



***Gablánach in scélaigeacht: Celtic Studies in Honour of Ann Dooley.***  
Edited by Sarah Sheehan, Joanne Findon and Westley Follett. Dublin:  
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In 2006, Ann Dooley brought out an important monograph on the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge*, a volume that dared to go beyond mere analysis or summary and grappled headlong with Ireland's crown jewel of storytelling. Dooley challenged readers with an "open text" approach to the complex epic, using a Barthesian critical methodology. Needless to say, her conclusions would have unsettled the venerable likes of Whitley Stokes, Brian Ó Cuív or Fred Norris Robinson when she wrote: "It may have struck readers as odd that this entire volume has been skewed, biased even, against a straightforward investigation of the main show attraction of Irish sagas generally and the *Táin* in particular" (2006: 204). To celebrate such forthrightness, her gifted teaching and Dooley's thirty years plus of scholarly publications, fellow Torontonians and prominent scholars in medieval Celtic studies in 2013 published sixteen fresh and important studies of early Irish and Welsh literature and history, literary theory and feminist approaches to medieval Celtic literature. The title refers to the "branching," "intricate" or "complicated" nature of storytelling (see page 1) as well as to the learned Dooley's varied pursuits.

A detailed introduction by Sheehan, Findon and Follett (1-8) offers a dense overview of the contents. To lead off, Michael W. Herren offers "Patrick, Gaul, and Gildas: A New Lens on the Apostle of Ireland's Career" (9-25) in quest of more comprehensive information about the saint's training and episcopal ordination. While the argument rambles, Herren does draw on recent revelations (in particular on Gildas and the early British church), deducing evidence regarding monastic styles. He concludes convincingly that Patrick was ordained a bishop in Gaul where he had been "nourished and encouraged" by *fratres* "for whom he openly expressed [...] admiration" (25). Next, in "The Sea and the Spirit: Two Notes," John Carey analyzes Eriugena's interesting (quasi-Augustinian) sea metaphor—the vast deep of the ocean as divine substance or dangerous path of sin and hardship—as a follow-up to Peter Dronke's invocations on the subject. Drawing on the "voyage itself as the vehicle of enlightenment" (28), Carey then proceeds to adduce further Hibernian analogies, as forerunners, with various *immrama*: the voyages of St.

Brendan (Selmer 1959), Máel Dúin (Oskamp 1970) and the journey of Bran (Mac Mathúna 1985). An iconographic puzzle is unwound next by scrutinizing the Incarnation page of the *Book of Kells*, where mice gnaw at, and desecrate, a communion Host, all taken as a "paradoxical fusion of glory and degradation" (36), a metaphor for the flesh of the God-man and his Crucifixion, a theological point lifted, Carey argues, from a passage in the Life of St. Brendan. While learned and well-argued, this interpretation does stretch credulity.

Focusing on the order of canons regular of St. Augustine (first established in Ireland in the 1130s) and assembling an impressive array of evidence, Pádraig Ó Riain, in "The O'Donohue Lives of the Salamancan Codex: The Earliest Collection of Irish Saints' Lives?" (38-52), refutes, in the main, Richard Sharpe's earlier arguments on this subject (Sharpe 1991). Ó Riain disputes the early dating of the lives (eighth-ninth centuries), and he sees their apparent archaism as a misleading attempt by twelfth-century hagiographers to "deceive their readers, while persuading and edifying them [... an example] of *felix seductio* at its best" (52). Does not the anecdote from the *Life of Ailbe* that he recounts about the nun pregnant with Saint David evoke the doomed prophecy of Deirdre? (51). Westley Follett, with "Women, Blood, and Soul-Friendship: A Contextual Study of Two Anecdotes from the Tallaght Memoir" (53-68), elaborates on his previous publication (2006), a study of a Tallaght (Co. Dublin) anchoritic reform community founded by St. Máel Ruain in 774. Considered by some "Ireland's Desert Fathers" (53), these ascetic "clients of God" in their founding documents (the Memoir) reveal particulars (anecdotal *exempla*) about their sexual practices that are contextualized here from the perspective of physiological theory propounded early on by Galen. In particular, the teachings concern repression of sexual desire and excessive blood in the body, and as further interpreted, involve early Irish practices regarding confession and so-called soul-friendship (*anmchairdes*), even between males and females.

