

Mocking the afflicted: morals and missing body-parts in *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó and Waltharius*

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz entwickelt die schon anderswo im Druck verfochtene Ansicht des Verfassers weiter, dass die frühirische Geschichte von Mac Da Thós Schwein als eine gegen gewisse kriegerische Sitten und Anschauungen gerichtete moralische Satire im christlichen Sinne aufzufassen ist. Während auch andere Aspekte (z. B. das Schicksal des Hundes und desjenigen, der ihn erlegt hat) von einem teilweise vergleichenden Standpunkt untersucht werden, wird besondere Aufmerksamkeit den Spottwettkämpfen und dem darin geschilderten auffälligen Verlust wesentlicher Körperteile gewidmet. Daraufhin wird das ungefähr gleichzeitig auf dem Festland verfasste lateinische Epos Waltharius zum Vergleich herangezogen, weil dieselben vier derartigen Verluste (nämlich des Kopfes, eines Auges, einer Hand oder eines Fusses bzw. Beines) auch dort eine wichtige Rolle spielen, wohl ebenfalls, um unchristliche kriegerische Tätigkeit in Frage zu stellen. Zum Schluss werden einige Ergebnisse des vorliegenden und eines in ZcP 67 erschienenen Beitrags auf den Gegensatz zwischen "nativistischen" und "antinativistischen" Vorstellungen zur frühirischen Literatur bezogen.

I.

The basic structure of *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó* resembles a sandwich: two outer slices deal with the fate of Mac Da Thó's great hound Ailbe (THURNEYSSEN 1935: §§1–4 and 19–20), and the filling is a feast at which rival boasts for the privilege of dividing a huge pig end in mayhem. The importance of the latter is indicated by its length (§§5–18 of Thurneysen's 20-section edition or 152 of its 243 lines) and the saga's evidently original title: 'The tale of Mac Da Thó's pig'.¹

¹ See THURNEYSSEN (1935: i) on the title *Sc/gēl(a) mu(i)c(c)i meic Dathó* given by all three manuscripts (LL, H. 3. 18 and Harley 5280) in which the earlier version is preserved and the inclusion of the dog beside the pig in the title used by a later recension found in Rawlinson B 512. It is immaterial here whether the original had sg. *scél* (LL) or pl. *sc/géla* (H, Hl; unless perhaps for sg. *io*-stem *scélae* as in *soi-scélae* 'gospel'). The title *O/Argain Meic Da Thó* in all five surviving manuscript versions of a saga list originally compiled in the 10th century according to THURNEYSSEN (1921: 22) is clearly a secondary adaptation to fit it into a category of *o/airc/gne(a)* 'slayings' (MAC CANA 1980: 67, cf. 47, 61).

Some of the following analysis is based upon an earlier treatment in German (McCONE 2006).

The size (120 lines, about half of the total), centrality (§§7–16) and artfulness of the boasting competition for carving rights indicate its significance in the eyes of the story's unknown but accomplished² author. After a brief series of exchanges between four warriors from Connacht and Ulster (§7), further unspecified toing and froing sees Cet mac Mágach of Connacht emerge victorious and prepare to carve the pig if no one challenges him (§8). Seven Ulstermen in succession then try and fail to dislodge him:

1. (§9) Lóegaire concedes defeat after being reminded that the expedition to Connacht made by every Ulster lad 'who takes up arms' (*gaibes gaisced*) had, in his case, ended in flight with a spear through him and the loss of his chariot and horses.
2. (§10) "It shall not be" said a large fair warrior who had come out of the cubicle "that Cet divides the pig right in front of us". "Who is here?" said Cet. "He is better as a hero than you are" said everyone. "That is Óengus son of Lám Gábaid [Hand of Danger] of the Ulstermen". "Why is his father called Lám Gábaid?" said Cet. "Why indeed?" "I know" said Cet. "I once went west. A cry is raised around me. Everyone arrived. Lám then arrived. He threw a cast of a great spear at me. I cast the same spear at him so that it took his hand (*lám*) from him until it was on the floor. What would bring his son to contest with me?" Óengus goes and sits down'.
3. (§11) "On with the contest" said Cet "or let the pig be divided!". "It shall not be that you divide it first" said a large fair warrior of the Ulstermen. "Who is here?" said Cet. "Éogan son of Durthacht" said everyone "i.e. the king of Fernmag". "I have seen him before" said Cet. "Where did you see me?" said Éogan. "At the entrance of your house when taking a drove of cattle from you. A cry was raised around me in the territory. You came in response to the cry. You cast a spear at me until it was sticking out of my shield. I cast the same spear at you until it went through your head and carried your eye out of your head. The men of Ireland see you with a single eye. It is me that took the other eye out of your head". He then sat down'.
4. (§12) "Carry on with the contest, Ulstermen!" said Cet. "You will not divide it now" said Muin-remur [Fat-neck] son of Ger-genn. "Is this Muinremur?" said Cet. "I have cleaned my spears at last, Muinremur!" said Cet. "It is not two days and nights since I took three heroes' heads, including your eldest son's head (*im chenn do chét-meic*), from you out of your land". He then sat down'.
5. (§12) "On with the contest!" said Cet. "You shall have that" said Menn [Clear] son of Sál-chad [Heel-battle(r)]. "Who is this?" said Cet. "Menn" said

² 'One of the best told of Old Irish sagas' (THURNEYSSEN 1935: i; cf. 1921: 494, and CHADWICK 1968: 80).

everyone. “What then?” said Cet “The sons of churls with their nicknames contesting with me? For it was me that was the priest christening your father with that name, me that took his heel (*sáil*) from him with a sword so that he only carried a single foot (*oín-chois*) away from me. What would bring the son of the one-footed one to me?” He then sat down’.

6. (§13) The ‘grey(-haired), large, ugly warrior’ Celtchair mac Uithechair yields after being reproached with a urinary ailment and lack of offspring as a result of Cet’s spear passing through his thigh and the top of his testicles during a raid on Celtchair’s home.
7. (§14) King Conchobor’s son Cúscraid Mend [Stammering] Machae is hailed as ‘the makings of a king on account of appearance’ (*adbar rig ar deilb*) but has, as Cet callously points out to the ‘youngster’ (*gillae*), a speech impediment on account of the damage done to his vocal cords by a spear through the throat on a first armed expedition (*cét-gaisced*) to Connacht that cost the lives of a third of his men.

This sequence opens and closes with first forays into enemy territory traditionally undertaken after initiation as a fully-fledged warrior by a rite of *gabál gaiscid* ‘taking arms’. The classic account was the precocious Cú Chulainn’s illustrious initial expedition after receiving a set of arms (*gai-sced*, a compound of *gai* ‘spear’ and *sciath* ‘shield’) comprising a spear and shield from King Conchobor, followed by a chariot and horses from him the next day. This was the last of Cú Chulainn’s *mac-gnímrada* ‘boyhood deeds’ in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (O’RAHILLY 1976: 19–26), the centrepiece of the “Ulster Cycle” and obvious point of reference for *Scéla Muicce* and other tales belonging to it.³ The first outings of Lóegaire (1) and Cúscraid (7) were, by contrast, utterly inglorious as both were put to flight with spears through them. To add insult to injury, Lóegaire lost his chariot and horses, and Cúscraid a third of his men.

Each of these two initiatory fiascos, which were survived by the principals, is separated from a brief central incident featuring three decapitations (4) by two episodes that resulted in permanent but non-fatal physical defects (2–3, 5–6). Four of Cet’s opponents were the direct targets of his scorn, but the other three were demeaned vicariously with reference to the worsening of a close relative (the father in 2 and 5, a son in 4). The events mentioned by Cet may be said to have had only limited lasting effects upon his first five adversaries, since even Éogan had lost an eye (3) but evidently not his sight and the reference to Muinremur’s dead son as his ‘first’ or ‘eldest’ (4) clearly implies that he still had at least one direct male heir. However, the stakes are raised in the last two encounters, in which Cet is confronted by an ugly older and a handsome younger opponent: Celtchair’s testicular trauma has rendered

³ Note, for instance, the classification of a number of narratives as *rem-scéla* ‘fore-tales’ of *TBC* (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 248–51; cf. MAC CANA 1980: 88–9).

him incapable of producing an heir (6)⁴ and Cúscraid's prospects of becoming his royal father's heir are vitiated by the need for a king to be eloquent as well as good-looking (7).⁵ While the nature of Lóegaire's spear-wound is not mentioned in (1), different types of invisible but permanent physical damage are specified in (6–7) and the very visible loss of various body-parts figures in (2–5), which are translated *verbatim* above as the focus of the subsequent comparison with *Waltharius*.

Muinremur and Celtchair got second bites of the cherry, having already appeared as the two Ulster participants in the series of four brief alternating boasts (§7) preceding Cet mac Mágach's assertion of his claims (§8): Muinremur had vaunted the death of his opponent's brother and Celtchair had countered a boast by Lugaid mac Con Rui with 'my killing [Cú Rui's brother⁶] Conganchnes mac Dedad and striking his head off him'. Beheadings not only lead into Cet's spell of supremacy (§§9–14) and mark its middle (§12) but also bring it to a dramatic end in a climactic encounter, duly highlighted by a formal exchange of rhetorics (§15), between Cet and the newly arrived Conall Cernach. When the latter claims to have killed a Connachtman daily and regularly slept with a Connachtman's head under his knee since taking arms, Cet concedes Conall's superiority and tees up a *coup de théâtre* by expressing regret that his own brother Ánlúan is not present to provide stronger opposition: "But he is!" said Conall, taking Ánlúan's head out of his belt, and he throws it to Cet across his chest so that a draught of his blood broke onto his lips. The latter then betook himself from the pig and Conall sat at it' (§16). Having boasted about an opponent's loss of a brother (§7), Muinremur was bluntly informed about the recent taking of his firstborn son's head by Cet (§12), who is now hoist spectacularly by his own petard when his own brother's head is unexpectedly produced by Conall (§16). Cet's spell of dominance is thus punctuated at key intervals (intro, middle and end) by three increasingly poignant references to the loss of heads, each directed at a close relative of the chief victim.

The opening and closing challenges to Cet are made by Lóegaire Búadach and Conall Cernach, Ulster's third- and second-ranked warriors (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 94). The absence of the province's preeminent champion from the gathering of Ireland's notable fighters in the *ríg-briugu* 'arch-hospitaller' Mac Da

⁴ See McCONE 2006: 158 on the discrepancy between Celtchair's childlessness here and the son and daughter of his appearing in his death-tale, *Aided Cheltchair maic Uithechair*, as well as several children ascribed to him in genealogies.

⁵ See McCONE 2006: 159 on the arguably rather late (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 94) tradition of Cúscraid's succession following Conchobor's death after the unexpected death of his brother Cormac Conn Longas, who had been preferred over Cúscraid as Ulster's next king despite being in exile among Ulster's deadly enemies, Ailill and Medb, in Connacht. Even then, the kingship was supposed to have been offered to Conall Cernach, who declined on grounds of age and instead recommended his foster-son Cúscraid (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 594–5).

⁶ E.g. *Aided Cheltchair maic Uithechair* §8 (MEYER 1906: 26).

Thó's hostel (*bruiden*; §5, l. 3)⁷ inverts the situation in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, where Cú Chulainn alone confronts an army recruited by Ailill and Medb from the rest of the island until the other Ulstermen eventually arrive for the final battle after recovering from a debilitating bout of *ces noi(n)den* (see THURNEYSSEN 1921: 97 and 360–1). Eschewing Lóegaire's customary sobriquet, the author of our tale tells of a first expedition upon which he was the reverse of *búadach* 'victorious'. Conall's success, after Lóegaire and another half-dozen of Ulster's finest had failed, finally settled the contentious issue of who was to apportion the gigantic pig. However, after gluttonously devouring its whole belly (§17), he only granted the 'Connachtmen' its two front feet, an insultingly inadequate serving that brought the two sides first to blows and bloodshed inside and then to a battle in the enclosure (*les*) just outside the residence (§18).

The saga began with the requests of two powerful neighbours, the Connachta and their bitter Ulaid rivals, for the great hound owned by Mac Da Thó of Leinster, who sought a way out of his dilemma by following his wife's devious advice to offer it to each side unbeknown to the other, invite both on the same day to receive it, and leave it to them to fight it out (§§1–4). After their arrival, attention shifted to the giant pig, the contest for the right to carve it and the ructions caused by its lopsided division (§§5–18). When the fight was about to exit the homestead, the focus returned to the dog. Having been released by Mac Da Thó to see which side it would choose, the hound set about slaughtering the Connachta, attacked the chariot of their king Ailill and queen Medb, but suffered the final decapitation in the tale when struck by their charioteer, Fer Loga (§19). Consequently, although the Ulstermen prevailed in the contest for the pig and the resultant battle, the humiliations and casualties suffered by both sides were rendered vain by the death of their main objective. Not only was Mac Da Thó's hound thus lost by its original and would-be new owners alike but Ulster's anyway pointless triumph was also tarnished by one last humiliation (§20). As the rout (*a mmaidm*) moved north-westwards, Fer Loga dismounted and ambushed Conchobor by jumping into his chariot and grasping his head from behind. The latter yielded forthwith, granting Fer Loga's modest request to be taken to Emain Machae and regaled every evening by the single women and girls of Ulster with the refrain 'Fer Loga is my darling'. The charioteer's return home a year later along with two gold-bridled steeds of Conchobor's ends a tale in which 'thoroughly unchristian behaviour ... proves totally futile and counter-productive for all concerned' (McCONE 1990: 78).

The climactic outcome of the contest for the pig was highlighted by a metrical exchange between Cet and Conall made up of heavily alliterative two-

⁷ See McCONE 1984a: 2–4 on Mac Da Thó's status as a (*rig-*)*briugu*. CHADWICK (1968: 83) is surely right that Cú Chulainn's 'omission can not be accidental' and just as surely wrong to suggest that this 'is probably an indication of the antiquity of the tradition of our story, before the development of the *Cú Chulainn Cycle*'. McCONE (2006: 150–1) suggests that Cú Chulainn's stature was such that the author of *Scela Muicce* chose to satirise him obliquely rather than frontally.

or three-stress lines (§15, ll. 10–15) and a stylised coda displaying alliteration and parallelism (§15, ll. 16–20). A metrical dialogue, this time in rhymed heptasyllabic verse, between Mac Da Thó and his wife (§3) had also marked an earlier tipping point, namely his acceptance of her two-faced solution to the apparently intractable problem of dealing with the requests of two powerful rival interests for his hound without incurring retribution from the disappointed party (cf. McCONE 1983: 8). The final resolution of this initial conundrum, the mainspring of the story's plot, came with the denial of the hound to both as a result of its death after being released to join in the final battle (§19). Its location after 'a great watershed in the narrative' means that 'the Fer Loga episode appears as something of an anticlimax' (McCONE 1990: 60) at the tale's end (§20).

A funny side to *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó* was noted by THURNEYSSEN (1921: 494; cf. 1935: i): 'nowhere has the unrestrained pugnacity of the time been more forthrightly expressed; the humorous conclusion also displays the boisterous mood'. In similar vein, CHADWICK (1968: 80–1 and 83) saw the tale as a pro-Leinster reaction to the Ulster-biased *Táin Bó Cúailnge* that 'does not take even the political issues very seriously' and 'purports to give a picture of the old heroic life in Ireland and its warlike spirit' suffused with 'laconic humour and a spirit of ripe burlesque' as its 'laughing story-teller turns both these great rival dynasties [of Ulster and Connacht] to ridicule' (1968: 80–81 and 83). In short, it was neither 'a direct and truthful presentation of the warlike spirit of its time' nor 'a parody' but rather 'a well-preserved heroic tradition, seen through the prismatic lens of a later age' and displaying 'a ripe sophistication, a concentrated irony, and a gay and lighthearted hyperbole' (CHADWICK 1968: 91–2). More recently, BUTTIMER (1982: 65 and 68) has perceived a serious social and political dimension, whereas Ó CORRÁIN (1985: 86) has concentrated upon 'the jape' of what 'seems to be a parody of the heroic genre as represented by *Táin Bó Cúailnge* – whilst the principle characters remain the same [cf. THURNEYSSEN 1921: 494], a new tale is built about the dog of the king [or rather chief hospitaller; see note 7] of Leinster in the place of the divine Brown Bull of Cúalgne and heroic contests become boorish boasting'. An intermediate position has since been proposed (McCONE 1990: 77): 'for all its decidedly grim humour and moments of bathos, this taut and purposeful tale ... can hardly be dismissed as a mere burlesque with no aim beyond parody for entertainment's sake' but is rather 'a deadly earnest, if at times amusing, moral satire in the classical tradition of the ever-popular Horace or Juvenal but inevitably geared by its monastic author to Christian principles'. This approach has been maintained and developed in the present study as well as the earlier one (McCONE 2006).

