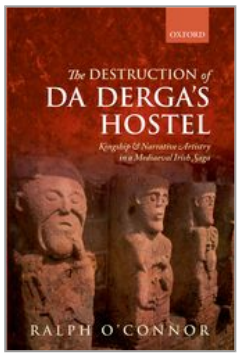

The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga
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Sovereignty Shattered

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Abstract and Keywords

At the heart of the saga is an extended description of Conaire himself, as both strong ruler and vulnerable youth. This depiction is an artistic *tour de force*, crystallizing the saga's dramatization of tensions inherent within kingship itself. Using Conaire's tableau as a focal point, this chapter examines how the symbolism of sovereignty develops ‘visually’ by means of verbal and thematic echoes as the saga proceeds, from the opening description of Étaín through to the final image of the warrior Conall Cernach's shattered shield-arm. The saga's movement from linear narrative to poetic description enables a broadening of symbolic scope more conducive to paradox and ambiguity. This cumulative process gives a special depth of significance to the saga's epilogue, which describes the battle and its aftermath in a return to the simple linear narrative of the first half. The epilogue ties together the proliferating strands of imagery and sovereignty-symbolism woven through the saga.

Keywords: description, kingship, sovereignty, ekphasis, contrast, paradox, destruction, catastrophe, violence, symbolism

In the *Togail*, the king is presented as the central figure around whom the land finds order and meaning. When he goes astray, ‘Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’.[1] The saga's intense focus on Conaire and on the institution he represents is reflected in the length and complexity of his tableau in the description-sequence, and especially Ingcél's three-part description with its embedded verses. But the significance of Conaire and his kingship is embodied no less significantly by that tableau's relations with the rest of the description-sequence and with earlier and later parts of the saga. These relations are built up chiefly in terms of the iconography of sovereignty. In chapter 5 this iconography was examined in relation to the first half's increasingly sinister manifestations of the Otherworld. In this chapter I shall explore how the resulting strands of meaning are taken up and further dramatized in the second half of the saga. I begin with the description-sequence and finally turn to the last sections of the saga, which narrate the battle and its immediate aftermath.

An Ideal King?

Ingcél's three-part description of Conaire is the epicentre of the description-sequence in formal, not merely dramatic, terms. This 77-line description is preceded by 320 lines of tableaux in Knott's edition and followed by 325 lines (including Fer Rogain’s response), a symmetry which is not immediately apparent from looking at Fig. 10.[2] The other members of the court are ranged around Conaire in the Hostel according to their rank and station—and according to whether or not they are *geis* for him—just as the named figures in many individual tableaux are surrounded physically and symbolically by their own retinues of lesser ‘supporting actors’.[3]

In mediaeval European literature, it was common to enhance the status of great kings in legendary history by representing them as surrounded by a circle of renowned champions. Yet in terms of narrative interest, kings such as Arthur, Charlemagne, the Danish king Hrólfr kraki, and (for the Ulster tales) Conchobor (p.194) mac Nessa are often overshadowed

by their more actively martial champions, such as Lancelot, Roland, Böðvarr bjarki, and Cú Chulainn.[4] Kingship ideology is an important theme in the tales alluded to here, especially when they are examined as a group or cycle (as Thomas Owen Clancy has emphasized for the Ulster sagas);[5] but in most cases the heroes' exploits dominate each individual narrative. The main focus of interest is their status, rather than that of the king, and consequently (at a simple level) it is they who are seen to gain or lose prestige from their association with the king.

The *Togail* follows a different pattern. Conaire is not just the saga's centre of gravity; he is also its chief focus of attention, despite the presence of several noted Ulster warriors in his retinue. It is chiefly Conaire's prestige which stands to gain from the fact that nobles have flocked from distant lands (including various Otherworldly localities) to serve the king about whom they have heard such *airscéla* ('great tales', line 776). Instead of a proliferation of heroic episodes pushing the narrative outwards from the courtly centre, the story of the *Togail* coils in on the king both topographically and chronologically. Only in the brief epilogue, after the king's death, is his hold on the narrative loosened a little, shifting the audience's attention briefly to the wounds suffered by his two greatest champions. Yet throughout the saga, the prowess of Conaire's champions is expressed in pictorial, ekphrastic form rather than as separate narratives (albeit with fragments of anecdotes provided to add life to the portraits). The description-sequence contains the variety of Conaire's court within a firm but supple structure surrounding, supporting, and reflecting in on the king.

Conaire's own tableau is by far the most extensive and formally adventurous in the sequence. It is structured as a detailed three-part description followed by a shorter two-part response. Ingcél first describes the king's beautiful and shining appearance in the apartment (lines 990–1009). He then reports that he (Ingcél) recited a praise-poem on the spot, and he now repeats this to his companions (lines 1010–44). The poem is cast in an irregular alliterative metre, each section beginning with the words *At-chíu* ('I see'); it describes

Conaire in more general and timeless terms as an ideal king. After this praise-poem, Ingcél continues his description of the king as seen in the Hostel, and he reports that Conaire awoke from sleep and uttered a poem himself, a threefold prophecy of his own doom in *rosc* form (lines 1045–66, quoted in full in the previous chapter). Fer Rogain identifies the king, first waxing lyrical on Conaire's greatness as a ruler (lines 1069–78) and then describing his martial prowess when the battle-frenzy falls on him (lines 1079–97). This second part also functions as a prophecy of how many people Conaire will kill, eliciting gloomy responses from Fer Rogain's brothers (lines 1098–1106).[6]

(p.195) With its dramatic juxtaposition of past, present, and future and its frequent recourse to lyric modes, this tableau offers a broad space for the simultaneous elaboration of several aspects of Conaire, and of kingship more generally. According to traditional Irish kingship ideology, the king is supposed to embody cosmic order in his perfect appearance, behaviour, wisdom, authority, and martial prowess. In depicting and commenting on this ideal, Conaire's tableau echoes and develops images and themes associated with other figures in the saga, drawing them together into a single, ideologically charged composite image. As will become clear below, this image is not monolithic but riddled with tensions and paradoxes, and some of these have been viewed as narrative inconsistencies suggesting compilation from multiple sources.[7] While it seems likely that Conaire's tableau was based on divergent sources, the supposed inconsistency is in fact the very linchpin of the saga's artistic design and a key to its meaning.

The leading feature of Conaire as described and eulogized by Ingcél and Fer Rogain is his perfect beauty. Detailed descriptions of his clothing, face, and other bodily features appear in the first two parts of Ingcél's description and the first part of Fer Rogain's response. His appearance strongly recalls that of his ancestress, the woman of sovereignty Étaín.[8] As Étaín is the fairest of women, so Conaire is the fairest of men, with the words *cáem* (‘fair, dear, gentle’) and *caín* (‘fair, gentle’) sprinkled around them and sometimes used

interchangeably (lines 44, 79, 990, 1012, 1071). Both paragons are presented as the object of an evaluative male gaze. Étaín is the woman *as caemeam* […] *ad-connarcadar súil*[9] *doíne de mnáib domain* (‘who is the loveliest […] of [all] the world's women that the eye of man beheld’, lines 41–2); while for the watching Ingcél, Conaire is *ingelt súili sochaidi* (‘a grazing for the eyes of a multitude’, line 1032), and *Do neoch at-connarc di delbaib betha isí delb is áilldem díb* (‘of [all] the forms in the world that I have seen, it is that form [Conaire's] which is the loveliest of them’, lines 1002–3). Nobody has as beautiful a *cruth* (‘form’) as Étaín or Conaire (lines 43, 1074), nor as *cóir* (‘perfect, well-proportioned’, lines 41, 1075). No flaw may be found in Étaín's proportions, even with the help of a measuring-stick (lines 31–4); Fer Rogain likewise insists of Conaire that *nícon fil locht and isind ḟir sin* (‘there is no flaw in that man’, line 1074). Their clothes and adornments are described in more conventional terms, such as their hair like *ór* (‘gold’, lines 17, 1001) and their eyes as blue as *buga* (‘hyacinth’, line 24, U line 7384), as well as other distinctive features such as purple cloaks, animal brooches, and gold inlay.[10]

(p.196) Just as the length and position of Conaire's description make it spatially as well as ideologically pivotal to the description-sequence, Étaín's description constitutes the starting-point of the saga. We have already seen how it functions as a source of images for Conaire's sovereignty in perfect working order (as eulogized by the narrator in lines 182–91 and by Fer Rogain in lines 597–610) and how it is transformed into its hideous opposite to embody Conaire's fall from grace in the person of Cailb. When Étaín's ideal beauty is recalled once again in Conaire's tableau, the audience is reminded simultaneously of the king's early promise and of his tragic failure to live up to the perfection required by his Otherworldly kin and guarantors.

Some of the physical characteristics shared by Conaire and Étaín are mirrored in the description of the leading Ulster champion Conall Cernach which immediately precedes Conaire's tableau. Like Étaín and Conaire, he is described as the fairest (*caíme*, line 959) of his kind (i.e. of the champions

of Ireland); like them his eyes are as blue as *buga* (‘hyacinth’, line 961) and his hair golden (line 963). This description of Conall differs from descriptions of him in other sagas, such as *Fled Bricrenn*.[11] In the *Togail*, Conall's appearance has been modified to engineer him into a mirror-image of Conaire. This modification is explicitly signalled in the saga: we are told that Conaire loves Conall more than his other retainers *fo bith a chosmailisa fris a chrotha 7 a delbae* (‘because of his similarity to him in beauty and form’, lines 973–4).[12] In the visual logic of the saga, the fact that Conall is described before Conaire means that the similiarities between the two men imbue the king with something of Conall's martial-heroic stature once Conaire’s own turn comes to be described: he appears as a kingly version of the Ulster hero. Conversely, the replication of Étaín's and Conaire's features in the person of Conall enables Conall to carry an after-image of ideal kingship into the final episode narrated in the saga, after the king himself has been killed; as we shall see, echoes of Étaín are poignantly evoked in the saga's final image of Conall's wounded arm. The spread of Étaín-like features beyond Étaín herself mirrors what we have already seen of the proliferation of Conaire's special talents beyond his three foster-brothers, and the dissemination of dark Otherworldly features among the story's more sinister personages.

Conaire's martial prowess is not just implied by his physical resemblance to Conall, but is confirmed in Fer Rogain's prediction of his performance in the battle. Conaire is not a king to hide behind his champions; his ability to kill outshines even his two most hardened warriors, Conall and Mac Cécht, and this comparison is prompted by the fact that the same vivid and extended simile used to illustrate their prowess is also used of Conaire (and nowhere else in the description-sequence). We have already seen that Mac Cécht becomes increasingly larger than life as the saga proceeds, taking on gigantic form to repel the invaders. Even Ingcél alludes to the (p.197) possibility of dying from terror on seeing him (lines 825–6), while Fer Rogain predicts that in his warlike ardour he will kill over six hundred men, and that the entrails, brains, and bones he strews all over the ridges will be more numerous than hailstones or grass on a lawn (lines 855–64). This

gruesome simile recurs in Fer Rogain's assessment of Conall's performance, although he will kill only half the number Mac Cécht kills (lines 983–6);[13] and it recurs again in Fer Rogain's prediction of Conaire's performance (lines 1091–3).

The beautiful, fair-haired Conall and the dark, ugly, terrifying Mac Cécht seem to embody opposite but complementary aspects of the martial hero's identity. This duality recalls the elaborate bipartite description of Cú Chulainn in the *Táin* entitled *In Carpat Serda 7 Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne* (‘The Sickled Chariot and the Great Rout of the Plain of Muirthemne’), an episode whose late Middle Irish language and style suggest that it postdates the *Togail*.[14] Here Cú Chulainn undergoes his celebrated distortion or *ríastrad*, appearing as a hideous and demonic shape-shifter to wreak unparalleled slaughter upon the men of Connacht;[15] but the next morning he reappears in all *a chrotha álgin álaind* (‘his gentle and attractive beauty’) before the admiring ladies of Connaught, brandishing the heads of his enemies in a more classically dignified manner.[16] Like the two faces of Cú Chulainn, Conall and Mac Cécht epitomize the warrior-hero's liminal status, not only poised between world and Otherworld, but also embodying at crucial moments (like Cailb and Étaín) the Otherworld's two aspects of horrifying destructiveness and divine beauty.

Conaire brings both these aspects together: as Ingcél says in his praise-poem, he combines beauty with a warrior's frenzied ardour, *rechtbruth cain cruth* (‘furious[?] ardour,[17] a fair shape’, lines 1012–13), and in a somewhat ironic touch the same poem shows the king successfully warding off invaders with his spear and shield. He is as handsome as Conall, but as Fer Rogain warns, he is not to be underestimated by virtue of his youth and mild appearance: *Már a oítiu ind ḟir cáldae forbaeth conid-rala ar ṅgním ṅgaiscid* (‘Great is the youth of the drowsy, simple man until he applies himself[18] to a deed of arms’, lines 1079–80). His destructive power recalls and surpasses that of Mac Cécht, with a body-count of twelve hundred dead at the (p.198) first onslaught (lines 1082–4). His ferocity is emphasized by being narrated again in the battle scene, unlike the achievements of his companions: after

Conaire has killed his twelve hundred and shows no sign of stopping, Fer Rogain says, *As-rubartsa fribse* (‘I told you so’, line 1415) and repeats his warning word-for-word.

Ingcél and Fer Rogain enthusiastically praise the social and governmental aspects of Conaire's kingship and person, and here the layers of irony become more evident. Conaire's generosity (line 1043) was never in doubt: it was this quality which initially won him the kingship as *rí óc eslobar* (‘a young, generous king’, lines 162–3). The Otherworldly red horsemen specifically mentioned this quality (*rígh oes labra*, ‘a king's generosity’, line 318), but they also took advantage of his hospitality against his will even as they refused to accept his gifts, just as other spectral characters forced Conaire to honour his social obligations so as to violate his *gessi* (Fer Caille, Cichuil, and Cailb). Ingcél's and Fer Rogain's references to material abundance (lines 1012, 1033–4, 1077) recall the language of the two earlier eulogies of Conaire's wonderful reign (lines 182–91, 597–610).

