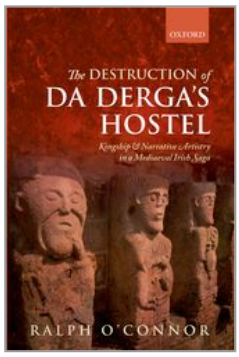


The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga
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Print publication date: 2013
Print ISBN-13: 9780199666133
Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: May 2013
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199666133.001.0001

# The House of Death

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199666133.003.0006

## Abstract and Keywords

The momentum of the first half of the saga is further sustained by devices which underscore the perceptions of the protagonists involved. Besides formal prophecies, Conaire's last journey is punctuated by omens which present him (and us) with signs of the coming catastrophe. He and his companions respond with mounting fear. Supernatural beings proliferate and human characters take on Otherworldly attributes, transforming Da Derga's Hall into a sinister otherworldly location in its own right. These apparitions become increasingly formulaic, not because the author lacked imagination, but in order to make the meaning of the catastrophe increasingly evident. Simultaneously, Conaire and his foster-brothers are shown responding to signs of each other's approach by means of alternating narratorial viewpoints, increasingly representing events through the direct speech of those involved. Often mistaken for evidence of clumsy compilation, this technique provides a bridge between the first and second halves of the saga.

*Keywords:* Da Derga, hostel, momentum, otherworld, myth, omen, fear, fate, formulae, interlace

*Just as the image of the sun is thrown*

*Upon the haze, before it rises, so*

*Great destinies send out their harbingers.*

*And in today, tomorrow's spirit walks.*[1]

Conaire's death at Da Derga's Hostel was an important reference-point in mediaeval Irish legendary history, and its significance went well beyond the fate of a single king. The bare prose of annals and regnal lists is eloquent on this point: Conaire's death is followed in one Middle Irish regnal list with the words, *Cōic bliadna iar sin do hĒrind cen ardrīg* ('For five years after that Ireland was without an over-king').[2] According to some chronicles and sagas, this period of five or seven years in which no over-king or *ardrí* ruled at Tara saw Ireland divided between five separate (and usually warring) provincial over-kings: the Pentarchy or period of the 'fifths' (*cóiceda*).[3] This sense of impending political breakdown may help to explain the intensity with which the atmosphere of doom is sustained in the *Togail*.

In any case, few members of the original audience of the *Togail* would have been surprised that a saga bearing the title *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* should relate Conaire's death. Many or most of them probably knew the basic story already. At the very least, it seems clear that the narrative was not constructed with a view to surprising its audience at the end. Thurneysen criticized the saga-author for spoiling the story: for incorporating so many prophecies and predictions into its fabric that the final battle, when it came, was an anti-climax because its events were (p.130) already predetermined.[4] But one could say as much of many Greek tragedies, whose legendary storylines were common knowledge among the better-educated Athenians who attended these events.[5] Here too, prophecies such as those uttered by Cassandra (in *Agamemnon*) and Teiresias (in *Oedipus Tyrannos*) played their part in jogging audiences' memories, ensuring that the

outcome was clear in advance as well as engendering dramatic situations in their own right. In both Greek drama and Irish saga, expectations were subverted and interest generated by the *ways* in which the expected events took place, and in the meanings given to those events, rather than by surprise revelations of *what* took place.

More recently, in a now-classic study of *geis* and prophecy, Charles-Edwards has refuted Thurneysen's criticism by showing that the author of the *Togail* was writing for an audience fascinated by ‘the unavoidable connexions between events and the impotence of men to escape their fates’. He further suggests that the saga-author was not remotely interested in maintaining the uncertainty of the story's outcome or following ‘the often fortuitous combinations of human choices to the end’.[6] The *Togail* does in fact accord great significance to individual choices made by Conaire and his foster-brothers, as we have seen in previous chapters; but this does not prevent the story's outcome from appearing strongly pre-ordained. *Gessi*, prophecies, omens, and oaths, alongside the less Otherworldly narrative techniques analysed in the previous chapter, all conspire to make the ending abundantly clear not only to us, but also—eventually—to several of the characters themselves. What gives the narrative its poignancy is that these characters nevertheless continue to struggle against their fate. The very title of the saga has shown us from the start that such a struggle must be futile: Da Derga's Hostel, exerting its magnetic pull on the ill-fated companies converging on it, gradually assumes an iconic and baleful significance as it is revealed to us over and over again as the saga's inevitable endpoint in fitful, charged glimpses.

In this process, the Hostel itself is seen to metamorphose from a hall of good cheer to the house of death. In the end it seems populated no longer by ordinary people but by Otherworldly apparitions and mysteriously doomed figures of heroic, even monstrous, stature. This element of supernatural mystery, conveyed in such a vivid and variegated manner, has probably been the main reason why the saga has attracted so much attention over the past century. Much energy has been expended, with considerable success, on trying to uncover the

myths and legends which underlie the representations we see in the *Togail*. In this project the saga has sometimes served as a quarry rather than a text, the assumption being that the (p.131) later or Christian element is a superficial stratum which can be peeled off fairly straightforwardly to reveal something of the ‘original’ story. Thomas O'Rahilly, for instance, argued at some length that, in the original saga or ‘primitive legend’, Conaire met his death while defending his people against a hostile Laginian invasion from overseas, and that he was originally represented as having journeyed to the Otherworldly location of Da Derga's Hostel after his death.[7] Those who later ‘committed the tale to writing’, as O'Rahilly put it, both embellished and rationalized this mythological dimension, presenting Conaire's last journey as taking place *before* his death and adding ‘supernatural’ characters like Mac Cécht and Fer Caille in order to ‘infus[e] into it a strong element of weirdness’.[8]

The creative confidence with which O'Rahilly reconstructed such ‘primitive legends’ has nowadays fallen into disfavour, although his account of the prehistory of the *Togail* remains compelling on its own terms. Current scholarship also favours a more circumspect approach to the identification of euhemerized or humanized gods in Irish narrative: Mac Cécht may possess attributes which mark him out as not entirely normal, but this does not mean that he is ‘really’ a sun-god, at least not in the extant *Togail*. More fundamentally, our knowledge of unambiguously pre-Christian Irish mythology is extremely sparse. Archaeological finds may hint at some important figures and practices, but the narrative dimension so essential to the reconstruction of a mythology is entirely lacking until we reach the productions of a sophisticated literary culture, several centuries after the Christianization of the Gaelic world. The need to read these narratives critically—treating their forays into myth as refractions of, rather than windows upon, earlier myths—has become a commonplace of much recent scholarship.[9]

In this light the persistent Otherworldly dimension of the *Togail* deserves consideration as part of its author's purpose. O'Rahilly rightly stated that the mythological elements in the

extant saga have given it ‘a sense of mystery and magic which it could never have acquired had the storyteller treated it merely as a bit of legendary history’.[10] But these elements cannot be treated merely as relics of older myths, accidents of textual history now lying stranded and lifeless on the surface of our texts like fossil fish on a sandstone outcrop. They have been purposefully deployed within a dynamic structure, reinforcing and heightening the tale's onward momentum. If, as the story progresses, Da Derga's Hostel comes increasingly to resemble a *síd*-mound ruled by the denizens of the Otherworld, this may be a function of the extant saga's structure and literary effect as much as the result of an underlying myth. We should also not lose sight of its initial ‘real-world’ location within the Ireland ruled by Conaire. Indeed, one of Ingcél's formulaic imprecations in the description-sequence seems to invoke the mythological abode (p.132) of the dead as a quite different place, namely Tech Duinn, ‘The House of Donn’, elsewhere described as an island off the southwestern coast of Ireland:[11]

> ‘At-mbía basa lecht bas brisceam lurcu; manaís[12] for tráig maitne do thig Duind matin moch a mbárach.’[13]
>
> ‘Let him whose death is most certain[14] strike troops; let him flee on the morning tide to the House of Donn early tomorrow morning.’

The house of Donn, rather than that of Da Derga, is the plunderers’ ultimate destination; but Da Derga's Hostel is the place where they will meet their deaths. It is therefore not ‘situated in the Otherworld’ in any simple way;[15] rather, it and its associated characters becomes clustered about with Otherworldly attributes and significance. How and why this takes place demands close attention.

## A Crescendo of Omens

As the buzzing of flies intensifies when one approaches a rotting corpse, so the air becomes thick with spectres as Conaire approaches the fatal Hostel. His journey is marked by the appearance of increasingly vivid and malevolent manifestations of the Otherworld, flocking southwards. First

comes the apparition which forces Conaire onto the wrong road on his return from Thomond:

> Is ed gabsait, seach Huisneach Mide co n-acus íar sin a n-indread anair 7 aníar 7 andeas 7 atúaid, co n-accatar na buidne[16] 7 na slúagu mo seach 7 na firu lomnacht[17] 7 rop nem thened tír Húa Néill immi.[18]
>
> They were going past Uisnech Mide when its devastation was seen to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south, and they saw companies and armies in turn, and naked men, and the land of Uí Néill was a sky of fire around him.

(p.133) This unnerving description is narrated with disarming simplicity, its bizarre phenomena bound together in a mere list by the repeated word *ocus* (‘and’). Conaire turns south, and after unwittingly hunting the dimly glimpsed, possibly Otherworldly beasts of Cernae (lines 248–9),[19] he sees three red horsemen. Their appearance is dwelt on in more detail:

> rathaiges in triar marcach riam dochum in tigi[20] 7 teora léne derga impu 7 trí bruit derga impu[21] 7 trí scéith derga foraib 7 trí gaí derga ina lámaib 7 trí heich derga foa suidib 7 tri fuilt derga foraib. Derga uile cona fíaclaib 7 foltaib[22] iter each 7 duine.[23]
>
> he noticed three horsemen ahead, making for the house, with three red tunics about them, three red cloaks about them, three red shields on them, three red spears in their hands, three red horses under them[24] and three red heads of hair upon them. They were all red to the teeth and hair, horse and man alike.

