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Ulidia 5 – open access edition

ISBN 978-3-942002-57-8

ULIDIA 5

MMIT VII

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Maynooth 18–20 March 2016

edited by

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curach bhán publications

2024

Hagen/Westf.

Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutschen Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet unter http://dnb.ddb.de abrufbar.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (editors):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster cycle of tales
Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts, Vol. VII

ISBN: 978-3-942002-58-5 (print edition)
ISBN: 978-3-942002-57-8 (open access edition)
ISSN:1393-970X

© 2024 by the authors and curach bhán publications – daniel büchner
Verlag für Kunst & Kulturwissenschaften
Eppenhauser Str. 85 – D-58093 Hagen – Germany
http://www.curach-bhan.com

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Satz: curach bhán publications
Druck: SDL Digitaler Buchdruck, Berlin

Printed in Germany 2024

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Preface

In the opening remarks of his contribution to this volume, Ralph O'Connor observes that there have been many developments in our understanding of the composition and transmission of medieval Gaelic narrative literature in recent decades, but that these advances have sometimes happened within different and distinct academic specialisms and have not always been communicated beyond disciplinary boundaries. O'Connor's concern is the boundary between 'historical' and 'literary' fields of enquiry, and as he notes, 'the aims of historical research and literary criticism are so different that even within the largely happy family of Celtic Studies there is still a risk of talking at cross-purposes, or not talking to each other at all'. The Ulidia conference series on the Ulster Cycle of tales has always been an opportunity for conversation across disciplines, as scholars bring their research interests, not only in history and literature, but also in placename studies, archaeology, comparative religion, linguistics, folklore and much more besides, to bear on a corpus of medieval texts and its later reflexes.

Some of the essays presented here offer probing explorations of particular aspects of individual Ulster Cycle tales: Michael Clarke, for example, elucidates the idea of 'barbarousness' in the Middle Irish tale *Mesca Ulaid* ('The Intoxication of the Ulstermen') and Elizabeth Gray focuses on the character of Deirdre in *Longes mac nUislenn* ('The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu'). Others turn their attention to the intellectual inheritance that influenced the authors of various Ulster Cycle narratives: Máire Herbert discusses the influence of the 'Letter of Abgar' tradition on the various versions of the death of Conchobar, and Daniel Watson situates the earliest extant death-tale of Cú Chulainn in the context of thinking about the 'Six Ages of the World' and Augustinian historiography. Some contributors look across the corpus, such as in Mary Leenane's study of the presentation of Cú Chulainn across the Ulster

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. vii–ix.

Cycle and Patricia Ronan's analysis of 'conflict talk' in seven different Ulster Cycle tales, or beyond the corpus, as with Kay Muhr's study of the character of Dáire, not only in the Ulster Cycle but in legal and hagiographical texts. Of course, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cooley') is a significant site of interest for many authors: Ralph Kenna, Pádraig MacCarron and Denis Casey offer an innovative network analysis of character interactions in the *Táin*, and Thomas O'Donnell considers the physiology of Cú Chulainn in the saga. The physical depiction of Cú Chulainn is also a concern for Gaël Hily, who examines the wider literary resonances of the 'one foot, one hand, one eye' motif. Some of the contributions deal with the afterlives of Ulster Cycle texts and characters: Cameron Wachowich, for example, presents a study of an Irish poem of the late twelfth or thirteenth century on an invasion of Ireland by the 'King of Africa', which deploys Ulster Cycle characters in intriguing ways, possibly for an English patron, John de Courcy. Breandán Ó Cróinín brings us right up to the present day with a study of modern Irish literary retellings of Ulster Cycle tales. With different approaches come different viewpoints on what the Ulster Cycle actually represents – a self-consciously crafted medieval literature, or the remnants of a more ancient mythology (or a bit of both). Chapters which take a comparative mythological or cosmological approach, such as those by Garrett Olmsted and Phillip A. Bernhardt-House, or that analyse a tale as a reflection of kingship ideology, such as Marion Deane's, sit side by side with those that approach the Ulster Cycle as literature and/or a medieval form of historiography, and we hope that this juxtaposition will serve as an invitation to future interdisciplinary dialogue and shared insights.

The present volume comprises many (though not all) of the papers presented at the fifth Ulidia conference, held at Maynooth University in 2016, and as with previous instalments in this series, includes papers which draw on a range of disciplines, some of which fall within the editors' primary areas of expertise (literature, linguistics, history) but some of which draw widely from areas as diverse as statistical modelling and comparative mythology. Two of the three plenary lectures – by Máire Herbert and Ralph O'Connor – are included as chapters in this volume; the third, by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, will appear in a forthcoming Festschrift. We are grateful to all the contributors for their patience, as the volume met with delays and setbacks, not least the COVID-19

pandemic, which slowed scholarly work for many people, and particularly those with caring responsibilities. During the lengthy gestation of this volume we witnessed the tragic passing of two of our contributors, and we offer our sincere condolences and thoughts to the loved ones of Marion Deane and Ralph Kenna. We are grateful to Daniel Büchner at curach bhán publications for his patience and expertise, and to the Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University, for financial support. Finally, we thank our colleagues in Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge and the Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University, for their support of the conference from which these papers derive and for their ongoing collegiality over the years.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle
Maynooth, May 2024

The Ulster Cycle: History, fiction or literature?

Ralph O'Connor

University of Aberdeen

Introduction: history versus literature[1]

Since the 1950s, many advances have been made in our understanding of the historical contexts in which Gaelic sagas were composed and transmitted, and the techniques used to write them. These two areas of research fall into the specialist domains of historical and literary studies, and this division of labour raises the possibility that insights achieved in one field will not necessarily be noticed or assimilated by the other. We are fortunate in Celtic Studies that this disciplinary division is thinner than in more populated fields. Yet the aims of historical research and literary criticism are so different that even within the largely happy family of Celtic studies there is still a risk of talking at cross-purposes, or not talking to each other at all. Máire Herbert pointed this out back in 1988, in her classic article 'The World, the Text and the Critic of Early Irish Heroic Narrative'. Here she set out and elegantly demolished some of the artificial dichotomies and 'worn oppositions' which presented stumbling-blocks to a full appreciation of early Gaelic saga literature (Herbert 1988a: 6, quoting Seamus Deane).

Despite Herbert's warnings, the absolute distinction between literary and historical narratives has remained one of the most durable of these 'worn oppositions', especially in the common formulation

[1] I am grateful to the organizers of and participants of the 2016 Ulidia conference at NUI Maynooth where I first presented a version of this chapter. I thank Erich Poppe, Gregory Toner and the editors of this volume for their valuable feedback on subsequent versions. I remain responsible for any remaining errors, overstatements or inappropriate analogies.

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(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 1–35.

whereby 'literary' narratives are assumed to be fictional and entertaining, whereas 'historical' ones are collections of would-be facts. Many a scholarly survey of mediaeval Gaelic narrative ranges different groups of texts on either side of this fence: *Lebor Gabála* is (pseudo-)history, romantic tales are literature. Several sagas find themselves on both sides depending on whether the scholar is trying to do historical or literary analysis with them. So Seán Mac Airt wrote in 1958 (151 n. 1) that 'the *filid* regarded the sagas not primarily as literary entertainment but as historical evidence'. A quarter of a century later, the late Donnchadh Ó Corráin repeated the same point with more rhetorical force and in a different socio-political setting: 'Here then is no tale which "whiled away the evening for audiences gathered round the fire of a royal residence on winter nights" but the real stuff of politics and diplomacy' (Ó Corráin 1986: 152). The phrasing of both scholars implies a more or less unbridgeable gulf separating storytelling from the 'real' world of history and politics.

This dichotomy remains strong despite a number of recent attempts to conceptualize the 'literary' nature of early Gaelic sagas more precisely. In particular, much work has been done to clarify how those who wrote, compiled and used the extant sagas engaged with mediaeval literary theory and practice, including core Latin European concepts such as *compilatio*, *historia* and *fabula* and the rhetorical resources of Latin *grammatica*. This work has both broadened and sharpened our sense of the compositional strategies at work in individual texts, notably *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Nonetheless, it remains an open question as to whether sagas were envisaged as history or literature, even when those fuzzy modern terms are replaced by their seemingly more precise, less anachronistic counterparts *historia* and *fabula*.

For Erich Poppe (1999a; 1999b; 2008; 2014), Gregory Toner (2000b; 2009) and Dagmar Schlüter (2010), the *Táin* and many other early Gaelic sagas are a variety of *historia*, although Poppe (2012) has suggested moves away from historical truth-claims in some Middle Irish narratives. This view of sagas as *historia* has gathered momentum, and some valuable recent survey-articles present it as uncontested (Ní Mhaonaigh 2017; Wadden 2022), but it is not yet a consensus position. Some of the most sustained recent studies of early Gaelic rhetorical practices, literacy, and outlook on history display a distinct unease in including sagas within the purview of *historia*. For Brent

Miles, their rhetorical flights make them 'easily recognized as imaginative literature', with saga-adaptations of Latin histories embodying 'the transformation of *historia* in the direction of *fabula*' (Miles 2011: 103). Elva Johnston's study of early Gaelic literacy similarly positions sagas as a culturally valorized form of *fabula* (Johnston 2012: 155–156), while Elizabeth Boyle's study of salvation history in mediaeval Gaelic literature makes insightful use of sagas as 'literary' or 'exemplary' texts which engage in dialogue with historiography without themselves being historical narratives (Boyle 2021: 54, 188) – in this regard mirroring the relationship between history and romance presented by many scholars of mediaeval French or English literature (Stein 2006).

In framing their positions, almost all these scholars draw on the famous colophon to the Book of Leinster *Táin* which hovers between labelling it as *historia aut fabula* ('history or fable'), but they have interpreted its implications in very different ways. Our position remains as uncertain as that colophon: is this saga, and are other Ulster sagas, *historia aut fabula*?

Recent scholarship favouring the *historia* view has focused primarily on reception: how others besides the saga-authors used the sagas. It is now hard to dispute the claim that the authors of Middle Irish chronicles, king-lists, genealogies, poetico-legal tracts and synthetic histories, as well as compilers and scribes of several important mediaeval manuscripts from the twelfth century onwards, viewed at least some sagas as sources of historical information. Yet this overriding focus on reception has made it easy for others to continue to assume that the same texts were composed or intended as literature (even fiction) but later treated, whether mistakenly or disingenuously, as history.

To gain a clearer sense of what sagas were, closer attention to narrative signals *within* the extant sagas is required, following the example of Toner's study of the *Táin* (2000b) but extending the range of signals and texts covered.[2] Given that all our extant texts are either copies or reworkings of lost exemplars, we have no direct access to 'originals' whose his-

[2] Some discussion along these lines has been offered by Erich Poppe, concerning *Cath Ruis na Ríg* and sagas involving Suibhne Geilt, in his contribution to a book with the working title *Propaganda and Pseudo-History in the Medieval Celtic World* (ed. Ben Guy and Patrick Wadden). I am grateful to Erich Poppe for sharing a draft with me. For an analogous study of narrative signals of historicity in different groups of Icelandic sagas, see O'Connor 2022a.

torical credentials can be tested. To that extent, analysis of our extant texts is already a kind of reception-study. But if we are to make firm judgements about the nature of the Ulster sagas, here is where we must begin.

On this basis I will argue that not only were Old and early Middle Irish Ulster sagas conceived as a form of history-writing, but that the same applies to their late Middle Irish and Early Modern Irish successors which are typically celebrated or dismissed as works of fiction. But I also want to adjust the terms of the whole debate, by looking more closely at where this argument for *historia* leaves the sagas' status as 'literature', undeniably imaginative and largely made-up as so many of them are. I will therefore need to shuttle back and forth between the 'history question' and the 'literature question'. On the 'literature question', I take as my starting-point a remark by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, who has done more than any other living scholar to exemplify the literary analysis of Irish sagas. Ó Cathasaigh (2011: 216) concluded a discussion of memory in mediaeval Ireland with the *caveat* that 'an appreciation of the historical dimension of the texts should not blind us to the (other) literary properties of many of our surviving texts'. I will now attempt to smooth the way towards appreciating both aspects together, partly by knocking off a few of the sharp edges which have built up around the notion of sagas as history-writing.

One of the least useful of these sharp edges is the idea that one has to choose between 'literature' and 'history' when elucidating sagas' compositional strategies and meanings. This polarity is often expressed in terms of form versus content. James Carney grouped most early sagas under the label *scélshenchus*, borrowing a Middle Irish term for a group of kings' sagas about Leinster dynasts but redefining it as a genre of history-writing which might contain touches of drama and imagination, but which was basically utilitarian and instructional: 'the "facts" are primary, the form secondary', so such a text 'rarely achieves a satisfactory literary form'.[3] By contrast, more rhetorically ambitious sagas such as the *Táin* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* were free compositions, 'the result of a fully conscious creative act' (Carney 2005: 479–480,

[3] On the category *scélšenchas* and its modern rebranding, see Poppe 2008: 42–4; Schlüter 2010: 56–59; and O'Connor 2022b (in which the argument in these two paragraphs is applied to the Cycles of the Kings).

483), and not *scélshenchus* at all but literature. His views replicate those of Myles Dillon (1946: 2), but replace oral with literary creativity. Seán Ó Coileáin (1981: 123) disagreed with Carney about which sagas belonged in which category, but agreed that any saga's historical and literary aspects competed in a zero-sum game: 'both elements, those of story and history, occupy … the same creative space in differing proportions and as one element expands the other must correspondingly contract'.

Carney's attempt to carve out a valid space in scholarly discussion for the more modest examples of saga narrative deserves recognition, arising as it did (like Ó Corráin's comment quoted earlier) from a desire to rescue those texts from inappropriate aesthetic condemnation. But to make this point, Carney had to brand them artistic failures, relying on his own literary taste to do so. Like many twentieth-century literary critics, he assumed that didactic and historical purposes constrained literary creativity. Theorists such as Isidore of Seville might have agreed, but as will become clear below, most mediaeval authors and audiences of history-writing would not.

A desire to push back against inappropriate aesthetic judgment also underpins Toner's 2000b article 'The Ulster Cycle: Historiography or Fiction', an essential reference-point in this debate (hence my pilfering of its title). Toner took issue with scholars who had dismissed the first recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* for its failure to achieve a coherent, unified literary form, especially in its inclusion of long variant accounts: 'These apparent defects in the *Táin* have never been satisfactorily explained, and we can only conclude that it is a failure as a literary work'. But, Toner continues, 'its author never intended it to be read in that way. Rather, his aim was to construct a history of the cattle-raid of Cooley following normal medieval historiographical practices' (Toner 2000b: 6). He goes on to demonstrate, convincingly, that Recension 1 was composed and read as a true historical account, not as fiction. His article concludes:

> The examination of Ulster Cycle texts as literary artefacts has produced much fruit in the past, but this approach on its own is inadequate and we must begin to evaluate the texts as historical discourse. (Toner 2000b: 19)

Toner was trying to redress the balance of criticism rather than denying

that Ulster Cycle texts, as historiography, were also 'literary artefacts'. Nonetheless, his argument does not explicitly endorse the literary nature of mediaeval history-writing (apart from one remark about the smoother and more 'appealing' narrative profile of Recension 2: Toner 2000b: 19), and part of its force arises from its focus on episodes in Recension 1 that modern readers find 'superfluous and discordant' when '[j]udged as a story' (Toner 2000b: 18). This landmark study thus unwittingly perpetuates some aspects of the either-or dynamic that marked earlier contributions to the debate.

Consequently, in response some scholars have felt called on to defend the specifically 'literary' nature of the *Táin* by emphasizing its distance from what Toner calls 'normal medieval historiographical practices'. Helen Fulton, for example, has argued that there are fundamental differences between representations of a distant historical past in the first recension of the *Táin* and in Continental Latin histories and their Irish adaptations, specifically *Togail Troí*. Pointing to differences in these two sagas' construction of history's shape and meaning, their scope, degree of compositional freedom, inclusion of supernatural episodes and representation of motivation, cause and effect, she concludes that the past as represented in the *Táin* is 'a literary rather than a historical construct' (Fulton 2014: 46 and 49).[4] While Fulton accepts that the *Táin* can still be viewed as a kind of history-writing (Fulton 2014: 45–46), her point is that to lump two such different texts together under this label obscures more than it reveals.

Fulton is surely right to emphasize that the differences between the two texts are as important as their similarities, and that any shared ambition of telling a true story about the past is only part of a complex and varied picture. In her words, 'classifying all or most of the Irish sagas together as "history" elides the very real textual differences between them of function and subject position' (Fulton 2014: 46). The *Tain* and *Togail Troí* may have become increasingly aligned with each other during the course of their textual transmission and come to share various features of epic and historical discourses (Clarke 2006; 2009; Miles 2011; Poppe & Schlüter 2011), but their narrative shapes, priorities and stances towards the past are not identical.

[4] Fulton's analysis of the narrative procedures of the *Táin* is developed more fully in Fulton 2011. For contrasting assessments of the *Táin* and its relationship to *Togail Troí*, see Clarke 2011; Miles 2011 and Poppe & Schlüter 2011.

Yet variety of function does not rule out larger groupings. Fulton's point about the differences between the *Táin* and *Togail Troí* can be applied with equal force to Recensions 1 and 2 of the *Táin*, which diverge significantly in terms of functions, narrative strategies, scope and attitude towards the past despite their basis in shared material and their shared title. Grouping them together – whether as 'literature', 'history', 'Ulster sagas' or simply *Tána Bó Cúailnge* – elides their differences only if we allow labels to substitute for actual analysis. Porcupines and puffer-fish are manifestly different despite both belonging to the subphylum Vertebrata; a porcupine breeder[5] would say the same about the personalities of two individual porcupines. For anyone interested in analysing Gaelic sagas, their membership of a common grouping such as 'history' only makes their differences in historical perspective and philosophy more pointed. And, in defence of Toner, the question of whether the *Táin* was intended or received as a true story is surely one of the most fundamental, if prickly, questions one has to ask in assessing any story's purposes and meanings.

The framing of the debate so far, then, tends to push us towards a choice between 'history' or 'literature', seeing the *Táin* as either in line with, or relatively distant from, 'normal medieval historiographical practices' (Toner 2000b: 6) as typified by chronicles in the Latinate tradition.[6] But the differences between the *Táin* and Latinate history-writing that Fulton rightly points out can be seen as differences, not between historical and literary narratives, but between different genres or modes of history-writing. When it comes to mediaeval historiography, chronicles are not the only fruit, even though scholars ever since the Enlightenment have seen the Latin chronicle tradition as the yardstick by which to judge whether a text is history-writing or not (with exceptions sometimes made for saints' Lives and secular biographies). By contrast, and again in good Enlightenment style, anything with a whiff of 'epic', 'romance',

[5] These do exist: see http://www.acresoffunfainters.com/porcupines.html, last accessed 21 January 2023 ('People wonder how we got into porcupines').

[6] In Fulton's account, mediaeval history-writing is exemplified by the short prose chronicle *De excidio Troiae historia*, whose lack of narrative drama was specifically designed to elevate its historical veracity above that of Homer's *Iliad* as an alleged eyewitness account. Toner's primary reference-points are chroniclers in the Latin tradition (to judge from references to secondary literature) and Isidore of Seville's conceptualization of *historia* as eyewitness report.

'saga' or 'ballad' is usually excluded by definition, even if some of these are acknowledged to have shared an aim of narrating the past truthfully (Ainsworth 2003). Even in the most generically inclusive survey of mediaeval history-writing in Britain and Ireland yet published, its chapter on 'Vernacular History' (Fisher 2019) focuses exclusively on chronicles without even defending this choice, despite the wealth of other vernacular genres of history-writing that are tentatively acknowledged as such elsewhere in the book.[7]

Toner's point is that the *Táin* represents a species of history-writing in its own right. This is not some fringe Celtic phenomenon to be contrasted with 'proper' history-writing elsewhere in mediaeval Europe; it is part of a wider suite of imaginative forms of history-writing practised in Latin and vernacular languages across mediaeval Europe (Taranu & O'Connor 2022). To consider the *Táin* as historiography is to broaden our understanding of the practice of *historia* in the Middle Ages more generally, as well as to enhance our understanding of the literary genres of *historia*.

Narrative signals of historicity in Ulster sagas

What about the rest of the Ulster Cycle? In Toner's account, the *Táin* (especially its first recension) stands proxy for all the Ulster sagas. This is a common shortcut in our field; after all, in the Gaelic Middle Ages the *Táin* became the centre of an emerging immanent cycle of Ulster narratives (Poppe 2008). Nevertheless, it is hardly a typical Ulster saga of the Middle Irish period (in any of its recensions), being more than ten times the length of the next longest. Its first recension is unusual even

[7] Some balance is restored by Katharine Simms's invaluable chapter on Irish 'professional historians' in the same book (Simms 2019), but even here, unease remains as to whether 'the accumulation of pseudo-history, narrative entertainment, political propaganda, and poetry that formed a large part of the professional historian's craft', with sagas described as 'heroic tales' and 'versions of pagan myths' (Simms 2019: 298, 287, 281), is meant to be seen as history-writing. Chapters on hagiography and romance in the same volume make similar steps towards a more generically inclusive profile of mediaeval history-writing, but the chronicle remains the gold standard.

among *Táin*-texts for the number and extent of variant accounts given narrative voice, which play such an important part in Toner's argument.

Consequently, the question of whether the Ulster Cycle is historiography cannot be properly answered without looking at the wider corpus. While treating a shared or overlapping cast of major characters (Hillers 1999) and a linked set of themes, the Ulster Cycle is bewilderingly varied. Taken across the Gaelic Middle Ages, its texts include genealogical tracts, origin-legends, heroic epics, anti-heroic farces, battle-narratives, Otherworld adventure-tales, romance quests and conversion legends. Could so many different narrative varieties have been viewed by their authors and redactors as different species of historical writing?

Space does not allow a systematic survey here. But soundings may be taken across the corpus by focusing on moments in sagas where a narrator steps in and declares that what is being told is a true story, or applies historical reasoning to its contents.[8] I will first consider the three kinds of narratorial signals of historicity that Toner discussed in relation to the *Táin*. The main subject of his article is the inclusion of (sometimes judgement between) **divergent accounts** of the same event, suggesting an underlying concern with what really happened and in what order, rather than the fashioning of a made-up story. These inclusions appear throughout Recension 1 of the *Táin*, including in margins and later interpolations (Toner 2000b: 9–18).

Smaller-scale allusions to divergent accounts, often credited to *araili libair* (other books), suggest a historical outlook in other sagas and *dindṡenchas*, as Toner has argued more recently (2005: 70–74). The Book of Leinster recension and the composite Liber Flavus Fergusiorum recension of *Aided Chonchobuir* cite alternative accounts of who conveyed the news of Christ's death to Conchobar, the Roman consul Altus or the Irish druid Bochrach, with the last-named text appearing unwilling to judge between them (Meyer 1906: 10 and 16; Imhoff 2012: 45–46). In the Lebor na hUidre text of *Fled Bricrenn*, a long sequence in one of the H-hands alludes to a divergent account of how Lóegaire and Conall responded to the giant's beheading challenge (Best & Bergin 1970: 272; Henderson 1899: 98).[9] Both recensions of *Bruiden Da Choca* men-

[8] I have attempted a closer rhetorical analysis of two such passages in their wider mediaeval literary contexts in O'Connor 2016b.

[9] Noted by Toner (2005: 70). *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* is an honorary Ulster saga with its inclusion of Ulster characters: two allusions to divergent accounts appear

tion scholarly disagreements over whether Cet mac Mágach decapitated Cormac Connloinges after slaying him (Toner 2007: 136 and 272). The second recension of *Tochmarc Emire* notes *araili slechta* (other versions) for three sequences of events. These accounts allegedly report that Forgall, not Domhnall's daughter, raised a deceptive vision to waylay Cú Chulainn; that other Ulaid warriors including Fer Diad and Náisi were training with Scáthach alongside Cú Chulainn; and that Cú Chulainn slept with Scáthach shortly after arriving at her fort (van Hamel 1978: 46, 49–50 and 52). In the first instance no judgement is made, but in the second and third the narrator holds firm to his or her own version of events despite the prestigious testimony of the *Táin* concerning Fer Diad's training.

Admission of doubt, when faced with competing accounts, would not necessarily have been felt to undermine the story's overall credibility. Quite the reverse, as Slavica Ranković (2012) has shown in connection with Norse-Icelandic family sagas and Serbian epic poetry. She has argued that admissions of the redactor's doubt or ignorance often have an authenticating function, displaying the redactor's critical and scholarly spirit, thus encouraging the audience to trust that other episodes lacking such variant accounts can be relied on. This seems applicable to Gaelic sagas.

The other text-internal evidence for the Ulster sagas' historical intent adduced in Toner's article comprises **explicit comments on the saga's labelling as *historia***. But this appears only once in the corpus, in the famous colophon to the Book of Leinster *Táin*: the writer finds the saga wanting, but seems to assume that it would be approached primarily as *historia* (Toner 2000b: 7–8; see also Ó Néill 1999; Poppe 1999a; O'Connor 2016b). Like most scholars, Toner treats this colophon as a scribal addition in this manuscript only, although it could conceivably be authorial (Miles 2011: 1–6).

These are not the only signals of historical intent to be found in extant Ulster sagas. Toner's aim was to tackle aspects of historical procedure that were felt to damage the *Táin*'s literary coherence and narrative flow. To test his claims for the Ulster Cycle more fully, a wider range of signals of historicity needs to be considered, some of which have little or

on the same page of its Lebor na hUidre text (Best & Bergin 1970: 243), one in hand M (on the body-count after the final battle), the other in an H-hand (on where Conaire's body was buried, noted by Toner 2009: 110).

no effect on the flow of the story. In identifying such signals, I have drawn on a range of scholarship about mediaeval narrative, including Toner's later work (2005) on poetic authentication in mediaeval Ireland, Dennis Green's research into historical and fictional techniques in European epic and romance (Green 2002) and scholarship on authenticating devices in Icelandic sagas (O'Connor 2005; Ranković 2012), all of which concern the identification of *historia* as, in Isidore's words, *narratio rei gestae* (a narration of deeds done), of *res verae quae factae sunt* (true things that were done) (Lindsay 1911: I, xli.1 and xliv.5).[10]

Before continuing, it is important to emphasize how ephemeral these signals of historicity could be. Because most of them take the form of metatextual commentaries in the voice of the narrator or redactor, they are among the most textually unstable elements of any saga-text during transmission. Several of them are unique to one manuscript or hand, especially those positioned as colophons (and are thus evidence of reception as much as intention). We do not know whether such comments were frequent in the earliest written versions of the relevant sagas. My interpretations relate to the extant texts, and thus mostly to Middle and Early Modern rather than Old Irish saga-writing.

One obvious means of presenting a saga's events as authentic history was to underline the story's **transmission from an eyewitness report**. Toner (2005: 62) cites the conclusion of the Book of Leinster recension of *Tochmarc Ferbe*, where Conchobor reports the battle he has won to the poet Ferchertne and commissions *glónathe airchetail co cummair do chumnigud in sceóil sin* (a short poem to preserve that story in memory), after which the poem itself is narrated in full (Irische Texte III,2: 518; see also Shercliff 2018: 6 and 82). Similar devices conclude the TCD H.3.18 version of *Cath Airtig*, where the final battle is said to be commemorated by a poem attributed to Genann mac Cathbad, of which the first line is given (Best 1916: 179);[11] and, by implication,

[10] My translation draws heavily on Barney *et al* 2006: 67. Isidore's more detailed definitions of history are contradictory (compare Lindsay 1911: I, xl.3), and his prescriptions were less influential than is usually believed (Taranu & O'Connor 2022: 49–50, with further references). Nevertheless, the basic sense 'narration of what really happened' is common to most early mediaeval conceptualizations of *historia*, including Isidore's various formulations.

[11] The poem begins *Cath Airtich cuirsim ar lo* (We fought the battle of Airtech by day). Best (1916: 184 n. 2) commented that he had been unable to trace it elsewhere.

Aided Guill na Carbada, where Cú Chulainn gives gifts to the poets *co mbad marthanach ind echtra sin* (so that this adventure [of his] might be enduring) (Stokes 1893b: 430). As is well known, supernaturally resurrected participant-eyewitnesses are also employed to tell the story in a few Ulster sagas, such as Fergus in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* and Cú Chulainn in *Siaburcharpat Con Culainn* (Nagy 1997: 7–8; Toner 2005: 79–80; O'Connor 2016b).

A more frequent authenticating device is the **invoking of learned authorities or authoritative utterances**. As has often been noted, poems or stanzas, whether by famous named poets or unnamed sages (not necessarily eyewitnesses), are often quoted to authenticate significant information in a legendary-historical account, a function Proinsias Mac Cana referred to as 'evidential' (Mac Cana 1997: 111–112; Toner 2005). The Ulster sagas are no exception, from the *Táin* down to the shortest anecdotes. To cite just a few examples, the account of Cú Chulainn's burial in the first recension of *Aided Chon Culainn* – a reworking *c.* 900 of an eighth-century original – is supported with a poem by Cenn Fáelad (Kimpton 2009: 24–25); unattributed stanzas are found throughout *Aided Con Roí* to corroborate individual episodes, especially deaths (Best 1905); and amid the many verses spoken by participants in *Bruiden Da Choca*, heightening its emotional effect, both recensions also feature unattributed stanzas which make no claim to eyewitness authorship, authenticating individual details (Toner 2007: 136, 138–142, 228, 264, 272, 274). Interestingly, the Early Modern Irish second recension contains more of these than the first (they do not detract from its much smoother and more flowing narrative), and it makes the function of one such verse particularly explicit when describing how hostels functioned in early Ireland: *Gonadh dá fhoirgill sin as-beart an t-eólach sunna* (and it was to bear testimony to that that the sage spoke these verses) (Toner 2007: 242).[12]

Written texts, in prose or verse, are sometimes cited with a similar purpose in mind. As noted above, these are frequently mentioned in connection with variant accounts of an event. As Toner points out (2005: 70–71), a written version is not automatically favoured as the correct

Genann plays no role in the story's events, but he plays a significant sage-like role in the second recension of *Bruiden Da Choca* and seems to have been envisaged as Cathbad's successor at Emain Macha.

[12] I have slightly altered Toner's translation.

version; it is often simply mentioned (as in *Fled Bricrenn*, noted above) and sometimes overruled.[13] Nevertheless, sometimes the authority of a book is presented as decisive, as the variant accounts of Cormac's death in *Bruiden Da Choca* show. Instead of being narrated directly, Cormac's decapitation is told as a summary of what a well-known book says on the matter: *Is ed at-beir Lebor Dromai Snechtai coro díchendad Cormac* (the Book of Druim Snechta says that Cormac was decapitated), followed by a corroborative verse. The alternative account with no beheading is then summarized briefly, *acht cena is é in slicht aile fil isna lebraib* (but, nevertheless, it is the other version which is in the books) (Toner 2007: 134–136), referring back to the *Lebor Dromma Snechta* account and vaguely invoking books in the plural.[14] These allusions to written authorities could be extremely general. The conclusion of the Early Modern *Foglaim Con Culainn* (in the early eighteenth-century manuscript BL Egerton 106) confirms the bravery of the 'Red Branch' heroes and their superiority to Continental competitors by appealing to *áirmid uchdair 7 eolaigh* (the opinion of authors and sages) (Stokes 1908: 146). Here the general term for an authoritative tradition-bearer, *eólach*, is supplemented by a calque on Latin *auctor*, connoting written sources.

Such gestures persisted, indeed became more emphatic, in the Early Modern and Modern periods. The version of *Aided Chloinne Uisnig* incorporated into Geoffrey Keating's historical compendium *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (*History of Ireland*) cites place- and dynasty-names to support the story's attribution of power to the three sons of Medb by Fergus, concluding with a reference to a written poem:

> *cibé léighfeas an duain do rinne Lughair file Oiliolla darab tosach 'Clann Fhearghusa clann ós cách', do-ghéabhaidh go follus gurab mór an t-arrachtas is an neart do ghabhadar an triúr mac soin Meidhbhe i gConnachtaibh agus san Mhumhain. Bíodh a fhiadhnaise sin ar na tíorthaibh atá dinmnigthe uatha san dá chúigeadh soin.*
>
> whoever reads the poem composed by Lugair, Ailill's poet, beginning 'The children of Fergus, children beyond all', will plainly find that

[13] However, I do not accept Toner's claim that 'anonymous books have no known source and, therefore, cannot be authoritative' (Toner 2005: 70); some of his own examples contradict this. Earlier tradition-bearers, named or unnamed, could be presented as authoritative.

[14] Recension 2 lacks the final judgement about the books' contents (Toner 2007: 272).

> these three sons of Medb wielded great power and authority in Connacht and in Munster. This is proved by the territories named after them in these two provinces.
>
> (Comyn & Dinneen 1902–14: II, 194)[15]

The same passage, appealing to placenames, commemorative verse and written texts and using the language of legal witnessing, recurs in several later texts of the saga, including that in the probably eighteenth-century Edinburgh manuscript NLS Adv. 72.2.6 (Irische Texte II,2: 150).[16]

Probably the most frequent of authenticating devices is the **citation of a communally agreed tradition** such as a proverb or placename which allegedly derives from the story's events. This attitude is fundamental to the *dindṡenchas*, themselves explicitly framed as legendary-historical explanations of how places acquired their names and/or physical forms (Toner 2005: 73–74; Ó hUiginn 2014: 8). Sagas of all kinds, including Ulster sagas, maintained a continuous dialogue with the *dindṡenchas* tradition through the Middle Irish period, both drawing on them and being drawn on (see now Theuerkauf 2022: 87–124). Here the sagas contributed not just isolated names or synchronisms, but also circumstantial details of individual episodes which were treated as legendary history about the real world, not something made up by the fictive imagination.

Recension 2 of the *Táin* may lack most of the variant accounts which give Recension 1 its distinctive historiographic profile, but it contains numerous placename-explanations of a similar kind, as do both recensions of *Bruiden Da Choca*. Other sagas ground aetiological gestures in isolated placenames and episodes: Loch Mámhraith and Coirthe Lugdach in the first recension of *Aided Chon Culainn* (Kimpton 2009: 23), Indber mBicne and Bennchur in *Táin Bó Fraích* (Meid 1974: 15), Áth Chinn Chon in Bile in *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó* (Thurneysen 1986: 19), Snám Rathaind and Úaig Búana in *Fled Bricrenn* (Henderson 1899: 88 and 90), Glondáth, Crúfóit and Áth Imfóit in the second recension of

[15] My text and translation adapt Dinneen's, adjusting lenition-marks and punctuation.

[16] Mac Giolla Léith (1993: 45) tentatively dates this manuscript to the nineteenth century. My dating follows Mathis (2010: 140; see also 38 on Stokes's edition). On Keating's version of this saga see Mathis 2010: 157–160; Levin 2018: 12–13. I am grateful to Kate Mathis for sending me a copy of her dissertation.

Tochmarc Emire (van Hamel 1978: 63–64),[17] Ferta na hIngine in *Tochmarc Treblainne* (Meyer 1921b: 173), Sliab Dáil Buinni and Ciarraige in *Aided Chloinne Uisnig* (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 122) and Belut in *Aided Guill na Carbada* (Stokes 1893b: 422). As my selection shows, this feature remained current in the later sagas as well as the early ones.

A similar purpose could be served by citing well-known sayings or customs whose origin was explained by an event in the saga. Examples include explanations of how the saying *ríge Cind Berraide for Ultaib* (Cenn Berraide's kingship over Ulster) came about, in two texts of the A-recension of *Aided Chonchobuir* (Meyer 1906: 6); of the custom known as the *trenae samna* (literally 'thirds of Samain') cited at the beginning of *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon 1953: 1); and of the custom of the *tendál Samna* (Samain fire) cited in the Lebor na hUidre text of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (Best & Bergin 1970: 216).

Citing extant physical relics of the story could likewise authenticate it, whether these were landscape features (overlapping with the placename-evidence just mentioned) or other objects. Sometimes this authenticating function is made explicit using the word *inchomartha*, literally a sign or token, hence by extension a mute witness or memorial. *Mesca Ulad* alludes to stone columns made by the Ulaid to protect their horses from a snowstorm. Named Echlasa Ech Ulad, the columns are said to survive *cunad d'indchomarthaib in scéoil sin* (so they bear witness to that story) (Watson 1941: 14; Mac Gearailt 1986: 162). Graves and death-sites are prevalent focal points for these memorials. *Cath Ruis na Ríg* cites Lind Féic, the name of the pool where Féic drowned, as a lasting *innchomartha* 'sign, witness' of that event (Hogan 1892: 34). In the Lebor na hUidre version of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (in hand M), the cairn at Carn Lecca – consisting of all the stones brought to the cairn by the hostel's attackers before the battle and not taken away by a survivor

[17] The second recension of *Tochmarc Emire* is remarkable for reporting, as part of Cú Chulainn's riddling conversation with Emer, a lengthy sequence of *dindṡenchas* offering alternative explanations rooted in a more distant legendary past for many placenames around Ireland. The first recension is acephalous and contains only the last of these, whose historical frame of reference is extremely vague (Meyer 1890: 442); this version also lacks the place-name explanations cited in the saga proper, as well as the references to other versions mentioned above. See Toner 1998 on the relationship between the two recensions, and Theuerkauf 2019 for an insightful analysis of the saga's deployment of *dindṡenchas*.

– is made an eloquent witness to be cited by future storytellers: *Conid ed ármit eólaig in tsenchas sa conid fer cach clochi fil i Carnd Leca ro marbait dona díbergaib oc brudin* (and this is what those skilled in *senchas* recount, that for every stone in Carn Lecca one of the plunderers was killed at the hostel) (Best & Bergin 1970: 216).[18]

Elsewhere the authenticating function is underlined discreetly or left implicit. *Aided Fhergusa maic Róich* notes, of Fergus's grave by Findloch on Mag Ái where he was killed, that *atá a lige ann fós* (his grave is there still) (Meyer 1906: 34). The detailed account of the construction of Ferb's grave at the end of the Book of Leinster's prose version of *Tochmarc Ferbe*, along with indications of where it can be found, serves a similar purpose (Irische Texte III,2: 516; Shercliff 2018: 82). In wording very close to that of *Aided Fhergusa*, the A-text of *Aided Chonchobuir* cites two pillar-stones marking where Conchobar was buried: *Atá a lige and baile i torchair* (His grave is there where he fell). The texts of this recension in Edinburgh NLS Adv. 72.1.40 and NLS Adv. 72.1.5 further cite the survival of Mess Gegra's brain-ball which had caused Conchobar's death by popping out of his head: according to these manuscripts, as well as the D-recension of the saga, the brain-ball survives as *adart Buite* (St Buite's pillow), a prized holy relic at Monasterboice.[19] Some of the many placenames mentioned and explained in *Bruiden Da Choca*, too, are physically present. Cormac Connloinges's gravemound Clúain Duma is mentioned in the first recension (Toner 2007: 136), and the huge throwing-stone in the well of Cell Lasra, hurled by several warriors in the battle, is said to mark the present-day site of Bruiden Da Choca in both recensions (Toner 2007: 130–132 and 262–264) – like Mess Gegra's brain-ball, a lethal weapon turned source of refreshment.

Many Ulster Cycle stories strike us as incredible, and at least some probably struck mediaeval audiences as incredible too. Instances where an author or redactor attempts to **respond to anticipated scepticism**, whether by defending or rationalizing an unlikely episode or by admitting doubt about its veracity, indicate that the underlying expectation of these sagas was historically oriented. The best-known example of an admission of doubt is the Latin colophon to the Book of Leinster *Táin* (O'Rahilly, C. 1967: 136) mentioned above, where uncertainty is

[18] My translation draws partly on Borsje 2012: 296–297.
[19] On the Buite anecdote, see Clancy 1996: 91 and 108–115; Imhoff 2012: 46.

expressed over whether the story really deserves the expected title of *historia* and labels some episodes as being *figmenta poetica.* This could be seen as a way of salvaging the credibility of at least parts of the story at the expense of those parts which the audience might find unbelievable, thus maintaining the writer's credibility as a responsible redactor (O'Connor 2016b).[20] The reference in this colophon to demonic illusions (*praestrigia demonum*) also appears in the colophon to *Serglige Con Culainn*, where Otherworldly apparitions are rationalized as the deceptive illusions of demons in pre-Christian times (Dillon 1953: 29), thus saving the good faith of eyewitnesses thought to have reported these apparent events (Ó Cathasaigh 1994; O'Connor 2016b).

Tochmarc Luaine, in several of its versions, deals with anticipated scepticism about one of the *Serglige*'s most magically gifted personages, Manannán, in two ways. First, as in the glossary *Sanas Chormaic*, Manannán mac Lir's seemingly godlike powers are explained in a conventional euhemeristic way: he was a merchant and druid, with magic powers and/or the skill of a weather forecaster which caused people to mistake him for a god (Williams 2018: 251–252). In case that is not enough, the narrator then asserts that the Manannán featuring in his own story was not Manannán mac Lir but another man of the same name (Breatnach 1980: 11 and 27–28). Such contortions would be unnecessary in a work of fiction.

Some other sagas do not engage explicitly with sceptical responses, but display anxiety about the credibility of certain details. The B-recension of *Aided Chonchobuir* seems eager to explain how a king in pre-Christian Ireland would know about events in the Holy Land. The visit of the Roman consul Altus explained this in most versions of this story, but in case audiences wondered what a Roman consul was doing in Ireland, the narrator adds that Ireland was under Roman rule:

> *Ar ba cuma bátar rechtairea ríg Rómán in n-aimsir sin for medón in uetha 7 for indsip fuinid 7 turcbálai, co mba comderb isin mbith nach sgél n-airdirc forcumcad ann.*
>
> For at that time stewards of the king of the Romans held power over the centre of the world and over the islands of the west and east

[20] Similar strategies are visible in some of the more fantastic Icelandic sagas (O'Connor 2005).

> alike, so that every famous story/event that would happen there was equally known in the world. (Meyer 1906: 12)

Similarly, the citation of a placename-legend about Belach Muni in tSiriti in *Fled Bricrenn* may have been intended to authenticate the information just given about the shapeshifting powers of Úath mac Imomain (Henderson 1899: 96).

Finally, one example of a forthright denial of the veracity of one detail, as a means of salvaging the credibility of the whole, occurs in an editorial comment in the Egerton 1782 text of *De Chophur in Dá Muccida*, immediately after a reference to the Conmaicne standing up in the preceding passage. The redactor objects:

> *Ni fir am sin eter ar ni rabatar Conmacni for bith. Ar iss do thsiol Ferguso maic Roaig doib 7 isse ni rugad sidi hinn inbuid siden, acht hit iat na duini ro batar issin tir atat Conmaicni reimib anall. It e atrachtatar reimib.* (Irische Texte III,1: 240)
>
> However, that is not true, as the Conmaicne were not in the world. For it is from the line of Fergus mac Róich that they descended, and at that time he had not been born. Instead, they were the people who had previously inhabited the country which is now Conmaicne. It was they who stood up before them.

What is striking is that the redactor still included the offending passage. This suggests a desire not simply to ensure a chronologically and genealogically credible narrative, but also to display forensic skill in ensuring its credibility. *De Chophur* contained much that might have seemed (to some) even less credible than this moment of anachronism, namely the central sequence of multiple shapeshifting by the swineherds. In the absence of any satisfactory means of either rationalizing or denying the truth of those episodes, central to the text's claim to be a *remscél* to the *Táin*, the redactor might have felt it easier to demonstrate his or her historical credentials elsewhere in the story, gnawing at a peripheral detail rather than casting doubt on the central narrative.

Lastly, many sagas signal their historical intent by **anchoring the saga's events within a larger chronological framework**. Sometimes its events are tied into universal history, such as *Aided Chonchobuir*. In all its versions the death of Christ triggers the saga's *dénouement*, while in the A- and B-recensions this chronological placement is reinforced by

name-checking the Roman emperor whose consul was visiting Ireland at the time: Octavian in A, Tiberius in B (Meyer 1906: 10 and 12). This addition produced its own difficulties for the redactor of recension B, as discussed above.[21] Other sagas tie their events into Gaelic synthetic history (which, in the form of *Lebor Gabála* and various synchronistic texts, was already keyed into world history and chronology). In all versions which preserve the opening, *Mesca Ulad* locates its events in its first few lines as (in part) arising from the defeat of the Túatha Dé Danann by the Milesians (Watson 1941: 1; Mac Gearailt 1986: 158).

The commonest and best-known strategy of this kind is to tie the saga's events, chronologically and causally, to events narrated in another saga set around the same time, producing a connected relative chronology of Gaelic history (Poppe 2008; Burnyeat 2016). These include the many sagas and anecdotes whose redactors called them prequels or *remscéla* to the *Táin* (Burnyeat 2013a), but also the composition of sequels for better-known and widely accepted earlier narratives, sometimes adjusting aspects of the previous text's portrayals. So the opening sentence of *Tochmarc Luaine* positions it as a sequel to the death of Derdriu as related in *Longes mac nUislenn* and later reworkings: *iar n-éc Derdrindi uad* (after the death of Derdriu by him [Conchobar]) (Breatnach 1980: 6). *Cath Ruis na Ríg* begins with Conchobar at Emain Macha *ar cur chatha na Tana lais* (after he had been victorious in the battle of the *Táin*) (Hogan 1892: 2). The first sentence of *Bruiden Da Choca* in both recensions shows the Ulaid deliberating about a new king *íar ndíth Conchobair / iar n-éag Conchabhair* (after the death of Conchobar) (Toner 2007: 104 and 224), while *Cath Airtig* opens with a reprise of exactly the same situation in the same words, *ier ndith Corbmaic i mBruidin Da Cocæ* (after the death of Cormac in Bruiden Da Choca), underlining its status as sequel to *Bruiden Da Choca* (Best 1916: 172).[22]

This desire to weave saga-events into a connected chronological web may lie behind the appearance of Ulster warriors in Conaire's retinue in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and, conversely, the allusion to Conaire's

[21] On the significance of this Roman framing, see Imhoff 2012: 69–71.

[22] On this saga's historical ambitions see Ó hUiginn 2014: 14–18. The strategy discussed here, and the example from *Tochmarc Luaine*, are discussed in Poppe's essay cited in footnote 2.

death in the middle of the Ulster-centred events of *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon 1953: 8–9). Here the history of the kings of Tara is dovetailed with the history of the warring rulers of Ulster and Connacht. Lest we be tempted to see the intertextuality of the Ulster sagas only in terms of a multi-authored 'make-believe world' of characters and events, the historical underpinnings of such cross-references seem confirmed by the less ambiguous signals of historical intent listed above.[23]

Clearly, some of these techniques were used more than others. Some are more overt in their authenticating function than others. But this widespread scattering of historiographical signals across the corpus does indicate that numerous Ulster Cycle sagas were intended as history-writing, despite being highly imaginative and not remotely reliable as sources for the events they describe. It also confirms, and provides some perspective on, Fulton's cautionary remark about the diversity of narrative forms and purposes within the saga corpus. The sagas surveyed are diverse in style, scale, structure, tone and ideology, with differences at least equalling those between the *Táin* and *Togail Troí*. Yet their authors and redactors all tapped into the same baseline discourse of historicity.

What is particularly striking in the above survey is that later recensions of sagas, and new sagas composed in the late Middle Irish or Early Modern Irish periods – a period of saga-writing associated with increasingly self-conscious literary ambitions, a smoother narrative flow and a general willingness to experiment with 'romantic' modes and styles – do not shy away from these gestures of historical authenticity. On the contrary, such gestures remain an important feature of many of these sagas. Besides the examples already mentioned, it is the elegantly narrated Early Modern recension of *Bruiden Da Choca*, rather than its more obviously compilatory Middle Irish recension, that contains the greater number of corroborating verses. Similarly, the surviving part of the Old Irish version of *Tochmarc Emire* lacks most of the placename-lore and allusions to variant accounts found at the equivalent points in the text of the Middle Irish recension. We have seen that the language of source- and book-citation becomes more emphatic in some of the Early Modern

[23] The phrase 'make-believe world' is from Hillers 1999: 101, where, however, Hillers equates this world with 'mythology' and distinguishes it from the multi-work creations of modern novelists like Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*. Boyle (2022: 232) offers an analogy with the modern mythmaking of the 'Marvel Cinematic Universe', with its 'shared cast of characters'.

(and later) versions of these sagas. Such gestures cannot be dismissed as 'mere' literary conventions, because conventions reveal assumptions about the nature of these texts.

It would appear, then, that new forms of literary and rhetorical experimentation were carried out within, not in spite of, the historical expectations of saga narrative. Ruairí Ó hUiginn (2014) has shown that the gathering of new and old Ulster narratives into a connected web of legendary history gained momentum through the Middle and Early Modern Irish periods. His examples relate to Connacht localities, and to sagas I have not discussed here such as the second recension of *Táin Bó Flidais* and short tales about the deaths of Medb and Fergus. But the phenomenon seems widespread across the whole corpus. As Ó hUiginn points out, several of these later texts connect Ulster Cycle events to national history, prompted by the ongoing project of reworking *Lebor Gabála* and fixing events in relation to the reigns of kings of Tara such as Eochaid Feidlech and Conaire Mór. This aim persisted into the seventeenth century, when Keating incorporated versions of Ulster sagas into his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, as noted above for *Aided Chloinne Uisnig*.

Add to all this the well-known evidence, from the Middle Irish period onwards, of Ulster Cycle narratives being mined for historical information in annalistic chronicles, genealogical compilations, synchronisms and summaries of Gaelic history and presented in historiographic frameworks in prestigious manuscripts (Toner 2000b: 7; Poppe 2008: 44–47; Schlüter 2010; Ní Mhaonaigh 2017), and it becomes hard to avoid the conclusion that, whatever we might think of their plausibility or literary qualities, the Ulster sagas were intended, written and used as historical narratives throughout the Middle Ages.

Most of the signals of historicity surveyed above are also found in other branches of Gaelic saga literature, from mythological tales through to voyage-tales and stories about Finn mac Cumaill and various Gaelic kings and saints. Here we occasionally also encounter the question of allegory, whose relation to historical narrative deserves fuller discussion elsewhere;[24] but the overall continuity of narrative stance supports the view that Irish sagas in general were transmitted as historical narratives by the time they appear in our textual record. This view has received its most careful advocacy by Erich Poppe, who until very recently has

[24] On Gaelic secular allegorical narrative, see Poppe 1999b and Boyle 2016a.

focused his attention chiefly on evidence outside the saga-narratives themselves. In my view, Poppe's case is clinched by the fact that mediaeval Gaelic legal texts outlining the knowledge required of a poet explicitly refer to the traditional body of 'major and minor tales' as forming part of an overarching category of *stair*, an Irish calque on Latin *historia*: *Is i in sdair .i. na tana 7 na toghla 7 na tricha prímscel 7 na tri fichit foscel* (this is history, namely the cattle-raids and the destructions, and the thirty major tales and the sixty minor tales).[25] All this evidence can now be complemented by the evidence of narratorial signals in the extant sagas, as outlined above.

History as literature

There may seem little point in saying any more. But the way in which Poppe's conclusions (2014: 139) have been framed demands further discussion:

> the vast majority of medieval Irish prose narratives composed up to about the twelfth century were considered by authors and audiences alike to belong to a genre of medieval *historia* ... rather than to 'literature' with all the problematic modern connotations of this concept.

Here Poppe, too, draws a sharp line between history and literature (in the modern sense) and places sagas on the side of history. But in contrast to several scholars cited earlier, he does so without claiming or unwittingly implying any lack of literary artistry. On the contrary, he is careful to note (albeit in passing) that mediaeval historical narratives 'had to captivate the intended audience' by employing diverse stylistic and rhetorical techniques (Poppe 2008: 61) and that once their historical dimension is appreciated, the 'complementary aspect of narrative "history" as "literature"' is equally worthy of attention (Poppe 2007: 27). This point deserves fuller elaboration and I will return to it below.

However, while Poppe sees the Gaelic sagas as an often aesthetically ambitious variety of historical writing, he avoids labelling them as 'literature' (except with scare-quotes as above) because of the confusing,

[25] Poppe 2008: 52, citing Binchy 1978: III, 1106. Other legal texts are quoted and discussed in Poppe 2008: 52–54, drawing on unpublished work by Abigail Burnyeat. On *scél* in relation to *stair*, see also O'Connor *in press*.

value-laden conceptual baggage associated with that word in academic English usage today (Poppe 2014: 143–147). In its general sense, current since the nineteenth century, 'literature' has become a term applied to writing which claims a special kind of attention from its audience. It is (or demands to be) read not only for the information it may contain, but also – depending on one's priorities and outlook – for its formal or aesthetic attributes, its emotional power, imaginative play or semiotic openness, or simply for the pleasure it brings.[26] This concept of 'literature' can be applied to fiction and nonfiction alike. For this reason it poses few problems for my argument in this essay. Many of its individual criteria correspond to priorities that we know were shared by mediaeval authors and audiences. That said, its analytical usefulness as an overarching category is limited by the fact that it does not readily correspond to any named mediaeval category.

Less helpfully, from the early twentieth century onwards, academic disciplines of literary studies increasingly came to focus their special forms of literary attention more narrowly on a set of canonical genres dominated by fiction, poetry and drama.[27] Most nonfiction was implicitly excluded from the category 'literature', which has come to be seen as an autonomous aesthetic sphere floating free of direct reference to external reality. Besides making very little sense in its own right, defining literature in this prescriptive way excludes almost all mediaeval narrative prose as well as much of its poetry and drama, thus outlawing most of the texts to which mediaevalists generally pay literary-critical attention (compare Eagleton 2012: 1–105) – unless large swathes of mediaeval narrative are redefined as fiction. That is exactly what many twentieth-century scholars of epic, romance and saga did, especially those situated in literature departments.

It was this rarefied notion of literature which allowed the dichotomy 'historical texts versus literary texts' to make such a royal muddle of ancient, mediaeval and early modern literary studies, as well as seriously

[26] This is, in effect, a more detailed and updated rendering of the *OED*'s 'restricted sense' of 'very recent emergence' (from an early twentieth-century standpoint) denoting 'writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect': *OED*, s.v. *literature* 3(a), discussed in O'Connor 2017.

[27] Life-writing (biography, autobiography, personal memoirs, letters) has been a relatively recent addition to the fold.

hampering the study of modern nonfiction. Worse still, it has become current among many historians as well as literary scholars: it is used to police the boundary between these disciplines, as those who work at their intersection have learnt to their cost. Fortunately, if a 2017 UK survey is to be believed, many people seem relatively untouched by the distortions imposed by this notion of 'literature' and instead assume that whatever they read for pleasure is literature.[28] This is a much more sensible starting-point, although it is not the whole story.

The historically attentive reader of Gaelic sagas may recoil from all this confusion. It is tempting to follow Poppe's example and replace the label 'literature' with more precise categories such as 'narrative history' or 'textualized memory in narrative form'. But I believe the pragmatic advantages of the word 'literature' to outweigh the disadvantages when applied to Gaelic sagas, if it is used in an inclusive and critically aware manner. We know how important it was to many writers of narrative history, including saga-authors, to display rhetorical skill and move or entertain their audiences. To call such ambitions 'literary' in the broader sense does not do them a disservice, but simply translates those mediaeval priorities roughly into modern parlance. The words 'history' (equally anachronistic in its modern meaning) and 'narrative' do not quite capture the sense of imaginative play and artistic creativity which was fundamental to so much writing about the past in the Middle Ages. 'Literature' manifestly does. If the lazy equation of 'literature' with 'fiction' runs up against a reality-check in the form of the Ulster Cycle, the solution is not to abandon the concept of literature, but to reinstate a more critically responsible usage of the concept of 'literature'.

There is a parallel here with what I have argued in another field, concerning science writing with obvious literary ambitions (O'Connor 2017). Whatever its claims to truth may be, such writing does not ape literature or borrow its plumage; it *is* literature, and many individual examples have been enjoyed by generations of readers as literature, today as well as in previous periods. Acknowledging the (at least potential) place of this branch of nonfiction within the category 'literature' may seem a superficial gesture of taxonomy, but it opens up the possibility of reading such texts in a new and more aesthetically attentive

[28] Ipsos MORI and the Royal Society of Literature 2017. See especially question 2: 'What kinds of writing are generally considered to be literature?'

way: aware of larger-scale structures and rhythms as well as content or argument, and yielding pleasure as well as clearer understanding. Such sustained readings are still only finding their feet in the study of mediaeval Gaelic sagas. To suggest that these texts are not literary works, however justifiable in the name of terminological precision, may not encourage the further application of literary-critical methods to these texts.[29]

The literary nature of narrative history in the Middle Ages, mentioned in passing by Poppe, requires emphasis here, because misunderstandings about the limits of creativity in historical writing remain widespread in our field. *Historia* was a branch of rhetorical training rather than being a separate science or even discipline. Writing history of any scope beyond a mere list was not about transmitting 'facts' alone, still less 'for their own sake' as modern historians often frame their own motivations, but about reconstructing the past persuasively for diverse contemporary purposes (Coleman 1992: especially 274–323). Thus, narrative history used rhetorical devices to generate meaning, to move and persuade, to point up exemplary or cautionary messages. The past was the primary storehouse of examples to imitate or avoid (Morse 1991), so a narrative's exemplary purpose or shaping were not (in themselves) signs of fictionality as literary critics so often assume. To bring the past to new life and present it in a compelling narrative form, historians were allowed to invent speeches, speculate about causes and motivations, and use other forms of rhetorical presentation (Kempshall 2011). This seems to have been commonly accepted, even though individual historians argued with each other about what really happened just as they do today, and theorists differed about the limits of legitimate invention.

The specifically *imaginative* aspects of the compositional latitude claimed by mediaeval historians, and granted to them by theorists from Cicero and Quintilian onwards, deserve emphasis here. The best-known

[29] By way of analogy, the UK's leading periodical in literature and science studies, the *Journal of Literature and Science*, currently allows only article submissions on topics 'since the Scientific Revolution' (https://www.literatureandscience.org/, last accessed 21 January 2023). One can sympathize with the likely rationale (the term *scientia* was too broad before the Renaissance, including for instance theology) while regretting the exclusion of so many fascinating ancient and mediaeval writings about the cosmos or the natural world from discussion within this interdiscipline.

ancient and mediaeval theory of the difference between history and fiction is the division between *historia*, *argumentum* and *fabula* as discrete kinds of composition. As summarized by Isidore, these were defined respectively as true stories, made-up but verisimilar stories, and made-up and unbelievable stories (Lindsay 1911: I, xliv.5). When such distinctions were applied to historical composition, the situation became more complex. We see this when we turn away from pithy summaries like Isidore's and from historians' promises to eschew fable and stick to mere facts, and look instead at extended late-Antique and mediaeval discussions of the circumstances in which it was appropriate and necessary to incorporate half-credible rumours and different species of made-up material, both verisimilar and unbelievable (*fictio*, *figmentum*, *fabula*, *mendacium*), into a historical account. The work of Augustine and Boethius – especially if we look beyond the *City of God* and the *Consolation of Philosophy* – is particularly revealing of the continued centrality of rhetoric and its priorities to the writing of mediaeval history (Cullhed 2015). Indeed, its rhetorical and imaginative component was conventionally held to distinguish *historia* from forms such as annalistic chronicles (Kempshall 2011).

Mediaeval authors interpreted these subtle, often confusing and competing theoretical conceptualizations of historical narrative in diverse ways which are impossible to characterize as one coherent genre. The *Táin* may have been composed using 'normal medieval historiographical practices' (Toner 2000b: 6), but what constituted normality in this enterprise was continually renegotiated, depending on the genre of *historia* being written, the needs of different audiences and the reason for including the episode in question. Openness to an author's or redactor's creative input does, however, seem to have been a common denominator. To write an account of the past, especially one designed for secular or part-secular audiences, it was essential that it be both compelling and credible. Credibility had to be constructed using other techniques than simply recounting what happened. Plausible invention was also required. We associate that practice with the writing of fiction, but it was part of the historian's toolkit as well (it still is, albeit in different narrative manifestations, especially in histories aimed at a wider public). And to narrate a remote history for which reliable sources were largely lacking demanded wholesale invention on a scale that modern readers often find hard to see as anything other than fiction.

Hence the legendary and romance-riddled profile of so many mediaeval histories of the remote past. We can see this artistic licence put into practice in much European history-writing from Antiquity to the high Middle Ages, both in Latin and in the European vernaculars (Partner 1977; Goffart 1988; Morse 1991; Mortensen 2012). Mediaeval narrative history about recent or remote times alike – whether by Gregory of Tours, Paul the Deacon, Bede, Dudo of St Quentin, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Saxo Grammaticus, Froissart or the French Crusade chroniclers – was designed to grip, move and entertain its audiences, to display literary skill and historical discernment, to fill gaps in knowledge that previous sources left open, and to contest previous interpretations. It brought the past back to life to shape their audiences' lives in the present. When dealing with remote periods, its authors made liberal use of invention, employing narrative patterns drawn from folklore, mythology, epic and romance.

This much is obvious in the early books of Saxo's and Paul's histories of the Danes and Lombards. But despite their manifest inventiveness, nobody denies that these are works of history-writing, because they are (broadly speaking) chronicles and therefore written within an approved historiographical genre. *Lebor Gabála* is often seen in the same way by Celticists: terms such as 'pseudo-history' and 'synthetic history' recognize the historical pretensions of this panoramic survey of Gaelic prehistory (Carey 1994b). The same recognition should be extended to the smaller-scale and/or more chronologically focused narratives about the distant past that we find in vernacular sagas, since the same challenges applied here too.

The recovery of the past narrated in the Ulster sagas (unlike the past narrated in *Togail Troí*) was unaided by prestigious Classical or late-Antique literary works and relied on oral tradition, *fama* and *rumor* at least as much as on written sources. Here the scope and the need for creativity must have been very wide indeed, whether to point up moral lessons or dramatize the story's meaning (common to all kinds of history), or to fill gaps in the historical record and suggest credible causes and outcomes for the events narrated. As Boyle puts it (2022: 296), the saga-authors 'took the liberties of novelists' in order to narrate an otherwise almost totally irrecoverable past. A still greater degree of creative latitude must be factored in if we follow Miles's argument (2011) that the authors and redactors of longer sagas such as the *Táin* were ambi-

tious to imitate the compositional techniques of Classical epic, where a virtuoso mixture of *historia* and *figmenta poetica* was to be expected, yet within an overarching expectation of historical truth (Poppe 1995; Clarke 2009).[30] Such a mixture is emphasized throughout the Servian commentaries on Virgil's *Aeneid* which were much studied in early and central mediaeval Gaeldom (Dietz 1995: 88–92).

The incorporation of plausible (and implausible) invention into histories of ancient times would only begin to be consistently addressed as a problem for historiography when its theory and practice were reconfigured from the sixteenth century onwards, under the influence of a whole-hearted adoption of Aristotelian empiricism and a hardening of the boundary between history and imaginative writing or 'poetry' (Kempshall 2011: 479–534). It was not fully outlawed until well into the Enlightenment (Levine 1987). As part of this reconfiguration, domains distant in time or space which had once been the realm of the creatively minded historian were increasingly given over to the writers of heroic fiction, a narrative mode which gained respectability and territory from history's losses (Nelson 1973). The rise of the historical novel could not have happened without the decline of legendary history. Both use the imagination to bring the past to life, but whereas the historical novel does so on the understanding that not everything in the story is to be taken as literally true, legendary history claims to tell the truth about the past to the best of the author's ability.[31]

This is why it is both instructive and confusing when Carney writes that the *Táin*, with its blend of known fact and imaginative fiction, possesses 'the truth of a historical novel' (1983: 116), or when Boyle refers to sagas' invention of Gaelic prehistory as 'historical fiction' (2022: 296).[32] The problem is with the labels 'novel' and 'fiction'. In their compositional freedom, sagas do resemble novels and other kinds of fiction; but in terms of historical purpose and function they are utterly different.

[30] On vernacular epic as historiography in mediaeval Europe more generally, see Duggan 1986 and Taranu 2021 (I am grateful to Catalin Taranu for sending me an early version of the latter).

[31] The relationship between the modern historical novel and historiography is more complicated and ambivalent than my summary suggests (see Mayer 1987 and 1997), but it does depend on a basic premise of the fictionality of the novel as a genre.

[32] The sagas' mixture of historical fact and imaginative 'fantasy' is similarly assessed in Ó Cuív 1963 and Byrne 1974.

Inventing a historical account is not the same thing as composing a work of fiction. Properly speaking, fiction involves a tacit agreement between narrator and audience that the story is not true, not an attempt to pass off a made-up story as literally true. The inventiveness of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* still sometimes earns it the label of 'fiction' despite abundant evidence that he saw himself as an authoritative historian of legendary Britain, and was recognized as such by most of his contemporaries and successors. His critics expressed doubts about individual episodes by lambasting them *figmenta* or *fabulae*, but in the sense of 'lies' rather than what we would call 'fiction' (Green 2002: 169–175).

Similar questions arise when Carney (1983: 125) calls *Longes mac nUislenn* 'a fiction composed in the Old Irish period' in order to 'whitewash' the character Fergus mac Róich who had appeared in a bad light in earlier accounts. Carney's argument about the saga's purpose makes sense only if *Longes mac nUislenn* was intended to be received as a true story, persuading its audience that Fergus was not so bad after all. What Carney meant was not 'fiction' but 'made-up history'. That sounds less attractive and more duplicitous than fiction, but what Ó Corráin and others have shown about the pliability of mediaeval genealogies is no less true of legendary histories. Making up or adjusting stories is what historians of the distant past did, often in good faith – which meant, for them, for good reasons of interpretation, illustration, patronage or simply making the story more effective. 'Constructed', 'imaginative' or 'novelistic' history would be closer to the mark.

Here I take issue with German literary historians' concept of 'functional fiction', coined to refer to invented passages within purportedly historical writings which are not thereby deemed fictional. As one of its most perceptive users, Sonja Glauch, points out, 'Funktionale *fictio* ist fiktionalitätsneutral' (functional fiction is neutral as regards fictionality) (Glauch 2014: 101–107).[33] This being so, I would suggest that the term 'fiction', even with the qualifier, is not appropriate for such creativity, because it blurs the vital distinction between the stance of narrating a supposedly true story and that of narrating a story which was not to be taken as literally true. Artistic licence is not always a producer of fiction.

[33] I thank Erich Poppe for drawing my attention to Glauch's study.

A helpful way of conceptualizing artistic licence as applied to narratives about very ancient times is the concept of 'mythopoiesis', which Lars Boje Mortensen has applied to the work of Geoffrey, Saxo Grammaticus and other inventive historians of the distant past. In Mortensen's view, such writers (like Virgil before them) were granted by their patrons and audiences something not unrelated to the poet's conventional 'licence to lie': a historian's authority to narrate and recreate the legendary past in the most appropriate way, with 'a certain amount of fabrication ... agreed upon in the peer group'. They were 'socially empowered to make choices for local mythopoiesis: if anything should be said authoritatively about the distant past, they were the professionals to do it' (Mortensen 2012: 133).

This way of taking seriously both the inventive and truth-telling aspects of mediaeval history-writing is worth applying to sagas as well. Most sagas are anonymous, so we cannot talk here about authorial prestige as we can with Geoffrey or Saxo, but the written tradition of *senchas* itself was clearly treated as authoritative in its own right up to Keating's day. We may also be able to draw on insights from studies of other vernacular traditions of anonymous but authoritative historical narrative in the vernacular. Poppe (2008: 2014) suggests the relevance of Icelandic sagas in this connection (compare O'Connor 2022a). Equally helpful comparators are provided by the European *chansons de geste*, epic narratives which are usually viewed as a kind of 'popular historiography' but whose authors played fast and loose with the historical traditions they retold (Duggan 1986). Here, as in the Gaelic sagas, we find a wide range of styles, tones, structures and ideologies, from the comic romp of *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* to the damning exposé of royal power in *Renaud de Montauban* and the idealizing high tragedy of the *Chanson de Roland*.[34] Yet all claimed to tell true stories about the past.

The idea that imaginative, playful, aesthetically ambitious narrative cannot really be considered history is surprisingly resilient. Even Ó Corráin, who did so much to illuminate the historical fabrication engaged in by mediaeval genealogists and saga-authors alike, moved in the direction of 'art for art's sake' when turning to the sagas most celebrated for their literary qualities. In a now-classic formulation which tacitly evokes T. S. Eliot's 'tradition and the individual talent', he referred

[34] For discussion of these texts, see Kay 1995 and Burgess 1988.

to these texts as 'products of the individual artist working within the tradition of the learned classes', producing works which, though 'much admired' today, were 'incidental for the most part' to the learned classes' 'main function' (Ó Corráin 1986: 143). Or, in more celebratory vein:

> the imaginative re-creation of that past ... produces a literature which, in time, frees itself from the historical matrix in which it is formed and becomes progressively an autonomous work of art, responding not to any one narrow historical situation but to broader and increasingly universal human situations .... a literature pleasing to the sensibilities of many who evidently cared little for the historical and genealogical material contained in it (Ó Corráin 1985: 85)

The implication is that historical writing evolves into literature only when it pulls free of historical purposes and political needs. Yet, as Ó Corráin elsewhere noted, the most durable texts were those which could continue to function on several levels. One of the main purposes of writing history in the first place was to encourage reflection on timeless truths (as well as, quite simply, to delight audiences). F. J. Byrne (1974: 148–149) reminds us that 'pure fiction' was extremely rare in the saga tradition. Even the late, romantic and essentially made-up Ulster saga *Caithréim Chongail Chláiringnigh* turns out to serve a very specific 'pseudo-historical purpose' for its fourteenth-century patrons, as well as exercising a more general appeal for wider audiences.

Conclusion

If saga-writing was a kind of history-writing which offered skilled practitioners a degree of compositional freedom resembling that of a novelist today, two consequences suggest themselves. First, the 'saga as history' model poses no threat to literary scholars and imposes no constraints whatsoever on literary-critical analysis. The idea that these stories were designed by their authors and redactors (in their surviving forms) to narrate a real past, not a fictitious one, simply gives us one more level on which to appreciate the sagas' meanings for their audiences. It does not shelve the question of their literary nature, since history-writing inhabited a very wide range of genres in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, it sharpens the need for literary analysis.

Second, when constructing our literary histories, there is no need to create a kind of special 'über-literary' status for sagas which parody or play with the tradition's conventions. For Ó Corráin, *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó* was a 'sophisticated parody of the heroic genre', the final stage of evolution away from the genre's historical roots which should not be mistaken for genuine 'Irish learning' (Ó Corráin 1985: 86). Developing this line of thinking, Poppe has invoked the notion of an 'activation and vindication of a positive category of "fiction"' in the twelfth century to speculate on the possible emergence of 'pure [i.e. autonomous/fictitious] literature' within the Irish saga tradition around this time, in the shape of 'self-conscious literary' sagas like the B-version of *Mesca Ulad* and *Fled Bricrenn* whose carnivalesque humour 'subvert[s] the truth-value of *historia*' (Poppe 2008: 62–63; Poppe 2012).

The danger here, again, lies in collapsing 'literature' with 'fiction'. Fiction is not more literary than history, but is literary in a different way. Nor need parodic or farcical aspects of a story exclude historical intent or reception. Such an exclusion would have made sense to Eusebius and Bede, and perhaps even to the main scribe of the Book of Leinster; but not to the authors of *chansons de geste* like the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* or Icelandic family sagas like *Bandamanna saga*.[35] Mixing jest with earnest was a common mediaeval practice, in history as well as fable. In *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*, the B-version of *Mesca Ulad* and *Fled Bricrenn*, the narratorial gestures towards placename-lore and other signals of historicity mentioned above suggest that these sagas, too, were transmitted as *historia*.

Some may object that such signals of historicity must be mock-authentications in the Rabelaisian manner. But the difference between Rabelais and the Gaelic sagas in this respect is best demonstrated by simply quoting the best-known example from Rabelais himself, the opening chapter of *Gargantua* (1534) in which the fictitious 'editor' claims to have discovered a manuscript of his hero's genealogy and history within a gigantic tomb. In the tomb were found

[35] Poppe himself cites the *Pèlerinage* too (2008: 62), but as evidence of a carnivalesque subversion of historical truth. Its relationship with *chanson de geste* conventions is still much debated (Burgess 1998: xliv–xlvi).

> neuf flaccons ... des quelz celluy qui on mylieu estoit couvroit un gros, gras, grand, gris, joly, petit, moisy livret, plus, mais non mieulx sentent que roses.
>
> En icelluy fut la dicte genealogie trouvée, escripte au long de letres cancelleresques, non en papier, non en parchemin, non en cere, mais en escorce d'ulmeau, tant toutesfoys usées par vetusté qu'à poine en povoit on trois recognoistre de ranc.
>
> Je (combien que indigne) y fuz appellé, et, à grand renfort de bezicles, practicant l'art dont on peut lire lettres non apparentes, comme enseigne Aristotele, la translatay… (Calder *et al*. 1970: 23–24)

> nine flagons ... of which the one in the middle covered a huge, stout, big, grey, pretty little mouldy little book smelling more but not better than roses.
>
> In this was the said genealogy found, written out at great length in chancery letters, not on paper, not on parchment, but on elm bark; these, however, so worn with age that you could hardly make out three in a row.
>
> I, unworthy as I am, was summoned to it, and, with great reinforcement from spectacles, practising the art by which one can read invisible letters, as Aristotle teaches, I transcribed it… (Frame 1991: 8)[36]

Unlike the Gaelic examples, Rabelais sends out some fairly obvious signals that he is joking: a source which is both huge and small, both pretty and putrid, and is mostly illegible cannot be taken seriously as a token of the story's authenticity. He was parodying a genre of heroic romance which took itself extremely seriously at all times. The Ulster sagas, on the other hand, were a form of (sometimes) heroic narrative which already often delighted in undercutting the glory of the past depicted, in both serious and comedic veins, but were still oriented and received as history.

One of Poppe's prime examples of a burlesque undermining of literary expectations in the B-recension of *Mesca Ulad* is its hyperbolic description 'der ökologischen Konsequenzen der nächtlichen Fahrt der Ulsterleute für die Landschaft Irlands' (of the ecological consequences of the Ulaid's night-journey for the Irish landscape), with their chariots carving valleys into every hill and uprooting forests (Poppe 2012: 152). He is surely right that listeners would have laughed, but I am not sure that they would have felt their expectations dashed, given the

landscape-shaping feats attributed to the same people in other Ulster sagas. Its comic verve need not have been felt to negate its historicity. One Middle Irish author treated this very same journey-episode as historical by building a *dindṡenchas* on it (the prose *dindṡenchas* of Luibnech), referring to it as a *baeth-réim* (crazy journey) (Watson 1941: 48–49). For this author it was the Ulaid who were out of order, not their historian. Another Middle Irish author summarized the equally uproarious tale of Mac Dathó's pig in order to explain the origins of the name Mag Léna (Thurneysen 1986: 23–24). Ó Corráin (1985: 86) has accused writers like these of having 'missed the point of the jape', but who is to say that nobody was laughing? History could be hilarious.

It would be perverse to deny that self-conscious fiction could have been something that individual saga-authors played with. Recent studies of *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* suggest that they did (Poppe 2012: 153–155; Burnyeat 2013b)[37] – but that text is perhaps the only pre-modern Irish saga which can withstand a comparison with Rabelais's narrative voice. Such examples deserve to be given credit as special cases, just as the self-consciously fictional romances of Hartmann von Aue in the late twelfth century were not the first steps of an escalator moving steadily upwards to culminate in the modern novel, but a radical but short-lived moment in the long history of European romance as another imaginative variety of legendary history (Green 2002: 200–201). Even the modern English novel itself had to be presented, in all seriousness, as true history-writing for several generations before its status as fiction could be openly acknowledged as a positive aspect of its makeup (Day 1987; Mayer 1997).

One last point in defence of Gaelic legendary histories as 'literature'. That word comes with unhelpful baggage, but so do all words that mean much to the culture at large. What mediaevalist fond of their Chaucer or their Chrétien is going to go out of their way to read an interesting work of textualized narrative *memoria* from mediaeval Ireland, unless they are being paid to do so? The concept of 'literature' resonates powerfully with students and the reading public as well as with researchers. Some of us owe our livelihoods to this fact: it is one reason why universities

[37] Erich Poppe's contribution to the volume in which Burnyeat's essay is included explores similar issues. I am grateful to him for sharing it in advance of its eagerly anticipated publication.

still have departments of literature. But Gaelic sagas, and the Middle Ages generally, are now somewhat endangered in this arena. If literature did not really exist before the modern period, why not (one can imagine the suits asking) bow to patterns of student demand and focus our literature teaching on the modern period only? The answer is that literature did exist in the Middle Ages, and in these islands it was even more fundamental to the production of knowledge than it is today.

In my view, the solution to the unhelpful baggage which goes along with the category 'literature' is not to abandon that category to its abusers, but to keep it under surveillance. If we avoid the pitfall of attempting to substitute umbrella-terms for critical tools, and remain alert to our own uses of the term, then it can prove an essential tool of general communication, a means of opening doors and inviting attention. As the poet said: unattended baggage will be removed, and may be destroyed.

Christianity and the Ulster Cycle: The case of Conchobar mac Nessa

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Acceptance of Christianity in Ireland brought new values and new cultural forces. Yet there was no traumatic social disruption, as religious conversion was accomplished in a process of peaceful assimilation rather than through conquest and imposition. From about the sixth century onward, the challenge for Irish learned men was to reconcile continuity and change, to find the means of accommodating Ireland's inheritance from its past within a new Christian dispensation. The making of written versions of narratives of the pre-Christian world placed them in a medium and a context linked with the new religion. This process engendered its own narrative commentary. Textual representations of encounter between long-lived or resuscitated survivors of the pagan era and Irish saints authorized the communication of testimony about the past to the Christian world. Ancient witnesses were portrayed as receiving baptism from their Christian interlocutors. Irish saints' Lives also told of the baptisms of pagans whose natural goodness had led them to belief. (Nagy 1997: 1–22; Carey 1999: 1–38). Instructive as were such parables of integration, however, many matters remained problematic. While there may have been support for Christian transmission of narratives about the past, how were the pagan heroes of such narratives to be regarded? Did their celebration entail approval of their non-Christian way of life? It appeared that the possibility of baptism had been granted to certain individuals born into heathendom. But what about the salvation of the many other unconverted ancestors and heroic exemplars whose stories had transcended the barriers of time and religious change?

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 37–53.

With such considerations in mind, we turn our attention to tales of the Ulster Cycle. References in the early Irish laws to prominent figures in the tales suggest that in the eighth century the Ulster cycle had acquired 'an acknowledged pre-eminence right across Ireland' (Breatnach 2005: 362–7; Charles-Edwards 2015: 98). It may be inferred also that the era of the tales was considered a point of reference by legal and historical scholars (Qiu 2017; Charles-Edwards 2000: 519; *Chronicon Scottorum* s.a. [432]); *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 482). Yet in certain Christian circles the Ulster cycle era represented, not a relevant past, but a pagan past which was being repudiated. At the beginning of the ninth century, the verse prologue to the *Martyrology of Óengus* contrasted the desertion of sites of former glory like Emain Macha and Crúachu with the flourishing of Christian churches (Stokes 1905: 23–7, lines 157–237). Mention of King Ailill in association with Crúachu identified the story-world of the Ulster Cycle as an exemplar of a heathen world which Christianity had superseded (Stokes 1905: 24, line 177). The *Martyrology* view, however, came from a milieu of ascetic monasticism (Follett 2006: 117–21, 171–215). Around the time of its production another illustrative text, on the finding of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, was compiled. This assigned the restoration of this central Ulster Cycle tale to the Christian era, the text's deficient state being laid at the door of its traditional poet-custodians. While there are differences between the five surviving manuscript versions of the *Finding*, their collective testimony suggests ecclesiastical approbation for the raising from his grave of Fergus, a leading character in Ulster saga, so that he might recount the tale in its entirety (Murray 2001: 17–23; Corthals 2008 1–9). We see a story-pattern noted already, in which a revenant or survivor imparted testimony from pre-Christian times, thereby validating it for a Christian epoch. In the case of the *Finding of the Táin*, this resulted in an imperfect tale being made good. Here, the importance of recording the past justified the preservation and transmission of tales of the heroic era.

Between the foregoing poles of negativity and affirmation, a broad spectrum of responses to the Ulster cycle by Christian *literati* may be envisaged. Close examination of each individual narrative is necessary to elicit its outlook. The present examination focuses on *Aided Chonchobair* (hereafter *ACon*), a narrative concerned with the death and post-mortem destiny of a leading protagonist of the Ulster tales, the king, Conchobar mac Nessa.

The content of *ACon*

A cumulative view of its diverse versions offers the following story-outline:

- The brain of Mes Gegra, a trophy of the Ulaid, is stolen by the Connacht warrior Cet mac Mágach for use against them.
- Cet instigates hostilities and persuades the Connacht women to lure the Ulster king, Conchobar, into his sights.
- Cet launches the calcified brain from his sling at Conchobar, embedding two thirds of it in his skull.
- A physician declares that the king would die if the missile were removed. If it were left, Conchobar would survive, but would be blemished. The Ulstermen decide that a blemished ruler would be preferable to enduring his death.
- Forbidden from active pursuits or emotional engagement, Conchobar remains in a state of stasis for seven years until he is given news of Christ's crucifixion.
- The king, greatly moved by Christ's fate, declares himself willing to attack those responsible.
- Conchobar's reaction leads to the dislodgement from his skull of the embedded brain of Mes Gegra, but his death as a supporter of Christ gains him salvation.

Admittedly, the foregoing synopsis is a construct, based on the aggregate of existing texts. Carney (1955: 296) suggested that in an original traditional tale, Conchobar dies after being struck by Mes Gegra's brain, but he is 'revived in a most unconvincing fashion in order to play a part in what is essentially a Christian story'. We have no 'original traditional tale' for purposes of comparison. However, the term *aided* in the title suggests that the story's generic categorization may provide a key to understanding its structure. Translated as 'violent death' as opposed to death through natural causes, *aided* may be better characterized as 'untoward or untimely death'. Though violence may be involved, it seems to be secondary to the significance of a life cut short. While the category of *oitte/ aideda* 'death-tales' is included in the Book of Leinster listing of Irish tale types, (Mac Cana 1980: 44; Toner 2000b: 88–120), it appears also in an earlier context, in the Old Irish text of *The Death of*

Cú Chulainn. There, verse attributed to the seventh-century poet, Cend Fáelad mac Ailella, is said to be originally located *i nAidedaib Ulad,* 'in the Death-tales of the Ulstermen' (Kimpton 2009: 24,43, 61).

Previous studies of Ulster death-tales from the Book of Leinster tale-list (Melia 1977–78), and from the collection in the manuscript NLS Adv.MS 72.1.40 (Clancy 2008), differ in approach, but both take a collective view of the tales. In such studies there is a critical tendency 'to take the martial hero as the norm' (Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 9). However, the starting point for discussion of *Aided Chonchobair* is that it is a narrative about royal fate. Though a king-hero may display aspects of martial heroism, narratives of kingship are primarily concerned with the king's fulfilment of his duty to his realm, the success of which is materially manifested in the fruitfulness of the land and in the physical perfection of the ruler. The *topos* that a physical blemish constitutes a disqualification from kingship is long engrained in Irish ideology (McCone 1990: 121–4). Its resonance in an Ulster context into the historical period is indicated by the citation in the seventh-century law-text, *Bechbretha,* of the case of Congal Caéch (d. 637), an Ulster ruler said to have been disqualified from the kingship of Tara after being blinded in one eye by a bee-sting (Charles-Edwards & Kelly 1983: sections 30–35). In early Irish narrative examples, the blemishing of a king (Cross 1969: P 16.3; Jaski 2000: 82–6) may lead to a hiatus in rule, often specified as seven years (Cross 1969: Z 71.5.4,5; Jaski 2000: 86–7). The final resolution may involve a king's return or his death, the outcome apparently dependent on his culpability for his injury.

What of *ACon*? A possible *comparandum* to assist its elucidation is the death-tale of another Ulster king, Fergus mac Leite, preserved for its legal content in material associated with the *Senchas Már* (Binchy 1952; McLeod 2011). The death-story recounts how Fergus, defying an injunction against entering a lake, encounters a monster so terrifying that the king's face becomes permanently contorted by fear. His followers conspire to keep the news of this blemish from him so that he continues in his kingship for seven years, until a mistreated servant taunts him about his appearance. Thereafter Fergus plunges again into the monster-infested lake. After an epic confrontation, he emerges victorious over the beast, but dies straightaway from his wounds.

Despite their differences, the death-tales of the kings, Conchobar and Fergus, show a common pattern:

- The king becomes blemished through a character-fault of his own, vanity on the part of Conchobar, on being importuned by the Connacht women, arrogance on the part of Fergus, when he ignored a ban on entering Loch Rudraige.
- The Ulstermen chose to retain the blemished king, but he remains in a diminished state for seven years, inactive in Conchobar's case, in ignorance, in the case of Fergus.
- A catalyst precipitates the king's transition from his situation.
- The king loses his life as a result of the ensuing events, but in so doing he retrieves honour or gains credit.

This paradigm of a royal *aided* counters Carney's view of the structure of *ACon*. We may suppose that, whatever prior narrative explanation accounted for Conchobar's abandonment of his enforced inactivity, this is replaced by an account of the king's disturbance on hearing news of the Crucifixion. Thus, *ACon* retains the structural framework which it shares with narratives like that of Fergus mac Leite, while transforming the context of Conchobar's death.

Versions of *ACon*

The number and diversity of the surviving copies of *ACon* is indicative of substantial engagement with the tale (Imhoff 2012: 43–4; *Clavis* #963). 'The death of Conchobar' survives in versions attested in ten Irish-language manuscripts as well as in a single Latin source.

The present analysis revises those of Meyer (1906), and of Imhoff (2012). It takes the view that on formal grounds *ACon* presents itself in three versions:

- A short version which assumes knowledge of the full story, but which is concentrated on the final section, Conchobar's reception of news of the Crucifixion, and his ensuing death.
- A long version which narrates the lead-up to the king's wounding as well as the circumstances of his death. While two manuscript witnesses end in advance of the king's death, the sum of evidence indicates that this abbreviation is secondary.
- A versified account, which changes the perspective from which

events are recounted, though ultimately its source seems related to version 2.

