Cú Chulainn’s first arming and outing (*cét-gabál gaiscid*): Roman and Greek parallels for his slaying of three brothers (Horatius, the Curiatii and Heracles), “woman trouble” (Horatius and Coriolanus), and immersions (Diomedes and Odysseus)

Zusammenfassung

Die Tötung der drei Söhne von Necht Scéne in Einzelkämpfen mit Cú Chulainn in seiner letzten ‘Jugendtat’ wurde schon in einer frühen Arbeit Dumézils *(1942) mit dem legendären Kampf zwischen zwei Gruppen von Drillingen verglichen, in dem der einzige überlebende römische Horatius die drei Curiatii aus Alba Longa der Reihe nach umbrachte. Später (*Dumézil *1956 und 1970) wurden diese und weitere Parallelen, vor allem die Siege von Trita ‘Drittem’ (dreier Brüder) und Herakles über dreiköpfige Ungeheuer in der indischen resp. griechischen Mythologie, unter den gemeinsamen Nenner ‘der Dritte erschlägt die Dreiheit’ gebracht und auf einen uridg. Mythos zurückgeführt: Dieser sei in den griechischen und indoiranischen Versionen am treuesten bewahrt, in den römischen und irischen jedoch zum Teil der rationalisierend-historischen (im Gegensatz zur mythologischen) Denkweise angepasst worden. Der vorliegende Beitrag stimmt weitgehend mit Dumézils Analyse überein, fügt aber einige Modifizierungen und Erweiterungen hinzu, vor allem: (1) Herakles’ Ermordung seiner drei Söhne (die naturgemäß Brüder waren), die für eine schon uridg. Variante mit drei erschlagenen menschlichen Brüdern neben dem Mythos der Tötung eines dreiköpfigen Ungeheuers spricht; (2) die Geschichte von Coriolanus, dessen Begegnung mit seiner eigenen Mutter und anderen römischen Matronen in mancher Hinsicht der Begegnung Cú Chulainns mit den Frauen von Ulster näher steht als der von Dumézil herangezogene Streit zwischen Horatius und seiner Schwester; (3) eine bisher unbeachtete Parallele für das dreifache Tauchen von Cú Chulainn in kaltes Wasser nach seiner Heimkehr am Ende seiner letzten Jugendtat, nämlich die dreiteilige (Seebad, Bad, Salbung) Abkühlung und Reinigung der griechischen Helden Diomedes und Odysseus nach ihrer Heimkehr aus einem erfolgreichen Ausflug im zehnten Buch der* Ilias.

I. Cú Chulainn and Necht Scéne’s three sons

The primary focus of the present study is the last and longest of Cú Chulainn’s *mac-gnímrada* ‘boyhood deeds’, which is entitled *Aided trí mac Nechta Scéni* ‘the death of Necht(a) Scéne’s three sons’ in the *LU*-text of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*

https://doi.org/10.1515/zcph-2022-0004

(O'Rahilly 1976: ll. 608–824). Cú Chulainn's central role in this has been pertinently portrayed

> 'as an utterly classic example of a three-stage rite of passage as theorized by Arnold van Gennep (1960) ...: he sets out on his own, kills the sons of Nechta Scéne, and boils with battle frenzy, threatening his own people (separation), then returns for his liminal bath, and is reassimilated into society with a privileged position at Conchobor's knee' (Boyd 2016: 38). Furthermore, 'Cú Chulainn's crossing of the frontier and his combat with the three supernatural sons of Nechta Scéne has been identified as an ancient Indo-European initiation *scenario* of a struggle with three monsters or with one three-headed monster' (Rees 1961: 249, citing Dumézil 1942 in note 9).

The episode featuring Necht[1] Scéne's three sons opens with Cathbad the druid (*druí*, l. 610) one day prophesying fame and glory for 'a young warrior who should take arms on it' (*ócláech no gébad gaisced and*, ll. 613–14). Having overheard this, the six-year-old (l. 822) Cú Chulainn went 'to request arms' (*do chuingid gascid*, ll. 616–17) from King Conchobor, who duly 'gives him a spear and shield' (*dobeir gaí ⁊ scíath dó*, l. 621; i.e. the two components of the compound *gaisced* = *ga-sced*). After breaking this and the rest 'of the fifteen sets of arms' (*dona cúic gaiscedaib déc*, l. 622) kept in reserve in the king's house 'with a view to someone's breaking a weapon or taking arms' (*fri maidm n-airm nó fri gabáil ngaiscid do neoch*, l. 623), Cú Chulainn was given Conchobor's own *gaisced* (l. 623–4) and this withstood his onslaught. The deeper roots of this initiation ceremony are indicated by ancient Germanic and Greek parallels entailing the public presentation of spear and shield to youths about to leave home and join a sodality (McCone 2021: 210). Individual initiation as a 'wolf' was followed by departure for the wilds to join others of the same ilk in ancient Arcadia,[2] and a similar process may be hinted at in Cú Chulainn's apparently pointless suggestion, on encountering the Ulster warrior Conall Cernach guard-

[1] Since *Nechta* appears only in the genitive, its nominative is uncertain and generally reproduced as *Nechta*, presumably on the assumption of a fem. *iā*-stem (OIr. nom./gen. **Nechtae*). However, nom. *Necht* is posited here on the basis of a fem. *ī*-stem (OIr. nom. **Necht*, gen. **Nechtae*) cognate with OInd. *naptī*, Lat. *neptis* (actually glossed *.i. necht* with a further marginal explanation in*gen bráthar .i. femi*ninum *indí as nepos* at Sg. 67b3, 4), and a feminine equivalent of *nia* 'sister's son' (gen. *niad*, Ogam niotta < **niot-* < **nepot-*; see *NIL* 520–4), which also occurs in a few personal names such as *Nia Cuilind* and *Nia Segamain* (O'Brien 1962: 712–14).

[2] 'Someone would always be turned from a man into a wolf at the sacrifice of Lycaean Zeus but ... if he abstained from human flesh when a wolf, they say that he would be turned back from a wolf into a man in the tenth year thereafter' (Pausanias viii, 2, 6). Pliny (*Nat. hist.* viii, 81) repeats an earlier Greek author's report of an Arcadian family's practice of choosing by lot one of its members, who then 'goes away into the wilderness and is changed into a wolf and joins a herd with the others of the same kind for nine years'.

ing the border, that they go to view the sandbank of Loch Echtrae since 'it is customary for young warriors of the *fían* to wait there' (*is gnáth airiseom óc féne and*, l. 677–8). The name of the lake cues Cú Chulainn's imminent *echtrae* 'outing, expedition' abroad, while the proposal to view a *fertas* 'sandbank' prefigures the rear shaft (*fertas*) of Conall's chariot (l. 681) broken by a stone from Cú Chulainn's sling. This incident obliged Conall to return home, leaving Cú Chulainn and his charioteer to go on alone to Loch Echtrae, where they found no one 'waiting for him' (*ara chiund*, l. 689). Thus, a failure of two different *feirtsea* turned his *echtrae* into an essentially solitary affair, like the receipt of arms from the king of the Ulaid that had initiated it.

Cú Chulainn was in a chariot by now because, the day after (*a lláa n-aile*, l. 642) taking *ga(i)sced*, he had overheard Cathbad predicting lasting fame for 'someone who should enter a chariot on it' (*nech no ragad hi carpat and*, l. 644), had approached Conchobor again and been given the king's own vehicle after breaking twelve others offered to him. Having mounted it with Conchobor's charioteer, he got the latter to drive him to Slíab Fúait, where the aforementioned encounter with Conall Cernach occurred. This second initiation will be discussed later in relation to the *Iliad*'s "Dolonea" episode featuring a nighttime raid and capture of horses by the Greek heroes Diomedes and Odysseus.