This marvel is described using the same cumulative syntactic arrangement as in the previous vision, though in more detail. The initial long sentence gains an incantatory rhythmic quality from its repetition of the pattern *trí* + object + *derga* + preposition + third-person-plural pronoun + *ocus*. The word *derg* (‘red’) carries a sinister significance of its own, portending the blood to come and echoing the name of their destination by appearing each time in the nominative plural

*derga*.[25] The repetition of *derga* is designed to jog the audience's memory about the *geis* against three Reds preceding Conaire to the house of Red. Three times Conaire's son tries to stop them, but each time they ride on ahead, one of them turning only to deliver a set of increasingly threatening prophecies in the allusive poetic form of *rosc*.[26] In these verses the horsemen confirm that they are from the *síd*, adding that *cíammin bí amin mairb* (‘though alive, we are dead’). They elude not only Lé Fer Flaith's pursuit but also Conaire's increasingly lavish promises of honourable gifts.

This combination of gift-giving with the detaining or winning over of another character has occurred twice before in the *Togail*. At the very beginning, Eochaid had successfully sent men ahead to detain Étaín, then had his way with her by offering her his hospitality, fidelity, and proper bridal price (lines 45–62). Later, Conaire had confidently (and, as it turns out, accurately) predicted that Da Derga would not refuse him hospitality that night, because Conaire had been so generous to him before. This speech of Conaire's had chiefly consisted of a list of the gifts he (p.134) had given to Da Derga (lines 265–75), after which he had sent Mac Cécht ahead to persuade Da Derga to accommodate his retinue.[27] Now, in the episode immediately following, Conaire tries to use similar tactics to detain the horsemen, and here too the gifts are listed:

> ‘Eirg ina ndiaid,’ for Conaire, ‘7 toirg doib sé dumo 7 sé tindiu 7 mo ḟuidellsa 7 aiscidi ammárach 7 airead beiti im theaglachsa ní bía neach etarru ó then co fraig.’[28]
>
> ‘Go after them,’ said Conaire, ‘and offer them six oxen, and six salted pigs, and my leftovers, and gifts tomorrow, and for as long as they are in my household, there shall be no-one among them from the fire to the wall.’

The contrast between the horsemen's response and that expected of Da Derga is pointed up by the narrator's play on *derga*. The promise of earthly riches and fine food, let alone the codes of mortal honour, have no effect on these figures, since they are not of this world.

Just as uncooperative are Fer Caille and his wife Cichuil, who appear in the next episode.[29] The narrator lavishes still more alliterating descriptive detail on them, and while the horsemen's appearance was bizarre, these two are hideous:

> Is and dosn-árraid in fear maeldub co n-oenṡúil 7 oenláim 7 oenchois. Mael garb for suidiu. Cía fo-certa míach di ḟíadublaib for a mullach ní foíchred uball for lár, acht ro gíulad cach uball díb for a findiu. Ó fo-certa a ṡrúb ar géscoe ima-tairisfeadh doib.[30] Sithremir cuing n-imeachtair ceachtair a dá lurgan. Mét mulaig for got cech meall do mellaib a dromai. Gaballorg iairn ina láim. Muc mael gearr[31] dub dóiti for a muin 7 sí oc síréighim, 7 ben bélmar már[32] dúb duabais dochraid ina diaid. Cía fo-certa didiu a ssrúb ar gésce fo-lilsad. Tacmaicead a bél íchtarach co a glún.[33]
>
> At that point, there overtook them a man with short dark hair, with one eye, one arm and one leg. He had rough cropped hair. If a sack of wild apples were thrown on the crown of his head, not an apple would fall to the ground, but each of the apples would stick on the hairs. If his snout were thrown on a branch, they would stick to each other. As long and as thick as an outer yoke were each of his two shins. The size of a cheese on a withe was each globe of his buttocks. He had a forked iron pole in his hand. He had a bald, gelded, black, singed pig on his back, squealing continually, and a thick-lipped, dark-haired, gloomy,[34] ugly great woman following him. And if her snout were thrown against a branch, it would stick [there]. Her lower lip hung down to her knee.

(p.135) The last of Conaire's unwanted guests is the hideous seeress Cailb, who arrives when the company is seated in the Hostel (after an account of the plunderers' activities which includes the second and far more hideous portrait of Ingcél). Cailb's approach threatens to violate another of Conaire's *gessi*: *con-accatar a n-oenbandscáil do dorus na Bruidhne iar fuinead ngréne, oc cuindchid a lléicthi isa thech* ('they saw a single woman coming towards the door of the Hostel after sundown, looking to be let into the house', lines 535–7).

Cailb's refusal to cooperate is couched in more aggressive, even taunting language than previous apparitions. Whereas Cichuil was *duabais* (‘gloomy, ill-omened’, line 354), Cailb is overtly hostile, *oc admilliud ind ríg 7 na maccoem* (‘casting the evil eye on the king and the young men’, line 543).[35] Cichuil was silent, but Cailb is only too willing to talk, prophesying Conaire's death more clearly and specifically than anyone so far. Her conversation with the king is particularly dramatic, showing the latter squirming desperately to avoid violating his *geis*. Its mercurial shifts of mood and tonality are best demonstrated by excerpting the whole passage:

> Sithir cloideb ngarmai ceachtar a dá lurcan. Batir dubithir dethaich.[36] Brat ríabach rolómar impi. Tacmaicead a fés in t-íchtarach co rrici a glúin. A beóil for leith a cind. To-téit co tard a leathgúalainn fria hursaind in tigi oc admilliud ind ríg 7[37] na maccoem ro bátar immi sin tig.
>
> Héseom feisin ata-raglastar as tig: ‘Maith sin, a banscál, cid at-chí dúnd,[38] inda fisid?’
>
> ‘At-chíusa duidseo immurgu, ol sise, nocon érnaba cerr[39] ná chárnai dít asin taig hi taudchud acht a mbértae eóin ina crobaib.’
>
> ‘Ní bo dochél célsamar, a bean,’ ol seisem. ‘Ní tú chélas dúind do grés. Cía do chomainmseo, a banscál?’ ol Conaire.
>
> ‘Cailb,’ ol sí.
>
> ‘Ní forcrad n-anma són ém,’ ol Conaire.
>
> ‘Éce[40] it ile imda mo anmandsa cheana,’ ol sí.
>
> ‘Citn-éisidi?’ ol Conaire.
>
> ‘Ní anse,’ ol sisi:
>
> > ‘Samain, Sina006Ed, Seiscleand,
> > Sodb, Saiglend,[41] Samlocht,[42]
> > Caill, Coll, Díchoem, Díchuil,

(p.136) Díchim, Díchuimne, Díchuinne,
Dairne, Dáirine, Der úaine,
Égem, Agam, Ethamne,
Gním, Cluichi, Cethardam,
Nith, Nemain, Noenden,
Badb, Blosc,[43] Bloar,
Huaet, Mede, Mod.'[44]

For énchois 7 oenanáil[45] ro chachain doib in sin uile ó dorus in tigi.[46]

'Cid as áil dait?' ol Conaire.

'A n-as áil daitsiu indiu,' ol sisi.

'Is ges damsa,' ol Conaire, 'dám óenmná[47] da airitin íar fuin ngréne.'

'Cid geis,' ol sisi, 'ní ragsa co ndecha m'aididecht[48] di ráith isind aidchise inocht.'

'Abraid fria,' ol Conaire, 'bérthair dam 7 tindi dí ammach 7 mo ḟuidelsa, 7 anad i maigin aile inocht.'

'Má dod-ánic ém dond ríg,' oll sisi, 'co praind 7 lepaid n-oenmná ina thig,[49] ad-étar na aill ó nach ailiu oca mbiad ainech, mad ro scáich coiblide[50] na flatha fil isin Bruidin.'[51]

'Is fechuir a frecra,' ol Conaire. 'Dos-leic ind, cid geis damsa.'

Buí gráin már foraib íar sin dia accallaim na mná 7 míthaurassa acht nád feadatar can boí doib.[52]

(p.137) As long as a weaver's beam were each of her two shins. They were as black as smoke. A very woolly striped cloak was about her. Her pubic hair hung down to her knee. Her mouth was on the side of her head. She came and leaned one shoulder against the doorpost of the house, casting the evil eye on the king and the youths who were about him in the house.

He himself addressed her from the house: ‘Well then, woman, what do you see for us, if you are a seer?’

‘Indeed, I see for you,’ she said, ‘that neither wart nor flesh of you shall escape from the house where you have come, but what the birds carry off in their claws.’

‘We foresaw no evil omen, woman,’ he said. ‘It is not you who usually prophesies for us. What is your name, woman?’ said Conaire.

‘Cailb,’ she said.

‘A name that wastes no time, that one,’ said Conaire.

‘Lo, many and numerous are my other names,’ she said.

‘What are those?’ said Conaire.

‘Not difficult,’ she said.

> ‘Samain, Sinand, Seiscleand,
> Sodb, Saiglend, Samlocht,
> Caill, Coll, Díchoem, Díchuil,
> Díchim, Díchuimne, Díchuinne,
> Dairne, Dáirine, Der úaine,
> Égem, Agam, Ethamne,
> Gním, Cluichi, Cethardam,
> Nith, Nemain, Noenden,
> Badb, Blosc, Bloar,
> Huaet, Mede, Mod.’[53]

She chanted all these to them from the doorway of the house, standing on one leg, and in one breath.

‘What do you want?’ said Conaire.

‘You want it too,’ she said.[54]

‘It is *geis* for me,’ said Conaire, ‘to receive the company of a single woman after sundown.’

‘Though it be *geis*,’ she said, ‘I will not go until hospitality is given me at once, this very night.’

> ‘Tell her,’ said Conaire, ‘an ox and salted pork will be brought out to her, and my leftovers, only let her stay somewhere else tonight.’
>
> ‘If food and a bed for one woman in his house are such a great matter for the king,’ she said, ‘then something else will be got from someone else who has honour, if the generosity of the sovereign in the Hostel has come to an end.’
>
> (p.138) ‘Savage is the reply,’ said Conaire. ‘Let her in, though it is *geis* for me.’
>
> A great horror came over them then, and ill forebodings, because of the conversation with the woman, but they did not know whence these came to them.

