

MANY NAMES - MANY SHAPES

THE WAR GODDESS IN EARLY IRISH LITERATURE - WITH REFERENCE TO INDIAN TEXTS.

A Study in the Phenomenology of Religion.

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I, Ursula Bauer-Harsant, declare that this thesis has been composed
entirely by me and that the work is my own.

Signed.

.....Edinburgh. 1996

TEXT OF ABSTRACT OF THESIS:

A quote from the Rees brothers book 'Celtic Heritage', comparing one of the Irish war-goddesses to the Indian Kālī has provided the first impulse for this thesis. In the course of the study it emerged that the Indian material would be most useful in shedding further light on the Irish figures rather than to undertake a fully developed comparison.

When studying the Irish texts it soon becomes apparent that the war-goddesses cannot be seen in isolation but only in relationship with a male hero. Two heroes have extensive dealings with the war-goddesses, Cú Chulainn, the famous hero of Ulster, and the Dagda of the Túatha Dé Danann. Cú Chulainn generally benefits from the activities of the Badb, the screeching battle crow, while the Morrīgan displays a relentless hostility towards him. One important fact which emerges from these stories is the existence of a deep-seated similarity between the great hero and the otherworldly females which becomes particularly obvious when studying the various animal shapes the latter appear in. On the whole, the war-goddesses reveal themselves to be elusive, many-shaped figures who attack the hero's courage and inner strength rather than challenging him physically. They are not interested in questions of allegiance though this changes as time goes by, with later texts showing a different perspective.

The relationship between the Morrīgan and the Dagda in Cath Maige Tuired takes a different form. Here, a powerful male figure who incorporates both life-giving and destructive aspects within his nature turns the destructive and chaotic potential personified by the Morrigan into more controlled channels so that she benefits his own people. Through his agency she becomes a powerful influence in the battle against the Fomorians. Figures who resemble the war-goddesses closely are investigated such as Washers at the Ford, death-messengers, hags and other hostile females. Variations on familiar themes and developments over time can be observed. It seems that very often the male hero determines the role of the otherworldly female and the later texts show a marked decline of the latter.

Comparison with Indian evidence is prompted by the curious fact that although male figures are the protagonists of war in both cultures, it is female figures who emerge most clearly as the personifications of death and destruction. The question is asked whether any common features emerge which may explain this phenomenon and lead to a typology of female figures of death and destruction. An investigation of Kālī's story reveals that certain attitudes towards violence and destruction are indeed similar, and that certain methods of containing this dangerous force in female shape find echoes in both traditions. However, the details as to behaviour, strategy, appearance, etc. show marked differences. It is concluded that comparison with Kālī throws certain features of the Irish goddesses into sharper relief which may not have been possible otherwise. Any claim to seeing true similarities has to remain very tenuous indeed.

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INTRODUCTION:

'... Cailb, like the Indian Kālī, is the personification of death, woe and destruction, and she invites the reluctant hero to make her his ultimate bride' (1). This short sentence is the only instance where one of the Irish hostile females is compared to Kālī, the black goddess of Hinduism, and it provided the first impulse for the study of destructive female figures in Ireland and India. The comparison with Kālī in the above context is valuable mainly because of the many questions it provokes. Is it meaningful to compare a figure from one culture to a similar one in another? Is it just coincidence that in both cultures the typical warrior is male and yet it is fierce females who exert significant influence on war? If there are similarities, are they just superficial or are they expressions of a similar response to death and destruction in general? These and other issues formed the motivation for the research.

During the process of collecting details on the fierce females in both traditions it became clear that relatively little work had been done on the Irish figures. Hennessy has devoted an article on what he terms the 'goddess of war' and has compiled many passages and stories which proved to be immensely valuable as a starting point for further research (2). The most detailed analysis has been carried out by Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h (3) who approach the subject from an Indo-European angle, following Dumézil's method. Dumézil (4) himself took an interest in Macha, a topic also researched by Carey (5) who offers a different conclusion. Máire Breathnach (6) has focussed on some of the hag figures occurring in kings' tales and wonders whether they constitute the dark side of the sovereignty goddess while Marie-Louise Sjoestedt's interest lies with in all the goddesses which she classes under the title 'Mother-goddesses' (7). Otherwise, the fierce females appear in articles and books whose main interest lies in different matters. It seemed time for a more comprehensive study of these sinister goddesses in Irish literature before any comparison could be attempted. The emphasis is thus firmly on the Irish figures while a comparison with Kālī is made simply to provide another dimension, as, it seems, the Rees brothers did in the above quote. This statement needs some further justification.

Comparison, it seems, lies at the very heart of this study but not in the sense that some comparative theory has been applied to the Irish texts. Instead, every attempt has been made to keep an open mind when reading the text in order to understand it on its own terms. While particular texts have obviously been chosen with a view to accumulate knowledge about the female figures in question, it was important to see them as part of the text rather than pluck them out and look at them in isolation. It very soon appeared that the emphasis of the text is firmly on the male and nothing useful can be learned about the war-goddesses unless they are seen in relationship with the heroes. Thus, this study concerns itself, for a substantial part, with the main male partners/opponents of the war-goddesses, who are Cú Chulainn and the Dagda. It is only through knowledge of the male figures that the true significance of the female figures can be understood. Comparison comes into the picture first of all when attempting to make sense of details in the Irish material. For example, details pertaining to the war-goddesses' appearance such as the colours, dress, hair, the feature of being blind in one eye, etc. are incomprehensible unless compared to figures in other stories. Only then can the true significance of a particular feature emerge. The same applies for assessing the meaning of a particular animal shape, an activity, a location, a particular profession attached to the war-goddesses, and so on. Without comparison to other stories, no patterns can emerge and no understanding be gained.

After an evaluation of the details, the role of a war-goddess in one text needs to be compared to the role of a war-goddess in another. Here, comparison allows useful information to be gained both from the similarities and the differences. The similarities allow us to see the constant features, in other words, the criteria by which a war-goddess can be identified as such, while the differences bring out the specific position and characteristics in a way which is not possible without the comparison.

Further, the war-goddesses need to be compared to each other in order to arrive at differences in function, or not, as the case may be. It is during such endeavors that differences between early and late texts appear and interesting developments can be observed. Matters of comparison are also important when attempting to decide whether an unnamed or differently named figure can be classed among the war-goddesses.

One of the aims of the study is to arrive at a 'portrait' of the war-goddesses which has taken every possible angle into account. For this reason it is not enough just to look at the stories to gain a body of evidence comprising the appearance and activity of the war-goddesses, their relationships with other figures and their role. Other hints are provided which convey valuable information as to attitudes towards the fierce females. They appear in the form of glosses, authorial intrusions or special terms. Sometimes, names from classical literature occur to replace an Irish term. This process works the other way as well in that classical figures were called by Irish names at a stage when Greek and Roman literature was translated into Irish. It is interesting to see what names were chosen for the figures under scrutiny and what attitudes underlie such a choice.

Further, given the Christian milieu of the texts, it is worthwhile keeping an open mind for hints which may stem from an identifiably Christian view-point. Sometimes opinions are passed openly and clearly, while in other instances certain slants on the story seem like attempts to pass a judgement which can most reasonably be attributed to a Christian point of view.

A method which is not suggested by the texts themselves but is applied to the texts by many scholars is Dumézil's analysis of Indo-European remnants. This method is usually triggered by the appearance of three related figures or other signs of a threefold nature. It is worthwhile to add this perspective to our study when appropriate. The above steps seem necessary to come to as full an appreciation of the war-goddesses as the Irish material allows. After having gained such an appreciation, one further step is taken, to compare the war-goddesses to what appears to be an Indian equivalent, ie Kālī.

There has, of course, been a long history of comparison between Irish and Indian figures, prompted by the search for Indo-European origins. However, it is now widely accepted that Kālī's continuity with earlier, Vedic material is highly questionable while continuity from non-Aryan, native cults is much more likely. Thus, Kālī could not be interpreted as a deity showing Indo-European traits. The comparison with Kālī then, if it is to be made, has to be conceived of on different lines altogether. It is prompted by the curious fact that in both cultures war is the prerogative of the male, yet powerful

female figures appear as personifications of destruction. If we accept the assumption that death and destruction are basic experiences of being human, it is, to my mind, permissible to search outside a given culture for parallels on these more general lines. It seems sensible to ask the question how another culture, through the medium of a corpus of literature, responds to these issues. If a fierce female figure appears as part of that response, there is no reason why one should not compare it with the original objects of study. It will become clear from the study that the Morrigan and her sisters are not simply arbitrary figments of someone's imagination. Instead, certain uncomfortable truths are being expressed through them and similarities and differences in another culture can be useful to throw these observations into sharper relief. Kālī's stories have been approached with the same agenda in mind as the Irish figures. This means that each text has been studied on its own and then compared to others in order to understand both the differences specific to each text and the continuing characteristics. I hasten to point out that this comparison is not intended to make any claims as to the real existence of a goddess like the Morrigan or what she may have been like, had she existed. This can never be conclusively demonstrated. My concern is with the conceptual world - with images and stories people use in order to express certain aspects of reality.

The material which forms the basis of this study obviously needs to be restricted as it is vast and not all of it is relevant. On the Irish side, the emphasis lies firmly on the early medieval texts although occasionally later evidence is referred to. This is particularly necessary when briefly dealing with classical texts in Irish translation, as they tend to be late rather than early. As dating texts is a notoriously difficult procedure and one which I am not qualified to enter, I am mainly guided by Thurneysen's analysis (8) but mentioning also any opinions passed by scholars who have edited and translated the main texts used here. The corpus of texts being examined is obviously defined by whether or not the fierce ladies make an appearance in them.

At this stage, clarification of the term 'fierce ladies' is called for. Cailb has been the figure which initiated this study and thus should be the first to attract attention. However, it so happens that Cailb is specific to one story only. Fortunately, she bears

strong resemblance to a group of figures which have become known to scholars as 'war-goddesses', following Hennessy's article. They comprise Badb, Macha, Nemain and the Morrígan/Morrígu. The texts themselves perceive these figures as 'the daughters of Ernmas', generally understood to be a trio of various combinations of the above names. Other figures are sometimes substituted, sometimes added, and sometimes just associated with these and we end up with a list which includes also Anu, Bé Neit, and Fea. The term 'war-goddesses' is appropriate because they appear in the context of battles, assuming various shapes and roles. Additionally, in a few instances they are associated with a figure called Neit who is defined as a god of battle. Generally, the texts are silent as to matters of classification.

The term 'goddess' is not without its difficulties and other terms are possible.

Thurneysen, for example, writes about the fury Morrígan (9), or the demoness (10), or simply the prophetess (11). Any such term is justified simply because we do not know what standing these figures had before the coming of Christianity and the writing of the texts. The only information we can glean from the texts is how the people who were involved in creating them saw beings who, strictly speaking, belonged to a time before the advent of Christianity and seemingly still had some sort of existence during the writers' own time. For this reason, I tend to use the term 'otherworldly' whenever possible so as not to give the impression that information is passed on about 'real' and fully functional deities. 'War-goddesses' will remain as a term of convenience for the moment.

Apart from the figures which are usually classed as war-goddesses, there are others which bear close resemblance to this group but whose names do not appear among the daughters of Ernmas. These will also be examined. While hostile ladies remain throughout the literature, Badb, Macha, Nemain and the Morrígan all but disappear from the textual tradition after the 14th century, with Badb lingering on the longest. However, even she had become an identification for nearly every hostile female being in ever more fanciful guises, which is why many later texts are only mentioned briefly. The study centres on the relationship between the war-goddess and the hero which has dictated the choice of texts. Two main heroes emerge, ie Cú Chulainn and the Dagda. It follows that *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (and tales related to it) (12) and *Cath Maige Tuired*

(13) are the central texts and were the starting points for my investigation. *Táin Bó Cúailnge* features Badb/Nemain and the Morrígan are investigated separately, but both investigations follow the same pattern.

First of all, each one is seen in relationship with Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, then in relationship with Cú Chulainn outside *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and finally, in relationship with other heroes, for the sake of comparison. Interesting differences can be observed which contribute to a better understanding of why Cú Chulainn is such a special warrior. There is a small overlap between the two main strands of the study because the Morrígan's bird-form is placed together with the stories of the Badb who is, of course, the battle-crow.

Only the Dagda has a love-affair with the Morrígan and we turn to *Cath Maige Tuired* for details. *Cath Maige Tuired* shares the theme of a great battle with *Táin Bó Cúailnge* but the reason for and the outcome of the battle are quite different. The conduct of characters in *Cath Maige Tuired* seems to be affected by the changed context, and interesting conclusions can be drawn. Badb only occurs once in a brief but significant episode. Macha is also mentioned in the passing. As in the case of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, many smaller episodes are based on *Cath Maige Tuired*, particularly in the place lore, and relevant episodes are cited. Macha has her own group of texts attached to herself and these form the subject of a separate chapter.

After having explored the 'main' figures in the Irish texts, hostile and war-like females not specifically identified as war-goddesses are explored. They occur in a variety of texts, ranging from the Ulster cycle to the Fiana cycle, from king-tales to place lore. The connections with Badb, Macha and the Morrígan are clarified.

The Indian material has also been severely restricted. The works which deal with Kālī as a 'Great Goddess', in other words, the ultimate source of all that exists, have been excluded. The main interest lies in the earlier, medieval texts where Kālī features in stories. More detailed reasons as to the choice of material will be given in the chapter itself. Here, it suffices to say that the *Devī-Māhātmya* (14) forms the starting point as a good deal of information is conveyed and the evidence ranges amongst the earliest available to us. One particularly significant incident occurs in the *Mahābhārata* (15),

while the purānas supply the rest of the tales. David Kinsley (16) has been influential in shaping my ideas about Kālī, and it would be difficult to improve on his arrangement of the material. Original research has not been a priority in the Indian field although it may be somewhat unusual to see Kālī's features as fairly stereotypical when compared to a number of other fierce beings.

After careful comparison it can be established whether new insights have been gained by including the Indian Kālī in a study of war-goddesses and whether the Irish response to death and destruction is lit by a shaft of light from a culture as far away as India.

