

E. C. QUIGGIN MEMORIAL LECTURES 15

Ruairí Ó hUiginn

Marriage, Law and *Tochmarc Emire*



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Edmund Crosby Quiggin (1875-1920) was the first teacher of Celtic in the University of Cambridge, as well as being a Germanist. His extraordinarily comprehensive vision of Celtic studies offered an integrated approach to the subject: his combination of philological, literary, and historical approaches paralleled those which his older contemporary, H. M. Chadwick, had already demonstrated in his studies of Anglo-Saxon England and which the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic continues to seek to emulate. The Department has wished to commemorate Dr Quiggin's contribution by establishing in his name, and with the support of his family, an annual lecture and a series of pamphlets. The focus initially was on the sources for Mediaeval Gaelic History. Since 2006 the Quiggin Memorial Lecture is on any aspect of Celtic and/or Germanic textual culture taught in the Department.

Marriage, Law and *Tochmarc Emire*

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The body of heroic literature known as the Ulster Cycle spans most of the Irish literary tradition. The earliest compositions associated with it have been dated to the seventh century and throughout most of the Old Irish (c. 600–900 AD) and Middle Irish (c. 900–1200 AD) periods we find new tales and poems being written and older tales undergoing linguistic modernisation or being otherwise redacted.¹ This process continued, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree, through the Early Modern Irish period down to the fall of the Gaelic aristocratic order at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Even after this, scholars and scribes continued to redact a body of older tales that evidently enjoyed some popularity,² and versions of tales or songs have been collected from oral recitation both in Scotland and Ireland from as early as the eighteenth century.³ Tales or traditions associated with the Ulster Cycle, moreover, have inspired, poems and plays, not only in modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic, but also in English as writers such as W. B. Yeats, and John Millington Synge used material from the Cycle in their own compositions.

¹ On the Ulster Cycle in general, see R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* (Halle, 1921). For the dating of the earliest tales, see id., ‘Colmān mac Lēnēne und Senchān Torpēist’, *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 19 (1933), pp. 193–209.

² Among the tales that appear most frequently in the manuscript tradition of the seventeenth to the nineteenth century are, *Foghlaim (Oileamhain) Con Culainn*, ed. and transl. W. Stokes, ‘The training of Cúchulainn’, *Revue Celtique* 29 (1908), pp. 109–52 and 312–14; *Oidheadh Chonlaoich mic Con gCulainn*, ed. P. Walsh in *Éigse Suadh is Seanchaidh* (Dublin, 1909), pp. 15–28 and 59–71; *Brisleach Mhór Mhaighe Muirtheimhne (Aided Con Culainn)*, ed. A. G. van Hamel in *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, (Dublin, 1933), pp. 69–133; *Comhrac Fir Diad agus Con Culainn*, ed. S. N. Rutten in ‘Battles at the Ford: an Introduction to the Tradition of Comrac Fir Diad, with Editions of the Later Versions of the Tale’, (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2006), pp. 243–425; *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach. The Violent Death of the Children of Uisneach*, ed. and transl. C. Mac Giolla Léith, Irish Texts Society 56 (London, 1993), as well as some ballads that were popular in Ireland and in Scotland.

³ See J. F. Campbell, *Leabhar na Féinne* (London, 1872), pp. 1–6, 9–33.

Confining ourselves to the medieval period, the production and cultivation of this body of literature over such a long time represented a considerable intellectual investment on the part of the scholars who composed or redacted the tales through the ages and was no small financial investment for those who supported this endeavour be that the Church or, at a later period, the lordships of late medieval Ireland under whose patronage the learned classes flourished. Such investment was made because the Ulster Cycle, as other medieval Irish literary material, was deemed to be of importance. Its purpose was not as a body of literature primarily composed to entertain – although it certainly could do that – but as a body of lore, inherited or otherwise, that had a central function in the society in which it was produced.

To the Irish, tales such as those of the Ulster Cycle represented what they called *senchas* ‘traditional history’ which served, among other things, to explain how the physical, social and political world they inhabited came into being.⁴ Thus, for instance, we find characters and events associated with the Cycle being pressed into service to explain the origins of certain place-names. In this function they feature in aetiological or onomastic legends as part of the tradition of *Dindshenchas* (‘lore of famous places’) that seeks to explain the origin of such toponyms by reference to tales and characters associated with Ireland’s legendary past.⁵ Heroes from the Cycle, moreover, are cast as ancestral figures to dynasties and septs that ruled certain parts of Ireland in the medieval period,⁶

⁴ On *senchas* ‘traditional history’, see F. J. Byrne, ‘*Senchas*: the nature of Gaelic historical tradition’, *Historical Studies* 9, ed. J. Barry (Belfast, 1974), pp. 137–59; G. Toner, ‘The Ulster Cycle: historiography or fiction?’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 40 (Winter 2000), pp. 1–20.

⁵ We have both prose and verse versions of the *Dindshenchas*. See E. Gwynn (ed. and transl.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, 5 vols (Dublin, 1903–35); W. Stokes (ed. and transl.), ‘The Bodleian Dinnshenchas’, *Folk-Lore* 3 (1892), pp. 467–516; id., ‘The Edinburgh Dinnshenchas’, *Folk-Lore* 4 (1893), pp. 471–97; id. ‘The prose tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas’, *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894), pp. 418–84; 16 (1895), pp. 31–83, 135–67, 269–312.

⁶ The most important figures that appear in this function are Fergus mac Róich (al. Fergus m. Rossa), Conchobar mac Nessa and Conall Cernach mac Amargin. See M. A. O’Brien (ed.)

and this genealogical dimension of the literature can be adapted, reworked and modified according to the requirements of the redactor and of those for whom he engaged in this work.⁷ *Senchas* was also a repository of inherited wisdom and could contain matter that was of legal or moral relevance to society. Tales or events associated with the Ulster Cycle are frequently used as ‘leading cases’ in Early Irish law, where they present precedents for matters of contemporary legal import and are analysed and discussed on a legal basis.⁸

Court poets of the late medieval period, and doubtless in earlier periods too, make use of these tales in their apologues – tales or traditions recast in verse in the body of their bardic compositions in which moral or political precepts are exemplified and expounded by reference to this body of literature. So a poet, acting in the capacity of advisor to a patron, as often they did,⁹ could refer to a legend from the Cycle from which he would draw parallels for the situation in which his patron might find himself and would offer his counsel based on it.¹⁰ It follows that the exemplary use of such material can have a negative as well as a positive thrust, and if the poet wished to counsel his patron against a certain course of action, then the former would be called for. In other cases, the comparison between the patron and a figure from the Cycle may simply serve the aim of giving praise. Such uses of the tradition are explicit and the reader or hearer is left in little doubt as to what function the literary tradition

Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae (Dublin, 1962), index s.vv. Fergus m. Róich, Conchobar m. Nessa, Conall Cernach m. Amargin m. Caiss. On this point, see further T. F. O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), pp. 480–1; R. Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige: a brief biography of Fergus mac Róich’, *Emania* 11 (1993), pp. 31–40.

⁷ On the question of adapting and reworking materials such as these, see D. Ó Corráin, ‘Historical need and literary narrative’, in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies. Oxford 1983*, ed. D. Ellis Evans, J. G. Griffiths and E. M. Jope (Oxford, 1986), pp. 141–58.

⁸ See M. Dillon, ‘Stories from the law-tracts’, *Ériu* 12 (1932), pp. 42–65, and L. Breatnach, ‘Law and literature in Early Mediaeval Ireland’, in *L’Irlanda e gli irlandesi nell’alto medioevo. Spoleto, 16–21 aprile 2009*, Atti delle Settimane 57 (Spoleto, 2010), pp. 215–38.

⁹ On this and other functions of the court poet, see P. A. Breatnach, ‘The chief’s poet’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 83C (1983), pp. 37–79.

¹⁰ On this see L. Ó Caithnia, *Apalóga na bhFilí 1200–1650 AD* (Dublin, 1984).

that is being evoked serves in the context it is introduced, be it a poem, legal commentary, a genealogy or a place-name legend. A greater challenge to the modern reader, however, is presented by texts in which their function is not stated explicitly and their message, if any, must be sought by examining the literary or manuscript context in which they appear, or by looking at extra-textual matters. Such matters might include trying to establish any possible political or social background the work might have, seeing if there is anything in the text that might be reflective of the world in which it came into existence and if it contains any teaching that might be directed at that society. This approach is challenging but is one that has been championed with some success by a number of scholars and has brought some illuminating results.¹¹

Tochmarc Emire: Summary

In this light, the text at the centre of this paper presents a particularly interesting challenge. *Tochmarc Emire* (*TE_m*) ‘The Wooing of Emer’, is one of the longer narratives of the Ulster Cycle. Both it and its sequel, *Aided Énfir Aífe* (*AÉA*) ‘The Death of Aífe’s Only Son’ form a group of tales that evidently enjoyed some popularity through the ages, as they have been transmitted to us in many versions that can be dated to various different stages of the medieval and modern periods. Before examining them and trying to ascertain what message or messages they may have contained, it will be of use to give a synopsis of the complex of tales which for our purposes can be broken down into four main parts. This summary is based on the longest known version of *Tochmarc Emire* (*TE_m²*) which has been dated to the Middle Irish period but is based on an Old Irish original (*TE_m¹*).¹² It is followed by a synopsis of its sequel, *Aided Énfir*

¹¹ See, for instance, T. Ó Cathasaigh, ‘*Cath Maige Tuired* as exemplary myth’, in *Folia Gadelica. Essays Presented to R. A. Breatnach*, ed. P. De Brún, S. Ó Coileáin and P. Ó Riain (Cork, 1983), pp. 1–19; M. Herbert, ‘*Fled Dúin na nGéd: a reappraisal*’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18 (Winter 1989), pp. 75–87.

¹² The dating of *Tochmarc Emire* is discussed below.

Aífe. I have used the edition of A. G. van Hamel and refer to the paragraph arrangement therein.¹³

Part 1 (§§1–59) The Ulstermen wish to find a wife for the youthful hero Cú Chulainn as they are afraid their wives and daughters will fall in love with him and that he will become a major disruptive force in Ulster. Despite searching for a year they fail to find a suitable spouse, but on his own initiative, Cú Chulainn goes to Leinster to woo Emer, daughter of the hospitaller, Forgall Monach, who is presented as a rather shadowy figure. He engages her in a long dialogue cast in kennings and riddles so as to hide his true intent from anyone who might relate it to her father who would have opposed such a match. Having demonstrated to her in this manner his intellectual prowess, she consents to be his wife and they arrange to go to Emain Macha, capital of Ulster. Forgall discovers their intent, arrives at Emain in disguise, and contrives to have Cú Chulainn sent abroad for a while so that he can complete his martial training. Even though this conveniently suits Forgall's purposes by removing Cú Chulainn from the scene for a period with no guarantee of his eventual return, Cú Chulainn agrees to travel and before he departs both he and Emer pledge their chastity to each other.

Part 2 (§§60–79) sees Cú Chulainn and some companions departing from Ireland and visiting firstly the encampment of Domnall Míldemall in Alba. Domnall's hideous daughter named Dornoll ('big fist') falls in love with him, but he refuses her advances. He is then separated from his companions through the sorcery of Forgall Monach and after an eventful journey arrives at the martial school of Scáthach situated to the east of the Alps. Scáthach ('the shadowy one') is an Amazonian figure and reckoned to be the best teacher of warriors there was. Scáthach's daughter named Úathach ('the terrible one') falls in love with Cú Chulainn. He initially refuses her advances, but when she offers to betray to him how to take advantage of her mother so that he could gain the best martial training, he agrees to sleep with her.

At this time Scáthach is engaged in warfare with another people who were ruled by a woman named Aífe. Cú Chulainn goes to battle against Aífe, overcomes her and forces her at sword-point to grant him three demands, which are that she should submit to Scáthach, that she should sleep with him and that she should bear him a son. All his wishes are granted, albeit at sword-point, and before he departs from her, he leaves a name for his unborn son, asks that he be sent to Ireland to seek his father when he is seven years old, leaves him a thumb-ring as a token for recognition, and then places certain injunctions on him, i.e. that he should neither name himself to anyone nor shun single combat if challenged.

Part 3 (§§80–92) of the tale involves Cú Chulainn's eventful return to Ireland following his period with Scáthach. On his way he stops off at an island where he finds that *Derb Forgail*, the daughter of King Rúad is to be given as tribute to

¹³ 'Tochmarc Emire', ed. van Hamel in *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, pp. 16–88.

three Fomorian kings. Cú Chulainn kills all three kings and rescues the girl who is then offered to him as a wife by her father, Rúad. He refuses to accept her at that point but suggests they should make a tryst a year from then. He returns to Ireland to claim Emer, but is unable to gain access to her, as her father has her closely guarded. After a year has passed *Derb Forgaill* arrives in the form of a bird to keep her tryst with him. Failing to recognise who she is, Cú Chulainn brings her down with a slingshot and when she re-assumes human form he sucks the stone from her body, drinking some of her blood in the process. Having thus consumed some of her blood he states he cannot marry her and gives her in marriage to his foster-son, Lugaid Riab nDerg.

Cú Chulainn finally manages to unite with Emer, but even at this stage their travails are not over for the king of Ulster, Conchobar, must exercise his prerogative of *ius primae noctis* and sleep with Emer on her wedding night. In order to assuage the enraged Cú Chulainn, an agreement is reached whereby Conchobar and Emer are joined in bed by Fergus mac Róich and Cathbad who ensure that Cú Chulainn's honour is protected.

