24 of *Uraicecht na Ríar* and includes the added information that one can use 'a clayen image of the man to whom it [the satire] is made, and a thorn from the whitethorn in each man's hand, and they piercing the image with their whitethorn thorns.'[413]

Taken together, we get a description of an extraordinary performance: in the early hours before dawn seven professional poets, representing each of the seven grades of *filid*, make their way to a hawthorn-topped hill. Once there, they stand in a circle, facing out with the central tree at their backs, and recite the *glám dícenn* whilst stabbing a clay idol of their target with thorns. If this is the culmination of the full satire/*trefhocal* ritual, it is certainly a striking image and performance, and one that exudes an air of magic and mystery, reminiscent as it is of modern depictions of Houdon ceremonies, complete with a so-called 'voodoo doll'. However, the use of such items as clay dolls and poppets made from natural materials dates back to long before the modern era and can be found in a number of cultures and countries, including early England, Scotland and Germany. Indeed, such figurines have a similar geographical and chronological history to curse tablets, although it is believed that they are more archaic and 'could therefore constitute a forerunner of curse tablets'.[414] If this is the end of the satire ritual, then it doubtless made an impression on those outside of the ranks of the *filid* who witnessed it.

However, the glosses from *Uraicecht na Ríar* that describe the *glám dícenn* ritual date to a later period than the text to which they belong. Without the glosses, the original text

[412] CIH 1564.27.
[413] Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 140.
[414] Curbera and Giannobile, 'A "Voodoo Doll" from Keos', p. 125.

speaks of *aidech n-aicetail, congain comail, corrguinecht* ('harmonious reciting, magical wounding, sorcery') as the correct way to 'announce' the *glám dícenn.* It is the glossator who defines these things as piercing a clay figure while chanting the 'spell'. It is, of course, possible that the glossator is drawing on a later, contemporaneous ritual that had evolved in a more theatrical manner by his own time, but if this was the case, we would expect to find descriptions of such a ritual in other contemporary sources, such as narrative tales and annals, similar to how we find reports and descriptions of clerical cursing. This, however, is not what we find.

O'Davoren's Glossary contains the following entry concerning a ritual called *corrguinecht: Corrguinecht .i. beith for leth-cois ⁊ for leth-laimh ⁊ lethsuil ag denam na glaime dícinn* ('being on one foot, with one hand, with one eye [closed], while making the *glám dícenn*').[415] Here, we are given completely different directions for the performance of *glám dícenn* and, again, it is visually striking. The posture described here is also one that reoccurs in narrative texts, particularly in relation to 'magical' people or the performance of 'magical' verbal acts. However, as a description of *glám dícenn*, this performance is only recorded in this entry to O'Davoran's Glossary, where it is joined by a second entry on *corrguinecht*, which states that 'for *sén uaire* ('good luck') especially it used to be performed'.[416]

Cath Maige Tuired ('The [second] Battle of Moytura') appears to incorporate a similar performance. When the Túatha Dé and Fomorians go to battle against each other, Lug casts a spell to influence the outcome and grant victory to the Túatha Dé: *Conid and rocan Lug an cétal-so síos, for lethcois ⁊ letsúil timchell fer n-Érenn* ('Then Lug chanted the cétal ('spell') which follows, going around the men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye

[415] Borsje and Kelly, 'The Evil Eye', p. 22.
[416] Ibid.

closed').[417] What follows is a section of highly elevated, poetic speech that the text's editor has described (but not translated) as a kind of encouragement of his own army and satire of his opponents.[418] Thus both of the O'Davoran glosses for *corrguinecht* appear here: a satire pronounced against an enemy, and words that strengthen and bring good luck to Lug's own side. This scene of battlefield poetry follows an earlier scene where Lug expressly describes himself as '*Im corrguinech'* ('I am a sorcerer') when listing his many talents and proficiencies.[419]

The pose also appears in the depiction of the character Cailb in *Togáil Bruidne Da Derga*. Cailb is a woman who, while never stated to be Otherworldly, is identified as a 'seer' by the doomed King Conaire Mór, who asked her what will happen in the future. In her response, she prophesises the coming evil he would face. When Conaire asks her name, she tells him 'Cailb', but when his reaction is underwhelming, she continues to tell him that she had many more names, before she recites them to him in one breath while standing on one foot. In the version of the tale preserved in *Lebor na hUidre*, the scribe adds the detail that Cailb also raised one hand while reciting this list of names:[420]

> Samon Sinand Seisclend
>
> Sodb Saiglen Caill
>
> Coll Díchóem Díchiúil
>
> Díthim Díchuimne Dichruidne
>
> Dairne Dáríne Déruine
>
> Égem Ágam Ethamne

[417] Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 58–9.
[418] Kelly and Borsje, 'The Evil Eye', p. 22. See Gray (ed. and trans.) *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 58–9, §129 for the passage in question, and p. 106 for her notes on the episode.
[419] Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 40–1, §64.
[420] Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye,* p. 101.

Gním Cluiche Cethardam

Níth Némain Nóennen

Badb Blosc Boár

Huae Óe Aife la Sruth

Mache Médé Mod[421]

Borsje has characterised the list as an 'alliterative, rhythmic string of names', but rightly points out that it certainly does not fit any of the descriptions given for *glám dícenn*.[422] However, she notes that, in the example given in §23 of *Uraicecht na Ríar*, Néde repeatedly names Caíar explicitly as the subject of his *glám dícenn*. This, obviously, is not the case in Cailb's recitation, where the names refer exclusively to herself.

However, Borsje has noted that many of the 'names' Cailb gives herself are meaningful as they invoke imagery of harm. The list begins with *Samon*, written as *Samain* in the version of the tale found in the Yellow Book of Lecan. Samain, of course, refers to the beginning of Winter when, according to Irish tradition, 'the boundaries between this world and the Otherworld are more unstable than usual, and the worlds themselves are in a liminal, dangerous state.'[423] Other words, such as *col* ('sin, infringement, violation')[424] and *níth* ('fighting, conflict')[425] clearly relate to dangerous states or threatening situations, while some of the female names used, such as Nemain, Badb, and Macha, are all 'supernatural women associated with war and slaughter.'[426]

[421] Best and Bergin (eds.), *Lebor na hUidre,* p. 214. See Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye,* pp. 79–116 for a fuller discussion of the role of Cailb in *Tógáil Bruidne Dá Derga* and her Otherworldly nature.
[422] Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye,* p. 110.
[423] Ibid., p. 111. Samain also features in a number of Otherworldly narrative texts, such as *Serglige Con Culainn* and *Echtra Nerai.*
[424] eDIL s.v. col or dil.ie/10473.
[425] eDIL s.v. níth or dil.ie/33196.
[426] Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye,* p. 111. Further to this, the Otherworldly woman who helped Cú Chulainn gain further martial prowess, and who eventually bore his son Conla, was named Aífe.

In this way, while Cailb is not pronouncing a *glám dícenn* as described in any of the glosses, the words and names she uses can certainly be interpreted as threatening. Indeed, Borsje takes them as such, arguing that 'it could well be that what Cailb is doing here is threatening Conaire with satire: she takes up some of the gestures of *corrguinecht* and utters alliterative names, which could sound like some kind of malediction.'[427] As with the verbal components of charm texts, which often contain nonce words and lexical elements drawn from other languages, it may be that the words and names in Cailb's speech were chosen specifically for the effect they had on the audience and the meaning with which this audience would associate them. In this instance, Conaire Mór certainly interprets the name-list as a threat and immediately asks Cailb what she wants from him, a response that Borsje suggests acts as a 'negotiation', and one that is 'in accordance with the use of *glám dícenn'*, whereby the satirist has put forward their demand while using the threat of full satire against the target.[428]

On the face of it, Cailb's request appears to be simple enough: she wants to remain at the hostel for the night. However, it is deeply problematic for Conaire, who was under a *geiss* that did not allow for this circumstance. On hearing his refusal, Cailb then appears to threaten him with a full satire, referencing his meanness and lack of generosity, and implying that he lacks these necessary kingly qualities.[429] Although Cailb does not pronounce a full satire, this threat is enough to force Conaire to break that *geis*, contributing to his eventual downfall and death.

While it was common to use small effigies during imprecatory rituals, the description of *glám dícenn* gives details that are so specific that, if adhered to, would see very

---

[427] Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye,* p. 111.
[428] Ibid.
[429] "'If in sooth', she says, 'it has befallen the king not to have room in his house for the meal and bed of a solitary woman, they will be gotten apart from him, from someone possessing generosity, if the hospitability of the Prince in the Hostel has departed.' See Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Togáil Bruidne Dá Derga*, pp. 52–3.

few people even qualifying for being an acceptable subject of satire, regardless of their status in society. After all, how many people would have a hill with a whitethorn tree on top of it, which lay on the boundary of their land? How common would it have been for *nemed* to have such a specific geographic feature near, but not on, their lands? And if one did have such a tree and such a hill in such a position, surely cutting the tree down, or perhaps replacing it with a nice shrubbery, would automatically disqualify them from being the target of satire, as one of the main, necessary components of the ritual space is thus removed from the ritual itself.[430]

It is more likely that *glám dicenn* underwent a similar process as the *filid* practices of *teinm laedo, imbas forosnai* and *díchetal di chennaib* (interpreted as 'a divinatory incantation used by the *filid'*; 'great knowledge/referring especially to (fore)knowledge obtained through magical means'; and 'incantation or spell composed extemporaneously by *filid* and druids'),[431] which are cited in a number of sources as the three things that were required of a master *fili*.[432] However, as Carey has noted, the original passage from *Bretha Nemed* purported as being quoted states that the three qualifications of a *suí* ('sage' or 'person of learning')[433] were *imbas forosnai, díchetal do chennaib* and *anamain*, the last of which is a type of verse form named in *Uraicecht na Ríar* as one of the skills of an *ollam*, the highest grade of poet.[434] Further, the phrase *do chennaib* originally meant something like 'at once', implying that the original meaning of *díchetal do chennaib* was a type of verse that was composed off the top of the *fili'*s head, rather than a magical spell or incantation.[435]

---

[430] See this thesis, pp. 232–5 for the use of ritual spaces.
[431] See eDIL s.v. 2 teinm or dil.ie/40394; eDIL s.v. 1 imbas, imbus or dil.ie/27294; and eDIL s.v. díchetal or dil.ie/16103.
[432] Carey, 'Three Things Required of a Poet', p. 42.
[433] eDIL s.v. suí or dil.ie/39179.
[434] Carey, 'Three Things', p. 43. See also Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar,* pp. 59, 178 and 182.
[435] Carey, 'Three Things', p. 45.

Carey has demonstrated that *anamain* was the original third skill that every *fili* was supposed to have achieved, and that the three skills were originally without any supernatural associations: *anamain* was 'technical expertise', *díchetal do chennaib* meant 'improvisational ability', and *imbas* was simply 'inspiration'.[436] Carey has also argued that *díchetal do chennaib*, which originally meant the ability to improvise a verse, 'acquired magical connotations through reinterpretation of *di chennaib* "extempore" to mean "from heads"',[437] and from this new interpretation, coupled with the already-supernatural implication of *imbas forosnai* as gaining knowledge from an Otherworldly source, over time other writers, particularly the author of *Sanas Cormaic*, applied a similarly supernatural meaning to *teinm laedo*, thus turning what had been three poetic skills into magical practices.[438] In this way, 'poetic status is made dependent on supernatural powers, and the profession's legitimacy is implicitly derived from its pagan origins.'[439] My best suggestion for *glám dícenn* is that it too underwent a similar reinterpretation, with the later glossator of *Uraicecht na Ríar* deliberately attempting to tie it into the same supernatural tradition as *imbas forosnai, díchetal do chennaib*, and *teinm laedo*.

Regarding the form *glám dícenn* takes, Ó Cathasaigh has made an interesting observation regarding the use of names.[440] He has argued that satire and clerical cursing take a similar form, particularly in their words of power, highlighting the episode in *Acallam na Sénorach* where St Patrick curses Bécán and the satire pronounced by the poet Coirpre son of Étáin against Bres in *Cath Maige Tuired.* In both instances, the use of the subject's name in the words pronounced by both poet and saint has led Ó Cathasaigh to characterise the words of power as 'an incantatory verse wound around the name of the king', which leads to the

[436] Carey, 'Three Things', p. 47.
[437] Ibid., p. 50.
[438] Ibid.
[439] Ibid., p. 52.
[440] See this chapter, pp. 154–6, above, for Borsje's observations on the names of Cailb and *glám dícenn.*

king losing both his status and title.[441] In the case of Patrick and Bécán, the curse outright killed the king, his followers and his livestock, while Bres lost his kingship and was forced to seek help from his father's people, the Fomoire, in gathering enough warriors to take his kingship back by force. In Patrick's curse, Bécán is named twice, as the first and last word in the spoken verse, creating a *dúnad.* In the case of Coirpre and Bres, Bres's name is the last word of the verse and is spoken only once. To these examples, however, we can add the satire Néide pronounced against Caíar, in which the name Caíar is repeated six times.

Both Patrick and Coirpre were denied hospitality by the respective kings they targeted, who are thus in neglect of the expected social contract whereby clerics and poets were to be afforded the hospitality due to their social status and professions. However, as noted above, Caíar had not been found to be derelict in his duty or obligations. Therefore, although the satire killed him, it was an illegal one and its power rebounded on Néide, killing him too.

In the case of the three maledictory verses, the speaker clearly states what they want to happen to the subject while naming him explicitly: Patrick asks that 'may there not be many of his fastings' in regards to Bécán,[442] Coirpre asks for a reversal of Bres's fortunes, while Néide asks for the death of Caíar 'under embankments, under stones'.[443] In all three cases, the speakers are granted what they ask for. Bécán is swallowed by the earth, Bres loses his kingship, and Caíar eventually dies after a year, crushed to death by a rock while hiding under his royal fort.

[441] Ó Cathasaigh, *Coire Sois,* p. 98.
[442] Ibid., p. 96.
[443] O'Donovan and Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Sanas Cormaic,* p. 87.

The types of verbal, performative legal procedures outlined above were not limited to Ireland, of course. Indeed, there is a ritual from medieval France, called *clamour*, which also relied on the same public and ritualistic devices used in Ireland. Originally, *clamour* was a church service 'designed to invoke God's judgement upon those who had despoiled ecclesiastical holdings',[444] a definition that will be relevant to the discussion below. While it no longer exists in this capacity in modern France, the islands of Guernsey and Jersey have retained a form of this ritual, called *clameur de haro*, although it has been reworked to fit a new legal capacity. The modern *clamour* sees the person who is invoking it entering an area of land that they own and that is now contested by an outside party, while raising their voice in opposition to a legal judgement that has been pronounced against them: a sort of inverse of the verbal warnings given in distraint. The steps are as follows: the person who wishes to raise the clamour, also called the 'criant', must kneel down in the presence of witnesses and recite the following verbal formula: '*Haro! Haro! Haro! À l'aide, mon Prince, on me fait tort*' ('Hear me! Hear me! Hear me! Come to my aid, my Prince, for someone does me wrong').[445] This is then usually followed by reciting The Lord's Prayer in French. There have been three recent uses of the *clamour,* in Guernsey in 2016 and again in 2018; and in Jersey, also in 2018.[446]

Although the practice of the *clamour* no longer exists in modern France, it developed in an area of Europe 'noted for the influence of Irish missionaries and scholars at the time', and it is thus unsurprising that 'clamours have been ascribed an Irish origin based on the well-known earlier Hibernian tradition of saintly cursing'.[447] However, as Gaulish

[444] Wiley, 'Maledictory Psalms', p. 262.
[445] https://www.citizensadvice.je/clameur-de-haro/#. Please note the warning to seek legal advice prior to invoking the ritual.
[446] https://guernseypress.com/news/2017/03/14/clameur-car-case-appeal-could-hinge-on-change-in-condition/; https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/14/guernsey-resident-halts-road-works-with-ancient-plea; and https://www.bailiwickexpress.com/jsy/news/clameur-de-haro-raised-first-time-20-years/#.Y2zLx3bP1PY.
[447] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 130.

France had a Roman, poetic style of cursing that predated Christianity, it may be that there was already a place for a new, more Christian style to develop naturally in response to the changes in Frankish society. In Ireland, this style of cursing appears to have developed in response to the legal issues regarding the *nemed* classes and a need to provide some kind of apparatus whereby clerics could gain restitution or settle matters of honour regarding attacks on their church, or on other churches founded by their saint.

Clerical cursing in Ireland appears to have developed independently from the Roman style utilised in Gaulish France. While a great number of native words were used for the ritual of satire,[448] the word used to describe clerical cursing, *maldacht*, developed from the Latin word *maledictio* ('curse').[449] This also influenced the use of the loan-words *melltith* in Welsh and *melloc'h* in Breton, to describe clerical cursing in those vernaculars.[450] Other Irish words used in the context of clerical cursing also appear to have developed from Latin. For example, *tríst* ('sorrow') came from *tristis* ('sad'/'sorrowful'); *anoráit* ('not-prayer', or 'curse') is a negation of the Latin *oratio* ('prayer').[451]

As we have seen with healing charms, Christian prayers and elements of the liturgy could be used as words of power or as extra-vocal components designed to draw more power into the cure or accompanying ritual. The most common prayer in healing appears to have been the Pater Noster, the prayer that petitions God directly, asking for blessings, forgiveness, and protection against evil. This was, of course, one of the first prayers that a cleric would have committed to memory, along with the psalms. Indeed, 'our earliest manuscripts and associated material culture surviving from medieval Ireland attest to this centrality of the psalms to ecclesiastical life and education.'[452] There are around one hundred and fifty psalms,

[448] Discussed above, pp.136–8.
[449] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 116.
[450] Ibid.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Boyle, *History and Salvation,* p. 85. See pp. 84–117 of Boyle's work for her exploration of the various uses of psalms in medieval Ireland.

with the word ‘psalm’ deriving from the Greek word *psalmoi*, or ‘hymns of praise’, indicating that they may have begun their life as individual songs collected together to form a sort of anthology that was preserved in the Old Testament.[453] As they vary in tone and content, with many being self-contained, particular psalms have been recited during certain times or for specific periods. For example, Psalm 50, called *Miserere Mei*, has been linked with King David’s repentance for the death of Uriah and David’s lust for Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba.[454] As such, it is one of seven that have become collectively known as the ‘Penitential Psalms’. In modern Christianity, Psalm 23, beginning ‘The Lord is my shepherd’, contains a message of comfort and has become associated with funerals.

While poetic satire can also be viewed as a type of curse, or at least as a verbal ritual that seeks to enact a harmful result, these verses, or pronouncements, were written and recited within the rules that governed the professional poets, and while the *filid*, during the medieval period at least, were Christians, the institution itself was secular rather than clerical. Additionally, the Bible itself is clear on the concept of cursing enemies and those who have wronged you:

> But to you that hear: love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you.
>
> Luke 6: 27–28.

> If I have been glad at the downfall of him that hated me, and have rejoiced that evil had found him, for I have not given my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.
>
> Job 31: 29–30.

[453] Boyle, *History and Salvation,* p. 85.
[454] Ibid., p. 97.

> Bless those who persecute you: bless those and do not curse.
>
> Romans 12: 14.

However, in a society that makes space and allowances for satire, there appears to have been room for cursing within the religious sphere. Indeed, the Irish canons expressly defend the various curses laid by Saints Peter and Paul.[455]

Imprecatory psalms are those psalms that invoke judgement or call for God's wrath in a manner that curses the person against whom the psalm is being used. For example, one of the most important and well-known of the imprecatory psalms, Psalm 69, gives expression to the theme of undeserved suffering, and contains the lines:

> They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually shake. Pour out their indignations upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.
>
> Psalm 69: 21–28.

[455] O'Neill, 'A Middle Irish Poem', p. 40.

As is evident from the content and the use of the imperative tense throughout, the speaker is asking that those who persecuted or wronged him to be subjected to a series of calamities that culminates with death, and their continued condemnation even after their passing.

Psalm 109 runs in a similar vein, although it goes further in its call for judgement and censure:

> Set though a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife be a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let strangers spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any favour to his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.
>
> Psalm 109: 6–13.

This psalm extends the desired judgement to the children of the person being targeted. Not only does the speaker desire the death of the target, but his children should carry the weight of his punishment, and it appears that the speaker calls for them to die without issue, with the target's name, or bloodline, ending with them.

ADAMNÁN'S CURSING RITUAL

By the seventh century, a number of maledictory psalms had been compiled, which Wiley argues was a way to give clerics and the Church 'a weapon comparable to the *filid*'s satire.'[456] The earliest written evidence of this list and the accompanying ritual (henceforth *sailm escaine,* or 'maledictory psalms') appears in *Cáin Adamnán* ('the Law of Adamnán'; also called *Lex Innocentium,* 'the Law of Innocents'). This legislation was intended to protect non-combatants during periods of warfare or raiding, particularly women, children, and the clergy, and was promulgated by Adamnán of Iona in 697AD. There are two extant copies of this text: Rawlinson B 512, compiled in the fifteenth or sixteenth century and Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 2, 324–40, written in the seventeenth century. These manuscripts date to considerably later than *Cáin Adamnán* itself, and as such they each contain layers of text from later dates, and later additions from later hands. Meyer has argued that they both ultimately derive from the Book of Raphoe, a lost manuscript produced at the Monastery of Raphoe in County Donegal.[457]

§§30 and 31 of *Cáin Adamnán* contain what called a 'sanction clause', a feature of earlier Roman law that was adapted by various medieval societies. In these two paragraphs, we are told that good things will come to those who uphold the law,[458] while those that do not may be at risk of being sanctioned.[459] In §32 then, we are told that 'Adamnán has also set down an order of malediction for them [those who do not uphold the law] that is, a psalm for every day up to twenty days, and an apostle or a noble saint for every day to be invoked with

[456] Wiley, 'The Maladictory Psalms', p. 262.
[457] Ibid., p. 263; Meyer (ed), *Cáin Adamnáin,* pp. vii–viii.
[458] *Óen comaldathar in cáin si etir saigid 7 timmarcain 7 comalnath 7 éraicc, arim sírsaegul somma 7 arop airmitnech féith la Dia 7 dóine, arim inducbude in-nim 7 hi talmain.* ('Whoever fulfils this law, both as to claim and levy and fulfilment and *éric,* may have a long and prosperous life, and may be honoured in the eyes of God and of man, may be exalted in Heaven and on earth.') Wiley, 'The Maledictory Psalms', p. 264.
[459] *Arimm garit a hsaegul co n-imniuth 7 dígrád, cen athgabáil nime ná talman úadhibh.* ('May his life be short and with suffering and dishonour, without any of his offspring attaining Heaven or earth.')

it.'[460] What follows is a list of twenty psalms and eighteen saints' names, as the final two psalms are given no saints to accompany them. Wiley has compared this list to the litany of saints, and suggests that the saints chosen, each of whom represent a specific institution of the Church, is an attempt by the cleric undertaking the cursing to tie 'himself and his psalmodic pleas to the communion of saints. His concerns become their concerns, and he is thus able to bring the full weight of the Roman Church to bear on the object of his displeasure.'[461]

A later version of Adamnán's cursing ritual also survives in the form of a thirteen-stanza poem also found in Rawl. B 512, following that manuscript's version of *Cáin Adamnán*.[462] As with the prose version, it attributes the creation of the ritual to Adamnán, and lists the saints and psalms the curser should use 'to curse every enemy'.[463] However, there are a few differences, with the final three psalms differing from the ones specified in the prose version. Additionally, the poem names saints for all twenty psalms and days, using the final days – left blank in the prose version – as a way to call on later Christian martyrs, such as St George.[464] Crucially, although it purports to be a cursing ritual designed by Adamnán and the manuscript scribe recorded it in the space following *Cáin Adamnán,* it does not mention *Cáin Adamnán* at all internally, which Wiley interprets as an indication that the ritual grew to encompass other situations, rather than remaining solely as the ritual to use when *Cáin Adamnán* was broken.

The Fragmentary Annals offer an anecdote that shows the performance of this ritual, undertaken by Adamnán himself against King Fínnechta Fledach.[465] In this tale, Fínnechta agreed to remit the cattle-tribute due from St Mo Ling 'for a day and a night'. As with other

---

[460] Wiley, 'The Maledictory Psalms', p. 264–5.
[461] Ibid., p. 268.
[462] O'Neill, 'A Middle Irish Poem', pp. 53–56.
[463] Ibid., p. 267.
[464] Ibid.
[465] O'Donovan, *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments,* pp. 78–85.

instances of this phrase being used in tale-texts, it can mean either a period of one day and one night, or for all time as 'there is nothing in time but day and night'.[466] In return, Mo Ling appears to grant Fínnechta access to heaven. Unfortunately, Adamnán is unhappy with this decision, as he serves notice to Fínnechta that the cursing ritual will be undertaken unless he comes to speak to Adamnán about the remittance. A description of the cursing ritual then follows.

The performance unfolds in a similar manner to distraint and the other legal procedures outlined above.[467] First, Adamnán and his retinue go to Fínnechta's lands and an emissary is sent to the king, relaying to him a request to meet with Adamnán and discuss the problem. Thus, notice is given when, on Fínnechta's refusal, he is informed of Adamnán's intention to sing psalms against him. This is repeated twice more, with an escalation of penalties against the king mounting up the longer he refuses to come to terms. First, his descendants will be barred from holding the kingship in the future; secondly, his own life will be shortened; and finally, he will be barred from reaching Heaven, a fate worse than the first two punishments from a Christian point of view. Interestingly, this fate overturns the initial promise of Heavenly rest that Mo Ling had offered, should the tax be overturned. Clearly, the author of the account from the Fragmentary Annals saw Adamnán, and his Church, as having greater authority than Mo Ling.

As with the legal procedures and ritual satire detailed above, we see notice being given and the ritual unfolding over a set period of time – three days – with psalms being chanted over that period and Fínnechta being given the opportunity to come to terms and stop the ritual and the mounting threats, before the curse is fully drawn down on him. Unfortunately, the psalms being recited in this account do not match the imprecatory psalms laid out in *Cáin*

---

[466] O'Donovan, *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments,* p. 79.
[467] Above, pp. 139–42.

Adamnán or the poem from Rawl. B 512. Where *Cáin Adamnán* and the poem give the names of twenty psalms and eighteen or twenty saints' names, here we are told that Adamnán will sign fifty psalms per day – the full psalter over a three-day period – and hidden in each fifty of those psalms is a single maledictory psalm that contains the curse. However, as detailed above, there was a large number of imprecatory psalms, and if all 150 were chanted then it stands to reason that eventually all of the imprecatory psalms were also chanted during this ritual. There is the chance, of course, that over time the ritual had changed so much that later authors and scribes were attempting to bridge the gap between how it was presented in older material versus how it appeared in their own lifetime.

Clerical Cursing in Hagiographical Sources

It has been demonstrated above that, while psalms could be used to call for comfort and protection, they could also be used to call for harm, and the actions of saints in several Irish hagiographical texts certainly suggest that they were used in an imprecatory way. For example, the *Life of Saint Ruadán* describes in great detail an episode where the saint and his clerics employed a ritualised ceremony of cursing against Diarmait, son of Fergus Cerrbél, who is named as *ri Erenn i rreimhes Ruadhain* ('the king of Ireland in the time of Ruadán'.)[468] According to this narrative, a steward of Diarmait, named Baclam, insults Aed Guaire, king of the Uí Maine, by carrying an enormous spear into his fort, held aloft to reinforce the position of Diarmait and increase the insult to Aed Guaire. In response, Aed Guaire kills Baclam, incurring the wrath of Diarmaid. In order to try to escape a similarly violent reaction, Aed Guaire seeks sanctuary from Senach, the Bishop of Muscraig. Eventually, Aed Guaire finds himself under Ruadán's protection, hidden underground in order to save him from Diarmait's wrath. The ploy fails; Diarmait's men discover Aed Guaire's hiding place and bring him to the king to face judgement. As Diarmait has violated both Ruadán's duty of protection and the sanctuary of his church, Ruadán responds by assembling his monks, along with Brendan of Birr, before marching on Tara to demand the release of the prisoner, which Diarmait refuses. Accordingly, the monks and saints

> *Ro triallsat a cclucca 7a cceolana do bein for Diarmait, go ros gortaighset aga mbein. Co ngabhsat fós a psalma esccaine 7 innighte fair, nir cumaingset iter a riar don airdri lasodhain, acht doratt i ttarcusal dermáir íatt.*

[468] Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada Naem nÉrenn,* I, p. 321 and II, p. 312.

