ABSTRACT

“COMALL INAR TENGHTAIBH”: RHETORIC AS BORDERLAND IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

by Graham Thomas Wilcox

This thesis argues for the examination of early medieval Ireland as a time and place worthy of in-depth rhetorical study. The approach used for this examination draws upon intercultural and comparative rhetorics, borrowing in particular from the work of Mao and Baca. The thesis also takes an interdisciplinary tack, examining scholarship produced by historians and Celticists, which further informs and contextualizes the rhetorical analysis. This study includes an extensive literature review of relevant scholarship from both rhetoricians and historians, and concludes with a rhetorical analysis of three primary documents from the early medieval Irish corpus. Analysis of the primary documents and the sociohistorical context surrounding them revels the presence of sophisticated rhetorics within early medieval Ireland that exist alongside, and outside, the mainstream European tradition. Implications for the plurality of rhetorical traditions within Europe, and the continued study of those plural traditions, are discussed.
“COMALL INAR TENGTHAIBH”: RHETORIC AS BORDERLAND IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

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Dedication

To Andrea, my woman.
To Dennis and Margaret, my parents.
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Chapter 1: “Eochair fessa foglaim” — Introduction and Literature Review

The rhetorical tradition taught within most American universities, when indeed it is taught at all, relies overwhelmingly upon classical Greco-Roman rhetoric as a sort of scholarly “norm” against which all other traditions are measured. Within that history, the classical Greco-Roman tradition of rhetoric progresses into the medieval trivium, which in turn becomes part of Renaissance humanism, before becoming relegated to the academic back-burner by the influence of anti-rhetoric scholars such as Peter Ramus, Rene Descartes, and others (Kennedy, 1999, Corbett, 1990). This linear model of history and rhetoric, though admittedly truncated, privileges a certain set of rhetorical values, a certain set of cultural values, and privileges the histories of those cultures associated with the transmission of that history.

Therefore, the western canon of rhetoric is represented by a rather diminutive choir of voices all granted legitimacy, in some fashion, by their perceived descent from the Classical “heartland” of Greco-Roman culture. The scope of European history—and American history for that matter, since it is so often tied to the efforts and settlements of European Americans—still conforms, in many ways, to the familiar model of “Greece, to Rome, to England, to America.” It mirrors, in many ways, this linear model of rhetorical development: rhetoric, as a discipline and a concept, for many centuries defined education within Europe, first as a facet of Athenian and Roman public life, then as one third of the medieval trivium, and later as a cornerstone of Renaissance humanism (Kennedy, 1999, Murphy, 1974). Its teaching in the United States of America, once threatened and marginalized, now demonstrates signs of recovery and reuse; however, in many ways the teaching of rhetoric, and rhetorical history in particular, cleaves close to the classical tradition, sometimes to the exclusion of other voices.

Outside of the classical tradition, or perhaps adjacent to it, scholars such as Anzaldua and Baca have both argued for the reclamation of rhetorical traditions found within Mesoamerican cultures, as well as arguing for rhetorics in general as “borderlands” where influences from multiple cultures and traditions collide, rather than seeing traditions as possessing mutually exclusive spheres of influence. A multitude of traditions converging within contact zones across the breadth of time and space provides a more rounded view of rhetoric, its history, and its application, than does a singular tradition privileging a monocultural sphere of influence (Baca, 2008, Berlin, 1994, Jarratt, 1998).

In that same vein, I seek a method by which early medieval Irish rhetoric might inform contemporary concepts of rhetoric, history, identity and hybridity. I choose early medieval Ireland because of its rather unique place within the western European historical record: it possesses one of the largest, oldest traditions of vernacular literature in European history (O’Corrain, 1972, O’Croinin, 1995), and yet that tradition comes filtered through the lens of a Christianized, classically influenced scholarship. Ireland has traditionally been conceptualized as lying on the “fringe” of European history, and therefore its contributions to the historical record have been likewise marginalized and neglected (O’Croinin, 1995); yet in recent decades, its status on this “fringe” has been called into question (Richter, 1999, p. 11) due to the influence of Ireland as a nexus of Christian learning in the early medieval period, and the influence of the Irish themselves as scholars and missionaries within western Europe. Ireland was intimately connected to the transmission of classical learning and literature to the rest of Europe, and its
own secular tradition of literacy has been recently recognized for its intense and purposeful rhetoricity (Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch, 2007).

Ireland stands on a borderland, in other words, between fringe and mainstream, between the venerated classical tradition and its own vernacular tradition. The early medieval Irish notion of rhetoric synthesized these disparate traditions—though some degree of tension remained present throughout, and beyond, the early medieval period—and created a literary tradition remarkable for its purposeful, rhetorical approach to poetry, history, and other forms of literate knowledge-making. Early medieval Ireland—and I suspect, many early medieval societies beyond that—was not merely one borderland at one time, but a multitude of them. Classical Greco-Roman rhetoric merged with early Christianity, which merged with Ireland's own pre-Christian traditions, which themselves influenced and were influenced by contact with other cultures in the British Isles: the Britons, the Anglo-Saxons, and later the Scandinavians and Normans as well.

One of the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis will be intercultural rhetoric: the “togetherness in difference” model proposed by LuMing Mao inspired me to examine the various strands of medieval Irish rhetoric from this perspective because early medieval Ireland provides an excellent example of a time and place where rhetoric flourished in the “West,” and that rhetoric was, in many ways, quite unlike the rhetorics that arose from Greece and Rome. That “classical” rhetorical tradition was present in Ireland; however, there existed other forms of rhetorical usage in early medieval Ireland that, while obviously connected to and influenced by the classical tradition for a variety of reasons, remained distinct from it.

For clarity’s sake I divide these traditions in two, and call them the classical tradition, by which I mean the Greco-Roman rhetoric of Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, their antecedents, their contemporaries, and their successors, and the “native” tradition, by which I mean the rhetorical usage practiced within Ireland by the filid (and others) that was not descended from the Greco-Roman tradition. The rhetorical features of the classical scholarly traditions are well-documented and well-privileged (Kennedy, 1999): as Berlin (1994) wrote, “the tradition of rhetoric is one, and its authentic exponents are united in a common language and purpose. Plato speaks to Aristotle and Aristotle to Cicero and Cicero to Quintilian and Quintilian to Augustine and Augustine to himself until Aristotle and Cicero and Quintilian are again given their due respect in the Renaissance” (p. 112). The privileged tradition within western academia is focused on a strand of Greco-Roman thought that, while undoubtedly influential and useful, does not constitute the entirety of rhetorical thought and theory around the world. Indeed, it does constitute the entirety of rhetorical thought and theory within Europe.

The native Irish tradition of rhetoric was quite expansive, covering a number of genres ranging from the explicitly rhetorical teosc—an admonition or set of instructions from one person, or one group of people, to another person/group—to the less explicit (but no less rhetorically active) narrative, poetic and genealogical texts. Drawing from translated primary sources—generally translated from Old Irish, which I read only in the most halting and infantile manner, to English—I will argue that the early medieval Irish purposefully performed a rhetoric founded in moral instruction and political action. Moral instruction was typically focused on the morals of a particular social class, such as the aristocracy or the filid, and in particular focused on
the notion of honor/face (log n-enh in Irish), which was relative in its application based on social class and situation, and central to the highly stratified hierarchy of early medieval Ireland. Connected to log n-enh and the maintenance of societal hierarchy is political action, defined in this context by the interactions of the various social classes within the tuaith, the basic political unit of early medieval Ireland comprising one tribe and its king, roughly analogous in some fashion to the classical Greek polis. This early medieval Irish rhetoric possessed its own discursive parameters for authority and privilege, and incorporated a complex network of allusions, metaphors, and tropes for persuasive purposes. Issues of audience and temporality were attended to with conscious, deliberate effort.

Intercultural rhetoric helps explain the relationship between these rhetorical traditions within medieval Ireland: how they coexisted, how they acted upon one another, and how an analysis of that interaction helps complicate the current study of the “Western” rhetorical tradition(s). That final matter, the complication of the current study of the “Western” rhetorical tradition, is my end goal with this study. In that vein, I participate in what Berlin (1994) calls “the search for alterity, for rhetorics other than the familiar, [which] can reveal to us alternative possibilities in conceiving discursive practices and their power formations” (p. 118). I examine early medieval Ireland as a “rhetoric other than familiar” in the West, one with discursive practices and power formations that were both like and unlike those in Greece and Rome, or England and Frankia for that matter. From a methodological standpoint, I look to comparative rhetoric as a place where “alterity” is sought and found and studied. To that end, I examine a handful of texts from two disciplines: cultural rhetoric itself, and Irish studies. I analyze the cultural rhetoric texts for their theoretical aid in interpreting and comparing and contrasting the rhetorics of medieval Ireland: examining the language of Irish (as in Irish-speaking, as opposed to Latinate or Greek) rhetoric in its own terms, the rhetorically significant terminology preserved within the texts themselves. I analyze the Irish studies texts for their contribution to my understanding of the actual features of rhetorically significant literature within the medieval Irish corpus: the importance of prose and verse as rhetorical tools, the centrality of the filid and their work to medieval Irish culture and society, and the rhetorical bond between king and country (meaning both the literal country landscape around him, and the polity he leads).

In order to accurately portray the above, I plan to analyze three main primary sources from early medieval Ireland. These texts are the the Audacht Morainn, the Testament of Morann in English, a poem in which the poet explicitly advises a king on his duties; the Togail Bruidne Da Derga (The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel), a literary narrative in which a king’s decisions and their effect upon his tribe are examined, and finally, the Letters of Columbanus, written by a sixth-century Irish monk in Latin on the continent to other clergymen (including, among others, the pope). The Audacht Morainn and Togail Bruidne Da Derga both date from the Old Irish period, and were therefore written sometime in the eight-ninth centuries, whereas Columbanus’ Letters date from the sixth-century, written as they were during his lifetime. Moreover, Columbanus’ Letters and Audacht Morainn both belong to the same genre of Old Irish literature, the teosec/admonitio, and will therefore be analyzed as representatives of borderland rhetoric: though operating in different languages and contexts (Latin/ecclesiastic as opposed to Irish/secular), they employ similar persuasive strategies and draw upon a shared rhetorical heritage. The Togail Bruidne Da Derga will be examined as coda to the Letters and the Audacht: as a literary narrative, it is perhaps meant as a more “popular” text than the others,
with their very specific, targeted rhetoric, and yet it explores similar themes: the relationship between ruler and people, the reciprocity inherent to that relationship, and the consequences that occur for both king and tribe when the king shirks the principles of proper rulership.

Through my analysis of the above primary documents, I will tentatively explore the foundations for public rhetorical discourse in early medieval Ireland, as expressed through the written word. I will argue that this public rhetorical discourse operated within a borderland, where Christian and pre-Christian elements mingled and influenced one another. In that manner, I argue for the consideration of early medieval Ireland as a vibrant rhetorical landscape within western Europe, and one worthy of further discussion by scholars within field of rhetoric and composition.

Cultural Rhetoric: Theory and Methodology

I will begin by surveying some of the literature on comparative rhetoric, and assessing the methodology through which scholars compare rhetorics across and within cultures. In this section, I will discuss the contemporary rhetorical conversations in which my work participates. I begin by discussing certain theories of comparative rhetoric, and then move onto theories of rhetoric-as-borderland. I will also analyze works where these theories are put into practice, so that I may demonstrate that my methods speak to certain predecessors in the field, and are not mere momentary inventions of my own.

R. Radhakrishnan (2009), in his “Why Compare?” examines the questions a scholar must ask before engaging in this sort of intercultural study of rhetoric. He argues that, “Any act of comparison is predicated on an unavoidable deracination and yoking together that one hopes will not be violent. The two works to be compared are deterritorialized from their "original" milieu and then reterritorialized so that they may become cospatial, epistemologically speaking” (p. 456). Comparison involves, in a way, some element of artifice: it is forced upon the comparative subjects by the scholar, and therefore the very act of comparison becomes hazardous. The scholar comparing A and B filters these comparisons through his own (and I use the male pronoun because the scholar in question is me, and I’m male, so there) values, his own lens, but they exist independent of those values and that lens. Comparisons occur both in, and out, of the realities within which the original subjects occur, and through comparison, new realities are created. Where once A and B stood apart, now they stand together, both blurred by comparison and unmarred by it.

In that way, as Radhakrishnan notes, comparison involves both inevitable idealism (in the Platonic sense, perhaps) and in-depth deconstruction: “To state this differently, a comparatist project has to be perennially double conscious: on the one hand, act as the comparison is being made in an ideal world and at the same time deconstruct such an idealist ethic in the name of lived reality and its constitutive imbalances” (p. 459). Subject A and B are, for the purpose of comparison, idealized into their “perfect selves,” and at the same time deconstructed from this ideal so that comparison becomes evident. Radhakrishnan asserts that this becomes problematic because it ignores the lived realities of the subjects compared, or rather, it potentially ignores them. Comparison is hazardous, because the scholar must ask “In whose name will the comparison be valorized? Which will be the signature, and which the countersignature? Who
will be officially responsible for the comparison: Self or Other or both or neither? There is no

easy way […] to escape the dire binary separation between "the ones and the others" (p. 464).

Therefore, when comparing two cultural rhetorics, the scholar must remain conscious of their

own biases and values, their positionality. They must recognize that the very act of comparison

invites separation into a binary, division into a dichotomy, and therefore, the scholar must work

actively against that simplification. The scholar must know that no true “objective” comparison

can take place because comparison is always valuecentric, and occurs only through the lens

adopted by the scholar. With these hazards in mind, the scholar must acknowledge their

positionality, and having established that, they can begin crafting a more rigorous methodology

through which they might tackle the comparison.

One challenge inherent to the study of rhetorical traditions outside the Greco-Roman

narrative is the definition of “rhetoric” employed in said study. Mary Garrett (1999) in her

“Some Elementary Methodological Reflections on the Study of the Chinese Rhetorical

Tradition” notes that the first step in discussing a cultural rhetoric involves defining “rhetoric”

itself, and that defining process can open avenues of discussion and comparison, or it can close

them. Speaking in terms of Chinese rhetoric, Garrett acknowledges that if one works off a

definition of rhetoric that privileges the classical Greek rhetorics typified by Plato and Aristotle,

then it may appear that the Chinese possess no rhetoric, or at least, a very truncated approach to

it (p. 54). By doing so, one becomes open to the “deficiency-model” of scholarship, interpreting

the absence of these particular Greco-Roman rhetorical traits in a Chinese context as the absence

of rhetoric, and rhetorical thinking, in Chinese culture as a whole. On the other hand, by opening

up one’s definition of rhetoric to include a more inclusive model, the rhetorical thought and

practice of Chinese thought becomes more apparent (p. 55-56). Garrett offers the following as

examples of rhetorical definitions that are more amenable to non-Greco-Roman contexts: “the

ability to persuade with words politically powerful people on issues of the public interest […]

persuasion in interpersonal contexts […] an organized study of discourse” (p. 55). By applying

these different definitions, the rhetorical lens widens, and instead of engaging in “deficiency-

model” scholarship where one spends a great deal of time pointing out the lack of similarities to

Greco-Roman rhetoric (and interpreting that lack as a marker of the inferiority of the non-Greco-

Roman culture), one can engage in a honest comparison of rhetorical methods without framing

everything in terms of Aristotle’s presence in the text, or lack thereof.

Speaking in terms of medieval Irish rhetoric, Garrett’s methodology proves useful for

defining the boundaries of what should be considered “rhetoric” and what should not. Though

medieval Ireland was involved in the transmit of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition, said

tradition was at times not expressed in the same way it would’ve been in classical Athens, or

Cicero’s Rome. Moreover, the “native” rhetorical tradition of Ireland was itself expressed in a

manner foreign to the rhetorical theories of Aristotle, Quintilian and their fellows. Rhetoric in an

Irish context, therefore, cannot be solely circumscribed by a definition derived from Greco-

Roman sources, or even from contemporary sources in the Church, or among other medieval

European polities. Rhetoric in medieval Ireland included “good men speaking well,” and it

included clerics in the Augustinian tradition using the “pagan art” to proselytize the masses, but

it also included tribal genealogies rewritten to accommodate new political realities (Gibson,

2011, p. 118-129); histories written to valorize a particular clan’s lineage in order to argue for

their right to rule in the present (O’Corrain, 1972, p. 37); poems satirizing warriors for their
cowardice (Simms, 1990, p. 337); the aforementioned explicitly rhetorical teosc genre; and literary narratives showcasing the political realities of rulership, and the dangers of breaking the king’s bond with his people (Togail Bruidne Da Derga, 1901). Rhetoric in medieval Ireland was a flexible concept, applied to the written and spoken word as well as to physical action and appearance. Therefore, the definition of rhetoric used must be similarly flexible.