In the categorization of the formal properties of the various renderings of *ACon*, there is a further compositional element to be considered. A discourse in formal speech called *retoiric* is attested in two manuscript witnesses to the short Version 1, and in one manuscript of the long Version 2 (Corthals 1989). This will be discussed further below.

Version 1 is found in manuscripts RIA 967 (23 N 10), pp. 16–28 (N) and in RIA 476 (23 O 48 = *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*), f. 105ra (F). A Latin textual witness is found in the Brussels *Codex Salmanticensis*, f. 90a, col. 236–7 as an interpolation in the *vita* of St Ailbe (S). For published texts of N and F, see Meyer 1906: pp. 12–17. For S, see Heist 1965: pp. 118–19, #3, Ó Riain 2017: pp. 60–61,#3.

Version 2 manuscript witnesses are TCD 1339 (The Book of Leinster), pp. 123b-124b (L), RIA 1234 (C i 2), ff. 5v–8r (C), NLS Adv. 72.1.5, ff. 7v–8r (Ea), and NLS Adv. 72.1.40, pp. 1–3 (Eb). For published text of L, see Best *et al.* 1954–83, II: pp. 458–60; For L with variants from Eb, see Meyer 1906: pp. 4–11.

Version 3, in eleven verse quatrains, is attested in TCD 1339 (The Book of Leinster), f. 150, with a copy in the seventeenth-century RIA manuscript 1080 (B iv 2), f. 150a (V). The verse in RIA 1223 (D iv 2), f. 52rb is prefaced by a brief prose summary of *ACon* (Va). The prefatory prose only is found in Bodleian manuscript Laud Misc. 610, f. 42b (Vb). For a published text of V, see Best *et al.* 1954–83, III: pp. 633–34. For Va see Meyer 1906: pp. 18–21; for Vb, see Meyer 1921a: p. 7.

The oldest of the manuscript witnesses is the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, but the majority date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A detailed discussion of the manuscript tradition by Helen Imhoff (2012), and an unpublished dissertation by Kobel (2015) have advanced the previous work of Meyer (1906). Such analysis along conventional text-critical lines offers a valuable view of interrelationships between the various textual witnesses. The focus of the present study, however, is to seek to elicit how the primary narrative of *ACon* was compiled and received in pre-Norman Ireland.

The genesis of Version 1

While Imhoff's chart of the distribution of content across manuscript witnesses (2012: 45–6) provides a comparative overview, we must distinguish between elements belonging to the structural core of the story, and those which constitute additional episodes. Setting aside the central narrative of Conchobar's injury and *aided*, what does the evidence reveal? The king's reaction to news of the Crucifixion, his declared readiness to do battle on behalf of Christ, presents as a striking common thread through the various versions of *ACon*. This is expressed verbally or with words and physical action combined. Moreover, the *retoiric*, mentioned above, is framed entirely as a first-person speech on this theme. We may infer tentatively, therefore, that an articulated wish to take counteraction on behalf of Christ is a significant feature of the Christianized *ACon*.

The *retoiric* expression of this theme is, indeed, the oldest in linguistic terms. Thanks to the work of Johan Corthals, the text has been edited and assigned to a date around the year 700 AD (Corthals 1989; 1996). The speaker of the *retoiric* is unidentified, and there is nothing in the content which links it specifically with Conchobar or with the Ulster Cycle. It is a sustained soliloquy, declaring regret at not having been present at the Crucifixion to assist Christ. The speaker acknowledges that his action would have been futile, fatal for himself, as well as contrary to the choice of Christ to suffer (Corthals 1989: 46–7, stanzas 1–7). The realization does not end his turmoil at not having stood against the Crucifixion (*ibid*, stanzas 8–10), but he accepts that his willingness to die is acceptable to Christ, who heals him. Yet the poem closes by echoing the opening statement of regret at not having requited the Lord (*ibid*, stanzas 11–13).

Accepting the view of Corthals (1996: 20–23; 36) that the *retoiric* is a self-contained composition produced in a context of familiarity with late Antique and early Christian Latin works, we may seek in such a milieu for thematic as well as formal influence. Helen Imhoff (2012: 48–9, 70, 76–9) has drawn attention to the view of Szovérffy that the Latin apocryphal works *Cura Sanitatis Tiberii* and *Vindicta Salvatoris* were possible influences on *ACon*. However, she has pointed out various difficulties which the proposition involves (2012: 77–9). The concept of taking arms on behalf of Christ, expressed in the *retoiric* and in *ACon*

itself, appears more closely aligned in content with another apocryphal work, circulating in Ireland from an early date. This is the story of Abgar, best-known from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, (1.13, II.1), which was transmitted to Ireland in Latin translation by Rufinus (McNamara 1975: 58–9). The *Ecclesiastical History* relates how news of Christ's miracles reached Abgar, ruler of Edessa, who was suffering from disease, whereupon he sent a letter to Jesus, asking for healing, and offering Jesus refuge in his city. Eusebius quotes a document, said to be a reply from Jesus, stating that he had to fulfil his mission on earth, but promising that after his Ascension he would send a disciple. In due course Thaddeus is sent to Edessa. Abgar, expressing the fervour of his belief in Christ, affirms that he had resolved to lead an army against the Jews who had crucified Christ, had he not been deterred by the might of the Roman empire (Considine 1973: 237, 250–3).

Evidence has been adduced that the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius was known in Ireland at least by the seventh century (Breen 1987a: 198–200). Moreover, we find evidence that its narrative of Abgar was not confined to a historiographical context, but also had a liturgical presence in the early Irish Church. We find mention of Abgar's encounter with Thaddeus in the hymn *Celebra Iuda* assigned to the seventh century (Howlett 1996: 41, lines 23–4). The text of the Letter of Jesus itself is included in both copies of the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, while the title only is attested in the Basel Psalter (Considine 1973: 238–41; Cain 2009: 179–80). I propose tentatively that the *retoiric* may be interpreted as a vernacular expression of Abgar's affirmation of belief, relayed thus in the *Ecclesiastical History* (1. 13):

> *'Usque adeo', inquit, 'credidi ei, ut et Iudeos, qui eum crucifixerunt velim, si ulla mihi adesset tanta exercitus copia, trucidare, et si non Romani regni auctoritas impediret'*. (quot. Considine 1973: 252, lines 80–82).
>
> 'So much have I believed in him that I wished to take an army and destroy those Jews who crucified him, had I not been deterred from it by reason of the dominion of the Romans'. (For translation of the original Greek, see Crusé 1892: 34).

In its historiographical context, Abgar's response appears to be ultimately pragmatic – taking arms against those responsible for the Crucifixion would be a fight against impossible odds. The versified speech of the *retoiric*, however, traces an emotional trajectory from regret at

not having acted against Christ's adversaries, *triún úaisib,* 'as a strongman above them' (Corthals 1989: stanza 5b) to realism, *ma chuto[n]-occaibmis, at-bélmis*, 'if we should have risen, we would have died', (stanza 9b), and finally to regret again. In the Eusebian narrative (I.13), Thaddeus accepted Abgar's affirmation of willingness to fight on behalf of Christ as a testimony of belief. Consequently, Abgar received the cure of his infirmity which he had sought. I suggest that the foregoing provides a model for the statement of the *retoiric* (stanza 13ab): *Armu éda inscib, inna roacht fir-fortacht Crísts, fritom-thá* : 'Because of my words in which I was not able truly to assist Christ, my Lord heals me' (Corthals 1989: 47), Then the *retoiric* recapitulates the opening expression of self-reproach for not having avenged Christ, *cen Dúileman dígail* (13c).

The proposition, therefore, is that the *retoiric* imaginatively recreates Abgar's response to Christ's crucifixion, in a composition that originally may have had a liturgical or devotional function in the early Irish church. Why should such a text, concerning the ruler of Edessa at the time of Christ, be chosen as an apt model for a Christianized story of Conchobar mac Nessa? In the accompanying prose of the N copy, it is stated that Conchobar was *cét-gentlide docóid hi flait[h] nimea*, 'the first pagan [in Ireland] who went into the Kingdom of Heaven' (Meyer 1906: 14–5, #4). While Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* does not claim specific primacy for Abgar as the first gentile convert of the early Church, the positioning of his story in the opening section of the *Ecclesiastical History* conveys such an impression. Book I of the *History* opens with a summary of Christ's life and death, the work of John the Baptist and the choosing of Christ's disciples. Then follows (I.13) a digression about the disciple Thaddeus, which recounts how he came to convert Abgar, who had exchanged letters with Christ. Indeed, Eusebius refers to this story again in a following chapter (II.1). Therefore, the early prominence in the *Ecclesiastical History* of an account of Abgar may have inspired the Irish narrative of a king who similarly was first of his people to express belief in an unseen divinity, declaring his readiness to take up arms against those responsible for the Crucifixion.

In his edition and discussion of the *retoiric*, Corthals (1989) contends that its primary location is in the text now preserved in manuscript N, and he gives examples of poetic statements from the *retoiric* which are echoed in the prose of N. While there have been contrary arguments

(Imhoff 2012: 90–5), I have reached the same conclusion as Corthals. The narrative surviving in N (which belongs to Version 1) seeks to create a plausible scenario for Conchobar's reception of news of the crucifixion. Thus, the king's encounter with an Imperial emissary is explained by information that such officials travelled widely throughout the world, consequently ensuring that significant events were universally known (Meyer 1906: 12–3, #1). The emperor is correctly identified as Tiberius. We are told that Altus, the emissary, was a Christian, thereby providing grounds for his revelations about Christ to Conchobar. The writer seems to draw on information from texts like Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* to create his context, possibly in awareness of the significance of Eusebius's work for the *retoiric*.

Yet we must recall that in Eusebius's account Abgar encountered the disciple Thaddeus, and thus had the opportunity of formal conversion. In the Irish N-text of Version 1, Conchobar is depicted as learning of Christ's crucifixion from a Roman official, and not in a situation whereby he might obtain sacramental baptism. The Irish narrative shows that the king's vehement reaction to news of the Crucifixion moved from words to deed. After declaring how he would have attacked Christ's killers, had he been near, Conchobar lunged as if entering battle, thereby dislodging the embedded object in his skull, causing his death. Conchobar attained Heaven according to the text, *fobít(h) robad bat(h)ais dó ind fuil donesmacht ocus rocreite do Chríst* 'because the blood which he had shed was a baptism to him and (because) he had believed in Christ' (Meyer 1906: 14–5, #4; Corthals 1989: 52 n. 9). This rationale for Conchobar's salvation rests on an assumed equivalence between the king's fatal reaction to the Crucifixion and the bloodshed willingly undergone by unbaptised martyrs (Corthals 1989: 52–3). For the latter, accepting death for the sake of their Christian belief constituted a true 'baptism by blood', whereas in the case of Conchobar, his death appears as a by-product of his emotional response to Christ's death, not as a voluntary sacrifice in a context of persecution.

In the light of this, it is probably not surprising that the story of the king's conversion engendered alternate accounts of how he was informed about the Crucifixion, and of the rationale for his salvation. In the short Latin rendering of Version 1, represented by S, Conchobar learns about the Crucifixion from Palladius, otherwise identifiable as the bishop sent to Christians in Ireland by Pope Celestine in the year 431

(Charles-Edwards 2000: 202–14). According to the S text, the king, moved by fervour and fury, declared his wish to have been present with the men of Ulster so that he might fight for the son of God and free him. Thereupon the stone in his head was dislodged, and Conchobar is said to have merited eternal life, *pro suo zelo*, 'because of his zeal'. The hagiographical redactor seems to imply that the king's intense wish to assist Christ had a baptismal effect more in keeping with *baptismus flaminis*, 'baptism of desire' than with 'baptism of blood' (Fanning 1907).

Clearly there was some discomfort with adjudicating Conchobar a martyr, as we see also in the F text of Version 1 of *ACon*. At the core of this composite work is a text of the N narrative of *ACon*, the prose almost in its entirety (see Imhoff 2012: 60), but only a garbled version of the opening words of the *retoiric*. Two alternative accounts of Conchobar's reception of news of the Crucifixion are added, the first (Meyer 1906: 14–15) involving Bochrach, a poet and druid of Leinster, the second (Meyer 1906: 16–17), involving the Ulster druid Cathbad. As we shall see subsequently, these feature in Version 2. The most significant F variant comes at the end. In accordance with the N account, the text states that the blood shed by Conchobar served to baptise him. However, F goes on to state that Conchobar's soul was taken after death to hell until Christ came to free those held captive there, whereupon the soul was brought by Christ to heaven (Meyer 1906: 16–17). The tradition that Christ descended to hell in the interval between his burial and resurrection and released captive souls was well-known in early Christendom. It is attested in early Irish Christian writings such as the late sixth-century Latin hymn, *Precamur patrem*, and the eighth-century vernacular verse attributed to Blathmac (Herren & Brown 2002: 157–60). The text of *ACon* in F suggests that Christ's foray to hell had freed all who were captive there. This universal freeing of souls runs counter to the *Gospel of Nicodemus* tradition that only the righteous of the Old Testament were delivered by Christ from hell. However, such universal liberation is implicit in Irish works of the seventh and eighth centuries. Indeed, Clemens, an eighth-century Irish missionary on the continent incurred the ire of Boniface for preaching that all souls had been freed from hell by Christ (Lawrence 1995; Meeder 2011; Meens 2015). For the *ACon* reviser, therefore, the idea that Conchobur was brought to heaven in the wake of Christ's 'Harrowing of Hell' evidently assuaged doubts that the king had gained heaven solely through the manner of his death.

The historical and theological contexts of the Ulster king's salvation thus engendered differing views among the redactors of Version 1 of *ACon*. Yet its various expressions of the story of Conchobar are related structurally and seem to derive ultimately from an Old Irish exemplar resembling N. In the proposed exemplar a spare prose narrative provided a setting for the *retoiric,* now reframed as Conchobar's speech. The *retoiric*, the original mainspring, does not survive well in transmission, being omitted from S, and only attested in its opening words in F. Yet the sentiments of support for Christ are retained. Moreover, a key authorial statement in N, repeated in F, affirms that Conchobar is 'the first [Irish] pagan who went into the kingdom of heaven'.

Version 2

Further interpretation of Conchobar's encounter with the Crucifixion is to be found in the longer account of Version 2. The relationship between the four manuscript witnesses to this version has been set out diagrammatically by Imhoff (2012: 58). My reading of the evidence suggests that the texts of L and C descend separately from an abbreviated exemplar, while Ea and Eb descend separately from a related, but fuller, exemplar. Their common narrative opens with the back-story of Conchobar's wounding, knowledge of which is simply assumed in Version 1. Then follows the revelation about the Crucifixion to the king. We have seen in Version 1 that external narrators bring news of the Crucifixion to Ulster. In Version 2, however, the news comes from within the king's realm. Disturbances in nature at Christ's death (as recounted in Matt. 27.51–2) reverberate in Ulster, and Conchobar asks his druid for an explanation. The latter relates the story of the Crucifixion, telling Conchobar that he shared a birthday with Christ, though they had not been born in the same year. This final detail is omitted in the copies in Ea and Eb, which thereby claim Conchobar as an exact contemporary of Christ. This depiction of the king recalls the reference to him as Christ's *comhalta* in one of the alternative accounts in F (Meyer 1906: p. 16 #4).

According to Version 2, Conchobar expresses his belief after hearing the druid's account of Christ and his death. At this juncture, all copies add that Conchobar was one of two believers in Ireland before Christianization, the other being Morann, a legendary judge (Kelly F. 1976:

22–3). This statement is evidently revising the assertion of Version 1 that Conchubar was unique among the unconverted Irish in gaining salvation. In fact, the LC copies of Version 2 show explicit signs of awareness of a text resembling the N copy of Version 1. For example, L contains the text of the *retoiric,* attributing its recital to the announcement of the Crucifixion either by Bachrach of Leinster, or by Altus the consul. The related text in C contains only the reference to Altus, who is, of course, Conchobar's informant in N. We may deduce, therefore, that Version 2, the longer version, was evidently secondary to, and drew on, Version 1. In Version 2, the copies in L and C break off at the point of the king's declaration of faith, while Ea and Eb continue with Conchobar's statement of willingness to fight for Christ. These texts recount that the king seizes weapons, and proceeds to fell the neighbouring wood as he would have felled the enemies of Christ. Thereupon the missile in his skull was dislodged, causing his death. The text of Eb states that Conchobar was held to be a dweller of Heaven *trit an durtacht doroine Conchobar.* Meyer renders this as 'for the wish he has uttered', reading *dúthracht* for *durtacht* (1906: p. 11, note d). This may be interpreted as implying that the king was saved by 'baptism of desire'. The Irish phrase could also be intended as an equivalent of the Latin *pro suo zelo* of S (see *DIL* s.v. *duthracht* (a) and (c)), and thereby may refer more generally to the king's readiness to avenge Christ. While it has been argued by Imhoff (2012: 90–91) that the LC text 'makes good sense without the ending attested elsewhere', the intention of the Book of Leinster copy (L) to continue as far as Conchobar's death is implied by its manuscript title, *Aided Choncobuir* (Best *et al.* 1954–83, II: 458). While the laconic Version 1 omits details such as those of time and place to concentrate on Conchobar and his death, all manuscripts of the longer Version 2 agree in their location of significant story-events in the territory of Fir Rois in present-day Co. Louth (Mac Íomhair 1962). Placenames such as 'the ford of Daire Dá Báeth' where Conchobar was struck by the missile, Ardachad Sléibe Fuait, to which he is brought thereafter, and Mag Lámraige, where the frenzied king assailed a wood, add to the localisation of the story. Yet the finale (only in the manuscripts Ea and Eb), on the fate of the death-dealing object dislodged from the king's head, goes on to add new geographical references, to Monasterboice and Leinster. We may surmise that these represent further revision, as we turn to the remaining version of *ACon.*

Version 3

This metrical version not only involves a change of narrative medium, the perspective also changes. The poem, beginning *A chloch thall for elaid úair/Bute búain meic Bronaig báin,* 'O stone yonder upon the cold tomb of ever-famous Buite, the blessed son of Brónach' (Best *et al.* 1954–83, III: 633; Meyer 1906: 19) is present-centred rather than past-centred. The poet, named as Cináed úa hArtacáin in the copy in the Book of Leinster (L), frames the story of Conchobar's death as an address to the object which killed him. The stone which now lies on the tomb of Buithe, the patron saint of Monasterboice, is identified as the stone which had been embedded for seven years in the king's head. The poet mentions its prior history, as originally the brain of Mes Gegra, cast by Cet at Conchobar, which remained in his body until ejected at Lettir Lámraigi. Through divine agency the stone is said to have been revealed to the saint, who used to sleep on it. Thus, in its changed designation, the brain of Mes Gegra, formerly a hostile weapon, by virtue of its saintly association is now revered as *adart But[h]i*, 'Buithe's pillow'.

While Cináed's poem (V) is found independently in the Book of Leinster (Best *et al.* 1954–83, III: 633–4, in Va (Meyer 1906: 18–21) it is prefaced by a brief prose text and two metrical stanzas. The prose consists of short statements, identifying persons and places in the story of Conchobar's death. Two appended verses ascribed to 'Flann', probably Flann Mainistrech, the eleventh-century scholar of Monasterboice, probably originated as glosses. A copy of the prose only is found in Vb (Meyer 1919: 7). Shorn of its association with the poem, the form of the Vb text supports the inference that the prose of Va and Vb is secondary, functioning as a series of informational notes rather than as part of a redaction of *ACon.* The rather elliptical poem evidently was considered to require an explanatory supplement for a later public.

In Cináed's poem, the recall of the past is facilitated by divine revelation of the stone to Buithe. The saint's use of the stone as a pillow may be based on the Biblical example of Jacob's stone (Gen. 28. 11–18). As the poet relates the object's former existence, reference to placenames such as Áth Daire Dá Báeth suggest that his narrative source was related to Version 2 of *ACon.* Yet the focus of the tenth-century composition moves from the Ulster Cycle era to Christian Ireland, from Conchobar's eternal destiny to the remembrance of his story. We see that Buithe's use of

the former weapon, the brain of Mes Gegra, as *adart*, 'pillow' transfers the object from a pagan to a Christian world. In the poet's time, it functions as a relic of the saint, located at Buithe's church of Monasterboice. Can we ascertain anything further about the context for this version of events?

The poet, Cináed úa hArtacáin, counted among his patrons Congalach mac Máelmithig, king of Tara, killed in the year 956, and buried at Monasterboice (*AU*, Murray 2004: 46–7, #55; Ní Mhaonaigh 2005 Carey 2004). We may infer that Cináed's poem, written in the interests of Monasterboice, provided authentication for a relic of the founder, Buithe, while also linking that relic with the Christian conversion of early Irish kingship. This had resonance in an ecclesiastical centre that had constituted itself as a royal burial-site in the tenth century. Moreover, a story centred on response to the Crucifixion had additional resonance in an ecclesiastical setting where spectacular stone crosses were being erected in the tenth century (Roe 1981). The versified *AC,* therefore, has Monasterboice at the centre of its interests. It follows that references in Version 2 manuscripts Ea and Eb to the revelation of Conchobar's death-stone to Buithe are secondary. Indeed, the Edinburgh copies of the longer prose text of Version 2 include a further prophecy that the former brain of Mes Gegra would be carried southward to Leinster. This connects with the tradition that Mes Gegra had been a Leinster ruler.

Conclusion

At this juncture we may tentatively trace the development of *ACon* from the composition of the *retoiric* about 700 AD to the composition of Cináed ua hArtacáin's poem around the second half of the tenth century. When did the *retoiric* become the basis for the story of Conchobar's Christian conversion? The view of Corthals (1989: 52) that 'the prose context of N must have been written by someone who was fully aware of the meaning and intention of the poem', suggests that the N-text of Version 1 may be placed reasonably close to the date of the *retoiric*. It is likely to have been followed by the Latin *Vita Ailbei* text (S) before the end of the eighth century. While textual scrutiny reveals that the *ACon* narrative stands as an interpolation in the eighth-century *Vita*,

the interpolation is most likely to have been added before the end of the eighth century, before the self-assertion of the saint's successors had passed its peak. (Herbert 1989b). We may note that the phrase used concerning Conchobar in S, *vitam eternam adipisci meruit,* finds an echo in the Annals of Ulster phrase *regnum celeste adipisci meruit*, attested uniquely in the year 768 (*AU* s.a. 768. 5). Approaching the dating question from another viewpoint, the fact that text L of Version 2 occurs in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster provides us with a chronological marker of the story's currency in medieval Ireland. Indeed, we may infer from evidence in *Lebor na hUidre (LU)*, our earliest surviving manuscript in the Irish language, that the story of Conchobar's precocious salvation had been well accepted into Irish narrative tradition by the eleventh century. The *LU* tale *Siaburcharpat Con Chulainn*, (Best & Bergin 1970: 278–57) not only seeks to add Cu Chulainn to the ranks of the saved, it also relates in verse how the hosts of Ulster were languishing in hell *Acht in rí mac Nessa / arbáge ar mac Maire* 'Except for the king, the son of Ness, who fought on behalf of Mary's son' (p. 285, lines 9463–4) In another text in *LU*, *Senchas na relec,* 'lore about [famous] burials' (Best & Bergin 1970: 127–32), a trio of Irish believers before the coming of Patrick is enumerated, the first being Conchobar mac Nessa *díaro innis Altus dó césad Críst* 'when Altus told him about the Crucifixion of Christ (recalling the Version 1 narrative). Second on the list of precocious believers is Morann (recalling the revision of Version 2), and the third believer who is introduced is Cormac mac Airt (p. 127, lines 4048–51). The same text (p. 129, lines 4103–6) further states that the Ulstermen used to be buried in Tailtiu until the time of Conchobar, who chose to be brought 'between Slea and the sea' to be buried facing east, because of his belief.

The versions of *ACon* which originated between the eighth and the late tenth century may be mapped on to three different presentations of encounter between Conchobar and Christianity. Version 1 involves an external narrator. In the texts of N and F of this version, Altus, a functionary of the Roman Empire, who was Christian, informed the king about the Crucifixion. In the Latin text of S, under the influence of its host text, the Latin Life of Ailbe, the chronology is changed. Conchobar learns of the Crucifixion from Palladius, recorded as having been commissioned by the Pope to minister in Ireland in the year 431 AD (Charles-Edwards 2000: 202–14). Yet despite this adjustment, S

shares an outlook with its fellow representative texts of Version 1, that Conchobar's conversion takes place within the framework of Christian history. The link with the wider world is all-important. Whether it be the Empire or the Papacy, the Roman world was the ultimate source of Ireland's first intimation of Christianity. In Version 2, on the other hand, the revelation about the Crucifixion does not come from without, but rather from within Ireland itself. The context here is scriptural. Cosmic disturbances at the time of Christ's death (Matt. 27, 51–2) manifest themselves in Ulster. Their import is revealed to the king by his druid, Cathbad (or alternatively by Bochrach of Leinster). Conchobar thereby is granted his own disclosure of divine events. Ulster heroic society is presented as a chosen participant in salvation history, and Conchobar himself is singled out by the revelation that his birth-date coincided with that of Christ.

By the time of Cináed ua hArtacáin's composition of Version 3, the narrative focus has moved from the era of the Ulster Cycle to the manner of its remembrance in Christian Ireland. The poet addresses a revered relic, the pillow-stone of St Buithe, which is revealed as having had a prior history as the calcified brain of Mes Gegra, the instrument of Conchobar's death. The stone had been divinely revealed to Buithe who brought it into a new existence. The saint's repurposing of the former weapon as his pillow created a continuity between the world of Conchobar and that of the churchman. Thus, the narrative emphasis has moved from Christianizing a figure of the past to demonstrating a present inclusivity in which past and present were linked. Buithe's followers honoured an object hallowed by its association with the saint, but that object had a past that was worthy of recall. In Cináed's tenth-century composition, the Ulster Cycle era is not the antithesis of Christian Ireland, but rather stands as prologue, to be incorporated into the continuum of Ireland's story.

The barbarity of the Ulster warriors in *Mesca Ulad*

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Habit and old survey books make it easy to assume that the essential business of the Ulster Cycle tradition was the celebration of heroic excellence.[2] As a result, it can be difficult to make sense of the element of the grotesque, the exaggerated, and the disorderly that so often emerges in the depiction of the Ulaid. At the climax of the archetypally tragic episode of the Book of Leinster version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, where two loving foster-brothers must face each other in mortal combat, Cú Chulainn's spear 'entered Fer Diad's body through the anus and filled every joint and limb of him with its barbs';[3] yet the death-blow delivered by the explosion in his bowels is both preceded and followed by poetry of elegiac sadness between the combatants, poetry that seems precisely aligned with the tone of solemn pathos that one expects to find in monumental epic. How is the interpreter to deal with this jarring dissonance? In search of an explanation I do not think anyone nowadays would slip into the old lazy stereotypes – 'the Celtic love of exuberance' – but moments like this continue to challenge our sense of what *ruraíocht* is really about.[4]

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[1] I am grateful to Liam Breatnach for his help on the institution of the 'enforcing surety', which enabled me to frame the argument of this paper. Translations from *Mesca Ulad* are based on Carey & Koch 2003; translations from *TBC* are from O'Rahilly, C. 1967, 1976 except where noted otherwise.

[2] Cf. Dooley 2006: 10, where the statement that 'Cú Chulainn is presented [in *TBC*] as the youthful hero par excellence' sits uneasily with the subtlety and sensitivity of the discussion of literary 'play' that surrounds it.

[3] *TBC LL* 3358–9 (tr. O'Rahilly). For *timthirecht a chuirp* as a reference precisely to the anus, see *eDIL* s.v. *timthirecht.*

[4] Edel (2015: 116–117) in her discussion of the LL version of this episode, mentions only the earlier cast of the *gae bolga* that pierces Fer Diad's heart.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 55–72.

Warning and parody

One response is to invoke an argument like Radner's, that the Ulster Cycle narratives were meant to serve as a negative *exemplum*: 'the tragic breakdown of those relationships on which early Irish society was founded... [A] picture of a society moving to dysfunction and self-destruction', designed 'to teach the Uí Néill lesson: the Ulaid were heroic but doomed, and the Uí Néill have legitimately inherited their power' (Radner 1982: 47).[5] Seen in this light, extremities of fury and brutality underscore an implied message of moral condemnation. A distinct strategy is to class such things as parody or burlesque, subversions of a genre whose normative theme is the glories of the heroic past. Thus, for example, *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó*[6] has been described as a 'parody of the heroic genre as represented by *Táin Bó Cuailgne*', or alternatively as a cluster of clerically-inspired warnings *against* the behaviours narrated: 'a veritable catalogue of serious sins...and a salutary reminder' against a catalogue of excesses listed in the Book of Proverbs (Ó Corráin 1986; McCone 1990: esp. 77). A third approach is to assign different attitudes and affiliations to texts composed at different periods in the tradition: in a recent contribution, for example, Poppe (2008) has suggested that the apparent 'predilection for humour and exaggeration' in narratives of twelfth-century origin may be linked to the emergence of a category of 'pure literature' in opposition to the historiographical tone of earlier sagas like *Táin Bó Cúailnge* itself.[7] Similarly, in his study of *Aided Guill meic Carbada* 7 *Aided Gairb Glinne Rige*, Fogarty (2014: 208) argues that this text is the work of

> '[an] inward-looking author…who uses his familiarity with, and command of, a narrative universe to accomplish a specific subversion of a secular heroic ethos…[H]e is intent on using that expertise to drive home his points: that martial frenzy yields to controlled force of arms, and that impetuous, impulsive behaviour is not proper to a hero.'

[5] For discussion and nuanced recasting of this argument, see O'Connor 2013: 313–25.

[6] Edition, Thurneysen 1986; translation, Carey & Koch 2003: 68–75.

[7] Poppe 2008: 62–63, including *Fled Bricrenn* and the LL recension of *Mesca Ulad* in his collection of select examples. See further O'Connor in this volume.

Although these interpretative strategies move in the same direction, in any given instance they remain distinct from or even incompatible with each other. Usually they depend on imposing meanings or messages that go beyond what is expressed in the surface discourse: for example, nothing explicitly stated in *Scéla Mucce* signals that the text is parodic, nor is there any clear signal of an allusion to or dependence on the teachings of Proverbs. Similarly, Fogarty's reading of *Aided Guill* depends on recognising the presence of allusive reworkings of formulae and specific passages from *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and other earlier texts, even in the absence of clear authorial signals that such references are there to be picked up.

Against this background, a particular interest attaches to any authorial or redactorial passages that give explicit directions as to how the behaviour of the characters is to be judged. My aim here is to investigate a series of such passages in the Book of Leinster redactions of Ulster Cycle texts, especially *Mesca Ulad*, in which the word *barbarda* 'barbarous' (along with the rarer abstract noun *barbardacht* 'barbarity') is associated with the warriors of Emain Macha. In each case the word occurs in a section of text that is unique to LL, and a preference for it has been ascribed to the redactor(s) responsible for the form taken by the Ulster Cycle texts in that manuscript, Thurneysen's 'Bearbeiter C' (De Paor 1921–3: 121–2; Watson 1942: 98). We are, therefore, dealing with a late stage in the Cycle's development; nonetheless, our words occur within the flow of the narrative every time, and have none of the externality that characterises (for example) the critical judgments on *TBC* voiced in the Latin colophon to the text in the same manuscript. [8]

Barbarda in the Ulster Cycle texts in LL

A general survey of the word *barbarda* across other Middle Irish sources suggests that it has much the same range of reference as the Latin word on which it is built, *barbarus.* The latter can be used purely to refer to users of a non-Classical language[9], or to make the ethnic distinction

[8] The classic assessment of the colophon and its relationship to contemporary Latin rhetorical theory is Ó Néill 1999.

[9] For example, in the copy of the hymn *Audite Omnes* preserved in the Book of Ballymote, where the Irish converted by Patrick are referred to as *barbaras nationes*

between Greeks or Romans and other peoples, but it can also refer to violent savagery in behaviour, especially warrior action, and in such cases it asks to be taken in a negative and condemnatory sense. *Barbarda* in this sense is found as early as *Saltair na Rann*, where it is used of the pagan enemies of the Israelites in war, *buidni borba barbardai* 'savage barbarous hosts' (*SR* 5016),[10] but other examples mostly date from the late Middle Irish period onward: for example, Ulysses in *Merugud Uilix*, speaking of the monstrous cannibal Cyclops, speaks of *in barbardacht fil ina churp* (*MUil* 58), and *barbarda* appears in the later recension of *Togail Troí* in a Greek's disparaging description of the Trojans (*Irish Ach* p.122.39). It is also applied to Balor in the Early Modern narrative of *Cath Maige Tuired* (*CMT*$_2$ 1060). The usage appears to be consistent across this long time-range, and suggests that the word is unambiguously pejorative.

Turning now to our cluster of examples in the Book of Leinster,[11] the first and most straightforward is in the description of the hound of Culann in *TBC LL*:

> *Ocus ba borb barbarda bruthmar bachlachda múcna matnamail cách baí and sain.* (*TBC LL* 869–71)
>
> 'And wild, savage and fierce, rough, surly and battlesome was he who lay there.' (tr. O'Rahilly, C. 1967)

Compare the description of Láiríne, a fool who is being set up to fight Cú Chulainn and die: *drúthóclach borb barbarda bailc búadnasach* (*TBC LL* 1924). O'Rahilly (1967) translates this as 'a foolish youth, proud and arrogant, but a strong smiter and a victorious fighter', yet the run of co-ordinated adjectives gives no warrant for the contrastive 'but'. Rather, the plain sense of the Irish is that his 'barbarity' is co-ordinated with his violence and aggression – just as in the case of the hound, or again (within the same group of Book of Leinster texts) when the word is used in *Tochmarc Ferbe* of rough wild *fomoiri* (*TF* 164). It is significant that *barbarda* is repeatedly co-ordinated with *borb*, both here and in

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the word *barbaras* is glossed as *alienas...quia sint alieni a Romana linga* (*LH* vol. 1 p. 8, gloss on lines 13–14). These glosses are most likely of early eleventh-century date, like those to the other Latin hymns in the collection.

[10] Sim. *borba na mbarbarda* 'savagery of the barbarians' (*SR* 7352).

[11] All the instances of *barbarda* discussed here are unique to the Book of Leinster recension of each text in question.

the instances from *Saltair na Rann* listed above: wild uncouthness goes with the propensity to unbridled violence, whether in man or beast or monster. [12]

This leads us to a less easily tractable instance in *TBC LL*, where a hoop or withe on which Cú Chulainn has written a challenge is referred to as *id barbarda* 'barbarous withe'. To understand this instance, we need to trace the development of the passage, starting with Recension I. In this version Cú Chulainn, who has been standing at the ford alone, explains to his father Sualtaim that he has to abandon his post for a tryst with a woman: after discussion with Sualtaim he makes an *id n-erchomail* ('a withe consisting in a small spancel') with ogham writing on it (*TBC Rec. 1* 225–6), and Fergus interprets this to Medb as a challenge to anyone who dares to cross the river in his absence: if anyone 'flouts this withe' (294) Cú Chulainn will kill them all.[13] In *TBC LL* the making of the withe has increased in scale, becoming a superhuman feat. Cú Chulainn takes an entire oak sapling and twists it into the *id* while standing on 'one leg, one hand, one eye' in order to inscribe it with the challenge (446–61). This withe is what the Connachta are looking at, *oc fégad ind idi barbarda* (472–3), upon which Fergus explains that the challenge to Cú Chulainn's enemies is to make a similar withe standing on one leg, one hand, one eye, failing which they must stay at the ford for the night.

In what sense are Cú Chulainn's enemies looking at something 'barbarous' when they look at the withe? It has been suggested that ogham as opposed to alphabetic writing is being condemned as barbaric in itself,[14] or that the challenge has pagan associations, looking towards

[12] I pass over one attestation in the LL text of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, where in the battle-rush of Conall against the Norsemen it is said that *Ro gab Conall ac slaide in tślúaig co dremun 7 co barbarda, co uathmar 7 co dícheillid* (*CRR* §47, 2318–19) ('Conall began smiting the army fiercely and furiously, fearfully and madly') (tr. Hogan 1892). The overall thrust of the narrative is to glorify Conall: if *barbarda* makes sense there and is more than mere padding, it refers to the notion that excessive fury is integral to heroic excellence. However, Mac Gearailt (1991) has argued that this text here was rewritten *in light* of the 'Common authorship' texts, not as one of them, so it is reasonable to suppose that this represents a later stage in the word's semantic history.

[13] On this passage in *TBC Rec. 1* see Edel (2015: 27–31).

[14] See O'Rahilly's suggestion in her note (TBC-LL pp. 284–5, note at 472–3). Her suggestion depends on the *etymological* association between *barbarus* and 'speaking a foreign language', but this does not work, both because there is no evidence for this

a ritual practice enacting a magical prohibition.[15] However, our survey of *barbarda* above suggests that it is far more likely that the 'barbarity' is bound up either with the savagery of its maker's extreme strength or (better) the savagery of the vengeance he will take on whoever ignores its challenge and crosses the river without matching the feat.[16] As I will argue, it is significant that in Fergus' verse account of the withe he calls it *naidm*: 'a binding pledge'. As we will see, it is typical of the practices labelled as 'barbarous' that Cú Chulainn's setting of the withe is explained in terms of a reciprocally binding pledge whose violation will lead to slaughter.

If this approach carries conviction, the episode of the 'barbarous withe' is concerned with the laws and customs of binding contracts: a man places others under an obligation to perform a pledge, and if the pledge is violated he will turn to violence against the offender. So stated, it chimes significantly with one of the *macgnímrada* stories, which are of course told specifically to explain the savagery of Cú Chulainn's behaviour at the ford. Stacey (2007) has shown that the episode in question is structured by the vocabulary and ethics of contract-making and contract-breaking.[17] Cú Chulainn arrives to join in the boy-troop's game before Emain Macha, but conflict breaks out, in the words of *TBC Rec. 1*, because he has come *cen naidm a fhóesama forru* (*TBC Rec. 1* 418): 'without the binding of his surety upon them'; similarly, in *TBC LL* Follamain tells him it is *geis* for a newcomer to come into their game *can chor a faísma foraib nó a commairge* (778–80): 'without putting themselves under your protection and safeguard'. After they fight and are separated, Cú Chulainn is placed under a contract of protection by them using quasi-legal formulae - *geibid foraib, gaib it láim* 'take it upon yourselves': 'take it on your hand' etc, *ataimem omm* 'I acknowledge it indeed' (*TBC Rec. 1* 447–56, cf. *TBC LL* 800–802). In *TBC LL* Conchobar

sense of *barbarda* in relevant Middle Irish sources, and because there is no suggestion that the inscription is in a language other than that familiar to the characters of the saga.

[15] Cf. Bergin (1921–3) with Edel (2015: 39–40), on *geis* in connection with another withe-challenge at *TBC Rec. 1* 710–20 (corresponding to the expanded version at *TBC LL* 1068–81).

[16] For the collocation *id barbarda* compare *id niachais* 'withe of valour' in a similar context (*TBC LL* 1070).

[17] Cf. Stacey (2007: 122), citing *TBC LL* lines 800–813.

binds the boys to protect Cú Chulainn, but he attacks them again until the king himself agrees to pledge protection for the boys themselves (800–813). This sequence constitutes one of the marvellous deeds that prove Cú Chulainn's superhuman prowess and ferocity: as Fergus says, what wonder that one who did such things at the age of five would cut a four-pronged pole at seventeen and impale four enemies' heads upon it as a challenge? The theme, then, is the extreme or murderous implementation of a recognised procedure in contract law. This theme will emerge as the background to the remarkable series of instances of the word *barbarda* in *Mesca Ulad*, which will provide the focus for this contribution.

The case of *Mesca Ulad*

Mesca Ulad[18] is the classic case of a tale whose plot seems absurd, even comical: the culmination is that the Ulaid try to go from one feast to another in the middle of the night under the influence of drink and go astray two hundred and fifty miles to Temair Luachra in Munster, where they walk into a trap and narrowly escape death. In this case, unlike *Scéla Mucce*, we know that the medieval *literati* themselves saw the story in terms of something like a sense of absurdity: the *explicit* at the end of the Edinburgh text of the tale refers to it as *baothrēm Ulad* 'the Ulstermen's foolish riding, absurd riding' (*MU-E* 713),[19] and the ride is referred to in the same way in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*: *borb in báeth-réim*:

[18] Edition by Watson, *MU-W* and *MU-LU*, with Mac Gearailt's edition and study of the Edinburgh text (*MU-E*); translation by Carey & Koch (2003: 106–126). Watson's edition is based on juxtaposing the Book of Leinster fragment for the beginning and main body of the tale with the LU fragment for the end: but the two recensions differ, and cannot be fused. The complete and unified tale that was created later on the basis of both earlier recensions, which is now represented by the texts in the Yellow Book of Lecan and in MS Edinburgh, NLS 72.1.40, is beyond the scope of this article, except as mentioned piecemeal below: for text and analysis see Mac Gearailt's edition (*MU-E*). The key passage about the exchange of sureties is substantially the same in LL as in the Edinburgh text (*MU-E*, lines 43–135).

[19] Similarly, in the tale-lists, where the same term appears in the title referring to all or part of *MU* (see Watson 1941: xiii–xiv).

'wild was the mad career'.[20] The 'barbarity', however, begins at an earlier point in the story and does not concern such a straightforward kind of absurdity. To understand it, we must trace the plot carefully.

It has been decided that Ulster is to be divided into three parts, to be ruled respectively by Conchobar, Cú Chulainn, and Fintan mac Néill Níamglonnaig. The flashpoint of the trouble is the obligation of *each* king to invite his peers to a feast at the time of Samhain. Conchobar, accordingly, invites the other two to his feast, but Cú Chulainn, who has been organising his own feast in his own kingdom, is unwilling to go and must be persuaded by Emir. When he arrives at Emain Macha, Sencha mac Ailella gives him an extravagant welcome, to which he replies warily: 'That is the welcome of a man who asks a request' (*fir connaig aiscid*, 61). Cú Chulainn wants to know what 'request' will be asked, but Sencha agrees to tell only if he has 'the *glinni* of my choice for it (64).' The logic of this depends on the legal concept of the guarantor or surety, who witnesses a contract and undertakes to ensure that it will be fulfilled (Kelly, F. 1988: 171). The standard terms are *ráth* 'surety', *naidm* 'enforcing surety'; *glinne*, a nominal formation from the adjective *glinn* 'firm, secure',[21] is less common but is regularly co-ordinated with the other terms, both in legal texts and in narrative texts like *Táin Bó Cúailnge* itself. Like the other terms, its meaning extends between the phenomenon itself and the person – that is, the guarantee and the guarantor are equally called *glinne* or *naidm*.[22] Cú Chulainn agrees only on condition that he can ask a *frithaisced* 'counter-request', which in turn is guaranteed by securities (here *cuir*, 72). In this way, the two men are bound (*fornaidmed*) by mutual pledges, and each pledge is guaranteed by three men acting as securities (*glinni*, *cuir*), who are named in each case – members of the Ulaid, all of them on both sides related to each other and part of the same warband.

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[20] *Met. Dinds.* IV: 220–1, *Luibnech* line 10; the same word is used in the corresponding section of the *Dindshenchas* in the prose text (*RD* at *RC* 16 (1894/95: 73)).

[21] On *glinne* as a legal term see Thurneysen (1928: 83); *eDIL* s.v. *glinn*.

[22] For *glinne* as the security itself, see e.g. *TBC Rec. 1* 224 = *TBC LL* 452; *TBC Rec. 1* 1730, sim. *TBC LL* 1562; *TTr-H* 1803; *Ep Í* 208 § 27; *BDC* rec. A line 602 Toner. *Glinne* as the person: *TBC Rec. 1* 2056, *TBC LL* 343–4. Co-ordinated with other terms in the same semantic field: *cuir* 7 *glinni, rátha* 7 *trebairi*, *TBC-LL* 1562; glinne 7 *enighe*, *TTr-H* 1803; *cor* 7 *glinni* 7 *trebairi*, *TBC LL* 343–4; *rāith* 7 *glinde*, *CIH* 896.17; *nadmann* 7 *rātha* 7 *glinne*, *CIH* 1142.5, sim. *CIH* 1315.25.

???

Sencha's request is that Cú Chulainn is to abandon his portion of Ulster to Conchobar for a year. Cú Chulainn agrees, with the rider that he will take it back at the end of the year if the arrangement does not work out. Fintan mac Néill arrives and the process is repeated down to the demand of another 'counter request' with the naming of a further three *glinni*. They all go into the hall where Conchobar holds court, and Cathbad the druid announces that Conchobar is now king of all Ulster. Cú Chulainn invokes his counter-request, demanding that Conchobar come to a feast at his own house. Fintan in indignation asks 'Where are my requests (*acsine*)[23] and my guarantees (*urnadmand*)[24] that you dare to ask such things?', upon which the two groups of securities rise up:

> *Tincsetar glinni cechtar n-aí díb cu barbarda, 7 ba sed barbardacht na comérgi co mbaí nónbor i ngonaib 7 nónbor i fuilib 7 nónbur ra hulibásaib eturru leth for leth.* (*MU-W* 115–18, cf. *co barbarda* 161)
>
> 'Each of their sureties performed his duty barbarously, and such was the barbarity of the rising that there were nine of them wounded and nine bloodied and nine entirely done to death among them on each side.'

The 'barbarism' at this point is the action of the securities, which leads to such slaughter – for what purpose? Sencha waves his branch of peace and says they are fighting too much; after additional negotiations and pledges the matter is adjourned for a year, and they feast and go home.

All is well till the end of the year, when both Cú Chulainn and Niall make preparations for the feasts that they plan to hold themselves; they arrive simultaneously at Emain, and when Cú Chulainn invites Conchobar to his feast Fintan asks for his securities (*mo chuir 7 mo ghlinni*, 156), Cú Chulainn responds in like kind and the conflict erupts again: *At-raachtatar Ulaid co barbarda ara n-armaib* (161): 'the Ulstermen rose up barbarously to their arms'. The chaos continues until Conchobar quells the conflict of these 'unpeaceful' warriors (*essídaig*, 162) by sending as mediator a boy whom Cú Chulainn himself had fostered.

The basis of all this is that the two men's counter-requests each demand that Conchobar attend a feast, and the two feasts will take place

[23] See *eDIL* s.v. *aicsu* 'request, wish', v.n. of *ad-goa*, with Watson's note in the Glossary (1941: 62).

[24] See *eDIL* s.v. *airnadm* 'bond, guarantee'.

on the same day on opposite sides of Ulster, so by honouring the one *frithaisced* he defaults on the other; hence the *glinni* are inevitably called on to fight each time. The first time, the 'branch of peace' imposes a truce which delays resolution to year's end; the second time, the solution is one that will turn out to be disastrous. On Sencha's advice they divide the feast in two, assigning the first half of the night to Fintan's hospitality and the second half to Cú Chulainn's (183–6). So at midnight in the middle of Fintan's feast Cú Chulainn summons all the Ulaid to go to his own: and this sets off the drunken journey that goes astray and ends up at Temair Lúachra.

Why, then, do the *glinni* fight each other to the death, and in what sense is this behaviour 'barbarous'? Their action is that of the *enforcing surety*: that is, is one who not only witnesses and guarantees the contract but also undertakes to use physical force against the other party if he defaults.[25] As Stacey has shown, the text *Berrad Airechta* gives details of the kind of procedure that was involved: the two sides in the contract appointed enforcing sureties for their claims, and the mutual obligations of the parties and the securities were stated to each other in ritualised speech-acts in the making of the contract.[26] This, then, is the correlate in legal procedure for the process by which the twelve Ulster warriors become bound by obligations to ensure that the four principals will carry out the 'requests' that they have undertaken to honour from each other.

According to the canonical law tract known as the *Sechtae* or *Heptads*, dated to the Old Irish period (Kelly, F. 1988: 266; Breatnach 2005: 291–2), *fuil fir saiges naidm* 'blood spilt by a man enforcing his surety' is one of the categories of killing that is recognised as valid procedure to the extent that the killing does not incur fines or sick-maintenance.[27] It was evidently a recognised reality that the enforcing surety would become a force of violent disruption, and this could lead to chaos if taken to extremes. As early as the *First Synod of St Patrick* the practice of acting as an enforcing surety (*fideiusor*) is forbidden to clergy:

> *Clericus si pro gentili homine fideiusor fuerit in quacumque quantitate et si contigerit, quod mirum non potest [?leg. est], per astutiam aliquam*

[25] See Binchy (1941: 100–101); Kelly (1988: 171–2); Ó Cróinín (1995: 135); Edel (2003: at 67–9).
[26] Stacey 1986; 1994: 34–39; 2007: 118–22.
[27] *Heptad* 6, *CIH* 9.5; sim. *GC* p. 325 para 17 gl., discussed by Ó Cróinín 1995: 135.

> *gentilis ille clerico fallat, rebus suis clericus ille soluat debitum. Nam si armis conpugnauerat cum illo, merito extra ecclesiam conputetur*.
>
> (*Penit* pp. 54–5, at §8)

> 'If a cleric has given surety for a pagan in whatsoever amount, and it so happens – as well it might – that the pagan by some ruse defaults upon the cleric, the cleric must pay the debt from his own means; should he contend with him in arms, let him be reckoned outside the church, as he deserves.' (tr. Bieler 1963)

This is cited as from *Patricius* in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, and the word for the 'giver of surety' is again *fideiussor* (*CCH* 34.2, cf. 34.3–8). Later, the words for a witness are *testis* and then *stipulatio*, *rata* (34.7, 34.8). As Thurneysen (1930: 364–72) saw, *rata* corresponds to *ráith* and *stipulatio* corresponds to *naidm*, extended from abstract to agent just as *naidm* itself does. The actual procedure is described in a further passage of the *Hibernensis*, in terms reminiscent of the procedure described in *Mesca Ulad* (*CCH* 34.7). This suggests that, from the perspective of the eleventh-century composer or redactor, the application of the law of contract-making in our text may have been seen as a throwback to a problematic custom from the past.

The essence of the episode, then, is that the Ulaid are applying the law in a wildly exaggerated way, slaughtering each other in order to vindicate obligations whose only significance lies in the enactment of respect and honour by attendance at the lord's feast. So stated, the episode finds a partial parallel in *Fled Bricrend*, where the *aitiri* appointed to guarantee Bricriu's departure from the feast are prepared to draw blood to enforce the pledge (*FB*$_1$ §13); but the situation in *Mesca Ulad* is more extreme, because the enforcing securities are drawing blood over something as insubstantial as the predicted logistical problems of attending feasts – in the first case, a feast that is not even due until a year will have passed.

The solution proposed by Sencha, that they should divide the night in two and travel to Cú Chulainn's Dún Delga, leads to the ludicrous outcome of the *baothréim*: on the journey across Ulster they become wildly disorientated and eventually find themselves deep in Munster. As they approach Temair Lúachra, where Ailill and Medb are being entertained by Cú Roí mac Dáire, the theme of barbarous violence reappears when the Ulster host bursts into a charge towards the fort:

> *Ba sed a barbardacht at-raachtatar cuna fargaib sleg ar aidlend ná sciath ar berraidi ná claideb ar alchaiṅg i Temair Luachra na torchair.* (*MU-W* 494–6)
>
> 'Such was the barbarity with which they arrived that there was not left a spear on a bracket nor a shield on a peg nor a sword in a rack in Temair Luachra that did not fall.'

The ground shakes, the fort totters; the scene, says the narrator, was like the return of the Flood over the world (548–9). The scene has obvious antecedents in the Ulster Cycle tradition – for example, the image of the return of the Flood is paralleled in *TBC LL* in the prophecy of coming battle uttered by Sualtaim and then re-echoed and amplified by Conchobar (*TBC LL* 3986–8, 4041–7). The scene next develops into a variant of the 'watchman scene' *topos*, when Crom Deróil, one the two druids on the wall who have witnessed their approach, goes to describe them to Cú Roí and his guests, and they interpret his descriptions to identify the people he has seen.[28] At the beginning of his account, the image of barbarity appears again:

> *Is a Hérind anair, dar lecnib na hIrlúachra cu demin', ar Crom Deróil: 'táchim slúaig barbardai nad etar-sa indat Hérenaig indat allmaraig...'* (*MU-W* 514–16)
>
> ''From the east of Ireland, by the slopes of Irluachair, indeed', said Crom Deróil: 'is the march of this barbarous host, and I do not know if they are Irishmen or foreigners.''

In what quality does the 'barbarity' reside: in the disorderly movements of the host, in the fact that they are presumably drunk, in a sense that the Ulaid are more violent than the other peoples of Ireland – or in something else? The question recurs in the course of Crom Deróil's detailed descriptions:

> *'Unsea riu sain anair anechtair', bar Crom Deróil: 'ata-connac-sa and triar n-úathmar n-anachnid i n-airinuch na buidni. Trí lénti línecda i caustul fri cnessaib dóib; trí bruitt fhinnig líathodra i forcipul impu. Trí cúalli íairn isna brattaib úasa mbrainib; trí fuilt fordonna fráechda forru; trí glanscéith odorda co caladbúaltib finnuma forru; trí slega slindlethna leo; trí claidbi órduirn acaib. Ba samalta ri gláim con all-*

[28] On this *topos* see Sims-Williams 1977/8; Miles 2011: 175–93.

maraig i fathod srenbúrach craidi cech miled díb ra forcloistecht a mbidbad isin dúnad sa.'
'Is barbarda 's is cauratta in tuarascbáil', ar Medb.
'Is barbarda in lucht issa tuarascbáil', bar Cú Ruí. (*MU* 603–17)

''Here before them outside to the east,' said Crom Deróil: 'I saw three fearsome unknown men in the vanguard of the host. Three linen shirts next to (?) the skin upon them; three woolen dun-grey cloaks wrapped around them. Three iron stakes in the cloaks over their breasts; three brown heathery heads of hair upon them; three grey smooth shields with bosses of pale bronze upon them; they hold three broad-headed spears; they have three golden-hilted swords. Like to the howl of a foreign hound in the attack (?) is the bellowing of the heart of each warrior among them when he overhears his enemy in this fort.'
'Barbarous and heroic is the description', said Medb.
'Barbarous is the host in the description', said Cú Roí.'

Note that the Ulaid in question are *not* described in absurd or undignified terms: they are not absurd buffoons, and there is nothing to suggest that they are behaving like drunks. Presumably, then, what justifies the adjective is the wildness and savagery of their demeanour.

Ius primae noctis

In terms of narrative motivation, the theme of *barbarity* in this text makes for an instructive comparison with another Ulster Cycle moment, in *Tochmarc Emire* (*TE*, van Hamel 1978). This text, as Ó hUiginn (2013) has shown, weaves its way between different articulations of the politics of sexual union – wooing, seduction, concubinage, parental manipulation, eternal triangle – and this sequence of variations on a theme has a strange coda in the version known as Recension 3 (the recension which is first attested in the hand of one of the H-interpolators in Lebor na hUidre, suggesting a milieu of composition close to that of the Book of Leinster versions of the Ulster Cycle texts). When the story reaches what should be its happy conclusion, the fulfilment of the marriage between Cú Chulainn and Emir, it hits a snag when Bricriu reminds the Ulaid of an awkward custom:

> *'Bid doilig ém', ol sé: 'la Coin Culainn aní dogéntar anocht and .i. in ben tuc leis a feis la Conchobur anocht, ar is leis coll cétingen ria nUltaib dogrés'.* (*TE* §88)
>
> 'Hard for Cú Chlainn' he said 'will be the thing that will be done tonight, viz., for the wife he's taken to sleep with Conchobar tonight: for to him belongs the despoiling of every first girl (?) before the Ulstermen always.'

Bricriu has not produced this custom out of nowhere. It is of course the dark theme later dignified with the name *ius primae noctis* or *droit de seigneur*, the idea that the lord has special access to the bride of each of his retainers on her wedding night.[29] The Irish evidence for this custom is instructive.[30] It appears in *Scéla Conchobuir* among a list of disorderly behaviours and excesses ascribed to Conchobar's reign as if they were signs of propitious kingship:[31] here, one guesses, the image is a comment on his behaviour in the case of Deirdre and the sons of Uisnech. In the so-called *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, Mageoghegan's translation of the 'old Irish book' has at the year 830 a highly-coloured account of the atrocities committed by the Vikings, including the claim that 'the chief governor of them should have the bestowing of any woman in the kingdom the first night after her marriage...to satisfy his lust'.[32] It is impossible to tell where this came from, but if it is not an invention of the seventeenth-century translator it presumably goes back to a source in our period, a source which associated this custom with the grotesque behaviour of the Danes.

Hearing this from Bricriu, Cú Chulainn goes into fury and must be sent to chase birds to calm his rage. This gives the Ulaid time to work

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[29] On the data for this theme in continental Europe see Boureau 1998.

[30] Other sources for *ius primae noctis* from Ireland are post-medieval and probably unconnected with the examples discussed here: see Mac Philib 1988.

[31] *Ba sí a airmitiu ám leo .i. cech fer di Ultaib dobered ingen macdacht a feiss le Conchobor in chetadchi combad hé a cétmunter.* 'This truly was the respect that they had for him, viz. every man of the Ulsterman who would marry a grown girl, she would sleep with Conchobar the first night, so that he would be her first spouse.' (*SC* §9)

[32] See the transcription of this paragraph from TCD MS 673 by Mac Philib (1988: 103). This passage is omitted (evidently on grounds of its indecency) from Murphy's published edition (1896: 134); on this omission see also McCarthy 2007: 56, with further references.

out a solution: Emir sleeps with Conchobar but has Fergus and Cathbad in the bed with her *do chomét enig Con Culainn 7 bennacht Ulad don lánamain ara fóemad* (*TE* §90) 'for the preservation of Cú Chulainn's honour and the blessing of the Ulstermen on the couple for what was concluded.' The sleeping arrangements for Cú Chulainn's wedding night are absurd, but they are forced upon the Ulaid because of insistence on the physical implementation of a custom that the audience and authors of the narrative would have seen as a grotesque aberration of normal social structures, one associated with the wild savagery of pagan barbarians. As such, I suggest, this motif in *Tochmarc Emire* is the equivalent in sexual power-politics of *Mesca Ulad*'s image of the bizarrely excessive implementation of an archaic and violent version of the law of suretyship. It is significant also that both narratives use the motif in question to explore the implications of a king's over-literal insistence on the upholding of his rights and privileges.

Taking these two texts together, then, I suggest that the *barbarity* explored here is bound up with the sense of an archaic and disorderly excess of energy – "too-great manliness" in the sense of a propensity towards violence and also towards the vindication of personal honour that goes beyond the constraints of common sense.

Dashing their heads against the rock

As noted above, the instances of the 'barbarous' words that we have gathered from *Mesca Ulad* and other Ulster Cycle texts are all attributable to a late phase of the tradition, the framing of the recensions of the various texts that are found in the Book of Leinster. As such, they could potentially be argued away as mere editorial additions, closer to the contribution of a disapproving copyist rather than a creative contributor to the development of the literary tradition. I believe, however, that that would be unnecessarily reductive: it can be shown that the same theme is already present, although more allusively expressed, in the fragmentary closing episode of the earlier recension that survives in Lebor na hUidre. The Ulaid are now trapped in Temair Luachra, at the mercy of Cú Roí and his people, and Dubthach Dóeltengad realises that they are being made ready for destruction:

Tongu-sa a toinges mo thúath nadcon ricfaid far tír co bráth acht a mbértae éoin úaib ina crobaib, acht fir Hérend 7 Alban do aitrib for tíre 7 do breith for mban 7 for sét 7 do brisiud cend for mac fri clocha.
(*MU-LU* 928–32)

'I swear what my people swears, that none will reach your country but what birds will carry of you in their claws, but the men of Ireland and Alba will possess your land and seize your women and your treasure and break the heads of your children on the rocks.'

Carey (1990: 41–44) showed in a brilliant note that this is an allusion ultimately to Psalm 136, whose final verse notoriously says of Babylon

Beatus qui tenebit et allidet parvulos tuos ad petram.

'Blessed is he who will seize thy little ones and dash them against a rock.' (Ps 136)

As Carey shows, however, this is more than a mere verbal echo of the Psalm. The Latin version of the commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia, preserved as the text that carries the Milan Glosses in Old Irish, has the following to say about this line:

Consuetudo est barbarorum ut nulla miseratione commoti infantium capita petris inlidant, quos non dignantur fortium morte occidere.
gl. *occidere .i. interfectione .i. ni fiu leu bás n-aill du techt forru acht beim a cinn fri cloich.* (*TP* 1. 473)

'It is the custom of the barbarians that, moved by no pity, they dash the heads of infants against stones, thinking them unworthy to die by the death of the valiant.
"By murder": viz. they think it unworthy for any other death to come upon them but to strike their heads against a rock.'

It is striking that the pivotal word in the intertext is *barbari*: but even if this is a coincidence as concerns the agendas of the composer(s) of *Mesca Ulad*, it encourages us to consider further the implications of the association between the savage imagery of Dubthach and the commentator's sense of the association between warlike infanticide and barbarism.

The Tuatha Dé unseen

One last issue remains: why did the violence of *Mesca Ulad* arise in the first place? The explanation lies in the Prologue in the LL text. The Tuatha Dé Danann, withdrawing into the subterranean places on the arrival of the Sons of Míl, have left five of their number in each province to stir up 'battle, conflict, strife and struggle' (*MU*-W 11) among the newcomers. The five in Ulster 'drive a division' (*bar-immartatar sin inlach*, 18) among the Ulstermen, and this causes – or is directly identified with[33] – the division into three kingships as recounted above. This must prompt the suspicion that the conflict and chaos that follow are a manifestation of their malign influence. Their presence is not spelled out in the negotiations between Conchobar and other two temporary kings, but it appears in the 'watchman' scene at Temair Luachra, the next description after the barbarous Ulstermen described above. Crom Deróil has described an extraordinary figure among the host of the Ulaid – 'large-eyed, great-thighed, large-shouldered, enormous, very tall, with a great grey cloak around him' (*MU-W* 624–5), plying an apparently magical club:

> *'Cid ón, cia sút?' bar Ailill.*
> *'Ní hannsa' bar Cú Ruí: 'in Dagda Mór mac Eithlenn, dagdía Túathi Dé Danann. Da mórad áig 7 urgaile ra cummasc isin matin indiu for in slúag, 7 ní fhaccend nech issint shlúag é.'* (*MU-W* 636–38)
>
> ''Who is that, who is there?' Ailill asked. 'Not hard to answer', Cú Roí said: the great Dagda son of Eithliú, the good god of the Tuath Dé Danann. In order to increase battle and strife this morning he mingled himself with the host, and no-one in the host sees him.''

Crom Deróil, with the heightened vision typical of the 'watchman device', has seen what the men in the host could not see: the Túatha Dé are present unseen among the Ulaid, and the tendency towards chaos and social disruption – or, as here, for drunken disorder – can be linked to their continuing influence. In terms of the cultural horizons of those responsible for transmitting and reshaping the Ulster Cycle through the 'long eleventh century', this conception is far from unique: witness at the most famous *riastrad* of Cú Chulainn in *TBC*, where

[33] The connection of ideas in lines 18–28 can be understood either way.

after the account of the frenzy and the ensuing slaughter an editorial comment records 'Others say that Lug mac Eithlend fought along with Cú Chulainn at Sesrech Breslige'.[34] If the *furor heroicus* of the *riastrad* can be conceptualised as the presence of Lug alongside Cú Chulainn, so too the strife and confusion of the Ulaid in *MU* are conceptualised as the unseen influence of his kind upon the lesser race to which the Ulaid belong.[35]

[34] *TBC Rec. 1*, 2316–7, in the main text; *TBC LL* 2322–3, in the margin of the manuscript.

[35] On the theme of the continuing influence of the Túatha Dé after their descent below ground, see most recently Williams 2018: 214–247.

The ends of the earth: *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* and Augustinian historiography[1]

Daniel James Watson

> All things are fashioned from the first nature of things, and are seen to be shaped by the *ratio* of numbers. For this was the principal exemplar in the Creator's mind.[2]
>
> *De computo dialogus*

> For who can explain the virtue of the number six, which is regarded as the basis of all harmony? Who can explain the ratios that are contained in it, of three to two, of four to three and of double? Or why the Universe of all visible and invisible creatures is constituted in it as a kind of archetype?[3]
>
> Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, V.966A

Introduction

In recent years there has been an eclipse of scholarly enthusiasm for discovering Indo-European sun-gods in medieval Irish saga in favour of Christian typological themes. However, the extent to which this represents a true renaissance of interest in the form of the

[1] My thanks to Elizabeth Boyle (Maynooth) and Joan Marie Gallagher (Glasgow) for their input and advice on this paper as it developed, and to Elliott Lash (Göttingen) for his encouragement at a pivotal stage of the process. My thanks also to Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (Cambridge), for giving me a chance to test out my revisions of the original paper, by inviting me to present the result as an ASNC Research Seminar in January of 2020.

[2] *PL* 90, col. 649A: 'Omnia quæqunque a prima rerum natura constructa sunt, numerorum videntur ratione formata. Hoc enim fuit principale exemplar in animo Conditoris.' The translation above is that of Wallis (1999: xxv). All translations in this paper are those of the translator cited unless otherwise indicated.

[3] Jeaneau (2003: 148): 'Quis enim senarii numeri uirtutem, qui totius armoniae intelligitur fundamentum; quis collationes ipsius cum suis sesqualteris, sesquiterciis, duplis quoque intra naturas rerum potest cognoscere, dum rerum omnium uisibilium et inuisibilium uniuersitas in eo ueluti in quodam principali exemplo constituta sit?' trans. O'Meara (1987: 648).

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 73–107.

sagas as we have them, rather than a mere reorientation of an old tendency to look past the nuances of a text to find pre-determined hidden meanings, remains to be seen. Certainly, an approach which makes every otherworldly being into an allegory of the Church will not be much more convincing than one which makes them all into sovereignty goddesses. Either approach would seem to lack the theoretical complexity necessary to match the complexity of the evidence. Yet the new prejudices have the advantage of being, if not necessarily shared by, at least in sympathy with, the prejudices embodied in medieval exegetical practice, both in Ireland and elsewhere. More than one medieval interpreter of the Christian Scriptures has been accused, by those of modern historicist convictions, of reading typology into the Bible that is not there.[4] Moreover, given the centrality of the Church to all forms of education during the centuries in which these sagas were written, it would seem rash to try to explain away such Christian typology as we find in them as a merely superficial element, there only to disguise a fundamentally pagan product. However much of the material for the sagas may actually be a survival the pre-Christian past, they evidently function as part of an understanding of the world that their authors believed to be, not only Christian, but orthodox. Still, while it will be important (in the interpretation of any given saga) not to make the author into a modern Romantic, that, as such, delights in creativity and perceived heterodoxy for their own sake,[5] it is also essential to refrain from assuming that we understand what perceived orthodoxy actually is in any particular case. The tendency to confuse our own received notions of the way that Christian orthodoxy operates with the various understandings of it we

[4] Friedrich Schleiermacher is a seminal figure relative to modern historicism's characteristic incredulity towards ancient and medieval allegorical interpretive practices. See, for example, Bowie 1998: 15–20.

[5] *John* Carey, for example, has occasionally seemed to suggest that medieval Irish authors who affirmed pre-Christian Irish learning did so self-consciously conceiving of it as something that contrasted with Christian revelation (1999: 7–11, 24–6 and 38; 2015, 52, 55–6 and 61). This, at any rate, seems to be the implication of referring to the results of their various attempts to demonstrate the agreement of pre-Christian revelation with that of the Church as 'audacious' (1999: 38; 2015: 55), 'venturesome' (2015: 52) 'risqué', 'subversive' (2015: 56) and, even, in one instance, as representing an 'alternative' to Christian doctrine (2015: 61). If they are so on a doctrinal level, it is, evidently, from a perspective other than that of the authors in question.

find in early Irish sources remains a significant impediment to progress in the discipline. Furthermore, not everything that accords with a given author's view will necessarily be a feature of it. As noted above, scholarship on the sagas has sometimes been overzealous in its hunt for Christian typological meaning.[6] Yet, if ever there was a text-book example of how figures in a medieval Irish saga are sometimes presented as types which anticipate some aspect or another of the advent of the Church, in much same way as the figures of the Old Testament were understood to do so by Christian theologians from St Paul onwards, it would surely be the Cú Chulainn of *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* (*BMMM*).[7]

The character and dating of the text

BMMM[8] survives only as a single copy in the Book of Leinster (119a–123b; Best *et al*. 1954–83, II: 442–57) and in a series of glossed excerpts found in Trinity MS H.3.18, on which we rely for our fragmentary knowledge of the beginning of the saga, which is missing in the Book of Leinster.[9] The scholarship on *BMMM* is not yet very developed,[10] but there is a recent edition and translation of the text by Bettina Kimpton (2009), who argues on linguistic grounds,[11] and on the basis of the excerpts of the saga found in *Sanas Cormaic*,[12] that it is a 'late ninth- or

[6] For example, the attempt to draw a direct connection, without qualification, between the three red horsemen of *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* to the respective white, red, black and grey horsemen of the Apocalypse. See McCone 1990: 44. For discussion, other examples and references, see O'Connor 2013: 245.

[7] Albeit, Cú Chulainn's typological anticipation of Christ, in *BMMM*, certainly does not exhaust his typological potential. For Cú Chulainn as a new David, in the Middle Irish story, 'David and Goliath', see Boyle 2022: 55–61. Though of course, since Christ himself is often refered to as the 'son of David' (e.g. *Luke* 18:38–9), this may function as a feature of Christ-typology, rather than an alternative to it.

[8] Thurneysen's 'Version A', as opposed to the early modern version of the saga, which he designated 'Version B'. See Thurneysen 1921a: 548; on 'Version B', see Kuhns 2009.

[9] Kimpton 2009: 1; Lehman 1989: 7; Tymoczko 1981: 14.

[10] But see Kuhns 2009: *passim*. My thanks to Kate Louise Mathis (Edinburgh) for drawing my attention to this reference.

[11] Kimpton 2009: 1, following Thurneysen 1921a: 548–9 and Pokorny 1919: 123.

[12] Kimpton 2009: 1; Thurneysen 1921a: 548. The excerpts in question refer to Cú Chulainn's post-mortem prophecy of Christ: *BMMM* §30.489–32.575 (Kimpton

tenth-century reworking of an early eighth-century composition, with later scribal innovations'.[13] If the typological content of *BMMM* could indeed be demonstrated to be part of an eighth-century version of the text, this would prove highly significant, seeing as it would likely place the association of Cú Chulainn with Christ, in the saga, earlier even than the disputed[14] hypothetical exemplar (ca. 790), that Kelleher argued was ultimately responsible for the brief overlap between Christ's and Cú Chulainn's life (34 BC – 2 AD) in the Annals.[15] However, the greater part of recent scholarship on the Pre-Patrician Annals[16] would seem to

2009: 27–30). For the excerpts, see Russell *et al* 2006–: B.28 and 520, La.83, M.24, Y.26 and 959.

[13] Kimpton 2009: 9.

[14] Dumville 1977–9.

[15] Kelleher 1971: 115, 119 and 121–2. Daniel McCarthy also argues that Cú Chulainn's obit († 2 AD) was added in the eighth-century, but for different reasons. See McCarthy (2007: plate I, commentary), where he attributes this to the 'Moville Compiler', and (2007: 169–187 and 196), for his arguments regarding that compiler's eighth-century date.

[16] On the dating of the 'Pre-Patrician Annals / Irish World Chronicle', see O'Rahilly (1946: 253–4): 'certainly not earlier than the ninth century'; Mac Airt (1951: xviii): 'the earliest possible date … lies in the first decades of the eighth century'; Hughes (1972: 144): world-chronical element added to Annals of Tigernach after c. 913; Dumville (1975–6: 52–3): 725 A.D. publication date of Bede's *DTR* the only firm *terminus post quem* – no *terminus ante quem* earlier than 1050, the date of the first witness of the text, in the absence of further proofs; Grabowski & Dumville (1984: 122): Clonmacnoise Chronicle produced in early years of the tenth century – (1984: 156): the 'Irish World Chronicle … seems likely to be an integral part of the Clonmacnoise Chronicle', but 'the conclusion is scarcely more than a guess'; Miller (1991: 79): 'took its origin at Clonmacnoise (Co. Offaly) in the tenth century'; Charles-Edwards (2006, I: 3): in the tenth-century 'prefixed to the Chronicle of Ireland in a daughter chronicle compiled in the monastery of Clonmacnoise'. For a helpful, if polemic, overview of the history of the dating of this text, see McCarthy 2007: 81–116. In his recent book, McCarthy has restated his argument that the 'Pre-Patrician Annals / Irish World Chronicle' did not develop separately from the 'Chronicle of Ireland' (2007: 112–3, 150–52, 166–7, 196–7). However, while his emphasis on the role of the earliest Irish chronological achievements (2007: 110, esp. note 161) is no doubt justified, the seeming dependence of this theory on the thesis that a hypothetical and unattested Rufinian chronicle is the source of the Annals' similarities to Rufinus' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, rather than the *Historia Ecclesiastica* itself, places it, to all appearances, on very shaky ground; see Flechner (2013: 426–7, esp. note 19) for this problem, among others, with McCarthy's reconstruction of the evidence, and references.

indicate that any attempt to connect the Annals' doctrine of Christ's temporal coincidence with Cú Chulainn to *BMMM*'s typological content will make a ninth- or tenth-century origin for that content rather more likely.[17] This would, moreover, have the added plausibility of making the development of this theme in the death-tale of Cú Chulainn, roughly contemporary with related developments in that of Conchobar,[18] as well as the earliest historiographical precursors to the grand synthesis of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* in the eleventh century.[19]

Typology – general considerations

As for the actual features of the Christ-typology in the saga, these are numerous enough that both McCone and Kimpton were content to mention only the most salient examples.[20] The following list represents a moderate expansion of their findings. On the level of narrative devel-

[17] Dumville has argued that it is 'difficult to place the Irish material in the prehistoric section of the annals before the tenth century' (1975: 52), but that it is, at any rate, 'current at Clonmacnoise in the eleventh century and … transmitted to Munster not later than 1056X1072' (1975: 54). While this would seem to push us towards the likelihood of a tenth-century date for *BMMM*, the possibility that *BMMM* may be ninth-century, a possibility, moreover, which is further supported by the dating of similar developments in *Aided Chonchobair* (see note 18), would seem, conversely, to cast doubt on any attempt to make the tenth-century a hard *terminus post quem* for such ideas in annalistic literature.

[18] For the date of the original composition of *Aided Chonchobair*, and those of its oldest existing recensions, see Kobel 2015: 70, 76, 86 and 92. For the *Vita S. Albei*, which places Conchobar's death hundreds of years later than that of Christ (i.e. contemporary with Palladius), as evidence for a late eighth-century version of these events, see Imhoff 2012: 50, 73–6, 78 and 80. Imhoff, however, suggests that the *Vita*, and recension B of *Aided Chonchobar*, in taking Conchobar to have received the news of Christ's passion at some point after the fact, and from a foreign messenger, are most likely derivative from an earlier version, attested by recensions A and D (2012: 50, 73–6, 78 and 80), in which Conchobar receives the news of the Christ's passion from a local poet or magus (*druí*), contemporaneous with its occurrence (2012: 65–6). If this is so, and her dating of the *Vita* is correct, these recensions would seem to present the earliest evidence (i.e. prior to the late eighth century) for the doctrine of Christ's coincidence with the heroes of Emain Macha.

[19] For an overview of its precursors, see Carey 1993: 3–6; 1994: 9–18; 2005: 33–41.

[20] Kimpton 2009: 4–5; McCone 1990: 197. See also Kelleher 1971: 121–2.

opment, Cú Chulainn, like Christ, prophesies his coming death,[21] but does not avoid it,[22] a death which results from a plot against him,[23] and involves him being wounded by a spear,[24] as well as thirsting for and receiving drink,[25] for which female mourners are the most important witnesses,[26] and after which he gives a message to his people before disappearing into the heavens.[27] On the level of images, we find that Cú Chulainn, like Christ, is compared to a slain lamb,[28] and that his horse sheds tears of blood prior to his death,[29] evoking the drops of blood shed by Christ during his passion.[30] Then there is also the question as to whether his 'hero's-light' (*lón gaile/láith*)[31] is intended to bring to mind the glory around the head of a saint, or his 'phantom-chariot'

[21] For example, *Matt.* 16:21–28, 17:22–3, 20:17–22, 21:33–45, 26:21–31, etc.

[22] *BMMM* §10.129–185 (Kimpton 2009: 16–17); *Matt.* 26:39–56, *Mark* 14:35–50, etc.

[23] *BMMM* [H.3.18] §31.1–6 (Kimpton 2009: 11); *Matt.* 26:3–16; *Mark* 14:10–11; *Luke* 20:19–20, 22:1–6, etc.

[24] *BMMM* §20.358–9 and 31.507 (Kimpton 2009: 23 and 28); *John* 19:20.

[25] *BMMM* §21.362–9 (Kimpton 2009: 23); *Matt.* 27:48; *Mark* 15:36; *John* 19:28–30.

[26] *BMMM* §8.94–116 and 30.489–90 (Kimpton 2009: 14–15 and 27); *Matt.* 27:55–28:9; *Mark* 15:40–7; *Luke* 23:27–8 and 55, 24:10–24.

[27] *BMMM* §31.504–32.575 (Kimpton 2009: 28–30); *Mark* 16:14–19; *Luke* 24:36–51; Acts 1:2–9.

[28] *BMMM* §31.505 and 511 (Kimpton 2009: 28); *Exod.* 12; *John* 1:29–36; *Rev.* 5:6–13.

[29] *BMMM* §8.94–5 (Kimpton 2009: 14); *Luke* 22:44. My thanks to Michael Clarke (Galway) for reminding me that the literary *topos* of a horse's weeping for his master's death is likely from Virgil's *Aeneid* XI.89–90 (Mynors 1969: 365), either directly, or by way of Servius' commentary on the same (Thilo & Hagen 1881–1902, II: 487.9–11). In this case, we seem to have a synthesis of this *topos* with the Old Irish theme of the tears of blood, provoked by Christ's passion [Blathmac §132 (Carney 1964: 45; Breeze 1988: 115)], distress at being forced to work on the Lord's Day [*Cáin Domnaig* §9 (O'Keeffe 1905: 195–6; Hull 1955: 228)], or else, forced exile [Meyer 1907: 136.23; Hull 1957: 29 and 46; 1955: 231]. For examples of tears of blood in subsequent Irish literature, see Hull 1955: 228–35. Later in *BMMM* (§34.671 Kimpton 2009: 32), Emer expects that every eye which has seen him will weep with 'gushes of blood' (*frassaib fola*). Given the grammatical similarity that Kimpton has noted (see note 37) between this later passage and the 'heavy tear of blood' (*tromdér folo*) passage in Blathmac §132 (Carney 1964: 45), and the thematic similarity between the keening of Christ, in Blathmac, and the keening his typological representative in *BMMM*, it seems that Blathmac's treatment of the idea has the most relevance for both instances of gory tears in this text.

[30] *Luke* 22:44.

[31] *BMMM* §12.265 and 23.378 (Kimpton 2009: 19 and 23).

(*síacharpat*),[32] that of the prophet Elijah's own prefiguration of Christ in his ascent to heaven in a chariot of fire.[33] Whatever the case may be regarding these latter images, this typology is expressed in *BMMM*'s phrasing as well. Erc's *rosc* which warns of Cú Chulainn's approach is, simultaneously, a warning of the coming of the 'son of God, son of man' (*mac Dé mac duini*),[34] one of Christ's titles in context of the Bible,[35] but also fitting for Cú Chulainn, if the idea found elsewhere, that Lug is his father, is taken to apply here.[36] Moreover, Kimpton has suggested that there are echoes of the keening of Christ, made by Blathmac in his eighth-century religious poetry,[37] in Emer's keening of Cú Chulainn, and also, of the narrator's description of his attack on the Leinster hosts, in Cú Chulainn's own description of Christ's all-encompassing victory over the powers of Hell, later in the saga.[38] Of all these, the last, together with Cú Chulainn's description of himself as a slain lamb, are perhaps the most significant. For in prophesying Christ's triumphant return in a way that parallels the narrator's description of his own martial achievements, and in applying iconography, that typically pertains only to Christ, to himself, Cú Chulainn becomes his own exegete (as

[32] *BMMM* §30.490 (Kimpton 2009: 27).

[33] For Elijah's ascension into heaven, see 2 *Kings* 2:11; for Christ's ascension into heaven, see note 27.

[34] *BMMM* §13.277 (Kimpton 2009: 20).

[35] For 'Son of man' (*filius hominis*), as applied to Christ, see *Matt.* 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, 32 and 40, 13:37 and 41, 16:13 and 27–8, 17:9, 12 and 22, 18:11, 19:28, 20:18 and 28; 24:27, 30 and 37, etc. This expression is used by all four Gospel-writers. See also *BMMM*'s description of Cú Chulainn as a 'heavenly nobleman' (*nár neóil*) §14.280 (Kimpton 2009: 20).

[36] *Compert Con Culainn* §5 (Van Hamel 1978: 5); *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* 2108ff. (O'Rahilly, C. 1976: 65).

[37] §132.525 (Carney 1964: 44). In the passage in question (2009: 67), Kimpton is speaking of the 'ba méite' (it were likely) construction, used in BMMM to indicate the necessity of lamenting Cú Chulainn, and in Blathmac (§132.525 Carney 1964: 44), relative to the necessity of lamenting Christ. Kimpton's suggestion of a connection between these texts is further strengthened by their shared theme of Christ as 'sister's son'; see *BMMM* §32.543 (Kimpton 2009: 29): 'nia'; §100.400 (Carney 1964: 34): 'deirbsethar'; §103.412 (Carney 1964: 36): 'fírbráthair'. Although in *BMMM* Christ is the sister's-son of humanity, where he is the sister's-son of the ancient Israelites in Blathmac. On the theme of the sister's-son in early Irish Literature, with reference to both these texts, see Ó Cathasaigh 1986.

[38] Kimpton 2009: 4.

Christ often is of himself in the Gospels),[39] not only being presented by the narrative as a type of Christ, but effectively interpreting himself as such, and inviting the reader to do the same.

Yet it is not sufficient to say that Cú Chulainn functions as a type of Christ in this text and to leave it at that. Typology is not a one-way street. The appearance of the archetype in the type means something about the type as well.[40] Moreover, there are different kinds of types. To say that something is a type of another merely indicates that it has a likeness to it which is that of a lesser thing to a greater, insofar as the lesser is a manifestation of something that is more perfectly present in the greater. In biblical typology, this most often also involves a temporal distinction in which the type most often precedes, but sometimes succeeds, its archetype in time.[41] However, a wide array of possibilities remains within these basic parameters. To put it broadly, a sociopath might be said to be like a scholar in being poorly socialized and a bat might be said to be like a scholar in hiding from sunlight, and both, by virtue of their likeness, to foreshadow something that is fully present only in the scholar, but this clearly does not allow us to assume that the respective relationships of the sociopath and the bat to the scholar, as likenesses of him, are in any way equal. Differences of both degree and kind are at play. What then is the significance of Cú Chulainn's Christ-typology in *BMMM* for how he and his context are understood by its author? Kimpton has suggested that it is fundamentally a narrat-

[39] See, for example, *Luke* 24:58; this is true of St John the Baptist as well, who, significantly for our purposes, interprets his own role as that of the forerunner of Christ [*Mark* 1:3; *John* 1:23]. See also, pages 88–95 (esp. note 86).

[40] Seminal texts for the relationship of archetype and type include Plato's *Symposium* 210a-211d (Dover 1980: 60–2), *Republic* 508e-518c (Slings 2003: 254–64) and *Timaeus* 27d-29c (Burnet 1964). Note how, in Biblical examples, the movement from the lesser reality of the type to the higher reality of the archetype, such as we find in Plato, has come to include a temporal movement, usually from an earlier epoch to a later. See, for example, *Rom.* 5:14; *Gal.* 4:22–26; *Col.* 2: 16–17; *Heb.* 8:5, 9:6–25, 11:17–19, 19:1; *1 Pet.* 3:20–2.

[41] Examples of both tendencies are found in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*: 1) The type precedes its archetype, e.g. the liturgy instituted by Moses, is a type of the heavenly liturgy, such as it is subsequently revealed in Christ (*Heb.* 9:9–24, esp. 23); 2) The type succeeds its archetype e.g. the liturgy instituted by Moses, is a type of the heavenly liturgy, such as it was previously revealed to Moses (*Heb.* 8:4–5).

ive of Christian pacifism over pagan violence,[42] something which has been argued for other Ulster Cycle texts.[43] However, upon a further consideration of the saga's typology, this seems rather unlikely. For our purposes, the most important thing here is the way that the Day of Doom, prophesied by Cú Chulainn, is anticipated in his own exploits at *Mag Muirthemne*.

Kinds of violence

Placing Cú Chulainn's enemies under the rubric of 'pagan violence' is apt enough so long as we keep in mind that this term applies equally to him and his activities. He has not been baptised, nor has he even heard news of Christ from a Roman messenger, as Conchobar does in two versions of his death-tale.[44] He is, however, the kind of pagan who not only foreshadows the coming of Christ to Ireland (both in the person of St Patrick, and at the end of the world), but is capable of seeing and knowing what he foreshadows, apparently by some sort of divine inspiration. Yet while his paganism is one which reveals what is to come, the paganism of his opponents is characterized by magical deception, and, moreover, by treachery relative to himself and, thus, to what he typologically represents. But these qualities are not confined to the pre-Christian past. If those who lead the Leinstermen against the Ulaid, the children of Calitín, are, by virtue of their wizardry (*druíghecht*), sympathetic magic (*tosúgud*)[45] conjuration (*dolbit*) and sorcery (*amaitecht*),[46] capable of creating false sounds and sights of battle,[47]

[42] Kimpton (2009: 1): 'It will be argued that the narrative and poetic devices of the text address the conflict between the destructive and protective aspects of war, and serve to transform the tale of vengeance into one of pacifism, social cohesion, and Christian salvation'; Kimpton (2009: 4): 'the text promotes a conversion from a martial ethos to pacifism under Christian law. *BMMM* thus adapts a tale of vengeance to a Christian one of salvation, and depicts a victory over pagan violence'.

[43] Radner 1982.

[44] Meyer's versions B (1906: 12–15) and C §1–3 (1906: 14–17). For an up-to-date discussion of these versions, see Kobel 2015: 8–20, 38–57 and 77–91. For new editions and translations of these versions see Kobel 2015: 219–377.

