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The Heroic Biography of Fergus mac Róich.

A case study of the heroic-biographical pattern in Old and Middle Irish literature

by

Patricia Ní Mhaoileoin

Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.,
in Old and Middle Irish,
School of Humanities,
National University of Ireland, Galway.

December 2015

Supervisor: Dr Graham Isaac
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Declaration

I, Patricia Ní Mhaíleoin, certify that the present thesis is all my own work and that I have not obtained a degree in the National University of Ireland, Galway, or elsewhere on the basis of any of this work.

Patricia Ní Mhaoileoin

________________________________________

30 September 2014
ABSTRACT

The heroic-biographical pattern has been investigated for other heroes of medieval Irish literature such as Cú Chulainn and Cormac mac Airt, but not much scholarship has been devoted to either the investigation of the pattern outside of these heroes. This case study carried out a survey of the extant literature in order to investigate the heroic-biographical pattern for the Ulster hero Fergus mac Róich. Analysis of extant narrative and genealogical material combined with an analysis and comparison of the patterns proposed by Lord Raglan and Jan de Vries showed that while Fergus possessed a heroic biography, he lacked the tales that constitute the conception, birth and youth episodes of a heroic-biographical pattern. Fergus’ detailed genealogies suggest that there may have originally been these sorts of tales composed on his behalf, but they have simply not survived. This investigation of the extant material relating to Fergus mac Róich has been beneficial in arriving at an understanding the development of his heroic biography and providing a valuable contrast to the heroic biography of Cormac mac Airt, a king-hero, whose heroic biography, of necessity, differs from that of Fergus.

The application of the heroic biography pattern to the extant material regarding Fergus has proven to be a useful analytical tool for the understanding of Old and Middle Irish literature. Certain of the episodes that comprise Fergus’ heroic biography would seem to be unique in the context of early medieval Irish literature; there are no other examples of two warriors fighting to the death for the hand of a woman in Old and Middle Irish literature. As Fergus’ heroic biography is developed it appears that his heroic standing within the literature is diminished, and the composition of episodes which would seem to ‘fill in the blanks’ of his heroic biography do not lend additional prestige to his character in the tales.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been completed without the help, support, and kindness of many people. My thanks are first due to my supervisor, Dr Graham Isaac whose feedback and expertise have been invaluable. He allowed me the space to make the project my own and for that I am truly grateful. I must also thank Dr Nollaig Ó Murafle for stepping in while Dr Isaac was on sabbatical, and for his enthusiasm and valuable feedback.

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Special thanks are also due to Professor Joseph Nagy, for his guidance and advice from afar, and for taking the time to read my dissertation and offer valuable feedback on its contents.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the support my parents who always believed in my ability to complete this project. Thank you for your patience and your constant love and encouragement, and for not giving me up for adoption when stress and a broken digestive system made me difficult to be around.
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>BDC</td>
<td><em>Bruiden Da Chocae</em>, ed. G. Toner Irish Texts Society, 61 (London 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Lec</td>
<td>Book of Lecan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGH</td>
<td><em>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</em> ed. M. A. O’Brien (Dublin 1962)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGSH</td>
<td><em>Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae</em> ed. Pádraig Ó Riain, (Dublin 1985)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIH</td>
<td><em>Corpus Iuris Hibernici</em>, ed. D. A. Binchy (Dublin, 1978)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMCS</td>
<td>Cambridge/Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies</td>
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<td>IHK</td>
<td><em>Die Irische Helden-Und Königsage Bis Zum Siebzehnten Jahrhundert</em>, Rudolf Thurneysen, (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1921)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td>Middle Welsh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCU</td>
<td>Oidheadh Chloinne hUisnigh</td>
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<tr>
<td>O. Ir.</td>
<td>Old Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Revue Celtique</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Scéla Conchobhair maic Nessa</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBC1</td>
<td>Táin Bó Cúailgne</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBC2</td>
<td>Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBC-St</td>
<td>The Stowe Version of Táin Bó Cuailgne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBF1</td>
<td>‘Táin Bó Flidais’</td>
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<tr>
<td>TG</td>
<td>Tromdám Guaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>Visio Tnugdali</td>
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<tr>
<td>VSH</td>
<td>Vita Sanctorum Hiberniae Partim Hactenus Ineditae</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZCP</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie</td>
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0.0 Introduction

The heroes of the Ulster Cycle stand in the shadow of Cú Chulainn. As a result of his pre-eminence in early medieval Irish literature he tends to be the subject of more investigation than the other heroes of the Ulster Cycle. The project aims to shed light on the character of Fergus mac Róich and to examine his role in the literature of early medieval Ireland through the application of the heroic biography pattern to the extant literature. It is hoped that this case study will lead to meaningful conclusions in relation to both the role of Fergus in the early literature and the generative force of his character in the later tales. By ‘generative’ I mean that Fergus inspires the composition of new tales or the embellishment of older, established tales and that these embellishments or new compositions augment his heroic biography.

Thus far the investigation of the heroic biography pattern in Irish heroic literature has been sporadic. In 1977 Tomás Ó Cathasaigh applied the pattern to his investigation of the heroic biography of Cormac Mac Airt, a study which remains as the standard for the application of the pattern to Irish material. Ruairí Ó hUiginn published a concise review of the heroic biography of Fergus mac Róich in 1993. Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin undertook a brief survey of the Ulster and Mythological Cycles in her 2009 book on early Irish literature but to date, no exhaustive consideration has been given to either the heroic biography pattern or the character of Fergus mac Róich. This investigation intends to fill that lacuna in the scholarship undertaken so far by using Fergus mac Róich as a case study against which to apply the international heroic biography pattern.

To do this one first must begin by defining what is meant by heroic biography pattern and then identifying the parameters of the research corpus. So far, varying approaches have been taken in the description of the common biographical pattern and its interpretation. There is neither a universally-accepted pattern describing it nor is there a consensus on its interpretation. In the case of this study it has been necessary to synthesise the heroic biography patterns so far described as no one pattern accurately describes the material as it remains for the character of Fergus. Only tales in which Fergus takes an active role, and which describe the major life events of the hero were considered in this study, as there is no accepted corpus of texts which represent this pattern in the case of Fergus mac Róich.
0.1 The International Biographical Pattern

In Tomás Ó Cathasaigh’s seminal work on the heroic biography of Cormac Mac Airt he draws attention to the problem of methodology highlighting the number of patterns which have been proposed and the fact that they all differ in many respects.\(^1\) Despite the amount of scholarship that has been devoted to the common biographical pattern its exact morphology has yet to be determined. Archer Taylor described the discovery of a biographical pattern as ‘a natural utilization of a pattern easily inferred from life itself, or from biography, history, and human psychology.’\(^2\)

This has been studied by Arnold Van Gennep in his work on the rites of passage, while the rites of passage studied by Van Gennep are not the same in every society he studies; rites of passage are present in each of these societies.\(^3\) Van Gennep posits that the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another, and that progression from one group to the next is accomplished by special act, or ceremonies. The rites of passage are thresholds crossed by both groups and individuals; thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity, old age, death and the afterlife.\(^4\) He says that:

transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings [...] birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialisation and death.\(^5\)

Dundes adds that the relative positions of the rites are what is of importance, their order within the life of an individual or group results in a typical pattern. The differences in matters of detail are inconsequential to the arrangement, which remains the same.\(^6\)

A ‘heroic biography,’ as described by these scholars, is a narrative pattern in which the essential incidents found in hero myths are presented, one which has been

\(^5\) Van Gennep, pp. 2–3.
\(^6\) Dundes, p.106.
identified in a variety of narrative traditions.\(^7\) The morphology of the pattern varies between scholars in relation to the incidents they have chosen to focus on or the heroes they have used in their specific case studies; but, in general, the concept of a heroic biography represents a fixed series of incidents that the hero must navigate between conception and death.

### 0.1.1 Tylor, Von Hahn, and Nutt

The earliest investigation into the nature of hero myths was undertaken by anthropologist Edward Tylor in 1871.\(^8\) He argued that many hero myths follow the same plot, or pattern: the hero is exposed at birth, saved by other humans, or animals, and grows up to be a national hero.\(^9\) This work was followed in 1876 by a more comprehensive investigation by Johann Georg von Hahn who used fourteen cases to argue that all ‘Aryan’ (i.e. Indo-European) hero tales follow an ‘expulsion and return’ formula.\(^10\) In each case the hero is born illegitimately, then after hearing a prophecy of his future greatness the hero is then abandoned by his father. The hero is then saved by animals and raised by a lowly couple. During his lifetime the hero fights wars and returns home triumphant where, among other feats and achievements, he defeats his persecutors, becomes king, founds a city and then dies young.\(^11\) Von Hahn found general agreement in the fourteen biographies, and beyond establishing a pattern and calling the formula ‘Aryan’, he carried out no interpretation on the variations in individual details.

Alfred Nutt’s amendment of both von Hahn’s pattern and the case-study group in 1881 included some Celtic heroes for the first time in the consideration of the common biographical pattern. Nutt’s amendments allowed for greater flexibility within the pattern and his departure from von Hahn’s formula allowed for the

\(^7\) Taylor, p. 128; Ó Cathasaigh p.4.
\(^8\) See Appendix 1: The Heroic Biography Patterns of von Hahn and Nutt (in italics)
inclusion of incidents from tales which otherwise did not fit the formula. Nutt added amendments to episode [1] of Von Hahn’s pattern, stating that not only was the hero born out of wedlock, but that he could also be born posthumously or supernaturally. He amended episode [7] stating that the hero could also be brought up by a widow. He added episodes [9a] and [9b] to reflect the hero’s attack or slaying of monsters and his acquisition of supernatural knowledge through eating a magic fish.

In investigating the tales of Cú Chulainn, Labraid, Conall, Peredur, Arthur, Merlin and Taliesin, he concluded that “all the existing Celtic versions of the formula” had been examined and that while the Heldensage warranted close analogy with other Indo-European hero tales, the transmission of the Celtic tales and the euhemerising scholarship of the day hampered the identification of the mythic features of the tales. Rather than seeing reminiscences of actual events in the Celtic material, Nutt argued for common origin from the same myth-root as the Teutonic and Hellenic heroes. He concluded that there was not a single incident in the Fionn, Cú Chulainn or Arthur tales which cannot be paralleled from the formula or from other Indo-European folk-tales. Careful examination of the Celtic Heldensage, he argued, would reveal the same materials as the common Indo-European folk-tale.

0.1.2 Rank

Otto Rank’s Freudian study of the biographical pattern, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, published in 1914, included heroes from outside the Indo-European area and swiftly dispelled von Hahn’s belief that the pattern was exclusively Indo-European. Rank’s pattern approximates that of von Hahn’s, although Rank was apparently unfamiliar with the latter’s work. Rank studied fifteen heroes and his pattern is limited to what Jungians refer to as the first half of the hero’s life, from his birth to the attainment of a ‘career’:

---

13 Nutt, pp.1–2.
14 Nutt, pp. 38–9.
15 Nutt., p.41.
17 Sargon, Moses, Karna, Oedipus, Paris, Telephus, Perseus, Gilgamesh, Cyrus, Tristan, Romulus, Hercules, Jesus, Siegfried, Lohengrin.
The hero is the child of most distinguished parents; usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy … there is a prophecy, in form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father or his representative. As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal, or by a humble woman. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion; he takes revenge on his father on the one hand, is acknowledged on the other, and achieves his rank and honours.  

The shortfalls of Rank’s pattern are that he does not include female heroes, nor does he consider non-aristocratic ones. He never explains why the hero is usually the son of royalty and his pattern ends with the attainment of the throne. Rank’s theory, because of his psychoanalytical bias, only fits hero myths that cover the first half of life, and of the hero myths that Rank chose for his pattern they come universally from Europe, the Near East, and India. Because of his choice of hero and the limitations of his study, producing a composite synopsis of the hero pattern, rather than a detailed listing of individual incidents, his pattern may not be applicable to heroes who come from outside his corpus of material nor to heroes whose tales contain a death component.  

The heroes of Rank’s pattern are heroic, Segal argues, because they rise from obscurity to attain the throne. Symbolically, however, the hero is heroic not because he wins the throne, but because he kills his would-be killer, the father who abandons him at an early age. As a result of this, Segal says of the hero of Rank’s pattern that “the hero becomes an innocent victim or at worst a justified avenger.”  

0.1.3 Lord Raglan

Raglan’s myth-ritualist study is based in large part on the heroes of Rank’s and von Hahn’s patterns, however, unlike the earlier patterns, Raglan equates the king with the hero and in contrast to Rank’s pattern, and Raglan’s covers the life of the hero from conception to death. His principal concern was to regard as typical a number of incidents which occurred with sufficient regularity in the careers of a number of heroes from both within and without Classical literature. He states clearly

---

18 Rank, p.65.
19 Segal p.16, 186, 189.
21 See Appendix 2: Lord Raglan’s Heroic Biography Pattern
that in tabulating these incidents he is making no attempt to represent the complete careers of the heroes.\textsuperscript{22} Episodes [1]-[13] of Raglan’s pattern correspond to the pattern described by Rank, although Raglan himself never read Rank’s work and was an avowed anti-Freudian.\textsuperscript{23} Differences in the pattern proposed by Raglan and those proposed by von Hahn and Rank can be ascribed to Raglan’s preference for gods and heroes with historical or pseudo-historical patterns.\textsuperscript{24} For Rank, the heart of the pattern is the acquisition of kingship, and for Raglan it is the loss of kingship. Raglan’s hero is driven from and sacrificed by his community in order to save everyone else.\textsuperscript{25} Like the patterns produced before his, Raglan’s hero must be male, and a king, although he can be divine. Raglan maintains that all biographies follow a more or less single pattern, but rather than attempting to explain variations from it; he sought to find an explanation that suited all texts.\textsuperscript{26} Raglan’s pattern begins at conception, outlining that the hero may have an unusual conception and birth, with royal or divine parentage. His pattern includes the abandonment of the hero while still a child, but includes no episodes concerning the youth of the hero. In manhood, the hero is victorious in battles against kings, giants or beasts and wins the hand of a maiden, becoming king. Following this Raglan’s hero is exiled from his kingdom and dies in a mysterious fashion. The pattern outlined by Raglan is explicit in stating that the hero’s children do not succeed him as king.\textsuperscript{27}

0.1.4 De Vries

According to Jan de Vries the lives of all heroes do not necessarily need to contain the complete series of episodes present in the common biographical pattern, and that ‘the hero’s life is the more or less complete reflection of a pattern in which these elements have their fixed places.’\textsuperscript{28} De Vries’ pattern, like that of Raglan, does not simply focus on the first half of life and includes events from conception to death.\textsuperscript{29} His pattern begins at conception and covers the birth and youthful exploits of the hero, allowing for an unusual conception and birth, and abandonment while

\textsuperscript{23} Segal, p.24. See also Raglan, \textit{Jocasta’s Crime} (London: Metheun, 1933).
\textsuperscript{24} Taylor p.118.
\textsuperscript{26} Taylor, p.119.
\textsuperscript{27} Raglan, pp. 174–5.
\textsuperscript{29} See Appendix 3: ‘De Vries’ heroic biography pattern.
still a child. The hero of de Vries’ pattern undertakes feats of valour, wins a maiden and is later banished. The pattern allows for the hero’s return from banishment, and also a second departure from his realm after he has been victorious over his enemies. De Vries’ hero dies young. He makes no claim to completeness, and only attempts to show the widespread nature of the pattern, however, like Rank, he mostly limits himself to Indo-European legend.

De Vries says of the hero that he does not become divine, rather the transition is in the opposite direction, and that the gods have ‘regressed’ to mortal status, albeit the status of a heroic mortal. Ó Cathasaigh argues that the hero being raised to the level of the gods is less important than the transmutation of the hero into something quite other, a sacred personage, by means of the heroic biography. He argues that heroic biography is a virtual life cycle of a sacred personage as part of the prestige legends of the cultural group in question. The hero is a mortal whose life is characterised by certain specific elements which mark him off as sacred, and the presence of a pattern congruent with the international biographical pattern does not prove that this was an historical person, or that these were historical acts. Alwyn and Brinley Rees argue that the pattern of the hero’s life bears little relevance to the events that are historically significant in the lives of men; they follow Lord Raglan’s pattern, and maintain that the heroic biography is rather a virtual life cycle.

0.2 Methodological Problems
The aim of this thesis is to create a ‘heroic’ biography from the corpus of early Irish literature which has come down to us for Fergus mac Róich based on a combination of patterns thus far proposed by previous scholars and to draw conclusions about literature and Fergus’s role in it more generally. The overall advantage to the patterns suggested by von Hahn, Rank, and Raglan is that they are the result of three independent studies of essentially the same material in which all three were able to extrapolate biographical incident sequences from a more or less common body of data and whose sequences reveal a high degree of uniformity. Dundes argues that these independent investigations make it easier to defend that

30 De Vries, pp.211–217.
31 De Vries, p.229.
32 Ó Cathasaigh, p.5.
33 Ibid.
there is an empirically demonstrable hero pattern for at least Indo-European and Semitic heroes.\textsuperscript{35}

That is not to imply that an investigation of common biographical pattern is a complete approach to understanding literature, but rather it is a way of looking at a corpus of texts with a common protagonist through a particular lens. The conformation of the hero’s biography to a particular pattern, Dundes suggests, implies that the folk repeatedly insist on making the version of the lives of the heroes follow the lines of a specific series of incidents.\textsuperscript{36} The application of the pattern to the corpus acknowledges them as disparate and yet thematically related while also treating them as a group and the investigation involves the collection of structured data on each tale in the group, after which the data is analysed with the heroic-biographical pattern in mind.

The methodological problem posed by the heroic biography should be clear, the patterns are not consistent in the episodes that they favour, the types of heroes contained within their various case studies, nor the portion of the heroic life which they survey. This is most likely due to the insular nature of the heroes chosen by the main proponents of the common biographical pattern and the absence in these studies of heroes from Africa, Oceania, or the Americas. There is no doubt that there is a discrepancy between the biographical pattern as it exists and the pattern as it has been rather reconstructed thus far by scholarly investigation. Much more research is needed in order to attempt to reconstruct a composite notion of a legendary figure’s life story.

In his work on the heroic biography of Cormac mac Airt, Ó Cathasaigh opted for the pattern proposed by Jan de Vries as being the most suitable for his project. He notes of de Vries that “he avoids the rigid formulations of von Hahn, Rank and Raglan … and flexibility is allowed as it is called for by the nature of the material.”\textsuperscript{37} Since de Vries’ work is based primarily on warrior heroes it also suits the material under consideration in this project, although it is necessary to depart from de Vries and give principal consideration to the formula proposed by Raglan, despite what Ó Cathasaigh felt as a major shortcoming in its apparent rigidity. Raglan’s pattern was

\textsuperscript{35} Dundes, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{36} Dundes, p.190.
\textsuperscript{37} Ó Cathasaigh, pp.5–6
considered to be more appropriate to this project as it contains within it a longer and more precise sequence than that of de Vries’, and Raglan’s 22-point pattern provides a much more detailed sequence of events to apply to the corpus of literature. The more structured and detailed pattern of Raglan’s was judged to be its strength, and the 22-point sequence would require a more detailed examination of the material at hand than the less structured pattern of de Vries’ which had been favoured by Ó Cathasaigh. The common biographical pattern is effectively concerned with life crises and the episodes contained within it are described by Ó Cathasaigh as the “mythic correlatives” of the rites of passage which were first identified by Van Gennep. If de Vries’ formula provides the general architecture upon which to construct the heroic biography of Fergus mac Róich, then Raglan’s formula provides the detail against which a more precise examination of the Fergus material can be applied. Even though I will discuss both Raglan and de Vries’ patterns in this case study, it will become evident that neither pattern entirely suits all the material under consideration, and the flexibility that Ó Cathasaigh called for in utilizing these patterns will be necessary.

0.3 Application of the Pattern

In the application of these patterns to the extant Fergus material, I have chosen to focus on the themes which feature most prominently in the schemata described by de Vries and Raglan (highlighted below in bold) and which are common to them; these are: an anonymous childhood, the fight with a king/beast or dragon, the wooing of a maiden, attainment of kingship, exile and return, and a mysterious death. Obviously, the heroic biography of a legendary personage contains more subtleties than just these themes, but I judge these to be the most frequently cited and salient incidents in the patterns suggested for a heroic biography. Below are the two formulae laid out side by side with the episodes from each which are reflected in the Fergus material highlighted in bold. In analyzing the pattern as it is judged to be present in the Fergus material it is necessary to recall both van Gennep and de Vries’ assertions above that the pattern itself need not be complete (indeed, only 1 of Raglan’s heroes scores full points in his 22-incident pattern), but that the underlying arrangement remains the same, and the incidents as they are presented in the literature hold the same place as in the pattern.

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38 Ó Cathasaigh, p.22.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DeVries³⁹</th>
<th>Raglan⁴⁰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother is a virgin, overpowered by a god/ has extramarital relations with hero’s father who is a god / god in animal form, or the child is conceived in incest.</strong></td>
<td>The hero’s mother is a royal virgin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth takes place in an unnatural way, or the child is ‘unborn’, i.e. birth by caesarean section.</strong></td>
<td><strong>His father is a king</strong> and often a near relative of his mother; but the circumstances of his conception are unusual; and he is also reputed to be the son of a god.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child is exposed by father who was warning that child was danger to him or by mother who wants to hide her shame. The child is exposed and fed by animals, found by shepherds/fisherman/gardener, or raised by mythical figure.</td>
<td>At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather to kill him, but he is spirited away, and raised by foster-parents in a far country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The child reveals his special features at an early age, or is slow in development/ pretends to be deficient.</strong></td>
<td><strong>we are told nothing of his childhood,</strong> but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero often acquires an invulnerability.</td>
<td><strong>On reaching manhood, he returns or goes to his future kingdom.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Fight with a dragon or another monster. | after a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast, |
| Hero wins a maiden, after overcoming great dangers | he marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and |
| Hero makes expedition to the underworld. | |
| When the hero is **banished in his youth** he returns later and is victorious over his enemies. | becomes king |
| | for a time he reigns uneventfully, and |
| | prescribes laws, but |
| | later he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and |
| In some cases he has to leave the realm again, which he has won with such difficulty | is driven from the throne and city, after which |
| Heroes often die young | he meets with a mysterious death |
| | often at the top of a hill |
| | his children, if any, do not succeed him |
| | his body is buried, but nevertheless |
| | he has one or more holy sepulchres. |

Ó Cathasaigh advises against being solely concerned with the ‘bare bones of an international pattern’, rather he advocates a study of how the pattern operates within the tradition in question. This project is concerned not only with a description
of the events contained within the heroic biography pattern, but investigates how the pattern operates within the Irish tradition. The Irish version of the pattern, Ó Cathasaigh says ‘was valid for the Irish... because it had meaning in terms of the native cultural matrix.’ This study, therefore, proposes not simply to describe the pattern as it is present for Fergus mac Róich, but to seek its meaning in terms of the ‘cultural matrix’ of Medieval Ireland. As with of Ó Cathasaigh’s study of Cormac mac Airt, I have freely engaged in discussion of other topics outside the limited scope of the international heroic biography as necessary.41

0.4 The Pattern in an Irish Context: speculation on its origins

Much work remains to be done on reconstructing the common biographical pattern in an Irish context, with only Ó Cathasaigh’s volume on Cormac Mac Airt and the many detailed investigations of Cú Chulainn attesting to the investigation of the pattern in the Ulster Cycle. Máire Herbert argues that the saga texts were a product of the Early Christian era, and were consciously-created, purposeful narratives in which Christian authors drew not only on native material but on their total literary experiences and are both monastic and literary in nature.42 Rather than being a closed system, early Irish literature is replete with external influences, looking to both a pagan, oral native tradition and to a Christian, literate, Latin one.43 In his detailed examination of the influence of Classical epic on vernacular Irish literature, Miles laments that the application of theories which show awareness from Classical models has been, thus far, restricted to the Táin.44 He notes that distinguishing between the Latin and Greek learning of Christian Ireland on the one hand, and the survival of specifically ‘classical’ or pagan learning on the other can only be imperfectly observed.45 Máire Herbert also notes that there is little evidence of the availability of Classical literature in early medieval Ireland.46

41 Ó Cathasaigh, p.7.
44 Miles, p.9.
45 Miles, p.15.
46 Herbert, p.5.
With regard to the external influences most acutely noticeable in the library of any early Irish monastic scholar, the prime instance is of course, the Bible. Both Dundes and Rank argue that the life of Jesus as contained within the four canonical gospels is an apt example of the common biographical pattern. While Rank only looks to the birth of Jesus in his examination of the common biographical pattern in the gospels (the only scholar to do so), in applying Raglan’s pattern to the gospels, Dundes discerns 17 out of Raglan’s 22-point pattern: 1) born of a virgin mother, 2) has an unusual conception, 5) reputed to be son of a god, 6) an attempt is made to kill the hero, 7) hero is spirited away [flight to Egypt], 8) reared by foster-parents [Joseph], 9) no details of childhood, 10) goes to future kingdom, 13) becomes ‘king’ [cf. mock title of king of the Jews INRI], 14) ‘reigns’ uneventfully for a time, 15) prescribes laws, 16) loses favour with some of his ‘subjects’ (Judas), 17) driven from the throne and city, 18) meets with a mysterious death, 19) at the top of a hill, 21) body is not buried, 22) has a holy sepulchre.\(^{47}\)

Judith Diehl argues that gospel writers created the gospels by using existing sources of literature that were available to them at the time, the authors of the gospels, she argues, framed their narratives in a fashion similar to Graeco-Roman biography (bioi) and the Graeco-Roman aretalogies, exaggerated stories based around the feats of a ‘divine man’ who lived in the past.\(^{48}\) Clyde Votaw is also of this view, arguing that the canonical gospels are biographical of Jesus, “in the nature and form of ancient Greek literature.”\(^{49}\) For Votaw, the closest parallels to the gospels are the reports of Epictetus, Apollonius and Socrates in the works of Arrian, Xenophon and Philostratus.\(^{50}\) While Votaw applies the parallels in a general way, Talbert has also said of the gospels that there exists between them and Graeco-Roman biographies a similarity in that both are intended as a prose narration of a

\(^{47}\) Rank, pp.39–40 and Dundes, p.191


\(^{50}\) Votaw, p.10.
person’s life, apparently giving historical facts, but which are selected to relate the person’s character.\textsuperscript{51}

New Testament scholars currently maintain the opinion, according to Diehl, that the gospels are a blend of historical narrative and literary adaptation. She quotes N. T. Wright who maintains that the canonical gospels are “a unique combination of Hellensitic biography and Jewish history”.\textsuperscript{52} In allowing for the differences in traditional Graeco-Roman biography and the canonical gospel, the biographies were personal stories about eminent individuals, however, the ancient \textit{bios} was not a fixed format and was continually evolving, from which, the gospel genre developed.\textsuperscript{53} There was a literary flexibility, she says, during the time in which the New Testament gospels were written and the early Christians adopted both the historical and biographical aspects of Graeco-Roman literature to suit their own culture and needs.\textsuperscript{54} Blomberg, especially, is of the opinion that the canonical gospels and especially those of Mark and Luke compare quite favourably with the ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman histories and biographies.\textsuperscript{55}

Dundes’ application of Raglan’s biographical pattern to the canonical gospels found in the New Testament reveals a match in 17 out of the 22 incidents and New Testament scholars would appear to be of the opinion that a close relationship existed between Graeco-Roman biographies and the gospels, referred to by Blomberg as “theological biography”.\textsuperscript{56} I would argue that the \textit{literati} of early Medieval Ireland were aware of the basic narrative and plot of the biographical pattern from their study of the Bible, the only external text that we can place with any certainty in early Medieval Ireland and of which we be sure influenced their activities. I would further argue that either implicitly or explicitly, the biographical pattern as represented in the life of Jesus was incorporated into material of their own

\textsuperscript{53} Diehl, p.186.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Blomberg, pp107–8.
creation, similar to the method by which the gospels themselves were formed by 
reinterpreting written documents known to the gospel writers to create the gospels.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{0.5 The Heroic Biography of Fergus mac Róich, a brief summary}

In terms of what we have come to understand as a traditional ‘heroic’
biography, according to the patterns proposed by de Vries, and especially Ragalan, it
is clear from the extant material that the Ulster hero Fergus mac Róich does not have
complete one. Even though the episodes relating to conception, birth and youth are
not reflected in the extant Fergus material, this does not mean that they were not
composed at some point and lost over time. Certainly Fergus’ occasionally
conflicting lineages in the genealogical material suggest that his origins were given a
great deal of time and attention.\textsuperscript{58} The latter stages of the series of incidents which
are understood to comprise a traditional heroic biography are well represented by a
number of tales in the corpus of literature available to us, but Fergus mac Róich
lacks the conception, birth, and youth tales which have come to typify the
international biographical pattern in an Irish context. When compared to Cú
Chulainn, Cormac mac Airt or Finn mac Cumhaill, at first glance the heroic
biography of Fergus mac Róich seems wanting. An examination of the extant
material will demonstrate that although this character lacks the initial stages of a
traditional biographical narrative, there nevertheless remains a wealth of material
from which to understand of the latter stages of his heroic biography.

Chapter One will look at the youth of the hero, lacking as Fergus does any
\textit{comperta} or \textit{macgnímrada} type tales, my investigation of the youth of the hero will
consist of Fergus’ background and what information the genealogical tracts can
reveal about his parentage and his name. Chapters two and three investigate the
maturity of the hero and is, of necessity, separated into two chapters by virtue of the
bulk of material which survives relating to this part of the heroic biography pattern.
Considering the primacy of Fergus’ exile and its establishment at an early date in the
Ulster Cycle, Chapter Two will focus on Fergus’ loss of the throne, his exile from

\textsuperscript{57} For an examination of the biographical pattern in a later Christian context, most specifically in
medieval hagiography, see D. A. Bray, ‘Heroic tradition in the lives of the early Irish saints: a study in
Congress of Celtic Studies} (Ottawa 1986), pp.261–17 (p.262 and 267 where she offers a tentative
scheme for the saintly biography pattern based on the extant lives of 44 Irish saints) and E. R.
232.

\textsuperscript{58} See Appendix 4 for Fergus’ genealogical material.
Introduction

Emain Macha, his presence in Connacht in the service of Medb and Ailill. Consideration will also be given to Fergus’ brief return to Emain Macha after the death of Conchobar mac Nessa and his eventual departure for Connacht again after the death of his wife, Flidais. As part of this chapter, there will be some discussion on the geis in Irish literature and the manipulation of Fergus’ geis by Conchobar mac Nessa in the tales Longes mac nUislenn and Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach. Chapter Three investigates Fergus’ victory over a king, giant or beast, his wooing of a princess and his reign as king of Emain Macha. Chapter Four will investigate Fergus’ death in Connacht at the hands of Ailill mac Máta, and his posthumous roles in three other tales in which the dead Fergus is either brought back from the dead or features in an otherworld vision. An analysis of the genealogies and the early poem, Conailla Medb míchuru, investigates the circumstances surrounding Fergus’ descendants and their departure from Ulster. Chapter Five will contain a recapitulation of the common biographical pattern, a discussion of the pattern as an approach to understanding the literature of early medieval Ireland and the conclusion of the thesis. 59

0.6 Summary and Methodological Considerations

One might argue that to synthesise a heroic biography for this figure from different centuries of creative activity with their own political and ideological agendas is too artificial an undertaking to lead to any meaningful conclusions, but any biographical examination of a literary (or historical) figure must take into account all instances of their role in the literature, and for this reason a corpus of literature was chosen based on Fergus’ active role and the events which frame his ‘life’ found within those tales, as such, any conclusions about Fergus are valid only for the material under consideration. This case study is an examination of the generative influence of this character through the specific lens of the heroic biography pattern. The tales which comprise the corpus of material in this study does not supply us with all the material to create a complete heroic biography no matter which pattern is used. Only the second half of Raglan’s pattern is evident in the Fergus material; likewise, only certain selections of de Vries’ pattern apply to it. Rather than the complete biography of a hero, what seems to be highlighted is an

59 This thesis will not investigate Fergus mac Léti or the similarities between this figure and Fergus mac Róich. For an investigation of Fergus mac Léti, see Ruairí Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige. A brief biography of Fergus mac Róich’, Emanía, 11 (1993), 31–40, pp. 36–38.
elaborate death narrative with much emphasis placed on Fergus’ departure from Ulster and his exile in Connacht, and much effort seems to have been put into the redaction of certain tales to ensure that at least that part of the biography is as complete as possible regardless of the awkwardness with which these insertions occur. It seems to have been of utmost importance for some authors that explanations be given for his period of exile in Connacht, as in the tales *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* and *Longes mac nUislenn*. It also seems to have been important that he die in exile; so that, when he has his eventual homecoming to Ulster in *Cath Airtig*, it is short-lived; and he returns to Connacht following the death of Flidais.

What appears to be revealed in the literature, rather than a purely martial hero, or a king hero, is the creation and maintenance of, perhaps a peripheral hero, but certainly a figure with dynastic prestige. Much effort would seem to have been expended in the creation of several genealogies for him, presented in Appendix 4, and later tales contain mention of the *Síl Fhergusa*, a group through which many later figures trace their own lineage back to Fergus as a prestige ancestor.

Because of the incomplete nature of the extant Fergus material it has been necessary to alternate between patterns in order to achieve a framework for recognizing the kind of biographical narrative that would seem to be present for Fergus, however, in my investigation I will be chiefly referring to the pattern and the incidents proposed by Raglan. I have found that it is only by examining the material in full we can achieve an understanding of at least a partial shape of the biographical pattern that brings together various elements in the texts that are preserved for the character of Fergus. This pattern is a generative and dynamic force in the Fergus material, propelling the development of his narrative over time.
1.0 Chapter One: Youth of the Hero

This chapter will begin by investigating the episodes of the heroic-biographical pattern which comprise the conception, birth and youth of the hero. As none of these episodes are extant in the material related to Fergus, discussion will be limited to a brief survey of the episodes in an Irish and international context. Beginning with a short discussion on the conception, birth and youth episodes, I will then discuss a selection of the episodes found in the heroic literature of Wales and Ireland. Next I will discuss the importance of Fergus’ narration of the macgnímrad of Cú Chulainn in Táin Bó Cúailnge; a pivotal section of the saga which defines the character and martial prowess of Cú Chulainn. Next I will discuss Fergus’ name and parentage, the only aspect of his origins about which we have any information.

1.1 Youth of the hero in the patterns

The scholars who initially investigated the biographical pattern of the hero were agreed that the conception and birth of the hero, as well as the manner in which he was raised, were important elements in the pattern. J.G. von Hahn’s pattern described the mother of the hero as a princess, while the father was either a god, or a hero from another country. The hero of von Hahn’s pattern was born out of wedlock, and to this Nutt added that the hero could be born posthumously or supernaturally. Von Hahn’s pattern contains warnings about the hero’s future greatness and contains an inclusion that he is consequentially driven from his home where he is suckled by wild beasts or is brought up by either a childless couple, or following Nutt’s amendment, a widow.60

Rank’s pattern follows much the same pattern as von Hahn and Nutt. His hero is the child of distinguished parents, the status of the mother is not indicated, but the father is usually a king. The origin of the child is fraught with difficulty either because of the barrenness of the mother or because of some other prohibition or obstacle. Because of foretold danger to the father, revealed in the form of a dream or an oracle, the child is abandoned, but then is saved by a couple of lower status than his noble parents, or is suckled by wild animals.61

61 Rank, p.61.
Raglan’s hero is of similarly royal parentage, with the parents sometimes being related or with the father being a god. The circumstances of his birth are often unusual, although there is an attempt to kill him at birth he is spirited away where he is reared by foster parents. Raglan’s hero has an unremarkable childhood, and nothing is said of him at all.

The patterns presented by these scholars all agree that the hero is of either noble or supernatural parentage, and has a difficult birth after an unusual conception, at which point an attempt is made to kill him, but he is saved from that fate by a low-status couple or wild animals. Only two of the patterns mention the youth of the hero, stating that he is violent and passionate or that he displays a prodigious skill at an early age. Only Raglan’s pattern specifically mentions that the hero has an unremarkable youth, while Rank’s ignores it completely.

There is very little material relating to Fergus’ parentage and youth. In the LL and Stowe versions of TBC it is stated that he is the son of a king, *mac ind ardrig*, and like Raglan’s and von Hahn’s hero patterns he has an unremarkable youth, in that he appears and dies in the literature as a fully grown adult male, and unlike other heroes from the Irish tradition, little is known about his parentage, the circumstances of his conception and birth, or his youth. An argument could be made for assuming that, similar to Cú Chulainn, the prodigious martial skill, strength and physicality for which Fergus was renowned were supernatural traits and not simply the result of training. Another argument could be made that Fergus does not have *comperta* or *macgnímradh* episodes, because, unlike Cú Chulainnhe does not require them, as his function in the literature would appear to be chiefly genealogical and that of a prestige ancestor. Placing so much focus on the lineage of the character and who is descended from him would, perhaps, not require quite as much detail in the early part of the life of the hero. Given the detailed genealogies that were created and maintained for Fergus and his descendants, his origins were at least debated and considered, even if there were no narratives written for this express purpose.