"The Colloquy of the Ancients" is a prosimetric narrative dating from the twelfth-thirteenth century, and the first complete English translation of it was published by Ann Dooley and Harry Roe (1999). Anne Connon, in her "Plotting *Acallam na Senórach*: The Physical Context of the Mayo' Sequence" (69-102), offers a long-winded mapping of textual episodes therein (over thirty pages). Graced with three black and white maps and a genealogical chart, the inquiry examines some fifteen place-names in the saga that recounts St. Patrick's travels throughout Ireland along with the last members of the Fianna warrior band. The goal is to parse the physical episodes to establish the historical framework. Rather than a "rambling catch-all of Fenian tradition," the *Acallam*'s associative multivalencies—dynastic, secular and ecclesiastical—are uncovered, "with a single location often resonating with multiple layers of [...] narrative" (98). To enrich her methodology, it is a pity Professor Connon did not have access to Gene Haley's useful Harvard dissertation (1970) (more vivid still is Gosling's blog). "The *Acallam*: The Church's Eventual Acceptance of the Cultural Inheritance of Pagan Ireland," Harry Roe's synthesizing contribution (103-115), delves further into this primary tale of the Fenians, a kind of inventive, pseudo-historiographical and anachronistic account of how ancient lore, like narratives and place names, were to be preserved by the scribes of St. Patrick. Roe expertly pulls back the curtain, so to speak, by identifying three Patricks: the historical (a slave, British-born, associated with leading Irish families and "more or less tribal monastic foundations" [105]); the mythological (a seventh- and ninth-century invention as seen in the Latin lives and the Tripartite Life, wherein the formerly modest, traveling teacher is described "humbling druids by staging

colossal miracles before the Uí Néill king of Tara" [ibid.]); and the literary (here Roe demonstrates how the Irish secular themes and figures of native learning were amalgamated with Christian values). As he surveys the rise of Christianity in the West, Roe ponders one surprising point: the conflict between the "scruffy", "lower class" and foreign monastic way of life and the hierarchical or curial class (urban bishops, for example) inherited from the Roman Empire (111). James Acken, in "Lexical Specificity in the *Auraicept na nÉces*" (116-130), grapples with the core text of the bardic poet's training, a primer of medieval Irish poetic and vernacular tradition, a challenging work whose multiplicity "generates meaning through the interplay and tension between denotation and connotation" (117). The treatise weaves together terms in the interpretive, delimiting or complex mode and its terminology, categories and definitions of verbal relationships reveal the fluidity of bardic language within poetic discourse.

The next four essays deal with the Ulster Cycle and the *Táin* in particular, the focus of many of Dooley's courses and publications. "The Body in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*," by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (131-153) considers the web of human, geographical and textual occurrences in the great epic. These include first of all the reference to the narrative itself as a *corp* (body), presumably recovered from the resuscitated form of Fergus, as well as the powerful metaphor of the physical shape of Ireland itself, resulting from bodily transformations on the landscape. Concluding with an interesting insight into Cú Chulainn's ambiguous and simultaneous role as heilbringer and destroyer, Ó Cathasaigh divides his work into ten sections, though not all his observations are equally convincing or compelling: i) bodily matters (the amusing Lairine episode, one of Kenneth Jackson's favorites!); ii) the body of the *Táin* (the "Finding of the *Táin*" at Fergus' tomb is featured); iii) the body transformed (the body parts of Donn and Finnbennach become memorialized portions of the land of Ireland); iv) the body disabled (the debility of the Ulstermen, due to Macha's curse); v) the birth of the hero and the body of Ireland (the *útländer* Cú Chulainn's physical conception and birth are localized in the Otherworld "in a stone womb," [140]); vi) the incorporation of the hero (the hero's initiation and naming—episodes that involve intimate bodily contact with the hand, breast and knee of King Conchobar and viewing the breasts of the Ulsterwomen); vii) the body of the hero (recalls Medb's early and important point that Cú Chulainn's body is not divine or even semi-divine [TBC I, ll. 393-395; see below], and his *riastrad*—suggesting a dual nature); viii) the body fused (grotesque descriptions of Cethern and Iliach); ix) reading the body (Cethern's wounds from Medb are described); x) the body dismembered (bodily parts are enumerated in detail by Fergus, as part of the *dénouement*).

"Nes, Deirdriu, Luaine: Fated Women in Conchobar's *Life*" by Joanne Findon (154-170) focuses on the fraught kingship of Conchobar revealed in three shorter intertextual Ulster Cycle tales from the fourteenth-century Yellow Book of Lecan; *Compert Conchobuir*, *Longes mac nUislenn* and *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*. Critiquing the king's abuse of power, women's words and druidic prophecies announce a dark dimension to his blemished and prideful decisions and to the detriment of the welfare of the kingdom, thus jeopardizing any gains in the political realm. The destiny fulfilled by Nes and the fateful desire for Deirdriu and Luaine foretell doom for Conchobar's kingly career. Obsessive and unstoppable love, lust-filled, wreaks disaster in Ulster. A distraction for the reader: Findon deploys at times what one might call speculative codicology, asserting in her conclusion that the audience for such tales in the vernacular may have "[...] contemplated the social and political dangers for rulers who think they can have everything they want" (170).