The *Táin's* concluding account of the two bulls' fight to the death and of the places named after the actions of one and the body-parts shed by the other on the way (O'RAHILLY 1976: 124) is unmistakably echoed in miniature by

the final episode of *Scéla Muicce*.⁸ In this, the great hound Ailbe was killed and its body fell to the ground on the Plain(s) of Ailbe (*Maig(e) Ailbi*) but its head remained stuck in the rear shafts of the chariot as the fight passed through several named places and finally fell off at the Ford of the Dog's Head (*oc Áth Chinn Chon*). That said, the dog's death and its effect in the "Fer Loga episode" have a still more pertinent point of reference in another of the *Táin*'s episodes, namely Cú Chulainn's penultimate 'boyhood deed' (O'RAHILLY 1976: 17–19). This tells how young Sétantae slew the smith Culann's great hound after arriving late at his home for a feast and temporarily took over its function as the guardian of Culann and his property to earn the new name *Cú Chulainn* 'Culann's Hound'. As pointed out elsewhere (McCONE 1984a: 7–8), both narratives feature a feast-giver (Mac Da Thó, Culann), his mighty guardian hound, its death at a visitor's hands, and advancement for its slayer (Cú Chulainn, Fer Loga) but there are also significant differences: 'Unlike Cú Chulainn ..., Fer Loga reaps only transient benefits ... and the female adulation is bogus insofar as the women in question are acting on Conchobar's express orders rather than spontaneously. The difference in results can be explained partly by Cú Chulainn's start far higher up the scale of warlike capabilities and partly by the different types of encounter with the hound: Cú Chulainn engages it in hand-to-hand combat that accords fully with the martial principle of *fir fer* ['men's truth'] ... while Fer Loga smites it from an advantageous position in the chariot after the dog has seized one of the shafts beneath him' (McCONE 1984a: 12). Moreover, he then secured Conchobar's submission by unheroically surprising him from behind after leaping onto the back of his chariot (cf. McCONE 1990: 64). Fer Loga thus attacked a chariot in the rear like the great guard-dog slain by him, whereas Cú Chulainn assumed the full protective role of his mighty canine victim on his way to becoming 'the warrior hero *par excellence*' (McCONE 1990: 63).

Fer Loga's role is anomalous from the outset. As charioteer to the king and queen of Connacht (*ara Aillella ocus Medba*; §19, l. 6), he might have been expected to do the driving and leave any fighting to his passengers. Nevertheless, the royal pair failed to act and, for no stated or obvious reason, it was their "chauffeur" who killed the dog at the back instead of keeping his hands on the reins and his eyes on the horses at the front. Insofar as Fer Loga overshadowed two monarchs (Ailill and the hitherto unmentioned Medb) and overpowered a third (Conchobar), 'its very bathos can be seen as precisely the point of this conclusion, which subverts the love of fighting as an end in itself by representing battle as a bagatelle in which, with luck, even the lowly born might distinguish themselves at their betters' expense, a scenario hardly calculated to appeal to an aristocratic audience' (McCONE 1990: 78). Apart from a passing no-

⁸ The *Táin* itself not only ends in futility like *Scéla Muicce* but also contains humorous and/or unseemly episodes susceptible to a satirical interpretation (e.g. Ní MHAOLDOMHNAIGH 2008).

tice of Conchobor's joy at Conall Cernach's arrival (§15, ll. 4–5), §§19–20 make the first mention of Ulster's king or his Connacht counterpart since their brief agreement to award the privilege of dividing the pig 'on the basis of contests' (*ar chomramaib*; §6, l. 9). The intervening boastings then expose the weaknesses of a series of notable aristocratic warriors, up to and including the speech impediment afflicting a son (Cúscraid, §14) of Ulster's king as well as the gluttony and unfairness of the province's second-best warrior (Conall, §§17–18). The finale turns to the top of both scales: the rulers of Connacht (Ailill and Medb) and Ulster (Conchobor) are eclipsed by a mere servant (Fer Loga), while the killing of Mac Da Thó's hound by 'Lug's Man' and its aftermath echo Cú Chulainn's momentous slaughter of Culann's hound in a manner calculated to undermine that paragon of martial prowess and heroism *in absentia* by parodying the account of how he got his definitive name. The at first sight anticlimactic "Fer Loga episode" thus marks the satirical high point by belittling the Ulster Cycle's mightiest monarchs and warrior.

The charioteer's very name is suggestive in view of Lug's status as the supernatural father of Cú Chulainn (e.g. THURNEYSSEN 1921: 62 and 177–9), who is addressed in his death-tale as *a gein Loga soalta* (KIMPTON 2009: 12, l. 18) 'o well-fostered offspring of Lug'. Since Ailill and Medb's charioteer is not named in the "first recension" of the *Táin*,⁹ Fer Loga or 'Lug's Man' was surely the intentionally allusive creation of an author whose imaginative manipulation of names is also seen elsewhere in *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*, notably in the above series of seven confrontations recalling losses inflicted by spears or (in 5 only) a sword. He called Lóegaire's regular epithet *búadach* 'victorious' into question in the first of these (§9) by omitting it in the account of his disastrous first expedition. In the second (§10), an account of a warrior's loss of a hand is based upon the name *Lám Gábuid* 'Hand of Danger' by interpreting the qualifying genitive as 'endangered' rather than more natural 'dangerous'. In the fifth (§12, ll. 6–12), the obvious reference of the name *Sál-chad* 'Heel-battle(r)' would be to fleetness of foot¹⁰ not the loss of one in battle that is made the basis of Cet's boast. Finally (§14), a spear through the throat was said to have made Cúscraid *mend* 'stammering'.

The shamings and killings in *Scéla Muicce* ultimately stemmed from the decision by the despairing Mac Da Thó to set aside his qualms, based on a saying of King Crimthann's, about confiding in a woman (§3, ll. 10–11) and accept his wife's Machiavellian advice in a scene very probably inspired by King Ahab's depression¹¹ on account of Naboth's refusal to sell him his vineyard and his readiness to let his evil wife Jezebel secure it for him by subterfuge (1 Kings

⁹ However, the reworked "second" recension does call him Fer Loga, evidently having adopted the name from *Scéla Muicce* (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 212, n. 2).

¹⁰ Cf. references in the *Iliad* to 'swift-footed' Achilles (e.g. πόδας ὠκύς/ταχύς ix, 307; xvii, 709; xviii, 354, and ποδώκης/ποδάρεκς xviii, 261; ii, 688; xvi, 5), to Meriones catching an enemy 'with swift feet' (ποσὶ καρπαλίμοισι xvi, 342), and so on.

¹¹ 'And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned his face away, and would eat no

21: 1–21). The tables are turned at the end of the tale by making women the victims of public humiliation, when Ulster’s nubile females were forced by their compromised king to declare their love for the upstart Fer Loga openly every night. The conclusion of Crimthann’s warning (*maín ar mug ní aithenar*) is translated as ‘for a slave [or servant] no treasure [valuable] (or jewel) is given in recompense’ and then dismissed as ‘irrelevant here, being appended to the preceding proverb merely for the sake of rhyme’ by THURNEYSSEN (1935: 25, n. 6). However, just such compensation was made at the very end of the story when Fer Loga returned home with two of Conchobor’s steeds and their gold bridles, on the reasonable assumption that these were intended for Ailill and Medb in lieu of a year without their charioteer’s services. If so, both of Crimthann’s rules are broken, the first very soon after Mac Da Thó has cited it and the other in the text’s final sentence.

The two great dogs slain by Cú Chulainn and Fer Loga have been seen as reflexes of ‘the Otherworld hound as the quintessence of martial qualities and transmitter of these to its slayer’ and compared with Cerberus und Orthus, the mythical Greek canine guardians of Hades’ realm and (on a far-distant island shared with Hades’ herds) Geryon’s cattle respectively that were both overcome by the archetypal hero Heracles (McCONE 1984a: 11 and 22–6). This comparison neglected LINCOLN’S (1979) treatment of the PIE ‘hellhound’ and SCHLERATH’S (1954) postulate of a PIE pair of savage otherworldly guard dogs on the strength of Yama’s Syāma and Śabala in early Indian material, Oðinn’s Gifr and Geri in Old Norse literature and an Armenian pair called Spitak and Siaw. Conversely, neither of those studies considered the Greek and Celtic twosomes. All five witnesses combined put PIE belief in two canine guardians of the realm of the dead¹² beyond reasonable doubt.

From a structuralist point of view (see McCONE 2020: 101–2, note 52), ‘the essence of the hellhound is his intermediary position – at the border of this world and the next, between life and death ... between good and evil. For

bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him: “Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?”” (1 Kings 21: 4–5). Mac Da Thó lapses into silence, will not eat or drink and tosses from side to side, leading his wife to ask him what is the matter as ‘he turns away from me to the wall’ (§3, ll. 1–8).

¹² Although hardly relevant here, a malign outsider third hound/wolf or the like is added by McCONE 1984a: 25–6 and 1987: 125 on the strength of Celtchar’s Dáelchú (from the same litter as Culann’s hound and Mac Da Thó’s Ailbe according to *Aided Cheltchair* §11; MEYER 1906: 28–31) and the Greek Hydra (of the same litter as Cerberus and Orthus according to Hesiod, *Theogony* ll. 306–18). The reference to the trio’s sibling status in Celtchar’s death-tale may well have served as a deliberate cue to its relationship with the tale of Mac Da Thó’s pig and the episode of Culann’s hound, in which they figure prominently, but a contemporary intertextual function is by no means incompatible with the inference from Greek and other parallels that ‘an appreciable part of this material has pagan, oral and even Indo-European roots’ (McCONE 1990: 64).

this role, the dog is perfectly suited, being ... the tamed carnivore who stands midway between animal and human, savagery and civilisation, nature and culture' (LINCOLN 1979: 285). Whether as a (pack-)hunter or a fierce protector, the hound had much in common with the wolf, to which JAMISON (2009: 208–9 and 207) has assigned a similar structural slot as a 'liminal creature ... assimilated to the outskirts of human society' and 'in the Vedic conceptual universe (and the Indo-European one from which it descended) ... a denizen of the transitional zone between the settled and the wild ... and indeed between the animal and the human'. In effect, a fierce but domesticated guard-dog typically stood on the home territory's threshold looking out, while wild and ferocious wolves frequented the area beyond looking in (cf. BERNHARDT-HOUSE 2010: 15–16). After discussing Indo-Iranian evidence, LINCOLN (1981: 126) points out that 'the ideology of man as wolf, the fiercest and most cunning of predators, is well attested in Baltic, Slavic, Germanic, Greek, Roman, and Anatolian sources, and thus must ascend to the Proto-Indo-European period'. Celtic data offer further support for the case that warriors belonging to aggressive vagabond sodalities were particularly liable to be viewed as "wolves" (MCCONE 1986a: 15–21, and 1987: 102–6 and 118–24), whereas a warrior in defensive or protective mode might be more appropriately associated with a guard-dog such as Culann's hound (*cú*).

PIE had separate words for 'wolf' and 'dog, hound', namely **u̯lkʷos* or metathesised **lukʷos* (MCCONE 1985: 171) and **k̑uō* (weak stem **k̑un-*; NIL 436–40). Reflexes of the former are widely attested among IE peoples 'in literally hundreds of proper names' (LINCOLN 1975: 103), whereas the latter generally has a much less prominent onomastic role. In Celtic, however, the situation is reversed. Likely survivals of **u̯lkʷos*/**lukʷos* are so far confined to a couple of personal names, notably Gaulish *Catu-(v)ulcus*/*-(v)olcus* 'Battle-wolf' (a number of possible interpretations of which are discussed by EVANS 1967: 70–3) and OIr. *Luch-thonn* 'Wolf-skin' (MCCONE 1985: 175–6), and the Old Irish adjective *olc* 'evil' (MCCONE 1985: 172–4). By contrast, reflexes of the PIE word for 'dog' are abundant in compound names: UHLICH (1993: 209) records some fifty different early Irish compounds with *con-* as their first element, e.g. *Conal(l)* < *Con-ual* 'having a *cú*'s strength' (Ogam CUNA-VA[LI?], OBrit. *Cunovali*, OW *Con-gual*, *Cin-gual*; UHLICH 1993: 211–12; cf. Lat. *val-ere* 'be strong' etc.), and even more with final *-chú* such as *Ár-chú* 'slaughter-*cú*' (MW *aer-gi*;¹³ UHLICH 1993: 164). To these may be added some four score examples of a later "Cú Chulainn"

¹³ The nom. sg. seen in MW *ci* (lenited *-gi* as the second element of compounds) etc. presupposes a British Celtic **kī* < **kū*, which must have replaced **kūū*, presumably on the analogy of inherited weak stem *kun-*, before British *kʷ* (also < *kū*) > *p*. Irish *cú*/*-chú* would be the regular outcome of **kū* or **kūū* but the former can now be dated as far back as Proto-Celtic on the basis of the Celtiberian name *Uiroku* (see below) and Lepontic *Minuku* (SOLINAS 1995: 329) probably consisting of *minu-* 'small' (OIr. *min* 'small'; see UHLICH 1989: 132, n. 11) plus *-kū*.

type consisting of *cú* plus an attribute (usually a gen. sg. noun but occasionally an adjective or a prepositional phrase) recorded by O'BRIEN (1962: 572–5). British cognates indicate that in some cases both types of compound name go back at least as far as Insular Celtic. Furthermore, with the help of rather meagrely attested Gaulish and Celtiberian, a couple of examples can be positively traced back to Proto-Celtic, notably: Gallo-Latin *Cuno-pennus*, OIr. *Co(i)nchenn* and OW *Con-cenn* (MW *Kyn-gen*, a stumbling block for Gallo-British¹⁴) < PC **kuno-k^uenno-* ‘**kū*-headed’ (UHLICH 1993: 214–5; on “dog-heads” generally see BERNHARDT-HOUSE 2010: 257–325), and Celtib. *Uiro-ku* (WODTKO 2000: 451–2), OIr. *Fer-chú* and O/MW *Gur-ci/Gwr-gi* (UHLICH 1993: 245–6) < PC **uíro-kū* ‘man-**kū*, werewolf’ (McCONE 2000a: 484). The obvious inference is that close affinities between the two animals had led to a tendency to call both **kū* as early as Proto-Celtic. Since the meaning ‘wolf’ can be rendered unambiguously by new terms (*fáel* ‘howler’, *mac tíre* ‘son of the land’) or qualifications (*cú allaid* ‘wild *cú*’, *fáel-chú*¹⁵), *cú* (gen. *con*) without further specification tends to mean ‘dog, hound’ in Old and Middle Irish. Nevertheless, ambiguity persisted, not least in proper names, and it could still designate a wolf rather than a dog, as when Laignech Fáelad was described as ‘in *cú*-shapes’ when *fri fáelad* ‘behaving as a wolf’ (ARBUTHNOT 2007: 58, §218).

Given a tendency to use suitable domestic animals as sacrificial surrogates of wild ones (cf. BURKERT 1983: 43), a dog would be the wolf’s natural equivalent in rites connected with youthful sodalities and/or fighting. ANTHONY & BROWN (2017) preface important findings from their recent excavation of a site most likely occupied by speakers of an early IE language (139–40) with the following abstract: ‘At the Srubnaya-culture settlement of Krasnosamarskoe in the Russian steppes, dated 1900–1700 BCE, a ritual occurred in which the participants consumed sacrificed dogs, primarily, and a few wolves, violating

¹⁴ Unless they are separated from the Gallo-Latin form by an alternative analysis as ‘dog-skin’ (for **kenno-* ‘skin’ see GREENE 1958; 1975: 175–6; LEIA C-55; McLAUGHLIN 2006: 275–8 on the nom. sg. attested in Midlr. *cenn for saillib* ‘a scum on flitches of bacon’), the Welsh form and Ogam Irish CUNACENNI point to assimilated (**k...k^u...> *k...k...*) Insular Celtic **kuno-kenno-* (OIr. *cenn*, MW *pen* ‘head’ < **k^uennom*). The discrepancy between British and Gaulish cannot be explained on the “P-Celtic” or Gallo-British hypothesis but is no problem for the Insular Celtic alternative making typologically unremarkable *k^u* > *p* a separate development in Gaulish and British (McCONE 1996b: 67–8).

