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ABBREVIATIONS

AFM	<i>Annals of the Four Masters</i>
AI	<i>Annals of Inisfallen</i>
ANS	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
AT	<i>Annals of Tigernach</i>
AU	<i>Annals of Ulster</i>
CMCS	<i>Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies</i>
HE	Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum</i> , ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896)
ITS	Irish Text Society
MÆ	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
OMT	Oxford Medieval Texts
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PKM	Ifor Williams, <i>Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi</i> (Cardiff, 1930, 2nd ed. repr., 1974)
RC	<i>Révue Celtique</i>
RHASS	Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SGS	<i>Scottish Gaelic Studies</i>
SM	<i>Studi Medievali</i>
THSC	Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorian

PREFACE

This publication is the outcome of an initiative taken in 1999 by members of the post-graduate community in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic. That they have brought their venture so successfully to fruition is testimony not only to their commitment and enthusiasm, but no less importantly to the professionalism which they have displayed at every stage of the process. The Department is proud indeed to be associated with the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, and wishes it every success in the future.

Professor Simon Keynes
 Head of the Department of ASNC
 University of Cambridge

COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The sixth annual Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic took place on Saturday, April 30th, 2005, in the Winstanley Lecture Theatre, Trinity College, Cambridge. Papers on the theme of 'Asylum and Immigration' were presented in four sessions:

Session I (*Chair: Elizabeth Boyle*)

Thomas Owen Clancy, 'The Needs of Strangers in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi'

Session II (*Chair: Peter Stokes*)

Flora Spiegel, 'Asylum & immigration: the Blickling Homily & the transmission of Pseudo-Augustine Sermo 120'

Erik Niblaeus, 'Eleventh-century manuscript fragments in Swedish archives: evidence of English missions across the North Sea'

Harriet Thomsett, 'Migration of manuscripts across the Straits of Moyle: a case study'

Session III (*Chair: Emily Lethbridge*)

Anna Zanchi, 'Female immigration in the Íslendingasögur: the case of Unnr djúpúðga and Guðriðr Thorbjarnardóttir'

Mark Zumbuhl, 'The men who would be king? The Úa Bríain "exiles" in the North revisited'

Ross Smythe, 'Did King Eadwig really abandon his coronation feast to have a ménage à trois with his wife and mother-in-law? What's the story behind this story?'

Session IV (*Chair: Geraldine Parsons*)

Toby Levers, 'Constructing subjectivity in the Caedmon story'

Elizabeth Boyle, 'Stranger in a strange land: an Irish monk in Germany and a vision of the afterlife'

The members of the colloquium committee for 2004-5 were: Elizabeth Boyle (Chairman) and Geraldine Parsons (Secretary).

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The Needs of Strangers in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi

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Amongst the pioneering studies of the four linked tales which go under the title of the *Mabinogi*, John Bollard and Jeffrey Gantz both identified thematic strands binding the tales together.¹ Prominent among the themes identified by Bollard were marriage, friendship and feud; Gantz similarly identified nested themes grouped around alliances and misalliances. This paper sets out to explore further the thematic approach to the Four Branches by investigating a counterpoint to these broader themes, that of the treatment of strangers. I define strangers here primarily as those who are or who appear to be outwith those social contexts which would normally have provided them with protection (for example, kin, community,

¹ J. K. Bollard, 'The structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *THSC* (1974–75), 250–76; J. Gantz, 'Thematic structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *MÆ* 47 (1978), 247–254 (both reprinted in *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays*, ed. C. W. Sullivan III (New York & London, 1996), pp. 165–96 and 277–302 respectively. Citations from the articles will be from the reprinted versions). See also Bollard's 'The role of myth and tradition in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *CMCS* 6 (Winter 1983), 67–86, repr. in Sullivan, *Mabinogi: Essays*, pp. 277–302. The text of the Four Branches used throughout this article will be from the edition of Ifor Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Cardiff, 1930, 2nd ed. repr., 1974). Translations will be my own unless indicated. Editions of the individual branches are also available: *Pnyll Pendeuic Dyuet*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1957), *Branwen uerch Llyr*, ed. D. S. Thomson (Dublin, 1961), *Manawydan uab Llyr*, ed. P. K. Ford (Andover MA, 2000); *Math uab Mathonny*, ed. P. K. Ford (Andover, 1999); also *Math uab Mathonny*, ed. I. Hughes (Aberystwyth, 2000).

kingdom), and who are thus made dependent on the power of others.²

INTRODUCTORY

Before moving to the main theme of this paper, it seems wise to situate both it and myself within the complex of commentary on the Four Branches, by way of a basic introduction to the texts, accompanied by position statements regarding my views on the main issues for debate: date, location, authorship, structure and the like.

Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi, 'The Four Branches of the Mabinogi', is a modern title for four linked medieval Welsh tales, appearing primarily in the two most important manuscripts of medieval Welsh prose, dating from the mid-fourteenth century and c. 1400 respectively, with fragments in another somewhat earlier manuscript.³ They are linked expressly by a collocation (with variations) 'thus ends this branch of the Mabinogi' at the end of each branch; by a clear narrative join between branches 2 and 3 ('Branwen'⁴ and 'Manawydan') and by various characters who appear and reappear across the four tales, sometimes with narrative reminders of our having encountered them before. One character, Pryderi, appears in all four branches, and he has been seen by some as the thread holding the whole together, the *mab* in the *mabinogi*, if that etymology is correct in any way.⁵ The tales are also importantly linked by temporal setting (a rather amorphous

² I have been influenced in the writing of this paper, and in the choice of title, by M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (London, 1984, repr. 1990).

³ For a general introduction to the Four Branches, see S. Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi. Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Llandysul, 1993), esp. chs 1 and 2.

⁴ Although I hold, like some recent commentators, that this branch would better be entitled 'Bran' or 'Bendigeidfran', I have kept to the conventional terminology.

⁵ See summary discussion and references in S. Davies, *Four Branches*, 18–19.

time in the Welsh traditional past which is not shared with much else in the way of narrative and para-narrative literature from medieval Wales), and a balance of locations (two branches set, more or less, in the north, two in the south, alternating), and by a certain distinctive approach to storytelling. Finally, as Bollard, Gantz and others have shown, they are linked by structured, intertwined themes: friendship and feud, marriage and feasting, violence and its consequences, shame and reparation.

That these tales are particularly fine specimens of medieval Welsh prose is uncontroversial; that they were meant, as they stand, to stand together is difficult to dispute, but about other aspects of the tales there is much controversy and only the most guarded of consensus. Sioned Davies raised for us over a decade ago the spectre of there having been more than four branches: is the text as we have it complete?⁶ An uneasy return by most commentators to a consensus view of 'yes' cannot entirely disguise the force of her challenge (though I for one think we do have a complete work).

What is the date of the tales? Linguistic arguments have provided little help to date, beyond pointing to a period no earlier than the late eleventh century and probably rather earlier than the late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts in which they are found. Most scholars have gravitated towards the earlier end of this period, adopting Thomas Charles-Edwards's date-range of 1050x1120,⁷ but I

⁶ 'Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi—a case for multiple authorship', in *Proc. of the First Amer. Congress of Celtic Stud., held at Ottawa from 26th-30th March, 1986*, ed. G. MacLennan (Ottawa, 1988), pp. 443–59; see also *eadem*, *Four Branches*, ch. 2.

⁷ 'The date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *THSC* (1970), 263–98 (reprinted in *Mabinogi: Essays*, pp. 19–58); Davies, *Four Branches*, notes this as the consensus (p. 9). For a recent discussion of the problems of dating medieval Welsh texts, including important considerations with respect to the Four Branches, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The textual tradition of medieval Welsh

sense that the rather self-willed anxiety for the ancient which once beset the discipline is fading, and scholars would now entertain later dates with more openness, as they have for other iconic texts within the medieval Welsh canon. Two scholars have recently sought to outflank this issue in critical readings by taking the tales as primarily relevant to the audience of the manuscripts, that is, a late thirteenth-century or fourteenth-century audience.⁸ Although I have not constructed a coherent argument to this effect, I have begun to be convinced by a variety of signs that the Four Branches as originally constructed belong to a later period than the traditional consensus, to the middle or second half of the twelfth century—though this does not affect materially the main thrust of this paper.

What of authorship? Sioned Davies' case for multiple authorship of the four branches also deserves to be considered judiciously by anyone working with these texts, even if they return to the consensus view that, at least within the constraints of medieval notions of authorship, these are the work of one author. My own view here is that there is a single guiding hand at work on the Four Branches, but that scholars have paid too little attention in recent years to the probability that that hand was sometimes working on material over which he or she had less firm control. There may be differentials,

prose tales and the problem of dating', in *150 Jahre 'Mabinogion'—Deutsche-Walische Kulturbeziehungen*, ed. B. Maier and S. Zimmer (Tübingen, 2001), 23–40. Patrick Sims-Williams has recently expressed his feeling that they are 'roughly twelfth-century': *The Iron House in Ireland* (H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 16, Cambridge, 2005), p. 3.

⁸ Helen Fulton, 'The *Mabinogi* and the education of princes in medieval Wales', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. H. Fulton (Dublin, 2005), p. 230–47; Catherine McKenna, paper on *Branwen* delivered at the joint Celtic Studies Association of North America/University of California Celtic Colloquium conference, March 2006.

then in the extent to which the author's hand has been applied to received narrative material. This has crucial ramifications for how one approaches questions such as location of composition. Brynley Roberts' recent case that the northern Welsh details in 'Branwen' and 'Math' must mean northern Welsh authorship of the whole suite falls at this hurdle.⁹ The details need not be a sign of the location of the author, just of the detailed nature of the material he or she worked on in producing these branches.¹⁰ Taken over all, the most innovative and best controlled texts are instead the two southern ones, whilst 'Math' and especially 'Branwen' seem less well controlled, and possessed of more 'received' material. We need at least to be aware that details which could tell us about the composition of the overall text might rather be telling us about the origins of its raw materials. All of this is to leave to one side the much more complicated issue of the potential oral and aural dimension lying behind the versions of the texts we have, and their predecessors. The fact that these tales were not created for manuscript *de novo* means that, as with most medieval literature, the notion of the 'authorship' must remain a shorthand for the written reification of a more ramified tradition of telling.¹¹

⁹ B. Roberts, 'Where were the Four Branches of the Mabinogi written?', in *Celtic Stud. Assoc. of North Amer. Yearbook 1: The Individual in Celtic Literatures*, ed. J. F. Nagy (Dublin, 2001), 61–73.

¹⁰ For further northern material in the Four Branches, see P. Sims-Williams, 'Clas Beuno and the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in Maier and Zimmer, *150 Jahre 'Mabinogion'*, pp. 111–27.

¹¹ See Sioned Davies, *Crefft y Cyfarwydd. Astudiaeth o dechnegau naratif yn Y Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1995); *eadem*, 'Written text as performance: the implications for Middle Welsh prose narratives', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. H. Pryce (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 133–48; see also the comments of Charles-Edwards, 'Textual tradition'.

The gender of the author has been one of the most spectacular of the recent controversies regarding the Four Branches.¹² My own view, which I have expressed in review, is that whereas Andrew Breeze's much-trumpeted and reiterated arguments for female authorship have been framed very poorly, there are still grounds for maintaining a neutral stance on the gender of the author. The lack of evidence for female literacy in medieval Wales is, admittedly, discouraging, but then one of the few texts to portray a literate woman (Branwen) is the second branch.¹³ I find none of the more specific arguments for the kind of author we might be dealing with (noblewoman, cleric, lawyer), still less specific individuals (Gwenllian, Sulien or one of his sons), terribly convincing, and we should admit that we simply do not know enough about the context of composition for medieval Welsh prose literature to be able to judge.¹⁴

My own particular stance is that not enough has been asked about audience in all this, and here I think there can be some more interesting, if still inconclusive, conjectures.¹⁵ Two important scholars

¹² A. Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin, 1997), ch.3; *idem*, 'Did a woman write the "Four Branches of the Mabinogi"?', *SM*, 3rd Ser., 38 (1997), 679–705; reviews: Dafydd Johnston in *CMCS* 34 (Winter 1997), 122–123; T. O. Clancy, in *Peritia* 12 (1998) 410–15.

¹³ On female literacy, see C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'More written about than writing: women and literacy in medieval Wales', in Pryce, *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, pp. 149–66.

¹⁴ For a short summary of past arguments about the author, see Davies, *Four Branches*, pp. 13–16. For Sulien and his sons, see P. Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr* (Cardiff, 1958), pp. 184–7. For Gwenllian, see Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature*, pp. 75–9.

¹⁵ I am conscious, however, of the strictures of Cerdiwen Lloyd-Morgan concerning the (im)possibility of accurately defining an audience for these tales, in 'Gender and violence in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in Maier and Zimmer, *150 Jahre Mabinogion*, pp. 67–77, at 68 and 75.

have recently widened out our understanding of what must have been the primarily aristocratic social context of the tales—Fiona Winward in her work on women in the Four Branches, and Catherine McKenna in a series of persuasive articles on aspects of lordship in individual tales.¹⁶ I have in the past few years moved increasingly towards a view which would situate the primary audience for the Four Branches in twelfth-century Deheubarth (south-west Wales), and in the court of the native rulers of that kingdom, the Lord Rhys (1155–1197), or possibly that of his parents (one of whom was the Gwenllian targeted by Breeze as the author). At present, however, this is a speculative suggestion, though I hope to be able to bear it out in a more concrete argument in the future. Helen Fulton's recent incisive contribution allows us to begin to reposition the text in this way, although she more cautiously deals with the question of the reception of the text in its manuscript form, rather than whoever its original audience might have been.¹⁷ The question of audience is crucial, however, to the discussion in this paper: the aristocratic, bound-in, social, indeed, legal framework of characters is emphasized throughout. Thus, when people are not bound in to that society, or are cast out of it, we feel the disjunction more closely.

The final controversial issue has been that of literary structure. For an earlier generation of scholars, much concerned to uncover

¹⁶ F. Winward, 'Some aspects of women in The Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *CMCS* 34 (1997), 77–106; C. McKenna, 'The theme of sovereignty in Pwyll', *Bull. of the Board of Celtic Stud.* 29 (1980), 35–52; *eadem*, 'Learning Lordship: the education of Manawydan' in *Ildanach Ildirech. A Festschrift for Proinsias Mac Cana*, ed. John Carey, John T. Koch, and Pierre-Yves Lambert (Andover and Aberystwyth, 1999), pp. 101–20; *eadem*, 'Revising Math: Kingship in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi', *Cambrian Med. Celtic Stud.* 46 (Winter 2003) 95–118.

¹⁷ Fulton, 'The Four Branches'.

ancient temples in medieval buildings, there was little sympathy for perceived structural flaws and for the tendency of the tales to cut against the grain of comparator tales and narrative templates. Under the tutelage of many fine scholars since the 1970s, however, we have learned to appreciate the 'essential architecture' of the Four Branches in its own right, and in particular the thematic interweave and counterpoint of them. Two of the earliest scholars on this question, John Bollard and Jeffrey Gantz, came at it from similar standpoints, Bollard stressing the major themes—feuds, friendships and marriages—which lie at the heart of the Four Branches, parallel episodes set against each other. Gantz's article is rather more neglected and problematic, but it has some persuasive moments, none more so than his demonstration of the parallel and contrasting structures of the opening sequence of the first branch and the final sequence of the fourth branch, with his thought-provoking observation that 'extremes of selfless and of selfish action are set at either end of the Four Branches.'¹⁸

It is very much in the tradition of Bollard and Gantz that I approach the Four Branches, with a sense of the interwoven thematic strands, paralleled characters, strong moral or ethical contrasts in behaviour, as its guiding structural basis. Unlike Bollard, however, I see no reason to turn to Celtic art to explain this narrative structure: this is how the Bible was read in the Middle Ages, and needs little special pleading.

STRANGERS

With these thoughts as a long preamble, I turn now to the needs of strangers, as defined above, in the Four Branches.

¹⁸ Gantz, 'Thematic structure', 274 (see n. 1 above).

Two episodes immediately stand out in considering the question of the stranger in the Four Branches. The first is from the Second Branch, usually called 'Branwen', but better entitled 'Bran' or 'Bendigeidfran' after the central kingly figure and the one whose name opens the first sentence. In the relevant episode, the king of Ireland has sailed across to north Wales, to ally himself to Bran by marrying his sister, Branwen. Before the marriage feast, Bran's half-brother Efnisien maims the king of Ireland's horses, and Bran energetically tries to compensate for the insult which has been committed. When Matholwch, the Irish king, continues to sulk, Bran offers him a magic cauldron. The ensuing conversation is crucial to our theme, and deserves to be quoted in full:

And the second night, they were all seated together. 'Lord,' said Matholwch, 'whence did the cauldron come to you that you gave to me?' 'It came to me,' said [Bran], 'from a man who was in your country. And I don't know that it wasn't there that he got it.' 'Who was that?' 'Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid,' he said. 'And that man came here from Ireland, with Cymidai Cymainfoll his wife along with him, and they had escaped from the iron house in Ireland when it was made white-hot around them, and they escaped from there. And I find it strange that you do not know anything about that.' 'I do know, lord,' he said, 'and as much as I know, I will tell you. I was hunting in Ireland, one day, on top of a mound above a loch which is in Ireland, and it is called Loch Cauldron (*Llyn y Peir*). And I saw a big man with red-blond hair coming from the loch, with a cauldron on his back. And he was, moreover, an enormously big man with the evil look of a thief about him; and he was followed by a woman, and if the man was big, the woman was twice as big as him. And they approached me, and they greeted me. 'Well,' I said, 'how goes it with you?' 'Here's how it's going with me, lord,' he said, 'this woman,' he said, 'at the end of a month and a fortnight will be pregnant, and the son that will be born then from that pregnancy, after a month and a fortnight, will be a fighting man fully armed.' I took them into my care, to look after them; they were with me for a year. To the end of the year I took them

ungrudgingly; after that time I resented it. And before the end of the fourth month they themselves had made themselves hated, and unwelcome in the land, causing insults, and molesting and annoying noblemen and women. From that time on my kingdom rose about me, to ask me to separate from them, and giving a choice to me, either my kingdom, or them. I put it to the council of my land what might be done about them. They wouldn't go willingly; there was no need for them to go unwillingly, because they could fight. And then in that difficult council, they caused to be made a room entirely of iron, and after the room was prepared, all the smiths in Ireland came there, of those who owned hammer and tongs, and they made coal to be piled as high as the top of the room, and food and drink were made to be served unstintingly to them—to the woman and her man, and their children. And when they were seen to be drunk, they began to mix fire with the coal around the room, and to blow the bellows that had been placed round about the house, one man to every two bellows, and they began to blow the bellows until the house was pure white about them. And they took counsel in the middle of the floor of the room; and he waited until the iron wall was white-hot. And by means of the great heat, he went at the wall with his shoulder, and he broke out through it, and the woman after him. And nobody escaped from there except him and his wife. And then, I reckon, lord,' said Matholwch to Bendigeidfran, 'he came over to you.' 'Then indeed,' he said, 'he came here, and he gave the cauldron to me.' 'In what way, lord, did you receive them?' 'They are quartered in every place in the kingdom, and they are numerous, and increase everywhere, and they fortify wherever they are with the best men and arms anyone has seen.'¹⁹

This episode has been studied for the light it might shed on links between Irish and Welsh narrative—the theme of the Iron House, for

¹⁹ Williams, *PKM*, pp. 35–6; my translation. I am conscious that Patrick Sims-Williams, *The Iron House*, has recently dealt in detail with this same episode, to rather different effect, but touching on some of the same issues, including the motif of troublesome foreigners. I was unaware of Prof. Sims-Williams' lecture when I gave my own paper, and I am grateful to Elizabeth Boyle for supplying me with a copy of it at a late stage of my production of a written artefact.

instance, is familiar to readers of Irish tales from the story *Mesca Ulad* and others.²⁰ Less clear has been the function of this sequence in the tale itself. Certainly here we have the placing side by side of two kings and their reactions to these strangers in their midst—strange enough strangers as it happens. The two kings, whose characters are carefully accentuated throughout the tale, reveal very different attitudes. Matholwch, hounded by the people he rules, always blown with each new gust of popular wind, eventually conspires to destroy, by deceit, the strangers he had at first welcomed and patronized. He seems to be ruled, here as elsewhere, not just by his counsellors, but by the mob, by whisper, by innuendo, and by reputation.²¹ Bran is unmoved by such issues, though he is usually shown as a well-counselled king. On the face of it, this little conversational exchange leaves Bran coming out the better of the two kings. And yet, details here should concern us. By story's end, we may well feel that his gifting of the cauldron to Matholwch is an unwise move. This cauldron would nearly lead to the defeat of the Men of the Island of the Mighty when, in due course, they came to violence with the Irish. Indeed, we should perhaps worry just as much at Bran's seemingly lackadaisical attitude towards the implicit threat of Llasar and his tribe. Should Matholwch's observations on their behaviour be taken merely as his own perspective, or as an implicit and objective warning? Like the closing sequence in *Branwen*, the image of Llasar's people, armoured men all, spreading through the country fortifying the land wherever

²⁰ See for instance Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 16–23 and passim; for the incident, see J. Carmichael Watson, *Mesca Ulad* (Dublin, 1941), pp. 38–41; fullest treatment is now Sims-Williams, *The Iron House*.

²¹ A subtle illustration of Matholwch's character is found in his own account of his treatment of the strangers: after the council is held, decisions and actions are couched impersonally, as if the burning in the Iron House was someone else's responsibility.

they went, is hard to dissociate from the Anglo-Norman context of the twelfth-century.

This vignette, then, and the conversation between Bran and Matholwch, does much to highlight the 'managerial styles' of each of the rulers. Whilst Matholwch is given to harsh and unjust punishments of essentially innocent people, and is also prone to alarming changes of mind and to going back on his word (all of these set the scene for his dramatic *volte face* in punishing Branwen for insults which had already been compensated for), Bran on the other hand seems mildly impetuous, giving away precious gifts (and perhaps this reflects also on his gift of Branwen's hand?), perhaps heedless of the strangers he has settled on his land, and not terribly interested in the consequences of Matholwch's experience of Llasar's kindred. One significant feature of the problems these immigrants caused in Ireland seems also relevant to the past and future action of this branch, and to the two rulers. Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid and his family commit *sarhaed*, insult or outrage, and they do so continuously. This reflects, in a sense, both on Bran (who has allowed his half-brother to remain unpunished for the *sarhaed* done to Matholwch), and on Matholwch, whose punishment of Branwen is intended to return insult with insult (in a vivid parody of the original crime).²²

If this short episode reflects on the treatment of strangers, a more extended sequence in the Third Branch reflects on what it is like to be strangers.²³ In a sense, this sequence dominates the whole branch, as the two couples who are the protagonists of the tale—Pryderi, ruler of Dyfed and his wife Cigfa; Manawydan and his new

²² A further way in which this episode can be seen as something of a dumb-show for later episodes in the tale is that Llasar's children are burned in the house, echoing, perhaps the burning of Gwern by Efnisien, ironically the man who will also destroy the cauldron.

²³ Williams, *PKM*, pp. 51–5.

wife Rhiannon—are left bereft of the normal societal underpinnings when Dyfed is laid magically waste. They thus become exiles, initially internal ones, estranged from the norm. Having exhausted the local game for food, the two couples go off to England to find work. There they, like Llasar Llaes Gyfnewyd and his family, are seen as far too successful, and driven successively out of town after town. There is, I should note, an explicit linkage made between these two episodes in the Second and Third Branches, in that in the very first town, Hereford, Manawydan makes saddles, and colours them 'in the manner he had seen it done by Llasar Llaes Gygnwyd with lapis lazuli (*calch lassar*)'.²⁴ This sequence happens time after time. Here we are presented with an inside view of the treatment of strangers, particularly successful foreigners, bringing new trades and skills to the provincial towns of England, ostensibly undercutting or outperforming local businesses.

Once again, however, the episode in question reflects back on the two main male characters, and on their style of lordship, their balance of violence and restraint. Manawydan counsels, in every instance, restraint in the face of opposition, while Pryderi counsels violence, fighting even if it be a lost cause. Here we see a vivid object lesson, impossible to miss really, in why it is Manawydan who saves the day by patient discernment, and Pryderi who ends up rushing into a magical castle in the wilderness, to be abducted by the magician who is persecuting them.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52. I note that Sims-Williams, with others, disputes the reading of *calch lassar* as enamelling, favouring a blue lime-wash. That may be, but I am less certain that, in the absence of any other information, we should reject enamelling. I translate here on the basis that *calch lassar* refers simply to ground lapis lazuli itself, the form in which it was most commonly used in the middle ages as a pigment.

WOMEN

In these two instances, then, the treatment of strangers, and the acting of the role of strangers, reveals much about the nature of male behaviour in the stories, and in particular raises questions about judgement and discernment. Whilst it would be possible to try to make a thorough search and study of different categories of strangers in the Four Branches, and while there are some notably strong sub-categories treated—children for instance (think of Pryderi's appearance as a mysterious bundle dropped by a monster claw, or Gwydion's nephew Lleu, and how such strays are taken in and fostered)—for me the area where one best sees the situation of the stranger, the vulnerable person effectively cut off from the main sources of protection and power, is the situation of women, particularly women in marriage.²⁵

Throughout the Four Branches, the author presents us with a linked series of pen-portraits of the situation of women working within the constraints of love, marriage and motherhood. These portraits are carefully balanced against each other and we may weigh up—are intended to weigh up—the responses of each to their situation. Fiona Winward has astutely pointed out that it is not only the major figures of Rhiannon, Branwen, Aranrhod and Blodeuedd who command attention in this respect, but also the seemingly minor characters, some of them unnamed: Arawn's wife and Teyrnon's wife; Cigfa, the wife of Pryderi; Goewin, Math's footholder and later his wife. Each of these characters has a short intervention in the form of

²⁵ This is far from the first approach to this theme: see importantly, Roberta Valente, 'Merched y Mabinogi: Women and the Thematic Structure of the Four Branches' (unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell Univ., 1986); Winward, 'Some aspects'; and in particular Lloyd-Morgan, 'Gender and violence'. Nonetheless, I hope what follows contributes a moderately different perspective to these readings.

a statement which questions, weighs up, and commands reflection on the behaviour of her male partner at an intimate level. Some of these statements, as we shall see, highlight estrangement and powerlessness.

The author highlights the facts of life for women in medieval Wales, to whatever end: that when women married, they left their own country and the guardianship of their kin and became vulnerable to the judgement, mercy and sometimes whim of their husband—and sometimes to the alteration of the political concerns which had necessitated the marriage in the first place. Neither relatives nor husbands necessarily acted with the intentions of the woman in mind, or even remembered the woman's viewpoint in marriage or otherwise. This fact our author prods us with, in some notable sequences. I would like to explore the theme sequentially, but briefly, in the Four Branches, focussing on several female characters, whilst paying attention to others as well.

Pwyll

In the First Branch, the character of Rhiannon brings this theme out most forcefully. She is portrayed as a woman powerful in wisdom and counsel before marriage, capable of subverting her family's intentions. Once in Pwyll's court, she is subject instead to his capacity for good judgement, judgement which the tale has given us reason to question at various points up to her arrival in his court. In a sense, the demonstration of Rhiannon's capacity for intervention—which may not have been as attractive to medieval audiences, female as well as male, as we like to think—brings into even sharper relief her necessity for silence and restraint, and for a different sort of patient wisdom in the final section of the branch, where she must bide her time, accept her (unjust) punishment, and hope that all will come well. It may be worth noting though that what leads her to this course of inaction is

consultation with *atbrawon a doethon* 'scholars and wise men'.²⁶ The author, however, manages to stress her danger, by pointedly showing us that only Pwyll's own authority prevents worse punishment, and also stressing his continued incorporation of her at court and at his table whilst being punished. In the Third Branch, on the other hand, we are once again shown Rhiannon's downside, a personality we are perhaps meant to take as shrewish, her wisdom overbalanced by her partiality towards her son. This may also be an exercise in contrasts: her behaviour here brings out more sharply the extent to which Manawydan is a study in patience, male restraint with the capacity for decisive action. The First and Third Branches certainly set out the virtues of restraint, especially when accompanied by insight, and by showing the restrained protagonist of the First Branch (Rhiannon) in a moment of unrestraint, the Third Branch simply highlights Manawydan's own virtues.

Returning more specifically to the situation of women in marriage, both Arawn's wife and Teyrnon's wife express something of its uncertainties. Arawn's wife in particular, after her year with the chaste 'man in the shape of Arawn' (i.e., Pwyll) is revealed to her, expresses the situation in tones of ill-concealed alarm, that her husband could simply trade places with another man, who could have behaved in any manner.²⁷ We have hitherto seen the relationship between Pwyll and this woman, in bed, him turning each night to the wall, essentially from his point of view. Her intervention reverses the perspective, exposing her own precariousness in much the way Pwyll's counsellors later expose the caprice with which he has treated the kingdom, albeit in both cases the outcome has been a good one.