Notes to Introduction:

- 1)Rees, A. and Rees,B. 'Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales' (London, 1989; first published in 1961) p.338
- 2)Hennessy, W.M 'The ancient Irish Goddess of War' RC1 (1870-72) p.32-55
- 3)Le Roux, F and Guyonvarc'h C.J. 'Mórrígan - Badb - Macha: la souveraineté guerriere de l'Irlande' *Ogam-Celticum* 25 (1983)
- 4)Dumézil, G. 'Mythe et épopée' (1968)
- 5)Carey, J.'Notes on the Irish War-Goddess' *Éigse* 19 (1982-3) 263-274
- 6)Breathnach, M. 'The Sovereignty Goddess as Goddess of Death?' *ZCP* 39 (1982) 243-60
- 7)Sjoestedt, M-L.'Gods and Heroes of the Celts' (translated by Myles Dillon) (Dublin, 1994)
- 8)Thurneysen,R. 'Die Irische Helden und Königssage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert' (IHK) (Halle, 1921)
- 9)ibid. p.96
- 10)ibid.p.104
- 11)ibid.p.144
- 12)O'Rahilly, C.'Táin Bó Cúailnge' Recension1 (TBC1)(Dublin, 1976), dated to the middle of the 11th century but with a core going back to the 8th and 9th century. O'Rahilly,C. 'Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster' (TBC2) ITS 49 (Dublin, 1967), dated to the 12th century. See Thurneysen, IHK, p. 96ff. Windisch,E. 'Táin Bó Regamna' IT 2.2; translated by Hull,E. 'The Cuchulinn Saga in Irish Literature (London, 1889), p.103-107; Meyer,K. 'Echtra Nerai' RC 10 (1889) p.212-228
- 13)Gray, E. 'Cath Maige Tuired' , (Dublin,1982)
- 14)Coburn, Thomas B. 'Encountering the Goddess - A translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a study of its interpretation'(DM) (Indian edn.,Delhi 1992)
- 15)The Mahābhārata. Ed. and transl. by J.A.B. v. Buitenen. 3 volumes (Chicago, 1973-78)
- 16)Kinsley,D. 'The Sword and the Flute' (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1975); 'Hindu Goddesses - Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition' (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1986)

Chapter 1:

BATTLE CROWS AND BIRDS OF PROPHECY - BADB, NÉMAIN AND THE MORRÍGAN IN BIRD SHAPE

Badb is the crow who haunts the battlefields with her croaking and fluttering and can be observed hopping busily among the slain. Translators generally refer to the scald-crow or royston crow which is the Irish name for a hooded crow (*corvus corone cornix*), according to Webster's Dictionary. This crow has a black head and black wings but a grey body. The translation is known to us from the various Irish glossaries. The 17th century Glossary by O'Clery (1) has four entries about her: '*Badhb .i. feannóg*', (2) *feannóg* being the modern word for a scald-crow. Under *Teathra* (3) we find '*Teathra .i. Badhb, no feannóg, a royston crow, scall-crow*' (4). *Macha* also appears in this glossary and is explained as '*.i. badhb, no feannóg. macha .i. cruinniughadh badhb, no feannóg, a royston crow*' (5). Lastly, when looking for *Nemain* we find '*Nemhan .i. Badhb chatha, no feannóg, a scall-crow or royston crow*' (6). O'Davoran's 16th century glossary has the word '*crú-fechta*' glossed with *bodba* (7). Stokes also quotes from *LU 109a* '*is crúfechta .i. bodba*' (8) and wondered whether *crú* may be the equivalent of Latin *corvus*. He also quotes *Cormac* here who glosses *crú.i.bodb* and *fechta .i. catha* so that the whole sentence seems to mean something like battlecrow. *Cormac's* glossary has a similar entry: *crúfechta .i. bodb no Bódb* (9). Finally, O'Mulcrony's Glossary glosses *Macha* with *Badb* (10).

One of the earliest known examples of *Badb* stems from a Gaulish inscription in Haute-Savoie (11) and reads '*Cathubodva*', the equivalent of *Badb catha* in the above examples.

Maria Tymoczko cites *Julius Porkorny's* etymological analysis which arrives at the root **bhedh*, meaning 'to cut, to dig'. The Celtic-Germanic root is **boduo* ie 'fight, battle' (12).

Hennessy thinks that there is a difference between crows and ravens: 'In the Irish mythological tracts a well marked distinction is observable between the attributes of the scald crow and that of the raven; the scald crow, or *cornix*, being

represented....,not only as a bird of ill-omen, but as an agent in the fulfilment of what is ...decreed for a person, whilst the raven is simply regarded as a bird of prey, that follows the warrior merely for the sake of enjoying its gory feast' (13). The function of the raven (*bran*, *fiach*) can be illustrated by just a few examples. Firstly, in the warning of the Morrigan to the bull she talks about ravens (*fiach*) '...Fierce is the raven, men are dead,...' (*...feochair fiach fir máirm...*) (14). Ravens (*bran*) figure largely in her speech before the final battle of the *Táin*: 'Ravens gnaw the necks of men. Blood flows. Battle is fought.' (*Crenaid brain bráigde fer. Bruinded fuil. Feochair cath*) (15). In the poem on Odras the Morrigan is actually called 'the cunning raven-caller' (*in fiachaire fáthach*) (16). In Dubthach's prophecy in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* we read: '...ravens on the battle-field will drink men's blood' (*...ibairt fiaich lugbairt lucht...*) (17). In *Fingal Rónáin*: 'A raven was taking the fool's entrails from him on the steps' (*No bered immorro in fiach a inathar on drúth for irdrochiut*) (18) and in *The Exile of the sons of Uisliu*, a raven (*fiach*) drinks the blood of a newly slaughtered calf (19). Note also the terrifying nature of the black birds (*bran*) in the *Metrical Dindshenchas* of *Srúb Brain* (20). Maria Tymoczko has found that both *bran* and *fiach* are generic terms for the *corvidae* in general. Additionally, *bran* denotes specifically the raven while *fiach* designates a particular bird through the addition of adjectives, eg. *fiach garb*, *fiach mara*, *fiach dubh*, etc. (21). She quotes Pokorny (22) who derives the term *fiach* from **ues* meaning 'to feast', 'to be in good spirits' which is fitting in view of the raven's gory feast.

Even though I agree that the war-goddess is more complex than the raven, there seems to be one layer of her mythology that is directly concerned with the 'gory feast', for instance when the Badb is called red-mouthed: 'The red-mouthed Badbs will cry around the house, for bodies they will be solicitous' (*Badb bel derg gairfid fon tech; Bo collain bet co sirtech*) (23). Two examples from *Cath Almaine* are especially illustrative: 'the beaked, foul-mouthed Badb was grateful/satiated that hour' (*Ba buideach Badb birach bésalach in uair-sin...*) (24) and 'the red-mouthed, sharp-beaked Badb calls a shout of victory around Fergal's head' (*ro-lá Badb bélderg birach/ ilach imcheand Fergaile*) (25). The notion that the corpses of

warriors are the war-goddesses' food is stated clearly in O'Mulcrony's glossary: 'Macha, ie a Badb, or she is the third Morrigan, Macha's mast ie the heads of the men after their slaughter' (*Machae .i. Badb, nó así an tres morrigan, unde mesrad Machae .i. cendae doine iarna n-airlech*) (26). Not surprisingly, we find her dwelling among the corpses in an episode of the boyhood deeds of Cú Chulainn, 'The Fight between Eógán mac Durthacht and Conchobor' (27). It is also worthwhile to point out that the term 'vulture' in Leviticus 11:14 is translated as 'rough raven' (*fiach garb*) in Bedell's 17th century translation of the Old Testament, with 'Badb' as a synonym (28).

It seems that the negative associations are not solely due to the unsavoury habits of the carrion birds, ravens and crows alike, but also, or maybe most importantly, because of their black colour. Black, according to Maria Tymoczko, is not just a colour category but also a conceptual category with the extended meaning of 'dark, dire, gloomy, melancholy' and anything that is unfortunate, destructive, ominous, etc. (29). This explains why the black-bird (*lon*) is regarded with great suspicion. Black-birds are neither carrion eaters nor particularly aggressive and yet negative associations have become attached to them. This is supported by the fact that *lon* occurs as a name for warriors. Gárach, for example, has three sons: Lon 'the blackbird', Úalu, 'the prideful' and Diliu 'the torrent' (30). Judging by the names of the other two sons, Lon hardly denotes a peaceful person.

We learn from the above passages that the Badb and her 'sisters' show many characteristics which are directly derived from the habits and appearance of actual crows. Their life is sustained by men's deaths. What fills others with sorrow contributes to their joy and well-being and what is gruesome and horrific to men, like a battle-field full of corpses, is their favourite dwelling place. However, there are other aspects which go beyond the model of the carrion bird and we turn to the stories in order to gain more insight into these shadowy figures.

Táin Bó Cúailnge offers examples of Badb as well as another and very similar figure, Nemain, whose name means 'frenzy, battle-fury'. Note O'Clery who glosses Nemhain as '*dasacht, no mire*' meaning 'madness' (31). Nemain is the more elusive of the two as she does not reappear in other stories apart from occasional

references to her name. *Táin Bó Cúailnge* offers the only glimpse of her action and its effect on warriors. As the passages are few and short it is as well to explore her first and subsequently clarify her relationship with Bodb.

The Nemain appears on her own three times in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*¹, the first time after a dark prophecy of Dubthach spoken in his sleep which, 'according to one version' (32) took place after the redistribution of the Gailiúin by Medb.

Presumably it is night time as Dubthach is asleep and the camp has been set up.

The *rosc* tells of the impending slaughter wrought by 'the distorted one' and

'Thereupon the Nemain, that is, the war-goddess, attacked them. That was not the quietest of nights for them with the trance speech of the boorish Dubthach as he slept.

The host rose up at once and the army was thrown into confusion until Medb

came and quelled them' (*Dosfóibair thra ind Nemain la sodain 7 níp sí sin adaig ba*

sámam dóib la buadris ind athig triana chotlud. Foscerdat inna buidne fo chétóir 7 foherd dírna mór din tslóg co luid Medb día chose) (33). Nemain is glossed as '.i. Bodb'

at this stage, within the text in LU, and above the name in YBL (34). Later on

Dubthach has another vision in which he foresees the final battle. Interestingly,

he talks about 'A wonderful morning for a battle, a wonderful time when armies

will be thrown into confusion...!' (*Amra maitne amra mithisi mescfaithe slóg...*)

(35). And confusion sets in again after the vision: 'The Nemain attacked the host.

A hundred fell dead' (*Cotmesca ind Nemain forsin slóg. Adbail cet fer dib*) (36).

Note the word *mescaid* used in both instances. While it is translated as 'attack' in

connection with the Nemain its true meaning is 'to confuse, to intoxicate' which is

used in Dubthach's prophesy. In fact, C.O'Rahilly translates the same phrase in LL

as 'she brought confusion on the host'. The word appears again in a later episode

'*Cordas mesc ind Nemain forsin slóg*' (37) and it is quite clear from these examples

that the Nemain's attack consists of confusing the warriors. She thus affects their

state of mind rather than attacking them physically. This is interesting in view of

the fact that her own name means 'frenzy' which points to a particular state of

consciousness. The meaning of *nemain* as a noun becomes particularly clear when

reading it in conjunction with other terms as can be found in the tale of *Buile*

Suibhne where '*nemain ocus dothar ocus dásacht*' (frenzy and gloom and

madness) (38) occur. Frenzy, gloom and madness are all states of mind which are obviously regarded as similar. It seems that Nemain is frenzy and causes confusion.

To return to our survey of passages on Nemain: the corresponding passage in Recension 2 to Dubthach's prophesy runs as follows: 'Then Dubthach awoke from his sleep and the Nemain brought confusion on the host so that they made a clangour of arms with the points of their spears and their swords, and a hundred warriors of them died on the floor of their encampment through the fearsomeness of the shout they had raised. However, that was not the most peaceful night ever experienced by the men of Ireland at any time, because of the prophecies and the predictions and because of the spectres and the visions which appeared to them' (*And sain confucht[r]aither Dubthach trina chotlud coro mesc ind Neamain barsin slóg co llotar i n-armgrith ba rennaib a sleg 7 a fáebor co n-ébailt cét laéch díb ar lár a ndúnaid 7 a llongphuirt re úathgráin na gáire rabertatar ar aird. Cid trá acht ní hí sin aidche ba sáime d'fheraib Hérend fúaratar ríam ná híaram risin tairchetul 7 risin tarngiri, risna fúathaib 7 risna haslingib facessa dóib*) (39). We notice a slight change in emphasis in this attack. While Nemain confuses the host as usual, death occurs particularly because of the shout the warriors have raised, in other words they die because of their own noise. Noise is a well-known tactical weapon in war-fare and used to intimidate the opponent (40). The fact that the warriors die of noise created by their own side is tragic and bears witness to the confusing effect of the Nemain.

The visions and spectres referred to above are listed in greater detail in a section entitled 'The Scythed Chariot and Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne' in both Recensions. Cecile O'Rahilly notes that the language and style of the latter is much later than the rest of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in *LU* and forms a self-contained episode which is nearly identical in all three Recensions (41). This is what happens: Cú Chulainn becomes very angry on seeing the enemy '...and he uttered a hero's shout deep in his throat. And the goblins and sprites and spectres of the glen and demons of the air gave answer for terror of the shout that he had uttered. And Nemain, the war goddess, attacked the host, and the four provinces of Ireland made a clamour

of arms round the points of their own spears and weapons so that a hundred warriors among them fell dead of fright and terror in the middle of the encampment on that night' (...7 *dobert a srem caurad asa brágit coro recratár bánánaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinni 7 demna aeóir re úathgráin na gáre dosbertatár ar aird. Cordas mesc ind Nemain forsín tslóg. Dollotár i n-armgrith cethri chóiced Érend im rennaib a sleg 7 a n-arm fodessin co n-erbaltatár cét láech díb do úathbas 7 cridenes ar lár in dúnaid 7 in longpairt in n-aidchi sin*) (42). Note that the equivalent passage in *LL* has a gloss at the margin which identifies Nemain with Badb.

The pattern is clear: a terrifying event is followed by the Nemain's attack which causes - or is equivalent to - confusion. This seems to be due to the fact that the warriors are roused to battle-frenzy which manifests itself in shouting and clanging arms, yet there is nobody to fight, so confusion sets in all around. The warriors start fighting each other because clear thinking or rational assessment of the situation is no longer possible. Some are overcome by fear and die. A modern reader would interpret Nemain as a psychological state following a frightening event such as Cú Chulainn's war-cry or a sinister prophesy but in the *Táin* this inner state is seen as the work of an external agent.

This leads me to C.O'Rahilly's suggestion that it may be as well to use a non-personal translation for '*dos-fuabair ind Nemain*' such as 'war-frenzy seized them' (43). However, the text seems to suggest a personalised agent, otherwise Nemain could not be glossed with another personal name (Badb). It gives us an illuminating insight into the way the early Irish understood a phenomenon which a modern reader would explain as a state of mind.

To re-capitulate: Nemain's attacks occur at night, twice after a prophecy of slaughter and once after a horrifying cry. She is somewhere near the Connachta army but her location is not specified; neither is her appearance - we can only assume that she is a bird because of her link with Badb. Exactly how she attacks we do not know but it appears that she affects the warriors mentally, causing general mayhem in the camp with some people even losing their lives. *LL* specifies

the general din as the cause of death rather than directly the action of the Nemain. Overall, her actions are to Cú Chulainn's advantage.