LuMing Mao (2003), in his “Reflective Encounters: Illustrating Comparative Rhetoric,” further describes the purpose and theory behind comparative rhetoric as an interpretative lens for analysis of rhetorics other than that found in typical Western canon. Mao details a brief history of comparative rhetoric, describing in particular the shift from a deficiency-model of scholarship to a model focused on describing non-Greco-Roman rhetorics in their own terms (p. 411). Since the terms associated with rhetorical study in Western academia originated in the very specific cultural and historical context of classical Greece and Rome, it stands to reason that those rhetorics originating outside that specific cultural/historical context would use different terms rooted within their own specific contexts. Employing these terms rather than insisting on transplanting Greek or Latin terms into other contexts avoids the universalization of Greco-Roman rhetoric and helps deflect any temptation to indulge in deficiency-model analyses and interpretations.

As Mao says, “to study non-Western rhetorical traditions on their own terms can lead to positive representations of these traditions rather than to conclusions involving “deficiency” that we have encountered in some of the studies previously” (p. 412). As an alternative to the deficiency-model and to the “language of opposition” often privileged within western academic discourse (p. 417), Mao proposes the “etic/emic approach” (p. 418) in order to enact “reflective encounters” rather than analyses of polarized binaries. This approach acknowledges that comparison must start somewhere, usually with a discourse familiar to the author (such as Aristotelian or Ciceronian rhetorics); this is the etic, the approach from outside the non-western rhetorical tradition. As one becomes more familiar and comfortable with the non-western tradition, one moves toward the “emic,” which engages with those materials and terms native to the non-western tradition, and so encourages the development of “appropriate frames and languages… [that can] deal with differences as well as similarities between different traditions” (p. 418). In this way, the comparative rhetorician reflects upon their own discursive practice as well as the “foreign” discourse they studied alongside their own, and gains new insight into their own culture’s rhetorical practices through this honest reflection and comparison.

Megan Schoen (2012) in her “Rhetoric of the Thirstland: An Historical Investigation of Discourse in Botswana” describes some of the rhetorical practices of the Tswana people: she focuses on two aspects integral to their rhetorical practices, namely the communal oratorical meeting place (kgotla) and the use of traditional praise poetry (p. 272). Her work is methodologically interesting because of some striking similarities between Tswanan and medieval Irish rhetorics, particularly in the form of praise poetry. Praise poetry in a Tswanan context serves the following functions according to Schoen:

Poems were often composed to extol the laudable qualities of chiefs and great warriors, but they were also composed about common people, whole Tswana nations, animals, landscapes, and inanimate objects Praise poetry of the Tswana
suggests the central importance of the individual’s connection to the group: Personal identity is inherently bound up with group identity, with the intricate web of social connections that hold the community together […] The Tswana themselves regard praise poetry “the highest products in their literary art” (p. 277).

Schoen examines the rhetorical function of these poems; specifically, she analyzes the “naming” of people, and the relations drawn between them as a result of these naming practices, which she claims serves a rhetorical function: “Evidence of this value can be found in one of the more salient features of Tswana praise poetry—the pervasive “naming” that occurs within the poems, locating the subject of the praise within the social group by providing the various names that demarcate aspects of that subject’s identity in relation to others” (p. 278). She gives several examples of these names: “the Nimble One, / brother of Rakitla the Kgatla’ (p. 71), Very brave Refuser, / Walker of Kweni with a white porcupine cap’ (124), and “Son of MaSeepapitsi Ngwato”’ (p. 279). Through this persistent naming, Schoen argues, the Tswana create a rhetoric of social personality; i.e., through one’s naming in a praise poem, an identity is created and perpetuated, cementing an individual’s place within their community as a sibling, a child, a parent, and so on.

However, Schoen also points out that these praise poems do not merely emphasize the relational aspects of community, but also provide a place for communal dissent, even censure (p. 280). Schoen concludes her paper with some preliminary thoughts on the nature of Tswana rhetorical practice, which she divides into three main points: the centrality of communal cohesion and social relationships (p. 282), counterbalanced by the evidence of dissent and censure in both the kgotla and the praise-poems (p. 283), and finally, the evidence of “wisdom literature” or proverbs that show a clear and abiding concern for “understanding of the importance of language in the forging of communal identity and the facilitation of conflict resolution” (p. 283). The methodology Schoen employs reflects Garrett’s discussion on the importance of defining rhetoric: the Tswana do not engage in the creation of formalized treatises on rhetoric, grammar, and pedagogy, such as one finds in the Greco-Roman tradition. However, Schoen examines how the Tswana use language in public for persuasive and deliberative purposes, and through that examination she describes a deep, complex tradition of discourse that could—indeed, should—be termed “rhetoric.”

Continuing the use of African models, Kermit Campbell (2006) in his “Rhetoric from the Ruins of African Antiquity” engages in a study that proves useful in part because it also engages in historiography; also, he engages with societies that do not easily conform to westernized definitions of orality and literacy, similar to the cultural situation of medieval Ireland. As Campbell begins, “The methodological framework of [Kennedy’s] Comparative Rhetoric divides human culture into two main groups: “Societies Without Writing” and “Ancient Literate Societies.” Such a dichotomy assumes that societies are categorically one or the other, literate or oral, and that literacy is non-transferable, that one culture’s literacy or language cannot be appropriated by another culture because said culture is traditionally oral” (p. 258). Campbell examines three African civilizations: Nubia, Axum, and Mali. Each possessed a complex relationship with orality and literacy that defies the normal dichotomy presented above. Discussing Nubia, the earliest recorded African civilization besides Egypt, Campbell examines
their use of hieroglyphs in conjunction with their brief conquest of Egypt itself, where a King Piye proclaims his right to rule the Upper and Lower Nile: “He reiterates this line of discourse elsewhere in the stela, only not in verse or by way of a command. Quite spontaneously, it seems, in the course of chiding a local sovereign for neglecting his stable of horses, Piye reminds the lesser king of his divine authority” (p. 261). Campbell examines Piye’s recurrent use of divine metaphor, interpreting as both an appeal to divine authority and an example of Piye’s unique position as the unique incarnation of the gods on earth. He analyzes Piye’s recorded word and contextualizes it: Piye declares his right to rule, chastises a subordinate ruler, and orders about his troops. In doing so, he consistently emphasizes his position as divine viceroy; indeed, when his troops experience a minor failure, Piye expresses anger at what Campbell interprets to be the way in which their failure impugns Piye’s claims to divinity.

Campbell’s approach here is interesting because he simultaneously engages in historical work and rhetorical analysis, quite similar to the approach I must take in studying early medieval Ireland. Campbell is also careful to contextualize his analysis: he recognizes, for example, that while King Piye was a Nubian, the work was written down in Egypt by Egyptians, and Piye’s dynasty was itself fairly Egyptianized. So rather than presume a unique rhetorical tradition inherent to the Nubian peoples, Campbell instead examines Piye as a rhetorician at a cultural borderland, drawing influences from both his Nubian and Egyptian cultural spheres. At the same time, Campbell couches much of his analysis in the familiar terms of westernized rhetorical analysis: Piye’s metaphors and expressions enhance his ethos, or appeal to pathos, and so on (p. 262-63). Campbell focuses on analyzing the metaphorical and figurative language used within the work itself, and analyzing recurrent themes and imagery within that language. He incorporates certain terms—ethos, for example—from the classical tradition in his analysis, but by and large depends upon a combination of historical context and close reading for his interpretations. Notably, he does not engage in the construction of an outright dichotomous relationship between the African rhetorics he explores, and the Greco-Roman rhetorics typically used as benchmark. Rather, he interprets and analyzes the African rhetorics on their own terms, and does not judge them via the rhetorical criteria of other cultural systems.

Finally, I turn to one of the only published analyses of medieval Ireland from scholars operating within rhetoric/composition: Richard Johnson-Sheehan and Paul Lynch’s (2007) “Rhetoric of Myth, Magic, and Conversion: A Prolegomena to Ancient Irish Rhetoric.” Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch’s joint article on ancient Irish rhetoric begins with a summary of the two types of history written in early medieval Ireland, the mythological and the chronological, and their rhetorical applications within that context. The mythological history of Ireland, as they note, was comprised typically of literary narratives, often centered on particular heroes, or groups of heroes; or on the settling of Ireland by various waves of invaders, culminating in the final wave of invaders, allegedly from Spain, from whom all the current (or rather, medieval) Irishmen were purported to descend. Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch argue that these two histories, the mythological in particular, provide a valuable insight into the rhetorical mindset of the ancient Irishman: “Globally in these narratives, we find consistent thematic patterns that construct and preserve Irish thought and beliefs. At a local level, within these narratives, we see how language, especially poetry, is an essence of power and a central ingredient to life in ancient Ireland” (p. 234). Certain themes and archetypes occur again and again in these narratives, with various characters either subjects of praise or scorn based on their adherence to certain values. In
this manner, these myths, constructed as history, are a “narrative-based rhetoric, steeped in legend, myth, and magic, which promoted and preserved Irish culture and values” (p. 234).

Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch’s argue that this narrative-based rhetoric was employed for civic purposes, in that it passed along certain values and practices which certain elements of society deemed valuable. They focus in particular on the aes dana, the “men of art,” whom were a privileged social class in Ireland that included the drui (from whence we get the loanword “druid” in English, which is in fact simply the Irish plural of drui) and the fili (a complex rhetorical and poetical position explained later on in this thesis); Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch compare these aes dana to the Greek sophist, in that they were itinerant rhetoricians and educators who were “fascinated by the power of language to shape reality” (p. 241). It would have been the aes dana who composed and propagated the aforementioned myths, and so they played a very real role in shaping the society of early medieval Ireland. Echoing Thomas Cahill, Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch assert that there were four “master themes” to this narrative-based rhetoric propagated by the aes dana: “courage, generosity, loyalty, and beauty” (p. 242). They acknowledge such themes are arguably present in many cultures, but in Ireland’s narrative-based rhetoric, these four qualities appear to take upon a significance akin to ethos, pathos, and logos in Greco-Roman rhetoric (p. 242).

Furthermore, Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch describe the rhetoric of conversion employed by St. Patrick, who they assert adapted Christian arguments to an Irish rhetorical landscape, rather than employing Christianized classical rhetoric ala Augustine (p. 245-246). Partially this can be explained by Patrick’s apparent lack of rhetorical schooling: he was rather uneducated in Latin, perhaps due to his education’s interruption by Irish slave-raiders. He was cognizant of his failings as a rhetorician, yet at the same time proud of his accomplishments (p. 247). Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch argue that Patrick’s approach to rhetoric had more in common with Burke’s idea of identification than it did Aristotle’s—or indeed, Augustine’s—concept of persuasion (p. 248). Rather than attempting to force the Irish to believe in the Christianity touted by the well-schooled, rhetorically-minded scholars of Roman Britain, Patrick instead “uses identification to make Christianity consubstantial with Celtic beliefs and practices. He adopts the narrative-based rural rhetoric that we find in Irish legends and mythology. More than likely, he had the appearance of a traveling druid, and he used narratives of Jesus that reinforced the Irish master themes of courage, generosity, loyalty, and beauty” (p. 249).

The above authors, particularly Schoen, Campbell and Mao, discuss the rhetorics of China and Africa (among others), but their framework for comparative analysis still applies within the context of early medieval Ireland. As Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch argue, Irish rhetoric is certainly still a western tradition, but one notable for its characteristics that exist alongside, and outside, those typically associated with the classical/neo-classical rhetorical traits of the academic canon. On one hand, the classical canon of rhetoric was known in Ireland, and it certainly existed and participated within the greater sphere of western European rhetorical culture throughout the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Ireland differed from the rest of Western Europe in that it never came under Roman rule, and so did not inherit Roman culture and customs to the same extent as they were inherited in areas closer to the Roman heartland, such as France and Italy. Moreover, Ireland had its own body of rhetorical literature which remained a privileged part of the culture after the Christianization of the island, and it was this comingling of
traditions, Christian and pre-Christian, that created a unique rhetorical landscape distinct from the mainstream western tradition.

*Intercultural Rhetoric: Contact Zones and Borderlands*

As Mary Louise Pratt (1991) argues, there is a general tendency among academia to see historical discursive communities, and the traditions associated with them, “as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members” (p. 36). This creates a fictitious sense of unity and homogeneity, which academic histories and theories then reflect: historians and rhetoricians alike (I am doubly guilty of this, then) refer to “the Aristotelian tradition,” the “Ciceronian tradition,” and other such constructs, as if those traditions were coherent homogenous objects with traits consistent across time and space. However, as Pratt points out, these references to homogenous traditions of language-use reflect certain internalized assumptions regarding what constitutes “legitimate” language-use, and the asymmetrical power dynamics behind these assumptions. Pratt's examples were grounded in an analysis of teacher-student relationships, and nation-community relationships: the constructed ideals of the orderly classroom and the culturally homogenous nation-state, she argued, assume a level playing field of power, access, and identity when used as the frames through which academics view linguistic interaction in these spaces.

However, these spaces are anything but level-playing fields: the teacher-student relationship is inherently weighted toward the teacher, for example, and discussions involving the social use of language in the classroom examine the teacher's perspective without necessarily acknowledging the input from students. Pratt argues that rather than these imagined, homogenous communities conceptualized as separate spaces without the interplay of power dynamic, cultural fusion/clash, and other functions of heterogeneity, academics should look toward what she defines as contact zones: “I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 33). In regards to early medieval Ireland, Pratt's contact zone theory elucidates the framework through which it is necessary to view the various traditions in contact with one another within the Irish cultural milieu, and how the power ascribed to these traditions was not a static instrument; but rather, these various traditions created a fluid dynamic in which notions of identity and power were constructed based on a multitude of factors interconnected in relationships that were at once companionate and adversarial.

Pratt uses examples where the asymmetric power dynamics are often adversarial, and typically involve some quite negative outcomes for one party in the relationship: the colonized suffers at the hands of the colonizer, the slave suffers at the hands of the slave-owner, and so on. For an early medieval Irish context, I find it necessary to modify this adversarial dynamic: the relationships in early medieval Ireland were not necessarily asymmetric in the sense of slavery, or colonialism. Rather, they were nuanced in their relationships to one another: the Christian gaze certainly disparages the non-Christian worldview and the pagan past to some extent, and yet the entrenchment of pre-Christian cultural values in Irish society meant there existed a flexibility to Irish treatment of their pre-Christian past and culture. Indeed, there were aspects of early
medieval Ireland in which the power dynamic was weighted toward the non-Christian elements: marriage law, for example, was (in)famously liberal in its approach to polygamy, divorce, and the inheritance of illegitimate children (O’Croinin, 1995, p. 132-33). The contact zone that existed was one of integration and exchange, to an extent: Christian and pre-Christian practice adapted to one another, as demonstrated in certain elements of rhetorical practice including the conversion of Ireland itself (Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch, p. 239), and the adaptation of certain pre-Christian principles into the early Irish church itself.