After they had left Loch Echtrae, Cú Chulainn induced the charioteer to drive him to a vantage point overlooking Mag mBreg and point out its landmarks, including *dún trí mac Nechta Scéne .i. Fóill 7 Fandall 7 Túachell a n-anmandaidi* (ll. 702–3) 'the fort of the three sons of Necht Scéne, i.e. Slight, Swallow and Cunning (are) their names' reflecting their different individual attributes as fighters. Having asked whether they were the ones 'who say that there are not more Ulstermen alive than those of them whom they have struck down' (ll. 704–5), Cú Chulainn instructed his reluctant charioteer to pay them a visit. On arrival, he performed a provocative act to attract their attention and then took a nap, during which his fearful charioteer made preparations for a quick escape. When the brothers had appeared and been told by the charioteer that the offender was 'a little lad who has gone into a chariot today on account of a propitious date' (*mac bec dochóid indiu ar esclu hi carpat*, l. 723), one of them wished him no joy of 'his first (expedition on) receipt of arms' (*a chétgabáil gaiscid*, ll. 724–5)[3] and warned the pair to leave forthwith. When the charioteer replied that the reins were in his hands but the lad was asleep, Cú Chulainn awoke and declared 'it is to seek combat with a man that the lad has come' (*is do chuingid chomraic fri fer dodeochaid in mac*, ll. 729–30). When the warrior accepted the challenge and agreed to fight in a nearby ford, the charioteer

[3] Cf. the reference to Cúscraid's first armed expedition as his *cét-gaisced* in the 'Tale of Mac Da Thó's pig' (Thurneysen 1935: §14). Lóegaire's expedition in a chariot after taking *gaisced* is hardly a further support for this practice, since it is rather obviously geared to the *Táin*'s account of Cú Chulainn's *gabál gaiscid* and first expedition (McCone 2021: 199).

identified him as Fóill and revealed his key characteristic to Cú Chulainn, who duly dispatched him and took 'his spoils and his head' (*a ḟodb ⁊ a c[h]end*, l. 740). *Mutatis mutandis*, this process was repeated in the cases of Fannall and Túachell (ll. 741–54). When a hue and cry was raised by their mother, Necht Scéne, the triumphant Cú Chulainn brought his spoils and the three heads (*a ḟodb ⁊ ... na trí cind*) thence in his chariot (ll. 755–6). The charioteer then made good the pair's escape towards Emain Machae with remarkable speed (ll. 758–66).

II. Horatius and the three Curiatii

The Roman legend of the Horatii and Curiatii at the heart of Dumézil's (1942) aforementioned study is extant in two late first-century BC sources. Although otherwise broadly similar to Livy's account summarised below, Dionysius of Halicarnassus' characteristically prolix version (iii, 13–22) has a long preamble revolving around the bonds of kinship and fosterage between them through their mothers, twin Alban sisters who had been betrothed (one to a Roman Horatius and the other to an Alban Curiatius), become pregnant and given birth to triplets at the same time (13, 4). Rome's king, for instance, points out to Alba's ruler that 'the lads have been reared (τέθραπται τὰ μειράκια) in the bosoms of both women, and greet and love each other no less than their own brothers (τοὺς ἑαυτῶν ἀδελφούς)', and consequently cautions that it might be 'not holy (οὐδ' ὅσιον)' for them to urge 'cousins and foster-brothers (ἀνεψιοὺς καὶ συντρόφους)' to fight each other since compelling them 'to stain each other with murder (ἀλλήλους μιαιφονεῖν)' would incur 'kindred (blood-)pollution (ἐμφύλιον ἄγος)' (15, 2). However, the Alban informed him that the Curiatii had already agreed enthusiastically to take on the Horatii and suggested sounding the latter out (15, 2–4). They, after due consultation with their father (17, 1–5), accepted the challenge (17, 6) on the grounds that 'we shall not be the first to break (the bond of) kinship with our cousins (τὸ ... πρὸς τοὺς ἀνεψιοὺς συγγενές)' (17, 4) and 'if the Curiatii deem kinship (τὸ συγγενές) less than honour (τοῦ καλοῦ), the Horatii will not value birth (τὸ γένος) more than valour (τῆς ἀρετῆς)'. 'Thus, in the last analysis, the sole bearers of the ἐμφύλιον ἄγος are the Curiaces' (Dumézil 1970: 21).

The strong maternal link between the two sets of triplets and resultant qualms about matching them in mortal combat were hardly Dionysius's own invention, but rather were taken by him from some earlier source. The absence of this feature from Livy's more streamlined account (i, 23–6) could be plausibly put down to his regarding it as an unnecessary and even distasteful complication. He simply states (23) that Tullus Hostilius and Mettius Fufetius, the rulers of Rome and Alba respectively, wished to avoid excessive casualties in determining which people was to govern the other and, since there happened to be in each army a set of triplet brothers of similar age and strength (*trigemini fratres, nec aetate nec uiribus dispares*), namely the Curiatii and Horatii (24, 1), agreed to settle the issue on the basis of a fight between them (24, 2). After

this had been solemnly ratified by Rome's first recorded formal *foedus* 'compact' (24, 3–9), the triplets took arms (*trigemini … arma capiunt*; 25, 1). The signal was given and both trios of youths (*terni iuuenes*) joined battle (25, 3). Two of the Roman Horatii were killed and all three Alban Curiatii wounded (25, 5). Although unharmed (*integer*), the remaining Horatius was no match on his own for all three adversaries at once (*uniuersis solus nequaquam par*) but fierce enough to face them singly (*aduersus singulos ferox*; 25, 7). Accordingly, he took to his heels (*capessit fugam*) in order to string his wearied opponents out, killing first one and then another at intervals (25, 7–10). That left two combatants, 'the one physically untouched by weapons and fierce through a double victory' (*alterum intactum ferro corpus et geminata uictoria ferocem*), whereas the other was 'dragging a body tired by a wound, tired by running' (*fessum uolnere, fessum cursu trahens corpus*) and 'overcome by the slaughter of brothers ahead of him' (*uictusque fratrum ante se strage*) (25, 11). Horatius duly dispatched and despoiled his opponent (25, 12), and both armies returned home (26, 1). Returning at the head of the Roman host and bearing the triple spoils before him (*princeps … trigemina spolia prae se gerens*), Horatius was met at a city gate by his sister, who had been betrothed to one of the Curiatii and ostentatiously bewailed her fiancé's death on recognising his military cloak over her brother's shoulders (26, 2). Her lamentation 'amidst his victory and such public rejoicing (*in uictoria sua tantoque gaudio publico*)' provoked 'the wild youth (*feroci iuueni*)' to draw his sword and kill her (26, 3), crying: 'Go hence with untimely love to your betrothed, forgetful of dead and living brothers (and) forgetful of fatherland. So may any Roman woman go, who mourns an enemy (*sic eat quaecumque Romana lugebit hostem*)' (26, 3–4). Although that crime was deemed atrocious (*atrox uisum id facinus*; 26, 5) and Horatius was condemned to death for 'treason' (*perduellionem*; 26, 7), he was acquitted on appeal by the people in response to the pleading of his father, who then arranged for due expiation of, and penance for, an outrage primarily affecting the *gens Horatia*, upon which the repetition of certain ceremonies thereafter was enjoined (26, 8–14).

In a substantially revised (DUMÉZIL 1970: xiii) English version of an earlier work (1956), DUMÉZIL (1970: 9–11) gives the following summary of the still earlier study mentioned above:

> 'We attempted in 1942 … to interpret … the duel between Horace and the Curiaces … It seemed to us that this little drama in three scenes – the duel against three brothers from which one of the three Roman champions emerges, alone, but victorious; the cruel scene where the warrior, in the intoxication and excess of triumph, kills his sister … for her crime of revealing the feminine weakness of a lover's grief; finally the judgment and the expiations which reserve this youthful glory and this youthful force for Rome while effacing its blemish – is but the Roman adaptation, … colored in accordance with Roman morality, of … the story of the first combat, the

> initiatory combat, of the celebrated hero Cúchulainn … There we proposed a "model" of evolution …: once the *furor* which had been the savage ideal … of the Italic warriors of prehistory (as it remained that of the warriors of Celtic and Germanic epic) had been depreciated for the sake of legionary discipline, the scenes of the narrative, while retaining their order of succession, were articulated differently … a justified and almost reasonable anger, provoked from without and following the exploit, was substituted for the physical and spontaneous exaltation of the entire being in the course of the exploit; and, above all, the confrontation of aggressive virility with unleashed femininity abandoned the troubled regions of sex and took the form of a moving moral conflict between a homicidal brother and a widowed sister. It is only in the conclusion of the book (pp. 126–34) that, passing beyond this limited comparison, we mentioned that the exploits of Cúchulainn and Horace are two variants, or rather two neighboring forms of one and the same variant, of a ritual or mythical exploit known from other examples in the literatures of several Indo-European peoples: the combat, fraught with consequences, of a god or hero against an adversary endowed with some form of triplicity'.

The basic relationship between these Roman and Irish narratives envisaged by Dumézil seems eminently plausible. Young Cú Chulainn's sexually suggestive encounter with the bare-breasted women of Emain Machae on returning home with 'three heads in his chariot' (*trí cind inna c[h]arput*, l. 801; cf. Horatius' return *trigemina spolia prae se gerens* above) and in a state of high excitement from a remarkably successful *cét-gabál gaiscid* will be considered below, after a look at the broader IE parallels claimed above and duly subjected to a further study (Dumézil 1956).