[45] *BMMM* §2.6 and 9 (Kimpton 2009: 12).

[46] *BMMM* [H.3.18] §1.1 (Kimpton 2009: 1); *BMMM* §2.6–10 (Kimpton 2009: 12).

[47] *BMMM* §2.10–13 (Kimpton 2009: 12).

putting spells on a roast dog,[48] and sufficiently cursing three spears that they succeed in killing Cú Chulainn, together with his horse and his chariot-driver,[49] the Antichrist will succeed in deceiving the entire world and perversely transforming the whole created order. If they deny Cú Chulainn 'fair-play' (*fír fer*)[50] on the battle-field and use his honour as a means of manipulating him into enabling his own destruction,[51] the Antichrist will remove justice from civilization as a whole:

> Mean is the person who will be born shortly before the destruction of the world. His clientship will be base; his time will be dark; he will deceive a multitude; he will pervert many … He will extend falsehood; he will destroy truth … perverse proud laws; gold in homages, silver on trees, gems from rockslabs will fill the greed of a crystal mountain; offering will be insulting; dissembling, noble.[52]

Thus, the dilemma of the poem would seem to be, not between pagan and Christian, but between false and true belief (together with their respective practical manifestations), whether before Christ or after, whether in its inchoate pagan prefiguration, or in the more definite form of the future struggle between orthodoxy and heresy. Indeed, it is doubtful that the term 'pagan' is truly a useful one here at all. The characterization of pre-Christian belief in this saga seems to have much more in common with a Pauline distinction between spiritual and the fleshly forms of Judaism, between what is believed to be the true and authentic form of pre-Christian belief and its false distortions,[53] than with a distinction between Christianity and something that is thought to be wholly other than it. This is evidently not a Tertullianesque 'what does Emain Macha

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[48] *BMMM* §11.233–4 (Kimpton 2009: 18).

[49] *BMMM* [H.3.18] §5–6 (Kimpton 2009: 11); *BMMM* §14.283–92 and 16.302–20.361 (Kimpton 2009: 20 and 21–23).

[50] *BMMM* §10.159 (Kimpton 2009: 16).

[51] *BMMM* §11.234–41, 14.283–92, 16.307–12, 17.321–32 and 19.346–52 (Kimpton 2009: 18, 20, 21, 21–2 and 22)

[52] *BMMM* §10.192–221 (Kimpton 2009: 17–18): 'Gand gein / gignithar gair / ría ndomu[i]n díth. / Bith dáer a acille. / Bid dorcha a amser. / Togaéthfaid sochaide. / Soífid iliu. / … / Riris goí. / Cloífid fír. / … / sáebrechta úabair, / ór urraib, / arget ar crannaib, / gemma a leccaib / línfait saint / sléibe glainithe, / gressach taircsiu, /sáer diamlaid. / Ar do:fessammar fair / i forciund a dála / lathe dia mbáidfider bith / móras doíne dúib / dúile dia cennach.' (Kimpton's translation above, lightly edited).

[53] *Rom.* 8–9.

have to do with Jerusalem, the sagas with psalter'[54] but, if we will, a careful Augustinian delineation between 'the earthly Emain Macha, and the heavenly'[55] bearing in mind that according to this author, its worldly, false, form would, as such, seem to be closely associated with Leinster.

As far as violence is concerned, it is something of which Cú Chulainn and Christ seem eminently more capable than their heretical counterparts. The delight which the saga-author seems to take in the carnage caused by Cú Chulainn – in the greyness of the field of battle from the brain-matter strewn over it, in the hands, feet, heads and bones that like the descendants divinely promised to Abraham in *Genesis*, are as numerous as the 'stars of heaven' (*renna nime*) and the 'sand of the sea' (*gainem mara*)[56] – is much what we would expect regarding the hero of a Tarantino film,[57] but seems an unlikely feature of a narrative seeking to contrast the peacefulness of the Christian faith that Cú Chulainn typologically represents with the putative violence of its rivals. The violence of Christ's apocalyptic return is manifested mostly through its type in this saga, yet in the more general description made of his 'victory in battle' (*búaid catha*) and the 'establishment of his rule' (*suidiugad suide*) over the whole of heaven, earth and hell by means of his 'mighty battle-host' (*lánarbur catha*),[58] it is clear that even Cú Chulainn's violence, in all its

[54] The above is derived from a conflation of Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII.1ff., esp. 9 (Refoulé 1957: 96–7) and St Jerome's similar sentiments in, *Epistulae* XXII.29.7 (Hilberg 1910–8, I: 189). See also Alcuin, *Episotlae CXXIV* (Dümmler 1895: 183.21–26): 'Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? …'.

[55] The opposition between the 'heavenly city' (*civitas caelesta*) and the 'earthly city' (*civitas terrena*) is the fundamental distinction on which St Augustine's *DCD* is based: *DCD* XIV.28 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 451–2; trans. Bettenson 1972: 593–4).

[56] *BMMM* §15.295–301 (Kimpton 2009: 20–21); *Gen.* 22.17: 'benedicam tibi et multiplicabo semen tuum sicut stellas caeli et velut harenam quae est in litore maris' (= I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea shore).

[57] See, for example, Tarantino 2003: 1:22:06ff.

[58] *BMMM* §32.543–73 (Kimpton 2009: 46–7): 'Nia doíne ticfa. Arecht cach leth línfaid… Tróethfaid Ísu iffern immergib áil Ádaim … Cía rí seo, cía tuili dia n-epérat arbuir? In rí ro:ícc talmain ar flaith fordon:os[n]dá, ar ríchid na:tesbaí do foirm nert nime. La forlínad suide séis for dindaib flatha in rí íar ṁbúaid chatha óenaib dédaib trédaib tria chumachta nat:érglond nad:écgut(h) nad:erbur… Ísu as úasliu as ísliu tria ercartad iffirn, tria ṡuidigud suide, tria thúaslucud flatha, tria lánarbur catha tria lánchumacta nime im nimib, im doíne, im duile, im bethu tria bethu.

exuberance, is only a dim shadow of that greater, more perfect (and successful) violence which the author locates in Christ. The greater violence is associated with the future apocalypse rather than the battles of the pre-Christian past, but it remains that at any point in time, past or future, it is distinguished by a truthful and just manifestation on one hand, and a deceptive and unjust manifestation on the other.

Cycles of time

Thus, history, as we find it in this saga, is not truly linear,[59] since what happens in the past is the likeness and image of what will occur in the future. The past is not a pagan other, but a struggle in which the structure of the future conflict of Christ and Antichrist, orthodoxy and heresy is seen, known and lived to some degree or another. Nor is it merely cyclical, since it does not repeat itself exactly, but moves irresistibly towards the *eschaton*, the consummation of time at Christ's return. One might say, then, that for *BMMM*, history is a kind of spiral that ascends through cycles whose typological imaging of the victory of Christ over the Antichrist grows ever closer to its reality as they grow closer to it in time. But to further understand what the spiral structure of temporality in *BMMM* means for our interpretation of the saga requires that we contextualize

Críst' (= A sister's son of men will come; His law will fill every place … Jesus will vanquish Hell for the tribes of Adam's offspring … What king is this, what flowing of hosts will speak? [It is] the king who has saved the earth, our Lord / for the sake of the Lord who illumines us, for the kingdom which does not lack any form of the virtues of Heaven. With a fullness of seats the king after victory in battle will sit above mighty kingdoms, as one, as two, as three, through His power which I cannot examine, which cannot tell, which I cannot say… Jesus most noble, most humble, though His harrowing of Hell, through His establishment of rule, through his deliverance of the kingdom, through His mighty battle-host, through his great heavenly power encompassing the heavens and mankind and Creation and life everlasting. Christ'.

[59] Cf. Roy Flechner's description of Augustinian temporality as 'linear' (2013: 447). However, see Palmer (2013: 612): 'such interpretative strategies upset the linear progression of time through the introduction of repetitive but unpredictable types of events'. For a fuller exploration of how deeply non-linear time can be for Augustine, see *Confessiones* XI (O'Donnell 1992, I: 148–64; trans. Chadwick 1991: 221–45).

it within a more direct consideration of the Augustinian theory of the 'Six Ages of the World' which it exemplifies.

St Augustine articulated his theory of the 'Six Ages'[60] with varying emphases and degrees of detail throughout his life,[61] with the most important treatments being found in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (*DGCM*) I.xxiii–v[62] and *De civitate Dei* (*DCD*) X.xiv, XVI.xliii and XXII.xxx,[63] but its architecture remains fairly consistent throughout his works.[64] Its fundamental basis is that the ages of creation, recounted at the beginning of Genesis, the ages of individual human life, and the ages of world history are all analogous to each other, so that knowledge of any one of these things amounts to insight into the others. Knowledge of the self is also a knowledge of history.[65] Knowledge of the symbolically veiled origins of existence is also a knowledge of the self, and so on.[66] Like such Christians as believed in seven equal ages of 1,000 years,[67] he says that, from the time of Christ onwards, we have been

[60] For a general overview of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory in the context of other enumerations of world- and life-ages, see Schmidt 1955–6; Luneau 1964; Archambault 1966; Gnilka 1972; Burrow 1986.

[61] Other significant treatments of this theme by Augustine include, *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXII*, I.lviii.36–85 (Mutzenbecher 1975: 105–7; trans. Burrow 1986: 199–200); *De vera religione*, XXVI.48–9 (Daur & Martin 1962: 217–9; trans. Burleigh 1953: 248–9); *Sermo CCXVI* (*PL* 38, col. 1076–82, at 1081 VIII.8); on these, see Luneau 1964: 288.

[62] Weber 1998: 104–14, trans. Teske 1991: 83–90.

[63] Dombart & Kalb 1955: 288, 548–50 and 865–6, trans. Bettenson 1972: 710 and 1090–1.

[64] The excellent overview of Augustine's theory of the 'Six Ages', and its subsequent reception, found in Clarke & Ní Mhaonaigh 2020: 472–5, and 'Appendix', can be usefully read alongside my own.

[65] For example, *DGCM* I.xxiii.35.14–15 (Weber 1998: 104, trans. Teske 1991: 84); *DCD* XVI.xliii.47–52 and XVI.xliii.73–7 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 550, trans. Bettenson 1972: 710). See also, *DTR* LXVI.11–14 (Jones 1975–80: 463, trans. Wallis 1999: 157).

[66] For example, *DGCM* I.xxv.43 (Weber 1998: 112–4, trans. Teske 1991: 89–90); for knowledge of history amounting to knowledge of the self, see *DCD* X.xiv.1–11 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 288, trans. Bettenson 1972: 392).

[67] For an excellent summary of the various early medieval orderings of time, their spheres of influence and relevant sources, with special reference to the contrast between Augustinian and Millenialist 'Six Ages' schemes, see Palmer 2013: 607ff. For examples of early Irish millennialism see *Commentarius in Epistolas catholicas Scotti Anonymi: Epistola I Iohannis,* XVIII (McNally 1973: 40.70–41.79) and the

in the Sixth Age.[68] However, contrary to them, he argues that these ages are of varying length, and that the Sixth Age, like old age in an individual human, is of an unknowable length.[69] The Fourth Age of the world, analogous to the age of mature youth in a person, is described as the king and ornament of all the ages, and is the time of King David and the kings that followed him.[70] This summit, as in human life, is followed by a decline into weakness and decrepitude, but a weakness in which, as earthly hope and vigour fail, the divine hope on which all the ages depend is revealed.[71] In *DGCM*, this process ends in an eternal Seventh Age which commences with Christ's return and judgement.[72] However, in his later work on the theory, in *DCD*, Augustine no longer understands the Seventh Age to be the eternal culmination of the first Six, but the rest enjoyed by the righteous throughout the Six Ages[73] as they await the eternal Eighth Age, in which the whole created order will be revived and renewed, just as Christ was on the mystical Eighth Day of the creation week, the Sunday of his resurrection.[74] This development was fully integrated with Augustine's earlier and more systematic treatment of the subject in *DGCM* by Bede, in Books X and LXVI-XXI

eighth-century (Kelly, J. F. 1989–90: 412–3) *Anonymi in Matthaeum* 17.1–6 (Löfstedt 2003: 147).

[68] *DGCM* I.xxiii.40 (Weber 1998: 108–9, trans. Teske 1991: 86–7); *DCD* XVI.xliii.47–52 and XXII.xxx.134–5 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 549 and 865–6, trans. Bettenson 1972: 709 and 1091).

[69] *DGCM* I.xxiv.42 (Weber 1998: 112, trans. Teske 1991: 89); *DCD* XXII.xxx.136–8 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 865–6, trans. Bettenson 1972: 1091).

[70] *DGCM* I.xxiii.38 (Weber 1998: 106–7, trans. Teske 1991: 85). See also *DTR* X.24–6 and LXVI.29–30 (Jones 1975–80: 311 and 463–4, trans. Wallis 1999: 41 and 158), but esp. LXVI.393–415ff. (Jones 1975–80: 475–6ff., trans. Wallis 1991: 171–2ff.).

[71] See note 68 above. See also, *DTR* X.39–41 and LXVI.37, 977–8 and 997–1000 (Jones 1975–80: 311, 464 and 495–6, trans. Wallis 1991: 41, 158 and 195–6).

[72] *DGCM* I.xxiii.41 (Weber 1998: 110–11, trans. Teske 1991: 86–7).

[73] *DCD* XII.97ff. (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 864–5, trans. Bettenson 1972: 1090–91). See also *DTR* LXVII.39–53 and LXXI.8–24 (Jones 1975–80: 536–7 and 542, trans. Wallis 1999: 240 and 246–7).

[74] *DCD* XXII.xxx.141–8 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 866, trans. Bettenson 1972: 1091); Peter Darby (2002: 73) downplays Augustine's role in the formation of this notion, emphasizing the importance of Bede's role in synthesizing Augustine's comments on the ages of the world in *DCD* with those in *DGCM*.

of his *De temporum ratione* (*DTR*).[75] However, this particular feature of the theory is not as important for our interpretation of *BMMM* as is its general character as an interpretation of history. For in all its permutations, it is, in sum, a view of history that is motivated by the ideals of Christian (and pagan Platonic)[76] ascetic discipline.[77] The natural goods of bodily perfection, understood to have been more abundantly present in the earlier ages of human life and world history, while recognised as good, are denied in favour of the superior goods of spiritual perfection, decisively manifest in the present age,[78] in the hope of an eventual resurrection and glorification of both soul and body together, at the end of time.[79] The consequence of this is that the losses of old age in human

[75] Specifically, *DTR* X.42–4, LXVI.46–7 and LXXI *passim* (Jones 1975–80: 312, 464 and 542–4, trans. Wallis 1999: 41, 128 and 246–9). Bede outlines this theory in a number of other places as well, notably, *De temporibus* XVI-XXII (Jones 1975–80: 600–11, trans. Kendall & Wallis 2010: 131); *In Genesim*, I.1093–224 (Jones 1967: 35–9, trans. Kendall 2008: 100–105). For a thorough source-based description of the development of Bede's thought on this theme, see Darby 2002, 65–91.

[76] One of the most important images for subsequent Platonic theories about the body believed always belong to the soul (as opposed to physical body), is that of the soul's 'chariot' (ὄχημα) in Plato's *Phaedrus* 247b (Burnet 1967) and *Timaeus* 41e (Burnet 1964), etc. Dodds (1933: 313–23) still provides one of the best historical summaries of Platonic thinking regarding this pneumatic body of the soul (usually identified with the soul's imagination) and regarding the moral and ritual purifications of this body thought to be the necessary means of the soul's ascent to its divine causes; see also Bos 2007. For a more recent and detailed discussion of how this works in a specific case, see Watson 2013: 64–8. This understanding of the soul's body is, however, not strictly pagan. For example, Eriugena's insistence [*Periphyseon* V.923C-984B, esp. 945B-946A, 948C-950D, 955A-C, 961D, 963B-C (Jeaneau 2003: 484–716, trans. O'Meara 1987: 597–669)] that the relative perdition or blessedness of the final state of a person lies strictly in the kind of imaginations (*phantasia*) their virtues and vices have formed in them, is, evidently, based on just such an identification of the soul's proper body with the imagination, likely mediated to him through the works of Origen. For an overview of Eriguena's understanding of the Last Judgement, see Heide 2015: 207–12.

[77] Here a saying of Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), as reported by Bloom (1967: 41) serves as a useful summary of the basic principles of Patristic ascetic doctrine: 'Kill the flesh to acquire a body'. In Augustine, see, for example, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXL.14–16 (Gori 2002, trans. as Psalm 141 in Pusey *et al* 1847–57, VI: 250–52).

[78] See references in note 71; also *DTR* X.39ff. (Jones 1975–80: 311–2, trans. Wallis 1999: 41).

[79] *DCD* XX.ivff., esp. xx and XXII.xiff., esp. xxx.141–5 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 703ff., esp. 733 and 777ff., esp. 866, trans. Bettenson 1972: 927ff. esp. 935 and 1049ff.

life,[80] and in the world's life, while experienced as real losses, are also seen as an opportunity for spiritual progress, since the loss of bodily excellence leaves little to distract from more spiritual aims.[81]

An Augustinian Cú Chulainn

Interpreted through the lense of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory, Cú Chulainn's death (as we find explicitly stated in the *Annals of Inisfallen* and *Annals of Tigernach*)[82] would mark the transition of the Fifth Age

esp.1091); Bede, *DTR* X.52–3, LXVI.45–7, LXVII.52–3, LXX.30–41 and 83–5, LXXI *passim* (Jones 1975–80: 312, 464, 536, 537 and 542ff., trans. Wallis 1999: 41, 158 and 244–9). See especially, LXX.31–4: 'Cum autem peracto iudicio fuerit caelum nouum et terra noua, id est non alia pro aliis, sed haec ipsa per ignem innouata et quasi quadam resurrectionis uirtute glorificata claruerint …' (= But when there will be a new heaven and a new Earth after the Judgement which is not one [heaven and Earth] replacing another, but these very same ones [which] will shine forth, having been renewed by fire and glorified by the power of the Resurrection); LXXI.6–8: 'non auferens gloriam, quam exutae corporibus a suae quaeque egressionis tempore beata in requie perceperant, sed maiore illas gloria etiam corprum redditorum accumulans' (= He will not take from them the glory which they, released from their bodies, receive in blessed peace from the moment of their departure [from this life], but will heap upon them the even greater glory of their restored bodies).

[80] J. E. Cross (1962: 19) and Hill (1981: 16–17 and 20) point to the significance of the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin wisdom-text, *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*, relative to just such an ascetic characterisation of the stages of human life, and also to the importance of this theme for understanding the historiographical idea of the old age of the world; *De duodecim abusio saeculi*, II–III (Hellmann 1909: 43–7, trans. Throop 2011: 117–19).

[81] See Augustine, *DGCM* I.xxiii *passim* and xxv.25–34 (Weber 1998: 108–9 and 113, trans. Teske 1991: 86–7 and 90), where the sixth day is explicitly described along the lines of the subjugation of carnal (*carnalis*) to spiritual desires. Bede informs us that the Church 'labouring on behalf of God in the Six Ages of this world, anticipates the splendor of the Seventh [Age] of the coming Sabaath', whereas 'the reprobate are content, merely with present happiness' (= in sex huius seculi pro Deo laborans aetatibus in septima sabbati future gloriam dedicationis exspectat … reprobi sola praesenti sunt felicitate contenti): *DTR* LXVI.109–12 (Jones 1975–80: 466, trans. Wallis 1999: 161), present happiness, of course, being much more readily available in the youthful ages. See also, Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, I.lviii, (*PL* 40, col. 43–4, trans. Burrow 1986: 199–200).

[82] *Annals of Inisfallen* §205–6 (Mac Airt 1951: 31); *Annals of Tigernach* (Stokes 1895–7: 406–7).

of Augustine's system to the Sixth, which begins with Christ's birth,[83] or else the preaching of the Gospel.[84] As we would expect of the commencement of the 'old age' (*senectus veteris*) of the world, this transition involves the final passing away of the glory of the natural excellence that belongs to the world's youth[85] in the person of Cú Chulainn, his horse, Liath Macha, and his charioteer, Lóeg, each of which are confirmed to be the best of their own kind[86] by the nature of the enchantment on the respective spears that kill them.[87] In Conall Cernach, some vestige remains of the heroic ideal[88] which they embodied as its superlative

[83] *DCD* XXII.17, 19–21, 29–30 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 835–42, 856ff., trans. Bettenson 1972: 1090–91); *DTR* X.39–40 and LXVI.37 (Jones 1975–80: 311 and 464, trans. Wallis 1999: 41 and 158); *Etym.* V.xxxviii.5 (Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 133).

[84] *DGCM* I.xxiii.40:1–2 (Weber 1998: 108, trans. Teske 1991: 86): 'Mane autem fit ex praedicatione evangelii per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum et finitur dies quintus, incipit sextus' (= Morning came [i.e. of the Sixth Age] with the preaching of the Gospel by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fifth day ended).

[85] See note 130.

[86] It is worth noting here that the first biblical death of a notable righteous person, within the parameters of the Sixth Age of Augustine *et al*, is that of St John the Baptist (*Matt.* 14:1–12; *Mark* 6), who is described by Christ as greater than the prophets of all the previous ages (*Matt.* 11.11–13; *Luke* 7:28). This could be taken to be implied by Augustine's statement in *DGCM* I.xxiii.40:1–3 (Weber 1998: 108, trans. Teske 1991: 86), that the 'Sixth Age' begins with the preaching of the Gospel (*John* 1:29). However, the only Augustinian version of 'Six Ages' doctrine, of which I am aware, that is either prior, or potentially contemporary, to *BMMM*, and makes *John* the Baptist an explicit means of defining the transition from the Fifth Age to the Sixth, is found in the *Catechesis Celtica*: Wilmart 1933: 77.92–5. The fact that, in both cases (*BMMM* and *Catechesis Celtica*), such good as existed prior to Christ is summarised in a person, or persons, who endures violent death in conjunction with their role in pointing the way to Christ's manifestation, at the very least makes it necessary to consider whether there may be an implicit comparison between Cú Chulainn and *John* the Baptist here. Such an idea could, nevertheless, just as easily have its ultimate sources in a Millennialist understanding of the 'Six Ages'; for an late seventh-, or early eighth-century (McNally 1973: xvi) Irish example, see *Commentarius in Epistolas catholicas Scotti Anonymi: Epistola I Iohannis* (McNally 1973: 40): 'Et VI milibus annorum aetas mundi describitur … et a transmigratione Babiloniae usque ad Iohannem, et ab Iohanne usque ad finem mundi'.

[87] *BMMM* §17.313–20.361 (Kimpton 2009: 21–3).

[88] *BMMM* §27.437–29.481 (Kimpton 2009: 25–7).

examples.[89] However, the tone is primarily elegiac, filled with prolonged utterances of mourning for a good that has passed from the world and will not be seen again.[90] The last glimmering of this natural excellence, in the person of Cú Chulainn, nevertheless, prefigures and foretells the spiritual excellence that will be manifest in the Sixth Age through the advent of the Gospel and, beyond that, the eventual reconciliation of both natural and spiritual goods, in the superlative and simultaneous martial prowess *and* holiness of Christ at the end of time.[91]

The 'Six Ages' framework also enables us to refine our understanding of the role of violence in *BMMM*. We have already established that *BMMM* does not seem to associate the enactment of violence with the heretical party of a given age any more than it does with their orthodox adversaries. The difference seems to be purely qualitative. Moreover, the more profound violence seems to be associated with the end of the world rather than with the struggle between Cú Chulainn and the Leinstermen. This conclusion is now further reinforced. In Augustine's or Bede's account of the 'Six Ages', each world-age, like the ages in which the world was created, have a 'morning' (*mane*) and an 'evening' (*vespera*).[92] This has a number of layers of meaning relative to the ages of creation,[93] but for the ages of history, the 'evening' of an age is predominantly understood to refer to its end, something which always results

[89] Particularly important since he is understood to be the progenitor of the subsequent rulers of Ireland, in the Sixth Age of the Annals; (Stokes 1895–7: 407ff.); *Annals of Inisfallen* §220ff. (Mac Airt 1951: 32ff.; Kelleher 1971: 110 and 114).

[90] *BMMM* §8.94–10.229 and 33.576ff. (Kimpton 2009: 14–18 and 30ff.).

[91] *BMMM* §10.217–25 and 32.535–75 (Kimpton 2009: 18 and 29–30).

[92] *DGCM* I.xxiii.36–41 *passim* (Weber 1998: 104–11, trans. Teske 1991: 83–8). While the system of mornings and evenings of ages is preserved in Bede (*DTR* LXXI.1–20 [Jones 1975–80: 542, trans. Wallis 1999: 246–7]), he only makes use of evenings when speaking of specific ages: *DTR* X.6, 12, 19, 26, 33–4, 43 (Jones 1975–80: 310–12, trans. Wallis 1999: 39–41).

[93] In *DGCM*, Augustine takes this to be a metaphorical way of speaking about the beginning and the end of a complete divine work: *DGCM* I.xiv.21 (Weber 1998: 87–8, trans. Teske 1991: 69). In his *De Genesi ad litteram* the emphasis is more on morning as form, and evening as privation of form, thus bringing it closer to his historiographical use of these terms elsewhere: *De Genesi ad litteram* VII.28 and XV.51–2 (Zycha 1894: 478–9 and 495.12–496.14, trans. Teske 1991: 163–5 and 180–82).

from a disaster brought about by a collapse into collective sin.[94] If then, as we concluded previously, the battle at Mag Muirthemni marks the end of the Fifth Age, just as the Day of Doom, prefigured in it, marks the end of the Sixth, then neither battle can be taken to be directly indicative of the relative violence or peace of their respective ages, so much as evidence that their respective ages are indeed coming to end. It could be inferred that, since the collapse of the Sixth Age appears more calamitous than that of the Fifth, the Sixth Age must have a generally more violent character than the Fifth. However, such a conclusion only moves us further from characterizing the pre-Christian past as a time of violence in contrast to the Christian era which follows.

The 'Six-Ages' context of *BMMM*

Admittedly, this is all still, to some degree, begging the question, regarding why we should be looking at this text in light of Augustinian 'Six-Age' historiography in the first place. Of primary importance here is that fact that Augustine's version of the 'Six Ages' theory appears to have been widely known in medieval Ireland, even where it may not have been known directly from Augustine's own writings,[95] through Bede's *DTR* (of which there are manuscripts with Old-Irish glossing in the ninth-century,[96] and perhaps even the eighth-),[97] and, in a much

[94] *DGCM* I.xxiii.35.14, 36.9–10, 37.20–22, 38.9–10, 39.20–23 and 41.1–4 (Weber 1998: 104–8 and 110, trans. Teske 1991: 84–6 and 88). See *DTR*.V.120ff. (Jones 1975–80: 289–90, trans. Wallis 1999: 23) for the general association of 'evening' (*uespera*) with sin. For the application of this association to each age, see *DTR*.X.6–7, 12–5, 19–22, 26–8, 33–6, 42–4 (Jones 1975–80: 310–12, trans. Wallis 1999: 40–41).

[95] Smyth (1996: 183–4) suggests that Augustine's *DGCM* was likely the exemplar for a number of seventh-century Hiberno-Latin texts and presents the descriptions of Mount Olympus in *De Ordine Creaturarum* as a case in point. Gerard McGinty (2000: 324) finds the section of *Pauca Problesmata* [*Das Bibelwerk*] which covers the Pentateuch dependent on it in at least ten separate instances.

[96] For the Old-Irish Glosses on the Carlsruhe copy of Bede's *DTR*, see Stokes & Strachan 1901–3, II: 14–30. For those on the Vienna copy of Bede's *DTR*, see Stokes & Strachan 1901–3, II: 31–7.

[97] See Ó Cróinín (1981: 8–9) for overview and further references.

simplified form, through Isidore's *Etymologiae*,[98] by the mid-seventh.[99] That this theory was not only available to, but taken up by, early Irish scholars is seen by the number and variety of its witnesses from the eighth-century onwards. The 'ages of man' aspect of the theory is found in the ninth-century Old Irish of the *Milan Glosses*, and in its rough contemporary, *Sanas Cormaic*.[100] Likewise, its 'ages of the world' aspect is found in a number of eighth-century Hiberno-Latin texts, namely, *Liber de numeris*,[101] *Liber questionum in euangeliis*[102] and *Pauca problesmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis*.[103] Moreover, while it does not appear to be clear whether the *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae* is a specifically Irish text, given that it is an Insular product of the eighth century,[104] the fact that

[98] *Etym.* V.xxxviii–ix, IX.vi.28 and XI.ii (Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 130–3, 210 and 241). The account of the 'Six Ages' scheme in the *Etymologiae* is relatively brief. However, it still includes the characteristic comparison of the ages of the world to those of human life (*Etym.* V.xxxviii.5–6 [Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 130]): 'etas autem proprie duobus modis dicitur: aut enim hominis, sicut infantia, iuventus, senectus: aut mundi, cuius prima aetas est ab Adam usque ad Noe …' (= The term 'age' properly is used in two ways: either as an age of a human – as infancy, youth, old age – or as an age of the world, whose first age is from Adam to Noah …). Moreover, in contrast to Millenialist 'Six Age' theories, it emphasizes the indeterminate length of the sixth age (*Etym.* V.xxxvix.42 [Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 133]); 'Residuum sextae aetatis tempus Deo soli est cognitum' (= The remaining time of the Sixth Age is known to God alone).

[99] Herren 1980. Cf. Smyth 2016, although the later date for which she argues [i.e. the 'late seventh century'] is not, to my knowledge, generally accepted.

[100] Stokes & Strachan 1901–3, I: 128, 12 and 26. *Sanas Cormaic* has the full list of the 'Six Ages of Man': namely, infancy, adolescence, youth, manhood, old age, decrepitude. See Russell *et al* 2006-: B 253; Y 322. For cautions against assuming this dating of *Sanas Cormaic* applies to every entry, see Russell 2008b: 16–17.

[101] Tristram 1998: 294–7. On the *Liber de numeris* as exemplary of how the theory of the 'Six Ages' was mediated to later medieval authors, both in Ireland and on the Continent, see Clarke & Ní Mhaonaigh 2020: 496–8.

[102] For Rittmueller's dating of *Liber questionum euangeliis* to the first quarter of the eighth century, see Rittmueller 2003: 11ff. For its treatment of the 'Six Ages', see *Liber questionum euangeliis*, VI and XXV (Rittmueller 2003: 137.33–138.49 and 398.93–6).

[103] *Pauca problesmata*, 390.13 (McGinty 2000: 172). As McGinty notes, this seems to be a quotation from Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum: In Exodum*, XXIII.5 (*PL* 83, col. 298B-C).

[104] For other eighth-century Insular treatments of the Augustinian theory of the 'Six Ages' see Palmer 2013: 610–11, esp. notes 31–3. See Wright 1993: 68 for the enumeration of the 'Six Ages of Man', and 'of the World', in an unpublished dia-

both human and historical sides of the 'Six Ages' tradition are present in it is also worth noting.[105] But the most decisive source-evidence for our purposes is the fact that the 'Pre-Patrician Annals', or else, the 'Irish World Chronicle', in which, as mentioned above, we find the other early reference to Cú Chulainn as a contemporary of Christ, presents his death as the first event of the Sixth Age of the world. The theme of the 'Six Ages' could, of course, have entered into the manuscript tradition at any point prior to the twelfth-century production of their earliest extant witnesses,[106] but since the respective *Annals of Inisfallen* and *Tigernach* are both organized along these lines, there seems no reason to assume that it would not have been incorporated into the 'Pre-Patrician Annals' along with the rest of the information which is generally agreed to have been incorporated into them from Bede's *DTR*, LXVI in the ninth or tenth century.[107] Thus, at whatever time the figures of Cú Chulainn and Conchobar became features of this annalistic material, it seems to be precisely as figures who are emblematic of the transition between the Fifth and Sixth Ages, that they first appeared in that context.[108]

logue of Hiberno-Irish identity or affiliation, on folio 90v of *Cologne, Dombibliothek* 15, a manuscript which has been dated to the ninth century; for the dating of the manuscript, and arguments for its Hiberno-Irish character see Wright 1993: 62–77 and 91.

[105] *Collectanea* §377–8 (Bayless & Lapidge 1998: 180–82). For the Insular, possibly Irish, and (likely) eighth century, origin of the text see Lapidge 1998: 1–12. He notes here that the closest analogues to the section on the 'Six Ages' are 'found in Anglo-Saxon texts of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries', but that they are not themselves 'precisely datable' (10). Significant here also is the outline of the 'Six Ages' in the *Catechesis Celtica* (Wilmart 1933: 76.65–77.97).

[106] On the reception of Augustine's theory of the 'Six Ages' in Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Clarke & Ní Mhaonaigh 2020: 475–87, 498–9.

[107] For the ninth- or tenth-century date of the 'Pre-Patrician Irish Annals' / 'Irish World Chronicle', see note 16 above. For *Bede's DTR* LXVI as among its fundamental sources, see Mac Airt 1951: xvii–iii; for references to earlier scholarship, see also Mac Airt 1951: xvii, note 2; Grabowski & Dumville 1984: 122. McCarthy argues for the latest possible incorporation of this material, i.e. ca. 1071 (2007: 120–21, 151 and 195–6), but also suggests that some form of the 'Six Ages' was present as an organizing principle in it from ca. 687, through both Augustinian [Isidore] and other sources [Jerome-Eusebius *et al*] (2007: 120–31 and 167).

[108] As Kelleher notes, there are discrepancies in the 'Pre-Patrician Annals' regarding the exact dates of Conchobor and Cú Chulainn. While *BMMM*'s strong connection between Cú Chulainn and Christ does not necessitate to any particular version of things, it seems most in harmony with the typology inherent in the idea that Cú

Such circumstantial evidence certainly strengthens the case for interpreting *BMMM* in light of an Augustinian conception of the 'Six Ages', especially given that the text, as we have seen, lends itself so readily to such an interpretation. Among other things, the culmination of successive ages in purgative destruction, and not just the last, points to the influence of the 'Six Age' theory of Augustine's *DGCM*, or Bede's transmission of its ideas in *DTR*, rather than one of its non-Augustinian counterparts, or even an Augustinian version of it that makes no relevant statements on this issue, such as Isidore's *Etymologiae* or Augustine's *DCD*. Between these two sources, *BMMM*'s additional attention to the theme of the Antichrist suggests that Bede's version of the theory may, perhaps, be more decisive in determining the character of its overall conception of the 'Six Ages'.[109] It seems to be only there, at any rate, that the nature of the Antichrist is explored as a major part of an account of this historiographical system.[110] Yet the strongest reasons for supposing that its perspective is deeply indebted to an Augustinian understanding of the 'Six Ages', have yet to be considered. In this case, the most decisive evidence does not, as we might expect, take the form of quotations of the relevant sources, or the direct evocation of the 'Six Ages' as a concept. These are not to be found. It lies, rather, in the nostalgic character of its view of history. For, upon examination, it seems that the poignant nostalgia which the saga evokes for the lost heroism of the pre-Christian past, is inseparable from this Augustinian historiographical framework. As much as the figure of Cú Chulainn, like St John the Baptist, points to the coming of one who is 'greater than he',[111] this seems to do nothing to mute the loss which his death represents. Were one to remove the awe-struck descriptions of Cú Chulainn, by both friend and foe alike,[112]

Chulainn's death happened shortly after Christ's birth. On this idea, see Kelleher 1971: 108–13.

[109] For the theme of the Antichrist, see *BMMM* §10.192–225 (Kimpton 2009: 17–18); *DTR*, LXIX (Jones 1975–80: 538–9, trans. Wallis 1999: 241–3.

[110] *DCD*'s discussion of the end of the world certainly includes an account of the Antichrist. However, this is not done in close proximity to the sections where he deals with the theme of the 'Six Ages', such as it is in Bede's *DTR*; *DCD* XVIII.52–3, and XX.8 and 13–14 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 650–53, 712–5 and 721–5, trans. Bettenson 1972: 835–9, 910–14 and 921–5.

[111] *Matt.* 11:11; *Luke* 7:28. See pages 77–81 (esp. note 39) and 88–95 (esp. note 84).

[112] The most extended and idealised description of Cú Chulainn, while still alive, is by his enemy, Erc mac Caipri: *BMMM* §12.256–13.282 (Kimpton 2009: 19–20). See also,

and together with them, the lamentations that are occasioned by the anticipation and fulfillment of his death,[113] very little of the saga would be left. The longest speech and the conclusion of *BMMM* is not Cú Chulainn's prophecy of Christ, but Emer's keening of Cú Chulainn.[114] If, then, we are to make any attempt to understand how a nostalgia for pre-Christian realities functions as a central feature of the author's interpretation of history, and how this relates to its otherwise apocalyptic orientation, we are compelled to attempt to understand this nostalgia in light of the theories of history which we know, in a general sense, to have been available. Of these, Augustine's theory of the 'Six Ages' is the only one, and then, only in the full form of the doctrine, which includes a detailed comparison of the ages of the world's history to the ages of human life, in which such a nostalgia is intelligible.

The significance of nostalgia

Orosius' importance to early Irish historical writing cannot be overestimated, but tends towards an 'if-you-think-this-is-bad' approach to historiography, in which present troubles are compared favourably to a rather more severe pagan past.[115] Few resources for pre-Christian nostalgia are to be found there. Eusebius, whether in Jerome's translation of the first book of his 'Chronicle',[116] or in Rufinus' reworking of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*,[117] might at first appear to be a natural place to look, seeing as he strongly affirms the way that pre-Christian developments (even non-Hebrew pre-Christian developments) pointed the way to Christ.[118] Yet, in the end, he is far more interested in the triumphal Christian present than in the lesser realities that he understands to be

the narrator's description of him at *BMMM* §15.293–301 (Kimpton 2009: 20–21), and the quoted poem at *BMMM* §24.389–412 (Kimpton 2009: 24–5).

[113] For example, *BMMM* §7.72–8.116 (Kimpton 2009: 14–15).

[114] *BMMM* §33.577ff. (Kimpton 2009: 30ff).

[115] Arnaud-Lindet 1990–91, trans. Fear 2010.

[116] Helm 1956, trans. Donalson 1996.

[117] Mommsen 1903–7, trans. Amidon 2016.

[118] See, for example, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.ii.18–23 (Mommsen 1903–7, I: 21, 23 and 25). In the *Chronicle* this is more implicit (i.e. through his extensive listing of the events of non-Biblical history alongside the events recounted in Scripture).

finally realising their potential in that present.[119] In early Irish literature, the Prologue to the *Senchas Már*,[120] seems to be the pinnacle of such a Eusebian approach, where the laws (and practitioners of the laws) of the pre-Christian past are enthusiastically idealised, but are presented as becoming better than they ever were through their contemporary incorporation into the Church and its own law.[121] However, according to the more complete form of Augustine's theory, such as we also find in Bede's *DTR* X and LXVI–XXI, the loss of the pre-Christian past, like the loss of youthful vigour in old age, is a real loss. As we have seen, it is not the Sixth Age, but the Fourth, that is the 'firm ornament of all the ages' (*firmum ornamentum omnium aetatum*), which, 'among all the other ages, truly reigns' (*revera inter omnes aetates regnat*).[122] This may seem surprising, given the teleological push that we have observed, in the earlier ages of this historiographical system, towards the revelation of the Gospel in the Sixth Age. But our uncertainly will persist only insofar as we lose sight of the ideal which is articulated by this Gospel as Augustine understands it. Were its eschatological expectation to be for the soul's eventual escape of the prison-house of the body, for the liberation of spiritual goods from the humbler demands of natural goods,[123]

[119] This is even more the case of Eusebius' Constantine than Rufinus' Constantine and Theodosius, but Rufinus reworking of Eusebius' history remains a more moderate example of the same tendency. This difference in emphasis is primarily manifest in Rufinus' replacement of the panegyrics in praise of Constantine, in Book X of Eusebius version, with an account of the history from Constantine to Theodosius, in Books X and XI of his own version. For the Greek text of Eusebius' Book X, in Schwartz's edition, together with the Latin text of sections of it still used by Rufinus, in Mommsen's edition, see Mommsen 1903–7, II: 856–904. For the Latin text of Rufinus' Books X and XI, see Mommsen 1903–7, II: 957–1040, trans. Amidon 2016: 378–482. For a translation of Eusebius' Book X, see Louth & Williamson 1989: 303–33.

[120] For an edition and translation of the prose of the Prologue, see Carey 1994b. For an edition of Dubthach's judgment, see McCone 1986a: 29–35, trans. McCone 1986a: 6–8.

[121] See, for example, *CIH*: 2226.3–11, ed. and trans. Breatnach 2014: §1, 2 and 4; Muirchú, *Vita Patricii* I.18–22 Bieler 1979: 90–99.

[122] See note 70 above.

[123] As is the case in Gnostic forms of Christianity; see Turner 2001: 42, 130–36, 144, 264, 449–50. For Augustine's explicit rejection of such a view, see *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXLI.15–19 (Gori 2002: 95.5.43–9, trans. as Psalm 142 in Pusey *et al* 1847–57: VI 273–9).

then the inspired, yet infirm, Sixth Age would be the its best typological representation, and would, no doubt, have been idealised accordingly. However, we have already found that Augustine's understanding of the content of the Church's aspiration is rather different. It lies, not in the escape of the incorporeal from the corporeal, the spiritual from the natural, but in their mutual glorification in the restoration of the whole created order at the end of time.[124] This is, therefore, why the Fourth Age is given a certain preeminence. For it is the Fourth Age, which, as the age of David, Solomon and the prophets, is intermediate between the ignorant vitality of the First Age[125] and the visionary infirmity of the Sixth, and, as the mature youth of the world,[126] is analogous to the age of the bodies of the resurrected saints in the world to come,[127] that, of all the ages, is the most fitting image of the future conciliation of natural and spiritual goods which has come to have been hoped for clearly, for the first time, in the Six Age.[128]

The Fifth Age, at issue here, marks a decline from this preliminary harmony of natural and spiritual goods towards the infirmity of the Six Age, just as the time following mature youth marks its decline towards senility,[129] and yet, as a decline, still possesses more of the natural goods of former ages than the time to which it leads. From the perspective of

[124] See pages 86–88, esp. note 78.

[125] *DGCM* I.xxiii.35.14–5, xxiv.42.5–14 and xxv.43.3–5 (Weber 1998: 104, 111–12, trans. Teske 1991: 84 and 88–9); *DCD* XV.ix, xxiii and XVI.xliii.73–7 (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 465–6, 488–92, and 550, trans. Bettenson 1972: 609–10, 641 and 710); *DTR* LXI.11–14 (Jones 1975–80: 463, trans. Wallis 1999: 157).

[126] See pages 85–86, esp. note 70.

[127] See, for example *DCD* XXII.xiv–v (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 833–5, trans. Bettenson 1972: 1054–6).

[128] Bede's direct statements about the Fourth Age, as the 'ruler' of the other ages of this world, are not as effusive as Augustine's. Yet he seems to go beyond Augustine on the Fourth Age's typological relationship to the Eighth in his emphasis on the significance of the Solomonic temple. For him, the Solomonic temple, alone of any development that he recounts in the world's history, is an image (*figuram*) of the way that every age is gathered up into the unity of the Eighth; *DTR* LXVI.402–8 (Weber 1998: 476, trans. Wallis 1999: 172); see also his *De templo* II.xviii.186–96 (Hurst 1969b: 196–7, trans. Connolly 1995: 71–3); *De tabernaculo* II.192–7 and 967–75 (Hurst 1969a: 47 and 66, trans. Holder 1994).

[129] *DGCM* I.xxiii.39.1–9 (Weber 1998: 107, trans. Teske 1991: 85); *DTR* LXVI.36–40 (Jones 1975–80: 464, trans. Wallis 1999: 158) = *Epistola ad Pleguinam* IV.70–3 (Jones 1975–80: 619, trans. Wallis 1999: 407).

the Sixth Age, all the former ages will be objects of nostalgia insofar as they, to varying degrees, enjoyed natural capacities which will not be known again prior to their restoration at the end of time.[130] But such nostalgia for prior ages is not simply proportional to the degree a given age is thought to possess natural goods no longer present in the Sixth. If this was so, the First Age, with it's extremely long life-expectancy and its semi-divine personalities,[131] would be idealised, rather than the Fourth. Neither is it simply a question of how close a given age is to the Fourth's typological approximation of the eschatological hope most clearly known and desired in the Sixth. Since each world-age is linked to a day in the cumulative unfolding of the creation week, there is an implicit sense that, like the stages of the creation week,[132] each world-age manifests some part of the goodness of the providential unfolding of the created order that is not present in any other stage of the process to which it belongs, a part, without which, the goodness of that order would be deficient and incomplete. The Fourth Age may, of all the ages, be the best image of that which is to come at the end of all ages. However, it is also but one age among all of those that will be gathered up in the eternal unity to which it points.[133] As such, the union which the

[130] For similar arguments regarding the Old English poet known as 'Guthlac A', without, however, a representative presentation of the Patristic sources through which this theme was mediated, see Cross, J. E. 1962; Hill 1981.

[131] *DCD* XV.ix–x (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 465–7, trans. Bettenson 1972: 609–11). For Augustine's contention that the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6 are not fallen angels, but the righteous descendants of Seth, and that angelic lineage is not necessary to account for the proliferation of giants in the First Age, see *DCD* XV.xxii-iii (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 487–92, trans. Bettenson 1972: 636–42); *DTR* X.7–8, LXVI.101–4 (Jones 1975–80: 310, 466, trans. Wallis 1999: 40, 160).

[132] *DGCM* I.xxi.32.1–31 (Weber 1998: 100–101, trans. Teske 1991: 80–1); *Gen.* 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. Augustine notes that God calls the creation of each day 'good' (*bonum*), but that, in verse 31, he calls all the created things, created in all the days of creation, taken together as a totality, 'very good' (*valde bona*).

[133] See *DGCM* I.xvi.25–6 (Weber 1998: 91–4, trans. Teske 1991: 72–4) where we are told that the 'supreme measure, number and order' (*summa mensura summus numerus et summus ordo*) that is in God alone, is known through the 'measures, number and order' (*mensuras et numeros et ordinem*) of the creation, and that the seemingly insignificant aspects of the created order can reveal things about the supreme order that would not be known by us otherwise; in *DCD* such a doctrine is also present, but with emphasis on the other side of the resurrection: *DCD* X.14–5, XI. 4–31 and XXII.18–30 *passim* (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 288–9, 323–51

Fourth Age typologically represents is manifested in the other ages in ways that it cannot be by the Fourth, since their respective contents are also part of what will be unified in it. Thus, for such a view,[134] an apocalyptic yearning for the restoration of the whole created order at end of time will also, inescapably, be a yearning for the restoration of the lost graces of *all* former ages. This is partly because they are ages in which the natural goodness of creation, to varying degrees, was not yet so diminished and warped by toil and vice as it is in the age which is known to the saga-author and saint alike, a natural goodness that they know now to be largely lost to them, prior to the resurrection. But it is

and 373–85, trans. Bettenson 1972: 392–3, 432–66 and 815–66). The eternal state of the Eighth Age is described as the perfect experience and knowledge of God as 'all in all' (*omnia in omnibus* [XXII.18.38, 29.89, 30.2–3, 33 and 114–15]). Even now, the goodness of an any given feature of the created order necessarily corresponds to something in God's own goodness (X.14–15, and XI.24 and 29–30), so that the 'invisible things of God', can, to some degree, be known by humans through such (XI.22). Yet it remains that any created good can also be distraction from the eternal reality the is symbolically manifest in it (X.14). However, in the Eighth Age, the human intellect will effortlessly see God 'by means of bodies, in every body,' (*per corpora in omni corpore*) that is a part of the 'new heaven and new earth' (*caelo nouo et terra noua* [XXII.29]). Since Augustine firmly associates temporality with corporeality (XI.6, 22), this transfiguration of bodies would seem to result in a similar glorification of temporality, a conclusion which seems to be emphasised by his return to the theme of the 'Six Ages' at the culmination the work, towards the end of his description of the Eighth Age (XII.30). Thus, it would appear that the temporal structure of the 'Six Ages' not only reveals something about God himself, but reveals something, albeit enigmatically, about the character of the 'all' in which God shall be 'all' in the Eighth Age. Elsewhere, Augustine conceives of this return, much more succinctly, as a melting, of the divisions inherent in the soul's temporal experience of reality, by love, so that they flow together into God's unity; see *Confessiones* XI.xxix.39 (O'Donnell 1992, I: 242, trans. Chadwick 1991: 244). For Bede's following of Augustine in these matters note 127 above, where the anticipated Eighth Age is conceived of as the simultaneity and perfection of the 'totality of time' (*universi temporis*). See also *DTR* LXXI.61–98 (Jones 1975–80: 543–4, trans. Wallis 1999: 248–9, esp. lines 91–3.

[134] There is a significant amount of scholarship on temporality and eternity in Augustine's thought. See, for example, Teske 1985; 1996; Johnson 1996; Kirby 1997; Brann 1999; Pranger 2001; Robinson 2006; Lamb 2007; Humphries 2009. However, outside of a few comments in recent scholarship on Bede (for example, Wallis 1999: 373–5; Palmer 2013: 612; 2014: 148–9), studies of his 'Six Ages' theory and those which consider his theory of time, as such, have tended to be mutually exclusive.

also because, as much as the means of that future union are most clearly known in the Sixth, and its character most evident in the Fourth, each age, as a part of what will be restored and glorified in that resurrection, manifests something of that longed-for state of blessedness which would remain hidden otherwise.

In all this, Augustine's understanding of history is certainly not exceptional in thinking of the culmination of an individual's experience of time in terms of the reunification of their soul and body, any more that it is in its concern with six world-ages, or creation days. The decisive element of his contribution here lies, on the one hand, in his bringing the individual and cosmic sides of the experience of time together, through his interpretation of the progress of the world's ages, by means of the analogy of an individual human's physical development from birth to resurrection. On the other, it lies in his linking of both to the absolute basis of time, the stages through which divine causality became manifest as creation, each of which has been affirmed as 'good' (*bonum*) by God himself. For in doing so, Augustine universalised the nostalgia for the lost natural capacities belonging to each of the earlier stages of life, which is implicit in the Christian hope of bodily resurrection. In this it became, simultaneously, a window onto, and even a local form of, the nostalgia for earlier world-ages, which it reveals to be inherent in the desire for the re-creation and restoration of all the ages in the eternity of the world to come, the microcosm revealing the form of the macrocosm made visible in it.[135] Of course, it cannot be assumed that the author of *BMMM*, or any other given reader of the relevant texts will have picked up on every nuance of this historiographical approach. The important point is that the nostalgia for earlier ages which it evokes, on the simplest level of interpretation, through its metaphorical description of history as a movement from youth to the broken-down old age of the present, does not exist only in the absence of a more substantial grasp of how the underlying system operates as a theory of time. On the contrary, the more we have come to grasp what this metaphor means philosophically,

[135] On the individual human as 'microcosm' (*microcosmos*), see *DTR* XXXV.21–5 and LXVI.1–7 (Jones 1975–80: 392, trans. Wallis 1999: 100–101, 137). At LXVI.1–7, this is spoken of with direct reference to 'Six Ages' theory. This interpretation of the macrocosm by means of the analogy of the microcosm is the reverse of Plato's *Republic*, 368c-369b (Slings 2003: 59–60), where the macrocosm (in this case, the state) is studied as a way of better understanding the human microcosm.

the more this nostalgia has been revealed to be a necessary expression of its orientation towards the end of all things, given the character it understands that end to have.[136]

This is not to say that Augustine invented such an interpretation of history *ex nihilo*. In Christian circles, the idea of World Ages had always been linked to the divisions of the creation week. Nor was it exactly novel to suggest that the succession of historical epochs resulted in an aging process comparable to that of an individual human. The idea of a correlation between a three- or four-age division of human-life, and that of the life of Rome, generally taken to have already entered into the decline of old age, was relatively wide-spread among Latin writers from Livy onward.[137] Moreover, some of these authors seem to have been known, at least in part, to medieval Ireland.[138] There was also a

[136] For a recent philosophical historiography, with striking (and, perhaps, self-conscious), affinities with Augustine's, see Walter Benjamin's 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' (Benjamin 1974, trans. Zohn 1969). Benjamin's linking of his own thought, to that which he attributes to medieval monastics, medieval theology and theology in general (X, VII and I, respectively, Benjamin 1974: 698, 696 and 693, trans. Zohn 1969: 258, 256 and 253), in tandem with the themes of an original Paradise, the Apocalypse and the Antichrist (IX, XVII-B and VI, respectively, Benjamin 1974: 696, 702–3 and 695, trans. Zohn 1969: 257–8, 263–4, 255) suggests that this similarity may indeed point to the direct or indirect influence of Augustinian historiography on his thought. My thanks to Chris Beausang for first drawing my attention to the parallels between these two historiographies.

[137] Namely Livy, Florus Flavius Vopiscus and Ammianus Marcellinus; see Archambault 1966: 195–200 for discussion and references. For Lucretius on the old age of the world, see Cross 1962: 5–6. For Philo of Alexandria on humanity's necessary decline over time, see Cross 1962: 9–10.

[138] Lactantius' *De Opificio Dei* is, for example, cited in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* LXV.1 (Wasserschleben 1885: 232–3). For the reasons outlined by Russell (2021), it seems that Wasserschleben's edition remains the most reliable. On the significance of Lactantius' *DI* for medieval Irish thought about natural law, but with its availability, unfortunately, assumed rather than proven, see Conrad-O'Brien 2002. See Breen 1987b: 235; 1987c *passim*, for *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*'s use of Cyprian's works; J. F. Kelly (1974: 114 and 128), for a citation of Cyprian's *Epistola* 64.2, in *Commentarius in Iohannem*, and of *Epistola* 74.2, in *Commentarius in Lucam*; Walsh (1987: 218 and 221); Ó Cróinín (2005: 377), for the citation of Cyprian in Cummian's *Paschal Letter*; Lowe (1947: 458 and 464–5); Bieler (1949: 272), as cited in Hillgarth (1961–3: 172, note 26), for descriptions of two early Insular manuscripts of Cyprian, and arguments for their Irish origin. However, to my knowledge, there is not, as of yet, any direct confirmation that either Cyprian's *De mortalitate*

tendency among certain patristic authors, to match the stages of human life with the stages of revelatory history, one of the most common divisions being: Nature, Mosaic Law and Grace,[139] but such a comparison generally tends towards a triumphalist culmination in maturity, rather than an intermediate culmination succeeded by feeble old age.[140] Yet there are certainly those, like Lactantius and St Cyprian, who anticipate the synthesis and extension of these two strands in Augustine.[141] Lactantius, in his *Divinae Institutiones*, following a summary of his Christian Millenialist views, applies the metaphor of decrepit old age (which he elsewhere, like so many other Latin writers, reserved for the current state of Roman Empire)[142] to the Sixth Age of the world itself.[143] Cyprian, also a Millenialist, similarly compares the present wearing away of the world to the final stages of human life.[144] In these instances, the nascent universality of the correlation between human and Roman ages becomes unambiguous through making human aging an analogy of the historical development of the cosmos itself, rather than that of the universal city which had come to rule it. Moreover, such a development would seem to have potential for the kind of nostalgia which is at issue here. Yet, in the absence of a more deliberate affirmation of earlier stages of world history, it remains unclear, especially in Cyprian, whether this does indeed reflect a nostalgic tendency, or more of a 'good-riddance-to-bad-rubbish' view of the pre-apocalyptic world.

We certainly cannot declare it impossible that such nostalgia for pre-Christian realities as we find in *BMMM* could be derived from this kind of pre-Augustinian Millenialism. However, possibility is not yet

(Simonetti 1972), or his *Ad Demetrianum* (Fredouille 2003), were known, either in whole or in part, in early medieval Ireland.

[139] Archambault 1966: 200–1.

[140] Tertullian, *De virginibus verlandis* I.40–51 (Bulhart 1957: 180, trans. Dunn 2004: 102); Ambrose, *De Abraham*, II.ix.65 (Shenkl 1986: 620.8–621.6, trans. Tomkinson 2000); for discussion, see Archambault 1960: 202.

[141] Archambault 1966, 202.

[142] *DI* VII.xv.12–19 (Heck & Wlosok, IV: 698–700, trans. Bowen & Garnsey 2003: 423). Though, in his case, the old age of the empire is a sign of the old age of the world as a whole.

[143] *DI* VII.xiv.5–xv.11, esp. xiv.16 (Heck & Wlosok, IV: 694–698, esp. 696, lines 16–19, trans. Bowen & Garnsey 2003: 419–22).

[144] *Ad Demetrianum* III–IV (Fredouille 2003: 74–9, trans. Deferrari 1958b: 169–70); *De mortaltiate* XXV (Simonetti 1972, trans. Deferrari 1958a: 219).

probability. Augustine's theory of history remains alone in making the nostalgia for the ancient past, which is characteristic of a certain strand of Roman historiography, fundamental to a Christian understanding of the Ages of the World. For it is only in Augustine that this occasional metaphor is transformed into a systematically applied historiographical principle[145] which is, in turn, fully integrated with the related issues of ascesis, eschatology and psychology. Insofar as nostalgia for the pre-Christian past preexisted him in the literature, he is the one who moved it from a loose, if powerful, metaphor, of largely undetermined significance for Christian thinking about the historical development of the cosmos, to a central characteristic of the experience of time itself, and of the status of the individual human as microcosm of the cosmos. Given, that this nostalgia does not, as we have seen, seem even to be intelligible in the context of any of the fully-realised theories of history that rivaled his own in the Latin West, his achievement would seem to have an immeasurable importance, not only for understanding the *BMMM*'s longing look back at Cú Chulainn, but for a more general consideration of the nostalgia for the pre-Christian past which is so wide-spread throughout medieval Irish literature.[146] Taking this in tandem with the broad extent of the influence which we have seen that an Augustinian understanding of the 'Six Ages' had in early medieval Ireland, it seems safe to say that where such a nostalgic stance may have been taken up, in part, from other late Roman authors, notably Lactantius and Cyprian, we can expect that these statements of the theme will have been interpreted in light of some form of Augustine's synthesis.[147]

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[145] St Ambrose is another important precursor of Augustine in this regard; Archambault 1966: 202. Augustine seems to follow the lead of his teacher, Ambrose, in bringing the various three or three- or four-age schemes mentioned above into self-conscious agreement with the Christian idea of the correlation of the six or seven ages of creation with the ages of the world; Ambrose, *Epistola XLIV* (*PL* XVI, col. 1133–42) trans. as 'Letter 50' in Beyenka 1954: 264–72. Note, however, that the nostalgic implications which Augustine found in a conciliation of these various kinds of ages are not present in Ambrose's preliminary form of it.

[146] On nostalgia for the pre-Christian past in *fíanaigecht* literature, see Parsons 2014: 221–31.

[147] The same also applies to later writers who would mediate something of this aspect of Augustine's thought in a less systematic fashion than Bede or Isidore; see, for example, St Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob* II.vi.16.20, IV.xviii.33.53, IV.xxii.18.44, VI.xxx.16.53 and VI.xxxiv.1.1 (Adriaen 1979–85: 297–8, 921, 1123–5,

Augustine transformed

Yet the question remains as to why this application of the 'Six Ages' theory seems to have flourished in early Irish literature to such an unusual extent, especially seeing as its potential in this direction does not appear to have been self-consciously developed by either Augustine or Bede, or even by many of their early medieval successors.[148] The inherent nostalgia of Augustine's system is articulated exclusively with reference to the pre-Christian figures of the Bible. Even the fact that the Cú Chulainn of *BMMM* functions as a type of Christ at all is somewhat unusual in this context. In most 'Six Ages' texts, and indeed, most often in patristic literature, the only people that are interpreted as types of the salvific future are those that are thought to have an institutional continuity with the Church, which is to say, only spiritual leaders of Israel or their patriarchal ancestors.[149] This is not always the case, but where there are exceptions they tend to indicate that the author believes that the figure in question belongs to a revelatory tradition which is in some way comparable to that which God granted Israel and its Biblical predecessors, something which Rufinus, for example, suggests regarding Greek philo-

1527–8 and 1733, trans. Marriott 1844–50, II: 355 and 583–4; IV: 401–2 and 619–20); *Homiliae in evangelia* II.xxix (*PL* 76, col. 1214, trans. Hurst 1990); *Dialogi* IV.41 (de Vogué & Antin 1978–80, III: 154–67, trans. Zimmermann 1959: 251); cf. J. E. Cross (1962) and Hill (1981) who tend to present Gregory's as a rather more central figure than he seems to be, in the dissemination of the theme of the 'old age' (*senectus veteris*) of the world.

[148] Since Donahue's pioneering work on the subject (1949–51; 1965), there has been a tendency to downplay the possibility of Augustine as a source of early Irish affirmations of pre-Christian Irish realities; see also, Márkus 2005; O'Sullivan 2010. Conrad-O'Briain (2002) has offered an important, if somewhat overstated, corrective to Donahue. However, none of these have considered the significance of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory relative to these matters. Donahue is surely right that one is unlikely to account for such things 'by means of Augustine alone' (Donahue 1949–51: 266). Yet it is equally true that it will be hard to account for the character of many examples of this tendency, such as what we find in *BMMM*, without recourse to Augustine.

[149] i.e. Adam, Eve, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Judah, Joseph, Aaron, Moses, Miriam, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, etc.

sophy and Latin law in the first book of his revision of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[150]

Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* is an interesting exception here when compared to the other major Augustinian 'Six Ages' authorities. The nostalgic elements of this theory of history are not at the forefront in Isidore, since he discusses the ages of the world and the ages of individual human life only tangentially in relation to each other.[151] However, his tendency, inherited from Jerome's translation of Eusebius' 'Chronicle', to people his account of the Augustinian world-ages with an abundance of non-Biblical figures, and, elsewhere in the *Etymologiae*, to list the Biblical founders of a given art together with its subsequent non-Biblical practitioners,[152] results in a much stronger identification between Biblical figures and their non-Hebrew contemporaries than we find either in Augustine, or in the uses to which Bede put Augustine. Perhaps, the most striking results of this tendency, relative to the *BMMM*, is found at the end of his chronicle of the events of the Fifth Age. There, he does not follow Augustine and Bede in describing the Jewish people's failure to recognise Christ,[153] or else their loss of sovereignty to the Romans,[154] as the disaster which brings that age to its close,[155] but (albeit without comment) closes the Fifth Age with the reign of Julius Caesar.[156] This is too little information on which to base any claim that that the author of *BMMM* necessarily sees an analogy between the death of Julius Caesar and that of Cú Chulainn, or that Isidore's placement of Julius Caesar in his chronicle implies that he understands him to be, in some way, a successor to the Patriarchs and perhaps even a type of Christ. However, such details as this, in tandem with Augustine's own warm descrip-

[150] *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.ii.18–23 (Mommsen 1903–9, I: 21, 23 and 25).

[151] *Etym.* V.xxviii.5 (Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 130).

[152] Notable here, for example, is his placement of Moses at the head of a list of the law-givers of other countries; see *Etym.* V.i.ff (Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 117). Their association with him is further encouraged by: 1. his description of Moses as the first to promulgate 'divine laws' (*divinas leges*), 2. the definition of divine law as being such law as is based on nature (*Etym.* V.ii), and 3. the claim that natural law is common to every nation (*Etym.* V.iv).

[153] *DGCM* I.xxiii.39.21–3 (Weber 1998: 108, trans. Teske 1991: 86).

[154] *DTR* X.33–6 (Jones 1975–80: 311, trans. Wallis 1991: 40).

[155] Augustine links these two disasters; *DCD* XVIII.xlvi (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 643–5, trans. Bettenson 1972: 827).

[156] *Etym.* V.xxix.25 (Lindsay 1911, trans. Barney *et al* 2006: 132).

tion of such non-Hebrew ante-Sixth Age personalities as the Sibylline Oracles,[157] show, at any rate, that the intellectual *milieu* that produced the Cú Chulainn of this saga did not operate in a theological vacuum. On the most basic level, what we seem to have in a text like *BMMM*, is an interpretation of Augustinian historiography from the perspective of a less guarded affirmation of non-Hebraic forms of pre-Christian revelation, such as they would have found in Rufinus' translations of Eusebius and Lactantius, among others, a trajectory which is already anticipated, in some measure, by Isidore.[158] A further exploration of these matters must, unfortunately, await another occasion. Yet, while much that is at work in such an interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of the 'Six Ages' must remain obscure for the time being, it remains clear enough that, of the theories of history both known to us, and conceivably known to the author of *BMMM*, some fairly robust version of Augustine's 'Six Ages', but extended in the way suggested above, seems to provide the best way forward for explaining the way that its nostalgia for a pre-Christian Emain Macha functions as a part of its overall outlook.

Conclusions

Such a path of inquiry opens a myriad of complexities which it will not be possible to address here. We do not know, for example, if another idea implicit in the 'Six Ages' theory, that knowledge of the ages of history is a knowledge of the self, would have been a part of what the author of *BMMM*, or its contemporary readers, would have had in mind. It would certainly be consistent with this historiographical perspective to take Cú Chulainn, for example, to be, not only an important type of Christ, at the end of the Fifth Age, but also a type of some aspect of the individual soul's spiritual progress.[159] Yet proving this would require more

[157] *DCD* XVIII.xxiii (Dombart & Kalb 1955: 613–15, trans. Bettenson 1972: 788–91). For an edition of the *Sibylline Oracles*, see Geffcken 1902. For an English translation, see Collins 1983–5. Note, however, Lightfoot's more recent edition and translation of Books I–II (Lightfoot 2007), and also Buitenwerf's translation of Book III(2003).

[158] As such, *BMMM* is further proof of Elizabeth Boyle's thesis that the same eschatological themes are expressed in both Latin and Irish texts (2016b: 270).

[159] See *DGCM* I.xxv.43 (Weber 1998: 112–4, trans. Teske 1991: 89–90).

evidence than is present here. Such an approach also renders the role of the goddess, Morrígan, in attempting to prevent Cú Chulainn from going to his death,[160] all the more strange in its perplexity. The place of the gods of the sagas in the Christian cosmology of their writers, especially when they, as here, seem not to be presented as angels, devils, or humans, evidently needs much more study than it has received to date before such an ambiguity can be adequately addressed.[161] However, it is surely a further testimony to the importance of Augustinian historiography for clarifying the kinds of meaning found in a saga such as *BMMM* that such difficulties are now made so starkly visible. Furthermore, while its relevance elsewhere can never be assumed, the broad transmission of the idea of the 'Six Ages' in medieval Ireland, would seem to suggest that it may, both in regard to, and beyond the theme of nostalgia explored here, be similarly important for our understanding of a wide range of texts as early as the ninth- or tenth-century composition of *BMMM*, and perhaps earlier.[162] But whatever the case, we may, at the very least, take this as a unambiguous example of how, the more we consider medieval Irish literature in light of the larger traditions in which it participated, the more we will be able to identify and appreciate the remarkable contribution to these traditions which belongs to it alone.

[160] *BMMM* §7.78–9 (Kimpton 2009: 14).

[161] But see these important contributions Carey (1987; 1999: 1–38; 2015). Mark Williams' recent book should do much to facilitate rapid advancement in this area (2018). For a recent attempt at such advancement, see Watson 2020: 56–9.

[162] On its importance for twelfth-century Irish literature, with special reference to the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* and *Cath Maige Tuired*, see Ní Mhaonaigh 2014: esp. 144ff.

Comparative network analysis of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*

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Over the past decade, a new, quantitative approach to analysing epic texts has been initiated, using ideas inspired by statistical physics. The mixture of maths and myths generated enormous amounts of interest, both within academia and beyond. A first publication, in *Europhysics Letters*, the flagship journal of the *European Physical Society*, focused on Kinsella's version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, henceforth referred to as the *Táin* (MacCarron & Kenna 2012). The paper has since (2012–2022) been downloaded over thirty thousand times, a record for the journal and, besides demonstrating an extraordinary resonance with a broad readership, has brought the most famous tale from the Ulster Cycle to new and far-flung audiences. Although it is unusual to publish on epic literature in a physics journal, statistical physicists have a long tradition of applying their wares beyond their native discipline. This has accelerated with the recent development of complex-network science, an ideal platform for interdisciplinary activity.

While much of the attention the new approach receives is positive, there has always been scepticism and a degree of resistance from the humanities to what Irving Babbitt long ago described as the 'encroachments of physical science' (Babbitt 1908: 31). Here we recall the age-old relationship between humanities and science before summarising a networks comparison of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* to three other epics. Within these contexts, we then outline a critique of the approach from

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 109–131.

a humanities point of view and address it from a scientific standpoint. We end by outlining a vision for the future of this hybrid approach and other exciting interdisciplinary initiatives. We expect some of these to impact on the studies of Irish narratives in general, and the Ulster Cycle in particular, in the years and decades to come.

The relationship between humanities and science

Charles Snow famously lamented that 'the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups', namely the humanities and the sciences (Snow 1959: 3). Snow worried that their separation by a 'gulf of mutual incomprehension' (1959: 4) impedes solving world problems as political leaders trained in one side lacked the background to understand and manage the other. Such disunion is unfortunate, in our view, as the sciences and humanities share the same basic goals: rational and systematic investigations of our world. Pure sciences such as theoretical physics also share a major driving factor with the humanities: curiosity. Increasingly also, their disciplines are interconnected, and nowadays digital humanities and related areas are perhaps emerging as links between the two traditions. Their emergence is reminiscent of the birth of theoretical physics itself about a century ago, and more recently of computational physics which sits alongside experiment as a third branch of the discipline.

Statistical physics, in particular, offers a bridge between the sciences and humanities. The two areas have a common cousin in the social sciences. In the eighteenth century, patterns to births, marriages and death, enabled predictions about future numbers of such events at societal level, even though prediction at an individual level is impossible. This paradox motivated the development of statistical physics as a means to study systems comprising many constituent parts by Boltzmann, Gibbs, and others (Fortunato, Macy & Redner 2013).

Statistical physics is now a mature subject. Thanks to a remarkable property called universality, highly simplified models of physical systems comprising large numbers of interacting parts can deliver meaningful predictions.[1] Universality means that average properties of the

[1] Understanding between the sciences and humanities can be stymied by variances

aggregate systems are independent of microscopic details such as the internal quantum structures of the comprising elements. Properties of many-body systems are often not simple sums of the properties of molecules. E.g., a single molecule cannot freeze like ice or flow as water. Similarly in the social world, the behaviours of a population are not simple aggregates of individuals. E.g., a single bee cannot swarm; a single person cannot form a culture. Models, inspired by statistical physics, have been developed to account for emergent social phenomena and sociophysics has emerged as a discipline, alongside complexity science.

Theoretical physicists have always been keen to expand the range of applicability of their models. Wider applicability implies more general – and more fundamental – models. And fundamental models are the goal of the theoretical physicist for therein lies the deepest understanding. However, such explorations have not always been welcomed down the years. John Keats, in the nineteenth century, worried that the new science of physics may 'unweave a rainbow', subverting poetic beauties in nature (Stillinger 1978: 473).[2] Although Keats represents an extreme position, scientists and humanities scholars do not always share similar notions of beauty, and the same mathematical model (particularly when applied to texts, as in our case) may be deemed attractive by a scientist and crudely reductive by a scholar of the humanities. Mathematical models are idealised and may be criticised as overly simplified. As pointed out by Dietrich Stauffer (2004), when Kepler pretended that celestial bodies are point particles, he was committing a gross simplification, yet his laws of planetary motion are correct. For humanities experts, trained in grasping the totality of a narrative with all its nuances and subtleties, reduction of a character to a number may be difficult to accept or at least overly reductive. Nonetheless, experience shows that, with a large number of elements in a system, one can say something meaningful about

in the meanings of crucial terms. The word 'model' means an idealised system using mathematical concepts and notations. A statistical 'model' is such a concept with variables accounting for errors. (The word 'error' here refers to stochastic deviations, not mistakes). To 'predict' means to deduce from a theoretical model, even if properties are already well known through experiment.

[2] Although Keats referred to philosophy as the means of unweaving the rainbow, his seconding of comments that Newton 'had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours' (Elwin 1950: 317) indicates that he thought of physics in a similar vein.

the aggregate by simplifying the individual. As the statistician George Box stated, 'essentially, all models are wrong but some are useful' (1979: 2).

Of course, nobody expects humanities scholars to accept a number ground out by an algorithm as a definitive answer in itself. One hopes instead that quantitative approaches may deliver patterns which can be recognised and considered in a manner that is appropriate for the field. In other words, the statistical approach may aid in pointing a way, but the answers, and indeed the questions, must ultimately come from interdisciplinary dialogue.

Over the past ten years, as the approach described herein developed and matured, even forming a 'focal point' for extraction and analysis of character networks (Labatut & Bost 2019), it resisted attempts to pigeon-hole it into existing academic disciplines or even in some emerging ones. Although we referred to digital humanities above, in the book *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives* (Kenna *et al.* 2017), we expressed discomfort at the association. As stated in the introduction to the book 'There is, as yet, however, no satisfactory agreement as to what precisely digital humanities actually are and the term encompasses many things from digital archiving and text editing to data mining'. Indeed, we questioned 'whether or not quantitative approaches of the types described in the [book] are categorised as digital humanities or something else is unclear'. Although more recent work by our team (Gessey-Jones *et al.* 2020) has been described as 'the exemplar' for digital humanities, we find the more recent term 'cultural complexity' sits easier with the approach (Roller *et al.* 2022) and two of our most recent publications have comfortably appeared there.

Network statistics

Access to the *Táin* and other epic narratives was facilitated by the relatively new discipline of network science (MacCarron & Kenna 2012; 2013a). A network is an assemblage of nodes connected by links. In the case of *social networks*, nodes represent people and links denote relationships or interactions between them. For transport networks, nodes may be cities and links may represent roads connecting them. Other examples include computer networks, communication networks,

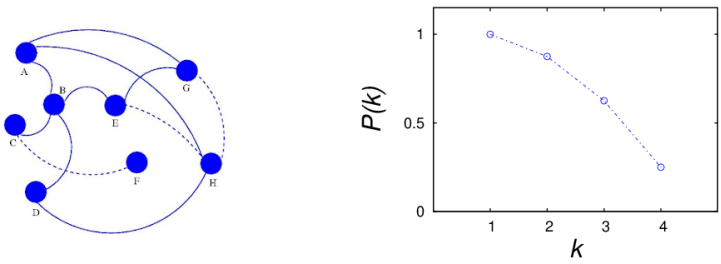

Fig. 1 a und **b: Left (a)** – an illustration of a network comprising nodes and links. Solid links represent positive relations and dashed links are negative. **Right (b)** – the corresponding complementary cumulative degree distribution. The point at k=1, $P(k)$=1 means that $P(1)$=100% of nodes have degree greater than or equal to k=1. The point at k=4 and $P(4)$=0.25 means that a quarter of nodes have degree four (or more).

power-grid networks and the wiring of the brain. All of these differ from random networks, formed by arbitrarily linking nodes. Of these, social networks often have distinguishing features that make them stand out. We will discuss some of these below.

In the case of literature, interest lies in how the various characters interact amongst each other and the structures of the emergent networks. These are referred to as *character networks*. One aim is to determine whether these are like social networks or whether they more resemble some other network structures, random or constructed. It is also interesting to compare character networks against each other. This may deliver a new approach to comparing different genres of narrative or, indeed, different cultures. Here we report on a comparison of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* to three other narratives: *Njáls Saga* (Iceland), *The Iliad* (Greece), and *Beowulf* (England). The corresponding networks were constructed by carefully reading versions by Kinsella (1969), Bayerschmidt & Hollander (1998), Rieu (2003), and Heaney (1999), respectively, and recorded the interactions between the various characters.

E.g., if two characters know each other, are related to each other, speak to one another, or appear in a small social congregation together they are positively linked. If two characters meet in physical conflict, their link is classified as negative.

In Fig. 1 a sample network is presented. Positive and negative links are represented by solid and dashed lines, respectively. In real social

Network	N	Δ	G_c	ℓ	ℓ_{max}	C	$\langle k \rangle$	γ	r
Njáls	575	10	100	5.1	24	0.40	5.6	1.6	0.01
Njáls+	564	–	96	5.4	24	0.39	4.9	1.7	0.07
Iliad	694	3	99	3.5	11	0.43	7.7	1.7	-0.08
Iliad+	640	–	86	3.8	10	0.44	7.3	1.7	0.09
Beowulf	72	13	69	2.4	6	0.57	4.6	2.4	-0.12
Beowulf+	68	–	68	2.5	6	0.56	4.1	2.1	-0.07
Táin	422	12	99	2.8	8	0.73	6.0	2.2	-0.33
Táin+	405	–	93	3.0	8	0.74	5.5	2.1	-0.32
Beowulf*	67	–	66	2.8	7	0.52	3.5	2.2	0.01
Táin*	405	–	47	4.0	8	0.36	2.9	2.1	0.03

Table 1: Network statistics. *Táin* means the full *Táin* network, *Táin+* refers to its positive sub-network, and *Táin** is the modified sub-network explained in the text. The other networks are identified by similar notation. The number of nodes in the network is N (degree-zero characters are excluded); the percentage of triangles with an odd number of negative links is Δ; the size of the giant component relative to N is G_c; the mean path length is ℓ; the mean clustering coefficient is C; the network diameter is ℓ_{max}; its average degree is $\langle k \rangle$; the parameter that best fits (truncated) power-law degree distributions is γ; the degree assortativity is r.

networks, an odd number of negative links in a relationship triangle (triad) is rare. In Figure 1, the single negative and two positive links in the triad formed by Nodes *A*, *G* and *H* place Node *A* in the challenging position of trying to maintain good relations with *G* and *H* who are in mutual conflict. The tendency to take sides eventually undermines such an unstable equilibrium. Similarly, three negative links in a triad are rare because it is strategic to view the enemy of an enemy as a friend. The tendency to have a small proportion of triangles with one or three negative links in social networks is called *structural balance*. The actual networks for the four narratives are depicted in Fig. 2. The percentage of closed triads with odd number of negative links is denoted by Δ. The values of Δ for each network are listed in Table 1. One sees that Δ is never greater than 13%, meaning that the four character networks are structurally balanced.

One notices a certain 'clumpiness' to the structural appearances of the character networks of *Beowulf* and the *Táin* in Fig. 2 which makes

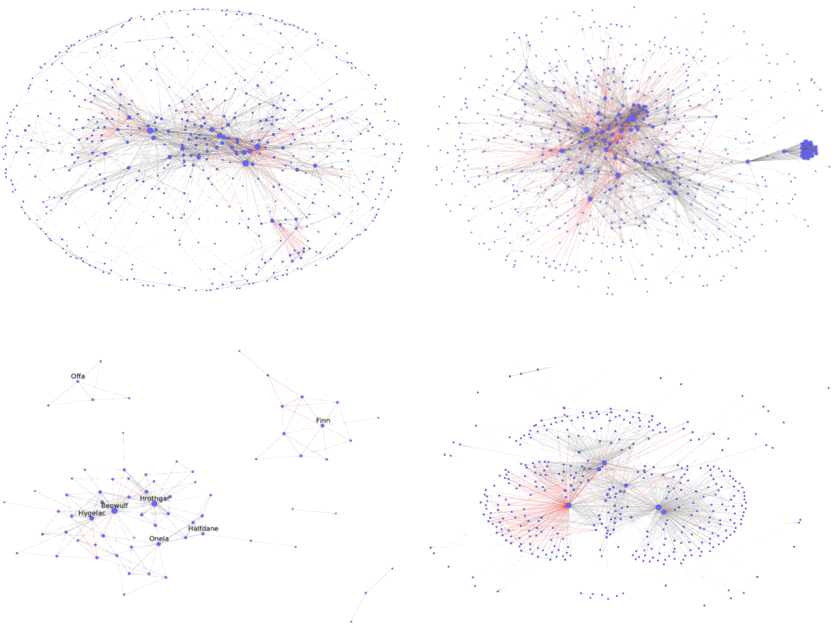

Fig. 2: Character networks for *Njáls saga* (top left **(a)**); the *Iliad* (top right **(b)**); *Beowulf* (bottom left **(c)**) and the *Táin* (bottom right **(d)**). The sizes of the nodes are proportional to the degrees of the characters they represent.

them seem qualitatively different to the networks of *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad*. This intuition is more or less substantiated quantitatively, as will be shown below. *Beowulf* has the smallest network of them all and it is the most fragmented – it has five parts which are disconnected from each other. The largest of these is called the *giant component* and comprises 69% of the full set of nodes. This is quite different to the *Táin*, *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* whose networks are far more connected. In Table 1 such data are recorded for the full and the positive sub-networks formed by using only positive links. These are denoted by a '+' sign – e.g., '*Táin+*' refers to the positive *Táin* network.

In Fig. 1 (whose single component, by default, is the giant one) the shortest route between Nodes F and D has three steps ($F \longrightarrow C \longrightarrow B \longrightarrow D$). On the other hand, Nodes G and D are separated by only two steps ($G \longrightarrow H \longrightarrow D$). The average length of all of the shortest paths between all pairs of nodes is called the *mean path length.* This measures

the connectivity of the entire network. Mathematically (and in Table 1), the average path length is denoted by ℓ. This is smallest for *Beowulf* and the *Táin* (2.4 and 2.8, respectively) and largest for *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* (5.1 and 3.5). In this sense, the character networks of *Beowulf* and the *Táin* are similar to each other. Those of *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* are also similar to each other but rather different to the other pair. These statistics are also recorded in Table 1. The values of the *maximum* path length for each network are also recorded (this is the *longest shortest length*, also called the network *diameter*) and denoted by $\ell_{\max}$. *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* have the largest values but this is likely to be simply due to the fact that they are the largest networks.

In everyday life, there is a high probability for friends to have mutual acquaintances. In network terms, the predominance of this type of feature is measured by the *clustering coefficient*. In Fig. 1, Nodes *B*, *G* and *H* are neighbours of Node *A*. We saw earlier that *AGH* forms a triad. If there were a link between *B* and *G*, the set *ABG* would form a triad too. A similar statement holds for *ABH*. So, of *A*'s three potential triads (*ABG*, *ABH* and *AGH*), only one is realised. One says that the clustering coefficient for Node *A* is 1/3. The average of the clustering coefficients over the entire network is called its *mean clustering coefficient*. This is 0.4 for *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad*. It is 0.6 and 0.7 for *Beowulf* and the *Táin*. Again, the statistics for the first two narratives are closer to each other than to the latter pair. These data are also recorded in Table 1 where the clustering coefficient is denoted by *C*.

In order to get an idea of how purposeful the construction of these networks might be, it is informative to compare their statistics to those of networks with the same number of nodes and links, but with the links distributed in a random manner. These random networks are well understood mathematically but are unable to sustain the complex set of relations typical of normal societies. The path lengths of counterpart random networks are about the same but the clustering coefficients of the character networks are far greater than those of the random counterparts (MacCarron & Kenna 2012). This is a classic property of social networks which is then called a *small world* (Watts & Strogatz 1998). Thus, unlike random networks, our character networks are small worlds.

Network degree distributions

So far we have discussed statistics which are averaged over the entire network. One can probe at a finer level too to investigate how local properties differ from character to character. The *degree* of a node is the number of links emanating from it. In Fig. 1, for example, character A has degree three because it is linked to three other nodes (B, G and H). Different nodes have different degrees and the probability that a node has some specific degree is called the *degree distribution*. In complex networks, it is usual that many nodes have a small number of links, but a few have many links. Such a distribution is *positively skewed*.

One way to compare such distributions is to attempt to describe them by so-called *power laws* (Albert & Barabási 2002). Technically, this involves representing the probability for a node to have a degree whose value is k or more by $P(k)$, and fitting the distribution to the mathematical form $P(k) = k^{-\gamma+1}$. The inverse proportionality means that as the degree k increases, the probability $P(k)$ decreases. The important part of the formula is the exponent γ. This is a positive number that characterises the speed of decrease of the degree in the network. If the data fit the formula well, the network may be called *scale-free*. This simply means that there is no special value of degree k and we can expect some characters to have a vastly greater degree than the average. Sometimes the power-law holds only for a finite range of k-values beyond which the degree distribution falls rapidly. Such a truncated function is not scale-free. It should be noted that many networks and empirical distributions do not follow power-law degree distributions (Clauset *et al.* 2009; Broido & Clauset 2019), and identifying the most appropriate distribution can be challenging (Mannion & MacCarron 2023). However, whether the model is scale-free or not, by comparing γ-values, we can compare different networks at a fine, local level. If the network is better fitted by a faster-decaying distribution, this will result in a higher value of γ. Hence we are not interested in identifying the most appropriate distribution here, but comparing the values of parameters for one such distribution.

We plot the degree distributions for the four networks in Fig. 3. *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* are each well fitted by truncated power laws with γ=1.6 and 1.7, respectively. For *Beowulf* and the *Táin* scale-free fits suffice and we found γ=2.4 and 2.9, respectively. These numbers signal, yet

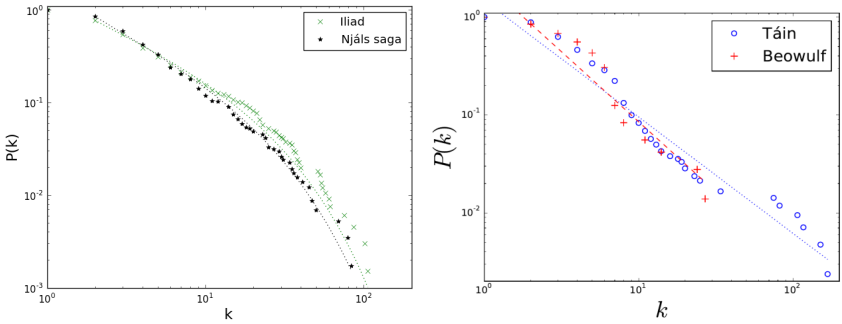

Fig. 3 a und **b: Left (a)** – degree distributions for *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad*. **Right (b)** – degree distributions for *Beowulf* and the *Táin* which have a strong degree of overlap except for the six rightmost *Táin* points.

again, that there is structural similarity between the networks underlying the Icelandic and Greek texts. And yet again, the *Táin* appears closer to *Beowulf*. In Table 1 we also record the values of the mean degrees for each network (denoted by $\langle k \rangle$).

