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Master thesis

Through the Lens of the Beast

Animal Transformations, the Progression of Time, and their Relation to Perceived Cultural Shifts in Medieval Irish Literature

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Abstract

This thesis primarily focuses on the motifs of animal transformations and the progression of time as they appear in medieval Irish literature. While scholars have previously written in depth about each motif as an individual study, I have endeavoured to address both in tandem. In this pursuit I have identified three criteria which I have determined to be essential for the purpose of selecting texts for my analysis. Firstly, there must exist the presence of atleast one animal transformation present within the text. Secondly, there must be some clear example of the progression of time being present. This thesis addresses that due to the function of time in relation to the Tuatha Dé Danann, this progression of time can be seen to be both endured and manipulated in relation to which group of people it is applied to. Lastly, the presence of some form of cultural shift occuring within the narrative must be present. Together these criteria contribute to my overall argument that when an animal transformation is featured in combination with the preogression of time, it is a conscious effort by the texts author to display perceived cultural changes occurring within the country of Ireland itself. By looking back at the rapidly shifting cultural landscape of Ireland, these authors used these transformations to convey what was occurring over hundreds of years through an easily digestible narrative for future readers.

The introduction of this thesis describes the methodology employed throughout the textual analysis. Furthermore, it establishes how time is typically displayed in medieval Irish literature, specifically in the case of the Irish Otherworld and Tuatha Dé Danann. Lastly it gives a brief overview of the tremendous changes that medieval Ireland was experiencing at the time these texts were being written. The second chapter covers the characters of Fintan mac Bóchra and Tuán mac Cairill as they are found in the texts *Lebor Gabala Érenn, Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* and *The Hawk of Achill.* Through the animal transformations of these characters, parallel cultural shifts in Ireland can be found in regards to the transition towards Christianity. This theme is found also in the third chapter where the characters of Fionnghuala and Lí Bán are discussed. Their presence in *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* and *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* respectively, highlight the Christian virtue of fortitude and importance of baptism, while conveying perceived shifts in regards to the decline of pagan religious practice and rise of Christianity. The fourth chapter solely addresses the characterisation of Étaín as she is presented in *Tochmarc Étaíne.* As a woman of sovereignty and through her animal transformations, she demonstrates the tumultuous nature of medieval Irish kingship.

Foreword

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Kristen Mills, Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, for her unwavering guidance and mentorship throughout the process of completing this project. I am forever grateful for all the energy and insights that she has invested into my work, as well as her support in advancing my academic career.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The transformation from man to beast is a theme common to a vast number of cultures throughout recorded history. As such, attempting to place a definite meaning behind these transformations would be an impossible task. However, by narrowing the scope of these animal transformations to one single culture, certain trends can be observed to inform readers as to what deeper meanings were intended by the respective text's author. For the purpose of this thesis, I have limited the scope of my research to animal transformations found solely within Ireland. While arguments could certainly be drawn to suggest that Ireland's animal transformations were a result of external influences such as the Indo-European tradition, this falls outside of my focus. The aim of this thesis is not to pinpoint the origin of animal transformations within Ireland; rather by analysing texts that share a similar skeleton, I will demonstrate my theory as to how medieval Irish authors used these transformations in particular. In regards to my theory, there are three specific criteria which I have isolated as being essential for incorporating select texts within the framework of my argument. Primarily, the texts which will be used must feature the usage of at least one or more animal transformations. Relating to the second, there must be some distinguishable passage of time present within the narrative, regardless of whether it functions normally or is manipulated; more on this below. Lastly, these texts must demonstrate a parallel to some form of cultural shift that had taken place within Ireland. These cultural shifts do not need to be contemporary to when the text was written, nor do they need to pertain to any historical event in particular. Together these criteria form the foundation of my argument; that when animal transformations were used in conjunction with the passage of time in medieval Irish literature, distinct cultural shifts within the narrative can be observed. These cultural shifts have meaning that go beyond the story being told, as they often parallel real changes that were occurring within Ireland. It can therefore be said that Ireland's learned, looking back on the island's ancient history, used animal transformations as a vehicle to convey real shifts that developed over the span of hundreds of years.

Keeping in mind the criteria listed above, there are a select number of texts which will be included over the span of three chapters to properly demonstrate my argument. While the text as a whole will be discussed in the analysis of each chapter, emphasis will be given to select passages that highlight the usage of time, animal transformations and cultural shifts. The first chapter will focus primarily on the texts *Lebor Gabála Érenn, Hawk of Achill,* and

Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill. While the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* will serve as the primary source of analysis, the prominence of the characters Fintan and Tuán found in the *Hawk of Achill* and *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* respectively, necessitate further discussion of these texts. Through this chapter, Fintan and Tuán will be shown to be characters who endure for thousands of years while assuming a variety of animal forms. By the end of each of their lives, these characters are displayed as having developed into saintly clerics and sources of ancient history. These texts together will display cultural shifts in regards to the Christianisation of Ireland, the process of how man came to Ireland, as well as how Ireland's pagan past remains relevant in a post-Christianised society.

The second chapter will consist of two sections discussing *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* and *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* respectively. The former text will highlight the suffering of the children of Lir as swans over the course of nine hundred years. As will be shown, *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* begins with the prominence of the Tuatha Dé Danann. However, as the children endure their curse, the strength of their race fades from Ireland and is replaced by the newly emerging Mílesians who worship the new Christian God. Likewise, *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* also features a character cursed to exist in animal form following the death of her family. In both texts, all of the characters ultimately find salvation by pronouncing their faith in God. By enduring tremendous hardship, these characters experience death at the end of the narrative but are likewise rewarded with salvation. Similarly to the previous chapter, the cultural shifts here can be seen as the transition from Ireland's pagan past towards its conversion.

The final chapter of this thesis will cover the text *Tochmarc Étaíne*. As the apparent cultural shifts within this text differ more drastically than those covered in previous chapters, more emphasis will be given to historical accounts and proceedings within Ireland rather than analysing multiple primary sources. While the cultural shifts within *Tochmarc Étaíne* can be said to apply to the decline of the Tuatha Dé Danann, it more accurately parallels shifts in dynastic kingship that frequently made the borders of Ireland's many kingdoms tumultuous during the medieval period.

Having given a brief overview of what the bulk of this thesis will focus on, the remainder of the introduction will now be used to briefly discuss the way time is typically understood and displayed within medieval Irish literature, as well as some of the major changes that were occurring over time on the island. While these brief sections may feature example texts which contain within them one or more of the criterion I have laid out above,

their failure to include all three is what ultimately prevents them from being included in the body of this thesis.

1.1 Otherworldly Time

In medieval Irish literature, time can often be observed as being inconsistent and operating differently from one text to another. This idea is discussed by John Carey in two of his articles, namely *Time, Memory, and the Boyne Necropolis* and *Time, Space, and the Otherworld.* While these two articles both primarily focus on the passage of time in the Otherworld, the dwelling of the Tuatha Dé Danann after their retreat from Ireland, it is nonetheless the case that individuals who have no connection to this realm often find themselves there through various, and sometimes peculiar, means. It is through these brief sojourns into the Otherworld that some of Ireland's most prominent and iconic stories take form. In these tales, members of the Tuatha Dé Danann are often shown to not abide by the passage of time and the symptoms that come with it, whereas humans must endure it. An example of this can be found in *Laoi Oisín an Tír na n-Óg,* where the character of Oisín is brought to the land of the Tuatha Dé Danann by his Otherworldly patron and lover, Niamh.[1] Though he lives the next few years in total bliss, he inevitably longs for home, and after being permitted to leave, Oisín journeys back to Ireland. However, upon returning to his homeland, it is different from when he had last laid his eyes upon it. To Oisín, he had only felt the passage of a few years while in the Otherworld, stating:

> "Do chaitheas tréimhse fada, cian
> Trí cheud bliadham is dóigh 's ní as mó
> Gur smuain mé féin go mb'e mo mhian
> Fionn 's an Fhiann d'fheicsin beo."
>
> [Long lived I there as now appears
> Tho' short the years seemed e'er to me,
> Till a strong desire of my heart took hold
> Finn and my friends of old to see.][2]

[1] Micheál Coimín, *Laoi Oisín an Tír na n-Óg or The Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth,* Ed. Tomás Ó Flannghaile (London: City of London Book Depot, 1896), pp. 9-15.
[2] Coimín, *Laoi Oisín an Tír na n-Óg,* pp. 56-57.

The reality was that being in the Otherworld had obscured the passage of time and that more than three hundred years had passed since he had last been amongst his companions.[3] Unlike Niamh and the rest of her kindred, Oisín was susceptible to the passage of time; therefore after falling from his horse, the three hundred years that had eluded Oisín caught up to him, ultimately proving to be fatal.[4] Stories such as *Laoi Oisín an Tír na n-Óg* demonstrate the dichotomy between the Tuatha Dé Danann and humans in regards to time within Ireland's literary tradition, as well as how time is seemingly manipulated in the eyes of the characters involved.

This apparent time manipulation found in the Otherworld is due to a phenomenon which John Carey refers to as the "eternal present." For Carey, "Timelessness and eternity are qualities fundamental to the Irish conception of the realm of the *síd*-dwellers; and the early literature is full of tales which exploit the temporal anomalies of the Otherworld."[5] Though the passage of time is quite ordinary when written in regards to mankind, the intrinsic connection the Tuatha Dé Danann seem to share with time and eternity demonstrates a conscious effort to highlight something entirely out of the ordinary when the long passage of time affects them. Returning to the thoughts of Carey, he notes that time functions differently within the Otherworld; thus, those that inhabit it are typically able to perceive it, yet also operate outside its constraints.[6] Within *Baile In Scáil,* the mortal Conn finds himself within the court of the Irish pre-Christian deity Lugh. Conn, as a human, is only able to perceive Lugh and the female embodiment of sovereignty; however Lugh, operating outside the constraints of time, is able to see and proclaim all of the future kings of Ireland succeeding Conn up until the reign of Ireland's final ruler.[7] The text *Immram Brain,* likewise, provides a narrative which demonstrates the Tuatha Dé Danann operating outside the natural progression of time. While crossing over the sea, Bran is approached by the god Mannanán mac Lir. Over the span of a number of quatrains, Manannan conveys that what Bran was experiencing as a vast ocean; he himself sees as large fields full of blossoming flowers, fruit, and wildlife. Through these poems, it is revealed that, unlike mankind, the Tuatha Dé Danann, and by extension the Otherworld, are untouched by original sin, and as a result, do

[3] Coimín, *Laoi Oisín an Tír na n-Óg,* 67.
[4] Coimín, *Laoi Oisín an Tír na n-Óg,* pp. 75-77.
[5] John Carey, "Time, Memory, and the Boyne Necropolis" in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol. 10* (Harvard University, Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures, 1990), 28.
[6] John Carey, "Time, Space, and the Otherworld" in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol. 7* (Harvard University, Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures, 1987), 8.
[7] "Baile In Scáil 'The Phantom's Frenzy'" in *Irish Texts Society Vol. 58,* Ed. Kevin Murray (Dublin: Brunswick Press Limited, 2004), pp. 51-67.

not tarnish as a result of time.[8] However, while the Tuatha Dé Danann often demonstrate their transcendence over time, in certain narratives they can also feel and be negatively impacted by its passage.

In all of the subsequent texts under analysis, the progression of time will be demonstrated to be something that is inherently connected to the characters involved. While some of these figures are of the human race, and therefore expected to suffer the ravages of time, the majority are either members of the Tuatha Dé Danann or of a race of people much older. Considering Ireland's rich literary culture that features the timeless nature of their pre-Christian deities, it is unsurprising when these characters express their immortality. However, when these characters are affected by its passage, it must be seen as something that is intentionally inserted into the narrative by the author, and therefore deserving of analysis. This begs the question as to what these authors were attempting to convey through their unique application of time? Just as Oisín returns to an Ireland unrecognisable to him over the course of three hundred years, I maintain that when the progression of time is either manipulated or applied to characters who should otherwise be immune to it, it alludes to parallel shifts that were truly occurring over extended periods of time in Ireland.

1.2 An Era of Change

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an in-depth analysis encompassing all of the major changes that occurred within Ireland throughout the medieval period, it must nonetheless be emphasised just how tremendous these changes were. From as early as the fourth century, Ireland began to experience cultural shifts in regards to both people and religion. As time progressed, the native traditions of Ireland, in combination with foreign and newly emerging ideas such as Christianity, would lend itself towards the creation of a rich literary tradition that is reflective of the cultural landscape it was developed in. While I do not presume to directly link any of the texts under analysis with any particular historical event or cultural shift, I maintain a firm stance that each text is representative of various cultural shifts occurring in Ireland as a whole.

Beginning with the Christianisation of Ireland, Lorcan Harney writes that the new religion began to emerge relatively around the collapse of the Late Roman Empire. While

[8] Séamus Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain: Bran's Journey to the Land of the Women* (Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen, 1985), pp. 51-53.

Rome never occupied Ireland like it did Britain, Harney notes that the Empire's influence was still present on the island and can be seen through archaeological sources relating to Late Iron Age burial customs, ritual practices and elite paraphernalia.[9] Christianity was present in Ireland in the earliest years of the fifth century and may have entered into the country through British slaves or through small communities of converts who were exposed to the influences of Roman Britain.[10] While Ireland was not yet entirely converted, it nonetheless supported enough converts for Pope Celestine I to send Palladius as Ireland's first Bishop in 431 AD.[11] From this point, the religion continued to grow in prominence, and by the beginning of the sixth century, Christianity had become legally established as a privileged order. With this development came monasticism, Latin education, and ecclesiastical learning.[12] By the seventh century, Christianity had become the predominant religion within the country as it was fully embraced by Ireland's societal institutions and hierarchy.[13] From around 700 AD, pagan divinities began to appear within Irish literature. However, as Mark Williams notes, this emergence began roughly three hundred years after the conversion process of Ireland, and therefore these stories were written by Christians.[14] These characters are inherently recorded through a Christian lens, and, as a result, the narratives are laced with Christian motifs and parallels.

