Introduction

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter provides a synopsis of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, a general introduction to the world of Irish saga literature, and an outline of the approach taken in this book. It goes on to address the question of why this literature has attracted such a diverse range of excellent scholarship, particularly on the mythological aspects of the story and its textual history, but so little sustained literary criticism of the Middle Irish saga itself.

Keywords: synopsis, scholarship, introduction, methodology

The emergence and proliferation of vernacular Irish prose sagas is a phenomenon without parallel in Europe during the early and central Middle Ages. Beginning perhaps in the eighth century, hundreds of tales about notable events of the past were written on parchment by scholars to entertain and instruct their contemporaries. These sagas testify to a remarkable creative fusion between inherited oral tradition and classical and biblical learning. Blending prose with poetry,

high tragedy with quickfire wit, their authors dramatized the deeds and struggles of men, women, gods, and monsters. The resulting 'web of story' stretches from the Gaelic early Christian period back into a mythic past.

The earliest extant manuscripts containing these sagas date from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, by which time the Old Irish language had metamorphosed into Middle Irish.[1] By this point the production of vernacular narrative literature was enjoying a remarkable revival after the economic and political difficulties of the Viking Age. In wealthier ecclesiastical institutions, large manuscript books were being produced. Responding to their patrons' and audiences' need for entertaining and edifying narrative, propelled by the momentum of their developing literary tradition, authors had become ambitious. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries they produced large-scale vernacular narratives, some stitching together or reworking smaller tales, others writing substantially new ones.[2] This period saw the composition of many of the sagas best known to modern readers, such as *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, 'The Cattle-Raid of Cooley', an extended tale about an ill-starred attempt by the king and queen of Connaught to capture the prize bull of Ulster, foiled by the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn.[3] Some see the *Táin* as no less than an Irish (p.2) epic; whether or not this is an accurate label, it is no coincidence that the later Middle Irish period also saw the translation (or adaptation) of classical texts such as Virgil's *Æneid* into Irish, the first vernacular language in which that work appears.

Second only to the *Táin* in reputation, and second to none in its literary achievement, is *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel',[4] written in the earlier part of the Middle Irish period (the tenth or eleventh century) and drawing substantially on Old Irish material.[5] The *Togail* tells of the fall of Conaire Mór of the Érainn dynasty, the greatest of all the over-kings of Ireland. Begotten and raised to the kingship of Tara by the shadowy powers of the Otherworld, he brought peace and plenty to Ireland. But the golden age did not last. A false judgement, momentarily placing his affection for his delinquent foster-brothers above his responsibilities as

sovereign, set him and his realm on the road to ruin. The Otherworld, manifested in an ominous succession of spectres and apparitions, compelled Conaire to break one royal taboo after another, eventually hounding him to a violent death at a royal mansion or guesting-hall, Da Derga's Hostel, at the hands of his own foster-brothers. His and their desperate attempts to stave off the inevitable were of no avail. His death left his realm in turmoil: according to other sources, Ireland remained without an over-king for several years.[6]

This saga is one of the outstanding literary monuments of mediaeval Ireland. It has been much studied and even more admired. However, until fairly recently scholarly enthusiasm has burned brightest when considering this saga and others like it in a very different, distant context—that of its ultimate roots.

The roots of the mediaeval Irish saga reach far back. As historians we can trace them as far as the fifth century; but some would go further, digging down to the archaic culture of the so-called 'Continental Celts' of the first millennium BC. Nor need we stop here. These roots have been held by some to reach further still. Nobody knows who the Indo-Europeans were; but their view of the world, some claim, underpins many Western cultures, some of which may preserve vestiges of this immeasurably ancient past. Traditions from its eastern and western extremities, recorded in the Sanskrit and Irish languages, provide intimations of a common (p.3) tongue and, with it, a common world-view. Like the world before Babel this unity has been fragmented, lost forever in deep time.[7]

Yet the fragments remain. The quest to understand more about the primeval roots of Western civilization can lend to these fragments an almost numinous aura. Scholars have long busied themselves with the mythological dimension of Irish literature, uncovering connections and allusions to a succession of lost worlds: the Indo-Europeans, the Continental Celts, the pre-Christian Irish, the pre-literate Irish.[8] This perspective has dominated studies of the *Togail* in particular, because this tale is unusually rich in allusions to mythology and archaic social practices. But these allusions are concealed in the extant text: the essence is hidden, some have said,

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beneath layers of scribal interference and clumsy compilation.[9] There remains only the ghost of a once-potent myth or epic, of which the now-blighted saga text can only provide the occasional tantalizing glimpse.[10]

However useful such methods may prove for the reconstruction of older mythologies and world-views, they do not represent the only way of looking at an Irish saga. Roots are important, but so too is the tree itself. In this book I shall focus on the Middle Irish saga as a brilliantly crafted literary work in its own right, putting older stories to new uses, rather than viewing it solely as a distorted relic of those older stories.[11] With its dazzling array of different styles and modes, its deft interweaving of mythological themes with contemporary political and religious (p.4) concerns, and above all its dramatic orchestration of heterogeneous materials, it more than justifies the attention of the literary critic, and the general reader.

Compared with other branches of mediaeval studies, however —for instance, the massive interpretative industry surrounding the Old English epic *Beowulf* since the 1930s—our understanding of Irish sagas as literature is still in its adolescence.[12] A revival of interest has taken place since the late 1970s. In 1978, for example, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh registered 'a pressing need to analyse the extant texts as literary works in their own right'.[13] Since then he and several other scholars have gone on to do just this, especially for the shortest tales, but few have been willing to extend their analyses beyond the conventional scholarly medium of the short, tightly focused research article. We have thus built up an immensely valuable mosaic of short critical studies, most of which trace single themes across a range of texts (and thus do not have the space for more sustained exploration). Literary monographs (an extreme rarity in this field) have greatly enhanced our sense of the complexity and sophistication of mediaeval Irish literature by applying feminist, structuralist, and post-structuralist approaches to the corpus as a whole; yet this thematic emphasis and the range of texts scrutinized mean that we still have only a fragmentary sense of how the longer, more ambitious, and arguably more important sagas

actually 'work' as literature. As recently as 2006 it was possible for Ann Dooley to gloss her mention of 'the critic of early Irish literature' with the caveat 'if one may so posit such a person in the discipline of Irish Studies as currently practised'.[14]

Why should this be so? Seán Ó Coileáin, writing in the late 1970s, suggested that scholars were inhibited by a climate of 'personal acrimony' held to distinguish Celtic studies, but in this respect the field does not seem especially different to other branches of mediaeval studies.[15] Patricia Kelly observed in 1992 that much editorial groundwork needs to be done establishing reliable texts before literary criticism can proceed: this remains a common perception within the field.[16] Yet the same is true of Icelandic saga studies: many of its most celebrated texts, such as *Njáls saga* and *Laxdœla saga*, do not exist in satisfactory critical editions, but this field (and especially these texts) have benefited from a vigorous tradition of literary (p.5) analysis going back to the nineteenth century. In any case, the existence of a critical edition of a saga, in Ireland or Iceland, by no means guarantees that it will attract more literary-critical attention.