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63 TBC2 l.702, St. TBC l.728.
Chapter One: Youth of the Hero

1.1.1 The youth of the hero in the literature: comparative material

In many examples of the common biographical pattern, much attention is paid to the ways in which the heroes are conceived and the events surrounding their birth and youth. The youthful exploits macgnimrada, courtship and marriage tochmarca, and their deaths aídeda, are outstanding events in the careers of a heroic figure. Rees and Rees describe as illustrative of these episodes of the heroic biography in a Celtic context the births of Pryderi, Lleu Llaw Gyffes, Finn, Conchobar, Cú Chulainn, Conall Cernach and Cormac Mac Airt.64

A brief survey of the heroic literature of Wales and Ireland demonstrates that the hero possesses an unusual or supernatural conception or birth, which often has an animal association that frequently enhances the supernatural qualities of the hero, following which the hero displays a precocious youth during which he requires no training to achieve mastery in his art. For example, Pryderi has overt equine imagery in his fantastical birth tale and grows and matures at a superhuman pace.65 Culhwch’s mother goes mad during her pregnancy and wanders the wastes until she gives birth among swine.66 Lleu Llaw Gyffes is born of a virgin and like Pryderi and Cú Chulainn enjoys a precocious development.67 Finn’s grandfather is a druid and, like Cú Chulainn, he masters martial skills and achieves greatness as a youth.68 Conall’s mother, who was barren, drinks from a particular well, and in doing so, swallows a worm and becomes pregnant. After hearing a prophecy at his birth, Conall’s father attempts to break his neck but fails, leaving Conall with a crooked neck.69 Cormac is raised by wolves after his father’s death and a hunter brings him back to his mother.70

In many of the conception and birth tales of Celtic heroes, the hero’s greatness is foretold; occasionally the hero is destined to bring death or misfortune to those in power, which may be his grandfather, uncle, or mother. Often the hero’s

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64 Rees and Rees, pp. 213–223.
66 Ford, pp.14, 121.
67 Ford, pp.6, 98, 99.
mother is barren and the begetting of the hero is shrouded in mystery; he is born of incest, fathered by a god, or his mother’s pregnancy comes about by her swallowing a creature in water. The hero’s birth can be delayed until the appropriate time, and animals are often associated with his birth and upbringing. The hero can be lost or survive an attempt on his life at birth. During the hero’s youth he displays qualities that mark him out as extraordinary. The hero will, also, on occasion, have two names, or there will be difficulty in securing a name for him.\textsuperscript{71}

In their research, Rees and Rees point out that the nature of the hero’s conception and birth is “all wrong”, rather than being born of married parents who are not blood relations, the hero is more often than not conceived illegitimately by an unmarried mother. In instances where his mother is married, the hero’s father is often not his mother’s husband, and instead is another figure; this union is occasionally marked by violence or trickery and the hero’s birth is often the result of an incestuous union. They remark that “a mockery is made of even the laws of biological nature, for a barren woman may conceive a hero by drinking water, by swallowing worms, or by eating a fish or a grain of wheat.”\textsuperscript{72} Where the hero’s father is not a blood relative, they stress what they refer to as “the third factor”, where the child is born of earthly parents he is also the incarnation of a supernatural essence: a supernatural being, a king, or stranger from another race, in these instances the role of the human father is discounted altogether.\textsuperscript{73}

Where the birth of the child is considered an embarrassment and an attempt is made to get rid of him by exposure or committal to water, unlike ordinary unwanted children the hero endures. More often than not, the people who find him are of a humble status, although he can be reared among the upper orders. The extraordinary nature of the hero is not revealed, then, by his ancestry, which is often unknown, but by his precociousness. The child may either have the ability to express himself in poetry and pronounce judgements, or he may grow with extraordinary speed and master various skills at a very young age. While still a child, as in the case of Cú Chulainn, he may don the king’s armour, present himself at the king’s court, and slay

\textsuperscript{71} Rees and Rees, pp. 223–4; Ford, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{72} Rees and Rees, pp. 225–6.
\textsuperscript{73} Rees and Rees, pp. 226–8, see also Ford, pp. 14, 119.
Chapter One: Youth of the Hero

a monster.⁷⁴ Such a child has no need to grow up; since the heroic traits inherent in the hero child are not subject to any physical development, his presence is, according to Rees and Rees, “a triumphant intrusion upon adult society”, and one of the universal themes of mythology.⁷⁵ In the case of Fergus, however, he does not experience a transition from conception to adulthood, and does not age; there is no indication in the literature of him being anything other than the adult male that he is with all the attendant strength and virility that implies.

In the *macgnímrada* of Cú Chulainn, Rees and Rees identify typical initiation motifs – separation from motherly care, acquisition of a new name, taking up of arms and victory over a wild beast.⁷⁶ The victorious aspect of the ordeal achieved during the rites of initiation is highlighted in these tales, and not the submissiveness that is associated with initiates. The newly-initiated hero can now identify himself with supernatural beings.⁷⁷ Again, this aspect of the hero is contrasted sharply with how Fergus is represented in the literature: he carries with him both an overt and implicit association with supernatural beings, both in his display of superhuman strength at the end of TBC when he shears the tops off three hills and in his prowess and virility, fathering three sons on Medb who then carry on to establish dynasties of their own in other parts of the country.

1.1.1 Fergus and Cú Chulainn: narrating the *macgnímrada*

Even though Fergus has no associated comperta or *macgnímrada*, it is reasonable to assume that were he to possess them, they would be of a type discussed above. Such supernatural origins would provide an explanation for his prodigious size and strength, recounted in SC. The only information that the literature provides about his parentage or his past is that he was born of a king.⁷⁸ It is likewise reasonable to assume that he came to the throne of Ulster by inheriting it from this royal father. Lacking, as he does, the *macgnímrada* episodes of similar heroes in medieval Irish literature, it is noteworthy that it is Fergus who acts as a facilitator of the *macgnímrada* of Cú Chulainn in the Táin. In light of the bond of kinship shared between Cú Chulainn and Fergus, it is only fitting that Fergus is the one to describe

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⁷⁴ Rees and Rees, p.241.
⁷⁵ Rees and Rees, p.244.
⁷⁶ Rees and Rees, pp. 249–51.
⁷⁸ TBC2 1.702, TBC-St 1.728.
the majority of Cú Chulainn’s *macgnímrada* to the host advancing on Ulster who are ignorant of his background and skill set. It is also appropriate that the Ulstermen relate the episodes most demonstrative of his prodigious strength from his youth while in sight of the heads of four of an advance guard whom Cú Chulainn has just decapitated, as demonstration of the veracity of the tales that the Ulstermen in the Connacht camp are about to relate about Cú Chulainn’s prodigious martial skills.79

Cú Chulainn’s reputation and status in the Ulster corps of warriors is initially established in the minds of the advancing Connacht army and in the minds of the audience through Fergus’ relation of the *macgnímrada*. As an Ulsterman, and erstwhile enemy, in the Connacht camp, Fergus is in a unique position to transmit the extraordinary feats of arms that Cú Chulainn achieved while still a child. In fact, Fergus and the Ulstermen are relating information upon which an important aspect of Cú Chulainn’s fame rests, specifically that by the age of seven he had the strength and skill to execute the martial feats of a grown man. Fergus becomes the medium through which Cú Chulainn’s *macgnímrada* are broadcast, and through which Cú Chulainn earns his fame; since a hero’s martial deeds must be public, they must be publicly acknowledged, and the honour that comes from the mighty deeds and feats of arms publicly sanctioned by an ever-vigilant warrior public. Fergus’ communication of Cú Chulainn *macgnímrada* establishes him as the central hero of TBC and has a twofold function. In the first instance it establishes Cú Chulainn’s martial prowess in the minds of the Connacht warrior public and the audience, while also introducing the relationship that the two men share, around which much of the emotional crux of TBC pivots.

Cú Chulainn’s *macgnímrada* are related by way of a series of recollections in which Fergus, Conall, and Fiachu provide a detailed description of the heroic deeds of a young boy. Fergus relates the bulk of the episodes, and the ones most pertinent to establishing Cú Chulainn’s martial reputation as the principal warrior of the tribe, the reputation upon which Cú Chulainn’s honour and fame rest. Fergus informs the assembled Connacht warriors how Cú Chulainn came to Emain Macha as a young boy and how he had the remarkable natural strength to attack the boy-troop as soon as he arrived. He also relates how Cú Chulainn bested one hundred and fifty of the

boy-troop at games and killed a third of them, as well as how, while still only a boy, he rescued Conchobar mac Nessa and his son from the field of battle when it appeared that all hope was lost and Conchobar had been slain. In being cast as the broadcaster of Cú Chulainn’s superhuman deeds and prowess, Fergus delivers an important piece of plot exposition regarding the Táin itself, providing an explanation for the debility that the Ulstermen are suffering from, and explaining why it is that Cú Chulainn is defending the province single-handedly. Conall then takes up the thread of the macgnímrada and relates Cú Chulainn’s killing of the smith’s hound, and finally Fiachu concludes the sequence with Cú Chulainn’s fateful taking up of arms and the death of Nechta Scéne’s three sons.

Cú Chulainn remarks early in the Táin that, provided he is famous, he is content to be only one day on this earth.  

Ward Parks has pointed out that “such fame can be achieved only through the agency of observers” so if there is no one to witness and recount to others the taking up of arms and the feats of valour that the hero performs then there can be no fame and no glory. In light of his close relationship with Cú Chulainn, Fergus is in an exclusive position to be the witness, heroic peer and narrator of the macgnímrada; through his agency these tales of martial prowess are known to the world that is depicted within the Táin and to a wider literary audience.

The heroic biographies of Cú Chulainn and Fergus are quite complementary. In terms of the common biological pattern, Cú Chulainn and Fergus occupy adjacent sections of the spectrum. Fergus lacks the conception, birth, and youth tales that are common in Irish heroic biography, and Cú Chulainn lacks the ancestral aspect of some other prestigious characters in the Ulster cycle in that he kills his only offspring in battle and no one is left alive to claim descent from him; this aspect may not be a traditional element of heroic biography in Irish literature, but is an element of Fergus’ heroic biography to which a great deal of time and attention has been given, and writing, creating, or maintaining genealogies is a
preoccupation within the literature of the time. In each case the one character exhibits an influence over the other: in TBC, Fergus narrates and acts as publisher for the macgnímrada of Cú Chulainn, an important episode in TBC which, as already stated, defines the character and martial prowess of Cú Chulainn. In TBF2 and CLR, after the death of Cú Chulainn, Fergus is invited to return to Ulster in order to aid in the province’s protection from hostile forces and he is granted Cú Chulainn’s land in Muirthemne, quite literally taking his place in a geographical and functional way as a master-warrior of Ulster.

Fergus lacks the ‘origin story’ of the hero that the conception, birth and youth tales in heroic biography provide; tales which serve as explanation for the superhuman or otherworldly aspect of the hero. In the pattern described above, the hero is the son of a god who has come to his mother in human or animal form, or he is conceived and born in another unusual way. These events are the explanations for the ‘otherness’ of the hero who is physically distinct from the rest of the tribe, or who has an unusual or prodigious skill set that has been revealed at an early age. In the case of Cú Chulainn, while possessed of two human parents, a mother who is sister to Conchobar mac Nessa and a father who is brother to Fergus mac Róich, it is revealed that he is also the son of the god Lugh. In an episode of role-reversal Lugh takes on the aspect of his son in TBC when Cú Chulainn needs time to rest and recuperate after suffering injury while defending Ulster. In the case of Fergus, he is of extraordinary strength and size, as recounted in SC, and as a result of his phenomenal virility he is assumed as supernatural ancestor for a number of tribes in the west and south of Ireland, who use his exile in Connacht, and specifically his relationship with Medb and their offspring, to their advantage in claiming descent from this prestige character. In contrast, Cú Chulainn kills his only son in battle and dies before he has the opportunity to continue the family line.

1.2 Pedigree and Supernatural Parentage: Fergus’ Name

1.2.1 Fergus m. Róich

Lacking, as we do, an origin story for Fergus mac Róich, it is necessary to utilise other avenues of investigation to uncover information about his origins and parentage. Ó hUiginn notes that much can be made of his name, and we do know

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84 This will be discussed in more detail in sections 2.1 and 4.3.2. below
85 See 2.7 Return from Exile, p. 60
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that according to the genealogies and Cóir Anmann he was named for his mother Róch or Roach.86 Senchas Síl Ír says of Fergus: *Fergus dano fodeisin iarna máthair mac do Róích ingin Echach meic Carpri* ‘Fergus … son of Roach the daughter of Eochaid son of Cairpre’…87 Cóir Anmann §295 provides a different lineage for Fergus,


Fergus mac Róich: how did it come about? It is not difficult, i.e. Róich daughter of Eochaidm, sone of Dáire, was his mother. He was named after her. Or Róch daughter of Ruad, son of Derg Dathfola and the mother of Súaltach meic Róich. And she gave Súaltach supernatural power. And he used to be called Súaltach Síde [< síd ‘the Otherworld’] after her.89

The Bansenchus names Fergus’ mother as Roach Rithfhota, daughter of Eochu, *Roach Rith-flota ingen Echach, mathair Fheargusa 7 Súaltaig.*90 However, Ó hUiginn notes that neither Eochu mac Dáire nor Rúad mac Deirg Dathfhola are mentioned in the early genealogies91

Thurneysen derived Fergus’ metronymic, elsewhere unattested, from *ro-ech* ‘great horse’.92 Ó hUiginn states that within the Irish and Celtic tradition of deriving names from horses, e.g. Epona, Eochaid, Echtigern, it is a plausible etymology. The prefix ro- ‘great’ has precedent in both Irish and in Continental Celtic, e.g. Robili ‘the very good’ and he points out a parallel Gaulish formation for Roach, Rocabalus

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89 Ibid., p.149.
91 Ó hUiginn, , Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’, p.32.
‘great horse’.  

He further points out that Roach is a masculine noun and the application to a woman is quite unusual, and notes Bruford’s suggestion that it represents a later apocopation of the genitive singular *Roiche, with the shortening having occurred when the importance of Fergus’ mother had long since been forgotten and an alternative patronymic, mac Rosa Ruaid, mentioned in the Rawl. B502 genealogies is invented.  

There appear to be no traditions concerning a woman Roach outside of the genealogies, and even within the genealogical context there is a lack of uniformity. Ó hUiginn agrees with O’Rahilly who suggests that the application of the name Roach to his mother while retaining Russ for his father is a later attempt by which the genealogists attempted to rationalise conflicting genealogical traditions.

### 1.2.2 Fergus m. Rosa/ Fergus m. Rosa m. Róig

In keeping with Rees and Rees’ suggestion of the hero that he may have two names, Fergus is also alternatively referred to as Fergus Mac Rossa. Ó hUiginn states that this was certainly an alternative name and not a separate one since both forms alternate in the literature and in the genealogies.

In the Rawlinson B502 version of the genealogies of Conmaicne, Mac Tóeth (Dóet) is called the son of Fergus mac Rosa, while the corresponding passage in the Book of Lecan has him as the son of Fergus m. Roaich. More often both names appear together: Fergus mac Rosa mic Róig (rodánai), while occasionally the order of the alternates is inverted, with Fergus being referred to as Fergus m. Róig m. Rosa in the genealogies of Feir Maige, as Fergus m. Rosa m. Róig Rodánai in the genealogies of the Cíarraige from LL, and Fergus m. Rosa m. Rudraige in the genealogies of the Cíarraige genealogies from Book of Lecan.  

The doubling up of Fergus’ genealogical origins is also described in the section on the Cíarraige in Rawlinson B

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94 Ní Chathain, P. ‘Traces of the cult of the horse in Early Irish sources’ *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 19 (1991), 123–132, p.129 erroneously suggests that the name is an archaic formation which preserves the otherwise extremely rare category of feminine o-stem nouns.

95 Ó hUiginn, Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’, p. 33, see also O’Rahilly, p. 481 n.1.

96 O’Brien, p. 319. The B.Lec genealogy continues ‘ m. Echach Ruaid m. Cairpri Cendeirg m. Lugdach m. Lugair m. Loga m. Deithnend m. Danand m. Bratha m. Connaich m. Deatha m. Ceu m. Celebair m. Boais m. Anboais m. Eber m. Eithiur m. Airich Feabruald m. Milead Espáine’.

97 O’Brien, p.386.


Chapter One: Youth of the Hero

502: do síl trá Fergusa do Chiarrassib ut prescripsimus 7 atát dá genelach la Fergus .i. genelach cu hÉrech Febra mac Mílede; ab hÉrech usque Ádam no a Rudraige usque hÍr; ab h Ír usque Ádam 100 ‘the Ciáraige are of the seed of Fergus… and Fergus has two genealogies, i.e. to Érech Febra son of Míl and from Érech to Adam, or from Rudraige to Ír and from Ír to Adam’. There exists an alternative tradition in LL genealogies of Corco M’druad which traces his lineage through Ross and Rudraige through Eber and Ír back to Míl Espáine. 101

1.2.3 Fergus m. Rosa m. Rudraige

Unlike Róich, Russ/Ruad is not isolated and the name appears frequently in the Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae. 102 Senchas Síl Ír in the Book of Lecan names Ross (or Rossa) mac Rudraige as father of Fergus Mór, Glas, Niall and Fer Tlachtga, trí meic nó ceathra meic la Rosa mac Rudraidi. i.e. Fergus Mór; Niall; Glas; Fer Tlachtga. 103 Fergus is also mentioned as being one of the sons of Ros Róig Rodáni in the genealogy of the Araid, Trí meic Rosa Róig Rodáni: Fergus, Fer Ceug, Fer Tlachtga. 104 In the genealogy of the Ciáraige he is listed as the son of Ros son of Roach Rodáni, Fergus m. Rosa m. Róig Rodáni. 105

In the second recension of TBC, Fergus is introduced as Fergus meic Rosa Ruaid 106 and Conchobar mac Nessa as Conchobar mac Fachtna Fáthaig meic Rossa Ruaid meic Rudraigi. 107 O’Brien thinks it appropriate to connect this figure with the Russ Ruad son of Fergus Fairrce. O’Rahilly adds to this Leinster connection and suggests that the adjectival rúad ‘red’ was borrowed from Russ Rúad son of Fergus Fairrce through the influence of Find fili mac Rosa Ruaid of Leinster. 108 Ó hUiginn counters this suggestion by arguing that it was more likely that it was the influence of Medb’s husband, Ailill mac Rosa Rúaid do Laignib. 109

100 O’Brien, p.288.
O’Brien, p.255 ‘... m. Rosa Róich m. Rudraidi m. Sithrigi m. Duib m. Fomair m. Airgedmáir m. Sírláim m. Findr m. Blátha m. Labrada m. Cairpri m. Ollamain Fódla m. Fiachach Finscothaig m. Sétina m. Airtri m. Airt m. Éibir m. hÍr m. Milead Easbáine’.
102 O’Brien, pp. 726–7 (Ross), 726 (Ruad); 728 (Russ).
104 O’Brien, p.386.
106 TBC2 l. 388.
107 TBC2, l. 4756–7.
108 O’Rahilly, p. 480, n3.
109 TBC2, l.38.
There is a tradition that unifies the two Russes in the Leinster genealogies, \(^{110}\) Conchobar mac Nessa is referred to as son of Cathbad son of Russ Rúad son of Fergus Fairrce. \(^{111}\) Cathbad, for his part, is generally depicted as a descendant of Rudraige via Congal Cláríngnech. \(^{112}\) Rudraige is generally depicted as ancestor of all the Ulaid who are referred to en masse as Clanna Rudraige. There are several characters who have this name in Lebor Gabála not least of whom is the Rudraige who was king of Ireland for seventy years and whose pedigree traces his descent through Ollamh Fótila to Míl Espáine, and from whom many of the mythical kings of Ireland claim descent. \(^{113}\)

Ó hUiginn makes an argument based on the first element of the name Rudraige that as a byform of the adjective ruad ‘red’ it appears as a common noun and as a personal name. \(^{114}\) He goes on to point out that further evidence for rud as a byform of ruad is provided by the words ruide ‘strong’ orig. ‘red’

\(< {^*}r udh-\text{-}i o, \text{ruidi}d \text{‘reddens’}, \text{rondi}d \text{‘reddens’} \text{(pret. rerid)} \text{<} ^*\text{ro}^{n}d\text{-}d, \text{ruccae} \text{‘shame’} \text{<} ^* \text{rudh}-\text{kio/kia}.\(^{115}\)

Both Ó hUiginn and Bruford draw attention to the fact that the most famous bearer of the name Ruad is Ruad Rofhessa, an alternative appellation for the Dagda. \(^{116}\) Ó hUiginn emphasises that even though the epithet rofhessa is a later formation, the possibility might exist that Ruad did not originally mean ‘the red/strong one’ but actually derives from *ro-wid- ‘great knower’. \(^{117}\) This would have been further aided by the homophony between *ruad (gen. sing.) and the adj rúad. Such a paradigm split in consonantal-stem nouns is not an unusual phenomenon in Irish. \(^{118}\) Bruford makes an argument that the name Rus is properly Rús (gen. rósa), deriving it from a contraction of the compound ro + fis, ro-fhis ‘great knowledge’. He suggests that Rús Ruad is simply a reversal of In Ruad Ro-fhessa, and rather than meaning ‘the

\(^{110}\) Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’ p.34.
\(^{111}\) O’Brien, p.22.
\(^{112}\) O’Brien, p.271.
\(^{113}\) Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’ p.34 cf LG v518 v114.
\(^{114}\) Ibid.
\(^{115}\) Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’ p.34 cf LG v518 v114.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Ibid. Cp. sui g. saud (<*so-wid-s, * so-wid-os), this would have resulted from a split in the paradigm with nominative ruí being generalised as an indeclinable form and the gen. ruad forming a new o-stem paradigm.
red haired one of great knowledge’, it simply means ‘know-all the redhead’.\textsuperscript{119} This being the case, Bruford argues that Fergus, along with Conchobar and Ailill is being identified as the son of the main god.\textsuperscript{120} For Ó hUiginn, however, this interpretation of rus/rús seems to be unlikely, since, as he points out, the vowel is customarily written short. He makes an alternative argument, suggesting a meaning of rus ‘countenance’ or ‘shame, blushing’, which etymologically would have meant ‘redness or red’. This would take Russ to have meant ‘the Red One’ and the use of the adjective rúad as an attempt to clarify the original meaning which had since become obscure.\textsuperscript{121}

1.4 Conclusion

As mentioned above, Fergus lacks the comperta and macgnímrada sections of the heroic biography and nothing is known of his parentage or youth, however, if we are to take Dundes and de Vries’ evaluations of the pattern into consideration, what matters is not whether the pattern is entirely complete, but that what elements of it are presented are done so in order. I do not consider it a shortcoming of the pattern that it is incomplete in the ‘youth’ respect. The pattern that is present, for the most part presents the biographical episodes in order. I will discuss the deviation from the pattern below where appropriate.

What little we do know about Fergus’ ancestry is contained in the genealogies which display some confusion regarding the exact nature of Fergus’ pedigree. This confusion is evidence of the attempt to reconcile the figure of Fergus either through descent from the Sídhe or through Míl Espáine by way of various intermediaries with the changing socio-political structure of early medieval Irish society. It is clear that he was deemed important enough to have a genealogy that stretched back to the foundation of the ruling hierarchy. The men who constructed and maintained the patrilineal genealogies were responsible for making and adjusting the past in order to suit the needs of the present and were active in about developing new myths and making adjustments to the prevailing conditions as they saw fit. They are of necessity ideological statements which reveal both society’s organisation and its perception. In the framing of genealogies to suit the political status quo, the past

\textsuperscript{119}Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’, p.34.
\textsuperscript{120} Bruford, p.132.
\textsuperscript{121} Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’, p.34.
can quite legitimately be subjected to the workings of the creative imagination and this leads to the imaginative re-creation of the past as conscious literary activity.\textsuperscript{122}

2.0  Chapter Two: Maturity. The hero is driven from the throne

The common biographical patterns all contain within them some element of exile, either willing or forced. In episode [5] of von Hahn’s scheme the hero is driven forth from home when still a child, but when he is an adult the hero episode [9] seeks service in foreign lands and then episode [10] returns to his own country, retreats, and, as Nutt added to von Hahn’s scheme later, returns again. The hero of Rank’s scheme only suffers exile as a child when he is surrendered to water in a box in order to mitigate the threatened danger to his father. Raglan’s and de Vries’ patterns, however, contain an elaborate series of episodes concerning the exile and occasional return of the hero. Episodes [16] to [19] in Raglan’s pattern deal with the exile of the hero, where episode [16] the hero loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and episode [17] is driven from the throne or city. The exile episode of Raglan’s pattern also contains the death of the hero, but this will be discussed separately. The hero of de Vries’ pattern is exiled in episode [9], which describes how the hero is banished in his youth and returns victorious. De Vries makes allowances, like Nutt, for the hero to leave his kingdom for a second time after his return from exile.

2.1  The Pattern in Context: Exile

The exile aspect of the common biographical pattern is the principal element in the extant Fergus material. It is the oldest tradition with which he is associated and it is the feature of his biography which is most frequently exploited or commented upon. The bulk of the tales which feature Fergus in the Ulster Cycle relate to his status as an Ulster exile in the court of Medb and Ailill and his relationship with the royal couple. While he is in exile, he carries on a sexual relationship with Medb and during TBC he is an agent in the enemy camp, providing advice and information to both sides whilst all the while refraining from engaging in battle. There is very little in the extant material that places Fergus in Ulster at all, either in the role of king or warrior.

123 Nutt, pp.39–42.
124 Rank, p. 61.
125 Raglan, p. 175.
126 De Vries, pp.212–216.
While both Raglan’s and de Vries’ schemes are the ones which best reflect the exile aspect in the Fergus material, it is a prominent feature of the extant material that the exile episode is out of order with the general pattern, taking place before the hero attains a victory over a beast or king, or wins a maiden or marries a princess, or becomes king. Any episodes which could be interpreted as Fergus’ engagement in battle with either king or beast, and the majority of his associations with women, take place once he has been exiled from Ulster. Since the hero’s exile, described in the patterns discussed above, comes after the hero defeats a dragon or beast in battle, acquires a wife and becomes king, is inverted in the Fergus material, the circumstances of his departure from Ulster and his presence in Connacht will be considered before these other episodes. The exile of Fergus from Ulster and his role as ambassador, or agent in the enemy camp, is the oldest and most persistent theme of Fergus’ heroic biography, and an argument can be made that the other episodes in the pattern which deal with battle and the taking of a wife which do not take place in Ulster are subsequent to his exile, since by necessity, they must have been composed after Fergus’ exile was already established in the literature.

2.2 Part 1: The hero loses favour with the gods and/or subjects and is driven from the throne

In terms of how the pattern described above is reflected in the extant Fergus material, only de Vries and Raglan attempt to put the exile of the hero in context. Von Hahn is content to state simply that the hero seeks service in foreign lands, and de Vries to state that the hero is banished. Raglan is more specific, and states that the hero’s exile comes about after he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects before he is driven from his throne and the city. In the case of the prose material we have for Fergus, it is clear that his road to exile is uneven, and occurs in three stages. SC and CLR relate how the Fergus first loses his throne to Conchobar mac Nessa in what should have been a temporary arrangement, but which proves to be so prosperous that the nobles of Ulster elect to keep Conchobar as king, displacing Fergus completely. LMU and OCU recount how Fergus is then driven from the kingdom and goes into exile. Since this series of episodes is dealt with in many separate tales, I propose to discuss the loss of kingship and then the retreat into exile as separate events in order to fully investigate the evolution of the sequence.
Chapter Two: Maturity. The hero is driven from the throne

If we investigate these episodes sequentially, we see that the extant literature reveals that the first episode whereby the hero loses his throne and favour is revealed in three tales: *Fochunn Loingse Fergus meic Róig* (hereafter FLFmR), *Scéla Conchobhar meic Nessa* (hereafter SC), and *Cath Leitreach Ruibhe* (hereafter CLR).

### 2.2.1 Fochonn Loingse Fergus meic Roig

This tale is partially preserved in LL, fol. 185v, col. b, ll. 7-52. Only the opening portion of the tale is extant and it lacks a conclusion, Breatnach has argued that a version of it is also embodied in the later Táin Bó Flidais.\(^{127}\) That the tale deals with the banishment of Fergus is clear from the title, but due to the incomplete nature of the text it is unclear how this was established. The remaining portion simply relates how two youthful warriors came to a feast at Emain Macha on a day when Fergus and Dubthach were absent. The text continues with a description of these warriors, their appearance at Emain Macha, and their recounting of their skills before their admission to the feast. The text ends with their admission to the ‘royal mansion’ of Emain Macha.\(^{128}\) Hull’s brief discussion of the linguistic forms in the extant fragment of the text leads him to conclude that it was written at least as early as the beginning of the Middle Irish period. He bases his conclusion on the distinction between deuterotonic and prototonic verbal forms, the invariably correct use of infixed pronouns, the preservation of disyllabic oäc, the survival of the neuter and superlative, the constant occurrence of the equative followed by the accusative, and the use of ol and olséat instead of the later forms ar and or. These features combined with what he refers to as the ‘literary primitiveness of this fragment’ lead him to suggest a date of composition of the ninth century.\(^{129}\)

Hull comments that the absence of the concluding portion of the tale allows for speculation regarding the ways in which the plot of the tale would have been resolved. He suggests that one of two possibilities is likely regarding the conclusion of the tale. In the first suggestion he speculated that the warriors occupied Fergus’ position on the couch at the feast, an action which offended him, and upon his return he quarrelled with them and this eventually led to his banishment.\(^{130}\) Or, another possibility is that during an assembly the heroes are challenged to combat by a

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\(^{127}\) Hull, pp.295–298.

\(^{128}\) Hull, p.294.

\(^{129}\) Hull, pp.293–294.

\(^{130}\) Hull, pp.293–294.
Chapter Two: Maturity. The hero is driven from the throne

‘demonic’ or otherworldly creature, similar to the ugly ‘bachlach’ who appears at Emain Macha and challenges the warriors to single combat at the end of *Fled Bricrend*.

§91 Bá uauthmar ocús bá granni a innas in bachlaig [...] suíllí cichurda budi inna cind, méit chroe ródaim céchtar de na dá sula sín fria chend anechtar. Remithir dóit lama neich aile cach mér dú dá méraib. Cepp ina lámh chlí irraibe ere fichet cuinge do damaib. Biáil ina lámh deis i n-deochatár tri coecait bruithdamna, bui feidhm chuinge sesrige ina samthaig, nothesclado finna fri gaith ar altnidecht.\(^{131}\)

Horrible and ugly was the carle’s disguise […] Ravenous yellow eyes he had, protruding from his head, each of the twain the size of an ox-vat. Each finger the size of a person’s wrist. In his left hand a stock, a burden for twenty yoke of oxen. In his right hand an axe weighing thrice fifty glowing molten masses [of metal]. Its handle would require a plough-team (a yoke of six) to move it. Its sharpness such that it would lop off hairs, the wind blowing them against its edge.\(^{132}\)

§94 ‘[...]táet co tallur-sa a chend de innocht ocús co talla [sa mo cenn dím-sa imbarach dadaig]’\(^{133}\)

‘I may cut off his head tonight, he mine tomorrow night.’\(^{134}\)

Thurneysen noted the similarities between the episode of this type in FLFmR where two armed otherworldly figures enter the assembly and similar episodes in French Arthurian romances.\(^{135}\) The figures in FLFmR are described as being youthful champions and strong men, ‘dias oác-fene [...] dá ecland, dá thrén-fer’\(^{136}\) with jet black bristling hair, and black skin ‘batir duibidir cir’. Their physical stature is imposing, with broad feet, ankles and knees, ‘batir métithir coire colptaige a nhglúine ...Leithit leth n-dam-šeiche cechtar a n-dá thraig. Ba mmoir choire n-darta cechtar a n-dá odbrand’. They carried weapons: shields, ‘ro·boí foraib scíath for muin cechtar de. Ba lleithir domain dabcha’, javelins ‘sleg condúala miled i lláim cechtar de’ and swords as large as a weaver’s beam ‘batir móir claideb ágarmna a n-dá claideb’.\(^{137}\) Hull points out the parallels in the Middle English Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; the knight that enters the hall during Arthur’s feast is similarly

\(^{132}\) Henderson, p. 117.
\(^{133}\) Henderson, p. 120.
\(^{134}\) Henderson, p. 121.
\(^{135}\) Thurneysen, *IHK*, p. 321
\(^{136}\) Hull, p. 295.
\(^{137}\) Hull, p. 296–7.
gargantuan, ‘his lyndes and his lymes so longe & so grete./ Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were.’\textsuperscript{138} Not only that, but he appears hostile and is entirely green, ‘He ferde as freke were fade./ and oueral enker-grene.’\textsuperscript{139} The green knight is not as heavily armed as the two men who enter Emain Macha, carrying only a twig of holly in one hand and an axe in the other, ‘Bot in his on honde he hade a holyn bobbe/ [...] & an ax in his oþer’.\textsuperscript{140} Similarly to the warriors in Emain Macha, the Green Knight’s weapons are massive in size and engraved, ‘a hoge & vn-mete,/ A spetos sparþe to expoun in spelle quoso myȝt / [...] al bigrauen with grene’\textsuperscript{141}

Only the title of the tale refers to Fergus’ exile, and given the incomplete nature of the text we are left to speculate exactly as to the cause of his loss of kingship and his departure from Ulster. The tale under this title is not listed in either tale list A or B, but the title is mentioned in the list of remscéla in D iv 2.\textsuperscript{142} Since it is preserved in only one manuscript we do not have the luxury of comparing it to variant copies. The tale lists do contain a story referred to as \textit{Tochomlod Loingse Fergusus a hUltai}, and the miscellaneous section of tale list B includes the title \textit{Longus nUlad}, which, Mac Cana says, may refer to either this story or to \textit{Longes mac nUislenn}. Mac Cana also makes the suggestion that the title \textit{Feis Emna} in tale list A also refers to the story of \textit{Fochonn Loingse Fergusus}.\textsuperscript{143}

\subsection{2.2.2 Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa}

The only complete version of SC is preserved in LL ff. 106a—107a. Fragments of it survive in the Book of Lismore, f. 167va—167vb (olim 125b), and in the Book of Ballymote, f. 136Ra—136Va. Stokes notes that the first three paragraphs of the tale correspond to the beginning of \textit{Compert Conchobair} and describes the text as having particular value as ‘a specimen of Early Middle Irish’.\textsuperscript{144}

The episodes of SC that are of interest here are §§5-8 which describe how Fergus relinquished the throne of Ulster and how Ness established her son on it. §5 describes how Ness, Conchobar's mother, agrees to marry Fergus on the condition

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} vv..149–50, p.38.
\item \textsuperscript{140} vV.206–8. p.42.
\item \textsuperscript{141} vV.208–16. p.42.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Thurneysen, IHK, p.321
\item \textsuperscript{143} Proinsias Mac Cana, \textit{The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland} (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980), p.67 n4.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Stokes, ‘Scéla Conchobair’, p.18–21.
\end{itemize}
Chapter Two: Maturity. The hero is driven from the throne

that he relinquishes the kingdom to Conchobar for the period of a year at the end of which he may have it back.

§5  Bói dano Fergus mac Rossa i rígu Ulad. Adcobrastar-side in mnáí .i. Ness, do mná i dó. Nathó, ol sisi, co ndomrab a log .i. ríge mbliadne dom mac, conid tairle co n-erberthar mac ríg frim mac [...] Foid tra iar suidiu in ben la Fergus, ocus coighbairther ríge n-Ulad do Chonchobur. 145

Fergus the son of Ross was then in the kingship of Ulster. He desired the woman, even Ness, for his wife. “Not so,” quoth she, “till I get a guerdon therefore, to wit, a year’s kingship for my son, so that it may come to pass that his son may be called the son of a king.” […] So after this the woman sleeps with Fergus, and the kingship of Ulster is nominally Conchobar’s. 146

§7 and §8 describe the displeasure of the nobles of Ulster at being exchanged as a bride price, and so they decree that Fergus should lose the kingship of Ulster permanently and that Conchobar would retain his throne.

§7  Ba dímicin mór leo Fergus dia tabairt hi tindscra. Roptar buidig immorro do Chonchobor ar a degthidnacul dóib. Ba sí immorro a n-immacallaí, an ro rír Fergus scarad dó friss: an rochennaig Conchobar anad aici. 147

They deemed it a great dishonour that Fergus had given them (to Ness) as a bride-price. But they were thankful to Conchobar for his goodly gift to them. This then was their suffrage: “What Fergus sold, let it part from him: what Conchobar bought let it stay with him.” 148

§8  Is andsin tra ro scar Fergus fri ríge n-Ulad, ocus iss andsin tra ro [con]gaired ardrige choicid Herenn do Chonchobor mac Cathbad. 149

So tis then that Fergus parted from the kingship of Ulster, and tis then that Conchobar was called the overking of a fifth of Ireland. 150

In SC, Conchobar’s assumption of the throne is considered temporary until his reign proves to be more prosperous than that of Fergus. Angered by their king’s decision to relinquish the throne, the nobles of Ulster elect to keep Conchobar as their regent permanently, citing Conchobar’s generosity and Fergus’ poor decision to give up his position in the first instance. The same

146 Stokes, ‘Scéla Conchobair’, p.25.
150 Stokes, ‘Scéla Conchobair’, p.25.
events are related in CLR, but with extra emphasis given to Conchobar’s prosperous reign.

2.2.3 Cath Leitreach Ruibhe

CLR is a Middle Irish rom-scél to TBC, and is preserved in five manuscripts, three of which are in the Royal Irish Academy, C.1.2, fo.19b (Stowe), 23 K 37, p.190-193, and E4.3. There is another version in the British Museum, Egerton 106, fo. 50v, and a copy in the National Library of Scotland, MS 72.1.5 (Advocates Library, MS V, fol. 1b). The Edinburgh MS is the oldest version of CLR, but it is incomplete, the opening paragraphs are missing and §8 is unreadable, whilst other letters and words in the text are impossible to decipher.\footnote{151} Dobbs says of the manuscripts that RIA MS C 1.2 is the most complete of the oldest forms of the narrative, which she ascribes to the fifteenth century. According to Dobbs and MacKinnon, the language of the Edinburgh MS is ‘more archaic’ than that of RIA MS C 1.2, and Dobbs argues that the only difference between the texts is the more archaic language in the Edinburgh manuscript,\footnote{152} an assertion with which van Hamel disagrees. He says that from such an assertion, one could infer that 72.1.5 would be the exemplar; however, he argues that most of the differences are minor, and in most cases it is C 1.2 that presents the best readings, while 72.1.5 contains many mistakes and scribal errors.\footnote{153} His investigations found that there may have been a common text which was mostly, although not consistently, better preserved in C 1.2. He sees no reason why this original text should not be regarded as the archetype, pointing out that nothing in the language of either version of the story points to the Old Irish period and therefore CLR ‘has no claim to high antiquity.’\footnote{154}

The portion of the text that relates to Fergus’ relinquishing of the throne occurs at the very end of the tale where it seems to be remarkably out of place. The episode bears no relation to the tale which precedes it and it comes after the enumeration of the dead of the titular battle. However, as Edel Breatnach points out, the episode provides an explanation for the competition between Conchobar mac Nessa and

\footnote{153} Van Hamel, pp.59-60.  
\footnote{154} Ibid.
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Fergus for the kingship of Ulster, and provides a context for the plot of TBF. The episode is generative within the context of the heroic biography in that it provides an introduction to the circumstances surrounding Fergus’ wooing of Flidais and a context for the enmity between Fergus and Conchobar.

§15 Feargus mac Rosa for Ulltaib re VII mbliagan co eirig Concubar 7 dorat Feargus gradh do mathair Concubair, i. do Neasa ingen Eachach Salbuidhe, 7 doraid Neasa nach faighfedh leis ach muna fhaghad in aiscid do iarrfadh hair gemadgar indgar, 7 do raigh Feargus co tibreadh di 7 dorat. “Agus ised is coma lion” ar si “righ Ulad do Concubar co ceand mbliadna.” Agus do raigh Feargus co tibred 7 dorat. Et bai Concubar bliadain a rigi nUlad 7 fa maith tra rigi Concubair. Bam or a h-ith 7 a blicht 7 a meas 7 a torad. Agus do iar Feargus a righi fein a cind bliadna 7 do raighsitar Ulaid nach tibhridis fein a righe don fir dorat a tinnscra mna iat 7 corfearr do righi Concubar na eisean. Do righsita Ulaid Concobar.

Feargus mac Rosa ruled the men of Ulster for seven years until Conchobar was brought up. Feargus fell in love with the mother of Conchobar, Ness, daughter of Eochaid Salbuidhe. Ness told him she would marry him only if he would grant her request, whatever it was. Fearghus promised to grant it and granted it. “Here’s the gift that I want,” she says, “the throne of Ulster for Conchobar for a whole year.” Feargus promised to grant it and granted it. Conchobar reigned one year over the men of Ulster and his reign was very prosperous. Great were the products of wheat, milk, acorns and fruit. At the end of the year Feargus again asked his throne. The Ulstermen replied that they would not give up their kingdom to a man who was using them as a dowry, and that Conchobar was a better king than he. The Ulstermen crowned Conchobar.