Theological shifts were not the only major changes occurring in Ireland in the medieval period. In a similar fashion to the rest of what is now known as the British Isles, Ireland began to experience Norse raids and eventual settlement. Else Roesdahl breaks down the history of the Norse in Ireland into four distinct sections spanning from 790 AD until the invasion of the English Normans in 1170 AD.[15] As Roesdahl discusses, while the first stage of interaction between the Norse and Irish consisted of rapid coastal raids on monasteries and other centres of wealth, by the end of the Viking age, the Norse had become fully integrated

[9] Lorcan Harney, "Christianising pagan worlds in conversion-era Ireland: archaeological evidence for the origins of Irish ecclesiastical sites" in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature , Vol. 117C* (2017), 103.
[10] Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 4.
[11] Harney, "Christianising pagan worlds in conversion-era Ireland: archaeological evidence for the origins of Irish ecclesiastical sites," 103.
[12] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 4.
[13] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 4.
[14] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 5.
[15] Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings,* Second Edition, trans. Susan M. Margeson & Kirsten Williams (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 221-222.

within the Irish community. Norse towns, such as Dublin, flourished, and the production of goods strengthened the Irish economy while also influencing the country's art.[16]

The interaction between, and melding of Norse and Irish culture is also visible within their respective written literature. Sources such as the Irish *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* and Icelandic *Brennu-Njáls saga* share a similar narrative regarding the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 AD, ultimately demonstrating the historical repercussions resulting from interactions between both people. More will be written on the rise of Brian Boru later, but for now it is only of note that after becoming overking of Ireland, his death is recorded within the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh.* While praying for his warriors in his tent during the battle, Brian is approached by an Earl of the invaders named Brodar who delivers a lethal strike.[17] This Brodar, known in *Brennu-Njáls saga* as Bróðir, is similarly stated to have beheaded Brian Boru during the battle.[18] Brennu-Njáls saga was almost certainly written much later than the events recorded within the narrative, as linguistic changes in the text support its assumed date of around 1280 AD.[19] However, as James Henthorn Todd discusses, the author of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* was potentially Brian Boru's own chief poet, or at the very least a partisan of the king who experienced the Battle of Clontarf first-hand.[20] These recordings demonstrate the learned's recognition that the Norse presence in Ireland was directly shifting the island's balance of power. This notion is one that also seeps into Ireland's mythological literature. John Carey suggests that within *Cath Maige Tuired* the actions of the Fomorians who oppress and fight the Tuatha Dé Danann are written by the author to parallel the Viking activity in Ireland in the latter half of the ninth century.[21]

From these examples it is clear that Ireland's ancient authors were aware that the rise of Christianity and the presence of Norse invaders were fundamentally changing the culture of Ireland. Due to this, the changes that were impacting Ireland should be kept in mind when addressing any text from that period, as the authors would convey these real-life changes behind the veil of the narrative.

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[16] Roesdahl, *The Vikings,* pp. 222-227.
[17] *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill Or, The Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and Other Norsemen,* trans. James Henthorn Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 203.
[18] *Njál's Saga,* trans. Carl F. Bayerschmidt & Lee M. Hollander (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), pp. 348-349.
[19] Haraldur Bernharðsson, "Copying *Njál's saga* into One's Own Dialect: Linguistic Variation in Six Fourteenth-Century Manuscripts" in *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga,* ed. Emily Lethbridge & Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 126.
[20] *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh,* pp. xix-xxvii.
[21] John Carey, *Myth and Mythography in Cath Maige Tuired* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1989), 60.

Chapter 2: Lebor Gabála Érenn

Due to the sheer amount of animal transformations undertaken by Tuán mac Cairill and Fintan mac Bóchra as well as the clear endurance of thousands of years during their inhuman lifetimes, my analysis will commence with the texts they are found in, particularly the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* hereafter *LGE*. *LGE* is a late eleventh century text which was constructed, as Mark Williams suggests, "in order to bridge the chasm between world-chronology and the prehistory of Ireland."[22] As he goes on to explain, the learned in Ireland by this time had a wealth of knowledge regarding their own people's origin on the island, and yet the Bible which was the primary source for all ancient history, failed to make mention of anything to do with the migration of man to the island of Ireland.[23] Thus, *LGE* corroborated what was revealed through scripture while blending the ancient traditions and stories of Ireland's pre-Christian past. This view, that there was a need for some form of bridge to connect the ancient native traditions of Ireland with incoming Christian values, often found in the form of Fintan and Tuán, is shared by a number of other scholars. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta proposes that "Fintan is the divinely inspired link between Irish *senchas* and the Christian message. He helps to unite the Irish Old and the Christian New Testaments."[24] Similarly to and much earlier than Williams, Eleanor Hull describes the following medieval Irish problem: that if only eight individuals were said to have survived the great flood, and none of them settled in Ireland, then how was the ancient history of the island pre-dating the arrival of the so-called Milesians passed down? The conclusion she presents to this, as one might have been expected, is through the invention of characters such as Fintan and Tuán.[25]

Moving on to the discussion of Fintan and Tuán themselves, what is immediately compelling is that despite their inclusion within the *LGE,* the majority of what is presented regarding their animal transformations comes from external sources. In these texts they serve as vessels, delivering the ancient history of Ireland to listeners in the age in which the text was written.[26] As these characters impart their wisdom and experience, it is revealed that they

[22] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 130.
[23] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* pp. 130-131.
[24] Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, "Migratory Legends in Medieval Irish Literature: Third Response to Dáithí Ó hÓgáin's Paper" in *Legends and Fiction: Papers Presented at the Nordic-Celtic Legend Symposium (*Folklore of Ireland Society, 1992/1993), 91.
[25] Eleanor Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals" in *Folklore Vol. 43 No. 4* (Taylor and Francis Ltd., 1932), pp. 386-387.
[26] Vessels, as I intend the term to be used throughout the remainder of this thesis, refer to characters who serve as the vehicle to deliver perceived cultural shifts within the respective texts they belong to. These cultural shifts can pertain to changes in people and/or religion.

both respectively share the common theme of transforming into a variety of animal shapes as the denizens of Ireland are recycled and replaced. Though much of the contextual information regarding these characters is found externally, their inclusion within the *LGE* cannot be ignored. If Williams' hypothesis is correct, then the inclusion of Fintan and Tuán within its pages demonstrates an apparent view that their experience is essential for bridging the myths of Ireland's ancient past with the unquestionable scripture of medieval Christian belief. Therefore, the *Hawk of Achill* as well as the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* will be included in this analysis as a means to supplement the greater cultural significance that these characters hold within the *LGE.*

Beginning with Fintan mac Bóchra, he is recorded in the *LGE* as being one of the first people to arrive in Ireland along with Cessair, the invented granddaughter of Noah who, barred from entering the ark, follows the advice of her grandfather and flees to a land untarnished by earthly sin.[27] Their efforts are entirely in vain however, as all succumb to the deluge save for Fintan who is able to transform into a salmon and survive beneath the water, making him the eldest ancient witness to all that occurs in Ireland.[28] While the salmon is not directly mentioned within the *LGE,* it is nonetheless stated by Fintan within a stanza of one of the poems that:

> "Bliadain dam fo díland
> i Taul Tuinne tend;
> ní fuaras dom tomaltus
> aen-chodlad bud ferr."
>
> [I had a year under the Flood
> in strong Tul Tuinde;
> I found nothing for my sustenance,
> an unbroken sleep were best.][29]

This at the very least leaves room for the salmon transformation to be assumed by readers. Furthermore, the sage like quality Williams attributes to Fintan after surviving the flood seems to be expressed by Fintan himself where later into the same poem he states:

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[27] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 131.
[28] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* pp. 131-134.
[29] *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland Part II,* Ed. Steward Macalister (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 1939), pp. 210-211.

"Missi Fintán find
mac Bochna, ní chél;
d'éis na dílend sund
am sruith úasal ér,."

[I am Fintan the white
son of Bochna, I shall not conceal it;
after the flood here
I am a noble great sage.][30]

This is significant as later into the *LGE,* it is described: "Is emilt trá anadh frí an aisnes seo huile cen a comfis cia ro comet in senchus-sa" [But it is disheartening to linger over this recital, without knowing who preserved this history]. To this, it is said that "Ocus ro comet Findtan mac Labrada *qui dicitur* Mac Bochrai, bai bliadain fó dílinn, 7 ro mair in gach aimsir co táncatar na naeib" [Fintan s. Labraid, *qui dicitur* s. Bochra, preserved it—he who was a year under the Flood, and who survived in every age till the coming of the Saints.][31]

Drawing solely from *LGE* it is clear that Fintan was depicted as an individual possessing immense knowledge as well as an inhuman lifespan. This makes him a perfect vessel to carry forward perceived cultural shifts occurring in Ireland overtime, as his characterisation maintained the knowledge and lifespan to oversee these changes. The presentation of these shifts take form in the poem *The Hawk of Achill,* which is preserved through the early-sixteenth-century Book of Fermoy.[32] The text itself revolves around a conversation being had between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill, who to mutual surprise, are the exact same age. Together, they recall all that they had seen and experienced throughout their long lives in Ireland, beginning with Fintan's escape from the flood by becoming a salmon. Over the course of the conversation, Fintan reveals the various other animal forms in which he assumed, including that of an eagle and a hawk, before being granted human form by God. Finally, as a man, Fintan served as the chief judge for many great kings up until the arrival of Patrick in Ireland.[33] In response to Fintan, the hawk recalls his own stories and

[30] *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland Part II,* pp. 214-215.
[31] *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland Part V,* Ed. Steward Macalister (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 1956), 225.
[32] Eleanor Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals" in *Folklore Vol. 43 No. 4* (Taylor and Francis Ltd., 1932), 392.
[33] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," pp. 389-390.

repents for the ill deeds he committed, to which Fintan offers forgiveness and the hawk is promised heaven.[34]

Taking an analytic view of the text, it is clear that the relationship shared between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill is one that can be described as antagonistic in nature. Throughout the narrative, Fintan conveys a plethora of hardships he endured throughout his long lifetime. As each is discussed, it is revealed that the hawk was either responsible for, or at least contributed to, the sorrow that Fintan experienced. In the earliest of these occasions, Fintan conveys how after escaping the incoming flood and experiencing the loss of his beloved wife by becoming a salmon, he subsequently suffers the loss of one of his eyes at the hands of a crow that "came out of cold Achill."[35] Unsurprisingly to the reader, the Hawk of Achill chimes in that it was he himself who was responsible for the theft of Fintan's eye, and after a brief debate regarding whether or not the hawk should provide compensation, Fintan ultimately takes the moral high ground and moves on from the transgression.

> "Searb a cana a mir-eóin móir
> binne cach fethim co fóill
> do-ghén-su osa mé is míne
> comrádh ar mo choimdíne"[36]
>
> [Harsh is thy chant, O great wild bird,
> Sweeter than all to wait a while,
> Since it is I who am the gentler,
> I will talk with thee about thy contemporaries.][37]

This exchange offers an interesting insight which can be taken from within the text. Fintan is a character who was born in a time much earlier than the birth of Christ. Thus, it would be expected for him to present ideals pertaining to the Old Testament. However, reflecting on the loss of his eye, Fintan decidedly follows a path more closely in line with the teachings of Christ. In the book of Matthew, it is expressed:

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[34] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," 392.
[35] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," 394.
[36] "The colloquy between Fintan and the hawk of Achill", in *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts*, vol. 1, ed. Osborn Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, and J. G. O'Keeffe (Dublin: Halle A. S. Max Niemeyer, 1907), 28.
[37] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," pp. 394-395.

> "Audistis quia dictum est : Oculum pro oculo, et dentem pro dente. Ego autem dico vobis, non resistere malo : sed si quis te percusserit in dexteram maxillam tuam, praebe illi et alteram : et ei, qui vult tecum judicio contendere, et tunicam tuam tollere, dimitte ei et pallium."[38]
>
> [You have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other: And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him.][39]

Keeping this passage in mind, Fintan's appeal to the teachings of Christ is apparent. Though he may have originally sought compensation for his impairment, literally an eye for an eye, he opts instead to turn the other cheek. In this instance, the author may be using Fintan to simultaneously demonstrate the adoption of Christianity in particular within Ireland rather than pagan religious traditions. Due to his birth prior to Christ, there would be no reason to immediately infer a Christian connection. Allusions to Christian parables are therefore a means to establish an implicit connection of Fintan's belief in Christ.

Furthermore, later into the text it is revealed that after regaining his human form, Fintan suffers the loss of his twelve sons. The Hawk of Achill taunts Fintan by recalling how he feasted on the various limbs of his children, stating:

> "Ann torchair do dá mac dég
> 'ga faigsin adhbul in béd
> do chognus da gach géig úir
> lám nó leth=choss nó leth- súil"[40]
>
> [There fell thy twelve sons ;
> On seeing them, dreadful the deed,
> I plucked from each fresh scion,
> A hand, a foot, or an eye.][41]

In light of this quote, it should be clear that Fintan's long life was not without hardship but, rather than succumbing to his sorrow, he endures until finding absolution at the end of the narrative. In this sense I find a striking similarity to the characterization of Fionnghuala

[38] Matthew 5: 38-40 Latin Vulgate.
[39] Matthew 5: 38-40 Douay-Rheims Version.
[40] "The colloquy between Fintan and the hawk of Achill", 29.
[41] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," 396.

within the narrative of *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* which will be discussed in greater depth in the second chapter. For now, all that will be mentioned is that Mark Williams presents Fionnghuala as being representative of the Christian virtue of fortitude, a view which I hold to be very persuasive. In his analysis, Williams cites the work of Caoimhín Breatnach and his efforts in linking the text to a Franciscan monastery in the North of Ireland.[42] While this same evidence cannot be applied to The Hawk of Achill directly, the similarity in the proposed *terminus post quem* of each text combined with a shared narrative of the chief characters strongly supports a related Christian influence in writing. If my argumentation is correct, with characters who experience animal transformations over long periods of time serving as vessels to demonstrate cultural change, then the demonstration of Christian values through the hardship of these characters can hardly be seen to be coincidence.

This is even more apparent, regardless of what region the texts were written in, when considering the structure of Irish kingdoms and their relationship to the church from the medieval period onwards. Early Irish kingdoms were tumultuous and fragmented, with various dynastic kings frequently attempting to exert dominance over smaller kingdoms.[43] As Else Roesdahl discusses, the medieval Irish monastery operated almost entirely independently and was not bound by the constantly shifting borders of Ireland. Only the Abbots of Armagh had any form of secular jurisdiction over the entirety of the island, and it was not uncommon for individual monasteries themselves to be in conflict against Irish kings.[44] Thus, while the political circumstances of the surrounding areas may have been in flux, individual monasteries would not become isolated by the disputes of their so-called "landlords," and would remain in contact while continuing to share information amongst other Irish secular centres. Therefore, despite being separated by kingdom and geography, it would not be impossible for the writing of a Franciscan monk in the north of Ireland to influence the writings of a potential scribe further south, or vice versa.

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[42] Caoimhín Breatnach, "The Religious Significance of Oidheadh Chloinne Lir" in *Ériu Vol. 50* (1990), pp. 37-40. The earthly suffering of both Fintan and Fionnghuala within the *The Hawk of Achill* and *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* respectively, is a striking resemblance which should not be ignored. These characters are characterised by animal transformations and endure tremendous hardship throughout their inhuman lives and ultimately find salvation through Christ. Little has been written regarding this theme of suffering amongst Irish shapeshifters, thus these characters being influenced by a shared literary tradition must remain speculative. However I feel the similarities and messages inferred speak for themselves.

[43] Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings,* Second Edition, trans. Susan M. Margeson & Kirsten Williams (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 223.

[44] Roesdahl, *The Vikings,* pp. 223-224.