¹⁵ < Ins. Celt. **uailo-kū* ‘howling *cú*’, if MW *gweilgi*, a kenning for the (raging) sea, is cognate as suggested by THOMSON (1961: 19, note 4). Armenian *gayl* ‘wolf’ is probably also derived from **uai-lo-* ‘howler’, MARTIROSYAN (2010: 197) noting that ‘it is remarkable that both the Armenian and Celtic terms formed anthroponyms, cf. Arm. *Gayl*, *Gayl-uk* etc ... and Gaul. *Vailo*, *Vailico*, OIr. *Failan* etc.’. O'BRIEN (1962: 541–2 and 623–5) lists over forty bearers of the name *Cenn Fáelad* ‘Wolf’s Head’ and almost forty of *Fáelán* ‘Wolfling’ plus a further thirty or so of compound names with *fáel* as the first element.

normal food practices found at other sites, during the winter. At least 64 winter-killed canids ... were roasted, fileted, and apparently were eaten. More than 99% were dogs. Their heads were chopped into small standardized segments with practiced blows of an axe on multiple occasions throughout the occupation ... The repeated violation of the canid-eating taboo, unique to this site, combined with the metaphor of human transformation into male canids, suggests that the participants entered a liminal state typical of a rite of passage. Parallels from comparative Indo-European (IE) mythology provide the indigenous narrative that gave meaning to this ritual: we argue that it was an initiation into the widely attested IE institution of the youthful male war-band, symbolized by transformation into a dog or wolf'.

Pausanias (iii, 14, 8–10) describes a ritual battle near Sparta between two bands of adolescents, each of which sacrificed a hound's whelp to the war-god Enyalios the night before and also set trained wild boars to fight as a foretaste of the next day's contest. In Plutarch's (*Romulus* 21) account of the Lupercalia, 'we see the Luperci beginning the circuit from where they say that Romulus was exposed ... For they kill goats ... [and], having cut the goats' skins into strips, they run about naked wearing [only] belts, striking anyone in the way with the leather strips ... It is a feature of the festival that the Luperci also sacrifice a dog'. Valerius Maximus (ii, 2, 9) implies that their two colleges shared a bibulous meal before the run: 'The custom of the Lupercalia was initiated by Romulus and Remus when, exulting joyfully ... and having followed their rearer Faustulus' advice to perform a sacrifice and slay goats beneath the Palatine Mount ..., under the influence of the merriment and rather abundant wine of the feast they divided the band of shepherds into two and, girt in the skins of the sacrificed victims, playfully made for those in their way. The memory of this merriment is repeated in the annual round of festivals'. Livy (xl, 6–7) records the prelude to an incident involving a Macedonian king's two sons: 'the time for purifying (*lustrandi*) the army had come, its ceremony being as follows. The head of a bitch cut through the middle is placed on the right and the rear part plus entrails is placed on the left of a road. The armed forces are led between this divided victim ... His two young sons (*filiu iuvenes*) flanked the king ... It was the custom, after the rite had been completed, for the army to perform exercises and for two double lines to run together in imitation of a battle. The royal youths (*regii iuvenes*) were made leaders (*duces*) of the sportive contest. However, it was not a mock battle but they ran together as if fighting for the kingship and many wounds were inflicted with sticks ... That day each [son] held a feast for the comrades (*sodales*) who had performed together ... Then recollection of the mock combat and jocular remarks were tossed at the opposition, not even the leaders themselves being spared'. A striking Hittite parallel for the first part is recorded about 1300 BC: 'When troops are defeated by the enemy, they then arrange a sacrifice beside the river as follows. Behind the river they cut a man, a kid, a pup [and] a piglet through the middle and lay [one set of] the halves on one side and the [other] halves on the other

side ... The troops pass through the middle. However, as soon as they have reached the river sideways, they sprinkle water over them. Then they perform the campaign ritual as they always perform a campaign ritual' (KÜMMEL 1967: 150–1).

All four rituals include a canine sacrifice and three are characterised by duality: two dogs at Sparta, and one split into two among Hittites and Macedonians. Three versions add pigs and/or goats (all but Macedon) and aggressive behaviour by two groups of youths: a mock battle in Sparta and Macedon, flagellation of bystanders in Rome. The Roman and Macedonian gatherings also included a shared feast accompanied by badinage. This rather circumstantial set of correspondences points to an underlying PIE prototype with a military orientation and a purificatory purpose (also apparent in the Hittite and Roman rites¹⁶) along lines identified in Macedon by PARKER (1983: 22): 'each spring, when the Macedonian army reassembled, it was marched between the two halves of a sacrificed dog, which created what has been called an "absorptive zone" for all its impurities ... After the purification had, as it were, reconstituted the men as an army, they divided into two halves and proceeded to behave as an army in simulated fight'. One might add that the prominent role of youths in Macedon, Rome and Sparta indicates a ritual basically connected with sodalities, the binary tendencies of which (HÖFLER 1934: 159) are reflected by the splitting first of the hound into two halves and then of the youthful participants into two groups. These may well then have been reunited at a feast (also implied between the goat-sacrifice and the run in the Lupercalia, as noted above) in accordance with the Macedonian pattern of sacrifice → mock battle → feast and VAN GENNEP's (1960: 20–1) threefold scheme of *preliminal* 'rites of separation from a previous world', *liminal* 'transition rites' and *postliminal* 'ceremonies of incorporation into the new world': "Purifications" (washing, cleansing, etc.) constitute rites of separation from previous surroundings; there follow rites of incorporation (presentation of salt, a shared meal, etc.)'. This analysis would imply an original ritual of renewal by purging a warband of past impurity (separation), dividing it to test its mettle (transition) and then reassembling it (incorporation).

A pup (along with a piglet,¹⁷ a kid and a man) was split in two in the Hittite sacrifice but there is no mention of a subsequent mock battle or feast. By contrast, classical sources record the ancient Gauls' penchant for combining mock battles and other contests with feasts but do not mention any associated killing of a dog, pig or the like. For instance, Athenaeus (iv, 154a–b) quotes

¹⁶ The Lupercalia took place in February, the month of *februum* 'purification', and were explicitly associated with cleansing (e.g. Plutarch *Romulus* 21; Dion. Hal. i, 80), which was presumably symbolised by the sprinkling of water in the Hittite ritual.

¹⁷ Cf. the fighting boars in the Spartan ritual. KÜMMEL (1967: 152) emphasises the Hittite combination of a pig with a dog on grounds of their relative infrequency as victims and possible 'chthonic connection'.

Posidonius' since lost history as follows: 'The Celts sometimes have single combats during dinner. Having assembled under arms, they indulge in sham fights ... [and] sometimes they proceed even to the point of wounding each other, and then, exasperated by this, if the company does not intervene, they go as far as to kill. In ancient times ... when whole joints of meat were served, the best man received the thigh but, if another man claimed it, they stood up to fight it out in single combat to the death'. Probably also drawing on Posidonius, Diodorus (v, 29, 3) notes that boasting and single combat go hand in hand: 'When any man accepts the challenge to battle, they then break forth into a song in praise of the valiant deeds of their ancestors and in boast of their own high achievements, reviling all the while and belittling their opponent'. Note has duly been taken (e.g. by CHADWICK 1968: 82–3) of obvious similarities with the happenings at Mac Da Thó's feast, where the severing of a pig's forequarters is at least suggestive in the light of the non-Celtic IE evidence just discussed.

The already mentioned practice of *gabál gaiscid*, whereby a youth was presented with a spear and shield as a prelude to a first expedition away from home, was evidently traditional and is recorded by Tacitus (*Germ.* 13, 1) in the 1st century AD among the Gauls' Germanic neighbours: 'It is not customary for anyone to take arms until the state has approved the candidate. Then in the council itself one of the leaders (*principes*) or the father or relatives provide the young man with shield and spear (*scuto frameaque iuvenem ornant*). This among them is the toga of manhood, this the first distinction of youth. Before this they are regarded as part of the home, thereafter (as part) of the state'. Moreover, the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* §43, 4–5 (see RHODES 2017) refers to an annual assembly at which ephebes publicly demonstrate their manoeuvres, receive a shield and spear from the city (*ἀσπίδα καὶ δόρυ παρὰ τῆς πόλεως*) and are sent out on patrol to guard the territory for two years. It has been pointed out above that signal misfortune befalls the two warriors who make their first forays after similarly receiving *gaisced* in *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*. An inherited warrior ritual centred upon the aforementioned sacrificial cutting of a dog (sometimes along with a pig) into front and rear halves may similarly have been targeted by the tale's basic plot: two hostile groups of armed warriors¹⁸ assemble for a feast upon a great pig, engage in boasting contests to determine who shall divide it and are finally provoked into a fight resulting in many deaths, including that of the hound responsible for their attendance in the first place when its head is severed from its body. The succession of divisive feast, real battle and the dog's beheading in the tale is the inverse of the ritual sequence posited above, namely the transversal cutting of a dog into two, a mock battle and a reuniting feast. This could well have been intentional for the satirical purpose of parody in the admittedly uncertain event of a martial rite of this type still being practised, however marginally (see below on a surviving

¹⁸ Evident from the reference in §8 to Cet raising his arms (*gaisced*) over those of the rest of the company and the rapidity with which a bloody conflict breaks out in §18.

“pagan fringe” of *fian*-members, druids and others), or at least remembered as late as the 9th or 10th century AD in Ireland.

Culann’s hound as well as the Greek pair Cerberus and Orthus were overcome by the greatest of heroes, Cú Chulainn and Heracles respectively. In stark contrast, Mac Da Thó’s guard-dog Ailbe was slain by the mere charioteer Fer Loga, a normally non-combatant underling. The potent martial symbolism of the hound in pagan myth and ritual was thereby devalued, presumably with a deliberate satirical intent already observed in relation to the warrior customs of *gabál gaiscid* and contentious feasting.

It is now time to return to the key body-parts lost in the second (hand), third (eye), fourth (head) and fifth (foot) of the seven contests against Cet (§§9–14 in Thurneysen’s edition) cited at the beginning of this study. Regular involvement in fighting with sharp weapons naturally entailed above-average risks of losing an eye or a limb: modern stereotypes of the pirate with an eye patch, a hook for a hand or a wooden leg are obviously rooted in reality, and well-known actual instances include Nelson, who lost an arm and the sight of an eye in battle, as well as the Iberian Peninsula’s two sixteenth-century literary giants, Portugal’s Camões and Spain’s Cervantes, who lost an eye and the use of an arm respectively in military actions. That said, the frequency with which the loss or lack of an eye, hand/arm or foot/leg is mentioned in medieval Irish and other sources suggests that these mutilations had acquired a special significance. Obviously, deprivation of both eyes, arms or legs would end a fighting career, as would loss of a single leg or foot as a rule. A missing arm or hand would be a serious inconvenience, especially on the usually stronger right side, but loss of one eye was less likely to impair a warrior’s effectiveness unduly and so was particularly prone to exploitation. Head/eye, arm/hand, and leg/foot were basically differentiated as whole/part but, whereas a hand and a foot were interchangeable with an arm and a leg respectively as a rule, the inevitable fatality of its loss precluded straightforward substitution of a head for an eye.

The highlighting of head-hunting and its brutally shocking consequences in *Scéla Muicce* reflects the regularity with which slain enemies’ heads are cut off as trophies in early Irish sagas. A couple of examples involving Cú Chulainn will suffice here: at the tender age of seven he successively defeated the three sons of Necht(a) Scéne in single combat, beheaded them and returned in triumph to Emain with these and other spoils on his already mentioned first expedition into enemy territory, and later in the *Táin* (O’RAHILLY 1976: ll. 2364–5) he donned festive apparel to show himself to the enemy with ‘nine heads in one hand’ and ‘ten heads in the other hand’, which he ‘shook from him at the hosts’ as ‘the trophy of a night(’s fighting)’. A similar Gaulish practice is mentioned disapprovingly by Greek and Roman authors such as Diodorus (v, 29, 5) and Strabo (iv, 4, 5), who refers to the eyewitness evidence of his source: ‘In addition to this folly there is also the barbarian and inhuman practice mostly followed by northern nations, namely suspending enemies’ heads from the

necks of their horses on leaving battle, bringing them [home] and fixing them to their portals. At least, Posidonius says that he himself saw this sight in many places and at first was discomfited by it but subsequently endured it calmly on account of familiarity. They embalm the heads of the famous in cedar oil and show them to strangers and are not prepared to dispose of them even for their weight in gold'. Accounts of particular incidents include Polybius' statement that in 218 BC 'the Celts attacked the Romans encamped near them. They killed many of them and wounded not a few. Finally, cutting off the heads of the dead, they went over to the Carthaginians' (iii, 67). Livy (xxiii, 24, 11–12) refers to an ambush of Romans by Cisalpine Gauls in 216 BC: 'Postumius fell while striving with all his might not to be taken captive. The Boii triumphantly brought the body, spoils and severed head of the general to a temple that is most holy among them. They then cleaned the head, as is their custom, and plated the cranium with gold, and that was a sacred vessel for them, with which they made libations at solemnities, and also a cup for the priests and chief'. The literary record is corroborated by archaeological evidence from the Iberian Peninsula, Gaul and Britain, and around the middle of the first century BC, Caesar's Gaulish opponent Dumnorix minted coins bearing his name and the image of a warrior with a severed head in his left hand.¹⁹

Herodotus (iv, 64, 1) states that a Scythian soldier typically 'carries off the heads of all those that he kills in battle to the king. For he who has brought back the head shares in the booty taken but not he who has not brought it back'. After describing the scalps' preparation for hanging as trophies from horses' bridles, he adds (65, 1) that 'they treat the heads, not of all but of the most hated, as follows: having sawn off everything below the brows, he cleans it out and, if he be poor, stretches raw cowhide only around the outside and uses it but, if he be rich, he stretches the cow hide around the outside, plates it with gold inside and thus uses it as a drinking vessel'. The Thracians to the south also displayed severed enemy heads, to judge from Livy's account (xlii, 60) of an incident in 171 BC: 'Two hundred cavalry (and) scarcely fewer than two thousand Roman footsoldiers fell on that day, whereas of the king's (force) twenty horse and forty foot were killed. After they had returned victorious to camp, all were happy, (but) the excessive joy of the Thracians stood out above all. For they returned singing, bearing the heads of the enemy fixed upon the tips of their spears'. Striking Germanic instances include 'heads fixed onto the trunks of trees (*truncis arborum antefixa ora*)' after the massacre of Varus' three legions in 15 AD (Tacitus, *Annals* i, 61) and Paul the Deacon's (*Historia Langobardorum*, 27) statement regarding a Lombard and a Gepid king that 'in that battle Alboin killed Cunimundus and made a drinking vessel out of his removed head'.

¹⁹ See, for instance, REINACH 1913, BIRKHAN 1997: 817–19 and ELLIS DAVIDSON 1988: 72–3. Stone figures holding heads from the nearby 3rd-century BC Entremont site are displayed in the Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, and images may be found under 'archéologie' on the museum website or in JAMES 1993: 44–6 and 82.

According to FINLEY (1967: 138), ‘a trophy is lasting evidence, to be displayed at all appropriate occasions. Among more primitive peoples the victim’s head served that honorific purpose; in Homer’s Greece armour replaced heads’. Even so, the *Iliad* records a Trojan’s declared intention of taking Menelaus’ head home in revenge for his slain brother (xvii, 39–40) and Hector’s resolve to sever the head from Patroclus’ corpse and display it on a stake (xviii, 176–7), although neither was fulfilled. Moreover, in a well-known Greek myth (Apollodorus, *Epit.* ii, 5) Hippodamea’s suitors were given a start in a chariot race by her father, Oenomaus, who cut off their heads and nailed them to his house for display after overtaking and killing them. As for Roman sources, Vergil (Aeneid viii, 196–7) mentions slain victims’ heads hanging outside the entrance to the mythical Cacus’ cave in Italy. Livy records the display of a Roman legate’s head in battle by the neighbouring Aequi in 464 BC (iii, 5, 9) and Cossus’ tide-turning feat of riding against the Veian king, striking him from his horse, killing him with a spear, cutting off his head and displaying it on a spike in 437 BC (iv, 19, 1–5). He also mentions the promise of freedom in 214 BC to any Roman soldier who brought back an enemy head (xxiv, 14, 7), although this proved too time-consuming in the heat of battle and was rescinded (15, 3–6), and the casting down of the slain Hasdrubal’s head outside his brother Hannibal’s camp in 207 BC (xxvii, 51). It appears, then, that major “barbarian” peoples of Europe in classical antiquity such as the Scyths, Celts and Teutons retained a practice of head-hunting already abandoned by the Greeks and Romans, but not without trace.