The Nemain is also a member of a trio of war-goddesses which includes Badb and Bé Neit. While the beginning and middle of the tale generally mentions the Nemain on her own the heightened tension of the end, the great battle between the men of Ireland and Ulster, seems to require a triplication. This is how they enter the stage: 'As to the men of Ireland, Badb and Bé Neit and Nemain shrieked above them that night in Gáirech and Irgáirech so that a hundred of their warriors died of terror. That was not the most peaceful night for them' (*Imthús immorro fer nÉrind, cotagart Badb 7 Bé Neit 7 Nemain forru ind aidchi sin for Gáirig 7 Irgáirich conidapad cét lóech díb ar úathbás. Nírbo hísín adaig ba sáimam dóib*) (44). This passage stands strangely on its own here but is repeated later, where it fits better into the text (45). The threesome is not mentioned in Recension 2.

Here we are left in no doubt what the attack consists of: the three shrieking at night and they are situated above the army (whereby it is not certain that they are actually visible; it may be just the sound which comes from above), a direct result of which is terror and death, for some at least. Again the event benefits Ulster.

Unlike the Nemain on her own, whose attack is equivalent to the frenzy and confusion following a disturbing event, the appearance of the trio is the disturbing event itself. It is their shrieking which causes the men to die of terror. The terror presumably stems from the knowledge that the threesome only appear where carnage and death can be expected so that their cry is synonymous with death.

Their croaking forebodes doom and this knowledge is too much for the more faint-hearted amongst the warriors.

That her shrieking can be taken as a sure sign for bloodshed is supported by the words of Fer Diad before his fight with Cú Chulainn: 'Let us go to this encounter to contend with this man, until we reach the ford above which the Badb will shriek' (*Tíagam issin dáil-sea/ do chosnom ind fhir-sea,/co rísem in n-áth-sa/ áth forscara in Badb*) (46). Needless to say, a fight takes place and blood is spilled (47). As already pointed out, the Badb's favourite place is among the corpses and can be found like that in 'The Fight between Eógán mac Durthacht and Conchobor.'

Further, this is the only time where Badb speaks an exhortation herself and it is also the one instance where Cú Chulainn and Badb come into direct, one-to-one contact with each other. The story will be dealt with in greater detail below as it contains important clues about who exactly Cú Chulainn is. However, as we are trying to elicit how the Badb behaves, what she looks/sounds like, and so on, it needs to be mentioned here as well. The story goes that Cú Chulainn searches for Conchobor on the battlefield at night and meets a monstrous, otherworldly figure with whom he becomes embroiled in a fight. Cú Chulainn's demise is close at hand when suddenly 'He heard the Badb (crying) from among the corpses. 'Poor stuff to make a warrior is he who is overthrown by phantoms' ' (*Co cuala ni, in [m]boidb dinib collaib. 'Olc damnae laich fil and fo chossaib aurddrag'*) (48). The mockery fires his anger which allows him to draw on extra strength and he overcomes the ghost.

Badb's action obviously benefits Cú Chulainn in this instance. Cú Chulainn describes *gressaid*, meaning 'incites, urges, stimulates, provokes' (DIL) himself: 'Therefore if it be I who am defeated this day, you must incite me and revile me and speak evil of me so that my ire and anger shall rise the higher thereby' (*...is aire sin mad fhorum-sa bus róen indiu, ara nderna-su mo grísad 7 mo glámad 7 olc do ráda rim gorop móite éir m'fhír 7 m'fhergg fhoromm*) (49). Does this imply that the Badb is a benevolent being in this instance, equivalent to Loeg, for example? As it happens, the fact that a character uses *gressacht* to spur another into action does not allow deductions as to the character's overall disposition. While Loeg is a steadfast supporter of Cú Chulainn, the same cannot be said about Bricriu Nemthenga, 'Poison-tongue' who uses the same technique while Cú Chulainn is nearly overcome by the Morrígan in a later episode. Bricriu is undoubtedly a dubious character who is famous for causing trouble, setting warriors against each other just for the sake of it. I would suggest that the Badb falls into the category of dubious incitors, useful for the moment, but not to be trusted. The reason for this conclusion is on account of the location in which we find her - among the corpses on the battle-field. This singles her out as a truly

deadly figure, albeit not deadly to Cú Chulainn for reasons which will become apparent during the course of this study.

It is worthwhile mentioning at this stage, however, that there is a certain closeness between the Badb/Nemain and Cú Chulainn. Notice, for example, how the Nemain is activated, so to speak, by Cú Chulainn's war-cry which is obviously such a terrible sound that terror, panic and confusion seizes the enemy.

This is brought out even further in a passage in Recension 2 where Cú Chulainn's helmet is described: 'From it was uttered the shout of a hundred warriors with a long-drawn-out cry from every corner and angle of it. For there used to cry from it alike goblins and sprites, spirits of the glen and demons of the air before him and above him and around him wherever he went, prophesying the shedding of the blood of warriors and champions (... *asa ngáired gáir chét n-óclách do sírégem cecha cúli ocus cecha cerna de, dáig is cumma congáirtis de bánánaig ocus bocánaig ocus geniti glinne ocus demna aeóir ríam ocus úaso ocus ina imt[h]imchiull cach ed no téged re testin fola na mmíled ocus na n-anglond sechtair*) (50). This passage is highly embroidered and an obvious interpolation into *LU* in the style of *LL*. It shows us how Cú Chulainn appropriates some of the aspects of the war-goddess in time: just as she is accompanied by the battle-field spirits, they also rally round Cú Chulainn and the effect on enemies is devastating. This event occurs just before one of his famous distortions which turns a youth noted for his beauty into a terrifying monster, an appearance which he himself considers to be dark and magical (*in dúaburdelb druídechta*) (51). It seems that what causes other warriors to die of terror just adds to Cú Chulainn's strength and fearsomeness. Further, there are hints that Cú Chulainn does not only attract the battle-field spirits but that in some instances he is very much like them. Amongst Nemain's following we find a creature called *geniti glinne*, translated 'spirits of the glen' in the above quote. This, however, does not express the female gender of these figures and the DIL translates *genit* as 'a female being with malevolent powers'. They usually appear in the above manner, which is together with a whole host of spirits. They frighten warriors with their screeching in much the same way as the war-goddesses. Occasionally, however, they are on their own and always in

conflict with Cú Chulainn. Fled Bricrend is the most prominent example: after their night-time attack has frightened away Loegaire Buadach and Conall Cernach, Cú Chulainn goes to meet them the third night: 'The Amazons shrieked at him. He and they fought each other till his spear was splintered, his shield broken, his raiment torn off. The Amazons were beating and overpowering him.' Loeg taunts him and 'Then Cú Chulainn was enraged at the sprites. He turned back upon the Horrors, and cut and gashed them till the glen was filled with their blood' (*Nosgrechat na geniti dó, imma comsinitar dóib. Brútir a gai ocus bristir a sciath ocus rebthair a étach immi, ocus noscúrat ocus nostraethat inna geniti hé. ... Sia[ba]rthar co urthrachta im Choinculainn andaide ocus noscerband ocus nosbruend ita, co-mbo lán in glend d'ía fulriud*) (52). He takes their cloaks and their weapons, which is an interesting detail as the *geniti* must obviously be physical beings and, unlike the war-goddesses, they carry weapons which, as we have seen in this story, they are keen to use.

However, other evidence supports the idea that their attack is more in line with that of the war-goddesses. Thurneysen calls them '*Lacherinnen der Schlucht*' (53) which means 'the laughing ones of the glen' because *genit* is derived from *gen* 'to smile, laugh'. It is interesting to mention 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn' in this connection. Not only are the otherworldly women referred to as *geniti* in one of the poems there, but they also smile before beating Cú Chulainn senseless (54). One gets the impression that smiling/laughing is not a friendly gesture but an aggressive one. Sayers suggests in connection with the origin of the name that '*gen* as 'ridicule, derision' may also be entertained, their scorn intended to rob the warrior of his courage' (55). While the *geniti* are accused of having bound, tortured and destroyed Cú Chulainn, much as is the case in *Fled Bricrend*, it is also clear from the rest of the story that Cú Chulainn does not suffer from ordinary wounds but some type of 'magical' disease, a wasting-sickness which sounds like a stupor. While these two stories show the *geniti* as Cú Chulainn's opponents, it is inter*sting to notice that Cú Chulainn himself is sometimes called a *genit*, apparently because of his feats of leaping. J.Carney (56) quotes an example occurring in *Tochmarc Emire* where he is called a *genit* in connection with the feat

of leaping over three walls. Cú Chulainn is also called a *genit* in *Mesca Ullaid*: 'Is this the fairy that is the best warrior among the Ullaid?' (*Inne in genidseo as dec gaiscedach la h-Ulltu*) (57). We can deduce from these examples that Cú Chulainn is perceived to be like these creatures, at least some of the time, despite *genit* referring to female beings. The DIL lists two definitions of *genit*, the first reading 'a female mythical being of malevolent powers' but when it refers to Cú Chulainn it is translated as 'a weird, sprite-like creature'. Returning to the episode in the *Táin* where Cú Chulainn's war-cry results in the battlefield-spirits and Nemain's attack we can speculate that the overlap between the characteristics of the battlefield spirits and Cú Chulainn is because of Cú Chulainn being such a formidable opponent that he inspires the same terror as the battle-field spirits themselves. Seen from the perspective of his enemies at least, Cú Chulainn becomes one of these supernatural beings.

Could Cú Chulainn therefore be described as a champion of the Badb? This intriguing expression occurs in Recension 2: 'Weary are the champions of the Badb' (*Scíth á ái óenfhir Bodba*) (58). These are the words of Fergus after having been given his sword again. It is not clear who these champions are. Does it denote hostile champions, the ones on whom Fergus' sword is meant to be plied, in other words, the men of Ulster? It would certainly fit in with the bias shown by the Badb for Ulster and against Connacht. A further point in favour of this interpretation is that Cú Chulainn does indeed lie in weariness at that moment due to his many wounds. He does not join the battle until later when Fergus attacks Conchobor. When we turn to Recension 1 for the corresponding passage in order to gain further information, we are confronted with an obscure phrase about the *óenhúair bodba* which means the 'prime hour of the Badb' or the 'war-like hour' rather than anything to do with champions (59). It is difficult to make sense of this passage. One possible explanation is suggested by Cath Almaine by the following sentence: 'The beaked, foul-mouthed Badb was grateful/satiated that hour and the loving mothers were sorrowful, weeping and lamenting and keening for the noble children that hour' (*Ba huideach Badb hirach bélsalach in uair-sin 7 bad brónaid máthair báeid ig gul 7 ig gulgairi ac cáinead na sáerland in uair-sin*) (60). 'That hour' is

repeated twice, possibly for emphasis, and one could argue that the hour of the Badb is the time following a battle when the dead provide a feast for her while the living mourn their loved ones. An interesting fact I want to draw from this is that the two words *óenfhir* and *óenhúair*, when spoken, sound very similar and may indicate an oral element in the transmission. Whatever the case may be, it proves hardly helpful to our enquiry about the Badb's disposition towards Cú Chulainn. The issue of Cú Chulainn as Badb's champion has to be left undecided.

Mention should be made of Cú Chulainn's death-tale in order to round off her relationship with him. The tale exists in two versions, and only the older one is considered here (61). The Badb does not appear under her own name, but consider the scene when Cú Chulainn is dead: 'It was then a scaldcrow came onto his shoulder. 'It is not usual that the pillar yonder is under birds', said Erc' (*Conid iarsin dolluid indennach fora gualaind. Nirbognáth incorthe út foénaib ar Erc mac Coirpri*) (62). This is the sign that Cú Chulainn is truly dead and his enemies finally find the courage to come close and strike his head off.

Ennach is not a common word and occurs only once more in connection with the war-goddesses in a late text. This time, it is a term used in connection with the Morrígan: '*do-luidhsi (se in Morrígan) i richt enchi (.i. fhennoigi) ar in sgiaigh*' (63). The fact that Badb is often translated scaldcrow and the close relationship she has with Cú Chulainn make it most plausible that this *ennach* is the Badb even though a different word is used, a view supported by Edward J. Gwynn (64).

While the Badb's actions have benefitted Cú Chulainn during his career, there is never any indication that she is located close to him. Even in the *macgnímrada* episode discussed above, her place is firmly with the corpses, not with the living. It is only when Cú Chulainn is dead that she draws close. This is a pattern which can also be observed with regard to other heroes. These now deserve attention in order to fully appreciate the Badb's behaviour.

The first story to consider is 'The Battle of Allen' as it is also relatively early and as its structure resembles that of the *Táin* (65). It tells the story of the battle the Leinstermen under Cathal mac Findguine, king of Cashel and the Uí Néill under

Fergal mac Maíle-dúin. One passage involving the Badb has already been quoted in connection with the hour of the Badb. The word *bélsalach* is another way of describing the Badb while feasting on the dead bodies. The bird imagery is unmistakable here as she is beaked which also means that she is definitely visible. Her pleasure is sharply contrasted with the sorrow of the mothers over the death of their children and we notice from the fact that all the mothers are grieving that here the Badb is on no side. She benefits from the dead, no matter where they belong.

A poem appears in all three texts which mentions the Badb again. P. O'Riain comments that the poems are older than the 10th century prose (66) and comparison of prose and poetry yields an intriguing insight. The poem gives us the following information: 'the red-mouthed, sharp-beaked Badb calls a shout of victory around Fergal's head (*ro-lá Badb bélderg birach/ ilach imcheand Fergaile*) (67). Again it is patently bird-imagery we are dealing with while her audible manifestation, which is her shrieking, remains prominent also. Interestingly, even though she utters a shout of victory, she is not near the victorious king or just above the army but flutters around the victim's head, spelling out his doom. As far as Fergal is concerned, her presence means death, just as it did in Cú Chulainn's death-tale. Remembering also the evidence of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* where the Badb and the Nemain are close to the Connachta, in other words, the losers: we realise that the same principle applies - if the Badb is close to an army or an individual, their demise is at hand.

It is interesting to compare this poem to the prose version, keeping in mind what has been said about the disastrous effect of the Badb's proximity. Badb does not appear at all but in her place we find Brigid: 'The attention of Colum Cille did not remain... with the Uí Néill in that battle, however, with the appearance of Brigid over the army of the Leinstermen intimidating the army of Conn's half so that through the appearance of Brigid like that, Áed defeated Fergal and the Northern half (... *nír thairis menma Coluim Cilli ar Uíb Néill isin cath-sin la faicsin mBrigdi ós cath Laigen ac fubdad slóig Lethi Cuind, conad la faicsin Brigdi amlaid-sin romeбайд in cath ar Fergal 7 ar Leth Cuind ria nÁed...*) (68). Another

version reads: 'One said that one could see Brigit above the heads of the Leinstermen, moreover one could see Colum Cille above the heads of the Uí Néill' (*As-bert co n-accas Brigit ós cinn Laigen: at-ches dno Colum Cille ós cinn Úa Néill*) (69). Brigit, the patron saint of the Leinstermen, comes to aid her people and is directly responsible for their victory because she frightens the other side in what may appear to be on first sight a typical war-goddess fashion. However, the differences to the Badb are striking. Not only is Brigit's hovering above the army a visual phenomenon, lacking the characteristic shrieking, but she also draws close to her own side. Brigit's proximity means victory - the Badb's proximity means death. This marks Brigit essentially as protector who takes on war-goddess aspects when defending her territory while the Badb is essentially a war-goddess who never clearly fights for one side or another (70).