Viewing *The Hawk of Achill*, the presence of animal transformations and the progression of time are clearly on display. However, if the theory that I've presented at the beginning of this chapter is correct, then the question must be asked as to what cultural shift the transformations of Fintan mac Bóchra found in *The Hawk of Achill* over time are attempting to convey to readers? I have argued above that Fintan's animal transformations correspond to theological shifts in Ireland. With his origins connected to the Old Testament and his Job-like suffering eventually giving way to Christ-like peace and forgiveness, Fintan embodies Ireland's conversion to Christianity in particular. However, Fintan is a complex character and his presence demonstrates much more than this. Returning to the prior discussion of *LGE,* the learned in Ireland needed to demonstrate that despite Ireland's pagan past, the people of Ireland have always been intrinsically intertwined with biblical scripture, and Fintan was one of the means to reiterate this by the sixteenth century. Thus, regardless of the shifting peoples belonging to Irish myth, Fintan demonstrates Ireland has always been a land claimed and inhabited by God's faithful.

The notion that Fintan is a sage figure and source of great knowledge, as he is portrayed within the *Hawk of Achill* as well as *LGE,* is also shared within the narrative of *Suidigud Tellaig Temra.* In this text, the men of Ireland under the recently crowned sixth century Diarmait mac Cerbaill are seeking to re-establish the original boundaries of Tara; the traditional and sacred location where kingship was conferred and celebrated.[45] In this endeavour, the men of Ireland first turn to the clerics and learned within the island, however even with the aid of the legendary scribe Cénn Fáeled, their knowledge of the ancient past does not extend far enough back in time. Thus, at the behest of Cénn Fáeled, all of the most ancient men of Ireland are gathered to answer the questions regarding Tara that the clerics could not. Fintan mac Bóchra is one of the men whose help is enlisted, and through whom all of the sought after answers are found as he was "knowledgeable about the visions, cattle raids, destructions, and wooings that have occurred since the Flood until now."[46] Yet as Joseph Falaky Nagy explains, while Fintan may have had the required knowledge, it was actually transmitted to him much earlier by an "angel of God himself" who conveyed the division of the four provinces surrounding a fifth which contained Tara.[47] Therefore, while Fintan may have predated the arrival of Christianity into Ireland, the knowledge which he

[45] Joseph Falaky Nagy, *Conversing with Angels & Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 4.
[46] Nagy, *Conversing with Angels & Ancients,* pp. 4-5.
[47] Nagy, *Conversing with Angels & Ancients,* 5.

conveyed was nevertheless derived through a Christian source. Despite the miraculous survival of Fintan, it is clear within the text that his long life is coming to an end and that his persistence as a living recording of Ireland's history would cease to exist. To this Nagy conveys how this demonstrates the development of oral to literary traditions within the island.[48] Within *Suidigud Tellaig Temra,* Fintan is once again a vessel used to bridge certain developments taking place within the nation together over time. In this text he serves as the medium to demonstrate the development of oral to literary culture, while also once again blending the mythological past of Ireland within the confines of Christian doctrine.

The learned of Ireland's past undoubtedly took inspiration from the previous works they had access to. As such, there is considerable discussion amongst scholars surrounding the *LGE,* and which texts may have contributed and inspired its creation. As Sharon Paice Macleod explains, the history within the text reflects a blend of Biblical, native, and medieval traditions.[49] This blend of traditions is precisely what allowed *LGE* to bridge the ancient Irish past with Christian values. The connection to Fintan between the *Hawk of Achill* and *LGE* is obvious. Notably however, while there is space to assume that Fintan may have transformed into a salmon to escape the flood in *LGE,* there is no explicit mention of animal transformations found within the text. Therefore, the inspiration for Fintan's transformation into various animal forms in *The Hawk of Achill* may have been inspired by another text written around the same time as *LGE*: *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill.*

Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill focuses primarily on the life of Tuán mac Cairill and the various animal shapes he assumes as he observes from a distance the arrival of a number of different peoples on the island over many centuries. As Hull notes, "Each time that a change takes place in the peopling of Ireland a parallel change comes over Tuan as he passes from one form into another." These forms are respectively that of a stag, boar, hawk and a salmon before, like Fintan, being ultimately returned to the shape of a human.[50] Like *The Hawk of Achill, Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* was preserved through the Book of Fermoy. John Carey takes an in depth look at the various surviving texts from the Book of Fermoy to provide insights regarding the text as well as to provide as close to an unadulterated reading of the text that is perhaps possible thus far. Carey suggests an approximate *terminus post quem* of the text to be in the latter half of the ninth century.[51] Furthermore, Carey details that prior to

[48] Nagy, *Conversing with Angels & Ancients,* 6.
[49] Sharon Paice Macleod, "The Descent of the Gods: Creation, Cosmogony, and Divine Order in Lebor Gabála" in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol. 21* (2000/2001), 331.
[50] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," 388.
[51] John Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill" in *Ériu Vol. 35* (Royal Irish Academy, 1984), 97.

his proposed date of composition for the *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, there is only one document which seemingly makes mention of Tuán mac Cairill, that being the *Martyrology of Tallaght*. While this text bears similarities in both the region and inclusion of a Tuán son of Cairill, Carey concludes that due to the apparent gap in time between the two texts, it cannot be taken as a corroboration in any of the story elements. Rather, the *Martyrology of Tallaght* at most demonstrates that Tuán mac Cairill may not have been entirely a character of fiction but inspired by a man once living in the Bairche region of Ireland.[52]

Assuming Carey's proposed date for the creation of the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* is correct, this would mean that the character of Tuán predates Fintan and the *LGE* by a few centuries. This is not surprising to Carey, as he notes that both texts more than likely sprang from the same pseudohistorical tradition, and that the later and far more influential *LGE* affected future revisions of the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill.*[53] There is a high probability that these texts interacted and continued to influence one another through various recensions. Tuán as an example, is not originally found within the *LGE* and only begins to appear in obscure passages from the third recension onwards.[54] Furthermore, within the given narratives, Fintan is supposedly the eldest of the characters and is said to have arrived prior to the biblical flood. Despite this, within the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* it is stated by Tuán in regard to Ireland that:

> "'Cúic gabála ém ro ngabath Hériu cossin amsir sea. Ní ragbad ria ndíle 7 ní ragbad iar ndíle co tormalta dí bliadain ar míle iar ndu dílenn din tír."[55]
>
> ['Ireland, then' (said Tuan), 'has up until now been settled by five settlements. It was not settled before the Flood, nor was it settled after the Flood until one thousand and two years had passed since the Flood went from the land.][56]

This narrative contradicts the view that Fintan and his retinue settled prior to the flood that is presented by the *LGE* as well as the *Hawk of Achill*, ultimately providing further credence to the notion that the development of Tuán is older than Fintan, and that the former characters narrative influenced that of the latters. What is likely the case is that the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* was constructed initially, which influenced the subsequent *LGE*. The *LGE* proved to

[52] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," pp. 97-98.
[53] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," 99.
[54] John Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill" in *Ériu Vol. 35* (Royal Irish Academy, 1984), 98.
[55] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," 101.
[56] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," 105.

be far more influential and popular, thus its presence can be observed in later recensions of the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill.*

As has already been discussed, the *LGE* served to bridge the native traditions of Ireland with later Christian values. Considering the interplay *LGE* had with *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill*, one should not be surprised to discover that a similar notion was delivered by the latter text as well. While Tuán initially refuses to entertain the visitation of Finnia and his retinue, the saint returns the next morning to find that Tuán has transformed into a "venerable cleric" and was now ready to pass along his ancient knowledge.[57] In this sense, Tuán also serves as a vessel who as a Christian man is able to bridge Christian values with his own ties to the native traditions of Ireland. The sage quality of Tuán is demonstrated once more through *Suidigud Tellaig Temra,* as Tuán, like Fintan, is included amongst the most ancient of Ireland's inhabitants. While it is Fintan that ultimately provides the sought after information, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Tuán is listed as one of the five seniors of Ireland, seemingly only second to Fintan.[58] He arrives in Ireland and after losing his own people, he wanders the country in various bestial forms serving as the harbinger for various herds of animals.[59] Through these transformations he witnesses the arrival and dissolution of various peoples, and yet while he watches them, he distinctly never interacts or rejoins society amongst them. This changes however just after the arrival of the Milesians, where in the form of a salmon, Tuán is consumed by the wife of king Cairill, where he is subsequently conceived and born as the heir apparent, in which he is provided with his proper name. This occurrence falls in line with the arrival of Patrick and the Christianisation of Ireland, where Tuán is formally baptised and accepts the teachings of Christ of his own accord.[60]

This development is interesting and can be seen to contain a significant yet hidden meaning. The relevance of the traditional and proper baptism is obvious, yet a strong argument can be made suggesting that Tuán underwent a baptism of a different kind. In his animal forms Tuán is representative of the pagan and animalistic native tradition within Ireland prior to the conversion. During this period, he is nameless and a heathen, and thus exists on the outskirts of society; however after undergoing literal rebirth, Tuán is provided with a name and is reintroduced into society just in time to confirm his faith in Christ. In the medieval period, particularly within the British Isles, a similar practice occurred when Viking

[57] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," pp. 105-107.
[58] R. I. Best, "The Settling of the Manor of Tara" in *Ériu Vol. 4* (1910), pp. 126-129.
[59] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," pp. 105-106.
[60] John Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill" in *Ériu Vol. 35* (Royal Irish Academy, 1984), 106.

warriors were converted to Christianity. This is perhaps most widely known through the conversion of Guthrum after the Great Heathen Army's defeat at the battle of Edington in 878 AD.[61] Through his conversion, Guthrum is provided with the baptismal name of Æthelstan, and was able to persist within England as a Christian king and adoptive son of king Alfred until his death in the year 890 AD.[62] While there is no such vivid account of a Viking ruler being baptised in Ireland, Else Roesdahl notes that by the mid-ninth century, many Norse had become settled and integrated throughout the island. This integration is demonstrated through inter-marriages, the adoption of Irish names in subsequent Norse generations, and most importantly through Norse conversions to Christianity.[63] Roesdahl's timeline for these occurrences lines up nicely with Carey's proposed *terminus post quem* of the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill,* which taken together suggests that the learned in Ireland at the time were witnessing the conversion of Norse settlers and using their experience to influence the written works they were producing. Looking at these historical accounts, it seems likely that Tuán's rebirth is representative or symbolic of genuine conversion practices taking place within the region. Due to this, Tuán's presence as a vessel to convey deeper meanings within the narrative is once again cemented. Through the progression of his animal shapes over time, Tuán literally demonstrates the progression towards Christianity from a pagan past, while simultaneously and perhaps metaphorically embodying the conversion and progression of faith of the individual.[64]

Considering the exchange that has been established by Carey between the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* and the *LGE,* I am persuaded to view Tuán as the inspiration for the later Fintan in the latter text. Tuán through his animal transformations was the first to bridge Christian values with those of ancient Ireland, and the character of Fintan took this one step further within the *LGE* to push these values back prior to the biblical flood. Tuán being the

[61] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* ed. Michael Swanton (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 75-77.
[62] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* 83.
[63] Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings,* Second Edition, trans. Susan M. Margeson & Kirsten Williams (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 225.
[64] Following this argumentation, it should be noted that Ireland had obviously been converted long before the presence of Guthrum in England. By this point, it would be unlikely that any Irish king or warrior would belong to a faith other than Christianity. However, the Norse presence within Ireland during the period that this text was supposedly written in cannot be ignored, nor can the fact that the conception of this text was absolutely written by a Christian, most likely a monk. Various kings within Ireland were of Norse origin themselves. Due to this, it is very likely that the narrative of these texts was meant to appeal to Viking kings and warlords who had come to call Ireland home. That despite their perceived barbaric and heathen nature, they were not beyond salvation if they were to simply convert. By this period there were no more practitioners of pagan religion of Irish descent within Ireland. Therefore, narratives alluding to the benefits of conversion must be towards the remaining population that had not yet converted, the Norse.

inspiration for Fintan is perhaps even evident within the *LGE* itself, where in the following brief passage, Fintan is explicitly mentioned as being Tuán: "Ocus asberar comba sé Túán mac Cairill meic Muiredaig Muinderg do Ulltaib íartain; 7 ro coimet-side co haimsir Patraic 7 Coluim Cille 7 Comgaill 7 Findén" [And it is said that he [Fintan] was Tuan mac Cairill s. Muiredach Muinderg of the Ulaíd afterwards, and [God] preserved him till the time of Patrick and of Colum Cille and of Coimgall and of Findian.][65]

Connecting these notions back with the *Hawk of Achill*, I would like to present the argument that this sixteenth century text was directly influenced by both the *LGE* and the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill.* As has been discussed, it seems clear that both the *LGE* and *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* were influencing one another and were at the very least being considered in tandem. My suggestion is that when the author of the *Hawk of Achill* was looking back on prior Irish writing traditions for inspiration, the characters of Tuán and Fintan shared a striking resemblance to one another due to their shared literary tradition. Thus, to once again bridge Christian values with the ancient past, the author of the *Hawk of Achill* merged the stories of Tuán and Fintan into one palatable narrative which could be dispersed amongst the Irish people and help reconcile the discrepancy found between the ancient beliefs found in Ireland with those of Christian scripture. Fintan and his arrival to the island with the granddaughter of Noah provided the means for connecting Ireland with the antediluvian world described within Christian scripture. Additionally, the animal transformations of Tuán and his presence as a clerical figure served as the vehicle in which the long life of Fintan could be explained through methods not unfamiliar in Irish literature.[66]

The lasting influence Tuán and the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* had on Fintan's characterization within the *Hawk of Achill* is perhaps best seen through the transformation of both characters into a salmon. As has been discussed, Fintan suffers the loss of one of his

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[65] *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland Part V,* Ed. Steward Macalister (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 1956), pp. 224-225.

[66] The usage of animal transformations as a means to explain the long lives of various Irish mythological figures is apparent within the *Hawk of Achill* as well as the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill.* However, through the remainder of my analysis, this notion should be cemented even further. While I maintain that Fintan and Tuán are two characters worthy of their own analysis regarding the topic of animal transformations, they are by no means an anomaly. Animal transformations are not uncommon to a large number of historical cultures throughout the world, let alone the greater Celtic sphere such as with the Eagle transformation of Lleu Llaw Gyffs in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi after being struck by a poisoned spear. See: *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales,* Trans. & Ed. Patrick K. Ford (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1977), 106. Within the Irish context there exists an abundance of examples. When applied to time, the number of examples may be more limited, however, through my subsequent analysis of characters such as the Children of Lir, Lí Bán, and Étaíne it should be understood that the motif of long-lived shapeshifters was common. Therefore, it should not be surprising that these characters were used as literary devices by their authors to convey subtle ideas to their intended audiences.

eyes and for the next five hundred years, bears the burden of blindness before his form shifts once more.[67] In addition to this, Fintan also recalls how he suffered in the seal-haunted waters of Asseroe, implying that in this form he was constantly eluding the animals which hunted him.[68] Furthermore, after recalling the death of Cú Chulainn and his attempt to feast on his eyes, the hawk conveys how the hero pierced him with the barb of his spear leaving a wound which never truly healed, stating:

> "Anaidh am cholainn in cenn
> mo chraidhe do chráidh go tend
> co slán ní fuilimm ó h-soin
> 's ní cheilim ótú arsaid."[69]
>
> [The head (or barb) remained in my body,
> It tortured my heart distressingly,
> I have never been sound since then,
> And I do not conceal it, since I am old.][70]

In these instances, Fintan and the hawk convey a mark or stigma they bore which continued to burden them throughout their lives.