Part 4 This is *Tochmarc Emire*'s sequel, *Aided Énfir Aífe*. Cú Chulainn's son by Aífe, Conlae, arrives in Ireland to seek his father. Although but a youth, the martial skill he demonstrates in view of the Ulstermen causes them some consternation as they fear an invasion by the grown men of the country from which he has come. When asked to identify himself, he refuses to do so in accordance with the injunctions placed on him by his father and defeats and humiliates in single combat some Ulster warriors who demand to find out who he is. Cú Chulainn is sent for, engages his son in combat and deals him a fatal blow; Conlae identifies himself with his dying breath and shows his father the thumb-ring Cú Chulainn had left him as a token of identification. Thereafter, Cú Chulainn and the Ulstermen enter a period of great mourning.

Sources

Before examining this complex of tales, it will be useful to look at our various sources. In dealing with them, I refer where appropriate to the four different parts I have identified above:

A. *Tochmarc Emire 1 (TEM¹; Part 2)*¹⁴

This is the earliest version of *Tochmarc Emire*, and is found in one manuscript of the fifteenth century, Rawlinson B 512.¹⁵ On linguistic grounds, Meyer dated the text to

¹⁴ K. Meyer (ed. and transl.), 'The oldest version of *Tochmarc Emire*', *Revue Celtique* 11 (1890), pp. 433–57. Specific references to this text are to the lines in Meyer's edition.

¹⁵ See B. Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 223–54.

the eighth century.¹⁶ It is, however, acephalous, and lacks the first part of the tale corresponding to most of Part 1 (§§1–55). Cú Chulainn's return to Ireland is briefly described, but neither his encounter with *Derb Forgaill* nor the incident involving *Conchobar* spending the first night with *Emer* are found in this version of the tale.

B. *Aided Énfir Aífe* (AÉA: **Part 4**)¹⁷

This short tale tells of the birth of *Conlae*, his arrival in Ireland, his encounters with the *Ulstermen* and subsequent death at the hands of his father, Cú Chulainn. It is found in only one manuscript, the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, which is of the late fourteenth century. Linguistically, it would appear to belong to the late Old Irish or the early Middle Irish period, i.e. the ninth or tenth century.¹⁸

C. *Tochmarc Emire 2* (TE^m²: **Parts 1–3**)¹⁹

This is an enlarged and somewhat modernised version of *Tochmarc Emire 1*. It is found complete or in fragmentary form in six manuscripts the earliest of which, *Lebor na hUidre*, belongs to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.²⁰ The text of *Tochmarc Emire 1* has been incorporated into it with little linguistic modernisation, although it contains many glosses. A comparison of the extant portion of *Tochmarc Emire 1* with the corresponding section of *Tochmarc Emire 2* shows the latter contains many additions and much new material, some of which has been taken from other texts of the *Ulster Cycle*.²¹ Among these later additions is the encounter with *Derb Forgaill* (§§80–4) which most likely had as its source the tale *Aided Lugdach*

¹⁶ 'The oldest version of *Tochmarc Emire*', p. 439. Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 381, held it to be of the eighth or, at the latest, the beginning of the ninth century. See also G. Toner, 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', *Ériu* 49 (1998), pp. 71–88, at p. 87.

¹⁷ K. Meyer (ed. and transl.), 'The death of *Conla*', *Ériu* 1 (1904), pp. 113–21, and A. G. van Hamel (ed.), 'Aided Énfir Aífe', in *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, pp. 9–15. While van Hamel's edition is the more modern of the two, he has introduced some violent and unnecessary emendations to the text of the manuscript. Specific references to the text are therefore to the numbered sections in Meyer's edition. I also have used Meyer's translation with some minor modifications in the passages cited in this paper.

¹⁸ Meyer, 'The death of *Conla*', p. 113 ascribes it to the ninth century, but Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 404, enters a note of doubt with regard to Meyer's dating. Van Hamel, 'Aided Énfir Aífe', p. 9, suggests the later ninth or the tenth century.

¹⁹ Van Hamel, 'Tochmarc Emire'; K. Meyer, 'Tochmarc Emire la Coinculaind', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 3 (1901) pp. 229–63. References are to the numbered paragraphs in van Hamel's edition.

²⁰ For a discussion of the manuscripts, see Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, pp. 377–82, and Toner, 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 72–6.

²¹ A list of such material used by the compiler of TE^m² is given by Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 82.

ocus Derbforgaill,²² and an extended version of Scáthach's prophetic poem, the *Verba Scáthaige* (§79).²³

D. ***Dindshenchas: Lecht Óen-Fir Aífe***²⁴

A brief onomastic legend which simply seeks to explain that the toponyms Lecht(án) Óen-Fir Aífe ('the gravestone of Aífe's only son') and Airbe Rofir ('the great man's track') were named from the place Aífe's son met his death.

E. ***Foghlaim (Oileamhain) Con Culainn (FCC)***²⁵ 7 ***Oidheadh Chonnlaioich mhic CongCulainn (OC)***²⁶ (Parts 2–4)

This long narrative is found as a single tale or as a sequence of two tales in over 50 manuscripts dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.²⁷ Linguistically it belongs to the Early Modern Irish period (c. 1200–1600 AD). Gerard Murphy has assigned it to the thirteenth century but does not state his reasons for so doing.²⁸

²² C. Marstrander (ed. and transl.), 'The deaths of Lugaid and Derbforgaill', *Ériu* 5 (1911), pp. 201–18; K. Ingridsson, *Aided Derbforgaill 'The Violent Death of Derbforgaill'. A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation and Textual Notes* (Uppsala, 2009).

²³ The shorter and older version has been edited by K. Meyer, 'Verba Scáthaige fri Coinculaind', in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, ed. O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, K. Meyer, J. G. O'Keefe, 5 vols (Halle, 1907–13), vol. 5, pp. 28–30, and by P. L. Henry, 'Verba Scáthaige', *Celtica* 21 (1990), 191–207. The longer and later version has been edited by van Hamel, 'Tochmarc Emire', §79.

²⁴ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol. 4, pp. 132–5; Stokes 'The prose tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas', pp. 46–7. On the place-name Airbe Rofir, see also P. Walsh, 'On a passage in Serglige Conculaind', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 8 (1912), pp. 554–5. There are some small differences between the verse and prose versions of this tradition.

²⁵ The first part of the tale, known variously as *Oileamhain Con Culainn*, or as *Foghlaim Con Culainn*, has been edited by Stokes, 'The training of Cú Chulainn', and is taken from a manuscript penned in 1715 by the scribe Richard Tipper. References are to the numbered sections in this edition. There are some other witnesses of an earlier date, the earliest being found in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Gaelic Manuscript 72.1.38, which probably dates from the first quarter of the seventeenth century. See J. MacKechnie, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (Boston, 1973), vol. 1, p. 190.

²⁶ P. Walsh (ed.), 'Oidheadh Chonnlaioich mic CongCulainn', but this edition omits a brief episode near the beginning of the tale. References are to the numbered lines in Walsh's edition. A later edition appeared in S. Ó Ceallaigh's *Rudhraigheacht* (Dublin, 1935), pp. 25–38. I have prepared a new edition of both tales from Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Manuscript 72.1.38 which I hope to publish in the near future.

²⁷ By my reckoning, both tales are found together in direct sequence or in close proximity to each other in 34 manuscripts. *FCC (OCC)* is found in a further 14 manuscripts, while *OC* on its own occurs in a further 13.

²⁸ G. Murphy, *The Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Medieval Ireland. Fianaíocht agus Rómánsaíocht* (Dublin 1961, revised edition 1971), p. 31. According to Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, pp. 73, 396–7, 408–9, this redaction is the work of a *Modernisator* who was active in the fifteenth century.

It is a modernised and expanded version of the second part of *Tochmarc Emire* (Parts 2 and 3) and *Aided Énfir Aífe*, although some material has been added and several details have been changed. Included in this additional material is a stanza from the metrical *Dindshenchas* poem on Leachtán Óen-Fir Aífe. It is possible that the compiler of this tale had some of the alternative versions of *Tochmarc Emire* mentioned at various points in *Tochmarc Emire 2*, at his disposal.

F. Bardic apologue in the Book of the Dean of Lismore (Part 4)

The tale of Conlae's arrival in Ireland forms an apologue found in an elegy to Aonghus Óg MacDonal, son of Eoin Mór, Lord of the Isles whose killing at the hands of an Irish harper is recorded in the year 1490.²⁹ While the apologue purportedly serves to compare the grief felt by the poet, a certain Giolla Coluim mac an Ollaimh, to that of Cú Chulainn at the death of his own son, it carries a powerful subtext. In the years leading up to his killing, Aonghus Óg had been engaged in warfare with his father, had ousted him from the headship of Clan Donald and subsequently defeated him in a sea-battle off the island of Mull sometime in the early 1480s.³⁰ In invoking this particular apologue, the poet takes the extraordinary step of publicly implicating Eoin Mór in the death of his estranged son.³¹

G. Legal commentary (Part 4)

The tradition of the killing of Cú Chulainn's son is used in a legal discussion of the crime of *fingal* ('slaying of a kinsman') and the appropriate punishment pertaining thereto. The bare outline of the tale is given and this concludes with a stanza in which Cú Chulainn laments his fallen son. A legal discussion then follows. The unique copy of the tract is found in the composite manuscript Dublin, Trinity College Manuscript H. 3. 17 assigned at the earliest to the sixteenth century.³² The language is Early Modern Irish.³³

²⁹ See M. Freeman (ed. and transl.), *The Annals of Connacht* (Dublin, 1944), *s.a.* 1490.3; W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy (eds and transl.), *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster Otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 431 to A.D. 1540*, 4 vols (Dublin, 1895), vol. 3, *s.a.* 1490 (p. 351).

³⁰ On this struggle, see J. D. Mackie *A History of Scotland* (second revised edition, Harmondsworth and New York, 1978) and D. Gregory, *History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland* (London and Glasgow, 1881), pp. 51–8.

³¹ The poem which is found in the Book of the Dean of Lismore is in two parts: the first part, the elegy for Aonghus, has been edited by W. J. Watson, *Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 82–9. The apologue has been edited by N. Ross, *Heroic Poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1939), pp. 168–75. On its background, see T. O. Clancy, 'Court, king and justice in the Ulster Cycle', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. H. Fulton (Dublin, 2005), pp. 163–82, at pp. 163–5.

³² See T. K. Abbott and E. J. Gwynn, *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin, 1921), p. 355.

³³ J. G. O'Keefe (ed. and transl.), 'Cuchulainn and Conlaech', *Ériu* 1 (1904), pp. 123–7. References are to page and line number in this edition. It also has been published in *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. D. A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin, 1978), vol. 6, pp. 2127.19–2128.17

H. **Geoffrey Keating, *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn* (Part 4)**

Keating's *History of Ireland*, written about 1634 AD, contains a version of the tale related in *Aided Énfir Aífe*, albeit with some small changes of detail.³⁴ It is possible that the text *Oidhidh na gCuradh* ('The Death of the Champions') to which Keating refers in the preface to the work may have provided the source-material for his narrative.³⁵

I. **Ballads (Part 4)**

Two related ballads are found in many manuscripts dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.³⁶ The first of these, usually opening with the line *Tháinig triath, an borblaoch* (i) tells of the arrival of Cú Chulainn's son in Ireland and his fatal encounter with his father. The second, which begins *Truagh sin a Aoinfhir Aoife* (ii) is a lament uttered by Cú Chulainn following the death of his son.³⁷ These ballads are not infrequently found in manuscripts together with the prose tale (E) and are closely linked to it.

Although originally cast in different metres, *ógláchas* of *deibhidhe* and *rannaíocht mhór* respectively, they subsequently are brought together as one long poem of which there are two main variants, one beginning *Iar dteacht don mborb ó mhuir isteach* (iii)³⁸ and the other *Tháinig borb chugainn go fíochmhar* (iv).³⁹ These compositions contain not only versions of the two ballads, but also verse from the *Dindshenchas* and the stanza found in the legal commentary (D and G above).

This tradition of the father-and-son combat was used by James Macpherson in his composition *Carthon*,⁴⁰ which most likely he based on a version of the ballad current in Scotland in his time. Some years later, Charlotte Brooke published the first two ballads listed above, (i) and (ii), in her *Reliques of Irish*

³⁴ D. Comyn and P. S. Dinneen (eds and transl.), *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn. The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating, D.D.*, 4 vols, Irish Texts Society 4, 8, 9, 15 (London 1901–14), vol. 2, Irish Texts Society 8 (London, 1908), pp. 216–9. References are to volume and numbered lines therein.

³⁵ Comyn, *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 1, pp. 80–1.

³⁶ For a list of the many manuscripts in which they are found see, L. Ní Mhunghaile (ed.), *Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry*, 2 vols (Dublin, 2009), vol. 2, p. 8.

³⁷ These have appeared in several editions following publication in Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. For a list of printed editions, see Ní Mhunghaile, *Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry*, vol. 2, p. 8.

³⁸ 'Bás Chonlaoich mhic Con Culainn', *An tUltach* 15, no. 10 (November, 1938), pp. 7–8.

³⁹ R. Ó hUiginn (ed.), 'Laoidhe Mhiss Brooc', in *Téada Dúchais. Aistí in Ómós don Ollamh Breandán Ó Madagáin*, ed. M. Ó Briain and P. Ó Héalaí (Indreabhán, 2002), pp. 341–69.

⁴⁰ Published in J. Macpherson's *The Works of Ossian the son of Fingal*, 2 vols (London, 1765), vol. 1, pp. 179–201

Poetry,⁴¹ and it has been argued that her choice of this material, taken from Irish manuscripts and thus representing the genuine tradition, was partly in response to Macpherson's forgeries.⁴² In further response to the Ossianic controversy, the work of the Highland Society of London, and that of other collectors, resulted in many versions of the ballads being collected from oral tradition in Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴³ Oral versions of *Foghlaim Con Culainn* 7 *Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh mhic Con gCulainn*, often incorporating verse from the ballads, have been collected in both Scotland and Ireland down to comparatively recent times.⁴⁴ One of those involved in collecting such material, Douglas Hyde, collaborated with Lady Augusta Gregory who published a version of the story of Conlae's death in her *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne* (1902),⁴⁵ a collection of translations for which W. B. Yeats wrote the introduction. This tale, it would appear, inspired the composition of his play, *On*

⁴¹ *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (Dublin, 1789).