Other battles, all from later texts, show us Badb in much the same light as the ones so far discussed although the events are often greatly embellished. One that is frequently quoted is *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 'The War of the Irish with the Foreigners' where Badb is accompanied again by all the fear-some creatures noted already in the *Táin*: 'And there arose a Badb, wild, impetuous, precipitate, furious, hard, frightful, voracious, merciless, combative, contentious screaming and fluttering over their heads. And there arose also bananaig and boccanaig etc. and they were screaming and glorifying the valour and combat amongst themselves' (*Ro erig em Badb discir, dian, denmetach, dasachtar, dur, dualsech, detcengtach, crúaid, croda, cosaitech co bai ic screchaid ar luamain os a cennaib. Ro eirgetar ann bananaig ocus boccanaig ocus geliti glinni,... co mbatar a comgresacht ocus i commorad aig ocus irgaili leo*) (71). Although this passage could easily be quoted as an example of the exaggeration of style A.J. Goedheer refers to when he talks about the dependence of this battle on the style of *Táin Bó Cúailnge 2* (72), it still confirms the basic characteristics we found in other tales concerning Badb (note, here just Badb, not the Badb): she screams and flutters over the warriors heads, here it seems neither on one side nor the other but simply adding to the general noise and stress of battle, while her companions are said to celebrate the combat which seems to give them an inciting role. The whole passage shows these beings

as enhancing and inciting the battle-ardour on both sides rather than intimidating one or the other. The appearance of the great number of such beings obviously adds dramatic value to the description and we have already noted in the earliest parts of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* that the war-goddesses appear in threes at the final conflict while otherwise they appear singly. This trend is also noticeable in the later inserts into the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, 'The Scythed Chariot and *Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne*' where Nemain has an entourage of spirits. These large numbers of battle-field spirits appear quite frequently in later tales and instances can be found as late as the bardic poems (73). Badb is no longer distinguished from all the other spirits and has lost her special role.

While the above are descriptions of Badb actually appearing in battle, her name is also used as parts of prophecies of battle or laments after battles are finished.

Tochmarc Ferbe provides a good example for both. The first instance we find in the poem spoken by a druid following an ominous wind. It is a prophecy of battle, of course, and one of the lines runs as follows: '*Badb wird brechen - wird wilde Macht sein - eine Bresche gegen Medb*' (*Brisfid Badb, bid bríg borb, tolg for Meidb*) (74). '*Brissid*' means 'breaks, smashes, destroys, injures' but also 'defeats, puts to rout, overthrows' (DIL) and it seems that Badb's wild power is predicted to be unleashed against the Connachta which betrays her Ulster bias.

The second instance where Badb is mentioned is within the context of a lament, here spoken by Ferb over the youngsters of Connaught, and refers to her role as reveller amongst the slain: '*Thr habt die Badb gespeist, die Bleiche/ vermittelst der Waffen - genügend ihre Härte!*' (*Ro biathsaid Baidb co m-bani, allus airm, lor a chruadi*) (75). In situations where dead warriors provide food for the Badb, she is usually described as *bél-derg* or *bél-salach* so that it is interesting to note a different adjective here, ie *ban*, 'pale,white'. This colour is mentioned again in *Tochmarc Ferbe* where it is regarded as ugly and obviously denotes the colour of death: '*Du bist hässlich jetzt/ bleich sind deine Hände*' (*Isat etic innossa/ isat bana do bassa*) (76). It is noticeable that there is no equivalent to these two passages in the prose text, in the summarising poem at the end or the Egerton version. Badb, in fact, does not appear at all in *LL* prose and final poem. She does, however, acquire

an important role in the Egerton Manuscript in that Badb is the name of the woman who appears in Conchobor and Medb's dream (not specifically mentioned in the first case but thus named in the latter). All versions agree that the woman is beautiful which does not fit at all with the pale and therefore ugly Badb.

Additionally, while Badb is certainly heavily involved with battles, she is nowhere pictured as actually causing a conflict, while the dream-woman does just that.

Egerton is a very late source and it thus may bear witness to the fact that Badb became a general term for dangerous female figures.

To summarise the evidence we have found so far we could say that the Badb is the red-beaked battle-crow who, fluttering and shrieking above the battlefield either alone or as part of a threesome, confuses and frightens, exhorts through mockery, proclaims victory and indicates defeat, delights in bloodshed and relishes the dead. It is important to emphasize that her role in battle is invariably that of indicating the loser, weakening the side that is doomed to defeat rather than positively strengthening the victor. Even Cú Chulainn benefits from her activities only indirectly because she terrifies his enemies, not because she strengthens him. Only once is she of positive help to him but without coming too close - she still remains amongst the corpses, her victims. As time goes by she merges more and more with other horrible and increasingly fancyful beings.

A discussion of Badb would not be complete if the use of *bodba* as a descriptive term were not mentioned. C. O'Rahilly usually translates the word as 'warlike' or similar while Windisch (77) retains the name and uses it as the genitive of Bodb/Badb. In a way, the latter usage is more illuminating because 'war-like' could be expressed equally well with *catha*. Retaining the name of the war-goddess in the translation can still convey all the associations of confusion, terror, bloodshed etc. which the term *bodba* must have had for the Irish. It is interesting to note, however, that this type of usage seems to have been applied later on only; it does not occur in the earliest parts of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Only once do we find it, but in the later interpolation 'The Scythed Chariot and *Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne*'. A description of Cú Chulainn includes the expression 'the marshalled

fence of battle' (...*t-indellchro bodba...*) (78). Numerous examples can be found in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*2.

It seems that the usage of the name Badb became more generalised as time went by, denoting objects and activities connected with war rather than a particular being. This, and the lack of the *macgnímrada* episode in *LL* which views the relationship between her and Cú Chulainn from an unusual angle, is probably the main difference with regard to the Badb in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*2 as compared to *Táin Bó Cúailnge*1.

Mention should also be made of the instances where Badb forms part of a name. Maria Tymoczko quotes two names, Bodb Derg 'the bloody crow', an otherworldly character appearing prominently in 'The Dream of Oengus' and Badb Chrúachain, a Connacht warrior (79). As already mentioned in connection with Cú Chulainn, a warrior can indeed be as deadly as the battle crow from the point of view of his enemies.

The question which remains is that of the relationship between Nemain and Badb. Nemain is glossed *.i.Badb* twice, in *LU/YBL* and *LL*, and both appear together with Bé Neit as a trio, frightening the men of Ireland. We have noted already that the appearance of the trio is the frightening event itself while Nemain, albeit with the gloss, always appears in the wake of one, and is the personified reaction to the fright. Badb has a wider range of actions and effects, as we have seen. While the Nemain arises at night and before a big battle, Badb is active day or night and she is found mainly during and after a conflict except for the one instance where she is with the Nemain and Bé Neit. Nemain's shape when on her own is not specified - the example of Brigit shows us that a figure can hover above the army without having to be a bird. On the other hand Nemain, when part of the trio, seems to be in bird-form because the three shriek above the host. Badb definitely appears in bird-form - not just her name tells us she is a crow but she is explicitly described as beaked, fluttering and shrieking.

A lot of the differences quoted above could be simply due to lack of information on Nemain. The fact that a separate name exists speaks for a separation at some stage although we cannot clearly decide whether the different name signified a

form of the same figure or actually a separate figure. As Nemain was glossed with Badb shows that the two merged and Badb remained the most popular name, subsuming Nemain's role into her own activities.

How does Bé Neit fit into this scheme? Information on her comes mainly from passages which are concerned about genealogy. Hennessy has listed a lot of these passages and concluded that nothing definite can be found out about the relationship of these figures (80). E. Grey suggests that 'Bé Neit could be taken as a descriptive title meaning 'Woman (Goddess) of Battle' rather than 'Net's wife', perhaps the source of some confusion among the *Túatha Dé Danann* genealogies' (81). As Nemain is also called wife of Net both Badb and Nemain could sensibly fill the slot of being 'woman of battle'. In fact, Nemain is at times directly called Net's wife/woman (82).

We do not fare any better when examining the material for clues about the relationship between the above war-goddesses and the Morrígan. One example will suffice to illustrate this point. A passage from *Tochmarc Emire* links together Badb, Bé Neit and the Morrígan when describing the names of a forest: '*Ross Bodba .i. na Mórrígná. Ar is ed a ross side .i. Crích Roiss 7 is sí dano in Bodb catha í 7 is fria asberar Bé Néid .i. bandé in chatha úair is inand Néid 7 díá in chatha.* 'the Badb of battle and of her is said Bee neid ie goddess of battle for Neid is the same as god of battle' (83). Badb here is obviously a generic term, probably denoting the battle-crow who is the same as Bé Neit and the same as the Morrígan. The name Morrígan can also be used generically, as will be seen in a later chapter. Apart from overlapping names and descriptions, the war-goddesses also share shapes. Above, the Morrígan has been described as the Badb of battle and some stories depict her as a bird. On one occasion she seen above the armies, in the way the Badb shows herself. This instance occurs in 'The Battle of Mag Rath' in the following quatrain: 'Over his head is shrieking/a lean hag, quickly hopping/over the points of their weapons and shields/she is the grey-haired Morrígu' (*Fuil os a chind ag eigmig/caillech lom, luath ag leimnig/ós eannaibh a n-arm sa sciath/is í in Morrígu mongliath*) (84). Otherwise, she assumes the bird-shape in order to speak a prophesy, conforming to the widely held notion that crows and ravens are

exceptionally intelligent and can prophesy the future. As Rooth writes: 'The croaking of the raven has certainly contributed to the conception of the raven as an oracular bird' (85). One example can be found in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: 'While the army was going over Mag mBreg Allecto came for a while, that is, the Morrígan, in the form of a bird which perched on the pillar-stone at Temair Cúailnge and said to the bull:...(Céin bátár didiu in tslóig oc tochim Maige Breg, forrumai Allechtu colléic, noch is í Morrígan són i ndeibb eúin co mboí forsin chorthi hi Temair Cúailngi 7 asbert frisin tarb:...) (86). The Morrígan's warning results in the bull's departure which brings him out of Medb's reach. It seems she has a special interest in the bull who, in turn, listens to her advice. The second instance occurs in *Táin Bó Regamna*, to be discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter. Suffice it to say that the Morrígan changes herself into a black bird (*én dub*) and, sitting on a branch, foretells the fight between Cú Chulainn and herself (87). Judging by these examples it seems that the battle-crow has quite a different function from the Morrígan as '*én dub*'. The former is simply part of the battle, terrorising with her shrieks and fluttering and gorging herself on the corpses, while the Morrígan in bird-shape is mainly concerned with prophesy.

One interesting snippet of information regarding the relationship between Badb and Morrígan can be found at the end of *Cath Maige Tuired*. While this text is discussed at great length below it is worthwhile quoting just a small part near the end at this stage. After the great battle, the Morrígan proclaims the victory all over the country. The writer then inserts this sentence: 'And that is the reason Badb still relates great deeds' (*Conid do sin inneses Badb airdgníomha beus*) (88). While the Morrígan proclaimed great deeds then, Badb proclaims them now, and the now presumably is the writer's own time. To me, this sentence supports the observations we have made above with regard to Badb becoming more and more a general name for any war-like or hostile being. Badb remains, in later texts as well as outside the literary tradition (89) while the Morrígan is hardly ever mentioned again outside *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (and tales related to it) and *Cath Maige Tuired*. Given this development, it is quite impossible to meaningfully distinguish between the various war-goddesses in general. However, the Morrígan has a distinct story of

her own which is quite different from the battle-crows examined so far and it is to her we turn next.

Notes to Chapter 1

- 1) Miller W.K. 'O'Clery's Glossary', RC 4 (1879-80), p.349-428; RC 5, (1881-83), p.1-69
- 2) *ibid.* RC 4, p.369, also glossed as 'tuath thire' ie a district.
- 3) *ibid.* RC 5, p.54
- 24) Tethra is also glossed as .i. muir, ie the sea. Tethra appears as a Fomorian leader in CMT l.25,93,162 while the wife of Tethra is said to be badb in a gloss to Serglige Con Culainn (see Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre*, p.124, folio 50a. Translated by Stokes, W. 'The ancient Irish goddess of war' (comments on Hennessy's article) RC 2 (1873-75), p.489-92)
- 5) *ibid.* RC 5, p.19
- 6) *ibid.* RC 5, p.29;
- 7) Stokes, W. 'O'Davoran's Glossary', in Stokes, W. and Meyer, K. 'Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie', vol 2 (Halle, 1904) p.375
- 8) *ibid.* p.256
- 9) Stokes, W. 'Cormac's Glossary' in 'Three Irish Glossaries' (London and Edinburgh, 1862) p.12 (1-46)
- 10) Stokes, W. 'O'Mulcrony's Glossary' Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie vol.1, (Halle, 1900) p.271, No.813
- 11) Hennessy, W.M 'The ancient Irish Goddess of War' RC1 (1870-72) p.1
- 12) Tymoczko, Maria 'The Semantic Fields of Early Irish Terms for Black Birds' in 'Celtic Language, Celtic Culture' (California, 1990), p.155, citing Pokorny, J 'Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (1951-69), vol 1, 113
- 13) 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' p.53
- 14) TBC 1 l.961, transl. p.152
- 15) TBC 1.3878, transl. p.230
- 16) Gwynn, E.J. 'The Metrical Dindshenchas' vol.4 (Dublin, 1924), l.24, p.198. (p.196-201)
- 17) TBC 1.196, transl. p.130
- 18) Greene, D. 'Fingal Rónáin', Medieval and Modern Irish Series, vol.xvi (Dublin, 1975), p.7, l.153
- 19) Hull, V. 'Longes mac n-Uislenn' (New York, 1949), l.92
- 20) Gwynn, E.J. 'The Metrical Dindshenchas' vol 3 (Dublin, 1913), p.256; although the term is bran, the birds come over the sea and paddle. It seems that the black colour of the birds is more important than exactly what species they are.
- 21) 'The Semantic Fields of Early Irish Terms for Black Birds' p.155
- 22) *ibid.*, citing Pokorny, J. (1951-69), vol 1.1171
- 23) 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War', p.38. Unable to find the quote anywhere else.
- 24) Ó Riain, P. 'Cath Almaine' (Dublin, 1978), p.21, ll.56-7
- 25) *ibid.* p.8, ll.6-7; p.23, ll.84-5
- 26) O'Mulcrony's glossary, p.271, paragr.813
- 27) TBC1 ll.498-9
- 28) 'The Semantic Fields of Early Irish Terms for Black Birds', p.156
- 29) *ibid.* p.162
- 30) TBC1 l.909
- 31) 'O'Clery's Glossary', RC5, p.29
- 32) TBC1 l.189
- 33) TBC1 ll.210-212, transl.p.131; no LL equivalent
- 34) see TBC1, p.7 note a
- 35) TBC1, l. 3532, transl. p.219
- 36) TBC1, ll.3537, transl.p.220; TBC 2, ll.4148-51
- 37) TBC1, ll. 2084-5
- 38) O'Keefe, J.G. 'Buile Suibhne', ITS xii, (London, 1913) ll.194, p.15.
- 39) TBC2, ll.4148-54
- 40) Mac Cana, P. 'Laíded, Gressacht 'Formalized Incitement', Ériu 43 (1992)p.69 (69-92)
- 41) TBC1, note to ll.2072ff, p.267
- 42) TBC1 2081-87; transl. p.182-83; TBC2 ll.2134-36; transl.197-8
- 43) TBC1, note to l.210, p.245