This notion is one that can also be seen through the *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill*, which demonstrates the long-lasting impact Tuán had on the much later text. Within the narrative, Tuán states:

> "'Ro aínius nómaid and 7 lot so i ndeilb iaich abae. Domchuirethar Dia isin n-abaind. Amrae lim ón dano 7 basa stretch sáithech 7 basa urrae snáma. Adluinn as cach gábud: a llámaib línaige 7 a crobaib séga 7 a gaaíb iascaire, co filet a chréchta indum."[71]
>
> ['I fasted an ennead then, and went into the shape of a fresh-water salmon. God puts me into the river. That was wondrous for me then, and I was vigorous and happy, and I was a master of swimming. I escaped from every peril: from the hands of fishermen and from the claws of hawks and from the spears of fishers, so that the wounds of them are in me.][72]

[67] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," pp. 394-395.
[68] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," 394.
[69] "The colloquy between Fintan and the hawk of Achill", 37.
[70] Hull, "The Hawk of Achill or Legend of the Oldest Animals," 400.
[71] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," 102.
[72] Carey, "Scél Tuáin meic Chairill," 106.

Here Tuán discusses how after becoming a salmon, despite remaining free and content, he was plagued by the talons of hawks and the instruments of fishermen. Though none were able to truly catch him, he concedes that like that of the hawk and Fintan, he bore the wounds of the attempts he thwarted. What is particularly interesting is the precise means of how Tuán was hunted. Escaping the hawk talons mirrors the narrative of the *Hawk of Achill* almost identically. While the salmon is Tuán's last transformation, within the *Hawk of Achill* it is Fintan's first, during a period where Ireland was supposedly uninhabited. It is reasonable that if the narrative was influenced by Tuán, the author simply replaced the attempts of being hunted by fishermen to that of seals. Lastly, while it does not pertain to Fintan directly, the mention of barbs leaving permanent scars on both Tuán and the hawk remains a noteworthy similarity. If I am correct, then the author of the *Hawk of Achill* was heavily inspired by the narrative of Tuán and, taking a look at how Tuán was said to have experienced his animal transformations, expanded the narrative to encompass both the life of Fintan as well as the hawk.

Regardless of which text they are viewed in, one thing that remains common amongst these figures is that they persist through Irish literature and history as tools used to demonstrate the shifting of Ireland over time. Whether it's Tuán or Fintan, their long lives and animal transformations highlight the rise and fall of various peoples within Ireland. Simultaneously, both characters by the end of their narrative exist as clerical figures who have turned to Christ and are able to impart wisdom on those that are listening to them. In this regard, they have lived through and experienced the entirety of pre-Christian Irish traditions and through their transformations demonstrate theological shifts in Ireland over the centuries, while perhaps also mirroring what was occurring currently within the country itself.

Chapter 3: Oidhe Chloinne Lir & Aided Echach Maic Maireda

The following chapter will analyse the texts *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* as well as *Aided Echach Maic Maireda*; two texts in which the Otherworldly children of ancient Irish kings are cursed and forced to endure animal transformations on various bodies of water throughout Ireland. Through their fortitude in enduring their respective curses, these children ultimately are able to find salvation through God. While *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* narratively focuses on all four of Lir's children, the portrayal of the eldest child Fionnghuala will be paramount to my argument. Following *Oidhe Chloinne Lir,* the character of Lí Bán from *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* will be discussed. Lí Bán will be shown to fulfil many of the same narrative points as Fionnghuala and therefore serves as a fitting literary companion. *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* and *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* have received minimal scholarly attention in recent years. As such, by analysing them in conjunction with one another, this chapter will attempt to build a strong argument in favour of the display of cultural shifts in Ireland relating to the conversion of pagan worship to Christianity.

3.1 Oidhe Chloinne Lir

Oidhe Chloinne Lir begins with the nobility of the Tuatha Dé Danann deciding on whom amongst them should rule, as it was better to be united under one king than to be divided and at odds. In this pursuit, Lir of Sidh Fionnachaidh puts forward his candidacy; however when he is ultimately passed over for the eldest son of the Dagda, Bodb Dearg, Lir leaves without swearing fealty to his new king, invoking the anger of those who were present for the assembly.[73] Unexpectedly, and perhaps immediately demonstrating his worthiness as High King, Bodb Dearg approaches this insult with patience and forgiveness, despite his subordinates and advisors wanting to pursue Lir to "burn his house, and to expose himself to wounds of spear and sword."[74] Rather, following the death of Lir's wife, Bodb Dearg offered

[73] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir* (Dublin: Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 1897), pp. 39-41.

[74] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir*, pp. 40-41. The significance of Bodb Dearg's response to Lir's slight against him is not to be taken lightly. Considering the vast examples of Medieval texts coming from Western Europe which feature the call to action and revenge against perceived personal slights, often becoming the source of lengthy familial blood feuds, the decision by Bodb to stay his hand is a remarkable outlier, and by no means the norm. As his advisors seem to suggest, Bodb Dearg was well within his right to respond, yet his inaction may signify his altruistic nature as king, but perhaps also the fear of Lir's power and potential response to conflict.

him the hand of his foster daughter Aobh in marriage in exchange for his fealty, which in time produced four children who were loved by all who met them. However, despite the now fruitful relationship between the two former rivals, Lir's happiness was not to last as his wife succumbed to birthing his two final children.[75] Distraught for the loss of his foster daughter, and for his grieving friend, Bodb Dearg presented Lir with a marriage to the sister of his deceased wife, Aoifé. While Aoifé may initially have felt love and a sense of duty towards her stepchildren, this quickly soured and turned into hatred and enmity as her jealousy towards the children and the affection they received grew.[76]

Though this brief summary has yet to touch on the motifs of the progression of time and animal transformations, the information presented thus far is essential as it necessitates the following crime and betrayal of Aoifé and contextualises the extremity of the hardships the children are yet to face. As one might expect, the jealousy of Aoifé did not lay dormant for long and being unable to kill the children herself, she lures them into the water of Loch Dairbreach and curses them to persist as four perfect swans.[77] As swans, the children are together forced to live the next nine hundred years upon three bodies of water in three hundred year increments in and around the country while only retaining their voices, unable to set foot upon the land. After their nine hundred years of suffering, the children are once more permitted to step foot onto Ireland where they encounter a saintly priest who blesses them, healing them yet also rendering them crippled and not long for life due to the compiling hardships of old age and life on the water taking hold. They inevitably pass away, however with their newly acquired blessing, the children are able to ascend to heaven.[78]

Williams makes a compelling analysis on the children of Lir regarding how it pertains to conversion and the Christian virtue of fortitude. He particularly emphasises the eldest of Lir's children, Fionnghuala, and how her efforts to fortify her younger brothers despite compounding miseries brings her closer to God. As Williams notes, it is through the lens of Fionnghuala that the suffering of the children is often conveyed to the audience and thus it is

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[75] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir*, pp. 41-43.

[76] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir,* pp. 43-45. Perhaps worth mentioning here without straying too far from the core themes of the text is the extent to which the children of Lir were loved by all. Lir, being a powerful lord in his own right, doted on his children and began each morning by laying with them until they rose. Yet beyond the familial love of their father, all else who looked upon them "could not help giving them the love of [their] soul." This love extended to the High King as well who is stated to have regularly housed the children for long durations of time. Simply put, it cannot be emphasised enough how loved the children were, thus making Aoifé's curse on the children all the more detrimental, and wide-reaching.

[77] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir*, 46.

[78] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 257.

unsurprising that she is the first to turn towards Christ, even before Christianity is stated to have arrived in Ireland.[79] Williams further explains that while the *Oidhe Chloinne Lir*, may use mythological characters core to the Irish pagan past, it is fundamentally not an Irish "myth" in of itself; rather it is a religious anecdote used to demonstrate the prior Christian virtues.[80] The reasoning for this text not being accepted as a proper Irish myth is that it is rather convincingly demonstrated by Caoimhín Breatnach as having likely been written in the Franciscan monastery of Multyfarnham in the fifteenth century.[81] This would place the *terminus post quem* of this text much later than the vast majority of Irish mythological texts; however it also serves to further demonstrate my argument that when there exists a pairing of time and an animal transformation within a text, it often alludes to an author's perceived cultural shift in the past as having occurred. Within *Oidhe Chloinne Lir*, this is classified by perceived shifts in people and religion.

One aspect of the text that merits further discussion is the swan transformation itself. It is clear from the text that the Ireland that the children knew prior to becoming swans has all but vanished by the time they return to their human forms, however what signifies this change? Surely the author of the text could not highlight one exact event as marking the shift in the land, thus the swan transformation serves as the vehicle which drives this notion forward.

Through this lens, there are a few passages within the text which I have determined to be essential to demonstrating this. Prior to the children's transformation there is mention made only of the Tuatha Dé Danann. After commencing their three hundred years on Loch Dairbhreach, the clan of the Milesians (mankind) begin to settle around the lake alongside the Tuatha Dé Danann to listen to the songs and stories of the children.[82] Amongst those present is the High King of the Tuatha Dé Danann, Bodb Dearg, though with the emergence of the Milesians and the curse forcing the swans to flee to the next body of water, the connection the children have to the Tuatha Dé Danann as well as their power seems to wane both physically and metaphorically. Thus, after the children arrive at Sruth na Maoilé and begin the next leg of their curse, they are once again met by members of the Tuatha Dé Danann. This time however, it takes the form of the fairy cavalcade led by the two sons of Bodb Dearg. From

[79] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* pp. 257-258.
[80] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 256.
[81] Caoimhín Breatnach, "The Religious Significance of Oidheadh Chloinne Lir" in *Ériu Vol. 50* (1990), pp. 37-40.
[82] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir* (Dublin: Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 1897), pp. 54-55.

this interaction, the children are able to gather that their father and Bodb Dearg are still well, but are seemingly now congregated together at the house of Lir in Sioth Fionnachaidh.[83] Finally as the siblings transition to their final, and harshest body of water at Iorrus Domhann, they no longer come into contact with their people and only find companionship in the company of a young man and his family who seem to be of Milesian descent.[84] It is at Iorrus Domhann that Fionnghuala puts her faith in God, and compels her siblings to follow her example.[85] After nine hundred years of suffering the children are permitted to return to the land, and as any lost child would do, they head towards their home and family only to find that their fathers court had grown derelict and empty over the centuries.[86] Taking a critical look at the time the children of Lir spent at each of the three bodies of water, and the interactions they had with those they came across, it seems apparent that the nine hundred years demonstrate a degradation of the Tuatha Dé Danann's power and influence in Ireland as a new people emerge in the land and rise to power. The children serve as the vehicle to demonstrate this shift over time. The narrative begins at the unification of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the seemingly height of their power and ends with all they had accomplished falling into ruin and distant memory. The children, as swans, are distant from this change yet also inherently connected to it.

Up to this point, I have been persuaded by Williams' interpretation of *Oidhe Chloinne Lir,* however when the children first turn to God on the water of Iorrus Domhann, it is said to have taken place at the 'proper hour' which Williams suggests to be denoting the time of the crucifixion of Christ.[87] This seems agreeable to me, as it is not uncommon for key moments in Irish texts to line up perfectly with essential dates pertaining to Christ, especially in regards

[83] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir*, pp. 64-65. Of note is the presence of Bodb Dearg and Lir now congregated together. From the text, it may simply be the case that the men have gathered together for the regular 'Feast of Age' as it is written. However, if this was the case, surely the presence of Bodb Dearg's heirs would be expected? Perhaps then this passage has greater meaning, in that Bodb Dearg may no longer hold his seat of power, and thus has retreated to the abode of Lir. With the emergence of the Milesians, it can be theorised that they have risen to power by this point in the text and the Tuatha Dé Danann have begun to lose their prominence on the surface of Ireland. However, parroting Mark Williams, there has not been enough critical assessment of this text and thus this interpretation of this vague passage must remain nothing more than speculation.

[84] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir*, pp. 68. The tribe of the man in question is not explicitly stated however given the apparent decline of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the emergence of the Milesians, his belonging to the latter group seems evident. It is made abundantly clear in the two previous meetings that those who the children met were of unquestionable Tuatha Dé Danann stock, a point which is not made here.

[85] *Oidhe Cloinne Lir The Fate of the Children of Lir*, pp. 68-70.

[86] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* pp. 259-260.

[87] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 258.

to the hero Cú Chulainn. This can be seen in both the *Chronicon Scotorum* as well as the *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* ("The Death of Cú Chulainn"). Beginning with the *Chronicon,* an obscure annal from 432 AD, although assuredly written much later, records the arrival of the Archbishop Patrick into Ireland and the start of his baptisms amongst the island's inhabitants. In this, it uses the death of Cú Chulainn as a metric to contextualise Patrick's arrival; that it had been 431 years since his [Cú Chulainn's] death. This places the death of Cú Chulainn at 1 AD, which coincides with the supposed birth of Christ; a fact that would be foolish to accept as pure coincidence.[88] Moreover, in the *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni,* Cú Chulainn on the verge of death proclaims the coming of Christ as well as his inevitable sacrifice.[89] In this proclamation, the exact date as to when Christ would arrive to rid the world of sin remains unclear. Despite this and in conjunction with the *Chronicon,* it seems apparent that the death of one hero would lead into that of another. This seems supported by Cú Chulainn in the preceding passage, where he states: "Úaine ortae, a Eomain. Dítiu ortae, a Éomain." [The little lamb has been slain, Emain. The protector has been slain, Emain.][90]

However, returning to Williams, he goes on to suggest that it is this acceptance of Christ's death and resurrection which serves as an exorcism for the Tuatha Dé Danann from Ireland. There are a few contentions I have with this notion. First and foremost, as I have attempted to demonstrate above, the decline of the Tuatha Dé Danann as portrayed in this text is one which has occurred over the course of nine centuries. Because of this, when the children arrive at the home of their father, it is overgrown and dilapidated due to the passage of time, yet Williams' argument seems to suggest this exorcism as having occurred with a

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[88] *Chronicum Scotorum : a chronicle of Irish affairs from the earliest times to A.D. 1135 ; with a supplement, containing the events from 1141 to 1150*, Ed. & Trans. William M. Hennessy (London : Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866), 21.

[89] Bettina Kimpton, "The Death of Cú Chulainn A Critical Edition of the Earliest Version of *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* with Introduction, Translation, Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary," *Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts VI* (Maynooth: School of Celtic Studies National University of Ireland, 2009), pp. 46-47.

