

bordered on that of the *fian* or association of propertyless and predominantly young, unmarried warrior-hunters on the fringes of settled society (ch. 5, 8; ch. 9, 2-3). If Brig *ambue* did have such connections and made any contribution to the Christian Brigit's cult, this might help to explain St. Brigit's role as helper of kings in battle in sources such as her First Life (pars. 64-6) and *Cath Almaine* (par. 10).

We may thus tentatively postulate an erstwhile link between the triple Brigit *alias* Brig of the *des dáno* and a further pair of Brigs associated with hospitality and warfare respectively, as in the scheme below.



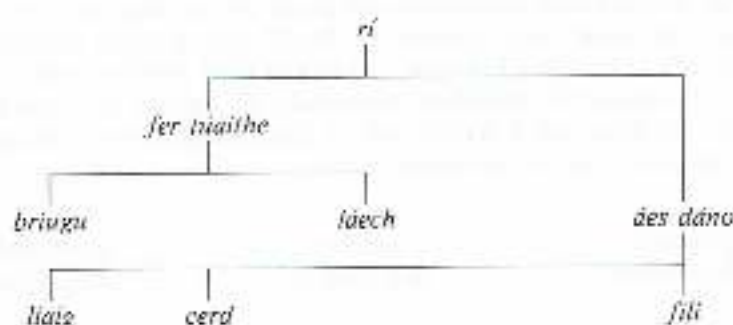
Whatever the connection or lack of it between these Brigs, Cormac's three Brigit's and the various Christian saints bearing these names, notably Brigit of Kildare, there can be no doubt about the correlation of (the basic threefold classification of the arts just identified in section 2 with that of the three social primes of hospitaller (*briugu*), warrior (*féindid/cathmíl/lech* etc.) and men of art (*des dáno*) exemplified earlier. That said, some vacillation between the full-time warrior and the soldier-farmer backbone of settled society (*grád tialithe*) in this scheme needs to be kept in mind (ch. 5, 8-9).

Obviously the hospitaller and the physician (*liatg*) are both concerned in their different ways with people's physical welfare, while smiths and their ilk, to whom *cerd* could be applied as a general designation, produce the various artefacts needed by hospitallers, farmers, warriors and even craftsmen themselves. For instance, the basic landowning commoner called *mrugfer* in *Crith Gablach* is expected to possess such wooden and metal implements as large cauldrons (*caire*) with accoutrements, a vat (*dabach*) for brewing, iron vessels (*erna*), kneading troughs (*loistela*), wooden mugs (*cuaid*), wash-basins, candlesticks, knives, woodworking tools, spear, ploughing outfit, milk-jugs and so on (pars. 14-5). The importance of metal cauldrons to the *briugu* will emerge below, and *Cath Muige Tuired* neatly illustrates the cooperation required between blacksmith (*gabae*), carpenter (*sáer*) and brazier (*cerd*) to produce the head, shaft and rivets respectively of spears for battle (par. 122).

Medical charms preserved in the St. Ciall and Stowe Missal collections (*Thes. II*, 248-50) or the spell-binding activities of a legendary smith like Olc Aiche in *Scéla Éogain 7 Chormaic* show that inspired knowledge, incantatory and related skills were characteristic of the major *des dáno* in general as compared with hospitaller, warrior or soldier-farmer. Within the professional classes themselves, however, specialization in this area belonged primarily to druid, poet, ecclesiastical scholar and the like, thus enabling them to function as an internal microcosm of the group as a whole.

The upshot of this was a basic triple classification of the *des dáno* mirroring that of the broader society to which they belonged. In this way the scheme in chapter 5, 9

can be expanded to include a further set of three-in-one correlates as in the diagram below.



4. Daig's Life obligingly confirms the connection of his name with the Old Irish word *daig* "flame, conflagration, fire", itself the reflex of an Indo-European root *d^heg^h- seen in Sanskrit *dah-* "burn" etc. During the visit to Mochtae of Louth "the building in which the boy was left alone appeared to burn in a great fire (*magno ardere incendio videbatur*). But when the monks were hastening to put out the blaze, they found the building and the boy who was staying in it safe without any harm from fire. Then they return to the holy bishop and recount the most great miracle in his presence. Then Mochtae said in prophetic spirit, 'that boy shall burn greatly with the fire of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, shall not undeservedly be called Daig (*igne Spiritus Sancti puer ille multum ardebit, ideoque non immerito Daig vocabitur*)'. For this name signifies 'great flame (*magnam flammam*)' in the Irish language (*in scotica lingua*)" (par. 2).

A virtually identical fire miracle is related of the baby Brigit in section five of her First Life (Bollandus, 1658, 119) as well as at the outset of *Bethu Brigte* in its extant accephalous form. Furthermore, the twelfth-century visiting cleric Giraldus Cambrensis describes a fire cult at her main church of Kildare that can hardly be other than a pre-Christian survival and is quite reminiscent of the Vestal fire tended by a college of virgins in ancient Rome: "in Leinster's Kildare, which glorious Brigit made famous, there are many miracles worthy of record. Of these the first to come to mind is Brigit's fire, which they say is inextinguishable, not because it could not be extinguished but because nuns and holy women tend and maintain it so carefully and attentively with sufficient fuel so that it has ever remained unextinguished from the time of the virgin (Brigit) throughout the passage of so many years . . . That fire is surrounded by a circular hedge of brushwood, inside which no man enters" (*Topographia Hiberniae*, 67-9).

De Vries plausibly suggests that the Romano-Celtic Minerva is a partially syncretized native Celtic *Brigantī* named on various inscriptions and cognate with Old Irish *Brigit*, and quotes Solinus' remarks in his *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* 22, 10 about the curative thermal springs of *Aquae Sulis*, present-day Bath: "the patron goddess over these springs is Minerva's, in whose temple perpetual fires never whiten into ashes but, when the fire has dwindled, it turns into stony lumps" (1961, 78-9). It thus seems quite likely that the Bath cult and its christianized Kildare counterpart related ultimately to the same goddess, variously known as *Brigantī* "exalted one" or *Sol* "sun" cognate with Latin *sol*, Welsh *haul* "sun", semantically

shifted Irish *súil* "eye" and so on. At all events, the pagan Brigit's association with sun and fire seems to be beyond reasonable doubt and thus constitutes a further similarity with Daig, himself probably a pagan fire god in origin.

The evidence assembled so far points to an intimate ideological connection, apparently with pagan roots, between fire and the tripartite arts of medicine, craftsmanship and learned insight. Whereas *leges* "leechcraft, medicine" was essentially unitary, the other two categories could be further subdivided, apparently triadically in the first instance. Thus the trio of mythical craftsmen mentioned in *Cath Maige Tuired* and elsewhere are Luchtae the wright (*sáer*), Goibniu the blacksmith (*gobae*) and Créidne the smith (*cerd*) of non-ferrous metals (Gray, 1982, 120 and 125-6), while classical descriptions of the pagan Gauls such as Strabo IV iv 4 trichotomize the mantic order into bard, seer and druid (Old Irish *bard*, *faith* and *druí* respectively). Since, however, by the time of our earliest Irish sources the Church and other factors had caused considerable modification and expansion of these sub-sets (ch. 4, 2; ch. 9, 9-12), we may return without further ado to the basic trio of *áes dáno* callings.

5. Three significant males in St. Brigit's life each represent one of the three main categories of *áes dáno*. Firstly, Dubthach maccu Lugair, the fabled prototype of the Christian poet or *fili* (ch. 4, 3-5), is refused her hand and then helped by her to find the right bride in *Bethu Brigitte* (par. 14). Secondly, her helpmeet bishop Conláed of Kildare is described as *princeard Brigitte* or "Brigit's chief craftsman" in a gloss on *Féilire Óengusso* May 3rd. (Stokes, 1905, 128). Finally, a head-ailment causes her to seek a physician, the *suid-liag* or "master leech" Áed mac Brice in *Bethu Brigitte* (par. 29), while St. Áed's own Salamanca Life claims that "whoever is troubled by a headache is healed after calling upon the name of St. Áed (*quicumque dolore capitis vexatur, invocato nomine sancti Aidi sanatur.*) For St. Brigit, when she was struggling with a most serious headache, invoked the name of holy bishop Áed and was forthwith cured of the headache until the day of her death. As she used to say: "invocation of St. Áed's name has cured me of most serious pains in my head" (par. 17; Heist, 1965, 173).

Endowed by the hagiographical tradition with remarkable healing powers, St. Áed was traditional founder of the monastery of Killare, which contained buildings dedicated to St. Brigit (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 392) and was situated beside the hill of Uisnech, symbolic centre of Ireland and site of an erstwhile fire ritual according to the Metrical Dindsenchus 2, 42 (Gwynn, 1906). Like Daig's, Áed's name means "fire", being frequently glossed as *tene* "fire" (see *DII* entry) and cognate with Greek *aithōs* "fiery", Sanskrit *édhah* "kindling" etc. Here too, then, we may well have to do with a christianized pagan fire deity, to whom the name of the Gaulish *Aedon* and, as in the case of St. Brigit and the Dagdae's identically named daughters above, a *Tuatha Dé Danann* doppelgänger bear witness (cf. ch. 3, 8). Indeed, a gloss on *Imucallam in dá Thiarad* or "the colloquy of the two sages" (par. 139) makes the somewhat unorthodox claim that the latter Áed and his brothers were the "three gods of Danu" who possessed "mastery of learning (*súlthe na hécsi*) fully" between them and were "the three sons of Brigit the poetess". The attributes of the Christian saint suggest that Áed's third here may have been medicine.

Section 16 of Daig's Salamanca Life mentions a sister of the saint called Lasair, one more name meaning "flame" in Old Irish that quite possibly points to yet

another christianized fire goddess with a cult sufficiently widespread to generate the diverse local saints of this name recorded in genealogies (see Ó Riain, 1985, 249). One such, based in Roscommon, is the subject of an early Modern Irish Life of Lasair that may have older roots and repeatedly stresses her association with various types of learning and verbal skill (Gwynn, 1911).

This quartet of saints with arguable origins as pagan deities connected with fire and the arts falls into two pairs comprising a closely related male and female. One member of each pair covers all three main types of *dán* "art" while the other specializes in just one, but there is inversion of the sexes in this respect. Thus in the first duo the female Brigit is omniscient and the male Áed is restricted to medicine, whereas in the second it is the male Daig who has a general command and the female Lasair concentrates upon learning. These detailed correlations point to an old pagan mythological schema expressing an intimate ideological connection between fire and the three main branches of the arts. This is most directly discernible in Cormac's above reference to the three goddesses named Brigit, but in the hagiography of Áed, Daig and Lasair there are significant survivals in a christianized form reflecting the Church's proprietorial interest in this vital area (ch. 4, 2).

6. The fifth-century B.C. Greek tragedian Aeschylus maintains a thematically parallel connection between fire and the arts subdivided into healing, divination and craftsmanship in his play *Prometheus Desmotes* or *Prometheus Bound*, which recounts Zeus's punishment of the philanthropic Titan for stealing some of the gods' fire and giving it to men. There fire is called *pántekhnōn* "promoter of all the arts" (l. 7) and "teacher of every art to mortals . . . and great way to achievement" (ll. 110-1), the arts and ways involved being enumerated under the basic headings of cures for diseases, divination and sacrifice, and finally the working of bronze, iron, silver and gold (ll. 476-506).

The importance of fire in the smelting and working of metals is too obvious to require comment. Regarding the physician's use of fire to prepare medicaments, *lagert bruthchán* "heating of brews" in the Old Irish legal tract on distraint *Cethirslicht Athgabála* (CIH 420.32) is glossed "as long as he is boiling anything good of herbs and prescriptions for someone who is sick" (ibid., 421.10-1; *airet bes oc bruth in neich as catn do lasaib 7 do éolusaib do neoch hís i ngalar*), while in the course of his cure of Níadu in *Cath Maige Tuired Miach* "for the third nine days kept casting white tufts of marshy rushes black after they had been blackened in fire" (par. 33; *in tres nómaid do:bidced gelscotha di hoc-suihnib dubaib ó-ro:dubtis i tein*).

The intriguing Old Irish text known as "the Caldron of Poesy", edited by Breatnach (1981) and dated by him to the early eighth century A.D. (ibid., 55-6), is concerned with the respective roles of heredity and inspiration in the ability to produce poetry: "where is the foundation of poetic art (*bunadus ind airchetail*) in a man? Is it in the body or the soul (*in i corp fa i n-anmain*)? Some say it is in the soul, since the body does nothing without the soul. Others say it is in the body, since it is inherent in accordance with physical relationship, i.e. from father or grandfather, but it is truer that the foundation of poetic art and knowledge (*bunad ind airchetail 7 int sois*) is present in every physical person, but in every second person it does not shine forth (and) in the other it does shine forth (*tacht cach lu dhóne ní:tuídi, alailiv a(d):tuídi*)" (par. 3). The 'three-generation' requirement for a poet has been

discussed elsewhere by Breatnach (1987, 94-8), who concludes that "only one thing then, natural ability, is required of a *bard* . . . To qualify for the status of *fili*, on the other hand, normally both ability and study are essential, the ideal consisting of having the proper family background in addition to these two qualifications. Where ability is missing, one's poetic family background is only of relevance as long as one's father lives" (ibid., 98).

The Caldron of Poesy approaches the basic issue by means of a doctrine that three separate cauldrons (*coiri*) within a man generate aptitude in the arts, including poetry and learning. Concerning the first, termed *coire goiriath*, "out of it is distributed knowledge (*soas*) to people in pure youth (*i n-óg-áilú*)" (par. 5) and reference is made to "the fine speech which overflows from it (*hétrae mbil brúchtas úad*)" (par. 1). As to the second *coire érmal* primarily responsible for poetry, "in every second person it is upside down, i.e. in ignorant folk (*i n-áes dois*). It is on its side in the practitioners of hardic composition and verses (*i n-áes bairne 7 ruid*). It is upright in the champions of knowledge and poetic art (*i n-áruithib sois 7 airchetail*). And the reason, then, why everyone does not practise at the same stage is because the *coire érmal* is upside down until sorrow or joy turns it" (par. 8). The various emotions and experiences capable of accomplishing this are then enumerated, and there follows a poem ascribed to the legendary *fili* Néde mac Adnai in which this cauldron is praised among other things for containing "a noble brew in which is brewed the foundation of all knowledge (*sáer-brud i mberbthar bunad cach sois*)" (par. 13, ll. 85-6). This is turned by "divine joy and human joy" (par. 10; *fáilte déodae 7 fáilte dbéndaé*) into the third *coire sois* or "cauldron of knowledge", which is generated upside down and "out of it is distributed knowledge of every art besides poetic art (*soas cach dáno olchenae cenno-thá airchetail*)" (par. 7).

