

## Otherworld Women in Early Irish Literature

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# Otherworld Women in Early Irish Literature

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# Abbreviations

<i>AD</i>	<i>Aided Derbforgaill</i>
<i>ALC</i>	<i>The Adventure of Loegaire mac Crimthainn</i>
<i>AME</i>	<i>Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca</i>
<i>AO</i>	<i>Aislinge Óengusso</i>
<i>AOA</i>	<i>Aided Oenfir Aife</i>
<i>BB</i>	Book of Ballymote
<i>BiS</i>	<i>Baile in Scáil</i>
<i>CCC</i>	<i>Compert Con Culainn</i>
<i>CDS</i>	<i>Cín Dromma Snechtai</i>
<i>CMT</i>	<i>Cath Maige Tuired</i>
<i>CMTC</i>	<i>Cath Muige Tuired Cunga</i>
<i>Diii</i>	Stowe D.iii.1
<i>Div3</i>	Stowe D.iv.3
<i>Dv1</i>	Stowe D.v.1
<i>DIL</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Irish Language</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>Echtrae Airt</i>
<i>EB</i>	<i>Echtrae Brain</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Echtrae Chonnlai</i>
<i>Ecm</i>	<i>Echtrae Chormaic</i>
<i>EN</i>	<i>Echtrae Nerai</i>
<i>F</i>	Book of Fermoy
<i>FR</i>	<i>Fingal Rónáin</i>
<i>IB</i>	<i>Immram Brain</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>Imacallam Choluim Chille ocus ind Óclraig</i>
<i>ICMD</i>	<i>Immram Curaig Máele Dúin</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Immacaldam in Druad Brain 7 inna Banfátho Febuil ós Loch Fébuil</i>
<i>L2</i>	Book of Lecan
<i>LL</i>	Book of Leinster
<i>LGÉ</i>	<i>Lebor Gabála Érenn</i>
<i>LU</i>	<i>Lebor na hUidre</i>
<i>SCC</i>	<i>Serglige Con Culainn</i>
<i>TBC</i>	<i>Táin Bó Cuailgne</i>
<i>TBDD</i>	<i>Togail Bruidne Dá Derga</i>
<i>TBM</i>	<i>Tuait Baile Mongáin</i>
<i>TE</i>	<i>Tochmarc Emire</i>
<i>TÉ</i>	<i>Tochmarc Étaíne</i>





## Preface

The purpose of this book is to examine the ways in which Otherworld (i.e., supernatural) women interact with mortals and the mortal world. First, I establish the position of women in early Ireland so that appropriate comparisons can be made between mortal and Otherworld women throughout the book. This is accomplished primarily through use of early Irish legal and wisdom texts. I also define what is meant by the 'Otherworld' and its relevance to the early Irish.

Gender is a hot topic in today's world. What does or does not constitute a woman is beyond the scope of this book; indeed, it is the subject of many books in and of themselves. For purposes of this volume, 'woman' is meant to be understood as the society of early medieval Ireland would have understood it. That is, any person born into the female sex. I realize that this is not an ideal 'definition,' but for the scope of this book it will be adequate simply because we are attempting to look through the eyes of the audience of the time.

In the main body of the text I move to discussing the differing goals of various intermediaries in early Irish texts, and the manner in which they interact with mortals. For this purpose, I selected five of the earliest known tales containing these themes, all of which claim provenance from *Cín Dromma Snechtá: Echtrae Chonnaí, Immram Brain, Serglige Con Chulainn*, the eponymous goddess episodes from *Lebor Gabála Éreann*, and *Echtrae Nerai*.<sup>1</sup> Some of these women come to the mortal world for love of a certain mortal hero, some to seek help, others have the mortal world come to them. At least one seemingly comes for the sole purpose of starting a war. Near the end, I briefly look at how Otherworld male intermediaries are treated differently in the literature. Finally, I tender conclusions as to why early authors might have used women in these roles as often as they did.

I extend my thanks to Amsterdam University Press for publishing my book, and to the editors, particularly Erin Dailey, for the patience and assistance shown to me throughout the process. Thanks, also, to all who read and critiqued the manuscript, especially Prof. John Carey; it would

<sup>1</sup> For excellent discussions of *Cín Dromma Snechtá*, please see Nagy, JF. "Writing from the 'Other Shore' and the Beginnings of Vernacular Literature in Ireland." *A Companion to British Literature, I: Medieval Literature, 700–1450*, Robert DeMaria, Jr., Heesok Chang and Samantha Zacher, eds., Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014 and Ó Concheanainn, T. "A Connacht Medieval Literary Heritage: Texts derived from *Cín Dromma Snechtá* through *Lebor na hUidre*." *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, vol. 16, 1988.

not be what it is without you. Finally, my eternal gratitude to my mother, Marci Key, who supported me throughout the writing and publication of this book. Your love and support has been everything to me.

# Part I

## Introduction



# 1 Women in Early Ireland

## Status of Women

There is a tendency in popular culture to think of women in early Ireland as less oppressed than their continental counterparts; to think that they had more freedoms and were treated with a higher regard than in other medieval cultures.<sup>1</sup> This is a fallacy based largely on the romanticization of women in the saga literature, along with misunderstandings of early Irish marriage and divorce laws caused by a lack of understanding of their cultural context.

The primary legal source on marriage was the eighth-century text *Cáin Lánamna* (Eská 61–62). While commenting on a variety of sexual unions, it recognized three primary forms of marriage: union of common contribution (*Lánamnas comthínchuir*); union of a woman on a man's contribution (*lánamnas mná for ferthínchur*); and union of a man on a woman's contribution (*lánamnas fir for bantínchur* [Ó Corráin 47–50]). In the first form, the man and woman bring equal amounts of property to the marriage; in the second, the woman might bring some property, but the primary contribution would be the man's (47). The woman's would be moveable property, such as cows, as a woman could not inherit land unless her father died without sons, and even then it reverted to her male kin on her death (52). This was the defining circumstance of the final type of marriage listed above. Here, the woman brought the property and the roles were reversed. Usually a woman would marry someone from her own kin, but occasionally she would marry an outsider. Such a man would be even more dependent on his wife. Any man who left his own *túath* – which could loosely be translated as 'kingdom' – had no rights, unless he was a king or belonged to a particular group of craftsmen, and those who did so were regarded with some contempt. In fact, it was considered acceptable under the law to refuse to pay honour price for killing

<sup>1</sup> This assertion can be substantiated by a simple internet search for the words 'celtic women.' This will turn up any number of sites to prove the point, often laced with just enough fact to sound convincing, e.g., <http://www.celticquill.com/2017/10/16/celtic-women>; <http://www.celtlearn.org/pdfs/women.pdf>; and <http://www.sarahwoodbury.com/womens-status-in-the-dark-ages>.

one type of outsider, the *ambue* (F. Kelly, *Guide* 4–5). This being the case, it is unlikely that many left their own *túath* lightly.

The laws recognized two types of men who resided outside their native *túath*. One was the above-mentioned *ambue*, which has been translated as ‘stranger’ or ‘outlaw’ (Charles-Edwards, “Social Background” 52; F. Kelly, *Guide* 5). The other was the *cú glas* or ‘grey dog.’ Whereas the *ambue*, while an outsider to the *túath*, was still from within the island of Ireland, the *cú glas* came from overseas and seems therefore to have been held in even lower regard than the *ambue* (Charles-Edwards, “Social Background, 52–53).

The grounds for divorce were many and varied, for both men and women – which is one reason for the aforementioned misconception. Heptad 3 lists seven types of men a woman could divorce without penalty: a barren man; and unarmed man; a man in holy orders; a church man; a ‘rockman’; a very gross man; and a man who discloses the events of the bedchamber (Binchy, *Corpus* 4.33–5.32; Hancock 5.132–4.137). Heptad 52 adds seven more: a man who spreads lies about her; one who makes satire about her; a man who marked her during a beating; a man who deserted her for another woman; a man who preferred to sleep with boys when he had no cause to do so; a man who excited her to fornication; and one who did not meet her needs in the marriage (Binchy, *Corpus* 47.21–48.26; Hancock 5.292–5.197). Polygyny was widely practised, but only for men. Men could have several wives through different types of unions, as long as he could afford them (Binchy, *Bretha Crolige* 44–47). However, as cited above, a woman could choose to divorce her husband if he repudiated her for another woman. According to a gloss on § 44 of *Gúbretha Caratniad*, a man could divorce his wife if she betrayed him, if she was unfaithful, if she had an abortion, if she disgraced him, if she was barren due to disease, if she committed infanticide, or if she spoiled her domestic work (Binchy, *Corpus* 2198.24–2198.26).

At first glance, then, it looks like women are allowed twice as many reasons to divorce as men – giving the false impression, as referenced in the first paragraph, that women in early Ireland had more rights and freedoms than their continental sisters. However, this system was not developed for the benefit of the women, but out of political expedience for their families. As noted by Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, it would be rare for women of the lower classes to divorce as they would have no means of support other than to throw themselves at the mercy of their male kin (Ní Bhrolcháin, “Banshenchas” 73.). The upper classes could and did make use of the liberal divorce laws – not the women themselves, but their male kin. In this way, families could make and break alliances with other noble families easily and quickly (72).

In point of fact, women were included among those who were considered mentally incapable (*báeth* or *nach/nacon/ni túalainig*) by law in early Ireland (Binchy, “Legal Capacity” 211–215 §§ 1, 3, 5, 10, 11). According to the *Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL)*, *túalainig* indicates ability or capability, so *nach/nacon/ni túalainig* would indicate a simple lack thereof. *Báeth*, however, has a range of meanings including ‘foolish,’ ‘stupid,’ ‘silly,’ ‘thoughtless,’ and ‘reckless’; D. A. Binchy tends to render it as ‘senseless,’ which could indicate any of the above meanings (211 §§ 1, 3). This class of people also includes the child, the ‘son of the living father,’ the insane, the slave, and the unransomed captive (F. Kelly, *Guide* 68; Binchy, *Corpus* 351.24–351.28; Meyer, *Triads* 20–21 §§ 150, 151).

Like the rest of this class, women were – with a few exceptions – unable to make their own contracts. In fact, the law tract known as the *Díre* text says:

The worst of transactions are women’s contracts. For a woman is not capable of selling (alienating) anything without [the authorization] of one of her “heads.” Her father watches over [?] her when she is a girl; her *cētmuinter* watches over her when she is the wife of a *cētmuinter*; her sons watch over her when she is a woman with children; her kin watch over her when she is a woman of the kin (i.e., with no other natural guardian, father, husband, or son); the Church watches over her when she is a woman of the Church. She is not capable of sale or purchase or contract or transaction without one of her [aforementioned] heads, save a proper gift to one of her heads, with agreement and without neglect.

*Messom cundrada cuir ban. Air ni tualainig ben roria ni sech oen a cenn: adagair a athair imbi ingen; adagair a cetmuinter imbi be cetmuinter; adagair a mme[í]c imbi be clainne; adagair fine imbi be fine; adagair eclais imbi be eclaise. Ni tualain[g] reicce na creice na cuir na cunruda sech oen a cen, acht tabairt bes techta d’oen a cenn cocur cen dichill.* (Binchy, “Legal Capacity” 211–215 § 10)<sup>2</sup>

Any contract made by a woman had to be perfected, or authorized, by the man responsible for her as outlined in the above passage. Otherwise, it would be overturned as a matter of law, regardless of whether it would benefit either party: “The *fuidirs* of a lord, unfree church clients ... women ... neither overreaching nor bad (disadvantageous) contract nor good (advantageous) contract is made fast against them without their rightful guardians

2 Here *cētmuinter* means ‘head of household’; elsewhere, as below, it can mean ‘chief wife.’

authorizing their contracts" (*Fuidre flatha, daermanaig ecalsa ... mna ... ni astaither saithiud na docur na sochur foraib cen a fircodnachu oc forngaire a cor* [212 § 7]).<sup>3</sup> Likewise, most women were bound by the contracts of the men over them, regardless of how disadvantageous these were. The exceptions to this were the 'chief wife' (*cétmuinte*), who could impugn any of the contracts of her husband, and the subordinate wife with sons, who could impugn certain types of contracts (Eska 196–203 §§ 21–22).

Women were also presumed to be incapable of making oaths – and were therefore barred, in most cases, from being legal witnesses: "There are seven grades in Irish law, none of which is capable of giving legal evidence in a *túath* ... woman-evidence ... ." (*Tait III. Ngraid lā nacon tualuing nach æ fiadnaise do denum i tuaith ... Banfiadnaise ...* [Binchy, *Corpus* 45.1–45.5]).<sup>4</sup> A gloss in one text gives the reason; a woman's evidence was considered to be 'partial and unworthy' (*ecoitcenn eisinnruic* [45.11]).<sup>5</sup> Again, there were certain exemptions, but these were considered exceptional. These include a woman on sick-maintenance regarding the number of menstrual periods she had during that time; a woman at childbirth; a nun's testimony against a cleric; and the testimony of a female examiner on sexual matters (F. Kelly, *Guide* 201–207; Binchy, *Corpus* 145.30–145.4, 996.2–996.7, 2197.5–2197.6, 2296.29–2296.331; Meyer, *Triads* 22–23 § 165).

By the same token, women were much more limited than men in their ability to offer pledges and sureties. A pledge is some object of value given into the keeping of another to ensure fulfilment of a claim. A person can make a pledge on their own behalf, or on behalf of another. If one made a pledge on behalf of another, they were entitled to interest on the item for the period of time it was pledged (F. Kelly, *Guide* 165–166). With a surety, on the other hand, the person giving the surety took responsibility for the enforcement of the contract or claim. A surety could be made with the pledger's personal property (*ráth*), his personal bond (*naidm*), or by hostage (*aitire* [167–173]). A woman could not give sureties, and could only pledge something that was specifically hers – not anything owned by her husband. An embroiderer, for example, could pledge her needle, or a queen her work-bag (Binchy, *Corpus* 464.1–464.12).<sup>6</sup> If a woman did attempt to offer a pledge of her husband's property, he could either repudiate or authorize the pledge. If he did authorize

3 *Fuidir*. Usually translated as 'semi-freeman' or 'tenant-at-will'; however, his actual status could vary considerably. The lord was responsible for maintaining his *fuidir*, but the *fuidir*, in turn, was required to perform any service requested by his lord. See F. Kelly, *Guide* 33–35.

4 Translation mine, with assistance from John Carey.

5 Translation mine.

6 Translated and summarized by me from *Bretha im Fuillema Gell*.



it, however, the interest went to him, and its amount was reduced because it was a woman who initiated the pledge (464.26–464.29).<sup>7</sup> The only exception to these rules would be the *banchomarbae*, or female heir, who would have inherited her father's property on his death if he had no sons (F. Kelly, *Guide* 76).

Another area of the law that illustrates women's status in early Ireland is the question of honour price (*lóg n-enech*, literally 'the price of a face' [8]). Any offence against a person's honour required the payment of this price, which was dependent on status. A person's ability to make contracts and oaths was generally dependent on his honour price, though, as we have seen, these rights did not apply to women. Honour price was usually given in *cumals*, a *cumal* being the equivalent of three milch cows or one female slave (xxiii, 8–9). A woman's honour price was usually half of her husband's, though, again, rare exceptions did exist:

For as regards every condition [of man] in Irish law, half his honour-price is [assigned] to his wife, except for three men alone, namely, a man without land, without property, who has a female heir [to wife] – he is paid honour price according to the honour of his wife; and a man who follows his wife from across the border (i.e., a member of another *túath*) – he is paid honour price according to the honour of his wife; and a *cū glass* ('grey wolf; i.e., and outlawed stranger?) – he is paid honour price according to the honour of his wife ... . These three women are capable of impugning the contracts of their spouses, so that the latter are not competent to sell or buy without their wives, but only what these authorize.

*Ar cach rect la Fēniu acht oentriar, is letlog a enech dia mnai: ferson cen se[i]lb cen t(h)othcus lasmbi bancomarba, a inchiuib a mna direnar side; 7 fer inetet toin a mna tar crich, direnar a inchiuib amna; 7 cu glas, direnar side a inch(a)uib a mna ... . It [t]ualaing na teora mna so imoicheda cor a cele, connatat meise recce na crecce sech a mna acht ni forcongrat.* (Binchy, "Legal Capacity" 215)<sup>8</sup>If the woman was injured by a third party, the honour price was payable not to her, but to her husband or kin (Binchy, *Crith Gáblach* 5, lines 121–127).

*Bretha Crólige* adds twelve women who would be given their honour price instead of being brought away on sick-maintenance; for three of these, the

<sup>7</sup> Translated and summarized by me from *Bretha im Fuillema Gell*.

<sup>8</sup> "[A] man who follows his wife from across the border" is a rather polite translation; literally it would be "follows a woman's buttocks."

'sharp-tongued virago,' a 'werewolf,' and 'a vagrant (?) woman [one who is 'half-witted']' the glossator gives the reason, "[f]or nobody dares to undertake responsibility for them, for their crime, on account of their audacity in committing crime" (Binchy, "Legal Capacity" 27–29 §§ 32, 34).

In addition to the laws, the wisdom texts are helpful in providing an understanding of the early Irish view of women. These texts seem to present a strong duality, which can be referred to as the pedestal versus the pit: women are seen either as a necessary and beneficial part of society, or they are wicked and undermine its very fabric. Take, for example, Triad 75: *Trí cóil ata ferr folongat in mbith: cóil srithide hi folldeirb, cóil foichne for tuinn, cóil snáithe dar dorn dagmná*. "Three slender things that best support the world: the slender stream of milk from the cow's dug into the pail, the slender blade of green corn upon the ground, the slender thread over the hand of a skilled woman." The hand of a skilled woman is similarly named as one of the three best hands in the world in Triad 76. On the other hand, if a woman acts badly, she is vilified: *Trí buidir in betha: robud do throich, airchisecht fri faigdech, cosc mná báithe do drúis*. "Three deaf ones of the world: warning to a doomed man, mocking a beggar, keeping a loose woman from lust" (Meyer, *Triads* 10–11 §§ 75, 76, 83). Triad 185 and Heptad 15 enumerate lists of women whose conduct has deprived them of a payment for their honour price, including loose women, female thieves, women who use magic, female satirists, gossips, adulteresses, and women who refuse hospitality (24–25 § 185). In addition, in *Tecosca Cormaic (TC)*, when Cormac is asked his opinion of women, he spends more than one hundred lines declaiming their faults – without a kind word for any of them (Meyer, *Instructions* 28–35).

### Anomalous Women

One might well ask, then, why so many prominent women are represented in early Irish literature. This is a complex question, to which there are multiple answers and the issue must be examined on a case-by-case basis. However, it must be kept in mind that the fact that such women are present in the literature of a culture does not necessarily mean that they were deemed admirable or even desirable in the everyday life of the society. This point will be explored further later.

One reason for using a strong female figure in a narrative can be to express ideas that might not otherwise sit well in an heroic setting. As Maria Tymoczko has said, "[w]here the heroic ethic hung on and was slow to die,

feelings of love, grief, dismay over societal disintegration and defeat, fear of ageing, and self-pity were charged; by putting on a mask and projecting these feelings outwards, particularly onto females, the poet could free himself – and his audience – to consider and express aspects of life that were, if not forbidden, then at least difficult” (Tymoczko 203). Notably, Emer is sometimes used in this way. Her speech in *Aided Oenfir Aife* (AOA) is a good example of this. In this tale, a young boy appears in a marvellous boat off the coast of Ulster, performing incredible feats. He proceeds to defeat the first two champions sent to meet him, and when Cú Chulainn sets off to confront him, only Emer seems to recognize that the boy is Connlae, Cú Chulainn’s son by the warrior-woman Aife. “It is a son of thine that is down there. Do not murder thy only son! ... It is not fair fight nor wise to rise up against thy son ... Turn to me! Hear my voice! My advice is good” (Meyer, “Death” 119). Indeed, Emer seems to be the only voice of reason in an assembly of men who are more concerned with their honour than with who the child is and what his presence might mean for them. Cú Chulainn’s reply encapsulates the heroic ideal that imprisons them: “Forbear, woman! Even though it were he who is there, woman ... I would kill him for the honour of Ulster” (119). This is despite the fact that kin-slaying (*finjal*) is one of the greatest crimes in early Irish law, one whose “horrendous character ... strikes at the heart of the kin-based structure of early Irish society” (F. Kelly, *Guide* 127). As Joanne Findon points out when discussing this tale, there are other stories in the Irish corpus that mirror the father–son conflict problem presented here, but these manage to neatly avoid *finjal* through some mechanism of recognition, for example, Finn revealing himself to Oisín in *The Quarrel Between Finn and Oisín*, or the ring left by Elatha for Bres in *Cath Maige Tuired* (CMT [Findon, *Woman’s Words* 86–87]). Strikingly, a similar ring left for Connlae by Cú Chulainn in *Tochmarc Emire* (TE) does not figure at all in AOA. Neither of the other texts features an intervening female, however – not even the son’s mother. This seems a significant absence, as the three texts appear to be roughly contemporaneous, each deriving from the ninth century (Meyer, “Death” 113; Meyer, “Quarrel” 23; Gray 11–21). In AOA, Emer – concerned for Connlae despite the fact that he is her husband’s son by another woman – is the only source of recognition, and her testimony is ignored. Of the three stories, only AOA seems to focus on the problems inherent in the heroic ideal. This seems to illustrate the scenario described above. Emer, being a woman and therefore not expected to subscribe to the heroic ideal, is the perfect person to express the author’s anti-heroic sentiment. The results of ignoring her are tragic not only for Connlae but for the heroic paradigm itself, as there will now be no new hero to take Cú Chulainn’s place after his death.

Mothers of significant historical or legendary figures such as saints and sovereigns were also greatly revered in their own right, and therefore often appear to advantage in the early texts. Simone de Beauvoir explains this tendency for mother reverence as follows:

On account of the influence the mother has over her sons, it is advantageous for society to have her in hand: that is why the mother is surrounded with so many marks of respect, she is endowed with all the virtues, a religion is created with special reference to her, from which it is forbidden to depart at the risk of committing sacrilege and blasphemy. She is made guardian of morals; servant of man, servant of the powers that be, she will tenderly guide her children along appointed ways. (De Beauvoir 173).<sup>9</sup>Here, De Beauvoir is speaking specifically of the relationship between the mother and the hero gone to battle, but the analysis is equally applicable to the heroes and saints of early Irish literature.

In this way women such as Nes, Conchobar's mother, come to prominence. Indeed, Nes' only appearances are in stories relating to Conchobar. She strategically manipulates Fergus and the men of Ulster to ensure that Conchobar gains and retains the kingship, even though she already has Cathbad's assurance that he would be a great king based on the day of his conception or birth, depending on which version is read (Stokes, "Tidings" 22–23; Koch and Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age* 59–63).

In one account, she asks the druid Cathbad what that day was good for – and he responded that it would be good for getting a king. She therefore decides to sleep with him to gain that assurance for her child (Kinsella 3). In another version, she even holds back from giving birth – thereby prolonging her labour – for a day to ensure that Conchobar is born at the most propitious time possible (Koch and Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age* 61–62). Later, she convinces Fergus, who is by now her husband, to give up his throne for a year in favour of Conchobar. During that year, she causes her son to give so generously that when the year is up, the people are not willing to part with their new king, and Fergus loses his crown for good (Stokes, "Tidings" 24–25). Between lying with Cathbad at the 'propitious' time, and marrying Fergus, the king of Ulster, thereafter, Nes grants the ongoing use of her body in an attempt to ensure the kingship of her son – effectively living through him to bolster her own prominence.

9 Original edition 1949.

This is not Nes' only claim to fame, however. She is also a female *fénnid* (or *banfhénnid*), a type of warrior outlaw, which is an unusual occupation for a woman in early Ireland (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 60). A band of *fianna* had killed her foster fathers, and she chose to become one herself in order to avenge them (Stokes, "Tidings" 22–23).

This brings us to a third category of women in early Irish literature: those who are simply out of the ordinary. Their absence from the surviving records points to the likelihood that there were no historical *banfhénnidi*, so stories involving female warriors, such as Nes in her *banfhénnid* role, certainly fit this category. Other *banfhénnidi* in the literature are Creidne and Scáthach, whom we can now consider.

According to an anecdote included in a genealogical tract, Creidne was the daughter of a king, and had borne him three sons. The king was ashamed of this, and exiled the three boys from his *túath*. Creidne, angry with her father's actions, became a *fénnid* and, in vengeance, ravaged his *túath* for seven years before finally coming to terms with her father (Meyer, *Fianaigeacht* xi–xii). Scáthach, on the other hand, did not seem to be directly associated with the *fianna*, but instructed warriors – most famously, Cú Chulainn – in Alba (Miller 179 & 184). These examples suggest that, even in the literature, women only became warriors under extreme circumstances – at least in Ireland.

## Magical Women

Devaluation and demonization of women's magic appears to have been quite prevalent during the Old and Middle Irish periods, though not universal. *DIL* lists no less than nine words used throughout these periods that refer in some way to women with magical powers, whether mortal or Otherworldly. Of these, *ammait* is the one most consistently used in this way, and it can mean 'a fool' or 'a foolish woman' as well as 'witch' or 'hag.' In his article "Notes, Mainly Etymological", T. F. O'Rahilly indicates that the former was the original meaning, and that the word gained its association with witches because "the speech of a crazed person was regarded as divinely inspired" (151). None of the references listed in *DIL* for *ammait* under the meaning of 'witch' generates a favourable picture of magical women. Take, for example, the story of Conall Corc:

Conall Corc [*<corc* 'purple']: how did it come about? It is not difficult. Once when the king, i.e., Lugaid son of Ailill Flann Bec, was in his house in Feimen, a female satirist came to the king's house. Her name was

Bolc Bainbretnach [>*Bretnach* 'Briton], i.e., she was a satirist belonging to the Britons. The satirist demanded that the king sleep with her. The king agreed to that and he went to bed with the satirist. The satirist was made pregnant by the king at that time and she bore him a son, i.e., Conall son of Lugaid.

Láir Derg daughter of Móthaire, son of Clithaire, from Corcu Oiche of the Uí Fidgeinte, and Torna Éices, the aforementioned poet, reared Corc son of Lugaid. And he is called Corc mac Láire after that Láir. Feidlim daughter of Móthaire was Láir's sister. She was a witch. And she went to the king's house the night Corc was born. The witches of Mumu came to the house that same night that Conall was brought forth. They were witches who used to engage in witchcraft and injure little children. And Feidlim daughter of Móthaire, the witch, was one of them. Those who were in the house were very afraid when they heard the other witches at the door. They all hid the little boy under the mouth of the [upturned?] cauldron that was in the house and put him under the protection of Feidlim the witch. The witches had been entitled to an assurance from Feidlim that she would not take refuge from them wherever they might meet together. For that reason Feidlim the witch ordered the little boy to be put under the cauldron to conceal him from the [other] witches. But that was revealed to the witches. One of them said: "Whom, of those inside, would she destroy?" Her companion answered: "The one who is hidden under the cauldron." After that another of them shot a flame from the fire onto the little boy so that it burnt his ear and turned it purple. For that reason he is called Corc.

*Conall Corcc, cidh día dá? Ni ansa. Fecht día mboí in rí.i. Lugaid mac Oililla Flainn Big, inna thaigh a Femiun doluid bancaínti do Bhretnaibh issidhe. Dolád in benchainti ailgis forsind righ im feis lé. Faemaís in rí inní sin, 7 luid a comlemaid na banchainti. Ba torrach in bhanchainti ón rí intan sin, 7 ruc mac dó .i. Conall mac Luigdech. Lair Derg ingen Mothaire mic Clithaire de Chorca Oiche a Hú[b] Fídh[g]ínti 7 Torna Eigis in fili remráiti, is síat rus-ail Corc mac Luigdech. Ocus is ón Láir sin aderar Corc mac Láire frís. Bá súr don Laír ssin Feidlim ingen Mothaire, ban-aimit issidhe, 7 luidh sidhe do thigh in rígh i n-aidhchi rogenair Corc. Tangadar aimdidihi Mumhan gusín tech a n-aidhchi cétna rucad Conall. Ban-aimiti íatsidhe nóbhíth aga imitech 7 agá idhmilled mac mbeg. Ocus ba díbh sin Féidlim ingen Mothaire, inn amait. Ro hómhnaighedh co mór a mbai astigh odchualadar na hamaide aili isin dorus. Docuiredh in mac beg a fuin la cách fo bhel*

*in choire bhoí sisin tigh 7 for faesom Féidlimid na hamaide. Rodhlightsit na hamaide forcell di gin chumairci do ghabháil forra gibé maighin a coimhreígdís fri araile. Conad aire sin rofuráil Fedlim in amait in mac beg do chur fón coire día folach for na hamidibh. Rofoillsighedh tra dona hamidibh in ní sin. Isbert amait díbh: “Cía choillfedh día fil astigh?” Asbert a séchi: “a fuil a fuin fon coire”. Iársin bruinnith araile díbh bréo don teni forsin mac mbeg, gurus-loisc a eó 7 gurus-corcc. Is aire sín asberar Corcc friss. (Arbuthnot, *Cóir*, Part 2 16–17, 92–93).*

Though Feidlim is portrayed here as protecting Conall, this does not redeem her character from the fact that she keeps company with a group of witches who are known for their propensity to attack small children. Indeed, the statement in the text that she was not allowed to “take protection against them in what place soever they should meet with each other” makes it appear as if the other witches came to meet with her, which would make her presence at the birth the factor that places Conall in danger in the first place. However, it is interesting to note a slight difference in the Book of Ballymote version of the story:

Láir Derg of Corcu Oiche was Corc's mother. She demanded that the king, Lugaid son of Ailill Flann Bec, sleep with her. And she bore him a son, i.e., Corc. There was a witch in the house of the king, i.e., of Lugaid. She was Feidlim daughter of Nóchaire. And Corc's mother put him under the protection of this witch.

*Lár Derg di Corco Oiche máthair Cuuircc. Dobertsíde ailgis forsan rig, for Lugaid mac Oilella Fland Big, im feis lee. Ocus rug mac do .i. Corc. Ro bai banamaid i tig in rig .i. Lugdech. Feidlimi ingen Nochairi isidhe. Ocus dobert a máthair Corc for fæsam na hamaide. (Arbuthnot, *Cóir*, Part 1 93 & 132).*

Here, Láir is Conall's mother, rather than the female satirist Bolc, and Feidlim herself was his foster mother. At first blush, it seems strange that a witch would be given a child to foster if witches have such a poor reputation. However, the latter text does not indicate whether Feidlim was known by those around her to be a witch at the time – unlike the previous text, which seems to imply it. It is even less strange if we assume, as is explicitly stated in the first text, that Feidlim and Lár are sisters.

Similarly, it is three witches who are partly responsible for Cú Chulainn's ultimate downfall. In *Aided Con Culainn*, these three invite Cú Chulainn to dine with them.

He saw something: three witches, blind in their left eyes, waiting for him on the path. They were cooking a lap-dog with poisons and spells on spits of rowan. It was one of Cú Chulainn's *geissi* to not visit a cooking pit to eat. It was also *geis* for him to eat the flesh of his namesake. He runs and was for going past them. He knew they were not there acting in his interest. Then a witch said to him, [Come] visit, Cú Chulainn.

*Co n-accai ní na teora ammiti túathchaecha ara chind forint sligid. Orce co nemib 7 ephthaib fonóiset for beraib cairthind. Ba do gessib Con Culaind cen adall fulachta dia chathim. Geiss dó dano cárna a chomanma do ithi. Rethid 7 ba do dul seccu. Rufitir níbu co denam a lessa ro bass and. Conid dé asbert friss ind ammait, Tadall latt a Chú Chulaind.* (Kimpton 18 & 19).

These three, in catching Cú Chulainn between conflicting *gessi*, deliberately weaken him so that his enemies can kill him. And, as if their actions did not speak loudly enough, the author is careful to specify that they are blemished: each is *túathcháech*, which Kimpton translates as 'blind in the left eye.' Jacqueline Borsje, while challenging the assumption that *túathcháech* always means 'blind in the left eye,' also discusses the fact that having a single eye is often associated with the power of the evil eye – also known as the destructive or angry eye – and that this power is often attributed to witches. She points out, however, that while the two overlap, the fact of a character having a single eye does not guarantee that they are possessors of the evil eye, and such an evaluation must be taken on a case-by-case basis (Borsje & F. Kelly 3,7, 12, 21).

This idea of the witch as blemished or ugly is echoed in the description in the late Middle Irish or early Modern Irish Fenian tale *Acallam na Senórach*. In the version found in the Book of Lismore, Cálte describes the Fianna's run-in with an *amait chaillige corrluirgnige cirdhuibe* (O'Grady 181.8.); O'Grady translates this as 'a crooked-shinned grimy-looking hag,' taking *amait* and *chaillige* together. However, it would be literally rendered as 'a witch of a hag.' So, here again, we have the witch presented as an unsavoury – and, in this case, a downright revolting – character.

In both *Acallam na Senórach* and *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* (an eleventh-century account of Norse invasions and the Battle of Clontarf), the term *ammait* appears in a list of evils. In the former, Finn mac Cumail advises Mac Lugach and warns him against various types of misconduct, including associating with witches: "Mac Lugach ... neither have anything to do with either a witch or a wicked one ..." (*ar am[m]aid ná ar drochdhuine* [107



(vol. 1), 115 (vol. 2)].<sup>10</sup> In *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, the witches seem to be a part of a group of supernatural fiends inciting armies against each other:

And there arose also the satyrs, and the idiots and the maniacs of the valleys, and the witches, and the goblins, and the ancient birds, and the destroying demons of the air and of the firmament, and the feeble demoniac phantom host; and they were screaming and comparing the valour and combat of both parties.

*Ro eirgetar am bananaig, ocus boccanaig, ocus geliti glinni, ocus amati adgail, ocus siabra, ocus seneoin, ocus demna admílti aeoir, ocus firmaminti, ocus siabarsluag debil demnach, co mbatar a comgresacht, ocus i commorad aig ocus irgaili leo.* (Todd 174–175).

This is especially interesting as *ammait* is also used in a quatrain from the *Dindshenchas* to refer to the Morrígain:

The milker of wealthy fair Buchet,  
[who was] a freeman of handsome noble Cormac:  
Odras her name, gentle quick;  
The witch [Morrígain] drowned her.

*Bligríóir Buchet búasaig báin  
boaire Cormaic caemnáir.  
Odras a hainm tláith trait.  
ros baid in benammait.*<sup>11</sup>

This quatrain follows a prose section in which the Morrígain has turned the woman referred to into a puddle of water. The reason this is interesting is that the Morrígain is well-known as a war-goddess, along with other Otherworld women with whom she may or may not be synonymous: the three Machas, Anann/Dianann, and the Badb, the latter of whom is also known for inciting warriors to battle (Carey, “Notes” 269).

Similarly, *ammait* is used to refer to the Furies of Classical Greek mythology, in stories of both countries. It is, for example, used this way in *Cath Muighe Rath*:

<sup>10</sup> O’Grady’s translation of *ammaid* as ‘mad man’ corrected by Stokes.

<sup>11</sup> *LL* lines 22312–22315. Translation mine, with assistance from John Carey and Esther LeMair.

Whoever felt dejection for the battle, it was not the arch king of Ulster that was sorrowful, dejected, or pusillanimous at the approach of this final defeat; and it was in vain for his druids to make true magical predictions for him, and it was not profitable for his tailginnns [clergy] to seek instructing him; for his friends might as well converse with a rock as advise him, in consequence of the temptations of the infernal agents who were pressing his destruction upon him; for the three destructive infernal furies Electo, Megæra, and Tesiphone, had not forsaken him from the time he was born until the period of his final dissolution, so that it was their influence and evil suggestions that induced him to stir up every evil design, meditate every contention, and complete every true evil; for the snare-laying...

*Cid cia ar ar cuirestar ceist in catha, ni he aird-rig Ulad do bi co dubach, dobronach, ná co beg-menmnach, re bruinne na bresligi brátha sin; uair ba dimain da dráithib derb faistine demin do denum do, ocus nír tharba do thailgennaib triall a thegaisc; ar ba corad re carraic dá chairdib comairli do Congal, re h-aslach na n-amaidead n-ifernaiddi ag furáil a aimlesa air; uair nír treicset na tri h-úire urbadacha, ifernaiddi eisium o uair a thúismid co trath a thiugh-bá, .i. Eleacto, ocus Megeera, ocus Tesifone, conad h-e a siabrad ocus a saeb-forcetul sin fadera do-sum duscad cach droch-dála, ocus imrad cach a iomarbhais, ocus forbad cach fín-uilc; uair is ann ro-thaigestar in úir indledhech. (O'Donovan 166–167).*

John O'Donovan translates *n-amaidead n-ifernaiddi* here as 'infernal agents,' rather than the more literal 'infernal witches,' possibly to avoid the appearance of redundancy – though it is impossible to say for sure as he does not make a note of it. An early Irish audience, however, seems likely to have understood the phrase in terms of figures like the Morrigan and Badb, as described above.<sup>12</sup>

*Aupthach*, another word that can be translated as 'witch' or 'sorceress,' is also frequently found in lists. It appears in § 185 of the *Triads*:

Three women that are not entitled to a fine: a woman who does not care with whom she sleeps, a thievish woman, a sorceress.

*Trí mná ná dlegat díri: ben lasma cuma cipé las fáil, ben gatach, ben aupthach. (Meyer, Triads 24–25, § 185).*

12 For other references to *ammaid*, see Mac Mathúna, "Duibheagháin" 325–343.

And again in *Fís Adomnáin*:

It is they, then, who are in that torment, i.e., thieves and liars and treacherous folk and slanderers and plunderers and despoilers and falsely judging judges and contentious folk; spell casting-women and satirists. Brigands and teachers of heresy.

*Is iat iarom fílet isin phéin sin .i. gataige 7 ethgig 7 áes braith 7 écnaig 7 slataige 7 crechaire 7 brethemain gúbrethaig 7 áes cosnoma mná aupthacha 7 cánti. aithdibergaig 7 fir léigind pridchait eris.* (Stokes 187–188, § 27).<sup>13</sup>

In these texts, as in *Acallam na Senórach* and *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, no real description is given of the women designated as ‘witches.’ Instead, we must deduce their character from the company in which the texts place them. The *Acallam* names the witch as someone to be avoided, while the other three include them in lists of various evil-doers, both supernatural and mortal. Indeed, *Fís Adomnán* enumerates them among those who will suffer the tortures of Hell. In these texts, the magic of women is not only devalued, but demonized.

Another form of the same word, *ipthach*, is even more obscure with respect to the nature of the ‘witches’ it references. The one attestation in *DIL* that actually seem to refer to a woman with magical powers comes itself from a spell:

Against disease of the urine.

I save myself from this disease of the urine, ... save us, cunning birds, birdflocks of witches save us. This is always put in the place in which thou makest thy urine.

*Árgálár fúail;*~

*Dumesursa diangalar fúailse dunesairc éu ét dunescarat eúin énlaiithi admai ibdach;*~ *Focertar inso dogrés imaign hitabair thúal.* (Stokes & Strachan 248.12).

Apart from the rather singular expression ‘birdflocks of witches,’ which I have not encountered elsewhere, the most interesting thing about this excerpt is that it is one of the few references to witches I have found that treats them relatively favourably – and the only one of this kind that refers to a mortal

<sup>13</sup> Translation mine with assistance from John Carey.

witch. Whereas elsewhere witches are generally people to be avoided, here they are being called upon to prevent – or cure – illness in the petitioner.

There are several other words or phrases listed by *DIL* as meaning ‘witch’ or ‘hag,’ in reference to a woman with magical powers: *(ben) cumachtach*; *caillech*; *(ban)túathech*; and *túathaid*. There is a further curious commonality among these words – all of the uses of these terms in Old and Middle Irish, which carry a supernatural sense, designate Otherworld women.

While in Modern Irish the most common meaning of *caillech* is witch,<sup>14</sup> in Old and Middle Irish this was not the case. According to Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, it evolved from earlier references to veiled women (*caill* + *ach* ‘veiled one’). She argues that the earliest meaning was that of a spouse, in reference to the veils worn by betrothed women to indicate that they were ‘spoken for.’ From there, it came to refer to a ‘spouse of Christ’ or ‘nun,’ who was also veiled by virtue of the fact that she was ‘spoken for.’ This could be the case whether she was a virgin nun, one who renounced a former marriage in favour of becoming a nun, or a widow who took the veil. In any case, the woman in question was an adult. Ní Dhonnchadha goes on to suggest that there was a shift in meaning from an adult spouse to an older woman, and eventually this degenerated to to modern meaning of ‘witch.’ In fact, of the references in *DIL*, there is only one which might refer to the supernatural, though Ní Dhonnchadha questions it as well. This excerpt is from *Cath Muighe Rath*:

There is over his head shrieking  
 A lean, nimble hag, hovering  
 Over the points of their weapons and shields:  
 She is the grey-haired Morrighu

*Fuil os a chind ag eignig,  
 caillech lom, luath ag leimnig  
 ós eannaib a n-arm sa sciath,  
 is í in Morrighu mong-liath.* (O’Donovan 198–199).

Of interest here, though, is that we have a woman who is possibly a witch – this time the Morrígain herself – hovering over a battlefield (Ni Dhonnchadha 71–96). There is another in *Silva Gadelica*, which also references Otherworldly, rather than mortal, women. In *Bruiden chéise Chorainn*, while Finn and his *fianna* are hunting, they enter the land of Conaran, the ruler the local *síde*.

14 For modern Irish uses of *caillech* (or *cailleach*), see Ó Cruaíoch, *Book*.

In anger, Conaran sends his three daughters – described as *caillecha* – to work dark magic on the *fianna*. The three sisters disable the warriors in small groups, until they are overcome by Goll mac Morna, the only one not to have fallen into their trap (O’Grady vol.1 306–310, vol. 2 343–347).<sup>15</sup>

*Cumachtach* (‘powerful’) is also used to refer to women of the *síde*. In *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, it is used (with the gender descriptor *ban*) of a *síd*-woman named Cáineog, who is turned to stone by a saint for attempting to abduct the king’s son:

Cáineog, a fairy witch,  
Followed the king’s son thither;  
She and her company of women, (turned) into stone,  
Are there above the lough of the churches

*Cáoineoc ban-cumachtach síthe*  
*Do len mac an righ anall;*  
*Ata sa banntracth na cclochaibh*  
*Tall os cionn locha na cceall.* (Plummer 151.33).

To some extent, this recalls the group of witches who destroyed little boys in *Cóir Anmann*, though, of course, ‘fairies’ carrying off children is a widespread phenomenon in literatures worldwide. Indeed, it has been suggested by James Carney that echoes of this may be seen in *Echtrae Chonnlai* (EC [Carney, “Deeper Level” 165]).

*Cumachtach* is also found in Mongfhind’s death scene in *Aided Crimthainn*, along with its near-synonym *túathaid*.

To her brother’s house Mongfhionn repaired therefore; betwixt Crimthann and her children she patched up a fraudulent peace, and conducted him to the feast. When they had made an end of the entertainment Mongfhionn put into her brother’s hand a poisoned cup, but: “I will not drink,” he said, “until thou first shalt have drunk.” She drinks, and Crimthann after her. Subsequently Mongfhionn died, on *samhain*’s very eve, and this constitutes [the tale called] Mongfhionn the Sorceress’s Tragical Death; and the reason for which *samhain*-tide is by the common people called the Festival of Mongfhionn is that she, so long as she was in the flesh, had [occult] powers, and was a witch: wherefore it is that on *samhain*-eve women and the rabble address their petitions to her.