In the first part of their conversation—the part preceding Cailb's recitation of her names—Conaire seems to speak with more authority than before, addressing her directly and breaking her awkward and baleful silence with his forceful *Maith sin, a banscál* (‘Well then, woman’). He also suddenly seems to have acquired a sense of humour, or at least a certain laconic wit, which he deploys at Cailb's expense after compelling her to reveal her name: *Ní forcrad n-anma són ém* (‘A name that wastes no time, that one’, lit. ‘No superfluity of a name, that one, indeed’). It is as if his fate has become so evident to him that he momentarily goes beyond fear, displaying a kind of reckless bravado which marks him as doomed or fey.[55] His peremptory dismissal of her prophecy, for instance, is impressive enough as an assertion of his apparent authority, but we have already been shown his growing awareness of his own fate, so these words have a hollow ring.

Cailb plays Conaire's game, letting him appear to have the upper hand in their sparring-match, until she gets her chance to chant her thirty-one other names in response to his taunt, in a spell-like list bound together with strong rhythms and complex alliteration.[56] The king appears cowed by this sinister recital, and asks her what she wants—to which she replies by throwing his words back at him: *A n-as áil daitsiu indiu*

(literally ‘That which you want too’). By playing on the word *áil* (‘desire’), Cailb deftly implies that Conaire wishes to sleep with her.[57] The tables have been turned, and the joke is now on Conaire; wrongfooted by her words, he replies in a somewhat stilted manner that her company is *geis* for him. At this she tightens the screws and straightforwardly demands his hospitality. Torn between his royal duties and his royal *gessi*, Conaire pleads with her by offering substitute gifts instead. He stops addressing her directly, issuing this command to a nameless third party: the dramatic shift in stance heightens the formality of his offer and suggests that Conaire is attempting to distance himself from Cailb's demands (‘Someone please show this lady out’).

She responds in similar vein, referring to him in the third person as she prepares to leave; but this formal distance paradoxically allows her to strike him a very near blow indeed, since she refers to him not only as *rí* (‘king’) but as the *flaith* (‘sovereign’), and her declaration of his dishonourable meanness carries the threat of direct satire.[58] As Conaire well knows, her very presence indicates that his *fír flathemon* has indeed *ro scáich* (‘come to an end’), and when he capitulates to her demands he only makes his fate all the more certain. Yet while his initial reaction— (p.139) *Is fechuir a frecra* (‘Savage is the reply’)—betrays sheer desperation, his final words on the subject—*Dos-léic ind, cid geis damsa* (‘Let her in, though it is *geis* for me’)—may be read in two ways. Those last three words could be interpreted either as a gloomy prediction of disaster (‘though I shall regret it later’) or as a return to the fey recklessness Conaire had displayed earlier (‘and damn the consequences’). Conaire appears to be both making a public statement of his coming doom and washing his hands of the problem—the latter stance reinforced by maintaining his third-person distance from Cailb.

In this remarkable conversation, Conaire is seen swerving between confidence and desperation, between laconic wit and stilted formality. His men, on the other hand, stand by, aghast. This episode marks the last of a series of increasingly threatening uncanny encounters, to which Conaire and his men have responded with mounting horror, culminating in

their *gráin már* (‘great horror’) and *míthaurassa* (‘ill forebodings’, lines 578–9) when Cailb arrives. This process begins in line 250 when the narrator makes the solemn statement that Conaire has been exiled by the spectres. Fear instantly leaps in: *imus-rola in t-omon íar sin co nach roba conar do-chóstis* (‘fear bewildered them then because there was no road which they could take’, lines 251–2).[59] Later, when Lé Fer Flaith reports the ominous prophecy of the red horsemen, *bádar íar sin na míthurassa*[60] *imomna foraib* (‘ill forebodings of great fear came over them’, lines 337–8: note the intensive prefix *im-*), and Conaire exclaims in desperation: *Rom-gobsa mo gesa ule anocht* (‘all my *gessi* have seized me tonight’). The effect on the company of the next apparition (Fer Caille with Cichuil) is not shown to us, as the narrative suddenly shifts in mid-sentence to the plunderers’ story (lines 372–3); but during this section, when the main narrative emphasis falls on Conaire's foster-brothers (lines 372–523), the sense of mounting terror is carefully preserved by diffusing it among them as well. As we have already seen, in this part of the narrative Ingcél racks up his companions’ fears that they may have to kill their foster-brother.[61]

The fearful significance of all these omens is rendered more specific and convincing by the fact that some of the spectres prophesy Conaire's doom to him. Characters with prophetic powers have been abundant from the saga's earliest episodes: Étaín knows in advance that Eochaid is the man for her (lines 54–5); she predicts that her daughter's daughter will be pursued by a king (line 70); Eterscéle seeks out Mess Búachalla out because of a prophecy (lines 87–90); the birdman who impregnates Mess Búachalla knows that a son will be the result (line 96); and both Nemglan and the sleeper at the prophetic bull-feast know about Conaire's kingly destiny in advance (lines 150–6). The fulfilment of all these positive prophecies builds up a sense that events are indeed pre-ordained, ensuring that the later, more negative prophecies are taken seriously.

(p.140) From the moment when the *gessi* are violated, the future becomes defined in increasing detail, maintaining a sense of the coming disaster and developing its significance as

the narrative proceeds. The third of the three red horsemen utters three poems in *rosc*, a traditional metrical form characteristically used for prophetic utterances and typified by a succession of vivid haiku-like images.[62] *Rosc* does not offer detailed explication, but rather a calculated obscurity. For instance, all three verses here begin with the otherwise unattested interjection *én*, which I read (with Gantz and McCone) as deriving from the Latin interjection *en* (‘lo’, ‘behold’), but which may conceal a mocking reference to Conaire's avian paternity (*én* also meaning ‘bird’ in other contexts):[63]

| | |
|---|---|
| ‘Én a meic | ‘Behold, lad! |
| mór a scél | Great its tale |
| scél o Bruidin | Tale from the Hostel |
| bélot loṅg | Meeting of ships |
| lúaichet fer ṅgablach | Spearsmen's gleam |
| fíangalach ṅdoguir | Hard war-bands' doom |
| cned misad[64] | [Curse] of wounds |
| mór bét | Great the crime[65] |
| bé find | Fair woman |
| fors ṅdestatar | On whom have settled |
| deirindlith[66] áir.’[67] | [Red weavings] of slaughter.’ |

While this *rosc* foretells Conaire's doom in a somewhat distant, allusive manner, the horseman's second and third prophecies become increasingly specific in predicting what is going to happen at Da Derga's Hostel. The third concludes with a sequence of close-up images of carnage and its aftermath, presenting the violence itself and the noise of battle:

| | |
|---|---|
| ‘Én a meic | ‘Behold, lad! |
| mór a scél | Great its tale |
| scítha eich imda-rríadam | Tired the horses we ride |
| im-ríadam eocho | We ride the horses |

| | |
|---|---|
| Duind Desscoraig a sídaib | Of Dond Desscorach of the *síd* |
| cíammin bí amin mairb | Though alive we are dead |
| móra aird[68] | Great the omen[s] |
| airdbe as saegal[69] | [Cutting short of lives] |
| sásad fiach | Sating of ravens |
| fothath mbran | Feasting of crows |
| bresal airlig | Clamour of slaughter |
| ar-liachtait faebair | Blades are striking |
| ferna tullochtaib[70] | Boss-rent shields |
| tráthaib íar fuin.'[71] | After sundown.' |

(p.141) And later, once Conaire's men are installed within the Hostel, he receives a still blunter, less ornate prophecy in prose from the seeress Cailb:

> At-chíusa duidseo immurgu, ol sise, nocon érnaba cerr[72] ná chárnai dít asin taig hi taudchud acht a mbértae eóin ina crobaib.[73]
>
> 'Indeed, I see for you,' she said, 'that neither wart nor flesh of you shall escape from the house to which you have come but what the birds carry off in their claws.'

This allusion to birds is far more definite than the obscure pun opening the horseman's *rosc*:[74] Nemglan, the king of the birdmen, had foretold that Conaire's reign would be a glorious *énfláith* ('bird-reign', line 171), but now that his rule has *ro mebaid* ('broken', line 244), the birds are to reclaim his mangled body for themselves.[75]

More strikingly still, the crescendo of fear resulting from all these ominous apparitions also comes to implicate the plunderers themselves. Ingcél is described as *húathmar* ('terrifying', line 406), and his appearance becomes increasingly monstrous; when the plunderers land, Conaire reacts to the noise by admitting that, if only his foster-brothers

had remained loyal to him, then *nísn-áigfimis anocht* (‘we would not fear them tonight’, line 506). This incorporation of the plunderers into the proliferation of omens may shed light on the otherwise perplexing (p.142) tendency of the plunderers’ fleet to proliferate in numerical terms.[76] At the time of their initial *díberg*, they had numbered 150 (line 206), and Conaire had sent them to sea with other, older men (*senóire*, line 218). The second time this overseas-episode is narrated, the individual Irish *fíanna* are enumerated one by one and far exceed 150; we are also told that Ingcél's forces numbered 1,300 men, but that they were outnumbered by the Irish (lines 408–12), and that the total combined forces were five thousand (line 475).[77] (A head-count based on the individual *fíanna* enumerated in lines 374–99 adds up to 4,270 Irishmen plus leaders and supernumeraries, at least in Y, depending on how one interprets the figures given.) The earlier references to 150 men have metamorphosed into references to 150 boatfuls of men (lines 475 and 497). The plunderers’ number has now expanded to nightmarish proportions, and in this light Conaire's admission of fear seems entirely understandable. Shortly afterwards, their number shoots up to a truly monstrous 500,000 (line 522), a figure which is repeated at the end of the battle (line 1493).

