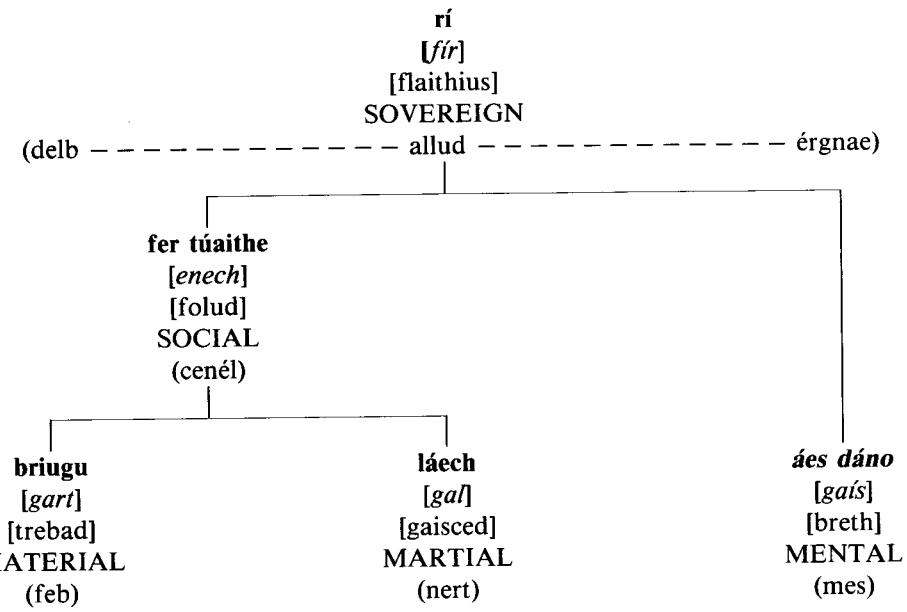
still more explicit in a genealogical narrative from the Book of Leinster about a quartet of brothers famous in saga: "Art Mes Delmonn son of Sétnae Sithbacc had four sons, namely Mes Gegra the king (*rí*) of the Laigin, Mes Réta, i.e. Mac Da Thó . . ., Mess Dána the battle-champion (*cath-míl*), Mes Domnann, i.e. the poet (*filí*)" (Knott, 1936, 72-3). Significantly, it is known from elsewhere that the only brother whose role in life is not specified here, Mes Róeta alias Mac Da Thó, was a *briugu* (McCone, 1984c, 4) to complete the trio of hospitaller, warrior and member of the *áes dáno* related to the king.

9. These considerations point to something like the system represented diagrammatically below, in which three separate specializations in the ideologically crucial areas of material provision, warfare and mental capacity are integrated in two stages. The first two are combined by a landowning class of farmer-soldiers, and then the most exalted of these, the king, further incorporates the *áes dáno* aspect.

Certain key terms and concepts tend to be associated with these spheres in the literature. Owing at least in part to the exigencies of alliteration so prominent in the descriptive passages in 6 above, there is considerable variation in the actual words used, but usually this happens within the confines of a recognizable semantic field and in what follows one appropriate word will do duty for a cluster of others with similar sense or implications.

Activities and qualifications of the *briugu* are covered by terms like *gart* "generosity", *trebad* "property-management" and *feb* "wealth", those of the *láech* or warrior by *gal* "valour", *gaisced* "bearing arms" and *nert* "strength", and those of the *áes dáno* by *gaís* "wisdom", *breth* "judgement", *mes* "discernment" and *éolus* "knowledge". All of the attributes of hospitaller and warrior are required in a somewhat less concentrated form by the landowning citizen or *fer túaithe*, to whom the need for *enech* "face", *folud* "good standing" and *cenél* "breeding" applies with particular force. As the integrating pinnacle of this social and ideological system, the king should not only manifest the whole range of these features but also mirror them in his own person viewed under three main headings of physical appearance (*delb, cruth* etc.), social and martial eminence (*allud, ordan* etc.), and judgement or discernment (*mes, érgnae* etc.). Each term in this trio incarnates the matrix of functions and attributes in the material, martial (capable of being expanded to social) and mental columns respectively, the whole constituting the *fír* or "truth" essential for the successful exercise of the monarch's *flaith[ius]* or "sovereignty". As Alden Watson has recently put it, "sovereignty must create order in all things. This is why the king's truth is seen as so all important in early Irish society. Schematically, the king is viewed as someone whose truth and person must be flawless, for it is by upholding his own honour that he upholds the honour and face of his tribe. The monarch creates order in society by himself being a personification of order. If the king cannot embody these concepts, then disaster can befall the tribe which he rules" (1986, 133).

Thus the main divisions of society integrated by the king follow the same ideological lines as the sovereign's principal personal qualities and the cosmic aspects mediated by sovereignty itself (see 10 below). In this way a triple parallelism on several different levels is established by means of a classificatory scheme to which Lévi-Strauss's generalizations about what is ironically termed 'the savage mind' are eminently applicable insofar as it allows "the natural and social universe to be



grasped as an organized whole" (1972, 135). Rather like the 'totemic operator' posited by the famous French anthropologist in a South American Indian context "the whole set thus constitutes a sort of conceptual apparatus which filters unity through multiplicity, multiplicity through unity, diversity through identity, and identity through diversity" (ibid., 153). A characteristic of such 'pre-scientific' thought is the belief that a particular constellation of features on one level such as the individual may influence and be influenced by similar constellations of comparable features on other levels like human society, nature or the world at large. In such cases the establishment of classificatory parallels between microcosm and macrocosm, nature and society and so forth implies links of causation that modern science would frequently reject (cf. McCone, 1980, 152-5). Hence, for example, the at first sight bizarre notion that a king's physical, social and mental attributes have a direct bearing upon the workings of nature, society and the human disposition in general.

10. It is hardly a coincidence that these should be precisely the three personal aspects identified by Mac Cana as being prone to transformation in literary representations of the goddess or woman of sovereignty: "we have a number of instances falling into three distinct categories, namely those depicting the goddess as (i) an ugly hag transformed into a beautiful lady by the embraces of the hero destined to become king, e.g. the Niall Noígiallach and Lugaid Laígde tales, (ii) a wild wandering female who is restored to sanity and beauty through union with the rightful king, e.g. the tales about Mór Muman and Mis, and (iii) a girl of royal birth brought up among cowherds and elevated again to her due dignity through marriage to the king, e.g. the story of Ethne, the fosterling of Buchet . . ., and that of Mess Buachalla, who was reared among cowherds and eventually became the wife of Eterscélae, king of Tara" (1958, 63-4).

Abstract or non-personal representations of the sovereignty similarly tend to focus upon prosperity or disaster, as the case may be, in the spheres of nature, society and morality. For example, a rather comprehensive list of the benefits of *fír flathemon* or "ruler's truth" in *Audacht Morainn* (par. 12-21) comprises the warding off of great lightnings and plagues, the acquisition of territory and riches, the blessings of peace, tranquillity, happiness, comfort and health, success in war, continuity of inheritance, and abundance of mast, dairy produce, cereals, fish and offspring.

From the milieu of saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* offers two fine descriptions along similar lines. "There were great benefits in his reign (*flaith*), namely seven ships putting in every month of May at Inber Colbtha, and mast to the knees every autumn, and great knowledge (*imbas*) on the Bush and the Boyne in the middle of the month of May every year, and an abundance of pleasant intercourse so that no one was against the other in Ireland during his reign (*flaith*) and everyone thought the voice of his fellow in Ireland during his reign (*flaith*) as sweet as the strings of lyres would be. The wind used not to disturb the tail of a cow from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn. His reign (*flaith*) was not thundery and stormy" (par. 17). "His reign (*flaith*) is good", said Fer Rogain." A cloud has not come over the sun since he took up sovereignty (*flaith*) from the beginning of spring to the middle of autumn, and drops of dew have not come from the grass until midday, and wind does not toss the tail of livestock until evening, and no wolf has trespassed in his reign (*flaith*) save for a bull calf from every byre from the end of one year to the next, and there are seven wolves in hostageship against the wall in his house to maintain that ordinance, and there is a back-up surety behind them, namely Mac Locc, and it is he who pleads on their behalf in Conaire's house. It is in his reign (*flaith*) that every man thinks the voice of his fellow as sweet as the strings of lyres would be on account of the excellence of the law and the peace and the pleasant intercourse that are throughout Ireland. It is in his reign (*flaith*) that there are the three top crops on Ireland, namely a crop of corn ears, a crop of blossoms and a crop of mast" (par. 66, cf. *LU* 7009-20).

A similar point is made more laconically at the beginning of *Scél na Fír Flatha*: "an exalted, eminent king once took the sovereignty and supremacy over Ireland, namely Cormac grandson of Conn. The world was full of every goodness in the time of that king. There was fruit of tree and earth and sea (*mes ⁊ clas ⁊ murthorud*). There was peace and ease and pleasure (*síd ⁊ sáime ⁊ subae*). There was neither slaughter nor reaving (*guin na díberg*) at that time, but everyone in his own ancestral place (*ina inad dúthaig fodéin*)". Social stability is emphasized in the validation of Conchobar's reign after his probationary year of sole dominion over Ulster in the saga *Mesca Ulad*: "the province was a well of plenty and propriety through Conchobar, so that there was not an empty and deserted former homestead . . . without a son in the place of his father and his grandfather serving his ancestral lord" (ll. 130-5).

The following are typical enough examples of the reverse effects of a king's unsuitability or misbehaviour. During the reign of the usurper Cairbre Cinn Chait and his plebeian followers "the earth did not then yield its fruit to the churls (*aithig*) after the great murder they had inflicted upon the noble lineages (*sóer-chlanna*) of Ireland, and there was a great famine among the men of Ireland so that there was neither grain in the earth nor mast in the wood nor fish in the inlets nor milk with

cows nor weather in its due order" (Thurneysen, 1917, 63, par. 11). After Lugaid Mac Con's false judgement in *Cath Maige Mucrama* "for a year thereafter he was in kingship in Tara, and grass did not come through the earth nor a leaf through trees nor grain into corn. Then the men of Ireland expelled him from his kingship because he was a false king" (par. 66; *an-flaith*, literally 'non-king'). In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* hostile incursions and mayhem signal the beginning of the end for Conaire after his unjust partiality towards his fosterbrothers (cf. O'Daly in Dillon, 1968, 113-5): "they made for Tara past Uisnech Midi and then saw their incursion from East and West and South and North, and they saw the bands and the hosts and the land of the Uí Néill about him was a heaven of fire. 'What is that?' said Conaire. 'Not difficult', said his followers. 'Namely, it is not hard to recognise that it is the law that has broken down when people have set about burning the land'" (par. 25-6, cf. *LU* 6741-6). King Bres reaps a fitting reward for his stinginess in *Cath Maige Tuired*: "neither service nor compensation by the kingdoms (*túatha*) continued, and the wealth of the kingdom (*túath*) was not being rendered through the tribulation of the whole kingdom" (par. 38). Finally, the outraged poet Cairbre ends his famous satire with the words "Bres's wealth is not, then" and it transpires that "that was true, indeed. There was only decay upon him from that time" (par. 39).

It thus emerges that the king (*flaith[em]*) and the woman of sovereignty (*flaith[ius]*) mate and interact as respective representatives of human society and the divine powers manifested in nature or the cosmos as a whole. As individuals each is endowed with a similar threefold set of personal qualities that essentially replicates the basic arrangement of the constituencies they represent. The relevant details pertaining to the king and the society ruled over by him have been given in 9 above, while the foregoing should have demonstrated an analogous connection between the sovereignty herself and the cosmic order she embodies. The broad outlines may be conveniently summarised in diagrammatic form.

material – – – – – – social – – – – – – moral

COSMOS

form – – – – – – status – – – – – – mind

SOVEREIGNTY
| |
KING

form – – – – – – status – – – – – – mind

SOCIETY

	freeman/	
hospitaller – – – – – –	warrior	– – – – – – man of art
(provision)	(rank)	(wisdom)

The remarks about the diagram in 9 above with reference to Lévi-Strauss's totemic operator apply with even greater force to this scheme, which provides a

classic stratagem enabling "the natural and social universe to be grasped as an organized whole" by means of configurational parallels between various parts repeatedly classified on a "three in one" basis. The upshot is a flexible framework in which social and natural forces can be embodied in an individual, a system of a common type described by Mary Douglas as one in which "the cosmos is turned in, as it were, on man. Its transforming energy is threaded on to the lives of individuals so that nothing happens in the way of storms, sickness, blights or droughts except in virtue of these personal links" (1966, 85). This capacity to personalise or otherwise particularise broader concepts or issues, thus focusing them upon a specific symbol or set of symbols, is crucial to mythical discourse in general since, in Vernant's words, "thought takes shape by expressing itself symbolically in and through myth as it does in and through language" (ch. 3, 4).

11. In this respect the woman's mythical role as the embodiment of sovereignty is crucial as an adaptable device for the narrative treatment of kingship in both general and particular aspects. For example, it has already been seen towards the end of 4 above how *Cath Bóinde* and *Aided Meidbe* express the sovereignty's tripartite nature, threatened disintegration, ultimate reintegration and retention within the family, so to speak, in an account of Lugaid Réo nDerg's conception through a sister's incest with her three brothers in order to thwart their rebellion against a royal father. Conversely it emerged that *Esnada Tige Buchet* uses Eithne's abandonment of her feeble father and greedy brothers for Buchet and Cormac Mac Airt to depict the passage of the Tara monarchy from the Laigin to the Síl Cuinn forebears of the Uí Néill.

As Mac Cana points out, "the underlying tradition envisages the goddess espoused to the rightful king, but it also regards her as the mother of such a king and the ancestress of a royal line" (1957, 88). Thus towards the end of *Esnada Tige Buchet* Eithne bears Cormac a son Cairpre Lifechair to continue the line of Síl Cuinn kings descended from him, while Mes Búachalla's union with the hitherto childless king Eterscél of Tara duly provides the son and heir promised to him, namely Conaire, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 6-8). Such literary reflections of a real enough queenly function can endow a woman of this type with considerable significance in the genealogical record cultivated by early Christian Ireland's monastically educated *senchaidi* (ch. 1, 10-11), and her various relations with the traditional founders of one or more lineages can serve to define their respective political fortunes or aspirations.

Two striking examples ably discussed by Ó Corráin (1985, 74-80) and Sproule (1985, 18-21) deserve brief mention here, pending a fuller treatment of the political aspect in chapter ten. A short narrative insertion into a genealogy of the Munster Éoganacht describes a dream by king Conall Corc of Cashel's wife Oíbfind concerning her four sons, from whom a central group of these dynasties claimed descent, and a fifth half-brother Cairbre Cruithnechán, ancestor of their more distant and bitter rivals the Éoganacht Locha Léin: "this is the Oíbfind who saw the vision the first night she had slept with the king in Cashel. That is, she saw that she had begotten four whelps. She bathed the first whelp in wine, namely Nad Froích, she bathed the second in ale, namely Mac Cas, she bathed the third in new milk, namely Mac Bróc, she bathed the fourth in water, namely Mac Iair. The fifth whelp reached her from outside as she lay, and she bathed that one in blood. He is Cairbre

Cruithnechán and he turned on her and ate her breasts from her bosom etc." (*Corp. Gen.*, 196 = 148a33-9). Obviously this politically biased tale seeks to exclude the Éoganacht Locha Léin from a claim upon the provincial kingship by portraying their ancestor as a vicious intruder consequently devoid of legitimacy.

In the genealogically oriented saga *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (3 above), by contrast, the woman of sovereignty is cast as actual or would-be lover rather than as mother or stepmother of the principals, and it is the illegitimate Níall Noígiallach who sleeps with her, thereby securing the Tara kingship for himself and his Uí Néill descendants to the almost complete exclusion of his royal father's legitimate sons. Eponymous ancestors of the Uí Ailella, Uí Fiachrach and Uí Briúin, their rejection of her effectively restricts their and their descendants' dynastic pretensions to Connacht.

It has already been seen (10 above) that changes in the physical, social or mental condition of the woman on contact with her destined royal mate serve to personalise for narrative purposes the natural, social and spiritual benefits thought to accrue to a kingdom under a *fír-flaith* or "true king" in the sense already defined (see 6-7). Conversely, she can also function in a number of ways as a narrative index of failure or unsuitability on the part of a king or would-be king.

Bruiden Da Choca is the story of the rather contentious election of the exile Cormac Conn Loinges to succeed his father Conchobar as king of Ulster and of his death at Da Choca's hostel on a journey from Connacht to Ulster that is beset by tokens and prophecies of doom. The prize of sovereignty over the Ulaid thus tantalisingly eludes him when almost within his grasp, a fate poignantly portrayed by his brief encounter with a fair and shapely maiden (*ingen chóem chruthach*) who approaches and gives the following reply to his question as to whether she will stay and accompany him: "no, and I would prefer it that you should not go, for the cutting short of your life has come. Malevolent is the man who reached you this morning, Craiptine the harper, when he played his hole-headed lute to you. The reason he came was to violate your taboo (*geis*), so that it may be a short life for you in order that we may never meet again. I am gone now, since we shall not meet henceforth" (pars. 19-21). Thereupon she leaves him.

12. Máire Bhreathnach (1982) has argued with particular reference to *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* that the goddess of sovereignty may revert to a malign or hideous aspect in order to portend or encompass the death of a king who has done wrong. In the former tale this feature is chiefly exemplified by the hideous hag Cailb, who foretells Conaire's slaughter while seeking admission to his company in Da Derga's hostel after sunset in breach of one of his taboos or *geisi* (pars. 61-3). One of the many aliases she intones on one leg is Badb, probably a pagan war goddess in origin (e.g. de Vries, 1961, 137-8) and commonly depicted in the literature as a gruesome haunter-of the battlefield and harbinger of carnage. In the generically related *Bruiden Da Choca* the fleeting encounter described above between Cormac and the beautiful woman of sovereignty is preceded by a quite different confrontation with the bloody Badb, who like her *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* counterpart prophesies the king's impending doom on one leg, this time with one eye closed too (pars. 15-8). This juxtaposition seems to vitiate Bhreathnach's equation of the latter type with the sovereignty, and in any case retribution for regal wrongdoing is hardly the motive for Badb's appearance to Cormac, who has yet to assume the kingship promised him.

The patently Christian message of *Aided Muirchertaig* will be discussed below (ch. 6, 4), but the beautiful Sín undoubtedly functions in it as a diabolical sovereignty woman who bewitches the Tara monarch, causes him to abandon his former wife, and leads him to conflict and death. However, far from punishing any previous misdemeanour of the king's, Sín leads a hitherto flawless sovereign astray out of personal malice.

In *Echtra Airt meic Cuind* and *Fingal Rónáin* the fate of the kingship is bound up with tensions that arise when a royal father's new bride comes between him and the son who is his heir apparent. Although the language of the extant version of the former is early Modern Irish, the title appears in all three surviving manuscripts of the roughly eleventh-century saga list B (Mac Cana, 1980, 53), and linguistic modernization need not have significantly affected the basic framework of an old tale. At any rate, *Echtra Airt* combines various narrative stereotypes and supernatural features with some palpable Christian allegory to be discussed below (ch. 6, 8), whereas social and psychological realism pervades much of *Fingal Rónáin* despite linguistic features pointing to an Old or early Middle Irish date of composition.

Echtra Airt begins with a reference to the benefits of Conn Cétchathach's rule in Tara with his beloved wife Eithne Tháebfata at his side, and then tells how Eithne's death so dejected him that he lost the will to govern. One day, while Conn was alone on Howth Head lamenting his wife, the Túatha Dé Danann assembled in the land of promise (*tír tairngiri*) to expel the adulterous Bé-cuma Cneis-gel ("Woman-shape Skin-fair") to Ireland, home of their hated Milesian successors (ch. 3, 8). "She had a lover in Ireland, namely Art son of Conn Cétchathach and it was not known to her that Art was her lover". Her dress, looks and accomplishments as she voyaged to Ireland are lavishly described as perfect "but for one thing, that a woman was not fit for a high-king of Ireland after her banishment for her own misdeed" (par. 5). Meeting Conn at Howth, she declares that she has come from the Land of Promise to seek Art son of Conn, to whom she had given "love in absence" (*grád écmaise*; 3 above), and introduces herself as Delb-cháem ("Form-fair") daughter of Morgan. Announcing that "I see no defects in you for which it would be right to refuse you, unless they are concealed in you", Conn allows her her own choice between himself and his son (par. 6). Having chosen the old king, she secures Art's banishment from Ireland for a year to the chagrin of Conn and his subjects, and "there was neither cereal nor dairy produce (*ith ná blicht*) in Ireland during that period" (par. 8). His druids' revelation that his wife Bécuma's defilement (*corbad*) and lack of faith (*creitem*) are responsible induces Conn to seek a remedy for this scarcity that proves only partial and will be discussed later (pars. 8-14; ch. 6, 8).

After his return to Tara, Art and Bécuma play *fidchell*. Bécuma loses the first game and carries out the feat imposed upon her (pars. 15-17), but unfairly wins the second and sends Art on an exceedingly difficult quest to bring Delb-cháem daughter of Morgan to Ireland from a distant island in the sea, where she is guarded by various obstacles and her grim parents, all of which Art duly overcomes to win her (pars. 17-28). "And he took the maiden with him to Ireland, and the place they landed was at Howth Head. And when they had reached the shore the maiden said 'go to Tara and say to Bécuma daughter of Éogan that she should not tarry in Tara but should go from it forthwith and that it would be a bad portent if she were ordered to leave Tara'. And Art went on to Tara and welcome was given him and

there was no one in Tara whom his progress did not please except for the wanton and grievous Bécuma. Nevertheless, Art ordered that sinful woman to leave Tara. And she arose quickly in dudgeon from the presence of the men of Ireland without conversation or farewell until she reached Howth Head" (pars. 29-30).

Like Sín in the *Aided Muirchertaig*, Bécuma in this tale proves to be a beautiful but morally defective successor to a king's previous wife, with disastrous consequences for the monarch's reign. However, the above synopsis should have shown that *Echtra Airt* has a further central narrative thread in the form of two related ambiguities affecting Bécuma, the significance of which has been well appreciated by Brendan O Hehir (1983, esp. 169-70). The first is her love-hate relationship with the king's son Art, and the second her status as Delbcháem's flawed *alter ego* and ultimately rival, the Hyde to Delbcháem's Jekyll, so to speak. On arrival in Ireland as Art's intended lover she actually identifies herself as Delbcháem before marrying Conn and insisting, as Bécuma again, upon Art's temporary banishment. Similarly, in the second half of the story it is she, Bécuma, who actually forces Art to search for the very Delbcháem who, as Art's spouse, will supplant her in Tara at the end of the tale.

The symbolism here seems fairly clear. The death of his first wife Eithne and Conn's resultant loss of desire to rule function as an indication that it is time for him to relinquish the kingship to his heir (cf. end of 6). A new sovereignty figure duly appears with the potential to be a success as Delbcháem if joined to her destined lover Art, the king's son, but instead perversely opts, as the wicked Bécuma, for the outgoing monarch, who thus obtains a rather unpropitious extension of a hitherto beneficent reign. This unsatisfactory state of affairs can only be remedied by Art's arduous winning of the true Delbcháem in conformity with the dictum in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* concerning the sovereignty (*in flaithius*) that "it is seldom it is obtained without battles and conflicts" (par. 16). This, of course, stands in marked and deliberate contrast to the casual way in which Bécuma fell into his father's arms, and the basic moral of *Echtra Airt* is that it is folly for an ageing ruler to hang on beyond his allotted span.

Whereas the literary or mythical significance of a king's spouse as an indicator of his rule appears essential to this narrative, in *Fingal Rónáin* this aspect is somewhat marginal in relation to more mundane motives ably brought out by various critics (Greene in Dillon, 1968, 162-3; Charles-Edwards, 1978, 130-41; Ó Cathasaigh, 1985). Nevertheless, the two sagas do share some significant similarities despite *Fingal Rónáin*'s relentless verisimilitude. As O Hehir puts it, "in the almost completely demythologized *Fingal Rónáin*, it is Rónán's nameless replacement wife who brings about his catastrophe" (1983, 168).