Assortativity

In general, people tend to associate with similar people, a phenomenon known in sociology as *homophily*. In network science this can be measured by a quantity known as *assortativity*. We are particularly interested in degree assortativity and networks which link nodes of similar degrees are termed *assortative*. The opposite feature, whereby low-degree nodes tend to link to high-degree nodes, is called *disassortativity* (Newman 2002). In Fig. 4 simple examples of assortative and disassortative networks are displayed.

Assortativity is measured by a number, denoted by r, which lies between -1 and 1. A positive value signals an assortative network; a negative value indicates a disassortative one. The results are listed in Table 1. Of the four main networks, only *Njáls saga* is (marginally) assortative. The *Iliad*, *Beowulf* and the *Táin* are increasingly disassortative.

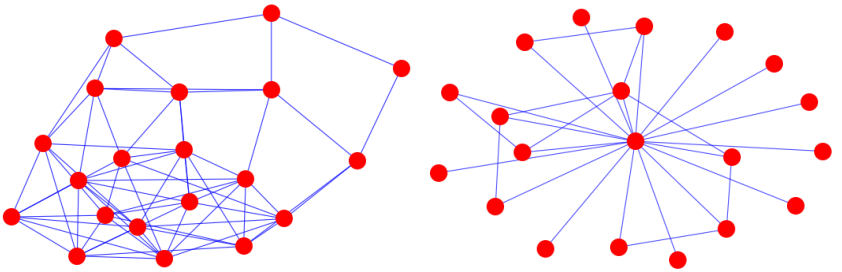

Fig. 4 a und **b: Left (a)** – in this assortative network, high degree nodes in the top tend to link to other high degree nodes while low degree nodes in the bottom are also mutually linked to each other. **Right (b)** – this disassortative network has the opposite tendency; the high degree node in the middle connects to many low degree nodes, which tend not to connect to each other.

Comparisons between networks

We are now in a position to discuss our comparisons of the four networks to each other. All of the data are gathered in Table 1. We have seen numerous instances where the statistics for *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* are similar to each other as are those of *Beowulf* and the *Táin*. This is graphically illustrated in Fig. 5 where the values of the exponent γ, the clustering coefficient C and the assortativity r are plotted on a single three-dimensional plot. Implicitly the plot carries a notion of distance and this can even be measured. The distance between *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* on this plot is 0.14. That between *Beowulf* and the *Táin* is 0.33. These are significantly less than the distances between any other pair; e.g., the distance of the *Táin* to *Njáls saga* is 0.76 and that from the *Táin* to the *Iliad* is 0.63. In this measurable sense, the *Táin* is closer to *Beowulf* than to any other network examined.

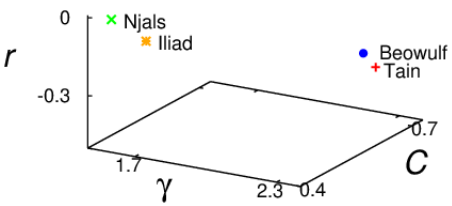

Fig. 5: Positions of the four full character networks in the metric space spanned by the degree-distribution exponent γ, the clustering coefficient C and the assortativity r.

One has to be cautious about selective use of statistics. Firstly, only three statistics are presented in Fig. 5. One could have included the mean degree $\langle k \rangle$, the path length, or the diameter. However, these are less appropriate because they are strongly (and non-trivially[3]) dependent on the sizes of the networks. A second criticism is that the relative importance of γ, C and the assortativity r are weighted equally in Fig. 4. This is entirely an arbitrary decision – there is no externally given 'rule', or absolute truth, to serve as guidance in making such a decision. Still, the evidence appears strong for the statement that the *Táin* network looks more like that of *Beowulf* than that of either of the other two networks examined.

The four narratives contain high proportions of hostility and conflict. To properly probe the *social* interactions recorded in the texts, one should investigate the positive sub-networks rather than the full networks. From Table 1, one observes that the differences between many of the full-network statistics and those of their positive sub-networks are small. The values of N, $\langle k \rangle$, γ, ℓ, $\ell_{\max}$, and C differ by less than 10% between the full and positive networks. So the main conclusion so far, that the *Táin* is more like *Beowulf* than either of the others, holds also for the positive sub-networks.

How do the four networks compare to those from (real) societies? Network analyses have by now been performed on a range of social systems and examples include actors, musicians, managers, and scientists. It is now known that social networks are different to other types of complex networks (Newman & Park 2003). Typically they exhibit structural balance; small-worldness; high clustering coefficients ($C > C_n$ where C_n is the expected clustering coefficient from the degree distribution); positively skewed degree distributions; non-negative assortativity ($r \gtrsim 0$). Although not discussed here, they are robust to the random removal of nodes and they have definite community structures (MacCarron & Kenna 2012; 2013a). Non-social networks may have some of these properties, but rarely have all of them. The question now arises as to how closely character networks from epic narratives resemble social networks. And in particular, where does the *Táin* sit in relation to the others?

[3] The word 'trivial' in science signifies a relationship that is straightforward. It does not mean that something is pointless or insignificant.

As is clear from Table 1, and from MacCarron & Kenna (2012; 2013a), the networks are robust, structurally balanced, small worlds with community structures. These are likely to be universal properties common to many networks from epic literature. However, networks coming from fictitious narratives are also structurally balanced, small worlds with community structures and are robust to random exclusion of nodes (MacCarron & Kenna 2012). So the universality observed appears to extend to works of fiction.

To further compare literary networks to social and fictional ones, one may turn to assortativity. In the absence of constraints, the natural manner in which most networks mix causes them to be disassortative. This is explained from entropic considerations: there are more disassortative configurations than assortative ones (Johnson *et al*. 2010). The absence of disassortativity in social networks is due to social constraints which counter this phenomenon. Thus assortativity is a particularly human feature and distinguishes social networks from other types (Newman & Park 2003).

In looking at assortativity, it is sensible (for the reason outlined above) to restrict considerations to the positive sub-networks. From Table 1, it is clear that the positive sub-networks of *Njáls saga* and *Iliad* are assortative. Interestingly, this feature was absent in all of the (mostly modern) fiction networks we examined for comparison purposes. It is also absent in both the *Beowulf* and *Táin* networks!

So, does this mean that *Njáls saga* and *Iliad* are based on real societies and that *Beowulf* and the *Táin* are fictional? Certainly not! First of all, one cannot make such a statement on the basis of network analysis alone – a more holistic approach is required. Secondly, a story which is focused on the exploits of a few individuals, for example, rather than on an entire society, may have a disassortative network. What one can say is that the networks of *Njáls saga* and *Iliad* are more 'social' in the sense that they are focused more on societies than individuals. *Beowulf* and the *Táin* are more individual-oriented. But one can go further and ask: what is it that makes *Beowulf* and the *Táin* disassortative? In particular, is disassortativity a feature that is endemic to the entire network structures or is it something that is localised within a small number of characters?

The existing literature may hint at a direction for further investigation. Although *Beowulf* is obviously embellished by fictional elements, archaeological excavations offer some support for the historicity

associated with some of its characters (Anderson 1999). But the character Beowulf is believed not to have existed (Klaeber 1950; Chambers 1959). Prompted by this, the character Beowulf was removed from the *Beowulf* network and the network was re-analysed. We denote the resulting network by *Beowulf** (still considering the positive sub-network only). Interestingly, it turns out that *Beowulf** is not disassortative. The value $r = 0.01$ is akin to that of a real (or realistic) social network.

This approach is reminiscent of that of Barnes (1972) who distinguishes between ego-centric and socio-centric networks. The former 'anchor social networks around particular points of reference' while the latter 'focusses on the pattern of connections in the network as a whole' (Scott 2000: 72). Moreover, 'in an ego-centric network, it is usual to disregard the focal agent' (Scott 2000: 72) when studying density, to look at the links between the background society. Here, this approach is extended to the study of the assortativity in ego-centric networks.

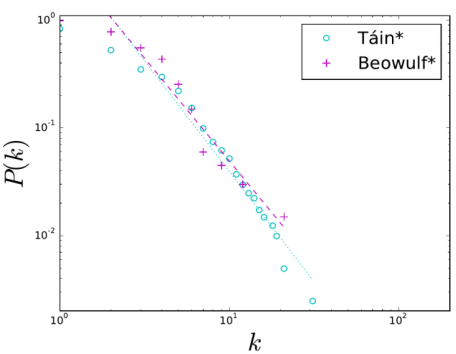

Fig. 6: The positive *Táin** network strongly overlaps with that of *Beowulf** and both are marginally assortative.

Thus a local manipulation[4] of Beowulf is enough to render the entire society realistic (in a networks-science sense). What about the *Táin*? Would it require local or global interventions to neutralise the very strong disassortativity of the positive sub-network? Recall the similarity between the degree distributions of *Beowulf* and the *Táin* and that only the top six data points of the *Táin* network appear to diverge from the *Beowulf* pattern. It is not desirable to remove six characters from the network (as there is no external basis on which to do this). Instead one may consider that the weakest links might be proxy interactions in the tale. To identify weak links in the network, the numbers of times individuals interact with each

[4] The word 'manipulate' also has a special meaning; it refers to the processing of data and not to some kind of illicit tampering.

other are counted. If two characters interact once only, the corresponding link is deemed weak. The weak links associated with the top six *Táin* characters are then removed. For example, Medb directly interacts only once during the entire narrative with Lóch mac Mofemis, a warrior called in to fight Cú Chulainn (Kinsella 1969: 133–136). We imagine that, rather than Lóch interacting directly with Medb, he interacts with Medb's unnamed proxy instead (an unidentified commanding officer or servant, perhaps). The corresponding weak link between Lóch and Medb is then removed. The resulting network is denoted by *Táin** and compared to *Beowulf** in Fig. 6. The figure shows that the top six points corresponding to the Ulster tale are no longer offset with respect to the others and nearly all the data points fall on the same line. Most interestingly, the resulting *Táin** network is assortative (albeit mildly) with r=0.03.

It is worth reiterating that any interpretations have to be made with great care and in a holistic manner. One can never rely on statistics alone and knowledge established using traditional humanities and sociological approaches has always to be taken into account. Notwithstanding this, one may argue that the realism of the *Táin* network (or, indeed that of *Beowulf*) is on a par with those of *Njáls saga* or the *Iliad*, once local adjustments are made. A complementary interpretation is not to view these characters as anomalous, but instead to recognise their very strong influence over the entire network. Interpreted this way, we can view *Beowulf* and the *Táin* as more individual-centred than *Njáls saga* or the *Iliad*, which are more society-centred. Perhaps this tells us something about the preferences of the societies which generated those stories.

Influence of and objections to the networks approach; future directions

As stated in the introduction, the original publication on this theme (MacCarron & Kenna 2012) generated an extraordinary amount of interest. It resulted in newspaper articles the world over, radio interviews and online comments. It inspired multitudes of projects and a yearly citation count that continues to increase linearly. It was selected as one of *Europhysics Letters*' 'Highlights' (the most influential research published in the journal) and remains in the top five 'most read' on a

monthly basis, ten years after publication. In a HERA report it was highlighted as providing 'an example of how digital techniques and technologies, applied to literary works, can open up a new field of inquiry' (Hazelkorn *et al.* 2013: 32). There it was also welcomed as having 'maintained the importance of continued support for research in the humanities, but also expanded the notion of what humanities research is or can be' (Hazelkorn *et al.* 2013: 32).

However, in keeping with the above-discussed uneasiness associated with quantitative approaches to humanities, some objections were raised (Casey 2012) (which, by association, became that author's most viewed/downloaded paper too). Here we summarise these humanities concerns and detail a response.

The first objection was to the use of Kinsella's version of the *Táin* which is 'largely (but not exclusively) based upon one of three extant versions of the medieval *Táin*' (Casey 2012: 2). This means that the study 'is essentially a study of Thomas Kinsella's *The Táin*, rather than the universe of the *Táin* characters or even any one recension of the *Táin*' (Casey 2012: 5). Indeed, we do not have a canonical *Táin* at our disposal and, given the absence of such a version, study of any text necessarily comes with qualifications about its status and completeness. MacCarron & Kenna explicitly stated that 'the reader should keep in mind that these networks, like many others, are necessarily of limited extent and incomplete – potentially representing spotlights on the societies from which they are drawn' (2012: 2).

It is important to appreciate that, in the spirit of science, MacCarron & Kenna (2012) represents a first step – the first attempt at a network-based comparison of this type of epic narratives. That is why a letters journal was chosen for publication, where very new, original results are first published, possibly of a pilot study or preliminary results. There is a strict page limit and the idea is that details are published in an expanded follow-up paper. For example, a typographical error mentioning 'three manuscripts' instead of 'three recensions' also appeared in an early draft that the authors failed to spot before publication. In follow-up papers the 'manuscript' vs. 'recension' typo is corrected (MacCarron & Kenna 2013b: 11).

The differences between two recensions of the *Táin* are illustrated by Casey, which also gives an instance of an inconsistency in one of these (where the character Findabair, said to have already died, ends

up co-habiting with Cú Chulainn) (2012: 2). The inconsistency refers to an event rather than to a relationship link, simplified as positive or negative. The network approach is only concerned with the configuration of such links amongst nodes; events are, per se, irrelevant (although they give the backdrop to such links). Once a (simplified) relationship between Findabair and Cú Chulainn is established, the said inconsistency is inconsequential to the networks approach. The example serves, therefore, to demonstrate a robust aspect of the networks approach. It also demonstrates the power of the statistical approach, which lies in its ability to deal with large numbers of entities (characters and links in this instance) rather than sensitivity to detail.

A third 'more serious problem' was also given by Casey (2012: 3). There is an episode in which many characters of the same name appear ('two men called Crúaid, two called Calad, two called Cír,...'). Each of these was counted only once in MacCarron & Kenna (2012). 'If this one incident alone is taken into consideration then approximately 150 extra individuals must be considered' (Casey 2012: 4). But the purpose was not to document kill counts. Rather it was to study the underlying social networks. This is why the networks were partitioned into negative and positive. The extra characters identified in the above passage would appear in the negative networks only; they would have no bearing on the analysis in the paper which is of positive networks. To illustrate the point, we present here the negative network in Fig. 7. It is dominated by a star-like structure in the centre-left. The nucleus of this structure is the node representing Cú Chulainn. The links to this node are negative interactions, namely slayings. This structure is not a social network. Its topology is not complex enough to be capable of sustaining a society. Adding more kill counts would only serve to increase the number of

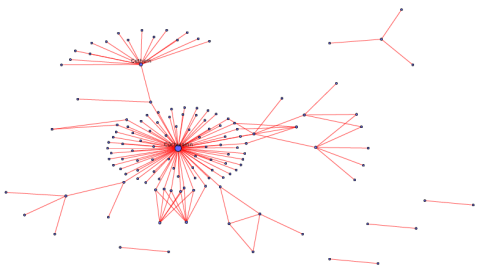

Fig. 7: The negative *Táin* network is topologically trivial and statistically uninteresting and adding more links does not affect our study of the positive networks.

negative links emanating from the central character but would not in any way alter the direction of the social network, its analysis or its conclusions. It does not matter how many of these duplicates Cú Chulainn kills, because they are not linked to anyone but him and, if we were to use the transport-network analogy, they are like individual driveways in front of houses, all emptying onto a single street. They are not roads linking towns and cities and consequently cannot be considered part of the transport network.

Casey compared the approach of MacCarron & Kenna (2012) to 'the old adage about how to carve an elephant from a block of marble: continue removing everything that does not look like part of an elephant until an elephant remains' (2012: 4). Inadvertently, this comparison is a good one, in that the intention is to determine the degree of manipulation that would be required to convert a disassortative character network into one which resembles a social network. The point is that it suffices to make local changes; one does not have to remove many characters but simply to remove the weakest links of the few strongest characters. In terms of the analogy, the block of marble already resembles the elephant; in the main, dissimilarities are small in number and localised. In this sense, the character network is not so far removed from social networks – minimal intervention is required for it to attain the required attributes.

Over the years, resistance to the application of physics techniques beyond traditional disciplinary confines emerged from within the physics community, too. Such hesitancy was more commonplace in the early days of sociophysics when some believed that physicists have no right to do something other than traditional physics (see, e.g., Galam 2004 for a personal testimony from one of sociophysics' founding fathers). Modern opinion is that it is not always the object of study that defines the field; rather it can be the set of notions and methodologies used. In this sense, physics 'is a certain way of understanding how processes happen in the world' (Ball 2016), and in studying epic literature in the above manner, one is (also) doing physics.

Still, there are many ways that this work can be extended and improved upon. For example, all interactions and relationships were treated as being equal – irrespective of their strength. This is akin to treating all roads of a transport network as being equal, irrespective of the volumes of traffic they carry. This is a reasonable thing to do if one is interested in the topology of the network. But it would be interesting

to also comparatively study weighted networks in which strengths of relationships are accounted for, in some sensible fashion. One possibility is to endow links with a weight proportional to the number of times characters interact in the narrative. But this may underestimate the importance of kinship, for example. In the *Táin*, kinship and foster-kinship are important factors in the narrative, exemplified by the foster father-son relationship between Fergus mac Róich and Cú Chulainn. More work is required to develop this idea in a manner that is helpful to humanities scholarship.

We have considered undirected networks so that if Node *A* interacts with Node *B*, the reverse occurs too (and with equal weight). Again, some sense of orientation could be introduced in a manner that is sensible for humanities scholarship. The networks considered here are static – they collect the entire sets of interactions over the entire time-span of the narrative and collapse them into a single timeless structure. It would be interesting to explore the evolution of the networks over narrative time and compare such dynamical properties.

It would also be interesting to explore the differences between various recensions. This would require making comparisons at a more local level, too, and would necessitate a more nuanced approach than that reported upon here. From a humanities perspective, this opens up a multitude of possibilities for Ulster Cycle studies, three of which will be briefly touched upon here. Firstly, a comparison of the networks in Recensions I and II of the *Táin* could be used to comment upon the long-standing agreement that the second recension represents a reworking of the first, in which narrative inconsistencies were smoothed out and important characters (like Fergus mac Róich) were subject to different portrayals (Greenwood 1994). Secondly, the 'life' of pivotal characters could also be used as the narrative time-span for individual studies, e.g., the 'heroic biography' of Cú Chulainn (a series of tales of widely differing dates, narrating his life from conception to death) might be amenable to such an approach. Thirdly, the relationships of the characters in the *remscéla* ('prefatory tales) to the *Táin* would be an interesting subject of study, since this small body of tales has been imagined as the closest thing medieval Irish authors had to a narrative 'cycle' (Chadwin 1997).

There are other developments in network science that would be fascinating to apply. For example, there are now ways to predict missing

links (Clauset *et al*. 2008) and to improve measurement of errors (Newman 2017).

Conclusions

Here we have reported on an ongoing project which uses network theory to compare the societal structures underlying epic narratives, focusing on the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. One of our main conclusions is that the network structure of the *Táin* more closely resembles that of *Beowulf* than it does either *Njáls saga* or the *Iliad*. One possible reason may be that *Beowulf* and the *Táin* are more hero-centric narratives; *Njáls saga* and the *Iliad* are more society-centred. These qualities may reflect similarities and differences between national preferences in story-telling in medieval times or they may reflect societies which inspired the tales. Further research is required to make more progress in these directions, and the possibility exists for fruitful comparison between the networks identified in these texts with those in narratives set in the historic period. For example, the social network of the *Táin* could be compared with that of the encomiastic biography of Brian Boru (*ob.* 1014), *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* ('The War of the Irish with the Foreigners'; Todd 1867), which was written approximately a hundred years after his death and is roughly contemporary with Recension II of the *Táin*.

In relating social network findings to historical societies we are connecting with older debates. In 1946, T. F. O'Rahilly wrote that 'Ulidian tales are wholly mythical in origin, and they have not the faintest connexion with anything that could be called history' (1946: 271), whereas his contemporary Myles Dillon claimed that they give 'a picture of pre-Christian Ireland which seems genuine' (1948: xii). These opinions may be viewed in relation to attempts to use the tales as evidence for actual events or to investigate the broad contours of society, respectively. The six characters that our algorithmic approach identifies as rendering the *Táin* disassortative (i.e. as having more links to low-degree nodes than one might expect and thereby rendering the *Táin*'s character network less akin to a realistic social network) are: Conchobar mac Nessa, Cú Chulainn, Ailill, Medb, Finnchad Fer Benn, and Fergus mac Róich. This identification is pertinent in the light of a comment by Kenneth Jackson: 'the characters Conchobar and Cúchulainn, Ailill and Medb

and the rest, and the events of the Cattle Raid of Cooley, are themselves entirely legendary and purely un-historical. But this does *not* mean that the traditional background, the setting, in which the Ulster cycle was built up, is bogus' (1964: 44). Thus, each of the characters in Jackson's list was picked up as 'anomalous' by our 'mechanistic' approach. Notwithstanding this, research in the humanities and social sciences since Jackson's time increasingly suggests that the setting is largely bogus, too. Even in his attempt to partially rehabilitate Jackson's theories (as originally expressed in *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age*), John T. Koch acknowledged 'the now near total deconstruction of Jackson's case' and that 'I am nonetheless forced to concede that Jackson's little book has been so wounded by well-founded objections and was in some respects so poorly conceived in the first place that its only salvageable contribution to the restated case for continuity will be the memorable subtitle' (1994: 229). The increasing consensus in the humanities is that the world of the *Táin* is partially modeled on the medieval world (in many respects that of the late first millennium A.D.) and projected backwards onto a more remote past. For example, the material culture of the world of the *Táin* is predominantly that of the medieval period and does not match the archaeological record for the period in which the *Táin* is set (Mallory 1981; 1986; 1992). To this may be added an increasing appreciation of the pervasive influence of Classical narrative upon Irish heroic literature (Miles 2011), which at the very least supports Tomás Ó Cathasaigh's cautious assertion that 'early Irish narrative literature is not the detritus of a lost mythology, nor yet a new phenomenon, born, like Athena, fully grown' (1984: 307).

However, we repeat Heather O'Donoghue's assertion (in a Norse saga context) that it is 'almost impossibly difficult' to unambiguously distinguish fact from fiction in such sagas (2004: 29). This is true for the Norse sagas that deal with otherwise historically attested individuals, and the implication is that even greater difficulties exist in trying to establish any 'historic facts' in the *Táin*. For this reason, in the original paper and in subsequent work, it was repeatedly stated that everything presented is from a networks point of view only and that to draw any firm conclusions the reader should take a more holistic view – taking into account literary studies, archaeology, history, linguistics and comparative mythology (to name but some relevant disciplines). Our suggestion is that networks study could form another element of such a

holistic approach. If holistic considerations indeed lead one to believe that the *Táin* approximates an actual society, then network theory suggests, rather like Jackson's belief, that the six most connected characters are anomalous (i.e. exaggerated, unrealistic, invented, or similar). A concern, from a humanities point of view, is that such a holistic approach will not be adopted, and that network theory results will be adopted by fringe elements who seek to establish that the *Táin* is 'real', without appreciating the nuances or scholarship of any of the aforementioned disciplines. Similar concerns have previously been cogently aired regarding the use of DNA evidence to argue for links between ancient populations and languages (Sims-Williams 1998). However, this is a risk inherent in any field of study, and the questionable use of results should not be allowed to prejudice appreciation of the intrinsic value of a field of study or its methods.

It has to be appreciated that this is pioneering research in a fledgling area. There are no rules for deciding what nodes or links to include in the networks; we have to make them up as we go along. In one sense the precise set of rules is not so important for a first-approximation approach such as ours, so long as we apply the same rules to different narratives. To use another analogy, attempts to compare the heights of people using a wooden staff rather than a properly calibrated ruler can deliver meaningful (if imprecise) results. Our job in the long term is both to make the comparisons and to calibrate the measuring devices.

There are many other directions one could take. Some of these are discussed in the volume *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives* (Kenna *et al.* 2017). This is a compendium of approaches which go far beyond network analysis, including, e.g., phylogenetics and principal-component analysis. The mathematical sciences are intrinsic to the understanding of our physical universe and essential for certain aspects of sociology and economics, too. Combining these fields with physics has given rise to new research areas of econophysics and sociophysics. These interdisciplinary areas are capable of dealing with large data bases now available and exploiting modern computational technology. We believe that a similar approach can be taken to deliver new understandings of the structures embedded in our literary and imaginative universes, too. It can be used to remove the 'two cultures' entrenchment and cross old disciplinary boundaries.

Acknowledgements

RK and PMC are grateful for support from the Leverhulme Trust (Grant No. F/00 732/I), the European Science Foundation (Grant No. EW13-082) and the EU FP7 IRSES network DIONICOS (contract No. PIRSES-GA-2013-612707). RK is also supported by the $\mathbb{L}^4$ Collaboration & Doctoral College for the Statistical Physics of Complex Systems, Leipzig-Lorraine-Lviv-Coventry, Europe. RK would like to thank members and supporters of ÉIRÍ (Evoking Ireland's Resilient female Icons) for inspirational cross-disciplinary discussions on the theme of Irish mythology.

The presentation of conflict talk in texts from the Ulster Cycle of tales

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1. Introduction

A typical form of conflict which we frequently encounter in Early Irish, and in medieval material in general, is a physical fight between two or more participants. In addition to physical fights, we also find instances of verbal conflict. Broadly speaking, these come in two different shapes: on the one hand this is *antagonism*, the general opposition towards any proposition as, e.g., presented by Efnissien, the malicious character in the Welsh text *Branwen Verch Lyr*. In the Irish context, the character of Bricriu in the Ulster Cycle of Tales fulfils the same function as described below. On the other hand this is *aggression*, a dispute about a given topic.

In a situation of verbal conflict, a first speaker's interactional move may be opposed. Now it is the second speaker's choice whether they want to enter into a verbal conflict or not (Hutchby 1996). This choice is influenced by various factors, such as the formality of the situation. Verbal conflict has previously been described particularly on the basis of English (e.g., Grimshaw 1990a), but also on the basis of other languages, such as Chinese (Kuo 1992) or Japanese (Takagi 1999). A good overview of the literature on conflict in contemporary languages has been provided by Leung (2001). Concerning language conflict in pre-modern languages, research has been carried out particularly on literary representation in classical languages (Lentini 2013; Gottesman 2008) or in early English (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000).

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 133–152.

Even though conflict is indeed a central topic of early Irish literature, no investigation of verbal conflict appears to have been attempted on the basis of early Irish material, and the further investigation of medieval European literatures seems to be a general desideratum. Here, select early Irish texts from the Ulster Cycle of Tales will be examined on the basis of discourse analytic approaches (e.g., van Dijk 1985). The aim of this investigation is to present a typology of verbal conflict situations in the Old Irish Ulster Cycle tales and to determine the functions of these conflicts. After this short introduction, we will first provide an introduction to theories of verbal conflict, then present the data and material, before providing an overview of the literary representation of verbal conflict in select early Irish texts. In this we will focus on the structure of the verbal battles, rather than on an interpretation of the involved speech acts in a Gricean[1] sense. This analysis will be followed by a discussion and a summary of these findings.

2. Verbal conflict

In situations of verbal conflict, different stages may be detected. These are the initialisation of the conflict, the escalation, and the closure of the conflict. Further, specific strategies may be observed in the conflict. These will be introduced below.

2.1 Initialisiation

Generally, in society, agreement is preferred to conflict (Levinson 1983; Pomerantz 1984: 64). Where non-agreement is found (Goodwin & Goodwin 1990), this may be an explicit *no*, or other opening sequences. What is important for a conflict to arise, in any case, is the presence of open and mutual verbal opposition (Spitz 2005: 533). For this, different rhetorical signals may be employed (Georgakopoulou 2001). These may be special markers at the beginning of the conversation, which are then followed by narratives as analogies, or by aggressive questions.

[1] Such as looking at the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of the speech acts.

2.2 Escalation

Even though agreement typically is the socially preferred option in most societies, once a conflict has been started, the unmarked action for the participants becomes to continue arguing. In that case, the otherwise conversationally preferred agreement is replaced by the defence of the positions of the participants, and no gaps are left in the discourse in order not to create a weak point in the argument (Kotthoff 1993).

Once the escalation of the conflict is taking place, typical structures of escalation can be observed: in the first sequence, speaker A makes a statement, which speaker B contradicts, then speaker A either reiterates their own statement or contradicts the contradiction (Muntigl & Turnbull 1998: 243; cf. Leung 2001: 8). In the escalation of the argument, the topic of the argument is typically broadened, it may also shift from impersonal argument to personal argument, and reference to class and social differences may be made, irrelevant claims may be put forward or imprecise proof may be given (Grimshaw 1990b). Any re-contextualisation can either lead to escalation of the conflict or, on the other hand, to the slackening of dispute.

2.3 Completion of the conflict

After the escalation of a conflict has taken place, various avenues of bringing the conflict to completion have been observed (Leung 2001: 13; Vuchinich 1990). First, this may be the acceptance of one of the participants' positions by the other party or parties in the conflict. Second, a compromise may be offered by one of the participants and taken up by the other or others. Also, a dominant outsider may resolve the conflict, in the cases discussed by Vuchinich these are typically parents who resolve the children's disputes. Further, one of the participants may withdraw physically from the conflict. This may be done with or without the abandonment of their position. Thus, if no solution can be found in the conflict, an impasse may be reached. Such an impasse may lead to the postponement of the conflict that may or may not be accompanied by the physical retreat of a participant.

2.4 Strategies

Within a dispute, we can predominantly identify two positions. The first can be the attack on a given position (argumentativity). The second can be the attack on persons rather than positions (verbal aggression). In addition to resolving existing differences in opinion, verbal conflict can also ensue because one or more particpants want to enact their social superiority (Goodwin & Goodwin 1990). In this case, a verbal conflict cements existing hierarchies by putting down the opponent, and by creating the own superior identity or by involving higher ranking persons. Thus, Schiffrin (1984) describes dispute as an instrument of social positioning, which is characterised by prefering dispute to consensus, by lacking a clear beginning and end. Here participants experience the dispute as positive. Correspondingly, people with less social power rarely attack people with more social power (Grimshaw 1990b: 300). Where power-holders are attacked, they are attacked less frequently, less directly and less intensely.

How often and how intensely conflicts are carried out depends on various factors. On the one hand, the cultural background plays a role. In different cultures, loss of face will be experienced at different points (e.g., Zarend 2015: 34), and this will impact on what is considered acceptable in discourse. Further, the speakers' own personal characteristics play a role, as speakers may show more or less personal agression. Conventionally, women are supposed to be less aggressive than men. Yet conflict studies show that in fact they behaviour similarly to men in conflict (Spitz 2005: 547). The dispute strategies that are employed in a conflict are instances of non-verbal behaviour on the one hand, but on the other hand phonological and lexical modification can be observed, formulaic language may be used, and especially specific pragmatic factors, irony or sarcasm (Kallmeyer & Keim 1996).

Researchers working on pre-modern texts determine a further relevant strategy that is used in verbal disputes. This strategy has been termed 'flyting' (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000; Lentini 2013). Working on the Greek Iliad, Lentini explains flyting to be the ritualistic verbal duelling of opponents on the battlefield. He identifies intercommunal aggression on the battlefield, such as mocking, disparaging and threats. He also points to intracommunal aggression and cites examples of verbal aggression being used to strengthen internal cohesion by extorting her-

oes into action against external enemies. The inciter is supposed to be in a socially superior position to the hero.[2] In addition, Lentini identifies disruptive intracommunal verbal abuse, typically in the form of threats, boasts and rude commands. These may be used instead of physical attacks between members of one community group (*ibid.*: 19–20). In a similar vein, Gottesman (2008: 7) identifies verbal abuse presented by *kertomia* in Ancient Greek literature as the trading of insults by young men to increase their status.

Referring to Old English, Jucker & Taavitsainen (2000) also identify ritual insults and flyting, especially in Old English heroic poetry. They point out that in contrast to more playful verbal duelling of, for example, contemporary teenagers, the flyting of Anglo-Saxon warriors could lead to physical battles – or to silence of the opponents. They find that the common structure of these ritualistic insults is claim, defence and counterclaim, with both the claims and the counterclaims consisting of boasts referring to past deeds and of threats and curses referring to the future. They argue that semantically some of these insults may be testable in court if they are slanders or slurs that violate truth-conditions, while others, name-calling and use of expletives, are performative insults. We will find that some of the structures discussed in Jucker & Taavitsainen (2000) can also be applied to our Early Irish material.

3. Data and method

For this study of conflict talk, texts have been selected from early Irish sources mainly stemming from between the 12th and 14th centuries and arguably going back to as far as the 8th–9th centuries. It is of course open to dispute to what extent these literary representations accurately represent real-life conflicts. Spitz (2005) makes a case for treating literary sources as authentic examples of real-life conflict. While this may or may not be the case for the early Irish material in hand, we are

[2] No examples of this, which match the search criteria, consisting of at least three turns are found in the source material used here. However, in the Early Irish data we may think of charioteers such as Lóeg exhorting heroes to start fighting. In contrast to the Greek material, the exhorter is then in a socially inferior position.

lacking any other, more authentic means of reconstucting verbal conflict situations than the examination of literary sources from early Ireland. Therefore we can only exploit these literary sources. In particular, texts with relevant examples of verbal conflict have been selected, with which the author was already previously familiar. The selected texts are the following.

Aided Óenḟir Aífe 'The Death of Aífe's Only Son' (*AOA*; ed. van Hamel 1978: 9–15). According to the editor, this text goes back to the late 9th or 10th century (*ibid.*: 9). The edition is from the *Yellow Book of Lecan*.

Compert Con Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Conception' (*CCC*; ed. van Hamel 1978: 1–8). The edition is mainly based on *Lebor na hUidre*, and also includes variants from Egerton 1782, and the Royal Irish Academy MS D 4.2 (van Hamel 1978: 1). The editor dates it to the early 12th century, possibly going back to an 8th-century archetype.

De Chophur in da Muccida 'The *Cophur* of the two Swineherds' (*DCDM*; eds Best *et al*. 1954–83 V: ll. 32930–33042). The edition is based on the *Book of Leinster*, dating from the late 12th century.

Fingal Rónáin 'The Kin-Slaying of Rónán' (*FR*; ed. Greene 1955). The text is thought to belong to the early 10th century. It survives in the late-12th-century *Book of Leinster* and in the Trinity College Dublin MS H.3.18.

Fled Bricrenn 'Bricriu's Feast' from *Lebor na hUidre* (*FB*; eds Best & Bergin 1970). The text is thought to have been compiled in the early 12th century, and, according to the editors, its textual history may go back to 8th century.

Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó 'The Tale of Mac Dathó's Pig' (*SMMD*; ed. Thurneysen 1986). The text has been reconstructed from the late-12th-century *Book of Leinster*, Trinity College Dublin MS H.3.18, and British Museum MS Harley 5280, going back to an assumed common source from the 10th–11th century (*ibid.*: i–iv).

***Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Recension I** 'The Cattle-Raid of Cúailnge' from *Lebor na hUidre* (*TBC Rec. 1*; ed. O'Rahilly, C. 1976). The text is thought to have been compiled in the early 12th century.

Extending the investigation to texts from other contexts is planned for future work.

From the above sources, a manual selection has been made of all episodes that correspond to the criteria that are outlined for verbal conflict as discussed in sections 1 and 2. In order to guarantee enough context for the examination of the conflict, conflict episodes with at least three turns have been selected. This unfortunately means that potentially appropriate examples such as

1) *'In fer uait dam-sa,' or ingen Echdach fria sētchi, 'nó bás fort bēolu!'* (*FR*: 71–2)

'Give me the man,' said Echuid's daughter to her servant, 'or you will die.'

had to be excluded, as not enough context is provided for a context-based analysis of the example. Accordingly, all of the episodes have at least two participants or more. The selected examples were then analysed using the methodology of discourse analysis (van Dijk 1985).

4. Verbal conflicts in Early Irish

When examining the examples of conflict episodes in the early Irish tales selected for this study, distinct patterns can be observed concerning initialisation of the conflicts, escalation and resolution. These patterns are presented below.

4.1 Initialisation

In the initialisation phase of the conflict, we typically find one of the following initialisations: one participant questions the truth value of a given proposition, or a comparison of the later conflict parties, the devaluation of an opponent, the incitement to physical fight or the prohibition of an action – or alternatively an order to carry out an action.

4.1.1 Questioning the truth value of a proposition

In such examples, the truth of what a conversation partner says is questioned.

2) ***Niba fír.*** (*SMMD*: §9, 10, 11)

It will not be(come) true.

Here the truth of a statement is called into question by a member of the opposing community to provoke their opponent, yet, as the statement refers to the future, we cannot say the statement constitutes a lie.

4.1.2. Comparison of the conflict parties

In examples like these, the conflict is initiated by a depreciating comparison that is made by one of the conflict parties.

3) *'Asberat ind firseo is **mó do chumachtasu indausa**.' 'Ni lugu ém,' ol muccaid Ochaill.* (*DCDM*: LL 32946–7)

'These men say **your power is larger than mine**.' 'It is not smaller, anyway,' said Ochall's swine-herd.

4) *'Menic **ag méith díb** d'(f)ácbáil acum-sa.' '**Ba méthiu a n-ag** fo-rácbais-{s}iu ocainni,' ol Muinremur mac Gerrginn, '.i. do bráthair fadéin.'* (*SMMD*: §7)

'Often was a **fat bull** left with me **by you**.' '**Fatter was the bull** which you left with us,' said Muinremur Mac Gerrginn, 'namely your own brother.'

Here the opponents are insulted by members of the opposing communities in order to present the speaker as stronger than his opponent.

4.1.3 Devaluing an opponent

A depreciating comment may also be made about one of the conflict parties in order to try to insult the opponent.

5) *Is and sin luid sís fésin. '**Is álaind, a macáin, in cluiche** dogní,' ol sé.* (*AOA*: §10)

He then went down himself. '**Nice, boyo, is the game which you play**,' said he [after a display of fighting techniques].

It is noteworthy that here, too, the opponent from outside the community is belittled, which is a typical form of verbal interaction between intercommunity opponents as observed by Lentini (2013).

4.1.4 Incitement to physical fight

Verbal aggression by one of the participants may also have the goal to explicitly incite the participants to a physical fight.

6) *'**Frithālid a Ulto in comram beus!**' ol Cet. 'Rot-bia són,' ol Mend mac Sálchada.* (*SMMD*: §12)

'**Attend to the fight still,** oh Ulstermen!' said Cet. 'You will have it,' said Mend Mac Sálchada.

Here, too, the incitement to fight comes from a member of the opposing community who explicitly wants to incite towards physical fight (Lentini 2013; Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000).

4.1.5 Order to carry out or avoid other actions

One participant may order the other party to carry out, or avoid, an action. This order may lead to conflict situations.

7) *Luid Condere íarom 7 is and ro gab in mac tráig in tan sin. '**Is lóor dothéig, a macáin**,' ol Condere, 'co fessamar cid no théig 7 can do chenél.'* (*AOA*: §4)

Condere went then and there the boy took to the beach then. '**You have come far enough**, **boyo**,' said Condere, 'till we know where you go and who your people are.'

8) *'**Eirg ón muicc didiu!**' ol Conall. 'Cid dano dot-bérad-su cucce?' ol Cet.* (*SMMD*: §16)

'**Arise from the pig now!**' said Conall. 'What would bring you to it?' said Cet.

9) *'**A n-guin!**' **ol Medb**. 'Ní chélam as banchomairle,' or Ailill. 'Ní maith a n-asbir' la sanais ón, ol Fergus.* (*TBC Rec. 1*: 162–4)

'**Kill them**,' **said Medb**. 'I do not deny that this is a woman's council,' said Ailill. 'It is not good what you say,' said Fergus with a low voice.

Here, the orders may come from outside the community, as in examples **7** and **8**, or from inside the community.

All the examples given under **4.1.1** to **4.1.5** may be possible beginnings of a conflict situation. The first three types explicitly envisage opposition. If an order is given, we may by contrast suppose that the person who gives the order hopes or expects it to be fulfilled rather than opposed. That would definitely be the case if the person giving the order is more powerful than the addressee of the order. If the addressee does not accept the addressor's power to order an action, the order will be contested. The move towards conflict is then initiated by the person who refuses to comply with the order.

4.2 Escalation

Once a conflict is initialised by one participant of the conversation, another participant – or the other participants – cause the escalation of the conflict by taking it up. This uptake can be done in a number of different ways. This may be by furnishing a counter-claim, or presenting a counter-narrative, by refusing an order, by taking up an insult, or by methods of self-presentation. These different strategies are presented in the following.

4.2.1 Claim – counterclaim

A participant in a dispute may take up the dispute by producing a counterclaim to a claim that has previously been made. This, for example, may involve comparisons between the conflict parties.

10) (=3) *'Asberat ind firseo is **mó do chumachtasu indausa**.' '**Ni lugu ém**,' ol muccaid Ochaill.* (*DCDM*: 32947–8)

'These men say **your power is larger than mine**.' '**It is not smaller, anyway**,' said Ochall's swine-herd.

11) (=4) *'Menic **ag méith** díb d'(f)ácbáil acum-sa.' '**Ba méthiu a n-ag** fo-rácbais-{s}iu ocainni,' ol Muinremur mac Gerrginn, '.i. do bráthair fadéin (...)' '**Nibo ferr side**,' ol Lugaid mac Con Ruí, 'oldás Inloth Mór mac Fergusa meic Léti.'* (*SMMD*: §7)

*'Often was **a fat bull** left with me by you.' '**Fatter was the bull** which*

*you left with us,' said Muinremur Mac Gerrginn, 'namely your own brother (…)' '**He was not better**,' said Lugaid Mac Con Ruí, 'than Inloth Mór Mac Fergusa Meic Léti.'*

A similar category to this early Irish category involving claim and counterclaim is also described for Anglo-Saxon literature by Jucker & Taavitsainen (2000).

4.2.2 Claim – counternarrative

In answer to a claim by one participant, other participants may aim to disprove the claim by providing a counternarrative. Examples are given in **12** and **13** below.

12) *'In comram beus!' ol Cet. '**Rot-bia són**,' **ol Mend** mac Sálchada. 'Cía so?' ol Cet. 'Mend' ol cách. '**Cid ane' ol Cet, 'meic na mbachlach cusna lesanmannaib do chomram cucum? Ar ba mese ba sacart oc baistiud ind anma-sin fora athair,** messe t{h}all a sáil de co claidiub conna-ruc acht oínchois úaim.'* (*SMMD*: §12)

'On with the contest!' said Cet. '**You will have it**,' **said Mend** Mac Sálchada. 'Who is that?,' said Cet. 'Mend,' said everyone. '**What then**,' **said Cet**, '**the sons of the lame with his nicknames giving battle to me? For it is I who was the priest at his father's baptism with that name,** I, who took his heel off him with the sword so that I did not leave him but with one foot.'

13) *'Ro bodrais sind,' or sī, 'oc imrādud do maic.' 'Is cóir a imrādud,' ol Rónán, 'ar nī fil i nHērinn mac as ḟerr do rēir a athar.'* (…) *'**Nī étann úam-si ám**,' **or si-si**, '**in sāmchaire ass áil dó** (…) **Rom-uc-sa Congal chuci co bo thrí ó matin co n-erlós ar écin assa lāmaib**.'* (*FR*: 107–16)

'You deafen us,' said she, 'praising your son.' 'It is fitting that he should be praised,' said Ronan, 'for there is not in Ireland a boy who is more obedient to his father.' (…) '**He does not obtain from me, however**,' **said she**, '**the pleasure which he wants**. (…) **Congal brought me to him already thrice since morning so that I hardly escaped from his hands**.'

This category of claim and counternarrative also seems to correspond broadly to the category of claims and counterclaims in Anglo-Saxon,

which, like the early Irish material observed here, consist of boasts by the participants (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000).

4.2.3 Insult – answer

If one participant tries to insult the other participant, the second participant may decide to take up the insult or ignore it. A corresponding sequence which shows initial ignoring is presented in example **14**.

14) *'Cid dofécai?' ol Cú. 'Tussu,' ol Etarcomol. '**Mós tairchella ém súil tar sodain**,' ol Cú Chulaind. 'Is ed ón atchíu,' ol Etarcomol.* (*TBC Rec. 1*: 1322–5)

'What are you looking at?' said Cú Chulainn. 'You,' said Etarcomol. '**Quickly the eye passes over this**,' said Cú Chulainn. 'This is what I see,' said Etarcomol.

Ignoring the insult could potentially avoid an escalation of the conflict. However, in the further context of example **14** the situation comes to escalation in spite of Cú Chulainn's initial refusal of taking up the initialisation. The pattern of trading insults has also been observed as part of the escalation phase in other early heroic literature. In the Old English heroic tradition, insults that target alleged cowardice, failure of honour, irresponsible behaviour or crimes of kinship are considered to be central (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000).

4.2.4 Order – rejection

By contrast, if one participant orders others to do something, then the addressee, or a third person, may reject the order and in that way start a conflict. An example of this course of events is presented below.

15) *'**Is letsu in curadmír' ol Bricni** fri Coin Culaind 'is follus as for ngnímaib ni dligthi comardad fris etir.' '**Nibá fír ani sin a Bricriu**' for siat (...).* (*FB*: 8551–3)

'**You will have the hero's portion**,' **said Bricriu** to Cú Chulainn, 'it is clear from the deeds that you (others) are not worthy to fight with him.' '**This will not happen, Bricriu**,' they said.

By rejecting an order by a participant of the conversation, the respondent denies the authority of the person who gives the order, in this case Bricriu. We see a similar pattern in example **9**, where Medb and Ailill

argue over the distribution of Leinster troops within the army, with the situation being resolved with the help of outside mediation by Fergus.

4.2.5 Event – self-aggrandisement

A further interesting form of discourse can be found in early Irish literature. This does not openly display aggressive verbal behaviour. Instead, the utterances are examples of a person's self-aggrandisement or boasting with the intention of displaying their superiority to other participants in the conversation. As these examples also have the intention to present the point that the person in question is superior to other people, we may confidently assign them to the category of verbal aggression.

16) *'Gaib duit in mac,' ol Conchubur béos fria fiair. '**Niba sí nod n-ebla ém**,' **ol Sencha**, '**acht is messe nod n-ailfea, ar am trén, am trebar, am án, am athlam athargaib, am ollam, am gáeth. (…) Ním thorgnea eter aite aile inge Conchubur**.' (…)*
*'Cía contúaisi frim,' ol Amorgen, 'ní arthai. **Am túalaing altroma do ríg. Rom moltar ar cech feib, ar mo gail, ar mo gaís, ar mo thocud, ar m'áes, (…) Ní comul fri nech inge fri ríg nammá.**'*
(*CCC*: §7)

'You take the boy,' says Conchobur to his sister. '**It will not be her who shall raise him however**' **says Sencha**, '**but it is I who will raise him. For I am strong, I am skillful, I am noble, I am nimble at arms, I am an *ollam*, I am wise. (…) Nobody surpasses me as a fosterfather except Conchobur**.' (…)
'Whoever listens to me,' says Amorgen, 'you don't run away (?). **I am worthy of raising a king. I am praised for every distinction, for my valour, for my intelligence, for my fortune, for my people, (…) I do not join assemblies but with kings only**.'

A similar situation can be found in the text *Fled Bricrenn* 'Bricriu's Feast'. In a passage which in the text itself is entitled *Bríatharchath Ban Ulad* 'The Ulster Women's War of Words' (LU lines 8278–8368), we find a section where, after the male heroes have been set against each other, the women try to outshine each other by praising their respective virtues. They emphasise their own beauty, lineage, virtue and the benefits of their husbands, without a direct, but implicit challenge to the position of the other women.

This type of verbal battle will have posed an indirect threat to the honour of the other participants by challenging them to accept somebody else's superiority. The presence of these examples underlines the special importance of public perception in Early Ireland, as indeed in other early heroic cultures as shown by the work on Early English (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000) and Greek (Gottesman 2008; Lentini 2013). We can observe that the verbal duels comprise both truth-conditional insults, i.e. slurs, and performative insults, i.e. name-calling and insults. In the examples found in our texts, none of the 'slurs' on others seem to contain any content that is so untrue that it would be likely to constitute legally actionable slander.

4.3 Resolution of the conflict

The resolution of the verbal conflicts in the corpus data may take place through the intervention of a superordinate person, by the acceptance of somebody else's superiority, by withdrawal, or by the transition to a physical conflict.

4.3.1 Resolution by a superordinate person

In the case of contemporary family disputes, Vuchinich (1990) observes the function of parents as peace makers between children. In early Irish society, the function is sometimes taken by socially superordinate persons, especially kings.

17) ***Asbert Conchubur**: 'Ní bía tra bá di sodain. Gaibed Finnchóem in mac co rísam Emuin fuiglea Morann imbe.'* (*CCC*: §7)

Conchobur said: '**This will not come true**. Finnchóem will take the boy till we reach Emain and Morann shall decide about him.'

Here, Conchobur takes the decision on the conflict that is presented in example **16** above and overrides the initial contention of his decision to have Cú Chulainn fostered by Finnchóem and thus resolves the verbal conflict between Sencha and Amorgen.

4.3.2 Accepting a winner

In some situations, the participants will themselves concede victory to one of the conflict parties.

18) *'**Niba fír**' ol Lōegaire 'Cet do rainn na mucce arar m-bēlaib-ni.' 'An biuc, a Lōegairi, corot-aicciller!* (…) *at-rulais fēin ocus gaí triut. Nistoirchi in muicc fon indas-sin.'* ***Dessid side dano.*** (*SMMD*: §9)

'**It will not be true**,' said Loegaire, 'for Cet to divide the pig before our eyes.' 'Wait a while, Loegaire, till I address you! (…) You yourself escaped with a spear through you. You will not reach the pig in this manner.' **He sat down then**.

In these cases, not to bring the conflict to escalation means that the position of power is conceded to the opponent.

4.3.3 Impasse

In a number of examples, no overt solution to a conflict is found and further measures must be taken. These may be the solution of the conflict by other means, or a temporary withdrawal by one party with a later continuation of the conflict, here illustrated by example **19**. An example of conflict solution by other means is provided in **20** below.

19) *'Asberat ind firseo is mó do chumachtasu indausa.' 'Ni lugu ém,' ol muccaid Ochaill. '**Bieid ní i fessamar ón**,' **ol muccaid Boidb**.* (*DCDM*: 32947–9)

'These people say that your power is larger than mine.' 'It is not smaller, anyway,' said the pigkeeper of Ochall. '**There shall be something from which we get to know this**,' **said the pigkeeper of Badb**.

4.3.4 Withdrawal with later continuation

20) *'Dorag-sa dait i r-richt samaisci maíle derce* (…) *7 ním aircecha-sa ar do chend.' 'Tolécub-sa cloich deit-siu,' or sé, 'co m-mema do fergara fót, 7 bia fóind anim sin coro secha bráth bennachtan fort.'* ***La sodain téit úad.*** (*TBC Rec. 1*: 1866–71)

'I will come to you in the form of a hornless red heifer (…) and you will not see me in front of you.' 'I will cast a stone at you,' said he, 'so that your legs will break under you, and you will suffer from this till you will get a blessing.' **With that she went from him.**

In the continuation of the tale the fight indeed takes place as described. The narrative strand leading to conflict is interrupted, either as in the case of example **19** to heighten the narrative tension, or in the case of example **20** to provide the explanation for a later event.

4.3.5 Verbal conflict leads to physical conflict

In a number of instances, no solution can be found in the verbal conflict and the conflict becomes physical. In those cases, the verbal conflict is the prequel to a physical fight.

21) *'Tongu a toinges mo thuath,' for Conall Cernach 'níbá breth rucad and 7 nibá lat in curadmir.'* ***Cotnerig cach díb diaraili la sodain cusna claidbib nochtaib.*** (*FB*: 8991–4)

'I swear what my tribe swears,' said Conall Cernach, 'it was not a judgement that was given there and you will not get the champion's portion.' **Each of them rose towards the other then with the naked swords**.

In *Fled Bricrenn*, it is the verbal conflict of one group, the women, which fuels the later surrogate conflict of their husbands.

22) *'Anaid,' or Sencha, 'ni ba cath co ngaisciud digentar ann, acht bid cath co mbriathraib.' La sodain doluid cech ben fo choím a céli,* ***conid ann sin dorónsat an briatharchath ban Ulad.*** (*FB*: 8274–7)

'Wait,' said Sencha, 'it shall not be a fight with weapons that is fought here, but it shall be a battle with words.' Then every one of the women went under the protection of her husband **so that they then carried out the Ulsterwomen's war of words**.

In modern discussions of conflict talk, the possibility of a verbal conflict turning into a physical conflict is not commonly treated. The early Irish, like the Anglo-Saxon and Greek material, by contrast shows a number of examples where the verbal conflict is a prequel to physical fighting and correspondingly is only resolved by the physical fight. This scenario can be observed in other early cultures, but possibly also in modern cultures.

4.4 Strategies

Observing the conflict strategies that are used in this data, we find a number of examples of aggression against persons – particularly in the foretales to the *Táin*. These are clearly used to construct superior social identities of the participants in relation to the other participants of the discourse. Self-aggrandisement, boasting, discussed above, can also be seen as a form of this.

In the *Táin* itself, we particularly find instances of argumentation that is directed towards opinions rather than persons. This can be seen in example **23**.

23) *'**Ní regat lend**,' ol Medb. 'Anat didiu,' ol Ailill. '**Nach ainfet dano**,' ol Medb. '**Ficfit fornd** iar tiachtain dúin,' ol sí, 'ocus gébtait ar tír frind.'*
(*TBC Rec. 1*: 156–9)

'**They will not come with us**,' said Medb. '**They will stay though**,' said Ailill. '**They will not stay then**,' said Medb. 'They will attack us after we come back,' said she, 'and they will take our land from us.'

The fact that opinions are attacked here rather than persons will be due to the fact that the social positions of the participants are not open to dispute. In contrast to the examples where heroes oppose each other, social positions do not need to be constructed by the verbal conflict here.

5. Discussion

In the examples discussed above, the outcome of a significant number of instances of verbal conflict is the confirmation of power positions by means of the conflict. During the conflict one participant accepts the position of power of his opponent. This holds both for intercommunity and intracommunity examples. In other cases, the conflict is either postponed or results in later physical conflict, with the latter being true particularly in the *Táin* itself.

Concerning the strategies used, we find that within the conflict the attacks are directed towards a person's position in case the social ordering is not clear or is challenged, especially the order of precedence or social power amongst heroes in society. For non-heroes, especially for people with higher social standing, or for more genteel women, except-

ing, obviously, the Morrigan, outwardly aggressive verbal conflict is replaced by self-aggrandisement. Self-aggrandisement avoids open face threats and instead uses implicit strategies to construct the participant's superiority. The core factor in these cases is ego-construction by the participants. Self-aggrandisement is not typically described as a conflict strategy, but it seems that similar examples can be found in other early literatures,[3] as well as in contemporary data. Nevertheless, the presence of such conflict strategies, which focus on ego-construction, underlines the importance of publicly displayed honour in early Ireland and other early societies.

There are some typical verbal characteristics, which can be observed in the conflict episodes. These are particularly obvious in the inception of the conflict, where we find markers of negation (e.g., examples **16**, **17**) or interdiction like *niba fír* 'it will not be true', imperatives in orders, or incitements to physical fights, like *frithálid in comram beus* 'attend to the fight still/continue the fight'. In contemporary descriptions (Kallmeyer & Keim 1996), the presence of irony or sarcasm is also mentioned. In the present corpus material, two instances of irony or sarcasm are found, namely the above-mentioned *is álaind, a macáin, in cluiche* (*AOA*: §10) 'Nice, boyo, is the game that you play,' and *'Cid dofécai?' ol Cú. 'Tussu,' ol Etarcomol.' 'Mós tairchella ém súil tar sodain,' ol Cú Chulaind* (*TBC Rec. 1*: 1322–5)) ''What are you looking at?', said Cú Chulainn. 'You,' said Etarcomol. 'Quickly travels the eye over this,' said Cú Chulainn.'

Thus, irony is clearly a feature of early Irish verbal conflict, but it is not exploited to any great extent in the present corpus material.

The structural properties of the conflict episodes are most typically initialisation followed by escalation through

- Claim – counterclaim/counternarrative
- Order – denial
- Insult – answer
- Event – threat
- Event – self-aggrandisement

These courses of events follow 'normal' descriptions of the unfolding of conflicts, as, for example, discussed by Goodwin & Goodwin (1990) or Vuchinich (1990).

[3] Cf. Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000; Gottesman 2008; Lentini 2013.

What is different here from descriptions of contemporary conflict situations are the examples of self-aggrandisement. These examples are provided by persons of high status, nobles and sages, and noble ladies. They could therefore be instances of a genteel form of verbal conflict, which is particularly suitable for persons of high status and for intra-community conflict. As in the Greek material described by Lentini (2013), the verbal conflict clearly supplants physical conflict within this non-warrior community.

In the resolution of conflict, we can observe three main outcomes. First, this is the acceptance of somebody else's superiority by the other party. Second, we find that the verbal conflict leads to an impasse and is either continued or resolved at a later stage. Finally, verbal conflict may lead directly to physical conflict. Most importantly, the resolution of the verbal conflict enables the winner to celebrate their own power and have it publicly recognised – unless a superordinate person resolves the conflict in a manner that does not favour any of the participants. The possible resolution of shifting verbal conflict to a physical fight is not typically described for modern societies, but nevertheless likely to be a common phenomenon both in early and certain contemporary sections of societies.

6. Conclusion

The investigation of a sample of Early Irish literature shows that conflicts in this literature are depicted in a manner that is comparable to contemporary international descriptions of verbal conflict. Furthermore, verbal conflicts may form alternatives to physical conflict and, particularly where persons rather than positions are attacked, they serve to construct power positions in society. If there is no clear winner of such a conflict, physical conflict may ensue. Thus they can be considered parts of a heroic habitus, a fight by other means. This would be particularly relevant in a warlike society, such as the one described in the texts under investigation, in which status and power played a central role and were constantly enacted. In comparison with contemporary research on verbal conflicts, there are thus two notable additions. On the one hand, this is the possibility of verbal conflicts, if they cannot be resolved, leading to physical fights. On the other hand, this is the pres-

ence of overtly non-threatening self-aggrandising by some, particularly noble, participants, which also serves to enact their social status. These outcomes are paralleled in descriptions of other early societies.

As the findings of this study are as yet based on a comparatively small data set, further work will be needed to corroborate the findings. This could be done by increasing the corpus size, particularly by including more foretales (*remscéla*) of the *Táin*, as well as by comparison with more diverse early literatures, in particular continental literatures, or English literature, in order to determine potential differences in social structures that might be reflected in different descriptions.

Dáire, St Patrick and the bull: Person, place and time

Kay Muhr

Ulster Place-Name Society

1. Introduction

In the Ulster Cycle a significant character called *Dáire* is the keeper of the Brown Bull in Cúailnge, while in the *Lives* of St Patrick Dáire holds and then gives the saint the territory of Armagh. In the preface to the *Senchas Már, Dáire* appears again, as a king, apparently of Ulster, as part of a team assisting St Patrick with early Irish law, while in recent Ulster folklore St Patrick is linked to the bull. Who is Dáire, why does he appear in the stories in these places, and what does he signify there?

The name *Dáire*

An ancestor named *Dáire* appears near the head of various pedigrees in the genealogies, sometimes with the epithet *derg* 'red' often used of supernaturals (*TBDD* §133–4), or close to other names known to be pre-Christian deities: Núadu, Lug, or the legendary Munster warrior Cú Roí. In the genealogy of the Fothaid is (*mac*) *Dáire Deirg m. Gnáthaltaich m. Núadat Necht* (*CGH*: 155b35). In the genealogy of Corco Loígde is Dáire great-grandson of (*mac*) *Loga m. Eithlenn* (*CGH*: 155a6–8). The genealogy of Dál Fíatach of Ulster, one-time rulers of the province, describes the eponymous ancestor Fíatach (his personal name sometimes altered to or confused with the name Fíacha, gen. Fíachach) as

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 153–182.

Fíatach Find (a quo Dál Fíatach) m. Fir Furmi m. Dáiri m. Dlúthaig (*Laud Genealogies*; Meyer 1912c: 337). In the list of legendary 'Kings of Ireland' a simplified pedigree of Fíatach Find is given as *mac Dáire meic Forgo, a quo Dál Fíatach*, 'son of Dáire son of Forgo, from whom Dál Fíatach descend' (*Ríg Érenn*, *CGH*: 136a47).

In the genealogies, Dál Fíatach are also said to be 'of the offspring of Cú Ruí son of Dáire son of of Ded from the province of Cú Ruí in Munster' (*Dál Fíatach insin de clainn Con-ruí meic Dáire m. Dedaed a cóiciud Con-ruí la Mumain*; *CGH*: 143a17). This relationship was quoted as part of the politicised learned argument raised c. 800 that, since they were Érainn, and thus belonging to Munster, Dál Fíatach could not be the *fír-Ulaid*, and the 'real Ulaid' should be understood as their rivals, Dál nAraide of the Cruithni. However, this was not the original tradition, according to which Dál Fíatach were 'the historical representatives of the ancient Ulaid' (O'Rahilly, T. F. 1946: 81, 346–348; Byrne 1973: 108–109; see Muhr 1996a: 57–59).

T. F. O'Rahilly (1946: 276) discussed Dáire son of Ded, 'ancestor of the Érainn', and *Dairini* as a tribe mapped by Ptolemy, located by him in the north-east of Ireland: 'Their name implying descent from Dáire (Darios) shows them to have been a branch of the Érainn'. He continued, 'In historical times both the Dál Riata of North Antrim and the Dál Fíatach of East Down claimed descent from Dáire' (*ibid.*: 7, 455), and 'even if we had no other evidence, some of the names occurring in the Ulidian tales would suggest plainly that the ancient Ulaid were Érainn [...], witness [...] *Dáire* (owner of the bull, Donn Cualnge)' (*ibid.*: 81 n. 1). Donn Cúailnge is the mighty 'Brown Bull' of Cooley in County Louth, which is the ultimate subject of the Ulster-cycle epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* 'the driving of the cattle from Cooley'. In O'Rahilly's view, to be discussed further below, it is the Érainn ancestor- or bull-god Dáire, Dáire Donn, who appears in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* 'with his divinity disguised, as the huge bull Donn Cualnge, owned by one Dáire mac Fíachna' (*ibid.*: 454).

The etymology of the name *Dáire* derives 'from an old root meaning "fruitful, to make fruitful, fertile". (...) In secular sources the name is almost invariably a divine name' (Ó Corráin & Maguire 1990: 68–69). In the text *Geasa Ríg Érenn* 'The taboos of the Kings of Ireland' one of the *geasa* of the King of the Ulaid is 'to arrange a feast of the flesh of the bull of Dáire mac Dáire' *costadh feissi for feóil tairb Dáire maic Dáire*

(Dillon 1951: 18 §5). These texts corroborate the interlinked identity of the Érainn royal line of Ulster and guardianship of the bull.

1. Historical background to the Ulster Cycle, particularly *Táin Bó Cúailnge*

For the historical background to the Ulster Cycle, particularly *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, it is helpful to draw on the framework in an article by Thomas Charles-Edwards (2015). In the setting of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and the other Ulster Cycle tales the province of Ulster, extending south to the Boyne, is ruled from *Emain Macha*, Navan Fort or Ring outside Armagh. However, by the time the tales were put in writing, Dál Fíatach, 'the historical representatives of the ancient Ulaid' (O'Rahilly, T. F. 1946: 81), had relocated themselves in County Down, and ruled an overkingdom east of the Bann.

After the loss of Emain Macha itself to the Airgíalla in prehistory, possibly about the time of St Patrick, three major battles with the Uí Néill further restricted the area ruled by the Ulaid and their subkingdoms: *Móin Dairi Lothair* in AD 562 (possibly at Loughermore, Co. Derry; Devlin 2013: 33, 84), *Mag Roth* in AD 637 (at Moira, Co. Down; Muhr 1996b: 271–277), and the battle of Fochart (now Faughart) in north Louth in AD 735. Defeat at *Móin Dairi Lothair* lost the Ulaid the north-west, and defeat at Faughart lost the Ulaid control of the south, although, thanks to their historical connections, the Conaille still considered themselves as part of the ancient province of Ulster (Charles-Edwards 2015: 87, 95–96, 102).

The result of this no doubt painful 'downsizing' is reflected in the literature, as when the area of Queen Medb's harrying expedition in *Táin Bó Cúailnge Rec. 1* is exactly the contracted Ulaid overkingdom of what is now Counties Down and Antrim, comprising the Ulaid, the Cruithni and Dál Ríatai (Charles-Edwards 2015: 90 n.; cf. Dobbs' comment on the Black Pig's Dyke alias Danes' Cast; Dobbs 1912: 340; Muhr 1994: 149; 1996b: 53–54). Likewise the motif of the *Ces Noíden* (a mysterious debility said to be inflicted on the Ulster warriors by the goddess Macha after her ill-treatment by the king) provides the story with a convenient way of avoiding the truth that the traditional royal centre at Emain was not in Ulaid keeping any more. The weakness of his coun-

trymen meant that the heroic Cú Chulainn had to hold off the Connacht army single-handed in the hills bordering Ulster to the south. Meanwhile the description of the *ces* in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, including that whoever wounds an Ulsterman suffering from it will suffer the same debility, waste away or shorten his life, meant that Emain, although defended by useless warriors, was left undisturbed (*TBC Rec. 1* ll. 525–529; Charles-Edwards 2015: 90).

Charles-Edwards notes that the early written version or versions of the 8th century, and some traceable seventh-century materials, presume a long tradition, oral and written, before what survives (2015: 90, 86). Familiar 'literary' Ulster Cycle characters such as Conchobar the king and Senchae the sage can appear as legal authorities in Old Irish law-tracts (Charles-Edwards 2015: 98; Breatnach 2005: 363, 367). As first-written, the story 'had no truck with the plea' that the Cruithni were the *fír-Ulaid* (Charles-Edwards 2015: 90). The contents of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (or any particular story in the cycle) were still at the (oral) narrator's choice (*ibid.*: 94), as can be seen when background knowledge is assumed in making sense of the story as written. The relevance of this comment continues. Charles-Edwards believes that *Táin Bó Cúailnge* was 'not written to any precise political agenda' (*ibid*: 98–99) and that *Táin Bó Cúailnge Rec. 1* is 'not specifically about this tension between the territorial distribution of power and the sense of where a people belonged, but it helps to understand the particular state of Ireland' when this version was written (*ibid.*: 102).

However I think that the tensions are important – reflecting the status of the Ulaid, and the relationship of the Ulaid and the Cruithni in the text, and that the presentation of particular characters and places helps to articulate these tensions within the text. It would not be surprising if the early Ulster Cycle tales contained some self-promotion by Dál Fíatach, whose heroic past they celebrate. A monastery in north Down still seems to me the most likely birthplace of the written Ulster Cycle, with Armagh influence coming later (Ó hUiginn 1992: 58, 62; Muhr 1996a: 56b; Herbert 2009: 216). It is here suggested that Dáire and his bull can be interpreted as literary code for the status and vigour of Dál Fíatach.

2. Dáire and the Donn Cúailnge in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and its *remscéla*

In the Ulster Cycle, the characters of Dáire and his bull were established in Cúailnge, now the Cooley Peninsula in Louth, and appear not only in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* but also in *Echtra Nerai* and *De Chophur in dá Muccida*.

Echtra Nerai *'Nera's Otherworld adventure'*

Echtra Nerai (Meyer 1889) is mainly set in Connacht and describes Nera's alarming visit to and sojourn in the Otherworld dwelling of Crúachain. It contains an episode in which the Brown Bull sires a bull calf in Cúailnge on a cow of Nera's brought to it from Síd Crúachan by the war-goddess Morrígán. Despite objections from Cú Chulainn, as guardian of Ulster's border, the cow was allowed to return home, and its calf grew up to attack and be defeated by the champion Connacht bull Findbennach 'white-horned' in Crúachain.

When an attack on Síd Crúachan by Ailill and Medb, king and queen of Crúachain, was planned, Nera was advised to bring his cattle out of the *síd*, but as the bull calf emerged, it bellowed three times. Ailill was playing *fidchell* with the Ulster exile Fergus when they heard the noise, and Fergus said:

> *Ni bud inmain limm in ag*
> *geissius isin Cruachanmag,*
> *Mac Duib Chuailngne conodsoid*
> *macan in tairb ol-Loch Lóig.*
>
> 'I like not the calf
> which bellows in the plain of Crúachain,
> the son of the Black of Cúailnge, which approaches,
> little son of the bull from Belfast Lough.'
>
> *Bet loegain de cin buu*
> *i m-Bairchi, hi Cuailgniu* (…)
>
> 'Because of it there will be calves without cows
> in the Mournes and Cooley (…).' (Meyer 1889: 224)

When she heard that the Findbennach would have more trouble defeating the bull-calf's father, Queen Medb was determined the two full-grown bulls themselves should fight:

> *Tonga na dea thungus mo thuath, na tairinnfit*, (…) 7 *ni cainairbiur dergflatha na finn* 7 *niconn-airbiur biuth, conamrabat na da tharb sin ar mo uhelaib a comracc.*
>
> 'I swear by the gods by whom my tribe swears that I will not lie down, … nor drink red ale or wine, nor eat any food, until I have those two bulls fighting before me.' (Meyer 1889: 226)

Regional detail is supplied in the place-names of the bull-calf's Ulster origin. *Loch Loíg* 'Belfast Lough' in fact means 'lough of the calf' (Ptolemy's *Logia*, the river Lagan, Muhr 1996b: 295–296), while *Bairche*, literally 'peak district', is the old name of the Mourne mountains, only later settled by the Mugdorna (*Boirche*, a collective noun derived from *barr* 'top, pinnacle'; Arthurs 1952–3: 17; Ó Mainnín 1993: 119–125, esp. 123). This tale is set in Ulster and Connacht.

Although Dáire is given influential status, the final battle of the bulls is the episode towards which *Táin Bó Cúailnge* moves, and with which it ends, where the bulls represent the forces of the Otherworld or the world of the *síd* across Ireland, in destruction beyond human control (*Dinda na Tána:* (…) *Damgal na Tarb, a Us in Duib Chúalngni for Táin* 'Episodes of the Cattle Raid: (…) the Fight of the Bulls, the Adventures of the Dub Cúailnge on the Cattle Raid' *TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 3154–60). Both versions of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* tell of the battle between the bulls in Crúachain, the victory of the Donn Cúailnge, and the place-names commemorating his triumphal circuit of Ireland, where pieces of the corpse of the Findbennach fall from his back, before his own collapse and death. 'Even the victors lost the symbol of male force and political power about which the entire affair revolved' (Charles-Edwards 2015: 101). However, although on a human level the death of the bulls rebuked Queen Medb with 'the futility of martial victory … at the expense of fecundity', the bulls bring about 'the cosmogonic significance of the final scene, in which the landscape is re-created' (Kelly, P. 1992: 76, 95; cf. Mac Cana 1970: 50).

De Chophur in dá Muccida *'The begetting of the two swineherds'*

The fore-tale *De Chophur in dá Muccida* provides the information that the two bulls that meet and fight at the end of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* were the final transformation of two hostile Otherworld swineherds, originally from the provinces of Munster and Connacht. The Munster swineherd

was reborn in Ulster, in Cúailnge, as the bull Donn or Dub Cúailnge of Dáire son of Fíachna (Roider 1979: 38, 58; *LL*: 32990). The version in the Book of Leinster ends with stressed-metre poems in praise of each of the bulls (Roider 1979: 42–46; *LL*: 32998–33042). In the Egerton version, the creature (*míol*) that his cow would later drink and bring to birth met and talked with Fíachna mac Dáire and told him how the Findbennach would be born to one of Medb's cows, and how the two bulls would bring about a great war between them in Ireland (*ibid.*: 54–58). This conversation took place at the river *Glass Cruinn* in Cúailnge, a river which appears again in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, especially in Recension 1, as a boundary of Muirthemne, where its waters rose to prevent the Connacht army crossing (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 198, 1000, 1106, 1123, 1160).

Both the name Dáire, and the original home of the swineherd transformed into the bull Donn Cúailnge, link the Ulaid with the Érainn and Munster.

Táin Bó Cúailnge

The long-established title of the main Ulster Cycle story is *Táin Bó Cúailnge* –'the driving of the cows from Cooley' – but why Cúailnge? It has been suggested that the original rivalry between provinces was between Ulster and Tara, rather than between Ulster and Connacht (e.g. Carney 1971: 79). According to Dáithí O hÓgáin (1991a: 267) the Cooley Peninsula was 'an obvious area on which an Ulster versus Tara war would focus,' but even accepting an earlier Tara-Navan axis, why should Dáire (of the Dál Fíatach) live and own the bull in Conaille? There is clear evidence in place-name detail in the tale that part of it was written or redacted in County Louth (Kelleher 1971: 122; Charles-Edwards 2015: 102). However, the setting of much of the tale in Cúailnge, part of Conaille, is also an assertion that the Conaille, though Cruithni, belonged to Ulster under the Dál Fíatach (Charles-Edwards 2015: 95–96)[1] and a reminder that ancient Ulster extended to the Boyne (their ancestor Conall Cernach's father Aimirgin is of Tailtiu; *TBC Rec. 1* ll. 3406–9).

[1] Those descended from Conall Cernach – the Cruithni – were: *Clann Conaill Cernaich: Dál nAraide 7 Húi Echach Ulad 7 Conaille Murthemni* (*CGH*: 157.46).

Táin Bó Cúailnge Rec. 1*: Dáire and the bull*

Táin Bó Cúailnge I contains no account of the bull's origin, and Dáire is hardly mentioned. The introduction (*titulrad*) describes how a Connacht army is gathered and sets forth eastward to Cúailnge, where from Findabair Cúailnge they spread out to look for 'the bull' (*TBC Rec. 1*: l. 132). In Mag mBreg the Mórrígan perched on a standing stone in Temair Cúailnge and spoke a *retoiric* to the bull (*in dub* 'the black one' *TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 957, 959; *in Dub Cualngni*, l. 3160). At this the bull moved to the landmark hill of Slieve Gullion, entry to the Armagh uplands, digging a trench (*búrach*) at *Tír Margéni* in Cúailnge, and throwing off the boys that used to play on his back and killing most of them. Alternatively, the bull disembowelled Medb's cowherd Lóthar with his horns and killed fifty of Medb's warriors, before disappearing to the 'recesses of Slieve Gullion' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 967–98). The use of *díamair* 'hidden, secluded, remote, lonely; hence mysterious, curious, recondite; mystic', like the bull's entry into the lough at Crúachain later on, suggest he belongs partly to the Otherworld. In one version Cú Chulainn killed another of Medb's herdsmen, Buide mac Báin, who captured the bull (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 1491–1503). Then the bull trampled his own herdsman, Forgaimen, in escaping (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 964, 1542). An Ulster request for Medb's bull to be brought from the west to fight him was refused (*TBC Rec. 1*: l. 2472, cf. l. 193).

While the Donn Cúailnge and his cows wander through the uplands, and Medb and her army seek and lose him again near Slieve Gullion, he remains 'the bull' in the narrative until the final episode, in which both he and his owner are referred to by their names. Since the ultimate battle of the two bulls was predicted in both *Echtra Nerai* and *De Chophur in dá Muccida*, and has been accepted by modern editors as the cosmogonic theme of the story, the lack of introduction in the narrative of version 1 of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* can be seen as assuming audience knowledge of it from other tales in the cycle (*TBC Rec. 1*; Charles-Edwards 2015: 94).

Carried off to Crúachain, the Ulster bull meets the Findbennach at *Tarbga* 'Bull-sorrow or Bull-battle', and their combat has begun before 'the Donn Cuailnge's foot was impaled on the horn of the other bull' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 4126, 4133). Once the horn was withdrawn (whence *Slíab nAdarca* 'mountain of the horn'), he was able to carry off the Findbennach, drag him through the lake at Crúachain, and head north 'to his

own land', leaving parts of the corpse and new place-names wherever he stopped to drink (*TBC Rec. 1*: l. 4145). He left Findbennach's loin at Athlone *Áth Lúain* 'ford of the loin' and came through Louth and the Moyry Pass in Armagh to Cuib, the plain of Iveagh in County Down, where the place-name theme continues.

> The [Donn Cúailnge] went then to the place called *Étan Tairb* and rested his forehead against the hill in *Áth dá Fherta.*[2] Hence the name *Étan Tairb* 'the bull's forehead' in Mag Muirthemne. He travelled along the *Slige Midluachra* to Cuib – it was in Cuib he used to abide with the dry cows of Dáire – and there he pawed the earth (*do-gní búrach ann*). Hence the place-name *Gort mBúraig* 'the field of the trench'. Then he went on and died in *Druim Tairb* between Ulaid and Uí Echach. That place is called 'the Bull's Ridge'.
>
> (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 4152–5; Muhr 1994: 158)

A sub-kingdom called *Búrach Ulad* 'trench of the Ulaid' is mentioned elsewhere in the Ulster Cycle, and the 'trench' may be identified with the Danes' Cast between counties Down and Armagh (Muhr 1996b: 53–54; 2002: 33–34). There is a possible location for *Druim Tairb* in Carricknadarriff (?*Carraig na dTarbh*) beside a small lake called Lough Erne, at grid J3256 (*Loch Érann* 'lough of the Érainn') on the eastern border of Iveagh (Muhr 2009: 122–125, 134–135).

Táin Bó Cúailnge II

Táin Bó Cúailnge in the Book of Leinster (Recension 2, *TBC II)* begins its narrative with an opening section where Medb and Ailill, queen and king of Connacht, compete with each other about the magnitude of their possessions, and Medb finds herself without a bull to match Ailill's Findbennach. The herald Mac Roth knows where to find one:

> *i cúiciud Ulad i trichait cét Cúalnge i tig Dáre meic F[iach]nai .i. Dond Cúalnge*

[2] Haley followed Fr Mac Íomhair's (1962) study of the boundaries of the Fir Rois in identifying the ford with Knockbridge, Co. Louth, where the townland of Loughantarve, *Loch an Tairbh* 'lake of the bull' is beside the river Fane (Haley 1970: 170; Muhr 2009: 161–162).

> 'in the province of Ulster in the cantred of Cúailnge in the house of Dáire mac Fíachna. *Donn Cúailnge* is his name.' (*TBC II*: l. 79)

Mac Roth and a Connacht delegation were thus sent by Medb with a request to borrow for a year that 'special treasure' *in sét sainemail*, his bull. The landowner Dáire is described as a generous man, who was happy to agree to the terms offered by Medb and lend the Donn Cúailnge, whatever the Ulaid thought. However, his generosity in supplying drink to the messengers led to drunken boasting by some of them that they would have taken the bull from this vassal of Conchobar's anyway. Dáire's butler was angry and told his master. For all Mac Roth's diplomacy in the morning, Dáire had changed his mind, and the delegation returned to Medb empty-handed. She then summoned her warriors to take the bull by force (*TBC II* ll. 88–147).

The Donn Cúailnge was roaming with fifty heifers, digging the earth and leaving tracks (*búrach*) in *Crích Mairgín*, when the Connacht forces reached Conaille Muirtheimne. The Morrígan came from the *síd* mounds and sat on a pillar stone in Temair Cúailnge to warn the bull, in prose and *retoiric*, that the army wished to carry him off. At this the Donn Cúailnge and his heifers moved to *Glenn na Samaisce* 'glen of the heifer' in Slieve Gullion (*TBC II*: ll. 1301–19).

As Cecile O'Rahilly noted, the Book of Leinster version refers more explicitly to the magical nature of the bulls (*TBC II*, p. 277, n. 72). An enumeration of Donn Cúailnge's attributes (*buada Duind Chúalnge*) includes that he bulled each day 50 cows which would calve the next day or burst; that his shadow could protect a hundred warriors from heat and cold, that spectres dared not come near him, and that his musical lowing coming home in the evening filled his land of Cúailnge (*TBC II*: ll. 1320–33). Whatever Ulster cattle are rounded up by the Connacht army, there will be no shortage of Donn Cúailnge's offspring.

The bull was not referred to as the armies struggled to cross the river *Glais Cruind*. At length, Medb managed to move into Cuib in County Down, and Cú Chulainn went back to protect his own territory further south. There he met Buide mac Báin Blai and his warrior-company from Medb's household, driving the Donn Cúailnge from Slieve Gullion. While Cú Chulainn dealt with Buide the Connacht army carried the Donn Cúailnge to their camp. 'That was the greatest reproach and

grief and madness that was inflicted on Cú Chulainn on this hosting' (*TBC II*: ll. 1772–88/1800). Forgaimen was then trampled to death.

There is no further mention of the Donn Cúailnge until Medb sent him ahead to Crúachu, so that whoever else might or might not get there, the Donn Cúailnge would arrive as she had promised, and she 'assembled the men of Ireland that they might see the combat of the bulls' (*TBC II*: l. 4823–52). When the Ulster bull saw the 'beautiful strange land' he bellowed three times, and the Findbennach, hearing the sound that no local male animal dared to make for fear, came to meet the challenge. The combat is described with something resembling a human battle-run, including distortion with battle fury, noise and lasting effect on the ground (cf. Cú Chulainn at *Brislech Maige Muirthemne*, *TBC II*: ll. 2262, 2281, 2306 f). Both bulls dug trenches and cast earth behind them. In their first onrush Findbennach took advantage, the Donn Cúailnge was wounded and the Ulster exile Bricriu was trampled to death. Then the Donn Cúailnge was spurred on, since he had 'human sense,' by Cormac Cond Longas' disparagement, 'This treasure is not a wonderful lasting treasure for us (*Ní rap sét suthain suachnid dún*) since he cannot repel a calf his own age' (*TBC II*: l. 4888). After this the fight and its noise resumed, and that night the bulls traversed the whole of Ireland. In the morning the Donn Cúailnge appeared, carrying the mangled Findbennach on his horns.

Again places were named where the Donn Cúailnge 'shook off the Findbennach over Ireland', and this time the body parts fell at towns as far south as Waterford: at *Cruachnae Ae* the liver, at *Áth Luain* the loin, at *Áth Troim* the liver, at *Port Lárge* the thigh, at *Áth Cliath* the ribcage (*TBC II*: Crúachain l. 4901; Athlone l. 4904; Trim l. 4905; Waterford l. 4908; Dublin l. 4909). Then the Donn Cúailnge looked north and recognised Cúailnge, where the 'women and boys and children' were lamenting him. They saw his forehead coming towards them, whence the hill-name *Taul Tairb*, before the bull attacked and killed many of them, and died (*Taul Tairb* in Cúailnge, *TBC II*: l. 4913).

In *TBC II* Dáire's bull thus had as much effect on the midlands as on the county Down heartland of Dál Fíatach and, if remembered, Dáire's status as divine ancestor of the Ulaid was even mocked in a description where he bounces on and bursts his feather bed with delight at the thought of Medb's *cairdes slíasta* in reward for lending his bull (*TBC II*:

l. 97, although the same motif is used of the Munster warrior *Láirine mac Nóis*, a foster-brother of Cú Chulainn, *TBC II*: l. 1940).

In *TBC Rec. 1*, before the final battle, and following Fíacha and Fíachna sons of Conchobar, three Ulster warriors called Rus, Dáire and Imchad, sons of Fíachna, from *Cuib, Roth* and *Midlúachair*, came to join the Ulster army (*TBC Rec. 1*: l. 3780). The place-names are again the plain of Iveagh in west County Down, Moira and the valley of the Moyry Pass (Muhr 1996b: 5–6, 274–277; 2002: 31–32). In *Táin Bó Cúailnge II*, although Dáire mac Fíachna is introduced early as the owner of the bull (l. 88 f.), the same trio is mentioned at Cúailnge among the summons to the Ulster warriors: *co trí macaib Fiachnai, co Ross, co Dáre, co Imchaid co Cúalnge* (*TBC II*: l. 4078), although they are not among those gathered for the battle (*TBC II*: l. 4479). This threesome may once have had a bigger role within the tale. In the genealogies, a verse attributed to Conchobar mentions,

> *Trí maic Fiachrach a Cúalngni, cethern robíd fri huaibrin,*
> *ní chomboitis dath* (sic) *Rus & Dáre is Imchath.*
>
> 'Three sons of Fiachra from Cooley (…) Ros and Dáire and Imchad.' (*Laud Genealogies*; Meyer 1912c: 333 v. 5; *LL*; ending *Findchadh*, *CGH*: 283 v. 22 = Rawl. B 502 158.22)

Later accounts: Dinnshenchas

A different story about the bull and Ulster Cycle characters appears in the *Dinnshenchas* of Slieve Gallion, on the border between counties Derry and Tyrone (*Met. Dinds.* IV: 170–172; Stokes 1893a: 482–483; MacNeill 1962/82: i 152; *Sliab gCallainn* explained as 'mountain of the high ground', McKay & Muhr 2007: 113). In the Dinnshenchas, Callann is said to be the name of the hound of Buide mac Báin, which was sired by the hound of the Ulster warrior Celtchar mac Uithechair, and then killed on the mountain by *Donn dub Cúalnge* 'the dark Brown (Bull) of Cúailnge'. This Slieve Gallion story must be somehow related to or adapted from the incident in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* where Cú Chulainn killed the (Brown) Bull's cowherd Buide mac Báin from Slieve Gullion, County Armagh, whence *Áth mBuide* 'Buide's ford', was named (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 1491–1506; *TBC II*: ll. 1772–83).

Later accounts: oral tradition

In later folklore, stories of a bull are found connected with St Patrick as well as *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. As with the folklore concerning Queen Medb of Connacht, probably a pagan goddess in origin, it is hard to provide a time-line for the on-going relationship between literary and oral tradition (Muhr 2013). Continuing the re-interpretation of Slieve Gullion in Armagh as Slieve Gallion in Derry/Tyrone, in 19th-century Derry lore there was a story that a cairn of stones on Slieve Gallion, then called the Giants' Grave, commemorated the vanquisher of a bull that had been resisting the missionary work of St Patrick: 'When St Patrick was building the cathedral of Armagh he was much annoyed by a large black bull who came every day and destroyed the work', and he told the workmen to give up. Then he heard of 'Teag More, a man of courage who lived at the foot of Slieve Gallion'. St Patrick blessed him with mighty strength so that he could hit the bull with an ash tree that Teag handled 'like a benweed', so effectively that the bull fled 'over the Blackwater and the Bann and made for the top of Slieve Gallion, where he fell into a bog-hole and was killed by his enemy'. Feeling hungry, Teag set to eat the bull raw. People were frightened and begged Patrick to take his strength away, but when he did Teag died of indigestion, and was buried in the Giant's Grave (*OSM* Desertmartin, vol. 31: 57).