These discrepancies may point to diverse original sources, and on the face of it suggest slips made by the compiling saga-author;[78] but their overarching pattern of inexplicable increase is consistent with, and positively contributes to, the dramatic structure of this part of the saga. The same aesthetic of proliferation informs the way in which Conaire's *búada*—his special ‘talents’ of sight, hearing and judgement, which he had taught to his three foster-brothers—are now seen spreading beyond their original recipients: the two Maines are shown using the gifts of sight, hearing and judgement to spy on Conaire (lines 439–43), while Ingcél himself possesses the gift of sight in no small measure.[79] Just as Conaire's ever-proliferating network of foster-kin—set up by his mother in order to provide him with support and protection—now serves fatally to entangle him with conflicting duties, so too his gifts, bestowed in friendlier times, are now returning in greater numbers than before to destroy him.[80]

These various patterns of ominous proliferation and intensifying malevolence are accompanied by what might be described as a movement towards myth, in which events and characters take on increasingly supernatural, even apocalyptic overtones.[81] The convergence of the court and the plunderers is marked by a series of impressive crashes and explosions. Conaire's battle-champion Mac Cécht performs a leap for his weapons which the listeners compare to *torandchleas trí cét* (‘the thunder-feat of three hundred’, line 512), and the ambiguous syntax of this passage even suggests a more mythological interpretation in which the weapons leap (p.143) towards him;[82] Mac Cécht also turns out to have the superhuman power of striking a spark whose force pushes their entire fleet miles out to sea (lines 479–82). This behaviour paves the way for the magnificent riddling description of Mac Cécht in the second half where he appears to Ingcél's astonished eye as a gigantic personification of the Irish landscape (lines 806–33), as well as being described in more recognizably human terms.[83] His eyes, ears, shoes, sword, and scabbard are seen in the following terms:

> ‘ “dá loch im ṡlíab, do drumchla tuindi tulguirmi,[84] dé ṡeichi im rolaig,[85] dá noeíne lána de delgib scíach[86] for rothchomlai[87] occaib, 7 is cosmail limsa fri caelglais[88] n-uiscidi forsa taitne grían, 7 a trebán[89] úadi sís, **7** sechi i n-echrus íarna chúl […]” ’[90]
>
> ‘ “two loughs by a mountain, two sheets of blue-topped water, two hides by an oak, two boats full of whitethorn spines on a round cover nearby, and there is what looks to me like a slender stream of water on which the sun is shining, and its trickle coming down from it, and a hide arranged behind him […]” ’

The texts vary considerably in this description, but the overall effect is very similar. The juxtaposition of ordinary description with this superhuman apparition conveys a sense that Mac Cécht is simultaneously a fierce but human warrior and a giant of cosmic proportions, depending on how the viewer looks at him. In positivist terms this may seem a narrative contradiction (and it does seem likely that two different

sources have been incorporated at this point), but the saga's underlining of Mac Cécht's dual identity in the description-sequence is deliberate and dramatically coherent. It is also not unusual in Insular narrative: Fergus mac Róich and the Welsh Brân both swerve between human and superhuman aspects without any explicit ‘transformation scene’ (such as we are given for Cú Chulainn's distortions in the *Táin*, for example).

(p.144) The plunderers, too, take on superhuman dimensions as they approach the Hostel. The beaching of their exponentially expanding fleet many miles away causes the whole Hostel to shake and all the spears inside to fall crashing to the ground (lines 496–9). This passage, too, may be interpreted in terms of the weapons themselves taking on supernatural agency and uttering a cry (*ro láiseat grith*, line 499).[91] Conaire describes the noise in cosmic terms:

> ‘“Ním-thása a ṡamuil, manid talam imid-rae[92] nó manid in Leuidan timchela in domuin ad-comaicc a erball do thochur in beatha tar a cheann nó bárc mac Duind Désa ro gab tír.”’[93]
>
> ‘“I know of nothing like it, unless the earth has spun around, or the Leviathan that encircles the world is striking its tail to turn the world upside down, or a boat of Donn Désa’s sons has landed.”’

As sovereign, Conaire inhabits the very centre of the cosmos: it is through his sovereignty that his realm and the natural world enjoy fruitfulness and peace. The thunderous noises and the image of the thrashing Leviathan aptly convey the disruption brought about when Conaire's world is turned upside down.[94]

In images like this, the *Togail* is seen doing more than simply telling an exciting story about a king's death. The saga's many passages of riddle, simile, and vivid description overlie the story with multiple layers of symbolism and significance, while the story's narrative momentum and dramatic, dialogue-rich structure bring to life the meanings expounded in these more static, poetic passages. Besides accumulating momentum, the first half of the *Togail* accumulates further layers of meaning

in the increasingly complex counterpoint of its visual imagery. This is especially true of imagery associated with the Otherworld, the guarantor and destroyer of Conaire's kingship and the chief producer of ominous signs on his last day. As Conaire's doom approaches, the omens’ meanings become increasingly evident, and the presence of a hostile Otherworld appears more and more obvious. As I shall now explain, this movement towards myth is sustained chiefly by the skilful deployment of descriptive formulae.

## Descriptive Formulae and the Movement Towards Myth

One superficially puzzling feature of these Otherworldly encounters, and one which some readers find disappointing, is the increasing replication of their (p.145) descriptive formulae. Whereas the apparitions of the burning land and the three red horsemen remain unique in their appearance, at least within the *Togail*, the characteristics of subsequent apparitions are no longer limited to the person they are first used to describe. In short, we (and Conaire) are presented with hostile characters who look more and more alike.

It may be tempting simply to dismiss such formulae as meaningless because they draw unthinkingly, even lazily, on the stock-in-trade of literary convention. It is certainly true that Middle Irish narrative generally drew on a common fund of conventional epithets and images for use in descriptions. Lips are likened to *partaing*, teeth are showers of pearls, and the ornamented weapons, brooches, and garments all seem to be designed by the same craftsmen. Prescriptive neoclassical conceptions of symmetry and perfection had begun to make their mark on Irish prose (as well as on the metalwork itself), and the Middle Irish period also saw an increasing use of neoclassical rhetorical techniques, amplifying and systematizing descriptive trends already present in the literary and perhaps also oral traditions.[95] These trends, native and foreign, give many extant descriptive passages a strong potential for homogeneity, so that (for instance) the Conchobor of *Mesca Ulad* looks almost identical to the Cormac Cond Loinges of the *Togail* (lines 670–6).[96]

However, as Jacqueline Borsje and Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan have shown in their respective studies of one-eyedness and male anatomy in the *Togail*, the manipulation of descriptive formulae deserves considering as a deliberate authorial strategy.[97] As with Old English poetry, the replication of formulae should not discourage the literary critic from identifying purposeful echoes and repetitions within a single text, especially a text which places such thematic weight on physical appearance and acts of observing. In the *Togail*, the reappearance of old formulae in new contexts represents yet another way in which the saga can both build up a mounting sense of foreboding and forge meaningful links between the phenomena described. Formulae are particularly useful in constructing semantic continuities and parallels between personages and events which, at the narrative's most literal level, are distinct and separate. They can lift the veil of specificity to reveal the face of the myth beneath.

This process begins unobtrusively enough. Two important elements of Fer Caille's description recur in the first description of Ingcél: both possess an *oenṡúil* (‘single eye’, lines 346 and 406), which marks them out as being of ill omen,[98] and both they and Cichuil are associated with the colour black (lines 345, 354, and 407). Cichuil also shares this coloration, as well as possessing the same kind of nose as Fer Caille (lines 349–50 and 355). The second, amplified description of Ingcél (p.146) shows that these similarities are not coincidental, since this time (as Borsje notes) two entire phrases from Fer Caille's description are reiterated:[99]

> [Fer Caille] Sithremir cuing n-imeachtair ceachtair a dá lurgan. Mét mulaig for got cech meall do mellaib a dromai.[100]
>
> Each of his two shins was as long and as thick as an outer yoke. Each globe of his buttocks was the size of a cheese on a withe.
>
> [Ingcél] Mét mulaig for gut mella a droma. Sithir cuiṅg n-úarmedóin cechtar a dá lurcan.[101]

> The globes of his buttocks were the size of a cheese on a withe. Each of his two shins was as long as an outer yoke.

This spread or ‘infection’ of formulae from one description into the next can also be seen in the persons of Cichuil and Cailb. Cichuil is described as *ben bélmar már*[102] *dúb duabais dochraid […] Tacmaicead a bél íchtarach co a glún* (‘a thick-lipped, dark-haired, gloomy, ugly great woman […] Her lower lip hung down to her knee’, lines 354–6). Cailb's portrait amplifies the unlovely characteristics of Cichuil while also incorporating elements of the portraits of Ingcél and Fer Caille:

> Sithir cloideb ngarmai ceachtar a dá lurcan. Batir dubithir dethaich[103] […] Tacmaicead a fés in t-íchtarach co rrici a glúin. A beóil for leith a cind.[104]
>
> As long as a weaver's beam were each of her two shins. They were as black as smoke […] Her pubic hair hung down to her knee. Her mouth was on the side of her head.