Thus we are told that king Rónán mac Áeda of Leinster remained single for a long time after the death of his wife Eithne, who had borne him his wonderful son Máel Fothartaig, popular with his own and adored by the opposite sex of the province. Eventually Rónán decided to marry the young daughter of the northern king Echaid despite his son's warning that an older, steadier woman would be more suitable. The marriage duly took place, but the attentions of his father's new wife forced Máel Fothartaig into virtual exile, from which he was soon recalled at the behest of the Leinstermen. Original matrimonial intentions were made abundantly clear during a visit to his stepmother's father on the way home: "it is bad for you that you did not sleep with our daughter. It is to you we gave her and not to that old man"

(ll. 66-7). Here too, then, it can be argued that an undue prolongation of his reign is implicit in the aged Rónán's decision to take a wife otherwise destined for a son whose obvious qualifications for kingship are repeatedly dwelt upon. This time the catastrophic consequences are dynastic, encompassing the tragic deaths of all the principal characters – Máel Fothartaig, his friends and assassin, the woman's parents and brother, and finally Rónán himself – rather than crop failure.

It thus appears that the woman of sovereignty can indeed serve as a harbinger of royal death but typically does this in her young and beautiful guise as the heir's intended rather than by reversion to a hag in her capacity as the old king's original spouse.

It remains to note that the loss of kingship brought about by such a woman's behaviour is not invariably final. For instance, according to an early tale conventionally called 'Cormac's dream', after Cormac mac Airt had become king of Tara and Eochu Gunnat king of Ulster, "one night as Cormac slept he saw a vision and a dream, namely Eochu Gunnat having come to Tara and the lifting of the hostages' pillar out of Tara by him and its carriage to Crúachu and setting up by him in Ráth Crúachan. Moreover, he sees his own wife, namely Eithne Thóebfata, sleeping with Eochu Gunnat and fornicating with him repeatedly and coming (back) to him (Cormac) after that . . . He saw the province of Connacht come to Tara and set the hostages' pillar in its own place in Tara. Furthermore, he sees their heads being cut off the women of Ulster by the Connachtmen and Lugaid son of Lugna striking the head off the wife of Eochu Gunnat, namely Cacht daughter of Fergus (par. 5). The king arose terrified, and his druids and sages are brought to him and he relates the dream to them, namely Melchend the druid and Óengus mac Bolcadáin and Ailbe mac Delind and Fíthal, the latter being Cormac's poet and judge (*fili ⁊ brethem Cormaic éisside*). That group then had recourse to their knowledge (*fius*) and told him the interpretation of the dream (par. 6). 'The hostages' pillar being put out of its place', they said, 'what it signifies is your being put out of the kingship of Tara, for it is you who are the hostages' pillar there, and you shall be put among the Connachtmen and you shall be king over Crúachu as long as Eochu be in the kingship of Tara . . . Moreover, your wife sleeping with him, what it signifies is that your kingship (*ríge*) will sleep with him and he will be but one year in the sovereignty (*flaithius*) of Tara. Moreover, the striking of her head from the wife of Eochu Gunnat, what it signifies is that the Ulstermen together with their king will fall at your and the Connachtmen's hand on the day of battle, and it is Lugaid son of Lugna of the Connachtmen who will behead the king himself. For it is the Connachtmen who will take that battle along with you and it is they that will place you again in your kingship. And that', they said, 'is the interpretation of the dream' . . . Three kings of Ireland unite with Eochu Gunnat to depose Cormac . . . (par. 7)" (ed. Carney, 1940, 192-3).

The precise and detailed correspondences between the dream's imagery, its interpretation and what actually happened have a distinctly biblical ring (cf. O Hehir, 1983, 174), being reminiscent of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of the butler, the baker and Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41-2), for example. Such allegorical application of mantic technique is, of course, by no means confined to the Bible (e.g. Iliad 2, 308-32) and provides, as it were, a commentary on the intended values of the symbols employed. A non-oneiromantic situation analagous to that in 'Cormac's Dream' is presented more allusively near the end of *Esnada Tige Buchet*, which tells

how Cormac seized Eithne by force, lost her to the Leinstermen and then recovered her permanently with proper marital arrangements (see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 75-6).

13. A further factor liable to figure in the literature as a portent of death is the breach of *geisi* or "taboos". As A. and B. Rees put it, "the violation of *gessa* is such a sure omen of approaching death that it might almost be inferred that a hero is safe from harm while his *gessa* remain inviolate. Then, as his time approaches its end, he finds himself in situations where he cannot avoid breaking them" (1961, 327). Although such taboos are by no means confined to kings in medieval Irish material, their significance and accumulation do tend to be greatest in the case of major monarchs by virtue of Sjoestedt's principle that "the more important a person is and the more sacred he is, the more *geasa* he has. The king's person is thus hedged around with prohibitions" (1949, 71). Although there does not seem to be any compelling evidence for an Indo-European institution of regal taboos, this apparently widespread concomitant of priesthoods and sacral kingships around the globe (cf. Frazer, 1922, 168-75) could have attached itself easily enough to the hierogamous monarchs of the pagan Celts or the pre-Christian Irish.

Whereas royal *geisi* in saga generally pertain to the individual destined to be king rather than to the office itself, an extant Middle Irish text edited by Dillon (1951) lists and describes the seven prohibitions (*urgarta*) and seven prerogatives (*búada*) of the king of Tara followed by the twin sets of five applying to each of the four provincial kings. It is difficult to gauge the relationship between such a synthetic historical scheme and current socio-political observances. However, the past tenses predominating in the prose seem to betoken a deliberately antiquarian orientation, and David Greene may well be right to caution in this connection that "in the case of sacral kingship . . . there was an enormous gap between the concept as preserved and elaborated by the literary men, on the one hand, and the realities of political structures in Early Christian Ireland" (1979, 19). As Kelly points out, although *Tecosca Cormaic* begins its list of a king's proper attributes by recommending *rop sogeis* "let him be of good (i.e. keep) taboos" (par. 6), "*geisi* are not mentioned in the surviving law-texts" (1988, 20). The fact remains, however, that even unreal or ostensibly outmoded features may provide a means of articulating very real contemporary concerns, as suggested by Philip O'Leary in a recent study (1988) arguing that in medieval Irish literature *geisi* are first and foremost a narrative index of such important considerations as honour and social standing. Moreover, whatever their pagan origins, taboos are not inherently inimical to Christian teaching. After all, in accordance with an angel of God's injunction the cutting of his hair was taboo for that great biblical leader of Israel Samson and duly caused his ruin at the hands of Delilah and the Philistines (Jud. 13-7).

In *Bruiden Da Choca* the offering of the kingship of Ulster to Cormac and his acceptance are followed by a list of the "determinations of his life (*ércholti a sáeguil*)" or "taboos (*gesa*)" enjoined upon him at his birth by the druid Cathbad (par. 6). These are broken one after the other in the doom-laden narrative leading up to Cormac's premature death, which they thus portend. Like the woman of sovereignty mentioned in 11 above, maintenance of his *geisi* eludes him as he is on the verge of becoming king.

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* there is a still more obvious link between the maintenance of such taboos and the fortunes of the sovereignty itself. Upon being made king

of Tara, Conaire promulgates the prohibitions revealed to him by the supernatural father (par. 16) who had shown him how to qualify as king (par. 13). After unjust failure to enforce one of these, "let not plundering (*díberg*) be taken in your reign", against his beloved fosterbrothers (pars. 18-21), Conaire breaks his remaining taboos at an accelerating rate as a prelude to death, remarking at one climactic moment *ro-m:gabsat-sa mo gessi uili innocht* "all my taboos have caught me tonight" (par. 36 = *LU* 6814). As manifestations of the ruler's contract with the divine or supernatural order, the state of his *geisi* is here symptomatic of the health of his kingship and thus performs a narrative function analogous to that of the woman of sovereignty's condition and conduct in some other tales.

14. The preceding sections have sought to highlight the close correlation between narrative and more abstract accounts of the proper or improper attributes of sovereignty, the corollary being that myth and story accurately reflect contemporaneous ideology in this crucial area. However, the next chapter must address the question of how far this ideology and its mythological or narrative reflections were in tune with the Christian tenor of the Patrician settlement held to govern early medieval Irish law and society as a whole (ch. 3, 9; ch. 4, 3-9).

CHAPTER SIX

Sovereignty and the Church

1. In view of the comparative evidence adduced in the previous chapter for the quite extensive pre-Christian roots of many basic ingredients concerned, one might be forgiven for thinking that a fundamentally pagan ethos of sacral kingship had survived the establishment of Christianity in Ireland with little or no significant change. This, for instance, appears to be Mac Cana's view: "the Church's organization adapted itself to the native social structure and evolved with it until the great ecclesiastical reform of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This native order was based upon the small tribal kingdom, or conglomeration of such kingdoms, each with its sacred king who was the focus and pivot of socio-political organization. By him stood his druid in pre-Christian times, later his learned poet ('fili') and judge, who were later joined by abbot or bishop. Because of its central role in traditional society the kingship generated a vast proliferation of myth, hero-tale and legend, which continued to be added to within the Christian and literate period . . . When the ritual of the 'hierogamos', the sacred marriage to the goddess which solemnized the inauguration of the sacral king, was trimmed of its more blatantly sexual elements, probably in the sixth century, its accompanying mythology continued unabated, because of the very centrality of the institution of kingship . . . Like all myths it had its stereotypes (was in itself, one might say, a stereotype), but never lost its social reference and function until the society itself was finally destroyed. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the continuity of mythological concepts in Irish thought and literature under Christianity" (1986, 43).

However, Mac Cana's own rather surprising strictures about "Irish scholars, who because of their strongly positivist philological formation, have disregarded the likely effects of a sweeping religious (and intellectual) change on the traditional corpus of mythico-religious texts" (ibid., 37) prompt the question whether the Christian and monastic moulders of this material really could have accepted at face value a sacrality vested in a goddess or goddesses, when the very acknowledgement of such status flagrantly contravened the First Commandment of their monotheistic creed: "thou shalt have none other gods in my sight" (Deut. 5:7 *non habebis deos alienos in conspectu meo*). If, however, they did have scruples about this fundamental matter, why did they exploit and even delight in these often unashamedly erotic symbols? Did they, perhaps, apply an allegorical or typological *interpretatio Christiana* (ch. 3, 12)?

2. To begin with, there can be no doubt that central tenets of this regnal ideology were fully attuned to clerical attitudes from at least the seventh century on. Thus the early eighth-century Irish Canons, here citing the seventh-century text *De XII Abusivis Saeculi* (Anton, 1982, 583-4), declare that "the iniquity of an unjust king disrupts peoples' peace, raises obstacles to kingship, removes lands' fruits, hinders the people's services, leads to dear ones' deaths, stirs up enemies' incursions into territories, works beasts up everywhere with the savaging of stock, gives rise to atmospheric storms, impedes the fecundity of lands and the bounties of the sea, kindles lightnings, burns up the blossoms of trees, casts down unripe fruits, not only darkens the countenance of the present rule but also obscures sons and grandsons so that they should not inherit the kingship" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 3).

According to the same source "the justice, however, of a just king (*justitia vero regis justi*) is the following: to judge no one unjustly, to be a defender of strangers, widows and orphans, to check thefts, to punish adulteries, not to nurture the unchaste and actors, not to exalt the wicked, to destroy the wicked from the earth, not to allow parricides and murderers to live, to defend churches, to succour the poor with alms, to set just men over the kingdom's affairs, to have wise and sober old men as counsellors, not to heed the superstitions of druids (*magorum*), sorceresses and augurs, to defend the country bravely and justly against adversaries, to trust in God throughout, not to become haughty from successes, to bear all adversities patiently, to hold the catholic faith in God, not to allow his sons to act wickedly, to attend to prayers at regular times, not to take food before a suitable hour. The king's justice is peoples' peace, a country's protection, subjects' inviolability, a nation's defence, cure of diseases, men's happiness, clemency of weather, calmness of sea, fecundity of land, solace of the poor, sons' inheritance, hope of future felicity, abundance of crops, fertility of trees (*justitia regis pax populorum est, tutamen patriae, immunitas plebis, munimentum gentis, cura languorum, gaudium hominum, temperies aeris, serenitas maris, terrae fecunditas, solatium pauperum, hereditas filiorum, spes futurae beatitudinis, segetum abundantia, arborum fecunditas*)" (ibid., XXV, 4).

The basic dichotomy here is entirely in keeping with Proverbs 29:4 "the just king raiseth up the land; the greedy man shall cast it down (*rex iustus erigit terram vir avarus destruet eam*)". Furthermore, "a king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes" (Prov. 20:8, *rex qui sedet in solio iudicii dissipat omne malum intuitu suo*).

Narrative reflexes of these and similar principles are in good supply, but a few germane examples must suffice here. Regal injustice's hindrance of people's services is illustrated when "neither service (*fognam*) nor recompense by the kingdoms remained" as a result of Bres's meanness in *Cath Maige Tuired* (par. 38), probably a deliberate echo of Judges 9:38 "who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?" (see 11 below). The enfeebled Cathâer's failure to check his greedy sons' depredations on Buchet in *Esnada Tige Buchet* contravenes the injunction not to allow one's sons to act wickedly and causes loss of the Tara sovereignty rather as the venality of the aged Samuel's sons signals the end of their line of judges and a new line of kings (1 Sam./Kgs. 8). In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* the people of Tara's initial reluctance to accept the youthful Conaire as king (par. 15) is eminently compatible with the Irish Canons' citation of Ecclesiastes 10:16: *vae tibi terra cuius rex est puer* "woe to thee, o land, whose king is a boy" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 5). Conaire soon shows

himself ready to have wise and sober old men as counsellors by announcing "I will enquire of the wise that I may be wise myself" (par. 15, *im:cáemros-sa do gáethaib corbom gáeth fo-deisin*), but then fails to check theft in his reign by his foster-brothers (pars. 18-9). Almost ineluctably his partiality for the latter leads him into a false judgement allowing them and their fellow murderous miscreants to live (pars. 20-21), with disastrous consequences for king and kingdom. Solomon, it seems, was right.

Moreover, the imbuing of the king's justice with obviously Christian elements and ecclesiastical concerns is also found in so-called "secular" wisdom texts in the vernacular. These typically blend a smattering of such specifics with many more neutral precepts that are, nevertheless, by and large perfectly compatible with the teachings of Church and Bible. Recognition of this feature led Thurneysen to moot the following possibilities about the author of what he regarded as the earliest recension (A) of the *Audacht Moraind* edited by him: "the author might well be a *fili* who was a *brithem* at the same time; he recommends the king to base his decisions on judgements reached earlier (19); naturally, only the professional *brithem* can provide him with these. On the other hand, he is quite unwarlike (32); his ideal is peace and comfortable quiet (13), and there is no word about the king's duties of looking after his army and being ready for battle, even though he is promised victory as a reward for his righteousness (52, cf. 11). Thus only one side of the Old Irish kingship is emphasized. One could almost think of a churchman as the author, if this were not contradicted by the drunkenness allowed at festive gatherings and in the king's drinking hall" (1917, 78).

Thurneysen's grounds for suspecting clerical authorship are typically perceptive, and such status need no longer be regarded as at all incompatible with that of poet or judge (ch. 1, 10-12). On the other hand, tolerance of drinking is no more cogent an argument against ecclesiastical authorship here than in the case of Saint Brigit's Old Irish Life, which refers to the monastic production of ale for consumption by visiting preachers and others on Church feasts (e.g., *Bethu Brigte*, pars. 21 and 28). Still more strikingly, a contemporary poem in praise of Áed Úa Foirréid, bishop of Armagh 1032-1056, edited by Gerard Murphy (1944, 140-64) flatters its recipient as "Áed, good bishop of Armagh, for whom maltings are brewed" (vs. 18, *Áed, epscop Aird Macha maith, dia ndéntar bracha do bruith*) presiding over "heavy drinking in his wattled house" (vs. 11, *ól.'na thig threbraid co trén*) and refers to his contemporary, the famous ecclesiastical scholar-poet Flann Mainistrech of Monasterboice, as "a magical mead-sage who quaffs ale" (vs. 31, *mid-suí síde súiges linn*).

The complex relationships between *Audacht Morainn*'s various extant versions have yet to be definitively clarified, but according to Binchy "there is a remarkable contrast between the A and B recensions of this text: the former, which Thurneysen mistakenly took to be older (see ZCP xiii.43ff., 298f.), contains a number of Christian loanwords as well as several counsels based on Christian teaching, whereas B has no loanwords (other than *clannaid* 'plants') and no specifically Christian sentiments" (1966, 3-4, n.3). Regarding the same B recension its most recent editor, Fergus Kelly (1976), asks "was *Audacht Morainn* composed by a cleric?" and replies "I would doubt this. Apart from a few Christian Latin loanwords (e.g. par. 59 *bendacht* 'blessing') and a reference to the Creator (par. 32 *dúilem*), *Audacht Morainn* seems devoid of Christian elements. If it were the work of a cleric, one

would surely expect him to attribute the prosperity of the territory not only to the king's justice (*fír flathemon*) but also to divine favour" (1988, 236).

Arguably, however, that is precisely what is conveyed by the highly significant reference to *dúilem*, an obvious calque on Latin *creator: ad:mestar dúili dúilemon do-da:rósat amal do:rósata* "let him estimate the creatures of the creator who has created them as they have been created" (par. 32). This precept is undoubtedly based upon the Christian Irish conceit (ch. 3, 10) that the ideal king Cormac mac Airt was a notable exception to the Pauline rule that prior to the coming of Christianity gentiles had missed the opportunity of worshipping God aright through his creation. As such, it is a product of learned ecclesiastical sophistry implying clerical authorship for *Audacht Morainn* as well as a concept of ruler's truth bound up with due regard for the Almighty. The A version remarks of kinslaying (*fingal*) that "it is avenged by God to the ninth man" (par. 38). Given that the three- or four-generation extended family termed the *derb-fine* comprised nine degrees of consanguinity (*derbfine co nónbor*, *CIH* 430.5), presumably reckoned inclusively from a member of the younger generation, this is probably an echo of Exodus 34:7 (cf. Deut. 5:9): "(Thou) who visitest the iniquity of the fathers on the sons and grandsons unto the third and fourth generation". The same recension also enjoins Christian orthodoxy on the king by warning "let him not sell the old faith for a new faith" (par. 43, *ní:ria sen-iris ar nua-iris*) and "let him not trust in false prophets, let him trust in the truth" (par. 51, *ní:n-erbba do sóeb-fáthib, n-a:n-erbba do fírinni*). Moreover, the oldest extant manuscript version of A, or at least of a recension very close to it, in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster (l in Thurneysen, 1917, 88) concludes with the precepts "let him not trust in paganism, let him trust in truth – it will sustain him" and "let him not trust in idols, let him trust in the God who is the best of gods, the God of heaven" (pars. 56-7: *na-ch:n-erbbad i ngentliucht, n-a:n-erbbad i fírinne, co-t:n-oaba . . . na-cha:n-erbbad i ṅ-idlu, n-a:n-erbbad i nDía as dech deib, Día nime*).

This notion of the king's faith in and obedience to God as the linchpin of his truth and the benefits that flow from it is, of course, essentially biblical, being beautifully expressed by Psalm 71, for example: "give the king Thy judgement (*iudicium*), O God, and Thy justice (*iustitiam*) unto the king's son, to judge Thy people in justice and Thy poor in judgement (*iudicare populum tuum in iustitia et pauperes tuos in iudicio*). Let the mountains take up peace for the people and the hills judgement. He shall judge the poor of the people, and shall make safe the sons of the poor, and shall humble the disparager. It shall endure with the sun before the moon for generations of generations. It shall descend like showers upon a fleece and like rains dripping over the earth. Justice shall arise in his days and abundance of peace until the moon be removed, and he shall rule from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the world" (vs. 1-8).

Since the perfect justice and concomitant success of that paragon of pre-Patrician Irish kingship Cormac mac Airt are likewise ascribed to his "faith in the one God according to law" by *Senchas na Relec* (ch. 3, 10) and to the "judgements of the law of Moses" that he used to deliver by *Scél na Fír Flatha* (ch. 4, 7), it is hardly surprising that the gnomic tract fathered upon him, *Tecosca Cormaic*, opens with an unambiguous statement that the benefits accruing under a good and pious king ultimately flow from God: "O grandson of Conn, O Cormac", said Cairbre, "what is best for a king?" "Not difficult", said Cormac, "best for him (is) steadiness

without anger, patience without strife, affability without arrogance, concern for lore (*senchus*), reciprocation of truth, hostages in fetters, hosting with just cause, truth without venality, mercy with consolidation of law, peace to kingdoms, diverse sureties, true judgements, fasting on boundaries, exaltation of inviolate persons (*mórad nemed*), honouring of poets (*airmitiu filed*), worship of great God (*adrad Dé móir*), produce in his reign (*torud ina flaith*), regard for every unfortunate, many alms (*almsana ile*), mast on trees, fish in inlets, fruitful earth, ships putting into port, importing of riches, forfeit flotsam, silken raiment, a sword-smiting troop to protect every kingdom, attacks over borders, let him minister to the weak, let him cherish the strong, let him possess truth (*fír*), let him reprove falsehood (*gó*), let him love truth (*fírinne*), let him quell fear, let him suppress criminals, let him give true judgements (*fír-bretha*), let him feed everyone, let him consolidate every peace (*síd*), let him buy treasures, let him improve the soul (*lessaiged anmain*), let him recount every clear judgement, abundance of wine and mead, let him utter every truth. For it is through his ruler's truth that God gives all that (*ar is tria fír flaitheman do:beir Día in sin uile*)".

In the scheme of things worked out by early medieval Irish *literati* the ascription of Christian or biblical sentiments to Morann and Cormac well before Patrick's mission is not, of course, an anachronism but reflects their acknowledged status as pre-Patrician figures who believed in the one God and had access to basic divine truths such as Mosaic Law and Paul's teaching (ch. 3, 10). It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the three most comprehensive extant wisdom texts (see Kelly, 1988, 284-6) purporting to belong to the pre-Christian period in Ireland should be ascribed to such precocious believers or their close associates as Morann (*Audacht Morainn*), Cormac (*Tecosca Cormaic*) and Fíthal (*Senbríathra Fíthail*), who is presumably to be identified with the man named as Cormac's chief poet and judge in the passage from 'Cormac's dream' near the end of the previous section. These very ascriptions indicate that their authors regarded the texts in question as fundamentally compatible with Christian teaching, and there is little to commend Roland Smith's view of them as "a distinctly pagan tradition; wherever Christian elements have crept in, as they have in several cases, they must be considered late additions due to the desire on the part of Christian scribes to overcome the pagan traditions by tempering them with Christian motives" (1927, 412-3). Instead of asking what is specifically Christian about extant vernacular instructions for princes and the like, one might equally or more appropriately ask what they contain that is specifically pagan or unapplicable to early Christian Irish society. The answer is, little or nothing.

Although they cannot, of course, be absolutely disproved, claims that "clearly the genre was traditional and pre-literate and an integral part of the pagan liturgy of sovereignty" (Mac Cana, 1979, 448) are pure speculation, and it seems quite likely that a foundation provided by biblical wisdom texts was adapted to existing Irish ideas and institutions. Be that as it may, the texts available to us indicate that pre-Christian sacral principles had been assimilated at least as early as the mid-seventh century to a biblical concept of kingship by divine grace that belongs firmly in the mainstream of medieval Christian European thought. As Neil McLeod has pertinently remarked, "breaches against the inherent truth comprised in natural order could only bring disorder. Therefore, Truth could be revealed in a tradition of rulings which had proved to preserve harmony. To this Christianity added the element of the divine author" (1982, 362). 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. In effect, a typical enough sacral kingship with pagan foundations was converted into a Christian monarchy under God's auspices at a stroke.