[90] Kimpton, "The Death of Cú Chulainn A Critical Edition of the Earliest Version of *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* with Introduction, Translation, Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary," pg. 28 & 46. Christ in Christian doctrine is often referred to as the lamb of God due to his short and sacrificial life on Earth in order to cleanse mankind of sin and create a new covenant with God. In this passage, Cú Chulainn seemingly views himself as Ireland's original protector and young lamb destined for an early demise while in service to his fellow man. Through this frame of thinking, perhaps the death of Cú Chulainn is symbolic of a new covenant being made within Ireland as well. With his impending death and the prophesied coming of Christ, Cú Chulainn relinquishes his status as Ireland's protector, and seeks to inspire his countrymen to now put their faith in God. If this is the case, it seems to support the timeline presented by the *Chronicon Scotorum,* that the life of Cú Chulainn leads immediately into the birth of Christ.

degree of immediacy. Moving on from this point, this apparent disappearance of the Tuatha Dé Danann in their entirety seems to conflict with the vast number of texts which promote the idea that the Tuatha Dé Danann retreated into the *síd* mounds scattered across Ireland. Considering this recurring motif, it seems unlikely that Williams interpretation of the Irish deities total disappearance is accurate. Lastly and perhaps most importantly to my argument, the conversion of the children of Lir seems to me to demonstrate a degree of motion or progression. Just as the Tuatha Dé Danann declined as the Milesians emerged, the belief in the old faith moving towards Christianity followed a similar trajectory. First Fionnghuala, and the boys announce their faith on their own accord, and later after hearing the bells of the new church in Ireland, are baptised, or blessed by the priest Mochaomhóg before their ascent to heaven.

3.2 Aided Echach Maic Maireda

Just as *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* demonstrates the rise of the Mílesians and the fall of the Tuatha Dé Danann over the passage of Ireland's ancient history, so too does it convey the perceived rise of Christianity on the island. Through their transformations into swans on various bodies of water spanning nine hundred years, Lir's children ultimately convert to the new faith and are able to find salvation. Another text which may fruitfully be read alongside *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* is *Aided Echach Maic Maireda.*

Much like the children of Lir, the narrative of *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* revolves around the character of Lí Bán who after enduring a significant period of aquatic limbo, is able to cross the threshold of pre-Christian to Christian times, as well as the boundaries of the human realm and the Otherworld.[91] As Ranke de Vries notes, Lí Bán as a character is the product of a sexual union between Eochaid, the king of Munster, and the Otherworldly being Ébliu. Due to her parentage, Lí Bán from the outset of the tale serves as a bridge connecting the two worlds of humans and the Tuatha Dé Danann.[92] In the beginning of the text, Eochaid and his brother Ríb each individually come across Midir and Óengus, two prominent members of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Through a series of conflicts, each brother succumbs to a tremendous loss of wealth while witnessing the supernatural creation of two lakes in Ireland;

[91] Ranke de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán" in *Myth in Celtic Literatures 6,* Ed. Joseph Falaky Nagy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 40.
[92] de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán," 40.

namely Loch Rí and Loch nEchach.[93] In the case of Ríb, Midir kills all of his retinue's horses and thus are doomed to drown as a result of the deluge coming from Loch Rí.[94] Likewise, Eochaid in conflict with Óengus also loses all of his horses, however he is able to quickly construct a fortification to contain the body of water and put it under guard by a woman of his kingdom. This does not last however, as the fortification bursts due to neglect and Eochaid and his family drown, save for Lí Bán who is transformed into a salmon or perhaps mermaid like form and spared from the catastrophe.[95]

Through her animal transformation, Lí Bán is able to survive for the next three hundred years beneath Loch nEchach. Ireland in time undergoes Christianisation and Lí Bán is eventually discovered by a man named Béoán, a monk from the monastery of Tech Dabeoc in Donegal. Through her meeting with Béoán, Lí Bán organises a meeting between her and the saints of Dál nAraide on the condition that Béoán be permitted to bury her corpse at his monastery upon her death.[96] At this meeting, Lí Bán is put on display in a vessel for onlookers to see, and conflict emerges between her captors Béoán, Fergus, and the Abbot Comgall over whom she belongs.[97] God intervenes in the affair and Lí Bán is brought to Tech Dabeoc where she is given a choice; either receive baptism and die immediately or live for another three hundred years as is. Ultimately, Lí Bán chooses to be baptised as a Christian and is given the new name Muirgein, where she then dies and immediately enters heaven and is provided with the same respect as the saintly virgins found in the presence of God.[98]

When comparing Lí Bán with Fionnghuala from *Oidhe Chloinne Lir,* the similarities shared between the two texts are apparent. Both female characters belong to a pre-Christian world and are of supernatural origins. Due to circumstances out of their control, the two daughters are transformed against their will into an animal shape and live upon or within the lake of their curse for intervals of three hundred years. Lastly, both characters turn their faith towards God and are blessed, so that after their rapidly incurred deaths, they are able to find salvation and enter heaven. While there are some differences between the narratives, the

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[93] Helen Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda" in *Ériu Vol. 58* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008), 108.
[94] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 108.
[95] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 108. Midir and Óengus are two members of the Tuatha Dé Danann of particular prominence and strength, and are often portrayed in relation to grand landscape altering feats of strength. While more could be written on their appearance within this text, I will elect instead to save their discussion for my chapter relating to *Tochmarc Étaíne* where they serve a much more significant role in the narrative.
[96] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 108.
[97] de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán," 42.
[98] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," pp. 108-109.

underlying skeleton of both texts seem strikingly similar. This is not surprising, as Helen Imhoff notes that the author of *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* appears to be an educated individual with an in-depth understanding of the literary culture within medieval Ireland, both in regards to Biblical and theological issues as well as perceptions of Ireland's ancient past. As a result of this understanding, the author was able to make reference to events and characters found both earlier and later than the time the narrative of the text is set in, allowing it to support the literary tradition it was part of as well as that which it would subsequently contribute to.[99] Due to this, while Imhoff dates the text to at the latest being written in the late eleventh century, it is possible that the fifteenth century *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* was influenced by this same literary tradition as a result of the careful foundational work laid by *Aided Echach Maic Maireda*'s author.[100]

If *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* was influenced by the same literary tradition as *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* then some of the subtle undertones shared between the texts are less likely to be pure coincidence. As has been discussed above, Mark Williams views the children of Lir, particularly Fionnghuala, as an allegory for the Christian value of fortitude. By enduring the earthly suffering experienced on each of the lakes, the children are ultimately able to grow closer to God. Just as Williams does with the children of Lir, Imhoff connects the character of Lí Bán to earthly suffering. Imhoff expresses her belief that the purpose of *Aided Echach Maic Maireda*, is to heighten the audience's sense of "Lí Bán's suffering and endurance by emphasising her struggles, loneliness and helplessness."[101] In this way, Lí Bán's fortitude and endurance are demonstrated, as the flood tests her faith and resolve, ultimately making her a saint-like martyr.[102]

As is the case with the virtue of fortitude, the Christian perception of baptism is paramount to understanding this text. It is through the baptisms of Lí Bán that the cultural shifts occurring over time can be seen. While the baptism at the end of the poem is obvious, Imhoff presents the idea that Lí Bán's transformation into a mermaid-like form in order to escape the flood denotes another baptism of sorts. By assuming her new form, Lí Bán

[99] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," pp. 118-119.
[100] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 109. While speculative on my part, it seems that both the chosen place names of key narrative points in *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* and *Aided Echach Maic Maireda* are heavily concentrated in the north of Ireland. If the scribes or authors of each respective text were in proximity to the north such as the previously mentioned Multyfarnham monastery, it is even more likely these scholars would be borrowing from other texts that shared geographic features.
[101] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 123.
[102] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 124.

discards the belief in deities such as Óengus and Midir, and is reborn into a new Christian age.[103] It is this potential baptism that Imhoff addresses as being a so-called *baptismus flaminis* or 'Baptism of Desire;' the salvation and forgiveness of sins through faith and a desire for baptism for oneself when it is otherwise impossible to receive.[104] Lí Bán's initial Baptism of Desire protects her from the deluge that kills her family and by connotation, the old faith. It is through the following three-hundred-year period endured by Lí Bán after the transformation that Christianity is able to enter Ireland. Due to her fortitude and faith, Lí Bán is rewarded with her final and proper baptism and given a new name *Muirgein,* literally "sea-birth," which fully converts her as a proper Christian allowing her to enter heaven. As Ranke de Vries notes, the new name assumed by Lí Bán is quite literal and intentional, as she was taken from the water and reborn into her new Christian faith.[105]

The assumption of a new name and subsequent baptism is reminiscent of my earlier discussion of Tuán and his return to human form after being consumed as a salmon and conceived by king Cairill's wife. In reference to Joseph Falaky Nagy, Ranke de Vries discusses how the salmon often acts as an intermediary between the human and otherworld.[106] Tuán after undergoing his animal transformations is consumed as a salmon where he regains his human form and becomes a sage-like figure to pass along the ancient history of Ireland. Likewise, Lí Bán, who transforms into a mermaid-esque figure containing the qualities of a salmon while also consuming salmon within the narrative, demonstrates her connection to the Otherworld as well as her ability to pass on her knowledge to the saints to whom she relates her story.[107]

Returning to the *baptismus flaminis,* Fionnghuala can be said to have, with her brothers, undertaken a similar Baptism of Desire to that experienced by Lí Bán. The Baptism of Desire was recognized by early Christian writers and medieval churchmen as being a valid means to sanctify the soul. This is conveyed by Augustine in which he writes:

> *inuenio non tantum passionem pro nomine Christi id quod ex baptismo deerat posse supplere, sed etiam fidem conuersionemque cordis, si forte ad celebrandum mysterium baptismi in angustiis temporum succurri non potest.*

[103] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 128.
[104] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," 129.
[105] de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán," 42.
[106] de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán," pp. 51-52.
[107] de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán," 52.

> [I find that not only suffering for the name of Christ can fill up that which is lacking in baptism, but even faith and conversion of the heart, if perhaps it is not possible for the celebration of the mystery of baptism to take place because of dangerous times.][108]

Imhoff notes that Lí Bán is baptised by faith in a time still considered pre-Christian, thus fulfilling Augustine's criteria. However, true baptism remains superior and thus Lí Bán's Baptism by Desire is legitimised through her proper baptism.[109] In regards to Fionnghuala, it can also be said that she and her brothers experienced a Baptism by Desire at the proper hour in which they pronounce their faith in God and from that point on live on Iorrus Domhann in peace. This initial proclamation of faith eases the suffering of the children, however like Lí Bán, it is not until they are properly blessed that the children are permitted to enter heaven.

As de Vries concludes, over the course of *Aided Echach Maic Maireda,* Lí Bán goes from an old world where the lines dividing the human world from the Otherworld are blurred, to a new world existing in a post-Christianised Ireland.[110] Due to this, *Aided Echach Maic Maireda,* like the other texts discussed thus far, represents the shifting theological landscape of Ireland, as it moved from pre- to post-Christian times. This changing landscape is conveyed through the vessel of Lí Bán. Through her animal transformation over the course of three hundred years, she endures a liminal period which, similarly to *Oidhe Chloinne Lir,* allows the author to narratively bridge these two periods of Ireland's ancient history together, just as Fintan and Tuán similarly bridged the ancient past of Ireland with later Christian doctrine.

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[108] Augustine, *De baptismo libri septem iii* 21, 29. See: "Sancti Aureli Augustini scripta contra Donatistas, Pars I: Psalmus contra partem Donati, contra epistulam parmeniani libri tres, De baptismo libri septem" in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum 51*, Ed. M. Petschenig (Vienna and Leipzig, 1908), 257. As pulled from: Helen Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda" in *Ériu Vol. 58* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008), 129.
[109] Imhoff, "The Themes and Structure of Aided Echach Maic Maireda," pp. 129-130.
[110] de Vries, "The Names of Lí Bán," 54.

Chapter 4: Tochmarc Étaíne

The texts under discussion have thus far focused on characters who are said to have existed prior to the arrival of the Mílesians, the Gaels, in Ireland. In these prior examples, Fintan, Tuán, the Children of Lir and Lí Bán demonstrate in their own ways examples of some of the earliest inhabitants of Ireland and the transitioning of peoples over time until the sons of Míl are dominant throughout the island. With the arrival of these various new groups of people, apparent cultural shifts that were actually occurring within Ireland can be seen to be represented in the narrative of the texts, such as the rise of Christianity. As has been demonstrated, these new developments are often marked by the supernatural transformation of key narrative figures into various animal shapes over the course of long expanses of time. However, as will be seen through the analysis of Étaín, animal transformations denoting cultural shifts over time within Ireland are not limited to otherworldly figures such as the Tuatha Dé Danann nor are they required to be of an age long forgotten. Through Étaín, it will be shown that the presence of animal transformation motifs go beyond characters belonging to the Otherworld; that these transformations, regardless of whom they are applied to, are intentionally inserted into the narrative to denote apparent and perceived cultural shifts.

Étaín is the eponymous heroine of the ninth or tenth century text *Tochmarc Étaíne*, which can be broken down into three key narratives pertaining to her biography.[111] In the first section of the text, the birth of Óengus Óc and how he laid claim to the Bruig na Bóinde (modern day Newgrange) is explained, as well as how Midir, the foster father of the Macc Óc, came to be married to Étaín. Within the second section, the jealousy of Midir's first wife towards Étaín is displayed, and how through her magic, Étaín is subjected to live in various animal forms before her eventual reincarnation. Lastly, the final section of the text discusses the reincarnation of Étaín and the methods taken by Midir to reclaim his wife from her marriage to the Irish king Eochaid.[112] In these three sections, as will be shown, time is a constant factor that is essential to the narrative. Though time remains crucial to the plot of *Tochmarc Étaín*, the passage of it is experienced differently depending on which key narrative it occurs in. In the first and final sections, time will be shown as being something that is manipulated; whereas in the second it proves to be something that is endured. This distinction regarding time is important in differentiating the progression of time between the

[111] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 83.
[112] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* trans. Jeffrey Gantz (London: Penguin Group, 1981), pp. 39-59.

Tuatha Dé Danann and mankind, a point which will be elaborated upon below. In this regard, the second section of the text is the most blatant demonstration of time being used in relation to animal shifts within *Tochmarc Étaíne,* however this does not discount the importance of temporal manipulations taking place in that of the others.