Nevertheless, one element which suffused the first two eulogies is conspicuously absent from this third and most extensive eulogy, namely the crowning notion of peace. As we saw in chapter 4, the second eulogy (by Fer Rogain) described how Conaire had secured *febus na cána 7 in tṡída 7 in chaínchomraic fil sethnu na Hérind* (‘the excellence of the law, peace and goodwill [literally ‘peaceful gatherings’] which exist throughout Ireland’, lines 607–8), echoing the first account's *imbét chaínchomraic* […] *in nÉrinn* (‘abundance of goodwill […] in Ireland’, lines 186–7).[19] The gathering about to take place between the eulogists and the man eulogized is of course hardly peaceful, and the ideal king in Conaire's tableau is seen fighting his enemies rather than presiding over a peaceful realm. This shift is further traced in the transformation of music in the three descriptions. Both earlier eulogies included the statement that in Conaire's reign *ba bindithir la cach n-aen guth aroile […] 7 betis téta mennchrot* (‘everyone […] found each other's voice as sweet as harpstrings’, lines 187–9; cf. lines 606–7). In Conaire's description, however, the sweetest music is that of the king's sword: *Is bindiu bindfodhrughud in claidib sin oldás bindfogur*

na cuisleann n-órdae fo-chanait ceól isin rígthaig (‘sweeter is the sound of that sword than the sweet sound of the golden pipes which play music in the royal house’, lines 1007–9).[20] Conaire's doom-laden prophecy reinforces these ironies by using the positive concept of abundance (*imbet*, *immed*) to characterize the accumulation, not of material goods or peaceful gatherings, but of evil omens: *imed síabra* (‘an abundance of phantoms’, line 1064).

The plunderers’ praise of Conaire's wisdom and justice is still more problematic (lines 996–7, 1013–15, 1076). Fer Rogain's term *gaís* (‘wisdom’, line 1076)[21] (p.199) recalls Conaire's first royal statement at Tara, his Solomon-like promise to learn *do gaethaib* […] *gaeth* (‘wisdom from the wise’, lines 166–7). But this area of *fír flathemon* was clearly violated when Conaire unwisely refused to punish his foster-brothers and, later, hastily delivered a false judgement. The word Ingcél uses to describe Conaire's prudence or wisdom is especially double-edged. What Ingcél praises as *comairle senchad* (‘the wisdom of a historian’, lines 996–7) is shown by Conaire not in his judicious treatment of his people, but in his ability to foresee his own death in his prophetic *rosc*. There is a distinctively Otherworldly justice in the fact that his final achievement of wisdom serves only to confirm his doom to him.

Lack of wisdom and justice is the ultimate cause of Conaire's death, but those who will execute the Otherworld's death-sentence on him—his foster-brothers—are the very men who stood to benefit most from his false judgement, and who are now praising him for the quality he so fatally lacked. This painful paradox recalls the moment when Fer Caille had said to Conaire on his last journey, *Is tú rí as deach tánic in domun* (‘You are the best king who has come into the world’, lines 363–4), simultaneously turning this statement on its head by virtue of his own identity (a hideous sign of Conaire's failure as sovereign) and his actions (causing the king to violate one of his *gessi*). The parallel is apparently deliberate: Fer Caille's remark is amplified in Conaire's tableau when Fer Rogain states, *Is é rí as ánem 7 as ordnidhem 7 as chaínem 7 as cumachtachom tánic in domun uile* (‘He is the most splendid,

the most distinguished, the gentlest and the most powerful king who has come into the whole world', lines 1070–1).

Ingcél's and Fer Rogain's descriptions of Conaire are almost entirely positive, but the fact that they are the speakers reminds the audience of the reasons why Conaire has ended up in this plight, adding layers of dramatic irony to descriptions whose content is otherwise straightforwardly laudatory. May we even see these tensions as marking the difference between the theory and practice of kingship? These matters will be discussed more fully in the last chapter of this book. It is clear, at any rate, that Conaire's tableau is presented in a manner which highlights the tension between ideal and reality, and the tragic contrast between his past achievement and his present situation. These contrasts emerge partly from the way in which his description is framed and focalized; they also emerge, at another structural level, from the contrast between the two most heightened utterances in the tableau, Ingcél's praise-poem and Conaire's prophetic *rosc* which immediately follows it. As we shall now see, the carefully plotted and climactic discord resulting from the juxtaposition of these two poems points to further levels of tension and paradox not only in the surrounding tableaux, but also in the very nature of the destruction which follows.

The Centre cannot Hold

Ingcél is prompted by his sight of the king to praise him in ten irregular alliterating verses, of which the first, fourth, and last give a flavour:

> (p.200) 'Is and as-biurtsa,' for Ingcél, 'oca déicsi:
> '"At-chíu flaith n-ard n-aireagdai
> as[22] bith builech búiredach
> brúchtas roimse robartai
> rechtbruth cain cruth ciallathar.
> […] '"At-chíu a dá ṅgrúad ṅngormgela
> conid fri fuamun find fuinecthae
> fordath, soerdath snechtaidi.
> Di díb súilib sellglasaib
> gloiniu a rosc [robuga][23] –
> tenniu a chuindsciu[24] chaíntocud –

iter clethchor ndub ṅdaelabrat.
[…] ‘“At-chíu a scíath n-étrocht n-aílenda
fail húasa drongaib dímes
[…] for-osnai líth lúaichet
tuiri di ór indtlaise
lám rígh fris des dingabar
fri triath[25] tailc taurgaib
conid fri cronu[26] crúadchassa –
trí cét coirae comlána –
húasin rurig rathrúnigh[27]
fri boidb hi mbroí bertas
isin bruidin bróntig.”’[28]
‘Then I said,’ said Ingcél, ‘gazing at him:
‘“I see a high noble sovereign
[Over] a fair clamorous world
Which overflows with a flood-tide's fullness;
Furious[29] ardour and a fair form are signified.[30]
(p.201) […] ‘“I see his two clear white cheeks
and on his fair, spotless skin[31]
is a lustre, a noble snow-white hue.
From two grey-irised eyes
his gaze, brighter than hyacinth
(firmer his face than his fortune)
amid a fence of beetle-black lashes.
[…] ‘“I see his shining whitened shield
which is above him, a scorn to hosts
[…] a flash lightens the feast
a spearshaft of inlaid gold
a king's right hand is warded off by it
it rises up against a powerful lord
and is set against fierce intricate wrongs[32]
(three hundred proper, perfect [warriors])[33]
a strong surety above the over-king
which he wields in Badb's face[34]
in the sorrowful Hostel.”’

Each verse opens with the word *At-chíu* (‘I see’), marked in all four manuscripts with a large initial **A**.[35] Some elements of the content (such as the second stanza quoted here) amplify Ingcél's previous prose description of the king, and the reference to *bith builech búiredach* (‘a fair clamorous world’) encapsulates the sparkling, teeming activity of the other apartments described, imagined perhaps as a microcosm of the king's realm. Other elements of the content, however,

suggest that this is not simply an account of what Ingcél saw in the Hostel, but a vision of Conaire as a glorious and successful king. The last few lines seem to prophesy Conaire's performance in the *togail* (lines 1041–3),[36] and the final line hints gently at the tragic outcome of that battle; but the poem as a whole describes Conaire in terms of an ideal state of justice and authority, strength, and confidence, which has now completely collapsed. The poem is cast in a timeless poetic present tense, suffused with images of beauty, light, and brightness, as if to depict true kingship as it was (and is) always meant to be.

(p.202) Conaire himself, on the other hand, is at that very moment seeing a spectre-haunted vision of his imminent death and the ruin of his realm, which he communicates in an explicitly prophetic poem in *rosc* form, quoted and discussed in the previous chapter. The short prose passage introducing this poem contrasts sharply with Ingcél's exalted vision of the great king:

> ‘Ro buí íarum ina chodlud in maethóclach, a chosa i n-ucht indala Ḟir 7 a chend in n-ucht aroile. Do-ríussaig íarum asa chotlud 7 at-raracht 7 ro chachain in laíd seo.’[37]
>
> ‘The young warrior was asleep then, his feet in the lap of one man and his head in the lap of the other. Then he awoke from his sleep, rose up and chanted this lay.’

This reference to a *maethóclach* (literally ‘tender youth’ or ‘tender young warrior’) harks back explicitly to Ingcél's previous description of Conaire in his apartment: Ingcél had seen *maethóclach eturru i medón* (‘a young warrior in between them [his two fosterers]’, lines 995–6), but had not revealed that the young king was asleep. This information is withheld until after Ingcél's praise-poem, so that when revealed it magnifies the contrast between the active, resolute warlord described in Ingcél's visionary poem and the vulnerable, passive individual whom Ingcél sees in the Hostel.[38]

Having brought Ingcél's vision of kingship down to earth, the narrative now plunges into the depths. From beginning to end,

Conaire's *rosc* is a tortured mosaic of images of darkness, destruction, and chaos; its mood is one of terror and grief, reflecting the state of Conaire's *fír flathemon* as it actually is, rather than as it should be. Its fearful significance is heightened by placing it almost immediately after Ingcél's joyous praise-poem, whose images of strength and brightness in turn shine out, in retrospect, against the darkness of Conaire's *rosc*. This narrative *chiaroscuro* is reinforced in an almost chiastic manner by the identity of the two poems' speakers: the fair-haired, benevolent, handsome Conaire and the fearsome, hideous, dark, and destructive Ingcél each recites a poem which reflects the other's salient characteristics. As Ingcél reacts to Conaire's appearance by 'seeing' the perfect Otherworldly sovereignty he once embodied, so Conaire reacts to Ingcél's malevolent gaze by 'seeing' the approaching destruction in terms which recall the hostile Otherworld. Behind the individual speakers and the earthly objects and phenomena they describe, the recurring abstract patterns from which these descriptions are woven allow us to glimpse, once again, the two faces of the Otherworld in a single charged moment.[39] Conaire's kingship is here depicted and constructed in opposites: light and dark, order and chaos, strength and weakness, glory and annihilation.

Some scholars have suggested or implied that these and other oppositions within Conaire's portrait are merely the accidental result of a compiler's desire for (p.203) completeness at the expense of narrative consistency. This suggestion is made most cogently by West on the basis of the 'contradictory' contrast between Ingcél's description of the confident ruler in his praise-poem and his subsequent description of the terrified, vulnerable *maethóclach*:

> Both [poems] could be parallel descriptions of the same king at different stages in his career, and, if we accept that there were several traditions about Conaire's age when he tragically met his death, then the redactor probably amalgamated descriptions of Conaire Mór from several sources here.[40]

West's argument for multiple sources is supported by the self-contained nature of the two poems as individual compositions. It is certainly possible that Ingcél's praise-poem, Conaire's *rosc*, and the rest of Ingcél's description originated in divergent earlier accounts of Conaire's reign, and were juxtaposed by the Middle Irish saga-author. Yet, if so, they have not been juxtaposed unthinkingly. If the putative sources contained contradictory information about Conaire's age, there is no trace of these contradictions in the *Togail*: both prose and verse descriptions of Conaire, for example, emphasize his golden hair, so we are not dealing with the septuagenarian ruler indicated by some of the king-lists and chronicles.[41]

Nevertheless, in case any lingering confusion remains in the audience's mind about such a young man being king, the saga-author has Fer Rogain acknowledge the apparent discrepancy, warning Ingcél not to misjudge Conaire's fighting skills by his youthful, sleepy appearance (lines 1079–80). Like Cú Chulainn, he may be very young, but he is a deadly opponent in battle. Furthermore, he himself had to quell his people's doubts about his age when becoming king at Tara: to their complaint that he was too young, he won them over by saying, *Ní hainim rí óc eslobar* (‘a young and generous king is no blemish’, lines 162–3). By raising and then settling the potential problem of his age, the narrative corrects the ‘ageist’ assumptions of both internal and external audiences and recalls the example of other young kings in Irish sagas, such as the seven-year-old Conchobor of Ulster.[42]

The chief difference between the two images is not one of age, ability, or appearance, but of behaviour and demeanour. The author of one recent study was so taken aback by the contrast between the stirring final scene of Ingcél's praise-poem and the sudden appearance of Conaire as a frightened youth that he did not realize the latter was Conaire at all, suggesting in a footnote that Fer Rogain's failure to identify this youth in his response was another example of a deficiency in the text.[43] Yet despite the violence of the contrast, any real contradiction vanishes when one remembers that Ingcél's praise-poem and Conaire's *rosc* are not part of a single monovocal description.

They operate at different levels of focalization from each other and from the rest of Ingcél's description.

(p.204) ‘Focalization’—the representation of events through specific viewpoints—may be a modern critical term but, as we have already seen, Irish saga-authors were well able to deploy it in their literary practice. What the late-antique scholars Porphyry and Athenaeus said of the supposed contradictions in Homer's epics may readily be applied to the *Togail*: ‘It is no cause for wonder if in Homer contradictory things are said by different voices’, and ‘it is not true that if something is said in Homer, it is Homer who says it’.[44] If Ingcél's and Conaire's descriptions of Conaire's kingship differ, it is because the two speakers have different perspectives on the matter. Conaire's fearfulness is represented as part of his *rosc*, framed as a vision which came to him involuntarily in sleep. In a tragic narrative of this kind there is nothing inconsistent in showing a confident, powerful ruler suffering from ominous dreams or visions. Both the cause and the content of Conaire's bad dream are consistent with the rest of the saga: we have seen him swerving between confidence and desperation ever since the spectres began to waylay him, a process culminating in the uneasy bravado of his encounter with Cailb.