It thus transpires that, far from being a bizarre 'Celtic fringe' repository of barely adulterated pagan notions, early Christian Irish kingship theory had acquired a relatively unobtrusive but nevertheless pervasive biblical dynamic. This helps to explain the significant contribution it seems to have made to the moulding of the Carolingian *speculum regis/principis* or "prince's mirror" (cf. Anton, 1982, 568-617). The latter has been described as tending "to deemphasize the Augustinian concept that secular rule is a necessary evil imposed by God on the sinful nature of fallen man and to emphasize instead the Christian ruler's high moral responsibility to his people and to God", the basic assumption being "that good government will follow from the rule of a morally good man" (Eberle, 1987, 434). For instance, the description of Smaragdus' early ninth-century continental *via regia* as "a guide to Christian ruling. The king should be unequaled in wisdom, justice, prudence, humility, mercy, detachment, patience, receptiveness to counsel, and the love of God and neighbour" (Renna, 1986, 261) would be quite applicable to medieval Irish texts like *Audacht Morainn* or *Tecosca Cormaic*.

3. As McLeod further points out, the welfare of a people preeminently dependent upon their monarch's behaviour and qualities was explicitly linked by monastic lawyers with general uprightness and proper dues to God's Church. "There is a passage in the tract 'On the Confirmation of Right and Law', which emphasises the connection between law and the order of the universe, and in which the influence of Christianity is most explicit in the insinuation of the Church's right to alms" (ibid., 364). This runs as follows: "what are the three times in which his produce (*torad*) perishes for every ruler (*flaith*) so that there be loss in grain, dairy produce and mast (*ith ⁊ blicht ⁊ mes*)? An annulling of oblations, a freeing of serfs, a dissolution of tithes (*dechmad*), a release for slaves. There are three calamities which befall the world that are hardest: the coming of famine upon a people, bad contract, a plague coming upon them. There are three remedies which cure them: observance by judges lest they pass false judgement, alms from everyone from each produce (*almsana ó chách di chach thorad*), no statement of falsehood or false eyewitness in the kingdom (*túath*)" (*CIH* 231.15-31).

McLeod continues, "the imprint of the Church in regard to its financial affairs is still more distinct in the *Córus Béscna*, where this triad appears to occur in a more complete, and more successfully reworked, form: 'there are three times in which the world is disordered (deranged): the visitation period of an epidemic, the onslaught (?) of war, the dissolution of contracts. There are three things which cure them: 'tithes and firstfruits and alms which hold back the visitation period of an epidemic; The subduing [influence] of pacts [made] with king and kingdom which holds back the onslaught (?) of war; Everyone's holding to his good contract and his disadvantageous contract which holds back the derangement of the world'" (ibid., 365).

The Old Irish legal tract *Din Techtugud*, moreover, explicitly places an offence against the Church at the head of the seven major indications of a king's disqualificatory falsehood, and is in no doubt that retribution upon a people for their

or their king's mendacity stems ultimately from God: *a:taat .uii. fíadnaisi for:gellat gaí cach ríg: senad do soud asa n-airlisi cen fír cen dliged, détiu aíre inge mad tar cert, maidm catha fair, núna ina flaithius, dísce mlechta, milliud mesa, séol n-etha. It é .uii. béochaindlea and-so for:osnat gaí cach ríg. Teora gua ata moam do:fich Día for cach túaith: fuillem gúnadmae, forgell gúfíadnaise, gúbreth ar fochraic* "there are seven testimonies that attest the lie of every king: turning a synod (glossed "of the Church") out of their precinct without truth (and) without right, suffering of satire unless it be in spite of granting the claim, his defeat in battle, famines in his reign, drying up of dairy produce, ruin of mast, blight of grain. These are the seven living candles here which expose the falsehood of every king. The three greatest lies that God avenges on every kingdom: interest on a false surety, the bearing of false witness, a false judgement for reward" (*CIH* 219, 16-30).

The biblical ethos of this doctrine is unmistakable, given the Old Testament's insistence that Israel's fortune depends upon God's reaction to her success or failure in righteousness, observance of the law and the performance of religious duties such as the offering of tithes and firstfruits to God's house (e.g. Nehemiah 10:35-8). The connection between God-given calamities and the people's misbehaviour is repeatedly stressed as, for instance, in king Solomon's blessing upon Israel: "when heaven is shut up and it does not rain on account of their sins and they pray in that place and perform penitence in your name and turn from their sins on account of their affliction, hear them in heaven and remit the sins of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, and shew them the good way on which they may walk and give rain upon Thy land which Thou hast given to Thy people for possession. If famine (*fames*) arise in the land or pestilence (*pestilentia*) or foul air, mildew, locust, rust and an enemy besieging her gates, . . . if any man shall recognise the plague of his own heart and spread out his hands in this house, Thou shalt hear in the place of Thy habitation and shalt be propitiated again and shalt so do that Thou give to each according to all his ways" (1/3 Kgs. 8:35-9).

Needless to say, under the kings the monarch's role assumes central importance in this equation. Thus the great summary of the Law in Deuteronomy urges that a future king "learn to fear the Lord his God and to preserve the words and ceremonies that are enjoined in the law" (17:19). Medieval Irish concern with looks, martial leadership and judgement of the king or his heir apparent (see 6 above) likewise have Old Testament analogues. For instance, in demanding a king the Israelites state "and we too shall be like all nations, and our king shall judge us and shall go forth before us and fight our battles for us" (1 Sam./Kgs. 8:20), while the young David's beauty is duly emphasised at his royal anointing by Samuel (1 Sam./Kgs. 16:12) and it is said of his eldest son that "there was no man in all Israel exceedingly beautiful and fair like Absalom - from the sole of his foot up to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him (*non erat in eo ulla macula*)" (2 Sam./Kgs. 14:25). As in Ireland, the king and his justice have wider cosmic repercussions determined by his relationship with Almighty God. David laments the death of king Saul with the words "mountains of Gilboa, let neither dew nor rain come upon you, and let there not be fields of firstfruits", while the Lord's prophet Elijah swears in God's name that there will be neither dew nor rain in wicked king Ahab's reign unless he says so (1/3 Kgs. 17:1). A natural metaphor closely akin to the mainspring of early Christian Irish notions of sovereignty occurs in David's "last words": "the just ruler of men, the ruler in fear of God, as the light of dawn

gloweth when the sun riseth in the morning from the clouds and as the grass sprouteth from the earth through rain" (2 Sam./Kgs. 23:3-4).

4. Such insistence upon the Church's relevance to a kingdom's overall welfare and the closely related ruler's truth or its opposite was an obvious legal reaction to the kind of polity presided over by early Christian Irish kings. Since this was founded upon *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* or "the sewing together of Church onto State" (ch. 1, 11), it is hardly surprising to find a corresponding narrative response in a couple of sagas set in the post-Patrician period, namely *Aided Díarmata meic Fergusa Cerrbéoil* (O'Grady, 1892, 72-82) and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*. Both are concerned with Uí Néill dynasts supposed to have held the Tara kingship in the sixth century A.D. and, in their rather different ways, stress the importance of maintaining or restoring the connection between Church and State by portraying the negative effects of a rupture.

The former begins with Díarmait's exile from the Tara king Túathal Máelgarb and cooperation with St. Cíarán of Clonmacnoise in the founding of his church. In return for this he is promised the kingship, a prophecy soon fulfilled on Túathal's death. Thereafter king Díarmait offends Cíarán by burning, wounding and drowning an enemy on land he has just granted the saint. Although not prepared to jeopardise the king's salvation, rule or dynastic prospects, Cíarán does curse him to a similar threefold death in due course. Thus, after opening with an obvious instance of *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* and its benefits to king and churchman alike, this tale introduces its major theme, the harm resulting from a breach in this essential relationship owing to royal failure to respect due rights of sanctuary on Church property (see ch. 4, 2 on the monastic "city of refuge").

After submitting himself and his descendants to Cíarán, Díarmait rules prosperously, but his peculiar end is foretold by the *fáid* or prophet Becc mac Dé. There follows a long episode about a further breach of sanctuary by Díarmait, who this time seizes an enemy being sheltered by St. Rúadán of Lothra and so incurs a yearlong cursing of Tara by him and St. Brendan. The king capitulates and peace is made, but he predicts that Ireland and her churches will never be as well off as in his reign. This is followed by a highly significant vision.

"When Díarmait was there one night, ⟨And⟩ he saw a pair approaching him. It seemed to him there was a cleric's attire (*écosc cléirig*) on the one man and a layman's attire (*écosc laích*) on the other. They come towards him and strike his king's diadem from him and make a diadem for each of them. And each man had a half of it and they divide it between them thus. They go from him then. Díarmait awoke from his sleep after that and recounts his vision. 'True', said Becc mac Dé and Cáirid mac Findcháeme, Díarmait's poet, 'we have the interpretation of your dream. Your sovereignty (*flaithius*) has come to an end', he said, 'and it is an end to your kingship (*ríge*) and Ireland has now been deprived of your grip of sovereignty, i.e. division between Church and State (*roinn etir chill ocus túaith*), that is what there shall be henceforth. And that is what the division of your royal diadem foretells to us, namely division of the sovereignty of Ireland between State and Church (*roinn flaithesa Érenn etir thúaith ocus eclais*). But besides', he said, 'there will come a time when Church will be in thrall to State (*bus dóer eclais do thúaith*) so that there shall not be privilege of Church (*neimthes ecalsa*) but her being billeted upon by everyone. Moreover, evil will then come to lay society (*don túaith*) with

joint slaughter by the son, the father and the brother against each other so that everyone's arms will be red from their blood. The ground shall perish and the mast of trees and the produce of water through everyone's untruth (*ainfír*)'" (78-9).

The antidisestablishmentarian author of this linguistically late Middle Irish text is presumably basing this prophecy on evils of his own time, a clue to the likely date of composition being supplied by the fact "that sanctuary rights were a major issue in Church-State relations in Ireland in the eleventh century" (Radner, 1983, 193). In this way a current crisis can be unfavourably contrasted with conditions in an earlier golden age, when Church and State were beneficially interlocked under a true king despite the odd threatening hiccup.

The saga's finale is introduced when Díarmait executes a miscreant son of the king of Connacht despite his being under the protection (*comairce*) of Muirchertach mac Erca's two sons and St. Colum Cille alias Columba. This further breach of sanctuary causes the Gonnachtmen to turn against Díarmait and induces Colum Cille to assemble the Northern Uí Néill against the Southern Uí Néill monarch, who is defeated, returns to Tara and asks Becc mac Dé about the manner of his death. Becc himself then meets Colum Cille, accepts Christianity and dies, the epitome of the true prophet paving the way for Christianity. Díarmait is now left with his druids, who similarly foretell his peculiar death. Later, when a royal circuit of Ireland brings him to Ulster, he accepts an invitation to Banbán's hostel. Significantly, his wife Mugain refuses, leaving Díarmait free to accept the favours of Banbán's daughter. The various prophecies concerning his end are then fulfilled and the king duly perishes.

This lively tale represents Díarmait as a somewhat ambiguous figure in relation to the Church and Christianity. Although he cooperates with Cíarán, receives the saint's blessing and endows his church, as king he continues to associate with druids and the like too. The main blocks of the subsequent narrative are an escalating alienation from the Church triggered by three successive breaches of sanctuary. Relations with Ciarán after the first are soon mended by the king's submission to clerical authority, but the feud with Rúadán and company after the second lasts for a whole year until Díarmait eventually yields. The third and final delinquency against Colum Cille entails the king's defeat, and throws him back upon the druidic establishment, the best of whom, Becc mac Dé, is lost to the Church's side. Finally, Díarmait loses his wife's company as a prelude to the termination of his life and sovereignty at the hands of Banbán's beautiful daughter.

The steady decline in Díarmait's royal fortunes culminating in his death obviously correlates with his cumulative offences against and increasing isolation from the Church. As the Irish Canons remind us, "for Maximian, the king of the Romans, fell in war through laying heavy hands on God's churches" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 15; *Maximianus namque rex Romanorum adgravans manus in ecclesias Dei cecidit in bello*).

Although discussions of *Aided Díarmata* and *Aided Muirchertaig* by Byrne (1973, 97-104) and Bhreathnach (1982) have effectively blotted out the Christian and ecclesiastical considerations that pervade both tales by concentrating upon the allegedly pagan motif of the king's threefold death, these narratives share with the legal maxims cited in the previous section an insistence that in post-Patrician Ireland there can be no ruler's truth without Christian faith in God and a proper respect for the Church. This aspect has, however, been duly emphasized in an admirable

recent study of these two stories by Joan Radner (1983, 191-8), who argues persuasively that "the threefold death . . . is in Celtic tradition an explicitly Christian narrative device" and that "tales of mysterious death reinforce their audiences' awareness that God is attending, that God is in control, and in the specific case of the threefold death tales, in which events are triggered by a human offence, that God will punish and purge significant wrongdoing" (ibid., 187). The moral is that "the power of the king and the power of the Church cannot coexist in opposition to one another. Concentrated in the story of the death of Diarmait, and carried strongly by its use of the threefold death plot, is one of the great themes of the Irish Church in the eleventh century: that peace and social stability are possible only through cooperation and alliance between secular overlords and the churches" (ibid., 194-5).

That said, we may turn to what O Hehir rightly terms "the highly Christianized *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*" and sees as "an anti-goddess story, reversing the pagan polarities" (1983, 168). However, the fact that this text happens to survive only in a late Middle or even early Modern Irish recension falls well short of proof that an unattested "genuine original" has been tampered with later "by a Christian redactor bent on discrediting otherworld goddesses as queens" (ibid., 178). Its central Christian message might well have been there from the beginning, whenever that was - perhaps the eleventh century as suggested by Radner (1983, 198).

The story begins with the Tara king Muirchertach encountering the beautiful Sín and being so infatuated with her that he agrees to a liaison on her terms. Rejecting the usual valuable gifts, she insists "my name is never to be uttered by you, and Duaibsech, the mother of your children, is not to be in my presence, and clerics are never to come into the same house as me" (par. 4). They go to Tech Cletig on the Boyne, the excellence of whose Uí Néill denizens is stressed, whereupon Sín has Duaibsech, her children and the Uí Néill magnates expelled (par. 8). Duaibsech flees to her confessor (*anmchara*), the saintly bishop Cairnech of Dulane, who brings the Northern Uí Néill to Tech Cletig, is rebuffed by Sín and angrily curses the place and its king while blessing the rest of the Northern Uí Néill (pars. 9-12). The conflict continues with Muirchertach vacillating between the clerics and Sín, who uses various magical devices of inebriation and delusion to keep a grip on him as "the black parody continues with a lavish Samain feast - simultaneously a pastiche of the goddess's ale-feast, the Biblical wedding at Cana, and the Christian communion ritual - in which Muirchertach consumes wine and flesh magically produced by the *síd*-woman from Boyne water and bracken. In her power his sovereignty is not assured, but destroyed; he is poisoned, weakened, doomed. Phony goods all along the line: and he has taken these extinct symbols of the pagan sacral kingship in preference to his own earthly lineage, his confessor St. Cairnech, and the Church" (Radner, 1983, 197).

Finally, Muirchertach is put to death by burning, wounding and drowning in accordance with Cairnech's curse, but is given a Christian burial in Dulane. Duaibsech dies of grief and is buried with him (par. 46). Sín then appears to the clerics and reveals that she acted to avenge Muirchertach's slaughter of her parents and sister in a crushing victory over the *sen-túatha Temrach* or "old (i.e. vassal) tribes of Tara" (par. 49). In the end she too makes confession, dies and is buried, and Cairnech eventually succeeds with considerable difficulty in rescuing Muirchertach's soul from hell.

Muirchertach's sovereignty here disintegrates in a tussle symbolised by two consorts who stand for quite different values. On the one hand, there is his first wife Duaibsech, a pious aristocrat supported by the Church and the main branches of the Northern Uí Néill, and on the other there is Sín, the anticlerical enchantress of vassal stock. All was well with Muirchertach's reign until he cast off Duaibsech along with all she represented and allowed Sín to lead a revolution deeply offensive to the Christian Irish establishment on both religious and social or political grounds, favouring as it did paganism and the plebs. The results were predictably catastrophic, but the Church and her noble supporters ultimately triumphed and order was restored.

As Radner perceptively remarks, the author of *Aided Muirchertaig* "has structured it by careful manipulation of many traditional motifs and themes, including several especially characteristic of stories set in the pre-Christian 'heroic' era, in order to say that in Christian Ireland the very nature of traditional kingship has changed" (1983, 196). Indeed, this struggle for the king's affections and soul between a virtuous Christian woman and a wicked pagan witch of sovereignty can be seen as a narrative expression of the diverse origins of good and bad rule put thus by the Irish Canons: *omnis ordinatio a Deo, opera autem maligna a diabolo* "every good governance is from God, but wicked works are from the devil" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 15).

5. The fact that the 'goddess' of sovereignty's various representations in medieval Irish literature undoubtedly owe a good deal to divine pagan antecedents does not, of course, necessarily imply anything like a one to one relationship between individual literary manifestations and presumed pre-Christian deities of this kind.

Women such as Medb or Eithne whose names occur repeatedly in appropriate contexts are the most likely to be directly rooted in earlier sovereignty goddesses (cf. ch. 5, 3), but even here the type may be so radically altered as to make such an ascription well nigh meaningless in some texts. This, for instance, is the basic point made by O'Rahilly regarding queen Medb's attributes in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and associated Ulster tales: "she is no longer a goddess but a masterful woman, with the inevitable result that her character has sadly degenerated, so much so that at times she is no better than a strong-willed virago with unconcealed leanings towards a multiplicity of husbands and paramours". (1943, 15-6). Conversely, historical or legendary human queens may attract mythico-literary sovereignty motifs like magnets, a possibility recently elucidated by W. Ann Trindade (1986) with reference to the literary reflexes of three historical Gormlaiths of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries respectively. Since questions about origins are irrelevant to the present concern with attested narrative functions, it seems best to term such figures in the literature 'women' rather than 'goddesses' of sovereignty in order to avoid confusion.

The approach of pre-Norman Ireland's monastic *literati* to supernaturally endowed figures in their *senchus* was varied within the confines of a typical enough medieval western outlook. One obvious possibility was to doubt their actual existence, as when the twelfth-century scribe of the *LL-Táin* refers, in a famous postscript, to figments of the poetic imagination (*figmenta poetica*, l. 4923). An alternative was the so-called 'euhemeristic' notion of great men posthumously acquiring divine or semi-divine attributes.

This was the line adopted by that polymath prelate Isidore of Seville in the section on pagan gods in his *Etymologiae* entitled *de dis gentium*: "those whom the pagans declare to be gods are exposed as having once been men, and on account of their individual lives and deserts they began to be cultivated among their own people after death" (*quos pagani deos asserunt, homines olim fuisse produntur, et pro uniuscuiusque vita vel meritis coli apud suos post mortem coeperunt;*, VIII xi 1). *Cóir Anmann*'s treatment of Manannán mac Lir constitutes an explicit medieval Irish application of such reasoning: "Manannán mac Lir, i.e. Oirbsen was his name, i.e. he was a marvellous merchant who was in the Isle of Man, i.e. he is the best steersman there was on the sea in the West of the world. He used to discover through his meteorology, i.e. through his observation of the sky's or the air's appearance, how long the good or the bad weather would last and when each of them would change into the other. And it is on that account that the Britons and the men of Ireland reckoned him to be the god of the sea and he was called Mac Lir, i.e. Son of the Sea" (par. 156).

A commoner approach, however, seems to have been the acceptance of non-human supernatural status and an explanation of this either in diabolical or in angelic terms, the only two such alternatives compatible with Christian cosmology. The postscript to the *LL-Táin* leans towards the former in speaking of *praestrigia demonum* or "delusions of demons" (l. 4923; cf. Isidore, *Etym.* VIII ix 33, *dictum enim praestigium quod praestringat aciem oculorum*), while the early twelfth-century main scribe of *LU* concludes his copy of the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* with the following strictures: "so that that is a destructive apparition (*taidbsiu aidmillti*) to Cú Chulainn by the folk of the *síd*. For great was the devilish power before faith (*in chumachta demnach ria creitim*) and its extent was such that the demons used to fight bodily with the people and that they used to show delights and secrets to them as if they existed. It is thus that they used to be believed in, so that it is those apparitions that the ignorant call *síd*s and folk of the *síd*". That monastic debate on this topic was by no means one sided is indicated by the claim in an important passage at the end of *Scél na Fír Flatha* (see 10 below) that the display of "wondrous apparitions" to kings of yore was regarded by ecclesiastical scholars (*ecnaidi*) as a godly and not a devilish ministration (*conid timthirecht díada . . . ⁊ conach timthirecht demnach*).

6. In Ireland, as in other parts of Christendom, a special version of the euhemerist line with considerable appeal was sanctification, a process which will be further illustrated in the next chapter. This made it possible for pagan deities or heroes and their more desirable attributes to be appropriated by the Church through transformation into saints, rather as the very word *nóeb* in Irish acquired the value "holy, saint" in a specifically Christian sense (ch. 1, 7). An interesting narrative combination of this approach with the diabolical assessment is found in the intriguing saga *Altram Tige dá Medar*, the essential contents of which may be rather older than the extant Modern Irish version.

After some necessary synthetic historical preliminaries centring upon the Túatha Dé Danann (pars. 1-2), the tale begins with their king Manannán's machinations to expel his host Elcmar from Brug na Bóinne in favour of his fosterson Óengus. Manannán urges Óengus to accomplish this by means of "the charm (*sén*) whereby the angels came from the King of heaven and from the Lord of the universe and the

charm (*sén*) whereby we separated Ireland's sovereignty (*flaithes Fótla*) from the Fir Bolg and the charm (*sén*) whereby the sons of Míl separated the precedence over Ireland (*oirechas Éirenn*) from us in turn" (par. 4). To Óengus's question "is there a god above our gods (*in fuil día ós ar ndeib-ne?*) Manannán replies that indeed there is, the invincible Almighty God (*int áen-Día uile-chumachtach*), Creator of heaven, earth, sea and the four elements. He then goes on to explain that this God "created ten orders of angels around him and, as to the lord of the tenth order, pride and vanity arose in his mind and they left the plain of heaven unnecessarily. God (banished) the tenth order from his territory . . . and formed men . . . and put the group that had arrogantly left his territory into the shapes of demons (*i ndelbaib deman*)". Men's fate is determined by whether they side with God or these devils (par. 4). Elcmar is then expelled from the Brug despite Óengus's feelings of guilt (par. 5).

This doctrine presumably reflects the claim in Isidore's *Etymologiae* that there is scriptural support for nine orders of angels (VII iv 4; *novem autem esse ordines angelorum sacrae Scripturae testantur, id est angeli, archangeli, throni, dominationes, virtutes, principatus, potestates, cherubim et seraphim*) in addition to the wicked fallen angels turned devils (ibid., 30; *hic est ordo vel distinctio angelorum qui post lapsum malorum in caelesti vigore steterunt*). Thus God's righteous expulsion of the fallen angels or devils to be a source of damnation for themselves and of temptation for mankind is misused as "druidry and devilry (*draídecht ⁊ díabaltacht*)" by the king of the Túatha Dé Danann on earth to dispossess one of his subjects.

There follows the account of Eithne's birth and early life among the Túatha Dé with Óengus in the Brug until an insult from the latter's brother makes it impossible for her to consume food in their company apart from the milk of two special cows from holy India milked by her own hands. The cause is ultimately divined by Manannán, who says that as a result of Eithne's shaming "her guardian devil (*a deman comaitechta*) has gone (from . . .) her heart and an angel (*aingel*) has come in its place, and that does not allow our food into her breast and she will not worship druidry or devilry (*ní:aidéra si draídecht na díablaigecht*) henceforth . . . and it will be the three-personed . . . Trinity that shall be the God of worship (*Día adartha*) for that maiden" (par. 8).

Eithne lived in this way for centuries until Patrick's arrival in Ireland and the banishment of druids and demons (*díchor druad ⁊ demon*) in Lóegaire mac Néill's reign. One day near the Boyne she left her Túatha Dé Danann friends and began taking instruction from a cleric. Finally, Patrick himself intervened to prevent Óengus from recovering her. She then commended her soul to God and Patrick, died, released her spirit to heaven, was buried and gave her name to Cell Eithne or "Eithne's Chapel" at Brug na Bóinne (pars. 9-12).