The retention of severed heads as trophies looks like a medieval Irish survival of an ancient Celtic custom, quite possibly one with deeper Indo-European roots. The point of the tale’s moral satire would be blunted somewhat if this was no more than a literary motif by the time of *Scéla Muicce*’s composition, but a striking real-life occurrence is attested as late as 1169: the bringing of some two hundred heads of enemies slain in a battle against the Osraige to Díarmait mac Murchada that is recorded in two separate accounts of the Norman invasion of Ireland by authors with access to some of those involved.²⁰

There are occasional references to taking an arm as a trophy or offering. After Cú Chulainn had been killed, ‘Lugaid then arranged his hair behind him and smote his head from him. Thereafter his sword fell from Cú Chulainn’s hand and struck his arm from Lugaid so that it was on the ground. His arm is then struck from Cú Chulainn in revenge. The hosts then depart and take Cú Chulainn’s head and arm with them until they reached Tara. So, it is there that the grave of his head and his arm is’ (KIMPTON 2009: 24, ll. 382–7). When Cú Chulainn’s foster-brother, Conall Cernach, caught up with Lugaid, he agreed to fight him with one arm bound to his side in the interests of fairness,

²⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica* i, 4, 8–23 (SCOTT & MARTIN 1978; see xviii–xix on his relations with eyewitnesses) and ll. 768–83 of an Old French *chanson de geste* (MULLALLY 2002; see 27–37 on ‘author, date and patronage’).

defeated him and struck off his head (KIMPTON 2009: 26–7, §§28–9). Thus, the occasionally one-eyed Cú Chulainn loses his head and takes Lugaid’s arm off. In return, his own arm is cut off but this is requited when the temporarily one-armed Conall severs Lugaid’s head. Herodotus (iv, 64, 3) records a Scythian practice of skinning victims’ right arms to make covers for their quivers, and Strabo (iii, 3, 6) states that the Lusitanians, an IE people of the western Iberian Peninsula, used to cut off and offer up the right hands of prisoners of war.

As has been seen, Cet’s boast about removing the head of Muinremur’s son (4) is directly preceded by his boasts about cutting off the hand of one opponent’s father (2) and knocking out another opponent’s eye (3). Pairings of a one-eyed figure with another lacking a hand or arm in Germanic myth (Óðinn and Týr) and Roman legend (Horatius Cocles or ‘Cyclops’²¹ and Mucius Scaevola or ‘Left-handed’) make a major contribution to Dumézil’s system, two legendary Irish rulers (Lug and Núadu) having been added as a further support by DE VRIES (1961: 154). DUMÉZIL (e.g. 1974) views such pairs as reflexes of complementarily twinned gods, one lacking an eye (‘*dieu borgne*’) and the other a hand or arm (‘*dieu manchot*’), a western IE configuration corresponding to the sometimes paired but physically unimpaired Vedic gods Varuṇa and Mitra as an embodiment of interlocking “magical” and “contractual” halves of a sovereign “first function” (see McCONE 1996a: 94–5 and 108–9). However, even if doubts about the validity of Dumézil’s overall trifunctional model and his evaluation of early Indic evidence relating to Mitra and Varuṇa (McCONE 2020: 163) are discounted, there remain serious objections to this scenario, as even his generally sympathetic critic LITTLETON (1973: 87) concedes: ‘Granting the Roman tendency towards historicizing myth, the connection between Horatius Cocles and Othinn the One-eyed nevertheless seems remote; if Jupiter and Dius Fidius, or even Romulus and Numa, exhibited these characteristics, or if there

²¹ Cocles is ‘nothing more than the Etruscanized form of Κύκλωψ’ /kyklōps/ according to PALMER 1954: 52. Pliny (*Nat. hist.* xi, 55, 150) says that ‘they were called “cocles” (*coclites*) from those born deprived of one eye’, and Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* x, 163) that ‘the ancients called the one-eyed (*lusci*) “cocles” (*coclites*), whence we read that the cyclopes (*cyclopes*) too were called “cocles” (*coclites*) because they are stated to have had one eye’. Horatius is surnamed Cocles without comment in the earliest extant account by Polybius (vi, 55), who links his fully armed jump into the Tiber after heroic defence of a bridge to the ambition fostered in the young by the recalling of great ancestors’ deeds at Roman funerals (vi, 54, 3). In later versions (Livy, ii, 10; Dion. Hal. v, 23–5; Plutarch, *Publicola* 16, 4–7) he survived his plunge after holding Lars Porsenna’s men long enough for the bridge to be cut down. Dionysius (v, 23, 2) and Plutarch (*Publicola* 16, 4–5) ascribe his nickname to loss of an eye in battle (cf. *De viris illustribus* 11: *illo cognomine quod in alio proelio oculum amiserat*). Dionysius contrasts his two companions ‘from the older men’ with Cocles ‘from the younger ones’. However, Livy evidently deemed a physically unimpaired mature fighter more decorous and made him a ‘man (*vir*) ... threateningly shifting his ferocious eyes (*truces oculos*) around towards the Etruscan leaders’.

were some evidence that Varuna and Mitra or their Iranian counterparts were so afflicted, the theory would be more convincing'. Cocles and Scaevola, neither of whom is said to have attained high office, are unambiguously depicted in Roman sources as fighters, not rulers. Lug and Núadu may be erstwhile deities (e.g. DE VRIES 1961: 50–55 and 100–4) euhemerised as kings but battle was the reason for the former's one-eyed performance as well as the latter's loss of an arm and with it the kingship. The one-eyed Óðinn is king of the gods in Norse mythology and may have displaced the one-armed Týr's precursor **Tīuz* in that role, but ELLIS DAVIDSON (1964: 48–72) has presented good evidence that both were primarily gods of war (cf. McCONE 2020: 110–11).

It thus looks as if the common denominator of these and other one-eyed and one-armed western figures was warfare not sovereignty, the incompatibility of which with the lack of an eye or an arm is not only clearly implied by Núadu's case but also made quite explicit in several medieval Irish texts (McCONE 2020: 86). Moreover, a third body-part appears in a number of instances but not in Dumézil's scheme: Cet also boasted of hacking off the foot of an opponent's father (5), Lug hopped on one leg while closing one eye, and Horatius Cocles' inability to serve the state further after heroically defending the bridge was due not to his loss of an eye in but to lameness caused by a spear through the buttock according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (v, 25, 3; cf. v, 23, 2 and 24, 3) and Plutarch (*Publicola* 16, 6–7). Evidence presented elsewhere (McCONE 1996a: 95–9) for the martial orientation of three rather than just two physical defects will now be summarised with some additions and omissions.

In the saga *Cath Maige Tuired* (GRAY 1982), loss of his hand in battle obliged Núadu to abdicate (§§11, 14) but, fitted with a silver hand (§§11, 33), he resumed rule over the Túatha Dé Danann (§53) after his successor Bres had been expelled for unkingly meanness. When Bres tried to regain the throne by invading Ireland with a host of Fomorians ('men with single arms and single legs' according to *LL* 486–9), Núadu temporarily relinquished leadership to the recently recruited Lug and battle was joined. At a crucial point 'Lug was strengthening the men of Ireland that they might give battle vehemently ... And it is there that Lug chanted this chant going on one leg and with one eye around the men of Ireland' (§129). A single eye was a fundamental attribute of the Germanic god Óðinn but was only adopted temporarily by his arguable Celtic counterpart Lug in a ritual that also involved hopping on one leg. The latter combination occurs as a permanent feature in the medieval Welsh romance *Owein*, which states of an ugly 'large black man (*gwr du mawr*)' with a large iron staff about to be encountered amidst wild animals in the woods that 'he has one foot, and one eye in the middle of his forehead' (*vn troet yssyd idaw, ac vn llygat yg knewillyn y tal*; THOMSON 1968: ll. 108–14).²²

²² Although the relationship between this text and the Old French romance *Yvain* composed in the late 1170s by Chrétien de Troyes is unclear (see RECK 2010: 61–5), the

In two episodes in ‘The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel’ (KNOTT 1936: ll. 345–72 and 535–79), the king of Ireland, Conaire, encountered firstly a ‘short-black-haired man with one eye and one arm and one leg’ (345–6) called Fer Caille and later a loathsome woman who chanted a prophecy of his and his followers’ doom in the forthcoming battle ‘on one leg and with one breath’ (562). Having predicted in the incompletely preserved Old/Middle Irish version of his death-tale that ‘witches blind in the left eye will bring about my destruction’ (KIMPTON 2009: 16, §10, ll. 142–3), Cú Chulainn happened upon three of these cooking and was obliged by them to eat the forbidden flesh of his namesake, the hound (*cú*), with debilitating effects. A fully preserved Early Modern Irish version (VAN HAMEL 1933: 72–133) begins with the death of Calatín and his twenty-seven sons at Cú Chulainn’s hands. When his pregnant wife bore three sons and three daughters, Medb ‘came to them and made six mute sorcerers blind in the left eye of them’ and arranged for them to acquire the knowledge and weapons that would bring about his death. There was ‘a large red broad and dark single eye in the forehead of each sorcerer and a sinewy single hand with long nails from the breast of each sorcerer’s body and a twisted, leathery, thin, ugly single leg from the backside of each evil scald-crow’ (§30). Cú Chulainn’s achievements in his final battle included ‘the severing of eight hundred right hands, (and) the blinding of eight hundred eyes so that he left all that host under blemish (*fo anim*) in his wake on the one day’ (KIMPTON 2009: 32; §34, ll. 636–42).

KILLEEN (1971) has argued that the classical motif of the warrior with only one foot shod simulates one-leggedness. For instance, Jason lost a sandal in the river on his way to Iolcus and so arrived carrying two spears and wearing a leopard-skin but, as an oracle had warned, only one shoe according to Pindar (*Pythian* iv, 70–119). Vergil’s *Aeneid* (vii, 678–90) describes Caeculus and his men as follows: ‘Also present was the founder of the city of Praeneste, whom every age has believed to have been born of Vulcan among rustic flocks to be king and to have been found on the hearth, Caeculus. He is abundantly accompanied by a wild troop ... None of these has resounding arms, shields or chariots. Most cast balls of dark lead, some bear two javelins, one in each hand, and they have tawny caps of wolfskin as a covering for the head. They made bare-footed tracks on the left side and a raw leather boot covers the other’. *Caeculus* is derived from *caecus* by the suffix also seen in the name of Romulus, another herdsman’s fosterling and leader of young brigands. Once *caecus* had come to mean ‘blind’ in the prehistory of Latin, Caeculus could be said to owe his name to two very small eyes (see BREMMER 1987: 49) but an original sense ‘blind in one eye’ is guaranteed by Celtic and Germanic cognates:

motif of the one-eyed and one-footed giant is evidently a native Welsh one as it is missing from Chrétien’s account, lines 269–93 of which refer to a huge, ugly churl ‘who looked like a Moor’ sitting with a great club in his hand on a tree stump near wild bulls fighting in a clearing (OWEN 1993: 284).

OIr. *cáech*, OCorn. *cuic* (glossing Lat. *luscus vel monoptalmus*) and Goth. *haihs* (translating Gk. μονόφθαλμος), all meaning 'blind in one eye' (cf. Skt. *keka-ra-* 'squint-eyed' and the early Indian warrior tribe of *Keka-yāh*). This implies a cyclops at the head of a wild one-shoed army wearing wolfskin caps, and invites comparison with the one-eyed Germanic deity **Uōdanaz* with his following of berserk warriors or 'wolfskins' (e.g. KERSHAW 2000: 7–8). It looks, then, as though the warrior with only one shoe was a ritualised counterpart of the largely mythical one-footed fighter. Although there seem to be no examples in medieval Irish or British literature, a 13th-century Welsh manuscript²³ contains two striking images of warriors with one foot bare and the other covered, while the French *Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monsrelet* (i, 404; COSGROVE 1981: 73–4) refer to the stocking and shoe worn on one leg only by a troop of Irishmen brought to France in 1418 by Thomas Butler in support of Henry V of England. Late though these sources are, the usages look old.

A study of the Lithuanian *Vėlnias*, *Vėlenas* or *Vėlinas*, now the name of a devil but described as a god of the dead in a Latvian grammar of 1783, notes that belief in ghostly fighters or hunters known as *vėles* survived into the later nineteenth century and that 'Velinas' one eye is magic, like the Germanic Odin's ... From a description of Lithuanian paganism in 1595 by Henneberger we learn that there was a holy spring Gobbe near Isrutis (Insterburg) in Lithuania Minor, to which men came "to become one-eyed", that is to sacrifice one eye. It was a great honour to be one-eyed and some one-eyed old men were still living in Henneberger's time' (GIMBUTAS 1974: 89). Given the frequent linkage of myths with rituals (e.g. McCONE 2020: 100), a similar erstwhile pagan Nordic practice may be plausibly inferred from Snorri Sturluson's account of a spring (*Mímisbrunnr*) under one of the ash *Yggdrasil*'s great roots, a source of wisdom from which its owner Mimir drank with the Giallarhorn: 'Thither came Allfather (*Allfǫðr* = Óðinn) and asked for a drink from the spring and he did not get it until he had set down his eye as a pledge' (*Gylfaginning* xv; LORENZ 1984: 233–4). Cyclopism, it seems, was sufficiently prestigious for an eye to be deliberately pledged and sacrificed on occasion. Plutarch (*Lycurgus* 11, 1–2) records that the legendary founder of ancient Sparta's militaristic social system, Lycurgus or 'Wolf-actor', was fleeing a fracas when Alcander, an impetuous youth (νεανίσκος ... ὁξὺς δὲ καὶ θυμοειδής) who later became his devoted follower, knocked out one of his eyes. This was dedicated to Athene Ophthalmitis by Lycurgus in a temple raised at the place of refuge from his pursuers (Pausanias iii, 18, 8).

The deliberate sacrifice of a hand also figures in a couple of mythical or legendary narratives. The lame 'Cyclops' Horatius' defence of the Roman bridge forms a virtual diptych with a subsequent heroic action in the same brief war. Livy (ii, 12–13) tells how, during Porsenna's siege of Rome after the failed

²³ Chapter House Liber A: images in McCONE 2002: 59 and at http://warfare.gq/13/Chapter_House-Liber_A.htm.

assault on the bridge, a ‘noble youth’ (*adulescens nobilis*) named C. Mucius was apprehended in an attempt to assassinate the Etruscan king and declared that the whole Roman youth (*iuventus Romana*) was ready to follow his example one by one, if need be. Threatened with burning if he did not reveal all, Mucius showed his contempt by thrusting his right hand into the fire to be burned, so impressing the king that he let him go. Alarmed by Mucius’ warning that his fellow conspirators were ‘three hundred leaders of the Roman youth (*trecenti ... principes iuventutis Romanae*)’,²⁴ Porsenna sued for peace and Mucius was nicknamed Scaevola ‘the Lefthanded’ on account of the loss of his right. As for the Norse Týr, ‘he to a large extent decides the victory in fights. It is good for brave men to invoke him ... This is evidence for his courage. When the Æsir were leading the Fenris wolf (*fenrisúlfr*) in order to place the fetter Gleipnir on him, he did not trust them to release him until they placed Týr’s hand in the wolf’s mouth as a pledge. When the Æsir were not prepared to release him, he then bit off the hand which is now called Wolf-limb (*úlf-liðr*), and he [Týr] is one-handed (*ein-hendr*)’ (*Gylfaginning* xxv; LORENZ 1984: 348).

When battle fury comes upon him, Cú Chulainn undergoes a fearsome set of distortions called *riastrad*. The first of his *Macgnímrada* or ‘boyhood deeds’ contains the earliest occurrence in response to an attack by Conchobor’s fosterlings for seeking to join their band without performing the requisite admission ceremony: ‘Thereupon distortion came (*riastartha*) upon him. You would have thought that every hair had been driven into his head by the way it rose up. You would have thought it was a spark of fire that was on every single hair. He closed one eye so that it was no wider than the eye of a needle. He opened the other so that it was as large as the mouth of a mead vessel ... The warrior’s moon rose from his crown’ (O’RAHILLY 1976: ll. 428–34). Cú Chulainn thus became a cyclops in this irresistible state and this was precisely the trait imitated by his many female admirers in Ulster according to the saga *Talland Étaíre*: ‘The third who loved Cú Chulainn were one-eyed (*goll*) when talking to you’ (Ó DÓNAILL 2005: ll. 216–17).²⁵ Cú Chulainn’s first adult *riastrad* distorts his legs and head as he gets literally fired up: ‘A crooked-bout of reaving (*sáeb-glés díberge*) befell his body within his skin. His feet and shins and knees shifted to his rear. His heels and calves and haunches shifted to his front ... He sucked one eye into his head such that a wild crane would not manage to pick it from the back of his skull to the surface of his cheek. Its companion jumped out onto his

²⁴ In Dionysius’ similar account (v, 27–35), his followers were ‘three hundred men of the same age from the ranks of the patricians (ἄνδρες τριακόσιοι τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχοντες ἡλικίαν ἐκ τοῦ γένους τῶν πατρικίων)’ (v, 29, 3). Dionysius ignores the burning of Mucius’ hand found in Plutarch’s version (*Publicola* 17) as well as Livy’s.