> proceeded to ring their bells, both large and small, against Diarmait so violently that they damaged the bells in ringing them. They also sang psalms of cursing and vengeance against him, but they could not obtain their will of the king, but he treated them with great contempt.'[469]

Dermot's contempt was not the desired outcome, and nor was it the end of the cursing ritual. The company of holy men remained in Tara, presumably continuing their chanting and bell-ringing, and in the morning it was discovered that the twelve sons of twelve kings, who were guests of Diarmait, had all died during the night. It is expressly said that this is because of the actions of the monks: *Is tre shailm-chettal na ccleirech ⁊ antí naemh Rúadhain fil oc tabach a dhála sunn fortsa, is desin ro eibhletar ar meic ne* ('it is through the psalm-singing of the clerics of this saint Ruadán, who is here demanding the settlement of his business from you, it is through this that our sons have died.')[470]

The foster fathers of the youths go to Ruadán to implore him to bring the boys back from the dead: *Luidh Ruadan ⁊ Brenainn cona mancaibh ina crois-fighill iarttain, ⁊ dosgnit duthracht nataigh forsan cCoimdhe im thodusccadh na mac marbh; co ro shóidh an Coimdhe iatt ina mbethaidh doridhisi, i nonoir Ruadhain.* ('Then Ruadan and Brendan with their monks prostrated themselves in "cross-vigil"' and made earnest prayer to the Lord for the raising up of the dead boys; and the Lord brought them back to life again in honour of Ruadan)'. Although the boys are returned to life and restored to their fathers, Ruadán continues his ritual for a second night. Accordingly, Diarmait dreams of *crann dermair* […] *Andar leis boi feicce an croinn a clethibh nimhe, ⁊ a fremhae i ttalmain* ('a mighty tree; and it seemed to him that the top of the tree was among the rafters of heaven, and its roots in the

[469] Plummer (ed. and trans.) *Bethada Naem nÉrenn*, I, p. 315; and II, p. 314 –315.
[470] Ibid., I, p. 315; and II, p. 324.

earth.') One hundred and fifty men, each carrying an axe, then approach the tree and cut it down, at which point Diarmait awakens to *foghar sailm-cettail Ruadhain cona mhancaibh 7 a claicc-beim dibhlínaibh occ esccaine fair, gur forlíonsatt a clúasa iarttain.* ('the sound of the psalmody of Ruadán with his monks, and the ringing of their bells together as they cursed him.')[471]

Diarmait finally approaches Ruadán and tries to plead his case: he is attempting to uphold the law on one who has broken it. There follows a back and forth between the two men, with each predicting ruin for the other, until Diarmait capitulates and releases Aed Guaire to Ruadán. In accordance with the law, Ruadán pays the compensation price of Beclam's murder to Diarmait, in the form of three blue, Otherworldly horses that come from the sea and which are faster than any horse in Tara. However, there is a final sting in the tail of the narrative for Diarmait, who gives the horses to members of his household: once Ruadán and his clerics depart with Aed Guaire, the horses return to the sea *gan poinn dia ttarbha 'ga nerradhaibh* ('without a particle of profit to the warriors'), leaving Diarmait without restitution for the death of Baclam and essentially without justice being served.

This is wild tale, filled with supernatural elements and imagery. Take, for example, the vision Diarmait receives of a tree being cut down. As seen above, Psalm 109 calls for not just the death of the target of the imprecatory psalm, but the loss of status of his children and the destruction of his family line. Trees, with their connected roots, trunks and branches, have become emblematic of 'family'. Even now, when one researches one's genealogy, it is commonly referred to as 'the family tree'. They were often common symbols for lineage during the medieval period too, with the earliest extant praise poem, *Áed oll fri andud n-áne*, comparing its subject to 'the bole of a great tree' and 'the sapling of silver'.[472] Diarmait's

[471] All from Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada Naem nÉrenn* I, p. 324; and II p. 315.
[472] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Making of a Prince', pp. 144–145 for text and translation.

dream of a grand tree being hacked down is symbolic not just of his own death, but of the destruction of his family and the end of his issue. The horses given in restitution are markedly 'Otherworldly' in nature: they come from the sea and are blue in colour, and once Ruadán has achieved his goal of freeing Aed Guaire they return to their own world.

The cursing itself takes on a ritualised aspect in this tale. The monks congregate around Tara, within sight (or at least sound) of the royal residence, and once they have begun they do not cease their chanting and bell-ringing until they have achieved their goal. The public nature of this action seems to invite onlookers to witness it: the ritual becomes a spectacle for the consumption of the public. Legally, Diarmait has violated the principle of protection. Under medieval Irish law, any freeman had the right to grant protection to a person of equal or lower rank.[473] As a high-ranking member of the Church, Ruadán should be within his rights to grant protection to Aed Guaire. Indeed, the Old Irish word *termonn,* or 'sanctuary', 'refuge', developed from the Latin word *terminus* ('limit/extent of monastic lands').[474] However, it was also illegal under the law for anyone, including clerics, to give protection to anyone who absconded from the law. This included fugitive killers, of which Aed Guaire clearly is one.

As mentioned on page 139 above, making a legal claim against a *nemed*, especially a king of Diarmait's high status, was difficult. As with the standard legal practices, the ritualised 'cursing' carried out by Ruadán and his monks has a highly visible, public, and performative aspect to it. By bringing the performance to Tara – within earshot and perhaps eyeshot of the royal residence, considering how clearly the psalms and bell-ringing could be heard by those within the building – the monks were deliberately drawing public attention to the situation and highlighting what they perceived to be an injustice against them and the

[473] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 140.
[474] Ibid., p. 141.

legitimacy of Ruadán's protection. As with the performance of *troscud,* their presence – throughout the day and night, rather than during the hours of darkness, when the royal household would be enjoying their main meal and sleep – was designed to bring pressure to bear on the king through public witness, and shame him into doing the right thing by submitting to Ruadán's request.[475]

While the maledictory psalms are the words of power used to enact the curse, the use of bells is an important part of the ritual act. Thus, the text states:

> *Maircc sháireochas mo chill cáid, Maircc fa ttabhraid mo cluig gair, Maircc ara mbentar mo cluicc Gacha maidne is gach easpuirt* […] *Gibe ara mbentar mo cluicc, Loitter leo, ocus marbaitt; Gair mo thermainn is mo mionn Acc cur anmann i nifrionn.*
>
> Woe to him against whom my bells utter their voice, Woe to him against whom my bells are rung, Every morning and every evening.[476] […] Whoever they be against whom my bells are rung, They are destroyed and killed by them, The voice of my sanctuary and my relics, Places souls in hell.[477]

There are several accounts of clerical cursing through the use of bells within the hagiographical tales. The *Life* of St Berach also includes an episode where the saint is forced to use cursing against a king. Cucathfaid, king of the Úi Briuin in the Shannon area, *d'orccain ina focland ro bhattar ar comairce Beraigh* ('came to raid the inferior clans that were under the protection of Berach'.)[478] When he discovers this plan, Berach goes out to meet the army and attempts to dissuade them from this course of action. However, as with

[475] See this thesis, p. 142.
[476] Plummer, *Betheda Náem nÉrenn,* I, p. 285 and II, p. 276.
[477] Ibid., I, p. 286 and II, p. 277.
[478] Ibid., I, p. 40 and II, p. 40.

Diarmait and Ruadán, Cucathfaid ignores the saint and 'went past him in contempt'. In response to this slight, Berach rings his bell against them, which causes the boglands the army were marching across to open up and swallow them all, before turning into a lake where the army *docither la tascc righ an sluagh sin, 7 a ngai fria nais* ('may still be seen beneath the water, going on the king's errand, their spears on their backs.')

Only one person escapes this fate, a *scolocc* ('scholar' or 'student', or perhaps 'follower', although Plummer suggests 'farmer'),[479] who immediately throws himself on the mercy of Berach, asking for the saint's protection. Berach, however, is feeling less than merciful, and makes to *triallaidh an cloc do bein air, dia cor fon talmain* ('strike his bell against him, and put him under the earth'). This course of vengeance is averted when two of Berach's followers, Dicholla and Toranach, point out that, with the men of military-age in the area cursed to spend eternity under the new lake, the land is in need of the now-penitent *scolocc,* whereupon Berach stays his hand and accepts the man's penance and gifts. However, as with Ruadán, there is a sting in the tail of this narrative too: although the *scolocc* is spared a watery (or rather an earthy) death, *'Ro fhaccaibh Berach do gan dol tar nónbhar'* ('Berach left to him [as his destiny] that he [i.e., his seed] should not exceed nine [generations]'). Therefore, although the *scolocc* avoids the killing curse, his hubris in initially following Cucathfaid against those under the saint's protection still sees his family line cut short.

In a similar vein, the *Life* of Máedóc of Ferns tells of an incident where, whilst travelling on the Irish coast following his miraculous adventures in Britain, Máedóc comes across a band of brigands *ag slad 7 ag marhadh oilitrcch 7 áosa eccruaidh* ('robbing and killing pilgrims and feeble folk').[480] Máedóc springs to the defense of the victims by ringing his bell loudly. Indeed, so loud was the bell *go ccuala tigerna na ngadaighedh e: 'As guth*

---

[479] eDIL s.v. scolóc or dil.ie/36566. See also Plummer's note, *Betheda Náem nÉrenn,* II, p. 40.
[480] Plummer, *Betheda Náem nÉrenn,* I, p. 211 and II, p. 205.

cluicc fir diadha degh-craibhthigh so', ar se, '7 as uime bhenus a clocc da fhurail orainne gan an gniomh so do dhenamh.' Do sccuirettar dona hoilithrechaibh iarsin. ('the chief of the brigands heard it. "It is the sound of the bell of a devout and Godly man," said he, "and he rings his bell to tell us to cease this work." They let the pilgrims be after this.')[481] In this instance, the sound of the bell alone acts as a warning that discourages the anti-social behavior. Presumably, the sound indicates that a curse was forthcoming, giving the brigands the opportunity to respond and amend their actions before incurring further censure. Indeed, this type of delay is almost reminiscent of the delays granted at each stage of distraint.

This is not the only time Máedóc is forced to resort to cursing. Towards the end of the saint's life he retires to Ros Inbir, in the territory of Muscraige Failinne, which at that time was under the control of a local king called Muirigen son of Duban. Muirigen, along with his *siur mhenmnach, mor-cumachiach* ('proud and powerful sister') Failenn, took exception to the fact that Máedóc had moved onto their land and built a new church there. Indeed, we are told that *Ro dlomsat 7 ro diultsat do as* ('They warned him off and denied it to him'), before taking steps to expel him from the land and banish him from their territory completely. In response to this rather shabby treatment, Máedóc *Impáidis a bachla 7 a bhuain-mionna fo tri túaith-[bél] ina ttimceall. Benais a cluice 7 a ceólána a naoiniecht orra [...] 7 esccainis gan fuirech iatt'* ('He turned his bachalls and enduring relics around them three times widdershins. He rang his bells and his handbells together against them [...] and he cursed them without delay').[482]

There are two things of note in this episode. The first is that Máedóc's curse appears to have taken the form of Muirigen's initial actions: the saint regains his church, but Muirigen himself has to leave his ancestral territory for pastures new in Leinster. So powerful is

[481] Plummer, *Betheda Náem nÉrenn,* I, p. 211. and II, p. 205.
[482] Ibid., I, p. 236 and II, p. 229.

Máedóc's curse that even Muirigen's descendants are victims of it: none of them try to reclaim their family's land, but are to remain in Leinster 'til doom'. Failenn, however, falls victim to the same threat from the other saints we have looked at so far and sees her branch of the family tree fail, remaining without issue:

Docuir Muirigén mac Dubháin,

Dana an daigh-fer,

Asa thir féin, ba fál folaigh

Go lár Laighen.

Anaid a clann i ccrich Laighen,

Lor do dhiamair

Gan techt 'na tir féin da fegain,

Réim gan riaghail.

Do fháccaibh esccaine Maodhócc,

Meisde a hionad,

Faoilenn mór gan mac, gan muirer,

Slat ogh, iodhan.

He expelled Muirigen son of Doban,

Bold was the good man,

From his own land, it was a concealed hedge,

To the center of Leinster,

Enough of gloom,

Without returning to their own land to see it,

A course without rule.

Maedoc bequeathed a curse,

Worse was her place therefore;

Great Failenn had no son or household,

A pure virgin branch.[483]

From these hagiographical accounts, then, we can see that 'cursing' becomes a ritualised and public performance. The aural aspect is an important component of the ritual, and while the spoken Latin of the psalms was, no doubt, integral to the performance of the curse itself, helping to identify the speaker as a member of the clergy and thus authenticating the curse. The sound of the bell(s) must also have been a fundamental part of it, and likewise helped associate the ritual with the Christian Church.

[483] Plummer, *Betheda Náem nÉrenn*, I, p. 242 and II, p. 235.

CURSING IN THE ANNALS

We can also find descriptions of cursing in other textual sources. Although much later in date than the events purported as happening in the hagiographical accounts, the Annals of Tigernach for the year 1043 say that this was the year that

> *Troscadh do samadh Ciarain hi Tulaig Garba for Aedh Húa Confiacla for ríg Teftha, cor' benadh an Bernan Ciaraín fair co lois na Bachla Issa. In t-inadh iarom inro impó a druim risna cleirchib isinn inadh sin taland a cend de ria cind mís.*
>
> The fasting of the community of Ciaran, at Tulach Garba, upon Aed Hua Confiacla, the king of Teffa; and the (bell called) *Bernan Ciaraín* ('Ciaran's Gapling') was struck against him with the end of the *Bachall Issu* ('staff of Jesus'). Now in the place at which he turned his back on the clerics, in that place his head was cut off before the month's end.[484]

As mentioned above, the process of 'fasting' against a *nemed* was carried out when one could not gain legal redress because the subject was of too high a status, and while the annals call the process here a 'fasting', the description given is strikingly similar to the accounts of cursing in the hagiographical sources examined above. Not only was a bell central to the performance, but the description of Aodh Ó Confiachla's actions – 'he turned his back on the clerics' – is similar to the language and situations recounted in the saints' *Lives:* Cucathfaid and his army ignored Berach's attempt to prevent their raiding; similarly, Diarmait ignored Ruadán's entreaty to release Aed Guaire. Bachalls were used as part of Máedóc's cursing of Muirigen and Failenn, and the *Bachall Ísu* appears first in a ninth-century hagiography of St

[484] AT 1043.8. Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'The Annals of Tigernach', p. 383.

Patrick, where it is described as having been gifted to the cleric by God himself; it later became the most precious relic in Armagh's possession, as well as one of the most famous relics in Ireland.[485] Even the punishment Ó Confiachla received – having his head cut off in the very place he slighted the clerical community, by the end of a one-month period – seems more fitting as a result of cursing rather than fasting, and the delay of a month is again suggestive of the periods of delay in distraint and other legal procedures.

The Annals of the Four Masters for 1233 also details a comparable account, in which the word *escaine* ('cursed') is used:

> *Slóighead lá Feidhlimidh mac Cathal Croibhdeirg I Cconnachtaibh, 7 do dheachaidh Corbmac mac Tomaltaigh (tigherna Maighe Luirg) ina dhail, 7 tuc leis I Maigh Luircc é. Do Rónadh longport leo occ Druim Gregraighe. Baoi Corbmac, Conchobhar a mhac, 7 na trí túatha, dá mhac Muircertaigh meic Diarmada, .i. Donnchadh, 7 Muirchertach ina fhorraidh ansinn. Así comairle do rónsat dol I ndiadh aodha (ríg Connacht), 7 cloinne Ruadhri ar chena. Iar ndol dóibh ina ndóchum, ro sraoíneadh for Aodh mac Ruadhri ro marbhadh é féin, 7 Aodh Muimhneach a dearbhrathair, 7 a mhac, 7 Donnchadh Mór mac Diarmada mic Ruaidhri, 7 ile oile cenmhothát. Ro marbhadh ann dana Raghallach ua Flannagáin, 7 Tomás Biris constapla na hEreann, Eoan a brathair, Eoan Guer, 7 a gaill iomdha de bheós iar mbuain clog 7 bachall, iar ndhénamh easccaoine 7 bathadh coindell do cleirchaibh Connacht orra uair ro sharaigh 7 roslatt Aodh Muimhneach teach baoithin, 7 cealla*

[485] Wycherley, *The Cult of Relics,* p. 138; Bieler (ed), *Vita Quarta,* p. 77; Francis and Byrne, *The Two Lives of Saint Patrick,* p. 37.

iomda ar cena gur ro thuitset féin in enech na naomh isa cealla ro sháraighset. Ro benadh ríghe, 7 cendus Condacht do cloim Ruadhri mic Toirrdhealbhaigh is in ló sin. Gabaidh Fedhlimidh mac Cathal Croibdeirg righe Connacht iarttain, 7 na caisléin do rónadh lá neart cloinne Ruidhri uí Conchobhar, 7 mic Uilliam Búrc do sgaoileadh lais iad, .i. caislén Bona Gaillmhe, cailsén na Circe, caislén na Cillighe, 7 caislén Dúin Iomgain.

An army was led by Felim, son of Cathal Crovderg, into Connaught, and Cormac, son of Tomaltagh (Lord of Moylurg), went to meet him and brought him into Moylurg. A camp was formed by them at Druim Gregraighe, and Cormac, his son Connor, the people of the three *túathas,* the two sons of Murtough Mac Dermot, namely Donough and Murtough, joined him there. The resolution they adopted was to go in pursuit of Hugh, King of Connaught, and the other sons of Roderic. On overtaking them they attacked and defeated Hugh, the son of Roderic, slew himself and his brother, Hugh Muimhneach, his son, Donough More, the son of Dermot, who was son of Roderic O'Conor, and many others besides them. There were also slain on this occasion Raghallagh O'Flanagan, Thomas Biris, Constable of Ireland, John, his relative, John Guer, and many other Englishmen; after they had been cursed and excommunicated by the clergy of Connaught, by the ringing of bells with croziers, and the extinguishing of candles; for Hugh Muimhneach had violated and plundered Tibohine, and many other churches, so that he and his party fell in revenge of the saints whose churches they had violated. The kingdom

> and government of Connaught was on that day taken from the sons of Roderic, the son of Turlough. After this Felim, the son of Cathal Crovderg, assumed the government of Connaught, and demolished the castles which had been erected by the power of the sons of Roderic O'Conor, and the son of William Burke, namely, the castle of Bungalvy, Castle-Kirk, and Castle-na-Cally, and the castle of Dunamon.[486]

As with the original version of the French *clamour*, we see that the performance is in response to direct action taken against the church and clerics: the raiding of their churches. The performance involves the ringing of bells, again through the use of 'croziers', or the clerical staff of office. The result is that the offending party all lose their lives 'in revenge of the saints', although here the curse goes further and their lands and territories are lost to their descendants. Their residences are also destroyed, something that mirrors Diarmait's nightmare and Muirigen's punishment in the *Life* of St Máedóc.

[486] O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annala Ríoghachta Eireann,* pp. 267–9.

Conclusions

The hagiographical and annalistic accounts of clerical cursing, with the exception of the that found in the Fragmentary Annals, appear to be in agreement with one another: the Church's community gave notice to the subject, typically in response to an outrage or martial attack against the Church or its personnel. A public, highly visible and audible procession took place, as the community made their way to the site selected for the cursing ritual. Once in place, the chanting of maledictory psalms and the ringing of bells began, with increasing tensions and spiraling results, until the target agreed to come to terms. However, in these descriptions, the list of psalms being chanted is not included. Therefore, it is conceivable that all 150 – the full psalter – is being recited, as is depicted in the Fragmentary Annals. However, the authors of the hagiographical tales indicate that the psalms being chanted were limited to just the maledictory ones, as these are the only psalms we are told were being chanted. It is equally possible, then, that only the twenty from *Cáin Adamnán,* or any psalms already defined as a malediction, that were being recited.

It is, of course, very possible that, just as the list from *Cáin Adamnán* grew over time to include trespasses against the Church that went beyond those listed in *Cáin Adamnán*, the ritual itself grew to be just as public and important as the legal procedures and the recitation of satire that it sought to emulate. We may, then, be looking at a ritual in flux, observing its growth through the textual evidence from a smaller ritual meant for specific circumstances, to a much more involved and public one that was more in line with the legal procedures used on the secular and non-*nemed* side of the public sphere.

We come across a similar position with satire. However, from the detailed description of satire and poetic grades that exist in the legal material, it gives the impression that this imprecatory ritual existed from an earlier date than clerical cursing. Where we appear to encounter problems is with the question of when the glosses of texts such as *Uraicecht na*

Ríar were written, with different descriptions and instructions being offered. This problem is most acute in the case of *glám dícenn* versus *corrguinecht,* probably as the lines between the two original rituals became blurred, and *corrguinecht* appears to have been incorporated into *aer/*satire as a part of that ritual. This blurring of lines, then, along with the reinterpretation of poetic skills as stemming from the supernatural that Carey has highlighted, may account for the description of *glám dícenn* from the glosses of *Uraicecht na Ríar*, which includes the information about the clay idol of the subject.

The restorative nature of justice in medieval Ireland ideally saw the wrong-doer take responsibility for their fault and attempt to mitigate or pay for the damage done to the plaintiff. This would not work, however, if those classed as *nemed* were truly above the law. Clearly, extra procedures such as fasting, cursing, and satire were necessary constructs to plug this gap in the existing legal system, and became the preferred methods for dealing with those situations that saw contracts or payment being reneged on, or raids taking place against clerical targets. Although these rituals stood in place of legal proceedings, that they relied on supernatural power, effected through the use of words of power, sets them firmly in the 'magic' sector, rather than legal. Further, the language contemporary Irish scribes and authors used to describe the results of these rituals, particularly satire and *trefhocal,* shows that they clearly envisioned physical punishment stemming from the use of these powerful words.

Chapter 5: Love Magic in Medieval Ireland

This chapter builds on the preceding discussion of charms and medicine in Chapter 3 by turning to look at 'love magic', a type of supernatural activity that frequently intersected with ideas about medical magic and charming traditions throughout the medieval world. Love magic is here defined as 'verbal and material instruments with which erotic and affectionate feelings are believed to be aroused and destroyed in a supernatural way.'[487] When thinking of 'love magic', it is easy to dismiss or minimise it simply as a way to force one person to exhibit lust or become infatuated with another for the purpose of sex or marriage. However, that would be a gross oversimplification and one that, as we will see, ignores a number of social and theological concerns that had arisen during the Classical and medieval periods, when Christianity had been adopted by the Roman Empire as its main religion.

[487] Borsje, 'Rules and Legislation', p. 173.

LOVE MAGIC AND MARRIAGE IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Love magic has existed for a very long time, as evidenced by a Sumerian love charm from the Old Babylonian period (c. 1900–1600 BC).[488] The Roman goddess Venus and her Greek counterpart, Aphrodite, were often invoked in love spells in the Hellenist and Roman periods, while Gaulish tiles inscribed with the name of Venus have also been uncovered at Celtic springs and sanctuaries, such as the La Tannerie site in Chateaubleau, France.[489] There even exist spells designed to sow discord between couples and separate them, such as a Greek example that has been dated to the fourth century BC, which also contains an enumeration of body parts.[490]

Throughout the medieval period, concerns surrounded love magic, particularly harmful types of spells that could cause problems such as impotency or otherwise separate a legitimate sexual union. Indeed, such concerns continued to be articulated well after the medieval period and into the early modern, when Inquisitorial manuals such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the *Compendium Maleficarum* discussed the ability witches had to create impotency through the use of magic, including ligatures.[491]

Marriage was a complex affair during both the pre-Christian and Christian periods of all cultures, particularly at the elite level of society, where alliances and political contracts were often the main point of marriage unions, along with concerns surrounding succession and inheritance. In addition to the important social aspect of marriage unions, there were theological concerns too. Indeed, it appears that 'Christianity has been concerned with marriage ever since Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding in Cana.'[492] The early Church fathers, including Augustine of Hippo and Isidore of Seville, wrote about marriage,

---

[488] Bigs, *Sa.Zi.Ga,* p. 1.
[489] Mees, *Celtic Curses,* p. 80.
[490] Ibid. For *Lorica* charm texts and the enumeration of body parts in Irish magical tradition, see this thesis, pp. 49–51.
[491] Mitchell, 'Anaphrodisiac Charms', p. 20.
[492] Stone and West, *The Divorce,* p. 45.

with Augustine arguing that the institution itself was 'intrinsically good, possessing the three "goods" of off-spring, fidelity to one's spouse, and *sacramentum* – a symbolic bond mirroring that between Christ and the Church.'[493] From the early eighth century, then, there was a concentrated effort to bring the social and legal institution of marriage more in line with Christian teachings.[494] By the ninth century, the push had been so successful that the idea had emerged that marriages were not 'proper' unless they had been carried out with a Christian religious ritual, an idea that was supported by a number of new Church texts, including the Pseudo-Isidorian texts.[495] It took time, however, for marriage unions to fall under the banner of 'religious ritual'. Even Charlemagne, who was considered a good example of Christian piety, had five wives and a number of concubines, and was thus hardly an exemplary model of marriage reform.[496]

However, any attempt at marriage reform during this period would have been slow to take hold, as the unification of theological ideologies regarding social institutions and customs that would eventually impact the early Church had not happened yet. As such, the Church needed time to develop and unify its position on issues such as marriage and related questions, for example divorce and remarriage. Even the Gospels lacked unity on certain aspects of marriage. As political alliances fell apart or shifted with the evolving geo-political situations still emerging, so too did elite marriages. Where once a union was beneficial to a family or territory, this could change, and the dissolution of the marriage could easily be one of the main casualties of this, particularly where a more expedient union could be made. While the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John were clear that this is not a valid reason for divorce, Matthew diverged and made an exception where 'fornication' – defined as sex

[493] Stone and West, *The Divorce,* p. 45.
[494] Ibid., p. 46.
[495] Ibid.
[496] Ibid., p. 47.

outside of the marriage union – had taken place.[497] In the New Testament, then, reasons for divorce were interpreted as extremely limited and frowned upon, yet in the Old Testament divorce appears to have been entirely acceptable to God, including at the elite level of society, with many Biblical figures having multiple marriages, sometimes simultaneously.[498]

A further issue with regard to the divorce question was whether or not future marriage unions could be entered into by the divorcees. Many of the early authorities argued against this; for example, Hincmar of Rheims considered marriage to be as ancient as the human race, bestowed on Adam and Eve by God Himself.[499] Hincmar also believed that the bonds of marriage should be lifelong, and prescribed 'Church medicine', a ritualised type of love magic that depended on prayer sessions led by a Church official, as a way to resolve the need for a divorce. Indeed, in Response Fifteen of his *De divortio Lotharii regis et Theutbergae reginae,* he tells the story of a young man entering into a union of unequal status, where the bride's mother disagreed with the choice of groom but was overruled by her husband. When the young man discovered he was impotent with his wife – but not with his concubine, it is noted – he asked for a divorce. Hincmar tells us that, after many meetings with the local bishop, including a death threat made against said bishop for a timely resolution, it was only on completion of penance, along with *medicina ecclesiastica* ('Church medicine'), that *fugato odio diabolico* ('devilish hatred was driven off') and the couple lived

[497] Stone and West, *The Divorce*, p. 48. Note that, while divorce or dissolution of marriage is allowed under this condition, there is no further information given regarding whether or not marriage to another after this was allowed. This was yet another concern for Church authorities during the period, as demonstrated by the divorce in question.
[498] Ibid. Solomon was said to have had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines; Easu, son of Isaac, had three wives simultaneously; Jacob married two sisters over the course of seven years, divorcing neither, and was given both their handmaids as concubines when each wife was unable to have sex or reproduce; Elkanah, father of Samuel, had two wives simultaneously; and King David is said to have had at least six wives, plus a lot of concubines, simultaneously.
[499] Ibid., p. 269. In his twenty-first response, Hincmar writes that, *sic et leges Christianae sunt inspirate Domino canditae, quibus legaliter initur conjugium, et sacerdotalis auctoritatis est sanctitas, qua benedictionem suam Dominus in paradise primus perentibus per sedatum conjugibus lelaliter copulatis* ('These are the Christian laws, inspired by the Lord Creator, by which a marriage should be legally entered into. And this is the sanctity of priestly authority, by which the Lord wishes to give his blessing, given by himself in paradise to the first parents [Adam and Eve], in turn to each of those legally joined to each other in marriage.')

happily ever after, producing many children.[500] Nor are accounts such as this limited to Francia. In the very early part of the eleventh century, Burchard, bishop of Worms, wrote that anyone who believed or engaged with love magic, using it to facilitate infidelity, was to undertake a year of penance.[501] Indeed, he addressed a very similar situation as that conveyed in Hincmar's anecdote, adding that: 'When they [mistresses] first learn that their lovers wish to take legitimate wives, they thereupon by some trick of magic extinguish the male desire, so that they are impotent and cannot consummate their union with their legitimate wives.'[502]

Other sources relate similar anecdotes, with the twelfth-century *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, from England, relating an account of a woman who employed a witch to divert her husband's love for his son, produced during his first marriage, to focus solely on herself.[503] In 1325, the Norwegian Bishop Auðfinnr wrote about a woman named Ragnhilde, who was accused of using love magic to cause impotence in her cousin, with whom she had entered into an incestuous union, in order to separate him from his legal wife. The written account of the ritual relates that she placed loaves of bread and an equal number of peas into the marital bed, along with a sword, and recited the words *Ritt ek i fra mer gondols ondu. Æid þer i bak biti annar i briost þer þridi snui uppa þik hæimt oc ofund* ('I cast from me Gandul's spirits. May one bite you on the back, may another bite you on the breast, may the third stir up against you hatred and ill-will.').[504] These words were to be spoken out loud, before the speaker spat upon the person they were cursing.

