Pagan Nostalgia and Anti-Clerical Hostility in Medieval Irish Literature

by

Kerry Lynn Turner

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Kerry Lynn Turner

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Signature:

Kerry Lynn Turner — 4-30-01

Kerry Lynn Turner, Student — Date

Approvals:

Leslie S. Domonkos — 4/30/01

Dr. Leslie Domonkos, Thesis Advisor — Date

4/30/01

Dr. Saul Friedman, Committee Member — Date

Lowell J. Satre — 4/30/01

Dr. Lowell Satre, Committee Member — Date

5/3/01

Dr. Peter J. Kasvinsky, Dean of Graduate Studies — Date

Abstract

The work examines the pagan nostalgia and anti-clerical hostility in early Irish literature, from the inception of the Celtic Christian church to the eve of the Norman invasion in 1171. The sentimental longing and animosity expressed through these tales was not an aversion to the Christian god, but rather a very human yearning for a romanticized past. A variety of factors inspired the urge for escape into pagan literature. For example, lay forces in Irish society used traditional story telling as a vehicle to regain status—and valuable patronage--lost to the church. The church, in turn, adopted and Christianized many of the folk tales and pagan elements for further assimilation into Celtic society, and in order to combat lay literary influence over the Irish people. Special attention has been paid to the Viking invasions, as the havoc wreaked upon society greatly altered the status of the church, and molded the content and mood of the existent pagan tales.

The evolution of the traditional stories follows a similar pattern. Initially, the tales originated among the folk, based upon local legends, local deities, or fanciful and/or fictional oral histories. The professional storytellers, either of their own accord or commissioned by their patron, added chosen stories to their repertoire. As the church introduced education and literacy, the monk or clerical scribe wrote the tales down, Christianizing and often greatly altering the content. These manuscripts would then be copied and recopied repeatedly. The events of contemporary society exercised influence throughout this process. The thesis

therefore examines pagan literary elements in relation to the Irish church and the social and political climate of the island in general.

Contents

Note on Irish Names, Words, and Pronunciation

The various terms cited in this work possess a range of spelling and pronunciation, spanning Old, Middle, and Modern Irish Gaelic, Anglicized alternatives, and Norse translations. I have chosen specific spellings for the sake of simplicity and ease in distinguishing similar names from each other. Whenever alternative spellings appear in a quotation, its familiar counterpart will appear in brackets.

As for pronunciation, the first syllable is always stressed, unless otherwise indicated. In addition, there exist certain sounds that are not heard in English—many consonants are aspirated to near-silence. As a general guide, some basic rules apply: the *ch* and *gh* in phonetic spellings is the soft pronunciation, as in Scottish or German; *c* is pronounced hard like *k*, not like *s*; *g* also has a hard pronunciation, never pronounced like *j*; and *s* when followed by *e* or *i* , is pronounced *sh*. I have provided a pronunciation key for some of the names and terms that will appear, as a representative sample:

armchara	**awrm chaw-ra**
Ath Cliath	**aw `klee-a**
Ard Macha	**awrd vo-cha**
Ardri	**awrd `ree**
Bealach Lechta	**ba-loch lach-ta**
Brehon	**bre hoon**

Brian Boru	bree-an bo-`roo
Cathbad	kaff-a
Cian	kee-an
Cill Maighnenn	kile mwi-nen
Cinneidhe mac Lorcain	ki-`nade-uh mok lur-kawn
Clontarf	klon-`tarf
Colum Cille	kol-um kile
Conchobar	kon-or
Cuaran	koo-ar-awn
Cuchullin	koo-`hull-in
Dal gCais	dawl gosh
Deise Mumhain	dai-sheh moon
Domhnall	doe-nal
Donnabhan	don-a-van
Donn Cuan	down koo-an
Donnchadh	doon-a-cha
Echthighearn	ech-thi-gharn
Eidirsceol	eh-dir-skole
Eile	ale
Emain Macha	ev-in mah-ha
Eoghanachta	own-ach-ta
Flaithbheartach	fla-har-tach
Feidlimid	fe-lim-i
Filid	fil-i
Gae Bulga	gay bul-guh
Gaedhill	gah-ghil
Gaill	gawl
Gleann da Locha	gleh-own da luh-cha
Gleann Mama	gleh-own maw-ma
Gormlaith	guh-rom-la
Laegaire	loy-ir

Leath Mogha	la-`mow
Macha	mah-ha
MacLiag	mok lee-ag
Mahoun	mah-hoon
Maigh Adhair	mwie ir
Maoil Seachlainn Mor	mweel `shach-lin mor
Maol Mordha	mwale mo-ra
Maolmhuadh	mwee-`loo-a
Mumhain	moon
Murchadh	moo-ra-cha
Sadbh	sive
Saingeal	sang-gel
sidhe	shee
Slaine	slan
Slieve Fuad	shlee-av foo-id
Sodomna	sah-done-a
Sulcoit	suh-la-`chode
Tadhg	tige (as in "tiger")
Tirechan	tee-reh-chan
Tordelbach	tur-lach
tuath	too-ah
tuatha	too-ah-ha
Tuatha de Danann	too-ah-ha day dan-ann
Ua Faolain	oo fai-lan
Ui Fhidhghinte	ee een-the
Ui Neill	ee nale
Uisneach	ish-nach

Preface

He said to me in prudent words,
Sing to me the history of my country;
It is sweet to my soul to hear it.[1]

Pagan Irish myth, recorded and preserved in the Christian era, reflects the tension and ambivalence not only of the laymen who originally created the fables, but also of the clerics and monks charged with transcribing these stories. The mood of this body of work ranges from nostalgia for Ireland's Celtic past to outright anti-clerical hostility. The literature belies the notion that the Christian conversion of Ireland by Saint Patrick (389?-461?) constituted the total immersion of the popular consciousness in the new religion. On the contrary, medieval Irish literature reveals the inner conflict of its creators: the attempt by individuals—centuries after Patrick's death—to reconcile their proud pagan heritage with the realities of every day life.

For a people who had felt a deep reverence for their professional story-telling class from antiquity, expressing himself or herself through a literary medium was natural. The pre-Christian educated classes, as they possessed no writing apart from the *ogham* script*, committed their notion of science, philosophy, law, history, and literary art to memory, passing

* Ogham is a laborious system reserved for labeling landmarks and short messages. It is characterized by dashes and designs that intersect a central vertical line.

their knowledge orally from teacher to student. This respect for learning continued into the Christian era with the introduction of Latin and the written word, and the eventual transcription of oral traditions. Eventually, monastic education became available to the laity. As a consequence, Ireland undoubtedly boasted an unusually high literacy rate in comparison with the continent.[2] The Irish, however, did not reserve their literacy only for God. The educated laymen continued to transmit the native pagan folklore, and through their efforts, influenced the church to do the same. As the tales evolved and changed through repeated transcription--and in most cases, Christianization—from the sixth through the twelfth centuries, they absorbed the sentiments of contemporary society and reflected contemporary events.

According to Irish literary expert and poet Frank O'Connor (1903-1966), the pagan world-view gleaned from their tales possessed an extremely subjective nature. He cites "the relativity of time, the relativity of matter, and the relativity of identity" as basic truths shared by the Irish Celts as revealed in their legends.[3] This mode of reasoning boasted remarkable elasticity: as the past informs the present, the past lives with an ethereal vitality. The pantheon of gods and goddesses that the pagan Celts worshipped and the spirits that they fearfully respected existed all around them—in every spring and tree, under every rock, and at the peak of every mountain.

Patrick, formerly enslaved by the Irish, understood these deeply held convictions. He Christianized pagan holy sites (such as the well of Elphin in County Roscommon),[4] illustrated the parallels between the priest and the druid, and attempted to leave as many of the traditional laws and customs intact as possible.[5] As a consequence, two different thought systems merged into a sometimes uneasy alliance. As human beings naturally romanticize the past when their present proves unsatisfactory, the Irish expressed their dissatisfaction and sought comfort and understanding in their literature.

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed the first major proliferation of scholarly analysis and translation of early Irish folklore. Whitley Stokes (1830-1909), one of the premiere scholars of the period, featured prominently as a translator of early Irish epics. Stokes also edited and translated The Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick[6] from the original texts—the first scholar to do so. Eminent critic Standish Hayes O'Grady (1846-1928) translated and compiled the Silva Gadelica in 1892,[7] a work which became the standard text for future studies of the Irish Fenian Cycle. Minister J. G. Campbell (1836-1891) further collected oral folklore, publishing The Fenians in 1891.[8] Other translators and critics of note include Alfred Nutt (1856-1910), Kuno Meyer (1858-1919), and Eugene O'Curry (1796-1862).[9]

The study of medieval Irish literature continued into the twentieth century. Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) published Duanaire Finn in 1908[10]—which also became a standard and much-cited translation of portions of

hich also became a standard and much-cited translation of portions of the Fenian Cycle. In 1921, Seamus MacManus (1869-1960) finished the mammoth Story of the Irish Race,[11] which featured critical examinations of Ireland's cultural history and literature. Gerard Murphy furnished a more sophisticated analysis in The Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Ireland,[12] working from his own translations of Duanaire Finn II (1933).[13] James Carney and Brian O Cuiv both dealt in part with folklore as orally transmitted history, and how these traditions related to Irish society.[14] Kathleen Hughes used the same approach in her examinations of the medieval Celtic church, most credibly in The Church in Early Irish Society (1966).[15]

The scholarship of the last ten years—although not as prolific—has proven just as innovative. In 1992, J. A. MacCulloch published Celtic Mythology, which includes critiques of the Ulster and Fenian Cycles.[16] His final chapter deals with the Christianization of Irish pagan myth and briefly notes the hostility directed toward Saint Patrick in some of the tales. Norman Vance investigated the social history of Ireland and its reflection in literature,[17] while Ian C. Bradley concentrated on the church and its role in Irish nationalism.[18] Other recent scholars venturing their own interpretations of pagan folklore include Seamus Deane, Andrew Carpenter, Jonathan Williams, and Patrick K. Ford.[19]

ENDNOTES PREFACE

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Chapter One: Assimilation: Patrick, Heathen Society, and the Early Church

Faith has flow'red and flourished,
This shall fail us never,
Raths which Gentiles nourished
Now are empty ever.

* * *

Pagan power is over,
False its fair devotion;
God rules, Lord and Lover,
Earth and sky and ocean! [1]

In 431, Pope Celestine I (?-432) sent his representative Palladius "*ad Scotos in Christum credente*"—"...to the Irish believers in Christ...."[2] Unfortunately, a Leinster chieftain called Nathi did not welcome the presence of an interloper on his lands—he attacked Palladius and drove the Christian trespasser out of his territory. Understandably, Palladius abandoned his mission.[3] Author Seamus MacManus assumes that Patrick then received permission from the papacy to try his hand on the island,[4] however, church historian Katherine Hughes doubts that the pope ever rendered his official sanction to Patrick's aspirations.[5] Regardless, in 432 Patrick landed on Ireland's eastern coast in the vicinity of present-day County Wicklow, where again, the native residents forced the withdrawal of the missionaries, causing Patrick and his entourage to sail north to

Strangford Loch. After landing and suffering further aggression from Dichu of the Dal Fiatach clan, the chieftain allowed Patrick to continue his travels by land.[6]

Little is known of Patrick's mission of conversion—but in his Confession the saint claimed, "I was threatened with danger on every side."[7] Patrick further stated,

> ...I came here to the Irish gentiles to preach the gospel. And now I had to endure insults from unbelievers, to "hear criticisms of my journeys," and suffer many persecutions "even to the point of chains."[8]

One such instance of persecution Patrick rendered in some detail:

> ...I would bring gifts to kings, and over and above that I made payments to their sons who journeyed with me. In spite of that, on one occasion they took me and my companions prisoner, and were all set to kill me.
>
> . . .
>
> They laid hands on everything we had, put me in irons, and only after fourteen days did the Lord free me from their power.[9]

Patrick briefly mentioned "...some twelve dangers in which my very life was at stake,"[10] illustrating the difficulties the missionary endured in the conversion of the pagan inhabitants. The families and clans of those that chose to follow the would-be saint often ostracized and degraded the converts. "Not that their fathers agree with their decision," Patrick wrote. "More often than not, they gladly suffer persecution, yes, and even false charges from their own parents."[11]

Patrick and his followers traveled throughout the island--and as God's word gained a foothold, Patrick learned the importance of integrating his small

community into the larger society. In his dealings with the "heathen people," Patrick claimed,

> I have always been straight with them and will continue to keep my word with them. God knows that "I have not cheated a single one of them," Nor would I dream of such a thing, for God and for the sake of his church, lest I should stir up persecution for them and all of us....[12]

According to the *Senchus Mor*—an early ecclesiastical collection of legal codes--Patrick actively sought reconciliation between church doctrine and secular or Brehon Law:

> There are many things that come into the law of nature which do not come into the written law. Dubhthach showed these to Patrick; what did not disagree with the word of God in the written law, and with the consciences of the believers, was retained in the Brehon code by the church and the poets. All the law of nature was just, except the faith and its obligations, and the harmony of the church and the people, and the right of either party from the other and in the other; for the people have a right in the church, and the church in the people.[13]

Nevertheless, the chieftains, petty kings, and members of the professional classes continued to reject conversion rather than overthrow custom.[14]

The aristocratic society that Patrick sought to alter faithfully followed extremely conservative traditions. Overseen by a class of legal specialists, custom dictated Irish law. The Irish possessed no concept of capital crime—instead, individuals paid compensation based upon the social status of the victim. In addition, an intricate surety system existed wherein those entering into a contract required a guarantor held liable if the individual violated the agreement. A broken contract resulted in a loss of social status, which in turn limited the rights of compensa-

tion.[15] However, the system required the cooperation of the Irish people (especially the wealthy aristocracy) in order to function. Tradition and custom ensured the system's survival.[16] Neither Patrick nor the church sought to undermine this policy.