From the description of the first cauldron (*goiriath*) of youthful knowledge at the beginning of the text it emerges as a provider of "knowledge and grammar, writing and metrics, which is of course a necessary prerequisite for any learned person" (Breatnach, 1981, 48). The second cauldron (*érmal*) is concerned with "the acquisition of the power to compose poetry, or being inspired, which is also indicated by the gloss *is maith in coiri a fáil in tein fesa* 'good is the cauldron in which is the "fire of knowledge" [= inspiration, see notes]'" (ibid., 49). The third cauldron of knowledge (*sois*) seems to refer to "what the highest grade of learned person had over and above the basics" (ibid., 51), in other words to the essential broader education of a top poet in adjacent disciplines. In short, this text, which not only gives due credit to the impulses provided by God (l. 2) and the religious life (ll. 40, 43) but also insists upon the indispensability of God's grace for bringing the poetic cauldron *érmal* to its final upright position (par. 12), is geared to the core monastic syllabus of overlapping branches of learning, including *fíledocht*, described earlier (ch. 1, 10-1).

As Breatnach points out, "central to this text is the idea of the cauldron as the source of ability in poetry (and other skills) . . . Two aspects of the cauldron are relevant: (i) that of a cooking vessel . . . and more important, (ii) that of a container" (ibid., 48), the three possible positions of which obviously relate to the amount of knowledge and ability it can be expected to hold: "the upright is regarded as the ideal, the upside-down as the least desirable, with the inclined position being in between. The three positions can be taken to correspond roughly to full, empty and half-full, respectively" (ibid., 50).

In the present context particular significance attaches to the culinary metaphor associated with the preparation and allocation of the cauldrons' contents, as in the passages cited above about "the noble brew in which is brewed the foundation of all knowledge" and the "fine speech" that boils over (*brúchtas*) from its vessel. The cooking of a cauldron's contents, of course, requires the application of heat from a fire, in this case arguably the *tein fesa* or "fire of knowledge" in the gloss on l. 108. In similar vein *aicheadal* or "poetic art" is said to "shine forth" (par. 3) in appropriate circumstances, while one of the human joys that stir the cauldron *érmái* is "joy at the arrival of *imbas* which the nine hazels of fine mast at Segais in the *síd*-mounds amass and which is sent upstream along the surface of the Boyne, as extensive as a wether's fleece, swifter than a racehorse, in the middle of June every seventh year regularly" (par. 11).

This, of course, is a reference to that well known perquisite of the fully accomplished poet *imbas for:osnai* "great knowledge that lights up", and references to the nuts of Segais have been collected by O'Rahilly, who summarizes their import as follows: "the well of Segais was, according to one account, situated beneath the sea in Tír Tarnaire (the Otherworld). Around it were hazel-trees, the fruit of which dropped into the well and caused bubbles of mystic inspiration (*na dolca immaiss*) to form on the streams which issued from the well. Another account has it that the nuts which fell from the hazels into the well of Segais used, either once a year or once in seven years, to pass into the River Boyne; and those mortals who were fortunate enough to find the nuts and to 'drink the *imbas* out of them' obtained the seer's gift and became accomplished *filid*. According to other accounts, there were salmon in the Otherworld well, and as the wisdom-full hazel-nuts dropped into the water the salmon ate them" (1946, 322-3).

These accounts are very different from what Cormac's Glossary describes as the pagan rite of *imbas for:osnai* involving consumption of a piece of animal flesh by the *fill*, an incantation (*díchetal*) over him, an offering to idols, and a ritual trance in which the revelation is made (Stokes, 1862, 25). The unacceptability of this rite to the Church is clear from Cormac's statement that it had been banned along with the related *teinn* (verbal noun of *teinnid* "cracks, breaks") *láeda* by St. Patrick, and it has obvious affinities with two very similar literary descriptions of the *tairb-feis* or "bull-feast" in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 11-2; cf. ch. 3, 4) and *Serglige Con Culainn* (pars. 22-3). The use of imperfects in both indicates that this mantic ritual to determine a future king of Tara was regarded as a thing of the past, the latter text's slightly fuller version running as follows: "then a bull-feast is held by them that they might discover from it to whom they would give the kingship. It is thus that that bull-feast used to be held, namely a white bull was killed and one man would consume his fill of its flesh and its broth and the prayer of truth (*óir sírinde*) would be sung over him by four druids and there used to appear to him the manner of the man who would be made king there from his form and description and the manner of the action he would perform." The act of cooking as a prelude to the acquisition of knowledge by eating, merely implicit in Cormac's account of *imbas for:osnai*, is made quite explicit in these accounts of the *tairb-feis*. Moreover, their reference to broth leaves little doubt that boiling in a cauldron or the like was envisaged.

Clerical sensibilities seem to have been more in tune with the association of *imbas for:osnai* with nuts falling into a well in an otherworld readily perceived as an

allegory of the sinless Christian paradise governed by God's truth (ch. 3, 13). The centrality of this thinking to the section of *Scél na Fir Flatha* called *Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri* has already been argued (ch. 6, 10), and on arrival in the land of promise Cormac soon espies "a shining well in the enclosure, five streams (coming) out of it and the hosts in turn drinking the water of the streams. Nine everlasting hazels above the well. There the purple hazels drop their nuts into the well and the five salmon that are in the well crack them open so that their bubbles (*bolca*) are sent on the streams" (par. 36). The allegorical significance of this passage is subsequently expounded by Manannán as follows: "the well that you saw with the five streams out of it is the well of knowledge (*topur in fis*). They are the five senses (*na cúic cétfada*) through which knowledge is obtained and, moreover, no one who does not drink a draught from the well itself and from the streams shall have art (*dán*). The people of many arts (*lucht na n-ildán*), it is they who drink from them both" (par. 53).

Whether this is an allegorical interpretation of a somewhat modified pre-Christian doctrine or a further instance of the capacity of Christian allegory to generate fresh 'traditional' narrative (see ch. 3, 13), the nuts bubbling in the water can be regarded as analogous to the seething cauldron from which knowledge may be obtained according to other representations above. Moreover, the role of actual or symbolic cooking in the acquisition of knowledge is a central feature of a famous episode in the *Maegntmartha Finn* or "Boyhood deeds of Finn" where the young hero, still called Demne, sucks his thumb after burning it while cooking the long-awaited salmon of Fecc, no doubt a relation of the supernatural fish mentioned in *Echtra Cormaic* above, for the poet Finn, who then realizes that Demne is the Finn for whom the eating of the salmon is destined. "Thereupon the youth eats the salmon. It is that which gave knowledge to Finn, to wit, whenever he put his thumb into his mouth and sang through *teim láeda*, that which he did not know would be revealed to him. He learned the three things that constitute a poet, to wit, *imbas for:osnai*, *teim láeda* and *dícheat di chennaib*" (pars. 18-9 = Nagy, 1985, 214).

According to Joseph Nagy's penetrating analysis of this narrative in his pioneering book on *The wisdom of the outlaw* "cooking is apparently also an important part of the communication of imbas from its mysterious source to the poet . . . Only after it is cooked does the wisdom-bearing food become acceptable to the poetic consumer . . . The gilla, a living symbol of transition, is asked to effect the transformation of the salmon from raw to cooked, and of the knowledge it contains from wild and inaccessible to cultural and usable. The gilla is ordered to cook the fish only and not to eat any part of it. But in the process of preparing the food for the poet, the gilla becomes a cook, a consumer, and an odd sort of cooked commodity himself . . . Demne in the salmon episode of the *Boyhood Deeds* absorbs the entire cooking situation: he cooks the salmon, is burnt while cooking it, and puts his quasi-cooked finger in his mouth as if it were the food to be eaten. In the end he himself eats the cooked salmon" (ibid., 157-8).

It thus seems that poetic understanding is not only itself 'cooked' for human ingestion but also transforms its recipient by a kind of culinary process, as is implied by its very name *imbas for:osnai* "great knowledge which lights up, kindles".

7. The foregoing has focused upon evidence for a persistent connection in early Irish sources between the arts and fire allied with cooking. In the case of metalwork

and medicine the role of fire-induced smelting or cooking to transform crude natural resources into refined products fit for human use and consumption is an observable fact of life open to mythical and ideological exploitation. It then becomes easy enough to understand how this mediatory function of fire and cooking as interconnected modes of conversion from one state to another could lend itself to mythical treatments of poetic inspiration, learning and other social activities.

This nexus has been explored by Levi-Strauss in his *Mythologiques*, the first volume of which in English translation is appropriately entitled *The raw and the cooked* and analyses various mostly southern Amerindian myths "which view culinary operations as mediatory activities between heaven and earth, life and death, nature and society" (1970, 64-5). The notion that "cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw" (*ibid.*, 142) has recently been put to good use by Nagy, who neatly states the basic premise as follows: "as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has amply demonstrated, cooking and fire in myth and ritual often represent the process of socialization. Ideologically, just as food is turned from raw and indigestible to cooked and edible by being exposed to fire, so, concurrently, it is translated from the realm of nature into the realm of culture by the civilized and civilizing act of cooking. In the language of myth and ritual symbolism, that which exists outside society or is not entirely social is designated 'raw', while that which exists within society and has an identifiable social function is designated 'cooked'" (1985, 132).

If we move beyond the *des dána* to the other main early Irish social categories, it is immediately apparent that the relevance of cooking is at its most literal and direct in the case of the *bríugu* or "hospitaller", the owner of various kinds of livestock by the hundred for the public provision of hospitality to anyone visiting his *tech n-óige* or "guesthouse" (ch. 5, 8). Fire was the means of cooking unending supplies of food for guests in the great cauldrons that were the *bríugu*'s hallmark in myth and real life. Thus the law tract *Uraicecht Becc* insists that the superior *bríugu leitech* or "ample hospitaller" must possess a *coire ainsicc* apparently understood as an "immovable cauldron" (*CYH* 1608.30; McCone, 1984c, 3), while the opening description of the hostel of the *rig-bríugu* or "arch-hospitaller" Mac Da Thó (*ibid.*, 4) in *Scéla Muice* refers to "seven hearths in it and seven cauldrons, an ox and a bacon fitch in each cauldron". A particularly significant stock motif already cited from *Esnada Tige Buchet* (ch. 5, 8) recurs as follows in *Togail Buidne Da Derga* with reference to the arch-hospitaller from whom that tale takes its name: "since he took up management of house and land (*trebad*) his cauldron has not been taken from the fire (*nútucaid a chairi do thenid*) but was boiling food (*no:bid ac bruith bid*) for the men of Ireland" (par. 133; here *LU* 7771-2).

For the hospitaller, then, cauldron and fire were an essential means of mediating between nature and society by dispensing his possessions in cooked form to his visitors and thereby securing his own social identity and status. In effect, the *bríugu*'s preoccupation with *trebad* and hospitality constituted a full-time version of concerns applying in a rather less concentrated form to the *grád tialthe* or land-holding class in general. It has already been seen that such status depended largely on possessions, notably livestock and utensils including a large cauldron, and the attendant obligation to give and right to receive due hospitality (3 above and ch. 5, 8). Thus culinary activity associated with fire and cauldrons was a potent overall symbol of the bonds holding society together.

As has been seen in the previous section, the culinary uses of fire were likewise essential for the *des dána*. The physician or *liaig* was, like the *bríugu*, a straightforward cook by virtue of the herbal concoctions he brewed, while the smith or *cerd* used fire to 'cook' or convert nature's crude ores into refined metal artefacts for social use. Finally, the element of knowledge and inspiration also present in the activities of physicians and smiths is realized in its purest form by the learned poets or *filid*, and was apparently envisaged as being released in them by the consumption of magically cooked food or, in the case of the Caldron of Poesy, by the direct action of a metaphorical divine fire upon the inner man, a vessel comparable with one or more types of cauldron in which knowledge could be 'brewed'. Thus were the forces of nature and the supernatural channelled by the 'cooking' of inspiration into the supreme socio-cultural artefact of knowledge and learned composition.

8. Fire, however, can be destructive as well as constructive (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1970, 106), a dichotomy well brought out by Aeschylus's *Prometheus*. Lines 351-72 of this Greek tragedy vividly describe the death and havoc unleashed by various kinds of elemental fire both during and as a result of the ferocious conflict between Zeus and Typhon, in deliberately marked contrast with the fire that Prometheus controlled by enclosure in a fennel stalk in order to benefit mankind with the arts.

The ancient Irish were equally aware of fire's destructive power and potential, particularly in martial contexts, which brings us to the third basic social category made up of warriors (ch. 5, 8-9). A typical enough instance of the destructive use of fire in warfare is provided by the Ulster hero Conall Cernach's boast in *Scéla Muice Meic Da Thó*: "I swear what my people swear that, since I took a spear into my hand, I have not been without the slaying (*guin*) of a man of Connacht every single day and slaughter by fire (*orvain fri daigid*) every single night" (par. 16). Furthermore, there is an obvious ring of elemental destruction to the well known and much discussed motif of threefold death by *guin* γ *bádud* γ *lascud* "wounding and drowning and burning" (Radner, 1983, with further references; cf. ch. 6, 4).

In contradistinction to the fundamentally beneficent and productive fires of the *bríugaid* and *des dána*, the early Irish warrior's inherent fire was regarded as essentially elemental and, unless checked, liable to burst forth with dire consequences for friend or foe alike in the immediate vicinity. The famous physical distortion or *flustrad* that accompanies the preeminent hero Cú Chulainn's outbursts of uncontrollable ferocity includes "a spark of fire on every single hair (*oibell tened . . . for cach denfinnu*)" and "the warrior's radiance from his crown (*in léan láith assa mulluch*)" (*Táin* 430 and 433-4). Even at the level of vocabulary *fichid* "fights" and *fichid* "boils" are homonyms, while *grís* "heat" and *bruth* "boiling heat" also mean "ardour, valour", *daig* "flame" can signify "hero" and so on (see relevant *DII.* entries).

In Cú Chulainn's final *mac-gnímrud* or "boyhood deed" in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* his martial exploits whip him up into such a state of frenzy that on returning home he demands combat with his own people but is shamed by the sight of bare-breasted women into covering his face, seized and plunged into three successive vats of water to cool him down sufficiently for readmission into settled society. The warrior's heat here is no mere metaphor: "they put him into a vat (*dabach*) of cold water. That vat bursts about him. The second vat, moreover, into which he was put, it boiled with fists therefrom (*fichis dornaib de*, presumably fist-sized bubbles). The third vat into

which he went after that, he heated it until its heat and its cold suited him. He then comes out, and thereafter the queen, Mugain, puts a blue mantle around him with a silver brooch in it and a hooded tunic. And he sits at Conchobar's knee then" (*Táin* 815-20).