III. Indo-Iranian and Greek slayings of a three-headed monster

The first and foremost of these is rather baldly and allusively attested in early Indian sources. According to the *Rig-veda* (x, 8, 8–9), 'knowing the paternal weapons, at Indra's instigation (*índreṣita*) the Āptya fought and, having killed the three-headed (*tri-śīrṣā́ṇaṃ*) seven-bridled one, Trita also released the son of Tvaṣṭr̥'s cows (*Tvā́ṣṭrásya … gā́ḥ*). Indra beheaded the one who pretended to great strength (*ójo*) … and, having also gathered together (some) of Tvaṣṭr̥'s son Viśvarūpa's cows (*Tvā́ṣṭrásya cid Viśvárūpasya gónām*), took his three heads (*trī́ṇi śīrṣā́*) off' (cf. Cú Chulainn). A passage from the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* (i, 2, 3, 1–5; cited in English translation by Dumézil 1970: 24–5) tells how the Āptyas (Trita 'Third', Dvita 'Second' and Ekata 'First') were born from the fire-god Agni's successive expectorations upon the water and were Indra's followers, how Trita slew Tvaṣṭr̥'s three-headed son Viśvarūpa, and how the sin deemed to have arisen thereby was expiated by sacrifice. Its basic nature is delineated by Dumézil (1970: 19–20) as follows:

> 'The Brāhmaṇa and the epic literature hold above all the crime of brahmanicide, one of the gravest of all crimes: the Tricephal was a brahman. And more than just a brahman; he was, despite his demonic affinities, the chaplain of the gods ... As Tvaṣṭṛ's son, however, he had another connection with the gods ...: this chaplain of the gods was their nephew, their "sister's son," *svasriya*'.

An Indo-Iranian prototype of Trita the Āptya's act can be posited on the strength of Avestan references to the killing of a three-headed 'serpent/dragon' (*aži*) by the bearer of a similar name, Θraētaona the Āθβiia, whose medieval Persian outcome Ferīdūn had two older brothers (Dumézil 1970: 14–18). He was one of three admittedly non-sibling recipients of the *x^varənah* '(radiant) glory' which left Yima in three parts according to the Avestan *Zamyād Yašt* (Yašt 19, 31–43; cf. McCone 2020: 107–8 and 129):

> 'That one, the Glory (*x^uarənō*), Θraētaona seized, (Θraētaona,) the son of the Āθβiia-clan, of the heroic family ... who slew the Dragon Dahāka, who had three mouths, three heads (*ažim dahākəm θrizafanəm θrikamərəδəm*), six eyes, a thousand skills, the very mighty devilish Falsehood (*aš.aojaŋhəm* [*aojah-* cognate with Vedic *ójas-* above] *daēuuīm drujim*) ... whom the Evil Spirit brought forth as the mightiest Falsehood against the corporeal world, for the destruction of the world of Truth (*aṣ̌ahe*)' (36–7; text and translation Hintze 1994: 22).

In the Indian/Indo-Iranian as well the Roman version, one of three brothers overcomes threefold opposition, a scheme formulated by Dumézil (1970: 15) as 'the third kills the triple'. The triplicity straightforwardly manifested by the three sons of Necht Scéne has also been claimed for their slayer, albeit on the grounds that 'the characteristic of "thirdness" is present in a remarkable form' in Cú Chulainn's three-stage conception,[4] in a footnote (Dumézil 1970: 15–16, n. 7) offering a still less straightforward example: 'In the case of the Greek

[4] It has been suggested (McCone 1990: 198–9) that 'deliberate resonances with Christ's career also help to explain the extraordinarily elaborate triple conception of Cú Chulainn as recounted in *Compert Con Culainn*', where 'the normal heroic halfway house ... of human mother plus supernatural father' is an intermediate stage linking a fully supernatural higher with a fully human lower one by means of the same father (the supernatural Lug) in stages 1&2 and the same mother (the mortal Dechtire) in 2&3. While the choice between clerically introduced triplication and Dumézil's proposal is an "either or", both approaches may be accommodated by positing clerical adoption (and, quite likely, some adaptation) of a pre-existing threefold scheme deemed amenable to an *interpretatio Christiana.* Whatever the reason, Cú Chulainn's final emergence after the early death of the first and abortion of the second child clearly makes him a 'third' and, not unlike Heracles, the superhumanly powerful cumulation of a triply protracted process in 'Version I' of CCC (Thurneysen 1921: 268–71). That said, the balance of probability is tipped against Dumézil's hypothesis by the absence

hero Heracles, conqueror of the triple adversary (Indian type: Geryon has three heads), "thirdness" is expressed in a different but related way ...: his conception occurred not ... in three years and three attempts, but in one night three times as long as normal (... Diodorus 4.9.2: τὸν γὰρ Δία μισγόμενον Ἀλκμήνῃ τριπλασίαν τὴν νύκτα ποιῆσαι ...)' on account of Zeus making the night of his congress with Alcmene 'three-fold (τρι-πλασίαν)' and their issue exceedingly strong as a result of this extended period of 'child-making'. According to Hesiod (*Theogony* 287–94), Chrysaor and a daughter of Oceanus begot 'three-headed Geryon' (τρικέφαλον Γηρυονῆα, 287), whom Heracles slew on sea-girt Erythia as he was driving his cows (βοῦς) off after killing Orthus and the cowherd Eurytion'. Apollodorus' fuller account (*Bibliotheca* ii, 5, 10) provides the context: the tenth labour enjoined upon Heracles was the bringing of Geryon's cows from the distant island of Erythia (later Gadeira, present-day Cadiz) near the Ocean, where they were tended by Eurytion and guarded by the 'two-headed hound' (ὁ κύων δικέφαλος, 106) Orthus (see McCone 2021: 205), and Geryon was shot by an arrow in a fight with Heracles after catching up with him as he was abducting the cows, having slain Geryon's hound and herdsman (108). Trita's slaughter of the three-headed Viśva-rūpa 'All-shaped' was likewise accompanied by the abduction of his cattle, while Necht Scéne's three sons were killed as part of a foray by Cú Chulainn that also yielded booty.

It seems worth asking what relationship, if any, may exist between the 'adversary endowed with some form of triplicity' (Dumézil 1970: 11) and the postulate of a PIE system in which three social bodies (the main age-grades) were integrated by a single head called **(H)rḗĝ-on-* 'king' (McCone 2020: 104–15 and 130). An antagonist combining three heads with a single body would effectively constitute an inversion of this. A PIE myth setting him in opposition to "three-in-one" sovereignty might then be posited on the strength of the *Zamyād Yašt*'s aforementioned embedding of Θraētaona's killing of the three-headed Aži Dahāka, significantly called a 'lie (*druj*)' inimical to 'truth (*aṣ̌a*)' (Hintze 1994: 22, §37; cf. McCone 2020: 130), in an account of the tripartition of Yima's *x^varənah*. It must, however, be admitted that no such context is apparent in the Indian cognate, Heracles' encounter with Geryon or the Roman and Irish variants with three brothers. That said, the medieval Irish narrative *Aided Meidbe* 'Medb's Death(-tale)' (ed. and trans. Hull 1938: 55–61) ascribes a key role in the transmission of kingship (McCone 2020: 107) to yet another version of 'the third kills the triple'. Its opening (Hull 1938: 55) states that the king of Ireland, Eochaid Feidlech, had three sons and three daughters, naming the former as the 'white triplets (*find-emna*)' Bres and Nár and Lothur, and the latter as Eithne Úathach and Medb of Crúachu and Clothru of Crúachu. It then tells how the brothers sought to take their father's kingship, were approached by Clothru and reproached by her with 'un-truth' (*an-fír*) against their father

of this elaborate triple scheme from the similarly old 'Version II' (Thurneysen 1921: 271–3), which features a single conception and birth.

but accepted her offer to provide them with issue by sleeping with each of them in turn. The result was their joint fathering of the future king Lugaid of the Red Stripes (McCone 2020: 107) and the triplets' death in battle against their father for committing the 'un-truth' (*an-fír*) of sex with their own sister. The Indo-Iranian, Greek, Roman and Irish narratives of primary concern here can, then, be derived from a PIE prototype centred upon a male monster, whose fearsome form with three-heads united by one body inverted a social structure with three main components integrated by one head, and the taking of his life, heads and cattle by the "third" of three brothers.