As pointed out by Claire Dagger (1985), this tale obviously articulates a transition from pagan deity to Christian saint, the probability being that at least some of the known St. Eithnes, including the ten listed in *Comainmniugud Náem Hérend* (Brosnan, 1912, 358; Ó Riain, 1985, 140-56), have roots in various local manifestations of the identically named sovereignty goddess best known as Eithne Tháebfata (ch. 5, 3 and 12). If so, the christianization of sovereignty itself would seem to be implied here, and it may be added that *Altram Tige dá Medar* offers a pointed and structurally central contrastive parallelism between the wicked angels' departure

from the holy company of heaven for damnation and Eithne's abandonment of her demonic Túatha Dé Danann kith and kin for salvation. The heroine's demise in such contexts is an obvious expression of her death to paganism and resurrection in Christianity.

Tírechán presents a striking analogue or even antecedent in his famous seventh-century description (par. 26; Bieler, 1979, 142-5) of Patrick's encounter at the well of Clíabach (cf. 3 above) beside the royal site of Crúachu with Eithne the white (*alba*) and Fedelm the red (*rufa*), both daughters of the Tara monarch Lóegaire, who remains a pagan in Tírechán's narrative (par. 12). These question the saint about his God and receive a lyrical reply concluding with the words "now, indeed, I wish to join you to a Heavenly King since you are the daughters of an earthly king ⟨,if you wish⟩ to believe" (par. 26, 12; *ego uero uolo uos regi caelesti coniungere dum filiae regis terreni sitis ⟨,si uultis (?)⟩ credere*). They duly believe, are baptized, take communion and die so that they may behold the Heavenly King forthwith. Their druid fosterers come to mourn and are both eventually converted. Moreover, the burial mound with the bones of the two holy virgins becomes the site of a church (par. 26, 21) and Eithne daughter of Lóegaire is listed as a saint (Ó Riain, 1985, 155).

7. Watson (1986) has recently made a good case for a thematic orientation towards sovereignty in *Echtra Nerai*. One might further suggest that this relatively old saga's distinctly unpleasant aura helps to highlight the unredeemed and malignant nature of a pagan otherworld source of kingship liable to destroy unless destroyed.

The setting is a feast held on Samain eve by Ailill and Medb at Crúachu the day after "two captives (*cimbid*) had been crucified (*ro:crochtha*) by them". In return for a prize a challenge is issued along the same lines as in the commentary on *gell fri saigid n-omna* "a pledge for facing fear" in a legal heptad (*CIH* 18.20-31). This entails placing a chain (*id*) on the foot of a captive on the cross (*issin chroich*), but all except Nerae are unnerved by the darkness (*dorchatu*) and awfulness (*grándatu*) of a night on which "demons (*demna*) used regularly to appear". In view of this text's penchant for sets of three the presence of only two crucified captives may be intended to hint at a missing third, perhaps Christ himself between the two thieves crucified on either side of him (e.g. Mark 15:27). Arguably, then, this grim opening (pars. 1-2) acts as a cue for the absence of Christian redemption and presence of malefactors and demons in the narrative about to unfold.

When one of the captives asks for a drink, Nerae takes him on his back. After passing two houses surrounded by fire and water respectively, they reach a third containing three vessels of dirty water. The captive drinks from each, kills the inmates by spraying them with the last draught, and is returned to his cross (pars. 3-6). This episode associating impurity and death with a drink elsewhere prone to symbolize kingship (cf. 3 above and Bhreathnach, 1982, 256-9) leads Watson, on the strength of a somewhat different analysis of the details, to the plausible conclusion that "the captive's search is a negative paradigm which indicates what sovereignty must not be" (1986, 133). Watson also rightly insists that it be taken in conjunction with two further episodes involving the carrying of burdens (ibid., 132-7).

Having witnessed Crúachu's destruction by fire and the sword, Nerae follows the perpetrators into the nearby *síd*-mound of Crúachu, where the king gives him a

consort and sets him the daily task of bringing firewood to his fort (par. 6). The imposition of the same menial labour upon the heroic Ogmae was one of king Bres's infringements of propriety in *Cath Maige Tuired* (par. 37), and Watson is doubtless right in seeing the *síd*-king's behaviour as a sign of his inadequacy (ibid., 134).

While carrying his own burden, Nerae saw every day a blind man bearing a cripple to a well to ascertain from him whether something was still there. When Nerae questions his wife, she informs him that the object in the well is a gold diadem worn on the king's head. She also assures him that the sack of Crúachu was a premonition of what would happen the following Samain unless prevented by destruction of the *síd*-folk (par. 8). This is ultimately accomplished with her help, and the "crown of Brión (*barr Briúin*)" is carried off from the well as she had promised along with "the mantle of Lóegaire (*cétach Lóegairi*) in Armagh and the tunic of Dúnlang (*enech Dúnlainge*) among the Leinstermen in Kildare" (par. 19, cf. 9).

Various other aspects of this elaborate story, such as those relating to its role as an explanatory prelude to the Táin, have been discussed by Watson and need not concern us here. What is clear is that Nerae and his captive passenger's deadly encounter with the house containing three vessels both correlates and contrasts with the visits of the blind man with the lame man on his back to the well containing the three great talismans of sovereignty over Connacht, the Uí Néill and Leinster respectively. Whereas murder of the house's harmless inmates brings the malevolent captive no gain, destruction of the *síd*'s baneful inhabitants yields its justified human perpetrators these three tangible benefits, emphasis being upon the *barr Briúin* in a tale centring upon Connacht's chief royal site. Equally significant is the information that at least two of these major emblems of kingship are now located in great monasteries. A central message of our text, then, is that they, and consequently the sovereignty embodied by them, have been released from a moribund and demonic pagan environment into proper Christian custody.

8. In marked contrast to *Altram Tige dá Medar*'s location of the Túatha Dé Danann in the diabolical Brug, *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn* places them on an insular *tír tairngiri* or "land of promise" of the type encountered in *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai* (ch. 3, 13). Bécuma's expulsion from this paradise for committing a sin and her subsequent mischief-making among men in Ireland (par. 3) can be seen as a microcosm of the behaviour and fate of the fallen angels alluded to at the beginning of section 6. Conn's reign of paradisaical plenty in Ireland, when "nothing was lacking" and "they used to reap the grain crops thrice every year" (par. 1), is blighted by his liaison with this beautiful but evil woman (see ch. 5, 12), a situation reminiscent of God's cursing of the hitherto bountiful earth after Adam's temptation by Eve (Gen. 3:17) and further reminiscent of Jeremiah's plaintive question: "how long shall the land mourn and the herbs of every region wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The animal is consumed, and the bird" (12:4).

After ascribing these misfortunes to his wife's depravity and lack of faith (*ar los corbaid mná Cuind ⁊ gan creitim aice*), Conn's druids tell of "the one from whom their remedy (*leiges*) will come, namely the son of a non-carnal couple (*mac lánamna nem-cholaide*) to be brought to Ireland, killed at the entrance of Tara and his blood mixed with Tara's earth" (par. 8). Conn duly sets out across the sea on this quest and reaches a wondrous island where he is offered glorious hospitality by a couple

from the "land of promise" and the "land of wonders" who, like their parents before them, had only departed from their chastity once in order to produce their son Ségdae Sáerlabraid. Despite his parents initial reluctance, Ségdae is allowed to assist Conn by coming to Ireland under the protection of various of her potentates (par. 11).

On Ségdae's arrival there is a contention between his protectors and the druids, who bay for his blood. In despair Ségdae declares his readiness to be put to death. However, a woman, who turns out to be Ségdae's mother, appears with a cow to sacrifice in his stead. When it is cut up, two bags are opened and found to contain a one- and a twelve-legged bird respectively. Surprisingly, the one-legged bird is victorious in a fight between them, the moral drawn by the woman for the men of Ireland being "you are the twelve-legged bird and the little lad the one-legged bird, since it is he who represents the truth (*óir is é a:tá arin fírindi*)". She goes on to command the seizure and execution of the druids before telling Conn that a third of Ireland's corn, milk products and mast will still be lacking as long as he retains the depraved Bécuma. When, however, he replies that he cannot put her away, mother and son depart. There ensues the final part of the tale, already discussed (ch. 5, 12), where Bécuma uses a game of *fidchell* to send Art in quest of her *alter ego* Delbcháem.

The son of parents from paradise, the sinless Ségdae is ready to die in order to save others but is snatched back from the jaws of death to paradise, leaving the restoration of the men of Ireland's beatitude incomplete as long as the she-devil Bécuma is still in their midst. This obvious allegory of Christian redemption has been perceptively commented on by O Hehir, who also notes that "the substitution of the cow for the boy is modeled on the sacrifice of Isaac" (1983, 174). The victory of the bird with one leg over its twelve-legged rival presumably betokens the superiority of true belief in the one true God over pagan belief in a plurality of deities, a message hammered home by the contrast between Ségdae's survival and the destruction of his druidic would-be executioners. In the first half of this story the corrupted sovereignty's fate is in the balance between the redemption offered by the christlike Ségdae and his near-virgin mother on the one hand and the deterioration brought about by the demonic Bécuma on the other.

The upshot is a pre-Patrician or 'Old Testament' prefiguration of the Church's indispensable contribution to ruler's truth and its attendant blessings in the Christian period (3 and 4 above). Indeed, with due reservations about unprovable claims as to the lateness of its composition and addition to "the last half of the story" continuing "the essential substance of the lost older tale that is named in saga-list B" (see ch. 5, 12), one can hardly help agreeing with O Hehir's verdict that "the entire first half of the extant text of *Eachtra Airt meic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime ingine Morgain* can therefore be seen as a late and entirely Christian invention" (1983, 179).

9. Thus the woman of sovereignty may not only appear as hideous, lowly or deranged, pending the release of her glorious potential to the right spouse and his subjects, but conversely may also conceal beneath a glamorous exterior a malign or diabolical disposition destructive to her royal mate and damaging to his kingdom. The comparative evidence (ch. 5, 2-5) indicates that the pagan sovereignty goddess was something of a chameleon whose main attributes were merely symptomatic of

the presence or absence of a worthy royal consort rather than inherently good or bad. That being so, it looks as though the dichotomy between the essentially virtuous and the morally flawed royal bride in medieval Irish literature reflects the fundamental Christian cosmological duality neatly applied to kingship in the citation from the eighth-century Irish canons at the end of section 4 above: "every good governance is from God, but wicked works are from the devil", a theological principle manifestly connected with the same book's contrast between "the justice of a just king" and "the iniquity of an unjust king" (see 2 above).

It is, moreover, worth recalling that the Bible itself, perhaps as a distant reflex of the ancient Mesopotamian *hieros gamos* (ch. 5, 3), contains some striking images of women as royal spouses and territorial symbols.

The Apocalypse introduces a particularly obvious diabolical figure of this type in "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication (*cum qua fornicati sunt reges terrae*), and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her harlotry (*de vino prostitutionis eius*) . . ., a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and gilded with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication (*habens poculum aureum in manu sua plenum abominationum et immunditia fornicationis eius*) . . . And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus . . . And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them" (Rev. 17:1-4, 6 and 12-4).

Representation of Israel or Jerusalem as a bride, widow or the like in various conditions is well attested in the prophets. For instance, a prediction of Israel's future greatness in Isaiah 54 contains the following striking passages: "praise, O barren one that dost not bear (1, *lauda sterilis quae non paris*) . . . For he who made thee shall be lord over thee; the Lord of hosts is his name . . . For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieving in spirit and a rejected wife of youth" (6, *quia ut mulierem derelictam et maerentem spiritu vocavit te Dominus et uxorem ab adulescentia abiectam*). The well-known opening of Lamentations likens the desolate Jerusalem to a once prosperous widow who has been deserted and has fallen on bad times: "how doth the city (once) full of people sit solitary; the mistress of nations (*domina gentium*) hath become as a widow . . . She hath lamented dolefully in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; there is none to comfort her from all her lovers (*ex omnibus caris eius*); all her friends have despised her and are become her enemies". This basic image and idea may well have influenced the famous and similarly oriented Old Irish verse lament of the Old Woman of Beare (*caillech Bérri*; ed. Ó hAodha, 1989), whose connection with the sovereignty has been most recently discussed by Ó Cathasaigh (1989, 33-8).

Ezekiel 16 offers what is, perhaps, the most sustained metaphor of this kind in the Old Testament in response to the exhortation "son of man, make known her abominations to Jerusalem" (2). God's word concerning her unpropitious birth and subsequent elevation to beauty and prosperity is reported as follows: "and when I passed by thee, I saw thee downtrodden in thine own blood and I said to thee when

thou wast in thy blood, Live . . . I have granted thee to be multiplied as the bud of the field, and thou hast been multiplied and made great, and hast entered and attained a woman's ornament (*mundum muliebrem*): thy breasts have filled out and thine hair hath sprouted (*ubera tua intumuerunt et pilus tuus germinavit*), and thou wast naked (*nuda*) and full of confusion. And I passed by thee and beheld thee and, lo, thy time was the time for lovers (*tempus amantium*), and I spread my mantle over thee and covered thine ignominy and I sware unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine (*et facta es mihi*). And I washed thee with water . . ., and clothed thee with different hues . . ., and clad thee with finery, and decked thee with ornament . . ., and I set a jewel above thy visage, and rings in thine ears and a crown of beauty upon thine head . . ., and thou becamest quite exceedingly beautiful and didst prosper into a kingdom (*et decora facta es vehementer nimis et profecisti in regnum*). And thy name went forth among the nations for thy beauty, since thou wast perfect in my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God" (6-14). Thereafter, however, Jerusalem plays the harlot "as an adulterous wife who takes in strangers in addition to her husband" (32) and is duly threatened with retribution along with "thy sisters, who have abandoned their husbands and their sons . . . thine elder sister Samaria . . . thy younger sister . . . Sodom and her daughters" (45-6).

The Bible, then, individually equates various cities and countries, particularly Jerusalem and Israel, with women whose physical condition, prosperity and happiness depend upon the bestowal or withdrawal of God's favour, a relationship liable to be expressed in sexual terms. The woman may also take various earthly lovers, albeit usually at the cost of her divine husband's jealousy, and finally may become so wanton as to figure as an agent of the devil.

It can thus be seen that there was no lack of obvious biblical models to which inherited Irish concepts of the female embodiment of sovereignty could be at least partially assimilated. In effect, the condition of the Old Testament women in question serves as an index of God's satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as the case might be, with the rulers and people of the kingdoms symbolized by them. That being so, it would presumably have been easy enough for medieval Ireland's monastic men of letters to interpret the transformations undergone by their own women of sovereignty as comparable tokens of God's attitude towards a king and his kingdom. This approach would, of course, be applicable to the pre- as well as the post-Patrician period, given the early Christian Irish belief, already amply documented (e.g. ch. 3, 7-10; ch. 4, 4-9), in the role of divine providence and revelation from the very beginning of their history.

In that case, pre-Christian Irish kingship would constitute a typological anticipation of its Christian counterpart (cf. ch. 4, 9), and the woman of sovereignty, instead of being an antiquarian pagan anomaly, would have acquired a narrative role in keeping with contemporaneous Christian notions of a kingship *Dei gratia*, in which the benefits of the ruler's truth flowed ultimately from God (see 2-4 above). Their ascription of this insight to Cormac mac Airt himself (2 above) shows that monastic *literati* regarded this essentially Old Testament model of sovereignty as a feature of the pre- as well as the post-Patrician era.

10. Since even in the patriarchal period of the Old Testament prior to the Mosaic covenant God might speak to chosen individuals either directly or through the

medium of angels, it is no surprise that similar possibilities were envisaged in Ireland's ostensibly pre-Christian *senchus*. Mention has already been made of the wise giant Trefuilngid's status as "an angel of God" or "God himself" appearing to the men of Ireland under their king long ago in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra*, but the conclusion of *Scél na Fír Flatha* referred to at the end of section 5 above is of particular interest: "but the ecclesiastical scholars say that every time a wondrous apparition (*taidbse ingnad*) used to be shown to the royal rulers (*dona ríg-flathaib*) of yore - as the Scál revealed to Conn and as the land of promise (*tír tairngiri*) was shown to Cormac - it was a godly ministration that used to come in that guise and not a devilish ministration. Moreover, (it is) angels that used to come to help them, since it is natural truth (*fírindi aicnid*) that they used to follow and it is the commandment of law (*timna rechta*) that served them".

There is an obvious allusion here to *Baile in Scáil* and to that part of *Scél na Fír Flatha* (pars. 25-54) commonly known as *Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri*, both texts primarily about sovereignty. In the former a mist descends upon Conn Cétchathach and his companions before clearing to reveal a fine house containing a maiden called *flaith Érenn* "the sovereignty of Ireland" and the phantom or *Scál* himself, who prophesies concerning Conn and his successors in the Tara kingship with each drink that the maiden draws (ch. 5, 3). Interpretation of the Scál as God's agent surely places the woman of sovereignty associated with him firmly on the side of the angels, so to speak.

In the second tale Cormac is visited by a fair youth holding a musical silver branch with a trinity of fruits (ch. 3, 13) "from a land that has only truth . . . and neither age nor decay nor sorrow nor pain nor rage nor jealousy nor hatred nor pride" (par. 27). Cormac's acquisition of the branch by granting three requests enables his visitor to remove the trio of the king's daughter, son and wife Eithne Tháebfata in succession to this sinless paradise, whither Cormac sets off in search of them. On arrival in a fine palace there, he is given two striking lessons in the threefold nature of truth. Firstly, he encounters a pig that can only be cooked by the recitation of a truth over each quarter (pars. 37-52). Three truths relating to stock and crops are so uttered to render it three-quarters done, Cormac then recounting the fourth to complete the process in a manner obviously relevant to the tripartite structure of nature and society integrated and made whole by the king's truth (ch. 5, 4 and 9-10). Cormac's family is then restored to him and he is shown a cup which breaks in three when "three words of falsehood (*téora bríathra bréice*)" are uttered over it but becomes whole again with the speaking of "three true confessions (*téora coibsena fíra*)", an image not only equivalent to that underlying the tale of Lugaid Ríabderg's conception (ch.5, 4) but also fully in keeping with the Augustinian doctrine that all truth is recognised by its threefold compatibility with nature, Scripture and informed conscience (ch. 4, 4). At any rate, the desired reintegration is accomplished when Cormac's host declares "that neither your wife nor your daughter has seen the face of a male phantom (*ferscál*) since they were brought from Tara until today and that your son has not seen the face of a female phantom (*banscál*)" (par. 52) before revealing himself as Manannán mac Lir, king of the land of promise, and explaining that Cormaç has been deliberately lured there to witness these wonders (par. 53). The king awoke on the morrow to find himself on the green of Tara with his family of three, the branch with its three fruits and the three-in-one cup "which used to distinguish truth and falsehood for the Gael" (*no:deilged fírindi ⁊ gaí i Gaedelu*, par. 54) during Cormac's lifetime.

There can be no doubt that this tale functions in *Scél na Fír Flatha* as an allegory of Cormac's attainment of the truth of God's law that was the bedrock of his regal excellence according to this and other texts (ch. 3, 10-11; ch. 4, 7). In effect, the sovereignty personified by his wife Eithne is briefly withdrawn from him only to be returned in a newly perfected form born of a sojourn in the sinless paradise that is the home of truth and angelic beings. The king of these, Manannán, can be seen as an allegory of God himself here as in *Immram Brain*, in which the close of Manannán's great poem about paradise, the fall of man and Christ's redemptive incarnation draws a patent parallel between this and his own mission from the land of promise to the world of men in order to sire a remarkable son upon a mortal woman. What Cormac is allegorically vouchsafed in this tale is nothing less than a divine revelation about the three-in-one nature of the truth essential to the proper exercise of kingship. Whatever its pagan Indo-European and Celtic roots, a trinitarian concept of sovereign's truth linking the human and divine worlds had an obvious potential for Christian exploitation.

Furthermore, the notion of angelic guardians and revealers of sovereignty such as the Scál or Manannán in pre-Christian Ireland would conform nicely to Isidore's doctrine "that there is no place over which angels do not preside" (*Etym.* VII v 29 *nullum esse locum cui angeli non praesint*), itself explicitly deduced from the words of the angel to the prophet Daniel: "but the prince of the kingdom of the Persians withstood me one and twenty days: and, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes (i.e. of angels, *unus de principibus primis*), came to help me; and I remained there beside the king of the Persians" (Dan. 10:13).

In medieval Irish myth the beneficial woman of sovereignty mediates, as it were, between an otherworld susceptible to depiction as a sinless paradise presided over by the likes of Manannán and the sinful world of men governed by their kings. This status is both functionally and allegorically comparable to that of the biblical brides of God and earthly monarchs referred to in 9 above.

In early Irish literature such women symbolize the various destinies of individuals eligible for the kingship, being represented not only as bestowers but also as withholders or withdrawers of true sovereignty. The beautiful woman who fleetingly appears to Cormac Conn Loinges in token of the imminent slipping of the Ulster kingship from his grasp (ch. 5, 11) is a case in point, but death or incapacity were not the sole catalysts of failure to become king. For instance, in the Christian period it was common enough for scions of royal houses to embark upon ecclesiastical careers. The nobly born St. Laisrén's refusal of the kingship offered him for an eremetic existence in his Salamanca Life (par. 7; Heist, 1965, 7) and the pious clerical career of the sixth-century king of Connacht's son Cellach in *Caithréim Cellaig* are obvious literary examples. Typical enough historical instances are provided by the archbishop Áed Dub and abbot Óengus of Kildare, brother and nephew respectively of the seventh-century king of Leinster Fáelán mac Colmáin (cf. McCone, 1982, 110).

It has been seen that monastic ideals are highly germane to *Echtrae Chonlai*'s account of the overseas woman's conflict with the evil druid to rescue the legendary Tara monarch Conn Cétchathach's son Connlae from secular mortality among his own people to everlasting sinless bliss in the Land of the Living. Insofar as she thereby decides both his fate regarding the succession and that of the future king of Tara, his brother Art, it seems legitimate to regard her as at least having

significant affinities with the mythical woman of sovereignty. However, this in no way detracts from the demonstrable role of Connlae's beloved as a symbol of the Church in accordance with an allegorical principle readily applied to Old Testament brides like Esther, the Persian emperor's consort "in the image of God's Church" (*sub figura ecclesiae Dei*; Isidore, *Etym.* VI ii 29) who struggled to save her people from Aman's wicked machinations (see ch. 3, 13).

If the wife or lover of a king or his heir apparent can be allegorized as the Church in *Echtrae Chonlai* as in standard medieval biblical exegesis, the possibility surely presents itself that this equation was applied more or less generally to the woman of sovereignty in her benign aspect by the monastic writers of early Irish sagas. If so, the successful liaison of such a figure with an actual or prospective king should be seen as a highly effective device for giving typological prefiguration and narrative realization to the cornerstone of successful rule in early Christian Ireland, namely *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* or "the union of Church with State" (see 4 above). Clearly failure with or separation from a woman of this type or association with a diabolical counterpart would be similarly apt as a means of representing a breach in this indispensable symbiosis.

The early Christian Irish 'goddess' or woman of sovereignty, then, may well be the end-product of the ecclesiastical enrichment of potent native symbols with biblical concepts and exegetical insights to provide vital current concerns with appropriate historical justification and literary expression. At all events, her mythical attributes can only be fully squared with the monastic literary environment to which we owe their transmission by positing that her literary role of sexually symbolic mediation in tandem with the king between this world and the other, man and god, matched and foreshadowed that of Christ's bride the Church in medieval Christian ideology and allegory.

11. If, as has been argued in the preceding sections, 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, one might reasonably expect some influence from biblical prototypes upon the representation of great kings in Irish tradition.

A series of articles by Elizabeth Gray (1981-3) have done much to illuminate the manner in which *Cath Maige Tuired* draws on originally pagan mythical traditions to treat a wide range of social issues relevant to early medieval Ireland, the principal illustrative technique being to juxtapose positive and negative behavioural patterns. As also recognised by Ó Cathasaigh (1983b), a central contrast of this type is between Bres and Lug as bad and good paradigms respectively for accession to and stewardship of the kingship. Still more recently (McCone, 1989, 122-32) it has been suggested that contemporary clerical attitudes were fundamental to a further opposition of this type between *cáinte* or "satirist" and *fili* or "poet" (see ch. 9, 9-12) in the same text. Moreover, its monastic author may well have seen in the central conflict between the Túath(a) Dé (Danann) and Fomorians an Irish analogue of that between the Israelites and Philistines (ibid., 136-7; see ch. 3, 8).