A more important difference between Irish and Icelandic saga studies is the perceived status of their objects of study. Icelandic sagas date from the thirteenth century onwards, after the rise of romance and the twelfth-century renaissance. For all their debt to oral tradition, their status as highly crafted literary works is now (largely) a critical commonplace. But Irish sagas, some of which may date back to the eighth century, reflect a much earlier phase in the development of vernacular narrative prose, and are consequently harder to fit into the framework of established genres available to mainstream mediaevalists. This has not prevented scholars from teasing out many of the meanings encoded in these texts, but it has meant that the texts' own literary nature and status remain uncertain.

In recent decades, Irish sagas' status as 'literary works' has been laid open to question by both literary theorists and political historians. The post-structuralist and deconstructionist approaches which inform several recent

monographs on mediaeval Irish sagas actively downplay the concept of a 'literary work' as an internally consistent whole. Dooley's own important and insightful contribution to the literary understanding of Irish sagas illustrates this point. Her recent monograph on *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle-Raid of Cooley') explicitly denies the ambition of producing a systematic analysis of the text. She 'defer[s] further attempts to determine the significant structural design of the whole work', producing instead 'a series of thematic essays' on heroic ideology and the textual construction and deconstruction of mythic meaning based around key passages in the *Táin*.[17] Icelandic sagas are currently being given similar treatment, but unlike the Irish sagas they had already been the subjects of a solid, extensive, and ambitious body of literary-critical groundwork, whose (sometimes overconfident) pronouncements about texts' structures and meanings have since been usefully destabilized by more nuanced theoretical approaches. Most Irish sagas have not had this groundwork done. For readers unfamiliar with the genre in the first place, the result can be confusing.

Historical scholarship on these tales, on the other hand, often embodies a more hard-nosed form of scepticism about Irish sagas' literary status. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, for example, suggested in the mid-1980s that many Irish vernacular narratives were not originally written with aesthetic concerns uppermost, but were 'historical scripture, part of a dossier of dynastic claims' produced by a scholarly 'mandarin' caste to meet the immediate political needs of their patrons.[18] This strongly intentionalist perspective, reflecting an increasing interest in the 'uses of the past' among mediaevalists in general, has dominated recent studies of Irish (p.6) saints' lives and sagas. The latter have typically been seen as parables with clearly defined 'messages' for their target audience, ranging from political claims to moral or religious principles.[19]

These studies have transformed our understanding of the political dimension of Irish saga-writing, yet the search for straightforward 'messages' can end up making these imaginatively complex narratives look rather cramped and

one-dimensional. Ó Corráin himself points out elsewhere that these texts 'can be understood on different levels',[20] which by extension suggests that their meanings are not, and were not, restricted to the immediate 'historical needs' they may have addressed. Ambiguity and multivalence seem to have formed part of the compositional strategy of many Irish sagas, as well as to the often playful plurality of meanings attached to these texts by their mediaeval users.[21] Furthermore, today's sharp pseudo-generic distinctions between 'literary' and 'non-literary' narratives, or between 'history', 'pseudo-history', and 'fiction', would not have made sense to mediaeval authors who recognized different levels of truth-value and function within a single text.[22] In densely woven sagas such as the *Togail*, aesthetic and political concerns are inseparable from each other.[23] The medium *was* the message: the richer and more complex the tale, the greater the need today for literary-critical groundwork to clarify its textual strategies (including those we might consider 'aesthetic') before the historian can confidently identify any ideological purposes or undercurrents the tale may have.[24] This is especially true of texts whose structure is (p.7) difficult to understand at first glance, or whose ideology is not expressed in a directly prescriptive form.

My approach in this book occupies the undercultivated middle ground between the poles of message-centred historicism and postmodernist literary theory, while drawing on aspects of both these approaches. Embedding the *Togail* in its contemporary literary, political, and religious contexts, I shall offer my own interpretation of what makes this saga work, how it is constructed, what it may have meant (and been intended to mean) for its original audiences, and why it is still worth reading today. I hope to show that the *Togail* is indeed a literary whole—that, far from being a 'mere' compilation without a coherent narrative strategy, it is a compelling dramatization of the events surrounding Conaire's death and a profound exploration of contemporary anxieties surrounding the theory and practice of Christian kingship. As will become apparent, the *Togail* inhabits a narrative world of its own which is not always hospitable to modern generic expectations or neo-Aristotelian conceptions of literary 'unity'. At the same

time, however, its aesthetics are not so alien that they cannot be enjoyed by the modern reader.

My approach thus builds on the long-established Anglo-American critical tradition of interpreting and ascribing value to a text in terms of its formal attributes, but it does so with a difference. In her incisive survey of critical approaches to the mediaeval Celtic literatures, Helen Fulton criticizes this 'liberal-empiricist' tradition (especially in the forms of Leavisite criticism and the New Criticism) for its ideological conservatism: detaching texts from their social and historical contexts, elevating form over content, and privileging the idea of a single 'correct' meaning intended by a single gifted author rather than attending to 'issues related to cultural production and theories of transmission and signification'.[25] My analysis, by focusing on the compositional strategies of the Middle Irish recension which underlies the extant texts of the *Togail*, does indeed privilege the creativity of a single author within a larger network of cultural production; but he seems to have used a wide range of texts by other authors when composing his saga,[26] so he cannot be held personally responsible for every poetic image or rhetorical trope. I have therefore attempted to restrict the single-author perspective to my discussions of the saga's overall structure (as well as indicating where this structure was altered in subsequent copying or rewriting). It is my hope that the result transcends at least some of the ideological limitations of the 'liberal-empiricist' tradition. Above all, I have tried to use these traditional literary-critical techniques in a way which demonstrates that the concept of a single 'correct' meaning is alien to the purposes of this literature (not merely its later readers), and that close attention to form and technique—to the 'effects' created by a text—can and should be *combined* with close attention to its content and especially to its social and historical contexts. (p.8) To use the bourgeois label 'masterpiece' of a saga like the *Togail* does not necessarily mean detaching it from the culture which gave it life in the first place or subordinating its meaning to 'a deeply conservative political ideology'.[27] It simply means acknowledging that, if read in its own terms, this is a text which continues to have meaning and power in our own time.