⁴² See Ní Mhunghaile, *Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry*, vol. 2, p. 14.

⁴³ Campbell, *Leabhar na Féinne*, pp. 9–15. On these early collections, see D. S. Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1952).

⁴⁴ For such material collected from folk-narration see G. Dottin, 'Études sur la prononciation actuelle d'un dialecte irlandais', *Revue Celtique* 14 (1893), pp. 97–136; J. Curtin, *Myths and Folklore of Ireland. Twenty Traditional Tales of Celtic Adventure, Magic and Romance. Translated Directly from the Original Gaelic* (London, 1890; repr. New York, 1996), pp. 304–26; S. Laoide, *Cruach Chonaill* (Dublin, 1900), pp. 96–8; S. Gwynn, 'The life of a song', *Fortnightly Review* 75 (1904), pp. 281–9; H. T. Knox, 'A Mayo version of the legend of Cuchulainn and Conlaoch', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 6, no. 4 (1910), pp. 235–37; I. Nic Néill and S. Ó Searcaigh, *Cú na gCleas agus Scéalta Eile* (Dundalk, 1915); A. Bh[reatnach] 'Conlaoich 7 Cúchulainn', *An Stoc* (September–October 1918), p. 3; ead. 'Sgéal Conlaoich', *An Stoc* (April 1919), pp. 4–5; T. Ó Máille, *Urlabhraidheacht agus Graiméar na Gaedhilge* (Dublin, 1927), pp. 186–7; S. Mac Giollarnáth, *Loinnir Mac Leabhair agus Scéalta Eile* (Dublin, 1936), pp. 37–46; L. Mac Coisdealbha, 'Seanchas agus scéalta ó Chárna', *Béaloideas* 9 (1939), pp. 51–65, at 55–8; 'Máire', 'Scéal Chú Chulainn', *An tUltach* (April, 1940), pp. 3, 6; L. Ó Drisceoil, 'Cú Chulainn agus a mhac', *Irisleabhar Mhuighe Nuadhat* (1963), pp. 106–9; C. Póirtéir, *Micí Sheáin Néill. Scéalaí agus Scéalta* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 165–210; H. Wagner and N. McGonagle, 'Téacsanna as Carna: Gaelic texts with phonetic transcription, English summaries and folkloristic notes', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 47 (1995), pp. 93–175, at pp. 100–6. Some verses of the ballad, with accompanying narrative, were recorded in 1931 by Karl Tempel from the recitation of Tomás Ó Gallchobhair from Ardara in Co. Donegal and can be accessed at www.dho.ie/doegen.

⁴⁵ *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne. The Story of the Men of the Red Branch. Arranged and Put into English by Lady Gregory* (Dublin, 1902; reprinted Buckinghamshire 1970), pp. 237–41.

Baile's Strand, a year later.⁴⁶ Mícheál Ó Siocfhradha's Irish-language play based on the same tradition, *Aon-mhac Aoife Alban*, was published in 1938.⁴⁷

Modern and English-language compositions aside, it is clear that this tale had a long and varied life in the Gaelic literary tradition, both in Ireland and in Scotland.⁴⁸ We have several versions of it in Old, Middle and Early Modern Irish sources, and at least two of these sources make reference to other versions being available to their redactors. Thus, at a number of points in the longer version of *Tochmarc Emire* (*TEm*²), reference is made to the existence of alternative versions that relate certain details of the tale somewhat differently.⁴⁹ Keating, likewise, refers at one point to a detail in the story for which he was aware of an alternative account.⁵⁰

We also find small but significant differences between various versions of the tradition. I list some of the more noteworthy here:

- (i) The name Cú Chulainn leaves for his son is not given in *Tochmarc Emire I* (A). In *Aided Énfir Aífe* (B) and *Tochmarc Emire 2* (C) it is given as Conlae, a form that develops to Connlaoch in the later *Foghlaim Con*

⁴⁶ Published in Yeats' collection, *In the Seven Woods* (Dublin, 1903), pp. 34–87.

⁴⁷ *Aon-mhac Aoife Alban* (Dublin, 1938).

⁴⁸ We might also note that brief references to Conlae/ Connlaoch or to his death are found elsewhere in the literary tradition, e.g. Cináed Ua hArtacáin's poem 'Fianna bátar in Emain' refers to the death of Conlae at Tráig Baili, *Revue Celtique* 23 (1870), p. 306, verse 11; it is mentioned in the Book of Leinster version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (see *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, ed. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1967), ll. 3456–7 (henceforth *TBC-LL*)); a chronological note on the death of Connlaoch is found in Dublin, National Library of Ireland Manuscript G1, 48r1, a manuscript of the sixteenth century, and it is furthermore referred to in a number of bardic compositions of the Early Modern Irish period, e.g. *Dioghlúim Dána*, ed. L. McKenna (Dublin, 1938), poem 82, verse 18b; *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr I*, ed. C. Mhág Craith, (Dublin, 1967), poem 51, verse 6b; *Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh*, ed. L. McKenna, Irish Texts Society 21 (London, 1920), Poem 28, verse 57b; Dublin, Royal Irish Academy Manuscript 165 (23 O 18), p. 38, verse.18c; P. Ó Macháin, 'An elegy for Seaán Ó Dochartaigh', *Celtica* 26 (2010), pp. 89–110, at, p. 100, verse 21a.

⁴⁹ *TEm*² §§58, 61, 67, 71. Thurneysen understood such references to point to the existence of an intermediate recension of *TEm*, he called 'Fassung II', a recension that no longer survives but was incorporated into the text of *TEm*² (which he referred to as 'Fassung III'). On this question see his *Heldensage*, pp. 377–82.

⁵⁰ Dineen, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 2, ll 3381–2.

Culainn and *Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh*.⁵¹ In both the metrical and prose *Dindshenchas* (D) he is referred to simply as Óen-Āer Aife, while the legal commentary (G) states that this was the name Cú Chulainn enjoined Aife to give to him, and indeed in this text his son identifies himself therewith.⁵² The ballads (I) have both Aoinfhir Aoife and Connlaoch. He is also referred to as ÓenĀer Aife in a poem in the version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* found in the Book of Leinster.⁵³

- (ii) According to *Aided Ēnfir Aife* (B), Conlae encounters Cú Chulainn at a place called Trácht Éise.⁵⁴ In the prose *Dindshenchas* (D) the encounter takes place at either Tráig Baili or at Áth Bec, both of which are situated in Conaille Muirthemne.⁵⁵ The metrical *Dindshenchas*, on the other hand, relates that their fight took place on the banks of the river Dall. In the legal commentary (G) the Ulstermen are gathered at Mag nEne, a plain in the Northwest of Ireland between the rivers Erne and Drowes.⁵⁶ The Dall mentioned in the metrical *Dindshenchas* has been tentatively identified

⁵¹ This occurred evidently under the influence of the common noun *láech* ‘warrior’.

⁵² *tabair Aenfir Aife d’ainm fair* ‘call him Aenfir Aife’; see O’Keefe, ‘Cuchulainn and Conlaech’, p. 124.5–6; *AinĀer Aiffi missi ... 7 mac do Choinculaind mac Sualtaim* ‘AinĀer Aife I am, son of Cuchulinn, son of Sualtam’, p. 124.27–8. This is the only name used in this text.

⁵³ *TBC-LL*, ll. 4029–30. As a personal name, ÓenĀer Aife, is singularly peculiar. I suspect it may have been abstracted from a place-name such as *Lecht Óenfir ‘the lone man’s grave’, in order to forge a connection between tale and toponym, as is customary in *Dindshenchas* legends. The word *óenfir* ‘lone man’ is found in other toponyms: see E. Hogan *Onomasticon Goedelicum locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae: An Index with Identifications, to the Gaelic Names of Places and Tribes* (Dublin, 1910), s.vv *Ard in aenfhir*, *Carn in aenfir*, *Dún aonfhir*. The later *OC* seeks to explain that the *forainm* (‘nickname’) *Aoinfhear Aoife* ‘Aoife’s only man’ arose because her son became her ‘only man’ after his father had left her (*OC*, ll. 19–21).

⁵⁴ Somewhere in Ulster (*Tráig Ési la Ultu*, *AÉA* §11).

⁵⁵ Both were situated near the modern town of Dundalk, Co. Louth: see Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, s.vv. *Áth Becc*, *Tráig Baili*. The reference to the death of Conlae found in the Book of Leinster *Táin Bó Cúailnge* also names Tráig Baili as the place in which he died; *TBC-LL*, l. 4029.

⁵⁶ On the identification of Mag nEne, see D. Ó Murchadha, ‘Mag Cetne and Mag Ene’, *Éigse* 27 (1993), pp. 35–46.

by Gwynn as the River Dall in County Antrim,⁵⁷ but another river of the same name is found in County Sligo and seems to be located in or close to Mag nEne.⁵⁸ In *Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh* (E), the encounter takes place at Tráig na dTréinfhear, which has been identified as Tráig an Chairn, near Dunseverick, Co. Antrim.⁵⁹

- (iii) According to *Aided Énfir Aífe*, Scáthach's encampment is in Letha (§1).⁶⁰ In both *Tochmarc Emire 1* and *Tochmarc Emire 2* it is situated to the east of the Alps.⁶¹ In *Foghlaim Con Culainn* it is situated in Scythia (FCC §11),⁶² while in the apologue, ballads and later folk tradition it is in Dún Scáthaich/Dún Scáithche, identified with the place of the same name in Sleat, on the Isle of Skye, in Scotland.⁶³ Both the legal commentary and Keating's account place Scáthach's encampment in Scotland, but are no more specific than that.⁶⁴
- (iv) In *Aided Énfir Aífe*, Scáthach's full name is given as *Scáthach Úanaind ingen Airdgeme* (§1). Aífe, the mother of Cú Chulainn's son and Scáthach's enemy is also named as *ingen Airdgeme* (§1). Keating refers to Aífe as *inghean Airdghéime*⁶⁵ but does not give Scáthach's patronymic. Both *Tochmarc Emire 1* and *Tochmarc Emire 2* describe Aífe

⁵⁷ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol. 4, p. 409.

⁵⁸ See Hogan, *Onomasticon*, s.v. *Dall 1*. The name is no longer known.

⁵⁹ See Hogan, *Onomasticon*, s.v. *Tráig in chairn*.

⁶⁰ Part of Gaul corresponding to modern Brittany (Welsh Llydaw); cf. Hogan, *Onomasticon*, s.v. *Letha 1*. Letha is also given as her location in the late tale *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa* which may, however, have taken this from *AÉA*. See W. Stokes (ed. and transl.), 'Tidings of Conchobar mac Nessa', *Ériu* 4 (1910), pp. 18–38.

⁶¹ *fri hAilpi anair TEM¹* l. 34; *TEM²* §60.

⁶² According to classical tradition, Scythia was home of the Amazons, and situating Scáthach in this region appears to show an awareness of this tradition.

⁶³ See Ní Mhunghaile, *Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry*, vol. 2, p. 5, verse 1.

⁶⁴ See O'Keefe, 'Cuchulainn and Conlaech', p. 124, l. 2; Dineen, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 2, ll. 3370-1

⁶⁵ Dineen, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 2, l. 3372.

as the female ruler of other (unnamed) tribes with whom Scáthach has to do battle (*TEm¹*, ll. 95-6, *TEm²* §74), but her patronymic is not given in these texts. *Foghlaim Con Culainn*, on the other hand, names her as *Scáthach inghen Búanuinne, i. rígh na Scitia* ‘Scáthach, daughter of Búanainn, i.e. the king of Scythia’ (*FCC* §11), while other manuscripts of this tale cast her as the daughter of the king of Greece.⁶⁶ The legal commentary has Aífe as Scáthach’s daughter.⁶⁷

- (v) *Aided Énfir Aífe* (§1) and the later tradition, as evidenced by *Foghlaim Con Culainn*, Keating’s account and the legal commentary, assert that the encounter between Cú Chulainn and Aífe was consensual. Keating’s version states that Aífe had fallen in love with Cú Chulainn by hearing of his fame and then went to be with him.⁶⁸ The legal commentary states that she was given to Cú Chulainn by her mother, Scáthach.⁶⁹ In *Foghlaim Con Culainn*, Aífe is presented as the counterpart of Scáthach, a formidable female warrior, from whom he learns further martial skills including his ability to wield the fearsome *gae bulga*, the weapon with which he kills Conlae. The version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* found in the Book of Leinster refers to this weapon as *gae Aífe* ‘Aífe’s spear’,⁷⁰ suggesting this tradition is of some antiquity, and further recounts that Cú

⁶⁶ Cú Chulainn arrives at *dúnadh Aoife ingheine Airdrígh Gréag isin Ghréig Mhóir* in the version of *Oileamhain Con Culainn* found in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Gaelic Manuscript 72.1.38, p. 126 .

⁶⁷ See O’Keefe, ‘Cuchulainn and Conlaech’, p. 124, ll. 2–3.

⁶⁸ *Agus tarla inghean álainn in Albain an tan soin dar bh’ainm Aoife inghean Airdghéime tug grádh éagmaise do Choin gCulainn ar a airdscéalaibh go dtáinig da fhios gur chumaisc sí féin is Cú Chulainn re chéile go dtarla mac ‘n-a broinn* ‘and there was a fair lady in Scotland at that time called Aoife daughter of Airdgheim who cherished a longing affection for Cú Chulainn because of his great fame; and she came to visit him; and they had intercourse with one another, and she conceived a son.’: Dineen, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 2, l. 3371–5

⁶⁹ *tuc Scáthach a hingin dó .i. Aífe, ⁊ ro toirrchestar hí* ‘Scáthach gave her daughter Aífe to him and he left her pregnant’, O’Keefe, ‘Cuchulainn and Conlaech’, p. 124, ll. 3–4. This may result in confusion between Úathach, Scáthach’s daughter, who also had a sexual encounter with Cú Chulainn, and Aífe, identified as Scáthach’s sister in *AÉA*.