2.3 Part 2: The hero is driven from the city

Von Hahn’s episode [9] where the hero seeks service in foreign lands and episode [17] of Raglan’s pattern where the hero, having lost the favour of the gods and or his subjects is driven from the city, or de Vries’ episode [9] where the hero leaves the realm are well represented in the Fergus material. Fergus’ exile from Ulster, either in Tara, or later and more enduringly in Connacht, is one of the oldest themes of the Ulster Cycle. Paired with his relationship with Queen Medb, Fergus’ exile is the thematic point around which much of TBC revolves, and correspondingly on which many of the tales within the Ulster Cycle is based.

The poem beginning *Conailla Medb míchuru* (hereafter CMM), preserved in Bodleian (Oxford) MS Laud 610, 93 b 2-94 has been ascribed by James Carney to the seventh century, although he provides no linguistic criteria for this assertion. Carney tended to be overly optimistic in his dating of Old Irish texts, but this poem still represents the earliest introduction of Fergus’ exile in the Ulster Cycle. This poem introduces the earliest evidence of the enduring tradition of Fergus’ exile in the camp of Medb and Ailill. In this poem, however, in contrast to the later prose versions of TBC, Medb and Ailill are located at Tara rather than at Crúachan. It has been suggested by Carney and Olmsted that the poem represents an archaic metrical version of TBC much older than the prose version as it has come down to us today, described by Carney as the “oldest evidence of Táin Bó Cúailnge”.

LMU, preserved in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster and the fourteenth-century Yellow Book of Lecan, preserves the most dramatic account of Fergus’ departure from Ulster. The later tale OCU, from the fifteenth-century Glenmasan manuscript, purports to present the same saga of the fate of the sons of Uisliu, however, it differs from the earlier LMU in certain respects. LMU is the older of the two texts, whilst also being the shorter. It is defined by what Hull describes as an “economy of words and emotional restraint”, features which are not found in OCU. The lack of emotional restraint in the latter is evident in the increased number of lays assigned to Deirdre in comparison with LMU. Cosmetic differences aside, these are two different treatments of the same material. In OCU Fergus’ role is enhanced from that presented in LMU; he appears as a rather different character in the later tale, and the ambiguous nature of his departure to Connacht in LMU is replaced with a more distasteful motivation; however, his role is still brief.

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2.3.1 Conailla Medb míchuru

CMM is part of the ‘Laud genealogies and tribal histories’ and details the migration of prominent Ulster figures to the south and west of Ireland, among them the descendants of Fergus mac Róich.\textsuperscript{160} The poem contains a cursory summary of Fergus’ exile, in Tara rather than in Crúachan, his role in TBC and his subsequent migration along with his followers to Munster. The poem is prefaced by 20 lines of prose which is titled \emph{De causis quibus exules Aquilonensium ad Muminenses adducti sunt} (About the reasons by which the exiles of the north were led to Munster) in which are detailed the migrations of Ulster families which have connections to Fergus mac Róich.

Section 1 of the poem, lines 1-27, deals with Fergus and his situation as an exile in the camp of Ailill and Medb. Olmsted says that the account of Fergus’ situation is a reference to an early version of TBC and holds that the events described in this section of the poem are consistent with the events related in Recension 1 of TBC.\textsuperscript{161} Olmsted also argues that there are other tales alluded to in the poem apart from TBC, such as LMU which deals with Fergus’ exile, and Olmsted sees the migration of Cland Cethernd to Munster echoed in Tochomlod na nDéssi.\textsuperscript{162} Carney points out that the poet is not dealing with TBC directly; rather, he presents the political situation surrounding the Táin as attendant to the main purpose of the work, which is to provide a number of Munster septs with an Ulster ancestor.\textsuperscript{163}

The poem does not reveal the circumstances by which Fergus finds himself in the service of Medb and Ailill in any great detail. By way of explanation of this set of circumstances the poem states that Medb enjoined Fergus with contracts that were evil, strong and forced: Con-alla Medb míchuru/mac do Roich ruadchuru/ cuir sir for Fergus forcomol.\textsuperscript{164} It continues to state that she summoned associates to her

\textsuperscript{162} Olmsted, ‘Earliest Narrative Version of the Táin’, p. 6
\textsuperscript{163} Carney, ‘History of Irish Literature’, p.122.
\textsuperscript{164} Henry, ‘Conailla Medb míchuru’, p. 61. I refer to Henry’s 1997 reconstruction of the text. For the prose account, Henry has added some readings from the Book of Ballymote and the Book of Lecan (f.116b).
in an alliance with her for an ‘evilly-sworn journey’: Timgart cuici cardini / cuaird in n-díthrib drochmóite / drogaiceille cundomne / condiacht solam sochraitte.\(^{165}\)

Fergus, in turn, is described as a warrior of great valour whose leadership and strength inspired the men of Ireland. ‘Auruath niath nertchridi / na(d)bo fri nth fand fulomain / fo-gert guss gaile Fergusa / firu iath nÉrenn mórdee’. The poem alludes to Fergus having been outlawed by Conchobar without providing any details of the events surrounding the banishment. ‘Fergus fuacarta / fo-ocrad crib la Conchobur: / A comand erred ecnach hUlath / chur a h-iath nis-tórnebad/ tórund ceurt cumachtai.’ The poem continues to say that Fergus and his band, having been outlawed by Conchobar gathered at Tara: ‘oc Temair truim tetorig/ to-llēcset Ulaith nollmrugi / ol scarsat fri flaith fledolig’.\(^{166}\)

The prose introduction, *De causis quibus exules Aquilonensium ad Muminenses adducti sunt*, is of an unascertained date, and is more revealing than the poem in its explanation for the presence of Fergus in the service of Ailill and Medb. It relates that Fergus turned against his countrymen on account of a woman, i.e. Medb: ‘rogabsat hUlaid indib di āg Fergusa meic Rosa Roig ō rochinset. Ar fecca[i]s Fergus for Ulta di āg mnā i.i. di āg Medba Crúachan, ar imgeogain ar imt[h]ōin mnā fria chenēl fadessin’.\(^{167}\) This explanation is not presented in the poem in quite the same terms. There is nothing in the prose introduction either describing or alluding to the ‘evil’ contracts of the opening lines of the poem to which Fergus was subjected by Medb. The poem would seem to suggest that Fergus was forced into a relationship with Medb on account of these evil contracts, which, presumably were imposed upon him. Fergus’ description in the poem as a warrior of great valour whose strength and leadership were an inspiration to the men of Ireland would appear to be at odds with a man who would so easily forsake his people for a woman, as the prose introduction would have it, a state of affairs which echoes that of Recension 1 of TBC. This explanation of some kind of love connection between Fergus and Medb would be all the more believable and perhaps be less a cause for disgrace if the material were more developed. As it stands the relationship between the two as presented in the cőrugud aile section of TBC and the prose introduction to

\(^{165}\) Henry, p.61.

\(^{166}\) Ibid.

\(^{167}\) Henry, p. 56.
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CMM is vague and under-developed, especially when considered in relation to Fergus’ later relationship with Flidais in TBF2. The situation in the poem presents a scenario which is more ambiguous than Fergus abandoning his own people for the sake of Medb. Instead, it offers a loose set of explanations for Fergus’ banishment from Ulster and for his presence in the court of Ailill and Medb, viz. that he was subject to evil contracts forced upon him by Medb, and having been outlawed by Conchobar because of it, finds a place in her court. The poem itself draws no connection between the two sets of events, but the prose introduction joins those dots for the reader and adds more spice and scandal to it.

2.3.2 Longes mac nUislenn

LMU is preserved in TCD MS 1339 (LL), fol. 192r b11-193r b24. It lacks a title but its colophon declares it to be the exile of the sons of Uisliu and of Fergus and the violent deaths of the sons of Uisliu and Deirdre. It is also witnessed in TCD MS 1318 (YBL), col. 749 l. 20 – col.753. This copy of the tale has a title, Loinges Mac n-Uislenn γ longes Fergusa γ aided Derdrinne. MS Egerton 1782 in the British Library also contains a copy of the tale, ff. 67r - 69v l. 9. Two transcripts of this version of the tale are preserved in TDC MS 1287 and NLI MS G 138. In his investigation of the manuscripts, Vernam Hull argued that the LL version of the text was from a different source to the texts preserved in YBL and Eg. 1782. In contrast to the LL text, he says that the latter share several common mistakes which he surmises they inherited from their exemplar. He is certain that the Egerton text is not a copy of the YBL text since it differs from YBL both in terminations and in vocabulary. However, the errors in the texts of both Egerton and YBL support an origin from a common exemplar differing from the one from which the LL text originated. In order to reconcile the three versions of the texts, he argues that the Egerton text must have arisen from an immediate ancestor which introduced changes in the exemplar common to both YBL and Egerton, but which are not found in LL. He concluded that the Egerton text was not copied from YBL or from LL, but originated from a “prototext which no longer survives” (O in the following stemma), and which was composed in the eighth or, most likely, ninth century. For the revised text (X in the stemma) from which he suggests the LL version descends (L in the

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168 See 3.5.3 Flidais, p. 93
169 Hull, Longes Mac N-Uislenn, p.7.
170 Hull, Longes Mac N-Uislenn, p.8.
stemma, with Y representing the YBL version and E the Egerton version), he ascribes a date of the early eleventh century. Thurneysen suggests that the tale has an eighth or ninth century layer, but says that there are linguistic forms which are not older than the eleventh. Hull argues that the text as it is transmitted represents a revision to the original text which was made ‘at the very end of the Old Irish period or shortly thereafter’. Based on the Middle Irish forms in LMU he suggests a date of ‘about AD 1000’ for this revision, but states that the archetype ‘considerably antedates the tenth century’ (see diagram below for Hull’s stemma).

![Stemma Diagram]

Fergus’ part in LMU is quite brief. If the tale was composed in part to explain the reason for Fergus’ exile in Connacht, as part of a process surrounding the Táin wherein narratives are constructed in order to explain the inconsistencies within TBC, a better developed storyline for Fergus would be expected. As a back-story for why Fergus would find himself in exile at the court of Medb and Ailill, LMU expands on the events of CMM and gives a definitive reason for Fergus to be an exile at war with his king and in the service of the enemies of his people. It is worth

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172 Thurneysen, *IHK*, p.324
173 Hull, *Longes Mac N-Uislen*, p.29
175 Hull, *Longes Mac N-Uislen*, p.9. Hull argues that Y and E belong to a different manuscript tradition to that of L on the basis of the mistakes common to them which do not appear in L, which, he suggests they inherited from their exemplar, labelled P in the stemma above. He argues that E is derived from an immediate ancestor which introduced the changes in the exemplar common to Y and E, which he labels Z in the stemma.
noting that the men who are mentioned in LMU as Fergus’ co-guarantors, Dubhthach and Cormac, are also mentioned in the opening lines of Fergus’ *aided* as being present with him in Connacht.\(^{177}\)

Fergus’ role in LMU comes about after a declaration from the Ulstermen that it is lamentable for the sons of Uisliu to be exiled from their homeland because of the crime of a ‘bad woman’. They entreat Conchobar mac Nessa to exercise leniency and allow the exiles to return home. Conchobar agrees and arranges guarantors for them. Following this, a message is sent to the exiles that their safe return will be ensured. The exiles agree to return to Ulster with Fergus, Dubhthach, and Cormac mac Conchobuir as guarantors. Unbeknownst to Fergus, however, and through the subterfuge of Conchobar mac Nessa, it was arranged that he be invited to ale-banquets. Fergus’ son, Fiacha went with the exiles in his stead and Fergus and Dubhthach remained at the feast.\(^{178}\)

In Fergus’ absence, and despite the efforts of his son, Fiacha, the sons of Uisliu are slain on the green of Emain Macha. Fergus arrives too late to prevent the carnage, but kills Conchobar’s son, Mane and his nephew, Fiachna. Fergus and the outraged Dubhthach and Cormac engage Conchobar in battle and between them kill three hundred Ulstermen. The maidens of Ulster were put to death by Dubhthach, and Fergus burned Emain. With three thousand exiles, they sought refuge at the court of Medb and Ailill.\(^{179}\)

2.3.3 *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisnigh*

In his research on OCU, Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith notes that the tale is preserved in ninety MS copies of which eighty-seven were available to him.\(^{180}\) He notes that the Glenmasan Manuscript, NLS Advocates MS 72.2.3 is the earliest, albeit incomplete, copy of OCU by at least one hundred and fifty years.\(^{181}\) The manuscript was probably written in the fifteenth century, according to Stokes, and Thurneysen and Mackinnon concur that the manuscript cannot have been produced

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\(^{177}\) Meyer, *Death Tales*, p.32. Cormac’s sobriquet, however, has changed to reflect his new status as an exile. He is no longer Cormac mac Conchobuir, but Cormac Conlonges mac Conchobair.

\(^{178}\) Hull, *Longes Mac N-Uislenn*, p. 47.


\(^{180}\) Mac Giolla Léith, p.24, 27. He provides a complete list of the MSS and their groupings in his edition of OCU.

\(^{181}\) Mac Giolla Léith, p.27
Chapter Two: Maturity. The hero is driven from the throne
earlier than the end of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{182} The earliest complete text of OCU is RIA MS B iv 1. Mac Giolla Léith notes that the text is similar in plot to that in the Glenmasan manuscript but contains verbal divergences from the majority of the other manuscript witnesses, most notably in the verse sections. It is noteworthy in the context of the present study that the only other text to be contained in the Glenmasan manuscript is the acephalous later version of \textit{Táin Bó Flidais} which contains Raglan’s episode [12] and de Vries’ episode [7] where the hero wins a maiden.

OCU is not a revised version of LMU, but rather must be considered a different tale with the same cast of characters and setting, but one which presents an altogether different version of events. Chief among the differences between the two versions of events are the enhancing of Deirdre’s role and the contrasting diminished roles played by the sons of Uisliu. Mac Giolla Léith points out that the characters of the male warriors, Fergus and the sons of Uisliu, are ‘mere pawns in the struggle between Conchobar’s desire for revenge and Deirdre’s attempts, aided by Leborcham, to prevent him from extracting it.’\textsuperscript{183}

OCU dispenses with the background detail of Deirdre’s birth, the prophecies surrounding her influence over the province, her segregated upbringing and her meeting with Naoise, her coercing of him into eloping with her, the party’s departure to Scotland, and their flight to an unnamed island in the sea. Fergus’ introduction in OCU comes after the decision is made to call home the sons of Uisliu from Scotland. Conchobar says that Naoise is under prohibition not to return to Ireland in peace except in the company of one of three people: Cú Chulainn, Conall Cernach or Fergus,\textsuperscript{184} building on the reasons presented in LMU for Fergus being sent to fetch the exiles home. Conchobar asks each one in turn what their reaction would be were the sons of Uisliu to be killed in spite of the surety provided by them. Of the three, Fergus is the only one who replied that he would not seek Conchobar’s death, but he

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{183} Mac Giolla Léith, p.15.
\textsuperscript{184} Mac Giolla Léith, pp.88–89.
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adds that he would inflict death and destruction on Ulster. Conchobar accepts his reply and announces that it is Fergus who will go for the sons of Uisliu.185

Conchobar advises Fergus to go to the Fortress of Borrach upon his return from Scotland and not to allow the sons of Uisliu to be detained until they reached Emain Macha. Meanwhile, Conchobar goes to Borrach and requests that he give a feast to Fergus, since it is one of his prohibitions to refuse, and this Borrach agrees to do.186 When the exiles arrive in Ireland, as he promised Conchobar, Fergus goes to the fortress of Borrach where he is offered a feast, and where the geis is implemented, with Borrach stating that it is geis for Fergus to leave a feast before it has finished. Realising that he has no choice but to abandon the exiles, Fergus sends his sons Iollan and Buinne as extra protection in his stead, confident of the abilities of his sons to protect the exiles.187

2.4 Evolution of Fergus’ exile

Regardless of whether Carney’s seventh century date for the composition of CMM is accurate, and it is not within the remit of this discussion to investigate the date of that poem, it still probably reflects the earliest source in which Fergus’ exile is mentioned or explanations presented for his situation, however vague and under-developed those explanations might be. In the poem the reasons given for Fergus’ presence in the camp of Medb and Ailill in Tara are that he was under evil and forced contracts by Medb and that he was banished by Conchobar. The poem does not provide any indication of the ordering of those events, nor does it provide an explicit explanation for the reasons behind Fergus’ banishment, but it may be inferred from both the poem and the prose introduction that Medb was at the heart of it, either because of the evil contracts enjoined upon Fergus by her or that it was his desire for Medb that was the cause of his exile. In any event, the status quo as presented by the poem itself and the introduction are both in keeping with the córugud aile section of TBC1 which would appear to have been well-established by the eleventh century.188 However compelling a reason this may have been for Fergus to be exiled from his province, this is the only time that Fergus’ relationship with

185 Mac Giolla Léith, pp.90–1.
186 Mac Giolla Léith, pp.92–3.
187 Mac Giolla Léith, pp.100, 102.
188 TBC1 Il 1040-1146, see Doris Edel, ‘Caught between history and myth? The figures of Fergus and Medb in the Táin Bó Cúailnge and related matter’, ZCP, 49-50 (1997), 143-169, p. 166.
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Medb is given as a reason for his presence in Ulster. The later tales which deal with this central theme of the Ulster Cycle pay scant attention to his relationship with Medb, or the love triangle among Medb, Ailill and Fergus, which was, as Doris Edel suggests, either marginalised or simply not developed.\textsuperscript{189}

It would seem that by the middle of the ninth century, an attempt was made to provide an explanation for the presence of Fergus in the court of Medb and Ailill which the contents of CMM did not go to sufficient lengths to provide. It is possible that was the goal of the composition of FLFmR, However, since FLFmR is incomplete and exists in only one copy, this is difficult to state with any certainty. However, as yet another version of Fergus’ exile to Connacht, LMU, existed by the eighth or ninth century,\textsuperscript{190} it is also possible that FLFmR was already incomplete at an early stage, necessitating the creation of LMU, which offers a new version of the story of Fergus’ exile in Connacht. This new tale, which Thurneysen and Hull both concur is not older than the eleventh century,\textsuperscript{191} provides a variant reasoning for his exile, and is at odds with the reasons presented in both CMM, FLFmR and TBC1. Instead, it presents Fergus’ love of ale-feasts and the manipulation of that fact by Conchobar, which results in Fergus’ abandoning his charges as a cause for his exile, and not, as the much earlier CMM and TBC1 would have it, his love for Medb.

In the early Middle Irish period, with the composition of SC, there is a marked departure from Fergus’ relationship with Medb as the impetus for fall from grace in Ulster and his banishment to Connacht. Instead Ness and her son are introduced, continuing the tradition established earlier that was apt to make poor decisions when it came to women. His abdication of his throne at Ness’ request and the establishment of his antagonistic relationship with Conchobar provide a meaty back story why it would be that Conchobar would seek to trap Fergus by calling his geis into play and causing him to abandon the exiled sons of Uisliu to their fate.

By the time the early Modern Irish OCU comes to be composed, this enmity is well-established. Along with the fifteenth century CLR, the relationship between Fergus and Conchobar and its attendant antagonism have well and truly replaced the abandoned love storyline between Fergus and Medb as being the reason the hero

\textsuperscript{189} Edel, p.150.
\textsuperscript{190} Thurneysen IHK, p. 323.
\textsuperscript{191} Thurneysen IHK, p. 324, Hull, pp.29, 31.
finds himself in Connacht, and is a fully-developed aspect of the narrative. This is especially evident in the composition of *Cogadh Fergusa agus Chonchubhair*, which is very close in style and content to CLR and to which Dobbs ascribes a similar date.\(^{192}\) She also proposes the idea that ‘some editor’ wished to unite the two texts in a single narrative, and so added the final paragraph of CLR to provide a link between them; the battle itself and the story proper finish with a list of the dead.\(^{193}\)

The *geis* never to refuse an ale-feast is built upon, or invented, in the later OCU, where there is a more descriptive version of the conspiracy between Conchobar and Borrach to invite Fergus to a feast, knowing he could not refuse, and thus leaving the exiles exposed and ready for the slaughter. OCU is the only tale to explicitly mention that it is Fergus’ *geis* that is being manipulated. LMU contains no mention of the connection between Fergus’ *geis* and the invitation to the feast. It is simply stated that it was through Conchobar’s manipulation that the invitation to attend an ale feast was extended with the knowledge that the sons of Uisliu would refuse, and the implication that Fergus would not. The text states that Fergus and Dubthach stayed behind while the exiles continued to Emain Macha. While OCU is more explicit in its description of Fergus’ *geis*, in contrast to LMU, OCU does not contain within it any description of what happens when Fergus does not break his *geis*.

### 2.5 Fergus’ character change

The manner in which Fergus is portrayed in the literature is not consistent and the depictions of Fergus in the tales which tell of his exile differ dramatically. In the poem CMM, though not in the prose introduction, he is a respected warrior who, although banished from his kingdom, is being held to evil and forced contracts by Medb. In the prose introduction to the poem he is presented in a less honourable light, as an exile who abandoned his people on account of his desire for Medb, who is still cast in the same light. In FLFmR, since the tale is incomplete, he does not figure at all; only the title of the tale suggests the ultimate outcome of the events which are introduced in the extant material. In LMU he is portrayed as a hero of Ulster who avenges the death of the exiles he was charged with protecting, however, the reason for his abandonment of them is not explicitly stated in the text, after

\(^{192}\) Dobbs, ‘La Guerre entre Fergus et Conchobhar’, *RC*, 40 (1923), 404-23, p.404

\(^{193}\) Dobbs, ‘La Guerre entre Fergus et Conchobhar’, p.405.
which he goes into self-imposed banishment. In the later OCU he is cast in an altogether different light and the tone of the section which deals with his abandonment of the sons of Uisliu is altogether different from that in LMU.  

James Carney has suggested that the function of LMU within the Ulster Cycle is to give an explanation of the circumstances of Fergus’ exile from Ulster and his presence in Connacht during the Táin. But this story is apparently not the ‘traditional’ story which explained the reason for the exile of Fergus. LMU replaced FLFmR, where two Otherworld figures usurp Fergus’ throne during his absence from Emain Macha. LMU arguably shows Fergus in a bad light, even if he is upheld as being a warrior of some virtue. Of LMU, James Carney suggests that the ‘fiction writer’ of the Deirdre story has carried out a thorough white-washing of Fergus’ character, since in this tale there seem to be honourable reasons for his exile in Connacht, more honourable at least than deserting his people for a foreign queen. This would apparently contrast with CMM and the wider genealogical tradition where Fergus’ departure from Ulster and his undeveloped but oft-quoted relationship with Medb present him in a negative light, something that is re-established by the composer of OCU in the early modern period.

The rewriting of the character of Fergus in OCU would seem to have been of central concern to the author, and Fergus’ portrayal in this later tale differs completely from what we find in LMU; the principled warrior king has been replaced by what Ó hUiginn refers to as a ‘weak and villainous figure’ whose character flaws lead to the death of the sons of Uisliu. Despite this blackening of Fergus’ name and reputation, Fergus’ most significant role in the Ulster Cycle is one of statesman. He is often described as an honest broker, championing the disadvantaged. While appearing to be the perfect candidate to provide sureties to the returning sons of Uisliu, it is apparent that Fergus is also likely to be deceived or exploited, especially in matters concerning Conchobar. As I have described above, by the time the later tales are composed Fergus’ exile is intimately connected with

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196 Mac Giolla Léith, p.11.
197 Ó hUiginn, ‘Growth and Development’, p.150.
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Conchobar. As it happens, Conchobar manipulates events in such a way as to invalidate the effectiveness of Fergus’ guarantorship.\(^{199}\) The demonising of Fergus in OCU, and to a certain extent in LMU, provides a compelling narrative of a man, previously honourable, fallen out of favour, with a decision to make. Cornelius Buttmer says of the events in LMU that they bring ‘simultaneously into play a set of ultimately dichotomous values.’ He remarks that there is a compelling conflict between the freedom of an individual to act as he or she may see fit and the weight of social responsibility. While one may make choices, he says that each choice has unforeseen implications which may turn out to be favourable or otherwise. The compelling aspect to LMU, he argues, appears to lie in the suggestion that the conflict of such values as freedom and social responsibility is inescapable, and ultimately, results in tragedy.\(^{200}\)

### 2.6 Fergus’ geis and the heroic code

The warrior society presented in early Irish literature is one which places a great deal of importance on the absolute value of honour. Honour and shame exist in opposition to each other, and are publicly declared valuations of one’s character by verbal praise, satire, ritual or symbolic action.\(^{201}\) In the tales which turn upon considerations of honour and status, Charles-Edwards says that the characters appear to be driven by intense forces far beyond that which might be considered rational.\(^{202}\) He goes on to suggest that the preservation of honour was the principal consideration for the intended audience of these types of story.\(^{203}\) According to Myles Dillon, the basis of all geis was honour; if a man violated his geis, he lost his honour.\(^{204}\) Joseph Dunn noted of the geis that it was neither positive nor negative, but that the person adjured was either compelled or bound by duty to do a certain thing.\(^{205}\) Dineen notes in his dictionary that the violation of a geis led to misfortune or death.\(^{206}\) O’Leary says of the geis in heroic literature that it was interwoven into concepts of generosity and hospitality where gifting becomes a compulsory aspect of what he terms the ‘competitive zero-sum game’ of aggressive competitive hospitality in


\(^{202}\) Ibid.


\(^{205}\) Dineen, An English Irish Dictionary (Dublin: Irish Text Society, 1904), s.v. geis.
which there can only be clear winners if there are also obvious losers. Fergus is under geis not only not to refuse a feast, but also, as Borrach points out, it is also prohibition for him to leave a feast before it has ended.\textsuperscript{207} When Fergus returns from Scotland he is honour-bound to preserve his geis by attending Borrach’s feast, depriving the Sons of Uisliu not only of their guarantor, but also of the protection of a man except under whose safeguard it was geis for Naisi to enter Ireland.\textsuperscript{208}

\textbf{2.6.1 Geis and honour: Fergus’ choice}

An aggressive and competitive system of hospitality was a feature of early Irish literature. The feast was often an arena for hostile outbursts between warriors. It was not only an occasion for non-martial competition, boasting and jeering, but also for the display of wealth, and provided the most obvious forum for the public appraisal of the champions and the conquered.\textsuperscript{209} Katherine Simms’ 1978 article highlights that such compulsory guesting and feasting was not limited to the literature, but formed an important part of Irish society.

Simms outlines the social landscape of twelfth to sixteenth century Ireland as being broadly rural and based on subsistence agriculture and a barter economy. She points out that whilst coins were known and used for certain transactions throughout Ireland in this period, they were not the basic medium of exchange. The economy was regulated by customs which she describes as ‘guesting and feasting’. She defines ‘guesting’ as going to someone’s house with the intention of exacting or demanding hospitality, and ‘feasting’ as entertainment where the host voluntarily issues invitations.\textsuperscript{210} The rights to hospitality in Ireland are detailed in both the law tracts of the Old Irish period and in sixteenth-century state papers, Simms summarises these legal rights in three categories: the right of a traveller to food and lodging, the right of a lord to be entertained by his vassals, and the right of a king to billet his servants on the inhabitants of his kingdom.\textsuperscript{211}

\textsuperscript{207} Mac Giolla Léith, p.100.  
\textsuperscript{208} John Revell Reinhard, The Survival of geis in Mediaeval Romance (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1933), 34,102.  
\textsuperscript{209} O’Leary, ‘Honour-Bound’, p.100.  
\textsuperscript{210} Simms, p. 68.  
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
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Most pertinent to the circumstances surrounding the invocation of Fergus’ geis is the second of those categories, the right of a lord to be entertained by his vassals. It is a ‘guesting’ scenario that is outlined in OCU where Conchobar demands a feast of Borrach, and knowing that it was geis for Fergus to decline an invitation, arranges to have Borrach invite Fergus in his stead. Borrach is not providing the feast voluntarily, in this context it may be understood as part of the compulsory cosheries which were owed by every vassal to their lord. Nor is the invitation which is extended to Fergus voluntary. O’Leary describes an invitation to attend a feast as representing a public challenge that could not be ignored. Mauss suggests that feasts represent complex gifts which one does not have the right to refuse, since refusal would result in the loss of honour by admitting defeat in advance.\footnote{Marcel Mauss, \textit{The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies}, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen and West, 1969), 10-11. Philip O’Leary, “Contention at Feasts in Early Irish Literature”, \textit{Éigse}, 20 (1984), 115–27, p. 118.} Invoking Fergus’ geis means that he cannot refuse the invitation, which, if we are to consider O’Leary’s definition of a feast as being at the heart of the competitive system of hospitality in Irish literature, then even were Fergus not under geis to attend, the invitation would still be obligatory.\footnote{O’Leary, ‘Honour-bound’, p.93.} This would appear to be closer to the situation as it is described in LMU, which contains no mention of Fergus’ geis and states simply that he was invited to an ale feast.\footnote{Hull, \textit{Longes Mac N-Uislenn}, p.46.}

The aggressive and competitive system of feasts depicted in Irish literature is described by O’Leary as a factor in the perpetual contest between lords, kings and persons of status to ruthlessly gain and maintain prestige. The extravagant generosity of the guesting and feasting system, he argues, was mandatory.\footnote{O’Leary, ‘Honour-Bound’, p.100.} At the root of the complex and aggressive system of hospitality is an overarching obsession with the establishment and preservation of one’s honour, which O’Leary describes as a ‘basic and constant value [...] of fundamental significance to the social structure itself, encouraging cohesion and commitment to shared ideals.’\footnote{O’Leary, ‘Contention at Feasts’, p.115.}

He suggests that the redactors of early medieval Irish literature were interested in the ‘narrative, thematic and ethic possibilities suggested by situations in which characters are compelled to make personal choices’; these compelling choices,
he adds, are either sympathetic to the heroic value system presented in the literature, or transcend it entirely.\(^{217}\) He argues that at the heart of the problem of choice and consequence for the Irish hero is the competitive and intensely public nature of the heroic code by which the characters of early Irish literature live.\(^{218}\)

Fergus’ angry response to Borrach in OCU,\(^ {219}\) his ensuing rage at being put in the predicament of having to choose between his responsibility to the exiles under his protection and his responsibility to maintain his public honour by accepting the invitation shows an awareness on the part of the character regarding the nature and consequences of the situation in which Conchobar has placed him. His decision to abandon his charges and attend the feast is justified since his *geis* obliges him to partake of and maintain the network of competitive hospitality. Deirdre’s subsequent anger at Fergus’ decision is also justified since it means that the primary responsibility of the hero to provide protection has been relegated to secondary importance after the maintenance of his *geis*.\(^ {220}\) The manipulation of Fergus’ *geis* and his ultimate decision to honour it show a character torn between his duty to his ruler and the many, mutually contradictory ways in which his personal honour could be either maintained or destroyed.

### 2.6.2 Honour and Public Sanction

The loss of one’s personal honour and the sanction of losing face may seem superficial to a modern audience, but laughter and therefore public ridicule was a conscious condemnation of behaviour deemed unacceptable to the warrior public, and was also a direct judgement; laughter was designed to mock and scorn.\(^ {221}\) An awareness of the devastating potential of laughter and public ridicule was never absent from the heroic mind in the early literature, O’Leary argues.\(^ {222}\) The potential for harm on the part of the mocked was neither metaphoric nor psychological; scars left as a result of public jeering at the hands of one’s social group had the capacity to

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\(^{218}\) Ibid.

\(^{219}\) ll.244–47.


\(^{222}\) O’Leary, ‘Jeers and Judgements’, p.17.
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be physical; enech ‘face’ refers to all the virtues most highly prized in the heroic ethos: honour, dignity, status, protection, security, generosity, hospitality, are all encompassed by this term. 223 In a passage from Críth Gablach, a person’s disgrace is graphically represented on his face, *cacc fora enech*. 224 In *Tochmarc Luaine* Ć Aided Athirne, Luaine dies as a result of the satires made upon her which left three blotches of shame, blemish and disgrace on her face. 225 The self-image of the hero is a reflection of the public opinion of his society; the hero’s existence achieves meaning only in a social context, and when he is rejected, or when aspersions are cast on his socially sanctioned honour, the hero becomes stripped of his identity. 226

In attempting to maintain his honour, the sacrifice of life for the Irish warrior — either his own, or someone else’s — is far easier than the sacrifice of ego; and in the face of the relentlessly competitive and intensely public nature of the heroic code, Fergus is torn between duty and personal honour, and chooses the latter. As mentioned above, O’Leary maintains that there was a fascination on the part of the redactors with the narrative, thematic, and ethic possibilities posed by situations like this, in which the characters are compelled to make personal choices. 227 While the dilemma introduced by his decision not to break his *geis* represents undoubtedly a sophisticated and skillfully executed piece of narrative drama, literary choice may not have been the only motivating factors of the authors of these tales. Ó hUiginn argues that the negative presentation of Fergus and the manipulation of his *geis*, most notably in the later LMU and OCU, represents not simply a literary choice on the part of the author, but suggests that the disparagement Fergus suffers in the tales is reflected on those who claim descent from him, 228 and that the authors are making a much larger statement than just a comment on the heroic ethos and the economy of reciprocal generosity. The revision of tradition on the basis of furthering political agendas was not unusual; 229 however, it remains uncertain what precise political

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227 O’Leary, ‘Choice and Consequence’, p.27.
229 Mac Giolla Léith, pp. 11–12.
purpose the replacement of FLFmR by LMU, or indeed the denigration of Fergus’ character by the author of OCU might have served.

2.7 Return from Exile

Episode [9] of von Hahn’s pattern states simply that the hero seeks service in foreign lands, but episode [10] of his pattern states that the hero returns to his own country and then retreats. Nutt includes an addendum to this pattern in which the hero again returns from exile. In contrast, once the hero of Raglan’s scheme has lost favour with the gods and or his subjects he is driven from the throne in episode [17] and remains in exile until his death. De Vries, like von Hahn, allows for the return of the hero to his homeland after he has been exiled, in episode [10] of his pattern.

Having been exiled and taking part in these ‘foreign’ adventures, the hero may return home, or he may die in exile – the proposed patterns differ on the precise details of these incidents. The pattern established by de Vries has the hero return to his homeland in victory, although he does make provision for the hero leaving the realm again, whereas the hero of Raglan’s pattern does not return and dies in exile. In the case of the Fergus material, both incidents are evident: he both returns home for a short while and then leaves again where he dies in exile. Fergus returns to Ulster in CA and TBF1, when the nobles of Ulster ask Fergus to return after the death of Conchobar. However, since Fergus’ homecoming is contingent upon the death of his rival, it is hardly the triumphant return that Raglan and de Vries would suggest for their hero.

2.7.1 Cath Airtig

CA is preserved in only two manuscripts, Book of Lecan (TCD MS 23 P 2) fol. 169 va -170 ra and TCD MS 1337 (formerly H. 3. 18) pp.724-728.230 Thurneysen argues that the tale is quite young, also noting that neither of the two tale lists makes any mention of it. He also points out that the tale was known to the interpolator of LU and the Annals of Tigernach, referring specifically to §8 of CA which sees Fergus return to Ulster with Flidais and then depart again for Connacht after her death only to meet his own death because of Ailill’s jealousy. These events are also referenced in the final interpolated paragraph of TBF1 and, Thurneysen suggests, were a later addition to CA. He offers a date of no later than the thirteenth

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century for this text, basing his argument on the interpolator, who, he says, was unlikely to have been active after this date.  

In the TCD manuscript CA follows *Bruiden da Chocae*, of which Best says it forms the natural sequel. Gregory Toner, in his edition of the tale dated BDC to the first half of the twelfth century, contradicting the thirteenth century date put forward by Thurneysen. BDC takes place after the death of Conchobar and it is decided that the kingship will pass to Conchobar's son, Cormac Con Longas, who is in exile in Connacht. The Ulaid send an envoy to Ailill and Medb, who agree to allow Cormac to take up the kingship and Cormac resolves to keep peaceful relations with Medb. Cormac then sets out with a retinue to take his place as king and multiple disasters befall him on the journey to Ulster. In their aftermath he does not keep his promise of peaceful relations with Medb and after Cormac and his retinue spend the night at Da Choca's hostel, it comes under siege by the Connachtta. Cormac is killed along with nearly everybody on both sides. CA begins with a preface referencing Cormac’s death at the hostel and the necessity to appoint a successor. Best says of the introduction that it seems to have been part of an inauguration ceremony. This prefatory matter, he notes, is absent from the Book of Lecan version of the text. He points out that the Battle of Airtech is also noted in the Annals of Tigernach, immediately after the obit of Conchobar, in the handwriting of interpolator H of LU. No mention is made of Cormac’s reign. The entry made by H reads:


In §6-§8 of CA the Ulstermen request Fergus’ aid in defending the province against the combined assaults of the men of Ireland, who, the text states, are assaulting the Ulstermen on all sides. Fergus accepts the invitation from the nobles of Ulster to return to the province and makes

peace with Conchobar’s son, Cuscraid. As part of the conditions of his return Fergus demands the land of Cú Chulainn’s father, Sualdam, as well as the lands of Cú Chulainn, which the nobles of Ulster granted him. In all he is granted Crich Cuailnge, Mag Muirthemne, Crich Rois and Brug Mna Elcmairi. The text also goes on to state that once Flidais dies at the Strand of Baile mac Buain he returns to the court of Medb and Ailill. Moreover, although CA describes Fergus’ return to Ulster with Flidais, he remains there only as long as she is alive. Upon her death he returns to Connacht and, ultimately, meets his own death through the jealousy of Ailill.237

§6 [H] Batar maitha Ulad ica radha ba techta doib Feargus mac Roich do tabairt chuca & a sid do denam armad treisií a nert ind aghaid a namhat, ar batar mifoltae vfer nErend co mor friu, 7 bator ica n-oircniob 7 ica cerbad 7 aca mbretadh di cech aird. Occus rainicc dno in fis co Fergus 7 dogni side corae fri hUlltaib 7 naiscis each diobh a comarach for araile.238

§6 [L] Badar maithi Ulad oga rada ba techta doib Feargus mac Roig do thobar chuch 7 a sith do denam ar comad tresiti iad i n-agaid a namad, ar badar mifolta fer nErind co mor friu, 7 badar oca n-argain 7 oca cerbad 7 oca marbad do each taib. Ranic dono in fis [s]in co Feargus 7 dorindi a chora fria hUlltaib 7 naiscis each dib a chomchadach fri araaili. i. Feargus 7 Cuscraid.239

The nobles of the Ulid were saying that it would be a good thing for them if Fergus son of Roch were brought back to them, and peace made with him, for they would be so much the stronger against their enemies; for the ill-deeds of the men of Ireland were mighty against them, and they were being raided and maimed and slain on all sides. These tidings reached Fergus, and he made peace with the Ulid, and they bound one another with a covenant, that is, Fergus and Cuscraid.240

§8 [H] Luidh Fergus a morimmirci sair co hUlltae 7 Flidais lais [...] Tucad dosom dono occai occ Traig Baile meic Buain conid deiside dicoidisim ier toin co hOIlill & Meidb ar nirbo maith a trebad dar eis Flidhaisi, conid deiside fuairsim bas tier die net Oilella meic Matai.