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The Story and its Critics

The story of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* begins by telling of the ancestry of Conaire's mother Mess Búachalla: it opens with a beautiful and elaborate description of Étaín, a woman from the Otherworld,[28] as she appears to King Eochaid Feidlech. After this remarkable opening flourish, the circumstances leading to Conaire's birth are laconically told, the narrative leaping over many years in a few lines. We[29] thus learn that Étaín and Eochaid became married; that their daughter later married a certain Cormac; that the daughter produced from that marriage (Mess Búachalla) was secretly fostered by cowherds after being exposed by one of her parents; that, many years later, the childless over-king Eterscéle learned of the girl's beauty and took her to wife; but that before this happened she was made pregnant by a mysterious Otherworldly bird-man, who stipulated that their son was to be called Conaire and was not to kill birds. Conaire is then born and raised as the king's son and is fostered alongside three sons of the hunter-warrior Donn Désa.

The saga then jumps ahead several years to Eterscéle's death, narrating the events leading up to Conaire becoming king of Tara. The narrator describes the divination-ritual (*tarbḟeis*, ‘bull-feast’) by which means the men of Ireland are about to learn who is to be the new king. At this point Conaire, still a beardless lad, learns of his true ancestry: he leaves his foster-brothers in the Liffey plain to pursue a flock of mysterious birds which, when he finally overtakes them on the waves of the sea, turn out to be Otherworldly bird-men, his father's kin. They are on the point of killing Conaire, but their king Nemglan protects him, reveals Conaire's paternity, and instructs him to go to Tara, advising him on how to fulfil the prediction made at the bull-feast and thus claim the kingship. Conaire duly follows Nemglan's instructions and wins over the people at Tara; they then confer the kingship on him.

At this point the narrator informs us that Nemglan, besides giving Conaire instructions on how to become king, had also laid on Conaire's reign eight *gessi*, prohibited actions (somewhat like personal taboos) which he must respect if his (p.9) kingship—and, by extension, the land itself—is to

prosper.[30] These *gessi* symbolize the king's contract with the Otherworld, encapsulated in the concept of *fír flathemon* or 'the prince's truth'. If he maintains justice and does not violate his *gessi*, his realm enjoys perfect peace and bounty, but if he breaks any of his *gessi* he will destroy his *fír flathemon*, effectively turning his realm from a paradise to a wasteland. The *gessi* are then listed: they include prohibitions on plunder being taken in his reign, on his spending the night in a house where firelight is visible from without after sunset, and on a single man or a single woman entering his house after sunset. Having listed the *gessi*, the narrator indicates the healthy state of Conaire's *fír flathemon* with a lyrical description of the golden age of peace, prosperity, and fine weather which ensues.

The main focus of the saga is on Conaire's failure to maintain this state of affairs, and the narrative now leaps again over several years to describe how his *gessi* were broken. Conaire's foster-brothers, sons of the hunter-warrior Donn Désa, come to resent the prohibition on *díberg* (plundering). After trying to provoke Conaire by indulging in petty thieving, they take up full-scale *díberg* with a large army. When they are captured and brought before Conaire, he orders all the plunderers except his foster-brothers to be killed—but at once realizes that this is a false judgement and retracts it (too late), banishing the whole host overseas instead. On the sea his foster-brothers meet the one-eyed British warrior Ingcél, with whom they form a binding pact to provide him with his choice of plunder in Ireland after he has provided them with their pickings in Britain. Meanwhile, the doomed Conaire breaks the rest of his *gessi* at an accelerating rate, largely prompted by a series of ill omens and visitations which indicate that the Otherworld has rejected him and his kingship. Bewildered by spectres on his way home from Clare to Tara, he is compelled to take the southward road to Da Derga's Hostel in Leinster, just under the northern edge of the Dublin Mountains.[31]

The plunderers have by this point returned to Ireland with Ingcél, having carried out a raid or massacre (*orgain*) in Britain on the house in which Ingcél's closest kin had been staying. Their spies now reveal that Conaire is on his way to

Da Derga's Hostel, and Ingcél selects this place for his chosen 'destruction'. He is unmoved by the grief which the sons of Donn Désa repeatedly express at the prospect as they advance towards the Hostel. Finally, Ingcél himself goes to spy on the company once the latter is within the Hostel, and the sons of Donn Désa ask him to describe what he saw. Ingcél does so, describing the occupants of each chamber in turn; Fer Rogain (son of Donn Désa) identifies them and predicts how they will perform in the coming battle; and he and his brothers utter choric exclamations of grief and doom. This sets the pattern for the extended description-sequence which follows. At last the plunderers storm the house, and the battle is briefly told. The Hostel is fired; Conaire and his men fight heroically, slaughtering thousands of plunderers; (p.10) but the enemy's druids subdue and confuse him by bringing a magical thirst upon him, and in this state he is decapitated. His champion Mac Cécht has meanwhile gone to fetch water; but all but one of the rivers and lakes of Ireland hide from Mac Cécht, causing a fatal delay. He returns at dawn, only to see Conaire being decapitated. He pours the water into Conaire's throat, and the severed head thanks him in verse.

Thus ends the battle, with all but a handful of the plunderers dead and most of the king's men still alive.[32] But the king himself is dead, leaving no successor, and his realm is in ruins. The saga ends with a grim epilogue in which two prominent survivors, the king's champions Mac Cécht and Conall Cernach, reveal their wounds.