Porphyry's and Athenaeus's remarks also apply to different categories of utterance spoken by the same person. Ingcél describes Conaire as both a confident ruler and a terrified youth, but he describes them from contrasting viewpoints and within different micro-genres. Unlike the rest of his prose description, his praise-poem is presented as a vision, a personal and idealizing response to the king's glory rather than a simple continuation of his report of the king in his chamber. This shift in focalization is made clear by the poem's framing as a report of Ingcél's own utterance *in situ*: *‘Is and as-biurtsa,’ for Ingcél, ‘oca déicsi’* (‘“Then I said,” said Ingcél, “gazing at him”’, line 1010). Likewise, the sense that this praise-poem is a personal response is underlined by its artistic self-consciousness:

> ‘“At-chíu a brat ṅderg n-ildathach
> nóthech siric srethchise

sluindar[45] delbthar ṅdennmaisi[46]
di annor aurrdreic […]”’[47]
‘“I see his red cloak of many hues
conspicuous braided silk
let it be described, let it be depicted, the beauty
of its colour
of pure conspicuous gold […]”’

This and other references to literary artistry in Ingcél's praise-poem are typical of its genre, but in the context of the *Togail* they also enhance the metatextual element already seen in Conaire's *rosc* and other references to storytelling in the saga. In this (p.205) way they heighten the impression that the whole saga is a carefully crafted aesthetic whole, and that its accumulation of descriptions is not an accidental result of excessive compilatory zeal but a conscious compositional technique which bears a significant weight of meaning.

The saga's portrait of Conaire is ‘contradictory’ only in the sense that ambivalence often marks fully imagined characters in drama or narrative when we see them in different situations and through the eyes of other characters. If the saga-author drew on divergent sources, he combined their contrasting portrayals in order to construct characters whose inconsistencies, both real and apparent, make them both plausibly human and dramatically compelling.[48] In ancient literature, divergent sources were likewise used to construct Homer's Penelope and the biblical king Saul, although in both cases arguments about whether or not these tensions result from careless conflation or artistic design remain unresolved (the biblical example may have influenced the *Togail* and will be examined more closely in the next chapter).[49] Shakespeare again provides a useful touchstone for the artistic legitimacy of this approach, drawing as he did on a range of divergent sources for character portrayals, notably in his plays on Roman history. *Julius Caesar*, for instance, draws on both republican and monarchist traditions concerning its protagonists in order to produce flawed, complex characters: Marcus Brutus appears variously as a revolutionary idealist and a self-deluding traitor, while Caesar appears as a glorious ‘colossus’, an enemy of traditional Roman virtues, and a man plagued by physical frailty.[50] Real people are contradictory,

especially when they are placed in positions of power and faced with difficult choices. So, too, in the *Togail*, the end result of the author's combination of his sources is a monument of dramatic irony, complementing the directional tension and momentum of the first half in a magnificent composite portrait of sovereignty on the point of destruction.

The sharp contrasts and double meanings of Conaire's tableau find curious echoes in other parts of the description-sequence, where use is made of the riddling principle by which somebody appears to be two or more mutually exclusive things at the same time. We have already seen this principle in action in the ‘alternatives device’ towards the end of the first half, in responses to Mac Cécht's lighting of the fire and the beaching of the plunderers’ boats. It is also the basis of Mac Cécht's tableau in the description-sequence, which divides into two parts: an alliterating metrical passage followed by a description in prose which maintains some of the first part's rhythmic and alliterative features. As with Conaire's tableau, West has argued that these two parts result from divergent sources ‘combined rather clumsily’.[51] The metrical part contains some ‘riddling’ elements, in which Ingcél mistakes Mac Cécht's knees for two tonsured warriors, and his shoes for two boats. The prose part restates these motifs as part of a more sustained riddling (p.206) description of Mac Cécht, rather as Ingcél's praise-poem about Conaire amplifies aspects of his earlier description in a heightened display of artistry; Mac Cécht appears here as a huge personification of the Irish landscape. Fer Rogain's identification draws on both parts of the description, but because it focuses on solving the riddle it is hardly surprising that it draws chiefly on the part with more riddling elements in it. The fact that we have two parallel descriptions of Mac Cécht in different metre leaves room for West's view that two sources were used, but, if so, there is no evidence of clumsiness here.[52] Mac Cécht's double appearance, like Conaire's, is consistent with what we have seen of him so far: in the perceptions of his enemies, his actions have been assuming increasingly cosmic, mythological form ever since he arrived in the uncanny Hostel.

In this context, the opposing aspects of Conaire seen within his own tableau may be viewed as an imaginative extension of the riddling principle. As king, Conaire is compelled to bring opposites together, to embody an impossible union between world and Otherworld. If we take another look at the tableaux surrounding Conaire's, we see the fractures in his portrait shivering outwards to expose similar unions of opposite qualities which, in some cases, open up fault-lines running through his realm. Kingship, perhaps, is the greatest riddle of them all.

In the previous section we saw how the portraits of Conall and Mac Cécht present contrasting aspects of the warrior-hero which are then united in the person of Conaire. Similarly, certain aspects of the king's portrait are echoed by those of his son and heir Lé Fer Flaith on one side of him (lines 1118–33) and three other sons on the other side (lines 876–84). Like Conaire, all four prompt the strongest expressions of grief from Fer Rogain (lines 885–7, 1134–5). All four are, like Conaire, *maethóclaích* (‘tender youths’, line 876); Lé Fer Flaith is said to be only seven years old (line 1140), but like his father he is *dech tánic tír nÉrind* (‘the best [prince] who has come into the land of Ireland’, line 1138), while the other princes surpass anyone in the Hostel in word and deed (lines 883–4). Like Conaire, all four lads are beautiful, their appearance recalling aspects of Étaín. Lé Fer Flaith's crimson cloak and the three princes’ fur cloaks recall Étaín's furred crimson cloak (lines 6–7), while the princes have her golden hair and golden brooches (lines 6–16). Lé Fer Flaith's hair is simultaneously green, crimson, and golden, recalling the enchanting shift of these same colours in the hair and garments of Étaín (and Conaire's cloak of many hues); but whereas Étaín's colour-scheme was propitious, in the boy's case this unearthly play of colours is specifically said to signify that he is *trú* (‘doomed’, line 1141), and Fer Rogain calls him, like Conaire, a pig who falls before the acorns (lines 1137–8).

The two aspects of the king's demeanour—fierce, confident, and warlike from one point of view, disoriented and despairing from another—are also separately (p.207) embodied in his offspring. The doomed, passive Lé Fer Flaith, lamenting

constantly and handed from one lap to another, echoes (and amplifies) the situation in which Conaire uttered his *rosc*, whereas his other three sons are described as ferocious warriors with *gala mathgamna 7 brotha leómain* (‘the fury of bears and the ardour of a lion’, lines 893–4). Skilled beyond their years (lines 896–7), they will perform great deeds in the battle and will survive. These two tableaux, occupying positions roughly equidistant from Conaire's on each side, amplify the tensions within the king's own portrait by functioning as partial simulacra of himself. Their symbolic function seems to be echoed in the name Lé Fer Flaith: the first two words reverse the name of one of Conaire's plundering foster-brothers, Fer Lé (one of three who functioned as virtual simulacra of Conaire before he became king), while the third element, *flaith*, means not only ‘prince’ but also ‘sovereignty’.

Besides these examples of separate individuals embodying or echoing contrasting aspects of the king's identity, much of the activity within the Hostel is itself marked by tensions in the form of energies and forces suppressed or only barely under control. Indeed, this is one effect of the overarching structure in which the warriors’ destructive feats in the battle are narrated in advance while the warriors themselves are seen standing, sitting, or sleeping in the Hostel. At a more local level, the extraordinary juggling-feats performed by several characters prompt the question of how long such a tense equilibrium (like Conaire's kingship) can last, a question answered by the ominous clattering of Taulchaine's feat under Ingcél's gaze.

The self-destructive potential of martial heroism itself—a theme which has been seen to run through the *Táin* and other Ulster sagas[53]—may be seen in the motif of a magic Ulster spear incorporated into this sequence, the Lúin of Celtchar:

> Is écen cori co neim día fábdud[54] in tan fris-áilter gním gona duine di. Manis-tare sin, lasaid ara durn 7 ragaid tria ḟer a himochair nó tria choimtig[55] inn rígthaigi.[56]

> A cauldron of poison is needed in which it is to be dipped whenever a deed of slaughter is expected of it. If this does not happen to it, it blazes up on its haft and pierces the man holding it, or pierces the lord of the royal house.

Like the martial hero, if its thirst for slaughter is not forcibly restrained, this lethal weapon which has been brought to aid the king may turn on its master.[57] A similar danger may be seen to lurk within some of Conaire's retinue, which incorporates the unspeakable alongside the familiar. Mac Cécht may be terrifying to the plunderers outside, but the three churls from the Isle of Man—whose swarthy appearance amplifies the uglier aspects of Mac Cécht—are shunned in terror even by those for whom they will fight (line 1283). Their status as allies is uncertain: they are trophies from the siege of Man, spared by Cú Chulainn because they were (p.208) so strange (lines 1287–90). Likewise, the three triple-headed Fomorians are shunned because of their monstrosity (line 906). They will be a great asset in the battle with their formidable bites and kicks, but (like Conaire's seven wolves) they are hostages kept to prevent the Fomorians from laying waste to crops and cattle while Conaire's reign lasts (lines 920–2). They are therefore not allowed to bear arms *arná dernat mídénam isin tig* (‘lest they do mischief in the house’, lines 930–1); if they were allowed to bear arms, they would kill two thirds of the plunderers (line 932). Finally, one of the last tableaux shows that Conaire's allies include three British plunderers (lines 1361–70).

These dangerous alliances, especially the last, recall Conaire's earliest and most perilous friendship, that with his own plundering foster-brothers. Like them, some of his retinue in the Hostel threaten the peace of his realm from within, and are only kept in check while his authority lasts; given what we know of Conaire's fate, these individuals seem poised to break loose. According to the traditional ideology, a king was expected to embody, represent, and control every aspect of his realm.[58] The inclusion of monsters and plunderers within his polity suggests that this may be an impossible task. The narrative logic of the *Togail* suggests that a kingship forced to contain such irrepressible tensions within the *fír flathemon*

must, in the end, annihilate itself: the tense balance of the description-sequence seems set up for a fall.

The representation of the Otherworld in Da Derga's Hostel both encapsulates these tensions and illustrates their outcome. At the most obvious and ominous level, the Otherworld's presence in the Hostel is represented by descriptions of creatures already seen on their way to the Hostel in the first half of the saga. The three red riders, Fer Caille, and Cichuil are all clearly recognizable; Cichuil's *alter ego* Cailb is missing, but in the extra tableaux added by the H-scribe in U her presence seems to be further represented by the tripartite war-goddess with whom she had claimed identity, the three Badbs of tableau (k).[59] Multiple incarnations of the same Otherworldly principles continue to proliferate. The last tableau of all is a second Lord of the Otherworld Feast, Nár Thúathcháech, who roasts a screaming pig like Fer Caille but is also one-eyed (with an evil eye) and sinister like Ingcél and Cailb.[60] The ominous significance of both pig-bearers is emphasized by Fer Rogain, who tells Ingcél that Fer Caille and his pig are *geis* to Conaire and therefore signal his rejection by the Otherworld: they are *a aidmi téchte lasin n-aidchi fair raidse inocht Conaire* (‘the instruments by which you may lawfully destroy Conaire tonight’, lines 1355–7).[61] As for Nár Thúathcháech, blood is always spilt at the feasts he attends (lines 1393–4).

At the same time, and more unexpectedly, the Otherworld's benevolent aspect also appears in the form of other personages previously unmentioned. Nine pipers from the *síd*-mound of Brí Léith and six dispensers from the *síd*-mounds are present (p.209) as Conaire's allies and will fight for him, unlike the more sinister figures just mentioned (lines 769–84, 1147–60). As is this saga's way, their propitious nature is indicated in terms of colour (*mongae findbuide foraib*, ‘light yellow manes on them’, lines 770, 1108), which resembles that of Conaire, Conall, Cormac, and Conaire's three propitious sons. The pipers are further described as *comáilli* (‘equally beautiful’ or ‘equally splendid’, line 770), and the light from their pipes illuminates the entire Hostel, as does Conaire's sword (lines 1006–7). That these parallels with Conaire are

deliberate is made clear by the ornate comparison made at this point in Conaire's tableau: *Is bindiu bindfodhrughud in claidib sin oldás bindfogur na cuisleann n-órdae fo-chanait ceól isin rígthaig* (‘sweeter is the sound of that sword than the sweet sound of the golden pipes which play music in the royal house’, lines 1007–9). These beneficent *síd*-dwellers contrast not only with the grotesque ugliness of the more ominous characters, but also with the earlier tale *De Ṡíl Chonairi Móir* in which the *síd*-dwellers of Brí Léith help Conaire take the kingship of Tara by force, but are there represented as monstrous, demonic beings.[62]

Both benevolent and hostile aspects of the Otherworld, imagined in terms of physical beauty or ugliness, are gathered under the roof of Da Derga's Hostel. Like the other uncertain allies mentioned above (and like the Hostel itself), the Otherworld is a functioning part of Conaire's realm and a hostile presence waiting for his destruction. In the first half of the saga, we have seen its benevolent aspect turning to hostility in a causal sequence of increasing malevolence and ugliness. The shape of this temporal movement is preserved in the description-sequence, in that the benevolent *síd*-dwellers appear within the first thirteen tableaux and the beings of ill omen only in the last seven.[63] Yet both aspects of the Otherworld are seen to be present at the same moment, as if to show Conaire's rule at its moment of highest glory and deepest failure.