Máire MacNeill printed a similar story about St Patrick's attempts to build the church of Donaghanie in Tyrone (MacNeill 1962/82, i: 256–257, ii: 477–478, collected by Fr Short; Ó Tuathail 1933: 110–111). The bull motif must to some extent derive from the Ulster Cycle, but also from the early Lives of Saint Patrick, in which the saint is resisted not by a mighty bull, but an Armagh landowner called Dáire.

3. Lives of Patrick: Dáire and St Patrick at Armagh

Muirchú

Dáire who gave the site of what became Armagh cathedral to St Patrick is a key figure in the foundation legend of Armagh. This Dáire first appears in the Latin life of Patrick as told in the seventh century by Muirchú moccu Machtheni, whose tribal name shows that he was probably from Armagh (Carey 2013: 126 n.; Bieler 1979: 1; Kenney 1929:

331–332). Muirchú's Life, preserved in the Book of Armagh, was written at the request of Áed Bishop of Sletty sometime between 661 and 700 A.D. (Bieler 1979: 2, 61–123; Stokes 1887a: 270).[3] Dáire is first named in Muirchú's list of chapters:

> *De fabula Dairi et equo, et oblatione Airddmachae ad Patricium*
>
> 'The story of Dáire and his horse, and the offering of Armagh to Patrick.' (Stokes 1887a: 271; Bieler 1979: 66–67, §24)

This is the only chapter title called a *fabula* by Muirchú, although it is the word used of similar stories told in Irish by the anonymous editor of the later *Additamenta* (c. 750; Bieler 1979: 49, 178 §17). More description of Dáire appears in the *fabula* itself:

> *Fuit homo diues et honorabilis in regionibus Orientalium cui nomen erat Daire.*
>
> 'There was a wealthy and honoured man in the territory of Airther [*sic*, for Airthir], whose name was Dáire.'
>
> (*Muirchú I*: 24; Bieler 1979: 108–109)

The name of the people of *Airthir* was translated into Latin as *Orientales* meaning 'Easterners' by Muirchú, and *Anteriores* in the contemporary *Vita Columbae* by Adomnán, which further explained 'who are called the *Airthir* in Irish' *qui Scotice ind Airthir nuncupantur* (Anderson & Anderson 1961: 44a, 109b). The *Airthir* were part of the group of peoples called *Airgíalla*, by tradition descendants of the Three Collas who had driven the earlier rulers of Ulster from their capital *Emain Macha*, Navan Fort west of Armagh. The *Airthir* lived around Armagh in the historical period. Their official descent was from Colla fo Críth (later *Dá Chrích*), whose line had divided into three groups: *Uí Níalláin, Uí Bresail*, and *Uí Echach* (Arthurs 1954; *CGH*: 419, *LL*: 334ab3). Airthir territory covered almost all of modern County Armagh (Glancy 1954–59: 83 n.).

The story of Dáire as told by Muirchú contains several episodes. Patrick asked this powerful local authority for a place in which to worship, specifically the hill-top called *Droim Sailech* 'willow ridge', but

[3] The texts in the Book of Armagh have been dated *Liber Angeli* 640–50, *Tírechán* 670, *Muirchú* 680–90 A.D. (Sharpe 1982: 34), making *Tírechán*'s account a decade or two earlier than that of *Muirchú*.

Dáire gave him another place of significance lower down, *Fertae Martyrum* 'the graves of the martyrs/relics' beside *Ard Mache* 'the height of Macha', that is, Armagh.

Patrick and his retinue were living at *Fertae Martyrum* when Dáire sent his groom to graze a horse in their meadow (*Muirchú I*: 24; Bieler 1979: 108–109). The groom ignored Patrick's objections to such intrusion and found the horse dead when he came to see it the next morning. In anger, Dáire sent the groom to kill Patrick, but fell dead himself. His wife sent for a cure to Patrick, who gave water which revived both horse and master. Máire MacNeill sees the story as an early variant of her Lughnasa legend-type 'Saint resuscitates pagan's bull', still current in County Armagh in the twentieth century, saying:

> 'There are circumstances that suggest that at Armagh, as elsewhere, the original myth concerned a bull (…) the name [Dáire] is certainly that of an ancestor deity and of the owner of the famous bull of Cuailnge.' (MacNeill 1962/82, i: 393)

However, it is evident that Muirchú was constructing his *fabula* for a purpose, so that, although bull mythology may feature in pagan storytelling, he has chosen to refer to a horse.[4] The issue he is calling to mind is a ritual asserting ownership of land; land which the pagan landowner, having given to the church, appears to be still treating as his own (Kelly, F. 1988: 109, 186). Lambkin comments that the story 'claims, in the manner of a charter, through the symbolism of the horse incident, Patrick's legitimate title to possession' (Lambkin 1987: 30b; Hughes 1972: 74). The status of the place, and its receiver, is emphasised via the status of its former owner.

After this Dáire gave Patrick a marvellous bronze cauldron from overseas (*mirabilem transmarinum*), but when Patrick seemed not to appreciate the gift he took it back. When this time the Christian did not retaliate, Dáire was impressed, and thus gave to him both the cauldron and the piece of land he had asked for before 'so far as it is mine'. Lambkin (1987: 30) considers that Muirchú's description of Dáire was suggesting 'the guardian of a ritual site', while the gift of the cauldron represented

[4] See Carey, who suggests Muirchú may have been familiar with some episodes appearing in *TBC Rec. 1* and was capable of adapting motifs in them for his own narrative (Carey 2013: 125–126).

'the symbolic transfer of Dáire's status and office to Patrick'. The new site was *ciuitas quae nunc Ardd Machae nominatur*, the 'city now called Armagh' (*Muirchú I*: 24; Bieler 1979: 110–111). Inspecting the land thus given, Dáire and Patrick found on the hill a fawn and its mother lying 'where there is now the altar of the northern church in Armagh', and Patrick carried the fawn out of harm's way to a place to the north of Armagh where some signs of the saint's power still remained (*Muirchú I*: 24; Bieler 1979: 108–113).

The sites of three churches, one at the foot of and two on tops of hills, all seem to be part of Dáire's gift and are apparently those mentioned in the *Book of the Angel* as the 'shrine of the martyrs' (*sarcifagum martyrum*, glossed *du ferti martar*), and the 'northern' and 'southern' churches of Armagh (*Liber Angeli*: §31n, §16n, §19; Bieler 1979: 186, 190).

Although he is located in what by the seventh century was Airthir territory, the 'wealthy and honoured' Dáire appears without a pedigree in Muirchú (*Muirchú I*: 11; Bieler 1979: 78), although Muirchú does provide the patronymics of some other characters in the legend of Patrick, such as Miliuc *maccu Bóin*, Lóegaire *mac Néill*, Dubthoch *maccu Lugir* (Bieler 1979: 62, 74, 92). Muirchú also tells, without identifying them, of Patrick's Dál Fíatach connections among the Ulaid in *Mag Inis* (Lecale, County Down) where the 'good man' Díchu of Saul became his first convert (*Muirchú I*: 11, 12, 14, II: 4). Others in Ulaid territory, such as Mac Cuill moccu Greccae, felt the force of Patrick's ire, but Patrick 'favoured and loved' Lecale (*Muirchú I*: 23, 26, 12). When Patrick died, it was in the land of the Ulaid rather than in Armagh, and with angelic guidance Conall's oxen bore his body to Downpatrick in Lecale for burial, although the Uí Néill and Airthir tried to seize it by force, until prevented by a vision (*Muirchú II*: 4, 8, 11, 13–14). Charles-Edwards (2011, 44) contrasts Muirchú's interest in the Ulaid (the 'first people' of East Ulster) with Tírechán's interest in the Cruithni (mapped in his fig. 3.3), noting that Muirchú's Life attests how the Ulaid were willing to defend their prize (the burial place of St Patrick) against the Uí Néill. The contention, with burial in Saul, is also in the additions to *Tírechán* (Bieler 1979: 165, §55).

The Tripartite Life of St Patrick

The story of the foundation of Armagh is elaborated in the *Tripartite Life of St Patrick*, where Dáire is given a pedigree which links him to a local ruling family:

> *alaili fer soimm airmitnech (…). Dáre (…) mac Findchadai meic Eogain meic Nialláin*
>
> 'a certain rich honourable man (…). Dáire (…) son of Findchad son of Eogan son of Niallán.' (Stokes 1887a: 228–229)

Níallán was the ancestor of the Uí Níalláin family of the Airthir, stewards (*oeconomus*) of Armagh, kings of Lough Gall north-east of the city (Byrne 1973: 116, 118), and later chiefs of Loughgilly to the east, in the barony called Orior (the anglicised form of *Airthir*). As interpreted by John O'Donovan, 'this Daire was chief of Oriors [Airthir] and descended from Colla Dá Chrích. The O'Hanlons of Orior descend from his uncle *Muireadhach mac Eoghain meic Nialláin*' (*AFM*: 1856, 143 n.c).[5] However, the genealogies contain no record of this supposed Dáire of the Airthir or of any descendants of his,[6] and the chronology is artificial. St Patrick is traditionally dated to the 5th century, but the abbot Flann Febla, like Dáire of the *Tripartite Life* seven generations from Colla Dá Chrích, was alive in A.D. 687 (Reeves 1860: vi 26; *AU*$_2$: 715). It is highly unlikely that this pedigree is anywhere as old as Muirchú, since it would have been patently false in his day.

The story as told in Irish in the *Tripartite Life* (Stokes 1887a: 228–233) contains various small additions to Muirchú, which amplify the setting of the scene in Armagh. To begin with, it suggests that Dáire's name was commemorated in the place-name *Ráth Dáire* 'Dáire's ringfort'.[7] The

[5] The *Tripartite Life* pedigree has been conveniently tabulated by Glancy (1954–59: 327).

[6] Contrary to Hood (1978: 9), though, there was an Airgíalla group called Uí Dáire descended from Dáire great-grandson of Conlae Oiss (*CGH*: 139 (*Rawl. B. 502*: 141a7), 416 (*LL*: 333c35)).

[7] *Ráth Dáire* does not survive as a place-name, but Seán Barden (2009) makes an excellent case for locating the viewpoint of 'Dáire's fort' at 'The Clump' east of and overlooking Armagh gaol, disposing of Reeves' suggestion that it was identical to the site of the original (now Church of Ireland) St Patrick's cathedral. Lynn & McDowell note 'apparently a high place' (1988: 73 n.). Barden's argument is even more persuasive when one realises that Macha is not 'elliptical (…) for Ard Machae'

story opens with Patrick coming:

don Machai (…) co magin hita Raith Daire indiu

'to the *Macha* (…) to the place where *Ráth Dáire* stands today.'

Muirchú had not used the simple place-name *Macha* at this point, but does so later, as the place where Patrick wished to die (*Muirchú II*: 4; Bieler 1979: 116–117). From its usage in the texts it is clear that (*In*) *Mache* 'The Macha' signified not just *Ard Macha* 'Armagh', the 'height of Macha', but the surrounding plain, later *Mag Macha* (Arthurs 1952–3: 25; Muhr 2002: 35; Ó Mainnín 2010a: 116, 126). The hill Patrick then asks Dáire to give him for a church is 'the place where *Ard Machae* (i.e. Cathedral Hill) is today'. Dáire refused, and the place Patrick was given first was 'in this strong *ráth* below' where *Ind Fherta* is 'today'. This site, later called *Teampall na Ferta* 'church of the grave-mound[s]', had remained in tradition as Patrick's first church (Barden 2009: 3 n. 7; supported by archaeological investigation, Lynn & McDowell 1988).

Reeves' assessment of the use of the word *ferta* in Irish suggested to him that the site might have been 'some old entrenched pagan cemetery' (1860 = 1900: 27).[8] It is certainly noteworthy that the Lives do not explain the name from deaths and burials of Patrick's followers. Sites with a grave-mound were *nemed* 'sacred' in pre-Christian times (Kelly, F. 1998: 436 n. 248: *nemed cille no dúin no a maigen firt*).

In the *Tripartite Life*, the groom brings Dáire's horses to graze in St Patrick's 'graveyard', but where Muirchú simply said *in herbosso loco* 'in a grassy place', the author of *inna reclés for fér, ar rob férach ind relec* 'on grass into his church-site, since the graveyard was grassy' seems to be visualising *Ind Fherta* as a church with enclosed churchyard, as it was in his own day. In the following story less attention is paid to Dáire's cauldron, but the church named *Ardd Machai* is founded on the hill, marked out, blessed and consecrated by Patrick and his elders along with Dáire and the 'nobles of Airthir'. The deer and fawn were found 'where the *Sabull* is today' and left at the place called *Telach na Licci* 'hill of the flagstone' today (Stokes 1887a: 230). The *Saball* was another of

(Stokes 1887a: 229), but the name of the surrounding district (Arthurs 1952–3: 25; Muhr 2002: 35; Ó Mainnín 2010a: 116, 126).

[8] *Fert* is used of a single burial mound while *ferta* is a collective, used either of mounds or the burials in a mound (Charles-Edwards 1976: 83 n.).

the churches of Armagh, named 'barn' like Saul in Lecale, and mentioned in the Irish annals (*AU*$_2$: 915, 1020). *Telach na Licci* also continued in later use (Muhr 2002: 37; Barden 2009: 3; Warner 2013–14: 66). Place-names still in use 'today' *indiu* occur regularly in the *Tripartite Life*, where they give an impression of verisimilitude and local knowledge (Barden 2009: 1; Muhr 2002: 35–42).

In the *Tripartite Life*, Dáire's influence on the local church was further extended when the desire felt by his daughter Ercnat for Patrick's chief disciple Benén was turned into spiritual love by St Patrick's prayer and she founded a church called *Tamlachta Bó*, 'field' or more precisely 'burial ground of the cow' (Stokes 1887a: 232; Muhr 2001: 304; 2002: 36). Ercnat does not appear in the genealogies of Irish saints.[9] Her name means 'little red-eared cow', and if her church was also on land provided by her father, it was likely to have been close by. Reeves was the first to identify this place with the modern townland of Tamlaght, held from the bishop of Armagh by the Airthir subgroup of *Uí Echach* or *Túath Echach*, later anglicised Tuaghy, west of Navan (Reeves 1860 = 1897: 194; Muhr 2001: 321). Tamlaght alone is the current place-name, but it was referred to in 17th-century sources as *Twalaghboe* and *Tawlatt-ibowe* etc., no doubt representing *Tamhlachta Bó* (*CPR Jas I*: 374b, 1609 (ed. Griffith 1966); *Inq. Ult. Arm* §20 Car I, 1633; Hamlin 1989: 42; Muhr 2002: 36 n. 252). A possibly relevant lost 'subcircular enclosure' has been found in the adjacent townland of Ballydoo (Warner 2006: 23; *NISMR* ARM 011:025 at grid reference H8246045240) and investigated by a group including Malachy Conway.

The limited excavations at Ballydoo 'provide clear evidence for use of the site in the Early Christian period,' including work with glass rods 'most likely for use in enamelling of prestigious objects whether religious or secular'. While the enclosure contains no clear structural features, there is evidence throughout of occupation, which 'fulfils the criteria for an Irish enclosed ecclesiastical site' (Conway 2006: 50). Where

[9] *Erc(nat)* is mentioned in the *Notulae* (Bieler 1979: 182 §46)]. However Ercnat of *Dún dá Én* in the *Fidbad* (Duneane in the Feevagh) in Dál nAraide, who is named in some martyrologies (*Fél. Óeng*. Jan. 8, p. 42, repeated in the Martyrologies of Gorman and Donegal), must, as O'Laverty noticed, be a mistake for Ernach of Duneane whose commemoration is later in the year (*Fél. Óeng*. Oct. 30, p. 230). Colgan also noted the form *Ercnait*, but mistakenly located Duneane parish in Co. Down (McKay 1995: 79).

Conway is impressed at the surrounding of Emain Macha by Christian sites, this corroborates the extent of Church lands gifted by Dáire as suggested in the *Tripartite Life*: three churches in Armagh and another a mile or more to the west, in an area that was church land in the seventeenth century. The regular use of the name (*In*) *Mache* 'The Macha' as Patrick's base in the *Tripartite Life*, as in *Muirchú* and *Tírechán* (*Muirchú II*: 4; *Tírechán II*: 3, *III*: 1.5; Bieler 1979: 116, 122, 126), implies that Patrick was given the whole plain around Armagh, of which all of these would have been part.

Patrick's people also reap a farm (*orba* 'hereditary land'), which they had made in *Trian Conchobuir* 'Conchobar's third', and when one of them died he was buried 'at the cross in the doorway of Patrick's house' (Stokes 1887a: 236). Patrick had also apparently been given the land called *Óenach Macha* 'the assembly(-ground) of Macha', the ancient assembly site of the Kings of Ulster (Lynn 1997: 8; Muhr 2002: 11–12; Ó Mainnín 2017) where two crosses had been erected (Stokes 1887a: 238; Muhr 2002: 40–42).

A Plantation inquisition investigating church lands in 1609 shows that Dáire was still remembered in Armagh in the early seventeenth century. The inquisition reported that the district of *Coswoy* (*cois mhaighe* 'foot of the plain'), consisting of 20 townlands including the townland of *Eawin* (Navan, which can be indentified with *Emain Macha* or the ancient capital of Ulster; Muhr 2002: 4) had been given to a predecessor of the Archbishop of Armagh by *David Derrag O'Hanlon* (Glancy 1954–59: 83 = *CPR Jas I*: 374a–375b). The inquisition also shows that the district of *Tuaghy*, which included Tamlaght (Boe), was also part of the territory of the Archbishop of Armagh. Dáire, now anglicised David, was also called *dearg* 'red' in the material on St Patrick collected by Colgan (1647: 162; Stokes 1887a: 229 n. 2). Reeves pointed out that, following his pedigree in the *Tripartite Life*, Dáire had been given the surname of the O'Hanlon descendants of Níallán by 'a kind of reflex nomenclature' (Reeves 1860 = 1900, 26; Glancy 1954–59: 83 n.). Seán Mac Airt thought that the survival of this tradition of 'David Derrag's' land-grant was important confirmation that the lands of the Archbishop were the original church lands in Armagh (Arthurs 1956–7: 9). In both earlier and later accounts, Dáire is credited with giving the ancient plain of *Macha* – including *Ard Macha*, *Óenach Macha*, and also *Emain Macha* – to St Patrick.

The Ulaid of Downpatrick are also represented in the *Tripartite Life*, as in Muirchú. Díchu, the donor of Saul (*Saball Pátraic*) in Lecale, is given a patronymic 'son of Trechem', and Patrick extended his preaching to Díchu's brother Rus mac Trichim in Derlus near Downpatrick, now called Bright (*Mrechtan*), staying till all the Ulaid were converted (Stokes 1887a: 36–38).[10] Their father was not mentioned in Muirchú, although Trechem is named in the Book of Armagh *Notulae* as a brother of *Trian m(acc) Féic m(aicc) Amal(gaid)*, who in the *Tripartite Life* is a king, apparently in the south of County Down. Trian's line was disinherited by Patrick, although his son Iarlaithe would become a saint and successor of Patrick in Armagh (Bieler 1979: 181 §26; Stokes 1887a: 218–220; Ó Riain 2011: 374).

An eighth-century text in the Ulster Genealogies says of Díchu:

> *Dichu din adrobart do Patraic Sabull uachtar 7 benedicta est progenies ejus usque hodie 7 in h-eternum*
>
> 'Díchu gave to Patrick upper Saul and his descendants are blessed to this day and in eternity.' (Dobbs 1921/23: 346)

Trechem's relations are listed at length as a branch of Dál Fíatach in the same genealogy. In the Lecan B text, said to be from the Book of Saul, seven sons of Trechem in Lecale are mentioned: six full brothers in pairs, ancestors of families: Ros and Díchu, Ailill and Láegaire, Derthucht and Eogan, and Níall from a different mother.[11]

In the *Tripartite Life* as in Muirchú, Patrick hoped to die in Armagh, but was turned back by an angel to die in Saul. Conall's cattle carried his body to Downpatrick for burial, although the Uí Néill and the Airgíalla fought the Ulaid for possession (Stokes 1887a: 252–256).

The *Tripartite Life* also mentions the East Ulster royal line of the Ulaid. The names *Echu, Cairel, Domungart* are listed in the Book of Armagh *Notulae* (Bieler 1979: 181 §27), and the *Tripartite Life* describes how Echu mac Muiredaig offended Patrick so that the line of his brother Cairell was blessed instead as king of Ulaid, *Conid hé sin síl na ríg co bráth síl Demán maicc Cairell maicc Muiredaig, tría bréithir Pátraic* 'so

[10] The personal name *Trechem* seems to relate to *trechem* 'three-year-old pig' rather than *trichem* 'cough'. There appears to be no basis for the length mark added to *Tríchem* in *CGH*.

[11] A verse of the poem on saints of Dál Fíatach (*CGSH*: 96, no. 662.141) numbers six sons, so that Niall seems to be an added seventh (cf. Muhr 2017: 184).

that through the word of Patrick, the line of Demmán son of Cairell son of Muredach would be the line of (Ulster) kings for ever'. However, when Echu's wife accepted Christianity, Patrick blessed the baby in her womb, Domungart son of Echu (Stokes 1887a: 224). Domungart's life would be extended, and this was explained earlier in the *Life*, which says that Patrick left Ireland in the care of five saintly guardians, one of them Domongart macc Echach whose church was in Maghera beside Slíab Sláinge, later Slieve Donard, in the Mournes (Stokes 1887a: 120).

Further back, the Irish genealogies link St Patrick with the ancestor of the East Ulster Dál Fíatach *Muiredach Munderg quem benedixit Patricius (ut alii aiunt) in regnum Hibernie* 'Muredach Muinderg whom Patrick blessed – as some say – in the kingship of Ireland' (*CGH*: 408 (*LL*: 330b61); *Laud Genealogies*; Meyer 1912c: 328; Dobbs 1921/23: 336). Muiredach's son Cairell, who became Christian (*qui credidit Patricio*), is also mentioned in the genealogies (*CGH*: 322 (*Rawl. B. 502*: 161b50); also in *LL* and *Laud*), while the 'Chronological Tract in the Leabhar Breac' says that Cairell son of Muredach was present at Patrick's death 'as books and the learned say' (*amal atfiadat liubair agus eolaig*; Stokes 1887a: ii 552).

Although the *Tripartite Life* relinquished Dáire to the Airthir, like the genealogies it shows considerable interest in the Ulaid of East Ulster, their association with St Patrick and with some of their local saints. It is not clear which happened first, since, although the language may be late 9th century, the dating of the material in the *Tripartite Life*, prefigured by the *Notulae*, has to be elastic – giving time for 'the development of the Patrick legend into a 'national epic'' (Binchy 1962: 170; Muhr 1996a: 57). The following text, once thought to be eleventh-century, has now been redated to the Old Irish period.

4. Dáire and the Ulaid in the prologue to the *Senchas Már*

Outside the Lives of St Patrick, but still associated with the saint (and dependent on the story of Lóegaire mac Néill's conversion), Dáire appears in the introduction to the compilation of early Irish legal texts called the *Senchas Már*, which provides a legendary explanation of how the collection was put together. Analysis has shown how the complicated textual history of the three manuscript versions and offshoots,

with evidence of later editing, of this 'pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már*' nevertheless indicates that all versions go back to one original written in the Old Irish period (Binchy 1975–6: 17, 20–21; McCone 1986: 19; Carey 1994a: 9). According to this, St Patrick was encouraged by Lóegaire, king of Tara, to collect and ratify 'whatever did not go against God's word' in native law, as the leader of a team of nine. Dáire 'king of Ulaid' was one of the chosen nine members:

> *Pátraic 7 Benignus 7 Cairnech, trí epscoip; Loegaire mac Néill rí Hérenn 7 Dáire rí Ulad 7 Corc mac Lugdech rí Muman, trí ríg; Dubthach maccu Lugair 7 Fergus fili 7 Ros mac Trechim suí bélra Féne.*
>
> 'Patrick and Benignus and Cairnech, three bishops; Lóegaire mac Néill king of Ireland, Dáire king of Ulster and Corc mac Lugdech king of Munster, three kings; (and) Dubhthach maccu Lugair and Fergus the poet and Ros mac Trechim the expert in legal language'.
>
> (Carey 1994a: 12, 19 §8)

The poet Dubthach moccu Lugair, the first person at Lóegaire's court in Tara to become a convert, is a character in the *Life* of Patrick by Muirchú, the *Additamenta* and the *Tripartite Life* (Bieler 1979: 92, 176; Stokes 1887a: 52). The foundational event in the narrative of the preface to the *Senchas Már* was an inspired judgement, given by Dubthach in the presence of Patrick and Lóegaire, which impressively combined native law with Christian doctrine on forgiveness. The judgement was expressed in a poem, which however is only given in full in one manuscript (Binchy 1975–6: 18–19; edited by McCone 1986: 29–30, translation 6–8; first line only in edition of prose, Carey 1994a: 12, 18 §6).

Kim McCone's edition of Dubthach's poem, a Christian composition closely related to the prose around it, shows that the poem and prose are of the same date, early eighth century, although the poem is contrived to look older by writing the prose as 'commentary' (McCone 1986: 17). The idea that St Patrick harmonised the laws of nature and scripture appears in three other law tracts:[12] the late seventh-century *Cáin Ḟuithirbe* (Breatnach 1986: 51) and, within the *Senchas Már*, in *Do Ḟastud Cirt ocus Dligid*, and the early eighth-century *Córas Béscnai* (Breatnach

[12] *Cáin Ḟuithirbe* 'The law of Fuithirbe (a place-name?)'; *Do Ḟastud Cirt ocus Dligid* 'On the confirmation of right and law'; *Córas Béscnai* 'The regulation of proper behaviour' (Kelly, F. 1988: 273, 266, 267). *Córus Béscnai* is translated 'the arrangement of discipline' by Breatnach (2017: 26–27, 122–123).

2005: 290; 2017: 32–33, 152–153 §32). In the last of these, Corc mac Luigdech, considered in the *Lives* to belong to an earlier generation, also appears alongside Dubthach, Lóegaire and St Patrick (McCone 1986: 20, 24; Carey 1994a: 26).

The poets, Ros mac Trechim, and the saints of the Ulaid

Some manuscripts describe the final group as 'three poets', while Fergus *Fili* bears that title in his own right. In one manuscript he is called the author of the *Senchas Már* and in another joint author with Dubthach; he is also attached to the Cíarraige Lúachra in Kerry (Carey 1994a: 26). This seems to be all that is known about him.

Ros mac Trechim, the legal expert, is from Ulster and has links with the development of the Life of Patrick. He appears in the *Tripartite Life* as a brother of Díchu of Saul, Patrick's 'first convert among the Ulaid', and as an early Patrician convert in Lecale associated with Derlus or Bright near Downpatrick (Stokes 1887a: 36–38). Ros also appears in the Ulster genealogies of Trechem's descendants, dated by Dobbs to the eighth century, and apparently derived from local sources.[13] The manuscripts named the 'Book of Downpatrick' and the 'Book of Saul' suggest learning, and that the monastery associated with Ros mac Trechim had a scriptorium. In parallel to their founding of local families, the corpus of saints' genealogies makes all seven sons of Trechem patrons of churches around Lecale:

> *Laegaire ic Dún, Ailill i mMaig Bile, Dichú ic Sabull, Durthech ic Oendruim, Eogan i Cill Chlethi, Niall i Cill Clethi, Rus ic Dun Da Lethglas*

[13] Between its Ulster genealogical texts A and B, the Book of Lecan mentions the sources of its information, *do reir lebair Duindaleathglas 7 lebair Dairi 7 lebair Duine Geimin 7 lebair Sabaill Padraig* 'according to the books of Downpatrick, Derry, Dungiven and Saul'. Dobbs was dubious what relevant information might come from Dungiven or Derry (though this *Dairi* may be Derryloran or Ballinderry by Lough Neagh; Muhr 2015: 239, 241, 245 n.; Devlin 2013: 151), but considered that the Lecan B text, which she edited, took its sections 2, 5, and 11 from the Book of Saul and probably took section 14 from the Book of Downpatrick (Dobbs 1921/23: 308–309).

> 'Laegaire at Down(patrick), Ailill in Movilla, Díchu at Saul, Durthech at Nendrum, Eogan at Kilclief, Níall at Kilclief, Ros at Down(patrick)' (*CSHG*: 23, 136.2)

According to the same eighth-century secular genealogical text mentioned above, Trechem's descendants included the sixth-century saint Finnian of Movilla at Newtownards, who became patron saint of Dál Fíatach (*CGH*: 411 (*LL*: 331a5, 11); Dobbs 1921/23: 346). St Finnian, *Findia* in this text, is shown as doubly of Dál Fíatach origin, being on his father's side of the Uí Aililla of *Muigbile*, but on his mother's of the Uí Láegaire of Downpatrick (Dobbs 1921/23: 346–348).

Two early saints called Finnian are referred to in the Irish annals, Finnian descendant of Teldub, who died in 549, and Finnian descendant of Fíatach who died in 579 (AU_2). The form of their patronymics, using *maccu*, suggests they were so-named before A.D. 700, and they were known as saints of Clonard and Movilla (Dumville 1997: 72, 76). As with other instances of several saints of a name, scholars suggest both were originally one (Ó Riain 2011: 322 n. 7; Dumville 1997: 75). A historical character of the sixth century was referred to as *Vennianus auctor* 'Finnian the writer' in a letter to pope Boniface *c.* 600 by the originally Bangor saint Columbanus, who also mentioned a penitential by that author, although no writings survive (Ó Riain 2011: 321). Adamnán's *Life of Columba* says that Colum Cille studied sacred scripture with an elderly bishop called Finnian, Finnio or Findbarr, of which Findbarr could be the original Irish form of the personal name, with Finnio being a hypocoristic (Dumville 1997: 75). These references do not give a location, though geographical proximity might suggest that 'Movilla must be regarded as the strongest contender' (Ó Riain 2011: 322). However, the Brittonic hypocoristic form of the personal name, and comments such as that Findbarr of Movilla 'brought law from overseas' (*Fél. Óeng*. 10 Sept.) suggest that the original Finnian, i.e. Uinniau, may have come from Britain. Dumville allows for the possibility that 'the cult of St Uinniau had been localised at Clonard and Movilla by the mid-seventh century'. He suggests that 'various reasons could be plausibly hypothesised for the community of Movilla presenting Uinniau as a member of Dál Fíatach' (Dumville 1997: 80). He does not elaborate further, but the tradition of the legal expert Ros mac Trechim suggests the prestige of a reputation for learning.

The cultural credentials of Dál Fíatach expanded further. According to the ninth-century 'Story of Tuán son of Cairell', a son of Cairell unknown to the genealogies, who had returned to human form and become a Christian after many cycles of rebirth, met St Finnia who was visiting county Down and told him all he had seen. Finnia was refused hospitality in the Mourne Mountains, *Benna Bairche*, until the aged Tuán invited him to his *dísert*, explaining that he was of (Mid and East) Ulster, 'I took the heritage of my father from *Mag nÍtha* (at Raphoe) to this hermitage in Benna Boirche' (Carey 1984: 101 l. 11). Tuán is also regarded as a saint, mentioned in the notes to the Martyrology of Tallaght at April 1st: *Tuan mac Cairill o Thamlachtain Bairchi* 'Tuán son of Cairell from Tamlachtae Bairchi'. *Tamlachtae Bairchi*, meaning 'burial ground in the Mournes', still exists as Tamlaght, a graveyard with a ruined church by the Cassy Water on the western boundary of the parish of Kilkeel near the southern coast of the Mournes (Carey 1984: 98; Ó Mainnín 1993: 64–65; Hamlin 2008: 20, 325). Tamlaght, possibly 'set-apart grave', is a recurring place-name element regularly used in Ulster for early Christian churches: compare Tamlaght of Dáire's daughter near Armagh (Flanagan 1981–82: 74–75; Muhr 2016: 601–602).

Ros mac Trechim thus had family connections in the churches of County Down, from Newtownards to Lecale to the southern coast of the Mournes. Both the Lives of Patrick, the Prologue to the *Senchas Már*, and the genealogies show that the Dál Fíatach had added to their ancient Ulster-Cycle connections a claim to a special relationship with St Patrick and other powerful saints related to themselves.

Saints and the bull in folklore

St Donard

A story told in 19th-century Down linked the bull with Patrick's Dál Fíatach disciple St Donard. Domongart mac Echach, of the royal line of Dál Fíatach, and his church *Ráith Murbuilc hi tóeb Sléibi Sláinge* 'Maghera beside Slieve Donard', are mentioned in the *Tripartite Life* (Stokes 1887a: 120). Domangart also appears in both saints' and secular genealogies (*CGSH*: 56, no. 358; cf. *CGH*: 408 (*LL*: 330c1)), and in the martyrologies for March 24 (see Ó Riain 2011: 272 fn. 6.). In 1834 he was still locally remembered as 'a fierce and warlike pagan chief who, greatly impressed by Patrick's restoration to life of a bull, became a meek and

humble disciple' (Ó Riain 2011: 272). The story was told in full to John O'Donovan when he was climbing Slieve Donard with a guide in 1834, and recorded by him (*OSL* Down 96–7; reprinted MacNeill 1962/82, ii: 436–437). Donnart, chieftain of Maghera, gave a fierce bull to St Patrick as alms, knowing well that it was undriveable, but it was tamed by St Patrick's halter, and the monks killed it and salted the meat. Donnart then asked for his bull back and so Patrick restored it to savage life again. Seeing this, Donnart became a convert to Christianity and took himself to fasting and prayer on Slieve Donard.

The Bull's Track stones

Also in County Armagh, there are two boulders now called 'The Bull's Track stone', one on the old road west past Navan Fort, and another in Ballymacanab near Lisnadill which show marks explained locally as the bull's footprints.[14] These were the focus of further bull lore in Ulster. Máire MacNeill repeats oral stories of St Patrick and a wild bull which prevented his church-building in mid Armagh, collected by the Armagh antiquarian and folklorist T. G. F. Paterson *c.* 1928:

> The Bull's Track. Shure the marks o the baste's cloots are as plain this blessed day as they wur when Patrick himself was here. (…) ay, many the time I heared the story of how the bull riz on the Brague [Armaghbrague] an' niver touched earth till he lit at Ballymacnab. An' then he riz again an' come down on the side of Navan Rath. An' he back an' he leps on another in Lisnadill. An' after that he went clane mad, an' the country up an' slaughtered him. An' they buried him on Corran, an' there he lies under a lump of a stone.
>
> ('the Grey Stone', MacNeill 1962/82, i: 159, full story ii: 475)

The Grey Stone at Corran, shown on 6-inch sheet 20, grid H 9035, is now hard to reach for barbed wire fences, but two footprint stones at Ballymacanab and Navan Fort survive. During his fieldwork in the 1920s

[14] Thanks to Sean Barden for photographs. The Ballymacanab stone is similar to a stone at the foot of the old cross at Ardboe, associated with a cow from Lough Neagh, which gave her milk to mix the mortar for the church (McKay & Muhr 2007: 105), while the marks on the Navan fort stone are more like scratches. Sean also pointed out to me that the Bullock Stone is marked at Ballymacanab on John Rocque's map of Co. Armagh in 1760 (pers comm. 11 May 2017).

and 1930s, Paterson said he had seen a third Bull's Track stone at Lisnadill church, but this cannot now be found (Sean Barden, pers. comm. 11 May 2017). There are other versions from Armagh and elsewhere of similar bull legends, such as a church-destroying bull at Donaghanie in Tyrone (MacNeill 1962/82, i: 396–397). MacNeill then notes that a similar bull story of resuscitation and conversion was told of King Leary at Teltown, and of Crom Dubh at Croagh Patrick and other Patrician sites (1962/82, ii: 437–450). However, the Ulster stories seem to remain closer to their origins – apparently drawing on both the Ulster Cycle and legends of St Patrick (Muhr 2009: 124–125, 138).

5. Significance of Dáire: Conclusion

Dáire appears in Old Irish or Latin texts from four genres in Early Irish: genealogies of the Érainn, the Ulster Cycle, the Lives of St Patrick, and the prologue to the Irish law collection *Senchas Már*. His role may be interpreted as ancestor-deity; owner of an extraordinary bull; bestower of a cauldron and the plain of Macha along with an ancestral burial site; king of Ulster.

In the Ulster Cycle the implication is that the landowner Dáire on the borderland and the king Conchobar in the heart of Ulster are both linked with the Ulster bull, and that (as in *Gessa Ríg Érenn*) the bull is a symbol of the kingship of the land of the Ulaid, with Dáire as its supernatural guardian. This is despite the emphasis on place-names and events in East Ulster, which, as in the opening scene of *Tochmarc Étaíne* in Lecale, reveal that the Dál Fíatach were at the time based east of Glenree and centred on Downpatrick, where the Ulster warriors Celtchair and Cúscraid, 'the stammerer of Macha', had been relocated (Muhr 1994: 154–155, §§16, 30; 1996a: 51–55). The place-names Navan and Creeveroe appearing in the Ulster Cycle have been used to the present at Armagh (Muhr 2002: 14–17).

The mythological significance of the bull in the secular literature is parallelled in Muirchú's Life of Patrick by the location in Armagh of Dáire with his 'marvellous overseas' cauldron, both representative of ancient pre-Christian vigour and fertility. As regards contemporary ecclesiastical politics, Sharpe notes that Muirchú felt truth impelled him to include the story of Patrick's burial at Down (Sharpe 1982: 41), but that on the other hand he deliberately 'improved' Tírechán's narrative of

Patrick's mission by making Lóegaire mac Néill, king of Tara, become Christian rather than remaining a pagan (*ibid.*: 58). This account was influential, and necessary to the Prologue introducing the *Senchas Már*, and the legal text *Cáin Ḟuithirbe* shows that the conversion story was taken up in Munster within the seventh century (Breatnach 1986: 51).

The later versions of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and the Life of St Patrick add more details to the story. While Dál Fíatach power lasted, Muirchú's under-stated assertion of their ongoing importance across Ulster would have been clear to all hearing or reading the texts, and the political significance of the Dál Fíatach must have led to the inclusion of not only 'Dáire king of Ulster', but also of another Ulaid character, Ros mac Trechim, among those chosen to edit and codify the *Senchas Már*. The *Notulae* and then the *Tripartite Life* make visible the continuing importance of the Dál Fíatach and septs in the Patrick legend.

The *Tripartite Life* shows Dáire being claimed as a member of the Airthir rather than representing the former authority of the Ulaid over Airgíalla, while at the same time (supported by some of the Ulster genealogies) boasting of St Patrick's blessing of the saints and kings of Dál Fíatach. Meanwhile there is the attempt *c.* 800 by the Dál nAraide to claim that they, not the Dál Fíatach, were the ancient Ulaid, a theory fully accepted in the pedigrees of Ulster-Cycle heroes in *TBC II*, although historically by 900 the Dál Fíatach were able to re-assert their supremacy in East Ulster (Muhr 1996a: 57–59; 2017: 178–180). The introduction at some stage of the possible British outsider St Finnian into the descendants of Patrick's County Down supporters, the Uí Thrichim, creating a major influential saint of Dál Fíatach's own people, is likely to have been in response to the increasing identification of Patrick himself with Armagh. What survives to the present no longer shows the stages by which these political re-alignments happened.

Thus I suggest that at some time in the early historical period, before the arrival of the Normans, the Dál Fíatach used the character of their ancestor-god Dáire as one of several cultural or literary strategies to assert their continuing power and influence in Ulster. He is the owner of the Ulster Bull in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (explicitly in *TBC II*, implicitly in *TBC Rec. 1*), and in Muirchú's Life he gives the plain of Macha to St Patrick – even though by this stage it had been occupied by the Airthir. Dál Fíatach influence also maintained, in Muirchú's and Tírechán's accounts, a claim to St Patrick in East Ulster, where the saint was welcomed and

blessed Díchu who gave him Saul, his first church, where he died and near which, despite the pull of Armagh, he was buried. In the *Tripartite Life*, St Patrick also blessed Díchu's relations, local saints, and the line of Dál Fíatach kings. Probably earlier than the attempt in the *Tripartite Life* to claim Dáire genealogically as chieftain/king of the Airthir, the Prologue to the *Senchas Már* called Dáire king of the Ulaid and gave him a significant role as one of three powerful over-kings who helped codify law in Early Christian Ireland.

Later, the tradition of another Dál Fíatach member, Ros mac Trechim, as legal expert in codifying the *Senchas Már* may have inspired the adoption of the learned Finnian or Uinniau as a blood-relation and patron saint of the Dál Fíatach. However, in the story in which St Finnian is received by Tuán of the Dál Fíatach and taught 'whatever history and genealogy is in Ireland,' Finnian is portrayed as a visitor (Carey 1984: 101, 102, translated 105, 107).

In the early texts, St Patrick never meets Dáire in his bull aspect, but within the later oral tradition secular and sacred are combined. The separation of Ulster Cycle and Saint's Life genres, distinguishable as regards early place-names in County Armagh, and the combination of genres in later narratives, have been noted previously (Muhr 2002: 20, 40–46). However, book-learning and pious and diplomatic pressure were unable in the end to control and keep for one people only the pagan vigour of the original theme, where in popular tradition the bull-god continued to range and disrupt the plans of humankind.

Raven and wolf, satirist and *fénnid*: Defining Deirdre in *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

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In the older version of *Longes mac n-Uislenn,* 'The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu' (*LMU*), found in the Book of Leinster, Deirdre operates as satirist and *fénnid*, repeatedly challenging Conchobor's judgment as king of Ulster.[1] At the inflection points of a woman's life – birth, fosterage, marriage, widowhood, remarriage and death – Conchobor faces decisions regarding Deirdre, and her responses to his actions raise ever-sharper questions about his capacity as king.[2]

Animal imagery is central to the narrative.[3] Repeated allusions to the tale's central characters as 'heifer' and 'bull' set the everyday experiences of Irish animal husbandry within a complex web of symbolic and intertextual associations. When we meet Deirdre and the female satirist

[1] The text is edited and translated by Hull 1949. On its date, Hull concludes: 'the external and internal evidence, especially the occurrence of older and later forms side by side, leads one, therefore, to conclude with respect to the date of composition of *LMnU* that sometime before A. D. 1000 – probably in the ninth century, possibly even in the eighth century – the archetype was committed to writing; that about A.D. 1000 or shortly thereafter it was modernised in part by a redactor who also introduced a new poem; and that from his partial modernisation of the text the three extant copies of *LMnU* ultimately are descended' *(LMU* 32).

[2] Extensive fundamental studies of *LMU* include Buttimer 1994 and Tymoczko 1985–1986. Joseph Nagy's transformative analyses of Fenian literature provide context for considering Deirdre as *fénnid* in her flight and exile (Nagy 1985, 1997). Tomás Ó Cathasaigh's explorations of the multiple significances of stories about kings provide an ongoing guide to the analysis of the Ulster Cycle and early Irish narrative in general, cf. Ó Cathasaigh 1983, 1985a and 1985b.

[3] Tymoczko's (1985–1986) groundbreaking study on animal imagery in *LMU* remains essential to further exploration of how that imagery develops the narrative.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 183–200.

Leborcham watching a raven drink blood in the snow (*LMU* 62–63), the juxtaposition of corvid and satirist brings to mind the shapeshifting Morrígan, who like her sisters Badb and Macha, can appear as a crow or raven, scavenging the battlefield and bearing tidings after victory.[4] A satirist, she also takes the forms of beautiful woman, heifer, and wolf. In *Táin Bó Regamna*,[5] for example, the Morrígan appears as a female satirist who transforms herself into a black bird, and who threatens to oppose Cú Chulainn in the form of a heifer or a grey wolf.[6] While the Morrígan herself plays no part in *LMU*, the visual image of the bloodstained raven recalls her attributes and foreshadows Deirdre's own related roles as satirist and ongoing source of strife. In contrast to the visible raven, the wolf imagery of *LMU* is figurative or virtual, grounded in the often-ambiguous literary characterisation of warriors as wolves or hounds.[7] In early Irish usage, the wolf is conceptually a wild dog, and the word *cú* can be used for both dog and wolf, although there are also unambiguous terms for wolves.[8] Noísiu and his brothers are swift as hounds – or wolves (*LMU* 63). Once in exile, living as *fénnidi*, Deirdre and Noísiu are figuratively living as wolves.[9] In what follows, we shall

[4] For the classic early collection of textual references to the Morrígan, see Hennessey (1870: 32–57). On the corvid carrion feeders, the raven (*Corvus corax*) and the hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*), Irish *badb*, see Kelly, F. 1998: 191–192. The Irish words for raven *bran* and *fiach* are 'used to symbolise violent death in Irish literature of all periods' (*ibid.*: 192).

[5] For an edition and translation, see Corthals 1987.

[6] Hennessey (1870: 44–50) provides quotations and translations of key passages related to the Morrígan's shapeshifting.

[7] Wolf and hound images characterise accounts of young *fían*-warriors living in the wild, and sharp distinctions are not always drawn between canine and lupine activities. See especially discussions of the world of the *fíanna* in McCone 1986, Nagy 1985, also 2006, and Sharpe 1979. For the symbiotic relationship between ravens and wolves, and for magnificent photographs of their interaction, see Brandenburg 1993. His comments and photographs, the result of extended observations of North American wolves and their relationship with ravens, bring us closer to a world now long vanished from Ireland. See also Mech 1970.

[8] Fergus Kelly (1998: 619, 625, 639), gives *cú allaid*, *fáel*, *fáelchú*, and *mac tire* 'son of the land' as words for wolf.

[9] Mech (1970: 114) notes that wolves are commonly thought to mate for life, and that while this would be hard to prove, there is evidence for strong preferences: 'Consequently, courtship usually is devoted to the preferred mate, and mating attempts by other wolves generally are spurned.' Many packs include several mature wolves

look more closely at these images in the context of Deirdre's unfolding biography and Conchobor's deteriorating kingship.

Birth:

Deirdre's prenatal howl in the midst of an Ulster drinking party startles and terrifies – it is uncanny and requires a druid's interpretation. Cathbad foresees that the child will become a surpassingly beautiful woman but will cause 'many slaughters among the chariot-fighters of Ulster' (*LMU* 61). The warriors present rationally propose killing the infant, and the decision falls to the king. Conchobor determines to raise her in a household apart to become his spouse, apparently judging that no one would dare compete openly for her, and isolation would eliminate the risk of seduction. The narrator notes 'the Ulstermen did not dare to set him right with respect to it' (*LMU* 62), the tale's first indication that Conchobor's judgment might be flawed.

Fosterage:

Besides Deirdre's foster parents, the female satirist Leborcham is a regular presence in her life. Leborcham, who is elsewhere said to be Conchobor's slave and the daughter of slaves, is no suitable companion for a girl being reared in isolated innocence to become the wife of a king, but as a satirist, the narrator explains, Leborcham 'could not be prevented' (*LMU* 62).[10] In both legal and narrative sources, the female satirist is a socially marginal figure, but marginality is not necessarily powerlessness, and the difficulty of controlling a female satirist is well recognised.[11] *Bretha Crolige*, 'The Laws of Sick Maintenance', for example,

(*ibid.*: 115), who help care for the young (*ibid.*: 111). A small wolf pack with a single breeding pair and adult siblings would not be unusual. Mech (*ibid.*: 40–41) indicates that a pack size of two to eight is typical.

[10] In *Talland Étair*, 'The Siege of Howth' (Stokes 1887b: 55), Leborcham is said to be a slave and the child of slaves in Conchobor's household. In other words, she was not a free woman who became a slave through misfortune, but one born into slavery, the detail emphasising her low status.

[11] See the discussion of the satirist, and in particular the female satirist, by Kelly (1988: 49–50). He points out that legal texts tend to focus on the satirist's performance of illegal satire, portraying the satirist (*cáinte*) as satirising unjustly, and they seek to reduce or cancel the satirist's status for this misuse of 'the magic power of satire,'

exempt certain classes of injured women at both ends of the social spectrum from receiving sick maintenance.[12] Queens and abbesses are exempted on account of their high status, while at the opposite end of the spectrum is the dangerously uncontrollable woman who might commit some 'crime of her audacity' within the household as she recovers.[13] Among such women are the vagrant, the female werewolf, and the woman of sharp words – the female satirist.[14]

So like that archetypal female satirist and tidings-bearer, the Morrigan, Leborcham goes where she pleases.[15] Leborcham's freedom suggests that Deirdre, far from being ignorant of life outside her foster parents' sequestered compound, might be thoroughly cognisant of what lies beyond – both settled and wild, who's who and what's what in a world of wider options – and at the same time well aware of the power of satire. Her strong bond with Leborcham cues the possibility that Deirdre herself will display characteristics of a female satirist – and that her movements will be similarly unconstrained.

reserving 'particular odium' for the illegal satirist who is female (*ibid.*: 49–50). The female satirist bears no legal responsibility for rearing her own children (*ibid.*: 85), and as a practitioner of illegal satire lacks honour price (*ibid.*: 50).

[12] See Kelly (1988: 50). He notes that *Bretha Crólige* exempts the guilty party from providing sick maintenance for a female satirist he has injured, although equivalent compensation remains due to her. The reason given is that no one could be expected to take responsibility for a female satirist's actions while she living in the household supplying her sick maintenance during the period of her recovery.

[13] Binchy (1938b: 122) explains the phrase as 'the illegal actions of which such irresponsible persons may be guilty at any moment.'

[14] Binchy (1938a: 66 note to §34) remarks 'All three were regarded as highly dangerous – satirising is attributed to the *birach briathar*, killing livestock to the *confael*, and summoning demons to the *bē foimrime*. As the person undertaking *othrus* was liable for damage done by the patient, these women were really excluded for the benefit of the injurer.'

[15] While not a shapeshifter, Leborcham can also cover ground. In *Talland Étair*, 'The Siege of Howth' (Stokes 1887b: 55), for example, she is said to run around Ireland in a single day gathering news, returning each night to Conchobor with tidings of 'everything of good or evil that was done in Ireland.'

Reaching marriageable age:

Seeing a raven in the snow drinking the blood of a calf her fosterer has butchered for her dinner, Deirdre confides to Leborcham: 'I could desire a man who had those three colours there: hair like the raven, cheeks like blood and his body like snow' (*LMU* 62–63).[16] Her comment shifts the register of appetite from hunger to sexuality. By the time a young woman is fancying a man, she is on the threshold of the next phase of life, ready to leave fosterage and the circumstances of dependency that have nurtured her. The laws expect that a girl will leave fosterage at fourteen (or seventeen) for a husband or the church.[17] Deirdre's response to the feeding raven serves as a reminder that if parents or guardians are not watchful and active in making arrangements for a girl's transition to womanhood, they risk its outcome being determined by chance and the force of adolescent sexuality.

Courtship:

When Leborcham reveals that a man such as Deirdre imagines is nearby and identifies him as Noísiu, son of Uisliu, she moves Deirdre closer to choosing her own mate. Deirdre's reply, "I'll be ill in that case ... until I see him", introduces the motif of love-sickness, which at least in literature can be a mortal illness (*LMU* 63).[18] Deirdre does not suffer in silence, and taking the initiative, she soon crosses paths with Noísiu. Not knowing who she is, he remarks 'fair is the heifer which goes past

[16] Tymoczko (1985–1986: 148–9) discusses the linked imagery of blood, raven and war goddess in the context of the three-color motif. For the motif more generally, see Hemming 2012.

[17] In regard to the age for leaving fosterage, see Kelly (1988: 88) 'Old Irish glosses to *Cáin Íarraith* give fourteen as the age at which a girl completes her fosterage, and seventeen as the age at which a boy completes his fosterage. *Bretha Crólige* §7 allows for fosterage to continue up to seventeen for both sexes.' Note also Kelly (*ibid.*: 78) 'According to *Bretha Nemed déidenach* 'at a proper age a girl should be betrothed to God or to a man.'' For an overview of the custom of fosterage, see Ní Chonaill 1997.

[18] See Michie (1937: 304–314). A classic example occurs in *Tochmarc Étaíne* (Bergin & Best 1938) where the queen's brother-in-law, Ailill, overwhelmed by her beauty and under Midir's spell, is nearing death before she intervenes. See also the early example of love sickness in *Aislinge Óenguso* (Cleary 2018).

us' (Kelly, F. 1998: 63). Given Leborcham as a potential source of information, Deirdre can hardly be unaware of Noísiu's circumstances and family relationships.[19] Noísiu, for his part, will learn the heifer's identity soon enough.

For the tale's audience, Noísiu's reference to Deirdre as a heifer may have evoked the terminology and social context of formal courtship. As Martin (2007) has shown in his comprehensive study of courtship, marriage and matchmaking, the use of riddling or allegorical language is widespread in these social interchanges.[20] Courtship and the tendering of a marriage proposal, as well as any resulting marriage, involve the recognition and re-negotiation of status, with social consequences for both families. Given all that is at stake, courtship negotiations are often undertaken in riddling terms,[21] avoiding an actual offer (and possible loss of face) until conversations are well along. Images from animal husbandry can cast a thin but serviceable veil over the proceedings: the men of a family seeking a bride may claim to be looking for a special ewe, for example, or for a particularly fine heifer. Martin emphasises the degree to which, once these negotiations are begun, even in wholly symbolic terms, neither side can easily retreat.[22] Martin also points out that

[19] On the relationship between Conchobor and the sons of Uisliu, Tymoczko considers the possibility that earlier versions of the story reflected the *Senchas Síl Ír* genealogy in which Cathbad and Uisliu are brothers – making Noísiu a fitting contender for sovereignty so far as birth is concerned (1985–1986: 154–155). *LMU*, however, implies that Noísiu and Conchobor belong to different generations.

[20] In regard to allegorical 'asking' dialogues, Martin (2007: 200–24) provides an extended discussion alongside illustrations of the practice. As a mode of communication, allegory can allow the exchange of information on a range of topics about the prospective bride. These include the bride's virginity, about which 'an enquiry which, even in past centuries, could easily have been construed as a grave insult to the whole family.' (*ibid.*: 218). In these allegorical exchanges, a ewe lamb or a heifer can represent the bride (*ibid.*: 214, 217, 273).

[21] Another notable literary example of riddling courtship dialogue between two lovers is found in the wooing of Emer by Cú Chulainn (van Hamel 1978: 16–68 and Meyer 1901, see also Meyer 1888).

[22] See especially Martin's discussion of the evil eye as influencing ritual exchanges (including courtship) in several domains: threats relating to milk and other fluids; praise and dispraise; buying and selling; thigging; and concealment, distraction and silence (Martin 2007: 323–346). Given these analogies, once a girl has been closely inspected, or praised, (as is the case with an animal potentially for sale) by the potential groom or his representative, she is at risk, just as 'once an offer had

while these verbal courtship patterns are still well-known from Gaelic Scotland, Wales and Brittany, he has found no survival in Irish matchmaking tradition. The possibility that such customs formerly existed in Ireland deserves further exploration. In that hypothetical context, Noísiu's words would be a paradoxical allusion to language conventions employed in socially-sanctioned courtship, although occurring in circumstances far removed from formal matchmaking.

Noísiu's term for Deirdre is precise: the *samaisc* 'summer-dry' is a three-year-old heifer that has not yet been brought to the bull (Kelly, F. 1998: 63). Without knowing who she is, Noísiu recognises Deirdre as single, perhaps by her hair style – unmarried girls wore tresses or braids – and yet ready, or nearly ready, to be married.[23] Deirdre takes no offense at her categorisation as *samaisc.* Implicitly, she is more than ready for a sexual partner. Her generalising response, 'Heifers are bound to be big where there are no bulls' (Kelly, F. 1998: 63), underscores her isolation from other potential mates as well as Conchobor's absence from her life.[24] Noísiu, now aware of her identity and his peril, protests that she has the bull of the province for herself. Deirdre immediately shifts her argument from absence to preference: ''I would choose between the two of you,' she said, 'and I would take a young bullock like you'' (*LMU* 63).[25] Deirdre's characterisation of heifers 'where there are no bulls' is figurative and possibly proverbial. It is also satire, pointing out Conchobor's failure in all that a bull should provide, including timely

been received for [the purchase of] an animal, it was safer to let it go, since it would be 'tainted' and difficult or impossible to find another buyer.' (*ibid.*: 335).

[23] Kelly (1988: 103) includes references to 'a girl in plaits (i.e. an under-age girl)' in a passage indicating that her son cannot inherit family land (since the union would not have been authorised by the family). His note 22 mentions a passage at CIH 1242.16 regarding *trillsech re toga* 'a girl in plaits before [a husband] is chosen for her.' See *DIL*, *trilis* f. Orig. n.? 'tress or plait of hair.' In regard to this passage in *LMU*, Kelly states 'From non-legal sources it is clear that the term *samaisc* may be used of an older heifer which would be expected to have come into calf but has not yet done so' (*ibid.*: 63). In regard to cattle breeding practice in early Ireland, Kelly notes that 'the written evidence indicates that the normal practice was for a cow to be bulled at 3 ¼ and then to produce her first calf at four' (*ibid.*: 37).

[24] *DIL*, *mór* (*már*) o, ā. 'great' is the word used to describe Deirdre as a heifer, its adjectival meanings including 'big, great, of size, quantity or extent, physical or moral.'

[25] Kelly (1998: 63–64) notes that Deirdre's 'young bull' (*tairbín)* is one kept alive for breeding purposes; the majority of male calves were slaughtered.

sexual attention to his cows.[26] Although Noísiu denies the truth of Deirdre's allegation, his protest betrays that he has understood its point as satire. As royal bull of the province, Conchobor is no suitable mate for this 'big heifer' who has not yet been big with calf. Conchobor's failings contrast sharply with the virtues of that other royal bull of the province, the Donn Cúailnge, famed for bulling fifty heifers a day, and destined to become the object of strife between Ulster and the armies of Queen Medb of Connacht.[27]

In preferring a 'young bull' like Noísiu, Deirdre rejects Conchobor as not only absent but too old to be an appropriate spouse. Betrothals of young women to older men form a subset of Irish tales in which women strike out on their own to choose a sexual partner, usually with tragic results and little narrative sympathy for either party, with *Fingal Ronain* (Meyer 1892) being a classic case in point.[28] General social disapproval surrounded an older man's marriage to a young girl, despite the wealth and status that would allow him to obtain her family's consent, and such

[26] See McLaughlin (2008: 48–50) on the systems of classification of satire. She notes (*ibid.*: 48) '*ail* may take the form of either a nickname or a verbal insult (rhymed or unrhymed).' See also Kelly (1988: 137) on types of satire. A king who 'tolerates satire' loses his honour-price, and at the extreme, the laws provide that a person who unjustly satirises a king is liable to be put to death (*ibid.*: 137–138, also 138 n. 103). Various forms of sexual neglect are cited as grounds for divorce in the laws and suggest the general principle that a husband must provide appropriate sexual attention to his wife or be subject to her withdrawal from the marriage (*ibid.*: 73–75).

[27] 'Here are some of the virtues of the Donn Cúailnge: He would bull fifty heifers every day. These would calve before the same hour on the following day, and those of them that did not calve would burst with the calves because they could not endure the begetting of the Donn Cúailnge. It was one of the virtues of the Donn Cúailnge that fifty youths used to play games every evening on his back. Another of his virtues was that he used to protect a hundred warriors from heat and cold in his shadow and shelter. It was one of his virtues that no spectre or sprite or spirit of the glen dared to come into one and the same canton as he. It was one of his virtues that each evening as he came to his byre and his shed and his haggard, he used to make a musical lowing which was enough melody and delight for a man in the north and in the south and in the middle of the district of Cúailnge. These are some of the virtues of Donn Cúailnge.' (O'Rahilly, C. 1967: ll. 1320–1333).

[28] For discussion of the tale, see Ó Cathasaigh 1985a and 1985b. *The pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne (Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne)* (Ní Shéaghdha 1967) also presents the situation of a young woman eloping with the young man of her choice to avoid an unwanted match with an older man.

social attitudes are well-documented in later centuries in both Ireland and Scotland.[29]

The social ideal was a match between two young people. The bride need only have ended her fosterage. For men, the attainment of full adult status was marked by movement from landlessness to settlement on land – *trebad* – a way of life built on farming and cattle-raising that supported the economic and social relationships of marriage.[30] During the landless stage, young men, especially young men of rank, might live as members of *fíana*, men's societies maintaining themselves in the wild by hunting, at times also by cattle-reiving or service as mercenaries.[31]

Like Deirdre, Noísiu and his brothers seem ready to move from one age-related status to the next. Standing alone on the ramparts of Emain and soon to meet Deirdre, Noísiu is first characterised by his singing, a talent shared by his brothers: 'Each cow and each animal that heard [it – their singing], two thirds of surplus milk always was milked from them' (*LMU* 63).[32] Next the sons of Uisliu are described as expert *fénnidi*: formidable warriors, they are able to ward off all of Ulster in a fair fight, and are swift and successful as wolves or hounds at hunting wild animals (*LMU* 63). Noísiu here seems poised to move beyond hunting and fighting, to take land and begin a new life, although not with the woman whose disastrous destiny was prophesied by Cathbad.

Marriage/elopement:

Wedding and Wolfing. When she understands that Noísiu is rejecting her because of Cathbad's prophecy, Deirdre raises the stakes. 'Therewith she made a leap to him and grasped both ears on his head. 'These [are] two ears of shame and of derision,' she said, 'unless you take me away with you' (*LMU* 63).[33] Still struggling, Noísiu tells her to get away from

[29] Martin (2007: 274) provides an example of attitudes in Scotland toward the marriage of an old man with a younger bride. Medieval and modern instances can easily be multiplied. Recent Irish examples are noted in Gray 2012: 210–212.

[30] See *DIL*, *trebad* u, m. a) act of ploughing, cultivating; husbandry.

[31] See note 7 above.

[32] For the similarly benign lowing of the Donn Cúailnge, see note 27 above (O'Rahilly, C. 1967: ll. 1320–1333).

[33] In regard to Deirdre's attack on Noísiu's ears, see Tymoczko (1985–1986: 152) discussion and notes. See also McLaughlin (2008: 16–17) on rubbing an earlobe in satirising. Tymoczko (1985–1986: 147–148) suggests that the tale's early image

him – and she answers: 'You shall have that' (*LMU* 63). Her weapons are those of the female satirist, and she is willing to use them. Deirdre will satirise Noísiu as she has Conchobor for repeating Conchobor's failure. Here another bull – this time a young and preferred one who brings abundant milk to cows as he sings – is refusing to act his part. Noísiu resists no further, and his singing now causes all who hear it to spring up in alarm. His brothers rush to him, and when they understand the situation, vow to support him in flight, preferring the risks of exile to the loss of honour through satire (*LMU* 63–64).

In her challenge to Noísiu, Deirdre has abandoned a woman's usual passive role in marriage arrangements in order to select and pursue her mate. Cast as a dry heifer, responding to Conchobor's actual absence and potential presence with satire, she pursues her 'young bull' with the threat of satire. Paradoxically, Deirdre gains her reward by silence, not speech, and the price of her silence is high. To obtain it, Noísiu and his brothers must relinquish their legal standing in Ulster society. Forcing Noísiu to elope with her, to return to the wild, unsettled, and categorically more juvenile world of *fían* life, Deirdre takes on the role of *fénnid* as well as satirist, and as a 'wolfish' predator carries off her chosen bull. In the tale's imagery, she is at once predator and prey, wolf and heifer, *fénnid* abductor and chosen bride.

For a woman to become a *fénnid* is rare, and typically occurs in response to a social injury that cannot otherwise be redressed (Nagy 1997: 295). In one account of his birth, Conchobor's mother Ness did so in response to the murder of her fosterers by unknown parties, striking out indiscriminately until the perpetrator, Cathbad, made her his wife by force and restored her to society where she became the mother of a king.[34] Nagy has articulated the ambiguity of the status of the *fénnid* as follows:

of a butchered calf prefigures the death of Noísiu and that of Deirdre, with direct relevance to the interpretation of Deirdre's attack on Noísiu's ears. She notes (*ibid.*: 152) that a calf may not need a halter to be led but can be led by its ears: 'She is seizing her beloved as she would seise a favourite calf.' – Figuratively, the form of Deirdre's attack might also allude to the behavior of dogs that have taken to worrying sheep or of wolves when confronting new prey, in both cases by attacking the ears of the victim.

[34] See Nagy 1985: 48–50; Meyer 1885: 174–175; also Stokes 1908–10: 18–38. The story of Conchobor's birth is found in Meyer 1885: 174–175. Stokes edits and translates another version (1908–10: 18–38, especially 22–23).

> 'A fénnid, as described in pre-thirteenth-century texts, is a male (sometimes a female) in search of revenge, the righting of a wrong, or the opportunity to return to the social fold – in general, the missing pieces of his or her social identity. *Fénnidecht* 'being a fénnid' can be a temporary state, a prelude to the assumption of full adult status, responsibility, inheritance, and marriage. Or it can become a permanent way of life, a deferral of adulthood as it is traditionally defined or an acknowledgment of the impossibility of obtaining adult status under a given set of circumstances.' (Nagy 1997: 294–295)

For Deirdre, already outside the social fold, flight with Noísiu and his brothers will distance them further from the 'assumption of full adult status, responsibility, inheritance, and marriage' (Nagy 1997: 295) in the world of settlement and landholding.

Deirdre's elopement/abduction is an offense against the honour of those responsible for her, including Conchobor who arranged her fosterage and claimed her as his intended spouse.[35] The laws, however, recognise the possibility of a permanent union through abduction and specify the compensation due in cases of elopement or abduction, whether the missing woman is restored or remains with her partner.[36] Immediate action is apparently expected from a woman's people following her disappearance, whether or not she goes willingly, with the differing legal status of children conceived before and after a month's time suggesting that recovery would be anticipated within that period.[37] After a great while, however, Conchobor's efforts have not regained Deirdre (*LMU* 64). Despite repeated attempts to ambush the exiles, the blemish on Conchobor's honour has not been removed. Noísiu remains her spouse. Conchobor has made Ireland too small for them, but by the time Deirdre and the sons of Uisliu leave for Scotland, Conchobor has only succeeded in driving her further away.

Once in Scotland, Deirdre and the sons of Uisliu at first live off the land and their hunting skills make them self-sufficient. Then game

[35] On legal recognition of forms of sexual union, see Kelly, F. 1988: 70. Nancy Power (1936: 90) discusses the penalties to be paid in cases of abduction or elopement.

[36] Kelly (1988: 70–71) discusses marriage beginning with elopement or abduction. See also (*ibid.*: 136) for a discussion of marriage begun by rape.

[37] See Power (1936: 88) on the differing status of children begotten within a month of abduction and those begotten later.

grows scarce, an ominous intimation of failing kingship on the part of Alba's unnamed ruler, given associations between a land's abundance and its ruler's effective sovereignty throughout Irish literary tradition.[38] Without legitimate wild prey, Deirdre and her *fían* begin to kill livestock and the men of Alba rise up against them (*LMU* 64). Seeking the king's protection, the sons of Uisliu enter his service as fighting men and initially peace is restored. Once the brothers have established themselves as successful mercenaries, with dwellings arranged on the royal green so as to conceal Deirdre from view, their situation seems stable. All goes well until the king's prowling steward happens to glimpse her, returning to his master with news of a woman 'worthy of the king of the Western World' (*LMU* 64), and her beauty proves too great a temptation for the king. Sending the brothers into harm's way on the battlefield, as King David did with Uriah the Hittite, fails to render Deirdre a marriageable widow.[39] After learning that the impatient king is prepared to kill the brothers outright, Deirdre warns Noísiu and they flee to an unnamed, symbolically liminal, island between Ireland and Scotland (*LMU* 65).

At this point the warriors of Ulster intervene. They attempt to repair relations between the sons of Uisliu and the king, blaming Deirdre and counseling Conchobor to bring the exiles back into Ulster society: 'It were better to be lenient with them and to feed them and not to slay them and for them to come to land than for them to fall at the hands of their foes' (*LMU* 65). Will Conchobor display greater integrity and wisdom than the King of Alba in a situation that challenged even King David? Can he resolve the breach with Noísiu and his brothers, finding a way to balance his personal loss and issues of honour with the well-being of Ulster, to bring them in from the wild to become part of productive settled society?[40]

At first, the answer seems to be yes. Conchobor immediately accepts his warriors' counsel and arranges legal guarantees for the exiles' safety:

[38] See, for example, McManus 2006.

[39] See Buttimer (1994: 39, n. 120) on the parallel with King David (2 Sam. 11) and references to various perspectives on questions of deliberate scriptural analogy.

[40] For the complex role of the Irish king in establishing and maintaining social order, as well as the power attributed to the king's justice (*fír*), as presented in Irish legal material, wisdom literature, and narratives, see Kelly (1988: 17–26). Jaski (2000) also discusses the role of the king in society, especially chapters 1 "King and People" (*ibid.*: 37–56) and 2 "Sacral Kingship" (*ibid.*: 57–88). See also McManus 2006.

'Let them come...and let sureties go for them' (*LMU* 65). Conchobor, however, proves as treacherous as the king of Alba, and more lethal, arranging the murder of the sons of Uisliu by Eogan mac Durthacht, an old rival (by some accounts also his brother-in-law) now seeking peace, on the royal green of Emain itself.[41] He also plots first to isolate the returning exiles, separating them from the guarantors who have pledged to ensure their safety, among them his own son Cormac and Fergus mac Roich (*LMU* 65). When the Ulster warriors who had undertaken to protect the exiles learn that their suretyship has been broken, three hundred Ulstermen fall in the immediately ensuing conflict, Emain is burned by Fergus, and three thousand Ulstermen, led by Conchobor's son Cormac, head for Connacht (*LMU* 65–66). Eventually they will return in the company of the armies of Queen Medb seeking Ulster's emblematic bull, the Donn of Cúailnge.

Among the fundamental social issues raised by the case of Deirdre and Noísiu is the question of available 'space' for young people making their transitions into adult society. Do young women enter timely marriages – and with partners of an appropriate age? Do young male 'wolves' gain land and marry, or is their way blocked by competition from their elders? As guarantor of social order, the king – by his truth, *fir* – is responsible for maintaining a society in which the rising generation can succeed.[42] He must also frame his actions within the context of things foretold, whether in the form of prophecy or traditional royal *gessa*. From the moment of her birth, each stage of Deirdre's life has required Conchobor to make decisions that define his kingship. His betrayal of the sons of Uisliu and their sureties is the final choice that

[41] Buttimer (1994: 25 especially n. 84) discusses the relationship between Eogan and Conchobor, indicating 'it appears that Conchobor and Eogan were brothers-in-law, the former's wife being Mugain Attencháithech, daughter of Eochu Feidlech, while Eogan was wed to Mugain's sister Findige according to one tradition.' This relationship is not mentioned in *LMU*.

[42] On royal hospitality, see Kelly (1988: 29, also 139), where the king must not refuse hospitality lest he lose his honour price. On royal forbearance, see Ó Cathasaigh 1983. In general, the king is like any lord in regard to what threatens his honour, see Kelly, F. 1988: 25 where the point is made in reference to hospitality and *ibid.*: 140–141 in relation to violation of protection and the concept of a protected area around a residence. Jaski (2000 44) discusses general consequences of an individual's failure in matters of protection and in regard to inhospitality, applying to kings as well as to other free members of society

brings about the devastation of Ulster prophesied by Cathbad. By his treachery toward the sons of Uisliu, his near kinsmen, who returned to Emain under guarantees stipulated by the king himself, Conchobor creates a host of exiled fighters engaged in perpetual warfare with their own people so that 'To the end of sixteen years, neither weeping nor trembling ceased…' (*LMU* 66) as the result of their depredations.[43] Given that royal hospitality, strategic forbearance, respect for negotiated contracts of protection, and the sanctuary of a king's green are all identified as marks of legitimate sovereignty, Conchobor has struck deeply at the foundations of his own kingship, with proportionately disastrous consequences for the well-being of Ulster.

Widowhood and Keening/Remarriage:

Deirdre remains with Conchobor for a year, constantly lamenting Noísiu and his brothers in verses that are a ritual expression of her grief. During that time, 'she did not smile a laughing smile, and she did not partake of her sufficiency of food or sleep, and she did not raise her head above her knee' (*LMU* 66). Whenever Conchobor himself seeks to mollify her, she repeats a verse lament for Noísiu and dismisses Conchobor's attentions: 'Yes, indeed, as long as I may abide, / My love for you will not be of very great account' (*LMU* 68).

Deirdre's poems (*LMU* 66–69) express her grief for Noísiu using the themes of the traditional keen or lament, identified by Bourke 1988, as including 'the dead man's beauty, generosity, bravery, noble ancestry, and skill as a hunter and lover' in addition to praise for 'his home place in traditional formulas describing its natural beauty and fertility.'[44]

[43] Ó Cathasaigh (1986: 157) comments on the destructive possibilities of the avuncular relationship displayed in the Ulster cycle, specifically as regards Noísiu and Conchobor, alongside positive illustrations such as Conchobor's relationship with Cú Chulainn.

[44] The traditional elements of the lament are outlined by Bourke (1993: 160–183, specifically 168). In her seminal work (as Angela Partridge) (1980: 25–37), she describes the lamenter as occupying a liminal space in relation to society, much like those driven mad by battle. On the lament more generally, see Bourke 1988: 287–291. She makes specific reference to laments 'addressed to dead men by close women relatives. They praised the dead man's beauty, generosity, bravery, and aristocratic lineage, his home, his clothing, and his horse. They also cursed his enemies or the inanimate objects thought to be responsible for his death, and articulated various

Bourke emphasises the deliberately disheveled and liminal character of the keening woman in relation to social norms:

> 'the lamenter occupies a marginal position between the worlds of the living and the dead: on the one hand she cuts herself off from the stable community by her behavior, gaining in the process a licence to speak vehemently and even violently; on the other hand, although most of the lament is an address to the corpse, she speaks not to the dead but to the living, and to the recently dead person as a member of the community of those living". (Bourke 1988: 289)

As a social act, such laments transcend personal emotion and play a cathartic role in addressing communal loss. Deirdre's poems of praise and grief, however, express more than the usual multi-dimensional functions of keening. Her verses are also a form of satire, deliberately and publicly repeated each time Conchobor seeks to distract her, her detailed praise of Noísiu pointing directly and repeatedly to the king's inadequacy. Unlike the rightful rulers identified as such in tales that reveal their ability to transform women associated with sovereignty from grief-stricken madness or advanced age into young and beautiful women ready to take their place as queens, Conchobor cannot transform Deirdre.[45] He may control her body, but he cannot force Deirdre to regard him as a legitimate spouse.

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kinds of social tension, such as that between neighbours and between in-laws' (*ibid.*: 288).

[45] Comparison has been drawn to the situation of the widowed queen Órnait, reproached by her new husband, King Guaire, for her continuing grief. Guaire makes explicit that Órnait's unceasing sorrow is ultimately a reflection upon him. Mac Cana (1955–1959: 363 n. 3) cites *Sanas Cormaic* and translates 'It is long since you have laughed, while we are shamed before men. I see it on the tips of your eyelashes, painful is the loss which you lament.' Tymoczko (1985–1986: 157) points to examples of stories 'moulded by Sovereignty patterns' that also present lamenting female figures, including the figures of Gormlaith, Mis, Medb Lethderg, Mór Muman, and Órnait. In the case of Órnait, she notes 'Órnait's husband objects because she does not laugh and hence he is shamed; here we have virtually the same situation as in *LMU*.'
Classic discussions of female Sovereignty figures include Ó Máille (1928) and Mac Cana (1955–1959). Mac Cana explores the transformations of queenly figures from age or madness to youth and sanity through sexual relations with men who, through that transformation, show themselves to be rightful rulers.

Remaining with Conchobor only to lament Noísiu, Deirdre states that her life is nearly over: 'Do not break today my heart, soon I shall reach my early grave' (*LMU* 69). In fact, her life will end precisely a year and a day after Noísiu's death. Such an extended period of formal mourning also appears in *Agallam na Senórach*, when the mother of a brilliant young *fénnid* killed by envious ill-wishing laments him for a year and a day, and then dies herself on his gravemound.[46]

Death:

The year ended, after ascertaining that Eogan mac Durthacht is the man Deirdre hates most after himself, Conchobor announces that Deirdre will spend the following year with Eogan (*LMU* 69). The day after he has passed her over to Eogan, the three of them together in a chariot, Conchobor jokes, 'It is the eye of a sheep you make between me and Eogan' (*LMU* 69). Thinking he categorises her – a ewe between two rams, a woman under his control who is sexually available to himself and Eogan – Conchobor unwittingly reveals his own decline. No longer the royal bull of the province, he is now a mere ram, lacking the drive to compete for his mate and yielding her voluntarily to a lesser rival.[47] Conchobor has in effect satirised himself. Within the narrative, only Deirdre herself can appreciate the full irony of Conchobor's words, but the tale's audience, aware of her earlier exchange with Noísiu, shares her perspective.

When Noísiu referred to Deirdre as a heifer, her reply targeted Conchobor's shortcomings: 'Heifers are bound to be big where there are no bulls' (Kelly, F. 1998: 63). When Conchobor identifies her as a ewe between two rams, the earlier use of animal imagery leads the reader to anticipate a verbal response from Deirdre paralleling her

[46] Dooley & Roe 2008: 164. The young man, Fer Óc, is 'struck down by a grievous illness caused by the baleful eyes of the company and the envy of the great host… His mother spent a year in this place after the death of her son, and came, each day, to visit his grave. She grieved all that year and died herself one day as a result.' The significance of a year of mourning is also discussed by McManus (2006: note 89), who indicates that 'some elegies were composed on the first anniversary of the chieftain's death.' He provides additional references including Simms, 'The Poet as Chieftain's Widow: Bardic Elegies,' in: Ó Corráin *et al*. 1989: 401).

[47] See Tymoczko (1985–1986: 153) for comments on the relative value of bulls and rams in this context. Kelly outlines cattle prices and values (1998: 57–66) and sheep values (*ibid*.: 75–77).

exchange with Noísiu. Instead, she says nothing. Her silence could be regarded as marking defeat in the Irish world of verbal contests where winning means having the last word.[48] Within the context of the narrative, however, Deirdre has no need to address Conchobor's diminished status. His own words and actions both recall and confirm Deirdre's earlier implied judgment. The self-proclaimed ram has demonstrated conclusively that he is no bull.

Although the tale largely allows the characters' actions to speak for themselves, the narrator's voice enters here to suggest a motive for Deirdre's subsequent suicide, a motive not otherwise addressed in the tale: 'She had promised that she would not see her two companions on earth on the same occasion' (*LMU* 69). The comment, perhaps an incorporated gloss, underscores Deirdre's determination to shape her own life.

Keeping her word, Deirdre chooses the moment and manner of her death, having completed a year and a day of mourning for Noísiu and his brothers. Her answer to Conchobor's gibe is direct and nonverbal: she leaps from the chariot and dies striking her head against a rock (*LMU* 69). Her action proclaims without words that her eye is **not** the eye of a sheep as he alleged. Her eye is rather that of a wolf, a predator, a *fénnid*, and her final 'wolfish' act is impossible to rebut.[49] Where once Deirdre abducted herself as heifer along with the young bull and *fénnid* warrior Noísiu to live as 'wolves' in the wild, in ending her life she steals herself again, as ewe (and unwilling consort) from between two ineffectual rams. A

[48] A classic verbal contest, with the loser reduced to silence that signifies defeat, involves the poet Aithirne and a mysterious stranger, who reduces Aithirne to speechlessness by reciting his long name for which Aithirne can find no rhyme, then who walks off with a pig and a pot of mead that Aithirne had planned to consume alone (Robinson 1912: 116–117). Dooley (1982: 155–159) explores Deirdre's silence from a different perspective, emphasising her secluded fosterage and acquisition of language apart from society, noting that the narrative ends with her loss of language. See also the analysis by Johnston 2011.

[49] For reference to 'wolfishness' in reference to acts of exceptional savagery (for example, Judas' betrayal of Christ, seen as an example of kinslaying in regard to Christ's maternal kin), see Ó Cathasaigh 1986: 132–133. Kelly (1988: 127) discusses the legal and social problem of kinslaying, which 'could not be avenged by other members of the kin, as they would themselves be guilty of *fingal* if they put the killer to death.' For reference to legal commentary in which the suicide is classed as kinslayer, see *ibid.*: 127 n. 17.

widow who has spent her final year refusing all comfort in order to keen for her husband, Deirdre ends her life figuratively as a wolf, devoted to her mate.

Her death recalls the wider Irish literary context of traditions of women of sovereignty, divine or human, who choose and thereby legitimate rightful kings – or as here, find none worth choosing. Dismissing both Conchobor and Eogan from her consideration, she remains to the end a woman fit to be consort of the king of the Western World. Throughout the narrative, Deirdre's actions have spoken as loudly as her words, her suicide proclaiming beyond the possibility of argument that there is no king for her to choose here, no bull of the province. In the interlaced, allusive, and paradoxical imagery that establishes her multivalent identity, Deirdre remains captive and queen, prey and predator, satirist and *fénnid*, raven and wolf.

Preliminary thoughts on Cú Chulainn's physiology as presented in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*

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1. Introduction

Cú Chulainn is often referred to as the boy-hero of Ulster. Fergus mac Róich points it out to Aillil and Medb during the *Formolta Con Culainn*:

> *Inna chóiced bliadain luid dia cluchiu cosin macraid do Emain Machi. Issin tṡessed bliadain luid do ḟoglaim gaiscid 7 chless la Scáthaig. Isin tṡechtmad bliadain gabais gaisced. Isin tṡechtmad bliadain déc a áes ind inbaid sea.*
>
> 'In his fifth year he went to the boys in Emain Macha to play. In his sixth year he went to learn feats of arms with Scáthach. In his seventh year he took up arms. At the present time he is seventeen years old.' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 376-80, p. 135)

Yet what is very rarely asked is how this youth affects the character of Cú Chulainn. Are contemporary scientific views of childhood reflected in the way in which the hero is presented? This short note is a prelude to the further work that is needed to fully integrate a reading of Cú Chulainn's physiological youth with his characterisation in the *Táin* and other texts. Yet, even this brief outline of the ways contemporary physiology can aid our understanding of the character is a fruitful approach and one that points to other lines of investigation. This particular study takes great inspiration from the work of Mary Dzon and her approach to the Christ Child as a physiological child (Dzon 2011).

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 201–211.

I will argue here that taking into account the childhood of Cú Chulainn affects our reading of his depiction and actions during the *Táin*. He is neither an entirely noble character, nor is he utterly reprehensible, but rather his childlike nature is one that is understood as having inherently positive and negative aspects. He is the noble defender of Ulster, miraculous in his fighting abilities, but he is also a boy of seventeen, or even younger in the *macgnímrada*, who is subject to the weaknesses of this time of life. I will examine three main aspects of children's physiology as they appear in the character of Cú Chulainn. The first is children's ability to live in the present, strongly moved by their current emotions, but with little regard for future planning or dwelling on the past. Secondly, I will address children's love of play, seeking out children the same age as them and engaging boisterously with them. Finally, I will discuss the hot and humid humoral composition of children and the constant physical changes they undergo as they become full-grown humans. I will then draw some conclusions on how this new appreciation of Cú Chulainn's physiology changes the way we view the character. These thoughts are merely the beginning of a discussion on how the physical body in flux, the body of the child, changes how Cú Chulainn's character is to be read and understood. To this end, any conclusions will be partial and a more thorough investigation of the reciprocal roles of character and physiology remains a desideratum.

Youth is everywhere in the *Táin*. Mostly this is Cú Chulainn's youth. He is only seventeen years old, according to Recension 1; in Recension 2 (*TBC II*) his age is not mentioned but Medb slights him as follows: *is áes ingini macdacht ármthir leis 7 ní géba fri feta in serrate óc amulchach atberthe* 'his age is reckoned as but that of a nubile girl nor will that youthful beardless sprite you speak of hold out against resolute men' (*TBC II*: ll. 785–6, p. 158). This theme of slighting the hero because of his age is one that runs throughout the tale. His beardlessness is commented upon again by Medb when Nad Crantail is boasting of his victory. It becomes a central feature of the encounter with Lóch. The older warrior will not deign to fight the beardless stripling so Cú Chulainn resorts to the subterfuge of smearing his face with berries to make it seem as if he had a beard. During the fight with Fer Diad, the age gap between the heroes is used to paint Cú Chulainn in a negative light. When Fer Diad is having the better of the encounter on the final day, he throws Cú Chulainn off his shield 'like a child [*mar mac becc*]' and, in order

to exhort his master to win, Lóeg criticises Cú Chulainn by saying: *rat chúr in cathmílid ḟail itt agid mar chúras ben baíd a mac* 'your opponent chastised you as a fond mother chastises her child' (*TBC II*: ll. 3304–5, p. 227). Childhood is seen as incompatible with the warrior ethos and is something that the hero has to continually overcome. This is the creative tension within which the unique character of Cú Chulainn is to be read.

Before continuing, I wish to make a point about the difficulties in aligning the depiction of Cú Chulainn with medieval scientific thought. For the medieval understanding of childhood and what that means physiologically I will, by necessity, be drawing on material that postdates the supposed date of composition of the *Táin*. Of course, the views on physiology emerging during the twelfth century do coincide with the earliest manuscripts that include versions of the *Táin*. The question to be asked, then, is if there is any validity in drawing out these parallels and comparisons. They clearly had no input into the artistic decisions made during the composition, but the physiology expressed by these later theorists can be found in some earlier texts. For example Hippocrates divides human growth into seven phases each controlled by different planets. The second and third phases, 4–14 and 15–22 years old, were under the control of Mercury and Venus respectively, which accounts for youth's changeable and passionate nature (Still 1931: 5–6). In Isidore's *Etymologiae*

> *Inde est quod convenit sibi infantum aetas et senum: senes enim per nimiam aetatem delirant; pueri per lasciviam et infantiam ignorant quid agant*. (Lindsay 1911: XI.2.28)
>
> 'This is the reason why infancy and old age resemble one another: old people dote because they are too old, while children have no insight into their actions due to playfulness and childishness.'
>
> (Barney *et al* 2006: 243).

However, I would suggest that by looking at the character of Cú Chulainn through this later lens we can access twelfth- and thirteenth-century ways of reading the text and its central character. Such an analysis is important for understanding the context of the later recensions of the text. Once more, I hope the preliminary nature of this discussion will prompt further investigation.