This theme was also expanded upon in Old Norse narratives, with the thirteenth century tale *Kormáks Saga* featuring a curse that was placed on Kormak that left him unable to engage in intercourse with his chosen partner, Steingerðr. The situation continued

[500] Stone and West, *The Divorce,* p. 237.
[501] Migne (ed.), Decretum *Corrector*, XIX, p.140, col. 961.
[502] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* p. 232, citing McNeill and Gamer (trans.), *Medieval Handbooks,* p. 340.
[503] Ibid., p. 233.
[504] Mitchell, 'Anaphrodisiac Charms', p. 22.

throughout the tale, and the story concludes with the magic spell still intact and the couple unable to consummate their union.[505] A similar curse was placed on the character of Hrútr, from *Njáls Saga*, which also dates from the thirteenth century. Cursed by his former lover Gunnhildr when he deserts her for another woman, Hrútr is unable to consummate his marriage to Unnr, although he can still engage with sexual relations with anyone else. Left without the possibility of consummation, Unnr then attempts to divorce him due to lack of sexual intercourse.[506] Considering the anecdotes and their cognates in narrative texts, there was clearly a concern in many different societies regarding love magic and its ability to disrupt legitimate unions.

The anecdote from Response 15 of the *De Divortio* mentioned above is also followed by an interesting description of what appear to be rituals and materials needed for love magic. This passage implies that the husband's impotence was caused on purpose, either by his wife's mother, who opposed the union, or the concubine herself, who was unaffected by the impotence and thus able to keep her status and his affections through the use of magic. Hincmar was writing in response to a strange and scandalous situation that was playing out in Francia when, between 858 and 869, King Lothar II of Lotharingia, the middle Frankish kingdom, attempted to divorce his wife, Theutberga. While the whole situation is long and full of exciting twists and turns, the barest facts of the case are as follows. Theutberga was unable to conceive, leaving Lothar without a legitimate heir and his kingdoms at risk from his various family members around him.[507] This included his uncles, Louis the German of East Francia and Charles the Bald of West Francia. Lothar also had a long-standing romantic relationship with a woman named Waldrada, which predated his marriage and produced at least four children, including a son who Lothar wanted to be legally recognised as his heir.

---

[505] Mitchell, 'Anaphrodisiac Charms', p. 21.
[506] Ibid., p. 21–2.
[507] See Stone and West, *The Divorce,* 'Introduction', pp. 1–81 for a more in-depth analysis of the background to the divorce.

The divorce story played out against a backdrop of contemporary politics and the machinations that went along with it, including shifting alliances between family members as and when details of the situation changed. Thus, the stage was set for an unprecedented drama to play out.

Hincmar wrote *De divortio Lohtarii regis et Theutbergae reginae* in response to the situation. This text lays out Hincmar's own reasoning regarding the un-divorceable nature of Christian marriage in general, and in Lothar's case in particular. In Hincmar's view, Christian marriage may allow for separation, but differed from secular marriage rites in that divorce should not be undertaken. The text, although primarily concerned with marriage and the conditions where a separation or a divorce could possibly be applicable, also gives a great many details regarding social and political conditions in Francia during the ninth century. As mentioned above, this includes details on love magic, along with other harmful magical practices Hincmar believed to be anathema to the Church and its teachings.

Hincmar addressed love magic in response to the thirteenth question asked of him:

> *Et si hoc verum esse possit, quod plures homines dicunt quia sunt feminae, quae malificio suo inter virum et uxorem odium irreconciliabile possint mitere, et inenarrabilem amorem iterum inter virum et feminam serere, et quod vir legitime sortitam conjugem maritali commercio non possit adire, et aliis valeat feminis commisceri, et itidem eodem maleficio potentia concumbendi, et dilectione quondam habita fruendi per artem maleficarum possit restitui. Et quae sit causa cur Deus, ut dicitur saepe in legitimo conjugio permittat talia fieri. Et si forte tales viri malefici, vel incantatrices feminae inventae feurint, quid de hujusmodi debeat fieri.*

> And if it might be true, as many people say, that there are women who by their sorcery are able to provoke irreconcilable hatred between man and wife, and to sow an indescribable love between a man and woman? So that a man is unable to engage legitimately in marital commerce with his wife, yet is able to unite with other women, but that by the same sorcery the power of sleeping with someone, and of love, formerly enjoyed, can be restored by the art of sorceresses. And tell us the reason for which, it is said, God often allows such things to happen in legitimate marriage. And if such [male] sorcerers or female magicians should be found, what should be done about them?[508]

The question appears to be suggesting that, similar to the accounts of love magic from later parts of Europe and the later narrative texts mentioned above, Lothar's mistress, Waldrada, was ultimately the source of his inability to successfully conduct a sexual relationship with his wife. Similar to the situation Hincmar laid out in his fifteenth response, above, Lothar appeared to have been able to have sex, in this case with Waldrada, just as the man in Response 15 was able to continue a sexual relationship with his concubine. The implication, of course, is that in these cases other women are the ones to restrict sexual relations, but have directed their spell against the married couple in particular, rather than the husband specifically, similar to Gunnhildr in *Njáls Saga*. Like Hrútr, Lothar can still conduct relations with his mistress, while his impotence only occurred when sleeping with his legal wife.

In Hincmar's writings, we get the impression that he is addressing such things because they exist in his world. He certainly writes with the expectation that his audience will understand exactly the practices he is describing, even in instances where he refuses to

[508] Stone and West, *The Divorce,* p. 221.

elaborate, such as in his wider discussion of love magic and magical practices in Response 15. What is very telling is the remedy he offers when the question of love magic arises and threatens to derail a marriage conducted through Christian wedding rituals, which he refers to as ‘Church medicine’.

This ‘Church medicine’, along with penance, formed part of the solution Hincmar suggested in Response 15, in response to the anecdote of the young couple who were unable to have sex. The young groom went to repeated ‘meetings’ with his bishop, ‘until the works of the devil were dissolved by the grace of God’ and sexual relations were able to be enjoyed once more. To underline the effectiveness of repeated meetings to conduct what appears to be some kind of religious instruction at the very least,[509] we are then told that, following these meetings, the young couple were reconciled and were able to produce ‘numerous children’, indicating that the impotence problem was truly cured.[510]

This section is then followed by Hincmar’s list, which condemns magical practices and their users, as well as those who seek them out.[511] In this passionate exhortation for all to recognise and repudiate such people and practices, Hincmar wrote that exorcism and Catholic remedies were the cure to such problems.[512] So, although no specific ritual is given, exorcism at least appears to have been an acceptable part of it. That exorcism was mentioned in the section that dealt with love magic may mean that Hincmar expected such a ritual to be used during the sessions of ‘Church medicine’. Hincmar, an educated and well-respected man, clearly believed that magic existed and, further, that the Church had its own form of ‘counter-

[509] Stone and West, *The Divorce*, p. 237: *De plecito ad pacitum, de one ad diffinitionem per frequentes tracta vitavet, usque dum operations diabolicae Dei dissolutae sunt* (‘And he went from meeting to meeting, and through many discussions of this sort took the matter from dispute to settlement, until the works of the devil were dissolved by the grace of God’). The discussion in question is centreed around a quote from the Book of Ezekiel: ‘Son of man, dig now in the wall, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. And when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.’ (Ezekiel 8:8).

[510] Ibid.

[511] Ibid., pp. 237–48. While the first half of the section deals with earthly magic users and their practices, Hincmar also uses this space to expand on demons and the danger they pose to the unwary, or those who underestimate their power.

[512] Ibid., p. 237.

magic', or 'medicine', to combat it. In addition, in secular Frankish rules regarding marriage and divorce, limited though the circumstances for divorce were, both men and women could freely petition to divorce in cases where their spouse was engaged with *malefecium* ('witchcraft').[513] This indicates that, while such practices were a concern for the Church, they were also enough of a concern for secular lawmakers to legislate against them. Similarly, the inclusion of witchcraft as a shared condition that allows either gender to petition for a divorce indicates the existence of a tradition of love magic being used in wider Frankish society.

IRISH PENITENTIAL SOURCES

Of course, Francia was not the only Christian country to have such concerns about the role of love magic in marital relationships. While no document comparable to Hincmar's *De Divortio* survives from medieval Ireland, we do have some relatively early textual evidence from the Church in Ireland that gives some information about belief in magic and love magic during the period. This evidence can be found in the penitential texts that were produced throughout the medieval period.

Many synods were held over the course of the medieval period, and by examining the information laid out in the accompanying penitential texts, where they still survive, we can see some interesting attitudes begin to emerge. The Penitential of Finnian mentions magic-use in wider society. This is the earliest surviving penitential text proper from medieval Ireland.[514] As with many early texts, the dating is uncertain, with Bieler suggesting a date of composition no later than 591. It deals with offences committed by both clerical and

[513] Flint, *The Rise of Magic,* pp. 291–2, notes that men could petition for a divorce on the grounds of adultery, witchcraft, or 'the violation of graves', while women could cite witchcraft, 'the violation of graves', or homicide. She also suggests that 'violation of graves' may have been related to concerns regarding necromancy or inciting a haunting.
[514] While the *Synodus episcoporum* deals with penance, it is technically not a penitential text, but rather a 'circular letter to the clergy of Ireland'. See Bieler, *Irish Penitentials,* pp. 1–2 for more information about the composition and form of the text itself.

lay Christians in the community, covering sins as diverse as thinking bad thoughts, various sexual offences, and crimes such as homicide. §§18–20 are concerned with magic and love magic, and the effects it can have:

> §18. *Si quis clericus uel si qua mulier malifica uel malificus si aliquem maleficio suo deciperat, immane peccatum est sed per penitentiam redimi protest; sex annis peniteat, tribus cum pane et aqua per mensura et in residuis .iii. annis abstineat a uino et a carnibus.*
>
> §19. *Si autem non deciperat aliquem sed pro inlecebroso amore dederat alicui, annum integrum peniteat cum pane et aqua per mesura.*
>
> §20. *Si mulier maleficio suo partum alicuius perdiderit, dimedium annum cum pane et aqua peniteat per mensura et duobus annis abstineat a uino et a carnibus et sex quadragissimas ieiunet cum pane et aqua.*

> §18. If any cleric or woman who practices magic have led astray anyone with their magic, it is a monstrous sin, but it can be expiated by penance. (Such an offender) shall do penance for six years, three years on an allowance of bread and water, and during the remaining three years he shall abstain from wine and meat.
>
> §19. If, however, such a person has not led astray anyone, but has given (a potion)[515] for the sake of wanton love to someone, he shall do penance for an entire year on an allowance of bread and water.
>
> §20. If a woman by her magic destroys the child she has conceived of somebody, she shall do penance for half a year with an allowance of bread and water, and abstain for

[515] 'Potion' has been inserted by the translation (Bieler) in place of the word 'it'. The Latin-to-English translation for this is: *si autem non deciperat aliquem sed pro inlecebroso amore dederat alucui:* 'but if he had not deceived anyone, but had given it to another for the sake of enticing love'.

two years from wine and meat and fast for the six forty-day periods with bread and water.[516]

Although clerics are mentioned as a (potentially the) male source of concern for love magic, the phrase *mulier malefica* (lit. 'an evil-doing woman') is also included. As with the case of Lothar and Waldrada, we see a clear concern regarding women using love magic to corrupt others in the community. More penance is prescribed for this – six years in total – than for the seemingly lesser crime of giving something 'for the sake of wanton love' to another person. 'Wanton love' I interpret as either once-off love-making, or a short dalliance that does not result in a recognised Christian marriage. Considering the assertion of the author(s) that it is a 'monstrous crime', I interpret the reference to 'leading astray' by magic as an instance where the end result led to a recognised marriage union.[517]

Legitimate sexual unions were, of course, a concern in medieval Ireland. The legal text *Cáin Lánamna* ('Law of Couples')[518] recognises nine such unions: the union of a man and a woman on joint property, where both bride and groom enter the union with an equal contribution of moveable goods; two unequal unions – the union of a woman on a man's contribution, and the union of a man on a woman's contribution; the union of a man visiting, where the man can 'visit' the woman, with her family's permission; a similar union that sees the woman going to the man, but without her parent's permission; a union of abduction where both man and woman are in agreement, but again receive no parental permission; and one where the man secretly visits without permission; and two final unions that Kelly has argued

[516] Bieler, *Irish Penitentials,* pp. 78–81.
[517] My interpretation is, of course, not the only one, and it is also probable that this does not deal with love magic specifically but is instead referring to magic in general, and using it as a way to draw Christians away from Church teachings on such matters.
[518] See Thurneysen (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Lánamna,* pp. 1–80 for his translation and edition; also Eska (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish Tract,* pp. 9–320 for her edition. See also Kelly (ed. and trans.) *Marriage Disputes,* pp. 26–7, § 1, for a list of eight types of union under medieval Irish law.

‘can in no sense be described as marriage’.[519] These are a union by rape or stealth, where the woman is described as being uncooperative, or non-consenting; and a union made between people with severe mental disabilities, described as ‘a union of mockery’.[520]

It appears that Finnian warns against clerics also engaging in the use of love magic. Of course, at this early period of Christianity, celibacy for the clergy had not been promulgated by the Church. *Synodus episcoporum* §6 mentions the wife of any clergy member who *si non uelato capite ambulauerit* (‘goes about with her head unveiled’).[521] This appears to be referring to Christian traditional dress as opposed to non-Christian clothing and fashion. As the clergy, and by extension their families, were central to Christian settlements, it probably means that they should visually reflect that and help spread the adoption of Christian ways and styles by the rest of the community.

As the idea of clerical celibacy had yet to be fully introduced into the Church, it is not outside the realm of possibility that a cleric would also attempt to enter into an expedient marital union that could advance his own wealth and power. It is possible that §18 of the Penitential of Finnian refers to a cleric resorting to the style of love-magic levelled against Waldrada in an attempt to force one of his brother clerics out of an ill-advised, or career harming, relationship, but the wording *si aliquem maleficio suo deciperat* (translated as ‘led astray’ by Bieler, but lit. ‘deceived anyone with his wickedness’) indicates the opposite, and if this was the case, the cleric using love-magic would be leading his brother back to accepted Christian morality, rather than driving him deeper into sin. And although it is a fun idea to imagine a romance-loving cleric offering, or selling, his ‘Church medicine’ to the young men

[519] Kelly, *Guide,* p. 70.
[520] This is where a ‘lunatic or madman’ is forced into a union with ‘a deranged woman or a mad woman’. Blame appears to lie with whoever brought them together, or ‘the responsible person in whose presence this takes place.’ See Eska (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Lánamna*, pp. 292–9.
[521] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 54–5.

and women of the community, it seems more likely that this cleric would be attempting to gain his own ill-advised sexual union.

The next penitential text to mention love magic is the Penitential of St Columbanus, which also deals with offences committed by monks, secular clergy, and the Christian laity. As this penitential draws heavily on the Penitential of Finnian, Bieler believed it to be the later of the two, and thus composed after 591, the latest date he assigns to the Penitential of Finnian.[522] §6 of the Penitential of St Columbanus deals with issues relating to magic and love magic:

> *Si qui maleficio suo aliquem perdiderit, iii annis paeniteat cum pane et aqua per mensuram et iii aliis annis abstineat se a uino et carnibus et tunc demum in septimo anno recipiatur in communionem. Si autem pro amore quis maleficus sit et neminem perdiderit, annum integrum cum pane et aqua clericus ille paeniteat, laicus dimidium diaconus duos, sacerdos tres; maxime, si per hoc mulieris partum quisque deceperit, ideo vi quadragesimas unus quisque insuper augeat, ne homicidii reus sit.*
>
> If anyone has destroyed someone by his magic art, let him do penance three years on an allowance of bread and water, and for three other years let him refrain from wine and meat, and then finally in the seventh year let him be restored to communion. But if anyone has used magic to excite love, and has destroyed no one, let him do penance on bread and water for a whole year if a cleric, for half a year if a layman, if a deacon for two, if a priest for three; especially if anyone has thus produced abortion, on that account let each add on six extra forty-day periods, lest he be guilty of murder.[523]

[522] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 3–5.
[523] Ibid., pp. 100–1.

The penitentials diverge on some details. While Finnian addresses women and clerics, the language of Columbanus is gendered male. The only pronouns used are he/him, and the people mentioned are clerics, deacons, priests and laymen. The first part of the section does not appear to be related to the creation of a sexual union either, with the language specifying that the magic used has ‘destroyed’ (*perdiderit*) the target, rather than led them astray (*deciperat*). This is still followed by six years of penance by the magician, before he can be ‘restored to communion’. However, the part that speaks about using ‘magic to incite love’ without inciting destruction on the target differs from Finnian in the length of time penance should be undertaken. Laymen (those who have not taken holy orders but are still Christian and part of the community) receive only six months, while full priests receive three years of penance, indicating that resorting to love magic was more sinful the further one advanced within the Church’s hierarchy.

Finnian and Columbanus also diverge on the issue of procuring an abortion.[524] Finnian states: *Si mulier maleficio suo partum alicuius perdiderit, dimedium annum cum pane et aqua peniteat per mensura et duobus annis abstineat a uino et a carnibus et sex quadragissimas ieiunet cum pane et aqua* (‘If a woman by her magic destroys the child she has conceived of somebody, she shall do penance for half a year with an allowance of bread and water, and abstain for two years from wine and meat and fast for the six forty-day periods with bread and water.’)[525] This perhaps indicates that it is the woman herself who performs the abortion, probably through a herb-based mixture intended to induce a miscarriage. The Latin is ambiguous, though, with Bieler noting that this ‘interpretation of the words *partum alicuius* seems to be required in view of the opening of §20. Otherwise, the words might be understood as meaning “some other woman’s child”.’[526] Columbanus, on the other hand,

[524] See also Mistry, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages,* for a more in-depth study of abortion in the medieval period, specifically pp. 126–64 for his discussion of abortion in medieval penitential texts.
[525] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 79–81.
[526] Ibid., p. 243.

states that *si per hoc mulieris partum quisque deceperit* (translated by Bieler as 'if anyone has thus produced an abortion', but lit. 'if, by this, anyone has taken away a woman's pregnancy'). I am interpreting the 'by this' as referring back to the preceding lines of the decree, regarding magic use, and suggesting that this also refers to the production of some item designed to induce an abortion through 'magical' means, again most probably through a herbal mixture.

LOVE MAGIC IN HAGIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

As mentioned in Chapter 2, saints were also shown as engaging in practices of popular magic, and love magic is also featured in some hagiographical narrative texts.[527] Borsje has highlighted episodes from the various extant Lives of Brigit, along with the Life of Columba attributed to Adamnán, while a further example can be found in the Life of Ciarán.[528] There are four extant versions of the episode relating to Brigit and love magic: the Old Irish version, which has been dated to either the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth; the *Vitae Prima S. Brigitae*, from the ninth century; the Middle Irish Life of Brigit; and a later revised version of the Vitae Prima called the *Vita Quarta S Brigitae*, which, along with the Middle Irish version, has been dated to the twelfth century, although the Middle Irish *Life* is older than the *Vita Quarta* version.[529] The earliest version is quite short, and offers few details regarding Brigit's ritual:

> *Anaiss arabarach i cCill Lasre. Do-lluid alaile Cennenses genere, fora tarat sua uxor miscuis, co Brigti da chobair. At Brigita benedixit aquam. Ille secum portavit, uxore aspersa amavit suum protinus inpatienter.*

> She remained the next day in Cell Lasre. A certain man of Kells by origin (?), whom his wife hated, came to Brigit for help. Brigit blessed some water. He took it with him and, his wife having been sprinkled [therewith], she straightaway loved him passionately.[530]

[527] See this thesis, p. 63.
[528] Stokes has produced an edition of the Old Irish *Bethu Brigte* in the Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore; Karina Hochegger has edited and translated the *Vitae Sanctae Brigitae* ascribed to Cogitosus; Anderson and Anderson have produced an edition and translation of the *Vita Sancti Columbae* ascribed to Adamnán; while Plummer has produced an edition and translation of the Life of Ciarán of Saigher in *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*.
[529] See Borsje, 'Love Magic', pp. 7–9 for her analysis, including dating information.
[530] Through Borsje, 'Love Magic', p. 7.

The only real details we are given is that Brigit blessed some water, which in turn was sprinkled on the woman. We are not told what the blessing was, and whether it was achieved through physical action, spoken word, or by both. Borsje argues that this blessing would have contained both, and constitutes a ritual, citing the rituals of consecration and exorcism as examples where 'verbal formulae for exorcising and blessing the water were accompanied by gestures, such as making the sign of the cross and changing the inflection of one's voice.'[531] The Irish word *bennacht* can also be translated as 'blessing or salutation', indicating that something has been spoken aloud.[532] Similarly, *bennachad* can be both 'a blessing' and 'an act of greeting, salutation'.[533] The Latin *benedico* can also mean 'to bless', 'to praise', or 'to speak well of', again indicating at a spoken element. Indeed, where it is described in the Irish textual sources, the rite of exorcism takes the form of a verbal and performative ritual similar to the procedure used for clerical cursing.[534] Borsje reasonably concludes that, at the very least, it is 'likely that an invocation of the divine was included in the blessing.'[535] Such a verbal component is included in both the Latin Lives of the *Vita Prima* and the *Vita Quarta*, invoking Christ himself to deliver the blessing.[536]

The Middle Irish version of the Life of Brigit is longer and contains more details than the Old Irish version:

> *Araili fer robhai i cill Lassaire, 7 robui a ben occa fhacbhail, 7 nis-geibheadh cuit na codlad imailli fris, cu tainic co Brigit usqui do chuinghidh eptha cu rocharadh a bhen he. Robennach Brigit usqui dhó 7 is ed atbert; Tabair in t uisci-sin tar in tech 7 tar bhiadh 7 tar digh dhuibh fein 7 tar an leapuid a n ecmais na mna. O doríne amhlaid*

[531] Borsje, 'Love Magic', p. 8.
[532] eDIL s.v. bennacht or dil.ie/5661.
[533] eDIL s.v. bennachad or dil.ie/5658.
[534] See this thesis, pp. 160–80.
[535] Borsje, 'Love Magic', p. 8.
[536] Ibid.

> *dorat in ben sheirc ndímhoir dosom conná faghbhadh bheith 'na ecmais cidh il-leth in tigi fris, acht fora leathlaim eiccin. Laa n-ann dochuaidh-sium for turus 7 rofhacuibh in mnai 'na codladh. O radhuisigh in ben atracht co hanbhfhail 7 dochuaidh a ndegaid an fhir cu bhfacuidh uaithe hé 7 gabhal mhara etarra. Roghairm sí a fer, 7 iss ed roraidh, noragad isin fairrce mina thised som cuice.*

> There was a certain man biding in Lassair's church, and his wife was leaving him and would not take bit nor sleep along with him; so he came to Brigit to ask for a spell to make his wife love him. Brigit blessed water for him and said: 'Put that water over the house, and over the food, and over the drink of yourselves, and over the bed in the wife's absence.' When he had done thus, the wife gave exceeding great love to him, so that she could not keep apart from him, even on one side of the house; but she was always at one of his hands. He went one day on a journey and left the wife asleep. When the woman awoke she rose up lightly and went after the husband, and saw him afar from her, with an arm of the sea between them. She cried out to her husband and said that she would go into the sea unless he came to her.[537]

We can see that, in this version, the husband asks Brigit explicitly for a spell 'to make his wife love him' (*eptha cu rocharadh a bhen he*). We are still given no details about the blessing Brigit gave to the water, but she gives the husband further instructions on how to use the water properly to incite love. He is to sprinkle it on the house, the marriage bed, their food, and their drinks. Moreover, he is to do this 'in the wife's absence', thus removing consent from her, something that the penitential texts seem to warn against. This Middle Irish ritual appears to incite much stronger love than the other versions too. In the Old Irish

[537] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Lives of the Saints,* pp. 44 and 192.

version, the wife is left loving her husband passionately, while in the Middle Irish version we see an almost slavish devotion: she follows him around, even within their own home, and threatens to jump into the sea in an attempt to rejoin herself to him when he tries to take a trip without her. As Borsje notes, 'Brigid's blessed water seems to have "worked" most strongly in this version, which used the term for "spell, charm."' (*eptha*, from *epaid/aupaid*).[538]

Hayden has more recently highlighted a comparable charm from an Irish collection of medical remedies compiled in the early sixteenth century.[539] The cure in question, which is stated to be *ar leimhe* ('for/against impotence'), is also described as an *obaid* (a later spelling of *epaid/aupaid*), but is evidently meant for a man rather than a woman, as it is included in a chapter of cures for andrological ailments. As Hayden has argued, though, 'the ultimate effect of the cure in both cases – restoring proper sexual relations – is the same.'[540] Although neither the charm nor Brigit's cure explicitly state that the water used must be holy water, it is interesting that Brigit blessed her water, thus making it holy, while in the charm the water to be used is described as *fírthiprait* ('a pure source'). This has led Hayden to suggest that the water in the charm may have been understood to be blessed, similar to how Brigit blessed the water from her cure.[541]

In Adamnán's *Life of Columba*, from the seventh century, we see a similar situation, as a husband approaches the saint and tells him that the man's wife 'would on no account allow him to come near her for marriage rights.'[542] When the saint speaks to the wife, she proposes a compromise of either of two solutions: that she remain in the marriage but both become celibate, or that they separate and she enters a convent. Either of these solutions would have been acceptable during the period: 'her solution – neither divorce nor remarriage

---

[538] Borjse, 'Love Magic', p. 8. See also eDIL s.v. epaid, aupaid or dil.ie/20176.
[539] See Hayden, 'A Sixteenth Century Irish Collection', pp. 258 and 267.
[540] Ibid., p. 258.
[541] Ibid.
[542] Reeves (trans.), *The Life of Saint Columba,* p. 70.

but separation – was legitimate according to ethical views of Christians at the time.'[543] This distinction – separation, but not divorce and remarriage – was one of the points Hincmar of Rheims made regarding the ending of Lothar's marriage to Theutberga; that they could separate, yes, but as they had entered into marriage with a Christian ceremony, under Christian beliefs, remarriage (unless under very specific circumstances, as we have seen) counted as adultery. Indeed, in Response 2 of *De Divortio* he addresses celibacy in marriage,[544] and in Response 5 he sets out the possibility of the couple agreeing to separate and enter into religious life instead.

However, in the Irish hagiographical examples given above, the saints in question agreeably cooperate and deliver a ritual-based solution that repairs the marriage. The solution offered by Columba seems similar to that offered to the young husband in Hincmar's anecdote from Response 15 of *De Divortio*, when he describes the 'Church medicine'. Columba speaks to the wife, and both husband and wife undertake a fast with the saint. After this fast, we are told 'the following night the saint spent sleepless in prayer for them.' As with Brigit's blessing, we are not told what words were used, but the use of the word 'prayer' certainly indicates a verbal aspect, as typically prayers are said, both spoken aloud as well as thought within the mind. Even thinking a prayer, as Borsje notes, involves speaking it silently, if only to oneself.[545] Although it could be seen that Brigit and Columba engage in love magic against the recommendation of the penitential texts, in reality they are delivering the style of church medicine recommended as a counteraction to harmful love magic.

The answer as to why it was acceptable for clerics to engage in this ritual procedure lies in Columba's speech to the wife: 'What thou dost propose cannot be lawfully done, for thou art bound by the law of the husband as long as thy husband liveth, for it would be

[543] Borsje, 'Love Magic', p. 8.
[544] Stone and West, *The Divorce,* p. 120; see pp. 114–21 for the full text of Response 2.
[545] Borsje, 'Love Magic', p. 8.

impious to separate those whom God has lawfully joined together.'[546] This, again, forms the rest of Hincmar's argument from *De Divortio*, which can be found in Responses 2, 4 and 5. Indeed, Response 2 quotes both the Books of Corinthians and Romans, stating '"And a woman is bound by the law of her husband" as long "as her husband liveth. But if her husband is dead, she is loosed from the bond of her husband, let marry who she will, yet in the Lord."'[547] This stems directly from biblical teachings and theology regarding marriage unions, in particular Mark 10, where the Pharisees ask Jesus for his opinion on divorce ('Thereafter, what God has joined together, let no one separate'), and Matthew 19: 1–12, which tells an expanded version of the above story but adds 'They are no longer two, but one flesh' (9:6) and 'I tell you this, anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery' (9: 9).