Grotesque female sexuality was hinted at in the ambiguous wording of Cichuil's description—*bél íchtarach* (line 356) could refer either to the lower lip of her mouth or to her vulva—but Cailb's description recasts the epithet and makes the hint explicit. There is no doubt as to the location of a *fés in t-íchtarach* (literally ‘nether beard’). As with the two monstrous men, the unusual length of her *dá lurcan* (‘two shins’, line 538) is emphasized.[105] A kind of one-eyedness is implicit in her casting the evil eye, an action that is directly recapitulated by the literally one-eyed Ingcél shortly afterwards.[106] The very wording of Ingcél's action is designed to recall (p.147) Cailb's. She stands just outside the door of the house, *oc admilliud ind ríg 7 na maccoem ro bátar immi sin tig* (‘casting the evil eye on the king and the youths who were about him in the house’, lines 543–4); Ingcél peers in from outside *do aidmillead ind ríg 7 na maccaem ro bátar immi isin tig* (‘to cast the evil eye on the king and the youths who were about him in the house’, lines 642–3). The simile *dubithir dethaich* (‘black as smoke’)—

or a beetle in D and U—is applied to her, as to Ingcél in both portraits of him.[107]

Why this proliferation of formulaic Otherworldly attributes beyond their original possessors? It is a mistake to wrap up the question of formulae simply by diagnosing 'doublets' and pointing the finger once again at a careless compiler.[108] True, Cailb is a kind of *alter ego* of Cichuil: the saga-author seems to take pains to stress this fact. But this doubling is only contradictory if we treat such personages as ordinary human beings rather than manifestations of a many-faced supernatural power. Cailb herself delights in this multiple, conflated identity when Conaire asks her name: she lists no fewer than thirty-one names (lines 552–61).[109] One of these is *Díchuil*, which may be a play on *Cichuil*. She also calls herself *Badb* ('scald-crow') and *Nemain* ('Battle Fury'), and *Mache* (= Macha) in U (line 6982). In other texts, these names refer to female supernatural figures associated with violent death in battle and possibly identical with the ambivalent goddess-figure, the Morrígan. The latter female appears in sagas such as *Táin Bó Cúailnge* as an implacable and prophetic war-goddess who also, valkyrie-like, seeks sexual union with the martial hero.[110] This mixture of violence and sexuality may be reflected in the two names *Cichuil* and *Cailb*, which appear to mean 'teated one' and 'harshness' respectively.[111] Both women, along with the male figures Fer Caille and Ingcél who share their appearance in several particulars, reveal what William Sayers has called 'the darker face of the goddess'.[112]

This dynamic is emphasized by the sharp contrast drawn between Cailb and the first Otherworldly being to appear in the saga, Étaín. She, too, is the subject of a detailed, vivid, and conventional description which aligns her with the (p.148) mythological sovereignty-goddess, the consort of the true king. Whether, in pre-Christian Irish religion, sovereignty-goddesses and war-goddesses represented aspects of the same (or any) goddess, is matter for continuing debate; but the *Togail*, in its extant version composed in the Christian period, does indeed draw links between these two kinds of figure. This is unsurprising given the centrality of the theme of sovereignty to the saga as a whole. As Máire West has argued, Cailb

appears as a destructive version or even aspect of the woman of sovereignty, attending or hastening the death of a doomed king and representing in her physical ugliness the failure of his *fír flathemon* and the barrenness of his reign (in this sense she is the opposite of the auspicious *puella senilis*, the hag transformed into a beautiful woman or goddess by the kiss of the rightful king).[113] In the *Togail*, this symbolic contrast and affinity between the two women is highlighted by the way in which the Cailb episode picks up and transforms crucial elements of the Étaín episode. As was mentioned earlier, the Étaín episode contains the seeds of much that comes later in the saga and provides a resource for the symbolic representation of Conaire's kingship in later episodes.

The Cailb episode may be seen as a dark parody of Étaín's.[114] Like Étaín sitting at the boundary between world and Otherworld, the well, Cailb occupies a literally liminal position during her conversation with Conaire, standing in the doorway to the Hostel. Both episodes begin with a detailed description of the woman as she appears to the king and his retinue: the use of the verb *ad-cí* (‘sees’) to introduce these descriptions emphasizes the fact that we are looking at them through the eyes of this internal (male) audience. The king then opens the conversation, and the woman reveals her name and her desire to stay with the king. Both women are alone, and their search for a royal welcome has distinct erotic overtones, underlined by the vividly sexualized descriptions of their bodies. But whereas Étaín's beauty fills Eochaid with desire, Cailb's ugliness repels everyone who sees her. Eochaid and Étaín are only too eager to sleep together as soon as possible; but when Cailb insinuates that Conaire has something similar in mind, the king retreats into stiff formality. Whereas Eochaid drops everything—even his current wives or concubines—to give Étaín her proper *fáilte* (‘welcome’), bestowing on her a generous bride-price, Conaire's *geis* forces him to appear niggardly. He tries to avoid letting Cailb into the Hostel, and attempts to buy her off with an ox, a salted pig, and his leftovers—hardly a gift fit for a goddess. Like the three red horsemen, she is not interested in food.

The transformation undergone by this figure of ‘sovereignty’ is underpinned by the epithets used to describe these women. Both are wearing furry cloaks, but there the similarity ends. Étaín's description is littered with compounds based on the (p.149) word *cóir* (‘perfect, perfectly-formed’), and every limb is of the correct proportion. For instance, her *dé lurgain* (‘two shins’) are *gerrgela* (‘short and white’); but Cailb's *dá lurcan* are long and black. Étaín's face is symmetrical; Cailb's has a mouth on one side, and like Fer Caille she stands on one leg.[115] In the person of Cichuil, a similar contrast is pointed up by the recasting of an expression involving one part of the body being thrown against another object. Of Étaín it is said that *Cid ríagail fo-certa forsna traigthib, is ing má ’d chotad égoir n-indib* (‘If a measure were placed [literally “thrown”] on her feet, it would hardly find a flaw on them’); whereas in Cichuil's case, *Cía fo-certa didiu a ssrúb ar gésce fo-lilsad* (‘If her snout were thrown against a branch, it would stick [there]’). Étaín's sexuality is emphasized by the male gaze of the narrator, whose eye steadily descends her body and offers alluring lyric epithets for each part. Cailb's sexuality, however, is emphasized crudely, briefly, and explicitly. No elegant narrative order is offered, and the narrator makes a disconcerting leap of free association in moving from Cailb's furry cloak to her unnaturally long pubic hair.[116]

To turn from Étaín to Cailb is to turn from light to darkness. The word *gel* (‘white, fair’) is found in most of the epithets describing Étaín's skin; Cailb, like Cichuil, Fer Caille, and Ingcél, is associated with the colour black. The only black element in Étaín's description (and an element only included in Y) is her two eyebrows, a small but integral part of her beauty which sets off the light colours characterizing her overall form; on Ingcél and Cailb, blackness—the absence of light and colour—has become a dominant feature of their hideous and asymmetrical appearance. Whether or not the blackness of Étaín's eyebrows was in the archetype or was added to Y, the effect is to heighten the contrast: Étaín's eyebrows are *duibithir druimne daeil* (‘as black as a beetle's back’, line 22), and both Ingcél's eye and Cailb's shins are

*dubithir dethaig* (‘as black as smoke’, lines 407, 518, and 539–40), or as black as a *dega* (‘beetle’) in the other texts.[117]

The symbolic value of Étaín's stereotypical beauty and Cailb's stereotypical ugliness as reflections of the king's *fír flathemon*—and, by extension, of the state of his realm—becomes more evident when we look at the nature-imagery in these descriptions, comparing them with the eulogies of Conaire's peaceful reign. Étaín is suffused with images of brightness coupled with sunshine, and the word *grían* (‘sun’) appears twice in her description. Even weather usually classed as adverse here becomes an image of perfection: the *sneachta* (‘snow’) with which Étaín's skin is twice compared is either extremely light, being of a single night only, or else paired with the word *solusgile* (‘shining brightness’).[118] She is likened to three kinds of (p.150) flower (iris, foxglove, hyacinth), and here specifically with reference to the *fertility* of the natural world: her hair is compared with *barr n-ailestair hi samrad* (‘the flowering of the iris in summer’). In the iconography of *fír flathemon*, nature's bounty and costly metals worked by human hands go hand in hand: the costliness of Étaín's ornaments and accoutrements is as conspicuous as the natural images (silver birds, gold and silver animals) depicted on them. Immediately after her hair is likened to the flowering of the iris, an alternative simile is offered: *nó fri dergór íar ndénam a datha* (‘or like red gold after burnishing’). The word *ór* (‘gold’) and its compounds occur six times in the first paragraph, and *airgit* (‘silver’) and its compounds, four times. Gems, pearls, crimson dye, green silk, ornamented metalwork, and intricate embroidery all reinforce the impression of material abundance, later taken up in the narrator's eulogy of Conaire's reign (lines 182–91), which concentrates images of summery weather, sweetness, wealth, cheerfulness, and natural abundance to show that the Otherworld is smiling upon Conaire.

By the time Cailb appears, the smile has turned to an unmistakable snarl. This change is reflected in the chaotic spurts of imagery in Cailb's chanted list of names: fine weather turns stormy (*Sinand*), beauty turns ugly (*Díchoem*), sweetness and music turn harsh and noisy (*Blosc*), a gentle,

dignified voice becomes an outcry (*Égem*), cheerfulness becomes gloom (*Mod*), neighbourly love becomes the fury of battle (*Nith*, *Noenden*, *Nemain*), and nature's fertility withers to a wasteland (*Seiscleand*). *Cailb* itself may mean 'harshness'.[119] The presence, within the same list, of one or two names suggesting natural fecundity and fertility (*Der úaine* 'green girl', *Ethamne* 'arable land') may be seen as setting up intentionally puzzling tensions within this riddling utterance;[120] equally, however, it serves to remind us that Cailb is but one aspect of the 'woman of sovereignty'. Étaín herself was described initially as a 'green girl', dressed in a green tunic glinting in the sun. In making such direct but transient gestures towards her opposite aspect, now hidden from the king himself, Cailb's few positive names throw into sharp relief the present plight of his *fír flathemon*. In case the audience has not got the point, the contrast is drawn still more clearly in the next episode (lines 597–612) when Fer Rogain utters his own eulogy of Conaire's paradisaical reign as it used to be.[121]

In this connection it is worth also drawing attention to one particularly fine example of the metamorphosis of sovereignty-symbolism in terms of the female form, namely the first prophecy of the red horseman, which comes midway between the opening vision of Étaín and the arrival of Cailb. The horseman sees, among other visions of the coming carnage,

(p.151)

| | |
|---|---|
| bé find | Fair woman |
| fors ṅdestatar | On whom have settled |
| deirindlith[122] áir. | [Red weavings] of slaughter. |
| Én.'[123] | Beware!' |

The name *Bé Find* ('Fair Woman' or 'White Woman') seems to refer specifically to Étaín, since it is the special name by which her Otherworldly consort Midir addresses her in *Tochmarc Étaíne*.[124] Her identity is confirmed by the fact that, like the Cailb episode but on a much more elliptical scale, the image of the fair woman covered in what the U-text calls *deirgindlid áir* ('red weavings of

slaughter') transforms one of the visual elements in Étaín's initial description in the *Togail*.[125] Étaín's tunic was described as follows:

> dei sítiu úainide fo *derginliud óir* impi […] Taitned fria in grían co bba forderg[126] dona feraib tuídhleach ind óir frisin ngréin asin títiu uaindi.[127]
>
> green silk with *red weavings of gold* in it […] The sun was shining on her, and the men saw the gold glistening in the sunshine, intensely red against the green silk.