However, the church would legislate against pagan survivals for centuries.[17] The canons of Patrick, Auxilius, and Iserninus prove that the Irish *brehons* of the sixth century continued to cling to their heathenism. For example, the canons disclose that the church prohibited Christians from appealing to pagan secular courts: "A Christian whom someone has wronged and who calls that person to court, and not to the Church, for the case to be tried, he who does this shall be a stranger."[17] Furthermore, these canons order clerics and church officials to reject the alms of the non-Christians laity.[18] Even among the converted, some aspects of church law and doctrine proved difficult to enforce. The traditional Brehon Law allowed divorce and remarriage—for both men and women—under a variety of circumstances. Church legislation reveals that some Irish Christians had refused to part with their customary marital rights.[19] In addition, the canons refer to clergy who have rejected the Christian ideals of chastity and poverty, acquiring both wives and private property:

> Any cleric, from ostiary to priest, that is seen without a tunic and does not cover the shame and nakedness of his body, and whose hair is not shorn after the Roman custom, and whose *wife* [my emphasis] goes about with her head unveiled, shall both likewise be held in contempt by the laity and be removed from the Church.
>
> ...If a cleric has given surety for a pagan in whatsoever amount, and it so happens—as well it might—that the pagan by some ruse defaults upon the cleric, the cleric must pay the debt from his own means....[20]

The willingness of the Irish church to adapt to Celtic society enabled its growth in the sixth century. Celtic Ireland possessed a network of *tuatha* (clans), petty kingdoms, and overlordships that made centralized government impossible. To adapt to this political mosaic, the structure of the early church transformed from episcopal to monastic, as no tribe would tolerate a bishop from a foreign or rival *tuath*. As a result, clans often built their own monasteries.[21] In addition, the sixth-century church had begun actively legislating against married clergy, making monastic life a welcome refuge from female temptation.[22] The end of the century saw the rise of monastic houses such as those at Derry, Durrow, and Iona founded by Colum Cille (521-597), while Columbanus (543-615) traveled to the continent, establishing houses at Annegray, Luxeuil, and Bobbio.[23]

Monasticism additionally made concessions to traditional Irish society. As the ownership of land—and its agricultural produce—provided the wealth for the *tuath*, custom often forbade the bestowal of land outside the family or clan. Hereditary monasteries evolved as a result: houses built on family lands, with the kin of the donors taking orders and fulfilling abbatical offices for generations. Like Irish kingship, primogeniture did not dictate succession to the office. However, the frequent accession by the sons and grandsons of the abbots hints that some clergy continued to turn up their Irish noses at clerical celibacy.[24]

By the seventh century, Christianity had established its permanence, with the clergy consequently gaining an esteemed position in Irish society. Early canons reveal that the individual who had taken clerical orders in the fifth and sixth centuries retained their social status: a nobleman remained a member of the ar-

istocracy, and the low-born cleric served the church "*iugo seruitutis*" ("under the yoke of servitude").[25] Eventually, as traditional Celtic society held their learned class in high esteem, the cleric soon took his place among the professional *filid*. The *Uraicecht Bec*—another early ecclesiastical law code--bestowed a considerable "honor-price" or *dire* upon the clergy.[26] The Irish based this honor-price upon a unit of value called the *cumal*, or a female slave. A heifer equaled one *set*, with six *sets* making up one *cumal*.[27] The *dire* allowed the clergyman to exact compensation, therefore extending the protection of the secular law to the church.[28]

Ultimately, the Christian church did not dominate or replace Celtic society, but re-shaped itself to accommodate existing social structures. In the same manner, the Irish fitted Christianity and its doctrine into their traditional world-view. The following headache charm is an example of the Irish reconciliation of Christianity with pagan magic:

> Head of Christ, eye of Isaiah, forehead of Elijah, nose of Noah, lip of Job, tongue of Solomon, neck of Matthew, mind of Benjamin, breast of Paul, grace of John, faith of Abraham, blood of Abel: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.[29]

The church also tolerated the *filid*—the professional poet and storyteller. The role of the *filid* in antiquity, according to O'Connor, filled a deep psychological need. As the pre-Christian Irish Celts possessed no writing, they did not have a medium for recording their history and ancestry. Therefore, committing their history to memory was the only available bulwark against the loss of identity.[30] The local king or chieftain employed the *filid* to memorize and publicly recite genealogies, histories, legal records, and the prowess of contemporaries.[31] Many

filid toured the island, composing and reciting for the smaller tribes whom could not afford to support a resident professional. A nomadic *fili* (singular) could ply his trade anywhere, as all of Ireland shared a common language and a similar point of cultural reference.[32]

The *filid* held a position of great respect—both financially and socially. As the poets composed and recited genealogies and histories, they could blackmail a patron in return for "good press." If a patron refused to pay the poet's asking price, or failed to treat the *fili* with due respect, the poet would most likely compose a withering satire that would haunt the offender for generations.[33] The *filid* enjoyed such high status under the Brehon Law that society deemed the killing of a poet as "sacrilegious."[34] The *Uraicect Becc* gives the honor-price or *dire* of a poet as seven *cumals*—the same as a king.[35] Furthermore, O'Connor contends that the professional poet belonged to a hereditary profession.[36] The *filid*, by the seventh century, had joined the rest of the aristocracy in Christianity. As the clergy rose in status, society classed churchmen in the same social strata as the poet.[37] The *filid* maintained their professional position until the Norman invasion, which effectively removed much of the poets' traditional patronage.[38]

Although the cleric and the *fili* shared the same social standing early on, the growth of church power impaired the poet's prestige. The churches and monasteries—and the schools they founded—soon grew wealthy and powerful as they attracted students from abroad. Consequently, the clerical poets rose in stature, to the detriment of the *filid* who could not compete with the monasteries' superior educational system. Evidence of bad feeling between the clerical poets

and the *filid* arose early. Leaders supposedly convened the Convention of Drum Cet in 575 to exile the *filid* from Ireland on account of the poets' excessive greed. According to O'Connor, the church concocted the story as propaganda.[39]

Nevertheless, the coming of Christianity brought with it an invaluable gift to the professional poet—the written word. This observation may appear obvious on the surface, but the literacy of the *filid* had deeper implications. Now, the professional poet and storyteller could compete with the clerical poets and monastic scribes on their own "turf." In the seventh century, a secularly schooled *filid* employed this new medium in the creation of the *Tain bo Cualnge*, or "The Cattle Raid of Cooley."[40]

The *Tain bo Cualnge* wound become the centerpiece of the Ulster Cycle—one of two great cycles that dominated early Irish literature. The *Tain* features Cuchullin and King Conchobar mac Nessa's Red Branch warriors defending Ulster against the aggression of Queen Medb of Connacht. According to expert and translator Cecile O'Rahilly, scholars no longer accept the contention that these stories possess a historical foundation. Nevertheless, they provide an important window into pre-Christian Irish civilization.[41] The culture depicted in the tales corresponds to the accounts of the Celts of Gaul by classical authors and scholars such as Diodorus Siculus (90-21 B. C.), Strabo (63? B. C.-A. D. 24?), and Caesar (100-44 B. C.): the style of weapons, shields, the collection of trophy heads, and the bestowal of the "champion's portion"* at mealtime.[42] The cycle ultimately portrays a third-century Irish society.[43]

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* The chieftain reserved the prime cut of meat for the most heroic. Warriors often fought (sometimes to the death) for this privilege.

The *Leabhar na hUidre*—or, The Book of the Dun Cow, housed at Clonmacnois[44]—contains the oldest surviving rendition of the *Tain*, transcribed in 1106.[45] However, Kenneth H. Jackson asserts that the *Tain* originated from an oral tradition that did not receive transcription until the seventh century.[46] In The Book of the Dun Cow, and in later versions contained in The Book of Leinster (twelfth century) and The Yellow Book of Lecan (fourteenth century), one finds "...constant evidences of Old Irish originals written up into Middle-Irish form," according to MacNeill.[47] Furthermore, linguist L. Winifred Faraday finds evidence in The Yellow Book of Lecan that implies the text had been copied and re-copied, ultimately from a seventh-century manuscript.[48] O'Connor cleverly equates the study of the *Tain* to archaeology, as each century saw different writers and transcribers reinterpret and elaborate upon the tale.[49]

Supposedly, the king of the Ulaid of Ulster ordered his *fili* to record the clan's native legends—after the Ui Neill of Leinster had invaded Ulster and asserted their dominance over Ulaid territory. The Ui Neill would remain preeminent in Ulster and monopolize the high kingship until the tenth century. Ui Neill hegemony over the high kingship elevated the prestige of Ulster—therefore, by 700 A. D., Cuchullin of the Ulaid had become Ireland's national hero.[50]

The *Tain* is of an especially bloody and violent nature. Nearly every sequence features Cuchullin slaughtering his enemies and procuring their heads for his personal trophy collection. The creator renders the scenes without apology, reaffirming the universal human penchant for a good rumble. At the attack of the nefarious Nadcrantail, "...Cuchulainn went mad...and he springs on his shield

therewith, and struck his head off. He strikes him again on the neck down to the navel. His four quarters fall to the ground."[51] The battle scenes are uniformly spectacular for their gore—another typical example reads, "Cuchulainn hurled a stone at him, so that his head broke, and his brains came over his ears...."[52]

Clerical scribes countered the popularity of the secular sagas with their own heroic literature.[53] Clerical authors such as Muirchu composed works directed toward a lay audience, with the sole purpose of glorifying the saints. In his Life of Patrick, Muirchu depicts his subject as a zealous soldier of Christ, performing miracles and using God's divine power to best and often destroy his pagan enemies. The gentle Patrick evolves into an avenging angel—resembling Cuchullin more than the actual saint:

> ...Then they began their dispute, and one of the druids named Lochru provoked the holy man and dared to revile the catholic faith with haughty words. Holy Patrick looked at him as he uttered such words and, as Peter had said concerning Simon, so with power and with a loud voice he confidently said to the Lord: "O Lord, who art all-powerful and in whose power is everything, who hast sent me here, may this impious man, who blasphemes thy name, now be cast out and quickly perish." And at these words the druid was lifted up into the air and fell down again; he hit his brain against a stone, and was smashed to pieces, and died in their presence, and the pagans stood in fear.[54]

Muirchu wished more for Patrick than simply a macho makeover. Muirchu sought pre-eminence for the Ulaid patron saint of Armagh—therefore, he created a myth that would attach Patrick to the ruling Ui Neill overlordship. Muirchu composed a legend recounting Patrick's supposed conversion of the pagan king Loegaire, son of Ui Neill founder Niall of the Nine Hostages:

> ...And holy Patrick said to the king: "If you do not believe now you shall die at once, for the wrath of God has come down upon your head." And the king was in great fear, his heart trembling, and so was his entire city.
>
> King Loiguire [Loegaire] summoned his elders and his whole council and said to them: "It is better for me to believe than to die", and having held council, acting on the advice of his followers, he believed on that day and became converted to the Lord the eternal God, and many others believed on that occasion....[55]

The myth took root, and by the end of the seventh century Patrick had become the patron saint of the entire island by riding on Ui Neill coattails, replacing the Ui Neill saint, Colum Cille.[56]

However, Patrick's legend required incorporation into Irish folklore in the same manner that Christianity had been incorporated into Celtic society. According to Irish annalists the Four Masters, when Patrick founded Armagh in 457 he allegedly discovered a doe and a newborn fawn threatened by builders. He rescued the pair.[57] The veracity of the tale is negligible—however, the story either created or continued a tradition in hagiographic literature that associated Patrick and deer. The deer was a common motif in secular Irish literature—often appearing as a shape-shifter and/or member of the *sidhe* (faeries). Muirchu kept the deer's magical element. As Loegaire's druids lie in wait to ambush Patrick and his retinue, the saint chants the *Faed Fiada* or "Deer's Cry", which creates the illusion that Patrick's group is a harmless herd of deer passing before the heathens:[58]

> I bind me to-day on the Triune a call
> With faith on the Trinity—Unity—God over all.
> I bind me the might of Christ's birth and baptizing,
> His death on the Cross, His grave, His uprising,
> His homeward ascent, the power supernal

Of His coming for judgement eternal.
I bind me the might of the Seraphim's love,
The angels' obedience, the hope of arising
To guerdon above:
The prayers of the Fathers, prophetical teachings,
The virtue of virgins, apostolical preachings
The acts of the True:
I bind to me, too,
Heaven's dower, sun's brightness,
Fire's power, snow's whiteness,
Wind's rushing, lightning's motion,
Earth's stability, rock's solidity,
Depths of Ocean.