15 See also Mac Mathúna, “Duibheagháin,” 327–329.

*Tic diu Moingfionn iarum do thaig a bráthar. Ocus doróine síth ceilge etorro ocus a clainn ocus beirid léi a bráthair do saigid na fleide. Ó ro scaich iarum tesbénad na fleide dobert Moingfionn copán neime illáim a bráthar. Nocho nib ar Crimthann nó co nebasa ar tús. Ibid Moingfionn dig ocus ibid Crimthann iarum. Atbail iarum Moingfionn aidche samna do sonnrad. Conid sí aided Moingfinne bansídaide. Conid de garar féil Moingfinne frisin samain ocon daescarshluag. Ár ba chumachtach side ocus bantuathaid céin báí i colainn. Conid de cuindgít mná ocus daescarshluag itcheda aidche samna fuirri. (O'Grady vol. 1 332, vol. 2 374–375).*

O'Grady translates the name of this tale-within-a-tale as “Mongfhiinn the Sorceress's Tragical Death.” However, the word he translates as ‘sorceress’ is actually *bansídaide*, or ‘woman of the *síd*,’ and her supernatural nature is confirmed in the populace's subsequent worship of her. In addition, according to *DIL*, the two copies of this story exemplify the only extant use of *túathaid*.

This brings us, finally, to consider *túaithech*, which is also used exclusively of *síd*-women. It is used twice in reference to Nár, wife of Crimthann: in *Cóir Anmann* and the prose *Dindsenchas*. The latter text runs:

A fort which was constructed on Benn Étair (Howth) by Crimthann son of Lugaid who was also called Nár's *nia* i.e., man, and who reigned thirteen years.

Tis he that went on an adventure from Dún Crimthainn or from Dál Uisnig, as he himself said, with the witch Nár the banshee. With her he slept a month and a fortnight. And to him she gave many treasures including the gilt chariot and the draughtboard of gold, and Crimthann's *cétach*, a beautiful mantle, and many other treasures also. And afterwards, after his adventure, he died on Mag Étair and was buried in his fort.

*Dun conróacht la Crimt[h]an mac Luig[d]ech i mBend Etair, qui et Nia [.i.] fer Naire dicebatur: tredecim annos regnavit.*

*IS é docuaid i n-echtra a Dun Cremt[h]ainn nó a Dail Uisnigh, ut ipse dixit, la Nair tuaidhigh in bandsidhe, coma fce caictighis ar mís [and], dia tubairt na seotu imdai, imon carpat n-oir, imon fi[d]chill n-óir, imon cétaigh Crimthainn .i. lend sainemail, aroile séotu imda olchena; atbath iarsain ahaithe a echtra im-maig Étair, roadnacht ina dún. (Stokes, “Prose Tales” 272–356, 418–484).*

Here, we have one of the rare references to witches that seems favourable – though, in this case, the reference is, again, to an Otherworld woman,

rather than a mortal witch. A more neutral portrayal of the same woman is found in *Cóir Anmann* 106:

Crimthan *Nía* – *Náire*: *nía* champion, that is *Nár*'s champion. For *Nár* the witch, from the elfmounds, was Crimthan's wife. Tis she that took Crimthan with her on the famous adventure from Dún Crimthain on Howth.

*Crimthan Nía Nár: níadh.i. trén.i. trénfear Náire .i. Nár thúathach a sídhibh, ben Chrimthain. Is sidhe rug Crimthan lé a n-echtra n-ordhairc a Dún Chrimthain a n-Édur.* (Arbuthnot, *Cóir* Part 1 89 & 128).<sup>16</sup>

The final examples of this term – using the prefix *ban* – are similarly neutral. Here, again, we are restricted to lists, but these are lists of names subsequently said to be those of witches or sorceresses, giving no further information on the nature of their bearers beyond that they are of the *Túatha Dé Danann*. The *Banshenchas*, for example, yields the following:

Nemain, Danann, Bodb and Macha, Morrighu who brings victory, impetuous and swift Etain, Be Chuilli of the north country, were the sorceresses of the *Tuatha De*. It is I who sing of them with severity.

*Nemain, Danand, [Bodb] is Macha, Morrígu nobered búaid, Etain co luinni is co lluathi, Be Chuilli na tuathi thúaid: ban-tuathecha Tuathe De Danand, is me nos canand co crúaid.* (Dobbs 292 & 318).

It is unclear from the context whether *crúaid* 'severity' is meant as a reproach toward the women, or to signify the seriousness of the subject. In addition, *Lebor Gabála Érenn (LGÉ)* lists "Be Chuille and Dianann, the two witches" (*Be Chuille & Dianand na dí bantuatig*) as two of the daughters of Flidais (Macalister 122).

## Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief, women in early Ireland were no more emancipated than their continental sisters. They were considered incapable under the law, and the general view was that they were 'senseless' or 'foolish.'

<sup>16</sup> See also Borsje 153–191.

They were not allowed to make their own contracts or oaths, and were therefore unable to serve as witnesses. Their ability to make pledges or sureties was severely curtailed. Except where the husband was *ambue* or *cúglas*, a woman's honour price was only half that of her husband or closest male relative. The wisdom texts largely reinforce this view of women, except on occasions where women are behaving 'properly' or usefully (for example, as embroideresses), resulting in a confusingly dualistic view of women.

Strong women are represented – both positively and negatively – in the early Irish tales. Sometimes, they are used to express ideas that the author wanted to get across, but would be inappropriate to a heroic male figure. Mothers of saints and sovereigns were also revered in their own right. Occasionally, women who were simply anomalous to early Irish society appear, such as *banfennidi* and witches. Women of magic seem to be almost invariably represented as evil. They are often depicted as attempting to trap a hero to his detriment. Even those who are amiable may become dangerous if spurned. Sometimes, the various appellations for 'witches' would be applied to Otherworld women as well, but with consistent enmity. There are, of course, other types of exceptional women in early Irish literature – female saints, female poets, the heroines of tragic love tales, and the like. These, however, are beyond the scope of the present enquiry.

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## 2 The ‘Otherworld’ of Early Ireland

Patrick Sims-Williams points out that the term ‘the Otherworld’ is a modern academic term that has no equivalent in medieval Celtic literatures (Sims-Williams 60). What, then, do we mean when we discuss the Otherworld in these literatures? What attributes characterize a place or places as being an/the Otherworld? In short, do we understand the supernatural realm(s) in the same way that the authors of medieval Celtic literatures perceived it (or them)?

### Immanence and Sacred Space

One of the most striking attributes of the supernatural dwellings or realms in Irish legend, which are conventionally designated the ‘Otherworld,’ is that they – or at least the entrances to them – were generally localized within the geography of the mortal world; a part of it, rather than apart from it. As John Carey says, “the Otherworld’s *separation* from our world ... coexists with its immediacy: it is hidden within, or identified with, the landmarks of each locale” (Carey, “Time, Space” 2). When it was accessible to mortals, it was generally through certain ‘hollow hills’ or bodies of water – lakes, wells, or rivers – and occasionally through a mysterious mist. Newgrange was such a place, as was the Hill of Allen (Koch & Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age* 147; Nagy 262, n. 55). *Immacaldam in Druad Brain 7 inna Banfátho Febuil ós Loch Fébuil (IDB)* and the metrical and prose *dindshenchas* both mention Otherworldly wells (Carey, “Lough” 76–77; Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas* vol. 3 26–33), and Dorn (or the wife of Badurn) obtains a vessel from *síd* women in a spring (Carey, *Ireland* 88–89), while both *Baile in Scáil (BiS)* and *Echtrae Cormaic (ECm)* mention reaching Otherworldly realms through thick mists (Murray, *Baile* 33 & 50; Hull, *Echtra* 876–879).

There are references to what are called *síde* throughout the legends and sagas of early Irish literature. The early Irish believed these mounds to be entrances to the Otherworld, as I shall show below. There appears to be no over-arching pantheon of gods in Celtic myth; gods were mostly regional,

and connected with specific features of the landscape (Maier 135).<sup>1</sup> This is most easily seen in place names: for example, the Marne River in France was named after the goddess Matrona (Bromwich 449; Falileyev 158); the French city of Lyon was originally called Lugdunum, meaning ‘Fort of Lugus,’ a Gaulish god (Raftery 196);<sup>2</sup> the River Dee on the Welsh March goes back to Primitive British \**Dēwā* ‘Goddess’ (Koch, *Celtic Culture* 1512), and, in Ireland, the River Shannon, the River Boyne, and the twin mountains known as the Paps of Anu, are all named after Irish goddesses (Gwynn vol. 3 30–31 & 294–295; Macalister 122). Such divinities may even originally have been seen as inherent to the environment with which they were associated. The Irish examples demonstrate this particularly well. The Paps of Anu *are* the breasts of the goddess (Macalister 122), and certain stretches of the Boyne are known as the ‘forearm of Nuadu’s wife’ or the ‘calf of Nuadu’s wife’ – Nuadu being one of Boann’s husbands (Gwynn vol. 3 26–33).

This identification of the gods with the land seems to have had a profound effect on how the Celts perceived the Otherworld. Marie-Louise Sjoestedt theorizes that, “the Celt imagines his gods as dwelling on this earth. For him there is no ‘beyond’ or ‘elsewhere’, no reservation to which he can relegate what is sacred, whether for reasons of respect or of prudence” (Sjoestedt 92). Hills and bodies of water were especially important in this respect, as they were believed to be entrances to the Otherworld. It is believed that this is why, when the Romans invaded Gaul, they found vast caches of treasure in lakes and rivers, which seem to have been deposited there by the Celts as offerings to the gods (Raftery 81). In Ireland, such collections of precious objects, including the Broighter hoard, were also found in or near bodies of water, and this is reflected in medieval Irish literature, where one can often find references to the people of the *síde* protecting treasure at the bottom of wells or other bodies of water (Carey, “Lough” 76; Koch & Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age* 129; Meyer, “Adventures” 218–219; Carey, *Ireland* 88–89).

Some *síde* were actually passage tombs built by the stone-age people of Ireland, the most famous being the above-mentioned tumulus at Newgrange. While their original purpose seems to have been unknown to the Celts, the memory of their sacred nature remained and the Celtic Irish began to associate them with their own gods (Carey, “Time, Memory” 24–30). Newgrange, for example, was generally associated with Oengus mac Óic, son of the Dagda (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 147–148).

1 But see Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* 20–24.

2 But see Maier 127–135.

Carey also suggests that royal strongholds be included in the list of Otherworldly sites, as does Kim Selling. They use a number of tales as evidence, including *Tucait Baile Mongáin (TBM)*, *Tochmarc Becfhola*, *BiS*, *ECm*, *EC*, *Immram Brain (IB)*, and *Tochmarc Étaíne (TE)*. In each of the first four, the protagonist either enters or leaves the Otherworld at a royal site, or both – Uisnech and Ráith Mór Maige Line in the first, and Tara in the other three. In the latter three, furthermore, an inhabitant of the Otherworld appears without warning within Tara's boundaries, without appearing to have approached it from the outside. Both Conn and his grandson Cormac, in their respective adventures, find themselves in an Otherworld setting after being caught in a mysterious mist in or near Tara. Conn meets with Lug, who directs a sovereignty figure to pour the cup of kingship for each of Conn's descendants in turn (Murray, *Baile* 34–49, 51–67). Cormac meets with Manannán and, after a test of truth, is rewarded with the return of his wife and children, and a cup of truth (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 187). At the end of their adventures, each returns – implicitly or explicitly – to Tara (Murray, *Baile* 49 & 67; Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 187). Carey also says that when the royal site is not immediately identifiable with the Otherworld, the two may be seen in juxtaposition with each other – such as Ráith Cruachan and Síd Cruachan, or (to cite a Welsh parallel) Arberth in Dyfed and Gorsedd Arberth (Carey, "Time, Space" 3–5; Meyer, "Adventures" 212–228; Thomson 2000, 7–8; Jones & Jones 8). In addition, Selling notes that,

The four main sites considered in Christian times to be pagan Irish royal capitals were Tara and Dun Ailinne in Leinster, Cruachain in Connacht and Emain Macha in Ulster. Surprisingly, however, archaeological excavations reveal that none of these royal strongholds appear to have actually been permanent habitation sites. The evidence suggests that they were ceremonial centres incorporating ancient cemeteries and burial mounds, and were used mainly for tribal gatherings and festivities, seasonal or occasional meeting places in the open air where games and assemblies could be held (Selling 295).

There are not only a wide variety of places identified with the Otherworld, but many names for Otherworld regions as well. In *EC* it is called *Síd mBoadaig*; in *IB* it is called *Tir inna mBan* or 'The Land of the Women'; in many places (including *EC* and *IB*) it is called *Mag Mell* or 'The Plain of Sports/Delights.' Ó Cathasaigh acknowledges and attempts to solve this problem: "The Irish conception of the Otherworld, as it is expressed in the literature, is extraordinarily complex ... [a]midst all the confusion, however, *síd* enjoys

a special status as a term for the Otherworld; it is the normal generic term which can be used without further definition to denote the Otherworld" (Ó Cathasaigh 149). The problem, of course, is that the Otherworld is not always represented as being in a *síd*-mound.

Carey writes, "[t]he supernatural realm which the gods inhabited ... was thought to be immanent everywhere, but most often accessible by going underground or under water..." (Carey, "Ireland" 6). While acknowledging that in the literature *síd* almost always refers to an earthen mound or hill (the overseas location of *Síd mBoadaig* in *EC* being a possible exception), Ó Cathasaigh argues that this is due to a gradual specialization of meaning from its IE root \**sed-*, which means 'seat' or 'abode.' "[I]t may be conjectured," he says, that it "narrow[ed] from abode in general to abode of the gods in particular, and then from abode of the gods in general to hollow hill in particular" (Ó Cathasaigh 150). When *síd* is used "less specifically in collocations such as *ben síde* it must mean simply '(the) Otherworld,'" he says, "thus, *ben síde* (or *ben a sídib*) 'goddess, woman of the Otherworld', *fer síde* 'god, man of the Otherworld', *áess síde* 'Otherworld folk, the gods'" (Ó Cathasaigh 149). Patrick Sims-Williams, though agreeing in general with Ó Cathasaigh's argument for gradual specialization, disagrees that this makes *síd* potential evidence for the concept of a unified Otherworld. He states that "the evidence for this broad sense has been disputed by [John] Carey ("Location" 40 n. 20)" (Sims-Williams 62). However, Carey's note challenges only Ó Cathasaigh's statement that the Otherworld in *Serglige Con Culainn* (*SCC*) is located overseas (Ó Cathasaigh 149 n. 44), not the validity of *síd* as an inclusive Otherworld term (Carey, "Location" 40 n. 20).

Sims-Williams argues, instead, that the modern term 'Otherworld' is a combination of "unconscious analogy with the Christian dichotomy of *this world/the other world*...and partly from a calque on *orbis alius* in Lucan's account of the druidic doctrine that souls survived not in Hades but *orbe alio* (*Pharsalia* 1.457 cf. Reinach 1901, 454)" (Sims-Williams 60–61). He admits to the Welsh *Annwfn* being presented as a unitary realm, but agrees with Ó Cathasaigh that it derives independently from the 'Celtic Otherworld' (Ó Cathasaigh 150; Sims-Williams 76). Sims-Williams does not, however, clarify what he means by this, since he seems to be arguing that there is no cohesive concept of a 'Celtic Otherworld' to begin with. "[S]íde, by contrast," he says, "are independent kingdoms, which enjoy more or less friendly relations with one another, like the mortal *tuatha* of early Irish Law" (Sims-Williams 63). However, if what Carey argues about the royal site/Otherworld identification is true, then these two are simply mirrors of one another anyway. Much as Ireland was one land which supported many

*túatha* – ostensibly under the rule of the king at Tara – the Otherworld, too, can be conceived of as a single land with many kingdoms. In addition, in his article “The Irish ‘Otherworld’: Hiberno-Latin Perspectives,” Carey argues that while Sims-Williams is correct that there is no direct cognate for *Annwfn* in other Celtic languages, one may be had in Irish by analogy. The Annals of Ulster record the death of Cernach mac Fogartaig in 737 A.D., saying, “the women of the lowest world wearisomely lamented him” (*infimi orbis mulieres tediose fleuerunt* [Carey, “Irish ‘Otherworld’” 155–156]). “I take the Latin phrase,” he says, “to correspond to the Irish *mná síde*, the ‘banshees’...traditionally believed to keen the members of ancient noble families” (156). He backs this up with another reference, this time to *Táin Bó Fraích*: “the ‘cry of lamentation of the women of the *síde*’ (*golgaire ban síde*)” is heard after Fraech is betrayed (156). Carey goes on:

If *infimus orbis* can in fact be taken as the Hiberno-Latin equivalent of *síd(e)* ‘Otherworld mound(s)’, then the AU entry appears to be evidence for an idea that some single realm, here visualized as lying beneath the surface of the earth, was the home of the immortals (156).

In respect to Sims-Williams’s argument regarding Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Carey points out that there was actually an Irish version of this text composed in the twelfth century, under the name *In Cath Catharda*. Lucan states that the Druids believed that “the same spirit governs the limbs in another realm” (*regit idem spiritus artus/orbe alio*) after death, which the author of *In Cath Catharda* interprets in this way: “those who died in this temperate zone were borne southward through the torrid zone, and placed in other bodies in the southern temperate zone” (*marbh isin mesraighthisea do breith tresin tendtigi fodes & a tabairt i corpaibh ele isin mesraighthi descertach* [157–158]). “It appears, then,” Carey concludes, “that for an Irishman writing Latin in the eighth century, or reading it in the twelfth, the word *orbis* could be applied to the realm of the immortals and the dead, a nether region corresponding to the *síde* of vernacular tradition” (158).

According to Sims-Williams, the Otherworld of Welsh and Irish tradition “has two main locations, under the ground (including beneath lakes and springs) and on an island across (or under) the sea.” He goes on to state that there does not appear to be a single term encompassing both (Sims-Williams 60). He professes doubts that *síd* fits the bill, though he admits that it is “difficult to evaluate, for the writers of the few texts that refer to overseas *síde* may still have been thinking of ‘fairy mounds’ on islands” (62–63.) He asserts that the Otherworld on an island is an international story motif,

and may therefore arise from polygenesis (68). Carey, on the other hand, calls into question whether the overseas Otherworld is really a native idea at all. After examining the only two extant tales in Old Irish that mention the overseas Otherworld, Carey follows James Carney and David Dumville in positing that the overseas Otherworld is due to the influence of the ecclesiastical practice of *peregrinatio*, or voluntary exile, which was becoming popular in Ireland about the time these stories started to be written in clerical scriptoria (Carey, "Location" 36–43). Sims-Williams rebuts this conclusion by asserting that the "rejection of the overseas Otherworld as an extraneous notion seems implicitly to deny the degree of abstract thinking about *the* Otherworld generally attributed to early Irish mythographers by modern scholars" (Sims-Williams 69). Whether or not this is the case, it is not dispositive; Carey does not suggest that early Irish mythographers could not think about the Otherworld abstractly; if anything, it is that they did not view it abstractly in this particular way. Sims-Williams also says that belief in an overseas Otherworld would be predictable among coastal-dwelling Celts, as such belief "seems to be universal among maritime peoples." He points to Posidonius and Pomponius Mela's accounts of ritual islands off the coast of Brittany as evidence for such a belief, as well as the "widespread and ancient practice of ship burial," which, he says, "implies that beliefs in overseas Otherworlds are an ancient inheritance in northwestern Europe in general." But simply because a belief would seem predictable does not make it fact, and, as Carey points out, the Celts did believe in the presence of the Otherworld on actual islands off the coast – the Isle of Man being one famous example – calling into question Sims-Williams's argument regarding the observations of the Classical authors (Carey, "Location" 40 n. 21). Moreover, while ship burials were indeed a widespread practice in early northwestern Europe, there is, to my knowledge, no evidence that this was practised by the Celts specifically.

Returning to the Welsh evidence may allow us to tease out further comparisons. There are a couple of other terms besides *Annwfn* that should be considered. The first is *gorsedd*, "which derives, like *síd* from \**sed-* 'sit' and denotes both a manmade tumulus and a natural hill (not necessarily a reputedly hollow one like the Irish *síd*)" (Sims-Williams 64). Sims-Williams quotes Ó Cathasaigh's statement that "it may be assumed on the evidence of *gorsedd*, that *sedd* had Otherworld connotations," after briefly outlining the supernatural roles played by *Gorsedd Arberth* in the *Mabinogi* (Ó Cathasaigh 154). However, Sims-Williams disagrees with Ó Cathasaigh, pointing out that while "the uncompounded Irish term seems to emphasize that a *síd* was the 'seat' or 'abode' within which divinities dwelt...the preposition(s) prefixed



to the *sedd* of Welsh *gorsedd* seem rather to emphasize that the *gorsedd* was an eminence *up and upon* which an ordinary mortal could sit for various purposes” – some having no supernatural significance, including assemblies and lookout posts, much as the Irish *forad* (Sims-Williams 64–65). But it seems to me that Ó Cathasaigh’s argument still stands. For one thing, he did recognize the similarities, both of etymology and definition, between *gorsedd* and *forad* – and notes that the Irish evidence presents compounds comparable to the Welsh (Ó Cathasaigh 150). Further, his argument is that *sedd* itself – uncompounded, as *síd* is – would have had Otherworld connotations (154).

Also worth mentioning is the reference to the Otherworld as *Kaer Sidi* in the Welsh poems *Preideu Annwn* and *Golychafi gulwyd*. Sims-Williams persuasively argues that this use of *sidi* is a borrowing from rather than cognate with the Irish *síd*, and that it was done in a learned and literary context rather than an oral one (Sims-Williams 70). However, it seems to me that this usage still indicates that, at least at the time it was first borrowed, the Welsh author understood *síd* to be analogous to the Welsh conception of the Otherworld, especially since the two poems in which the phrase *Kaer Sidi* appears seem to be – to some extent, at least – dependent on *IDB* (Carey, *Ireland* 80–98). Indeed, the descriptions of *Annwn* in *Pwyll* are reminiscent of the ‘Happy Otherworld’ of the Irish tales. The text says of the year *Pwyll* spent in *Arawn*’s court:

Here he could see a war-band and retinues entering in, and the most comely troop and the best equipped any one had seen, and the queen with them, the fairest woman any one had ever seen ... And of all he had ever seen to converse with, she was the most unaffected woman, and the most gracious of disposition and discourse. And they passed their time with meat and drink and song and carousal. Of all the courts he had seen on earth, that was the court best furnished with meat and drink and vessels of gold and royal jewels (Jones & Jones 5).

*Llyna y guelei efteulu ac yniueroed, a'r niuer hardafa chyweiraf o'r a welsei neb yn dyuot y mywn, a'r urenhines y gyt ac wynt, yn deccafgwreic o'r a welsei neb. Ac o'r a welsei eiryoet wrth ymdidan a hi, dissymlafgwreic a bonedigeidafi hannwyt a'y a hymdidan oed. A threulaw a wnaethant bwyt allynn a cherdeu a chyuedach. O'r a welsei o holl llysoed y dayar, llyna y llys diwallafo uwyt a llyn ac eurllestri a theyrndlysseu. (Thomson 3–4.)*

Carey, in his article “Ireland and the Antipodes,” argues that the acceptance of the existence of the Antipodes by the Irish intelligentsia was an effort

on their part to rationalize the immanent yet subterranean/submarine realm of the gods of their ancestors with Christian and Graeco-Roman thought(6). I believe this rationalization argument can be used with some certainty regarding most of the writings of the early Irish clerics regarding the Otherworld, whether or not they identify this realm with the Antipodes. In *IB*, an Otherworld figure claims intimate knowledge of the yet-to-come Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and in *EC*, Connlae's mistress foretells the coming of Christianity to Ireland (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 50–54; McCone, *Echtrae* 178). In *TÉ*, Midir tells Étaín that among his people there is “conception without sin, without fault” and that “it is the darkness of Adams sin/which prevents our being counted” (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 160). All of these present the Otherworld figures – who would have previously been part of a pagan paradigm – as understanding and accepting the revelation of Christ.

There is, however, another possible explanation for the multiplicity of names and places associated with the Otherworld in early medieval Celtic literature. Mircea Eliade, in his book *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, discusses the importance of sacred space to the spiritually minded. Without sacred space, he says, we live in an homogeneous cosmos in which we are unable to orient ourselves. The manifestation of hierophany – the act by which something sacred shows itself to us – marks out sacred space from the profane space around it, and gives us a sacred centre from which to orient ourselves. According to Eliade, such a centre is actually a re-creation of the cosmos; it represents reality whereas the homogenous space around it – profane space (or chaos) – does not. Further, *every* time sacred space is consecrated, this re-creation occurs: “Every creation repeats the pre-eminent cosmogonic act, the Creation of the world ... [c]onsequently, whatever is founded as its foundation at the centre of the world (since, as we know, the Creation itself took place from a centre)” (Eliade, *Myth* 18). For example:

“The erection of the Vedic altar of sacrifice is ... instructive ... in this matter ... the building of the altar was conceived as a creation of the world. The water with which the clay was mixed was the same as the primeval waters: the clay forming the altar's foundation, the earth; the side walls the surrounding atmosphere and so on” (Eliade, *Patterns* 372).

Humanity wants to live as much in this sacred centre as possible, as this is the only way for us to live within reality. This, therefore, allows for many such centres, each of which is simultaneously the centre. As stated by Eliade, “there can be a multiplicity of ‘centres’, because the nature of sacred space admits the coexistence of an infinity of places in a single centre. And the

'dynamic', the 'actualization' of this multiplicity is possible because it is the repetition of an archetype" (385). If we follow Eliade's argument to its logical conclusion with regard to the Celtic Otherworld, *all* places identified with the Otherworld are this single sacred centre, as all occur in sacred space.

The Otherworld was, as discussed above, identified with certain mounds/hills and bodies of water, as well as nearby islands and houses discovered in a mist or in the dark. How, then, is it that it seems to be only rarely encountered? Carey posits that it is a matter of perception (Carey, "Time, Space" 2–5). In *EC*, for example, when the druid Corann chants against the Otherworld woman he does not force her to leave – rather, he renders her imperceptible to everyone present: "Then he intoned over the location of the woman so that no one heard the woman's voice and so that Connlae did not see the woman at that time" (*Do: cachain íarum for suidiu inna mná co-nna: cóle nech guth inna mná , co- nna: haccae Connle in mnaí ind úair sin* [McCone, *Echtrae* 156–159]). And on her second visit, she tells Connlae that he is "a champion to the people of the sea, who behold you every day in the assemblies of your fatherland amidst your beloved near ones" (*At gerat do doínib tethrach ar-dat: chiat die i ndálaib t'athardai eter do gnáthu inmáini*), implying that the entirety of her people are near enough to observe him in his daily life, though he cannot see them (170–172). And when Bran encounters Manannán in his chariot on the sea, the latter describes it as a flowery plain with calves and lambs (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 52). Again, in *TÉ*, Midir tells Étaín, "[w]e see everyone on every side, and no one sees us" (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 160). Both Manannán and Midir attribute our inability to perceive the Otherworld to original sin (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 52; Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 160). This will be discussed further below.

## Sacred Time

Time in the Otherworld appears to be just as independent of our time as its space is independent of our space, and just as difficult to pin down. In *IB*, Bran and his men return to Ireland to find that they have been absent for hundreds of years, though it had seemed to them that they had only been in *Tír inna mBan* for one year (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 44 & 57), and in *TBM*, Mongán and his company spend one night in an Otherworld hall, only to find on leaving that they have been gone for a year (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 207–208). Nera, on the other hand, spends a year in *Síd Cruachan* before returning to *Ráith Cruachan* – and has to take the fruits of summer (*toirthe samraid*) back with him to prove he has been into the *síd* at all, since to

his comrades it has only been moments since he left (Meyer, "Adventures" 220–221). Other tales, such as *SCC*, *Ecm*, and *BiS* contain no mention of any time difference (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 47–88; Dillon, *Serglige* 1–29; Hull, "*Echtra*" 871–873; Murray, *Baile* 33–67).

According to Carey, not only is Otherworld time different in measure, but "fundamentally different in kind" (Carey, "Time, Space" 8). Carey states that, in the Otherworld, all of time exists in eternally present, "golden age" conditions (8).

Though speaking of sacred time in general, rather than Otherworld time in particular, Eliade's discussion on the topic seems to confirm such a difference in the nature of Otherworld time from time in the mortal world. Like space, time is not homogeneous; there is a separation between sacred time and profane time. This, Eliade says, "does not merely mean periodic incisions made in the profane duration to allow of the insertion of sacred time..." (Eliade, *Patterns* 391). These periods of sacred time are also connected, linked together contiguously with those before and after them, resulting in a separate continuity that can be seen as parallel to but not dependent upon profane time (391–392). Eliade also confirms the nature of sacred time as being ever-present, as every ritual act – i.e., every act committed during ritual time – is recognized as contemporaneous with that which it represents, and with every other re-enactment of that ritual (392–394). This also means that, with every ritual act, the actor places himself within what Eliade calls mythical time – Carey's golden age (394–397). These observations are entirely consistent with the description of Otherworld time in Celtic literatures. In *BiS*, all of Conn's descendants are present at the same time in Lug's Otherworld hall (Murray, *Baile* 33–67). Lost kingdoms still exist under bodies of water, which were once dry land in stories such as *IB* and *The Adventure of Loegaire mac Crimthainn* (*ALC* [Carey, "Time, Space" 8–9]).

## The Role of Peace

In his article "The Semantics of *Síd*," Tomás Ó Cathasaigh discusses what he believes to be an etymological nexus between the two meanings of *síd* in Old Irish, 'Otherworld mound' and 'peace.' Here, he posits that the second meaning is a fundamental attribute of the first; that peace is an essential feature of the Otherworld (Ó Cathasaigh 137–155). His discussion of *síd* as a general term for the Otherworld can be found above. A connection between peace and the Otherworld, he says, is clearly stated in *EC*; both meanings of *áess síde* – people of the Otherworld and people of peace – can be equally

applied (139). According to Ó Cathasaigh, “the key to the semantics of *síd* is to be found in the central role of the king in Irish political ideology the reign of the righteous king is marked by peace (as well as plenty) within the land” (140). Carey concurs: in his article “Time, Space, and the Otherworld” he comes to the conclusion that “the Otherworld lay not only beyond the limits of existence, but also at the very heart of society: it was the source from which values and authority derived” (Carey, “Time, Space” 15). Conn, Cormac, and Conaire all had their kingships sanctioned by Otherworld personages; Conn and Cormac upon their respective sojourns into the Otherworld, and Conaire within his own kingdom (Murray, *Baile* 33–67; Hull, “*Echtra*” 871–883; Stokes, “Destruction” 24–25, 27). Also, the legitimate king was often chosen or validated by uniting with the sovereignty goddess, as was the case with Niall of the Nine Hostages, or Eochaid in *TÉ* (Koch, *Celtic Heroic Age* 206 & 154). In addition, the reign of a righteous king mirrored the Otherworld. It was said of Cormac that “Ireland became a Land of Promise during his reign” (O’Grady vol. 1, vol. 2 97);<sup>3</sup> and Pwyll was able to be a more capable and righteous ruler after learning how Arawn had reigned during his absence in Annwfn, and actually became known as the ‘Head of Annwfn’ (Jones & Jones 8).

Ó Cathasaigh asserts that it is truth (*fír*) that characterizes a worthy king, and that peace is a symptom of his exercise of this quality (Ó Cathasaigh 140). He supports this position by appealing to three sources. The first of these is the seventh-century wisdom text *Audacht Moraind*, which states that “[i]t is through *fír flathemon* [literally, prince’s truth] that the ruler secures peace (*síd*), tranquility, joy, ease and comfort” (F. Kelly, *Audacht* 6–7 § 14). Second, Ó Cathasaigh notes that, in Cormac’s visit to the Otherworld, there is a pig roasting, which requires four truths to be told over it to cook completely; the last of the four is Cormac’s tale, which wins him the return of his family and the gift of a cup that is capable of ascertaining the truth. Cormac’s reign was considered to be a golden age for Ireland (Hull, “*Echtra*” 871–883). Conaire, on the other hand, had peace and plenty in his reign until he gave a false judgement; then, his kingship began to fall apart (Stokes, “Destruction” 30).

## The ‘Feminine’ Otherworld

Joan Radner says that the Otherworld is symbolically feminine (Radner 183); Joseph Nagy implies something similar in his book *The Wisdom of*

3 This is, however, a late Middle Irish text.

*the Outlaw* (Nagy 168). Radner depends upon the features of the landscape associated with the Otherworld for her assessment, while Nagy is less forthcoming as to his reasoning. But is there more to it than that? Given the topic of this investigation, it is not only important but necessary to answer this question: in what way (if any) might the Otherworld be feminine?

We have previously examined what we mean by the term 'Otherworld'; let us now explore what is meant by 'feminine'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) records a number of definitions for the word:

"1. Of persons or animals: Belonging to the female sex; female ... 2. In same sense, of objects to which sex is attributed, or which have feminine names, esp. one of the heavenly bodies ... 3. Of or pertaining to a woman, or to women; consisting of women; carried on by women ... 4. Characteristic of, peculiar or proper to women; womanlike, womanly ... 5. Depreciatively: Womanish, effeminate" (Simpson & Weiner s.v. feminine).

With such variety, it is not surprising that how the word is and should be used has been much debated among feminists over the last several decades. Still, all of these definitions beg the question: what does it mean to be a woman? The answer is not as simple as it first appears.

In her ground-breaking book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asks this very question. For de Beauvoir, womanhood is not a fact of biology; it is a societal construct. "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman," she declares (De Beauvoir 267).<sup>4</sup> The basis of this construct, she says, is the idea of woman as 'Other.' This provides a useful starting point for approaching the Irish evidence.

De Beauvoir approaches the 'woman problem' (as she and others of her time call it) from an existentialist point of view (Flynn 98–102). Borrowing from phenomenological method, in existentialism the existent sets himself as Subject, finding itself in the Object – the 'Other' (Flynn 17).<sup>5</sup> "[N]o group ever sets itself up as the One," she says,

without at once setting up the Other over against itself ... [t]hings become clear if ... following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental

4 This does not apply equally to men, "as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general (De Beauvoir xxi).

5 'Subject' is used here in the masculine with the understanding that, according to de Beauvoir, woman is always Other.

hostility toward every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object. But the other consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim ... (De Beauvoir xxiii).

In most cases, this relativity becomes apparent when the two subjects come into conflict. This being the case, de Beauvoir poses the obvious question: why has it not become apparent in the case of women? Unlike other oppressed groups, such as blacks or Jews, she says, women have no collective understanding of themselves as a group. "They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat ... they live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women" (xxv). This condition has historically allowed men continuously to define women in relation to themselves, and to refuse them the ability to define themselves. As we have seen, this is a very appropriate description of the position of women in early Ireland. Their worth was determined by the position of their closest male relative. They were considered 'foolish,' and could not make contracts without the consent of that male relative; and if they did, the profit from it still went to the male relative. And they were bound by the contracts of their male relatives, regardless of how foolish or harmful these might be.<sup>6</sup>

To be a woman is to be essentially 'Other' – more so even than the more general 'other' of, for example, a racial minority, which may set itself up as subject against the majority, where women may not. Femininity, then, is to possess those attributes that come with otherness: to be marginal in the picture of society in which men (in this case, as the society of the mortal world) are the centre. This, then, gives us one indication as to a possible association of femininity to the Otherworld.

In the above discussion of the definition of the Otherworld, I explained that the Otherworld is immanent within the mortal world, yet imperceptible to mortals. The authors, themselves mortals, write from a mortal point of view. From an existential perspective, then, the author necessarily posits himself, his characters, and his world as 'Subject.' The Otherworld, while theoretically present, is not actually present to the experience of the author. To some of his characters, the Otherworld may become a reality, but the final point of view in each tale is that of the mortal world, to which it remains

6 See Part I, Chapter 1.

something apart – marginal.<sup>7</sup> This is the case whether the hero's sojourn in the Otherworld is of a limited duration and he returns to the mortal world, as in *SCC* (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 70; Dillon, *Serglige* 24), or the hero remains forever in the Otherworld, as in *Echtrae Nerai* (*EN* [Meyer, "Adventures" 226–227]).

In addition, the essential aspects of the entity posited as 'Other' are defined by the Subject or 'One.' This often results in an oxymoronic polarity of descriptions of the 'Other.' For example: the native is a barbarian, or a 'noble savage'; women are angels or enchantresses. Likewise, the inhabitants of the Otherworld are variously presented as humans unaffected by the Fall, or demons deceiving pre-Christian peoples (Carey, "Baptism" 1–38). The Otherworld itself is portrayed in both ways as well. It can be the blissful 'Happy Otherworld' of *EC* or *IB* when the hero is invited. Or, when the hero comes uninvited for his own aggrandizement, it can be dangerous and threatening – such as the flooding well in *IDB*, or the dark land of Scáth ('shadow') where Cú Chulain encounters a fort with seven walls with palisades of iron, with heads upon the palisades, serpents, toads, and dragon-like creatures (Cross & Slover 352).

A major component in the positing of woman as Other is the objectification of the female form.<sup>8</sup> As John Berger has said: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: of sight" (Berger 47). We have seen that, to a great extent – if not entirely – the Otherworld was imagined as being immanent within the landscape. When Radner suggests the femininity of the Otherworld, she points out that "[i]ts geography is suggestively female: access is through a passageway into a mound, or down a well, or under or across water" (Radner 183). As stated above, these hills and bodies of water are often linked with or considered to be the bodies of goddesses themselves – making them *material* objects as well as objectified women. In addition, they are sometimes reduced to being just a part of the goddess: her breasts, as in the Paps of Anu, or an arm or leg, in the case of Boann.<sup>9</sup> This particularization of focus is a symptom of further objectification, as it reduces woman from a whole person to a single

7 I use the male pronoun for the author because, as far as we know, the authors were most often monks and the likelihood of female authorship is very low.

8 MacKinnon, 127. "Male dominance is sexual."

9 See Part I, Chapter 2.



aspect, lifeless and incomplete. On the other end of the scale, the island as a whole is identified with Banba, Fódla, and especially with Ériu in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (LGÉ [Macalister 114–117]). That kind of identification is not found with the male gods – or not to the same extent. This certainly seems to suggest an association of the supernatural realm – the Otherworld – with women in particular.

It is also worth pointing out that the two earliest tales of journeys to the Otherworld that we have available to us – *EC* and *IB* – both feature lands where there are no men. In *IB*, this land is even referred to as *Tír inna mBan* – ‘The Land of Women.’<sup>10</sup> A comparable ‘Land of Men’ does not appear until much later in the literature, and then only in contrast to a ‘Land of Women’ (Stokes, “*Accallam*” 164).

We can say, then, that the Otherworld is, in an essential way, feminine. It is by nature Other, and marginal to the experience of the mortal author depicting it as well as to his audience and his characters, and that depiction is objectified, and based on its relation to the (at that time) male-dominated mortal world.

## Conclusion

The Otherworld is seen as immanent within the landscape, and accessible through ‘hollow’ hills or under/across bodies of water. It is also associated with royal strongholds. The Irish Otherworld has no direct cognate with the Welsh Annwfn, but it is analogous, and the descriptions of Annwfn in *Pwyll* are similar to those of the Irish ‘Happy Otherworld.’ The seeming multiplicity of Irish ‘Otherworld(s)’ can be either conceptualized as one land with many *túatha*, or understood as individual ‘sacred centres,’ which, by their sacred nature, are all *the* sacred centre. While the Otherworld is immanent with the mortal world, it remains unseen; this appears to be a matter of perception.

Time in the Otherworld moves differently than in the mortal world, but not with consistency. It is an eternally present ‘golden age’ or ‘mythical time,’ which, like sacred space, is linked as one with any and all re-enactments of sacred time.

Peace seems to be an essential aspect of the Otherworld, and since sovereign authority in the mortal world derives from the Otherworld, the

<sup>10</sup> These will be discussed further below.

reign of a righteous king can be recognized by how peaceful it is. A righteous king is characterized by truth, which, by its nature, brings about this peace.

The Otherworld can also be seen as symbolically feminine, recognizable by the ways in which it is 'other.' It is marginal where a male-based society is central. Depictions of it – all rendered by mortals, and probably all by men – are characterized by extreme duality. Its recognized points of continuity with the landscape, along with many of its female denizens, are physically objectified, and, in some cases, portions of it are described as being inhabited entirely by women.

Now that we have some background, we can move to examine the textual evidence. The texts selected below are all (purportedly) from the *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (CDS), a now-lost eighth-century manuscript from the monastery at Drumsnat, County Monaghan. Each was chosen for its antiquity, as well as its inclusion of Otherworld women and Otherworldly themes. We will begin with *Echtrae Chonnlae* (EC) and *Immram Brain* (IB).

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# Part II

The Texts



### 3 *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain*

#### Introduction

Because of similarities and relationships between the texts, which will become apparent during the course of this chapter, I have deemed it expedient to consider *Echtrae Chonnlai* (*EC*) and *Immram Brain* (*IB*) together. Before beginning my analysis, I will give a brief synopsis of each story.

In *EC*, we are presented with a protagonist, Connlae son of Conn of the Hundred Battles, king of Ireland, who is invited to a blissful Otherworldly land by a strangely dressed woman whom only he can see, though all can hear her speak.<sup>1</sup> She describes some of the wonders of her home and tells him that she has come to fetch him there because of her great love for him. When Conn hears this, he calls his druid to drive her away, lest his son be taken from him by “the spells of women.” The druid chants against her, causing her to become imperceptible – but not before she tosses an apple to Connlae. This apple, and no other food, sustains him for the next month, it also induces in him a longing for the woman. A month later she appears to Connlae again – and again he is with his father – and exhorts him to come with her. Conn calls for his druid, but the latter does not seem to be at hand. The woman tells Conn he should not love druidism, and prophesies the coming of one who will overthrow the druids. Conn asks Connlae if the woman’s words affect him, and Connlae replies that, though he loves his people, he longs for the woman. Finally, he jumps into the woman’s crystal boat and they leave, never to be seen again (McCone, *Echtrae* 121–199).

*IB* is a considerably longer and more complicated text. When the story begins, Bran is walking alone outside his fort. He hears music behind him, and it lulls him to sleep. When he wakes, there is a silver branch lying next to him, and he takes it with him into his fort. Later, when the people are assembled in the fort, a woman in strange clothing appears among them. After describing an Otherworldly archipelago in the western ocean, she

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Strangely dressed’ is one way of translating a phrase that can be understood in various ways; this is a question that will be addressed below.

enjoins Bran to travel to the Land of Women. She then takes the branch and disappears. Bran and his company set sail the next day. Two days into their journey, they are approached by a man driving a chariot over the waves. He identifies himself as Manannán Mac Lir and describes the ocean as a flowery plain. He describes this region further, and tells Bran both of his own journey to father the wizard-king Mongán and of the coming of Christ. Bran and his men sail on, and find an island where everyone is laughing. Bran sends one of his men to the island, but he begins laughing like the others, and will not speak to his former shipmates no matter how they entreat him. Eventually, they sail on to the Land of Women, leaving him behind. The leader of the women there invites Bran to come ashore, but he hesitates to do so. She throws a ball of thread at him, which he catches. It sticks to his hand, and she uses it to draw his boat to shore. They go into a house where there is a couch for each couple and endless supplies of food (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 57). After they have been there for what they believe is a year but is actually many years, one of the men becomes homesick and begs Bran to return to Ireland with him. The leader of the women tells them they will regret the journey, that they should not touch the earth when they return, and that they should take with them the man whom they had left on the Island of Joy. When they come to Srúb Brain ('Bran's Headland'), they find a gathering of people who ask who they are. Bran gives them his name, and they say that they do not recognize it but that 'the voyage of Bran' is one of their ancient stories. The homesick man jumps off of the boat onto the earth and immediately becomes dust. Bran laments his death, and relates the story of his journey to the assembled people. He and the rest of his company then sail away, never to be seen or heard from again (33–58).

Of first importance to the present investigation is determining the nature of these Otherworldly women. What kind of literary figure do they represent? Are they generated from the old pagan myths of Ireland, from early Christian thought, or from somewhere else entirely? What might the early Irish authors have had in mind, and why did they choose these women for their purposes? To find the answers, we must look more closely at these two early tales. To this end, I will first review the scholarship currently available, and then provide my own views.