In his prophecy, the red horseman shifts the rich and propitious red of *ór* ('gold') to the bloody and ominous red of *ár* ('slaughter'). *Indlid* or *inliud* appears to derive ultimately from the verb *ind-slaid-*, whose participle *intlaise* means 'inlay', literally 'cutting-in': the term can apply to metalwork and enamelling as well as to textile embroidery. Its root, *slaid-*, gives the simple verb *slaidid* ('slaughters, destroys'), so the horseman's pun reactivates the violence latent within a conventionally decorative word.[128]

This heightened juxtaposition of a female figure with weaving and slaughter calls to mind various ominous women of the mediaeval North: the valkyrie-like figures in Old Norse poetry who weave the fates of men in battle on a loom constructed from human viscera,[129] or the native Gaelic figure of the 'Washer at the Ford', a (p.152) blood-soaked woman washing clothes in a river of blood and usually identified by saga-authors with Badb or the Morrígan as portending a hero's violent death. These women are not simply hags. The Morrígan, like the Norse valkyries, can appear in beautiful as well as terrifying form, both a hag and a 'fair woman'.[130] The horseman's prophetic pun displays the woman of sovereignty at the very moment of transformation: beauty on the point of its bloody destruction. The image itself—whiteness sprinkled with red—is strangely alluring, and will echo on into the subsequent descriptions of the battle itself.

The mythological associations which these various personages evoke certainly predate the *Togail*, but the personages would not evoke such associations so powerfully and coherently without the sophisticated structural devices and management of formulae which this saga displays. The figure of Cailb is

thus made to emphasize the Otherworld's role in bringing about Conaire's death. More unexpectedly, Ingcél, introduced as a mere cipher early in the story, is made by the disrupted chronology of the narrative to assume monstrously Otherworldly characteristics. The merging of his features with those of the other spectral figures discussed here suggests that this kin-slayer has now become an aspect of the Otherworld's will, a tool by which they may destroy their chosen son. These figures' individual characteristics are subsumed in a welter of conventional monstrous imagery whose creeping homogeneity and uniform blackness (and redness) show the Otherworld's increasingly undisguised hostility towards the king. Its manifestations announce themselves with mounting persistence, flocking into Da Derga's Hostel and helping to transform the royal *bruiden* on this Samain-eve into a veritable *síd*-mound.[131]

This movement towards myth infuses the narrated events with layers of meaning that reach beyond the historical moment depicted, hinting at larger matters for the audience to consider. So, too, does the saga's tendency to dwell on modes which work outside ordinary narrative time: lyrical descriptions, riddles, eulogies, prophecies. We are increasingly prompted to draw meaning from vivid visual images whose connections with each other become increasingly complex as the saga progresses. The first half of the saga can therefore be seen to prepare the narrative (and our imaginations) for the description-sequence which dominates the saga's second half. As we shall now see, Conaire's entire court is here presented in terms of vivid, stylized, and often paradoxical formal patterns which demand interpretation, both by us and by the plunderers whose eyes we look through.

Notes:

([1]) Friedrich Schiller, *Wallensteins Tod*, V.iii, translated in his *The Robbers and Wallenstein*, trans. F. J. Lamport (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 456.

([2]) From a list of pre-Christian kings in the twelfth-century portion of the manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B502, printed in O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum*, p. 120, lines

32–3. For other versions of similar statements, see the ‘Cottonian Annals’ in Freeman, ‘The Annals’, p. 314 [1924], and Whitley Stokes, ed. and partial trans., ‘The Annals of Tigernach: I. The Fragment in Rawlinson B. 502’, *Revue Celtique*, 16 (1895), 374–479, p. 405. In the ‘Annals of Inisfallen’ two leaves are missing at this point, but elsewhere there is a reference to Conaire as the last Munster (i.e. Érainn) king to rule over Ireland: see Seán Mac Airt, ed. and partial trans., *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), p. 30 note c and §127. These and other references to the Pentarchy have been discussed by John Kelleher, ‘The *Táin* and the Annals’, *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 107–27, pp. 108–11, and West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 188–217.

([3]) This concept's connection with Conaire is discussed further in chapter 10.

([4]) Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 627; Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography*, p. 63.

([5]) Peter Burian, ‘Myth into *muthos*: The Shaping of Tragic Plot’, in P. E. Easterling, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 178–208, pp. 183–5.

([6]) Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, p. 38. Compare Edward Gwynn (‘On the Idea of Fate’, p. 159): in this saga ‘the idea of fatality plays a more important part than anywhere else in Irish literature. Every incident in the tale […] carries us forward step by step towards the final catastrophe’. On fate and mediaeval Irish narrative more generally, see Borsje, *From Chaos to Enemy*, pp. 66–75.

([7]) Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, pp. 124–9.

([8]) Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, p. 125.

([9]) See Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Pagan Survivals’. For Dumézilian approaches to the *Togail*, see Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Concept of the Hero’; Sayers, ‘Charting Conceptual Space’, especially pp. 46–7.

([10]) Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, pp. 129 and 125.

([11]) On *tech Duinn* see Kuno Meyer, ‘Der irische Totengott und die Toteninsel’, *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1919), pp. 537–46; Sayers, ‘Charting Conceptual Space’, p. 46.

([12]) With West, I take Y's and H2's reading, *manaís*, as an error or variant form of *maís* (‘let him flee’, U, D, E). Normally *manaís* means ‘broad-bladed spear’. See Knott, *Togail*, pp. 84–5; West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 759–63.

([13]) Lines 716–19. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 727); U, lines 7115–17; D (MS, fols. 81v–82r); E (MS, fol. 22r), partly illegible; H2 (MS, p. 479.1).

([14]) Literally, ‘whose grave is most fragile’, following the interpretation offered by West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 759–60.

([15]) Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, p. 123. On the Otherworldly aspect of the later mediaeval *bruiden*, see Joseph Falaky Nagy, ‘Shamanic Aspects of the *Bruidhean* Tale’, *History of Religions*, 20 (1981), 302–22; see also Rekdal's discussion of *bruidne* as cult sites in his ‘From Wine in a Goblet’, pp. 251–60.

([16]) Instead of *buidne* (‘companies’), D and E have *bidbaid* (‘enemies’).

([17]) The naked men (*firu lomnacht*) are absent from U, D, and E. In Y and H2 they serve as the grim obverse of the bull-feaster's more propitious vision of Conaire himself as a naked man approaching Tara (*fer lomnacht*, lines 131 and 150).

([18]) Lines 237–41. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, cols. 719–20); U, lines 6741–4; D (MS, fol. 80r); E (MS, fol. 19v); H2 (MS, p. 477). At the end H2 has the additional phrase *do gac leeth* (‘on every side’). On the apocalyptic significance of the ‘sky of fire’ see Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, pp. 15–16.

([19]) This taboo-violation is impossible for him to avoid, since *ní ḟacai coru scáig a tofonn* (‘he did not see until he had finished chasing them’, lines 248–9).

([20]) As before, H2 emphasizes the destination, having *na bruidne* (‘the Hostel’) instead of *in tigi* (‘the house’).

([21]) H2 does not mention the red cloaks (*trí bruit derga impu*).

([22]) Instead of *cona fiaclaib 7 foltaib* (‘to the teeth and hair’), U has *eter chorp 7 folt 7 etgud* (‘body, hair, and clothes alike’).

([23]) Lines 288–93. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 720); U, lines 6779–82; D (MS, fol. 80r); E (MS, fol. 19v); H2 (MS, p. 478).

([24]) Literally ‘under their seats’.

([25]) McCone (*Pagan Past*, p. 44) has suggested an allusion to the ominous red horse of Revelation 6:4 (discussed below, p. 245).

([26]) These verses are discussed below, pp. 140–1.

([27]) On the relationship between king and royal hospitaller, see O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in Medieval Ireland*, pp. 129 and 138 n. 181.

([28]) Lines 322–5.

([29]) On Fer Caille see William Sayers, ‘Deficient Royal Rule: The King's Proxies, Judges and the Instruments of His Fate’, in Wiley, ed., *Essays*, pp. 104–26, pp. 106–8; Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 84–9; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 94–101.

([30]) Before *ima-tairisfeadh doib* (‘they would stick to each other’), H2 has the additional words *folilsath 7* (‘it would stay there and’).

([31]) Y is the only text describing the pig as *gearr* (‘gelded’); the others all combine *mael* (‘bald’) with *dub* (‘black’) to give *maeldub* (‘black-headed’), which seems more likely to be the archetype's reading.

([32]) *Már* (‘great, big’) is absent from D.

([33]) Lines 345–56. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 721); U, lines 6819–29; D (MS, fol. 80r); E (MS, fol. 20r); H2 (MS, p. 478).

([34]) *Duabais* means ‘ill-omened’ or ‘unlucky’ as well as ‘gloomy’ (*DIL*, s.v. *duabais*).

([35]) In D (MS, fol. 81r) the words *ind ríg* (‘the king’) are omitted: Cailb here casts the evil eye on all the young men (*na maccoem*) in the Hostel. For wider discussion, see Jacqueline Borsje and Fergus Kelly, ‘The Evil Eye in Early Irish Literature and Law’, *Celtica*, 24 (2003), 1–39, and Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye*. More specifically, see Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 80 and 90; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 86–7 and 102–3.

([36]) D has *degaid* (‘beetle’) instead of Y's *dethaich* (‘smoke’); U has *druim ndail* (‘beetle's back’). These variants are discussed in the next section.

([37]) D lacks *ind ríg 7* (‘the king and’).