§8 [L] Luid thra Fergus a moirimirci soir co hUlltaib 7 Flidais a bancheli lais [...] Tucad dosom in fearand sin 7 baisin i n-aitreib indsín corbo marb Flidais aice of Traig Baile meic Buain conad de sin dochuaidsiun iar sin co hOilill 7 co Meidb uair nirbo maith a aitreb

237 Best, ‘Battle of Airtech’, pp.175,182.
238 From H 3.18 [H]
239 From the Book of Lecan [L]
240 Best, ‘Battle of Airtech’, p.181
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thoir rare is Flidaisi. Conad de sin fuairsiun bas tre ened Ailella meic Magach. 241

Now Fergus went eastwards to the Ulid, with a great retinue, and his wife Flidais along with him [...] The said land was given to him, and he dwelt there until Flidais his wife died at the Strand of Baile mac Buain, after which he went back to Ailill and Medb, for his householding in the east was not good after Flidais. In this way he met his death, through the one act of jealous of Ailill son of Mata. 242

Fergus’ ‘return’ is somewhat curious; for, despite the fact that Fergus has specifically been invited back to help defend Ulster, he takes no actual part in the defence of the province; the text does not make any further mention of him after §8. It seems a curious thing for the compiler or interpolator of this text to go to the trouble of including reconciliation between Fergus and the nobles of Ulster only to have him depart the province once more without lifting a hand to defend it.

2.7.2 Táin Bó Flidais 1

TBF1 is one of the remscéla of TBC and is extant in two versions, the Middle Irish TBF1 and the early modern Irish TBF2. TBF1 is preserved in four manuscripts: LU (RIA MS 23 E 25), fol. 21a - 22a, LL (TCD MS 1339), fol. 247a - 248a, British Library MS Egerton 1782 (fol 82) and in Liber Flavus Fergusiorum (RIA MS 23 O 48) fol. 26. The text of LU, LL and the Egerton manuscript together with a translation of the LU text is given by Windisch, who remarks that the LL and Egerton versions agree closely with each other. 243 A different version of the story entirely is contained in the later version TBF2, but that will be discussed below. TBF1 relates how Fergus mac Róich came to slay the king of the Cíarraige, Ailill Find, and carried off his wife, Flidais, and her cows. The LU version, which is acephalous, has Flidais assist in TBC by feeding the army of Medb and Ailill with the produce of her cows every seventh day. In the older version she dies in Ulster after the Táin as the wife of Fergus. In the later version, preserved in the Glenmasan manuscript, she is rescued from her captors by the Gamanradh and she returns to the west with Muiredach, the son of her dead husband.

The LL and Egerton versions of TBF1 correspond with the events recorded in CA, which state that Flidais returned to Ulster with Fergus and that she died at Tragh

Baile, but neither version mentions the parcel of land which was granted to Fergus upon his return nor mentions Fergus’ return to Connacht after her death. The interpolated ending of the tale preserved in LU differs from the ending preserved in LL in terms of its content, language, and length with the section in LU running more than twice as long as the section preserved in LL. In the case of the matter under discussion here, new material is introduced which sheds more light on Fergus’ return to Ulster and provides more detail of his settlement there and his eventual return to Connacht. Overall the section of the interpolated ending in TBF1 which concerns Fergus mirrors that in CA which recounts the same events.

A closer examination of the events recorded in CA and the LU version of TBF1 show interesting correlations, and some telling differences. The LL and Egerton texts state that Fergus took the kingship of Ulster ‘co ngab rige nUlad’, whereas the LU text has him take kingship of part of Ulster only, ‘co ngab rígi blogi do Uldaib’. All three manuscripts state that Fergus was granted Mag Muirthemne, the land previously held by Cú Chulainn. All three have Flidais die at Trágh Baile; likewise, all three manuscripts state specifically that after his return to Connacht, Fergus died as a result of Ailill’s jealousy. CA, MS 1337: ‘fuairsim bas tier di e net Oilella meic Matai’, CA B. Lecan: ‘fuairsiun bas tre ened Ailella meic Magach’ and TBF1 LU: ‘fúair a bás taet Ailella’.

Only the LU version of TBF1 and §8 of CA, however, offer a reason for his return to Connacht, stating that his husbandry had declined after Flidais’ death since she used to supply him with all the provisions he required.

2.8 Fergus’ Character Revision and the History of Connacht

Ó hUiginn suggests that either an early version of TBF2 must have been available to the interpolator H, or at least he had some knowledge of the tradition from which it came for him to have erased the original ending of TBF1 and replaced it with a ‘favoured’ version. The version with which it was replaced, however, aside from providing more information on Fergus’ return to Ulster and the conditions of his departure for Connacht, presents him as a man who was dependent
on his wife’s wealth. Ó hUiginn comments on the use of the words ‘trebad’, husbandry, and ‘tincur’, act of contributing; marriage contribution; husband’s preponderant contribution, a term frequently used in marriage contracts. He speculates that the LU ending of TBF1 implies that the arrangement between Fergus and Flidais is fer for bantinchur, i.e. a man supported by his wife’s wealth. Both versions of CA would seem to bear this out, as they state that [H] ‘nirbo maith a trebad dar eis Flidhaisi’ [L] ‘nirbo maith a aitreb thoir tar eis Ó Fidhaisi’. If the interpolator of LU were drawing on the younger version of TBF2, this representation of Fergus as a man beholden to his wife would be appropriate as Fergus’ reputation suffers greatly in the course of TBF2, and of the prequel to the tale, OCU, where the combined tales purport to present him as a ‘drunkard and a kept man’. As Ó hUiginn points out, this denigration of the character of Fergus is not a matter of a simple literary choice. Fergus was an ancestor figure for many groups in the west and south of Ireland, a figure he describes as being ‘genealogically loaded’, and, as such, the redactor can be seen to be casting aspersions not only on the character of Fergus but on those peoples who would claim descent from him.

In her article on the tales of Connacht, Edel Bhreathnach focuses on four tales which, she says, form part of the history of the relationship between Connacht and Ulster. She makes the argument for three dominant characters in all of these tales: Eochaid Feidlech, his daughter Medb, and Fergus. She refers to Caoimhín Breathnach’s assertion that a constant theme is Fergus’ career both in Ulster and in Connacht. In CA, a sequel to TBC, and the earliest of the texts she investigates, Bhreathnach notes that there is a return to Ulster for Fergus and another departure from his native province once his wife, Flidais, has died. In both versions of TBF, the figure and career of Fergus takes centre stage. The chronological framework of TBF2 deals with the aftermath of the killing of the sons of Uisliu and highlights

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250 DIL T 281.55.
251 DIL T 177.53.
257 Bhreathnach, p. 27.
258 Ibid.
Chapter Two: Maturity. The hero is driven from the throne

Fergus’ seizure of the kingship for seven years while Conchobar is in exile. Both Bhreathnach and Breatnach agree that Fergus is a key figure in the ‘history’ of Connacht that these tales purport to present; Caoimhín Breatnach describes him as the “unifying factor” throughout the later tales of OCU and TBF2. Edel Bhreathnach argues that the key to understanding these texts is to consider them as belonging to a single narrative, one which forms a ‘history’ of Connacht, sharing as they do a common store of characters and themes that relate the ‘history’ of Ireland, with the emphasis on certain individuals who have a Connacht-centric focus of their own, e.g. Medb, Fergus, Eochaidh Feidhlech. She suggests that the intended audience for these tales was primarily a Connacht audience, but leaves open the question of whether they were intended for a learned class or a wider audience.

Fergus’ return episodes are clearly later additions to his narrative, possibly products of interpolators who amended the tales for political reasons in order to denigrate the character of Fergus and those who claimed descent from him, or to aggressively advance a different political agenda. For whatever reason, Fergus’ part in these tales has been amended to include a return to and yet another departure from Ulster. Outside this reasoning there is almost no other explanation for his role in CA or in the awkward final paragraph of CLR which mirrors the description of Fergus’ abdication in SC and comes after the roll call of the glorious dead, and lends no narrative significance to the tale. Removing these episodes from CA and CLR would cause no loss in terms of the narrative foundation of the tales, unlike H’s interpolation of the return incident in TBF1 which contributes heavily to the narrative and provides a conclusion to Flidais’ story.

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261 Bhreathnach, pp. 41–42.
Chapter Three: Maturity. The hero is victorious, woos a maiden and becomes king.

3.0 Chapter Three: Maturity. The hero is victorious, woos a maiden and becomes king.

In this chapter I will begin by contextualising the episodes in the heroic-biographical patterns. whereby the hero battles a beast, dragon, or monster, wins the hand of a maiden, and becomes king. As Interpolator H’s revision of LU is pertinent to the understanding of the revised ending of TBF1 I will briefly discuss some of the issues regarding H and his revision of LU. I will also investigate the Connacht dimension of TBF2 as it relates to the excision of the Cíarraige and the introduction of the Gamanradh. I will begin this chapter by analysing Fergus’ battles with kings and beasts individually and then discuss the phenomenon of single combat in the heroic context more generally. Next, I will examine the episode where the hero wins a maiden and follow it with a general discussion about Fergus’ relationship with women in the extant literature. Then I will investigate Fergus’ assumption of the kingship of Ulster and discuss the concept of kingship in early medieval Irish literature. Finally I will discuss the significance of these episodes in Fergus’ heroic biography.

The majority of the patterns outline a series of incidents whereby the hero engages in battle with a beast, or a dragon or monster, or even another king, after which he wins the hand of a maiden or princess and assumes the throne. De Vries commented on the specific order of these episodes, which is constant in the schemata in which these episodes appear, and he linked the hero’s performance in battle and the winning of a maiden to the rite of initiation proposed by van Gennep, suggesting that a man has to prove his valour in order to be worthy of his wife.262

Von Hahn did not include the battle or maiden episodes in his scheme, which only covered episode [11] where the hero attains the throne. He did include the exile episode, [9] where the hero is in service in foreign lands, to which Nutt added [9a], whereby the hero attacks and slays monsters.263 Neither von Hahn nor Nutt make any mention of winning the hand of a maiden. Rank, likewise, does not make any reference to the slaying of a beast or the winning of a maiden; the pattern he

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262 De Vries, p.221.
263 Nutt, p.2.
proposes ends with the hero achieving rank and honours.\textsuperscript{264} This is most likely due to the fact that Rank’s pattern covers only the first half of life; the vague description of achieving rank and honours could be interpreted as the hero achieving martial distinction and acquiring a wife. Both Raglan and de Vries, by contrast, make adequate allowance in their respective patterns for the hero having a battle with a beast, acquisition of a wife, and gaining kingship specifically in that order. Raglan’s [11-13] state that after a victory over a king and/or giant, dragon, or wild beast, the hero marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, becomes king.\textsuperscript{265} De Vries also identifies the first two of these episodes and states in his pattern that [6] the hero fights with a dragon or another monster and [7] wins a maiden, after overcoming great dangers.\textsuperscript{266} Presumably the dangers to which de Vries refers are those inherent in fighting a dragon or monster. However, he makes no allowances in his pattern for the attainment of kingship.

### 3.0.1 Lebor na hUidre and Interpolator II

The episodes under consideration in this chapter are found principally in the later tale TBF2 and in the interpolated conclusion to TBF1 in LU. Ó hUiginn agrees with Ó Concheanainn’s suggestion that the author of TBF2 in its earliest form in YBL was Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh, putting the composition of the text in the early fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{267} TBF1 is extant in LU, LL, Liber Flavus Fergusiorum and MS Egerton 1783, however, comparisons with these other texts with a view to arriving at a date of composition is rendered difficult due to the violent revision to TBF1 in LU by the interpolator. The LU text is acephalous and the final section, with which I am concerned, differs to the LL version to such an extent as to render comparison redundant. Ó hUiginn suggests that while the LL and LU versions of TBF1 evolved from a common original there were differing intermediate exemplars which account for the content in LU which finds no correspondence in LL.\textsuperscript{268}

At the Lebor na hUidre Conference in the Royal Irish Academy in 2012, Elizabeth Duncan demonstrated that the situation regarding Interpolator H is much

\textsuperscript{264} Rank, p.61.  
\textsuperscript{265} Raglan, p. 175.  
\textsuperscript{266} De Vries, p.221.  
\textsuperscript{267} Ó hUiginn, ‘Growth and Development’, p. 151.  
\textsuperscript{268} Ó hUiginn, ‘Growth and Development’, p.152
more complicated than was hitherto realised. She introduces the possibility of a fourth hand, even subdividing hand H into several distinct groups each of which displays great variability, leading to the implication that the hand described by Best as ‘H’ was actually several different hands. Duncan notes that while H2 was responsible for transcribing most of TBF, the interpolated ending is in a different hand than H2, but since the marginalia has faded and only a small specimen of script remains there is little material for a detailed investigation. Dating the addition to the TBF with any degree of certainty is exceedingly difficult, and Duncan notes that the ending to TBF1 was added to LU in the period after H2 and M were active. However, while she concludes that there is no strong palaeographical evidence for attributing the revisions and interpolations thus far assigned to H to one and the same scribe, she notes that all the various H hands display the angularity that is typical of Gaelic national miniscule. This heavy, angular style script in LU is typical of that found in the Annals of Inisfallen, both displaying a heavy type of script common in the last quarter of the twelfth and into the thirteenth centuries.

3.0.2 The Connacht Connection: Hand H and Fergus

Mac Eoin remarks that H’s “violent” revision of LU represents a considerable undertaking. He argues that the amount of work undertaken by H in his revisions and insertions was not far removed from the amount of work required for the creation of a new manuscript. Choosing new texts, erasing old material, inserting new text in its place and providing glosses and emendations for texts he left unrevised would have been a very labour intensive undertaking. If all the material required was not available at the centre at which he was based, and he had to travel to seek new material, Mac Eoin argues that his endeavour would have taken even longer. He doubts the selection of texts required by H in his revision of LU would have all been present at Clonmacnoise at the same time, and so suggests that H undertook his revision of LU at a later date and time to the principal scribes working on the manuscript.

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271 Ibid.
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The question of the identity of H, his centre of work and the time during which he was active are of great importance to the understanding of the various interpolations which he undertook in LU. Of particular importance to this investigation is the interpolation of TBF1, not only for the episodes in Fergus’ heroic biography which the interpolated version provides, but also for the continuing evolution of the character.

The question of H’s activities has been scrutinised for many decades. Thurneysen placed H in the thirteenth century due to the lateness of the versions that he employed in his interpolations. Based on interpolations in H’s hand (or one of the many hands we now know have come under the umbrella designation of ‘H’) in the Annals of Tigernach it has long been assumed that H’s place of work was Clonmacnoise. Working on this assumption Françoise Henry added her voice to the conversation, expressing doubt that the requisite facilities would have been available to him at that time, given the frequency with which Clonmacnoise was sacked in the final decades of the twelfth century. Gearóid Mac Eoin also argues against Clonmacnoise as a centre of work for H and suggests an alternative location in north Connacht, whilst preserving the argument that he was active in the twelfth century, based on a linguistic and orthographic study of his interpolations in LU.

Mac Eoin proposes that H was associated with the learned family of Uí Mhaoil Chonaire in north Roscommon and was active sometime in the mid to late twelfth century. His assertion is based on the addition by H of the figure of Aed mac Bricc into a story relating to the conception of Aed Sláine, giving him a ‘share’ in the miracle of a barren queen who wished to bear a child. The Latin Life of Aed mac Bricc puts his principal churches in Killare (Cell Áir) beside the Hill of Uisneach, and Rahugh (Ráth Aeda), approximately seven miles to the south-east, both in modern Co. Westmeath. The Latin Life contains a similar incident in which the miracle of assisting a barren queen bear a child is ascribed to Aed alone. Mac Eoin argues that H must have been aware of the story and been sufficiently interested in the career of Aed mac Bricc to insert him into the text of LU.

272 Thurneysen, IHK, pp. 31, 594-5.
273 Mac Eoin, p.41.
274 Mac Eoin, p.42, see also Charles Plummer, Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae, 1910:34–5.
275 Mac Eoin, p.43. See also Plummer, VSH, p. 39, xiv.
Secondly, in TBC, H adds a gloss to the place name Cúil Sibrinne, located to the south east of Crúachan: “.i. Loch Carrcín o Silind ingin Madchair ro ainmniged”;276 another mention of Cúil Sibrinne on the following page is similarly glossed.277 From the annalistic evidence related to the location and history of Loch Carrcín, Mac Eoin argues that the site was most likely to have been a fortified island or crannóg, apparently belonging to a branch of the Ua Conchobhair.278

Finally, in the Latin Life of Aed mac Bricc, the saint is credited with the transfer of a lake from Mide to Connacht overnight where the lake was renamed Loch na hAidche, at modern Cluain na hAidche which lies a couple of miles east of Elphin in Co. Roscommon and about seven miles northeast of Loch Carrcín.279 The district around Elphin is the focus of H’s gloss on the place name of Cúil Sibrinne and is located in territory that was occupied by the learned Uí Mhaoil Chonaire family from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. The family were professional scholars, historians and scribes to the families of the Ua Conchobhair among others, and, it would seem, were already engaged in learned pursuits by the twelfth century.280

Considering that H’s revisions of Recension 1 of TBC in LU are in keeping with all of the expanded versions of TBC witnessed by other manuscripts which were known to be associated with scribes of the Uí Mhaoil Chonaire family or scribes who had close connections to them, Mac Eoin makes the argument that H’s additions to Recension 1 of TBC were made in order to introduce additions attested in manuscripts which had strong connections with that family.

To this evidence for a Connacht locus for some or all of the hands known as H, Ruairí Ó hUiginn adds another supporting argument. He points to a group of twelfth-century texts which deal with the legendary prehistory of Connacht, namely CA, CLR and TBF2, all of which are relevant to this investigation because of their depiction of Fergus mac Róich, and all of which have as their focus an attempt to

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276 LU ll. 4954.
277 LU ll. 4615.
278 Ibid.
279 Mac Eoin, p.44.
280 Ibid.
explain the history of Connacht. Ó hUiginn points specifically to the prestigious position afforded a group referred to as the Gamanradh. The Gamanradh are noted for their martial prowess and were reckoned among the most formidable warrior bands in the later saga literature. However the Gamanradh do not appear in the pre-Norman genealogies nor in Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae nor are they mentioned in any annals. Likewise they are absent from the Dindsenchas, Cóir Anmann, Bansenchas and Lebor na Cert. The early saga literature mentions neither Fer Diad nor Fraoch as being of their number earlier than the twelfth century. The earliest mention of the Gamanradh is in H’s interpolation of TBF1 in LU, for which the scribe removed half a page of the original manuscript and replaced it with the interpolated version as we now have it. In this interpolation the Gamanradh are described as one of the three warrior classes of Ireland who come to the aid of Oílill Finn: ba hísín tres láirchaími Herend i. Gamanrad a Hirrus Domnand 7 cland Dédad hi Temair Lóchra & clanna Rudraige in Emain Macha ‘That was one of the three warrior-groups of Ireland, i.e. the Gamanradh from Iorras Domhnann, and Clann Dédad in Temair Lóchrae and Clanna Rudraige in Emain Macha’. This mention of the Gamanradh does not occur in any of the other manuscripts in which TBF1 is found. However, in TBF2 their role is expanded and they feature prominently in the tale.

The association of the Gamanradh with the Erris area of Mayo is stressed throughout the text of TBF2; Ó hUiginn counts over one hundred mentions of the people in a text by a redactor who he says, ‘spares neither pen, ink, vellum nor effort in heaping copious praise on them for their bravery, martial skill and generosity.’ In order to stress the association with Erris, some amount of revision in the text was required. In TBF1 Oílill Finn is depicted as belonging to the Ciarraige, whose territory was in parts of modern Roscommon and Mayo; in TBF2, however, Oílill Finn’s territory is shifted to the west, and is now on the shores of Lough Conn. Oílill Finn is now the son of Domnall Dualbuide, king of the Domnainn and the Ciarraige

284 LU ll. 1620–1.
285 the earliest of which is incomplete and found in YBL, dated to c. 1380.
286 Ó hUiginn, ‘The Gamanradh’, p.84.
are erased from the narrative completely. In fact, the Gamanradh would appear to be an entirely literary creation belonging to the later part of the medieval period, and do not appear in any saga material prior to the twelfth century.

Ó hUiginn argues that H was particularly concerned with the creation of a ‘history’ of Connacht, not only on the basis of his role in revising the Annals of Tigernach to include the battle of Airtech, as discussed above, but also for his role in the interpolation of TBF, most notably his inclusion of the Gamanradh in the text, the pejorative description of Fergus mac Róich as a kept man, a character trait which permeates the later version of the tale, and the addition of a poem in the mouth of Bricriu which is expanded upon in TBF2. The Connacht-centric nature of the texts, the importance attached by the revisers to the area around Airtech and north Connacht, and the familiarity H shows with minor place names in the area demonstrates to Ó hUiginn that the revisers must have carried out their work in north Connacht. TBF2 in particular is characterised by an extremely intimate knowledge of the topography of north Connacht, which leads Ó hUiginn to infer that either the author was a native of the area or was very familiar with it.Ó Concheanainn suggested the author of TBF2 in its earliest form in YBL was Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh (fl.1380-1418), a prominent scholar and scribe whose ancestral roots lay in Erris. Ó hUiginn notes that since LU was in the possession of the Uí Chonchubhair of Sligo between 1359 and 1470 the codex would have been accessible to a writer active in north Connacht at this time. Mac Fhir Bhisigh was known to consult various codices in his work, especially drawing from LL. Ó hUiginn supports the strong circumstantial evidence for Mac Fhir Bhisigh as author by pointing out that LMU and FLFmR, both tales which provide important background and context for Fergus’ exile in Connacht, were not only present in LL but appear in close proximity to TBF1 in the manuscript.

287 Ibid. Ó hUiginn notes that the Gamanradh and the Fir Dhomhann would appear to be interchangeable.
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If the reviser responsible for the interpolation of TBF1 in LU were to have belonged to the Úi Mhaoil Chonaire family, then he most likely would have been based at one of their centres in modern Co. Roscommon. This would put him in the territory of the Cíarraige, which, Ó hUiginn argues, would explain his interest in advancing a version of the tale in which a legendary king of their people is a principal character.²⁹³ Both LU and LL versions of TBF1 cast Oilill Finn as king of the Cíarraige, moving away from the genealogical tradition which would claim Ciar, son of Medb and Fergus, as the eponymous ancestor of the Cíarraige. This eschewing of accepted genealogical tradition, Ó hUiginn suggests, comes from an alternative tradition (twelfth century) about the migration of the Cíarraige, according to which they came north from Munster under the leadership of one Coirbri mac Conaire.²⁹⁴ Casting Oilill Finn in such a role as the clear hero of the tale betrays the sympathies of an author anxious to play up the tale of a north Connacht king who loses his wife and then his life to an unscrupulous Ulster warrior who is presented in a profoundly negative manner as one at whose treacherous hands the local hero dies.

The redactor of TBF2 has a clear interest in north Connacht, most specifically in the Erris area in which Oilill Finn reigned, and much effort was expended in order to move the action of TBF2 from the territory of the Cíarraige to the purported territory of the Gamanradh, in the process erasing all references to the Cíarraige and recasting Oilill Finn as the king of the Gamanradh.²⁹⁵

3.1 Victory over a king and/or giant, dragon, or wild beast

TBF2 relates Fergus’ victory over two kings and also includes a battle with a vicious hound. After suffering capture and humiliation at the hands of Oilill Finn, Fergus eventually meets him in single combat and succeeds in defeating him after having his sword, the Caladbolg, mysteriously returned to him. Fergus decapitates Oilill at the end of their duel and carries off his wife, Flidais. In the concluding section of TBF2 entitled Toraigecht Tána Bó Flidaise Fergus and his allies are harried by the Gamanradh who are attempting to rescue Flidais and her wonderful cow. Fergus fights the massive hound of Domnall Dualbuide, king of the Gamanradh.

²⁹⁴ This version of the migration is dated to the twelfth century on linguistic grounds by Hull and is attested in two manuscripts, YBL and the Book of Uí Maine. Vernam Hull, ‘The Migration of the Cíarraige’, Speculum, 25 (1950), 184–9, p. 184–5.
and father of Oíll Finn, but not before it destroys his horses and kills his charioteer. The discussion that follows will separate the episode ‘victory over a kind and/or giant, dragon, or wild beast’ into the various battles Fergus has with both beasts and kings.

3.1.1 Victory over a wild beast. Táin Bó Flidais 2: Domnall’s Wolf Hound

In the concluding section of TBF2 entitled Toraigheacht Tána Bó Flidaise Fergus is victorious over a vicious wolf-dog that belongs to Domnall Dualbuide. In a rather gruesome episode, Domnall sets loose a pack of wolf dogs to attack the fleeing Connacht. Fergus and his charioteer, Fergarbh, are separated from the fray, but when a particularly vicious wolf-dog spots Fergus he makes a fierce spring at him. The dog launches himself at the two men and the chariot is destroyed under the combined weight of both men and dog. Fergus jumps out of the chariot, but the dog grabs Fergarbh and rips his head off. Fergus is shamed by observers for having abandoned his chariot and when he sees that his horses and charioteer have been mangled by the dog, he destroys the dog by spearing it through the head and pinning it to the ground with the thrust of his spear.296

3.3 Victory over a king.

3.3.1 TBF 2, Oíll Finn

Following deaths of the sons of Uisliu, Fergus and his followers are exiled from Ulster and seek a new home. In TBF2, Bricriu suggests that the exiles make their home in Connacht. The exiles are welcomed by Medb and Ailill, and Fergus enters into a relationship with Medb. They are discovered by Ailill, who replaces Fergus’ sword, the Caladbolg, with a wooden blade, in an apparent echo of the episode in TBC2 where the pair are discovered and Fergus has his sword removed from his scabbard.297

As well as carrying on a sexual relationship with his hostess, Fergus proves to be a costly house guest and the expense of keeping the exiles is met by Medb. Bricriu does not miss an opportunity to make trouble and he chastises Fergus for failing to honour his pledge to his followers to compensate them adequately for

296 TBF2 §209.
297 TBF2 §137.
See 3.1 Victory over a king and/or giant, dragon, or wild beast. p.75
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going into exile with him. Bricriu travels to the court of Oilill Finn to request tribute from the nobles of the Gamanradh that was required to pay the expenses incurred by Fergus and his retinue. While he is there he has a conversation with Flidais. She tells Bricriu that she is in need of a husband worthy of her and she asks him to put Fergus under obligations to come and carry her away, declaring herself his rightful spouse and his worthy wife. Upon his return to Crúachan, bricriu tells Fergus that Flidais had declared her love for him and that he should go and carry her off.298

When Bricriu returns to Áth Féan with Fergus he lets slip to Oilill Finn that Fergus’ real intention is to carry off his wife with her full consent. Oilill says of Fergus that if he is questioned about a subject he would never conceal the answer, so when he confronts him about his true intentions, Fergus does not deny it. In order to settle the matter, the pair agree to meet at a ford, and the one who returns will have the lady.299

In their initial confrontation, the two warriors fight until dawn, brandishing their swords skilfully but attacking each other indecisively so that neither makes a mark on the other or draws blood.300 More of Fergus’ compatriots arrive at the scene and at one point Oilill is battling against ten men. Fergus’ servant asks the servant of Oilill Finn why he does not go to his chiefs and tell them that their king is outnumbered. Oilill Finn’s servant replies that he has taken a vow and will not say anything about combat as long as it is equal; the implication being that fir fer is not being violated since Oilill Finn is equal to ten men in battle. The battle rages on and eventually Fergus draws blood, wounding Oilill below the belt. Fergus’ companions, Dubthach and Angus, also wound Oilill Finn, but he returns the thrusts to such an extent that the men were a mass of gore.301

At the ultimate moment when Fergus reaches for his sword he finds that it is not in his scabbard; thinking the Connacht men have removed it to insult him, he is unaware that it was Ailill who had taken it while he was enjoying a tryst with Medb. Fergus gives the order to retreat but swears that he himself will not leave the field of

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298 TBF2 §96.
299 TBF2 §120.
300 TBF2 §129.
301 TBF2 §134.
battle. While his men retreat, Fergus is overwhelmed by Gamanradh warriors, and although he returns each thrust made at him he is surrounded and shackled.  

Fergus is defeated and imprisoned by Oilill Finn. He is brought to Flidais’ fort where he is tied to a pillar and humiliated; stripped naked and exposed to Flidais each morning as she takes her breakfast. The humiliation of Fergus is continued as the text describes how the local youths and children would gather to laugh at his expense. 

During Fergus’ imprisonment, Flidais hatches a plot to free him. She tells him she has prepared a banquet for her husband and that when Fergus sees Oilill Finn in a state of drunkenness and unreason he is to say to him that the men of Ireland attack his fortress in a feeble manner and the attack would be more forceful and successful were Fergus leading them. She guesses that Fergus’ boast will cause her drunken husband in his high spirits to set Fergus free in order to prove it. Fergus goes along with the plan and at the opportune moment he taunts Oilill Finn, Oilill Finn falls into the trap neatly set for him by his wife and frees Fergus so that they may see if it would be the case. 

Unbeknownst to Oilill Finn the Gamanradh have deserted him and he is outnumbered; he tells his council that he is certain he will fall at the hands of Medb, Ailill and Fergus because of the guile of his wife. He tells a messenger to prepare a ship for him so that he can avoid a duel with Fergus; however, Fergus intercepts him before he can flee and the two warriors are given a second chance to fight. The warriors address each other in verse, Fergus recalling Oilill Finn’s victories against the nobles of Leinster and his slaying of Munstermen, but finishing his verse with the assurance that he is a hard man to kill, and an invitation for Oilill to try. 

Oilill Finn’s reply is designed to raise Fergus’ hackles; he refers to him as a royal hireling, a rígh amais, claiming that Oilill’s match is hard to find, Terc milidh mo midhemhnais, and that he, Oilill, will be the end of his career as a warrior: ‘Tráettar lim do luamhairecht/ Tainig crich do caith-reime/ Cian o tái for tolg

TBF2 §139. 
TBF2 §155. Dundes, pp.206–8 suggests that the humiliation of the hero and the threatening of his masculinity is not unusual in the hero pattern. He notes that the hero inevitably overcomes this. See 3.4 in this chapter for a detailed discussion on heroic verbal sparring and verbal humiliation. 
TBF2§180. 
TBF2§195.
Chapter Three: Maturity. The hero is victorious, woos a maiden and becomes king.

buáidris timcell Banba bar acharde. 306 Oilill carries on the rain of insults, referring to Fergus as a poor king, a drunkard, an itinerant exile, a laughing stock, Medb’s kept man and not the great lover he thinks himself to be, but rather the darling of queens’ maids. The battle then begins in earnest and the two warriors would seem to be equally matched both in their virility and enmity towards each other. It is not a long battle and Fergus decapitates Oilill, along with his sons, and the men of his household who defended him.307

In an episode which is unique in early medieval Irish literature, Oilill and Fergus agree to fight to the death for the hand of Flidais after she has declared her love for Fergus. An initial skirmish during which neither warrior is able to penetrate the defences of the other due to the high level of their martial skill ends with Fergus’ capture since at the moment Fergus goes to reach for his sword he finds it is not in its scabbard. The missing sword is a reminder that it had been taken from him, and an insult to his status as a warrior. However, even without his sword, Fergus is the equal of Oilill in combat. Fergus’s second battle with Oilill ends more decisively, after Oilill insults Fergus’ status as an exile and a kept man, Fergus wastes no time in decapitating him.

3.3.2. TBF 2, Domnall Dualbuide

Fergus also faces off against Domnall Dualbuide, father of Oilill Finn, in the final section of TBF2, Toraigecht tana bo Flidaise ann so. Domnall and his ferocious dogs are harrying the fleeing men of Ireland in an attempt to rescue Flidais and her cow and obtain vengeance for the death of Oilill Finn. After Fergus kills Domnall’s hound the two men clear a battleground and square off against each other, but their weapons make no impression on each other because of the quality of their armour. They turn to fight at close quarters, each man battering the head, shield and helmet of the other so fiercely that the din was heard throughout the provinces of Ireland. The supporting men of each warrior are convinced that neither champion would yield, so equally matched are they in their attack, defence, mutual enmity and strength. Despite the fury with which they attack each other and the mangled helmets, armour, shields, and weaponry, neither man draws blood. It is only when

306 TBF2§196.
307 TBF2§198.
they fight to the point of exhaustion that the men cease to fight and withdraw, skinwhole, from the duel.308

As in the successive battles that Fergus fights with Oilill Finn, the first encounter proves indecisive, but the men have another opportunity to face off against each other. Later in the tale as the Gamanradh continue their harrying of the men of Ireland in their pursuit of vengeance, Domnall overtakes them in his pursuit of them and enters their camp. When the gathered men see Domnall, they berate Fergus for not having defeated him in their earlier encounter. The two men meet on the appropriately named Ford of the Champions, Áth na Féinned. This time, as in the duel against Oilill Finn, the households of both champions intervene, but it is the duel between Fergus and Domnall that takes centre stage. Fergus is victorious, and Domnall falls under the powerful blows of the Ulster warrior.309 Domnall is not even afforded the warrior’s burial; his body remaining on the field of battle as the Gamanradh continue to pursue the men of Ireland.

As with his son before him Domnall appears to be the equal of Fergus in battle in their initial confrontation, and neither warrior draws blood. Their second confrontation is decisive and Fergus emerges victorious, killing the Gamanradh warrior and swiftly leaving the field of battle.

3.4 Verbal Sparring and Single Combat in the Heroic Context
Single combat was central to the heroic ethos that dictated the behaviour of warriors in the violent and disruptive world of the Ulster Cycle. Many of the tales that comprise the Ulster Cycle are concerned with martial figures and occur against a backdrop of warfare, which, therefore present a set of rules that the players must adhere to. The type-scene of single combat where there is a duel between the hero and an enemy warrior is the essential scene of the martial epic; this is the highly ritualised ad hominem verbal contests, flyting, which, Parks notes, can either occur on their own or as part of the larger context of single combat.310 These ritualised verbal contests are reflected ideologically in the incontestable fact of speaking and fighting:

308 TBF2§211.
309 TBF2§221.
310 Parks, p.5.
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OIr. briathar ‘speech’ = MW brwydyr ‘battle’ (*breitrá)
OIr. focal ‘word’ = MW gwaethl ‘battle’ (*woxtlon). 311

The social status of an individual, their heroic honour, is earned and maintained through the attribution of praise or blame accordingly, which is, in turn, reinforced by a vigilant and critical warrior public. The ceremonially-contest of single combat, of which flyting is an integral aspect, provides not only an arena for the attainment of heroic honour, but is also a system by which concepts of selfhood and identity may be explored. 312

Most flytings come from a direct challenge on heroic identity, although there may be many reasons for heroes to be challenged. Ward Parks argues that resources such as food, territory or mating privileges may be cause for flyting and single combat. He notes specifically that the Trojan War revolves around possession of a woman and Scéla Muicce Mei Da Thó is a clash over the division of food at a feast. 313 Flying and single combat are less pronounced amongst members of the same kin group, and deadly combat is more likely to occur in inter-group scenarios. Parks notes that altruistic behaviour is more likely to occur between close relatives since men bound by intimate reciprocal ties are less likely to compete with each other in ways that are life-threatening. 314 The principal cause of flying and single combat is the need for the maintenance of heroic honour, and the formalised contest provides the medium for the winning of glory and the public establishment of fame and honour. 315 Honour in heroic society exists in the context of one warrior affording it to another in the sight and hearing of their respective peer group(s). In this context, honour exists in opposition to shame, which is a powerful social sanction in a society obsessed with the acquisition and maintenance of honour, and the ultimate motive for pursuing honour is the assurance of one’s merit within a society where success in battle represents the ultimate reflection of manhood. 316

312 Parks, pp. 29–30.
313 Parks, p. 20.
314 Parks, p. 22.
315 Parks, p. 30.
316 Parks, p. 24, 26–30.
Chapter Three: Maturity. The hero is victorious, woos a maiden and becomes king.

Single combat between two ‘conspecific’ adversaries\(^{317}\) is negotiated by means of a particular set of actions: A) engagement, B) flyting which may have either a combative or contractual aspect, C) trial of arms, and D) ritual resolution which may involve a speech or symbolic action of some kind.\(^{318}\) Such fame and glory as may be acquired in the ritualised contest can only be achieved through the witnessing function and testimony of observers who create a public record of the martial exploits and heroic deeds of the combatants and thus corroborate any future boasts and the fame they have earned through victory.\(^{319}\)

3.4.1 Cú Chulainn

Fergus’ confrontation with Cú Chulainn in *Comrac Fergusu fri Coin Culaind* in Recension 1 of TBC is one between members of the same kin group, and as to be expected, does not involve the combatants fighting to the death.\(^{320}\) This is not to imply that the confrontation is not taken seriously by both men. Fergus goes to Cú Chulainn not as his foster-father or even as a member of his kin group, but as an opponent. The verbal duelling begins the flyting phase with Cú Chulainn mocking Fergus for having an empty scabbard. Such a taunt is designed to highlight the fact that Fergus’ martial identity has been compromised, and, thus, his manhood, since he allowed another man to take his sword while he was engaged in a tryst with a woman. William Sayers argues that Cú Chulainn’s youth is an important obstacle to his recognition as a warrior (Nad Crantail will not fight him because he is beardless, therefore too young to fight, and Cú Chulainn resorts to smearing blackberries on his face in an attempt to appear older and thus a valid opponent); as such he is inferior to his adversaries and barbed comments such as the reference to Fergus’ empty scabbard would carry no weight.\(^{321}\)

Since Cú Chulainn’s attempt at humiliating Fergus by calling his honour and masculinity into question is relatively innocuous, the confrontation moves into the second movement. The pair strike a particularly un-heroic contract whereby Cú Chulainn agrees to retreat from Fergus now so long as Fergus agrees to retreat from

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\(^{317}\) i.e. combatants who have comparable social standing measurable in terms of proven heroic accomplishment, rank in hierarchy, and lineage (Parks, 1990:35).

\(^{318}\) Parks, p. 104.

\(^{319}\) Parks, p. 37–8.

\(^{320}\) TBC1 ll.2495–2521; TBC2 ll.2473–2509.

Cú Chulainn at some point in the future. This is a private agreement between the two men, unbeknownst to the vigilant warrior public who are watching the exchange at some remove. The flying in this instance lacks the belligerence of Fergus’ other contests and the contract is for non-combat both presently and in a confrontation yet to come. The encounter is resolved non-violently with Cú Chulainn retreating from Fergus and the Connachtmen encouraging Fergus to follow him and finish him off. Fergus refuses, stating that he has routed Cú Chulainn when none before him could. In this case, it is a symbolic victory, but an important one, which nonetheless achieves something unique within the Connacht camp and preserves his heroic status within the peer group.

3.4.2 Oilill Finn

Fergus’ confrontations with Oilill and Domnall take on a completely different complexion from that of the encounter with Cú Chulainn. To begin with, they are ‘intergroup’ adversaries and their flying and combat more belligerent than Fergus’ confrontation with Cú Chulainn. In a unique scenario in both Old and Middle Irish and Welsh literature, Oilill and Fergus agree before their duel that the last man standing shall have Flidais, this is possibly the only example in early medieval Irish literature where two men fight over a woman. This arrangement is characterised by an almost civilised exchange. Oilill asks Fergus bluntly if he has come to carry off his wife, either willingly or by force. It has already been established in the exchange that Fergus will not lie if questioned directly about a subject, and so he replies that Flidais is the reason he has come. There follows a mild verbal sparring where Oilill denies Fergus hospitality and Fergus replies that he would not take it anyway, since he had never slain a man after sharing his food, the implication being that any future confrontation between the two men will involve deadly force. The two adversaries fight at a ford but by dawn it is apparent that neither man has yet made a mark on the other. The battle is indecisive until nine of Fergus’ comrades join the fray, apparently in clear violation of fir fer, something that does not go unnoticed by Fergus’ servant. When he remarks upon it to the servant of Oilill Finn, the latter seems unconcerned, and implies that ten against one is a fair fight for Oilill, such is his martial prowess.