²⁵ *Serglige Con Culainn* goes even further: ‘Similarly every woman who loved Cú Chulainn used then to blind (*no:gollad*) her eye in the likeness of Cú Chulainn and for love of him. For it was his practice, when his disposition was bad, to swallow up one eye so that a crane would not reach it in his head. The other one used to rise up as big as a cauldron capable of holding a two-year-old heifer’ (see DILLON 1953: ll. 42–6).

cheek ... The candles of the war-goddess (Badb) and the rain-clouds of venom and the sparks of flaming red fire were seen in clouds and gusts above his head in response to the seething (*fiuchad*) of truly fierce frenzy that rose above him ... The warrior's moon (*lúan láith*) arose out of his forehead ...' (O'RAHILLY 1976: ll. 2245–78).

Muirchu's late seventh-century Latin Life of Saint Patrick describes a practitioner of *díberg* 'reaving' as follows: 'There was a certain man in Ulster territory in Patrick's time, Macuil moccu Greccae, and this man was an exceedingly impious cruel tyrant, so that he was called a cyclops (*cyclops*) ... Such were the depths of impiety to which he was inclined that sitting one day in a mountainous, wild and high place in Druim moccu Echach, where he daily exercised his tyranny by taking up most wicked signs of cruelty (*signa ... nequissima crudelitatis* glossed by Old Irish *díberca*, the plural of *díberg*) and slaying passers-by with cruel criminality, he also saw ... Patrick ... and thought to kill him' (BIELER 1979: 102). After their arrest and banishment in 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel', Ireland's *díbergaig* came across British counterparts under the leadership of Ingcél 'the One-eyed': 'When they reached the high sea they encountered Ingcél Cáech and Éiccel and Tulchinne, three descendants of Conmac of Britain, on the raging sea. An ungentle, big, terrifying, strange looking man was Ingcél. A single eye in his head as broad as an oxhide and as black as smoke, and three pupils in it. Three hundred in his reaving band (*fo churp a díbergae*). The Irish reavers (*díbergaig*) were more numerous than they' (LU 6863–8, cf. KNOTT 1936: ll. 403–9). The two bands coalesced after doing a deal to raid first Britain and then Ireland, the second leg culminating in a disastrous conflict at Da Derga's hostel. Early Irish cyclopes, then, were typically connected with warrior activity, especially the *díberg* practised by the mostly youthful members of a *fian*. The Middle Irish 'Cause of the Battle of Cnucha' (*Fotha Catha Cnucha*, LU 3135–3219) tells how the *rig-fénnid* or chief *fian*-warrior 'Cumall fell at the hand of [his successor] Goll son of Morna. Luchet wounded him in his visage so that it destroyed his eye so that it is from that the name Goll ["blind in one eye"] stuck to him' (LU 3176–8; see NAGY 1985: 83–7).

The legendary Irish *fian*-band of ferocious *díbergs* led by a cyclops such as Ingcél or Goll has obvious counterparts in the one-eyed Germanic deity Óðinn leading his rabid berserks, the Latin Caeculus 'the One-eyed' with his wild followers wearing single shoes and wolfskin caps (cf. the three hundred *iuvenes* at the one-armed Mucius Scaevola's beck and call), and the fearsome 'one-eyed' (*ekākṣa*; *Mhb.* xiii, 146, 2) Indian god Rudra with his divine band of youthful Maruts or 'Rudras' (e.g. MACDONELL 1917: 21–3).²⁶ Lug's ritual chant on one leg and Cocles' laming by a wound to his thigh indicate the further possibility

²⁶ Ancient Greek cyclopes do not conform so straightforwardly to this pattern. The transformation of mighty one-eyed warriors prone to fiery outbursts into the trio of mighty one-eyed forgers of Zeus' thunderbolts (Hesiod, *Theogony* 139–45) seems

of juxtaposing a one-armed or one-handed figure (Núadu and Scaevola respectively) and another with only one eye and one properly functioning leg. Individuals might even lack an eye, an arm and a leg simultaneously in early Irish narratives.

Far from supporting Dumézil's ascription of the "borgne" and "manchot" to his sovereign "first function", the evidence indicates widespread regard for a missing eye, hand/arm or foot/leg as a highly visible casualty of eminently "second-function" warfare. Such was the esteem for these defects as enduring symbols of their bearers' past or current military activity that they acquired cultic and mythical significance in relation to a warrior's frenzy-induced prowess and might even be self-inflicted or imitated ritually. Their status as badges of martial distinction is presumably why Cet devotes one of three successive boasts (interrupted only by a brief one about the taking of heads) to each of them in turn in *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*. However, its author characteristically undermines the awe that such disfigurements conventionally inspired and converts them into emblems of shame by picturing an all too likely way of incurring them: demeaning defeat in combat.

THURNEYSSEN's edition sought (1935: iii–iv) 'not to reconstruct the original', but 'the common source from which the three principal MSS. derive ... [, namely] a transcript containing a certain amount of later forms introduced by successive copyists. Judging by the language on the whole, I think the original tale was composed (roughly) about A.D. 800' but, on the basis of various Middle Irish forms found in all three witnesses, 'we may presume a common source, say, of the tenth or eleventh century'. A more flexible date of composition between the early ninth and the early tenth century AD might be inferred from the language of the extant manuscript copies, in which case a later 'common source' might be dispensed with by ascribing the original to the late 9th or early 10th century AD when (Late) Old was giving way to (Early) Middle

natural enough. Even the apparently opposite pastoral lifestyle of the ferocious Polyphemus and his fellows displays familiar attributes of Celtic or Germanic sodalities, namely non-involvement with agriculture, life in the mountainous wilds and freedom from the laws and institutions of normal settled society: 'We came to the land of the overbearing, lawless Cyclopes, who trusting in the immortal gods neither plant crops by hand nor till them, but everything grows unsown and untilled ... They have neither assemblies for counsel nor laws but inhabit the peaks of high mountains in hollow caves and each governs his children and wives and they pay no heed to each other' (*Odyssey* ix, 106–15). The legend of Romulus and Remus attests to the association of sodalities with herdsmen in the wilds, and a shift from wolfish warrior to savage shepherd would resemble the inversion seen in the infant Zeus' nurture by wild young Curetes and a she-goat instead of herdsmen and a she-wolf (McCONE 1996a: 106). His encounter with the man-eating Polyphemus consigned Odysseus to nine years of wandering that has been aptly compared with the cannibalistic initiation of an Arcadian 'werewolf' into a similar period in the wilds away from home (BURKERT 1983: 133; cf. McCONE 2020: 95).

Irish. The story's considerable and enduring popularity is indicated by various poetic allusions (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 498–500, and 1935: v–vi and 20–4), the adoption of Fer Loga's name in the "second recension" of the *Táin* (note 9 above), and its survival in several different manuscripts and versions: the probably 9th- or early 10th-century original in three mss., some remoulding in another (Rawl. B 512; text published below that of the older version in THURNEYSSEN 1935: 1–20) dated to the 11th or 12th century by THURNEYSSEN (1935: ii–iii), and a modern reworking edited by BREATNACH (1996: 64–91) and dated by him to the later 16th century (BREATNACH 1996: 22–32).

II.

It is now time to turn to *Waltharius*, a 1456-line continental epic with a Germanic orientation composed in Latin hexameters in the 9th or 10th century AD and quite widely read in the Middle Ages on the evidence of rather numerous surviving manuscript copies (STRECKER 1947: 6–8).²⁷ Apart from its intrinsic merits and interest, it is notable for the first literary appearance of Hagen and King Gibich's son and successor Gunther, both prominent in the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* produced two or three centuries later and thence in *Götterdämmerung*, the final opera of Wagner's 19th-century *Ring* tetralogy.²⁸ Tantalisingly, Gunther of Worms and his eminent subject Hagen encounter an exceptional warrior (Walther/Sivrit aka Siegfried) who possesses an enviable hoard of treasure and goes on to marry a princess of note (Hiltgunt/Kremhild) in both *Waltharius* and the *Nibelungenlied*.²⁹ Quatrains 93–5 of the latter's flashback account of Sivrit and the Nibelungs contain two further

²⁷ The standard text established by Strecker was published after his death in 1945 in a so-called *editio minor* with a German translation by Vossen (STRECKER 1947) and an *editio maior* in *MGH* (STRECKER 1951). The former is cited here, and use has also been made of a more recent text, introduction and commentary by FLORIO 2002. The poem is dated before the end of the 10th century by its earliest manuscript witness. A prologue dedicating it to a bishop Erkambald (arguably of Strasbourg 965–991) has been doubted as it is found only in one of the manuscripts' two main families, and it is questionable whether this epic poem was the *vita Waltharii* ascribed to Ekkehard of St. Gall (mid-10th cent.). Whatever view is taken of these issues, a 9th- or 10th-century date seems assured. See STRECKER 1947: 12–14, FLORIO 2002: 47–53 and ZIOLKOWSKI 2008: 193–4 (or 2001: 30 for a very brief note on date).

²⁸ Wagner, of course, also used other (chiefly Nordic) sources as well as his own imagination. See HAYMES 2010: 8–38 for this and further references.

²⁹ Significant differences include the following: Kremhild was Gunther's sister but Hiltgunt and Walther had been betrothed in their youth by their parents, shared exile as Attila's hostages and escaped together. In the *Nibelungenlied* Hagen knows more than Gunther and the rest about Siegfried but had never encountered him before his arrival in Worms, whereas Hagen and Walther had formed a bond in their shared exile as hostages of Attila. Above all, Siegfried lost his life and treasure, whereas Walther lost only his hand, kept his treasure and went on to succeed his father and enjoy a

parallels between him and Walther, namely the vanquishing of twelve mighty warriors and possession of a wondrous sword with a name (Sivrit's Balmung and Walther's Mimming, albeit not in *Waltharius* itself but in the third line of Fragment A of the Old English version discussed below). More to the point here, 'the three main components of Carolingian culture – Germanic, classical, Christian – are fused in the *Waltharius*. The poet ... was a monk ... The *Waltharius* is the first literary treatment of characters and events from Germanic legend that appear in a wide range of medieval literature. The surviving fragments of the Old English epic *Waldere*, for example, contain statements by Walter and Hiltgunt that seem to occur just prior to the attack by the Franks in the mountain pass ... The Christian message of the *Waltharius* is contained in the poet's criticism of the concept of heroic excellence associated with both Germanic and classical epic. The *Waltharius* attacks the heroic ethos, with its emphasis on vengeance and the quest for worldly fame, as being rooted in the sin of avarice. The tone of the narrative is one of mocking humor. The mockery is used to condemn the actions of the main characters' (KRATZ 1989: 535). In an examination of the poem's concern with 'play' against a native Germanic background,³⁰ ZIOLKOWSKI (2001: 39) notes that 'two studies of the *Waltharius* that were printed in the 1970s both advocated that the poem has a lighter side' and seeks 'to follow the poet's lighter vein as it reveals itself in what may appear to be a most unexpected place, the massive bloodletting at the end of the poem'. He concludes (2001: 50) that the poet's 'fantasy could have resided in adding the theme of play to a story that had previously circulated without it. In this case he could have used the playfulness as one further means to make Germanic heroism look ludicrous'.

Waltharius, then, can be seen as a serious attempt by a Carolingian cleric to inculcate Christian morality³¹ by using humour and other means to mock and question traditional warrior figures and ways. This view resembles the one advanced above regarding *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*, the more or less contemporaneous product of an Irish monastic milieu, and it will emerge below

long and successful reign in Aquitaine. The present article gives the names of the protagonists in *Waltharius* in their usual Middle (and Modern) High German forms, reflecting umlaut, weakening of internal and loss of some final vowels. However, the Latin forms were evidently and naturally based upon OHG *Walthari*, *Gunthari* (by simply adding *-us*) and *Hagano* (by simply transposing an OHG *n*-stem into a Latin one). Unadapted Germanic forms of names may be used (e.g. of various opponents of Walther's in the single combats below), including quite exceptional metrically conditioned *Gunthere* (1171) and *Walthare* (1435), both with (admittedly weakened) final vowel and one with umlaut (a phenomenon already found in the later OHG period) indicated by the mss. at least. I am grateful to Patrick Stiles for help with the OHG aspect.

³⁰ See ZIOLKOWSKI 2008 on its reflection of that background in the depiction of weaponry.

³¹ See ZIOLKOWSKI 2006 on some further aspects of Christian symbolism in the poem.

that each of these narratives affords prominence to loss of the same body parts, namely the head, eye, hand, and foot or leg.

The above analysis of *Scéla Muicce* implies that its plot was essentially constructed by the author himself, albeit on a base of pre-existing characters, motifs and narratives suitably adapted to satirical aims. In the case of *Waltharius*, by contrast, a main outline and some key details of the plot seem to have become established before being made into a Latin verse epic with a satirical slant by a monastic author who alludes to his youth at its end (ll. 1453–5).

A short narrative concerning Walther, Hildegund and Hagen occurs in the composite Scandinavian *Thidrekssaga*, which survives in a rather diffuse longer Icelandic-Norwegian version (earliest extant ms. 13th. cent.) and a more compact and coherent Swedish one (oldest ms. 15th. cent.; RITTER-SCHAUMBERG's 1989 translation of this into German is used here). The debate about which of these should be accorded priority (RITTER-SCHAUMBERG 1989: 399–451) has little bearing upon the similar versions of this episode in both. Whether translated from a since lost original or compiled from a range of written and/or oral sources, *Thidrekssaga* seems ultimately to derive from Low German material of, in some cases at least, considerable antiquity (RITTER-SCHAUMBERG 1989: xv–xix). Despite evident agreements with *Waltharius*, the relevant part (RITTER-SCHAUMBERG 1989: 193–5, §§222–5) also displays notable divergences from it. These include the pedigrees of major figures: Walther is King Ermenrik's nephew; Hildegund (incompatible with a hexameter and so modified to Hiltgunt in *Waltharius*) is the Earl of Greken's daughter (§222) and there is no mention of her youthful betrothal to Walther by their parents; Hagen is half-brother to Gunther, the son of King Aldrian of the Nibelungs, by virtue of being the offspring of Aldrian's wife and an elf (§161, the version adopted by Wagner), whereas he is (thanks, perhaps, to Christian sensibilities) a leading vassal but not a close relative of Gunther's in *Waltharius* and the *Nibelungenlied*.

Young Walther, Hildegund and Hagen were all sent to King Attila as hostages (the first two explicitly and the third presumably; §222 and §224) in agreement with *Waltharius*. At a great feast thrown by Attila, Walther asked Hildegund to follow him and she agreed, promising her love. He bade her take gold, silver and clothing and meet him on the morrow at the secret gate. Attila, having been informed by the gatekeeper after they had departed (§223), sent Hagen and eleven horsemen after them. On catching sight of them, Walther prepared to fight against the odds, giving his previous military experience as grounds for rejecting Hildegund's plea that he save his life by fleeing. He then rode at the enemy and killed eleven of them, but Hagen fled into a nearby wood (§224). He subsequently attacked Walther with a sword as he and Hildegund were taking a meal in the same wood. Warned by Hildegund, Walther knocked Hagen's eye out with a boar's leg that he was eating. Hagen then rode home to Attila and Walther to Ermenrik, a royal welcome and a long stay (§225).

Significant agreements with *Waltharius*, which is summarised below, are the three protagonists' sojourn with Attila, a great feast as a prelude to Walther and

Hildegund absconding with treasure, Walther's slaughter of eleven opponents, removal of Hagen's eye and happy return home. Even these are accompanied by discrepancies. The feast is thrown by Walther as part of his plan of escape in the Latin epic, according to which Hagen had already returned home to Gunther and no one obliged Attila by going after Walther on account of his proven military prowess. Gunther plays no part in this episode of the saga, whereas in *Waltharius* he and eleven knights (Hagen having withdrawn in a huff) oppose Walther with a view to securing his treasure. A close bond forged between Hagen and Walther during their exile is missing in the saga but plays a key role in the poem, where Hagen is torn between the claims of friendship with Walther and duty to Gunther but rejects each of them for a time. Although eleven men are killed and their leader put to flight in both accounts, this is in a succession of single combats and Gunther is the coward according to *Waltharius*. Hagen flees but later attacks Walther in *Thidrekssaga* and Gunther similarly returns to the fray in *Waltharius*, but only after enlisting the disaffected Hagen's support. Hagen lost an eye in both accounts, but Walther's loss of a hand is confined to *Waltharius* and Gunther was not even involved in the *Thidrekssaga* episode. Descriptions of Gunther and Hagen, at an earlier point in the saga (§§173–4) but a later stage in their careers, mention no physical impairment of the former but do refer to the latter's single black eye (cf. Ingcél Cáech's one black eye above).

In RITTER-SCHAUMBERG's (1989: xvii) judgment, Christianity is little more than skin-deep in *Thidrekssaga*, and God is invoked just once (by Walther, §223) in the episode of concern here. Since it is hard to explain this narrative as a derivative of *Waltharius* or some closely related account, it looks as though *Thidrekssaga* has here preserved an independent version reflecting an older form of the legend quite faithfully, RITTER-SCHAUMBERG (1989: 366, n. 73) going so far as to call it 'probably the source' of the Latin poem. It would follow that a later stage saw Gunther's inclusion in the action and the conversion of a fight between the fugitive Walther and a "posse" of twelve led by Hagen on Attila's behalf into a series of combats initiated by Gunther between himself, Hagen and eleven other followers on the one hand and Walther on the other.