²⁶ Williams, *PKM*, p. 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

Teyrnon's wife, on the other hand, expresses a realistic, perhaps one might even say a clinical, approach to the situation when she and Teyrnon decide to give back their adopted son to Rhiannon, listing the benefits which will accrue to them.²⁸ Note also that Teyrnon's wife has not borne a son, and yet he has not given her up—as the author makes sure we know he could do, when Pwyll notes this as one reason he could be compelled to divorce Rhiannon.²⁹ In this branch, then, we already have three female characters who voice their situation, call attention to the precariousness of their roles within marriage, and yet, in all three cases, as Fiona Winward has demonstrated, manage to manipulate speech, action and restraint to the best of their ability and advantage.

Branwen

Branwen is a contrast to all this. Her much-remarked passivity, and the contrast with her half-brother's psychotic and random bouts of violent action, give this branch much of its hothouse atmosphere. This passivity also throws her few moments of speaking into sharp relief, as also the manner in which she does manage to communicate in the first instance (she has not spoken up to this point in the tale): through a letter, she shows her brother the way her diplomatic marriage has gone. Branwen's marriage is just the sort Rhiannon had feared: political, rather than for love; arranged by her family with no input from herself. The passivity of Branwen carries through to several key moments and images in the tale: her inability even to kill herself (her brother prevents this in a striking moment of choreography); the image of her being turned metaphorically into horsemeat in symbolic reflection of the insult delivered to her husband before their marriage. Like two other characters in this

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

branch, she dies of a broken heart, a strikingly passive form of tragic death. Again, minor characters seem to throw aspects of Branwen into high relief: Cymidai Cymainfoll, who gives birth to fully armed men; the five pregnant Irishwomen left alone in a cave.

Manawydan

Is there an irony in the fact that it is Cigfa who best expresses the situation of women in the Four Branches as strangers, exiles, powerless? Cigfa is seemingly a minor character, albeit the one with the most extensive genealogy. Pryderi's wife, she is a bourgeois noble who does not like it when her men engage in seemingly ignoble tasks. Left alone in the wilderness with Manawydan, she gives voice to her fear by wailing, lamenting and wishing she was dead.

When Cigfa, daughter of Gwyn Gloew, wife of Pryderi, saw that there was no one in the court save she and Manawydan, she lamented that it was no better for her to be alive than dead. So Manawydan observed that. 'God knows,' he said, 'you are wrong about it, if it is for fear of me that you lament. I give you God as my surety, you have not seen a more proper companion than you will get in me, as long as God desires for you to be this way. Between me and God, even if I were at the start of my youth, I would keep propriety with Pryderi, and for your sake I would keep it; and have no fear,' he said.³⁰

Manwydan's reassurance is something of a contract for how the author thinks men should treat vulnerable women: look at Pwyll, the good friend, and contrast Gwydion and Gilfaethwy; contrast Blodeuedd and Gronw Bebr; contrast the ugly and incestuous scene at the end of Branwen.

Math

The vulnerability of women is, in a sense, the main theme of the Fourth Branch. The two main demonstrations are Goewin, who is

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57 (my translation). The speech goes on for another few sentences.

subject to the machinations of Gilfaethwy's brother Gwydion, and is raped by Gilfaethwy with Gwyion helping; and Blodeuedd, created by men out of flowers purely to circumvent Aranhod's curse of Lleu. Blodeuedd is one of the most striking characters in the Four Branches. For our purposes, she is a key figure as well, as the most extreme example of a stranger.³¹ The Four Branches are full of marriage feasts, yet there is no marriage feast for Blodeuedd: she has no relatives, no legal status, and has been created for this purpose alone. There is no negotiation, as we find with every other marriage in the text. Her attempt to set her own rules goes awry—and there are certainly some oblique and grim back references to Genesis here, with Gwydion and Math playing God, and Gronw Adam to Blodeuedd's Eve. But the entire branch shows a certain type of cold justice, in which women and their vulnerability are startlingly displayed. Aranhod also, for all she appears as a character in control of her own destiny, fits into this paradigm: she is vulnerable to the shame of her kin, and tries to resist it by resisting motherhood and trying to deny her offspring. The contrasts are as clear between Rhiannon and Aranhod as between Branwen and Rhiannon.

For me, the point for us in examining these contrasts in the Four Branches is not that through these women the author displays concerns with 'babies and baubles' (as one famous summary of Breeze's argument put it), but that the author engages in a discourse about the very features of women's position in a society such as Fiona Winward has shown the society of the texts to conform to. In all this, the author may well be presenting what I like to see as a 'mirror for princesses', a series of sketches of the various and occasionally dire

³¹ In this I would take issue with Lloyd-Morgan's perhaps overly modern characterisation of her as 'the freest woman in the *Pedeir Keinc*', see 'Gender and violence', 72.

situations in which a woman may find herself, and whatever his or her gender, the author does this with acute effectiveness.

MEN

However, importantly, studies such as Catherine McKenna's and Helen Fulton's show us that the Four Branches can also be read as a mirror for princes. Just as we can draw out from it a series of object lessons instructive for and sympathetic to women, so too we may draw one out for men as well. Just as we weigh the characters of Rhiannon, Brawnwen, Cigfa, Aranrhod and Blodeuedd in the balance, so too we are invited to do so with the characters of Pwyll, Arawn, Gwawl, Pryderi, Matholwch, Bran, Efnisien, Math, Gwydion, Lleu and of course Manawydan. Each displays different virtues and vices—violence, restraint, judgement, the ability to learn, rashness, patience. Where does the discourse about women sit within that scheme? Is it part of its instruction to princes that they should behave with chastity, like Pwyll, and with restraint, like Manawydan? Or is it part of its instruction to princesses that they are shown the multiple and occasionally flawed nature of the men who may have dominion over them, be they brother (contrast Bran, Efnisien and Gwydion), husband (contrast Pwyll, Arawn, Matholwch, Manawydan, Llwyd, Lleu), son (Pryderi, Lleu), or 'lover' (Pwyll, Gilfaethwy, Gronw).

That balance between male and female characters is brought out also by the fact that it is not only women who find themselves 'estranged' and at the mercy of others. Men, too, can be found in this situation. Here I have in mind not only the obvious cases of Pwyll in Arawn's court or Matholwch in Bran's at the beginnings of the first two branches, but particularly Manawydan at the opening of the Third Branch: his family wrecked, his brother's kingdom usurped, nowhere to go. As he himself says, 'there is no one without a place

for him tonight except me'.³² Only Pryderi's generous offer of his mother to Manawydan (a more courteous backward glance at the ending of Branwen, where everyone sleeps with each other's mother) saves him from his rootlessness, a good turn which is ultimately repaid. The Fourth Branch, however, brings out most startlingly the potential for estrangement, as three male characters—Gilfaethwy, Gwydion and Lleu—experience the very same estrangement from human nature from which Blodeuedd is taken and to which, as Blodeuwedd the owl, she returns at the story's end.

COPING WITH THE UNEXPECTED

Gronw's example in the Fourth Branch—the huntsman out hunting who finds himself, rather surprisingly, in another man's bed alongside that man's wife—brings us back to the First Branch. In what remains of this paper, I would like to reflect on the particular qualities of the First Branch in regard to the treatment of strangers. The First Branch is an extraordinary roller-coaster ride of upset expectations. Time and again, we witness the characters having to make fundamental decisions about how to deal with the lurch from the expected to the unexpected—acceptance or resistance? And if acceptance, on what terms?

If Dyfed disappears before the eyes of the protagonists of the Third Branch, the shift from socially powerful to socially vulnerable happens at a subtler level and a more alarming speed in 'Pwyll'. Characters think one thing has been happening, but different valencies are revealed. The opening scene sets the mood: Pwyll thinks he is the king of all the land round about him and has no reason to suspect he should defer to anyone, but reckons without the lurch into the otherworldly which the superior presence of Arawn, crowned

³² Williams, *PKM*, 49.

king of Annwn, brings. Arawn's wife thinks she has been sleeping with her husband, but finds it has been a stranger; Pwyll's counsellors think he has been ruling them well and justly, but it has not been him. The ability or inability to deal with the unexpected is something we are attuned to in the character of Pwyll, at his wedding feast or at the *gorsedd*. What is striking about the First Branch in particular is the stark contrast of the ordinary and estrangement—the slow gait of Rhiannon's horse that outstrips the fastest steeds in the kingdom. The author's highlighting of mundane or domestic detail accentuates the presence of and absence of norms. Thus Arawn and his wife's exchange nestled in amongst the domestic bedclothes, during which the full extent to which both had been estranged from each other the past year is revealed. The scene which encapsulates this ability to make the ordinary and the estranged turn on a pin is one vilified by Kenneth Jackson for its failure to explain details. This episode follows on from Rhiannon's loss of her son in unclear circumstances, and shifts the action to Gwent, where a landholder named Teyrnon is keeping watch on his prize mare, since each year its foal has disappeared on May eve. A monster claw appears, snatching the foal, but Teyrnon hacks it off, leaving the foal inside.

And at that he heard a great noise, and scream, both together. He opened the door, and made a rush after the noise. He could not see the noise on account of the darkness of the night. He made a rush after it and followed it. And the memory came to him of leaving the door open, and he turned back. And at the door, here was a little boy in swaddling clothes, wrapped around in a cloth of brocaded silk.

Jackson fulminated against this section of the tale, saying 'It is obvious, as all agree, that this story as it stands is confused and senseless', and calling it 'practically unintelligible in its present form. Who stole the child? What was this mysterious claw? Why did it steal Teyrnon's foals? How did it come to drop the child in Teyrnon's

stable and what was it doing there anyway? These are some of the questions which arise when we first read *Pwyll* ...³³ Pace Jackson, I first read *Pwyll*, in translation, at the age of eleven, and none of these questions worried me, and they still don't. The point of mysterious happenings is that they are, and remain, mysterious. The reader, like Teyrnon, must cope with the strange, the unexpected and the unexplained; Teyrnon, in contrast to the perplexed and affronted Jackson, copes with these with remarkable equanimity, and I suspect most readers do likewise. Surely it is Teyrnon's memory of the open door (and, implicitly, the horses that might get out) that gives this scene its power—out in the dark, chasing after a strange noise, he is recalled to the farmyard smell of the stable—only to find a strange boy at its door. Far from confused and senseless, this scene lies at the heart both of the themes of the First Branch, and of its artistry.

CONCLUSIONS

If *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* is in every sense a literary text (albeit a problematic one), what I suggest here is that it is also a political text. I do not mean a politically propagandistic piece of the sort that scholars have been finding in early Irish tales these past twenty-five years, but rather one which reflects on the ethics of lordship and society, and indeed, of being human. How do we treat the powerless? How do we behave when we are left stranded outside those networks from which we draw security and power? How should we behave when our land, our child, our husband, our humanity (or, if we are Blodeuedd, our florality) are taken away? Does the experience of disjuncture, of being or having been a stranger, an exile, in need of asylum, lead us on to be merciful to others, or to

³³ K. H. Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961), pp. 87 and 93.

impose the cold, bleak 'justice' of the final scene of the Four Branches?³⁴

³⁴ I would like to thank numerous students both undergraduate and extra-mural, who have played nursemaids, active and passive, over the past 15 years to these thoughts in various guises; and especially to thank my friend and colleague Gilbert Márkus who introduced me both to Michael Ignatieff's work and also brought me, through the work of the Glasgow Catholic Worker community, into touch with the real needs of asylum seekers in modern Britain. Highest thanks must go to Elizabeth Boyle, who invited me to give this paper, and who was exceedingly courteous about the inexcusable delays in the production of a written version.

Migration of Manuscripts across the Sea of Moyle:
A Case Study

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In the late twelfth century, Giraldus Cambrensis wrote in Book III, Chapter 91, of his *Topographia Hiberniae*: 'Scotia quoque pars insule Britannice dicitur aquilonaris, quia gens originaliter ab hiis [Gaidelo et Scotia] proagata terram illam habitare dinoscitur. Quod tam lingue quam cultus, tam armorum etiam quam morum, usque in hodiernum probat affinitas'.¹

The fact of this relationship between the peoples on either side of *Sruth na Maoile* has long been accepted by scholars, although a current debate raises questions as to the detail of how the situation came about.² This paper does not seek to add fuel to that particular controversy, but to examine the issue of the affinity between Ireland and Scotland from a different perspective. The evidence presented below dates from the very late medieval and early modern periods,

¹ *Topographia Hiberniae*, ed. J. J. O'Meara, 'Giraldus Cambrensis in Topographia Hiberniae: Text of the First Recension', *Proc. of the RLA* 52C (1948–50), 113–78, at p. 161: 'The northern part of Britain is also called Scotia, because it is known to be inhabited by a people which was originally propagated by Gaidelus and Scotia. The affinity in language and culture, as well as in weapons and customs, to this day bears out this fact', trans. J. J. O'Meara, *Gerald of Wales: the History and Topography of Ireland* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 99, §91.

² The debate was stimulated by the following article: E. Campbell, 'Were the Scots Irish?', *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 285–92. For a summary of the issues relating to the question of the identity of Scotland and many further references, see E. J. Cowan, 'The Invention of Celtic Scotland', *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Middle Ages*, ed. E. J. Cowan and R. A. McDonald (East Linton, 2000), pp. 1–23.

but it is still relevant and of use for students of the early Middle Ages. Study of the early medieval Gaelic world must frequently depend on such late sources. In order for these to be fully interpreted, it is necessary to understand their transmission history. By reconstructing the circumstances by which a source came to survive to the present day, it may be possible to work back to discover its origins, and hence assess its value and reliability. This paper attempts that process for a single, somewhat unusual, manuscript.

It has been demonstrated by Máire Herbert that in the early medieval period, Gaels understood race to be defined by genealogical origins.³ Therefore, the people of north British Dál Riada, who lived on the south-western coast and isles of modern day Scotland, and the inhabitants of the island of Ireland considered themselves a united entity because they were all descended from the sons of Míl. However, from the later ninth century, the terms of definition became territorial and there was a gradual political separation as a distinct sense of nation developed on either side of the North Channel.⁴ Nevertheless, a cultural unity was maintained as long as the Gaelic learned order survived. This was made possible by what is the most conspicuous evidence of the bond between the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland, their shared language. Although by the twelfth century it is probable that differences were beginning to appear in their everyday spoken tongues which reflect an early stage in the development towards modern Irish and Scots Gaelic, the learned classes continued to use a standard language and set of poetic forms until at least the

³ M. Herbert, 'Sea-divided Gaels? Constructing Relationships between Irish and Scots c. 800–1169', *Britain and Ireland 900–1300: Insular Responses to Medieval European Change*, ed. B. Smith (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 87–97.

⁴ D. Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Stud. in Celtic Hist. 18 (Woodbridge, 1999).

seventeenth century.⁵ This enabled much interchange and movement.⁶ Several poems survive by Irish poets which are addressed to Scottish lords and vice versa, and these may in fact be evidence of the part the learned men had to play in establishing diplomatic negotiations and maintaining existing relationships.⁷ Moreover, communication was not confined to political matters: there was also opportunity for exchanges concerning the bardic craft in all its dimensions.⁸

It therefore seems inevitable that there would be some transfer of the materials of learned culture, manuscripts. Where the scribes or

⁵ On the later medieval development of the Goidelic languages, see W. Gillies, 'Gaelic: the Classical Tradition', *The History of Scottish Literature I: Origins to 1600 (Medieval and Renaissance)*, ed. R. D. S. Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 245–61; K. H. Jackson, 'Common Gaelic: the Evolution of the Goidelic Languages', *PBA* 37 (1951), 71–97; R. L. Thomson, 'The Emergence of Scottish Gaelic', *Bards and Makars: Scottish Language and Literature: Medieval and Renaissance*, ed. A. J. Aitken, M. P. McDiarmid and D. A. Thomson (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 127–35; J. MacInnes, 'The Scottish Gaelic Language', *The Celtic Connection*, ed. G. Price (Gerrards Cross, 1992), pp. 101–30.

⁶ W. McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland c. 1200–c. 1650* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 55–107; D. S. Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (London, 1974), pp. 21–40; D. S. Thomson, 'The Poetic Tradition in Gaelic Scotland', *Proc. of the Seventh Internat. Congress of Celtic Stud. held at Oxford*, ed. D. E. Evans, J. G. Griffith and E. M. Jope (Oxford, 1986), pp. 21–32.

⁷ The earliest extant example is the late eleventh-century poem *Duan Albanach*; see K. H. Jackson, 'The *Duan Albanach*', *Scottish Hist. Rev.* 36 (1957), 126–37; K. H. Jackson, ed., 'The Poem *A Eolcha Alban Uile*', *Celtica* 3 (1956), 149–67. A full list is given in W. McLeod, *Divided Gaels*, pp. 223–30. Note also the comments of H. Gaidoz, 'Les Manuscrits Irlandais D'Edimbourg', *RC* 6 (1883–5), 109–14 at 111: 'On sait jusqu'à la Réforme il y eut unité littéraire entre l'Irlande et l'Ecosse, et que les traditions de l'Ecosse sont encore aujourd'hui les mêmes que celles de l'Irlande'.

⁸ D. S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland', *Scottish Stud.* 12 (1968), 57–78.

patrons of particular volumes can be identified, it is possible to establish the direction in which they crossed the Sea of Moyle. However, when those details are lacking, the very fact that made the exchange feasible, the shared, standardised, bardic language, makes it very difficult to locate a manuscript or text, because regional indicators are rare. It has long been a much lamented fact that relatively few sources survive from what is now Scotland for all pre-modern periods, particularly in comparison to the seemingly vast quantities from Ireland. It has yet to be established whether this is simply because circumstances conspired to prevent their transmission to the present, or whether they never existed in the first place.⁹ This has led to suspicions that some Gaelic manuscripts may in fact be Scottish rather than Irish and to attempts to identify them as such. Ronald Black assembled a checklist of some 138 items containing classical Gaelic material which can be shown to have been in Scotland at some point in their history.¹⁰ However, only a small number can be proved to have originated there. This paper will consider one manuscript from this list which has previously been somewhat neglected. It will endeavour to establish whether it might be added to the modest Scottish corpus, or at least illustrate the nature of the relationship between the Gaels across the Sea of Moyle.

The manuscript which is the focus of this investigation is classmarked Advocates 72. 1. 32 in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh; in a previous system of cataloguing it was Gaelic

⁹ K. Hughes, 'Where are the Writings of Early Scotland?', *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Scottish and Welsh Sources*, ed. D. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1980), pp. 1–21; J. Mackechnie, 'The Gaelic Manuscripts of Scotland', *Stud. in Scottish Lit.* 1 (1963–4), 223–35; W. McLeod, *Divided Gaels*, pp. 57–63.

¹⁰ R. Black, 'The Gaelic Manuscripts of Scotland', *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus A'Ghàidhlig*, ed. W. Gillies (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 146–74.

XXXII.¹¹ However, its whereabouts were in fact last known in 1841, when it was lent to one 'Thomas Thomson Esquire, Deputy Clerk Register, for examination'.¹² Nevertheless, fortuitously, it is possible to reconstruct a fairly comprehensive picture of the lost volume from a number of sources. In particular, the texts it contained can be established and its scribe tentatively identified, and from this information it is feasible to infer something about the origins, connections and subsequent history of the manuscript.

The only published record predating the loss of Advocates 72. 1. 32 is the description of the manuscript written by Donald Smith in one of the myriad appendices to the *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland Appointed to Inquire in the Nature and Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* in 1805.¹³ His report is largely concerned with speculation based on a misinterpretation of one of the colophons, and is hence of little value to this investigation. However, a more reliable source of evidence is found in the work of Ewan MacLachlan, schoolmaster and scholar from Aberdeen, who was employed by the Highland Society in various capacities.¹⁴ He produced for them *An Analysis of the Contents of Celtic Manuscripts*

¹¹ See D. Mackinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the Advocates' Library Edinburgh and Elsewhere in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 217–21; J. Mackechnie, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1973), I, 172.

¹² D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 217.

¹³ D. Smith, 'Account of the Principal Manuscripts now in the Possession of the Highland Society', in H. Mackenzie, ed., *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland Appointed to Inquire into the Nature and Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1805), Appendix, pp. 285–96.

¹⁴ On MacLachlan see P. J. Anderson, *Ewan MacLachlan: Librarian to University and Kings College Aberdeen 1800–18* (Aberdeen, 1918), and R. Black, 'The Gaelic Academy: the Cultural Commitment of the Highland Society of Scotland', *SGS* 14 (1986), 1–38, at 19–22.

Belonging to the Honorable Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, which is now preserved as National Library of Scotland, Advocates 72. 3. 4.¹⁵ Manuscript XIII in this account can be identified as the lost Advocates 72. 1. 32, and MacLachlan gives a detailed description of the contents of the volume and summaries of the narrative texts it contained.

Furthermore, another role MacLachlan performed for the Highland Society was the transcription of texts from manuscripts they had collected, from the traditional Gaelic script into more familiar Roman letters, which he did in a beautifully written copperplate hand. In several cases both MacLachlan's source manuscript and his copy survive and these indicate that he was a careful and largely accurate copyist.¹⁶ Where he does make alterations, they are generally minor orthographical ones, revealing the influence of MacLachlan's native Scots Gaelic.¹⁷ Most notably, his transcripts contain very few of the morphological features, or Scotticisms, which have been used to identify the work of Scottish as opposed to Irish writers, whether

¹⁵ See R. Black, 'Gaelic Academy', p. 36, and D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 257–8.

¹⁶ For example, he copied *Mesca Ulad* and a number of death tales of Irish heroes from Advocates 72. 1. 40 (Gaelic XL) into Advocates 72. 3. 5; see J. Mackechnie, *Catalogue I*, 192–5 and K. Meyer, 'The Edinburgh Gaelic Manuscript XL', *Celtic Magazine* 12 (1887), 208–18. On the copy, see below, n. 21.

¹⁷ The orthography of nineteenth-century Scots Gaelic has not yet been fully studied, but some sense of its features may be gained from W. Gillies, 'Scottish Gaelic', *The Celtic Languages*, ed. M. J. Ball with J. Fife (London, 1993), pp. 145–227; K. H. Jackson, 'Some Remarks on the Gaelic Notitiae in the Book of Deer', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 86–98; T. F. O'Rahilly, *Irish Dialects Past and Present* (Dublin, 1932), pp. 122–60; *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. D. S. Thomson (Oxford, 1983), pp. 95–6 and 99–101.

authors or scribes.¹⁸ Evidence derived from the work of MacLachlan may therefore be regarded as a reliable reflection of the sources he had before him. Indeed, his legacy was assessed in the following glowing terms by Donald Mackinnon, one of the first holders of the Chair of Celtic at Edinburgh University: 'Considering the state of Gaelic scholarship in Gaelic Scotland at the time, [his observations and transcripts are] a lasting tribute to the capacity, knowledge and integrity of this distinguished scholar'.¹⁹

MacLachlan twice had occasion to transcribe parts of Advocates 72. 1. 32, and it can be shown that in each case he worked directly from the manuscript, as a different set of very minor errors appear in each copy.²⁰ These two copies are now preserved as National Library of Scotland, Advocates 72. 3. 5 (Gaelic LXXXIII),²¹ and in the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland Library at Ingliston, MS A. vi. I.²² The former is also known as *An Leabhar Caol*, 'The Narrow Book', from its physical appearance, and was titled by MacLachlan *The Celtic Repository or A Collection of Extracts from the Ancient Gaelic Manuscripts of the Highland Society*. It contains a series of transcripts from nine manuscripts and appears to have been made for MacLachlan's personal use in 1812, probably in the course of his work in producing *An Analysis*. Each page is headed with either the title of the tale he is copying or the source from which it is taken, and

¹⁸ C. Ó Baoill, 'Scotticisms in a Manuscript of 1467', *SGS* 15 (1988), 122–39.

¹⁹ *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 258.

²⁰ Some of these errors are noted in my edition of MacLachlan's transcripts in 'Transmission and Validation of Information in Medieval Irish Literature' (unpub. PhD thesis, NUI Cork, 2006).

²¹ D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 258–60; J. Mackechnie, *Catalogue I*, 258–60.

²² R. Black, 'The Gaelic Academy Appendix: the Ingliston Papers', *SGS* 15 (1988), 103–21, at pp. 109–10.

a number of texts are followed by a note indicating when he recopied them for use by the Highland Society. However, it is significant that those deriving from Advocates 72. 1. 32, which is dubbed *Leabhar Chille Bride* by MacLachlan, have no such colophon, which would seem to be further evidence that he worked directly from the source when he came to transcribe the texts again. These latter copies were apparently produced specifically for the Highland Society in 1814. RHASS A. vi. I is a much neater volume, and several tales have been reproduced in full this time, where they are abbreviated in *An Leabhar Caol*.

However, for the current purpose, it is particularly significant that as well as copying the texts themselves, MacLachlan also reproduced colophons and notes as he found them in the source manuscript. It is these which provide the best clues to the origins of Advocates 72. 1. 32:

Aidchi causc anochd 7 nar aifriche Dia form sin do graif uair nir leig tinnus damh èn rann do graif o samhain cusandiu. An coimtheach mo feith .i. Muirgiusa mac Paidin damh. Misi Fithil.²³

Oidche bealtne ann a coimhtech mo Pupu Muirciusa agus as olc lium nach marunn dial in linesi dom dub. Misi Fithil ace furnuidhe na scoil.²⁴

²³ Advocates 72. 3. 5, p. 253; RHASS A. vi. I, p. 16; Advocates 72. 3. 4, p. 123; D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 217–18: 'Tonight is Easter-eve and may God not rebuke me for writing that since illness has not allowed me to write one sentence from Samhain to today. In the house of my master, that is, Muirgius son of Paidín. I am Fithil'; all translations are my own.

²⁴ D. Smith, 'Account of the Principal Manuscripts', Appendix, p. 285: 'It is May-Day eve in the house of my master Muirgius and I regret that I do not have ink for filling the line. I am Fithil, in attendance on the school'.

Misi Fithil mac Flaithrig mic Aodho.²⁵

From this evidence, it may be deduced that the scribe was named Fithil mac Flaithrig mic Aodho and that he was writing in the house of a certain Muirgius mac Paidín. The nature of these names would suggest that both characters were members of the Ó Mael Chonaire family, an Irish learned family of considerable note in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in particular.²⁶ They were hereditary historians to the Síol Mhuireadhaigh, and were based in modern-day north County Roscommon, although branches of the family were also found elsewhere in Ireland, including Thomond in Munster.²⁷ Fithil and Flaithrí are names which frequently appear in association with the family, the most famous example being Flaithrí mac Fithil, archbishop of Tuam and author of the devotional work *Desiderius*.²⁸ Fithil mac Flaithrig mic Aodho does not occur in the family tree of the Ó Mael Chonaire constructed by Paul Walsh, but Walsh only included names which appear in the chronicle record and so it is certainly not impossible that some members of the clan are missing. Moreover, it is fairly certain that Muirgius mac Paidín is the Ó Mael

²⁵ Advocates 72. 3. 4, p. 123: 'I am Fithil son of Flaithrí son of Aodh'. MacLachlan notes that the signature headed the first column of text in the manuscript.

²⁶ On the Ó Mael Chonaire see P. Walsh, *Irish Men of Learning*, ed. C. Ó Lochlainn (Dublin, 1947), pp. 34–48; B. Hazard, 'An Irish Medieval Legacy: Case Studies of the Ó Maoil Chonaire Family and Three Sixteenth-Century Gaelic Manuscripts' (unpub. MA dissertation, NUI Cork, 2002).

²⁷ M. J. Connellan, 'Ballymulconry and the Mulconrys', *Irish Eccles. Record* 90 (1958), 322–30.

²⁸ On the names, see T. Ó Concheanainn, 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Mesca Ulaí*', *Celtica* 19 (1987), 13–30 at 29, n. 69; *Desiderius otherwise called Sgáthán an Chrábhaidh by Flaithrí Ó Maoilchonaire*, ed. T. F. O'Rahilly, Med. and Mod. Irish Ser. 12 (Dublin, 1941).

Chonaire of that name who was a prominent early sixteenth-century scribe. Among other manuscripts, he was the scribe of Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 23 P 26 (479, the 'Book of Fenagh'), which was written in 1516 under the patronage of Tadhg O'Roddy to promote the claims of the *coarba* ('hereditary stewards'), of saint Caillín, patron of that church.²⁹

Furthermore, this identification of a connection between Advocates 72. 1. 32 and the Ó Mael Chonaire is supported by the evidence of specific texts which the manuscript contained, as these provide further links to the activities of the family. For example, the first tale in *An Leabhar Caol* which MacLachlan labels as deriving from *Leabhar Chille Bríde* is the story of the quarrel between Finn mac Cumhaill and his son Oisín. This is found elsewhere only in London, British Library, Harley 5280 and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 23 N 10 (967), both manuscripts produced in the Ó Mael Chonaire circle.³⁰ However, perhaps even more suggestive are the affiliations of the text of the great Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and of the short tale which recounts its recovery, *De Fhoillsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*, which were also to be found in the manuscript.