([38]) D has *cid atchi dun anocht* (‘what do you see for us tonight?’).

([39]) Neither *cerr* (Y) nor *caer* (D, H2) is attested elsewhere as a noun, but either may be a misreading for another word. U has *cern* (‘wart’, line 6972), which I use in my translation here; another possibility is *cenn* ‘skin’. Stokes emended to *ceinn* ‘hide’ (‘The Destruction’, p. 59 n. 9).

([40]) After *éce* (probably ‘lo’ or ‘indeed’), U has a gloss in hand M: *.i. ní dorcha .i. is follus* (‘i.e. it is not dark, i.e. it is clear’).

([41]) These two names are absent from H2.

([42]) U lacks *Samlocht*.

([43]) D has an additional name here, *Bolsc*.

([44]) U has three more names between *Huaet* and *Mede*: *Óe, Aife la Sruth, Mache*. I have lineated this speech as verse.

([45]) Instead of *oenanáil* (‘in one breath’), H2 has *aenlaim 7 oenṡuil* (‘[holding up] one hand and [looking through] one eye’); U retains *oenanáil* but this word is preceded by *oenlaim* 7 (‘one hand and’).

([46]) On these gestures' significance, see West, 'An Edition', p. 752; Borsje, 'Approaching Danger', pp. 90–5; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 103–7.

([47]) H2 adds *no aoinfir* ('or a single man') above the line, tying Cailb's request more closely to the list of *gessi* earlier in the saga.

([48]) At *co ndecha m'aídidecht* ('until hospitality is given me', Y), U glosses *co ndecha* (*.i. co ferur no co rucur*). In H2 the main phrase is followed by *a norcuinich* (or *anorcuinich*), which is obscure to me but may perhaps be related to the words *onóir* ('honour') or *orgain* ('destruction'). D has *co tomliur m'oigidecht latsa* ('until my hospitality from you is consumed'). On these variants see Knott, *Togail*, p. 82; West, 'An Edition', p. 753.

([49]) For this difficult passage my translation freely adapts the interpretation offered by West ('An Edition', p. 753). In D this passage is modernized as follows: *Ma roscaith conna talla fair proinn do aenmnai no lepaid* ('If it [the king's honour] has come to an end, so that food or lodging for a single woman are not possible for him').

([50]) Instead of *coiblide* ('generosity'), D has *enech* ('honour').

([51]) My interpretation is based on that of West, 'An Edition', p. 754. As with the previous part of the sentence, in D the whole passage from *ad-étar* to *Bruidin* is modernized, but the meaning remains similar. Instead of *ad-étar na aill* ('something else will be got'), U has *fogebthar na ecmais* ('it will be taken in his absence').

([52]) Lines 537–79. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, cols. 724–5); U, lines 6966–95; D (MS, fol. 81r); H2 (MS, p. 479, beginning with Cailb's *At-chíusa*, 'I see'). D has more detail in the final sentence: *boi grain mór 7 uamain orra tria irlabra na mna 7 ro thirchan mor do mícélmaine 7 ni fetatar can bai doib* ('a great horror and fear came over them from the woman's speech and the evil augury she had foretold, but they did not know whence these came to them'); the whole final sentence is

absent from H2. The statement that ‘nobody knew whence these came’ is a conventional signal of Otherworldly origin in mediaeval Irish narrative. Other examples include an eighth-century tale about Colm Cille and an Otherworld youth, edited and translated by John Carey, ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts: *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg* and *Immacaldam in Druad Brain 7 Inna Banḟátho Febuil Ós Loch Ḋebuil*’, *Ériu*, 52 (2002), 53–87, p. 60, lines 26–7; and Máire Bhreathnach, ‘A New Edition of *Tochmarc Becfhola*’, *Ériu*, 35 (1984), 59–91, p. 76 (§11).

([53]) A possible, highly speculative translation of this list might be as follows, drawing on suggestions made by Sayers, ‘Charting Conceptual Space’, pp. 51–2, and Mark Williams, ‘“Lady Vengeance”: A Reading of Sín in *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 62 (Winter 2011), 1–32, p. 8 n. 32: ‘Samain [i.e. All Hallows’ Eve], Stormy, Wasteland, Bitch, Punishment, Blemish, Forest, Destruction, Ugly, Neglect, Dislike/Tributeless, Oblivion, Foolishness, Little Oakwood, Little Oakwood [again], Green Girl, Outcry, Battle, Arable Land, Deeds, Sport, Four Oxen, Conflict, Battle Fury, War, Scaldcrow, Crash, Noise, Fear, Headless One, Surly’. For discussion of these names, see William Sayers, ‘Supernatural Pseudonyms’, *Emania*, 12 (1994), 49–60, pp. 56–8.

([54]) Literally, ‘That which you want too’.

([55]) See Edward Gwynn, ‘On the Idea of Fate’.

([56]) On the list's significance see Sayers, ‘Supernatural Pseudonyms’, pp. 56–8; on its maledictory nature and proximity to satire, see Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 91–6; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 107–12. On its alliteration, see David Sproule, ‘Complex Alliteration in Gruibne's *roscad*’, *Ériu*, 33 (1982), 157–60, p. 160.

([57]) Máire Bhreathnach, ‘The Sovereignty Goddess’, p. 251.

([58]) Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, p. 96.

([59]) In U (line 6751) Conaire is specified as the victim of this fear, here the more emphatic *ómon mór* (‘a great fear’). On

connections between omens and fear, see Jacqueline Borsje, ‘*Fled Bricrenn* and Tales of Terror’, *Peritia*, 19 (2005), 173–92.

([60]) U (hand M) has a gloss for this word: *.i. drochmenmand* (‘i.e. bad spirits’, lines 6813–14 n.).

([61]) See chapter 3.

([62]) The metrical and structural aspects of these verses are illuminated by McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 38–46. See also Stephen Tranter, ‘Marginal Problems’, in Tranter and Tristram, eds., *Early Irish Literature*, pp. 221–40, pp. 227–8 n. 8. Contrasting studies of *rosc* include Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘On the Use of the Term *retoiric*’, *Celtica*, 7 (1966), 65–90, and Corthals, ‘Zur Frage’.

([63]) McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 39.

([64]) *Misad* (Y, D, E) is unintelligible, as is *miosat* (H2); with Knott (*Togail*, p. 78 n. 304) I read this as an error for *míscad* (‘curse’), U's reading.

([65]) *Bét* could also mean ‘calamity’.

([66]) *Deirindlith* (Y, D, E) is presumably a variant for *deirgindlid* (‘red weavings’, U), which Knott inserted into her text here. H2 has *fir derindlith*.

([67]) Lines 304–7, which I have lineated as verse. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 721); U, lines 6790–2; D (MS, fol. 80r); E (MS, fol. 19v); H2 (MS, p. 478).

([68]) U has *airdi* (‘omens’); Y, D, E, and H2 have the singular *aird*, which does not make sense with the plural *móra* (noted by West, ‘An Edition’, p. 737).

([69]) The *as* in Y makes this line unintelligible; all the other texts lack *as*, and my translation ignores it. This line recalls Conaire's remark on his own false judgement: *Ní haurchor saegail damsa in breath ron-ucus* (‘No extension of my life is the judgement I have given’, lines 216–17).

([70]) The words' endings vary in the extant texts, all of which contain one or another error at this point (see West, 'An Edition', pp. 737–8). I interpret *faebair* as a nominative plural of *faebar* ('blade'; the plural is usually *faebra*), *ferna* ('shields') as accusative rather than nominative, and the dative plural *tullochtaib* ('boss-rent') as an error for accusative plural. On this last word, besides West's discussion, see also Knott, *Togail*, p. 79 n. 332. I follow West's suggestion (ibid., pp. 737–8) that *ar-liachtait* comes from an otherwise unattested verb **ar-śliachta* ('strikes'), although I retain the reading of Y (shared with D, E, and H2), whereas West's text follows U's reading *airlíachtad* (the verbal noun, hence 'striking' or 'smiting', with *faebair* read as a genitive).

([71]) Lines 328–32, laid out (as far as possible) as verse. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 721); U, lines 6806–9; D (MS, fol. 80r); E (MS, fol. 20r); H2 (MS, p. 478).

([72]) Interpreted as *cern* ('wart'): see note 39 above.

([73]) Lines 546–8.

([74]) As noted by Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*', p. 53.

([75]) It is significant that, although Conaire's question may refer to himself or his whole retinue (*cid at-chí dúnd?*, 'what do you see for us?', line 545), Cailb's prophecy employs only the second person singular, referring to Conaire alone (*dít*, *taudchud*): he will be killed, but most of his men will survive.

([76]) The following numbers come from Y: the other texts present the same pattern, but differ in the precise numbers used (especially E and U). See also chapter 4, note 18 above.

([77]) U here has 500,000 men (line 6919), by including the multiple *cét* (100) in the sum. This may have been an attempt to bring the total number in line with the 500,000 men mentioned at lines 522 and 1493 (U, lines 6955 and 7956) and matches U's tendency to rationalize some of the numbers.

([78]) West, 'Genesis', pp. 417–18. West calculates the head-count above as 7,270.

([79]) See the discussion in chapter 1 pp. 46–7.

([80]) Ó Cathasaigh (‘The Concept of the Hero’, p. 87) has suggested that Conaire's foster-brothers serve to represent ‘the evil side of his nature’, projecting in corporeal terms ‘the enemy within’.

([81]) Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, p. 16.

([82]) Knott, *Togail*, p. 82; West, ‘An Edition’, p. 750; Borsje, ‘Omens’, pp. 229–31.

([83]) References to Mac Cécht outside the *Togail* usually refer to a member of the Túatha Dé Danann. See, for example, R. A. Stewart Macalister, ed. and trans., and Pádraig Ó Ríain, *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, 6 vols. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1938–2009), IV, 182. See Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, 66 and 125, for an identification of Conaire's champion with Dian Cécht as ‘solar deity’. On Mac Cécht's dual appearance in the *Togail*, see Eichhorn-Mulligan, ‘*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*’, p. 17, and pages 205–6 below.