Damian Baca (2008) builds on Pratt's contact zone, connecting it to the concept of la Frontera—borderland—articulated by Anzaldua (2012): “overlapping and converging disparate worldviews effectively subverts the linear configuration of conversion and assimilation. By inventing from Anzaldua's conceptual borderlands, we are no longer obliged to compose under the hierarchical construct of Eurocentric designs” (Baca, 2008, p. 130). Baca refers to the hegemonic influence of European rhetorics on the study and teaching of rhetoric itself, which form a major part of the narrative framework through which history and rhetoric alike have been traditionally analyzed. That hegemonic Eurocentric framework is problematic because it can lead to a universalizing impulse that inhibits more than it illuminates. For example, in his discussion on the rhetoric of borderlands, Baca critiques this tendency towards this universalizing, polarizing rhetorical history:

“as a largely unquestioned point of departure, the dominant narrative 'from ancient Greece to modern America' advances myopic assumptions about both the nature of writing and those civilizations that collectively maintain the longest cumulative histories of writing and writing instruction in North America. Even while writing specialists imagine their ethos around a diversity of inclusive theories, the harmfully narrow, racially coded East-to-West narrative endures as an overhanging determinant of the study of written language” (p. 121).

In his “Rethinking Composition: 500 Years Later” Baca (2009) argues that the nature of the Eurocentric rhetorical narrative he articulates above is rooted in the Otherizing principles of colonialist logic: the world is divided into the “center” and the “fringe,” with the center represented as the privileged European narrative, and the fringe includes those less-privileged narratives native to the lands colonized by Europeans (p. 230-231). He writes of a “global turn,” which he places not in the conventionally accepted twentieth century, but in 1492, when Columbus made contact with the Americas and began Spain’s colonial enterprises in the New World. Baca asserts that the European conquest of the Americas began the process of Western globalization, and in his words, “it was this centuries-long imperial era that laid the groundwork for today's global economy. Thus, rather than restrict our comprehension of globalization to contemporary global capitalism, rather than restrict our comprehension to the present, I argue that globalization is best understood as a five-hundred year process” (p. 231). I am skeptical of his claims that it was the European conquest of the Americas that created a new “global economy” since large-scale “global” economic activities were the focus of polities for centuries, if not millennia, both within and without Europe: the Venetians and the Genoese, the Roman Empire in all its various incarnations, the various Chinese kingdoms/empires, the Mongolian khanates, the Ottomans, the Sassanids, the Carthaginians, and so on. That quibble notwithstanding, he approaches the various literacies and composing practices of Mesoamerican
peoples from a perspective I find quite intriguing, and wholly applicable to the context of medieval Ireland.

That approach looks to challenge “the enduring East-to-West Eurocentric global unconscious” (p. 238) by studying those elements of Mesoamerican literacy that are not cognate with western forms of the written word, but instead include pictographs, stone-carvings, and other literate forms. In doing so, Baca hopes to illuminate the complex rhetorics and written discursive practices of Mesoamerican peoples from within their own context, rather than gazing at them as “fringe” literacies relative to the centralized western forms. Though Baca speaks in relation to Mesoamerican cultures, much of what he says applies in an Irish historical context as well: myopic assumptions about the nature of writing and rhetoric have led generations of scholars, beyond those invested in Irish and/or Celtic Studies, to dismiss Irish writing as primitive, biased, and untrustworthy. Or, rather more often, to ignore the corpus of Irish texts, Latin and vernacular alike, in favor of texts more closely linked to the dominant “East-to-West” narrative. George Kennedy's *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern times* (1999) makes no mention of the Irish; nor does James Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (1974); nor does the island figure into the works of grammar and rhetoric collected by Copeland and Sluiter (2009) in their anthology *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*.

In explaining this gap, the “central-periphery” model remains useful: Ireland is often termed a “fringe” nation (indeed, the term “Celtic fringe” is not uncommon in historiographical accounts, often referring to Wales and the Gaelic-speaking portions of Scotland as well) relative to the “centered” nations of England, France, Italy, and so on. The rhetorical practices of the classical tradition, or even those rhetorical practices considered unique to the Middle Ages—such as the *ars dictaminis*—are privileged and centered, while the potential for rhetorical traditions outside of those are typically left unexplored, or considered only in terms relative to the “central-periphery” model. Therefore, a rhetorical analysis of medieval Ireland must rely on similar principles to one of Mesoamerican peoples, both pre-and-post-Columbus: rhetoric cannot be viewed primarily through the lens of the privileged Greco-Roman (or Anglocentric) tradition, though it may (and does, as previously mentioned) apply at times. Instead, new places for rhetoric must be evaluated: for the Mesoamerican peoples, this would their codices, engravings, and pictographs (among others.) For the medieval Irish, this would be their poetry, their histories, their genealogies, and their literary narratives.

Perhaps this disregard stems from the difficulty of integrating medieval Ireland with any single rhetorical and historical narrative. Early medieval Ireland exemplified Pratt's contact zone, and Anzaldua/Baca's borderland. Contact and integration occurred between the pagan native Irish culture, and the Romano-British Christian culture introduced by missionaries such as the famed Patrick, and his lesser-known antecedent, the Bishop Palladius; yet, that Christian culture itself was a contact zone between late Roman rhetorical/pedagogical theory, and anti-pagan (therefore anti-anything-not-written-by-Christians, including the whole of Greco-Roman rhetoric) sentiments, which necessitated the Christianization of rhetorical philosophy among its adherents. Moreover, Ireland itself boasted a thriving vernacular culture prior to the arrival of Christianity, that boasted its own brand of literacy (ogam), and possessed its own strident form of authority. Ireland took to Christianity at a startling pace, and soon became a center for
Christian learning and language; yet, it did not abandon its own distinct cultural methods of learning and language, which were rooted in orality, and yet embraced literacy.

Early medieval Irish rhetoric synthesized these Christian and secular traditions, leading to a view of language as fundamentally rhetorical: something that created knowledge, and impacted the world as a form of action. The early medieval Irish use of rhetoric, as expressed in their use of poetry, in prose, in legal texts, in genealogies and histories, and in various ecclesiastical contexts, assumed a worldview remarkable in its acknowledgment of the power of language. Just as Baca argued for Mesoamerican rhetorics as a method of resistance against the monolithic, myopic assumptions of Eurocentric historical-rhetorical narratives, so do I argue for early medieval Ireland as a method of resistance against the same narratives. Ireland is counted among the European nations but, as explained above, has found itself consistently marginalized as part of the European “fringe,” and therefore conceptualized in terms similar to Baca's mestiza rhetorics: something “other,” and therefore lesser than the dominant narratives explored by Murphy, Kennedy, and others. Ireland was both part of, and apart from, Europe, and integrated rhetorical traditions founded within the mainstream—the classical and the Christian traditions—within its own unique context. Analysis of this early medieval Irish borderland demonstrates the existence of European narratives other than that typically touted as representative of all of Europe at all times; it therefore critiques the primacy of that Eurocentric narrative while also demonstrating the plurality of traditions within Europe itself.
Chapter 2: “Ní flaith téchtae nád ingella laith ar cach ndomnach” — Status and Hierarchy as Rhetoric in Early Medieval Ireland

In this section, I will continue my literature review by examining the historical context for early medieval Ireland. First, I will examine the structure of early medieval Irish society, which was central to its rhetorical practice in part due to its preoccupation with notions of status and hierarchy. In particular, I will focus on the interlocking hierarchies of the aristocracy, since most (if not all) of the literature surviving from the period was written by and for an aristocratic audience; the aristocracy includes the filid—secular poets with a complex role in society—and the clergy, as well as the secular warrior aristocracy. Moving on from there, I will discuss the role of the Church within medieval Ireland, due to its essential role in the development and propagation of the Irish written culture. I will then conclude by examining medieval Ireland’s place as a rhetorical borderland: one where several competing influences—hierarchy, status, secular interests, religious beliefs, and so on—formed a fertile, vibrant rhetorical landscape.

As mentioned above, early medieval Ireland was a contact zone between at least two traditions of education and rhetoric: the secular tradition, typified by the filid; and the Christian tradition, descended from classical Greco-Roman rhetoric and practice, and redefined within the new contexts of use defined by the rise of Christianity. In the interest of understanding early medieval Irish rhetoric, and its continuing relevance to modern rhetorical inquiry, one must first understand the history of contact between these traditions, their separate features, their common features, and the ways in which those distinctions and commonalities shifted over the time period covered in this paper. Several books could be, and have been, written on the subject of early medieval Irish culture, its introduction to Christianity, and the various competing theories of how said Christianization occurred, what effect it had upon the culture of the Irish, and how that affects the historical record. In the interests of time, I will first provide a brief summary of early medieval Irish society, the place of language within that society, and the position of those who principally used language, ecclesiastic and secular alike.

Early medieval Irish society was, in the words of esteemed historian of early medieval historian Donnchadh O’Corrain (1972), “heavily stratified” (p. 42). Stratification ran along horizontal, as well as vertical lines: with each tier of society, there existed grades and subgrades, often organized along professional lines: i.e. one’s position in the hierarchy was determined in part by one’s profession, with warriors/nobles (effectively synonymous, in many ways) occupying one tier, the clergy occupying another, the filid yet another, and so on. This gradated society was quite complex, and evolved over time. However, a few basic principles apply to the period of early medieval Ireland. O’Corrain provides a succinct description of these principles: “in classical Irish law, society is divided into three grades, kings, lords and commons. The distinction between the latter was not watertight, and upward and (more often) downward social mobility was possible between the lower grades of nobles and the upper grades of commoners” (p. 42). The aristocracy, including kings, were defined in part by possession of clients—though, genealogical identity was also a major facet of aristocratic, and kingly, status—and commoners were therefore defined by the absence of significant clientage (p. 42-43).

Early medieval Irish society, and the literature it produced, was intensely aristocratic, and when analyzing these texts from a rhetorical standpoint, the positionality of the writers (and their
intended audience) must always be considered. A major source (sources, really) for early Irish society is the legal literature penned by both churchmen and *breitheamh* (a secular legal scholar or jurist, often anglicized as “brehon”) in the seventh-eleventh centuries. In one of the larger legal tracts, the *Senchas Mar*, the text’s introduction includes an expression of horror regarding the very thought of an egalitarian society (Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 124). In the *Triads of Ireland* (trans. Meyer, 1906), a sort of common “wisdom literature” with legalistic overtones structured around groups of three unlike things clustered together for the purpose of stating a “truth,” this aristocratic disdain for the commoner was also apparent: “Three that are not entitled to renunciation of authority: a son and his father, a wife and her husband, a serf and his lord” (para. 160), “Three contracts that are reversed by the decision of a judge: the contracts of a woman, of a son, of a cottar” (para. 150), “Three oaths that do not require fulfilment: the oath of a woman in birth-pangs, the oath of a dead man, the oath of a landless man” (para. 165). Even in this sort of pithy wisdom literature, which must have been in some way familiar to those beyond the learned classes in the fashion of idioms or proverbs, demonstrates an aristocratic worldview hostile to the lower classes. A commoner (though, it must be noted, a certain grade of commoner, since not all were considered serfs, cottars, or landless men, all of whom were on the lower end of the hierarchal spectrum) was used as an example of the sort of person whose contract may be reversed, whose authority may be reversed, and whose oath need not be fulfilled. These sayings carry with them both the weight of realized legal authority—contracts and oaths were integral to the social fabric of early Ireland (O’Corrain, 1972, p. 43-44)—and the sting of rhetorical scorn. By declaring the low commoner a person without authority, with whom no contract or oath must be fulfilled, the authors of this text communicate the general worthlessness of the commoner: they are, in essence, non-persons compared to both higher commoners and their lords. Without the binding power of oaths or contracts, low commoners must rely on the good graces of the nobility for protection, both legal and physical. These texts argue for the very hierarchy they replicate, and replicate the very hierarchy for which they argue.

The aristocratic-commoner relationship formed one hierarchy of early Irish society, and it was a vertical one, defined by the aristocracy at the top, and the commoners below. The other prominent hierarchies were those of the learned classes, or the *aes dana*, the “men of art/skill” (Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 125). The *aes dana* were divided into three, legally separate, hierarchies: specialized artisans and craftsmen such as blacksmiths and carpenters formed one hierarchy, the *filid* (perhaps loosely, and unsatisfactorily, translated as “poet”) of the native rhetorical tradition formed another, and the clerics of the ecclesiastic tradition formed the final. These all constituted their own separate hierarchies, with the most skilled artisans, the most learned poets, and the most powerful clerics at the head of their respective strata. Social mobility was possible, upward as well as downward, in all three of these hierarchies, since social status was defined in part based on malleable conditions: a commoner who acquires training as a poet, for example, enters the privileged social class of *fili*, and a commoner who becomes wealthy enough to gain clients of his own becomes a noble. Conversely, a noble who no longer possesses clients becomes a commoner, and a *fili* who does not practice poetry is deprived of his privileged status.

However, social status was also linked to genealogical bloodline: the basis of Irish law at the time in this respect was a concept called the *derbfine*, which was the basic family unit consisting of a man, and his descendants, up to the fourth generation; i.e., his great-grandsons
(Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 86-87). It was possible to “fall off” a genealogy, if one's descent strayed too far from the main lineage: if your great-grandfather had not been a noble member of the lineage, than you could not be considered part of it. D. Blair Gibson (2012) argues that the Irish social system was preoccupied with the maintenance of social status: “as cadet lineages branch off of the main line of descent, and as further branching takes place off of these lineages, the ranking of individuals within these cadet lineages becomes correspondingly lower” (p. 7). One of the major tensions in early medieval Irish society was this potential loss of status, which was an ever-present threat to members of the aristocracy.

The relevance this bears to early medieval Irish rhetoric stems from the methods by which the Irish aristocracy avoided this loss of status. Charles-Edwards argues that “the early Irish aristocracy had a crucial problem, how to avoid social descent; and it therefore sought to multiply ways in which it could avoid degradation” (p. 74). This involved horizontal changes of social status: nobility to clergy, nobility to *fili*, and vice versa. These three classes were all roughly analogous in their social standing, as defined by their honor-price, or *eraitic*, which was one of the standard medieval Irish legal indicators of status (analogous to the Anglo-Saxon *wergild* and other similar legal practices present throughout early medieval Europe): the price a person's life was worth, and which must be paid to their family upon their death if said death was caused by another person. The law tract *Uraicecht Becc* states that the highest grade of poet possessed an honor-price roughly equivalent to the highest grade of nobility, and the lowest grade of king; the highest grade of clergyman possessed an honor-price identical to that of the highest king (Charles-Edwards, 2000, 131-32). In order to prevent loss of status, the cadet lineages of aristocratic families would often seek poetic and/or clerical training: “high-ranking families were, therefore, anxious to place their members in positions of prestige, competition for such positions made the whole business uncertain, and hence learning was of direct social and political concern to the aristocracy, including ruling lineages” (Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 74). The ranks of the poets and clergy were often filled by the cadet lineages of the aristocracy, who then created new identities for themselves as poets or clergy, but remained bound by social and political ties to the aristocratic lineages in which they originated.

I will focus now for a moment on the *filiid*. Just as classicists study the sophists and orators of the Greco-Roman world, and sinologists study the work of sages and educators in ancient China, so must I study their cognates in medieval Ireland: the *filiid*, or bards. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (2013), a noted scholar of early Irish literature and culture, describes them thus: “we may begin with the *fili* (pl. *filid*), who was at once a man of letters and a professional academic. The conventional English translation is “poet,” but this word, as we understand it today, is a poor enough equivalent of the Irish” (p. 124). These men were the primary rhetoricians of early medieval Ireland: their work was produced and consumed within the polity, the *tuath* (loosely translatable as “tribe” or perhaps “small kingdom/lordship”), where they exerted enormous social influence. Their work combined orality and literacy (p. 124-25), and they created works of artistic literature alongside creating and maintaining the vast quantity of legal texts that survive to this day. As Ó Cathasaigh notes, “the *fili* had a legally recognized status and role in early Irish society. He was credited with supernatural wisdom and had at his disposal two powerful instruments in the form of satire and eulogy. He was expected to be competent in the law [...] the *filiid* had an important role in the transmission and teaching of customary law” (p. 124). The
majority of works extant in the medieval Irish literary corpus stem from the work of the filid, often in conjunction with the work of Christian scholars, typically monks.