I bind me to-day
God's might to direct me,
God's power to protect me,
God's wisdom for learning,
God's eye for discerning,
God's ear for my hearing,
God's word for my clearing,
God's hand for my cover,
God's path to pass over,
God's buckler to guard me,
God's army to ward me
Against snares of the devils,
Against vice's temptations,
Against wrong inclinations,
Against men who plot evils
To hurt me anew,
Anear or afar, with many or few.

I have set all these powers around me,
Against danger and dole
Of all the foe-powers that would wound me
In body and soul:
Against each incantation
By false prophets breathen,
Against black legislation—
The laws of the heathen,
Against idolatry's wares, and heretical snares,
Against spells of the women, smiths, druids, the whole
Of that knowledge which blindeth the soul.
Christ keep me to-day
Against poison and burn,
Against drowning and wounding,

Until I may earn
The guerdon abounding.
Christ near,
Christ here,
Christ be with me
Christ beneath me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ be o'er me,
Christ before me,
Christ on the left and the right,
Christ hither and thither,
Christ in the sight
Of each eye that shall seek me,
Christ in each ear that shall hear,
Christ in each mouth that shall speak me,
Christ not the less,
In each heart I address.
I bind me to-day on the Triune the call
With faith, on the Trinity—Unity—God over all.
Christi est salus
Christi est salus
Salus tua, Domine, sit semper nobiscum![59]

ENDNOTES CHAPTER ONE

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Chapter Two: Secularization and the Viking Age

'Whence are you, learning's son?'
'From Clonmacnois I come;
My course of studies done
I am off to Swords again.'
'How are things shaping there?'
'Oh, things are keeping fair;
Foxes round the churchyards bare
Gnawing the guts of men.'[1]

By the eighth century the clergy had not only evolved into a hereditary profession, but the church had also grown more secularized. With increasing wealth and an emphasis on education, monastic houses utilized their *scriptoria*—not only for religious studies, but also for secular literature as well. Although in competition with the work of the professional *filid*, the Church had never legislated against their recitation or transcription.[2] Monastic scribes would co-opt pagan literature—balancing the gruesome nature of stories like the *Tain* with Christian interpolations. Eleanor Hull correctly observes, "This frequent association of pagan and Christian personages and ideas is not without meaning; it shows that not only no strong prejudice existed against the ancient literature, but...that a curiosity and an appetite was felt with regard to it; and a desire was experienced...to reconcile the two systems."[3]

The church ultimately intended not only to render the pagan protagonists more amenable to Christianity, but also to reduce the influence of the profes-

sional *filid* on the laity—to "steal their thunder", so to speak. However, an inherent paradox of heroic esteem versus Christian acceptability appears. After the killing of Cuchullin in the *Tain*, "...the soul of Cuchullin appeared there to the thrice fifty queens who had loved him, and they saw him floating in his spirit-chariot...and they heard him chant a mystic song of the Coming of Christ and the Day of Doom."[4] Messianic prophecy is a common element in these interpolations. However, in some instances, the authors unwittingly lend credence to the supernatural powers of pagan necromancers in the process. At the conception of Conchobar, his father Cathbad declares that the hour of his son's birth will coincide with the birth of Christ:

> ...The same propitious hour
> To him and to the King of the World
> Everyone will praise him
> For ever to the day of Doom;
> The same night will be born.
> Heroes will not defy him,
> As hostage he will not be taken,
> He and Christ.[5]

Cathbad supposedly possesses this power of prophecy because he is a druid. Therefore, the prophecy does not originate from a divine source, but is nonetheless a correct prediction. There is no attempt to reconcile this paradox.

The fable of Macha--the pregnant *sidhe* or fairy wife of an Ulster Red Branch warrior featured in the Ulster Cycle—contains an especially curious interpolation. The warriors force Macha into a foot race against the kingdom's fleetest steeds. She outruns the horses, but the exertion causes the unfortunate woman to go into labor before the merciless spectators. "Then she gave vent to a cry in

her pain, but God helped her, and she bore twins, a son and a daughter, before the horses reached the goal."[6] Macha, in reality, occupied a place in the pantheon of Irish pagan goddesses. However, God's intervention does not detract from the power of the *sidhe* woman—in fact, the interpolation lends weight to the subsequent curse Macha lays upon the spectators: that for nine generations, the men of Ulster will suffer birthing pains in times of crisis. As with Cathbad's prophecy, the Christian elements give legitimacy to non-Christian power, especially considering that women (and goddesses) enjoyed greater social status and legal rights in pre-Christian Ireland than in the post-conversion era.[7]

Of course, the most obvious monkish interpolations feature conversion. However, the composers often reveal an unconscious ambivalence over the scenes they create. King Conchobar and his Red Branch warriors, enjoying a drunken evening at the stronghold of Emain Macha, fall to comparing war trophies. They boast of their "brainballs": hardened projectiles created by mixing the brain of their vanquished enemy with lime. Conall the Victorious calls for the brain of Megegra—however, a comrade of Megegra (Cet of Connacht) steals the ball. "He adjusted the brain of Megegra in the sling and threw it so that it hit the crown of Conachar's head, so that two-thirds of it entered his head...."[8] The king's physician, unable to remove the ball, cautions Conchobar that undue excitement could precipitate his demise. He lives for seven years with the wound, until the druid Bacrach reports the death of Christ. The king rages at the injustice. "Then Conachar [Conchobar] believed; and he was one of two who believed in God in Erin before the coming of the Faith...."[9] However, his conversion has a

profound side-effect for the noble king: "...from the excess of the fury that seized upon him, the lump started out of head, and some of his brain came away with it; and in that manner was his death."[10]

This prevalent motif—equating conversion with death—runs not only through the Ulster Cycle but also through other fables of the early medieval period. "The Death of Eochaid" tells the story of Liban, a three-hundred-year-old *sidhe* woman who lives with her beloved lap dog beneath the waters of Loch Neagh. Liban's music gains the attention of the cleric Beoan mac Innle, who extracts a promise from Liban to meet him on the edge of the lake. Foolishly, she complies, and Beoan and two other clerics throw a net over the *sidhe*. Cruelly, one of the witnesses to the capture murders Liban's pet, while the clerics bicker over ownership of the catch. Ultimately, the monks offer the woman a choice: baptism and another three hundred years of life on Christian soil, or baptism and her immediate demise. The grief-stricken Liban chooses death.[11]

Other stories of conversion follow the same formula, but with the inclusion of a dramatically different element: Saint Patrick himself. Two sisters, Ethne the Fair and Fedelm the Ruddy, encounter the saint while washing at the well of Cliabach. The sisters question Patrick at length about his God. After a lengthy exchange, the pair eagerly seeks baptism. Patrick complies:

> And they asked to see Christ, face to face. And Patrick said to them: "Ye cannot see Christ unless ye first taste of death, and unless ye receive Christ's Body and his Blood." And the girls answered: "Give us the sacrifice that we may be able to see the Spouse." Then they received the sacrifice, and fell asleep in death; and Patrick put them under one mantle in one bed; and their friends bewailed them greatly.[12]

In another example of death after baptism, this time from the Fenian Cycle, Patrick himself is apparently responsible for the death of one of his converts, Caoilte mac Ronin. The pagan warrior had miraculously survived with his cousin Oisin for over one hundred and fifty years:

> Patrick of the smooth hands baptized them at the end of their days: he called Oisin Art and Caoilte Conn.
>
> There you have the manner of Caoilte's death, the mild son of sportive Ronin: in the last days of his vigour he was drowned at Tara.
>
> The prince's son fell by the cast of the cleric: Oisin though he was stout and obstinate, never rose after that cast.[13]

The church had effectively integrated into Irish society, appropriating its literature and molding itself to native law—but, in the eighth century, the church became involved in and adopted the less savory aspects of Irish political life. Before the sixth century, early churches had depended to a certain extent upon royal patronage.[14] In addition, ecclesiastical synods had provided the means for mediating differences and feuds between monasteries. Unfortunately, as each monastery grew in wealth and prestige, their abbots would turn to the petty king instead of to each other. The result, surprisingly, was clerical carnage as monasteries began settling their differences on the battlefield. In addition, many houses supported their king in secular wars by providing clerical troops.[15] For instance, the monastery of Clonmacnois battled and defeated the house of Durrow in 764, killing 200 of the Durrow *familia*.[16] Durrow fought again in 776, this time in alliance with the king of Munster against the Ui Neill.[17]

Ecclesiastical violence continued regardless of the influence of the ascetic revival of the ninth century. In 817, the king of the Ui Chenselaig battled the monastery at Ferns, wherein the annals report that "four hundred persons were slain."[18] Ultimately, the autonomous nature of the Irish monastic system was a primary causal factor for the anarchy, as the Irish church had no centralized hierarchical authority.[19]

However, the monasteries exacted compensation when attacked outright, as in 839 when Ui Neill king Mael-Sechnail killed Durrow's steward.[20] Nevertheless, such instances proved rare, as the laity believed the hagiographic literature that guaranteed the patron saints' divine vengeance upon violators. "The Life of St. Declan of Ardmore" clearly illustrates the fate of even the petty pilferer:

> The bondswoman of a certain steward came, in the course of her servile business, to St Declan's monastery; but shortly she stole from the city a large hide, part of the holy pontiff's rents, wrongly intending to give it to others. But—in the presence of wayfarers—the earth swallowed her up, avenging by divine intervention the wrong she had done earlier, and continued to do, to the holy bishop's good monastery. But, even as the earth devoured her, it flung the hide up from her arms, and this instantly appeared to all who were present in the form of a stone. The holy bishop in his monastery saw all this with his spiritual vision, and he told the story to his brothers. The people, in great fear, carried to him the stone into which the flying hide had turned, and they told everyone what they had seen. The name of St Declan was greatly magnified by all, and they were afraid of him both in his presence and in his absence.[21]

As superstition protected the church, consistent lay attacks against monastic houses did not begin until after 830,[22] encouraged by the Viking invasions. By that time, the church had already become a corrupt and thoroughly secularized institution, with lay abbots, hereditary offices held in plurality, and married

clergy.[23] The abuses and violence of the church marred the reputation of the clergy as God's representatives in the minds of the laity. The church's helplessness against the Viking invasions would further validate lay suspicions that clerics laid claim to more divine power than they actually possessed.