⁷⁰ *TBC-LL*, l. 2069.

Chulainn and Fer Diad were trained in arms by the same teachers, named as Scáthach, Úathach and Aífe.⁷¹

- (vi) In *Aided Énfir Aífe* Emer tells Cú Chulainn that the boy he is about to engage in combat is his son and begs him not to commit the crime of *fingal* (*AÉA* §8). This is reflected in the later *Oidheadh Chonlaoich*.⁷² In other versions of the tale, Cú Chulainn is ignorant of the identity of his opponent and finds out only after he has struck the fatal blow and is shown the thumb ring he left as a token of identification for his son. The legal commentary, for instance, assumes ignorance on the part of Cú Chulainn in its discussion of the crime he committed and thus judges that an ameliorated penalty would have been appropriate in his case.⁷³

These and other differences suggest the existence at one time of intermediary texts that are now lost. From the extant versions that have been transmitted to us – and it is clear that what we have is only part of the evidence – we can see that the tale developed and grew over a long period of time and enjoyed no small popularity throughout a wide expanse of the Gaelic world.⁷⁴ As with any tale that has such a long history, we can expect to find differences of the kind listed above.

⁷¹ *TBC-LL*, ll. 2611–3, 2938–9, 3002, 3066–7, 3090–1, 3265, 3278–9, 3443–4, 3495–6, 3539–40, 3553. The first recension of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* refers only to Scáthach as their teacher; see C. O’Rahilly (ed. and transl.) *Táin Bó Cuailnge. Recension I* (Dublin, 1976), ll. 278, 1772–3, 3057, 3088–9.

⁷² Walsh, ‘Oidheadh Chonlaoich’, ll. 262–72.

⁷³ O’Keefe, ‘Cuchulainn and Conlaech’, pp. 126–7. See also J. Findon *A Woman’s Words. Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle* (Toronto, 1997), pp. 93–6.

⁷⁴ I fail to see the grounds on which Hollo asserts that evidence for the popularity of the tradition is ‘scanty’, even allowing for the narrower confines of the period 1200–1600 AD on which she comments. See M. Caball and K. Hollo, ‘The literature of later medieval Ireland, 1200–1600: from the Normans to the Tudors’, in M. Kelleher and P. O’Leary (eds) *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 74–139, at p. 115.

Theme

Variations on this central theme of our tradition, the tragic encounter of two close relatives in mortal combat leading either to the death or near death of one, is found in many different literatures, but our tale has a number of features that connect it to others found in various Indo-European traditions.⁷⁵ The most prominent of these are the Persian tale of Sohrab and Rostam found in the *Shahnamah*, ‘the Book of Kings’, compiled by the poet Ferdowsi in the eleventh century, but which evidently is based on earlier material;⁷⁶ the conflict between Hildebrand and Hadubrand in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* of the eighth century⁷⁷ and its thirteenth-century Old Norse derivative, the *Piðriks saga*,⁷⁸ although this differs in some details. The same theme is found in the late Russian ballad of Ilya of Murom, who fights and kills the son Falcon he has by Zlatigorka, a woman of the Tatar people.⁷⁹ At a further remove, it also is found in the Greek legend of Odysseus and Telegonus, in which the father, Odysseus, is slain by Telegonus at the instigation of his mother, Circe,⁸⁰ and furthermore in the tale of Odysseus and Euryalus, in which case it is Odysseus who commits filicide.⁸¹ It also appears in the Indian *Mahābhārata*, in the tale of Arjuna and Chitrāngadā, where Arjuna is slain by his son, Babhruvāhana.⁸²

⁷⁵ An early survey and discussion of this theme in a wide range of literary traditions is found in M. A. Potter, *Sohrab and Rustem. The Epic Theme of a Combat between Father and Son* (London, 1902).

⁷⁶ On the *Shahnamah*, see O. M. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Cornell, 1994).

⁷⁷ W. Braune (ed.), *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch* (8th edition, Halle, 1921), pp. 80–1.

⁷⁸ H. Bertelsen (ed.), *Piðriks saga af Bern* (Copenhagen, 1911).

⁷⁹ I. Hapgood (transl.), *The Epic Songs of Russia* (New York, 1916), pp. 155–60. See also Potter, *Sohrab and Rustem*, pp. 28–32.

⁸⁰ M. L. West (ed. and transl.), *Greek Epic Fragments. From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Harvard and London, 2003), pp. 164–72.

⁸¹ This legend formed part of a drama by Sophocles that is now lost but is referred to by Parthenius of Nicaea in his *Erotica*. On this see, H. Lloyd-Jones (ed. and transl.), *Sophocles. Fragments* (Harvard and London, 1996), pp. 82–3.

⁸² In this case, however, Arjuna is brought back to life. For a comparison of this tale with *AÉA* see A. M. Ranero, “‘That is what Scáthach did not teach me’ *Aided Óenfir Aífe* and an episode from the *Mahābhārata*”, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 17 (1997), pp. 243–55.

The theme of father-and-son conflict leading to the death of one, or narrow avoidance thereof, is found elsewhere in Irish tradition.⁸³ It also may have featured in British literary tradition; the *Historia Brittonum* informs us that King Arthur killed his own son Amr and buried him at a place called Llygad Amr, but the circumstances surrounding this are not given.⁸⁴

The nature of the connection between the Irish *Tochmarc Emire* and *Aided Énfir Aífe* and tales found in other traditions is a matter of debate. Some hold that the motif of father-and-son combat is a shared Indo-European inheritance,⁸⁵ while others would argue that it was borrowed at a relatively late stage into Irish, most probably from a Germanic source, and adapted for use in our tale.⁸⁶ The similarities between the Irish, German, Persian and Norse versions of the tale are such that a connection between them, whether through inheritance or borrowing, must be assumed. The similarities the Irish tale has with the Greek and Sanskrit traditions are also apparent, but perhaps less striking. While this is a question of great interest and no small importance, it will not have a major bearing on the present discussion of our texts.

As with several of the tales found in other traditions, the *Tochmarc Emire* saga clearly does not have a happy ending. The tragic killing of Conlae and the

⁸³ Among such tales are the ninth-century *Cath Maighe Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, ed. E. Gray, Irish Texts Society 52 (London, 1982), pp. 34-7. See T. P. Cross, “‘Sohrab and Rustum’ in Ireland”, *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 1 (1949-50), pp. 176-82. Some of the similarities between these tales and *Aided Énfir Aífe* are discussed briefly by Findon, *A Woman’s Words*, pp. 86-8.

⁸⁴ *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed and transl. J. Morris (Sussex, 1980), pp. 42, 83. For a brief discussion of the onomastic legend in which it is mentioned, see B. F. Roberts, ‘*Culhwch ac Olwen*, the Triads, saints’ lives’, in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 73-96, at pp. 91-2.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, J. de Vries, ‘Le conte irlandais *Aided Ôenfir Aífe* et le thème dramatique du combat du père et du fils dans quelques traditions indo-européennes’, *Ogam* 9 (1957), pp. 122-38; M. Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago, 1948), p. 16. Ranero, “‘That is what Scáthach did not teach me’”, argues for a close association between *AÉA* and the *Mahābhārata*. This is also argued by N. Allen, ‘Cú Chulainn’s women and some Indo-European comparisons’, *Emania* 18 (2000), pp. 57-64.

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Thurnseysen, *Heldensage*, p. 403; J. Carney *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), p. 279 and see T. P. Cross, “‘Sohrab and Rustum’ in Ireland”, pp. 180-2.

heartbreak felt by his father at the enormity of the deed he has perpetrated, becomes the focus of the ballads and the later folk material, all of which are quite maudlin in their nature.⁸⁷ It is unlikely, however, that this highly-charged, emotional ending, effective though it may have been, was the reason the tale was composed in the first place. If anything, it was the vehicle for the delivery of any teaching or message that was encoded in *Tochmarc Emire*. If this tale is exemplary in any way, then the ending as found in *Aided Énfir Aífe* suggests that any such message it seeks to convey must be negative, that it is a negative exemplary tale, and that it is the course of action followed by Cú Chulainn that led to his committing filicide and the tale's tragic end. So, what teaching or message might *Tochmarc Emire* contain? To attempt an answer I think we must look at both versions separately. Before doing so, however, we also need to evaluate some aspects of the relationship between *Tochmarc Emire* and its sequel, *Aided Énfir Aífe*.

Aided Énfir Aífe

As we have already observed, there are certain differences between *Aided Énfir Aífe* and other parts of the tradition. Some of these are quite minor, e.g. (ii) and (iii) in our list above, but others are of more serious import.

The first of these is the fact that *Aided Énfir Aífe* states that Aífe, apparently of her own volition, went to Cú Chulainn who left her pregnant:

Luid Cūculaind do forceatal gaiscid la Scāthaig nŪanaind ingin Airdgeme il-Letha co ndergene sūithi cleas lea. ⁊ luid Āifī ingen Airdgeme chuici ⁊ ba torrach forfācaib (AÉA §1)

Cú Chulainn went to be taught craft of arms by Scáthach Uanaind, daughter of Ardgeimm, in Letha, until he attained mastership of feats with her. And Aífe, daughter of Ardgeimm, went to him, and he left her pregnant.

⁸⁷ Later tradition also has it that Aífe, seeking revenge for having been abandoned by Cú Chulainn, sends the boy in search of his father in full knowledge that this outcome will ensue. See Campbell, *Leabhar na Féinne*, p. 15.

There is no intimation here that their encounter was violent. In this, *Aided Énfir Aífe* chimes to some degree with later tradition which holds that Aífe had fallen in love with the Ulster warrior and that their encounter was consensual. It seems a little strange that the redactor of *Aided Énfir Aífe* would phrase his text so, had he been familiar with the alternative tradition recounted in *Tochmarc Emire I* in which Cú Chulainn impregnates Aífe by forcing himself violently on her. Either the redactor was unaware of the early recension of the tale and simply drew on a different version of events, or otherwise he was familiar with it but chose to recount it differently.

The second point, concerns the fact that Emer makes Cú Chulainn aware that the youth he is about to engage was his son:

‘*Nā tēig sīs!*’ ar sī. ‘*Mac duit fil tis. Nā fer fīnga[i]l ’mot ēnmac*’ (AÉA §8)

‘Do not go down!’ said she. ‘It is a son of yours that is down there. Do not murder your only son.’

This again seems to be reflected in some of the later texts. *Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh*, for instance, states that Emer, having heard the description of the youth who has come to Ireland, seeks in vain to prevent Cú Chulainn from fighting with him.⁸⁸ The legal commentary and Keating’s text, on the other hand, seem to accept that the killing was carried out in ignorance of the boy’s identity.

Cú Chulainn’s response to Emer’s intervention puts the honour of Ulster above any other considerations:

cid hē nobeth and, a ben, ... nangonainn-se ar inchaib Ulad (AÉA §9).

even though it was he who was there, woman, ... I would kill him for the honour of Ulster.

⁸⁸ Walsh, ‘*Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh*’, ll. 262–3.

This, of course, is what transpires and even though the ‘honour of Ulster’ has been upheld, it is a hollow victory for, in doing so Cú Chulainn has killed his only son and the final scene has the warrior and the other Ulstermen lamenting their great loss.

The killing of Conlae forms the main focus of this tale. The circumstances leading to his conception and birth are dealt with in summary form and the author may have assumed some familiarity with the general tradition on the part of his readers or audience. He does, however, supply the crucial information that Scáthach and Aífe were sisters.

The negative ending can be seen to represent a scathing criticism of the honour-based martial code of violence espoused by Cú Chulainn, and found in many other Irish tales. It most likely would have found resonance in a society in which violence among the nobility was not uncommon and which for long had been a matter of concern to the Church. From the promulgation of *Cáin Adamnáin* ‘the law of Adamnán’ in 679 AD, the Church introduced a number of measures aimed at establishing some order in a society in which violence was not uncommon,⁸⁹ and this was still a matter of concern in the twelfth century.⁹⁰ This concern seems to be the main focus of the negative message carried by *Aided Énfir Aífe* whose redactor moulded the tradition surrounding the death of Cú Chulainn’s son to suit the message he wished to deliver.⁹¹

⁸⁹ See D. Ó Corráin, ‘Ireland c. 800: aspects of society’, in *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 1, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. D. Ó Cróinín (Oxford, 2005), pp. 549–608, at pp. 582–4, and C. Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999), pp. 194–216.

⁹⁰ Measures against violence enacted by the twelfth-century Church are discussed by M. T. Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 171–84.

⁹¹ On the negative message encoded in *AÉA*, see Findon, *A Woman’s Words*, pp. 98–9.

Tochmarc Emire 1

The first version of *Tochmarc Emire*, which can be dated most probably to the eighth century,⁹² is incomplete and is missing most of the first section through a lacuna in the sole manuscript witness. Apart from that, Part 3 of the tale is recounted briefly and describes simply Cú Chulainn's return to Ireland, including neither his encounter with Derb Forgaill nor the episode in which Bricriu asserts Conchobar's right to sleep with Emer on her wedding night. Despite its imperfect transmission, what stands out as the most prominent feature of this tale is the multiplicity of relationships Cú Chulainn has with various different women. The first part concludes with a scene where both he and Emer vow to remain chaste during the period of their separation:

*Tingell cach di alaili a genass co comristais (TEm¹, ll. 23-4).*⁹³

They each promised the other to remain chaste until they should meet [again].