- 44)TBC1, ll.3942-4, transl. p.231
- 45)TBC1, ll.4033-5, transl. p.234
- 46)TBC1, 2835-2838;TBC LL 2805-2808
- 47)TBC1 comments no further on Badb in this episode while TBC2 has a lay spoken by CC after Fer Diad's death. He says: 'The breach made by the red-mouthed Badb will not be dug up (?) for encampments full of shimmering shields.' (Níba búriud berna Baidbi bél-dergi do scoraib sciathcha scáthbricci. TBC2 ll 3431-2) It seems that 'the breach made by red-mouthed Badb' refers to the loss of Fer Diad, seemingly making her responsible for his death.
- 48)TBC1 ll.448-500
- 49)TBC2 ll.3271-5; transl. p.227
- 50)TBC1 ll.2238-2242
- 51)TBC1 l.2339
- 52)Henderson, G.'Fled Bricrend' ITS 2 (London,1899) p.84-86; transl.85-87
- 53)IHK, p.64
- 54)Dillon, M. 'Serglige Con Culainn' (Dublin, 1953), l.318 and l.75
- 55)Sayers,W. 'Airdrech, Sirite, and other Early Irish Battlefield Spirits', *Éigse* 25 (1991), p.51
- 56)Carey, J.'Suibhne Geilt and Tuán Mac Cairill', *Éigse* 20 (1994), p.98 note 33, quoting K.Meyers, ZCP 3, p.237.19.
- 57)Carmichael Watson, J. 'Mesca Ulad' MMIS vol.13 (Dublín, 1941) l.908. This work quoted in DIL and also in 'Airdrech, Sirite and other Early Irish Battlefield Spirits'.
- 58)TBC2 l.4721
- 59)TBC1 l.4028
- 60)'Cath Almaine' p.21, ll.56-8
- 61)Early version from LL, partially ed. and transl. by Stokes,W. 'Cuchulainn's Death' RC 3 (1876-78), p. 175-185
- 62)W.Stokes translates 'Then the birds came onto his shoulder.' (p.181) However, do-lluid is a 3rd.p.sg and ennach means 'scaldcrow', also singular, according to the DIL
- 63)Nettlau, M. (ed) 'A Fragment of the Táin Bó Cuailnge in MS Eg.93', RC 15 (1894), p.72, para.112
- 64)Gwynn, E. 'ennach = badb' *Hermathena* 44, (1926), p.71-2
- 65)P. O Riain suggests that Cath Almaine was modelled on the plot of TBC. 'Cath Almaine' p.xxx-xxxii
- 66)op.cit. p.xxix
- 67)op.cit. p.8,ll. 96-7;p.23,ll.84-5
- 68)op.cit.p.21, ll.59-62.
- 69)op.cit.p.6-7, ll.80-1
- 70) Other instances of Brigid's war-like aspect can be found in FM 506 and the same quatrain in the poem called 'A Choicid Choin Chaipri Cruais' which reads: 'Cath lond Luachra, huasa tuas/ at- chess Brigit, nib firt fas.' which means:'the fierce battle of Luachair/ up above it was seen Brigit/ it was no vain miracle. (translation by M. O'Daly in *Éigse* 10). LL ll 7518-21 describes Brigid as 'an integral element of the Leinster line of battle, protecting it from the front and the back.' (Ó Riain,P. 'A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man' *Éigse* 14 (1972),p.189,note32). Finally, SG 370 tells us that a Leinster king had won 28 battles tre breithir mBrigte, 'through the blessing of Brigit'. All references from Cath Almaine.
- 71)Todd, J.H.'Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib' (London, 1867; reprinted New York 1965) p.174
- 72)Goedher, A.J. 'Traditions about the Battle of Clontarf' (Haarlem, 1938), p.11.
- 73)Simms,K. 'Images of Warfare in Bardic Poetry', *Celtica* 21 (1990), p.615. (p.608-619)
- 74)Windisch,E. 'Tochmarc Ferbe', IT 3.2, line 108, p.470. Dated by Thurneysen to not earlier than 10th. cent., some parts 12th. cent. IHK p.351-2
- 75)op.cit. ll 623-4, p.508
- 76)op.cit.ll 710-11, p. 514
- 77)Windisch, E. 'Die altirische Heldensage Táin Bó Cúailnge' (Leipzig, 1905)
- 78)TBC1, ll 2213-4; TBC2 2230-31)
- 79)'The Semantic Fields of Early Irish Terms for Black Birds' p.169
- 80)'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' p.34-37
- 81)CMT, Index to Persons, p.118
- 82)'Cormac's glossary'(Sanas Cormac)says: 'Neith .i. dia catha la géntib Gaedel. Nemon .i. uxor illius.' meaning 'Neit, ie the god of battle of the pagan Gaedel. Nemon his wife.' Stokes, W. 'Three Irish Glossaries' (London and Edinburgh, 1862), p.31

- 83)v.Hamel, A.G. 'Compert Con Culainn and other stories' (Dublin, 1956), p.42, para.50
84)O'Donovan, J.'The banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the battle of Mag Rath' (Dublin, 1842), 198.2
85)Rooth, A.B. 'The Raven and the Carcass' (Helsinki,1962) p.213
86)TBC1 ll. 954-56
87)Windisch,E. 'Táin Bó Regamna' IT 2.2,p.245
88)Gray, E. 'Cath Maige Tuired'(Dublin,1982), l.817-8

Chapter 2:

THE MORRÍGAN'S CHALLENGE TO CÚ CHULAINN IN TÁIN BÓ CÚAILNGE

The story of greatest interest is about the meeting and fight between Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan. The tale is inserted in the middle of a series of fights between Cú Chulainn and his foster-brothers who are also his erstwhile companions on Scáthach's island: Fer Báeth, Lóch and Fer Diad. Their closeness and nearly even skill at arms obviously heightens the drama of the tale and to have a supernatural being involved as well cannot have failed to create even further tension.

The encounter seems innocent enough at first, beginning with a section called 'A Conversation of the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn' (*Imacallaim na Mórígna fri Coin Culaind inso*) (1). This conversation appears in no other version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and is considered to be an interpolation, particularly as the rest of the story in the *Táin* refers, not to the *imacallaim* but to a parallel tale, *Táin Bó Regamna* (2). According to C.O'Rahilly this interpolation is due to the compiler of *LU* (3). Curiously, it does not mention the Morrígan's name at all but instead introduces a beautiful young woman: 'Cú Chulainn saw coming towards him a young woman of surpassing beauty, clad in clothes of many colours. 'Who are you?' asked Cú Chulainn. 'I am the daughter of Búan the king,' said she. 'I have come to you for I fell in love with you on hearing your fame, and I have brought with me my treasures and my cattle' (*Co n-aca Cú in n-ócben chuci co n-étuch cach datha impe 7 delb roderscaigthe furri. 'Cé taí-siu?' or Cú Chulaind. 'Ingen Búain ind ríg,' or sí. 'Dodeochad chucut-su. Rot charus ar th'airscélaib, 7 tucus mo sheótu lim 7 mo indili'*).

So far the story conforms to a pattern set by other tales in which a man encounters an otherworldly woman, often the sovereignty goddess: the woman takes the initiative, she is very beautiful, she loves him on account of his reputation (usually called *grad ecmaise* 'love of one unknown') and she brings gifts from the Otherworld. Compare, for example, the sovereignty tale *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*

where the otherworldly Étaín is also in love with the king because of his deeds and offers her love to him (4). *Echtra Art Maic Cuinn* (5) and *Aided Muirchertach Mac Erca* (6) show the same initial scene; both revolve around the sovereignty theme (7).

Cú Chulainn's reaction, however, breaks that pattern because he decides that 'It is not a good time at which you have come to us, that is our condition is ill, we are starving. So it is not easy for me to meet a woman while I am in this strife.' 'I shall help you in it.' 'It is not for a woman's body that I have come.' 'It will be worse for you', said she, 'when I go against you as you are fighting your enemies. I shall go in the form of an eel under your feet in the ford so that you shall fall.' 'I prefer that to the king's daughter,' said he. 'I shall seize you between my toes so that your ribs are crushed and you shall suffer that blemish until you get a judgement blessing.' 'I shall drive the cattle over the ford to you while I am in the form of a grey she-wolf.' 'I shall throw a stone at you from my sling and smash your eye in your head, and you shall suffer from that blemish until you get a judgement blessing.' 'I shall come at you in the guise of a hornless red heifer in front of the cattle and they will rush upon you at many fords and pools yet you will not see me in front of you.' 'I shall cast a stone at you,' said he, 'so that your legs will break under you, and you shall suffer thus until you get a judgement blessing.' Whereupon she left him.' (*Ní maith é in inbuid tonnánac, nachis olc ar mbláth, amin gorti. Ní haurussa dam-sa dano comrac fri banscáil céin no mbeó isind níth so.* 'Bidim chobair-se dait-siu oc sudiu.' 'Ní ar thóin mná dano gabus-sa inso.' 'Bid ansu dait-siu,' or sí, 'in tan dorag-sa ar od chend oc comruc frisna firiu. Dorag-sa i rricht escongan fót c[h]ossaib issind áth co thaáthis.' 'Dóchus lim ón oldás ingen rí. Not géb-sa,' or sé, 'im ladair co mmebsat t'asnai 7 bia fón anim sin coro secha bráth bennachtan fort.' 'Timorc-sa in cethri forsind áth do dochum-sa, irricht soide glaisse.' 'Léicfe-sa cloich dait-siu asin tailm co commart do súil it c[h]ind, 7 bia fón anim [sin] coro secha bráth bennachtan fort.' 'Dorag-sa dait i rricht samaisci maíle derce riasind éit co memsat ort forsna iláthu 7 forsna háthu 7 forsna linniu 7 ním aircecha-sa ar do chend.' 'Tolécub-sa cloich deit-siu,' or sé,

'co mmema do fergara fót, 7 bia fóind anim sin coro secha bráth bennachtan fort.'
La sodain téit úad.')

Even the woman's promise to help him in his strife, which introduces her martial aspect, does not change his mind. For him her offers are totally out of context - he is a fighting man, not a lover. It may be worthwhile to keep in mind that the Morrígan's offers amount to the giving of gifts which, if accepted, obliges the recipient. Rejection, on the other hand, maintains a person's independence but it is offensive and not surprisingly, conflict is now inevitable (8).

A rejected woman can be a formidable enemy, as is illustrated by tales such as *Fingal Rónáin* or *Longes mac nUislenn*. Maybe the relentless hostility between the hero and the Morrígan, particularly in view of the the other war-goddesses' less negative approach (I hesitate to call it a positive approach because their help is only indirect) has called for an explanation at some stage and the wronged woman theme could have sprung to mind quite readily.

Cú Chulainn remains fearless; in fact his response 'I prefer that to the king's daughter' could be interpreted as a sigh of relief that at last things have reverted back to a martial context. It may also denote a realisation on Cú Chulainn's part of the lady's true nature, that her claim to be a king's daughter was false all along, and that he now knows how to deal with her. Thomas Kinsella seems to have understood the passage in exactly this way because he translates Cú Chulainn's response: 'That is easier to believe. You are no king's daughter' (9). This interpretation is supported by the fact that mistaken identity is an issue in the third part of this episode as well as in the parallel tale, *Táin Bó Regamna*.

No one could blame Cú Chulainn for not recognizing the Morrígan immediately as one of her most characteristic abilities is that of shapeshifting, as the subsequent passages demonstrate. In one instance, it seems, she is actually invisible: when bringing the cattle down to the ford she says '... yet you will not see me in front of you.' (...*nim aircecha-sa ar do chend*). This brings her on a par with Lug who can walk right through the enemy ranks without anyone seeing him except for Cú Chulainn and Loeg (10).

The final comment on this section pertains to the themes of sexuality and war which do not seem to be separated here: the woman is prepared to aid Cú Chulainn in war and offer her love. A similar theme appears with regard to the other important female figure in the *Táin*, Medb, who trades sexual favours for help in battle. The link between Medb and the Morrígan - and by implication, between Fergus and Cú Chulainn - has been pointed out by Patricia Kelly when discussing the expression '*tóin mná*', meaning 'the body of a woman' or 'a woman's buttocks' (11). While Cú Chulainn rejects the woman's body and concentrates on his duties as a warrior, Fergus, on the other hand, is accused of being allied with the Connachta only for the sake of a woman's body: 'Too great is that force which you exert against (your own) people and race, following a wanton woman as you do,' said Conall Cernach. (*'Bá ramór in bríg sin,' ar Conall Cernach, 'for túaith 7 cenél ar thóin mná drúithi'*) (12). The result of Fergus' alliance with Medb leads to disgrace: not only is Fergus a traitor but he has his sword taken by Ailill while making love to Medb. As a warrior without weapons is no warrior at all and as the loss of the sword can be read as a symbolic castration, Fergus has lost both his status as a warrior and his manhood, as Patricia Kelly argues convincingly (13). If we are allowed to read the passages in parallel, due to the use of the expression *tóin mná*, it follows that Cú Chulainn would have suffered an equal fate had he accepted the Morrígan's favours. Further evidence that cross-reference is indeed permissible is supplied by the fact that both female figures are queens, Medb the queen of the Connachta and Morrígan either the 'Great Queen' or the 'Queen of Phantoms' (14). Cú Chulainn's behaviour towards the Morrígan could be seen as a distrust of females, particularly as he is quite prepared to accept Lug's help a little later on.