Comparison with the account given in MacLachlan's *An Análysís* indicates that the text of the *Táin* found in RHASS A. vi. I is not a complete copy of what was present in Advocates 72. 1. 32. It would

²⁹ See *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin, 1926–70) Facsimile X, 1284–8; *The Book of Fenagh*, ed. W. M. Hennessy and D. H. Kelly (Dublin, 1875); R. A. S. Macalister, *Book of Fenagh Supplementary Volume*, Irish Manuscripts Commission (Dublin, 1939); P. Walsh, *Irish Men of Learning*, pp. 49–73.

³⁰ *RLA Catalogue*, pp. 2769–80; R. Flower, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum Volume II* (London, 1926), pp. 298–323; *Fianaigeacht: Being a Collection of Hitherto Inedited Irish Poems and Tales Relating to Finn and his Fiana*, ed. and trans. K. Meyer, RIA Todd Lecture Series 16 (Dublin, 1910), pp. 22–7.

seem that MacLachlan simply transcribed enough text to fill the space he had left in his small volume. However, the source manuscript itself did not contain the whole epic, ending with the death of Fer Baeth which comes about a third of the way through the tale. Nevertheless, there is more than enough information available from the text in RHASS A. vi. I and the list of episodes in *An Análysís* to indicate that the version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* found in Advocates 72. 1. 32 was that of Recension I.³¹ This is also preserved in London, British Library, Egerton 1782, a manuscript copied by Ó Mael Chonaire scribes in 1517.³² Significantly, the narrative of the *Táin* in Egerton 1782 is also incomplete, again continuing only as far as the death of Fer Baeth.³³ Moreover, several scholars have suggested that the Ó Mael Chonaire can be connected with other copies of Recension I of the *Táin*, although this is a complex and controversial textual issue which cannot be fully dealt with here.³⁴ Be that as it may, the similarities

³¹ The standard edition of this recension is *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension I*, ed. and trans. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1976). Her introduction summarises the complex relationship between the various versions of the tale.

³² R. Flower, *BM Catalogue II*, 259–98. *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is to be found on fols. 88–105.

³³ It was edited by E. Windisch, 'Táin Bó Cúailnge nach der Handschrift Egerton 1782', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 9 (1913), 121–58. The relationship was also noted by R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle, 1921), p. 100, n. 3.

³⁴ See for example, G. Mac Eoin, 'The Interpolator H in *Lebor na hUídré*', in *Ulidia: Proc. of the First Internat. Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8–12 April 1994*, ed. J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast, n.d. [1996]), pp. 39–46; E. Bhreathnach, 'Learning and Literature in Early Medieval Clonmacnoise', *Clonmacnoise Stud.* 2, ed. H. A. King (Dublin, 2003), 97–104. The most recent discussion of the relationship between the texts of Recension I is T. Ó Concheanainn, 'Táin Bó Cúailnge: Foinsí an Téacs atá in Egerton 1782', *Celtica* 24 (2003), 232–8. It is hoped that in the fullness of time, Dr Tina Hellmuth will clarify how the Scottish copies fit into this picture. The question

between the versions of the *Táin* found in Egerton 1782 and RHASS A. vi. I are sufficient in themselves to support the suggestion that Advocates 72. 1. 32 should be connected with the Ó Mael Chonaire family.

The argument is also reinforced by the evidence of the associated narrative *De Fhoillsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*. This short tale tells how the poet Senchán Torpéist secured the resuscitation of the great Ulster hero Fergus mac Róich, in order that Fergus might recite to him a full account of his adventures on the *Táin*. This text survives in four distinct recensions, the three earliest of which appear to independently rework a common source narrative.³⁵ The version found in both Egerton 1782 and Advocates 72. 1. 32 is characterized by the fact that the figure who tells Senchán how his mission might be achieved is saint Caillín, the patron of Fenagh. It has already been implied that the Ó Mael Chonaire, or at least Muirgius mac Paidín, in whose house Fithil mac Flaithrig was writing Advocates 72. 1. 32, can be connected to this church. Consequently, it is probable that they would have had access to, and a special interest in, this particular version of *De Fhoillsigud*. It would therefore seem feasible to argue

is complicated by the extent to which it is accepted that later medieval Irish scribes were able to redact the texts they copied, on which see the numerous articles by Tomás Ó Concheanainn, in particular 'Textual and Historical Associations of *Leabhar na hUidre*', *Éigse* 29 (1996), 65–120, and 'Leabhar na hUidre: Further Textual Associations', *Éigse* 30 (1997), 27–91, which include references to his earlier discussions.

³⁵ The versions are most conveniently summarised in J. Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), pp. 165–88, although his conclusions as to their relationship are outdated. The text is frequently cited, but attention is rarely paid to the significant differences between recensions. My views on the issue are presented in my thesis, 'Transmission and Validation' (see above, n. 20), which also includes an edition of the Egerton version of *De Fhoillsigud*, using all known manuscripts.

that the cumulative impression created by these various small pieces of evidence points strongly towards indicating that Advocates 72. 1. 32 was produced in the Ó Mael Chonaire family circle around the beginning of the sixteenth century. How, when and why, then, did it come to cross the Sea of Moyle to Scotland?

Unfortunately, there is probably insufficient data available to be able to answer all aspects of that question with certainty. Nevertheless, it can be shown that it is not at all implausible that a manuscript written by a member of the Ó Mael Chonaire family should end up in Scotland. Part I of National Library of Scotland, Advocates 72. 1. 1 (Gaelic I) was written by one Dubhgall Albanach mac mic Cathail while he was at Baile Uí Bhuadhaigh near Clonmel in 1467.³⁶ The adjective *Albanach* suggests some connection with Scotland, and it is most likely that it was applied as a distinguishing qualifier to a Scotsman working as a scribe in Ireland. Furthermore, Colm Ó Baoill has argued that the inclusion of the name Cathal in his genealogy probably indicates that he was a Mac Mhuirich, member of one of the major bardic families of western Scotland.³⁷ This identification is supported by the fact that the language of the texts he copied contains certain features, largely morphological, which have been identified as Scotticisms.³⁸ Notes in the manuscript indicate that Dubhgall Albanach was assisted by one Tanaighe Ó Mael Chonaire. This is therefore evidence of contact on at least one occasion between the Ó Mael Chonaire and a member of the learned classes from across the Sea of Moyle. Baile Uí Bhuadhaigh was in the territory of the Butlers, who are known to have used MacDonald soldiers in their armies. These mercenaries may well have been

³⁶ See D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 72–9; J. Mackechnie, *Catalogue I*, 111–15.

³⁷ 'Scotticisms', p. 123.

³⁸ These are discussed in full by C. Ó Baoill, 'Scotticisms'.

accompanied by some compatriots with rather more peaceful interests, who were able to use the opportunity to copy new texts to take back home, and perhaps also to pick up volumes produced by their hosts.³⁹

As to the question of when Advocates 72. 1. 32 in particular may have changed hands and made its way to Scotland, MacLachlan and Smith both note that on one of the blank leaves of the manuscript, some genealogies of the families of Argyll and McLeod had been added.⁴⁰ These apparently descended to Archibald, who succeeded in 1542 and died in 1588. This would seem to suggest that the manuscript was probably in Scotland within fifty years of being written. It is also of note that all accounts agree that the manuscript reached the Highland Society from the Kilbride collection.⁴¹ The MacLachlan family of Kilbride were celebrated for their interest in Gaelic culture and their collection of manuscripts, which ranged across all subjects of learned culture: poetry, saga, genealogy, history and medicine.⁴² There is firm evidence that their library was in

³⁹ W. McLeod, *Divided Gaels*, pp. 40–54. It is also interesting to note that Part II of Advocates 72. 1. 1. (see D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 106–8) is another example of an Irish manuscript owned by a Scot. It was written by Adam Ó Cuirnín in 1425 and was in the possession of John Beaton of Mull when Edward Lhuyd met him at Coleraine in 1699; J. L. Campbell and D. S. Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands 1699–1700* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 37–51.

⁴⁰ Advocates 72. 3. 4, p. 122; D. Smith, 'Account of the Principal Manuscripts', Appendix p. 290; see also D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 219.

⁴¹ H. Mackenzie, *Report*, pp. 90–1, and Appendix, pp. 280–96; it was noted above (p. 5) that MacLachlan referred to his source manuscript as *Leabhar Chille Bride*; see also D. Mackinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 2–3; R. Black, 'Gaelic Manuscripts'.

⁴² J. Bannerman, 'The MacLachlans of Kilbride and their Manuscripts', *Scottish Stud.* 21 (1977), 1–34; R. Black, 'Gaelic Academy', p. 4, n. 6; J. Mackechnie,

existence in the seventeenth century, and anecdotal suggestion that they were in a position to gather up manuscripts when monasteries were dissolved at the Reformation.⁴³ It is possible, therefore, that Advocates 72. 1. 32 reached their hands fairly soon after it arrived in Scotland. In any case, it almost certainly owes its survival into the nineteenth century to the fact that it was owned by them. John Bannerman argued that the MacLachlans initially held land by virtue of their position as members of the learned classes, but that at some point they gave up their profession to become a territorial power in their own right.⁴⁴ However, they maintained an interest in cultural matters. This transition was instrumental to the fact that so many of the manuscripts that were at some point in their possession survive to the present day. Their library provided a safe environment of transmission, rather than the books being tools of the trade for poets and doctors for example, and hence vulnerable to damage and loss. In fact, the Kilbride collection was the source of a very large proportion of the Gaelic manuscripts now in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.⁴⁵

It would therefore seem that the history of the lost manuscript Advocates 72. 1. 32 is in many ways representative of that of other Gaelic manuscripts in Scotland. Indeed, it reflects what a glance at Black's checklist reveals: most of the manuscripts of this later medieval period which passed through Scottish hands actually

'Gaelic Manuscripts'. There is no direct relationship to Ewan MacLachlan of Aberdeen.

⁴³ J. Bannerman, 'The MacLachlans of Kilbride'; D. S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders', p. 63.

⁴⁴ J. Bannerman, 'The MacLachlans of Kilbride'.

⁴⁵ See the provenances listed in R. Black, 'Gaelic Manuscripts'.

originated in Ireland.⁴⁶ Moreover, the literary evidence of bardic verse supports the view that cultural traffic was largely in one direction. Scottish poets describe Ireland as the source of their bardic culture, the fount of knowledge.⁴⁷ Learned families stressed their Irish origins, and students were sent to study in the 'homeland', as perhaps Dubhgall Albanach was.⁴⁸ It is tempting to suggest that this was a result of the gradual marginalisation of Gaelic culture within the greater territory of Scotland in the late Middle Ages. As the east became increasingly Anglicized, Gaels on the western seaboard had no option but to look to their relations on the other side of the North Channel who still spoke their language as a source of both inspiration and physical resources.⁴⁹

However, although this investigation has not discovered a new Scottish manuscript as possibly might have been hoped, it has perhaps demonstrated that the situation is not quite as bleak as Donald Meek suggested when he wrote:

It is, moreover, a striking paradox of the close relationship between Ireland and Gaelic Scotland that, while they share much in common, there is little which exists in a single manuscript which illustrates the literary and cultural interaction of Gaels on both sides of the strategically important Sea of Moyle. The evidence for linkages across

⁴⁶ Moreover, most of the Scottish manuscripts now in Irish libraries reached these through the collecting activities of the antiquary Edward Lhuyd; see J. L. Campbell and D. S. Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd*; R. Black, 'Gaelic Manuscripts', pp. 157–8.

⁴⁷ M. B. Ó Mainnín, "'The Same in Origin and in Blood': Bardic Windows on the Relationship between Irish and Scottish Gaels c.1200–1650", *CMCS* 38 (1999), 1–51.

⁴⁸ W. Mcleod, *Divided Gaels*, pp. 14–54 and 194–219.

⁴⁹ D. S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders', p. 75.

Sruth na Maoile has to be collected from different and scattered sources.⁵⁰

Indeed, it has been shown that even when a manuscript no longer exists, it can still serve to illustrate the nature of the connection between the 'sea-divided Gaels'.⁵¹

⁵⁰ D. E. Meek, 'Duanairé Finn and Gaelic Scotland', *Duanairé Finn: Reassessments*, ed. J. Carey, ITS Subsidiary Ser. 13 (London, 2003), 19–38.

⁵¹ See above, n 3. Some of the research on which this paper is based was supported by a Government of Ireland Scholarship from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. I am grateful to Tina Hellmuth, Benjamin Hazard and Ronald Black for responding to questions raised by this investigation and to the librarians of the National Library of Scotland and the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland for allowing me to consult manuscripts in their care.

Female Immigration in the *Íslendingasögur*.
The Case of Unnr djúpúðga and Guðriðr Thorbjarnardóttir

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According to Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók*, Iceland was settled from Norway in the days of King Haraldr hárfagri, '870 years after the birth of Christ'.¹ A Norwegian named Ingólfr is there said to have first travelled from Norway to Iceland when King Haraldr was sixteen years old, and a second time a few years later, to finally settle south in Reykjavík at Ingólfsfell. It is further stated that the country was fully settled in sixty years, 'a winter or two before Haraldr hárfagri died', that is 931–2.²

A thorough account of the settlement of Iceland is provided by *Landnámabók*, the medieval Icelandic Book of Settlements. The work accounts for the majority of the best known colonists, naming the area they chose to inhabit and at times giving details of their origin and kinship line in mainland Scandinavia or in the British Isles. As for the reason behind the emigration of individual settlers, where specified, the text refers to King Haraldr's aggressive campaign towards the creation of a unified Norwegian state.

The same reason is also emphasized in the sagas. In his history of the kings of Norway, *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson relates that after the battle of Hafrsfjörðr, 'no resistance was made to King Haraldr in Norway. All of his greatest enemies had fallen, though some had fled

¹ 'en þat vas sjau tegum <vetra> ens níunda hundraðs eptir burð Krists', *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), p. 4.

² 'vetri eða tveim áðr Haraldr enn hárfagri yrði dauðr', *ibid.*, p. 9.

the country, and that was a very great multitude, because at that time extensive uninhabited lands were settled'.³ According to the saga, foreign countries such as the Shetlands, the Faeroes and Iceland were colonized during those times of warfare, when several members of the nobility are said to have fled Norway as outlaws and embarked on viking expeditions to the west—'ok margir ríkismenn af Nóregi flýðu útlaga fyrir Haraldri konungi ok fóru í vestrvíking'.⁴

An account of King Haraldr's oppression is also found in the beginning chapters of *Egils saga*. King Haraldr is said to have been *mjök görbugall*—'very watchful'—of landowners and wealthy farmers and anyone else whom he suspected of being likely to rebel.⁵ He thus gave them the option to either become his *þjónustumenn*—his retainers—or abandon the country, or otherwise suffer hardship and forfeit their lives. As the narrative relates, some suffered torture and had their hands and feet mutilated—'sumir váru hamlaðir at höndum eða fótum'.⁶ All farmers became his tenants—*leiglendingar*—and everyone who worked on his lands was made to pay him tribute—'þá váru allir þeir honum lýðskyldir'.⁷ *Egils saga* too states that 'because of this tyranny many people fled the country and settled various uninhabited areas in many places', among which the Hebrides, Ireland, Normandy, northern Scotland, and the Orkney, Shetland and

³ 'Eptir orrostu þessa fekk Haraldr konungr enga mótstöðu í Nóregi. Váru þá fallnir allir inir mestu fjándmenn hans, en sumir flýðir ór landi, ok var þat allmikill mannfjöldi, því at þá byggðusk stór eyðilönd', *Haralds saga hárfagra*, *Heimskringla* 1, ed. Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26 (Reykjavík, 1941), p. 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵ *Egils saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk fornrit 2 (Reykjavík, 1933), p. 11

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Faeroe Islands.⁸ 'And,' the author concludes, 'at that time, Iceland was discovered'.⁹

If we are to believe the sources, King Haraldr Hárfagri's oppressive rule seems to have provided the Norwegian chieftains with a good enough reason to escape their country and seek refuge elsewhere. As it appears from *Landnámabók*, most settlers of Iceland were male. They brought with them, together with personal possessions, cattle and provisions, members of the household, relatives and their wives. Very few paragraphs refer to women who took the initiative in emigrating to a foreign country. Judith Jesch has pointed out that only in thirteen cases *Landnámabók* mentions women as first settlers of a specific area.¹⁰ Some made the move together with their brothers, as in the case of Hildir and Hallgeirr and their sister Ljót, others went on their own accord.¹¹ We are told of Ásgerðr Asksdóttir hins ómálga, wife to Ófeigr, a famous man in the Raumsdal province. Ófeigr is said to have fallen out with King Haraldr, 'and because of this he made preparations to journey to Iceland'.¹² Just when he was ready to depart, King Haraldr sent men to murder him. Nonetheless, Ásgerðr went to Iceland with their four children and her illegitimate brother Þórólfr, taking possession of extensive lands in the southern part of the country. It is also mentioned that Þórólfr settled around the same area *at ráði hennar*—'with her approval'—suggesting that, as Jesch points out, it was

⁸ 'En af þessi áþján flýðu margir menn af landi á brott, ok byggðusk þá margar auðnir víða', *ibid.*

⁹ 'Ok í þann tíma fannsk Ísland', *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ J. Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 1991), p. 82.

¹¹ *Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), p. 355.

¹² 'Ófeigr varð missáttir við Harald konung hárfagra ok bjósk af því til Íslandsferða', *ibid.*, p. 343.

Ásgerðr's brother 'who was under her protection rather than the other way around'.¹³

The best known female settler of Iceland is Unnr, or Auðr, in djúpúðga, the only female entrepreneur in the process of Norse colonization of the country to be mentioned in sources other than *Landnámabók*. She is the only woman to be named *landnámskona*¹⁴ in the *Íslendingabók*, and the Book of Settlements mentions her among the *göfgastir landnámsmenn*—'leading settlers'—of the West Quarter of the country.¹⁵

Unnr's experience in the British Isles and her early years in Iceland are best described in the opening chapters of *Laxdæla saga*. She is said to be the daughter of Ketill flatnefr, a powerful and highborn Norwegian *hersir*.¹⁶ Her father had moved to Scotland—or, according to *Eyrbyggja saga*, the Western Isles¹⁷—and had given Unnr in marriage to the Norse king of Dublin Ólafr hvíti, who was 'the greatest warlord in the British Isles at that time'.¹⁸ Once her husband was killed in a battle in Ireland, she decided to go with their son Þorsteinn to Scotland, where he was also slain at Caithness in a battle against the Scots. Having heard that her father had also died she

¹³ Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, p. 82. For the quotation see *Landnámabók*, p. 344.

¹⁴ *Íslendingabók*, p. 26.

¹⁵ 'Þessir landnámsmenn eru göfgastir í Vestfirðingafjórðungi: [...] Auðr djúpauðga [...]'] *Landnámabók*, p. 209.

¹⁶ 'hann var hersir ríkr í Nóregi ok kynstórr', *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 5 (Reykjavík, 1934), p. 3.

¹⁷ cf. *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), p. 4.

¹⁸ 'Ketill flatnefr gípti Auði, dóttur sína, Ólafi hvíta, er þá var mestr herkonungr fyrir vestan haf', *ibid.*

'thought she would never manage to reclaim her position there'.¹⁹ It is for this reason that, according to *Laxdæla saga*,

she has a ship built secretly in the forest; and when the ship was finished, she then made the ship ready and loaded it with a wealth of goods. She took with her all of her kinsmen who were still alive, and people think it hard to find another example of a woman having succeeded in escaping such hardship with as much wealth and such a large company. From this it can be seen what an outstanding woman she was.²⁰

Unnr is also said to have taken along with her many other men 'who were of great worth and noble descent'.²¹ She then embarks on her journey towards Iceland, making also sure to marry off two of her son Þorsteinn's five daughters to chieftains in the Western Isles. She first sails to Orkney Islands, where she gives her granddaughter Gró in marriage to the local earl, and then moves on to the Faeroes, marrying off Ólöf, another granddaughter.

In other words, Unnr's emigration seems to be the result of a well thought-of resolution rather than a hurried flight. Her achievement is twofold: not only does she manage to arrange for her family relations to leave the country unharmed, and for her possessions to remain essentially intact; her move also proves to be of a highly diplomatic nature, as she effectively establishes significant connections with the local chieftains throughout the North Atlantic islands on her way to Iceland.

¹⁹ 'Þá þóttisk hon þar enga uppreist fá mundu', *Laxdæla saga*, p. 7.

²⁰ 'Eptir þat lætr hon gera knörr í skógi á laun; ok er skipit var algört, þá bjó hon skipit ok hafði auð fjár. Hon hafði brott með sér allt frændlið sitt, þar er á lífi var, ok þykkjast menn arla dæmi til finna, at einn kvenmaðr hafi komisk í brott ór þvílíkum ófriði með jafnmiklu fé ok föruneyti; má af því marka, at hon var mikit afbragð annarra kvenna', *ibid.*

²¹ 'Unnr hafði ok með sér marga þá menn, er mikils váru verðir ok stórættaðir', *ibid.*

Once in Iceland, Unnr seeks hospitality at her brother Helgi's farm at Kjalarness, who invites her to join him for the winter with only nine of her men. Insulted by Helgi's *lítilmennska*²²—'pettiness'—and lack of hospitality, she heads to her other brother Björn's homestead in Breiðafjörður. He invites his sister to stay with all of her entourage and Unnr thanks him for his *stórmennska*—'generosity'.²³ The following spring she travels through Breiðafjörður in search of a place to settle, and a number of place names in the area suggest her passage there. Unnr is then said to have journeyed 'through all the valleys of Breiðafjörður' and to have taken possession of as much land as she wished to—'ok nam sér lönd svá víða, sem hon vildi'—or, as *Landnámabók* states, 'of all the Dales District at the end of the fjord, between the Dögurðar and Skraumuhlaups rivers'.²⁴ In the end, she chooses to build her farm at Hvammur, where her high-seat pillars had floated ashore.

Not only was Unnr's departure from Scotland remarkable; so was also her land-taking. According to the *Hauksbók* version of *Landnámabók*, women settlers were said have been allowed to take possession of 'as much land as they could walk around from dawn to sunset on a spring day, while leading a two-year-old well-fed heifer'.²⁵ This could have signified a substantially large area, although smaller

²² 'Hon svarar reiðuliga og kvazk eigi vitat hafa, at hann væri slíkt lítilmenni, ok ferr í brott', *ibid.*, p. 9.

²³ 'og þakkaði honum stórmennsku sína', *ibid.*

²⁴ 'Eptir þat fór hon um alla Breiðafjarðardali ok nam sér lönd svá víða, sem hon vildi', *ibid.*; 'Auðr nam öll Dalalönd í innanverðum firðinum frá Dögurðarar til Skraumuhlaupsár', *Landnámabók*, p. 139.

²⁵ 'Enn þat var mællt at kona skyldi ei vidara nema land enn leida mætti kvigu tuævetra varlangann dag solsetra millim half stalit naut ok haft vel', *Landnámabók*, *Hauksbók*, pp. 98–9. Passage in translation in J.L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland—Society, Sagas and Power* (Enfield Lock, 1993), p. 86.

than the one which men were entitled to claim for themselves. In view of Unnr's status as *landnámskona* and head of her farm, family and retinue, it would be interesting to investigate whether, by taking possession of 'as much land as she wished to', she allowed herself to transgress land-taking regulations, colonising a larger area than she was allowed to, possibly as much as a man's share.

Laxdæla saga goes on to describe Unnr's dealings with the people who accompanied her, and the administration of her farm and lands. *Landnámabók* describes the events in detail, reserving to Unnr, her household and their descendants twelve chapters—further testimony to her effective status of chieftain. She marries off the last three of her granddaughters—Þórgerðr, Þórhildr and Ósk—to local chieftains, and shares her extensive lands with her 'ship-mates and freed slaves',²⁶ in order to keep control over them. *Laxdæla saga* reports a speech that Unnr is supposed to have made to the members of her household in regard to Erpr, an Irish man of high-birth who had fallen into slavery and whom she had freed:

You shall now receive the reward for your services; we now do not lack the means with which to repay you for your work and goodwill. It is known to you that I have freed that man whose name is Erpr, son of Earl Meldun; it has never been my wish that such a highborn man should be called a slave.²⁷

Unnr then grants him all Sauðafellslands between the Tungu and Mið rivers. The same generosity is also shown to other freed slaves, some

²⁶ 'Auðr gaf land skipverjum sínum ok leysingjum', *Landnámabók*, p. 140.

²⁷ Unnr mælti við sína menn: "Nú skulu þér taka ömbun verka yðvarra; skortir oss nú ok eigi föng til at gjalda yðr starf yðvart ok góðvilja. En yðr er þat kunngt, at ek hefði frelsi gefit þeim manni, er Erpr heitir, syni Melduns jarls; fór þat fjarri um svá stórættaðan mann, at ek vilda, at hann bæri þræls nafn." Síðan gaf Unnr honum Sauðafellslönd á millum Tunguár ok Miðár', *Laxdæla saga*, p. 10.

of Scottish origin. As Jesse L. Byock has pointed out, Unnr's speech aims at emphasising how prominent Icelandic families had in fact descended from slaves, who had once been nobles in their land of origin.

Unnr's authority does not seem to diminish with the passing of years, and her presence still commands respect. Both *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Laxdæla saga* provide an account of Ólafr feilan's betrothal to Ásdís in barreyska. The two sagas portray Unnr as *mjök ellimóð*—'very old and frail'—when she decides that the time has come for Ólafr, her grandson whom she had fostered, to settle down and marry, as he is now *fullroskinn*—'a grown man'.²⁸ She has nominated him heir to all of her property and he is eager to 'rely on her judgement'²⁹ on account of the betrothal. He also tells his grandmother that he will marry 'only a woman who will not deprive you of neither wealth nor authority'.³⁰

Ólafr marries Áldís the same autumn and a grand wedding feast is held at Hvammur. Although 'old age was coming hard upon Unnr',³¹ she nonetheless enters the hall on the day the feast began looking *há ok þreklig*—'tall and stout'.³² She thanks the guests for having come to the feast and publicly announces her wish to leave her farm in inheritance to her grandson. She then walks 'briskly along the hall and people commented on how dignified the woman still

²⁸ 'mjök var Auðr ellimóð', *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), p. 24.

²⁹ 'Ólafr tók því vel ok kvezk hennar forsjá hlíta mundu um þat mál', *Laxdæla saga*, p. 11.

³⁰ "þeirar einnar konu ætla ek at fá, at sú ræni þik hvárki fé né ráðum", *ibid.*, p. 11.

³¹ 'Elli sótti þá fast at Unni', *ibid.*, p. 12.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

was'.³³ The next day Ólafr finds Unnr dead in her bedchamber, and decides to prolong the feast in commemoration of her. On her final day of the feast she is brought to the burial mound that had been prepared for her. She is placed in a ship with a great deal of wealth and buried there—a burial custom usually reserved for male chieftains.

Unnr was *vegskona mikil*,³⁴ a woman 'of great dignity', as the author of *Landnámabók* describes her. After her husband's death, she moves to Scotland with her father and, having lost her son and then her father, she takes the initiative to embark on a journey to Iceland, determined to save the remaining members of her family and household, together with the family's wealth. She settles in Iceland, taking possession of as much land as she wished to, and then shares it with family connections and slaves she had freed in order to administer her estate at best. Aged and frail, female and widowed, she arranges marriages and wedding feasts, commands respect from relatives and neighbours alike, and is finally buried in the manner of a chieftain. Unnr goes far beyond the gender roles traditionally assigned to women. Her *stórmennska* is on the verge of turning into *karlmennska* since, as Robert Cook has pointed out, 'she does all of the things that are usually associated with powerful patriarchs'.³⁵ Carol J. Clover has also noted how the story of Unnr at the beginning of *Laxdæla saga* 'prepares the reader to believe that anything is possible for women; Unnr sets the tone for a saga in which women's potential for action will be exhibited to the utmost'.³⁶ Within the literary frame of *Laxdæla saga*, Unnr's experience seems to have been not an exception, but the

³³ 'hon gekk hart útar eptir skálanum; fundusk mönnum orð um, at konan var enn virðulig', *ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁴ *Landnámabók*, p. 146.

³⁵ R. Cook, 'Women and Men in *Laxdæla saga*', *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 39.