The seminal edition of *IB* by Kuno Meyer in 1895 serves as a point of departure for this inquiry. Meyer placed the date of the original text in the late seventh or early eighth century on linguistic grounds; the historical evidence discussed by Alfred Nutt pertaining to the wizard-king Mongán – whom Manannán claimed as his son in *IB* – was compatible with this analysis (Meyer & Nutt 141). Different sources, including the Annals of



Ulster and the Annals of Tigernach, placed Mongán's death around 620 A.D. (Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle* 133). Nutt maintained that it would have required at least two generations for Mongán's legend to coalesce into the form we have in the extant tales (Meyer & Nutt 141). He argued for the later date, as he felt that Christianity must have been well-entrenched in order for the author to feel comfortable using pagan imagery in his Christian text (141).

In his analysis, Nutt identified the central issues as "questions of the nature, age, and origin, on Gaelic soil, of the conceptions of the Happy Otherworld ... parallels to which can be adduced from both Christian and Pagan classic culture" (134). He then set out to reconstruct the paradise ideal of the ancient Irish by comparing *IB* with other early Irish texts with similar themes and then comparing the result with Christian and Classical sources that may have influenced the author. He noted the close connection between *IB* and *EC*, both in the manuscripts in which they were found and in their themes. He said that both are "decidedly incoherent" due to episodes such as *Inis Subai* (the 'Island of Joy') in *IB* and the appearance of the woman's crystal boat in *EC*, and he regarded the Christian overtones as having been "foisted in" on the original (oral) tales by the authors of the written texts (148). "The oldest form of a story," he said, "may be the starting point of a new literary organism; it may equally be the last link of a long chain, all the predecessors of which have perished" (137).

In his book *Immrama*, published in 1941, A. G. van Hamel postulated that the body of poetry in *IB* was originally larger (noting the discrepancy between the number of stanzas stated and those actually given), but held that it was doubtful whether even the original text had preserved them (1). He claimed that all of the extant manuscripts went back to an ancestor, which was itself a copy of the *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (CDS [Van Hamel, *Immrama* 7; Carey, "Lough" 53–56]).<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter, Myles Dillon expressed his opinion that the Christian material in *IB* was the result of interpolation (*Early Irish Literature* 106).

In 1955, James Carney countered both of these assertions in *Studies in Irish Literature and History*. He pointed out that Van Hamel was thinking of an oral tradition that was identical in form with the written literature of seventh-century Ireland, but that in fact such a tradition had never existed. Even when both traditions were present, they existed in separate spheres; where they did overlap, literary customs overcame oral customs. Carney also did not believe that the text contained interpolations, saying that there had been no linguistic evidence adduced to demonstrate their presence (Carney,

2 But see Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain* 421–436.

*Studies* 277 & 281). He made a case for viewing *IB* as a “thoroughly Christian poem” and an allegory of Man voyaging to Paradise (282). Carney supported this by outlining what he called the “clear parallel” between Mongán and Christ drawn by Manannán’s poem (280). He further asserted that the description of the Otherworld given in *IB*, rather than being engendered by native tradition, was a picture of the early medieval idea of the state in which humanity would have lived but for Adam’s sin, and that the Isle of Women was based on Greek material (286).

In 1969, Carney assessed *EC* in his article “The Deeper Level of Early Irish Literature” (162–165). In it, he postulated that *EC* was written as a study aid for monastic students (164). He stated that “it is impossible to maintain that we are presented here with an Irish pre-Christian view of the Otherworld”, inasmuch as the druid is in opposition to, instead of allied with, the Otherworld woman. In his view, the apple given to Connlae by his Otherworld mistress belonged to the Tree of Life found in the garden of Eden (164). He believed that rather than its stated purpose of explaining Connle’s brother Art’s epithet ‘Oenfher,’ the story had more relevance to some of the intellectual problems that faced an Irishman of about A.D. 700 when he “tried to accommodate his inherited pagan beliefs and ideas to the dominant Christian and monastic culture of the age” (165). It is, he says, an “effort to rationalize the virtually ineradicable Irish belief in fairies” to be “descendants of Adam and Eve before they committed their transgression ... begotten without sexual act” (165).

Proinsias Mac Cana, writing in 1972, agreed with Carney that the Christian materials in these texts were not interpolated, and stated that the text bore all the marks of having been composed in a monastic milieu. He nevertheless disputed Carney’s claim that *IB* was a ‘thoroughly Christian’ tale. He maintained that both the Christian and exotic themes were integral to the extant texts, and were the work of a single author who consciously used and re-imagined traditional themes to suit his purpose. He claimed that the structure of the prose passages resembled an oral *echtrae*, and suggested that the author used one as a prototype. He questioned Carney’s assertion that *IB* was a Christian allegory, as Carney had not clearly illustrated why upon arriving at the Otherworld the hero enjoyed not heavenly happiness, but the fulfillment of worldly desires. He argued that this was only problematic if one discounted the use of native tradition, as Carney did (Mac Cana, “Mongán” 102–142).

In 1974, Hans Oskamp published an edition and short critique of *EC*. He stated that the author of *EC* was “a Christian literator who drew on early material with which he was familiar but which, at his time, had lost its

original meaning" (Oskamp, "*Echtra*" 213.). Oskamp maintained that the Otherworld woman's proposal of immortality represents a climax, because love, though temporary and imperfect in the mortal condition, becomes eternal and perfect when combined with immortality (213). He asserted that the everlasting apple was a symbol of immortality, and argued that it linked Connlae with the Otherworld and that he became a part of that world when he ate it (216).

Three years after his first article on the subject, Mac Cana approached the *IB* material again in his article "On the 'Prehistory' of *Immram Brain*". This time, he looked at a variety of other texts that seemed to relate to the same material as *IB*, which appeared to be of a similar age, and which were possibly also from *CDS*. He began by considering *Imacallam Choluim Cille ocus ind Óclaig* (*ICC*), in which Colum Cille speaks to a youth (tentatively identified as Mongán in an addendum to the title) at Carrac Éolairg, near Lough Foyle. Mac Cana emphasized that where this tale appeared in the extant manuscripts it was flanked by other materials from *CDS*, and that it shared a "marked resemblance" to the structure and style of the opening of *EC*, particularly the Latin and Irish verb forms marking the dialogue. It therefore seemed likely that it, too, had been included in *CDS* (37–38).

In this tale, Colum Cille and his followers saw a youth at Carrac Éolairg, and Colum Cille asked him from where he came. The youth responded that he came from lands both strange and familiar, and that he came to learn from Colum Cille the spot on which knowledge and ignorance were born and died. Colum Cille then asked him to whom the lough (Lough Foyle) formerly belonged. The youth responded by recounting the different shapes in which he had traversed that space in different times. Colum Cille went on to ask what was under the sea to the east. The youth told him of long-haired men, fearsome (or great-uddered) cows with musical lowing, oxen, horses, along with "two-headed ones" and "three-headed ones." Colum Cille thereafter took the youth aside to ask him about "the heavenly and earthly mysteries." Then, after they had been conversing for half a day, the youth disappeared, and they did not know where he had gone. Colum Cille refused to tell his followers of his private conversation with the youth, saying it was better for mortals not to know (Carey, "Lough" 61).

According to Mac Cana, *ICC* is an instance of the popular theme of a meeting between a revered saint and a famous figure of antiquity. Most examples of this theme, however, resulted in the ancient hero being converted to Christianity and receiving baptism. This was not the case in *ICC*. This suggested to Mac Cana that *ICC* was typologically early, and supported (he claimed) the linguistic and textual evidence for its being chronologically

early as well.<sup>3</sup> He believed that Colum Cille replaced an earlier protagonist in this tale, explaining that change of characters is a familiar feature of the evolution of oral literature (Mac Cana, “Prehistory” 41–43).

Mac Cana also alluded to possible pre-existing Otherworld associations for Carrac Éolairg. Mag nÉolairg, for example, occurred in other sources referring to part of Lough Foyle, or to the sea between Lough Foyle and Iona. The use of *mag* for the sea was strongly suggestive, he said, of an Otherworld context and/or an inundation legend, as the two occasionally went hand in hand. Also, this particular area was associated with Manannán (49). He alluded, further, to a nineteenth-century tradition that Manannán’s castle lay under Lough Foyle (48–49).

Mac Cana went on to outline what he said were two more sources of evidence for traditions regarding Lough Foyle, in two *CDS* poems. The descriptions to which he referred are the two speeches that comprise *Immacaldam in Druad Bran 7 inna Banfátho Febuil ós Loch Fébuil* (*IDB* [48]). This poem consists of two parts with four stanzas each – the first four spoken by Bran’s druid and the other four by Febal’s prophetess. Bran’s druid rhapsodized about the glory and extent of his knowledge when he served Bran, saying that it went “to the high clouds.” He spoke of an Otherworld dwelling in a well with a host of supernatural women and the vast treasure guarded by them. The prophetess, on the other hand, bemoaned the loss of Febal’s kingdom and the delights thereof, proclaiming the beauty of the lands, music, and companies of women that were lost “since Mag Febuil ... is a stony grey sea” (Carey, “Lough” 77).

Mac Cana pointed out that the prophetess’s description presupposed the existence of an inundation legend regarding Lough Foyle, and that this interpretation was supported by *Lebor Gabála* (Mac Cana, “Prehistory” 48). He then went on to draw comparisons between *IDB* and *ICC*. In each, he said, the themes of the Otherworld journey and inundation legends were juxtaposed; in the former, each was represented by a different speaker, whereas in the latter, the youth described what once was where the lough now lay (50).

Mac Cana seemed to believe that Mongán was indeed the youth referred to in *ICC*, based on correlations he made between that text and *IB*. He translated a statement in the youth’s speech as “I know neither father nor mother,” and compared this to the description in *IB* of Christ as “the son of a

3 Detailed linguistic analysis of this text was not actually made until John Carey’s edition of it in 2002. This analysis indicated that it was definitely Old Irish, but not necessarily from very early in that period.

woman who knows no mate.” He suggested that this was perhaps originally a pagan traditional phraseology, adapted by monastic authors to apply to Christ. He also related Manannán’s description of his son Mongán as one who would “make known secrets – a course of wisdom – in the world, without being feared” to the scene in *ICC* in which Colum Cille took the youth aside to ask him about the heavenly and earthly mysteries (51–52).

The following year, Carney assessed much of the same material in his essay, “The Earliest Bran Material.” Unlike Mac Cana, however, he gave *IDB* primary importance (73). From this text he extrapolated the existence of an earlier *echtrae*, which he called *Echtrae Brain (EB)*. He said that both *EB* and *IB* were variations on a single theme – Bran’s final act (81–82). He described them as being “two compositions ... separated by the cultural chasm that divided pagan and monastic Ireland.” He went on to say that the “qualities of thought, imagination and poetry found in *Immram Brain* may be regarded as the exclusive contribution of the seventh-century author” (89).

Carney interpreted the druid’s statement that his knowledge reached the clouds as an expression of a shamanic experience. This vision, he said, corresponded in function to the summoning woman in *IB*, in that both provided the impetus for the action of the story – though this action is only implied in *IDB* (82).

The well in the dialogue was, according to Carney, analogous to the sea in *IB*, as it was a dangerous stretch of water through or over which Bran must pass to reach the Otherworld. He pointed out that the well was a natural entrance to the Otherworld in Irish tradition, and that in other inundation stories, a well was the instrument by which Otherworld forces destroyed kingdoms, turning them into lakes (82–83). There were even mentions of the inundation of Lough Foyle itself in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and in a topographical tract in National Library of Ireland MS. G 1, which refers to “Magh Fuinnsenn upon which is Loch Foyle” (88). He posited that the “Otherworld beyond the sea” was simply a rationalization of the older “Otherworld beneath the water” (82–83).

Carney would have it that Bran’s objective in both *EB* and *IB* was to reach a company of Otherworld women, though his motivation was different in each case – treasure and immortality, respectively (83). While noting that “Otherworld women are fully sexual beings and often fall deeply in love with human men; indeed, the attraction is mutual,” he specifically stated that in *EB* (in other words, in the hypothetical narrative, which can be conjectured to lie behind *IDB*) there was no evidence of sexual motivation (84). However, he then posited that the Otherworld women of Christian Irish literature (which, in his view, definitely included *IB*) were either above or opposed

to sex – unlike, presumably, their pagan forebears. As evidence he cited Manannán’s recognition that sin stemmed from Adam, and his assertion that his people had not been touched by it. “Were it not for Adam’s sin,” said Carney, “the human species would propagate itself by a lustless and presumably unexciting device” (84). He continued in this vein, noting what he took to be examples of this attitude, such as Midir’s statement to Étaín that “conception there is without sin or guilt,” and a poem in a fourteenth-fifteenth-century manuscript that offered the idea of gazing as a means of procreation.<sup>4</sup> He also touched on the negative treatment of women and sex in an Otherworld setting in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* (ICMD [84]).

Carney closed his article with the provocative suggestion that *IB* was actually written in commemoration of Mongán, who, as noted above, appears to have lived in the early seventh century, not long before *IB* was written. He harmonized this with his claim that the tale is a Christian allegory by asserting that Bran was envisioned as only a general symbol of the seeker, and Mongán as the reality (90).

That same year, David Dumville published an article entitled “*Echtrae* and *Immram*: Some Problems of Definition.” As the title suggests, his aim was to draw a clearer line of distinction between the tale types than had previously been attempted. He began by giving a literal translation of the words. An *echtrae* – or outing – he argued, involved a human excursion into supernatural territory and was therefore pagan in essence (73). The *immrama* – or rowings about – on the other hand, were frame tales in which a number of disparate incidents might be brought together. His claim was that these incidents, as opposed to the *echtrae*, used episodes and motifs that could only be derived from ultimately classical sources via ecclesiastical learning (75–76). He said that the evidence for an ecclesiastical origin for the *immrama* is overwhelming, and postulated that they may have arisen from a combination of knowledge of the existence of numerous islets around the Irish and Scottish coasts, and the popularity of clerical sea pilgrimages (77). There was no lack of evidence for the *echtrae* as a genre at a very early date, he said, while most extant *immrama* are from the Middle Irish period. He did not deny that elements of the *immrama* as a story-type were developing by the end of the seventh century, but pointed out that there was no evidence for pagan or pre-Christian *immram* literature – though possibly these tales borrowed somewhat from the *echtrae* (89).

Dumville identified Mag Mell – which means something like ‘Plain of Sports’ – as the most frequently used designation of the Irish Otherworld. He

4 See also Ó Cuiv 93–94.

pointed out that neither this nor a Latin equivalent was found in the extant *immrama* or in the Brendan literature (79). The fact that it represented the Irish pagan Otherworld could, according to him, be seen from its context in *EC*, *IB*, *Serglige Con Culainn* (*SCC*), and other stories (80).

Here, Dumville turned to consider *IB* itself. He claimed it was “structurally in a very poor condition,” citing several factors (84). First among these was the lack of identification between the summoning woman and the one who greeted Bran on his arrival at Tír inna mBan, though in Dumville’s mind they must be the same woman. The lack of an explanation for the visit to *Inis Subai* concerned him as well, as there was no surplus crew member to be gotten rid of as in later *immrama*. He also cited the failure of Bran to return to *Inis Subai* on his way back to Ireland as directed by the leader of the women. Finally, he found the return to Ireland to be carefully manufactured as a means of explaining the author’s own knowledge of the story (84). He concluded by saying it was “impossible to avoid the conclusion that before the present tale was created there existed a mythological story ... of which the extant tale is a confused and rewritten remnant, interpolated with the story of Mongán, and possibly with the motif of *Inis Subai*.” This mythological story, he insisted, must have been consistent with the above definition of an *echtrae*, and would have presented a motivation and action that were completely non-Christian (86).

Also in 1976, Mac Cana continued his series on *IB*, reacting to Carney’s position on Otherworld sexuality in “The Earliest Bran Material” with his article “The Sinless Otherworld of *Immram Brain*.” Here, he claimed that the author’s purpose was to create an “aesthetic rapport” between the pagan concept of the Otherworld and the Christian concept of Paradise. He stated that the evidence made it clear that those who formulated ecclesiastical attitudes at that time made a distinction between benign paganism and malignant paganism – regarding druidism as decidedly on the malignant side (95–96). On the benign side of this line lies the Otherworld, which Mac Cana regarded as a “naive prolepsis of the Christian Heaven.” In *IB*, he said, the Otherworld was harmonized with the biblical *terra repromissionis* through the general Christian bias of the composition, and the juxtaposition of Mongán with Christ. In *EC*, on the other hand, this benign conception of the Otherworld is used to condemn druidism and all it represented to early Irish Christianity (98).

Mac Cana then proceeded to discuss how the concept of sin is handled in the *IB* account of the Otherworld. He, like Carney, began with Manannán’s statement that the inhabitants of the Otherworld did not experience death or decay because they were untouched by the sin of Adam. He disagreed,

however, with Carney's equation of sinlessness with chastity. He stated that if this equation were valid, Carney would have to make an ad hoc differentiation between Manannán's isle and the women of Tír inna mBan, as the latter were not chaste (100). Mac Cana asserted that the people of the Otherworld in *IB* were sinless not because they did not have sex, but because they did so in the "same pristine innocence that had prevailed among men before they became conscious of evil" (101). He argued that the reference to men and women 'contending' with one another *fo doss* – literally 'under/in a bush' – put the matter beyond doubt, as it and similar phrases were commonly used throughout world literatures to express illicit and/or promiscuous love (101). He went on to explain that in societies comparable to early Ireland, sin was defined in relation to and as a violation of the prescribed moral order. He said:

Like other social restraints these are temporarily discarded at certain festive and ceremonial times of transition and renewal while their total and permanent absence is the mark of the inverted image of this mortal world which is the Otherworld. There is no reason to suppose that such a reversal of normal social prescription on sexual relations did not characterize the Irish concept of the Otherworld, in which case the seventh-century (?) poet of *Immram Brain* (or a predecessor) may have done little more than adapt to the Christian ethic and terminology one of the motifs of the traditional contrast between the two worlds (108).

He said that an Otherworld inhabited exclusively by women was an idea that "lends itself admirably to the theory of polygenesis," and that with the preoccupation shown in Irish myth with the land as goddess, for its own sake and for its fertility, and goddesses in whose province lay such important aspects of life as war and sovereignty, it was not surprising that such an Otherworld should appear in Irish literature (111). He claimed that these women and their land could not be disassociated from "those goddesses ... whose fairy dwellings constituted familiar landmarks in the Irish countryside" or "the corresponding goddess of British tradition ... and Arthurian romance" (111). He admitted that it was true that the "Irish Goddess," as he put it, was not always as "seductive" as in *EC* and *IB*, but said that where the narrative was focused on the Happy Otherworld, it was natural that it would be its "bounteous and sensual element that prevails" (112). He ended by saying that "almost everywhere ... where belief has existed in a golden age or in a millennium, the idea of material or economic communism has been closely coupled with that of sexual communism" (115).



In 1982, John Carey entered the discussion with his article “The Location of the Otherworld in Irish Tradition.” In this article, he attempted to determine whether the Irish indigenous tradition included an overseas Otherworld. He confined himself to *CDS*, realizing that anything later might be unduly influenced by the development of the essentially Christian *immram* genre (36). He pointed out that the only known Old Irish sources where an overseas Otherworld appeared were *EC* and *IB* – elsewhere it was placed in hills, beneath bodies of water, on islands in lakes (or off the coast), halls which appear during the night and disappear at dawn, and in underground or underwater passages (39). He cited Carney’s article “The Earliest Bran Material,” using it to show that the original *EB* involved an Otherworld in a well, which was changed to the Otherworld island of Tír inna mBan by the author of *IB*. He also noted that the overseas location of Connlae’s mistress’ Otherworld “appears almost as an afterthought”; she originally had said they lived in a *síd* (39). These, the only Old Irish sources, being questionable, he therefore concluded that there were no grounds for postulating an indigenous belief in an overseas Otherworld (43).

In his 1985 edition of *Immram Brain*, Séamus Mac Mathúna pointed out that Otherworld beings seem to have a dual nature: kind and helpful, or contrary and malicious. He enumerated among the positive aspects of the Otherworld realm and its people “prosperity in the form of ... beautiful women...” (248). He claimed that the fairy woman was ubiquitous in the hero’s Otherworld quest for immortality, and said that she could be seen as a parallel of the female spirit-protector of the shamans in other cultures (260). Such a female visitor would come when the hero/shaman was in an altered mental state, such as illness, a trance, or sleep (261).

Moving on to *IDB*, Mac Mathúna agreed with previous scholars that a well was exceptionally well-documented as an entrance to the Otherworld (271). He noted that in other (later) literature, a figure named Connlae was also connected with a well. In the story of Sinend, daughter of Lodan Lucharglan mac Lir, the protagonist went to Connlae’s well to gain wisdom – and died when the waters of the well overwhelmed her. Mac Mathúna felt this might provide a link, albeit admittedly a tenuous one, between *EC* and *IB* – the presence of a secret well of inspiration under the sea, the inundation theme, and the presence of Lotan mac Lir (Bran’s paternal grandfather according to some Middle Irish sources) are all suggestive (273).

John Carey picked up the *EC* thread again with his article “*Echtrae Conlai: A Crux Revisited*” in 1987. He argued that if *con-ricc* and *long* were taken in their secondary senses of ‘cohabit’ and ‘bed,’ respectively, the quatrain in question gained the sense that it formerly lacked. He noted that the

*Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL)* had a citation for a similar situation in a different story (9). He conceded that this seemed to conflict with the most popular interpretation of the previous line, but if the “wave of your longing” translation of said line were upheld over the alternative “longing to go away from them to the sea” the sense remained (10). He contended that this translation “brings us closer to the authentic spirit of the narrative: an opposition between the speeches of the mortal characters, tormented by impotence and uncertainty, and the immortal woman’s imperious self-confidence” (11).

Kim McCone first registered his opinion on the topic in 1990 with the publication of his book, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. He firmly stated his agreement with Carney’s identification of both *EC* and *IB* as “thoroughly Christian allegories,” and regarded the suggestion that the apple the Otherworld woman gave to Connlae was from the Tree of Life as “brilliant.” He disagreed with Mac Cana’s assertion that the image of the Otherworld in these tales was essentially a traditional one, and discounted his identification of the woman as a sovereignty goddess or as a representative of Mac Cana’s “benign paganism” (80). McCone himself compared the authorial intent behind *EC* and its Otherworld woman to Gregory the Great’s explication of the Song of Songs and Isidore of Seville’s treatment of Esther in the Old Testament. He insisted that “[g]iven the Christian flavor of her message and prophecy, it can hardly be doubted that the otherworld woman in *Echtrae Chonlai* symbolizes the Church in accordance with an allegoristic principle undoubtedly familiar to early Irish monastic men of letters” (81–82). He claimed that *EC* was meant as an inversion of the Fall in Genesis (82). However, he then followed these arguments with the statement that “[i]t thus transpires that mythological, historicising, allegoristic and typological factors could be combined freely and often inextricably together in varying proportions by early Christian Irish literati to modify pre-existing narratives and generate new ones” (82). Later in the book, he allowed for the probability that the representations of the sovereignty goddess throughout medieval Irish literature were the descendants, as it were, of pre-Christian deities though not equivalent to them (148). In Christian cosmology, he said, they had to be re-cast in diabolical or angelic terms (149).

Mac Mathúna re-entered the discussion with his 1994 article “The Structure and Transmission of Early Irish Voyage Literature.” Along with several other *immrama*, Mac Mathúna revisited his assessment of *IB*, examining it in relation to what he called the concept of *samail* or ‘resemblance.’ He took the first Otherworld woman’s use of the word with respect to the silver branch

found by Bran as a starting point, and stated that this justified Carney's reading of the entire piece as a metaphor. He then went on to give examples of several pairs that could be thus derived, including: the Otherworld woman and paganism; the Otherworld woman and Eve; the Otherworld woman and Christianity; the Otherworld apple-branch and the Otherworld; Bran and paganism; Bran and Adam; Mongán and the Otherworld; Mongán and Jesus; Manannán and the Otherworld; and Manannán and God. He agreed with Carney on the essentially Christian nature of the text, but also stated that "[t]he centrality of sexuality in this work is highlighted by the paradox of apparently sanctioning lust and fornication, while simultaneously prohibiting sloth ... drunkenness ... gluttony ... avarice ... pride ... and deceit" (344).

In 1995, Carey returned to the argument with his article "On The Interrelationships Of Some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* Texts." Speaking on the relationship of *EC* with *IB*, Carey expressed his belief that *EC* influenced the writing of *IB*. He pointed out thematic similarities between the two, including the emphasis on the woman's clothing and visibility, the longing/homesickness experienced by Connlae and Nechtan, and the descriptions, which included reaching the Otherworld before sunset (84–85). Then he said:

*Immram Brain* is a relatively long text, containing diverse elements almost certainly drawn from a variety of sources; *Echtrae Chonlai* is very brief, and relatively uncomplicated. It is easy enough to imagine the latter as one of the texts on which the former drew; but it is more far-fetched to suppose that the author of *Echtrae Chonlai* made such eclectic use of *Immram Brain*, extracting isolated ideas from several sections of the tale (85).

In addition, he argued that since *IB*'s sources include *ICC* and *IDB*, if *EC* were based on *IB* one would expect some of the northern material from those stories to be present in *EC*, but this is not the case. "[W]hat *Immram Brain* shares with *Echtrae Chonlai* and what it shares with the colloquies and Mongán tales have no apparent overlap" (85). He also pointed out that if his argument that the overseas Otherworld in *EC* was secondary was correct, for *EC* to have been influenced by *IB* would require "an apparently unmotivated elimination of all reference to an overseas Otherworld ... followed by this theme's reinsertion at a later stage of the tale's transmission" (86). Finally, he argued that the author of *IB* had borrowed elements from *EC* that would allow him to make sense of cryptic legends of Mongán and Lough Foyle (86).

During the same year, Carey also published the article "The Rhetoric of *Echtrae Chonlai*." He began by comparing, as Mac Cana had done, the

opening scene of *EC* with a similar scene in *Pwyll*. In each, a prince on the summit of a hill associated with sovereignty saw a mysterious woman in strange clothes. The prince then asked the woman from whence she came, and she told him she loved him and had come seeking him as her mate. Carey stated that this scenario could be amply supplemented by other sources, which made him certain that the beginning of *EC* preserved elements of an indigenous narrative theme (42–44).

He noted that the woman's descriptions of the Otherworld were couched almost entirely in terms of contrasts and negatives, and echoed language that was used elsewhere in early Irish literature for Heaven and Paradise (44). He also pointed out that the description – life without death and feasts without toil – could also be applied to the condition of humanity before the Fall, per Genesis 3:19. This same association was made by the Otherworld woman in linking death with sin. Carey asserted that the woman and her homeland could therefore be seen as having escaped the Fall (45).

Carey pointed out that when the druid Corann chanted against the woman he rendered her imperceptible; and although Connlae was only just being made aware of the existence of the Otherworld via her contact with him, she told him that the inhabitants of the Otherworld “see him every day.” He asserted that this most likely meant that the Otherworld co-existed side by side with the mortal world, rather than being separated by physical distance, and its people moved among mortals unseen (54, 56).

Carey disagreed with Oskamp's theory that the woman's final words constitute a spell binding Connlae to follow her. He found no clear support for this in the text, and argued that such a reading would rob the text of much of its psychological force. He also pointed out that *rosc* is more generally associated with magic in Irish literature than is syllabic poetry (59).

In addition, Carey also disagreed with McCone's theories that the woman was merely a cipher for the Church, and that the story as a whole was a deliberate inversion of the Fall in Genesis (64). He noted that the woman's prophecy to Conn was the first explicit reference to Christianity in the text, and that this dramatically shifted the overall frame of reference. The woman now appeared as a prophetess of the new religion, in opposition to the druids (63). He said it was simpler to see the woman as a “pre-Christian harbinger of Christian revelation, unfallen and divinely inspired” (65). Carey further disagreed with McCone's argument that the tale could be read in the same manner in which Gregory the Great read the Song of Solomon. The latter, he said, was based largely on feminine descriptions of beauty, and the reader was meant to identify with the bride, not her lover. He also found it difficult to accept the concept that early Irish exegetes would be

comfortable applying the same hermeneutic methods to their own pagan imagery and tradition as to the Christian scriptures (64).<sup>5</sup>

In 2000, McCone returned with his critical edition of *Echtrae Chonnlai*. In his Section IV, “Some questions of content and interpretation,” he disagreed with Mac Cana and Carey’s comparison of *EC* with *Pwyll*. Though he acknowledged the similarity of her declaration of love with others in medieval Irish literature, he said that “in the absence of crucial specifics, this need no more be understood carnally than, say *Aipgitir Chrabuid’s* injunction ... love God (and) everyone will love you” (55). While he agreed that there were enough episodes in medieval Irish narrative literature to suggest that a strange and beautiful woman appearing to a king’s son in an early Irish tale would raise expectations of a sovereignty goddess, he contended that the crucial point was that this woman did just the opposite, offering immortality in the Otherworld rather than kingship in Connlae’s own (55). He rejected Carey’s view that the woman’s statement that she lived in a great *síd* was a deliberate pun meant to invoke both the word’s primary meaning of a fairy-mound as well as its secondary meaning of peace. Through comparisons with descriptions of Conaire’s reign, he concluded that, in this context, it must only be understood as meaning the latter. He stated that the pre-Christian elements used here were employed solely in order to subject them to an *interpretatio Christiana* (56–57). Further on, McCone criticized Mac Cana’s argument that sinlessness did not equal chastity, pointing out that the word sin in both *EC* and *IB* is expressed either as *immormus* or as the Latin loanword *peccad*, leading him to conclude that it was a uniquely Christian concept and therefore analogous to sex (64). He addressed the subject again in regard to Carey’s argument in “A Crux Revisited” above. He claimed that the third singular masculine or neuter infix in *cot-rísmis* rendered Carey’s proposed translation impossible, and any sexuality in the text accordingly “evaporated” (92).

In addition, McCone rejected Dumville and Mac Mathúna’s arguments that an “appreciable” time passed between the writing of *IDB* and *ICC* and the writing of *IB*. Instead, he favoured Carney and Carey: “*Immram Brain* deviates from [*IDB*] by virtue of being the deliberate literary composition of someone prepared to remould a traditional account drastically in order to get the desired message across” (76).

He then returned to the theme of the sovereignty goddess. He argued that *EC* was an inversion of the traditional sovereignty narrative. Instead of ending in mating, the couple’s first encounter was prematurely terminated;

5 See also Carey, “Review” 450–452.

instead of the natural satisfaction of hunger and thirst with a meal followed by a drink given by the goddess, there was the elimination of normal hunger and thirst via the apple. Usually, the woman experiences love in absence for a man she has not seen – here, Connlae experienced love (or rather, a kind of homesickness) in the absence of a woman he had seen (81–83). He suggested that possibly the concentration on Connlae's beauty rather than the woman's may be another feature of this inversion (102).

McCone further disputed Carey's suggestion that the mortal world and the Otherworld were not separated by physical distance. The woman's people could see Connlae every day, he said, because he was by the sea at the time (84).

McCone also re-examined his arguments regarding the woman as an allegorical symbol of the Church. He compared the structure of *EC* to that of Muirchú's *Vita Patricii*, paralleling the woman with Patrick and “thus placing her and the saint in the same functional slot” (87 & 100). He argued that this virtually forced the conclusion that she must be identified with Saint Patrick and the Church (100). He claimed that Carey's preference for seeing her as a typological harbinger, rather than as an allegorical symbol for the Church, was without merit, as there was no real difference between the two. In addition, he argued that typology and allegory were complementary exegetical devices; it was possible to interpret the woman as exemplifying both simultaneously.

He also rebutted several of Carey's criticisms of his previous interpretations of the woman. He claimed that Carey gave no reasons for his position that *EC* should not be regarded as an inversion of the Fall in Genesis. He said that the consequences of the gift of the apple were diametrically opposed, and the only question was whether the author intended this to be the case, or whether it was coincidence. “Considerations of economy clearly favour authorial intent,” according to McCone (100). He further claimed that Carey's criticism of his argument comparing *EC* to the *Song of Songs* (stating that, in the latter, the reader was meant to identify with the bride) failed to address McCone's actual argument, which he said was the syncretism between pre-Christian sovereignty goddess concepts and those in the Bible representing king's wives, such as Esther, as the Church. Finally, he dismissed Carey's argument regarding hermeneutic methods being applied to pagan source material without any firm explanation (106).

It has been over a century since Meyer and Nutt's edition of *IB*, and scholarship regarding these two tales has, accordingly, gone in a variety of directions and undergone many changes during that time. There are, of course, a wide variety of issues presented here – not all of which are directly

relevant to the present inquiry. Those that I will address are the location of the Otherworld (assessed in the preceding chapter); descriptions of the Otherworld by Otherworld personages, including how these descriptions affect views of the nature of sinlessness in the Otherworld, and nativist (represented by those who tend to emphasize the contribution of pre-Christian Irish oral material to the Irish written corpus) vs. anti-nativist (represented by those who tend to emphasize the contribution of foreign Christian and Classical material to the Irish written corpus) arguments regarding the representation of the Otherworld woman as metaphor; whether Bran's return to Ireland was manufactured; and the possibility of an implied presence of shamanism in *IB* and related texts.

Carney, Mac Cana, Carey, and McCone have various opinions on how to interpret the Otherworld figures' descriptions of their world, to some extent based on their positions in the nativist/anti-nativist debate. I will therefore discuss these descriptions, the above scholars' views of them, and my own, focusing not only on what they say and how they say it, but on what they do not say as well.

It seems to me that the nativist/anti-nativist argument has come a long way over the years, and that a middle ground, recognizing both the Christian purpose of the tales and pre-Christian influences on them, is possible. That said, some of the specific arguments regarding the Otherworld woman as a metaphor for the Church/Christianity, Eve or paganism, present textual and interpretive problems that should be addressed. McCone attempts to stretch biblical exegesis beyond its logical limits, while it is not always clear what conclusions are to be drawn from the multiplicity of possibilities afforded by Mac Mathúna's model. I will elaborate on these concepts later in this chapter.

As noted above, Carney sparked the discussion on Otherworld sexuality in his 1976 article "The Earliest Bran Material," stating that Otherworld women in early Irish Christian literature were above or opposed to sex. Mac Cana responded later that year with "The Sinless Otherworld of *Immram Brain*," arguing that the claim of sinlessness in the Otherworld did not necessarily mean that its inhabitants were celibate. John Carey brought the Otherworld sexuality debate to *EC* with "A Crux Revisited," but demurred after his arguments were rejected by McCone in his 2000 edition of *EC* (Carey, "Crux" 9–11). I believe, however, that Carney and McCone are too dogmatic in their objections to the possibility of sex in the Otherworld, and that Carey's arguments in regard to *EC* are still viable if subjected to a little tweaking. This, too, will be dealt with more fully below.

Dumville, while discussing *IB*'s "structurally ... poor condition," states that he finds Bran's return to Ireland, and subsequent relating of his tale to the

people he finds there, to be manufactured. In reality, of course, many tales have a similar return and recounting of the hero's adventures. What makes *IB* so interesting in this respect is that when Bran returns, the inhabitants of his homeland already have a story about him. If Carney is correct in his supposition of a pre-existing *echtrae EB*, then *IB* may be the author's attempt to 'set the story straight' in a Christian framework rather than a pagan one.

Both Carney and Mac Mathúna mention the possibility of a shamanic interpretation in *IB* or one of the tales related to it. Mac Mathúna, in his edition of *IB*, sees the woman in the role of a shamanic spirit-protector. Previous to that, Carney interpreted the druid's statement in *IDB*, that his knowledge "reaches the high clouds," as a shamanic experience. A more recent article by Grigory Bondarenko expands on this interpretation and makes some interesting observations, which I believe merit further exploration. This, accordingly, will be discussed in its own section below.

It is inevitable in any inquiry that there are issues that will go unaddressed, even when this inquiry has been carried on by several scholars and over such a long period. Nor will I be able to address all of the possible variables here.

### Uncommonly Strange: The Uses of *Ingnad*

The term *ingnad* is used in *IB* to describe both the Otherworld womens' clothing and the Otherworld itself (Quin s.v. *ingnad*). According to the *DIL*, the word is a combination of the negative prefix *in-* with the adjective *gnáth* (Quin s.v. *gnáth*).<sup>6</sup> Both terms have a range of meanings, though these do not necessarily exactly mirror each other. *Gnáth*'s basic definition is 'usual,' 'familiar,' or 'well-known'; however, when used in conjunction with the preposition *co*, *do*, and *i* it can also mean 'usually' or 'always.' *Ingnad* is associated with the basic definition, and can therefore have meanings ranging from simply 'unfamiliar' or 'strange' to 'wonderful' or 'marvellous.'

In some cases, it is quite simple to determine which meaning is appropriate, but many are more ambiguous. First, I will look at examples in which the meaning is evident from the context or textual clues, then I will examine those that are less clear. I will treat separately those cases where the meaning is definitely unfamiliar/unknown/unusual/uncommon or a stranger, those where the meaning is wonderful/marvellous or a wonder/a marvel, strange, and those where it could have a variety of connotations.

6 Compare Thurneysen 544 § 872(d).



In *Compert Con Culainn* (CCC), for example, there is a mysterious house that contains “every good ... both ... common and uncommon, and familiar and unfamiliar.” (*gach maith ... etir ... cuimtig ocus eccuimdig, etir gnath ocus ingnath.*) The phrase *gnath ocus ingnath* (familiar and unfamiliar) is here preceded by the analogous phrase *cuimtig ocus eccuimdig* (common and uncommon [Windisch 137]), giving us a point of reference from which to translate *ingnath*.<sup>7</sup> A section of the *Senchus Mór* regarding the death of *séts* (cattle) given as fosterage fee, states that: “Whatever death, usual or unusual, has carried them off after the proper period ... [*séts*] of the same nature and value shall be given by the foster father to the father” (*Cid be aighaig, gnath no ingnath, beirus iat iar re niubaile ... seoit a comaicinta on aite don athair* [Hancock 170]). While there are no definite textual clues here, the usage seems comparable to that in CCC. An untitled fragment of poetry contains the following: “it was not unusual/in the house of Crundmál ... /salt on bread without butter” (*n̄rb ingnad/i tig Chrundmāil ... /salann for arān cen imm* [Meyer, *Bruchstücke* 33 § 75]).<sup>8</sup> When Medb and Aillil are comparing their riches in the pillow talk portion of the Book of Leinster version of *Táin Bó Cualnge*, Medb says, “*is me ra chunnig in coibchi n-ingnaid na ra chunnig ben riam remom,*” which Cecile O’Rahilly translates as “I demanded a strange bride-gift such as no woman before me had asked of a man.” However, it is evident from the second part of Medb’s statement – that “no woman before [her] had asked [it] of a man” – that *ingnad* here again means ‘unusual’ (C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cualnge from the Book of Leinster* 1 & 137). By extension, *ingnad* could also be taken to mean ‘foreign’ – indeed, this is one possible interpretation of the description of the Otherworld woman as *i n-étuch ingnuth* (in strange clothing [Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 46]).<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, *ingnad* can also mean ‘wonderful’ or ‘marvellous.’ In the late Middle Irish *Passion of the Image of Christ*, it is stated: *is and da-ronad in gnim n- ingnad-sa, uair ni dernad remi na degaid mirbuil bud mo na bud ingantu inas.* (“[T]hen was done this wonderful deed, than which before nor since was never miracle greater or more wonderful.”) ‘Wonderful’ is easily the most effective translation here, as it refers to a miracle (Atkinson 42 & 278). Likewise, the Milan glosses describe witnesses of the darkening of the sky at Christ’s crucifixion as saying: “we marvel at what we see” (*is ingnad linn a n- adciam* [Stokes & Strachan 18.]). A fragmentary poem lamenting the death of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in 847 lauds him as wonderful (*badid*

7 My translation.

8 My translation.

9 My translation.

*n-ingnathar*) in a phrase that seems to be a variation on the phrase *badid n-amraithir*, which essentially means the same, but is better attested (Meyer, *Bruchstücke* 46 § 102). *Ingnathar* is used here to rhyme with *-gignethar* in the following line. In the poem beginning *A Rí ríchid, réidig dam*, by Gilla in Choimded ua Cormaic, *ingnad* is used to describe a cowl found by Finn mac Cumail: *Atbert Ossín: In sét séim/is ingantu fūair Find féin/is é cen dærmūich daille/cochlān cæmdlūith Crothrainne/Ór a indech, airget foé,/mín re cnes a chocoé,/ ba cú, ba duine, ba dam/ra impúd, ra aitherrach*. “Ossín said: “The most marvellous dainty jewel which Finn himself found, that is, without vaporous ignorance, the fair close-woven hood of Crothrainne./ Gold is its woof, silver underneath it, soft to the skin is its lining; you will be hound, man, or deer as you turn it, as you change it” (Meyer, *Fianaigeacht* 50 §§ 25–27). Here, the content from the following line gives us our clue: not only is the hood made of unusually rich materials, but it grants magical powers as well. Marvellous indeed!

Later, in *The Passion of the Image of Christ* mentioned above, *ingnad* is used again in a substantive rather than descriptive sense. As the text describes how evil men are desecrating the image of Christ, it also relates the miracles that happen in conjunction therewith. When they pierce the side of Christ in the image, it is said that: *do-rala ingnad mor mirbolldai and* (there befell a marvellous wonder [Atkinson 45 & 282]). Here, *ingnad* is a wonder – it is the miracle itself. But not all substantive uses refer to something as obvious as a miracle. One Middle Irish text listing natural and other anomalies has the title *Inganta Eirend* (The Wonders of Ireland [Meyer 23 § 1]).<sup>10</sup> The items in this list, while referring to things neither unusual nor miraculous in the usual sense of the word, seem to point to nature or aspects thereof as a sort of wonder.

Then, there is the category of uses where ‘unusual’ or ‘uncommon,’ while applicable, for one reason or another do not seem sufficient. In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, when Conaire is seeking shelter for the night he tells his companions of his kindness to a hosteller named Da Derga. In consequence, he says, “[i]t is strange if he is surly to me tonight when reaching his abode” (*is ingnad mad brónach frimsa innocht oc riachtain a trebe chuici* [Stokes, “Destruction” 35].) It cannot mean ‘unusual’ here as there is nothing usual to contrast with it. Likewise, we can hardly believe that Conaire would think it wondrous that this man to whom he was so kind would turn him away in his time of need. Rather, it would be strange, unexpected, or surprising – rather than simply unusual. In *Aided Derbforgaill*, after a competition between women,

<sup>10</sup> My translation.

which Derbforgaill wins, the other women mutilate her out of jealousy. She retreats to her house to hide. When Cú Chulainn and Lugaid approach the house, Cú Chulainn says: “*Is ingnad lem, a Lugaid ... snechta for taig Derb F[h]orgaill*”. (“[It seems] strange to me, O Lugaid. ... [that there is] snow on Derbforgaill’s house” [Ingridsdotter 82–83].) Cú Chulainn finds the presence of snow on her house ominous, because if her fire was lit as it should be, the snow would have melted off. This apprehension is confirmed in Lugaid’s response: “*Is i n-écaib atá-si didiu*” (“She is dying then” [Ingridsdotter 82–83]). More pertinent for our purposes, this seems to be the way in which the word is used in *EC* as well. The text says: *Ba hingnad la Conn nícon:taibred Connle taitheasc do neoch acht tised in ben* (Conn thought it strange [that] Connlae would not give answer to anyone except when the woman should come [McCone, *Echtrae* 122, 182–183]). While the circumstance is certainly unusual, one can almost feel Conn’s apprehension at the fact that his son, who is to be king after him, will respond to no one unless this woman who wishes to take Connlae away from him is present.