The next question is whether this change was made before the composition of *Waltharius* or by its author. This brings us to two short fragments (about 30 lines each; text and translation available at <https://heorot.dk/waldere.html>) which are all that survives of a vernacular Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Waldere*. These basically consist of (incomplete) speeches and are sufficiently distinctive to show that *Waldere* was certainly not a translation and hardly even a free adaptation of *Waltharius* but rather an independent work based upon earlier (oral and/or written) sources related to those underlying the Latin poem. The first fragment (A) is addressed, doubtless by Hildegund, to 'Ælfere's son' (l. 11; i.e. Waldere aka Walther, who is King Alfer's son in *Waltharius*). She refers to his military service with Attila (l. 6), encourages him to face death or glory (9–11), praises his courage in battle (12–22) and predicts success with the

help of God and his great sword (22–5; ‘Weland’s work’ Mimming according to 2–3) against the men of Gúðhere (aka Gunther), who had unjustly initiated strife by refusing an offer of the sword and many valuable rings (25–9). In the second (B), Waldere calls an opponent ‘lord/friend of the Burgundians’ (l. 14), mocks him for thinking that ‘Hagen’s hand (*Hagenan hand*)’ would prevail against him (14–16), dares him to take the corselet inherited from his father Ælfhere off his shoulders in his battle-weary state (16–24) and recommends righteousness and trust in God as a basis for victory (25–9). Since the reference to battle-weariness locates this speech near the end of the fighting and it was clearly not addressed to Hagen, Waldere’s interlocutor here was presumably Gúðhere prior to a climactic combat between them. Waldere’s words indicate that he had already got the better of Hagen, whereas the hero of *Waltharius* disables Gunther first, thereby exposing his own hand to be struck off by Hagen, and then gouges Hagen’s eye out.

These speeches differ markedly from those towards the end of *Waltharius*, where Hiltgunt urges flight (cf. *Thidrekssaga*) and Walther, ignoring Gunther’s intervention, appeals in vain to Hagen on the basis of former friendship. That said, some crucial agreements with *Waltharius* against *Thidrekssaga* can be deduced from them: Gúðhere/Gunther instigated the conflict after rejecting Waldere/Walther’s offer of part of his treasure (doubtless because Gúðhere too insisted upon getting all of it) and led a group of men including Hagen against the poem’s hero, who presumably vindicated his possession of the treasure in keeping with Hildegund’s prediction that Gúðhere would return home ‘ring-less’ (*béaga léas*, A 29). In the almost certain event that the Old English epic was independent of the continental Latin one, it follows that a version with these probably innovatory features had come into being some time before the composition of either. One notable difference between them centres upon a great sword made by the legendary smith Weland (aka Wieland) and called Mimming, which is prominent in fragment A of *Waldere* but missing from the Latin epic. Walther does own a piece of ‘Wieland’s work’ in the latter, but this is a defensive piece of chainmail ‘with hardened rings’ (*duratis Wielandia fabrica giris* at *Waltharius* 965; cf. *hrægla sēlest ... Wēlandes geweorc* ‘the best of corselets ... Weland’s work’ at *Beowulf* 454–5).

While undue weight should not be placed upon absences from two such short extant fragments, they at least leave open the question of whether *Waldere* included three features of major import in *Waltharius*: different physical maimings of the three protagonists in the final conflict, the friendship forged between two of them while in Attila’s service, and Gunther’s cowardice. While Hagen may well have lost an eye in *Waldere* as in both *Thidrekssaga* and *Waltharius*, it seems quite possible that corresponding loss of a limb by Gunther and Walther was a satirically motivated innovation by the author of *Waltharius*. Admittedly weak support for this hypothesis may be sought in Hildegund’s failure to predict Gúðhere’s imminent loss of a leg as well as the rings, but it might

conversely be argued that Walther's maiming is anticipated by three mentions of 'hand' in Fragment B.³² In that case, despite just having been defeated and probably deprived of an eye by Waldere, Hagen will still have managed to deprive him of his right hand as he fought Gúðhere. The continental poet may also have added downright cowardice to Gunther's avarice and introduced the friendship between Hagen and Walther or at least enhanced its role as a source of ambivalent attitudes. However that may be and although God is invoked on occasion in the *Thridrekssaga* episode and the *Waldere* fragments, it seems most likely that the *Waltharius* poet himself was responsible for the Christian critique of the warrior ethos pointedly made by Walther's two bouts of "schizophrenia", Hagen's outburst of moral outrage, and Hagen and Walther's jesting about the other's loss of a hand and eye respectively. These are discussed at the relevant points in the following treatment of the poem.

Harking back to earlier times, the plot of *Waltharius* is set in motion by the decision of Gibich (14), the 'fearful king' (*pavidus regis*, 17) of the Franks, to buy Attila and his Huns off with tribute and hostages (24) by sending him the noble youth Hagen 'with a huge treasure' (*cum gaza ingenti*, 31) as a substitute for Gibich's under-age son Gunther (27–33). The Burgundian king Heririch, whose only child was a daughter named Hiltgunt, followed suit (34–71) and 'went out, bringing countless treasures (*asportans innumeratos thesauros*), and struck an agreement (*pactumque ferit*) and relinquished his daughter (*natamque reliquit*), who duly 'proceeded into exile (*pergit in exilium*)' (72–4). Next in the line of fire was Aquitania, whose king Alfer had betrothed his son 'named Walther, radiant in the first flower of youth' (*nomine Waltharium, primaevae flore nitentem*, 79) to Heririch's daughter and followed his Frankish and Burgundian counterparts by providing tribute and his son as a hostage (75–82). 'Then the Avars, finally laden with many treasures (*gazis onerati denique multis*) and having taken as hostage Hagen, the girl Hiltgunt and Walther (*obsidibus sumptis Haganone, Hiltgunde puella nec non Walthario*), returned joyfully' (93–5). It was seen above that the rulers of Connacht and Ulster hardly covered themselves in glory in *Scéla Muicce*, particularly its final episode. The three Germanic kings behaved even less gloriously at the start of *Waltharius* by yielding to Attila and his Huns or Avars without a fight after the rot had been started by the submission of the 'fearful' king of the Franks, whose son and successor Gunther turns out to be the villain of the poem as a whole.

³² Apart from 'Hagen's hand' above, there are references to Waldere with his sword 'in his hand ... {in} his grip' (12–13, *him on handa ... {on} gripe*) and to his corselet's virtue 'when hand protects' (21, *þonne ha{n}d wereð*) life against enemies. I am grateful to Patrick Stiles for drawing my attention to this feature and its possible significance as well as for making a number of other helpful suggestions after reading a draft of this article. The core of this article was given on 16th April 2021 to the Harvard Celtic Colloquium at the invitation of Prof. Joseph Nagy as an online lecture, which benefited from a lively and interesting subsequent discussion.

Hagen and Walther were treated like foster-sons by Attila and excelled in warfare, while the queen's affection for Hiltgunt grew and she was eventually put in charge of the royal treasury (96–115). Gibich's death was followed by repudiation of the treaty with the Huns by his successor, Gunther (116–18). Hearing of this, Hagen escaped and returned home (119–20). Walther stayed on, successfully resisting an attempt to bind him to the Huns by marriage on the grounds that this would hinder his military activities (121–169). After winning a notable victory (170–211), he returned in triumph and, on his way to Attila, encountered Hiltgunt (212–21). After he had accepted a drink from her and recalled their previous betrothal, the two planned their escape: she was to get treasure and equipment, while he was to invite Attila and his men to a sumptuous feast and get them thoroughly drunk (222–86). There follows a lively description of his guests' enjoyment of the opulent and bibulous festivities laid on by Walther and of their resultant complete incapacitation (287–323). He took advantage of this and Hiltgunt's procurements to arm himself fully, secure a warhorse, load it with 'chests full of treasure' (*scrinia plena gazae*, 330), provisions and equipment and then make good his and her escape (324–357). The scene shifts back to the revellers awakening from their drunken stupor around midday on the morrow, including a comically lifelike Attila 'clutching his head with each hand' (*manu caput amplexatus utraque*, 362). Puzzlement as to their host's absence turns to fury on his part as the truth emerges, but his offer of great riches to whoever could bring the fugitive back in chains finds no takers on account of Walther's daunting military record (358–418).

Travelling by night, hiding by day and catching birds and fish for food, 'the praiseworthy hero (*laudabilis heros*) Walther refrained from taking advantage of the maiden (*se ... virginis usu continuit*) during the whole period of flight' (426–7). After a scripturally suggestive spell of forty days in the wilds, he reached the Rhine near Worms and paid to be ferried across with non-local fish (428–35). These found their way to the table of King Gunther, whose enquiries revealed their source as a fully armed warrior accompanied by a girl and a horse bearing 'two sizeable chests' (*scrinia bina ... non parva*, 459) which jangled as if containing gold and jewels (436–63). Hagen joyfully recognised that his associate Walther had returned from the Huns, but Gunther avariciously expressed his joy at the prospect of recovering 'the treasure that Gibich transferred to the eastern king' (*gazam, quam Gibicho regi transmisit eoo*, 471) and chose twelve men of notable strength and proven courage for that purpose, including the demurring Hagen (464–88). This claim to the treasure was, of course, dubious since not only Gunther's but also Hiltgunt's and Walther's fathers had paid Attila off and, anyway, the wealth in his treasury was hardly confined to those three sources.

Walther meanwhile had reached the Vosges and found a narrow mountain gorge to sleep in while Hiltgunt kept watch until she saw men approaching and warned Walther, who was relieved to see that they were not Avars but Franks with his former comrade Hagen among them (489–558). Having vowed that

no Frank would return home to tell his wife that he had taken any part of so great a treasure (*gazaе ... tantae*, 563), Walther knelt and begged forgiveness for these words before stating that, Hagen excluded (*Haganone remoto*, 567), he feared none of them (559–71). At Hagen's behest, Gunther sent Camalo of Metz to offer Walther terms, namely his life in return for surrendering the horse with its chests and the girl. He firmly rejected them but offered 'a hundred armlets of red gold' (*armillas centum de rubro quippe metallo*, 613) as a gesture to royalty (572–614). Hagen urged acceptance, warning again of Walther's prowess and revealing a dream in which a bear bit off Gunther's 'shank and knee as far as the thigh' (*crus cum poplite ad usque femur*, 625) in a fight and then 'ripped out an eye [of Hagen's] and some teeth' (*oculum cum dentibus eruit unum*, 627) when he came to his king's assistance (615–27). When Gunther accused Hagen of sharing his father's timidity, the latter angrily withdrew to a nearby hill and dismounted to observe events (628–39). Instructed by the Frankish king to renew his demand for the whole treasure and take it by force if necessary, Camalo returned and was again firmly rebuffed, although Walther sardonically doubled his previous offer to two hundred armlets if the Franks were so antisocial as to require non-hostile strangers to pay for passage through their territory (640–63).

Declaring the time for talking over, Camalo initiated the first of eleven single combats between Gunther's followers and Walther, who won all of them in a defile too narrow for more than one warrior to come against him at a time in response to Gunther's repeated urgings (664–1061): [1] Camalo was run through after his hand and thigh had been transfixed to his horse's back by Walther's spear (675–85); [2] his nephew was wounded by Walther's spear and then beheaded with his own sword (686–719); [3] Werinhart had unfair recourse to archery but was dislodged from his horse and beheaded with his own sword (725–53); [4] an exile 'from Saxon shores' (*a Saxonis oris*, 756) bearing the Germanic name Ektivrid and using florid 'Celtic language' (*Celtica lingua*, 765)³³ was killed by a spear through his shield and chest, and dragged off behind his horse

³³ DUMVILLE (1983) reviews the considerable academic discussion provoked by Walther's comment, asking 'could the author of *Waltharius* actually have classified as "Celtic" Irish, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton?' and noting that 'the classical equation was *Celticus* = "Gaulish" (89). The question must be answered in the negative (see MCCONE 2008: 8–28), thus ruling out the possibility that 'Saxon shores' here referred to Britain. The designation of a large part of NW France as *litus Saxonicum* 'the Saxon shore' (references in DUMVILLE 1983: 90, n. 22) seems more promising but the same cannot be said of the tissue of improbabilities underlying Dumville's own proposal: that Ektivrid was from Brittany specifically and 'if someone came from that region speaking a *Celtica lingua*, his language would be either Gaulish (if that were chronologically still possible, whether in the fifth century of the story or the ninth century of the poet) or Breton' (1983: 90–1) and that a Carolingian perception of Saxon or Breton perfidy underlies Walther's reference (ll. 765–6) to nature having endowed Ektivrid's race with superiority over the rest *ludendo* on the assumption of

(756–80); [5] Hadawart attacked with a sword only, was brought down in flight after losing it and run through by Walther's spear (781–845); [6] the deafness of his full sister's son, Patavrid, to his entreaties provoked Hagen into an impassioned condemnation (857–75) addressed to 'o world's whirlpool, the insatiate hunger for possessing, maelstrom of avarice, root of all evils' (*o vortex mundi, fames insatiatus habendi, gurgis avaritiae, cunctorum fibra malorum*, 857–8) and lamenting his dear nephew's readiness to die for this and 'for cheap praise' (*vili pro laude*, 871), but Patavrid also ignored Walther's pleas to desist (881–6) and ended up spilling his guts and dying (912–13); [7] 'and as the mighty warrior was cutting through the neck of the prostrate [Patavrid]' (*et dum bellipotens recidisset colla iacentis*, 917) Gerwit attacked Walther with a double axe but was laid low by a spear through the groin into the thigh and put out of his misery by decapitation (936–40); [8] in response to Gunther's effective shift from gold to vengeance as a motivation for his now hesitant remaining men (941–58), Randolph launched a dangerous attack but was finally felled and beheaded (959–81); [9] a trident hurled by Eleuthir aka Helmnod and attached to a rope held by the other three (Trogus, Tanastus and Gunther) stuck in Walther's shield and a tug of war ensued but Walther held firm and finally split his opponent's head, cut through his neck and opened up his chest (982–1020); [10/11] he then turned to Trogus at the end of the rope and, as the latter ran back for his weapons, cut his calves with his sword and, when his friend came up to protect him, ripped Tanastus' shoulder from its joint, spilled his guts with a thrust through the side and then 'gave a (red-)golden torque [of blood] around his neck' (*torquem collo circumdedit aureum*, 1059) to the still recalcitrant Trogus, leaving him and Tanastus writhing on the ground in their death throes (1021–61).

A warrior's one-to-one confrontations with a series of different rivals play a major role in both *Waltharius* and *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*. In the former, Walther prevails over eleven opponents in successive fights to the death that are often accompanied by boasts and/or insults, to which moralising is added in the single combat with Hagen's nephew. In the latter, Cet gets the better of seven opponents in a succession of verbal exchanges decided on the basis of boasts and insults relating to wounds or death inflicted by him upon his rival or the latter's father or son in real earlier conflicts. A whole arm is wrenched off in one combat [10/11] in *Waltharius*, which includes wounds to the legs in several others, and the loss of a hand is central to one encounter (§10) in *Scéla Muicce*. Decapitations figure prominently in both narratives, and Walther's

a quite abnormal meaning 'in lying/deceiving' (89–93). *Celtica lingua* can only refer to Gaulish, by then an extinct language known from classical sources available to Carolingian scholars to have been formerly spoken in French territory. If *ludendo* has its usual meaning 'playing' (with words?) or the rarer one 'mocking', Ekvirid's language and likening of Walther to a *faunus* 'woodland spirit' (suggested by etymologising his name as *Walt-hari* (later *-her(r)*) 'Wood-lord' in the plausible opinion of ZIOLKOWSKI 2001: 34) may presumably have been called 'Celtic', in effect 'all Greek', by Walther on account of its preciousness and use of an obscure pagan term.

treatment of Patavrid's corpse suggests that, like a typical Irish warrior, he routinely removed the heads of victims killed by other means, if practicable.

By rights, after the loss of Tanastus and Trogus, it should have been Gunther's turn to face Walther in single combat. Instead, however, 'fleeing with all determination' (*omni aufugiens studio*, 1062–3), he mounted his horse, 'flew' (*volavit*, 1064) to the grieving Hagen and insistently sought his support. In reply, the latter forcefully reminded the king of his previous imputation of hereditary cowardice (1067–72) but, yielding to the claims of honour, duty and his slain nephew, eventually relented and proposed an apparent withdrawal in order to entice Walther away from his impregnably narrow base and out into the open (1089–1125). After Gunther had given Hagen his assent, an embrace and a kiss, the pair sought a suitable place for a surprise attack (1126–9).