Such is the basic plot of the *Togail*. Told in this way (as it often is in the secondary literature), summarized in chronological order with helpful phrases such as 'meanwhile' and 'by this point' to order the various parallel strands, it acquires a certain *prima facie* narrative sense, for all its oddities of detail and incident. But the novelistic neatness of arrangement conferred by this kind of plot-summary vanishes when one is confronted by the saga itself, which may be read in a number of different translations.[33] It divides into two clear halves, distinguished by contrasting and complementary narrative strategies.[34] The first half consists chiefly of a linear third-person narrative relating the conception, rise, and fall of

Conaire, while the second half is almost completely taken up by a floridly ritualistic sequence of descriptions and prophecies uttered by the plunderers surrounding the Hostel. The saga as a whole houses a great variety of styles and modes: spare paratactic narration and linear momentum are juxtaposed with the hectic stasis of descriptive ornament, and prose is regularly interrupted both by verse and by the incantatory rhythmical form known as *rosc*. Some of the more elaborate descriptive passages make such powerful use of alliteration and rhythmic devices that it is often unclear whether they should be lineated as poetry or prose:[35] the *Togail* as a whole may be seen as a kind of poem in prose as well as a prose saga interspersed with verses (p.11) (or prosimetrum). Alongside this variety of styles and modes is a similar variety of linguistic registers. Besides the mixture of older and newer linguistic forms common in early Middle Irish texts, some of the verses preserve still older forms. Whether these passages have been retained from early Old Irish sources or composed in a deliberately archaic manner, they are deliberately set off against the surrounding prose and displayed as ancient outcrops breaking through the saga's topsoil.

In architectural terms, this saga is Gothic or baroque rather than classical. Yet even though Gothic architecture is as much admired as its Palladian counterpart, literary commentators regularly betray their discipline's roots in modern neoclassicism.[36] The great German critic Rudolf Thurneysen, on whose work much of our knowledge of Irish sagas is built, denied that the author of the *Togail* was an artist in any sense, and this has set the tone for much subsequent commentary.[37] Sagas whose structures are more immediately intelligible, more commensurate with modern tastes, naturally provide a more tempting prospect for the critic, as suggested by the case of the slightly earlier and much shorter Middle Irish saga *Fingal Rónáin* ('Rónán's Kin-Slaying'), the story of how a Leinster king killed his son.[38] Whereas the *Togail* seems to sprawl irregularly, with a profusion of material apparently irrelevant to the main plot, the structure of *Fingal Rónáin* is clear and symmetrical. While the *Togail* seems to cram in as much supernatural and legendary material as possible, *Fingal*

Rónáin internalizes its mythological reference-points. Both sagas combine prose and poetry, but whereas the prose parts of the *Togail* run the full gamut of Middle Irish narrative styles from terse dialogue to florid, alliterating descriptive 'runs', those of *Fingal Rónáin* are cast throughout in a compressed, elliptical style which Hemingway would have admired. The shorter tale's economy and verisimilitude reminded David Greene of the 'plain straightforward narratives' of the classical Icelandic sagas and, strikingly, suggested to him 'the idea of pure literature'.[39] Hence *Fingal Rónáin* has become a favourite text for literary scholars to unpack, treating it as a self-consistent work consciously crafted by an 'author'.[40]

(p.12) The *Togail* simply does not fit within a literary paradigm which depends on superficial resemblance to modern realist fiction. Scholars have therefore been reluctant to treat it as an artistic whole. It may be one of mediaeval Ireland's most widely read and most frequently translated sagas, but it remains an enigma. Indeed, translators regularly leave out almost half the text because these parts are deemed 'unimportant' or 'repetitious';[41] one translator felt the need to apologize for the 'disappointingly perfunctory' climax and for the way in which its literary set-pieces often 'flower […] out of all proportion to their narrative importance', yet he included the saga in his book all the same.[42] Scholarly responses show a similar duality. On the one hand the *Togail* is deemed an 'unbalanced', 'barbaric', and 'frankly tedious' mass of 'inconsistencies' with no structure worth speaking of, or as a text whose 'compiler' wanted 'to amalgamate as much source material […] as was available to him at the time, regardless of contradictory details'.[43] On the other hand, it is also judged—in many cases by the same scholars—as 'a cohesive whole', alive with all the 'magic of Celtic romance', 'as tragic as a Greek drama', 'the most majestic and monumental of all extant early Irish sagas', and a 'literary tour de force' possessing in its 'magnificence of imagination' a 'higher literary value than the more famous *Táin*'.[44] If this saga really does represent a pinnacle of mediaeval Irish prose, the nature of its achievement may seem, at first glance, problematic.

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The *Togail* has attracted sustained attention chiefly in studies whose aims and objectives lie outside the domain of literary criticism as traditionally practised. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, its suggestive subject-matter has served mythologists and historians with rich pickings: the saga has become a focal point for debates over the mythology of sovereignty, the nature of ancient Irish taboo, and the structure of Irish (and Indo-European) society.[45] On the other hand, the (p.13) unusual number of manuscripts containing divergent versions of the Middle Irish saga has given the *Togail* a prominent role in codicological and text-critical studies, where its variant readings and alleged textual contradictions fuel arguments over the relative priority of (for instance) the manuscript book *Lebor na hUidre* and the nature of the saga's sources.[46] These two branches of scholarship have immeasurably enriched our understanding of the saga's development; in particular, the many contributions of Ó Cathasaigh and Máire West provide an indispensable background to any understanding of the *Togail* as literature.

Yet none of these studies focuses primarily on the Middle Irish saga itself, let alone its compositional structure. Most of the work just cited is geared towards peering through the text. Some of it is trained on what came *before* the saga was composed (myths, folktales, etymologies, social structures, the textual components and predecessors of the extant saga): the contributions of the mediaeval saga-author(s) are set aside as 'later literary and borrowed inventions', and the *Togail* is viewed as a window through which the object of the scholar's interest is 'refracted'.[47] Conversely, much of the textual and codicological criticism just (p.14) cited focuses on what happened *after* the original saga's Middle Irish composition (relations between extant manuscripts, the identity of scribes and so on):[48] such investigation concentrates on textual fault-lines and scribal errors, and only rarely touches on any positive creative contribution made by those responsible for the extant texts, whether we see these figures as scribes or as authors in their own right. In these cases, then, the scholarly gaze has been directed in two opposite directions, leaving the outlines of the Middle Irish saga somewhat blurred.

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Literary-critical attention, meanwhile, has certainly not been lacking, but it has tended to be brief or else trained on a few specific passages. Some particularly incisive commentary has emerged from comparative studies in which a particular theme is traced across the corpus, such as regal moderation or fosterage relationships.[49] The work of Kim McCone and Jacqueline Borsje, exploring a wide range of different themes and repeatedly touching on the *Togail*, has been particularly important in teasing out some of the textual strategies of the extant saga. Borsje has been particularly explicit in her aim of 'studying the extant text the way it has been handed down to us'.[50] Other scholars have focused squarely on the *Togail*, whether seeking to explain its intended 'moral',[51] elucidating isolated phrases or passages—the riddling description of Mac Cécht, the phrases *deirgindlid áir* ('red weavings of slaughter') and *deog tonnaid* ('drink of death')[52]—or tracing an underlying theme through the saga, such as plundering, prophecy, one-eyedness and the grotesque.[53] These studies, to which this book is deeply indebted, have illuminated vital aspects of the saga's narrative logic and thematic consistency. Nevertheless, their focus on single themes means that leading features of the saga as a whole remain unexplored, not least the basic question of its overall structural coherence.