It has been suggested elsewhere (McCone, 1986d, 16-7; 1987, 112-4) that Cú Chulainn's martial outing and subsequent homecoming in this episode constitute a somewhat formalized and clerically bowdlerized literary reflex of the aristocratic youth's semi-bestial phase as a member of a *flan* or hunter-warrior association before his transition to full membership of propertied society was marked by an erstwhile baptismal rite similar to that represented iconically on the Gundestrup Cauldron (ch. 9, 2-3). However, in this *mac-gnúrad* the transitional immersion has been significantly endowed with marked culinary overtones. Like once raw meat being rendered fit for human consumption in a seething cauldron, Cú Chulainn has the wildness literally boiled out of him in a vat. The violent young warrior is 'cooked' into social acceptability, so to speak.

In early Irish myth and saga the warrior's ambiguity or instability as a figure capable of switching from protection to destruction is also prone to be expressed in canine terms with quite striking Greek analogues (McCone, 1984c). Just as a happy or unhappy sexual liaison with a woman of sovereignty may serve as an index of a king's good or bad rule, so too can the nature of a warrior's martial encounter with a supernatural hound prove symptomatic of his good or bad fortune and conduct. It has already been seen that the propitious combination of king and woman blesses sovereignty and society with the pervasive benefits of ruler's truth (*fír fiaithemon*), whereas their separation signals the end of this prosperity and may portend the king's death (ch. 5, 5). Similarly, success in slaying the great hound in fair fight according to "men's truth" (*fír fer*) could signify the attainment of martial prowess through appropriation of its fierce attributes, whereas loss of a hound through its rabid disobedience might bring a mighty warrior down (see ch. 3, 5).

Liabile, like his hound mascot, to fluctuate between controlled loyalty and unruly frenzy, an early Irish warrior like Cú Chulainn lent himself to representation as a kind of self-heating vessel that could boil over all too easily, a tendency that needed restraining in time of peace and directing properly in time of war if it was not to prove indiscriminately destructive.

It is also worth noting that fire and heat in their negative burning rather than their positive cooking aspect can serve as appropriate symbols of the 'desocializing' transitions involved in loss of status through various types of misdemeanour. The importance of *enech* "face, honour" as a component of social worth has already been alluded to, as have various disgraceful conditions that cause its loss and include being the object of a justified satire (*áer*), a false witness (*gú-fiaidhaise*) or an evader of sureties according to legal tracts (ch. 5, 7). The shame engendered by such acts reddens and burns their demoted perpetrators, being designated by terms like *enech-rúisce* "face-flushing, insult" (Binchy, *Criú Gablach*, 85), *imdergad* "reddening, disgrace" and *grísad* "burning (by satire)" (see *DIL* entries). For instance, with regard to the heavy compensation due for an unjust satire on the honour (*enach*) of a powerful man *Bretha Nemed* cautions "do not wound it with burning (*ní-sí grísid -gona*) and do not satirise cheeks unless you get the gold of Ophir and Havilah" (*CIH* 2218.24-5), two places famed for their gold in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 29:4, 2 Chron. 8:18, Gen. 2:11-2; Breatnach, 1984, 457-8).

Like bubbles (*bolga*) rising to the surface of a heated cauldron's contents, blisters (*ferba, bolga*) are raised upon a cheek burned by the shame of satire or the like, as happened when the poet Néde lampooned Caier to force him out of the kingship (Stokes, 1862, xxxvii-viii). Indeed, Cormac's Glossary defines *ferb* "blister" as "a bubble that comes upon a person's face after satire or after false judgement (*bolc do:culrethar for aigid duine lar n-alf nó lar ngábresth*)" (ibid., 19). It thus transpires that the poet's fire, like that of the warrior, could destroy by burning on occasion.

9. If the mediatory or transitional imagery of fire and cookery was applicable in various analogous ways to each of the main social categories identified above and in chapter five, what of the king who embodied and presided over them all?

The significance of the equine inauguration ritual described by Giraldus Cambrensis (ch. 5, 4) in this respect has been elucidated by Nagy through a suggestive comparison with Mis's nuptials: "this symbolic system operates vividly in the medieval Irish story of Mis, a woman who goes mad after the death of her father and wanders off into the wilderness, where she runs as fast as the animals. She is finally rescued and tamed by a musician; he lures the swift female to his side with music, has sexual intercourse with her, feeds her cooked meat, and - to complete her reformation - washes her in the broth of the meat. Mis, who is being changed from virginal daughter to sexual partner, achieves this passage in the setting of the wilderness - the domain of the *fénidí*, who are also involved in a passage from childhood to adulthood. The girl, to become civilized once again and an adult, must eat cooked meat and be bathed, or 'cooked', in the broth of the meat. This theme of an initiate being immersed in hot liquid in which food has been stewed also appears in Gerald of Wales' late twelfth-century description of an Irish kingship ritual. In both of these instances the initiate who is fed and treated as food is invested, as a result of this treatment, with a new social identity (that of wife in one case, king in the other)" (1985, 132-3).

The culinary ritual of the *tarb-feis* to determine a new king (see 6 above) has a similar, if less direct, implication, as does the more mundane *feis* or "feast" held in celebration of a king's accession. The account of the five brothers Lugaid in *Cúir Anmann* (par. 70; ch. 5, 4) is of especial interest in this regard by virtue of its association of an act of cooking, this time roasting rather than boiling, and eating with each of the above transitions from sexual immaturity to maturity, from youthful hunting in the wilderness to civilized life, and from candidacy for to acquisition of the kingship itself. Essentially the same constellation of elements also occurs with similar import in *Echtra mac nFhach Muigneddán* (pars. 9-18; see ch. 8, 2). Since we shall see that kings' sons tended to pass their youth in the wild hunting and fighting company of the *flan* (ch. 9, 3 and 8; McCone, 1986d, esp. 8-10), this direct progress from wilderness to kingship is a highly significant version of the type of culinary passage into respectable society seen in Cú Chulainn's case above.

Having been told that a son of his called Lugaid would succeed him as king, Dáire Doinrthech duly gave this name to all five of them. In answer to his question as to which of these would actually gain the kingship, a druid replied that a fawn would enter the assembly and that the son who caught it would be king. The fawn duly appears and the five brothers set off in pursuit of it. "Lugaid Laigde caught the fawn (*laig*) and Lugaid Cose broke it up (*coscras*) so that it is thence that (the name) Lugaid Cose stuck to him. Lugaid Laig-fes performs its roasting (*im(f)uine*), i.e. a

feast (*feis*) for them of it, so that it is thence that (the name) Lugaid Laigdes was granted him. Lugaid Orde goes for water with a pitcher (*cilora*) so that it is thence he is called Lugaid Ore (cf. Lat. *orca* "a large-bellied vessel"). Everything that was roasted (*no:fainte*) of it, Lugaid Laigde would eat it. Every leaving that he would put from him, Lugaid Corb would consume it so that it is thence that Corb stuck to him, i.e. he was defiled (*coirbthi*) from it. Lugaid Cál slept (*collais*) so that it is thence he took his name (*cál*, a rare word glossed "sleep" - see *DIL*). Thereafter they go hunting in the wilderness". The quest for shelter after a snowstorm brings Lugaid Corb to a lavishly appointed house inhabited by a hideous hag whom he spurns when asked to share her bed. Later, however, Lugaid Laigde arrives and agrees to sleep with her, whereupon she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and reveals herself as the sovereignty (*flaithias*). A feast is then given to all of the brothers.

Food and its digestion also serve to mark the transition from paganism and Christianity in the essentially similar cases of Eithne in *Altram Tige dá Medar* (ch. 6, 6) and Brigit in her First Life (ch. 8, 2), where both become incapable of holding down the food given them by Tuartha Dé Danann and a druid respectively and then live on a pure diet of the milk of special white cows, milked by Eithne herself in *Altram Tige* and by a Christian virgin in Brigit's Life, as a prelude to entering Christian society. Indeed, given the pagan connotations and excommunicate status of *fian*-members in early Christian Ireland (e.g. McCone, 1989, 127-8; ch. 9, 8-9), their baptismal immersion and, particularly in the case of successors to the kingship, consumption of food and drink as tokens of admission to settled society may well have been invested with some Christian significance despite palpable pagan roots.

Be that as it may, it appears that the king is not only initiated into his new supreme status by being made the object and/or recipient of cooking but also himself then becomes a cooking vessel channeling nature's bounty into and harmoniously combining the various ingredients of the whole society over which he rules. This idea is beautifully expressed by a passage from *Bretha Nemed* that has been brought to my attention by Liam Breatnach and could almost have been written by an early medieval Irish adherent of Lévi-Strauss: *cach dhine dligthech do:garar uile a fathmain fir fo bhith as n-é colre corberba cach n-uile n-om* "(it is) every lawful person that is called from a true ruler because he is a cauldron that cooks together every raw thing" (*CJH* 2215.40-2216.2).

10. The ubiquity of fire's essential role, constructive or destructive as the case might be, in transitional processes crucial for mankind has ensured its extensive literal or metaphorical exploitation in many systems of religious belief. These broad considerations combine with the specific evidence concerning Brigit and Aed, Daig and Lasair (2-5 above) to make it virtually certain that pagan Celtic and Irish mythology were no exceptions to this general tendency. It thus seems quite probable that originally pagan notions underly the use of cooking or burning by fire as symbols to express a whole batch of major social processes and functions in a wide variety of early Christian Irish sources ranging from law tracts to sagas and saints' Lives.

That said, however, the inventory of religions prone to fire imagery most certainly includes Judaism and Christianity, the sacred scriptures of which abound in highly charged references to fire and its effects. In the Bible fire is above all a divine

attribute, typically functioning as a manifestation of God's power to punish or assist men. Indeed, it is a classic instrument of mediation between the chosen people and a God gratified by proper burnt offerings from those obedient to him, and himself "like a (s)melting fire" (Mal. 3:2, *quasi ignis conflans*) capable of burning up those that offend him: "and, behold, there came a fire out from the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat (*et ecce egressus ignis a Domino devoravit holocaustum et adipem qui erant super altare*); which when the hosts saw, they praised the Lord and fell upon their faces. And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took censers and put fire therein and incense thereon, and offered strange fire (*ignem alienum*) before the Lord, which had not been commanded them. And there went out fire from the Lord and consumed them (*egressusque ignis a Domino devoravit eos*), and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 9:24-10:2).

There are, of course, plentiful biblical occurrences of fire as an agent of God's wrath, which "rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19:24, cf. Luke 17:29), was repeatedly warned against by the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 47:14, 66:15, Jer. 21:12), was reserved for unbelieving sinners liable "to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (Mk. 9:42) and so on. However, fire also has a positive side in Holy Writ as the source or accompaniment of divine revelation and guidance, as when God's angel appears and God himself speaks to the exiled Moses from the burning bush, promising the Israelites' deliverance (Ex. 3:3ff.), or God "went before them to show them the way in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night" (ibid. 13:21). Jeremiah's attempts to resist the 'cooking' of divine inspiration by God's word (*sermo Domini*, 20:8) came to naught because "it became in mine heart as a fire boiling up and shut up in my bones" (20:9, *et factus est in corde meo quasi ignis exaestuans claususque in ossibus meis*). One of the seraphim actually placed an obviously hot stone taken with tongs from the Lord's altar (6:6, *calculus quem forcipe tulerat de altari*) upon Isaiah's mouth to purify him for prophecy, and Ezekiel's apocalyptic visions were introduced by a whirlwind, a great cloud, a fire and a brightness (1:4).

Most importantly of all, however, the Church itself had been brought into existence by the effects of the inspiring fire of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles: "and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them (*et apparuerunt illis dispersitae linguae tamquam ignis seditque supra singulos*). And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). It was presumably the Holy Spirit's quasi-culinary potential to ignite men into good and committed believers combined with the pervasive light and fire imagery in St. John's Gospel (e.g. 1:9, Christ as *lux vera quae illuminat omnem hominem vententem in mundum* "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world") that led the eighth-century author of the Old Irish *Críth Gablach* to designate Christianity the "faith that kindles (*crettiem ad:annaí*)" (ll. 523-4), a concept quite compatible with the various probably native fire symbols discussed in previous sections.

Although the miraculous exposure of the babes Daig and Brigit to fire without being harmed may be rooted in the properties of these saints' arguable divine pagan precursors (see 4 above), they obviously constitute very apt portents of the saints'

future greatness in view of biblical parallels such as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles or the preservation of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace so that "the fire had had no power on their bodies (*nihil potestatis habuisset ignis in corporibus eorum*), nor had a hair of their head been singed, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of the fire passed through them" (Dan. 3:27/94). Indeed, in both cases the appearance of fire is explicitly seen as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence. Mochtac's prediction that Daig would "burn greatly with the Holy Spirit" has already been cited (4 above), and this time the array of fire miracles surrounding Brigit's birth in her First Life may be given in full.

Before she was born "there came a certain holy guest, praying to God through the night, and he frequently saw in the night a ball of fire in the place where the bondmaid was sleeping" (par. 3). After the happy event "one day, however, that bondmaid went to milk cows a long way off and left her daughter sleeping alone in the house. Then that house appeared to have caught fire and they all ran to put out the fire. And when they had drawn near to the house, the fire was not visible and they saw the girl happy in the house with beautiful countenance and ruddy cheeks. And they all said, 'this girl is full of the Holy Spirit (*haec puella plena est spiritu sancto*)'. One day, moreover, the druid and bondmaid and others sat in a certain place and suddenly they saw the cloth touching the girl's head burn with the fire of a flame (*subito viderunt pannum contingentem caput puellae flammis incendio ardere*), and when they stretched out their hands suddenly, they did not see the fire (*ignem non viderunt*)" (par. 5). Finally, "one night this druid (*hic magus*) was keeping watch as was his custom and beholding the stars of heaven, and throughout the whole night he saw a blazing column of fire rising from the little house in which the bondmaid was sleeping along with her daughter" (par. 6). This igneous emission of inner spiritual power is reminiscent of the *lián láith* bursting from the crown of a furious warrior like Cú Chulainn (see 8 above), while at the same time inviting comparison with a notable fiery sign of superhuman greatness in the Bible, namely the star betokening Christ's birth and seen by the Magi (Matth. 2:1-12).