The Vikings had intermarried and traded with the Irish well before any serious depredations. However, the odd raid here and there along the eastern islands was not unknown. In 616, a Viking attack resulted in the death of Donnan and the burning of his cloister at Ega.[24] It was not until 794 that the raids commenced in earnest, beginning with the attack at Rechren or modern Lambay.[25] The Vikings not only destroyed monasteries but sacked towns, murdering or enslaving the populace in the process. In the areas they controlled, the Norse extracted "nose money" (or the removal of the nose) when the people could not pay the heavy taxes that the aggressors demanded.[26]

However, the invaders primarily targeted the great wealth of the monastery and church. The Norse burned Iona in 801,[27] returning in 806 to slaughter 68 of the *familia*.[28] In the 820's—when the violence escalated—the Vikings desecrated the relics of St. Comgall at Bangor.[29] Soon, the attacks spread south along the coast, reaching Skellig Island off the coast of modern County Kerry in 823. The annals state, "Etgal of Scelig [Skellig] was carried off by Gentiles [the Norse], and died soon after of hunger and thirst."[30]

The devastation accelerated in 831 under the Norwegian Tuirgeis, who sought to master Ireland as his countrymen had mastered England and Normandy.[31] Placing their fleet in Dundalk Bay, the Norwegians sacked and plun-

dered Armagh three times within the space of a month.[32] By 835, the Norse had spread to the Shannon region and throughout Leinster, raiding Kildare in 835.[33] In 837, Tuirgeis and ten-to-twelve thousand men entered the interior of the island through the rivers Liffey and Boyne, gaining access to the River Shannon.[34] By 840, the Norwegians had established Dubhlinn (meaning "Blackpool") on the site of an Irish village on the Liffey called Ath Cliath or "The Fort of the Hurdles."[35] In addition, the Norse sought domination in the north by placing fleets on Lough Neagh in 838.[36] By 845, legend has it that Tuirgeis took Armagh and converted the church into a heathen temple—and further gave the church at Clonmacnois to his wife Otta, who supposedly meted out pagan prophecies.[37] The same year, Maelsechlainn—the king of Meath and member of the southern branch of the Ui Neill—captured and drowned Tuirgeis in Loch Owel.[38]

After Tuirgeis' death, rival Danes seized the opportunity to invade Ireland in 848.[39] The Irish called both the Danes and the Norwegians *Genti* ("the heathen") or *Gaill* ("the strangers").[40] To distinguish between them, the people labeled the Norwegians either *Lochlannaigh* or "white heathens" and the Danes either *Danair* or "black heathens."[41] The annals state that the rival Vikings "...disturbed all Ireland afterwards."[42]

In 852, the Norwegians reasserted their power under Olafr ("Olaf the White") or Amhlaim in Irish Gaelic.[43] Olafr proclaimed a joint kingship of Dublin with fellow Norwegian Ivor, then established towns and trading posts like Strangford, Carlingford, Wexford, Waterford, and Weatherhaven in 853. The Danes countered by building the rival city of Limerick on the Shannon—also

strategically important as the river runs through the center of the island. Responding to the rivalry between the Danes and the Norwegians, the Irish chieftains soon sought alliances with one side or another.[44] As a result, the rules of warfare changed. The Vikings cared nothing for the traditional Irish laws of conduct during battle. The Irish abandoned their centuries-old standards when in conflict with the Norse, and the habit soon bled into purely Irish versus Irish confrontations.[45]

Warfare was not all that changed. Ninth-century Ireland appears as a tapestry of alliances forged and broken between the invaders and the provincial kings. A statement entered into the annals in 859 made a pertinent observation. A now-anonymous monk wrote, "...it is a pity for the Irish that they have the bad habit of fighting among themselves, and that they do not rise all together against the Norwegians."[46] The inclusion of this new Norse element into Irish politics (contentious and confusing at the best of times) impaired the fragile stability of Celtic society. As no centralized authority existed, the delicately balanced system of status and compensation gradually fell apart.[47]

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Chapter Three: Initial Effects of the Viking Invasions on the Church and Literature

Since tonight the wind is high,
The sea's white mane a fury
I need not fear the hordes of Hell
Coursing the Irish Channel.[1]

As the security of society disintegrated, so did the security and status of the church. For centuries, the requirements of compensation—and more importantly, the fear of God's wrath—had checked aggression against the church. Such threats of reprisal meant nothing to the Norse.[2] The Vikings murdered bishops and priests in their own churches, rifled Christian graves, desecrated shrines, and stole holy articles and artwork. The Irish, lay and cleric alike, observed that neither the patron saint nor the hand of God punished the offenders.[3]

Not long after the first major Viking raids, the Irish themselves began sacking Irish monasteries. The most notorious example was Feidlimid of Munster, the King of Cashel. His reign (820-847) reveals a consistent policy of violence against the monasteries and churches of rival *tuatha*, including the slaughter of the *familia* of both Durrow and Clonmacnois in 832.[4] Feidlimid's nefarious career ended after plundering the Termon of St. Ciaran in 843. The annals record that he soon grew ill and died "of the flux" in 847.[5]

These annals reflect the demoralization of the church and of the monks who wrote them. Initially, the entries purveyed shocked indignation at the attacks,

especially when the Irish colluded with the invaders. An entry written in 852 states, "In this year...many abandoned the Christian baptism and they plundered Ard Macha [Armagh], and took out its riches."[6] After a time, these entries reveal the eventual habituation and resignation of the chroniclers to the raids. Two later examples from 856 simply state, "The oratory of Lusca was burned by the Norwegians,"[7] and "Sodomna, bishop of Slaine, was killed by the Norwegians."[8] In 890, for the eighth time, the Norse sacked Armagh. The Four Masters stated that the attackers "...carried off seven hundred and ten persons into captivity," then added:

> Pity, O holy Patrick, that your prayers did not stay
> The Gaill with their axes when striking your oratory.[9]

By the end of the ninth century, Norse assimilation—beyond the political alliances—had begun: intermarriage, fosterage, and conversion grew more common.[10] In addition, the Irish enjoyed some limited relief with the cessation of Viking raids. In 902, an Irish coalition defeated the Dublin *Gaill* at the Battle of Brega. The annals record that "...they left a great number of their ships, and escaped half dead, after having been wounded and broken."[11] In 914 however, the attacks recommenced—likely due to the blocked Norse expansion of England and Western Europe by Edward the Elder and Rollo respectively.[12]

The course of the tenth century saw power shift repeatedly between the Norse and the natives. In addition, the church continued to suffer. Already dependent upon secular authority before the Viking invasion, the monasteries

sought protection from their provincial kings against attack from both Viking and Irish alike. In addition, rival clans attacked monastic houses, as the interlopers considered the monastery to be a defensive enemy position.[13] As political—as opposed to spiritual—entities, the practice of provincial kings and local rulers taking abbatical offices increased. For example, the Four Masters describe Cormac, a ninth-century King of Cashel, as both a king and a bishop.[14]

However, the hagiographic literature of the period reveals the financial woes of the church. "The Life of St Ailbe" reinforces the importance of accepting alms—and other valuables—from the laity:

> Do not reject God's gifts;
> Do not refuse to possess them;
> You may take what is offered
> --But it makes you no greater than another.[15]

The Tripartite Life features God delivering "as much gold and silver as the nine companions could carry" to Patrick and his followers in exchange for their faith.[16] The hagiographic writers sought not only money for their monasteries, but also increased temporal power over the laity. The Tripartite Life depicts Patrick shamelessly bargaining with God, demanding:

> ..."On the day that that the twelve thrones shall be on the Mount (Zion), when the four rivers of fire shall be around the mountain, and the three households shall be there...let me myself be judge over the men of Ireland on that day." "Assuredly," saith the angel, "that is not got from the Lord." "Unless it is got from Him, " saith Patrick, "departure from this Rick shall not be got from me, from to-day till Doom; and, what is more, I shall leave a guardian there."
>
> The angel went to heaven. Patrick went to mass. The angel came (back) at nones. "How is that?" saith Patrick. "Thus," saith the angel. "All

> creatures, visible and invisible, including the twelve apostles, besought (the Lord) and they have obtained. The Lord said, 'There hath not come, and there will not come, after the apostles, a man more admirable, were it not for thy hardness.' What thou hast prayed for, thou shalt have...." [17]

The attempts to raise clerical prestige and church funds were not always successful. The Norse raids eventually caused a migration of church scholars, either to Europe or to less dangerous portions of the island. The clerical transcriptions of the Ulster Cycle, for example, had originated in the northeast--later, the transcriptions spring up in the south, near the Shannon.[18]

With the plundering and destruction of monastic houses and their *scriptoria*, the professional *filid* again rose to prominence. The previous secular literature had also declared a need for funds, indicating that the *filid* had lost social status and patronage.[19] However, with the church's literary output impaired, the professional poets resumed their place as receivers of royal patronage.

The Fenian Cycle, a portion of which preceded the Viking period, would later come to dominate Irish literature. The cycle recounts the exploits of Fionn mac Cumhaill and his roving band of *fiana*, commissioned by King Cormac mac Art as a defensive force against "Lochlannach" or Viking attack in the third century. However, Ireland did not suffer Norse raids in the third century, erasing any historical validation for the tales. Essentially, third century events were replaced by contemporary Viking elements.[20]

The stories and poems that constitute the Fenian Cycle took their classical form in the ninth century.[21] Furthermore, one of the earliest fables—the *Macgnimatha* or "The Boy-Deeds of Fionn", appearing in the Psalter of Cashel—contain

elements that date the story to a period before the hegemony of the high kingship at Tara.[22] The Book of the Dun Cow is the oldest surviving MS. that contains Fenian stories, which according to Nutt was probably compiled before 1050, representing "...a mass of written tradition already one hundred to one hundred and fifty years old."[23] Cormac's Glossary confirms Nutt's estimation. It's compiler, the King of Cashel, died in 908—the oldest sections within the glossary refer to tales of Fionn.[24] In addition, The Book of the Dun Cow features a story wherein Fionn reincarnates as the sixth-century king Mongan.[25] The fable dates to the latter part of the eighth century, as the story contains no trace of Norse influence.[26]

The Fenian Cycle represents a wish fulfillment on the part of the laity. Fionn and his *fiana* are valiant warriors who successfully defend Ireland and her people from the heathen invaders—in a manner no one in Ireland had yet been able to do with any permanence. As it grew apparent that the church and its patron saints were powerless to check Norse aggression, the laity and the *filid* turned to its pagan past to find Ireland's defenders--at least in its literary imagination.

The church originally did not appreciate the image of the pagan *fiana* as Ireland's heroes. Ann Dooley and Harry Roe, translators of the Fenian *Acallam na Senorach*, contend that organized *fian* bands—supposedly comprised of noble youth devoid of inheritance—were an accepted part of Irish society well into the Christian period. They cite hagiographic literature of the time to prove that the church opposed this remnant institution, stating, "In a number of saints' Lives this antagonism between the saint and the brigand becomes the occasion of an im-

pressive display of the saints' superior power and the resulting conversion of the *fian* members."[27] Nutt argues that *fian*-type bands never existed in any form.[28] It is more likely that clerical writers composed these hagiographic stories in response to the tales of the *fiana* that circulated among the folk and the *filid*.

The Fenian literature reveals a growing dissatisfaction with Christian life in the Viking period. Clerical abuses, violent rivalries, and the church's involvement in political affairs had all undermined the moral authority of the monk and priest. The church's helplessness in the face of Norse aggression further tested the credulity of the cleric's claim to divine power. As Irish ecclesiastics had never suppressed secular literature, the church unwittingly had supplied the laity with an alternative world-view. The rival professional *filid*, seeking to re-establish their lost status, had kept Ireland's pagan past alive in the imagination of the Irish people. Consequently, the laity—and the monks and clerics themselves—possessed an alternative point of reference when judging their present circumstances. The Ulster Cycle and the Fenian Cycle continued to provide the vehicle of expression for this dissatisfaction.

A central legend in the Fenian Cycle is the *Acallam na Senorach*, or Tales of the Irish Elders, often labeled "Ossianic", as legend attributes authorship of the works to Fenian figures Oisin and Caoilte—although, in reality, there is no attributable author.[29] The fifteenth-century Book of Lismore, discovered in Waterford's Lismore Castle in 1814, is the oldest text of the *Acallam* still in existence. The twelfth and thirteenth century manuscripts from which the Book of Lismore was copied are now lost.[30] Furthermore, Nutt deduces that the actual genesis of the

stories precede the twelfth century MSS. by one hundred and fifty years.[31] He places the creation of the *Acallam* in the Viking age, as the work overflows with Norse elements (such as grave robbing),[32] but are totally free of any later Norman influence.[33]

The *Acallam* recounts the introduction of Saint Patrick to the aged *fian* warriors Caoilte and Oisin. Existent MSS. from the eleventh and twelfth centuries that feature Fenian legends contain the central theme of the *Acallam*: both warriors lament over lost youth, comrades, and way of life. Although the only versions that exist are thoroughly Christianized, the clerical transcribers allowed the unrelieved longing to remain intact.

The *Acallam* does not recount how Oisin and Caoilte managed to survive for over one hundred and fifty years. An imaginative explanation (at least for Oisin's survival) may exist in an eighteenth century poem by Michael Comyn. According to literary historian T. W. Rolleston, Comyn had adapted his work from earlier traditional sources that have since vanished.[34] Oisin, as a young man, joins a *sidhe* woman riding on her magical horse to the Land of Youth.* After only three weeks, the warrior journeys home to revisit his friends and family, only to find his father's *dun* (fort) on the Hill of Allen overgrown and dilapidated:

> What shock I felt none could report,
> To see the court of Finn [Fionn] of the steeds
> A ruin lone, all overgrown
> With nettles and thorns and rankest weeds![35]

* The Land of Youth is also known as Tir na n-Og or I-Breasil, located beyond (or beneath) the western ocean.