In Dumezil's (1970: 11) already cited opinion, the episodes involving Cú Chulainn and Horatius are closely related variants of a broader IE mythical pattern featuring an implicitly triple god or hero's victory over an overtly triple supernatural opponent. Indeed, 'the triplicity of the monster adversary of the new Victor-type champion is such a general feature in the Indo-European world that one is tempted to see it as an inherited detail from a common prehistory. There are different ways this triplicity has been expressed ...: sometimes it is a three-headed or three-bodied being (the Vedic and Iranian Tricephal, the Greek Geryon), sometimes triplet brothers (the three sons of Nechta ...; the three Curiaces, etc.)' (Dumézil 1970: 159). As to the relative antiquity of these two alternatives,

> 'the Indo-Iranian myths of the victory over the Tricephal seem to retain definite traces of a type of ritual in which the hero's victim was other-worldly ... Evidently those western traditions in which the hero triumphs over three brothers are much less ancient. Presumably they represent a free literary variation, rationalized and historicized, on the theme of the triple adversary' (Dumézil 1970: 154).

Taken together, these rather scattered comments imply (1) a PIE prototype in which a three-headed monster is killed by a hero, probably one of three brothers on the strength of the Indic Āptyas and Roman Horatii (with or without further support from triple aspects of the conceptions of Cú Chulainn and Heracles), and (2) an apparently "Italo-Celtic" variant (whether denoting a sub-PIE genetic node or diffusion between Celtic and Italic speakers) substituting three brothers for the single being with three heads and perhaps adding a fraught encounter between the returning warrior and a woman or women from home.

IV. Kin-slaying and Heracles' slaughter of his three sons

Kin-slaying and its expiation are central to Dumézil's comparison of the Indian myth of Trita and Viśvarūpa with the Roman legend of the Horatii and Curiatii. As noted above, Dionysius' account of the latter 'elegantly avoids this consequence' insofar as 'not only do Rome and her king avoid stain by not compelling their champions, but so do the champions themselves by establishing juridically that the bond has already been broken in the choice taken by their

partners' (Dumézil 1970: 21). It seems quite possible that the maternal link between the two sets of triplets originally constituted the kin-slaying calling for atonement, as in the case of Trita and Viśvarūpa. If so, it has been neutralised and then displaced by a more limited case arising from the intemperate murder of his provocatively distraught sister by the surviving Horatius:

> 'The stain demands expiation, purification. And it is probably here that the functional correspondence of Trita and the Āptya on the one hand, and of Horace and his *gens* on the other, appears in its most suggestive form ... and no longer mythically, but ritually—for India, in the ordinary liturgy of the sacrifice, and for Rome in an annual ceremony—the Āptya and the [clan/*gens* of] Horatii are repeatedly charged ... with the role of cleansing the stain' (Dumézil 1970: 22–3).

The child Sétantae acquired his definitive new name Cú Chulainn as a result of his slaughter of a fierce attacking hound belonging to the smith Culann in the episode (O'Rahilly 1976: ll. 540–607) directly preceding his successful first armed expedition and defeat of three notable enemies of the Ulaid in the last of his *mac-gnímrada* described above. A Greek parallel is provided by Diodorus Siculus' (iv, 10) account of how Heracles, when an infant (βρέφος; eight months old in the episode as described by Apollodorus ii, 4, 8), was given this name in place of the one (Alcaeus) bestowed by his parents after he had strangled two serpents (δράκοντας) sent by Hera to kill him. Later (when eighteen years old, to judge from Apollodorus ii, 4, 9), he persuaded his coevals (ἡλικιώτας) to join him in taking arms and defeating Thebes' Minyan overlords. He was given the Theban king Creon's daughter Megara in marriage as a reward but Eurystheus, the king of Argos, then demanded his services in performing 'labours (ἆθλους)' and Heracles' refusal was undermined by a Delphic oracle. Diodorus goes on (iv, 11) to recount how, when he was plunged into extreme despondency (ἀθυμίαν) by this demeaning but divinely ordained prospect, Hera inflicted 'fury (λύσσαν)' upon him. As a result, he fell into 'madness (μανίαν)' and shot down his children by Megara under the impression that they were enemies. When he realised the enormity of what he had done, he spent a long time grieving and avoiding human company before finally deciding to undertake the labours enjoined by Eurystheus. After completing these, he gave his wife to Iolaus (iv, 31). Viewing infanticide as the first of three key sins committed by Heracles, Dumézil (1970: 98) sees in Diodorus' foregoing account 'a whole cycle: the murder of his children ..., the painful return to reason, the submission to the will of the gods, the twelve labours accomplished under the order of Eurystheus'.

The source used by Dumézil makes Heracles' aversion to the unavoidable labours ultimately responsible for his derangement and murder of his own children, after which he accepted the gods' will after a long period of grief. However, Apollodorus places the madness and infanticide before the imposition of the labours, which are thus effectively part of the atonement for his sins. In

both versions, the 'whole cycle' is initiated by Heracles' marriage to Megara and terminated by her bestowal upon another. According to Apollodorus, Creon of Thebes gave his eldest daughter Megara in marriage to Heracles in return for his victory over the Minyans, and she bore him three sons (ii, 4, 11). Hostilities with the Minyans had been provoked by Heracles' mutilation of messengers sent by them to exact the annual tribute due from Thebes, when he encountered them on his way thither after slaying the lion of Cithaeron, which had been destroying King Thespius' cattle, and then using its head and skin as his characteristic garb (ii, 4, 9–11). However, 'after the fight against the Minyans, it so happened that he went mad (μανῆναι) on account of Hera's jealousy and threw his own children by Megara and two of Iphicles' into the fire. Having consequently condemned himself to exile, he is purified (καθαίρεται) by Thespius and, having come to Delphi, enquires of the god where he shall settle. The Pythian priestess of Apollo at Delphi then addressed him as Heracles for the first time – he was previously called Alcides. She told him to settle in Tiryns, serving Eurystheus for twelve years, and to carry out the ten labours/ordeals (ἄθλους) imposed' (ii, 4, 12). His performance of these, the tenth being the already recounted slaughter of the three-headed Geryon, and of a further two subsequently added is then narrated (ii, 5, 1–12). 'After the labours/ordeals (ἄθλους), having arrived in Thebes, he gave Megara to Iolaus' (ii, 6, 1). Here too acquisition of his definitive name Heracles followed upon a killing in response to a hostile intervention by Hera, but the victims were his own three sons and he was a young adult according to Apollodorus whereas they were two serpents and he was a mere baby according to Diodorus.

Like Horatius and Cú Chulainn, Heracles slew three brothers. That said, their status as his own young sons and his atonement for their murder merit further comparison with Horatius' killing of his own unmarried sister after dispatching the Curiatii triplets. Although its significance as the earliest surviving account of the infanticide is somewhat diminished by a number of liberties apparently taken with more traditional versions of the myth,[5] Euripides' (*c.* 480–406 BC) tragedy *Heracles* likewise sets the number of the hero's sons by Megara at three (ll. 462–75), describes their successive deaths from his arrows (969–1000) and refers to the impurity attaching to him (e.g. 1233, ἀνόσιον μίασμ' ἐμὸν) as a result. A higher original number might be inferred from the

[5] These include an otherwise unattested usurper of Creon's throne called Lycus, from whose lethal machinations Megara and her children had sought sanctuary. Heracles, meanwhile, was believed to be missing in Hades' realm on his twelfth labour, the capture of Cerberus, but appeared unexpectedly and killed Lycus. Having been turned mad by the goddess Lyssa on Hera's orders, he then slew not only his sons but also Megara. The malevolent Lycus and the location of Heracles' crazed murder of his sons (and also his wife) after the conclusion of his labours look like innovations serving Euripides' dramatic purpose, while its obvious appeal to an Athenian audience was presumably his chief reason for the likewise innovatory appearance of Theseus at the end of the play to comfort Heracles and take him to Athens to recover.

reference to sacrifices performed at Thebes in honour of the eight dead sons of Megara and Heracles in a somewhat earlier source, Pindar's (*c.* 520–*c.* 440 BC) fourth *Isthmian ode* (ll. 69–70), especially if Apollodorus' count were ultimately derived from Euripides. However, not only are there no other indications of Apollodorus' ultimate dependence upon the Athenian tragedian but he also supplies a detail absent from Euripides' account in naming Heracles' three sons as Therimachus, Creontiades and Deicoon (ii, 4, 11). That being so, the support of two independent sources tips the balance of probability in favour of an original trio of sibling victims, the alternative eight then being explicable as an admittedly rather old feature of a local Theban variant in which an increase in the length of Heracles' sojourn in Thebes as husband to the daughter of the city's king Creon had had a knock-on effect on the number of their sons.