After seeking blessing and inspiration from Christ, who is addressed as "king of the bright sun" (l. 4, *a rí gréine gile*) and "bright sun that lights up heaven with much holiness" (ll. 5-6, *a gél-grían for:osnai/ riched co méit noibe*), the author of *Féire Óengusso* proceeds to the stirring central contrast of his prologue between the fate of the saints, tortured in obscurity on earth but recipients of fame and heavenly bliss after death, with that of their proud and prosperous persecutors, long forgotten and rotting in hell. Fire plays a prominent role in this sustained series of images illustrating the triumph of once weak Christianity and the rout of the once powerful heathen. The Christian martyrs' passage to heaven could be accomplished by a rather gruesome culinary process whereby "they have been burnt over fires" (l. 39, *ro:loisetha úas tenib*) or "were scourged, a hard course, through the furnaces of fire" (ll. 43-4, *sroiglithea, séol catad/ tréna surnu tened*), but now "the great kings of the pagans wail perpetually in burning (*mór-rig inna ngente/ bith-golait i lloscud*), the hosts of Jesus without fall are joyful after triumph" (ll. 61-4).

Patrick Ford has recently drawn attention to the mythological significance of fire in Muirchú's late seventh-century *Life of Patrick*, arguing "that the tensions arising from the confrontation between the old and new religions came to be expressed (and subsequently resolved) through these symbols" (1983, 29). Thus Patrick's imminent destruction of paganism is foreshadowed quite early in this work when his obdurate

erstwhile master Milucc immolates himself and his possessions in a great conflagration rather than accept Patrick's offer of salvation (I 11-2; Bieler, 1979, 76-81).

The centrepiece of the Life is Patrick's ultimately successful struggle to convert the stubborn king of Tara Lóegaire along with his heathen court, a conflict deliberately echoing the Old Testament episode of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the fiery furnace (ch. 2, 3) that is symbolically ushered in when the saint lights his paschal fire on the hill of Slane in defiance of a pagan custom that no fire should be lit on that night until one had been kindled in Tara, "the head of all paganism and idolatry" (I 13, 2, <caput> *omnis gentilitatis et idolatriae*). Lóegaire's druids duly warn that "unless this fire, which we see and which has been lit before one could be kindled in your house, is extinguished on this same night that it has been lit, it will never be extinguished forever. Moreover, it will also surpass all of the fires of our custom, and he who has kindled it and the kingdom reaching us through him by whom it was kindled will on this night overcome us all and will seduce you and all the men of your kingdom. And all kingdoms will fall to him and it will fill everything and will reign for all eternity" (I 15, 5-6). Needless to say, Lóegaire and his cohorts fail to put out the fire destined to 'cook' Ireland into a Christian country, a further significant culinary symbol being the bronze cauldron (*caenus*) bestowed upon Patrick along with the land for his church of Armagh (I 24).

The ordeal in which Patrick's disciple Benignus is unharmed by fire whereas Lóegaire's druid is consumed (I 20, 9-15) draws on the episode of the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:22-7) as well as Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal (see ch. 2, 3). In each case so far "the acts are highly symbolic, the symbolism recreating the triumph of the new faith over the old - Patrick's fire (of Christianity) over the pagan cult fire" (Ford, 1983, 32).

On his way to Armagh to die, Patrick was spoken to by an angel from a burning bush that was not consumed, "as had previously happened to Moses (*sicut antea Moysi provenerat*)". However, whereas God's message to Moses was to leave his father-in-law and return to Egypt to deliver his own people, the angel orders Patrick to turn back from Armagh and accept death in Saul (II 4). As in the Moses story, fire here marks a major transition for the hero, this time from Armagh to Saul and life to death. Fire is associated with Patrick even after death. When a church was being built over his grave, the excavators "saw a fire burst forth from the tomb and retreating feared the flame-bearing fire of the flame" (II 12, *ignem a sepulchro erumpere viderunt et recedentes flammigerum timuerunt flammae ignem*).

Mention has already been made of the caustic effects of poetic satire (8 above), but the legal tract *Míadslechtsa* actually uses an apposite Latin quotation from the Bible to liken a poet's praise to proving in a smith's fire: "question, is the lief (*taur-chreic*) of praise or satire ordained? If it be according to the entitlement of the people of God, only the praise of God is ordained and heaven is its reward. If it be according to the entitlement of the people of the world, however, it is ordained as Solomon (said): "as silver is proved in the melting pot and gold in the furnace, so is a man (proved) by a praiser's mouth (*quomodo conprobatur argentum in confutona ⁊ in fornace aurum, sic homo ore laudantis*)" (CIII 587.21-4, cf. Prov. 27:21).

There was, then, no reason why monastic authors should feel discomfort with much of the fire symbolism probably inherited from pre-Christian times, since the Bible itself made extensive use of such images and concepts to express God's power

to blight or bless men. Themselves adroit cooks of suitable native and ecclesiastical ingredients into a literary and ideological brew infused with Christianity, medieval Irish *literati* seem to have had no qualms about exploiting or combining similar native and biblical mythological concepts of fire's role in order to convey syncretistic textual messages to God-fearing contemporaries.

Heroes and saints

1. As scholars have long recognised, there are undeniable thematic and compositional affinities between medieval Irish sagas and saints' Lives. Although the two-way direction of this interaction has been duly acknowledged, the greater emphasis has usually been placed upon the influence of the native heroic upon the imported hagiographic genre.

Charles Plummer supported a statement along these lines with pertinent examples: "and just as Cuchulainn was made to prophesy of Christ, so Finn prophesies of various saints. In other ways, too, saints are brought into secular stories, sometimes with a fine contempt for chronology and morality. But if in these and other ways the ecclesiastics modified the secular literature, which they largely helped to preserve, much greater was the influence of the secular story upon the ecclesiastical legends. This influence may take the form either of direct importation, or of conscious imitation, or of unconscious permeation" (1910, I, cxxxii). Felim Ó Briain's brief article on "Saga themes in Irish hagiography" (1947) has a similar import, as does Jean-Michel Picard's recent detailed investigation of an episode in Adomnán's seventh-century Life of Columba (1989), and Binchy has gone so far as to claim that the saintly stories "were, after all, nothing more than the old heroic tales transposed in a Christian or quasi-Christian key. Indeed, as the French scholar Czarnowski has pointed out, this type of Christianised saga was best calculated to appeal to a seventh-century Irish audience . . . Without accepting the author's extreme thesis that the Patrick legend is the creation of the professional poets (*filid*), one can readily agree with him that the Irish *Heiligensage* is the direct descendant of the Irish *Heldensage*" (1962b, 57-8).

As a number of cases to be discussed below suggest, there is something to be said for this approach, particularly as applied to saints' Lives apparently composed after the seventh century. After all, this would be a manifestation of what Plummer calls "a process which may be noted wherever we can trace to any extent the history of the introduction of Christianity among heathen people; the incorporation, namely, into the structure of the newer creed of fragments of materials - 'stones not of this building' - taken from the old" (1910, I, cxxix). Indeed, the appropriation of pagan materials, with such adaptations as were deemed necessary or desirable, to the Church's purpose was not only quite in keeping with early medieval missionary

strategy, to judge from the sixth-century Pope Gregory the Great's advice to Augustine of Canterbury as reported by Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* I 30), but has also been seen in previous chapters to be a pervasive feature of early Christian Ireland's so-called 'secular' literature. As far as her hagiographers were concerned, Picard opines with some justice that "reducing the cosmogonic content of ancient Indo-European myths to their 'historical' meaning and transferring the supernatural element to the person of the saint are two complementary techniques designed to obliterate older beliefs and replace them by the new christian faith" so that "in transmitting older myths as anecdotes or isolated legends within the context of a christian system of faith, they contributed to the breaking up of an integrated system of pagan beliefs" (1989, 373).

On the other hand, it must also be borne in mind that Irish hagiographical composition in Latin can be traced back with complete certainty at least as far as the middle of the seventh century, whereas there is no good reason to suppose that the writing of sagas in Old Irish began on any scale before the eighth (cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 14-6). While this consideration will hardly deter those inclined to place monastic literacy in thrall to a secular oral tradition from very early on, the monks' initial concentration upon saintly rather than secular heroic narrative surely points to an appreciable degree of independence coupled with the likelihood that they drew upon familiar continental hagiographical models as well as "the miracles of the canonical and apocryphal scriptures" (Plummer, 1910, I, cxxxiii). Despite Plummer's hesitation, the latter were surely the ultimate catalyst for "stories of raising the dead, turning water into wine, walking on the water, multiplying food, miraculous power of speaking languages, and so forth" (ibid.) in the Lives. Since, moreover, "one very obvious way of expanding the life of a saint was to incorporate incidents relating to that saint from the lives of other saints" (ibid., xci), hagiographical writing readily acquired its own momentum and proved quite capable of influencing 'secular' saga, as convincingly argued by Carney (1955, 35-48) on the basis of strikingly similar motifs shared by the vernacular sagas *Táin Bó Fraích* and *Aided Iergusa* with the seventh-century Latin Lives of Brigit and Columba by Cogitosus and Adomnán respectively.

Regarding the structure of those Irish saints' Lives confidently dated to the seventh century, the 'continental' stamp of Sulpicius' Life of Martin upon Cogitosus's Life of Brigit and Adomnán's Life of Columba has recently been contrasted with the 'native' orientation of politically motivated narrative itineraries typified by Tírechán's work on Patrick and the older lives of Brigit by Ultán and Ailerán embedded in her eighth-century First Life (McCone, 1984b, 29-32 and 34-6). The final Life in this group could then be said to combine and develop these two strands: "drawing as it does upon the resources of continental-style hagiography and native saga to produce what is, despite some rough edges, a thoroughly well constructed narrative, Muirchú's account of Patrick seems to have become something of a trend-setter in Irish hagiographic composition" (ibid., 34). The corollary was that "the earliest Irish saints' Lives are all in Latin and owe much to continental models, but were subjected from an early period to increasing influence from secular tradition, particularly as regards a preoccupation with political status and connections that was usually expressed in geographical and genealogical terms, the adoption of various themes and ultimately of a certain narrative style" (ibid., 38).

This 'semi-nativist' stance requires some modification in the light of Picard's still

more positive evaluation of the role of literary continental sources: "by the mid-seventh century, hagiography was a well-established genre, with its *topoi*, rules and conventions and the Irish monks had access to the best models available in Europe at the time. Monastic libraries contained works such as Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* in the Latin translation by Evagrius, some of the Lives written by Jerome, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, the *Acta Silvestri*, Constantinus's *Vita Germani* and the more recent *Vita Benedicti*, written by Gregory the Great in his *Dialogi*. Modern scholarship has shown that these works were used in Ireland and many themes and motifs of Irish saints' Lives are borrowed from them" (1985, 69). Furthermore, "under the disguise of *constantia*, an important monastic virtue, the static element of the saint's character also appears in Sulpicius's *Vita Martini*. In seventh-century Irish hagiography, this feature dominates not only the *Vita Columbae* but also Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae*. This conception of biography will survive in some of the later *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*. One then understands why both authors did not hesitate to present their saint's life *praepositero ordine*. What has been seen as a failure in the structure of these works in fact reflects a deliberate attitude of the writers towards biography. They conceived their *vitae* as accounts of significant events through which the special nature of the saint was revealed and not as a chronological story of his or her life. Moreover, this presentation happened to correspond to the character of the hero in Celtic mythology. By retaining this feature of classical and early christian biography, Cogitosus and Adomnán were able to combine their native tradition with that of Latin letters" (*ibid.*, 79).

Leaving questionable assumptions about the nature of the pagan Celtic hero to one side for the time being, we may turn to Picard's important identification of likely continental models for the allegedly native itinerary approach referred to above. "While the *Vita Martini* represents the main influence in early Irish hagiography, another trend was also in vogue. Its structure was akin to that of an *itinerarium* in which the life of the holy man - itself a journey in this world - is presented against a background of travels. The pattern was traditional among hagiographers. It was successfully used by Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonios of Tyrona*, and Jerome had made it famous in Latin hagiography with the *Vita Hilarionis* written in 391. This work was known in Ireland in the seventh century for Adomnán quotes from it in the *Vita Columbae*" (*ibid.*, 80). This pattern of composition too, then, was probably based upon foreign originals, although it was of necessity swiftly adapted to the early Irish political environment in which it was expected to function.

The various patterns of borrowing and influence arguably responsible for the rather complex and elusive historical relationship between saga and hagiography will be largely ignored below in favour of an attempt to clarify the contemporaneous implications of some demonstrable convergences in our early Irish sources' representation of heroes and saints.

2. In the 1870s J.G. von Hahn identified what he termed an "Aryan expulsion and return formula" in the lives of famous heroes like Perseus, Heracles, Oedipus and Theseus from ancient Greece, the Roman Romulus and Remus, the German Siegfried and Wolf Dietrich, Cyrus of Persia and India's Karna and Krishna. The scheme he elaborated was soon applied with slight amplification to Celtic material by Alfred Nutt (1881; see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 2-4), whose treatment included the

Irish characters Fionn, Cú Chulainn, Labraid Máen and Conall. A major advance came in 1914 when, as Ó Cathasaigh puts it, "some forty years after von Hahn, the psychoanalyst Otto Rank produced a study of the pattern based on fifteen biographies, including those of Moses and Jesus Christ. Rank's use of biographies from outside the 'Indo-European' area was important, and von Hahn's belief that the pattern is exclusively 'Aryan' cannot be sustained" (*ibid.*, 4). Lord Raglan continued this process by adding Javan and Nilotic heroes as well as the Old Testament's Joseph and Elijah to his Greek, Norse and British examples (1934; 1936, 144ff.), and de Vries too based his version of the pattern on a number of different traditions, including Celtic (1963, 211ff.; see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 6-7). The Rees brothers have set up a paradigm for the hero's conception and birth in Celtic material and duly note that "stories of the coming of saints into the world (as recorded in the Lives of the Saints) have a great deal in common with those of the 'secular' heroes" (1961, 223-4). Finally, Ó Cathasaigh (*loc. cit.*) has used de Vries's model as the framework for a detailed examination of the heroic biography of Cormac mac Airt.

The medieval Irish vernacular saga *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* will serve here with the help of italics to give some idea of the kind of features commonly held to be significant in accounts of the birth and youth of a hero, in this case Niall Nolíallach, the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill and mythical founder of their monopoly over the Tara kingship in the historical period.