³⁶ Cook, 'Women and Men', 39.

starting-off point of a narrative centred on heroines rather than heroes, where all main female characters are, each in their own particular way, *mikið afbragð annarra kvenna*—'a very outstanding woman.'

Although the Book of Settlements and the *Íslendingasögur* refer to King Haraldr Hárfagri's oppressive rule as the most common cause of emigration from Norway, the extensive migratory movements of the Norse people must also be considered in the light of the Viking expansion throughout the North Atlantic region between the 9th and the 11th century. Expansion which did not stop in Iceland, but continued to Greenland and North America, as it is related in *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*.

Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir's life experience is closely intertwined with these voyages and intimately shaped by them. She is mentioned in *Landnámabók* in connection with her grandfather, Vífill, one of the Gaelic slaves whom Unnr djúpúðga had freed in Iceland.³⁷ Daughter of Þorbjörn Vífilsson, a 'man of great worth' and a 'successful farmer' who 'lived in grand style'³⁸ at Laugarbrekka, she is however brought up by her foster parents Ormr and Halldís at Ánastapi, as mentioned in *Eiríks saga rauða*. She is portrayed from the start as *kvenna vænst*, 'the most beautiful of women' and *inn mesti skörungr í öllu athæfi sínu*, 'the most distinguished person in all her dealings'.³⁹ She is also said to have been asked in marriage by many a suitor, but to be 'particular as

³⁷ *Landnámabók*, p. 141.

³⁸ 'Rékz Þorbjörn þangat byggðum ok gerðisk göfugmenni mikít. Hann var góðr bóndi ok hafði rausnarráð', *Eiríks saga rauða*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslenzk fornrit* 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), p. 203.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

to choice of a husband', and her father a demanding man too in terms of his daughter's betrothal.⁴⁰

Eiríks saga rauða relates Þorbjörn's decision to move to Greenland after having landed in financial difficulties at home. During a feast held at his farm in the spring he announces: "I would rather leave my farm than lose my reputation. I would rather leave my country than dishonour my family".⁴¹ He has decided to accept his friend Eiríkr hinn rauði's offer to join him at his estate in a land off the west coast of Iceland, which he had explored and settled, and had named Greenland, 'as he said that people would be very much inclined to go there if the land had an attractive name'.⁴² Þorbjörn sells his lands in Iceland, buys himself a ship and embarks on the journey to Greenland together with thirty companions, among whom are Guðríðr and her foster parents, and friends who did not wish to part with him. Favourable weather accompanies them in the beginning, but the fleet is soon beset by storms, so that they make little progress during the summer. The company is subsequently plagued by an illness that causes Ormr and Halldís to die, together with half of Þorbjörn's crew. Eventually they reach Greenland and make land at Herjólfssnes, where the farmer Þorkell is eager to give them shelter for the winter.

It is interesting to note that *Grænlandinga saga* gives quite a different account of Guðríðr's arrival in Greenland. According to the saga, she is rescued at sea by Leifr, son of Eiríkr hinn rauði, who too

⁴⁰ 'Beðit hefir hennar víst verit, ok liggir þat eigi laust fyrir; finnsk þat á, a t hon mun vera mannvönd ok svá faðir hennar', *ibid.*, pp. 203–4.

⁴¹ "Nú vil ek fyrr búinu bregða en sæmðinni týna. Ætla ek fyrr af landi fara en ætt mína svívirða", *ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴² 'Þat sumar fór Eiríkr at byggja land þat er hann hafði fundit ok hann kallaði Grænland, því at hann kvað menn þat mjök mundu fýsa þangat, ef landit héti vel', *ibid.*, p. 201.

was on his way to Greenland. She is accompanied by her husband Þórir, who claims to be of Norwegian origin, although no other source seems to mention Þórir or his marriage with Guðríðr. Leifr invites them to spend the winter at Eiríkr's farm in Brattahlíð, where, however, Þórir and his crew are struck by illness; he dies together with most of his travel companions.⁴³

Guðríðr is still a young woman when, according to *Eiríks saga rauða*, she encounters Þorbjörg. She is a *spákona*, a seeress, and is called *lítill-völva*,⁴⁴ 'Little Prophetess'. She is one of ten sisters, all of them *spákonur*, and the only one of them still alive. It is Þorbjörg's custom to spend the winter visiting farmers who had invited her, particularly those men who were 'curious to know about their future or the coming year's prospects'.⁴⁵ Þorkell had invited her at his farm to know whether the hardship that he had recently been experiencing would ease off. However, a problem arises when Þorbjörg asks for women able to perform the *Varðlokur*, or *Varðlokkur*, the 'ward songs' required to carry out the *seiðr*—'magic rite'—as no such women were to be found at Herjólfssnes.⁴⁶ Guðríðr admits to knowing such songs, having learned them from her foster mother, but is reluctant to perform them since she is a *kristin kona*, a Christian

⁴³ Cf. *Grænlandinga saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), pp. 253–4.

⁴⁴ 'Sú kona var þar í byggð, er Þorbjörg hét; hon var spákona ok var kölluð lítill-völva. Hon hafði átt sér níu systur, ok váru allar spákonur, en hon ein var þá á lífi', *Eiríks saga rauða*, p. 206.

⁴⁵ 'buðu þeir menn henni mest heim, er forvitni var á at vita forlög sín eða árferð', *ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴⁶ 'Hon bað ok fá sér konur þær, er kynni fræði þat, sem til seiðisins þarf ok Varðlokur hétu. En þær konur fundusk eigi', *ibid.*, p. 207.

woman.⁴⁷ Urged by the seeress, Þorkell encourages Guðríður to sing, and she is said to have spoken the chant 'so beautifully and well that the people present thought they had never heard the chant recited in a finer voice'.⁴⁸

It strikes us as unconventional that Guðríður, a Christian woman descended from a Gaelic family line should be accustomed to specialised pagan ward songs. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson has regarded Guðríður's explanation of having learned the chant from her foster mother as 'quite unlikely'. According to him, Guðríður's excuse 'sounds very much like a somewhat uncomfortable explanation put together by a saga author or recorder who needed to give some explanation for what Guðríður was said to have chanted as part of the *seiðr* performance.⁴⁹ Jón Hnefill suggests that the chant performed by Guðríður might in fact have been a Christian hymn. 'In a pagan society', he notes, 'there would have been very little differentiation between a religious chant from a Mass and a pagan incantation. Both would have sounded powerful'.⁵⁰

Þorbjörg wishes to reward Guðríður for the help received with a prophecy on her fate. She predicts that Guðríður will 'make a match here in Greenland, the most distinguished there is.' However, it will not last for long, 'as your path lies out to Iceland,' the seeress says, 'and there will stem from you a descent both great and worthy, and

over all the branches of your family will shine brighter rays than I have the power to see in such detail'.⁵¹ The prophecy proves to be correct, as Guðríður is given in marriage to Þorsteinn, son of Eiríkr hinn rauði, in Greenland the following autumn, but is widowed shortly afterwards, her husband having fallen ill and perished the same winter.

A similar prophecy is voiced in *Grænlandinga saga* by Þorsteinn's ghost, who had wished to tell Guðríður her fate 'so that she can better accept my death'.⁵² He foretells her marriage with an Iclander, with whom she will have 'many descendants, promising, bright and fine, and scented-scented'.⁵³ She will leave Greenland to go to Norway, and from there to Iceland, where she will settle. She will outlive her husband and travel abroad, go south on a pilgrimage and finally return to Iceland, where she will take holy orders and end her long life.⁵⁴ In other words, the prophecy gives the reader an insight into what will be narrated next in the saga.

Both *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* relate that Guðríður is given in marriage to Þorfinnr Karlsefni, a 'wealthy man of good family'—*attgóðr maðr ok auðigr at fé*—and 'a successful merchant'—*góðr*

⁴⁷ "Hvarki em ek fjölkunnig né vísindakona, en þó kenndi Halldís, fóstura mín, mér á Íslandi þat kvæði, er hon kallaði Varðlokur. ... Þetta er það eitt atferli, er ek ætla í engum atbeina at vera, því at ek em kristin kona", *ibid.*, pp. 207–8.

⁴⁸ 'Kvað Guðríður þá kvæðit svá fagurt ok vel, at engi þóttisk heyrt hafa með fegri rödd kvæði kveðit', *ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴⁹ Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 'The *Varðlokkur* of Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir', *Northern Lights—Following Folklore on North-Western Europe. Essays in Honour of Bo Almqvist*, ed. S. Ó Catháin (Dublin, 2001), p. 107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8.

⁵¹ "Þú munt gjaforð fá hér á Grælandi, þat er sæmilegast er, þó at þér verði þat eigi til langæðar, því at vegar þínir liggja út til Íslands, ok man þar koma frá þér bæði mikil ætt ok góð, ok yfir þínum kynkvíslum skína bjartari geislar en ek hafa megin til at geta slíkt vandliga sét", *Eiríks saga rauða*, p. 208.

⁵² "Mér er annt til þess, at segja Guðríði forlög sín, til þess at hon kunni þá betr andláti mínu", *Grænlandinga saga*, p. 259.

⁵³ 'ok mart manna mun frá ykkur koma, þroskasamt, bjart ok ágætt, sætt ok ilmat vel', *ibid.*, p. 260.

⁵⁴ 'Munu þit fara af Grænlandi til Nóregs ok þaðan til Íslands ok gera bú á Íslandi; þar munu útan fara ok ganga suðr ok koma út apr til Íslands til bús þíns, ok þá mun þar kirkja reist vera, ok muntu þar vera ok taka nunnu-vígslu, ok þar muntu andask', *ibid.*, p. 260.

*fardrengur*⁵⁵—who had just landed in Greenland. It is with Karlsefni that Guðríðr leaves Greenland in search of Vínland, a land on the east coast of the North American continent that had been previously discovered and explored by Leifur Eiríksson—although *Grænlandinga saga* assigns the first sighting to Bjarni Herjólfsson.⁵⁶ Both sagas also state that Guðríðr gives birth to her child Snorri while in Vínland, the first person of European descent to be born in America.

Guðríðr is nursing her baby when, according to *Grænlandinga saga*, she receives a mysterious visitor. A woman enters the farm, 'dressed in a tight black mantle, rather short in stature, with a headband around her chestnut hair, pale and with eyes so large as they had never been seen in a human head'.⁵⁷ Guðríðr asks the woman for her name, who, as reported in the saga, answers: "My name is Guðríðr; and what is yours?" Guðríðr also answers: "My name is Guðríðr", and gestures for her to take a seat beside her. A great crash is then heard from outside and the woman disappears. At the same moment, we are told, a *skerælingi*—a native American, as the Norse called them—is killed by Karlsefni, who had caught him stealing some of their weapons.

Bo Almqvist has attempted, in my opinion successfully, to disentangle the mystery.⁵⁸ Following a thorough analysis of the

⁵⁵ *Eiríks saga rauða*, p. 218.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Eiríks saga rauða*, p. 211 and *Grænlandinga saga*, pp. 244–54.

⁵⁷ 'þá bar skugga í dyrin, ok gekk þar inn kona í svörtum námkyrtli, heldr lág, ok hafði dregil um höfuð ok ljósörp á hár, fölleit ok mjök eygð, svá at eigi hafði jafnmikil augu sét í einum mannshausi', *Grænlandinga saga*, p. 262.

⁵⁸ B. Almqvist, 'My Name is Guðríðr: An Enigmatic Episode in *Grænlandinga saga*', *Approaches to Vinland—A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America. The Nordic House, Reykjavík, 9–11 August 1999. Proceedings*. Sigurður Nordal Inst. Stud. 4, ed. A. Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík, 2001), pp. 15–30.

enigmatic visitor's dress and appearance, he concludes that, rather than a spirit or apparition of some kind, the woman could rather have been a *skerælingi* herself. Almqvist attempts to make sense of the dialogue between Guðríðr and her visitor by suggesting a scribal error in the punctuation of the manuscript. He ascribes the first part of the dialogue to Guðríðr, who is trying to establish a contact with a possibly scared and speechless native. In reply, the totally baffled Skeræling woman, he notes, 'repeats like a parrot what she has just heard, uttering the words (perhaps imitating Guðríðr's voice) *Ek heiti Guðríðr*'.⁵⁹ Guðríðr realises that verbal communication with the woman would be hardly possible and offers her to take a seat instead. Almqvist concludes his analysis by appointing Guðríðr 'the first American woman of whom a verbal description is extant'.⁶⁰

The Vínland sagas cite the constant attacks made by the *skerælingjar* as the main reason for the Norse to abandon their post on the North-American continent and discard any attempt at colonization of the country. Three years after her arrival in Vínland, Guðríðr moves back to Iceland, her home country, with her husband Karlsefni and their son. According to *Grænlandinga saga*, the family first journeys to Norway to sell the goods they had collected in Vínland. They remain there for the winter, and are warmly welcomed as guests at the courts of 'the most noble men in Norway'.⁶¹ As *Eiríks saga rauða* relates, they then set sail to Iceland and move to the farm at Reynines, where Karlsefni's family lives. His mother is said to have

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶¹ 'Nú er at segja frá því, er Karlsefni býr skip sitt ok sigldi í haf. Honum fórsk vel ok kom til Nóregs með heilu ok höldnu ok sat þar um vetrinn ok seldi varning sinn ok hafði þar gott yfirlæti ok þau bæði hjón af inum göfgustum mönnum í Nóregi, en um vátir eptir bjó han skip sitt til Íslands', *Grænlandinga saga*, p. 268.

thought Guðríðr hardly her son's match at first, and did not allow her to stay at their farm the first winter, but once she realised what an outstanding woman—*kvenskörungur mikill*—she was, Guðríðr moved to the farm and 'they lived happily together'.⁶²

According to *Grænlandinga saga*, on the other hand, the couple make land in Skagafjörður, North Iceland, and purchase land at Glaumbær to build their own farm. After Karlsefni's death, Guðríðr is said to have taken over the administration of the farm together with her son Snorri. Once Snorri got married, his mother embarks on a pilgrimage to Rome, to then return home to her farm and become *nunna ok einsetukona*—'a nun and an anchoress'—at the church that Snorri had built for her at Glaumbær.⁶³ Both sagas end with the mention of the three Icelandic bishops who were said to have descended from her—Þorlákr Rúnólfsson, bishop at Skálholt (1118–33) and Björn Gilsson and Brandr Sæmundarsson, both bishops at Hólar, (1147–62) and (1163–1201) respectively—which fits with the allusions to a 'bright beam of light' and a 'bright and noble and sweet-scented' descent contained in the prophecies voiced by the seeress Þorbjörg and Þorsteinn's ghost.

It is striking to note how much attention the *Vínland Sagas* seem to put on the character of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir. As Ólafur Halldórsson has pointed out, *Eiríks saga rauða* 'ought really to be called "the Saga of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir"', and not the "Saga of

Eiríkr the Red".⁶⁴ The figure of Guðríðr is central in the saga and her life experience is given priority to Leifr's travels. According to Ólafur, "it was not the saga author's intention to write a scholarly account about the discovery of Greenland and *Vínland*", but rather to write a saga in honour of Guðríðr, the prominent ancestor of the above mentioned twelfth-century bishops.⁶⁵ In particular, he speculates that accounts of Guðríðr's life were assembled in an attempt to "find out whether her descendant Bishop Björn Gilsson would be a suitable future saint for the diocese of Hólar".⁶⁶ Of a similar view is Helgi Þorláksson, who believes that the extensive role played by Guðrún in *Eiríks saga rauða* should be considered in conjunction with the foundation of a nunnery at Reynistaðr—then Reynisnes—by abbess Hallbera in 1295. He notes that Hallbera, as Guðríðr, was in charge at Reynisnes, which might have led people to draw a parallel between the two women, 'and this in turn could have led to the expansion of Guðríðr's role in *Eiríks saga rauða*'.⁶⁷ Helgi regards it as 'perfectly plausible that *Eiríks saga rauða* could have been viewed as appropriate reading matter for the Benedictine nuns at Reynisnes and indeed as a guide for noble women generally', as Guðríðr was a Christian woman who 'behaved with great circumspection, and lived a thoroughly respectable and dignified life in a hazardous world'.⁶⁸ '*Eiríks saga rauða*', he concludes, 'was written at the instigation of someone who felt that the foundation of the Reynisnes nunnery was a good reason to highlight the role of Guðríðr, whose name could help to establish a

⁶² 'Móður hans þótti sem hann hefði lítt til kostar tekit, ok var hon eigi heima inn fyrsta vetr; en er hon reyndi, at Guðríðr var kvenskörungur mikill, fór hon heim; ok váru samfarar þeira góðar', *Eiríks saga rauða*, p. 236.

⁶³ 'Ok er Snorri var kvángaðr, þá fór Guðríðr útan ok gekk suðr ok kom út apr til bús Snorra, sonar síns, ok hafði hann þá látit gera kirkju í Glaumbæ. Síðan varð Guðríðr nunna ok einsetukona ok var þar, meðan hon lifði', *Grænlandinga saga*, p. 269.

⁶⁴ Ólafur Halldórsson, 'The *Vínland Sagas*', *Approaches to Vinland*, ed. Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, p. 42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁷ Helgi Þorláksson, 'The *Vínland Sagas* in a Contemporary Light', *Approaches to Vinland*, ed. Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, p. 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

prestigious pre-history for the new foundation and could also serve to promote the reputation of Abbess Hallbera, the founder'.⁶⁹ *Grænlandinga saga*, Helgi believes, was modified in the light of this. Reynisnes was replaced by Glumbær, and the saga's account of the church at Glaumbær, Guðríðr's religious vows and her pilgrimage to Rome—details which are not mentioned anywhere else—were subsequently added to the text.

Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir undoubtedly was one of the most widely travelled women of her time. Born in Iceland to a distinguished family of Gaelic origins, she emigrates to Greenland and then to Vínland, the farthestmost edge of the Viking world, where she gives birth to the first European to be born in North America. She then journeys east on a trading voyage to Norway on her way back to Iceland, her home country. Having outlived two—or three—husbands and getting on with age, she runs her farm with the help of her son Snorri. After his marriage, according to the literature, she departs yet again and heads off to the south of Europe on a pilgrimage to Rome. She finally returns to Iceland and settles as a nun and anchoress at the church her son had built for her.

A widely appreciated woman both in her own and later times, not only did Guðríðr journey across the then known world, but also established a prominent ancestral line of clergymen and chieftains. As Unnr djúpúðga in *Laxdæla saga* is portrayed as a *vegskona mikil*, so is Guðríðr a *kvenskorungr mikill* in her own right. However, it should also be stressed that Unnr functioned in practice as chieftain to her family and connections. Although a woman and a widow, she acted independently in all of her dealings, thus demanding the respect and privileges that were customarily intended for male rulers. Guðríðr's extensive travels, on the other hand, seem to have been the result of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

decisions that had been dictated by her different husbands's wishes rather than being a self-reliant, autonomous enterprise. In any case, Unnr and Guðríðr represent two outstanding women whose life experience went far beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries of social conventions and traditional female gender roles.

The Men Who Would Be King?
The Ua Briain Exiles in the North, Revisited¹

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This paper re-opens the file on two eleventh-century Irish nobles who, although their careers are in many respects obscure, present an important case-study for those investigating the nature of Irish kingship. These men, Conchobar and Cennétig, were members of the ruling Ua Briain dynasty of Munster (descended from Brian Bóraime, d. 1014), who appear to have left their homeland as a consequence of dynastic feud. They travelled to the northern half of Ireland, leading 'a life of roving adventure' as Donnchadh Ó Corráin memorably put it,² and were received most favourably by at least two rulers, to the extent that they seem to have been granted kingships in those parts of Ireland, a very unusual occurrence in the context of pre-Norman Irish history.

¹ I must apologise to other scholars who have employed versions of the title for their own works. In this instance however, the parallel between the subjects of the present study and Rudyard Kipling's two adventurers who came to the kingship of a foreign land, only for one to be killed by the locals, proved irresistible. The present text is a corrected version of that delivered at CCASNC 2005, though the original presentation (designed for a medievalist audience without specialist knowledge of Irish history) was intended to be light in tone and made more references both to Kipling's tale and John Huston's 1975 film of the same starring Sean Connery and Michael Caine. I would like to thank the organisers of CCASNC for their invitation to participate and to the audience for their most helpful comments and suggestions.

² D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), p. 141.

One detailed study of the subject has been made before, by James Hogan, in 'The Ua Briain Kingship in Telach Óc',³ a landmark study which, as well as containing a number of the author's typically keen insights into the history of the Ua Briain exiles, also incorporates a good deal of original research into the early history of Tír Eógain. His essay remains the first port of call for students of the subject, and most of Hogan's conclusions appear to me to still be valid. The present paper aims to supplement Hogan's work by commenting in more detail on some aspects of the exiles' careers, and by suggesting some ways in which their activities and contexts are particularly noteworthy.

The story begins, perhaps inevitably, with Brian Bóraime of Munster, who by 1002 had become the most powerful king in Ireland and in the following years could claim with some justification to be effective king of all Ireland.⁴ His domination of the island, though it was to an extent hitherto unknown, was not to last, for many rulers resented his overlordship. A crisis in 1013–14 forced him to bring as many troops as he could muster against the independent-minded men of Leinster, the Hiberno-Scandinavians of Dublin and their allies from across the sea.⁵ In the famous battle of Clontarf on Good Friday, 23 April 1014 the Leinstermen and Scandinavians were

³ J. Hogan, 'The Ua Briain Kingship in Telach Óc', *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill .i. Tráchtas Léigeanta i n-Onóir do'n Ollambhain Eóin Mac Néill, D. Litt. do Scríobh Cáirde d'á Cáirdibh i n-Am a Déichmhadh Bliadhna agus Trí Fichid, an Cúigmhadh Lá Déag de Mhí na Bealtaine, 1938: Essays and Studies Presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill D. Litt. on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday May 15th, 1938*, ed. J. Ryan (Dublin, 1940), pp. 406–444.

⁴ For a summary of his career see Ó Corráin, *Ireland*, pp. 120–8, and J. Ryan, 'Brian Boruma, King of Ireland', *North Munster Studies*, ed. E. Rynne (Limerick, 1967), pp. 355–74.

⁵ Ó Corráin, *Ireland*, pp. 128–31.

defeated, but Brian was killed, and more importantly his most senior son Murchad was killed, along with many of the Munster aristocracy.⁶ This turn of events occasioned a succession dispute between two of Brian's other sons, Donnchad and Tadc.⁷ It is important for those unfamiliar with early Irish history to note that for kingship there was no practice of primogeniture, or even definite succession from father to son; in theory, any male member of the dynasty who was no more than three generations from a king was qualified to contest the kingship himself.⁸ In this case there was a feud between the two brothers and their followers: Donnchad was the younger and a son of Brian's second wife, but was able to secure a position such that the overkingship of Munster was shared, or at least disputed and divided, until Tadc's death in 1023.⁹ For the next four decades Donnchad was master in Munster, but after the middle years of the century Tadc's son Tairdelbach renewed the contest. We do not have to go into all the details here other than to say that soon Tairdelbach gained the upper hand, in part because he was in some ways the protégé of Diarmait mac Máil-na-mBó, king of Leinster and also probably the

most powerful king in Ireland in the two decades after 1050.¹⁰ The writing was on the wall for Donnchad in 1063 when he was defeated by the combined forces of Tairdelbach and Diarmait, and the vanquished king went on pilgrimage to Rome where he died the following year.¹¹ Donnchad's son Murchad made a bid to recover his line's fortunes, but was unsuccessful and was later slain in Tethba.¹² The location of Murchad's death suggested to Hogan that he had been exiled from Munster to the Irish midlands.¹³ It does seem likely that many leading members of Donnchad's branch of the dynasty went into exile: apart from Donnchad's own retirement to Rome, both Murchad and the two characters we are concerned with here are recorded acting in theatres beyond Munster in the years after 1063. In this period Tairdelbach gained a supremacy over much of southern and central (but not northern) Ireland analogous to that enjoyed by his grandfather Brian.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there were several powerful kingdoms in the northern half of Ireland implacably opposed to the king of Munster; naturally, such lands could provide asylum for any opponents of Tairdelbach from within his own dynasty.

THE DEEDS OF THE EXILES

What do we know about our two exiles Conchobar and Cennétig? They were grandsons of Donnchad son of Brian Bóraime through his son Lorcán, and thus had a legitimate claim to the kingship of Munster, though as we have seen it was Lorcán's brother Murchad

⁶ Chronicle-accounts of the event have been influenced by later literary accounts (most notably the early twelfth-century *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*). The more important of these may be found in the *Annals of Ulster*, ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983); the *Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951); and *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann: the Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters*, ed. J. O'Donovan, 2nd ed., 7 vols. (Dublin 1856); all *s.a.* 1014. The so-called *Annals of Tigernach*, ed. W. Stokes, RC 17 (1896), 6–33, 119–263, 337–420 and 18 (1897), 9–59, 150–97, 267–303 lack the folio narrating the battle of Clontarf.

⁷ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 428–9.

⁸ For a full study of the customary Irish rules of succession see B. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000).

⁹ *AI* 1023.1, *AU* 1023.5.

¹⁰ Ó Corráin, *Ireland*, pp. 131–7; for a summary of Diarmait's career see *idem*, 'The Career of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, King of Leinster', *Jnl of the Old Wexford Soc.* 3 (1970–71), 26–35.

¹¹ *AI* 1063.6, 1064.5; *AFM* 1063, 1064; *AU* 1064.4.

¹² *AI* 1068.2.

¹³ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', p. 429.

¹⁴ Ó Corráin, *Ireland*, pp. 137–42.

who attempted to take the throne after 1063.¹⁵ About Lorcán himself we know almost nothing other than that he died in 1078.¹⁶ The early careers of Conchobar and Cennétig are also a blank, but that we subsequently find them in exile suggests that they supported the claims of their branch of the dynasty, the descendants of Donnchad, to be kings of Munster, or otherwise simply by membership of this group were considered too dangerous to be left in Munster.¹⁷

The actual information on their careers-in-exile is so sparse that we may examine it in its entirety. Our first data come from a family of chronicle-entries for the year 1078, and it will be useful to quote them in full:

AU 1078.3

Concobur H. Briain ri Telcha Óc & ridamna Erenn do marbadh .i. cum sua uxore do Cenel Binnigh Glínni.¹⁸

AI 1078.3

Conchobur h-Ua Briain do marbad a fill i Ceneul Éogain iar n-gabáil ríge and, & in fer ro marb do marbad fo chetoir; ocus Cennetich h-Ua

Briain do gabail ríge dia éis.¹⁹

AT 1078

Lethlobur O Laidhgnén, rí Airgiall, do ég, & Concobar h-Úa Briain, ri Ceneoil Eogain & Domnall mac Tigernain h-Úi Ruairc, rí Conmaicne, omnes occisi sunt.²⁰

AFM 1078

Conchobhar Ua Briain, tigherna Ceneóil n-Eoghain & Tealcha Occ do mharbhadh la Cenel m-Bindigh Glinne.²¹

Though there is some disagreement here, the overall picture seems straightforward enough: In 1078 (or before) Conchobar Ua Briain became king in Tulach Óc (modern Tullyhogue fort, Co. Tyrone) and was killed by the Cenél mBinnig Glinne, a local population group who lived a little way from Tulach Óc.²² That Conchobar was murdered (rather than dying in battle) is shown by the mention in *AU* of his wife and *AP*'s reference to the deed as a treacherous one for which the perpetrator was immediately killed. *AI* further add, uniquely, that Cennétig took the kingship after his brother's death. The wording of *AI* could also imply that the killing took place very

¹⁵ The dynastic relationships are most easily seen from the tables in Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', p. 444 and in F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 2001), p. 297.

¹⁶ *AU* 1078.1, *AFM* 1078.

¹⁷ We do not know the ages of either Conchobar or Cennétig, but the fact that Cennétig had a son old enough to die in battle in 1084 suggests they were adults when Donnchad mac Briain was overthrown in 1063-4, the years when Hogan assumes the exile of Donnchad's family members to have taken place ('The Ua Briain Kingship' p. 429-30). Unfortunately we are not told where Lorcán died; that his end is reported in *AU* but not *AI* might suggest that the event took place in a region of particular concern to the midland and northern chroniclers whose work underlies most of *AU*, rather than a location in Munster.

¹⁸ 'Conchobar Ua Briain, king of Tulach Óc & rígdamna of Ireland, was killed, i.e. with his wife, by the Cenél mBinnig Glinne.'

¹⁹ 'Conchobar Ua Briain was treacherously killed in Cenél nEógain after taking the kingship there, and the man who slew him was immediately killed; and Cennétig Ua Briain took the kingship after him.'

²⁰ 'Lethlobur Ua Laidhgnén, king of Airgialla, was killed, & Conchobar Ua Briain, king of Cenél nEógain, & Domnall mac Tigernáin Uí Ruairc, king of Conmaicne, were all killed.'