The text opens with the conception of Óengus. The Dagda who is chief over the race of the Tuatha Dé Danann coveted the wife of Elcmar, Bóand, and in a ploy to spend an evening with her sends Elcmar on a distant journey to fulfil his bidding. However, as Elcmar leaves the Dagda casts great spells to prolong the evening so that he would not feel the passage of the night nor would he feel weariness, hunger or thirst. Thus, what seems to Elcmar to be a single evening, in reality encompasses the expanse of nine months.[113] During this period, the Dagda impregnates Bóand and together they produce Óengus who comes to be known as the Macc Óc "young son" as he was conceived at dawn yet was born before the evening.[114] In this occurrence, the passage of time, while present, can plainly be seen to be manipulated rather than endured, relating back to my initial analysis of the eternal present within the Otherworld.[115]

As Óengus reaches maturity, his foster father Midir seeks compensation after being shamed within Óengus' domain. In this pursuit, he beseeches Óengus to negotiate Midir's marriage to Ireland's most beautiful woman, whom he identifies as Étaín, a woman of the Ulaíd and daughter of king Ailill.[116] Of note is the fact that unlike Midir and Óengus who belong to the tribe of the Tuatha Dé Danann, Étaín is of human descent. While her lineage is noble as she is the daughter of a king, the disparity between her and Midir is reinforced through Óengus' negotiation. Through his appeal to Ailill for the hand of Étaín, the king replies by saying:

> " ' Nis tiber deit,' ol Ailill, ' daigh ní rochaim bá fort ar suiri do cheniul, ar med do cumachtai 7 cumachta th'athar. Cach a dénai frim ingin do meboil ni rochar fort itir. ' "[117]

[113] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 39.
[114] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 40.
[115] While this facet of *Tochmarc Étaíne* remains inapplicable to how the passage of time has been discussed thus far, it is successful in demonstrating from the outset of the narrative that the motif of time was something present in the mind of the author. It is not random, rather it is inserted to fulfil a literary purpose in regards to the birth of one of Ireland's most prominent pre-Christian deities. Thus, when later into the narrative Étaín experiences the progression of time, it should also be seen as being included with intention.
[116] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 43.
[117] "Tochmarc Étaíne" in *Ériu Vol. 12*, trans. Osborn Bergin & R. I. Best (Royal Irish Academy, 1938), pp. 148-150.

> ['I will not give her to you,' said Ailill, ' for there is no profit in it. The nobility of your family and the extent of your power and your father's is so great, that if you were to shame my daughter, I would have no recourse.']118

Through this exchange, the difference of power between Ailill and Óengus is clear, and Ailill's lack of ability to find recourse in the chance the marriage was compromised could have a more complicated and hidden meaning.

The first understanding of this sequence is perhaps the most obvious in that if Midir were to shame Étaín, the Ulaíd would simply not have the military capacity nor the means to retaliate against the power commanded by Óengus or the Dagda. However, it is likely that this passage may also refer to the dowry Ailill would be required to pay if something were to compromise the new marriage as well as the bride price required for the betrothal. In medieval Ireland, the family of the bride was required to contribute a dowry which would serve as financial security if the husband were to pass or in the case of divorce. Uniquely in Ireland, the amount of wealth given was classified as being entirely the bride's property, not the property that was allotted by the family towards the new couple.[119] This is demonstrated in the twelfth century when Diarmuid Mac Murchada carried off Derbforgaill, the wife of king Tigearnán Ó Ruairc of Bréifne. As James Doan notes, this was a seemingly willing abduction as the queen prepared and brought her dowry possessions with her.[120] This insinuates that her dowry remained accessible to her and was not held collectively with her husband's finances. Furthermore, within medieval Irish law, women were allocated additional land rights depending on the amount of wealth that they brought towards the union.[121] The terms of the dowry would almost entirely be negotiated during the betrothal, which in medieval Ireland would have typically occurred by the bride's father presenting the union to the groom. Thus, during this period, the betrothal was the primary legal-driving force rather than the marriage ceremony which would simply act as the fulfilment of the arranged union. While the dowry provided by the bride would remain in her possession, it was also true that

118 *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 43..
119 Dorothy Dilts Swartz, "The Legal Status of Women in Early and Medieval Ireland and Wales in Comparison with Western European and Mediterranean Societies: Environmental and Social Correlations" in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol. 13* (1993), 112.
120 James Doan, "Sovereignty Aspects in the Roles of Women in Medieval Irish and Welsh Society" in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol. 5* (1985), 95.
121 Swartz, "The Legal Status of Women in Early and Medieval Ireland and Wales in Comparison with Western European and Mediterranean Societies: Environmental and Social Correlations," 113.

these resources would join that of the groom's, ideally to create a successful farm which belonged to the husband and wife in cooperation.[122]

In light of this, it can be interpreted that the dowry Ailill would need to pay for Étaín would prove to be a financially devastating and perhaps unrecoverable hit to Ulaíd's economy, as the wealth consolidated between those seeking Étaín were too great. Therefore, rather than pay the dowry, Ailill opts to accept a tremendous bride price from the Tuatha Dé Danann. As Charles-Edwards discusses, by presenting the bride with a dowry towards her union, her kindred would maintain entitlement to protect her interests. However, by accepting a payment and foregoing the dowry altogether, the bride's family would nullify any right they would have regularly maintained to protect her from ill-treatment.[123] If Charles-Edwards reasoning is correct, then Ailill was fully aware of the fact that his resources and power paled in comparison to that of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and as a result if Étaín was shamed by her new husband, their obligation to protect her interests would prove to be meaningless. Understanding the circumstances he has found himself in, and his inability to guarantee the safety of his daughter, Ailill instead forgoes these obligations and petitions Óengus for an immense bride price; an amount impossible for any human king to replicate but possible for Óengus and his kindred. The bride price, taking the form of tremendous labours used to increase the wealth and arable land of the Ulaíd as well as Étaín's weight in gold and silver, is paid and Étaín is obtained by Óengus for Midir.[124] What this passage establishes, in simple terms, is the immense power of the Tuatha Dé Danann at the outset of the text. Ailill and Étaín are characters of high nobility and power by the standards of man and yet despite their resounding qualities, cannot compete with that of their otherworldly solicitor.

The second section of the text takes the points which have been outlined above and reapplies them in more dire circumstances. After being married, Étaín is taken back to Brí Leíth, Midir's homeland, yet before leaving Óengus imparts a warning on Midir to watch over Étaín as a woman of dreadful sorcery lay in wait; one who maintained the protection of the Tuatha Dé Danann. This woman is revealed to be Fúamnach, the first wife of Midir and a sorceress of tremendous power who was reared by the great druid Bresal.[125] While Fúamnach initially seems to greet her husband and his new bride warmly, encouraging him to show off

[122] T. M. Charles-Edwards, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*: a Literal Interpretation" in *Ogma Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Catháin,* ed. Micheal Ricther & Jean-Michel Picard (Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 170-171.
[123] Charles-Edwards, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*: a Literal Interpretation," 171.
[124] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* pp. 43-44.
[125] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* pp. 44-45.

his house and land "coro thaispenar duit do tech 7 do thechta feraind cona dá cathair ingen in rig dom aithis," [so that the king's daughter may see [his] wealth,] the true nature of her feelings were yet to be revealed.[126] After Midir leaves Étaín with Fúamnach for the evening, Fúamnach expresses her disdain and strikes Étaín with a wand, ultimately turning her into a puddle and fleeing the home of Midir to return to her foster-father, Bresal.[127] It is here where the animal transformations of Étaín commence, alongside what can be seen as a cultural shift taking place within Ireland, in line with similar developments in the texts examined above. After becoming a puddle, Étaín undergoes first a transition into a worm, and then ultimately into a fly.[128] Miranda Green discusses how in Irish mythology, individuals were transformed from human to animal shape either in revenge for an alleged wrong or as punishment for an antisocial behaviour.[129] While I agree that revenge may have been the literary catalyst for these transformations, I maintain that their purpose within the narrative is of greater significance than simply a revenge plot. Of note is the natural metamorphosis of worm/maggot into the fly. Other than the transformation into a puddle, Étaín's transformations are not manually inflicted upon her; rather it is stated in the text that:

> "Doghni tes in tened 7 ind aeoir 7 combruith na talman imfortacht ind uscí co ndernai cruim din lind ro baí for lar in tighi, 7 dogni iar sin cuil corcrai don chruim sin."[130]
>
> [The heat of the fire and the air and the seething of the ground combined to turn the pool of water that was in the centre of the house into a worm, and they then turned the worm into a scarlet fly.][131]

Just as one insect form naturally progresses into that of another, the changes occurring in relation to Étaín may also be symbolic of apparent shifts in Ireland as well, a point which will be returned to soon.

Despite existing as a fly, Étaín maintains much of her beauty and grace in her new form:

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[126] For old Irish see: "Tochmarc Étaíne," 152. For modern English translation see: *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 45.
[127] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 45.
[128] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 45.
[129] Miranda Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1992), 193.
[130] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 152.
[131] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 45.

> "Ba bindi cuslendaib 7 crotaib 7 cornairib fuaim a foghair 7 easnad a heiti. Doaitnidis a suili amal lega loghmara isnaib reib doirchib. Arghaireadh itaidh 7 gortaidh do neoch a boladh 7 a blath ima teighedh. No ícadh saetho 7 gallra 7 teadmanda fursitin na mbraen foceirded dia heitib dinni imma theighedh."[132]
>
> [the sound of its voice and the beating of its wings were sweeter than pipes and harps and horns. Its eyes shone like precious stones in the dark, and its colour and fragrance could sate hunger and quench thirst in any man; moreover, a sprinkling of the drops it shed from its wings could cure every sickness and affliction and disease.][133]

Due to this, despite her new insectoid form, Étaín persisted as a constant companion to Midir, bringing him comfort in all that he endeavoured. Yet Fúamnach, once again displeased with her former lover's attachment to Étaín, conjures a powerful wind to send Étaín away. For seven years Étaín endures the wind until ultimately arriving at the abode of Óengus who, upon recognising her and the fate she had suffered, offers to provide her with sanctuary; however, upon learning of the whereabouts of Étaín and the fortunate position she had found herself in with Óengus, the vengeful Fúamnach casts Étaín adrift on the wind for another seven years. Unlike the first occasion, Étaín this time finds herself landing in the cup of a woman from the court of Conchobar, perhaps an allusion to her previous transformation into a puddle, and in much the same fashion as Túan, is consumed and subsequently becomes conceived in the woman's womb. Étain is eventually born, and it is revealed, rather blatantly, to the reader that one thousand and twelve years had passed since her first birth as the child of Ailill until her last as the offspring of the warrior Étar.[134]

Returning to the various transformations of Étaín, the exact animal forms she assumes may give insight into the message that the author was trying to convey more obviously than in the previous texts. While figures such as Túan assumed forms iconic to the Irish landscape such as the salmon or stag, Étaín is characterised by creatures weak and pest-like. As Fúamnach casts her spells upon Étaín, the latter character is displayed as being powerless against the magic she endures. This may be an allusion to the words of her father, who conveys that if she were to be shamed, no recourse would be attainable, just as Étaín now as a fly has no choice but to endure the machinations of Fúamnach. To reiterate a motif seen prominently amongst all of the texts discussed thus far is the virtue of fortitude. Though there are some key differences to the circumstances of Étaín between the children of Lir, Tuán and

[132] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 152.
[133] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 45.
[134] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* pp. 46-48.

Fintan, such as most importantly finding salvation in God, it is nonetheless noteworthy that the titular characters' animal transformations are once again shown in tandem with earthly suffering.

Furthermore, as has been briefly mentioned already, the transition of a worm to a fly is of particular note in regards to my argument that animal transformations are a vehicle used to denote perceived cultural changes over time. While the exact nature as to where creatures such as frogs, maggots or worms would appear from may have been unknown, it is safe to assume the medieval Irish would be aware of the natural metamorphosis of say a caterpillar to butterfly, or of a maggot to a fly due its action being observable. Though the scientific explanation as to why this metamorphosis was happening was not properly understood, its occurrence must have been at the very least observed. Isidore of Seville comments on the appearance and development of vermin and notes that maggots are generated in putrid meat.[135] Furthermore, in his analysis on tiny flying animals, Isidore notes that like maggots:

> "Many people know from experience that bees are born from the carcasses of oxen, for the flesh of slaughtered calves is beaten to create these bees, so that worms are created [from] the putrid gore, and the worms then become bees. Specifically, the ones called 'bees' originate from oxen, just as hornets come from horses, drones from mules, and wasps from asses."[136]

From this, Isidore demonstrates that the metamorphosis of one animal to the next was known, specifically in relation to animals that originate from carcasses. While the fly and bee differ, their similar origin makes it likely that flies were also believed to transform from maggots in a similar fashion. The inclusion of two animals that naturally metamorphosize from one form to the other is an aspect of the text that I would argue strongly for as being intentional.

When Étaín's hand in marriage is first sought after by Midir through the means of Óengus, it is demonstrated that the strength of the Ulaíd paled in comparison to that of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Yet after one thousand and twelve years of elapsed history the circumstances of the kingdoms had shifted. Thus, when Midir attempts in the final section of the text to win Étaín from her new husband, Eochaid Airem, he is presented with an adversary who proves to be much more powerful than Étaín's original father, Ailill. As Charles-Edwards discusses, the name Eochaid Airem, while explained within the text, was presumably intended to be contrasted with that of Eochaid Ollathir, another name of the

[135] Stephen A. Barney, "Book XII Animals (De animalibus)," *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 259.
[136] Barney, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville,* 269.

Dagda. Like the Dagda, who served as the overking of the Tuatha Dé Danann, Eochaid Airem likewise serves as the overking of the men of Ireland by the time of his marriage to Étaín.[137] This is reinforced within the text as unlike king Ailill of the Ulaíd, Eochaid is written to have subjugated the five provinces of Ireland under his rule, as well as the five regional kings who ruled them respectively.[138]

In addition to his name alluding to the power he possessed, Eochaid Airem's seat of power also demonstrates the rise of the Mílesians within the narrative. As conveyed in *Cath Maige Tuired,* Tara was the Tuatha Dé Danann's royal hall at the height of their power, seating gods such as Núada and Lugh during their reign.[139] While not directly stated within *Tochmarc Étaíne* itself, there is reason to assume that the Dagda also rules from Tara at the outset of this narrative. As Williams discusses, Bruig na Bóinde is the pre-eminent *síd* mound within medieval Irish literature, that is distinctly associated with the Dagda.[140] However, seeing as the Dagda provided instruction to his son, Óengus, to claim ownership over, and reside in the mound for the remainder of the text, the Dagda must be located elsewhere.[141] As the Dagda serves as king over the entirety of Ireland, a likely hypothesis is that he presided over Tara, in a similar fashion as the other kings of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Due to this, even before Midir begins to challenge Eochaid for Étaín, the latter king due to his name and royal seat of power is to be understood by association as being powerful in his own right.