The fight during which she makes an appearance is the one between Cú Chulainn and Lóch and the events happen more or less as predicted: 'Then when the combatants met on the ford and began to fight and to strike one another and when each began to belabour the other, the eel twined itself in three coils round Cú Chulainn's feet so that he fell prostrate athwart the ford. Lóch attacked him with the sword until the ford was blood-red with his gore. 'That is indeed a wretched

performance in the presence of the enemy!' said Fergus. 'Let one of you taunt the man, my men,' said he to his people, 'lest he fall in vain.' Bricriu Nemthenga mac Carbada rose up and began to incite Cú Chulainn. 'Your strength is exhausted,' said he, 'if a puny opponent overthrows you now that the Ulstermen are on their way to you, recovered from their torpor. It is hard for you to undertake a hero's deed in the presence of the men of Ireland and to ward off a formidable opponent with your weapons in that way.' Whereupon Cú Chulainn arose and struck the eel and its ribs were broken within it, and the cattle rushed eastwards over the army, carrying off the tents on their horns, so great was the thunderfeat of the two warriors in the ford. The she-wolf attacked him and drove the cattle on him westwards. He threw a stone from his sling and her eye broke in her head. Then she went in the guise of a red hornless heifer and the cattle stampeded into the streams and fords. Cú Chulainn said then: 'I cannot see the fords for the streams.' He cast a stone at the red hornless heifer and her leg broke. Thereupon Cú Chulainn chanted: 'I am here all alone, guarding the flocks. I neither hold them back nor let them go. In the cold hours I stand alone to oppose many peoples. Let someone tell Conchobor that it is time for him to come to my aid. The sons of Mágu have carried off their cows and shared them out amongst them. One man alone may be defended but a single log will not catch fire. If there were two or three, then their firebrands would blaze up. My enemies have almost overcome me, so many single combats have I fought. I cannot now wage battle against splendid warriors as I stand here alone.' Then it was that Cú Chulainn did against the Morrígan the three things that he had threatened her with in the *Táin Bó Regamna*. And he overcame Lóch in the ford with the *gáe bolga* which the charioteer threw to him downstream' (*'Ó ro chomraicset iarom ind fir forsind áth 7 ó ro gabsat oc glaid 7 oc imesorcain and 7 ó ro gab cách díb for trúastad a chéli, focheird ind escongon trí ol im c[h]ossa Con Culaind co mboí fáen fortarsna isind áth ina ligu. Danautat Lóch cosin chलाईub combu chróderg in t-áth día fhulriud. 'Olc ón óm,' for Fergus, 'a ngním sin hi fiadnaisi námat! Gressed nech úaib, a fhiru,' for sé fria muintir, 'in fer nár tháeth i n-ascid.' Atraig Bricriu Nemthenga nac Carbatha 7 gabais for gressacht Con Culaind. 'Ro scáich do nert,' ol sé, 'in tan is bratán bec*

dattrascair in tan dofil Ultu asa ces chucut. Dolig duit gním n-erred do gabáil fort hi fiadnaisi fer nÉrend 7 láech ansa do dingbáil a gaisciud fón samail [sin].’ La sodain atraig 7 benaid in n-escongain co mebdatár a hasnai indi 7 comboing in cethri darsna slúagu sair ar écin co mbertatár a puple inna n-adarcaib lasa torandcless darigénsat in dá láth gaile isind áth. Tanautat-som in tsod meic tíre. Doimairg na bú fair síar. Léicid-som cloich asa tailm co mebaid a súil ina cind. Téite i rricht samaisce maíle derge. Muitti riasna búuib forsna linni 7 na háthu. Is and asbert-som: ‘Ní airciu a n-átha la linni’. Léicid-seom cloich don tsamaisc maíl deirg co memaid a gergara foí. Cachain láid la sodain: ‘M’óenurán dam ar étib/sech níd n-étaim nís léicim/atú ar tráthaib úaraib/m’óenurán ar iltúathaib./Aprad nech fri Conchobar/cía domíssed níbo rom/rucsat Meic Mágach a mbú/conda randsat etarru./Ro bli cosnom im óenchend/acht nád lassa nach óenc[h]rand/día mbetis a dó nó a trí/lasfaitis a n-athinni./Bec nárom nítsat ind fhir/ar imad comlaind óenfhir/ní rubaim níth n-erred n-án/immarr atú m’óenurán.’ Is and sin trá dogéni Cú Chulaind frisin Mórrígain a tréde dorairngert di hi Táin Bó Regamna, 7 fichid Lóch isind áth cosin gaí bolga doléic in t-ara dó lasin sruth) (14).

We notice that the fight has a rather peculiar and unexpected effect on Cú Chulainn. Instead of wounding him herself, the Morrígan actually causes him to be wounded by interfering in the conflict between Cú Chulainn and Lóch, so much so that Fergus describes Cú Chulainn's fighting as a 'wretched performance', not exactly a flattering comment on the capabilities of the greatest hero of Ireland. Bricriu's taunting picks up the same issue again: 'Thy strength is exhausted ... if a puny opponent overthrows you.' Additionally, his mental state leaves something to be desired when he calls out: 'I cannot see the ford for the streams.' It seems that confusion has set in all around him, an impression that is heightened by images of cattle rushing eastwards, westwards, carrying tents on their horns and all that while the two warriors perform their thunderfeats.

After the fight we find Cú Chulainn severely wounded, exhausted and confused. For the first time his will to fight seems to be called into question. He speaks of

his loneliness, his inability to confront all these warriors by himself and his need for support.

It is illuminating to look at a second version of these events. The Book of Leinster version is lost and has to be supplemented by the Stowe version: 'It was at that time that the Morrígan daughter of Ernmas from the fairy-mounds came to destroy Cú Chulainn, for she had vowed on the Foray of Regamain that she would come and destroy Cú Chulainn when he was fighting with a mighty warrior on the Foray of Cúailnge. So the Morrígan came there in the guise of a white, red-eared heifer accompanied by fifty heifers, each pair linked together with a chain of white bronze. The womenfolk put Cú Chulainn under tabus and prohibitions not to let the Morrígan go from him without checking and destroying her. Cú Chulainn made a cast at the Morrígan and shattered one of her eyes. Then the Morrígan appeared in the form of a slippery, black eel swimming downstream, and went into the pool and coiled herself around Cú Chulainn's legs. While Cú Chulainn was disentangling himself from her, Lóch dealt him a wound crosswise through his chest. Then the Morrígan came in in the guise of a shaggy, russet-coloured she-wolf. While Cú Chulainn was warding her off, Lóch wounded him. Thereupon Cú Chulainn was filled with rage and wounded Lóch with the *gáe bolga* and pierced his heart in his breast.' (*Is ann sin táinic in Morrígan ingen Ernmais a síodaibh do admilledh Con Culainn, ar ro gellastair for Táin Bó Regamna go dtiocfad do aidhmilledh Con Culainn in tráth do beith ig comrac fri degláoch for Táin Bó Cúailnge. Táinic ieramh in Morrígan ann sin i rriocht samhaisci finne óderge co coícait samasc uimpi 7 ronn fiondrúine itir gach dá samaisc díoph. Dobertsat in bantracht gesa 7 airmberta for Coin cCulainn dá ttísadh úadh gan fhosdadh gan aidmilledh fuirre. Dobert Cú Chulainn rót n-urc[h]uir di gur bris let[h]rosc na Morrígna. Táinic dano in Morríghan ann sin i rriocht escuinge slemme duibi lasan srut[h]. Tét ieramh forsan lind gurrus ionnaisg fo chosaibh Con Culainn. An fad boí Cú Chulainn agá díchur de, ro ghon Lóch urt[h]arsna é tre c[h]ompar a c[h]léb. Táinic ieramh in Morrígan i riocht saidhi gairbi glasrúaidhi. Cien goirit boí Cú Chulainn igá díchur dhe, ro ghon Lóch é. Iar sin ro érígh fercc Con Culainn ris gonais Cu Chulaind Lóch din gai bulga coro thregda a chridi 'na chliab) (16).*

Here the Morrigan appears particularly to destroy Cú Chulainn as she had vowed in *Táin Bó Regamna* - we note the absence of a reference to any passage within *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Further, the Morrigan has been given a parent and a home - she is daughter of Ernmas (17) and comes from the fairy-mounds, although it is not specified which one. Her animal forms are more or less the same though some minor differences occur: the red heifer appears as a white red-eared one which corresponds to the usual fairy-cows of later literature, the eel is specifically black, and the grey wolf is a shaggy russet coloured one. Her actions and Cú Chulainn reactions also differ slightly but agree in general. The interesting feature here is that Stowe makes it absolutely clear how Cú Chulainn comes to be injured so badly. Every time he is busy warding off the Morrigan Lóch deals him another blow until Cú Chulainn becomes so furious that he manages to pierce Lóch's heart. Note how great anger saves him from defeat, anger being the fuel for superhuman efforts. Nothing is said about Fergus' comments or Bricriu's satirising. Stowe portrays the event simply as a case of Cú Chulainn being outnumbered. The mental effect, the confusion and weakness, the uncertainty whether he really could win, which are such prominent features in *Táin Bó Cúailnge 1*, have disappeared. As Cú Chulainn tends to dispatch great numbers of opponents at any one time this solution is not altogether satisfactory (18). Cú Chulainn's difficulties could possibly be explained by the fact that Lóch is, of course, one of Cú Chulainn's foster brothers who trained with him under the guidance of Scáthach and is therefore nearly his equal. *Táin Bó Regamna*, as we shall see, emphasizes this fact. If this were so, it is not so much a case of being outnumbered but of having an enemy of unusual capabilities.

We also need to take note of the women's actions. One wonders why there is a need to lay 'tabus and prohibitions' onto him when one would expect Cú Chulainn to defend himself anyway. At the same time, Cú Chulainn apparently breaks his *geiss* by not destroying the Morrigan, an event which should have warranted some comment. The whole passage does not make much sense. It seems that, on the one hand the event is to be toned down in that it offers a simple but not very

satisfactory solution as to why Cú Chulainn found himself in severe trouble, on the other hand an awareness that the occasion had some special features remained.

The final episode 'The Healing of the Morrígan' (*Slánugud na Mórrígná inso*) (19) shows us that the Morrígan has paid a prize as well and in the third part of this encounter we meet her in form of an old woman: 'While Cú Chulainn lay thus in great weariness, the Morrígan came to him in the guise of an old crone, lame and blind in one eye (20) and engaged in milking a cow with three teats. He asked her for a drink. She gave him the milk of one teat. 'She who gives it will at once be whole,' said Cú Chulainn. 'The blessing of gods and non-gods be on you!' - The magicians were their gods but the husbandmen were their non-gods. - Thereupon her head was made whole. Then she gave him the milk of the second teat, and her eye was healed. She gave him the milk of the third teat, and her leg was cured. - And it is suggested that on each occasion he said: 'The judgement of blessing be on you!' - 'But you told me,' said the Morrígan, 'that I should never get healing from you.' 'Had I known that it was you,' said Cú Chulainn, 'I should never have healed you.' (*O cond aifh]scéis mór sin trá do C[h]oin Culaind, danarraid in Mórrígan i ndelb na sentainne caillige 7 sí cáech losc, oc blegon bó triphne. Coniacht-som dig furri. Dobert-si blegon sini dó. 'I n-iam bid slán doduc!' ol Cú Chulaind. 'Bennacht dé 7 andé fort!' ol sé. Déi leó-som in t-áes cumachta, andéi immorro in t-áes trebtha. Íctha a cend-si iarom combo slán. Dobeir blegon indala sini combo slán a súil. Dobeir blegon in tress sini combo slán a fergaire. Combad atberad-som in cech ní díb sin: 'Bráth bennachtan fort!' or sé. 'Atbirt frim trá,' or in Mórrígan, 'ním bíad íc lat co bráth.' 'Acht rofessin[d] combad tú,' ol Cú Chulaind, 'nít ícfaind tria bith sír.')*

When we turn to the details of the text the first noticeable fact is the Morrígan's form as old hag. The text makes sure that we do not mistake her for just any old woman: the term used is not '*sentainne*' (old woman) on its own but the much more loaded term '*caillech*' is added. A *caillech* is definitely associated with a world beyond this one: in a Christian context the word denotes a holy woman, a nun, while in the saga context she is an otherworldly being with dangerous

overtone (DIL). A frequent feature of these hags and other otherworldly personages is that they are blind in one eye and one-legged, just like the Morrigan is here. Sometimes a third disability, being one armed, is added. One could argue that this third disability is present here as well. Note how only two disabilities are mentioned while in fact she has sustained three injuries and receives three blessings. The one which is missed out is the crushing of the ribs while in shape of an eel which is an injury to the upper body close to the arm. I think we can safely assume that she is also one-armed. It is noteworthy that these otherworldly features are interpreted as injuries here, ie as a disability, a defect which requires mending. She seems to be engaged in a rather benign activity, milking a three-teated and therefore presumably otherworldly cow (a cow normally has four teats) and offering a drink of that milk to Cú Chulainn who in turn blesses her. This comes rather unexpectedly after the last passage has shown them to be vicious enemies. It may well have prompted Tomas Ó Broin's statement: 'In the form of the Morrigan the Mother-Goddess makes some brief appearances in the *Táin*, where she behaves as one who has a half-motherly interest in Cú Chulainn, a type of relationship between the goddess and the young male deity which is easily paralleled elsewhere,...' (21). Indeed, the image of the Morrigan milking a cow and offering a drink does have a somewhat 'motherly' air surrounding it. Further, a drink offered by a woman is a very potent symbol in Irish tales and generally associated with the sovereignty goddess who offers the king a drink and thus confirms his righteous kingship.

Can we, therefore, see the Morrigan as a Mother- and/or Sovereignty goddess? As is well known, the Sovereignty goddesses are usually beautiful and young when they just offer a drink to the prospective king. While the woman gains a husband, the man is confirmed in his kingship. A later variation on the theme is that of the old hag guarding a well of water and insisting on sexual intercourse with the prospective king in exchange for a drink. By means of this encounter the hag is rejuvenated while the hero's claim to kingship is authenticated. In both cases, the otherworldly female and the human male benefit from the encounter. Turning to the meeting between Cú Chulainn and the Morrigan we are struck by the lack of

balance between what is given and what is received. Cú Chulainn only gains a temporary relief of his thirst. His wounds are not healed, his exhaustion not alleviated. All of this is only accomplished by Lug through herbal remedies and chants in a subsequent episode. The Morrígan, on the other hand, receives a permanent healing of her wounds and is now fully restored to her original condition and shape, whatever that may be. The Morrígan takes what she needs and gives precious little in return. At the same time it also transpires that Cú Chulainn's healing through words is clearly superior to the Morrígan's nurturing through milk.