²¹ Conchobar Ua Briain, lord of Cenél nEógain and Tulach Óc was killed by the Cenél mBinnig Glinne.

²² For discussion of Cenél mBinnig groups and their distribution, see Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 423-4.

shortly after Conchobar's accession, though this does not have to be the case.²³

One of the most meritorious aspects of Hogan's article is the attention paid to the early history of the Tulach Óc region, and its place in the unfolding history of the kingdoms of the Cenél nEógain and Airgialla.²⁴ Tulach Óc itself is a complex hilltop site whose uses may have extended back into the Iron Age. In the medieval period appears to have been an important centre first for the Uí Thuirtri, an Airgiallan people of mid-Ulster; when these fell under the overlordship of the Cenél nEógain kings of Ailech it was used as their royal inauguration-site and later as the inauguration-site of their Ua Néill (O'Neill) successors into the later middle ages.²⁵ It was thus a very important centre within the context of the northern overkingdom of Ailech. How could a Munster exile come to be king there?

Before Hogan's pioneering study, it had been assumed by some scholars that Conchobar acquired the kingship of Tulach Óc through the agency of Tairdelbach ua Briain and that this was a symptom of

²³ The reference in *AT* and (perhaps consequently) *AFM* to Conchobar being 'king of Cenél nEógain' is probably best taken as a misunderstanding of the internal structure of the Ailech overkingdom, though there might be some more specific reason for it; *AT* in this period does normally use the term *rí Ailig* for the Cenél nEógain overkings and thus probably did not understand Conchobar to have held that position.

²⁴ Hogan had earlier investigated the history of the kingdom of Ailech, particularly with reference to its regnal succession: see 'The Irish Law of Kingship, with special reference to Ailech and Cenél Eóghain', *Proc. of the RIA* 40 C (1940), 186–254.

²⁵ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 419–21. For a discussion of Tulach Óc itself and its context as an inauguration-site, see E. FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100–1600: a Cultural Landscape Study* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 139–49.

the developing powers of the 'Irish high-kingship' in the period after Brian Bóraime.²⁶ Hogan showed this not to be the case at all: that Tairdelbach, whatever his power, was in no position to impose a king in the hostile territories of Ailech, and that even if he were to do so, would scarcely choose a candidate from a hostile segment of his own dynasty with whom he had striven for the kingship.²⁷ For Conchobar to have come to power in the north he must have been dependent on the local overlord, the king of Ailech, Áed mac Néill. From Conchobar's point of view, it made sense to ally with (and submit to) the rulers of Ailech, long-time enemies of the ruling Ua Briain kings. We cannot know, of course, whether Conchobar intended to recover the kingship of Munster with Cenél nEógain help, or whether he merely hoped to make the best of his situation.

The more difficult questions pertain to the motives of Áed king of Ailech. Why should he have installed an exiled Ua Briain dynast in Tulach Óc, rather than simply taking him on as a noble client, perhaps just granting him lands from his own holdings? Hogan saw part of the answer as lying in the history of Tulach Óc; since it had become the Cenél nEógain inauguration-centre and residence, control of it was vital to those wishing to hold the overkingship. However, for some years there had been a struggle for the kingship of Ailech between two branches of the Cenél nEógain dynasty, Clann Domnaill and Clann Néill.²⁸ These two branches had irregularly shared the kingship of Ailech from the early tenth century, but after the death of Flaithbertach mac Muirchertaig in 1036 Clann Néill were excluded.²⁹ Despite this they retained some degree of control over Tulach Óc, for they expelled Ardgar mac Lochlainn of Clann Domnaill hence in

²⁶ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', p. 433.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 433–4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 424–7.

²⁹ Hogan, 'The Irish Law', pp. 206–19; *idem*, 'Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 422–7.

1051; Ardgar had apparently been ruling as a sub-king while his uncle Níall mac Maíl Sechnaill was king of Ailech.³⁰ In 1061 Ardgar succeeded Níall; in 1063 we hear of one Muirchertach Ua Néill (i.e. of Clann Néill) dying as king of Tulach Óc.³¹ In the same year Ardgar himself died at Tulach Óc and was buried at Armagh; yet in 1068 Flaithbertach, another member of Clann Néill was killed as king of Tulach Óc (interestingly also by the Cenél mBinnig Glinne).³² At almost the same time, the Clann Domnaill king of Ailech, Domnall mac Néill, was killed by his brother Áed who succeeded him.³³ Thus, in the two decades before the Ua Briain exiles came to Tulach Óc, Clann Domnaill dynasts held the overkingship of Ailech, but were infrequently able to install their own as kings of Tulach Óc, which was more often ruled over by members of Clann Néill.

We must be aware that though this arrangement was presented by Hogan as a purely antagonistic one, at times Clann Néill might have held Tulach Óc with the consent of the Clann Domnaill rulers of Ailech (or at least with their acceptance of a *fait accompli*); such a situation might have eased friction between the two branches of Cenél nEógain. On the other hand, the events of 1051 and the history of Tulach Óc itself suggests that it was a valuable prize, and when Áed murdered his way to the top in 1068 he must have had a thought as to securing the site from the possession of Clann Néill. This appears to be the situation into which the Ua Briain exiles came in 1064x78. Ardgar mac Lochlainn had ruled as a Clann Domnaill king in Tulach Óc for some time before 1051. But in installing Conchobar Ua Briain rather than a relative, Áed mac Néill was innovating in terms of royal practice in the north and making powerful statements

³⁰ AU 1051.5.

³¹ AU 1061.4, 1064.3.

³² AU 1064.7, 1068.4.

³³ AU 1068.5.

about his control of the place. Though it may be thought of as a bold experiment, Áed held all the cards. The Uí Briain exiles were dependent on Áed for their position and it must be assumed that this would have been a guarantee of their loyalty. Should something befall them the leading members of Clann Domnaill would not be directly affected. In the year before the events of 1078 the Fir Manach were defeated by a group AU call the 'Cenél nEógain of Tulach Óc'.³⁴ Hogan took this to be a reference to Clann Néill, which would mean that they retained control of the site until Conchobar Ua Briain was installed there.³⁵ This is by no means certain, for when the term is used again by AU (in the 1160s), it seems to refer to people of Clann Domnaill.³⁶ In any case, other information shows that Clann Domnaill and not Clann Néill were the instruments of Ua Briain succession in Tulach Óc. We cannot know whether there was a long-term plan on the part of Áed for the exiles to recover the Munster throne (and therefore henceforth be allies of Ailech), but AI in stating that Cennétig took the kingship of Ailech after Conchobar suggest that Áed persisted with his policies. Moreover, we have evidence of a direct link between Cennétig and the royal dynasty of Cenél nEógain. Bébin, wife of Áed's cousin and successor Domnall Mac Lochlainn, is given an obit in 1110, where she is stated to be the daughter of Cennétig.³⁷ As Hogan observes, this marriage-alliance further supports the idea that the Uí Briain in Tulach Óc were agents of Clann Domnaill, and these steps were designed to permanently detach Tulach Óc from Clann Néill control.³⁸

³⁴ AU 1077.5.

³⁵ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', p. 427.

³⁶ *Annála Uladh: The Annals of Ulster*, ed. W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, 4 vols. (Dublin, 1887–1901), i, s.a. 1160, 1166, 1181, 1186.

³⁷ AU 1110.8.

³⁸ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', p. 434.

Nevertheless, despite the marriage-tie and Cennétig's apparent assumption of the kingship of Tulach Óc in his brother's stead, he appears not to have remained there very long. For *AFM* 1078 also report that *Cinnedigh Ua Briain do ghabhail tighernais Gaileng*—'Cennétig Ua Briain took the lordship of Gailenga'. This entry is difficult to assess, for it is unique to *AFM*. That in itself is insufficient grounds for rejecting its authenticity, but doubts are occasioned by the fact that at no other time and place is Cennétig referred to as ruler of any of the Gailenga peoples. However, we may turn to a group of chronicle-entries for the year 1084, narrating the events of the significant battle of Móin Chruinneóice (Monecronock, near Leixlip, Co. Kildare), in which Cennétig was killed. The battle was fought between Donnchad mac Airt In Cailig Uí Ruairc of Bréifne and Muirchertach, son of Tairdelbach ua Briain king of Munster, both leaders bringing substantial forces to the field. All of the accounts state that Cennétig Ua Briain fell in the battle on Ua Ruairc's side; *AFM* add that his son Tadc was killed also, while *AI* state that he was one of five Uí Briain (presumably fellow-exiles) who fell alongside Ua Ruairc.³⁹ The account in *AT* states that among the forces which Donnchad brought to the field were the Gailenga, though it does not specify that they were led by Cennétig.

It seems a safe bet then that whether or not Cennétig took the kingship of Tulach Óc in 1078 at some point afterwards he became a client of Donnchad Ua Ruairc. This makes sense, as Ua Ruairc was no less a foe of Tairdelbach and Muirchertach Ua Briain than the kings of Ailech had been. The matter of whether he took the kingship of Gailenga (here the kingdom of Gailenga Breg in Co. Meath is intended) is more complicated. In the eleventh century Gailenga, nominally under the overlordship of the Uí Maíl Sechnaill kings of

³⁹ *AU* 1084.3, *AI* 1084.2, *AT AFM* 1084.

Mide, came increasingly into the orbit of the expanding kingdom of Bréifne.⁴⁰ Though a native dynasty of Gailenga persisted well into the twelfth century, at least part of their territory seems to have fallen under the lordship of the Ua Ruairc rulers of Bréifne by the end of the eleventh.⁴¹ In the mid-twelfth century the Ua Ruairc kings set up their relatives the Uí Ragallaig as rulers in the area, but were probably in a position to impose candidates before 1100.⁴² This seems to be the case with Cennétig, and the entries for 1084 do back up the assertion of *AFM* 1078. Frustratingly, none of the chronicles have records of events connected with Gailenga from 1078 to Móin Chruinneóice in 1084, so if Cennétig was king there his reign appears to have been fairly quiet; but this is merely an *argumentum ex silentio*. The one piece of information we do have is *AFM* 1082 which report the death of Conchobar Ua Briain's son Domnall. Unfortunately no other information is provided, so we can merely guess as to whether

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the history and expansion of Bréifne in this period (which has been little-studied), see M. J. Zumbuhl, 'The Practice of Irish Kingship in the Central Middle Ages' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Glasgow Univ., 2005), pp. 206–21.

⁴¹ The most secure piece of evidence for this is the *notitia* in the Book of Kells guaranteed by both Conchobar Ua Maíl Sechnaill king of Mide and Donnchad Ua Ruairc, the latter called *rí Connacht ocus Gaileng*; the accepted date range for this notice is 1073x84. The most accessible edition of this material is G. Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "Charters"', *The Book of Kells, MS 58, Trinity College Library Dublin: Commentary*, ed. P. Fox (Lucerne, 1990), pp. 153–65, at 155–6. Note that one witness to this same grant was another exile from Munster, Donnchad mac Carthaig of the Eóganacht Chaisil.

⁴² Gofraid Ua Ragallaig was king of at least Machaire Gaileng (the area of Gailenga which gave its name to the later barony of Morgallion) by 1133, for he appears in that capacity in one of the Kells *notitiae*; see Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "Charters"', pp. 154–5.

Domnall accompanied his uncle to Gailenga, or remained with the Cenél nEógain, or indeed was somewhere else entirely.

As with the events of 1078, we must consider why an overking, Donnchad Ua Ruairc in this case, might install an Ua Briain exile as sub-king in his domains. In the first place, we are faced with the difficulty that Donnchad does not appear to have been the sole Ua Ruairc ruler in the years before 1084. Two kings of Bréifne are known to have been active in the 1070s and 80s. The more significant is Áed (son of Art Úallach) Ua Ruairc, who probably came to the throne of Bréifne in 1066 but also took the provincial overkingship of Connacht in 1067, though he was not universally recognised.⁴³ Donnchad (son of Art in Cailech) Ua Ruairc first appears in *AFM* 1070, though little else is known about his deeds before 1084.⁴⁴ We cannot discuss all the possibilities here, but the two main ones are that either Donnchad ousted Áed from the kingship of Bréifne, or that he ruled as a sub-king of Bréifne (perhaps based in the eastern regions) while Áed was overking of Connacht.⁴⁵ One piece of evidence for Áed and Donnchad being kings simultaneously (and not in an antagonistic relationship) is the reference in *AP*'s account of Móin Chruinneóice to *muintir m. Cailich & mc. Airt b-U Ruairc* 'the people of In Cailech's son and [of] Art Ua Ruairc's son' (i.e. the people of Donnchad and of Áed) burning Killaloe and Tomgraney in Munster.⁴⁶ Though we cannot know the exact circumstances attending Cennétig's move from Tulach Óc to Bréifne and Gailenga, we again should accept Hogan's conclusions that in so doing Cennétig (and his fellow exiles) joined a king with whom they shared

⁴³ For a fuller discussion of the complex dynastic politics of Bréifne in the period, see Zumbuhl, 'Practice', pp. 211–4.

⁴⁴ For his appearance in the Book of Kells see n. 37 above.

⁴⁵ Mac Niocaill, 'Irish "Charters"', p. 156, n. 18 prefers the former option.

⁴⁶ *AI* 1084.2.

common enemies, namely Tairdelbach ua Briain and his son Muirchertach; and that the main bone of contention between Bréifne and Munster was the domination of Mide.⁴⁷ Despite the death of Donnchad and Cennétig and the apparent loss of 4000 men, this was by no means settled in 1084.

CONCHOBAR AND CENNÉTIG'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE STUDY OF IRISH KINGSHIP

Thus far, we have seen that a couple of aristocratic exiles were installed as sub-kings at the behest of overlords with whom they had common cause. The student of Frankish or Anglo-Saxon history might find the phenomenon of an overking installing an outsider as ruler in one of his dominions an interesting, though not especially rare phenomenon. However, it has to be said that in the Gaelic world, at least, this was a rare occurrence; there are actually few instances of this, and it is worth reconsidering what this rarity might tell us about Irish kingship. First, let us briefly summarise the other examples. Tairdelbach ua Briain successfully intruded his son Muirchertach as king of Dublin, and it was in that capacity that Muirchertach defeated Donnchad Ua Ruairc and Cennétig at Móin Chruinneóice. Later kings tried the same policy in Dublin, including kings of Leinster who attempted to dominate the emporium on their doorstep and aspiring overkings of Ireland who sought to impose their own candidates.⁴⁸ The main instance here is that of Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair of Connacht, whose gave the kingship of Dublin to his son Conchobar in 1126.⁴⁹ Conchobar was deposed by the Leinstermen and Dubliners in the following year, and Tairdelbach decided it would be safer to

⁴⁷ Hogan, 'Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 435–8.

⁴⁸ For a summary, see the list in *A New History of Ireland*, ed. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne, ix (Oxford, 1984), 208–9.

⁴⁹ *AU* 1126.7, *AI* 1126.8.

install a king from the native Leinster royalty, though his candidate does not appear to have reigned for long.⁵⁰ Interestingly Tairdelbach tried to install this same Conchobar as ruler of the overkingdom of Mide in 1143. However, within a few months Conchobar was dead, killed by what *AT* called *choccar fer Midhe uile co inleithe*—‘a secret conspiracy of all the men of Mide’.⁵¹ One Murchad Mac Murchada of Uí Chennselaig ruled briefly (and probably jointly with a native king) in Osraige after 1123, and was presumably imposed by the king of Leinster, his brother Énna.⁵² Apart from these instances, I have encountered no other examples of complete outsiders acquiring the throne of a major Irish kingdom.⁵³

However, these are not necessarily direct parallels for the Ua Briain exiles. Tulach Óc and Gailenga, though significant in different ways, were not kingships on the scale of Mide or Osraige or Dublin. It is well-known that even before the viking-age, ambitious Irish kings conquered lesser peoples and appropriated those lands and royal titles for themselves;⁵⁴ and it is clear that the increasing power of overkings allowed them to intrude relatives or allies into lesser kingships as in the case of Conchobar and Cennétig.⁵⁵ Several rulers of lesser kingdoms of unknown provenance may well have been candidates imposed by overkings in spite of the claims of the native dynasty;

⁵⁰ *AU* 1127.5.

⁵¹ *AT* 1144.

⁵² This part of Murchad’s career is not alluded to in the annals; the information derives from the king-list in the *Book of Leinster*. For discussion of these problems see Zumbuhl, ‘Practice’, pp. 245–8.

⁵³ Byrne, in *A New History*, ix, 196–7 suggests that Muirchertach, king of Mide (d. 974) was in fact of Cenél nEógain, but it seems certain that he was of the native Clann Cholmáin dynasty; see, e.g., the table in Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, pp. 308–9.

⁵⁴ For discussion see Ó Corráin, *Ireland*, pp. 30–2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 168–71.

only further detailed work with chronicles and genealogies will identify these occurrences. Nevertheless, when overkings did interfere in royal succession, they more often installed native dynasts (sometimes dividing the kingdom between two or more such claimants) than ‘strangers in sovereignty’. The place where outsider-kings were most successfully intruded was Dublin. Dublin, of course, was not a long-standing polity on the Irish scene, but one created in the ninth and subsequent centuries.⁵⁶ Though the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns and their hinterlands were fairly rapidly assimilated to the general Irish political structures, there was still something different about them—they were not native kingdoms of ancient origin. Of the other kingdoms where overkings tried to install outsiders as candidate, there was little success, most strikingly in the case of Mide. It seems clear that *Fer Midi* ‘The Men of Mide’, a term commonly employed by the annalists, by which I think is meant the native aristocracy (though it could be the general populace), were deeply resentful both of the control and conquest implied by the imposition of Conchobar, but also at a more fundamental level disturbed by the fact that he was not a member of the native dynasty, Uí Maíl Sechnaill.⁵⁷ It is notable that before Ua Conchobair attempted to impose his son as king, he had used Uí Maíl Sechnaill dynasts as his instruments, deposing and installing them several times between 1115 and 1143 until, it seems, his patience ran out.⁵⁸

This situation seems to have been more common in Ireland—though we cannot deny that the great overkings made and unmade

⁵⁶ See H. B. Clarke, *Medieval Dublin*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1990) for the early history of the city.

⁵⁷ For instances of the term, see e.g. *AU* 1002.1, 1013.5, 1103.5, 1114.3 and 1122.1.

⁵⁸ *AI* 1120.5; *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. W. M. Hennessey (London, 1866), *s.a.* 1116 (=1120); *AU* 1125.3; *AFM* 1127; *AT* 1143.

lesser kings as they wished, generally speaking, when intervening in the kingships of long-standing Irish polities they placed members of a native dynasty on the thrones. This makes the exceptions all the more noteworthy—Conchobar Ua Conchobair in Leinster and Mide, and our ‘adventurers’ Conchobar and Cennétig in the north.

But why then, were overkings apparently fairly reluctant to intrude their own family members or cronies into the rule of sub-kingdoms? An earlier age of scholarship would have interpreted this as a genuine lack of centralising power on the part of the greater overkings, a flaw in the Irish political system that permanently hindered the creation of a national monarchy. Such views have been long discarded, and scholars, particularly following the 1978 publication of Donnchadh Ó Corráin’s ‘Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’ has been affirmative of the extension of Irish royal power and ambition in the ninth and subsequent centuries.⁵⁹ The Irish king ridiculed as a ‘priestly vegetable’ by Patrick Wormald has been rightly questioned.⁶⁰ The newer model however does have problems of its own. The current consensus holds that the lowest levels of Irish kingship, the so-called *ríg túaithe* or kings of small local kingdoms, suffered an erosion of power and status to the extent that by the twelfth century their *túatha* were merely districts subsumed into larger overkingdoms, and that they themselves had been reduced to

⁵⁹ D. Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland’, *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, ed. T. W. Moody, Hist. Stud. 11 (Belfast, 1978), pp. 1–35.

⁶⁰ P. Wormald, ‘Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: some further thoughts’, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. P. Szarmach (Kalamazoo, 1986), pp. 151–83, at 153. For comment on Wormald’s statement and analysis of the developments in scholarship to 1995, see C. Etchingham, ‘Early Medieval Irish History’, in *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, ed. K. McCone and K. Simms (Maynooth, 1996), pp. 123–53, esp. 128–33.

local chieftains styled *táisech*, or *dux* in Latin.⁶¹ It is certain that the local kings suffered a drastic decline in power in the face of the encroachments of the overkings. But if this is so, if local kings became merely local chieftains, why were the overkings generally unwilling to do away with them altogether, or replace them with more suitable candidates? We cannot address this matter fully here, but part of the answer, I think, lies in the fact that though the local kings did decline in power and importance they did not necessarily suffer an equal decline in status. The model of transition from kings to chieftains derives largely from Ó Corráin’s work, and was based on his observation (already made by Mac Neill and earlier generations of scholars) that in the chronicles rulers of polities who had previously been called *king* were styled *dux* or *táisech*. However, as Wendy Davies some years ago, and more recently Colmán Etchingham have pointed out, the usage in the annals is sporadic and unsustainable, and in many cases appears to be the result of fashion; generally speaking, many minor rulers were still awarded the title *rí* down to the end of the twelfth century.⁶² Byrne noted that it did not seem to have occurred to the great overkings to abolish the local kingships.⁶³ In this context,

⁶¹ Ó Corráin first set out this argument in *Ireland*, pp. 29–32 and 168–72; it was further developed in ‘Nationality and Kingship’, esp. pp. 9–12. For an example of scholarship based on this model, see C. Doherty, ‘The Vikings in Ireland: a Review’, *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. H. B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh and R. Ó Floinn (Dublin, 1998), pp. 288–330, esp. 312–4.

⁶² W. Davies, ‘Celtic Kingships in the Early Middle Ages’, *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. J. Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 101–24, at 106, n. 11; C. Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland, AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999), p. 147. For a numerical case-study of the titles employed by *AU* (which supports Davies’ and Etchingham’s observations), see Zumbuhl, ‘Practice’, pp. 275–8.

⁶³ Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 270.

we see even more that Conchobar and Cennétig Úa Bríain were in many ways special.

CONCLUSION

Finally I would like to return to the colloquium themes of asylum and immigration, in this particular case exile, to make a few remarks. The apparent uniformity of the early Irish written language, as well as continuity of literary and archaeological evidence, has given us the impression that pre-Norman Ireland was a remarkably uniform society from Malin Head to Cape Clear. Things were certainly a good deal more complex, and there must have been considerable regional variation of both plebeian and aristocratic culture. However, that exiled members of a royal dynasty were not only able to find asylum and protection in royal halls far from their homeland, but also able to move into positions of great importance within the new environs they found themselves—in Cennétig's case, perhaps twice over—suggests, to my mind, a considerable sophistication and continuity of political culture in different parts of the Gaelic world, a point which is useful to make to medievalists unfamiliar with the Insular scene. Moreover, though political circumstances provided an obvious context for the Ua Briain exiles to pitch up in Ailech and Bréifne, there could well have been earlier links of fosterage or marriage which facilitated Conchobar and Cennétig finding asylum in those northern lands.

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, in her studies of the manuscripts of *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, the great Ua Briain propaganda text, has noted that the D version contains material with a pro-Bréifne bias, probably composed in the mid-twelfth century.⁶⁴ She suggests that a text of the *Cogad* came to Bréifne in this period because Ua Briain exiles or their

descendants still lived there. We have seen that Cennétig's daughter Bébin married into the Ailech royal dynasty. Another daughter was married to the royal dynasty of Ulaid.⁶⁵ It is equally possible that other Ua Briain exiles (perhaps relatives of the five who fell at Móin Chruinneóice) married into the Bréifnian aristocracy, and it is through such channels that the *Cogad* could have travelled north. Ties of marriage and fosterage bound the Irish polity together far more extensively than many scholars have appreciated, and who knows which of these links may have made it possible for the Ua Bríain exiles to actually find refuge in these kingdoms in the first place. Perhaps first they had travelled to other places we do not know about seeking a way of regaining political influence; the lack of circumstantial evidence as to the fate of Lorcán in 1078 is a major hindrance in this respect, and it is not certain that Murchad mac Donnchada was an exile in Tethba when he was killed there in 1068. Yet whatever wanderings were undertaken, some Uí Briain did prosper in the north. If events had fallen differently at Móin Chruinneóice, Cennétig may have founded a permanent royal house in areas of Gailenga, much as the Uí Ragallaig did several decades later. In the end it was not to be, and though Conchobar and Cennétig did succeed temporarily in 'going away to be Kings', as Kipling put it, their adventures ultimately came to a premature end.

⁶⁴ M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne Bias in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*', *Ériu* 43 (1992), 135–58.

⁶⁵ Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne Bias', p. 157 and n. 140.

Did King Eadwig really abandon his coronation feast to have a *ménage à trois* with his wife and mother-in-law?

What's the story behind this story?

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This paper aims to accomplish two things: first, to illuminate the context of the text in question; second, to examine the story of Eadwig's coronation threesome as a literary work—to place it in its milieu, to understand what the author is doing and how he is doing it; in short, to recognize how literary and how stylized this text really is. Before that, however, a brief comment about methodology is required. I approach this individual story and the *vita* containing it from a social history perspective, one initially defined and expounded by Gerd Althoff of Universität Münster in the 1980s and 90s.¹ His work has inspired many others, and has inspired a reaction led by

¹ Gerd Althoff has written extensively on the subjects of rituals, friendship and the unwritten rules of medieval society. Perhaps his most influential contribution is his reappraisal of the reign of Otto III; see: G. Althoff, *Otto III* (Darmstadt, 1996); for a translation, see: G. Althoff, *Otto III*, trans. P. G. Jestic (University Park PA, 2003). For a detailed and yet easy-to-understand introduction to medieval rituals and how to interpret them, see: G. Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue. Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im früheren Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1990); for a translation, see: G. Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers. Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2004).

Did King Eadwig really abandon his coronation feast ...?

Philippe Buc of Stanford University.² My approach is heavily influenced by their scholarship. Also, I am indebted to Björn Weiler of The University of Wales, Aberystwyth, an historian of 12th century England, who asks the same questions of his 12th century texts and authors as I ask of my Anglo-Saxon texts and authors.³ He has beaten a path that has made my understanding much greater and my work much easier.

Eadwig was crowned king of England in January 956, aged fifteen. He died in 959. His short, four year reign is amongst the most maligned of Anglo-Saxon kings: only Aethelred the Unready has received worse press, at least from the people of his own age. The

² Philippe Buc has highlighted the intentional bias of medieval authors in the transmission of narratives containing ceremonies and rituals. He argues that we cannot trust medieval authors to have written objective, detached histories; their writing served propagandistic purposes and therefore must be understood as such. Buc's most important contribution is: P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001). Of particular relevance is Part I, in which he examines several case studies where medieval authors shaped rituals to suit their own agendas. Part II is a detailed analysis of theories of social textual criticism, which is not particularly relevant to this paper.

³ I have benefited greatly from numerous conversations with Björn Weiler. Amongst his articles, the most relevant to this analysis are: 'The *Rex Renitens* and the Medieval Ideal of Kingship, ca. 900–ca. 1250', *Viator* 31 (2000), 1–42; 'William of Malmesbury on Kingship', *History* 90, 1 no. 297 (Jan. 2005), 3–22; 'The King as Judge: Henry II and Frederick Barbarossa as Seen by Their Contemporaries' in *Texts, Histories and Historiographies: Essays in Memory of Timothy Reuter*, ed. P. Skinner (Turnhout, forthcoming); 'Kingship, Usurpation and Propaganda in Twelfth-Century Europe: The Case of Stephen', *ANS* 23 (2001 for 2000), 299–326; and 'Royal Justice and Royal Virtue in William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella* and Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*', in *Virtue and Ethics in the Twelfth Century*, ed. I. P. Bejczy and R. G. Newhauser (Leiden, 2005), 317–39.

source of this bad press is, fundamentally, one saint's life—the *Vita S. Dunstani* written by B; we only have the author's first initial, though Michael Lapidge has made a compelling argument in favour of a monk named Byrthelm, who may have been private secretary to Dunstan in his pre-Canterbury years.⁴ This *vita* was written about forty years after Eadwig's death, around the year 1000. B dedicated it to the archbishop of Canterbury, Ælfric, whose archiepiscopate lasted from 995 to 1005. This *vita* was not very popular; it is found in only three manuscripts and was replaced rather quickly at Canterbury, first by a *vita* by Adelard in the first decade of the 11th century, and then by *vitae* by Osbern and Eadmer.⁵ Finally, William of Malmesbury wrote a *Vita Dunstani* for Glastonbury in 1129/30.⁶ But B's *Vita Dunstani* provided many of the stories found in these later *vitae*. In short, the hagiographer B ruined Eadwig's reputation by the use of unflattering stories about the teenager. Certainly the most famous story is his coronation feast *ménage à trois*. It is worth quoting much of the episode as presented by B. He wrote:

21. Post hunc surrexit Eadwig, filius videlicet Eadmundi regis, ætate quidem juvenis parvaque regnandi prudentia pollens, licet in utraque plebe regum numeros nominaque suppleret electus. Huic quædam, licet natione præcelsa, inepta tamen mulier, cum adulta filia per nefandum familiaritatis lenocinium sectando inhærebat; eotenus videlicet quo sese vel etiam natam suam sub conjugali titulo illius innectendo sociaret; quas ille ut aiunt alternatim, quod jam pudet

⁴ M. Lapidge, 'B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*', *St Dunstan. His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992): 247–59

⁵ All three may be found in *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, ed. W. Stubbs, Roll Series 63 (London, 1874).