Sarah Sheehan, in "Loving Medb" (171-186), investigates chronologically the evolving views of the nearly-always prejudicial reception of that transgressive character Medb (with her unregulated sexuality) as "sovereignty goddess"—from divinity to political or allegorical personality. Drawing on Dooley's revisionist and liberating view, Sheehan shows how the queen's ambiguity may be glimpsed today in the graphic novel *An Táin* (2006). "The Monstrous Hero (or Monster-as-Hero): A Celtic Motif in Contemporary Literature" by Connell Monette (187-197) draws on his comparative monograph *The Medieval Hero* (2011). Medieval and modern representations of a character-type are examined—a fusion of contemporary demons and vampires with the dangerous and monstrous protagonist, exemplified most strikingly by an uninhibited Cú Chulainn in his "warp-spasm" (*riastrad*). Though he deals with this fascinating and problematic episode, Monette does not cite my note in *Celtica* 14 (1981). And, in asserting Cú Chulainn's "divinity," he forgets Medb's retort that the hero can be wounded and is just another human (she quips to Fergus, "He has but one body; he suffers wounding; he is not beyond capture" vv. 393-394, Rec. I; see above). One criticism of the *Táin* essays is the way the authors seems to switch somewhat carelessly between the *Lebor na hUidre* ("Book of the Dun Cow"—Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 25) and the later *Book of Leinster* version. I should prefer more disciplined circumspection on that subject.

With "*Eól dam seiser cloinne Cuinn: The Fortunes of a Twelfth-Century Irish Syncretistic Poem*" (198-219), Dáibhí Ó Cróinín illustrates in the twelfth-century poem the rationalizing processes so typical in early Irish tradition. Mac Neill's uncomplimentary term for antecedent Irish genealogies was "synthetic history"—also known as *coimgne*, "harmonization of traditions" (200). Amidst the heavy genealogical layers, Ó Cróinín detects an "influence of the *Bansenchas*" (210). Moreover, diagnostic criteria found in the poem also appear in the older *deibhidhe* and *dán direach* versification (what Brian Ó Cuiv deemed "prosodic straitjacket" [211]), as they provide a valuable marker for dating the bardic makeover from Middle Irish to Early Modern Irish. Not the earliest datable but best text of the fifty-stanza heretofore-unedited poem under discussion is an Ó Clérigh codex, now G 131 (National Library of Ireland; formerly Phillipps MS 17082). A pity Ó Cróinín decided not to provide a translation of the poem, even though it consists principally of a name list. Brent Miles undertakes a further step in studying the ever-irresistible Troy narratives. In "The Irish History of the 'Third Troy' and Medieval Writing of History" (220-237), he expands upon his earlier *Heroic Saga* (2011). Here, exploiting work initiated under the direction of Dooley, he considers the Irish reception and transmission of a classically-derived *Don Tres Troí*, an "eccentric" (236) late Middle Irish synthesizing story (attributed here to a lay historian, Flannagán) about the refounding of the city after its fall in the Trojan War. Interest in the text may have arisen in the context of Irish scholarly *translatio studii*, because, given its lack of Christian moralizing, the "intellectual thoroughness and independence of mind" (237) reinforces Irish literary autonomy vis-à-vis French historiographical models. I keep missing in Miles's erudite research on Ireland and Greco-Roman antiquity reference to a fine essay by my mentor Charles Dunn (1954).

Medieval Welsh topics are the focus of the last three contributions. With "Gwydion in the Court of Pryderi" (238-252) Patrick K. Ford, analyzing again the representation of poetry and court culture, ponders, not without humor, the exchange of gifts scene in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi* where the presumed *pencerrd* (chief poet) Gwydion (identified here by Ford as a *cyffarwyddyd*) requests, in poetic/storyteller form, of Pryderi, the "powerful and princely ruler"

(252), a gift of pigs. Karen Jankulak inquires into the Irish presence within the Welsh kingdom of Ceredigion in the pre-Norman period ("How Irish was Medieval Ceredigion? Pseudo-History, History, and Historiography" [253-264]). Very slim indeed is the aetiological as well as the epigraphical evidence adduced, and the argument regarding the Irish features of a medieval Welsh origin legend linking Ceredigion to Cunedda and his son Ceredig relies on historiographical myth. Finally, can bardic regulations decline over a period of forty years? This is the question asked by David N. Klausner in "The 'Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan': A Window on Late-Medieval Welsh Bardic Practice" (265-275). The Statute reveals that due to a downturn in reputation and social standing, contention arose in late medieval bardic tradition regarding training (less strict between the statute's early and late versions, 1523 vs. 1567). Also to blame was the rise of "vagabonds and rogues"—unscrupulous "worthless weeds" (272) in the bardic order—and the abuse of patronage (appropriateness of fees were in question). This situation calls to mind a late twelfth-century parallel in French, wherein Chrétien de Troyes, in the prologue to his first Arthurian romance, nails inept (though courtly) story-tellers as spoilers who mangle tales like *Erec et Enide*, which he is about to recount.

This is a fitting and lusty volume dedicated to a fine scholar. Here and there in the text, she is acknowledged and her inspiration recognized, but a note somewhere as to her relationship to each of the contributors would have been enlightening. On the whole, the volume will certainly become a standard tool of reference for Celtic scholars, young and old. My few reservations should not deter the reader as the book offers a diverse, enjoyable and enlightening read.

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