(p.15) To resume the architectural analogy, the overall effect is like loitering inside the west porch of a cathedral just before the building is locked up for the night. The nave is shrouded in darkness, apart from a few lights high up in the clerestory from which one gains a vague sense of the building's scale. Scattered moonbeams illuminate a sculpted capital here, the base of a column there. It is a mysterious and picturesque situation, but not particularly conducive to appreciating the building as a whole. Moreover, whereas our loiterer knows perfectly well what the interiors of cathedrals look like when fully lit, the lack of analytical groundwork ensures that the *Togail*'s unusual structure continues to baffle readers.

The focus of my analysis, then, is the Middle Irish saga preserved in mediaeval manuscripts. In attempting to explain and explore its unusual structure, I begin from the

methodological assumption that it was structured like this for its author's own reasons, rather than because of a lack of skill, since to assume incompetence would paralyse effective analysis from the start. In this I am following the line taken by Thomas Charles-Edwards in his penetrating analysis of prophecy and related concepts in the *Togail*.[54] For Charles-Edwards, the saga-author's interest in prophetic utterance and other concerns of the hereditary poetic order of the *fílid* helps explain why so many of the story's events are narrated in advance as predictions, so that when they actually happen there is no need to relate them in full. Such oddities of the saga's procedure make sense when seen from the perspective of this particular branch of Irish secular learning.

My approach extends this principle of reading the saga in its own terms, but differs in one important respect from that of Charles-Edwards. The historical context invoked in his analysis is not that of the period when the extant Middle Irish saga was written, but that of the 'Old Irish period' a century or two earlier, when many of its sources were written. The same is true of West's insightful study of the plundering theme in the *Togail*.[55] Although their analyses are (perforce) based on the Middle Irish text, they seem to be making sense of its structure and meaning only insofar as it represents its Old Irish predecessor(s)—naturally enough, given that these scholars' purpose is to show how writers from the 'early christian period' perceived the then-fading heathen phenomena of *díberg* and druidry.[56] Of course the surviving texts of the *Togail* bear witness to the concerns of writers from the Old Irish period, as indeed to still older layers of meaning. But the extant saga was composed in the tenth or eleventh century, making it impossible to discern how its putative predecessors were themselves structured overall. The Middle Irish author seems to have used a number of different sources in constructing his saga, not just two as Thurneysen thought;[57] and the lineaments of any individual one of these contributory Old Irish texts are obscured still further by this saga-author's own abundant creativity. Without ignoring Old Irish contexts, then, my analysis of the saga's structure and meaning will highlight the cultural (p.16) concerns of the Middle Irish period, especially those surrounding the changing

ideology of Christian kingship in Ireland during the central Middle Ages.[58]

Overview of the Argument

This book is organized as follows. Chapter 1 sets out the material basis for my analysis by explaining how the surviving texts of the *Togail* may be used as a window onto the Middle Irish saga from which they all derive, and sketching out the relationship between it and other stories about Conaire circulating in the early and central Middle Ages. This will lead into a discussion of how Irish saga-writers approached their sources, and the relationship between compilatory methods and literary technique in saga authorship. Chapters 2–7 then explore leading features of the saga's structure and artistry, showing how its diverse source-materials were welded into a unified whole (albeit not always the kind of unity demanded by neoclassical critics). While broadly following the order of events narrated, these chapters focus in turn on important themes or narrative devices found in the saga, all illustrated with reference to the wider world of Irish saga-writing.

Chapter 2 thus shows how the apparently disjointed opening episodes of the *Togail* combine to set up an edgy, ambivalent relationship between world and Otherworld. Building on Ó Cathasaigh's seminal work, I shall explore how the saga's central expression of that relationship, the Otherworldly *gessi*, functions as an engine of narrative. Chapter 3 examines the way in which the saga flags up ironic parallels between Conaire's career and that of his marauding foster-brothers, in particular the impossible choices faced by each in turn between their hereditary obligations and their ties of foster-kinship. These parallel dilemmas are staged using devices which may seem merely repetitive, but which are carefully orchestrated for dramatic effect. The resulting sense of mounting tension is sustained by a range of structural and emotive devices which I examine in chapters 4 and 5. These include tightening the narrative focus, underlining the protagonists' converging trajectories, emphasizing their mounting fear and gradual realization of their fate, a proliferation of predictions and portents, and the transformation of their destination into an Otherworldly site

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rich in mythological symbolism. As the two groups converge on Da Derga's Hostel, the story's events are focalized increasingly through the eyes of the plunderers and in direct speech, preparing the narrative for the extended description-sequence which takes up most of the second half.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine this magnificent but much-disparaged sequence, comparing it with other instances of the device in Irish literature. I argue that it is crucial to the saga's dramatic effect, bringing together and transforming the (p.17) various structural techniques and narrative themes of the first half. Symbolically and dramatically, the central tableau of Conaire is the very heart of the saga, and chapter 7 shows how its employment of contrasting and paradoxical images of kingship embodies in microcosm the compositional procedure used throughout the *Togail*. The saga's movement from linear narrative to poetic description can be seen to enable a broadening of its range of meanings, which in turn informs the saga's return to spare linear narration seen in the final battle-narrative and epilogue, explored in the final sections of this chapter.

Having outlined the saga's narrative architecture and dynamics, in chapters 8–10 I place it in selected literary and historical contexts to shed light on its contemporary meanings. In chapter 8 I consider the Latin learned culture in which Middle Irish authors were steeped, discussing the relative importance of classical and biblical pretexts for the *Togail*'s creative transformation of sovereignty myths. In chapter 9 I argue that one important pretext may have been the story of the doomed king Saul in the book of 1 Samuel, the Bible's darkest and most perplexing kingship-narrative. Its parallels with the *Togail* are structural as well as thematic, suggesting that the Irish tale may have been partly patterned on it. The chapter goes on to explore what purpose such parallels could have served, placing the *Togail* against a backdrop of transformations in mediaeval kingship ideology as seen in various didactic texts both in Ireland and further afield (notably Francia). Chapter 10 goes on to outline the tensions within this kingship ideology as seen in Irish didactic and propagandistic texts, exploring how these tensions were

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exploited by saga-authors in the Middle Irish period, when kingship over all Ireland was becoming a potential reality, not just a myth. Considering the *Togail* alongside these texts will allow us to approach a possible answer to the question of what the *Togail* meant for its contemporaries, and the related question of how far it and other sagas can be seen as 'parables'. They use a legendary past to comment on or respond to the troubled politics of their authors' times, but, as with other quasi-heroic literary traditions in northern Europe, they were not primarily interested in offering practical solutions.