⁶ Also in *Memorials of St. Dunstan*. For a modern edition with translation, see: *William of Malmesbury: Saints' Lives/Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002).

dicere, turpi palpatu et absque pudore utriusque libidinosè tractavit. Et cum tempore statuto ab universis Anglorum principibus communi electione ungueretur et consecraretur in regem, die eodem post regale sacræ institutionis unguentum, repente prosilivit lascivus, linquens læta convivia vel decibiles optimatum suorum consessiones, ad prædictum luparum palpamentum. Et cum vidisset summus pontificum Oda regis petulantiam, maxime in consecrationis suæ die, omni per gyrum consedenti senatui displicere, ait coepiscopis suis et cæteris principibus, 'Eant, oro, quilibet ex vobis ad reducendum regem quo sit suorum satellitum, ut concedet, in hoc regali convivio jocundus consessor'. At illi molestiam regis vel mulierum querimoniam incurrisse metuentes, singuli se subtrahentes recussare cœperunt. Ad extremum vero elegerunt ex omnibus duos quos animo constantissimos noverant, Dunstanum scilicet abbatem, et Cynesium episcopum ejusdem Dunstani consanguineum, ut omnium jessu obtemperantes regem volentem vel nolentem reducerent ad relictam sedem. Et ingressi juxta principum suorum jussa, invenerunt regiam coronam, quæ miro metallo auri vel argenti gemmarumque vario nitore conserta splendebat, procul a capite ad terram usque neglegentur avulsam, ipsumque more maligno inter utrasque, velut in vili suillorum volutabro, creberrime volutantem; et dixerunt, 'Nostri nos proceres ad te rogitando miserunt, ut eas quantocius ad condignum sessionis tuæ triclinium, et ne spernas optimatum tuorum lætis interesse conviviis'. At Dunstanus primum increpitans mulierum ineptias, manu sua dum nollet exurgere, et extraxit eum de mœchali generarum occubitu, inpositoque diademate duxit secum, licet vi a mulieribus raptum, ad regale consortium.

22. Tunc eadem Æthælgvū, sic erat nomen ignominiosæ mulieris, inanes orbes oculorum contra venerandum abbatem ferventi furore retorsit, inquiens hujusmodi hominem ultra modum esse magnanimum qui regis in secretum temerarius intraret. Audivimus enim in veternis regum libellis Jezabelem errore gentilitatis et vipereo veneno perfusam die noctuque in prophetas Dei amara detestatione sævisse, et in mortem usque per sequi non destitisse: ita et hæc impudens virago, ex hac die prædicta, eodem Jezabelis flatu venenifero perfusa, licet nomine Christiano uteretur indigna, virum Deo Dunstanum consiliis inimicabilibus persequi non quievit, quousque pestiferam execrationis

suævoluntatem cum adaucta regis inimicitia adimpleret. Tunc illa ex prædicti regis consensu omnem illius ordinis honorem omnemque subpelletilis sui substantiam suis legibus subjugavit; quinetiam, urgente regis imperio ipsum ad incolatum calamitatis celeriter ipsa præscripsit. Non enim erat hujus furentis fœminæ vesania adeo adtendenda, sed discipulorum, quos ipse teneros nectareo dogmate inbuendos nutribat, clancula machinatio magis stupenda; nam et ipsi conspirationis iniquæ sub occulta fraude assentatores fuere, qui si possent iniqua ejus dispensia detestari debuissent. Et dum ejectores ejusdem cunctas res ecclesiasticas ad conscribendum prospicerent, ecce in parte occidentali templi aspera vox ridentis diaboli ...

23. Quicumque enim amicorum post hæc hunc eundem virum Dei, injusto arbitrio criminantis fœminæ ejectum, causa caritatis vel compatiendi hospitio susceperunt, frementem regis iram graviter incurrerunt, et propterea insanos fluctus turbidi æquoris periculoso navigio tranare, et incerta Galliarum exilia adire coactus est. Et dum velificata veloci quasi tria miliaria maris ingressus fuisset, venerunt nuncii ab iniqua populatrice, ut ferunt, qui oculos illius si in his maris littoribus inventus fuisset, eruendo dempsissent. Ipse autem æquoreas vias ponti cærulei rapido cursu transiliens venit ad ignotam jam regionem dictu Galliæ, cujus pœne loquelam ritumque ignorabat. Sed comitante secum misericordia Dei sui, invenit coram quodam terræ illius principe gratiam, qui eum paterno caritatis affectu sub exilii sui tempore custodivit ...⁷

⁷ *Sancti Dunstani Vita Auctore B.*, §21–3, in *Memorials of Saint Dunstan*, pp. 32–4: ‘21. After him (King Eadred) succeeded Eadwig, the son of King Edmund, young in years and with small skill at ruling, although he had been elected to make up the line of royal names in both peoples. A well-born but foolish woman attached herself to him, and who with her grown-up daughter pursued him with indecent proposals, aiming to join either herself or her daughter to him in marriage. He—and I am even now ashamed to mention it—took it in turns (so it is said) to subject them to his lustful attentions, fondling them obscenely; not that either felt any shame. And when the appointed time came around, he was by common consent anointed and consecrated king by the assembled nobility of the English. On the very same day, after the royal

anointing at the holy ceremony, he suddenly jumped up, lustful, leaving the happy banquet and the fitting company of his nobles for the aforementioned caresses of whores. When Archbishop Oda saw that the king's wantonness, especially on the day of his coronation, was offensive to all the lords sitting around, he said to his fellow-bishops and to the other leading men: “Let some of you go, I pray, to bring back the king, so that he may, as is fitting, be a pleasant companion to his followers in the royal banquet”. But fearing to incur the king's wrath and the women's complaints, they began to make excuses one after another. Finally they chose from them all two whom they knew to be most resolute, Abbot Dunstan and Bishop Cynsige, Dunstan's kinsman; and the nobles ordered that they should bring the king, willing or unwilling, back to his deserted seat. As their nobles had ordered they went in, and found the royal crown, brilliant with wonderful gold and silver and many-coloured gems, carelessly tossed on the floor, far from his head, while he disported himself disgracefully, wallowing between the two women as if in a vile sty. They said: “Our nobles sent us to ask you to come as quickly as possible to your proper place in the hall, and not to spurn your chief men at the joyful banquet”. Then, Dunstan first rebuking the foolish women, then taking the unwilling-to-rise king by his hand, he removed him from his licentious reclining with the women, placed the crown on him, and, though carried off from the women by force, took him to the royal assembly.

‘22. Then this Æthelgifu, that was the name of the disgraceful woman, directed the empty orbs of her eyes in blazing fury against the reverend abbot, saying that it was a peculiarly high-minded man who ventured to violate the privacy of a king. In the old Book of Kings we have heard how Jezebel, steeped in heathen error and a viper's venom, bitterly loathed God's prophets and raged against them day and night, persecuting them to death: and so this shameless woman, from that day on, inspired by Jezebel's poisonous breath, took no rest from persecuting the man of God, Dunstan, with her devilish counsels, call herself a Christian though she improperly did. Finally, she took advantage of the king's increased enmity to carry out her accursed intentions. With the king's consent, she brought under her sway all the honour of his order and all the riches of his property. Indeed, using the weight of the king's authority, she dictated Dunstan's hasty withdrawal to a bitter exile. But it was not the madness of this crazed woman that was so notable so much as the astonishing secret

The purpose of retelling this story, apart from its obvious entertainment value, is to familiarize all of us with the story so that we may come to grips with the mechanics of how B destroys Eadwig's reputation. So what does B tell us? Fundamentally, he tells us that Eadwig was the rightful king, but that he did not act rightly. The story about the king leaving the feast for the bed of his mistresses is an example of how the king misbehaved. We are told that the king allowed a foolish woman to seduce him; that he had sex with both her and her daughter; and that they were trying to marry the king. We

machinations of pupils whom Dunstan had nourished when young and steeped in the nectar of his teaching. For with unjust deceit these flatterers connived at the secret plan, though if possible they ought have loathed the monstrous injury done to him. While the bailiffs were looking out at all his church goods for confiscation, there was heard, from the west end of the church, the harsh mocking laughter of the Devil. ...

'23. Thus was the man of God driven out by the unjust whim of a woman accuser. Those of his friends who, for charity or sympathy, gave him shelter after this incurred the raging wrath of the king to their own cost; and so Dunstan was forced to make the dangerous voyage across the mad billows of the tossing ocean, and seek the uncertainties of exile in Gaul. When his swift vessel had taken him about three miles out to sea, there arrived messengers from the wicked pirate-woman (so the story goes) who would have torn out his eyes if he had been found on English shores. Dunstan was, however, by now speeding along the sea-ways across the blue waters. He came to an unfamiliar district of Gaul, where he was more or less ignorant of the language and customs. But the mercy of his God was with him, for he found favour with a local magnate, who looked after him with a father's affection during his exile. ...'. In this paper, all translations of the *Vita Dunstani* are based primarily on one kindly supplied to me by Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (a first draft from their forthcoming book: *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, OMT (Oxford, forthcoming)). Also consulted was the partial translation in *English Historical Documents*, Vol. I, c. 500–1042, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd ed. (1979, repr. 1996), no. 234. I have made several minor changes to the text and any errors are, of course, mine.

are told that on the coronation day, after the ceremony, the king was feeling randy, so he left the feast with his nobles and went to bed with the women. We are told that this offended his nobles, but they were too afraid to get him back; but Dunstan and Cynsige, being brave enough, were nominated to do the job. They entered the bedchamber, saw the beautiful crown on the floor and the king in bed between the two women. Eadwig did not want to leave. So Dunstan scolded the women, physically picked up the king, put the crown on his head, and led him back to the feast. Put in a single sentence, Eadwig gave in to his passions on his coronation day and Dunstan corrected him.

B continues his story. He says that the older woman Æthelgifu raged against Dunstan; she told him he was overstepping his limits by entering the king's private chamber uninvited and dragging him away. B tells us that she continued working against Dunstan until the king finally gave in, confiscating Dunstan's property and sending him into exile. We are told that the greatest shock was that some of Dunstan's former pupils connived with the woman against Dunstan. When Dunstan was out to sea, his ship was boarded by the woman's messengers, who said that had he been found in England his eyes were to have been torn out. But Dunstan escaped to Gaul where he was hosted honorably. The story finishes with Eadwig being deserted by the people of Mercia and Northumbria and replaced as king there by his brother Edgar, who promptly recalled Dunstan from exile.

This familiarizes all of us with the story. Let us move on to analyse what the author B is doing from a literary perspective. Regarding Dunstan's exile, the fundamental problem for B is how to explain it. Dunstan has fallen from power. He had been chief advisor to King Eadred. Now he is exiled. The obvious answer is to portray the man who exiled him in a poor light. This is exactly what B did. B uses ideas of right and proper kingship, of the good king, to

undermine Eadwig. These ideas had existed since late Roman times and were stock character traits in the Middle Ages.⁸ They are generic in the sense that everybody agreed that these were good qualities, and when invoking them, an author was plugging into an established, recognizable archetype.

The first thing B says is that 'Eadwig (was) the son of King Edmund, (he was) young in years and with small skill at ruling, although he had been elected to make up the line of royal names in both peoples'. In other words, he was the rightful king but did not act rightly. Our first impression of Eadwig is negative. He is no usurper, but rather a 'bad' king.⁹ B then shows how Eadwig failed in the basic tenets of good kingship. Eadwig's flaws were numerable. To begin with, he was ruled by women. It was the two women who first

⁸ Björn Weiler wrote: 'By combating ... evils ... new kings proved themselves to be the very embodiment of ideal royal lordship. Above all, a monarch was to be a guardian of justice, a protector of the weak, and an oppressor of those who oppressed others. This concept was formulated in patristic writings, elaborated upon in commentaries on the Bible, in letters and personal advice to kings, and in theoretical texts on the nature of kingship and secular authority. Central to most of these texts was St. Augustine's definition of kingship: the word king derived from acting righteously, "rex a rectum agere". Weiler, 'Kingship, Usurpation and Propaganda', p. 309. Janet Nelson commented on good and bad kingship in a Frankish context, and the parallels with Anglo-Saxon England are striking; see J. Nelson, 'Bad Kingship in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Haskins Soc. Jnl.: Stud. in Med. Hist.* 8 (1996), 1–26.

⁹ Following Philippe Buc's model, a bad king is one whose rituals are perverted (i.e. abnormal) or whose rituals become perverted (i.e. something goes wrong with them). See Buc, 'Writing Ottonian Hegemony: Good Rituals and Bad Rituals in Liudprand of Cremona', in his *Dangers of Ritual*. Björn Weiler's analysis of William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, an anti-Stephen narrative history written during the Civil War, is particularly insightful. William portrays Stephen as a 'bad' king using many of the same stock traits as B applies to Eadwig. See Weiler, 'Kingship, Usurpation and Propaganda'.

attached themselves to Eadwig, not he who chose them. It was the women, not Eadwig, who shouted invective at Dunstan in the bedroom. It was the women who raved against Dunstan, and then persecuted him in the king's name. It was the women who took Dunstan's and Glastonbury's properties. It was the women who convinced the king to exile Dunstan. And it was the women's messengers who were to have plucked out Dunstan's eyes if he were found in England. B clearly portrays Eadwig as controlled by women. A man who was ruled by women was no man at all. He was weak.

Another aspect of the king's weakness is his inability to control his own passions. A good king was expected to conduct himself with honour and behave virtuously. The good king was in control of himself, and this inner strength and rectitude was projected onto his subjects; indeed, it was required of his subjects. But Eadwig lacked the inner strength and virtue to control his own lusts. B describes Eadwig as subjecting the women to his lustful attentions, as fondling them obscenely, as suddenly abandoning the coronation feast because he was lustful, as fornicating with harlots. All of these comments are intended to demonstrate that Eadwig did not have control of himself—that he lacked the virtues (the moral strength) of a good king. B drives home this point in chapters 32 and 33, well after he has killed off Eadwig in chapter 24. This is how he does it. Dunstan and Ealdorman Athelstan are riding along and Ealdorman Athelstan asks Dunstan to interpret a dream he has been having. In the dream, the king is at court and suddenly he and his fellow-feasters fall asleep, and then all the magnates and counselors turn into goats at the table. Dunstan interprets the dream, saying:

Dormitio regis mortis ipsius indicium est; quod autem magnates vel sapientes illius in muta animalia et insensibilia commutatos vidisti, futurum tempus designat, in quo pœne universi regionis istius principes rerumque rectores voluntate ultranea a via veritatis, cum ipsi

sint sapientes, tanquam stolidia animalia non habentes pastorem, deviabunt.¹⁰

B has Dunstan interpret the dream as a time of poor morals in Eadwig's reign due to poor moral leadership. In chapter 33 the dream is fulfilled, and B speaks directly to his readers, saying:

Ecce enim quam mature de rege beati viri claruere praesagia. De principibus autem non nisi Eadwigi regis temporibus, si rex jure queat appellari qui nec sese nec alios quosque bene rexerat, patuere.¹¹

B's point is direct: Eadwig was unable to control himself and therefore was unable to control his subjects. Eadwig's moral weakness is a principle sign of his bad kingship. Closely related to his lack of moral strength is Eadwig's sacrilege. The Anglo-Saxon coronation ceremony was a religious rite, a divine blessing. In a very real way the coronation ceremony transformed the new king from ordinary noble to part of God's anointed class, a member of the clergy.¹² There were very clear strictures about the conduct of the

¹⁰ *Vita Dunstani*, §32, Stubbs, p. 45: 'The king's falling asleep is a portent of his death. As for your seeing his great men and counselors turned into dumb and irrational animals, this is a sign of the future, when almost all the princes and rulers of this part of the world will voluntarily deviate from the path of truth. For all their wisdom, they will be like stupid animals with no shepherd'.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46: 'See, it was very soon indeed that holy man's prophesies concerning the king came true. As for those concerning the magnates, they came to pass only in the time of King Eadwig, if you can properly use the term 'king' of one who controlled neither himself nor others as he should'.

¹² This concept of the king as quasi-priest is a common one. For example, W. A. Chaney wrote: 'Thus a people may choose a monarch but may not depose him once he is anointed. *Mana*, in the Church's view, no longer abides in the divine descent of the king from Woden but in its sacring of his power as a quasi-priestly *christus*'. W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1970), pp. 247–59, at pp. 254–5. However, Janet Nelson rejects the idea that anointing makes the king a quasi-cleric; rather, she views the anointing and all other rituals within the coronation as symbols that help create

clergy in the Bible. For example, Lev. XXI.12–14 prohibits a priest from profaning himself with cheap women because he had been anointed. If we consider Eadwig's coronation a religious ceremony making him something of an ecclesiastic (and it is likely that this is how his contemporaries saw it) then Eadwig's rushing off after the ceremony to fornicate with cheap women is a jarring sacrilege. B meant it to be jarring. He was portraying Eadwig as a sacrilegious king, i.e. a bad king.

Eadwig also lacked judgment regarding the people with whom he chose to surround himself. The two scarlet women may have attached themselves to him, but it was Eadwig's poor judgment to maintain their company. He could have sent them away, but he did not. Even worse, at the feast following the coronation, Eadwig elected to abandon the company of his good nobles and sought out the company of his fallen women. He abandoned the honorable men for the dishonorable women. Eadwig exiled the saintly, morally virtuous Dunstan, and maintained the company of the lewd women. And in chapter 24, B makes it absolutely clear that Eadwig surrounded himself with inferior people. He wrote at the end of the exile story that:

Factum est autem ut rex praefatus in praetereuntibus annis penitus a brumali populo relinqueretur contemptus, quoniam in commisso regimine insipienter egisset, sagaces vel sapientes odio vanitatis

solidarity between witnesses and participants in the ceremony—in other words, a polity building exercise. See J. Nelson, 'Ritual and Reality in the Early Medieval *Ordines*', in her *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 329–39, esp. p. 336. I do not see that these two points are mutually exclusive.

disperdens, et ignaros quosque sibi consimiles studio dilectionis adsciscens.¹³

Eadwig was a bad king because he surrounded himself with bad advisors and with people of little virtue. This demonstrated Eadwig's lack of wisdom, which proved he possessed little virtue, and therefore was a bad king. There is a corollary to the idea of choosing poor counsel. It is the idea of doing injustice. A good king was just.¹⁴ But Eadwig listened to the counsel of fools and evil women, and followed it. By exiling Dunstan, Eadwig was punishing a just man—a good and honorable man. Eadwig dismissed all his wise and sensible advisors because of 'idle hatred'—in other words, for no good reason. Eadwig's idle hatred is another sign of his inability to do justice, a sign of his injustice. The king who committed injustices was a bad king. Obviously, B is depicting Eadwig as an unjust, bad king.

But B does not stop here. In the threesome bedroom scene, he utilizes the imagery of the beautiful crown lying on the floor, far away from the head of the king where it belongs, to indicate that Eadwig is a poor ruler, a poor governor. The neglected crown represents the neglected kingdom. The king is too busy seeing to his carnal needs to see to the needs of the people. The image of Dunstan putting the

¹³ *Vita Dunstani*, §24, Stubbs, pp. 35–6: 'As the years went by it came about that King Eadwig was totally abandoned by the people of the north, for they despised him for his imprudent discharge of the power entrusted to him. The wise and sensible he got rid of in a spirit of idle hatred, replacing them with ignoramus like himself to whom he took a liking'.

¹⁴ Indeed, justice was so important that it was incorporated into the three promises that a later Anglo-Saxon king made at his coronation. For commentary on this three-fold oath, see J. Nelson, 'The Rites of the Conqueror', *ANS* 4 (1982), 117–32, 210–21; repr. in her *Politics and Ritual*. For 'justice' in a Frankish context, see J. Nelson, 'Kings with Justice, Kings without Justice: An Early Medieval Paradox', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 44.2 (Spoleto, 1997), 797–826.

crown back on the king's head is shorthand for Dunstan trying to guide the king back to proper, responsible behaviour—to being a good king. But B tells us that Dunstan and Cynsige had to drag Eadwig back to the banquet—in other words, Eadwig did not want to be a good king.

Finally, Eadwig suffered the fate of so many bad kings. B writes:

Interea germanus ejusdem Eadgari, quia justa Dei sui, judicia deviando dereliquit, novissimum flatum misera morte exspiravit.¹⁵

Eadwig died a miserable death—a suitable end to an unsuitable king. B employs other topoi of good and bad kingship. The primary purpose of his *vita* is not to denigrate Eadwig but to praise Dunstan. This he does by means of comparison. Specifically, he lets his readers know that Dunstan is like the prophet Elijah. He is not very subtle in how he accomplishes this. He calls the older woman in the bedroom (*Æthelgifu*) a Jezebel, not once but twice. B's Anglo-Saxon audience would have known the story of Elijah, Ahab and Jezebel, and recognized the parallels. A brief version of the Old Testament story follows.

King Ahab was a Hebrew king who took a foreign bride named Jezebel. Jezebel hated the Jewish prophets and King Ahab allowed her to persecute and kill them. As a consequence, the prophet Elijah went into exile. When he returned, he vanquished Jezebel's priests in a contest, which really angered her. She tried to have him killed, but Elijah fled into exile again and God protected him from her evil designs. Meanwhile, King Ahab desired a vineyard owned by Naboth, so Jezebel had Naboth falsely accused and stoned to death so that she could get the land for Ahab. Eventually both Ahab and Jezebel were

¹⁵ *Vita Dunstani*, §24, Stubbs, p. 36: 'Meanwhile Edgar's brother breathed his last, dying a wretched death because he had deviated from and deserted the just judgments of God'.

killed in separate incidents, and Elijah returned to Israel and was the most powerful prophet in the land.

There are several parallels between the story of Elijah and the story of Dunstan. Both were important and powerful men in their kingdoms, religious leaders and advisors to kings. Both fell out of favour with their kings because of evil women. Both were persecuted by evil women, exiled by evil women, and survived assassination attempts by evil women. In both stories evil women took property that belonged to innocents. And both men returned to power after the deaths of their vice-loving kings.

Here is the big question: do the parallels reflect facts, or has the Dunstan/Eadwig/Æthelgifu story been shaped to fit the Elijah/Ahab/Jezebel story? I think some shaping has occurred. The author B in his *Vita Dunstani*, at least in the matter of Eadwig's reign, modeled his narrative to make Dunstan look like the prophet Elijah, and the lewd mother Æthelgifu look like Jezebel. This enabled, perhaps even required, B to portray Eadwig as a bad king. B utilized the bad king topoi available to him. Eadwig allowed himself to be ruled by women, which revealed a lack of strength. Eadwig could not control his own lusts, which revealed a lack of discipline and moral weakness. He committed sacrilege on the day of his anointing by having sex. Eadwig chose the company of fools and harlots over the company of the wise and noble, which revealed a lack of wisdom. He unjustly persecuted and exiled Dunstan, he dismissed his wise counselors because of his idle hatred, and he confiscated property unjustly—all signs of his injustice. He neglected his kingdom. He died wretchedly. Eadwig was a model 'bad' king.

B's account is highly stylized and therefore cannot be accepted as providing historical facts, and certainly not relied upon as a historical narrative. Because B is the source for Eadwig's poor reputation, to come to a more balanced understanding of Eadwig's reign we need to

reevaluate the existing evidence without the mis-information of the *Vita Dunstani*.

The Construction of Subjectivity in the Caedmon Story

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The novelties of *Caedmon's Hymn* have been mixed blessings for Caedmon scholarship. The *Hymn's* fame as our oldest extant example of English poetry, and the historical interest of the story of Caedmon's life and artistic inspiration (as found in the fourth book of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*) helped to attract early critical attention, but the poem's connection to the topic of oral composition has traditionally limited discussion of the episode as a whole, and made it the victim of assumptions and received ideas.¹ Fortunately for modern readers, a number of recent scholars have begun to study the Caedmon episode in ways that do justice to the complexity of the story itself, and to its significant role in the *Historia* as a whole. Most notably, Allen Frantzen, Clare Lees, Gillian Overing, and Seth Lerer, while studying the episode from varied perspectives, share an interpretive mode that brings the dichotomies and power relationships of Caedmon's story into the foreground, and examines them as functions of the text and of Bede's project (rather than as

¹ That is, as Magoun's vehicle for the application of the Lord/Parry oral-formulaic theory to Anglo-Saxon poetry, and more generally as an episode that is seen as a confirmation of oral production and nothing more. See F. P. Magoun, 'Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry', *Speculum* 28 (1953), 446–67, and 'Bede's Story of Caedman: The Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 49–63.

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elements of a straightforward account of the birth of English poetry).²

In this article, I will explore an issue that I believe touches all aspects of the broad significance of the Caedmon story (as studied by these and other scholars), but has been taken for granted by a tradition that approaches the story as a more or less reliable account of early vernacular composition (as Francis Magoun puts it, a 'case history'). Specifically, we will look at how the story—as found in the Latin *Historia ecclesiastica*—works to construct a particular, altogether new concept of authorship in Anglo-Saxon poetry. My argument will hinge on two ideas: that in the Caedmon episode the very presence of the author's name and biographical *vita* marks a fundamental divergence from the Anglo-Saxon attitude toward vernacular poetry, and that Bede indeed draws attention to this divergence by crafting a story (Caedmon's) that itself represents a progression toward a new, 'literary' image of the vernacular poetic subject. The result is that Bede portrays the arrival of Christian vernacular poetry by underscoring a new divide between author and reader in that tradition—a task that he begins within the Caedmon story itself, and ultimately accomplishes by positing himself as a reader and commentator of the *Hymn*. Although we will first approach this project as a 'documentation' of a change in the concept of vernacular authorship (a movement away from oral formulaicism, and towards grammatical *auctoritas*), we will ultimately characterize it as a construct—as Bede's formation of a new type of literary subjectivity, which functions through the dichotomies of reader-author, and individual-community.

² See A. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins* (New Brunswick, 1990), pp. 130–66, C. A. Lees and G. R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 15–39, and S. Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln, 1991), pp. 42–8.

I.

In an article on post-structuralist approaches to Old English texts, Carol Braun Pasternack suggests that we investigate a conversion of subjectivity in the Caedmon episode:

We might, for example, revisit the idea that in his story of Caedmon Bede represents the conversion of heroic diction to Christian and oral discourse to written. Although most have conceived of this process as a straightforward addition of new to old, Lacan's work implies that this conversion of old forms to new content and medium would also have been a conversion of subjectivity, of the identity of the subject who composed the verse and the subjects who became such through their use of this new symbolic order.³

With only brief reference to Caedmon's story we can see that Bede indeed does represent a movement away from secular, oral discourse toward written, Christian discourse. Caedmon is a lay member of the Whitby monastery in the latter half of the seventh century. When others in the monastery gather to sing songs for entertainment one evening (a *conuiuium*), Caedmon—having no training in song—leaves them and goes to sleep. In a dream, a figure appears to him and instructs him to sing a song about the creation—Caedmon is inspired, and sings the *Hymn* that now bears his name. The next day, he demonstrates his newfound ability to various people in the monastery. He soon takes the monastic vow, and begins to translate books of the bible into Anglo-Saxon verse, whereby he converts many of his countrymen to Christianity before his death.⁴ Caedmon leaves one 'literary setting' for another, departing from a context of oral, secular poetry (the *conuiuium*), and arriving in one of grammatical,

³ C. B. Pasternack, 'Post-structuralist theories: the subject and the text', *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 170–91, at p. 179.

⁴ Bede, *HE*, II.307–11.

Christian translation (his later role as poet).⁵ In this sense, we could easily take the action of the story as representative of a broad literary conversion in Anglo-Saxon England: Caedmon's leaving the mead-hall and entering the monastery mirrors vernacular poetry as it is converted from the context of oral, heroic song, to written, Christian verse.⁶

This conversion of literary context is still, however, the only the grounds on which Pasternack predicts a more significant conversion of *subjectivity*. I would suggest that we begin to see the latter conversion in the very presence of the story itself—the Bedan prose that accompanies the *Hymn*. That is, in the act of writing the story, Bede is representing the emergence of a literary environment in which the personal history and inspiration of a vernacular poet is of interest to an audience. More than a mere 'conversion' of subjectivity, this story marks the novel approach to a work of Old English poetry as the product a singular subjectivity—that of an individual author whose personal story and inspiration are connected to his poem from the beginning.