The Last Battle and the Deathless Destruction of Ireland

With Ingcél's words *Comérget súas trá, a fíannu! […] dochum in tigi!* (‘Arise then, *fíanna*! […] To the house!’, lines 1395–6), the narrative—along with the plunderers themselves—at last moves forward again, releasing the dramatic tension built up during the frozen moment of the description-sequence. This return to a linear narrative mode is underlined by the visual layout of the beginning of this episode in all three manuscripts which preserve the final part of the saga. All three have a large and conspicuous initial letter set back in the margin, which in The Yellow Book of Lecan and *Lebor na hUidre* is

filled in with ink, and in The Yellow Book of Lecan also begins a new column. In RIA D iv 2, the shift is also from an older to a newer recension: here the initial letter is larger than any other in this manuscript's text of (p.210) the *Togail* (D), and is accompanied by the D-text's one and only subheading.[64] More importantly for anyone listening to the saga, this shift is emphasized by the extreme stylistic contrast which the first few lines of the new section present (even in D's amplified version of this section). This passage could serve as a textbook example of the hard-boiled ‘laconic style’ which represents one end of the stylistic spectrum of Old and Middle Irish sagas:

> Cota-érgat íarum la sodain na díbergaig dochum na Bruidne 7 fo-carthar a ṅdord n-impiu.
> Tá chéin, for Conairi, cid so?
> Fíanna ar thig, or Conall Cernach.
> Óig doib sund, ol Conaire.
> Ricfaiter a les innocht, for Conall Cernach.[65]
>
> With that the plunderers started up for the Hostel and raised their war-cry around them.
> ‘Hush! said Conaire. ‘What is that?’
> ‘*Fíanna* before the house,’ said Conall Cernach.
> ‘There are warriors for them here,’ said Conaire.
> ‘They will be needed tonight,’ said Conall Cernach.

Terse as it is, this exchange is in fact a variation on the same pattern on which the description-sequence was built: a phenomenon is perceived, its nature questioned and identified, followed by a response and counter-response. This structural ‘family resemblance’ serves to heighten the contrast in narrative mode. The exchange more directly recalls the identifications of frightening noises which preceded the description-sequence (the beaching of the ships, Mac Cécht's lighting of the fire), but this time there is no triadic dithering about what the noise might be. The brevity and directness of Conall's response, in contrast to the elaborate comparisons made before the description-sequence, underscores the sense that time has finally run out. Conall's use of the word *innocht* (‘tonight’) is the last time anyone in this saga will use that

word of the impending battle, because the battle begins in the very next line.[66]

Much of what will happen in the battle has of course already been predicted in detail, so it does not function as the saga's true climax as it might in a late Middle Irish battle-saga. The growing popularity of the latter genre in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries perhaps led to the abortive attempt in U to narrate the whole battle in detail, as well as prompting the composition of the new and more elaborate recension which takes over in D at this point.[67] In the original *Togail*, the saga's climax is the (p.211) description-sequence itself, above all Conaire's tableau. The battle itself is telescoped into a fast and furious explosion of slaughter. Like the parts of the saga immediately preceding the description-sequence, it is marked by rapid switches between the viewpoints of Conaire and the plunderers. Despite these shifts of viewpoint, however, its focus remains squarely on Conaire and his heroic last stand, until the narrative mode changes once again with Mac Cécht's impromptu departure.

The king's fortunes in the battle are set up to mirror his larger trajectory in the *Togail* as a whole. To begin with, he is peerless and invincible, routing the plunderers as predicted. But, as before, supernatural forces soon intervene: the plunderers' druids inflict him with a raging thirst, and as with the Otherworld's intervention on his last day, the effect is immediate and catastrophic. Instead of displaying his dexterity and military leadership, he now becomes confused and does nothing except ask those around him for a drink, a situation which echoes his bewilderment and loss of direction after encountering phantoms on the road to Tara. As in that situation, so in this, he turns to Mac Cécht for help, since it has become clear that no water is to be found in the Hostel: it has all been used up in quenching the fires, and the River Dodder which flowed through the Hostel has dried up.

Conaire's thirst introduces into the *Togail* a further facet of the traditional symbolism of Irish kingship, namely the 'drink of sovereignty'. In the sagas, the woman of sovereignty was typically portrayed dispensing drink to the rightful ruler, often represented as an intoxicating drink (playing on the

homonyms *flaith* ‘sovereignty’ and *flaith* ‘ale’).[68] In the *Togail*, this symbolism is echoed in the statement that Conaire's six dispensers are of Otherworldly origin. His thirst is inflicted as a deliberate strategy by enemy druids, but like Ingcél they have become the tools of the Otherworld's retribution (an assimilation made easier by the traditional association of druids with hidden knowledge). In this light Conaire's thirst reflects the failure of his rule and the Otherworld's withdrawal of sovereignty from him.[69] The drink which should have been gladdening his people has been used up in putting out the fires, just as Conaire's kingly energies—which should have been directed to maintaining peace and justice in his realm—are now spent in fighting enemies whose arrival is the indirect result of his own failure.

Conaire's loss of royal charisma is dramatically portrayed in the ensuing breakdown of established hierarchies among his retinue. This breakdown was first signalled much earlier in the saga, back on the road to Tara, when Mac Cécht had hesitantly expressed surprise at the king's loss of direction and confidence: *‘Domm-air a rád, a Chonaire*[70] […] *batir menciu fir Hérenn oc do chosnamso cach n-aidchi*[71] *indás beith duitsiu for merugud tigi aíged’* (‘“May I say this, Conaire […], more often were the men of Ireland vying for your company every night than you were wandering about in search (p.212) of a guesthouse”’).[72] Now its consequences emerge more explicitly. On being asked for drink, Mac Cécht signals his surprise at Conaire's confusion in a much more peremptory manner, refusing the king's request outright and reminding the king of the appropriate *ord* (‘order’ in both senses):

> ‘Ní hé ord ron-gabus húait co se ém,’ or Mac Cécht, ‘tabairt digi deit. Atát dáleamain 7 deogbairi lat, tuiccet dig deit. In t-ord ro gabusa húait co se do imdídiu ó beit fíana fer nÉrenn 7 Alban deit immon mBruidin. […] Cuindig dig cod dáilemnaib 7 cod deogbairib.’[73]
>
> ‘Indeed, that is not an order I have taken from you up to now,’ said Mac Cécht, ‘to bring you drink. You have dispensers and cupbearers: let them bring you drink. The order I have taken from you up to now [is] to protect

> you when the *fíanna* of Ireland and Alba are [coming] to you around the Hostel. […] Ask your dispensers and your cupbearers for drink.'

Conaire has to ask three times (twice in D and U) before Mac Cécht will obey him, and on the final occasion Mac Cécht still tries to get out of having to do it, asking the other champions if they will fetch drink instead. Conall refuses in turn and advises Mac Cécht to follow the king's orders, *húairi is chuccad chuindegair* ('since it is you who was asked', line 1446). U further notes (lines 7885–7) that this exchange led to a feud between Mac Cécht and Conall: the king's loss of his sovereignty here causes internal strife between his two strongest defenders.

This breakdown of authority is seen not only in the difficulty with which Conaire exacts obedience from Mac Cécht, but also in his forms of address. On first requesting drink he calls Mac Cécht *popa* (line 1423), the affectionate form for addressing a superior or foster-parent, and a term applied only to Conaire elsewhere in this saga (lines 359, 368, 533, 1175). The second time, Conaire calls Mac Cécht *dalta* ('fosterling', line 1437). Conaire's apparent uncertainty about his relationship to Mac Cécht is symptomatic of his general confusion about hierarchy at this point;[74] but it is worth noting that in D, E, and H2, Mac Cécht himself calls Conaire *dalta* ('fosterling') in the earlier passage quoted above, when reminding the king that he should not need to beg for hospitality (line 257). Whether or not Mac Cécht was one of Conaire's many fosterers in some lost earlier version of the story, these alternative forms of address make sense in terms of the dynamics of both conversations: on both occasions, Conaire loses control and yields to Mac Cécht for guidance, placing himself in the position of an inferior. On the second occasion, however (as Sheila Boll has suggested), he then attempts to reassert his authority by (p.213) repeating his order and this time addressing Mac Cécht as his fosterson.[75] The very fact that he has to do such a thing is symptomatic of his loss of control.

Up to this point in the saga, the narrative has been relentlessly homing in on Conaire from two alternating points of view,

reflecting the king's symbolic position at the centre of his realm. The approaching plunderers have been presenting Conaire to the saga's audience in ever-increasing close-up. But when Mac Cécht finally accepts Conaire's order to abandon his usual role and goes to fetch drink (tucking the king's son Lé Fer Flaith under his armpit for protection), the narrative suddenly spins away from Conaire and Da Derga's Hostel, embarking with Mac Cécht on a whistle-stop tour of the chief rivers and loughs of Ireland. As the king's loss of sovereignty becomes clear, it is as if he loses his magnetic hold on the narrative, freeing it for this unexpected excursion. Its geographical remoteness from Da Derga's Hostel is emphasized by the enumeration of each river and lough by name: the list includes the River Búas and Loch Febail in the north, Loch Mesca in the west, Loch Cúan in the northeast, and the Rivers Nem and Laí in the southwest.[76]

Yet, while Conaire's person no longer commands the narrative's primary attention, at a symbolic level he remains at the heart of the story. The journey is, after all, conducted on his behalf. Mac Cécht's quest for water dramatizes the cosmic reverberations of Conaire's loss of sovereignty, showing how it affects his entire realm. The waters of Ireland hide themselves from Mac Cécht, all but Úarán nGaraid in Connaught which finally allows him to fill his cup.[77] There is an implicit contrast here, not only with previous eulogies of natural bounty in Conaire's reign, but also with an earlier enumeration of the waters of Ireland: Maine Andoe's stirring metrical description of the king displaying his lordship over the whole island by crossing its waters, heights, and river-mouths.[78] Reflecting the Otherworld's hostility towards Conaire, the natural world now withdraws its former abundance and prevents Mac Cécht from bringing Conaire his ‘drink of sovereignty’ until it is too late.[79] On returning to Da Derga's Hostel he sees two men decapitating Conaire. He kills them and pours the drink into the severed neck of the king, whose headlessness embodies his loss of leadership in a drastically physical manner.

(p.214) The king's head then recites a quatrain to thank Mac Cécht for his services. The king's last words are the last piece

of verse in the *Togail*, as well as bringing the main body of the saga to a close:

> Maith fer Mac Cécht,
> fó fer Mac Cécht;
> do-beir digh do rígh
> 7 do-ní échd.[80]
> A good man, Mac Cécht,
> a fine man, Mac Cécht;
> he gives drink to a king
> and performs a feat.

In the context of what has just happened, this deceptively simple little quatrain bears its own weight of irony. The jauntiness of the rhymes ('Mac Cécht' rhyming with itself and *échd*, and the half-rhyme of *digh* with *rígh*)[81] contrasts disconcertingly with the gravity of tone prevailing in the narrative up to this point. Spoken as it is by a severed head, the quatrain points up the costs and limitations of the martial-heroic ethos which a champion such as Mac Cécht represents. The *écht* ('feat, deed of valour') referred to here is the slaughter of Conaire's two killers, and by extension Mac Cécht's slaughter of hundreds of other plunderers (he also goes on to pursue the routed foe after this verse). He is a matchless killer, but in preserving life he proves less successful. His decision to protect Lé Fer Flaith by carrying him around Ireland fails disastrously when the boy dies just after the cup has been filled: *do-cher an mac foa choimb* ('the boy under his protection died', line 1469).[82] In U, the H-scribe added the further detail that *ro leg bruth 7 allus in miled hé* ('the heat and sweat of the champion had destroyed him', line 7976): this detail is echoed in the Middle Irish *dindṡenchas* of Ráth Cnámrossa, which offers a further irony in referring to the boy's death as a *mór-écht* ('great deed').[83] This image of Lé Fer Flaith boiling to death in Mac Cécht's armpit, killed by the warrior's *gal* ('valour, steam'),[84] embodies the self-destructive potential of military heroism. It offers an uncomfortable parallel between the lawless violence of the plunderers and (p.215) the royally sanctioned violence of the king's men;[85] and the enumeration of the death-toll which follows this passage reinforces the sense of futile bloodshed which suffuses the description-sequence and its aftermath.

In this connection, Mac Cécht's tour of Ireland also finds curious echoes in the very last battle of the *Táin*, namely the battle between the two prize bulls of Connaught and Ulster following the defeat of the Connaught army. The Ulster bull Donn Cúailnge (for whom Medb had initiated the cattle-raid in the first place) kills his opponent, the Finnbennach, but is himself mortally wounded; he then does a circuit of Ireland, dropping parts of the Finnbennach's body in different places. He, too, ends up killing his own people: he tramples Bricriu to death while doing battle with the Finnbennach, and in Recension II his final act is to slaughter the women and children of Emain Macha.[86] In contrast to earlier stories about the young Cú Chulainn's threat to his own people when in his warlike frenzy, here the symbol of Ulster's martial glory succeeds in carrying out such a threat. In the *Táin* and the *Togail* alike, the scale, significance, and (arguably) absurdity of the internecine strife which has cost so many Irish lives in the main body of the saga is signalled by these pointless and accidental deaths framed within a closing episode in which the stage momentarily broadens to include the whole of Ireland.[87]

Conaire's own death, which takes place just after that of his son, brings us back to the paradoxes and Otherworldly mysteries which suffuse the description-sequence. On one level his death is straightforward: weakened by a druidical thirst, he is killed and decapitated. On another level, however, Conaire's death partakes of (or alludes to) a riddling pattern common to mythology and folklore worldwide, namely the paradox of being killed in more than one way at the same time. The best-known manifestation of this paradox is the so-called threefold death. Although this motif predates Christianity in world literature, in mediaeval Gaeldom it is typically found in explicitly Christian settings, where a saint inflicts it on a king or prince as divine punishment for transgressing a holy law. In Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, Columba pronounces a terrible judgement on the killer of the divinely ordained over-king Diarmait mac Cerbaill, namely that he will die by the spear, by a fall from wood, and by drowning. Several late Middle Irish sagas, including those which recount Diarmait's own death, replace falling with burning (usually in a king's hall which is set on fire).[88] As Joan Radner has pointed out, the riddling

(p.216) nature of this motif—often combined with protestations of its impossibility by its prospective victim—serves to emphasize the presence of powerful supernatural forces operating behind the transitory scenes of earthly kingship, and the terrible consequences of transgressing divine law.[89]

Conaire's death presents a variation on this pattern. The house in which he is staying is set on fire, although it is not specifically said to burn him; instead of being drowned, he is afflicted with its opposite, a druidical thirst and a supernaturally sanctioned lack of water; and he is then slain by the sword. More importantly, his death clearly shares the same element of supernatural requital and the apparently impossible coming to pass: he is issued with a set of absolute supernatural prohibitions, some of which seem easy to avoid but all of which are broken in the end, resulting in his death.[90] And if Conaire does not explicitly die three deaths himself, his destruction is surrounded by a clustering of triple events. Conaire asks for drink three times (in Y) during his fatal thirst; Lomna initiates the battle when his head is chopped off and thrown in and out of the Hostel three times (in Y and U); the Hostel is fired and the fires quenched three times; and the three red riders are said to be undergoing their third of three destructions on this occasion.