If Eochaid's power is hinted at by his similarity to the Dagda, then it is cemented through Midir's fidchell challenges towards Eochaid. When Midir originally attempted to lay claim to Étaín, Ailill was unable to rise to the challenge presented to him, found in the form of dowry payment. However, Eochaid as high king is now able to rise and match any challenge presented to him by Midir, demonstrating his own wealth and power.[142] While these wagers may not accurately provide any limit in regards to the extent of either figure's inherent wealth, it does convey that at the very least, Eochaid and Midir were entering into competition as comparable equals. Far gone were the days that earthly kings could find no recourse against the wealth and power of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Under the protection of Eochaid, Étaín could no longer be taken simply due to a disparity in wealth, as was the case

[137] Charles-Edwards, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*: a Literal Interpretation," 173.
[138] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 49.
[139] *Cath Maige Tuired The Second Battle of Mag Tuired,* Ed. Elizabeth A. Gray (Naas: Irish Texts Society, 1982), pp. 38-43.
[140] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 37.
[141] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* pp. 39-42.
[142] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, pp. 52-55.

with Ailill. Eochaid had the means to protect that which belonged to him, requiring Midir to employ strategy to claim that which he desired. If the similarities drawn above are seen to be intentional, then the decline of the Tuatha Dé Danann is apparent. Due to this, it should not be seen as surprising that when Midir beckons to Eochaid Airem on the ramparts of his fortress, he is now entirely unknown to the men inhabiting Ireland and that his power has waned to the confines of his síd, Brí Léith. As Mark Williams notes, the ethnic Irish now rule over Ireland and the diminution of the Tuatha Dé Danann is subtly conveyed by the similarities of the two Eochaid's and the fade of Midir from collective memory.[143]

Just as Étaín's transformations are demonstrative of a natural progression from worm to fly, so too does it represent the apparent progression of the Mílesians' power and affluence. The Mílesians begin the tale too weak to find any recourse against the might of the Tuatha Dé Danann, yet nearing the end of the text, the humans present a significant challenge in the way of the Tuatha Dé Danann's interests. After competing for possession of Étaín, Midir ultimately finds victory, yet over the course of the games played it is clear that Midir does not leave his bouts with Eochaid unscathed. Through one of his losses to Eochaid, Midir is tasked with completing three great labours. In response to this Midir replies by saying "Romór a ndobeiri orm" [You ask too much of me], demonstrating one of the few occasions in the entirety of the Irish mythological corpus in which a member of the Tuatha Dé Danann struggles to fulfil a challenge presented by a human opponent.[144] While Midir may have been able to call upon the aid of Óengus and the Dagda in order to complete the labour tasks initially required for Étaín, here Midir must complete the tasks asked of him on his own. I am inclined to view this absence as intentional. Midir requests for the men and women to stay indoors while he completes his tasks so that none may witness how they are accomplished, and yet despite this opportunity to appeal for external aid, the presence of the Dagda and Óengus remain absent from the story.[145] Here it is likely that the absence of the Dagda and Óengus, paramount figures to the Irish pantheon, is a symptom of the Tuatha Dé Danann's decline over the course of Étaín's transformation.[146] Furthermore, while one may be tempted to suggest that the labours Eochaid asked of Midir are similar to the bride price Óengus

[143] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 97.
[144] For Old Irish see: "Tochmarc Étaíne," 178. For modern English translation see: *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 53.
[145] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 54.
[146] *See* note 83. If this is true, then my prior argument regarding the children of Lir and the loss of Bodb Dearg's seat of power can perhaps be seen as a motif relating to the decline of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and thus held with more credibility.

performed on his behalf for Ailill, Charles-Edwards suggests a key distinction between these two occasions. When Midir performs his labours, it is not done as a form of bride payment as it was before, rather it was out of obligation for having lost his game with Eochaid. Similarly, when Eochaid subsequently loses Étaín to Midir, it is again due to the result of their game.[147] There was no legal connection between either game, and thus their results simply do not serve as a proper parallel of the betrothal presented earlier in the text. Due to this, when Midir flees with Étaín Eochaid is within his right to pursue and attempt to regain her. In the post-fly transformation sequence of the tale, it has been displayed how the power dynamics of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the Mílesians have shifted. Throughout this segment, one element of the tale that remains constant is the fact that whenever Midir conveys his desire to reclaim Étaín, she outright refuses to leave with him until Eochaid himself wills it, a sentiment which can be seen below.

> " ' Atrubartsa fritso,' ol si, 'conom riré Eochaíd nít rís. Atometha lat ár mó chuit fén dianom riri Eochaid."'[148]

> ["I have said," Étaín replied, "that I will not go with you unless [Eochaid] sells. For my part, you may take me if [Eochaid] sells me."][149]

Why is this? The answer may lie in what has been discussed thus far; that Étaín no longer recognises the power and legitimacy of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Their prominence in Ireland has shifted and Eochaid remains her best option. This notion contributes to the idea that Étaín operates within this text as a woman of sovereignty, a subject that much has been written on, and that which will be expanded upon below.

Eochaid's right to pursue and reclaim his wife leads into the finale of the tale in which Eochaid travels throughout Ireland digging up *síd* mounds in order to find the home of Midir. When he finally is able to do so, he is once again approached by Midir who informs him that on the morrow Étaín would be returned to him if Eochaid would swear to no longer incur further injuries on him and his abode.

> " 'Erg do[t] tigh. Roticfa do ben trath teirti ambarach. Fír na cetnai 7 na n-irradh,' ol Midir. 'Nacham forais ather- rach, madh slán do menma lat don chur sa uaim."'[150]

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[147] Charles-Edwards, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*: a Literal Interpretation," 180.
[148] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 184.
[149] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 57.
[150] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 186.

> ["Go home - by the truth of the one and the other, your wife will return to you by the third hour tomorrow. If that satisfies you, injure me no further."][151]

Eochaid ultimately agrees to these terms, and just as Midir pledged, he arrives the next day with an excess of fifty women all with the appearance and clothing of Étaín. John Carey discusses how this exchange can be seen to be an inverse from the typical motif of human kings interacting with the Tuatha Dé Danann. Rather than characters such as the mortal Conn visiting the immortal Lugh in his great hall at Tara, we instead are presented with the immortal Midir visiting the mortal king of Eochaid at his own abode in the same locale.[152]

Returning now to Étaín's role as a woman of sovereignty, while it is not my intention to delve into this topic in great detail, I do feel it is worth mentioning in regards to *Tochmarc Étaíne* as in the final sub tale of the text, it can be said to relate to perceived cultural shifts as well as the progression of time; two of my primary criteria established at the beginning of this thesis. As Erica Sessle discusses, the trend of scholarly works to analyse Irish and Welsh female characters existing or presenting as sovereignty goddesses was developed in the 1920's. This theory maintained that the female deity was the embodiment of the physical land and through the union of the otherworldly woman and the earthly king, the latter would take within him the right to rule.[153] While Sessle does not seem to disagree with the identification of certain figures as sovereignty goddesses, she does present a convincing argument that the current trend of academia may be overindulgent in applying this status to the large variety of female figures found in the Old Irish literary corpus.[154] Through her article, Sessle analyses the characterisation of the Welsh Rhiannon, and how by applying divine status to her, it limits the depth of the character as a whole. Rhiannon makes costly mistakes that make sense if she is accepted as being mortal, yet seem entirely incompatible if interpreted as a goddess figure.[155]

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[151] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 58.
[152] John Carey, "Identity, TIme, and the Otherworld: An Observation on the Wooing of Étaín" in *Celtic myth in the 21st century: the gods and their stories in a global perspective,* ed. Emily Lyle (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 27.
[153] Erica J. Sessle, "Exploring the Limitations of the Sovereignty Goddess through the Role of Rhiannon" in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol. 14* (Harvard University: Department of Celtic Languages & Literatures, 1994), 9.
[154] Sessle, "Exploring the Limitations of the Sovereignty Goddess through the Role of Rhiannon," pp. 9-10.
[155] Sessle, "Exploring the Limitations of the Sovereignty Goddess through the Role of Rhiannon," pp. 10-12.

While I am of a similar mind to Sessle, in the case of Étaín, the elements of her character throughout the text seem to overwhelmingly support her as being representative of a true woman of sovereignty regardless of her presence as a mortal.[156] Unlike Rhiannon, who may be better interpreted as being a mortal rather than an immortal figure due to the infallibility of her decision making, Étaín's demeanour remains constant and she never succumbs to detrimental choices. As has been discussed previously, despite her transformation into a fly, Étaín retains the grace and beauty she presented in her human form. When Eochaid Airem is away on a circuit throughout Ireland, Midir arrives feigning the identity of Eochaid's brother Ailill while also casting magic upon the true Ailill causing him to fall terminally lovesick for Étaín. Étaín realising the source of Ailill's affliction, agrees to meet him for a romantic tryst to heal him. However, on each occasion that Étaín attempts to rendezvous with Ailill, he sleeps through the meeting and Étaín is confronted by the disguised Midir.[157] What is interesting is that on each of these occasions it is never stated that Étaín spends the night with Midir, implying that she does not in fact conduct sexual relations with her former lover; rather, she is always stated to return home. Étaín expresses that her agreeing to the tryst was to save a man who would be worthy of ruling over Ireland from his affliction, and that Midir who was unknown to her was undeserving of her. This is expressed by Étaín she states:

> " 'Ni fritsu,' ar si, 'ro dalasa. Cíasu tu dodeac[h]aid im dail ? An fer frisro dalusa ni ar c[h]ul t aimleas tiacht ara c[h]ind, acht as ar cuís tesairgne domnai rig Erenn don galar fotrubai.' "[158]

> ["It is not you who I am to meet," she said. "I come not to hurt or sin against the man I am to meet; I come rather to heal one who is worthy to be king of Ériu."[159]

The above excerpt demonstrates the noble intentions of Étaín's arranged meeting with Ailill and may signify the expression of her woman of sovereignty status. Whereas the below quote signifies his loss of power, and thus right to Étaín.

> " ' Nocho rairaibsa rig Erenn ar fear nach fedur clann no cenel do ' "[160]

[156] See pages 43 & 44 for further discussion of Étaín as a woman of sovereignty.
[157] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, pp. 50-51.
[158] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 170.
[159] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 51.
[160] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 170.

["I will not exchange the king of Ériu for a man whose race and family I know nothing of."][161]

The above interactions ultimately serve to demonstrate the discrepancy of worthiness between Midir and Ailill, a criterion which Étaín as the symbol of power assigns to each figure respectively.

Étaín's role as a sovereignty goddess is also hinted at much earlier within the tale during her first marriage to Midir. As Tomás Ó Cathasaigh discusses, after consummating his first marriage to Étaín, Midir is gifted with a mantle and a chariot. As Ó Cathasaigh goes on to further explain, the gifting of a cloak and a chariot were symbolic gestures in Ireland's ancient past of becoming king. In support of this, Ó Cathasaigh draws upon the text *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* which features the young Conaire being fitted with the clothing of a king and being placed within a chariot.[162] Taking the bestowment of Midir's badges of kingship and building upon the work of T. F. O'Rahilly in demonstrating Étaín's status as a sovereignty goddess, Ó Cathasaigh concludes that to be married to Étaín is to be king.[163] Compiling all of what has been said thus far, it is clear that beyond being a fantastical and otherworldly love story, *Tochmarc Étaíne* is a metaphorical competition for the right to rule. By paying for Étaín's marriage, Midir demonstrates his right to rule over Ailill just as Étaín's refusal to leave Eochaid for Midir denotes the former's superiority over the latter. When Eochaid loses the final Fidchell match against Midir, allowing him to embrace and kiss Étaín, he can be interpreted as losing his grasp on his right to rule.

The competition for control over Étaín subtly conveys ideas of power dynamics and cultural shifts within the narrative. As kingship passes from the hands of one king to another, so too does the power of the Tuatha Dé Danann and mankind wax and wane. As has been discussed, the decline of the Tuatha Dé Danann and rise of man can be seen to have occurred over the course of the one thousand and twelve years that Étaín survived as a fly. If Midir's recapture of Étaín is demonstrative of Eochaid's lapse in power, then if my theory is correct, one should expect another animal transformation to coincide with the decline of human power as well as the progression of time in the narrative. As will be shown, both these factors are present albeit not as pronounced as Étaín's fly transformation.

Turning again to Erica Sessle, an aspect of the sovereignty goddess which is often demonstrated in their respective narratives is their dual feature, as they can appear both

[161] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 51.
[162] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, "The Wooing of Étaín" in *Coire Sois The Cauldron of Knowledge,* ed. Matthieu Boyd (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 181.
[163] Ó Cathasaigh, "The Wooing of Étaín," 181.

repulsive and beautiful to those that come across them. Sessle notes in certain characters such as the Irish queen Medb, her dual feature is conveyed through the alteration of her personality, as without her king her personality became an ugly manifestation of the goddess.[164] However, more often than not, the dual feature is conveyed through physicality. The ancient Irish held the belief that the fruitfulness of the land coincided with gain and loss of the true king, and as a result of this, the sovereignty goddess often appeared repulsive until the time that the one destined for kingship would recognise her worth and accept her advances, ultimately transforming her back into her state of grace and beauty.[165] As Proinsias Mac Cana notes, this is perhaps best displayed through the tale of Níall Noígiallach's rise to kingship, where he and his brothers come across a hag while searching for water. While his brothers are unwilling to satisfy the hag's request for a kiss, Níáll does not hesitate which subsequently turns her into a beautiful maiden and identifies herself as Ireland's sovereignty embodied.[166]

Returning to our tale of Étaín, when Midir arrives in Eochaid's court with fifty of her doppelgangers, it is clear that none of whom he had brought were truly Étaín herself. When Eochaid attempts to identify his wife by having each woman pour liquid, none truly perform the task adequately as Étaín was known to be the best at serving in Ériu.[167] However there is one other female figure that is in the retinue of Midir, this being the "grey gast" or "slut" that beckons Eochaid to "'Togai do mnai din chur sa, no apair fri mnaí díb anadh lat" [Choose your wife now, or tell one of these women to remain with you].[168] Many scholars have presented the notion that this female figure before Eochaid is none other than Étaín herself expressing the dual feature of the sovereignty goddess.[169] Étaín, who was once beautiful to Eochaid while he was worthy, has now been reduced to a repulsive form. John Carey, while in agreement over Étaín's new form, presents a significant distinction regarding the

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[164] Sessle, "Exploring the Limitations of the Sovereignty Goddess through the Role of Rhiannon," 9.
[165] Proinsias Mac Cana, "Aspects of the theme of King and Goddess in Irish literature" in *Etudes Celtiques, vol. 7, fascicule 1* (1955), pp. 84-85.
[166] Mac Cana, "Aspects of the theme of King and Goddess in Irish literature," 85.
[167] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 58. Enough time has been spent identifying Étaín's role as a sovereignty goddess, however it must be noted that the motif of pouring liquid for the king is a motif that is quite common to the sovereignty goddess (See: Máire Bhreathnach, "The Sovereignty Goddess as Goddess of Death?" in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 39 (1982), pp. 256-257.) Here the fifty women pouring liquid for Eochaid is a symbolic action of bestowing kingship, and yet none truly perform the duty adequately. Only one can do this, Étaín, and her presence is not felt by Eochaid, signifying his loss of worth in regards to ruling Ireland.
[168] For Old Irish see: "Tochmarc Étaíne," pp. 186-187. For modern English translation see: *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 58.
[169] John Carey, "The final transformation of Étaín" in *Ériu Vol. 66* (Royal Irish Academy, 2016), 32.

terminology used to describe the hag. As Carey explains, there is approximately five centuries between the writing of *Tochmarc Étaíne* and the glossary which is the lone source for all assertions that there was a Gaelic word *gast* meaning hag or slut.[170] While he does not completely discard the possibility of this interpretation, Carey does appeal to the Welsh alternative meaning for the word *gast*, meaning bitch or female dog, and uses key examples of other dog transformations and forms found throughout Irish literature as his preferential interpretation.[171] Of particular note in regards to our tale under discussion is the Middle Irish *Rígad Néill Noígíallaigh ós Clann Echach,* which features the personification of sovereignty appearing as a woman with the head of a dog.[172] If Carey is correct in his analysis, then Étaín exhibiting her dual feature as a sovereignty goddess by turning into the form of a dog simultaneously aligns itself with my argument. Eochaid Airem is no longer able to recognize the form his wife has taken, and thus his worthiness to lead his people as king has faltered. Just as the animal forms earlier within *Tochmarc Étaíne* and the previous chapters have shown, the physical transformation of Étaín into that of an animal is demonstrative of a cultural shift as Eochaid loses the legitimacy of his kingship.