Walther, who had observed Hagen's reconciliation with the king, considered his position as evening fell and, being unsure whether they had returned to the city for reinforcements or were lurking nearby in ambush, decided to stay put and rest until morning lest he be accused of absconding by night like a thief (1130–54). After fortifying the defile's entrance, 'he turns to the torsos (*ad truncos*) with a bitter groan and joins its own head to each (*et cuicumque suum caput applicat*)' before prostrating himself towards the East to pray, thanking God for his protection and contritely (*contrita mente*) beseeching him for the privilege of seeing the deceased in Heaven one day (1155–67). He then tied up the six horses now in his possession and took turns with Hiltgunt to sleep and keep watch (1168–87). At dawn he stripped the dead of their arms and armour, while leaving them dressed in their tunics etc., and loaded this booty onto four horses before setting Hiltgunt on the fifth and himself on the sixth, which also carried the treasure chests, and departing (1188–1207).

Insofar as all of the deaths and other losses in *Waltharius* followed from Gunther's greedy and implacable urge to possess the treasure stolen from Attila by Hiltgunt and guarded with determination by Walther, Hagen's despairing diatribe against avarice as the root of all evil (857–75) may be regarded as the epic's moral heart. A comparable moment is provided by Walther's just described shift from a warrior's typical concern with tactics and honour to an attack of Christian contrition manifested in a groan and restoration of his victims' severed heads to their torsos along with a prayer for their and his salvation. However, he then resumes his former preoccupations and even, after a night's sleep, proceeds calmly and methodically to take the spoils of combat from the corpses whose heads he had so touchingly replaced the night before. This striking sequence amplifies his similarly "schizophrenic" behaviour earlier, when his vow that no Frank would take any of his treasure and live to tell the tale was followed first by a prayer for forgiveness of this utterance and then by a statement that he feared none of his adversaries but Hagen, whom he hoped to overcome with God's help (559–71). Whatever misgivings he may have had about his vow, Walther went on not only to preserve his treasure intact at the cost of eleven lives in the subsequent single combats but also to augment it

afterwards with his victims' spoils. Hagen's passing outburst and Walther's brief interludes of repentance reflect tensions between martial mores and Christian ideals by, in effect, using the pair's own thoughts, words and/or gestures of regret as a Christian critique of their more usual attitudes, utterances and actions as fierce warriors bound by the conventions of a strict martial and social code. It was argued above that the author of *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó* set the taking of heads in contexts calculated to bring the practice's unchristian brutality into sharp relief. A similar effect was presumably intended by having Walther contritely reunite his victims' torsos with the heads that he had himself deliberately severed.

Walther and Hiltgunt had not gone very far when she espied two men approaching from behind and anxiously urged him to flee, but he declared his preference of a 'beautiful death' (*pulcrum ... mortem*, 1217) to solitary escape and loss of possessions (*solum amissis palando evadere rebus*, 1218), sent her to shelter with the treasure-laden horse and awaited his foe on a mountain slope (1208–27). This resolve to stand his ground alone against two adversaries rather than fleeing contrasted starkly with Gunther's avoidance of single combat by flight and return to the fray only after securing a two-to-one advantage. Ignoring Gunther's taunts, Walther urged Hagen to desist in the name of their bosom friendship, but the latter invoked his slaughtered friends and relatives and, above all, the need to avenge his dear nephew's death (1228–79).

After the three had dismounted and got ready, there ensued a fiercely contested and dramatically described battle on foot in which Gunther did not acquit himself well (1280–1395). Walther's struggle against the other two was, in an obvious echo of Hagen's earlier dream (621–7), likened to that of a powerful bear with encircling hunting dogs (1337–42). He then succeeded in hacking off Gunther's lower leg (*crus cum poplite adusque femur*, 1364; = 625 [*ad usque*] in the dream) with his sword, only to lose his mighty and feared right hand to Hagen (1381–5) shortly afterwards. However, Walther quickly retaliated by inserting his wounded arm into his shield, pulling out his small sword with his good hand, gouging out Hagen's right eye, cutting his temple, ripping his lips and knocking six back teeth out of his mouth (1386–95; cf. the dream's briefer account at 627). Wounds and exhaustion thus ended an encounter 'in which two great-hearted heroes as well matched in strength as in fervour of spirit had stood in the thunderous heat of warfare (*in fulmine belli*)' (1399–1400). The results are summed up as follows (1401–4):

*Postquam finis adest, insignia quemque notabant:
Illic Guntharii regis pes, palma iacebat
Waltherii nec non tremulus Haganonis ocellus.
Sic sic armillas partiti sunt Avarenses.*

'After the end had come, **insignia** marked each (of them): there King Gunther's **foot**, Walther's **hand** and also Hagen's quivering **eye** lay. Thus, thus did they divide the Avar armlets!'

In the opinion of KRATZ (1989: 536) ‘this passage alludes to the biblical admonition (Mark 9: 42–48) that it is better to lose one’s eye or to cut off one’s hand or foot, should those members cause one to sin, than to go uninjured to hell. The symbolic appropriateness of Hagen’s injury is immediately recognizable, since he is motivated by a desire for vengeance, but all three injuries are to be understood as suitable retribution for sinful behaviour. Walter rightly loses the hand with which he vows to protect his treasure. The *Waltharius* is representative of much of the literary and artistic activity of the Carolingian renaissance. The pagan heritage is not rejected but transformed. Using the language and conventions of the classical epic, the poet has refashioned a portion of Germanic legend into a vehicle for the expression of a Christian moral theme’.

Comparable manipulation of inherited native characters and tropes to convey a Christian message has been argued for above in the case of *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*, where the humiliations and deaths ended in futility with the killing of the hound selfishly sought by the rulers of Connacht and Ulster simultaneously. Similarly, all that the avaricious and pusillanimous Gunther had to show for his inconsiderate and unsuccessful efforts to deprive Walther of the treasure stolen from the Huns was the loss of his own lower leg, Hagen’s eye (plus six teeth) and the lives (often along with the heads) of eleven loyal followers. Even the heroic Walther’s retention of the Huns’ treasure came at a high price, namely the loss of his hitherto weapon-holding right hand.

As the trio were attempting to staunch the blood, Hiltgunt obeyed Walther’s instructions to bind all their wounds, mix wine and present it to Hagen first for his prowess, to Walther second for having endured the most and to Gunther last for his feeble performance, but Hagen insisted on Walther getting the first draught for surpassing him in bravery and everyone in arms (1405–20). The participant who was first in rank as a king was thus placed a distant last in valour, his vassal Hagen second and the king’s son Walther first. After the one-legged Gunther has been dismissed as a military non-entity, the “borgne” Hagen and “manchot” Walther ‘make fun (of each other) in their cups in a jesting match’ (*inter pocula scurrili certamine ludunt*, 1424). Hagen jokes that Walther will have to hunt deer and use their hides for a constant supply of gloves, filling the right one with wool to simulate a hand, but that fastening his sword on the right thigh or embracing his wife with the left arm will give the game away and his left hand (*laeva manus*) will have to do everything (1425–34). Walther rejoinders that, if he has to hunt deer, Hagen (addressed as *lusce* ‘one-eyed’) will have not only to avoid boar’s meat and eat porridge (presumably on account of his lost teeth) but also to order his servants while squinting (*suspectando*) and greet warrior hosts while looking sideways (*transversa tuendo*) (1435–42). The pair then renewed their friendship, ‘and together lifting the greatly hurting king’ (*atque simul regem tollentes valde dolentem*, 1444) they put him on a horse and set off for home, the two Franks to Worms and Walther to Aquitania (1445–6). There he was gladly received with great honour, married Hiltgunt and, after

his father's death, was a popular and successful ruler for thirty years (1447–52). The author then begs the reader's indulgence for his youthful effort (1453–5) before concluding as follows (1456): *Haec est Waltharii poesis. vos salvet Iesus.*

The monastic authors of *Waltharius* and *Scéla Muicce* were doubtless well aware of Christ's aforementioned advice in Mark's gospel to get rid of your hand (*manus tua*), foot (*pes tuus*) or eye (*oculus tuus*), if it tempts (has tempted) you to sin (*scandaliza(veri)t*), since it is better to enter into (eternal) life/God's kingdom (*in vitam (aeternam)/regnum Dei*) disabled/lame/one-eyed (*debilem/claudum/luscum*) than to go/be sent with two hands, feet or eyes into hell (*in gehennam*) with its inextinguishable fire. However, even if a nuance of atonement for temptation and sin by pain and loss in this world as a means of avoiding the fires of hell was intended, that was hardly the main object. After all, the gospel enjoins deliberate self-inflicted excision of an offending eye or limb as a path to salvation, whereas our two narratives represent loss of the same as the involuntary and unwelcome outcome of an enemy assault without hinting at any salvific potential. A lack of comprehensively convincing correspondences vitiates the interpretations of these losses as punishments to fit a crime or sin adumbrated by Kratz above and elaborated by GOTTMANN (2000). *Waltharius* agrees with the Irish saga in avoiding any suggestion that the missing body-parts might be a source of future pride: of the *insignia* acquired in the climactic final battle Gunther's loss of his lower leg is represented as an agonising impediment resulting from his inadequacy as a warrior, the hero Walther's one-handedness is depicted by Hagen as an embarrassing inconvenience to be concealed as far as possible, and the noble Hagen's lack of an eye will prevent him from seeing straight according to Walther. It thus appears that both works singled out these particular three losses of a normally visible body part for disparagement. To judge from the comparative mythical and legendary evidence presented above, this was because prestige had traditionally been accorded to them over a large part of Europe by speakers of Celtic, Germanic and other Indo-European languages. As a component of what Kratz terms 'pagan heritage' deemed ripe for re-evaluation, this trio of physical defects is incorporated by the continental Latin poem and the Irish tale into a broader Christian critique of inherited warrior practices, beliefs and values.

Although both were quite possibly composed almost simultaneously and hardly much over a century apart, it seems most unlikely that a vernacular Irish saga directly influenced a Carolingian Latin poem and there is no obvious reason to posit the reverse. Rather, palpable points of similarity between them reflect the composition of both by monastic men of letters intent upon subjecting comparable Irish and West Germanic warrior traditions deemed unchristian to question and even ridicule. These included the routine removal of heads and reverence for a missing eye, arm/hand or foot/leg. Not only do all four losses figure prominently in both narratives, but the distribution in *Waltharius* with an eye plus a leg lost on one side and a hand on the other also recalls the

already mentioned pairings of Scaevola's lost hand with Cocles' lost eye plus lame leg and of the one-handed Núadu with the transiently one-eyed as well as one-legged Lug. These parallels seem too circumstantial to be coincidental and it hardly matters, for present purposes, whether they were due to shared Indo-European inheritance, to diffusion between neighbouring Celtic, Germanic and other (e.g. Italic) peoples in ancient Europe, or to some combination of the two. The fearsome one-eyed warrior has the strongest and head-hunting the next best claim to PIE provenance. An apparent lack of attestations beyond western Europe means that a single arm/hand or foot/leg may not have acquired mythical and ritual significance until a subsequent shared Western IE phase or a still later stage of diffusion between neighbouring Germanic, Celtic and Italic and other peoples. The basic point is that, as far as the Christian authors of *Waltharius* and *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó* were concerned, all four features were obvious targets as tangible survivals of morally reprehensible pagan practice and ideology.

III.

It remains to ask how the thrust of this and another recent article (McCONE 2020) relates to the confrontation, to use Hegelian terms, between “nativist” *thesis* and “anti-nativist” or “clericist” *antithesis* in the study of “secular” early medieval Irish literature. The former envisaged an ‘enduring tradition’ (RICHTER 1988) directly propagated from prechristian roots by a partially literate but otherwise essentially intact “native” learned class counterbalancing the church. For instance, MAC CANA (1971: 86) claimed that ‘much of the traditional teaching and practice of the druids was maintained without interruption by the *filid*’ and BINCHY (1954: 52–3) had espoused a similar view of early Irish legal material: ‘For centuries this ancient lore was preserved orally in the native professional schools. Then in the seventh ... doubtless under the influence of the Christian monastic schools, it was committed to writing; and finally, about the beginning of the eighth century, it was embodied in a series of canonical texts ... The pattern of society outlined in these ... goes back ... to pre-Christian times, for though the early Irish laws ... have a Christian façade, their basic structure is pagan’.

CARNEY made a measured pioneering objection to ‘what I term the nativist conception of our early literatures ... as having had a long life in oral tradition before being (with suggestive phrase) “committed to writing”’ at the beginning of a chapter entitled ‘the external element in Irish saga’ (1955: 276–323), which reached the following conclusion: ‘Without any doubt this literature was based in part upon an oral tradition going back to the remote pre-Christian past. But the traditional element is often a mere nucleus because the Christian authors, in presenting the pre-Christian past, drew not only on native material but upon their total literary experience ... [including] a knowledge of the scriptures, of apocryphal works, and the Fathers of the Church’ (1955: 321). Nevertheless,

“nativism” continued to hold the fort until its legal bastion came under attack from Ó Corráin and Breatnach.³⁴

The present writer’s criticism was directed not at the preservation of preliterate pagan elements *per se* but at the neglect of contemporary Christian and other factors engendered by a blithe tendency to make prechristian oral origins the default without adequate or, all too often, any supporting evidence.³⁵ The main objection was that the key nativist doctrine of a “secular” learned class providing a largely church-proof conduit for the direct transmission of oral prechristian lore into writing was not only unsubstantiated but also roundly contradicted by the clear evidence of actual early medieval Irish texts for the intimate connection of *filid* ‘poets’, jurists and the like with monastic schools and learning (McCONE 1990: 22–8).³⁶ In contrast with nativism, the anti-nativist or clericist position emphasises the input of the Bible, other ecclesiastical sources and a Christian orientation into written works manifestly produced in monasteries.

The very title ‘pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature’ (McCONE 1990) acknowledged that often, as Kratz put it above *vis à vis* *Waltharius*, ‘pagan heritage is not rejected but transformed’ by accommodation, with any adaptations deemed necessary or desirable, to Christian ideas and/or current political interests (especially dynastic; see e.g. Ó CORRÁIN 1985). The central argument was that prechristian ingredients were combined with others taken from the Bible and other literature cultivated or produced in church circles into a vast hybrid construct called *senchas* as a kind of pre-Patrician Irish “Old Testament”, which could be harmonised with the post-Patrician settlement by means of such standard methods of biblical exegesis as allegory and historical typology (e.g. McCONE 1990: 256–7 and 56–7). In short, “secular” tales ‘were not merely preserved in monastic manuscripts, but were apparently composed by clerics or clerically educated scholars ... using inherited themes and characters from the pagan past partly to convey a Christian message through allegory, and also

³⁴ E.g. Ó CORRÁIN, BREATNACH & BREEN 1984, BREATNACH 1984, and McCONE 1986b.

³⁵ E.g. McCONE 1990: 5: ‘oral transmission is the sole possibility for the preceding period and is hardly likely to have been eradicated by the introduction of ... clerical and monastic literacy from the fifth century onwards. The fact remains, however, that we have no direct knowledge of this presumed oral tradition and that what have come down to us from the period in question are exclusively the written products of the monastically educated. To deny that these were influenced by and drew upon an oral tradition with pagan roots would be as fatuous as the unprovable and unsupported nativist assumptions about the dominant role of orality and paganism in the creation of so-called “secular” genres of this monastic literature’.

³⁶ Cf. SIMMS 2020: 26: ‘The privileged status of the druids was rapidly taken over by the Christian clergy’ and ‘Irish poets and judges were able to combine their traditional high status and learning not merely with the new Christian religion, but in many cases with ordination as clerics and/or monks, and to continue to practise their skills inside the church schools using written texts in both Irish and Latin’.

to magnify the reputations of the secular dynasties who were their patrons' (SIMMS 2020: 62).

It follows from this ecclesiastically concocted framework 'that, assumed oral origins for some of its constituents notwithstanding, the proper frame of reference for early Irish literature is early Christian Ireland rather than the preceding pagan period' (McCONE 1990: 4).³⁷ This principle was strictly adhered to in the aforementioned article's first part (McCONE 2020: 66–90): 'Analysis has so far been confined to *Esnada Tige Buchet* in the light of relevant early medieval Irish aspirations, circumstances and narrative conventions. Since the results explicate its contemporary message satisfactorily, this would be a reasonable point to stop' (90) for anyone only interested in this dimension.

That said, wider comparative vistas also presented themselves and thematic affinities, as well as contrasts, with the *Odyssey* were adduced with a view to illuminating aspects of both narratives (McCONE 2020: 90–99). The present study has sought to sharpen and corroborate its interpretation of *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó* by means of parallels closer to home with *Waltharius*, the more or less contemporary product of a broadly similar early medieval monastic environment in western continental Europe. The point is that typological comparison of this kind can be a useful adjunct to literary analysis.