The sense of paradox surrounding Conaire's death is enhanced still further by the repeated occurrence of a still greater riddle, embodied in the last two examples just cited. This is the phenomenon of deathless destruction, of surviving one's own slaughter. Conaire himself survives his decapitation long enough to recite a verse to Mac Cécht, but some of the Otherworldly characters involved in the destruction appear to survive their own deaths permanently or repeatedly. For example, the severed pig's head which Nár Thúathcháech carries to the fire is able to squeal (lines 1390–1), echoing the screams of the singed pig roasted and sacrificed[91] by Fer Caille (lines 1351–2) but also prefiguring the utterance of the king's severed head; the parallel is strengthened by the fact that Conaire has already been described as *muc reme-tuit mes*, ‘a pig who falls before acorns [fall]’ (line 611).[92]

A more complex and mysterious example of this Otherworldly life-in-death is provided by the three red riders, who announce themselves on their first appearance as both alive and dead: *cíammin bí amin mairb* (‘although we are alive, we are dead’, lines 329–30). In the description-sequence Fer Rogain enlarges on this paradox, explaining that they had done wrong or committed falsehood (*do-rónsad goí*, line 1331) in the *síd*:

> (p.217) Is í digal do-radad foraib la rígh sídhi a n-orgain co ba trí la rí Temrach. Is é rí dégenach lasa n-orgiter, la Conaire mac Eterscéle. […] Sech ní génaiter ní génat nech.[93]
>
> This is the punishment which the king of the *síd* laid on them: their destruction three times by the king of Tara. The last king by whom they are destroyed is Conaire mac Eterscéle. […] They will neither be slain nor slay anyone.

This deathless destruction has intriguing parallels with other Irish sagas and stories further afield, such as that of the Green Knight in Middle English literature and the shapeshifter Úath mac Imomain in the Ulster tale *Fled Bricrenn* (‘Bricriu's Feast’).[94] But whereas those two Otherworldly beings have themselves decapitated as a supernatural trick to test the hero's resolve, the red riders in the *Togail* are being punished by a higher Otherworldly justice. The motif has been reshaped in order to echo the situation of the human protagonists. Like Conaire, the riders are about to be destroyed in Da Derga's Hostel for having practised falsehood (*do-rónsad goí* recalls the false judgement of Conaire himself before the people, elsewhere termed *gáu flathemon*, the prince's untruth). Like the sons of Donn Désa,[95] they are both the instruments of Conaire's destruction (since their presence violates his *gessi*) and doomed to be destroyed in the process.

These parallels underline the element of supernatural requital which is manifest in the destruction about to take place: its supernatural dimension is signalled by the fact that (unlike both Conaire and his foster-brothers) the horsemen are destroyed three times without dying. U's additional tableau of the many-faced tripartite war-goddess, entitled *Imda na*

mBadb (‘The Apartment of the Badbs’) and in the hand of scribe H, reinforces this topos by representing the Badbs as perpetually slaughtered:

> ‘Atconnarc triar nocht hi cléthi in tigi, a tóesca fola trethu, 7 súanemain a n-airlig ara mbraigti.’
>
> ‘Rusfetursa sin,’ ol se, ‘tri ernbaid[96] úagboid. Triar orgar la cach n-áim insin.’[97]
>
> ‘I saw three naked ones on the ridge-pole of the house, gushes of their blood coming through them, and the ropes of their slaughter around their necks.’
>
> ‘I know those,’ he said, ‘three chosen *ernbaid*. Those are the three who are destroyed every time.’

Like the other references to deathless destructions in the *Togail*, this passage is obscure and allusive rather than explanatory, enhancing the sense of ominous Otherworldly forces surrounding Conaire's death. As with Fer Caille's pig, it is (p.218) hard to avoid thinking of sacrifice: the references to blood and to ropes around necks recall the ways in which early Christian writers elsewhere in Europe represented heathen sacrifices. In the Old Norse poem *Hávamál*, which may date from the twelfth century in its extant form, the god of war Óðinn reports that he sacrificed himself to himself by being hanged on the world-tree and stabbed with a spear.[98] A Carolingian commentary on the classical Roman author Lucan likewise alludes to men being sacrificed to the Gaulish god Esus by being hanged on a tree and then stabbed.[99] And of course there is the more immediate and obvious parallel of Christ hanging on the cross and being stabbed with a spear (before coming back to life): the other passages are all used, with good reason, by modern scholars to advance speculations about heathen sacrificial practices among the pre-Christian Celts, Scandinavians, or Indo-Europeans, but they are presumably not uninfluenced by the shared Christianity of those who wrote the extant sources.

The strange phenomena surrounding Conaire's death enhance the sense of Otherworldly justice in its execution, and prompt

us to see it as a form of sacrifice: his failure as king introduced a cosmic imbalance into his realm, and his death restores cosmic equilibrium.[100] But what kind of equilibrium is this? The story may draw partly on the mythological pattern by which a king's sacrificial death restores good relations with supernatural forces and guarantees continuity by making way for a new king, but Conaire's death is accompanied by massive civil strife and achieves nothing. If this were a Frazerian kingship myth, Ingcél would take Conaire's place as king; but no such event takes place. In an H-interpolation in U, the only text which tells of Ingcél's further actions, he goes home and becomes king in his own country by virtue of his *búaid* (‘victory’) in Ireland—a victory which resulted in the annihilation of his army.[101] Conaire's chief warrior, meanwhile, has caused the death of Conaire's heir; nobody is left to take over the over-kingship of Ireland, which then descends into political chaos. Conaire's death results in *Temair fás*, ‘Tara desolate’.

Of course, the mediaeval audiences of the *Togail* would have known that Tara would not remain desolate for ever; it would be restored as a royal centre after the period of the Pentarchy, albeit under the control of other dynasties. Only with the death of the Uí Néill king Diarmait mac Cerbaill several centuries later would Tara (p.219) finally cease to play this role (a parallel which may explain some of the similarities between the *Togail* and Diarmait's own death-tale).[102] Perhaps this is part of the point of the deathless destructions surrounding Conaire's death: like the Badbs and the red riders, the over-kingship of Ireland is destroyed catastrophically, yet it will return. So, too, the saga's title could suggest that Da Derga's Hostel will be razed to the ground and its occupants slaughtered or subjugated (this is what *togail* means in, for example, *Togail Troí*, ‘The Destruction of Troy’),[103] whereas in fact the fires destroying the Hostel are quenched each time they are lit, the destroyers are routed, and almost all the people inside the Hostel survive to tell the tale. What gives the saga its overwhelming sense of finality and apocalypse is the irrevocable destruction of Conaire and his sovereignty, the linchpin of the realm and the focal point of the saga; but the deathless destructions

clustering around this event, and its unexpectedly skewed death-toll, remind us that the realm is still there, even if its king is not.

Yet this possibility of a new beginning does little to mitigate the scale of the catastrophe. In this the *Togail* resembles the Middle Welsh story of *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr*, with which it shares a number of motifs and structural features. Composed in the eleventh or twelfth century, *Branwen* features a climactic battle in Ireland between the men of Britain and Ireland from which *ny bu oruot* ('there was no [real] victory'), since *da a dwy ynys a diffeithwyt* ('two good islands have been destroyed').[104] All but seven of the British warriors are killed, the British king Brân is mortally wounded, and the Irish king and the entire Irish population are killed except five pregnant women, whose offspring found the five provinces of Ireland and begin the slow process of rebuilding the realm. Back in Britain, Brân's decapitated head lives on for some decades with his surviving companions in an Otherworldly state of bliss, until the breaking of a taboo returns them to the grief and desolation of the real world: the British kingship has been seized by another dynasty, Brân's son and heir is dead, and Brân's head has to be buried. As in the final scene of *Branwen*'s best-known (if distant) analogue, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, so too in *Branwen* and the *Togail*, the realm is not annihilated but disastrously crippled; the surviving lords are left at the end to 'Rule in this realm and the gored state sustain'.[105] **(p.220)**

Epilogue

In the last scenes of the *Togail*, this maiming of the body politic is represented visually in descriptions of warriors' wounds.[106] To escape wounded is the predicted fate of many individual warriors: while that may sound fortunate, the descriptions of Mac Cécht's and Conall's wounds vividly bring home the cost of conflict and invite interpretation on the level of political metaphor. Eichhorn-Mulligan has suggested that Conaire's dismemberment (losing his head) reflects the loss of order and hierarchy in the realm when its political head is removed.[107] So, too, the difficulty with which its two most

prominent survivors literally hold themselves together reflects the fragility of what survives.

Dominated by direct speech, the two-part epilogue harks back to the description-sequence by presenting first Mac Cécht and then Conall as the static objects of another's gaze, inviting evaluation in terms of physical appearance. Their appearance is indeed much altered. Mac Cécht is found by a nameless woman on the third day lying helpless on the battlefield, suffering from what he thinks is the nipping of a fly, a midge, or an ant.[108] In fact, a wolf is buried up to its shoulders in his wound, and the woman calls it *sengán sentalman* (‘an ant of [the] ancient earth’, line 1506).[109] In a detail absent from Y, she pulls it out by the tail and it takes the fill of its jaws as it comes out.[110] In the description-sequence Mac Cécht was feared for his ability to dismember the wolvish invaders, scattering their entrails over the ridges; now, his own body is invaded and partly dismembered by a real wolf. Mac Cécht then says, *Tonga do dia a toingti mo thúath* […] *ní ba mó lemsa oldás cuil nó corrmil* (‘I swear to God what my people swear, it was no more to me than a fly or a midge’, lines 1507–8).[111]

As with Conaire's posthumous quatrain, there is a disconcerting incongruity of tone between Mac Cécht's solemn display of the heroic stiff upper lip (stiffened by his oath) and his undignified circumstances, forced as he is to rely on a woman to rescue him from bodily invasion. After such a devastating loss as the land has just suffered, the only form of heroism left is the outward form of heroic utterance, which now rings rather hollow—especially as Mac Cécht does *not* then die as his heroic utterance would seem to demand.[112] Such a heroic death is first offered and then withheld from the audience in the (deliberately?) awkward syntax of the (p.221) scene's final sentence in Y and D: *At-bail íarum Mac Cécht isind ármaig acht becc* (‘Afterwards, Mac Cécht almost died on the battlefield’, line 1509). This is an all-too-human form of deathless destruction: instead of being granted a hero's death, Mac Cécht lives on, but only just. U further emphasizes his pain and indignity in its ensuing interpolation about Mac Cécht's cure: first Lé Fer Flaith's boiled corpse falls out from under his armpit at this point, then we are told that the place

where he was eventually healed was named after him *Mag mBrénguir* (‘Plain of Putrid Pus’, U line 7981).

The saga's final scene is more dignified, but its own depiction of a body barely holding itself together is no less vivid, and the questions it raises over the warrior's heroic status are more explicit. Conall Cernach returns home, and his father greets him with another wolvish image:

> ‘Lúatha coin dod-repnadar, a maccáin,’ for a athir.
>
> ‘Is hed ro boí do chomracc fria hócca ón, a senlaích,’ for Conall Cernach.
>
> ‘Scéla lat na Bruigne Da Derge? An beó do thigerna?’
>
> ‘Nochon beó imorro,’ for Conall.[113]
>
> ‘Swift are [the] dogs that have hunted you, little son,’ said his father.
>
> ‘This is what comes of[114] a fight with young men, old warrior,’ said Conall Cernach.
>
> ‘Do you have news of Da Derga's Hostel? Is your lord alive?’
>
> ‘No, he is not alive,’ said Conall.

Amairgen then employs the heroic device of the oath (which Mac Cécht has just used to insist on his own courage) to accuse Conall of cowardice for escaping alive: *‘Tonga do dia tongthi mo thúath,*[115] *is midlachdo dond fir do-deachaid a mbeathaid as íar fácbáil a thigernai lia a námtiu i mbás*’ (‘“I swear by the god my people swear by, it is cowardly of the man who has come away alive having left his lord dead among his foes”’, lines 1522–4). In reply, instead of denying his abdication of heroic responsibility, Conall simply holds up his arm to show that he has not been idle in the battle. The dialogue pauses while the narrator invites us to view Conall through his father's eyes, first his shield-arm, then his sword-arm:

> ‘Nídat bána mo chréchda ém, a senlaích,’ for Conall. Tadbaid a láim scéith. Trí .l. créchta imorro[116] is ed ad-comaicc furri. In scíath imorro imarro-dídnestair ind lám sin[117] is ed rus-anacht. Ind lám des imorro imo-roprad[118] for suidiu co rrice a dí chutramai. Ro cirrad imorro[119] 7 ro hathchumad 7 ro créchdnaiged 7 ro chríathrad acht congaibset na féthe frisin corp cen a etarscarad innát raba in scíath oca himdedail.
>
> (p.222) ‘Ro fích ind lám sin indnocht for cách, a maccáin, 7 ro fiched furri,’ ol Amairgin.[120]
>
> ‘Fír són, a senlaích,’ ol Conall Cernach. ‘Is sochuide día tarad deoga tondaig anocht ar dorus mBruidni.’[121]
>
> ‘My wounds are not white, truly, old warrior,’ said Conall. He shows his shield-arm. Indeed, a hundred and fifty wounds had been inflicted on it, and what had saved it was the shield which protected that arm. As for the right hand, however, that one [had] been worked over twice as much – indeed, it had been maimed and cut and wounded and pierced through, except that the sinews kept [it] joined to the body without its falling off[122] – for the shield had not been guarding it.
>
> ‘That arm beat everybody down tonight, little son, and it was beaten down,’[123] said Amairgen.
>
> ‘That is true, old warrior,’ said Conall Cernach. ‘Many are those to whom it gave drinks of death tonight at the door of the Hostel.’

