Essay—Dragon Slayers and Lion Friends: Intertextual Considerations in *Tochmarc Emire*

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> There was a tremendous response to the Graduate School of the CACSSS' inaugural PhD Essay Prize. The essays were reviewed by all the members of the Graduate School Executive Board. The process highlighted the excellent, engaged research being undertaken by postgraduate researchers across the disciplines in the college. The finalists were further double-blind peer reviewed by national and international experts in the respective fields. It is with great pleasure that we now publish the inaugural recipient's essay in this edition of *Aigne,* the postgraduate journal of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, at University College Cork.
>
> Orla Murphy, Graduate School Executive Committee

Tochmarc Emire 'The Wooing of Emer' (hereafter *TE*) tells the story of how the early Irish hero Cú Chulainn receives his training in arms and woos a wife, and is held to be an addendum to his heroic biography (Thurneysen 1921, pp.377-8).[1] The life cycle of Cú Chulainn represents the binding ingredient of the Ulster Cycle; a collection of tales set in the northern Irish province of Ulster around the court of King Conchobur in Emain Macha. This *mise-en-scène* is in some ways comparable to the cycle of stories around King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Although Arthur is the keystone of the Arthurian Cycle, the valorous deeds of his knights are actually recounted. Similarly, Cú Chulainn absorbs most of the glory in the Ulster Cycle tales.[2]

In summing up his textual history of *TE,* Thurneysen concluded: "Es gibt wohl keine andere irische Sage, in die so viel fremde Sagenbestandteile (...) aufgenommen sind."[3] *TE* incorporates a plethora of elements from i) much older material,[4] ii) contemporary material (other Ulster Cycle tales) and iii) elements which seem completely alien and arbitrary. Some of these features are common in modern

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[1] But even though Thurneysen sees the tale as a secondary addition, he believes that it was added 'schon früh'.

[2] He does not figure in *Scéla Muicce Maic Dá Thó* which is, in fact, a parody of the Ulster Cycle and of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* in particular.

[3] "There is no other Irish tale which has incorporated as many foreign saga elements as this one" (*ibid,* p.381).

[4] The *Verba Scáthaige* is one of the texts found in the now lost manuscript *Cín Dromma Snechta.* For the most recent edition of the early version, see Henry (1990).

folktales and, to some extent, in medieval romances. And it is these aspects in particular which will be the focus of this investigation.

The hero's quest for Emer, daughter of Forgall, in many ways follows features commonly found in a wooing story: a youthful hero—shunned by his prospective in-laws—must overcome a series of difficult tasks in order to obtain his bride. Cú Chulainn overcomes the traps set for him by Forgall and ultimately brings about the latter's demise. This basic structure forms the skeleton of *TE*. Forgall's request to Cú Chulainn requires him to gain training in arms with the fierce warrior woman Scáthach,[5] whose fortress is in Alba.[6] He therefore sets out from Ireland with a small group of the finest warriors which the kingdom of Ulster has brought forth: Conall Cernach ('the Triumphant'), Loegaire Búadach ('the Victorious') and Conchobur mac Nessa, the king of Ulster himself.[7] His trip is impeded however, by a series of curious events, which strip him of his companions and test his strength and valour. Shortly after the group's departure from Ireland, a strange vision appears before the warriors, showing them their home of Emain Macha. Conall, Loegaire and Conchobur are unable to go past it and are thus separated from Cú Chulainn. He continues his journey alone, since he has sworn not to return until he reaches Scáthach or finds death. At this point in the narrative Cú Chulainn comes upon a terrible beast similar to a lion which lets him ride on its back for four days. He meets a maiden who tells him that she had studied eloquence and sweet speech with him under a certain Ulbecán the Saxon. Another youth gives Cú Chulainn a wheel and an apple, artefacts which will help him to cross the Plain of Ill-Luck. After crossing the plain, Cú Chulainn comes to a glen filled with monsters (sent by Forgall) through which winds only one narrow path. Despite all of Forgall's efforts to let him perish on his journey, the hero reaches the land of Scáthach. Once his training is completed and on his return to Ireland to marry Emer, Cú Chulainn spends Samain night[8] on the Hebrides and rescues a local princess from three monstrous attackers known as *Fomori*. When he is offered the princess's hand in marriage, Cú Chulainn refuses and instead asks her to come see him in Ireland in a year's time.