Cú Chulainn, however, fails to honour his undertaking and enters a downward spiral.

His first encounter is with Dornoll ('big fist') daughter of Domnall (*TEm¹*, ll. 29–32). She falls in love with him but Cú Chulainn refuses her advances. This probably did not require strong moral resistance on his part, as the text informs us that she was physically repulsive.⁹⁴ His second encounter is with Úathach who likewise falls in love with him and makes sexual overtures.⁹⁵ He initially rejects her – quite forcefully – but yields to her demands once she

⁹² See n. 16 above.

⁹³ I follow Meyer in translating *comrístais*, 3 pl. prototonic past subjunctive of *con-ricc*, in its basic meaning of 'meets', although in the present case it could also be translated in the meaning 'has intercourse with'; cf. E. G. Quin *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (compact edition, Dublin, 1976), s.v. *con-ricc*.

⁹⁴ *Batar morai a gluine. A sala reme, a traigt[h]i ina diaid. Ba hetig a delb* 'Large were her knees. Her heels (turned) before her, her feet behind her. Her shape was loathsome'. *TEm¹*, ll. 30–1.

⁹⁵ This, it should be noted, is with her mother's consent; *TEm¹*, ll. 62–88.

offers to betray her mother to him so as he will gain superior training in arms from Scáthach.

On forcing Scáthach to yield to his terms, Cú Chulainn enters a period in which he cohabits with Úathach. At this point the narrative switches back to Ireland. In Cú Chulainn's absence, Emer's father, Forgall Monach, attempts to have her marry a nobleman from Munster named in this tale as Lugaid Noes mac Alamaicc. When the wedding feast is arranged, Emer sits next to Lugaid and, holding him by both cheeks⁹⁶ and appealing to his honour, declares her love for Cú Chulainn. Lugaid then withdraws his suit (*TEml*¹, ll. 84–94).

The narrative then returns to Cú Chulainn who embarks on his momentous sexual encounter with Aífe (*TEml*¹, ll. 95–132). In this case it is Cú Chulainn who is the active instigator. Fighting on Scáthach's behalf, he engages the fearsome Aífe in combat. She initially gains the upper hand, but he diverts her attention, holds her by her breast, bundles her over his shoulder, then throws her to the ground, and, at sword point, forces her to grant him his three demands which are, that she should yield to Scáthach, sleep with him that night, and bear him a son (*TEml*¹, ll. 115–29).

The narrative thus has moved from Cú Chulainn's encounter and cohabitation with Úathach, to Emer's refusal to yield to Forgall Monach and marry Lugaid, before we return to Cú Chulainn's sexual encounter with Aífe. The juxtaposition of these incidents in the tale, in close proximity to each other, can hardly be fortuitous, and it serves to highlight and to contrast the behaviour of Emer with that of Cú Chulainn. He is willing to ignore the solemn promise he made to Emer and sleeps with Úathach in order to gain advantage over Scáthach. He then forces himself on Aífe to gain further advantage. Emer, on the other hand, remains true to her promise, even to the extent of going against her father's will.

⁹⁶ For the association of the cheeks with one's honour, see Quin, *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, s.v. *gruad*.

Before exploring the significance of this, we should address a question that arises out of the relationship *Tochmarc Emire I* has to *Aided Énfir Aífe*. In *Tochmarc Emire I*, Cú Chulainn's violent encounter with Aífe is fully described, but the instructions he leaves for his unborn son are given with the minimum of detail:

Asbert si iarum ba torrach. Asbert dana ba mac nobereith 7 aratised dochum n-hErend dia secht mbliadan 7 fuacaib ainm do. (TEM¹, ll.130–2)

She said she was pregnant. He said she would give birth to a son and that he should come to Ireland in seven years and left a name for him.⁹⁷

We note that there is no mention of the two injunctions Cú Chulainn places on the as-yet-unborn child, nor is there any mention of the thumb-ring he leaves as a token of recognition. Just as the redactor of *Aided Énfir Aífe* would appear to have a differing account of the nature of Cú Chulainn's encounter with Aífe from that in *Tochmarc Emire I*, so also the redactor of the latter text gives an account of Cú Chulainn's parting instructions not as complete as that found in *Aided Énfir Aífe*. It may well be that the redactor of *Tochmarc Emire I* was unaware of the details of this account, in particular the motif of the thumb ring, and that he simply knew of a tradition that Cú Chulainn was fated to kill the son he had by Aífe. If this is the case, then the fuller details given in *Aided Énfir Aífe*, which is of a later date, would represent a further development in the tale in which the ring motif has been introduced.⁹⁸

Returning to *Tochmarc Emire I*, how might we interpret the tale's focus on marriage and sexual relations? Sexual union is an area on which Irish law

⁹⁷ Meyer's translation attributes the second sentence to Aífe, but Cú Chulainn clearly is the one who leaves the instructions for his son.

⁹⁸ This might be an argument in favour of this particular motif having being borrowed into Irish from an external source at a point in time later than the redaction of *TEM¹*. *AÉA* is not included in the medieval tale-lists and while this might also be taken as a sign that the tale was not well known at the time the lists were compiled, it may also be that its absence is merely through chance. See P. Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), p. 66. *Tochmarc Emire*, on the other hand, is found in all these lists.

has a lot to say. The question was a rather vexed one in Irish as in other societies. We know that polygamy was widely practised by the Irish nobility and that this practice endured down to the fall of the Gaelic order in the seventeenth century.⁹⁹ To take one example from the fourteenth century, Toirdhealbhadh an Fhíona O'Donnell, Lord of Donegal, had eighteen sons by ten different women, and quite probably an unknown number of daughters through relationships that may have involved further sexual partners.¹⁰⁰ While perhaps a somewhat extreme case, multiple unions of this nature were evidently quite common in Irish society but, quite crucially, were regulated by law.

This practice brought native custom into conflict with the ordinances of the Church and a degree of tension is evident in the early Irish laws, framed in a Christian environment. A frequently-cited passage in *Bretha Crólige*, a legal text of the eighth century, states:

ar ata forcosnam la Féne cia de as techtta in nilar comperta fa huathad. ar robattar tuiccsi de i (n)nilar lanamnusa, connach airissa a caithiugud oldas a molad.

there is dispute in Irish law as to which is the more proper, whether many sexual unions or a single one for the people of God lived in a plurality of unions, so that it is not easier to condemn than to praise it.¹⁰¹

Strict church ordinance and native practice were clearly at odds and the ambivalence noted in the passage just cited can be found elsewhere.¹⁰² The

⁹⁹ I use the term 'polygamy' to refer to multiple marriages or sexual relationships, not necessarily engaged in simultaneously. On the application of this term to early Irish society, see A. Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy: women and marriage in late pre-Norman Ireland', in *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century. Reform and Renewal*, ed. D. Bracken and D. Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin, 2006), pp. 106–27, at p. 110.

¹⁰⁰ On this, see the genealogy of his family published by P. Walsh in *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill. The Life of Aodh Ruadh O Domhnaill*, 2 vols, Irish Texts Society 42 and 45 (London, 1948 and 1957), vol. 2, pp. 168–71. See also K. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages* (second edition, Dublin, 2003), pp. 12, 83–7. On some marriages of the Irish nobility in the period preceding the Norman invasion, see A. Candon 'Power, politics and polygamy'.

¹⁰¹ D. A. Binchy (ed. and transl.), 'Bretha Crólige', *Ériu* 12 (1938), pp. 1–77, at 44–5 (§57).

¹⁰² See also Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p. 315.

Church, however, strove to end this practice although it endured until the seventeenth century. A somewhat amusing obit from the Annals of Connacht notes the death in 1233 of a certain Aodh Ó Conchobhair, son of Ruaidhrí, former king of Ireland, who was the last of his progeny. The annalist notes with some satisfaction:

Deod flaithesa clainni Ruaidri h.Conchobair Rig Erenn ann sin. Uair tarcaid in Papa cert ar Erinn do fein ⁊ da sil 'na diaid co brath & seser do mnaib posta ⁊ scur do pecad na mban o sin amach, ⁊ o nar gab Ruaidri sin do ben dia rigi ⁊ flaitheus dia sil co brath a ndigaltus pecaid na mban.

Here ends the rule of the children of Ruaidrí Ó Conchobair, King of Ireland. For the Pope offered him the title to [the kingship of] Ireland for himself and his seed for ever, and likewise six wives, if he would renounce the sin of adultery henceforth; and since he would not accept these terms God took the rule and sovranty from his seed for ever, in punishment for his sin.¹⁰³

Despite Church stricture or special concessions such as those of the kind noted by the annalist, native custom, which was embedded in law, proved difficult to change.

The main law tract that deals with marriage, *Cáin Lánamna*, recognises nine forms of union, ranging from a marriage between two social equals through marriages in which the man or woman is the main provider in the household through a variety of other less-formal, sometimes tangential, but nonetheless regulated unions, down to union arising out of rape.¹⁰⁴ As Fergus

¹⁰³ Freeman, *The Annals of Connacht*, s.a.1233.3.

¹⁰⁴ Edited with German translation by R. Thurneysen in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, ed. D. A. Binchy (Dublin, 1936), pp. 1–80 and, with an English translation, by C. Eska in *Cáin Lánamna. An Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law*.(Leiden and Boston, 2010). *Cáin Lánamna* has been dated to the eighth century by D. Ó Corráin ‘Cáin Lánamna (The Law of Couples) (c. 700)’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, 4. Women’s Writing*, ed. A. Bourke et al. (New York, 2002), pp. 22–6, at p. 22. and by Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, pp. 61–2. For a discussion of marriage in Irish law see also D. Ó Corráin, ‘Marriage in early Ireland’, in *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. A. Cosgrove (Dublin, 1985), pp. 5–24, F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 70–5 and B. Jaski, ‘Marriage laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the early middle ages’, in *The Fragility of her Sex. Medieval Irish Women in their European Context*, ed. C. E. Meek and M. K. Simms (Dublin, 1996), pp. 16–42.

Kelly observes, some of these unions cannot in any way be described as marriage.¹⁰⁵ While the need to have protection for the personal and economic rights of a couple involved in a stable long-term union is apparent, one may ask why native Irish law also felt the need to regulate liaisons that arose through violence or were otherwise of a transitory nature. The answer must be because such encounters, however short-lived, could result in offspring, and with offspring came responsibility for maintenance, rights of inheritance and other issues that required legal regulation.

Looking, then, at Cú Chulainn's encounters in these texts through the lens of this legal system, we find a number of striking features. His first encounter is with Úathach. After he initially has refused her, she entices him by betraying to him how he can gain advantage over her mother:

Dobert iarom ind ingen comarli do Coinchulaind dia tress lau, ma bu denam læchthachtaí dolluid, arateissed dochom Scathchai magen a m-buí oc forcetal a da mac .i. Cuar 7 Cet ar in corad ich n-erred isind ibardoss mor i m-boi si, 7 si foen and, conidfurmuð eter a da cich cona chlaideb contardaud a trí indrosc do .i. a forcetal cin díchell 7 a hernaidm-si co n-icc a tindsrae 7 epert ind neich aritmbuí, ar ba faith si dana (TEM¹, ll.74–81).

Then on the third day the maiden advised Cú Chulainn, that if he had come thence to learn chivalry he should go to Scáthach in the place she was instructing her two sons, Cuar and Cet, and that he should make a salmon-leap into the yew tree in which she reclined and that he should place his sword between her two breasts until she should give him his three wishes, namely, that she should teach him without neglect, that she should betroth her [Úathach] to him with payment of bride-price and that she should tell him what awaited him for she was a prophet.

We may note that the terms *ernaidm* and *tinnsrae*, used of betrothal and dowry respectively in this passage, belong to the legal glossary and refer to a

¹⁰⁵ *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 70. While the terms *lánamain* and *lánamnas* are translated 'married couple' and 'marriage' respectively and clearly cover such concepts, the basic meaning of the latter would appear to be 'sexual union'. See Quin, *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, s.vv.

formalised union.¹⁰⁶ When Cú Chulainn has extracted his wishes from Scáthach he enters a period in which he lives in *munteras* ‘cohabitation’ with Úathach.¹⁰⁷

The world of Úathach and Scáthach, however, is quite different from the Ireland of Cú Chulainn. It is one that is dominated by a female warrior-class; no mention is made of Scáthach’s spouse or Úathach’s father, and in the absence of any senior male kinsman, Cú Chulainn is allowed to cohabit with Úathach, without having to pay her *tinnsrae*, or dowry, a reversal of what was a central part of any formal marriage contract in the Irish legal system, that is, in order to marry, the prospective husband should pay a bride-price to his spouse’s kin. Scáthach, moreover, is willing to allow Úathach to lie with Cú Chulainn before any ‘formal’ betrothal is contracted, something that again would be alien to Irish marriage legislation. Úathach, for her part, engages in unnatural behaviour by her willingness to betray and to put her mother in mortal danger in order to gain Cú Chulainn’s favour. No issue comes of the union between Úathach and Cú Chulainn, however, and after living with her for a period the Ulster warrior moves on to his next entanglement.

His violent encounter with Aífe cannot be understood as anything but a union brought about through violence and under duress. There would seem little to distinguish it from a *lánamnas éicne* ‘union through rape’. Were this encounter consensual, as a foreigner in this land, a *cú glas*, he would be exempt from parental responsibility which then would fall to the child’s mother. Where a child is begotten due to rape, however, Irish law ordains that it falls to the father to maintain his offspring, and moreover that recompense should be paid

¹⁰⁶ On these terms, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 71–2 and Jaski, ‘Marriage laws’, pp. 22–7. The most common word for ‘dowry’ in the laws is *coibche* and while *ernaídm* (*airnaídm*) is also found, it is predominantly used in sagas and wisdom texts: Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 72, n. 30.