But there are also instances in which the best translation for *ingnad* is not so clear-cut; not surprisingly, many of these have to do with the Otherworld. As we have seen, the Otherworld is almost by definition very different from the mortal world, so any translation of *ingnad* in relation to it might be applicable: unfamiliar; unknown; unusual; uncommon; wonderful; marvellous; strange. And often in these circumstances there are no further textual clues to assist in translating it appropriately, though when *ingnad* and *gnáth* appear together, it is likely that their meanings are the opposite of each other. If one should be translated ‘familiar,’ you would expect the other to mean ‘unfamiliar,’ and so forth. In *SCC*, to be sure, when Lóeg describes the Otherworld to Cú Chulainn as “a place unfamiliar although it was familiar” (*bale ingnad cíar bo gnád* [Dillon, *Serglige* 477]), he does so at the same time that he is listing the marvels he has seen when led there by Lí Ban.<sup>11</sup> This might suggest, at least, that the meaning ‘unfamiliar’ is most applicable, but even then this is by no means certain; any of the other translations would hold up under scrutiny as well. In *ICC*, when Colum Cille asks the mysterious youth where he is from, the youth replies simply, *a tír ib ingantu, a tír ib gnath*. Meyer translates this as “from unknown lands, from known lands”; Carey translates it as “from lands of strange things, from lands of familiar things” (Meyer, “Colloquy” 316; Carey, “Lough Foyle” 61). But there is nothing to prevent it from being reasonably translated as “from lands of wondrous things, from lands of common things” as well. *IB* uses the word

11 My translation.

twice, within the space of a few lines. The first is reminiscent of its use in *ICC*; it refers to the woman as *in ben a tírib ingnad*. Meyer translates this as “the woman from unknown lands,” while Mac Mathúna translates it as “the woman from the lands of wonders” (Meyer, *Voyage* 2; Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 46). It could be equally well translated as “lands of strange [or foreign] things.” As in *ICC*, there is no further contextual evidence to suggest one over the other. The second time is just after the woman appears in Bran’s hall; the text calls her *in ben i n-étuch ingnuth*. “[A] woman in strange raiment,” says Meyer’s translation (Meyer, *Voyage* 4). Mac Mathúna’s: “the woman in unusual attire” (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 46). The argument is much the same, except that here we have a point for comparison: when Connlae first sees the woman in *EC*, she is described as being dressed *i n-étuch anetargnad* (“in unfamiliar clothing”), and *anetargnad* has a much narrower definition than *ingnad* (McCone, *Echtrae* 122 & 130). How, then, do we determine what the meaning is under these circumstances?

One approach might be to consider how *gnáth* is used in those texts where it is also present. The Otherworld woman in *IB* says of the silver branch found by Bran that *do-fet samail do gnáthaib*. Mac Mathúna translates this as “its like surpasses the known ones,” though ‘familiar ones’ would do as well. The use of *ingnad* (both adjectivally and substantively) with regard to the woman’s clothing and homeland might, in that case, be taken as meaning ‘unfamiliar,’ ‘unknown,’ or ‘foreign.’ In *ICC*, the case is less clear, as the use of *gnáth* occurs at the same time and in the same context as *ingnad*, so all of the possibilities listed above continue to be viable.

Another possible way of looking at these texts would be to consider that all connotations of *ingnad* are meant to be invited into the reader’s mind by the author. This is, after all, an open-ended word being used in a rather open-ended context. While *ingnad* was possibly the most common word used for its various meanings, it was by no means the only one. An author could easily have substituted a less common word to make his meaning more clear, if that were his intention. This is especially true for the reference to the woman’s clothing in *IB* if the author did indeed draw on *EC* and *ICC* as sources (Carey, “Interrelationships” 85–86), since *EC* uses *anetargnad* in the same context.

## Otherworld Descriptions

The descriptions that the Otherworld personages give of the realm to which they belong are an important part of both tales. These descriptions give

us our best insight into the character of the Otherworld – at least as it was imagined by the author(s) of these particular tales. They also enable us to examine a variety of issues, including to what extent Christian and native imagery are used, the nature of the sinlessness ascribed to the Otherworld, and how it is possible that sinful mortals are able to enter the Otherworld without marring its perfection.

In *EC*, the woman describes the Otherworld in largely (though certainly not entirely) negative terms. It seems likely to me, therefore, that in the mind of its author, the Otherworld was a place of such extreme wonder that it could only be described – or at least, could best be described – by listing the evils it lacked. The woman says there is no death, no sin, no transgression, no grief, no woe, and implies that there is no nagging as well (McCone, *Echtrae* 121, 132, 138, 141, 144). Even when she gives the Otherworld's characteristics in positive terms, this is frequently balanced with a negative: “everlasting feasts without exertion” and “harmony without strife” (121, 131–134).<sup>12</sup> She does give it a name – Mag Mell – which McCone translates as ‘Plain of Delight’ (121, 139–140). *IB* incorporates most of these elements, but goes on to give a great deal more concrete imagery as well (Mac Mathúna, *Imram* 34–35, 47–48 §§ 9–10). The Otherworld woman at the beginning speaks (among other things) of an island on four legs of white silver; an ancient tree in blossom with birds that call the hours in harmony; continuous sweet music; dragonstones and crystals and silver that drop from the sky and crystals that wash up on shore; riches and treasures of every colour; most palatable wine; chariots of gold, silver, and bronze; steeds of different colours, and women in colourful clothing (33–38, 46–51 §§ 3–30). She also uses negatives and contrasts: she states that there is no wailing or treachery, no rough or harsh voices, but only sweet music; no sorrow, grief, death, sickness, or wounds (34–35, 47–48 §§ 9–10). She further describes it as a land of laughter, to which come safeness, soundness, permanency, and pleasure (36 & 49 § 21). Manannán describes the sea surrounding Bran's ship as a plain of red-topped flowers from which honey flows, containing calves, lambs, and steeds, a numerous host, streams of silver, steps of gold, and forests of fruit trees with golden leaves (39–43, 52–56 §§ 33–60). These are all around Bran and his comrades, but unseen by them. In addition, he describes the people of this land as playing “a gentle game/... men and gentle women under a bush/without sin, without transgression” (*Clu(i)ch n-aímin n- inmeldag/... fir is mná míne fo doss/cen peccad cen immarboss* [40 & 53 § 41]).

12 See also Patch, *Other World* 12–13, 26–59.

It has previously been noted that the language of Connlae's mistress is "that of the ecclesiastical culture of homily and exegesis" (Carey, "Rhetoric" 47). Given that we believe that *IB* was based to some extent upon *EC*, it is not surprising that we should find these descriptors present there, as well (Carey, "Interrelationships" 83–86). Similarly, other portions of *IB*'s descriptions are due to *ICC*'s influence, but do not seem to share the same ecclesiastical nature as those that derive from *EC* (78–79). Carney suggests that the depiction of the Otherworld in *IB* is really the medieval conception of what life would have been had the Fall never occurred (Carney, *Studies* 286). For comparison, he adduces Adomnán's *Vision of Paradise* – but this vision is of Heaven itself, not of Eden, nor does it match any description of Eden with which I am familiar. From where, then, do such descriptions come?

Interpreters of Celtic Otherworld accounts have claimed that descriptions of the Otherworld in the bulk of non-Christian religions focus primarily on fulfilling men's earthly desires (Oskamp, *Echtra* 214). This might include (but certainly need not be limited to) abundant food, beautiful women, and untold riches of every description (Oskamp, *Echtra* 214; Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 269). We can set aside the first – abundant food – as we have already seen that feasts are included in the Christian descriptions of paradise as well. Indeed, Jesus himself states that there will be feasts in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:29). This idea could therefore stem from either a Christian or native source. The other features, however, do not lend themselves so easily to such an explanation. I have already quoted Mac Cana's observation that "an Otherworld peopled by beautiful women is one which lends itself admirably to the theory of polygenesis," which is admirably shown by his own comparison to the *apsarases* of Indra's paradise, Carney's comparison to the 'Greek material,' and the heavenly paradise of Islam among others (Mac Cana, "Sinless Otherworld" 111–112; Carney, *Studies* 287 fn. 1; Qurān Sūrah 38:52, 56:23–25). The *apsarases* were originally water nymphs, born from the churning of the ocean. Later, they were considered to be celestial maidens, and lived in Indra's paradise of Amaravati. They were voluptuous and beautiful, and were the object of love affairs among the Gandharvas; in some sources, the Gandharvas took them as wives. *Apsarases* were sometimes sent to tempt ascetics who had grown too powerful, to prevent them from challenging the gods. Five hundred *apsarases* were said to meet the soul after death (Coulter 63; O'Flaherty 77–78). In the case of Carney's 'Greek material,' it is difficult to be sure exactly what he was referring to as there are several groups of Otherworldly women in Greek myth. There are several groups of nymphs, such as the handmaidens of Artemis and the handmaidens of Themis, as well as more specialized groups, such as

the Muses (Callimachus *Hymn 3 to Artemis* 12ff, 40ff; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 48, 302ff; Apollodorus 2.38–39, 46, 114; Hesiod, *Theogony* 1ff). Probably the closest comparison for our purposes, however, are the Hesperides, who lived in the far west, guarding the golden apples presented to Hera by Gaia on her wedding day (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 742ff; Apollodorus, 2.5.11; Athenaeus, 83c). In addition, they were said to be the heralds of the bridal bed (Nonnus 13.333ff, 38.135ff; Quintus Smyrnaeus 4.128–144). The *houris* of Islam, on the other hand, were a heavenly reward to pious men (Qur’ān Sūrah 44:54). They are beautiful, with “swelling breasts,” modest and virginal (Qur’ān Sūrah 78:33, 56:56). In fact, some later ḥadīths – that is, traditions relating to the Qur’ān – state that the *houris*’s virginity is perpetually renewed (Lewis 1979, 581). As can be seen from these examples, the women often fill a sensual role – either in and of themselves, or in blessing the coupling of others – which is likely why they are so notably absent from Christian lore, the possibility of male-female relations in the hereafter having been dismissed by Jesus.<sup>13</sup> So, both *EC* and *IB* refer to an Otherworld that is inhabited by women alone, an idea evidently native in origin but used to convey a Christian message (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 38 & 51 § 30; McCone, *Echtrae* 123 & 194 § 14).

This brings us to the last of the three factors I mentioned above: untold riches of every description. The aforementioned steps of gold are immediately reminiscent of the “gold as pure as glass” from which the New Jerusalem is built in the Book of Revelation (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 40 & 53 § 40; Rev. 21:18). In *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, the earth in the Land of Promise is itself composed of precious stones (Selmer 78–80). Still, one must note that there is no mention in either text of steps, let alone of steps of precious stone or metal – so reasonable doubt is in order. Christ does tell his followers to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:20–21). However, there is no imagery as specific as we find in *IB*; there does not seem to be anything in Christian literature comparable to having precious stones and metals falling from the sky or being washed ashore by the waves, or to streams of silver. While streams of silver could be taken as metaphor, the image’s use in conjunction with steps of gold invites a more literal interpretation. So, while these details may be meant to represent the spiritual treasures of which Christ speaks, the images themselves would seem to spring from a

13 “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:30.

native source – the renowned treasures of the Otherworld (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 269).

Having established that the Otherworld in these two tales is indeed populated by women, and given Manannán's description of their 'games,' the 'sinlessness' of the sexual aspect of these tales must be accounted for. In relation to *IB*, Carney seems to argue both for and against Otherworld sexuality. As I have outlined above, Carney in "The Earliest Bran Material" first says that (presumably pre-Christian) Otherworld women are "fully sexual beings and often fall deeply in love with human men; indeed, the attraction is mutual" (Carney, "Earliest Bran Material" 84). He also says that Otherworld women in Christian literature were above or opposed to sex (84–85). Two issues occur to me here. First, as Mac Mathúna points out, there is the seeming paradox of the first Otherworld woman in *IB* encouraging Bran to seek *Tír inna mBan*, and therefore apparently sanctioning lust, while discouraging other sins (Mac Mathúna, "Structure" 341). This is later followed by Manannán's shameless avowal of his imminent lustful lying (*lúthlige*) with Mongán's mother (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 42 & 55 § 51). This makes the most sense if sex is present in the Otherworld, but not sinful. Second, the further argument Carney gives for sexlessness – i.e., that there was a concept of gazing as a means of procreation – come from much later sources and is not necessarily pertinent to the discussion of eighth-century tales (Carney, "Earliest Bran Material" 85).

It seems to me that Mac Cana's assessment – that sinlessness in Paradise or a paradisaical Otherworld does not necessarily equate to celibacy – is the correct one. Mac Cana, as described above, asserts that rather than refusing to engage in sex, the inhabitants of the otherworld were simply not conscious of any connotation of sin associated with it (Mac Cana, "Sinless Otherworld" 101). Indeed, Karin Olsen says that "[s]inlessness in the Otherworld cannot be equated with chastity; instead, *Immram Brain* advocates sexual pleasure without sin" (60; see also Byrne, 43–44). McCone's assertion that the use of *peccad* and *immormus* by the authors of both *EC* and *IB* establishes incontrovertibly that the Otherworld was completely without sex does not stand up to scrutiny. While both words are laden with Christian connotations, neither is restricted to a sexual meaning. And though the *DIL* entry for *immormus* does specify, as McCone points out, that it is strongly associated with the Fall, none of the entries expressly refers to sexual sin – disregarding, of course, McCone's debatable interpretation of its use in *IB* (McCone, *Echtrae* 102).<sup>14</sup>

14 McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlaí* 102.



But the sin of the Fall itself was not sex, but disobedience. The medieval Irish understood this, as can be seen from the reference in the Middle Irish *Passion of Andrew* to “the sin of the tree of transgression” (*peccad craind an imarbois*): here, both *peccad* and *immarmus* are directly associated with the eating of the forbidden fruit, not with the subsequent sexual relations of Adam and Eve (Atkinson ln. 2448). Perhaps the most influential interpretation of the relationship between sex and original sin was that of Augustine, who held that the connection between the former and the latter was one of transmission, not origination. That is to say, sex itself was not inherently sinful, but rather it was the mechanism by which original sin was transmitted from sinful parents to their offspring. Therefore, once Adam and Eve had sinned, their sin was transferred to their children via the seminal fluid (Pagels 127–150). And even Augustine appears to have believed that in Eden life was “as ... it ought to be, a condition in which women experience painless childbearing and enjoy marriage without oppression or coercion” and that “the blight of male domination has fallen upon the whole structure of sexual relationships” (Pagels 133).<sup>15</sup>

To summarize, sex only transmits original sin, and can only do so if sin is present in the parent. Therefore there is the real possibility of sinless sex on the part of Adam and Eve – and conception on the part of the latter – before the Fall; by potential children of the first parents who might have escaped the consequences of their sin, simply by the expedient of having been born before it happened; and by their descendants. It is true that orthodox Christian doctrine held – and still holds – that the Fall occurred shortly after the creation of Eve, and the first sexual encounter of the two after that. As Aquinas lucidly put it:

...as Augustine says in *De Genesi ad litteram IX*, that the first parents did not have intercourse in Paradise, because once the woman had been formed they were cast out of Paradise after (only) a little time on account of sin; or because they were waiting for divine authority, from which they had received the universal command, to determine the time of their coming together.

*sicut Augustinus dicit IX super Gen. ad Litt., ideo primi parentes in Paradiso non coierunt, quia, formata muliere, post modicum propter peccatum de Paradiso eieci sunt, vel quia expectabatur divina auctoritas*

15 Augustine found support for his position in Gen. 1:28 & Gen. 3:16.

*ad determinatum tempus commixtionis, a qua acceperunt universale mandatum.* (Aquinas, *Summa theologica* I q. 98 a. 2)<sup>16</sup>

Be that as it may, there are exceptions to this point of view. The apocryphal Book of Jubilees, with which the medieval Irish were familiar, states that Adam and Eve were in Eden for seven years before the Fall though it gives no indication of any children being born to them during that time (McNamara 20–21; Jubilees 3:15). There is plenty of evidence, however, for such descendants in Irish tradition. There is more than one Irish text that expands the traditional duration of Adam and Eve’s time in Eden, as well as sources which mention prelapsarian children of Adam and Eve (Glaeske 10). For example, the biblical commentary *Pauca problesmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis*, which draws from Irish exegetical tradition and may be nearly contemporary with *EC* and *IB*, refers to “another race of Adam ... which he [God] created before he [Adam] sinned” (*aliud genus Ade ... quod creauit antequam peccasset* [MacGinty 54]).<sup>17</sup> The poem *Duan in choícat cest* includes a quatrain referring to “Adam’s offspring before the Fall,” to which a gloss adds, “*Seir* is the son whom Eve bore to Adam before the Fall; from him are the *Seiri* and *Seiria*, as folk say” (Carey, “Irish Vision” 74). A gloss on a later quatrain names the *Seiricda* as one of three peoples who escaped the Flood (the others being those in the Ark, and the fishes [74]). Carey makes the point that the attempt in Ireland to justify belief in the *aes síde* by making them unfallen humans pre-dates more mainstream theories of euhemerism (making them glorified heroes) and demonization (denouncing them as evil [Carey, “Baptism” 27]). This tradition seems to have kept its hold, for the much-later *Eachtra Thaidhg mheic Céin* makes Connlae’s mistress into a daughter of Adam and Eve (named Veniusa), as well (O’Grady 350). This later text does seem to depart from earlier sources, though, in holding that Veniusa and her sisters are destined to live apart from each other due to their mother’s sin, making them inheritors of her guilt despite apparently having had no part in it. In addition, the sisters are allowed to live in paradisaic regions due to their virginity. We cannot, however, assume, as Carney did, that this means that Otherworldly celibacy was the intent of earlier authors as well, as there is more pertinent evidence to the contrary.

Since there is evidence that the medieval Irish believed that Adam and Eve may have had children before the Fall, Mac Cana’s arguments regarding the

<sup>16</sup> Translation by John Carey.

<sup>17</sup> All translations in this paragraph by John Carey.

use of the phrase *fo doss* (literally ‘under a bush’) in *IB* are not unreasonable. However, I believe they can be carried further, as Mac Cana relies primarily on non-Irish sources for his claims and there are Irish sources available.<sup>18</sup> In the *DIL* entry for *muine*, another word for bush or brake, there are at least four entries that reflect the term’s sexual connotations. For example, *Fingal Rónáin*, a tale from about the early tenth century, includes the following phrase: “You can be about no good walking about alone, or about anything unless coming to a tryst with a man ... [a] bad woman to disgrace him in ditches and brakes going alone to meet a lad” (*Ní maith duit imthecht toenur, acht maní[d] dáilfir no théig ... [d]rochben dia imdergad i claidib ocus muinib a h-oínur i n-dáil gilla* [Meyer, *Fingal* 380]). Similarly, the Heptads list “a woman who makes a tryst with a man secretly in a bush” (*ben aradala fer cuice i muine*) as one of seven women who receive no compensation for being slept with unawares (Binchy, *Corpus* 42.27). In addition, the phrases *merdrech muine* ‘whore of a bush’ from the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már* and *mac muine* ‘a bastard’ (literally, ‘son of a bush’) from Triad 152, both have the sexual connotation evident in their meanings (Binchy, *Corpus* 15.14–16; Meyer, “Triads” 20–21 § 152). There is no reason, then, to assume that the Otherworld, though sinless, was necessarily sexless. Mac Cana’s arguments, together with those presented here, make a sexual interpretation of the quatrain in *IB* the most likely and natural one.

In regard to *EC*, we have seen that McCone rejects Carey’s argument in “A Crux Revisited” on the basis that reading *cot-rísmas* as ‘cohabits’ is grammatically impossible due to the masculine/neuter infixed pronoun. Carey himself apparently accepts this argument as he distances himself from his previous interpretation in *Ireland and the Grail* (30). This is only half of Carey’s argument, however, and the rest still stands with only a small amendment. If we translate the previous line as “the wave of your longing” as Carey suggests, along with *long* as ‘bed’ – or even as a pun between the two meanings of ‘bed’ and ‘boat,’ since Connlae does later jump into her boat – but read *cot-rísmas* as “we may encounter it” as McCone does, we arrive at a fruitful translation: “we may encounter it [i.e., Connlae’s longing] in my crystal bed.” This works not only with the phrasing of these two lines, but within the larger context of the tale: twice before this we are told that Connlae longs ‘for the woman’ (McCone, *Echtrae* 163, 183–184).

There is another issue that does not seem to have been addressed by the scholarship to date. In *IB*, Manannán tells Bran that the immortality

18 The phrase has always been translated this way in editions of *IB*; however, it could technically be rendered under a tree(top) as well.

of his people and the perfection of his realm is such because *nín-táraill int immarbuss*, “the sin [of Adam] has not reached us” (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 40 & 53 § 44). Carey has surmised that this is also the case in *EC* (Carey, “Rhetoric” 45). If this were the case, would the entrance of sinful beings such as Connlae and Bran and his company not bring sin – and all its attendant horrors – with them into these paradisaic regions? Why, then, would the *aes síde* invite them to the Otherworld at all?

A possible answer, at least for these two tales, may lie in Manannán’s soliloquy to Bran. As discussed above, the Otherworld is immanent in – but invisible to – the mortal world. Carey believes the problem to be one of perception, and Manannán’s description of the Otherworld seems to confirm this (Carey, “Time, Space” 5). Where Bran and his men see open sea and fishes, Manannán describes a flowery plain, with a great company of people and animals of various descriptions. He then moves smoothly from a description of the land to its people, and the reason for their immortality: *ní-frescam de mbeth anguss, /nín- táraill int immarbuss* (we do not expect lack of strength through decay, /the sin has not reached us [Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 40 & 53 § 44]). “The sin” here is explained to be Adam’s sin, causing “exhaustion by diseases and age, /death of the soul through deceit” (*troíthad galar ocus aíss, /apthu anma[e] tria togaís* [41 & 54 § 47]). Manannán stresses that “[i]t is the law of pride in this world /to believe in creatures, to forget God” ([*i*]s *recht óabair i mbith ché/cretem dú(i)le, dermat nDé*). If what blinds Bran to the Otherworld wonders that are all around him is sin, then it makes sense to conjecture that the alteration of perception that eventually allows him to see the Otherworld involves sin as well. Such a change of perception would involve changing one’s state of mind to see from another point of view; a shift from a mortal state of mind to an immortal one, from a sinful state of mind to a sinless one. This would explain the delay of gratification in both *EC* and *IB*, and the necessity for two visitations in each case. In *IB*, the woman’s invitation sets Bran and his companions on their way, and introduces the Christian theme. The meeting with Manannán illustrates the problem – they do not yet have the correct state of mind for the Otherworld to be present to them – and gives them the information needed to correct this. The journey gives them the time and opportunity to change their awareness. For Connlae, the month-long interval with only the Otherworld apple as nourishment could serve much the same purpose – as McCone’s ‘reverse Fall’ theory would indicate (McCone, *Pagan Past* 82). This, too, could account for the ‘homesickness’ he feels for the woman; his state of mind is now nearer hers than that of the mortals around him. When the transformation is complete, the woman returns and bears him away with her.

Nor are these the only stories in which such a delay in searching for the idyllic Otherworld is found. In the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, Brendan and his company sail in circles for seven years before finally finding the Land of Promise, which was apparently off the coast of Ireland the entire time (Selmer 78–80). The intervening years are spent stopping only at specific intervals to celebrate events of religious significance to the monks. When the travellers do finally reach the Land of Promise, they are told: “You could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you his varied secrets in the great ocean” (O’Meara 68–69; Selmer 80).

The evidence above leads me to conclude that Carney was correct – at least to a point – in believing that *IB* was meant to be an allegory of the Christian journey of life, though I differ with him as to the extent to which native imagery might have been used to accomplish this end. Despite the latter, it seems evident to me that at least one message of *IB* is that life is a journey meant to put us in the proper state of mind and spirit to be properly received into Heaven when the journey is done.

## Prophecies

Among the ways in which Otherworld women serve as intermediaries in the tales we are studying, the uttering of prophecies is almost unique to *EC* and *IB*. And what is entirely peculiar to these two tales is the nature of their prophecies, both of which relate to the Christian revelation.

In *EC*, the Otherworld woman’s first visit consists of her description of her realm and her invitation to Connlae. She does not even mention Christianity directly until her second visit, and then what she prophesies is not the coming of Christ specifically, but the coming of Patrick to found the Irish Church, and this only in response to Conn’s attempt to banish her a second time by calling for his druid. She essentially tells him that it is druidism that will be banished by “the Great High King’s righteous and decent one,” who will “destroy the spells of the druids of base teaching in front of the black bewitching Devil” (*artrag máir fírián connil ... con:scéra brichtu drúad tárdechto ar bélaib demuin duib doilbthig* [McCone, *Echtrae* 122, 175–181]). In this way, she places herself and the Otherworld she represents firmly within the cosmology of Christian belief, rather than within that of paganism as might otherwise be expected.

McCone argues that this should be interpreted in light of the type of biblical exegesis used by many medieval biblical scholars to interpret the Song of Solomon, with the Otherworld woman representing the Church,

as does the bride in the Song (McCone, *Pagan Past* 81–82; McCone, *Echtrae* 102–103). The most apparent problem with this is the nature of the bride/bridegroom relationship. This interpretation works in the Song because the bridegroom is nameless, and is presumed to be Christ – and the Church is the bride of Christ.<sup>19</sup> However, if we interpret the Otherworld woman as the Church, that puts Connlae in the position of Christ, which is not consistent with Christian theology of any time period. Connlae does not resemble a Christ figure at all. His father was the mortal king Conn – the same Conn whom the woman rebuked for relying on his druid. Connlae had to be convinced to give up his worldly desires, and it was the woman doing the saving. Connlae's 'sacrifice' – giving up his family, his people, and his future kingship – saved only himself.

McCone dismisses Carey's argument that the Otherworld woman is a typological harbinger of the Church, rather than an allegory for it, by stating that these interpretations are complementary. There are inherent problems of definition here, however. An allegory is a symbol for something; a typological harbinger, while in some sense symbolic, by definition prefigures the thing or event it represents. In addition, an allegory is generally sustained throughout the given piece of literature; here, however, the evidence of the Otherworld woman's alliance with the Church does not emerge until late in the tale; there is no reason to identify her with it earlier. This being the case, and since the Otherworld woman actually prophesies the coming of Patrick – and therefore the Church – the latter seems the more credible interpretation.

In contrast, the Christian intent in *IB* is presented very near the beginning of the tale during the first Otherworld woman's speech to Bran in his hall, and her prophecy focuses directly on the birth and divine character of Christ (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 37–38, 50–51 §§ 26–28). This is placed in direct juxtaposition with Manannán's prophecy, which, while briefly touching on the Christian revelation, concentrates primarily on the conception, life, and death of Mongán (41–43, 54–56 §§ 48–59). Both are represented as positive supernatural figures, though the characterization of each is markedly different.

Manannán's recitation of Mongán's supernatural qualities somewhat mirrors the Otherworld woman's enumeration of the divine attributes of Christ. Each begins with the subject's parentage. The woman describes Christ as "the son of a woman who will not know a mate" (*mac mná nád-festar céle*); the audience, of course, would know that this referred to Mary's impregnation

19 See Eph. 5:23.

by the Holy Spirit (37 & 50 § 26). Manannán describes his plan to “lie/a vigorous lying with Caíntigern” (*Con-lé ... lúthlige la Caíntigirn*) in order to beget Mongán, giving the latter a supernatural parentage as well (42 & 55 § 55). Where the Otherworld woman describes Christ as “[a] king without beginning without end” (*Flaith cen tossach cen forcenn*), Mongán’s kingship is portrayed – at least by the glossator – as being without end, but after he dies in the mortal world, where he will live only 50 years (37–43, 50–56 §§ 27, 55, 58). Christ, says the woman, created the world; Mongán is associated with the Otherworld, as he “will soothe the company of every fairy mound” (*Moíthfed sognáiss cach síde* [37, 42, 50, 54, §§ 27, 52]). The woman says that the land, sea, and heavens all belong to Christ, while Manannán lists some of the myriad different shapes that Mongán will assume in all three regions (37–38, 42, 50–51, 55, §§ 27–28, 53–54). Here, however, the similarities seem to end. The woman, for her part, suggests that Christ will punish the wicked when she says: “Woe to him who will be under His displeasure,” followed by “Happy he whose heart will be pure” (*is mairc bíús foa étuil ... cé(i)n-mair dia-mba findchríde* [37–38, 50–51 §§ 27–28]). She further prophesies that he will “purify hosts” (*glainfid slúagu*) and heal the sick (38 & 51 § 28). Mongán, on the other hand, “will relate mysteries in the course of his knowledge” (*ad-fí rúna rith ecni*), and when he dies “the white host will take him under a wheel of clouds/to the assembly which is not sorrowful” (*gébtha[i] in drong find fu roth nél/dund nassad nád-etarlén*) – presumably the host of the *síde* – according to Manannán (42–43, 55–56 §§ 52, 59).

Despite these differences, both are represented in a positive light. The Otherworld woman says of Christ’s coming that it will be “a great birth” despite the lowly conditions that accompany it. She emphasizes the extent of Christ’s sovereignty: in addition to having created the world and owning the land, sea, and heavens, she says that, “[h]e will assume the kingship of the many thousands” (*gébaid flaith na n-ilmíle*) – the presence of ‘the’ before ‘many thousands’ implying that this encompasses everyone (36 & 50 § 26). His abilities to purify and heal round out the portrait of divine perfection made man (38 & 51 § 28).

In comparison, Manannán’s description of Mongán focuses mostly on his Otherworldly knowledge and abilities, and his battle prowess. In addition to the attributes described above, Manannán says that Mongán “will be the darling of every fine land ... in the world, without fear of it” (42 & 55 § 55). In respect of his military expertise, Mongán will “clear grave-slopes” (*silis lerca lecht*) and “redden (battle)-fields” (*derg fed róí*), according to Manannán (42 & 55 § 55). Again, despite the fact that the latter are violent acts, they are presented in a positive light; Manannán says Mongán will “be recognized

as a battle-champion" (*bid láth gaile fri haicni*), and, as mentioned above, he would be returned to the *síd* after his death (42–43, 55, 59 §§ 56, 59).

From this comparison we can see that while Christ is depicted in Christian terms, the prophecy concerning Mongán has a more pagan flavour – being the son of Manannán, his association with the *síde*, the implication that he possesses the power of shape-shifting, etc. However, neither is praised at the expense of the other. As has previously been demonstrated, the author of *IB* drew heavily on *EC* as a source.<sup>20</sup> That being the case, I believe that the above discussion lends new credibility to Mac Cana's argument that the author of *EC* drew a distinction between benign paganism, which was consonant with Christianity, and a malignant paganism, which was not (Mac Cana, "Sinless Otherworld" 95) – represented in *EC* in the brief interaction between the Otherworld woman and the druid Corann, and more expansively in *IB* in the parallels between the prophecies concerning Christ and Mongán.

## Otherworld Tokens

Objects from the Otherworld play a major part in many *echtraí* and *im-mrama*. These objects, dubbed "Otherworld tokens" by Kevin Murray ("Role" 187), may serve what seems, on the surface, to be a variety of functions, but these may, in fact, be narrowed down into two distinct groups. In essence, an Otherworld token is an object, originating in the Otherworld, which serves either to draw the hero into the Otherworld, or to prove the veracity of his story regarding his sojourn there.

Murray's use of the term is simply in reference to the latter function. Some tokens, as he points out, serve merely to prove the hero's story within the context of the tale itself, and often these disappear back into the Otherworld and/or the audience is never told what happens to them. Others may exist in the mortal world for a time, possibly even extending to the time of the narration, serving to prove to the audience that the tale is true (187). Sometimes, the latter not only prove the existence of the Otherworld and the validity of the tale, but symbolize the nature of the relationship between the Otherworld and the mortal world as well. This type of token will be examined more fully in a later chapter.

The other function of an Otherworld token is to draw the hero into the Otherworld, either literally or figuratively. It is in this context that we must

20 See Part II, Chapter 1.



look at the Otherworld tokens found in *EC* and *IB*. Connlae's mistress throws him a magical apple, which sustains him and causes him to long for her. In *IB*, the Otherworld woman's appearance is preceded by Bran finding a silver apple branch, which she then takes with her when she leaves.

The apple in *EC* may well be the oldest example of an Otherworld token we have in Irish literature. It seems, in some way, to be an extension of the woman – or at least her power over Connlae – in her absence. It certainly serves to make him vulnerable to her, invoking a 'longing' or 'homesickness' (*éolchaire*) in him for her (McCone, *Echtrae* 163).

McCone suggested that the giving of this apple represents a sort of reverse of the story of the Fall in Genesis, annulling the effect of the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil, which Eve offered to Adam (McCone, *Pagan Past* 82). While this is certainly possible, other equally valid interpretations exist, and this explanation is not without its own problems. Eve's apple, for example, triggered the fall of all humanity, while the Otherworld woman's apple saved only Connlae. Carney proposed – and McCone agreed – that this apple could represent the fruit of the other major tree in Eden, the Tree of Life, which grants immortality (Carney, "Deeper Level" 164). This interpretation has the appeal of not only having a biblical basis, but also of having parallels in Indo-European mythologies. The Hesperides of Greek mythology guarded a garden of golden immortality-granting apples that were the gift of Gaia to Hera upon her marriage to Zeus (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 742ff; Apollodorus, 2.5.11; Athenaeus, 83c). In Norse myth, likewise Iðunn had a garden of golden apples, which kept the gods young and immortal (Lindow 198–199). While this reference is relatively late, as Caroline McGrath points out, "the discovery of buckets of apples left as a votive offering on the Oseberg Viking ship (c. 850 A.D.) ... suggests that they were considered to be a divine food in Scandinavian tradition" (McGrath 20). Also, the Welsh Otherworld isle of Avalon has traditionally been interpreted as 'Island of Apples,' and it was here that King Arthur was taken to recover from his fatal wound at the hands of Mordred, to return when his people had need of him. This interpretation has been contested, largely based on Avalon's identification with Glastonbury (Ahl 397–404). Rachel Bromwich, however, has convincingly argued that this association is later, and that the name is a borrowing from the Irish *abhlach*, which was used as an adjective to describe the apple-producing Otherworld home of Manannán mac Lir – which was associated variously with the island of Arran and the Isle of Man (Bromwich 245–256). Interestingly, each of these Otherworldly orchards is kept by one or more supernatural young women.

A third reading might construe the apple as an implicit invitation to sexual dalliance. The apple was associated with Aphrodite in Greek mythology (Pausanias, 2.10.5; Elder Philostratus 1.6). It was an apple from the garden of the Hesperides with which Eris instigated the quarrel that triggered the Trojan war – and Aphrodite who won it (Colluthus, 58ff). Also, as mentioned above, the apples guarded by the Hesperides were a wedding present to Hera from Gaia. In a Celtic context, *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (TBC) says of Findabair that “it was she who gave him fragrant apples over the bosom of her tunic” (*is í no dáiled ubla fírchubra dar sedlach a léned fair*) in order to tempt Fer Diad into fighting Cú Chulainn (C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailgne: Recension I* 196 & 79). In *Aisling Meic Con Glinne*, Lígach sends apples (among other ‘sweets’) to Cathal mac Finguine in order to show her love (Jackson, *Aislinge* 2 § 5). In addition, in *Betha Molaise Daiminse*, the saint’s mother dreams of eating seven apples, the last of which was too large to fit into her hand; her husband interprets this as an indication of the nature of their child (O’Grady vol. 1 17ff; vol. 2 18ff). Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis believed that it was likely that as the tale was originally told, the eating of the apple was the conception itself, again linking apples with the sexual act (Loomis 2:276). And while these combined examples weigh, I think, against the idea that Connlae’s apple is ‘purely’ Christian, there is evidence that the Israelites had some similar beliefs about apples. The woman in the Song of Songs says: “As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste ... sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love” (Song of Sg. 2:3–5). Later, the groom says to her: “Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples” (Song of Sg. 7:8). This interpretation is backed textually by the fact that the Otherworld woman’s apple induced a longing only for her, and not for the Otherworld itself.

Bran’s Otherworld summoner bears away the enchanted silver branch, which Bran had found just before her appearance. She identifies it as a branch of an apple tree that is found in ‘Emain’ and says that it “bears a likeness to those which are familiar” – except, of course, that it is made of silver with crystal flowers, and seems to emit enchanting music. The fact that it is an apple branch seems to strike a chord with the apple provided by Connlae’s mistress. However, the Otherworld woman takes it with her, rather than leaving it to increase Bran’s vulnerability to her. It seems to heighten the comparison between this world and the Otherworld; it is something that should be familiar, but is sufficiently different to render the object completely foreign.

### *Immram Brain and Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*

Scholars are generally in agreement that the depiction of the Isle of the Queen and her Seventeen Daughters in *ICMD* is based on *Tír inna mBan* in *Immram Brain*, though few have gone beyond noting their basic similarity. Before discussing these and my own observations, it will be useful to summarize the relevant portions of *ICMD*.

At the beginning of *ICMD* we learn that Máel Dúin's mother was a nun who had been raped by his father, who thereafter was killed in battle. His mother gives him to her friend, the queen, to be fostered. When he is a grown warrior, he learns of his father's death and seeks to avenge it, which requires a sea voyage. He and his crew experience many adventures before they arrive, by which time Máel Dúin has given up his quest for vengeance. I believe that two of these adventures are related to what we find in *Immram Brain*. The first is the Island of the Glass Bridge, where the voyagers find a fortress to which access is gained by a glass bridge. They repeatedly try and fail to cross the bridge, when a woman comes out of the fortress to fill her pail with water. They request entrance, which she refuses with cryptic replies. This happens for three days, until, on the fourth day, she finally welcomes them, calling each by name and telling them their coming has been foretold. She leads them into the fortress and serves them food and drink, which to each tastes like whatever he prefers. There is a bed for Máel Dúin, and one for every three of his men. Máel Dúin's companions decide this woman would make a perfect wife for him, and ask her to sleep with him. She does not answer them for three days, except to say that she does not know what sin is. On the fourth day, they awake to find themselves on their boat at sea, with no view of the island.

The other relevant episode is that of the Island of the Queen and her Seventeen Daughters. The travellers arrive on the island and are welcomed by an emissary of the Queen, who entreats them to come to her fort. They are treated to a feast, and at bedtime the Queen directs each man to sleep with the girl sitting across from him; she herself sleeps with Máel Dúin. The next day, she tells them that she must go to judge her people in lieu of her late husband the king; they, however, need not work, but will stay young and have as much food and drink as they desire as long as they remain in her house. After three months – which seems to them to be three years – they try to leave, against Máel Dúin's better judgement. The Queen pursues them and pulls their ship back to shore by throwing a ball of thread that sticks to Máel Dúin's hand when he catches it. After another three months they attempt to leave again. This time, another man catches the thread, and has

his hand cut off. The woman begins to shriek as they sail away, “so that all the land was one cry, wail and shrieking.”

The only similarity between the two stories that Stokes mentions in his edition of *ICMD* is the use of the ‘clew’ (that is, ‘ball of thread,’ rendering Irish *ceirtle*) to bring Máel Dúin and his companions back to the island (Stokes, “Voyage” 449). Oskamp notes three similarities: an island inhabited by women; the difference between actual and perceived time; and the scene with the clew. In his opinion, the differences in the way these things are treated in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* is due to the author having lost contact with the original reasoning involved in the conception of *Tír inna mBan*. Specifically, he states that the time difference in *Immram Brain* was meant to show that “time passes unnoticed in happy circumstances” (*Voyage* 59–60) while in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* this time difference is reversed. Christa Maria Löffler does not allude to the similarity between the two, simply ascribing the character of sovereignty goddess to both the leader of *Tír inna mBan* and Máel Dúin’s island queen. She claims that the “ritual welcome” of Máel Dúin and his companions by the maidens and their mother is a re-enactment of a fertility rite, and that the Queen was disconsolate at his departure because the loss of her consort leaves her unable to produce a male heir (*Voyage* 547). Mac Mathúna compares the utilization of the ball of thread and the difference in the experience of time in both tales with similar instances in modern Irish folktales (Mac Mathúna, “Motif” 257–260). None of these scholars mentions any possible connection between *Immram Brain* and the woman on the Isle of the Glass Bridge, which seems to me to be an oversight. In fact, both scenes appear to involve not merely a borrowing, but a reaction to and re-writing of *Immram Brain*’s depiction of *Tír inna mBan* by a somewhat more misogynistic author.

Oskamp’s summary of the similarities between *Tír inna mBan* in *Immram Brain* and the Isle of the Queen and her Seventeen Daughters in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* is fairly stated, apart from his assumption that the latter is inhabited entirely by women. While Máel Dúin and his companions only ever see the queen and her daughters, we are told that there are other people on the island, and nowhere does the text say that these are exclusively of the female sex. Indeed, we are told that there was, at one time, a king on the island, which indicates at least one male presence (Oskamp, *Voyage* 152–159).

The significant difference between the two texts appears most strongly in the ways in which the author of *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* uses the motifs, which he appears to have taken over from *Immram Brain*. The first and most obvious difference is that there is no alignment of the people of this island with Christianity, either implicit or explicit, as there is in *Immram*

*Brain*. Indeed, the Queen of the isle acts in a manner that would have been in conflict with the Christian and societal norms of the time – or even with what one would expect of Löffler’s sovereignty goddess – ruling over her island country even after taking Máel Dúin as a consort. In other accounts of sovereignty goddesses, such as *Echtrae Mac nEchach* or *Tochmarc Étaíne* (*TÉ*), the goddess only chooses the rightful king – she does not rule in her own right.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, such queenship was not practised in early Irish culture. “Only stay, she said, in your house and you need not labour. I will go to judge the folk for your sake.” (*Anaid amain ol sí an bar tigh , níba heicen duib nach saethar. Ragaidsa do breitemnacht na tuathe do bar cenn.*) Here, she even appears to assume authority over Máel Dúin and his men, telling them that they must remain in her house while she goes to “give judgment and settle the community” (*do brithemnacht , do etercert na tuaithe* [Oskamp, *Voyage* 156–157]). There is nothing in *Immram Brain* to suggest that Bran’s hostess/consort acts as ruler over a *túath* in this way.

In *Immram Brain*, Bran and his companions are granted freedom of movement, being allowed to leave when they please with only words of warning and advice from the leader of the women. This contrasts starkly with the situation in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*. It is true that in both tales the leader of the women draws the companions’ boat to shore by means of a magic clew that sticks to the hero’s hand. The circumstances and the motivation are, however, different in the two stories, reflecting differences in the attitude of each author. In *Immram Brain*, the woman uses the clew to draw Bran’s boat to shore in order to overcome his understandable yet unnecessary hesitation after the company’s experience at the Isle of Joy (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 43–44 & 56–57, §§ 61, 62). The Queen of the isle in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*, on the other hand, uses it to force Máel Dúin’s crew to return to the island after they have chosen to leave. That she does so out of her own selfishness is reinforced by her overly dramatic reaction after Diurán cut off the hand of the man who caught the clew the next time, so as not to be drawn in again (Oskamp, *Voyage* 156–157). Here, again, we have the twisting of the previous idea to reveal a more unflattering and sexist view of women.

Oskamp’s theory (mentioned previously) as to the divergent uses of the time difference between the two tales is certainly one possibility. However, given the artful bending of other aspects of the tale to fit the author’s own agenda, it seems more likely that such manipulation is present here as well. It seems doubtful that Máel Dúin and his men would have taken kindly to being ruled over by a woman, or to spending their days in complete

21 But see Meyer, “Dindshenchas” 235–236; Stokes, “Prose Tales” 279 re: Macha Mongruad.

idleness. This would have been why the men were so sure that Máel Dúin was in love with the Queen – these were the only circumstances under which they could imagine a warrior would allow himself to be treated in this manner (156–157). Contrast this with *Immram Brain*: while Bran and his men did indeed enjoy luxurious feasting and abundant sex, that the first woman’s invitation includes such descriptions as a “plain on which the hosts play games” (*mag for-clechtat in tshluaig* [Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 34 & 47, § 5]) perhaps implies that they enjoyed these sorts of pastimes, as well, which would have been much more palatable to the warriors. Based on this disparity in occupations, the difference in the time discrepancies mentioned by Oskamp could well be intentional: just as happy times pass quickly, unhappy or boring times seem to pass that much more slowly. So, while for Bran and his men many years passed as one (44 & 57, § 62), for Máel Dúin’s company a few months seemed like years. The difference in perceived and actual time therefore need not be supernatural in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* as it was in *Immram Brain*.