Before we can assess these various elements in turn, it will be important to address the 'compositional' character of *TE* and say something about its textual history. *Tochmarc Emire* is preserved in six manuscripts. These six witnesses are divided into two recensions (or versions) of the story: a shorter one and a longer one.

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[5] Scáthach has been variously described as an Amazonian queen, a warrior princess and a prophetess. She utters the *Verba Scáthaige* 'Scáthach's Words', a prophecy concerning events which are to take place during the *Táin*.

[6] Nowadays the Gaelic term for Scotland, Alba designated the whole of northern Britain, including Pictish territories as well as Gaelic ones. For a detailed history of the early history of Scotland see Anderson (1973) and Woolf (2007).

[7] Conaire and Loegaire are Cú Chulainn's competitors in in an heroic contest in the tale *Fled Bricrenn* ('The Feast of Bricriu'). Conchubur himself never takes part in any of his warriors' exploits; his involvement here perhaps underlines the significance of the quest.

[8] The Celtic feast of Halloween ; generally a time when the veil separating the mortal world from the Otherworld is lifted.

The general consensus supports the view that the short recension (only preserved in one manuscript) is also the older one.[9] Of the remaining five manuscripts, only three are complete. Judging from the length of the *lacunae* in the fragmentary witnesses, we can however assume that they, too originally preserved the same version of the story (Toner, 1998). The division into the two recensions has been made partly on linguistic and partly on structural grounds: scholars have variously distinguished an Old Irish and a Middle Irish recension, or a pre-Viking and a post-Viking one (Toner, 1998 and Meyer, 1890 respectively). The Middle Irish recension has been expanded through the insertion of a certain number of additional episodes and descriptions. Among these is the incident which takes place on the Hebrides in the course of Cú Chulainn's return to Ireland. Both recensions include the episodes of Cú Chulainn's first journey to Alba: the lion, the youths, the wheel and the apple, and the perilous glen.

It seems curious that the sequence of extraneous elements is attached to those parts of the plot, in which Cú Chulainn is travelling to and from Ireland. In these sections, he behaves in a manner incompatible with the heroic expectations and conventions which characterise him in other sagas: he receives (and accepts) advice from others; he feels lost, abandoned and even afraid; and he refuses to accept the young girl he rescues from the *Fomori*. This behaviour stands in contradiction to what other Cú Chulainn tales tell us. As a semi-divine figure (his father, Lug, belonged to the *Tuatha Dé Danann* 'Tribes of the Goddess Danu'), Cú Chulainn has not only inherited Herculean strength, but also wisdom and foresight. In heroic contests he is always victorious. He defends the entire province of Ulster single-handedly against the Connacht army in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, the epic account of the great Cattle Raid of Cooley. He is further known to ignore advice (especially coming from women)[10] and to never miss an opportunity to sleep with a woman.[11] How is this incongruity to be explained?

John Carey (1989) has suggested that what we have here is in fact a conflation of two narrative settings (in- and outside Ireland) where each setting carries its own narrative conventions; therefore "when Cú Chulainn leaves Ireland, he leaves his cycle also, and enters a world of wonder tale and romance"(Carey, 1989, p. 33). The omniscient and all-powerful martial hero thus receives treatment no different from what would be accorded to a romantic or folktale protagonist. The change occurs at the precise moment when Cú Chulainn loses his companions, as they, too, form an inherent part of the Ulster Cycle. We are told that Cú Chulainn turned away from his companions *i conar n-inderb* 'on an unknown road' (van Hamel, §62). As he loses his way, he lingers until a terrible lion-like beast approaches him (*bíastai úathmair máir amal leoman*). The lion at first stares at Cú Chulainn (*baí oca fethem*), then offers its

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[9] For contrasting views, see especially Toner (1998) and Ó Concheanainn (1996). Thurneysen's original division into three recensions has been dismissed as unlikely, cf Thurneysen (1921). Kuno Meyer (1890) dates the short recension of *TE* to the 8th century.

[10] In *Aided Oenfhir Aífe,* Cú Chulainn kills his own son despite Emer's warning. For a discussion of this section, see Findon (1997).