Sayers, p. 55.
Chapter Three: Maturity. The hero is victorious, woos a maiden and becomes king.

If the first confrontation between the two men is marked by a certain amount of civility their second confrontation is marked by the absence of it, and it takes on a more belligerent and deadly tone. This time the confrontation follows the paradigm put forward by Parks: engagement, flyting, feat of arms, and ritual resolution. Fergus’ flyting is weak; he manages to praise Oilill without calling his honour into question or even making a solid attempt at the verbal humiliation that characterises flyting. Nor does he boast much of his own accomplishments, something which Bricriu had been keen to do earlier in the tale, even comparing Fergus to the formidable warriors Hector and Hercules. Fergus’ speech angers Oilill, and he replies with a torrent of verbal humiliation in which he promises to end Fergus’ martial career by dint of his own superior skills as a warrior. He calls Fergus’ masculinity into question in every way possible; he marks Fergus’ position as an exile in Medb’s court as well as calling him a drunkard, a laughing stock, and one whose fame as a great lover is predicated on his dalliances with ladies’ maids.

The text states that in the course of their great battle Fergus recalls the disgrace and insults that he has suffered at the hands of Oilill Finn and the Gamanradh while captive there, remembrances which call his honour into question even to himself. It is possible that the threat of suffering further shame and ignominy by being defeated by Oilill again spurs Fergus to victory, in this case a decisive victory that concludes with the beheading of Oilill. The ritual resolution of the episode is realised in Fergus’ presentation of her husband’s decapitated head to Flidais as a love token.

3.4.3 Domnall Dualbuide

The saga is unclear as to why Domnall Dualbuide and Fergus fight with each other. It could be viewed as being vengeance for Domnall’s slain son, or for the safe return for Flidais and her supernatural cow. In the context of the flyting paradigm either or both would be suitable reasons for calling an adversary to battle. Fergus and Domnall’s duels follow much the same pattern as the duels between Fergus and

323 A better comparison might between Fergus and Aeneas. The two are compared in Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna (Miles, p.39). Aeneas was a wanderer in exile (p.48), disgraced because of his status as a kept man in Dido’s court (p.47), the account of the fall of Troy is narrated by Aeneas (Aeneid 2, p.110), like Fergus, Aeneas kills two kings in Togail Troi (p.123) and finally, the lines of the Roman princes are traced back to Aeneas (p.65, 225), who performs a similar function to Fergus as a dynastic ancestor. See also Miles, pp. 159–163 for a discussion on the parallels between Polynices and Fergus (especially his role in TBC).
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Oilill. The stylised verbal sparring that characterises such confrontations is lacking in their initial duel. Fergus’ honour is called into question this time not by his adversary but by his compatriots. The tale states that when Domnall’s hound kills Fergus’ charioteer, Fergus is chastised for leaving his chariot. The warrior public are much more visible in Fergus and Domnall’s duel; they do not partake in combat after Fergus has called out his man; instead they clear an appropriate patch of ground on which the two men duel, but in the first bout they are equally matched and neither is able to inflict a wound on their opponent, exhausted from their efforts, they retreat from one another.

The second duel between the two men, however, does contain the public jeering of flyting, the feat of arms and the ritual resolution, but in an innovative way. This time, it is not Fergus’ ‘conspecific’ adversary who is calling Fergus’ masculinity and honour into question, but rather his own men, who, the tale says, reproach Fergus for his inability to decisively win the first duel with Domnall. This, presumably, is the downside to having a vigilant warrior public; they are happy to remind you of your failures as well as your successes. In a similar vein to what happens in his duel against Oilill, calling his honour into question and the threat of further shame appear to give Fergus extra incentive to win. Like his son before him, Domnall falls at Fergus’ hand, in full view of all the men of Ireland. The ritual resolution of this confrontation is the opposite of Oilill Finn’s, in which Flidais buried her husband’s decapitated head alongside his body, the armoured body of Domnall is left to lie on the battlefield where he fell and he is not afforded the same funeral rites as his son.

There is little evidence in these various duels of Fergus enjoying the prestige that his heroic status would seem to afford him. There is no evidence of the celebration of Fergus’ heroism within his own community, rather than achieve exalted status and praise for his exploits, he is chastised and his honour called into question. He is the equal, if not the better, of two of the greatest warriors of the Gamanradh, besting them both in single combat, and as far as the warrior public is concerned, he is also the better warrior than Cú Chualainn, yet this superiority never translates into acknowledged glory. Sayers notes that if glory cannot be won and heroic identity cannot be solidly established then single combat becomes an exercise
in futility, since its function is to either gain or maintain status by publicly defeating an adversary.\textsuperscript{324}

Indeed, the one aspect of Fergus’ character that is not consistent is his identity. He is sometimes an ambassador, honest broker, a king without a throne, or a disgraced former king who threw a tantrum and laid waste to his province for a period of sixteen years. Sometimes he is portrayed as a valued ally while being an exile in the territory of his enemy, but still with a certain degree of prestige and nobility, while being paramour of Queen Medb, or else he is an itinerant exile, a drunkard and a philanderer and chaser of ladies’ maids. It is the fluidity of his character and the mutability it affords that allows successive generations of literati to fashion Fergus into whatever they need him to be; this creates a contradiction between his reputation and his narratological function in the literature. His glory, such as it is, is posthumous, and comes in the form of his resurrection to tell the tale of the Táin; according to Marbán in \textit{Tromdám Guaire} Fergus is the only man who is qualified to recount the saga.\textsuperscript{325} Whatever honour and glory he wins by defeating three formidable adversaries in single combat is rendered largely irrelevant to his contemporaries in TBF2 by their lack of appropriate recognition of his exploits despite his primary narratological importance in the Cycle in general as a revenant-storyteller.

3.5 The Hero Wins a Maiden or Princess

Fergus has complicated relationships with three women over the course of his biography. Through Ness’ conniving he relinquishes his throne in Ulster; because of Medb his reputation is tarnished, especially according to an alternative, and undeveloped tradition, where it is because of Medb that he goes into exile, and not because of the loss of his throne through the scheming of Ness.\textsuperscript{326} His relationship with Flidais fits in smoothly with the heroic-biography episode in which the hero woos a maiden, but it is also a relationship that tarnishes his reputation even further. In the interpolated ending of TBF1 and in CA, it is implied that Fergus was a kept man and after her death and because of his diminished fortunes he returns to exile in Connacht.

\textsuperscript{324} Sayers, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{325} See 4.4.1 Fergus’ Resurrection p.118
\textsuperscript{326} See 2.2.2 Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa, p.42.
3.5.1 Ness

On account of his desire for Ness, Fergus gives up the throne of Ulster. The consequences of his abdication cause him to lose favour with the nobles of Ulster and create an antagonistic relationship with Conchobar mac Nessa, as a result of which he goes into exile in Connacht where he carries on an affair with Medb. For such an important relationship, one that sets the stage for Fergus’ tumultuous relationship with Conchobar mac Nessa and is closely connected to his ultimate exile (which is the central episode of his heroic biography and a fixed point around which most of the action of the Ulster Cycle pivots), there is very little in the extant material related to it. SC has a brief line describing how Fergus wished to have Ness as his wife, *adcobrarstaide in mnáí. i. Ness, do mnáí dó.*\(^{327}\) While Fergus considers the abdication temporary at the time, by the end of SC it becomes clear that the situation is permanent. In the absence of a complete tale explaining his exile in Connacht or a more developed storyline regarding his relationship with Medb, a more satisfactory explanation for Fergus’ exile would have been required. Introducing Ness and her demand that he relinquish his throne in favour of her son creates the scenario where Fergus not only loses his throne but also fall out of favour with the nobles of Ulster and sets up the circumstances for antagonistic relationship between Conchobar and Fergus.

3.5.2 Medb

Fergus’ relationship with Medb, while certainly more notorious than his relationship with the other women with whom he is connected, receives very little development or description in the tales. In CMM she is the one who put him under evil and harsh contracts, *Con-alla Medb michuru/mac do Roich ruadchuru/ cuir sir for Fergus forcomol,*\(^{328}\) and she is, presumably, the reason for which Fergus has to leave Ulster under a cloud of disgrace. The poem does not describe the circumstances which led to the relationship; it is simply presented to the audience as fact. The prose introduction to the poem describes the relationship, stating that Fergus turned against his people on account of a woman, i.e. Medb: ‘rogabsat hUlaid indib di ág Fergusa meic Rosa Roig ó rochinset. Ar fecc[í]s Fergus for Ulta di ág


\(^{328}\) Henry, p.61. I refer to Henry’s 1997 reconstruction of the text. For the prose account, Henry has added some readings from the Book of Ballymote and the Book of Lecan (f.116b).
The relationship between Fergus and Medb as portrayed in the extant material is not of a couple in love. Doris Edel suggests the relationship has been contrived to provide a reason for Fergus’ exile in Connacht, as related in CMM and TBC1, but was either discounted or discarded in other tales such as FLFmR or LMU. Medb and Fergus have three sons together while Fergus is in exile, and genealogical tradition has these sons migrate to the south and west of the country and found dynasties which then trace their lineage back to Adam through their prestigious ancestor, Fergus. Fergus and Medb are caught together in a tryst, either by Ailill or, alternatively, by Ailill’s charioteer, and Fergus’s sword is removed from his scabbard, or replaced with a wooden one. The taking of a warrior’s sword is signal enough that he has been caught off guard, and in not maintaining the correct vigilance, has been found wanting as a warrior. Replacing his sword with a wooden one insinuates that he has been emasculated into the bargain. Both instances of Fergus’ sword being taken are an obvious commentary on his honour, or the perceived lack of it.

329 C.f. TBC1, ll. 4068-9 “ar im[t]hōin mnā” where Conall Cernach chastises Fergus: *Ba ramór in brig sin…for tuaith 7 cenél at thóin mná drúithi* ‘too great is that force…against (your own) people and race for the sake of a wanton woman’s body.

330 Henry, p. 56.

331 Edel, p. 150.

332 For Genelach Ciarraige and Corco M’Druad, Genelach nEthne, Genelach Conmaicne, Genelach Fer Maige, see Appendix 4. See 4.3.2 *Síl Fhergusa*, the Visio Tnugdali and the Lismore connection, p.123.

333 TBC1 ll.1040-1146.
thereof, and say little about his relationship with Medb. The episodes would carry
the required narrative weight and cast the sort of aspersions on Fergus’ character and
heroic honour that the composers clearly intended were he with any other woman; it
need not have been Medb with whom he was engaged in a tryst at the time. In TBF2,
this particular tryst is highlighted as the occasion when Medb became pregnant, the
text is very careful not to mention who her offspring were and what their
genealogical roles are, in other texts one of Medb’s offspring, Ciar is the dynastic
ancestor of the Cíarraige who, in TBF2, are displaced by the Gamanradh. The
mother of Ciar, the eponymous ancestor of the Cíarraige need not be Medb, since the
genealogies trace the ultimate origins of the Cíarraige back to Adam through Fergus
and not Medb; he is the prestige ancestor, and not she.

In Fergus’ death tale, Medb acts purely as a catalyst and fulfils no other
significant role in the tale other than to rouse Ailill’s jealousy and provide him with a
valid reason to have Fergus killed. The pair go for a swim together and at one point
Medb wraps her legs around Fergus, an event that triggers Ailill’s jealousy, and
prompts him to say to Lugaid that he should cast his spear at the doe and the hart
frolicking in the lake. Once Medb’s actions have roused Ailill’s jealousy she takes
no further action in the tale, not even commenting on her dead lover, something as
might be expected if the romance between the pair had been more developed and not
been relegated to a perfunctory role in the narrative tradition, as something that was
employed by the literati to create scenarios which provided opportunity for either
compelling narrative or pointed political commentary.

3.5.3 Flidais

I would argue that it is Fergus’ liaison with Flidais in TBF1 and TBF2 that is
the best representation of the wooing incident episode one expects in the heroic-
biographical pattern. Flidais, while not a princess in the strictest sense, is a woman of
some status, and the text relays how Flidais suffers grád écmaise for Fergus, falling
in love with him after hearing of his exploits, 334

Bóí Flidais ben Ailella Finn i crí[c]h[Cíarraige. Carais Fergus
macRooig ara airsclaib, γ dothegetis tec[h]ta uadi cid ce[ch]a
sechtma[ñ]e beusa dochu[m]
Flidais was the wife of Oilill Finn in the realm of the Cíarraige. She loved Fergus mac Róig on account of the famous tales about him, and at the end of every week she sent messengers from her to him.\footnote{TCD MS 1339 p.247, ll. 34–37, my translation.}

In TBF1, Fergus is successful in winning her hand and she returns to Ulster with him, The LL version states: \textit{Is iarsin luid Flidais co Fergus mac Roig}, which is mirrored by the same passage in the Egerton text: \textit{Iss iarsin luid Fliduis co Fergus mac Rosui}.\footnote{Windisch, ‘Táin Bó Flidais’, p.212.} Flidais’ flight to Ulster with Fergus in the LU version of TBF1 is not as straightforward. The union is not presented as that of a woman and her husband, but rather as a commercial enterprise. The text states that Flidais went to Fergus as a result of a decision made by Ailill and Medb so that they would have access to the prodigious amount of milk produced by her cow which they plan to use to provide the Connachta with food during the raid on Ulster.\footnote{Windisch, ‘Táin Bó Flidais’, p.215. The LL and Egerton texts also contain the arrangement whereby Flidais' cow provides food every seventh day, but it is not presented as a decision made by Ailill and Medb and does not carry with it the same contractual overtones as in the LU text, nor do these versions imply that Fergus was a kept man because of it.}

The LU version of TBF1 says that when she dies in Tráigh Baile Fergus’ fortunes suffered because of it, and he returns to Connacht. It further states that it was in Connacht that he met his death as a result of Ailill’s jealousy.\footnote{Windisch, ‘Táin Bó Flidais’, pp. 212, 214.}

Her initial interest in Fergus in TBF2 comes about through a conversation with Bricriu, who is infamous in general, but most markedly in TBF2, for spreading enmity and discord. Flidais asks Bricriu about Fergus and he sings his praises, referring to his strength and valour in battle; he states that Fergus lacks nothing except that he is not king of Ulster and he does not have a queen worthy of him. Bricriu displays uncharacteristic tact and does not mention Medb’s role as Fergus’ paramour in this exchange with Flidais. Flidais empathises, stating that she lacks for nothing herself except a suitable husband. Bricriu extols the virtue of Oilill Finn but Flidais states that she loves Fergus greatly and asks him to put Fergus under obligation to carry her away from the Gamanradh: ‘ni gabthar uaidsi sin, oir tuca-sa grad dermar d'Fergus, agus ar imtechta imgesa? nach b-f [...] ortsa acht mana chuirer Fergus fo gesaib fa techt do n' breith-si leis o'n Gamanraid d'ais no dligí.’\footnote{TBF2 §85. The text is unclear at certain points in this section.} She tells Bricriu that when Fergus comes for her she will find a suitable wife for any
warriors he might bring with him and that she will bring with her the Maol Flidais, her hummel cow, who will supply the men of Ireland with milk every seventh night. She recites a love song to Bricriu, declaring Fergus to be her rightful spouse and pronouncing herself his worthy wife: Is e sin mo ceile cóir, /An fer re n-abor mac Roigh, /A ben dingmala de. 340

When Bricriu returns to Crúachan he tells Fergus that he has been courting on his behalf and relates to him the obligation that Flidais has put him under: Geis ort is troig mná troguin; / Mana thuga le tigh /Rigain Oilella echtaigh. Fergus’ reluctance to engage Bricriu on this matter leads to Bricriu’s harsh reminder of the state of affairs in which Fergus now finds himself; boiled down to the bare facts he is a landless and fortune-less exile who is getting older, Do chuir do gaisged ar cul /On ló tangais o d’ dun; /Do sgail do gnim is do gráin,/ Do chuaíd do brig acht becán. 341

Fergus agrees to go to the fort of Oilill Finn and to carry off Flidais; when confronted about it by her husband, he does not deny that is the reason for his presence there. When Fergus is captured by Oilill Finn, the former tells her in a moment of tenderness that the men have heard of their love for each other and he fears that her honour is at stake since she will not be held in the same regard by them, and he asks what is to be done. 342

She replies by orchestrating his escape, telling him to wait for the opportune moment when Oilill is drunk and gullible to boast of his prowess as a military leader. In such a situation Oilill would release Fergus so as to have him back up his claims and then he could escape.


340 TBF2 §87.
341 TBF2§96.
342 TBF2§178.
343 TBF2§178.
‘I know for certain what we shall do’, said Flidais; ‘for I have a great feast prepared for Oilill; and I shall ply him with the choicest of the banquet until the high prince gets into a state of drunkenness and unreason and until his mind becomes greatly excited. When you see him in that condition, say that the men of Ireland attack the fortress but feebly. And he will reply: ‘Do you think they would attack it more valorously if you were along with them?’ Then you say that if the might of your arm were aiding them, they would have captured it long before now. When he hears these words his unreason and high spirit will cause him to set you free.’\textsuperscript{344}

It is a rare touching moment between the two lovers who are trying to devise a way out of a difficult situation; he is concerned for her honour and she wishes to set her lover free, and she is prepared to use no small amount of guile in order to trick her husband into releasing Fergus. However, the mood is short-lived and the tone of their relationship changes dramatically after Fergus killed Oilill Finn and Flidais is finally legitimately his. She has a change of heart and is not pleased with the gift of her husband’s decapitated head; she is wracked with guilt that she was the cause of his death. She laments for her dead husband who has died on her account, and recites a poem praising his generosity and his goodness. Such a lament is in stark contrast with Fergus’ actions, namely his attempting to carry off another man’s wife and also his killing him and presenting her with his decapitated head. In her grief Flidais has her attendants dress the head of her dead husband, and she makes sure that it is buried along with Oilill’s body.\textsuperscript{345}

In the final section of the tale, Muireadach Mend, a member of the Gamanradh host who are chasing Fergus and the men of Ireland in an attempt to take Flidais and her wonderful cow back from them, comes across Flidais by chance and is successful in rescuing her.\textsuperscript{346} TBF2 does not preserve the tradition of TBF1 that Fergus and Flidais returned to Ulster until her death. In fact, nothing else is mentioned of Flidais for the rest of the tale except one comment at its conclusion which says that some learned people say that Flidais stayed with Muiredach for a season but later, along with her cow and retinue, she went to Loch Letrech and nothing was known of her since.\textsuperscript{347}

\textsuperscript{344} TBF2§178.
\textsuperscript{345} TBF2§200.
\textsuperscript{346} TBF2§223.
\textsuperscript{347} TBF2§226
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3.6 The Hero Becomes King

Even though Fergus is frequently depicted as a disgraced former king of Ulster who relinquishes his throne and subsequently goes into exile, there is very little in the surviving tradition relating to his role as king. What material that does exist in reference to Fergus’ kingship of Ulster is quite late. Even so, there are some details in keeping with Raglan’s formulation of, principally episode [13] where the hero becomes king and [14] where he reigns uneventfully. Fergus is described as having been king in SC and CLR but it is only in TBF2 that there is a description of him assuming the throne. In the course of Fergus’ rage over the slaying of the sons of Uisliu he reacquires the throne of Ulster after he routs Conchobar mac Nessa, and TBF2 relays that he reigned for a period of seven years. While this period of kingship would seem to be uneventful in terms of Fergus’ kingly duties, it was not a successful tenure and is referred to as the black reign of Fergus.

3.6.1 Táin Bó Flidais 2

The passage which deals with Fergus’ assumption of the kingship is absent from the Glenmasan version of TBF2, but is present in RIA MS B iv 1. According to Dobbs, the RIA manuscript supplements and completes the events recorded in the Glenmasan manuscript. RIA MS B iv 1 provides the opening paragraphs of the tale, lost in Glenmasan. For the rest of the tale it provides an inferior rendition in which much of the poetry has been ommitted. This section adds the episode between the killing of the sons of Uisliu and Fergus’ departure for exile in Connacht. It tells how he comes upon the bodies of the sons of Uisliu at Emain Macha but finds that otherwise the fort was empty. The tale then goes on to tell of how Fergus plunders and pillages throughout the province and assumes lordship over Emain Macha for either the period of a year, or, according to an alternative version, for a period of seven years, do gabh féin tigernas in tire re bhliadhna go ffiuileadh. Agus adberat aroile go raibhe Fergus go cenn șecht mbliadhan a ríghi nUladh. His reign is not deemed to be successful or popular, for the tale states that the sun did not rise over the edge of the ramparts of Emain Macha in that time, and it is therefore known as the black reign of Fergus, nár éirigh grian tar uillin laoch-mhúir na hEmhna, gurab dubh-flaithes Fergusa ainm na ríghé sin. The text goes on to state that while Fergus held the throne Concobhar was banished and there was general disruption of

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349 Ibid.
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the proper order of things during this time, with a war raging amongst the Ulstermen that caused waste and destruction in the province.350

The nobles of Ulster gather to chastise Fergus for his disgraceful reign and urge upon him that it would be better for him to be a prince among men than a disgraced king.351 They proceed to try to bribe him to relinquish the throne, offering him wealth, warriors, prestige and fortune if he would consider doing so. The text is incomplete and as there is no corresponding passage in the Glenmasan manuscript it is difficult to know if Fergus gave any consideration to their offer, since in the Glenmasan version of TBF2, he sulks off to Connacht in a self-absorbed exile.

3.6.2 Kingship

The saga literature illustrates a belief system according to which the king is a sacred figure at the centre of his universe. The maintenance of the proper natural order depending on the well-being of the king and his possession of a range of qualities listed in the B version of Audacht Morainn (herafter AM) as being: merciful (trócar), righteous (fíríón), proper (cosmail), conscientious (cuibsech), firm (fosath), generous (eslabar), hospitable (garte), of noble mien (fíal-ainech), steadfast (sessach), beneficent (lessach), able (étir), honest (inric), well spoken (suthnge), steady (foruste), true-judging (fír-brethach). The text also contains a list of alliterative pairs favourable to fir flathemon: lordship and worth (flaith γ febas), fame and victory (cluith γ coscar), progeny and kindred (cland γ cenél), peace and life (síd γ sáegul), prosperity and parturitions (toceth γ toatha).352 Along with this list of attributes, Irish kings were also considered to embody a series of metaphysical and symbolic qualities linking the kingdom and its social and natural welfare to the physical, mental and social condition of its ruler.353

*Audacht Morainn*, and Old Irish text which is an example of *Speculum principum* (The Mirror of Princes), a literary genre that consists of giving advice to a king. AM describes the institute of kingship in early Irish society, characterises four types of kingship according to the character of the king rather than their rank in the

351 ‘A gcuid Eochach’ is a possible reading according to Dobbs, 1916:135.
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hierarchy of overkings and petty kings. One of these is cíallflaith, the ‘prudent ruler’ who takes power without victories and without triumphs, deprives no one and is deprived by no one no one deprives him. Another is the tarbflaith, the “bull ruler”, to-slaid side to-sladar, ar-clich ar clechar, con-claid con-cladar, ar-reith ad-rethar, to-seinn to-sennar, is fris con bith-buírethar bennaib, who, according to Byrne’s translation:

is not a well liked man. He strikes and is struck, he injures and is injured, he tosses and is tossed. Rough and difficult is the beginning of his lordship, hateful and unprincely its middle, unstable and fleeting its end. Against his sons crimes will be committed, men’s faces will be turned, men’s hearts will be closed. ‘Not welcome’ all will say, ‘are the sons of that prince: evil was your father’s lordship before.

All these are in stark contrast with fírflaith, the true ruler, Fírflaith cétamus, luithir side fri cach fó, fris-tibi firinni inde-cluinethar, coten-ocaib inden-aici. Ar ní fírflaith nad níamat bí bendachtnaib, The true ruler, in the first place, moves towards every good thing, he smiles on the truth when he hears it, he exalts it when he sees it. For he whom the living do not glorify with blessings is not a true ruler.

Along with the attributes listed above and that are prevalent in the literature is the concept of fír flathemon, ‘The Ruler’s Truth’, which “ensures the society’s prosperity, abundance of food and fertility and protection from plague, calamity and enemy attack”; such a concept, argues Watkins, is prevalent in Old Irish, Indo-Iranian and Greek material. Central to the Irish perception of kingship, it lies at the very heart of sacral kingship. Such views are expressed in AM:

§6 (7) Comath firinni, cotn-ofathar.
§7 Turcbath firinni, tan-uircéba.
§8 (8) Ocbath trócaire cotn-océba.
§9 Coicelth a thuatha, cot-céllfetar.
§10 Fairtheth a thuatha, fa-rresat.
[...]
§14 (13a) Is tre f. fl. fo- síd sámi sube soad sádili – sláini.

Kelly, Audacht Morainn, pp. 18–19.
§62 'The bull ruler strikes [and] is struck, wards off [and] is warded off, roots out [and] is rooted out, attacks [and] is attacked, pursues [and] is pursued. Against him there is always bellowing with horns.' Kelly, p. 19
Byrne, p. 25. See also Kelly, pp.18–9.
Kelly, p. 18–9.
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§15 (11) Is tre f. fl. ath- (mór) cathu fri crícha commámat-cuirethar.
[...]
§17 (16) Is tre f. fl. ad-manna mármsó mófedo-mlasetar.
§18 Is tre f. fl. ad- mlechti márbóis-moínigter.
§19 (15) Is tre f. fl. ro-bbí cech etho ardósil imbeth.
§20 (23) Is tre f. fl. to-aidble (uisce) éisc i sruthaib –snáither.

Let him preserve justice, it will preserve him. Let him raise justice, it will raise him. Let him exalt mercy, it will exalt him. Let him care for his tribes, they will care for him. Let him help his tribes, they will help him. [...] It is through the justice of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquillity, joy, ease [and] comfort. It is through the justice of the ruler that he dispatches [great] battalions to the borders of hostile neighbours. [...] It is through the justice of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted. It is through the justice of the ruler that milk yields of great cattle are maintained. It is through the justice of the ruler that there is abundance of every high, tall corn. It is through the justice of the ruler that abundance of fish swim in streams. 359

AM contrasts the legitimate tenure of kingship and just rule with the illegitimate rule of unjust kings; the rule of a righteous prince could confer prosperity on the túath over which he rules; conversely, gáu flathemon, ‘the falsehood of a king’, was believed to be detrimental to the prosperity of the túath, ‘For it is the Prince’s Falsehood that brings perverse weather upon wicked people and dries up the fruit of the earth.’ 360 In Corpus Iuris Hibernici it is recorded that there are seven testimonies that attest to the lie of every king, which include: ‘famine in his reign, drying up of dairy produce, ruin of mast, blight of grain.’ 361 In the seventh century De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi (On the Twelve Abuses of the World), the ninth abuse is the rex iniquus, ‘whose rule precipitates defeat, disorder, death and destruction.’ 362

Apart from this metaphysical aspect of fir flathemon, legitimacy is afforded to a just king by means of two criteria. Firstly, legitimacy is conferred on the rule of the just king when it is recognised as such according to tradition and is readily accepted by society. The king’s office is further legitimised by his inauguration.

362 Aitchison, p.63.
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according to customary practice. Furthermore, the Triads state that there are three things that are found in a just king: a contract with other kings, the feast of Tara, abundance during his reign. *Tréde neimthigedar rig: fónaidm ruirech, feis Temrach, roimse inna fláith.*

It should be clear that the reign of Fergus described in RIA MS B iv 1 is not the legitimate reign of a just king in possession of *fir flathemon*. Fergus’ reign most closely resembles that of the *tarbfhlaith*, a ruler who is not well liked, and who presides over a rough, unprincely, and unstable reign. Fergus plundered and slaughtered throughout the province in the wake of the death of the sons of Uisliu, according to the text, and embodies none of the qualities described in AM as befitting a legitimate ruler; he is neither merciful, nor righteous, nor generous, nor hospitable. Rather he presides over a dubh-†laithes and his reign could well be characterised as marked by *gáu flathemon* and replete with defeat, disorder, death and destruction. Added to which Fergus does not have the blessing of the elements; even the sun did not rise over the ramparts of Emain for the duration of his sovereignty. Lacking the natural harmony that a just king would have engendered enjoyed, his lordship of Emain could have no abundances of fruit, milk, corn, or fish, in accordance with the principles of *fir flathemon* laid out by AM. His sovereignty in Emain is characterised by an absence of peace and life (síd 7sáegul) and of prosperity and parturitions (toceth 7toatha).

Thomas Charles-Edwards points out that one of the underlying assumptions made in Críth Gablach is that the status of the nobility is normally inherited. On the question of inheritance, Aitchison says that the king was chosen from a kin group (*derbfine*) whose affiliation was restricted to four generations of a common ancestor who had once held the kingship. The same scholar observes that the presumed passing-down of a sacral quality within royal lineages, a heritage that predisposed its members to qualities necessary for holding royal office and embody the principles of *fir flathemon*. Since the LL and Stowe versions of TBC refer to Fergus as mac in ardřig, it is conceivable that he was a member of that select group through which the

363 Aitchison, pp. 64-5.
366 Aitchison, p. 64.
367 Aitchison, p. 67.
metaphysical qualities Irish kings were understood to possess were inherited. The Biv 1 passage only describes how Fergus re-assumed the throne, and nowhere else in the extant material are we given information about his first tenure as sovereign. Given the contrast between the later tales and the earlier, more ‘noble’ descriptions of Fergus’ ambassadorial roles, it is likely that his first reign did not resemble the *dubh-ślaithes* described here.

Binchy notes that “it was the reverence due to kingly blood and the aura of sanctity attending his inauguration that exalted him above all others...It was the royal blood that was sacred rather than the particular individual in whose veins it flowed.” If this is the case, it is easy to see the *dubh-ślaithes* as a commentary on Fergus’ descendants. Just as honour could be passed forward through generations, so honour or dishonour could go in the opposite direction. By creating an illegitimate reign characterised by destruction, disorder, and violence and standing in stark contrast with the rule of a legitimate sovereign, so the framers of this tale are dishonouring Fergus’ royal blood and thus everyone who claims descent from him. Dishonouring Fergus’ descendants or removing all mention of them as in TBF2 would appear to have been an important agenda item for the composers of this version of TBF, who went to great pains to promote the Gamanradh and to recast Oilill Finn as a Gamanradh king rather than the ruler of the Cíarraige Af, as in TBF1, by removing any mention of Ciar, the eponymous ancestor of the Cíarraige, and son of Medb and Fergus, from TBF2. Casting Fergus’ reign in such an unfavourable light effectively sullies the ancestral gene pool, and with such potent narrative criticism of Fergus’ kinship, the tale implies that the claims of the scions of Fergus to the right to rule through descent from him are now doubtful.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The themes of duel with a beast, wooing a maiden and assuming kingship as described by Raglan and de Vries are present in the Fergus material. As stated at the outset, all the patterns thus far proposed contain these episodes in a particular order. The hero must fight with a beast, then woo the princess and then assume the kingship. In Raglan’s pattern these episodes take place before the hero is exiled and in de Vries’ pattern, while the hero’s assumption of the throne is missing, the hero

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fights with a dragon or another monster before he wins the maiden and goes into exile. It is clear that these episodes do not follow the order that would be expected from the heroic-biographical tradition in the case of the extant Fergus material, which is undoubtedly due to the primacy afforded Fergus’ exile in the oldest stratum of the Ulster Cycle material. The exile of Fergus mac Róich from Ulster and his presence in the service of Medb of Crúachan are among the oldest and most prevalent themes in the Ulster Cycle. All subsequent literature had to respect the existing conditions that the early tales established. Clearly, with respect to the later tales which feature Fergus mac Róich, those existing conditions were respected to a certain degree, but the later composers of tales such as TBF2 were happy to adapt the status quo to their own narrative and political advantages while still maintaining Fergus’ exile status as a principal theme in their narratives.

As Fergus’ exile is such a dominant theme in the Ulster Cycle, and is already well established in the earliest literature, any additions to Fergus’ heroic biography should be considered subsequent to his exile. Therefore, the battle, wooing, and kingship episodes, which are related and co-dependent, and which form the heart of the maturity of the hero must be considered in relation to each other. The earlier versions of the tales which contain these incidents are necessarily out of order when considered in the larger context of the biographical pattern in relation to the Fergus material, as the exile episode has been given primacy in perpetuity, the importance of Fergus’ exile has displaced these episodes, which would have occurred earlier in his career to later. In terms of the later phases of composition for the material discussed above, Fergus woos the maiden Flidais in both TBF1 and 2 and fights with both a king and a beast, Domnall Dualbuaidhe and his hound in TBF2. These incidents, although present in only two tales are late additions to the corpus of Fergus material, can be considered to be in order. However, since it is stated in both versions of TBF that Flidais has fallen in love with Fergus on account of stories she has heard about him, there is no traditional wooing episode to be investigated, as she is already in love with him before he shows up to carry her away from her husband in TBF nor is there any need for Fergus to engage in single combat to win her hand as she has already freely given it. Since she falls in love with him on account of hearing of his bravery, the episodes could be said to appear in order, as de Vries argues that the function of the hero’s battle with a monster is to prove his valour and
strength in battle and thus to be worthy of the hand of the maiden. In the, earlier, interpolated ending of TBF1 she leaves her husband and goes back to Ulster with Fergus, but in TBF2 she has a change of heart after Fergus kills Oilill Finn and is eventually rescued by the Gamanradh and taken back west with them; neither version of the tale presents a particularly successful union. In TBF1, Fergus is described as being something of a kept man and over-reliant on his wife, and after her death his status declines to such an extent that he returns to Medb and Ailill in Connacht. In TBF2, Flidais is so horrified by her actions, which have caused the death of her husband that she balks at the idea of being with Fergus, in stark contrast to the tender romance that had been described between them earlier in the tale. In neither tale does the union produce offspring, which must be considered the epitome of a successful relationship, and in light of that criterion, only Fergus’ relationship with Medb can be considered as being successful.

While Fergus is described as having been king early in his heroic career, specifically in SC, the means by which he assumed the throne are unknown, and this lacuna allowed later tales to fill that narrative vacuum with events as discussed above, which present Fergus as a less than desirable candidate for the kingship of Ulster. Perhaps the description of his unsuccessful kingship in TBF2 serves to bookend the tradition, according to which he gave up his throne for the sake of a woman in the first place. Such an individual was clearly not destined to be a great ruler. Fergus’ kingship and exile are presented in the Glenmasan manuscript in the order in which the pattern dictates. In the period between the events of OCU and TBF, Fergus returns to Emain Macha and assumes the throne in Conchobar’s absence, only later taking up service with Medb and Ailill in Connacht after the end of his *dubh-flaithes*.

Fergus’ single combats in the extant literature are striking. In the course of his martial career he fights a beast and two kings. He secures victories over all his opponents in these single combats, even if in the case of Oilill Finn and Domnall Dualbuide the battles are fought twice. The flyting ritual common to heroic literature is present in TBF2, and intensifies the latter fights between Fergus and Oilill and Domnall; the posturing, jeering, and ritual verbal humiliation common to flyting are particularly notable in these duels and the flyting is presented with the appropriate vigilant warrior public as witnesses. Whatever honour and glory Fergus
wins by defeating three formidable adversaries in single combat are rendered largely irrelevant to his contemporaries in TBF2, as his reputation and his the portrayal of his character does not benefit from the enhanced status that these victories would inspire.

TBF2 evinces an intimate knowledge of the narrative tradition that it draws upon in order to advance its agenda that Ó hUiginn terms the Connacht Project through the promotion of certain individuals of North Connacht provenance at the expense of other legendary characters, most notably Fergus mac Róich.\(^{369}\) Fergus is presented in these texts in a way which denigrates his character and would appear to be used as a narrative device in which his descendants, the Cíarraige, are removed from the narrative of TBF completely and replaced with the Gamanradh. These revisions were carried out with a view to, presumably, altering the popular reception of Fergus that heretofore had cast him in a ‘heroic’ if ambiguous role, and recasting him as a more peripheral character. In TBF2 there is no ambiguity, and Fergus he is presented as a weak character, subjected to taunts about his honour by his own people, and the stages of the heroic biography that frame this recasting are carefully chosen. The battle with a beast, the wooing of a maiden and the assumption of kingship, each of which figures in TBF2, all play into the concept of heroism, and are laden with subtle information on what it means to be a hero. All three are rites of passage. Defeating a powerful and dangerous adversary indicates that the hero is a man, a full adult in heroic society with the strength to fight and defeat an equally powerful and masculine adversary. The display of physical prowess and the wooing of a maiden are also related. The hero must display his physical dominance and in doing so prove to the maiden that he is worthy of her hand and can act as her protector.

The assumption of the kingship is the apex of the hero’s career in the heroic-biographical pattern, the achievement of which comes only after he has demonstrated his martial prowess and passed through the rite of marriage. However, in all these episodes Fergus fails: he gains no honour from his defeats of Oilill and Domnall, his attempt to woo Flidais is doomed once she re-examines her love for Fergus in the light of her husband’s death, and she is rescued by the Gamanradh, and his rule at

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Emain Macha is a disaster. While, in a manner of speaking, the character goes through these rites of passage successfully, in that he survives the ordeals they present, he gains nothing lasting from any of them; none of his achievements serve to enhance his narrative prestige. There seems to be a direct relationship between Fergus’ loss of heroic prestige and the development of his heroic biography, especially in the tales TBF2 and OCU just discussed, which suggest that as the 
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*added in the ‘missing’ episodes of his heroic biography, augmenting his role in the narrative and moving him from a central ‘heroic’ character in the earlier tales, to a more peripheral one, or rather, a character with a more peripheral function, at the expense of the very nature of the criteria that make a character heroic. In this light Fergus is a less-than-heroic character and the focus shifts to his role as prestige ancestor. Framing his kingship in such a bad light reflects badly on those who would claim descent from him, and the displacement of the Cíarraige in TBF2 and the elevation of the Gamanradh is surely supportive of this shift in the function of Fergus in the literature from a central heroic, if ambiguous, character to one who occupies a mostly genealogical function on the periphery of the cast of literary 
*dramatis personae.*
Chapter Four: Death of the Hero

4.0 Chapter Four: Death of the Hero

This chapter is concerned with the death of the hero. Fergus is unusual in that he has an active role in the literature after he dies. I will firstly investigate the death of Fergus as it is related in his aided. Next I will discuss the affinities between Aided Fhergusa and the death of Baldr in the Norse tradition. Then I will address Fergus’ resurrection to relay the Táin and his presence in a Latin vision text. Finally I will examine the episode in Raglan’s pattern which describes how the hero’s children do not succeed him with an analysis of Fergus’ descendants in Munster and a brief discussion of their genealogical tradition.

The investigations carried out by Von Hahn and Nutt describe the death of the hero as occurring in an extraordinary manner while he is still young, episodes [13] and [14]. In Raglan’s pattern episodes [18] and [19] follow those described by Von Hahn, in which the hero meets a mysterious death. De Vries’ pattern also describes the death of the hero while he is still young in episode [10]. Rank’s pattern does not consider the death of the hero at all, since his pattern covers only the first half of the hero’s life. Fergus, however, enjoys an active afterlife and is resurrected to tell the story of the Táin Bó Cúailnge in two texts which describe how that tale was rediscovered. He also makes an appearance in a Latin vision text, Visio Tnugdali, holding open the mouth of a massive hell beast with his comrade in arms, Conall Cernach.