The first aspect of childhood that I wish to comment on is how children are thought to live in the present. This conception of children's

mentality is something that religious writers have used both positively and negatively. On the one hand, children live without care – they are masters at 'mindfulness' existing solely in the present, not remembering their past and not thinking about the future. In the words of Hugh of St Cher, *item sine sollicitudine sunt* 'again they are without anxiety' (Pezzana 1732: 240). This present-mindedness can be interpreted as preventing children from holding grudges. But on the other hand, they have no thought for the future – they cannot plan. The thirteenth-century theologian Bartholomaeus Anglicus says of children, in the fourteenth-century translation of his work:

> 'they leade their liues without tought & care, and set their courages onelye on mirth and lyking.'
>
> 'they lead their life without care and business and give value only to mirth and liking.' (Seymour 1975: I: 301)

While living in the present can allow children to live without care, this present-mindedness can also have its downsides. They live in the moment and as such are prey to the whims of that moment. This lack of rootedness can lead to emotional instability, again in the words of Bartholomaeus: 'Sodainly they laugh, and sodainly they wéepe' 'Suddenly they laugh, suddenly they weep' (Seymour 1975: I: 301). Not only are they emotionally unstable, but the emotions they do display are often tinged with anger. This is partly due to the humoral composition of children as hotter than adults – and therefore prone to anger – and partly due to this heightened experience of their emotions in the present.

Cú Chulainn displays both the positive and negative aspects of this present-mindedness. The hero displays anger throughout the tale, exemplifying the destructive fury that forms a motif in the text. This is seen in the *Táin* when he rages at being unfairly treated by Aillil and Medb, when he kills poets and satirists, and during his warp-spasm. However, Cú Chulainn is also quick to weep. We can see this after the fight with Lóch when he is 'seized by a great depression (…) and a great depression and weariness took possession of Cú Chulainn' (*Ocus gebis athrechus mór Coin Culaind* (…) *Ocus ro gab-sum merten ⁊ athscís forru*; *TBC II*: ll. 2912–5, p. 194). Of course, this sadness does not come upon him on a whim. The poem in which his depression is described recalls all of his privations on the cattle-raid and the lament after killing a warrior with the *gáe bulga* foreshadows the 'nadir of grief' that is the combat with Fer

Diad (Edel 2015: 101, 118–119). Yet the abruptness of the change, the way in which his emotions overpower him quickly, can be linked to his youth.

The child's only concern for the present moment and a desire for play can be seen in Cú Chulainn's interaction with Nad Crantail. Nad Crantail comes to fight Cú Chulainn with sharpened javelins. Our hero ignores the attacks and uses the javelins as stepping stones to pursue a flock of birds. In Recension 1, he is engaged in fowling when Nad Crantail appears, whereas in Recension 2 a flock of birds appears during the casting of the spits and Cú Chulainn goes off after them. This is mistaken, in both texts, for him fleeing. I would suggest that this could be viewed as a childish distraction, either by the task in hand or the sudden appearance of new stimuli. The question then becomes, is this heroic *sang froid* or childish present-mindedness? A similar process can be seen in the *macgnímrada*. When Cú Chulainn is dangerously journeying alone, either to Emain or to the house of Culann, he is unconcerned by the journey and more interested in playing with his stick and ball.

What is important to the character is fun in the moment, regardless of the peril that may lurk around the next corner. In this way present-mindedness is firmly connected to children's love of play. The play that children enjoy is usually described as quite boisterous. For example, Bede's Life of Cuthbert describes the young saint as loving the physical exertions of play and excelling all his friends:

> *Siue enim saltu, siue cursu, siue luctatu, seu quolibet alio membrorum sinuamine se exercerent, ille omnes aequeuos, et nonnullos etiam maiores a se gloriabatur esse superatos.*
>
> 'Whether they were jumping or running or wrestling or exercising their limbs in any other way, he used to boast that he had beaten all who were his equals in age and even some who were older.'
>
> (Colgrave 1985: 156–157).

The physiologist Bernard de Gordon described the age between six and fourteen as the *aetas concussionis*, the age of restless activity as *in hac aetate incipient currere, saltare, et se ad invicem percutere* 'in this age they begin to run, to leap and to run into each other' (Gordon 1542: 386). Not only do they love to play with each other, there is a trope by which youths seek out those of the same age as them and shun the company of older people. Hugh of St Cher has commented on children's specific

affection for one another while commenting on Luke 9:47. He states that 'children love each other' and 'those with whom they are accustomed to play' (*Pueri hos amant, cum quibus ludere consueverunt*; Pezzana 1732: VI 240). For Cú Chulainn we can see this desire to be with those his own age in the very first of the boyhood deeds. His desire to set out to Emain and become part of the Ulster warriors is motivated by tales of those youths in the *macrad* and his desire to play with them:

> *Ocus adféta don mac sin scéla na maccáem 7 na maccraide i nEmain, 7 rádis in mac bec ria máthair ar co ndigsed dá chluchi do chluichemaig na Emna.*
>
> 'The stories about the youths and boys in Emain were told to that lad, and the little lad asked his mother if he might go and play to the playing-field at Emain.' (*TBC II*: ll. 748–751, p. 158)

Although the legal aspects of his interaction with the children and Conchobur have been emphasised, these legal wranglings take place against a background of a shared game. In Recension 2, Cú Chulainn tries to join the play by holding the ball between his legs and scoring a goal. In Recension 1 he complains to Conchobur

> *Doroacht do chluchiu óm thaig, óm máthair 7 óm athair, 7 ní maith ro mbátar frim.*
>
> 'I came to play with them from my home, from my father and mother, and they were not kind to me.' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 440–2, p. 137)

This attachment can be seen beyond the *macgnímrada*. That same band of youths with whom he fought and played in the *macgnímrada* come to fight in the *Táin* and fall in battle. The death of the youths so moves Cú Chulainn that it instigates the great slaughter of the scythed chariot. This is noted as one of the three great slaughters in which men and horses and hounds are killed. At the beginning of the episode, Cú Chulainn calls upon the mysterious warrior who has been tending his wounds to come with him to 'avenge the youths on the hosts' (*ar co ndíglom 'malle in maccraid forsna slúagaib*; *TBC II*: l. 1196, p. 199). Before the slaughter truly begins, the famous scythed chariot is used to create a rampart to make sure that none of the men of Ireland can escape Cú Chulainn's righteous fury:

> *Is airi focheird in circul ṁBodba sin mórthimchell chethri n-ollchóiced*

> *ṅHérend ammaig anechtair arná teichtis úad 7 arná scaíltís immi co tórsed forro re tenta fritharggain na maccraide forro.*
>
> 'The reason why he made this warlike encircling of the four great provinces of Ireland was that they might not flee from him and that they might not disperse around him until he took revenge on them by thus pressing them for the wrong done to the youths.'
>
> (*TBC II*: ll. 2310–3, p. 203)

This great, violent anger is something that we have seen associated with children and it was prompted by the death of his contemporaries, those with whom he loved to play.

However, it would be hard to comment on the contemporaries of Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* without mentioning the foster brothers with whom he is forced to fight. This is not the place to fully address these complicated interactions, for more see O'Donnell 2020. However, there are several features of youth that are common to these interactions. The foster brothers are around the same age. The prospect of facing Fer Báeth in combat makes Cú Chulainn uneasy because *dá chomaís sind, dá chomṡolam, dá chutrummae* 'we two are of equal age, of equal swiftness and of equal weight' (*TBC Rec. 1*: l. 1766, p. 174). The close bond of fosterage is so fitting because of their shared age. While Cú Chulainn is the same age as Fer Báeth, he is depicted as slightly younger than Fer Diad. Fer Diad uses references to Cú Chulainn's inferior age during their poetic discussions in order to lessen his opponent's status. Cú Chulainn is a *gilla co ngicil* (…) *cen gaisced cen gus* 'nervous lad (…) without valour or force' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 3070–2, p. 207). There is another illuminating discussion that highlights Cú Chulainn's youth, but also some of the problems we encounter in using the body of the child as the sole manner to interpret his character. Recalling their training in Alba, Fer Diad says

> '(...) *is tussu ba forbfer frithálma dam-sa .i. ra armad mo ślega 7 ra déiged mo lepaid.' 'Is fír ám sain ale,' bar Cú Chulaind. 'Ar óice 7 ar oítidchi donín-sea duit-siu, & ní hí sin tuarascbáil bá tú-sa indiu itir, acht ní ḟil barsin bith láech nach diṅgéb-sa indiu.'*
>
> '(...) 'you were to me a serving-man who used to prepare my spears and dress my couch.' 'That is true indeed,' said Cú Chulainn, 'because of my youth and lack of age I used to act thus for you. But that is not

> how I am today indeed for there is not in the world a warrior whom I shall not drive off.'' (*TBC II*: ll. 2939–43, p. 219)

This marks out the way Cú Chulainn is not wholly a child in the *Táin*. He can recall his past with Fer Diad and the other foster brothers, he is not solely in the present and although he has a love for his contemporaries, he will still kill them to protect the province. Cú Chulainn's character starts to straddle typical youthful behaviour and the proper behaviour of a man.

The third and final characteristic associated with children that I wish to discuss is their humoral composition. It was widely thought that the humours of children were hotter and moister than adults in order to help them grow, a characterisation of the humour which goes back to Galen. For example, William of Conches, a twelfth-century philosopher, explains children's love of food as motivated by their humoral composition:

> *Cum enim illa aetas calida sit et humida tantum, statim cibum digerit et appetit: unde frequenti influxione indiget et effluxione* (PL: 90.1177)
>
> 'Since that age is hot and moist, [a child] immediately digests and desires food. Whence frequent intake and discharge are necessary.'
>
> (Maurach 1974: 113)

These humoral attributes also associate youth with blood, the hot and wet humour, and spring, the hot and wet season – the season of growth. This association can be found in a Salernitan verse that equates the four ages, elements, humours and seasons, linking blood, youth, and spring (Burrow 1986: 19) and this association has been visually represented in the thirteenth-century frescoes in the cathedral of Anagni in Rome (Jouanna 2010: 2). As well as addressing how Cú Chulainn's humours as described, I will address the theme of growth and 'becoming'. Both are important for how medieval people thought of the child, as Isidore says

> *Adolescens dictus, eo quod sit ad gignendum adultus, sive a crescere et augeri*
>
> 'An adolescent (*adolescens*) is so called because he is 'old enough' (*adultus*, past participle of *adolescere*) to procreate, or by derivation from 'growing' (*crescere*) and 'being strengthened' (*augere*).'
>
> (Barney *et al* 2006: 242)

The inclusion of the *macgnímrada* towards the beginning of the *Táin* allows the audience to view the progress of Cú Chulainn's young life. They see him set off for Emain, receive his arms, and use his arms to deadly effect during the main action of the *Táin* itself. Growth is made central to the structure of the narrative. Set against this more gradual growth, Cú Chulainn exhibits monstrous growth. There have been many interpretations of the *ríastrad*, for example by Erni (2013), Künzler (2016) and O'Connor (2016a), but I think it can also encode some of the concerns surrounding youth and growth. When Cú Chulainn is in his battle fury, he is characterised by producing excessive heat, needing three vats of cold water to cool his ardour. Excessive heat is a humoral marker of childhood. This is needed for them to grow. Growth is central to the *ríastrad*. In the encounter with Fer Diad,

> (…) *goros lín att 7 infithsi mar anáil i llés co nderna thúaig n-úathmair n-acbéil n-ildathaig n-ingantaig de, gomba métithir ra fomóir ná ra fer mara* (…)
>
> '(…) he swelled and grew as a bladder does when inflated and became a fearsome, terrible, many-coloured, strange arch and the valiant hero towered high above Fer Diad, as big as a *fomóir* or a pirate (…).'
>
> (*TBC II*: ll. 3317–9, p. 228)

The internal growth can get so excessive that blood bursts out through his skull in the distortion of *Breslech Maige Muirthemne*:

> (…) *airdithir remithir tailcithir tressithir sithithir seólchrand prímluṅgi móre in bunne díriuch dondḟola atracht a fírchléithe a chendmullaig*
>
> '(…) as high, as thick, as strong, as powerful and as long as the mast of a great ship was the straight stream of dark blood which rose up from the very top of his head.' (*TBC II*: ll. 2290–2, p. 202)

Blood is needed for growth and is particularly associated with youth.

However, physicians are often warning against the dangers of distorted growth. Soranus, in his *Gynaecology* (II 14 [83]) suggests that children should be swaddled to bring out their natural shape:

> ὅθεν δεῖ διαπλάσσειν μὲν ὡς ἔχει ἕκαστον φυσικοῦ σχήματος <καί>, εἴ τι παρὰ τὸν τῆς ἀποκυήσεως χρόνον διέστραπται, τοῦτο ῥυθμίζειν καὶ εἰς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν μετάγειν σχῆμα. (Ilberg 1927: 61)

> 'one must mould every part according to its natural shape and if something has become twisted during the time of delivery, one must correct it and bring it into its natural shape.' (Temkin 1956: 84)

This need for swaddling to produce the correctly proportioned child is something that Gerald of Wales brings up when criticising the Irish for not swaddling their children:

> *Non in cunabulis aptantur: non fasciis alligantur: non frequentibus in balneis tenera membra vel foventur, vel artis juvamine componuntur.*
> (Dimock 1867: 150)

> 'They [the children] are not put in cradles, or swathed; nor are their tender limbs helped by frequent baths or formed by any useful art.'
> (O'Meara 1951: 100)

This excessive, unregulated, unnatural growth is shown by Cú Chulainn in the *ríastrad*. It is dangerous, as it moves him from the category of human to that of monster; the child does not grow into a man, but into something both more and less than a man. This is why it is important that he shows his fully human, beautiful form to the men of Ireland, after the transformation of *Breslech Maige Muirthemne*. As we have seen in Cú Chulainn's interaction with Fer Diad, during the *Táin* he stands on the cusp. He has left behind the young childhood of the *macgnímrada* and the training in Alba, but he has not fully entered the ranks of full-grown adult males. His final form still eludes him and as such, he is still in danger of growing into something monstrous, as well as something beautiful. It may be interesting to note that the *ríastrad* takes place in the *macgnímrada* and then at times associated with his youth: avenging the boy-troop and fighting his foster brothers.

The problem with delineating stages of human growth and development comes at the borders of each stage, something reflected in the proliferation of different versions of the seven-ages-of-man trope throughout the Middle Ages. Is it right that we talk about the child's body in the *Táin*, or should we be concerned with the adolescent's? At seventeen years old, according to Recension 1, Cú Chulainn is just about to leave youth behind. It is this important, interstitial moment that colours the way in which he should be read. He is not the fully fledged hero. He is still prone to the weaknesses of childhood: distracted by birds, liable to emotional outbursts, disdainful of elders and overly attached to those

his own age, and capable of terrifying growth spurts. Yet he is no longer the boy he once was. He can recall his past, he can plan for the future and he can function as an adult member of society. In this way, when we consider the child's body as it appears in the *Táin*, we gain a new appreciation of the character of Cú Chulainn and a new way to interpret his actions, neither wholly negative or positive, but understandable for his time of life.

Tracing Cú Chulainn's characterisation in the Ulster Cycle

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Cú Chulainn's character is arguably the most developed in the Ulster Cycle of tales and largely overshadows all others. He is somewhat unusual in that he appears, fairly prominently, in a substantial number of texts composed at various times roughly across a six hundred-year period. The earliest body of tales in which he is given pre-eminence date to the eighth century, although material embodied in some of them, for example, the short *Verba Scáthaige*, may be older still (Henry 1990: 196). More belong to the next two centuries, a lesser amount to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and a very small number date to as late as the Early Modern Irish period.[1] Unsurprisingly, we find that his representation evolves and develops in the context of a changing societal, religious, and political environment, thus maintaining his relevance and appeal across such an extended timespan. All of this creates a

[1] Here we might include texts like *Fled Bricrenn*, *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*, also perhaps *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn* and *Aided Óenfir Aífe* as ninth century developments (Henderson 1899: 2–129; Hollo 2005; Meyer 1910: 48–56; Meyer 1904: 113–121). *Aided Derbforgaill*, *Táin Bó Regamna*, and perhaps *Echtrae Nerai*, can be assigned to the tenth century (Marstrander 1911: 201–218; Ingridsdotter 2009: 67, 82–87; Corthals 1987: 15; Ó Duilearga 1940: 522). Later again, we find *Aided Guill Meic Carbada ocus Aided Gairb Glinne Rige* and *Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn* with the recasting of earlier materials in tales, such as *Aided Con Culainn* and *Foghlaim Con Culainn*, in the Early Modern Irish period (Stokes 1893b: 396–431; Hogan 1892: 2–107; van Hamel 1978: 69–133; Stokes 1908: 109–147). Cf. also Thurneysen (1921a: 666–670).

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 213–225.

relatively complex figure, countering, to a large degree, a concise, coherent and integrated appreciation of his characterisation.[2]

Cú Chulainn's interpretation as the supreme Ulster warrior is not in question here, but rather a closer examination of early sources to determine, if possible, themes and influences, and their impact, on his depiction over time. A survey of an early stratum of tales reveals a group which are quite specifically concerned with recounting core life-events. These include *Compert Con Culainn*, detailing his conception and birth, *Tochmarc Emire*, his marriage along with an adventure in a distant hostile realm, and *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne*, narrating his death, all of which can be dated to the eighth century.[3] His *macgnímrada* can, arguably, be located in the same era and we have further early evidence for *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the form of the seventh century prophetic piece *Verba Scáthaige*.[4] These underline his extraordinary youth and the defining moment in his adult martial career defending Ulster in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.

The fundamental parts in his heroic biography are in existence from an early stage, and these form the centrepieces of his representation in the pre-Norman period. In the modern sense, a 'biography' is taken to mean a written account of another person's life and is usually compiled by a single author. Within such a biography, there are often defining moments like birth, marriage, death, etc. While due allowance must be made when dealing with literary figures, early writers' perceptions of biographies, especially those pertaining to heroes or exceptional figures, are much less certain. Having said that, it is apparent that at least some milestones are shared with the ordinary mortal, although in the case of Cú Chulainn, for example, these are distinguished through the

[2] See Dooley (2006) and Edel (2015: 23–137) for an appreciation of Cú Chulainn's presence in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. See also my PhD thesis concerning the role and representation of Cú Chulainn in the pre-Norman period incorporating an evaluation of his heroic biography (Leenane 2014: 53–171). This paper arose from the latter research. See also Leenane (2018), published after this paper, for a further discussion of character creation in the Ulster Cycle.

[3] Unless stated otherwise, the following editions will be used: *Compert Con Culainn* (van Hamel 1978: 3–8), *Tochmarc Emire* (Meyer 1890: 442–53; van Hamel 1978: 20–68), *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* (Kimpton 2009) and Recension I of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*TBC* I).

[4] Miles (2011: 161) notes that *Verba Scáthaige* 'understands Cú Chulainn' as the principal hero of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.

impregnation of special themes and motifs, like the divine ingredient in his conception, which we will return to later (van Hamel 1978: 3–5, §§3–5). At least for Cú Chulainn, he can be convincingly classified as a warrior-hero, while doubts remain about the heroic status of other figures in the literature. However, this question is beyond the scope of this discussion. It has long been recognised that early Irish literature is replete with external influences, quite explicitly with respect to biblical material. Though the place of classical works is less certain, it is much better understood, particularly in the context of heroic sagas, in light of Miles' (2011) recent study.[5] The survival of gospel books demonstrates their centrality in early Irish monastic houses, while also intimating familiarity with narrative expositions of the life of Jesus.[6] In accepting the Bible as an intrinsic work in the libraries of the early Irish *literati*, it is reasonable to assume their acquaintance with the basic plot and story of the biographical pattern (Ní Mhaoileoin 2015: 22). From at least the second half of the seventh century, early Irish saints' lives, such as those of Brigit and Patrick, are recorded in a form that is heavily influenced by continental-style hagiography but is not impervious to secular themes, motifs and other elements including political or geographical bias (McCone 1990: 180). Understanding the complete literary experience of the scribes, including a less quantifiable contribution from an oral native tradition, is essential in any attempt to decipher perceptions of biography from a narrative perspective. It is also important to be mindful that any concept of *bios*, like it is today, was not static, but evolving. Due allowance must also be made for the orientation of texts, whether of a hagiographical, or of a more secular nature.

Like modern biographies, the unified text format similarly applies to the life of Jesus, and is thus different from the themed narrative approach adopted by the medieval Irish *literati* when capturing key life-events

[5] For a further discussion of the influence of classical works on medieval Irish literary traditions, see O'Connor (2014: 1–24, 165–195); Clarke (2006: 243–271; 2009: 238–251) and Ní Mhaonaigh (2015: 258–268) consider a possible classical context for aspects of Cú Chulainn's characterisation.

[6] From the late seventh century, gospel books, along with psalters, were the most important books of the Irish church. Early examples of the former include the Book of Mulling (TCD MS 60) and the Book of Dimma (TCD MS 59), with the Book of Kells (TCD MS 58) and the Book of Durrow (TCD MS 57) being among the most well-known. See O'Neill (2014) for an overview of early Irish manuscripts.

for at least some figures including Cú Chulainn. This possibly hints at the early existence of at least some 'tale-types', which are largely borne out in the medieval Irish tale lists (Mac Cana 1980: 41–63).[7] Though not conclusive, some evidence advocates this kind of arrangement with respect to other figures, for example, Conchobar's conception is similarly presented in the eighth-century anecdote *Compert Chonchobuir* (Hull 1934: 4–12).[8] *Comperta* 'conception tales' for other Ulster figures, such as Conall Cernach and Celtchar mac Uithechair, are also enumerated, but do not survive, apart, possibly, from the preservation of a form of *Compert Conaill Chernaig* in the late Middle Irish treatise *Cóir Anmann* (Mac Cana 1980: 53–54; Arbuthnot 2007: 69 & 141–142, §264). *Tochmarc Emire* may be one of the oldest attestations of the genre of *tochmarca* 'wooing tales' with mention of others, including *Tochmarc Étaíne*, *Tochmarc Ailbe* and *Tochmarc Lúaine*, with textual recordings for these surviving (Bergin & Best 1938: 142–193; Thurneysen 1921b: 251–282; Breatnach 1980: 1–31). *Aideda* 'death tales' are tabulated for a cast of Ulstermen and correlating tales exist for many, including Conchobar, Fergus, Lóegaire and Celtchar (Meyer 1906: 2–35). Although Cú Chulainn is assigned one, the earliest account of his demise occurs in an acephalous document identified as *In Brislech* (Kimpton 2009: 1). Toner (2000a: 88) notes that the tale lists were in 'a constant state of growth and change', so this is possibly accommodated under the revised title of *Aided Con Culainn*.

Despite a hiatus in the extant material, this perhaps points towards a thematic arrangement of tales as a template upon which biographies might have been based, perhaps as early as the eighth century in Cú Chulainn's case. This is not to say that evidence confirms a fixed or uniform strategy for compositions exposing life-events. A degree of variation is apparent in their formulation. For example, Cormac mac Airt's conception, birth, and ascension to the throne occur in *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormac*, and more complete biographies for Deirdre and Conaire Mór are expressed in *Longes mac nUislenn* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* respectively (Hull 1949; Knott 1963).[9] Regardless of the format, these record-

[7] See Toner (2000a) for a discussion of the tale lists.

[8] See Ó Cathasaigh (1994: 85–89) for a discussion of this tale.

[9] Ó Cathasaigh (1977: 111–117) places *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormac* in the eighth century and notes that the later account of his birth, *Geneamuin Chormaic*, extends to his death and burial. His edition of the former text is used here unless stated other-

ings affirm a strong interest in biographical events, alluding to this as a component of character and narrative development from at least the eighth century with interest continuing into the Middle Irish period.

Biographical patterning across literary traditions has invited considerable attention. One of the major problems posed by the heroic biography is one of methodology, and this is reflected in the number of formulas produced to capture this idea by scholars, such as von Hahn, Nutt, Rank, Raglan, and de Vries (McCone 1990: 184).[10] While there is considerable agreement across them, there are also differences with no definitive consensus on the edicts of the common biographical sequence, or on the interpretation of material of this kind. Central to these hypotheses is the widespread occurrence of similar themes and motifs at distinct life-points from conception to death, with the hero being required to navigate through some, or all, of these. To date, engagement with the heroic biographical pattern, in an Irish context, has been rather intermittent with considerable scope for further research around a possible biographical impetus for characterisation. Ó Cathasaigh (1977) chose de Vries' scheme in his seminal appreciation of Cormac mac Airt's life in a series of texts, largely because of its flexibility. More recently, Ní Mhaoileoin (2015) relies mainly on a hybrid of this, and Raglan's, to probe Fergus mac Róich's literary life.[11]

Although this methodological approach is not without its failings, emphasis here is placed on its value as an analytical tool for examining Cú Chulainn's portraiture in a series of intertwining sources, rather than confirming expression of these patterns. On the whole, de Vries' ten-point arrangement is concise, clear, and, with the inclusion of a num-

wise (Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 119–127). The language of Recension I of *Longes mac nUislenn* dates to the Old Irish period (Hull 1949: 29–32; Herbert 1992: 53). The extant Middle Irish compilation of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* derives from earlier sources. See O'Connor (2013: 18–50) for a discussion of the textual history of the latter.

[10] For an outline of these theoretical stances, see Taylor (1964: 114–129) and Ó Cathasaigh (1977: 1–8).

[11] An overview of Fergus mac Róich's biography is provided by Ó hUiginn (1993: 31–40). See McCone (1990: 179–202) and Ní Bhrolcháin (2009: 112–136) for considerations of some general manifestations of life-events in early Irish literature. Since the delivery of this paper, Pagé (2018) and Downey (2022) have provided invaluable discussions of heroic biographical material relating to Deirdriu and Níall Noígíallach respectively.

ber of variants, offers considerable flexibility (de Vries 1963: 210–226). Additionally, it does not require that each point be represented, nor does it insist that these are found in a single source. When dealing with a diverse corpus, a degree of adaptability is called for; however, this might also be viewed as a failing as it allows for quite a liberal application to varying heroic circumstances. Some, but not all, of its provisions are catered for in Cú Chulainn's case, while others can only be made to fit with special pleading. Though quite old, the principles of this theory help us to interpret evidence to form a core understanding of him.

Bearing this in mind, we will turn our attention to how aspects of de Vries' schema might be applied to Cú Chulainn's case.[12] The initial slots focus on the origin of the hero, drawing attention to this crucial time in Cú Chulainn's narrative persona. Divergent begetting tales are not anticipated here but this is what we find for Cú Chulainn in *Compert Con Culainn* (Version I) and *Feis Tige Becfholtaig* (Version II), indicating that stories about events are not entirely fixed and may evolve over time. The details of Cú Chulainn's conception match the first point quite well, with both accounts alluding to a divine segment in his make-up along with the motif of conception due to incest – both of which are variants for de Vries (van Hamel 1978: 3–6, §§1–6; Meyer 1905: 501–504). Lug mac Ethnenn and Súaldaim mac Róich, Fergus' brother, are presented as his god-like and earthly fathers respectively. Incidences of deviation can be of equal importance and this certainly holds true for Cú Chulainn's triple conception in Version I, which goes well beyond the 'heroic norm' by exploring all possible conceptual combinations. The hero's mixed origin and liminal status are highlighted in both accounts as defining attributes, and de Vries' model permits us to reach this conclusion.

While de Vries' second point appears to have limited application to Cú Chulainn, it nevertheless highlights the potential importance of the hero's birth as one deserving of closer investigation. The upshot of this viewpoint is that the hero is born in an unusual way, thus often complementing an atypical conception. Early Irish figures are often born at lim-

[12] The following four points from de Vries (1963: 210–226) are not readily applicable to Cú Chulainn's case and will not be addressed here: I The youth of the hero is threatened; V The hero often acquires invulnerability; VI One of the most heroic deeds is the hero's fight with a dragon or another monster; IX When the hero is banished in his youth he returns later and is victorious over his enemies. In some cases he has to leave the realm again which he has won with such difficulty.

inal settings including Brigit, Níall Noígíallach, Cormac mac Airt, Fíachu Muillethan and Conchobar mac Nessa. For example, Brigit's mother gives birth astride a doorway, Níall's on the green in front of Tara, Cormac's on the way to Connacht, Fíachu's on a stone in the middle of a river and Conchobar's beside a river (Connolly 1989: 15, §6; Stokes 1903: 190–192, §2; Hull 1952: 82–83; O'Daly 1975: 50–51, §§42–43; Meyer 1885: 174–181). A variation of this theme can be argued for in Cú Chulainn's case. The Ulstermen are drawn away from their royal epicentre at Emain Macha, southwards to what appears to be an otherworldly location, possibly Newgrange, for his first birth in Version I, and also in Version II (van Hamel 1978: 3–5, §§1–4; Meyer 1905: 501–502).

De Vries' fourth slot highlights the hero's early exposition of strength, courage and other skills (de Vries 1963: 214–215). A second variant allows for another extreme by noting that the development of the hero may be delayed. Opposing options allow for a liberal enough application, but have a much more limited use when trying to determine precise features. Arguably, it is the exceptional aspect that is reflected in the youths of divergent Irish figures, namely Cormac mac Airt, Brigit, Finn mac Cumaill, and indeed Cú Chulainn himself (Hull 1952: 82–85; Connolly 1989: 16–20 §§11–30; Nagy 1985: 211–218; *TBC* I, ll. 373–824). Medieval Irish *literati* appropriated narratives in line with the perceived status of a figure, be they, for example, king, saint or warrior. For Cormac, it is his ability to issue a true judgement that is underlined, for Brigit, her capacity to perform extraordinary miracles, for Finn and Cú Chulainn, their exceptional martial skills. Stories of their childhood act as precursors to later lives, establishing and promoting distinct virtues and de Vries' approach guides us to this pivotal phase. Cú Chulainn's budding martial prowess also serves as a unifying theme upon which his boyhood deeds are anchored.

The seventh point proposes that the hero wins a maiden after overcoming great dangers (de Vries 1963: 215–216). Again, this specification is very general and it can be asserted that Cú Chulainn's wooing of Emer and Finnchóem in *Tochmarc Emire* and *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait* respectively, can be equally made to fit this point.[13] Nonetheless, we are required to look beyond this to establish the centrality of either of these, or both, in terms of his overall portrayal. Emer's status

[13] Hollo's (2005) edition of *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait* is used here.

as Cú Chulainn's wife is entrenched from at least the eighth century, and maintained quite firmly throughout the pre-Norman period, in recordings such as *Tochmarc Emire*, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne*, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Fled Bricrenn*, *Aided Óenfir Aífe*, *Mesca Ulad* and *Serglige Con Culainn*, thus endorsing this as a crucial factor in his biography.[14] In contrast, his relationship with Finnchóem is limited to a single text, which is not embedded into the Ulster Cycle corpus in the way *Tochmarc Emire* is. Hollo (2005: 12–13) quite rightly suggests that the author of this late Old Irish tale, 'was familiar with the Emer-texts, yet decided to write a tale that is not consistent with the tradition that they represented'.[15] His wooing of Finnchóem is best understood as a later, and rather peripheral, addition to the Cú Chulainn story.

There are a few difficulties pertaining to de Vries' eighth point concerning the hero's expedition to the 'Underworld' (de Vries 1963: 216). Most importantly, there is a lack of clarity around the typical hallmarks of these trips and the nature of the 'Underworld', perhaps best referred to as the 'Otherworld' in Irish tradition. Bearing this in mind, and the fact that the concept of the Otherworld is fluid and not defined, a number of stories relating Cú Chulainn's outings to distant realms might agree with this motif, although the international heroic biographical framework only anticipates a single example. In this regard, a case can be made for each of Cú Chulainn's adventures in *Tochmarc Emire*, *Forfess Fer Fálgae*, *Serglige Con Culainn*, *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn*, *Aided Con Roí* and *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*.[16] Nevertheless, had a copy of *Echtrae Con Culainn* survived, this might shed a different light on these discussions.

Though not specified, it is reasonable to expect some kind of boost to his martial persona as a consequence of such an outing. His successes in combat are a feature of many of these, with the hero, for instance,

[14] *Serglige Con Culainn* also bears testimony to another tradition, Eithne Ingubai (*Ethne Inguba ben Chon Culaind*; Dillon 1953: 2, §2).

[15] For a fuller discussion of *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*, see Hollo (2005: 2–31).

[16] Unless stated otherwise, the following editions are used: *Forfess Fer Fálgae* (Meyer 1912a: 564–565), *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon 1953), *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn* (Meyer 1910: 48–56) and *Aided Con Roí* (Best 1905: 18–35; Thurneysen 1913: 189–234). See Leenane (2013: 97–105; 2014: 112–147) and Duignan (2011: 168–188) for detailed appraisals of Cú Chulainn's trips to distant realms.

overcoming Eochaid Glas in *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait* (Hollo 2005: 60, §§40–41), Aífe in *Tochmarc Emire* (Meyer 1890: 448–450) and similar victories are achieved in *Forfess Fer Fálgae* (Meyer 1912a: 564) and *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon 1953: 20–21, §§36). Like the early group of tales previously referred to, *Forfess Fer Fálgae* also dates to the eighth century. Here, he is enticed to an overseas setting, possibly the Isle of Man, where he is successful in battle. While it is possible to align this with de Vries' eighth point, to do so would be problematic and misleading. It is probable that this particular outing is inspired by similar examples in *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Connlae*, given that all three tales are likely to have occurred in the lost manuscript *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (Meyer 1895; McCone 2000). According to Carey (1982: 39–40), *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Connlae* are amongst our earliest examples for an overseas setting for the Otherworld. Given the presence of these in *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, it is likely that early interaction with these tales account for Cú Chulainn's outing in *Forfess Fer Fálgae*. Thus, it is more appropriate to interpret this, in the main, as another exposition of the voyage tale-type as opposed to a defining biographical moment.

Though de Vries' model would concede a consideration of Cú Chulainn's outing to the lands of Scáthach under the umbrella of the 'great dangers' that a hero is expected to overcome when wooing his maiden, a more distinct relevance is indicated. Whether Scáthach's home is perceived as a supernatural setting or a distant hostile realm, the implication remains the same for the hero. Ultimately, he proves himself worthy to receive further training in arms, including the acquisition of the deadly weapon, the *gáe bolga*, from Scáthach, resulting in a clear advancement in his martial capacity, underscoring another key moment in his warrior career (van Hamel 1978: 56, §78).[17]

De Vries' final point prioritises the hero's premature and, possibly, miraculous death (de Vries 1963: 216–217). The details of Cú Chulainn's death related in *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* align well with this, with a fitting send-off for the hero in the form of an early and dramatic demise. Revenge serves as the main catalyst for the story plot, with the

[17] The story of Cú Chulainn's training in feats evolves over time. The oldest account of the tale intimates that Cú Chulainn secures training upon overcoming Scáthach, although the specific feats taught are only detailed in the later reworked version of the tale (Meyer 1890: 448–449; van Hamel 1978: 56, §78).

hero finding himself outnumbered, and further weakened, through the employment of various tactics, including two lethal *geisi* by the three witch-figures, against him, and these might also be taken to constitute the possible miraculous component mentioned by de Vries (Kimpton 2009: 11–27, §§1–29).

It is proposed here that six of the ten points in de Vries' schema can be applied with varying degrees of success to Cú Chulainn's narrative existence. At the very least, the tenets of this approach promote the identification of distinct life-points from a series of intertwining texts. The presence of five of these in three eighth-century tales along with the sixth one in the roughly contemporaneous *macgnímrada* is significant. However, one of the greatest shortcomings of this method is its inability to cater for Cú Chulainn's depiction in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. This saga encapsulates the next natural phase in Cú Chulainn's story, after his wooing of Emer and exploits in a foreign region, marking the culmination in his adult martial career. It is the cornerstone upon which his persona is based and is paramount to any discussion of his biography. In view of the fact that this exemplar was not created exclusively for Cú Chulainn, it is expected that it will not fit his situation perfectly. The arrangement into a series of slots lends itself well to adaptation and thus one can be omitted or inserted without undermining the overall framework as a theoretical approach. Rather than shoehorning events into the framework, we must be aware of its limitations and be prepared to make modifications where necessary. Though not ideal, an additional slot can be devised to accommodate his experiences in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.

Nevertheless, this approach identifies an explicit interest in different events that equate to a thematic-based heroic biography from at least the eighth century. Although the level of integrated thought is impossible to gauge with certainty, these tales are built around an accepted view of Cú Chulainn as the great Ulster warrior. With the necessary adjustments and an enquiry beyond its basic elements, this framework enables us to decipher the crux of his presentation across these tales. While such texts, including *Compert Con Culainn*, are self-contained, they have as 'their *raison d'être* an intertextual relationship with other items' in the Ulster Cycle (Ó Cathasaigh 1994: 86–87). It is probable that medieval Irish writers were familiar with broader customs and anecdotes pertaining to different figures, like, for example, the conception and death accounts of an individual hero. Ó Cathasaigh (1994: 86–87) notes *Com-*

pert Chonchobuir's 'unspoken relationship' with its narrator, reader and presumably composer, given that Ness' son is identified only in the title and 'in order to get to the point of the tale, the reader must have some acquaintance with other stories concerning Conchobar'.

Similar patterns can be argued for in Cú Chulainn's situation; for instance, the widely-attested tradition of Emer as his wife across the Old and Middle Irish periods has already been observed. Although it may not always have been the case, all extant copies of his *macgnímrada* are found within *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, thus marrying together the exploits of the young hero and those of the adult warrior (*TBC* I, ll. 398–824; *TBC* II, ll. 638–1217; Melia 1974: 214).[18] Further similarities are attested in the tale of his early death and in the *Táin*, the most obvious of which is his role as his people's solitary defender in both stories. *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is central to, and anchors to some degree, our early group of tales, *Compert Con Culainn*, *Tochmarc Emire*, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* and the *macgnímrada*. The interconnectedness of *Compert Con Culainn* and *Tochmarc Emire* is intimated in a later source through their identification as *remscéla* to *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in *Do Ḟallsigud Tána Bó Cúalṅge* in *LL* (ll. 32878–909). And we might also add his *macgnímrada*, or at least his three main ones, as these are said to transpire, alternatively, within the corpus of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. In the later version of *Tochmarc Emire*, there is mention, with varying detail, of Cú Chulainn's unusual conception – birth outside Ulster, wooing of Emer, adventures in Scáthach's homeland, his martial exploits in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and his demise (van Hamel 1978: 21–65, §§6–90). The tying together of these stages reflects, at the very least, an effort to provide an integrated outline biography for him (Toner 1998: 88). It seems clear that authors had considerable knowledge of material beyond a single source with indications of a general acceptance of the crux of his character. A biography formulated around a series of themed narratives lends itself well to further additions, but does not dictate, however, that it was put together by a single author.

Early evidence indicates the deliberate fleshing out of his character

[18] The hero's premature death is prefaced in his boyhood deeds (*TBC* I, ll. 635–641). He assumes a cloak and brooch as part of his ceremonial crowning as Conchobar's chief warrior in his final boyhood deed, and we see something of an inversion of this motif in his death tale, when his brooch falls from his cloak piercing his foot, suggesting his imminent demise. These defining items of martial clothing bookend the rise and fall of his warrior career (*TBC* I, ll. 814–821; Kimpton 2009: 13–14, §6).

with biographical emphasis, rendering him more 'real', 'alive', relevant and with greater appeal to a wider audience. Taking the case of, for example, *Forfess Fer Fálgae*, his appearances are not limited to a strict biographical context. Nevertheless, he is embedded as an important character with very distinguishing attributes, principally revolving around his status as the great Ulster warrior, underpinned by core biographical details. This is not to insist that his character becomes fixed. On the contrary, the establishment of his persona in this way makes him amenable to adaptation, or manipulation for the purpose of conveying politically, or ecclesiastically motivated messages, or simply to reflect prevailing literary themes and motifs.

Christian influences on Cú Chulainn's portrayal are argued for by Kelleher (1971: 121–122) and McCone (1990: 197–199), most specifically in the case of *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne*. Certainly, Cú Chulainn's posthumous address therein seems to strongly reflect the resurrected Jesus (Kimpton 2009: 27–28, §§30–31). Like Christ, Cú Chulainn plays – to some degree – a prophetic role in foreseeing the foundation of Armagh and the salvation of mankind by Jesus. In the context of Cú Chulainn's prophecies, McCone (1990: 197) asserts that '[i]n this way the standard biblical device of prophecy linking the Old and New Testaments places Cú Chulainn's demise on the threshold looking forward from his own marginally pre-Christian era to Christ's imminent world mission and Patrick's future conversion of Ireland, more specifically of Emain into Ard Machae'. In returning from the dead, Cú Chulainn becomes a mediator between the past and present, an authoritative figure encouraging and justifying conversion to Christianity.

Although he fulfils a similar function in the later *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn*, essential differences are reflected in his representation. The message of this tale is fundamentally the same, if not stronger, in that it calls for paganism to be renounced in favour of Christianity, through the appropriation of the resuscitated hero in a bid to convert the pagan king Lóegaire to the new faith. In contrast to his death tale, Cú Chulainn, as an exponent of the heroic pagan lifestyle, is clearly condemned and confined to the distant past in *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn*. His beseeching of Patrick to raise him up to heaven, while also acknowledging the futility of his once renowned martial skills in hell, affirms the passing of his martial ways and the broader heroic era (*LU* ll. 9459–9540). Perhaps this indicates that the Ulster Cycle material was falling in popularity in some

quarters, but if we accept a ninth century date for this text, there is little corroborative proof for this. Conversely, it might simply indicate a more localised effort to denigrate it by targeting its main figure. Regardless of the exact motivation, the manipulation of his character in this vein relies on his recognition as the supreme Ulster warrior.

The heroic ideal also, arguably, comes under fire in the later Old Irish tale, *Aided Óenfir Aífe*, where Cú Chulainn is made to kill his son, the warrior prodigy, Connlae. This disastrous outcome may underline the futility of the heroic ideal in this sequel to *Tochmarc Emire*. Conversely, according to Ó hUiginn (1996: 227), it may 'represent the apex of the heroic ideal', in that the great hero is forced to kill his son to preserve the honour of the Ulstermen. A combination of factors might have inspired this, including exposure to the motif of killing a close relative as demonstrated in other literatures, most notably in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* and the Persian tale of Rostam and Sohrab. Yet, if we couple it more closely with its sister tale, *Tochmarc Emire*, it might reflect the Church's disapproval of the wayward sexual practices of the Irish focusing explicitly on Cú Chulainn's encounters with Úathach, Scáthach and Aífe (Ó hUiginn 2000: 83–87). This was of intense concern to the Church reform in the eleventh century and might have influenced the redactor of the later *Tochmarc Emire* as Cú Chulainn's sexual encounters appear more liberal therein. Either way, this depends on an overriding notion of him as the great warrior-hero.

In conclusion, there is certainly no question that many of the texts contain what we may call straightforward biographical detail about the character and life story of Cú Chulainn; perhaps, even lacking a desired fine textual chronology, they can be seen as the cumulative, and perhaps deliberate, expansion on the persona of an increasingly attractive, and possibly increasingly fantastical, arch-hero. Collectively, the early texts present the complete, and sequenced, story of a complex and seminal figure. The addition of further details, often recounting separate and narratively distinct adventures, frequently in illustrative form, continued well beyond the early medieval period including the weaving of his special status into more recent Nationalist and Unionist cultural narratives. The latter reminds us that the 'heroic biography' is neither static nor sacrosanct in both the ancient and modern world, while the hero is, in essence and character, subject to opportunistic manipulation and re-interpretation.

Lug and Cú Chulainn, the *corrguinecht* and the *ogam*

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1. Introduction

Lug and Cú Chulainn are two central characters in Irish literary tradition.[1] The former is one of the major gods among the Túatha Dé Danann, skilled in many arts (Gray 1982: §§56–67) as expressed by his epithet *Samildánach*.[2] The latter is the hero of Ulster, particularly famous during the *Táin bó Cúailnge* 'Cattle-Raid of Cooley' (O'Rahilly, C. 1961, 1967, 1976), in which he alone defends his province against the army of Ireland led by Queen Medb. These two great characters are relatives, as is pointed out in *Compert Con Culainn* 'The Conception of Cú Chulainn': Lug is the father of Cú Chulainn (van Hamel 1978: 5, §5).

In this paper, the structural comparison between Lug and Cú Chulainn will be developed. In their careers, one moment holds our attention: in *Cath Maige Tuired* (*CMT*: §129), Lug accomplishes the ritual of *corrguinecht* during the battle against the Fomoire, going around his army with a single hand and a single eye, while in *Táin bó Cúailnge* (*TBC*), Cú Chulainn writes an *ogam* inscription in order to stop the progression of Queen Medb's army. In both sequences, father and son perform a magical act which is supposed to favour their side. A more detailed

[1] I am grateful for the helpful comments and suggestions proposed by several participants of Ulidia V at Maynooth. I would like also to thank Noémie Beck and Cyril Mocquard for improvement of the quality of the English language in this paper. Any mistakes are my own.

[2] For example: *CMT*: §§68, 74, ed. Gray 1982. *LEIA* s.v. *dán*.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 227–239.

analysis of these two passages should allow us to consider whether they provide a literary parallel between Lug and Cú Chulainn.

Initial situation
Second Battle of Mag Tuired / Cath Maige Tuired

Before comparing Lug and Cú Chulainn, we will present the texts. As regards Lug, the passage appears at the beginning of the crucial battle between the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomoire, related in *CMT* (§129). The language of this famous tale, contained in the British Library Harleian MS 5280, reflects Old Irish materials, but it was considerably influenced by Middle Irish scribes or redactors (Gray 1982: 11). When Lug arrives on the battlefield, he concludes his exhortation of the troop by an act which involves a ritual posture:

> *Conid and rocan Lug an cétal-so síos, for lethcois 7 letsúil timchell fer n-Érenn.*
>
> 'Then Lug chanted the spell which follows, going around the men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye closed.' (*CMT*: §129 ll. 587–8)

Soon after, Lug destroys the evil eye of Balor, which brings about the defeat of the Fomoire (*CMT*: §135). This episode also appears in the Early Modern Irish version of the tale, *Cath Muighe Tuireadh* (*CMT₂*), contained in RIA MS 24 P 9 and written by David Duigenan in 1651–2 (ed. Ó Cuív 1945).

> *Is ann sin ro dhealbhastur Lugh ē féin a riocht seantuinne saoibhléithe ar leathchois 7 ar leathlāimh 7 ar leathshúil timcheall an [an] tsluaigh cheachtarrdha ag trēntarrngire gacha h-imnidh 7 gacha h-urbhadha d'fhine Fomhra 7 ag rádh maitheasa re fearuibh Ēreann.*
>
> 'There, Lugh transformed himself into the guise of an old and half-crooked woman, going around each of the two armies on one foot and one hand and one eye, with a strong prophecy of every sorrow and every destruction for the race of the Fomoire, and a speech of goodness towards the men of Ireland.' (*CMT₂*: ll. 741–5)

However, there are two noticeable differences between *CMT₂* and the earlier version. Firstly, Lug's ritual posture occurs just after his destruction of Balor's evil eye (*CMT₂*: ll. 701–40), while in *CMT*, it takes place just before (Dupraz 2015: 129). Secondly, this posture does not involve

the same number of one-sided body parts: one hand and one eye in the earlier version, and one foot, one hand and one eye in the later version.

Táin Bó Cúailnge

As regards Cú Chulainn, the interesting passage for our purpose occurs, as is the case for Lug, at the beginning of a major conflict. In Cú Chulainn's case, it is at the beginning of the cattle-raid led by Queen Medb of Connaught. The army of the four provinces of Ireland has been gathered to seize the Ulster bull called the *Donn Cúailgne*. This cattle-raid will cause a long series of conflicts between the army of Ireland and Cú Chulainn and the Ulstermen. One day, Cú Chulainn observes from Irard/Ard Cuillenn that Medb's army is marching towards Ulster, and he reacts. The description of his action is not identical in each of the two recensions of *TBC*. In Recension I (ed. O'Rahilly, C. 1976), attested in *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU* – the oldest surviving manuscript), *Yellow Book of Lecan* (*YBL*) and *Egerton 1782*, it is said:

> *Dogní id n-erchomail íarom ría techt 7 scríbais ogum inna menoc, 7 focheird im úachtar in c[h]orthe.*
>
> 'Then before he went, he twisted a withe into a ring and wrote an *ogam* inscription on its peg, and cast it over the top of a pillar-stone.' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 225–6)

Recension II (ed. O'Rahilly, C. 1967), contained in the Book of Leinster (*LL*), is more developed:

> *Luid Cú Chulaind fón fid 7 tópacht and cétbunni darach d'óenbéim bun barr 7 ro sníastar ar óenchois 7 ar óenláim 7 óensúil 7 doringni id de. Ocus tuc ainm n-oguim 'na mennuc inn eda 7 tuc in n-id im cháel in chorthe ic Ard Chuillend.*
>
> 'Cú Chulainn went into the wood and cut a prime oak sapling, whole and entire, with one stroke and, standing on one foot and using but one hand and one eye, he twisted it into a ring. And he put an *ogam* inscription on the peg of the ring and put the ring around the narrow part of the standing-stone at Ard Cuillenn.' (*TBC LL*: ll. 456–60)[3]

[3] The Stowe version of *TBC II* is almost identical to the version of *LL*: *Luidh Cu Chulainn fon fiod 7 benais cetbhuindi darach ann ar énchois 7 énlaimh 7 ensuil, 7 dorinni idh dhe. Agus do sgrib ainm oghaim i meanadh an eada 7 tug an idh iom chaol*

As in *CMT*, the number of one-sided body parts involved in the posture is not the same in the different recensions of *TBC*.

A magical act

At that precise moment of each tale, both Lug and Cú Chulainn perform a magical act, combined with a temporary change of their physical appearance. The god goes around the men of Ireland standing on one foot, with one hand and with one eye closed in CMT_2. The hero writes an *ogam* inscription with a circle of wood, standing on one leg, with one hand and one eye closed, but this only appears in Recension II, because there is no mention of Cú Chulainn's physical change in Recension I.

In each case, the goal of their respective magical act is to help their army and to disturb their adversary. This double aim is well detected in *CMT*. Gray (1983: 245) suggests that Lug utters an incantation against the Fomoire, while predicting victory for the Túatha Dé Danann. In a recent study, Dupraz (2015) extends this principle of a double action. Referring to the ancient Italic ritual of *lustratio*,[4] he proposes that the *timchell* or circumambulation of Lug around the Túatha Dé Danann delimits two distinct areas: a protected area and an attacked area (Dupraz 2015: 127).[5] The obscure – and untranslatable – spell uttered by Lug is considered as an incantation or a satire.[6] Even if the text does not mention the true impact of Lug's act, we notice that soon after this magical performance, Lug destroys Balor, which marks the defeat of the Fomoire (*CMT*: §135).

We could make the same hypothesis for CMT_2. Lug performs a double circumambulation: one around his army and another around the

an coirthi ic Ard Cuillenn, 7 saidhis an idh go rainic remar an choirthi (O'Rahilly, C. 1961: ll. 471–5).

[4] This ritual consists of circumambulations performed by an officiant around somebody – or a people – in order to protect him against any external aggression. The different examples particularly emphasise the circumambulation which shares the space between the two camps, and also two kinds of prayers, one to protect those who make the *lustratio*, another to destroy their adversary (Dupraz 2015: 127).

[5] Dupraz (2015: 128) points out that he did not affirm any kind of filiation or relation between the Italic and Irish rituals.

[6] Cf. *infra*.

Fomoire, followed by a double speech, i.e. an evil prophecy towards the Fomoire and a speech of excellence towards his troop (Dupraz 2015: 129). The two versions of the tale seem to agree on the meaning of Lug's ritual, the aim of which is to protect and attack at the same time.

In *TBC*, it is possible to detect a double goal as well. When Cú Chulainn becomes aware of the progression of the opposite army, he prepares a two-step plan. Firstly, he asks his father Súaltaim to warn the Ulstermen (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 220–2; *TBC LL*: ll. 446–9). Then, he writes an *ogam* message to delay Medb and Ailill's troops, as it is said in the following inscription, which was later read by Fergus mac Róich:

> *'Ná tíagar secha co n-étar fer ro láa id samlaid cona óenláim, 7 óenṡlat día tá, 7 friscuriur mo phopa Fergus.'*
>
> 'Let none go past till there be found a man to throw a withe made of one branch as it is in the same way with one hand. But I except my friend Fergus.' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 269–70)[7]

This message is not only a wish; it is a real order, a threat. Soon after, Fergus gives further explanations on the meaning of this inscription:

> *'Má sáraighte in n-id se,' 'ol sé,' 'nó má thíastá secha, cia beith i lláim duni nó i taig fó glas, ricfe i ndead ind Ḟir ro scríb in n-ogum n-ind, 7 génaid-side guin dune díb ría mmatain mani láa nech úaib id samlaid.'*
>
> 'If ye flout this withe or if ye go past it, though it be in a man's possession or in a locked house, it will go after the man who wrote the *ogam* inscription, and he will kill one of you before morning unless one of you cast a withe in like manner.' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 294–7)

Fergus's speech in *TBC LL* is very similar:

> *'Mad dia tístai secha innocht*
> *can anad aice i lloṅgphort,*
> *dabarró in Cú cirres cach n-om;*
> *táir foraib a sár[u]god.*
>
> 'If you go past it tonight and do not stay in camp beside it, the Hound who mangles all flesh will come upon you. Shame to you if you flout it.' (*TBC LL*: ll. 482–5)

[7] The contents of this inscription are not specified in Recension II.

In other words, Cú Chulainn compels the opposing army to slow down at the risk of reprisal,[8] in order to secure time for his army to organise the defense of Ulster. After writing his magical inscription, the next action of Cú Chulainn differs from that of Lug. While Lug keeps on fighting and overcomes Balor, Cú Chulainn goes away, for he has a tryst with his handmaiden (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 222–5; *TBC LL*: ll. 450–5).

It is clear that in *CMT* and *TBC*, Lug and Cú Chulainn do not use the same magical skill, i.e. circumambulation and speech for the former, an *ogam* inscription for the latter. However, it is clear that both characters perform this magical act for the same reasons. The aim is to help their own side and disturb the enemy. Moreover, the motif of the temporary change of their physical appearance appears in both tales, which will be considered below.

Lug and the ritual of corrguinecht

Lug's performance has been recognised as a case of *corrguinecht*.[9] This kind of magical ritual is described in a famous gloss by O'Davoren from MS Egerton 88:

> *Corrguinacht .i. beith for lethcois 7 for lethlaimh 7 for lethsuil ag denam na glaime dícinn.*
>
> '*Corrguinecht*, i.e. to be on one foot and (using) one hand and (shutting) one eye while making the *glám dícinn*.'
>
> (*CIH iv*: 1480.12–3 = Stokes 1904: §383)

According to this definition, the act of *corrguinecht* results from a combination of unilaterality of body parts and of the *glám dícenn* satire.

[8] Regarding the debate on the agent of the revenge, i.e. the withe or Cú Chulainn, see Bergin 1921–3: 159; O'Rahilly, C. 1976: 246; Dooley 2006: 32–3; Edel 2015: 152. Whatever or whoever is the real agent, the attack on the men Ireland could come from Cú Chulainn.

[9] Gray 1983: 246; Scowcroft 1995: 142; McCone 1996: 95. The precise meaning of this word is not clear. The first element *corr* has the meaning of 'crane' according to Ó Cuív (1961–3: 338) (*eDIL* s.v. 2 *corr*), or 'point' for Meroney (1950: 220) (*eDIL* s.v. 1 *corr*); the second element is explained by Breatnach (1983: 194) as the agentive suffix *-e* added to the root *gonaid*, 'to slay'. The possible translations of *corrguinecht* for instance are 'crane-killer' (Kelly, F. 1998: 128), or 'piercing/slaying by points', as suggested by McCone (1996: 95), with reference to the ritual of the *glám dícenn*, which could be associated with *corrguinecht*.

A satire could be defined as a means for someone – usually a poet – to obtain what he wants from someone else under the threat that refusal will bring satire (Borsje 2002: 94–6), that is an utterance which could cause any kind of physical or moral damages, shame, or even death. Among the practiced satires in medieval Ireland, the *glám dícenn* is one of the most powerful – if not the most powerful – satires, uttered in a metrical form.[10] If the way to perform a *corrguinecht* is now clearer, it is important to point out its effects. From the extant literary evidence of this ritual, Borsje & Kelly (2001: 24; also Borjse 2002: 93) have noticed that the supernatural actions are numerous: 'certain forms of satirising and divination', 'bringing about illusions, causing good luck, satirising combined with piercing a clay image, bewitching, harming horses and cows and magically stealing dairy products'.

Thanks to this information about the *corrguinecht*, we can now return to the instance of Lug in *CMT*. According to Gray (1983: 146), the *corrguinecht* seems to appear in this text, because the presence of a satire was detected in the alliterative verse designated by the text as *cétal* 'incantation', which was uttered by Lug just after his circumambulation; and, of course, it is a satire against the Fomoire. Borsje (2002: 93) rather agrees with this hypothesis, but remains cautious and underlines that the text does not mention the word *corrguinecht* and that Lug uses only one foot and one eye, but not one hand.

In CMT_2, the *corrguinecht* may also be referred to: Lug holds the same posture as in O'Davoren's description (Stokes 1904: §383) and utters a prophecy – which is unfortunately not attested in the text. Though a prophecy is not precisely a satire, a connection exists between these two forms of magical speech.[11]

Two other instances of *corrguinecht* have been identified in Irish medieval literature (Borsje 2002: 92–6). The first one appears in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (*TBDD*).[12] A woman named Cailb arrives at the hostel

[10] See for example the three blisters which appear on the face of the victim (*Amra Collum Chille*, ed. Stokes 1899: 421–2), or the earth which swallows a king who has committed an offence (*Mittelirsche Verslehren III*: §155 (Thurneysen 1891: 96–7).

[11] See Borsje & Kelly 2001: 23 and Borsje 2002: 93 about a form of divination identified in an early Irish source as the *corrguinecht*.

[12] Ed. Knott 1963 from the text of YBL, with variant readings from D.IV.2; ed. Stokes 1901 from the texts of *YBL* and *LU*. The references to sections in the discussion on *TBDD* that follows are to Knott's edition.

where King Conaire Mór and his company are (*TBDD*: §61). She casts the evil eye on them, forecasts bad news and reveals all of her names. Then, in the *YBL* version, she sings on one foot and one breath, leaning against the doorpost;[13] but in the *LU* version, she sings on one foot, one hand and in one breath, leaning against the doorpost.[14] Conaire understands that she desires to stay in the hostel for the night, but it is one of his *gessi* not to accept the company of a woman after sunset. Cailb threatens him because of his lack of hospitality; so, though it is a *geis*, Conaire has no other choice but to admit her (*TBDD*: §63). In this case, the performance of the *corrguinecht* by Cailb is attested by her physical posture as well as her threat of satirising the king. As he finally accepts Cailb's demand, she does not satirise him, but his breaking of a *geis* is another step towards his doom (Borsje 2002: 96).

The second occurrence of the *corrguinecht* comes from the Middle-Irish narrative *Bruiden Da Choca* (*BDC*, ed. Toner 2007). In Recension A, Cormac Connloinges and his troop meet a red woman at Athlone (*BDC A*: §15). He wants to know what she is doing. She then chants to them standing on one foot with one eye closed.[15] Cormac considers her song as a bad omen and an evil prophecy.[16] In Recension B, the initial situation is similar, except that the text specifies that the name of the woman is Badb (*BDC B*: §17). She answers to the messenger of Cormac while standing on one foot with one eye closed and utters an evil prophecy to Cormac and his people.[17]

Some interesting parallels could be observed between the red Badb and Lug.[18] In *BDC*, the posture of the woman is identical to Lug's posture: both use one foot with one eye closed. Moreover, these two characters sing a song, though the form is not exactly the same in each text: in Recension A of *BDC*, she sings a bad omen, while in Recension B she

[13] *TBDD*: §62, ed. Knott 1963: ll. 562–3, 17: *For énchois 7 oenanáil ro chachain doib in sin uile ó dorus in tigi.*

[14] *TBDD*: §62, LU: ll. 6983–84: *For óenchoiss 7 óenláim 7 óenanáil rachain dóib insin uile o dorus in tige.*

[15] *BDC A*: §16, ll. 78–9: *is ann-sid*e *ro-chac*h*ain-si for lethchois 7 lethshūil dóibh an*n*so.*

[16] *BDC A*: §18, ll. 90–1: *'Nīdat maithe na cē*l*baine con-daige dūin', ar Corm*ac. *'Is dūaig* con *tirchanæ dūin.'*

[17] *BDC B*: §16: *Freagras hé 7 sí for leathchois 7 for leathshúil 7 adubhairt rosgadh ag mīchēalmhaine do Chormac gona m*h*uinntir.*

[18] Borsje & Kelly 2001: 22 and Borsje 2002: 93 have also proposed a convincing comparison between Cailb and the woman of *BDC*.

recites an evil prophecy. In *CMT*, Lug sings a satire, while in *CMT₂* it is an evil prophecy. Beyond these distinctions of speech, each one performs a supernatural action referring to the *corrguinecht*.

Cú Chulainn and the *ogam* inscription

We have noticed some common points between the magical performances of Lug and Cú Chulainn. One of them is the change of their physical appearance. As regards Lug, we know that this modification comes from the practice of the *corrguinecht*. Could this magical ritual be performed by Cú Culainn as well? It is then necessary to analyse whether the motif of one-sided body parts is valuable in *TBC* and whether the presence of a satire could be detected in this epic tale.

One foot, one hand and one eye

The first point is not easy to solve because there is a significant difference between the two recensions. In Recension I, there is no precision about the physical aspect of Cú Chulainn when he writes an *ogam* inscription. We could therefore think that he uses his hand, which is how an inscription is generally written. In Recension II, the hero of Ulster performs his magical act standing on one foot, with a single hand and one eye closed.

This distinction between the two recensions is confirmed a few lines later in each text, when Fergus speaks about the *ogam* inscription to the men of Ireland. Recension I contains two instances of this distinction. The first one takes place in a passage quoted above, when Fergus reads the *ogam* inscription:

> *'Ná tíagar secha co n-étar fer ro láa id samlaid* ***cona óenláim****, 7 óenślat día tá, 7 friscuriur mo phopa Fergus.'*
>
> 'Let none go past till there be found a man to throw a withe made of one branch as it is in the same way **with one hand**. But I except my friend Fergus.' (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 269–70)[19]

Fergus then asks a druid to explain this message. This is a part of his answer: *óenfer co n-****óenláim*** *ro lá* 'one man cast it there with **one hand**' (*TBC Rec. 1*: l. 285).

[19] The contents of this inscription are not specified in Recension II.

In Recension II, Fergus explains to the men of Ireland the possible evil impact if the message is not respected:

> '*Mad dia sárgid in n-id sin* 7 *in rígnía doringni can aidchi ṅdúnaid* 7 *longphuirt sund ná co nderna fer úaib id a mac samla sút ar* ***óenchois*** 7 ***óensúil*** 7 ***óenláim*** *feib doringni-sium* [...]'
>
> 'I swear to you that if ye flout that ring and the royal hero who made it and do not spend a night here in encampment until one of you make a similar ring, standing on **one foot** and using **one eye** and **one hand** as he did [...]' (*TBC LL*: ll. 502–7)

In her introduction to the edition of *TBC LL*, O'Rahilly (1967: xlvi) notices that the style of the *LL*-text is on the whole more diffused and more detailed than the text of Recension I. When the *LL*-compiler gave a more detailed account of an incident – as it is the case in this episode – he could have expanded and elaborated the text of Recension I (O'Rahilly, C. 1967: xxxvi). Then, it is necessary to keep in mind that the compiler of the *TBC LL* was familiar with an increasing number of traditions, which was not the case when the TBC LU was written down. This means that the influence of interrelated tales is effective (O'Rahilly, C. 1967: xlv).

Therefore, the most plausible explanation regarding this issue – the number of one-sided body parts – could be the invention or the literary influence of the *LL*-compiler. In other words, the text of Recension I should reflect the original and traditional structure of this episode, where Cú Chulainn performs his magical act only with his hand.

Generally, the presence of the *corrguinecht* in a considered ritual is detected according to its definition transmitted by O'Davoren (Stokes 1904: §383). But, as underlined by Borsje (2002: 93), 'the ritual posture involving one foot, one hand, and one eye is only mentioned among surviving texts in O'Davoren's cited description'. The evidence examined above and detected as *corrguinecht* confirm her analysis, as summarised in Table 1.

If we study the chart, we notice that only the later version of the battle of Mag Tuired proposes a ritual posture involving one foot, one hand and one eye as in O'Davoren's gloss (Stokes 1904: §383). Yet CMT_2 is clearly later than the other texts.[20]

[20] This observation leads us to propose an audacious hypothesis: is it conceivable that at the period of the composition of *TBDD*, *BDC* and *CMT*, the practice of the

Table 1

Tale	Copy / recension	Character	One eye	One hand	One foot/leg
BDD	YBL	Cailb			X
	LU	Cailb		X	X
BDC	Rec. A	Red woman	X		X
	Rec. B	Badb	X		X
CMT	Harleian 5280	Lug	X		X
	RIA MS 24 P 9	Lug	X	X	X

Finally, we could suggest some observations about the theme of unilaterality of body parts and the *corrguinecht* in *TBC*. In Recension II, the episode could certainly find its origin in literary influence. However, it is not absolutely senseless to consider Cú Chulainn's posture as the original scenario of the *TBC* tradition. In Recension I, this posture does not take place. We have noticed that in the *corrguinecht*, the number of involved body parts in this posture is variable, but there is no evidence of only one body part. Therefore, it seems difficult to believe that Recension I contains the *corrguinecht*. In order to have a complete view on this question, we have to consider the second component of the ritual of the *corrguinecht*, i.e. the satire.

Satire

As detailed above, the basis of a satire like the *glám dícenn* involves an utterance, a demand and a threat. While these three elements can be found in *TBC*, they do not actually appear in a conventional way.

Concerning the demand, it consists of the obligation for Medb's army not to pass where the *ogam* inscription is. Therefore, the troops have to change its itinerary because Ailill and Medb do not want to lose some of their men. Ailill suggests going southwards to find shelter for the night, and to hew a wood in order to make a new path for the chariots (*TBC Rec. 1*: ll. 298–301; *TBC LL*: 507–15). Thus, the army of Ireland has to

corrguinecht did not require a strict number of one-sided body parts, and later, at the time of O'Davoren's and David Duigenan's works, was this description of the *corrguinecht* set to three members?

stop its progression towards Ulster for one night. Yet, the demand in the *ogam* script was not uttered by Cú Chulainn in front of his enemies. He wrote it on a withe and threw it at the top of a standing-stone. When the army of Ireland arrived there, it was Fergus who publicly read the *ogam* inscription.

As for the threat, it is not mentioned on the inscription. It is once again Fergus who informs the army about the conditions: if they do not respect the inscription, Cú Chulainn will attack them. As this threat is not written, how does Fergus know exactly its terms? This might come from his closeness to Cú Chulainn – as he was his tutor (*TBC LL*: l. 718; van Hamel 1978: 7–8, §7) – which could have led him to perceive the intentions of the hero of Ulster. Another possibility is the great science of Fergus, which could include an access to the hidden knowledge of the future.[21]

In other words, the demand is made by Cú Chulainn, but uttered by Fergus. In addition, the terms of the threat are once again uttered by Fergus, as Cú Chulainn has left to visit his handmaiden.

Finally, *TBC* includes the three main elements which compound a satire, but there are too many discordances in comparison with the other literary evidence to believe in the presence of the *glám dícenn* in this epic tale.

Conclusion

The confrontation between the two passages of *CMT* and *TBC* was far from being uninteresting. Lug and Cú Chulainn have a similar aim, that is to help their own army and disturb their enemies. In each narrative, the fulfillment of this aim involves a change of the physical appearance – except in *TBC Rec. 1* – a demand and a threat.[22] While the general plot and some elements are alike, the precise means differ. Lug performs the *corrguinecht* magical ritual, while Cú Chulainn writes a magical *ogam* inscription. Maybe it is the final result of these acts which explains the proven difference. Lug's performance is immediately followed by the defeat of the Fomoire, who will never harm the inhabitants of Ireland

[21] Several examples of Fergus's science are listed in Hily 2014: 120–1.

[22] As Lug's incantation is untranslatable, it is difficult to precisely understand his demand and his threat. Nevertheless, they could go towards the Fomoire.

again. Yet Cú Chulainn's performance hampers the men of Ireland just for a short period of time. After setting off again to Ulster, they finally succeed in stealing the *Donn Cúailnge*. It is true that, at the end of the tale, the Ulstermen vanquished the army of Ireland, but their victory cannot be ascribed to the *ogam* inscription made by Cú Chulainn earlier. Therefore, in *CMT*: it is an act which leads to definitely vanquish the opponent, while in the *TBC* it is an act which temporarily disturbs the adversary. In other words, the power of the act performed by these two characters is really different, with a primacy for the effects of oral *corrguinecht* versus written *ogam*. Lug and Cú Chulainn are two important characters in the Irish medieval literary corpus. They both share common features and actions, but Lug is a god, while Cú Chulainn is a mere hero.

Cracked cosmology, escaped eschatology: Averting apocalypse in *Echtra Nerai*

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Several mythological traditions in the Indo-European cultures may or may not have definite creation or cosmic dissolution stories, while others exhibit several different examples of one or the other. Outside of Christian traditions, Irish culture does not appear to have definite creation nor eschatological myths, and the two-volume compilation of medieval Irish eschatological materials *The End and Beyond*, edited by John Carey, Emma Nic Cárthaigh, and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh (2014), as well as the *De Finibus* project generally, represent monumental contributions to the pursuit of these questions. Some traditions, like those of ancient Greece, have multiple traditions of cosmogenesis, but eschatological myths are essentially absent. However, in Greek traditions, the main reason for this seems to be that any prophesied downfall of the reign of Zeus ends up being circumvented by him through actions of one form or another. One especially important instance of this is the prophecy by Themis that if the sea-goddess Thetis were to have offspring with either Zeus or Poseidon, the child produced might be mightier than his father.[1] Thus, Zeus averts this potential usurping of his position by marrying Thetis to a mortal, Peleus. And yet, it seems that the eschatological potential of this situation cannot be overridden entirely, because at the wedding-feast of Thetis and Peleus, Eris tosses her golden apple and sets the course of events in motion which leads to the Trojan War, and the offspring of Thetis and Peleus – Achilleus – is the near-invincible hero

[1] This prophesying generally involves the titan goddess Themis; see Pindar (Sandys 1915: 500–503), Aeschylus (Smyth 1922: 234–235), Apollonius of Rhodes (Rieu 1971: 169), Ovid (Miller 1984: 136–137), and Pseudo-Apollodorus (Hard 1997: 128), amongst others.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 241–250.

of that war whose birth also results from these actions (Kerényi 1959: 308–318). The Trojan War, of course, was the centerpiece of the Greek epic tradition, but it was also a near-world-ending event that was superlatively costly in its destruction, and essentially was the twilight of the Greek age of heroes.

Potentially cosmos-upending situations cannot be avoided, it seems, without dire consequences resulting in one form or another in many mythic traditions. I propose that in the medieval Irish Ulster Cycle tale *Echtra Nerai*, and in the great *Táin Bó Cúailnge* which follows it and of which it is an important *remscél*, we have a parallel situation. Though the surviving manuscripts of *Echtra Nerai* are all from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, it has been argued that the language of the tale could be as early as the tenth century CE (Ó Flaithearta 1985: 28). The tale itself is one of the most remarkable of the various narratives concerned with travel from this world into the otherworld and the temporal shifts involved in such transits, as well as taking place at Samain, a time of year in which otherworld incursions are so common as to be expected rather than unusual. To begin, I will not summarize the tale, but instead will speak about events in the tale as they become relevant to the discussion, which will proceed through their chronology in the tale itself.

The narrative of *Echtra Nerai* has presented many problems for previous commentators, partially because of its rather unusual sequential characteristics; these were elucidated most usefully by John Carey (1988). In addition to Kuno Meyer's edition and translation of the tale (1889), there have been discussions of it by Thurneysen (1921a: 311–317), Ó Duilearga (1995),[2] Alwyn and Brinley Rees (1961: 301–303), Alden Watson (1986), Seán Ó Coileain (1990), Mícheál Ó Flaithearta (1990), Patricia Ronan (2000), Ann Dooley (2006), and most recently Gregory Toner (2013). Toner's discussion has been most helpful and illuminating for my present purposes, particularly as it highlights the centrality of sovereignty in the tale, though on one crucial point in relation to this matter I disagree with him, as will become apparent in what follows.

What I propose to do here is to discuss this tale from what one might call a Celtic cosmological and ritual exegetical viewpoint. I hope to

[2] Originally published in 1940.

illuminate in the course of this discussion how this tale is not a mere wonder-tale, with persistent folkloric motifs in it, and with great relevance as one of the *remscéla* of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, but one which has relevance for notions of sovereignty and the interconnection of it with primal cosmological and even eschatological principles that are deeply imbedded in Celtic pre-Christian conceptions of time and space.

The tale begins at Ráth Crúachan on the night of Samain. Two criminals were executed the day before, and Ailill the king of Connacht offers a reward to anyone who would go out and tie a withe around the foot of one of the criminals. From a ritual perspective, the very premise of the night's events is initially and deeply flawed, and potentially dangerous. Passages from legal tracts indicate that it is the responsibility of the *ollam flatha* or 'king's poet' to entertain the king with stories through the night of Samain, keeping him awake in order to avoid possible supernatural interference (Kelly, F. 1988: 44 n. 46). The beginning of the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* also takes place at Samain, and an assembly of the Ulstermen is convened at the beginning of the tale, but Cú Chulainn will not allow it to be convened until his foster-father Fergus mac Roích and his foster-brother Conall Cernach have arrived (Dillon 1951: 47–48; 1953: 1). We gain further insight into why this might be in the tale *Scéla Conchobor mac Nessa*, where it is explained that if someone was not within the tribal assembly at Samain, they would either go mad or end up dead due to the supernatural nature of the festival and the lack of protection such a person would have outside of the confines of the assembly (Stokes 1908–10: 26–27). As a result, we can see that in *Echtra Nerai* Ailill is already provoking disaster and potentially bringing about his ruin and a direct challenge to his sovereignty by making this suggestion for the night's entertainment. This is my primary disagreement with Toner's analysis (2013: 114): Ailill's kingship cannot be considered justified if he flaunts essential ritual protocols in this fashion, particularly around a festival as important as Samain. The cave at Crúachan is one of the most dangerous and active otherworld mounds on the island, and thus to send warriors out to accomplish such a feat on Samain is to quite pointedly kick a hornet's nest.

No one else is able to accomplish the task until Nera attempts to do so; and when he continues to fail at it, finally the dead man whose foot he is trying to encircle with his withe gives him advice on how to do it. Such a reanimated corpse appearing on Samain is not unusual, and

Nera not only follows the corpse's directions, but takes the corpse on his back[3] to fulfill its request for a drink of water. The two proceed to a series of three houses: the first surrounded by a lake of fire, the second by a lake of water, and the third is not protected at all, where they find dirty water in plentitude, which the corpse drinks, and then spits upon the inhabitants of the house, killing them. There is a short moralization at this point that extols the virtues of those who empty the dirty water at the end of the day, and who rake the coals of the hearth before going to bed. But, far from simply being a fable about good housekeeping and hygiene, I suspect there's something far more important going on in this incident.

Fire and water, and their proper management, are extremely essential to the well-being of civilizations generally; however, they are also potent elemental and cosmic forces in a variety of premodern societies, including Celtic ones. It is not merely a matter of good housekeeping to properly control these forces in a domestic sphere, it is a matter of maintaining good cosmic order. On the night of Samain, not doing this could be especially disastrous, since Samain is an important turning-point of the year, and as the Irish new year festival, it might even be thought of as the beginning and end of cyclical time in the Irish context. On the importance of fire and water and their eschatological implications, one is reminded of the words of Strabo in his *Geography*, written in the first century BCE, on the Gaulish culture: when speaking of the teachings of the druids, he says they teach that "men's souls, and also the universe, are indestructible, although both fire and water will at some time or other prevail over them" (4.4.4).[4]

In Irish tales, there are many examples of fire and water overcoming particular kingdoms. Finn mac Cumaill fights off Aillén mac Midgna on the night of Samain when he comes from the *síd* to burn Tara (Nagy 1985: 186–189); and likewise in the tale *Cath Maige Mucrama*, Amairgen, the father of Conall Cernach, fights off a three-headed creature that comes from the cave at Crúachan on Samain to devastate various

[3] Dooley 2006: 250 note 24, suggests that this involves ritual impurity. While the issue of ritual impurity is important to my reading of the tale, this act of contact with the dead in itself does not seem to be especially impure in context.

[4] ἀφθάρτους δὲ λέγουσι καὶ οὗτοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ἐπικρατήσειν δέ ποτε καὶ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ (cf. Jones 1923: 244–245; Fortson 2003: 18; Hofeneder 2008: 223–231).

places in Ireland (O Daly 1975: 48–49). The story of *Aided Echach meic Maireda* (de Vries 2012), as well as the poetic texts about Lough Foyle and the proto-versions of *Immram Brain* (Carey 2002), all detail kingdoms that were drowned by the mismanagement of a particular magical well. There is a tale from the *Dindṡenchas* regarding Loch Garman, in which a particular otherworld well floods at the *Feis Temro*, held specifically at Samain, in response to Garman's stealing of the crown of Cathaír's wife (Stokes 1894: 428–431; Ross 1962: 37–38), which bears especial consideration in the context of the incident in *Echtra Nerai* involving the recovered crown in the well from the otherworld, to be discussed subsequently. In the various versions of the voyage tale of Snédgus and Mac Ríagla, a lake of fire and water is said to be held back until doomsday, waiting to be released upon the earth (Murray 2014). The list here is not exhaustive, but suffice it to say, there are plenty of examples of otherworldly or magical fire and water causing great destruction in various Celtic contexts; the destruction is not absolute (except in the latter, most definitely post-Christian instance), but it proves to be extremely threatening and disruptive to the good rule of particular kings.

As highlighted by Toner (2013: 114–116), Nera's role as the *rechtaire* of Ailill and Medb, their 'steward' and the one most responsible for the maintenance of their household, and thus by extension of the entire kingdom, is the essential person to assist in this regard for the maintenance of both kingdom and cosmos. As a result, a ritual taboo being broken by Ailill, and one household's mismanagement of cosmic forces on a night of great temporal and cosmic significance results, in my view, in all that follows in the tale of *Echtra Nerai*. In brief, Ráth Crúachan is destroyed and everyone in it is killed, but after entering into the *síd*, Nera learns that he has a chance to go back and prevent the destruction from happening on the Samain to follow the one he just experienced. He does this, and is told to go into the *síd* once more by Ailill and Medb to secure whatever possessions he has there, but when he does, he finds that time has advanced there continuously whereas it did not in Crúachan, and he is advised to go back again and make sure that the warriors of Connacht attack the *síd* and in particular take a crown in a magical well. Nera again does this, and goes into the mound just before the attack, securing his wife, son, and cattle therein before the raid by the warriors of Connacht. He can never again return until doomsday, we are told in the final line of the story.

It is not simply otherworldly time-distortion that is occurring in this tale (Carey 1988), but instead the complete fragmentation of time and space into multiple contingent realities, which only Nera, through his otherworld contacts (and implied virtue), is able to experience as a mixed but ultimately linear reality between the continuous otherworldly time scale – in which a son and a calf are born in the intervening years – and the multiply-contingent world of the Ulster Cycle and the people of Connacht. This fragmentation and series of contingent timelines repeats itself in three different ways on what is the same night or series of nights before and on a particular Samain. One can say, in a sense, that the three-times-experienced Samain was Nera's 'Groundhog Day', just as the 1993 Bill Murray film of that name involved a repetition of the same day innumerable times for the protagonist until the perfect outcome was achieved.

The matter of the crown of Brion that is hidden in the well inside the *síd* and its connection to sovereignty is a further important incident to examine. While the structural remarks of Alden Watson (1986) on this part of the narrative are informative, they do not really tell us very much about the meaning of the incident. The well in the otherworld is watched over by a blind man who carries a lame man on his back, which is a kind of echo of the not-completely-informed Nera carrying the knowledgeable dead man on his back earlier in the tale. Nera is forced to gather firewood each day for the king of the otherworld, and the well is obviously a source of water, which again reflects the fire and water incidents earlier in the tale. What is occurring here, in Nera's otherworldly menial work, is a kind of restitution for the earlier mistakes of the human world, and a 'making right' of the situation of the mismanagement of fire and water that was a major contributing factor leading to the breakdown of time and the destruction of Ráth Crúachan. We can surmise, on analogy to the situation in the *dindśenchas* account of Loch Garman as well as other tales already mentioned above, if Nera's plundering of the crown from the well had been unrightful, it would have flooded, but it did not, thus signifying that his taking of its treasure was a rightful act.

Toner's suggestions (2013: 116) that the kingship occurring in the otherworld during this tale is not ideal are accurate assessments, but I suspect that this situation of non-ideal otherworldly kingship is not simply the way things were, but instead demonstrates that the cosmological cracking that occurred in the everyday world as a result of the

breaking of ritual customs had a negative effect on Connacht's otherworld counterparts. Thus, much of the tale represents a tug-of-war between the two worlds – the terrestrial and mundane Connacht of Ailill and Medb and the supernatural and otherworldly Connacht encountered by Nera – to restore the situation in both the otherworld and the human world. Perhaps not unlike *Compert Con Culainn* (van Hamel 1978: 3–6; Gantz 1981: 130–134), in which the being eventually known as Cú Chulainn is conceived three times – first wholly by otherworld forces, then in a human-otherworld hybrid, and finally in fully mortal form – so too do the three Samains of *Echtra Nerai* exhibit the shift back-and-forth between, first, human transgressions and otherworld repercussions, otherworld errors and human incursions, and finally a state of quasi-equilibrium with the final firm establishment of Ailill's sovereignty via the taking of the crown of Brion.

But there is a further comparative significance to the matter of the crown and other treasures in the well. The motif of 'fire-in-water' is an important one in Indo-European myth (Puhvel 1989: 277–283), and it is often associated with poetic inspiration in a Celtic context, though it is equally associated with warrior activities, and elsewhere, with matters of sovereignty. A Greek tale, told in Bacchylides' 17th ode (Campbell 1992: 220–221), Pausanias (Jones 1918: 82–83), and other sources, features Theseus diving down into the depths to regain a golden ornament on a sort of 'dare', and being given all sorts of treasures in his success by the 'fiery-limbed' Nereids, Poseidon, and Amphitrite. He of course goes on to be one of the greatest and most heroic kings of Athenian myth thereafter.[5] The crown in the well in *Echtra Nerai*, an apt symbol of sovereignty, is an image of this same sort of fire-in-water motif, and its ultimate recovery on the final iteration of the night of Samain for Ailill becomes essential to restoring the sovereignty of Ailill which the king had earlier undermined by his disregard of ritual injunctions for the night of Samain.

Echtra Nerai is one of the tales that appears in the 'canonical' list of the *remscéla* of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, and it is very logical that it is one of those tales. There is a portion of the tale that briefly retells another foretale, namely *Táin Bó Regamna*, involving the Morrígan coming to bring

[5] There is also the story of Antheus, who is lured by a queen to go into a well seeking a golden cup (Thornley & Gaselee 1916: 300–303).

a cow to mate with Donn Cúailnge, and being opposed by Cú Chulainn, whereupon she threatens to attack him in various animal forms during the great cattle raid to come. This is only able to come about, as pointed out by Toner (2013: 113–114), because Nera has fallen asleep during his cowherding duties – and thus we see that even as a maintainer of sovereignty and a stand-in for a king, Nera is not ideal. Nera is a *rechtaire*, not a *rí*, and did not have the advantage of having an *ollam flatha* to keep him awake through his Samain vigil, unfortunately, which– to return to our Trojan War analogy – the Morrígan is then able to act as the counterpart to Eris in our tale. In *Echtra Nerai*, the cow and the calf born from that cow belong to Nera's otherworldly son Ainge, and the calf attacks Ailill's bull, the Finnbennach Aí, which incites Medb to want to seek the bull who is the calf's father, thus giving a direct reason for the great cattle-raid tale without the Book of Leinster's 'pillow talk' episode (Dooley 2006: 59–60). Further, this part of the tale seems to be the possible identity of a further cattle-raid tale given in the tale-lists as *Táin Bó Ainge* or sometimes as *Úath Angeda*, 'The Cave of Ainge'.[6] In whatever case, the results for the later story are clear: Medb has a reason to seek the Donn Cúailnge, Nera is proven to be a virtuous functionary at the court of Connacht, but is subsequently not available to assist Ailill and Medb on their raid, and the narrative of how Ailill's sovereignty is compromised but restored proves that his rightful kingship is therefore prone to further undermining in the future, which the events of the great cattle-raid certainly prove to be the case.

Eschatology, in a Christian sense, is certainly implied by the final line of *Echtra Nerai*, which relates that Nera would never come forth from the *síd* again until the day of judgement. In a certain viewpoint, his aid in the restoration of Ailill's sovereignty and his help in averting total disaster for Connacht by the destruction of Ráth Crúachan proves that he is perhaps as good, if not a better, candidate for the kingship himself, and yet it is not his place to be a king. His successful coupling with an otherworld woman, in what might be a variation on the 'king-and-goddess' theme so consistently associated with sovereignty in the Irish context (Mac Cana 1955–1959), also might imply this: yes, he has a sexual and ongoing relationship with an otherworld woman, but she is very definitely not the Sovereignty Goddess, and their union results

[6] Mac Cana 1980: 94–97, particularly 95–96 on this specific title.

in offspring, which is not generally a feature of the 'king-and-goddess' myths. Her non-royal position is similar to his own, and she seems to have had duties reminiscent of his own in relation to the otherworld king. That the aversion of one Greek eschatological situation involved Zeus ensuring that Thetis marries an ordinary mortal rather than a more elevated *hieros gamos* taking place suggests itself as a strong parallel to the situation in *Echtra Nerai*.