All three main sources agree that the goddess Hera was ultimately responsible for the murderous madness that afflicted Heracles, whom she hated as her husband Zeus' illegitimate son. In two of them, this *mania* was triggered by *lyssa*, which is presented by Euripides (*Heracles*, 822–73) as an actual character in the form of a lesser deity Lyssa accompanying Hera's messenger Iris and acting reluctantly on her orders. In the *Iliad*, however, *lyssa*/λύσσα (< **luk$^{u̯}$-i̯a* 'wolfishness', an abstract based upon **luk$^{u̯}$-o-* 'wolf'; Lincoln 1975) regularly denotes an impersonal and irresistible battle-frenzy very similar to Norse *berserksgangr* 'going berserk', as a result of which Óðinn's 'men went to battle without coats of mail and acted like mad dogs or wolves' according to *Ynglingasaga* 6 (trans. Hollander 1964: 10), or Cú Chulainn's *ríastrad* 'warp spasm' (e.g. McCone 2021: 218–19): Hector, for instance, 'rages terribly ... for a great frenzy (λύσσα) has entered him' (ix, 237–9) and is said by Odysseus to be in the throes of 'deadly frenzy (λύσσαν ... ὀλοήν)' (ix, 305), while Achilles' heart is later described as being still in the grip of 'mighty frenzy (λύσσα ... κρατερή)' (xxi, 542–3; cf. λυσσᾶν 'be in a rabid/frenzied state (λύσσα)' in battle at Herodotus ix, 71, 3).

Mention has already been made of Dumézil's suggestion that, in the surviving accounts of Horatius' murder of his sister on returning from his victory over the three Curiatii, an emotional and moral conflict had replaced a more primitive trigger: namely, a surplus of warrior frenzy after success in a fierce combat as manifested by Cú Chulainn's aggression towards his own people in the aftermath, discussed below, of his triumph over the three sons of Necht Scéne. Insofar as the presence of λύσσα in two of the three main extant accounts points to its role as the trigger of Heracles' slaughter of his three sons in an earlier form of myth from which they derive, it seems quite possible that this had similarly rationalised an original concept of λύσσα still apparent in the *Iliad* into an instrument of divine vengeance. If so, there may have been a still earlier stage at which Heracles' crime of triple kin-slaying was simply the result of continuing λύσσα after a ferocious fight,[6] whether with man or

[6] Interestingly, this is a possibility envisaged by his mortal "father" in response to

beast. Be that as it may, his slaughter of three brothers raises doubts about this variant's status as a later "Italo-Celtic" historicisation of a PIE myth featuring the defeat of a supernatural tricephalic monster. Rather, its admittedly somewhat modified occurrence in Heracles' dossier alongside the killing of the three-headed Geryon suggests that both variants may have coexisted more or less from the outset, the former on a primarily human level of heroic mythology or "legend" and the latter on a more strictly "mythic" one with a greater or even entirely divine orientation.[7]

V. Cú Chulainn, Coriolanus and women

To return to Cú Chulainn's journey home after despatching, decapitating and despoiling Necht Scéne's three sons in successive single combats, he captured a stag and birds alive in a successful hunt on the way (O'Rahilly 1976: ll. 767–99; the same basic elements occur in reverse order in Apollodorus' already summarised account of Heracles' successful hunt of the lion and first battle against human foes). Consequently, he reached the Ulster capital Emain Machae with impressive trophies (ll. 799–802). Recognising his frenzied state, the lookout warned that a warrior in a chariot was approaching and general bloodshed would ensue unless precautions were taken and 'women naked in front went forth against him' (*mani dichset mná ernochta friss*, l. 804–5; for a couple of parallels, see Carey 2005: 36, n. 19). Cú Chulainn then issued a challenge by turning the left side of his chariot towards Emain, swearing to spill the blood of everyone in the fort (*isin dún*) 'unless a man be found to fight against me' (*mani étar fer do gleó frim-sa*) (ll. 808–9). The episode concludes as follows (ll. 810-821):

> '"Women naked in front to meet him! (*mná ernochta ara chend!*)" said Conchobar. Then the womenfolk (*bantrocht*) of Emain around Mugain wife of Conchobar mac Nessa come to meet him and bare their breasts to him (*donnochtat a mbruinni friss*). "These are the warriors (*óic*) that will encounter you today", said Mugain. He covered his face. Then the warriors (*láith gaile*) of Emain seize him and put him into a vat of cold water (*i ndabaig n-úarusci*). That vat bursts around him. The second vat into which he was put, it boiled with fist(-sized bubble)s (*fichis dornaib*) from him. The third vat into which he went afterwards, he warmed it so that its heat and cold were tempered for him. He comes out after that and the queen, i.e. Mugain, then invests him with a blue cloak with a silver broach in it and a hooded tunic, and he

Heracles' delusion that he had killed Eurystheus, not Lycus: 'Surely the killing of the dead whom you have just slain has not frenzied you (σ' ἐβάκχευσεν)?' (Euripides, *Heracles* ll. 966–7).

[7] Cf. McCone (2020: 137–50 and 157–62) on two similarly related sovereignty myths or a legend and a myth, if preferred, although the distinction between these categories is far from watertight.

sits below Conchobar's knee thereafter and that was his place (*lepaid*) always after that'.

Cú Chulainn's threat to slaughter his own people after killing three enemy brothers in succession obviously resembles Horatius' confrontation with his own sister in the afterglow of slaying triplets one by one, while kin-slaying and triplicity are fused in Heracles' slaughter of his own three sons. However, whereas Heracles and Horatius actually committed the grievous sin of murdering their own kin and had to be ritually cleansed of it, Cú Chulainn's frenzied lust for further combat was forestalled by the womenfolk of Emain and doused in three successive cooling baths. That said, this successful female thwarting of the danger to his own people posed by an impetuous young warrior also has a striking Roman parallel.

Livy (ii, 33, 5–9) observes that, before the capture of the Volscian town of Corioli in 493 BC, 'there was then in the camp among the leaders of the youths (*inter primores iuuenum*) one Cnaeus Marcius, a young man (*adulescens*) quick to consider and act, whose cognomen was subsequently Coriolanus' because he facilitated Roman victory by fiercely bursting in through the gate with a picked band of soldiers. When the ardent patrician Coriolanus' hostility towards the recently created tribunate of the common people and opposition to the unconditional distribution of grain to them antagonised the plebeians two years later, he went into exile among the Volsci to the immediate south of Latium and plotted revenge with his host (ii, 34–5). He then led a Volscian army against Rome, took a number of Latin towns and finally pitched camp near the city itself, remaining obdurate in the face of two embassies sent by the Roman senate to treat for peace (ii, 39). The first of these consisted of legates/spokesmen (*legati/oratores*; 39, 9–10) and the second of priests (*sacerdotes*) in full regalia (39, 12). Finally, Rome's matrons (*matronae*) assembled and descended upon Coriolanus' mother Veturia and wife Volumnia, whom they asked to join them and bring Coriolanus' two young sons along on a supplicatory visit to the enemy camp (ii, 40, 1–2). Having been unmoved by the legates' public dignity (*publica maiestate*) or the priests' great religious aura (*tanta ... religione*), Coriolanus was even more resistant to women's tears (40, 3). On being informed that his grief-stricken mother, wife and children were present, he frantically rose and went to embrace his mother but she, switching from supplication to anger, rebuked him firmly (40, 4–9). Having then been embraced by his wife and children, he was finally broken by the tearful lamentations that arose from the whole crowd of women (*ab omni turba mulierum*), took his leave from his family and moved his encampment away from the city (40, 9–10). The manner of his death after withdrawing his forces from Roman territory varies from author to author but he was said to have lived in exile until old age by the earliest of these, Fabius,[8] and the Romans built and dedicated 'a temple to women's Fortune (*templum*

[8] Quintus Fabius Pictor, the 3rd-century BC author of Rome's first known history

Fortunae muliebri)' (40, 10–12). The danger to Rome evaporated with the help of internal strife between the two main components of the enemy army (40, 12–13).

Dumézil's (1973: 239–62) study of the Coriolanus legend is based chiefly upon appreciably longer accounts by Dionysius (vi, 13–viii, 63) and Plutarch (*Coriolanus*). Both are in broad agreement with Livy's more succinct narrative but contain various extra details such as Coriolanus' unsuccessful candidacy for the consulship (Dion. vii, 21, 2; *Cor.* 14–15) and the charge that he was aiming at tyranny (Dion. vii, 58, 1). Dumézil, unsurprisingly, placed considerable emphasis upon two patterns selected and interpreted as manifestations of his scheme of three "functions", namely (1) sovereignty divided between and jointly exercised by (a) rulers and (b) priests, (2) warfare and (3) the likes of peace, fertility and crops (cf. McCone 2020: 104). The first of these was inferred from the main allegations against Coriolanus: (3) a plan to withhold grain from the plebs, (1a/b) an attack upon the tribunate and its sacrosanctity, and (2) his unauthorised division of booty among his army of volunteers (Dumézil 1973: 242–8). The second was seen in the composition of the three successive Roman embassies sent to (2) Coriolanus in his army camp: (1a) ex-consuls,[9] (1b) priests, and (3) women (Dumézil 1973: 248–52). Although not actually proposed by Dumézil himself, a similarly selective "trifunctional" approach to Cú Chulainn's first expedition abroad might have emphasised its initiation by Ulster's (1a) chief druid Cathbad and (1b) king Conchobor, its facilitation by incapacitating the province's (2) leading warrior Conall Cernach and its satisfactory conclusion through the intervention of (3) the women of Emain.