To begin with, Niall is *begotten out of wedlock* by his royal father, king Echu Muigmedón of Tara, upon a *lowly mother*, the slavewoman Cairenn, who is nevertheless a *foreign princess*. His life is *threatened* by the king's jealous wife Mongfind, who forces Cairenn to do hard labour "that the child might die in her womb" (par. 1) and thus causes Niall to be born and *left exposed* on the green (*faithche*) outside Tara, where he is attacked by birds. However, he is *rescued and reared by a stranger*, the poet (*éice*) Torna, who delivers a *prophecy of the child's future greatness* (pars. 2-4). After this *exile*, Niall *returns home* to Tara with Torna when ready to become king, and *elevates his mother to her proper royal status* (par. 4). Mongfind tries to thwart Niall's chances of succeeding to the kingship over her own sons by means of *various tests* (par. 5). Niall *duly succeeds* in these, *surpassing his rival elder brothers*: he earns a druidic sanction by bringing an anvil out of a burning smithy in contrast with the various lesser implements picked up by his brothers (par. 6-7), with Torna's help avoids a plan of Mongfind's to kill him (par. 8), receives the best weapons for the hunt (par. 9), and finally goes astray with his brothers in the wilderness but, when they encounter a hideous hag after kindling a fire to cook their quarry for eating, is the only one prepared to sleep with her. Thereupon she becomes a beautiful maiden and reveals herself as the sovereignty thus granted to him and his successors henceforth (pars. 9-17; cf. ch. 5, 3 and 11, ch. 7, 9). After a *triumphant homecoming* the right of Niall and his descendants to succeed his father ahead of his brothers and theirs is acknowledged and eventually implemented (pars. 18-9).

The close relationship between the secular and the saintly heroic biography is well illustrated by the opening sections of St. Brigit's Latin First Life (Bollandus, 1658, 118-20), in which these and more or less equivalent motifs are organised into an essentially analogous structure of expulsion and return, due allowance being made for the central figure's being a saintly heroine rather than a kingly hero.

Brigit's mother, the beautiful slave Broicsech, was impregnated by her concu-

piscent master, "a certain Leinster nobleman named Dubthach", much to the annoyance of the latter's lawful wife, who sought to persuade him to sell her "lest her offspring surpass my offspring" (par. 1). One day, when Dubthach and his pregnant slave were travelling in a chariot, the noise caused a druid to prophesy that "the seed of your wife will serve the seed of your slavewoman to the end of time". In response to this Dubthach thanked God "because hitherto I have had no daughter but only sons" (par. 2). Although the visiting bishops Mel and Melchú couple a prophecy that "the offspring of your bondwoman will surpass you and your seed" with the advice that she should "nevertheless love that bondwoman like your own sons because her progeny will greatly benefit your seed", his wife's unabated jealousy and fury finally force Dubthach to sell his slave to a visiting poet, while retaining his claim on the child she is expecting. The poet then leaves for his own territory, taking Broicsech and the nascent Brigit with him (par. 3). He in turn sells them to a druid from the North as a prelude to Brigit's birth (par. 4), the remarkable account of which will be given in full below, and various accompanying fire miracles that have already been described (ch. 7, 10). The druid migrates with Broicsech and her daughter to Connacht, but they are forced to move to Munster through local anger at little Brigit's prediction that the territory will be hers, "which was later fulfilled, for Brigit's *paruchia* is great today in those regions" (pars. 5-7).

There follows an episode containing virtually the same motif as that portending Fíthne's transition from a pagan to a Christian environment in the much later vernacular text *Aitrim Tighe dá Medar* (ch. 6, 6): "the holy maiden was nauseated by the druid's food and used to vomit daily. Considering these matters, the druid examined the cause of the sickness, discovered it and said: 'I am unclean, but that girl is full of the Holy Spirit. However, she does not take my food'. Then he picked out a white cow and destined it for the girl. And a certain Christian woman, a most religious virgin, used to milk that cow, and the girl used to drink the milk of that cow, without vomiting since her stomach was healthy. And that Christian woman reared the girl" (par. 8). In due course the druid sent for Brigit's father, who finally brought her peregrinatory banishment to an end by returning home with her (par. 9). Subsequently Brigit raises her slave mother to freedom in return for a miracle and escorts her home to Dubthach (par. 13). After performing various miracles and spurning matrimony, Brigit finally becomes a holy virgin in God's service by taking the veil (par. 16).

As regards date, mention of the Ui Néill king of Tara Máelscehlainn mac Donnail (reigned 980-1002 and 1014-22) and the Munster interloper Brian Bórama (1002-14) in sections 19 and 16 respectively of *Echtra mac nEchach* proves that the text in its extant form is no older than the early eleventh century.

Conversely, the lack of reference to later kings suggests that it was hardly compiled much later than this either, a hypothesis eminently compatible with its firmly Middle Irish language. This, however, would not preclude the possibility that the central story about Níall's acquisition of the kingship had been reworked from a rather older original, as perhaps indicated by a reasonable smattering of good Old Irish forms in the text. Be that as it may, the First Life of Brigit can be fairly securely dated to the mid-eighth century and its first 41 sections shown to be drawing heavily upon Ailerán's lost mid-seventh-century Latin Life on the basis of close similarities with the independent ninth-century Old Irish and late eighth-century metrical Lives (McCone, 1982, 114-24 and 132-6; 1984b, 40-6). The composition of Brigit's heroic

biography in Latin can, then, with some confidence be traced back in its essentials to around the middle of the seventh century. At such an early date, the native patterns that would seem to have contributed substantially to this narrative are likely to have been adapted from an oral rather than a written milieu, the corollary being that the earliest literary model for a typical Irish heroic biography was provided by a saint's Life in Latin.

3. Even when confined to two narratives such as the foregoing, essentially taxonomic comparison of the type adopted by von Hahn and others is confronted by obvious differences as well as striking similarities, and classificatory difficulties inevitably increase with the amount of relevant material brought into play. Consequently a major "problem posed by the heroic biography is one of methodology. Everyone who has investigated the matter has produced a formulation differing in some measure from the others" (Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 6). A maximally comprehensive classification of the constituent elements of heroic biography worldwide would presumably need to proceed in quasi-Linnaean fashion from very general major groupings down through increasingly detailed subdivisions. At present the nearest approach to this probably unattainable ideal is de Vries's system, the superiority of which to its rivals was apparent to Ó Cathasaigh (*loc. cit.*).

Thus conceived, the heroic biography would amount to a particular application of the motif-index approach to folklore and literature enshrined in Stith Thompson's monumental classificatory work (1932-6). Indeed, this overall scheme has been applied by Tom Peete Cross to early Irish literature, including hagiography, in an index which "follows Professor Thompson's method of classification and enumeration, numbers not occurring in Professor Thompson's work being marked with an asterisk . . . This index is intended primarily for the use of students of folklore, custom and of comparative literature. To this end, the references to early Irish or Hiberno-Latin sources are frequently supplemented by references to modern scholarly works in which motifs found in Celtic are cited for purposes of comparative study in various fields of literary or cultural history . . . To insure as wide usefulness as possible, preference is given to translations contained in books of relatively easy accessibility" (1952, preface).

It is easy enough to find Thompson/Cross labels for many features of *Echtra mac nEchach*, for example, as the following selection shows: T121 Unequal marriage [T121.6 *Man weds his bondmaid]; Q482.1 Princess serves as menial [Q482.1.1 *Second wife (slave) must serve as menial]; L10 Victorious younger son; H1242 Youngest brother alone succeeds on quest; H1574.3 King chosen by test [H1574.3.1 *The burning forge (smithy). He who salvages anvil will be king]; D732 Loathly lady. Man disenchant loathsome woman by embracing her; N771 King (prince) lost on hunt has adventures; M310.1 *Prophecy: future greatness and fame [M310.1 *Prophecy: preeminence of man's descendants]; M301 Prophets [M301.18 *Poet as prophet, M301.19 *Smith as prophet]; R131 Exposed or abandoned child rescued.

Were some such neat and nearly exhaustive classification of a reasonably typical heroic biography's key elements feasible, it ought then to be possible to extrapolate and list those applying to any given version of the fundamental pattern, whether occurring in early Irish texts, in some other oral or literary tradition such as the Bible, or even in modern comics or films about Superman and his ilk. The sum and arrangement of these would then constitute a taxonomic dossier on the individual

narrative or the narrative complex in question as the end result of a process analogous to that applied by Propp to his various 'functions' and 'moves' in order to determine the basic morphology of certain types of folktale (see ch. 3, 4).

However, like any other taxonomy, a maximally precise formal classification of the heroic biography's essential or optional features and their various attested combinations may be an invaluable analytical aid but cannot constitute an interpretation or explanation in its own right. In effect, it can help in recognising what the differences and similarities are but not what they are for. Moreover, insofar as it attempts to reduce a large number of surface variants to a basic prototype, it invites criticisms similar to those levelled by Lévi-Strauss against Propp's method (see ch. 3, 4) by virtue of failing to offer a mechanism for integrating the countless actual variants with the underlying pattern or patterns abstracted from them.

4. According to Rees and Rees, "whereas the pattern of the hero's life has little in common with what is historically significant in the lives of men, it does, as Lord Raglan has shown, correspond with the ritual life-cycle. In human societies generally, the times when each person becomes the central figure in a ritual are those of his birth and baptism, initiation and marriage, death and burial. The myth has a bearing upon the meaning of these rites" (1961, 213). After quoting the first part of this essentially functionalist explanation (see ch. 3, 3), Ó Cathasaigh agrees that "it seems true that the heroic biography is concerned essentially with life-crises, and there is much to be said for the view that the episodes in the heroic biography are the mythic correlatives of the rites of passage (border experiences) identified by van Gennep in his classic work" (1977, 22).

With regard to the various rituals or 'rites of passage' that were his immediate concern Arnold van Gennep explained the symbolic potency of 'liminality' as follows: "the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies . . . It will be noted that the rites carried out on the threshold itself are transition rites. "Purifications" (washing, cleansing etc.) constitute rites of separation from previous surroundings; there follow rites of incorporation (presentation of salt, a shared meal, etc.). The rites of the threshold are therefore not "union" ceremonies, properly speaking, but rites of preparation for union, themselves preceded by rites of preparation for the transitional stage. Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*" (1960, 20-1).

In an essay about aspects of Christ's mission entitled "Fishing for men on the edge of the wilderness" these three van Gennep phases have been summarised as follows by Sir Edmund Leach: "1. The initiate is separated from his or her original status in real world society (rite of separation). 2. The initiate is isolated from society in a state of limbo associated with taboos of various kinds (marginal state). 3. The initiate is brought back into real world society in his or her new (initiated) status (rite of aggregation)" (Alter and Kermode, 1987, 584). Leach then proceeds to analyse Moses' early career in these terms: "First sequence: 1a. Moses is born as a Hebrew Levite of lowly status (Exod. 2:1). b. During a massacre of male Israelite children

Moses is placed in an ark of bulrushes (sacrifice and rite of separation involving symbolic death [pictures of Moses' ark often show a kind of coffin]). 2. The ark floats in the river (marginal state). 3. Moses is discovered and lifted from the water by an Egyptian princess (symbolic rebirth). He becomes an Egyptian prince living in a palace (rite of aggregation). Second sequence: 1a. Moses is now an Egyptian prince. b. He kills an Egyptian and flees from Pharaoh (Exod. 2:15) (sacrifice and rite of separation). 2. Moses takes refuge in the Wilderness (marginal state). 3. Moses returns to Egypt with the standing of a mighty prophet with magical powers (Exod. 4:29) (rite of aggregation)" (ibid., 585).

In view of functionalist insights, which have been supplemented rather than supplanted by structuralist approaches (ch. 3, 3-4), into the close relationship between custom, ritual and myth, extensive mythical and literary exploitation of boundary symbolism is only to be expected. Ó Riain has made important use of van Gennep's approach to elucidate early Irish material (1972 a,b), and Nagy's recent revolutionary interpretation of a range of Fenian material (1985) constitutes a large-scale structuralist application of this theory to an Irish literary genre due to figure in the next chapter. Furthermore, the account of St. Brigit's birth in section 4 of her First Life provides as literal an example of liminality in van Gennep's sense as one could wish for: "one day, however, that druid invited his king and queen to dinner, but the queen was close to giving birth. Then the king's friends and servants were asking a certain prophet at what hour the queen should bear the offspring. The druid said: 'if it should be born on the morrow at sunrise, it would have no one on earth as its equal'. But the queen bore a son before time. However, in the morning when the sun had risen, the druid's bondmaid came home carrying a vessel full of fresh milk and, when she had put one foot across the threshold (*trans limen*) of the house and the other foot outside, she fell into a sitting position upon the threshold (*super limen*) and bore a daughter. For thus the prophet had said that that bondmaid would give birth neither inside the house nor outside the house (*nec in domo nec extra domum*). And the infant's body was cleansed with that warm milk which she was carrying" (Bollandus, 1658, 119).

The literally liminal birth so fully described and heavily emphasized here resonates with other boundary situations in Brigit's conception and early life. Thus her birth on a physical threshold, neither inside nor outside the house, matches her ambivalent social position as the child of a servile outcast mother and a noble land-owning father, as an exile from paternal home and territory destined to return in due course (see 2 above). Moreover, the very account of her birth contains a highly wrought contrast between the son born prematurely to a great queen and the daughter born at just the right time to a humble slavewoman. The former's birth fails to pass the temporal threshold of sunrise on the morrow to earn the great destiny prophesied, whereas the latter's does so to qualify for that greatness in breach of normal social expectations.

In some narratives to be discussed later similar liminal situations on the very threshold of life leave a permanent mark. As Ó Cathasaigh puts it with the help of a quotation from Leach's essay *Genesis as myth* (1969, 11), "it is clear that these birth-marks - as they may loosely be called - have a positive function to mark out the hero as an extraordinary person. The same is doubtless true of such features of the heroic life as virgin birth, incestuous birth and so on. The structuralists offer an explanation of these features in terms of 'mediation' of paired categories (such as

legitimate/illegitimate):—“‘Mediation’ (in this sense) is always achieved by introducing a third category which is ‘abnormal’ or ‘anomalous’ in terms of ordinary ‘rational’ categories. Thus myths are full of fabulous monsters, incarnate gods, virgin mothers. This middle ground is abnormal, non-natural, holy. It is typically the focus of all taboo and ritual observance.’ The hero belongs to this ‘middle ground’, for there can be no doubt about the anomalous character, the otherness, of the heroic life-pattern” (1977, 45-6).