The death of Fergus mac Róich is the culmination of a series of events which form the chief incidents in his heroic biography. Exiled from Ulster, Fergus formed an alliance with Ailill and Medb. He then entered into a sexual relationship with Medb, and despite his having the tacit agreement of Ailill at the outset, Ailill’s jealousy was eventually roused and he arranged to have Fergus killed. These events agree with incidents in the biographical patterns outlined by both Raglan and de Vries. In Raglan’s scheme, having been driven from the throne and/ or city episode [17], the hero meets a mysterious death episode [18], often on the top of a hill, episode [19], and his children do not succeed him, episode [20]. De Vries’ scheme

370 Nutt, pp. 3,11.
371 Raglan, p.179
Chapter Four: Death of the Hero

is less detailed in its structure and requires that hero die young, in exile.\textsuperscript{374} The exile motif, common to both schemata, is present in the death of Fergus mac Róich, as is the hero’s extraordinary death. De Vries and Raglan’s patterns also note that the children of the slain hero do not succeed him as king. The genealogies demonstrate that none of the children Fergus had with Medb succeed him as king of Ulster.\textsuperscript{375}

4.1 Aided Fhergusa

There are two versions of the \textit{aided} of Fergus mac Róich and they are preserved in only two manuscripts. A longer version of the tale is preserved in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh Advocates MS 72.1.40 which dates from the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{376} A shorter, incomplete, version is preserved in the Yellow Book of Lecan dated to the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{377} Both versions of the tale describe the death of Fergus in Connacht but differ on the details of the hero’s death.

The long version of the aided (hereafter AF1) from the Advocates manuscript describes how, while in exile in Connacht after the slaying of the sons of Uisliu, Fergus’ death is contrived by Ailill after his jealousy is roused when he sees Fergus swimming in a lake with Medb, and how Ailill tricked the blind Lugaid into casting a spear at Fergus, a blow which kills him.

Bui Fergus for luinges i con[n]achtaib iar na sarugud im maccuib usnech… Batar ann iar ngnimaib a con loch ar mag ai… luid in slog uili in i[ls]un loch… Luid Medb didiu co raibi for a bruindisim 7 a gabla ime 7 co taircell som in loch annsin 7 rogab et Ailill…. Is alaind ann dongn an dam a Lugaid 7 an eilit isin loch ar Ailill, Cid nac gontar or Lugaid…. teilsom dun orc[ho]r forru ar Ailill… do teile Lugaid urcor don gai com boi triana druim siar sechtuir… Truag sin ar Lugaid mo comalta 7 mfer cumtha do marbaid dimsar cin cinaid

Fergus was in exile in Connacht after his honour had been violated concerning the sons of Usnech… One day having exercised their hounds they were by the lake on Mag Ai… the whole crowd went into the lake to bathe,… Then Medb went until she was on his breast, her legs entwined around him, and then he swam around the lake. Jealousy seized Ailill…’It is delightful, Lugaid, what the hart and the doe are doing in the lake’, said Ailill. ‘Why not kill them?’ said Lugaid… ‘make a cast at them for us’ said Ailill…. Lugaïd cast

\textsuperscript{375} See Appendices 2 and 3, pp.143, 144. See Appendix 4 for detailed genealogies of Fergus’ descendants.
\textsuperscript{377} Hull, ‘The Death of Fergus Mac Róig’, p. 304.
the spear so it went out through his back…. ‘Alas,’ said Lugaid, ‘that I have killed my foster-brother and companion innocently.’

A shorter account of Fergus’ aided also survives in the Yellow Book of Lecan, (hereafter AF2). Although the YBL version of AF differs from the version preserved in Advocates MS 72.1.40 it communicates much of the same core information about the death of Fergus. It states that Fergus was in Connacht after the slaying of the sons of Uisliu, but it deviates from the longer tale by relating that after a year of exile in Connacht he made peace with Conchobar and returned to Ulster. This development echoes Fergus’ return in CA, but in AF2 the return episode includes a reconciliation with Conchobar instead of with his son as in CA. Hull draws attention to the affinities shared between this tale and Táin Bó Flidais, specifically Fergus’ return to Ulster with Flidais after the death of Cú Chulainn, and his being granted lands there. While in Ulster Fergus kills a man called Traiglethan, and was expelled to Connacht again for a period of six years. After presenting the death of Cú Chulainn the tale describes Fergus’ granting of Cú Chulainn’s lands in Ulster. The tale doesn’t explicitly mention Fergus’ return to Ulster but the events of AF2 place Fergus in Connacht on a visit when he was killed by Ailill.

Bui Fergus Mac Roig hi Conachtaib iar marbud mac n–Uislend for a chomairce. Gniid–sium síd fri Concobar iar m–bliadain 7 gelltar ferund 7 crodh dó 7 ní roacht sin dó intan ro–marb Fergus Troiglethan ar comairce Concobair. Indarbthar–som iar sin int–i Fergus hi Conachtaib fri re sè m–bl iadan. Iar n–eg Conculaind, tucad ferund ConCulainn do Fergus 7 luid a sein hi Conachtaib for celide 7 marbaís Ailill he i. Fergus et reliqua.

4.1.1 Structure of Aided Fhergusa

Daniel Melia has given some consideration to the structure of death tales in the Ulster Cycle. He takes, as his basis of study, the ten surviving aideda from the LL tale list, his justification for considering only these tales is that such a grouping on the basis of type indicates that these tales were considered as being a natural

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379 col. 343, 11. 50–56; facs. col 330a
381 Transcription and translation Hull, ibid.
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group. Melia’s intention is to break the tales down into their constituent narrative units, and in doing so, to suggest a morphological analysis of the aideda. He states that the structure of the death-tales is relatively simple, and the tales fall into one of two groups. In one of which the death of the hero comes about through his involvement in a sexual triangle and the other culminating in the death of the hero after the violation of a geis or social obligation. He terms these groups Woman-Revenge and Tabu-Revenge, the structure of which is as follows:

Woman-Revenge
1) Someone’s wife is slept with illicitly
2) The injured man takes revenge by killing the culprit [often by proxy].

Tabu-Revenge
1) Hero has tabu [or social obligation].
2) He is forced to break tabu [often by social obligation].
3) He dies a victim of vengeance.

Based on the dominant theme of each tale, Melia determines that the deaths of Fergus, Blai, Ailill, Máel Fothartaigh, and Cú Róí are as a result of woman-revenge; and the deaths of Conchobar, Cú Chulainn, Fer Diad, Celtchar, and Conall are the result of tabu-revenge. He notes that although all the tales contain elements of both, the emphasis varies between tales. In the woman-revenge scenario Medb and Fergus have intercourse, Ailill becomes jealous and has Fergus killed. In the tabu-revenge scenario, Ailill has the blind Lugaid cast a spear at Fergus in revenge for this breach of the rules of hospitality; in desiring Ailill’s wife and by having intercourse with her, he has, according to Melia, broken the rules that govern a man’s behaviour towards other men. Ailill arranges for Fergus to be struck with a spear while he is in the water with Medb. Fergus tries to retaliate and cast a spear at Ailill but misses and dies on a hillside near the lake.

Melia comments on the apparent similarities of plot structure inherent in all the tales of his case study, which, he says, whilst preserving a shared morphology of structure do not share enough linguistic characteristics for the tales to have been

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383 Melia, p.38.
384 brackets indicate optional action.
385 Melia, p.39.
386 Melia, p.43, 49.
copied from one another. Melia suggests that there must be something inherent in the structure of the tale types which has ensured its survival. Breaking down the structure of the death-tale pattern to three steps which he characterises as:

Woman + Man
Breaking of Rules
Death [in Revenge].

he notes that the elements above always appear in the same order in his case study and that the woman is always present. Sex always precedes a death and the hero is never killed by a man who desires the hero’s wife. He stresses that any number of these elements may be combined or a single element may constitute a story in itself, however, the order in which the elements appear in the corpus he investigated are always set.

Melia argues that this type of tale highlights the ultimate conflict between personal desire and the rigid code which governed social behaviour. In the woman-revenge tale type the conflict is lust, and in the tabu-revenge tale type, it is the gessi. Melia proposes that the message to be read in these particular tales is that of a conflict between personal and social obligations which causes the death of the hero.

He argues that the various points of reference within the tales indicate that they are probably not confined exclusively to Ulster material nor was the structure developed by a cohort of story-tellers. He reasons that the similarities in plot structure among the aideda imply that they did not have origins independent from each other, and likewise, had they all been copied from a single person, school or prototype, we would expect fewer discrepancies in the incidents preserved in them.

387 Melia, p.44.
388 Melia, p.48
389 Ibid.
390 Melia, p.40
391 Melia, p.49
392 Melia, p.53.
393 Melia, p.54.
4.1.2 Manuscript Context, ‘anthology’: Advocates MS 72.1.40

Thomas Clancy discusses the death tale of Fergus mac Róich in his 2008 article on what he refers to as the Ulster Cycle death-tale ‘anthology’ preserved in Advocates MS 72.1.40. He investigates the manuscript context of these tales, their relationship to each other and their relationship to the Ulster Cycle as a whole.\(^{394}\) The ‘anthology’ of which AF1 is a part is found in the first section, the earliest of the manuscript, dated by Ronald Black in his unpublished catalogue of Gaelic manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland, to the fourteenth or fifteenth century.\(^{395}\)

The first section of the manuscript is dedicated entirely to the genre of death tales, in particular, the death tales of Ulster heroes. While it is difficult to say when or where the manuscript’s contents came to be assembled in this present form, it important to consider why the contents came together, and that even though comprised of texts written at different times, there is an obvious focus to the collection which is unique.\(^{396}\)

p. 1 (fo. 1r): Aided Conchubair
p. 2 (fo. 2r): Aided Ailella ocus Conail Chernaig
p. 3 (fo. 3r): Aided Fhergusa maic Róich
p. 6. (fo. 3v): Aided Meidbe
p. 7 (fo. 4r): Aided Cheit maic Mágach (incorporating Aided Bélchon)
p. 8 (fo. 4v): Aided Lóegaire Búadaig
p. 9 (fo 5r): Aided Cheltchair maic Uthechair (incorporating Aided Bláf Briugad).\(^{397}\)

4.1.3 AF in the Tale Lists

The aideda of this manuscript share an affinity with the Irish tale lists, the aideda of Conall, Celtchair, Bláf Briugu, Loegaire, Fergus and Conchobar are recorded in both List A and MS 72.1.40.\(^{398}\) Of the other tales in the ‘anthology’, there are only four which are not mentioned in the tale list: those concerning Ailill,

\(^{395}\) Clancy, p.72.
\(^{396}\) Clancy, p.74.
\(^{397}\) Clancy, p.74–75.
Medb, Céit mac Magach and Bélchu. Mac Cana argues that the absence of the
_aideda_ from tale list B could reflect an opinion that they were so common that it may
have been considered unnecessary, or impractical, to catalogue them as a single
group.\(^{399}\) He draws attention to the words at the end of the tocharmlada section of List
A, _et inní rohort 7 robíth 7 abath_ ‘..and those who were slaughtered and were slain
and died’. Similarly in list B we find written… _aní rohort araile conedha imdha fo
Érinn archena_ ‘and those whom numerous peoples slew throughout Ireland
besides’.\(^{400}\) Mac Cana argues that these statements may have been considered
sufficient acknowledgement of the death tales which are omitted. He adds a caveat
that these statements may also refer to the oircne ‘plunderings, massacres’, but
argues that the phrasing of the statements could still generally be understood to refer
to many death tales, which for some reason or other the compilers left out.\(^{401}\)

As well as tale list A, the tenth-century poem _Fianna bátar i nÉmain_
mentions the deaths of Fergus, Conall and Ailill in almost the same order as
presented in MS 72.1.40. The poem also lists the deaths of Conchobar, Cét mac
Magach, Bélchu, Loegaire Buadach, Celtchar and Blaí Briugu; however, they are not
grouped in the same order as in the Advocates manuscript. The aideda of Ailill,
Conall and Fergus are consistent in the poem and in the manuscript, which is an
unsurprising unanimity considering the associations among these particular aideda.
The death tales of Loegaire, Celtchair and Blaí are listed in the poem before the
deaths of Ailill, Conall and Fergus, unlike in Advocates 72.1.40. However, both the
poem and the manuscript preserve the aideda of these laat-mentioned three heroes in
the same order, and similarly the aideda of Cét mac Magach and Bélchu; these
heroes are always associated with each other no matter in which order they are
presented. It is possible that Advocates MS 72.1.40 preserves an anthology of death-
tales which were compiled relatively early. Thomas Clancy suggests that the
presence of ‘Aided Fhergusa’ in both tale list A and the Fergus’ death referenced in
the poem _Fianna bátar i nÉmain_ suggests that the ‘anthology’, as he refers to the
collection of death-tales in MS 72.2.140, was known possibly as early as the tenth
and at least by the twelfth century.\(^{402}\) However, the ‘anthology’ as it is preserved in

\(^{399}\) Mac Cana, p.71.
\(^{400}\) Mac Cana, p.72.
\(^{401}\) Mac Cana, n19.
\(^{402}\) Clancy, p.76-77.
MS 72.1.40 is a modernisation of an older collection. Clancy does not go so far as to suggest that they all derive from a single act of creation, but argues that they had been brought together at some point because of their genetic similarities and by virtue of ‘the cycle context that they all share, and by the literary potential of their being brought together.’

4.1.4 Date and affinities

Both versions of Aided Fhergusa are preserved in manuscripts which date from the fourteenth century at the earliest and both are written in Middle Irish prose. As stated above, Clancy suggests that the presence of the title Aided Fhergusa in both tale list A and Fianna bátar i nEmain suggests that the tale was known possibly as early as the tenth and at least by the twelfth century. Whether the title refers to the short version of the tale from YBL or the longer version, now only preserved in MS 72.1.40, is unknown. The tales themselves offer us little in the way of evidence to investigate their provenance, as they are each attested in only one manuscript, and only in Middle Irish.

Both versions of the tale have common elements and contain features which link them to other tales. Fergus’ death in Connacht because of the jealousy of Ailill is a constant in both versions of his aided. Death in Connacht and the jealousy of Ailill are both referred to in CA and TBF1. In AF1, Fergus’ presence in Connacht is explained: Bui Fergus for luinges i con[n]achtaib iar na sarugud im maccuib usnech. ‘Fergus was in exile in Connacht after his honour had been violated concerning the sons of Usnech.’ AF2 relays the same information but does not mention the violation of Fergus’ honour: Bui Fergus Mac Roig hi Conachtaib iar marbud mac n-Uislend for a chomairce. ‘Fergus Mac Roig was in Connaught after the slaying of the sons of Uisliu (who were) under his protection.’

In AF2, the text is sparse and simply states that Ailill kills Fergus, marbais Ailill he .i. Fergus ‘Ailill killed him, namely Fergus’. The text offers no reason for Ailill’s killing of Fergus, provides no justification for the deed, nor does it offer a

Clancy, pp.76–78.
Clancy, p.76-77.
Ní Mhaoileoin, pp. 39, 43.
Hull, ‘The Death of Fergus Mac Róig’, p.304.
Ibid..
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description of the event; the fact that Ailill killed Fergus is simply declared. In AF1, it is clear that while it is Lugaid who casts the spear at Fergus, it is a jealous Ailill that encourages Lugaid to do so, and Lugaid is remorseful when he realises that he has killed Fergus in error.

The location and instigator of Fergus’ violent death are referenced in CA and TBF1. Both the H. 3.18 and Book of Lecan versions of CA relays that after Flidais’ death, Fergus returned to Connacht, where he met his end through the jealousy of Ailill.

[H] … conid deiside dicoidsim ier toin co hOilill & Meidb ar nirbo maith a trebad dar eis Flidhaisi, conid deiside fuairsim bas tier di enet Oilella meic Matai.

[L]… conad de sin cdochuaidsiun iar sin co hOilill γ co Meidb uair nirbo maith a aitreb thoir tar eis Ḍlidaisi. Conad de sin fuairsim bas tre ened Ailella meic Magach.408

The LU version of TBF1 communicates the same information, that after the death of Flidais, Fergus returns to Connacht and is killed as a result of Ailill’s jealousy.409

While both of the versions of Aided Fhergusa note that Fergus was killed in Connacht, either at Ailill’s instigation or by Ailill’s own hand, CA and TBF1 agree both with each other and with AF1 as to Ailill’s motivation in killing Fergus, and both explicitly state the reason. We know CA and TBF1 to have been composed by the end of the thirteenth century at the latest, and both tales agree as to the motivation for Fergus’ death. These elements are also contained in AF1, which was dated by Meyer to the fourteenth century.410 Therefore author of AF1 must have had access to these earlier tales, or be referencing an older version of Fergus’ aided which places the hero in Connacht at the time of his death and includes Ailill’s jealousy as the reason for why he dies.

4.2 Affinity with the death of Baldr

A compelling parallel to the death of Fergus is found in the Norse tradition of the death of Baldr. Baldr is one of the Æsir, the principal pantheon of Norse gods, and is the son of Odin who is a major god in all branches of Germanic mythology and along with Thor dominates the Æsir in the Norse pantheon. The death of Baldr is

409 LU ll. 1558–641. See p.61
preserved in Baldr’s Draumar, part of the Völuspá, one of the best-known Eddic poems, which presents the entire curve of Norse mythology, from cosmogony to the end of the order of the gods.411 Völuspá (“sibyl’s prophecy”) is preserved in the Icelandic Codex Regius (c.1270), and Baldr’s Draumar focuses on an encounter between Odin and a seeress who has been awoken from the dead to reveal secrets about the future which he does not know himself.412 In the 32nd stanza she reveals to Odin that from mistletoe a shot was made, that Hǫðr threw it and that Baldr’s brother was born, presumably we are to understand that he is to avenge Baldr’s death. Váli is named as the avenging brother, and Loki as the conspirator.413 Lindow notes that the dating of Baldr’s Draumar is unknown, placing it anytime between the tenth and twelfth centuries, but says that there is no reason to assume that it is anything but Icelandic.414

A later version is preserved in Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda. In the second part of the work, Gylfaginning, (“deluding of Gylfi”) three pagan wizards give details of Norse mythology to the prehistoric Swedish king, Gylfi, including information about Baldr.415 10% of the total text of Gylfaginning is devoted to Baldr’s death and recounts how Baldr is plagued by bad dreams foretelling his death. On telling the Æsir about his troubling dreams, his mother Frigg requests immunity for her son from fire, water, all kinds of metal, stones, the earth, trees, diseases, animals and birds, poison and snakes. After Baldr became invulnerable it became the favourite pastime of the gods at assemblies to throw stones or shoot at Baldr. When Loki witnesses this he is not pleased that Baldr remains unharmed. Loki foeds to Frigg in disguise and Frigg reveals to Loki that although she has received assurances from all things not to harm Baldr she did not receive assurances from mistletoe, as it seemed too young for her to demand an oath from it. Loki retrieves the mistletoe and returns to the assembly where he sees the blind god, Hǫðr, another son of Odin, standing at the edge of the circle of gods who were enjoying themselves flinging weapons at Baldr. Loki asks of Hǫðr why he is not shooting at Baldr, and Hǫðr

413 Lindow, p. 21.
414 Ibid.
415 Lindow, p. 22.
replies that he cannot see where he is and, besides, he lacks a weapon. Loki says that he will direct him and gives him a stick of mistletoe with which to shoot at Baldr. The missile finds its mark and pierces Baldr who falls dead on the spot. 416

The early poetic sources present disparate aspects of the Baldr myth. *Völuspá* relates that Baldr has a hidden fate and that a weapon will be fashioned from mistletoe and Hǫðr will fling it. *Baldrs Draumar* tells that he will die at the hand of Hǫðr. It also contains information about Baldr’s avenger, a half-brother sired by Odin, and the funeral which will be attended by creatures of various mythological races. However, it is not until the prose Snorra Edda that all these aspects of the Baldr myth are presented in one tale in chapters 22 and 49 of the Gylfaginning. 417

4.2.1 The Baldr myth

The Baldr myth is characterised by a triangle of victim, slayer and avenger. Such a triangle is likewise illustrated in Fergus’ aided and some of the related material. There are obvious points of comparison between the deaths of Fergus and Baldr, both are slain with a spear by blind kinsmen after coercion by another figure who is roused by either jealousy or dislike and both are ultimately avenged by yet another kinsman. In the case of the Baldr myth, Baldr is slain by his brother Hǫðr at the urging of Loki and avenged by his half-brother, Váli, who is sired by Odin for the express purpose of avenging Baldr’s death. Fergus is slain by his foster-brother Lugaid at the urging of Ailill and avenged by his comrade in arms, Conall. However, the victim of vengeance in the case of the Fergus material is Ailill, the instigator of Fergus’ murder, and not Lugaid, who actually carried out the deed. In the Baldr myth Loki is not killed on account of his role in the death of Baldr, but he is punished for his role in it. The Fergus material does not mention what penalty, if any, Lugaid suffered for his role in the death of Fergus.

4.2.2 Lugaid and Hǫðr

In the Prose Edda Baldr and Hǫðr are brothers, although Liberman points out that this is a ‘flimsy’ foundation since in the Poetic Edda almost every male god is a son of Odin. That said, originally they were conceived of as opponents and,

417 Lindow, pp. 21-22; Faulkes, pp.48–50.
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Liberman cautions, possibly, but not necessarily, brothers. The obvious comparison in AF is between Hǫðr and Lugaid. Both characters have a kinship with the figure that they will kill, both are blind and both are at a remove from the main action in the tale until introduced by what Liberman terms an ‘evil counsellor’. In the case of AF Lugaid is Fergus’s companion and foster-brother as well as brother to Ailill. Unlike the Baldr myth, the full extent of the relationship between Fergus and Lugaid is not revealed until the end of the tale when Lugaid expresses his dismay that he has killed his foster-brother in error, “‘Truag sin’, ar Lugaid ‘mo comalta 7 m’fer cumtha do marbaid dimsa cin cinaid’”. In the Gylfaginning Hǫðr’s blindness is stated as a matter of fact; the blindness of Lugaid is implied by his name, Lugaid Dailleigis, and is confirmed when he says to Ailill ‘Impo m’agaid cuctha’ after Ailill tricks him into believing that Fergus and Medb are a doe and a hart. Hǫðr allows himself to be tricked by Loki who asks why he is not shooting at Baldr with the rest of the assembly, Hǫðr’s reply is that he cannot see him, nor is he armed. Loki offers to direct Hǫðr to where Baldr is standing, mirroring Lugaid’s request of Ailill that he direct him to the doe and the hart. Both unwitiing slayers are initially unarmed until the ‘evil counsellor’ provides them with weapons: Lugaid asks that a weapon be brought to him (‘tabraid gai dam’), and Loki provides Hǫðr with the wand of mistletoe, which flies through Baldr who falls dead to the ground. In AF, the missile pierces Fergus in a similar manner, triana druim siar sechtuir, although his death is not immediate; in fact Baldr’s death, after such a build-up, is rather anti-climactic in comparison with Fergus’ dramatic and tragic exit from the lake and his eventual death on the hillside after he casts the same spear which pierced him at the escaping Ailill.

4.2.3 Ailill and Loki

In contrast to Ailill, Loki has no reason to hate Baldr; Liberman suggests that he is jealous of Baldr’s popularity, although he points out that jealousy is not among his prominent traits. Nor is jealousy one of Ailill’s prominent traits; according to the Book of Leinster version of TBC, Medb would take a husband only if he were

419 Liberman, p.47.
420 Gylfaginning §49. Faulkes, p.48
421 Ní Mhaoileoin, pp. 39–40, 43–44. See also Faulkes, pp. 48–9.
422 Liberman, p.25.
without stinginess, fear or jealousy: ‘cen nóit, cen ét, cen omon’. It would seem, however, that the events of AF were enough to rouse jealousy in him and it is on account of this jealousy that he tricks Lugaid into casting a spear at Fergus. As I have discussed above, Fergus’ death as a result of Ailill’s jealousy is a prominent feature of his aided and it is recorded in numerous mentions of Fergus’ death, not only in his death tale. Loki’s role in the death of Baldr is absent from the earliest poetic versions of the Baldr myth. Both Baldrs Draumar and Voluspá leave Loki’s connection to Baldr’s death unclear and his role in Baldr’s death is most prominent in Snorri.423 Loki is displeased by the glory attributed to Baldr as a result of his invulnerability and goes to Frigg, Baldr’s mother, disguised as a woman. Loki manages to learn from Frigg that she has received oaths from all manner of things excepting mistletoe not to hurt Baldr. After obtaining the mistletoe Loki returns to the assembly and encourages Hǫðr to shoot it at Baldr.

Apart from their roles in persuading the blind assassin to cast a shot at the targets of their displeasure or jealousy, the roles of Ailill and Loki have no other correlation.424 In AF1, it is clear that Ailill is the architect of the murder of Fergus, not Lugaid, and Fergus pulls the spear out of his own body and casts it at Ailill while he is trying to escape. In the Norse material, it is clear to the assembly that Hǫðr and not Loki is the one responsible. In stanzas 9 and 14 of Baldr’s Draumar the guilt is divided between Loki and Hǫðr, although it is acknowledged in stanza 9 that Hǫðr is the murderer.425 Lindow points out that in thirteenth-century Iceland the predominant thinking was that individuals, rather than their weapons or fists, were the responsible agents in cases of injury and manslaughter.426 As such, since Hǫðr was the one who threw the mistletoe spear at Baldr he is the one who is responsible for his death. In fact, Hǫðr is not mentioned in Gylfaginning again until after Ragnarok, when in §53 it is stated that Hǫðr and Baldr will return from Hel.427

423 Loki is also absent from the version of the Baldr myth preserved in the Gesta Danorum. Lindow, p.68.
424 It is an interesting correlation that Loki is named under his metronymic ‘Laufeyiarson’ in the Gylfaginning rather than the expected patronymic Fárbautason. (Lindow, p.53) Ailill mac Máta is similarly named, one of a few characters in the Ulster Cycle to be presented under a metronymic.
425 Liberman, p.36, see also Dronke, p.156
426 Liberman, p.48.
427 Faulkes, p.56.
4.2.4 Conall Cernach and Váli

The deaths of both Fergus and Baldr are avenged by kinsmen. In the case of Baldr, Odin sires a half-brother who grows to the size of a man overnight and on the second day of his existence slays Hǫðr.\footnote{Völuspá §33, Dronke, p.16.} In the case of Fergus it is Conall Cernach who avenges his death. In the Baldr myth, the focus of vengeance is Hǫðr, who, as I have discussed above, was clearly identified as the murderer despite the intervention of Loki. In the case of Fergus, it is evident from his aided that Lugaid is not blamed for his death and responsibility for his murder is laid squarely at the feet of Ailill who identifies himself as the guilty party by fleeing the scene as soon as Lugaid’s spear has been cast and has hit its mark. When in Goire Conaill Chernaig i Crúachain ocus Aided Ailella ocus Conaill Chernaig, Conall kills Ailill, he claims the death as vengeance for Fergus, atá digal Fergus[a] ann.\footnote{Kuno Meyer, ‘Goire Conaill Chernaig i Crúachain ocus Aided Ailella ocus Conaill Chernaig’, ZCP, 1 (1897), 102–111, p. 104.}

4.2.3 Significance of the affinities between two tales

The texts comprising Scandinavian (or Norse) mythology were composed between the tenth and thirteenth centuries in Iceland and are preserved in manuscripts dating from the latter half of the thirteenth century at the earliest.\footnote{Lindow, p.10} The Völuspá was composed sometime around 1000, however, Snorri’s Edda, in which is preserved the prose account of Baldr’s death in the part called Gylfaginning does not seem to have achieved its final form until ca. 1220–30.\footnote{Lindow, p.11.} Both Margaret Clunies Ross and John Lindow note that although Snorri retained ancient materials in his narratives, he was aware of contemporary European intellectual trends.\footnote{See also Margaret Clunies Ross Skáldskarmál: Snorri Sturluson’s Ars Poetica and the Medieval Theories of Language. Viking Collection, 4 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987).} Clunies Ross, however, whilst noting that many of the original Icelandic settlers of the ninth and tenth centuries were of Norwegian descent, many of whom were converted to Christianity in Ireland, she discounts any connection between the two literary cultures, pointing out that the myth of the death of Baldr is one of the elements of Snorri’s mythic narratives without counterpart elsewhere.\footnote{Clunies Ross, ‘Conservation and reinterpretation’, p. 131–2 Jan de Vries suggests that Irish ‘heroic poetry’ cannot be discussed without reference to Icelandic saga. He argues that both are remarkably similar in form: prose stories into which stanzas
have been inserted, in character partly lyrical and partly dialogic. However, once
the stanzas are excluded, the similarities between Irish and Icelandic prose stories are
not very good.

In the broad strokes perhaps this is true, but the similarities between the
triangle of victim, slayer, and avenger presented in the two tales above cannot be
discounted, and de Vries notes that everything in the cultural phenomena of Ireland
and Iceland must be considered as a borrowing from Ireland, with which I must
agree, despite any evidence of investigation along these lines from scholars of Norse
mythology, preferring to look to Danish and Latin sources for comparison.

A further argument to support the borrowing of the tale from outside
Scandinavia, if not from Ireland directly is the presence of the mistletoe in the death
of Baldr. Mistletoe is not native to Iceland, and is only known in a very small area of
Norway and the south of Sweden. Neither the author of the *Völuspá* nor Snorri had
knowledge of the plant, as it is unlikely that it could be fashioned into a spear, as it is
a bush and not a tree, and the same is likely to have been true of their audience.
Liberman says that as such it cannot have been an original feature of either a
Norwegian or Icelandic myth. He disputes an earlier hypothesis that the prevalence
of mistletoe in Britain supports the argument that the whole myth must have been
borrowed into Icelandic or Norwegian myth by Scandinavian settlers in England.
Rather he supposes that in an older Scandinavian version of the myth that Baldr was
killed with a different plant but for reasons unknown it became replaced by
mistletoe.

*Baldr's Draumar*, preserved in MS AM 748 I 4to which is usually dated to
the fourteenth century, and the poem to the twelfth. Unfortunately, the longer
version of Fergus’ *aided* is only preserved in one manuscript, which has been dated
on palaeographical grounds to the fourteenth century, elements of Fergus’ death
are also related in CA (specifically that Fergus was in Connacht when Ailill killed

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434 de Vries, p.92.
435 Ibid.
436 Lindow, p.12.
437 Liberman, pp. 26–32.
438 Liberman, p.41.
him), which Thurneysen dates to no later than the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{440} Fergus’ death tale is listed in tale list A, as well as in the tenth-century poem \textit{Fianna bátar i nEmain}, and Clancy makes the suggestion that the tale was known possibly as early as the tenth and at least by the twelfth century. These dates would certainly suggest that \textit{Aided Fhergsusa} is the older of the two, and the source of the structure of the triangle of victim, slayer, and avenger that is so prominent in the \textit{Gylfagninning}.

4.3 Epilogue: Afterlife of the hero

The scholars who have engaged in the study and description of the international biographical pattern do not provide a template for further incidents to take place after the death of the hero. The heroes of their studies, once dead, do not take part in any further incidents. After Fergus’ death, however, the character is repurposed, and he features in three tales written in Irish and Latin, which range in date from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. He is briefly resurrected in \textit{Da Foillsigud Tána Bó Cáulnige} (hereafter DFTBC) and \textit{Tromdám Guaire} (hereafter TG), two Irish tales concerned with the finding of the Táin, to tell the story of TBC to poets who did not know the full version of events. Fergus is also found in a Latin vision text, \textit{Visio Tnugdali} (hereafter VT), where he appears alongside a figure identified as Conall in ‘superior’ hell, in the uncomfortable position of holding open the mouth of the great beast Acheron. The two men form a doorway through which the souls of sinners pass to greater torments within the belly of the beast.

4.3.1 Fergus in Hell

VT relates that Tnugdal, a knight of noble birth who is neglecting the welfare of his soul at the expense of \textit{vana gloria}, is visiting a friend in Cork and falls into a coma for three days and three nights, during which time his soul goes on a voyage to the otherworld in the custody of its guardian angel.\textsuperscript{441} On his recovery from his trance-like state he tells his experiences to a monk named Marcus who later preserved the narrative. The text of the \textit{visio} was written in 1149 in Regensburg, Bavaria, by Brother Marcus.\textsuperscript{442} The \textit{visio} describes in twenty-four chapters what happens to Tnugdal’s soul when it leaves his body and is transported to the otherworld, with approximately half the text devoted to the description of torments

\textsuperscript{440} IHK, p. 594.
\textsuperscript{442} Jean-Michel Picard, trans. \textit{The Vision of Tnugdali}. Intro. by Y. de Pontfarcy. (Dublin: Four Courts, 1989), 11,13. References are to the Latin text of the vision edited by Wagner.
in ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ hell.\textsuperscript{443} When Tnugdal’s soul and its guardian angel reach ‘superior’ hell the pair comes across a gigantic beast of incredible size. The mouth of the beast was wide open and so enormous that it seemed to Tnugdal’s soul it could hold nine thousand armed men. Tnugdal’s guide takes care to point out the two figures holding open the mouth of the hell beast Acheron. These figures are locked in eternal positions, one standing upright with his head against the upper teeth of the beast, and his companion upside down with his head against the lower teeth, both men holding open the jaws of the beast to allow the souls of sinners to pass through to the greater torments within. The angel identifies these two figures as ‘Fergusius et Conallus’.\textsuperscript{444}

De Pontfarcy suggests that the reason that Fergus and Conall are not among of the multitude of sinners entering the mouth of the beast on their way to further torment, but are locked for eternity in the uncomfortable position holding open the gaping jaws of a gigantic hell beast, is because they were not Christian, and so were not guilty to the same extent as those who knew and broke Christian law. The angel says to Tnugdal’s soul that the pair holding open the mouth of the beast were faithful to the beliefs of their time, which would appear to be enough to excuse them from having to endure further suffering.\textsuperscript{445} The presence of ‘just pagans’ in Early Irish literature is not unusual, for example, Dubthach Maccu Lugair in the pseudo-historical prologue to the Senchas Már.\textsuperscript{446}

The presence of two Ulster warriors in a Latin visio which has an obvious Munster bias in its setting is curious, not least because they are secular heroes in a religious text warning those who would not repent about the dangers to their souls in hell, but they are also the only two Ulster heroes in a text which has an obvious Munster setting and is populated by figures from Munster. The presence of two Ulster warriors in a visio need not be peculiar, Cú Chulainn, after all, appears to St Patrick, as I will discuss below. However, this text is curious as it is the only text outside of the Ulster Cycle corpus of tales in which Fergus plays a prominent part. Tnugdal is from Cashel and is visiting a friend in Cork. Of the historical figures

\textsuperscript{443} de Pontfarcy, p.48.
\textsuperscript{444} Picard, pp.120–121; Wagner, pp.16–17.
\textsuperscript{445} De Pontfarcy, p.61.
Tnugdal meets while in the otherworld, all have a Munster connection; three kings who are closely connected with political strife of the province: Conchobhar Ua Briain, Donnchadh Mac Carthaigh and Cormac Mac Carthaigh, and Saint Ruadhán, Tnugdal’s patron saint and patron saint of one of the most important monastic churches in Munster, Lorrha. De Pontfarcy continues to point out that Ruadhán was supposed to be one of the Éoghanacht of Cashel from whom the MacCarthys were descended. She suggests that the inclusion of these three kings in particular is connected with the abbot of St. James at the time Marcus was in Ratisbon, Christianus Mac Carthaigh, who was a kinsman of the Mac Carthaighs. Rúadhán is not the only prestige ancestor to be connected with VT, Fergus is claimed as ancestor by a number of saints named in the LL genealogies as Síl Fhergusa. Among their number is Mochuta, founder of the monastery at Lismore, which was not only an important institution in Munster in the twelfth century, but one which provided personal sanctuary for Cormac Mac Carthaigh who entered the monastery and took the tonsure after a disastrous defeat by Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair in 1126. Lismore was also patronised by the kings of Munster, particularly the Mac Carthaighs, and was prominent in the church reform movement. According to de Pontfarcy, the inclusion of Fergus and Conall in this text is a commentary on the sins of adultery and murder for which the king Cormac is being punished. Cormac’s torment is graphically represented, he is plunged in fire up to his waist and forced to wear a hair shirt for three hours a day in order to atone for having sullied the sacrament of lawful marriage in the first instance, and also for ordering ‘one of his vassals to be killed near [the altar of] St Patrick, thus betraying his oath.’ She notes that the punishment for the sin of adultery is harsher than that for the murder that Cormac supposedly committed. De Pontfarcy argues that the punishment Cormac receives is Marcus’ contribution to the effort of the

447 Conchobhar Ua Briain (from 1118–1142 king of Thomond), Donnchadh Mac Carthaigh and Cormac Mac Carthaigh (Donnchadh’s brother who from 1124–1138 was king of Desmond).


449 De Pontfarcy, p.15.

450 Pádraig Ó Ríain (ed.), Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1985), §662.195, see also: §§126, 703.4, 714.11, 722.62. See also Lebor na nGenelach Mac Fhirbisigh, §729.1, 729.4.


452 De Pontfarcy, p.46.

453 Picard, p.145.
reforiners to align Irish matrimonial practice with that of the orthodoxy. She notes that this punishment is in line with Christian tradition, quoting the Visio sancti Pauli which calls for the immersion to the navel in fire for the sin of lechery.\textsuperscript{454}

Fergus’ patronymic, mac Róich, and Conall’s epithet, Cernach, are not revealed; the angel simply presents them as giants of their time who were faithful to the beliefs of their people.\textsuperscript{455} There is compelling evidence to support the identification of the two men in the mouth of the hell beast as Fergus mac Róich and Conall Cernach. Fergus and Conall are already closely related in the literature. Both are contemporary heroes of the Ulster Cycle and respected warriors in their own right. As discussed previously, Conall’s aided comes immediately before Fergus’ in Advocates MS 72.1.40, and is likewise recorded in the same sequence in the poem \textit{Fianna bátar i nEmain}, demonstrating that there was a close association between the death tales of the two figures in the minds of the literati.\textsuperscript{456}

The texts themselves also reveal close connections between Conall and Fergus. In the course of Conall Cernach’s aided the hero kills Ailill on behalf of Medb who discovers that her husband has been unfaithful to her, Conall states that Ailill’s murder is vengeance for the killing of Fergus…\textit{ata digal Fergus[a] ann}.\textsuperscript{457} As a result of Conall’s killing of Ailill, the Connachtmen are enraged and seek to take their own vengeance on the man who has killed their king. Medb is unable to secure Conall’s safety and while trying to make his escape after killing Ailill, Conall is himself subsequently killed by a horde of Connachtmen who cite not only vengeance for the death of their king, but also vengeance for the deaths of their kin, all the Connachtmen whom Conall has slain during Ulster’s many conflicts with that province.\textsuperscript{458}

If the sins of adultery and murder are part of the subtext of the appearance of these two particular figures as well as their placement in the mouth of the beast Acheron, then Fergus mac Róich and Conall Cernach must certainly be the figures in question. Much has been made of Fergus’ relationship with Medb and the bad

\textsuperscript{454} De Pontfarcy, p.45.
\textsuperscript{455} Wagner, p.17.
\textsuperscript{457} Meyer, ‘Goire Conaill Chernaig’, pp. 102–111.
judgement he was considered to have shown in continuing a relationship with her. In
light, then, of the close textual and literary relationship that the two men enjoyed,
and considering the deeds of their respective biographies, it is clear that the figures
of Conall and Fergus in the mouth of the beast Acheron must be identified as Conall
Cernach and Fergus mac Róich.