To return to Dumézil's two analyses, it seems quite a stretch to assign *tribuni plebis* to a "sovereign" first function, particularly in a narrative dominated by the attempts of a plebeian lower class, spearheaded by tribunes belonging to and elected by it, to assert its rights against a governing upper class of patricians enjoying a monopoly of the consulate as well as other higher magistrates and priesthoods. Coriolanus' failure to gain the consulate might have been entertained as an alternative but, unlike his alleged but unsubstantiated (Dion. viii, 6, 1–2) aspiration to tyranny, this was hardly an offence. As for the embassies, the first two were made up of precisely the two kinds of fellow patrician most likely to be respected by Coriolanus, while he yielded to the claims of family rather than femininity as such in response to the third. In any case, a "third function" sufficiently vague to be represented *ad libitum* by grain or women among other things seems to have a disconcertingly wide range and ease of

(written in Greek and no longer extant but known very fragmentarily from references by later classical authors), from the city's foundation to at least the middle of the Second Punic or Hannibalic War (Beck & Walter 2005: 56–60).

[9] Only specified as such by Dionysius (viii, 22, 5; ἅπαντες ὑπατικοί), but the ambassadors' seniority is also implied by Livy's reference above to their *publica maiestas*. Plutarch (*Cor.* 30, 4) states that they were Coriolanus' friends and relations. None of these designations is necessarily at odds with the others.

application. The basic point may rather be that the domesticity of mature married mothers stands in marked contrast with the bellicosity of a young married warrior like Coriolanus. Indeed, such women are the diametric opposite of an immature unmarried fighter like Cú Chulainn, whose uncontrolled outburst of raw masculinity was effectively countered by a deliberate part-exposure of seasoned femininity. Both confrontations and their outcomes may be viewed as the neutralisation of a young warrior's assertive aggression by its opposite, namely mature women's power to defy and shame him by sexual or supplicatory pressure.

Although political controversy revolving around a class struggle was the primary reason for Coriolanus' vengeful hostilities against his own people, his yielding to his mother, wife and Rome's matrons has obvious affinities with the quelling of the returning Cú Chulainn's frenzied urge to fight his own people by Emain's women under the leadership of Mugain, who was both the king's wife and his own foster-mother. Needless to say, the baring of breasts employed to that end by the Ulsterwomen would be deemed quite unacceptable in the case of such esteemed models of female virtue as early Roman matrons, who kept well within the perceived bounds of feminine propriety by recourse to tears, prayers and maternal disapproval. Notwithstanding Dumézil's silence on the subject, Coriolanus' encounter with the Roman matrons arguably has even stronger claims than Horatius' confrontation with his sister to be regarded as, in Dumézil's already cited words regarding the latter,

> 'the Roman adaptation, ... colored in accordance with Roman morality, of[, in this case, the conclusion to] ... the story of the first combat ... of the celebrated hero Cúchulainn'.

VI. Warriors' acquisition of horses and immersion in water

Their prevention by mature women from projected attacks upon their own people exempted both heroic warriors from ritual atonement of the kind enjoined upon Horatius. Whereas his u-turn ultimately doomed Coriolanus to death or a miserable long life in exile, Cú Chulainn was readmitted to his community by a process also described by his charioteer in the saga of 'Cú Chulainn's sick-lying (*serg-lige*)' (Dillon 1953: ll. 594–9): 'We fear, indeed, that the man will vent his anger upon us, since he deems the battle that he has obtained insufficient. Let someone go ... and let three vats of cold water be prepared in order to quench his fury (*bruth*). The first vat into which he goes boils (*fichid*) over. No one can endure the second vat on account of its heat. The heat of the third vat is tempered'.

As suggested elsewhere (McCone 1986: 16–17; 1987: 112–13; 1990: 172), this may ultimately be the narrative counterpart of an initiatory baptismal ritual similar to the one appearing on an internal panel of the second- or first-century BC Gallo-Thracian Gundestrup cauldron. This depicts (a) a lower line

of apparently fur-clad spear- and shield-bearing footsoldiers symbolised by a wolf and turned towards a large figure tipping one of them into a large vessel and (b) an upper line of helmeted horsemen moving away in the opposite direction. An Indian *brahmacārín* or Veda-student underwent a similar ritual of readmission after some eight years spent away from home with a teacher: 'Around the sixteenth year he ends his study of the Veda. On a riverbank he removes his clothing, casting belt, skin and staff into the river. Then his hair and beard are shaved, and he is washed and anointed. He receives golden jewellery, new clothing and sandals. He travels on a wagon to the village ... He returns to his parents and marries shortly thereafter' (Falk 1986: 70). Water, of course, lends itself to "rites of passage" such as Christian baptism by virtue of its frequent association with cleansing and boundaries as well as the appositeness of immersion and re-emergence as symbols of transition through "death" by quasi-drowning and then "rebirth". For instance, Pliny (*Nat. hist.* viii, 81) records an ancient Arcadian ritual whereby someone was chosen by lot from a particular kindred to strip off, swim across a pond, become a 'wolf' and member of a band comprising others of the same kind for a number of years before swimming back across the pond, getting dressed and returning to human society (cf. McCone 2020: 95). Another rather obvious ritual of this kind used envelopment of the head in darkness as a symbol of death and a beam as the threshold crossed (presumably before "rebirth" by removing the head-covering) in Livy's account of Horatius' purification by his father after an appeal to the people had overturned his conviction for *perduellio*, the penalty for which included complete covering of the head and hanging by a rope from a barren tree (i, 26, 6): 'He, after the performance of certain expiatory sacrifices subsequently entrusted to the *gens Horatia*, had a beam (*tigillum*) put across the road and sent his son with fully covered head (under it) as if under the yoke.[10] Regularly restored at public expense, it still remains today; they call it the sisterly beam (*tigillum sororium*)' (i, 26, 13). The punishment for *perduellio* seems to be echoed by the beam and head-covering in what looks like the aetiology of a rite of passage: 'The most persuasive interpretation of the myth is that the *tigillum* marked an ancient gateway into the city, through which warriors had to pass in a ceremony of purification at the end of a campaign in order to be readmitted to the civic community'[11] (Cornell 1995: 200).

As for the heat released during Cú Chulainn's triple immersion, the warrior's fire when in the throes of battle-frenzy figures as an outward manifesta-

[10] Not a literal yoke but a structure of two spears fixed into the ground with a third one tied above between them, through which a defeated army or people were required to pass as a sign of defeat and submission (Livy iii, 28, 10–11; cf. the Hittite rite in the following footnote).

[11] Cf. the (italicised) part omitted ('...') from the text of a Hittite ritual for purifying a defeated army in the citation by McCone (2021: 208–9): '*in front they make a gate of hawthorn and draw a rope up and over it. Then they light a fire in front of the gate on one side and also light a fire on the other side.* The troops pass through the middle'.

tion of his boiling inner heat in another contribution to the present volume (McCone 2022; cf. McCone 2006 on OIr. *gal* etc.). The notion of "burning", "boiling" or "seething" with rage or anger is still familiar, while OIr. *bruth* 'heat, fury' (< Celtic **bru-tu-*; see Irslinger 2002: 88–9) is a derivative of the root appearing in OIr. *berbaid* 'boils' (< **beru̯-e/o-*, PIE **bʰeru̯* 'seethe, boil'; *LIV* 65–6/*LIV*² 81, McCone 2009) and it has been argued (McCone 2010) that OIr. *fichid* 'seethes, boils' (< Celt. **u̯ik-ī-*) and *fichid* 'fights' (< **u̯ik-e/o-*) derive from a single PIE root **u̯ei̯k* with both meanings (but only the latter in *LIV* 611–12/*LIV*² 670–1).