In light of the biblical teachings, both Irish saints are acting in a way that is absolutely in keeping with the words of Jesus himself. They are using a Christian counter-ritual to ensure that the Christian union is not broken, even if the compromise – celibacy within marriage or entering into religious orders – is legitimate and lawful according to contemporary rules.

We find a similar situation in the second Life of Ciarán. Although this version of the tale was recorded by Mícháel Ó Cléirigh in the seventeenth century, Plummer has argued that it was based on an earlier Latin text written by John Capgrave (d.1464).[548] Even if the text does date as far as back as the fifteenth century, it is still much later than the *Lives* of Brigit and Columba discussed thus far. In this account, the king and queen of Munster are receiving hospitality from Concraid, son of Duí, the king of Ossory. The queen, Eithne, falls in love

---

[546] Reeves (trans.), *The Life of Columba,* p. 70. The reading from the Vulgate is *quod ergo Deus iunxit homo non separet* ('What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder').
[547] Stone and West, *The Divorce,* p. 115.
[548] Plummer, *Miscellanae,* p. 184; the tale was recorded in Brussels, Bibliothéque Royale de Belgique, MS 4190–4200.

with Concraid, who does not want to engage in an adulterous union with her. Eithne attempts to trick him by pretending to be sick and unable to move, and asks him to bring her some blackberries. Concraid conspires with Ciarán, who had previously discovered a juicy blackberry bush, and it is these blackberries that Concraid gives to Eithne. In response to eating the saint's fruit, we are told *do bí slán* ('she was healed'.).[549] In this account, the object given to cure the illicit attraction is not water, but food. However, Borsje has noted that a great many things, from physical objects to food, could count as aphrodisiacs.[550] This can also be seen from a short tale found in the Rennes *dindshenchas,* wherein a married woman called Maer fell in love with Find Mac Cumaill and attempted to cast a love spell on him through the use of nuts, which he was instructed to cut and eat. Recognising them for the harmful magic they held, he refused, calling them *cna-amrois,* or 'nuts of ignorance', and instead buried them deep in the ground, giving rise to the place called *Cnámros.*[551]

In the case of Eithne and Concraid, the fruit is being given as an anaphrodisiac. If Christian 'Church magic' is a response to pre-existing, native love magic that adapted the most acceptable parts into a Christian framework, it is not surprising that aspects of love magic such as aphrodisiacs and anaphrodisiacs were a part of the practices that were adapted. This, again, can be seen in the Middle Irish Life of Brigit, when the husband is told to sprinkle the blessed water onto both their food and drink. In this way, the water acts as an aphrodisiac, working to bring the married couple back together and incite lust between them, while Saint Ciarán's blackberries are used as an anaphrodisiac to quell inappropriately placed lust.

---

[549] Plummer (ed. and trans.) *Bethada Náem nÉrenn,* I, p. 118, and II, p. 114. A similar result is achieved in *Serglige Con Culainn* when the druids give Cú Culainn and Emer a 'drink of forgetting', which will be discussed below.

[550] Borsje, 'Love Magic', p. 12.

[551] Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'The Prose Tales', pp. 333–4.

The final examples to be considered here, however, seem to completely disregard accepted Christian traditions and rules, and feature clerical love magic to break up an accepted married couple, and a miracle from Cogitosus's *Life* of Brigit, in which she appears to procure an abortion for one of her followers. In the first instance, recorded in the twelfth-century *Life* of Colmán son of Luachán, the wife of the king of Tara falls in love with Cinaed, king of Offaly. They arrange to meet and make love secretly, accompanied only by her bondmaid and his *drúth*.[552] When the king of Tara discovers the betrayal, he sets out to find the lovers and kill his wife. However, Cinaed places them under the protection of Colmán, who works a miracle to disguise the men as stags and the women as fawns, similar to how Patrick was said to have used the Deer's Cry to hide himself and his entourage from danger.[553] They escape death in these forms by outrunning the king, his hounds, and his men, and the scribe confidently tells us that *romórad ainm Dé 7 Colmáin trit an fírt-sin* ('God's name and Colmán's were magnified by that miracle.')[554] In addition to this, Cinaed gives fine horses to Colmán and agrees to pay a yearly tribute. In return, Colmán leaves:

> *[...] búaidh each acu 7 búaid laech 7 búaidh cléirech 7 cruth a mban im chaeime for feraib Úa Foilgci co bráth 7 cruth a ríg úastu 7 gráin ríg cóigcid for fer a inaitt dogrés 7 ná bad begc la hingin ríg hÉrenn feis lais 7 cosgcur remi dogrés mad for eoch gerr bes alló chathae.*

[552] Translated as 'jester/buffoon', although DIL notes that in later texts it became confused with *druí*, so could also mean 'learned man' or 'poet' in this instance: eDIL s.v. 2 drúth or dil.ie/18911. It may also be a play on words regarding a fool who puts his faith in pagan gods over Christianity. The queen is similarly accompanied by a low-ranking and low-status servant, described as a *cumal* ('female slave'), perhaps to ensure they would not be betrayed by servants with the status of freemen.
[553] See Chapter 2 of this thesis (pp. 49–51).
[554] Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Betha Colmáin,* pp. 88–9.

> […] a triumph of horses and of warriors and of clerics, and beauty of their women together with handsomeness of their men, and beauty of their kings exceeding theirs, and that every successor of his should be dreaded like the king of a province, and the daughter of the King of Ireland should not deem it a small thing to sleep with him, and that defeat should always precede him if he rode upon a gelding on the day of battle.[555]

Although Colmán is not using his miracle to incite or break lust, such a miracle being worked in such a way verges on a type of love magic, in that it ultimately encourages a sexual union to take place. In light of the other hagiographical accounts discussed above, I can only suggest that perhaps the two lovers are Christian, and that this union took precedence over the union of a Christian with a pagan. However, while the *drúth* is shown placing his horse under the protection of Óengus, son of the Dagda, and consequently losing it to thieves, there is no indication that the king of Tara is also pagan.

If we refer back to Hincmar, however, we may be able to see a small glimpse that such mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians were taking place in other parts of Europe at an earlier age and were a concern of the Church. In Response 19, for example, Hincmar quotes St Ambrose in reference to marriage between a man who is *infidelis* and leaves his spouse, *stating Itaque non est ei fides servanda conjugii qui ideo recessit ne audiret rectorem esse Christianorum deum conjugii* ('Therefore, there is no need to keep the pledge of marriage to him who left so as not to hear about the Leader of Christians, the God of his spouse.')[556] This idea, that Christians can separate lawfully from their non-Christian spouses, is based on the biblical Book of Ezra, specifically 10:10–17, where the Israelites

[555] Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Betha Colmáin,* pp. 88–9.
[556] West and Stone, *The Divorce,* p. 256.

return from exile and Ezra orders them to separate from their foreign wives, who are of a different faith, as they had married against God's prohibition.[557] While the word *infidelis* can be interpreted as an unfaithful man as well as a non-Christian, it appears that Hincmar is using it as the second sense, due to the quotation from Ambrose that directly states that the man is uninterested in hearing about the God his spouse had. Further, Ambrose states that those who 'sent back' their non-Christian spouses were free to marry afterwards; 'for if Ezra ordered unbelieving wives or husbands to be sent away, so that God might be propitiated, nor angered if they took others from their stock – for it was not ordered to those, that once those had been sent back they might not marry others – how much more, if the unbelieving husband leaves, will she not have free will, if she wishes to marry a man of her law?'[558] He continues by saying, 'that should not be reckoned a marriage which was made outside the decree of God; and 'If, however, both believe [in God], their union is confirmed through the recognition of God.'[559] Hincmar also quotes St Augustine, another favourite of medieval Irish scholars, who had written; 'Rightly, at the Lord's command, the sons of Israel sent away the wives they had married against His prohibition, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin".'[560]

The Life of Colmán son of Luachán was written in the twelfth century, considerably later than the saint is believed to have lived. The Annals of Ulster record his death in 611AD, while in 1122 they record that his shrine was discovered on the 22nd of March of that year. This discovery, and perhaps renewed public interest in the saint, may have led to the writing of the hagiographical account. The author has included some figures taken from the pantheon of characters assigned as pre-Christian gods, including the detail that the *drúth* in this episode had placed his horse, a valuable commodity at the time, under the protection of the Mac Óg, Oengus son of the Dagda. The tale never outright states that the king in question is a non-

[557] West and Stone, *The Divorce,* p. 256.
[558] Ibid., p. 257.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Ibid.

Christian. However, it is probable that the author of the tale was aware of the general suspicion and conversation surrounding the validity of mixed pagan-Christian marriages. Taken in light of the sources above, along with the earlier penitential evidence in regard to the level of suspicion placed on pagans in medieval Irish society, this episode may have been a way for the author to promote non-mixed marriages, by presenting the saint as being justified in interceding on behalf of the Christian lovers, rather than attempting to uphold the fidelity of a mixed marriage.

In another departure from what appears to have been standard and accepted Christian practice, Cogitosus ascribes an abortion miracle to St Brigit, which concerns a young nun who had lapsed in her vow of chastity. Brigit blessed the woman and the pregnancy disappeared, allowing the nun to complete her penance and remain in service to the church.[561] Brigit was not the only saint to perform such miracles, although she is the only Irish female saint recorded as doing so. Ciarán of Saigir faced a similar situation, with the exception being that the miracle he supplied was for a nun who had been captured and raped by a local king, Dímna. Callan has analysed miracles regarding childbirth and miraculous abortions, noting that neither of the women in Brigit's and Ciarán's tales had explicitly asked for them, and that instead 'it seems almost as if abortion is part of their penance'.[562]

It must also be noted that, while the penitential texts hold abortion as a sin, it typically receives less penance time than sins related to fornication. For example, in the *Irish Canons* it is prescribed less time than an unmarried man engaging in sex with an unmarried woman, or a man who has intercourse with a female neighbour.[563] The *Penitential of Finnian* also states that a nun who bears a child must undergo six years of penance, and in the seventh year she can be restored to her position in the Church and be called a virgin again.[564]

[561] Connolly and Picard (trans.), *Cogitosus's Life,* p. 16.
[562] Callan, 'Of Vanishing Fetuses', p. 292.
[563] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 160–1.
[564] Ibid., pp. 78–81.

However, if she procures an abortion she is given significantly less penance: six months compared to the six years for giving birth, with additional fasts on forty feast days, and two years without meat and wine, indicating that she cannot participate in receiving the host for the first two and a half years. After this, she is restored to her position again.[565]

[565] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials,* pp. 80–1.

LOVE MAGIC IN MEDIEVAL IRISH LEGAL TEXTS

Concerns regarding love magic are also reflected in the legal texts. For example, two law tracts from the Old Irish period discuss regulations regarding the use of it: *Cethairṡlicht Athgabálae*, a legal text that details rules regarding distraint; and the *Sechtae*, or Heptads, which is a collection of legal maxims that belonged to the *Senchas Már*.[566]

Heptad 52 details seven kinds of women who were entitled to a divorce due to offences committed by their husbands, including one to whom her husband has administered a charm or spell without her consent or knowledge. The glossator has added the following explanation:

> *Bean di-a tabair a ceile upta .i. in inbaid bis ac a cuingi, is and dobair na uptha do urail a seirci fuirre .i. coibchi ⁊ eiric fo aicne an cineoil upta. Re tiachtain a ndliged lanamnais tucadh di na uptha, ⁊ a ndliged lanamnais tancatar ria, ⁊ smacht lanaman da uaidhe and, ⁊ coibchi ⁊ eineclann ⁊ coirp-diri di ⁊ imscar frisi; no eiric fo aicned an cineoil uptha, ⁊ a rogha di, an imscarad dodena, no a ndligi lanamnais o duine isin fogail do righe ria tiachtain a ndligid lanamnais.*

> A woman to whom her lover administers charms/spells, i.e. at the time that he was entreating her, he administered the charms/spells to press his love upon her, i.e. he pays dowry and eric, according to the nature of the charms/spells. It was before the entering of marriage the charm/spell was given to her, and it is within the law of marriage [the effect] became [apparent] upon her(?); and he pays the *smacht* fine of cohabitation for it, and there are due dowry and honour-price and body fine to her,

[566] See Chapter 4 of this thesis (pp. 140–2) for a more detailed discussion of distraint. *Cethairshlicht Athgabálae* is an Old Irish tract and a part of the *Senchus Már*, while the *Heptads*, another Old Irish text, are a large portion of legal material that has been arranged in sixty-five groups of sevens.

> and [liberty] to separate from him; or *eric* according to the nature of the charm/spell, and she has her choice either to separate or remain in the law of marriage.[567]

The penalties for such a situation are heavy, but the Heptad also states that this only applies to the situation at hand, when love magic was cast against the wife without her knowledge and before the marriage took place. This does not necessarily discount the idea that 'Church medicine' of the sort administered by Brigit and Columba was also prohibited, as that was undertaken after marriage and is designed to draw the couple back together as man and wife.

Although Hancock has translated *upta* as 'philters', a word that describes a potion designed to arouse love, *upta* is a variant spelling of *epaid*/*aupaid*, which is typically used in medical charms to refer to a speech-act in those rituals. The text of the Heptad is clear that it is the *upta*, or 'charms' that have aroused love or lust. Further, it is made clear that it is the husband who is expected to have performed such a ritual, and that women are vulnerable to such deceit.

[567] Hancock (ed. and trans.), *The Ancient Laws,* pp. 294–7.

Serglige Con Culainn and Love Magic

Contemporary concerns regarding marriage, separation and love magic can also be seen in narrative texts from the same period. For example, the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* (*SCC* hereafter) has been read in relation to medieval questions surrounding these subjects. Described as 'part myth, part history, part soap opera',[568] *SCC* is a composite tale created from two different versions. It is preserved in *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin, RIA MS 23 E 25), a manuscript that dates to the late eleventh or early twelfth century, where it was initially transcribed by the hand called M.[569] Sometime later, parts of the tale were erased by the hand called H1, who made a number of interpolations, including replacing the opening pages of M's text. Although M was working earlier than H1, it is now believed that H1's text was actually taken from an earlier version of the story.

In the tale, the hero Cú Chulainn is struck by an illness that leaves him in bed, unable to move, for a year. Eventually, he is cured by the Otherworld woman Fand, who appears to have been responsible for his debilitation in the first place, after he agrees to fight a battle to defeat three enemies of the Otherworld King Labraid. He spends a month with Fand in the Otherworld and agrees to meet up with her in the real world, to continue their relationship there. His wife Emer is, understandably, not too happy with this arrangement, and decides to kill Fand; she gathers up fifty of her women before going to intercept Cú Chulainn and his lover. When Cú Chulainn at first dismisses Emer, then admits that he still loves her and that she will always please him, Fand graciously stands down and returns to her own husband. Everyone then continues on in their marriages.[570]

[568] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths,* p. 153.
[569] Believed to be Mael Múire mac Céilechair of Clonmacnoise. For more details on the hand and dating of the various sections of the text, see Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', pp. 135–6.
[570] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths,* pp. 153–78.

A flippant recap, to be sure, but the meat and bones of the tale is what this chapter is concerned with. There are number of elements within the tale that have led me to analyse it in light of the discussion surrounding love magic and divorce that was taking place during the medieval period, an approach that has also been taken previously by Hayden.[571] The word *serglige* is typically translated as 'wasting sickness', a compound of *serg* ('decline, wasting sickness')[572] and *lige* ('the act of lying down, reclining, sleeping').[573] However, a number of other characters expressly state that the illness Cú Chulainn is suffering from results from love. For example Emer, when exhorting Cú Chulainn to wake up, exclaims: *Is mebul duit,' or sí, 'laigi fri bangrád, uair dogénad galar duit sírligi* ('Shame on you, lying there for love of a woman: long-lying will make you sick.')[574] Lóeg, when speaking to Cú Chulainn, states; *ar donadbat genaiti/áesa a Tenmag Trogaigi, condot rodbsat, condot chachtsat, condot ellat, eter bríga banespa* ('it shows that the spirits, the folk of Tenmag Trogagi, have bound you, and tortured you, and destroyed you, through the power of a wanton woman.')[575] Further, the incident that brings Cú Chulainn's sickness is not an event that takes place in the real world. Rather, it happens when he falls asleep, and a number of characters, including himself, refer to it as a vision or dream.

Otherworld entities or spirits appearing to mortals in dreamscapes, or while the mortal is vulnerable and on the verge of sleep, is a motif shared among many different cultures, including modern ones. For example, the incubus and succubus are corresponding male and female spirits who engage in sexual intercourse with sleeping victims. On the Sumerian King List, written c. 2400 BC, the legendary hero-king Gilgamesh is recorded as being the son of a *Lilu*, a type of male spirit or demon who seduces women in their sleep,

[571] Hayden, 'Lovers, Lovesickness and Medical Learning', CSANA online seminar series, 14 February 2022.
[572] eDIL s.v. 1 serg or dil.ie/37248.
[573] eDIL s.v. 1 lige or dil.ie/30199.
[574] Gantz (trans.), *Early Irish Myths,* p. 164; Dillon (ed.), *SCC,* p. 14.
[575] Gantz (trans.), *Early Irish Myths,* p. 162; Dillon (ed.), *SCC,* p. 11.

similar to an incubus.[576] In medieval German, there was the *alp* ('elf'), who also acted like an incubus, while Britain had the 'old hag' succubus-type female spirit. In modern Ireland, W. B. Yeats helped to popularise the *gancanagh* (from *gean* and *cánach*, 'love-talker'), an obscure spirit from Northern Irish folklore, by using it as one of his pseudonyms.

As with these beings, the two women who beat Cú Chulainn and bring on his affliction do so while he sleeps and is himself in a vulnerable condition. They beat him with whips until he is nearly dead, and in order to recover he must spend a full year unconscious, or at least unable to speak, in his bed. There is not much smut in early Irish medieval literature, though some of the imagery, particularly in the descriptions of some of the beautiful young men and women can, indeed, be thought-provoking. Ní Bhrolcháin has suggested that *SCC* may be a sexual analogy 'for Cú Culainn suffering from erectile dysfunction',[577] and also suggests that the use of the Otherworld in the tale may have been 'the fantasy of the clergy unwilling to go along with the asceticism of the Céile-Dé type spirituality'.[578] However, as Cú Chulainn's wife Emer outright tells us, for the majority of the story not much sex is being had at all: *Mí ⁊ ráthe ⁊ blíadain/cen chotlud fó chomríagail/cen duini bad bind labra* ('A month and a season and a year without sleeping together, without hearing a man of pleasing speech.')[579] In fact, the only sex that takes place does so between Cú Chulainn and Fand, the woman who cast the love spell, who is not his wife.

Read through this lens, we can clearly see the scenario laid out by Hincmar of Rheims and the other early theologians who struggled to define marriage under Christian rules and traditions, and who grappled with ideas of love magic and divorce.[580] In *SCC*, the

[576] Petai, *The Hebrew Goddess,* p. 221.
[577] Ní Bhrolcháin, 'A Possible Reinterpretation', p.355.
[578] Ibid., p. 350.
[579] Gantz (trans.), *Early Irish Myths,* p. 164; Dillon (ed.), *SCC,* p. 13. Dillon translates this line as 'A month and a season and a year without sleeping in wedlock, without one to speak softly', further reinforcing that Emer and Cú Chulainn are not engaging in marital matters during this time.
[580] Hayden also came to the same conclusion in her CSANA seminar series of February 2021. Her findings will be published in a forthcoming article. See also Toner, 'Desire and Divorce'.

husband has been made impotent, but only towards his wife. The woman who also loves him, and desires the break-up of his legitimate marriage, can still engage in sexual intercourse with him. When those around Cú Chulainn speak of his sickness, they blame it on love and Fand, and tend to be critical of it and of Cú Chulainn for being affected by it. This despite Lóeg's further admission that, were he Cú Chulainn, he too would go to Labraid's kingdom to fight for him and the chance to live in the Otherworld: *Mairg ná dechaid ó chíanaib,/ 7 chách icá íarrair,/ co n-aiced immar itá/ in tech mór atchonnarcsá./ Dámbad lim Ériu ule/ 7 ríge Breg mbude,/ dóbéraind, ní láthar lac,/ ar gnáis in bale ránac* ('A pity that son did not go himself, with everyone asking for him; he could have seen for himself the great house I visited. If I possessed all of Ériu and the kingship of yellow Brega, I would give it all, no bad bargain, to live in the place I visited').[581]

However, Fand eventually recognised the love that still existed between Cú Chulainn and Emer, and backed down. After she decided to return to her own husband, Mannanán Mac Lir, Cú Chulainn entered a state of madness that compelled him to live in the mountains, refusing all food and drink, out of grief for her loss. As with the other texts examined, his community resorted to their own version of 'Church medicine', by way of the anaphrodisiacs that had proved so effective in those tales. Conchobar's druids gave both Cú Chulainn and Emer a 'drink of forgetfulness' (*deog dermait*) to make them forget that the whole episode had happened. Cú Chulainn forgot Fand and his consuming love for her, while Emer forgot her jealousy and bad feelings towards her husband. Moreover, *Ro croth dano Manannán a brat eter Coin Culaind 7 Ḟaind, cronnáro chomraictís do grés* ('Mannanán shook his cloak between Cú Chulainn and Fand, that they may never meet again.')[582] and the tale ends with

[581] Gantz (trans.), *Early Irish Myths,* p. 169; Dillon (ed.), *SCC,* p. 19.
[582] Gantz (trans.), *Early Irish Myths,* p. 178; Dillon (ed.), *SCC,* p. 29.

future temptation having been dealt with, and the status quo among the married couples having been restored.

Read through the lens of the Church's concern regarding what was, and what was not, a legitimate marital union, and what happened when one partner desired to dissolve it, *SCC* seems to have been a reflection of those same concerns. The same situation occurs that the early theologians used as their prime example of not only the existence of love-magic, but also a threat to the relatively young, and still quite shaky, institution of Christian marriage. Thus, the remedy is in line with the remedies being used by the Church at the time. There were ways and means that the couple could pursue to break the power of love magic, and in this way divorce could be avoided, and the union blessed by God and performed according to His teachings could continue.

CONCLUSION

While the Church acknowledged the importance of addressing magical practices related to health and healing, it also recognised the pervasive nature of love magic, although it appears to have been a complex and controversial subject in Christian societies. The Church's concern with love magic extended beyond theological considerations to encompass social and legal aspects of marriage. Marriage, a critical institution in both pre-Christian and Christian societies, underwent a transformation influenced by Christian teachings. By the ninth century at least, the Church's influence appears to have led to the notion that marriages were not 'proper' unless conducted with a Christian religious ritual, a transformation that seems to be aimed at aligning the social and legal institution of marriage with Christian principles.

Textual evidence, including penitential tracts and hagiographical narratives, offer insights into how the Church addressed love magic in Ireland. The Church exhibited a complex attitude toward this type of magic, condemning certain practices while also acknowledging the need for Christian counter-magic in specific situations, with the Church seeking to maintain Christian marriages even in the face of magical influences. The use of church medicine in place of love magic, particularly in hagiographical accounts such as those involving Brigit and Columba, and particularly Brigit and Ciarán of Saigir's abortion miracles, reflect a nuanced approach. While the penitential texts explicitly prohibited clerics from engaging in love magic, the actions of these saints suggest a more pragmatic approach, as they employed Christian counter-rituals to repair marriages affected by love magic, aligning with biblical teachings on the sanctity of marriage.

Legal tracts in medieval Ireland, such as *Cethairṡlicht Athgabálae* and the Heptads, also addressed the regulation of love magic, with penalties applied in cases where love magic was cast without the knowledge of the affected party before entering into a marriage contract. The complexity of these regulations highlights the interplay between legal considerations and

social morality. The Church's response to love magic in Ireland involved a delicate balance between condemnation and accommodation, reflecting the broader societal transformations influenced by the adoption of Christianity. The interweaving of theological, social, and legal dimensions illustrates the multifaceted nature of the Church's engagement with magical practices in the context of romantic relationships and marriage, particularly in the case whereby a lawful Christian union could be saved.

Chapter 6: Aspects of Ritual Performance and Belief

The word 'ritual' invokes many images and meanings for different people. To some, it is a solemn or religious ceremony filled with sacred meaning. To others, it can be as simple as dressing oneself in a certain order or wearing a specific item of clothing to bring luck to a sports team or a significant event, such as a job interview. 'Ritual' goes much deeper than this, however. Rituals are a series of actions and behaviours, usually perceived as normal outside of the ritual space and frame, exaggerated and combined to transform them into something supernatural or 'other'. After all, 'ritual drummers ritually beating ritual drums are still drummers beating drums.'[583] However, within the ritual space the drums and their drummers are transformed into something new, with a new meaning and purpose. By 'frame', I refer to the principles of organization that govern and guide the ritual proper. Rituals such as religious cursing and the secular performance of satire by the *filid* were outside the normal routine of daily life, but worked through a frame that allowed the audience to interpret them correctly, even though the 'otherness' of the ritual automatically transformed the performers, props, and the space within which the act took place, into something 'other'.

This chapter will look at some of the significant psychological aspects of the 'magic' rituals explored in the preceding chapters, such as the performance of medical charms, the pronouncement of religious cursing, and the performance of secular satires. Such rituals take place between the performer(s) and the witness(es), who can range from a single subject (for example, the patient who is receiving the medical charm as a curative), or a much wider audience, as appears to have been the case with the very public performances of cursing and satire. While these rituals may appear, on the surface, to be distinct from one another, we

[583] McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind,* p. 10.

have seen that there are some comparable aspects between them, not least that they take place within the same cultural context, would have been recognised, understood, and legitimised within that context by those who were witness or subject to them, and often depend on words of power for their efficacy. Additionally, even though the ritual spaces and ultimate outcomes of these rituals may differ significantly from one another, they ultimately share some features, resembling each other due to the cultural and social contexts that they jointly inhabited. This chapter will also examine the rituals in question in the context of their Irishness, their legality, and the institution of Christianity, considering how medieval audiences interpreted them through these lenses and how their experience and belief in these contexts legitimised the rituals and gave them their power.

WHAT IS A RITUAL?

The word 'ritual' is defined as 'Of or relating to the performance of rites' by the Oxford English Dictionary. Additionally, the term 'rites' is defined as 'A prescribed act or observance in a religious or other solemn ceremony'. These are, however, very basic and vague definitions that do not encompass the powerful and unique aspects involved in ritual performance. Indeed, rituals are some of the most complex and evocative expressions of behaviour relating to shared social, cultural and/or religious systems. Rituals can be grand spectacles, such as the 2023 coronation of King Charles the Third, that can inspire a range of emotions among the participants and audience, while evoking strong memories and fostering a sense of community for all those who are present for it. However, at their heart, rituals are often comprised of 'the repetition of small and thoroughly mundane acts.'[584] We can take the aforementioned coronation of King Charles as an example of this. Westminster Abbey, an impressive Anglican church, holds daily religious services for the public to attend. During these services of daily worship, participants follow the structure of ritual as laid out in The Book of Common Prayer, which 'provides a blueprint for various ritual acts that priests and participants are expected to perform.'[585] As services of worship are held daily, this ritual act of religious expression becomes a part of the routine of life for those who participate. Responses to the priest and ritual actions such as kneeling or making the sign of the cross have become mundane, although still retain religious significance for the audience and celebrant.

On the sixth of May 2023, a seventy-four-year-old man, Charles, Prince of Wales, and his wife, Camilla, were brought to the Abbey. In an age of motorised transport, they travelled in a gilded carriage that was pulled by six white horses. Outside of Charles's family

[584] McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, p. 1.
[585] Ibid., p. 2.

home, six cannons were fired in sequence to announce the start of the journey. As the couple made their way through the streets of London, they were accompanied by many companies of soldiers from all branches of the British armed services, marching in formation while thousands of people lined the street to watch. When they arrived at the Abbey, they and approximately 2,200 of their guests, from 203 countries around the world, proceeded inside, where they engaged in a modified version of the daily service of worship that was conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Among other modifications to the daily service, the public – many of whom were watching from their own homes, or on large screens that had been erected in public spaces to encourage community togetherness – were invited to swear allegiance to Charles. In turn, Charles swore to govern his people justly and in accordance with the laws of their countries, while upholding and protecting the Church of England in the United Kingdom. The assembled people in the Abbey then continued with the service and listened to the sermon that was delivered. Following the sermon, Charles and his wife were crowned as King and Queen Consort of the UK and Commonwealth and Head of the Church of England. After this, everyone who wanted to could participate in the ritual of holy communion, as they would in any Anglican church service. The service was duly concluded and the couple went home to lead the UK in celebration. This time, they travelled in a slightly bigger gold carriage that was pulled by eight white horses.