Liminal situations obviously cluster round Brigit and other Irish heroic figures, both saintly and secular, to be discussed below precisely because of the hero’s universal liminal status and associated mediatory function. In his seminal study of the northwestern Amerindian Tsimshian myth *The Story of Asdiwal* (1978, 146-97; see ch. 3, 4), Lévi-Strauss has duly emphasized this aspect. The son of an earthly human mother and a supernatural bird father, the restless Asdiwal fails to maintain stable relationships and proves to be an inveterate two-way oscillator between divine and human wives, life and death, matrilocal and patrilocal residence, East and West, home and abroad, mountains and sea, earth and heaven, earth and subterranean regions, human and animal society, human and bird form etc. before finally being immobilized and turned into stone halfway up a mountain. This extraordinary career is punctuated by numerous contradictions, particularly in the second half when “from neutral the myth goes into reverse” and “the king of the mountains . . . is caught on a caricature of a mountain, one that is doubly so because, on the one hand, it is nothing more than a reef and, on the other, it is surrounded and almost submerged by sea. The ruler of wild animals and killer of bears is to be saved by a she-mouse, a caricature of a wild animal. She makes him undertake a *subterranean journey*, just as the she-bear, the supreme wild animal, had imposed on Asdiwal a *celestial journey*. . . . The man who had killed animals by the hundreds goes this time to heal them and win their love. The bringer of food . . . becomes food, since he is transported in the sea lion’s stomach” (1978, 160-1).

D. Alan Aycock has recently applied Lévi-Strauss’s insights concerning Asdiwal to the well known story of Lot and his wife (Gen. 19:1-38), which he sees as progressing between five thematic poles: firstly, from “the restraint and social formality” of “the hospitality offered by Lot to the two angels sent by God” to the “intemperance and social insensibility” of “the drunkenness of Lot as a consequence of the wine given him by his daughters”; secondly, from the companionship “of two males, disguised, and strangers to Lot” to that of “two females, ‘disguised’ by Lot’s drunkenness, and his intimates in more than one sense”; thirdly, from “the impending destruction of Sodom by God” to “the creation of the tribes of the Moabites and Ammonites, descended from the incestuous relationship of Lot with his daughter”; fourthly, from “the ‘Culture’ of the city” (Sodom) to “the ‘Nature’ of the wilderness” (the cave in the hills above Zoar); finally, from “a society of homosexuals, who by virtue of their (apparently exclusive) sexual preference *cannot* produce children” to “an incestuous association precipitated by Lot’s daughters, who justify their actions by asserting that they *must* bear children” (Aycock and Aycock, 1983, 114-5). Lot himself accomplishes the journey, “a metaphorical rite of passage from an old society to a new one” (ibid., 116), but his wife, being “anomalous both in the society of homosexuals she has abandoned, and in the incestuous ménage à trois which eventuates” (ibid., 117), suffers petrification in the middle Asdiwal-style by being turned into a pillar of salt, the ritual significance of

which as a symbol of purification, covenant etc. in the Near East is pointed out by Aycock. "The permanent geographical immobilization of Lot's wife in the wilderness of nature between the old Culture of Sodom and the new Culture emanating from the caves in the hills above Zoar should thus be interpreted as a moral analogy of her permanently liminal status in the rite of passage she chose to abort" (ibid.).

Tírechán 38 (1-3) offers a basically similar but simpler early Irish example of a companion's liminal immobilization on the way to an ascetic eminence reserved for his master alone: "and Patrick proceeded to Mount Aigli to fast there for forty days and forty nights following the discipline of Moses and Elijah and Christ. And his charioteer died at Muirese Aigli, that is, the plain between the sea and Mount Aigli, and he buried that charioteer Totmáel and gathered stones for a tomb and said: 'Let him be so for ever, and he shall be visited by me in the last days'. And Patrick went forth to the summit of the mountain over Crúachán Aigli, and stayed there for forty days and forty nights" (Bieler, 1979, 152).

All of this brings us to the nub of the matter. Being by definition abnormal, the hero does not fit neatly into ordinary human society and categories. As a superhuman but usually non- or only half-divine frequenter of the margin between men and god(s), society and outsiders, culture and nature, life and death etc., the hero can move freely between these worlds without belonging properly to any of them. Ambivalence and liminality are the hero's essential attributes, and mediation between what threaten and may ultimately prove to be irreconcilable opposites is his or, more rarely, her essential function. Not all heroic types manifest these traits as chronically or intensely as an Asdiwal or, in Irish tradition, a Finn mac Cumail (Nagy, 1985, 120-1), but the risks of constantly living on the brink are such that a single failure can trap the hero in no man's land, paralyse and destroy him.

As mediators between man and God in life as well as the afterlife by virtue of being mortals with an exceptional endowment of divine grace and power, saints function very much as the heroes of Christian ideology. This is doubtless the fundamental reason why, *mutatis mutandis*, the medieval Irish saintly and secular heroic biographies have so much in common. The cross-fertilization between these genres has already been discussed (1 above), but speculation about which influenced the other most seems less important than the observable fact of an appreciable degree of clearly deliberate homogenization throughout the period that concerns us here. Whatever their various ultimate roots, saints and secular heroes as presented in the literature both belonged to the same early medieval Irish mythology-cum-history.

In terms of the periodization of that history into two main epochs before and after the faith, marked by Patrick's alleged conversion of the Irish establishment in 433 A.D. (ch. 3, 9), most major secular heroes obviously belonged to the 'Old Testament', so to speak, while the Christian saints were almost inevitably of the 'New', due allowance being made for the tendentious claims of certain Munster churches that their founding saints had actually preceded Patrick (McCone, 1984b, 49-54; Sharpe, 1989). To that extent the partial assimilation of saint to secular hero and vice versa was presumably motivated by considerations of historical typology, since it has already emerged that this exegetical device for harmonising the Old with the New Testament played a major role in shaping the attitudes of medieval Irish *literati* to the history or *senchus* of their own island and race (ch. 3, 11; ch. 4, 9). After all, if the lives of great Old Testament figures like Moses, Joseph and Elijah bore

significant affinities to that of Christ in the Gospels (cf. 2 above), why should the biographical patterns of major pre-Christian Irish heroes not similarly resonate with those of the Christian saints?

5. Itself a, or even the, supremely liminal event, the birth of a hero(ine) destined to cross and recross all manner of thresholds is particularly prone to be enhanced by further liminal associations, Brigit's nativity being a patent example. The conception and birth of Niall Noigiallach in *Fechtra mac nÉchach* have already been compared with those of Brigit (2 above) and are similarly charged with surplus liminality aimed at underlining the hero's peculiar nature and status.

Here too we find a high ranking father among his own people and a servile mother, who is, moreover, a foreigner once possessed of high rank in her own land. Niall is born on the *faithche* or 'in-field' (Charles-Edwards and Kelly, 1983, 154), a manifestly liminal place of sanctuary (McCone, 1984d, 48-9) between the central walled homestead (*les*) and the world beyond. For the stranger poet who rescues and rears him away from his family the exposed Niall is literally a *frith faithche* or 'find of the in-field'. Significantly, this term is used in *Críth Gablach* (l. 257) as a metaphor of the *fer foithiú* or 'man of withdrawal', a commoner aspiring to lordship who 'stands as it were half-way between the two; he has 'secretly discarded his *bóaire*-ship' (249) by taking clients, but he has not yet reached the full status of an *aire déso* (the lowest of the noble grades)' (Binchy, *ibid.*, 89). In the case of bee swarms at least (Charles-Edwards and Kelly, *ibid.*, 82-3 and 154-6), a *frith faithche* is shared by the finder and the *faithche*'s owner for a time before reverting to the latter. In effect, this is what happens to the infant Niall, who enters his finder's charge temporarily but eventually returns across the *faithche* to the bosom of his family. As the earlier synopsis shows, there ensues a further separation, this time with his brothers in the wilderness, followed by the hero's triumphant return, vindicated as his father's heir.

The beginning of Tigernach of Clones' *Salamanca Life* offers an interesting inversion of the more usual pattern whereby the mother is the social and/or political outsider in relation to the father. "The venerable bishop (*praesul*) Tigernach, born of royal stock, (was) the grandson of king Echu, who lived beside the fort of Clogher . . . When, therefore, the aforesaid king Echu had raised three most beautiful daughters in his palace, one of these, Derfraech, fell in love with a certain nobleman among her father's soldiers, a Leinsterman by birth called Cairbre. When she had become pregnant from the same, she hid herself from men's sight until she should give birth and, when she bore a son, his father took him and proceeded in haste to his native province" (Heist, 1965, 107). When father and child reach Kildare in Leinster, St. Brigit foretells Tigernach's future greatness. After subsequent travels abroad (see 7 below), Tigernach first founds a church in Leinster, but his ultimate destiny is to return to his maternal grandfather's Airglalla territory and establish the great monastery of Clones (cf. McCone, 1984, 313-4 and 319-21).

We may now proceed to a pair of birth narratives, one from saga and the other from hagiography, that display striking affinities both with each other and with Brigit's natal episode. The first from the vernacular *Cath Maige Mucroma* concerns the legendary Munster Éoganacht dynast Fiachu Muillethan ('Broad-crown'); "now it is from this that Fiachu Broad-crown was named. The pains of childbirth seized Moncha daughter of Dil at Áth Nemthend on the Suir. 'It is unfortunate that

it is not tomorrow morning that you are brought to bed', said her father. 'If it were then', said the druid, 'the child would take precedence in Ireland forever'. 'So it shall be then', said she. 'Unless he come through my side, he shall come no other way'. She goes from them into the river. She lets herself down about a stone that is in the middle of the ford. 'It holds me back', she said. She was in that fixed position until the hour of tierce the following day. 'It is time now', said her father. She collapses. She dies. Now the head of the infant had widened out against the stone, whence he was called Fiachu Broad-crown" (pars. 42-3).

The piling up of liminal symbols in this passage is truly remarkable. Fiachu's mother waits for the crucial passage from one day to the next immobilized on a stone dividing the middle of the river dividing the land, a boundary within a boundary, and passes over from life to death just as her son is making the reverse transition from non-existence to life. A similar but less elaborate combination of birth, death and a river is alluded to by *Cóir Anmann*: "Furbaide, then, i.e. his excision (*furbad*), i.e. his cutting out of his mother's womb after her drowning in the river called Glaisse Beramain, and it is from that Eithne, the daughter of Lochaid Feidlech, that that river is called Eithne today" (par. 255).

The second example opens the Salamanca Life of St. Áed in Latin. "The holy bishop Áed who is called son of Brocc (*filius Briceii* = OIr. *mac Bricc*) was descended from the Uí Néill (*de Nepotibus Neill*) but the mother of Saint Áed traced her origin from the race of Munstermen, from the race of Múscrige Thíre. When she was pregnant and close to giving birth, a certain prophet came past her house and said to her companions: 'there is in this house a woman giving birth. If the infant to whom she is giving birth should be born tomorrow morning he will be great before God and men in all of this island of Ireland'. She said in reply: 'unless he come through my sides, he shall not emerge until tomorrow from my womb'. Rising up then, she went outside and sat on a rock. And the Lord performed this miracle. For the head of the infant stood on the rock and made a concavity in it after the likeness of an infant's head, and down to the present day it remains and water that appears in that concavity heals every disease for every believer" (Heist, 1965, 167-8).

All three narratives are based upon the desirability of birth on the morrow, but in the case of Fiachu and Áed this is achieved by the same delaying tactic of sitting upon a rock. The inverted results of the baby's head pushing against the rock are conditioned by the divergent aims of etymologizing Fiachu's name and of providing an aetiology for a miraculous concavity in the rock where Áed was supposedly born. The liminal aspects of Áed's nativity are weaker and less explicit than those pertaining to Brigit and Fiachu, but are present nonetheless. The passage of a time barrier is, of course, a shared feature, and Áed's mother moves from inside the house over the threshold to the outside, the reverse of the direction taken by Brigit's mother, in order to give birth on a rock rising up heavenwards from the ground, a very suitable intermediate locality for the emergence of a saint. It may be added that Áed's parentage, with an Uí Néill father and a Munster mother, spanned the most important political division in early Christian Ireland (ch. 10, 3-4).

6. Fiachu Muillethan had the misfortune of losing both parents, since his father Eogan had already died in battle the day after the 'one night's stand' with his host's daughter that brought about her pregnancy. In *Cath Maige Mucroma* Fiachu's conception and birth (pars. 39-43) are directly followed by a deliberately parallel

account of the future Tara king Cormac's conception when his father Art is given his host's daughter to sleep with the night before his death in the same battle as Éogan (pars. 44-7).

Cormac's actual birth is not mentioned in *Cath Maige Mucrama*, but the opening of *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic* also juxtaposes the conception and birth of the two heroes, this time giving a somewhat sketchy version of Fiachu's birth and a fuller account of Cormac's. "When Cormac was born the druid-smith Olc Achae put five protective girdles on him against wounding, against drowning, against fire (cf. ch. 6, 4), against reproach, against wolves, i.e. against every evil. Not long after that she was asleep on the green (*faithche*). A she-wolf came and, unbeknown to her, took her son away. And the bitch put him on the teat of her breast, and she did not know whither he had gone. There was a trapper there in that country, Luigne Fer Tri his name. He came to trap game around the litter of wolves and he catches the boy there - as for him, he used to run with her wolves. Luigne Fer Tri took him with him, and he was fed by him for a year. His mother learns of that. She went to Luigne Fer Tri and took him from him and tells him how things were with the boy" (pars. 11-13; O'Daib, 1975, 68-9 and Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 121). His mother then travels northwards through the wilderness with the young Cormac to place him in fosterage with Fiachra Cassán in the North, whence he comes to Tara at the age of thirty to claim the kingship from his father's slayer Lugaid Mac Con.

The significance of the Indo-European myth of the future king nurtured in the wild by a she-wolf will be discussed later with reference to another version of Cormac's birth, *Genemáin Chormaic* (ch. 9, 7). Here it will suffice to note the hero's transition from human (mother) to animal (she-wolf) company and back (Luigne), from civilization (mother) to the wilderness (she-wolf, Luigne) and back (mother, Fiachra), the final goal being Tara and the kingship. Like Níall above, Cormac here is found on the *faithche* between homestead and wilderness, but this time the finder is an animal.