¹⁰⁷ *Munteras* in this text refers to the state of being in a sexual partnership with somebody. This is the term Cú Chulainn uses in demanding a sexual encounter with Aífe; cf. *TEM*¹, 1. 127.

to the woman's legal superior.¹⁰⁸ In this society, however, Aífe has no legal (male) superior, and the laws governing sexual encounters, consensual or otherwise, clearly do not function in this land.

Cú Chulainn's union with Aífe, even though it results in progeny, is not regulated. He fails to take responsibility for the child's maintenance and to acknowledge it properly. It is this failure that results in the tragic outcome of the tale. Where unregulated union leading to the birth of offspring takes place it can lead to a course of events that break certain societal taboos. If the offspring is female, then it is possible that the father and his unacknowledged daughter can meet at some future point in an incestuous encounter. If the offspring is male, then father and son can meet in a violent encounter that leads to one of them committing *fíngal* 'kin slaying', one of the most heinous crimes recognised in Irish law.¹⁰⁹ This, of course, is the outcome of our tale.

The land in which Cú Chulainn thus found himself is one in which the normal order of society obtaining in Ireland is overturned. Warlike women, unencumbered by male figures of authority and devoid of any familial loyalty, live in a social system in which the laws of marriage or sexual union do not function. Cú Chulainn's entanglement with such people who are of licentious disposition and unnatural behaviour leads to personal and societal disaster for him. This outcome, in short, serves to exemplify the precept expounded in proverbs such as the German *heirate über den Mist, so weißt du, wer sie ist*, the Irish *níl cleamhnas is fearr rath ná cleamhnas na luaithe*, or the English 'better wed over the mixen than over the moor' which teach that one is better off marrying a neighbour whose background and lineage are known and whose demeanour should reflect the morals of the society to which she and her spouse

¹⁰⁸ See Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 85, 135.

¹⁰⁹ On *fíngal*, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 127–8. Indeed, the nature of the *fíngal* perpetrated by Cú Chulainn's forms the topic of discussion in the legal commentary (G); for the legal issues at the heart of this text, see further Breatnach 'Law and literature'.

belong, than to marry a stranger from a distant land whose ways are likely to be alien.

Tochmarc Emire 2

The second recension of *Tochmarc Emire* (*TEm*²) represents a major rewriting and revamping of the Old Irish tale. As has been pointed out elsewhere,¹¹⁰ it embodies most of the extant text of *Tochmarc Emire 1* with little or no change, but in addition to this it also contains the opening section (§§1–55), most of which has been lost in our only extant copy of *Tochmarc Emire 1*, and has a greatly extended third section, containing a prophetic poem uttered by Scáthach, the *Verba Scáthaige*,¹¹¹ the *Derb Forgaill* episode (*TEm*² §§80–4), and the incident towards the end where Bricriu invokes Conchobar's rights under *ius primae noctis* (*TEm*² §§88–90). Apart from this, it is written in a far more expansive style and contrasts greatly with the simple, almost laconic, prose of *Tochmarc Emire 1*.¹¹²

Its language, or at least the language of the sections not taken directly from *Tochmarc Emire 1*, is far more modern than that of the latter text and clearly belongs to the Middle Irish period.¹¹³ Moreover, it shows extensive glossing. There also are some divergences in detail between *Tochmarc Emire 1* and the corresponding text in *Tochmarc Emire 2*.¹¹⁴ One of the more interesting

¹¹⁰ See Thurnseisen, *Heldensage*, pp. 378–9; Toner, 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 83–4, and G. Mac Eoin, 'The dating of Middle Irish texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1983), pp. 109–37, at pp. 122–3.

¹¹¹ A version of this poem, totalling some 33 lines, is found immediately after the text of *TEm*¹ in Rawlinson B 512, and evidently was considered to be part of the tale. The version in *TEm*² has 80 lines and like the additional material in *TEm*² appears to be of a later date. Its expansion can probably also be dated to the redaction of *TEm*². On this, see R. Ó hUiginn, 'Zu den politischen und literarischen Hintergründen der *Táin Bó Cuailnge*', in *Studien zur Táin Bó Cuailnge*, ed. H. L. C. Tristram (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 133–57, at pp. 152–4.

¹¹² On this, see Meyer, 'The oldest version of *Tochmarc Emire*', p. 437 and Toner, 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 78–9.

¹¹³ See Toner, 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 83–4.

¹¹⁴ For a list of the main differences, see Meyer, 'The oldest version of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 437–8

of these is the fact that *Tochmarc Emire 2* gives a full account of the injunctions placed by Cú Chulainn on his son. It mentions the name (*Conlae*) he wished him to have, and furthermore refers to the thumb ring he left as a token of identification (*TEm²* §76). These details, not given in *Tochmarc Emire I*, accord with the account given in *Aided Énfir Aífe* (§1) and suggest either that for this part of his narrative the redactor¹¹⁵ of *Tochmarc Emire 2* had access to a version of *Aided Énfir Aífe* or that both derive ultimately from a common source, a source that clearly was not *Tochmarc Emire I* as it has been transmitted to us.

The textual history of *Tochmarc Emire 2* is not uncomplicated. Our earliest manuscript witness for it is *Lebor na hUidre*, a manuscript that is dated to the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. This witness, however, is incomplete due to the loss of four leaves and lacks §§27–78 and §§83–6 of the full text as found in other manuscripts. In addition, §§1–26 is in the hands of two scribes: §§18–27 is in the hand of the scribe known as H who most probably belongs to the earlier part of the twelfth century,¹¹⁶ while §§1–18 is in the hand of scribe M, identified as Mael Muire mac meic Cuind na mBocht whose death is recorded in 1106.¹¹⁷ Toner's comparison of the text in *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU*) with that preserved in other manuscripts shows that in some instances *LU* has readings that are inferior to those found in later manuscript versions of the same tale.¹¹⁸ *LU* cannot therefore represent the original text of

¹¹⁵ I use the term in the singular, although it is possible there may have been more than one person involved in redacting *TEm²* as it has been transmitted to us.

¹¹⁶ In a forthcoming volume of the proceedings of a conference held in Dublin in November 2012, (*Studies on Lebor na hUidre*, ed. R. Ó hUiginn, forthcoming, Dublin, 2014), Elizabeth Duncan has argued that the hand in *LU* hitherto assigned to H may represent the work of a number of scribes, while Liam Breatnach, at the same conference, assigned the work of this scribe, or scribes to the first third of the twelfth century, on linguistic grounds. Pending the publication of the conference proceedings, podcasts of these and other lectures together with the handouts used may be accessed at <http://www.ria.ie/library/exhibitions/lebor-na-huidre-conference.aspx>. Most of the remaining section of the text in *Lebor na hUidre*, i.e. §§78–92 (*LU*, ll. 10325–56), is also in the hand of scribe H.

¹¹⁷ See R. I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre. Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929), pp. x–xii. The section in the hand of M also shows some interventions by scribe H.

¹¹⁸ 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 83–4

Tochmarc Emire 2, the composition of which we must place somewhat earlier than the late eleventh or the very early twelfth century, at which time scribe M would have been active. Thurneysen,¹¹⁹ followed by van Hamel,¹²⁰ considered the opening section of the tale, as found in the hand of *LU*'s scribe M, to be part of *Tochmarc Emire I*, but Toner has argued against this on grounds of language and style. His comparison of this section with the surviving part of *Tochmarc Emire I* shows that they are quite different and he concludes that this section of *LU* text also must belong to the Middle Irish period.¹²¹

In addition to many other Middle-Irish developments in evidence in the language of *Tochmarc Emire 2*, one of the more prominent features we may note is the rather extensive use of independent pronoun objects, a development that would appear to have arisen in the literary language in the course of the eleventh century.¹²² Most of these independent pronoun objects, it is true, occur in sections of the text that are missing in *LU*, and are therefore found only in later manuscripts where it could be argued that they were introduced during a long period of transmission. Against this, they appear in all manuscript copies of the tale, a fact that suggests they were in their exemplar. Furthermore, we have one example of an independent pronoun object which occurs in the opening section of the tale found in *LU* (in the hand of scribe M), and as this is also found in the other manuscript witnesses it must therefore have been in the original text of *Tochmarc Emire 2* from which all our manuscripts derive.¹²³

¹¹⁹ *Heldensage*, p. 380.

¹²⁰ *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, p. 16.

¹²¹ 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', pp. 78–9.

¹²² See Toner, 'The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*', p. 85. On the development of the independent pronoun as object, see L. Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', in *Stair na Gaeilge in Ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta*, ed. K. McCone, D. McManus, C. Ó Háinle, N. Williams and L. Breatnach (Maynooth, 1994), pp. 221–333, at pp. 271–2. The earliest instance of an independent pronoun as object in the Annals of Ulster is found in the entry for 1099; see T. Ó Máille, *The Language of the Annals of Ulster* (Manchester, 1910), p. 180.

¹²³ *ar ro charsat a mná 7 a n-ingena co mór hé* 'for their wives and daughters loved him greatly', *LU*, ll. 10159–60. Note that other manuscripts show an infixed pronoun in addition to the independent pronoun object, e.g. *ar rascarsat a n-ingena ocus a mna co mor he*

The presence of such a feature in this text suggests that its compilation took place at a point in time not very much anterior to the period in which scribe M was active.¹²⁴

The gathering of Rawlinson B 512 in which the sole copy of *Tochmarc Emire I* survives states that it was taken from the now-lost book of Dub Dá Leithe.¹²⁵ The Dub Dá Leithe after whom this book was named has been identified with the abbot and *fer léigind* of Armagh in the years 1049–64 AD.¹²⁶ As we have noted, *Tochmarc Emire I* was one of several sources used by the compiler of *Tochmarc Emire 2*, and if a copy of this text was present in Armagh in the mid-eleventh century, it is quite possible that this was the copy used by the redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2*, who may even have been based in that location.¹²⁷ However we evaluate information such as this, ascribing a date in the mid-eleventh century to *Tochmarc Emire 2* would not conflict with the linguistic evidence. This text would subsequently have been used by the scribes of *LU* and of the other manuscripts in which *Tochmarc Emire 2* is found.

At this juncture we should also consider the relationship between *Tochmarc Emire 2* and the later *Foghlaim Con Culainn*. As we have pointed out

Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, Manuscript 23 N 10, p. 22, ll. 12–13. For this usage, see Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, p. 272.

¹²⁴ Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 381, assigns *TEm*² to the twelfth century, but for the reasons we have discussed, this seems somewhat too late.

¹²⁵ See Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts*, p. 247. Meyer states that the reference to this book which occurs at the beginning of the tale *Baile in Scáil* in Rawlinson B 512 be taken to refer to all the following texts in the gathering. This, however, need not necessarily be true. For a brief discussion of this issue with further references see Toner, ‘The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*’, p. 81, n. 56.

¹²⁶ Meyer, ‘The oldest version of *Tochmarc Emire*’, p. 437.

¹²⁷ That this is not an altogether improbable scenario is shown by the fact that we know that scribes of *LU* made use of manuscripts that originated in Armagh; cf. *LU*, ll. 2919–22 and M. Herbert, ‘Crossing historical and literary boundaries: Irish written culture around the year 1000’, in *Crossing Boundaries. Croesi Ffiniau. Proceedings of the XIIth International Congress of Celtic Studies 24-30 August 2003, University of Wales Aberystwyth*, ed. P. Sims-Williams and G. A. Williams, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 53/54 (2007), pp. 87–101, at pp. 90–7. Oskamp goes so far as to suggest that the writing of *LU* may have commenced in Armagh or in one of the other centres associated with sources to which its scribes refer. See H. P. A. Oskamp, ‘Notes on the history of *Lebor na hUidre*’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 65C (1966–7), pp. 117–37, at p. 122.

above, *Foghlaim Con Culainn* represents a modernised form of the second part of *Tochmarc Emire 2*. In addition to modernising the language of his exemplar, however, its redactor made numerous changes to his text, the most noteworthy of which is the omission of the entire first section and with it any reference to Emer. As such, it no longer represents a *tochmarc*, or tale of wooing, but rather a tale of adventure that concentrates on Cú Chulainn's adventures in the eastern world and the events that lead to the birth of his ill-fated son, here called Connlaoch. We have noted that the compiler of *Tochmarc Emire 2* makes reference at several stages to alternative versions of the tale being available to him. It is possible that the redactor of *Foghlaim Con Culainn* had access to one or more of such alternatives, and made use of them in the modernised tale he was creating. We presently will have cause to refer to certain incidents in *Foghlaim Con Culainn* that may have their source in one of these alternative versions.

As was the case with *Tochmarc Emire I*, the most pronounced aspect of *Tochmarc Emire 2* is the multiplicity of sexual relationships Cú Chulainn has. In this narrative, however, the number of such relationships is increased. He journeys initially to the fort of Domnall where he is subject to the attentions of his daughter, Dornoll, a woman whose hideousness is described in even more graphic detail, in keeping with the expansive language of this recension (*TEm*² §60). Thereafter he travels to Scáthach's encampment.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ At this point (*TEm*² §67) the text informs us that other versions of the tale recount that he was met on arrival by a group of Irish warriors who were learning martial skills from Scáthach, namely, Fer Diad son of Damán, Naísi son of Uisneach, Loch Mór son of Egomas, Fíamain son of Foroi and others. *FCC* (§14) refers to his being met at this point simply by four Irishmen. The earliest manuscript copy of the tale, however, names them as Naoise, Áinle and Ardán, the three sons of Dubh son of Conghal Chláiringneach and Fear Diadh son of Damhán son of Dáire (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Gaelic manuscript 72.1.38, p. 120). At a later stage (*FCC* §57), the text enumerates a list of Irishmen who likewise were training with Aoife: Fear Diadh son of Damhán, Fer Démain son of Damhán, Naísi son of Uisneach and Fraoch Fáil son of Fidach, Lóit [*sic leg.* Lóch] mór son of Mogh Febis, and Fergus son of Lua. A somewhat different list of names is given at this point in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Gaelic manuscript 38, p. 128. On his return to

Also in this recension of the tale he attracts the attentions of Úathach, but refuses her advances quite violently, an incident that leads to his engaging in combat and killing a certain Cochuir Cruibne, Scathach's champion (*TEm*² §69). By offering to betray her mother to him and telling him how he can gain advantage over her, Úathach seduces Cú Chulainn. The terms he subsequently exacts at sword point from Scáthach are the same as those recounted in *Tochmarc Emire I*. At his stage, however, reference is made to an alternative tradition:

Is ed áirmit araili slecchta and so co ruc Cú Chulainn Scáthaig isin trácht les 7 co comránic fria and 7 cor cotail ina farrud (TEm² §71).