Although both the daily worship and the coronation ceremony were built around a common blueprint for a religious service, there are major differences between the two events. The coronation, for example, is an infrequent, indeed rare, ritual that is designed to arouse specific emotions in participants and onlookers. While the daily service can also arouse an emotional response, it is performed regularly and contains little of the emotional intensity of the coronation and its accompanying spectacle. Undeniably, the 'sensory pageantry in the Abbey (and outside it for that matter) was overwhelming, the emotional reactions it elicited

were considerable'.[586] Yet in the coronation, the participants performed all of the accompanying verbal and physical responses, such as kneeling, standing, praying out loud, and singing, as would be expected during the daily service. Thus, we can say that ritual includes both 'activities filled with sensory pageantry that dazzles, and practices that are so repetitious and uninspiring they verge on the mechanical'.[587] The responses generated by both the coronation and daily services may appear, to an uninformed onlooker, to be mindless or automatic, and although the coronation service shares the same basic structure as daily worship, the crowning of a regent has imbued this service with a much different meaning, distinguishing both services from each other in a significant way.

We can also find such psychologically striking displays of ritual in medieval Ireland. For example, the legal process of *tellach* ('entry') depended on taking mundane aspects of the everyday and placing them within a distinct framework, which then transformed them into something interesting and unusual, while retaining enough of their familiarity to allow the audience to interpret them correctly. *Tellach* was used when 'a person registered a hereditary claim to land not then in his or her possession' and, much like the performance of a *trefhocal*, progressed within specific time frames that left the occupier of the land under pressure to concede and come to terms.[588] As the procedure moved forward, the time given to the occupier to come to terms and submit to surety became shorter and shorter, creating a sense of urgency as the need to settle the dispute became paramount to the health of the kin-group.

Tellach took place over a period of thirty days, with notice given at the beginning that the claimant intended to force the defendant to come to terms. The defendant was given ten days to comply, but should the two parties be unable to agree, the claimant entered the

[586] McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind,* p. 2. It must be noted that, while the authors were discussing the coronation of Elizabeth II, this statement can also be applied to the 2023 coronation of Charles III. As we will see, the ritual and its intent are often fixed and unchangeable, while participants and subjects can change depending on the circumstances.
[587] Ibid.
[588] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 29. See also this thesis, pp. 224–6.

disputed land along with a witness and two horses, 'crossing over the ancestral graves surrounding the estate.'[589] If the defendant agreed to concede, sureties were given on the fifteenth day and the claimant undertook a public circuit around the land in question on the twentieth day. If the defendant chose not to concede, the claimant instead made a second entry onto the land on the twentieth day, which saw him penetrate deeper into landholding, this time with four horses and two witnesses. During this entry, the horses would be unyoked and allowed to graze on the land. If the defendant conceded at this point, surety was given on the twenty-fifth day, and the circuit took place on the twenty-eighth. If not, a final entry took place on the thirtieth day, with three witnesses and eight horses. This time, the horses were fully stabled and fed there. Should the defendant still resist, the claimant was entitled to take possession, and was expected to do so in a highly visible and performative manner, by tending his animals there, entering the house proper, kindling a fire on the hearth, and spending the night there.[590]

As Stacey has argued, 'Ritual…both echoes and alludes to ordinary life: it also subverts it by, in this case, carving it up into artificial segments that call attention to the distance between what is lived and what is contrived.'[591] Thus, by using this framework, *tellach* becomes highly visible and dramatic, with each entry and the eventual circuit acting as a way for the audience to contextualise what they are witnessing and allowing them to interpret it correctly. Ordinarily, a landowner grazing or tending to his animals, or creating a domestic scene within the home, is unexciting and expected behaviour. However, by placing it within this frame, the performance of such actions becomes heightened and is perceived as being outside the normal behaviour expected in a domestic setting.

[589] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 29.
[590] Ibid., pp. 29–30.
[591] Ibid., p. 29.

Rituals, then, can be defined as performances that contain familiar, existing elements that have been combined with striking, unique components that attempt to capture attention and symbolically enact a larger change on the world around them, or at least that part of the world that the audience and participants inhabit. In the modern case study considered above, the change in question is the succession of Charles III to the throne of England, thus becoming the de facto head of the other three countries of the United Kingdom, as well as fourteen member states of the Commonwealth. It can also be said, then, that 'ritual has the symbolic power to change social statuses, such as from wife to widow, from child to adult, or from prince to king.'[592] This type of transformation can best be explained as 'the psychological and social change that occurs during or after ritual participation'.[593] In the case of *tellach*, the claimant, acting as an intruder under normal circumstances, is changed into a settled, domestic homeowner, accepted into the *túath* and made a full member of the kin group.

[592] Wojtkowiak, 'Towards a Psychology of Ritual', p. 461.
[593] Ibid., p. 462.

The Use of Space in Ritual Performances

Typically, rituals are social actions that take place in a social setting. These settings can be either religious or secular, such as the performance of clerical cursing and satire. In Ireland, clerical cursing rituals appear to have started with a procession, whereby the Church community undertaking the ritual made their way to the land or home of the subject of the curse.[594] This was done publicly and, if the textual sources are correct in their description, was accompanied by the sounds of bells and voices raised in chanting. This procession may have occurred over a long distance, as the sources depict the attack or threat that the clerics were responding to as coming from territories outside of their own. Thus, the procession began at the church that had been wronged, on their territory, and ended only when the clerics had reached the designated space, which was located on the boundary, or at least within earshot, of the target's home. Such a procession, crossing from the landholdings of the church into the territory of the offending target, would surely have attracted attention and gained an audience even if, at this early stage of the ritual, the witness did not have enough information available to them to interpret it correctly.

Rituals also create a liminal state for both the participants and the space in which they take place. During the time that the ritual is occurring, the space and people both transform and enter a temporary world where all focus is placed on the actions and players in front of them. Wajtkowiak refers to this as 'ritual time', a sort of 'space-time compression' when actors and audience in the ritual separate from ordinary life and enter into the liminal space and time of the performance.[595] The performers within rituals also enter a liminal state before a transformation is enacted on them. In the first example given in this chapter, Charles entered Westminster Abbey as a prince and exited as the King of England: his status and

[594] See this thesis, pp. 169–77.

[595] Wojtkowiak, 'Towards a Psychology of Ritual', p. 468.

social standing had changed considerably following the coronation ritual, but during it he remained in an unincorporated state as a king-in-waiting, not a prince any longer, but not yet a king either. In *tellach*, until the procedure had been completed and the claimant has had his claim recognised and authorised by the kin-group, he was not yet the owner, nor was he not the owner. He clearly had hereditary kinship, as the claim had advanced as far as the enacting of *tellach*, but until the defendant had agreed to concede, his claim was not yet fully recognised. He essentially took the role of intruder, and by the end was transformed into a homeowner.

One of the best examples of this liminal state, and the resulting change in subjects, can be seen clearly through a wedding ceremony. As van Gennep has argued, 'after a set amount of time has passed in this [the liminal] state, the final rite of incorporation brings the target out of the neither-nor liminal state and invests her/him with a new sharply defined social stature', which we can see clearly through the rituals associated with marriage.[596] The ceremony involves two sets of participants: the main actors involved in the religious section of the ritual, and a wider audience in the more passive role of witnesses. The religious participants are the priest, or celebrant, and the bride and groom. The bride and groom, who are the targets of the ritual, begin the ceremony as 'single' under the eyes of the law. They then enter a liminal state, where they are no longer truly 'single', but are still waiting to transition to the final, incorporated state that will be brought about by the conclusion of the ritual, where they will become legal spouses. When they enter their wedding reception they will be introduced as spouses, and during the rest of the celebrations there will be jokes and comments referring to their new status as such. In the eyes of the audience, from the moment that the celebrant announces the end of the liminal state, the targets are seen as spouses.

[596] Through Goodwyn, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology of the Placebo Effect', p. 402, citing Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage.*

In the case of *tellach*, Stacey argues that 'the transformative potential of performance is nowhere more clearly visible than it is here.'[597] During the procedure, the boundary to the land had been redrawn and entered into the public space. By the end, it had been restored back to the *túath*, and a productive household had been represented, if not created, predicting the most desirable outcome of the process. Throughout the thirty days, the land itself entered into a liminal space whereby it both belonged to the kin-group, yet remained apart from it until correct ownership had been determined and firmly established. Just as the procedure advanced through the timeline created by the frame of the ritual, the claimant advanced through the space of the land in a very deliberate way, beginning on the very border and the ancestral burial plots, until they had finally penetrated the house, uniting the land with the home itself.

The space selected for any type of ritual is rarely random or spontaneous. Typically, it is chosen for a specific or symbolic meaning. The choice of Westminster Abbey as the location of Charles III's coronation was deliberate. As mentioned above, it is a very impressive Anglican church, and Charles is now the *de facto* head of the Anglican faith. Thus, it was important to conduct the ceremony in a place both dedicated to his faith and suitably impressive considering his status and the occasion. The Abbey is also open for the daily mass ritual, its mundane and everyday purpose, but during the coronation the Abbey was transformed into a royal space even though the mass ritual still took place. The Anglican mass and symbols of faith simply worked to connect the occasion to the witnesses, allowing them to interpret it correctly.

In the case of ritualised religious cursing, the space the ritual takes place in is public and relatively close to the target of the curse.[598] This ensured a varied audience. Those within

[597] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 31.
[598] See this thesis, pp. 249– 54, for a more in-depth discussion of the way sound was used in ritual cursing.

the common area chosen for the ritual, who have no vested interest in either the performance or the outcome, are drawn by the noise created by the actors and become witnesses. These individuals were, surely, a part of the intended audience just as much as the target, whose home is within earshot of the ritual. While the space chosen for the ritual may have been a common and secular place, during the ritual itself it is transformed into a sacred space with a new purpose and meaning.

The target of the curse, whether he deigned to engage with the clerics or not, also entered a liminal state as ritual performance, time and space came together and began to grab the attention of more and more witnesses. The whole point of the ritual was to force restitution, either through getting the target to admit culpability and make amends to the church, or by dying a just death as judged by God. The target entered the ritual as a high ranking member of society, a lord if not a king, as he was consistently depicted as being able to command a force big enough to attack, or at the very least pose a credible threat, to the church whose members were conducting the ritual; he did not leave until he admitted to criminal or sinful behaviour, or until he died. Unless one of those new states was achieved, he remained a liminal figure: not yet a sinner or a dead man, but with all the potential to become either. Until he capitulated and agreed to the clerics' terms (or died), he remained singled out from, or highly visible to, the rest of the community and kin-group. Even after the clerics were gone, should the target not admit fault, he remained in this liminal state as the eyes of the community were on him, waiting for the curse to be enacted. As long as the performance was visually and imaginatively impressive, the knowledge of the curse would have remained in the community, even at the back of their mind if enough time should have passed by, and eventually would have become part of the local lore. Even if the target died of old age, it was not necessarily true that the curse would be proven to have failed: his progeny and subsequent generations were also under threat. The curse could easily have struck them too.

There is evidence that borders occupied an important place in medieval Ireland, and perhaps even during the pre-Christian period. This certainly seems to be the case in pre-Roman Gaul, where the boundary lands between two neighbouring peoples often became spaces that served as tribal assembly places, or meeting spaces for trade and commerce. Indeed, over time some of these sites developed into *appida*, from the Latin *oppidum*, meaning a defended administration centre. These *oppida* were settlements that typically had a market function and centreed on trade activities.[599] The archaeological record also shows that many were home to sites of religious function and worship.[600] In Ireland, prominent natural and man-made features served as boundary markers, with Ó Riain arguing that the observation that later parishes were often bounded by streams, mountain crests and other natural features can equally be applied to older territories, although these could usually be 'subject to appropriate modification'.[601] Indeed, *Bretha Comaithchesa*, the legal text mentioned in the preceding chapter as being concerned with the law of neighbourhoods, sets out a list of twelve types of boundary markers that includes man-made features such as roads, along with wooded areas, rivers and mountains.[602] This can be seen even at the end of the period, following the Anglo-Noman conquest, when, for reasons of security, the Kavanagh family removed themselves to the east borders of their landholdings in Idrone, where the landscape was bordered by woods and bogs.[603]

Sanas Cormaic contains an account of a ritual, recorded as part of the entry for *imbas forsonai,* which contains an interesting man-made boundary detail.[604] In the instructions for the ritual, we are told that the poet first chewed on a piece of meat which was then placed on a flagstone behind a door, before the incantation or words of power (which

[599] Ó Riain, 'Boundary Association', p. 13.
[600] Ibid.
[601] Ibid., p. 17.
[602] Ibid.
[603] Ibid., p. 23.
[604] See this thesis, pp. 157–9, for a discussion of *imbas forsonai.*

were not recorded as part of the entry) were recited over or on it.[605] Doors and entryways have long had symbolic meanings and associations in cultures across the world, including Ireland. Doors are, of course, practical objects. While they offer protection and defence as part of their primary function, they also act as either an entry or an exit depending on where one stands in relation to them. In this way, they could be described as liminal boundaries within ritual spaces, particularly when they are used in such intriguing ways, such as in the description of *imbas forsonai.*

Ó Riain has also demonstrated how a number of churches that were built during the medieval period were constructed specifically in the boundary lands that lay along the historic division of Ireland into Leith Cuinn and Leth Moga.[606] These churches were not central to the areas they served, but were instead placed some distance away from population centres, often in territory that was difficult to reach. Such clerical lands also appear to have been acquired from professionals and elites connected to a native, pre-Christian system of social hierarchy. While not necessarily pagan or religious in nature, many hagiographies state that churches were founded at the location of wells, such as those instances related in the *Tripartite Life of Patrick* discussed in Chapter 2.[607] The Life of St Berach, a saint who will be discussed in more detail below, tells of an episode where Berach's church in Rathann was taken from Diarmait, described as a *fer sochraidh* ('a goodly man'), but also as the king of Connacht's chief poet and master of druidism, who had received the land in the first place as payment for composing a panegyric for the king.[608] This may be an indication that the elites that existed in pre- and early Christian Ireland lost their lands as their professions were

[605] O'Donavon and Stokes, *Sanas Cormaic,* pp. 94–5.
[606] See Ó Riain, 'Boundary Association', p. 18 for a list of prominent churches that were built along this boundary marker.
[607] See this thesis, pp. 74–9.
[608] Plummer, *Bethada Néam nÉrenn,* I, p. 33 (ed.) and II, p. 32 (trans.).

phased out or lost prominence after the adoption of Christianity, and were replaced instead by churches and clerics.

Textual evidence also suggests that it was common for the *filid* to gain holdings on boundary lands. In addition to the narrative example of Diarmait gaining his land in Rathonn by writing a panegyric for Aodh, the real-life poet Eochaid Ó hEoghasa (d. 1617) wrote a poem to his patron, Aodh mac Guidhir, complaining about the land he was given, which was located in boundary lands:

Cladh tórann la tíribh foghladh,
Fód comhraic na cceithre rian,
Ród ríogh a ccinnionn gach congháir,
Imioll nár dhíol roghráidh riamh.

A fence that borders on the lands of marauders,
A spot where four tracks meet,
A king's high road where every tumult settles,
This is a neighbourhood that was never a mark of great love.[609]

These border spaces clearly held a significant place in Irish society, even if their owners disliked their position in such difficult geographical spaces. Not only were they the places where professionals such as clerics and poets were situated, but social events such as assemblies, synods, *óenaig* and fairs took place. Textual evidence also says that the kings of the Uí Maine, Clann Shuibne and the Dessí held their inaugurations in or near their

[609] Through Ó Riain, 'Boundary Association', p. 21, citing Bergin (trans.), 'Unpublished Irish Poems. XXI', pp. 80–2.

borderlands.[610] In this way, we can see that boundary spaces were also spaces that brought people together through shared experiences, as well as being places of defence and even solitude, particularly for those churches that purposely chose to place their main settlements far away from other human settlement sites. Just as Westminster Abbey was specifically chosen for the inauguration of Charles the Third, and as disused *túath* land became the focus of the *tellach* ritual, boundary lands were chosen for ritual cursing and satire because of their liminality and the mutability of their functions.

[610] Ó Riain, 'Boundary Association', p. 24.

Ritual and Time

The use of time and timings could also help to change space in innovative ways. For example, the ritual known as *glám dícenn* is said to be performed at is sunrise, a liminal time of the day in that it is not quite night and not quite day, but the time in between both states of being.[611] Even the place where it is to be performed, on a hill, may be a reference to a mountain or hill as a boundary marker, again another liminal space due to its varied use. The time of year specified by *Uraicecht na Ríar*, Spring, when the whitethorn's leaves are densest, is a liminal time of year, as the world moves from the dark and cold of Winter to longer days and warmer weather once more.[612] The ritual thus specifies a liminal season, a liminal height boundary, and a temporal boundary that is based on the liminal state between night and day.

As with the target of a curse, the subject of the *trefhocal* must agree to come to terms in order to offset the full satire and the damage it could do to him. Until he did so, or until the ritual was completed, he entered into the liminal state of being a *nemed*, albeit with the possibility of being one who threatened the status of that rank; he would remain in this liminal state as long as he was under threat of a satire. After all, a lord's reputation, and the support he received due to how he was viewed by others, could change depending on how successful the poet was and how the wider public perceived him. As Stacey has noted, 'Public praise and blame were crucial aspects of this social system in that they announced to the world the measure of a person's moral standing.'[613] Thus, although the target of the satire had entered the ritual as a *nemed*, until it concludes or he capitulates he is a person of suspicion and may not be worthy or capable of performing the complex and necessary

---

[611] See this thesis, pp. 150–9.
[612] Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar,* pp. 114–15. See also, this thesis, pp. 150–7, for a discussion on the whitethorn tree.
[613] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 106. See also Charles-Edwards, 'Honour and Status'.

obligations his status demanded. Surely an underlying concern would have been centreed on whether or not a lord who could not uphold his end of a contract with a *fili* would be able to uphold the social contracts he had with his clients? If he could not afford to properly reimburse a poet for a praise poem, could he afford to maintain warriors for the safety of the territory? The words of poets could very easily have a detrimental effect on a lord's reputation and his standing in the community.

In satire, notice was given on the boundary of the land owned by the target of the satire, and the *trefhocal* ritual was probably carried out there too. We can also reasonably assume that it too was supposed to be performed publicly in front of witnesses, due to this being the practice of the legal rituals whose structure satire loosely follows. This is best highlighted through the production of the cross that marked the performance of the *trefhocal* poem, as detailed in a legal text that consists of citations and commentaries in Old Irish on various subjects.[614] This passage stated that the rod was *in flesc do sadhudh i forba .x. maide don fhilidh trefhocail* ('to be set into the ground by the poet…at the end of the ten-day period of notice.')[615] The word *forba*, translated as 'ground' here, can mean 'a patrimony, heritage (of land), real estate', as well as 'home' or 'native territory' in a wider sense.[616] So, while it can certainly mean 'land' or 'ground' in a basic sense of *forba*, it seems to imply a specific tract of land, or land traditionally owned by a specific person or *túath*. This leads me to believe that, just as in the case of cursing, or the legal procedures such as fasting or distraint, the *trefhocal* and satire, and whatever performance went with the ritual as a whole, was performed on, or in sight/sound of, the subject's home.

Charming rituals, on the other hand, were probably not performed publicly. As with other healing rituals, they were in all likelihood performed in a private space, such as the

---

[614] Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar,* p. 139. See CIH 956.38 for the tract in question.
[615] Ibid.
[616] eDIL s.v. orb(b)a or dil.ie/33941.

patient's home. However, Goodwyn describes the performance of ritual as 'the deliberate, self-conscious, public, symbolic actions involved in a ritual', arguing that these actions 'communicate and create a sense of sacredness on multiple levels, and actively participating in a ritual pulls one into the theme and purpose of the ritual.'[617] Although they were performed on a much smaller scale, and hopefully in a more intimate and less public setting, I argue that the physical performance of charms contains enough of these features to qualify it as a true ritual. For example, although the power of many charms was perceived in coming from their words and God's power, it was the ritual aspect of those charms that acted as a curative in the eyes of the patient, rather than any of the words, symbols or transfers of power involved. It is the belief placed in the charm by the patient, and to a lesser extent the medical practitioner, that ultimately gives it its power.

This is made possible by the so-called 'placebo effect', whereby the patient's health is improved by medical intervention that does not 'have anything to do with specific modes and mechanics of healing known to medical science.'[618] Although the placebo effect has been dismissed as 'quackery' and described as a 'nuisance phenomenon' that can throw research trials into disarray, studies have shown that such inactive cures are in fact a 'potent psycho biological phenomenon where the body and brain anticipate and participate in clinical improvement'.[619] Such positive effects have been observed on a variety of physical and mental illnesses, including depression, Parkinson's disease, and even cancer.[620] Placebo surgery has even been developed and tested, with one study finding no significant differences

---

[617] Goodwyn, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology', p. 397.
[618] Ibid., p. 400.
[619] Ibid.
[620] See Khan *et al,* 'The Persistence of the Placebo Effect'; Colloca *et al,* 'Overt Versus Covert Treatment for Pain'; and Kradin, *The Placebo Response* for studies regarding the placebo effect and depression; Parkinson's disease; and cancer respectively.

between their patients who underwent a 'sham' surgery versus those who received a legitimate surgical procedure.[621]

The placebo effect has been known to exist for a long time. It is certainly not a new phenomenon. Research into it, however, has begun to expand over the last few decades, covering a wide range of physical and mental health issues. These include, but are not limited to, chronic conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, warts, and arthritis. Positive placebo effects have also been observed in much more serious conditions, such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and chronic depression.[622]

Studies have even been carried out on charismatic faith healing, where the strength of belief in the healing, coupled with faith in God, has also produced the placebo effect. One such study was conducted in 1979, with another taking place in 1986. In 1979, seventy-three individuals who underwent faith healing were examined, while in 1986 the number of participants included was 176. In both studies, the subjects underwent medical exams before and after, which discovered no physiological changes or improvements to their health. However, the participants themselves reported that 'their health and well-being had improved' following the healing ritual.[623] Their subjective health had increased, in that they felt that they were better than they were before the healing, while in actuality their physical health remained unchanged.

The famous 'Toronto Blessing', a charismatic service that began at the Vineyard Church near the Toronto Airport, was examined as part of a sociology survey carried out by Margaret Poloma of the University of Akron.[624] Of 850 people who agreed to participate in a follow-up study, 78% reported 'inner or emotional healing' while 21% reported that physical

---

[621] See Mosely *et al.,* 'A Controlled Trial of Arthroscopic Surgery'.
[622] See Goodwyn, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology', pp. 400–1 for further details of these studies.
[623] Argyle, 'The Effects of Ritual', p. 168.
[624] Ibid., p. 169.

healing had occurred.[625] An earlier study carried out in 1991 with 560 randomly selected participants in Ohio saw 72% of subjects asserting a strong belief in the power of prayer, and 34% claimed that they had experienced this power themselves.[626]

The mindset of the patient is, of course, one of the most important factors in producing the placebo effect. The patient's level of suggestibility is also a factor, along with their expectation of being cured; the level of optimism their doctor displays; the doctor's reputation within the community; the number of visits taken during treatment; and what other people, who have undertaken similar or the same treatment, have told them. Indeed, 'more frequent administration of a medication, larger pills, newer pills, and even the colour of a pill can enhance or diminish placebo responses'.[627] Within the setting of a wider religious community, as with faith healing or medieval charming, this sense of community and shared faith can also contribute to invoking the placebo effect and aid the continued belief and usage of charms. Therefore, while charms were conducted in a non-public space, the space was transformed through the use of other ritual elements to create a sacred space where healing was expected to occur, thus allowing the placebo effect to manifest. These elements are the use of sound and the visual stimulation used as part of rituals, and they will now be examined in relation to cursing, satire, and charming.

---

[625] Argyle, 'The Effects of Ritual', p. 169.
[626] Ibid.
[627] Goodwyn, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology', p. 401.

Sound – in particular, its reception by or effect on the audience – is an interesting aspect of ritual that often gets overlooked when dealing solely with evidence of a textual nature. Sound can trigger strong memories and elicit emotional responses in the audience. When combined with a visual or physical performance and the space within which the act takes place, it can affect the audience's interpretation and response to what they are witnessing. In order for this to work, the sounds, language(s) and visual imagery must be recognizable to the audience. Thus, the language of the medical charms must be recognizable to the patient as being imbued with some kind of higher power, even if the patient did not necessarily understand what was being spoken. This effect was achieved by using the Latin language, along with Christian prayers or parts of the liturgy that would have been familiar even to illiterate patients from daily worship. Although they may not have understood what was being said, they would have been able to associate the Latin language with authority and healing power. Even interesting poetic features such as rhyme and alliteration could be used to transform nonsense words into incantations that sounded mysterious and thus authoritative and 'magical' to the patient. Wojtkowiak calls this 'cognitive simplification', whereby 'participants should be able to understand and experience the ritual in one natural-feeling flow.'[628]

As shown in Chapter 3, the evolution of the charming tradition in Ireland and throughout Europe saw a move away from the 'I' statements, which saw power coming from within the speaker, to the use of Christian words and prayers. This includes the use of elements from Latin, one of the *tres linguae sacrae* or 'three sacred languages' of Christian tradition. Typically, holy or sacred languages are the languages in which a religion's sacred texts were written down. In the case of Christianity, Hebrew was the language of the Old

[628] Wojtkowiak, 'Towards a Psychology of Ritual', p. 468.

Testament, Greek was the language of the New Testament, and Latin was the language of the liturgy once Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire. The idea was termed, or at least widely popularised, by Isidore of Seville, who wrote in his influential *Etymologies* that these three languages were the most superior languages in the world.[629] By the medieval period, Latin was the language in which the Mass was said. It was the language that was used to pray to God and to ask the saints to intercede on behalf of supplicants. In Ireland, it was called *bérla bán*, (the 'white language'), and its religious context gave it its 'otherness' and a certain measure of respect.[630] It is therefore unsurprising to find Latin, or at least Latinate words, used as words of power in medical charms. As the language of the Old Testament, Hebrew was also held in high regard by the Church fathers. Alongside Latin, it was also a frequent element in charming traditions. Origen, for example, believed that 'Hebrew was the primal language and that divine names in prayers were effective in the original Hebrew, but lost potency in translation'.[631] Medieval theological belief also held that Hebrew was the original language spoken by Adam and by the voice of God.[632] Thus, Hebrew as a holy language was held in high regard, and words of power in Hebrew were considered particularly efficacious. It was much harder to learn Hebrew than Latin or even Greek, however, with the most effective way seemingly being to immerse oneself in a Jewish community, as Jerome did, when he settled in Bethlehem while working on his translation of the Old Testament.[633]

In medieval Europe, however, Ireland included, there did not seem to be any formal or comprehensive education in Hebrew. The majority of Jewish or Hebrew literature was

---

[629] Isidore, *Etymologiae,* ix.i.3.
[630] See Carey (ed. and trans.), *The Psuedo-Historical Prologue,* pp. 12 and 18. §7 recounts how the poets of Ireland had prophesied the coming of 'the white language of the *Beati',* that is, 'the Law of Scripture', indicating that they perceived Latin as one of the main languages of God and Christianity.
[631] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 113.
[632] Ibid.
[633] Moran, 'Hebrew in the Early Irish Glossaries', p. 2.

typically read through translation, usually via Latin.[634] The only Irish reference to Jewish people comes from the Annals of Inishfallen, where the entry for the year 1079 states that *Coicer Iudaide do thichtain dar muir ⁊ aisceda leo do Thairdelbach, ⁊ a n-dichor doridisi dar muir* ('five Jews came from over sea with gifts for Toirdelbach, and they were sent back again over sea.')[635] The passage would seem to suggest that they left under duress, or from pressure from the Irish, rather than concluding their stay on their own time. If this was the case, and they were indeed sent away, it does not seem likely that there was much time for comprehensive cross-cultural learning to have taken place. However, there appears to have been some engagement with the Hebrew language by some Irish scholars. Pádraig Moran has demonstrated, for example, that the early Irish glossary *De origine Scoticae linguae*, known more commonly by the title 'O'Mulconry's Glossary', contains fifty-seven Hebrew words used in the entries of etymologies of Irish words.[636] The majority of those words were taken from Jerome's *Hebrew Names*, while Moran has traced the remaining instances to Isidore's *Etymologies*.[637] It seems that, in Ireland at least, the learning of Hebrew was done individually, as and when scholars had access to Hebrew texts.

Hebrew even makes a brief, albeit bastardised, appearance in one of the texts of NLI MS G 11 that was selected for this study. It appears in the words of power of the charm titled *Ar ecmaig* ('Against farcy'):

> *Ar echmaig an araid so do scríba ⁊ a cengal don inad a mbia in péist ⁊ innarbaid fa cétōir nō a gabail ría † i nomine patris ⁊ filíí ⁊ spiritus sancti amen † saluator † alibria † trifon † ⁊ trofia † a † g †. Ar in cétna ⁊ a cur a n-innus sin ris † sendula ⁊*

[634] Moran, 'Hebrew in the Early Irish Glossaries', p. 1.
[635] Mac Airt (trans.), *The Annals of Inisfallen,* p. 235. See also Moran, 'Hebrew in the Early Irish Glosses', p. 4.
[636] Moran, 'Hebrew in the Early Irish Glosses', p. 9.
[637] Ibid., p. 10.

pendula opium 7 inopium sanctus negodsium oret pro me fiat uirmis mortua pater prius prius post 7 iccaid a n-innus cétna na hesbada. Colum Cille do rinne so.