[11] Despite his oath of chastity given to Emer, Cú Chulainn sleeps with three other women in the course of the tale and even begets a son, Connla.

side (*dobered a sliss friss béos*) and lets him climb on its back (*co mboí fora muin*) and carries him for four days, after which it takes leave of him (*lotir cethri láa fon chruth sin*). [12]

It goes without saying that lions are not native to Ireland and that any knowledge of them came to Ireland only via the transmission of foreign sources.[13] Incidentally, Cú Chulainn only meets his lion after he has left Ireland. References to these animals are, however, not unusual for early Irish literature. One of the earliest attested instances of the use of the word *léo* (borrowed from Latin *leo* 'lion') in Irish stems from early Leinster dynastic poetry in which we find *léo* being used to describe the strength of warriors.[14] There is however not a single tale in which a lion takes an active part in the plot. The exception in *TE* then, can best be explained in terms of shared elements with other vernacular literatures.

It has not escaped the notice of scholars that the role which the lion assumes in the tale, reminds us of the 'grateful lion' as we find it in Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion* (ed. Roques, 1982). *Yvain* leaves his newly wedded wife Laudine to embark on a series of heroic exploits with Gauvain, promising to return after a year has elapsed. He misses his deadline and is cast out by Laudine who swears that she will never forgive him as he has betrayed her trust and has put chivalric before conjugal duties. Alone and desolate, Yvain becomes an outcast of society: he loses his status, his clothes and even his mind and lives in the woods like a wild animal. One day, he comes upon a lion and a serpent fighting, the lion being entwined with the serpent, which is about to kill it:

> Si s'adreça lors vers le cri
> cele part ou il l'ot oï,
> et, quant il parvint cele part,
> vit un lÿon, en un essart,
> et un serpant qui le tenoit
> par la coe, et si li ardoit
> trestoz les rains de flame ardant.

(ll.3341-3347)

> He followed the shout thus
> to the part where he heard it,
> and, when he arrived in that part,
> he saw a lion, in a clearing,
> and a serpent which had seized it

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[12] *Ibid*., §63

[13] See also Carney's argument about pre-Christian Latin loanwords often found in a military context, in which he also includes 'leo', in Carney (1971, p.70).

[14] *Ibid*. p. 73: Carney dates the poem to the fifth century. This has been met with criticism by Ó Corráin (1985). See also Meyer (1913). See also *Tógail Bruidne Dá Derga* 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel': *Gnása ingen macdacht leó & cridi bráthar & gala mathgamna & brotha leómain*, 'manners of ripe maidens have they, and hearts of brothers, and valours of bears, and furies of lions' (Knott, 1975, p. 27); the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (here see O'Rahilly, 1978) abounds in references to warriors described as lions and with lion-like strength (cf. *as leo ar aithige*, 'in fierceness like a lion, l.4295). This seems to point to the fact that lions were regarded as strong and valorous animals. The conventional idea of the lion as 'king of beasts' is also found in one of the homilies in Leabhar Breac, edited in Atkinson (1887), where the term used is *airchindech* 'ruler, chief': *PH* 6383.

> by the tail, and burnt his
> hips with a blazing flame.

Yvain decides to save the nobler of the two beasts and slays the serpent. The lion, in gratitude, becomes tame and follows Yvain wherever he goes.

> Et li lÿons lez lui costoie
> que ja mes ne s'an partira,
> toz jours mes avoec lui ira
> que servir et garder le vialt.

<div align="right">(ll.3408-3411)</div>

> And the lion stayed close by his side
> that never he would separate from it,
> it would always go with him,
> so that it wanted to serve and protect him.

He plays a decisive role in a series of heroic combats which Yvain undertakes to regain his status as a knight (i.e. to become the *chevalier au lion*).

The resemblance to *TE* was first noticed both by T. M. Chotzen (1902) and Arthur Brown (1905). Brown states that the lion in *TE* serves as the hero's guide to the Otherworld whereas his role in *Yvain* is that of the hero's side-kick who comes to aid him at crucial moments in battle. He suggests that the lion's role can best be interpreted when seeing *Yvain* as a "partly rationalised Otherworld Journey story" in which the animal was "in origin a guide and helper for the marvellous road" (Brown, 1905, p. 692). He further suggests that the lion carrying Cú Chulainn on his back might be "a primitive form of the incident."[15] Unfortunately, he bases his argument solely on the fact that *TE* is anterior to Chrétien's romances.[16] Rudolph Zenker (1921) shares a similar view, and sees Cú Chulainn's journey as a "descente au séjour des morts" (a descent into the realm of the dead) and the lion as "un messager de l'empire des morts" (a messenger of the realm of the dead).[17] Chotzen on the other hand cautions against mistaking the 'lion conducteur' (guiding lion) – the role he assumes in *TE* – for the 'lion combattant' (fighting lion), in *Yvain*.[18]

It is precisely the function of the lion as an acting participant in the story which should point to the origin of the motif — namely that of the thankful animal — which stems from Classical sources. In *Yvain*, the protagonist rescues the lion from a serpent, saving the beast's life. The lion therefore follows him in gratitude. In Book V of Aulus Gellius's *Noctes Atticae* 'Attic Nights' is recounted the wondrous story of a young Roman slave named Androcles (or Androclus here) who, when hiding in a cave from his violent master, has a fateful encounter with a lion:

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[15] ibid.