Cú Chulainn's expedition and its watery conclusion may have significant but seemingly hitherto unrecognised features in common with an ancient Greek narrative involving two notable Homeric heroes. At the end of *Iliad* viii, the Trojan army camp out for the night after a successful day's fighting on the plain between their city and the Greek encampment, the guarding of which is entrusted to young warriors (κοῦροι) at the beginning of the next book: 'There were seven leaders of the guards, and a hundred κοῦροι armed with long spears accompanied each of them. They then went and sat between the ditch and the wall' (ix, 85–7), i.e. on the boundary between the camp within and the plain outside. A fruitless embassy to the disaffected Achilles takes up the rest of the book, which ends with the Greek kings retiring to bed. Whereas the fighting in the *Iliad* otherwise takes place in daylight, the self-contained tenth book commonly known as the Dolonea is set in the darkness of night. This was the time for κοῦροι to come into their own insofar as Greek 'sources tell us' that 'the man who fights by day is opposed to the youth who fights by night' (Vidal-Naquet 1986: 113) in a 'twofold structure' with 'Culture on one side, Nature on the other; on one side Savagery ..., on the other Civilization' (Vidal-Naquet 1986: 141).[12]

The Dolonea opens with an agitated Menelaus joining a sleepless Agamemnon on a visit to Nestor, whose own son [Thrasymedes] was joint head of the young guards along with Meriones (57–9). Once roused, old Nestor not only acceded to a check-up on the youths outside the camp but also recommended taking Diomedes, Odysseus and others along. This group found the guards fully alert like dogs (κύνες) who had heard the sound of a wild beast while watching sheep (180–93), and crossed the ditch with the youths' two leaders onto the plain to take counsel 'in the open, where there appeared clear of fallen bodies a place from which mighty Hector had turned back, when the cover of night came, from destroying Greeks' (199–201). In this "no-man's land", it was decided to send Tydeus' son Diomedes and Odysseus to spy on the Trojans. Thereupon 'both donned terrible arms. The staunch warrior Thrasymedes gave the son of Tydeus a double-edged sword ... and a shield. And around his head

[12] Without mentioning the Dolonea, Vidal-Naquet (1986: 119) claims that 'it is by reference to the same opposition that we can understand why Nestor has two different initiations into the art of war in the *Iliad*, first as a young man, lightly armed, taking part in a cattle raid at night, and then as a heavily armed adult (*Iliad* 11.670–762)'.

he put a helmet (κυνέην) of bull-hide 'without a horn, without a crest'. It is called a skull-cap (καταῖτυξ) and protects the heads of young men (αἰζηῶν) in their prime.[13] And Meriones gave Odysseus a bow and quiver and a sword. And around his head he put a helmet (κυνέην) made of hide … and outside the teeth of a white-tusked boar, set thickly here and there, held it well and cleverly' (x, 254–65). Warriors like Diomedes and Odysseus usually went into battle by day in horse-drawn chariots, but here they set out on foot 'like two lions through the dark night, over slaughter, over corpses, and through weaponry and dark blood' (297–8).

Hector also proposed a spying foray and a 'swift-footed' Trojan named Dolon, having volunteered in return for a promise of Achilles' horses and chariot, 'forthwith slung a curved bow and arrows around his shoulders, donned the skin of a grey wolf (ῥινὸν πολοῖο λύκοιο) on the outside and a cap of weasel skin (κτιδέην κυνέην) on his head and grasped a sharp javelin' (333–5). Having spotted him, Odysseus and Diomedes lay in wait 'off the road among the corpses' (349) and, after the youth had run swiftly by, pursued him like two dogs (δύω κύνε, 360) after a young deer or a hare. When caught by Diomedes, Dolon promised a ransom and gave information about the Thracian king Rhesus and his wonderful horses (350–441) but was nonetheless beheaded and despoiled (455–9). Their expedition now motivated by the prospect of acquiring horses as Dolon's had been, the two Greeks then made for the Thracian encampment and found its occupants asleep around the slumbering Rhesus and his steeds. Diomedes killed the king and twelve other Thracians while Odysseus took his horses. After a triumphant homecoming, 'when they reached the son of Tydeus' well-constructed hut, they bound the steeds with well-cut straps to the manger for horses' (566–8). Thereafter Diomedes and Odysseus bathed twice: 'When the swell of the sea had washed (νίψεν) the abundant sweat from their skin and they had been cooled (ἀνέψυχθεν) in their dear heart, they went into well-polished bath-tubs (ἀσαμίνθους) and bathed (λούσαντο). Having bathed and anointed themselves thoroughly with olive oil (ἀλειψαμένω λίπ' ἐλαίῳ), they sat down to a meal and made libations to Athene of honey-sweet wine drawn from a full drinking bowl' (574–9).

In this extraordinary narrative, the two leaders of the young guards protecting the Greek camp's perimeter bestow their own arms upon two of their visitors in readiness for a raid under cover of night. The adult warriors Diomedes and Odysseus are thereby symbolically initiated into the band of *kouroi* by their two leaders in a manner reminiscent of the presentation of a shield and spear by an adult to Cú Chulainn, Germanic (Tacitus, *Germania* 13) or Athenian youths (*Ath. pol.* §42; ed. and trans. Rhodes 2017) about to undertake their first expedition or patrol, but with inversion of the customary ages of the initiates and initiators. Diomedes and Odysseus duly set out on foot in one direction and the

[13] Note the '*aizēos* man (αἰζηὸς ἀνήρ) testing his youthful prime (πειρώμενος ἥβης)' at xxiii, 432.

fleet-footed Dolon in his wolfskin in the other. The Trojan had been promised Achilles' splendid horses and chariot but it was the Greek pair who serendipitously captured Rhesus' magnificent steeds on the strength of information given by Dolon after they had chanced upon and caught him. Having departed on foot but returned in triumph on horseback, they proceeded to go first into the sea to cool off and wash away sweat naturally and then into man-made tubs for a civilised bath followed by a thorough rub of olive oil, a prized agricultural product, before sitting down together to share food. Thus was their acquisition of horses followed by a homecoming and immersion/covering in a succession of liquids (saltwater, freshwater and olive oil) to effect a three-stage (cooling, cleansing and "polishing") transition[14] from "nature" (in the form of a savage night-raid after initiation as quasi-*kouroi*) back to "culture" (represented by a regular sit-down meal accompanied by libations of wine).

In both the Dolonea and the last of Cú Chulainn's 'boyhood deeds', an expedition lasting just one day or night may be regarded as the greatly compressed narrative counterpart of a real-life institution: a youth's formal receipt of weapons as a prelude to leaving home and becoming a member of a roaming sodality (such as an early Irish *fían*) for some years until his equestrian readmission to settled society along lines discernible on the aforementioned panel of the Gundestrup Cauldron. Although adults only temporarily initiated into their number by young warriors, Diomedes and Odysseus duly set out on foot for the enemy camp and later returned to their own with horses captured in a successful nocturnal raid. The precocious Cú Chulainn, by contrast, made his first foray into enemy territory not only at the exceptionally young age of six[15] but also in a horse-drawn chariot granted to him a day after his receipt of a spear

[14] Virtually the same sequence is seen in Odysseus' more dramatic return to civilisation (the Phaeacians) after his wanderings and final shipwreck. Firstly, he stripped off and plunged into the sea (*Od. v*, 372–5) for an exhausting three-day swim to land and a night's sleep in a wood. When she encountered him as he emerged on the morrow, the Phaeacian king's daughter ordered her handmaidens to give the stranger food and drink and bathe him in (the freshwater of) a river (λούσατέ τ' ἐν ποταμῷ) (vi, 209–10), placing clothes and a flask of olive oil ready for him (214–15). Odysseus duly cleansed himself in the river, anointed himself with oil and dressed (224–8). Although not explicitly mentioned, stripping before plunging into the sea and dressing after taking a bath and rubbing oil on were presumably to be understood at the end of the Dolonea.

[15] *Bretha Crólige* (Binchy 1934–38: 40–2, §52) states that the 'sick-maintenance of a child' (*mac-othrus*) ceased at 'the end of seven years' and was then succeeded by the 'soft food of fosterage' (*máeth-biad altruma*), while *Críth Gablach* (Binchy 1941: 2, §6) gives fourteen as the age for a *fer midboth* to emerge 'from childhood (*a mmaici*), from the law of fosterage (*a ddligi*ud *altruma*)'. In the first recension of the *Táin*, Cú Chulainn's last three *mac-gnímrada* are said to have taken place at the end of his fifth and sixth and during his seventh year respectively. Since a further two or three episodes intervene between these and the first one (O'Rahilly 1976: ll. 399–456) recounting the beginning of his fosterage with Conchobor, this was presumably

and shield. The early Irish Church's well-attested disapproval of the *fían* (McCone 1990: 218–23) may lie behind this acquisition of horses before rather than (as in the Dolonea) during the spell away or (as on the Gundestrup Cauldron) after it. Not only was Cú Chulainn's expectation of an encounter with young *fían*-warriors at Loch Echtrae explicitly frustrated but his first outing abroad was also distanced from the *fían* by using the intervening provision of equestrian transport as a means of breaking the traditional link of presentation of a spear and shield with initiation into a sodality. Although clerical manipulation may be suspected in these two cases, the comparative evidence considered above indicates that key elements of the episode have deep pre-Christian, indeed Indo-European roots. After all, notwithstanding a probable IE pedigree, its concluding message that the purging of a warrior's violent urges was a prerequisite for social acceptability was almost bound to appeal to churchmen.