In Y, the saga ends with the passage quoted here, closing the story on the arresting image of Conall's shattered sword-arm which, like Mac Cécht, will just about live to fight another day.

It is an abrupt ending (U also has a small onomastic afterword to wrap the story up; D simply announces that this is the end of the ‘battle of Da Derga's Hostel’).[124] But, beyond its bald reduction of the heroic achievement to pure, naked violence, this passage achieves a genuine sense of closure in its treatment of images and formulae developed earlier in the saga. This may be why Clancy calls it an ‘almost

Shakespearean ending'.[125] For example, it harks back to (and fulfils) Fer Rogain's prophecy about Conall's performance in the battle. Fer Rogain had predicted that Conall would fight them off at every one of the Hostel's doors, and the Hostel's door or doors are mentioned no fewer than five times in five lines (lines 979–83); this emphasis recurs in the very last words of the saga. Fer Rogain's prediction also introduced into the *Togail* the motif of the 'drink of death' (*deog tonnaid*), whose origins as a kenning for 'blood' have been expertly uncovered by Natalia O'Shea.[126] Of Conall's spear, Fer Rogain swears that *bid sochaidi forsa ndáilfea deoga tondaig innocht ar dorus na Bruidne* ('many are those to whom it will serve drinks of death tonight at the door of the Hostel'),[127] and his oath is later applied word-for-word to the spear of Conall's fellow Ulsterman, the Lúin of Celtchar (lines 1253–5). It now reappears as a report on the battle in the last words of the saga, by which point the kenning *deog tonnaid* has gained additional ironic value from the king's desperate requests for *deog* ('drink') and his death from thirst. As O'Shea puts it, 'In the middle of bloodshed and slaughter […] the only drink which the doomed thirsty (p.223) king can obtain is the drink of his death.'[128] Conall and Mac Cécht successfully dispense drinks of death in their king's service, but the king's own death from thirst (after Mac Cécht has failed and Conall has refused to fetch drink) gives a hollow ring to their achievement.

The epilogue's sense of finality is partly achieved by its repeated emphasis on looking back. This strikes a new note in the *Togail*. Up to this point, the whole saga has been built on a structure which compels the audience to look anxiously forward to the fateful event of the *togail*. Dramatic tension, accelerating events, proliferating omens, statements of intent, prophecies, and the increasing proximity of the protagonists all combine to elicit the emotions of pity and fear, both from the actors within the story and from the saga's audience. Once the fateful event has taken place, this tension disperses. The epilogue takes place in a landscape suddenly drained of the Otherworldly phenomena which have crowded the scene up to now, and fear gives way to exhaustion. A residue of Mac Cécht's power to inspire fear lingers about his half-dead body,

causing the woman passing by to say that she dares not approach *'lad gráin 7 t'oman'* ('"for fear and terror of you"', line 1500), but Mac Cécht's own response puts the time for such emotions in the past: *'Ro baí úar damsai disuidiu'* ('"I have had my hour for that"', line 1501).

This 'backward look' is enhanced by the unexpected three-day gap between Conaire's death and Mac Cécht's conversation with the woman (introduced *i cind in tres laithe*, 'at the end of the third day', line 1497). Up to this point the chronological gaps between episodes have been shrinking steadily, but for the first time this pattern is broken. The resulting discontinuity enables the speakers to reflect on the *togail* as an event in the past. Conall's scene takes place on the same night as the *togail* itself, but it is placed *after* Mac Cécht's chronologically later scene in the saga in order to open up a certain distance between it and the *togail*. This sense of pastness is enhanced by Amairgen's and Conall's use of the recurring word *innocht* ('tonight', lines 1535, 1538), used many times earlier in the saga to build up a sense of fearful anticipation of what the near future would bring. As before, this temporal descriptor is yoked to its spatial counterpart, Da Derga's Hostel, which Amairgen names at the beginning of the scene and Conall names at its close (lines 1519, 1539). Now, however, the word *innocht* and the allusion to the fateful *bruiden* look not forward but back. They seal off the narrative of the *togail* like the shutting of the *síd*-mounds when the long night of Samain is over.

This sense of pastness carries strong metatextual associations. The self-conscious references to storytelling and *scéla* scattered throughout the saga—especially in its prophecies—reappear in concentrated form in the epilogue, now referring back rather than forward, underlining the event's passage from reality to history. In the brief enumeration of the battle's death-toll which introduces the epilogue, we are told that *ní mór má' d-róinne sceóla indisen scél dona díbergchaib*[129] *ro bátar ar tig doib* ('of the plunderers who had been at the house, hardly a survivor [literally 'tale-bringer'] escaped to tell the tale', lines 1491–2). As the saying went, *ní gnáth orcain* (p.224) *cen scéola n-eisi do innisin scél dara n-éisi* ('it is not

usual for there to be a destruction without a survivor from it to tell the story/news thereafter').[130] Amairgen's opening question to Conall ('*Scéla lat na Bruigne Da Derge?*', 'Do you have news [literally 'tales'] of Da Derga's Hostel?', line 1519) invokes the title of the saga itself, recalling the prophetic allusions of the red horseman ('*scél ó Bruidin*', '"a tale from the Hostel"', line 304) and of Conaire himself ('*t*[*og*]*ail bruidne*', '"a Hostel's destruction"', line 1053). These *scéla* are no longer fragments of the future, fearfully glimpsed in some mysterious Otherworldly realm, but mundane reports of a dreadful past event which have found their way onto parchment as the saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and now call for reflection and interpretation. Like the ant of the ancient world, the event appears strangely magnified in this long historical perspective.

The *togail* is not commemorated in words alone. The landscape, too, bears a physical memory of the event, namely the cairn built at Lecca Cind Slébe by the plunderers to commemorate the genre of their attack. U, which generally emphasizes onomastic features, follows Conall's last words with an afterword explaining that the fleeing plunderers removed a stone from the cairn for each man not mortally wounded: *Conid ed ro márbad dib oc brudin fer cach clochi fil hi Carnd Leca* ('so this is what was lost to them by death at the Hostel, a man for each stone which is [now] in Carn Lecca', U lines 8003–4). The sudden jump to the present-day landscape reinforces the pastness of the events narrated, but the cairn also works—like the saga itself—to keep the past alive in the present. What purposes this past might have served in the mediaeval 'present' of the saga's audience will be explored in the final chapter of this book.

Finally, the *togail* is inscribed physically in the wounds of its participants. These are represented synecdochically by the stones of the cairn, but literally—and far more vividly—by the damaged bodies of Mac Cécht and Conall. Wounds can tell their own stories, as we saw in the *Caladgléo Cethirn* episode in the *Táin* which constructs a whole battle-narrative out of Cethern's injuries and the doctor's diagnoses. More effectively than his words, Conall's display of his wounds tells his father

how he performed in the battle. This final scene also reinforces the prevailing sense of closure by binding together some of the central strands of imagery woven through the *Togail* as a whole. It is a complex concluding gesture which returns us to the image of the king and his kingship.

The spectacle of Conall's maimed body, viewed close up, marks a brief but telling return to the ekphrastic mode of the description-sequence. It harks back to Ingcél's description of Conall as *caíme dí laechaib Hérenn* (‘the fairest of the heroes of Ireland’, line 959), loved by Conaire because he looks so like the king. As we have seen, Conall is set up as the king's mirror-image, and his body now becomes the site of a dreadful transformation from order to chaos: his broken appearance at (p.225) the end of the saga echoes the king's dismemberment and, by implication, the shattered state of Conaire's realm. Indeed, this chain of imagery connects the saga's opening and closing descriptions in a microcosm of the story's fatal trajectory. The *Togail* began with a detailed portrait of Étaín's perfectly proportioned body, whose appearance personified the cosmic order and peace to be found when the Otherworld was in harmony with the king. Étaín's beauty found echoes not only in descriptions of Conaire's peaceful realm, but also in the shared features of Conaire and Conall in the description-sequence; so it is appropriate that the saga should end with a vivid description of Conaire's alter ego, mangled by the violence which resulted from the breakdown of *fír flathemon*.[131]

As in the other metamorphoses of sovereignty-imagery discussed so far, this transformation is reinforced by verbal echoes. The smooth skin of Étaín's arms was *gilithir sneachta n-oenaichde* (‘white as the snow of a single night’, lines 19–20), but the work of a single night has now gashed the skin of Conall's arms with red wounds: *‘Nídat bána mo chréchda’* (‘“my wounds are not white”’, line 1525). The word used to emphasize the extent of Conall's wounds, *cutrumae* (line 1531), literally means ‘proportion’, a concept emphasized in the description of Étaín's limbs (lines 31–4) and used of Conaire's beauty (*Nícon fil locht […] iter méit 7 chóre 7 chutrumae*, ‘there is no flaw [in him] of size, evenness or

proportion’, lines 1074–5), but now used to emphasize crippling damage rather than flawlessness.

The self-consciously aesthetic level on which these transformations from beauty to bloodshed are conducted is highlighted in Fer Rogain's treatment of Conall's beautiful *scíath cróderg* (‘blood-red shield’, lines 966–7), admiringly described by Ingcél. Fer Rogain's prophecy replaces the shield's decorative red colouring and white speckling with the speckled red of real blood, the original ‘drink of death’: *In scíath cróderg sin fil ar a druim*[132] *ro brecad do semannaib findruine […] bid imda broen derg*[133] *tarse innocht ar dorus na Bruidne* (‘that blood-red shield on his back, speckled with white-gold rivets […] there will be many a drop of red on it tonight at the door of the Hostel’).[134] We have already seen a similar movement from red decoration to red blood in the image of Étaín herself, as noted by McCone: her tunic was conspicuous to her audience for its *derginliud óir* (‘red weavings of gold’, line 10), but in the red rider's *rosc* she appeared clad in *deirindlith/deirgindlid áir* (‘red weavings of slaughter’, lines 306–7) as an omen of the violence to come, reactivating the violence latent within the decorative term *intlaise* (‘inlay’, from *slaidid* ‘cuts, slaughters’). It may be no coincidence that three of the four remaining instances of this word in the saga occur in Ingcél's praise-poem about Conaire: his brooch, sword, and spear all feature *ór* […] *indtlaisi* (‘gold inlay’, lines 1027, 1035, 1040), (p.226) these last two items being themselves instruments of slaughter.[135] Conall's arm—bloody, scored with wounds, dispensing drinks of death—pulls these strands together and fulfils both Fer Rogain's and the red rider's prophecies.[136]

Redness and bloodiness are commonly used in mediaeval Irish and other European narrative as portents of disaster, infusing an individual scene with a sense of doom. In the prologue to the *Táin*, for example, the beautiful seeress Fedelm (described in Recension II in terms closely resembling Étaín) gazes at Queen Medb's army and prophesies, *Atchíu forderg, atchíu rúad* (‘I see it bloodied, I see it red’).[137] The *Togail*, however, treats its visual topoi in an unusually thorough and organic

manner. Motifs and iconographic patterns typically found in isolation are here sewn through the whole saga, woven into other chains of imagery and subjected to artful transformations at the saga's chief pressure-points. The saga's highly compressed closing passage transforms a complex network of symbols and images which has been growing and developing ever since the saga's opening phrases, its components reacting with each other as the saga progresses.

This technique not only enhances the delight in abstract pattern which R. Mark Scowcroft has identified as one of the distinguishing features of Irish saga, but also multiplies the story's possible meanings and amplifies the emotional resonance which its larger architecture has been designed to carry.[138] Conventional formulae thus take on a depth and concentration of meaning more often associated with poetry than with prose. Indeed, the specific play of images seen here in the *Togail*—shifting between ornamental beauty and the horror of bloodshed—recalls one poem in particular, albeit one unlikely to have been known to the Irish author: the Old English *Dream of the Rood*.[139] Its grief-stricken narrator first sees the Cross *gegyred mid golde* (‘adorned with gold’) and gems, brightly shining in its rich *wædum* (‘clothes’), but then the Cross begins to bleed and the dreamer perceives through the glitter *earmra ærgewin* (‘the ancient strife of wretched men’). The horror and the joy of Christ's sacrifice combine in a double image:

> Geseah ic þæt fuse beacen
> wendan wædum ond bleom; hwilum hit wæs mid wætan bestemed,
> beswyled mid swates gange, hwilum mid since gegyrwed.[140]
>
> (p.227) I saw that bright beacon
> change its clothes and colours; now it was drenched in moisture,
> soaked in the flow of blood, now adorned with treasure.