In many medieval vernacular traditions after the Anglo-Saxon period, the interest in authors as historical individuals will become familiar enough; by the time of Dante and Chaucer, authorship will

⁵ See Magoun, 'Bede's Story of Caedman' for the original study of the formulaicism of the Old English version of the Hymn; J. B. Bessinger Jr., 'Homage to Caedmon and others: a Beowulfian praise song,' *Old English Studies in Honor of John C. Pope*, ed. R. B. Burlin and E. B. Irving (Toronto and Buffalo, 1974), pp. 91–106, regarding how the *Hymn* participates in the familiar vernacular/secular genre of praise song, using its form of diction in a Christian context; M. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 431–5, regarding how the Hymn is working within a specific roll in grammatical culture (vernacular translation of Christian texts).

⁶ See Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, pp. 42–8.

be a subject of intense focus in literary commentary, and a common theme in poetry itself.⁷ In the last centuries of the first millennium, however, the almost universal absence of Old English poets' names underscores the general unimportance of the 'author figure' as a concept in this early vernacular poetic tradition. Broadly speaking, these texts were not understood by their connection to a particular author's intentions, but rather by their relation to a wider formulaic tradition—as Pasternack puts it elsewhere, 'instead of implying an author, Old English verse implies tradition'.⁸ In formulaic poetry, texts are not interpreted by reference to the original thoughts of an individual, but by reference to codified vocabulary and ready-made formulae that are repeated throughout the tradition.⁹ The roots of this practice are found in oral poetic production, in which singers use common formulae for extemporaneous composition.¹⁰ Thus, in the early written tradition (which maintains remnants of oral formulaicism) the lack of names attached to poetry underscores the

⁷ See A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1984), and A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford, 1988). On the tradition of biblical exegesis, see B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1964).

⁸ C. B. Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 19.

⁹ See Pasternack, *Textuality*, pp. 1–32 and 90–119 for a detailed discussion of the 'author question' in Anglo-Saxon poetry. In her words, 'Formulaic echoes and patterns that are frequently used to express an idea function as a code that readers can interpret as "tradition." In doing so, they recognize the present text's place in a network of expressions and thought...' (p. 19). Beyond this, Pasternack engages the issues of the oral/formulaic theory, readerly and scribal appropriation, and the different syntactical and thematic units by which Old English verse is structured.

¹⁰ I refer to the oral/formulaic theory of M. Parry and A. Lord, as applied to Old English poetry first in Magoun, 'Oral-Formulaic', and continually used in Anglo-Saxon studies with some success, and constant debate.

fact that authorship, in the sense that we now know it, is not a consideration—texts are perceived as parts of a larger formulaic tradition, and not as expressions of individual subjectivities.¹¹

Exceptions to this trend in the Old English tradition only reinforce the idea that the 'author figure' emerges as poetry moves further *away* from its oral/formulaic origins, and closer to an entirely written context. In the well-known case of Cynewulf, the identity of an author appears in poetry that openly points to its own 'writtenness'. Not only does Cynewulf portray himself in *Elene* as working away late at night writing his verse,¹² but the very mode in which he presents his name—runic acrostics in four different poems—can only be understood when seen on the written page.

¹¹ As Jeff Opland (indirectly) puts it, this poetry is not 'simply textual, but contextual'; 'From Horseback to Monastic Cell: The Impact on English Literature of the Introduction of Writing', in *Old English Literature in Context: Ten Essays*, ed. J. D. Niles (Ipswich, 1980), pp. 30–43, at p. 35. Opland quotes folklorist Bruce Jackson's comments on 'folk song' and 'art song', and applies them to examples in the Old English tradition. An oral performance relies heavily on context (historical setting, circumstances of production, narrative techniques, gestures) to convey its message, whereas written texts come to rely on more static structures to produce meaning. In the same way, formulaic texts (closer to an origin of oral composition) rely on the context of codified language and familiar formulas, whereas non-formulaic texts come to rely on assumed understanding of authorial intention. Obviously, I paraphrase a subject that has been studied in great depth by Ong, Havelock, and many others.

¹²

Ðus ic frod ond fus	Ðurh Ðæt fæcne hus
wordcræftum wæf	ond wundrum læs,
Ðragum þreodude	ond geþanc reodode
nihtes nearwe ...	

Elene, 1236–38a, in Opland, 'From Horseback', p. 34: 'Thus, I, aged and about to depart hence because of this frail body, have woven the art of words and have wonderously gathered my matter, have pondered at times and sifted my thought in the anguish of the night ...'. See pp. 33–7.

Thus, it is precisely in a case where poetry has begun to emphasize its own exclusively written nature that the identity of a single author surfaces and becomes an integral part of the text.¹³ It is no coincidence that in *Christ II*, another of the runic signature poems, Cynewulf addresses a single reader who searches for spiritual mysteries in the text—another action that points to the written nature of the work, and sets up a dichotomy of author and reader.¹⁴ We see in Cynewulf's work a stark example of the connection between a poetry that refers to its written identity, and an author who makes his own name and identity a part of his art. This case demonstrates one of the fundamental consequences of the shift to literacy, as described by Eric Havelock, Ursula Schaefer, Paul Zumthor and others: whereas in oral composition an audience witnesses a singer in performance, once texts have become exclusively written, the physical absence of the poet necessitates the creation of a 'vicarious voice'; a fictional speaker who stands in for the absent singer.¹⁵ As this process

¹³ Opland outlines the written character of Cynewulf's work, and presents him as the exemplary post-Conversion literate poet (p. 33).

¹⁴ Nu ðu geornlice gæstgerynum,
mon se mæra, modcræfte sec
þurh sefan snyttro, þæt þu soð wite ...

Christ II (*Christ B* 440–2b), in A. Orchard, 'Oral Tradition', in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. O'Brien O'Keefe, pp. 101–23, at p. 106: 'Now, you, illustrious man, earnestly seek in the spiritual mysteries with strength of mind, through the wisdom of your soul, so that you truly know ...'. See Orchard's comments on this address and how it indicates a 'text written for the eye' (p. 107).

¹⁵ See Pasternack, *Textuality*, pp. 3–5, and her discussion of the work of Schaefer. See also E. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write* (New Haven, 1986), pp. 112–3, for a discussion of the emerging concept of selfhood with the growth of literate culture in ancient Greece, and Paul Zumthor, 'The Text and the Voice', *New Lit. Hist.* 16 (1984), 67–92, for a theoretical discussion of the reader's creation of an authorial voice in the context of the later Middle Ages.

develops, readers begin to perceive texts as expressions of individual subjectivities, rather than parts of a larger formulaic tradition, and the concept of authorship begins to function in a way that more closely resembles its modern form. In the Old English tradition, just as poems like the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* illustrate the increasing presence of 'vicarious' narrative voices, Cynewulf illustrates the emerging identification of actual individuals ('historical' authors) as the sources of written poetry.

II.

It is with this in mind that we return to the story of Caedmon. In the context of the widespread anonymity of Old English poetry, the very fact that Caedmon's *Hymn* bears its author's name is noteworthy. Beyond this, the detailed story that Bede provides—of Caedmon's life and inspiration—is in stark contrast to the nature of the formulaic tradition that we have described (in which the modern concept of authorship is effectively non-existent). Although reminiscent of Latin *vitae* and later medieval forms of authorial biography, this story is inconsistent with the 'authorless' nature of the Old English tradition.¹⁶ As the example of Cynewulf suggests to us, however, the appearance of a single, historical author (such as Caedmon) in vernacular poetry is fundamentally connected to the emerging figure of 'writtenness' in that poetry. Just as Cynewulf's texts point to their own exclusively written nature, Caedmon's story tells of the conversion of vernacular poetry from the oral context (the pagan poetry he abandons) to the written (the Christian poetry that is recorded and used as a tool for conversion). Consequently, just as with Cynewulf, where the emergence of written poetry coincides with the identification of an historical author, with Caedmon the

¹⁶ See, again, Pasternack, *Textuality*, pp. 1–32.

conversion of vernacular poetry to its new, written context is accompanied by a detailed account of the author's life and inspiration. The 'conversion of subjectivity' in Caedmon's story begins with the very connection of the subject's voice to an historical author, and the presentation of his story as connected to his poetry—something that can be taken for granted by modern readers, but in Bede's time represented a new way to understand poetry and narrative voice. In the language that Pasternack uses, this change represents an 'alteration between man and the signifier',¹⁷ by redefining the source of the signifier (an author's identity rather than a tradition of formulae), and thus altering the reader's understanding of that signifier.

Undoubtedly, the fact that our awareness of Caedmon-as-author comes in the form of a separate prose text adds a dimension to his story that is not present in Cynewulf's poetry. In Cynewulf's work, both the written identity of the poetry and the author's name and persona come from the author himself within the work—in Caedmon's story, both come from outside the poetry, in prose that is essentially the commentary of one of Caedmon's readers (Bede). This fact is crucial to our line of questioning—that the very presence of 'exegesis' indicates the presence of *readership* (an audience that has produced commentary or biographical exposition for other readers; a subjectivity that shares textual space, but is distinct from that of the poet). By translating and writing down *Caedmon's Hymn*, and telling Caedmon's story as he does in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede frames the *Hymn* with the explanatory prose of a reader (himself), and gives a third person account of its composition and its author's life. This structure (which, again, is so familiar to later medieval and modern readers, but is alien to the Old English vernacular tradition)

¹⁷ Pasternack, 'Post-structuralist theories', p. 178 (quoting Lacan).

constitutes precisely the 'conversion' of subjectivity that Pasternack suggests, by drawing attention to a separation between poetic subject and audience that is present visually on the page (a separation which will later be incorporated into poetry such as that of Cynewulf). The new concept of vernacular authorship that this story represents is one that is defined by the very *distance* between author and reader. To clarify this, we must first step back and discuss how Bede anticipates this fundamental separation (between author and reader, subject and audience) in the action of the story itself, beginning the moment that Caedmon leaves the *convivium* to avoid singing.

In Caedmon's story, we see vernacular authorship evolve from the communal artistry of the oral context, to a multi-faceted grammatical *auctoritas*. The first context we have already seen indirectly in our discussion of oral/formulaic verse. With the *convivium* in which the story begins, Bede portrays a setting of secular, oral composition—a social gathering in which songs are sung for entertainment, and where ultimately the 'author' is the community itself, which generates and shares the formulae that make up its songs. The key feature of this setting is that there is no solid division between authorship and spectatorship: each listener is also a participant in the artistic production.

Unde nonnunquam in convivio, cum esset laetitiae causa, ut omnes per ordinem cantare deberent, ille [Caedmon], ubi adpropinquare sibi citharam cernebat, surgebat a media caena et egressus ad suam domum repedabat.¹⁸

¹⁸ Bede, *HE*, pp. 414–7 (my gloss in brackets): 'Indeed it sometimes happened at a feast that all the guests in turn would be invited to sing [for entertainment]; then, when he [Caedmon] saw the harp coming his way, he would get up from the table and go home', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. L. Sherley-Price and R.E. Latham (London, 1990), p. 248.

As Bede describes the harp being passed around to give each person a turn to sing, he represents a group artistry in which there is no concept of individual vernacular 'authorship' as we know it, but rather group participation in a tradition. Each member of the audience becomes a poet as he or she receives the harp, and each poet participates in a fluid oral tradition. The narrative voice that these singers use does not correspond to the authorial 'I' that emerges in later vernacular poetry, but to the formulaic usage that we have discussed—a 'network of expressions and thought'¹⁹ that uses ready-made phrases and vocabulary (rather than reference to the names and personas of historical authors) to produce meaning.²⁰ In this context, I would suggest, the fact that everyone present is both a singer and a listener underscores the fact that the subjectivity of any particular singer is unimportant; it not the subjectivity of a single person, but rather the narrative voice of the group's songs (constituted by the codes and formulae that they all share) that produces meaning.

Whereas in this *conuiuium* poets and audiences are interchangeable, and narrative voice is collective rather than subjective, in the story that follows Caedmon is presented in terms of his *separation* from his audience. This separation begins physically, of course, as he leaves the *conuiuium* due to his inability to participate in its form of artistry. With the composition of the *Hymn*, Caedmon's separation from the *conuiuium* is extended as he begins to acquire a distinct audience. The morning after his dream, Caedmon performs his *Hymn* to a series of people: the reeve, the abbess Hild, and various teachers:

¹⁹ Pasternack, *Textuality*, p. 19.

²⁰ See above, n. 9, and Pasternack's analysis in general of the 'authorless' textuality of Old English poetry.

Veniensque mane ad villicum, qui sibi praeerat, quid doni percepisset indicavit, atque ad abbatissam perductus iussus est, multis doctoribus viris praesentibus, indicare somnium et dicere carmen ...²¹

His original *Hymn* and the poems that follow not only please his audience, but as he begins to translate biblical texts, he comes to teach the learned men who feed him scripture ('... doctores suos vicissim auditores sui faciebat ...'),²² and inspire many pagans to adopt Christianity ('... cuius carminibus multorum saepe animi ad contemptum saeculi et appetitum sunt vitae caelestis accensi.').²³ Already, Caedmon's craft is drastically different from that found in the *conuiuium*. His poetry is described above all in terms of its effects on a diverse and growing audience, and rather than a member of a community of vernacular singers, he has become a unique individual with a singular literary role. He is at every turn distinct from his audience—there is no one else in the monastery creating vernacular Christian verse, no tradition that Caedmon is a part of, and thus the narrative voice of this poetry is ultimately his alone.²⁴ His leaving the *conuiuium* has come to signify the vernacular author stepping away and becoming separate from his audience, and consequently acquiring an

²¹ Bede, *HE*, p. 416: 'Early in the morning he went to his superior the reeve and told him about this gift that he had received. The reeve took him before the abbess, who ordered him to give an account of his dream and repeat the verses in the presence of many learned men ...', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Sherley-Price and Latham, p. 249.

²² Bede, *HE*, p. 418: '... he turned his instructors into auditors ...', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Sherley-Price and Latham, p. 249.

²³ Bede, *HE*, p. 414: 'these verses of his have stirred the hearts of many folk to despise the world and aspire to heavenly things', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Sherley-Price and Latham, p. 248.

²⁴ A fact that is emphasized when Bede tells us that Caedmon sings verses he had 'never heard before': '... coepit cantare in laudem Dei conditoris versus, quos nunquam audierat ...' (Bede, *HE*, p. 416, my italics).

authorial voice that is connected to his subjectivity alone, and that is first posited by its separation from a community of spectators.

With this distinction only, however, Caedmon does not necessarily warrant the uniqueness that I began by ascribing to him: a 'conversion of subjectivity' that sets him up more as a grammatical *auctor* than an Anglo-Saxon *scop*. Nor would the poems that he supposedly composes after the *Hymn*—translations of various scriptures into Old English²⁵—confirm such a status. As Martin Irvine has pointed out, with these poems Caedmon most closely resembles a 'glossator': a poet who would translate a text with an interpretive, metrical gloss, such as that of the Paris Psalter.²⁶ Although this role firmly places him in the realm of grammatical culture, it does not necessarily imply that he has the kind of unique

²⁵ 'Canebat autem de creatione mundi et origine humani generis et tota Genesis historia, de egressu Israel ex Aegypto et ingressu in terram repromissionis, de aliis plurimis sacrae scripturae historiis, de incarnatione Dominica, passione, resurrectione et ascensione in caelum, de Spiritus Sancti aduentu et apostolorum doctrina; item de terrore futuri iudicii et horrore poenae gehennalis ac dulcedine regni caelestis multa carmina faciebat. Sed et alia perplura de beneficiis et iudiciis diuinis, in quibus cunctis homines ab amore scelerum abstrahere, ad dilectionem uero et sollertiam bonae actionis exitare curabat.', Bede, *HE*, p. 418: 'He sang of the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and the whole story of Genesis. He sang of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the entry into the Promised Land, and many other events of scriptural history. He sang of the Lord's Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of the Apostles. He also made poems on the terrors of the Last Judgement, the horrible pains of hell, and the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven. In addition to these, he composed several others on the blessings and judgements of God, by which he sought to turn his hearers from delight in wickedness and to inspire them to love and do good.', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Sherley-Price and Latham, pp. 249–50.

²⁶ Martin Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, pp. 431–5.

subjectivity connected to his poetry that might definitively prefigure a vernacular *auctoritas*.

It is with the presence of Bede himself as reader and exegete that we get a more complete image of vernacular *auctoritas*, as his Latin prose is momentarily put in the position of commentary, and Caedmon's text is put in the position of an authoritative religious poem. Presenting the episode as he does, Bede both underscores the textuality that has become central to the *Hymn*'s identity, and evokes the kind of unique vernacular authority to which we have been referring. For exegesis to exist, there must be a distinction between the narrative of the poet and that of the reader whose commentary shares textual space with the original work²⁷—a separation between author and audience that is visible on the page, and that, like Cynewulf's runic signatures, mark the literary identity that the poem has gained. Bede's very presence as intermediary between the *Hymn* and the reader of the *Historia ecclesiastica* functions as an inscription of the *Hymn*'s textuality. Whatever the origins of the poem (oral composition, divine inspiration, etc.), we learn of these origins by reading the commentary. The poem's identity in the *Historia* is always already textual, and its author's subjectivity is posited in terms of its separation from at least two readers (Bede himself, and the reader to whom his commentary is addressed).

Surrounding the text with commentary, Bede thus continues the distancing between author and audience that begins in the story itself when Caedmon leaves the *convivium*. This distancing does not end here, however: the poem itself is transmitted through the

²⁷ Barring, of course, cases of auto-exegesis, which at any rate acknowledge the process of reading and the presence of distinct, critical readers to whom the commentary is addressed, and thus are strongly connected to the literary identity of their texts. Indeed, we could look at Bede's autobiographical note at the end of the *Historia ecclesiastica* as a most relevant example of auto-exegesis.

intermediary of a Latin translation. Caedmon begins in a context of direct, oral composition, in which everyone present is potentially a poet (and all presumably share a language and a formal technique), but he ends as the author of a text that is separated from its readership by time, intermediary commentary, and language. Additionally, the act of translating the poem is key to the evocation of traditional *auctoritas* that is central to this episode. We see Bede set up an author/commentator dichotomy not only as he surrounds *Caedmon's Hymn* with an interpretive 'uita,' but also as he qualifies his translation of the *Hymn* with an apology:

Hic est sensus, non autem ordo ipse verborum quae dormiens ille canebat; neque enim possunt carmina, quamvis optime composita, ex alia in aliam linguam ad verbum sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis transferri.²⁸

In Caedmon's later role as 'glossator', his vernacular poetry is in the service of scriptural texts, but with Bede's own translation and 'gloss' of the *Hymn*, Latin is placed in the service of the Anglo-Saxon vernacular. Augustine, in *De doctrina christiana*, describes Latin as a sort of crutch for those who do not understand Greek and Hebrew, and stresses that Latin translations of biblical texts cannot adequately express the nuances and idioms of the originals.²⁹ In this way, Bede labels his own translation as an inadequate vehicle for an original, vernacular text. Not only does the prose that surrounds *Caedmon's Hymn* frame the poem with the explanatory text of a distinct reader, Bede's apology within that prose aligns Caedmon's voice with the *auctoritas* that the grammatical exegetes of his time work to interpret

²⁸ Bede, *HE*, pp. 416-7: 'This is the general sense, but not the actual words that Caedmon sang in his dream; for verses, however masterly, cannot be translated literally from one language into another without losing much of their beauty and dignity.', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Sherley-Price and Latham, p. 249.

²⁹ II.11.

and honor. The *Hymn* comes to the reader of the *Historia* through the same intermediaries of language and interpretation that an authoritative scholastic or biblical text might, and Caedmon is endowed with a kind of singular *auctoritas* that is derived from the very *distance* between the final audience and the original 'logos' of the text. Bede's apology works to immediately remind the reader that he/she is always already separated from the very 'beauty and dignity' that is its key feature of the *Hymn's* success.³⁰ Indeed, conferring authority onto a text in the environment of grammatical exegesis is done precisely by constructing a hierarchy of intermediaries for the reception of the text: the translator, the compiler, the commentator, the scribe.³¹ In this episode, Bede plays these roles himself (save the last), and in doing so shows us that the conversion of the vernacular form to the Christian context does not entail a simple addition of 'old form to new content'. It entails a redefinition of the poetic subject in relation to the reception of the text by an audience. In this case, the result is a subject who retains linguistic and formal links to the 'many souls' that he is meant to convert, but whose image is touched by the logocentricity of Christian textuality, in which the hierarchy of grammatical intermediaries marks the poet's own role as an intermediary between the word of God and the reader.

Looking at Bede's text in this way essentially gives us a circular progression: Caedmon's story tells of his growing separation from an

³⁰ See Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 19.

³¹ For an interesting discussion of the 'division of labour' of scholastic and Christian exegesis, and the manipulation of this structure by vernacular poets (in a foreign but not totally unrelated context), see T. C. Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus* (Philadelphia, 1992). Stillinger studies the attempts of poets of the late Middle Ages (a period in which the 'author question' has exploded) to confer a kind of vernacular *auctoritas* onto their own poetry by means of the different characters of the commentary tradition.

artistic community, and his uniqueness as an author who gains a distinct audience; this in turn points back to Bede himself, who is visibly (on the page itself) Caedmon's most central reader; ultimately, in relating the story itself, Bede's translation and his exegetical mode of reading continue to separate Caedmon from his audience (the reader of the *Historia*), and in doing so confers to Caedmon a unique kind of vernacular *auctoritas*. The 'conversion of subjectivity' that Caedmon represents is the subject's constant movement *away* from an audience, in a way that is contrasted with constructed images of 'unified' communities and their relations to text. Indeed, we could summarize this episode exclusively in terms of tension between individual subject and images of community—namely, Caedmon's constant tension with the secular and monastic communities in the story, and with the exegetical 'community' (Bede as compiler, commentor, and translator) that ultimately delivers the text to the reader. It is precisely with these images of community that Bede creates the backdrops of readership from which Caedmon is progressively separated.

Hugh Magennis has shown us the importance of ideas of community—both secular and religious/monastic—in pre-figuring ideas of readership in the Anglo-Saxon period.³² Indeed, we not only see Caedmon physically leaving the secular community of the meadhall, but after he has joined the monastery, his very method of composition suggests that he is separated from his religious community in their daily readings of the scripture: 'At ipse cuncta, quae audiendo discere poterat, rememorando secum et quasi mundum animal ruminando in carmen dulcissimum convertebat ...'³³

³² H. Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1996).

³³ Bede, *HE*, p. 418: 'So Caedmon stored up in his memory all that he had learned, and like one of the clean animals chewing his cud, turned it into such

Before Caedmon composes his biblical translations, the original texts are read to him, and he contemplates them like an animal chewing his cud—clearly a reference to *ruminatio*, one of many monastic reading techniques through which monks would simultaneously read and meditate upon the Bible.³⁴ As Magennis points out, however, in the Anglo-Saxon monastic context practices like *ruminatio* in fact represent a separation from communal reading; whereas more common forms of meditative reading involve the community of the monastery reading aloud together, *ruminatio* is a private reading practice, done silently or at a low tone.³⁵ By using this private response technique to contemplate biblical texts, and by transforming it into a technique of vernacular composition, Caedmon separates himself from the group reading practices of the *lectio divina*, and even as a brother in the monastery is distinct from his peers.³⁶ Although

melodious verse ...', Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Sherley-Price and Latham, p. 249.

³⁴ See Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York, 1982), for example p. 24 and pp. 78–93, regarding monastic reading practices.

³⁵ 'And in the monastic context of our textual community the meditative and contemplative character of the reading process should also be borne in mind, since this would have had a distinctive influence on the way texts were read. *Ruminatio* introduces private response in reading even when the activity of reading may be communal.' (Magennis, *Images*, pp. 9–10). See also Walter Ong's comments on how the act of individual reading shatters the 'unity of the audience' in *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 74–5.

³⁶ In his analysis of the Caedmon episode, Seth Lerer relates the *convivium* that Caedmon exits to the mead drinking prominent in Germanic legends of the origins of poetry, and sees a trajectory of ingestion in the story, moving from the *convivium* to Caedmon's rumination, and finally to his taking of the Eucharist. Lerer places this trajectory in the context of the appropriation of pagan symbolism and 'modes of understanding' by written Christian culture

this might seem a minor detail (that we could simply attribute to Caedmon's illiteracy), we must carefully note that—just as with the *conuiuium*—this separation comes in terms of a community and its relation to a type of text. In both cases (the *conuiuium* of the meadhall and the *lectio diuina* of the monastery) Caedmon is shown in the milieu of a community, and he is revealed to have a unique relation to a 'text' in comparison to that of the community. This unique relation, in turn, becomes the background for the 'converted subjectivity' that ultimately comes to fruition with Bede's exegetical presentation of the episode.

III.

As I began by suggesting, in taking this kind of approach we are in many ways following the lead of scholars like Clare Lees and Gillian Overing. In their reading of the Caedmon story and the *uita* of the abbess Hild that precedes it, Lees and Overing analyze the gendered features of narrative and cultural production in the episode, pointing to Hild's silent role as 'mother' in relation to the patriarchal structures

(*Literacy and Power*, pp. 42–8). One of the intriguing aspects of Lerer's argument is the attention he pays to the Old English translation of the *Historia*, and the significant 'readings' that the translation gives of the Caedmon episode (e.g., emphasizing the written nature of Caedmon's poetry by translating 'doctores suos vicissim auditores sui faciebat' ('he in turn made his instructors into his auditors') as 'his lareowas æt his muðe wreoton ond leornodon' ['his teachers wrote down and learned from his mouth']). To this we might add that the word used to translate *conuiuium*—*gebeorscip*, or 'beer-drinking party'—is used elsewhere in Old English texts (in various homilies) to connote the heavenly *conuiuium* (feast) awaiting the soul after death (see Magennis, *Images*, pp. 3–9). In this sense, the use of *gebeorscip* not only appropriates pagan symbolism, but also maintains the Christian connotation, such that the earthly community that Caedmon leaves can run parallel to the heavenly community that awaits him after death.

present in the descriptions of the Whitby monastery and the 'birth' of English poetry via Caedmon. Importantly, they approach the Caedmon story above all as a construct—a 'patriarchal myth of literary creation' that sets up its central figures in a 'gendered paradigm of cultural production'.³⁷ In my approach, rather than looking at these figures in terms of gender or roles in cultural production, I am looking at them in terms of literary subject and audience, emphasizing that the opposition of these two roles is constructed in the text as emblematic of the written Christian culture into which Caedmon's poetry enters, and that this opposition (subject/audience) is contrasted with a constructed image of unity in the 'oral community' from which Caedmon emerges. Similarly, just as Lees and Overing contend that the lopsided scholarly treatment of these episodes (which tends to marginalize or forget Hild) is in fact a direct consequence of the structure of Bede's text, I would suggest that the traditional treatment of Caedmon's story as a 'case history' is a consequence of Bede's deliberate structuring of the episode as such. By emphasizing the theme of separation, however, I am hoping to distinguish this episode from an historical documentation of oral production (in the sense that Magoun approached it), and frame it rather as a crafted representation of the emerging figure of the individual vernacular poetic subject in Anglo-Saxon culture—a figure that goes hand-in-hand with the centrality of the written word in the Christian grammatical tradition.

While mentioning the traditional scholarly treatment of the Caedmon story, I should point out that I have not touched on the very issue that first drew the label of 'case history' to Caedmon's story: the important and complex topic of the Old English version of the *Hymn* (as found on the final page of an early *Historia ecclesiastica*

³⁷ Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 21 and 29.

manuscript, the lower margin of another,³⁸ and in different versions in later manuscripts). Rather, I have approached Bede's Latin 'translation' of the *Hymn* and subsequent apology as a deliberate part of his project (an indication of the *auctoritas* that he is conferring to Caedmon and another means of distancing the original text from the reader), and ultimately my focus on Bede's construction of this episode relies on his prose rather than on the *Hymn* itself. However, considering Bede's project in light of the questions surrounding the Old English version could be fruitful in at least two ways. First, if we take into account Kevin Kiernan's thesis that the Old English version is in fact a translation of Bede's Latin, we could put even more pressure (again, following Lees and Overing) on Bede's effort to construct a story in which the reader is always fundamentally separated from the poet and his original text (in this case, because the original text never existed).³⁹ Second, we could consider the work of scholars on the 'inscription of orality'—the ways in which medieval poets and scribes represent the oral roots of vernacular poetry in the written form. Franz Bäuml, for example, has applied (over 20 years ago) this question to the oral/formulaic theory in a way that is clearly related to the issue of vernacular verse translations of biblical and grammatical texts (i.e. related to Caedmon's eventual role as 'glossator'). Bäuml studies examples of vernacular poets who seem to have composed their poems in the written form, but have used clearly formulaic vocabulary to emulate the style of extemporaneous, oral composition.⁴⁰

³⁸ Respectively, the Moore and St. Petersburg manuscripts.