Against Farcy Write this charm/prayer and tie it to the place in which the worm is, and it drives it out at once: † I nomine patris 7 filíí 7 spiritus sancti amen † saluator † alibria † trifon † 7 trofia † a † g †. Ar in cétna 7 a cur a n-innus sin ris † sendula 7 pendula opium 7 inopium sancti negodsium oret pro me may the worm be dead. A Pater before and after, it heals the abscesses in the same manner, and Colum Cille made this.[638]

As we can see, the words of power begin with the Latin-language version of the prayer called the 'Trinitarian formula', more commonly referred to as 'the Sign of the Cross'. This invocation of the Trinity is a common feature of both charms and textual amulets, as it was believed to keep the devil away from whoever spoke it.[639] It was probably familiar to most Christians, including the laity, regardless of whether or not they had received a formal education. The following Latinate words look suitably mysterious, and possibly worked on a psychological level to soothe and reassure the recipient of the amulet. There are still some interesting features present, as can be seen with the alliteration between *trifon* and *torforia*, as well as the end rhyme between *torforia* and *alabria*.

This is then followed by the letters 'a' and 'g'. In isolation, they seem strange, or perhaps an attempt at obscuring further words of power by reducing them to their initial letters. However, there is another version of this textual amulet in Dublin, Trinity College MS H.3.17, which shows that the scribe of NLI MS G 11 either made a mistake due to his own

[638] See Appendix, p. 279.
[639] Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 112.

unfamiliarity with Hebrew, or was copying that version of the text from an incomplete exemplar:

> + *In nomine patris et reliqua* + *salauantur* + *alibria* + *trifon* + *et troferia* + ***a*** + ***g*** + ***l*** + ***a***
>
> *Ar echbad i n-etan eich i scribenn 7 tri patera 7 tri haue 7 creda na lorg 7 ni fogain gan aifrenn don spirut naem.*

> In nomine patris, etc.
>
> For horse plague. [Put it] in the forehead of a horse in a script, and three paters and three aves and a credo after it, and it avails not without a mass to the Holy Spirit.[640]

At first glance, we can see some obvious differences between the two texts, which suggests that they did not come from the same source. In NLI MS G 11, the textual amulet is written in the standard formula that was adopted by that scribe. It has a clear title, instructions and an efficacy statement that are written in Irish. In TCD MS H.3.17, the words of power are given first, before the title and instructions. There is also an extra step, in that here we are told that it will not work 'without a mass to the Holy Spirit'.[641] We can also see that the 'a' and 'g' have been expanded to 'a', 'g', 'l' and 'a'. Once we see the inclusion of the 'l' and second 'a', we can see that this is an instance of the 'AGLA' formula, a common Hebrew-language formula that was used in both the Jewish and Christian charming traditions. Unfortunately, the exact meaning of AGLA is unknown. Its usage has a long history, which has mostly obscured its beginnings. It is most commonly explained as coming from the

[640] Best (ed. and trans.), 'Some Irish Charms', p. 28.

[641] This may be an instruction to sanctify the textual amulet prior to placing it on the afflicted horse by leaving it on, or near, the altar during a mass given specifically to the Holy Spirit. This act indicates a level of cooperation between Church and practitioner.

phrase ‘You art mighty forever, Oh Lord’, from the Gevurot prayer, which is the second blessing of the Amidah, the central prayer of the Jewish liturgy.[642] This prayer, including the AGLA section, would most certainly be less well known to the laity than the preceding Trinitarian formula. Further, while the AGLA formula was used widely in other charming traditions, its full use in H.3.17, and the abortive attempt in G 11, are so far the only examples I have come across thus far in the Irish tradition. However, the charms contained in the extant Irish medical books have largely been neglected so far, and there thus may be other instances of the AGLA formula that simply have not yet been uncovered.

Greek, then, completes the trilogy of sacred languages. While Hebrew was theorised as being the language of God and the first man, Greek, as the language of the New Testament, retained its status as a prestige language. There were also more ways to learn it. As Moran has noted, ‘since the study of Greek language and literature was an integral part of Roman education, some bilingual conversation books, Greek-Latin glossaries, and learned Latin grammars survived that allowed a few enterprising scholars to acquire some knowledge of Greek in the early Middle Ages.’[643] Initially, it was believed that the learning of Greek was only available to those Irish scholars on the continent.[644] However, Moran’s examination of the early Irish glossary known as *De origine scoticae linguae* or ‘O’Mulconry’s Glossary’ demonstrates that there may have been access to Greek texts on the island of Ireland as well. In his recent edition and translation of this text, Moran catalogued 192 uses of Greek as part of the etymologies of Irish words and argued that, as the compiler of the glossary only chose Greek words that ‘correspond roughly with Irish words in sound and sense’, it stood to reason

[642] See, amongst many others, Skemer, *Binding Words,* p. 112; Borsje, ‘Medieval Irish Spells’, pp. 475–6; and Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 27.
[643] Moran, ‘Hebrew in the Early Irish Glosses’, p. 1.
[644] Moran, ‘Greek in Early Medieval Ireland’, p. 1.

that they had access to, or knowledge of, more Greek vocabulary, which they were able to select from according to their needs.[645]

Greek was also a component of the third St Gall incantation, where part of Matthew 28:19 was reproduced in a mix of Greek and Latin.[646] The use of Latin, Greek and Hebrew in words of power thus invokes a mystical atmosphere based on the use of recognizably Christian words, creating a sacred and magical space wherein healing can be enacted. Language is used in a similar way in both cursing and satire. In cursing, the power is invoked through the chanting of psalms, albeit in true Latin rather than the Latinate language of the medical charms. In satire, the language used was a form of the poetic language proper to the *filid*, called *berla na bhfiled*, which, although Irish, was of a higher, more learned register than the language used on a day-to-day basis.[647] However, these rituals were performed by social elites: clergy and poets. They were developed specifically for times when standard legal redress was unable to be attained.[648] They are specific to the Church and the professional order of poets, embedded within the community but distinct from it. These rituals could also be termed 'symbolic cultural systems'.[649] They were not expressly taught to non-clergy and non-poets, and therefore the audience must have some level of intuitive knowledge. They must be able to put the sounds, symbols and physical actions together to correctly interpret what is taking place. This can be achieved by associating aspects such as language with the context or institution they belonged to or, as we have seen in Chapter 4, through their similarities to other cultural systems, such as the accepted procedures used in the Irish legal system.

[645] See Moran, *De origine scoticae linguae* for the newest edition of this text.
[646] See Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination,* p. 7. See also this thesis, p. 98.
[647] See Calder (ed. and trans.), *Auraicept,* pp. 102–3 for examples of how medieval Irish learners perceived the language of the poets.
[648] See this thesis, Chapter 4.
[649] McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind,* p. 4.

Sound played a large part in providing necessary information to the audience. Several medieval Irish sources depict clerics as ringing their handbells or striking bells with their *bachall*s both when on procession and once they have arrived at their destination. The *bachall*, also called a crozier, was an emblem of office for high-ranking members of the Church. As Bitel notes, they, along with bells, 'were part of the kit of every priest, bishop and monastic leader in medieval Ireland.'[650] Indeed, high-ranking male members of the Church were not the only figures portrayed as carrying *bachall*s; it was not uncommon for abbesses to do so too.[651] There have been around thirty *bachall*s uncovered from archaeological sites that date to the early medieval period in Ireland, compared to the four uncovered for the same time period on mainland Europe.[652] Similarly, more bells have been uncovered from pre-Norman contexts in Ireland than in any other part of Christian Europe.[653] Two such items were said to have been owned by Saint Patrick: the *Clog an Edachta* ('Bell of the Testament') and the *Bachall Ísu* ('Staff of Jesus'), both of which are mentioned periodically in various annalistic sources.[654] While an early medieval bell popularly thought to be the *Clog an Edachta,* along with an ornate shrine of a later date, still exist and can be seen in the Treasury Room of the National Museum of Ireland, in 1538 the *Bachall Ísu* was burned in Dublin under the orders of the Anglican archbishop George Brown, as it was viewed as an object of Catholic superstition.

While the earliest form of the Mass said in Ireland did not include the ringing of handbells, it is probable that such objects were still used by celebrants to call the faithful to Mass, as was done in other parts of Christian Europe from around the sixth century.[655] *Aipgitir Chrábaid* ('The Alphabet of Devotion'), a devotional text ascribed to Colmán mac

---

[650] Bitel, 'Tools for Cursing', p. 7.
[651] Ibid., p. 6.
[652] Ibid., p. 14.
[653] Ibid., p. 6.
[654] Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', p. 8.
[655] Bitel, 'Tools for Cursing', pp. 9–10.

Béognae (d. 611), explicitly states that monks should listen for the bell to call them to prayer.[656] Indeed, this was probably the main function of bells until they became a part of the Mass service proper. In this way, the sound of bells marked sacred life from work life and designated the space where the sacred was upheld.

The rite of exorcism, as it is described in the hagiography, also included the use and sound of bells. We can see this in the Life of St Berach.[657] We are told that, during Berach's time in Glendalough, demons plagued the religious community there, causing sickness and plague while causing *crith ⁊ omhan imna daoinibh fanna* ('trembling and terror to weak men').[658] Berach is described as walking around the monastery while he 'rang his bell, and sang maledictory psalms against the demons, and cast them out' (*rob hen a clocc, ⁊ ro chan psalma easccaine forna demhnaibh, ⁊ ros díochuir asan ngleann*). The author of the Life has even included a poem that emphasises both the spiritual and auditory power of the bell Berach used:

Cluiccín Beraigh, buan an séud,
Doní deabhaidh fri claoin-ced;
Atclos go fearnna na ccéud,
Tafonn demhna asa náomh-tséud.

The little bell of Berach, lasting treasure,
Does battle against a perverse hundred;
It was heard as far as Ferns of the hundreds,
It chased demons from its sacred path.[659]

[656] Bitel, 'Tools for Cursing', p. 10.
[657] Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada náem nÉrenn* I, pp. 23–43 (ed.) and II, pp. 23–43 (trans).
[658] Ibid., I, p. 29 (ed.) and II, p. 28 (trans.).
[659] Ibid., I, p. 29 (ed.) and II, p. 28 (trans.).

Nor was Berach the only saint depicted as engaging in this kind of exorcism ritual. In the *Tripartite Life* of Patrick we are told that, while Patrick was spending time in isolation in Cruachán Oigle (Croagh Patrick) during Easter, *Hiforciund tra in .xl. laithi sin ocus in .xl. aidchi rolinad fair inslíab diénlaithib dubaib conná congain nem nátalmain* ('At the end of those forty days and forty nights, the mountain was filled with black birds, so that he knew not heaven nor earth.')[660] The exorcism ritual that follows is described in similar terms as Berach's: *Gabais salmu escaine foraib.* […] *Benaid a chlocc foraib cocualatar fir Erenn aguth ocus foceirt forru commebaid ass a bernn, conidé sin Bernan Brigte* ('He sang maladictive psalms against them. […] He strikes his bell at them, so that the men of Ireland heard its voice, so that its gap broke out of it, that [bell] is 'Brigit's Gapling'). The result of this is that *Ciid iarum Patraic comba fliuch a agaid ocus a chassal ara belaib. Ní tainic demon tír Erenn iarsin cocend secht mbliadan ocus secht mís ocus secht la ocus sécht n-aidchi,* ('Then Patrick weeps until his face and his chasuble in front of him were wet. No demon came to the land of Erin after that till the end of seven years and seven months and seven days and seven nights.')[661]

We can still see the performative aspect of the ritual here, as in the ritual of cursing: the chanting aloud of psalms and the ringing of bells. However, as the location is within a clerical community (or a mountain top) rather than a public space, the intended audience has changed and the active participants have been reduced to one: the saint himself. Rather than drawing a secular audience, the onlookers here would probably have been restricted to those who lived within the religious community. The effect, however, is the same. The very fact that the performance generates significant amounts of noise causes those within earshot to

[660] Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Tripartite Life,* pp. 114–5.
[661] Ibid.

participate as witnesses. As Stacey notes, 'the use of Latin automatically defined the occasion as ecclesiastical and established the speaker as a person with clerical training, if not a cleric himself.'[662] In the case of exorcism and cursing, I would extend this to the sound of bells, synonymous as they were with the Church, and as prevalent as they were as saints' relics.

Further, the Life of Maedoc of Ferns tells of how 'After all the miracles that Maedoc had done in Britain, he took leave of his master, David of Menevia, and began his return journey to Ireland together with his disciples' (*Ar ndol dó a bfoccus trachta na hErenn doconnairc sladaighthi do lettaobh na slicched, 7 siad ag slad 7 ag marhadh oilitrech 7 áosa eccruaidh, no bíodh acc siubal o ionad go hionad*).[663] Máedóc springs to the defense of the victims by ringing his bell loudly. Indeed, so loud was the bell that *Do bhen a clocc gan fuirech don chur sin, go ccuala tigerna na ngadaighedh e: 'As guth cluicc fir diadha degh craibhthigh so', ar se, '7 as uime bhenus a clocc da fhurail orainne gan an gniomh so do dhenamh'* ('Then he straightway rang his bell, and the chief of the brigands heard it. "Tis the sound of the bell of a devout and godly man," said he, and he rings his bell to bid us cease this work.') The end result of this is that *Do sccuirettar dona hoilithrechaibh iarsin* ('They let the pilgrims be after this.')[664] In this instance, the sound of the bell alone acts as a warning that discourages the anti-social behaviour. Presumably, the sound indicates that a curse was forthcoming, giving the brigands the opportunity to respond and amend their actions before incurring further censure. Thus, the sound of the bell ringing during the cursing procession may have acted as the audible indication that notice was being given, similar to the notice given at the beginning of *tellach*. This also appears to have been the purpose of a *trefhocal* poem being composed and recited prior to a satire proper.

[662] Stacey, *Dark Speech,* p. 100.
[663] Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada náem nÉrenn*, I, p. 211 (ed.) and II, p. 211 (trans.).
[664] Ibid.

The use of sound in ritual is a common element and is shared across cultures and time. For example, in Japan, the Shinto performance of kagura dances, which intend to provoke a state of *kamigakari* ('possession-trance') in the priestess, still requires the use of handbells to summon deities and to help produce the desired state of possession.[665] Such sounds can be the performative utterances, such as those used by a celebrant during a marriage ceremony; music, such as from a choir during a religious ritual; or sudden, startling noises such as handbells being rung at specific times during the Mass ritual where, once again, it is used as an audible way to signal certain significant moments or to segment the service, just as it was used to call people from their pastoral lives to religious worship. The use of handbells during the initial procession and during the cursing ritual proper would have marked the bell-ringers, and thus the performers of the ritual, as clerical or otherwise associated with the Church. The psalms would likewise have acted as an aural marker of religious ritual in Ireland. As the procession is made, those undertaking the journey are depicted as chanting, typically from the psalms. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the psalms were one of the earliest books of the Bible that a cleric would have committed to memory, and each priest or monk would have been expected to be able to recite them when necessary. Vocal utterances such as chanting or singing have also long been recognised as an important element of ritual ceremonies, with Smith arguing that the use of the human voice 'can function as an index of the body, a conveyor of language, a social bond, a musical instrument of sublime flexibility, a gauge of emotion, a central component of the art of acting, and a register of everyday identity'.[666] Certainly, the chanting of psalms would have identified the chanters as part of a religious community, and probably as members of the clergy.

[665] Averbuch 'Shamanic Dance in Japan', p. 297.
[666] Rajguru, 'Chanting in the Gallery', p. 182.

While psalms and Latin may have marked the speaker as a member of the clergy, the heightened form of language the *filid* used in their compositions would likewise have alerted the audience to the speaker's position and training as a *fili*. Calder, in the introduction to his edition of *Auraicept na n-Éces*, characterises this as 'a language peculiar and intelligible to themselves only.'[667] The *Auraicept* further claims that the Irish language was created from parts of every language on earth, and that *gach son fordorcha gach berla, fofhrithined doib isin Gaelelg ara forleighti seach gach mbescna* ('for every obscure sound of every language a place was found in Gaelic owing to its comprehensiveness beyond every speech').[668] It is further claimed that, once the language was brought back to Ireland, the poets added to it *tria fordorchadh* ('by way of obscuration'), indicating that they purposely made this form of language harder to understand by anyone who had not received the necessary training to use it correctly.[669] Hayden, drawing on the work of Vivien Law, has argued that this style of obscuration of language may reflect the Christian idea that 'knowledge of the divine scriptures should be the prerogative of only a select few because they sheltered celestial mysteries.'[670] In a similar way, the knowledge of the obscure language of the poets was hidden from those who were not considered capable of understanding and using it properly, by making it hard to understand for those outside of this system of education.[671]

Our surviving textual sources consistently present the figure of the *fili* as one who should be treated with the utmost respect and perhaps also fear, due to the power they commanded through their use of words. This fear can be seen in how satire is represented as a weapon that can be used to raise blemishes and even kill. Even unaffiliated poets could take advantage of hospitality, for their host's fear of the threat of satire, and the chance to gain a

[667] Calder (ed. and trans.), *Auraicept,* p. xix.
[668] Ibid., pp. 1–2.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Hayden, 'Old English', p. 372, citing Law, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar,* pp. 83–95.
[671] See also Arthur, 'Mystical "Gibberish"', pp. 198–203 for an explanation of the history of obscuration among the early Church fathers and the growth of the tradition throughout the Christian world.

reputation for being ungenerous, or perhaps even financially unable, to reward the poet properly.[672] The optics of this to the lord's clients and the non-*nemed* members of the territory, that he is not able to host a guest of such a rank in a socially proper way, may even have 'proved' the satire correct, like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The sounds generated by rituals, such as the use of Latin and *berla na bhfiled*, marked the speaker as belonging to the church or as a professional poet. These sounds also transformed the space the ritual was conducted in, by invoking Christianity and the church or the poetic language of the *filid*. In addition, the visual elements that accompanied these performances were just as important in helping the audience contextualise what they were seeing and interpret it correctly.

[672] Stacy, *Dark Speech,* p. 107.

The Visual Elements of Rituals

Along with the sound of bells and chanting, the clerics who were either proceeding towards the target's lands or conducting a cursing ritual proper would be further marked as church men through their wearing of clerical or priestly garb, as well as through the public symbols of their office and association with the Church. As mentioned above, these symbols included *bachall*s or even a cross, the most recognizable of Christian images. Any spectator who witnessed such a procession would have been able to recognise, at the very least, that it consisted of clerics. This would have been true for any lay person regardless of social status, and regardless of which territory or community they belonged to.

We are not given any information as to whether a public procession might have preceded a performance of satire, distraint or fasting, but it is likely that clerical cursing began in this manner. It is thus not unlikely that the procession was an innovation created for that ritual rather than a standard part of medieval Irish performative rituals in general. However, it is likely that the *filid* had a distinct mode of dress that served to distinguish them from other professionals of society, as well as those who lacked their social standing. Dunleavy has noted that an entry in the Annals of the Four Masters, purporting to stem from a much earlier period, tells us that in the 3,664th year of the world Eochaidh Eadhghadhach ('Eochaidh the cloth designer') was the first person to assign specific coloured clothing to the various ranks of Irish society, with

> *Aen dath i nedoighibh maghadh, a dó i nedoighaibh amhoss, a tri i nedoighibh daghlaoch 7 oigtighernadh, a ceathair i nedoighaibh brughadh, a cuig i nedoighaibh tighearnadh túath, a sé i nedoighaibh allamhan, a secht i nedoighaibh ríogh 7 ríoghan.*

> One colour in the clothes of slaves, two in the clothes of hired soldiers, three in the clothes of good heroes and young lords, four in the clothes of hospitallers, five in the clothes of lords of territories, six in the clothes of *ollaimh*, seven in the clothes of kings and queens.[673]

This entry, which was based on a section taken from *Lebor Gabála Érenn,* is clearly related to commentary in the early law tract *Cáin Íarraith*, which details the colours that the sons of various ranks of people were allowed to wear.[674] This point is also recorded in an entry in *Sanas Cormaic* for the word *tugen,* or 'toga', which etymologises a poet's toga as a covering, or *tuige,* made from the feathers of birds (*én*).[675] In the case of the ritual of satire, it is likely that the *file* pronouncing the satire would be attired in the clothes expected of his rank and status, thus giving a visual indication to those in the area that something special is about to occur.

It is true that the heightened poetic language of the *trefhocal*-poem would have helped the poet identify himself to the audience, providing more context and allowing the onlookers to begin to interpret what they were witnessing. By the time the *trefhocal* was first pronounced, however, the cross that marked the beginning of this stage of the procedure had already been planted, displaying to the audience the most powerful and recognisable symbol of their shared culture and beliefs. Although the language used marked the poets as educated at the very least and gave context regarding their likely profession and intention, the cross contained a number of clues and information too. Visually, it marked the speaker, connecting him to the audience through a shared belief system and demonstrating how shared symbols could evoke a positive emotional response. As Stacey has noted, 'the juxtaposition of the

---

[673] Dunleavy, *Dress in Ireland,* p. 16.
[674] CIH 1759.6. *Cáin Íarraith* is section four of the *Senchas Már* legal compilation. See Breatnach, 'The Early Irish Law Tract' p. 1.
[675] O'Donovan and Stokes (trans.), *Sanas Cormaic,* p. 160.

poet's rod with the foremost symbol of the Christian church testifies eloquently to the various types of sanction implicit in the practice.'[676] Therefore, although the language spoken marked the poet as different from the audience – educated, professional, authoritative – the symbol of the cross underlined the important cultural belief system that they shared, creating a connection that may otherwise have been lost. Without the emotional connection, the performance would not have been as memorable as it could have been.

While the use of Christian elements transformed the ritual cursing place into a religious and sacred space, so too did the poetic language of the *trefhocal* performance merge with the image of the cross to create a place of high authority. Not only did the cross imply that God condoned the performance, but also that the Church itself was satisfied to lend its own authoritative presence. As well as being the language of the *filid*, *rosc* was the language of the law, and the legal professionals made their own pronouncements in this heightened form of speech. Additionally, its association with the law was underlined not just through the language they shared but through the ritual framework that purposely mirrored the timing and structure used in legal procedures such as distraint and *tellach*. In this way, the space becomes the combined space shared by three different authoritative institutions embedded in both society and the minds of the audience. The religious, legal and poetic spheres came together in the ritual space and added their authority and permission to the performance.

Written texts are invariant. However, in practice texts such as charms, which come to us in written form but also include a ritual performance and speech act, were probably quite flexible. Stifter believes that it was their very variability that left them open to adaptation, with their flexibility allowing for further modifications in their use and performance, which may account for their long life and continued use over such a long period

---

[676] Stacy, *Dark Speech,* p. 113.

of time.[677] Although some aspects of performance, such as the use of sacral symbolism or physical movements such as the sign of the cross, may be included at specific parts of the ritual performance, it is possible that there were other performative aspects the medical practitioners included within the ritual that were not necessarily recorded in the written sources.

[677] Stifter, pers.comm., April 2024.

CONCLUSION

Rituals can be characterised as rigid, repetitive, and ordinary, but also capable of capturing the attention of participants and audiences alike. They follow a script, with a definite beginning and end, and with an intended outcome that has been specified and defined prior to the undertaking of the ritual. In the case of medical charms, the outcome is the transformation of the patient's health, while with cursing and satire it is the threat of a transformation that will reduce the subject's standing within their society. Thus, particularly in the cases of cursing and satire, ritual can also be seen as a regulatory process, designed to maintain cultural norms and social states. The Church, and its people and property, are to be respected, for example. As we have seen in Chapter 5, cursing was undertaken when this social condition was broken or ignored, and clerics or saints were disrespected by those outside of the law, for example criminals or the *nemed* classes, particularly royalty or those connected to the ruling class, with whom it was unwise to enter into contracts on account of their high status. Additionally, the *filid* must be properly compensated for the work they produce. When they are not paid, or if they are underpaid, satire and the performative process that followed was used to force the subject to adhere to social and legal norms and provide full restitution, thus healing the community and restoring it to its normal state.

Sound, space, and the visual markers used in ritual provide the information the audience needed to correctly interpret what they were witnessing. In the case of clerical cursing, they were watching something that was religious in nature and was being conducted by a community of clerics. If those clerics were carrying insignia or objects that further identified their church or saint, the audience might even have been able to deduce which specific clerics they are. Further, the space they chose, whether on the boundary of the target's landholdings or in front of his home where he can hear them clearly, identified their target.

Also mentioned in Chapter 5 was that every aspect of the *trefhocal* had to be metrically perfect and conform to the rules that governed its creation. That the procedure had already advanced as far as the planting of the cross and the performance of the *trefhocal* may have been spectacle enough to draw a larger audience for each day that it continued. As with *tellach*, the set time periods laid out for the *trefhocal* performance worked to create an increasingly heightened sense of urgency, with the ultimate outcome resulting in the full satire. This, of course, would have had negative consequences for the target. The strength of the *trefhocal* as a warning probably indicted how the full satire would have been received by audiences, and how likely it would be to enter into the public domain and do lasting damage to the target's reputation.

Satires could, of course, be performed again and again. Once a satire had been written and delivered, no doubt after the poet had followed all the legal and professional rules that governed this practice, it entered into his repertoire and could be performed again at social events, including at assemblies and public or private feasts.[678] Meroney has argued that the phrase *glám dícenn* meant something like 'endless attack', or 'permanent attack'.[679] This is certainly fitting, as once the satire had entered into the public consciousness it would live for as long as people enjoyed it and wanted to hear it recited. If the satire was particularly good or memorable it could live a very long life indeed. In a similar way, Lives of saints connected to particular churches would be read out on that saint's day. If the excerpts chosen to be read contained information regarding a curse being enacted on a specific family, this too was a way of bringing attention to the bad behaviour of an ancestor and served as a reminder of that shame to the current family members.

[678] Stacy, *Dark Speech,* p. 115.
[679] Ibid., p. 111.

Regardless of where the designated ritual space was, either on the lawn on or outside gate, the space was transformed by the performance of the ritual. Inhabited by Christian symbols, vocalisations, and the ambient sounds associated with a Christian lifestyle, the ritual place becomes a sacred space for the duration of the performance. Within it, sacred men were speaking directly to God, asking him to ensure that the target, and often his progeny, would come to a sudden and violent end. It has become a liminal place of mediation, where the possibility of restitution or divine judgement becomes not just possible but indeed probable, depending on how the target responds. It has transformed from property owned by the target or his kin-group to a sacred space wherein the clerics can commune freely with God, and it will only return to its former state as a stable location, with a clear cut and clearly defined purpose, when the ritual has concluded and the clerics retreat.

While healing charms lacked the public aspect of the cursing and satire rituals, they still contained enough elements of ritual to influence and inspire the patients who received them. In addition to the transformative aspect of ritual, Bell argues that rituals contain a number of other shared features, including formalism, traditionalism, invariance, sacral symbolism, and finally the performance of the ritual itself.[680] When we look at charm texts, we can see that they share all of these same features. Communication between patient and healer is certainly formal, with the verbal words of power restricted to the formula or verse supplied by the text. The 'mystical' language of charm texts, particularly when it invokes the language of the Bible, is certainly 'traditional' in its Christian context. The words may appear to be invariant due to their nature of being fixed on the page, but in reality they probably contained an element of spontaneity during the performance proper, depending on circumstances and who was performing the charm. They contain sacral symbolism through the physical actions, such as the sign of the cross, or the prayers that were recited along with

[680] Bell, *Ritual,* pp. 136–7; Goodwyn, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology', pp. 396–7.

them, that allowed the subject to connect to the performance due to recognised cultural practices.

All these factors combined to create the perfect mindset for belief to grow. Additionally, all three rituals, satire, cursing and healing, served a very real function in the wider world, with satire and cursing acting as a warning to local populations that they too could be under threat from the target now that social contracts and the obligations they necessitated had begun to break down. Such rituals 'worked' because they alerted society to the fact that the target had failed to uphold his obligations or had chosen unlawful targets for warfare, and as such were working outside of, and against, social convention. In performing the rituals publicly, they took away the safety of privacy from the target and forced the resolution to play out publicly, both by law and for the court of public opinion. Thus, the target had no option but to acknowledge the situation and legitimise it. In charm rituals, on the other hand, the patient would hopefully be healed, or at least have their symptoms alleviated.