The last component to Étaín's final transformation within *Tochmarc Étaíne* is time. When Étaín undergoes her first animal transformations midway through the text, the progression of time is conveyed blatantly. One thousand and twelve years had passed since Étaín's first birth to her second. Due to this the audience may not expect the subtlety of the final progression of time as Étaín takes her form of a grey dog. At the outset of *Tochmarc Étaíne,* the audience is presented with the birth of Óengus, a narrative that fundamentally deals with the manipulation of time. As has been discussed, the Dagda, not wanting his affair with Bóand to be discovered nor interrupted, manipulates time so that what felt like a single evening in fact stretched for around nine months. While the birth of Óengus has very little impact on the remainder of the story, it does establish from the outset that time is a concept fundamental to the events taking place. However, to echo my thoughts at the beginning of this chapter, the progression of time here is an example of manipulation rather than duration. The notion I would like to present is that when the progression of time is portrayed in *Tochmarc Étaíne* in relation to the Tuatha Dé Danann, it is something to be manipulated; where the progression of time does not affect them due to their residence in the eternal present. In contrast time is felt by humans, and thus when characters such as Étaín who is of

[170] Carey, "The final transformation of Étaín," 34.
[171] Carey, "The final transformation of Étaín," pp. 36-37.
[172] Carey, "The final transformation of Étaín," 37.

the human race intertwine with its progression, it is drawn out and endured. The Dagda manipulates time for his own purposes, and Étaín suffers it. Due to this, when Eochaid must select his wife from the women presented to him, time can be inferred to have been manipulated as a result of Midir's power.

Eochaid, unable to identify his wife as the grey dog, instead chooses the woman whose pouring most closely resembles that of his Étaín. The men celebrate Eochaid's choice and all seems resolved.[173] In the tradition of unhappy endings in medieval Irish literature, the resolved conflict of Eochaid and Étaín's reunification does not last, as Midir returns to inform the king that the woman he had chosen was none other than his own daughter, with whom Étaín was pregnant when he had claimed Étaín's embrace. Furthermore, in the time since Eochaid had made his decision, his daughter had also become pregnant with his child.

> "Focerd Eochaid i ces a ben do eludh 7 coiblighi a ingine fris, 7 ba torrach sidhe uadhasum, 7 bert ingean do."[174]
>
> [He was distressed that his wife had escaped and that he had slept with his own daughter; his daughter, moreover, became pregnant and bore a daughter.][175]

From this, there seems to be a dichotomy between the time that had passed since Midir first reclaimed Étaín and the age of her daughter when Eochaid selected her. On this matter, Carey notes that if Eochaid was unaware of Étaín's pregnancy before fleeing with Midir, it is likely that she had conceived just recently.[176] Furthermore, Carey discusses that the *Dindshenchas'* mention of *Tochmarc Étaíne* provides a timeline of just nine years before Midir and Eochaid entered into negotiations for Étaín's return, making Eochaid's daughter a little over eight years old. Ignoring this slightly longer timeline, if we are to focus solely on the information within the text, Carey notes that at maximum the daughter would be closer to five years in age.[177] With this in mind, Carey explains that this age simply does not conform with what was considered normal legal practice in medieval Ireland as women were unable to be betrothed - let alone married - before their fourteenth year.[178] Legality aside, the discussion

[173] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 58.
[174] "Tochmarc Étaíne," 188.
[175] *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 59.
[176] John Carey, "Identity, TIme, and the Otherworld: An Observation on the Wooing of Étaín" in *Celtic myth in the 21st century: the gods and their stories in a global perspective,* ed. Emily Lyle (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 24.
[177] Carey, "Identity, TIme, and the Otherworld: An Observation on the Wooing of Étaín," 25.
[178] Carey, "Identity, TIme, and the Otherworld: An Observation on the Wooing of Étaín," 25.

moves towards physiological feasibility. If the estimation of Étaín and Eochaid's daughter being between the ages of five and eight years old is accurate, she would physically be incapable of conceiving a child. In support of this Carey turns towards the writings of the seventh century theologian Augustinus Hibernicus who gives the interval of twelve and forty-nine as when women typically were able to give birth.[179]

Assuming my argument regarding the role of dowry and bride-price is correct, the author has thus far proven themselves to be versed in medieval Irish law. Considering the author's legal knowledge and the fact that Eochaid's daughter is pregnant with his child, it seems clear that she must be an adult; after all the fifty women who arrived in Eochaid's court were all like Étaín in appearance. When Midir took Étaín with him, he returned to his abode within the *síd* of Brí Leíth, crossing the border between the world of the mortal and that of the immortal. Through the birth of Óengus, the author has already established how the Tuatha Dé Danann are capable of manipulating time, particularly in regards to human pregnancy. Therefore, it is highly likely that the reader is to assume that, just as with Óengus, Étaín's otherworldly born daughter has reached maturity through an unnatural progression of time. I am of a similar mind to Carey who writes that:

> "The parallel between the gestation of the Mac Óc and that of Eochaid's daughter links the beginning of *Tochmarc Étaíne* with its end, confirming the structural integrity of the tale despite its division into three parts."[180]

If Étaín has in fact transformed into the form of a dog and her daughter has undergone rapid and otherworldly ageing, then the two criteria denoting cultural shifts, animal transformations and the progression of time, have been fulfilled. Just as Étaín's transformation into a fly represents the fall of the Tuatha Dé Danann's prominence in Ireland, her transformation into a dog demonstrates Eochaid's loss of sovereignty.

It has already been discussed how Ireland in the medieval period was constantly in conflict due to dynastic kings attempting to consolidate their own power and achieve dominion over weaker kingdoms within their periphery. This is perhaps best demonstrated through the drastic rise in power of Ireland's Brian Boru. After obtaining the throne of Dál Cais, Brian Boru underwent a rapid growth in power, subjugating the entirety of Ireland under his rule and becoming recognized as over-king in 1013 AD.[181] However, despite

[179] Carey, "Identity, TIme, and the Otherworld: An Observation on the Wooing of Étaín," 25.
[180] Carey, "Identity, TIme, and the Otherworld: An Observation on the Wooing of Étaín," 26.
[181] Clare Downham, *Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 104.

acquiring this unprecedented power, Brian Boru's success was fleeting. The very next year at the infamous Battle of Clontarf, Brian achieved victory against the forces of Dublin at the cost of his life.[182] While *Tochmarc Étaíne* may not be directly related to any specific historical event, at its very core the text revolves around the rise and fall of kingship. Through various marriages to Étaín, serving as the embodiment of sovereignty, the male figures found within the text exert their influence over those who oppose them. However, just as the peak of Brian Boru's status was historically cut short, the various kings found in *Tochmarc Étaín* have no guarantee in regards to the longevity of their reign. Étaín is a figure to be liberated and conquered, and as she assumes new forms over time, so too does the balance of power shift within Ireland. Due to all of this, the animal transformations over time within this text are demonstrative of cultural shifts that occurred within the island as a result of fluctuations in kingship and the balance of power.

[182] Downham, *Medieval Ireland,* pp. 104-105.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the words of Sharon Paice Macleod, "The stories of Fintan and Túan, as well as that of Lí Bán and the Children of Lir, may be relics of a native tradition in which 'the enlightened adept, by recalling former existences, can look back in time to the Golden Age'."[183] Macleod is certainly referring to the notion in medieval Irish literature that the Tuatha Dé Danann once lived in an Ireland much greater and untouched by sin than that enjoyed by mankind. However, her sentiment also suggests that the authors of these texts, by looking back, recognized that the Ireland they had lived in had changed over time. Over the course of this thesis, the subject of cultural change has continued to be paramount to my argument. In the medieval period, Ireland was undergoing these changes at every level of society.

The introduction of Christianity into Ireland brought ecclesiastical learning which in turn allowed for a rich literary tradition to blossom. As Christianity grew in popularity, the social structure of Ireland undeniably shifted. Christian values were adopted into the legal system, the kings of Ireland became Christian, and by the eighth century the druids, what Williams describes as the 'magico-religious specialists of Irish paganism,' ceased to appear in all legal texts and can be interpreted as disappearing from Irish society altogether.[184] Furthermore, all surviving Irish texts pertaining to pre-Christian figures were recorded by Christian monks, and therefore inherently do not attribute to them the deified status they would have maintained previously. These figures were not gods to the monks who wrote about them, and the literature surrounding them suggests their inferiority to, and conversion towards, belief in the supreme God of Christianity.

Likewise, the introduction of the Norse into Ireland also forced dramatic changes to occur within the country. Raids on monasteries and other centres of wealth became prime targets for the Norse; the fear of these sudden attacks is reflected in texts found throughout the British Isles. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle prophesied the future attacks by Norse warriors as divine punishment for the sins committed by the morally corrupt Christians in England.[185] Similarly, Carey discusses how the Morrígan also prophesied the Norse invasion of Ireland as

[183] Macleod, "The Descent of the Gods: Creation, Cosmogony, and Divine Order in Lebor Gabála," pp. 321-322.
[184] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth,* 4.
[185] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* pp. 55-57.

a portent relating to the end of the world.[186] Additionally, tapping into the unbroken landscape of Iceland had a prerequisite of tremendous slave labour; as a result many slaves were taken to aid in this endeavour, many of which came from Ireland and Scotland.[187] Norse towns in Ireland, the biggest being Dublin, became massive exporters of slaves. However, as has been discussed prior, these towns soon became fully integrated in Ireland and began to mass produce luxury goods such as art, ultimately bolstering the Irish economy and contributing to the newly forming Hiberno-Norse culture.

Lastly, the country of Ireland itself was tumultuous and full of infighting even without the presence of the Norse, primarily due to power struggles between regional and dynastic kings. Due to this, the island was subject to frequent border disputes as various kings attempted to achieve the status of overking and reign over the entirety of the country. Many historical examples of these internal struggles could be discussed, but Brian Boru, as briefly discussed above, demonstrates this best. These kings held tremendous power and were fully capable of eradicating rival families. In this way, the culture of Ireland was also directly tied to and influenced by the concentration of power maintained by these overkings as they rose and fell.

These changes cannot be categorised as being positive or negative; they inhabited a grey area in which both can be said to be true depending on when and who they were applied to. In the minds of the Irish who were experiencing them, these cultural changes were simply occurring over the span of hundreds of years, and they were required to adapt to them. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the medieval Irish were cognizant of the fact that these cultural shifts were happening. Returning to Macleods earlier sentiment, Ireland's learned, recognizing these changes, inserted allusions to them within the texts they created. However, this begs the question as to how these changes, hidden within the narrative, were transmitted within the text to readers? My theory, and what has continuously been argued over the course of this thesis, is that these changes are represented by the presence of animal changes acting in tandem with the progression of time. In each of the texts that have fallen under my analysis, one or more examples of animal transformations, the progression of time, and some sort of cultural shift can be seen. These three criteria have been the foundation of my argument. By using this criteria to isolate select texts, my aim has been to demonstrate that

[186] Carey, *Myth and Mythography in Cath Maige Tuired,* pp. 61-62.
[187] Jenny Jochens, "Late and Peaceful: Iceland's Conversion Through Arbitration in 1000," in *Speculum* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 73: 637.

these aspects of the narrative are intentional and can be seen to be part of a larger motif within the medieval Irish literary corpus.

The first chapter of my analysis focused on the characterisation of Tuán mac Cairill and Fintan mac Bóchra. Both characters through their unnaturally long lifetimes, spanning thousands of years, have quite clearly demonstrated the progression of time. Furthermore, the many animal transformations they undergo have been shown to coincide with a perceived series of inhabitation into Ireland. As Fintan and Tuán experience these various changes in animal form, they arrive at the same final state of being: a human clerical figure who has found wisdom and salvation through God. Through the aforementioned aspects of the various texts involving these characters, this chapter addressed multiple cultural shifts present. First, there was a recognition of pagan religion in Ireland that was slowly replaced by Christianity, and that this prior religion contradicted antediluvian Christian belief. Therefore, Irish authors used Fintan and Tuán to bridge these conflicting narratives together. By bridging these narratives, these Irish authors simultaneously convey the conversion period of Ireland.

The second chapter similarly addresses the cultural shifts pertaining to Christianity in relation to Ireland's conversion, baptism, and the virtue of fortitude. In my analysis of Fionnghuala and Lí Bán I have outlined a shared character schematic. Each character is cursed to inhabit one or more bodies of water in an animal form fulfilling the transformation requirement of my argument. Additionally, there is a distinct interval of three hundred years enforced on each body of water which provides defined progressions of time. Through these intervals in animal form Lí Bán and Fionnghuala have been shown to endure great suffering, and that through their fortitude, they are able to come closer to God. As I have shown, each respective text features the decline and inevitable disappearance of the Tuatha Dé Danann. I propose this relates to the cultural shift of Ireland's conversion where this decline is representative of the loss of faith in Ireland's pre-Christian religion and subsequent turn towards Christianity.

The final chapter of this thesis has focused on the character of Étaín. In particular, Étaín presents two animal transformations which I propose as being representative of cultural change; that of the fly and grey dog as presented by Carey. As the fly, the progression of time is clear as it is stated that one thousand and twelve years had passed. In regards to the grey dog, I have discussed how the progression of time can be seen through Étaín's pregnancy, where the manipulation of time in the Otherworld allows for a subtle and unclear progression. In this chapter, Étaín is a woman of sovereignty, and as such bestows rightful kingship on those who are worthy. In this regard, *Tochmarc Étaíne* conveys cultural shifts in relation to

Ireland's fluctuations in kingship. Just as characters such as Midir and Eochaid fluctuated between being worthy to rule, so too did the kingship of Ireland fluctuate on the regional and sometimes national level.

Ultimately, through the aforementioned analysis, I have provided a new lens through which to peer into medieval Irish literature. While much has been written in regards to animal transformations, as well as the functionality of time in Irish literature, little has been written about these themes working in conjunction with one another. One of the goals of this thesis has been to rectify this. By viewing the progression of time and animal transformations not as distinct individual motifs, but rather one larger motif when they appear in tandem, I have demonstrated that medieval Irish authors were attempting to parallel real cultural shifts that were occurring in the country over the span of hundreds of years. By looking retrospectively, these authors were able to structure these changes in a palatable format for readers, ultimately conveying the idea of what had in fact occurred over time, without the need to attach any direct historical truth.

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