While it is true that milking is an essentially feminine occupation (22), as is nurturing, it does not allow us to jump to conclusions regarding the benign, motherly character of the Morrígan because the whole scene is set in the context of trickery and deceit. Cú Chulainn does not realize whom he is helping while the Morrígan knows full well what the true situation is. The episode gains in irony when we remember that Cú Chulainn did not specify whose judgement blessing would help her - as it turns out he inadvertently delivers it himself. Again he is a player in a game which is controlled by someone else and the Morrígan's sneer confirms his helplessness in the situation. I would therefore conclude that the basically benign gesture of giving milk takes on sinister overtones in this episode, a suspicion which is already aroused when taking the form of the milker, ie the old hag, seriously. It is simply a ruse to obtain what would never have been given freely. The same technique occurs in the first part of this story, as already discussed. Imagery which signals benevolence, sovereignty, life-enhancement is cleverly manipulated to mean exactly the opposite and thus heightens the sense of dread that runs through the whole episode. The only way a 'half-motherly interest' can be deduced from this incident is to read the image 'hag and cow' as 'woman and cow', in other words, to ignore the dangerous overtones of the hag, and additionally to pluck this image from its context, all of which strikes me as a somewhat dubious procedure. In fact, one could go further and call the Morrígan an 'anti-mother' in the sense that motherly care implies giving while the Morrígan's main purpose lies solely in taking what she needs.

It is worthwhile noting that deceit, trickery and disguise in themselves are methods frequently used by warriors as a means to overcome enemies. Cú Chulainn often twists and turns words to suit his purpose. O'Leary characterises Cú Chulainn thus: 'Cú Chulainn surpasses his fellows in his use of words as much as in his use of weapons, and is perhaps even more elusive verbally than physically' (23). He mentions Cú Chulainn's taking of arms, Fer Báeths killing through trickery, and his encounter with the satirist in the *Táin* as examples where Cú Chulainn uses trickery and clever manipulation of words to get his own way while not losing face.

Disguise, though more often a technique employed by his enemies, can be detected in the episode where he paints a beard on his skin to be acceptable as a worthy enemy. Admittedly, the Morrígan's disguises go much further as she can completely transform herself but it also has to be said that she simply uses all the means available to her in order to gain an advantage which is what every warrior would do. The Morrígan's methods are therefore far from exceptional and fall well within the warrior ethos (24).

Possibly the most interesting aspect of this encounter is the blessing by which the Morrígan is healed. On close reading it becomes clear that two types of blessing are involved. The first one refers to the blessing of gods and non-gods, followed by the author's explanation as to who or what these gods and non-gods may be. This is obviously intended to allude to pre-Christian beliefs whereby the exact meaning of this phrase remains obscure. The second blessing is called a judgement blessing and seems to constitute an alternative version of the previously told events. As *bráth* denotes the Last Judgement it is permissible to read this phrase as referring to Christian beliefs (25). One begins to wonder which otherworldly power is meant to be responsible for this blessing and why it worries the author so much that he needs to intrude twice in such a short passage to offer explanations. Is it because Cú Chulainn's healing by blessing is a very unusual act in itself? Although Cú Chulainn is occasionally involved in helping wounded warriors, as for example in the Cethern episode (26), he certainly never demonstrates his skill at healing wounds by force of his blessing. Other figures who are healers include physicians such as Fingen in *Aislinge Óengusso*, Dian Cécht and his son Míach in *Cath Maige*

Tuired, and women such as Airmedh, Dían Cécht's daughter, or Flidais in a number of stories, but again their activity is not denoted to be a blessing, whatever the 'magical' means used may be. Even Lug's healing can not be regarded as an example as it is carried out by herbs and chants. Healing by blessing is an activity that appears most prominently as one of the miraculous abilities of saints (27). While the first version maintains a pre-Christian veneer on account of the content of the blessing, the second version has an unmistakably Christian tone to it. What is more, it is the version which is used in the threats and counterthreats, as quoted above. To liken Cú Chulainn to a saint is a remarkable twist in this story, and it is intriguing that it appears in connection with the Morrígan. Is the situation he finds himself in so serious, is her challenge so extreme that reference to the new belief system is necessary to explain his survival? If Cú Chulainn's deed is modelled on the deeds of saints, it follows that he, in a way, has stepped outside the pre-Christian world which is in keeping with later stories where he rises from the dead to confirm the truth of the Christian message in response to doubting non-believers. For the purposes of this study it is significant that this process takes place when faced with the Morrígan's challenge and while it singles out Cú Chulainn as a unique figure it also reflects back to the Morrígan who must be a truly powerful and formidable opponent (29).

It is interesting to turn to *Táin Bó Cúailnge 2* where the story is similar in outline but differs significantly in some details, particularly with regard to explaining the unusual feature of Cú Chulainn being involved in healing: 'Then came the Mórrígu, daughter of Ernmas, from the elf-mounds in the guise of an old woman and in Cú Chulainn's presence she milked a cow with three teats. The reason she came thus was to be succoured by Cú Chulainn, for no one whom Cú Chulainn had wounded ever recovered until he himself aided in his cure. Maddened by thirst, Cú Chulainn asked her for milk. She gave him the milk of one teat. 'May this be swiftly wholeness for me.' The one eye of the queen [which had been wounded] was cured. Cú Chulainn asked her for the milk of (another) teat. She gave it to him. 'Swiftly may she be cured who gave it.' He asked for a third drink and she gave him the milk of the (third) teat. 'The blessing of gods and non-gods be on you,

woman.' - The magicians were their gods and the husbandmen were their non-gods.
 - And the queen was made whole' (*And sin tánic in Mórrígu ingen Ernmais a sídib i rricht sentainne co rrabi ic blegu[n] bó trí sine 'na fiadnaisse. Is immi tánic-si [mar] sin ar bíth a fóríthen do Choin Chulaind. Dáig ní gonad Cú Chulaind nech ara térnád co mbeith cuit dó féin 'na legius. Conattech Cú Chulaind blegon furri iarna dechrad d'íttaid. Dobretha-si blegon sini dó. 'Rop slán a n-éim dam-sal so.' Ba slán a lethrosc na rígná. Conattech-som blegon sini furri. Dobreth[a]-si dó. 'I n-éim rop slán intí doridnacht.' Conaittecht-som in tres ndig 7 dobretha-si blegon sine dó. 'Bendacht dee 7 andee fort, a ingen.' - Batar é a ndee in t-áes cumachta, & andee in t-áes trebairé. - Ocus ba slán ind rígná) (30).*

In this version, the Morrígan also approaches Cú Chulainn in form of an old woman but the otherworldly features are played down. Not only is she just a *sentainne* without the more sinister *caillech* being added, but there is also no mention of her blindness or lameness. We can infer from the fight beforehand that she has an injured eye, which is the only wound alluded to and the only one which is healed. Interestingly, the first 'blessing', spoken after the first drink of milk and effecting the healing of the Morrígan's eye, seems to be a blessing for Cú Chulainn's own healing because he says: 'May this be swiftly wholeness for me.' This is echoed in the last sentence with reference to the Morrígan: 'And the queen was made whole.' This does not make any sense unless we assume that the acceptance of the drink in itself, rather than the blessing, is the cause of the healing which then contradicts all the other versions. We have to conclude that the passage is not very precise in its portrayal of the details.

The most significant detail is the explanation of why the Morrígan has to approach Cú Chulainn at all for her healing which is that only Cú Chulainn can aid in the cure of a wound he had inflicted. This is plainly not borne out by the stories and looks like an invention to clarify this particular issue. The fact that clarification seemed necessary is interesting in itself. Seemingly the interaction between the hero and the war-goddess was a source of astonishment or uncertainty which called for further elaboration. The solution follows the pattern established all through the *Táin* in that further special powers and extraordinary abilities are attached to Cú

Chulainn. However, none of the unusual features of Recension 1 are maintained in that neither the judgement blessing nor the scene of mockery and recognition are represented. The whole affair is shorter, less detailed, and no longer seems to have the same importance.

We have concluded the passage in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* with the suggestion that Cú Chulainn's predominance is confirmed by being able to heal the Morrígan while her disguise, her trickery, her manipulations point to her own power and importance. In order to see the conflict between Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan in its proper light it is important to set it against other fights in the *Táin* as well as considering her role in the final battle between Connacht and Ulster.

With regard to other encounters we find the following evidence: Firstly, all fights with human warriors are won by Cú Chulainn. Secondly, his relationship with male supernatural beings within the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is positive and there is no enmity between them. Lugh is his father and healer, Caulann the smith becomes his master despite the death of Caulann's dog through Cú Chulainn. There is only one exception which is the encounter with the 'phantom' in 'The Fight between Eógan mac Durthacht and Conchobor'. As this is discussed in greater detail in a subsequent chapter it will suffice to say that, after initial difficulties, Cú Chulainn emerges clearly as the victor.

Thirdly, his relationship with women, a rare occurrence in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, is either a love relationship (Fedelm) or he kills them outright, without the women offering any resistance. Medb's handmaidens are killed by mistake, two female thieves and two druids' wives are members of a whole crowd of enemies whom Cú Chulainn kills and Finnabair is insulted and possibly killed (31). If a situation arises where single combat becomes a possibility Cú Chulainn avoids it, either by fleeing as in the case of Nechta Scéne or by granting a request to spare a life as in the case of Medb. Women as a group of people rather than individuals are enchanted by his beauty but also have a strange power over him in that they, when showing themselves naked, are able to bring him out of his warrior frenzy. Fourthly, other supernatural female figures have already been discussed in the chapter on Badb and Nemain. Although one could not claim that Badb and Nemain

help him specifically, their actions are always detrimental for his enemies and thus beneficial for him.

We can see from this comparison that the Morrígan is the only being, male or female, human or supernatural, who seeks conflict with Cú Chulainn and yet is not overcome by him. Cú Chulainn tends to win his fights due to his superior physical prowess as much as his superior intelligence, both bordering on the 'supernatural' at times. The Morrígan weakens him on both levels. I think there can be no doubt that the Morrígan was considered a dangerous and powerful being, possibly more powerful than any other in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. While having said that we also need to remember that he resists her and heals her in the end and we are left with a situation which can only be described as interdependence.

This relationship has nothing to do with any allegiance to Cú Chulainn's enemies, the Connachta and the rest of Irlean, as becomes perfectly clear during the final battle (32). This is how she appears: 'Then the Morrígan spoke in the dusk between the two encampments, saying: 'Ravens gnaw the necks of men. Blood flows. Battle is fought. ... Hail to the men of Ulster! Woe to the Erainn! Woe to the men of Ulster! Hail to the Erainn!' These were the words she whispered to the Erainn: 'Woe to the men of Ulster for they have not won (?) the battle' (*Is ann sin asbert in Morrígan isin dorbles itir in dá dúnad: 'Crenaid brain bráigde fer. Bruinded fuil. Feochair cath. ... cén mair hUltaib, mairc Iarnaib, mairc d'Ultaib immorro, cén mair Iarnaib. Is ed dobreth hi clu[a]saib Iairn, mairc hUltaib ol niscainedar a ngle*) (33).

We could not ask for a clearer image of the Morrígan's role. She is a truly liminal figure, appearing at dusk, the borderline of day and night, in between the two armies and uttering contradictory prophesies. She misuses her role as a prophetess by speaking deliberate lies to the men of Ireland. Apart from bearing witness to her continuing role as a deceiver, her whispers about victory to both sides presumably encourages the warriors to fight all the harder, thus serving to prolong the conflict. It is obvious that she is not allied to either side because the conflict itself is all she is really interested in.

Táin Bó Cúailnge 2 is quite clear about her love for hostilities: 'It was on that night that the Morrígu daughter of Ernmas came and sowed strife and dissension between the two encampments on either side, and she spoke these words:... She whispered to the Érainn that they will not fight the battle which lies ahead' (*Is hí inn aidchi sin radechaid in Morrígu ingen Ernmaiss go mbaí oc indloch 7 oc etarchossaít eterna dá dúnad chechtarda. Acus rabert-si na bríathra sa: ... Iss ed dobert i clúais nÉrand, ní firfet a nglé fail fora cind*) (34). Again, the men of Ireland are especially deceived although the meaning of the sentence is not quite clear to me.

Before expanding our investigation of the relationship between the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn it is worthwhile to summarise the differences and similarities between *Táin Bó Cúailnge1* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge2* and state the implications thereof. Apart from *Táin Bó Cúailnge2* missing out the *Imacallaim* episode, the stories are similar in outline: the Morrígan interferes in the fight between Cú Chulainn and Lóch, appearing in her three animal forms and contributing to Cú Chulainn's injuries while sustaining wounds herself. However, *Táin Bó Cúailnge 2* has no sign of the mental confusion which seems to hamper Cú Chulainn's progress. The only hint that maybe all is not as usual is the strange prohibition spoken by the women which sits awkwardly in the text. *Táin Bó Cúailnge 2* omits the emphasis on the Morrígan's deceit and trickery which seems to be her main strategy as well as her strength in *Táin Bó Cúailnge1*. Equally, her otherworldly features are toned down so that the whole episode is portrayed as Cú Chulainn fighting yet another enemy and the reason he does not shake this enemy off quite so easily is simply due to the fact that he is outnumbered, as *Táin Bó Cúailnge2* explicitly states. Cú Chulainn seems to be firmly in control, he knows what he is doing, whom he is dealing with and even the healing episode is no longer a mystery - he needs to be consulted in the healing of wounds he has inflicted. Cú Chulainn's extraordinary nature extends even to the wounds he inflicts. It seems *Táin Bó Cúailnge 2* is reluctant to allow any doubt as to Cú Chulainn's strength, his clarity of mind and his capabilities as a warrior. The Morrígan, on the other hand, seems to be in decline - from powerful challenger she fades away to just another enemy.

The evidence of this chapter allows us to make the following summarising statements about the Morrigan: unlike the battle-crows who respond to a warrior's excellence by weakening his enemies and proclaiming doom over their heads, the Morrigan emerges as a powerful challenger who pushes Cú Chulainn to the very edges of his capabilities. It seems, his ability is not taken for granted, his status not yet established until it is proved in conflict with her. In the process she reveals herself as an expert in trickery and deceit which manifests in her words, her action and in her very appearance. The result is confusion and weakness on the part of the hero which reminds us again of the battle-crows' effect. Another common denominator between the role of the badba and of the Morrigan is the love for battle, for blood-shed, for a good hard fight which the Morrigan occasionally stirs up in a much more determined manner than the battle-crows. The latter often just form part of the scene while the Morrigan encourages conflict by uttering correct and false prophecies, proving that both believing her words or resisting them is fraught with danger.