The academic consensus in the past was that the picture painted above, of the filid and their vaunted position in early Irish society, was an anachronism born out of the intentional archaism of many early Irish texts. D.A. Binchy (1943), a seminal scholar of Irish studies in general and early medieval legal literature in particular, sums up this orthodoxy: “the conservatism which philologists have often noted as a feature of the Irish language is paralleled in Irish law...Indeed, the writings of the Irish jurists are something more than a faithful record of the customs of the conquering Goidelic tribes: they also furnish detailed information about certain legal institutions which are but dimly reflect in the most ancient records” (p. 21). The implication being that certain features of the medieval Irish legal system recall a conscious desire for archaicism among the secular filid, which further divides the “native” traditions of Irish writing from the newer, Christianized learning.

Ó Cathasaigh points out that this orthodoxy no longer predominates the field, and has been challenged in recent years: “recent research on the laws, however, has revealed the extent to which the laws are imbued with Christian teaching, and the emphasis has shifted away from the remote origins of the law […] there has been a growing consensus that the learned establishment of early Ireland comprised ecclesiastical and lay scholars and men of letters working together” (p. 123). Recent scholarship, as Ó Cathasaigh suggests, favors a picture of Ireland emphasizing the correlations and connections between the Christian and the secular, rather than one that leans on their differences (Charles-Edwards, 2000, O’Croinin, 1995).

Therefore, the context in which early medieval Irish rhetoric developed was one where literacy and rhetoric were bound to the conservation of social and political status among the aristocracy: the main purposes of Irish rhetoric outlined in this paper, including the instruction of young aristocratic men for public life, the maintenance of a specific cultural and/or genealogical identity, and the use of rhetoric as persuasive tool, all connect to this fusion of aristocratic identity with literacy. It also helps explain the cultural and historical background for Ireland's position as a contact zone. If the Irish clergy, fili, and secular nobility all formed various interlocking hierarchies of aristocracy, then fertile ground existed for the integration of various identities that might other have been at odds with one another. Richter (1999) argues that “Christianity in Ireland had been successfully 'localized'. According to this position, Christianity had been absorbed into Irish society while leaving much of its basic fabric unaffected” (p. 30). For evidence of this interpretation, I follow in the footsteps of Richter, Charles-Edwards, O'Croinin, and others, in examining early Irish Christians, how they examined their pagan past, and integrated into their written works.

Christian Past and Pagan Present as Rhetorical Borderland

Early Irish Christians accepted, and even embraced, their pre-Christian heritage, rather than rejecting it as was common in other parts of early medieval Europe. Rejection of pre-Christian rhetoric and philosophy was a documented trend in the early medieval era, as James Murphy (1974) points out here:
“Lactantius speaks of pagan literature as 'sweets which contain poison' [...] Justin warns against undue veneration of words (i.e., literature) which are not from God [...] Tertullian directs an attack against Greek philosophy and other pagan writings [...] ‘What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?’” (p. 49)

Such viewpoints indicated a tendency towards binary views of the Christian present and the pagan past: one is good, the other bad, and never the twain shall meet. Overall, there were exceptions to that binary, as exemplified by Augustine of Hippo’s advocacy of classical rhetoric for religious instruction and teaching (Murphy, 1974); however, the trend toward distance from the pagan past in favor of an idealized Christian present (or future) was dominant. In Ireland however, this separation of Christian present and pagan past was largely absent. The pre-Christian histories and traditions of their own culture were venerated, and indeed this veneration constitutes a highly visible example of “borderland” in early medieval Ireland. Irish society placed great stock on tradition and history, which were seen as important signifiers of meaning: histories, and historical precedent, were seen as some of the primary determinants of value in early Irish society. Indeed, historical precedent was of such rhetorical significance to early Irish scholars that conscious efforts were taken by them to give their work the weight of history in order to “legitimize all change by giving it the sanction of immemorial custom and who ruthlessly reshaped the past to justify the present” (O’Corrain, 1978). History, therefore, was a space for the invention of identity in the present by justifying it in the (rewritten) past. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the legal tracts of early Ireland, which constitute a large and indispensable portion of the historical record. These tracts, which define the social fabric of the period—albeit, in an idealized format—are rhetorical works in that, as O’Corrain notes, they use the pretension toward “immemorial custom” as an argument for the validity of the society for which they argue. Oftentimes, they do this by presenting a certain custom as resultant from the work of a prominent historical figure, or several such figures.

It is in that capacity that the early medieval law tracts exhibit the attributes of a borderland rhetoric, in which the Christian and pre-Christian traditions of Ireland are made one through reference to historical figures of authority within the secular and the religious realms, thereby arguing for the validity of both Christian and pre-Christian practices coexisting alongside one another. For example, Richter (1999) provides the following quote from law tract Corus Bescnai, dated to the early eight century

“Dubthach moccu Lugair the fili declared the judgments of the men of Ireland [which had been given] in accordance with the law of nature and the law of the seers; for [divine] inspiration had ruled the jurisprudence of the men of Ireland and their filid. There are many things covered in the law of nature which the law of the letter did not reach. Dubthach expounded [these] to Patrick. What did not conflict with the word of God in the law of the letter and with the conscience of the faithful has been fastened in the canon of the judges by the Church (clerics) and the filid. The whole of the law of nature was right save for the faith and the harmony of Church and tuath” (p. 33-34).
Dubthach is a famous poet and judge of Irish history, who here is paired with Saint Patrick, himself a figure of veneration and devotion. A meeting between the two is almost certainly ahistorical, and indeed the literal historicity of the account is not relevant: rather, both men represent certain aspects of the Irish identity. Dubthach, as a member of the poetic class with roots in pagan Ireland, represents the secular tradition, while Patrick of course represents Christianity. The two are figures of authority, and heroic exemplars of their own traditions in a culture that exalted individual heroes. By placing these two together, and having them agree, the law tract performs a rhetorical function: it argues the secular law and the Christian law are neither totally separate, nor totally integrated, but rather the secular law (and therefore, the pre-Christian elements of Irish identity and society enshrined in that law) is endorsed and validated by the Christian elements. That endorsement and validation is rhetorical in that it argues for the integration of Christian and pre-Christian identities: that which came before Christianity is not invalidated now that Christianity is the norm. The pagan past is privileged in that it bears the weight of tradition, and indeed the virtue of practice as well; at the same time, the Christian present is privileged in that its presence is “read back” into pagan past in order to validate that past for the current Irish who identify as Christians. In that sense, they mirror the viewpoints of mainstream Europeans, such as the aforementioned Lactantius and Tertullian: that which is wholly pagan is inimical to good, Christian people. However, rather than cast off their pagan past, the Irish rewrite it: their past, while pagan, was divinely inspired by the Christian god, and therefore constitutes a valid tradition for those in the Christian present to follow.

Other methods of reconciliation between Christian present and pagan past were evident in early medieval Ireland as well. Irish law was often written in ritualized forms of verse and prose (O'Croinin, 1995, p. 124); composing in these formal styles was considered indicative of poetic learning and talent, and texts written in this manner were considered to represent the “immemorial custom” described by O'Corrain above. However, as the above example from Corus Bescnai demonstrates, legal texts were themselves sites of cultural exchange between the secular tradition and Christian present. This exchange was rhetorical in that it constructed an integrated identity between the pagan past and Christian present, including the appropriation of traditional verse and prose forms for purposes other than the recording of secular legal tradition. O'Croinin cites the following example:

in the one striking instance where it has been demonstrated that a supposedly archaic law text in the vernacular was, in fact, derived directly from a Latin original (in the Irish collection of canon law), commentators have not explained why the Latin text was translated in the first place, and why the archaic rhythmic prose patterns of the oldest Fenechas-type laws were imitated in that translation. The answer is, surely, that for law to be accepted as venerable it must (p. 124).

By adopting traditional methods of literary composition, as well as composing in the vernacular rather than Latin, the document O'Croinin discusses again functions as a rhetorical exercise in the invention of history and identity. Composition in that specific format alongside a translation in Irish lends the newer Latin text the appearance and authority of secular tradition.
The use of history as a rhetorical borderland for the reconciliation of Christian present with pagan past was also expressed in relation to an early sort of “national” Irish identity, which was rooted in Irish concepts of genealogical identity. Genealogy was linked to identity, both social and political, and so genealogies were another space in which the illusion of immemorial custom was maintained. However, historians such as David Thornton have noted that many of these genealogies were not the product of ancient tradition, but rather served as spaces of identity that were continually composed and revised in the Christian era (Thornton, 1998, p. 83). These compositions and revisions of identity within the genealogies again utilized the historical realm as a space for the fusion of a Christian present with the trappings and authority of a pre-Christian past; they also served to situate the Irish as a nationality in relation to other nationalities of the time. Thornton says that Christianity “brought with it a whole series of biblical, Classical, and patristic teachings concerning the origins of peoples. Any self-respecting Christian people would naturally seek to find their particular niche within the overall scheme” (p. 94), and then points out cognates in Welsh genealogies, and in the Frankish “Table of Nations” (p. 95). Irish genealogies, and the identities dependent upon those genealogies, were rewritten to include descent of the entire Irish people all the way back to the biblical Noah; a rhetorical move meant to integrate the biblical traditions of Christianity, and therefore a unitary Christian identity, with the secular Irish genealogical tradition.

Furthermore, the fusion of Christian and pagan traditions argued for the status of the Irish as a natio on par with the Franks, Saxons, Lombards, and other significant power-cultures of early medieval Europe. Donnchadh O’Corrain (1978) argues that “behind this self-conscious antiquarianism is the doctrine that all the people of Ireland derive from one common source (however far removed) and form one natio. As the Franks, the Saxons, the Lombards, the Goths, the Greeks are nationes, so also are the Irish.” Invoking this sense of natio was achieved through the above rhetorical invention of identity through the composition and revision of genealogical history. The Irish were first all linked through genealogical descent to one common group of ancestors—the sons of Mil—and then from that common group of ancestors, they were linked to the biblical genealogies, all the way back to the patriarch Noah; the pre-Christian origins of the Irish are again validated by connection to Christianity, and the Christian tradition is validated by its inclusion in the ancient customs and genealogies of the Irish.

These example leads to a threefold conclusion: authority in early medieval Irish contexts is linked to the weight of history, typified by the respect afforded to certain literary formats associated with archaic legal tradition; the secular tradition carries enough authority that linking it to the newer, Christian identity transfers that authority in some respect by “altering” the secular tradition to include Christian aspects; bearing the above in mind, history becomes a malleable space for rhetorical invention in early medieval Ireland, and that invention often took the place of integrating the pagan past within the Christian present, or vice versa. History, genealogy, and identity were all interlocking rhetorical spaces in early medieval Ireland, and early Irish writers approached them as spaces in which to reconcile the potentially disparate and conflicting Christian and pre-Christian traditions. Therefore, early medieval Ireland formed a rhetorical borderland wherein differing rhetorical traditions and cultural practices were consciously integrated into one another through processes of deliberate rhetorical composition and invention that privileged both Christian and secular practice.
Chapter 3: Log n-ench — Honor and Aristocratic Morality as Rhetoric

In this section, I will discuss one of the central rhetorical themes in early medieval Irish literature: the notions of honor and morality. As will be discussed, honor and morality were complex subjects in early medieval Ireland, and while the surviving literature was penned for an aristocratic audience, that audience did not subscribe to one definition of honor/morality, but rather dealt with several semi-competing definitions. First I will examine some historical scholarship by noted scholars in that field, which will establish the basis for the terms I use in this analysis. Then, I will analyze two primary texts that concern themselves with notions of honor and morality: the Audacht Morainn, and Togail Bruidne Da Derga. Audacht Morainn is an explicitly rhetorical text: a “testament” or admonition addressed from a poet to his king, wherein he advises the king on how said ruler should act so that his people prosper. Togail Bruidne Da Derga is a narrative text depicting the rise and fall of a king, whose actions both conform and deviate from what was considered “honorable,” and so his fortunes (and those of his people) are suitably mixed. Recalling the rhetorical methodology I explored in my first chapter, and in particular building on the work of Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch, I will argue that honor and morality were essential topics of rhetorical discourse in early medieval Ireland, and that these two primary texts, when analyzed alongside one another, demonstrate a deliberately rhetorical method of discussing honor and morality within the context of one’s duty to the tuath.

Status, hierarchy and power in medieval Ireland were all closely linked, yet in some ways, separate from one another. Charles-Edwards (2000) connects status to the concept of “face,” or honor, log n-ench in Old Irish, which was itself connected to the proper and moral actions linked to a particular social grade or class (p. 136). To maintain one’s status in early medieval Ireland, one must act as was honorable for one’s station: naturally, since different social grades possessed different definitions of honorable, there was no one set definition of honor in early medieval Ireland, but rather several competing codes which acted dependent on one’s station within society. A boaire, the archetypal independent farmer of early medieval Ireland, for example, might act so that he be reckoned a trebar, which translates as “a good farmer and head of household” (Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 137). However, the actions that lead others to reckon a boaire as honorable would be wholly inappropriate for a ri tuath, the king of a small chieftd; similarly, the actions that lead a ri tuath towards honor are not appropriate for a sapiente, a church scholar, and so on.

Of course, when one considers that the bulk of surviving Irish literature from the period was aimed at, and produced by, members of the aristocracy, a certain commonality emerges. Churchmen, nobles, and filid all generally sprang from the same aristocratic class, and yet, their purposes in society did diverge somewhat. This led to what Charles-Edwards (2000) terms a “continuous half-explicit moral debate among the different orders of society. They might all, for the most part, speak the same moral language, but the values which they especially admired was likely to be different” (p. 137-138). There was even a particular genre of early Irish literature that was an explicit rhetorical space for this moral debate: the admonitio or, in Irish, the tecosc (p. 139). In this genre, which translates as either an “admonition” or an “instruction,” the author addresses another individual, typically one with a good deal of authority and power in their given societal sphere—e.g. a king, or a bishop or some other similarly significant person—and instructs them on what is right and proper for their station. This admonition/instruction need not
be antagonistic, though it sometimes is that as well, and it need not even come from within the same section of society; i.e., a *fili* may instruct a king, or a monk a *fili*, and so forth. Some are quite specific in their intent, addressed by one individual to another. Others are more generalized in their approach, perhaps even couched in mythological or fictional archetype, and address wider issues within society.

One prominent example of the latter in this genre is the *Audacht Morainn*, wherein a *fili* addresses a king and instructs him on the proper, honorable conduct of a king within the context of early medieval Ireland. The text at first appears to be an address between two specific individuals: the eponymous Morann, a *fili*, and the king Feradach Find Fechnach. However, these were not real people but rather fictional archetypes from the mythological cycles of early medieval Ireland: the king Feradach was purported to have lived hundreds of years before the Irish were Christianized, or indeed, before they were literate in the conventional Western sense. His mythological nature, and the symbolism behind it, becomes central to the rhetorical nature of the *Audacht* itself. Recalling Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch (2007), who noted the rhetorical value of the mythological cycles in early Ireland—“we see how Irish myths and legends employed the recurring repetition of common narrative patterns that would have been ingrained in the psyche of Irish audiences” (p. 2)—I will examine this poem has an “intimate” form of civic rhetoric, employed “not to persuade large urban audiences but rather to build a sense of identification that would have appealed to individuals and small groups” (p. 2), which in this case would have been the king of a *tuath* and his fellow noblemen.

The *Audacht* is a poem with a short prose introduction. This prose introduction sets the “rhetorical stage,” as it were, for the poem:

Here begins the Testament of Morann son of Moen to Feradach Find Fechnach son of Craumthann Nia Nar. He was the son of the daughter of Loth son of Derelath of the Picts. His mother brought him away in her womb after the vassal tribes had destroyed the nobles of Ireland except for Feradach in his mother's womb. He came over afterwards with hosts and Morann sent this Testament to him.

Feradach was the last member of the aristocracy of Ireland, whom had been slain during the revolt of their *aithchuatha*, the “vassal-peoples,” whom comprised the less-privileged social classes. This revolt violated the sanctity of the social order within Ireland, and Feradach corrects it with his “hosts,” a term synonymous with “armies,” or perhaps more appropriately, “warbands.” This historical component is important in and of itself: Feradach was a mythological king, meant to have ruled centuries before the Christianization of Ireland. Therefore, he ruled centuries before the arrival of the Roman alphabet and conventional written texts. Feradach himself, and Morann for that matter, are pre-historic characters. Their use within this text, however, and its historical positionality, was a calculated rhetorical tactic. The weight of history was itself rhetorically significant in early medieval Ireland, due to its connection with tradition and genealogy: the laws and traditions of Ireland derived their authority in part from their age. The *Audacht*, though written for a contemporary aristocratic audience, was couched in this mythological age in order to give it rhetorical authority. Had it been written in a contemporary setting, with kings and *fílid* from the ninth-century, then the text would have lacked the weight of
tradition, and therefore lacked rhetorical impact. The use of a past-historical setting as a place for rhetorical meaning-making constitutes a consistent theme within early medieval Irish rhetoric, and indeed, medieval Irish writing as a whole (O’Corrain, 1978, Thornton, 1998).