Notes:

(1) The conventional linguistic periods are as follows: Old Irish, *c*.700–900 AD; Middle Irish, *c*.900–1200; Early Modern Irish, *c*.1200–1600. On Middle Irish literature generally see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The Literature of Medieval Ireland, 800–1200: From the Vikings to the Normans', in James Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, eds., *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), I, pp. 32–73.

(2) On the literary revival of this period, see Máire Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries: Irish Written Culture around the Year 1000', in Patrick Sims-Williams and Gruffydd Aled Williams, eds., *Crossing Boundaries/Croesi Ffiniau* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, 2007), *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 53/54 (2007), 87–101.

(3) For the beginner, an excellent introduction to the *Táin* and its world is the collection of translated texts in Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Tain: From the Irish Epic* Táin Bó Cúailnge (Oxford University Press, 1970). Also recommended is Ciarán Carson, trans., *The Táin: A New Translation of the* Táin Bó Cúailnge (London: Penguin, 2007). For background, a good starting-point is J. P. Mallory, ed., *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast: December Publications, 1992).

(4) The term *bruiden*—a large hall or mansion in which a large number of people may be feasted and/or accommodated—has generally been translated 'hostel' since Walter Scott's revival

of an obsolete term for an inn (J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn., 20 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1989; henceforth *OED*), s.v. *hostel*). Newcomers to Irish sagas should banish from their minds all association with student dwellings and budget accommodation: these were buildings fit for royalty. For historical background see Catherine Marie O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in Medieval Ireland 900–1500* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

(⁵) Unless otherwise stated, my references to the *Togail* in this book are to the so-called 'second recension' (the oldest fully extant version of the tale). On the saga's date and the concept of 'recensions' see chapter 1 below.

(⁶) On mediaeval Irish representations of Tara as legendary seat of the over-kingship of Ireland, see (among other studies) Edel Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scotorum?', *Ériu*, 47 (1996), 67–88, and the essays collected in Edel Bhreathnach, ed., *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

(⁷) For an overview of Indo-European studies see J. P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989).

(⁸) Contrasting approaches to the mythological element in mediaeval Irish texts can be seen in Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1961); Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, 2nd edn. (Feltham: Newnes, 1983); Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990); Elizabeth A. Gray, '*Cath Maige Tuired*: Myth and Structure', *Éigse*, 18 (1980–1), 183–209, and 19 (1982–3), 1–35, 230–62. For commmentary see Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Pagan Survivals: The Evidence of Early Irish Narrative', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Irland und Europa: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter/Ireland and Europe: The Early Church* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), pp. 291–307.

(⁹) See Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946), p. 124; Máirín O Daly, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', in Myles Dillon, ed., *Irish Sagas* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1959), pp. 105–18, p. 117. Compare the more disparaging comments by Cecile O'Rahilly, ed. and trans., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), pp. viii–xviii.

(¹⁰) See, for instance, Tom Sjöblom's comment: 'it becomes necessary for the mythologist to trace and distinguish the so-called primal mythical motifs from later literary and borrowed inventions, and [...] reconstruct something of the native religious and mythical thinking' ('Advice from a Birdman: Ritual Injunctions and Royal Instructions in TBDD', in Anders Ahlqvist et al., eds., *Celtica Helsingiensia: Proceedings from a Symposium on Celtic Studies* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), pp. 233–51, p. 234).

(¹¹) The classic statement of this approach to early mediaeval legendary literature remains J. R. R. Tolkien's lecture of 1936, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (1936), 245–95, reprinted in Lewis E. Nicholson, ed., *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* (Notre Dame, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 51–103, and discussed on p. 339 below. On the need for both critical approaches, see Joseph Falaky Nagy's review of Mallory's *Aspects of the Táin*, *Éigse*, 28 (1994–5), 183–8, and Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Early Irish Narrative Literature', in Kim McCone and Katharine Simms, eds., *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth: St Patrick's College, 1996), pp. 55–64.

(¹²) On the *Beowulf* industry see Thomas A. Shippey, 'Structure and Unity', in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, eds., *The Beowulf Handbook* (University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 149–74.

(¹³) Ó Cathasaigh, 'Pagan Survivals', p. 292. See also *idem*, 'Irish Literature: Saga', in Joseph R. Strayer, ed., *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 12 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1982–9), VI, pp. 544–9, pp. 544–5, and Máire Herbert, 'The World, the Text, and the Critic of Early Irish Heroic Narrative',

Text and Context, 3 (Autumn 1988), 1–9. For more polemical accounts of the role of literary criticism in this field, see Varese Layzer, *Signs of Weakness: Juxtaposing Irish Tales and the Bible* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 17–41; Helen Fulton, 'Critical and Theoretical Perspectives on the Study of Literatures in the Celtic Languages', in John T. Koch, ed., *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), pp. 496–501.

([14]) Ann Dooley, *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge* (University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 16.

([15]) Seán Ó Coileáin, 'Irish Saga Literature', in Felix J. Oinas, ed., *Heroic Epic and Saga* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 172–92, p. 180.

([16]) Patricia Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 69; compare Ó Cathasaigh, 'Early Irish Narrative', pp. 55–7.

([17]) Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, pp. 4–5, 20–1.

([18]) Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', in D. Ellis Evans et al., eds., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Oxford: D. E. Evans, 1986), pp. 141–58, pp. 141–3. See also Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Fingal Rónáin*', *Celtica*, 17 (1985), 123–44, p. 123.

([19]) Effective examples include Máire Herbert, 'The Preface to *Amra Coluim Cille*', in Donnchadh Ó Corráin et al., eds., *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 67–75, p. 67; *eadem*, '*Fled Dúin na nGéd*: A Reappraisal', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 18 (Winter 1989), 75–87; Pádraig Ó Ríain, 'The *Táin*: a Clue to its Origins', in J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman, eds., *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* (Belfast: December Publications, 1994), pp. 31–8; Erich Poppe, '*Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* Revisited', *Studia Celtica Japonica*, new series, 9 (1997), 1–9; Michael Chesnutt, '*Cath Maige Tuired*— A Parable of the Battle of Clontarf', in Séamas Ó Catháin, ed.,

Northern Lights: Following Folklore in North-Western Europe (University College Dublin Press, 2001), pp. 22–33.