Finally, the Queen’s wailing and shrieking in response to Máel Dúin’s departure are a far cry from the leader of *Tír inna mBan*’s calm warning and advice to Bran and his men when they decide to return to Ireland. In *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*, when Diurán cuts off the hand of the man who caught the clew, the text says, “[w]hen she saw that, she at once began to wail and shriek, so that all the land was one cry, wail and shrieking.” (*Ot connaircsi ón aní sin fo cetoir. Gaibais gol, eigem corbo aengair gol, egem a tír uile.*) When Bran’s mistress is advised of his intent to leave, on the other hand, she composedly warns that “the journey would be repented” (*As-bert in ben ro-bad aithrech ind fáball*) and advises them to retrieve their comrade from the Isle of Joy, and not to touch the land once they reach Ireland (*as-bert in ben arná-tuinsed nech díub a tír ocus ara-taidlitis leu in fer fon-ácabsat i nInis Subai tar éssi a chéili.*) Again, I believe *Immram Brain* conveys an equality between the island’s inhabitants and Bran’s company that *ICMD* lacks. But it also reveals more about how the author sees women – particularly women who are not under the authority of a man. When the men leave in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*, the women become hysterical and out of control. They need the men on the island because despite the fact that the Queen fulfils the king’s role, she is unable to govern herself.

The portrayal of this Queen is reminiscent of that of Medb in the *Táin*. Both wield authority traditionally restricted to the male sphere, and both use this authority to dominate the men with whom they are sexually involved – Máel Dúin for the Queen, and Ailill and Fergus for Medb. Indeed, both offer themselves sexually to men to whom they are not married – in Medb’s case,

this is in spite of the fact that she is married to Ailill. And neither's sexual freedom is restricted to her own person, either; each offers her daughter or daughters to strangers. In the *Táin*, Medb offers Findabair to each warrior in exchange for fighting Cú Chulainn, and to Cú Chulainn himself in *Fled Bricrenn* to prevent the Ulaid from attacking (Henderson 68–69 § 53–54). The island queen lacks any such justification. Either way, it is, as Patricia Kelly notes, a perversion of the prerogatives of motherhood – exploitation where there should be protection (P. Kelly 82). Whereas Medb, according to Kelly, is “assessed here with respect to sovereignty ... and it is her sex which disqualifies her,” the author of *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* seems more concerned with the consequences of the island queen's overt sexuality (83). She appears to ensnare Máel Dúin with it, effectively un-manning him in the eyes of his men, who see that he is willing to accept a life of idleness out of love for her (Oskamp, *Voyage* 156–157). Still, there is an echo of this in the *Táin*, when Fergus loses his sword; as Kelly observes, “Fergus' union with [Medb] leads ... to loss of his warrior status, and of his manhood” (P. Kelly 81). Finally, both women are undone by the vulnerability of their gender at the end of their respective tales. Medb, at the end of the *Táin*, is caught by Cú Chulainn while either urinating or menstruating and is forced to request his protection; he agrees to do so “because he used not to kill women” (*úair nád gonad mná* [C. O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* 123 & 236 ln. 4117]). The island queen, as noted above, is made vulnerable by her emotional instability, sending the entire island into a cry of despair upon the retreat of Máel Dúin and his companions.

As stated above, no one appears to have commented on any possible connection between the leader of *Tír inna mBan* in *Immram Brain* and the woman of the Isle of the Glass Bridge in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*. However, there is much to recommend the comparison. In both, the woman knows the men are coming, and their identities (Oskamp, *Voyage* 134–135). Also in both, the companions are treated to great feasts in which every desired taste is provided to them (134–135). However, it is evident that the woman on the Isle of the Glass Bridge is more what the author of *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* thinks a woman should be like. She is portrayed as a paragon of chastity; when asked if she will sleep with Máel Dúin, she states that she has never known, and does not know, what sin (*peccad*) is (134–135). In this instance, unlike *Echtrae Chonnlai* or *Immram Brain*, sex is unconditionally equated to sin, and, in the end, she does not sleep with Máel Dúin (134–135).<sup>22</sup> In addition, the precise number of beds required are

22 See Part II, Chapter 3 for discussion of sex in the Otherworld in *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain*.

offered, though in this case there is one for every three of Máel Dúin's men rather than one for each (male-female) couple, as in *Immram Brain*. But even here, in what seems to be intended as a purely positive account of an Otherworld woman, the misogyny of the author is evident. As presented, the maiden's actions are, to some extent, those of a tease. She refuses to welcome the voyagers into her fortress until three days have passed despite their entreaties, yet she acknowledges their presence with cryptic comments. When she does welcome them, she tells them that she had foreknowledge of their coming – and still does not explain why she refused them entrance for three days. When asked to sleep with Máel Dúin, she refuses to give a straight answer – again for three days – and, on the fourth day, she literally leaves them adrift in their boat, with no sight of her or her island (134–135). So, despite her purity, it seems to me that this woman is also portrayed as being less than ideal. It might, of course, be argued that these observations of the maiden from the Island of the Glass Bridge are somewhat moot as they may not reflect the intent of the author. One might point to Máel Dúin's mother or foster mother, the nun and the queen, who appear to reflect fairly neutral portrayals of women. However, both are relatively undeveloped characters compared to the two examined here. The point is that the author of *ICMD* is not only consciously disapproving of what he seems to find to be morally reprehensible behaviour in *IB*, but that his need to address this is rooted in his attitude towards women in general, which he displays unconsciously in his portrayal of the woman on the Isle of the Glass Bridge as he does consciously of the Queen and her seventeen daughters.

However, even if we assume that the author intended to portray the woman on the Isle of the Glass Bridge in a purely positive light, this presents us with its own set of complications. In this case, we are presented with an essentially dualistic vision of women: pure, chaste, and modest on the one hand; promiscuous and domineering on the other. As Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin observes, “within the female lay the possible duality of good female (Mary) versus evil female (Eve) ... [r]emnants of the goddess, with her dual representation of positive sovereignty, passive and amenable (Mary) and the negative avenger, uncontrolled, sexual and dangerous (Eve) were perfect icons for Christian writers in their portrayal of human woman” (Ní Bhrolcháin, “*Re tóin mná*” 116). This is no less sexist or problematic than a purely misogynistic viewpoint as it provides women with only two modes of being, allowing no room for individuality or self-expression. Either a woman is debased and dehumanized, having only the lowest and meanest attributes of humanity, or she is attributed with blameless perfection, and thereby put on a pedestal from which she cannot help but fall. The contrast



presented between the Queen and her seventeen daughters and the maiden of the Island of the Glass Bridge shows just such a dichotomy.

Based on this evidence, it is my opinion that the author of *ICMD* is not so much out of touch with the original intention of *IB*, as he is writing from a radically different point of view – one that is distinctly sexist in nature. Whether this point of view reflects a change in societal attitudes since the time of the writing of *IB* or simply a difference in attitudes between the two specific authors is – for the time being at least – unknown.

### The Shamanism Question

Attempts have been made in the past, to a greater or lesser extent, to demonstrate the presence of shamanic elements in early Irish narratives. While it would be improvident to undertake an extensive examination of this question here, the fact that such claims have been made with respect to some of the texts being considered in this dissertation means that it must be accorded some attention. Here, I will discuss assertions made about *EC*, *IB*, and *IDB*; statements regarding *SCC* will be considered in a later chapter. Before looking at any of these proposals, however, it will be helpful to take a brief look at some of the central aspects of shamanism itself, as practised in societies where its presence is not a matter of debate.

One of the most closely examined characteristics of shamanism is the initiation the prospective shaman must undergo before attaining his/her shamanic powers. In his classic survey of the subject, first published in 1951, Mircea Eliade emphasized ritual death and resurrection as a necessary component of the initiatory process, as it is these that give the shaman the dual nature that enables him/her to control spirits and pass successfully into the celestial and infernal regions during shamanic ecstasies (Eliade, *Shamanism* 33–66). Piers Vitebsky states that “the first approach of the spirits takes the form of a violent onslaught” in which the candidate’s “psychic experience is expressed as a bodily dismantling” (Vitebsky 59). This, in turn, “leads to what seems like a complete destruction of the future shaman’s personality” in order to reconstruct in him/her a stronger personality more suited to the tasks of the shaman, “whose new powers are not simply an external adjunct or tool, but amount to a form of insight, a perspective on the nature of the world, and especially on the particular forms of human suffering which he or she has just undergone so intensely” (59). One Siberian initiate had to enter seven tents filled with cannibals and become acquainted with them – these turned out to be the diseases he would have

to cure when he was a shaman. After this, he was led to seven cliffs, each of which opened and granted him a gift to be used by humanity. Finally, he encountered a blacksmith who dismembered him and boiled the parts of his body in a cauldron. The blacksmith forged the shaman's head on an anvil before re-gathering his bones and putting them back together. These were re-covered in flesh, and the blacksmith gave him new eyes to replace the old ones, and pierced his ears so that he would be able to understand the language of plants (Eliade, *Shamanism* 39–42; Vitebsky 60–61). A Yakut shaman's soul was taken to the underworld by a Bird-of-Prey Mother with an iron beak, and left to ripen on a pitch pine. When this was accomplished, she tore his flesh into pieces and gave each sickness-demon a piece to devour; the shaman would later be able to heal each of these illnesses by virtue of this feast. After the disease-demons left, the Bird-of-Prey Mother restored the initiate to his former shape, and he awoke in his own body, now a shaman (Eliade, *Shamanism* 36). Vitebsky observes that the initiation process is not always so violent, particularly in the southern parts of North America where a would-be shaman might go to a secluded place to fast and wait for a vision. S/he may, however, still be required to contemplate his/her own skeleton (Vitebsky 60).

Because of the difficulties and dangers inherent in the life of the shaman, in many parts of the world one who is chosen for this vocation by the spirits will resist the calling. In some regions, a tutelary spirit called a 'celestial bride' or 'spirit-bride' will be involved, and will often force the chosen one into capitulation by causing a life-threatening illness.<sup>23</sup> According to Vitebsky, these and other types of tutelary spirits are necessary because "the teaching ... represents a process of moral and spiritual growth ... a young shaman has a limited understanding of how reality operates" (Vitebsky 66). Once the shaman agrees to his fate, she will then instruct him in the shamanic mysteries. Eliade is quick to point out that it is this instruction, not the relationship itself, that gives the shaman the ability to shamanize, and that this, too, would be ineffectual without the death and resurrection scenario of the initiation (Eliade, *Shamanism* 75).

The cosmology of many shamanic and other 'primitive' cultures consists of a triple-tiered world view, which comprises the sky (realm of the gods), the earth (the mortal world), and the underworld (realm of the dead and/or evil spirits). These are joined at the centre of the world by a world pillar, which may be represented as a tree or a mountain. Eliade emphasizes the triple-tiered world view of the shaman and his/her ability to leave his/

23 I will examine this phenomenon in greater depth when discussing SCC.

her body and take a journey to the celestial and infernal regions for the purposes of obtaining cures, rescuing lost or stolen souls, or guiding the dead to the afterlife (259–274, 376). Vitebsky does not place quite as much importance on this ability to ascend or descend to alternate levels of reality, pointing out that soul flight can carry the shaman through the mundane landscape as well. He does seem to see the ability of soul flight as essential to shamanism, however (Vitebsky 17).

Now, let us apply this information to our tales. Alwyn and Brinley Rees have suggested that the Otherworld woman who summons Connlae to the Otherworld in *EC* is meant to be a shamanic spirit-bride (Rees & Rees 310). However, while only Connlae can see the Otherworld woman, everyone is still able to hear her (McCone, *Echtrae* 121, 136–137, 145–146). There is also no life-threatening illness; though Connlae eats only the apple, he is healthy and whole throughout the tale (121–199). While he is seized with homesickness (*eólchaire*) after eating the apple, this is hardly the kind of near-fatal experience described by shamanic initiates as described above (121, 163–164). Also, as Vitebsky in particular emphasizes, shamanism is a cultural phenomenon focused on benefiting the community. While the shaman is the only one receiving the instruction, s/he uses it for the good of his/her people (Vitebsky 154–158). Connlae's interaction with the Otherworld woman benefits no one but the two of them; the people of his *túath*, on the other hand, lose their future king, and Conn loses his son (McCone, *Echtrae* 121–199). Finally, the Reeses contend that the Otherworld woman here is like a celestial bride in that “[d]esiring to keep him for herself, she too is prone to hinder her lover's spiritual progress” (Rees & Rees 310). But given that the woman here is aligned with Christianity while the rest of Connlae's people remain pagan, it would be more plausible to argue that the author intended Connlae's spiritual progress to be furthered, rather than hindered, by the woman's interference with his fate.

Séamus Mac Mathúna has suggested something similar regarding the first Otherworld woman in *IB*, though he states that this is only implicit in the tale since Bran only sees the woman after waking from a sleep caused by (presumably) Otherworld music (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 261). However, his claim is also problematic, for several reasons. Firstly, while only Bran was subject to the magical sleep, we are explicitly told that the whole assembly in his fort were able to see and hear the woman (33 & 46). Also, though the woman says her message is only for Bran, he takes twenty-six other men with him to search for *Tír inna mBan* (38 & 51). Finally, and most importantly, the tale lacks elements required in a shamanic initiation. A period of sleep is not the same as a life-threatening illness, and the present text gives no

indication that the sleep was sufficiently deep or long-lasting to simulate death. Bran does not undergo the ritual death and resurrection and/or destruction and reconstruction of the psyche that are so important for preparing the shaman for his/her future duties, nor does he become a new category of person as a result of his experiences. Finally, the Otherworld woman does not instruct him in shamanic mysteries, and what information she does share she presents to the entire assembly, and not to Bran alone. In neither tale does the woman threaten the hero to keep his loyalty to her, as a shamanic spirit-bride will often do (Vitebsky 57–58).

In a similar vein, Carney called Bran's druid's statements regarding his knowledge in *IDB* a "curious shamanistic visionary procedure" for which he knows "no parallel ... in Irish literature" (Carney, "Earliest Bran Material" 82). Grigory Bondarenko agrees with this characterization, basing his argument on the poem's use of the Old Irish word *fius* 'knowledge' – which he takes to mean specifically esoteric knowledge – and certain similarities to an Old Russian poem involving a shamanic wizard called Boyan (Bondarenko 188–200). In *IDB*, Bran's druid states that his knowledge (*fius*) "went to the high clouds," "bound strong men in the presence of witnesses," and "reached a pure well ... in which is the snare of a troop of hundreds of women" and their treasures (*fiad fiadnuib nenaisc tríunu/dia lluid mo fius co ardnúlu ... Ro-saig mo fius tiprait nglan/hi fil sáss cuiri chét mban./S éuit in banchuiri ...* [Carey, "Lough" 76–77]). Bondarenko (and presumably Carney as well) take these statements to refer to a shamanic soul-flight up to a celestial world and down into a lower world. But while it is not impossible to read the passage in this way, the interpretation does present problems. The purpose of shamanic celestial soul-flight is to seek assistance from the gods. However, as previously noted, indigenous supernatural beings in early Ireland seem generally to have been associated with the land rather than the sky; there would, therefore, be no need for celestial soul-flight. Also, there is no specific evidence from the poem that the druid's soul left his body, nor is actual flight or a vehicle for flight (such as a bird) mentioned, as it is in the Russian poem (Bondarenko 188). Flights of a 'spiritual' rather than 'ecstatic' nature are clearly delineated by Eliade as being of a different order than shamanic soul-flight: in these cases, "'flight' expresses only intelligence, understanding of secret things or metaphysical truths" (Eliade, *Shamanism* 479). And though Bondarenko tries to equate *fius* to soul, none of the definitions listed in *DIL* lends itself to such an interpretation (Bondarenko 192). Finally, he says that "[i]t is evidently significant that both poets in their shamanic flight bind or weave something/somebody together" (198). I think that there is a misunderstanding of how 'binding' is used here. Although Bondarenko

recognizes that *naiscid* 'binds' is often used in a legal sense, he still chooses to regard it in a literal sense, of rendering men unable to move. While this could be seen as a plausible interpretation, it seems much more likely in light of the fact that the druid seems careful to mention witnesses that it is being used in its legal sense of binding one to an oath; the presence of witnesses would not have a bearing on whether he was able physically to bind a man, but without them an oath would be unenforceable (F. Kelly, *Guide* 198 & 202).

The allure of shamanism as a source of comparisons and explanatory mechanisms is evident, but we must be careful not to drag and drop aspects of different systems because an analogy is attractive. If nothing else, there is Eliade's observation that narrative contamination can occur between shamanic and non-shamanic cultures, resulting in the presence of shamanic narrative motifs in cultures which have never had shamanic traditions (Eliade, *Shamanism* 510). Without absolutely ruling out the possibility of a Celtic shamanic heritage, I see no reason to attribute it in any of these three cases without more evidence.

## Conclusion

The secondary literature regarding *EC* and *IB* ranges over a century, and touches on a wide variety of issues. Among the foremost questions is whether native pre-Christian ideas or Christian and classical influences pervade the literature of early Ireland. These include who or what is represented by the Otherworld women involved, the nature of the Otherworld, and, in particular, the specifics of its sinless character, and whether certain aspects of the literature might be considered as evidence of shamanism in pre-Christian Ireland.

In both of these tales, as well as other tales involving Otherworld beings, the word *ingnad* is often used as a descriptor. Unfortunately, this is not always an easy word to translate in context, as it has a range of meanings and frequently more than one may apply, especially where the Otherworld is involved. Sometimes, as when paired with its opposite, *gnáth*, it is easily understood as 'uncommon' or 'strange.' But often, especially in situations like those we are studying, the meaning is less clear; *ingnad* can then mean anything from 'unfamiliar,' 'foreign,' or even 'marvellous.' The apparent flexibility of this word may have offered medieval Irish authors the ability to invite the audience to use their imagination in said authors' attempt to describe the indescribable.

*EC* and *IB* both give beatific descriptions of the Otherworld. Connlae's mistress offers images of her home that seem to be based in the language of ecclesiastical culture. The descriptions offered in *IB* are more detailed and point more specifically to an Otherworld peopled entirely by beautiful women. This seems to be a theme common throughout all Indo-European cultures. However, in both of these tales, as well as other extant early Irish stories, the sinless aspect of the Otherworld is emphasized. What then, is the nature of Otherworld sexuality, if any? Though certain anti-nativist scholars contend that, having been written in a Christian milieu, it must be the case in such stories that the denizens of the Otherworld are chaste, a close look at the beliefs of the early Irish and the church fathers who influenced them reveals a different picture. Other early Irish texts show that the medieval Irish believed in prelapsarian children of Adam and Eve, and in the possibility that the people of the Otherworld were descended from these children. Since, according to Augustine, sin was only transmitted through sex, and not caused by it, the inhabitants of the Otherworld would therefore be free to enjoy sex in the innocence that existed before the Fall. The question then arises why would sinful mortals be invited to a sinless Otherworld at all, if their sinfulness might mar the innocence of the Otherworld? The answer would seem to be in the journey – an experience, enhanced in whatever way deemed best by the Otherworld personages involved, which encourages the shift from a sinful to sinless attitude.

While there is evidence of native imagery in both tales, it is being used to convey a uniquely Christian message. The women who summon Connlae and Bran to the Otherworld both prophesy the coming Christian revelation. Connlae's mistress focuses specifically on the coming of Christianity – via Patrick – to Ireland. The first woman in *IB* and Manannán speak more generally of the upcoming birth of Christ. Manannán, recognized as the pre-Christian god of the sea, juxtaposes his prophecy of Christ's birth with that of his own son, Mongán. While the description of Mongán has a more Otherworldly than Christian flavour, he is still presented in a positive light, giving credence to Mac Cana's theory that the author of these tales drew a distinction between 'benign' and 'malignant' paganism.

An important aspect of both of these tales is the use of Otherworld tokens. The apple that Connlae's mistress gives to him is analogous to similar fruit in both Biblical and Indo-European mythologies. It could thus be interpreted in a number of ways, including symbolizing love and/or fertility, or having the ability to grant immortality. Bran's silver branch does not seem to have the same abilities as Connlae's apple, despite the fact that it is an apple branch. Instead, it serves to emphasize the difference between the mortal and

Otherworld and the wonders of the latter by juxtaposing their similarities and differences in a single object.

*IB* benefits from a further comparison with *ICMD*. Two episodes in *ICMD* appear to be based on *IB*. They seem to be polar opposites, formed loosely around the idea of *Tír inna mBan*, but by a more misogynistic author. The woman on the Isle of the Glass Bridge would then represent the author of *ICMD*'s ideal Otherworld woman, whereas the Queen and her seventeen daughters reflect his animosity towards women in positions of power.

Scholars as diverse as James Carney, Alwyn and Brinley Rees, Seamus Mac Mathúna, and Grigory Bondarenko have suggested that these and related texts carry hints of shamanism in early Ireland. However, when compared to the scholarship on shamanic cultures, these suggestions do not hold up. While there are certainly young women inviting heroes to the Otherworld, they do not serve the other functions of a shamanic spirit-bride. The experiences of the heroes benefit primarily themselves and not their communities as a shaman's activities would. Finally, the flight of knowledge is not comparable to shamanic soul-flight, as it yields no assistance from the gods as would the shaman's. This is not to say with certainty that pre-Christian Ireland might not have been, at one time, a shamanic culture; however, no evidence of such a culture is to be found in the tales studied here.

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## 4 *Serglige Con Culainn*

### Introduction

The one extant copy of this tale is a conflation of two versions, generally referred to as 'A' and 'B.' This results in duplications in the text, as will be apparent from the summary below. Version 'A' appears to be based on version 'B,' as well as taking material from *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (TBC [Carey, "Uses" 81]).

The story as we have it begins at Cú Chulainn's territory Mag Muirthemne, at the festival of Samain. Cú Chulainn refuses to allow the assembly to be convened until his foster brother and foster father have arrived. While they are waiting, a flock of beautiful birds settles on the lake, and every woman wants a pair to decorate her shoulders. Cú Chulainn is able to obtain a pair for each woman except his own wife (whose name at this point in the story is given as Eithne Ingubai), so he promises her that if birds come to the area again, the most beautiful pair will be hers. Shortly thereafter, two birds bound by a gold chain fly over the lake. Cú Chulainn attempts to shoot them down for his wife, despite her entreaty not to do so on the basis that these birds evidently possess some kind of power. After some unsuccessful attempts, he succeeds in wounding one before they fly beneath the lake. Despondent because his shot missed, he goes to sleep by a stone. While he sleeps, two women come to Cú Chulainn in a vision and beat him senseless with horsewhips. He regains consciousness, but is unable to speak and is confined to his bed for the next year. After that time, he is visited by a man who identifies himself as Óengus son of Áed Abrat, the brother of his attackers, whom we now learn to have been the sisters Lí Ban and Fand, from the Otherworld region of Mag Mell. He tells Cú Chulainn that his sisters would heal him if he were their friend, and that his sister Fand is in love with him, having been deserted by her husband, Manannán. Óengus promises to send Lí Ban to Cú Chulainn at Samain. Cú Chulainn is then able to sit up and speak. He goes to the stone where he had his vision the year before, and Lí Ban comes and tells him that he can be healed. She tells him that she and Fand did not come the year before to hurt him, but to gain his friendship and assistance. Understandably anxious, Cú Chulainn sends Lóeg,

his charioteer, as a scout before he goes himself. Lóeg goes with Lí Ban to see Mag Mell, meets Fand and Lí Ban's husband, Labraid, and reports back.

At this point the narrative takes a detour, probably due to interpolation (Dillon, *Serglige* xvii). A convocation is being held at Tara to determine the next king of Ireland by means of a bull-feast (*tarbfés*) in which a designated man would eat the meat and broth of a white bull, and then go to sleep. The druids would chant spells while he slept, so that he would dream of the next king. In this case, the king-to-be proved to be Lugaid, Cú Chulainn's foster son. When the news was brought to Emain, Lugaid was at Cú Chulainn's side, and, upon hearing it, the latter sat up and recited the *Briarthartheosc* ('Verbal Instruction') – i.e., instructions on how to be a proper king – to Lugaid.

After this, Cú Chulainn sends for his wife (now said to be named Emer), saying that he is feeling better. She exhorts him to throw off his illness. He again sends Lóeg to reconnoitre for him. Lóeg returns full of praise for the Otherworld. Cú Chulainn finally rises and goes to the Otherworld to fight for Labraid, Lí Ban's husband. After gaining victory over Labraid's enemies, he then stays with Fand for a month. He returns to Emain after making a tryst to meet with Fand later. When they meet, Emer and a group of women come with knives to kill Fand, but Cú Chulainn refuses to allow this. Emer claims he only loves Fand because she is new to him, and if he still loved Emer, they could be happy again. Cú Chulainn insists he does still love Emer, and Fand gives up her claim on him, returning to her husband Manannán. Cú Chulainn briefly goes mad, but is calmed by a draught of forgetfulness which is given to him and to Emer so they can be happy again. Manannán shakes his cloak between Fand and Cú Chulainn so they will never meet again.

## Otherworld Descriptions

There are significant differences between the Otherworld descriptions given in *Serglige Con Culainn* (SCC) and those in *Echtrae Chonnlai* (EC) and *Immram Brain* (IB). Instead of Otherworld figures describing their own world, the bulk of the description is provided by Lóeg, an apparently mortal man (though with Otherworld ties [Hollo 16–17]). His descriptions do not share the language of homily and exegesis that Carey ascribes to EC, but, like IB, use more concrete images to entice Cú Chulainn to the Otherworld. The one moral/spiritual aspect ascribed to the Otherworld by Lóeg, that of truthfulness, is not present in the Otherworld descriptions of EC and IB.

When Lóeg returns from his scouting mission to Fand and Lí Ban's Otherworldly home, this is what he reports to Cú Chulainn:<sup>1</sup>

1.1E

I came in joyous sport, to a place  
that is wonderful though not unknown,  
to a mound where scores of companies  
were assembled, where I found long-haired  
Labraid.

1.2E

I found him seated on the mound, with thousands  
of weapons, his hair yellow of lovely shades,  
a golden ball clasping it.

1.3E

He recognized me then, in my five-folded  
purple cloak. He said to me: "Wilt thou  
go with me to the house where Failbe  
Find dwells?"

1.4E

The two kings are in the house, Failbe Find  
and Labraid, three times fifty around each of them;  
it is the number of the one house-  
hold.

1.5E

Fifty beds to the right side and fifty ...  
Fifty beds to the left side and fifty  
couches.

1.6E

The stead of each bed is copper, white pillars  
gilded; the candle which stands before  
them is a gleaming precious stone.

<sup>1</sup> Poems are given in full due to their importance to the analysis. The stanzas are numbered for ease of referral; they are not referred to this way in the edition.

1.7E

Before the entrance to the west, where the sun sets, there are grey horses with shining manes, and others dark brown.

1.8E

Before the entrance to the east, three trees of purple glass, from which birds sing softly, unceasing, to the children from the royal fort.

1.9E

There is a tree at the entrance of the enclosure – it were well to match its music – a silver tree on which the sun shines, like gold is its brilliance.

1.10E

There are sixty trees there, their branches almost meet; three hundred are fed from every tree with abundant mast without husk.

1.11E

Now there is a spring in the mound, three times fifty brilliant cloaks, and a brooch of shining gold in the border of each cloak.

1.12E

There is a vat of intoxicating mead which is served to the household; it stays ever – a lasting custom – so that it is always full.

1.13E

There is a girl in the house who surpasses the women of Ireland, with yellow flowing hair; she is beautiful and skilled in many crafts.

1.14E

The conversation that she holds with each one is



beautiful, wonderful: the heart of every  
man breaks with longing and love for her.

1.15E

The maiden said: “Who is the lad whom we do  
not recognise? If thou be the lad of the  
man of Muirthemne, come a little closer.”

1.16E

I went forward slowly, slowly. I feared for  
my honour. She said: “Will the eager son  
of Dechtere come hither?”

1.17E

Alas! that he has not gone long since, for all  
invite him, that he might see the state of  
the big house which I have seen.

1.18E

If all Ireland were mine and the kingdom  
of golden Brega, I would give it – no weak  
resolve – to dwell in the place to which  
I came.... (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 63–65).

1.1I

*Ránacsá rem rebrad rán,  
bale ingnád cíarbo gnád,  
connici in carnd, fichtib drong,  
hi fúar Labraid lebarmong.*

1.2I

*Co fúarusa hé sin charnd  
ina súdi, mílib arm,  
mong buide fair álli dath,  
ubull óir oca íadad.*

1.3I

*Corom aichnistar íaraim  
a lleind chorcra chóicdíabail:*

*atbert rim: "in raga lim  
don tig hi fail Fáelbe Find?"*

1.4I

*Atát na dá rig is taig,  
Fáilbe Find ⁊ Labraid,  
tri cóecait im chechtar dé  
is é lín inn óentaige.*

1.5I

*Cóeca lepad na leith dess  
⁊ chóeca airides,  
cóeca lepad na leth chlí  
⁊ chóeca aeridi.*

1.6I

*Colba do lepthaib crónnda,  
úatne finna forórda,  
is sí caindell ardustá  
in lía lógmar lainerdá.*

1.7I

*Atát arin dorus tíar,  
insinn áit hi funend grían,  
graig ngabor nglas, brec a mong,  
is araile corcordond.*

1.8I

*Atát arin dorus sair  
tri bile do chorcor-glain,  
dia ngair in énlaithe búan bláith  
don macraid assin rígráith.*

1.9I

*Atá craind i ndorus liss,  
ní hétig cocetul friss,  
crand airgit ris tatin grían,  
cosmail fri hór a roníam.*

1.10I

*Atát and tri fichit crand,  
comraic nát chomraic a mbarr,  
bíatar tri cét do chach crund  
do mes ilarda imlum.*

1.11I

*Atá tipra sint síd thréll  
cona tri cóectaib breclend,  
7 delg óir cona lí  
i n-óe checha breclenni.*

1.12I

*Dabach and do mid medrach  
oca dáil forin teglach:  
maraid béos, is búan in bes  
conid bithlán do bithgrés.*

1.13I

*Itá ingen is tig trell  
ro derscaig do mnáib Érend,  
co fult budi thic immach,  
is sí álaind illánach.*

1.14I

*In comrád doní ri  
cách is álaind is is ingnáth:  
maided cridi cech duni  
dia seirc is dia inmuni.*

1.15I

*Atrubairt ind ingen trel:  
“Cóich in gilla ná haichnem?  
Masa thú, tair bic ille,  
gilla ind fíra Murthemne.”*

1.16I

*Dochúadusa co fóill fóill:  
rom gab ecla dom onóir:*

*atbert rim: "In tic i lle  
óenmac dígrais Dechtere?"*

1.17I

*Mairg ná dechaid ó chíanaib,  
7 chách icá íarrair,  
co n-aiced immar itá  
in tech mór atchonnarcasá.*

1.18I

*Dámbad lim Ériu ule  
7 ríge Breg mbude,  
dobéraind, ní láthar lac,  
ar gnáis in bale ránac. (Dillon, *Serglige* 16–19).*

And in another poem:

2.1E

... I saw a bright, free land where no falsehood is  
spoken, nor deceit. There is a king there,  
one who reddens troops with blood,  
Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword.

2.2E

As I came over Mag Lúada I beheld the Magic  
Tree. In Mag Denna I met with two two-  
headed serpents.

2.3E

Then Lí Ban said, as we were there: "Dear to  
me were the miracle if the Cú were in thy  
place."

2.4E

Beautiful women – virtue unbounded – are the  
daughters of Áed Abrat. The beauty of  
Fand – brilliant name – no queen or  
king has attained it.

2.5E

I shall tell it, since it is I who have heard it:  
in the race of Adam without transgression,  
the beauty of Fand is without equal  
in my time.

2.6E

I saw gaily clad warriors at play with weapons:  
I saw coloured raiment fit only for princes.

2.7E

I saw gentle women at a feast, I saw their  
girls, I saw comely lads going about the  
wooded ridge,

2.8E

I saw musicians within, playing for the maiden.  
Were it not that I came out so quickly  
they would have left me without reason.

2.9E

I saw the hill where dwelt a beautiful woman,  
Eithne of the Sigh; but it is the woman I  
tell of here who brings the hosts out of  
their senses (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 66).

2.1I

*... At chonnarc tír sorcha sáer  
inná ráiter gó ná clóen:  
fil and rí rúamna buden  
Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb.*

2.2I

*Oc techt dam [dar Mag Lúada]  
dommárfas Bili Búada:  
ro gabus i mMaig Denna  
la dá nathraig imchenna.*

2.3I

*Is and atrubairt Lí Ban*

*isin baliu i rrabammar:*  
*“Robad [inmain lem in]firt*  
*diambad Chú no beth it richt.”*

2.4I  
*Álains bantrocht, búaid cen chacht,*  
*ingena Aeda Abrat:*  
*delbad Fainne, fúaim co lli,*  
*ní roacht rígha ná rí.*

2.5I  
*Atbér, úair is lim ro clos,*  
*síl nÁdaim cen imarbos,*  
*delbaid is Fainne rem ré*  
*ná fil and a llethéte.*

2.6I  
*Atchonnarc láechu co lí*  
*co n-armmaib ic indibí:*  
*atchonnarc étach ndatha*  
*nocon erred anflatha.*

2.7I  
*Atchonnarc mná féta ic fleid,*  
*[atchonnarc a n-ingenraid,]*  
*atchonnarc gillu glána*  
*oc imthect in fiddromma.*

2.8I  
*Atchonnarc áes cúil is tig*  
*ic aerfithud dond ingin:*  
*manbad a lúas tísa ammach,*  
*domgéntais co hétréorach.*

2.9I  
*Atchonnarc in cnoc ro buí*  
*álains-ben Eithne Ingubai*  
*acht in ben atberar sund*  
*beres na slúagu asa cund (Dillon, *Serglige* 19–20).*

As observed above, Lóeg's enumeration of the attributes of the Otherworld lacks the religious character present in those of *EC* and, to some extent, *IB*. Where the latter emphasize the peacefulness of the Otherworld, and the absence of death there, Lóeg praises its warlike demeanour and its gaily clad warriors (1.2, 2.1, 2.6 [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 66; Dillon, *Serglige* 19]). Even Lí Ban, when greeting Labraid, dwells repeatedly on his military might – to the point that he rebukes her for attempting to appeal to his pride (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 55; Dillon, *Serglige* 8.). *EC* and *IB* give priority to such points as the lack of rough voices, woe, and wounds; *SCC*, on the other hand, praises the thousands of weapons in Labraid's keeping, and his warriors at swordplay (1.2, 2.1, 2.6 [Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 34–35, 47–48; McCone, *Echtrae* 133–134, 140–141; Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 64 & 66; Dillon, *Serglige* 16 & 20.]).

Rather than extolling the spiritual virtues of the Otherworld, Lóeg focuses on the beauty of its physical features, including the troop of beautiful women and especially Fand herself (1.14, 2.4, 2.9 [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 65–66; Dillon, *Serglige* 18–20]). This is understandable, of course, since she is the 'prize' that Cú Chulainn would win by assisting her people in battle. Some of the imagery he offers is somewhat reminiscent of that of *IB*, offering the combination of normality and wonder in an abundance of everyday objects of precious metals and crystal. However, some of the actual details are quite distinct. Whereas *IB* presents the wonders of the Otherworld as attractive in and of themselves, *SCC* includes them mostly as they are useful to humanity. Both *IB* and *SCC* mention sweet music, but only *SCC* points out its effect on the listeners (2.8) – with the exception, of course, of the presumably Otherworldly music that puts Bran to sleep (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 36 & 49; Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 66; Dillon, *Serglige* 20). The precious gems in *IB* are almost natural phenomena, falling from the sky and washing up on the shore (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 35 & 48). Here, there are hair ornaments of gold, beds of copper, candles of precious stone, and brilliantly coloured cloaks with gold brooches (1.2, 1.6, 1.8, 1.11 [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 64–66; Dillon, *Serglige* 16–18]).

A significant difference is that while the people of the *síde* are referred to as "the race of Adam without transgression" (*síl nÁdaim cen imarbos*), this state of innocence is not emphasized as an essential aspect of the Otherworld (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 66; Dillon, *Serglige* 19). And whether or not one chooses to associate sinlessness with celibacy in *EC* and *IB*, it certainly has no bearing on sexuality in *SCC* as we are told explicitly that Cú Chulainn sleeps with Fand after he has won the day for Labraid. With respect to this liaison, Leonie Duignan has said:

The implication that sexual encounters initiated in the otherworld were not feasible beyond it is observed by Rees and Rees (1961:309), who note that the “supernatural mistress entices the hero to a friendly feminine world” as in the case of *Immram Brain* and that “those who succumb altogether to the fascination of the mysterious otherworld woman are thus lost forever to the world of men.” Although Cú Chulainn did manage to make the transition back to the mortal realm in *Serglige Con Culainn*, it seems that his liaison with the otherworldly woman Fand could not be sustained there. By contrast, Art and Delbcháem’s sexual union does appear to have survived the transition from one world to the other in *Echtrae Airt* with positive implications for the kingship of Tara in line with the primary motivation of that *echtrae*. (Duignan 183).

However, *SCC* differs from *Echtrae Airt* (*EA*) in that Cú Chulainn’s sexual association with Fand actually began in the Otherworld, whereas *EA* gives no indication that Art and Delbcháem slept together until after returning to the mortal realm. In this, *EA* is more akin to the various sovereignty goddess tales, whereas *SCC* has a closer parallel in *Echtrae Nerai* (*EN*), where Nera leaves the Otherworld twice after having had sex there – though even he eventually returns and is never seen in the mortal world again (Meyer, “Adventures” 212–228). Similarly, Loegaire mac Crimthainn returns briefly after a sexual liaison in the Otherworld, but only to say goodbye to his father and his people. He, too, retreats to the Otherworld permanently (Jackson, “Adventure” 384–387). A third analogy can be drawn from oblique references to the lost tale of Crimthann Nia Náir, in which the hero returns from an *echtrae*, which appears to have involved a sexual liaison, but dies shortly thereafter.<sup>2</sup>

The Otherworld is also not found in an overseas location in *SCC*. Lí Ban tells Cú Chulainn that Labraid dwells on a clear lake, and Lóeg says he meets Labraid in a mound. This seems to suggest the presence of a *síd* on an island in the lake, rather than an Otherworld island across the ocean as in *EC* and *IB*.

The one aspect of Lóeg’s description that might be termed spiritual is the absence of lies and falsehood (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 66; Dillon, *Serglige* 19). It is also the only point that is described in terms of a negative, whereas much of the description in *EC* is composed of negatives, as noted above. However, lack of falsehood is not a feature shared by the Otherworld

2 For a discussion of the relevant evidence, see Borsje, *Celtic Evil Eye* 153–191.



descriptions of *EC* and *IB*; of the tales we have examined so far, this attribute is unique to *SCC*.<sup>3</sup> This may be a reflection of the association of truthfulness with sacred kingship, as described above.<sup>4</sup>

As noted above, Fand is a central focus of these passages, and for good reason. She is, in effect, the ‘carrot’ with which Cú Chulainn is being lured into the Otherworld. Lógé says that she is beautiful – surpassing any of the women of Ireland, any of the women of his time, and, more to the point, Eithne Ingubai, who, in the beginning of the tale, was named as Cú Chulainn’s own wife (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 65–66; Dillon, *Serglige* 18–20). He tells Cú Chulainn that, in addition to this, she has wonderful conversation with everyone, and she is skilled in many crafts. This is high praise, given that Triad 76 names the hand of a skilled woman as one of the three best hands in the world (Meyer, “Triads” 10–11 § 76). It is little wonder then that “the heart of every man breaks with longing and love for her” (*maided cridi cech duni/dia seirc is dia inmuni* [Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 65; Dillon, *Serglige* 18]), and no surprise at all that Cú Chulainn, who is not exactly known for his fidelity, finds her ample enticement to fight for Labraid on the basis of Lógé’s description.

### Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, but Whips and Chains Excite Me

Despite its intriguing place in *SCC*, the scene in which Cú Chulainn is beaten with horse switches (*echlasca*) by Fand and Lí Ban has received little critical attention. Myles Dillon and Joanne Findon, who, arguably, have written the most about *SCC*, do not touch on the subject at all. John Carey suggested at one point that it could be read in a shamanic framework with the two women as veritable spirit-brides – a view that will be considered more closely later in this chapter – but has since distanced himself from this interpretation (Carey, “Ailing Hero” 190–198). Even Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, in her re-interpretation of *SCC* in its entirety as a sexual metaphor, only touches on this scene. I will endeavour to show that whether or not one interprets the whole of *SCC* as a sexual metaphor, this scene certainly should be seen as a sexual encounter that is ultimately unfulfilled, leaving Cú Chulainn in a weakened state. That is to say, that it is not an attack at all, but a metaphor for a sexual liaison.

3 Though *IB* does mention a lack of ‘treachery’ (*mrath*) § 9.

4 See Part I, Chapter 2.

Before moving on to this argument, however, there is another set of comparanda that should be considered. In Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, the author reports that Colum Cille had a vision of an angel who appeared with a glass book recording the ordination of kings, and commanded him in the name of God to ordain Aidan as king. The text states: "But when he refused to ordain Aidan as king, according to what was commanded him in the book, because he loved Iogenan, Aidan's brother, more, the angel suddenly stretched out his hand and struck the holy man with a scourge, the livid scar from which remained on his side all the days of his life" (Anderson 473). (*Qui cum secundum quod ei in libro erat commendatum Aidanum in regem ordinare recussaret, quia magis Iogenanum fratrem ejus dilegeret, subito angelus extendens manum sanctum percussit flagillo, cujus livorosum in ejus latere vestigium omnibus suae diebus permansit vitae* [Anderson 472]). The angel appeared on three consecutive nights with the same demand; each time Colum Cille refused, incurring the same result. After the third night, Colum Cille submitted and ordained Aidan as he had been told to do (Anderson 472–475). This, in turn, seems to echo a scene from the letter of Jerome to Eustochium, in which he relates that, during a deathly illness, his spirit was taken before the heavenly judge, who accused him of being a 'Ciceronian,' rather than a Christian. The judge ordered him to be scourged, until he cried out for mercy, and promised never to possess or read books of a worldly nature again. He was then returned to his earthly body, which was black and blue from the scourging (Jerome 127 & 129). It is possible that our scene was taken from one or both of these, as the author probably knew of them. However, it seems unlikely. First, the difference between the setting and characters of the tales renders it improbable. In the two tales described above, the background is decidedly Christian, and the men involved are saints, and those who scourge them are angels. Jerome and Colum Cille are scourged as punishment for disobeying God, and their torment ceases when they agree to do God's will. There is no clear reason given for Lí Ban and Fand lashing Cú Chulainn; though they do want something of him, they do not tell him what it is during their attack – much less continue until he agrees to help them. I therefore do not believe that the account of either Jerome or Colum Cille's experience is behind this scene in *SCC*.

One can find examples throughout medieval Irish literature that seem to illustrate the idea that women's sexuality was considered a danger to a warrior's prowess. Some of these are explicit; others more subtle. Interestingly, the most explicit of all seem to relate to Cú Chulainn in some way. Probably the best-known instance is in the section of *TBC* containing Cú Chulainn's childhood exploits. After defeating the sons of Nechta Scéne, Cú Chulainn

returns to Emain Macha full of bloodlust. He threatens to kill everyone in the fort, and Conchobar responds by commanding that naked women be sent to meet him. The women bare their breasts to him, causing him to hide his face; this stops him long enough for the Ulstermen to throw him into three consecutive vats of water, until his fury is cooled (C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* 25 & 147–148.). In a scene at the end of *TBC*, Cú Chulainn stays his hand from killing Medb when she is either urinating or menstruating (C. O’Rahilly, *Stowe* 269–270). Both actions can be seen as sexual in nature; indeed, in *Aided Derbforgaill* it is urinating as an expression of sexuality that leads to Derbforgaill’s death (Ingridsdotter 82–83). *TBC* says that Cú Chulainn refuses to kill Medb because he would not kill women, but Catherine Karkov proposes that this is another case in which the hero is prevented from action by the nudity of a woman (Karkov 318).<sup>5</sup> In another tale, *Mesca Ulad*, Cú Chulainn is rendered incapable of defending himself when the female satirist, Richis, strips in front of him. After Cú Chulainn kills Richis’ son, she charges Crimthann to kill him in revenge.