But whereas Christ's sacrificial death and heroism will bring about new life, that of Conaire has no such saving grace. On the third day after the battle, in a detail added in the U-text,

Conaire does not rise again from the grave, but is carried off to be buried at Tara.[141] In Christ's death, the bloodshed conceals a greater glory and points forward to the kingdom of God and the joys of heaven; Conaire's death, by contrast, marks the final wreck of Ireland's perfect kingship and paradisaical golden age, and its bloodshed signifies nothing beyond destruction. Conaire may have Otherworldly blood in his veins, but he is not a god himself, and he is ultimately incapable of walking the tightrope of *fír flathemon*. As seen in the visual logic of his central tableau and the images radiating out from that point, the contradictory aspects of his realm and of his own nature combine to pull him and his country to pieces. The frozen energy of the description-sequence, sustained for a virtuosically extended span of narrative, finally explodes. Taulchaine's tricks are ruined by Ingcél's baleful stare; Leviathan turns the world upside down; the beauty of the sword-feats becomes the horror of carnage; and instead of the flawless form of the sovereignty-goddess, we are left gazing at a bloody mess of ligaments and tendons, while the ruined Hostel recedes down the darkening stream of time.

Notes:

([1]) Clancy, ‘Court, King and Justice’, p. 171, quoting from W. B. Yeats, ‘The Second Coming’ [1919], in *idem*, *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: Dent, 1990), p. 235.

([2]) U disrupts this symmetry by adding new tableaux to the second half of the sequence. By contrast, the extra response-formulae included in Mac Cécht's and Conall's tableaux in D, E, and H2 (see chapter 6, note 71) do not significantly disrupt it.

([3]) On arrangement by rank and station see Sayers, ‘Charting Conceptual Space’, pp. 38–42; on arrangement by *geis* see Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, p. 59.

([4]) On circles of champions, see Barbara Hillers, ‘The Heroes of the Ulster Cycle’, in Mallory and Stockman, *Ulidia*, pp. 99–106.

([5]) Clancy (‘Court, King and Justice’, p. 170 n. 36) suggests that the Ulster tales, like Arthurian romances, show ‘a

splendid but flawed king presiding over a glorious but doomed court’.

([6]) Manuscript-texts for the whole tableau: Y (MS, cols. 732–4); U, lines 7353–7501 (MS, pp. 90–2); D (MS, fols. 83r–84r); E (MS, fols. 21r–21v), ending with the final line of Ingcél's praise-poem and continuing immediately as F (MS p. 213); H2 (MS, p. 481; interestingly, this fragment begins at the same point as F, namely the introduction to Conaire's *rosc*).

([7]) West, ‘Genesis’, p. 433.

([8]) Manuscript-texts for Étaín's description: Y (MS, cols. 716–17); D (MS, fol. 79r); E (MS, fol. 18r); A (MS, fols. 4r–4v); Y2 (MS, cols. 123–4).

([9]) Knott silently adopted E's reading *suili* (‘eyes’), printing it *súili*. The other texts also have the plural, but in the variant form *suile* (D, A, Y2). Y has the singular *suil*, which I restore here although it is probably not the original form.

([10]) Instead of *robuga*, Y (line 1019), D, and E here have *robuidi*, which would mean something like ‘very yellow’. Eyes in Irish descriptions are rarely yellow, so this is probably an error arising from the words’ similar spelling and/or interference from the adjective *buidechas* (‘yellow-curled’) describing Conaire's hair a few words later. On the significance of purple and gold, see Whitfield, ‘Dress and Accessories’, pp. 8–12.

([11]) Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, pp. 58–60; noted by Knott, *Togail*, p. 88 (note to line 958).

([12]) Manuscript-texts: as for the beginning of Conaire's tableau (note 6), but without H2. U, D, and E also have *ar febus* after *fris*, giving ‘in the excellence of his beauty and form’.

([13]) Recension III of the *Togail* extends Conall's embodiment of martial-heroic beauty, comparing him with Lug as well as the Trojan hero *Hechtair mac Priaim* (‘Hector son of Priam’) to emphasize his pre-eminence as *firḟeochair ardairsid Eorpa* (‘Europe's supreme veteran’). The plunderers temporarily flee,

as with Mac Cécht in Recension II. See Stokes, ‘The Destruction’, p. 396.

([14]) On its date, see Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, ‘Forbairt na Stíle i Litríocht Phróis na Gaeilge Moiche’, *Léachtai Cholm Cille*, 26 (1996), 7–49, pp. 12–28; *idem*, *On the Date*. Most modern discussions of the *Táin* discuss its representation of martial heroism, but the starting-point for such discussion is still Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes*, pp. 57–80.

([15]) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 2245–2334; *eadem*, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 2262–2337.

([16]) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 2335–70; *eadem*, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 2338–75.

([17]) Knott translated *recht* as ‘furious’ (*Togail*, p. 140), which I follow here, but *recht* ‘lawful’ is equally possible, as suggested by West (‘An Edition’, pp. 659 and 779) and Eichhorn-Mulligan (‘*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*’, p. 13).

([18]) I follow Charles-Edwards (*Early Christian Ireland*, p. 143) in understanding *conid-rala* as present.

([19]) The term *caínchomrac* occurs elsewhere as a gloss on *síd* and as a characteristic feature of the Otherworld (Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Semantics’, 138–9). Note the variants: E (MS, fol. 19r) here lacks *imbet* (‘abundance’), while instead of *caínchomraic* D (MS, fol. 79v) has *cachae comraic* (‘of every meeting’).

([20]) Douglas Hyde suggested that the sound referred to was ‘the vibration of the steel when struck’ (*A Literary History*, p. 391 n. 2).

([21]) H2 has *gnáis* (‘manners’) instead of *gaís*. A few lines later, U, D, F, and H2 also ascribe to Conaire the quality of *ergnas* (‘understanding’), but Y offers *gnais* (‘manners’).

([22]) I take Y's reading *as* as a misreading of the preposition *ós* (‘over’), which is the reading given by D and E and suggested by Knott, *Togail*, p. 88 n. 1011. If Y's reading were taken as a form of the copula, the whole line would mean ‘who is ever striking blows, bellowing’ (and is rendered thus by Eichhorn-Mulligan, ‘*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*’, p. 13): this makes sense in another way, but Knott's examples of other attestations of the phrase *os* (or *for*) *bith bulid* (‘over a fair world’) seem to favour emending via the D/E reading. U has *asa*, which could be read as a variant on *ósa* and give ‘over his fair clamorous world’.

([23]) As mentioned in note 10, *robuidi* (‘very yellow’) is probably an error or variant spelling of *robuga* (‘hyacinth’): not only are eyes not yellow in praise-epithets, but a noun is required here to make the syntax make sense (as in the following line).

([24]) With West (‘An Edition’, p. 781), I read this as a variant on *chuinnsiu* (‘aspect/face’) rather than on *chuinnscliu* (‘attack’). Of the extant texts only U has an *l* in the middle of the word.

([25]) D and E have *fri tri ech*, which could be an erroneous form meaning ‘against three horses’ but is more likely to be an error for *fri triath* (West, ‘An Edition’, p. 788).

([26]) The other manuscripts have plural forms of *cern* ‘exploit’, but since Conaire is soon to fight against plunderers, Y's *cronu* may equally make sense as ‘wrongs’, ‘crimes’. On the syntax of the sentence, see West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 788–9.

([27]) With West (‘An Edition’, p. 789), I take this as a variant of *ráth rúanaid* (‘strong surety’).

([28]) Lines 1010–13, 1017–21, 1037–44. Manuscript-texts: see note 6 (but F and the fragment of H2 begin after this poem ends). On the form *bróntig*, see chapter 4, note 8.

([29]) On *rechtbrúth*, see note 17 above.

([30]) On *cíallathar*, see West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 778–9, whose suggestion I adapt here. The speaker may be referring to what his own poem ‘signifies’ in this first, introductory stanza:

other, clearer examples of self-reflexive language in this poem are discussed below.

([31]) I follow West's suggestion (‘An Edition’, p. 780) that *fuamun* is a variant on *úamann* (‘skin’). For a scribal reading of *fuamun* as ‘cheek’ see the example cited in *DIL*, s.v. *léoit*. *Fuinecthae* seems to be the past participle of *fo-nig* (‘cleans’) and translates as ‘cleaned’ or, slightly more loosely, ‘spotless’. See Knott, *Togail*, p. 89 n. 1018, and West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 780–1.

([32]) ‘Exploits’ (from *cern*) in the other texts.

([33]) ‘Warriors’ is implied in this construction. For an alternative translation which does not treat this line as a cheville and takes *coirae* and *comlána* (‘proper’, ‘perfect’) as qualifying *cronu/cernu* (‘wrongs/exploits’) see West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 788–9.

([34]) Literally ‘brow’.

([35]) D is a partial exception, beginning the sequence with a large majuscule **IS** (in the introductory prose sentence (fol. 83v)) and running straight into the first *At-chíu*; in the rest of the poem, D has a large **A** in the margin and begins a new line for some, but not all, instances of *At-chíu*, as if splitting up the poem into fewer stanzas. U and (with one exception) E begin a new line for each *At-chíu*, emphasized in U with coloured infills for each initial **A**. In Y (cols. 732–3) the stanzas are not lineated separately but are clearly marked off, each with a large initial **A**; most of these are filled in with red ink.

([36]) West, ‘An Edition’, p. 788.

([37]) Lines 1045–8. The contrast is emphasized by the physical separation of this prose passage from the preceding verse in Y (large red-filled initial **R**), U, D, and H2 (large initial **R** beginning a new line, and in H2 a new column), and E/F (the passage here begins the top of a new column and in fact marks the break between E and F, although its first two words are no longer visible).

([38]) Jacqueline Borsje (pers. comm.) has suggested an ominous significance in Conaire being asleep: he should be awake and alert after all the signs and portents he has witnessed earlier. See Edward Gwynn, ‘On the Idea of Fate’, pp. 155–6.

([39]) On this technique more generally, see Scowcroft, ‘Abstract Narrative’.

([40]) West, ‘Genesis’, p. 433.

([41]) For details see chapter 2, note 7.

([42]) On Conchobor's age, see Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., ‘Tidings of Conchobar mac Nessa’, *Ériu*, 4 (1910), 18–38, p. 22.

([43]) William Sayers, ‘A Swedish Traveler's Reception on an Irish Stage Set: Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning*’, *Keltische Forschungen*, 3 (2008), 201–19, p. 208 n. 12.

([44]) James J. O’Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 123–7; Nünlist, ‘The Homeric Scholia’, pp. 62–6. Many of the insights in Irene de Jong's study of Homer, *Narrators and Focalizers*, are applicable (with adaptation) to Irish saga literature.

([45]) Knott spelt *sluindar* as two words, *sluind ar* (*Togail*, p. 31).

([46]) U has *ndímaisse*, which would mean simply ‘beauty, handsomeness’ as opposed to ‘beauty of colour’.

([47]) Lines 1023–5. This passage requires emendation in order to make proper sense of it; on these points see West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 782–3. Compare the similarly metatextual passage at line 1036 (and see West, ‘An Edition’, p. 786).

([48]) The importance of contrast in Conaire's portrait has been noted by Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 142–3.

([49]) On Penelope see Ruth Scodel, *Credible Impossibilities: Conventions and Strategies of Verisimilitude in Homer and Greek Tragedy* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999), pp. 150–3. On Saul see chapter 9 below.

([50]) Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 76–115.

([51]) West, ‘Genesis’, pp. 432–3.

([52]) West (‘Genesis’, pp. 432–3) interprets the metrical part's reference to Mac Cécht's two tonsured companions as contradicting Fer Rogain's identification of these men as knees. But if the reference is interpreted as another riddling element (as Fer Rogain's phrasing suggests), the disparity between appearance and reality is consistent with the rest of this tableau. See my forthcoming article ‘Compilation as Creative Artistry’.

([53]) Radner, ‘“Fury Destroys the World”’.

([54]) D and F have *badad* or *badud* (‘submerged’).

([55]) U (hand M) offers a gloss, *no comsid* (‘or the ruler’).

([56]) Lines 1246–9. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 736); U, lines 7714–17; D (MS, fol. 84v); F (MS, p. 215). On this spear's significance in the *Togail* see also Nikolaeva, ‘The Drink of Death’, pp. 305–6.

([57]) On weapons acting as if alive, see Borsje, ‘Omens’, pp. 229–31.

([58]) McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 124–8.

([59]) See above, p. 147.

([60]) On Nár Thúathcháech, see Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, pp. 96–8; Jacqueline Borsje, ‘Über die Identität von Nár Túathcháech aus der verlorengegangenen Erzählung *Echtrae Chrimthainn Nia Náir*’, in Poppe, ed., *Keltologie heute*, pp. 169–93; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, pp. 112–14, 153–91. On the Lord of the Otherworld Feast, see Ní Chatháin, ‘Swineherds’.

([61]) I follow here Sayers's translation (‘Deficient Royal Rule’, p. 108).

([62]) Lucius Gwynn, ‘De Ṡíl Chonairi Móir’, p. 135.

([63]) The H-reviser of U disrupted this pattern by inserting the three Badbs before the six dispensers.

([64]) The Yellow Book of Lecan, col. 739; *Lebor na hUidre*, p. 97; RIA MS D iv 2, fol. 85r. The battle-narrative (the focus of this section of the chapter) gives way to the epilogue (discussed in the next section) in Y at col. 739a of the MS, in U at p. 98 of the MS (U, lines 7848–7963), and in D at fol. 85v of the MS. From this point on, the D-text is printed in full in Knott, *Togail*, pp. 65–9, and I give her chapter -headings.

([65]) Lines 1399–1402. Compare the similar exchange before the great battle in Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 3580–1: Conall's final remark (like Fergus's) emphasizes the peril they face, in contrast with Conaire's (like Ailill's) misplaced confidence.

([66]) It will be used twice more in one last exchange, the dialogue between Conall and his father, to look back at the battle. This sequence is discussed below (pp. 221–7 and 326–8).

([67]) For example, the first sentence of the passage just quoted, occupying two lines in Knott's edition, occupies eight in D (Knott, *Togail*, D §141). The H-reviser's intervention (U, lines 7898–7918) is discussed above, pp. 26–7.

([68]) On this trope, see Herbert, ‘Goddess and King’.