Although Lug is undoubtedly and Bres probably a pagan Celtic deity in origin, their representation in *Cath Maige Tuired* may still owe a good deal to biblical models. Thus Bres's improper succession through his maternal kin, unkingly

conduct duly subjected to formal public condemnation, and alienation of his former supporters are quite reminiscent of Israel's abortive first experiment with kingship in the person of Abimelech (Jud. 9). On the other hand, Lug's good looks, many talents, skill on the harp, valour, judgment and ability to slay a Fomorian giant with a slingshot bear an uncanny likeness to the attributes of that slayer of the Philistine Goliath and paragon of Old Testament kingship David that is hardly all due to coincidence (ibid., 137-9).

As Ó Cathasaigh has pointed out (1977, 74-80), the tale *Esnada Tige Buchet* purports to give the moral and historical justification for the passing of the Tara kingship from the control of the Leinstermen symbolized by Cathàer Már to that of the Síl Cuinn, later Uí Néill, symbolized by Cormac mac Airt. The basic idea was that for some time the Leinstermen held Tara and the Síl Cuinn resided in nearby Kells until Cormac mac Airt became the first of their line to establish his dynasty permanently in Tara and build there, as can be seen from the following two passages. "The Cathaír Már, then, whose sons we have enumerated, fifty years to him in the kingship of Ireland, as Laidcenn affirms. The occupation of Cathaír (was) fifty years as above. Cathaír and Conn Cétchathach were contemporary, Cathaír in Tara and Conn in Kells, without battle or war between them both" (*Corp. Gen.*, 70 = 124a22-7). According to a crucial part of *Esnada Tige Buchet* mistakenly removed against all the manuscripts to an 'Appendix A' as a "clumsy interpolation" by its editor (Greene, 1955, 27), "Cormac grandson of Conn was in Kells before he took the kingship of Ireland, for Medb Lethderg did not let him into Tara after the death of his father, i.e. Medb Lethderg of the Laigin had been beside Art and she had enjoyed the kingship after the death of Art. Kells, then, was the dwelling of the kings, and it is after the taking of the kingship by Cormac that Tara was dug by him, i.e. that was the land of Odrán, i.e. a peasant of the Déssi Breg." (ibid., 31). After Odrán's voluble protests Cormac agrees satisfactory compensation with him and is amicably confirmed in possession of Tara.

Whatever dim refractions of distant actual happenings it may or may not contain, this tradition's at first sight surprising generosity to the position of earlier occupants is most readily explicable in terms of Tara's comparability with Jerusalem (ch. 2, 3) and of Cormac's status as a pre-Patrician Irish counterpart of Solomon (see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 59-60) or David. Famed like this pair of preeminent Old Testament sovereigns for wisdom, justice and gnomic instructions (cf. ch. 2, 2), Cormac also shared with both, especially David, privileged royal access to God's truth and support (2 above and ch. 3, 10-1; cf. ch. 4, 7). Cormac was also comparable with David in that *Genemain Chormaic* depicts him as a pre-ordained king spending his youth hiding in the wilderness from his enemies. Moreover, rather like his biblical counterpart, who fled Jerusalem during Absalom's short-lived rebellion (2 Sam./Kgs. 15-8), he is represented as temporarily losing the Tara kingship for a brief spell (ch. 5, 12).

In line with these analogies Cormac's move from Kells to Tara can be plausibly put down to a deliberate evocation of David's move from Hebron to Jerusalem, which was likewise associated with building activity: "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land: which spake unto David, saying . . . 'David

shall not enter here'. Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, the same is the city of David . . . So David dwelt in the fort and called it the city of David and built around about from Millo and inward" (2 Sam./Kgs. 5:4-9).

In both cases a vassal people was supplanted, the Canaanite Jebusites by David and the *Dési Breg* by Cormac (cf. ch. 3, 8). If Odrán's initial objection to Cormac and his followers' intrusion into Tara can be compared with that of Jerusalem's Jebusite defenders, the subsequent accommodation between the two may well have been inspired by David's friendly negotiation with Araunah the Jebusite for the purchase of his threshing floor for building purposes (2 Sam./Kgs. 24:18-25).

There can be no doubt that Cormac's role in early Christian Irish *senchus* as the perfect pre-Patrician king was inextricably linked, whether as cause, effect or a mixture of both, with his alleged worship of God and adherence to Mosaic law. Like David in the Bible itself, he was the 'Old Testament' embodiment and prefiguration of what was to become the Christian ideal of kingship by God's grace, and monastic writers' enhancement of the similarities between these two mythical paragons of sovereignty need come as no surprise.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fire and the arts

1. It has been argued above that medieval Irish men of letters saw divine providence as operating through a series of trinitarian filters whereby the sovereignty's cosmic attributes were reconstituted in her personal ones and these then matched with her regal husband's three definitive traits, which in turn reflected the three primary social classes embodied by the king, namely hospitallers, warriors and men of art (ch. 5, 9-10). The aim of the present chapter is to show that the men of art or *áes dáno* too were classified into three further main spheres of activity correlating with those of society as a whole. This will lead to a consideration of the role of fire and cooking in descriptions of the *áes dáno* and other major social groups.

2. The Latin Life of St. Daig of Inishkeen in the Salamanca codex is unusual in displaying a striking thematic consistency that is clearly enunciated as early as the third section. During a visit by its youthful hero to the nearby monastery of Louth and its founder St. Mochtae "then the man of God ordered the holy lad to be brought to him and greatly rejoiced at his arrival. And taking his hand he said: 'this is the physician (*medicus*) concerning whom I once foresaw in the spirit that he would cure me of my three infirmities.' For Mochtae suffered from a severe ailment of head, heart and kidneys. However, by placing the boy's hand upon the sick members he was immediately cured. After this he blessed the same hand and said, 'that hand will artistically make very many utensils of iron and bronze as well as gold and silver for the use of the Church. In addition it will also write very many volumes most excellently (*plurima de ferro et aere, de auro etiam atque argento utensilia ad usum ecclesiae pertinentia artificiose manus ista operabitur. Insuper et plurima peroptime scribet volumina*)'" (Heist, 1965, 389). Throughout the rest of his life Daig's actions conform overwhelmingly to this prediction: in addition to some other cures the dead are restored to life with monotonous regularity, a long inventory of his various ecclesiastical metal artefacts is given (par. 3), and the production of such objects as well as books is mentioned from time to time. The Church's interest in and patronage of key *áes dáno* specializations are thus clearly asserted (see ch. 4, 2), as is the trichotomization of these under the major headings of healing, metalwork and learning.

Virtually the same tripartition of the arts is made quite unambiguously in the scholar-king Cormac mac Cuilennáin's ninth-century Glossary entry for Brigit: "Brigit, i.e. the poetess (*ban-file*), daughter of the Dagdae. This is Brigit the female seer or woman of insight (*ban-éces nó bé n-éicsi*), i.e. the goddess whom poets (*filid*) used to worship, for her cult was very great and very splendid. It is for this reason that they call her (the goddess) of poets (*poetarum*) by this title, and her sisters were Brigit the woman of leechcraft (*bé legis*) and Brigit the woman of smithcraft (*bé ngoibnechta*), i.e. goddesses, i.e. three daughters of the Dagdae are they. By their names the goddess Brigit was called by all the Irish" (Stokes, 1862, 8). This antiquarian passage in Old Irish interspersed with Latin gives a remarkably clear insight into the likely pagan antecedents of a major early Irish saint. Moreover, in presenting a trinity of identically named patronnesses of the arts subdivided into medicine, metalwork and the learned discipline of poetry it almost exactly replicates the scheme just identified from Daig's Life.

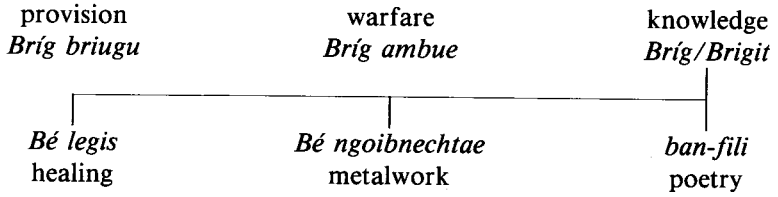
3. Apart from healing miracles, particularly the cure of lepers, that are too much of a hagiographical commonplace to prove much in isolation, the St. Brigit of hagiography displays little thematic affinity with the identically named daughters of the Dagdae as described by Cormac above. On the other hand, all of the early Brigidine Lives from Cogitosus' roughly mid-seventh-century *Vita Brigitae* on (trans. Connolly and Picard, 1987) share a rather distinctive obsession with the miraculous provision of food, drink and goods, hospitality and other acts of generosity. The obvious prototype for these would be a *briugu* or "hospitaller", and *Cethirslicht Athgabála* duly mentions the judgement of a legendary Bríg *briugu*, mother of the Ulster Cycle's peacemaker Sencha mac Ailella (*CIH* 377.26 and 380.14-5, cf. Kelly, 1988, 358).

The names Bríg and Brigit were prone to interchangeability in early Irish sources. Thus the inventory of identically named female saints, *Comanmann Náeb-úag nÉrenn*, lists ten different Brigits, twelve Brígs and three Brigits *alias* Brígs depending upon the manuscript (Ó Riain, 1985, 153-4 = no. 708.1-23), the Dagdae's daughter Brigit the poetess is called Bríg in *Cath Maige Tuired* (Gray, 1982, 119), and Bríg daughter of Comloch in the Old Irish *Bethu Brigte* (par. 31) turns up as a Brigit in the so-called *Vita I* or "First Life" in Latin (par. 27; Bollandus, 1658, 121). The Christian St. Brigit's cult or attributes may, then, be partly based upon those of the mythical female hospitaller whose name is preserved in a legal context as Bríg the *briugu*.

Another mythical Bríg mentioned in the law tracts is "Bríg *ambue*, the female expert of the men of Ireland in wisdom and prudence", as she is called in a list of pre-Christian Irish legal paragons attached to the H.3.17 version of the so-called 'pseudo-historical' prologue to the *Senchus Már* (*CIH* 1654.12). *Ambue* "stranger, outlaw" denoted someone without the property and attendant legal rights of a *bue* or full member of the *túath* such as the *bó-aire* or "cow-freeman", whose legal status is ascribed by *Críth Gablach* (pars. 13 and 24) preeminently to the ownership of cattle, the basic measurement of wealth in ancient Ireland as in many other societies (cf. Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 105-6). Etymologically *bue* and *am-bue* are from Celtic **bowyos* "posessing cows", (< IE **g*^{w}*owyos*; Gk. *-boios*, Skt. *gavyaḥ* "pertaining to cattle") and **am-bowyos* "cowless" (privative *am-* < IE **n̥-* "un-") respectively (McCone, 1986d, 11; 1987, 150, n. 15). The world of the *ambue*

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

We may thus tentatively postulate an erstwhile link between the triple Brigit *alias* Bríg of the *áes dáno* and a further pair of Brígs associated with hosptality and warfare respectively, as in the scheme below.



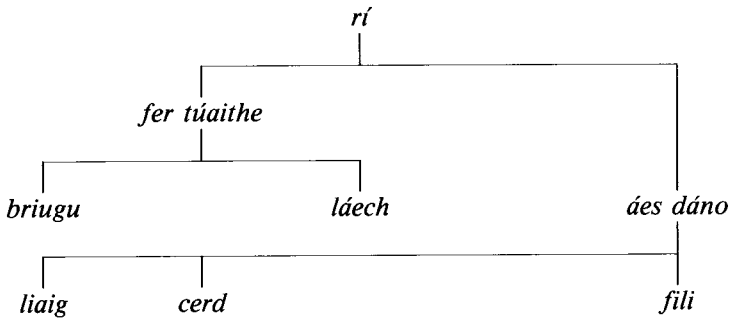
Whatever the connection or lack of it between these Brígs, Cormac's three Brigits and the various Christian saints bearing these names, notably Brigit of Kildare, there can be no doubt about the correlation of the basic threefold classification of the arts just identified in section 2 with that of the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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In contradistinction to the fundamentally beneficent and productive fires of the *briugaid* and *áes dáno*, the early Irish warrior's inherent fire was regarded as essentially elemental and, unless checked, liable to burst forth with dire consequences for friend or foe alike in the immediate vicinity. The famous physical distortion or *ríastrad* that accompanies the preeminent hero Cú Chulainn's outbursts of uncontrollable ferocity includes "a spark of fire on every single hair (*oíbell tened . . . for cach óenfinnu*)" and "the warrior's radiance from his crown (*in lúan láith assa mulluch*)" (*Táin*[1] 430 and 433-4). Even at the level of vocabulary *fichid* "fights" and *fichid* "boils" are homonyms, while *grís* "heat" and *bruth* "boiling heat" also mean "ardour, valour", *daig* "flame" can signify "hero" and so on (see relevant *DIL* entries).

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

which he went after that, he heated it until its heat and its cold suited him. He then comes out, and thereafter the queen, Mugain, puts a blue mantle around him with a silver brooch in it and a hooded tunic. And he sits at Conchobar's knee then" (*Táin*[1] 815-20).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER EIGHT

Heroes and saints

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The literally liminal birth so fully described and heavily emphasized here resonates with other boundary situations in Brigit's conception and early life. Thus her birth on a physical threshold, neither inside not outside the house, matches her ambivalent social position as the child of a servile outcast mother and a noble landowning father, as an exile from paternal home and territory destined to return in due course (see 2 above). Moreover, the very account of her birth contains a highly wrought contrast between the son born prematurely to a great queen and the daughter born at just the right time to a humble slavewoman. The former's birth fails to pass the temporal threshold of sunrise on the morrow to earn the great destiny prophesied, whereas the latter's does so to qualify for that greatness in breach of normal social expectations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dechtire became pregnant again after marrying Súaldaim, and bore Sétantae alias Cú Chulainn.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cú Chulainn concludes by extolling the benefits of believing in Patrick and reveals that even his apparently glorious accoutrements have been supplied by the saint for the occasion. Finally, "the earth came over Lóegaire, heaven is promised to Cú Chulainn" (9539-40), *LU* alone adding that "Lóegaire then believed in Patrick" (9540).

The scheme of saint, helper-hero and king here essentially replicates that of saint (Patrick again), helper-poet (Dubthach) and king (Lóegaire again) in the legal sphere (ch. 4, 5). The pathetic dependence of the once invincible main hero of the Ulster tales upon St. Patrick in order to escape the torments of hell is unremittingly hammered home in this powerful narrative: his greatness is in the past, and only the cleric's power can recreate any semblance of it in the present or secure him a bearable future. Patrick thus proves to have virtually complete control over the hero's image and message, which invites the reader to consider Scáth's nasty transmarine kingdom as a rather pale allegorical reflection of hell, just as the blissful land overseas functions as an allegory of the Christian paradise in *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai* (ch. 3, 13). Cú Chulainn may have escaped from Scáth's clutches under his own steam, but the real hell is a different matter. The very embodiment of the pre-Christian heroic tradition, Cú Chulainn can only be saved by entering the service of the Church and submitting to clerical manipulation.

Carney provides convenient synopses of the various main accounts of the *fallsigud* or "revealing" of early Christian Ireland's foremost literary epic, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (1955, 166-79). The earliest attested of these (*LL* 32878-909, trans. Kinsella, 1970, 1-2) tells how Ireland's *filid* were gathered before the traditionally seventh-century poet Senchán Torpéist (cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 252, n.2) "to see if they remembered *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in its entirety, and they said that they only knew bits of it. Then Senchán asked his pupils which of them would go with his blessing to Latin lands to learn the Táin which the sage (*in suí*) had taken eastwards in exchange for the *culmen*" (32880-3), an unmistakable reference to the scholarly bishop Isidore of Seville (+636), whose enormously influential *Etymologiae* were known in Ireland as the *cu(i)lmen(n)* or "summit" of knowledge (Ó Máille, 1921). Two pupils, one of them Senchán's own son Murgen, duly set out. When they reach Fergus mac Roig's gravestone in Connacht, Murgen is left to sit thereon alone and chant a lay to it as if it were Fergus himself. A great mist descends and keeps him from his followers for three days and nights, during which Fergus appears in all his glory "and then recites the whole Táin to him as it was done from beginning to end. However, others say it is to Senchán it was recited after a fast against the saints of Fergus's race, and it were no wonder if it should have been so. Then they all go to Senchán and recount their adventures to him and he was grateful to them then" (32895-6).

Here we see the *filid* of Ireland obtaining direct access to past events in the middle ground of heroic epiphany between an inadequate oral tradition and the literate ecclesiastical learning that had supplanted it. The Church's indispensability as a catalyst of poetic revelation, also stressed in the "Caldron of poesy" (ch. 7, 6), is made still more explicit in the other versions, where various saints are invoked to help the poets communicate with Fergus, a further application of the Christian saint's perceived affinities with the pre-Christian hero and a good example of the well attested symbiosis between churchmen and *filid* in early Christian Ireland (ch. 1, 10-11). As Nagy puts it, "the role of calling forth the dead Fergus is played jointly

by the seeking poets and the saints of Ireland, who through their joined powers accomplish the extraordinary deed" (1983, 141-2). In effect, these texts candidly acknowledge that nothing like a complete Táin was available in the early seventh century, its basis in oral tradition being at best fragmentary, and that it owed its subsequent existence to the ecclesiastically mediated efforts of poets. In straightforward modern parlance, it was a literary creation smacking of monastic learning, as Thurneysen cogently argued long ago (1921, 96-7).

Being aware that full-scale literacy had first reached their island in the wake of Christianity, medieval Irish men of letters had to confront the problem of how the truth about their pre-Christian *senchus* could be known. Consequently the conversion of oral into written testimony was a matter of profound concern to them, as Nagy has shown with reference to what he dubs these "close encounters of the traditional kind": "like Patrick in the tales discussed above, the Irish *literati*, extending the bounds of the new Christian culture, were attempting to record the words of a wondrous being, the oral tradition, that had its own modes of generation and transmission" (ibid., 136).

However, it might be argued that by regularly cutting out intermediaries to recover an eyewitness account, the kind of *fíadnaise* acceptable as evidence in court (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 90-1), this genre actually shows itself to be mistrustful or even subversive of oral *tradition*, which by definition entails a *chain* of such testimonies (Vansina, 1973, 19). That the 'close encounter' scenario was not specifically intended to justify the recording of genuine oral traditions is indicated by its application to the transmission of *senchus* as a whole, including key 'synthetic' historical schemes whose high literary and ecclesiastical content is not in dispute (ch. 3, 1 and 6-9). *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra* has already been discussed, and a further example of this type is *Scél Tuáin meic Cairill* (*LU* 1207-1355), in which the ancient shape-changing Tuán, eager to hear God's word, encounters St. Finnian of Moville and tells him of Ireland's five post-diluvian invasions.

It thus seems that, rather than placing much trust in an actual or idealized oral tradition's capacity to transmit their pre-Patrician traditions reliably, the clerical establishment adopted an obvious enough medieval solution to the problem of authentication by claiming for the Church and her learned appendages privileged access to the truth about the past through divine revelation. Classically liminal heroes like Cú Chulainn and Fergus could then be enlisted as suitable messengers along with other bridgers of gaps such as the patriarchal Fintan and Tuán or the angelic Trefuilngid, the Church's essential controlling role being personified by a saintly go-between or near equivalent. Through such interchanges between hero and saint on the boundary between the two, knowledge of the dead or dormant pagan past could be authoritatively channeled by the Church's allies and representatives into the Christian present. In practice, this doctrine was a charter for the monastically oriented literary reworking and invention of saga and other *senchus* as required, within the limits imposed by the need to avoid straining credibility by unduly great or sudden divergences from a received tradition increasingly bolstered by writing. Charters, of course, are usually intended for use.

CHAPTER NINE

Druids and outlaws

1. The *fían* and some of its basic traits have already been alluded to here and there in the preceding chapters (ch.1, 7; ch.3, 4; ch. 5, 8; ch. 7, 3 and 8-9; ch. 8, 7). It is now the turn of these and various other groups associated with them on the fringes of early Irish society to be considered in greater detail.

In ancient Ireland the early life of a girl or, even more pronouncedly, a boy was divided into distinct phases. After being reared in the parental home during infancy (*maice*), a child of free birth was usually sent away to be fostered when still quite young (Kelly, 1988, 86), the normal age for this being seven years according to *Bretha Crólige* (par. 7; Binchy, 1938, 8-9). Fosterage for affection (*altramm seirce*) with friends or relatives for no fee may well continue an Indo-European practice, convincingly documented by Jan Bremmer (1976), of giving a young boy to the head of his mother's kin, typically her father or oldest brother, to be reared. A good literary example of this institution bordering on the avunculate, Cú Chulainn's precociously early departure for fosterage with his mother's brother Conchobar in the first of his *mac-gnímrada* or "youthful deeds" in the *Táin* (ll. 399-456), has been discussed along with others by Ó Cathasaigh (1986b, esp. 152-5). However, the type of fosterage afforded most prominence in surviving legal material is a kind of early medieval Irish equivalent of the English 'public' school entailing the professional fosterage and training of a number of children for a fee and associated privileges determined strictly by parental rank (Kelly, ibid., 87-8).

There is some disagreement between the texts as to whether fosterage was generally concluded at the age of fourteen or seventeen years, *Críth Gablach* opting for the former and *Bretha Crólige* for the latter (ibid., 88-9). However, regardless of which of these is correct or of whether they reflect variations or changes in practice, the main concern of the present chapter is with the well born young male's position during the intermediate phase between the end of fosterage (*altrum*) and the attainment of manhood (*fertu*) along with the inheritance of landed property (*trebad*).

2. Concerning the lowest grade of freeman it recognises, *Críth Gablach* asks: "why is this man called a 'man of middle huts(?)' (*fer midboth*)? Because he has come from childhood, from the law of fosterage, and has not reached manhood

(*arindí do:ndichet a mmaici, a ddligiud altruma, ⁊ nad:roig fertaid*). Is a particular age assigned to the *fer midboth* who swears concerning penalties (*imma:thuing smachtu*)? An age of fourteen years is assigned. The reason he cannot maintain testimony is that he who has not already taken possession or inheritance (*na[d]:rogaib seilb ná comarbus ria sin*) is not capable of testimony except regarding every trifle before seventeen years, unless a free adult (*fer féne*) maintain it with him" (par. 6).

Regarding the second *fer midboth* "who maintains testimony" (*con:oí insci*), it is asked: "is [a particular age] assigned [to him? It is assigned] from fourteen years to twenty, to beard-encirclement. Though it be that he acquire the estate of a cow-freeman (*bó-aire*) before he have an encircling beard, his oath does not avail except according to the oath of a *fer midboth*. Moreover, though he be without taking inheritance until old age, his oath still does not go beyond the *fer midboth*. His fief is five *séts* (i.e. two and a half milch-cows), his render a wether with its accessories. That is the render of an *óen-chiniud*, a man who does not occupy possessions or land for himself (*fer nad:treba seilb ná ferann dó fadeisin*) . . . No one is allowed to set up his house as long as he is a minor until he is capable of separate estate ownership (*sain-trebad*) and of taking possessions (*gabál selb*), (and this applies to) a *fer midboth* as long as he be an *óen-chiniud*, except his lord be counterbound . . ." (par. 9).

It is apparent from this account that graduation to full legal status as an adult within the settled landowning laity of the *túath* depended upon the fulfilment of two conditions, namely the attainment of a minimum age of twenty symbolized by growth of a full beard and the acquisition of the appropriate property rating by inheritance. Hence the reluctance of an adult warrior like Nad Crantail to fight with the beardless Cú Chulainn in the *Táin* (ll. 1443-56) or the people of Tara's initial reaction to Conaire's youthful appearance naked and armed only with a sling to claim the kingship in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: "it seems to us that our bull-feast and our incantation of truth have been ruined since it is a beardless youth that was shown to us therein" (par. 15). In the absence of either one of these qualifications, progress from the relatively low status of *fer midboth* to the higher one of *bó-aire* or the like must wait. In the case of an under-age person with the necessary inheritance this would only be a matter of time, six years at most, but failure to inherit the requisite property might result in lasting *fer midboth* status.