Riches stripped off her clothes in Cú Chulainn’s presence. Cú Chulainn averted his face towards the ground in order not to see her nakedness. ‘Let him be attacked at this instant, Craumthann,’ Riches said. ‘There is the man [going] for you, [so defend yourself],’ said Lóeg. ‘Absolutely not,’ Cú Chulainn said; ‘while the woman is in that condition, I shall not rise.’ Lóeg grabbed a stone from out of the chariot, and he threw it so that it happened to strike through her arse, causing her back to break in two and for her afterwards to die from it. Then, after that, Cú Chulainn got up to oppose Craumthann, and he fought against him until he took his head with him and his armament. (Koch & Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age* 127).

*Tiscaid Riches a hétach dí fiad Choin Chulaind. Múchais Cú Chulaind a étan fri lár arnácha-ndercachad a hernochta. ‘Tófairthe hifechtso, a Chrumthaind,’ ol Riches. ‘Do-fuil in fer chucut,’ or Lóeg. Gabais Lóeg cloich asin charput 7 díbaircid dí conda-ecmaic tara luthain co mmemaíd a druim i ndé 7 combo marb de íarom. Cot-réracht iar sin Cú Chulaind ar cend Crumthaind 7 fich fris co tuc a chend lais 7 a fodb. (J.C. Watson 46-47).*

It is not until the woman is dead – rendering her nakedness asexual – that he is able to act once again. In the story of Cú Chulainn and his mistress Fedelm, this concept is presented on a much larger scale. “Fedelm prophesied that she

5 Karkov does not, however, support this supposition.

would be [Cú Chulainn's] lover for a year, and would show herself naked to the Ulaid before coming [to him]. She displayed herself a year and a day after that, so that that is what brought debility upon the Ulaid" (*Tairmgert Fedlim bliadain inna gnāis 7 a taidusin noc[h]t di Ultaib rie tuidecht dosnadba(i)t dīa bliadna arsene, conid ead fofuoair cess for Ultoip* [Carey, "Cu Chulainn" 68; Meyer, "Mitteilungen" 120]). Here, all of the men except for Cú Chulainn are affected, leaving him to defend Ulster against the armies of Connacht on his own. The text does not indicate why Cú Chulainn alone was not affected; perhaps he was not present at the time.<sup>6</sup>

The apotropaic function sometimes ascribed to the stone figures known as sheela-na-gigs may also be a reflex of this belief. These sheelas – as they appear in Ireland and Britain – are generally rough in appearance. They usually have a large head and body with somewhat grotesque features. The defining characteristic, however, is the overly large pudenda, which the sheela is either touching or gesturing towards, sometimes even appearing to pull the lips apart. Jørgen Andersen states that "[t]he sheela crops up, a fully developed motif, in the repertoire of the Norman carvers from about the middle of the 12th century" and ranges into the sixteenth century (Andersen 64 & 14). He does, however, admit that many of the figures, having been dug up or found in riverbeds, have no context from which they may be dated (32). They were most commonly found on churches, though later they began to appear on 'castles' as well (14).

Early antiquarians, upon asking locals what the sheelas were for, were sometimes told that they protected against evil – usually against supernatural threats, but sometimes against physical threats as well. Andersen was the first to seriously examine this claim, but his analysis was relatively weak, being based mostly on comparable carvings from other cultures rather than evidence of any such belief in early Ireland or Britain. While these comparisons were pertinent, he did not explain the relatively crude appearance of most sheelas, whereas his examples from other cultures tended to be aesthetically pleasing. His firm belief that the sheelas were wholly the result of the influence of Romanesque *exhibitionnistes* – "iconographic images whose purpose was to give visual support to the church's moral teachings" – from the continent also undermined his argument, as these were not possessed of an apotropaic function (Weir 10). Almost ten years later, Anthony Weir and James Jerman argued that the sheelas were entirely a function of the medieval Church, being used, as were the *exhibitionnistes*, to warn of the dangers of falling into lust. Their argument, however, failed

6 See also Carey, "Encounter" 10–24.

to adequately explain the (sometimes substantial) differences between the sheelas and *exhibitionnistes* and the common placement of the sheelas near entrances (10). It was Patrick Ford, writing in 1998, who was finally able to harmonize these views. By taking Andersen's argument and combining it with examples from tales such as those above along with the terrifying hags who confront Conaire Mór in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and Níall Noígíallach in *Echtrae mac nEchach Muimedóin*, he posited that the sheelas as we have them are a new expression of a much older idea – the idea that the nakedness of a woman, and particularly her genitalia, could serve as protection against very real dangers (Ford 176–190).

One might well wonder why this should be the case. Ford argues that female nudity represents a crossing of the boundaries on which early Irish society was based. He states that female genitalia “literally turn away and subvert culture as exemplified in male achievement, specifically military organization and heroic valour. The genitals [of the sheelas] are exaggerated to emphasize their role as envoys of otherness.” I believe it is a good deal more simple than that.

Sjoestedt makes some interesting linguistic observations regarding words for warriors that may serve to illuminate the problem. I believe the case can be made most effectively in her own words:

*Nia* can best be explained as from a stem \**neit*- which belongs to the root from which the name of *Mars Neto* is derived and which recurs in Irish *níth* ‘combat’, Welsh *nwyd* ‘ardour’, ‘passion’....

An analogous conception finds expression in *lath gaille*. The second term *gal* ‘valour’ doubtless belongs to the root of Anglo-Saxon *glēd* ‘flame’. It would then really mean ‘ardour’. The etymology of *lath* is obscure, but the word is not to be separated from the homonym *lath* ‘rut’, a meaning which sometimes attaches to Welsh *nwyf* cited above. Here we have two specializations, one sexual, the other military, of a single notion of ardour or excitement, which we noted in Irish *nia*.

*Cur* or *caur* ... is connected with a root which means ‘to swell’ ... (Sjoestedt 58).

I will address *caur* shortly; for now, let us turn our attention to *láth*, *nia*, and *níth*. Both the sexual and military meanings are derivations of an underlying concept; neither definition having evolved from the other – which would seem to indicate that to the early Irish and Welsh, sexual and military

prowess were seen if not as equivalent, then at least as two sides of the same coin. A man could not expend or express his military prowess and his sexual prowess at the same time; the use of one resulted in using up the other, as well. Therefore, if a warrior was confronted by female nudity, he was immediately drawn into a sexual situation and could no longer function as a warrior – his ardour was held captive by the sight of a naked woman.

Another factor that points in this direction is that, as Carey has shown, war goddesses and land goddesses (who are also related with fecundity) are often interlinked. In the genealogies of the Túatha Dé Danann and *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*LGÉ*), Ernmas is listed as having three war-goddess daughters – though only the first two, Badb and Macha, are consistently named as such. In the genealogies, the third is the Morrígain. In *LGÉ*, the third daughter is Anann; though in one of the texts she is glossed as being the Morrígain. In the same text, however, Anann is identified with the Paps of Anu, as well as with the land goddess. In addition, Carey adduces *LGÉ*'s naming of an additional three daughters of Ernmas, the three land goddesses Ériu, Fóitla, and Banba, as further evidence of this symmetrical duality. He also cites Néit's two wives, Nemain (war goddess) and Fea (tutelary goddess), and two of the Dagda's paramours, Boand (tutelary goddess) and the Morrígain (war goddess), to demonstrate his conclusion (Carey, "Notes" 269–275).

This may, for example, explain the outcome of the confrontation between Cú Chulainn and the Morrígain in *TBC*. The scene begins as follows:

Cú Chulainn saw coming towards him a young woman of surpassing beauty, clad in clothes of many colours.

'Who are you?' asked Cú Chulainn.

'I am the daughter of Búan the king,' said she. 'I have come to you for I fell in love with you on hearing your fame, and I have brought with me my treasures and my cattle.'

'It is not a good time at which you have come to us, that is, our condition is ill, we are starving (?). So it is not easy for me to meet a woman while I am in this strife.'

'I shall help you in it.'

'It is not for a woman's body that I have come.' (C. O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I* 176–177).

*Co n-aca Cú in n-óben chuci co n-étuch cach datha impe , delb roderscaigthe furri.*

'Cé taí-siu?' or Cú Chulaind.

*'Ingen Búain ind rí, or sí. 'Dodeochad chucut- su. Rot charus ar th'airscélaib,  
 7 tucus mo séótu lim 7 mo indili.'  
 'Ní maith ém ind inbuid tonnánac, nachis olc ar mbláth, amin gorti. Ní  
 haurussa dam-sa dano comrac fri banscáil céin no mbeó isind níth so.'  
 'Bidim chobair-se dait-siu oc sudiu.'  
 'Ní ar thóin mná dano gabus-sa inso.' (57, ln. 1846–1855).*

Here, we see the 'other' side of the Morrígain, beautiful and wealthy. Cú Chulainn holds to his decision, despite the fact that she then vows to oppose him out of vengeance – showing again her warlike side. In addition to his stated refusal, Cú Chulainn was likely also conscious of the fact that Medb's armies were able to enter Ulster while the rest of the Ulaid were under their debility because he had been away keeping a tryst with Fedelm – and, although this Fedelm is presented as human, there is surely a connection with his affair with the *síd*-woman Fedelm, with its disastrous consequences for the Ulaid (8 ln. 222–224 & p. 131).

There are, of course, two similar scenes in *Cath Maige Tuired (CMT)* involving the Dagda, who does sleep with both the Morrígain and the daughter of the Fomorian, Indech, and, in both cases, gains their help in the upcoming battle. However, in neither case is the battle imminent, and so the trysts do not affect the Dagda's fighting ability when the battle does commence (Gray 44–45 & 50–51). The conjecture might be made that success in gaining their assistance in the battle – even from Indech's daughter – could be due to his natural endowment and ability as a lover. His virility, in that case, would be of greater account than his martial prowess and the loss of the latter possibly less detrimental. A more thorough survey of the literature than can be made here would be required to establish this point, but it remains a possibility to be considered.

How do these observations relate to our whipping scene? The beating given to Cú Chulainn by Fand and Lí Ban is the evident cause of his year-long illness. However, there are allusions in the text which suggest that love-sickness is responsible. Lógé says that Cú Chulainn is "[y]ing in sleep of wasting sickness ... in the toils of women's wantonness" (*fri súan serglige ... eter bríga banespa*) and Emer rebukes him for "[y]ing for love of a woman" (*laigi fri bangrád* [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 59 & 61; Dillon, *Serglige* 11 ln. 317 & 384 & 14 ln 389]).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, when Cú Chulainn finally rises and goes to meet Lí Ban, she makes the curious claim that "Not to harm thee did we come ... but to seek thy friendship ... Manannán mac Lir has left [Fand], and

7 However, the precise meaning of *banespa* is unclear.

she has given her love to thee" (*Ní du for fogail ém ... dodeochammárni, acht is do chuinchid for caratraid ... Ros léci Manandán mac Lir, ⁊ dorat seirc duitsu íarom* [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 52; Dillon, *Serlige* 5 ln. 130–133]). This declaration makes no sense if the tale is given a straight reading. However, if we take the whipping scene as a metaphor for a sexual encounter – or more specifically for sexual frustration – it suddenly comes together.

As stated above, this is not the first time SCC has been read as sexual metaphor; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, in her article "*Serlige Con Culainn: A Possible Re-interpretation*," posits that the entire tale is a metaphor for Cú Chulainn's impotence and subsequent recovery in the Otherworld. In addition to the textual evidence discussed above, she takes his missed casts at the chain-linked birds – the first time he has ever missed his mark – as evidence of his impotence. While it is my own opinion that missing these birds is the cause, rather than a symbol, of his subsequent failure, other of Ní Bhrolcháin's suggestions are more relevant to the argument presented here. She suggests that the title is a play on the words *serg* and *serc*, which mean 'shriveled' and 'love,' respectively (Ní Bhrolcháin, "*Serlige*" 344–355). This is especially interesting considering Sjoestedt's grouping together of *caur* with *láth*, *nia* and *níth*. She does not give much explanation to *cur/caur*, but a connection can be found in Carey's article "*Fir Bolg: A Native Etymology Revisited*" where he comments, "The ... association between swelling and bellicosity appears in Welsh *cawr* 'giant', Cornish *caur*, Galatian *Καυραρος*, Gaulish *Cavarillus* – all from IE \*keuə- 'to swell'" (Carey, "*Fir Bolg*" 81). If a hero's strength comes from swelling, and love causes shrivelling as Ní Bhrolcháin seems to suggest, it is little wonder that a warrior cannot handle both simultaneously!

In a normal sexual encounter (as envisioned by the medieval mind) the male is the active element and the female is passive, the sperm from male ejaculation penetrating the waiting womb. Here, though, Cú Chulainn fails to participate actively in the encounter – which could be taken as Ní Bhrolcháin's postulated impotence, or a failure to orgasm. The result is that he is overcome by two active women, each wielding an *echlasc* or horse switch, elsewhere seen as an instrument of shame when used on a human being. An interesting comparison might be drawn here between SCC and *Fingal Rónáin (FR)*. In *FR*, the young queen believes she is going to a tryst with Mael Fothartaig, when, in fact, his man Congal is waiting for her, to berate her for soliciting her husband's son and so dishonouring them both. He beats her with a horse switch (*echlasc*), the same instrument Lí Ban and Fand use on Cú Chulainn. Shame, sexual frustration, and whipping with an *echlasc* are here, again, bound together. While it would be too much to



claim on the basis of this evidence that whipping with an *echlasc* should always be seen specifically as sexual shame, it would be remiss not to at least suggest that this might have been the case – at least under certain circumstances.

We therefore have a society in which the ideas of military and sexual prowess are bound up together. There is evidence for this in the language, art – if, indeed, the sheelas are apotropaic as I have argued – and literature of Early Ireland. *SCC* itself contains textual evidence that Cú Chulainn's wasting-sickness is actually love-sickness, and has elements found in another tale involving sexual shame. These things being the case, the tale does not make sense if given a straight reading – but understanding the whipping scene as failed sexual congress gives new meaning to a confusing aspect of this under-studied tale.

## Otherworld Women and Bird Transformations

It is generally accepted that the two chain-linked birds that Cú Chulainn is unable to bring down and the two Otherworld women who whip him are one and the same, though the tale does not explicitly say so (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” ln. 59–60, 72–78). This assumption seems to be made on the basis of Ethne's statement that Cú Chulainn should not cast at them, “for there is some power behind these birds” (*ar itá nách cumachta fora cúl na n-én sa* [Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 50; Dillon, *Serglige* 75, 3 ln. 62]). This is one of many places in early Irish literature – and other Celtic sources as well – where supernatural women are shown to have the ability of transforming into birds, though sometimes this power is used by or over mortals as well.

The tale that stands out as being most conspicuously like *SCC* in this motif is *Aided Derbforgaill* (*AD*). There, Derbforgaill falls in love with Cú Chulainn and decides to seek him out. She and her maid fly overhead in the form of two swans linked by a gold chain, just as Lí Ban and Fand do. Cú Chulainn casts a stone at her and, unlike the scenario in *SCC*, strikes her so that the stone goes into her side. She takes human form and rebukes him for harming her when she had come seeking him: “You have been evil to me’ said the girl, ‘and it is to you I have come’” (“*Olc ro bá frim*”, *ar ind ingen*, “& is tú do-röacht” [Ingridsdotter 82–83]). He sucks the stone out of her side but says that, since he has sucked her side, he cannot have sex with her. Instead he ‘gives’ her to Lugaid (82–83). Another version of this event appears in an episode interpolated towards the end of *Tochmarc Emire* (*TE*). Here, Derbforgaill has already met Cú Chulainn – in fact, he rescued her from

the Fomori and returned her to her father. She goes to meet him in Ireland as the result of an agreement between them to do so (E. Hull 82) – much like Fand's meeting with Cú Chulainn at the end of *SCC*. The scene where they meet is much the same, except that, this time, Cú Chulainn is more explicit in his reason for refusing her: “I cannot wed thee now ... for I have drunk thy blood” (“*Ní comricciubsa festa frit ... ar atibus t’ful*” [E. Hull, 82; Van Hamel, *Compert* 62; Cross & Slover 170]).

*Aislinge Óenguso (AO)* has elements of each of the tales discussed above. Oengus dreams of a beautiful woman, with whom he falls in love to the point of illness – not unlike Cú Chulainn, but without the element of physical contact. The search for this woman leads to Caer Iborméith, who is one of a company one hundred fifty swan maidens, every couple bound with a silver chain between them – except Caer, who wears a gold chain. She agrees to go with Oengus, provided she can first return to Loch Béal Dracon. There, they both turn into swans and fly around the lake three times before flying to Oengus's home (Shaw 43–64; Gantz 108–112).

Both versions of *Compert Con Culainn (CCC)* begin with a mysterious flock of birds devastating the land near Emain Macha (Van Hamel, *Compert* 3; Gantz 131; E. Hull 15). In one, the birds lead the Ulaid to a *síd*. But in a later version of the tale, the birds are, in fact, Dechtine, who is Conchobar's sister and (ultimately) Cú Chulainn's mother, along with a company of transformed women, again linked with chains, though this time they are silver (E. Hull 15–17). In both versions of the story, Dechtine is a mortal, being either the sister or daughter of Conchobar. However, she gives birth to Cú Chulainn (the first time) in a *síd*; this, along with the fact that the birds are linked with silver chains, suggests that she may have originally been an Otherworld figure (Hollo 16).

Étain in *Tochmarc Étaíne (TÉ)* is, of course, an Otherworld woman who is reborn to human parents, but without memory of her previous incarnation. When Midir, her Otherworld husband, comes to claim her, she agrees to go with him only with the consent of her mortal husband, Eochaid. When Midir wins the right to put his arms around Étain in a *fidchell* game with Eochaid, they both rise out of the house and turn into swans (Bergin & Best 184–185).

One aspect that all of the tales above seem to share is that the birds in question appear to be related to water, which, as explained previously, was seen by the Celts as an entrance to the Otherworld. The birds in *AD*, *TÉ*, and *AO* are all swans (Ingridsdotter 82–83; Bergin & Best 184–185; Shaw 61 & 63; Gantz 112). The birds in *SCC* fly under the water after Cú Chulainn hits one of them on the wing (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 50; Dillon, *Serglige* 3.).

Though it is not explicit in the tale itself, Anne Ross has surmised that the destructive birds in *CCC* are geese (Ross 271). Another water bird that seems to be particularly identified with transformed women is the crane. These do seem to be mortal women more often than not, with the possible exception of Aoife, daughter of Dealbhaoth, from whose skin Mannanán made his crane bag. Most of these, however, are turned into cranes by someone else out of jealousy or retribution, rather than having the inherent ability to do so of their own will. Aoife was one such, who was turned into a crane by a jealous rival (MacNeill 21–22 & 118–120). In *The Fate of the Children of Lir*, another Aoife turns her step-children into swans from envy (O’Duffy 45–46). Likewise, Colum Cille turned a queen and her handmaid into cranes (or herons) because they refused to show him due respect (Keating 90–91). The notable exception is Finn’s grandmother, who turned into a crane when he was an infant in order to rescue him after he is thrown from a cliff (An Chraoibhín 187–195). However, this tale is quite late and the author may well have chosen this theme for reasons of convenience and with reference to birds being associated with witches, rather than its being the case that the tale has any implications for the bird transformations of Otherworld women (187–195).

While water birds enjoy a central place in the lore, they are by no means the only birds for which Otherworld women have an affinity. In the Battle of Tailtiu, Ériu alternates in form between that of a woman, and that of a grey-white crow (Ross 205). Likewise, the triad of war goddesses – Macha, Badb, and Morrígain – often appear as crows or ravens. For example, in *TBC* the Morrígain appears to the Donn Cuailngi as a bird and warns him of the impending attack by the armies of Connacht: “Does the restless Black Bull know (it) without destructive falsehood? ... Fierce is the raven, men are dead ... every day the death of a great tribe ...” (*In fitir in dub dusáim can eirc ... boidb bógeimnech feochair fíach fir máirm ... coidge díá bás mórmacni iar féic muintire do écaib* [C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I* 152 & 30 ln. 957–962]). Indeed, one of the Badb’s epithets is *Badb Catha* or ‘Battle Raven,’ though it seems that the bird was named after the goddess, rather than vice versa (Van Hamel, *Compert* 42; Epstein Chapter 1). The association of such scavengers with war is easy to understand, as crows and ravens would surely feast on any remains of battle that were not removed quickly enough. But they were also associated with prognostication, an association that understandably linked them to witches in later times (Ross 243).

Arthurian literature, drawing presumably on Welsh sources, offers an interesting parallel here. The *Didot-Perceval* contains a scene where Perceval defeats a knight at a ford. The knight tells Perceval that he had been

defending the ford (and the invisible castle nearby) for nearly a year to win the love of a certain maiden who lived there. As he has now been overthrown, it is up to Perceval to defend the ford and castle. When Perceval refuses, he is attacked by a flock of large, black birds. He wounds one, and she turns into a beautiful woman, and is borne away by the other birds. The other knight reveals that the injured bird-woman was the sister of his mistress, and she would now be carried to Avalon (Loomis 97; Bryant 136–139).

Bird transformations are not limited to women, though it seems it is more common for them. Midir turning himself and Étaín into swans has already been mentioned above, as has the transformation of Óengus and his mistress (Bergin & Best 184–185; Shaw 61 & 63; Gantz 112). Conaire Mór's father in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* (*TBDD*) was a bird-man, as was his supernatural advisor, Nemglan. It was for this reason that one of his *gessi* (taboos) was not to hunt or eat birds (Knott 5; Koch & Carey 158).

Earlier evidence linking birds and supernatural beings – and women in particular – can be found in both the insular and continental archaeological record. A goddess with a beaked face is depicted on a jar cover from Linwood (Ross 217). The Reinheim torc has an owl emerging from the head of the goddess (217). Regarding the Gaulish goddess Nantosuelta, Ross says, “[o]n one occasion ... Nantosuelta appears without her raven attribute, but with wings, indicating the complete fusion of bird and goddess which is evident from the literary sources” (246). She does not, however, state where this representation can be found. She does mention two other representations of Nantosuelta – one in Sarreburg and one in Speyer – one of which show the goddess with a raven and dovecote (Ross 246).

We have seen that both Otherworld women and mortal women of magic are associated with bird transformations; the latter possibly by analogy to the former. The fact that the same kinds of associations can be found in the archaeological record suggests that the Irish idea is a remnant of an older religious belief.

## The Shamanism Question Re-visited

Like *EC*, *IB*, and *IDB*, *SCC* has been the subject of suppositions concerning shamanic content. In his article “Cú Chulainn as Ailing Hero,” John Carey proposes that, originally, Cú Chulainn's illness and Otherworld journey happened simultaneously, the latter being a visionary rather than a physical quest. He invites the reader to compare Cú Chulainn's illness, liaison with Fand, Otherworld journey, and the *Briarthartheosc* interpolation

with shamanic initiatory illnesses, spirit-brides, ecstatic journeys to the Otherworld, and advice gained from the Otherworld, respectively.

Taking the last comparison first, Carey argued that the *Briarthartheosc* section of SCC is evidence for his theory that two of the major episodes of the tale – Cú Chulainn's sickness and his journey to the Otherworld – were originally simultaneous.<sup>8</sup> His position was that, while ill, Cú Chulainn made a soul journey to the Otherworld. During that time, Lugaid Reóderg was named king of Tara. When the message was brought to Lugaid, Cú Chulainn's divine father, Lug, took up residence in the latter's inert body long enough to advise Lugaid on how to be a good king. A large part of Carey's interpretation was based on comparisons to the Welsh tale of Pwyll Prince of Dyfed, found in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* (Jones & Jones 3–20.). Carey compared Cú Chulainn's situation to that of Pwyll, when he went to the Otherworld region of Annwfn and Arawn, the king of Annwfn, ruled over Dyfed in his place. This took place over the course of one year, the same amount of time that Cú Chulainn was ill and unable to speak. Pwyll, like Cú Chulainn, enjoyed the companionship of a lovely Otherworld woman, although he notably abstained from sexual congress with her. Pwyll's name means 'mind' or 'sense,' leading Carey to observe that "the fact that it is 'Mind' who goes off into another realm suggests comparison with Cú Chulainn's year-long stupor" (Carey, "Cú Chulainn" 190–198). However, in his more recent book *Ireland and the Grail*, Carey retracts this portion of his argument, stating that Pwyll's story and especially his name are more comparable to Conn Cétchathach than to Cú Chulainn, and, indeed, that the figure of Pwyll may be derived from Conn (Carey, *Ireland* 112–114). This being the case, I will not discuss this portion of his article further.

The initiatory illness and acquisition of spirit-brides in shamanic societies have been described in some detail above (Eliade, *Shamanism* 33–66). To recapitulate briefly, the shaman-to-be experiences an initiatory illness, which involves ritual death and often dismemberment, followed by a resurrection process, which gives the candidate the ability to control spirits and travel to the Otherworld by means of ecstasy. This process represents the destruction of the candidate's psyche, and its reconstruction in a form more suited to the role of shaman (33–66). In those cases, where a spirit-bride is involved, she often initiates the illness in order to gain the affection of the shaman-to-be. The illness is followed by a period of instruction. It is this period of instruction following the ritual death and resurrection that

8 For information on shamanic advice from the Otherworld, see Vitebsky 104–105.

grants the ability to shamanize, not the mere fact of the relationship with an Otherworldly being (75).

In *SCC*, Cú Chulainn is attacked in a vision by Fand and Lí Ban. Later, he is told by Lí Ban that they came to him to gain his friendship, and that Fand is in love with him. Carey compares this to the celestial bride or spirit-bride acting to cause the initiatory illness out of love of the shaman-to-be (Carey, "Ailing Hero" 197). Such a comparison seems appealing, but only on the surface. Firstly, such a spirit is often very jealous, and will try to keep the shaman to herself, attempting to divide him from his earthly wife by keeping him in the celestial realms (Eliade, *Shamanism* 78). However, *SCC* gives no indication that Fand tries to keep Cú Chulainn from returning to the mortal realm and Emer when his time in the Otherworld is done. Indeed, Fand displays no displeasure at sharing him with Emer until Emer tries to attack Fand out of her own jealousy (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 70; Dillon, *Serglige* 24). More to the point, however, is the fact that while the illness is indeed inflicted by Fand (along with Lí Ban), this is not followed by a period of tutelage. The text says only that Cú Chulainn slept with Fand and stayed with her for a month (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 70; Dillon, *Serglige* 24). Were this a tale of shamanic initiation, the sharing of Otherworldly knowledge would be the essential fact to include (Eliade, *Shamanism* 75ff).

As previously mentioned, there are scourging scenes in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and in a letter from Jerome to Eustochium in which each saint is described as being scourged by an angel. However, as explained above, these scourgings are administered as punishment for disobeying God, and as soon as the men repent, the punishment is ended. That is not the situation we have here.<sup>9</sup>

Moving on to the Otherworld journey itself, other problems arise. As stated above, Carey maintains that Cú Chulainn's illness and his quest were originally undertaken simultaneously, with his soul wandering out of his body during his sickness – hence his inability to speak. The major argument put forward by Carey in support of this view was the existence of the *Briarthartheosc*, which, however, has been dealt with above. Carey also suggests that Fergus's saying that Cú Chulainn's body should not be disturbed can be interpreted in this way (Carey, "Cú Chulainn" 196–197 n. 22.). However, both versions (A and B) have Lóeg going to scout out the Otherworld for Cú Chulainn before he goes himself, and Lí Ban and Lóeg expressing their regret that it is he who is there and not Cú Chulainn (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 52; Dillon, *Serglige* 5). A potential argument in this case

9 See Part II, Chapter 4.

might be that Lóeg here serves as Cú Chulainn's alter ego, his soul-self who goes to the Otherworld to assess the situation before going physically. But this still does not address the fact that this journey does not constitute the kind of personality- and life-changing experience that the initiatory illness would be for a shaman. No new abilities are gained, a new understanding of the cosmos is not reached. Indeed, the supernatural beings present in this tale summon Cú Chulainn to the Otherworld not for his good or the good of his people, but for their own benefit.

Finally, Eliade says of shamans that “[t]hey are not alone in being able to fly up to heaven or to reach it by means of a tree, ladder or the like; other privileged persons can match them here – sovereigns, heroes, initiates” (Eliade, *Shamanism* 493). From the evidence adduced here, it seems to me that Cú Chulainn falls squarely into the category of hero rather than a shamanic role.<sup>10</sup>

## Lí Ban

It is interesting to compare how mortals treat the women of the Otherworld with how those same women are treated within their own society. We get a glimpse of this within *SCC*, if we analyse Lí Ban's treatment by Cú Chulainn and Lóeg, of the mortal realm, in contrast to how she is treated by her Otherworld husband, Labraid.

The most pertinent examples of Lí Ban's treatment at the hand of mortals – leaving out the account of Cú Chulainn's throwing stones and spears at her when she is in bird form, as he does not at that point know that she is a woman – occur when she asks Cú Chulainn to come to the Otherworld with her. He refuses, saying he will not go at the invitation of a woman; he sends Lóeg in his stead (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 63). This contrasts sharply with what we have seen in *EC* and *IB*. In those tales, the hero did not balk at being invited by a woman at all. Cú Chulainn's response is more in keeping with what we know of early Irish society, and the contrast emphasizes how subversive such an invitation would seem to an early Irish audience.<sup>11</sup> When Lí Ban warns Lóeg not to leave the Otherworld except under the protection of a woman, he demurs (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 52). The word that Lí Ban uses here is *commairge*, meaning ‘protection.’ It is the same word used with a more clearly legal connotation in narratives

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Carey, “Cú Chulainn,” 198.

<sup>11</sup> See Part I, Chapter 1.

such as *Longes mac n-Uislenn* regarding the sureties given for Derdriu and the sons of Uisliu to return to Ulster safely – sureties that substantially change the shape of the politics of Ulster when they are broken (V. Hull, *Longes* 47–48 & 65–66). But early Irish law prevented women from giving sureties, so such a statement as Lí Ban's would be rendered invalid (F. Kelly, *Guide* 202). It is no wonder, then, that Lóeg is hesitant about placing himself in her care. On the other hand, it might serve to illustrate another way in which Otherworld women may be different from mortal women, if they are granted such rights in their own society. Indeed, if we were to base our conclusion on this example alone, it appears as if a woman's pledge of protection may actually have a greater significance in the Otherworld than a man's, as Lí Ban is explicit that *only* under woman's protection is Lóeg safe. I do not, however, believe this is the case. It seems more likely that he must accept the protection of a woman, because only women are available – the men have all gone to war.

There is still Labraid's treatment of his wife to consider. After meeting with Fand, Lí Ban sees Labraid arrive and she takes Lóeg to meet him. She can tell he is angry, so she recites a poem of praise to him. He does not respond, so she chants another. Again, he does not respond. After her third attempt, he rebukes her saying, “[i]t is not pride in me, woman,/nor is my reason confused by joyous arrogance./We shall go into a fierce and crowded fight of many spears,/where red swords shall be wielded against right hands,/many peoples with the one heart of Eochaid Íuil./I have no pride” (*Ní úal ná húabur dam, a ben,/nach ardaicnid mellchi mescthair ar cond./Rechmi cath n-imrind n-imda n-imamnas,/imberta claideb nderg ar dornaib desaib,/túathaib ilib óenchrídiu Ehdach Íuil./Nítanbí nach n-úall./Ní úall ní úabar dam, a ben* [Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 55; Dillon, *Serglige* 8]). Though Lí Ban is trying to raise Labraid's spirits, he reprimands her in front of Lóeg, a visitor, which in most any culture would be shaming, but particularly in a culture so honour-bound as early Ireland. Of course, this interpretation depends on the tone of voice Labraid uses with his wife in this instance – something we cannot possibly know.

## Fand and Emer

While Lí Ban figures chiefly in the early part of the tale, Fand is, of course, the focus of the Otherworld visit for Cú Chulainn. Though familiar in some ways, she is in great part very different from the Otherworld women we see in *EC* and *IB*.



Like Connlae's mistress, Fand claims to have loved Cú Chulainn from afar. This theme is not uncommon in Celtic literature, and in early Irish literature in particular, where it was termed *grád écmaise* – 'absent love' (Quin s.v. *écmais*).<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of *TBDD*, for example, King Eochaid comes to Brí Léith and sees a beautiful woman preparing to wash her hair in a basin. When he propositions her, she says: "Tis for that we have come this way under your safeguard" (*Is ed dorochtmar fort foesam sunn* [Koch and Carey 156; Knott 2]). She goes on to tell him that she is Étaín daughter of Étar, king of the *síde*, and that "[t]he men of the *síd*, both kings and nobles, have been wooing me; but nothing was got from me, because ever since I was able to speak, I have loved you and given you a child's love for the great tales about you and your splendour" (*Fir in tshide, eter rigu, chaemu, ocum chuindchid, ni etas form fobithin rot-carusa* [<sub>7</sub> *tucus*] *seirc lelbhan o ba tualaing labartha ar th'airscelaib, t'anius* [Koch & Carey 156; Knott 2]). Also, in the Welsh tale of Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, the Otherworld woman Rhiannon appears to Pwyll. When he asks who she is and why she is there, she tells him, "I am Rhiannon daughter of Hefeydd the Old, and I am being given to a husband against my will. But no husband have I wished for, and that out of love of thee, nor will I have him even now unless thou reject me. And it is to hear thy answer to that that I am come" (*Riannon uerch Heueyd Hen wyfi, am rodi y wr om hanwod yd ydys. Ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti. Ac nys mynnafe'twa, onyt ti am gwrthyt. Ac e wybot dy attep di am hynny e deuthum i* [Jones & Jones 10; Thomson 11]). Like Étaín and Eochaid, Rhiannon and Pwyll have never met before; presumably, then, Rhiannon's love is likely based on Pwyll's reputation rather than direct knowledge of him. On this last point, *SCC* is similar to the above tales: Fand also falls in love with Cú Chulainn based on his reputation. However, the similarity ends there: whereas in most of these tales the woman makes a point of having refused all other suitors – a point that Ériu also makes after having lain with Elatha in *CMT* – Fand is actually already married (Gray 26–27). She only turns her attention to Cú Chulainn after she has been abandoned by Manannán, having been – as she later admits – happy in their marriage before then.

An even greater difference between *SCC* and the two tales discussed in the last chapter is in the portrayal of Fand herself. The Otherworld women in *EC* and *IB* are confident and authoritative. They are, with one possible

<sup>12</sup> See also Ingridsdotter 19, with the following qualifications: the Sanskrit word should be *adṛsta-kāma*, not *adṛst-akama*; and *amor de lonh* is Occitan, not Old French (per John Carey).

exception, in control of every situation in which they appear.<sup>13</sup> But apart from the whipping scene, Fand seems curiously absent for much of the tale, and even then her presence is classified as a vision: the women come to Cú Chulainn while he is asleep, and when the Ulaid go to wake him, Fergus refuses to allow it saying: “Do not disturb him. It is a vision that he sees” (*Náchi nglúasid res atchí* [Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 50; Dillon, *Serglige* 3]). Fand is a sort of shade in the background for most of the tale. She is constantly referred to by characters present in a given scene, but does not appear herself except at the beginning and end of the tale – except for a brief phrase stating that she welcomed him on his arrival in the Otherworld (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 66–67; Dillon, *Serglige* 20 ln. 580–581). Even Lóeg’s meeting with her in the Otherworld is referred to in a single line in the first account – in which she has no dialogue, though others in her company of women do – and occupies less than a quarter of his report in the second. Fand’s love for Cú Chulainn is expressed to him three times before he goes to the Otherworld, and yet she is not present for any of these declarations. The first time it is Óengus, when he visits Cú Chulainn at his sickbed, who tells him of her affections; the second time it is Lí Ban, when Cú Chulainn returns to the standing stone to meet her a year after their first encounter; the third informant is Lóeg, after his exploratory trip to visit her. Throughout the text, she only has two brief sentences where she speaks expressly to Cú Chulainn, and both signal endings. First, when they are parting at the end of the month Cú Chulainn spends in the Otherworld, she tells him: “Wherever thou tellest me to go to meet thee I shall go” (*In bale ... atbérasu frimsa dul it chomdáil ragatsa* [Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 70; Dillon, *Serglige* 24]). She speaks to him again after his admission to Emer that he will always desire her (Emer), saying: “Leave me then!” (*Mo lécudsa didiu*); this is the beginning of the end of their liaison (Dillon, “Wasting Sickness” 72; Dillon, *Serglige* 25). Her major speeches are directed at Lóeg, Emer, Manannán or the company in general – anyone, it seems, but Cú Chulainn himself. In this way, she is almost a mirror image of Connlae, who speaks to the Otherworld woman only once, when he first sees her, and does not speak to her again before jumping into her boat and disappearing with her over the horizon (McCone, *Echtrae* 130–131 & 193–195).

Nonetheless, it is here, at the end of the tale, that Fand really blossoms as a character. Here, she finally takes control of her own fate, rather than leaving it in the hands of others. It is a reactive choice, based on Cú Chulainn’s acknowledgement of his continuing attachment to Emer – but it is *her*

13 When the druid Corann renders the Otherworld woman imperceptible in *EC*.

decision, nonetheless.<sup>14</sup> And while she laments her loss, she does not appear to be resentful; she freely recognizes Emer's virtues and that she is a fitting spouse for Cú Chulainn. "Emer, the man is thine," she says, "and mayest thou enjoy him, good woman! I must long for what my hand cannot yet reach ... [u]nhappy is one who gives love to another, unless it be cherished: it is better to be thrust aside, unless love is given for love" (*A Emer, is lat in fer/, ro mela, a deigben:/aní ná roich lám cid acht,/is écen dam a dúthracht ... [m] airg dobeir seirc do duni,/menes tarda dia airi:/is ferr do neoch a chor ass,/mane charthar mar charas* [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 72; Dillon, *Serglige* 26]). In the text as we have it there is no indication that Fand believed Cú Chulainn's love for her to be superior to his love for Emer; indeed, she may have been counting on the allowance under early Irish law for a man to have multiple spouses of different classifications in order to entice Cú Chulainn to her at all (F. Kelly, *Guide* 70). But here she decides that since Cú Chulainn's love for her is not as encompassing as her own for him, it is better for her to leave. She implicitly contrasts her happy times with Manannán with her current tryst with Cú Chulainn: on the one hand, she says, "[w]hen noble Manannán took me/I was a fitting spouse:/he could not win against me, in his time/a game ... at chess" (*Dánam thuc Manannán mass/robam céle comadas:/noco bérad orm ria lind/cluchi eráil ar fídchill* [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 73; Dillon, *Serglige* 27]). But then she says of Cú Chulainn, "[h]e whom I loved exceedingly / has brought me here into distress" (*intí ro charus co holl/domrat sund i n-écomlond* [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 74; Dillon, *Serglige* 28]). *Écomlond* – which Dillon translated as 'distress' – is given a primary meaning in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL)* of 'unequal battle' or 'unfair odds' (Quin s.v. *éccomlonn*). She seems to be stressing here that while she and Manannán had been matched evenly, Cú Chulainn has brought her to a fight she cannot win. She returns to Manannán sorrowful but accepting of her situation, calling to mind their previous happiness even as she honestly admits to him her preference for Cú Chulainn. "There is one of you," she says to Manannán, "whom I would liefer follow than the other. But ... I will go with you, and I will not wait upon Cú Chulainn, for he has abandoned me. And ... [t]hou hast not a worthy queen already, but Cú Chulainn has" (*fil úaib nech bad ferr lim a chéli do lenmain. Acht ... is letsu ragatsa, ⁊ ní nraidiub Coin Culaind, ar rom thréc. Ocus ... ní fil rígain chátamail acotsu, atá immurgu la Coin Culaind* [Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 74; Dillon, *Serglige* 28]).

14 See Findon 126.

In short, what we appear to see here is a rapid growth of character – or at least of characterization – on the part of the Otherworld woman. At the beginning, Fand seems like a distant shadow; she is a way and a reason to get Cú Chulainn into the Otherworld, but not much more. In the ending dialogue this changes; as Findon points out, even Emer falls silent while Fand speaks (Findon 126–127). And though Findon claims that “[s]ignificantly, verbal prowess is the only one of Emer’s qualities not possessed by Fand,” it would be more accurate to say that it is the only one of the qualities not mentioned by Cú Chulainn (Findon 131). It is, after all, evident from the text that when the two women are each arguing that they themselves should be the one abandoned, it is Fand’s response which prevails. By the time we reach the end of the tale, Fand is a full-fledged character in her own right and her identity is intact.

## Conclusion

*SCC* grants us a picture of the Otherworld that is abundant in the best of earthly delights, one of which is, once again, beautiful women. It differs from *EC* and *IB* in not having more than a glancing allusion to spiritual benefits, and in glorifying warlike valour.

The under-studied whipping scene towards the beginning of the tale, which results in Cú Chulainn’s illness, would seem to be an expression of an ill-fated tryst, in which he was unable to perform fully. The wasting sickness, then, would seem to be in truth a sort of love-sickness, of the type described in *AO*, where Oengus falls ill over a woman he has seen in a dream, or in *TÉ*, where Eochaid’s brother Aillil sickens due to his love for Étain.

Like the tales examined in the preceding chapter, *SCC* has inspired conjectures regarding shamanic content. However, while there is a deathly illness and an Otherworldly woman involved, there is no destruction and reconstruction of the psyche or spiritual instruction, both of which are necessary in a shamanic initiation. In addition, the people of the Otherworld summon Cú Chulainn for their own benefit, rather than the benefit of his people, which would be the purpose of a spiritual journey in a shamanic society.

In *Lí Ban* we can see how the Otherworld woman is treated differently in the mortal realm and in her own. By mortals, she is treated with respect, if some trepidation. In her own realm and by her own husband, however, she appears to be shamed in front of their visitor.

Fand, who for Cú Chulainn himself is the focal point of the Otherworld journey, really comes into her own at the end of the story. As she and Emer struggle to keep the affection of the man they both love, Fand finally takes control of the situation and relinquishes her hold on Cú Chulainn once she realizes his attachment to her is not as strong as her love for him. She returns to her husband, sacrificing any opportunity she might have had to see Cú Chulainn again.

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## 5 The Eponymous Goddesses of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*

### Introduction

There are three main recensions of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*LGÉ*), each of which contains an episode in which the sons of Míl, the leaders of the Gaelic settlers, encounter three women of the Túatha Dé Danann on the mountaintops of Ireland. Which woman they meet on which mountain varies between the versions. The narrative is short enough that I believe an excerpt will do in lieu of a synopsis. The following quotations are taken from the third-recension text in the Book of Ballymote. The third recension merges elements from the first two, and is therefore well suited to represent the totality of *LGÉ*'s testimony.

Thereafter they came till they were in the mountain over against Loch Dergderc. The sons of Míl and Banba conversed together there. [Or it is at Sliab Mis they conversed with Banba, and wherever it was, this is what she said to them]: 'If it be to take Ireland ye have come, and so desire, not right were the chance in which ye have come.' 'It is, however,' said Amairgen Glúngel the poet. 'A boon to me from you!' said she. 'What is it?' said they. 'That my name be upon this island,' said she. 'What is thy name?' said they. 'Banba,' said she. 'Banba shall be a name for this island,' said Amairgen Glúngel.

The Book of Druim Snechtai said that Amorgen asked of her her race. 'Of the progeny of Adam am I,' said she. 'Of which race of the sons of Noah are thou?' said he. 'I am elder than Noah,' said she; 'I was on the peak of a mountain in the Flood. To this summit now,' said she, 'came the waters of the Flood; thence it is called [Tul] Tuinde ["Summit of a Wave"]'. However, that foregoing tale is extraordinary.

Thereafter they sing spells against her, and Banba is driven from them. They had colloquy with Fótla in Eibliu. She spake with them in like wise,

and begged that her name should be upon the island. Amairgen said that Fótla would be a name for the island.

They had colloquy with Ériu in Uisnech. She spake thus with them: 'Warriors,' she said, 'welcome to you. Long have soothsayers known of your coming hither. Yours shall be this island for ever, and no island of its size as far as the East of the world shall be better, and no race shall be more perfect than your race, for ever.' 'Good is that prophecy,' said Amairgen. 'Not to her is thanks due for it,' said Donn, the eldest of the sons of Míl, 'but to our gods and to our powers.' 'To say so is not thy concern,' said Ériu; 'thou shalt have no profit of the island, nor shall thy progeny dwell within it. A boon to me, ye sons of Míl and progeny of Bregon,' said she; that 'my name shall be upon this island.' 'It shall be its name for ever,' said Amairgen.