Morann recites his testament, the eponymous audacht, to instruct Feradach on the vagaries of kingship, and Feradach’s duties as king over his people. The implication here, though never explicitly stated, is that Morann seeks to instruct Feradach in such a way that he avoids the mistakes of his predecessors, whom let their aithechtuatha grow over-mighty, thereby leading to the destruction of the social order. This text therefore becomes a sort of “civic” rhetoric, perhaps even analogous in some fashion to the Late Roman practice of parrhesia: speaking truth to power. Morann, a fíli, instructs Feradach, a ri, on the proper and honorable methods of ruling. Thought the text does not outright rebuke Feradach—indeed, it praises him at every turn—it focuses on an instructive rhetoric meant for an audience of contemporary nobles/kings, and encourages a certain ideal of just kingship while rebuking the king who abuses his power, and commits violence against his people. Here again the historical setting of the text becomes rhetorically significant: Feradach becomes king in an age when the “natural” order of things has been upset, and he does so through use of force. In that sense, he is the archetypal “king-as-warrior.” However, as shall be seen, the text itself does not necessarily argue for the “king-as-warrior” as the end-all, be-all of kingship, but rather argues for a more nuanced approach to governing. The poem itself embodies a few rhetorical characteristics: continuous use of parallelism, a reliance upon metaphorical imagery, and a focus upon reciprocity.

Interestingly enough, the poem itself begins on a self-reflexive note, alluding to its contemporary audience while still maintaining the mythological setting: “Fair [and] lasting / My words before my death / Bring him the virtue of rectitude / Which each ruler must have / If you go past every [other] king / I measure them for the protection of my kin.” Morann, addressing his apprentice Neire, instructs him to deliver the audacht to Feradach; however, if he passes any other king, they too should heed the same advice since they are measured “for the protection of my kin.” The kin Morann speaks of are the people of Ireland themselves: the mythological cycle of Irish literature revolves in part around the genesis of the Irish people, whom are all conceptualized as descendants of a particular man, Mil Espaine, whose name means “The Warrior from Spain,” and therefore all the people of Ireland are, according to this mythology, kin. The text therefore argues for its own universality, at least within the context of early medieval Ireland. It is not merely meant for one tuath, or one group of tuatha, but instead applies to all kings upon the island. Furthermore, the kings that Neire may pass by are none other than the audience: those people listening as the poem passes them by. And indeed, the text hints at the role these kings ideally take: the guardian of their people. In this way, the text signals to the audience that they are in a rhetorical moment, and should expect to hear something of import.

It is the king’s role as protector of his tuath that Morann focuses the majority of his testament upon. However, he does not begin his advice by assuming the king possesses a place of absolute authority. The king’s role, in other words, is not that of some righteous paladin warding his defenseless charges. Rather, Morann begins his advice with a series of parallel statements explaining the reciprocal nature of the king’s relationship with his people: “Let him preserve Truth, it shall preserve him / Let him raise truth, it will raise him. / Let him exalt mercy, it exalteth him / Let him care for his tribes, they will care for him / Let him help his tribes, they
will help him / Let him soothe his tribes, they will soothe him.” The view of kingship presented here is not one of absolute monarchy, or even despotic autocracy. Instead, Morann argues for a king who works alongside people rather than dictates to them. The duty of the king lies in helping and protecting his people, and contrary to the militant imagery of the idealized warrior-king, the first advice given to Feradach focuses on almost-parental imagery: the king exalts mercy, the king cares, helps, soothes. And in return, he is cared for, he is helped, he is soothed. The tribe, the *tuath*, does not exist solely as an extension of the king—Louis XIV’s thunderous (and apocryphal) declamation, “I am the State,” need not apply—and yet, neither is the king a servant of the public in the modern, democratic sense. A social contract, of sorts, is established: the king and the *tuath* are symbiotes. One cannot exist without the other, and so their relationship must be predicated upon mutual trust and care.

Also worth noting in the above passage are the stylistic tendencies: the parallelism in the series of descriptors denotes a conscious attention to detail in that the poet structures his argument in a manner that suggests reciprocity. Each line follows the same parallel structure: a clause—“Let him care for his tribes”—followed by its inverse—“they will care for him.” The continuous parallel structure emphasizes the poet’s argument: an honorable king cares for his people, and is in turn cared for by them. Moreover, it mirrors the poet’s argument through the text itself: the lines themselves are formed from two clauses dependent upon each other for meaning. Or rather, their meaning is undoubtedly enhanced by their pairing.

The next few lines elaborate on the king’s position relative to his *tuath* through a series of metaphors regarding the king’s virtue as a ruler, and the prosperity of the very land itself upon which his people live:

- It is through the truth of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted.
- It is through the truth of the ruler that milk-yields of great cattle are maintained.
- It is through the truth of the ruler that there is abundance of every high, tall corn
- It is through the truth of the ruler that abundance of fish swim in streams.
- It is through the truth of the ruler that fair children are well begotten.

The text could be taken literally, in the sense that kings in medieval Irish literature often possess supernatural abilities and power and one might interpret this passage as simply replicating those tropes. However, when viewed alongside the earlier rhetoric of reciprocity, a different interpretation becomes plausible. Drawing on the king-as-protector motif, the text again stresses the interdependencies inherent to kingship and governing. The king’s decisions affect the whole of his people, and their prosperity depends upon his actions. A “true” king brings prosperity by acknowledging the reciprocal nature of lordship and engaging in practices worthy of a king, hence the metaphorical representations of bucolic favor: corn grown, cattle fattened, streams and oak-trees yielding their respective harvests (oak-mast, or acorns, were a traditionally important food staple in early medieval Ireland). A king’s wise rule allows his subjects the time and energy to reap these rewards, and so justifies the king’s contribution to the social contract. And implied within this contribution is its inverse: an unwise king deprives his people of the above.
The use of metaphor is continued in the next stanza, where the poet compares an honorable king to an old chariot-driver: “Let him observe the driver of an old chariot. / For the driver of an old wheel rim does not sleep / He looks ahead, he looks behind, in front and to the right and to the left. / He looks, he defends, he protects, so that he may not break with neglect or violence the wheel-rims which run under him.” The imagery employed is of particular rhetorical significance. The chariot was symbolic of the aristocratic young warrior in early medieval Ireland, and this symbolism continued far past the physical abandonment of the chariot as a weapon of war. Indeed, the word for chariot in Irish—carpat—was itself often used as in commonly-used symbolic metaphors for aristocratic warriors: the phrase carpat ar imram, or “a wandering chariot,” for example, was a phrase denoting a nobleman with neither king or tribe (Simms, 1996, p. 100), who acts as a mercenary by ranging from tuath to tuath. The use of the chariot imagery serves two rhetorical purposes. On one hand, it again grounds the poem in the mythical past of Ireland: the chariot was no longer in use by the time this text was written down, and yet the medieval Irish retained a sense of historicity which they valued in the rhetorical sense: that which was older, more grounded in tradition and history, was more persuasive. The aristocratic audience of the Audacht Morainn most likely rode on horseback to battle, and then fought as infantry; the chariot itself would have been a foreign instrument to them. And yet, the chariot remained a part of the aristocratic warrior’s identity, a symbol of the heroic past where larger-than-life figures such as Cuchulainn, Fergus Mac Roich, and Feradach Find fought atop chariots. So through use of this imagery, the poet appeals to the warrior culture in which his audience exists, and also emphasizes the rhetorical nature of history in early medieval Ireland: the past was continuously used, and refashioned, to convey meaning in the present.

However, the metaphor employed by this poet does not focus on the chariot-warrior himself, that violent and impetuous young man of whom sagas were penned. Instead, it focuses on the chariot-driver, a much humbler and less violent personage. The chariot-driver as a position in and of itself was generally a lower-class person than the aristocrat he ferried about, though still a generally well-off individual, and also, notably, a non-combatant. This choice of imagery implies an argument: the poet compares the honorable king to the old chariot-driver, who drives with care, rather than the young chariot-warrior, who rushes to battle without fear for life or limb. The metaphor is obvious: a king must not be impetuous, for he is no longer responsible simply for his own life, but for the life of his people. What is appropriate for other aristocrats is not appropriate for him, because his actions affect the entirety of the tuath. In that sense, some of his identity as a warrior is subsumed by this new responsibility to his people.

The final section of the poem is perhaps the most explicit in its rhetorical intentions. The author details the four types of king, and describes their virtues (or lack thereof):

Tell him, there are only four rulers: the true ruler and the wily ruler, the ruler of occupation with hosts, and the bull ruler.

The true ruler, in the first place, is moved towards every good thing, he smiles on the truth when he hears it, he exalts it when he sees it. For he whom the living do not glorify with blessings is not a true ruler.
The wily ruler defends borders and tribes, they yield their valuables and dues to him.

The ruler of occupation with hosts from outside; his forces turn away, they put off his needs, for a prosperous man does not turn outside

The bull ruler strikes [and] is struck, wards off [and] is warded off, roots out [and] is rooted out, pursues [and] is pursued. Against him there is always bellowing with horns.

The “true” ruler is the idealized king portrayed within the text itself, and the wily ruler perhaps serves as his slightly-more-pragmatic reflection. The ruler of occupation and the bull ruler are also idealized, but not as admirable figures. They represent the sort of king the Audacht Morainn argues against: they ignore the reciprocity of their relationship with the tuath and instead do their people harm, either by subjugating them with “hosts from outside”—almost certainly a reference to mercenaries hired by kings and billeted upon the population, a common practice of the time—or through subjecting them to countless wars and raids.

The text even refers to the consequences for such behavior, though in a somewhat oblique fashion: the ruler of occupation has his own “forces turn away,” heedless to his demands, “for a prosperous man does not turn outside.” These forces refer to the mercenary hosts he hired from outside the tuath, and perhaps they also refer to his own tribal vassals, who presumably lose respect for the king once he begins hiring outside mercenaries. The rhetorical message behind this criticism of the ruler of occupation may seem to advocate an insular, almost xenophobic stance, criticizing the ruler for bringing in “outsiders” to his kingdom. However, the text focuses on this kingly archetype’s use of mercenaries, not outsiders in general, and that is significant. Mercenaries in medieval Ireland were a somewhat thorny subject when encountered in the surviving literature: many would have been of the fianna, whom I shall discuss in more detail in conjunction with the analysis of Togail Bruidne Da Derga later in this chapter. Others would have simply been displaced nobility, foreigners, and any number of militant adventurers from within Ireland, and without. Hiring mercenaries was not uncommon, and became more so overtime, as kingly ambitions towards the expansion of their royal power increased, and so larger military forces became necessary. Of course, the hiring of mercenaries could be notable for the strain it placed on the population of a tuath: mercenaries were typically billeted upon the population, meaning they lived in the households of the populace rather than on the lands directly owned by the king himself, and so they needed to be fed (and clothed, and so on) by those people they lived alongside for the duration of their contract with the king. In effect, the Audacht Morainn equates that behavior with violating the reciprocal relationship between king and tuath: billeting mercenaries upon your tribe’s people subjects them to economic hardship (in addition to any other depredations the mercenaries may perform), and also, it indicates a lack of faith in your tuath’s ability to provide warriors for its own defense.

In summary, the poem Audacht Morainn is an example of a deliberate rhetorical discourse within early medieval Ireland. It operates within an established genre—the teosc—and that genre’s purpose was, in part, to provide a space for rhetorical discourse in which members of one hierarchy of status might critique members of another hierarchy of status (in this case, a fili
critiquing a king). The author of *Audacht Morainn* constructs his argument through the consistent use of parallel structure, metaphor, and a focus on reciprocity. Indeed, the focus on reciprocity is part and parcel to the author’s argument. The author creates a sort of “civic discourse” in that he explains the king’s role within the tribal structure of the *tuath*, which he couches in terms of honorable and moral behavior: i.e., a truly honorable and moral king will act in this prescribed way, which involves ruling in a conscientious, caring manner, rather than indulging in violence and autocracy. This sort of argument typifies one type of borderland within early medieval Irish rhetoric: here, at least two different ideas of morality and honor are in dialogue. The aristocratic morality privileges violence and physical courage, which the poet acknowledges and implicitly argues against throughout the poem. The poet’s ideal of morality and honor focuses on the reciprocal relationship between king and *tuath*, which he emphasizes through the metaphors he chooses: the old chariot-driver, the king’s connection to the prosperity of the land, and so on. Furthermore, the traits ascribed to the ideal king recall the four master themes of Irish rhetoric as argued by Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch: the ideal king is brave, yes, but also loyal to his people, and generous with them as well. This loyalty is expressed through their reciprocal relationship, and his generosity is further reflected in the agricultural bounty of their land.

*The Master Themes of Irish Narrative-based Rhetoric in Togail Bruidne Da Derga*

In this section, I will argue that the master themes of Irish narrative-based rhetoric, as articulated by Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch, are significantly present in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. Moreover, I will argue that the story functions in a manner similar to the *Audacht Morainn* in that it focuses on the actions of a king, and their consequences for him and his people. In that way, the text also comments upon a king’s proper observance of *log n*-ench, and present a complex rhetorical argument that emphasizes the role a king plays in the welfare of his *tuath*.

*Togal Bruidne Da Derga* chronicles the downfall of the mythical king Conaire Mor (Conaire the Great), whose virtue blesses his kingdom with peace and plenty for a time, until his refusal to obey the laws of the kingdom and his own oaths as a king lead to his death and the ruination of his kingdom. The story includes elements of magic common to many early medieval Irish tales, most prominently the *geis* (pl. *geasa*) or taboo: a mystical restriction placed on a king or hero that, once broken, provokes dire, often deathly, situations. Some of these restrictions are seemingly arbitrary, or appear nonsensical only to become relevant once the wordplay behind them is revealed (usually once they are broken.) However, as Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch (2008) point out, magic plays a major role in the rhetorical narrative-building of early medieval Irish rhetoric (p. 245-246). While not all of the *geasa* possess an implicit rhetorical purpose, there are a few that do suggest a deeper rhetorical meaning.

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Conaire Mor’s *geasa* are as such:

- Thou shalt not go righthandwise round Tara and lefthandwise round Brega.’
- ‘The evil-beasts of Černa must not be hunted by thee.’
- ‘And thou shalt not go out every ninth night beyond Tara.’
'Thou shalt not sleep in a house from which firelight is manifest outside, after sunset, and in which light is manifest from without.'
'And three Reds shall not go before thee to Red's house.'
'And no rapine shall be wrought in thy reign.'
'And after sunset a company of one woman or one man shall not enter the house in which thou art.'
'And thou shalt not settle the quarrel of thy two thralls'

Some of these seem spurious: “thou shalt not go righthandwise round Tara [the royal residence of the high king of Ireland] and lefthandwise round Brega [a small kingdom in the Irish midlands]” or “three Reds shall not go before thee to Red’s house.” Others are more obviously practical: “no rapine shall be wrought in thy reign.” *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* was a literary narrative, and as such its purpose would not only be to instruct but also to entertain. Therefore, some of the *geasa* may be farcical for that purpose. Others are a form of pun, foreshadowing the events of the narrative itself that would have been apparent to an Irish-speaking audience: the titular hospitaller’s name, Da Derga, means something like “the red one.” So “three Reds shall not go before thee to Red’s house” foreshadows the destruction of Da Derga’s hostel (“Red’s” house).