What other versions here relate is that Cú Chulainn brought Scáthach to the shore with him, and there had intercourse with her and slept with her.

The tradition that Cú Chulainn also slept with Scáthach is reflected in *Foghlaim Con Culainn*. The terms sought of Scáthach by Cú Chulainn in that tale are as follows:

na tri cleasa ata ugad nach tucais do duine riamh romham 7 cairdeas do sliasda 7 inghean fós (FCC §48).

the three feats you have which you have not given to anyone before me, and the 'friendship of your thighs' and also your daughter.

The narrative in *Foghlaim Con Culainn* then continues:

Agus do gheall Sgáthach na comhthoigh soin uile dhó 7 dorad sí na tri cleasa dho 7 dobhi ar feis laimhe 7 leaptha ag an inghin an oidhche sin, 7 dobhi cairdes slíasda ón ríoghain aige o soin amach: agus do an go cenn bliadhna na fochar (FCC §49).

And Scáthach promised him all of these rewards, and she gave him the three feats; and on that night he had the festival of hand and bed with the girl, and from the queen

Ireland, *TEm*² tells us he was accompanied by Lugaid and Lúan, the two sons of Lóch, Fer Bóeth, Láirin, Fer Diad and Drust son of Serb (*TEm*² §80).

he had thenceforward ‘the friendship of thighs’. And he remained in her company till year’s end.

Foghlaim Con Culainn thus agrees with the variant tradition, alluded to in *Tochmarc Emire 2*, that Cú Chulainn also had a sexual relationship with his teacher, Scáthach, and is in all likelihood based on such a variant version of the tale.¹²⁹

Tochmarc Emire 2 proceeds to relate Cú Chulainn’s encounter with Aífe. In this case the instructions he leaves for his son are given in their entirety and agree with the version related in *Aided Énfir Aífe*.¹³⁰ As in *Tochmarc Emire I*, however, his encounter with Aífe is violent, while *Aided Énfir Aífe* agrees with the later tradition in describing it as one born of love. Again, as in *Tochmarc Emire I*, the narrative shifts to Ireland and to Forgoll Monach’s failed attempt at having Emer marry Lugaid mac Nóis, an episode that is recounted at a point in the text between Cú Chulainn’s encounters with Úathach and with Aífe (*TEm*² §§72–3).¹³¹

A new element is introduced towards the end of *Tochmarc Emire 2*. This involves his meeting with Derb Forgaill in the Hebrides and his subsequent tryst with her in Ireland. On his return to Ireland, having failed for a year to gain access to Emer due to her being closely guarded by Forgoll Monach, he goes to keep his assignation with Derb Forgaill. We have seen that this incident has been introduced into *Tochmarc Emire 2* from the opening part of the tale *Aided*

¹²⁹ In *FCC* the champion whom Cú Chulainn slays after his encounter with Úathach is named as Cat, the son of Scáthach. After killing and decapitating him he presents his head to his mother, whereupon he is invited into Scáthach’s bed chamber where she tends the wounds of her son’s killer (*FCC* §42). This serves yet again to underline the unnatural behaviour found among the denizens of the world in which Cú Chulainn finds himself.

¹³⁰ We may note, however, that there are small differences in the wording of both versions.

¹³¹ The contrast between Emer’s encounter with Lugaid and that of Cú Chulainn with Aífe may be marked rather more subtly in this recension. Emer, mindful of her pledge to Cú Chulainn, holds Lugaid by his two cheeks and appeals to his honour to withdraw his suit (*TEm*² §73). The errant Cú Chulainn, on the other hand, holds Aífe by her two breasts as a prelude to having a violent sexual encounter with her (*TEm*² §76).

Lugdach ocus Derb Forgaill, which has been dated to the tenth century.¹³² As it stands, the latter tale forms an entirely coherent narrative. We are told that Derb Forgaill, daughter of the king of Lochlainn, fell in love with Cú Chulainn on hearing of his fame and came to visit him. The motif of ‘love through repute’ is not uncommon in early Irish literature and in this case forms a satisfactory opening to the tale, setting the scene for Derb Forgaill’s visit to Ireland.¹³³ The redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2*, however, wished to make use only of the first part of this tale and in order to do so, has removed the reference to the motif of ‘love through repute’ and has embedded the episode in his narrative by making it a sequel to Cú Chulainn’s sojourn with Rúad.

This episode is not found in *Tochmarc Emire I*, but a variant version occurs in the later *Foghlaim Con Culainn*. In the latter tale, Cú Chulainn, on his return journey to Ireland, visits the kingdom of Fir Chait¹³⁴ and saves the daughter of the local king, who are named Aoife and Aodh Rúadh respectively, from the clutches of the three Formorian kings to whom she is to be given in payment of tribute. In gratitude, Aodh Rúadh offers his daughter in marriage to Cú Chulainn and he sleeps with her that night.¹³⁵ After remaining with her in that kingdom for more than a month, he returns to Ireland where he receives a great welcome.¹³⁶ Finally, the episode in which Bricriu invokes King

¹³² On the date of this tale, see Ingridsdotter *Aided Derbforgaill*, pp. 64–6. This tale differs from *TEm*² in the small detail of casting Derb Forgaill as daughter of the king of Lochlainn.

¹³³ On this, see W. Meid (ed. and transl.), *Die Romanze von Froech und Findabair. Táin Bó Fraích* (Innsbruck, 1979), p. 82, note on *ara irscélaib* l. 7. *AÉA* (§1) also states that Aífe fell in love with Cú Chulainn in this manner. See further, M. A. O’Brien, ‘Etymologies and notes’, *Celtica* 3 (1956), pp. 168–84, at p. 179, no. 17 *grád écmaise*.

¹³⁴ In the north of Scotland; cf. Hogan *Onomasticon* s.v. *Inse Cait* (Shetland islands), *Cait* (Caithness).

¹³⁵ *FCC* §§70–1.

¹³⁶ It is possible that this part of *FCC* is a development of the Derb Forgaill episode as it has been transmitted to us in *TEm*². On the other hand, there may have been a variant version of *TEm*² which had Cú Chulainn consummate his relationship with Derb Forgaill/Rúad’s daughter while abroad, instead of making a tryst with her as he does in *TEm*², and that this tradition is reflected in *FCC*. A poem by Maoileachlainn na nUirsgéal Ó hUiginn beginning ‘Créad táraid treise Chonnacht’ refers to a girl named Bé Tuinne who is presented as the daughter of Cú Chulainn and Aoife. The Aoife in question is unlikely to be the mother of

Conchobar's right to sleep with Emer on her wedding night, is not found in *Tochmarc Emire I* and must also have been introduced by the redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2*.

This redactor was clearly intent in adding to the list of encounters Cú Chulainn had between the time he departed from his prospective wife and the time they finally marry. To the two encounters found in *Tochmarc Emire I*, two more have been added, that with Scáthach, and that with Derb Forgaill. His inclusion of the *ius primae noctis* episode at the end of the tale further betrays an interest in relationships and marriage customs obtaining among the Irish. I believe it is possible to associate this central thrust of *Tochmarc Emire 2* with certain issues that were of importance in ecclesiastical circles in Ireland at the time of its redaction which, we would suggest, may have been roughly the middle of the eleventh century.

We should look in the first place at those with whom Cú Chulainn has these encounters. *Tochmarc Emire 2*, or at least one of its variant versions referred to in the body of the tale, gives us to understand that Cú Chulainn had sexual relations not only with Úathach but also with her mother Scáthach. There is yet another family dimension to his entanglements. In neither *Tochmarc Emire I* nor in *Tochmarc Emire 2* are Scáthach's or Aífe's patronymics given. *Aided Énfir Aífe* (§1) informs us, however, that they were *Scáthach Ūanann ingen Airdgeme* and *Áife ingen Airdgeme*. Scáthach and Aífe therefore were sisters. Cú Chulainn sleeps not only with Úathach, but also with her mother, Scáthach, and then forces himself on her aunt, Aífe. The introduction of such an

Conlae, as *FCC* (§§52–3) informs us that Cú Chulainn left her once she announced she was pregnant (with Conlae). In the light of this, our reference seems to be to another tradition whereby Cú Chulainn had another child by Aoife, daughter of King Rúad. This poem has been edited and discussed by Gordon Ó Riain – to whom I am grateful for the reference – in an unpublished doctoral thesis: 'Ceithre dhán le Maol Eachlainn na nUirsgéal Ó hUiginn: eagrán criticiúil', University College Dublin (2008), pp. 147–67 and 173–83. Another edition can be found in D. McManus and E. Ó Raghallaigh (eds), *A Bardic Miscellany* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 157–9.

entanglement into the text, I would suggest, was a deliberate and pointed intervention by the ecclesiastic who redacted it.

The marital customs of the Irish nobility were a matter of concern not only to the Church in Ireland but also were increasingly becoming so to external ecclesiastics who commented on them. In his well-known letter to Guthric, king of Dublin, in 1073/74 Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury remarks:

In regno uestro perhibentur homines seu de propria seu de mortuarum uxorum parentela coniuges ducere, alii legitime sibi copulatas pro arbitrio et uoluntate relinquere, nonnulli suas aliis dare et aliorum infanda communitatione recipere. Haec et siqua sunt alia crimina propter Deum et animam uestram in terra potestatis uestrae corrige iubete.

There are said to be men in your kingdom who take wives from either their own kindred or that of their deceased wives; others who by their own will and authority abandon the wives who are legally married to them; some who give their wives to others and by an abominable exchange receive the wives of other men instead. For the sake of God and your own soul command that these offences and any others like them be corrected throughout the land which you rule.¹³⁷

Similar issues are to the forefront in a further letter he wrote to Tairdelbach ua Briain, king of Munster, around the same time. After praising the king for his Christian rule, he turns to the matter in hand, marriage practices that were contrary to Church teaching:

Verum inter multa quae placent relata nobis sunt quaedam quae displicent: uidelicet quod in regno uestro quisque pro arbitrio suo legitime sibi copulatam uxorem nulla canonica causa interueniente reliquit et aliam quamlibet, seu sibi uel relicte uxori consanguinitate proprinquam siue quam alius simili improbitate deseruit maritali seu fornicaria lege punienda sibi temeritate conjungit ... Haec omnia et siqua sunt similia contra euangelicam et apostolicam auctoritatem, contra sanctorum canonum prohibitionem, contra omnium orthodoxorum patrum qui nos precesserunt fieri institutionem nullus qui sacras litteras uel mediocriter legit ignorant.

But among many things which are commendable certain reports have reached us which are quite the opposite: namely, that in your kingdom a man abandons at his

¹³⁷ *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and transl. H. Clover and M. Gibson (Oxford, 1979), pp. 68–9.

own discretion and without any grounds in canon law the wife who is lawfully married to him, not hesitating to form a criminal alliance – by the law of marriage or fornication – with any other woman he pleases, either a relative of his own or of his deserted wife or a woman whom somebody else has abandoned in an equally disgraceful way ... No one who has the least familiarity with Christian learning in unaware that all these abuses and others like them are contrary to the Gospels and to apostolic teaching, that they are prohibited by canon law and are contrary to what has been established by all the orthodox fathers who have gone before us.¹³⁸

Diatribes such as these from Lanfranc and other clerics are directed not only at the Irish customs of polygamy and divorce, but also at of the nature of the relationships the Irish formed in taking ‘wives from either their own kindred of that of their deceased wives’ or to ‘form a criminal alliance ... with any other woman he pleases, either a relative of his own or of his deserted wife’.

Here, the Archbishop is pointing to marriage within one’s own kin in violation of the Church laws of consanguinity and marriage to a member of his wife’s kin, or the wife of a family member, which violated Church teaching on affinity. Affinity arises out of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman as a result of which the man is understood to have become related to the woman’s blood relatives and the woman to those of the man.¹³⁹ As with the related concept of consanguinity, this led to prohibitions on marriage within affinal groups. Strictures regarding affinal relationships are already found in the Old Testament,¹⁴⁰ and developed in the course of time through various Church councils and decrees which extended the degrees of affinity to which the prohibition applied. Marriages made in transgression of these rules were seen as incestuous.

This question loomed large in the Church’s dealings with the nobility in various European countries, many of whom struggled with the ecclesiastical

¹³⁸ *The Letters of Lanfranc*, ed. Clover and Gibson, pp. 70–4.

¹³⁹ On affinity, see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross, third revised edition by E. A. Livingstone (Oxford, 2005), s.v.