([20]) Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Legend as Critic', in Tom Dunne, ed., *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence* (Cork University Press, 1987; = *Historical Studies*, 16), pp. 23–38, pp. 31–2.

([21]) On open-endedness as a compositional strategy see Kaarina Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*: The Medieval Irish Text as Argumentative Space', in John Carey et al., eds., *Cín Chille Cúile: Texts, Saints and Places* (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004), pp. 141–9; Ralph O'Connor, 'Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*', *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 117–43. On the plurality of mediaeval readings of these texts, see Morgan Thomas Davies, 'Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature: Notes on Some Notes to *Orgain Denna Ríg* and *Amra Coluim Cille*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 32 (Winter 1996), 1–23.

([22]) On some aspects of this entanglement, see Erich Poppe, *Of Cycles and Other Critical Matters: Some Issues in Medieval Irish Literary History and Criticism* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 2008), 47–56; Pádraig Ó Néill, 'The Latin Colophon to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the Book of Leinster: A Critical View of Old Irish Literature', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 269–75.

([23]) Compare Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative: A Caveat from Ninth-century Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 17 (1994–95), 1–40.

([24]) Richard Mark Scowcroft, 'Abstract Narrative in Ireland', *Ériu*, 46 (1995), 121–58, p. 158; Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Court, King and Justice in the Ulster Cycle', in Helen Fulton, ed., *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 163–82, pp. 180–1.

([25]) Fulton, 'Critical and Theoretical Perspectives', pp. 498–9. For a more nuanced critique, see Morgan Thomas Davies, 'Protocols of Reading'.

(^{26}) This has been argued most cogently by Máire M. West, 'An Edition of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', Ph.D. diss., National University of Ireland, 1986, pp. 19–49, and more recently by *eadem*, 'The Genesis of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: A Reappraisal of the "Two-Source" Theory', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 413–35.

(^{27}) Fulton, 'Critical and Theoretical Perspectives', p. 498.

(^{28}) On the term 'Otherworld', see the second section of chapter 2.

(^{29}) In this book, unspecific use of the pronoun *we* refers both to us as modern readers and to the tenth- or eleventh-century audience, an admittedly anachronistic conflation which reflects the ultimate aim of this book: to explore the *Togail*'s meaning for a mediaeval audience, and thus to place modern readers in their position. Where 'we' denotes modern critics *in contrast* to the mediaeval audience, this denotation is specified.

(^{30}) A ninth *geis*, against killing birds, is revealed earlier in the story.

(^{31}) The site is currently occupied by the settlement of Bohernabreena (*bóthar na bruidne*, 'the road of the Hostel') at the southern edge of the Dublin conurbation, through which the River Dodder flows (as it did through the legendary Hostel).

(^{32}) There is no support in the text for the modern scholarly myth according to which most of the king's men died at the Hostel. For this view see Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London, 1899; reprinted London: Benn, 1967, ed. Brian Ó Cuív), p. 392; James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), p. 316; Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales, 700–1700* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 16.

(^{33}) Editions and versions are discussed in chapter 1. Translations of the whole saga into English include Whitley

Stokes, ed. and trans., 'The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', *Revue Celtique*, 22 (1901), 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–435 (later reprinted separately); Jeffrey Gantz, trans., *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 61–112; West, 'An Edition', pp. 608–94 (this edition is currently being revised for publication under the title *The Three Recensions of Togail Bruidne Da Derga: A Critical Edition of All Three Recensions*); Jacqueline Borsje, *The Celtic Evil Eye and Related Mythological Motifs in Medieval Ireland* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 269–339.

(34) Similar bipartite forms may be seen in other epic-length tales of the early Middle Ages, from *Beowulf* to the early French romances. On the implications for modern preconceptions about 'unity' in mediaeval narrative, see William W. Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 115–39.

(35) The first attempt to differentiate between prose and verse in the descriptive passages was made by West in her edition of the text, 'An Edition'.

(36) Maria Tymoczko has perceptively discussed the massive influence wielded by Aristotelian generic preconceptions on the reading of Irish literature in 'Inversions, Subversions, Reversions: The Form of Early Irish Literature', in Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ed., *Text und Zeittiefe* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994), pp. 71–85; *eadem*, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999).

(37) Rudolf Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1921), p. 25.

(38) David Greene suggested an early tenth-century date in his edition of *Fingal Rónáin* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), p. 2.

(39) David Greene, '*Fingal Rónáin*', in Dillon, ed., *Irish Sagas*, pp. 162–75, pp. 162, 172.

(⁴⁰) The many relevant studies include Ó Cathasaigh, 'Rhetoric'; Barbara Hillers, 'The Irish Historical Romance: A New Development', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 11 (1991), 15–25; Erich Poppe, 'Deception and Self-deception in *Fingal Rónáin*', *Ériu*, 47 (1996), 137–51; Sheila Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance, and Frustration in *Fingal Rónáin*: The Role of Foster-Kin in Structuring the Narrative', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47 (Summer 2004), 1–16; Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*'; Úaitéar Mac Gearailt, 'The Making of *Fingal Rónáin*', *Studia Hibernica*, 34 (2006–7), 63–84.

(⁴¹) Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover, eds., *Ancient Irish Tales* (New York: Henry Holt & Sons, 1936), p. 93; John Koch and John Carey, eds. and trans., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 2nd edn. (Malden: Celtic Studies Publications, 1995), pp. 155–74.

(⁴²) Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, pp. 60–1.

(⁴³) Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, p. 61; T. W. Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* (London: Harrap, 1911), p. 164; Eleanor Knott, ed., *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1936), p. ix; Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr: A Study of the Irish Affinities and of the Composition of the Second Branch of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), p. 42; West, 'Genesis', p. 414; Máire West, 'Leabhar na hUidhre's Position in the Manuscript History of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and *Orgain Brudne Uí Dergae*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 20 (Winter 1990), 61–98, p. 68.

(⁴⁴) Máire West, 'Aspects of *díberg* in the Tale *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 49/50 (1998), 950–64, p. 951; Knott, *Togail*, p. ix; Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 32; J. A. MacCulloch, *Celtic Mythology* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1918; reprinted London: Constable, 1992), p. 77; McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 52; Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, p. 60; Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, p. 164; Edward Gwynn, 'On the Idea of Fate in Irish Literature', *Journal of the Ivernian Society*, 7 (1910), 152–65, p. 159. Similarly paradoxical

opinions can be found in Proinsias Mac Cana, *Literature in Irish* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980), p. 27; James Carney, 'Language and Literature to 1169', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 451–510, p. 483.