One *geis* in particular is notable in that it does not concern itself with literary foreshadowing or formulaic magics: “no rapine shall be wrought in thy reign.” The word “rapine” is a rather inaccurate—or perhaps, incomplete—translation for the Old Irish *diberg*: which might be better translated as “reaving” or “marauding.” The word’s etymology is quite interesting, and its usage in this text constitutes a rhetorical statement in-and-of itself. Katharine Simms (1996), in discussing Irish military history in the Middle Ages, analyzes the word: “in Old Irish sagas […] these two words [*fian*na and *diberga*] were used interchangeably to describe an institution of pagan origins, whereby young unmarried nobles spent the years between the end of fosterage and the inheritance of their father’s lands as devotees of a warrior cult” (p. 100-101). The *diberga* were “naturally abhorred by churchmen, who anathematized them as excommunicates, *maicce bais*, ‘the sons of death,’ or *latrones*, the Latin for ‘brigands’” (p. 101). They were, however, eulogized in secular literature: the *dibergach* of the Church was the *fian* of the poets—indeed, an entire cycle of Irish literature, the Fenian cycle, deals with the adventures of a few bands of *fian*. The historical *fianna/diberga* were effectively young, landless warriors who ranged between different tribes, seeking employment as mercenaries (Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 112-15, Simms, 1996, p. 100-103). They were an important cultural institution for a society that produced many aristocratic children, but did not necessarily have the means to support all of them: *fian*-bands were a way of providing a vocation for these otherwise potentially disruptive young warriors. However, the divide between “mercenary” and “brigand” was quite tenuous, and in effect many of these *fian*-bands tended toward brigandry just as often as they tended toward the “mercenary” side of things (a rather academic distinction to those poor souls who found themselves opposite the sharp end of the *fianna*’s spears anyways).

The *diberga/fianna* distinction represents a microcosm of the aforementioned semi-competing moral rhetorics of early medieval Ireland. The Church was decidedly anti-*fianna*, a sentiment due as much (if not more) to their nomadic brand of violence as it was to any lingering brand of paganism extant in their behavior or rituals. The use of the term *diberga* in *Togail*
Bruidne Da Derga, among Conaire Mor’s geasa no less, is telling: it represents the influence of the Church, and the interjection of a newer value system into early medieval Ireland. By forbidding Conaire to allow diberga during his reign, the geis is an argument for the alteration of native Irish law and custom.

Returning to the text, at first, Conaire observes all of his geasa and his kingdom prospers:

“Now there were in his reign great bounties, to wit, seven ships in every June in every year arriving at Inver Colptha, and oakmast up to the knees in every autumn, and plenty of fish in the rivers Bush and Boyne in the June of each year, and such abundance of good will that no one slew another in Erin [Ireland] during his reign. And to everyone in Erin his fellow's voice seemed as sweet as the strings of lutes”

This reflects the sacral nature of kingship in early medieval Ireland: the king of a tribe did not have absolute authority or power, but he was seen as a physically sacred representative of his tribe, and therefore his tribe’s prosperity was inextricably linked to his own virtue as a ruler and a person (Bray, 1999). Conaire’s virtue as a person, in part demonstrated by his observance of his geasa, reflects onto his tribe. And of course, it recalls similar language in the Audacht Morainn: the king’s virtue reflects upon his people, and so they prosper as well due to his honorable actions. As was the case in Audacht Morainn, the prosperity is both literal and metaphorical: the magical nature of these events are clear, but they serve as metaphor for the effects of an honorable king’s reign over his people. Conaire observes his geasa, and governs his people wisely. They, in turn, are blessed by bounty. This bounty is symbolic of the king’s generosity, one of the master themes of early Irish rhetoric, in that the land and the king are metaphorically unified, and so the generosity of the king is expressed through an abundance of trade and plentiful harvests.

However, Conaire soon finds his virtuous life challenged in a manner that would be all-too-familiar to the aristocratic audiences of early medieval Ireland. Conaire forbids all raiding and marauding within the land under his reign, and his foster-brothers take exception to this mandate: “Now his fosterbrothers murmured at the taking from them of their father's and their grandsire's gifts, namely Theft and Robbery and Slaughter of men and Rapine. They thieved the three thefts from the same man, to wit, a swine and an ox and a cow, every year, that they might see what punishment therefor the king would inflict upon them.” This reflects two frequent dilemmas of early medieval Irish society: fostering, and the aforementioned fianna/diberga. Noble children were not typically raised by their parents, but rather fostered in a different aristocrat’s household—indeed, sometimes at several different households—in order to strengthen ties between various bloodlines. Children that were fostered together were considered as close as blood relatives. Closer, even, since aristocratic Irish families were often quite large due in part to the practice of polygamy, which meant many children of the same father may not have the same mother and indeed may not even know each other that well, having been fostered at different times and in different places. Conaire’s foster-brothers, therefore, are near and dear to his own heart, and should be counted among his closest allies.
However, his foster-brothers are members of a band of *diberga/fianna*. They consider it their right, which indeed it was under secular Irish law, to raid and reave and plunder. They disregard Conaire’s ruling that prohibits *diberg* (verb form of *diberga*) and so continue their reaving, perhaps counting on their foster-brotherhood with the king to protect them from legal recompense. This reflects what must have been a very real concern for many early Irish kings: maintaining peace and prosperity while balancing the significantly present cultural desire for warfare and plundering. Furthermore, it represents a narrative situation wherein one of the master themes of early Irish rhetoric is tested: that of loyalty. Conaire is caught between two loyalties: his loyalty to his *tuath*, represented by his *geis* that prohibits *diberg*, and so directly protects the people of the *tuath* from the depredations of aristocratic mercenaries; and his loyalty to his foster-brothers, men with whom he was raised and whom he loves quite dearly. Preserving his *log n-ench* as king becomes tricky: depending on which moral code he holds, he has different options available. The secular morality of the aristocracy, which privileges violence and warfare, might have him simply let his foster-brothers continue their marauding. The Christianized morality, which would deem his foster-brothers *maicc bais*, the “sons of death,” would have him prevent their raiding, through violence if necessary. In this manner, the text engages again at the borderland of Irish rhetorics: competing moral codes offering different solutions to the preservation of honor.

In the end, Conaire chooses something of a compromise. His foster-brothers and the marauders they lead are captured and brought before Conaire for judgment. At first he swears to execute them, but then is moved by his personal feelings for his foster-brothers, his loyalty to them, and so reneges on their execution: “They consulted the king concerning the matter, and he said: ‘Let each father slay his son, but let my fosterlings be spared’ […]‘Nay indeed,’ quoth he; ‘no 'cast of life' by me is the doom I have delivered. The men shall not be hung; but let veterans go with them that they may wreak their rapine on the men of Alba.” Conaire violates his *geis*, and does not punish the men who committed *diberg* in his land. His foster-brothers and their warband are exiled to Alba (Scotland), where they live for a time as pirates, but they soon return to ravage Conaire’s land. This begins a chain of events by which Conaire ends up breaking every other *geis* by which he is bound; in the end, he is besieged in the hostel of Da Derga by his foster-brothers and their warband, where he and all his followers (except for the hero Conall Cernach) die after the hostel is burned and a battle is fought.

It is significant that this is the first of many *geasa* Conaire breaks, since that is one related directly to the aforementioned sociopolitical climate of early medieval Ireland. Conaire chooses to break this first *geis*, allowing his own love for his foster-brothers to interfere with matters that affect the entire tribe. After willfully breaking this first *geis*, circumstances outside his control lead to all his other *geasa* breaking, and so the circumstances arise that beget his death. The text possesses a clear rhetorical purpose, thought it works in magical terms. Conaire was a virtuous king who brought doom upon himself by favoring his personal relationships over the health and prosperity of his people as a whole. The first *geis* he breaks is also one of the only ones that relates to purely pragmatic concerns of the early medieval Irish polity: the depredations of travelling *diberga*.

However, it is worth noting that Conaire still exhibits one of the master themes of early Irish literature, courage, throughout his impending demise. He slays “six hundred of the reavers”
and, exclaims one character, “the Destruction [of Da Derga’s hostel] will not be wrought unless Conaire’s fury and valour be quelled.” In the concluding battle of the saga, Conaire embodies the virtues of the archetypal warrior king: he fights at the head of his warband, with “fury and valor” and almost routs the reavers before, humorously enough, his thirst for mead distracts him and he is beheaded (perhaps its own form of subtle social commentary, but that is neither here nor there). His unremitting courage carries its own rhetorical implications: despite his mismanagement of the kingdom, Conaire is never the villain of the piece, despite arguably dooming himself, his foster-brothers, much of his kingdom, and many of his friends (as well as an unnumbered amount of dead/enslaved Britons, and one Anglo-Saxon prince). In many ways, his actions might even be considered virtuous and honorable, his log n-ench preserved: he upheld the laws of the land by allowing the diberga to raid in Scotland and Britain; he maintained his loyalty to his foster-brothers by refusing to execute them; and when it became apparent that his own violent death was imminent, he did not shirk from the fight but instead embraced it wholeheartedly, slaying all his foes and dying valiantly in the process.

And yet, the text can also be interpreted as a condemnation of his actions. Conaire betrays his loyalty to his tuath by refusing to slay the diberga, and in the end he, along with nearly all of his closest friends and family, die a bloody death due to his actions. Moreover, his kingdom suffers due to his choices. The rhetoric of the Audacht Morainn would condemn Conaire’s choices: he was not the “old chariot-driver,” but rather the young chariot-warrior. He neglected the reciprocity of his rulership, and instead focused on his personal relationships with other aristocrats rather than caring for the tribe as a whole.

In summary, the text’s complexity reflects its position as a rhetorical borderland: multiple interpretations occur because multiple moralities are at play, multiple definitions of log n-ench. Conaire preserved his honor as a warrior until the end, but the log n-ench of the “true king” as presented by Audacht Morainn was compromised by his decisions to favor his foster-brothers over the rest of the tuath. Moreover, the text’s Christian influences are apparent in its negative portrayal of the diberga and in the consequences stemming from Conaire’s tolerance for them. And yet, the secular influences are also readily observable in its valorization of Conaire’s fighting ability and his berserker courage in the face of death. In that manner, the text speaks to Ireland’s position as a rhetorical borderland where multiple traditions of honor and morality not only coexisted in written texts, but also in the lived experiences of the early medieval Irish themselves.
Chapter 4: “Vigila itaque, quaeo, papa, vigila; quia forte non bene vigilavit Vigilius” — The Transmission of Classical Learning to Ireland

The majority of rhetorical scholarship focused on the medieval era concentrates on the role of classical scholarship and its Christian descendants: Augustine, Isidore, Boethius, and the like (Murphy, 2005; Kennedy, 1999). In Ireland, as so many scholars have demonstrated, the classical tradition existed—albeit in the truncated form typical to the era—and its use was a privileged form of scholarship among the early medieval sapientia of the island (Charles-Edwards, 2000; O’Croinin, 1996; O’Corrain, 1972). In this section, I will discuss the extent to which classical scholarship was used in Ireland during the early medieval period, and the extent of the familiarity Irish scholars possessed regarding classical rhetorical training. Furthermore, I will examine how this classical scholarship was recontextualized by the Irish, and reused with rhetorical intent.

Ireland’s status as a noted place for scholarship in the early medieval period has been cemented for some time now, in both the public and the scholarly mind (Cahill, 1996; Charles-Edwards, 2000; O’Croinin, 1996; Richter, 1999). As elsewhere in Europe, Ireland’s connection to the Roman rhetorical traditions of Late Antiquity came through the Church; indeed, the connection between the ecclesiastical and the clerical may have been particularly strong in Ireland because of its distance from Roman rule. Ireland was one of the last unromanized areas of Western Europe, and so did not benefit from the possible transmission of classical Roman learning that may have occurred in Romanized regions such as Italy, Gaul, and Britain. That being said, the entirety of the early medieval era remains difficult to document—the “Dark Ages” moniker no longer carries weight among scholars, but there no doubt remain patches of darkness where we find little or no reliable information—and while in many ways the scholar of medieval Ireland seems spoiled for choice regarding primary documentation, determining the extent to which certain classical models of rhetorical scholarship survived remains problematic. *Early medieval Ireland as site for classical learning*

In order to illustrate the extent to which Ireland served as a nexus for several rhetorical traditions, I’ll provide a rather quick review of some of the recent (and perhaps less recent but still important!) scholarship on Latin learning and classical education in early medieval Ireland. Michael Herren (1996), in his *Latin Letters in Early Christian Ireland*, describes the origins of the classical learning known to Irish scholars of the early medieval era: “Dark Age Ireland developed remarkable in diverse areas of secular Latin studies. These ranged far beyond the bare basics of Latin grammar so necessary for participation in the life of the universal Church, though to be sure, such participation was the catalyst for much of their intellectual pursuit” (p. 22). Among these texts included some noted rhetorical texts from Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval era, including Isidore’s *Etymologies*, the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Gildas’s *De Excidio Britanniae* (Herren, 1996, p. 24-28). Herren argues that Ireland did display a vibrant and influential culture of Latin learning, but is diffident on the extent to which knowledge of Golden Age Latin authors (Virgil and his ilk) persisted in early medieval Ireland (p. 14-16). Indeed, he argues that “genuine classical culture in Ireland before the Carolingian Renaissance was virtually non-existent” (p. 21). This seems a damming indictment, but it stems in part from Herren’s rather particular notion of classical culture: “a real education in the Roman poets and prose writers of the Golden Age” (p. 21). In other words, a knowledge of Latin...
literature, and commentary upon that, constitutes “genuine classical culture,” while training in grammar and composition, and the rhetorical uses thereof, are hallmarks of the diminished era in which the early medieval Irish (indeed, all early medieval Europeans) lived. However, Herren does also argue that the early medieval Irish—while not great exponents of Latin literature until after the Carolingian Renaissance—were innovative and expansive in their approach to other areas of Latin scholarship: “Dark Age Ireland developed remarkably in diverse areas of secular Latin studies. These studies ranged far beyond the bare basics of Latin grammar so necessary for participation in the life of the universal Church, though to be sure, such participation was the catalyst for much of their intellectual pursuit” (p. 22). He goes on to note the scope of Latin studies in early medieval Ireland included both basic and complex grammar, computistics, astronomy, geography, as well as a multitude of commentaries and glosses on other works produced through the late antique and early medieval worlds (p. 22-23).

O’Croinin (1995) emphasizes the British connection with the early Irish church, citing Columbanus’ own account of a certain monk Finian writing to the famed British rhetor and author, Gildas “about the problems of wandering monks, and Gildas had sent ‘a most elegant reply’” (p. 173). The first missionaries in Ireland, and therefore the first Latin speakers, were most likely British (p. 172), and certainly the famed Saint Patrick was a post-Roman Briton abducted by Irish raiders (p. 169-173). O’Croinin praises the Irish for their mastery of Latin, which occurred quickly over the course of a century, and gave rise to prominent monastic schools which soon developed a reputation for excellence (p. 169). These schools were not located at every monastery, but they were common enough that they formed centers of learning for both the clergy and laymen: the children of nobility, even king’s sons, were fostered in monastic schools, where they learned the Latin of their peers despite being destined for a secular life of warfare, hunting, and cattle-raising (p. 178-179). Monastic schools were, not surprisingly, also associated with scriptoria, which were writing centers; here is where texts were created and copied, and the beautiful Insular calligraphy and art of works such as the Book of Kells took shape (p. 180-181). Writing was also done on wax tablets, which were presumably more disposable than the expensive vellum used for manuscripts, and indeed that very disposability made them suitable for writing instruction, which consumed a large portion of the curricula common to these monastic schools (p. 182-183).

O’Croinin also emphasizes the primacy of grammar instruction to early medieval Irish classical learning, arguing that it was in grammatical work that the Irish found themselves exposed to, and eventually masters of, classical learning:

these [grammatical] texts demonstrate a progression from the elementary stages of language acquisition to a sophisticated level of linguistic analysis, in the course of which the Irish schools passed from an initially wary and hostile attitude, in the face of the pagan heritage of Late Antique grammatical tradition, to a position in which they revel in the combination of late Roman ars grammatical and the Scriptures. In the process, Irish grammarians discovered the wealth of the ancient world as it was transmitted through these Late Roman works (p. 184)

Certainly, by the middle of the seventh-century, more and more classical authors find citation in Irish sources: Charisius, Pompeius, Priscian, Servius, and others (p. 184), and Irish
authors adopted wholesale the late antique practice of comprehensive shorthand, which they employed to a greater extent than any other contemporary European culture (p. 185). The Irish, despite their late introduction to Latin learning, were soon considered admirable proprietors of it, and gained influence abroad. The Venerable Bede of Northumbria knew of their reputation and remarked on the sheer amount of Englishmen educated in Irish schools (p. 186-187), and Irish grammarians were influential at the Carolingian court (p. 220-223).