³⁹ K. S. Kiernan, 'Reading Caedmon's "Hymn" with Someone Else's Glosses,' *Representations* 32 (1990), 157–74.

⁴⁰ F. H. Bäuml, 'Medieval Texts and the Two Theories of Oral-Formulaic Composition: A Proposal for a Third Theory,' *New Lit. Hist.* 16 (1984), 31–49.

More recently, and with direct reference to *Caedmon's Hymn*, Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe has looked at the liberties that early scribes of the *Historia ecclesiastica* take with the vocabulary of the Old English *Hymn*, which she interprets to be a free scribal 'participation' in the formulaic tradition with which they are clearly familiar.⁴¹ In light of the 'conversion of subjectivity' in the Caedmon story—which I have characterized as the subject's constant movement away from an audience, via a text—we could see this scribal participation as a visible trace of that first community from which Caedmon is separated.

The liberties that these scribes take—the freedom with which they change the vocabulary of the Old English *Hymn* using familiar formulae—suggest the same interchangeability of author and audience that Bede represents in the passing of the harp in the *conuiuium*. These liberties seem to draw the hymn back to this context in which author and audience are unseparated—in which a 'spectator' (the scribe, as a reader of the hymn) is free to take up the role of author and alter the poem at will. In doing this, however, these scribes effectively sharpen for us the trajectory of Bede's project—as he presents it originally in the *Historia*, the Latin *Hymn* is static and resistant to such scribal alterations. The alterations that O'Brien O'Keefe points out, by showing us the potential interchangeability of author and audience in a different textual milieu (formulaic Old English), bring into clearer view the fundamental separation of Caedmon from his audience in the episode as it is constructed by Bede.

⁴¹ K. O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge, 1990).

Stranger in a Strange Land:
an Irish Monk in Germany and a Vision of the Afterlife

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INTRODUCTION

In the late eleventh century Irish monks founded two religious houses in the German city of Regensburg. The first, the priory of Weih Sankt Peter, was founded in 1076 by an Irish scribe named Muredach mac Robartaig (Marianus Scotus). The second Irish foundation in Regensburg, the Benedictine monastery of Sankt Jakob (St James), was founded around 1090 with donations from the citizens of Regensburg. The monastery of S. Jakob went on to become the mother-house of a great family of Irish Benedictine monasteries—stretching from Ireland in the west, to Kiev in the Ukraine in the east—collectively known as the *Schottenklöster*.¹

It is within the context of the experience of Irish monks on the Continent that I wish to discuss the *Visio Tnugdali*, the best known literary production of the *Schottenklöster*.² In 1149 an Irish monk

¹ For an historical survey of the *Schottenklöster* see H. Flachenecker, *Schottenklöster. Irische Benediktinerkonvente im hochmittelalterlichen Deutschland* (Paderborn, 1995); P. A. Breatnach, 'The Origins of the Irish Monastic Tradition at Ratisbon (Regensburg)', *Celtica* 13 (1980), 58–77, at 73–4. For Irishmen on the Continent, not connected to the *Schottenklöster*, see M. Richter, 'The European Dimension of Irish History in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Peritia* 4 (1985), 328–45.

² For the most recent discussion and edition of the earliest surviving manuscript of the text see B. Pfeil, *Die 'Visio des Tnugdalus' Albers von Windberg*, Mikrococosmos. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung 54 (Frankfurt am Main, 1999). In this article quotations are from A. Wagner, ed.,

named Marcus who was in Regensburg, probably at the monastery of Sankt Jakob, wrote a text in Latin describing a vision of the afterlife. In the *Visio*, Tnugdall, a sinful knight from Cashel, is taken by an angelic guide through hell, 'purgatory' and heaven, and having repented of his sins and promised to serve God, is restored to life. The text stands within a tradition of European vision literature which encompasses such works as the vision of Dryhthelm, as recorded by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and Dante's *Commedia*.

According to the preface of the *Visio*, Marcus translated the text from Irish into Latin at the request of an abbess; 'Placuit namque vestre prudentie, quatinus mysterium, quod ostensum feurat Tnugdalo cuidam Hybernigeno, noster stilus licet ineruditus de barbarico in latinum transferret eloquium vestreque diligentie mitteremus transscribendum'.³ Every detail of the preface, however, has been questioned by scholars of the text and one has even gone so far as to say that 'Marcus n'a pas plus de réalité que le chevalier dont il conte les aventures'.⁴ It is necessary to ask, then, to what extent the *Visio Tnugdali* is an Irish text and to what extent a German one, in the hope that this might shed some light on the text and its author. J.-M. Picard's comment that the language of the text contains no characteristically 'Hiberno-Latin' features has been seized on by scholars seeking to demonstrate the Continental nature of the text, or

Visio Tnugdali. Lateinisch und Altddeutsch (Erlangen, 1882); translations are from J. M. Picard, trans., (with Y. de Pontfarcy), *The Vision of Tnugdall* (Dublin, 1989).

³ *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 4: 'For your wisdom has so wished that our pen, although uneducated, should translate the mystery which was shown to Tnugdall, an Irishman, from the vernacular into the Latin language, and that we should send it to you for copying under your vigilance', *Vision of Tnugdall*, trans. Picard, p. 109.

⁴ M.-O. Garrigues, 'L'Auteur de la *Visio Tnugdali*?', *Studia Monastica* 29 (1987), 19–62, at 24. See also Pfeil, *Visio des Tnugdalus*, pp. 87–97.

to suggest that Marcus may have received a Continental education.⁵ It is worth noting that Marcus's immediate stated audience was German and so he may have been tailoring his literary style to a German readership. Alternatively, any Hiberno-Latin features that may have existed in the text could have been erased during the process of transmission. Indeed Marcus himself states, 'rogans tamen, ut, si qua ibi fuerit minus compendiose interpolata sententia, emendare et competenter cudere vestra erudita non erubescat sollertia'.⁶ The date of composition was *c.* 1149 and yet our earliest manuscript-witness is by a German scribe and dates from *c.* 1190; therefore it must be allowed that linguistic evidence of Irish authorship may well have disappeared in the intervening decades.

It is to textual rather than linguistic evidence we should look, then, when considering questions of authorship and audience. I would argue that, despite the presence of the standard *topoi* of humility and compulsion in the preface, we have no reason to consider it a fabrication. The text itself points to Irish authorship and to the monks of the *Schottenklöster* as the primary audience, but not to the exclusion of a wider audience, both German and Irish. My aim is, through an examination both of Christian and of Classical elements in the text, to demonstrate the Irish intellectual and educational context in which the author of the *Visio Tnugdali* may have found his inspiration.

⁵ Picard's comment is reported by de Pontfarcy in her introduction to Picard's translation of the text (*Vision of Tnugdali*, p. 82), and also in Pfeil, *Vision des Tnugdalius*, p. 93.

⁶ *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 4: 'but I ask that wherever a phrase of less conciseness has slipped through, your shrewd erudition should not feel shy about amending it and coining a proper one', *Vision of Tnugdali*, trans. Picard, p. 110.

CHRISTIAN SOURCES

The Irish manuscript R. I. A. MS 23 E 25, known as *Lebor na hUidre*, which was compiled *c.* 1100, contains three texts of interest to us in this discussion; *Fís Adomnáin* (The Vision of Adomnán), *Scéla laí brátha* (Tidings of Doomsday) and *Scéla na esérgi* (Tidings of the Resurrection), which are found together in the manuscript, and which are all written in the form of homilies.⁷ *Lebor na hUidre* contains three hands, known as A, M and H. M is the hand that wrote *Fís Adomnáin*, and the interpolator, H, added the other two homilies immediately after it, suggesting that he felt these texts should be read together.

The three texts deal with eschatological themes in different ways. *Fís Adomnáin*, like the *Visio Tnugdali*, falls into the genre of vision literature; Adomnán, the seventh-century abbot of Iona and author of the *Vita Sancti Columbae*, is taken by an angel through heaven, 'purgatory' and hell. Adomnán is subsequently brought back to life in order to relate what he had seen to sinners on earth. The other two texts are not, in terms of modern sensibilities, as 'literary' as *Fís Adomnáin*, but are rather explications of Judgement Day. *Scéla laí brátha* is concerned with the fate of souls at judgement, whereas *Scéla na esérgi* is a philosophical investigation into the physicality of the final resurrection.

The central purpose of descriptions of the afterlife was to inspire the reader to turn towards a more virtuous life. For example, Bede, when he recorded the vision of Drythelm in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, stated that 'namque ad excitationem uiuentium de morte animae

⁷ *Lebor na hUidre. Book of the Dun Cow*, ed. R. I. Best & O. Bergin (Dublin, 1929), pp. 67–88; *Fís Adomnáin* is translated in *Irish Biblical Apocrypha. Selected Texts in Translation*, ed. & trans. M. Herbert & M. McNamara (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 137–48; 'Tidings of Doomsday', ed. & trans. W. Stokes, RC 4 (1879–80), 245–57; 'Tidings of the Resurrection', ed. & trans. W. Stokes, RC 25 (1904), 234–59.

quidam aliquandiu mortuus ad uitam resurrexit corporis'.⁸ Bede contrasts the metaphorical death of people who have strayed from the virtuous life with the literal death of Drythelm, and Drythelm's resurrection functions as a metaphor for his revitalised faith and the faith of those who heard his story.

Our three eschatological homilies in *Lebor na hUidre* have the same intention; to inspire the reader or listener to attain the *cétesergi*, or 'first resurrection', that is, 'esergi na hanma óna pecdaib hi sualchib tri athrigi do denam'.⁹ In the context of *Scéla na esèrgi* the motif of the first resurrection is a device to highlight the necessity of repentance and reform in this life, as is the vision of the afterlife in texts such as *Fís Adomnáin* and *Visio Tnugdali*.

In an article on the Middle Irish translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* Próinséas Ní Chatháin has suggested that the *Visio Tnugdali* has connections with the vision of Drythelm, as recorded by Bede.¹⁰ I think we can go further and suggest that both Bede's afterlife narratives—perhaps in Latin, perhaps translated into Irish—and also the afterlife material in *Lebor na hUidre* together form a body of material to which the author of the *Visio Tnugdali* was exposed, most likely as part of an Irish monastic education.¹¹

⁸ *Historia ecclesiastica*, V.12, ed. & trans. Colgrave & Mynors, pp. 488–9: 'in order to arouse the living from spiritual death, a certain man already dead came back to life'.

⁹ 'Tidings of the Resurrection', ed. & trans. Stokes, §32, 250–1: 'the resurrection of the soul from sins in virtues through making repentance'.

¹⁰ P. Ní Chatháin, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History in Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 115–30, at 121.

¹¹ As the subject of this article is the *Visio Tnugdali*, I do not have space for a thorough textual comparison between Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the eschatological homilies in *Lebor na hUidre*. However, one might, for example, compare the reference in *Scéla na esèrgi* to the heresy of 'Éotaic, doruménair curpu na esergi comtis semiu 7 comtis fóiliu indás áer nó gáeth' (§19,

Before examining how these texts impacted on Marcus's story of Tnugdál's journey through the afterlife, it is important to note that in terms of thematic or episodic similarities we are faced with a vast body of European vision literature which utilises certain standard *topoi* within the genre. Detecting direct borrowings by the *Visio Tnugdali* from the *Lebor na hUidre* texts is further complicated by the transition from Middle Irish to Latin.

Let us look at the description of the king Cormac Mac Carthaig, whom Tnugdál encounters in one of his purgatorial regions, the resting place of the not quite good. Cormac is described in terms reminiscent of King Solomon—he is clothed in heavenly garments, seated on a golden throne, in a hall decorated with jewels, surrounded by priests offering him gifts. However, Tnugdál soon sees that for three hours per day Cormac is forced to dress in a hair shirt and to stand up to his waist in fire. This is in order to atone for the sins of sullyng the sacrament of marriage and for ordering the killing of a vassal in a church.¹² One likely Irish source for this episode is *Fís Adomnáin*, where we are told that souls in hell are, on a Sunday, granted three hours per day when they do not suffer the torments of hell.¹³ However, we must not be too quick to assume that this is the

'Eutychius, who thought that the bodies of the resurrection would be thinner and more subtle than air or wind') with Bede's account of the same heresy: 'siquidem Eutycius ... dogmatizabat corpus nostrum in illa resurrectionis gloria inpalpabile, uentis aérique subtilium esse futurum' (II.1, 'Eutychius, ... taught that our body in its resurrection glory, would be impalpable and more subtle than wind or air'). Another example would be *Scéla na esèrgi*, §2, compared with *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III.19. For a survey of the reverse movement of ideas, i.e. Irish influences on Anglo-Saxon homiletic literature, see Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge 1993).

¹² *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, pp. 42–5, 'De Cormacho rege'; *Vision of Tnugdál*, trans. Picard, pp. 144–5.

¹³ Herbert & McNamara, *Irish Biblical Apocrypha*, p. 146.

only, or even the most likely influence. The motif of those in hell having three hours per day of respite from their torment is also found in the medieval recensions of the *Visio sancti Pauli*, which was also certainly known throughout Ireland and Europe at this time.¹⁴ However, we should note that it is a sign of Marcus's literary creativity that he inverted this motif to create the image of three hours per day of punishment thereby demonstrating a new approach to an old idea. St John Seymour, in his study of the *Visio Tnugdali*, noted that in the ninth-century Vision of the Emperor Charles there is the image of the visionary's father being immersed to his waist one day in a cask of boiling water and the next in a cask of cold water.¹⁵ I see this as a less convincing parallel than did Seymour, but it is a useful illustration of the point that there is a certain universality to vision literature which makes it difficult to detect direct influences.

With this caveat in mind, let us proceed to look at the Insular episodes in the *Visio Tnugdali*. The outline structure of the tale conforms to that of the vision of Drythelm and to the idea of a 'first resurrection' as described in *Scéla na esérgi*; Tnugdál has lived a sinful life, but after seeing heaven, 'purgatory' and hell with his angelic guide, is resurrected—both literally and spiritually—and he vows to spend the rest of his life in a manner devoted to God.¹⁶

Marcus essentially divides his afterlife into four: those who go directly to hell, those who go directly to heaven, and two 'purgatorial'

¹⁴ See *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin together with Nine Texts*, Stud. and Documents 4, ed. T. Silverstein (London, 1935). See also Wright's chapter on 'The *Visio S. Pauli* and the Insular Vision of Hell' in his *Irish Tradition*, pp. 106–74.

¹⁵ S. D. Seymour, *Irish Visions of the Otherworld. A Contribution to the Study of Mediaeval Visions* (London, 1930), p. 160.

¹⁶ *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, pp. 54–6, 'De reditu anime ad corpus'.

states for those whom Marcus terms *mali non ualde* and *boni non ualde*.¹⁷ These same four divisions are outlined by the author of *Scéla laí brátha*, and, despite *Scéla laí brátha* being an Irish-language text, the author specifically uses these Latin terms in his discussion.¹⁸ Here, therefore, we can see a direct parallel between the *Visio Tnugdali* and an Irish eschatological text that preceded it.

Scéla na esérgi states of souls on Judgement Day 'tuáslaicfiter 7 legfait ri tes tened brátha, acht cuirfiter na huli sin hi cruth bas aldiu 7 bas [s]ochraidiu co mór andás in cruth ir-rabatar iarna mbrunniud 7 iarna nglanad tria thenid mbrátha'.¹⁹ Compare this with the punishment for murders in the *Visio Tnugdali*: 'Descendebat enim super illam laminam miserrimarum multitudo animarum et illic cremabantur, donec ad modum cremii in sartagine concremati omnino liquescerent, et, quod est gravius, ita colabantur per predictam laminam, sicut colari solet cera per pannum, et iterum in carbonibus ignis ardentibus renovabantur ad tormentum'.²⁰ The idea that souls can be literally purified through being melted down and made anew is here twisted to form an eternal punishment; despite eternal melting and sieving souls will never be cleansed from the sin

¹⁷ 'mali, set non valde', *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 40, l. 20; 'boni non valde', *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 40, l. 19.

¹⁸ 'mali non ualde', 'Tidings of Doomsday', ed. & trans. Stokes, p. 250, §15; 'boni non ualde', 'Tidings of Doomsday', ed. & trans. Stokes, p. 250, §17.

¹⁹ §1: 'They will be dissolved and melted by the heat of the fire of judgment; but all those, after being smelted and purified by the fire of judgment, will be cast into a form more beautiful by far than the form in which they existed'.

²⁰ *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 13, l. 5–11: 'A multitude of wretched souls was falling on to this red-hot metal plate, and there they were burned until completely melted like cream which is reduced in a skillet. Then, what is even more painful, they were sieved through this metal plate as wax is sieved through a cloth, and their torment was again renewed, this time in the charcoals glowing with fire', *Vision of Tnugdál*, trans. Picard, p. 117.

of murder, and yet the image, even though Marcus uses it for a different purpose is essentially the same as that used by the author of *Scéla na esérgi*.²¹

The devil in *Visio Tnugdali* is described as having many hands: Marcus says that he has 'non minus mille manibus'²² and that 'est autem unaqueque manus digitis insita vicenis, qui digiti habent in longitudine centenas palmas et in grossitudine denas'.²³ We can compare this many-handed devil with the devil as described by *Scéla laí brátha* where the devil has 'cét lam furri. 7 cét mbas forcach laim. 7 cét ningen forcach bais'.²⁴ I would tentatively suggest that the *Visio Tnugdali* and *Scéla laí brátha* may have had a common Latin source for their descriptions of the devil but that the author of the latter text may have misunderstood that source. The *Visio Tnugdali* describes the devil's fingers as being 'in longitudine centenas palmas',²⁵ whereas *Scéla laí brátha* refers to him having 'cét mbas for cach laim'.²⁶ The author of *Scéla laí brátha* may have seen a Latin text with the words

²¹ The motif of being melted down and cast anew, like a statue, at the final resurrection occurs frequently in the writings of Augustine and was hugely influential in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It has been discussed extensively in C. Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), esp. pp. 94–104 and 117–55. Therefore we must note that the *Visio Tnugdali* need not necessarily be drawing on *Scéla na esérgi* but that both authors are operating in the same intellectual *milieu*.

²² *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 36, l. 7: 'no less than one thousand hands'.

²³ *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 36, l. 9–11: 'each hand had twenty fingers and the fingers were a hundred palms in length and ten in thickness'.

²⁴ 'Tidings of Doomsday', ed. & trans., Stokes, pp. 252–3, §20: 'a hundred hands [or forearms] upon him, and a hundred palms on each hand [or forearm], and a hundred nails on each palm'.

²⁵ 'one hundred palms in length'.

²⁶ either 'one hundred palms on each hand' or 'one hundred palms on each forearm'.

centenas palmas and confused palm, as denoting length, with the devil actually having many palms. Unfortunately I have been unable to identify an earlier source from which this might be drawn, and thus it must remain no more than a possibility.

The similarities and parallels between the *Lebor na hUidre* homilies, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Visio Tnugdali* emphasise Marcus's Insular origins. But, paradoxically, it is also in Marcus's use of foreign literary characters and motifs that we can see evidence of the influence of an Irish monastic *milieu*.

CLASSICAL SOURCES

The amalgamation of continental vision-text motifs with specific Irish influences is most strikingly seen when Tnugdál enters the level of hell reserved for the avaricious. Here souls enter the mouth of the beast Acheron; the jaws of Acheron are being held open by two characters from Irish literature, Fergus Mac Róich and Conall Cernach.²⁷ Acheron is taken from the name of a river in the otherworld and appears in literature from Virgil's *Aeneid* to Dante's *Commedia*.²⁸ There are Irish instances of the use of Acheron, not just

²⁷ *Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 17, l. 15.

²⁸ Marcus connects Acheron with the unbaptised: 'gigantes sunt et suis temporibus in secta ipsorum tam fideles, sicut ipsi non sunt inventi, quorum nomina tu bene nosti. Vocantur enim Fergusius et Conallus' (*Visio Tnugdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 17, l. 13–5): 'they are giants, and in their time they were so faithful to the beliefs of their own people that their likes have not been found since, and well you know their names. They are called Fergus and Conall' (*Vision of Tnugdál*, trans. Picard, p. 121). This tradition continued to the time of Dante where the River Acheron is again associated with the unbaptised: 'they did not sin; and yet, though they have merits, / that's not enough, because they lacked baptism' (*The Divine Comedy*, trans. A. Mandelbaum (New York, 1995), p. 73, Inferno, Canto IV).

in the Irish translation of the *Aeneid*,²⁹ but also in a gloss on the *Altus Prosator* which gives the names of all four rivers in hell.³⁰ Whether Marcus himself derived his understanding of Acheron from Ireland or Germany, it is certain that his knowledge of Fergus and Conall can only come from an Irish context. There is an interplay of influences both native to Ireland and from foreign literary traditions, and yet those foreign influences would not have been unfamiliar to a monastic audience in Ireland. Indeed it is probable that Marcus first came into contact with these foreign influences in Ireland.

There may also be significance in Marcus's choice of these particular Irish characters to hold open the mouth of Acheron. In a twelfth-century Irish poem entitled *Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna*, Fergus is specifically identified with Aeneas; 'Fergus Énias re luad loingse/ glé-dias buan nar choimse i cath'.³¹ If Marcus was acquainted with this poem, or if the poem reflects a wider tradition linking Fergus with Aeneas, then his choice of a character linked to another famous traveller to the otherworld may be taken as further evidence of his firm grasp of both Irish and Classical sources. Furthermore, the poem goes on to link Conall Cernach with Hector; 'Echtair mar Chonall

²⁹ *Imtheachta Aeniasa. The Irish Aeneid*, ITS 6, ed. & trans. G. Calder (London, 1907), pp. 82–5. For some context and discussion of this text see E. Poppe, *A New Introduction to Imtheachta Aeniasa The Irish Aeneid: The Classical Epic Poem from an Irish Perspective*, ITS Subsidiary Ser. 3 (Dublin, 1995).

³⁰ See J. Carey, *King of Mysteries. Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin, 2000), p. 40.

³¹ 'Aeneas is Fergus where exile is considered/ a bright constant pair who were not moderate in battle', 'Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna', ed. & trans. F. J. Byrne, *Studia Hibernica* 4 (1964), 54–94, at 61 and 76. Byrne also has a note (p. 81) stating that 'a less honourable similarity between Aeneas and Fergus is tacitly implied, for in late classical and medieval tradition Aeneas was regarded as a traitor'.

cert Cernach/ nert ro-garb re hernach n-áig'.³² That Irish poets linked native literary figures with the greatest of the Classical heroes demonstrates the confidence of the Irish *literati* that their native traditions could stand up to comparison with the Classical canon.

This connection between Fergus and Aeneas, Conall and Hector, might lead us to speculate on Marcus's intentions. The theme of the traveller or exile is recurrent through the text; Tnúgdal himself, although he is from Cashel, dies away from home in Cork. He then travels through the otherworld with the angel. Whilst in the valley of the proud, Tnúgdal sees a priest cross a bridge which no-one can cross safely unless they are one of the chosen. 'Erat autem ille presbiter peregrinus, portans palmam et inductus sclavinio et ante omnes intrepidus pertransibat primus'.³³ Tnúgdal then meets Fergus and Conall, Ulstermen who exiled themselves in Connacht. If these men represent respectively Aeneas, who not only travelled through the otherworld but was exiled for life from Troy after its fall, and Hector, whose defence of his homeland and parting from his wife and child form the most moving sections of the *Iliad*, then Marcus is handling themes and sources in his text with a subtlety and complexity as yet unrecognised by scholars. In these encounters with the migrants, the travellers, the exiles, we are being granted an insight into Marcus's psychology, given his own self-imposed exile from Ireland. Scholars have viewed the *Visio Tnúgdali* in terms of an 'interiorisation of *peregrinatio*' in tune with the contemporary thinking of Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux,³⁴ but the

³² 'Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna', ed. & trans. Byrne, pp. 62 and 76: 'Hector is like honest Conall Cernach/ a fierce strength against the iron of conflict'.

³³ *Visio Tnúgdali*, ed. Wagner, p. 15, l. 12–4: 'This priest was a pilgrim, carrying the palm and wearing the pilgrim's mantle, and he boldly crossed first before all the others', *Vision of Tnúgdal*, trans. Picard, p. 119.

³⁴ de Pontfarcy, *Vision of Tnúgdal*, p. 88.

significance of exile and pilgrimage in the text is not confined to the metaphorical or spiritual, but rather is central to many of the characters Tnugdál meets in hell.

If we accept this reading of the text, then perhaps Marcus's primary audience was the Irish monks of the *Schottenklöster* themselves. Marcus sets up the exile as the true 'hero' of the text. The Irish monks would recognise Fergus and Conall, but might also appreciate the layers of meaning inherent in their characterization: Fergus and Conall themselves are exiles but they also represent the heroic exiles from Troy. The monks of the *Schottenklöster* might also hope to recognise themselves in the pilgrim priest, journeying through hell, but safe in the knowledge that he is one of the chosen and will pass through his torments unscathed. The Irish monks in Germany may have felt a longing for their homeland but would have known that their self-imposed exile would earn them a place in heaven.

CONCLUSION

The identity of Marcus, the author of the *Visio Tnugdali* has been much debated: in early criticism of the text it was assumed that Marcus himself was Tnugdál, and that the *Visio* recounted his own conversion.³⁵ Scholarship has moved on, and, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Garrigues has even suggested that Marcus, like Tnugdál, was nothing more than a literary construction.³⁶ Like the

³⁵ E.g. Seymour, *Irish Visions of the Otherworld*.

³⁶ See above, n. 4. I would argue that Garrigues, in suggesting that Honorius Augustodunensis was the author of the *Visio Tnugdali*, has fallen victim to the desire to have a (relatively) identifiable figure associated with the text. Whilst both Garrigues and de Pontfarcy have shown a number of parallels between Honorius's writings and the concept of the afterlife in the *Visio Tnugdali* (see for example de Pontfarcy, *Vision of Tnugdál*, pp. 55–8), Carozzi has also shown

souls of murderers condemned to be forever melted and recast in a new form, there is a risk that the issue of authorship of the *Visio Tnugdali* will be condemned to forever consume and regurgitate itself in the torment of a postmodern hell. Yolande de Pontfarcy has stated, 'If Marcus hid his identity he did not conceal his nationality and his personality. The *Vision of Tnugdál* ... is a *summa* of continental and Celtic tradition blended by a powerful mind'.³⁷ Therefore, perhaps it is more profitable to ask not what more the text can tell us about the author, but rather what the text can tell us about the intellectual climate in which a twelfth-century Irish monk found himself. Marcus's text fits into the context both of eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish eschatological writing and also of the concurrent Irish translations and reworkings of the Classical canon.³⁸

The genre of medieval vision literature is one where each text is closely bound up with those that preceded it, in an intertextual relationship that stretches back to the earliest Christian apocrypha, and even beyond in Jewish and other non-Christian traditions. A commonality of conception of the afterlife means that direct influence can be hard to trace, particularly as we move from one language to another. However, in relation to Marcus, our Irishman in

significant theological differences between the two (C. Carozzi, 'Structure et Fonction de la Vision de Tnugdál', *Faire Croire. Modalités de la Diffusion et de la Réception des Messages Religieux du XII^e siècle au XIV^e siècle*, Ecole Française de Rome 51 (Rome, 1981), 223–34). The similarities can be accounted for given that both had connections with the same monastery and were therefore working within the same community.

³⁷ de Pontfarcy, *Vision of Tnugdál*, p. 90. However, given the influence of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, it would be more accurate to refer to a *summa* of Continental and Insular tradition.

³⁸ For Irish knowledge and translations of other Classical texts see B. L. Hillers, *The Medieval Irish Odyssey, Mergud Uilixis Meic Leirtis* (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Univ., 1997).

Germany, his erudite allusions to Classical and Continental literature should not necessarily be assumed to be evidence of a Continental education, but rather it might be seen as evidence of the breadth of Irish monastic scholarship in the twelfth century. The native Irish language eschatological texts of *Lebor na hUidre* show a similarly wide knowledge of non-Irish literature and theology. And Marcus's use of Irish literary motifs and characters combined with non-native influences demonstrates the product which could result from a twelfth-century Irish monastic education. These two travellers—Marcus, who journeyed from Ireland to Germany, and Tnugdál, who went from life to death and back to life again—have a great deal to tell us about the place of Irish eschatological literature within the wider context of the intellectual history of Europe.³⁹

³⁹ I would like to thank Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this paper, and to acknowledge the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council in funding my research.