([84]) The two sheets of water (*do drumchla tuindi tulguirmi*) are present in Y and D but not U, E, or H2.

([85]) The words *ślíab* (‘mountain’) and *rolaig* (‘oak’) are the other way around in H2.

([86]) E begins a new sentence after *de noi lanai de delciu* (‘two boats full of spines’) and, instead of *scíach* (‘of whitethorn’), has the nominative *Sciath* (‘a shield’). The result is a new image which lacks some words present in the other texts: *Sciath for rothc glais n-uisciu* […] (‘a shield on a wheel [?], a stream of water’). The dative case of *n-uisciu* suggests that it was intended to form part of the same image as the shield.

([87]) H2 here has the additional word *rigthige* (‘of the king's house’).

([88]) D has *cloenglais* (‘crooked stream’). For E's version see note 86.

([89]) *Trebán* (Y and U) is here understood to mean the same as *srebán* (‘stream’, D, E, H2).

([90]) Lines 827–32. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 729); U, lines 7209–12; D (MS, fol. 82v); E (MS, fol. 23r); H2 (MS, p. 480). Proinsias Mac Cana (*Branwen*, pp. 24–7) and others have argued that the Welsh tale *Branwen* borrowed from the *Togail* at this point, but Sims-Williams (*Irish Influence*, pp. 111–23) has shown that this is unlikely.

([91]) On this passage and the wider motif, see Borsje, ‘Omens’.

([92]) D (fol. 81r) has *ro mebaid* (‘has broken’), while U (hand M) has a gloss *.i. ro bris* (i.e. has broken), echoing the earlier statement that the law has broken (lines 243–4).

([93]) Lines 501–3. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 724), U lines 6938–40), D (MS, fol. 81r).

([94]) On earthquakes and Leviathan, see Jacqueline Borsje and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ‘A Monster in the Indian Ocean’, *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 49 (1995), 1–11. See also Liam Mac Mathúna, ‘Irish Perceptions of the Cosmos’, *Celtica*, 23 (2003), 174–87, p. 182; Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. 29 n. 30 (for a possible Latin source); William Sayers, ‘“*Mani maidi an nem…*”: Ringing the Changes on a Cosmic Motif’, *Ériu*, 37 (1986), 99–116; West, ‘An Edition’, p. 749.

([95]) Dorothy Dilts Swartz, ‘The Beautiful Women and the Warriors in the *LL TBC* and in Twelfth-Century Neo-Classical Rhetoric’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 5 (1985), 128–45, p. 130.

([96]) Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, lines 526–32.

([97]) Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’; Eichhorn-Mulligan, ‘*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*’.

([98]) Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, p. 85; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, p. 95.

([99]) Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 85–6; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 95–6.

([100]) Lines 350–2. Manuscript-texts: see chapter 4, note 13. As Borsje notes (‘Approaching Danger’, p. 86), Fer Caille is especially unusual in having two shins but only one leg. The saga-author was evidently anxious to bring out the parallel with Ingcél as clearly as possible and thus sacrificed what a modern reader might call ‘narrative logic’ to the higher logic of Otherworldly fatalism.

([101]) Lines 519–21. Manuscript-texts as in note 93 above. On *mulach* and cheese-making, see West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 740–1; Eichhorn-Mulligan, ‘*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*’, p. 10.

([102]) *Már* (‘great’) is not in D (MS, fol. 81r).

([103]) On the epithets for blackness used in Y, D, and U see note 107 below.

([104]) Lines 537–41. Manuscript-texts as in note 52 above.

([105]) The phrase *cloideb ngarmnai* (‘weaver's beam’) is analysed in a forthcoming article (which I have not seen) by Máire West, ‘Weavers’ Beams, Weaving Rods and the Prophetess Fedelm’, forthcoming in *Féilsgríbhinn for Gearóid Mac Eoin* (Dublin, 2012). Cailb's vulva is discussed by West in Máire Bhreathnach [= West], ‘The Sovereignty Goddess’, p. 251 n. 50 and p. 252.

([106]) On this parallel, see Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 89–90; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 101–2. On one-eyedness and the evil eye, see Borsje and Kelly, ‘The Evil Eye’; Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 119–51.

([107]) Lines 407, 518, 539. At all three points in D (MS, fols. 80v and 81r) and two points in U (lines 6866, 6951–2) the comparison is reframed as *dubithir degaid* (‘black as a beetle’) —or, in the final simile in U, a beetle's back (lines 6966–7). E2 has only the first passage (*degaid*, fol. 20v).

([108]) Nettlau, ‘On the Irish Text’, p. 451 [1891]; Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 626.

([109]) Thirty-three in U, twenty-nine in H2.

([110]) Máire Bhreathnach, ‘Sovereignty Goddess’, p. 255; Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 95–6. For further discussion of war-goddesses and battle-sprites, see John Carey, ‘Notes on the Irish War-Goddess’, *Éigse* 19 (1982–3), 263–75, especially p. 264; William Sayers, ‘*Airdrech*, *sirite* and Other Early Irish Battlefield Spirits’, *Éigse*, 25 (1991), 45–55; Máire Herbert, ‘Transmutations of an Irish Goddess’, in Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, eds., *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1996, 1996), pp. 141–51 (including a sceptical assessment of the valkyrie connection); Borsje, ‘Omens’, pp. 233–48; *eadem*, ‘The “Terror of the Night” and the Morrígain: Shifting Faces of the Supernatural’, in Mícheál Ó Flaithearta, ed., *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica* (University of Uppsala, 2007), pp. 71–98.

([111]) Sayers, ‘Charting Conceptual Space’, p. 51. On Cichuil's name, see also Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 117–18.

([112]) Sayers, ‘Charting Conceptual Space’, p. 36. In Irish sagas, the ‘goddess’ herself is very far from her putative origins in pre-Christian religion, surviving as a literary figure whose sinister aspects often tend to overshadow the positive ones. See Herbert, ‘Transmutations of an Irish Goddess’.

([113]) Máire Bhreathnach, ‘The Sovereignty Goddess’; on this transformation, see also Miranda Aldhouse-Green, ‘Pagan Celtic Iconography and the Concept of Sacral Kingship’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 52 (2001), 102–17, pp. 110–12. McCone has pointed out that not all hideous hags in Irish sagas are hostile sovereignty goddesses (*Pagan Past*, p. 132), but in the case of the *Togail* the parallel seems deliberately constructed.

([114]) The Étaín episode is on lines 1–61, and is excerpted in the first main section of chapter 2; the Cailb episode is on lines 535–79, and is excerpted in the previous section of the present chapter.

([115]) On ominous asymmetry, see Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 79–116.

([116]) On later mediaeval descriptions of ugly bodies as a reaction to the neoclassical ‘beautiful woman’, see Jan Ziolkowski, ‘Avatars of Ugliness in Medieval Literature’, *Modern Language Review*, 79 (1984), 1–20.

([117]) See note 107 above. *Doel* and *dega* may be identified as the same insect. *DIL*, s.v. 1. *dega*.

([118]) This phrase is only in the longer version of Étaín's description (in Y and D). On its snow-imagery, see Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan, ‘Prescient Birds and Prospective Kings: Further Comments on Irish Elements in the Eddic Poem *Rígsþula*’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 21 (2001), 285–310, p. 303.

([119]) *DIL*, s.v. 2 *calb*.

([120]) Sayers, ‘Supernatural Pseudonyms’, p. 56. Mark Williams (‘“Lady Vengeance”’, p. 8 n. 32) has suggested that the ‘green’ in *Der úaine* may imply ‘festering’, but I know of no parallels for such an epithet. Williams (ibid.) has also tentatively suggested that *Ethamne* may mean ‘snatching’.

([121]) Discussed in the last section of chapter 4.

([122]) As mentioned in note 66, *deirindlith* (Y, D, E) is presumably a variant for *deirgindlid* (‘red weavings’, U), which Knott inserted into her text here.

([123]) Lines 306–7, which I have laid out as verse. For manuscript-references see the fuller quotation earlier in this chapter, and note 67.

([124]) Bergin and Best, ‘Tochmarc Étaíne’, pp. 180–2; West, ‘An Edition’, p. 733. Considering the prophecy's reference to weaving, it can be no coincidence that Étaín's beautiful granddaughter Mess Búachalla is referred to in the *Togail* as a *druinech* (‘embroiderer’, line 78) and is brought up in a woven house (line 80). Charles-Edwards (‘*Geis*’, p. 51) notes the further association of Bé Find with Boand, the goddess of the River Boyne.

([125]) As noted by McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 46.

([126]) *Forderg* (‘very red, intensely red’) is Y's reading. As mentioned earlier, the other texts all have variants on *airdirc* (‘conspicuous’, D, E, A, Y2), and Y's reading may be an innovation.

([127]) Lines 9–10 and 12–14 (emphasis mine). Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 716); D (MS, fol. 79r); E (MS, fol. 18r); A (MS, fol. 4r); Y2 (MS, col. 123). Knott printed *uain*[*i*]*di* (‘green’). In D, E, and A, this second reference to the silk's greenness is absent.

([128]) See Knott, *Togail*, pp. 113–14, s.v. *derg*; *DIL*, s.vv. 1 *indled* and *intla(i)sse*.

([129]) These figures are described in the skaldic poem *Darraðarljóð* (‘The Lay of Dörruðr’): see R. G. Poole, ed. and trans., *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 116–56. They were compared with the Irish war-goddesses by Albertus Goedheer, *Irish and Norse Traditions about the Battle of Clontarf* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1938).

([130]) Knott (*Togail*, p. 78) suggested that the horseman's words refer to this figure; for further references, see West, ‘An Edition’, p. 733, and Herbert, ‘Transmutations of an Irish Goddess’, pp. 147–8. The sartorial figuring of slaughter is widespread in Irish literature: compare Rónán's lament for Mael Fothartaig *inna léni lān ḟola* (‘in his cloakful of blood’, line 183). On the shifting appearances of the Morrígan see Borsje, ‘The “Terror of the Night”’.

([131]) The placing of this event at Samain is mentioned only in U (lines 7044–6).