However, the question remains: how were the Irish exposed to these texts, and how did they come to become proficient in their use and teaching, when not only was Ireland outside the influence of Rome but much of their early interaction came in the form of Irish slave-raids on Roman Britain (O’Croinin, 1995, p. 140-142)? The general scholarly consensus is that classical learning arrived with Christianity, and that the first missionaries to Ireland came from heavily Romanized areas such as sub-Roman Britain and northern Gaul (Charles-Edwards, 2000, p. 182-189). However, unique conditions within Ireland led to a particular focus on Latin learning within the early Irish church, which in turn created the tradition of Irish scholarship in Latin. Charles-Edwards notes that Latin education in post-Roman Britain was linked to the “broad character of the earliest Irish Latin” (p. 176), because of two factors: “First, the church took over responsibility for education from local civitates such as that of the Demetae […] many post-Roman Britons were not native speakers of Latin […] The British Church, therefore, needed to organize the teaching of Latin to those who only spoke British” (p. 176). Ireland’s position was even more extreme than post-Roman Britain: there had never existed a Latin-speaking population in Ireland, and so the need for formal education in Latin, for both clerics and certain laymen (Charles-Edwards 176) was pressing. This formal education included instruction in both grammar and rhetoric, mirroring the two-tiered system of late Roman instruction taught by the grammaticus and rhetoricus (Lanham, 2012, 81-82). Charles-Edwards and O’Croinin both argue that elements of formal grammatical and rhetorical instruction survived in Ireland, and they use as their evidence the identifiable work of Irish scholars working in Latin, such as the monk Columbanus.

The Letters and rhetoric of Columbanus

In the same way as scholars tout Cicero and Quintilian and other luminaries of the Greco-Roman world, or certain literary works are noted for their influence within a particular discipline or field. The corpus of Hiberno-Latin literature is quite vast (Bischoff), and encompasses some fairly influential scholars, particularly toward the Carolingian era where Irish grammarians became quite common and influential on mainland Europe (O’Croinin, 1995, 220-223). Columbanus stands out as an exemplar among his fellow accomplished scholars for a few reasons. He wrote personal letters, which are the oldest epistolary accounts attributable to any Irishman, and those letters are remarkable for their impeccable Latin, and their fluid, evocative prose replete with allusions to classical authors and biblical verse.

Columbanus was a sixth-century Irish monk and missionary, whose mastery of Latin and rhetorical skill stands as stark contrast to the consciously low-brow language utilized by Patrick, Asper and other early luminaries of the Irish church. Scholars know a good deal about his life, in part due to the biography written on him by a certain Jonas, the Vita Sancti Columbani, and in part due to the survival of some of his own writing in the form of the aforementioned letters he
Columbanus was born in Leinster, the south-eastern province of Ireland, and educated at Bangor, a monastery in the northern province of Ulster. In 590 or 591, he received permission to become a *peregrinus*, the famous style of missionary exile peculiar to the early Irish church (Charles-Edwards, 2000, 344). He arrived, via Brittany, in Burgundy, which was at this time ruled by the Merovingians. He is, in many ways, truly central to understanding early medieval Irish Christian culture: as Charles-Edwards points out, he was both the greatest of the *peregrini* and one of the “only sources for Irish monasticism before the late seventh century that is both varied in content and considerable in extent” (p. 345). Moreover, he was remarkably well-educated in the classics, and possessed considerable rhetorical skill in his own writing, as well as a refined, even literary, sense of style. Ludwig Bieler (1987) notes that Columbanus borrows from, and alludes to, Sallust, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid (p. 99).

Bieler argues that it is not necessarily the allusive content of his writing that should garner Columbanus scholarly attention, but rather “the assuredness of his diction as applied to various subjects demanding different styles of treatment. Generally speaking, the style of the prose letters is direct and sustained, surging up rarely, but all the more impressively, to great pathos […] this keen sense of style—*recti generis voluntas*, to speak with Quintilian—would seem to be largely a fruit of classical reading” (p. 100). Also, Bieler notes that Columbanus’ classicism was always tempered by his humility and frugality as a clergyman (p. 101); in other words, he both indulges and restricts his classical allusions according to his audience, knowing as he must have that there was a consistent undercurrent of clerical dissent to the use of classical Greco-Roman texts due to their pagan origins. Bieler refers to Columbanus as a “humanist,” (p. 99-102), and places him in that tradition of classical humanism, by which the use of the human mind and reason were praised. It is this rhetorical humanism, where Columbanus balances classical allusions, biblical exegesis, and an excellent eye for his audience, that I will examine in his *Letters*.

Six of his own personal letters to various Church figures survive, and they depict a man who possessed extensive education in Latin, in scripture, and in the blending of the two for the persuasion of others. Moreover, they depict a man well-versed in the rhetoric of his fellow Irishmen; a man whom reversed Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch’s Patrician formula. For instead of adapting Christian rhetoric to an Irish context, Columbanus adapted Irish rhetorical form and genre to a Christian context. Charles-Edwards places Columbanus in the same *teosc* tradition as *Audacht Morainn*: “this [*teosc*] was the genre that allowed Columbanus to tell a pope what he should do, imitating in the process the Briton Gildas telling kings, bishops and judges how they should behave” (p. 138). In his *Letters*, Columbanus employs many of the same rhetorical strategies found in *Audacht Morainn*, though with an obvious shift in focus from the political relationships of secular Ireland to the pastoral and ecclesiastical concerns of his fellow clergymen. He relies on metaphorical imagery, and roots his arguments in a rhetoric of intimate, personal persuasion. He transposes the rhetoric of the *tuath* into the church, arguing for the reciprocity of relationships between the ruler and ruled, or rather, between the clergy and the laity. At the same time, he masterfully weds scripture to his arguments and continually makes clear his mastery of Christian rhetorical tropes through overt expressions of humility before God and his Church superior. In this manner, Columbanus stands at a borderland intersecting several different rhetorical traditions, the Irish, the Christian, and the classical, and he incorporates all of them to varying degrees in his *Letters*. 
For example, consider the opening to his first letter:

To the Holy Lord and Father in Christ, the fairest Ornament of the Roman Church, as it were a most honoured Flower of all Europe in her decay, to the distinguished Bishop, who is skilled in the Meditation of divine Eloquence, I, Bar-Jonah (a poor Dove), send Greeting in Christ.

‘Grace and peace to thee from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (Gal. 1.3)

It is my desire, Holy Father, (let it not be extravagant in your sight) to ask about Easter, in accordance with that canticle, ‘Ask thy father and he will show thee, thy elders and they will tell thee’ (Deut. 32.7).

For although, considering my insignificance, when my poverty writes to your distinction, I might be branded with that unusual remark of a certain philosopher, which he is said once to have made at the sight of a painted harlot, ‘I do not admire the art, but I admire the cheek’ (cf. Ecclus. 9.8.); yet trusting in the faith of your evangelical humility I dare to write to you, and subjoin the matter of my grief. For there is no pride in writing when necessity demands a letter, though it be addressed to one's superiors

Columbanus begins with a rhetorical move emphasizing his humility while also demonstrating his rhetorical expertise and proper knowledge of scripture. He praises the Bishop, declaring him a “fair ornament” and “honored flower of all Europe in her decay”: the poetic imagery of a flower amongst decay emphasizes the worthiness of the Bishop, and also demonstrates Columbanus’ linguistic talent. A cleric with lesser skill in Latin would be unable to write in this style, and would therefore be less “legitimate” as a commentator. In one rhetorical move, Columbanus massages the ego of the Bishop, and demonstrates his own skill with the Latin language. This is a necessary rhetorical move for the time and place: position within the Church as a priest or monk did not guarantee fluency in Latin, as many clerics—particularly those from poorer areas, or frontier regions, where education was often difficult to acquire—were noticeably deficient in their ability to read and write Latin. This lack of literacy was known to, and lamented by, the early Christian Church throughout Europe (Charles-Edwards 179). Moreover, Columbanus’ refers to himself as “Bar-Jonah,” which means “a poor dove.” Again, this serves a rhetorical purpose: he presents himself in a humble light, the “proper” light in which to view a monk from the very ends of the known world, but also showcases his own knowledge of scripture with his Biblical references (both the direct quote from Galatians, and his “poor dove” moniker). In addition, it is a bit of a pun: Columban in Irish means “a white dove” and so Columbanus, by naming himself “Bar-Jonah” offers a bit of word-play on his own name.

This give-and-take between the appearance of humility and the demonstration of rhetorical knowledge serves as evidence for Columbanus’ own ethos as a Christian scholar. He demonstrates his knowledge of scripture with his selection of quotes, which argues for his validity as a scholar, and also demonstrates his familiarity with the norms of discourse within the Church by making the proper literary genuflections to the Bishop as well as properly
deemphasizing his own self-worth. In effect, his writing style becomes a rhetorical statement in and of itself.

Also, as Bieler noted above, Columbanus regularly includes quotes from both Scripture and classical sources in his letters. He does so with obvious rhetorical purpose in mind. By quoting these primary sources, he not only provides a logical foundation for his arguments (in this letter, he argues over some minor point of theology that was contested between Irish clergymen and Continental bishops: the date of Easter) but also provides evidence of his education in both Scripture and classical learning, proving that he was no mere country bumpkin. In doing so, he railed against what was a semi-common stereotype of the Irish in the early medieval era; Jerome, a prominent scholar of the early Church, used the supposed stupidity of the Irish as a metaphor in his insult against the heretic Pelagius, whom he said was *Scotorum pultibus proegravatus*, “stuffed with Scottish [Irish] porridge,” which was Jerome’s version of “he is full of shit” (Pohle). In later centuries, Theodulf the Visigoth complained to Charlemagne of a certain Irish bishop named Cadac: Theodulf composed a rather nasty poem that ends in the lines “Before the Goth and Scot make peaceful pact; / For if he wishes peace ‘twill be undone. / If he be whipped or vanish like the wind, / Or turn himself to stone, ‘tis still a Scot […] He always mouths it, using you instead, / Our Savior’s letter, for your Scot’s a sot” (O’Croinin, 1995, p. 221). So, Columbanus had some impetus in proving he was neither “stuffed with the Scottish porridge” nor a besotted Scot, and his allusions to classical literature and Scripture help shore up his rhetorical *ethos* by demonstrating his high level of education, his access to the proper texts, and his mastery of those texts is such that he can quote from them in the appropriate context.

Paying closer attention to the quotes he chooses, their rhetorical impact stems not only from the *ethos* they present regarding Columbanus’ education, but also due to their provenance. Columbanus writes to men who did not necessarily share his love for classical works—the continental Church at the time of Columbanus was often skeptical towards classical literature due its pagan origins (Murphy, 2005, 7-11)—and so chooses his quotes with care, making sure to introduce more quotes from Scripture and the Church fathers than he does from classical works. In this first section, he cites all three quotes from Scripture but notably, his final quote (from Ecclesiasticus) he alters for rhetorical impact. He mentions “a certain philosopher,” and makes a rather cheeky pun, comparing himself to the painted harlot that the philosopher admired, not for her “art,” (i.e. the make-up she wore) but for the boldness of its presentation. He deprecates himself through this comparison, emphasizing his own lowly nature as a sinner comparable to a prostitute (which, I suppose also speaks to the misogyny inherent to this discourse, though that is a conversation for a later time altogether) but also subtly praises himself, asserting that his forthright claims on this theological matter, while perhaps importune, are not without merit.

Later in the same letter, he quotes St. Jerome, a noted scholar in the patristic tradition who was also an accomplished rhetor in Latin (and incidentally the same one who thought the Irish synonymous with stupidity): “For as I believe, it does not escape your diligence, how scathingly Anatolius, ‘a man of curious learning’ (*Hieron. De Viris Illustri* . 73) as St. Jerome says, excerpts from whose writings Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, inserted in his ecclesiastical history, and St. Jerome praised this same work on Easter in his catalogue” (Columbanus). The object of the quote is a certain Anatolius, another early church scholar, whose work on Easter agrees with
Columbanus’ own interpretation. Anatolius, however, is rather obscure, and that obscurity may make his use as evidence less rhetorically convincing. However, Columbanus cites Anatolius by way of Jerome, an example of “double-dipping” for rhetorical effect: Jerome does not spend much time on the Easter controversy in his own writings, but Columbanus notes that Jerome praises Anatolius. Jerome was a well-known and well-respected scholar in the patristic tradition, and his opinion carried far more rhetorical weight than the lesser-known Anatolius. Moreover, Anatolius was an Eastern Christian while Jerome was a Westerner. The split between Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking Christians was not complete in Columbanus’ era, but by appealing to Anatolius via Jerome, Columbanus cleverly supports his heterodox position on Easter while still maintaining continuity with the established western Christian tradition.

In his fifth letter, addressed to Pope Boniface V, Columbanus begins with the now-familiar, formulaic statement of his own humility: “To the most fair Head of all the Churches of the whole of Europe, estimable Pope, exalted Prelate, Shepherd of Shepherds, most reverend Bishop; the humblest to the highest, the least to the greatest, peasant to citizen, a prattler to one most eloquent, the last to the first, foreigner to native, a poor creature to a powerful lord.” However in this version, contrary to his first letter, he constructs the statement in a method familiar to his Irish fellows, and one mirrored in the Audacht Morainn. He creates a series of parallel statements where contrast is drawn between a pair of related opposites for rhetorical effect, usually implying a reciprocal relationship between the pair: the humblest and the highest, the last and the first, the poor and the lord, and so on. This recalls a similar construction in the Audacht Morainn, where the author also constructs a series of parallel statements containing pairs of related entities. The effect is clear: Columbanus casts himself as the “foreigner” to Boniface’s “native,” and in doing so presents himself in as humble before his superior. This humility is rhetorically significant within the Christian context, and doubly so in Columbanus’ rhetorical situation. He addresses the pope, a man high above Columbanus’ own station, and he does so with the intent of instructing him, as a fili instructs his king. A high-handed approach would be rhetorically inappropriate, and just as the author of Audacht Morainn praises king Feradach while instructing him on the nature of his honor despite occupying a different position on the social ladder, so does Columbanus praise pope Boniface despite the disparity in clerical authority between the two. In effect, Columbanus accomplishes a Christian rhetorical goal with the aid of Irish rhetorical strategies.

Columbanus continues his argument by establishing his ethos relative to the pope. He writes, in reference to himself, “Who would not say at once: Who is this bumptious babbler, that dares to write such things unbidden? What apostle of scrupulous justice would not immediately break out into that old abusive speech, the retort to Moses of the Hebrew that was doing wrong to his brother: Who made thee a lord or judge over us?” He poses a rhetorical question, seemingly agreeing with an assumed objection to his forthrightness in admonishing the pope. He garnishes this question with a Scriptural reference, itself a current theme in his work and of course, an appeal to his credibility as a Biblical exegete. Columbanus then answers his own question, asserting himself as reliable and credible within this conversation:

For I shall speak as a friend, disciple, and close follower of yours, not as a stranger; therefore I shall speak out freely, saying to those that are our masters and helmsmen of the spiritual ship and mystic sentinels, Watch, for the sea is
stormy and whipped up by fatal blasts, for it is not a solitary threatening wave such as, even across a silent ocean, is raised to overweening heights from the ever-foaming eddies of a hollow rock, though it swells from afar, and drives the sails before it while Death walks the waves, but it is a tempest of the entire element, surging indeed and swollen upon every side, that threatens shipwreck of the mystic vessel; thus do I, a fearful sailor, dare to cry, Watch, for water has now entered the vessel of the Church, and the vessel is in perilous straits.