The Book of Druim Snechtai said that it was in Sliab Mis that Ériu spake with them, and that she formed great hosts against them, so that these were combating with them until their druids and poets sang them spells. They saw something; that they were sods of the mountain bog. And so thence is its name, Sliab Mis; and it was Fótla who had converse with them in Uisnech.

*Do-lodar iarum co mbádar isin sliabh for aigidh Dergert. Imagailsead meic Míleadh ⁊ Banbha a chéile and-sin. Nō is ag Slēb Mis ro agallsead Banbha, ⁊ gebe hinadh, is ead at-bert friu: 'Mās do gabhāil Ēreann tāngabhair ⁊ bod āil dībh, nīrbo cōir in sēn tāngabhair.' 'Is ed amh ēigin,' ar Amairghein Glúngel in file. 'Aiscidh dam-sa ūaibh-sí,' ol sī. 'Cia hī?' ol siad. 'Mh' ainm foran indsi-sea,' ar sī. 'Caidhi h'ainm?' ol siad. 'Banba,' or sí. 'Bidh ainm don indsi-sea Banba,' ar Amorgein Glúngel.*

*Ad-bert Leabur Droma Snechta gor fhiarfaigh Amairgein dí a ceinēal. 'Do chloind Ādhamh,' or sī. 'Cia ceinēl do macaib Næ duit?' ol sē. 'Am sine-sea nās Næ,' ol sē [sic]; 'for rind slēbhe ro bhādasā isin dīlind. Gosa teal-sa anois,' ol sī, 'do-dhechain tonda dīlind. Is de-sin do-gairthear Tuinde.' Acht cheana ingnathach in seal-sin [sic] anuas.*

*Canaid iarom dīchealta fuirri, ⁊ ataghar Banbha uaidhibh. Agailsead Fōdla i nEiblind: at-bert in cētna friu, ⁊ inchuindgid a hainm forsan indsi. Atbert Amairgein robadh ainm don n-indsi Fōdla.*

*Agailsead Ēri a nUisneach. Ad-bert friu: 'A ōgo,' air sī, 'is mochean dībh. Cian ōtā og fāidibh bhor tiachtain ille. Bidh libh gu brāth in ind[is-]seo, ⁊ ni bhia inis*

*a comēid bhus fearr gu hairther in domain, 7 ni bia cineadh bus comhslāine nā bhar cineadh-si, gu brāth.* 'Is maith in fáistine-sin,' bhar Amorgein. 'Nī fria a buidhi,' ol Donn, sindsear mac Miled, 'acht fria[r] ndēibh 7 friar cumachtaibh.' 'Cuma duit a rāda,' ol Ēriu, 'nībha duit tarbha na hinnsi, 7 nī bia do clann indti. Aiscidh dam-sa,' ol sī, a macu Miled 7 a clanna Breogain .i. m' ainm forsán indsi-seo.' 'Ocus budh hē-sin bus ainm dī co brāth,' ol Amairgein.

*At-bert Leabur Droma Snechta conidh i Slēibh Mis ro agaill Ēriu iad, 7 gor dhealbh sluagha mōra fa chomair, co mbādar i[c] cathughudh friu iad coro chansat a ndruidhe-seom 7 a fīlidh dīcealta dōibh. Co n-accadar ní: batir fhōid mōna slēbe. Conad de atā Sliabh Mis; 7 Fōdla ro agaill iad a nUisneach.* (Macalister 76-79)<sup>1</sup>

There is also an earlier scene regarding Banba alone, which is pertinent to our enquiry, though it takes place before her meeting with the sons of Míl. Here, Banba replaces Cessair as being the first woman to 'take' Ireland:

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that the name of the first girl who took possession of Ireland before the Flood was Banba, and that it was from her Banba was on Ireland. Three fifties of maidens came and three men. Ladru, the third man, that is the first dead person of Ireland and it is from him then Ard Ladrann [i.e., Height of Ladru] is named. Forty years before the Flood they were on that island. Disease came then so that ... all perished in a single week. Two hundred years after that Ireland was without a living person, and it was after that that the Flood came. Forty years and a day Ireland was under the Flood.

*At-bert leabhar droma sneachta comad banba ainm na cet ingeine ro gabh erin ria ndilind 7 go madh uaithi no beith banba for erin tri l. og do deachaidh 7 triar fear. Laghra in treas fear is e sin cet marbh erin annsin 7 is uadh ainmnighthear ard laghrann. xl. bliadan ria ndilind do badar isin n-indsi sin. Dos-fainig iarom galar co n-erboiltidar uile a n-aenseachtmoin. Da cet bliadan iar sin bai Eiriu gan duine beo, conad iarum tainig diliu. Xl. bliadan 7 la ro bai Erin fo dilind.*<sup>2</sup>

The relevant portion of *LGÉ* is found in the three main recensions of the text (Macalister 76–79). The basic account that they all have in common is that

1 With emendations by John Carey. The Book of Ballymote is in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 12 (cat. 536); the passage quoted here appears on f. 21v.

2 My transcript and translation; see Appendix.

the sons of Míl met with each of the eponymous goddesses on a mountaintop, that each asked that her name be on the island, and that this was granted to each of them. Each also has some version of the second text quoted above, and attributes its origin to *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (*CDS*) with the exception of Stowe D.v.1 (*Dvi*), which simply gives the account on the authority of ‘others.’ The first and third recensions, however, also include dialogue between the sons of Míl and Banba in one scene, and Ériu in another. Both also have addenda with extended or alternative dialogue for these goddesses.<sup>3</sup> These also purport to come from *CDS*. One manuscript – Stowe D.iv.3 (*Div3*) – states that its description of Ériu’s interaction with the sons of Míl (and the claim of origination in *CDS*) come from *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU*). *Div3* is a second-recension manuscript, but as stated, it is purportedly borrowing from *LU* and the passage in question properly belongs to the first recension. Mac Mathúna has presented this material as three ‘extracts,’ which he dubs I, Iia, and Iib. I shall adopt his numbering system, but not his terminology, as the three sections of texts can more properly be referred to as ‘summaries.’

As indicated above, summary I (describing Banba as the leader of the first Irish settlement) is found in all recensions, while summaries Iia and Iib (the encounters of the sons of Míl with the eponymous goddesses) are only found in recensions one and three. Summary I is contained in the Book of Fermoy (*F*) (first recension), Stowe D.v.1 (*Dvi*) (second recension), the Book of Lecan (*L2*) and the Book of Ballymote (*BB*) (third recension). Summary Iia is present in Stowe D.iii.1 (*Diii*) (first recension; another part of *F*), *L2* and *BB* (third recension). Summary Iib is in *D.iii.1* and *Div3* (first recension), *L2* and *BB* (third recension). To my knowledge, Mac Mathúna is the only scholar to analyse these passages apart from the rest of *LGÉ*. In Appendix I of his edition of *Immram Brain* (*IB*), he argues for a post-ninth-century date for *CDS*, rather than the eighth-century date arrived at by other scholars (Carey, “Interrelationships” 71).<sup>4</sup> His case depends on making the date of *CDS* dependent on two apparent discrepancies: the first between summary I, where all of the invaders of Banba’s party are said to die, and summary Iia, where Banba claims to have survived the flood; the second within summary Iib, where he says that:

The *CDS* account oscillates in its attitudes. Ériu and Fótla are distinctly hostile towards the new would-be settlers and form great hosts to fight against them: the Sons of Míl have their poets and druids recite

3 See Appendix for texts and translation.

4 But see Ó Riain 212.

incantations against them so that they become sods of the mountain bog. Banba, on the other hand, has been perfectly civil and is not at all deserving of the harsh treatment meted out to her. Here again, as you see, we are faced with internal inconsistency on the part of *CDS*, which can only be explained by the assumption that it relates to both the tradition of orthodox LG in which the ladies submit to the Sons of Míl and to other accounts which depict a less favourable attitude on the part of the women. (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 433).

There are two problems with this assessment. The first – the question of discrepancies – itself has two parts. First, Mac Mathúna's second discrepancy is based on an apparent misunderstanding of the text. It is only Ériu who forms hosts against the sons of Míl, and it is those hosts who are revealed to be sods of bog, not the goddesses. There is no punishment as such meted out to any of them. Mac Mathúna's first discrepancy is more troublesome, but not insurmountable. The fact is that many Old and Middle Irish texts are not entirely consistent, and what Mac Mathúna calls the 'orthodox' *LGÉ* is no different, being itself a compilation of many different sources. Not knowing for sure what exactly the *CDS* account said, we cannot assume that this discrepancy was unaccounted for there or was not; therefore such arguments must give way to the linguistic analysis (Carey, "Lough" 53–56).

There is also, of course, the question of whether these ascriptions to *CDS* are genuine or indicate an attempt on the part of the compiler to lend the weight of authority to his alternative scenarios. Because we are dealing here with summaries which purport to come from an earlier text, attempting a traditional linguistic analysis would be an exercise in futility; the language would, necessarily, be predominantly that of the summarizer and therefore the date arrived at by such a process would likely yield a date in concordance with that of the individual main texts. That is not to say that some attention to linguistic analysis is not merited; it often happens even today that one who is paraphrasing a portion of text will use some of the language of that text in such a synopsis. This being the case, I will examine only the linguistic evidence that might point to an early original, assuming that the rest will be the Middle Irish used by the summarizer.

For summary I, there are a couple of interesting points. First is the use (or lack) of augmented preterites. The augment, originally perfective in nature, was coming to be used simply as a marker of the narrative past by the beginning of the ninth century. It was used this way freely in *Saltair na Rann* (*SR*; late tenth century [Jackson, "Date" 32; McCone, *Early Irish Verb* 185–187]). The two third- recension manuscripts feature both augmented

(e.g., *do bai*, *L2*; *do badar*, *BB*) and unaugmented preterites (e.g., *badar*, *L2*; *bai*, *BB*). *F*, however, does not use any augmented preterites at all. There is also the somewhat curious use of *do-dechaid* in both *F* and *BB* (where it is spelled *do-deachaidh*). Though the subject is plural – three fifties of maidens – the verb here is singular. This is strikingly similar to a phrase in *Scéla Éogain*: “[w]hen Art came from Tara to the battle he had come to the number of three fifties of warriors” (*In tan do-luit Art ó Themuir dochum in chatha do-deochaid trí cóicdaib óclach* [O’Daly 64]). Here, the singular is used with *trí cóicdaib* acting as a dative of apposition (Thurneysen 160 § 251.2). It seems likely that this was the original construction in our summary as well: a statement to the effect that Banba came to Ireland as one of thrice fifty maidens. The use of a singular verb in such constructions appears to have been rare after the Old Irish period (Dillon, “Nominal Predicates” 312ff). This lends more weight to the possibility that this summary is based on an Old Irish exemplar.

Summary IIa also furnishes us with a few intriguing prospects. The defective verb *ol* is used in all three second-recension manuscripts. While *ol* is used well into the Middle Irish period, the form *ar* is more common in the later language (Quin s.v. *ol*). *Diii* and *BB* also feature a distinctly neuter article in the phrases *cosa tellgosa teal*, respectively. According to Strachan, the neuter nasalizing article *a* had almost disappeared by the beginning of the eleventh century, only three examples being found in *SR* (Strachan 7). Ó Máille believes the change to be earlier, but declines to give a definite date (Ó Máille 124 § 137). Similarly, *Diii* uses the neuter form of the interrogative pronoun – *cid*, rather than *cia*. Again, Strachan states that the neuter, as a gender, was “in decay” by the late tenth century (Strachan 6). On either view, the form indicates a relatively early exemplar. In addition, *Diii* has *anas* rather than *na* or *nas* for the comparative. All three come from *indaas*, which, according to Thurneysen, is the dative singular of the article, plus a nasalizing relative, plus the substantive verb. He goes on to say, “Beside ... **in-** we sometimes find **a-**, the neuter accusative of the article. At first, presumably, this was used only after *amal* ‘as’ and after equative forms, which require the accusative ... [t]hence it may have spread to the position after comparatives” (Thurneysen 478 § 779.1).<sup>5</sup> Taken together – and especially since all three are present in the first-recension passage in *Diii* – these examples would seem to indicate that summary IIa could have an Old Irish predecessor as well.

5 However, *DIL* does note instances of the *an-* spelling in some quite late texts too (s.v. ‘*inaas*, *ind’as*,’ col. 213.19–33.)

There is less to be found for summary IIb. *Már* meaning ‘great’ is a conservative form of *mór*. Though it is found occasionally in Middle Irish, it is more usual in early texts. With a couple of notable exceptions, the Würzburg glosses already prefer *mór* (Quin s.v. *mór*). However, only *Div*<sub>3</sub> gives *mara* rather than *mora* in describing Ériu’s hosts; its fellow first recension text *Diii*, for once, does not have the earlier form.

More convincing is the use of *batir* for third plural preterite absolute of the copula. This form is attested as early as the Würzburg and Milan glosses, and while it can be found in Middle Irish texts, the later form *batar* becomes increasingly common (McCone, *Early Irish Verb* 73). The fact that all of the IIb manuscripts share this usage argues for an older exemplar.

On so little evidence, it is of course impossible to determine conclusively whether or not the summaries do stem from *CDS*. It seems likely that summaries I and IIa have an Old Irish provenance at the very least. Summary IIb is more difficult to evaluate; however, it is not impossible that it has a *CDS* antecedent, the nature of a summary makes it impossible to disprove such a theory.

## The Unfallen Race

In the summary IIa attributed to *CDS*, Banba tells the sons of Míl that while she is a descendant of Adam she is older than Noah, having survived the Flood on Tul Tuinde. This naturally raises the question of how she has survived since then.

In *Echtrae Chonnlai* (*EC*) and *IB*, we saw how Connlai’s Otherworld mistress and Manannán either implicitly or explicitly allude to their race originating as prelapsarian children of Adam. This accounts for their freedom from sin, their invisibility to the eyes of mortals, and their immortality – an argument also made by Midir in *Tochmarc Étaíne* (*TÉ* [Carey, “Rhetoric” 45; Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 40 & 53 § 44]). It is tempting to take these examples and pronounce Banba, on this basis, to be of the same stock. This would provide a tidy explanation of her longevity. In fact, Carey does just this in *A Single Ray of the Sun*. After discussing *EC*, *IB* and *TÉ*, he includes this section from *CDS* in his argument for the Túatha Dé as unfallen humans (Carey, “Baptism” 30–31).

There is, as examined above, ample evidence that the early Irish had thoroughly explored the idea of prelapsarian children for Adam and Eve, who became identified with the pagan gods of the early Irish.<sup>6</sup> However, the

6 See Part I, Chapter 1.

evidence for including Banba in this class is limited; the assumption would have to be made on the basis of two short phrases uttered by Banba to the sons of Míl. First she tells them she is “[o]f the race of Adam” (*Do chloind adhaimh*) and then that she is “older than Noah” (*sine ... nas nae*).<sup>7</sup> There is no mention of a sinless state, a veil of perception or even immortality – we know only that she is *long*-lived and human, of a race of humanity that is not mentioned in the Bible. Also, there is no description of her, so the emphasis on eternal youth and beauty, which is present in *EC* and *IB*, is missing as well.

There are other possibilities. As Carey himself notes in his article “The Irish Vision of the Chinese,” the Chinese were thought to be descended from a race of Adam who survived the Flood on a mountain top, just as Banba did. While it is true that they were said to be the descendants of another prelapsarian child of Adam and Eve named Seir, they were not accorded the kind of miraculous attributes – sinlessness, immortality, eternal youth, etc. – that we see with the Otherworld women in *EC* and *IB*, Manannán in *IB*, and Midir in *TÉ*, though they do not have Banba’s longevity, either (Carey, “Irish Vision” 74–75). The *Pauca problesmata de enigmatibus* also mentions another race of Adam, created before the Fall and living in the southern hemisphere (and therefore presumably having escaped the Flood [MacGinty 54]). There are no specifics given, however, so we cannot know how they survived or what they were thought to be like.<sup>8</sup>

This is not to say that Banba – as presented in summary Iia – was not meant to be identified with the ‘unfallen humans’ we have seen in texts like *EC*, *IB*, and *TÉ*. It may even be likely. However, it seems imprudent to assume this is the case without more evidence than this summary provides.<sup>9</sup>

## Ériu’s Prophecy

The text containing Ériu’s prophecy occurs in the first and third recensions of *LGÉ*.<sup>10</sup> It does not, however, occur in the portions of the text attributed to *CDS*, which do seem to be older than the main text (as argued above). The *CDS* version has Ériu raising up hosts from clods of soil to fight the sons of Míl, hosts they quickly defeat once their druids reveal them to be merely apparitions. It seems, then, that the compilers of *LGÉ* as we have it either

7 Taken from the Book of Ballymote; translations are mine.

8 But see Carey, “Ireland” 1–10.

9 For other views of Banba, see Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 425.

10 It does occur in Stowe D.iv.3. See Carey, *Lebor* 21–22.



replaced a scene in which the invaders defeat the final eponymous goddess with one in which she welcomes them and prophesies a prosperous future for them, or these two versions developed parallel to one another and the compilers chose the submissive over the antagonistic.<sup>11</sup> The question we face in either case is, why?

A simple answer, of course, would be that this is just a bit of *dindshenchas* that was interpolated here. The compilers could have decided that one doctrine was more important than the other – i.e., why Ériu's name has lasted longest for Ireland was more important than why Slíab Mis was so named. There could, however, be more to it than this, and the subject deserves further consideration.

Macalister suggested that the encounter of the sons of Míl with the three eponymous goddesses was originally a separate tale that was incorporated into *LGÉ* as it was being compiled (Macalister 3). Certainly, it is one of a handful of alternative sections which claim origins in *CDS* (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 425–443.). This section, which, as mentioned, does not contain Ériu's welcome and prophecy, would then be contemporary with *EC* and *IB*, discussed above. Unlike *EC* and *IB*, it reveals a vision of Otherworld personages who are at odds with mortals, rather than solicitous of them. It seems to reflect a view of the Otherworld more like that proffered by Carney's proposed *Echtrae Brain* (*EB*).<sup>12</sup> This suggests to me that while *EC* and *IB* were fresh compositions, created for the purpose of incorporating the Otherworld into a Christian framework, this might have been an older piece of lore (Carey, "Baptism" 27–31). Here, as in *EB*, there was evidently no welcome; Bran, like the sons of Míl, came as an invader and the women whose land was being invaded attempted to retaliate.

As indicated above, *EC* and *IB* attempt to Christianize the Otherworld and its inhabitants by transforming them into unfallen humans – children of a prelapsarian Adam and Eve (27–31). The 'canonical' version of *LGÉ* takes another tactic – euhemerism. Euhemerism, as noted earlier, is the theory that a given mythology arises from historical events, and that the gods are no more than deified heroes. *LGÉ* makes the entirety of the Túatha Dé Danann human, giving them a genealogy stemming from Noah (Macalister 126–127, 152–153, 186–187). The reason for their extensive magical abilities, according to *LGÉ*, is that they studied magical arts in the 'northern islands' before coming to Ireland, until they were proficient in them (Macalister 106–107,

11 Indeed, there are other sources for a hostile confrontation between the eponymous goddesses and the sons of Míl. See Hogan 246; Van Hamel, *Lebor* 26.

12 See Part I, Chapter 1.

142–143, 166–167).<sup>13</sup> In each case, then, the result is that the supernatural and mortal figures are now two kindred races of human, if in different ways for different reasons. But they still act very differently from one another.

It seems self-evident that at least one of the compilers was familiar with *CDS*, since we do find portions of it in *LGÉ*, so it is not unreasonable to conjecture that he may have been familiar with *EC* and *IB* as well. Given the similarity of subject, our answer might well be found there. In *IB*, we have an Otherworld woman who specifically welcomes Bran to *Tír inna mBan*; she has been expecting him since he has been specifically invited to join her there. In both *IB* and *EC*, an Otherworld woman extols her world (the Otherworld) and prophesies the coming of the Christian revelation, and how it will benefit the mortal world and its inhabitants. Now, let us turn to the meeting of Ériu with the sons of Míl. First, she welcomes them, telling them their coming has been long expected. Then, she extols the virtues of Ireland – which until now, has been her home. Finally, she prophesies that no race will be more numerous/perfect than that of the sons of Míl. First welcome, then extolling the homeland, then a beneficial prophecy for the other race as a whole.<sup>14</sup> Looking at it this way, it does not seem unlikely that the compilers of *LGÉ* – or at least of the earliest recension – might have drawn on *EC* and *IB* to provide a more propitious encounter between the eponymous goddesses and the sons of Míl. While it is true that the *CDS*-attributed material was not present in *LGÉ* in its earliest form – it does not, for example, appear in the Book of Leinster (*LL*) – this does not mean the earlier compiler could not have been as aware of *CDS* and its other texts as later compilers.

### Druids and Perception: What you see is not always what you get

Returning again to summary Iib's account of Ériu's encounter with the sons of Míl, we find a parallel between it and *EC*. In each, the other characters' perception of what is happening seems to be controlled by the Otherworld woman present, and in each that perception is changed by the magical chanting of the mortal druid(s). In *EC*, everyone present at Uisnech could hear the Otherworld woman, but only Connlae could see her. When Conn

<sup>13</sup> According to the first and third recensions; the second recension says Alba. Macalister 1941, 106–107, 142–143, 166–167.

<sup>14</sup> I state it this way as the Otherworld woman's prophecy in *EC* was not beneficial to Conn, but was meant to be beneficial to the race as a whole.

calls upon his druid Corann for help, the druid chants over her and she is rendered completely imperceptible to everyone: “Then he [the druid] intoned over the seat/location of the woman so that no one heard the woman’s voice and so that Connlae did not see the woman at that time” (*Do:cachain iarum for suidiu inna mná co-nna:cóle nech guth inna mná<sub>7</sub> co-nna:haccae Connle in mnaí ind úair sin* [McCone, *Echtrae* 159 & 156]). In the interview with Ériu in IIb, the druids and poets of the sons of Míl chant against the hosts she has raised against them, revealing them to be merely sods of the mountain: “Ériu spoke with them and formed great hosts in their presence so that they were fighting against them, until their druids and their poets chanted incantations against them. They saw something: they were clods of the peat of the moorland” (*ro agail Eriu iad<sub>7</sub> gor dhealbh sluagha mora fa chomair combadar i cathuǵud friu iad coro chansat a ndruidhe-seon<sub>7</sub> a filiá dicealta doib co n-accadar ni batir foidh mona slebe*).<sup>15</sup> The druids’ incantations are working in opposite directions in the two accounts – in *EC* Corann is banishing (or vanishing, if you will) a real presence, whereas in *CDS* the druids are revealing reality – but each is overcoming the control of perception previously held by the Otherworld woman.

Another interesting comparison can be made with the twelfth-century text *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* (*AME*). Here, an apparently Otherworldly woman named Sín comes to Muirchertach and convinces him to banish his wife and family in favour of her, along with all clerics. In the relevant portion of the tale, Sín conjures up hosts for Muirchertach to fight out of rocks and sods. At the end she arranges for his death before departing, and we eventually learn that she is not, in fact, of the *síd* but a mortal woman exacting revenge on behalf of her family whom Muirchertach had massacred (Cross & Slover 518–532). The similarity in the scenes involving the phantom hosts make it seem possible – if not likely – that the author of *AME* had Ériu’s battle with the sons of Míl in mind when he wrote it. However, while both texts feature (apparently) Otherworld women magically forming armies of the earth, Sín was providing them more or less for Muirchertach’s amusement – and to prove she had the magical power to do so (Cross & Slover 531). In addition, Máire Herbert makes the point regarding *AME* as a whole that it subverts the traditional king- and-goddess topos. Rather than the sovereignty goddess figure mating with the king to establish his kingship, Sín causes Muirchertach to abandon his lawful queen and works to bring about his death and the end of his reign (Herbert, “Death” 30). This kind of subversion also takes place in summary IIb, though with a different

15 Translation mine; see Appendix A.

outcome: Ériu, who would otherwise be acting as sovereignty goddess, resists the sons of Míl. They, however, ultimately succeed in taking Ireland without (at least in this scenario) her blessing.<sup>16</sup>

Summary Iib also contains similarities with a scene in *Cath Maige Tuired* (*CMT*). Just before the battle with the Fomoiri, Lug asks each group of his people what they will do to fight the enemy. One of the last groups he asks are his two witches (*bantuathach*), Bé Chuille and Díanann, who reply: “Not hard to say ... [w]e will enchant the trees and the stones and the sods of the earth so that they will be a host under arms against them; and they will scatter in flight terrified and trembling” (*Ní anse ... [d]olbfamid-ne na cradnai 7 na clochai 7 fódai an talmon gommod slúag fon airmgaisciud dóib; co rainfed hi techedh frie húatbás 7 craidenus* [Gray 55 & 54]). The similarity between the two situations is obvious; both are manipulating the surrounding landscape to make great hosts attack the enemy. In Ériu’s case, the hosts are mere phantoms, and the sons of Míl have what appears to be a swift and easy victory due to the magic of their druids, as described above. Whether the armies of Bé Chuille and Díanann are real or illusory is not clear; technically *dolbaid* – the verb used in both Iib and *CMT* – simply means to fashion something, often magically; but it does seem that it may have a connotation of manipulation of appearances (Quin s.v. *dolbaid*). In any case, unlike the sons of Míl, the Túatha Dé Danann undergo a long and bloody battle with the Fomoiri, which the Fomoiri lose only at great cost to both sides.

Returning to Iib itself, the question arises: how is it that mortal druids could defeat supernatural foes so easily? To answer this, yet another set of tales must be consulted. In these, an Otherworld king seeks out a mortal hero to help him win an ongoing battle with another Otherworldly enemy. It is only with the assistance of this hero that the battle can be won. We have seen this motif already in *Serglige Con Culainn* (*SCC*). It is also present in *The Adventure of Loegaire mac Crimthainn* (*ALC*), in which the eponymous hero is entreated by an Otherworld king, Fiachna, to retrieve his wife from another Otherworldly kingdom to which she has been taken. Loegaire does so, obtaining Fiachna’s daughter and half of his kingdom as a reward. This theme is also seen in the Welsh tale of *Pwyll* in the first branch of the *Mabinogi*. Pwyll, having offended Arawn king of Annwn, undertakes to fight Arawn’s nemesis Hafgan in Arawn’s likeness. Here again he is successful, gaining Arawn’s friendship ever after. In commenting on these tales and some more recent Irish folktales which display a similar theme, Kenneth

16 See Appendix.

Jackson put forth the theory that “in Irish belief the kings of the Otherworld needed the assistance of a human being in their contests with their rivals because the human could in some way supply a kind of power, a *mana*, which the Otherworld people lacked” (Jackson, “Some Popular Motifs” 88).<sup>17</sup> The mortal druid’s ability to manipulate this power and the Otherworld women’s inability to access it could account for their quick overthrow by mortal druids.

## Conclusion

The three eponymous goddesses of this portion of *LGÉ* are the embodiment of Ireland itself, and therefore it is not only propitious but necessary that the sons of Míl encounter them and either gain their blessings (as in ‘orthodox’ *LGÉ*) or subdue them (as in summary IIb) before taking Ireland for themselves. Three summaries attributed to *CDS* offer us more insight into the character of the three goddesses. These summaries may or may not actually come from *CDS*; linguistic analysis is inconclusive, but does seem to indicate an exemplar that is at least somewhat earlier than the compilation of the first recension of *LGÉ*.

In summary IIa, Banba tells the sons of Míl she is older than Noah, and survived the Flood on Tul Tuinde. This recalls Otherworld figures in other texts who exist as unfallen humans who are sinless, immortal, eternally young and beautiful, and live in peace and plenty. However, the description of Banba lacks all of the latter qualities, and is in this way more like the Irish view of the Chinese, who also escaped the Flood on a mountain. It is therefore difficult to say with certainty if she was meant by the author to be identified with Otherworld personages like those in *EC*, *IB*, and *TÉ*.

Ériu, in the ‘orthodox’ version of her encounter with the sons of Míl (rather than the one attributed to *CDS*), greets them, extols the virtues of her homeland, and prophesies in their favour. This could be seen as a parallel to *EC*, where Connlae’s mistress does much the same. Assuming the compiler was familiar with *EC* (since he claims familiarity with *CDS*), it may be that he borrowed this scenario from it in order to produce an encounter more propitious for the sons of Míl.

Summary IIb exhibits some very interesting parallels with other early Irish texts, such as *EC*, *AME*, and *CMT*. In each, appearances (and in *CMT*,

<sup>17</sup> Jackson, “Popular Motifs” 88. He includes *Pwyll* as exemplifying this belief later in the same paragraph.

possibly reality) are manipulated magically in order to bring about a desired result. In *Ilb*, the mortal druids are able to deflect this manipulation with their own magic. This may be due to the type of *mana* Jackson attributes to mortals, which allows them to end Otherworldly conflicts in other tales.

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## 6 *Echtrae Nerai*

### Introduction

It is Samain night in Ráith Cruachan and Ailill promises a reward to whichever of his warriors will dare the terrors of the night to go and place a looped twig around the ankle of one of the prisoners who had been hanged the day before.<sup>1</sup> Nera goes out and does the deed, after which the dead prisoner requests that Nera take him on his back to a nearby house so that he can slake his thirst. Nera takes the man on his back, and they approach three houses. The dead man is unable to enter the first or second house; at the third, the dead man goes inside where there is dirty washing and bathing water. He takes a drink from each and spits it into the face of each inhabitant, which kills them. Nera then returns the prisoner to his gibbet.

When Nera returns to Ráith Cruachan, he finds that it has been burnt and its people killed. He follows the army responsible into the cave of Cruachu. When inside, the king of the *síd* sets him to carrying firewood every day, and tells him to go and stay with a woman in a house nearby. Each day, he sees a blind man carrying a lame man on his back go to a spring. Each day, the blind man asks the lame man, “Is it there?” and the lame man replies, “It is indeed.” And then they go their way.

One day, Nera asks the woman about it, and she explains that they go to the spring to confirm that the king of the *síd*'s golden crown is still there. Then, she tells him that the destruction of Ráith Cruachan he had seen on Samain night was only a vision, but that it would become true the following Samain if he did not warn his people, because of a prophecy that the people of Ráith Cruachan [that is, the forces of Ailill and Medb] would ravage the *síd* and steal the crown. She sends him back to his people to warn them, bearing the ‘fruits of summer’ – wild garlic, primroses, and buttercups – as proof he has been in the *síd*, since no time has passed for his people though he has been in the *síd* for three days.

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<sup>1</sup> With them are a number of exiles from Ulster, including Fergus mac Roich, who, at this point, is Medb's lover. For the background to this exile, see Hull *Cuchullin Saga*.

Nera returns to Ráith Cruachan and tells his people his story. He remains there for a year, after which Ailill tells him to go back into the *síd* and bring out his cows, so that the warriors of Connacht may ravage the *síd*. Nera returns to the *síd*, where, in the meantime, the woman has given birth to his son, and given the son a cow. The king expresses displeasure that he and the woman slept together without permission. Nera tells the king he will accept his judgement in the matter, and the king tells him he will not be punished for it.

Later, the woman tells Nera to herd the cows. He falls asleep, and the Morrígain takes the cow to be bulled by the Donn of Cuailnge. Cú Chulainn meets her as she is returning and tries to prevent her leaving, as her doing so would go against two of his *gessi*.<sup>2</sup> He tells her that the *táin* (“[cattle-] driving”) must not be made – that is, that she may not take the cow out of Ulster. He does not succeed in preventing her or the cow from leaving, however.

Nera tells the woman that he fell asleep and lost his son’s cow, and the woman says she is due better than this. The cow comes back then, having been returned by the Morrígain. Again, the woman tells Nera to go and warn his people, saying the war band from the *síd* will do nothing until the following Samain. Nera does so, and waits in Ráith Cruachan until the following year, when Ailill tells him once again to bring out any of his possessions in the *síd*. He brings his cattle out the third day before Samain. Thereafter, the warriors of Connacht and the Ulster exiles go into the *síd* and ravage it, taking with them the items that would come to be known as the crown of Brión, the mantle of Lóegaire, and the *enach* or *enech* of Dúnlaing.<sup>3</sup> After they return, Nera goes back into the *síd* with his wife, son and belongings, and is never seen again.

## Otherworld Tokens

In the discussion of *Echtrae Chonnlai* (*EC*) and *Immram Brain* (*IB*) above, we examined closely one function of Otherworld tokens – that of drawing the hero into the Otherworld and, thereby, into the action of the tale. At the same time, we noted that Otherworld tokens can have another function: that of

2 As the story explains, his *gessi* included prohibitions against allowing cows or women to leave Ulster without his knowledge.

3 *Enach* or *enech*; Meyer’s note (“Adventures” 228) explains this word as “*enach*, or *eneach*, ‘a shirt or smock; weft’.” but the meaning is not actually clear. See discussion below.

serving as proof of the existence of the Otherworld and of the hero's journey there, and thus occasionally providing a sanction for mortal kingship.

As discussed previously, Ó Cathasaigh and Carey both recognize a link between Otherworld authority and mortal kingship (Ó Cathasaigh 140; Carey, "Time, Space" 15). In addition, Leonie Duignan has more recently argued that the entire genre of *echtraí* is tied to sovereignty concerns. According to Duignan, "[t]his concern appears in the royal lineages of the protagonists, the selection of ancient royal sites as initial locations, the presence of recognized sovereignty motifs such as the woman/goddess of sovereignty in her various guises, the nature and effect of various gifts and/or talismans brought back from the otherworld, and finally repercussions upon the kingship in either or both worlds" (Duignan 189). While the connection between *echtraí* and sovereignty may not be quite as far-reaching as Duignan supposes, it still comes as no surprise that many of the objects brought out of the Otherworld should be linked with sovereignty in some way. Such items as the vat, ladle, and cup of the sovereignty goddess in *Baile in Scáil* (*BiS*), the cup of truth in *Echtrae Chormaic* (*ECm*), and the crown and mantle of *Echtrae Nerai* (*EN*) all serve to sanction the sovereignty of a mortal king or kings, whether it is sanction by the Otherworld, or in spite of it (Murray, *Baile* 34 & 51; V. Hull, "Echtra" 877 & 883; Meyer, "Adventures" 221). *EN* contains two sets of these tokens which function as proof, at least one of which concerns sovereignty.

In 1986, Alden Watson's excellent article "A Structural Analysis of *Echtra Nerai*" appeared in *Études Celtiques*. In this study, he bases his methodology on Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach. Watson gives a concise summary of this method:

[S]imply put, the meaning of myth is found in the narrative structure of the story which it tells. A narrative can be broken down into a series of basic structural relations. The structural relations can be arranged in groups which pertain to the same topic or type of narrative action. For example all those relations which treat the carrying of a burden on the back would be grouped together. Once isolated from the order imposed on them by the sequence of the narrative, these structural relations or mythemes may be read together to give meaning, much as words are strung together in different combinations on the sentence level of speech ... Lévi- Strauss makes the controversial assertion that "the purpose of a myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction". The groupings or categories of relations should ideally form pairs of binarily opposed groups which illustrate the conflict. These may then be mediated by another group which provides a possible resolution. (A. Watson 130).

Watson goes on to say that this paradigm of contradiction and resolution can be problematic, as often no solutions are to be had. Instead of binary oppositions, which require resolution, he suggests that the themed groupings may simply illustrate contradictions and explore the issues (A. Watson 130–131). He uses this amended approach to analyse *Echtrae Nerai*, specifically the question of how the thematic categories relate to sovereignty.

While Watson describes and explains several sets of these relations, the most pertinent to the discussion below is the one mentioned in the passage quoted above: that of carrying a burden on the back. Thus he draws conclusions from a comparison of Nera carrying the dead man to the blind man carrying the lame man.<sup>4</sup> In this way, he finds a parallel between the Otherworld well and the buckets of waste water that allow the dead man to enter the third house. Watson posits that since the well contains the crown of the Otherworld king (later to be known as the crown of Bríón), a symbol of sovereignty, the wastewater in the buckets must therefore relate to sovereignty as well. He concludes that since effective sovereignty implies order, and dirt indicates disorder, the wastewater must represent “sovereignty gone awry” (A. Watson 132–133). He admits that the comparison is somewhat tenuous, but insists the “parallelism between these guardians [of the well and crown] and Nera and the captive is so strong that it helps bridge the much weaker connection which has been drawn between the buckets and the well which contains the crown” (133).

Watson evaluates several such sets of parallels, but one that he misses is a comparison between the two sets of Otherworld tokens in the tale. Unlike the Otherworld tokens discussed previously, these objects serve as proof of the existence of the Otherworld and of the hero’s adventures there.<sup>5</sup> The first set of Otherworld tokens in this tale is the fruits of summer, brought back by Nera as proof to his people of his sojourn into the *síd*. These are wild garlic (*crem*), primrose (*sobairce*), and (probably) buttercups (*buidrad* [Meyer, “Adventures” 220; Koch & Carey 129]). The second set comprises the three items brought out of the *síd* by the men of Connacht and the Ulster exiles: the crown of Bríón, the mantle of Lóegaire, and the *enach/enech* of Dúnlaing.<sup>6</sup> These presumably served as proof to the audience of the veracity of the tale as a whole, as well as, by their loss, perhaps symbolizing the loss of the Otherworld’s ability to control the

4 He also includes Nera carrying firewood in this category, but that particular parallel is not relevant to this discussion.

5 See Part II, Chapter 3; see also Murray, “Role” 187.

6 Whatever this might be; see discussion below.

sovereignty of the mortal world as well. The latter possibility is explored further below.

Carey has explored the literary evidence linking *crem* and *buiderad* to the beginning of summer (Carey, "Sequence" 72). Watson, as described above, compares the crown in the Otherworld well with the buckets of wastewater in the house entered by the dead man (A. Watson 132–135). As yet, no one has compared the two sets of Otherworld tokens to each other.

A crown seems a rather self-evident symbol of sovereignty, though admittedly there are few references to kings wearing crowns in medieval Irish literature. When Lug first appears in *Cath Maige Tuired (CMT)*, he is described as wearing "a king's diadem" (*imscigg ríog* [Gray 38–39 § 53]). Similarly, in the Book of Leinster (*LL*) version of *Táin Bó Cuailgne (TBC)*, Cethern mac Fintain attacks a standing stone believing it to be Ailill, since it is wearing Ailill's cloak and "golden crown" (*imscing n-órda* [C. O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailgne from the Book of Leinster* ln. 3794–3799]). The figure of Sovereignty in *Baile in Scáil (BiS)* is also depicted as wearing a "golden crown on her head" – this time with the same word used in *EN*, *barr (barr órdai fora mullach* [Murray, *Baile* 34 & 51]). While this object is given a pre-eminent place in the tale, it is not the only Otherworld token that signifies kingship. In early Ireland, the mantle, too, could have had this connotation (Gwynn 134 & 139). The *enach/enech* is more problematic, as its designation is not clear to begin with. If *enech*, it may be short for *clár enech*, which was a plate of precious metal the width of a king's face. This plate could be considered part of a king's honour price, such as the one given to Ailill in *Mesca Ulad* (JC Watson, 54–55). This would, indeed, have associations with sovereignty. Meyer speculates that it is *enech*, a shirt (Quin s.v. 2 *enech*). However, this conjecture is made on the assumption that *enech* is the same word as *indech* 'weft,' an interpretation for which there is no linguistic evidence. If it is meant to be *énach*, it could be the collective noun meaning 'birds' – an intriguing possibility, given the variety of Otherworld birds and especially that Conaire's father in *Togail Buidne Dá Derga (TBDD)* was an Otherworld bird-man (Quin s.v. 2 *enach*).<sup>7</sup> There is also *enach*, meaning 'bog' – but then how would one steal it? (Quin s.v. *enach*). It would be more difficult to posit a sovereignty connection for any of these on the face of it. What can be said for certain, however, is that Dúnlaing, like Brión, is the eponymous ancestor of an important dynasty (Byrne 84, 299 [Brión], 289 [Dúnlaing]). In Tirechán's *Collectanea*, indeed, he appears to personify the Laignin's claim to the Tara kingship, in opposition to Loegaire (Bieler 132–133).

7 See Part II, Chapter 4; See also Part II, Chapter 7.

Like the treasures of the *síd*, two of the fruits of summer might, at least for the purposes of this tale, be taken for sovereignty motifs. *Sobairce*/primrose and *buiderad*/buttercup (?) both have flowers that are golden yellow, and shaped roughly like a crown. In fact, one of the *Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL)* references for *sobairce* specifically mentions the crown of the primrose (*barr sobairci* [Bergin and Best 180 § 10]).<sup>8</sup> This is Midir's description to Étaín of hair in the Otherworld. This, of course, brings to mind Connlae's mistress description of him as having *barr buide* – a yellow crown or head of hair (McCone, *Echtrae* 121, 211, 212). The other reference for *sobairce* in *DIL* (other than that in *EN* itself) refers to hair as well. In the late eighth-/early ninth-century poem 'A Dirge For Niall Nógiallach,' Tuirn mac Tornai says of Níall: "[Y]ellow as a bright primrose was the hair upon the head of Cairn's son" (*buiditir sobairce nglé/folt bóí for cind mac Cairne* [Meyer, "Dirge" 69 § 1]). Likewise, the tale *Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni* describes Cú Chulainn's hair (*folt*) as being like "buttercups on which the sun shines, on a summer day in the middle of May" (*buiderad ris taitni grian i llathi samrata i mmedón mís mai* [Kimpton 19 & 39 § 12]). Individually, these references might seem mere conventional descriptive phrases. However, taken together – the hair being where a crown would be placed and, in the case of *barr*, designated by a term which can mean 'crown' as well – the physical attributes of the flowers, and the fact that these are the only references *DIL* gives for these two plants outside of *EN* itself – the evidence combines to form a strong suggestion that these two flowers are meant to mirror the crown in the well, and thereby adopt its symbolism.

These 'fruits of summer' are in some ways reminiscent of the apple branch of crystal and silver in *Immram Brain*. Like the branch, the fruits of summer are familiar and strange at the same time. They are plants known to the mortal world, but Nera's is blooming at the wrong time of the year and Bran's is ever-blooming; both emphasize the discontinuity between mortal and Otherworld time. In addition, each does this in a way that highlights concerns in its particular text: a description of Edenic immortality and supernatural beauty for *IB*, and a paradoxical narrative centring on temporal anomalies in *EN*. This oddity lends weight to Nera's tale, as it did to the first Otherworld woman's tale in *Immram Brain*.

Returning briefly to Watson's analysis, he highlights the Otherworld king's poor rulership by noting that he failed to realize Nera's potential as a resource, and reduced him to carrying firewood (A. Watson 134; see also

8 It should be noted, however, that *barr* can mean the top of anything, and that its meaning 'crown' is consequent on this.

Olsen 65). This issue itself will be dealt with further in a later section; for now, it is simply the Otherworld king's inability to use – or prevent the misuse of – the resources at his command that is of interest. The 'fruits of summer' being merely a bunch of flowers may seem insignificant, especially to a king; but in allowing them to leave his realm, they become something much more important: proof of Nera's story, and the impetus for the attack on the *síd* the following Samain. More to the point for our purposes, as (perhaps) symbols of sovereignty, they also symbolize the changing allegiance of the Otherworld woman; as she gives them to Nera to take to his people, she implicitly gives them the Otherworld treasures – and all they symbolize – as well, by giving them the reason and means to obtain them.