The re-making of the world as far as the island of Ireland itself is concerned as a result of the great *Táin*, including the cosmogonic implications of the re-shaping of the landscape by both bulls and warriors, particularly toward the end of the epic, all results from actions that directly follow on from incidents that take place in *Echtra Nerai*. The near-destruction of one kingdom – but, I think we can conjecture, of the very fabric of the cosmos itself – on a night filled with universal significance, and the breakdown of linear time for the one person who is able to do anything about it, cannot but have further effects for the rest of the world. The good actions of Nera, who demonstrates repeatedly that he takes his cues (except for the initial dare to go outside and play ring-toss with a dead criminal's foot) not from the people of this world, but the otherworld – the dead man himself, the king, and his otherworldly wife – are the heroic focus of this tale. He proves after a fashion that he is 'too good' for the flawed world, whether he was before or is thereafter simply because of his knowledge and what he has seen and experienced, and he is instead able to enjoy all that the otherworld offers in what seems likely to be a timeless and eternal joy, in the constant presence of the very roots of the power of sovereignty, poetic inspiration, warrior's fury, and the fiery-water wellsprings of the structure of the cosmos itself. Recalling the words of Strabo, one could say that both fire and water overcame him, but the revelation of his immortality is the reward at the end for him. Alternatively, to follow on from some of Toner's arguments, the situation of sovereignty in the otherworld has also been compromised while the human world's sovereignty has been restored and ensured for future generations, and so perhaps Nera's skills in maintenance and restoration of sovereignty are more needed there than they are in the human world, despite the major problems on the horizon in the human world consequent from the events of this tale itself.

In a Christian context, of course, this would not be the case; no matter how much Nera might enjoy his time in the otherworld, the final judg-

ment of God would determine who enjoyed a more permanent reward and who did not. However, putting that religious framework into parenthesis for the moment – for, indeed, it only seems to emerge at all in the tale in the final line, where Christian moralizing seems prone to turn up in a great many medieval Irish tales – I think it is possible to detect echoes of an older, Celtic-derived or influenced sense of eschatology and cyclical time in the narrative of *Echtra Nerai*, at play in particular relation to the more cosmic forces that have their earthly counterparts in domestic fire and water.

Feis Tigi Becfholtaig: Darkness yields to light

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There are two versions of *Compert Con Culainn* (Version 1, henceforth *CCC*[1]) that tell of the birth of the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn.[1] It is Version 2, additionally titled *Feis Tigi Becfholtaig* (henceforth *FTB*),[2] that is the subject of this article. Both versions, in which the same protagonists are present, begin when Conchobar, king of Emain, goes in pursuit of marauding birds that escape as darkness falls. He is given shelter in a house, where his sister Deichtire who will eventually give birth to Sétanta (later known as Cú Chulainn) is living with her lover Lug. Further details diverge significantly, but they re-converge insofar as it is Conchobar who arranges a marriage contract for his sister Deichtire either with himself as depicted in Version 2 or with Súaltaim as related in Version 1. These discrepancies are significant, for each tale can be considered an exemplary narrative. Each is constructed upon a solar myth,[3] where the sun's 'marriage' to the earth – essential for the genesis of vegetal life – has been adapted and modified for different purposes. As sun and earth are imagined as a division of primeval matter, they are often personified as the first couple in a relationship where husband and wife can be alternatively depicted as brother and sister (Rees & Rees 1961: 233). Version 1 repudiates this nature-based paradigm as a model

[1] Cited after Ernst Windisch, both versions published in *Irische Texte* (1880). For Version 1, Windisch used two manuscripts – Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 1229 al. *Lebor na h-Uidre* and British Library Egerton 1782. For Version 2, he used British Library Egerton 1782 f. 79.

[2] 'Sojourn in the House of Little Wealth'.

[3] This paradigm concerns its structure rather than its provenance (Deane 2007).

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 251–268.

for human conduct and illustrates instead that the prohibition of incest is a necessary catalyst for the emergence of such cultural institutions as marriage, clientship and kingship (Deane 2009 and 2011). By contrast, this paradigm is used in Version 2 as a metaphor to validate the king's achievements (Deane 2011–12). The alternative title of Version 2, changing from *compert* 'birth' to *feis* 'sacred marriage', signals a radical difference in emphasis, from procreation in Version 1 to sacred marriage or royal inauguration in Version 2.

The analysis in this article proceeds from the fundamental observation that myth often strives to communicate two levels of reality – the physical and the metaphysical, or the real and the ideal – by illustrating how earthly events are mirrored in the heavens (Waardenburg 1980: 53). I aim to show here how certain conventions, familiar to mythical and to Christian exegesis, illustrate the process whereby the king attained pragmatic knowledge for the conduct of his earthly affairs and how he also attained knowledge of eternal truth itself. I will identify how the tale, by superimposing patterns of semantics, of syntax, of metaphor and of homophonic correspondences upon each other, creates a wide complex of analogies as a means of highlighting that, in the interest of justice, the king must recognize that his history for good or for bad, and his responsibility for it, evolve from his relationship with other forces both in the human and in the supernatural world.

The narrative of *Feis Tigi Becfholtaig*

At a literal level, *FTB* opens with the information that Deichtire had eloped from Conchobar's jurisdiction and that he had been seeking her for three years, and that it was she who used to come back with her woman companions *hi rict enlaithe* 'in the guise of birds' and destroy Conchobar's crops. The salient events that distinguish this version from *CCC*[1] occur immediately after Conchobar finds shelter, when his poet Briccriu[4] wanders outside the house where they had been accommodated. He sees a large impressive house with a couple inside. The unnamed owner [Lug][5] invites him to enter and the woman welcomes

[4] Briccriu's poetic status is identified as *ánroth* in Version 1 (O'Rahilly, T. F. 1946: 522).

[5] Guyonvarc'h (1965: 383).

him. When Lug asks Briccriu whether he was lacking anything at Emain, Briccriu mentions the missing women. Then Lug asks whether he would recognize them, and Briccriu says he doesn't know, for they might have changed in the three-year interval. Lug encourages him to make an effort before revealing that the people he seeks are there in that very house and that the woman who had greeted him was Deichtire. Moreover, it was she who had actively contrived to lure the king and his company to her.[6] Briccriu returns to Conchobar, enthused about the house and its inhabitants,[7] but decides not to mention that Deichtire was among them.

> *Cot-cel-sa iarum* […] *armad sissi a ṡiur-sium cona hingenruid fog-abuinn*
>
> 'I will conceal then that it was his sister and her maidens that I found'. (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 31–32 and 145, l. 1)

However, Conchobar is attracted by the report of the house and its queen and expresses a desire to sleep with her.[8] He sends Fergus with this request, which Deichtire welcomes, and she returns with him. When Fergus reports to Conchobar that she is in labour, the king arranges their betrothal (*dál*, *eDIL* dil.ie/14345 IV (b)). After the child is born, Conchobar hands him to Finnchoem whom Briccriu identifies as Deichtire's sister. On hearing Deichtire's name, the king publicly proclaims the merits of his spouse. A debate concerning the boy's fosterage follows.

[6] The agency of both partners in forming a ((sacred) marriage) alliance is expressed through a conflation of genres – *tochmarc* 'wooing' and *aithed* 'elopement '. These patterns are subsumed within an *echtrae*, an expedition involving the king's journey into the otherworld (Deane 2011–12).

[7] *'Ranuc-si tech n-an n-uirnige', al Briccri, 'ocus rigon ran rathmur rignuidi chaemcasto ann. Banntracht finn fuinechto, techlach fial forlassuir is tig'.* ''I arrived at a freshly-clean bright house', said Briccriu, 'with a splendid gracious royal-looking curly-haired queen in it, a company of fair pure women, and a generous and radiant household inside.'' (Windisch 1880: 145, ll. 3–6).

[8] '*Toet chucum a ben hinnocht do fes lium*' 'Let his [Lug's] wife come and sleep with me tonight' (Windisch 1880: 145, ll. 7–8).

Analogies

However, this wedding address to Deichtire denotes not so much a renewal of a marriage but of a sacred-marriage contract. The actions of the central characters – Conchobar, Lug, Deichtire and Briccriu – are linked on many different levels, which are best understood by treating the narrative as a set of extended analogies. As Conchobar is both king and military leader, restored alliance with Deichtire, who, as land,[9] personifies both his territorial realm and its people, also indicates his return to office and his (re-)appropriation of sovereignty, and assigns to Deichtire the role of sovereignty goddess.[10] As will become apparent, the tale focuses on that element of the goddess whereby as a figure for the whole of life in its material and in its immaterial forms, she represents reality or 'what exists' to indicate that the king's epithalamium to Deichtire celebrates a more radical celebration, namely, a celebration of truth itself.[11]

[9] Deichtire is a personification of the land *tír* and also a figure for the Irish Elysium *dag-thír* 'goodly land' (*eDIL* dil.ie/14139; Baumgarten 1990: 114). The semiotic theory of language has shown that meaning emanates strictly from the procession and retroactivity of signifiers. Hence, in the commutation of Deichtire to *deg-thír* another level of meaning operates when lexical changes transfer from one semantic range to another. For example, the woman Deichtire, variously denominated as 'sister' *siur* or as 'wife' *ben*, can be exchanged for *deg-thír* 'goodly land', variously substituted by 'soil' *(f)úr* or by 'untilled land' *bán* which can be *heard* and activated simultaneously. The synchronization of these paradigmatic substitutions enables the conflation of a marriage and the theme of a sacred marriage (see de Saussure 2006).

[10] See footnote 6. Her contrivance to lure the king as her spouse denotes her as a sovereignty goddess (*aithed*: Mac Cana 1980: 74).

[11] On cosmic and ethic truth and their relationship with justice, see Wagner (1970: 8–11).

Military campaign

As the re-negotiated marriage contract between the king and Deichtire is a figure for his inauguration contract, the events leading to it merit consideration from that perspective. The question arises as to why Briccriu refused to tell the king the whole truth about the house and his reception there, and, in particular, why he deliberately decided to avoid mentioning that the people for whom Conchobar was looking were living in it with Deichtire as their leader. His idea not to identify them as the people responsible for luring the king to this destination was to enable Conchobar to continue his expedition in such a way that the success of the whole venture would be attributed solely to him without having to give credit to Deichtire for making it possible.

> '*In coeca ingensi tra*', *al se* '*testo ar Concobar, dobera muin nimmi a fagb… sunn.*'[12]
>
> 'The fifty young girls', he said 'whom Conchobar is missing; it will increase the esteem surrounding him that they have been found there'. (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 30–31)

However, Conchobar recognized his subjects[13] from Briccriu's report and that Lug was trespassing on his land: *Is im tir ata* 'It is on my territory he is' (Windisch 1880: 15, 7). He sent a message with Fergus that it be given back to him. The people (Deichtire) welcomed the terms offered (*imorchor*) and returned with Fergus. The success of the enterprise is marked by productiveness on two analogous fronts; just as his marital situation had been advanced through the negotiation of a tryst (*dál*) with Deichtire, his military transactions were rewarded with a peace agreement (*dál*) with his people.[14] Furthermore, not only was peace restored, but he had also arrived in time to guarantee the survival of the new produce (*mac*) that was about to be delivered.[15] However,

[12] Windisch *suim*.

[13] *Asiu aithig*. (Windisch 1880: 145, l. 6). 'These are subjects.'

[14] The king's realm constituted one contracting party of subjects in a relationship in which both parties were equal (Charles-Edwards 1994: 117; see also Deane 2011–12: 160–161).

[15] This is figured in Deichtire's imminent delivery of a son (*mac*) and in Conchobar's arrangements for his fosterage (Deane 2011–12). Conchobar's actions correspond with the powers of the king to 'issue special ordinances at a time of crisis, save the

the king's ultimate objective lay beyond purely pragmatic concerns, whether domestic or political. The object of his quest was truth itself, the acquisition of which is publicly affirmed in his eulogy[16] to Deichtire at the 'inauguration feast' (*banais*), which he had sought.[17]

Fír Flathemon 'the ruler's truth'[18]

FTB offers the conflation of a marriage-cum-sacred-marriage motif as a forum from which that specific category of truth known in early Irish kingship ideology as *fír flathemon* can be explored. Its basic tenet was two-fold. If a king was to rule justly, he must have knowledge of 'the ruler's truth', which was understood to have its origin in the otherworld, and he must proclaim that truth in public. Although in his inaugural speech Conchobar fulfilled this obligation and thus returned to office, the focal point of the narrative lies elsewhere. Its centrepiece is a colloquy or *acallam*[19] in which the spiritual process involved in his acquiring knowledge of the truth is dramatized. It takes the form of a conversation conducted on the king's behalf by his poet Briccriu[20] with Lug, a denizen of the otherworld.

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threatened harvest and repel invaders', as identified by Binchy (1970: 16).

[16] *Sochla brig becfoltach*
baithi indag Dectiri
domroet iarsin secht gcairptiu
sephaind huacht do eochraidib
[*runn-utaing*] *errethaib*
(Windisch 1880: 140–141, ll. 27–30, 15)

'Renowned and worthy (place) of little substance
in which the good Dechtire was;
(she) who then gave shelter to me and seven chariots,
she drove away cold from horses,
she has refreshed us champions.'
(my translation)

[17] *Toet chucum a* ben *hinnocht do* fes *lium.* 'Let his wife come and sleep with me tonight' (Windisch 1880: 145, ll. 7–8). *Banais* is a compound of *ben* and *feis* (see Mac Cana 1979: 49; see also note 10).

[18] On the ruler's truth (*fír flathemon*), see Wagner (1970: 1–45), Ó Cathasaigh (1977: 64–65), Watkins (1979: 181–198).

[19] Windisch (1880: 144, ll. 16–17): *Atn-gladustar* 'He addressed him.' See *ad-gladathar*, vb.n. *acallam* (*eDIL* dil.ie/459). It denotes a conversation between a seeker of truth and a supernatural possessor of truth (Nagy 1997: 3–7).

[20] His traditional role as poet/priest signals him as a conduit of otherworld wisdom. Discourse markers indicate access to the supernatural: *gu gcuala ni*, *con facco*, *ro cluinter*.

Mythic impersonation

However, to fully understand that the issue at stake pertains solely to the king's conduct is to understand that the narrative has divided different aspects of the king's thought processes into different personified entities. Various mental faculties, like different complexes within the individual psyche, are depicted as sub-personalities dialoguing with each other within Conchobar's mind (Deane 2011–12: 155–156). For example, Briccriu is a spiritual advisor and functionary in Conchobar's service, and, simultaneously, as a poet (*fili* 'one who sees') he can be considered a personification of the king's own reasoning powers. This conventional narrative technique[21] enables the stratagems exercised by Briccriu in the outer world to be recounted simultaneously with the analogous machinations inside Conchobar's mind. Briccriu's dual function as a social and as a psychic adjunct to the king is also replicated in the characterisation of the 'all-knowing' Lug (Wagner 1970: 21) who, as a spokesperson for Deichtire,[22] can be considered a personification of the king's intellectual faculty conversant with truth.

Refusal

FTB is essentially didactic. Briccriu's decision to conceal Deichtire's merits and thus further compromise Conchobar's legitimacy as ruler[23] is a narrative ploy to highlight the gulf that can exist between knowing truth and acting justly in accordance with that knowledge. Yet, the tale is at pains to show that Conchobar is as worthy of commendation for having acquired that knowledge in the first place as he is of censure for hesitating to make it operative. The conversation between Briccriu and Lug, therefore, can be considered a literary representation of a test,[24] in this case, a self-examination conducted within the king's own mind,

[21] See Eisenstadt (1968: 25).

[22] *Is fodaigind ina mna feruim-si failti fritt* 'It is on the woman's behalf I welcome you' (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 18–19).

[23] Kingly failure could be expressed in a narrative as a separation of partners accompanied by the deterioration of one or both (see McCone 1990: 120).

[24] Sacral kingship was celebrated by a ritual marriage between a goddess and a new ruler who emerged after appropriate tests (McCone 1990: 120).

to judge his suitability for office, for which the possession of truth was the determining factor. At every thematic level – a king's search for his realm, a husband's pursuit of his spouse, or, as in this last case, a ruler's quest for truth – Conchobar's struggle to regain contact with Deichtire is mediated by Briccriu and Lug, all four of whom are also here, as in other texts, personifications of sun,[25] earth,[26] dawn[27] and daylight,[28] respectively. These metaphorical personifications multiply and become more intricate when we become attuned to other rhetorical techniques that *FTB* uses to convey its analogies.

The search for truth

The tale has a wider scope than the conduct of a king. It has appropriated a particular king's search for sovereignty to act also as a parable for the universal search for truth. This is manifested through the reciprocal functions of the eulogy to Deichtire and the debate. Where the eulogy is a literary expression of the king's inauguration address in which he specifies ways[29] in which he is indebted to his people (Deichtire), the debate, in the form of a public contest, is a corollary to it. It gives an idealized snapshot of society in general and also of the personal and professional integrity of each individual present, eager to renew their co-operation with the king in return for the co-operation that he has just promised them.[30] *FTB* has expanded its paradigms to emphasize how the achievement of a goal – material, marital, political or spiritual – is the consequence of knowing *and* acting in accord with the reciprocities that characterize the agencies and phenomena of both this world and the otherworld. It shows that the king's clients, in meeting their obligations, were essential determinants of how successful his rule was. Truth, therefore, far from being the sole preserve of a king, is shown to

[25] Wagner (1970: 8).
[26] See note 10.
[27] Briccriu as *ánroth* denotes a solar deity or luminary of the heavens (O'Rahilly, T. F. 1946: 522).
[28] Lug 'the luminous one' (Green 1991: 110; MacNeill 1962: 409–430).
[29] Precise wording is essential for the furtherance of truth (Watkins 1995: 91).
[30] A public expression of gratitude is a tacit promise that he will continue to contribute efforts and resources in on-going exchange with theirs (see Deane 2013: 167).

be the prerogative of every human being. Therefore, this *acallam* acts as a template for the spiritual maturation of the ruler and for his subjects, and also for every human person whose humanity is enriched through the community so formed. That these reciprocities have already been jeopardized is indicated by the additional title that distinguishes version 2 from version 1.[31] The following is the *acallam* from *FTB* (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 10–27).

Luidh Briccriu amach iarsin, gu gcuala ni: in cloi deroil. Ro cluinter in fogur, ocus ni fes cia raide. Ted-i iarum fon fogur docum in tigi, con facco in tech mor coin cumtachto ar a chinn. Tet-e don dorus rathuigtir isin tig. Rathaig-i taisiuch inn tige.

Briccriu went out after that. He heard something: a slight commotion. A noise is heard, and it was not known who spoke. Then he goes towards the sound, approaching the house. He saw a big beautiful impressive house ahead of him. He goes to the door that he notices in the house. The master of the house notices him.

'*Tair issin tech, a Briccriu, all se fris.*' '*Ced ar acco sen?*' '*Fochen om eim,*' *ol in uen. Focherd a suilchor issin tig. Atn-gladustar in tuisich oglach side coem gratto.* '*Cid ara fera in uen failti friumb?*' *al Briccriu.* '*Is fodaigind ina mna feruim-si failti fritt. Inab-testa-si tesbuid a h-Emuin?* ol in fer.'

'Come into the house, Briccriu,' he said to him. 'What can you see there?' 'You are truly welcome,' said the woman. He cast a glance inside. The master of the house – a handsome and noble youth – addressed him. 'Why does the woman welcome me?' said Briccriu. 'It is on the woman's behalf I welcome you. Are you missing anything in Emain?' said the man.

'*Testa eim,*' *ol Briccriu,* '*caecco ingen oruinn is moum III bliadna.*' '*Cescc. Innd-athgnitae mad attceththae?*' *ol in fer.* '*Nach[a] aithgeuin,*' *al Briccri* '*forbartt na teoru m-bliadan no sergg na teora m-bliadan, bes immfolgna anathgnas no immraichni dun.*'

'Indeed, we are missing fifty young girls for more than three years,' said Briccriu. 'I want to know. Would you know them if you saw them?' said the man. 'I wouldn't recognize them,' said Briccriu. 'Perhaps growth for three years or decay for three years might cause us not to know or to be mistaken.'

[31] Reciprocity is given its most concrete expression in the debate (Deane 2013).

'*Saig aithgne forru*' *oll in fer.* '*It e fil issin tig si coecuit ingen. Is hi a toisiuch fil sunno imm laim siu. Dectire a hainm ocus it e dochotar hi rict na henlaithi do Emuin Macæ do thochuiriud hUlad, gu tuidchidis sunn ille.*'	'Try to recognize them,' said the man. 'It is the fifty young girls, who are in the house. She, who is here beside me, is their leader. Deichtire is her name. It was they who went in the form of a bird flock to Emain Macha to entice the Ulstermen, so that they would come hither.'

Lower and higher reason

This paper illustrates how the *acallam*, which dramatizes the spiritual struggle that the acquisition of truth entails, also serves to highlight concepts about the fundamental nature of truth itself. I illustrate how the way that knowledge of truth can be gained is described in terms of a personified mind that inhabits the 'house' of an inner world. It is difficult not to hear an echo of St Augustine's conceptualization of mental activity here,[32] for he, too, personifies the mind as 'some-one' (Holscher 1986: 103) and the inner world in which it dwells as a 'house' (O'Daly 1987: 81). As other theories of Augustine coincide with concepts embodied in this tale, I apply them simply as a hermeneutic tool for my discussion without claim of direct correspondence or influence. It is fruitful to consider, for example, how he differentiated between two functions of the mind – reason and intellect – and designated them lower and higher reason (Nash 1969: 7). This categorizing of mental activity as reason and intellect accords with that adopted in this tale, where it is similarly transmitted through impersonation. Augustine explains lower reason as the reasoning or thinking ability through which knowledge of the temporal world of particulars is attained (Nash 1969: 65). This kind of knowledge involves investigation and is indispensable for the preservation and sustenance of human life. Among examples of activities that fall into this category, Augustine cites managing the affairs of war and giving attention to crops (Nash 1969: 8). These duties coincide with those successfully undertaken by the king on his military campaign, when, as protector of his kingdom, he sent Fergus to negotiate a meeting

[32] Churchmen who came to Christianize Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries brought the works of Augustine with them (Duffy 1997: 14).

(*dál*) with his realm (Deichtire) whose produce (*mac*; Russell 2008: 435) he undertook to save.

However, Augustine stresses that it is only through the exercise of the intellect, that is, through reason illuminated by divine light, that knowledge of the eternal and immutable can be attained. He equates this latter knowledge, attained through contemplation, with wisdom (O'Daly 1987: 104), a defining attribute of the just ruler in Irish tradition.[33] Included in Augustine's examples of eternal things are moral norms and principles (Holscher 1986: 104). Most salient for our purposes is, firstly, his identification of truth and justice as exemplars of these ideals, and, secondly, his definition of justice-in-operation as 'the giving to everything its due' (Holscher 1986: 104). Furthermore, he believes that although justice and such other ideals are incorporeal, nevertheless, insofar as they are objects or facts capable of being grasped by the intellect, they are spiritual realities. Thirdly, as knowledge of these realities is of benefit to society as a whole and also of benefit to every individual to whom that knowledge is disclosed, so truth ought to be publicly circulated among the community and not remain a personal possession only (Holscher 1986: 111). In *FTB*, it is the king's reluctance to give due credit to his people (Deichtire) that constitutes the reason for the test and its aftermath. It is the overcoming of this unwillingness that provides the subject matter for the eulogy.

Augustine argues that the intellect is both active and passive, for knowledge is both the product of reason and of some entity that exists prior to its being perceived by the mind (Holscher 1986: 92). He develops this point by means of a metaphor in which reason's capacity to see is based by analogy on physical sight (O'Daly 1987: 204). As noted, he distinguishes between knowledge of the temporal world of particulars and knowledge of eternal truth itself. He believes that even though human affairs comply with or deviate from an ideal, there is an eternal model against which they can be measured.

FTB superimposes these realms upon one another. On the one hand, it reveals how information furnished by sight – both of the senses and

[33] The subtitle of the present article, 'Darkness Yields to Light', is a rendering of *To-léci dorche do ṡorchi*, which appears in *Audacht Morainn* (Kelly, F. 1976: §54a). *Audacht Morainn* is an example of the *Speculum Principum* ('Mirror of Princes') genre, whose purpose is to give advice on how to be a good king. This of course is a central theme in *FTB*.

of the mind – yields the knowledge it seeks. On the other hand, by means congruent with what is referred to as Augustine's 'illumination theory',[34] it illustrates that in order to reach truth itself, that is, to achieve an accurate understanding of reality, seeing must be aided by intellect, which he explains as a higher faculty that transcends reason. He compares the capacity of the intellect to render this sought-for truth knowable by analogy with the manner in which the sun makes material things visible (Nash 1969: 65).

Seeing and perceiving

The *acallam* transmits these concepts by means of an accumulation of verbs and phrases denoting sensory perception that also carry connotations of mental and spiritual apprehension. In every case, these acts of perception or cognition – seeing, hearing, noticing or recognizing[35] – command an object. The idiom *co n-acca ní* 'he saw something', which is essentially a 'look and behold what is there' formula, is particularly informative in this respect. *Go gcuala ní* 'he heard something', in which the simultaneous experience of listening and hearing is transmitted, operates on the same principle. In these idioms, semantics and syntax combine to indicate that one always perceives 'something' *ní* (*eDIL* dil.ie/33145). In other words, when Briccriu sees or hears, he apprehends something that existed before he began to look or listen, for knowledge is a product both of the mind and of the world (Nash 1969: 62). Therefore, as his sense perception depends for its effectiveness on something perceived which is prior, his mental or intellectual perception, too, is represented as an agent of knowledge of which it is simultaneously the recipient. Therefore, by maintaining a symbiosis between the activity and the receptivity of the mind and also between human and supernatural agency, the effect of these grammatical constructions is to establish a synchronicity between reason's capacity to grasp reality and the anteriority of that reality. The traditional image for the all-encompassing power of illumination that reveals that reality

[34] Light of the mind is the key concept behind his theories of knowledge.
[35] G*u gcuala ni; ro cluinter*; *rathuigtir*; *rathaig-i.*

is the sun. In casting its light, it enables the apprehension of the (already present) world (Holscher 1986: 17).

The *accallam* is also constructed upon this metaphor, for, as noted, myth frequently represents two levels of reality, the physical and the metaphysical, by illustrating how earthly events are mirrored in the heavens. To understand the process that unfolds here demands that we remain alert, firstly, to the fact that Briccriu and Lug are not just humans in social interaction, but representations of different thoughts deliberating about truth, and, secondly, that these mental faculties – reason and intellect – have been constructed also upon images of natural light. Consequently, there is a synthesis established between Lug and Briccriu as personified agents of Conchobar's mind and between Lug and Briccriu as figures for distinguishable features of one cosmic reality, the sun (Conchobar).[36] From these conjunctions, the illuminating power of intellectual knowledge is communicated in iconic detail by means of an analogous depiction of a skyscape or heavens with different stages of the sun's movements from its early morning appearance to its lighting up of the whole sky.

The conceit that sustains these analogies depends for its completion on the dual metaphorical impact afforded to different nouns. For example, a house (*tech*) is a metaphor both for the heavens[37] and also for the human 'mind' (O'Daly 1987: 81). The first denotation allows one to recognize the phenomenon of emerging sunlight, as a picture of daylight beginning to materialize is conjured up. Summoned by a faint musical strain (*in cloi deroil*), which is perhaps the incipient dawn chorus given that the birds had disappeared the previous night,[38] Briccriu, the personification of 'the speckled light of dawn' (Harrison 1989: 23), approaches. With its advance, a spectacle is revealed. Light (Lug) at the door of the expanded heavens (*tech*) greets the approaching dawn.

Just as the dawn intimates that the sun has begun its diurnal journey out of darkness, it is intimated, too, that Conchobar's mind has begun to stir. When Briccriu sets out from Conchobar's presence, Conchobar's

[36] The representation of the king as endowed with transcendental characteristics is based on a traditional analogy between king and sun (cf. Eisenstadt 1968: xviii–xxvi). On kingly charisma in version1 *CCC*[1], see Deane 2011.

[37] 'Heaven' (*eDIL* dil.ie/40265) and, by convention, the 'heavens' where it is 'housed'.

[38] *Doruichur iaram adaig foruib, ocus adrullui a n-enlaith* 'Then night fell on them and the bird-flock escaped' (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 3–4).

entry into another realm of thought is indicated. When he hears a barely audible sound, he is drawn to find the reason for it, for he does not know what it is. The active verb (*eDIL* dil.ie/40447) in the phrase *teid-i iarum fon fogur* (Windisch 1880: 144, l. 12) signals that he is going of his own volition towards the sound to investigate it, while simultaneously it signals that he is under the influence of the otherworld to which he 'succumbs'. As a scenario opens up before him, he sees something: *in tech mor coin cumachto ar a chinn* (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 12–13) 'a big impressive house ahead of him'. The double metaphorical connotations of *tech* and the impressive size allocated to it enables its appearance to function as a figure for the enlargement of the 'heavens' as dawn progresses towards daylight and also, in this case, as a figure for the expansion of the 'mind' as reason and intellect prepare to converge in the dialogue that ensues when Lug invites Briccriu to enter: *Tair issin tech* 'Come inside' (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 14–15).

Darkness yields to light[39]

Once inside, there is an intensification of his thought processes. Verbal forms denoting intellectual vigour (*rathaig-i* 'he noticed him' and *atn-gladustar* 'he addressed him') are active, for Lug, the supernatural interlocutor and harbinger of truth, like the intellect, acts as the driving force of observation, questioning and disclosure. As he poses a question, an inner debate is set in motion. *Ced ar acco sen?* 'What can you see?' (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 15–16). In response, Briccriu 'casts a glance inside' (*Focherd a suilchor*[40] *issin tig*).

Just as *tech* has enabled a correspondence to be maintained between the enlargement of the atmosphere with the arrival of dawn and the opening-up of Briccriu's (Conchobar's) mind, the analogy continues in its most potent form yet. An ingenious conjunction of images is evoked by *súil*, which not only denotes both the physical and the mental 'eye' of

[39] Among the precepts advocated for the just ruler, it is stipulated that 'darkness yields to light' and that 'falsehood yields to truth' (*Audacht Morainn*; Kelly, F. 1976: 15–16, §54a and 54m).

[40] Casting the eye around inside indicates that the sun casts its whole light inside. The sun (*súil* 'eye' « PIE **sah₂u̯el-* 'sun') was regarded as the divine eye of the heavens (O'Rahilly, T. F. 1946: 58).

the beholder, but, more significantly, it denotes the 'sun' itself (*súil* quasi *sol*; *eDIL* dil.ie/39215). From this composite, the transformative power of sunlight – as the sun fully enters the sky and 'casts its light all around' and 'inside the heavens' (*issin tech*)[41] illuminating them and rendering them visible – is conjured up to denote the corresponding illumination that occurs when Briccriu (Conchobar) 'cast his eye around inside his mind' (*focherd a suilchor issin tig*).

As 'he cast the sight-of-his-mind inside', he begins to reason things out[42] and another question arises. *Cid ara fero in uen failti friumb?* 'Why does the woman welcome me?' His experience is fraught with difficulty. What he sees and its full significance only become apparent gradually after a measure of soul-searching, as dramatized in this dialogue. The crunch issue is soon addressed. It is formulated in a question-and-answer sequence during which Briccriu (the king) under the spiritual duress of Lug's insistent questioning, admits the loss and lack[43] incurred by the absence of Deichtire. *Inab-testa-si tesbuid… Testa eim.* 'Do you lack anything at Emain?' 'Indeed, we do!' (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 19–20). He not only lacks Deichtire as an object. He, as subject,[44] is lacking. This double aspect is emphasized in the reiteration of the word in various nominal and verbal forms. In the construction of the *figura etymologica*, the difficult-to-distinguish logical (as opposed to grammatical) subject and object of this loss is stressed. Loss is of his own making, yet it is something from which he suffers. However, a mere admission of deficiency is inadequate, no matter how firmly it has been asserted. Just as he will eventually express his gratitude publicly to Deichtire for specific ways in which he is indebted to her, he must first affirm in his own mind concrete examples of her influence that he had failed to notice.

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[41] The supernatural properties of the house are indicated by the plethora of words denoting a transcendent or divine world. *Forlassuir* (*eDIL* dil.ie/23724) has special association with the radiance of heaven; *finn* (*eDIL* dil.ie/22134) the fairness and 'angelic' knowledge of divinity; *rán* 'bright, splendid' (*eDIL* dil.ie/34793) is used to describe the deity; *rathmar* 'gracious' (*eDIL* dil.ie/34853) is often used in a religious sense; see footnote 7.

[42] Nash (1969: 65).

[43] 'Lack' can denote a period of failure in a king's career (Ó Cathasaigh 1977).

[44] The plural form of address indicates Briccriu's special function in relation to the king and also the latter's responsibility for society (Watkins 1995: 140).

Falsehood yields to truth[45]

This failure to notice is a problem (*cescc*) with which he continues to wrestle. The multiple use of the verb *aithnid* (*eDIL* dil.ie/2762) – which denotes both visual and mental perception – is used to communicate the protracted and reluctant process during which he comes variously to see, or not to see, these facts clearly for himself. Although he has admitted his own failure in relation to Deichtire, he is so long separated from her and her cohorts that he is forced (by Lug) to ask himself. *Inn-dathgnitae ma dattceththae?* 'Would you know them if you saw them?' (Windisch 1880: 144, l. 21). At first he demurs (*nach aithgeuin*). He reflects, before citing mutability as a possible reason. Change, perhaps, might cause difficulties for him in this regard. After all, the prolonged interval of their absence with its inevitable development (*forbart*) or deterioration (*serg*) might cause him 'neither to know nor recognise them'.[46] But the change that they may have undergone is only part of the issue. The king is admitting his own not-knowing. A greater effort is demanded, as Lug, his own inner spiritual voice, insists *Saig aithgne forru* 'Try to recognize them' (Windisch 1880: 144, l. 24). In response, he makes a supreme, or, as one might say, a superhuman effort, and the truth becomes obvious.

> *It e fil issin tig si coecuit ingen. Is hi a toisiuch fil sunno imm laim siu. Deictire a hainm ocus it e dochotar hi rict na henlaithi do Emuin Macæ do thochuiriud hUlad, gu tuidchidis sunn ille.*
>
> 'It is the fifty young girls, who are in the house […]. She, who is here beside me, is their leader. Deichtire is her name. It was they who went in the form of a bird flock to Emain Macha to entice the Ulstermen, so that they would come hither.' (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 24–27)

These words give shape to the immediacy of his situation; ignorance had blighted his vision to the extent that he didn't detect their departure nor recognize them when they had come back in disguise. However, he had also come to see that she had been vital not only to the outcome of his present circumstances, but that she was a constant feature of life itself, in bad times as well as good, for death and absence (*tesbuid*; *eDIL*

[45] Falsehood is inherent in the concealment of Deichtire's role.

[46] […] *bes immfolgna anathgnas no immraichni dun.* (Windisch 1880: 144, ll. 23–24).

dil.ie/40585) are permanent features of existence over which he has no control.

That the king has knowledge both of the reality of his loss and of its eternal dimension is inherent in the very words he uses. *Testa eim* 'There is lack indeed'. They demonstrate in their form and structure the principles they articulate, for truth is latent in the predicative use of the verb 'to be' upon which *testa* (*to-ess-tá-*) is constructed, and, as denoted by the aspectual form of the verb, the truth that he utters is a lasting and enduring fact of life. The narrative implicitly endorses these structures as an appropriate medium for conveying the universal and inevitable nature of this loss about which the king (as voiced by Briccriu) confirms that he is 'really and truly' (*éim*; *eDIL* dil.ie/40585) convinced. However, the king, for reasons that we have seen, does not act immediately in accordance with this conviction. It is a conviction that lies dormant until after the birth of his son, when mention of Deichtire triggers a renewed awareness of those unpalatable elements of life with which he is now reconciled.[47] *Ni fil brig tra* 'That's not important however' (Windisch 1880: 140, ll. 5–6). And, with that, he delivers an exuberant expression of gratitude to her.

Conclusion

The gist of this tale has been to represent a king (Conchobar) who comes to appreciate the bounty of the goddess in his life affairs. Her absence denotes a removal of a supernatural presence from a ruler unable, or unwilling, to recognize the mark of the goddess in an unwelcome or (un)familiar guise. This sets up the central dynamic, namely, the extent to which Conchobar is fallible or culpable for the plight in which we find him, or the extent to which he is simply vulnerable to external influences. This dialectic is highlighted throughout, in the high proportion of words and phrases whose agency (among many other examples not treated here) is ambiguous, leaving us to puzzle the following: How active or

[47] […] *mac Dectiri do derbṡethur innsin. Is hi fil sunn cæca ingen don-estao a hEmuin teora bliadna gusinniud* '[…] this is the son of Dechtire, your sister. It is she who is here with fifty girls who have been missing from Emain for three years until now' (Windisch 1880: 140, ll. 24–25). In the near-identical but key repetition of the words uttered in the *acallam*, her existential significance is implicitly remembered.

passive was his reaction (enacted by Briccriu) to the barely perceptible sound from the otherworld?[48] Did Deichtire and her maidens come in the 'natural' or in the 'assumed' form of birds?[49] Was it a 'request' or a 'reply' that Fergus brought to the couple within the house?[50]

These ambiguities are deliberate. They emphasize that the object of the king's search was union with Deichtire while, simultaneously, it was a union that she herself desired and conspired to bring about. The line between culpability and vulnerability is never definitively drawn, nor are deeds of commission or deeds of omission fully explicated. What seems to be Conchobar's desertion by the goddess is later confirmed and identified by him, and by the reader, as a spiritual malaise or lack. He errs as much by default as by design, in answer to or in reaction to the devious and covert ways in which forces outside his control render stability impossible. Ultimately, we understand that Conchobar is worthy to be king, but we see that the inherent qualities of the just ruler, like the properties of the goddess herself, can be lost and regained (Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 90). For the moment, however, his reunion with Deichtire re-establishes conditions conducive to the creation of prosperity as symbolized in the plans made with his people for the care of his son, the future Cú Chulainn.

[48] *Téid fo* 'to succumb; go towards' (*eDIL* dil.ie/40447).
[49] *Richt* (*eDIL* dil.ie/35260).
[50] *Aithesc*, also 'message (of heavenly origin)' (*eDIL* dil.ie/2637).

Anglo-Norman uses of the Ulster Cycle: The case of John de Courcy's Irish 'Lai'

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The poem that will be discussed here is preserved in a single manuscript witness: the late-14th-century *Leabhar Ua Maine* (RIA D ii 1, ff. 147 (205)va – 149va).[1] The text is found near the end of the manuscript in the midst of a section containing predominantly secular poetry. The most substantive published description of the poem to date is found in Carney (2008). In the course of an overview of the Connacht contribution to Irish learning in the post-Norman period, he describes the poem as follows:

> The second item to be mentioned is the poem 'Fuaid i ceand reisi méidhi' (Stitch the head to the neck), a composition of 179 quatrains. This poem could be called 'The battle of Magh Tadhuirn (Tabhuirn)'. The period is that of Conchobar mac Nessae. Herod (Iruath) and the host of Africa, together with his allies, the kings of Greece and Italy, are in Magh Tadhuirn in northern Britain, ready to challenge the

[1] Prof. Em. Ann Dooley brought this poem to my attention during the last year of my undergraduate degree at Toronto and I subsequently completed an edition of the poem for my MA dissertation at Galway under the supervision of An tOll. Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha. The greatest thanks will always be owed to these two wonderful supervisors. For their comments on various incarnations of the present article, I am very grateful to Matthieu Boyd, Ranke De Vries, Gregory Darwin, Mark David L. Gibbard, Dorothea Kullmann, Marie-Luise Theuerkauf and the reviewers and editors of this volume. I owe a particular thanks to Georgia Henley for sharing with me an advance copy of her then-forthcoming article and Kensa Broadhurst for checking the pagination therein for me. While I owe a great deal to all of these people, I must note that all errors and omissions are my responsibility alone.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 269–280.

> northern peoples, [...] all the greater heroes of the Connacht—Ulster cycle are there. Magh Tadhuirn (Tabhuirn) is the Campus Taberniae of Patrician tradition, supposedly St Patrick's birthplace, and victory is won by anticipating his virtues; his birth there is foreseen in vision by the druid, Cathbad. The narration is by Conall Cernach who recounts this battle as the major portion of a lament for the death of his fosterling Cumscraid Menn Macha, son of Conchobar.
>
> (Carney 2008: 703–704)

Other than entries in catalogues of the manuscript, I am unaware of any other published scholarship on this poem. I am presently preparing an edition of the poem for publication. I intend to offer here some thoughts in the direction of a historicist analysis of the poem.

To begin, I will briefly flesh out those aspects of the narrative that have a bearing on my analysis. Carney's summary is essentially correct. In broad terms, the poem is a narrative of an invasion of Ireland by a king of Africa. It opens thusly:

1. *Fuaigh an gceann ris an méidhe*
   fá ndéandais óig uiréirghe,
   is saoth leam a bheith mar sin,
   ceann meic chródha Chonchobhair.

   'Stitch the head to the headless body, to which the youths used to give homage, I regret that it is like that, the head of the brave son of Conchobhar.'[2]

The first eleven quatrains are given over to a lament for Cumhsgraidh. This is followed by a prophecy of the coming of St Patrick put into the mouth of the druid Cathbhaidh:

19. *S é rug ár bhfáistine uainn,*
    ar an maigh-se go móruaill,
    sibhse, (sluagh iodhlaidhe inn)
    míorbhaile tréana an Táilginn.'

    'What took our prophecy from us on this plain with great pride is you (we are a heathen host), the powerful marvels of the Adze-Head.'

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

This prophecy extends until quatrain 29. In due course, Ioruath, aforementioned king of Africa, arrives and makes extravagant demands of tribute from Conchobhar and his host (qq. 37–54). When these demands are resoundingly rejected with almost operatic speeches (qq. 55–70), battle ensues. Conchobhar and the Ulster heroes are joined in the fray by a range of characters from Connacht, including Aillil, Medb and Fraoch. After an overview of the armies (qq. 79–88), the narrative turns to the exploits of individual warriors (qq. 89–144). Ioruath's own son enters the battle:

145. *In aghaidh Ioldoilbh go mbuaidh*
do éirigh Uath mac Ioruaith,
an chraobh iomslán re hathaigh
dá dhiongbháil dá dheaghathair.

Uath son of Ioruath arose against victorious Ioldolbh, the perfect branch was warding him off from his good father for a time.

Uath is promptly killed. This is a terrible shame as his name suggests he was an absolutely charming fellow – the name is, of course, synonymous with the Old Irish for 'fear, horror, or terror' (cf. *eDIL, úath* 1).[3] Meanwhile, Ioruath casts a stone at Conchobhar's shield:

152. *Do léig cloich as a láimh luinn,*
Ioruath mór go ngairge ngluinn,
ba mór a feadh is a faoidh,
go ros-bhris uile an Orchaoin.

153. *Seacht gcobhradh móra gan mheirg*
isin Orchaoin eochairdheirg,
níor fhágaibh cobhradh nár sgailt
insa sgíath álainn ordhraic.

152. 'He threw a stone from his violent hand, great Ioruath with fierce boldness, great was its reach and its cry so that it completely broke the Orchaoin'.

153. 'There were seven great bosses without rust in the red-rimmed Orchaoin; there was no boss that he did not split in the beautiful, famous shield'.

[3] (www.dil.ie 2019). Accessed on April 30th, 2023.

With Conchobhar incapacitated, it is left to Fearghus to finish off Ioruath. Though the Irish heroes are ultimately triumphant, the victory is rendered Pyrrhic by their heavy losses. Both sides depart by ship:

170. *Gidh líonmhar táinig a-niar,*
Conchobhar go n-iomad ngíall,
ní ráinig slán leis na luing
acht Bricne fa fhear fulaing.

171. *Gidh líonmhar táinig a-noir,*
Ioruath mór fa gharbh a ghoil;
marbhthar iad uile ar an maigh
acht a raibhe 'na longaibh.

170. 'Though many came from the west, Conchobhar with many hostages, there returned safely with the ships only Bricne who was a champion'.

171. 'Though many came from the east, great Ioruath whose valour was rough, all of them are killed on the plain except for those who were in their ships'.

The poem concludes with a return to the original lament for Cumhsgraidh.

As regards the linguistic date of the poem, I intend to explore the matter in greater detail in my forthcoming edition. For the present purposes, it will suffice to note that there is no reason to date the poem any earlier than slightly before the end of the Middle Irish period and, as independent personal pronouns are found sporadically throughout,[4] the linguistic evidence points to a date within the Early Modern Irish period. This date is supported by an examination of the content and historical context of the poem, as will now be demonstrated.

Now, to begin the analysis, I will start with what one might describe as one of the more intrusive questions raised by the poem: who is Ioruath? At first glance, and indeed a few glances after that, the name Ioruath seems to bear some resemblance to the Irish name for Norway or an otherworld location (Mac Cana 1983: 87–93). However, that form inflects as an *ā*-stem (cf. *eDIL, Irúaith*), whereas the Ioruath of this poem

[4] E.g. *muna raibh sé* 4c; *ó nach bhfuair sé* 14c; *go dtiobhra tú* 23c; *i dtig sé* 26a; *buailfidh mise* 74b; *beanfaidh mé* 74c; *Nochan fhaca mise* 104a, 149a; *do shir sé* 143b; etc.

declines as an *o*-stem throughout. There is similarly nothing in the text to suggest towards a connection with the legendary bird Hiruath, which is mentioned in *In Tenga Bithnua* (cf. McNamara 1988). Carney's association of the name with Herod is possible (2008: 703–704); however, this association is weakened somewhat by the fact that there is another poem in *Leabhar Ua Maine* explicitly about Herod, headed '*Seanchas Hiruath éistidh hé*', in which his name is spelt with a final lenited *d* in every instance except the first line (RIA D ii 1, ff. 66 (123)^{v}b – 67 (124)a). In place of biblical associations, I would posit that the name is drawn from earlier Irish vernacular tradition. In the Rawlinson B 502 copy of *Senchas Síl Ír*, there is a poem in which the genealogy of many Ulster heroes is recounted. One quatrain reads:

> Dá húa Roaich, ruamna gass,
> Illan ocus Ilarchass;
> trí huí Chleite – comol nglé –
> *hIruth, hUath is Aislingthe.* (O'Brien 1962: 283)
>
> 'Two descendants of Roach, young crimson warriors, Illan and Ilarchass; three descendents of Cleite – a clear company – Iruth, Uath and Aislingthe'.

Towards the end of *Tochmarc Emire*, an exceedingly similar quatrain turns up, likewise in a litany of heroes:

> A thrí dáilemain co mblaid
> Find, Erúath is Faithemain,
> trí uí Chleitig, comall nglé,
> *Úath, Urad is Aislinge.* (van Hamel 1978: 68)
>
> 'O three cupbearers with renown, Find, Erúath and Faithemain, three descendents of Cleitech, a clear company, Úath, Urad and Aislinge'.

Although there are no epithets or other details provided about these figures, the presence of both an Iruth/Erúath/Urad and an Uath in the midst of Ulster-cycle material is significant. They attest to the presence of at least two kernels of lore upon which a poet could draw.

What, then, is to be gleaned from the epithet 'king of Africa'? Where is our poet getting the idea of an African invasion of Ireland? I am unaware of any other surviving references to such an invasion in the earlier Irish corpus, but an unnamed '*rí na hAifrice*' features prominently in the seventeenth-century Irish Arthurian tale *Eachtra Mhelóra*

agus Orlando (Mhac an tSaoi 1946). The ultimate source, however is likely to be found slightly further afield. Accounts of an invasion of Ireland by a king of or from Africa appear in a wide array of French and French-influenced sources starting no later than the twelfth century. The king in question is most commonly named as Gormund or Gurmund - a character first attested in the mid-twelfth century *chancon de geste Gormund et Isembart* (Ghidoni 2013). Geoffrey of Monmouth recounts his invasion thusly in the generation after Arthur in book eleven of the first recension of his *Historia Regum Britanniae*:

> *Cui successit Kareticus, amator ciuilium bellorum, inuisus Deo et Britonibus; cuius inconstantiam comperientes Saxones iuerunt propter Gormundum regem Affricanorum in Hiberniam, in quam maximis nauigiis aduectus gentem patriae subiugauerat. Exin proditione eorum cum centum sexaginta milibus Affricanorum ad Britanniam transfretauit, quam in una parte mentitae fidei Saxones, in alia uero ciues patriae, ciuilia bella inter se assidue agentes, penitus deuastabant.*
>
> (Reeve 2007: 255)

> '[Malgo] was succeeded by Kareticus, a lover of civil wars, hateful to God and the Britons; the Saxons learned of his weakness and went to Ireland to fetch Gormundus the king of the Africans, who had landed there with a huge fleet and subdued its people. Thanks to the Saxons' treachery, Gormundus and a hundred and sixty thousand Africans crossed to Britain, which was being laid completely waste, on the one side by the faithless Saxons, and on the other by the continual civil wars waged by its own citizens'.

Similar and indeed similarly brief accounts of this same invasion are found in Wace's *Roman de Brut* (Arnold 1940: 699 (ll. 13385–13390)), Layamon's *Brut* (Brook & Leslie 1978: 758–760 (ll. 14415–14465)) and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristain* (Krohn 1980: 360 (ll. 5878–5884)) among others. Suffice it to note that the idea is current around the end of the twelfth century.

The account of this invasion that may be the closest analogue to that in the text under discussion here is to be found in book three, chapter 39 of Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica.* Drawing on Geoffrey's version, Gerald recounts:

> *In Britannica legitur historia, Gurmundum ab Affrica in Hiberniam advectum, et inde in Britanniam a Saxonibus accitum; Cirecestriam*

> *obsidione cinxisse qua tandem capta, et passerum, ut fertur, maleficio igne succensa, ignobili quoque tunc Britonum rege Keredicio in Kambriam expulso, totius regni dominium in brevi obtinuisse. Sive ergo Affricanus, seu, quod verius esse videtur, Norwagiensis fuerit, vel in Hibernia nunquam fuit, vel, relicto ibidem Turgesio, modici temporis in ea moram fecit.* (Dimock 1867: 184)
>
> 'It is read in the British history that Gurmundus came to Ireland from Africa, and from there into Britain, having been invited by the Saxons; he besieged Cirencester, which was finally taken, and, as it is said, burned down with fire through the ill use of sparrows, also Kedericius, then the unworthy king of the Britons, having been driven to Wales, Gurmundus obtained the dominion of the whole kingdom in a short time. Whether, then, he was an African, or, as is more probable, a Norwegian, either he was never in Ireland, or was there for a short time only, having left Turgesius behind him.'

The incendiary sparrows mentioned here are the subject of Krappe 1925. The potential Norwegian origin of Gurmundus here calls to mind the resemblance of the name Ioruath to *Irúaith* 'Norway' noted above. Georgia Henley notes that this account occurs in a section of the *Topographia* in which Gerald is providing a survey of successive invasions of Ireland as a means of 'justifying Henry II's actions in the 1170s by showing he is just one of many invaders of Ireland throughout history' (2021: 91). It is possible that the central narrative of the poem, in showing that Ioruath's invasion was repulsed, was intended as a direct rebuttal to Gerald or another closely-related source.

Now, turning to the place of the text within the broader Ulster cycle, as already noted, the text is framed as a lament for Cumhsgraidh Meann Macha. Cumhsgraidh is a comparatively minor character in the corpus as a whole. He is the second son of Conchobhar who is said to have been wounded in the neck by Ceat mac Mághach and as such gained a speech impediment and earned the epithet *meann* 'stammerer' (Ó hÓgáin 1991b: 142–143). He also underlies the placename Inis Cumhsgraidh, modern Inch Abbey near Downpatrick (Flanders 2008: 139). A lengthy physical description of him is given in the earliest two recensions of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (O'Rahilly, C. 1976: 109–110 (ll. 3603–3613). O'Rahilly, C. 1967: 119 (ll. 4312–4328)) while the origin of his stammer is recounted in both *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* and *Cóir Anmann* (Thur-

NEYSEN 1986: 13–14; ARBUTHNOT 2007: 76). There are two references to the death of Cumhsgraidh in the earlier tradition. BEST (1916: 171) notes in his edition of *Cath Airtig* that Cumhsgraidh's death at the hands of Mac Céacht is listed as having occurred at the battle of Airtech in an H interpolation in the *Annals of Tigernach*. Secondly, the death of Cumhsgraidh is listed by Cináed Ua hArtacáin in his poem *Fianna batar i n-Emain*, once again at the hands of Mac Céacht (STOKES 1902: 308). Beyond these references, Cumhsgraidh has little resonance in the wider tradition.

Nonetheless, here the plot thickens. On a flyleaf of Shrewsbury School Ms. 7, a mid-thirteenth century manuscript written in England, there is a list of sixty-seven titles of Breton *lai*s and romances, including eight by Marie de France and numerous others that survive as anonymous compositions. The penultimate item on the list is tantalisingly titled 'Coscra'.[5] Regrettably, no *lai* by this title is known to survive. Patrick Sims-Williams has argued that 'Coscra' refers to Cumhsgraidh Meann Macha and furthermore suggests that one John de Courcy could be the means by which Cumhsgraidh became the hero of a French *lai* (SIMS-WILLIAMS 2010: 78–79).

John De Courcy was an Anglo-Norman knight who came to Ireland 1176 in the entourage of William FitzAldelm. In early 1177, he launched a bold mid-winter invasion of the traditional territory of the Ulaid. He promptly routed the local king, Ruaidhri mac Dunnshleibhe, and established a powerful, semi-autonomous kingdom in the territory. He is known to have taken great pains to integrate himself into the Irish ecclesiastical, political and cultural establishments. He refounded the monastery at Inis Cumhsgraidh (FLANDERS 2008: 139). He granted the foundation to the Cistercians of Furness who established a sizeable abbey, which became one of the most lucrative operations in his territory. On the cultural front, he is known to have had something of a penchant for prophecies. Gerald of Wales, who provides a detailed description of John de Courcy, recounts in his *Expugnatio Hibernica* a prophecy put into the mouth of Columba foretelling John's victory in Ulster (FLANDERS 2008: 148). Gerald also draws parallels between John and a white knight foretold by Merlin Silvestris of Celidon. Finally, John went to substantial

[5] The most recent edition of this list was published with a facsimile of the manuscript page in ARCHIBALD 2000: 60–61.

lengths to promote the cult of Patrick and to associate himself therewith. At his Cistercian abbey, he commissioned Jocelin of Furness to write a new vita of Patrick – creatively titled *Vita Patricii* - to promote his cult in Ulster (Flanders 2008: 160). Gerald again tells us that John discovered the bodies of Sts. Patrick, Brigit and Columba buried together in cave near Down and that he had the relics translated. Furthermore, John also had a halfpence struck at Downpatrick with his own name on the obverse and on the reverse a crosier and the word Patricius (Seaby 1958–9: 87–90). Of course, one would expect to find the monarch on the reverse and, indeed, John de Courcy was expelled from Ireland in 1204 as a result of his falling out with king John and other Anglo-Norman nobles (Flanders 2008: 164–165).

To return to the text, I suggest that this combination of the African invasion narrative from Anglo-Norman literary tradition with prophecy, Patrician elements and with the characters of the Ulster cycle would have been well suited to the tastes and interests of John de Courcy, the first non-Irish ruler of the Ulaid. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the 'Coscra' *lai* of the Shrewsbury list refers to an Anglo-Norman translation of this text or a text quite closely related to it. Now, this raises an obvious question: what is a poem for John de Courcy doing in *Leabhar Ua Maine*?

It is already known that at least one other item in *Leabhar Ua Maine* derives from the intellectual milieu created by de Courcy. Boyle & Breatnach (2015: 31–34) have convincingly demonstrated that a significant episode in the poem headed 'Senchas Gall Átha Cliath' is derived from Jocelin's *Vita Patricii*. Furthermore, when one follows John de Courcy down the rabbit hole to the vernacular Irish corpus, a probable answer presents itself. Virtually, every vernacular Irish source that explicitly mentions John de Courcy, in the guise of either Sean de Curci or Sean de Chuirt, emphasises his alliance with Cathal Croibhdhearg Ua Conchobhair, king of Connacht from 1189 to 1199 and again from 1202 to 1224 (Flanders 2008: 162–163). The break in his reign was caused by an insurrection by his nephew, Cathal Carrach and it is during this period that Cathal Croibhdhearg and John de Courcy were most closely aligned. William FitzAldelm backed Cathal Carrach while John de Courcy backed Cathal Croibhdhearg. Keating recounted the alliance and its results thusly:

Léaghthar fós i n-annálaibh aosta Éireann ar mbeith d'Uilliam Mac Aldelmel i gceannas Luimnigh ó rígh Sacsan, go dtarla imreasan idir dá chomhmbráthair do shíol g-Conchubhair fá cheannas Connacht, mar atá Cathal Croibhdhearg is Cathal Carrach, agus do ghabh Uilliam páirt Chathail Charraigh i n-aghaidh Chathail Chroibhdheirg, agus do ghabh Seon de Curcy páirt an Chathail oile. Do biathadh an easaonta soin leath ar leath lé h-Uilliam is lé Seon idir an dá Chathal gur milleadh is gur hairgeadh an chríoch uile leo, is gur dícheannadh mórán d'uaislibh Connacht san spairn sin a los an imreasain sin, go dtarla coimheascar idir an dá Chathal, agus Gaill ar gach taoibh ag congnamh leo, gur briseadh do Chathal Carrach is da mhuinntir is gur marbhadh san deabhaidh sin é. (Dinneen 1908: 360)

'Moreover, we read in the ancient annals of Ireland that when William [FitzAldelm] was ruling in Luimneach on behalf of the king of England there arose a conflict between two brothers of the family of Conchubhar for the sovereignty of Connaught, to wit, Cathal Croibhdhearg and Cathal Carrach; and William took the part of Cathal Carrach against Cathal Croibhdhearg; and John de Courcy took the other Cathal's part. This disagreement between the two Cathals was fed on both sides by William and by John until the entire country was destroyed and plundered by them, and till many of the nobles of Connaught were beheaded in that conflict as a result of that disagreement, and a battle took place between the two Cathals, the foreigners helping them on either side, and Cathal Carrach and his followers were defeated and himself was slain in that conflict'.

(Dinneen 1908: 361)

De Courcy and Croibhdhearg had raided together in Munster as early as 1195; however, most significantly, the events of an expedition undertaken in 1201 seem to parallel the narrative of 'Fuaigh an gceann ris an méidhe' quite closely. I have so far found accounts of this expedition in the *Annals of Ulster*, *Boyle*, *Loch Cé*, *Mac Carthaigh's Book* and the *Annals of the Four Masters*.[6] The common account runs as follows: Croibhdhearg and de Courcy, along with the son of Hugh de Lacy, also named Hugh, undertake an expedition into Connacht. Tribute is sought and a running battle ensues. John de Courcy is struck by a stone and knocked

[6] Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983: 235–236; Freeman 1924–7: 295; Hennessy 1871: 218–220; Ó hInnse 1947: 82; O'Donovan 1848–51: III, 120.

off his horse. The losses are extremely heavy overall and the survivors of Croibhdhearg and de Courcy's expedition flee in ships across Loch Ree. Both are captured by the Anglo-Normans and later returned in exchange for pledges of loyalty to king John. With these anecdotal parallels, i.e. the exacting of tribute, the hosts of Ulster and Connacht standing shoulder to shoulder against a huge array of foes, the stone striking the ruler of Ulster and the necessitated sea-born escape, I would like to suggest the possibility that 'Fuaigh an gceann ris an méidhe' is a fictionalised account of this expedition.

There is further corroborating evidence to back up this association if one looks to the manuscript context of the poem. *Leabhar Ua Maine* is, of course, a Connacht manuscript. 'Fuaigh an gceann ris an méidhe' is found towards the end of the manuscript in the midst of a mass of material associated in one way or another with Connacht. Among this material are two praise poems explicitly dedicated to Cathal Croibhdhearg, 'Tairnic in sel-sa ac Síl Néill' and 'A fhir, ná suid ar in síd' (Ó Cuív 1983; 1987). Additionally, Ó Cuív (1987) has argued, and this matter has also been discussed by Ó Corráin (1986), that this part of the manuscript comprises 'an attempt by men of learning to provide a corpus of texts which could be seen to be supportive of a buildup of Ua Conchobhair power in Connacht' (Ó Cuív 1987: 32). The use of an Ulster cycle allegory of a recent event in this context would seem to serve two purposes: on the one hand, it provides a certain distance in the commemoration of a less than successful expedition; however, in creating a historical precedent for a recent event it also serves to confer legitimacy on the actions of the participants.

In conclusion, let us return to that cryptic first quatrain. I contend that it is laden with allegory. Cumhsgraidh in this context is the personification of John de Courcy's Ulaid principality. Indeed, the fact that the two names sound rather similar – likely pronounced /'ku:s.gri:/ and /'ku:r.si/ respectively at the time – further reinforces the connection. De Courcy, as he languishes in prison, is the head that has been separated from the body, ergo the exhortation to stitch the head to the body is a call to release de Courcy. The last word of the quatrain – generally reserved for the patron or subject – is Conchobhar. This could indicate that the poem was composed for the Ua Conchobhair dynasty, although the Conchobhar of the Ulster cycle is not the eponymous ancestor of the Ua Conchobhair line. More likely it is a reference to de Courcy himself.

Just as Conchobhar is the father of Cumhsgraidh, de Courcy is the creator of his Ulaid principality. However, these are all mere suggestions and this matter merits further consideration.

Modern Irish retellings of tales from the Ulster Cycle

Breandán Ó Cróinín

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Thomas Kinsella's renowned English language version of *Táin Bó Cúailgne* (henceforth *An Táin*), entitled *The Tain* (Kinsella 1969), is probably the first introduction for many readers today to tales from the Ulster Cycle, not alone in Ireland, but throughout the world, as *An Táin* has travelled much of the globe in this form and has provided the basis for translation into other languages.[1] In truth, Kinsella's version of *An Táin* is not merely, or even strictly speaking, a translation of this great centrepiece of the Ulster Cycle but is, in fact, a reimagining of that work. Of course, given the linguistic complexity of most of the Ulster Cycle texts, it is clear that works such as Kinsella's are in their own way as essential as the scholarly editions of these texts, which are sometimes accompanied by precise word for word translations, some of which can prove to be tedious for the modern reader. Unsurprisingly, this justly celebrated version of *An Táin*, first published in 1969, has long since been conferred with iconic status even among Irish language *literati*; the poet and novelist Ó Muirthile (1992), for instance, wrote at one time that *The Táin* is one of the enduring images of the late sixties and early seventies in Ireland, along with, as he says: 'Rubber Soul, Leonard Cohen, the two Seáns – Messrs. Ó Riada and Ó Ríordáin – free love (in Cork that is), smoking pot, drinking seven pints, discussing structuralism and mythologies, set dancing in West Kerry, the pill, hot pants' and much else besides.[2] In other words, Kinsella's *The Táin* is part of the Irish land-

[1] See, for example, Bryll & Goraj (1983) for a Polish translation of Kinsella's version.

[2] I have translated and quoted selectively here from Ó Muirthile's virtuouso piece and I commend the far superior original, in Ó Muirthile (1992: 187–8), to readers of Modern Irish.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 281–296.

scape, a part of the single literary tradition in Ireland which may be said to encompass two languages. Of course, the remarkable illustrations of Louis le Brocquy may have something to do with the enduring appeal of this version of Ireland's great epic and therefore, Ciarán Carson's well-received adaptation of this same epic notwithstanding (2007), the status accorded Kinsella's English arrangement is unlikely to ever be equalled.

What then, one might reasonably ask, can be said of the relationship of the modern Irish-language writer with our older literature? It is perhaps more complex than might be expected. For instance, the late novelist, journalist and broadcaster, Breandán Ó hEithir, a native speaker of Irish from Inis Mór in the Aran Islands, explained his decision not to continue with his study of Irish in University College Galway in part, as he put it, due to his 'horror at the prospect of having to study Old Irish' (Ó hEithir 1984: 101). Not surprisingly then, Cú Chulainn doesn't get even the merest of mentions in Ó hEithir's novels, or not as far as I can recall at any rate. Fortunately, however, not all our writers share Ó hEithir's apparent aversion to Old Irish and there have indeed been many attempts at producing Modern Irish versions of much of Old Irish literature over the years with, it must be said, various degrees of success.

The redoubtable An tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire was, unsurprisingly, to the fore in this respect during the Irish revival period and he produced two plays based on the story of *An Táin – Méibh* published in 1910 and *Táin Bó Cúailgne 'na dhráma* five years later; in the former he appears to read *An Táin* as a kind of temperance text emphasising the drunkenness of the Connacht messengers as the cause of Dáire refusing to loan the *Donn Cúailgne* to Méadhbh and thus bringing about conflict; in the latter – a play for voices – he adheres quite closely to the dialogue of the *Leabhar Laighean* text of *Táin Bó Cúalnge* (O'Rahilly, C. 1967) although he is clearly guilty of concealing the earthy sexuality of the character of Queen Méadhbh throughout, as well as of generally toning down any content which may have been deemed controversial by the standards of the time. Ua Laoghaire also published what are perhaps best described as 'free translations' of other tales such as *Aided Fergusa Mic Léide* (O'Grady 1892: I, 238–252; II, 269–285) although not an Ulster Cycle Tale; and *Fled Bricrend* (Henderson 1899) and, not surprisingly, he is guilty of bowdlerising these texts as well, the former text in particular requiring the omission of much material considered to be too coarse

for the Irish reading public by Ua Laoghaire[3] . Of course, it is easy to criticise such works a hundred years later and there is certainly no doubt that Ua Laoghaire is to be lauded not only for the purity of his Munster Irish prose throughout but also, as O'Leary (1994: 243) has pointed out, for giving readers of Modern Irish 'some sense of the extent, variety and interest, if not the form or spirit, of early Irish literature.'

There certainly was tremendous enthusiasm in the revival period for reworking the ancient tales of Ireland's glorious past and presenting them to a new Irish language readership which was then emerging. A list of the authors who tried their hand at making the old new again reads like a veritable who's who of the great and the good of the Irish language world at the time, and important figures such as Peadar Mac Fhionnlaoich (1914), Pádraig Mac Piarais (1908), and Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha (1911), or 'An Seabhac' as he was known and many others contributed greatly to this literary project. It is, of course, no coincidence that this literary fashion coincided with the emergence of The Irish Texts Society and the consequent availability, from this source and from others, of many older texts, the nature and content of which were hitherto unknown to all but a small number of scholars.[4]

After this initial revival period, however, enthusiasm for the modernisation of our older literature seems to have waned as Irish language writers sought to create a new modern European literature. Nevertheless, there have since been many notable publications by Irish writers which have represented much of our literary heritage to a Modern Irish audience. Ó Cadhlaigh's magnificent retelling of the whole of the *Fiannaíocht* cycle (1936), followed twenty years later by his equally impressive version of the Ulster Cycle of Tales (Ó Cadhlaigh 1956), are books which would certainly find a wide readership again if they were reproduced in modernised editions. Tomás Ó Floinn & Proinsias Mac Cana's *Scéalaíocht na Ríthe* (1956), also contains not only accurate and aesthetically pleasing translations of thirteen texts from the Cycle of the Kings, but also has the beautiful if somewhat eccentric illustrations of Mícheál Mac Liamóir as an added bonus. Honourable mention should also be given to Pádraig de Barra's very readable version of the great *Fian-*

[3] See O'Leary (1994: 239)

[4] Here I have relied primarily on O'Leary's (1994: 223–279) excellent account of this period in Ireland's literary history which is essential reading for those interested in this of this aspect of the Irish-language literary revival.

naíocht tale *Acallam na Senórach* (*Agallamh na Seanóirí*) in two volumes (1984; 1986); and *Scéalaíocht Ár Sinsear* (1992), produced by two former professors of Old Irish in Maynooth, Pádraig Ó Fiannachta providing accurate and spirited translations of nine Old-Irish texts, including two from the Ulster Cycle, and Kim McCone supplying the informative introductions.

Curiously enough, readers of Irish had to wait until the year 1989 for the first complete Modern Irish version of *Táin Bó Cúailgne* when Eoghan Ó Loinsigh's *An Táin* was published by Clódhanna Teoranta, and while this heroic attempt provides a very readable and reliable text for the most part it is hardly a publication to rival Kinsella's version and indeed, if I may say so, purely in terms of the book's physical appearance it is hardly a fitting celebration of Ireland's national epic. In other words, sufficient resources need to be put into this type of publication for it to have any chance of success. And therein lies the problem for Irish language writers today when it can scarcely be imagined that there is a reader of Modern Irish alive who is not also a reader of English, making it next to impossible for an Irish language writer to compete with the afore mentioned *The Táin* or *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (Gantz 1981) or *Over Nine Waves* (Heaney 1994) which are all produced to such a high standard by international publishing houses. It would take, one would have to say, a very different approach to arrest the attention of the Irish language readership.[5]

In this context, the recent work of Pádraig Ó Cíobháin is, to my mind at least, quite remarkable. Ó Cíobháin, a native Irish speaker from An Ghráig in the West Kerry Gaeltacht is an acclaimed writer of four collections of short stories and six novels and is about as far away on the map as you can get from the action of most tales of the Ulster Cycle. In 2007 he published *Dréachta Chrích Fódla*[6], a book which some would say defies categorisation, and indeed it was very much a new departure

[5] The publication of Darach Ó Scolaí's beautifully produced *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (2017) has shown however that a more straightforward approach can be successful, and this has in fact been reprinted twice: in 2019 and again in 2023.

[6] The title echoes Aogán Ó Rathaille's great eighteenth-century lament for Ireland, *Créachta Chrích Fódla* (see Dineen & O'Donoghue 1911: 2–5 for text and translation). *Créachta Chrích Fódla* can be translated as 'The Wounds of the Land of Fódla/Ireland' and *Dréachta Chrích Fódla*, therefore, presumably translates as 'Stories of the Land of Fódla/Ireland.'

for this prolific writer at the time, although there were more than a few hints in his previous two novels that Ó Cíobháin was drawing inspiration from his own extensive reading of Irish language literature's distant but glorious past.[7] *Dréachta Chrích Fódla* is a collection of thirteen separate texts, three of which are original compositions by the author inspired by his reading of mediaeval Irish literature, and ten others which are best described as retellings of tales from Old-, Middle- and Early Modern Irish. Four of these stories can be said to belong to the Ulster Cycle: *Scéla Muice Meic Dathó* (The Story of Mac Dathó's Pig: Thurneysen 1986); *Tochmharc Eimhire* (The Wooing of Emer: van Hamel 1978: 16–68); *Aided Con Roí* (The Violent Death of Cú Roí: Best 1905) and *Aided Con Culainn* (The Violent Death of Cú Chulainn: van Hamel 1978: 69–133), but here they are entitled *An Mhucsan!* (That Pig!); *Amor Vincit Omnia* (Love Conquers All); *Oidhe Chú Roí* (The Violent Death of Cú Roí) and *Anbhás Chú Chulainn* (The Violent Death of Cú Chulainn). A fifth Ulster Cycle tale, *Bás Chonchubhair* (The Death of Concubhar), is interwoven into one of the author's original pieces, *Créachta Chrích Iosrael*, which is the book's closing text. Other texts included are the story of *Labhraidh Loingseach* entitled *Claochó* (Metamorphosis), *Buile Shuibhne* or *An Fear ar an gCrann* (The Man in the Tree), *Cath Almaine* or *An Ceann a Chan* (The Head that Sung), *Fingal Rónáin*, entitled simply *Fionaíl* (Patricide), and a fascinating text entitled *In illo tempore* (In that time) based on Ó Cíobháin's reading of Tadhg Ó Cianáin's famous seventeenth-century account of the Flight of the Earls[8] with more than a hint that inspiration for this particular text was found in Grass's famous novel *The Flounder* (1978).

Ó Cíobháin begins proceedings with a fascinating introductory essay entitled *À Coeur vaillant rien d'impossible* ('For the courageous heart nothing is impossible') in which he outlines his own personal literary

[7] The two novels referred to are *Faightear Gach Laoch in Aisce* (Ó Cíobháin 2001), and *Ré an Charbaid* (Ó Cíobháin 2005) whose debt to the *Fiannaíocht* and *Rúraíocht* cycles respectively, I hope to deal with at a future date.

[8] The sources used for these non-Ulster Cylce tales are as follows: *Claochló* is based on Keating's version of the *Labhraidh Loingseach* story (Bergin 1910: 1–2); *An Fear ar an gCrann* relies mainly on J. G. O'Keefe's Irish Texts Society edition of *Buile Shuibhne* (O'Keefe 1913); *An Ceann a Chan* is based on Pádraig Ó Riain's edition of *Cath Almaine* (Ó Riain 1978); David Greene's edition of *Fingál Rónáin* (Greene 1955) provides the basis for *Fionaíl* and de Barra's (1972) edition of *Imeacht na nIarlaí* provides inspiration for *Mirabile visu.*

odyssey, and indeed his own literary philosophy, and explains his methodology and intentions in relation to the texts that follow. Here he mentions as a source of inspiration in his attempting the seemingly impossible the Italian writer Italo Calvino. Conveniently enough, in a rare foray into English at a seminar on the theme of 'Modern Writers and Medieval Literature' hosted in March 2014 by the School of Celtic Studies in Maynooth University, he mentions this debt to Calvino as follows:

> To Italo Calvino I owe the idea of immersing myself in the reading of early medieval Irish literature, as he had done with Italian folklore, and converting the language of then to the language of now. His introduction to his folktale anthology, *Fiabe Italiane*/Italian Folktales, pointed the way towards a past I felt I had to return to, in order to inform myself how the language of the present evolved.[9]

It is clear from the outset, therefore, that these texts are not mere translations and that Ó Cíobháin has set himself a far more ambitious task. Even a cursory glance at the opening pages of *Amor Vincit Omnia*, for example, would be enough for any reader of *Dréachta Chrích Fódla* to notice that Ó Cíobháin takes what we might call an intertextual approach in these Modern Irish retellings, as his version here begins with a lengthy quotation from an academic essay on the text in question, in this case Sayers' 'Concepts of Eloquence in Tochmarc Emire' (1991–2). It would also be apparent to our hypothetical reader that the author has chosen to provide copious footnotes throughout, as we might expect to find in academic editions of Old-Irish texts such as the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies' Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, for example. In this case, Ó Cíobháin's text is in fact based on van Hamel's edition of *Tochmarc Emire* (1978: 16–68) which is to be found in *Compert Con Culainn and other stories* from this same series, and for the most part this is indeed a very close translation as can be clearly illustrated by comparing the opening of van Hamel's scholarly edition with Ó Cíobháin's Modern Irish version along with a translation into English:

[9] I am grateful to Pádraig Ó Cíobhán, for furnishing me with a copy of his unpublished paper read at the *Modern Writers and Medieval Literature* seminar in Maynooth University in March 2014 from which the above quotation is taken.

Baí rí amrae airegdae i nEmain Maca fecht n-aill .i. Conchubhur mac Fachtnai Fáthaig. Baí már de amru ina flaith la hUlltu. Baí sídh 7 sáime 7 subaige. Baí mess 7 class 7 murthorad. Baí smacht 7 recht 7 degfhlaithius fria remis la hUlltu. Baí mór d'ordan 7 d'aircechus 7 d'immud isin rígthig i nEmain. Is amlaid íarom baí in tech sin .i. Cráebrúad Conchubuir fo intamail Tighe Midchúarta .i. noí n-imdhadha o thenid co fraigidh ann, tricha triaged ina ardai cach airenaig créumai baí isin tig. Errscur de derg-ibur ann. Stíall ar charbur é íar n-íchtur 7 tuige slinded íar n-úachtur. (van Hamel 1978: 20)

As ucht ár ndílseachta do dheasgnáth thionscanta na dea-scéalaíochta, is gá a athrá gur mhair rí *ar a raibh iomrá uair in Eamhain Mhacha dárbh ainm Conchubhar mac Fhachtna Fháthaigh. Le linn a réimis bhí rath ar Uladh. Bhí síth ann, bhí síocháin ann, féile agus fáilte. Thug an talamh dea-thoradh. Thug an fharraige a mórthoradh gan cheist. Bhí smacht agus reacht agus dea-fhlaitheas i réim ar fuaid an chúige. Insa ríthigh in Eamhain bhí flúirse, bhí dea-ord, bhí dea-riocht. Is é mar a bhí ag an dtigh sin, sé sin Craobh Rua Chonchubhair, ba chosúil é le Tigh Mhidhchuarda, roinnte i naoi ranna ó thine go falla. Na fallaí idir na ranna bhíodar déanta de chré-umha, iad tríocha troigh ar airde. De dheargiúr bhí an tsnoídóireacht dealbhaithe, admhad in íochtar an tí, slinn in uachtar.* (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 116-17)

'***On account of our loyalty to the ritual of introduction in good storytelling it is necessary to say again that*** there once lived a renowned king in Eamhain Mhacha whose name was Conchubhar the son of Fachtna Fáthach. During his reign Ulster prospered. There was harmony, there was peace, hospitality and welcome. The earth bore good produce. The sea gave forth its produce without question. Law and order and good sovereignty flourished throughout the province. In the royal house there was abundance, there was good order and good condition. That house, that is the Red Branch of Conchubhar, was like the Teach Midhchuarta, divided in nine sections from fire to wall. The walls between the sections were made from bronze, they were thirty feet high. The carvings were fashioned from red yew, wood in the bottom part of the house and tiles in the upper part.'[10]

[10] This and all subsequent translations of passages from *Dréachta Chrích Fódla* are by the present writer.

As can be seen here, aside from the initial authorial flourish, highlighted here in bold italics, this is certainly a very careful Modern Irish rendering of the original Old-Irish text, with very little divergence from the original. Indeed, we can be confident that the whole story of *Tochmarc Emire* is to be found in this modern version as, in fact, all the well-spoken dialogue and the long passages of poetry from the wonderful original text are included and faithfully rendered here. However, whilst most of the new Modern Irish version of *Tochmarc Emire* follows the pattern of translation which has just been illustrated, there are, from time to time, what could be described as synopses of complicated plotlines and, more often than that, interpolations on the part of the author where he gives free rein to his creative abilities. A good example of this can be seen at a significant juncture in the text when Cú Chulainn, now in Scotland, is spotted by Dornal, the somewhat less than engaging daughter of Domhnall. Again, the rendering into Modern Irish is impeccable here, as we can see below, but although Cú Chulainn sensibly enough rejects the charmless Dornall's advances, our modern-day redactor cannot help but comment on the warrior's general promiscuity in an aside that is also a tongue-in-cheek commentary on contemporary Irish youth (this interpolation is again highlighted here by means of bold italic print):

> *Carais íarom Coin Culainn ingen Domnaill, Dornoll a hainm, olldornae. Ba forgrándae a delb. Batir móra a glúine, a sala rempi, a traigthi ina diaidh. Súili dublíatha móra ina cind. Duibithir cúach cera a gnúis. Tul fortrén fuirri. Folt forgarb forrúad ina gibnib foa cend. Opais Cú Chulainn a comleapaid. Tingellaissi didiu a degdígailsi fair sin. Asbert Domnall nád boí fóisitiu (.i. forus) forcetail Con Culainn co rísed Scáthaig baí fri hAilpi anair.* (van Hamel 1978: 46)

> *Char iníon Dhomhnaill Cú Chulainn.* ***Sé is dóichí go gcúiteodh sé an cumann léi mura mbeadh gur chailleach cheart í, óir mar a chífimid, is sraithshuiríoch ár gcúna nach aon nath leis an tsuirí anonn agus an tsuirí abhus a chleachtadh gan chathbhuaic ar bith, é chomh héadónach le héinne dá chomhaoistí inniu.*** *Dornoll ainm na hiníne seo. A doirne a bheith ollmhór an réasún gur ainmníodh ar an gcuma san í. Ba ghránna a deilbh. Bhíodar mór a glúine, a sála roimpi, a troithe ina diaidh aniar, súile dúliatha móra ina ceann. Chomh dubh le cuach gainge bhí a gnúis. Tul éadain forthréan uirthi. Folt forgharbh. For-rua a bhí na gibní*

fan a ceann. Níorbh fhonn le Cú Chulainn dul chun leapan léi. Mhóidigh go bhfaigheadh sí díoltas de chionn an diúltaimh. Dúirt Domhnall ná beadh an teagasc go forásach ag Cú Chulainn nó go raghadh sé go Scáthach in oirthear na hAlban. (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 152)

[Domhnall's daughter loved Cú Chulainn. ***It is most likely that he would have requited this love had she not been a complete hag, for as we shall see, our hound is a serial wooer for whom a wooing here and a wooing there is no trouble at all, he being every bit as hedonistic as those of his own age today.*** Dornall was the name of this daughter. Her fists being so large was the reason for her being so-called. Her appearance was repulsive. Her knees were large, her heels in front of her and her feet behind her, large dark-grey eyes in her head. Jet black was her countenance. Her forehead was extremely hard. Her hair extremely rough. The locks of hair on her head were blood-red. Cú Chulainn did not wish to sleep with her. She swore vengeance on account of this refusal. Domhnall said that Cú Chulainn's training would not be complete until he would go to Scáthach in eastern Scotland.]

This philosophical, discursive style is, as we shall see, very much the norm in all of the tales that Ó Cíobháin has modernised and reimagined in this collection and, in fact, this is a distinctive feature of his work in general. Nowhere is this more evident than in his version of *Scéla Muice Meic Dathó* or *An Mhucsan*! ('That Pig!'), where, apparently not entirely satisfied with the introduction as found in the original text, he does his utmost to clarify, for the benefit of the reader, the role of the pig in this tale, and here he does not confine himself to a few short lines:

I dteideal an dréachta tá muc áirithe a bhí ag Mac Da Thó. Tá dhá rud is fiú a lua fén dteidealú. Ar an gcéad dul síos níl ainm na muice tugtha, é ina dán a hainmniú a bheith nasctha le hainm a húinéara, Mac Da Thó, go brách. An dara rud: ní hí a fhaigheann tús áite ach cú. Marbh a bheidh an mhuc. Chomh marbh le hart. Á róstadh. Ar bhior is dóichide don gcúram san a bheith á dhéanamh, an clúimhín colgach fágtha uirthi, is an craiceann trédhearcach mothálach (más muc cheansaithe í) nó an tseithe ghruagach righin (dá mba torc allta a bheadh i gceist) fágtha gan feannadh. Dar ndóigh, dubh ag an dtine fioghuail a bheadh an craiceann, pé scéal é, tóin is ceann uirthi, cheithre cinn is daichead d'fhiacla (mura mbeadh sí tar éis aon chuid acu a

chailliúint), na cosa gearra crúbscoilte, an t-eireabaillín mar a bheadh comhartha ceiste, feoil ar sileadh léi de chionn gurbh ainmhí uiliteach í ina beo – í á róstadh ina hiomláine de réir na tuairimíochta san, fé mar nár mhaith leis na hiteoirí caitheamh go heasonórach lena foirfeacht. Bíodh gur go heasurramach a tagraítear inniu di, gach uair a chuirtear i leith an duine é a bheith chomh dána léi, ná measaimis gur easurraim a bhíodh don muc san am úd gur cuireadh de gheis ar an laoch gan torc a fhiach. (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 83-4)

'In the title of the tale there is a certain pig belonging to Mac Da Thó. There are two things worth mentioning about this entitling. In the first place the name of the pig is not given, her naming destined to be forever connected with her owner's name, Mac Da Thó. The second thing: it is not she (the pig) who gets pride of place but a hound. The pig shall be dead. As dead as a doornail. Roasting. It is most likely that this task shall be carried out on a spit, the bristled coat left upon her, the sensitive, translucent skin (if it is a domestic pig) or the tough hairy hide (if it were a wild boar) left unflayed. Of course, the skin would be black from the charcoal fire in any case, both head and rump left on, forty-four teeth (if she hasn't lost any), the short cloven-hoofed legs, the small tail like a question mark, meat hanging from her since she was an omnivore while alive – being roasted in her entirety in accordance with that reckoning, as if those about to eat did not wish to dishonour her perfection. Although she is referred to disrespectfully today each time someone is accused of being as stubborn as her, let us not suppose that the pig was disrespected at that time when it was taboo for a warrior to hunt the boar.'

This passage ends with one of Ó Cíobháin's many footnotes, one of a total number of seventy -four in what is one of the shorter texts in the collection, in which he ruminates further on the relationship between boar and warrior, in particular the fatal relationship between Diarmuid Ó Duibhne and the wild boar in *Tóraíocht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, and in so doing forges an intertextual link between *Rúraíocht* and *Fiannaíocht.*

Interpolations and footnotes aside, Ó Cíobháin does give an extremely faithful rendering of the original text as edited by Thurneysen (1935) over 80 years ago now, and aficionados of what is surely one of the most enjoyable of all the tales in the Ulster Cycle can rest assured that

nothing is omitted: the fierce enmity between the assembled warriors of Connacht and Ulster, Mac Da Thó's catatonic state upon being asked for the hound by both sides, the pantomime-like contest over the pig-carving rights, and the mysterious case of Fer Loga at the very end are all here recast in the finest of idiomatic Modern Irish with references to much of the academic literature on the subject interwoven into the text. Indeed, it is this unusual blend of text and commentary that makes these versions invaluable to students of Old- and Modern Irish alike, and a pleasure to read for general readers of the modern language.