Christian (and some classical³⁸) Latin literature constitutes a special category because 'the Bible and other Christian works played a central and indispensable role in monastic life and letters' (McCONE 1990: 18), thus making overt borrowings and other more subtle direct influences a distinct possibility in many cases. The numerous instances discussed *passim* in the book include the motif of "pot luck" in the opening of *Scéla Muicce* apparently adapted from 1 Samuel 2:13–14, where it also forms part of an account of misconduct and its dire consequences (McCONE 1990: 32–3). The crucial question is whether their unique availability to medieval Irish authors as well as modern scholars means that sources of

³⁷ Cf. McCONE 1984b: 306: 'saints' Lives, like other branches of early Irish tradition such as sagas and genealogies, are first and foremost documents of their own time of composition, contemporary social and political propaganda that makes use of traditional materials in a kind of code ... The key to such interpretation of saints' Lives and similar material is to realize that a particular saint essentially represents his main foundation and prominent laymen, particularly kings, the dynasties tracing descent from them in this narrative code, which makes it possible to cast the driest of political claims in the form of a good story about people'.

³⁸ A more significant factor in the Carolingian "renaissance" than in early medieval Ireland. For instance, extensive echoes of classical works, especially Vergil's *Aeneid*, are identified in STRECKER's 'Anhang I' (1947: 118–51) and FLORIO's footnotes (2002: 76–195) to *Waltharius*. As KRATZ (1989: 535) puts it, 'the *Waltharius* poet has cast his version of the legend in the form of a classical Latin epic. The three classical poems that served as his models for language and diction are Vergil's *Aeneid*, Statius' *Thebaid*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The poet also makes extensive use of Prudentius' allegorical epic, the *Psychomachia*'.

plots, themes and other features in Old or Middle Irish literature should only be looked for in a certain range of Latin literature, as maintained by the more uncompromising strand of anti-nativism (see McCONE 1996a: 89–92).

Whereas the main aim of the first four chapters of McCONE 1990 was to present and justify a still controversial clericist antithesis to the nativist thesis, the next four aspired to the balanced approach pioneered by Carney and a third Hegelian stage of *synthesis* between them in three main areas, namely: **(a)** *sovereignty* in chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 107–60), which argued that ‘a hierogamous pagan Irish sacral kingship and associated mythology had by about the seventh century A.D. been subtly but nonetheless comprehensively converted by churchmen into a Christian ideology of monarchy by God’s grace with a marked Old Testament stamp’ (158); **(b)** *fire and the arts* in chapter 7 (pp. 161–78), which concluded that ‘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’ (178); and **(c)** *heroes and saints* in chapter 8 (pp. 179–202), which explored ‘the partial assimilation of saint to secular hero and vice versa’ (188).

Although ‘it can be confidently asserted that medieval Irish *literati* were quite unaware of their Celtic and Indo-European roots’ (McCONE 1990: 18; cf. 2008: 8–17), modern scholars can hardly plead similar ignorance in the light of the Irish language’s demonstrable Celtic and other Indo-European cognates (e.g. McCONE 2008: 35–6). Admission of the mere possibility of prechristian survivals in medieval Irish literature make it a potential source of evidence for inclusion in broader comparisons directed towards the reconstruction of features of earlier (Proto-)Indo-European culture. The final part of the recent article (McCONE 2020: 99–162) used similarities between *Esnada Tige Buchet* and the *Odyssey* as a transition to an array of data from medieval Ireland, ancient India and elsewhere offering support for the reconstruction of a tripartite PIE social structure integrated and presided over by a sacral king and of three specific myths pertaining to the transmission of kingship by a woman or goddess. This concluded that ‘notwithstanding deep influence from the monastic milieu in which it was produced, medieval Irish material has a crucial contribution to make to reconstructing PIE ideology and mythology of kingship’ (McCONE 2020: 162). Possible Christian Latin sources should also be borne in mind and, where such an alternative is available, a decision should be based upon evaluation of the evidence in any given instance rather than general preconceptions: e.g. the young Jesus was deemed a more likely model for Mongán’s precocious wisdom than less direct Welsh and Indian comparanda (McCONE 1990: 17–18) but pertinent Irish, Germanic and other IE parallels were preferred above to an appreciably less apposite New Testament passage in relation to loss of an eye, hand/arm or foot/leg in *Scéla Muicce* and *Waltharius*. Whereas the allusive potential of scriptural or other literary models and parallels can make them relevant to authorial intention and so to the meaning of medieval Irish texts (cf. “pot luck” in *Scéla Muicce* above), this clearly does not apply to Celtic and

Indo-European antecedents inferred by modern scholars but unknown to the medieval authors of the texts themselves.

Kingship is a case in point. Ó MÁILLE (1927) deduced the literary role of the oft-married Medb's Crúachan and Lethderg as representatives of sovereignty and agents of its transfer solely from references in medieval Irish sources. These and similar notices of Eithne Thóebfota provided an entirely adequate basis for analysing *Esnada Tige Buchet* without the further postulate of an underlying pagan goddess, however reasonable. Ó Máille's study and onomastic evidence for Medb's divine origin soon suggested to THURNEYSSEN (1930: 110) that 'at an earlier time among certain tribes the kingship was assumed and halloed through a mystic marriage with the goddess Medb'. Subsequently (1933), he adduced typological parallels for this 'ιερός γάμος' from ancient Sumer in the third millennium BC. A pagan Celtic comparandum was then added when an ancient Greek account of the foundation of Massalia in Gaulish territory (see McCONE 2020: 138–40) encouraged MURPHY (1937: 144) 'to connect two methods by which kingship is symbolised in ancient Irish literature. According to one symbol the king is the person for whom a mystic maiden pours a cup and a drink (*lind*). According to another the king is the husband of a goddess. The narrative quoted above shows that the two methods are fundamentally the same, the wine-pouring merely being the preliminary to marriage'. The implications were naturally congenial to nativists and, significantly, 'aspects of the theme of king and goddess in Irish literature' was the title of MAC CANA's (1955/8) important study identifying certain patterns of behaviour typically displayed by such female figures. McCONE (1990: 107–120) presented 'a substantial dossier of varied evidence, including some remarkably circumstantial correspondences, for an Indo-European institution, ideology and mythology of sacral kingship' (120), and has recently (2020: 104–64) augmented this from ancient Indic, Greek, Roman and Iranian sources above all.

In the nativist scheme of things, the virtually pristine preservation of a pagan concept of *hieros gamos* 'sacred marriage' and ancillary features was due to 'a well-organized class of learned men, independent of the Church, who controlled and maintained the structures and ideology of native kingship ... By the ninth century they were known as *filid*, but if ... we could somehow translate ourselves to fourth- or fifth-century Ireland, we should probably find them identified primarily as druids' (MAC CANA 1979: 445). The thereby implied lack of clerical concern with the regulation of so vital an institution as kingship was scarcely credible, but a solution to this conundrum was indicated by evidence that 'pre-Christian sacral principles had been assimilated at least as early the mid-seventh century to a biblical concept of kingship by divine grace that belongs firmly in the mainstream of medieval Christian European thought' (McCONE 1990: 142). An inherited female embodiment of sovereignty could be pressed into service, since 'the Bible ... contains some striking images of women as royal spouses and territorial symbols' (McCONE 1990: 154) liable to be understood allegorically as prefiguring the church (McCONE 1990: 158).

Overall, ‘this neat and economical approach apparently made it possible to preserve many features of traditional kingship doctrine with a modicum of ecclesiastically sanctioned additions and subtractions that may have been limited enough in volume but had enormous ideological implications’ (McCONE 1990: 142–3). Indeed, ‘the learned poets and clerics of seventh-century Ireland had in a manner invented the ideal pattern of Christian kingship which found acceptance at the court of the Carolingian emperors and through their endorsement spread across western Europe’ (SIMMS 2020: 32). However momentous its consequences, this process of adaptation seems to have been sufficiently unobtrusive to leave many surface details largely unchanged and hence potentially pertinent to comparisons in a broader Indo-European context. The basic point here is that the key role of monasteries and their adjuncts in the production of extant pre-Norman Irish literature, while a factor to be constantly borne in mind, does not preclude its exploitation for the purposes of comparative Indo-European reconstruction as an end in itself.

Notwithstanding their lack of direct bearing upon texts geared to current conventions and circumstances, such reconstructions (e.g. McCONE 2020: 104–64) have an obvious role to play in assessing the extent and nature of pagan input into early medieval Irish *senchas* because (P)IE provenance is tantamount to prechristian origin. Whereas evidence for external influences upon early Irish literature can be harvested directly from extant ecclesiastical Latin material, prechristian survivals tend to be harder to identify on the sole basis of written sources emanating from medieval Ireland’s monastic schools and their alumni. Straightforward references in these to pagan practices or beliefs are few and far between: one striking example is the explicit mention of three sister goddesses of poetry, metalwork and medicine called Brigit in Cormac’s 9th-century glossary, which served as a starting point (McCONE 1990: 162) for the aforementioned treatment of ‘fire and the arts’. Otherwise, a case for pagan provenance is likely to depend upon typological parallels, preferably supported by or consisting of specific comparative Celtic and/or other IE data, as seen above in the case of Medb and her ilk as bestowers of sovereignty.

Individual comparisons with plausibly inferred Celtic and/or (P)IE antecedents can also give some indication of the extent and nature of modifications to probable inherited “native” components in order to absorb them into a literary and ideological matrix reflecting the interests and concerns, ranging from the perennial to the ephemeral, of church(es) and state(s). *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó* may well exemplify ‘a phenomenon that one might call “transference” ... The author draws his characters from the native historical tradition, but he makes them act in a drama the plot of which came to him on a purely literary level’ (CARNEY 1955: 278). Whatever the input of Latin or vernacular literary models, comparable creativity was presumably applied in the same tale to certain traditional motifs (e.g. head-hunting and a missing eye, hand/arm or foot/leg) or themes (e.g. a first expedition after *gabál gaiscid* or a great guardian hound’s slaying by a mighty hero). On the other hand, the

comparative evidence indicated the insertion of appropriate traditional Irish characters plus some further elements into a basic framework inherited without essential change from a PIE stage in the following narratives: Clothru's incest with her triplet brothers, the expedition of the five Lugaid brothers and the similar one of Echu Muigmedón's five sons (McCONE 2020: 104–15, 143–9, 157–8 and 161–4). Finally, its central dynastic message was held to have motivated a significantly greater deviation of *Esnada Tige Buchet* from an inferred Common Celtic and PIE template still well preserved, for instance, in the aforementioned account of Massalia's foundation (McCONE 2020: 137–43). Since there is evidently a broad spectrum of possibilities, the proportion and interplay of old (prechristian), borrowed (mostly from ecclesiastical Latin sources) and new (creations and/or hybridisations) elements in the surviving medieval Irish literary corpus are best assessed with reference to individual texts in the first instance. Each case should be considered in the light of potentially relevant data without a distorting filter of formerly fashionable nativist or now prevalent clericist/anti-nativist preconceptions.

As insisted above, the messages of medieval Irish texts are to be determined with reference to their contemporary environment, which had a relatively stable ideological and a more variable political aspect reflecting the outlook and interests of an establishment centred upon monasteries and their secular royal patrons. At first sight, this excludes pagan heritage from consideration. Christianity had annexed Ireland's social and intellectual mainstream well before the emergence of narrative literature in monastic circles around the middle of the 7th century AD (McCONE 2000b: 118–19) only 250 years or so after the new religion's introduction.³⁹ Nevertheless, the survival of at least some pagan beliefs and practices would come as no great surprise, and evidence that the margins of society harboured a "counterculture" disparaged in Latin and vernacular sources dating from the later 7th to the 10th century was the main focus of a ninth chapter on 'druids and outlaws' (McCONE 1990: 203–32; cf. SIMMS 2020: 404–10). Building upon an earlier study (McCONE 1986a), this argued that *fian*-bands of mostly young warrior-hunters practising *díberg*, in effect ritualised "robbery with violence" (McCONE 1990: 206–7), in the wilds were a focus for other "deplorables" such as druids (*druid*) and satirists (*cáinti*; e.g. McCONE 1989). Evidence relating to druids in ancient Gaul and *fian*-like sodalities in various early IE societies helped to correct the marked bias against them in early medieval Irish sources produced by churchmen and their associates, who were implacably opposed to *fian*-warriors and their satellites. Whether manifested in reticence, obfuscation, implicit criticism or outright condemnation, this antipathy must be taken into account in order to gain a more objective pic-

³⁹ Without entering into the notorious controversy about the date of St. Patrick's mission, it will suffice for present purposes to note Prosper of Aquitaine's contemporary testimony (e.g. DE PAOR 1993: 79) to the presence of sufficient Christians in Ireland to merit the dispatch of a bishop (Palladius) thither by the Pope in 431 AD.

ture of this recalcitrant “pagan fringe” and its impact upon a literature whose levers of production were firmly under the church’s control.

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (KNOTT 1936), to take just one example, practitioners of *díberg* belonging to *fianna* play a central role (McCONE 1990: 206). Conaire and his beloved foster-brothers’ careers diverge when he succeeds his father as king and they follow their father, a *fián*-member, by taking up *díberg*. Conaire’s failure to punish their misdeeds properly allows things to escalate to the point where a large combined force of Irish and British *díberga(ig)* ‘marauders’, who were accompanied by druids (ll. 1419–20), attack the *briugu* Da Derga’s hostel, in which Conaire and his followers were staying. The few fatalities on the latter side tragically included the king himself, whereas all of the numerous *díberga(ig)* were slain apart from a few British leaders (§§157–9). Whatever proportion of tradition and fresh composition went into the extant narrative, the tale’s monastic cultivation was presumably due to its compatibility with the church’s outlook as a warning of the disaster in store for a king who failed to suppress the practice of *díberg*.

The patent negativity of the reaction in texts like this did not make the impact of paganism and associated practices such as *díberg* upon them any less direct. Nor, once allowed for, did it unduly impair the evidential value of their allusions to that side of life, especially if supported by relevant comparative data. After all, it is thanks to the scorn which he pours upon pagan Greek and Roman beliefs, practices and institutions that the early fourth-century Christian polemicist Arnobius has been ‘for a long time already acknowledged as one of the most important sources for our knowledge of ancient religion’ (WASZINK 1950: 117). To return to *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*, it follows from interpreting the tale as a Christian satire that the warrior conduct, practices and beliefs pilloried in it were regarded by its author not only as fundamentally non-Christian but also, since satire typically depends upon reality for effect, as a fact of contemporary life in certain quarters. It was hardly warfare as such that excited clerical disapproval but rather what were regarded as unjustified violence (notably *díberg*), wild behaviour and impious beliefs or practices as well as those (notably *fián*-members) most regularly engaged in them. As pointed out earlier, comparative evidence points to the prechristian origins of most of *Scéla Muicce*’s martial targets. Its monastic author presumably felt called upon to counter what he viewed an unchristian lifestyle because it still had sufficient, albeit increasingly marginalised, adherents to cause concern.

The following key points emerge: (1) early medieval Irish literature must be interpreted in the light of the ideals and interests of the contemporary christian establishment to which its authors belonged; (2) those concerns included hostility to a persistent “pagan fringe” that should not be neglected; (3) provided that it is given due weight, this predominantly christian matrix by no means rules out the profitable investigation of medieval Irish texts for data relevant to wider Indo-European comparisons and socio-cultural reconstructions; (4) research into the complex makeup of pre-Norman Ireland’s literary corpus should

take account of (a) external influences from ecclesiastically produced or cultivated Latin material, (b) prechristian survivals for which there is comparative or other tangible evidence, and (c) interplay or even hybridisation between these, as well as other creative modes of innovation; (5) typological comparisons with other literatures can provide mutually enriching insights.

To return briefly to palpable parallels between *Waltharius* and *Scéla Muicce meic Da Thó*, their roughly contemporary monastic authors, working in the Holy Roman Empire and in Ireland respectively, both seem to have been responding independently but in similar satirical vein to certain modes of behaviour still followed by at least some warriors in both regions. These reactions to more or less identical time-honoured martial mores repugnant to Christian morality chime well with the anti-nativist tenet that, on the whole, 'early Christian Ireland had a reasonably typical medieval western European social structure' (McCONE 1990: 25) and associated culture. ZIOLKOWSKI'S (1983: 267) reference to 'two opposed camps, one comprising those who search only for what is Christian and orthodox, another composed of those who strip away the Christian elements to uncover the supposed remnants of the pagan, the popular, or (at the very least) non-Christian' in medieval European poetry would have applied equally well to the study of medieval Irish literature. The pendulum may have swung strongly from the latter to the former camp in medieval Irish studies during the intervening period, but more than a mere shift of the blind eye from one side to the other is called for and an evidence-based synthesis of both approaches is as much a desideratum now as it was three or more decades ago.

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