[16] Composed concurrently with *Le chevalier à la charette* between 1177 and 1181 (Loomis, 1959, p.180) ; cf. Fourrier (1950).

[17] cf. Chotzen (1902, p.52) and Zenker (1921) : Zenker notes the parallel to the Welsh equivalent of the Yvain story, *Iarlles y Ffynnon*, 'The Countess of the Fountain' in which the lion is black. He sees the dark colour of the beast as proof for a connection with the realm of the dead. He disregards, as Chotzen duly notes the fact that the version of *Iarlles* in the White Book of Rhydderch describes the lion as *purwyn* 'pure white', and that the colour of the fur should be ascribed to the author's invention instead.

[18] ibid, p. 55

Neque multo post ad eandem specum venit hic leo, debili uno et cruento pede, gemitus edens et murmura, dolorem cruciatumque vulneris commiserantia. Atque illic primo quidem conspectu advenientis leonis territum sibi et pavefactum animum dixit. "Sed postquam introgressus," inquit, "leo, uti re ipsa apparuit, in habitaculum illud suum, videt me procul delitescentem, mitis et mansues accessit et sublatum pedem ostendere mihi et porrigere quasi opis petendae gratia visus est. Ibi," inquit, "ego stirpem ingentem, vestigio pedis eius haerentem, revelli conceptamque saniem vulnere intimo expressi accuratiusque sine magna iam formidine siccavi penitus atque detersi cruorem. Illa tunc mea opera et medella levatus, pede in manibus meis posito, recubuit et quievit atque ex eo die triennium totum ego et leo in eadem specu eodemque et victu viximus. Nam, quas venabatur feras, membra opimiora ad specum mihi subgerebat, quae ego, ignis copiam non habens, meridiano sole torrens edebam.

Noct. At. V.xiv.19-26

"... Not long afterwards this lion came to the same cave with one paw lame and bleeding, making known by groans and moans the torturing pain of his wound." And then, at the first sight of the approaching lion, Androclus said that his mind was overwhelmed with fear and dread. "But when the lion," said he, "had entered what was evidently his own lair, and saw me cowering at a distance, he approached me mildly and gently, and lifting up his foot, was evidently showing it to me and holding it out as if to ask for help. Then," said he, "I drew out a huge splinter that was embedded in the sole of the foot, squeezed out the pus that had formed in the interior of the wound, wiped away the blood, and dried it thoroughly, being now free from any great feeling of fear. Then, relieved by that attention and treatment of mine, the lion, putting his paw in my hand, lay down and went to sleep, and for three whole years from that day the lion and I lived in the same cave, and on the same food as well. For he used to bring for me to the cave the choicest parts of the game which he took in hunting, which I, having no means of making a fire, dried in the noonday sun and ate.[19]

When, years later, the slave and the lion are captured and forced to face each other in the arena, the lion recognises his former companion and, instead of devouring the man, greets him joyfully and wags his tail like a dog (*tum caudam more atque ritu adulantium canum clementer et blande movet*).[20] Parallels to the *Yvain* story are readily noted: the lion is saved by the hero and shows his gratitude by the expression of humility. Both lions further provide their companions with food and are also the

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[19] Text and translation from Rolfe (1984), p. 425. Aulus Gellius relates that he had found this story in the Αιγυπτιακά, 'Wonders of Egypt' of Apion.

[20] ibid., p. 422. The friendship between a lion and a man does not only exist in fiction: If one thinks of the two Australians, Anthony Bourke and John Rendall, who bought a lion cub in Harrods department store in London in 1969 and raised it in their home. When Christian, as he was named, grew too big to be living in a small London flat, the friends decided to return him to the wilderness of Kenia, his natural habitat. Visiting the country a year later, they were told that their lion had now become wild, and would not recognise them. To both their surprise, Christian not only remembered them well, 'hugging' and nudging both men, but also introduced them to the rest of his pride (Bourke et Rendall, 2009).

key to the protagonists' change in status: Androcles becomes a free man and enjoys popularity; Yvain becomes the 'Chevalier au lion'. Similarly, Cú Chulainn regains his courage and finds the road to Scáthach.