Binchy's textually untenable attempt to distinguish between a junior and a senior *fer midboth* aged 14-17 and 17-20 years respectively has been effectively criticised by McLeod (1982b), who proposes a single age group of 14-20 further subdivided on the basis of non-inheritance versus inheritance. However, this view is based upon a misinterpretation of the passage about the junior *fer midboth*, which clearly states that his definitive failure to maintain testimony did not extend beyond the seventeenth year. The solution would seem to be that both age and inheritance were involved: up to the age of seventeen failure to inherit entailed the lower *fer midboth* status, the upper grade being available from his fourteenth year to one who had inherited property but only from his seventeenth to one who had not. Moreover, the twentieth year only marked transition from the upper *fer midboth* to a higher status for the inheritor of sufficient property, the landless *óenchiniud* being condemned to remain at the former level until such time as he inherited, if ever.

Apart from a brief convergence in status from the ages of seventeen to twenty, the distinction between the inheritor of independent landed property or *trebad* and

the non-inheriting *óen-chiniud* is crucial throughout, differentiating the upper from the lower *fer midboth* in the fourteen-to-seventeen age group and the full legal status of *bó-aire* etc. from the merely partial competence of the upper *fer midboth* after the age of twenty.

Who, then, was this *óen-chiniud* or "sole kin" caught in limbo, as it were, between the end of fosterage and the more or less postponed inheritance of the independent property necessary to secure full legal status as a member of landed society? Thurneysen's rather desperate suggestion that he was "the last of an impoverished kindred (*fine*)" hardly squared either with mention in the sources of "his 'kin' . . . and his relatives . . . who can impugn his contract, if it exceeds what is normal" or with his obvious lack of inheritance since "in accordance with the Irish law of inheritance whereby the collateral kin of one who dies childless inherit, such a 'last descendent' ought to be particularly rich in land" (1923, 347). On the other hand, someone legally cut off from his kin until such time as he should inherit would fit the bill nicely. One is reminded of the similar term *é-cclann*, meaning literally "without family", applied to warriors in medieval Irish sources (see *DIL*), and the classically propertiless status of the *fían*-warrior emerges clearly from *Tecosca Cormaic*'s dictum *fénnid cách co trebad* "every one is a *fían*-member until (he acquires) landed property" (par. 31, 10).

The *óenchiniud*'s likely association with the warlike *fían* is confirmed by *Táin Bó Flidais*, in which the Ulster exiles' *óenchinidi* are cast in the role of naked berserks who intervene at the crucial stage of a siege to snatch victory for them and their Connacht allies from the jaws of defeat: *la sodain at:regat anchinnidi Ulad ⁊ siat lomnochta ⁊ do:berat fobairt trén tolchar co feirg ⁊ londnus dermar co rrucsat an n-imdorus inna cind co mboí for medon ind lis ⁊ tíagait Conachta léo immalle* "thereupon the Ulster *óenchiniuds* arose stark naked and launched a strong, vigorous attack with wrath and enormous fury so that they brought the lintel down upon them (the enemy) until it was on the middle of the courtyard, and the Connachtmen joined them" (*LU* 1606-8).

3. It appears, then, that the early Irish *fían* catered for propertiless males of free birth who had left fosterage but had not yet inherited the property needed to settle down as full landowning members of the *túath* liable to military service only on proclamation of a *slógad* or "hosting" (ch. 5, 8; Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 106). Moreover, the laws associate the latter status with a formal marriage in which both spouses should ideally be of the same social class and to which both or either should contribute the requisite property (see Kelly, 1988, 70-3). Since such matrimony obviously presupposed either the inheritance of property in one's own right, typically on the death of one's father, or marriage to an heiress cousin endowed by the strictly circumscribed 'Zelophahad' rule (ch. 4, 8), members of the *fían* can hardly have been married in the normal course of things.

Given the comparative paucity of *fíannaigecht* or Fenian lore in the pre-Norman record (see Meyer, 1910b), our fullest literary accounts of the *fían*'s ideals and way of life come from rather later sources, above all that massive twelfth- or thirteenth-century composition *Acallam na Senórach*. The basic traits of *fíannaigecht* in this broader perspective have been admirably brought out by Nagy's recent revolutionary study of *The wisdom of the outlaw* (1985), and seem to be reasonably congruent with such information as earlier texts give about the *fían* as a social

institution in early Christian Ireland, the focal point of the present chapter.

Whatever the propensities of later texts like the *Acallam* to differentiate a somewhat romanticized *féindid* or *fían*-member from the disreputable *díberg(ach)* or brigand, these terms seem to have been more or less interchangeable in the earlier sources (McCone, 1986d, 1-7). Thus when in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* Conaire's fosterbrothers, the three sons of the *féindid* Donn Désa (par. 9), complain about their inability to practise the profession (*dán*) of their father and grandfather, this is described as *gat ⁊ brat ⁊ guin daíne ⁊ díberg* "theft and plunder and slaughter of people and *díberg*" (par. 18). Subsequently "they took up brigandage (*díberg*) with the sons of the lords/kings of the men of Ireland about them (*co maccaib flaithi fer nÉrenn impu*)" (par. 20), a passage that corroborates the *Acallam*'s repeated designation of *fían*-members as *maic ríg* "kings' sons" with regard to the preponderantly youthful and aristocratic make-up of such bands. Moreover, the unprovoked pursuit of Maine Milscothach's swineherd by Donn Désa's sons and their fellow *díberg*s (par. 20) is reminiscent of the temporarily resurrected son of Mac Cais's complaint to Patrick in Tírechán's memoir: "I was the swineherd of Lugair king of Irrúaith. The *fían* of the son of Mac Con slew me (*iugulavit me fian maicc Maicc Con*) in the reign of Cairbre Nia Fer" (40 (7); Bieler, 1979, 154-5).

These *díberga* or (bands of) brigands and the British counterparts with whom they eventually combine are also termed *fíanna* on occasion in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (e.g. par. 145), a particularly striking instance being furnished by the description of their landing in Ireland with murderous intent: "the brigands (*díbergaig*) leap onto Trácht Fuirbthin and bring a stone for each man with them to make a carn. For the *fían*-bands (*fíana*) distinguished at the outset between raiding and decision in battle (*eter orgain ⁊ maidm n-imairic*). It is a column that they used to plant when it was decision in battle, but a carn that they used to set up when it was raiding. It was a carn, then, that they set up that time, since it was raiding, and a long way from the house at that lest they be overheard or seen from the house. They made the carn for two reasons, firstly because a carn was customary for brigandage/a brigand (*ba bés carn la díbeirg*) and secondly so that they might discover their losses at the hostel. Every one who should come safe from it would take his stone from the carn so that the stones of the people who had been killed there would be left" (*LU* 7028-37; cf. par. 67).

The brief genealogical tale of Creidne and her three sons, eponymous ancestors of the three main branches of the Conaille of Louth, neatly illustrates the association of *fíannas* or life in the *fían* with both raiding and lack of proper inheritance: "it is a daughter who bore them to her father, i.e. Creidne the female *fían*-leader (*ban-féinnid*) was their mother, she being the daughter of Conall Costamail. Conall belonged to Conchobar's province, and was ashamed that his daughter should bear him sons. They were put from him then into the edge of the territory. For Conall was forced to separate these sons from him on account of his queen, whose name was Aífe, since the conflict between Aífe and Creidne was great. Thereafter Creidne entered upon *fíannas* to plunder her father (*do fogail a hathar*) and her stepmother on account of her sons (being put) outside their ancestral kindred. She had three nines on *fíannas*, wore her hair plaited behind, and used to attack (by) sea and land alike. It is for this she was called Creidne the *fían*-leader (*C. ba féinnid*). Seven years she spent in exile (i.e. between Ireland and Britain) until she made peace with her father", adequate lands being promised to her sons (*Corp. Gen.*, 154).

As Richard Sharpe has demonstrated (1979, 80-7), *díberg* is represented in the hagiographical record as a ritualized form of brigandage involving the wearing of special marks (*stigmata* or *signa*) on the head in token of a vow to kill someone, a particularly illuminating instance being Muirchú's description of the ferocious Ulsterman Macuil moccu Greccae "residing in a mountainous, rough and high place in Druimm moccu Echach, where he daily exercised his lordship by taking up most wicked signs of cruelty (*signa nequissima crudelitatis*, significantly glossed *diberca* in the early ninth-century Book of Armagh text) and killing passing visitors with cruel criminality" (I 23(3); Bieler, 1979, 102-3). The size of these bands ranges widely in the sources from small groups of three or five through Creidne's twenty seven above to troops several hundred strong in *Togail Bruidne Da Dèrga* (par.s 41-4), Sharpe referring to "the frequent mention of men in multiples of three, most commonly nine" (ibid., 84). The opening of *Táin Bó Fraích* may indicate a tendency for such groups to be made up of rough coevals: "fifty kings' sons (*coíca mac ríg*) was the number of his household, all of the same age (*comaís*) and equality with him both in appearance and apparel".

As might be expected of unattached young men past the age of puberty, the *fían*-members' characteristically unmarried state was no bar to sexual relations with women, however transitory. There is no shortage of such episodes in later Fenian literature (see Nagy, 1985, 52 etc.), and *díberg* seems to have been a byword for sexual promiscuity in the earlier period too. In an extraordinary narrative from the Book of Leinster St. Moling punctures his own member with an awl to avoid temptation when a neighbour's wife bares her crotch (*gabul*) to him, and then shows himself as firm a believer as W.S. Gilbert's Mikado in letting the punishment fit the crime: "'very well, woman,' said he 'may bad people distort your crotch (*ro:riastrat droch-doíne do gabol*) until they have their fill of you'. 'That shall not be true' she said. 'There is not a man in Ireland who would try it on with me, thanks to my dogs'. It is afterwards, then, that brigands (*díbergaig*) came to her so that twelve of them mounted her" (*LL* 36707-10; Hull, 1930).

However, there was more to the Fenian way of life than the sexual licence, robbery and violence particularly associated with *díberg*. Although the more harmless role of nomadic hunters in the wild so prominent in the often somewhat romanticized later accounts tends to be neglected in the older sources, its major contribution to the *fían*'s livelihood in the early period can hardly be doubted. Thus a curious Old Irish charm preserved in the ninth-century *Codex Sancti Pauli* testifies to this side of their activities as well as to the role of inheritance in determining the choice between a settled farming and a vagrant hunting career in *túath* and *fían* respectively: "I wish for the wood (wooden board?) of notice (?) and of silver raven (chief?) between fire and wall. I wish for the three thin boars. May a fairy attend my encounter with cereal and dairy produce (*ith ⁊ mlicht*) of whatever I move it for. If I be granted good luck here may it be cereal and dairy produce that I see (*ma ro-m:thoicther-sa inso rop ith ⁊ mlicht ad:cear*). If I be not granted good luck let it be wolves (lit. "wild dogs") and deer and traversing of mountains and young warriors of the *fían* that I see (*mani-m:rothcaither ropat choin altai ⁊ ois ⁊ imthecht slébe ⁊ oaic féne ad:cear*)" (*Thes.* II, 293).

Obviously these words relate to a situation due to seal the speaker's fate as a landed proprietor, if lucky, or a wolf-like wanderer of the mountains with the *fían* in search of game, if not. What might this 'make or break' scenario be? The

standard early Irish practice of dividing a patrimony equally among the surviving sons with legitimate entitlement, allowing for the extra share or *cumal senorbai* due to the eldest (ch. 4, 8), must on occasion have resulted in portions no longer sufficient to maintain two or more such heirs in their father's status. Indeed, *Críth Gablach* envisages just such a situation when it asks the following question about the rather low ranking *aithech ara:threba a deich* or "commoner who cultivates his ten": "what deprives this man of status as a cow-freeman (*bóairechas*)? For perhaps there are four or five men who are heirs of a cow-freeman (*bíte hi comarbus bóairech*) so that (being) a cow-freeman is not possible for each of them" (ll. 145-8). That such ruinous divisions might be avoided by competition between the heirs is suggested by Tírechán's account (32 (1-5)) of two brothers preparing to fight an obviously traditional pagan duel to the death to resolve just such a problem (see McCone, 1984b, 57-8). A less extreme alternative is indicated by *Gúbretha Caratniad*, in which the judge *Caratniae* recounts a series of judgements that would be false under normal circumstances but then proceeds to justify these on account of the exceptional situation applying to the case in question. Consequently, when he announces "I have given precedence to an heir without lot-casting (*rucus tuus do chomarbu cen chrannchor*)" (*CIH* 2193.22), it follows that the casting of lots was the normal procedure for resolving disputes about an inheritance that was not to be divided. One may surmise that other forms of gambling might be adopted on occasion as a means of settlement, and the playing of *fidchell* for stakes or forfeits is a prominent constituent of sagas such as *Tochmarc Étaíne* (III, par. 3f.) and *Echtra Airt* (par. 15f.)

The charm's curious opening reference to *fid* "wood" and *arggat-bran* "silver raven" in a patently indoors setting "between fire and wall (*etir tenid ⁊ fraig*)" begins to make sense on the assumption that a board game such as *bran-dub* "raven-black" or *fid-chell* "wood-sense" is involved. In his valuable discussion of the relatively few passages in medieval Irish literature giving some indication as to how these frequently mentioned games were played, Eoin MacWhite refers to Eleanor Knott's (1926, 198-9) collection of references to *brannumh* and its "chequered board (*brec-clár*)": "she shows that there is a special piece in the game called the *branán*. The word *branán* is a common poetic epithet for a chief and the piece is probably a "king-piece" of some sort" (1948, 29). Since this word is an obvious diminutive of *bran* "raven (/chief?)" and the practice of playing *fidchell* with pieces made of precious substances such as gold or silver is well attested in the literature (e.g. *Táin Bó Fraích*, par. 8), it seems likely enough that *fid* and *arggat-bran* in the charm refer to the board and key piece respectively in this game.

The following verse from a poem in *Acallam na Senórach* led MacWhite to the cogent conclusion that a game akin to the Lappish tablut was involved: "my famed *brandub* is in the mountain above Leitir Broin; five men of white silver without voice and eight of red-gold" (ibid., 30). Since the composition of the smaller side is demonstrated by a reference in a bardic poem to the *bran(án)* with his four pieces on each square around him (Knott, 1926, 198), the basic situation and proportions appear to be exactly as in tablut, in which the central square is occupied by the "king of the Swedes" surrounded by his eight men, while the opposing force of sixteen differently coloured "Muscovites" is located in four groups at the edge. A turn consists of moving a single piece in the manner of the rook in chess, the "Swedish" objective being to get the king to the edge of the board, that of the "Muscovites"

being to surround him on all four non-diagonal sides. The Ballinderry board excavated by MacWhite has forty-nine squares (7x7) and may well have been used for a game like brandub with its thirteen pieces, whereas tablut with its twenty-five men has a correspondingly larger (9x9) board with eighty-one squares (MacWhite, ibid., 33-5).

In tablut an ordinary piece is taken when two opponent pieces are placed on either side of it horizontally or vertically. As MacWhite points out (ibid., 26), this was the standard capture move in *fidchell* on the evidence of a passage in the tale of Mac Dá Cherda and Cummaíne Fota: "Good," said Gúaire, "let us play *fidchell*." "How are the men slain?" said Cummaíne". "Not difficult, a black pair of mine around a single white man of yours on the same line (*dias dub dam-sa im oín-fer find duit-seo forsin oín-tí*) striving for advance yonder" (O'Keeffe, 1911, 32). Could "the three thin boars" in the Old Irish charm be a term for a similar move in *brandub* involving two pieces about to destroy a third aligned between them? Although doubts about exactly how these games, particularly *fidchell*, were played prevent further elucidation, the foregoing does establish a presumption that the charm relates to a 'winner take all' game of *brandub* between two heirs in order to determine which of them should receive an inheritance and which should remain propertiless. It is, so to speak, an early Irish "luck be a lady tonight".

It has already been seen that a major role in the *fían* is attributed to kings' sons, and the first Salamanca Life of St. Lugaid alias Moluae gives a nice vignette of a king's son called Fáelán "little wolf" with his brigand band who subsequently becomes king and later still a monk of St. Moluae's (par. 10; Heist, 1965, 133). From this it would follow that many an early Irish king had a youth in the *fían* behind him, and it is doubtless against this background that the reminiscences in *Tecosca Cormaic* about juvenile hunting and fighting in groups of various sizes are to be understood: "O grandson of Conn, O Cormac", said Cairbre, "what were your deeds when you were a lad (*gilla*)?" "Not difficult", said Cormac. "I used to kill a pig, I used to follow a track when I was alone. I used to march against a band of five (*cuire cóicir*) when I was one of five. I was ready for slaughter (*oirgnech*) when I was one of ten. I was ready for raiding (*indredach*) when I was one of twenty. I was ready for battle (*cathach*) when I was one of a hundred. Those were my deeds" (par. 8).

It may be added that nature's bounty and the fruits of raiding do not seem always to have sufficed for the *fían*, winter presumably being a time of particular hardship when they were most liable to batten upon the settled community. References in early legal and other sources to feasts given for them will be discussed later (8 below), note merely being taken here of Cú Chulainn's claim in *Tochmarc Emire* to have inherited from his fosterfather Blaí the hospitaller the ability to feed the men of Ulster with their king for a week, during which "I support their men of art and their brigands (*fo:suidiur a ndánu ⁊ a ndíberga*)" (par. 22; van Hamel, 1933, 29).

4. Remarks from a previous article on this topic (McCone, 1986d, 13-5) will serve here to pull these various strands together and place them in a broader context indicated by the anthropological studies of Heinrich Schurtz (1902), Adriaan Prins (1953) and Frank Henderson Stewart (1977) as well as the work of van Gennep discussed earlier (ch. 8, 4).

"It thus appears that for many males of free birth in early Ireland the termination

of fosterage around fourteen years of age was followed by a stage in the *fían*, an independent organization of predominantly landless, unmarried, unsettled and young men given to hunting, warfare, and sexual licence in the wilds outside the *túath*, upon which it made claims, by agreement or force as the case might be, to sustenance and hospitality and for which it might perform certain elementary police or military services where relations were not strained by hostility. Upon the acquisition of the requisite property, usually by inheritance upon the death of the father or other next of kin, but not before the age of twenty one would normally pass from the *fían* to full membership of the *túath* of married property-owners.

"This system displays classic features of what anthropologists term 'age grading', the division of a man's life into distinct phases of activity demarcated by key transitions such as puberty and marriage, and 'age sets' of more or less approximate coevals bound together by a common rite of initiation, the 'Männerbund' or society of young male warriors being a particularly prominent association of this type.

"East Africa has proved particularly rich in systems of this kind, ranging from the comparatively simple to the enormously complex, and the Masai there have structures whose broad outlines are quite reminiscent of what has just been posited for early Ireland. Thus 'between circumcision and their formal initiation as junior warriors, boys wander in bands all over the Masai country. After initiation they sleep in special bachelor huts with the unmarried girls. Only when they become senior warriors are they permitted to marry' (Murdoch, 1959, 338). Furthermore, these segregated, unmarried and promiscuous junior warriors lead a wild life of warfare and raiding until they have acquired sufficient cattle to set up house and purchase a bride, whereupon they shave their long hair, become senior warriors, and settle down to tending their herds, raising a family, and fighting as a rule only when necessary to defend the territory. Children of wealthy parents are liable to leave the junior warrior grade earlier than average to look after the family property, while those of poor parents may have to remain junior warriors for longer than average until they can get the necessary bride-price together . . . It may be added that the use of secret warrior societies to impose order and a rough-and-ready justice is well attested in the somewhat different West African and North American Indian systems.

"It should be apparent that the junior warriors in this system have much in common with the early Irish *fían*-members, and the senior warriors with active members of the *túath* . . ., and the segregation of sexually mature but unmarried males from the rest of society, as in the case of the Irish *fían* or Masai junior warriors, was a not uncommon method of minimizing the potentially disruptive effects of their wildness upon settled society as a whole".

Furthermore, instructive though such parallels are, we do not have to look beyond medieval France's knights errant for a broadly similar phenomenon closer to home, Georges Duby's description of which (1977, ch. VII) brings out the social and economic factors involved extremely well. Duby's account has been summarized as follows: "certain well-born men termed *iuvenis* individually or *iuventus* collectively in the relevant sources emerge as a particular social group committed to a life of wandering in search of sexual and martial adventure and advantage between two settled phases, namely childhood in the parental home or place of education and married life as a father and master of one's own house. Moreover, 'the pressures which forced twelfth-century knights after they were dubbed into a life of errancy

must therefore be attributed to customs regulating the distribution of inheritances and family wealth' (Duby, ibid., 118). Continued management of his estates by a father after sons had come of age was a significant factor, and the period spent as a vagrant 'youth' varied considerably according to circumstances. Duby's concluding remark to the effect that 'such was the aristocratic youth of France in the twelfth century, a mob of young men let loose, in search of glory, profit and female prey, by the great noble houses in order to relieve the pressure on their expanding power' could be applied with virtually equal force to the Irish *fíanna*'' (McCone, ibid., 15).

5. Although reliable information on this point for the early period is rather scanty, the *fían* clearly had its own hierarchy, some of its more senior members apparently being charged with the enforcement of law and order both within and without the *túath*.

Thus some old legal glosses in the H.3.18 manuscript allude rather cryptically and tendentiously to a special type of lord-client relationship within the *fían*'s membership by mentioning ''a wild fief (*fíad-rath*), i.e. a fief that is bestowed in a wood (*rath ernir i fid*). An exile or raider or *fían*-member (*loingsech nó fogluid nó féinniuth*) bestows it. That is a wild fief, for it is not in the divisions of lordship (*fullachtaib flatha*), for it is not to manifest lordship in a wood or mountain; it is not customary to take a lord's third (*trían flatha*) into a mountain; likewise, then, a fief that is bestowed in a wood to an exile or raider (*do loingsech nó foglaid*)'' (*CIH* 919.29-32).

The passage concerning the *aire échta* or ''lord of slaughter'', who is given a relatively high status equal to that of the lowest of the noble grades, is arguably the most obscure in *Críth Gablach*, which explains that he is so called ''because he is the lord of a band of five (*aire cóicir*) that is left to perform sláughter in allied territory (*i cairddiu*) until the end of a month to avenge the dishonour of a kingdom (*do dígail enechruccai túaithe*) against whom recent homicide is committed. If they have not accomplished it by the end of a month they enter upon an agreement that their protections will not adhere to him (them?) any longer. Though the same band of five have slaughtered men from the allied territory, the *aire échta* can undertake (*as:com-ren*, lit. ''can pay'') on their behalf that neither land nor bronze cauldron is forfeit for it but only vessels to the value of a cow. He then brings them out to the end of the allied territory for their reception according to the extent of his protection and his friends. His retinue and maintenance are due as for an *aire déso*'' (par. 25).

Dissenting from the view of Mac Neill and others that ''the *a.é.* is the leader of a small band of 'avengers' who are left within the *túath* of the slayer and given a period of one month to take vengeance on the guilty parties'' (*Críth Gablach*, 72), Binchy preferred to see him ''as a member of the *túath* of the slayer. His duty is to harbour and protect the 'five men' who have been sent from the other *túath* to prosecute the blood-feud against the guilty party'' (ibid., 71). This notion of a public functionary charged with harbouring a 'hit squad' bent on murdering one or more of his fellow citizens is not only bizarre, to say the least, but is also flatly contradicted by the reference in a gloss on *Cethirslicht Athgabála* to ''a man beyond the territory (*fer tar crích*), namely the *aire échta*'' (*CIH* 395.29) as well as by a gloss on par. 51 of *Bretha Crólige* mentioning ''the removal of outrages on kingdoms and

races by the *aire échta (dingbáil greas túath ⁊ cenél don airig échta)*" (ed. Binchy, 1938, 40-1). It thus appears virtually certain that the *aire échta* and his band of five were charged with crossing the border to avenge the murder of members of their own *túath* by a person or persons from another *túath*. The apparent restriction of this process to a *túath* bound to their own by treaty (*cairde(s)*) is easy enough to explain, since the rules in question afford the band some protection in the foreign territory in return for a strict time limit on their activities. By then the dispute would have been resolved either by their failure to dispatch the wrongdoers within a month or by payment of rather low compensation for anyone duly killed. In short, these provisions were designed to prevent cross-border blood feuds from getting out of hand and could only have applied to *túatha* between which a treaty existed. The operations of an *aire échta* and his followers in a foreign *túath* with which no treaty existed can only have been legally unenforcible and correspondingly unregulated.