As he travels, Oisin discovers the entire island altered for the worse. He realizes that he has been absent from Ireland for some one hundred and fifty years, not a mere three weeks. As he approaches the Valley of the Thrushes (Glanismore, near Dublin), Oisin happens across a group of poverty-stricken peasants futilely struggling to remove a boulder from their field:

In passing through the Thrushes' Glen
A crowd of men in straits I see;
Full thrice five score and haply more
At toil full sore awaited me.

Then forth there spoke a man of that herd,
With suppliant word to me address'd—
"Come to our help, O champion brave,
Come quick to save us thus distress'd!"

I rode up briskly to the crowd
And found them bow'd beneath a weight—
A flag of marble great and long
Bore down the throng who moaned their fate.

Now all who tried to lift that stone
Did pant and groan most piteously—
Till some its crushing weight drove mad
And some fell dead, most sad to see!

Then cried a steward of that crowd,
And said aloud, "O haste and hie,
O gallant chief to our relief,
Or else 'tis brief ere all shall die!"

A shameful thing it is to say
--For such array of men these days—
They're powerless of blood and bone
Full easily that stone to raise!

If Oscar, Oisin's valiant son
Laid hold upon that marble stone,
With right hand bare he'd hurl't in air,
Flinging it fair, with ne'er a groan![36]

The scene illustrates a common motif: the reduction of the quality of life in Ireland since the coming of Christianity. Such was the misery and poverty of the people that even their physical attributes appear reduced from their former pagan glory. Comyn described the peasants' reaction to Oisin's countenance:

> Right gently they saluted me
> But marvell'd much to see my size,
> They marvell'd at my wondrous steed,
> For on such breed they'd ne'er set eyes.[37]

Apparently, pagans also grew larger than Christians. In the *Acallam*, its author describes Caoilte and his companions as "enormous", and consequently frightening to the monks they greet: "...the tallest of the clerics came only to the waist or the shoulder-tops of those great men, who were already sitting down."[38] The pagan warriors appear literally larger-than-life, making the Christians seem ordinary and shabby in comparison.

Patrick baptizes Caoilte and adopts the warrior as his primary companion. The pair enjoys a warm friendship, and they spend hours in conversation as Caoilte regales the curious saint with stories of the *fiana*. However, Patrick soon feels troubled by his fascination with the legends and the consequent neglect of his religious duties. To ease his apprehension, an angel appears and orders, "Have these stories written down on poets' tablets in refined language, so that the hearing of them will provide entertainment for the lords and commons of later times."[39] Patrick's troubled uncertainty over his enjoyment of the tales reflects the discomfort felt by the church concerning the pagan stories that circulated

throughout the island. In the *Acallam*, the creators solve this problem easily through angelic approval. As in the Ulster Cycle, divine intervention lends legitimacy to legend and eases the conscience of the storyteller, who thenceforth revels in the decidedly non-Christian legends.

Dismay over the ordinary quality of life, as opposed to a romanticized past, is another primary theme of the *Acallam*. After his conversion, Caoilte laments his advanced age:

> Shapeless, pale, confused, and slow
> My sense has gone, my grown remains
>
> Shapeless, pale, confused, and slow
> Age has broken my heart in three.[40]

Patrick, for his part, attempts to console his friend in the only manner of which he is capable--by extolling the virtues and blessed nature of a life in Christ: "Well, dear Cailte [Caoilte], you have no need for grief and sorrow, for you have fared better than any of them. I have given you, beyond any other one of the Fian, the goodness of the True and Glorious God, faith, piety, and cross-vigil."[41]

Caoilte, however, remains inconsolable. Christianity cannot replace his pagan youth. In conversation with King Eochaid Lethderg, Caoilte recounts a particularly fierce battle wherein "a thousand wounds and thirty-six I gave." The king observes, "Great was the evil of battles and conflicts that occurred at that time, my dear Cailte." Instead of concurring with Eochaid's notion of the superiority of the present, the old warrior answers, "Nothing remains for us today but senility and old age."[42]

The Fenian Cycle would gain a boost in popularity with the rise of King Brian Boru and the consequent shift of political power in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. As Norse incursions waned at the close of the ninth century, provincial kings and the Ui Neill (who dominated the high kingship) sought to solidify their power.[43] The obscure clan of the Dal gCais in Munster would most consistently adopt a successful anti-Viking policy, producing the most famous king in Irish history.

ENDNOTES CHAPTER THREE

1. Anonymous, "The Viking Terror", translated by Frank O'Connor, Ireland In Poetry, edited by Charles Sullivan (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), p. 84.

2. Otway-Ruthven, p. 26.

3. Hughes, p. 200.

4. Four Masters, p. 447.

5. Annals of Clonmacnois, p. 140.

6. Fragmentary Annals, p. 97.

7. Ibid., p. 107.

8. Ibid., p. 107.

9. Four Masters, p. 547.

10. MacManus, p. 273.

11. Annals of Ulster, p. 417.

12. Peter Brent, The Viking Saga (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), p. 108.

13. Hughes, p. 220-222.

14. Four Masters, p. 569.

15. "The Life of St Ailbe", Saint Patrick's World, p. 241.

16. Tripartite Life, p. 31.

17. Ibid., p. 119-121.

18. Hughes, p. 208.

19. Nutt, p. 36-7.

20. Ibid., p. 7.

21. MacNeill, p. xxvi.

22. Ibid., p. xxx.

23. Nutt, p. 49.

24. Whitley Stokes, ed., Cormac's Glossary, translated by John O'Donovan (Calcutta: O. T. Cutler, For the Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1868), p. 112, 129, 130, 142.

25. R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, ed., Lebor na hUidre=Book of the Dun Cow (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., for the Royal Irish Academy, 1929).

26. Nutt, p. 48.

27. Ann Dooley and Harry Roe, introduction to Tales of the Irish Elders of Ireland: Acallam na Senorach, translated by Ann Dooley and Harry Roe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xii-xiii.

28. Nutt, p. 34-5.

29. Dooley and Roe, p. viii.

30. O'Grady, p. viii.

31. Nutt, p. 21.

32. Ibid., p. 57.

33. Ibid., p. 50.

34. T. W. Rolleston, Celtic (London: Senate, 1994), p. 276.

35. Michael Comyn, "Oisin in the Land of Youth", Ancient Irish Tales, edited by Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1969), p. 454.

36. Ibid., p. 454-455.

37. Ibid., p. 453.

38. Acallam, p. 5.

39. Ibid., p. 11-12.

40. Ibid., p. 129.

41. Ibid., p. 129.

42. Ibid., p. 139.

43. Hughes, p. 215.

Chapter Four: Reality Becomes Myth: Brian Boru

...They are gone, those heroes of royal birth,
Who plundered no churches, and broke no trust,
'Tis weary for me to be living on earth
When they, O Kincora, lie low in the dust!
Low, O Kincora!

. . .

I am MacLiag, and my home is on the Lake;
Thither often, to that palace whose beauty has fled,
Came Brian to ask me, and I went for his sake.
Oh, my grief! that I should live, and Brian be dead
Dead, O Kincora![1]

Brian mac Cinneide was born in the village of Boromha (hence "Boru") in Thomond in 941. A much-cited contemporary account—War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill--labels Brian an "ever victorious Octavin [sic]," a "second Alexander", and a "magnificent, brilliant Moses"[2] for his defeat of the Norse at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Modern writers have continued in this tradition—novelist Morgan Llywelyn writes, "The figure of Boru bestrides the Irish past like Colossus, a reminder of the possibilities inherent in mankind."[3] Legend portrays Brian Boru as a heroic warrior saint-king, the savior of Ireland from the heathen, and the king who thoroughly destroyed the Viking presence in Ireland. In reality, Boru was a realistic, practical, and canny war leader whom managed to contain—not remove—the Norse presence while preserving Irish law and securing personal political power.

Legend and fact agree that no one before or since Boru has been as successful in nearly uniting Ireland into a single political entity. The Annals of Ulster mention Boru infrequently and entirely ignore his accession to the high kingship, as the ruling Ui Neill would have considered Brian a usurper of traditional power.[4] Other sources (primarily in Brian's native Southern Ireland) are remarkably unencumbered by objectivity, passionately painting Boru as Ireland's savior and the perfect romantic hero. The primary source for this partisan propaganda is the aforementioned War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, traditionally attributed to Boru's court bard, MacLiag. While generally accurate, the work drips with pro-Boru bias—a bias adopted and rewritten by generations of Irish historians. More interesting is the Viking Njal's Saga, written after the Norse Christianization. Upon the first mention of Boru, its author declares, "...he was a king of the noblest qualities"[5]—a surprising observation. Such an admiring declaration is not likely to be included in the traditions of a defeated people trammeled by a heroic colossus. An explanation for this paradox may be found in another passage: "King Brjan forgave all whom he had outlawed three times for the same misdeed, but if they transgressed more often, he had them judged in accordance with the law."[6] While this statement is certainly a dramatic exaggeration, it speaks to the fact that Boru sought to *include* the Norse in Irish society—but only under Irish law.

As Norse attacks recommenced in the tenth century, power struggles with the northern Ui Neill and infighting among the Munster clans weakened Irish resistance to a new Viking force in the person of Olaf Cuaran in 951.[7] Once in Ireland, Olaf reinforced his power through marriage. His first wife was mother to

King Maoil Seachlainn Mor of Meath (whom later inherited the throne of the *ardri*, or High King of Ireland), and his second—Gormlaith—was kinswoman to the King of Leinster. The Danish rulers of Limerick, secure in Olaf's power, exploited the political divisions in Munster and secured submissions from the leading *tuatha*.[8]

Boru's father Cinneide mac Lorcan, chief of the Dal gCais tribe of Thomond, refused to submit to the Norse, or the Viking-allied Irish in Munster. Cinneide and two of his elder sons, Donn Cuan and Echthighearn, died in the conflicts against the Norse, Ui Neill, and the allied Eoghanachta tribe.[9] Nearly broken after their deaths, Boru and the Dal gCais—led by Brian's older brother Mahoun—waged a guerrilla campaign from Dalcassian territory, or modern County Clare.[10] In the meantime, the Norse continued to expand along the Shannon to the west coast of Ireland.

Tiring of war, Mahoun made peace with the Danes—however, against his brother's wishes, Brian continued the campaign.[11] Upon the death of the reigning king of Munster, Mahoun and the Dal gCais—prompted by Boru—broke the peace by pursuing the Norse-friendly throne.[12] The conflict culminated in the Battle of Sulcoit near modern Tipperary in 965, against the Danish king of Limerick, Ivar. Mahoun, Brian and the Dalcassians routed the Norse, pursuing them back to Limerick. Ivar and a small band of warriors escaped via longboat while the Irish sacked and burned the town.[13]

The Gaedhil with the Gaill recounts Mahoun's ravishment of Limerick:

> The fort and the good town they reduced to red fire afterwards. The whole of the captives were collected on the hills of Saingel. Every one of them that was fit for war was killed, and every one that was fit for a slave was enslaved.[14]

The "spin", of course, was the righteous revenge of the Irish on the Viking marauders. In reality, the Irish matched atrocity for atrocity. Such action soon proved ineffective in eliminating the Danes as a political force in Munster. The Dal gCais, however, achieved their goal: Mahoun ruled as the king of Munster to 976.[15]

Ivar soon returned and allied himself with Donnabhan of the Ui Fhidghinte and Maolmhuadh of the Eoghanachta in Munster. Overwhelmed by this powerful Irish-Norse alliance, Mahoun relinquished the throne. Regardless, Maolmhuadh in all probability assassinated Mahoun at Sliab Caein, or modern Slieve Riach.[16] The Gaedhil with the Gaill states that Boru "...then made an invading, defying, rapid, subjugating, ruthless, untiring war, in which he fully avenged his brother."[17] Brian attacked Limerick, killing Ivar in the process. Boru then marched to Ui Fhidhghinte territory in Desmond to battle Donnabhan, whom was also killed. Finally, Brian defeated Maolmhuadh in the Battle of Bealach Lechta in 978.[18] Instead of destroying Limerick, Brian—recognizing the Danes as commercially important—simply demanded tribute. Boru also sought reconciliation with the defeated Eoghanacht by marrying his daughter Sadbh to Maolmhuadh's son Cian. "Cian of the Golden Cups" remained a lifelong ally, and Brian—now the undisputed king of Munster—had built a strong bulwark against future Norse incursions.[19]

It soon grew apparent that Brian needed to control the southeastern kingdom of Leinster in order to protect his own kingdom. The Norse, centered in Dublin and Waterford, nearly dominated the province, and threatened to overrun all of Southern Ireland.[20] The Vikings of Waterford—in collusion with Leinster's king Domhnall and Ua Faolain of the tributary kingdom of Deise Mumhain—agreed to check the growing power of Munster in 979. Ua Faolain invaded and ravaged Munster, after which Brian and Cian pursued Ua Faolain to Waterford. Boru sacked the city.[21]

King Domhnall eventually submitted after Brian's march through Leinster. As an ingenious condition of the surrender, Boru revived the ancient tribute of Eirdirsceol, which included the acknowledgement of the King of Munster as King of Leath Mogha, or all of southern Ireland.[22] Between 978 and 984, Brian received hostages and submissions at his palace at Kincora from kingdoms all through the south as a result.[23] Whether his motivation was to save Ireland from the heathen, political expediency, or personal ambition, the result was the same: Brian secured enough power to preserve Irish law at least in the territories under his control. By 984, there remained only three major powers in Ireland: Boru, the Norse, and the *ardri* or High King Maoil Seachlainn Mor of the Ui Neill.