([69]) Máire Bhreathnach, ‘The Sovereignty Goddess’, pp. 257–8.

([70]) U, E, and H2 lack *a rád* (literally ‘its saying’), and in D, E, and H2 Mac Cécht addresses Conaire as *dalta* (‘fosterling’), as discussed below.

([71]) The words *cach n-aidchi* (‘every night’) are absent from H2.

([72]) Lines 257–60. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 720); U, lines 6755–8; D (MS, fol. 80r); E (MS, fol. 19v); H2 (MS, p. 477). On the significance of this utterance, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 525.

([73]) Lines 1424–9. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 739); U, lines 7871–6; D (MS, fol. 85v; Knott, *Togail*, D §145). D here sticks fairly closely to the wording of the archetype, with a few minor amplifications. On this passage see Eichhorn-Mulligan, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', pp. 16–17.

([74]) As noted by Boll, 'Foster-Kin in Conflict', pp. 43–4.

([75]) Boll, 'Foster-Kin in Conflict', pp. 43–4.

([76]) The significance of these geographical locations has been discussed by Denis Casey in his unpublished paper '"Is chan easba bidh ach díobháil dí / a d'fhág i do luí thú ar chúl do chinn": Mac Cecht's Search for Drink in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', University of Cambridge, 15 May 2008. I am grateful to him for sending me a copy.

([77]) *Cath Maige Tuired* contains a similar reference to the chief loughs and rivers of Ireland which, through the power of a Túatha Dé Danann cupbearer, yield no water to the usurping Fomoire: see Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp. 42 (§79) and 96. A late Middle Irish parallel is provided by the tale edited by Carl Marstrander as 'How Samson Slew the Gesteda', *Ériu*, 5 (1911), 145–59: *tre feirg na ndee* ('through the anger of the gods'), the Gesteda are afflicted by a drought which ends only when they are slaughtered.

([78]) Lines 452–8, quoted in the last section of chapter 4, pp. 121–2.

([79]) Máire Bhreathnach, 'The Sovereignty Goddess', pp. 257–8.

([80]) Lines 1485–8. In U (line 7951), the third line reads *dobeir dig conoí ríg* ('he gives drink, he guards the king'). This poem was subsequently expanded: D has an additional separate poem beginning and ending with the word *oglach* ('warrior') (Knott, *Togail*, D §157), while in Recension III the poem is extended with different lines (Stokes, 'The Destruction', p. 323).

([81]) Noted by McCone in his discussion of the metrical structure of this 'rather crude jingle' (*Pagan Past*, p. 39). For a

more positive interpretation of this scene, see Rekdal, ‘From Wine in a Goblet’, pp. 261 and 262 n. 119, discussed below, p. 324.

([82]) Rekdal (‘From Wine in a Goblet’, p. 261) has suggested that Mac Cécht ‘saves Conaire's kingship’ by carrying Lé Fer Flaith under his arm, but the boy's death *in situ* undermines this interpretation.

([83]) Edward Gwynn, ed. and trans., *The Metrical Dindsenchas: Part III* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913), pp. 128–30.

([84]) On this concept, see Myles Dillon, ‘The Semantic History of Irish *Gal* “Valour; Steam”’, *Celtica*, 8 (1968), 196–200, pp. 196–7.

([85]) The socially threatening aspects of the martial hero are discussed by McCone, ‘*Aided Cheltchair*’, especially 15–16, in which displays of demonic power such as Cú Chulainn's *ríastrad* are linked with the exploration of *díberg* in the *Togail*.

([86]) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, lines 4125–55; *eadem*, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, lines 4854–4917.

([87]) This interpretation of the *Táin* passage is based on that of Radner, ‘“Fury Destroys the World”’, pp. 49–51.

([88]) Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, ed. and trans. Anderson and Anderson, pp. 64–6 [I.36]. See also Adomnán, *Life of St Columba*, trans. Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 139. The biblical resonances of this passage are discussed in chapter 9 below. For wider discussion, see Brian Ó Cuív, ‘The Motif of the Threefold Death’, *Éigse*, 15 (1973–4), 145–50; Máire Bhreathnach, ‘The Sovereignty Goddess’, pp. 257–9; Radner, ‘The Significance’; William Sayers, ‘*Guin & Crochad & Gólad*: The Earliest Irish Threefold Death’, in Cyril J. Byrne et al., eds., *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples* (Halifax, NS: St Mary's University, 1992), pp. 65–82; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Threefold Death in Early Irish Sources’, *Studia Celtica Japonica*, new series, 6 (1994), 53–75; Rekdal, ‘From Wine in a Goblet’. For discussion in the context of annalistic records of

regicide, see N. B. Aitchison, ‘Regicide in Early Medieval Ireland’, in Guy Halsall, ed., *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 108–25.

([89]) Radner, ‘The Significance’, pp. 187–8.

([90]) On the possibility of a vestigial threefold death, see Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Concept of the Hero’, pp. 86–7; West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 238–42; Sayers, ‘*Guin & Crochad & Gólad*’, p. 70; Nikolaeva, ‘The Drink of Death’, p. 301; Rekdal, ‘From Wine in a Goblet’, pp. 261–2. On the *gessi* as riddles, see Radner, ‘The Significance’, p. 185.

([91]) For this interpretation of the word *sligairdbi* (line 1185) see Borsje, ‘Approaching Danger’, p. 88; *eadem*, *The Celtic Evil Eye*, p. 99 n. 69.

([92]) On the motif of the animate severed head, see Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*, pp. 245–67.

([93]) Lines 1332–6. Y (MS, col. 738), U lines 7787–90, D (MS, fol. 85), F (MS, p. 216).

([94]) See Jacobs, ‘The Green Knight’; Borsje, ‘*Fled Bricrenn*’, pp. 176–82.

([95]) The parallel may be intentional. The three red riders call to mind the three ‘redheads’ (*rúadchind*) of Leinster, sons of Donn Désa who are held to have killed Conaire in a version of the story alluded to in some genealogical texts and regnal lists (e.g. O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum*, p. 120, lines 30–1). On this connection, see Jacobs, ‘The Green Knight’, p. 2 n. 6; West, ‘An Edition’, pp. 200–2 and 216.

([96]) This word is unattested elsewhere and its meaning is obscure. West (‘An Edition’, p. 806) suggests that it may be a corruption of the noun *erbaid* (‘destruction’).

([97]) U, lines 7658–61. West (‘An Edition’, p. 806) emends *áim* to *aín*, translating ‘destroyed by everyone’ instead of ‘every time’.

([98]) David A. H. Evans, ed., *Hávamál* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1986), pp. 68–9 [stanzas 138–9]; for an introduction to this passage (emphasizing the pre-Christian content) see ibid., pp. 29–34. For a translation see Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 34.

([99]) Hermann Usener, ed., *M. Annaei Lucani Commenta Bernensia* (Leipzig: Teubner 1869), p. 32. For commentary see Françoise Le Roux, 'Des chaudrons celtiques à l'arbre d'Esus: Lucain et les scholies bernoises', *Ogam*, 7 (1955), 33–58; Jacqueline Borsje, 'Human Sacrifice in Medieval Irish Literature', in Jan M. Bremmer, ed., *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 31–54, pp. 42–4. On the dating of the *Commenta* see Shirley Werner, 'On the History of the *Commenta Bernensia* and the *Adnotationes super Lucanum*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 96 (1994), 343–68.

([100]) Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Concept of the Hero'; West, 'An Edition', pp. 239 and 242.

([101]) U, lines 7958–9.

([102]) See below, pp. 306–8.

([103]) The saga's title is discussed in chapter 1, p. 35; its possible classical connection is discussed in chapter 8, p. 238.

([104]) Derick S. Thomson, ed., *Branwen uerch Lyr* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1961), lines 387 and 407; translation in Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 32–3. On some parallels with the *Togail* see Thomson, *Branwen*, pp. xxxiv–xlii; Mac Cana, *Branwen*; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Evidence for Vernacular Irish Literary Influence on Early Mediaeval Welsh Literature', in Dorothy Whitelock et al., eds., *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 235–57; and, for the fullest account, *idem*, *Irish Influence*, pp. 188–286.

([105]) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge University Press, 1992), V.iii.294.

([106]) Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, cols. 739a–739b); U, lines 7964–8004 (pp. 98–9). The modernized version in D is found in fols. 85v–86r of the MS (Knott, *Togail*, D §§162–7).

([107]) Eichhorn-Mulligan, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', pp. 16–17.

([108]) The enunciation of these alternatives aligns Mac Cécht's speech with other passages of threefold identification earlier in the saga, as Sims-Williams has pointed out (*Irish Influence*, pp. 80–1 n. 5).

([109]) This metaphor is unattested elsewhere. It may relate to the widespread belief that animals and humans in former times were gigantic (Genesis 6:4 states that long ago giants existed *super terram*, 'on the land'), and/or to the Irish term for a wolf, *mac tíre* ('son of the land'). On the wolf-*díberg* connection see West, 'Aspects of *díberg*', p. 962.

([110]) In U, the narrator reveals that it was really a wolf; in D, the woman tells Mac Cécht that it is a wolf, and Mac Cécht kills it once she has dragged it out.

([111]) On the oath-formula see Ruairí Ó hUiginn, 'Tongu Do Dia Toinges Mo Thuath and Related Expressions', in Ó Corráin et al., eds., *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, pp. 332–41.

([112]) Due to a translating slip, Mac Cécht does, however, die in Gantz's translation (*Early Irish Myths*, p. 105) and in some subsequent scholarship (Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos*, p. 165).

([113]) Lines 1515–21.

([114]) Following West ('An Edition', p. 820), I translate *do* (Y and U) as *di* ('from, of'), since the passage does not make sense otherwise.

([115]) Instead of *mo thúath* ('my people'), U has *mórthúatha Ulad* ('the great people of Ulster').

([116]) In U, *imorro* (‘indeed’) is absent and this sentence is spliced with the previous sentence: *Doadbat a láim scéith dó forsa rabatár tri. lll. crecht* (‘he shows him his shield-arm on which were a hundred and fifty wounds’).

([117]) U lacks *ind lám sin* (‘that arm’), but it remains implied.

([118]) This is a relative form, but I follow Knott's and West's suggestion (*Togail*, p. 130, s.v. *imm-beir*; ‘An Edition’, p. 820) that this should be understood as non-relative. Knott prints it *imo-robrad*.

([119]) Instead of *imorro* (‘indeed’), U has *iarom ind lám sin* (‘afterwards that arm’).

([120]) In U Amairgen simply says, *Ro fích ind lám sin innocht, a maccáin* (‘That arm fought tonight, son’).

([121]) Lines 1527–39. D has a close paraphrase, but omits the reference to *dí chutramai*.

([122]) Literally, ‘without its separation [from the body]’.

([123]) With the preposition *for* (‘upon’), the verb *fíchid* (‘fights’) carries the sense ‘prevailed over’ (*DIL*, s.v. *fichid*).

([124]) U's afterword is discussed below.

([125]) Clancy, ‘Court, King and Justice’, p. 170 n. 35.

([126]) Nikolaeva [= O'Shea], ‘The Drink of Death’.

([127]) Lines 980–1. In D (MS, fol. 83r) and E (MS, fol. 21r) the Hostel is referred to as Da Derga's Hostel, perhaps echoing the saga's title.

([128]) Nikolaeva [= O’Shea], ‘The Drink of Death’, p. 306.

([129]) U and D have *fíannaib* (‘*fíanna*’) instead of *díbergchaib* (‘plunderers’).

([130]) John Carey, ed. and trans., ‘Scél Túain meic Chairill’, *Ériu*, 35 (1984), 93–111, p. 101 (I have slightly altered Carey's translation). For a similar proverb see the *dindṡenchas* of

Tipra Sengarman in Stokes, ‘The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindṡenchas’, part 2 (1894), 418–84, p. 447. On the *scéola*, see Joseph Falaky Nagy, ‘The Irish Herald’, in Carey et al., eds., *Ildánach Ildírech*, pp. 121–30; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Oldest Story of the Laigin: Observations on *Orgain Denna Ríg*’, *Éigse*, 33 (2002), 1–18, pp. 12–13.

([131]) Eichhorn-Mulligan (‘*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*’, p. 18) contends that the saga ends on an image of ‘bodily integrity’, but I would add ‘only just’ and suggest that the narrative framing (contrasting with earlier images of wholeness) emphasizes the fragility of what remains.

([132]) U, D, and E have *ara durn* (‘in his fist’).

([133]) D has *dergfola* (‘red blood’, line 978).

([134]) Lines 975–81. Manuscript-texts: Y (MS, col. 732); U, lines 7338–43; D (MS, fol. 83r); E (MS, fol. 21r).

([135]) See pp. 150–2. The remaining instance of *deirgindlid* describes Da Derga's cloak (line 1305).

([136]) Recension III further has Lomna describe Conall as *infuilech forderg* (‘bloody, very red’), here apparently a metaphor for martial ferocity (Stokes, ‘The Destruction’, p. 396).

([137]) Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, line 50; *eadem*, *Táin Bó Cúalgne from the Book of Leinster*, line 205 (and lines 184–96 for Fedelm's description).

([138]) Scowcroft, ‘Abstract Narrative’.

([139]) On the contrasting possibility that the Irish *derg* (‘red, bloody’) lies behind the adjective *deorc* describing the nails piercing Christ in the Old English poem, see Andrew Breeze, ‘*Deorc* “Bloody” in *The Dream of the Rood*: Old Irish *derg* “Red, Bloody”’, *Éigse*, 28 (1994–5), 165–8.

([140]) Michael Swanton, ed., *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester University Press, 1970), lines 15–16, 19, 21–3;

translation in Richard Hamer, ed. and trans., *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London: Faber, 1970), p. 161. On these lines see Donald G. Scragg, 'The Nature of Old English Verse', in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 55–70, p. 68.

([141]) I owe this parallel to Jacqueline Borsje (pers. comm.).