The motif of the human being spared by a lion is also Biblical: In Daniel 6: 1-21, the protagonist is thrown into the lions' den after he is found guilty of praying to God whereas this practice was forbidden by decree of the king. The king, however, regretting his decision, hopes that Daniel's god will save him. As this comes to pass, Daniel relates that an angel descended from heaven to appease the lions whereafter they would not harm him. The cross-over to the Androcles story only concerns the episode of the fight in the arena/lions' den where both Androcles and Daniel are spared by the beasts. The Biblical story differs from the tale in that the lions spare the man through the power of God and not through friendship or gratitude.

This spiritual interpretation has gained popularity in religious texts in general. In Ireland, we find this motif to be recurrent in Irish saints' lives. *Vita Sancti Albei Episcopi in Imlech* for instance, recounts the life of the St Ailbe of Emly (Co. Tipperary). Ailbe's speciality (in which he surpasses Christ himself) consists in reviving the dead and restoring them to their original constitution (i.e. healthy and unharmed). Thus we are told that a camp of Romans is assailed by a lion, which kills a man and is about to devour him. But Ailbe, entering the scene, orders the lion not to eat the man and *statimque leo obediens virum mortuum ex ore suo...proiecit, et ad sanctum Albeum velociter...cucurrit et...pedes sancti Albei humiliter lambere cepit* ("at once the lion obeyed and spat the dead man out of its mouth, and ran quickly to saint Ailbe and he humbly began to lick the feet of the saint") (Heist, 1965, p. 120).[21]

We cannot be certain whether the story of Androcles and the Lion was known in Ireland at the time the earliest saga material was committed to vellum.[22] Daniel's story however, was most certainly known.[23] The ties between the Biblical story and the saints' lives are therefore evident but the connection to *TE* seems to be of a different nature. Whereas the lions serve as literary devices to illustrate a saint's power in the hagiographical material, Cú Chulainn exerts no power over his lion. A connection between *TE* and Irish saints' lives seems therefore too tenuous. Furthermore, the element of gratitude, which link *Yvain* and *Androcles,* is missing in *TE*. Cú Chulainn's lion rather seems to belong to the group of 'helpful animals'[24] which we find in modern folktales.[25] The notion of 'helpfulness' then received literary

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[21] As Philip Healy has pointed out to me, a similar incident is also found in the *Betha Brenainn Clúana Ferta* 'The Life of Brendan of Clonfert' in which Brendan goes to the desert and tames a lion and a lionness, compelling them to protect the cattle of the locals (Plummer, 1922, ii, p.82).

[22] It has, however, lent its name to the tale-type listed under *156 Thorn removed from the Lion's Paw (Androcles and the Lion)* in the Aarne-Thompson folktale index (Aarne, 1961). Althgough the entry gives mostly folktale references, 'literary treatments' are noted at the end. One of these literary sources for 156 is found in the *Gesta Romanorum* (Hooper and Swan, 1906), a fourteenth-century collection of tales and fables. Tale 104 gives a courtly reinterpretation of the Androcles story in which the place of the slave is assumed by a knight.

[23] For a reference to Daniel, see Carey (1998), p.225.

[24] Chotzen refutes this (op. cit. p.55).

[25] Cf. Aarne's types 530-559.

exaggeration by Chrétien as the lion plays a decisive role in Yvain's personal and chivalric development. What links Cú Chulainn's encounter and Yvain's lion is the function of the lion as a transitional device. Both heroes are stranded in the wilderness with no purpose (Yvain) or no orientation (Cú Chulainn) having just lost something dear to them. It would therefore be possible that the element in *TE,* although the beast itself is clearly non-Irish, was derived from circulating folktale elements,[26] the vestiges of which survived in *TE*, but of which no actual witness was ever recorded. We could suppose the same for Chrétien's sources.[27]