The northern and the southern branches of the Ui Neill traditionally alternated the high kingship—which in essence was merely a position of honor, with no unifying authority. In 979, the southern candidate from Meath, Maoil Seachlainn Mor ("The Great") replaced the quiescent *ardri* Domhnall.[24] Maoil Seachlainn set out to prove that he was not as passive as his predecessor.

In 980, Olaf Cuaran of Dublin chanced to test the new high king by attacking Maoil Seachlainn's homeland, Meath. The *ardri* defeated Olaf and laid siege to Dublin. After the city's surrender, Maoil Seachlainn freed all the Viking-held Irish hostages, allegedly declaring, "Every one of the Gaeidhil ["Gaedhil", or the Irish] who is in the territory of the Foreigners, in servitude and bondage, let him go to his own territory in peace and happiness."[25] One of whom he "liberated" was King Domhnall of Leinster, who had taken refuge in Dublin after his defeat by Boru. Olaf retired to Iona, and his son by Gormlaith--Sitric "Silkbeard"--became the new king of Dublin.[26]

Domhnall promptly allied himself with Sitric and rebelled against the *ardri* in 982.[27] After quelling the rebellion, Maoil Seachlainn decided to check the power of Boru. The Chronicum Scotorum states, "Maelsechlainn [Maoil Seachlainn]...plundered Mumhain [Munster], and gained victory over Brian and the men of Mumhain."[28] As a final insult, the high king entered Thomond and destroyed the royal tree at Maigh Adhair, under which the Dalcassians had inaugurated their kings for centuries.[29]

Two equally powerful forces vied for control. The fact that neither man attempted any further aggression testifies to the wisdom and practicality of both. Boru and Maoil Seachlainn allowed a standoff, as opposed to what would have been a devastating conflict. In addition, both shared the common problem of the rebelliousness of Leinster and its habit of allying with the Norse.

On at least two significant occasions between 989 and 999, Sitric of Dublin rebelled, forcing Maoil Seachlainn to retaliate. Finally—probably by pre-

arrangement—Sitric took King Domhnall prisoner. Domhnall's kinsman Maol Mordha, the brother of Maoil Seachlainn's wife Gormlaith, took the Leinster kingship. Maol Mordha then promptly allied himself with Dublin.[30]

Maol Mordha's alliance with Sitric did what nothing else could: it allied Brian with Maoil Seahlainn Mor. In 999, at the foothills of the Wicklow mountains at Gleann Mama, "A great hosting by Maelsechlainn, son of Domhnall, and by Brian, son of Cennedigh, to Glen-mama; and the Foreigners of Ath-cliath [Dublin] came to attack them, but the Foreigners were defeated and slaughtered...."[31] Maol Mordha fled the field.[32] In addition, "Maelsechlainn and Brian went afterwards to Ath-cliath, and remained a week there, and they carried off its gold, its silver, and its booty...."[33] Sitric, hoping for refuge with the northern Ui Neill, escaped to Ulster.[34]

Although Gleann Mama was a joint venture, Boru dictated the peace—using diplomacy as opposed to further military aggression to subdue the defeated. Instead of treating Leinster as a conquered territory, Brian merely proclaimed the kingdom a tributary and allowed Maol Mordha to retain his throne.[35] Boru further promised his daughter Slaine to Sitric if he agreed to acknowledge Brian as his overlord.[36]

As two others had done previously, Brian took Sitric's mother Gormlaith as his wife to further solidify his position. Maoil Seachlainn had repudiated and divorced Gormlaith undoubtedly under the pagan Brehon Law.[37] A rationale for the *ardri's* repudiation may be found in the Norse Njal's Saga, which contends that Gormlaith, "...was a most beautiful woman and showed the best qualities in all

matters that were not in her power, but in all those that were, people said she showed herself of an evil disposition."[38]

Regardless of Gormlaith's "disposition", Brian's alliance with Sitric nullified the previous alliance with Maoil Seachlainn. In 1002 Brian marched his army to the seat of the *ardri* at Tara, demanding Maoil Seachlainn's abdication. By now, Boru's army consisted of men from Munster, Dublin, Leinster, and Connacht. The allies of Maoil Seachlainn had already abandoned the high king, and the only remaining support came from Meath.[39] The Gaedhil with the Gaill recounts Maoil Seachlainn'a alleged response to Brian's demands: "...He said that had he been able he would have given him battle, and as he was not able, he said that he came to make his submission to him, and to give him hostages."[40]

Without any further bloodshed, Boru usurped not only symbolic but practical control of Ireland. As the new *ardri* Brian allowed all the under-kings—including Maoil Seachlainn—to keep their regional thrones. Thus, Boru would retain their allegiance in the face of any further foreign aggression.[41] As for the Norse already settled in Ireland, the Gaedhil with the Gaill states, "He extirpated, dispersed, banished, caused to fly, stripped, maimed, ruined, and destroyed the foreigners in every district and in every territory throughout the breadth of Erinn."[42] This is untrue. Brian recognized that the Viking element, after nearly two centuries in Ireland, could not be removed. Many of the Norse had converted, intermarried with the Irish, and bore children who called Ireland their homeland.[43] Consequently, Brian treated the Norse with leniency, as long as they recognized his authority. An example of this inclusion is Boru's creation of a Norse-Irish navy

1005—of great importance in strengthening Irish commerce and trade.[44] In fact, Njal's Saga states that Brian even had a Norse foster-son, Kerdjafad[45]—not unlikely, as Irish nobility fostered each other's children to cement alliances.

The Chronicum Scotorum simply states, "Brian begins to reign."[46] In this brief period of relative stability, Boru attempted to repair some of the damage wrought by the invaders. Fleeing from burned churches, decimated libraries, and devastated schools, the ninth and tenth centuries had seen a mass exodus of scholars to the continent.[47] Therefore, Boru set about rebuilding the centers of worship and learning that the Norse had destroyed. According to the Gaedhil with the Gaill,

> By him were erected also noble churches in Erinn and their sanctuaries. He sent professors and masters to teach wisdom and knowledge; and to buy books beyond the sea, and the great ocean; because their writings and their books in every church and in every sanctuary where they were, were burned and thrown into the water by the plunderers, from the beginning to the end; and Brian, himself, gave the price of learning and the price of books to every one separately who went on this service. Many works, also, and repairs were made by him. By him were erected the church of Cell Dalus, and the church of Inis Cealtra, and the bell tower of Tuam Greine, and many other works in like manner.[48]

This rebuilding and reinvigoration proved not only practical, but also a valuable source of positive public relations for a king considered a usurper. In 1004, Brian made a royal tour around Ireland, stopping at Armagh to leave twenty-two ounces of gold on the altar.[49] The significance of this stop can be deduced in the monk Tirechan's entry in the Book of Armagh:

> ...I see deserters and arch-robbers and warlords of Ireland hate Patrick's

> territorial supremacy...if an heir of Patrick were to investigate his supremacy he could vindicate for him almost the whole island as his domain....[50]

Brian shared in Armagh's supremacy. After Boru left his gift, his *armchara* or confessor Maolsuthain entered a passage on an empty space in the book:

> Saint Patrick, when going to heaven, ordered that the whole fruit of his labor, as well of baptism and causes of alms, should be paid to the apostolic city which in Irish is named Ardd-Macha. So I have found in the books of the Irish. I, namely, Calvus Perennis [Maolsuthain] have written in the sight of Brian, emperor of the Irish ["imperatoris scotorum"], and what I have written he has confirmed for all the kings of Cashel.[51]

As its champion, Boru gained church support for his nontraditional high kingship.

The Gaedhil with the Gaill states that peace ended with a family squabble. Supposedly, Maol Mordha received a taunting from his sister Gormlaith over his vassal status, after which Brian's son and primary general Murchadh belittled the man after Maol Mordha suggested a faulty chess move.[52] Regardless of its cause, Maol Mordha re-established his alliance with Sitric of Dublin and rebelled—with Gormlaith now at his side.[53] Maol Mordha ordered a kinsman of Maoil Seachlainn to attack Meath, in order to render the ex-*ardri* unable to assist Boru.[54] In defense of Meath, Maoil Seachlainn retaliated:

> A great depredation by Maelsechlainn in the territory of the Foreigners, and he burned the country as far as Etar; but Sitric and Maelmordha overtook one of his preying parties, and slew 200 thereof, together with Flann, son of Maelsechlainn....[55]

Responding to Maoil Seachlainn's plea for help, Boru sent his son Murchadh to southern Leinster, where, "...he plundered the country to Glenn-da-

Locha, and to Cill-Maighnenn, so that he burned and pillaged the territory."[56] Maol Mordha fled to the security of Dublin, after which Brian and Murchadh laid siege to the city until forced to retreat at Christmas, 1013.[57] After Boru's retreat, Sitric sought foreign help from whomever possible. He secured the assistance of Sigurd of the Orkneys and Brodir of Man—Njal's Saga relates that Sitric promised both men the same prize: the kingship and the matrimonial hand of the thrice-divorced Gormlaith.[58]

There is a question as to why, after so many years, Boru pushed for a final decisive battle. Historian Peter Brent notes that in 1013, Svein Forkbeard defeated Aethelred for the English kingship. Therefore, Brian could easily have assumed that the Norse planned the same fate for Ireland.[59] Diplomacy, alliances, and family ties having failed, Brian prepared for his final battle at the age of seventy-two. Boru had the support of most of Ireland, including his son Murchadh, Murchadh's son Tordelbach, and the Norse Ospak of Man. Boru sent his youngest son Donnachadh south to Wicklow to distract the Leinster chieftains from attempting to enlist the aid of neutral clans.[60] In his usual thoughtful style, Brian endeavored to control as much of the proceedings as possible.

The Battle of Clontarf took place on the River Liffey, near Dublin Bay, on April 23, 1014. Essentially, the battle arose out of Leinster's wish for political autonomy—however, Clontarf is remembered as a clash between Christian righteousness and heathen evil.[61] The fact that the battle took place on Good Friday certainly enhances the Christian romanticism. Historians and writers from 1014 to the present have continued in this tradition. At Clontarf, the elderly Brian

settled in Tomar's Wood to await the end of the battle. Brent creates a touching tableau, writing,

> He will pray, however, this old man, head bent, within earshot of death and destiny, his greatness that of Ireland, now submitting his authority to the authority of his God and awaiting the turns and tragedies of history.[62]

At Clontarf, Boru's son and successor Murchadh lost his life on the battlefield.[63] After breaking the Viking line, the Irish pursued the fleeing Norse to their ships moored at the mouth of the Liffey. Norse and Irish alike—including Brian's grandson Tordelbach—drowned in the changing tide:[64]

> For it was at full tide the foreigners came out to fight the battle in the morning, and the tide had come to the same place again at the close of the day, when the foreigners were defeated; and the tide had carried away their ships from them, so that they had not at the last any place to fly to, but into the sea...[65]

According to Njal's Saga, Maol Mordha's ally Brodir fled the field to hide in Tomar's Wood. Finding Boru in prayer—and only protected by a handful of warriors—Brodir beheaded the *ardri*.[66] Although the Irish had finally halted the Norse aggression, they lost their king and his successor.

In recording the Battle of Clontarf, the anti-Boru Ulster Annals called Brian the "King of Ireland" for the first time.[67] The Dalcassians buried Brian and Murchadh at Armagh on the northeastern side of the original church.* Today, a plaque commemorates the approximate spot of the grave.[68] One of Brian's remaining sons, Tadhg, inherited the tribal Dalcassian kingship of Thomond. If

* The original church burned to the ground in 1020.