¹⁴⁰ Lev. 18:18.

ruling on an issue that impinged in no small way on their lives.¹⁴¹ In these matters, Ireland was no exception, although such church rulings were treated with less respect in the Irish legal system than might have been the case elsewhere. That affinity was a matter of concern to the Irish church in the eleventh century may be gauged not only from communications such as those of Lanfranc, but more concretely from the fact that the Synod of Cashel (1101 AD) would appear to have legislated for it.¹⁴² This evidently continued to be an issue of contention between the Irish nobility and the Church for many centuries afterwards.¹⁴³

Viewed this time through the prism of canon law, the type of the liaisons Cú Chulainn formed with various different women would have been repugnant, not only because of their unregulated and polygamous nature, but also because they involve his having sexual relations with three members of the one kin-group, daughter, mother and aunt. In the society in which *Tochmarc Emire 2* was redacted, such liaisons would have been in flagrant violation of Church strictures on affinity. *Tochmarc Emire 2* was written in an ecclesiastical centre during a period in which the marriage practices of the Irish nobility, in violation of the self-same ordinances of the Church, were subject to severe reproach and were very much a live issue in clerical circles.¹⁴⁴ Concerns such as these cannot have been far from the mind of the cleric who redacted the second recension of *Tochmarc Emire* as he adapted, added to and recast the Old Irish text.

¹⁴¹ C. B. Bouchard, 'Consanguinity and noble marriages in the tenth and eleventh centuries', *Speculum* 56 (1981), pp. 268–87, Flanagan, *Transformation of the Irish Church*, pp. 184–95, and Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy'.

¹⁴² On this, see D. Ó Corráin, 'The Synod of Cashel 1101: conservative or innovative', in *Regions and Rulers in Ireland c. 1100–c. 1650: Essays for Kenneth Nicholls*, ed. D. Edwards (Dublin, 2004), pp. 13–19.

¹⁴³ See A. Cosgrove, 'Marriage in medieval Ireland', in *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. A. Cosgrove (Dublin, 1985), pp. 25–50.

¹⁴⁴ On the question of marriage in the twelfth century, see further Flanagan, *Transformation of the Irish Church*, pp. 184–95.

Such issues, I suspect, also moved him to weave the *Derb Forgaill* episode into *Tochmarc Emire 2*. In this incident, Cú Chulainn, having failed for a year to gain access to Emer, keeps his tryst with Rúad's daughter, *Derb Forgaill*¹⁴⁵ who arrives at Loch Cúan (Strangford Lough) in the form of a bird.¹⁴⁶ Having been brought down by Cú Chulainn's slingshot, she assumes human form and Cú Chulainn sucks the stone he cast at her from her body:

Súigis Cú Chulainn in cloich esti cona loim fola impe.

'Ní comricciubsa festa frit,' ol Cú Chulainn, 'ar atibus t'fuil. Do bér cena domdaltu sund .i. do Lugaid Reo nDerg. (TEM² §84)

Cú Chulainn sucks the stone out of her with some of her blood around it.

'I cannot mate with you now', said Cú Chulainn, 'for I have drunk your blood. I will give you to my foster-child, i.e. to Lugaid Reo nDerg'.

Cú Chulainn's bestowal of Lugaid on *Derb Forgaill* and their subsequent fate is dealt with in far greater detail in *Aided Lugdach ocus Derb Forgaill*, the tale from which this passage is taken.¹⁴⁷ The redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2*, however, appears to be interested only in Cú Chulainn's liaison with *Derb Forgaill* and how it comes to an end, and ignores the remainder of *Aided Lugdach ocus Derb Forgaill*.

The consequence of Cú Chulainn drinking some of *Derb Forgaill*'s blood must be that they have become consanguinous, and that any sexual relationship between them would consequently be seen to be incestuous. Whatever original

¹⁴⁵ The name *Derb Forgaill* means 'daughter of Forgaill'. On the etymology of *Der* in personal names, see O'Brien, 'Notes and etymologies'. It is unlikely, however, that the etymology of *Der(b)* would have been transparent to the redactors of either of the tales who cast *Derb Forgaill* as the daughter of the king of Lochlainn (*ALD*) or otherwise of Rúad, king of the Hebrides (*TEM²*), neither of whom is named Forgaill.

¹⁴⁶ On going to meet Rúad's daughter, Cú Chulainn remarks to his charioteer, Lóg: *Is indiu ... ro dáilsemair fri hingin Rúaid, acht ná fetamar, in n-inad n-áirithe ar ní gáeth ro bámar* 'it is today that we have arranged to tryst with Rúad's daughter, but we don't know the specific place, for we were not wise' (*TEM²* §83). I take his reference to his not being wise to refer to the arrangement he has made *in toto*, and not just his failure to designate their place of meeting.

¹⁴⁷ Marstrander, 'The deaths of Lugaid and Derbforgaill', p. 208.

belief system this particular marriage taboo may have arisen from,¹⁴⁸ the redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2* clearly saw advantage in adapting this incident to include in his narrative. The most likely reason for his doing so, it seems to me, was that it provided a striking parallel to the teaching on consanguinity and affinity being preached by the Church. Just as the relationship between Cú Chulainn and Derb Forgaill could not be consummated due to the fact they had become ‘one blood’, so also affinal relationships which in the eyes of the Church were tantamount to being consanguinous presented a similar impediment and should likewise be shunned.

It may seem strange that Cú Chulainn should balk at sexual contact with Derb Forgaill, given the extent of his activities prior to this point, but his return to Ireland marks a new departure in his behaviour. On terminating his liaison with Derb Forgaill, he attacks the encampment of Forgaill Manach and takes Emer with him by force. Forgaill dies while trying to flee from Cú Chulainn’s wrath.¹⁴⁹ Although he finally is now with Emer, a further obstacle is placed in his way when Bricriu asserts the king’s right to sleep with Cú Chulainn’s wife on their first night in accordance with the custom known as *ius primae noctis* or *droit de seigneur*.¹⁵⁰ Evidence for this custom in early Irish society is not at all copious. Apart from this reference in *Tochmarc Emire 2*, it also is mentioned in connection with Conchobar in the late compilation *Scéla Conchobair meic*

¹⁴⁸ Hodges argues somewhat implausibly, in my view, that it arises from the presence of a ‘blood-covenant’ among the early Irish: see J. C. Hodges, ‘The blood covenant among the Celts’, *Revue Celtique* 44 (1927), pp. 109–53.

¹⁴⁹ It should be noted that he does not die at Cú Chulainn’s hands, but falls over the rampart of his fort while fleeing. Although Cú Chulainn wreaks havoc on Forgaill’s fort, killing many of its occupants in the process, he makes sure that he spares Emer’s three brothers (*TEM*² §86).

¹⁵⁰ Bricriu is cast as a notorious trouble-maker in the Ulster Cycle, as his epithet *nemthenga* ‘bile-tongued’ suggests, and his invoking of *ius primae noctis* in this tale is totally in keeping with his character. In this case there seems to be a reluctance on the part of King Conchobar mac Nessa to engage in the practice, not least because of Cú Chulainn’s anger, but the druid, Cathbad, points out that the king is bound by injunction (*geiss*) to do so after it is enjoined on him by Bricriu. (*TEM*² §§88–90).

Nessa.¹⁵¹ It is mentioned in other, later, sources and traditions concerning its practice in the lordships of medieval Ireland have endured in folk-memory, but evidence such as this is difficult to evaluate.¹⁵² Writing in the seventeenth century, Geoffrey Keating excoriates many Irish kings and lords for their adulterous lives, claiming that the Norman Invasion and loss of the high-kingship of Ireland by the native Irish were God's punishment on the Irish for such practices.¹⁵³ He points the finger in particular at the twelfth-century king, Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair, who seems to have had quite a reputation in these matters:

*Óir léagthar ar Ruaidhrí Ó Conchubhair nachar lór leis seisear leannán do bheith aige gan a thoil féin do bheith aige ar gach mnaoi 'na dhúthaigh 'na gcuirfeadh dúil, gémadh pósta nó neamhphósta do bhiadh sí.*¹⁵⁴

For it is read about Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair that six mistresses were not sufficient for him and that he would have to have his way with every woman in his kingdom whom he desired, regardless of whether she were married or not.

The practice of *ius primae noctis*, whether widespread or otherwise, would have been seen as part of the sexual licence enjoyed by kings such as Ó Conchubhair and other members of the Irish nobility and was something that would have drawn clerical censure.

In *Tochmarc Emire 2*, however, a settlement is reached whereby two senior male figures in the king's household also spend the night with Emer and Conchobhar so as to protect Cú Chulainn's honour, and the practice is thus circumvented. The following day, Conchobar pays Emer's bride-price

¹⁵¹ Stokes, 'Tidings of Conchobar mac Nessa', p. 24 (§9).

¹⁵² On this, see S. Mac Philib, '*Ius primae noctis* and the sexual image of Irish landlords in folk tradition and in contemporary accounts', *Béaloides* 56 (1988), pp. 97–140.

¹⁵³ The abhorrent marriage customs of the Irish are referred to by Pope Alexander III, in his letter of 1172 to King Henry II, approving the latter's claim to the Lordship of Ireland. See F. J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', in *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 2, *Medieval Ireland*, ed. A. Cosgrove (Dublin, 1993), pp. 1–42, at pp. 41–2.

¹⁵⁴ *Trí Bior-ghaoithe an Bháis. The Three Shafts of Death by Geoffrey Keating, D.D.*, ed. O. Bergin (second edition, Dublin, 1931), ll. 5466–70.

(*tinndscrai*) and Cú Chulainn is paid his honour-price (*eneclann*).¹⁵⁵ Cú Chulainn sleeps with Emer and, with honour satisfied and the marriage carried out in accordance with native law, the tale concludes by stating they remained together thereafter until death (*TEm*² §90).¹⁵⁶ The redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2* has rewritten the tale, making it a parable suitable for the concerns of his own time. In doing so, he has built on the narrative found in *Tochmarc Emire I* and added to it judiciously and skillfully by excerpting and weaving passages from other texts into it, passages that were relevant to the message he wished to convey.

Tochmarc Emire, *Aided Énfir Aífe* and their associated texts form a complex and powerful tale that was narrated, sung, written and rewritten many times. That its central motif of kin-slaying (carried out unwittingly) is also found in several other literary traditions is testimony to the power this motif had to inspire wonder and awe among different peoples at different times. I have argued that marriage or sexual union is a central focus of *Tochmarc Emire*. This reading, however, does not preclude its being read and understood at other levels or other elements of its complex composition being foregrounded, as doubtless was the case during its long life. Nor does it preclude its having been enjoyed by many audiences simply as a good, if unsettling, story.¹⁵⁷ I would hold that this particular complex of tales provided a powerful vehicle to convey separate but related messages at different periods. At its heart lies the issue of unregulated union, especially with people from far outside the immediate

¹⁵⁵ As Findon notes: ‘the fact that Conchobar himself pays her *tinnsra* (bride-price) when the couple are eventually wed both highlights the unusual nature of their union and, at the same time, brings the marriage back within the parameters of law and custom. In paying Emer’s bride-price, the Ulster King is acting in place of her dead father and in the process legitimizing the union’: *A Woman’s Words*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁶ This seemingly happy ending, however, is tempered by the fact that Cú Chulainn is fated to kill his only son.

¹⁵⁷ For other interpretations of this tale see Joseph Baudiš, ‘On *Tochmarc Emere*’, *Ériu* 9 (1921–3), pp. 98–108, and Doris Edel, *Helden auf Freiersfüßen. ‘Tochmarc Emire’ und ‘Mal y kavas Kullhwch Olwen’: Studien zur frühen inselkeltischen Erzähltradition* (Amsterdam, 1980).

societal group, whose licentiousness and unnatural behaviour is emphasised. *Tochmarc Emire I* can be seen as a negative exemplary tale warning against such liaisons and the possible consequences thereof. In the course of time, however, this tradition was adapted and rewritten by the redactor of *Tochmarc Emire 2* to exemplify specific concerns felt by churchmen about marriage practices among the Irish nobility in the eleventh century, when such practices had become a prominent issue. The negative message of *Tochmarc Emire* would not have been lost on a contemporary audience of such people.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Some of the arguments I have advanced in this lecture have appeared in R. Ó hUiginn, 'Cú Chulainn and Connla', in *(Re)oralisierung* ed. H. L. C. Tristram (Tübingen, 1996), pp. 223–46, and id., 'Rómánsaíocht agus Rúraíocht: ceisteanna faoi fhorás an traidisiúin', *Éigse* 32 (2000), pp. 77–87. I am grateful to Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Professor Paul Russell and the other members of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic for inviting me to give the Fifteenth E. G. Quiggin Memorial Lecture in November 2012 and for the hospitality extended to me while I was in Cambridge. I am furthermore grateful to Dr Ní Mhaonaigh and Professor Russell for their extensive comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Needless to add, I alone bear responsibility for opinions that have been presented in it, as I do for any remaining errors.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AÉA* *Aided Énfîr Aífe*: K. Meyer (ed. and transl.), ‘The death of Conla’, *Ériu* 1 (1904), pp. 113–21.
- ALD* *Aided Lugdach ocus Derbforgaill*: C. Marstrander (ed. and transl.), ‘The deaths of Lugaid and Derbforgaill’, *Ériu* 5 (1911), pp. 201–18.
- FCC* *Foglainn Con Culainn*: W. Stokes (ed. and transl.), *Foglainn Con Culainn* ‘The training of Cú Chulainn’, *Revue Celtique* 29 (1908), pp. 109–52, 312–14.
- LU* *Lebor na hUidre. Book of the Dun Cow*. R. I. Best and O. Bergin (ed.) (Dublin, 1929).
- OC* *Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh*: P. Walsh (ed.), ‘Oidheadh Chonnlaoidh mic Con gCulainn anso síos’, in *Éigse Suadh is Seanchaidh* (Dublin, 1910), pp. 13–28, 59–71.
- TBC-LL* *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: C. O’Rahilly (ed. and transl.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967).
- TEm¹* *Tochmarc Emire*: K. Meyer (ed. and transl.), ‘The oldest version of Tochmarc Emire’, *Revue Celtique* 11 (1890), pp. 433–57.
- TEm²* *Tochmarc Emire*: A. G. van Hamel (ed.), ‘Tochmarc Emire’ in *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories* (Dublin, 1933), pp. 16–88.

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