The following elements in *TE* are perhaps more straightforward than the lion episode. After Cú Chulainn and the lion have separated, he comes upon a large house in a glen with a maiden waiting in it. She tells him that they have both studied eloquence together with a certain Ulbécan the Saxon. This is surprising. With regard to the narrative chronology of Cú Chulainn's life, the hero has never before left Ireland until the events recounted in *TE*. Ulbécan the Saxon is a further oddity here. Cú Chulainn should have no need to venture abroad to receive rhetorical training and especially not in the language of the Saxons. William Sayers (1988) has interpreted the name of Ulbecán as a hypocoristic form of the Irish word for 'wolf' and has drawn comparisons to Wulfstan, one of the disciples of bishop Æthelwold of Winchester. Wulfstan was most famous for his musical treatise *De harmonia tonorum,* which, as Sayers suggests "could have passed to an Irish monastic establishment as a gift or with the voyage of a single monk".[28] It seems however doubtful that a figure such as Wulfstan, whose work, as Sayers admits, was not necessarily known in Ireland, made his way into an Early Irish saga where his name received an Irish disguise.[29] The anomalous figure of Ulbecán the Saxon must therefore remain a riddle at present.

Cú Chulainn's next challenge consists in crossing *mmag ndobail* "The Plain of Ill-Luck', a task in which he is helped by the youth Eochu Bairche. The youth tells him that the plain has two sides, the first half of which makes a man's feet stick to it, whereas the second half lifts him on top of the grass blades.[30] He gives Cú Chulainn two items, a wheel and an apple, which set his pace across the plain. This is a curious motif which has no direct parallel in Irish literature. The only source which comes

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[26] perhaps a Celtic Proto-Yvain.

[27] See however, Tony Hunt's article on the sources of the lion episode in *Yvain*. Hunt argues that Chrétien was too well read and too careful, not to give way to any allegorical meaning that could be attached to the lion, i.e. that the lion be attached to any religious meaning. He further claims that Chrétien's treatment of the lion was possibly derived from Ovid and Isidore, from which he took the motif of *parcere prostratis* 'sparing the defeated', and the idea of the lion as the paragon of morality. Cf. Hunt (1983), pp 86-98. Doris Edel also mentions the lion episode in *TE* but only refers to the afore-mentioned articles by Brown and Chotzen. Cf. Edel, 1980, pp.125-6 and notes.

[28] *Ibid*. p.31.

[29] If we agree with Meyer's date of the eighth century for the first recension of *TE*, then Wulfstan, who lived in the late tenth/early eleventh century, can most certainly not be equated with Ulbecán.

[30] Edel (op. cit., p.129) has suggested that this description may refer to a plain frozen over in winter. Since the wheel is narrow and rolls fast, Cú Chulainn must cross the first half of the plain with speed in order not to get stuck. The apple (or 'round thing' as the word *uball* can also be interpreted) is broader and the hero is supposed to walk carefully across the slippery surface.

close to it, is found in a folktale collected by Jeremiah Curtin, entitled "The Son of the King of Erin" (Curtin, 1889). In the tale, the king's son loses his head to a giant and must seek him out in his castle. On his way, he is helped by three old women who each give him a ball of thread. The young man is to throw the ball in front of him which will then unwind, pointing out the road. At the end of the day, the accumulated thread will have formed another ball. This motif is found in Stith Thompson's international *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Thompson, 1960) as *D1313 Magic object points out road,* which the redactor of *TE* has adapted to suit the needs of the narrative.[31]

A further folktale analogue from outside Ireland, the story listed as 127 in Grimm's collection of fairy tales (Grimm 1992) tells the story of how a princess frees her prospective husband from an iron stove. When she asks the prince to allow her to take leave of her father, he agrees under the condition that she speak no more than three words. She infringes upon this prohibition and must now seek out the prince's castle herself, since the iron stove has disappeared. In order to find the castle, she needs to get past a high glass mountain, three piercing swords and a lake. She is given three magic objects by an old toad which instructs her how to use them: three needles she must put under her feet, in order not to fall on the slippery surface of the mountain; a plough-wheel she must sit on, to roll over the piercing swords; and three nuts containing three dresses she must wear to access the prince's castle. She reaches the castle and, dressed in her royal attire, is allowed to sleep in the prince's bed for three nights. On the third night, the prince hears her weeping and learns that she is the one who freed him from the iron stove. The couple marries the same night, crosses the three obstacles and finally arrives at the old toad's house. When they enter, the house turns into a castle and its inhabitants into a royal household.