Even in instances where the target admitted fault and accepted liability, that may not have necessarily been the end. After all, there are still examples of the performance of a *trefhocal* that show the skilful blend of praise and blame while conforming perfectly to the prescribed meter and framework that governed this procedure. The same can be said for examples of some kinds of satire. Further, the hagiography and the annals record successful accounts of cursing that ended in either submission to the church or death, focusing on some prominent medieval families. The fact that these poems and stories still exist generations later, still naming and shaming their targets and still associating their descendants with the nefarious deed that demanded censure, speaks to their popularity and testifies to the skill of the people who created them, while showing how easy it was for them to enter into the social consciousness.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored some aspects of magic and ritual in medieval Ireland. It has done so by examining how magic and magic users were portrayed in hagiographical texts; how healing charms fit into contemporary medical practice and the ideas behind how they worked; how cursing and satire were used to replace legal procedures in certain cases; how love magic was used to regulate recognised unions, while reflecting fears about how it could be manipulated to work against those same unions; and how the performance of some of these rituals could influence people to accept and legitimise the use of magic as a vital part of the society they lived in. In doing so, this thesis has highlighted a number of recurrent threads shared by these rituals and the way they were portrayed in the sources. It has also added to the corpus of medical charms by providing a transcription and translation of a page of magical healing texts that had not previously been brought to light, and has placed these texts within both a wider European context and prevailing theories regarding medical practices during the time period in question.

Hagiographical works, as with other types of narrative texts, serve as a mirror to the society for which they were created. While it is true that many texts were created for a specific purpose, which could range from legitimising land holdings to promotion of a particular saint, hagiographical narratives could also serve to promote Christian and social ideals in a more general sense and show the saint as a role model whom people could emulate. They also reflected elements of the society for which they were created. For example, Patrick engages in actions that are typically related to both the religious and the male spheres. His ministry saw him bringing Christianity to pagan places and repurposing sites that contain pagan wells, synchronising the Christian present with Ireland's past. He engaged in certain styles of miracles that can be classified as combative when he encountered

druidic magic users, although typically this type of miracle was enacted to help the community around him and tried to remain within the nature God has laid out for all things.

Further, Patrick was depicted as engaging in legal procedures such as fasting against God himself. Under Irish law at the time, slaves did not have the capacity to engage in legal procedures.[681] By showing Patrick engaging in *troscud*, the author is explicitly saying that Patrick is no longer a slave and is instead a full Irish man under the law. While this is a way to legitimise Patrick's words as a saint rather than a slave, it also reinforces his masculinity, as women did not have the same the same legal capacity as men.[682] Thus, the hagiography presents Patrick as a Christian man and active cleric engaging in actions that were suitable for his gender, status and religion.

Brigit's miracles were based more on provision than combat. She was portrayed as attempting to provide for the community around her in practical ways by distributing food and livestock to them, and delivering healing to them, through her power as a saint. Although some of these actions were performed when she was a child, before she joined the church, they demonstrate that from an early age she automatically took on the positive traits of Christians and lived openly under that religious system, even though it brought her into conflict with the people around her. While she was preordained since before her birth to become a saint, the fact that she adhered to Christian ideals and provided a Christian model for the women of her community still remains. While she may act contrary to some gender expectations at times, such as when she gives away her father's property to those in the community who need help, she is still acting as a good example of Christian womanhood. After all, her father is portrayed as being pagan, and by rejecting and subverting that lifestyle Brigit is displaying her Christianity and living up to the ideals of that faith.

[681] See Kelly, *Guide,* pp. 95–7 for more information regarding the rights and conditions of slaves in medieval Ireland.
[682] Ibid., pp. 75–8.

Although her miracles brought prosperity to the community around Brigit, her earliest extant *Life,* from the seventh century, appears to show a saint drawing directly on inner power to achieve these miracles, rather than a woman asking for God's intercession or channelling the power of God through her body, as is the case for Patrick's representations. Cogitosus portrayed Brigit's miracles as being spontaneous and rooted in the natural world, with Brigit being able to change the nature of even wild animals, similar to examples from the Bible. Additionally, the power originating from her is similar to how healing magic is represented in the Old Irish language charm texts, many of which were recorded contemporaneously to Cogitosus's *Life.*

However, as the medieval period advanced, we can see from the language of the charms that, as Christian ideologies began to be further developed, the appeals to older deities and authorities were replaced completely by appeals solely to Christian figures and *historiolae* based on biblical stories. They were also reinforced by the repetition of prayers such as the Pater Noster and the Creed. Where power had been envisioned as coming directly from the healer themselves, through their own skill and knowledge, it shifted to coming straight from God, as evidenced by the shift from 'I' statements that controlled and focused magical power, to the belief that God had hidden virtues in ingredients such as herbs, animal and mineral based components, and even words themselves. Rather than relying on the healer having innate access to magic, healers were seen as almost channelling the power of God and directing it at the patient and illness, similar to how saints worked miracles and performed astonishing feats of magic.

As classical medical theories were also adapted to fit in with new theological advances and emerging ideologies, so too were charms and charming practices, with elements such as herb gathering gaining explicitly religious trappings in the form of prayers to be recited during their harvesting. Verbal, spoken charms that contained pagan incantations were

also adapted, as can be seen with the second Merseburg Charm, which shifted from Germanic-based pagan deities to Jesus himself, and the first charm from St Gall MS 1395, which placed references to Christianity alongside older references to the figure of the legendary blacksmith, Goibniu. In this way, they too were able to continue the older traditions of charming whilst simultaneously making them more acceptable in the reality of a new social system that was guided by Christianity rather than native religious practices.

Additionally, where saints were shown as engaging in healing, they were portrayed as doing so in accordance with both the prevailing medical theories in use during the period, and through a Christian framework. When Patrick used herbalism to cure, he did so by using God to reveal the plant and quality it had for healing, just as medical and church authorities of the time advocated for. When Brigit healed, she healed through saintly miracles, regardless of where her power was perceived of as coming from. Although accounts of healing by these saints took different forms, both were expressly Christian in how they were presented and conformed to the ideas presented in medical texts. Even Brigit's abortion miracle, which by all rights should have been outside the Christian faith, appears to have been in compliance with the penitential texts, which prescribe more penance for bringing the child into the world than for aborting the pregnancy. This hints at underlying and subtle social attitudes to pregnancy and childbirth, possibly rooted in the production of children outside of a recognised or authorised marriage union: something that seems to be enforced by the use of Church medicine in place of love magic.

Cursing and satire were effective procedures that filled a gap in the legal system. That healing magic and power could rely on a hidden quality meant that even words could hold a similar quality, as seen with the words of power used in charming traditions throughout the medieval world. Satire and cursing also seem to have worked according to this logic, in that they were words spoken in the correct way, accompanied by ritual performances

that were conducted properly, and spoken and acted by people who had been trained in the right way to unlock the hidden quality of the words used.

This thought process is similar to how physicians had the correct training to use charms and magical cures, and saints and clerics had the training to perform the correct type of love magic for Christian couples. Indeed, the magic rituals selected for the case studies included in this thesis all show intersecting threads in how they appear in religious and legal texts, how they were presented in hagiography, and how they were interpreted by those who witnessed them. In each case, the magic being performed was based on the concept of restoration. Medical charms restored health to the individual; love magic restored health to the Christian couple; and the imprecation rituals restored health to the community at large.

While some saints, for example Brigit, may have worked outside the legal system as it existed in the extant narrative texts, they all still worked within the ethical and moral systems laid out by their faith. In the hagiographies selected for this thesis, the saints were shown as adhering to their own faith over cultural and social norms in instances where they conflicted with Christianity. However, as the church was not a monolith during this period, and many of the bigger questions and traditions had yet to be worked out and encoded into Christian doctrine, many of their actions differed from each other in execution. While Patrick used herbalism, he did so through the wisdom and knowledge offered by God, whereas Brigit relied on miracles for healing rather than popular magic. While Patrick worked within the legal system and was shown as engaging in ritual cursing and the procedure of *troscud*, Brigit skirted laws to give away her father's possessions, and produced a miraculous abortion while remaining safe in the knowledge that what she did was well within the teachings of her faith and of social expectations.

While healing magic found its place in both the medical and religious frameworks of the period, and the imprecatory rituals were a part of the legal system, it seems that love

magic was not as clear-cut. Some practices were deemed acceptable, however, as long as they conformed to the rules of the church which were still evolving at the time, as and when social concerns presented themselves. This appears to have been the case with marriage and divorce, and with the questions surrounding remarriages and second marriages. However, as with healing charms, love magic seems to have found its place in medieval society as long as it took a Christian form, such as the use of prayers and speaking with clerics and church authorities for guidance.

Saints were also portrayed as engaging with love magic, and as with the portrayal of their healing it was done in accordance with their system of faith. Although Columba was presented with a woman who wanted to separate from her husband and enter holy orders, an act that was in accordance with accepted secular and legal practice, the saint still worked within regulations laid out by penitential and religious texts by offering a Christian remedy to their loss of love, to restore the union between man and wife as the Bible prescribed. Brigit also supplied love magic to restore a union. This charm used water as a way to restore love, something also seen in the impotence cure highlighted by Hayden.[683] Blessed water as a way to restore purity, albeit to a place rather than a person, has also been seen as part of Pope Gregory's letter to Abbot Mellitus, where *aqua benedicta* ('blessed water') was recommended as a way of sanctifying pagan spaces in order to bring them into Christianity while allowing a sense of continuity to the wider community.

While the penitential and legal texts may have raised the issue of consent and its importance in relation to the illicit use of love magic, the saints themselves were not too concerned with this aspect. Although Columba acts with the full knowledge of the woman from the episode in his Life, he does so while knowing that she herself wanted to leave the union and enter into religious orders. Brigit, however, engages with subterfuge and, in the

[683] See Hayden, 'A Sixteenth Century Irish Collection'.

later version of her Life, recommends sprinkling the water she has blessed onto the food and into the drinks of the wife, without the wife's knowledge. Ultimately, the saints are depicted as acting correctly to save legal and recognised marriage unions, restoring them to full health.

Ultimately, the magical rituals and texts chosen for this study have uncovered a concern surrounding regulation and restoration. All of these magical practices involved regulation at their heart: the regulation of the charming tradition so that it fit within the prevailing medical theory and system as well as the regulation of the physical body and spiritual health; the regulation of sexual unions within the law and emerging marital practices of the church; and the regulation of the social system and community as laid out in the legal texts.

Finally, the public's consent played a crucial role in the legitimacy of these rituals. While day-to-day interactions with magic may have been restricted to charming or love magic, the public's acceptance of ritual expressions of imprecation suggests a nuanced relationship with magical practices. By presenting magic users, both secular and religious, as individuals who had been trained correctly, the community allowed these rituals to exist and become integral tools of social control, reinforcing the interconnectedness of magic, religion, and societal norms throughout the medieval period in Ireland.

Appendix

Transcription and translation of remedies from Dublin, National Library of Ireland MS G11, pp. 393–4

TEXT ONE: DUBLIN, NLI MS G11, P. 393A1–19:[684]

Dona l*eigeas*uib n*eich* fōires dortad na fola .i. ēirig *con*uice an ín*adh* a fāsand l*us* in sparāin ⁊ abair trī hAue M*aire* ⁊ 3 P*aitreach*a ar do glūinib an*n* ⁊ ab*air* an fersa so:

Guidim tū a tig*er*na in*nus* co f*óir*id tú in dortad fola so atā a*r* do banoglach nó ar d'oglach fēin n*ech* do fūaslaig*us* tre d'f*h*uil féin.

⁊ aca rād*h* sin duit, buain in lusrad*h* féin ⁊ mad*h* ailt a dō d*h*e do būain. Abair mar sin cōmad*h* dō.[685] ⁊ mad*h* ailt nisa mō de na l*usaib* ab*air* mar sin ⁊ cuir in l*us*r*ad* fae brāid*h*id i*n* ti ō silin*n* an fuil, nō um i*n* mball ō silind an f*h*uil. ⁊ mad ailt gan in l*us*r*ad* d'faicsin do duini, bris co mait*h* ē ⁊ cuir fa brāidid i*n* dui*n*e ō silin*n* an f*h*uil ⁊ coixid.

Translation

Concerning the cures of a person who heals a flow of blood: that is, go to the place in which the Shepherd's Purse grows, and say three Ave Marias and three Pater Nosters on your knees there, and say this verse:

I beseech thee, Oh Lord, that you heal this flow of blood that is on your maidservant, or on your manservant, the one whom you have delivered through your own blood.

[684] All transcriptions and translations are my own, except where indicated: any mistakes are mine. In the presentation of the texts, expansions are indicated by italics; and length-marks, where not found in the manuscript, have been supplied using a macron over vowels. Word-division and punctuation are editorial. NLI MS G 11 can be found online as part of the ISOS digital manuscript collection, at https://www.isos.dias.ie/NLI/NLI_MS_G_11.html#398 (accessed 29 October 2024).

[685] Carey has pointed out that, if this is *comadh do,* referring to a hymn or prayer, there should be no length mark on the first vowel. He suggests that the original meaning of the word, 'protection' would be more fitting in the translation. However, there is also the possibility that it should be read as *combad,* rendering the line 'speak like that so that it may be (a cure?) for him'. (pers. comm., April 2024.)

And while you are saying that, cut the plant itself, and if you wish, cut two of it. Say a hymn like that to him. And if you want more of the herb, say [it] like that and place the herbs around the neck of the person from whom the blood flows, or around the limb from which the blood flows. And if you do not wish a person to see the plants, crush them well, and place [them] around the neck of the person from whom the blood flows, and it heals.

Notes

Lus in sparáin – this translates literally as ‘a herb in a bag’. However, it is probable that this refers to the plant *Capsella bursa-pastoris*,[686] which has a long association with healing, in particular the healing of wounds and the staunching of blood. This plant was well known in medieval Ireland, and was used in medical healing, as we can see from the following entry in the *materia medica* compiled by Tadhg Ó Cuinn in the fifteenth century:[687]

> Bursa pastoris:.i. lus an sbarain; fuar tirim sa dara ceim & as cumachtac hi in aigid flux na fola & gach uile flux & is maith hi a n- uinneminntib bristi cuislinni & an bean aga mbi ina braigit ni urcoidiginn flux fola di. A cur a fotragadh & is mait i an aigid na buigeacairi. A cur fo braigid na caerach & ni faicid na mic tire iat. Pudur da denum dan luibh cetna & a cur isna cneadhaib & ni fasann ainmfeoil innta & tirmaig iat. Blat na luibhe so & blath uiole & blath sail cuach & siucra & a mbrisidh trit a ceili & a tobairt da caitim da luct an tseili fola mar ata emotoica pasio & a cosmuili.

[686] eDIL s.v. 1 lus or dil.ie/31106.
[687] Ó Cuinn, *An Irish Materia Medica* (accessed 12/04/2022).

Bursa pastoris: i.e. shepherd's purse; cold and dry in the second degree; it is powerful against a flux of blood, and against every flux; it is good in ointments for haemorrhage of a vein; a flux of blood will not harm the woman who keeps it at her throat. If put in the bath, it is good against jaundice. If it be put at the throat of sheep, wolves will not see them. If the same herb be made into a powder, and put in the wounds, proud flesh will not develop in them, and it will dry them. The flower of this herb and the flower of violet and the flower of violet (!) and sugar should be pounded together and given to eat to those who spit blood, that is haemoptysis, and such like.

Text Two: Dublin, NLI MS G11, p. 393a20–b11:

Tuill*ead eile* an*n* so do coscc f*h*ola .i. cuir buid*h*ēn rōstaidti an*n*sa s*r*ōin m*a*d ~~b~~uaiti[688] sil*us* an fuil ⁊ īc*caid*. ⁊ ma*r* i*n* c*étn*a do na ball*aibh eile*.	More of the same knowledge to stop blood, that is, place a roasted egg-yolk in the nose if it is from it that the blood flows and it heals. And in the same way for the other limbs.
Et dā roib dortad na fola ō cnēid, gab cuideoga ⁊ c*ur*tar ar slin*n* crīad dā rōstad*h* īad ⁊ dent*ur* p*ú*d*ar* d*e* ⁊ c*ur*tar ar in cn*éid* ⁊ īc*caid*.	And if there should be a pouring out of blood from a wound, take earthworms and they are placed on an earthen tile until they are roasted and a powder is made, and it is put on the wound and it heals.
Et c*ur*tar in p*údar* c*étn*a ⁊ tūis ⁊ geal*án uighi*[689] trīt a c*héile* ar an *ét*a*n* ⁊ ar na hairgib ⁊ coixid an f*h*uil ⁊ donī fin*nfad* míl *arn*a míniug*ad* in c*étn*a ⁊ ā c*umus*c maill*e* geal*án uighi*.	And put the same powder and frankincense and egg white mixed together on the forehead and on the temples and it restrains the blood, and the fur of a hare that has been pulverised does the same when it is mixed with an egg white.

---

[688] I am taking the addition of the letter 'b' at the beginning of the word *uaiti* ('from it'; third singular feminine form) as a scribal error.

[689] In this part of the text, the scribe has used the letter 'y' for *uighi,* or 'egg'. Additionally, another scribal abbreviation common to NLI MS G11 is '.ii.' Normally, this stands for *eile,* or 'another'. However, in G11 it appears to alternate meanings between 'another' and 'again'. Further, the abbreviation of *a c.ii.* appears to stand for *a céile* ('together').

Et coixid duill*e* ōg na heill*ind*i arna cur mar c*eir*ín gac uile dortad f*ol*a.

And the leaf of the elecampane restrains every flow of blood when it is applied as a poultice.

Et cuir barr n*en*ta isin s*r*ō*n* ⁊ donī c*r*ust uirri ⁊ coi*m*il sūg n*en*ta do na hairgib ⁊ coisc*id* an f*uil*.

And place the tip of a nettle into the nose and it makes a scab (?) on it, and rub the juice of a nettle on the temples and it restrains the blood.

Et cuir ath*air* talm*an* arna bris*ed* isin srōi*n* ⁊ f*or*ail*id* sil*ed* ar in fuil. ⁊ ib*edh* neac*h* í *nó* g*a*ba? a bal*adh*? ⁊ coiscid an fuil.

And place *athair talman*[690] that has been crushed in the nose and it will induce the blood to flow. And let a person drink it or take a smell of it (?) and it restrains the blood.

Et curtar c*r*aid*h*i nō sūil spideoige u*cht*d*eir*ge fae c*end*ad*har*t an oth*air* ⁊ coixid an f*uil* ⁊ i*n* f*edh* beas an*n* nī coideol*a* ⁊ do*n*ī salc*ur* cl*éibh*i?[691] *con* maill-u[692] i*n* coll*ad* do togai*r*m ⁊ dūisc*id* an[693] aic*cidit* sin.

And place the heart or the eye of a robin red breast under the pillow of the patient and it restrains the blood and as long as it is there, he will not sleep. And it causes an impurity of the chest along with those things, sleep summons and awakens that disease.

---

[690] Probably the plant mellifolia: see eDIL, s.v. 2 *athair* (dil.ie/4626).

[691] The symbol for *con* appears here, but I am unable to understand how it fits with the preceding and following words.

[692] The transcription is uncertain here; the text may be corrupt. While I have treated it as a 3rd conjunct form of *immallé,* as Carey has noted there is no evidence of that word being conjugated in this way, although it would certainly fit the translation. The contraction *maill* appears again in the manuscript, and can certainly be translated as 'together with'. However the inclusion of *-u* in this instance is a puzzle.

[693] I have expanded this as *duisced* ('awake'), although it may be a form of *do·díuschi* ('to bring back to life').

Et gab tūis 7 findf*ad* míl arna gearr*adh*[694] co min 7 geal*án uighi* 7 cum*us*ctear īat *nó* co mbet a tigi meala 7 c*ur*tar li*n* i*n* damái*n* all*aidh nó* cadās maill-u 7 c*ur*tar isin cr*eacht* 7 īc*caid*.

And take frankincense and the hair of a hare that has been finely ground and the white of an egg and they are mixed until they are the thickness of honey, and apply a web of the spider or cotton together with them and place over the ulcer and it heals.

nō mād cn*edh* ī, curt*ar* plást*r*a i*na* ti*mcill* dib*h* 7 l?tar[695] gres do laitib*h* can a t*hair*r*aing*(?) 7 is *m*aith sin i*n* gac uili dort*ad* f*ol*a, cidbe c*úi*s ō mbia.

Or if it is a wound place a plaster/poultice around it and it is left? for a period of days without taking it off, and that is good in every flow of blood, whatever the cause may be.

[694] there may be a few other words that this could be, for example *géraigid* (‘to intensify’). However, I have chosen to expand it as *gearradh* (‘to cut up finely’).

[695] The MS reading is uncertain here (it appears to be lh-t*ar*). Stifter has suggested that the *h-* is Latin *haec,* leaving us with *lhaectar,* which Stifter believes to be a more sophisticated way of writing Old Irish *lécter,* ‘it is left’. Carey, however, has suggested reading *h-* as an abbreviation for *ed*, and taking the word to represent *lethter* (< *lethaither*) ‘let it be spread’.

Text Three: Dublin, NLI MS G11, p. 393b12–19:

Do cosc rob*air* na f*ola* m*ista* scrīb na litri so ⁊ cuir ar u*cht* na mnā ⁊ coisc*id* an fuil

.p.x.b.c.p.c.a.n.o.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.p.r.d.d.i.d.i.p.m.i.i.i.s.

⁊ muna c*r*ed[696] ē sin, sc*r*īb a n-eím sceine ⁊ m*ar*b*h* ainmid*h*i di ⁊ nī tiucf*aid* f*uil* as.

For the staunching of heavy menstrual blood (lit: ‘the copious flow of blood that occurs monthly’):

Write these letters and place them on the lap of the woman, and it restrains the blood.

.p.x.b.c.p.c.a.n.o.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.p.r.d.d.i.d.i.p.m.i.i.i.s.

And if you do not believe that, write (them) on the handle of a knife and kill and animal, and the blood will not come out.

Notes

There are three variants of this charm that I was able to find. The first comes from Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 72.1.2, and is as follows:[697]

Do toirmeasc na fola mista .i. mín congna na fíada do cumusc air cuirm ⁊ a ōl ⁊ iccaid ⁊ sgrībh na litrica so a nda sdeill memruíb ⁊ cenal gach sliasuid di ⁊ coisidh an fola mista

p.x.b.c.p.e.n.g.a.g.h.e.ad.x.d.

a derbaid sin sgribhter a maidí sgíne iad ⁊ marb(u) muc dí ⁊ ní tiucfa fuil aisti.

[696] The reading of the suprascript symbol over the first letter of this word is uncertain, but it may be intended as an ‘e’, and thus part of the verb *creid* ‘believe’.

[697] Transcription and translation by me; any mistakes are my own.

For the preventing of a menstrual flow: i.e., the flour of deer's horn mixed together into ale, and drink it, and it heals. And write these letters on two strips of parchment, and tie under both of her shoulder blades, and it holds back the menstrual flow:

p.x.b.c.p.e.n.g.a.g.h.e.ad.x.d.

which prevents that. Write them on the handle of a stick/staff, and kill a pig, and the blood will not come out.

The third can be found in Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 185 T.8.17, a fifteenth-century English medical manuscript, and is as follows:

For to stonche blod of the nose or of wat place yt be of a man.

Lat hym drynke the jus of ache & ley of the pounynge to ys forhed athenes the eros of ys nose, or wryt these leters in two leues of perchemyne. Bynd yt betwene thy thyys

& thif thou leuestd nautht me, tak & wryt hem vp on a knyf. therwyth steke a swyn & the rennynge of the man schal be muche the lasse, thes beth the letris:

+ p + G + C + p + e + u + o + t + a + ges + ij + u + iiij + etc. + Arisme cladauis +++ + Arisme cladauis +++ + Arisme cladauis +++[698]

The fourth can be found in National Library of Wales Peniarth MS 368, a seventeenth-century miscellany that includes some medical texts, and is as follows:

ffor bleding at the hole

Another for the same vnderneth folowing in two scroules of parchmant and bind them on both his thyes and he shale sease of bleding. And if thoue wilt not boleue this writ the same

[698] Transcription by Alonzo Almeda, 'The Middle English Medical Charm' p. 13.

lettors vponne a knyffe and stike therwith anoþ or another both and then shale no blode come out and these buie the letters. P. C. V. S. X. A. G. Z. L. X. Z. N. M. or writ with his owne blode in the fforhead of a man Beronix. and in the fforhead of a woman Beronixa.[699]

[699] Transcription by Katherine Leach, 'Healing Charms and Ritual Protection in Premodern Wales' (unpublished PhD thesis).

TEXT FOUR: DUBLIN, NLI MS G11, P. 393B20–31:

Ar echm*aig* an araid so do s*crí*ba ⁊ a ceng*al* don in*ad* a mbia i*n* p*éist* ⁊ in*n*arb*aid* fa c*ét*ōir nō a gabail ría † i nomine p*at*ris ⁊ filíí ⁊ sp*iritu*s s*anct*i am*en* † saluator † alibria † trifon † ⁊ trofia † a † g †. Ar in c*étn*a ⁊ a c*ur* a n-in*nus* sin ris † sendula ⁊ pe*n*dula opium ⁊ i*n*opiu*m* s*an*c*t*us negodsiu*m* oret p*ro* me fiat uirmis mortua p*ater* p*rius* p*rius* p*os*t ⁊ ic*caid* a n-in*nus* c*étn*a na hespada. Colum Ci*lle* do rin*n*e so.

Against Farcy

Write this charm/prayer and tie it to the place in which the worm is, and it drives it out at once:

† I nomine p*at*ris ⁊ filíí ⁊ sp*iritus* s*anct*i am*en* † saluator † alibria † trifon † ⁊ trofia † a † g †.

Ar in c*étn*a ⁊ a c*ur* a n-in*nus* sin ris † sendula ⁊ pe*n*dula opium ⁊ inopiu*m* s*an*c*t*us negodsiu*m* oret pro me may the worm be dead.

A *Pater* before and after, it heals the abcesses in the same manner, and Colum Cille made this.

Obaid*h* do toir*mus*c ret*h*a fola na mbán.

Riuos cruoris torridos *con*t*ra*x*da* uestis abruit fletus gementis sublisis clausit flue*n*ta sa*n*g*ín*es libera me d*omi*ne ·N· mate*us* marc*us* lucas ioh*ane*s

ebistil tucc*as* do (iar?) si*n* ⁊ a gabail a cris na *m*ná ⁊ ic*aid*

Translation

Charm for stopping the course of women's blood.

[Latin words of power][700] ·NAME· Matthew Mark Luke John

Let a letter be given to it afterwards, Fand it's going into the girdle of the woman ['put the letter into the girdle of the woman], and it heals.

[700] Compared to the versions of this charm found in the Royal Prayerbook, it seems that some of the Latin words of power have been left out. For example, *clausit fluenta sangínes* probably stands for *clausit fluenta sanguinis* 'it closed the streams of blood'.

Bibliography

Ahlqvist, 'The Study of Language in Early Ireland', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86.2 (1985), 246–57.

Ahlqvist, 'The Native Grammarian, Revisited', in Evans, Geraint, Bernard Martin, and Jonathan Wooding (eds), *Origins and Revivals: Proceedings of the First Australian Conference of Celtic Studies* (Sydney, 2000), pp. 81–90.

Alonso-Almeida, Francisco, 'The Middle English Medical Charm: Register, Genre and Text Type Variables', *Neuphilologishce Mitteilungen* 109.1 (2008), 9–38.

Anderson, Alan Orr, and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (ed. and trans.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London, 1961).

Arbesmann, Rudolph, 'The Concept of "Christus Medicus" in St Augustine', *Traditio* 10 (1954), 1–28.

Argyle, Michael, 'The Effects of Ritual', *Archiv für Religionspsychologie/Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 24 (2002), 167–79.

Arnovick, Leslie, 'The Power of the Pater Noster and Creed in Anglo-Saxon Charms: Deinstitutionalization and Subjectification', in Yelle, Robert, Courtney Handman and Christopher Lehrich (eds), *Language and Religion* (Berlin, 2019).

Arthur, Ciaran, *'Charms', Liturgies and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England* (Suffolk, 2018).

Arthur, Ciaran, 'The Gift of the Gab in Post-Conquest Canterbury: Mystical 'Gibberish' in London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A. xv', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 118 (2019), 177–210.

Averbuch, Irit, 'Shamanic Dance in Japan: The Choreography of Possession in Kagura Performance', *Asian Folklore Studies* 57.2 (1998), 293–329.

Bailey, Michael, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages', *Speculum* 76.4 (October 2001), 960–90.

Barney, Stephen, W. J. Lewis, A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (trans.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2009).

Bell, Catherine, *Ritual* (New York, 2009).

Benton, John, 'Trotula, Women's Problems, and the Professionalization of Medicine in the Middle Ages', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59.1 (Spring 1985), 30–53.