Tadhg had also inherited his father's ambition to rise higher, internal dissension after Brian's death would have made it impossible. The Eile tribe of present-day Tipperary murdered Tadhg in 1023.[69]

Maoil Seachlainn Mor resumed the high kingship after Brian's death. He himself died in 1022,[70] the last high king to truly rule as *ardri* in the Boru fashion. However, because Brian had violated custom and usurped the Ui Neill throne, Irish kings would thenceforth compete and battle for the title.[71] In addition--as assimilation had already begun before Boru--the Norse in Ireland would soon become completely Christianized. The Irish would call the former heathen city of Dublin either *Ath Cliath na cloc* ("Dublin, rich in bells") or *Ath Cliath na land's na lecht* ("Dublin the city of churches and graveyards").[72]

ENDNOTES CHAPTER FOUR

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12. Ibid., p. 69-71.

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14. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 81.

15. Ibid., p. 89.

16. Ibid., p. 85-9.

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18. Four Masters, p. 705-7.

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23. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 107-9.

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25. Ibid., p. 709-13.

26. Newman, p. 105.

27. Four Masters, p. 715.

28. William M. Hennessy, ed., Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, From the Earliest Times to A. D. 1135, translated by William M. Hennessy (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1866), p. 235.

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32. Newman, p. 112.

33. Chronicum Scotorum, p. 237.

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35. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 119.

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37. Newman, p. 116.

38. Njal's Saga, p. 350.

39. Four Masters, p. 745-7.

40. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 131.

41. Newman, p. 127.

42. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 139.

43. Newman, p. 76-7.

44. MacManus, p. 277-8.

45. Njal's Saga, p. 350.

46. Chronicum Scotorum, p. 239.

47. Green, p. 373.

48. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 139-41.

49. Annals of Ulster, p. 515.

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51. James F. Kenney, The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Volume I. Ecclesiastical (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 354.

52. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 143.

53. Brent, p. 116-7.

54. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 147.

55. Chronicum Scotorum, p. 249.

56. Ibid., p. 249.

57. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 151.

58. Njal's Saga, p. 352-3.

59. Brent, p. 117.

60. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 115.

61. Richard F. Allen, Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njal's Saga (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), p. 158.

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63. Gaedhil with the Gaill, p. 197.

64. Ibid., p. 193.

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66. Njal's Saga, p. 356-7.

67. Annals of Ulster, p. 531.

68. Newman, p. 177.

69. Annals of Ulster, p. 551-3

70. Ibid., p. 549-51.

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Chapter Five: Hostility: The Legacy of Boru, and the Influence of Classicism

Old haunts of the heathen
Filled from ancient days
Are but deserts now
Where no pilgrim prays.

. . .

Heathendom has gone down
Though it was everywhere;
God the Father's kingdom
Fills heaven and earth and air.

. . .

All the hills of evil,
Level now they lie;
All the quiet valleys
Tossed up to the sky.[1]

Boru's high kingship caused the southern Fenian Cycle to rise in popularity, rivaling the Ulster Cycle in prominence. The switch from the northern dominance of the Ui Neill to the southern dominance of Brian's Dal gCais breathed life into the cycle, as Boru and his progeny provided the lion's share of patronage to the most prestigious poets of the day. Therefore, the Fenian Cycle simply became fashionable. In addition, reality fed the popular imagination. The legends of Fionn grew as the populace responded to the larger-than-life figure of Boru. Southern court poets grafted Boru's reputation, and that of his son Murchadh, onto the stories of Fionn and his warrior son Oisin.[2] As political power shifted to

the south, families such as the Laigis and Fothairt sponsored the transcription of the Fenian legends out of a new sense of pride in their traditions.[3]

Other changes occurred in literature over the course of the Norse invasions. However, O'Connor believes these changes had less to do with Viking influence than with the reign of Charlemagne on the continent. Irish missionaries had traveled abroad well before the Norse invasions—later scholars, seeking an education away from the danger of Viking depredations, brought home to Ireland the humanist influences they had eagerly absorbed in Europe. Classical schools sprang up throughout Ireland—one of the earliest being in Kildare, founded in the ninth century. Consequently, Irish literature began to reveal "...a passion for Virgil and a penchant for headhunting," O'Connor jauntily states.[4] The classical motif of suicide—an element that had never appeared in Irish literature before—and the "flashback" technique of "The Boyish Feats of Cuchullin" in the *Tain* illustrate the growth of European humanist influence.[5]

Not only had Boru established a reasonably stable high kingship (at least until his death), but he also used this comparative stability to rebuild the devastated church. Recovery continued after the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, and the church once again flexed its muscle in the political sphere. Unfortunately, the problems of involving itself in secular affairs returned, with the same results. A church or monastery in a rival's territory remained a strategical target. However, unlike the Viking age, the church exacted compensation for violence, theft, or damage incurred by secular rulers.[6] In 1044, the King of Munster bestowed forty cows in compensation after his men sacked Clonmacnois.[7]

Unfortunately, abbatical offices once again became a lucrative and much-contested position. Fighting among rival claimants resumed, with pitched battles and outright assassination often the result.[8] In 1055—after nocturns—the members of the *familia* at Cork murdered their own abbot.[9] The same year saw a battle at Martartech between a Meath abbot and the Dubhdaleithe coarb of Patrick "in which many were slain."[10] Laws enacted in the eleventh century are indicative of the moral breakdown and abuses within the church. Churchmen reinstated The Law of Sunday or the *Cain Domnaig* in 1040, and later enacted legislation stressing almsgiving and abstinence in 1096.[11]

The professional *filid* and the laity had already exhibited a penchant for nostalgia for their pagan past. The church, by co-opting the literature, had legitimized the alternate pagan world-view. The secularization and abuses of the clergy, and the lack of divine retaliation for the violation and destruction of churches during the Viking invasions, continued to damage the moral authority of those who had taken orders. Now, a strain of Fenian literature exhibited the anti-clerical sentiments that had sprung up among the laity. The influence of classical literature from the continent gave storytellers permission to criticize churchmen—and sometimes, Christianity as a whole—in surprisingly overt language.

In the *Acallam*, Caoilte and Patrick had maintained a relationship of mutual respect and amicability. The Ossianic ballads—which features Oisin as Patrick's companion—are spectacular for their acidity. Patrick transforms from a gentle, thoughtful cleric into a sour and dogmatic old man, unrelenting in his criti-

cism of Oisin's pagan longing. Furthermore, the author presents Oisin as Patrick's near captive, forced to suffer the priest's endless prosthelytizing:

[Oisin:] Cleric! Who chantest the psalms,
I am convinced your judgement is not sound,
Why should you not listen for a short time to a tale
About the Fians—you never heard before?

[Patrick:] For your authority, son of Fionn,
And though you highly esteem the Fians,
The voice of the psalms throughout my mouth,
That is music enough for me.

[Oisin:] Do you compare your psalms
To Fionn-recitations about bared weapons?
Cleric! I would not reckon it a disgrace
To separate your head from your body.[12]

The earliest renditions of these Ossianic ballads appear via Scotland in The Book of the Dean of Lismore, compiled by James Macgregor before 1518 from earlier (and now, non-existent) sources.[13] The oldest Irish source is the *Duanaire Finn*, or The Poem Book of Finn, gathered and transcribed by Aodh O'Dochartaigh for Captain Somhairle Mac Donnell between 1626 and 1627. The original MSS. that O'Dochartaigh had worked from are also lost.[14] Although the sources we have for the ballads are younger, elements within the text lead Nutt to conclude that they may in fact predate the *Acallam*. Ultimately, Nutt believes that the *Acallam* was a later compromise—an attempt to soften the vicious edges of the Ossianic works.[15] Regardless, a twelfth-century set of Welsh poems attributed to Llywarch Hen share the same anti-clerical and nostalgic themes as the Ossianic ballads, rendered under the same dramatic circumstances: a pagan, in advanced age, decries the effects of Christianity.[16] Therefore, borrowing oc-

curred between the two Celtic cultures well before the twelfth century—not an uncommon practice. Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and English folklore often traded and reshaped each others legends, a prime example being the Irish tales of Grainne and Diarmaid which easily parallel the Welsh/English fables of Lancelot and Guinevere.

In the Ossianic legends, the anonymous composer portrays the aged and blind ex-warrior as perennially bored. Oisin ponders over his life at the monastery at Elphin, comparing his quiet life to the hunting, drinking, gaming, and woman-izing of his youth. As Patrick approaches, Oisin asks for reassurance that his new life in Christ is worth the tedium:

> Patrick, on my behalf, ask God to let it be known in what place I shall be, or whether he will save my soul from evil—Time passes wearily in Elphin tonight.[17]

Ultimately, however, Oisin concludes that the acquisition of God's grace is a futile pursuit. He regrets trading his hunting spear for a cleric's staff—obvious symbols of his remorse over conversion:

> Woe for them that wait on churchmen, that are
> not heard on the hardy bray: woe for them
> that are checked by decay, unsightly end of shelter.
>
> Woe for a king's son that is faint-hearted, that imposes
> not his fear on man: woe for him who forsakes
> his pointed lance for a horned yellow staff.
>
> Oisin am I, the prince's son: I was wont not to put
> off battle: to many a hero on the stead of
> strife I have given cause to woe.
> Woe for them.[18]

Oisin torments himself (and apparently, Patrick) with the memories of the *fiana*. In every instance, his reminiscences outshine his present circumstances. Oisin recounts the campaign led by his son Oscar against the people of Sorcha, and like Caoilte, laments the passing of friends and family. Patrick chastises the old warrior, encouraging the abandonment of memories in favor of devotion to God. Oisin is totally unmoved by Patrick's advice:

> [Oisin:] It grieves me, Patrick of the relics, who makest devotion with diligence, to be alive now after Oscar who defended all that thou hast named.
>
> . . .
>
> [Patrick:] Practise devotion and prudence: many perils thou hast sustained ere now: every spear that thou hast ever cast, that great Mary's Son may forgive it.
>
> [Oisin:] Dearer to me were the deep chant of the fians, and the sound of the chase on every highland, and Caoilte's musical ay, than heaven and thy joys, O Adze-head.*
>
> [Patrick:] Accept faith, noble Oisin, man that wast attentive to a company, and do a pure repentance for thy smiting in battles.
>
> [Oisin:] If swift MacLughach lived, and sword-strong Caoilte, thou shouldst not have them in a church taking thy instruction, O Adze-head.[19]

Ballads such as this represented another argument in the centuries-old dialogue between the clerical scribes and the *filid*. The professional poet glorified the pagan warrior—the church responded with hagiographic literature that glorified the saint, and interpolations in the secular literature that included divine

* Adze-head, or *Tailgeann*, are nicknames given by the Irish that refer to the saint's tonsure.

prophecy and conversion of the heathen. The Ossianic ballads in turn reject the merits of conversion outright. Although nominally a Christian, Oisin remains unimpressed with the devout lifestyle:

> The hunger of Crionloch's church, uch, I cannot
> bear it; last of the royal prince's sons, we
> have suffered a scanty fare.
>
> Oscar, my heroic son, for whom songs of praise were
> made, were he alive at present, he would not
> leave me to hunger.
>
> My curse upon thy churchmen, Patrick, and mayest
> thou rot! If I had Oscar, he would not leave
> me to hunger.
>
> I am Oisin ruddy cheeked, son of Fionn, of
> honorable spirit: I have had in my
> pay twenty hundred that knew no hunger.
> The hunger.[20]

The hunger is literal and figurative—it is the hunger of the soul. According to the poem's anonymous author, there is nothing in a devout life to feed Oisin's spirit.

The creators of the lays expressed not only nostalgia for a lost society, but also a marked disdain for the ecclesiastical class. As Oisin learns that a blacksmith has sold his son's sword—called *Maol Chiar* or "Hew-the-bodies"—he spews venom at the unworthy cleric who purchased the famous weapon:

> A curse on the blacksmith's boy, shamefully he sold Hew-
> the-bodies: a blemish, man, on thy body! Thou
> didst ill to sell the sword.
>
> Take that sword from thy belt, thou little clerkling that
> hast afflicted me: have thou done with the fierce
> sword and stick to thy clerkly order.

Since the blind old man has been stirred by the souls of
Caoilte and Fionn, unless Maol-Chiar goes out
I will quickly kill the cleric.[21]

Threats of violence against the clergy are common in the ballads. Such threats would have been unthinkable had the clergy not already exhibited a propensity for violence, and had the Viking invasions not destroyed the fear of divine retaliation. In "The Bell on Druim Deirg", Oisin chafes at the sound of Patrick's bell ringing through the hills. Oisin provocatively tells Patrick that in his youth, one heard the sounds of the *fian*—hunting shouts, barking dogs—not a miserable church bell. This observation, of course inflames the anger of the arrogant Patrick:

[Patrick:] Though sweet to thee the cry of the hounds and though it cause thy spirits to rise, more pleasing to the King is he who listens to the cleric's words.