Marcus’ vision of the afterlife is undoubtedly a complex work that blends
together Irish conceptions of the otherworld as a real place that can be travelled to
(and, if the circumstances are right, returned from) with the Christian conception in
such a way that the different philosophies augment, rather than contradict each
other. It would seem that Brother Marcus was a sophisticated and learned author,
and has skilfully borrowed from all the sources available to him and de Pontfarcy
notes affinities with Fís Adomnán, the Visio Sancti Pauli, and the Aeneid in his
text. Marcus presents a vision of the Christian otherworld as a reality that in many
ways might seem familiar to Tnugdal, and is nonetheless a harsh truth that the
doomed knight cannot hope to escape unless he changes his frivolous ways.

4.3.2 Síl Fhergusa, the Visio Tnugdali and the Lismore connection

According to an alternative version of The Finding of the Táin, Senchán
fasted against the saints of Síl Fhergusa, ‘[a]s-berat alaili immurgu is do Senchan
ad-chaos iar troscud fri nóebu Síl Fhergusa 7 nibo machtad cid samlaid no beth’. The LL genealogies cite Fergus as ancestor for Cainnech, Mochuta of Lismore, Breannain of Birt, and the bishop Erc Sláne.

When we look at the contemporary Irishmen mentioned in the Visio
Tnugdali, it is strange at first glance to see Fergus and Conall, pagan figures from the
distant past and Ulstermen, so prominently figured amongst almost exclusive
Munster company. Closer examination, however, might suggest that the inclusion of
Fergus, given the saints that claim descent from him and the association between
him, Mochuta, and Lismore is neither accidental nor random. Mochuta was abbot of

459 De Pontfarcy, p.80.
460 Ibid.
461 CGSH §662.190. See Appendix 4 for a detailed genealogy of Síl Fhergusa.
462 Murray, pp.22–3.
463 CGSH §123.1, 123.2, 372, 402, 607.
464 CGSH §126, 703.4, 712.25, 722.62.
466 CGSH §130, 251, 513, 520, 559, 576.
Rahan and abbot-founder of Lismore. Mochuta was a member of the Cíarraige Luachra through his father, and his mother was of the Corco Duibhe. Elva Johnston notes that Lismore was one of the great monasteries of the province of Munster, favoured by the Mac Carthaig of Desmond and prominent in the church reform movement. Its influence was so great that it eventually became the see of the diocese of Lismore.

Most obvious in VT is what de Pontfarcy refers to as Marcus’ bias towards Cormac Mac Carthaigh. His chapter on Cormac is five times longer than those in which Conchobhar Ua Briain and Donnchadh Mac Carthaigh feature. Tnugdal meets ‘Cormachus’ in the Campus Laetitiae and apart from the torments the text describes Cormac as suffering, he is praised for his charity towards pilgrims and the poor.\textsuperscript{469} The portrayal of Cormac in VT as a generous man echoes his description in Mac Carthaigh’s Book which declares, on the occasion of Cormac’s death in 1138, that Cormac was the ‘most pious and valorous of men, the best for (bestowing) food and clothes’ and notes his contributions to the construction of twelve churches at Lismore.\textsuperscript{470} After the disastrous outcome of Cormac’s challenge to Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobar in 1126, he was deposed by the sub-kings of Desmond, entered the monastery at Lismore, ‘and took the tonsure’.\textsuperscript{471} Following Cormac’s deposition, Munster was divided between Donnchadh Mac Carthaigh and the brothers Conchobar and Toirrdelbach Ua Briain, nephews of Muirchertach Ua Briain, Cormac was persuaded to take up the kingship once more and this time it was Donnchadh Mac Carthaigh who was banished. In 1128 Donnchadh unsuccessfully tried to regain the kingdom, calling on the Cíarraige Luachra, the same people from whom Mo Chuta claimed descent, for aid.\textsuperscript{472}

Muirchertach Ua Briain, though not mentioned in the text explicitly, was a powerful figure in twelfth-century Munster. A great-grandson of Brian Bóruma, he was patron of the reform movement which was trying to bring religious practice in Ireland into line with that in western Christendom. When he was struck by illness in
1114, he was replaced in the kingship by his brother Diarmuid and eventually found retirement at Lismore.\textsuperscript{473}

Considering the prominence of Lismore and the Cíarraige Luachra (to a lesser extent) in the personal histories of the historical characters mentioned in the \textit{visio}, and the genealogical connection of Lismore’s founder with Fergus mac Róich, his presence in VT does not seem to be unusual. Another pair of Fergus’ purported descendants, Brendan of Birr and Cainnech, are also connected via their mutual teacher, Finnian,\textsuperscript{474} to the Munster saint, Ruadán of Lorrha, who is afforded prominence in the \textit{visio}, being the saint charged with welcoming Thnudal into paradise. Fergus and his myriad connections via the saints who claim descent from him thus offer a connection to the pre-Christian past, a historic legitimacy, and a new Christian legitimacy.

4.4 Accessing the Otherworld: The Authority of the Past

J.F. Nagy points out that in medieval Irish literature, quite often the best sources for understanding the past are those who should be dead, but are not, and who are called upon by the living in an attempt to recover the past.\textsuperscript{475} He points out that in the world presented in the literature death proves neither a barrier to the living in search of knowledge nor deprives the knowing man of it, and that there are ways and means of obtaining information from a source long since dead.\textsuperscript{476} This is not a phenomenon limited to the literature of medieval Ireland; Philip Freeman points out that Homer, Plato, and other Greek authors all feature the revenant as a messenger to the living.\textsuperscript{477} Freeman cites the theologian Tertullian (late second-early third century AD) who quotes an earlier author, Nicander of Colophon (second century BC), who says that the Celts spend the night near the tombs of their fallen heroes in order to receive visions from the dead. Freeman suggests that Tertullian’s reference of Nicander provides not only the earliest evidence about Celtic beliefs about life after

\textsuperscript{473} De Pontfarcy, p.32
\textsuperscript{474} Finnian being Brendan’s teacher is noted in
\textsuperscript{476} Nagy, \textit{Angels and Ancients}, p.3.
death, but also points to the quest for revelations from the dead as being present in Celtic culture from ancient times.\textsuperscript{478}

\textbf{4.4.1 Fergus’ Resurrection}

Fergus’ brief resurrection is described in two tales that witness to how the central epic of the Ulster Cycle was found; these are DFTBC and TG. The particulars of these texts differ greatly from one another, although the role of Fergus remains fixed in each text. James Carney says of the differing traditions that ‘Tradition A, the older tradition, is, so far as one can see, purely Irish. Tradition B is, in effect, tradition A with the addition of extra elements.’\textsuperscript{479} The most important of these extra elements is, according to Carney, the addition of a British element from the \textit{Vita Kentigerni}, and the new central character of TG, Marbán the swineherd, a character who has no existence in Irish literature outside the King-Hermit relationship with the Connacht king, Guaire.\textsuperscript{480}

DFTBC is preserved in the following manuscripts; LL, TCD MS 1339 (H.2.18)\textsuperscript{481} and RIA MS D.4.2.\textsuperscript{482} Kevin Murray says of DFTBC that ‘Apart from a light veneer of Middle Irish, the language of the narrative is Old Irish…It seems probable that the composition of the Finding of the Táin should be dated to the late Old Irish period (that is, to the ninth century).’\textsuperscript{483} He further notes that a date of the ninth century would fit with the position proposed by Thurneysen that Recension I of the Táin was a conflation of two now-lost ninth-century versions of the whole tale, and that it is entirely consistent that a text declaring itself to be a record of the rediscovery of the Táin should date to the same period as the writing down of the first ‘complete’ version of the Táin.\textsuperscript{484} TG is preserved most fully in MS Egerton 1782\textsuperscript{485} and in Bk. Lismore.\textsuperscript{486}

\textsuperscript{478} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{479} Carney, \textit{Studies in Irish Literature and History}, p.65.
\textsuperscript{481} fol 245b (ll. 32878–909).
\textsuperscript{482} fols 49b2–50a2.
\textsuperscript{483} Murray, p.19.
\textsuperscript{484} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{485} fol 87b.
\textsuperscript{486} fols 144a1–151b1. Carney also notes a single sentence in Hand H in LU (\textit{Cath Cairn Conaill}) which suggests that the complete text of TG was available to him. This reference does not mention Fergus, and so I have left out Carney’s ‘Tradition B2’ from my discussion.
The major difference in plot between Traditions A and B (DFTBC and TG) is the addition in B of Marbán, the swineherd of the Connacht king Guaire, and along with the King-hermit relationship between the two men, which becomes central to the text, which Carney says was borrowed from the *Vita Kentigerni*, and which mirrors the relationship of Rhydderch and Kentigern.\(^ {487}\) There are also further differences between the traditions concerning the events surrounding Fergus’ resurrection. In DFTBC, the poet, either Senchán or Muirgein, goes to the grave of Fergus, addresses him as if he were alive and is shrouded in mist for three days and three nights.\(^ {488}\) Fergus then comes to him in splendid apparel and relates the entire Táin.\(^ {489}\)

In TG Marbán tells the host of poets that only Fergus can recount story of the Táin from start to finish. He tells the host that they should assemble all the saints of Ireland at the site of Fergus’ grave and fast against God until he should send Fergus to them.\(^ {490}\) Fergus attempts to tell the story while standing, but the great hero is too tall to be heard until he sits down and Ciarán of Clonmacnoise writes everything down in what is presumably Lebor na hUidre.\(^ {491}\)

Although the circumstances of Fergus’ resurrection change from one tradition to the other, his role in each tale remains consistent. He is recalled from the dead at the site of his grave stone, either by a poet or a collection of saints and poets, in order to relate the events of the TBC, because as Marbán says in TG, there is no other witness, living or dead, who can reliably recount the events of TBC. Judith Diehl notes that from the point of view of the ‘ancients’, history could only be written within the period in which the author himself was an eyewitness of the events in question, or could at least interview an eyewitness.\(^ {492}\) Fergus’ resurrection as the ultimate witness of the Táin in TG and DFTBC recalls his broadcasting of the *macgnimrada* within the Táin itself. In both instances, Fergus is called upon to broadcast the central epic of the Ulster Cycle and the central episode around which the martial reputation and fame of the primary hero of that cycle is built.

\(^{489}\) Murray, pp.21–22.
\(^{490}\) Carney, *Studies*, pp. 169, 179.
\(^{491}\) Joynt, pp.39–40.
Siaburcharpat Con Culainn presents a parallel to Fergus’ resurrection and records St. Patrick bringing Cú Chulainn from the dead in all the traditional glory and prestige befitting him as a condition for king Lóegaire’s conversion to Christianity.\(^{493}\) Patrick agrees to his request and Cú Chulainn appears to the king in his chariot drawn by two horses and driven by Loeg, his charioteer.\(^{494}\) The king is doubtful of his experience, saying that it seemed that it was Cú Chulainn and Lóeg that he witnessed.\(^{495}\) Nagy suggests that this uncertainty on the part of the king is because the vision lacked a sufficiency of dialogue. He argues that the induced image of Cú Chulainn that Lóegaire witnesses lacked the hero’s own speech, which would have demonstrated the veracity or fiction of Lóegaire’s vision.\(^{496}\) Through the intervention of Patrick Cú Chulainn returns a second time, this time in the presence of the saint, whom he salutes and addresses: ‘Toluid Cuchulaind do acclaitaim Patraic & bennachais do & ispert fris’.\(^{497}\)

A dialogue between king and hero ensues in which Cú Chulainn outlines his mighty deeds while on earth, and although Lóegaire was initially sceptical, he is eventually convinced of the veracity of what he is seeing and hearing. Nagy argues that in the second meeting of hero and king it is through hearing the voice of Cú Chulainn in the acallam that follows between hero and king that Lóegaire is finally convinced of what he is witnessing. The initial visual presentation of the hero was not enough for him; there had to be a verbal interaction between the pair where the authority of the past was rendered through Cú Chulainn’s speech and his descriptions of his heroic deeds.\(^{498}\) After engaging in dialogue with Cú Chulainn, Lóegaire is happy to acknowledge the truth of what he is seeing and hearing and the authenticity of the figure with whom he is conversing.\(^{499}\)

Tirechán’s Life of Patrick describes that while in the territory of Macc Erce in Dichuil and Aurchuil, Patrick came to a huge grave of astounding breadth and

\(^{495}\) SCC ll.55–57.
\(^{496}\) Nagy, Angels and Ancients, p. 271.
\(^{497}\) SCC ll.70–71.
\(^{498}\) Nagy, Angels and Ancients, p. 271.
\(^{499}\) Nagy, Angels and Ancients, p. 274
excessive length, extending one hundred and twenty feet. Patrick’s followers do not believe that there could have ever existed someone as tall as this, and Patrick asks them if they would like to see him.

[…] and he struck the stone on the side of the head with his staff and signed the grave with the sign of the cross and said: ‘Open, o Lord, the grave’, and it opened. And a huge man arose whole, and said: ‘Thanks be to you, o holy man, that you have raised me even for one hour from many pains’, and, behold, he wept bitterly and said: ‘may I walk with you?’ They said: ‘We cannot have you walk with us, for men cannot look upon your face for fear of you. But believe in the God of heaven and receive the baptism of the Lord, and you will not return to the place in which you were. And tell us to whom you belong.’ ‘I am the son of the son of Cass son of Glas; I was the swineherd of Lugar king of Hirota. The warrior band of the sons of Mac Con killed me in the reign of Coirpre Nie Fer’ (a hundred years ago from now). And he was baptized, and confessed God, and fell silent, and was laid again in his grave.\(^{500}\)

While Irish tradition has various examples of a revenant being brought forth from the otherworld in order to reveal truths or relate marvels, it is the encounter between Muirgein and Fergus that most closely resembles the custom described in Nicander’s passage. A suppliant arrives at the tomb of a Celtic hero on a quest for knowledge long since lost and unavailable by solely natural means. At the tomb, the living requests aid from the dead. In DFTBC, Muirgein offers a eulogy to the tombstone of Fergus. Finally, night or a mist descends, and the revenant presents himself in a vision to the living to deliver that knowledge.\(^{501}\)

Nicander’s description of a suppliant seeking knowledge at the tomb of a dead hero is most fully realised in DFTBC where Muirgein addresses a eulogy to the tombstone of Fergus; Nagy argues this interaction occurs as though the tombstone were a living patron who could repay the poet for his performance.\(^{502}\) Muirgein’s performance proclaims the truth about the subject to both a present audience and an audience of posterity. The reciprocation from the patron whose memory has been revived and exalted by the eulogy in this case is the apperance of the resurrected

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501 Freeman, p.47.
502 Nagy, Angels and Ancients, p.313
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Fergus presenting the poet with a gift of the tale they had been seeking, and a story that enhances the praise which has been awarded Fergus in the eulogy.  

DFTBC utilises the sole survivor as eye-witness in much the same way as other early Irish narratives, Lebor Gabála Érenn, the Battle of Mag Roth and Acallamh na Senórach. Gregory Toner suggests that the literati went to extraordinary lengths to obtain contemporary eye-witness accounts in the absence of immediate sources for Irish pre-history; he draws on the example of Fergus being raised from the dead to relate the account of the Táin and argues that the purpose of introducing a revenant such as Fergus is to lend the authority of the past to and to guarantee the veracity of the tales they are relating. J.F. Nagy points out the Irish legal concept that the most reliable witness is ‘a living human being who was present at and saw or heard the event in question.’ As mentioned above, in the literature of medieval Ireland, death does not erase the once-held knowledge from the dead, nor does it prove an impediment to the living who wish to acquire it.

4.4.2 Affinities with DFTBC and TG

The same narrative pattern that was employed in DFTBC and TG has been adapted by Marcus for the Visio, although the cast of characters has been altered somewhat. In VT, as in DFTBC and TG, a ‘dead’ bringer of narrative tells a story via a translating and recording medium to a receptive audience. Tnugdal is not a semi-supernatural hero, but he has just undertaken a journey to the otherworld, been changed by it, and returns with a story to tell. These are feats which are outside the abilities of an ordinary man Tnugdal has been chosen to relay the message of the eternal damnation that awaits his soul, and the souls of all sinners who fail to follow the word of God. Like the poet who addressed Fergus’s grave and was shrouded in mist and invisible to his companions for a period of three days and three nights, Tnugdal appeared as though dead for a period of three days and nights …per trium

503 Nagy, Angels and Ancients, p.314.
505 Toner, Authority, Verse and Transmission’, p. 79.
507 A comparison with the death of Baldr is Odin’s visiting the dead seeress in the Völuspá order to find answers to mysteries he did not know. See section 4.2 above.
dierum et noctium spatium jacuit mortuus,\textsuperscript{508} while his soul journeyed to the otherworld.\textsuperscript{509}

According to the text itself, Marcus is writing the vision as it was told to him by someone who saw it.\textsuperscript{510} Similar to the poets in DFTBC and TG, Marcus’ role is as liaison between the voyager and the audience, as well as preserver of tradition. The receptive audience is present in all these tales, whether in the form of the assembled hosts, either of holy men and poets in the Irish text, or, in the visio, of the guests who are present at the house of Tnugdal’s friend who witness the knight’s mysterious coma-like state and hear him recounting his vision.

Though DFTBC, TG and VT would appear to be very different texts, coming as they do from different traditions, with differing motivations and ideological and political contexts, their structure is not dissimilar. The poets who are seeking knowledge known only to Fergus mac Róich fast against him and are shrouded in mist for three days and three nights. Tnugdal falls into a coma-like state and appears as though dead for three days and three nights. The poets at Fergus’ graveside are seeking ancient knowledge from a revenant storyteller. Tnugdal’s soul undergoes a conversion while in the otherworld and he returns to life having renounced his frivolous ways and announces his intention to lead a life devoted to god.\textsuperscript{511} Fergus has a similar role to play in each text, in DFTBC he is the revenant who brings forth knowledge from the otherworld. In VT he is subtle a reminder of the sins of murder and adultery.\textsuperscript{512} The conversation between the Christian present and the ‘pagan’ past occurs in much the same way in the two texts. In VT Fergus is drawn upon as a character of some prestige that some of the intended audience is expected to know. In DFTBC and TG he is resurrected to tell the complete story as a character of some standing in the literary canon, as an ancestor figure of authority, and an eye-witness of the event that he is recounting. His resurrection and recitation of TBC lend the tale narrative authority and eyewitness authenticity that is beyond reproach. According to TG, he is, in fact, the only person who has the authority to relate the story, nach

\textsuperscript{508} Wagner, pp.7, 19.
\textsuperscript{509} The theme of a three-day trancelike state is also found in the Vision of Thespesius and the presence of a guardian angel is also a prevalent motif not only in this vision text but also in the Vision of Drycthelm and the Vision of Alberic. (de Pontfarcy, p.71).
\textsuperscript{510} Wagner., p.4.
\textsuperscript{511} De Pontfarcy, p.88.
\textsuperscript{512} De Pontfarcy, p.43–47.
He features in the VT as a figure from Irish myth that is supposed to be known to some at least of the intended audience of the text would be expected to recognise. At least, it is assumed that he is known to Tnugdal. The angel says: *quorum nomina tu bene nosti. Vocantur enim Fergusius et Conallus.* The pairing of these two figures is not accidental, Brother Marcus did not choose two heroes at random to place in the mouth of Acheron, and their stories are interconnected in the literature. It must be assumed that this was also supposed to be known, and had a significance that would have been received by the audience. Contrary to DFTBC and TG, in the visio, Fergus appears alongside Conall not as a figure of authority, but with a didactic role whose message is obvious, that following in the steps of these legendary heroes is tantamount to spiritual damnation, De Pontfarcy suggests that Fergus and Conall are highlighting the sins of murder and adultery as a commentary on Cormac Mac Carthaigh, supposed adulterer who killed a vassal in a church.

### 4.5 His descendants do not succeed him

The two versions of Fergus’ aided and the other mentions of his death in TBF and CA all state that he was killed by the treachery of Ailill in Connacht; Ailill’s jealousy and the presence of Flidais vary between accounts, but Fergus’ exile in Connacht is the aspect of his heroic biography to which most attention is given. It is imperative for the agenda of the authors of most of our texts that he dies, not in his home province of Ulster, but in exile in Connacht. His essential role in TBC, his pivotal roles DFTBC and TG, his role in both versions of TBF and his death tale are all contingent upon his presence in Connacht.

In terms of the relationships Fergus has over the course of his career, it is his relationship with Medb that is given most attention in the literature, even though it could be argued that his relationship with Ness is more important in terms of the chief events of his heroic biography. His relationship with Ness costs him the throne of Ulster, sets Conchobar upon it, and ultimately leads to his exile in Connacht, during which time he has a relationship with Medb and, according to the later texts, with Flidais. His relationship with Flidais is also of some significance, but it is his...
relationship with Medb and Ness with which I will conclude this discussion, as they concern his offspring and the kingship of Ulster.

Of these three relationships only one produces children. His relationship with Ness appears to have been brief; she is not mentioned again in connection with Fergus once her son, Conchobar, assumes the throne. Likewise, his relationship with Flidais produces no heirs. Of these three women, it is only his relationship with Medb which produces offspring. This is a tradition which seems to be the oldest, and is referenced in the genealogical tracts as well as in the poem *Conailla Medb míchuru*. While the heroic-biographical pattern places much importance on the hero being in exile when he is killed, it also demands that the hero’s children (where he has any) do not succeed him.

### 4.5.1 The Death of Fiacc and Conailla Medb míchuru

As well as giving a cursory summary of Fergus’ exile and his role in TBC, CMM addresses the subsequent migration of Fergus and his followers to Munster.\(^{515}\) The poem also alludes to the death of Fergus’ son Fiacc at the hand of Cethernd and Fergus’ own death ‘on account of venom over the mortal illness of an enemy, striking Cethern with a sprig of rowan in the belly. Whence flows the hatred of Fergus, a venom through which he died by a design, when the enmity caused by a warrior deed was brought to his grave-strewn land beyond Larne.’