Bergin, Osborn, 'Unpublished Irish Poems XXI: The Poet Insists on His Rights', in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* Vol. 12, No. 45 (March, 1923), 80–3.

Best, R. I., 'Some Irish Charms', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 27–32.

Best, R. I. and Osborn Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre: The Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929).

Bieler, Ludwig (ed.), *Four Latin Lives of St Patrick: Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta* (Dublin, 1971).

Bieler, Ludwig (ed. and trans.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963).

Biggs, Robert D., *Sa Zi Ga: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations* (New York, 1967).

Binchy, D.A. (ed.), *Córus Béscnai, in Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 6 vols. (Dublin, 1978).

Binchy, D. A., 'Bretha Crólige', *Ériu* 12 (1938), 1–77.

Binchy, D. A., 'Bretha Déin Chécht', *Ériu* 20 (1966), 1–66.

Binchy, D. A., 'A Text on the Forms of Distraint', *Celtica* 10 (1973), 72–86.

Binchy, D. A., 'Distraint in Irish Law', *Celtica* 10 (1973), 22–71.

Bitel, Lisa M., 'Tools and Scripts for Cursing in Medieval Ireland', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 51/52 (2006/7), 5–27.

Borsje, Jacqueline, *The Celtic Evil Eye and Related Mythological Motifs in Medieval Ireland* (Louvain, 2012).

Borsje, Jacqueline, 'A Spell Called Éle', in Toner, Gregory, and Séamus Mac Mathúna (eds), *Ulidia 3: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* (Berlin, 2013).

Borsje, Jacqueline, 'European and American Scholarship and the Study of Medieval Irish "Magic" (1846–1960)', in Tuomi, Ilona, John Carey, Barbara Hillers, and Ciarán Ó Gealbhain (eds), *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern* (Cardiff, 2019), pp. 5–15.

Borsje, Jacqueline, 'Medieval Irish Spells: "Words of Power" as Performance', in *Words: Religious Language Matters* (New York, 2016), pp. 35–53.

Borsje, Jacqueline, 'Rules and Legislation on Love Charms in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 21 (2010), 172–190.

Borsje, Jacqueline, and Fergus Kelly, '"The Evil Eye" in Early Irish Literature and Law', *Celtica* 24 (2003), 1–39.

Boyle, Elizabeth, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland* (Abingdon, 2021).

Breatnach, Liam (ed. and trans.) *Uraicecht na Ríar: the Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1987).

Breatnach, Liam, *The Early Irish law Text Senchas Már and the Question of its Date*, E. C. Quiggin Memorial Lectures, 13, (Cambridge, 2011).

Breatnach, Liam, '*Araile felmac féig don Mumain*: Unruly Pupils and the Limitations of Satire', *Ériu* 59 (2009): 111–137.

Breatnach, Liam, 'Addenda and Corrigenda to "The Caldron of Poesy"', *Ériu* 35 (1984), 189–91.

Breatnach, Liam, 'Cáin ónae: An Old-Irish Law Text on Lending' in Jasanoff, Jay, H. Craig Melchert, and Lisi Oliver (eds), *Mír curad: Studies in Honour of Calvert Watkins* (Innsbruck, 1998), pp. 29–46.

Breatnach, Liam, ‘Law and Literature in Early Mediaeval Ireland’, in *Centro Italiano di studi sull’Alto Medioevo (ed.), L'irlanda e gli irlandesi nell’alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 2009), pp. 215–38.

Breatnach, Liam, ‘Satire, Praise and the Early Irish Poet’, *Ériu* 56 (2006), 63–84.

Breatnach, Liam, ‘The Trefhocal Tract: An Early Middle Irish Text on Poetics’, in Ó Riain, Gordon (ed.), *Dá dtrian feasa fiafraighidh: Essays on the Irish Grammatical and Metrical Tradition* (Dublin, 2017), pp. 1–65.

Brévart, Francis, ‘Between Medicine, Magic and Religion: Wonder Drugs in German Medico-Pharmaceutical Treatises of the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries’, *Speculum* 83.1 (January 2008), 1–57.

Burchard of Worms, *Decretum libri viginti*, in Migne, J. P. (ed.), *Patrologia Latina* 140, (Paris, 1891)

Byrne, F. J., and Pádraig Francis, ‘Two Lives of Saint Patrick: “Vita Secunda” and “Vita Quarta”’, *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 124 (1994), 5–17.

Calder, George (ed. and trans.*), Auraicept na n-Éces: The Scholars’ Primer* (Edinburgh, 1917).

Callan, Maeve B., ‘Of Vanishing Fetuses and Maidens Made-Again: Abortion, Restored Virginity, and Similar Scenarios in Medieval Irish Hagiography and Penitentials’, in *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 21, 2 (May, 2012), pp. 282–96.

Carey, John, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin, 2000).

Carey, John, *Magic, Metallurgy and the Imagination in Medieval Ireland: Three Studies* (Aberystwyth, 2018).

Carey, John, ‘An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the Senchas Már’, *Ériu* 45 (1994), 1–32.

Carey, John, “Charms in Medieval Irish Tales: Tradition, Adaptation, Invention”, in:
Ilona Tuomi, John Carey, Barbara Hillers, and Ciarán Ó Gealbhain (eds), *Charms, charmers and charming in Ireland: from the medieval to the modern*, (Cardiff, 2019), 17–37.

Carey, John, ‘The Uses of Tradition in *Serglige Con Culainn*’, in Mallory, James P., and Gearóid Stockman (eds), *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha*, 8–12 April 1994 (Belfast, 1994), pp. 77–84.

Carey, John, ‘The Three Things Required of a Poet’, *Ériu* 48 (1997), 41–58.

Carney, James (ed.), *Poems on the O’Reillys* (Dublin, 1950).

Carney, James and Maura, ‘A Collection of Irish Charms’, *in Saga och Sed: Kungliga Gustav Adolfs Akademiens Årsbok* (Uppsala, 1960), pp. 144–52.

Charles-Edwards, Thomas, ‘Honour and Status in Some Irish and Welsh Prose Tales’, *Ériu* 29 (1978), 123–41.

Chibnall, Marjorie, ‘Pliny’s Natural History and the Middle Ages’, in T. A. Dorey (ed.), *Empire and Aftermath: Silver Latin II* (London, 1975), pp. 57–78.

Cockayne, Thomas, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, Rolls Series, XXV, 3 vols (London, 1864–1866).

Colloca, Luana, et al., ‘Overt Versus Covert Treatment for Pain, Anxiety, and Parkinson’s Disease’, *Lancet Neurology* 3 (2004), 679–84.

Connolly, Seán, and J.-M. Picard, ‘Cogitosus’ *Life of St Brigit*: Content and Value’, *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), 5–27

Conrad, Lawrence (ed.), *The Western Medical Tradition: 800 BC to AD 1800* (Cambridge, 1955).

Cooley, Alison E. and Benet Salway, ‘Roman Inscriptions 2006–2010’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 102 (2012), 172–286.

Curbera, Jaime, and Sergio Giannobile, ‘A Voodoo Doll from Keos in Berlin’s Antikensammlun’, in Boschung, Dietrich and Jan N. Bremmer (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic* (Köln, 2015), pp. 124–6.

Cusack, Carole, ‘Brigit: Goddess, Saint, “Holy Woman”, and Bone of Contention’, in *On a Panegyrical Note: Studies in Honor of Gary W. Trompf* (Sydney, 2007), pp. 75–97.

Dalton, O. M. (ed. and trans.), *The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1927)

Datson, Lorraine, and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York, 1998).

DeWitt, Norman, ‘The Druids and Romanization’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 69 (1938), 319–32.

Dietler, Michael, ‘“Our Ancestors the Gauls”: Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe’, *American Anthropologist* 96.3, (Sept., 1994), pp. 584–605.

Dillon, Myles (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin, 1953).

Dobbs, Margaret E. (ed. and trans.), ‘Altromh Tighi da Medar’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 18 (1930), 189–230.

Dominican Fathers*, St Jude Thaddeus: Devotional Exercises and Novena Prayers*, Revised Edition, (London, 2018).

Dunleavy, Mairead, *Dress in Ireland* (London, 1989).

Eska, Charlene (ed. and trans.) *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law* (Leiden, 2010).

Farr, Carol A., ‘Reused, Rescued, Recycled: The Art Historical and Palaeographic Contexts of the Irish Fragments, St Gallen Codex 1395’, in Moss, Rachel, Felicity O’Mahony,

and Jane Maxwell (eds), *An Insular Odyssey: Manuscript Culture in Early Christian Ireland and Beyond* (Dublin, 2017).

Flint, Valerie, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (New Jersey, 1991).

Frazer, James G., *The Golden Bough* (London, 1913).

Fuller, Susan, 'Pagan Charms in Tenth-Century Saxony? The Function of the Merseburg Charms', *Monatshefte* 72 (Summer 1980), pp. 162–70.

Gantz, Jeffrey*, Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London, 1981).

Goodwyn, Erik, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology of the Placebo Effect in Analytical Psychology', *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 62.3 (2017), pp. 395–414.

Gordon, Richard L., 'Charaktères between Antiquity and Renaissance: Transmission and Re-Invention', *Les savois magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance* (2014), 253–300.

Grant, Mark*, Galen on Food and Drink* (London, 2000).

Green, R.P.H (ed. and trans.), *Augustine*, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford, 1996).

Green, Monica H., *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Pennsylvania, 2001).

Greene, David, 'Lapidaries in Irish', in *Celtica* 2.1 (1954), 67–95.

Grendon, Felix, 'The Anglo-Saxon Charms', *Journal of American Folklore* 22 (1909), 105–237.

Gray, Elizabeth (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (Dublin, 1982).

Gross, George, 'Why Will the Coronation Take Place at Westminster Abbey?', online at https://www.kcl.ac.uk/why-will-the-coronation-take-place-at-westminster-abbey#:~:text=On%2013%20October%201163%2C%20Edward,therefore%2C%20in%20the%20saint's%20presence.

Goodwyn, Erik, 'Rediscovering the Ritual Technology of the Placebo Effect in Analytical Psychology', *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 62.3 (2017), pp. 395–414.

Hambro, Catherine Dahl, 'The Religious Significance of the *sén 7 soladh* in *Altram Tige Dá Medar*', in Tuomi, Ilona; Carey, John; Hillers, Barbara; Ó Gealbháin, Ciarán (eds), *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern* (Cardiff, 2019).

Hancock, W. Neilson, Thaddeus O'Mahony, Alexander George Richey, and Robert Atkinson (eds and trans.), *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, 6 vols. (Dublin, 1865–1901).

Hansen, Bert, 'The Complementarity of Science and Magic before the Scientific Revolution: Medieval Science and Magic were Consistent Parts of a Unified Worldview that had Dominated Western Thought for Two Millennia', *American Scientist*, 74.2 (March–April 1986), 128–36.

Harney, Lorcan, 'Fasting and Feasting on Irish Church Sites: The Archaeological and Historical Evidence', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 73 (2015–2016), 182–97.

Hayden, Deborah, 'A Sixteenth-century Irish Collection of Remedies for Ailments of the Male Reproductive Organs', *Celtica* 33 (2021), 248–276.

Hayden, Deborah, 'From "The King of Waters" to Curative Manuscripts: Water and Medicine in Medieval Irish Textual Culture', in Cesario, Marilina, Hugh Magennis and Elisa Ramazzina (eds), *An Interdisciplinary Study of the Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air* (Leiden, 2024), pp. 148–85.

Hayden, Deborah, 'Lovers, Lovesickness and Medical Learning in Medieval Irish Literature: The Case of *Serglige Con Culainn'*, paper delivered at the CSANA Online Seminar Series, 14 February 2022.

Hayden, Deborah, 'Old English in the Irish Charms', *Speculum* 97.2 (April 2022), 349–76.

Hayden, Deborah, ‘The Context and Obscure Language of Medical Charms in a Sixteenth-century Irish Remedy Book: Four Case Studies’, in Kobel, Chantal (ed.) *Obscuritas in Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature* (Dublin, forthcoming).

Henning, John, ‘The Literary Tradition of Moses in Ireland’, *Traditio* 7 (1949–1951), pp. 233–261.

Hillers, Barbara, “Towards a Typology of European Narrative Charms in Irish Oral Tradition”, in Tuomi, Ilona, John Carey, Barbara Hillers, and Ciarán Ó Gealbhain (eds), *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern* (Cardiff, 2019), pp. 79–102.

Hochegger, Karina, *Untersuchungen zu den ältesten Vitae Sanctae Brigidae* (Vienna, 2009).

Lindsay, W. M., *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum libri XX* (Oxford, 1911).

Janowitz, Naomi, ‘Demons and Witchcraft in the Early Church’, *The Routledge History of Witchcraft* (2020), 36–45.

Jolly, Karen Louise, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996).

Jolly, Karen Louise, ‘Tapping the Power of the Cross? For Who and For Whom?’, in Karkov, Catherine E., Sarah Larratt Keefer and Karen Louise Jolly (eds.) *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England* (Suffolk, 2006), pp. 58–79.

Jones, Claire, ‘Formula and Formulation: ‘Efficacy Phrases’ in Medieval English Medical Manuscripts’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 99 (1998), 199–209.

Kelly, Fergus, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988).

Kelly, Fergus, *Marriage Disputes: A Fragmentary Old Irish Law-Text* (Dublin, 2015).

Kelly, Fergus, ‘Medicine and Early Irish Law’, in Lyons, J. B. (ed.), *2000 Years of Irish Medicine* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 15–19.

Kesling, Emily, ‘The Royal Prayerbook’s Blood-staunching Charms and Early Insular Scribal Communities’, *Early Medieval Europe* 29.2 (2021), 181–200.

Khan, Arif, et al, ‘The Persistence of the Placebo Response in Antidepressant Clinical Trials’, *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 42 (2007), 791–6.

Kieckhefer, Ricard, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Pennsylvania, 1998).

Kieckhefer, Richard, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989).

Kradin, Richard, *The Placebo Response and the Power of Unconscious Healing* (New York, 2008).

Kudenko, Ksenia, ‘In Defence of the Irish Saints Who “Loved Malediction”’, in: Tuomi, Ilona, John Carey, Barbara Hillers, and Ciarán Ó Gealbhain (eds), *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern*, (Cardiff, 2019).

Law, Vivien, *The History of Linguistics: From Plato to 1600* (Cambridge, 2003).

Law, Vivien, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 2009).

Lilian, Duncan (ed. and trans.), ‘Altram Tige Dá Medar’, *Ériu* 11 (1932): 184–225.

Lloyd, G, ‘The Hot and the Cold, the Dry and the Wet in Greek Philosophy’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 84 (1964), 92–106.

Long, George, *C. Julii Caesaris: Commentarii De Bello Gallico* (London, 1871).

Lucas, A. T., ‘The Social Role of Relics and Reliquaries in Ancient Ireland’, *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 116 (1986), 5–37.

Mac Airt, Seán (ed. and tr.), *The Annals of Inisfallen: MS. Rawlinson B. 503* (Dublin, 1951).

Maney, Laurence, ‘When Brigit Met Patrick’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 14 (1994), 175–94.

Marstrander, Carl (ed. and trans.) ‘The Deaths of Lugaid and Derbforgaill’, *Ériu* 5 (1911), 201–18.

McCauley, Robert N., and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge, 2009).

McCone, Kim, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth, 1990).

McGuinness, David, '"Druids"' Altars, Carrowmore, and the Birth of Irish Archaeology', *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* 19 (2010), 29–49.

McLaughlin, Roisin, *Early Irish Satire* (Dublin, 2008).

McLaughlin, Roisin, 'A Threat of Satire by Tadgh (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha', *Ériu* 55 (2005), 37–57.

McLaughlin, Roisin, "Metres in *Mittelirische Verslehren* III", *Ériu* 55 (2005), 119–36.

McMullen, Joseph A., 'Improper Requests and Unjust Satire: Problems with the Field of Cultural Production in *"Tromdám Guaire"*', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 32 (2012), pp. 198–213.

McNeill, John T., and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance; A Translation of the Principal libri poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents* (New York, 1938).

Mees, Bernard, *Celtic Curses* (Woodbridge/Rochester, 2009).

Meroney, Howard, 'Irish in the Old English Charms', *Speculum* 20.2 (1945), 172–82.

Meroney, Howard, 'Studies in Early Irish Satire', *Journal of Celtic Studies* 2.1 (1958), 59–130.

Meyer, Kuno (ed. and trans.), *Aislinge Meic Conglinne: The Vision of Mac Conglinne, a Middle-Irish Wonder Tale* (London, 1892).

Meyer, Kuno (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Adamnáin: An Old-Irish Treatise on the Law of Adamnán* (Oxford, 1905).

Meyer, Kuno (ed. and trans.), *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin. Life of Colmán son of Lúachan* (Dublin, 1911).

Meyer, Kuno (ed. and trans.), *The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt*, Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin, 1909).

Meyer, Kuno (ed.), 'Fingen mac Flainn's Gedicht auf die Fir Arddae', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 3 (1907), 291–301.

Meyer, Kuno (ed.), 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften: Der sündige Leib', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 12 (1918): 366–367.

Meyer, Kuno, *The Triads of Ireland*, Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin, 1906).

Mills, Kristen, 'Demna Aeóir: "Demons of the Air"', *Éigse* 41 (2021), 1–30.

Mistry, Zubin, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages, c. 500–900* (Suffolk, 2015).

Mitchell, Stephen, 'Anaphrodisiac Charms in the Nordic Middle Ages: Impotence, Infertility, and Magic', *The Norwegian Journal of Folklore* 38 (1998), 19–42.

Moran, Pádraic (ed. and trans.), *De origine scoticae linguae (O'Mulconry's Glossary): An Early Irish Linguistic Tract, Edited with a Related Glossary* (Turnhout, 2019).

Moran, Pádraic, 'Greek in Early Medieval Ireland', in Mullen, Alex and Patrick James (eds), *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds (*Cambridge, 2012), pp. 172–92.

Moran, Pádraic, 'Hebrew in the Early Irish Glossaries', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 60 (Winter 2016), 1–21.

Moseley, J. Bruce, et al., 'A Controlled Trial of Arthroscoping Surgery for Osteoarthritis of the Knee', *New England Journal of Medicine* 347 (2002), 81–8.

Murphy, Gerard, 'Notes on Cath Maige Tuired', *Éigse* 7 (1953–1955), 191–8.

Jones, Peter Murray, and Lea Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89.3 (2015), pp. 406–33.

Nemeroff, C., and P. Rozin, ‘The Makings of the Magical Mind: The Nature and Function of Sympathetic Magical Thinking’, in Rosengren, Karl S., Carl N. Johnson, and Paul L. Harris (eds), *Imagining the Impossible: Magical, Scientific, and Religious Thinking in Children* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–34.

Newton, Robert, ‘A History of Flying’, *The North American Review* 279 (1994), 4–7.

Nguyen, Truc, *A Critical Edition of the Poems and the Rosc in* Airec Menman Uraird maic Coisse (Unpublished PhD thesis, Maynooth University, 2024).

Ní Bhrolcháin, Muireann, ‘Serglige Con Culainn: A Possible Re-interpretation’, in Ó Catháin, Briain, and Ruairí Ó hUiginn (eds), *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* (Maynooth, 2009), pp. 344–55.

Nic Dhonnchadha, Aoibheann, ‘Michael Casey’s Medical Transcripts in Gilbert MS 147’, *Éigse* 40 (2019), 43–114.

Ó Catháin, Séamas, ‘The Festival of Brigit the Holy Woman’, *Celtica* 23 (1999), 231–260.

Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, *Coire Sois, The Cauldron of Knowledge: A Companion to Early Irish Saga* (Indiana, 2014).

Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, ‘The Making of a Prince*: Áed oll fri andud n-áne*’, in Henley, Georgia, Paul Russell, and Joseph F. Eska (eds), *Rhetoric and Reality in Medieval Celtic Literature: Studies in Honour of Daniel F. Melia* (New York, 2014), pp. 137–54.

Ó hUiginn, Ruairí, *Marriage, Law and Tochmarc Emire*, Quiggin Memorial Lectures 15 (Cambridge, 2013).

Ó Riain, Pádraig, ‘Boundary Association in Early Irish Society’, *Studia Celtica* 7 (1972), 12– 29.

O'Donovan, John (ed. and trans.), *Annala rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616* (Dublin, 1856).

O'Donovan, John, and Whitley Stokes, *Sanas Cormaic: Cormac's Glossary* (Calcutta, 1868).

O'Donovan, John (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments* (Dublin, 1860).

O'Neill, Patrick, 'A Middle Irish Poem on the Maledictory Psalms', *Journal of Celtic Studies* 3.1 (1981), 40–58.

Olmstead, A. T., 'Darius and his Behistun Inscription', *The American Journal of Semitic Languages* 55.4 (October 1938), 329–416.

Olsan, Lea, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', in Jonathan Roper (ed.) *Charms and Charming in Europe* (Hampshire and New York, 2004), pp. 59–90.

Olsan, Lea, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', *Social History of Medicine* 16 (2003), 343–66.

Osgood, Josiah, 'The Pen and the Sword: Writing and Conquest in Caesar's Gaul', *Classical Antiquity*, 28.2 (October 2009), 328–58.

Patai, Raphael, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Michigan, 1990).

Peters, Cherie, '"He is Not Entitled to Butter": the Diets of Peasants and Commoners in Early Medieval Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 115C (2015), 79–109.

Pettit, Edward, 'Miach's Healing of Núada in *Cath Maige Tuired'*, *Celtica* 27 (2013), 158–71.

Pick, Bernhard, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew and Thomas* (Chicago, 1909).

Plummer, Charles (ed. and trans.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn: Lives of Irish Saints*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1922).

Plummer, Charles, *Miscellanea hagiographica Hibernica: Vitae adhuc ineditae sanctorum Mac Creiche, Naile, Cranat* (Brussels, 1925).

Pollington, Stephen, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plantlore and Healing* (Dublin, 2008).

Pratchett, Terry, *Equal Rites* (London, 1987).

Poppe, Erich, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Lesson of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 37 (Summer, 1999), 33–54.

Preston-Matto, Lahney (trans.), *Aislinge Meic Conglinne: The Vision of Mac Conglinne* (New York, 2010).

Rajguru, Megha, 'Chanting in the Gallery: Ritual Sound and its Phenomenology in Contemporary Art', *The Journal of Visual Art Practice* 12 (2013), 181–93.

Ray, Celeste, 'Paying the Rounds at Ireland's Holy Wells', *Anthropos* 110 (2015), 415–32.

Reeves, William, *Life of Columba, founder of Hy, Written by Adamnan* (Dublin, 1857).

Riddle, John M., 'Lithotherapy in the Middle Ages: Lapidaries Considered as Medical Texts', *Pharmacy in History*, 12.2 (1970), 39–50.

Rider, Catherine, 'Magic and Gender', *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (Milton, 2019).

Rohde, Eleanour Sinclair, *The Old English Herbals* (Harlow, 1922).

Rosenblatt, Paul C., 'Communication in the Practice of Love Magic', *Social Forces* 49.3 (March, 1971), pp. 482–7.

Russell, Paul, 'Poets, Power and Possessions in Medieval Ireland: Some Stories from *Sanas Cormaic'*, in Joseph F. Eska (ed.), *Law, Literature and Society*, CSANA Yearbook 7 (Dublin, 2008), pp. 9–45.

Saliba, George and Linda Komaroff, ‘Illustrated Books May Be Hazardous to Your Health: A New Reading of the Arabic Reception and Rendition of the “Materia Medica” of Dioscorides’, *Ars Orientalis* 35 (2008), 6–65.

Schaff, Philip, et al. (ed.), *The Early Christian Church Fathers*, 38 vols (1886–1890).

Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It* (London, 2015).

Sharpe, Richard, ‘Books from Ireland, Fifth to Ninth Centuries’, *Peritia* 21 (2010), pp. 1–55.

Silberman, Henri, ‘Superstition and Medical Knowledge in an Italian Herbal’, *Pharmacy in History* 38.2 (1996), 87–94.

Siraisi, Nancy, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990).

Skemer, Don C., *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania, 2006).

Skemer, Don C., ‘Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion in the Late Middle Ages’, *Scriptorium* 55.2 (2001), 197–227.

Slavin, B., ‘Coming to Terms with the Druids in Early Christian Ireland’, *Australian Celtic Journal* (2010), pp. 1–27.

Springer, C. P. E., *The Manuscripts of Sedulius: A Provisional Handlist*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 85.5, (Philadelphia, 1995).

Stacey, Robin Chapman, *Dark Speech. The Performance of Law in Early Ireland* (Pennsylvania, 2007).

Stancliffe, Clare, ‘The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints’ *Lives*’, in Fontaine, Jacques and Hillgarth, J. N. (eds), *The Seventh Century Change and Continuity: Proceedings of a Joint French and British Colloquium held at the Warburg Institute 8 – 9 July 1988* (London, 1992), 87–115.

Stannard, Jerry, ‘Medieval Herbalism and Post-Medieval Folk Medicine’, *Pharmacy in History* 55.2–3 (2013), 47–54.

Stifter, David, *Sengoídelc: Old Irish for Beginners* (New York, 2006).

Stifter, David, 'The Old Irish Healing Charms in the Stowe Missal and the Protective Spell in the Karlsruhe Book Cover', in Hayden, Deborah, and Sarah Baccianti (eds), *Medicine in the Medieval North Atlantic World. Vernacular Texts and Traditions* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

Stokes, Whitley, *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890).

Stokes, Whitley, *The Tripartite Life of Patrick: With Other Documents Relating to that Saint,* 2 vols (London, 1887).

Stokes, Whitley (ed. and trans.) 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part One): The Fragment in Rawlinson B. 502', *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), 374–419.

Stokes, Whitley (ed. and trans.), 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part Two)', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), 6–33, 119–263, 337–420.

Stokes, Whitley, 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas', *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894), 272–336 and 418–84.

Stokes, Whitley (ed. and trans.), 'The Death of Crimthann son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903), pp. 172–207.

Stokes, Whitley (ed. and trans.), 'The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901).

Stokes, Whitley, and John Strachan (eds. and trans.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old Irish Glosses Scholia Prose and Verse* (Dublin, 1903).

Stone, Rachel, and Charles West (trans.), *The Divorce of King Lothar and Queen Theutberga: Hincmar of Rheims's De Divortio* (Manchester, 2016).

Hindley, Katherine Storm, *Textual Magic: Charms and Written Amulets in Medieval England* (Chicago, 2023).

Storms, Godfrid, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hauge, 1948).

Thorpe, Benjamin, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* Vol. 1 (London, 1844).

Thurneysen, Rudolf (ed. and trans.), 'Cáin Lánamna', in Thurneysen, Rudolf, Nancy Power, and Myles Dillon (eds), *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1936), pp. 1–80.

Todd, J. H., and Eugene Curry, 'On Rhyming Rats to Death', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 5 (1850–1853), 355–66.

Toner, Gregory, 'Desire and Divorce in *Serglige Con Culainn'*, *Ériu* 66 (2016), 135–66.

Tuomi, Ilona, 'Nine Hundred Years of the *Caput Christi* Charm: Scribal Strategies and Textual Transmission', in: Tuomi, Ilona, John Carey, Barbara Hillers, and Ciarán Ó Gealbhain (eds), *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern* (Cardiff, 2019), 51–64.

Tuomi, Ilona, 'Parchment, Praxis and Performance of Charms in Early Medieval Ireland', *Incantatio: An International Journal on Charms, Charmers and Charming* 3 (2013), 60–85.

Van Arsdall, Anne, Helmut W. Klug, and Paul Blanz, 'The Mandrake Plant and its Legend', *Old Names – New Growth: Proceedings of the 2nd ASPNS Conference* (Frankfurt, 2009), pp. 285–346.

Van de Wall, Etienne, 'Flowers and Fruits: Two Thousand Years of Menstrual Regulation', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28. 2 (Autumn 1997), 183–203.

Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1909).

Warner, Richard, 'The Irish Early Medieval Feasting House and its Iron Age Origins', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 74 (2017–2018), 33–47.

Wiley, Dan M., 'The Maledictory Psalms', *Peritia* 15 (2001), 261–79.

Williams, Mark, *Ireland's Immortals* (Oxford, 2018).

Williams, Mark, 'Magic in Celtic Lands', in Rider, Catherine and Sophie Page (eds), *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (2019), pp. 123–135.

Wojtkowiak, Joanna, 'Towards a Psychology of Ritual: A Theoretical Framework of Ritual Transformation in a Globalising World', *Culture and Psychology* 24.4 (December 2018), 460–76.

Wood, Ian, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum* 69.1 (January 1994), 1–17.

Wulff, Winifred, *Rosa Anglica seu Rosa medicinae: An Early Modern Irish Translation of a Section of the Medieval Text-book of John of Gaddesden* (London, 1929).

Wycherley, Niamh, *The Cult of Relics in Early Medieval Ireland* (Turnhout, 2016).