A striking hagiographical instance of suckling by a she-wolf, very similar to the Cormac story in basic pattern and implications, is provided by the beginning of St. Ailbe of Emly's Salamanca Life. "However, the father of St. Ailbe was called Olenais and lived with king Crónán in the region of Artrigi. There he secretly knew the king's own bondmaid, Sant by name, and slept with her. Knowing, however, that the bondmaid had conceived through him, Olenais, fearing death at the king's hands, became a fugitive, and the bondmaid bore a son. However, when king Crónán saw his bondmaid's son, he said: 'that ignoble boy, born of a servant and a bondmaid, will under no circumstances live under the roof of my house and be brought up with my sons'. Then the king's servants put the the boy down under a certain rock and left him there, where his name is venerated down to the present. However, a wild she-wolf lived beneath that rock, and she, loving the boy greatly, like a kind mother gently reared him among her own whelps. One day, while that wild beast had wandered in the woods to seek food, a certain man endowed with natural good named Lochán son of Lúgar, seeing the boy among the whelps under that rock, took him and brought him to his own home . . . Lochán son of Lúgar, however, gave him as a reward to certain Britons who were in service in the east of Clfu, and they brought the boy up and called him Ailbe because he was found alive under a rock, and God's grace was with him" (Heist, 1965, 118; the etymology is presumably based upon OIr. *ail* "rock" and *béa* "alive"). Ailbe then manages to

travel with his foster-parents to Britain and goes on to Rome before returning to Ireland to begin his mission.

A variant involving incestuous union and the wolf's domestic counterpart the dog occurs in the account of Mes Búachalla's birth in *Tochmarc Étaíne*. Horrified to discover that the woman he had rescued from the síd-mound and made pregnant, thinking her to be his wife, is in fact his daughter, who then bears him a daughter, king Eochaid declares "I and my daughter's daughter shall not behold one another", whereupon "two of his household go to put her into a pit with beasts. They visit the house of Findlám the herdsman of Tara which was in Slíab Fúait in the midst of the wilderness. There was no one in the house. They consumed food there. Then they put the girl to the bitch with her whelps that was in the pen in the house. They go away again. The herdsman and his wife come to their house and saw the fair infant in the pen. That amazed them. They take her out of the pen. They brought her up without knowing her origin, and her growth was good, as she was the daughter of a king and queen. She was a better seamstress than every (other) woman. Her eyes used to see nothing that her hands could not embroider. She was brought up in this way by Findlám until Eterscéil's people saw her one day and told the king and she was taken away forcibly by Eterscéil and she was with him then as wife. So she is the mother of Conaire son of Eterscéil" (III, par. 20).

A similar, if slightly garbled, account of Mes Búachalla's exposure is found in *Togall Bruide Da Derga* (pars. 5-8), which omits the bitch and whelps but encloses the beautiful heroine in a hut with an overhead skylight but no door or windows until her royal spouse-to-be becomes aware of her existence. The night before her delivery to the childless Eterscéil, however, she is made pregnant by a bird capable of assuming human form (par. 7). Thus Conaire, although generally believed and believing himself to be Eterscéil's son, is in fact the offspring of his mother's brief liaison with a supernatural birdlike being, who reveals himself and provides crucial aid later (pars. 13 and 16; cf. Asdiwal in 4 above). The child of a mother herself begotten through incest, banished to the wilderness and later reborn from a tomb- or womb-like solitary confinement to marriage and civilization, Conaire has a normal public parentage that conceals a secret conception straddling the boundary between the natural and supernatural, human and animal. The very embodiment of liminal paradox and ambivalence, he is conceived illicitly in the wilderness but born and raised in civilized society with all the trappings of legitimacy and royalty.

Further examples of the incest motif are Lugaid Réuderg's triple conception in *Cath Bóinde* (ch. 5, 4), Conall's shameful fathering of three sons on his daughter Creidne (*Corp. Gen.*, 154), Eterscéil's fathering of Conaire on his daughter or step-daughter Mes Búachalla in *De Sí Chonairi Móir*, and the following account of Fiachu Fer Mara's birth in *Cóir Anmuon*, which contains the further liminal motif, familiar from the Greek story of Perseus (Apollodorus II iv 1), of crossing the sea in a vessel set adrift: "Fiachu Fer Mara, whence is it? Not difficult. Óengus Tuirmech begat that Fiachu on his daughter through drunkenness after the drinking of much wine by him. Óengus deemed that very hard, i.e. for his own daughter to bear him a son. The counsel which Óengus took was to conceal the son well so that he might not be a son of his, and so it was done. The little lad was then put to sea in a boat (made) of one hide with the insignia of a king's son with him, namely a purple mantle with a goblet of gold in it. Thereafter fishermen of the king of Scotland found him in Traig Braena under the ravens (*fona fiachaib*), so that it is

thence that Fiachu Fer Mara ("F. Man of the Sea") stuck to him after that. And his offspring took the kingship of Ireland and Scotland after him, namely Eterscéil the Great descendant of Iar, and Conaire son of Eterscéil, and Conaire son of Mug Láma the son-in-law of Conn etc." (par. 55).

Although this coupling of incest between father and daughter with the former's drunkenness on wine may well emanate from the biblical episode of Lot and his daughters (4 above), the incestuous heroic birth itself is too widespread a phenomenon for borrowing from the Bible to be a necessary or even probable explanation.

7. As is clear from van Gennep's formulation and the quite explicit account of Brigit's birth in her First Life (4 above), liminal mediation presupposes a basic structural opposition between inside and outside, near side and far side or the like. Pairs that constitute an 'either/or' for run-of-the-mill people tend to be a 'neither/nor' in the case of heroes, who can thus break the rules by which others are bound, but only at the price of not really belonging on either side of a given line. The boundary between two categories is, of course, the classic 'neither/nor' location, the anomalous and transient nature of which entails risk as well as opportunity. This is precisely the dilemma confronted by heroic narratives the world over, and it has been seen that early Irish saga and hagiography offer abundant illustration.

To begin with, the hero's conception typically results from an illicit and impermanent union placing him or her between parents on either side of one or more key divides. Bearing in mind that in early Ireland's highly stratified society "husband and wife in the more formal types of union should be of the same social class" (Kelly, 1988, 73), Niall Nofglalach and Brigit's origins mediate the *social* contrast *in/high vs. out/low* represented by noble father and slave mother. Typical instances of a commensurate *geographical/political* opposition *in/home vs. out/away* are Niall's local father and foreign mother, Brigit's stay-at-home father and outcast mother, Tigernach's local mother and alien father, Ailbe's stay-at-home mother and fugitive father. Still more dramatically, the almost immediate deaths of their fathers after sleeping with their mothers place the conceptions of Flachu and Cormac virtually on the *existential* boundary between life and death itself (*near vs. far side*), while Conaire straddles the *cosmic* divide between the human and supernatural (*in/low vs. out/high*) as well as the cultural cleft between human and animal (*civilized inside vs. wild outside*) through his mother (Mes Búachalla) and bird-man father (Nemglan). Finally, the near-universal prohibition on intercourse between "primary kin" defined as "an individual's mother, father, son, daughter, brother and sister" (Fox, 1967, 33) is suspended at the incestuous conceptions of Lugaid Réoderg, Creidne's sons, Mes Búachalla (or Conaire in one version) and so on as breaches of the basic *sexual* taboo dividing immediate family from others (*near/taboo vs. far/non-taboo*). Some of these oppositions may be further expressed by differentiating an actual from an apparent father, the pair Eterscéil and Nemglan being functionally equivalent in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* to the couple Mes Búachalla and Nemglan as far as Conaire's human/supernatural and human/bird dimensions are concerned.

As has been seen, the birth itself is prone to take place on various boundaries. The mother's demise just before (Furbaide) or after (Fiachu) childbirth places the hero's emergence into existence on the threshold between life and death, while the

delay of Brigit's, Fiachu's and Aed's births until the following morning involves the *temporal* boundary between two separate days and destinies (*near/low vs. far/high*). Most obvious of all, *physical* boundaries include the actual threshold (Lat. *limen*) of a house for Brigit, the cultivated *faithche* between the enclosed dwelling space (*les*) and the world beyond for Niall (both *inside vs. outside*), a stone in the middle of a river between two shores for Fiachu (*near vs. far side*), and an elevated rock for Aed (*high vs. low*).

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 8-10) the mention of Conaire's birth is immediately followed by an account of the arrangements for his fosterage. This practice of sending young children away from home for a number of years was an important and carefully regulated early Irish institution (see Kelly, 1988, 86-90) marking the next major phase of a young boy or girl's career. For Brigit fosterage with a Christian woman combines with the drinking of a white cow's milk to mark a marginal state on the way from paganism to Christianity. In the case of some other heroes, the implied contrast *home vs. away* is intensified to *civilized inside vs. wild outside* or the like by being reared in the wilderness by an animal, typically a she-wolf, as in the cases of Cormac and St. Ailbe. Mes Brúachalla's childhood is characterised by a less extreme polarity between civilized aristocratic origins and nurture among lower-class cowherds in the wilderness (*inside/ civilized/high vs. outside/semi-wild/low*) in a solitary confinement symbolic of her otherness, but in the Cormac and Ailbe tales the female animal surrogate of the real mother gives way to a male human fosterer (Luigne, Lochán) in the wild, who thus mediates the passage back to civilized fosterage (*civilized human mother > wild animal foster-mother > semi-wild human foster-father > civilized human foster-father*). The liminal significance of the various tests that a hero like Niall is required to pass is obvious, and it will be seen in the next chapter that the pattern involving the wolf reflects a post-fosterage stage in the *fian*, after which a youth would normally join settled propertied society.

Viewed in relation to birth, fosterage, *fian*-membership and settling down, the recurrent patterns of expulsion and return in early Irish versions of the young hero's biography clearly do reflect, both directly and metaphorically, key transitions in the social life cycle. Moreover, the reality underlying such patterns may be specific as well as general. Thus St. Patrick's career, as narrated by himself with what one assumes to be basic accuracy in his *Confessio* (Hood, 1978), shows classic features of exile and return. Taken captive and brought from his native Britain to Ireland in his teens (par. 1), Patrick spent six years there tending flocks in the mountain wilderness before escaping across the sea in a boat (pars. 16-8). After reaching land three days later, he and his shipmates wandered in a wilderness for twenty eight days before reaching human habitation (pars. 19-22). In Britain again some time later, he was inspired to return to Ireland and begin his mission (par. 23).

Patrick's status and the suggestive nature of these wanderings, particularly after a Gaulish visit had crystallised out of his own vague account and hybridization with Palladius had yielded a visit to Rome and papal ordination (McCone, 1984b, 47-9), made for an influential model liable to be incorporated into other saintly biographies in the heroic mode. Thus Tigernach of Clones' Salamanca Life represents him as having been captured by pirates and taken from Ireland to Britain, whence he was freed to travel to Rome and Gaul before returning via Britain to Ireland (Heist, 1965, 107-9). Similarly Éogan of Ardstraw's Life has Éogan,

Tigernach and Cairbre of Coleraine (taken by pirates from Ireland to Britain. Freed and trained by St. Ninian of Whithern, they were again taken by pirates, this time from Britain to Gaul, but secured their freedom after a miracle, returned to Whithern and thence to Ireland (*ibid.*, 400-1; cf. McCone, 1984, 307-8). Ailbe of Emly too is taken on his British foster-parents' escape from servitude in Ireland to Britain, and travels thence to Rome, where he tends pigs and receives an angelic ordination in the pope's presence before returning via pagan regions to Ireland (Heist, 1965, 118-24; cf. McCone, 1984b, 50-1).

What matters here, however, is not so much the factual or fictional content of a given heroic biography as the way in which it conforms to an internal logic of its own, a structure built upon varied restatements of a basic liminal formula geared to the hero's central mediatory function. The numerous actual variants of this abstract formula display a degree of paradigmatic interchangeability (ch. 3, 4), as with Conaire's conception through incest in *De Síl Chonairi Máir* but airborne supernatural intervention in *Togáil Bruidne Da Derga*, and also tend to underline the hero's essential ambivalence by cumulative means. Nevertheless, it would be dangerously reductionist to regard them as merely tautologous, thereby denying any real significance to the diverse spheres in which and degrees to which they operate. Rather, a linear sequence punctuated, so to speak, by major transitions in the appropriate life cycle sustains an often non-sequential interplay between different modes and types of mediated opposition (e.g. inside-outside and high-low in a cosmic, cultural, social, sexual, temporal, political or geographical context).

8. Binchy stresses "the great gulf that is fixed between the Patrick of the Confessio and the Patrick of even the earliest Lives. In the interval the humble servant of God who speaks to us so movingly in his own writings has become a hero of folklore . . . But this glorified Patrick is not merely the successor of the hero: he has also inherited some of the more disagreeable characteristics of the very druids who were overthrown by him. He beats them at their own game, for he wins by 'bigger and better' magic; witness the ignoble competitions in thaumaturgy so industriously chronicled by Tirechán and Muirchú. Worse still, he shares to a remarkable extent their relish for malediction. According to Tirechán at least three rivers were made for ever barren of fish . . . And the rewards and punishments meted out by the saint are nicely adjusted to the hopes and fears of a barbarian aristocracy rather than to the message of the Gospel. The local magnate who 'believes' is assured that there will be kings of his seed for ever; the recalcitrant chief or druid, on the other hand, is told that his line will either shortly become extinct or will survive only in poverty and subordination. Naturally these unedifying features are much more prominent in the later Tripartite Life, but there are already sufficient examples of them to justify Dr. Esposito's view that they go back to the beginnings of Irish hagiography" (1962b, 58-9).

The fact is, however, that there was a ready supply of biblical models for "these unedifying features". Major Old Testament figures like Moses and Elijah were notable miracle workers (e.g. Ex. 14:21-9 and 15:25, 2/4 Kgs. 2:8), and it has already been argued that the thaumaturgic contest between Patrick and the druids in Muirchú drew upon that between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in the Old Testament (ch. 2, 3). Furthermore, Elijah was no mean curser himself, announcing that there would not be "dew and rain in these years except according to the words

of my mouth" (1/3 Kgs. 17:1) and informing king Ahab: "behold, I will bring evil upon thee and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and last in Israel, and will make thine house like the house of Jerebnaam the son of Nehai and like the house of Baasha the son of Abijah, because thou hast acted to provoke me to anger and hast made Israel to sin" (ibid. 21:21-2). When Ahab's injured son king Ahaziah sent in succession three captains with fifty men to Elijah, the first two were destroyed with the words "if I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty. Then there came down the fire of God from heaven and consumed him and his fifty" (2/4 Kgs. 1:10 and 12) but the third escaped this fate along with his followers by submitting to the prophet, who went then down with them to tell the king "therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up but shalt die a death. So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken" (ibid., 16-7). His successor Elisha proved equally adept in this department: "however, he went up from thence unto Beth-el; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little boys out of the city, and mocked him, saying, Go up, bald head; go up, bald head. And when he had turned himself round, he looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare apart forty and two boys of them" (ibid., 2:23-4). Finally, it is recorded of Christ himself that "when he saw a fig tree by the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And forthwith the fig tree withered" (Matth. 21:19, cf. Mk. 11:13-4).