To turn from this aspect to the reconstruction of a PIE myth or myths, recognition of ecclesiastical motives for placing the acquisition of horses before an initiatory outing in Cú Chulainn's case enhances the claims of the Dolonea or the Gundestrup Cauldron to have preserved a more traditional location of this development at a later point in the basic sequence of events.

The cooling of Cú Chulainn's ardour by successive immersions in three separate vats of cold water on his return to Emain constitutes a commensurate conclusion to a first expedition featuring the slaughter of three dangerous sibling opponents in successive single combats. Although thirteen was the number of Diomedes' victims in his and Odysseus' surprise night attack upon Rhesus and his men, their return to camp was accompanied by a corresponding three-stage bathing process, albeit a more sophisticated one moving along the scale from nature to culture: (1) a cold plunge into the briny sea, (2) a (presumably) warm freshwater bath in polished tubs, and (3) a thorough anointing with oil. Horatius' rehabilitation after murdering his sister as he returned from slaying the Curiatii triplets one by one also had three stages, albeit with an orientation towards a culpable homicide and an aetiology of rites associated with a Roman landmark, the *tigillum sororium*: (1) public trial and condemnation, (2) public acquittal on appeal, and (3) ritual purification arranged by his father. Apollodorus' account of Heracles' atonement for unwittingly murdering his three sons also recognised three phases: (1) self-condemnation to exile, (2) ritual purification by King Thespius, and (3) the Delphic oracle's instructions to perform a series of labours imposed by King Eurystheus of Tiryns.

envisaged as occurring before he reached the age of five (in his fifth year according to ll. 376–7). Thus, his period of fosterage is represented as beginning and ending some years before the normally allotted ages.

VII. Conclusions

These four rather diverse witnesses from three different IE branches point to a prototype in which a warrior, who was recently initiated (Dol.), young (Hor., Her.)[16] or both (CC), went on an expedition (CC, Dol.)[17] marked by the slaughter of three brothers in succession (CC, Hor., Her.;[18] kinsmen of his in the last two cases) and acquisition of equestrian transport (CC, Dol.) and was readmitted to his home community (CC, Dol., Hor.,) or otherwise rehabilitated (Her.) by undergoing a three-stage purging process of immersion (CC, Dol.) or, if kin-slaying had been involved, atonement (Hor., Her.).

The obvious next question is if or how an underlying narrative of this type may be related to a PIE myth, more or less directly extrapolated by Dumézil from Indo-Iranian and Greek examples, of a three-headed being's death (Viśvarūpa/Aži Dahāka, and Geryon) at the hands of a single but somehow "triple" god or hero (Trita the Āptya/Θraētaona the Āθβiia, and Heracles). Dumézil deduced the presence of kin-slaying and its expiation in the prototype from Indic sources and the Roman legend but paid scant attention to the raid upon the victim's cattle mentioned in the Rigveda's brief account and central to Heracles' tenth labour. However, Lincoln (1981: 103–22) has since invoked both as key supports for his reconstruction of a PIE myth of the first cattle raid, which would reflect the social and economic importance of owning and gaining cattle inferred for the Proto-Indo-Europeans from Indo-Iranian and other IE sources, not least medieval Irish (e.g. McCone 1991).

On the one hand, then, there is an arguably primordial cattle raid in which a monstrous tricephalic male loses his life and stock to a god or hero, in Trita's case a kinsman on the mother's side and a 'third' brother acting without the other two. On the other, there is an essentially human conflict in which three brothers are killed by a hero (himself the remaining survivor of triplets in Horatius' case) on an outing apparently initiated by the presentation of weapons, accompanied by the acquisition of horses, and concluded by a rite entailing

[16] As seen in the summaries of Livy's and Dionysius' accounts given earlier, the Horatii and Curiatii are collectively referred to as *iuvenes* in the former and μειράκια in the latter, and there is no indication whatever that they were married. Heracles was, of course, married when he slew his three young sons and was apparently envisaged as being in his twenties at the time, having married Megara soon after his victories over the lion of Cithaeron and the Minyans at the age of eighteen according to Apollodorus' account summarised above.

[17] Although theirs was hardly an expedition in the normal sense, the Horatii did fight the Curiatii outside Rome. In the already discussed accounts of Diodorus and Apollodorus, Heracles' expeditions against the Cithaeron lion and the Minyans occurred some years before his sons' murder but this was followed directly by departure from Thebes and then a whole series of expeditions constituting his labours.

[18] Heracles' three sons were shot down one after the other according to Euripides (*Heracles* ll. 970–1000) in the only extant detailed account of their murders.

either three successive immersions to temper the heat resulting from combat or a threefold expiation of kin-slaying. Reference has been made earlier to Dumézil's postulate of (A) a PIE original featuring the killing of a tricephalic relative by one of three brothers and its subsequent expiation, and (B) a western or "Italo-Celtic" derivative which substituted three sibling victims for the single three-headed one and added a fraught encounter with one or more women at the end. It has been argued above that Heracles' slaughter of three brothers, in this case his own sons, makes PIE provenance likely for B too. If so, A and B may well have coexisted as separate narratives more or less from the outset, the former on a primarily supernatural and the latter on a primarily natural/human plane. Needless to say, the boundary between them was far from impermeable since, for example, gods were prone to intervene in the affairs of men and an ability to move between human and divine spheres was an essential characteristic of heroes such as the demi-god Heracles.

Even if the three-headed and triple sibling victims belonged to different mythical paradigms from the outset, both of these still display similar basic frameworks: an expedition culminating in a single protagonist's victory over threefold opposition and a problematical aftermath. That being so, the possibility of subsequent interaction between them may be envisaged. The complication of kinship between slayer and slain may have been an "optional extra" in both from an early stage but, alternatively, it could originally have been a regular component of A lacking in B. If so, it may have been lost in some later versions of the former (Heracles versus Geryon and, apparently, Θraētaona versus Aži Dahāka) under the influence of the latter or conversely introduced into some variants of the latter (Horatii and Curiatii, Heracles and his sons) from the former. That said, there seems to be no good evidence to support projection of the fraught encounter with women in two witnesses back beyond an "Italo-Celtic" stage. Whereas this confrontation proved fatal for Horatius' emotional young sister, the mature women of Emain succeeded in shaming Cú Chulainn, a pattern also exemplified by the story of Rome's matrons and Coriolanus. In the absence of obstructive women, immersion was a voluntary affair in the Dolonea, whereas their intervention paved the way for the imposition of three cold baths upon Cú Chulainn.

The expedition in A was a cattle raid that apparently led to the slaying of a three-headed blood-relative and a need for its expiation. In B, however, the slaying of three brothers was the dramatic climax of an expedition lasting a mere day or night and presented as a condensed heroic narrative echo of a sequence typically taking several years in real life: a youth's initiatory presentation with arms, departure to join and spend some years away in a sodality, and return home to undergo an immersive rite of passage and assume adult equestrian status (McCone 1987: 112–13). B's initiatory orientation seems to have favoured horses over cattle as the expedition's main booty. The ritual depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron places the acquisition of equestrian transport after immersion, but in the Dolonea the two Greek heroes themselves capture horses

from a numerically superior enemy and bring them home prior to bathing. If Cú Chulainn's receipt of a chariot and horses directly before leaving home is the result of clerical manipulation as argued above, it follows that he obtained them at a different point in an unattested earlier form of the narrative, whether in the course of the expedition à la Dolonea or after immersion à la Gundestrup. The former variant seems the more likely in a heroic tale, and it is easy enough to envisage a plot in which the sons of Necht Scéne arrived on the scene in a horse-drawn chariot or chariots and, after slaying them, Cú Chulainn made good his escape in one of these.

Notwithstanding a certain amount of clerical interference, the last of Cú Chulainn's 'boyhood deeds' has a key role to play in reconstructing a PIE myth (plus a probably "Italo-Celtic" addition) concerning a warrior hero's initiation, first outing and triumphant homecoming (while posing a threat countered by women).

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