Here he employs a great deal of metaphorical imagery, creating a complex symbolic image of the Church as a vessel at sea wracked by storms and casting himself as a lowly sailor warning the “masters and helmsmen” (the Pope and his bishops) of their vessel’s “perilous straits.” Here again echoes the rhetoric of the Audacht Morainn and the teosc genre. Columbanus maintains his humble positionality while advising the pope, but crafts an elaborate metaphor arguing for the danger threatening both the Church itself and its leaders. The reciprocity of the relationships between Pope and Church, clergy and laity, superior and inferior, resounds.

Casting the Pope and his bishops as the “masters and helmsmen” implies their roles as leaders and shepherds of the Church, marshalling their flocks through foul weather and navigating the potential perils of their mutual journey. Yet, at the same time, the nautical imagery implies responsibility and stewardship more than it implies mere rulership: the helmsman of a vessel, and indeed its captain, do not merely reign over their crew and reap the rewards of whatever voyage upon which they venture. Rather, they are shareholders in the fate of the vessel: if capsized in a storm or dashed upon a reef, the captain and shareholders are no more exempt from a watery grave than their lowliest deckhand. And a ship does not function merely through the efforts of its officers. The sailors of a vessel are just as instrumental in its sailing as the captain. A captain without sailors is merely a man owning an impressively buoyant arrangement of lumber; similarly, a pope without a Church is just an elderly fellow with a tall hat and lots of wine. Columbanus’ choice of metaphor purposefully emphasizes the reciprocity of the relationship between cleric and flock, or superior and inferior, and in doing so, it apes in form (if not necessarily intention, impossible as that is to discern some fifteen hundred years after the fact) and function the rhetoric of Audacht Morainn. Though he does not explicitly define it as such, Columbanus discusses the relationship between pope and Church in a manner quite similar to the way the Audacht Morainn discusses the relationship between king and tuath: on one hand, the sovereignty of both pope and king are maintained and praised throughout these respective works. And yet, their power is acknowledged as limited and conditional. A contract exists between the ruler and the ruled, between the pope and his Church, and that contract exists for the benefit of all involved.

This reciprocal relationship becomes the basis by which Columbanus assumes the rhetorical authority to address, and indeed admonish, the pope. The poet of Audacht Morainn employs a similar tactic in addressing king Feradach, appealing to the king’s own position as guardian and benefactor of his tuath in order to emphasize the poet’s right, as a learned member of that tuath, to instruct the king on his proper duties. Columbanus articulates his role in a similar manner: just as the fili does not presume to say “I know more of kingliness than you” while instructing a king, neither does Columbanus say “I know more of popeliness than you” while admonishing Boniface.
Columbanus’ *Letters* include many more spaces for rhetorical analysis, but due to space and time constraints, the above shall suffice for now. He proves an exemplar of early medieval Irish rhetoric in the classical tradition in that he remixes and remediates his source material into a sort of hybrid rhetorical structure: as argued by Bieler, Charles-Edwards and O’Croinin, Columbanus was a skilled Latinist who employed the rhetorical style of late antique classical authors. However, he was also an unabashed Christian who knew that his audience often did not look favorably upon classicist tendencies, and so he combined his classical style with a self-effacing Christian rhetoric of humility and an eye toward Scriptural/patristic quotations that often subverted the original meaning of these quotations toward his own rhetorical purpose. He remediated both classical learning and Christian Scripture into a hybridized rhetorical style that embodies the Irish rhetorical practice of this era.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The search for alterity

My concluding sentiments begin, oddly enough, with an introduction of sorts. I have not discussed my personal reasons for this study elsewhere in the text, and so I have not introduced myself as such. Those personal reasons are, by and large, pedestrian, and so this introduction-to-a-conclusion will be (blessedly) brief. As an undergraduate, I was introduced to rhetoric and composition in a few seminar classes as a sophomore and junior. They were excellent classes taught by a truly inspirational professor. Throughout them, we discussed Western rhetoric. And other forms of rhetoric, from other locations on the globe. But, as American college students taught by an American professor, it’s safe to say we studied the rhetoric of the West more than we studied other rhetorics. And now I must apologize for truncating my own account, but I will spoil the ending of what would otherwise become quite the long-winded soliloquy, wholly out-of-place in this thesis, lacking, as it does, the requisite elements of parallel construction, metaphorical imagery, and appeals to bravery, generosity, loyalty, and beauty. Ergo, henceforth, and in conclusion: I do not like the term “Western rhetoric.”

I have heard that term since my first introduction to the academic study of rhetoric and composition, and I have not stopped hearing it since then. I am tired of Western rhetoric, and this confuses me, because I am tired of something that does not exist. Oh, I know what people mean, scholar and layman alike, when they say “Western rhetoric.” I wrote about that in my actual introduction: they mean a particular rhetorical tradition, that Athens-to-America trajectory of thought. It’s an excellent tradition, in my opinion, I won’t dispute that. And it’s an extraordinarily varied tradition: the Sophists and their slightly-better-known detractors Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, the second Sophistic (and the third, I hear), and so on. But Greece and Rome, their successors in Europe, and their descendants further abroad, are not the whole of the “West.” Admitting this does not demean those Greco-Roman traditions—and plural they were, as Jarratt (1990), Welch (1999), and Poulakos (1983), among others, have argued—nor does it imply they should be “dethroned” in some manner from whatever position they may hold atop the rhetorical heap. Simply put, I do not want to hear of “Western rhetoric,” nor read of it. I want to hear, and read, of “Western rhetorics.” and that is why I began my current study.

I return now to a certain quote by James Berlin (1994): “the search for alterity, for rhetorics other than the familiar, [which] can reveal to us alternative possibilities in conceiving discursive practices and their power formations” (p. 118). I encountered this quote in my first semester as a graduate student, and it struck me then as the keystone to my scholarly interests. I admit, with no small amount of chagrin, that I’d never read of Berlin’s work until introduced to him by way of a History of Rhetoric seminar. Despite the late hour of our association—Berlin died around the same time I’d begun speaking in full sentences—I feel a strong connection to that “search for alterity” he declared so essential to the scholarship of rhetoric and its histories. History, for all its intangibility, carries an awful weight. Or perhaps, an awesome weight. Less so in the colloquial sense of the word, and more so in its older definition: something so significant that it does not so much warrant awe as it does demand it. And while history itself may be ephemeral, if for no other reason than we all know of it only in its passing and our recording thereof, its effect are quite tangible. The history of rhetoric instruction in the American university
still affects our positions as scholars and instructors of rhetoric in numerous ways, small and
dlarge. The history of rhetoric instruction in classical Rome, for that matter, still affects our
positions as scholars and instructors of rhetoric, if for no other reason than the continued usage
of Cicero, Quintilian and others as exemplars of a vibrant and relevant rhetorical tradition. The
study and teaching of rhetoric is inseparable from the history of rhetoric, and so if the ways we
study and teach change, then so must the histories we write and read.

For this reason, I turn to the rhetoric of borderlands, as articulated by Baca, Anzaldua,
and others. I would argue that the comparative rhetorics of Mao, Campbell and Schoen also
generate in a borderland approach at times, or at least something adjacent to it, and so I consider
my research indebted to their work as well. Borderland rhetoric argues, by its very existence, for
the presence of a multitude of traditions and histories. I engage medieval Irish rhetoric for this
reason: it provides an additional history of rhetoric in the “West,” and an additional tradition of
rhetorical thinking/doing. This tradition favors rhetorical characteristics other than those
privileged by classical rhetorics, as seen in the analytical frame cultivated by Johnson-Sheehan
and Lynch, and expanded upon in this thesis. Though perhaps not as formalized as the rhetorics
of Aristotle and Cicero, the rhetoric of medieval Ireland is no less multilayered: just as the
Sophists and the Platonists and the Ciceronians and the Augustinians all speak to—and at times,
over—one another, so do different voices in medieval Irish rhetoric clamor for attention. The
rhetoric of the clergy binds itself closely to the classical and Christian rhetorics common to the
rest of Europe, while the rhetoric of the aristocracy privileges a different set of rhetorical values
based upon uniquely Irish notions of status, hierarchy, and honor.

Exploring and examining Irish rhetoric through the lens of the borderland is my
contribution to the ongoing “search for alterity.” Medieval Ireland’s vibrant rhetorical tradition
should be studied because it complicates the current narrative of western rhetorical history, both
by adding new strains of rhetoric in and of themselves, and also through its adaptation of
classical and Christian rhetorics. Medieval Irish rhetoric stands in contrast to what Sharon
Crowley calls “the ahistoricity of modern attempts to prescribe a universalized composing
process based on literate skills” (p. 34), and so contributes to the understanding of alternative
methods of rhetorical composition in the “West” by demonstrating methods of rhetorical usage
that expose the intellectual paucity of the universalizing impulse. The rhetorical traditions
inherent to the “West” were not uniformly descended from Greco-Roman rhetoric and its
permutations, nor from Christian rhetoric, but from a multitude of sources, of which medieval
Ireland merely constitutes one, rather fruitful, branch.

Contributions to the study of medieval Irish rhetoric

In addition to its participation and contribution to the search for alterity in “Western”
rhetorics, this thesis builds upon the foundation constructed by Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch vis-
à-vis a theory of medieval Irish rhetoric (though they term it ancient Irish rhetoric), and furthers
the work they began in understanding the features of medieval Irish rhetorics. In particular, I
have drawn upon their four master virtues of medieval Irish rhetoric, as well as their
understanding of it as “very intimate, used not to persuade large urban audiences but rather to
build a sense of identification that would have appealed to individuals and small groups in rural
settings. The rhetoric shown in these histories is a narrative-based rhetoric, steeped in legend,
myth, and magic, which promoted and preserved Irish culture and values” (p. 2). My contribution combines their four master virtues, and their theory of Irish rhetoric as intimate narrative, with the sociohistorical scholarship of Irish historians, as well as a commitment (burdened as it is by my nascent proficiency in Old Irish) to Mao’s principles of etic/emic analysis, which includes the description of Irish rhetoric, whenever possible, in “its own terms,” i.e. through the use of the appropriate words in the Irish language itself. So, whereas Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch look at ancient Irish rhetoric as a system of intimate narrative designed to promote and preserve certain values, I expand upon this and look upon the multitude of medieval Irish rhetorics as a connected group of civic rhetorics: instructions for the members of the tuath, mostly the aristocracy and the royalty, on their proper, honorable behavior. This honor was both for personal and communal benefit: i.e., observing honorable behavior for one’s station brought glory and fame to the individual, while also helping protect and serve the interests of the tuath. Accordingly, I tentatively term this a “rhetoric of the tuath.”

This is not to imply that Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch’s work was bereft of sociohistorical context, or displayed a lack of familiarity with the Irish language. They responsibly grounded their work in the history and culture of early medieval Ireland, and employed the Irish language when possible. However, my approach foregrounds the sociohistorical knowledge beyond the extent to which Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch did in their work. I do this because the rhetoric of medieval Ireland I explore, the rhetoric of the tuath, cannot be separated from this sociohistorical context in much the same way as Cicero’s rhetoric, or the rhetoric of the sophists, cannot be separated from the sociohistorical context of late Republican Rome and classical Greece, respectively. Bravery, loyalty, generosity, and beauty are all personal traits valued by the nobility in part due to the social context in which these nobles lived: they were, in general, professional warriors in a culture of endemic conflict. Bravery in the face of battle, loyalty to one’s fellows, and generosity in terms of loot gained from battle were not mere literary flourishes, but necessities of life. Without a knowledge of the conditions which rendered this rhetoric important, any study of it becomes unduly impeded.

I draw from Mao’s etic/emic theory of comparative rhetorical analysis in that I attempt to stress the use of Irish language terms when appropriate for the discussion of Irish rhetoric, rather than relying on terms drawn from Aristotelian rhetoric, for example. My own knowledge of Irish is quite limited, and Old Irish in particular is a notoriously difficult language to learn, but I have attempted here to reproduce the relevant words and phrases in Irish: log n-ench, teosca, filid, and so on. I do this because just as an understanding of Irish rhetoric cannot be separated from its sociohistorical context, neither can it be separated from the Irish language itself. I also seek to keep my spelling of the Irish names in this text faithful to their native language, which is standard practice in Irish historiography. There is an element of scholarly ethos to consider: spelling Caille mac Ronain’s name thus, rather than anglicizing it into Keelta such as Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch do (p. 8), conveys a certain consideration for the history of the Irish language and its inextricable link to Irish history and culture. Anglicizing names and terms, meanwhile, replicates, in an admittedly small manner, the destruction—both deliberate and incidental—of the Irish language, and the attendant repression of native Irish culture, which began in the medieval era. Moreover, it honors the link between language and identity as argued by Anzaldua (2012). Employing Irish language terms when possible, and using appropriate Irish spelling of names and so on, therefore makes sense both from an academic standpoint—the
rhetorical terms make sense within their own linguistic context and may lose something valuable in translation—and an ethical one.

What remains to be done

Moving forward, I feel the first thing that must be done to expand beyond the research in this thesis is to simply do more of it. Analyze more primary texts from more time periods (in particular, those beyond the Old Irish period), and begin assessing the changes in medieval Irish rhetorics over time, and indeed, over place. In particular, studying the rhetorics of medieval Ireland after its invasion by the English (Cambro-Normans, really, but they became English eventually), as well as studying the rhetorics of those English in Ireland, would shed a useful light on the historiography of medieval Ireland, which too often refuses to engage primary sources from a rhetorically critical point-of-view. Moreover, such a study would further highlight the borderland that was medieval Ireland, as influences from Norman and English and other European nations began intersecting with native Irish rhetorics. The effect this had on the Christian rhetorics of medieval Ireland was, I suspect, particularly intriguing, and warrants further study.

I will also note that I have only focused on the study of works written by and for aristocratic men, and further, research into the rhetorics of women in Ireland warrants attention. Several medieval Irish sagas and poems contain strong, vibrant female characters—such as the tripartite goddess called the Morrigan, the infamous Medb, queen of Connacht, and the warrior Scathach—and their actions, virtues, and vices may yet reveal another strand of rhetoric concurrent with, and intersected by, the more masculine-dominated rhetorics of the filid, clergy, and warrior aristocracy. I am unaware of any works written specifically by women in early medieval Ireland, but there are undoubtedly works about women, at least in part, including the saints’ life of Brigid, as well as various tales from the Ulster Cycle, such as the famous Tain Bo Cuailnge. Studying these would contribute to the reclamation of women’s rhetorics in the West, and speak to the late twentieth/early twenty-first century traditions of engaging with the rhetoric of women in the antique and medieval periods.

Finally, I feel the “search for alterity” in which this study participates need not limit itself to medieval Irish rhetorics. Using a similar methodology—i.e. one rooted in a borderlands approach, that foregrounds sociohistorical context, and engages with texts from their own linguistic standpoint—the rhetorics of other western European cultures could be examined in a new light. The Icelandic sagas, for example, long established as significant literary works of the Scandinavian cultures, might be revisited as places embodying a borderland rhetoric: written by a twelfth century Christian, they ostensibly detail the lives of ninth and tenth century pagans. Such work has begun already: John R.E. Bliese (1988, 1994) has written several articles on the Norman rhetoric of battle, for example, in which he explores the ways in which Norman authors of eleventh and twelfth centuries use the battles they chronicle as a particular rhetorical space for delineating Norman cultural virtues. Continuing the study of rhetorics within medieval Ireland, and indeed the rest of medieval Europe, will further not only our historical understanding of those peoples, but also our understanding of the history, theory, and practice of rhetoric.
Notes
1: “the truth in our tongues.” Part of a longer quote from *Acallam Senorach*, where a character responds to the question “what has kept you alive all these years?” with this maxim.

2: “Learning is the key to knowledge.” A proverb of medieval Ireland, found in Meyer’s *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*.

3: “A rightful ruler provides beer on Sundays.” A quote from the medieval legal text *Crith Gablach*, focusing on the proper duties of an honorable king.

4: “Watch therefore, I beg you, my Pope, watch; since perhaps Vigilius was not so very vigilant.” A paraphrase from the fifth letter of Columbanus to the pope Boniface V, urging him not to make the same mistakes as his predecessor, Vigilius.
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