On the whole, the basic character and attributes ascribed to Patrick in his early Lives seem far more likely to have been adapted from Scripture than derived from a pagan Irish druidry about which manifestly tendentious monastic literary sources provide next to no reliable information (see ch. 9, 13-4). Indeed, the national apostle's early hagiographical image can be seen as above all a composite of Moses, Elijah and Christ, the biblical trio with whom both *Tírechán* and *Muirchú* compare him (ch. 4, 3), although the figure of the Old Testament prophet perhaps preponderates.

Whether they arose by accident, design or both, the significance of further striking similarities between certain Irish and biblical heroes seems unlikely to have been lost upon monastic *literati*. For instance, Niall Noigíallach's selection as future king in preference to older brothers (see 2 above) is obviously analogous to David's anointing (1 Sam./Kgs. 16:1-13), and the future judge Jephthah of Gilead's situation links the highly germane factors of illegitimacy and familial jealousy with an expulsion and return, which in David's case was determined by fraught relations with Saul: "at that time Jephthah the Gileadite was a most mighty man and fighter, who was begotten the son of a harlot by Gilead. However, Gilead had a wife from whom he received sons, and after these had grown they cast Jephthah out, saying, Thou shalt not be able to be an heir in our father's house; for thou art born of another woman. And, fleeing and avoiding them, he dwelt in the land of Tob, and destitute men and brigands were gathered to him and followed him as leader. In those days the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, and, when they pressed vigorously, the elders of Gilead went to raise Jephthah to their aid from the land of Tob, and said to him, Come, and be our leader, and fight against the sons of Ammon" (Jud. 11:1-6).

9. According to the beginning of his Salamanca Life, St. Colmán of Land Eo's parents had settled in the presumably wild valley of Oichle after fleeing a hostile attack and "while they were there, the days were accomplished that his mother should be delivered" (Heist, 1965, 209; *dum ibi essent, impleti sunt dies ut mater illius pareret*). This quotation from Luke's account of Christ's birth (2:6, *cum essent ibi, impleti sunt dies ut pareret*) is an obvious cue linking this situation to that of Jesus' parents, who were forced in the same Gospel to leave home and bear their son in the animal environment of a stable, where they were visited by lowly shepherds at a shining angel's instigation, before returning home to Nazareth. In Matthew, on the other hand, the visitors are foreign magi prompted by a bright star, and the exile and return consists of the holy family's flight from the slaughter of the innocents into Egypt, whence they return after Herod's death. There was much for medieval Irish men of letters to exploit in Gospel narratives pullulating with liminal events and situations in the life of the mediator *par excellence* between God and man (cf. Leach in Alter and Kermode, 1987, 579-99), and the opening of Colmán's Life indicates that they were well aware of these possibilities (cf. ch. 2, 3).

The sagas and pre-Patrician annals clearly link the lives of the saviour and the king of the Ulstermen in the *Táin* with that of Jesus in the Gospels. As John Kelleher has pointed out, "the death of Cú Chulainn was to be placed at 2 A.D. The choice of that date - like 33 A.D. for the death of Conchobar - was clearly to associate these heroes with Christ. Thus the lives of Christ and Cú Chulainn overlap by one year - to which may be added that each has a life-span divisible by three; each has a divine father but is known as the son of a mortal father; each dies for his people erect and pierced with a spear" (1971, 121-2).

Furthermore, in the earliest extant version of his death-tale, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* in *LL* (ll. 13763-14295), Cú Chulainn also obtains a drink as he is dying (14032-40, cf. Mk. 16:36, Matth. 27:48), and appears above Emain after his death to address his people in obvious imitation of the resurrected Jesus (14174-8). These posthumous words consist of three rhetorics (ch. 2, 7-8). The first prophesies the foundation of Armagh: monks will come from Europe, inhabit the lands of Emain (*taicind trehfait iathu Emna, tiefat de Eoraip Elpae*), pray to the king of high heaven (*gigsit co rrig n-ardnime*) with Patrick (*Succer* - cf. *Tírechán* 1(1) in Bieler, 1979, 124) that "we may be settled in Zion by him (*co-ton: Sion -suidigthe leis*)" and "we shall go to the day of full judgment (*ragma do laithiu lánbratha*)" (14179-84). The second talks about the circumstances of Cú Chulainn's own death (14185-97), while the third, as its superscription indicates (*Cú Chulainn a-t:bert de adventu Christi*), foretells the salvation of mankind by Jesus Christ (14198-215). In this way the standard biblical device of prophecy linking the Old and New Testaments places Cú Chulainn's demise on the threshold looking forward from his own marginally pre-Christian era to Christ's imminent world mission and Patrick's future conversion of Ireland, more specifically of Emain into Ard Machae.

Cú Chulainn's immobilization on the boundary between life and death (see 4 above) is clearly articulated: "he goes towards a pillar of stone that is in the plain and put his girdle around it so that he should not die sitting or lying down (*na-r:ablad na suidiu nach ina lígu*) (and) it might be standing up that he would die (*combad ina sessam a-t:balad*). It is then that the men surrounded him, and they did not dare approach him. It seemed to them that he was alive (*andar leo ro-po béo*)" (14044-7).

In this liminal situation Cú Chulainn becomes half man and half stone, as it were, and a still more dramatic example of such a process is provided by the death-tale of Conchobar, *Aided Chonchobair*, summarized earlier (ch. 3, 10). In this Conchobar is all but killed by a calcified brain lodged in his skull, but has his life artificially prolonged by seven years of almost complete inactivity, a living death finally brought to an end when he is briefly revived into an angry outburst at the news of Christ's crucifixion, killed by the excitement and rewarded with salvation. The immobilized monarch thus spends seven years in a state of limbo between his effective death to his own world and a resurrection to eternal life eventually made possible by Christ's redemptive sacrifice.

The Latin Life of St. Berach provides a nice hagiographical example of a less protracted immobilization of brigands on the way from impiety to Christianity, a process made to coincide with the physical crossing of river as well as a monk's passage from life to death and then back to life again. "Here one should not pass over the way in which certain impious men, twelve in number, came one night to the man of God's monastery and, that they might the more freely be able to carry off booty with them, slew one of the brothers, who was watching over the protection of the monastery's goods. And when, having the monastery's cows as booty, they wished to cross through a certain stony ford, it happened by a miracle of God that the spears they were holding in their hands stuck firmly among the stones of the ford and their hands likewise to the spears, and thus they stood motionless in the middle of the river as if they were immobile stones. When this occurrence had divinely come to the holy man's attention, taking a crowd of monks with him, he hastens to the place where the body of the dead brother lay and, having poured forth prayer to Almighty God, resuscitated the slain brother to life. Also approaching the wretched thieves stuck through their crime afterwards, he mercifully absolved them and allowed them to depart. They then cast themselves at the man of God's feet and afterwards lived religiously according to his precepts" (par. 24; Plummer, 1910, I, 85).

It has been seen that the deaths of both Conchobar and Cú Chulainn are firmly linked to Christ's incarnation, and some annals lump all three together as watersheds from which to date the later coming of Christianity to Ireland as a whole in 431/2 A.D., the span between the two believing pre-Patrician kings Conchobar and Cormac (ch. 3, 10) also figuring prominently in the annalistic scheme of things (see Kelleher, 1971, 112).

These deliberate resonances with Christ's career also help to explain the extraordinarily elaborate triple conception of Cú Chulainn as recounted in *Comert Con Culainn*. In the first stage the Ulstermen, while on the track of magical birds, come to a house containing a man and a pregnant woman, who gives birth to a son. On the morrow house and couple have gone, leaving Conchobar's daughter Dechtire with the child, who later falls sick and dies, thus failing to make the direct transition from the fully supernatural to the fully human realm. Subsequently a little creature keeps jumping from cup to lip as Dechtire drinks. She falls asleep and sees a man in her dream who names himself as Lug, the occupant of the disappearing house, and says she is now pregnant by him with the lad she had fostered before, who would be called Sérantae. In the third stage, ignorance as to the father prompts rumours of incest between Dechtire and Conchobar in his cups, thus forcing Conchobar to betroth her to Súaldain. However, the pregnancy was terminated,

Dechtíre became pregnant again after marrying Sédaldain, and bore Sétantae alias Cú Chulainn.

There is obviously more in this intricate pattern than the normal heroic halfway house represented by the scheme of human mother plus supernatural father or an incestuous equivalent, with or without the addition of a human being generally acknowledged as the father but in reality a mere step-father. Here Cú Chulainn's fully supernatural origin in stage one is mediated by stage two, comprising an annunciation and the non-sexual impregnation of a virgin human mother by the supernatural father, into the fully human stage three. Going as it does well beyond the standard requirements of heroic liminality, this genesis of the Ulster hero *par excellence* can hardly be understood except as an orthodox allegory and 'native' typology of Christ's mysterious incarnation as set forth in the New Testament.

10. An elaborate nexus of related patterns emerges from the foregoing. These not only interlocked the heroes of pre-Patrician and the saints of post-Patrician Ireland typologically, thus providing a further means of harmonizing the pagan past with the Christian present (see ch. 4, 9), but also linked Irish with biblical heroic paradigms from both the Old and the New Testament. In this way a biographical structure concerned with liminality could itself provide essential mediation between the different historical phases that medieval Irish *senchais* sought to integrate and reconcile. A highly effective means to this end was, of course, the introduction of contacts between representatives of the different epochs, a prime example being the antediluvian *senchaid* Fintan's clerically induced sixth-century A.D. appearance before the men of Ireland to mediate between the worlds of the Old and New Testaments, pre- and post-Patrician Ireland in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra* (ch.3, 11).

As Nagy points out in a valuable discussion of this type of narrative, it typically concerns the transmission of "stories which, it is implied in our texts, either are already part of the narrative tradition at the time of the encounter between saint and hero or will become part of that tradition through the encounter. One could reasonably suggest that in these stories about amicable confrontations between ancient hero and saint, the otherworlds which form the dramatic background of the pre-Christian heroic and mythological traditions are in fact being related to the Christian cosmogonic scheme of things, even if only as foils to the Christian heaven and hell" (1983, 135). However, "in both the *Siaburchat* and the *Acallam* the focus of attention - that of the sympathetic saint as well as that of the audience of the tale - is on a pagan otherworld as revealed by a remarkable traveller in that world who is summoned by or attracted to the Christian holy man. Also, it is important to appreciate the fact that the revealing of the otherworld through the tale of the otherworldly traveller is made possible by the presence and power of a sacerdotal figure (here, specifically, the Christian saint Patrick), who is himself the translating medium between the bearer of that revelation and the audience of the narrative tradition through which the tale is known" (*ibid.*).

Although it cannot, of course, be disproved, there seem to be no solid grounds for Nagy's suggestion that "it is a subtle irony indeed that the stories which symbolically depict and justify the attempts of the clerical bearers of the literary tradition to preserve the oral tradition probably stem *from* the oral tradition - that they belong to a pre-Christian genre of aetiological narrative which functioned to

legitimate the oral tradition and those whose function it was to transmit and preserve it" (ibid. 136-7). Indeed, in view of the typological bonds between Ireland's 'Old Testament' heroes and her 'New Testament' saints, between Patrick in an Irish and Christ in a world context (ch. 3, 9), the initial impulse for the constitution of this Irish literary genre may be plausibly sought in Christ's transfiguratory encounter and conversation with Moses and Elijah (Matth. 17:1-8), supplemented perhaps by Samuel's posthumous appearance and address to Saul through the agency of the witch of En-dor (1 Sam./Kgs. 28:7-20).

Given the peculiar position of *fiannaigecht* (ch. 9, 8) and major contemporaneous shifts in the literary establishment (ch. 1, 12), the (twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Acallán na Seánraib*'s unusually complex and extended treatment of the confrontation between orality and literacy, so well brought out by Nagy (1989), will be left out of account here on the grounds that it probably reflects a rather different situation from that obtaining with regard to *senchus* in the earlier period.

One of the older extant texts of this type, *Staburcharpat Con Culainn* (Meyer, 1910; LU II. 9220-565), the language of which is compatible with a roughly ninth- or tenth-century date, opens with Lóegaire's refusal to believe Patrick's preaching "until you resurrect Cú Chulainn for me in his glory as it is recounted in stories so that I may see and address him before me here" (9225-7). This is arranged, and Lóegaire's breath is blessed by Patrick so that he can describe the splendid sight vouchsafed to himself and Patrick's disciple Benén, who explained that Cú Chulainn had been released from hell. Since, however, Lóegaire is still not prepared to believe on the grounds that he had not had time to talk with Cú Chulainn, Patrick summons the hero again. Once again Cú Chulainn appears with all the outward trappings of glory, but his words soon reveal a broken man: "I beseech you, holy Patrick - beside you I am - may you bear me with your faithful into the lands of the living" (9297-300), a stanza reiterated at the end of his long poem below (9532-5). There follows the urgent refrain, repeated at other points in the text (9314-6, 9536-8), "believe in God and holy Patrick, Lóegaire, lest the surface of the earth come over you, for it is not a spectre that has come to you, it is Cú Chulainn son of Súadainn" (9301-2). In response to the king's questions, Cú Chulainn adumbrates great past deeds and recites a poem about the great dangers he has faced, culminating in a visit to and escape from Scáth's grim and beastly overseas domain (9378-437).

This, however, merely paves the way for a sustained series of devastating vignettes, reminiscent of those in *Féilire Óengusso's* exultantly Christian prologue (ch. 1, 4), of his and the other mighty Ulster heroes' (Conchobar, of course, excepted) tortured helplessness in the face of hell's far worse horrors. "What I have suffered of tribulations on sea and land, more difficult for me was a single night with an angry demon. My body was wounded, the victory was Lugaid's; demons have taken my soul into the red flame. I have plied the javelin, the *gáe bolg* assiduously; I was in the company of a demon in torment. Most powerful was my valour, my sword was hard; he pushed me with a single finger into the red flame. The kings who strive for dominion with all their might, they have no power with the son of God, an equal length their punishment. The hosts of the Ulstermen around Conchobar, brave the heroes, the demons lash them, in hell they are sorrowful. Apart from the king, the son of Nes, who fought for the son of Mary, the pick of the warriors are in hell's torment. Well have I come at your word to Patrick now, that he may bring me out of hell so that his victory is for me".