(⁴⁵) Examples of myth-centred analysis include Edward Gwynn, 'The Idea of Fate'; Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, pp. 117–30; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of "*síd*"', *Éigse*, 17 (1977–9), 137–55; David Greene, 'Tabu in Early Irish Narrative', in Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al., eds., *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium* (Odense University Press, 1978), pp. 9–19; Kim McCone, 'Fírinne agus Torthúlacht', *Léachtaí Cholm Cille*, 11 (1980), 136–73; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Between God and Man: The Hero of Irish Tradition', in Mark Patrick Hederman and Richard Kearney, eds., *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies 1977–81* (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982), pp. 220–7; Máire Bhreathnach [= West], 'The Sovereignty Goddess as Goddess of Death?', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 39 (1982), 243–60; Kim McCone, '*Aided Cheltchair maic Uthechair*: Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers in Early Irish Myth and Story', *Ériu*, 35 (1984), 1–30; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Concept of the Hero in Irish Mythology', in Richard Kearney, ed., *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), pp. 79–90; Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (Winter 1986), 1–22; Philip O'Leary, 'Honour-Bound: The Social Context of Early Irish Heroic *geis*', *Celtica*, 20 (1988), 85–107; McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 129–37; William Sayers, 'Charting Conceptual Space: Dumézil's Tripartition and the Fatal Hostel in Early Irish Literature', *The Mankind Quarterly*, 34.1–2 (Fall/Winter 1993), 27–64; Sjöblom, 'Advice from a Birdman'; Tom Sjöblom, 'Before *geis* became Magical— A Study of the Evolution of an Early Irish Religious Concept', *Studia Celtica*, 32 (1998), 85–94; Tom Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos: A Study in Cognitive History* (Helsinki: Department of Comparative Religion, University of Helsinki, 2000), pp. 145–79; Grigori Bondarenko, 'Дороги и знание в *Togail Bruidne*

Da Derga', *Средние века*, 65 (2002), 145–65 ['Roads and Knowledge in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Srednie veka* (Middle Ages)]. This last essay is forthcoming in revised form in English as 'Roads and Knowledge in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*' in a volume of proceedings of a conference on 'Celtic Cosmology and the Power of Words'. I am grateful to Grigori for sending me printouts of both versions.

(46) Text-critical and codicological analyses include: Heinrich Zimmer, 'Keltische Studien 5: über den compilatorischen charakter der irischen sagentexte im sogenannten Lebor na hUidre', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, 28 (1887), 417–689, pp. 554–85; Max Nettlau, 'On the Irish Text *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and Connected Stories', *Revue Celtique*, 12 (1891), 229–53 and 444–59, 13 (1892), 252–66, 14 (1893), 137–52; Lucius Gwynn, 'The Recensions of the Saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 10 (1914–15), 209–22; Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 621–66; Knott, *Togail*; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Notes on *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Celtica*, 17 (1985), 73–90; West, 'An Edition'; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'A Connacht Medieval Literary Heritage: Texts Derived from *Cín Dromma Snechtai* through *Leabhar na hUidhre*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 16 (Winter 1988), 1–40; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'On the *Cín Dromma Snechta* Version of *Togail Brudne Uí Dergae*', *Ériu*, 41 (1990), 103–14; West, 'Leabhar na hUidhre'; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Textual and Historical Associations of *Leabhar na hUidhre*', *Éigse*, 29 (1996), 65–120; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, '*Leabhar na hUidhre*: Further Textual Associations', *Éigse*, 30 (1997), 27–91; West, 'Genesis'.

(47) Sjöblom, 'Advice from a Birdman', p. 234; Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Concept of the Hero', p. 88.

(48) The possible later mediaeval English and/or Welsh afterlife of material found in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* has also been examined in Mac Cana, *Branwen*, pp. 24–50 and 84–93; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Riddling Treatment of the "Watchman Device" in *Branwen* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Studia Celtica*, 12/13 (1977–8), 83–117, now revised in *idem*, *Irish*

Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 95–133; Nicolas Jacobs, 'The Green Knight: An Unexplored Irish Parallel', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 4 (Winter 1982), 1–4.

([49]) Philip O'Leary, 'A Foreseeing Driver of an Old Chariot: Regal Moderation in Early Irish Literature', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 11 (Summer 1986), 1–16, pp. 14–16; Philip O'Leary, 'Choice and Consequence in Irish Heroic Literature', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 27 (Summer 1994), 49–59, pp. 52–4; Sheila Boll, 'Foster-Kin in Conflict: Fosterage as a Character Motivation in Medieval Irish Literature', Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2002, chapters 4 and 5. Several of the studies cited in note 45 above, notably those by Ó Cathasaigh and McCone, likewise take this 'trans-corpus' approach. See also Carney's discussion of the 'watchman device' in his *Studies in Irish Literature*, pp. 305–21 (esp. pp. 316–17).

([50]) Jacqueline Borsje, 'Approaching Danger: *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and the Motif of Being One-Eyed', *CSANA Yearbook*, 2 (*Identifying the 'Celtic'*) (2002), 75–99, p. 79 n. 27; see also *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, p. 85 n. 28.

([51]) Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, '*Gat* and *Díberg* in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', in Ahlqvist et al., eds., *Celtica Helsingiensia*, pp. 203–13.

([52]) Sims-Williams, 'Riddling Treatment'; *idem*, *Irish Influence*, pp. 95–133; McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 46; Natalia Nikolaeva, 'The Drink of Death', *Studia Celtica*, 35 (2001), 299–306.

([53]) West, 'Aspects of *díberg*'; T. M. Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*, Prophecy, Omen, and Oath', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 38–59; Borsje, 'Approaching Danger', now revised as chapter 3 of *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye* (pp. 79–118; my citations relate to the earlier version, on which I have drawn); Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and the Politics of Anatomy', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 49 (Summer 2005), 1–19.

([54]) Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*'.

(55) West, 'Aspects of *díberg*', pp. 963–4; Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*', p. 59.

(56) Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*', p. 59; West, 'Aspects of *díberg*', pp. 950, 964 (but see note 58 below).

(57) West, 'Genesis', *contra* Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, pp. 623–7.

(58) Máire West has recently and independently developed a similar line of approach in her unpublished paper 'Images of Ideal Kingship in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies Research Seminar, University of Aberdeen, 3 November 2011, currently being revised for publication as 'A Re-Evaluation of the Concept of Ideal Kingship in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*'.

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