There is no obvious connection between the Iron House and *TE,* which are temporally and geographically far apart. It looks, though, as if the motif of the magic object can be moulded to suit about any situation. Interestingly, the story of the iron house describes a similarly hostile landscape to the one Cú Chulainn must cross. The context is also that of a wooing story, although the roles of the protagonists are reversed; it is the princess who must complete a set of tasks before she can reach her husband. The wheel and the apple, can therefore also be attributed to the circulation of oral folktale elements which *TE* absorbed.[32]

Further on his road, Cú Chulainn comes upon *glend gáibthech* 'the Perilous Glen' through which leads *óentéit cóel,* 'one narrow rope'. The glen is *lán di urthrachtaib* 'filled with monsters' sent by Forgall to destroy him lest he may reach the fortress of Scáthach. The description of such a monstrous valley sounds familiar to those acquainted with folktales. But a case can also be made to trace this theme back to Irish descriptions of hell. *Fís Adomnáin* 'The Vision of Adomnán' is ascribed to Adomnán, a seventh-century abbot of Iona, but was written centuries after his

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[31] It is also found as an AT tale-type listed under *934E The Magic Ball of Thread* (Aarne, 1961, p.330). A ball of thread leading the way is also found in the Classical account of Theseus and the minotaur.
[32] For further references to folktale connections, see Baudiš, 1923, p.101.

death.[33] In this text, Adomnán (or rather his soul) gains a first-hand experience of the fate of the human soul after death and, by the same token, glances upon the wonders of heaven and the terrors of hell. Hell is described as a dark and barren country with a valley crossed by a bridge, which is narrow at first, then broad. Those who fall from the bridge, land in the "jaws of the eight smouldering beasts who have their dwelling there" (Carey 1998, p.270). In Robert Atkinson's edition and translation of eschatological material found in the Leabhar Breac (Atkinson, 1887), we find a similar reference to "deep fiery glens" (*glennaib dóimnib tenntigib*). Evidence that secular Irish literature has been influenced by descriptions of the afterlife can also be seen in the Early Modern Irish *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn* edited by R. I. Best (1907) where a similar landscape is described.

It seems as though it would hardly be necessary to look for parallels outside Irish literature for the episode of the Perilous Glen, as the Irish sources paint a rather synchronized picture. It is however, worth mentioning that the twelfth-century French romance, *La mule sans frein*, (Méon, 1823) contains an incident in which Sir Kay rides a mule through the "Valley of the Fear of Death, which was beset by scorpions and serpents."[34] To what extent the French poem could also have drawn on eschatological material goes beyond the scope of the current investigation.

Having finally reached the land of Scáthach, Cú Chulainn must as soon prove his of strength and valour. But his exploits are not only of heroic nature. When Scáthach is under attack by her rival Aífe, Cú Chulainn defeats her and obtains three wishes from her, the last of which consists in bearing him a son.[35] When Cú Chulainn has completed his training, Scáthach utters a prophecy about future events in Cú Chulainn's life, his trials during the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* and his early demise.

Cú Chulainn's return journey homewards is interrupted by a brief interlude on *inse gall*, 'the island of the foreigners' (the Hebrides). As he arrives at the fort of the local king, some of the companions lost at the beginning of the story are already there (perhaps as a sign that he is re-entering the world of the Ulster Cycle?). He hears 'wailing' at the fort and learns that the king's daughter is to be carrief off, and now awaits her destiny down at the shore. He joins the princess and asks who the attackers are. The princess tells him that they are *Fomori*[36] and that they come from an island yonder. Cú Chulainn, undeterred by the girl's warning, stays and fights off the three attackers. The third one manages to inflict a wound on his shoulder which the girl bandages with a piece of her clothing. Cú Chulainn then takes off without leaving his name. Back at the fort, a multitude boasts of having slain the *Fomori* but the princess gives them no credence. Later a bath is prepared by the king to which Cú Chulainn also comes and is then recognized as the true hero (although this is not spelt out, it is presumable because of the piece of garment). The king offers him his daughter's hand

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[33] The Annals of Ulster record Adomnán's death in the year 704 (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, 2004)

[34] Translation in Brown (op. cit., p.692).

[35] The story of Aífe's son is related in *Aided Oenfhir Aífe,* mentioned above.

[36] Originally creatures from Irish mythology, the semantic development of the Fomori in Irish literature eventually turns them into 'giants'.

in marriage and is even willing to pay the bride-price himself. Cú Chulainn, however, refuses the girl, but invites her to Ireland in a year's time. Then he returns to Ireland.[37]

The episode described here fits an international story pattern known as the Dragon Slayer and is listed in the Aarne-Thompson index under AT300. The basic outline of the tale-type goes as follows: i) The hero and his dogs, ii) the sacrifice, iii) the dragon, iv) the fight, v) the tongues, vi) the impostor and finally vii) the recognition. The sacrifice is here represented by the princess (as is common for the tale-type), while the role of the dragon is assumed by the *Fomori*,[38] which Cú Chulainn goes on to fight. Although there are no tongues to be cut out as proof, the shred of garment given to Cú Chulainn by the princess reveals his identity as the true hero and therefore serves the same function. Impostors claim to have done the deed at the fort and the scene is finally resolved when Cú Chulainn is recognized as the actual hero and offered the princess's hand.