The glossing of the main text's *díbergach* as "the *aire échta*" in *Bretha Crólige* (par. 51) is summarily dismissed by Binchy: "it is strange that the *díbergach*, 'reaver', should be accorded a definite status: did he originally represent a member of a *fían* 'war band' (cf. Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 78)? At all events the glossator no longer knew what to make of him and, in an attempt to fit him into his scheme of things, ludicrously identifies him with the *aire échta*, a kind of public enforcer of penalties against alien offenders" (1938, 71-2). However, the notion that the *aire échta* and his band of five turned loose on a killing mission constituted a *fían*, far from being absurd, is fully substantiated by the gloss on *im chert cach fénneda* "concerning the right of every *fían*-member (-leader)" in *Cethirslicht Athgabála* partially cited above: "i.e. every treasure that is due to the *fían*-member (*fénnid*), since he is like a man beyond the territory, i.e. the *aire échta*" (*CIH* 395.24 and 29). In the *aire échta*, then, we have the adult leader of a small *fían* whose relatively high rank depends upon the performance of certain rudimentary external policing duties.

A similar picture emerges in the case of the *fer-gniae* or "champion", whose martial qualifications are described as follows in *Críth Gablach*: "who is right and proper for making a king's food? A *fergniae* of three blows. What are they? A man who can strike a blow on his matched adversary so that it transfixes the man through his shield. A man who takes a man in live capture and holds him in battle. A man who smites an ox with a single blow that does not leave (anything) over. A man who runs through a prisoner without compunction (?). A man who runs through a warrior (*éclann*) in front of the host so that he falls from a single blow" (par. 43). The reasonable suspicion that such a man might be associated with the *fían* is confirmed by his place at feasts in the king's house: "on the other side, in the *fían*-champion's seat (*i fochlu féinnid* - see McCone, 1986d, 7, n. 25) a *fergniae* to guard the door" (ibid., par. 46). Finally, a legal miscellany in H.3.18 asks "what is a *fergniae*? A man with whom there are proper manly deeds (*fer-gníma*), as he enumerates in *Berrad Airechta*. He exacts her bride-price for a woman after every one has failed. What makes him a *fergniae* is that seven combats have been arranged from a combat between two up to a combat between seven and he captures a man through his prowess (*tar a gaisced*) from every one of those combats until he has the seven man-takings. It is thence he is called *fergniae*" (*CIH* 973.13-7). It appears, then, that this relatively senior type of *féindid* also has rudimentary policing duties, this time within the *túath*, where he may help to keep order in the king's house and enforce the payment of a woman's bride-price where other means have failed (see Thurneysen, 1928, 58).

6. After the sons of Donn Désa had taken up *díberg* with the sons of Ireland's nobility in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, "they had thrice fifty men under instruction when they were wolfing (*oc fáelad*) in the territory of the Connachtmen" (par. 20). The werewolf implications of the term *fáelad* emerge clearly from the following passage about Laignech Fáelad in *Cóir Anmann*: "he was a man who used to go wolfing (*fri fáelad*), i.e. into wolf-shapes (*i conrechtaib*), i.e. into shapes of wolves (*a rechtaib na mac tíre*) he used to go and his offspring used to go after him, and they used to kill the herds after the fashion of wolves (*fo bés na mac tíre*), so that it is for that he used to be called Laignech Fáelad, for he was the first of them who went into a wolf-shape (*i conrecht*)" (par. 215).

This and other attestations suggest that, although the word *cú* usually refers to a hound, it was also a generic for hound and wolf indifferently, although the latter could be explicitly differentiated by adding the epithet *allaid* "wild", prefixing *fáel* "wolf" to give *fáel-chú* or using a term like *mac tíre*. As pointed out elsewhere (McCone, 1986d, 16), the prominence of *Cú* and *Fáel* in early Irish personal names is presumably rooted in the werewolf attributes of the *fían*, while the vagrant person termed *fulla* and described as having had the *dluí fulla* or "hair of vagrancy" put on him in some texts seems to belong in this context. The association between young warriors of the *fían* and wolves in the charm from the *Codex Sancti Galli* has already been alluded to in 3 above, and in the episode of St. Moling and the neighbour's wife discussed in the same section there is a clearly deliberate irony in the fact that it is wolf-like brigands or *díbergaig*, human *coin*, who frustrate the wanton woman's confident expectation of protection by her own hounds (*lam chona*) and rape her in a gang or pack.

The band of wolf-like young warriors is a sufficiently circumstantial and widely attested phenomenon among the Celts' sister peoples to put the institution's Indo-European provenance beyond reasonable doubt. The details having been given elsewhere (McCone, 1987), it will suffice to present the broad outlines of the argument here.

The Old Irish martial name or epithet *luch-thonn* "wolf-skin" (McCone, 1985b, 175-6) has parallels in the Old Norse term *úlf-heðinn* "wolf-skin" used of the *berserkr* or "bare-shirt" warrior, who like the Irish *óen-chiniud* (2 above) and Gaulish equivalents described by Polybius (II 28-30) tended to fight naked or virtually so (McCone, 1987, 106). Lily Weiser has put matters thus in a detailed discussion of the relevant Nordic material: "the early Norse berserks are mighty fighters . . . They also wore coats of wolfskin instead of armour and were consequently also called *ulfheðnar* ('Wolfskins') . . . Furthermore they are capable of states of frenzy in which they then become superhumanly strong and invulnerable. They are usually represented as unmarried, dangerous warriors, and appear mostly in groups of two, five or, very frequently, twelve. They are usually in a king's service . . . and constitute his crack troops . . . However, they also appear as robbers and criminals on their own behalf . . . Finally, however, there are berserks who follow this way of life only in their youth, and later become good citizens . . . Berserks are presented in the tradition as pagans . . . The Viking expedition usually lasts three years, after which the young man marries and becomes more or less settled. It is clear that the Viking and the old berserk way of life have a great deal in common" (1927, 44-5).

Less precisely similar werewolf expressions are also attested in Latin, Sanskrit, Greek, Russian and Armenian (McCone, 1987, 118). Use of the word for "wolf",

more often than not a reflex of the IE form, as a personal name or a designation for outlaws is found in early Celtic, Germanic, Greek, Indic, Iranian and Hittite sources (ibid., 118-20). In addition to the early Irish evidence and an obvious representation of a young male company of spear- and shield-bearing 'wolves' on the Gundestrup cauldron of presumed Celtic workmanship (ibid., 112-4), notable further support for an Indo-European 'Männerbund' of youthful werewolves is provided by Rudra and the Maruts in Old Indic myth (ibid. 120-21), ancient Greek accounts of Arcadian, Spartan and other customs (ibid., 121-7), the Roman legend of Romulus and Remus (ibid., 127-35; see 7 below) and the particularly well researched early Germanic material (ibid., 101-4).

Moreover, at the genetically crucial level of basic vocabulary the early Irish contrast between the settled *túath* under its king (*rí*) and the vagrant *fían*, formerly *cuire*, of young warriors (*oaic*) can be reconstructed for Indo-European itself on the strength of plentiful cognates in the sister languages. Thus OIr. *túath* continues IE **tewtā*, OIr. *rí* IE **rēḱs*, OIr. *cuire* IE **koryos* and OIr. *oac* IE **hyuhn̥ḱos* alongside **hyuhen-* without **-ḱo-* suffix as in Lat. *iuvenis*, Skt. *yuvan-* (ibid., 110-1, 116-8, 141).

7. The account of Cormac mac Airt's conception, birth and youth according to *Scéla Éogain ⁊ Cormaic* has already been summarized (ch. 8, 6), and attention will now focus upon the broadly similar but on comparative and political grounds (ch. 10, 9) probably older version known as *Genemuin Chormaic*.

This begins with Art's sleeping with his host Olc Aichi's daughter Étan the night before his death in battle against Mac Con and instructing her to give the son due to be born from this union to his friend Lugnae Fer Trí of Connacht for fosterage. "The king is then killed in the battle as he himself relates. Then Étan was pregnant and it came into her mind to set out to the house of Lugnae so that it might be there she would give birth to the offspring that was in her womb" (ll. 23-4). Having set out in her chariot with a single maidservant, she was seized by labour pains and bore a son on the way. Hearing a thunder-clap, Lugnae realized that this betokened the birth of a great king in the person of Art's son entrusted to him for fosterage, and set out to find him. Meanwhile Étan slept after giving birth and instructed her attendant to watch the baby boy. "The maidservant, then, fell asleep and a she-wolf reaches them and takes the lad to the place where her whelps were and to the rocky cave that is in Cenn Craíbigi in Conachail. That is Cormac's Cave today. The woman awoke thereafter and uttered her lament, for she could not find the son. Then Lugnae reaches her and asked them what was the matter with them. The maiden told him everything, that it was to seek him she had come since it was to him the lad had been entrusted for his fosterage. Lugnae takes the woman with him to his house thereafter and said that he would grant his wish to whoever should discover information about or the whereabouts of the lad" (ll. 39-46).

Grec mac Arod happened upon the wolfcubs and boy playing at the cave's entrance, notified Lugnae and was duly rewarded with land. Then they recovered the boy and cubs, whereupon Lugnae uttered a second prophecy of Cormac's greatness, including the words *bid féindid* "he will be a *fían*-member" (cf. end of 3 above) among the list of attributes prefaced to his later kingly accomplishments. "Thereafter the boy is fostered with Lugnae and mention of his lineage to his father's enemies was not dared . . . Once Cormac and Fer Trí's sons, i.e. Ochomon

and Úathnach, were playing. He struck one of them. 'Alack,' said he 'I have been struck by a man whose parentage and family are not known except that he is a fatherless bastard'" (ll. 68-76). Distressed by this slur, Cormac complains to Lugnae, who then reveals his exalted royal parentage and prospects to him. They then set out for Tara, where Mac Con receives them well and accepts Cormac as a foster-son. This leads to Cormac's famous correction of Mac Con's judgement about the sheep and the queen's woad, whereupon Mac Con is banished and Cormac duly becomes king (ch. 5, 6).

The classic narrative of this type is, of course, the story of Romulus and Remus as told by Livy (I, 3-16). Having deposed his brother Numitor and become king of Alba Longa in his stead, Amulius guarded against rivals by killing Numitor's son and committing his daughter to the chaste life of a Vestal virgin. When she nevertheless bore twins to the god Mars, Amulius ordered these to be exposed. However, having been rescued and suckled by a she-wolf, they were then found and brought up by the herdsman Faustulus and his wife Larentia in the wilderness. At this point Livy records an attempt to rationalize the role of the she-wolf away: "there are those who think that Larentia was called *lupa* 'she-wolf, prostitute' among the herdsmen for making her body available and that opportunity for the legend and miracle arose thence" (4, 7). At any rate, the twins in the wild eventually established a Männerbund predictably devoted to hunting and plunder, the latter activity being rather romanticized by Livy along 'Robin Hood' lines: "so born and so brought up, when their age had first reached maturity, they avoided inactivity in homesteads and among cattle by wandering through the woodlands hunting. Having derived strength for their bodies and souls from this, they were no longer content with wild beasts but attacked brigands laden with booty and divided the takings amongst the herdsmen, and celebrated serious and jocose matters with these as their band of youths grew day by day (*crescente in dies grege iuvenum*)" (4, 8-9).

At a subsequent celebration of the Lupercal rite whereby "naked youths (*nudi iuvenes* - cf. 2 and 6 above) should run in sportive wantonness in honour of Lycaean Pan" (5, 2), "brigands who had laid an ambush through anger at lost booty captured Remus after Romulus had defended himself by force, and handed the prisoner over to king Amulius with accusations to boot. The main charge they made was that an attack was made by them upon Numitor's estates, (and that) thereafter, having gathered together a band of youths (*collecta iuvenum manu*), they took booty in hostile fashion. Thus Remus was given to Numitor for punishment" (5, 3-4). Remus' subsequent arraignment before Numitor leads to his and Romulus' recognition by their grandfather and then to a successful armed insurrection by them and their youthful followers (*iuvenes*), who depose Amulius and restore Numitor to the throne. Thereafter Romulus and Remus set out to found a new city, ultimately Rome with Romulus as her first king through a series of events too well known to require comment here.

The Roman and Irish tales obviously have a good deal more in common than can be plausibly ascribed to coincidence. One solution, monastic Irish borrowing from a well known classical source like Livy is likely enough *a priori*, and has been mooted by Carney on the strength of the shared feature of suckling by a she-wolf above all (1955, 291, n.6; also in Dillon, 1968, 153). No doubt Carney is right in assuming that early Irish *literati* saw the parallel with Romulus and appreciated its imperial implications for the Tara monarchy, but this does not necessitate a hypothesis of direct borrowing.

This and similar cases must, of course, be argued on their individual merits or defects, and in the present instance, as Ó Cathasaigh judiciously observes, "it is true that a writer with even a moderate acquaintance with classical literature would be expected to know something of the story of Romulus, and it is possible that both SEC and GC have derived the Suckling-element from a source which was influenced by the story of Romulus. But it seems most unlikely that this was the case. For the suckling of a hero by an animal is an integral part of the international heroic pattern: de Vries gives a host of examples. The story of Cormac carries on the old tradition, but the story of Romulus has become a 'twin saga', which Mommsen considered a development away from the original saga. It is only in the form of a 'twin saga' that the Romulus story could have been known in Ireland, and there is nothing in Cormac's biography to suggest that it has borrowed from such a source. As Cormac's Suckling is closer to the postulated common original, we are not justified in assuming that it has been borrowed from the Romulus saga unless some definite evidence can be adduced to support such an assumption. Moreover, the lupine element is so strong in the Cormac tale that it seems unnecessary to regard wolf-suckling as an 'external element', except in so far as it derives from the international pattern" (1977, 54-5).

To these arguments may be added a further one. A very close ancient Iranian analogue recorded by the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus (I, 107-30) is clearly independent of the Romulus legend, as are certain Greek and Germanic variants of the basic type. As should emerge below, the only economical explanation of these detailed correspondences is derivation from a common Indo-European original, with which the Cormac tale too is perfectly compatible. That being so, the story of Rome's foundation would only become a more likely source for the latter on the strength of more distinctive similarities than can actually be adduced.

Herodotus' anecdote about the birth, youth and accession to the throne of the founder of the Persian empire begins with the Median monarch Astyages being warned in a dream of the threat posed by his daughter's future offspring and accordingly marrying her to a quiet Persian named Cambyses. The son born to them was then exposed on the king's orders but rescued by a herdsman and his wife and brought up in a mountainous area: "the name of the woman with whom he cohabited was Kúnō 'bitch' in the Greek tongue and Spakó in the Median, for the Medes call the bitch 'spax' (*tèn gàr kúna kaléousi spáka Mēdoi*)" (110). The child was then named Cyrus. "Now when the boy was ten years old the following happening to him revealed him. He was playing in this village in which were the herdsmen's quarters, and was playing in the road with others of the same age. And the boys at play chose for their king this alleged son of the cowherd. And he set some of them to build houses, others to be bodyguards, one of them to be the king's eye and to another he granted the privilege of bearing messages, enjoining upon each his task. Now one of these children playing together, being the son of Artembares a notable man among the Medes, did not perform what had been commanded by Cyrus. He bade the other boys seize him and, when the boys obeyed, Cyrus treated the boy very roughly to a flogging" (114). The scourged boy inevitably complained to his father, who duly brought the outrage at the hands of a mere cowherd's son to the king's attention. Cyrus's bold demeanour when brought before him and a certain family likeness raised Astyages' suspicions and eventually he forced the truth out of the boy's cowherd fosterer. Further events bring about a successful revolt by Cyrus

against his maternal grandsire, whom he replaces as king to turn the Median into a Persian empire.

Although the nurturing "she-wolf" or "bitch" is presented in this account as a woman so named, suspicions of a Greek rationalization similar to that sometimes applied to the Romulus and Remus story on Livy's evidence above are fully confirmed by Herodotus' comment that Cyrus "said he had been reared by the cowherd's wife and kept on praising her throughout and his whole story was full of Kúnō 'bitch'. Then his parents, taking up this name, put about the rumour that a bitch (*kúōn*) had suckled the exposed Cyrus in order that the survival of their boy might seem the more miraculous to the Persians" (122). Obviously, then, the Iranian original used by Herodotus, who correctly reproduces the Iranian outcome *spa-* (e.g. Avestan *spā*) of Indo-European **kwō(n)* "hound", shared with the Roman origin legend and the early Irish Cormac tale a two-stage upbringing in the wild for the future king involving suckling by a she-wolf and then fosterage with herdsmen or the like.

The rationale of this scheme in the context of the heroic biography and its essential liminal attributes has already been discussed (ch. 8, 6-7). The narrative mainspring of the initial threat to the hero and king-to-be's existence, his exile among lowly helpers and eventual return for elevation to his proper status comprises essential constituents of the international pattern that are correspondingly weak as evidence for a genetic relationship based on derivation from a common Indo-European prototype. On the other hand, there is no obvious reason why the Indo-Europeans should not have known a commonplace enough mythical schema along these lines, and circumstantial shared details within this framework would, indeed, create a presumption that this was so.

In the present instance suckling by a she-wolf or bitch specifically and disclosure of the future king's identity as a result of strife with his peers seem to constitute rather strong genetic indicators. These probabilities are significantly increased by the realizition that this mythical pattern of a king's son or successor expelled from his kin and initiated by a wolf into a life in the wilds correlates closely with the demonstrably Indo-European social institution of youth in the wilderness as a member of a predatory werewolf Männerbund or **koryos* (6 above). Once the wolf's specifically Indo-European role as the symbol or embodiment of such associations is recognised, a further Indo-European witness for this basic constellation of motifs can be found in the ancient Greek myth of Zeus' birth, youth and displacement of his father Kronos as king of the gods (e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* 453-506; Apollodorus 1, 1, 5 - 1, 2, 1).

Kronos was notoriously wont to devour children born to him by his wife Rhea in order to thwart a prophecy that one of these would dethrone him. Understandably vexed at her wasted labour, Rhea gave her husband a stone instead of the sixth child Zeus, who was born to her in the cave of Dikte in Crete and left there to be nourished on a she-goat's milk and protected by the warrior band of Curetes. Later Zeus rescued his brothers and sisters, led them in a successful rebellion against Kronos and the other Titans, deposed his father and became ruler of the gods. Allowing for the trivial inversion of the animal and human functions in this tale (martial wolf > pastoral goat, herdsmen > warriors) and the absence of a revelation motif, it reflects the archetypal scheme quite accurately and thus corroborates it.

In Germanic tradition the *Vǫlsungasaga* (4-8) tells of king Vǫlsung's murder by his son-in-law, and the exposure of his ten sons, bound and helpless, in the forest. Of these only Sigmund survived the nightly attacks of a she-wolf, lived secretly in the wood with the connivance of the sister married to his father's murderer and incestuously fathered a son Sinfjǫtli on her. After father and son had dwelt in the forest for a time in wolfish guise, Sigmund wrought vengeance on his father's murderer with Sinfjǫtli's help and returned home to become king. Saxo Grammaticus tells a similar story in the first book of his *Gesta Danorum* (see McCone, 1987, 139). This time the two sons of a king murdered by his brother are rescued from a similar fate by faking their laceration by wolves. Thereafter they were brought up in a hollow tree like hounds (*sub specie canum*) before being discovered by their uncle and banished. Later they returned and after acting like berserks destroyed their uncle, one of them becoming king in his stead. In these cases too the (she-)wolf, although malign rather than unexpectedly benign, provides the key to the hero's destiny in a further independent version otherwise close enough to the posited original Indo-European pattern.

The widespread and detailed correspondences considered here leave little doubt that the early Irish story of Cormac mac Airt's birth and youth, particularly as told in *Genemuin Chormaic*, continues an Indo-European myth of regnal succession with little essential modification in the course of three or more millenia of presumed oral transmission. Nor does this contradict Vansina's well founded dictum that "oral traditions are conditioned by the society in which they flourish" and "no oral tradition can transcend the boundaries of the social system in which it exists" (see ch. 1, 3), given that the Indo-European age-grading institution of the werewolf society of unmarried and mostly youthful warrior-hunters seems to have survived relatively intact in early medieval Ireland as the *fían*, rather as it apparently persisted amongst Nordic peoples. The resilience of an institution attested in various forms well beyond the confines of Indogermania was doubtless due to the kind of social and economic factors identified earlier (4 above).

8. If further proof were needed that the *fían* was part of early Christian Ireland's pagan heritage, this is supplied by plentiful literary evidence for the Church's strong disapproval of this practice in the pre-Norman period. Preceding chapters have documented at some length the early Irish Church's success in adapting or reinterpreting appropriate pre-Christian concepts and institutions as necessary, the upshot frequently being an antique shell, sometimes more fake than genuine, capable of housing a new or significantly modified ideology attuned to ecclesiastical requirements. Although Old Testament figures such as Jephthah of Gilead (ch. 8, 8) and, above all, King David himself had considerable potential as justificatory models for a youth spent in the wilderness at the head of a band of outlaws prior to becoming a leader or king of settled society, the clerical establishment tended to pass over this option in favour of outright condemnation of the *fían* and what it stood for. Indeed, given the centrality of sexual licence, gratuitous violence and pillaging to this way of life, it is hard to see how the Church could have reached a meaningful compromise compatible with fundamental Christian tenets. Moreover, any temptation to do so was doubtless minimized by the *fían*-members' general lack of property and their potential to disrupt settled society.

Still more to the point, perhaps, this pillaging or *díberg* apparently extended to

Church property, to judge from the late Middle Irish *Immram Curaig Úa Corra* or "Voyage of the Uí Chorra's boat". The Faustian beginning of this tale involves a *briugu* or "hospitaller" proposing to remedy his and his wife's childlessness by doing a deal with the devil. "They then performed a fast against the devil (*do:rónsat íarom troscad ria Deman*) and the maid was pregnant forthwith and she was nurturing her pregnancy until the end of her nine months. Then there came the mighty blows and woes of birth pangs to assault the maid and she bore three sons at that great begetting, i.e. a son at the beginning of the night, a son in the middle of the night and a son at the end of the night, and they were baptised according to the pagan baptism (*ro:baisted do réir in baisted[a] geinntlide íat*)" (par. 5). As these sons of darkness grew, their prowess and beauty were generally admired but fault was found with "their baptism into the devil's possession (*a mbaisted i selb díabuil*). 'It is hard for us', they said 'not to perform raiding and brigandage and assault (*fogail ⁊ díberg ⁊ ingreim*) on the enemies of the devil, since it is he who is our king or lord, i.e. to kill clerics and to burn and destroy churches'. It is then that those sons arose and came to Tuam, and they destroyed and burned the place and they performed astonishing raiding and brigandage (*fogail ⁊ díberg adbal*) throughout the province of Connacht on clerics and churches, so that the evil and awfulness of their raiding was fully heard of in the four corners of Ireland. They continued in this fashion to the end of a year until they destroyed half of the churches of Connacht in that period" (pars. 7-8).

The probably seventh-century vernacular text *Aipgitir Chrábaid* or "The alphabet of piety" offers the following comprehensive clerical condemnation of the *fían*-life: "four things that *fíannas* causes a man, i.e. it contracts territories (*to:imairc crícha*), it increases hostility (*to:formaig écraiti*), it destroys life (*etar:diben sáegul*), it prolongs torments (*ar:cuirethar píana*)" (par. 25). The term *maic báis* "sons of death" applied to *fían*-members obviously reflects this unfavourable view of them as murderers destined for hell. The *AU* entry for 847 A.D. provides a particularly conclusive example, proving that *fíanna* could be a real menace at least as late as the mid-ninth century, by recording "the sack of the island of Loch Muinremair by Máel Sechnaill against a large *fían*-host of sons of death (*fían-lach már di maccaib báis*) of the Luigni and Gailenga who had been overrunning the kingdoms (*oc indriud na túath*) in the manner of pagans (*more gentium*)".