As a West Kerryman, Ó Cíobháin could hardly resist the temptation to provide his readers with a version of *Aided Con Roí* or *Oidhe Chú Roí* (The Violent Death of Cú Roí), based primarily on Keating's seventeenth-century version (Bergin 1910: 10-12), but also with reference to other earlier sources (Best 1905). As devotees of the Ulster Cycle will know well, early on in this tale, Cú Roí, the great champion of West Kerry, gets the better of Cú Chulainn in single combat leaving him buried up to his neck in the ground and further shaming him by shaving his head, but of course, as we all know, Cú Chulainn treacherously takes his revenge later on with the help of the deceitful Bláthnaid. As we might expect, Ó Cíobháin does not shirk from describing the terrible beauty of this episode and, in fact, he achieves a kind of post-modern aesthetic of violence all of his own, in this most creative of reimaginings:

> *D'iontráil an dúnfort, ag bolú ina thimpeall mar a dhéanfadh brocaire tar éis é féin a scaoileadh dá shlabhra sa chonchró. D'éalaigh isteach sa tolg, an truán ar a raibh an mhíchríoch ar tí cuaird a thabhairt chomh ceangailte is ba cheart don mbrocaire réamhshamhlaithe a bheith, an dallbheart bainte ródhéanach dá shúile ag feall na mná inar chuir idir dhúil is iontaoibh. Na mná a bheith ag dul i dtréas agus i dtreise, an smaoineamh deireanach d'fhoirmigh a intinn, seans, sular tháinig an cú óg i leith a chúil, gur chuimil a lann faobhair dá scornach. Scaird an fhuil ina steall cródhearg as an ngoin, imlíne pharabóilóideach á dhearadh aici ar an aer, gur bhreac an t-urlár máguaird, gur smear a ucht is na héadaí leapan caite i ngabhal a chéile tar éis phléisiúir dhíomuain na hoíche roimh ré.* (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 467)

> 'He entered the fortress, sniffing around him like a terrier which had released itself from its chain in the kennel. He stole into the sleeping chamber, the wretch he was about to visit as restrained as

> the terrier we have just imagined should have been, the blindfold fallen from his eyes too late because of the treachery of the woman he had both desired and trusted. That women were becoming ever stronger and treasonous was the last thought which formed in his mind, perhaps, before the hound came from behind him and brushed his sharpened blade against his throat. The blood-red gushing from the wound, drawing a paraboloid outline in the air, so that it spattered the surrounding floor and daubed his chest and the bed clothes which were thrown untidily together after the transient pleasure of the night before.'

Cú Roí, however, is only one of Cú Chulainn's many victims and in the following tale, *Anbhás Chú Chulainn* (The Violent Death of Cú Chulainn), the hound of Ulster too gets his come-uppance as is foretold here by means of a kind of cinematic flash-back technique in the opening passage of the tale which, once again, is most definitely creation rather than translation:

> *A mairbh Cú Chulainn, mar atá ríofa go líofa i ndréachta eile, a chinn go mbeadh an chloch sa mhuinirtle chuige feasta. Ach de bharr a chuid íobartach a bheith ag tabhairt an bharra ná feicfid a thiacht arís, ba bheag d'fhéadfaidís a dhéanamh mar gheall air. Ní bhíonn rith maith ag an each i gcónaí, dar ndóigh, óir dheimhnigh a n-iarmhair nár ghá conradh-mharfóir a fhostú chun an cú a chur dá chois. Bíodh go mórtar an roimhghaois roimh an iarghaois, i muinín an iardhearcaidh ní mór dul san iontróid seo d'fhonn na n-iarmhar san a aithint. Tosnaímis leis an bhflaithbhile is mó cáil is clú .i. Lughaidh, gur fheallmhairbh an cú atá le hanbhás a fháil anso a athair i gCathair Chonroí, tar éis dó luí le céile mhídhilis rí Mumhan, rud a chuir Méadhbh Chonnachta i gcuimhne go pras do Lughaidh nuair a bhuail an fonn díoltais ise.*
>
> (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 477–8)

> 'It was all those who Cú Chulainn had killed, as has been skilfully recounted in other compositions, that determined that he would be a target for vengeance henceforth. But because his victims were all under the sod that they will never see again they could do nothing about it. It is a good horse that never stumbles, of course, since their descendants assured that a contract killer would not be needed to trip the hound up. Although foresight is valued above hindsight we must have recourse to the flash-back in this introduction so that we

> can recognise these descendants. Let us begin with the most noble and famous champion .i.e. Lughaidh, whose father was treacherously killed in Cathair Chonroí by the hound who is to die a violent death here after he had slept with the unfaithful wife of the King of Munster, something that Méadhbh of Connacht reminded Lughaidh of quickly when she herself was seized by a desire for vengeance.'

Anbhás Chú Culainn (Cú Chulainn's Violent Death), is again based on van Hamel's edition of *Compert Con Culainn* (1978: 69-133), and at times there is little difference between the Early Modern Irish of this text and Ó Cíobháin's fluent Corca Dhuibhne prose or *Gráigis* as it is called by some. Even so, our moderniser is not content with a single version of the great hero's death and, after providing a faithful version of this famous episode from van Hamel's text, he follows this with an alternate version in one of his many interpolations, having first wound the clock back and then forward as far as Easter 1916 in the GPO in Dublin where that most iconic image of the great hero of the Ulster Cycle is now to be found. The closing paragraph of this creative interpolation once again shows the author's muscular prose to be perfectly suited to the spirit of his source material:

> *'Ní chítear aon éanlaith ar an bpiléar san de ghnáth,' dúirt Earc go tearc. An i dtaobh ná raibh Lughaidh chomh dall le hEarc ar shiombalachas an fhiaigh dhuibh; arbh é an ráiteas neamhbhraiteach a thit óna bheola súd, nó an cumasc díobh fé ndear Lughaidh a spreagadh chun feillghnímh ag an móimint chinniúnach san? Ní fios. Tháinig i leith a chúil ar fheallmharfóir a athar. Rug ar ghruaig air. Chruinnigh chuige an mhoing nó go raibh sí i ngreim go maith aige, gur scuab an ceann de d'aon iarracht. Thit an claíomh as láimh an íobartaigh. Theasc an lann an lámh dheas ón stumpa dá bhásadóir sa titim di – fórsa an imtharraingte dulta i gcion ar a gluaiseacht. In éiric an fhrithghímh sin, teascadh an lámh dheas de Chú Culainn – léiriú níos grafaí ar a bhfuil i gceist leis an gcor a thabhairt in aghaidh an chaim ba dheacair a shamhlú.* (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 522)

> ''Birds are not usually seen on that pillar,' said Earc blithely. Was it because Lughaidh was not as blind as Earc to the symbolism of the black raven; was it the imperceptive statement that fell from his lips, or a mixture of the two that caused Lughaidh's treacherous deed at that fateful moment? It is not known. He approached his father's

> assassin from behind. He grabbed his hair. He gathered together that mane until he had a good hold of it and he swept the head clean off at one attempt. The sword fell from the victim's hand. The blade cut his killer's right hand off at the stump as it fell – the force of gravity effecting its movement. In retribution for that counterstroke Cú Chulainn's right hand was cut off – a more graphic example of tit for tat it would be difficult to imagine.'

The fifth retelling of an Ulster Cycle tale in this collection, *Bás Chonchubhair* (The Death of Conchubhar) is, as has been mentioned earlier, woven into the final story, *Créachta Chrích Iosrael* (The Wounds of the Land of Israel), a title which once again echoes Aogán Ó Rathaille's great lament for Ireland, *Créachta Chrích Fódla.* Here the narrative moves back in time from *Cathair Dháiví* (The City of David), the ancient city of Jerusalaem, in the year 2002 to Bethlehem where, two thousand years earlier, Christ was born. Naturally, Ó Cíobháin's retelling of the Nativity is every bit as daring as his reinvention of the Ulster Cycle tales, and although we do indeed see that the word is made flesh here, Miriam's labour pains are only too real, and they are certainly not the result of any immaculate conception. Compelling as this aspect of the story is, however, its relevance to our *Rúraíocht* theme here is only apparent at the very end when Ó Cíobháin brings matters to a close with a reworking of Keating's seventeenth-century version of *Bás Chonchubhair* (Bergin 1910: 5–8), allowing for discrepancies in historical chronology as follows:

> *Ní miste aird an léitheora a tharrac ar an nóta aireachais d'iontráil Céitinn ag deireadh a dhréachta féin. Do réir fírinne na staire, deir sé nár rugadh Críost go haimsir imchéin i ndiaidh bhás Chonchubhair. Is amhlaidh gur thairngir Bacrach go nginfí Críost an Tairngeartach, go ngeobhadh colainn dhaonna agus go n-imreodh na hÍodhail bás air, gurb ea chuala Conchubhar an méid sin, agus gur ghaibh ag gearradh Choille Lámhraidhe, a dhealraigh sé leis na hÍodhail, go bhfuair bás den bhfeidhm sin. Géilleann sé go mbíodh bua na tairngreachta ag na draoithe dá raibhe págánta. Uime sin, deir sé ina chonclúid, ní díchreitte an stair mar so. Bíodh sin mar atá, don gCeathrú Eagnaí tugtar an churadhmhír – an héadónaí tuaisceartach Conchubhar – óir ní ór, tús ná miorr d'ofráil sé d'Ungthach ceannláidir na Gailíle, ach a cholainn choscrach féin.* (Ó Cíobháin 2007: 591)

> 'It is no harm to draw the reader's attention to the note of caution which Keating inserted at the end of his own composition. *According to the truth of history*, he says that Christ was not born until *a very long time* after Conchubhar. It happened that Bacrach foretold that Christ, the Prophesised One, would be born, that he would take a human body and that the Jews would put him to death, so that when Conchubhar heard that he began to cut the trees of Coill Lámhraidhe, which he imagined to be the Jews, and *he died from that exertion*. He admits that the druids, who were pagans, did have the gift of prophecy. *Therefore*, he says in his conclusion, *this history is not unbelievable*. Although that may be so, it is to this Fourth Wiseman – Conchubhar, the hedonistic northerner – that the champion's portion is given, since it was not gold, incense or mirr that he offered the headstrong Messiah of Galilee, but his own shattered body.'

It would be difficult to surpass these, the final lines in *Dréachta Chrích Fódla*, as an example of Ó Cíobháin's intertextual artistry; the italicised phrases above denote direct quotations from Keating's seventeenth-century text, but these are merely the faintest of echoes of an earlier retelling – the distinctive, discursive narrative voice here is all Ó Cíobháin's own.

I have referred to Ó Cíobháin elsewhere as 'rí na hidirthéacsúlachta' or the 'king of intertextuality'[11] and my hope is that this short essay, focusing on only one aspect of his work, goes some way towards illustrating that this is no exaggeration. I would also hope that this account does some justice to his heroic work in bringing these timeless *Rúraíocht* texts to a new Modern Irish audience as, ultimately, these modern, intertextual versions are a testament to the enduring appeal of the Ulster Cycle tales for readers in every age, and it is indeed fitting that they should be retold in the modern vernacular of the language closest to that in which they were first written down.

Since the initial draft of this article was written the author has published a second volume of tales, entitled *Dréachta Chrích Fódla Imleabhar a Dó* (Ó Cíobháin 2019), in which there are even more *Rúraíocht* tales for our delectation: *Fled Bricrend* (Henderson 1899) and *Mesca Ulad* (Watson 1941) to name but two. He has chosen a rather different approach in presenting these tales to a modern audience and I hope to examine this

[11] See my review of Ó Cíobháin's novella, (2014: 26).

volume in the future. Ó Cíobháin is undoubtedly the equal of an tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire, who we have mentioned earlier, in his effortless mastery of Modern Munster Irish idiom, but where Ua Laoghaire and other writers of the revival period were perhaps guilty of suppressing many of the more provocative and visceral aspects of the Ulster Tales, Ó Cíobháin has no such qualms. He leaves nothing out and, as we have seen, he is not afraid to elaborate, supplement or re-arrange. For this reader at least, Ó Cíobháin's achievement in re-inventing these Ulster Cycle tales is matched only by Kinsella's famous work which we mentioned at the outset. *Ní beag san.*

The *Táin*: the myth of the ancient Irish Easter

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In ancient Europe festivals were reenacted on a yearly basis to ensure that the important events, such as the end of winter and the return of warmth, would continue to take place. In origin the early core episodes of the *Táin* preserve mythology associated with a pre-Christian equivalent to Easter, celebrating the springtime renewal of both vegetable and animal life. Many of the details behind this presentation may be found in my 1992a and 2001 works on the Coligny calendar and in my 1994 work on Celtic deities. Here I can give merely an outline of a very broad horizon. The significance of the encompassed details gain meaning only as aspects of the whole panorama. The view of the horizon is necessary, even if the fog of the millennia obscures some of the scenery.

Here I give evidence that the Celts in pre-Christian Ireland used the same calendar as that utilized by the Celts in pre-Roman Gaul. This evidence indicates that the *óenach* festivals in Ireland on *Samain* and *Imbolc* are descended from the IVOS festivals of the Coligny calendar in the months of SAMON (**Samonios*) and RIVROS (**Rivoros*). The major characters of the *Táin*, such as Medb, Boand, Fráech, Donn Cúailnge, and Cú Chulainn may be seen to be descended from the Gaulish deities, Medva, Bovinda, Vroicos, Donnotauros, and Esus, whose names are given directly in deity-inscriptions or implied by personal names (for details see Olmsted 1994: 321–322, 354, 372, 394–396, 402). These deities played an important role in the springtime festival. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere and will not return to again here, all of these deities are apparent in a narrative portrayal of an earlier Armorican version of the *Táin* on the inner plates of the Gundestrup cauldron (Olmsted 1976; 1979; 1994). Trace elements in the metal (Nielsen *et al.* 2005) as well as

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 297–319.

datable coins displaying a similar artistic style suggest that this massive silver cauldron was manufactured in Armorica, between 75 and 70 B.C. (Olmsted 2001a: 125). Here I shall examine only the nature of certain of the episodes of the *Táin*, to be found in the earliest poetic versions (Olmsted 1979; 1982; 1988; 1992b). I seek explanations for those episodes which, I have suggested, are portrayed on the Gundestrup cauldron: the confrontation with Morrigan/Boand, the death of Fráech, and the fight of the bulls. These episodes form the core of the springtime mythological events, which are the basis of the earliest version of the *Táin*.

Similar festivals to those celebrated in Ireland and Armorica were widespread throughout the Indo-European world: occurring in the springtime festivals of Naurōz and in the sacrifice given by Ahurō Mazdå to Apaoša and Tištrya in Iran, the Roman festival of Cybele and Attis, and the Greek festivals surrounding Dionysos (Olmsted 1994: 69, 240–247, 273–285). Extending further into the past, such festivals were also associated with springtime rituals of Dumuzi and Inanna in ancient Sumer. Extending into the present, aspects of these rituals are still important to the Christian celebration of Easter. Finally, I show that to understand their meaning, we must understand the nature of the cosmological and astronomical aspects of these festivals.

The 25-year Coligny calendar, which developed with a calendar reform from an earlier 30-year calendar during the final phase of pre-conquest Gaul, divides each year into two halves: a rising solar cycle and a lowering solar cycle. The rising solar half of the year begins with midwinter in the month *Samonios* 'Summer's End'. The lowering solar half of the year begins with midsummer in the month *Giamonios* 'Winter's End'. In medieval Ireland the year was divided into the same two parts: the winter half from midwinter to midsummer and the summer half from midsummer to midwinter.

On the Gaulish Coligny calendar Samonios is the first month of the twelve-month calendar. The month name and festival *Samonios* is cognate with Irish *Samain*. *Sanas Cormaic* refers to Samain as the first day of winter. *Sanas Cormaic* also refers to Irish Imbolc (February 1) as the first day of spring, Beltaine (May 1) as the first day of summer, and Lugnasad (August 1) as the first day of fall. *Tochmarc Emire also* indicates that winter began on Samain.

[Samain].i. sam-fuin .i. fuin in tsamraidh and. Ar is de roind no bíd

> *forsin mblíadain anall, .i. in samrad ó beltine co samain 7 in gemred ó samain co beltine.*
>
> '[Samain] is from *sam-fuin*, the end of summer. For this is the course which the year follows: summer from *beltine* to *samain* and winter from *samain* to *beltine*.' (van Hamel 1978: 43)

Note here that the month is named after the festival which relates to the end of the previous six months of the year rather than to the beginning of the next six months of the year. Thus, Samain and Samonios are festivals celebrating the completion of planting, harvesting, birthing, weaning, raiding, and construction activities associated with the summer half of the year. These festivals may be likened to the graduate ceremonies which occur at the end of the school year, not at the beginning.

It is clear that Samonios refers to midwinter. Noted in the beginning of each TII count to be found on the Coligny calendar are the terms LOVDIN and LAGET. LOVDIN (an abbreviation for **loudinos* 'waxing') derives from PIE **leu̯d^{h}-eno-* 'mount up, grow' (IEW: 684–685; Olmsted 2001: 37); PIE **lud^{h}-stu-* gives Irish *lus*, *luss* 'herb, plant'. LAGET (an abbreviation for **lagetos* 'waning') derives from Proto-Celtic **lagu-*, giving Irish *laigiu* 'smaller' (DPC: 236), suffixed as **lag-ito-* < **l$_{ə}$g$^{u̯h}$-eto-* 'diminuation, smallness', as Thurneysen noted (1899: 528–529). Perhaps implied here as well is Proto-Celtic **lagg-ito-* <**leh$_2$g-eto-* 'weak, slack'; IEW: 660–661; IEW: 959; DPC: 232; Olmsted 2001: 36); Proto-Celtic **laggo-* gives Irish *lacc* 'slack' < **lh$_2$g-ko-* (DPC: 232).

These terms divide the year into two halves, with the year beginning on Samonios at midwinter in the LOVDIN or waxing half (Olmsted 1992a: 89–90). The TII marks count in the four 30-day MAT months which occur in the LOVDIN waxing half of the year beginning at SAMON and in the four 29-day ANM[AT] months which occur during the LAGET waning half of the year beginning at GIAMON. The extra day in the 30-day months gives strength to the sun in its rising cycle (178 days total in the rising half year versus 176 days in the falling half year). On analogy with the division of the year into solar waxing and waning halves, one would expect that, in the first year of its first cycle, the 30-year calendar's first day would equate to the new moon, not to the sixth day of the moon. Such is indicated on the Coligny calendar by the fact that its 16th day, day one of the ATENOVX, would equate to the full moon. Here then, in the beginning of the 30-year cycle, the months

begin with the waxing, growing moon. So too, the year should begin with the growing sun.

Assuming the Celts in Ireland utilized the same 30-year lunar calendar as those in Gaul, because of a progressive calendar displacement of 1 day every 23.7 years between the Celtic calendar and actual solar time (counted by the TII marks), at the advent of Christianity around 450 A.D. in Ireland the celebration of midwinter would have been shifted back around 55 days. At the advent of Christianity, midwinter, occurring then on the Julian calendar on December 25, was celebrated in Ireland on November 1. The moon also shifts out of alignment with the 30-year calendar by 1 day every 199 years. At the inception of the 30-year Celtic calendar, datable between 1100 and 900 B.C. by the displacement of the day of the new moon by 5 days at the time of Plinius's source, the midwinter month did begin on the winter solstice. Thus the original Celtic festival corresponding to Irish *Samain* 'Summer's End' was celebrated at the winter solstice, and the festival corresponding to *Beltine, Beltaine* 'Bright Fire' was celebrated at the summer solstice. In Ireland two additional festivals occurred midway within each of these halves of the year: *Imbolc*, a festival of the *vernal equinox*, and *Lugnasad*, a festival of the *autumnal equinox*.

Imbolc and its original dating are important to understand the *Táin*, as the struggles outlined there take place originally from midwinter to the vernal equinox. *Tochmarc Emire* gives pseudo-etymologies for the Irish festival names, suggested by real aspects of the festivals. Here Emer tells Cú Chulainn that he shall fight during the *Táin* 'Cattle Raid' without sleeping for the three months from *Samain* to *Imbolc*. An interpolation fills in details about all four festivals, with that for *Samain* perhaps the most interesting. 'That is *samfuin* 'the end of summer', for this is the division that was formerly in the year, that is the summer half from *Beltaine* to *Samain* and the winter half from *Samain* to *Beltaine*' (VAN HAMEL 1978: 43). If Gaulish *Samonios* is equated to Irish *Samain* (< **sam-on-is*), since both items mark the end of the summer half of the year, then *Imbolc* should occur during the Gaulish month of *Rivoros*. Perhaps some indication of the nature of the original events celebrated by the Celts on *Rivoros* may be helpful in understanding the events taking place in the Irish equivalent on *Imbolc*. The events in the *Táin* occurring on *Imbolc* are then likely to preserve aspects of the original Celtic rituals surrounding the *vernal equinox*.

Gaulish month names, like those found in Rome and Greece, indicate the nature of the festivals and the deities honored by them. Correct translations of these month names can only be suggested after knowing the time of the year in which these months occur. A contextual control is provided by a comparison to Greek and Latin month names and knowledge of the festivals celebrated in Greece and Rome. Here I give translations for the Gaulish month names found on the Coligny calendar having determined that *Samonios* is the first month of the rising solar cycle:

(January) **Samonios** (MAT-30): 'End of Summer Half of Year' (< **samo-* DPC: 321). Midwinter. Irish *samain* (Germanic *Wintermanoth*). IVOS (5 days, Sam. 1): Cantlos (A-12: 13a–14a) through Samonios (M-1: 1–3).

(February) **Dumannios** (ANM-29): 'Earth Mother' (< **dumno-anna;* **dumno-* DPC: 107). EXO-IVOS (9 days, Dum. 1): Samonios (M-1: 11a–15a) through Dumannios (A-12: 1–4).

(March) **Rivros**/**Rivoros** (MAT-30): 'Moon Birthing', 'Seething Waters', or the 'Great Boiler Bormo' (see the following section). Month of Bormos-Vroicis with three days of IVOS each side of the full-moon middle of the month. Irish *imbolc*: Fráech drowned, Medb makes water, fight of bulls. [EXO]-IVOS (8 days, Riv. 16): Rivros (M-3: 13–15, 1a–5a).

(April) **Anagantios** (ANM-29): 'Offspring of Anna' (< **anna-gani-tio-*; **ganitor* DPC: 151). *Nectionos and Maponos in and out Underworld. EXO-IVOS (7 days, Ana. 1): Rivros (M-3: 11a–15a) through Anagantios (A-4: 1–3).

(May) **Ogronnios** (MAT-30): 'Fruit Trees Blossom' 'Month of the Gods of Tree Fruit' (< **agr-on-io-* DPC: 28). Bulls go in cow herd.

(June) **Cutios**, **Quitios** (MAT-30): 'the Bright Month' or 'Vindos [Apollo]' (< **k̂u̯ei̯-tio-* IEW: 629).

(July) **Giamonios** (ANM-29): 'End of Winter Half of Year' (< **gi̯amo-* DPC: 170). Midsummer. Irish Beltaine 'Bright Fire'. EXO-IVOS (6 days, Gia. 1): Quitios (M-6: 13a–15a) through Giamonios (A-7: 1–3).

(August) **Semivisonna** (MAT-30): 'Summer-time Sun Month' (< **semi-u̯ei̯-sonno-*; **sem-* IEW: 905; **u̯ei-* IEW: 1123; **sou̯ono-* DPC: 352, as

in Welsh *huan*). Coligny-calendar phrase CIALLOS BI[I]S SONNO CINGOS 'Propitious be the Sun's Path' (Olmsted 1992a: 108, 2001a: 46). (July is Sun month in Iceland).

(September) **Equos** (ANM-28/29): 'Horse Month' (< **ek^{u}o-* DPC: 114). (Hippodromios; June in Athens and July in Boetia).

(October) **Elembivios** (ANM-29): 'Deer-wounded' (see later section). Irish *Bron Trogan*, *Lugnasad* (Earth Goddess and Lugus): 'horse-racing, games, judgement'. (Greek Apollo and Demeter; Elaphebolion is in February in Greece). IVOS (8 days, Ele. 1): Equos (A-9: 11a–13a/14a) through Elembivios (A-10: 1–4/5).

(November) **Aedrinios** (MAT-30): 'Month of Eating and Drinking' (< **a̯id-rinio-*; **poi̯-d-* IEW: 794; **rēnio-* DPC: 309). Harvest Home. IVOS (3 days, Aed. 1): Aedrinios (M-11: 1–3).

(December) **Cantlos** (ANM-29): 'Final Month' (< **kan-t^{h}-lo-* IEW: 526, as in Welsh *cantell*).

In early Christian Ireland winter began with a seven-day festival centered around *Samain* (< **samonis*). According to *Serglige Con Culainn*, 'Every year an *oenach* was celebrated by the Ulstermen: three days before *Samain*, three days after [*Samain*], and the day of *Samain* itself' (Dillon 1953: 1–2). In Ireland, Spring began with the festival of *Imbolc*. Summer began with *Beltaine*. Fall (*im thaite fogmar*) began with *Lugnasad*. According to *Sanas Cormaic* '*Lugnasad* (...) is the festival (*násad*) of Lug son of Ethne, which is the festive gathering (*aonach)* held by him at the beginning of the fall of each year, occurring at *Lugnasad*' (Meyer 1912b: 66). The term IVOS on the Coligny calendar relates for the most part to the lunar festivals associated with the solstices and equinoxes (with IVOS perhaps derived from **h$_1$i̯u̯-* of IE **h$_1$i̯eu̯-* > **i̯eu̯-* 'preparation of food, feast', as in Welsh *iwt* 'mash, broth' derived from Gaulish *iutta* 'brew' < **i̯u-tā* (DLG: 194; IEW: 507; Thurneysen 1899: 530). In examining the distribution on the Coligny calendar of the IVOS festival days in normal years (for the distribution in intercalary years: see Olmsted 1992a: 86; tabs. 11b–11c), we should then note that IVOS usually occurs in clusters of days. During the LOVDIN solar 'rising' half of the year, these IVOS clusters occur from 2 to 5 days before and after Dumannios 1, Rivros 1a (16), Anagantio 1, and the solstice at Giamonios 1, all of which have EXO IVOS at day 1 or 1a. During

the LAGET solar 'diminishing' half of the year, these clusters occur at Elembivios 1, Edrinios 1, and the solstice at Samonios 1, all of which have simply IVOS at day 1. Except for a few singular occurrences, IVOS then occurs in groups clustering about day 1. The pattern of EXO IVOS for the festivals in the waxing half of the year ending in solstice at Giamonios and the pattern of simply IVOS for the festivals in the waning half of the year ending in the solstice at Samonios suggest the month and festival names refer to the preceding halves of the year rather than the following. Thus, as I indicated earlier, the festival at Samonios refers to the preceding summer half of the year from midsummer to midwinter and is the low point, occurring at midwinter, of the lowering or diminishing half-year solar cycle. The festival at Giamonios refers to the preceding winter half of the year from midwinter to midsummer and is the high point, occurring at midsummer, of the rising or increasing half-year solar cycle. Thus, ironically the midwinter festival occurs in Samonios containing the root **sam-* 'summer' and the midsummer festival occurs in Giamonios containing the root **giam-* 'winter'.

That the notation IVOS about Samonios 1 does relate to a festival finds support in the Old Irish tale of *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon 1953: 1). The tale opens *Óenach dogníthe la Ultu cecha blíadna .i. tri lá ría samḟuin 7 tri laa íarma 7 ocus lathe na samna feisne*, which is to say 'the Ulstermen used to hold a festival every year: on the three days before Samain, the three days after Samain, and upon the day of Samain itself'. The distribution of the *óenach* festival days about Samain (cognate with Samonios) then shows the same pattern as the distribution of IVOS about Samonios day 1. Indeed, it is this similarity which led Thurneysen (1899: 530) to see the meaning of IVOS as 'feast'. Now in Ireland, Samain is the festival of the beginning of winter, although it contains the root **sam-* 'summer'. Although the Irish festivals have been displaced as a block with respect to their original position in the year, it seems clear that, like the Celts who settled in Gaul, the Celts who settled in Ireland originally celebrated the beginning of winter at midwinter (December 25 at the beginning of the Julian calendar).

Thus, there is a correlation between the winter festival days centered about Samain in early Ireland and the block of IVOS days about the solstice on Samonios 1, the low point of the whole solar lowering or summer half of the year on the Coligny calendar. One similarly can relate the festival centered about Beltaine and the block of IVOS and EXO IVOS

days about Giamonios 1, associated with the summer solstice, the high point of the whole rising or winter half of the year. The other Irish festivals Imbolc and Lugnasad might then be related (Olmsted 1992a: tab. 56) to the IVOS days about Rivros 1a or about Anagantio 1, apparently festivals associated with the spring equinox, and to the IVOS days about Elembivios 1, apparently a festival associated with the fall equinox.

The Coligny calendar demonstrates that the Gaulish IVOS festivals may be correlated with the later Irish Quarter Festivals. We have noted that Samonios 1 may be correlated with midwinter for the first year of the calendar's operation, since Samonios 1 is the beginning of the LOVDIN 'rising' cycle of the sun, which the corresponding TII marks count out. In contrast, the cognate Irish Samain occurs on November 1. The fact that this Irish festival, like the other Irish quarter festivals, is 55 days out of whack with the solar year may then be explained as the result of a gradual calendar error, the result apparently of the early Celts, including those who settled in Ireland, utilizing a 30-year calendar, out of whack with solar time and shifting by 1 day every 23.7 years. So too, the corresponding Irish rituals and festivals associated with these quarter days can be aligned with those occurring elsewhere in European or Indo-Iranian culture associated with the solstices and equinoxes. With the adoption of the Julian calendar around 450 A.D. in early Christian Ireland, the original rough correlation of the festivals with solar events would have long been forgotten or perhaps best forgotten, since they were originally pagan in nature. The shifted festivals then became canonized to fixed dates within the new calendar as the Quarter Festivals of the Irish year.

Thus Irish sources about *Samain* and *Imbolc* are in agreement with Gaulish sources about *Samonios* and *Rivoros*. Since the first two festival/month names refer to the same event, midwinter, it is likely that the second two refer to the same event, spring. We thus have two words describing the nature of the festivals and associated rituals occurring on the final day of the *Táin*, one Gaulish and the other Old Irish. We can also compare the names of the major characters of the *Táin* with deity names from Gaul as well. Irish Medb derives directly from Gaulish Medva 'the Intoxicating Goddess', both apparently equivalent to the Vedic Uṣas. Irish Boand derives directly from Gaulish *Bormobovindona or *Borvobovindona [BORVOBO(V)ENDO(N)A] 'the Boil-

ing White Cow' (Gutenbrunner 1936: 211, S. 75, B5), which apparently contains the same root as Bormana for the first element in the name. The byname Bormana then allows *Bormobovindona to be brought directly into this group containing S(t)irona and Damona. Similarly, the last element of the name Borvobo(v)indo(n)a is the same as that in Ptolemaeus's Bovinda or Bovovinda 'White Cow' (Irish Boand, Boind), the name he gives for the River Boyne.

**Bovinda* 'White Cow' is equivalent to the Vedic *Rātri*. The Vedic goddess Uṣas had an association with the inner planet Venus as the morning star, which rises just before the sun and fades as it rises into the sky with daylight. Uṣas can also be associated with the Sumerian goddess Inanna, who is the morning star. The Vedic goddess Rātri had an association with the planet Venus as the evening star, which sets shortly after the sunset and sinks brightly into the earth's horizon, seemingly into the earth's depths with the oncoming darkness of night. Rātri can be associated with Ereshkigal, Inanna's sister and the goddess of the underworld, but Inanna also went yearly into the underworld (Jacobsen 1987: 205). So too, Irish Medb and Boand are sisters. Medb is queen of the earth's surface, and Boand is queen of the underworld.

From the point of view of ancient cosmology, the sun (Vedic *Surya-Agni*, Irish *Macind Óc* 'Young Son') is born of the night, and the moon (Vedic *Apām Napāt*, Irish *Nechtain-Fráech* 'Nephew, Heather', and possibly originally Sumerian Dumuzid) is born of the day. The sun embodies the same bright heat found in fire. The moon embodies the same cool light or warmth found in ocean phosphorescence or hot springs. This same warmth as in the hot springs is found in the living mammals and birds. In all of these sources, the Sun, the young son born at each dawn from Night, then weds his aunt Day, and the Moon, born at twilight from Day, weds his aunt Night.

Midwinter, which on the Coligny calendar is celebrated at *Samonios* 'the end of summer', is the birthday of the sun, which grows higher and higher in the sky each day until midsummer. It is on this day that the Irish Macind Óc is both conceived and born. In the *Dindṡenchas* tale of Boand, the Irish Dagda mates with the underworld nighttime goddess Boand-Morrigan on *Samain*. '[Dagda] brought her to the birth in a single day. It was then they made the sun stand still to the end of nine months' (Olmsted 1994: 187). It is likely that the Celts who kept the calendar celebrated the *hieros gamos* of the mating of the sky-father with

the nighttime goddess at midwinter. The goddess will become virgin again after giving birth to the sun. Her son, the sun, is taken from the nighttime goddess at birth or perhaps on the first day of spring by her sister, the daytime goddess (Irish *Medb*), who raises and weds her nephew (Irish *Ailill*).

The celebration of the vernal equinox occurs on the Coligny calendar for seven days marked IVOS surrounding the day of the full moon, the ATENOVX, during the month of **Rivoros*. The important ritual events associated with springtime festivals such as those celebrated in **Rivoros* still survive in various tales in the Ulster Cycle as well as in Greek and Roman sources. These rituals may be outlined as the burning and throwing into the rivers of the evergreen, which has been clothed to personify a deity identified as 'the Nephew of Waters' in several Indo-European traditions. The Nephew of Waters is drowned by his father, mourned, spends three days in the underworld, and then returns alive to the earth to the blare of trumpets. While the 'Young Son', the sun, is in the underworld during the winter with his mother, the nighttime White-Cow goddess, his polar twin cousin, the 'Nephew of Waters', the moon, is abroad with his mother the daytime Intoxicating Goddess. The underworld goddess may stay abroad with the moon, giving darkness and cold even to the day. The daytime goddess is infertile from midwinter to spring and ravages the earth with her infertility. With spring, fertility returns to the daytime earth goddess.

The 'Go-between' of the realms (Vedic *Pūṣan-Viṣnu*, Irish *Cú Chulainn*) fights to regain the productive time for earth. In the *Táin*, the 'Go-between' (Cú Chulainn) fights the underworld goddess in her shape-shifting forms of an eel, a wolf, and a cow and defeats her. He drowns his own son (Nechtain-Fráech), the 'Nephew of Waters', to give warmth back to the waters. After a period of being mourned by all, Fráech comes to life again and reappears briefly to the joy-filled blare of trumpets on the earth's surface. At the full moon associated with the *vernal equinox*, Fráech then returns to the otherworld, and the 'Young Son' (Macind Óc) comes to the earth's surface now as the grown celestial sun and returns warmth to the sky. The two cloud-bulls fight, and the rain (the Donn bull) wins over the snow (the Findbennach bull). Rituals involve drinking wine, the rejuvenating blood of the bull. Many of these rituals outlined in the *Táin* still survive in the Christian celebration of Easter.

Here I shall deal primarily with the festival surrounding *Imbolc*, whose significance could be 'Intense Showers, Swollen Streams, Intense Weeping' (**emb-* 'showers, streams' IEW: 315–316 + **b*^{h}*elg*^{h}- 'swell, increase' IEW: 125). Imbolc is the first day of Irish spring, which is when the Donn bull and the Findbennach fight and Medb gets her period. This day is also when Fráech is drowned by his father Cú Chulainn in the earliest version of the *Táin*. Since 'the whole encampment mourned for Fráech' after his drowning, if not simply 'Intense Showers', this is possibly the origin of the term *Imbolc* 'Intense Weeping'.

A calendar of Furius Dionysus Philocalus (354 A.D.) (*CIL* I: 260) gives the dates for the Cybele and Attis festivals in Rome (see Vermaseren 1977: 113). The *Tristia* and *Hilaria*, 'the Festival of Sadness and the Festival of Gaiety', corresponding to Attis' death and resurrection respectively, occurred on the 24th and 25th day of Martius and were followed on the 26th by a day of resting, the *Requietio*. Indeed, the Roman festivals and their names are suggestive of 'the music of weeping (*goltride)*, the music of laughter (*gentride*), and the music of sleeping (*súantride*)' played by Fráech's horn blowers (Meid 1974: 4–5; Olmsted 1976: 100 and fig. 8; 2001: pl. 37; as illustrated on Gundestrup plate E) or the *gol* 7 *égem* 'crying and shrieking' with which Brig bewails her dead son (Stokes 1891: 96–97). These themes must have a common source, with Irish myth apparently preserving the names of the music played at the ritual and Latin sources preserving the names of the festival days.

According to *Táin Bó Fraích* (Meid 1974: 1), Fráech mac Fidaig of Connacht had an aunt named *Boind* 'White Cow' or 'Fair Cow'. Fráech's mother was Bé Find (*a sídib*), stated to be Boind's sister but more likely another name for Boand, Fráech's aunt. From Bé Find, Fráech got seven hornblowers, three harpers, fifty grey horses, and twelve cows, all white with red ears. These cows produced so much milk that they would be able to feed the whole of Medb's army on the *Táin* 'cattle raid'. The name of Fráech's father Fidaig, *fidach* 'wooded; trees', is obscure, not occurring apart from Fráech. The full name Fráech mac Fidaig is probably poetic and descriptive, thus 'Heather the son of Trees', and is not likely to help us in our search for Fraech's parentage.

At *Ráth Crúachan*, Medb's supposed capital and presumably the center of her cult as a goddess, is a cave (*úam Crúachan)* considered to be the entrance to the otherworld (*síd Crúachan*). On the roof of this cave

is an Ogam inscription. This inscription gives an alternative and much earlier suggestion as to Fráech's mother. The inscription reads VRAICCI MAQI MEDVVI (Macalister 1945: 16–17, no. 12) and dates to the fifth century, from within a pagan context. A reference to *Medva* in the genitive following *MAQI* would be expected at Crúachu (Medb's capital). The inscription would make sense if the name were declined as a feminine *ā*-stem. However, the *-i* ending in *Medvvi* indicates a masculine *o*-stem genitive, which is difficult to explain in the context of Crúachu and Medb, especially since the inscription occurs on the roof of a very dark cave. One should note that *-a-* is indicated by a single dot in Ogam, and it would be easy to leave out if the carver copied the inscription from writing on a wood plack. What was intended was probably **MEDVVIA*. As Thurneysen (1946: 188) notes 'already in the Ogam inscriptions there are certain genitives in *-ia(s)*, *-eas* which have been, rightly it would seem, ascribed to *ā*-stems'. It would not be inappropriate to see a feminine genitive following *MAQI* 'son', in the case of a deity, as in Fergus mac Róech, named after his mother.

The genitive *VRAICCI* indicates that *síd Crúachan* was originally considered to be the property of Vraiccas. Indeed, this would appear to be the original site of *Síd Fraích*. One must take note that the inscription occurs in a cave where it can be seen only with great difficulty. One must lie on one's back aided by an artificial light to see it at all. It occurs at what was considered to be the entrance to the otherworld. In *Táin Bó Fraích*, the *bantrochta Bóinni* 'woman troops of Boand' carry off Fráech into this cave to be healed after his battle with the water monster (Meid 1974: 10). There can be little question of the ritual nature of the Ogam inscription and that Fráech and Medb are intended here.

In *Rivoros* (March) (abbreviated on the Coligny calendar as RIVO, RIVRO) the main stem **b^{h}oro-* or *b^{h}ro-* 'bubbling, boiling' (**b^{h}reu̯H-* in LIV, p. 96) would then be combined with the particle **per-, *prei-, *pri-* 'before, rise above' giving Irish *ria, ré* 'before'. Thus *Rivros* could then derive from IE **prei̯-b^{h}(o)ro-* or *pri-b^{h}(o)ro-* 'boiling over' or 'bubbling forth'. The significance of *Rivoros, Rivros* would be then the same as Irish *topur* and *fofar* 'gushing spring water'. The *o*-grade nominal form of the root is also found in Irish *topur* 'well, spring' from **to-uks-boro-* and *fobar* 'spring' from **upo-boro-* (Pokorny 1959: 132–133). Here then the name could relate to the gushing forth of the streams with the spring thaw. The month name *Rivoros* just as likely relates to the deity associ-

ated with these events. As a deity name Rivros, Rivoros would be equivalent to Bormos, Borvos, Bormo, and would be a byname for Bormos Vindovroicos 'The Boiler, Fair Heather', the Gaulish god of hot springs, equivalent to Irish Fráech.

From Ebersdorf in the Upper Panonnian province (Pannonia Superior) comes the tombstone of [...]IESSILLO F. VINDOROICI, with Vindo(v)roicus referenced in the genitive singular of an *o*-stem (*CIL* III: 4604). Although here it is a personal name, this Celt was undoubtedly named after a deity **Vindo(v)roicos*, with the loss of the *-v-* as in *Bassoledulitanos* for **Basso(v)ledulitanos*. Both Vroicos 'Heather' and Vindonnos 'the Fair One' are bynames for Gaulish Apollo. Considering the wide-spread adoption of deity names by individuals, as in Moritasgus (*o*-stem) and Camulorix, such a supposition provides the most likely explanation for this personal name. However, Schmidt (1957: 261) has suggested an alternative derivation of this name from **vindo-ro-vici-* 'the Fair Great Warrior', implicating a derivation from Gaulish Mars. However, elsewhere *vindo-* is only used for bynames of Apollo, suggesting that *Vindovroicos is inherently more likely (Olmsted 1994: 394).

Although on the Coligny calendar there was no IVOS festival in *Ogronnios* (May), I believe the name refers back to an event celebrated in *Anagantios* or even *Rivoros*, months corresponding to April and March respectively. The month name *Ogronnios* could be analyzed as **ogran-onio-* or **ogron-onio-* giving *ogronnio-* through syncope. Considering that this month coincides roughly with *Maius* (May), the month of Maia, OGRONN or OGRONV is likely related to the root **og-* (**h₂eg-*) 'to grow; fruit, berry' as in Irish *áirne* 'acorn' and Welsh *aeron* 'tree fruit', both from **agrīn̥iā* according to Pokorny (1959: 773) citing Celto-Roman **agraniō* 'tree fruit, berry'. Since, as I indicated earlier, the structure of the Coligny calendar (see Olmsted 1992a; 2001) indicates that SAMON begins at midwinter, not midsummer, an etymology from Celtic **o̯u̯gro-* 'cold' (DPC: 301) is not likely for a late spring month.

As tree fruits are not to be found in late April or May, but only the blossoms, the analysis of the month name *Ogronnios* could scarcely be seen to indicate 'the month of tree fruit'. One would then have to see the month *Ogronnios* as named directly after the deities, the Ogronii 'the Gods of Tree Fruit'. *Ogronnios* means 'Month of the Gods of Tree Fruit' (Olmsted 1994: 269–284). As no IVOS days occur in this month, the

name cannot come from a festival which occurs within it. The deities could have been celebrated in the previous festival in *Rivoros* or *Anagantios* and then have played some particular role in May. All throughout Europe the beginning of May and the end of April is when the bulls go into the herds. In the Zodiac at the time of Julius Caesar April 21 is the first day of Taurus. To survive, the calves may be born no earlier than the first of February, nine months later. There is a close association between Fráech and the Irish Brown Bull Donn Cúailnge and the Irish White-Horned Bull Findbennach. Fráech and his wife Boand 'White Cow' own the White Red-Eared Cows, whose milk can feed armies. These are the offspring of the Donn Cúailnge.

The two bulls, who might be identified with the Gaulish *Ogronii*, are described in the Irish tale *De Chophur in da Mucida* (Roider 1979). In the LL-version of the tale the bulls begin as shape-shifting contentious swineherds, who blight each other's tree fruit and fight in the forms of hawks, water beasts, stags, and warriors. In the *Dindṡenchas* of Áth Lúain, the two bulls fight as birds of prey, wolves, and trout. The two swineherds finally battle each other as the bulls Findbennach and Donn Cúailnge as described in the end of the *Táin*. These two shape-shifting Irish creatures are cognates of the Iranian gods Apaoša and Tištrya. They were condensed by the Thracians into the single god Zagreus and by the Greeks into the single god Dionysos, the bull-like god of wine (Olmsted 1994: 269–284).

In the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Fráech son of Medb, Fráech's wife Boand, Ailill son of Boand, Ailill's wife Medb, and Medb's paramour Fergus attack the Ulaid and make off with the Donn 'Brown Bull' so that he may fight Medb's Bull Findbennach 'the White-Horned Bull'. In the struggles Cú Chulainn defeats Fergus 'the Virile One' using his broken chariot wheel as a weapon. Cú Chulainn battles Boand, who comes at him in the ford as a white red-eared heifer, an eel, and a wolf bitch. He breaks her rib as the eel, takes out her eye as the wolf bitch, and breaks her leg as the heifer. Cú Chulainn fights his own son Fráech in the pool, hand to hand, while both are swimming and drowns him. Fráech then is carried by troops of women (*banchuire*) into the underworld to be healed and revived by his wife Boand. After Cú Chulainn captures Medb on *Imbolc*, she has her first period since *Samain* (she has been infertile from midwinter to the spring equinox and thus during the whole of the winter).

The two Bulls are themselves the end result of the shape-shifting swineherds. When there are plentiful acorns and tree fruit in the south, the swineherd from Connacht would take his swine south, and when there are plentiful acorns and tree fruit in the north, the swineherd from Munster would take his swine north. In contention over who produced the better tree fruit, they blight each other's nuts and fruit. As noted above, they then fight as hawks, sea beasts, and wolves (or stags and dragons). One then becomes the Findbennach and the other the Donn Cúailnge. As the bulls of the *Táin*, the Donn Bull kills the Findbennach, scattering pieces of him all over Ireland. All these events take place on or just before the vernal equinox.

The Greek god Dionysos was originally a deity of all tree fruit and not just a god of wine. Farnell lists the bynames of Dionysos interspersed throughout his text, so that I reference him but once here in the beginning of the analysis (see Farnell 1907: V, 96ff. and index at 489). Associating him with trees at Philippi, Dionysos was called *Prinophóros* and *Dryophóros* 'the Bringer of Oaks', and presumably of their mast of acorns as well. Clemens Alexandrinus (*Protrepticus:* 33P) notes an epithet *Choiropsálas* 'Controller of Swine', which would indicate he was responsible for the swine who fed on the mast as well. At Kallatis he was known as *Dasýllios* 'God of the Thicket and Wildwood'. He is elsewhere known as *Dendrítēs* and *Endendros* 'He who Lives in Trees', *Thyllophóros* 'Bearer of Boughs', and *Phloiós* 'God of Bark'. He was also associated with the fig tree, being known as *Sykítēs* 'God of the Fig'. It was he who put the bloom on the fruit trees, for he was *Anthinós* 'God of Blossoms' and *Próblastos* 'God of Early Bloom, God of Germination'. He was *Kárpios* 'the Fruit Bearer'. He was also associated with ivy, being known as *Kissós* 'God of Ivy' and *Perikiónos* (*Perikíōnios*) 'About the Pillar' (Olmsted 1994: 277).

Even within the classical repertory Dionysos was seen as a shape-shifting deity, most frequently appearing in bull-like guise. In the associated myth of Zagreus, the god is described as shifting through several animal forms in attempting to escape the Tītanes before being finally torn apart as a bull. 'Then he left the shape of the restless crawler and became a tiger with gay stripes on his body; or again like a bull emitting a counterfeit roar from his mouth, he butted the Tītanes with sharp horn' (Nonnos, *Dionysiakōn*: VI, 175–206; Rouse 1940: 226–229). From the Irish and Iranian sources it is clear that the Proto-Indo-European

conception which gave rise to Dionysos had a dual nature. There were, in fact, twin contrasting gods, one black and the other white. In the Iranian myth of Tištrya and Apaoša, these two polar opposite deities fight each other in several different animal guises beside the cosmic waters.

Like the infant Dionysos, in a quote from Nonnos's, *Dionysiakōn*, Zagreus tried to escape the Titans, taking the form of various animals and other shapes.

> The end of his (Zagreus's) life was the beginning of a new life as Diónysos. He (…) changed into many forms (…) He was (…) sometimes like a mad youth (…). Again, [as] a mimic lion he uttered a horrible roar in furious rage (…). Next, he left the shape of a lion's looks and let out a ringing neigh, now like an unbroken horse (…). Sometimes he poured out a whistling hiss from his mouth, a curling horned serpent covered with scales (…). Then he left the shape of the restless crawler and became a tiger (…); or again like a bull emitting a counterfeit roar (…), he butted the Titans with a sharp horn. So he fought for his life (…), Then the bold bull collapsed; the murderers each eager for his turn with the knife chopped piecemeal the bull-shaped Dionysos. (Rouse 1940: 226–229)

From the earliest period Dionysos was conceived of as a bull-god in Greece. As Farnell (1909: 126–127) has noted, 'the god was incarnate in the bull, and (…) assumed bovine form wholly or in part; (…) [the god was] a phallic deity, associated with the pasturing herds, and himself sometimes conceived of as horned'. In an Elean hymn, Dionysos is hailed by the women as 'Noble Bull' (reminiscent of Irish Donn Cúailnge or the Gaulish personal name Donnotaurus, derived from a deity name; Olmsted 1994: 402), and he is invited to come to the shrine 'charging with his bull's feet' (Olmsted 1994: 378).

Dionysos also had a special connection with water and water spirits. Farnell describes him as a 'deity of rivers and streams'. Common to almost all Dionysian cults is the spring-time festival of the epiphany of Dionysos coming from the sea. Plutarchus (Olmsted 1994: 279) describes this festival in Argos. According to Plutarchus, 'the Argives threw a bull into the deep and summoned Bull-Born Dionysos to rise up from the waters with the blowing of trumpets, and at the same time they threw a lamb into the bottomless pool as an offering to the 'warder of gates'. At Rhodes a mighty wind instrument, the 'water organ', was

used 'to awaken the dead or slumbering god'. The trumpet has heralded many epiphanies of the god. These lake legends would appear to have arisen from the widespread ritual practice of throwing an incarnation of the deity into the water (Farnell 1909: 124, 183–184). Thus Lykurgos drives Dionysos into the sea. Perseus flings Dionysos into a lake, while in a Thracian legend Dionysos leaps by himself into the sea.

This throwing the god into the sea or lake is also reminiscent of the Irish myth of Donn Cúailnge going into the lake at Crúachu. The association of the cult of Dionysos and Apollon at Delphi reminds one that the drowning of Irish Fráech (Gaulish *Vroicis* equated to Apollo) and the fight of the Irish bulls apparently both take place on the same day, the first day of spring (*Imbolc*, the Gaulish month *Rivoros*). So too, bull sacrifice and bull-blood baptism was an aspect of the rites of Cybele and Attis in Rome (equivalent to Boand and Fráech-Nechtain in Ireland).

From Rognes, Bouches-du-Rhône, comes an inscription to VROICIS ET ALD[A]ME[…]SIBVS (*AcS* III: 455). Although the last name was reconstructed by Allmer as ALD[E]ME[HEN]SIBVS after the German Matres Mahlineae, Nersihenae, and Vacalhinehae, his reconstruction seems dubious (Aebischer 1931: 312–313). The dedicators of this inscription *Verax Antenorus f(ilius) et Potissuma Ollunae f(ilia)* show nothing Germanic in their names. Potissuma is Latin from *potissimo-* 'best of all' (perhaps influenced by *potis summa* 'the best attainable'). Also Latin are Antenorus from Antenor, the name of the legendary Trojan founder of Patavium (Padua), and Verax from *verax* 'truthful'. However, significantly Potissuma's mother, Olluna, is a Gaul. The name Olluna is composed of the Celtic root *ollo-* 'great, ample, all' and is listed as a Celtic personal name by both Whatmough (*DAG*: §83) and Evans (1967: 238). Thus it is ludicrous to interpret this inscription from the Rhône basin as Germanic rather than Celtic. Antenorus has simply followed his Gaulish wife in giving a dedication to Celtic gods.

The Celtic goddess indicated here in the Latinized dative plural of an *s*-stem (perhaps for the triple Matres) is possibly *Ald(a)me[…]s* 'the White Cow of ?' (see above), drawing parallels to Irish Boand 'White Cow', the epynomous goddess of the Boyne river. The other deity to whom the dedication was made, *loco [privato aedem fecerut]*, is referenced in the Latinized dative plural as VROICIS, an *ā*-stem or an *o*-stem. Aebischer (1931: 313) chose to interpret this name as *ā*-stem, thereby indicating another goddess group, **Vroica* in the singular.

However, both Jubainville (1906: 320) and Whatmough (*DAG*: §82, p. 196) have noted that the reference to divine names in the plural is commonplace in Gaul, as in Martes (MARTIBVS, *CIL* XII: 4218), Mercurii, Minervae, and, especially noteworthy, Lugoves, where the plural form is much more prevalent than the singular. Similar inscriptions commonly refer to a god and goddess group. Thus it seems eminently more likely to see a god Vroicos implicated here. The use of the plural here would then simply be a sign of respect, as in the use of Lugoves for Lugus.

As Aebischer (1931: 322) indicated, the Celtic root **u̯roi̯ko-* is undoubtedly related to Irish *fráech, fróech* 'heather, rage, fierceness' and Welsh *grug* 'heather'. *Vroico-* may derive from IE **u̯rei̯k-*, **u̯roi̯ko-* 'heather' (IEW: 1155: DPC: 431), in turn, from the *i*-extended form of **u̯r̥g^{h}-*, the zero-grade of *u̯er-g^{h}-* 'turn, twist' (IEW: 1154), but Matasović thinks it has a non-IE origin (DPC: 431). However, *Fráech* (< *Vroicos*) is also the name of Boand's nephew, who plays a significant role in both *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Táin Bó Fraích.* Thus the inscription to *Ald[a]me[...]s* 'White Cow of ...' and Vroicos forms a complete parallel to Boand (Boind) 'White Cow' and Fráech.

In light of the many ex-votos to Gaulish Apollo indicating that the god was evoked for sexual problems in women, such as above under Vindonnos, it may be significant that Fráech has three magic harpers or horn blowers, whose playing makes child-bearing easier for women and calving easier for cattle. Significant as well, Boand journeys to Nechtain's well to be made pure again after bearing Mac ind Óc (*mac ind* < **maccan* < **mak^{u}k^{u}ono-* ?).

The deity-name Vroicos also gave place names, such as Vrocomagos, now Brumath near Strassburg (*Ptolemaeus*: 2, 9, 9; *AcS* III: 434). There are also many river names in France and Switzerland, as Aebischer (1931: 322) has shown, which derive from *vroico-*, such as the Broye in Switzerland (also the name of two smaller streams; Aebischer suggests the following derivation: *vroico-* > **brouco-* > **brauco-* > *broye*). In these names, Whatmough (1970: 69) suggests that **vrukos (*brukos)*, and **vraukos (*braukos)* are dialectical variations for *vroikos.* In Ireland there is also Dublind Fraích 'the Dark Pool of Fráech' in the Bréi in Connacht. As Aebischer has noted, these river names suggest that the god was honored throughout Gaul.

'Si tous ces noms remontaient vraiment à un **Vroico-* ou à une **Vroica*,

> on pourrait tirer la conclusion que le cult de cette divinité n'etait point particulier à la région de Rognes ou à celle du Léman, mais qu'on le trouvait, cá et lá tout au moins, en Gaule.' (Aebischer 1931: 324)

Some important cosmological events must lie behind these springtime rituals: the drowning of the god of evergreens, bubbling hot springs, and apparently of fermenting grain as well; and the blood-letting of the shape-shifting bull-like god of tree fruit and wine. Here it would be appropriate to examine the significance of three forms of the spiritual essence as conceived by the Proto-Indo-Europeans: Vegetative (earthly) spirit, Animated (watery) spirit, and Rational or Meditative (airy) spirit. These three types of spirit were visualized as that behind the fermented bread or grain, that behind the wine, and that behind the breath and the word (giving laws, since laws are composed of words). Life spirit resides in three material places: the flesh (bread, beer in liquid form), the blood (wine), and the breath (word). These correspond to earth, water, and air: the underworld, earth's surface, and the sky. Later Aristotle would make these realms into five by adding fire and aether. It is clear from the comparative method that in Proto-Indo-European society two thousand years before Aristotle, there were only three realms (Olmsted 1994: 35–40). So the breath, fire, and aether were originally seen as one aerial substance.

The body is of the substance of earth, the blood the substance of water, and the breath the substance of air. For man, the body spirit is eros, the blood spirit is power and vitality, the breath spirit is pure spirit. For the social order of the Vedic Indians this manifests itself as farmers (*vaiśyas*), warriors (*kṣatriyas*), and priests (*brāhmaṇas*). Thus one has the threefold division dear to Dumézil. However Jung (1967) said it earlier with his eros, power (aggression), and spirit. Some 2300 years earlier still Plato said it better than Jung. Plato in the *Politeia* outlined the kingdom ruled by the pure ethereal spirit of the philosopher, the timocracy linked by the honor-seeking and glory-seeking of the warrior, and the oligarchy linked by the material appetites of the merchants.

For the Christian, these three spiritual essences are simply manifest in the bread, the body of Christ; the wine, the blood of Christ; and the word, the holy spirit of Christ. Such is the essence of the Last Supper. The Eucharist of the bread and the wine are consumed as the body and blood of Christ, reminiscent of Dionysos, who in his bull-like form was

confined in the manger. At Easter, Christ, the son of the later deified Virgin, dies on the cross, equivalent to the evergreen of Vroicos and Attis. As with Vroicos and Attis after dying and spending three days locked away in the crypt or the cavern and descending into the underworld, Christ returns revived and arises from the dead.

The spirit of the flesh is the vegetative spirit, for this spirit also gives life to plants. The spirit of blood is the animated spirit, for this spirit gives movement, vitality, and youth to animals and man. The spirit of breath is the rational spirit used to express laws. Controlled breathing is also used to bring on meditation. Breath gives rise to speech and the word. Laws and recipes are conveyed in words. So it is breath which forms the laws of the universe and of men. Air lies above water, which lies above earth. So there is a natural order to the forms the spirit takes in each of these substances, and they form the three original realms of being.

Man experiences the spirit of meditation through breath and the control of breath. In this way one induces a natural high. The animated spirit found in blood is also found in red wine, which also intoxicates. The vegetative spirit found in the grain, which in earth gives rise to form the wheat plant, is found in beer. The beer too intoxicates. The spiritual essence found in the fermenting beer is also found in bubbling hot springs: the fire in water. This same spiritual essence is found, as the Upaniṣads say, in the fire of man and in the fire of woman. The spiritual essence found in the moon, the controller of eros, takes the form of bubbling hot springs on earth. Blood and wine rejuvenate the vitality. Hot springs rejuvenate the diseased body. Hot springs contain the vital spirit of the underworld and of night, for they bubble forth from the earth and the caverns, thus they are associated with the moon. Fire provides light as does the sun. Both the sun and the hearth fire are rekindled each day. The fire and the sun are both the young son.

The vegetative spirit found in the grain and which gives rise to the bubbling fermented intoxicating beer is also found in the evergreens, which do not shed their leaves in winter. Thus the evergreen, the beer, the hot springs, and the moon all contain the same vegetative spirit found in the body of animals and in the grain itself. Unlike grain, tree fruit produces juice which ferments without the need of fire to cook the mash. When it comes from the red grape, it is like the blood of the bull. The juice comes from the grape just as the rain comes from the

cloud. So too, does the animal seed gush forth from the man unlike the vegetable seed, which is dry. The rain from the clouds also gives form to the vegetable seed, as the semen from the bull gives form to the calf. The blood differentiates the animal from the plant, which lacks blood. So fruits are like animals in that they have juice. The blood, which gives vitality, is then the same as the fermented juice of the wine. The dark clouds of spring bring forth the life-giving rains, just as the dark grapes give forth the wine. So the Irish dark bull represents the life-giving rain-giving clouds and the wine-giving grape, just as the white bull represents the snow-giving clouds of winter and the unripe grape.

These spiritual entities were seen as poetically-inspired gods and goddesses. In Indo-European tradition, there are then two wedded pairs: the daytime earth's surface goddess personified in the lakes and large bodies of water paired with the young son (fire or the sun born each day) and the nighttime underworld goddess personified in the earth and its caverns and river sources paired with the nephew of waters, the god of hot springs and bubbling waters. Each goddess is wed to her nephew. Thus there was an underworld goddess of night (Boand, Rātri, Cybele, Demeter, Ereshkigal). She was associated with Venus as the evening star. Her cow-like nature arose from the fact that the evening star has phases like the moon. The crescent phase is likened to cow horns. All who sleep with the goddess of night are bound in the underworld. Since the morning and evening aspects of Venus were often seen as a single entity, Ereshkigal could be merged with Inanna. A Sumerian hymn refers to Inanna as 'the noblest one in heaven and earth, crowned with great horns, (…), Inanna, I will hail'. Inanna 'likes wandering in the sky, being truly Heaven's wild cow' (Jacobsen 1987: 113). Can the Gaulish god Bovinda and Irish Boand, the 'Bright Cow' be far from this conception?

In Sumerian hymns to Inanna, the goddess is equated with the planet Venus as the morning and evening stars, originally seen as two separate entities. 'The Queen, the evening star, has seen fit to come forth on high, warrior like in the sky' and 'the Queen, (…) the lone star, the morning star (…) hovering where heaven is founded, has seen fit to come forth warriorlike on high, and all nations do tremble before her' (Jacobsen 1987: 118, 120). Like Medb, who is also a great warrior and who in turn weds each of the Irish kings, after a ritual bath on New Year's day Inanna is a great warrior who weds the Sumerian kings: 'The king goes with lifted head to the holy loins (…) to the loins of Inanna' (122). 'Inanna

(…) [with an] arm around his shoulders (…) shines forth like the dawn' (123). It would not be far-fetched to see both Rātri and Uṣas as well as Morrigan and Medb as having a similar origin to Inanna.

The 'Go-between' in Ireland (Cú Chulainn) procreates the nephew of waters (the bubbling waters, the moon: Fráech, Nechtain) on the daytime earth goddess (Medb). The sky-father (Dagda) generates the young son (fire, the sun: Macind Óc), Óengus 'the One Passion, the One Conception' on the nighttime earth goddess (Boand). The twin gods, the nephew and the son, may alternate in and out of the underworld. The nephew of waters, who can heal with his hot springs, can also send diseases (like Apollo). As with Irish Nechtain, the springs Apollo controls are a source of poetic inspiration.

The sky-father in Ireland also procreates, on the night-time earth goddess, three horn-blowers who make childbirth easier for women, but men die of rapture from the music. These musicians play the 'music of crying', the 'music of smiling', and the 'music of sleeping', as with the three festival days of weeping, laughter, and sleeping surrounding the death and resurrection of Attis in the pagan Roman Easter. These Irish musicians correspond to the Maruts in the Rig Veda. The musicians may accompany either the nephew of waters or his sister, who (like Apollo's sister Diana) may also be associated with childbirth. Finally there are the shape-shifting gods of tree fruit and the wine, who in the heavenly realm perhaps are the clouds. They take on the forms of bulls (Findbennach, Donn Cúailnge, Dionysos), men, snakes, or dolphins and fight each other in these forms. Perhaps shape-shifting is an aspect of being clouds.

Most likely these two shape-shifting deities also correspond to the Zodiac in the winter, the rising half of the year, and the Zodiac in the summer, the falling half of the year. The shape-shifting then corresponds to the animal forms which dominate each of the twelve months of the Zodiac. Capricorn 'the sea goat', Pisces 'the fish', Aries 'the ram', Taurus 'the bull', Gemini 'the twins', and Leo 'the lion' could certainly be seen as forms of Dionysos or of the Bulls who fight in the *Táin*. Since Inanna is directly equated to the planet Venus, it would not be far-fetched to see Dionysos and the two Bulls of the *Táin* as the shape-shifting monthly progression of the Zodiac.

The planets Jupiter and Saturn (Sky Father) play important roles in the 30-year Celtic calendar. Saturn has a sidereal period of 29.46 years, while Jupiter has a sidereal period of 11.86 years. Thus relative to the

stars and the zodiac of constellations, Saturn enters a new zodiac constellation every 30 months (2 1/2 years), the period between the Celtic intercalary months. Jupiter enters a new zodiac constellation every year. The dates of the present-day Zodiac cycle are taken from Ptolemy's *Almagest* (2nd century A.D.), but the system was known in Babylon as early as 700 B.C. Because of the earth's precession once every 25,770 years, Ptolemy's Zodiac today occurs 26 days later. Now the constellation Aries appears on April 15.

The Zodiac constellations, under different names and slightly different identifications, were probably known to the Gauls as well. Plutarch (*de Moralia*) makes it clear that the 30-year cycle of Saturn was the basis of the Gaulish calendar cycle. The first day of Aries was on March 21 in 75 B.C. However, beginning around 2000 B.C. the first day of Taurus would have occurred on the first day of spring, March 21. Taurus would have continued to be the Zodiac sign of the month of spring in Gaul up to the Roman conquest. Throughout the pre-Roman period it would have been in the month of *Rivoros* that in bull form the two Celtic Zodiac gods fought each other. These Zodiac bulls would have been a vital aspect of the pagan Celtic Easter celebration on the full moon following the vernal equinox, the day of celebrating the return of life-giving warmth to the waters and the vegetation with the drowning and reviving of Nechtain-Fráech and the return of fertility to the goddess of the earth and the rivers.

Abstracts

The Ulster Cycle: History, fiction or literature? [pp. 1–35]
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Keywords:
history / historiography / fiction / literature / narrators / truth-claims / rhetoric

Some recent work on the Ulster sagas has explored how they were treated by manuscript compilers, scribes and other later users as history-writing, but other scholars resist this approach because it is sometimes felt to detract from the texts' imaginative and literary qualities. In this essay, building on work by Gregory Toner and Erich Poppe among others, I argue that the Ulster sagas were not only received but also *intended* as history-writing by those who composed our earliest surviving texts of these sagas. My discussion surveys the corpus as a whole, moving beyond *Táin Bó Cúailnge* which tends to monopolize debate on such matters. Contrary to what scholars have often assumed, I also show that this basically historical purpose intensified rather than diminished in later mediaeval Ulster sagas, even though these sagas and saga-recensions often display heightened (or at least more recognizable) literary ambitions. In the final part of the essay I expand on this last point to show that the extant Ulster sagas, early and late, present themselves as fully literature and fully history. Neither identity diminishes the other. I situate these texts' blend of creativity and truth-claims in the context of mediaeval European approaches to history-writing, looking beyond the chronicles and national histories that are often mistakenly assumed to represent the totality of mediaeval historiography.

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, David Stifter & Elizabeth Boyle (eds):
ULIDIA 5 – Papers from the fifth international conference on the Ulster Cycle of tales, Maynooth 18–20 March 2016.
(Hagen/Westf.: curach bhán, 2024), pp. 321–327.

Christianity and the Ulster Cycle: The case of Conchobar mac Nessa

[pp. 37–53]

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Keywords:
christianity / kingship / letter of Abgar / Conchobar / Aided Chonchobair

When the Ulster Cycle tales were committed to writing in the early Christian era, the salvation of its unbaptised personae became an issue. Kingship was an institution which was continuous from pre-Christian to Christian times. How should the pagan predecessors of current Christian kings be represented? In the written versions of the death-tale of Conchobar mac Nessa, the Ulster king has survived an enemy cast, at the cost of remaining inactive, with a brain-ball lodged in his skull. Told about the Crucifixion, the king's frenzied reaction brings about his death, when the embedded object breaks loose from his head. The king's ultimate salvation is variously rationalised in successive recensions of the tale as being due to Conchobar's shedding his blood for Christ, or demonstrating zeal on behalf of Christ. A further proposition is that the soul of Conchobar was among those brought to heaven by Christ when he entered the infernal regions. The focus shifts in a tenth-century rendering of the tale. The stone which had been the instrument of the king's death is revealed to St Buithe, who uses it as a pillow. Thus, in a final assimilation, the death-dealing object from the pagan past is granted a new and memorable existence as a saint's relic.

The barbarity of the Ulster warriors in **Mesca Ulad**

[pp. 55–72]

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Keywords:
Ulster Cycle / heroic narrative / barbarian / Mesca Ulad / early Irish law

This paper examines the meaning and significance in the Ulster Cycle narratives of terms derived from Latin *barbarus* 'barbarian', chiefly the adjective *barbarda* and the abstract noun *barbardacht*. The use of these terms seems to have been characteristic of the adjustments made by the redactor responsible for the Book of Leinster versions of some of these texts, especially *Mesca Ulad* 'The Intoxication of the Ulstermen'. The paper argues that the "barbarous" quality ascribed to the Ulster warriors involves not only their chaotic and drunken activities but also and more fundamentally their insistence on over-strict application of the law of surety or guarantor (*glinne*, *naidm*) etc), leading to a spiral of conflict and destruction between guarantors. The case study suggests that in the late Middle Irish period in which this version of *Mesca Ulad* was created, the ethical and social world of the Ulster Cycle could be seen as grotesque and disorderly rather than as a model of heroic excellence.

The ends of the earth: Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni *and Augustinian historiography*

[pp. 73–107]
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Keywords:
Cú Chulainn / Augustine / Bede / historiography / eschatology / nostalgia / typology

This article explores the meaning of the typological role which Cú Chulainn plays in the oldest extant version of his death-tale, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* (*BMMM*). It begins with an overview of the ways that this saga portrays Cú Chulainn as a type of Christ, and how this is used to draw a contrast between righteous and false forms of violence and belief, rather than a contrast between the perceived qualities of pre-Christian and Christian belief. It is argued that the cyclical view of history which emerges from this picture is best understood with reference to some version (likely Bede's) of Augustine's concept of the 'Six Ages of the World'. An overview of the early reception of this idea in Ireland is provided, which establishes its relevance for the compositional context of *BMMM*. Among the interpretations of history then in play, it is found that the concept of the 'Six Ages' provides the best way of understanding how the nostalgia *BMMM* evokes for the pre-Christian past would have been an intelligible feature of its medieval Christian perspective. Its application of this nostalgia to non-Hebraic forms of pre-Christian revelation, however, suggests that the interpretation of this concept was likely influenced by perspectives that are more characteristic of Lactantius, Eusebius and Isidore than Augustine himself.

Comparative network analysis of the Táin Bó Cúailnge

[pp. 109–131]
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Keywords:
Social networks / complex networks / quantitative comparative literature

In recent times network science has found a remarkable diversity of applications, with the social sciences amongst the most prominent in taking up the new mathematical tools it delivers. Applications to social networks appearing in literature (old and new) is a recent development that has gained traction in quantitative narratology. Social networks are found to have distinct mathematical properties setting them apart from other types of complex networks (e.g., power grids, the internet, neural networks, and so on). In this chapter, we define some of the fundamental properties of complex networks and investigate

them in Thomas Kinsella's translation of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. We find that the network structure of the *Táin* more closely resembles that of *Beowulf* than it does either *Njáls saga* or the *Iliad*, which themselves both have similar structures to modern real-world social networks. We track these down to a small number of previously observed major characters having extraordinarily high influence in the network. We also hypothesise that some of the network differences are due to differences in how stories are told and, as a result, how social network properties may vary due to genre.

The presentation of conflict talk in texts from the Ulster Cycle of tales

[pp. 133–152]

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Keywords:
Old Irish / early Irish literature / conflict talk / verbal abuse

This paper investigates how conflict talk is presented in texts connected with the Ulster Cycle of Tales. On the basis of select tales which represent verbal confrontation in the Ulster Cycle texts, the paper analyses the conversational patterns that are used in the relevant Early Irish texts and determines to what extent they correspond to known strategies in conflict talk according to research on contemporary and early verbal conflicts.

Dáire, St Patrick and the bull: Person, place and time

[pp. 153–182]

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Keywords:
Dáire / Ulster Cycle / St Patrick: ancestry, tradition, literature, law

This paper presents a comparative study of the portrayal of the character Dáire, named as an Érainn ancestor, who appears in early texts of several genres: the Lives of St Patrick, the Prologue to the *Senchas Már*, and the Ulster Cycle. As the bestower of the plain of Macha, a learned king of Ulster, and owner of a supernatural bull, it is suggested that Dáire is a literary personification chosen to promote the first-millennium status and significance of the Ulaid alias Dál Fíatach, the Ulster Érainn.

Raven and wolf, satirist and fénnid*: Defining Deirdre in* Longes mac n-Uislenn

[pp. 183–200]
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Keywords:
sovereignty / satire / animal imagery / age-grade customs

At key turning points in her life, Deirdre operates as satirist and *fénnid*, challenging Conchobor and calling into question his judgment and capacity as king. Closer examination of these categories and their associated imagery illuminates Deirdre's complex narrative role. One persistent characteristic of her identity is the union of opposites: Deirdre appears repeatedly as both victim and aggressor, both prey and predator. Employing direct imagery as well as 'virtual' imagery evoked within a cloud of cultural associations, the tale can be read both forwards (for plot) and backwards (for interpretation of imagery and events). This analysis compares and contrasts aspects of animal imagery, the function of satire, and implicit references to age-grade customs in relation to the central tension between Deirdre and Conchobor. Examples include a riddling element in Celtic marriage ritual and the association of *fíanas* (as a way of life for young men preceding marriage and *trebad* 'settlement on land') with wolf-imagery. Attention is also given to the symbiotic relationship between ravens (and other corvids) and wolves in the natural world as an external field of reference for the tale's audience.

Preliminary thoughts on Cú Chulainn's physiology as presented in Táin bó Cúailnge

[pp. 201–211]
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Keywords:
history of childhood / Cú Chulainn / history of physiology / children in literature

Throughout *Táin Bó Cúalnge* Cú Chulainn is a child. His lack of experience and youthful appearance are commented on by the men of Ireland and the Ulstermen. The contrast between his youth and his adult actions is one of the central tensions in the text. But what does being a child mean for a medieval audience?

In this paper I outline three indicative characteristics of childhood as they appear in medieval theorists' writings and map them onto the way Cú Chulainn is described in the *Táin* and in the *macgnímrada*. By describing Cú Chulainn's actions through the lens of childhood and adolescence, we can begin to see ways of understanding those actions not as the moral choices of a flawed man,

but as the faltering steps of a child growing into adulthood. This paper is a preliminary sketch of where reading the character of Cú Chulainn in the body of a medieval child can take literary analysis of the Ulster Cycle.

Tracing Cú Chulainn's characterisation in the Ulster Cycle [pp. 213–225]
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Keywords:
Cú Chulainn / Ulster Cycle / heroic biography / de Vries / life-events / conception / birth / youth / wooing / outings / *Táin Bó Cúailnge* / death

Cú Chulainn is somewhat unusual in that he appears, fairly prominently, in a substantial number of texts composed at various times across a six hundred-year period. Unsurprisingly, we find that his characterisation evolves and develops in the context of a changing societal, religious, and political environment. All of this makes for the creation of a relatively complex figure, presenting challenges to those attempting to appreciate him. This paper will look at how best we might decipher the essence of his personification with specific reference to the narrative expression of key life-events in texts such as *Compert Con Culainn*, *Tochmarc Emire*, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The development of his persona outside of this context will be briefly considered with a view to providing an insight into the textual creation of characters in the medieval period.

***Lug and Cú Chulainn, the* corrguinecht *and the* ogam** [pp. 227–239]
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Keywords:
Lug / Cú Chulainn / corrguinecht / ogam / Cath Maige Tuired / Táin bó Cúailnge / magic ritual

The biography of god Lug and hero Cú Chulainn, father and son, reveals a number of common elements, highlighted by Gray (1989–90). The aim of this paper is to go one step further in this comparison, with a focus on the well-known Irish literary feature of standing with one leg, one eye and one arm. Lug takes on this particular posture during the battle of Mag Tuired when he performs the ritual of glám dícenn (*CMT* §129 and *CMT*$_2$ 741–45) / Cú Chulainn appears in this posture during the cattle-raid of Cooley when he performs an ogam

inscription (*TBC LL* 457-60). While these two magical acts are not fundamentally identical, a precise analysis of the context could reveal some parallels in the manner that both characters act in a situation of warfare.

Cracked cosmology, escaped eschatology: Averting apocalypse in Echtra Nerai

[pp. 241–250]
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Keywords:
Nera / Ulster Cycle / eschatology / cosmology / Greek-Irish comparative mythology

Both native Irish and Greek mythological traditions lack explicit eschatological tales, though in the Greek case, this is because any attempted overthrow of Zeus' reign is thwarted by him in one way or another. Even when it is thwarted, though, as is the case with his avoided marriage to the goddess Thetis (prophecies of which indicated that the child would be greater than its father) and her subsequent marriage to Peleus, producing the hero Achilleus, eschatological possibilities are not entire avoided, as the Trojan War and the effective end of the Greek heroic age results ultimately from the events at Peleus and Thetis' marriage. *Echtra Nerai*, as a foretale of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, represents a parallel situation, with the mortal hero Nera – the 'steward' of the household of Ailill and Medb in Connacht – playing a role ultimately similar to Peleus in repairing the undermined sovereignty of Ailill which results from the willful ignoring of ritual injunctions on Samain. The subsequent fragmentation of time, and the role of the elements of fire and water being managed properly, all demonstrate how such ritual transgressions have cosmological implications on a night as important as Samain. The strange multiple timelines of *Echtra Nerai* are not merely a wonder-tale and an example of how otherworld time processes in Irish tradition are highly variable, but instead represent the breaking down of time, which Nera's actions must repair. Even despite this, and Nera's heroic maintenance of both the sovereignty of Ailill and of the integral cosmic balance, the nearly world-ending destruction of the great cattle-raid still results, just as the Trojan War did in the Greek case.

Feis Tigi Becfholtaig*: Darkness yields to light* [pp. 251–268]
Marion Deane †

Keywords:
Ulster Cycle / kingship / sacred Marriage / *fír flaithemon* / truth / analogy

The Old Irish tale *Feis Tigi Becfholtaig*, which is one of the birth-tales of Cú Chulainn, supplies a commentary on the eligibility of the king as ruler. The contract between the king and his people is rendered here as a marriage. At the core of the tale is a marriage-cum-sacred-marriage motif that is crucial to understanding the full range of meanings of the tale and its analogical content. This article identifies how the tale, by superimposing patterns of semantics, of syntax, of metaphor and of homophonic correspondences, creates a wide complex of analogies as a means of highlighting that, in the interest of justice, the king must recognize that his history, for good or for bad, and his responsibility for it, evolve from his relationship with other forces both in the human and in the supernatural world. The king's journey towards accepting truth is figured also as a journey from darkness into light.

***Anglo-Norman uses of the Ulster Cycle: The case of John de Courcy's Irish* Lai** [pp. 269–280]
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Keywords:
Ulster Cycle / John De Courcy / Cathal Croibhdhearg / *Fuaid i ceand reisi méidhi* / Leabhar Ua Maine

This article presents a study of a poem headed 'Fuaigh an gceann ris an méidhe' that is preserved in *Leabhar Ua Maine*. The poem is a substantial work – totalling 179 quatrains – framed as a lament for Cumhsgraidh Meann Macha and which recounts the invasion of Ireland by one Ioruath 'king of Africa', whose invasion is repulsed by a wide range of Ulster cycle heroes. The narrative is summarised and some of the most striking aspects of the work are analysed: references to a character named Ioruath in earlier Irish tradition are discussed, the narrative of a king of Africa invading Ireland is traced in the Arthurian literary tradition through to Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* and references to Cumhsgraidh in the wider tradition are surveyed. The title of a lost *lai* – 'Coscra' – in the Shrewsbury School manuscript is highlighted as a possible reference to this text or a translation thereof. Finally, it is suggested

that the text was written for John de Courcy or one of his Irish allies, that the narrative is broadly analogous to an expedition that de Courcy and Cathal Croibhdhearg undertook in 1201 and that the poem is preserved in *Leabhar Ua Maine* as one of several in praise of Cathal Croibhdhearg.

Modern Irish retellings of tales from the Ulster Cycle [pp. 281–296]

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Keywords:
Ulster Cycle / Pádraig Ó Cíobháin / modern retellings / *Dréachta Chrích Fódla*

This article examines some modern retellings of tales from the Ulster Cycle by the West-Kerry Gaeltacht writer Pádraig Ó Cíobháin in the context of the long tradition of retellings and translations of this type in both Modern Irish and English. His groundbreaking 2007 collection, *Dréachta Chrích Fódla*, contains striking new versions of the following five well-known Rúraíocht texts: *Scél Muice Meic Dathó* (The Tale of Mac Dathó's Pig), *Tochmharc Eimhire* (The Wooing of Emer), *Aided Con Roí* (The Violent Death of Cú Roí), *Aided Con Culainn* (The Violent Death of Cú Chulainn), and *Bás Chonchubhair* (The Death of Conchubhar). All five texts are here are here recast in the author's innovative, intertextual approach with references to the original texts, footnotes and authorial interpolations throughout which make the texts of great interest to students, scholars and to general readers alike. The author's muscular Modern Irish prose is very much in keeping with the spirit of the original source material and it is argued that these retellings are deserving of greater attention than they have hitherto received.

The **Táin***: the myth of the ancient Irish easter* [pp. 297–319]

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Keywords:
Pre-Roman Gaul / Gundestrup cauldron / Coligny Calendar / Pre-Christian Ireland / Táin / óenach / mythology

In ancient Europe festivals were reenacted on a yearly basis to ensure that the important events, such as the end of winter and the return of warmth, would continue to take place. In origin the early core episodes of the *Táin* preserve mythology associated with a pre-Christian equivalent to Easter, celebrating the

springtime renewal of both vegetable and animal life. Here I give evidence that the Celts in pre-Christian Ireland used the same 30-year calendar as that utilized by the Celts in pre-Roman Gaul. This evidence indicates that the *óenach* festivals in Ireland on Samain and Imbolc are descended from the IVOS festivals of the Coligny calendar in the months of SAMON (*Samonios) and RIVROS (*Rivoros). The major characters of the *Táin*, such as Medb, Boand, Fráech, Donn Cúailnge, and Cú Chulainn may be seen to be descended from the Gaulish deities, Medva, Bovinda, Vroicos, Donnotauros, and Esus, whose names are given directly in deity inscriptions or implied by personal names. These deities played an important role in the springtime festival. Indeed, all of these deities are apparent in a narrative portrayal of an earlier Armorican version of the *Táin* displayed on the inner plates of the Gundestrup cauldron: the confrontation with Morrigan/Boand, the death of Fráech, and fight of the bulls. These episodes form the core of the springtime mythological events which are the basis of the earliest version of the *Táin*.

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AcS = Holder 1896–1913
CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, ed. Theodor Mommsen *et al.* (Berlin 1863–).
CIIC = Macalister 1945–9.
DAG = Whatmough 1970
DIL = *Dictionary of the Irish language*, compact edition = Quin *et al.* 1983.
eDIL = *eDIL 2019: An electronic dictionary of the Irish language, based on the contributions to a dictionary of the Irish language (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913–1976)* (www.dil.ie).
DLG = Delamarre 2003
DPC = Matasović 2009
IEW = Pokorny 1959.
LEIA = Vendryes *et al.* 1959–.

AC = *Annals of Clonmacnoise* = Murphy 1896.
ACon = *Aided Chonchobair* = Meyer 1906.
AFM = *Annals of the Four Masters* = O'Donovan 1848–51.
AOA= *Aided Óenfîr Aife* = van Hamel 1978: 9–15.
AU₁ = *Annals of Ulster* = Hennessy & Mac Carthy 1887–1901.
AU₂ = *Annals of Ulster* = Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983.
BDC = *Bruiden Da Choca* = Toner 2007.
BMMM = *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* = Kimpton 2009.
CCC¹ = *Compert Con Culainn* = Windisch 1880: 134–145.
CCC = *Compert Con Culainn* = van Hamel 1978: 1–8.
CCH = *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* = Wasserschleben 1885.
CGH = *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* = O'Brien 1962.
CG = *Críth Gablach* = Binchy 1941.
CIH = *Corpus iuris Hibernici* = Binchy 1978.
CGSH = *Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae* = Ó Riain 1985.
CPR Jas I = *Calendar of patent rolls of James I* = Griffith 1966.
CMT = *Cath Maige Tuired* = Griffith 1966.
CMT₂ = *Cath Maige Tuired* = Ó Cuiv 1945.
CRR = *Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn* = Hogan 1892.
CS = *Chronicum Scotorum* = Hennessy 1866.
DCD = *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* = Dombart & Kalb 1955.
DCDM = *De Chophur in da Muccida* = Best *et al.* 1954–83 V: ll. 32930–33042.
DGCM = *Augustinus: De Genesi contra Manichaeos* = Weber 1998.
DI = *Divinae institutiones* = Heck & Wlosok 2005–11.

DT = *De temporibus* = Jones 1975–1980, 580–611.
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EpI = *Cáin Domnaig* [= *Epistil Ísu*] = O'Keeffe 1905.
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FB = *Fled Bricrend* = Best & Bergin 1970.
FR = *Fingal Rónáin* = Greene 1955.
Fél. Óeng. = *Félire Óengusso* = Stokes 1905.
GC = *Gúbretha Caratniad* = Thurneysen 1925.
Inq. Ult. = *Inquisitionum in officio rotulorum cancellariae Hiberniae asservatorum repertorium. Arm.* = the county Armagh section of the folio volume, wherein each inquisition has a number and reign = Hardiman 1829.
Irish Ach = *The Irish version of Statius'* Achilleid = Ó hAodha 1979.
Irische Texte = Stokes & Windisch 1880–1909.
LH = *Liber hymnorum* = Bernard & Atkinson 1898.
LL = *Book of Leinster* = Best *et al.* 1954–83.
LMU = *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* = Hull 1949.
LU = *Lebor na hUidre* = Best & Bergin 1970.
Met. Dinds. = *Metrical dindšenchus* = Gwynn 1903–35.
MUil = *Merugud Uilix mac Leirtis* = Meyer 1977.
MU-E = *Mesca Ulad*, Edinburgh text = Mac Gearailt 1986.
MU-LU = *Mesca Ulad*, LU fragment = Watson 1941: 40–47.
MU-W = *Mesca Ulad*, LL fragment = Watson 1941: 1–40.
NISMR = *The Northern Ireland sites and monuments record.* URL: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/sites-and-monuments-record.
OSL = *Ordnance survey letters.*
OSM = *Ordnance survey memoirs of Ireland* = Day & McWilliams 1990–98.
Penit = *The Irish penitentials* = Bieler 1963.
PL = *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* = Migne 1844–64.
RD = *Rennes dindshenchas* = Stokes 1894/1895.
SC = *Tidings of Conchobar mac Nessa* = Stokes 1908–10.
SMMD = *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* = Thurneysen 1986.
SR = *Saltair na Rann* = Greene 1981.
TBC I / TBC Rec. 1 = *Táin bó Cúailnge*, Rec. 1 = O'Rahilly 1976.
TBC II / TBC LL = *Táin bó Cúailnge*, Rec. 2(a) = O'Rahilly 1967.
TBC IIb / TBC St = *Táin bó Cúailnge*, Rec. 2(b) = O'Rahilly 1961.
TBDD = Knott 1963.
TE = *Tochmarc Emire* = van Hamel 1978: 16–68.
TF = *Tochmarc Ferbe* = Windisch 1897.
TP = *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* = Stokes & Strachan 1901–10.
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A. D. MMXXIV