Tales of this kind have been exceptionally popular even since pre-Christian times and across different genres of literature. The earliest version of the dragon slayer which conforms to much of the above pattern, is doubtlessly the story of Perseus rescuing Andromeda.[39] Andromeda whose mother had boastfully compared her to the beauty of the nymphs is to be sacrificed to a sea monster. The role of the impostor is here fulfilled by Phineus, the surplus suitor to whom Andromeda had been betrothed prior to Perseus's arrival.

Perhaps the most famous medieval version of the dragon slayer story type is the romance of Tristan and Yseult, the oldest version of which dates back to the twelfth century.[40] Tristan, nephew of king Mark of Cornwall first defends Ireland against the Irish warrior Morholt exacting tribute of young girls and boys on behalf of Ireland. After killing Morholt, Tristan sets out on a second quest to find a wife for his uncle. Upon learning that a dragon is devastating Ireland and that the king has promised his daughter Yseult to anyone who slays the monster, Tristan sets out and fulfills the task. The fight with the dragon leaves him unconscious and an impostor cuts off the dragon's head and claims to have done the deed. As Tristan is able to produce the dragon's tongue however, he obtains the hand of princess Yseult. On their journey back to Cornwall, the lovers drink the fateful love potion, meant for Yseult and Mark. From there the tragic love story ensues.

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[37] This episode is later resolved when Derbforgaill (the princess has no name in the first episode) travels to Ireland in the shape of a bird. Cú Chulainn, having hit the bird with a stone from his sling, sucks it out of the girl's wound. He then tells her that he cannot marry her because he has drunk her blood and they are now considered kin. Instead he gives her to his fosterson Lugaid Reoderg (Van Hamel, 1933)

[38] The actual monster to be slain varies from region to region : thus we tend to find giants in the Scandinavian countries, whereas as dragons and ogres are more dominant on the Continent.

[39] For a detailed study of the Andromeda story type, see Edwin S. Hartland (1894).

[40] For a semi-diplomatic edition of the early French poems, see Payen (1989). The French evidence only represents fragments of the romance. For the first complete witness see Eilhart von Oberge's *Tristrant,* most recently edited in Buschinger (2007) (modern French translation) and Bussmann (1969).

The parallels between Tristan and *TE* are readily noted. The basic structure of AT300 is intact in both instances. Moreover, we find a character named Drust mac Serb in Cú Chulainn's company as he journeys home. This character shows up nowhere else in Irish literature and his only purpose in *TE* seems to be limited to being part of Cú Chulainn's retinue. But as scholars already noticed a century ago (Deutschbein, 1904 and Thurneysen, 1921), it is likely that Drust mac Serb, whose name bears a certain resemblance to Tristan's, was in fact the original hero of the rescue episode and was later replaced by the more famous Cú Chulainn.[41] Early Irish literature seems to provide no other example of AT300 as represented both by *TE* and *Tristan*[42] making Cú Chulainn the earliest western European dragon slayer recorded.

According to John Carey, *TE* is a story which looks at itself (Carey, 1989). As I hope to have shown, one could go further and state that it is also a tale which looks at other tales; a tale which acts like a mirror of the literate environment which produced it. This environment was not only aware of Ulster Cycle conventions and eschatological material, but also conversant with folktale and romance. When Cú Chulainn leaves the princess without giving his name, he is made to act like the incognito dragon slayer of the folktale whose identity is only revealed as he exposes the impostors. His lion companion and his constant need for advice rather make the martial hero look like one of Chrétien's flawed protagonists. The hero's literary metamorphoses express an understanding of a broader kind of literature than one might expect to find in an Early Irish tale and *Tochmarc Emire* is, in this respect, to be seen as a 'tale of tales.'

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[41] Carney believed that a so-called 'Ur-Tristan' developed in northern Britain and later travelled south (Carney, 1979, pp. 187ff.)

[42] Unfortunately, Tom Peete Cross's (1952) index of motifs in Early Irish literature has been of little help here, as his references are often misleading or point to a dead end.

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