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Ba tucair bāis Fergusa
fī fri h-ēccrat n-ōenodir
airmaisiu Chethirn caīrthinn
croid tré chrōed[f]odail.
Can fer miscuis Fergusa?
fī diand-ebelt ar arathu,
ar breith fola ferglainne
fora lechtlaинд iar Latharnu.\(^{516}\)
```

This version of the death of Fergus bears no similarity to the circumstances of his death recorded in either AF1 or AF2, but the nature and details of his exile and the events of TBC find general agreement with the tales.

CMM tells that while Fergus is in exile in the court of Medb and Ailill at Tara, his son Fiacc takes on the role of defender of the province of Ulster. Cú

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\(^{515}\) See 2.3.1 *Conailla Medb míchuru*, p.46.

\(^{516}\) Henry, p.62.
Chapter Four: Death of the Hero

Chulainn is conspicuous by his total absence in the poem and P.L. Henry suggests that Fiacc served as a prototype for Cú Chulainn.\(^{517}\) He notes that while Fiacc plays no part in the extant saga of TBC, there may be a vestigial reference to him in the rosc(\textit{ad}) uttered by the Morrígain in this text, where refers to \textit{íar Fēic muintire do ēgaib} \(^{518}\) ‘after the death of Fiacc’s people’.\(^{519}\)

While Fergus is in exile in the court of Medb and Ailill, he had three children by her, either in spite of, or unbeknownst to Ailill: Ciar, Corcc and Conmac. These are the ancestors of the septs mentioned in the poem. Ciar is the eponymous ancestor of the Cíarraige, Corcc of the Corco Mo-druid and Conmac of the Conmaicne.\(^{520}\)

The prose introduction opens with a brief summary of these movements of people.

Issed cētamus fochond toirgi Ciarraigi \(\gamma\) na cethri nArad \(\gamma\) Dāl Medruath co Mumain \(\gamma\) Hui Nēill ar thosach \(\gamma\) Condachta ēcraite a senathar: rogabsat hUlaid indib dí ēg Fergusu meic Rosa Roig dō rochinset. Ar fecca[i]s Fergus for Uulta dī ēg mnā i.i. dī ēg Medba Cruachan, ar imgeogain ar imt[h]ōin \(^{521}\) mnā fria chenēl fadessin.

The cause of the migration of the Cíarraige and the Four Araid and Dal Medruath to Munster and the Uí Néill to Connacht was on account of the hostility of the Ulaid towards their ancestor, Fergus. Fergus turned against the Ulaid on account of a woman, i.e. on account of Medb of Cruachau; for he fought against his own people on account of a woman’s body.\(^{522}\)

Another lineage from the Laud Genealogies proclaims that Fergus had yet another son, Mog Roith, claimed as ancestor by the Fir Maige Féne, by Cacht, daughter of the king of the Britons, “Mug Ruith mac Fergusu a quo Fir Maigi Féne[… Cacht ingen Chathmind ríg Bretan máthair Moga Ruith”.\(^{523}\) Elsewhere Cacht is described as the daughter of the king of Mann in the \textit{Bansenchus}.\(^{524}\) There is yet another genealogical tradition, whereby six sons are sired by Fergus, providing ancestors for the Corco M’druid through Fer Deoda rather than Corc and for the Conmaicne through Mug Tóeth rather than Conmac. Ó hUiginn says that this

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517 Henry, p.53.
518 Henry, p.54.
519 Carney, ‘Three Old Irish Accentual Poems’, p. 79.
520 Ó hUiginn, ‘Fergus, Russ and Rudraige’, p.35.
521 imt[h]ōin imthain \textit{BB}, imthain \textit{Lec}.
522 Henry, p.56-7.
discrepancy is addressed in Cóir Anmann which attempts to reconcile these conflicting traditions by suggesting that Ciar is an alternative name for Mog Toeth, and Corcc an alternative for Fer Deoda.\textsuperscript{525}

However the genealogists reconciled the material, the poem, the prose introduction and the various and conflicting genealogical tracts all bear witness to the fact that Fergus’ children and descendants migrated from the province of Ulster to Munster and took no further part in the governance of the Ulaid. Fergus’ son Fiacc, who remains in Ulster while Fergus is in exile, was killed. Even taking into account the varying reports of Fiacc’s death, either in LMU where Fiacc dies before Fergus goes into exile, or in TBDC, where Fiacc goes into exile with Fergus, there are none of Fergus’ lineage left in Ulster.

4.6 Conclusion

The sequence of heroic-biographical incidents suggested by de Vries and Raglan differ somewhat when it comes to the death of the hero. The hero of de Vries’ pattern simply dies young, often during a period of exile.\textsuperscript{526} The hero of Raglan’s pattern, on the other hand, has more asked of him. Raglan’s studies led to his description of a sequence of events in which the exiled hero dies in mysterious circumstances episode [18], often at the top of a hill episode [19], and his children, if any, do not succeed him episode [20].\textsuperscript{527} While not strictly mysterious, the assassination of a hero by a blind assassin at the behest of the jealous husband of his lover while the hero is bathing in a lake is ‘extraordinary’, while Fergus is just injured by Lugaid’s spear in the lake he hauls himself out of the water and dies on a nearby hillside. In terms of the circumstances of Fergus’ death, the events related in AF2 are merely an outline; Fergus is killed at the instigation of Ailill while in Connacht. The substance of the tale and the incidents involving exile and a hillside are provided by the longer version of Fergus’ death-tale. There are obvious points of comparison between the deaths of Fergus and Baldr, both slain by a blind assassin at the behest of an agitator and later avenged by a kinsman.

If what the scholars proposing these patterns suggest is correct, and the common biographical pattern as they have described it is, in fact, a reflection of an

\textsuperscript{525} Ibid, see also Stokes, ‘Cóir Anmann’, p. 283.
\textsuperscript{526} De Vries, pp. 212–216.
\textsuperscript{527} Raglan, pp. 174–5.
international archaic pattern, then its presence in the repertoire of early Irish literati is not surprising. It would also go some way toward explaining the similarity in structure of the aideda that Melia has investigated.\textsuperscript{528} He even goes so far as to state that given the disparate incidents described in the various aideda, it is the narrative structure, in some cases vestigial, which forms the meaningful aspect of the tales.\textsuperscript{529} He argues that the similarities of plot structure inherent in all these tales are not close enough to one another either linguistically or descriptively for the tales to have been copied from one another. Considering that the tales preserve a shared morphology of structure and display a correlation in terms of sequence of action, Melia judges them unlikely to have been composed independently of each other.\textsuperscript{530}

Varying attempts have been made in interpreting Baldr’s role in Norse myth, however, Lindow quotes Kurt Schier makes the suggestion that Baldr was originally a Danish deity, whose power consists in having founded a dynasty to assume a role in the underworld.\textsuperscript{531} This interpretation follows closely with what we know about Fergus: he has as prominent role in the afterlife and was a founder of several dynasties. With the one difference that Baldr does actually remain dead; however his death in the \textit{Völsuspá} does require a revenant from the otherworld to furnish Odin with the particulars of his death,\textsuperscript{532} just as Fergus is called from the dead to relate the events of the Táin.

DFTBC and TG are examples of a revenant storyteller being brought forth from the otherworld in order to reveal knowledge that has been long lost and is unavailable by purely natural means. The trance like state in which the poets and saints in these texts appear is similar to the coma which befalls Tnudgal in VT. All of these tales are concerned with a ‘dead’ bringer of narrative relaying a story via a translating and recording medium to a wider audience. In VT, the ‘dead’ storyteller is Tnudgal, in whose trancelike state he undertakes a journey to the otherworld and is converted by his experience. In the Irish texts, Fergus is a revenant with the authority of the past who brings the central epic of the Ulster Cycle to a collection of poets

\textsuperscript{528} Melia, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{529} Melia, p.54.
\textsuperscript{530} Melia, p.44.
\textsuperscript{531} Lindow, p.31.
\textsuperscript{532} Lindow, p.33.
who have been seeking it. In these tales, Fergus offers a connection to the pre-
Christian past and lends legitimacy to the retelling of TBC.
5.0 Conclusion

It was the aim of this study to investigate the character of Fergus mac Róich through the application of the heroic biography pattern to the extant early medieval Irish literature. It was felt that due to the pre-eminence given to Cú Chulainn in research there was a lacuna in scholarship concerning heroic literature in general and in the Ulster Cycle in particular. This study set out to explore the heroic biography of Fergus mac Róich in Old and Middle Irish literature using the heroic-biographical pattern as a tool that amplified the subtle interlocking of story elements. The case study has identified that by this method it was possible to highlight the generative influence of the heroic-biographical pattern as a whole where particular elements of the pattern were emphasised at different points between approximately the eighth century and the fourteenth.

To date, the only other case study of the heroic-biographical pattern in medieval Irish literature was the investigation carried out by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, who explored the heroic biography of Cormac Mac Airt. His critical study of the king-hero by necessity achieves results different from a case study which has a warrior-hero as its focus. The analysis of the heroic-biographical pattern of Fergus mac Róich stands in contrast to it in terms of its objectives and results, while at the same time offering new insight into the presence and development of this pattern in Old and Middle Irish literature.

This chapter will initially provide a brief synopsis of the findings of the case study with respect to each of the three ‘phases’ of Fergus’ career and offer a synthesis of the arguments and main findings in each chapter. There will follow a discussion on the theoretical limitations of the study, particularly with regard to the interpretative shortfalls of the scholarship undertaken thus far on the pattern and the implications this has for understanding the meaning of this pattern in Irish literature, its initial appearance in the literary canon, and its development over time. I will then outline prospects for future research.
5.1 **Empirical Findings**

The episodes narrating the conception, birth and youth of the hero are absent from the extant Fergus material. Whether they were composed and long since lost, or whether the detailed genealogies created for Fergus served this function in the absence of narrative episodes is unknown and, possibly unknowable. Considering that this part of the heroic-biographical pattern is complete for heroes such as Cormac mac Airt and Cú Culainn, it is certain that the composers of Old and Middle Irish literature were aware of the tale types which comprised these episodes. Judging from the episodes of Fergus’ heroic biography which are extant, it would seem that the composers of these tales, and the later tales in particular, had a good knowledge of a heroic biography pattern and went to great lengths to compose tales which satisfied certain of those episodes, for example, wooing a maiden and becoming king. It is possible that the character of Fergus served a function in the literature which did not require an unusual conception and birth, as most of the generative activity seems to be concentrated on the theme of exile and return and the episodes which take place once the hero has reached maturity. The evidence in the extant material of Fergus’ background and origin is a concerted effort by the genealogists to create a prestigious lineage through which his descent is traced through the Sídhe back to Míl Espáine and Adam. If the literati went to the trouble of constructing detailed genealogies for Fergus tracing his ancestry back through the Sídhe, then it is likely that there were also tales composed to support the genealogical claims of a supernatural heritage. If such a narrative were constructed for Fergus, it has not survived in the literary record.

The maturity of the hero is where the generative force of the pattern is most noticeable in the Fergus material. The earliest material, CMM, FLFmR, and LMU relate his exile in Connacht and his relationship with Medb. His status as an Ulster warrior in Connacht is established in CMM because of his illegal relationship with Medb. When FLFmR is composed, it is to provide an explanation for his exile. We must presume that this tale was either unsatisfactory or lost its ending quite early because by the eleventh century LMU is composed to explain that it was a slight on Fergus’ honour by Conchobar mac Nessa which led to his exile in Connacht. Medb has been removed from the circumstances for his exile completely. By the time OCU is composed the reason for his exile has evolved from a simple slight on his honour
to a much more complicated scenario which also involves the tarnishing of Fergus’ own honour the redactors of that tale having been interested in the conflict of personal desire and duty surrounding the circumstances in the tale were Fergus must choose between breaking his *geis* and protecting the sons of Uisliu.

In CMM Medb is introduced as Fergus’ paramour but this love story is not developed and possibly in the twelfth, but certainly by the end of the thirteenth century, Fergus’ relationship with Flidais is established, but not before his relationship with Ness is put forward as a reason for his abdication of the throne of Emain in SC. His relationship with Flidais which was introduced in TBF1 and CA is greatly embellished in TBF2. In this later tale it is because of Flidais’ love for Fergus and her desire for him that creates the situation, possibly unique in early medieval Irish literature, where Fergus and Oilill Finn agree to fight to the death for her hand. Throughout the development of his heroic biography and even in certain tales which are outside the episodes related to the pattern, Fergus is a character who inspires the creation of new tales or the enhancement or revision of earlier ones, which in various ways refine and enhance his heroic biography.

With the creation of the later and better-developed episodes of the heroic-biographical pattern where the hero fights a beast, woos a maiden and becomes king before departing in exile, Fergus’ heroic star is markedly in decline. TFB2 and OCU are noteworthy in casting him in a particularly bad light, which, presumably alter the earlier perception of him which had previously cast him in a more heroic, if ambiguous role. With his martial successes over Oilill Finn and Domnall Dualbuide, and winning Flidais, his honour is diminished as his own people berate him for his inability to decisively beat his opponent. When Flidais finally has the opportunity to be with Fergus after the death of her husband she regrets her decision, souring a relationship which had been hitherto been portrayed in a touching manner. When Fergus (re-) attains the kingship of Ulster his reign is not successful, as the texts relate that the sun did not rise over the rampart of Emain during his reign. The composers of these episodes, while creating a heroic biography for Fergus, are, at every turn diminishing his heroic status within the heroic world which is embodied in the literature.
It is easy to see the *dubh-flaithes* as a commentary on Fergus’ descendants. He is recast as the archetypical bad king, and all those who follow in his bloodline are sullied by association with him. Just as honour could be passed forward through generations, so honour or dishonour could go in the opposite direction. By creating an illegitimate reign which stands in stark contrast with the rule of a legitimate sovereign, so the framers of this tale are dishonouring Fergus’ royal blood and thus everyone who claims descent from him, which would appear to have been an important agenda item for the composers of this version of TBF, who went to great pains to promote the Gamanradh and to remove any mention of Cíar, the eponymous ancestor of the Cíarraige, and son of Medb and Fergus, from TBF2.

There is little evidence in these various duels of Fergus enjoying the prestige his heroic status would seem to afford him. He engages two renowned warriors of the Gamanradh, a father and son, in single combat and is victorious. Not only that, but his duel with Oíllill Finn is unique in Old and Middle Irish literature for being a duel to the death over a woman. Having beaten his opponent and won the hand of Flidaius, she then decides that she no longer wants Fergus, and laments for her dead husband. As well as fighting mighty warriors, he also battles with beasts, in his battle with Cú Chulainn he is praised for routing the Ulster warrior when none before him could and this marks the only time that Fergus is praised for his martial prowess in the course of these episodes. When he slays the hound of Domnall Dualbuidhe, he is berated to having left his charioteer to be killed by the animal. There is no evidence of the celebration of Fergus’ heroism within his own community, instead of increasing his heroic status and winning praise for his exploits, he is chastised and his honour called into question. He is the equal, if not the better, of two of the greatest warriors of the Gamanradh, besting them both in single combat, and as far as the warrior public is concerned, he is also a better warrior than Cú Chulainn, yet this superiority never translates into acknowledged glory, and in his quest for Flidias in TBF2, he fails to get the girl.

The most complete reflection of Fergus’ death tale is AF1, dated by Meyer to the fourteenth century. Allusions are made to Fergus’ death in Connacht because of the jealousy of Ailill in CA and TBF1, both ascribed to the thirteenth century. However, DFTBC, which relates how Fergus was resurrected at the site of his gravestone to recount TBC has Fergus’ grave in Connacht. Murray dates DFTBC to
the ninth century, which is the earliest extant reference to Fergus’ grave being in Connacht. None of the extant material has Fergus die in Ulster, and it would seem that the composers of the death tale and the tales that are either connected with Fergus’ death, like DFTBC and TG, and the tales that make references to his death are all drawing on a tradition where Fergus dies, not in Ulster, but in Connacht. This aspect of Fergus’ heroic biography agrees with the patterns proposed by Raglan and de Vries where the hero dies in exile.

The patterns fail to account for the episodes that happen after the death of Fergus, in which he is resurrected to tell the tale of TBC and in which he appears in a vision text holding open the mouth of a hell beast. These two tales are further evidence of the generative force of the character and reflect an important narratological function. In DFTBC he is the revenant storyteller brought from the otherworld through the intercession of a poet to impart knowledge which is unavailable to the living. His recounting of TBC lends not only the authority of the past to the account, but also the authority of eye-witness testimony. This authority or narrative prestige is also brought to bear in VT where he appears in a didactic role with Conall Cernach in the mouth of a hell beast. The angel tells Tnugdal that they were so faithful to the beliefs of their people that they suffer no further torment, and the manner in which they are presented to Tnugdal suggests that he should know who they are and, presumably, the connection the two figures shared in the literature.

Since the central theme of Fergus’ heroic biography is his exile in Connacht, it is no surprise that his descendants do not succeed him as king of Ulster. This aspect of his biography is established in some of the earliest extant material dealing with his exile. In CMM the poem opens with the migration of his descendants, the Cíarraige, the four Araid, and Dal Medruath to Munster. The genealogies of the Síl Fhergusa trace the origins of a group of Munster saints, Brennain of Birr, Cainnech, Mochuta of Lismore and Erc mac Dega back to Fergus utilising him as a prestige ancestor and a connection to a ‘milesian’ ancestor, as the same genealogies trace Fergus’ own origins back to Míl Espáine and further, to Adam. These roles, as an archetypical bad king and an exile from whom a number of septs in the south and west claim descent through complex and diverse genealogies, seem to be foremost in the agenda of the literati who recast Fergus in the later tales as more of a peripheral hero.
5.2 Theoretical Implications/Limitations of study

This analysis highlights the generative impact of the heroic biography on the Fergus material in particular and displays a sense of witnessing the heroic biography being generated over time, from the eighth century to the fourteenth. What is revealed in particular in the later tales which feature Fergus is the sense of a ‘heroic’ biography being constructed, but in order to cast the character in an especially unheroic light. According to Dundes, the monastic centres which were responsible for literary output in early medieval Ireland already had this pattern to hand in the life of Jesus. Of course, this may not be not the case, but lacking a means to explain the method by which the heroic-biographical pattern came to be present in Irish literature in the first instance, it is difficult to otherwise definitively explain what appears to be a concerted effort to develop aspects of Fergus’ biography over time.

Of all the scholars who have investigated the heroic biography pattern, each has gone so far as to describe the pattern as they perceive it to exist in literature throughout the ancient and medieval world. Few scholars have gone so far as to attempt to interpret what it means. Rank’s heroic biography only covered the first half of life, and so was not valid for any heroes whose tales covered their careers until death. His analysis of the pattern was Freudian, seeing in it an expression of independence, separation from one’s parents and a mastery of instinct. However, the heroes who populate Rank’s pattern express the opposite of separation from one’s parents, as Segal points out; these heroes represent the most intense possible relationship to one’s parents and the most anti-social of urges: parricide and incest. Raglan was a myth-ritualist who saw in the pattern a virtual life-cycle culminating in the ritual sacrifice of the king, with the pattern representing the myth which the ritual demanded. De Vries interprets the pattern in light of initiation rituals and the primordial acts of the gods.

Not all of these interpretations can be true of every culture which possesses a heroic biography-type pattern in its literature if any one of them is. Ó Cathasaigh points out that the pattern appears in Irish literature not because it is also present in German or Indo-European literature but because it had “resonated” within the native

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533 Segal, *Quest of the Hero, Part 2*, pp.vii, xii.
535 Raglan, p.221.
536 De Vries, pp.220–226.
cultural matrix of early medieval Ireland.\textsuperscript{537} This is an unsatisfying explanation for the presence of the pattern in medieval Irish literature, and in order to try and uncover the development and meaning of the heroic-biographical pattern in Old and Middle Irish literature more case studies must be carried out on heroic literature with a view to discovering how the shape of the heroic-biographical pattern developed through time.

As a direct consequence of this methodology, the case study highlighted a number of limitations, which need to be considered. It is unknown what the pattern meant for the Old and Middle Irish authors who seemingly ‘filled in the blanks’ of Fergus’ heroic biography, nor is it known how the pattern became established in medieval Irish literature in the first instance. If Dundes is correct in his interpretation of the life of Jesus in the four canonical gospels, then the shape of the biographical pattern (especially as described by Raglan) was introduced into Ireland along with the advent of Christianity and literacy itself. Many different cultures throughout the world possess a heroic-biographical pattern within their literatures. In some cases, an argument can be made for the pattern being borrowed into literature from an external source. If this were the case in Old Irish literature, then without further investigation into the pattern and its presence in early Irish literature, we are at a loss to suggest at what stage during the development of Irish tradition such an adoption, if any, occurred. In any case, borrowing is merely a mechanism and does not explain the popularity of the pattern, nor does it explain the receptiveness of a wide variety of people to adopting it.\textsuperscript{538}

\section*{5.3 Recommendations for Future Research}

The problems of the origin and development of the heroic biography await further research, but this case study has gone some way toward illuminating the generative force of the pattern in Old and Middle Irish literature, and has proven to be a useful analytical tool for investigating the interlocking of various story elements. It would be worthwhile to investigate the pattern as it appears across the entire spectrum of early medieval Irish literature, initially beginning with a brief survey of the elements of the heroic-biographical pattern in the Ulster, Finn and Mythological cycles to allow for further assessment of the local and national

\begin{footnotes}
\item[537] Ó Cathasaigh, p.7.
\item[538] Ó Cathasaigh, p.4
\end{footnotes}
dimensions of the pattern. Following this it would be interesting to carry out in-depth case studies of the sort undertaken in this project with a view to not only creating a detailed impression of the pattern in the Irish context, but also attempting to arrive at an understanding of the pattern’s popularity in Ireland.

In the context of achieving a greater understanding of the character of Fergus, an investigation into his genealogical function as ancestor would be valuable. Fergus is heralded as a prestige ancestor for a group of saints referred to as Síl Fhergusa, some of whom claim descent from him through Cíar, Fergus’ son with Medb. His own genealogical background traces his parentage through the Síde back to Míl Espáine to Adam. There is a contradiction in the manner in which Fergus is used as a prestige ancestor and has a prestigious ancestry created for him in turn so early on, while in the later tales his character is maligned.

A detailed comparison between the deaths of Fergus and Baldr would be immensely valuable in terms of investigating the diffusion of tale types and episodes of heroic biography between Ireland and Iceland and could cast some light on the dating of the AF, for which we only have one extant manuscript witness.

This case study clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of using the heroic-biographical pattern as a tool by which the development of story elements can be observed diachronically. It has been demonstrated that Fergus mac Róich was a generative influence on Old and Middle Irish literature and for centuries was a character that could be used in various ways according to the political and ideological agendas of the medieval literati. It is interesting that in the course of the development of these later episodes which fill out Fergus’ heroic biography his heroic reputation in the tales suffers. Instead of bringing him increased cachet, the later tales which enhance his heroic biography in actuality diminish his heroic status. The partial biography that is revealed in the extant material is no less valuable for being incomplete, and the manner in which it developed reveals how successive generations of poets, literati and genealogists adopted this fluid and mutable character for their own particular needs.
## Appendix 1: The Heroic Biography Patterns of von Hahn and Nutt (in italics)

### Incidents

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<th>Perseus</th>
<th>Heracles</th>
<th>Oedipus</th>
<th>Romulus / Remus</th>
<th>Theseus</th>
<th>Siegfried</th>
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<td>4. Tokens &amp; warnings of hero’s future greatness</td>
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<td>5. He is in consequence drive from home</td>
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<td>6. Is suckled by wild beasts</td>
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<td>7. Is brought up by a childless (shepherd) couple, or widow [Nutt]</td>
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<td>By childless man</td>
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<td>fostered</td>
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<td>8. Is of passionate and violent disposition</td>
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<td>9a. Attacks and slays monsters</td>
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<td>9b. Acquires supernatural knowledge through eating a magic fish (or other animal)</td>
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<td>10. Returns to his own country, retreats, and again returns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Overcomes his enemies, frees his mother, and seats himself on the throne</td>
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<td>Releases mother</td>
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<td>12. Founds cities</td>
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<td>13. The manner of his death is extraordinary</td>
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<td>14. He is accused of incest. Dies young.</td>
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<td>15. He injures an inferior who takes revenge upon him or upon his children</td>
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<td>16. He slays his younger brother.</td>
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<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2: Lord Raglan’s Heroic Biography Pattern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raglan’ Pattern</th>
<th>Oedipus</th>
<th>Theseus</th>
<th>Heracles</th>
<th>Perseus</th>
<th>Sigurd</th>
<th>Beowulf</th>
<th>Lleu Llaw Gyffes</th>
<th>Cú Chulainn</th>
<th>Fergus</th>
<th>Jesus</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hero’s mother is a royal virgin</td>
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<td>2. His father is a king, and</td>
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<td>3. Often a near relative of his mother, but</td>
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<td>4. The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and</td>
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<td>5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god.</td>
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<td>6. At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or maternal grandfather, to kill him, but</td>
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<td>7. He is spirited away, and</td>
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<td>8. Reared by foster-parents in a far country.</td>
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<td>9. We are told nothing of his childhood, but</td>
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<td>10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.</td>
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<td>11. After a victor over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast.</td>
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<td>12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and</td>
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<td>14. For a time he reigns uneventfully, and</td>
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<td>15. Prescribes laws, but</td>
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<td>16. Later he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and</td>
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<td>17. Is driven from the throne and city, after which</td>
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<td>18. He meets a mysterious death.</td>
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<td>19. Often at the top of a hill.</td>
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<td>20. His children if any do not succeed him.</td>
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<td>21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless</td>
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<td>22. He has one or more holy sepulchres.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3: De Vries’ heroic biography pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>De Vries’ Pattern</th>
<th>Heroes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Begetting of the Hero</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mother is a virgin, overpowered by a god or has extramarital relations with</td>
<td>Peleus, Heracles, Amphion &amp; Zethus, Neleus &amp; Pelias, Leuccestus &amp; Parrhasius, Karna, Romulus &amp; Remus, Wolfdietrich, Cú Chulainn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the hero’s father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father is a god/god in animal form</td>
<td>Perseus (Zeus), Heracles (Zeus), Amphion (Zeus), Pelias &amp; Neleus (Poseidon), Karna (Surya, solar deity), Romulus &amp; Remus (Mars), Dionysus (Zeus), Chiron (Kronos), Vali (Odin),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is conceived in incest</td>
<td>Castor &amp; Clytemnesra, Cú Chulainn, Lugaid Riabderg, Sinfjöldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Birth of the hero</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes place in an unnatural way: through head/thigh/side or child is born</td>
<td>Dionysus, Athene, Rustum, Tristan, Rogdaí.</td>
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<tr>
<td>through Caesarean section</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Youth of the hero is threatened</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child exposed after prophecy of danger</td>
<td>Krishna, Cyrus, Oedipus, Amphion &amp; Zethus, Pelias &amp; Neleus, Leucasus &amp; Parrhasius, Wolfdietrich, Moses, Peleus, Dionysus, Taliesin, Romulus &amp; Remus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child exposed by mother wanting to hide her shame</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposed child fed by animals</td>
<td>Siegfried (swan), Romulus &amp; Remus, Wolfdietrich Cormac mac Airt (she-wolf), Paris (she-bear), Amphion &amp; Zethus (mare), Nebuchadnezzar (goat), Cyrus, Neleus (bitch), Gilgamesh (eagle),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child found by fishermen/shepherds/gardener or raised by a mythical figure</td>
<td>Krishna, Cyrus, Heracles, Oedipus, Orestes, Peleus, Sargon, Achilles, Aeneas, Jason, Peleus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. The way in which the hero is brought up</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero reveals special features at early age</td>
<td>Dionysus, Apollo, Heracles, paris, Cyrus, Sigfried, Vlai, Cú Chulain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero pretends to be deficient</td>
<td>Percival, Starkad, Grettir, Gilüm, Thorsteinn, Olfa, Hamlet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Hero often acquires an invulnerability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Fight with a dragon or another monster</strong></td>
<td>Achillles, Aias, Cycnus, Meleager, Minos, Sigfried, Fer Diad, Krishna, Balor, Lieu Llaw Gryfes, Baldr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Hero makes an expedition to the underworld</strong></td>
<td>Gilgamesh, Heracles, Ajax, Odysseus, Väinämöinen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. When the hero is banished in his youth he returns later and is victorious over enemies. In some cases he has to leave the realm again which he has won with great difficulty.</strong></td>
<td>Pandavas, Cyrus, Jason, Peleus, Theodric, Pelias &amp; Neleus, Amphion &amp; Zethus, Romulus &amp; Remus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. The death of the hero.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heroes often die young.</td>
<td>Achilles, Sigfried, Cú Chulainn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In some cases their death is miraculous.</td>
<td>Romulus, Heracles, Theseus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Fergus’ Genealogical Tradition, *Genelach Fhergusa*

**Genelach Cíarraige**

Rawl. B502 a54 d 24 cf. Rawl. 158 43; LL. 327 c 38, 336 e 38; Lec. 117 c 1

Mac-raith m. Meicc-bethad m. Conchobuir m. Cathail m. Muiredach m. Diarmata m. Indrechtaich m. Cormaci m. Cobthaich m. Mael-Cob m. Flaind Feur nae m. Colmain m. rechtbrat m. mael-tule m. Aedloga m. Daarthacht m. Senaich m. Rethaich m. Ferbba m. imchada m. Ambrt m. Mochon m. Saulim m. Messe-chon m. Saulo m. Mogo-Aritt m. Orbbsa m. Fiachna m. Aithre m. Ochomon m. Fidchuire m. Delbnae m. Einne m. hUillriuch m. Astomuin m. Moga-tuath m. Fergusa m. Rosa m. Rudraige.\(^{539}\)

**Genelach Corcco M’Druad**

Rawl. B. 502 154 d 44 = LL. 336 g 44 = Lec. 121 Rd 41 cf. LL. 327 e 17 ; Lec. 121 Vc 49 d 48.

Conchobor 7 Lochlaind da mac Mael-Sechnaill m. Argddai m. Sairennain m. Flaithbertaich m. Duib-ruip m. Rechatbrat m. laeg m. Duib-da-chrich m. Baethellaich m. Maelduib m. Ciliuin m. Senaich m. Argnai m. Tail m. Bruicci m. Conbruic m. Cuscrad m. Messen-Sulad m. Meic-Eirc m. Oscair m. Ochon m. Nechtain m. Art-Chuirp m. Aeda Gnoe Fir gai lethain\(^a\) m. Aitlithi m. Me-duad m. Ollomna m. Deodai m. Echach m. Cuircc m. Fergusa m. Rossa m. Rudraigi.

\(^a\) LL continues: m. Féidlimthe m. Medrúi m. Óllomnu m. Cuirc Dothi m. Órgusa m. Rosa

Lec has: m. Aithmbleithi m. Medruaid m. Ollamnai m. Deodai m. cuirc m. Fergususa m. Rosa Roich m. Rudrai February m. Sithrigi m. Duib m. Fomair m. Airgedmair m. Sirlaim m. Find m. Blatha m. Labrada m. Cairpri m. Ollamain Fodla m. Fiachach Finscothaig m. Setna m. Airtre m. Airt m. Ebris m. hIr m. Milead Easpaine.\(^{540}\)

**Senchas Síl Ír**

Rawl. B 502 156 a 55


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\(^{539}\) CGH p.254.

\(^{540}\) CGH p. 254-5
This section of the text in Lec. BB is: Ridraidi mac Sithridi m. Duib m. Fomair m. Aircemdair m. Sirlaim m. Find m. Blatha m. Labrada m. Cairpri m. Ollaman Fodla m. Fiachach Finscothaic m. Setna m (om.) Airt (Art) m. Airtri (Airt) m. Ebir m. hIr m. Milead Espaine. At é sdo clanda (meic) Rudraidi .i. Bresal Bodibad 7 Niall Niamglondach (om.) 7 Congal Cláiringneach ríg Erind 7 Alban 7 Rossa 7 Leidi (let) 7 Cass 7 Aengus 7 Ginga(Tinga) 7 Fer-filead 7 Ailill Cestach 7 Fachtna (om.). Congal Cláiringneach mac Rudraide dá mac lais .i. Cathbad drai athair Conchobair ríg Ulad 7 Uisleann (Ruisleann) athair Naidi Aindli 7 Ardain. (BB adds two quatrains). Feargod Mór (om.) m. Rosa m. Rudraidi .i. Fergus Mór 7 Niall 7 glas 7 Fer Tlachtga (BB. Om this passage) Conall Cernach m. Aimirgin Iarguindich m. Cais (om.) m. Capa (om.) m. Fachtna m. cais .i. Ginga (om.) m. Rudraidi. Ad-bert Cín Comna Sneachta comad amlaid bod choir .i. Conall Cernach m. Aimirgin Iarguindich m. cais m. Cappa m. Ginga m. Rudraidi (BB. om. this passage).^541

Rawl. B. 502. 158, 5 = LL. 331 c 34 = LA. 333, 27

Fergus daño fodeisin iarna máthair mac do Roich ingin Echach meic Cairpri m. Lugdach m. Loga Luaith m. Ceithnenn Cais m. Danann Deirg m. Eitheoir m. Echach Fiadmuine m. Congail Costudaich m. Echach Apthaich m. Airtt m. Flaind m. Beir Bricc m. Echach Etgudaich m. Dairi Doimthich m. Rossa Riguill m. Lugdach Loigde up supra.\(^c\)

\(^c\) LL La which add: ó Fergus m. Roig m. Rosa m. Rudraige. Nó Fergus m. Roich m.Echdach m. Coirpri m. Lugdach m. Lugair m. Loga m. Cethnend (Ethnend) m. Donand (Donaind) m. ratha m. Connaid m. Defatha m. Ceu m. Celebar m. Boais m. Anfois m. Ebir m. Ethiuir m. hEreich (Erech) m. Febria (Faebra) m. Miled Espain.\(^542\)

**Cíarraige**

Rawl. B. 502 158, 55 = Lec. 117 Rd 33 = BB. 155 c 8

Sé meic Colmáin meic Rechabrat .i. Flann Feorna, Conchobur Dúngal, Dub-dá-thuile, Dub-dá-braine, Dub-Daurlais.

159 a 1 Do síl tra Fergusa do Chiarraigib ut prescriptimus 7 atá dá genelach la Fergus .i. genelach cu hErech Febra mac Miled 7 ab hErech usque Adam nó a Rudraige usque hÍr 7 ab hÍr usque Ádam.\(^d\)

\(^d\) *om. Lec. BB. But cf. Lec 117 Rb 6.*\(^543\)

**Genelach nEithne**

Rawl. B 502 161 b 1 = LL. 332 b 11 = LL. 335 a 61 (from 161 b 7) = Lec. 122 V b 17 = BB. 161 a 6

\(^541\) CGH, p.271
\(^542\) CGH, p.281-82
\(^543\) CGH, p.288
Mael-Brenaind Dall m. Echtgaile m. Moicain m. Findsciatha m. Forsada m. Congein m. Congeith m. Cuanscrine m. Cairthind m. Etnai m. Caireda m. Findchaem m. Cuscraid m. Cecht m. Eircc m. Erecdail m. Duib m. Ma-druaid m. Nertai m. Óertnertai m. Cecht m. hUisli m. Béirre m. Beidbi m. Luigdech m. Conmaic a quo Conmaicne m. Óirbsen Mair a quo Lóch nÓirbsen ar ba Mag nÓirbsen a ainm prius 7 ata inad a thige i n-iarthr in loch acht tanic in loch tairis post 7 is fuath tige dicairr m. Óircc Dein m. Segdae m. Caithre m. Altai m. Ogomain m. Fidchuire m. Daibre m. Iona m. Calassaich m. Mochta m. Mesomain m. Moga-Doit m. Fergus m. Rosa e 7 rl.

Lec. Which continues: m. Óechach Ruiad m. Cairpri Cenddeirg m. Lugdach m. Lugair m. Loga m. Deithnend m. Danand m. Bratha m. Connaich m. Deaatha m. ceu m. celebair m. Boais m. Anboais m. Eber m. Eithiur m. Airic Feabruaid m. Milad Espaine.

Genelach Conmaice Cuili Talad


Is é seo in senchas coitich<enn> Sé meic Fergus i. Fer-Dea et Fer-Tlachtga, Mug-Tóeth nó Mug-Dóit nó Mug-Tuath, hUatu, Eithlenn, Corbb-Auluim. Fer-Deoda nó Dea a quo Corcco M’druad; Fer-Tlachtga a quo sunt na cethri Araid i. Tacraige 7 Arttraige 7 Hui Ibdana; Mug-Tóeth ó tát Ciarrage 7 Conmaicne 7 Bibraige; hUato a quo noí Meic Maccniad in cach baile; Eithlenn a quo sunt Orbraige 7 Bentraige; Corbb-Aulom a quo Corcco Auluim. Celtchair trá is dia chlaind Finnian Cluana Iraird ut præscripsimus. f

fFinnian Cluana Iraird i. Finnian m. Fintain m. Conchraid m. Dairchella m. Senaig m. Diarmata m. Aeda m. Óergusa m. Ailella m. Celthair, LL. La. m. Fothaid m. Óir-filed m. Glais m. Rosa m. Rudraige. Alibi scripsi genelogias Scottorum qui sunt de progenie Fergus, add LL. 545

Genelach Dál Araide

Rawl. B. 502 161 bb = LL. 332 a 10 = LL. 335 g 1 = La. 335, 12 = Lec. 126 ra 19 = BB. 167 bb 43.

Domnall m. Conchoibuir m. Echri m. Flathroi m. Aeda m. Loingsich m. Meicc-Étich m. lethlabair m. lingsich m. Tomaltaich m. Indreichtach m. lethlebar m. Echach Iarlathi m. Fiachnai m. Baetain m. Echdach m. Condlae m. Coelbad m. Cruind ba drui m. Echach m. Lugdach m. Rossa m. Imchada m. Feidelmid m. Caiss m. Fiachach Araidi. 546

Genelach Fer Maige


544 CGH, pp.318-9
545 CGH, pp.320-321
546 CGH, p.323
Domnall m. Aeda m. Conchobuir m. Mael-Declain m. Dirmata m. Aeda m. Dubacain m. Limmanaig m. Muridaig m. Dailgaile m. Cellaig m. Con-can-gairm m. Dathail m. Matnán m. Silán m. Lasri m. dathail m. Sairi m. Saiglend m. Dé m. Labrada m. Caes m. Buain m. Moga-Ruith m. Cuinisc m. Fir-Decet m. Forgib m. Firglain m. Firfalid m. Caer m. Fergususa m. Roig m. Rosa m. Rudraige.

Genelach Cíarraige
LL. 327 e 38 cf. Rawl. 158, 43

Mathgamain m. Meic-bethad m. Conchobuir m. Cathail m. Conchobuir m. Muridaig m. Diarmata m. Aeda m. Cobthaig m. Cormaic m. Inrechtaig m. Mael-Choba m. Flaind Eorna m. Colmain m. Rechtbrat m. Maeli-tuile m. Aithelch m. Einaig m. Retha m. Erba m. Imchada m. Mochon m. M’Oluim m. Messe-chon m. Moga-Airt m. Orbsen m. Artri m. Echomain m. Ldnaire m. Delmae m. Óinne m. Lonne m. Ualsaig m. Thamain m. hÉr m. Fergususa m. Rosa m. Roig Rodanai m. Edcdach m. Cairpri híc condrecat fri Chorco Óche im Charpre m. Lugdech m. Lugair m. Loga m. Ethlend m. Donond m. Bratha m. Connaith m. Deatha m. Ercfatha m. Ceu m. Iebuir m. Bouis m. anfois m. Fethoil m. Fothoil m. Órni Culbennaig ; sund condrecat 7 Fir Maigi Féni m. Fidbi Faeburdeigr m. Munreair m. Conndig m. Ollóti m. hÉrech Febrai ; iss é-side indara óchtigern déc ro gab hÉrind m. Miled Espane.

Genelach Cíarraige Luachra
LL. 336 e 38

Mathgamain m. Meic-bethad m. Conchoobir m. Cathail m. Conchoobir m. Muridaig m. Diarmata m. Cormaic m. Indrechtaig m. aeda m. Cobthaig m. Mael-Choba m. Flaind Feorna m. Colmain m. Rechtbrat m. Male-tuile m. Aidloga m. Senaig m. Dairthechtm. Meic-Recht m. Ferbba m. Imchada m. ambirt m. Mochon m. M’Aulaim m. Mabrit m. Mesochon m. Saulo m. Moga-Airt m. Coirp somnair m. Echten m. Aithri m. Ailti m. Sogomain m. Fidchori m. Delbnai m. Euni m. Ussalaig m. astumain m. Céir m. Fergususa m. Roig m. Rosa m. Rudraige uel: ita:
Fergus m. Roich m. Echdach m. Coirpri m. Lugdach m. Lucair m. Loga m. Cetnend m. Donand m. Bratha m. Connáid m. Deatha m. Ceu m. Celebar m. Boais m. Anfois m. Ebir m. Ethuiuir m. Êrech m. Míl Espaine nó:
Fergus mac do Roich ingin Echach m. Coirpri m. Lugdach m. Loga Lúaiith m. Eithnend Cais m. Domnand Dierg m. Eihiuir m. Echach Fiad m. CONgail Costudaig m. Echach Apthaig m. Airt m. Flaind m. Ebir Bric m. Echach Ettudaig m. Daire Daimthig m. Rosa Riguill m. Lugdach Loigde m. Bregair m. Lugdach m. Itha m. Bregain. Fs

547 CGH, p.385
548 CGH, p.391
Síl Fhergusa

CGSH §662.190-202, pp. 102-3

190 Mochuarocc nachar char crodh
Ailbe Imleach mac Olchon
do siol Fir Thlachtga trén dóibh
mic Fercchusa mic fionnRoigh.

191 Scuithin Slebe Mairce amuicch
mac Setna is mic Trebhuicch
do Siol Fir Thlachtga malle
do Scuithin ocus d’Ailbhe.

192 Epscop Erc mac Decch a umdail
Brenainn Biorra mac Nemain
do siol Chairbre Uluim dóibh
mic Fercchussa mic morRoich.

193 Caemhan o Ard Lethain leir
mac Talán aobda airmgeir
do siol Dubhthaigh os gach druing
‘ga ccomoic saomh fri Brenainn.

194 Deruisí Sinech, Criadh
trí hógha nar ainiardha,
Clann Earnain mic Colmain chain
do siol diograisech Dubhthaigh.

195 Brenainn mac Fionnloga os druing
is Mochuda mac Fionndaill
dias naemda go ngne ngossa
do siol chéir mic Fercchusa.

196 Mochuille mac Dhuill dil
Molacca mac Dubh Dlighidh
is Caollaind do cceil ngosa
[...] mic Ferghossa

197 Ciaran mac Beoain co n-aob
risa n-abar mac and tsaoir
eolagíh ro tuicc mar ata
do siol Chuirc mic Fergus.

198 Caindech mac Luigicche Lemna
mic Lucchaidh alaind Emhna
do shiol Fercchus[a] mic Roigh
or geinsett naoimh co nertchóir.

199 Iarlaitha mac Loccha lain
is Mochoemhocc mac Beoain
da naem gan formad abus
o Chonmac ba mac d’Fhergus

200 Caillin mac Mochta nir mer
is Ferccna mac ind filedh
do Siol Chonmhaic gan chaire
mic Fercchais ua Rudruide

200b Felic deochain roba daigh
is Cruimther Froach mac Carthaigh
do siol Chonmaic chaoim na ecaíth
mac do Meidb ingen Echach

201 Malan is Curnan gan cradh
Cronan caomh ocus Baedan
ceithre mic Sinill iad soin
mic Nadfraioch is mic Fiachaid.

202 Mic Alla mic Connaic glais
mic Fergusu reidh rendmais
Duilech mac Amalgaidh áin,
mic Sinill chedna chomlain.

549 Added in margin in had which wrote notes. Brux.
§ 125.1
Ciaran Cluana mac Nois m. Beodain m. Bolggain m. Linnida m. Cuirc m. Daaed m. Cunnida m. Cais m. Fraech m. Causcraid m. Messin Sued m. Suiled m. Ercada m. Mecoin m. Nechta m. Aeda m. Coirbb m. Aeda Gnoe m. Fer m. Gae Lethain m. Feidlimid m. Medrui m. Follomain m. Cuirc Dothi m. Fergus m. Rosa m. Rudraigé

§ 128
Duilech m. Malaig m. Sinill m. Nadfraich m. Ìachnai m. Allai m. Conmail Glais m. Fergus m. Rosa

§ 129
Mobaí dna m. Sinill m. Nadfraich. Malán dna m. sinill et Curnan m. Sinill et Cronan m. Sinill et Maniu m. Sinill.

i m. Fiathach (m.) Alla (m. Conmail Glais m. Fergus m. Roig) B (Lb)

§ 135
Ailbhe Imlecha Ibair Olcain, .i. Naiss m. Arra m. Dala m. Laidfhir m. Imrosa m. Ìir Thlachtga m. Celtchair m. Cechechair ut ante

ii m. Fergus m. Roig (Lb)

iii BLcLbH, m. Fothaid m. Fir Filed m. Glais m. Rossa (m.) Rudraige R(Lc1)

§ 149
Cruimthir Fraech Clinan Conmaicne m. Carthaig m. Nethe m. Onchon m. Findloga m. Findir m. Cusraud

iv (add) m. Cecht m. Eirc m. Ercdais m. Cecht m. Usni Finn m. Berri m. Doilbthe m. Lugdach m. Oirbsen Moir m. Duib m. Mag Ruaidh m. Nerta m. Fornerta m. Ecindin m. Segda m. Raidni m. Alta m. Ogomain m. Dolbri m. Duibcride m. Eoin m. Cetguiníg m. Esamain m. Mochta m. Moga Doith m. Conmaic m. Fergus (H1)

§ 189
Scuitheine Sleb Mairge m. Setnai m. Trebthaig m. Dala m. Laidfhír ut ante in genelogia Albi

v Laitir aria Con Corp m. Immrosa Nitha m. Ìir Thlachtga m. Fergus m. Roig (Lb)

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550 CGSH, p. 21.
551 CGSH, p. 22.
552 Ibid.
553 Ibid.
554 CGSH, p.32.
§217

Molaca m. Duib[ō]ligid m. Duib Dechoin m. Duib Chuilli m. Lactnai m. Colla m. Causcraid m. Fir Culchi m. Buain m. Moga Ruithvi

vi m. Fergus (m. Roig) (Lb) Le1, a quo Fir Muigi (m. Fergus) (M R1 La R1 [18] 40 Vc)555

§295

Epscop Lugach i Cúil Bennachair Lugdach m. Luchtaí m. Anrodain m. Maeli Tuili m. Aedlga m. Daurthecht m. Šenaig m. Retag m. Êrbba m. Imchada m. MAbrit m. Mochon m. Saulim m. Meschon m. Etetcha m. Saulo m. Moga Airt, qui 7 Ciar dicitur m. Fergus m. Rosa (Rossa Ruaid m. Rudraige)556

§302

Mac hÍ - .i. Colmán .i. Conna - m. Amargin m. Sarain m. Liadglassi.vii m. Duib m. Andagain m. Ferbba. Is è fil nAchud hÍ la Áes Tiri.

vii add. O fuilet U Ferba m. Imchada m. Eibric m. Mochoc m. Aulaim m. Meseschon m. Saula qui dicitur DCiara m. Moga Airt m. Fuirbsen Mór m. Eochadain m. Airtri m. Ochomoin m. Fidmuire m. Deilmbne m. Eoinne m. Laime m. Ulsaighi m. Domoin m. Moga Tuath m. Cer a quo Cairraide, m. Fergus m. Rosa m. Rudraide (H1)557

§384

Brenainn 7 Domaigne in uil a Tuaim Muscraide 7 Faichlech Chluana Tuasictirt 7 Faelan Chilli Tulach cethra meic Findloga m. Olchon m. Alttai m. Ogamain m. Fibchuire m. Dealmnai m. Etna m. Êgalascaig m. Axamain m. Moga Taeth m. Fergusussa. Do Ciarraige Luachra doib.558

§422

Ciaran m. Beodain sr sléacht reo Deoirchi m. Thigernmais m. Follaich (add no atberait aroili comad do slécht Fergus m. Rosa do La)559

§436

Ailbi Olchain ar slécht Êir Tlachtga m. Fergus no Fear Tlachtida m. Celtchair m. Uiheochair560

555 CGSH, p. 37.
556 CGSH, p. 48.
557 CGSH, p. 49.
558 CGSH, p. 59.
559 CGSH, p. 54.
560 CGSH, p. 65.
§443 Cruimthir Fraich m. Cairrthaich ar slicht Ireil m. Conaill Chernaig (Moga m. Conmaige m. Fergsa La)\textsuperscript{561}

§459 Cuana m. Cailcine ar slicht Moga Ruith m. Fergus\textsuperscript{562}

§493 Brenaind m. Findloga ar slicht Moga Doid m. Fargusa m. Roich\textsuperscript{563}

Cap XXX Do Naomhaibh Sleachta Cuirb Uluim meic Fergosae

1. Breanainn Birrae m. Nemain m. Duibhdeochain m. Sgellain m. Nazair m. Tapoill m. Brancan m. Armors m. Cathfir m. Oimchada m. Dubthaigh m. Rosae m. Fionnchada m. Fiacha m. Cais m. Fisis m. Airigh m. Connla m. Airt m. Cuirb m. Faoil m. Cuirb Uluim m. Feargosa m. Rosa etc

5. Earc Sláine .i. easbacc m. Deaghadh m. Branchon m. Armora m. Cathfir m. Iomchada m. Dubthaigh\textsuperscript{564}

\textsuperscript{561} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{562} CGSH, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{563} CGSH, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{564} CGSH, p. 111.
Breanainn of Birr

§124

Breaind Birra m. Nemainn m. Duib Dechoin m. Scellain – Darnisa et Sinech et Crón nó Cítra tri ingena Ernáín Coluim Ruaid m. Nemaind m. Dub Dechoin m. Scellain etcetera - m. Nastair m. Taphail m. Branchon m. Airmora m. Achir m. Imchada m. Dubthaig m. Rosa m. Imchada⁵⁶⁵

§127.1

Breaind apstal m. Findloga m. Olchon m. Altai m. Ogamain m. Ídícuiri m. Delmnai m. Ennae m. Fuascalaig m. Astaman m. Mogaed qui dicitur Ciar m. Fergusam m. Rosa Do Chiaragine Luachra, do Altaire Cind Bera 7 do Chircu Duibhni⁵⁶⁶

§127.2

Uel aliter Breaind m. Findloga m. Olchon m. Gossa m. Gabli m. Ecni m. Altai m. Ogamain etc⁵⁶⁷

§131 (cf §124)

Coeman Santlethan Ardni m. Thalain m. Dubthaig m. Rosai m. Imchada m. Echach – no Fiachach - m. Cais m. Isis⁵⁶⁸

§402 Da absdal dec Indsi Fail

Da Finden, da Colman caidh
Caindech, Ciaran, Comgall caín
da Breainn, Ruadan coli
Ninned, Mo Bí Mac Na[d]fraith .i. Molaisi Diamindsi⁵⁶⁹

§428 Breaind Birra ar slicht Cuirp m. Fergsa m. Rosa⁵⁷⁰

§670.30 Tri ingena Ernin m. Coluim Ruit .i. Darnisa 7 Sinech 7 Crón. A mbrathair i nEnuch Diarmaige (cf §124)

§704 Nomina episcoporum Hibernesium icipiunt⁵⁷¹

§712.8 Bartholomeus apostolus Breedinus Senior⁵⁷²

§722.43 Mugain matair Breaind Sacairt.⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁵ CGSH, p.20.
⁵⁶⁶ CGSH, p.22.
⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁶⁸ CGSH, p.23.
⁵⁶⁹ CGSH, p. 62.
⁵⁷⁰ CGSH, p. 64.
⁵⁷¹ CGSH, p. 136.
⁵⁷² CGSH, p.161.
§731.2

Epscop Eogain Aird Sratha
Brenaind fial [ m. Fin] dloga
dechoin Nessain, digrais dót
iarlathí 7 Mochaemóc

Erc m. Dega

§130

Epscop Erc Sláne m. Dega m. Branchon m. Airmora m. Cathfhír m. Imchada m. Dubthaig m. Rosa m. Findchada m. Echach m. Cais m. Isis m. Airig m. Carpre m. Fail m. Carpre Uloim m. Óergusa m. Rosa

§251

Epscop Eogain Aird Sratha m. Cannig – no m. Epscuip Erc - m. Cuirbb ut ante.

(om. BLC, ( m. Dega m. Branchon (Brocain M) m. Fir Mora m. Aichir m. Imchada m. Dubthaig m. Findchada m. Echach Caiss Isiss m. Oirig m. Airt m. Coirpre m. Cuirp Auluim m. Fergusa m. Roich Lb(M), m. Coirpre (Cuirc H) m. Óergusa m. Fothaig m. Eathach m. Meisin Corb (M¹ (R¹ H)).

§513  Eaxpr (?) Earc m. Deada ar slight Corb Uluim m. Fergusa

§520  Epscop Eogan m. Epscuip Eirc ar slight Corb Uluim m. Fergusa

§559  Epscop Eogain m. Eircc ar slight mesin Corb

§576  Epscop Earc Slaine m. Deaga ar slight Chais m. Rosa Ruaid

§712.16 (Hic incipiunt sancti qui erant bini unius moris)

Marinus  Epscop hEircc Slaine

§731.1

[…] ern cumtaig Class
confoat a n-oentachas
Ciaran, Cainnech is mochen
Epscop Erc 7 Coemgen

573 CGSH, p.174.
574 CGSH, p.186.
575 CGSH, p. 22.
576 CGSH, p. 42.
577 CGSH, p. 69.
578 CGSH, p. 70.
579 CGSH, p. 72.
580 CGSH, p. 73.
581 CGSH, p. 186.
Cainnech m. Luigthig

§123.1

Cainnech m. Lugthig m. Lugdach m. Daland m. Echdach m. Æidchuiri m. Æerguson m. Rosa m. Imchada m. Fiachu m. Cais m. Isis m. Airirich m. Condlai m. Corpore m. Orb m. Fael m. Corpore Auloim m. Æerguson m. Rosa m. Rudraige

§123.2

Uel aliter Cainnech m. Leintich m. Lugdech m. Eda Alaind m. Æidchuiri m. Altae m. Ogamuin m. Fidchuiri m. Delmnae et cetera sicut in genelologia Brendnae

§ 372

Mochua Balla m. Becain m. Baeirr m. Nathi m. Lugdach m. Thalann m. Ithchair m. Alta. Ic Lugaig chomraigious Caeinneach

§607  Cainnech m. Aeda ar slicht Æidchuiri m. Doilbri do sil Æergosa m. Rosa Ruaid.

§714.15

Fail and cassal Chainnig credail
as rocet mór salm;
sododúsaig, is scél derb
in mórfessiur marb.

§722.18  Mella mathair Chainnig sacairt 7 Tigernig Daire Melli

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582 CGSH, p. 20.
583 CGSH, p. 27.
584 CGSH, p. 75.
585 CGSH, p. 164.
586 CGSH, p. 172.
Mochuta (i.e. Carthach) m. Fínaill

§ 126

Mochuta Lis Moir m. Finaill m. Noe Náir m. Firb m. Ambrit m. Imchada m. hEbric m. Mencon m. Aulaim m. Meschon m. Sula m. Moga Airt m. Corspen Moir m. Echadoin m. Ennae Uais m. Eochamain m. Óidchuire m. telmne m. Eoinne m. Lainne m. Tulsaig m. Demmoin m. Moga Tuatha qui et Ciar m… m. Óergusa m. Rosa. 587

§ 703.4 Carthach ainm Mochutu Lis Moir588

§ 714.11

Fail and mullach Mochutu
condagab Les Már
fail and mullach Mochoe
lam’ Choemóc co ngrád589

§ 722.62

Finmed ingen Óingin m. Óintain m. Aedloga m. Nathí de hUib Meic Coinne de Chorco Duibhni mathair Mochutu Lis Moir.590

587 CGSH, pp.21-2.
588 CGSH, p. 131.
589 CGSH, p.164.
590 CGSH, p. 176.
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