Such shifting of an Otherworld woman's loyalties from her kin to her mate is not reserved for Nera's mistress. In *Cath Maige Tuired*, as noted above, the Dagda mates with the daughter of the Fomorian king Indech. Afterwards, she agrees to assist the Tuatha De Danann in their fight against the Fomorians: "She said that she would hinder the Fomoiré, and she would sing spells against them, and she would practice the deadly art of the wand against them; and she alone would take on a ninth part of the host" (*Atbert-si dano noríastrabadh-sí no Fomoiré, & docachnópad forrai, & arin-imreth-somh ceird marbthaig na gíce forró—ocus nogébad-sí a hóenór nómad rann forin slóug* [Gray 50–51]). Possibly this episode, and that in our story, are to be read as further instances in which the king's lack of careful ruling leads to his downfall: in *Echtrae Nerai*, the king lodges Nera in the house of a lone woman apparently without a thought as to the predictable outcome, as he expresses his displeasure when it becomes clear that Nera and the woman have slept together; and in *Cath Maige Tuired*, the king's own daughter is alone without an escort in the land of her father's enemies, and ends up in a sexual liaison with the Dagda. In *Fingal Rónáin* (*FR*), the king's wife is found out alone looking to tryst with his son, and this, too, leads to his downfall. Here, blame is explicitly laid on the woman: "You can be about no good walking about alone, or about anything unless coming to a tryst with a man ... [a] bad woman to disgrace him in ditches and brakes going alone to meet a lad" (*Ní maith duit imthecht toenur, acht mani[d] dáil fir no théig ... [d]rochben dia imdergad i claidib ocus muinib a h-óinur i n-dáil gilla* [Meyer, "Fingal" 380]). However, no such censure falls on the women in *Echtrae Nerai* and *Cath Maige Tuired*, and it is possible to see in all three tales the implicit reproach of kings – and very possibly, men in general – who do not keep proper supervision over the women in their charge. This is particularly important in *EN*, where lodging Nera with the single woman ultimately leads her to reveal the existence of the crown to Nera (after, of

course, he requests an explanation of the scene with the blind man and lame man – again, a consequence of the Otherworld king making a wood carrier out of him).

Finally, it might also be possible to see the two sets of tokens as belonging to the ‘drawing to the Otherworld’ type of token as well as the ‘proof’ type. It was these, along with the warning of the impending attack by the people of the *síd*, which engendered the attack by the men of Connacht and the exiles from Ulster. If not for the presence of ‘fruits of summer’ when Nera first returned from the *síd*, and his description of the crown at the very least, there would have been no reason for them to attack. Indeed, one could go one step further back and say that the crown, specifically, was of the ‘drawing’ type, since it was to protect it that the phantom army which drew Nera into the Otherworld appeared in Connacht in the first place.

### *Ambue*

Watson observes more than once that the way in which Nera is treated in the *síd* might seem unexpected or strange. Thus, he opines, in reference to the Otherworld king setting Nera to the task of carrying firewood, that this is because the king is ineffective and that “a smarter king would have realized Nera’s worth as a hero” and would have either ransomed him or won him over (A. Watson 134). Later, when speaking of the Otherworld woman’s gift of a cow to their son, Watson says that this “is something we might expect the male head of a household to do” (A. Watson 140). Here, he offers no suggestion as to why such an inversion takes place. In fact, both situations can be explained by the status of the *ambue*, a term already briefly considered in the first chapter. While neither is labelled as such within the tale itself, both Nera and the Ulster exile Fergus would have been considered *ambue* under early Irish law.

McCone defines *ambue* as a “‘stranger’ ... someone without the property and attendant legal rights of a *bue* or full member of the *túath* such as the *bó-aire* or ‘cow-freeman’” (McCone, *Echtrae* 162). However, this definition could as easily apply to the *cú glas* or ‘grey dog,’ another sort of outsider. Whereas the *ambue* comes from another *túath* within Ireland, however, the *cú glas* comes from outside Ireland altogether and has a correspondingly lower status. Both were regarded with some contempt by natives (Charles-Edwards, “Social Background” 46–49). In any case, having no legal connection, the *ambue* therefore has no legal rights and no redress for harm done to him under the law. Any pledge or surety made on his behalf



is invalid, and he may be killed without the perpetrator having to pay a body-fine (F. Kelly, *Guide* 5–6, 168, 173). If the *ambue* marries, his children are the sole concern of his wife's kin (15).<sup>9</sup> If he marries a *banchomarbae* or 'female heir,' the usual gender roles are reversed; the woman makes the decisions, and pays the *ambue*'s fines and debts (76).

In the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már*, there is mention of a figure called Bríg Ambue, a female legal expert (Carey, "Edition" 13, 19, 28). McCone uses her appellation of *ambue* to tentatively link this figure with the *fianna* and warfare in a triplicate schema of Bríg/Brigits, stating that "[t]he world of the *ambue* bordered on that of the *fían*" (McCone, *Echtrae* 162–163). This association seems tenuous. Certainly, both live outside of their home *túath*; but whereas in the case of the *fianna* this can be truly called a 'liminal' existence, the same is not true of the *ambue*. McCone aptly defines the *fían* as an "association of propertyless and predominantly young, unmarried warrior-hunters on the fringes of settled society ... the early Irish *fían* catered for propertyless males of free birth who had left fosterage but had not yet inherited the property needed to settle down as full landowning members of the *túath*" (163). Joseph Nagy agrees, calling membership in the *fianna* "only a temporary shelving of social identity rather than a complete and irreparable break with the world of the *túath*" (Nagy 46). An *ambue*, by contrast, was one who lived in a foreign *túath*, with consequent irretrievable loss of status and rights; he would never be a "full landowning member of the *túath*" in which he had settled (F. Kelly, *Guide* 5–6).

That said, the questions of Bríg's appellation can be explained in terms of the one thing *ambue* and the *fianna* have in common: their existence outside of the *túath*. In *EN*, Watson suggests that it is because of Fergus's status as an outsider who has shifted allegiance (i.e., from the Ulaid to Connacht) that he is able to make the prophecy regarding the *Táin* when Aingen's calf bellows (A. Watson 139). He includes the *síd* woman in this theory, stating that she is able to prophesy the overthrow and pillaging of the *síd* by the warriors of Connacht because of her own change in loyalties (138). In light of such observations, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest – tentatively – that Bríg's *ambue* appellation might be an attempt to convey her lack of specific loyalty, allowing her to see both sides and therefore be more evenhanded and just.

Nera and Fergus are both *ambue*, though each is treated very differently. Nera is made to carry firewood to the king's house each day. Watson notes the similarity to the way Ogma is treated by Bres – the "archetypal bad

9 For references to particular law tracts, see Part I, Chapter 1.

king” – in *CMT*, commenting that the early Irish audience would have been cognizant of the demeaning nature of this job as well (134). He takes it as evidence that the Otherworld king is a poor king (134). However, the early Irish audience would also have been well aware that this treatment was perfectly acceptable in respect to an *ambue*, although not to an accomplished warrior of one’s own people. The Otherworld woman also treats Nera as a typical *ambue*; in her household she is the decision-maker, telling Nera what he is to do both in regard to warning his people and in giving him chores, such as herding the cows; and it is she who gives a cow to their son. When Nera tells her that he lost his son’s cow, she tells him, “I did not deserve that thou shouldst go and tend kine in that way” (*Ní mo du do dul-sa do ingairiu fonn alt sin*), suggesting that his duty is to her, rather than vice versa (Meyer, “Adventures” 222–223 § 14).

Fergus, on the other hand, is one of a band of exiles from Ulster. Unlike Nera, he is not put to tasks of menial labour. In fact, at the point that he is first mentioned in the tale, he is playing *fidchell* with Ailill (224–225 § 15). He and the other exiles join the raid on the *síd*, and later take part in the *Táin* on Connaught’s side. However, he is still a subject of mockery, as Bricriu’s jibe shows. Bricriu compares the voice of Fergus – an exile from Ulster – to the defeated bellowing of a calf with an Ulster sire, underlying his vulnerability in a foreign province (226–227 § 18). Also, whereas the calf’s mother was taken to the bull in Ulster to be bulled, Fergus is out of his own province, and dependent on the goodwill of his lover, Medb, for his continued well-being, much as Nera is dependent on the Otherworld woman. Indeed, it is possible that the *fidchell* scene in *EN* is meant to be reminiscent of a similar episode in *TBC*, where Ailill humiliates Fergus by referring to his status as Medb’s lover (C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I* 33–34 & 155).

### *The Morrígain*

The Morrígain is different from other Otherworld women we have seen acting as intermediaries. She is one of what is generally considered to be a trio of war goddesses, though – as noted above – the composition of the trio is not always the same (Sjoestedt 32). In addition, Borsje associates her with the ‘terror of the night’ mentioned in *Reicne Fothaid Chanainn* and the *úatha* and *geniti glinne* mentioned in a variety of sources, most notably *TBC* and *Fled Bricreann* (Borsje, “‘Terror’” 71–90; Borsje, “*Fled Bricreann*” 175–177 & 190–192). However, while the Morrígain – and her cohorts/sisters/alter

egos – are associated with war and battle, and often present at such, they are usually not fighters themselves (Carey, “Notes” 269–271; Epstein Ch. 1; Sjoestedt 32).<sup>10</sup> They incite warriors to battle, lend magical aid to favoured warriors or armies, and heighten the terror of battle by adding to its noise and confusion – often in the form of a crow. They also sometimes instigate war or battle either directly or indirectly.

Both *CMT* and *TBC* offer examples of incitement by the Morrígain to warriors, on some occasions more explicitly, on others less so. One of the clearer instances takes place in *CMT*. It is related that, during the battle, “the Morrígain the daughter of Ernmas came, and she was strengthening the Túatha Dé to fight the battle resolutely and fiercely. She then chanted the following poem: Kings arise to the battle!” (*Táinic in Morrígan ingen Ernmusa anduidhe & boí oc nertad Túath nDéa co fertois an cath co dúr & co dícrá. Conid ann rocachain in laíd-se síis: Afraigid rig don cath!* [Gray 64–65]). Less self-evident as an instance of incitement is an episode in the section of *TBC* known as “The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn.” Here, a young Cú Chulainn is looking for Conchobar on the field of battle. He encounters a man with only half his head carrying a half of a man on his back, who enjoins him to carry the load for a while. Cú Chulainn refuses, the man throws the half-man to him, and Cú Chulainn drops it. The two wrestle, and Cú Chulainn is defeated. Then, the text says: “He heard the war-goddess crying from among the corpses. ‘Poor stuff to make a warrior is he who is overthrown by phantoms!’ Whereupon Cú Chulainn rose to his feet, and, striking off his opponent’s head with his hurley, he began to drive the head like a ball before him across the plain.” (*Co cuala ní, in [m]boidb dinib collaib. “Olc damnae laích fil and fo chossaib aurddrag!” La soadain fónéirig Cú Chulaind ⁊ benaid a c[h]end de cosind luirg áne ⁊ gabaid immá[i]n líathráite ríam dar in mag* [C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I* 139 & 16.]). At first blush, the statement by the war-goddess (here, either under the name Badb or in the form of a crow) seems like an insult. However, Angelique Gulermovich Epstein posits that this is a heretofore unrecognized instance of *gressacht*, a type of incitement by ridicule (Epstein Ch. 2). And indeed, the Morrígain’s words provoke Cú Chulainn into a very successful counter-attack.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to inciting warriors to fight, the Morrígain will sometimes give magical aid in battle as well. She does this for the Túatha Dé Dannan in both *Cath Muige Tuired Cunga* (*CMTC*) and *CMT*. In *CMTC*, the Morrígain, Badb

10 An exception to this widely accepted – and mainly valid – generalization would seem to be the Morrígain’s opposing Cú Chulainn in various shapes in *TBC*.

11 See Mac Cana 1992, 69–92.

and Macha together attack the Fír Bolg and send “magic showers of sorcery and compact clouds of mist and a furious rain of fire, with a downpour of red blood from the air on the warriors’ heads; and they allowed the Fir Bolg neither rest nor stay for three days and nights.” (*Cetha doilbthe draidechta 7 cithnela cothaigetha ciach 7 frasa tromaidble tened, 7 dortad donnfala do shiltin as in aeer i cennaib na curad, 7 nir legset scarad na scaledh do Feraib Bolg co cenn tri la 7 tri naidche* [Fraser 26–27]). In *CMT*, also, the Morrígan fulfills this role, though this time it is the result of a promise given to the Dagda after the two have trysted at Samain:

The Dagda had a house in Glen Edin in the north, and he had arranged to meet a woman in Glen Edin a year from that day, near the All Hallows of the battle. The Unshin of Connacht roars to the south of it. He saw the woman at the Unshin in Corann, washing, with one of her feet at Allod Echae (that is, Aghanagh) south of the water and the other at Lisconny north of the water. There were nine loosened tresses on her head. The Dagda spoke with her, and they united. ‘The Bed of the Couple’ was the name of that place from that time on. (The woman mentioned here is the Morrígan.)

Then she told the Dagda that the Fomoiré would land at Mag Céidne, and that he should summon the *áes dána* of Ireland to meet her at the Ford of the Unshin, and she would go into Scétne to destroy Indech mac Dé Domnann, the king of the Fomoiré, and would take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valour. Later she gave two handfuls of that blood to the hosts that were waiting at the Ford of the Unshin. Its name became ‘The Ford of Destruction’ because of that destruction of the king.

*Boí tegdas den Dagdae a nGlonn Edin antúaithe. Baí dano bandál forsín Dagdae dia blíadhnae imon Samain an catha oc Glind Edind. Gongair an Unius la Connachta frioa andes.*

*Co n-acu an mnaí a n-Unnes a Corand og nide, indarna cos dí fri Allod Echae (.i. Echuinech) fri husci andes alole fri Loscondoib fri husce antúaithe. Nóí trillsi taitbechtai fora ciond. Agoillis an Dagdae hí 7 dogníad ad óentaich. Lige ina Lánomhnu a ainm an baile ó sin. Is hí an Morrígan an uhen-sin isberur sunn.*

*Itbert-si íarum frisín Dagdae deraghdis an Fomore a tír .i. a Maug (S)cétne, 7 ara garudh an Dagdae óes ndánu Éríonn aro cend-si for Ádh Unsen; 7*

*noragad-si hi Scétne do admillid ríog na Fomore .i. Indech mac Déi Domnann a ainm, ⁊ dohéruadh-si crú a críde ⁊ áirned a gailie uadh. Dobert-si didiu a dí bois den crú-sin deno slúagaib bátar ocon indnaidhe for Ádh Unsen. Bai “Áth Admillte” iarum a ainm ónd admillid-sin an ríog. (Gray 44–45).*

She also offers help – presumably of a similar nature – to Cú Chulainn in *TBC*, but he scorns her. So, instead of assisting she attacks him in various animal forms while he is fighting, impeding his battles (C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I* 57 & 176–177).

The Morrígain is also known for striking confusion and terror into the hearts of warriors – generally through great noise – either before or during battle. A gloss in Trinity H.3.18 says that the Morrígnæ (the plural of Morrígain) “double the cries of the foxes, and they double the voices of the hooded crows” (*no eamnait a nglædha na sinnaigh, ocus eamnait a ngotha na fendoga* [Epstein Ch. 1]). In *TBC*, she (and/or equivalent war-goddess figures) twice cause terror and confusion in the armies allied with Connacht, once even causing men to die of fright because of it: “But as for the men of Ireland, Badb and Bé Néit and Némain shrieked above them that night in Gáirech and Irgáirech so that a hundred of their warriors died of terror” (*Imthús immorro fer nÉrind, cotagart Badb ⁊ Bé Néit ⁊ Némain forru ind aidchi sin for Gáirig ⁊ Ingáirich conidapad cét lóech díb ar úathbás* [C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne* 118 & 231]).

This brings us to the function the Morrígain performs in *EN* – that of instigating a war. According to Epstein, for the early Irish a cattle raid was synonymous with war – whether it be to obtain more cattle, to prove the fitness of one’s kingship by stealing them, or simply to pursue fame in the ensuing battle (Lucas 1–3). The Morrígain was associated with stealing cattle in both the *dindshenchas* of Odras, and that of Tulchaine, in the latter of which she is actually prayed to as a goddess for help in stealing the desired cattle (Epstein Ch. 2). In *EN*, as we have seen, in a quick but important aside from the main tale she steals Nera’s son’s cow while Nera is asleep, taking it to be bulled by the Donn of Cuailgne. On the return trip she encounters Cú Chulainn, who attempts to keep her from removing the cow from Ulster. This scene is a shortened version of the tale *Táin Bó Regamna*. In the latter, the Morrígain foretells the events of *TBC*, and tells Cú Chulainn that he will only live as long as the calf the cow is now carrying. Cú Chulainn responds that this is of no consequence, as the *Táin* will bring him everlasting fame (Cross & Slover 211–214).<sup>12</sup> This echoes the section of his childhood deeds in

12 The most recent edition is that of Johan Corthals in 1987.

which he chooses to take up arms on a day of which Cathbad has said that anyone who does so then will have a short life, but his deeds and valour will be known forever (C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailgne: Recension I* 19 & 142).

However, as important as it may ultimately be for the Ulster Cycle as a whole, the Morrígain’s part in this tale is even more peripheral than usual. She is completely removed from the main action from the tale. She never interacts directly with the hero; she takes the cow while Nera sleeps, and returns it unseen by him. She may interact with his son Aingen, but this is not clear and in any case, Aingen does not appear in the story except as an infant. She does interact with Cú Chulainn, but he is not the hero of this tale and their interchange here consists of a single sentence. In fact, the entire episode seems curiously separate from the rest of the tale, even while being intricately intertwined with its denouement. This is also the case with the scene between Nera and the dead prisoner at the beginning. For these reasons, and because in some places in the tale-lists the tale is known as *Táin Bó Aingen*, some scholars believe that the tale as we have it is a ‘clumsy’ compilation (Ó Duilearga 522). However, as Watson points out, it is as *Echtrae Nerai* that it is known as a *remscél* – that is, it is listed as one in *LL*’s list of *TBC* *remscéla* – and it is on that basis we must examine it (A. Watson 130). It may well be that *EN* is a compilation of earlier material; however, if so, it is hardly clumsy. While the sections of the story seem to be markedly different in content, each is skillfully woven into the others in an inescapable series of cause and effect. If Nera had not taken the dead man for a drink, he would not have seen the phantom host from the *síd*. If he had not followed them into the *síd*, he would not have met the woman, seen the place where the crown was kept and learned of the impending attack on his people. If he had not learned of the attack, he would not have been able to save his people, and if he had not found the hiding place of the crown, they would not have been able to capture it. Further, if he had not met the woman, he would not have had a son by her, or have been watching her cows when the Morrígain stole one to be bulled by Donn Cuailgne. If not for this action by the Morrígain, there would have been no calf, no fight with Finnbennach, and no oath by Medb. Each piece of the story is made dependent on what comes before it; this is not the work of a ‘clumsy’ author.

While the Morrígain’s actions within this tale are significant in order to bring about Medb’s oath, there seems to be no motive behind them – at least, none that can be determined from this text. For this reason, Watson has stated that she is “unabashedly up to no good” (137). However, Epstein has theorized that “[p]erhaps it is the Morrígain’s calling to facilitate war in order that heroes can ply their trade and so gain fame in battle...” (Epstein

Ch. 1). She believes that in this way, the Morrígain reflects both the horror and glory of war as the early Irish would have experienced it. So rather than acting as a mere trouble-maker, the Morrígain would seem to be performing her proper function, providing opportunities for the warriors of Ireland – and Cú Chulainn in particular – to fulfill their destinies.

## Conclusion

As has previously been demonstrated by Watson, *EN* is particularly bound up with sovereignty concerns. This can also be seen in the two sets of Otherworld tokens that are brought out of the *síd*. The first consists of a crown, mantle and *enech/enach*, each bearing the name of a significant royal figure in early Ireland. The other is three plants, the ‘fruits of summer,’ whose removal may seem insignificant, but they serve as proof of Nera’s words to his people and ensure that they will indeed attack the *síd* the following Samain. This, along with his use of Nera to carry firewood and lodging him with the single woman, help to show the Otherworld king’s lack of fitness to rule.

It is, however, entirely consistent with early Irish law to use an outsider in this way. Being from outside the Otherworldly *túath*, but still within Ireland, Nera would have been classed as an *ambue* – a stranger with no rights under the law. The king – or anyone else in the *túath* – could use or abuse Nera without repercussions. Fergus, similarly, would fulfil this description. He was treated rather better, being the queen’s paramour and a valued war leader, but was still the subject of mockery.

The Morrígain’s theft of Nera’s son’s cow seems like a strange aside to this text. However it found its way into the tale in the first place, it is inextricably part of it in its present form. Here, the Morrígain acts in her guise as war-goddess, forcing events so that the *táin* will take place. In this way, she will ensure the battle-glory of the warriors of Ireland, but particularly of Cú Chulainn himself.

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## 7 A Fair Shake: Otherworld Men as Intermediaries

Though they seem to be more numerous in the older tales, Otherworld women are not alone in acting as intermediaries between the worlds; male supernatural figures also act in this capacity. Their *modus operandi* tend to vary, so for the sake of brevity I will confine my attention here to three major categories: those offering guidance to the hero of a tale, those asking him for help, and those confirming the sovereignty of a king.

We have already explored Manannán's prophecy regarding the birth of his own son, Mongán, and the coming of Christ. We have also looked at his description of the Otherworld. It is the latter, along with his injunction "[s] teadily let Bran row ... you will reach [the Land of Women] before the setting of the sun" (*Fossad air sin imrad Bran ... ricfe [Tír inna mBan] re fuiniud ngréne*), which I wish to examine here (Mac Mathúna, *Immram* 43 & 56). Initially, it might seem strange to think of Manannán's observation of the differences between his perception of the sea and Bran's as constituting guidance. However, taken together with his explanation of Otherworldly immortality and the above exhortation, such a reading becomes much more plausible.

As described above, Manannán tells Bran that what he (Bran) sees as a "clear sea" (*muir nglan*) is, to Manannán's eyes, a "flowery plain" (*mag scothach* [39 & 52]). The "speckled salmon" (*ích bricc*) leaping beside Bran's boat are actually, he says, "calves, they are lovely-coloured lambs" (*loíg, it úain co ndagdath* [39 & 52]). He further says that Bran is actually sailing over the top of a golden-leaved wood, which has both flowers and fruit, and which does not decay (*Fid co mbláth ocus torad/fors-mbí fine fírbolad,/ fid cen erchra[e] cen esbad/fors-fil du(i)lli co n-órdath* [40 & 53]). Manannán immediately follows his description of the sea/plain with an explanation of why the people of the Otherworld are as comely and ageless as they are:

We do not expect lack of strength through  
decay the sin has not reached us.

Bad the omen when the serpent came to  
 the father in his city,  
 it perverted him, moreover, in this world  
 so that there came about an ebbing which was not original.

*Ní-frescam de mbeth  
 anguss, nín-táraill int  
 immarbuss.*

*Olc líth do-lluid ind nathir  
 cosin n-athair dia chathair,  
 saíbsi sec[h] recht i mbith  
 ché co-mbu haithbe nád  
 buë. (40–41 & 53–54).*

Again, as previously discussed, the people of the Otherworld are able to live in immortal bliss because they are free of the taint – and therefore the consequences – of original sin. As I argued above, I believe that the journey from the sinful mortal world to the sinless Otherworld in *IB* requires an alteration of one's state of mind – from sinful to sinless and from mortal to immortal – and that the author attempts to convey this as best he can in terms of the tale's pre-Christian setting. Manannán's extensive description of the beauty around him – beauty that Bran cannot yet see – along with the explanation of why he cannot see it, could be seen as an exhortation to make this alteration. Bran has already committed to the journey, but has not quite made the change that is necessary in order that he actually reach his destination. Manannán's vivid and captivating descriptions could easily serve as an inducement to make this change, while the understanding of why what Manannán sees is invisible to Bran communicates exactly what needs changing.

The advice of Nemglan – an Otherworldly 'bird-man' – to Conaire in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga (TBDD)* takes quite a different form. Here, we are presented with a list of *gessi*, or prohibitions. *Gessi* are not uncommon in early Irish legends, especially tragic ones. In Cú Chulainn's death tale, for example, competing *gessi* cause him to lose strength, enabling his enemies to defeat him at last (Kimpton 18–19 & 39). Philip O'Leary links *gessi* to the code of honour, which is ubiquitous in the warrior culture of early Irish literature. Some seem to promote the glory of fighting whenever the opportunity presents itself; others ensure that warriors will engage in other honourable tasks which do not necessarily involve fighting, including generosity and

hospitality (O’Leary 93–100). Tom Sjöblom takes a more cosmological view, arguing that receiving *gessi* is more akin to acquiring a destiny than serving a simple social function (Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos* 108–109).

The *gessi* Nemglan gives to Conaire are, according to Sjöblom, related to *tecosca*, which are instructions given to a newly selected or inaugurated king (Sjöblom, “Advice” 241). Nemglan met Conaire on the latter’s way to Tara, advised him of what would happen there, and gave him eight *gessi* (Stokes, “Destruction” 26–27). It was the breaking of one of these – that he should not allow brigandage in Ireland during his reign – that resulted in circumstances coming together to force him into the violation of the others (30). Other well-known examples of *tecosca* include *Audacht Morainn* and the interpolation in *Serglige Con Culainn* (SCC) where Cú Chulainn briefly rises from his illness to instruct Lugaid of the Red Stripes, who has just been informed of his selection as king of Tara (F. Kelly, *Audacht*; Dillon, “Wasting Sickness”).<sup>1</sup> As Conaire unavoidably violates one *geis* after another, they ensnare him more tightly in his downfall. Sjöblom asserts that Nemglan “has been introduced simply for the purpose of introducing Conaire’s injunctions into the tale ... a personification of those super- societal powers that were thought to control how well injunctions were observed and who granted a king the right to rule. Thus, Nemglan’s role in *TBDD* is not so much that of a supernatural adviser as that of a super-societal controller [sic] of human society and the protector of lands” (Sjöblom, “Advice” 247). While the bulk of this statement rings true, the contention that Nemglan is not actually a supernatural adviser does not. It does, after all, conflict with Sjöblom’s own argument that the injunctions in *TBDD* are a type of *tecosca*, which by nature are advisory. Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan’s reading of *TBDD* in conjunction with the Norse tale *Rígsþula* would seem to support this theory. The supernatural visitor in *Rígsþula* visits three households of differing classes, giving them advice and guidance each pertaining to their own class. Also, later in the Norse tale, a bird (a crow) visits the boy Kronr when he is casting at birds to chastise him into going and doing what he must to become king. Therefore, both boys receive advice according to their class and have a bird – in whatever guise – inform them of their upcoming kingship. While Eichhorn-Mulligan disputes other arguments for *Rígsþula* having Celtic connections, she seems to concede this as possible evidence that the two tales are related – though she refrains from saying in which direction the influence ultimately goes (Eichhorn-Mulligan 307–310). It would seem, then,

1 See also F. Kelly, *Guide* Appendix 2; Dillon, “Taboos” 1–6, 8–25, 27–36. See Part II, Chapter 2 of this text for discussion of the Biarthartheosc interpolation of SCC.

that it would be more correct to say that in the case of *TBDD* Nemglan is both 'supernatural advisor' and 'super- societal controller of human society.'

The male Otherworld figure in *SCC* also seems to fit this category. Though Cú Chulainn does go to the Otherworld to help in a battle (see the next paragraph), it is not Oengus but Lí Ban who asks for that assistance. Óengus actually seems to act more as a messenger for Fand, being the first to tell Cú Chulainn of Fand's love for him, and bringing a promise of healing:

Cú Chulainn, the delay in thy sickness will not  
be lucky. The daughters of Áed Abrat  
would heal thee, if they were with thee.

Lí Ban in the plain of Crúach, whose place is at  
the right hand of Labraid Lúath, said that  
it would be a delight to Fand to lie with  
Cú Chulainn.

*A Chú Chulaind fot galar  
níbo sirsan int anad:  
not ícfítí, diamtis lat  
ingena Áeda Abrat.*

*As-bert Lí Ban i mMaig Crúaich,  
bís for deis Labrada Lúath:  
"robad chridiscél la Faind  
coibligi fri Coin Culaind..." (Dillon, "Wasting Sickness" 51; Dillon, "Serglige" 4).*

It is not until Óengus visits and advises Cú Chulainn of these things that the latter is able to sit up and speak for the first time since his sickness began.

There are also times when an Otherworld figure will ask a mortal for help, rather than acting as a helper. A classic example is Fiachna mac Rétach in *ALC*. As we have seen, Fiachna comes to Connacht to ask assistance from their warriors in retrieving his wife, who has been abducted by a rival king in the Otherworld. Fiachna had won a battle against the man who had originally abducted her, but she had gone to the fortress of that man's nephew, named Goll, and Fiachna could not prevail against Goll's army. Loegaire takes fifty men and follows Fiachna to the place appointed for the battle. Upon winning the battle, they assault Goll's fortress and obtain Fiachna's wife from the enemy (a circumstance about which she is none too pleased). Afterward, Loegaire receives Fiachna's daughter as reward, and all

of his men are similarly rewarded with women of the *síd*. Loegaire and his men return to Connacht briefly to bid farewell to their people, at which time his father Crimthann Cass promises to give Loegaire half of his kingdom if only he will remain. Loegaire declines, citing the beauty of his new wife and of the *síd*, of which he is now co-king with Fiachna. Loegaire then returns to the *síd* with his men, never to be seen again (Jackson, "Adventures" 377–389).

I have also pointed out above that *The Adventure of Loegaire mac Crimthainn* (*ALC*) bears some resemblance to the First Branch of the *Maibinogi*, in which Pwyll is induced by Arawn, king of Annwn, to take his place in a duel a year hence. The fight is between Arawn and another Otherworldly king, and finishes in a stalemate every year. Each time, Arawn makes the killing blow, but is tricked into making a further blow which effectively restores his opponent to health. Compare this to *ALC*, where Fiachna is able to win the initial battle, but not to win the war and regain his wife.

Finally, an Otherworld figure will sometimes emerge to confirm the sovereignty of a given king's rule. The texts that illustrate this most clearly would be those in which an Otherworldly figure either chooses the king, or affirms the rule of a reigning king. The best-known instance of this would, of course, be those cases in which the sovereignty goddess chooses her consort outright. However, affirming an existing kingship seems almost exclusively the province of male Otherworld figures. Herbert argues that there was a shift of privilege from the female goddess in pre-historic times, as evidenced by archaeology and legends of Gaul, to the male figure of the king (Herbert, "Goddess" 269–272). The goddess – sovereignty – becomes an object to be acquired, rather than the one to select the best king (267 & 270). The tendency of the (sometimes kingly) Otherworld male may be taken as evidence of such a shift.

Nemglan, as discussed above, is one such Otherworld figure – though not yet informed or inaugurated, Conaire has been selected as king. In advising Conaire on how to conduct his reign, he is implicitly granting the sanction of the Otherworld on that reign (Stokes, "Destruction" 26–27). Another example would be *Baile in Scáil* (*BiS*), where Conn and his druids and *filid* are taken through a mysterious mist to a house in which sits Lug, along with a beautiful woman – 'the Sovereignty of Ireland' – with a vat of ale. Lug tells Conn of every descendant of his who will be king in Ireland, and the woman pours a cup of ale for each. Afterward, the house, woman and Lug disappear, leaving Conn and his druids and *filid* on the plain of Tara with the vat, ladle and cup of Sovereignty (Murray, *Baile* 34 & 51). Similarly, in *Echtrae Chormaic* (*ECm*), Cormac follows a stranger who has made off with his wife, son and daughter into a mist and finds himself in the Land of Promise (*Tír Tairngire*). Here, among other things, he finds a pig that is

cooked one quarter for each true tale told over it. His family is restored to him, and he is given a cup by Manannán that, if broken, will be made whole if the truth is spoken over it. Cormac retains the cup when he awakes the next morning, back in Tara (Hull, *Echtra* 871–883). The king's truth being essential to a bountiful reign – as is evident from the consequences of Conaire's false judgement – this 'cup of truth' becomes a strong testimonial to the favour of the Otherworld on Cormac's reign. It is interesting to note – especially in light of Herbert's argument, given above – that this tale seems to be based on the earlier story of Dorn (or Badurn) in which the cup or vessel was originally the property of *síd* women rather than of a male Otherworld ruler (Carey, *Ireland* 88–89).

From these examples we can see that while male intermediaries from the Otherworld are akin to their female counterparts, they work in somewhat different ways. While there are always exceptions, the men – with the possible exception of Manannán in *ECm* – tend to be straightforward in their approach, acting within the rules and expectations of society. The women, on the other hand, seem to feel less constrained to do so – if not in direct opposition to society, as with the woman in *Echtrae Chonnlai* (*EC*) or Ériu in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*LGÉ*) – then in ways which are more subversive, like Lí Ban's insistence that Lóeg be protected by a woman, or Nera's mistress' bearing him a child without permission from her king. While on the one hand this seems to betray a negative view of women of which we have seen evidence from the very first chapter, it also allowed the authors of the various tales to use women to critique the status quo in ways that male characters could not.

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## Conclusion

So, what can we take from all of this? It seems to have been the case that, despite the unenviable position of women in early Irish society, authors of the time had good reason to use strong female Otherworld characters in their texts. The 'same-only-different' aspect of the Otherworld we have seen time and again through this study allows a given author to treat and use Otherworld women in ways that would be unthinkable for most mortal women. They are able to challenge or subvert the status quo, in either the mortal world or the Otherworld. Connlae's mistress and her defiance of Conn provide an example of the former; Nera's mistress with her shifting loyalty the latter. Using Otherworld figures also allows authors to invoke native belief systems in service of the new Christian ideology, as do(es) the author(s) of *Echtrae Chonnlai* (*EC*) and *Immram Brain* (*IB*). And they have a number of tools at hand that most mortal women would not: access to Otherworld tokens, sometimes magical in nature – like Connlae's apple, the silver branch in *IB*, or the 'fruits of summer' and Otherworldly 'booty' in *Echtrae Nerai* (*EN*); knowledge of the future to assist them in securing their purposes, as in *EC*, or deflecting the wrath of potentially hostile invaders, as Ériu does in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*LGÉ*). In addition, they have access to realms in which they can promise heroes everlasting youth; and their own youthful immortality and beauty as well. These women have the beauty to attract the hero, and usually, the power to ensure his welfare. It is, then, no wonder that medieval Irish authors found them useful.



# Appendix

As discussed briefly in Chapter II.5, along with the main text in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (LGÉ), which describes the meeting of the sons of Míl with the eponymous goddesses of Ireland, there are three passages summarizing alternative accounts of these events, attributed by the various manuscripts to *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (CDS). What follows here is a semi-diplomatic edition of the relevant text from each manuscript that contains these passages. I expand all contractions (denoted by italics) except Roman numerals, but do not add punctuation or capitalization in the edited text. Each is followed by my translation.

## Summary I

*Book of Fermoy p. 8a (Redaction 1):*

is ed isbert lebar droma snechta comad banba ainm na .c. ingine fo gabad eriu ria nilind

.i. comad uait*hi* no bet banba for erinn tri .l. ogh dodechaid <sub>7</sub> triar fer ladra in tres fer is e .c. marb erenn insin is uad ainmnigter ard ladrann cetraca bliadan badar isan indsi dosainic iaram galar co nerbailtar uili a nænsechtmain da .c. bliadan iar sin do bi eriu can ænduine beo con[id] iaram tainic dili .xl. la <sub>7</sub> bliadain ro bi eriu fo dilind

This is what the Book of Druimm Snechtai said: that the name of the first girl under whom Ireland was taken before the Flood was Banba, that is, that it was from her that Banba was on Ireland. She came as one of three fifties of virgins, and three men. Ladru, one of the three men, he is the first dead person of Ireland. It is from him then that Ard Ladrann [‘The Height of Ladru’] is named. Forty years they were on the island. Disease came thereafter so that they all perished in a single week. Two hundred years after that Ireland was without a single living person, so that it is thereafter that the Flood came. Forty days and a year Ireland was under the Flood.

*Stowe D.v.1f. 3rb (Redaction 2):*

asberat araile comad banba ainm na hingine sin ro gab erinn ria ndilind <sub>7</sub> comad uait*hi* no beth banba for erinn

Others say that the name of the girl who took possession of Ireland before the Flood was Banba, and that it was from her that 'Banba' was on Ireland.

*Book of Lecan f. 271vb (Redaction 3):*

is ead asbert cin droma snechta comad banba ainm na cet *ingine* ro gob erind ria ndilind 7 comad uaithi no beith banba for erind 7 *tri* chæchad og 7 *triar* fer a llin ladra luam in treas fear is e cet marb *erenn* 7 is uada ainmnighther ard ladrann ceathracha bliadan badar isan indsi sea .i. in *nerinn* dosfainic iaram galar co nderbairt mile re hensheachtmain de da ched bliadan iar *sin* do bai eriu can oenduine beo inti conad iarum thanic diliu forsin nuile doman

This is what the Book of Druimm Snechtai said: that the name of the first girl who took possession of Ireland before the Flood was Banba, and that it is from her that 'Banba' was on Ireland; and three fifties of virgins and three men was their company. Ladru the steersman was one of the three men: he was the first dead person of Ireland and it is from him that Ard Ladrann ['The Height of Ladru'] is named. Forty years they were in this island, that is, in Ireland. Disease came to them thereafter so that a thousand perished from it before a single week [was up]. For two hundred years after that Ireland was without a single living person in it, so that it is thereafter that the Flood came upon the whole world.

*Book of Ballymote f. 12rb (Redaction 3):*

Margin [written in another, and later, hand]:

a cin droma sneachta in bec so sis co nigí ceassair

Main text:

is ead atbert leabhar droma sneacta comad banba ainm na cetingeine ro gabh *erinn* ria ndilind 7 gomadh uaithi no beith banba for *erinn* .t<sup>i</sup>. l. ogh dodheachaidh 7 *triar* fear laghra in treas fear is e *sin* .c. marbh *erenn* ann *sin* 7 is uadh ainmnightheard laghrann .xl. bliadan nó la ria ndilind do bhadar isin nindsi *sin* dosfainig iarom galar co nerboiltidar uile a *nænsheachtmoin* da .c. bliadan iar *sin* bai eiriu gan duine beo conad iarum tainig diliu .xl.a bliadan 7 la ro bai *erinn* fo dilind

## Margin:

From the Book of Druimm Snechtai this little which follows as far as Cesair.

## Main text:

This is what the Book of Druimm Snechtai said: that the name of the first girl who took possession of Ireland before the Flood was Banba, and that it was from her Banba was on Ireland. She came as one of three fifties of virgins, and three men. Ladru, one of the three men, he is the first dead person of Ireland and it is from him then Ard Ladrann [‘The Height of Ladru’] is named. Forty years (or days) before the Flood they were on that island. Disease came then so that they all perished in a single week. Two hundred years after that Ireland was without a living person, so that it was thereafter that the Flood came. Forty years and a day Ireland was under the Flood.

## Summary IIa

*Stowe D.iii.1f. 9vb (Redaction 1):*

atbert lebur dromma snechta cor iarfaig amairgen di a cenel do chlaind adhaimh dam ar si cid cenel do maccaib næ duit ol se am sini sea anas nae ol si for rind sleibe ro ba sa isin dilind cosa tel sa anois ol si dodechaid tonda dilend is de sin dogarar tel tuindi acht cena is ingantach i[n] slicht sin anuas

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that Amairgen inquired of her race. “I belong to the race of Adam,” said she. “To what kindred of the sons of Noah do you belong?” said he. “I am older than Noah,” said she. “I was on the peak of a mountain in the Flood. As far as this summit now,” said she, “the waters of the Flood came.” It is from that it is called Tul Tuinde. But that version above is extraordinary.

*Book of Lecan f. 284vb (Redaction 3):*

adbeart cín droma snechta coro fhiarfaid aimirgin di a cenel do chloind adaim dam ol si cia cenel do macaib noe duid ol se aimirgin am sine sea na noe ol si <sub>7</sub> forind tleb sea ro badusa isin dilind <sub>7</sub> cosin seal sa anois ol si o dadeachadar tonna dileann as is de sin dogairthear telach thuindi (.i. cailleach) acht cheana is ingnathach in slicht sin anois

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that Aimaigen enquired of her race. “I belong to the race of Adam,” said she. “To what kindred of the sons of Noah do you belong?” said Aimirgin. “I am older than Noah,” said she, “and I was on this mountain in the Flood, and [have been on it] until this time now,” said she, “since the waters of the Flood came [i.e., went] from it.” It is from that it is called ‘Telach Thuinde’ (that is, ‘hag’).<sup>1</sup> But that version just now is extraordinary.

*Book of Ballymote f. 21va (Redaction 3):*

adberty leabur droma sneachta gor fhiarfaigh amaigein di a ceineal do chloind adhaimh or si cia ceinel do macaibh na duit ol se am sine sea nas nae ol se for rind slebhe ro bhadhasa isin dilind gosa teal sa anois ol si dodhechain tonda dilind is de sin dogairthear tuinde acht cheana ingnathach in s[c]eal sin anuas

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that Amaigen inquired of her race. “Of the race of Adam,” said she. “To what kindred of the sons of Noah do you belong?” said he. “I am older than Noah,” said he [sic]. “I was on the peak of a mountain in the Flood. As far as this summit now,” said she, “the waters of the flood came.” It is from that it is called “of the wave”. However, that story above is extraordinary.

## Summary IIb

*Stowe D.iii.1 f. 14ra (Redaction 1):*

atbert lebar droma snechta conadh i sliab mis ro agaill eiriu iat<sub>7</sub> coro doilb sluaghu mora fo comair co mbatar ic cathaghudh friu iat coro chansat a ndruidh seon<sub>7</sub> a filid dichetla doib co naccatar ni batir fhoid mon[a] na sleibe conadh de ata sliab misse<sub>7</sub> fotla ro aigill iat i nuisnech

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that it is in Slíab Mis that Ériu spoke with them and that she magically formed great hosts in their presence, so that they were fighting against them, until their druids and their poets chanted incantations against them. They saw something: they were clods

<sup>1</sup> i.e., a place name meaning ‘Height of the Wave’ is here being taken to mean ‘Height of the Hag’; this presumably reflects an interpretation of the noun *sentonn*, *sentuinne* ‘old woman’ as *sen* ‘old’ + *tuinne* ‘old woman’ (*DIL*).



of the peat of the mountain/moorland. So that it is from it (that) it is Slíab Mis, and Fótla spoke with them in Uisnech.

*Stowe D.iv.3.f. 19rb (Redaction 1):*

atbert lebar dromma snechta conid i sleib mis ro accuill eri iat  $\gamma$  ro doilb sluaga mara co mbatar oc cathugud friu coro chansat a ndruid seom  $\gamma$  a filid dichetla doib co nacatar ni. batir foit mona  $\gamma$  sleibi conid de slíab mis

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that it is in Slíab Mis that Ériu spoke with them; and she magically formed great hosts, so that they were fighting against them, until their druids and their poets chanted incantations against them. They saw something: they were clods of peat and mountain/moorland. So that Slíab Mis is from that.

*Book of Lecan f. 284vb (Redaction 3):*

adbeart lebar droma sneachta corob a slíab mis do aicill eriu iad  $\gamma$  cor dealb sluagu mora fo chomair co mbadar i cacad friu iad conro chansad a ndruid seon  $\gamma$  a filig dicealta doib co nfacadar ni batir foid mona slebe conad de ita sliab mis  $\gamma$  fotla ro aicill iat a nuisnech do reir cach neich diandiabrad

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that it was in Slíab Mis Ériu spoke with them, and that she formed great hosts in [their] presence so that they were at war against them, until their druids and their poets chanted incantations against them. They saw something: they were clods of peat of the mountain/moorland. So that it is from it (that) it is Slíab Mis. And Fótla spoke with them in Uisnech, according to every person.

*Book of Ballymote f. 21va (Redaction 3):*

atbert leabur droma sneachta conidh i sleibh mis ro agaill eriu iad  $\gamma$  gor dhealbh sluagha mora fa chomair co mbadar i cathughudh friu iad coro chansat a ndruidhe seon  $\gamma$  a fhilidh dicealta doibh co naccadar ni batir fhoidh mona slebe conad de ata sliabh mis  $\gamma$  fodla ro agaill iad a nuisneach

The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that it is in Slíab Mis Ériu spoke with them and formed great hosts in [their] presence so that they were fighting against them, until their druids and their poets chanted incantations against them. They saw something: they were clods of peat of the mountain/moorland. So that it is from it (that) it is Slíab Mis. And Fótla spoke with them in Uisnech.



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