Early Irish hagiography abounds in episodes where a saint gets the better of small bands of what were evidently *díbergs*, often miraculously thwarting their murderous intentions by harmless delusions and not infrequently bringing the miscreants to penitence or even to monastic vows (Sharpe, 1979, 80-5). Moreover, her 'First Life' (Bollandus, 1658, 118-35) has St. Brigit give the following reason for refusing to bless a barren queen when prepared to help more lowly members of the *plebs* (= *túath*) in this way: "because all the men of the *túath* (*plebeii cuncti*) serve God and all pray to the Father. However, the sons of kings are serpents and sons of bloodlettings and sons of death (*filii vero regum serpentes sunt & filii sanguinum filiique mortis*) except for a few chosen by God" (par. 60). Evidently the eighth-century author of this Life, and presumably his seventh-century source too (cf. ch. 8, 2), regarded a disreputable life as "sons of death" in the *fían* as the norm for kings' sons in his day, only a minority resisting the temptation to enter this phase, and this, of course, fully matches evidence presented earlier (3 above) for the *fían*'s predominantly aristocratic make-up.

In the course of its description of the *aithech ara:threba a deich* (see 3 above) *Críth Gablach* insists that the robbery and violence typical of *díberg* activity are incompatible with good standing as a Christian member of settled society: "this one is a 'baptized freeman (*aithech baitside*)' if he be in his purity without theft, without robbery, without killing people (*cen gait, cen brait, cen guin doíne*, see 3 above) except on a day of battle or someone who seeks his head (= life), and have a proper marriage with (sexual) abstinence on fast-days, Sundays and Lents" (ll. 142-5).

To Robert Serpell of the University of Zambia I owe references from an unpublished thesis by Mapopa M'Tonga and further information about an interesting African parallel to this tension between the Church and a secret male society in existence before the advent of Christianity. The Nyau societies of the A-Chewa people straddling the borders of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique basically cater for young males aged between about ten and twenty, but contain older members and are led by adults well over thirty. In essence this is a masked dancing society characterized by animal symbolism, ancestral spirit worship and a strict code of discipline liable to be physically enforced. Both the Church and the colonial administration were predictably opposed to this organization, campaigned against and in the 1930s banned it, with the result that "in certain areas, the *nyau* secret societies retaliated by forcing all the boys to boycott schools . . . In addition, the *nyau* code included the banning of such items as books, papers or pencils which were considered as symbols of christianity and colonialism. Those who disobeyed these rules were either beaten up or banished from the village and the entire *nyau* movement" (M'tonga, 1980, 130-1; cf. further Schoffeleers, 1972). Spectators may observe their ceremonies at a proper distance but those venturing too close are physically expelled, and during *nyau* performances the women tend to sing exorcising hymns near the local church. Since Nyau societies continue to exist in a somewhat attenuated form, the ban proved at most only partially successful despite the Christian establishment's earnest efforts. On leaving the Nyau society a young man would, of course, have no undue difficulty in being readmitted to the Church's fold, should he so wish.

9. Early Irish clerical condemnations frequently associate certain other categories of person, notably the druid (*druí*) and satirist (*cáinte*), with *fían*-members alias *díberga(ig)*. As Sharpe points out, "brigandage, that is the activity of organized bands of killers, was particularly abhorrent to the Church, and in the Old Irish *Arraí* is associated with druidism and satirizing among the sins for which there could be no remission of penance. It was regarded as a pagan practice and evidently had its own ritualistic code of conduct" (1979, 82).

To begin with, "in glossed fragments of *Cáin Fhuithirbe* in Dublin, Trinity College, MS H.3.18 *étualaing* 'intolerable' is glossed *cáinti* and *escoman* 'excommunicate' is glossed *cáinti ⁊ díbergaig* (*CIH* 772.36 and 38). These *díberga(ig)* or the like had werewolf attributes, and *Cóir Anmann* par. 240 significantly bases an etymology of *cáinte* on similar features: '*Cáinte* from *canis* 'hound', on account of the head of a hound on a *cáinte* as he bays (satirizes?)'" (McCone, 1989, 128). The diametrically opposed status and deserts of the admirable *fili* and the despicable *cáinte* according to the Church-oriented ideology of early Irish literature are well brought out in the deliberately juxtaposed episodes involving Cridenbél the satirist's misbehaviour justly avenged by his host the Dagdae and Cairbre the poet's proper

punishment of his host Bres for maltreatment at his hands in *Cath Maige Tuired* (ibid.).

According to an Irish penitential probably dating from the seventh century (Sharpe, 1979, 82), "this is the penitence of a druid *(magi)* or a cruel man vowed to evil (*uel uotiui mali [si] crudelis*), i.e. a *díbergach* (*id demergach*), or a crier (*praeconis,* = *cáinte*?) or a cohabiter or a heretic or an adulterer, namely seven years on bread and water" (Bieler, 1975, 160, par. 4). A similarly hard line is taken by the Old Irish table of penitential commutations: "for there are some sins of them that are not entitled to remission of their penance though the period prescribed for them be long, unless God Himself shorten it through death or a message of sickness or the amount of mortification someone impose on himself. Such are brigandages, druidries and satirizings (*díberggae ⁊ druithdechta ⁊ cantechda*) and such are adulteries and incest and perjury and heresy and transgression of holy orders" (par. 5; Binchy, 1962c, 58-9). A manifestly tendentious passage in *Bretha Crólige* reveals the determination of monastic lawyers to reduce the entitlement of such reprobates to sick-maintenance below the relatively high level apparently still quite often observed, rather as the Cridenbél episode in *Cath Maige Tuired* (pars. 26-30) implies that a *cáinte* should be refused normal hospitality: "there are three in the kingdom who are maintained according to the maintenance of a *bó-aire*. Neither their dignity (*míad*) nor their inviolate status (*nemthes*) nor their entitlement (*dliged*) nor their tonsure (*cend-gelt*, lit. 'head-cropping') increases their sick-maintenance (*othrus*). (These are) the druid, the brigand, the satirist (*druí, díbergach, cáinte*). For it is more fitting in God's sight to spurn then to support them" (par. 51; Binchy, 1938, 40-1).

The eighth-century legal tract *Córus Béscnai* introduces a neat delineation of the three main early medieval Irish estates of Church, settled laity and various types of outcast with the question: "how many feasts (*fleda*) are there? Not difficult. Three. A godly feast (*fled déodae*), a human feast (*fled dóendae*), a devilish feast (*fled demundae*). What is the godly feast? A gift to God, a gift of Sunday on a weekday, celebration of a festival, the feeding of an anchorite, a gift to a church, the feeding of a company, refection of God's guests, comforting the wretched, consecration of a church, feeding paupers, comfortings that may sustain them for the poor. It is required of lords that they enforce each of them on their clients. What is the human feast? Everyone's alehouse feast for his lord according to his entitlement with which there go according to deserts dinner party (*feis*), supper (*fuiririud*), lunch (*dithit*). In the equal divisions of refections distinctions are arranged, refection of maintenance for a kingdom's allies, for the seeking of truth and right, for answering wrong. Mutual obligation of the *Féni* in feastings (and) refection. The propriety of service regarding hosting, encampment, pledge, assembly, vengeance, posse and vigilante action, serving God, furthering the work of a lord and of everyone for his lord, for his kin, for his abbot. Protecting his lord with every enrichment and benefit according to God and man as regards good conduct, good law, good attention. For every proper profit, every render, every nobility, every good reputation due to a lord is lawful. Attending to the warding off of every loss from his lord. Every due is bound, levied, enforced, paid for inviolate persons (*do neimthib*) according to God and man. A devilish feast, i.e. a feast which is given to sons of death (*do macaib báis*) and bad people, i.e. to buffoons (*do druthaib*, but in view of attested confusion between forms of *drúth* and *druí* possibly originally *do druídib* "to druids") and

satirists (7 *cáintib*) and begging poets (7 *oblairib*) and farters and clowns (7 *fuirseoraib*) and bandits and pagans (7 *geintib*) and whores (7 *merdrechaib*) and other bad people. For every feast that is not given (read *na:tabarr*) for earthly exchange and is not given for heavenly reward, that feast belongs to the devil" (*CIH* 524.18-526.19).

Here too, then, we find "sons of death" or *fían*-members accompanied by druids (or buffoons), satirists, other reprobates and pagans (*geinti*) in general at a feast stigmatized as "devilish" in contrast with the "godly feast" entailing Church dues or other acts of charity and the "human feast" centring around hospitality or other obligations due from a client to his lord.

This collocation of devilish, godly and human feasting is given narrative expression in a long entry under the year 721 in the so-called 'fragmentary' Annals concerning the Cenél nÉogain king of Tara Fergal mac Máele Dúin (+722) and his two sons and eventual successors, the warlike *fían*-leader Áed Allán (+743) and the pious Níall Frossach (+778), founder of a whole line of Tara monarchs. "At that time Fergal made a prophecy for his sons, i.e. for Áed Allán and Níall Cundail, and it is from this that that came about for him, i.e. one day they came to him in Ailech Frigrenn, i.e. Áed the elder son, who was a clever, cruel and vigorous prime young warrior (*cét-óclach*), it is thus that he came, with large well armed bands to Ailech. It is thus, however, that the younger son came, quietly, temperately and peacefully with small numbers, and what he said through his own diffidence and in his father's honour was: 'it is better for me', he said, 'to go outside for lodging than to stay as guest with you tonight' . . . Thereafter the older son, i.e. Áed, was brought into the great palace with his people. However, the young son, i.e. Níall, was taken to a lovely secluded house. They were entertained in due course and their father wished to test them together and came at the end of the night to the house in which the older son was and was listening to that house. It is vehement and foul that people were in that house. There were clowns (*fuirseoiri*) and satirists (*cáinteda*) and whores (*echlacha*) and begging poets (*oblairi*) and louts (*bachlaig*) roaring and bellowing there. One lot drinking, another asleep, another vomiting, another piping, another whistling. Drummers and harpers playing; a group boasting and arguing. Fergal heard them thus. And then he came to visit the secluded house in which the younger son was and he was listening to that house and did not hear anything there except thanksgiving to God for everything they had received, and quiet melodious harping, and songs praising the Lord being performed. And the king greatly perceived fear and love of the Lord in that house. Thereafter the king came to his own bed and greatly took heed of the situation of those two houses" (Radner, 1978, 60-3).

On the morrow king Fergal, unable to stay in the elder son's house for the filth and stench from the previous night's debauchery, visited the younger son Níall and found him praying. After some sleep "the son said to his father, 'dear father,' he said, 'it is proper for you to feast with us awhile here, since there remains with us half of what food and drink was given from you to us last night'. And he had not finished that, when servants brought out a great vessel full of mead and numerous foods and they feasted silently and peacefully together then. When everyone had got up, the king came out into his own house and recounted in the presence of all how the fortunes of those two sons would be. And he said that the older son would assume sovereignty and that his reign would be sturdy, valorous, vigorous, terrifying and lustful. The younger son, however, that he would assume sovereignty

piously and decently and that his descendants would be famous and royal and would take the kingship every second time. That is, moreover, what has been fulfilled hitherto" (ibid., 62-3).

Here, as in the hagiographical record and elsewhere, we find monastic authors quite prepared to acknowledge that life in the detested *fían* might precede succession to the kingship. However, this barely avoidable concession to current realities did not blunt their desire to draw a congenial moral where possible, in this case by admitting that both sons became kings of Tara while reserving the foundation of a major royal line to the pious non-Fenian brother.

Given the evidence already presented (3 and 8 above) for a tendency on the part of kings' sons to join a *fían*, the *cáinte*'s connections with such company are further evinced by the figure of Glasdám "the satirist of the king of Ireland's son with his nine satirists around him" seeking hospitality in the *Bórama* text (*LL* 38391-2; *cáinte meic ríg Hérend cona nónbor cáinte imme*). Similarly noteworthy is the legendary Cathbad's status as both druid and *fían*-member (*sech ba druí-side ba fénnid*) who goes on a murderous "circuit of *fían*-activity (*cúaird fénnidechta*)" in the opening section of *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa*.

It would seem, then, that in marked contrast to the ecclesiastically esteemed and connected *fili* and *brithem* (ch. 1, 10-12) some sections of the *áes dáno*, notably the druid and various types of versifier such as the *cáinte*, were an object of clerical opprobrium and excommunication by virtue of pagan attributes and a tendency to associate with the similarly stigmatized *fían*. For this reason it is quite inadmissible to use a king's slaughter of satirists (*cáinti*) as evidence for royal hostility towards poets (*filid*), as Mac Cana does in the case of the *Bórama* tale just mentioned about the deaths of Glasdám and his *dám* or following of satirists (1979, 472-3).

As the foregoing discussion has shown, the clerical establishment seems to have been quite successful in marginalizing what it saw as these unsavoury elements, a process doubtless facilitated by the fact that the vagabond *fían* was intrinsically peripheral anyway. However, the continuing role of some senior *fían*-members like the *fergniae* and *aire échta* in the public enforcement of law and order (5 above) suggests that obvious clerical propaganda for complete outlawry of the *fían* and its satellites proved relatively unsuccessful, presumably because of the institution's usefulness for military training and the partial relief of pressure upon the food supply as well as inadequate inheritances (4 above). After all, as Goody observes, "we cannot expect the same close fit between religion and society that sociologists often perceive in non-literate cultures when the reference point is not some locally derived myth subject to the homeostatic processes of the oral tradition but a virtually indestructible document belonging to one of the great world (i.e. literate) religions" (1968, 5), and there is no reason why the Church should have been more successful in early medieval Ireland than elsewhere in securing full implementation of its social and moral aspirations by a more or less sinful Christian majority. Indeed, even certain satirists may have had a public examining function in the *túath*, albeit one hardly calculated to endear them to *filid*, if one is to believe the following gloss on *cáinte* in the passage from *Bretha Crólige* (par. 51) cited earlier in this section: "for the lampooner's knowledge of all the metres (*ar aichni na n-uili n-aisti acin drisiuc*) so that he does not let a poet (*fili*) into the territory except according to paths of entitlement".

10. After enumerating eight types of *sóer-bard* or "free bard" and a further eight of *dóer-bard* or "base bard" the first Middle Irish metrical tract asks: "and the free bards, then, what differentiates them into grades? Not difficult. According to their skills (*asa ndánaib*) do they increase and differ. As each grade of poets (*filed*) increases beyond the other in learning and composition (*i sous ⁊ airchetal*), so does each of these increase beyond the other in amount of learning and metre (*in imud sois et segda*), apart from letters and syllables and inflections etc. And it is on that account that they only attain half the honour-price of the poets (*leth-enecland na filed*). For he is not paid in grades who neither learns nor is learned from (*nád:foglaind nad:foglainnter húad*), who neither studies nor is studied from (*nad:frithgnai nád:frithgnaither uad*)" (par. 3; Thurneysen, 1891, 6). Then, after exemplifying the various rhyming syllabic metres practised by them and assigning them to these different grades, the same text concludes: "it is for this reason that a regulation of rewards is not defined here, because these metres are new forms (*núa-chrotha*), because it is recent authors (*núa-litridi*, see ch. 1, 12) who discovered them. But it is in accordance with the generosity and liberality of everyone for whom they are made and in accordance with the skill and excellence of everyone who makes them that their rewards are paid. However, if it be according to true entitlement of poetic art (*éicse*), their rewards are paid at half the value of the chief metres (*na prím-aisti*, i.e. those exclusive to the *filid*). For it is not easy to despise them, since their gifts are from God . . . It is thus that they are not paid with equalities of honour price to the folk of study (*fri hóes ind frithgnama*)" (par. 68; ibid., 23).

As has already been pointed out (ch.1, 12), the *Ériu* 13 tract on the privileges and responsibilities of poets explicitly states that the bard's method of composition was essentially oral in the pre-Norman period. Consequently the above passage's equally categorical ascription of the invention of the metres they used to recent writers, themselves apparently influenced by Latin hymnody (ch. 2, 6), provides about as strong an indicator of the dominant influence of literacy in early medieval Irish culture as one could wish for.

Although his very lack of the literacy, formal learning (*foglaim*) and long course of study (*frithgam*) required of a *fili* (ch. 1, 12) restricted the oral bard's honour-price and rates of pay to at most half that of a trained poet, certain types of free bard were nevertheless highly regarded in lay society: "thus one of the grades of *sáer-bard* is called a *túath-bard ad-daiṃ túath* 'a *túath*-bard whom the *túath* acknowledges', while of the others the *tigern-bard* is an aristocrat with twelve clients as well as being a bard and the *ríg-bard* is both king and bard" (McCone, 1989, 129). To Liam Breatnach we now owe an extensive collection of material relating to the grades of *filid, baird* etc. (1987, 3-60), on the strength of which he makes the following important observations: "an essential feature of the seven grades of poets is that they are the successive stages in a progression which an individual may make in his own lifetime . . . Here we have one of the features which distinguish the *filid* from the *baird* . . . Nowhere.. do we find mention of the bards progressing from grade to grade. Note especially the definition of *tigernbard* as a person who is both a lord and a bard, and of *rígbard* as a person who is both a king and a bard in BN XIII. That factors other than ability in *bairdne* are taken into account surely indicates that we have a ranking due to relative importance, rather than a system of progression from grade to grade" (ibid., 87-8).

However, when we move from the free (*sóer-*) to the base (*dóer-*) bards, whose

inclusion of the *cáinte* and his ilk can just be discerned through a tangle of terms, our sources register a steep decline in respectability and entitlements. Thus two categories on the first metrical tract's list of base bards, the *long-bard* and *drisiuc*, are spoken of slightingly in Breatnach's *B(retha) N(emed) IV* passage (ibid., 36-9), and the *dul* and *drisiuc* are similarly lowly rated in *BN V* (ibid., 40-1).

As regards terminological confusion or overlap in this area, "the law tract *Míadshlechta* follows the descending seven grades of *fili* with *bard, fer cerda* and *cáinte*, defined as *fer ara-rósar a bíad t(resi)n ainim aíre* 'a man on account of whom his food be obtained through the blemish of satire' with obvious relevance to the behaviour of Cridenbél, but *cáinte* does not normally figure explicitly in lists of this type. However, some of the terms found in other lists may be associated or even equated with the *cáinte* elsewhere. Even if such equations were not entirely accurate, they would still indicate that the profession in question was regarded as very similar to that of the *cáinte*. *Mittelirische Verslehren* II pars. 132-35 is a section describing the metres of the base bards or *dáer-baird* and of the so-called 'subgrades of poets' (*na fográd filed*) consisting of *taman, drisiuc* and *oblaire*, and the same three subgrades are given by *Uraicecht na Ríar* and by glosses on *Uraicecht Becc* whereas some *Bretha Nemed* material presents a collocation of *bard, drisiuc* and *dul*. It has already been pointed out that *dul* and *cáinte* appear to be interchangeable in the Cridenbél tale and Cormac's Glossary.., and we have seen that *oblaire* and *cáinte* appear together at 'devilish' feasts. In *Mittelirishe Verslehren* I par. 1 and *Ériu* 13, 41.12 the *drisiuc* appears as a grade of the *dáer-baird*, but at *Bretha Crólige* par. 51 *cáinte* is glossed *.i. in drisiuc* and elsewhere it is said of the *drisiuc* that 'he sticks in the face/honour of everyone' (*lenaid i n-inchaib cáich*) and 'is a briar on account of laceration and a hound on account of fierceness and wickedness' (*is dris ar letarthaigi ⁊ is cú ar aminnsige ł ar anble*). The *taman filed* appears as an alternative to the *sacaire* or, in one version of the relevant material, the *cáinte* in a passage relating to the *fían*. To some extent this interchangeability of terms may be due to the fact that *cáinte*, like *fili*, is generic whereas *oblaire, drisiuc* and so on, like *dos, cano* etc., refer rather to specific grades within the class. At any rate, *Uraicecht na Ríar* informs us that the *drisiuc* should have ten compositions for an honour-price of a scruple but the *oblaire* only five for an honour-price of only half a scruple" (McCone, 1989, 129).

The Cridenbél episode in *Cath Maige Tuired* (see 9 above) depicts a *dul* or *cáinte* demanding food from his victim by means of an implied threat to assault his honour if refused (McCone, ibid., 123-4). This is precisely the import of doggerels put into the mouths of the *drisiuc* and *oblaire* elsewhere, the *taman* likewise being given a short begging poem (ibid., 129-30), and it seems clear that their offensive threat of satire for gain rather than its properly defensive use to avenge wrongdoing was made a target for criticism by clerics and their *filid* allies (ibid., 130-2).

A further obvious ground for disapproval was the *cáinte*'s already documented tendency to serve members of the *fían* loathed by the Church, and the native etymology of *drisiuc* just given agrees with that of the *cáinte* (9 above) in stressing canine or lupine aspects also typical of the *díberg(ach)* or *féindid* (6-7 above). Furthermore, the association of certain presumably base types of *bard* with the *fían* rather than the *túath* is indicated by the personal name *Fían-bard* and by a reference in the *Ériu* 13 tract to bards supported by young warriors of the *fían* (McCone, ibid., 129). It thus seems that early Ireland's *literati* recognized a threefold stratification of

versifiers according to the sort of training involved and the social milieu in which they operated. First came the exalted *fíli*, literate by dint of a long monastically oriented education and able to function in Church or aristocratic lay society (ch.1, 10-11 and Breatnach, 1987, 89-94), then the skilled but illiterate *sáer-bard* operating within the respectable confines of the propertied laity, and finally the dubious category of *dáer-bard*, including the *cáinte* etc., apparently hard put to find willing patrons outside the propertiless *fían*. The latter's members in turn presumably found such versifiers' threats of shame through satire a useful adjunct to or substitute for the menace of physical violence in the quest for hospitality.

11. There is, then, clear evidence for clerical hostility towards the various categories of actual or alleged pagan outlaw and excommunicate with which this chapter is principally concerned. Since the *fían* appears to have been unusual in an early Christian Irish context in that its very survival depended upon resistance to rather than accommodation with the ecclesiastical interest, it is hardly surprising that its basic ethos should have been little affected by Christianity and have proved so retentive of a pagan inheritance with deep Indo-European roots evinced by a wealth of comparative details. It was, moreover, almost inevitable that such an institution should have provided a focus for other elements such as druids and satirists that the Church disapproved of and sought to eliminate or at least ostracize from civilized society.

The reference to *geinti* "pagans" in a text like *Córus Béscnai* (9 above) proves that such people, or at least people so regarded by the Church, were still to be found in pre-Viking eighth-century Ireland. Although paganism may have survived among the settled population in some remoter parts, *Félire Óengusso*'s triumphalist assertions of Christianity's total victory in Ireland at the end of that century would have had an embarrassingly hollow ring if this had been the case on any scale. At any rate, the only good evidence that admittedly tendentious texts offer for anything approaching organized paganism in early Christian Ireland relates to the *fían* and its satellites. However odious such recalcitrants may have been to the Church, life in the *fían* was frequently a mere youthful phase prior to the inheritance of property and sometimes even accession to the kingship, processes of settling down that seem normally to have gone hand in hand with marriage and admission or readmission into the Christian community. Indeed, the monastic literature's somewhat grudging acknowledgement of this behavioural paradigm, especially in the common hagiographical motif of *díbergs* brought to repentance and forgiveness, could only serve to underline the transience of a period spent sowing wild oats at a relatively convenient remove. Perhaps this helps to explain why the Church's bark apparently proved worse than her bite in this matter.

Although the details cannot now be recovered, conflict between Church and *fían* will have introduced new tensions into a hitherto cohesive social system in which male age grades played a prominent role. This in turn presumably presented the *áes dáno* with an increasingly stark choice between a career amidst the Church and her adherents in the settled *túath* or one with the *fían* of excommunicates. The inherent paganism of his calling inevitably placed the druid on the wrong side of the tracks, while figures like the *cáinte* may already have been strongly associated with the *fían* and simply shared its fall from grace. Among the less affected, perhaps, was the free bard (*sóer-bard*), who continued to compose orally for the secular nobility, albeit