[Oisin:] Though sweet to thee what they say, and though it please the mind, the roar of the swift stag is more sweet than the music of the clerics chant.

I have seen men in the plain, who would not listen to the sound of thy bell, and who would leave thee and all thy clerics dead together.

[Patrick:] O Oisin, tell it, and leave us not ashamed: what would they do to me for ringing this little bell?

[Oisin:] I truly give my word, and I swear by the soul of my king that he would strike thy bell on thy head till thou wert lifeless.

Had fierce Garbh Doire heard the sound of a bell in this western church, he would have soon gone in and broken the clerics bell.

Had Fionn, the warrior, heard the sound of thy little bell,

> O cleric, he would assuredly have gone to meet you and you would not have been able to escape.
>
> Had Conan of the Fiana heard the note of this bell that comes to me from the west, though all the clerics of the world had been there they would all have been lifeless.
>
> Had dear Caoilte heard it, a man who did not refuse battle, he would have gone in (no lie) and broken your little bells.
>
> . . .
>
> I am Oisin, Fionn's good son: I believe in the God above, O Tailgeann. Though tonight I am without the *fian*, without wealth, the bell's note gives me pain.[22]

Such passages can be dismissed as merely humorous—if so, it is a black humor indeed. Regardless of the author's intent of mood, the passage illustrates a mindset that considered the Christian penetration of Ireland an invasion, even if subconsciously so. Oisin intimates that had the *fian* survived as long as he, Patrick's invasion would have failed.

As the previous passage asserts, Oisin does not claim disbelief in Patrick's God—he merely refuses to believe that his family and comrades deserve damnation, or that the Devil designed his former way of life. His hostility is reserved for the church, not for God. Consequently, nowhere in the dialogues between Patrick and Oisin does there appear as much vitriol as when the saint refuses to release the *fiana* from Hell. The story's creator renders Patrick's noncompliance as the ultimate example of the church's intolerance and hypocrisy in terms of Christian forgiveness and charity:

[Oisin:] Patrick, ask from your God, I pray you that Fionn of the Fiana and his children reach Heaven. Make prayer for the prince: never in my time did I hear of one equal to him.

[Patrick:] I will not seek Heaven for Fionn, unpleasant man against whom my anger has arisen; for what he loved in his day was to be in a glen amid the clamour of the chase.

[Oisin:] If you had been along with the Fian, O clerk of the clergy and the bells, you would have paid no heed to God, but to giving due treatment to learned men and scholars.*

[Patrick:] I would not desert the son of the Living god for all who have come in the flesh, east or west. Oisin of weak judgement, your rewarding of learned men has ended badly for you.

All of the money you and Fionn bestowed has ended badly for him and you: he is in Hell because of it; for he practised treachery and violence.

[Oisin:] Little faith would I put in your words, O clerk of the white books. Neither Fionn nor anyone so generous as he has been kept in bondage by man or God.

[Patrick:] He is a prisoner in Hell, that man who benignly bestowed gold. On account of his want of faith in God he is in sorrow in the house of torments.

[Oisin:] Were the children of Morna there, or the children of Baoisgne** (they were stout men), they would carry Fionn out, or else themselves take possession of the house.

[Patrick:] The five separate provinces of Ireland and the seven battalions of the Fian could not bring Fionn out, though their power and strength were great.

[Oisin:] Patrick, it is a pitiful thing that the generous man should be imprisoned, a heart without wickedness or hatred, a stout heart to do battle.

It is unjust that God should not be pleased with

---

* The "learned men and scholars" referred to are the druid class and the *filid*, which accounts for Patrick's abhorrence.

** Morna and Baoisgne were rival *fian* bands. Fionn led clan Baoisgne.

the giving to people of gold and food. Fionn refused neither strong nor weak, if cold Hell is his house.

What did Fionn do against God but attend to the learned and scholars, now giving up much time to the bestowal of gold, another time joyfully following hounds?

[Patrick:] Fionn and the Fiana is imprisoned on account of the joy of the chase and the attention he devoted to the learned every day without a single thought of God.

[Oisin:] Patrick of the speckled croziers, you could not find fault with Fionn: he never refused anyone as regards gold: he never perjured himself nor took false oath.

[Patrick:] Do you know that you are here in your folly, turn your thought upon yourself: reflect on your own case, poor wretch; turn your thoughts now to your tomb.[23]

A different version of the dialogue relates Oisin's argument with more irony and poignancy:

All that thou and thy clerics tell,
According to the laws of Heaven's king;
These (qualities) were possessed by the Fian of Fionn,
And they are more powerful in God's kingdom.

Great would be the shame for God
Not to release Fionn, from the shackles of pain;
For if God himself were in bonds,
The chief would fight on his behalf.[24]

ENDNOTES CHAPTER FIVE

1. Anonymous, "The Downfall of Heathendom", translated by Frank O'Connor, Ireland In Poetry, p. 71.

2. Nutt, p. 16-17.

3. Dooley and Roe, p. xvi.

4. O'Connor, p. 48.

5. Ibid., p. 49-50.

6. Hughes, p. 238-40.

7. Annals of Clonmacnois, p.177.

8. Hughes, p. 242.

9. Chronicum Scotorum, p. 283.

10. Annals of Ulster, p. 597.

11. Hughes, p. 248-9.

12. John Gregorson Campbell, ed. The Fians; Or Stories, Poems, and Traditions of Fionn and His Warrior Band, Collected Entirely from Oral Sources (London: David Nutt, 1891), p. 106.

13. William J. Watson, ed., The Book of the Dean of Lismore (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, for the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1937).

14. MacNeill, p. xx.

15. Nutt, p. 28.

16. Ibid., p. 58.

17. Duanaire Finn, Part II, p. 197.

18. Duanaire Finn, Part I, p. 194.

19. Ibid., p. 186-7.

20. Ibid., p. 195.

21. Ibid., p. 161.

22. Duanaire Finn, Part II, p. 178-83.

23. Ibid., p. 205-15.

24. Anonymous, appearing in The Story of the Irish Race by Seumas MacManus, p. 73.

Epilogue: Reconciliation

You messenger that comes from Rome,
The place whence bulls and sermons come,
Against our poets you appeal;
Well, show your writing and your seal.

. . .

'Tis strange that when Saint Patrick came
From Rome he did not do the same,
And ban from Ireland ever more
The arts that were her joy before.

. . .

The Red Branch Hall is honored still,
And Brian lives and ever will.
They perish not who praised are;
Is Conall dead or Concobar?

. . .

So Irishmen, if this decree
Expel the bards, where shall we be?
For every Gael that shows so brave
Is nothing better than a slave![1]

The Irish church soon came under the scrutiny of a papacy determined to extirpate its abuses and bring its organization in line with the rest of Europe. English archbishops Lanfranc and Anselm expressed particular anger over instances where Irish secular law had eclipsed church doctrine, as in the Brehon provisions for divorce.[2] Consequently, Rome reorganized the Irish Celtic church and introduced the Augustinian and Benedictine Rule to establish consistency with the rest of Western Christendom.[3]

However, Romanization did not quell the adoption of pagan literature by church scribes—on the contrary. The alien elements introduced into the Irish church had the opposite effect: Irish clerical scribes felt compelled to cling to their Celtic uniqueness. Monks transcribed pagan myth in the vernacular for a lay audience. Once again, the church co-opted secular literature and reshaped it to suit their Christian tastes—and further declared that the work of the professional *filid* had value. The twelfth century *Lebor Gabala* (The Book of the Taking), "...defends the arts of *eolas and filidecht* (learning and poetry), for 'though the Faith came, these arts were not put away, for they are good....'"[4] The statement is reminiscent of the *Acallam*, wherein the angel commands the dictation of pagan legends.[5] The church, always busy with the transcription of pagan literature, exploded with activity. O'Connor cites a cleric called Domnall, who compiled an anthology of stories that included "A Description of the Day of Judgement" alongside the *Tain*.[6]

Church scribes continued to reconcile pagan myth with Christian teaching. The bestowal of God's blessing, and the consequent ascension of the pagan hero to Heaven, became another vehicle to achieve this end. In the *Acallam*, Caoilte visits the grave of his sister, Roiriee:

> [Caoilte:] I have a request for you, holy cleric.
>
> [Patrick:] What is that, dear soul?
>
> [Caoilte:] Since I have acquired your fellowship and your love I ask that you bring my sister from torments.
>
> [Patrick:] You may have your mother and father and your lord Finn mac Cumhaill brought from torments, if God wills it.[7]

As with the conversion interpolations, the heroes' release from Hell validates their place in the hearts of the Christian descendents. The author designed these additions to the tales to alleviate the listener's discomfort, and to reconcile the conflicting loyalties within the minds of the creators and their audience. In "The Phantom Chariot of Cuchullin", King Laegaire refuses to convert unless Patrick calls forth the famous warrior from Hell. In this endeavor, Patrick is successful. After regaling the pair with demonstrations of his physical prowess and battle skill, Cuchullin describes to Laegaire the pains of Hades:

> What I suffered of trouble,
> O Laegaire, by sea and land:--
> Yet more severe was a single night,
> When the demon was wrathful.
>
> . . .
>
> I played the swordlet on them,
> I plied on them the *gae bulga*;*
> I was in my concert victory
> With the demon in pain.
>
> Great was my heroism,
> Hard as was my sword:
> The devil crushed me with one finger
> Into the red charcoal![8]

Cuchullin may suffer in Hell, but he bravely battles the Devil. The theme of noble resistance against demonic evil pervades not only the Ulster Cycle, but the Fenian tales as well. At the death of Fionn, Satan urges the warriors of the rival *fian* band, Clan Morna, to torment the warrior. To incite Clan Morna, the Devil recites

* The *gae bulga* was a spear of the *sidhe*, which miraculously never missed its target.

the wrongs committed against them by Fionn. Although tortured, and offered and opportunity to exact vengeance, clan Morna refuses. In fact, the men gather around Fionn to protect their earthly rival from Satan's minions.[9] Though they burn in Hell, the heathen warriors exhibit the very Christian characteristic of forgiveness—in contrast to the church, which has damned the men.

Although some heroes appear defiant, others wish for their liberation. In the aforementioned "Phantom Chariot", Cuchullin begs for ascendance to Heaven:

> I beseech, O holy Patrick,
> In thy presence, that I may come,
> That thou wouldst bring me with thy faithful ones
> Unto the land which thou drivest about.[10]

Cognizant of the fate that awaits the king, Cuchullin advises Laegaire,

> Believe in God and holy Patrick, O Laegaire, that a wave of earth may not come over thee. It will come, unless thou believest in God and in holy Patrick, for it is not a spirit that has come to thee: it is Cuchullin, son of Sualtach.[11]

God allows Cuchullin to enter heaven. In this manner, the author erases all conflict between pagan and Christian admiration. The conflicting urges of the layman and monk alike are reconciled.

1171 witnessed the first phase of the Anglo-Norman invasions. As many difficult centuries of British domination passed, the church and the storytellers shared in the duty of consoling and giving fortitude to the Irish people. Anti-Catholic legislation forced Irish priests to conduct mass in secret. Acknowledging

the insurrectionist power of folk literature and song, Elizabeth I ordered the hanging of Irish bards and poets.

As interest in Irish folklore flowered in the nineteenth century, mythic and historic figures such as Cuchullin, Fionn, and Brian Boru would become literary and nationalist heroes. The modern Irish continue to keep these traditions alive. In strife–ridden Ulster, for example, street paintings depict pagan personages as symbols of national pride. While the majority of these works communicate overwhelmingly positive messages, one misguided example portrays Cuchullin as a masked member of the I. R. A. As O'Connor wisely suggests, "Perhaps a people whose minds dwelt so much on the past...[cannot] bear to think of it as no better than the present...."[12]

ENDNOTES EPILOGUE

1. Giolla Brighde MacNamee, "To an Anti-Poetical Priest", translated by the Earl of Longford, Anthology of Irish Verse, p. 201-3.

2. Hughes, p. 260.

3. Ibid., p. 271.

4. Ibid., p. 272-3.

5. Acallam, p. 11-12.

6. O'Connor, p. 55.

7. Acallam, p. 122.

8. "The Phantom Chariot of Cuchullin", Cuchullin Saga, p. 285.

9. Duanaire Finn, Pt. II, p. 168-73.

10. "The Phantom Chariot of Cuchullin", Cuchullin Saga, p. 285.

11. Ibid., p. 285.

12. O'Connor, p. 18.

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