Notes to Chapter 2:

- 1) TBC1, ll.1845-71
- 2) Windisch, E. 'Táin Bó Regamna', IT 2,2 (Leipzig, 1887),p.240
- 3) O'Rahilly, C. 'Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster', ITS 49, (Dublin,1967), p.xxxii
- 4) Stokes, W. 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel' RC 22(1901), p. para.1-3, p.14-17
- 5) Best, R.I. 'The Adventures of Art Son of Conn' Ériu 3 (1907), p.152 and 154; transl. p.153-55
- 6) Stokes, W. 'The Death of Muirchertach Mac Erca', RC 23 (1902), para. 2-4, p.396-401 (p.392-431)
- 7) Le Roux, F and Guyonvarc'h C.J. 'Mórrígan - Badb - Macha: la souveraineté guerrière de l'Irlande' Ogam-Celticum 25 (1983), Chapter 2 'Les trois échecs de Cúchulainn' uses this episode, among others, as evidence to suggest that the Morrigan once was a sovereignty goddess and that Cú Chulainn, in rejecting her, rejected the kingship as he was destined to remain a warrior.
- 8) O'Leary, P. 'Contention at Feasts in Early Irish Literature', Éigse 20 (1984), p.123: '...., it is hardly surprising to see gifts refused as an assertion of independence.' (p.115-127)
- 9) Kinsella, T. 'The Táin',(Oxford 1970), p.133
- 10)TBC1, ll.2097-8
- 11)Kelly, P. 'The Táin as Literature' in J.P.Mallory (ed) 'Aspects of the Táin' (Belfast, 1992) p.80 (69-102)
- 12)TBC1, ll.4068-9; transl.p.235
- 13)'The Táin as Literature' p.80-1
- 14)Discussed in detail in 'Mórrígan - Badb - Macha'; cf. Thurneysen,R. 'Die Irische Helden und Königssage'(IHK) (Halle, 1921), p.63.
- 15)TBC1, ll.1982-2026; transl.p.180
- 16)TBC2, ll.1989-2004, transl. p.194
- 17)Ernmas or Ernbas, listed together in RID, means 'swordfight', ie a fitting name for the mother of the Morrigan. For genealogical connections, see E.Gray 'Cath Maige Tuired' (Dublin, 1982) Index of Persons, p.124.
- 18)The same solution is echoed in a long poem just before Cú Chulainn heals the Morrigan in TBC2. In it he summarises the fight thus: 'I was outnumbered when attacked by Loch together with Bodb, (according to) the prophecies of Tain Bo Regomna.'(Ba lia Lóch co lleith Bodba/go remfho-claib Regomna. ll 2058-9) Here, the Morrigan is substituted by Bodb.
- 19)TBC1, ll.2038-53; transl.p.181-2
- 20)O'Rahilly's translation changed here. She translates 'one-eyed and half-blind' but L. MacMathúna suggests more plausibly 'lame and half-blind.' MacMathúna, L. 'On the Expression and Concept of Blindness in Irish' SH 19 (1979), p.32, note 7
- 21)O'Broin, T. 'What is the 'Debility' of the Ulstermen?' Éigse 10, (1961-63) p.296 (286-299)
- 22)Lucas, A.T., 'Cattle in Ancient Ireland', (Kilkenny 1989), p.42
- 23)O'Leary, P. 'Verbal Deceit in the Ulster cycle' Éigse 21 (1981), p.24
- 24)The milking episode is also regarded as an attack in the re-telling of the episode in Cóir Anmann: 'Again she came, in the shape of an old woman, to attack Cu Chulainn, and she milked, in his presence, a cow with three teats.' (Stokes, W. 'Cóir Anmann' in Stokes, W. and Windisch, E. 'Irische Texte' 3.2 (Leipzig, 1897)p. 354-5)
- 25)Thurneysen suggests that it may mean 'Freisprechung, Verzeihung' (Release, Forgiveness) IHK p.169
- 26)TBC1 ll.3161ff
- 27)Ó hÓgáin, D. 'Myth, Legend and Romance: An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition' (London, 1990) p.379 for discussion.
- 28)In 'Myth, Cosmos and Society: Indo-European themes of creation and destruction' (Cambridge Mass. and London 1968) p.169-73 Bruce Lincoln discusses the three ways by which healing takes place: by incantations, which is regarded as the highest form and is associated with the priestly function, by cutting, which is associated with the martial function and by potions/drugs/ herbs which is associated with the agriculturalists. If this can be applied to the Táin we note that Cú Chulainn's form of healing is totally out of context as he is most certainly a warrior, not a priest. Whether one

examines the passage using Indo-European evidence or sees it within its own literary context the same result is arrived at: Cú Chulainn should not be behaving like this!

29)It is most interesting to see how healing in CMT is also specifically Christian: after Miach has been killed by Dian Cecht herbs grow from his body and are gathered carefully by his sister Airmed. However, Dian Cecht mixes them up '...so that no one knows their proper healing qualities unless the Holy Spirit taught them afterwards.' (ll.150-1) Presumably, Airmed still knows something about healing and she 'remains'(l.152) after Miach has died, but the full knowledge of healing lies with the Holy Spirit. The healing known by a pre-Christian female is again superceded by Christian healing.

30)TBC2 ll.2103-2113 transl.p.196-7

31)Cecile O'Rahilly suggests '...that the death of Finnabair was really intended here (cf. Atát a ndí chorthi and l.1603), but the interpolator shirked it and softened the details of Cu Chulainn's attack on the girl. The cutting of her hair as an insult is a common motif.' O'Rahilly, TBC1, note to line 1600, p.261.

32)The question of her allegiance is particularly pertinent in view of the parallel tales TBRg. and Echtra Nerai, to be discussed below, because in both stories we find the Morrigan associated with the sid of Cruachain in Connacht. Note also that the Morrigan is listed amongst the Ulstermen mustered for the final battle. (TBC1 l.3463-4 'cosin Mórrignai co Dún Sobairche) Thurneysen suggests that conclusions cannot be drawn from these lists as they are subjected to continuing expansion without regard to the overall contents of the respective story. IHK p.104

33)TBC1, ll.3877-83; transl. p.229-30

34)TBC2, ll.4600-07; transl. p.263



Chapter 3:

THE MORRÍGAN'S THREE ANIMAL SHAPES

One of the most dramatic parts of Cú Chulainn's struggle with the Morrígan is the fact that she transforms herself into three animals. They do not appear in any other story and could therefore have been invented to increase the suspense by heightening the element of danger Cú Chulainn has to face.

The question remains whether these animal forms were chosen arbitrarily or deliberately. In other words, can the animal forms provide any more information about this dangerous woman? I hasten to add that the full significance an animal symbol may have had to a medieval Irish person will elude a modern reader. I expect to find nothing more than hints and suggestions.

Before turning to the animals themselves, it is worthwhile to consider the number of transformations. The number three brings Dumézil's research to mind (1), particularly as the three forms fit rather neatly into the scheme of the three functions: the eel (which, as I shall argue, is the Irish form of the snake) for the first function encompassing the sacred, the wolf for the second, martial function, and the cow for the third function spanning everything to do with fertility, provision of food and agriculture. Given the hostility of the animals to Cú Chulainn and the battle-context, the pattern of the hero having to fight a three-fold enemy may also be applicable. Dumézil discovered it in Cú Chulainn's fight with the sons of Nechta Scéne (2) but there is no reason to assume that the pattern may not be repeated in another incident.

In this context it is also noteworthy that the Morrígan receives three injuries while in the shape of these three animals, one to the head (eye), one to the upper body (arm) and one to the lower body (leg) which also symbolises the three functions, according to Indo-europeanists. However, animal and injury do not correspond. According to the trifunctional scheme, the eel should have received an injury to the eye, the wolf to the ribs, the cow to the legs or hindquarters. While the heifer does indeed acquire a broken leg, the eel's ribs are crushed and the wolf's eye is hurt. This is true both for the threats and the actual fight. Recourse to other tales still

does not yield the desired result: *Táin Bó Cúailnge*² associates the eye with the heifer while *Táin Bó Regamna* agrees with *Táin Bó Cúailnge*¹. Only Recension 3 associates the eel with an injury to the head. A further line of inquiry is to check *Táin Bó Regamna* for Cú Chulainn's injuries, sustained through the agency of the Morrígan. We find that the eel casts a noose around Cú Chulainn's feet, the wolf takes strength from Cú Chulainn's arms and the heifer is mentioned in the same passage as Cú Chulainn's decapitation, in other words, the three-fold division is directly reversed. It follows that the Indo-European scheme is not applied consistently.

Returning to the animal forms, the dog or wolf (*cú [m]. or sod [f].*), though a second function animal, is placed under scrutiny first because the symbolism is particularly clear in this case. The dog or wolf is the warrior-symbol par excellence (3). Cú Chulainn himself bears witness to this when he defeats the big dog of Caulann the smith and takes on its name and function (4). We are told that one day Conchobor invites Cú Chulainn, then called Setanta, to a feast at Caulann's hostel. Cú Chulainn promises to follow later on. Conchobor forgets all about the boy and his host and Caulann, assuming that everybody has arrived, locks the fort. His magnificent hound, the protector of all Leinstermen, is set loose to guard the fort. When Cú Chulainn eventually comes along the hound naturally regards him as an enemy (5). Cú Chulainn emerges triumphant from the ensuing fight and kills the dog. Caulann, though pleased that the boy survived, grieves for his dog: 'The servant who has been taken from me, that is, my hound, maintained life and honour for me. He was defence and protection for my goods and my cattle. He guarded all my beasts for me in field and in house.' 'That is no great matter,' said the boy. A whelp of the same litter will be reared by me for you, and until such time as that hound grows and is fit for action, I myself shall be a hound to protect your cattle and to protect yourself.' (*ConággaiB ainech 7 anmain dam-sa,' ol sé, 'in fer muintire ruccad úaim .i. mo chú. Robo dín 7 dítu díar feib 7 ar n-indili. Robo imdegail cacha slabra dún eter mag 7 tech. ll.594-600*). This, of course, is only a stepping stone until he becomes the protector of his own people.

Two scholars, T.Ó Cathasaigh (6) and Kim McCone (7) have analyzed the story

with the aid of T.F. O'Rahilly's structural opposition of Hero versus Otherworld god. O'Rahilly was convinced that the hospitallers of the Irish tales were Otherworldly personages, the hostels being the setting for the Otherworldly Feast on the grounds of supernatural dimensions in stories such as 'Da Derga's Hostel' (8). Dispute arises as to what class the dog of Caulann belongs to. Ó Cathasaigh writes that he fits into the Otherworld God bracket in the same way as the smith (9) but Kim McCone rightly points out (10) that we then have two otherworld gods in one story and that the dog's martial qualities do not fit the predominantly peaceful ones of the hospitallers. Equally, Cú Chulainn does take over the role of the hound and thus proves that we are definitely talking about the warrior function. Thus he suggests that we should see the hound as Otherworld guardian, the 'quintessence of the warrior valour' (11). Cú Chulainn, in taking over this function bridges the this-worldly - otherworldly divide - he is a human hero and yet can fulfill the function of an Otherworld guardian. Being named after the dog means that he incorporates the nature of the animal, thus bridging the human-animal division at the same time. Because of these events he is placed firmly in the liminal position characteristic of heroes worldwide.

For our study it is particularly interesting that the opponents in question, Morrigan and Cú Chulainn, are both thought of as wolves. On first sight this may lead us to believe that there is a structural opposition between the two but I would follow Kim McCone's solution here who says: 'Equally unsurprising is the possibility that the hero,..., comes into conflict with animals of this type (ie wolves) ... since conflict is the bedrock of the warrior's existence' (12). The wolf seems to be the vehicle which is fit for both human hero and otherworldly woman. For Cú Chulainn it is a way to transcend his merely human bounds, for the Morrigan it is a way of manifesting herself.

The case of the other two animals is not quite as clear-cut as that of the wolf. The eel (*escung [ff]*) is mentioned only on rare occasions in other tales and then mainly as part of the description of particular rivers (13).

An interesting eel-adventure stems from the life of St. Samthann as summarised in Dorothy Ann Bray's article 'Motival derivations in the life of St.Samthann': 'A

lascivious cleric persuades a young girl in Samthann's care to elope with him; while crossing a river, he is bitten in the groin by eels and flees to Samthann for forgiveness. ... The incident is reminiscent of Cú Chulainn's battle at the ford during which the Mórrígan attacks him underwater in form of an eel' (14). While this underlines the negative character of the eel, it still does not clarify the animal shapes in the context of Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan.

The eel's snake-like appearance may be promising. It is a well-known fact that there were no snakes in Ireland but nevertheless the snake (nathir) was known and appears in the literature. We read in Wolfgang Meid's *'Die Romanze von Fróech und Findabair: 'Die Irischen Einwanderer behielten - wie die Bewahrung des Wortes zeigt - trotzdem Kenntnis der Schlangen, einmal durch die anhaltenden Kontakte zu Britannien und dem Kontinent und der darauf basierenden fabulösen Reiseliteratur, zum anderen durch Darstellungen der bildenden Kunst und, nach Einführung des Christentums, durch die Rolle der Schlange in der Bibel'* (The retention of the word demonstrates that the Irish invaders still maintained knowledge of the snake. This happened on the one hand through the continuing contact with Britain and the continent and the fabulous travelling tales based upon this contact, and on the other hand through pictures and, after the introduction of Christianity, through the role of the snake in the Bible) (15). If the Irish knew about the snake, it is not too far fetched to suggest that they may have substituted an indigenous animal when snake-imagery was appropriate. Evidence for the snake's association with the eel comes from O'Mulcrony's glossary. Under *fet* we find a story how the serpents tricked eels (16) which points to their likeness. *Forbuis Droma Damghaire* 'The Siege of Drom Damghaire' features a magical stone which transforms itself into a 'snaky eel' when thrown into the water and which was previously charged to be, amongst other things, a red water-snake, a sea-eel and an adder (17). Finally, Nagy informs us that the word *escung* may mean 'water snake' if Stoke's etymology is correct. Stokes suggests the derivation from *esc* 'water' and **ong* which is cognate with Latin *anguis* (18).

It is interesting to see that the snake is a creature associated with war and warriors. Evidence for this comes from diverse sources. In one of the earliest Irish poems a

warrior-king is praised for destroying with snake poison: '*ein Schlachtenkönig welcher Länder mit Natterngift (nathrach) verheerte*' (a battle king who devastated countries with snake poison) (19). *Tochmarc Ferbe* has a similar image '*7 ba nathir nemi ... und war eine Schlange voller Gift*', (... and was a snake full of poison) which refers to a warrior's fighting power (20). One of the most intriguing snake stories is that of Fróech and Conall Cernach in *Táin Bó Fraích*. The events are set abroad as are all tales figuring snakes (see above). Conall Cernach helps Fróech to conquer the castle where Fróech's family is held prisoner. A dangerous snake guards the castle and seems to be the main obstacle to the rescue operation. However, instead of the great fight the reader expects, the snake just jumps into Conall Cernach's belt and goes to sleep (21). A.Ross has an interesting theory on this, derived from continental sculptures showing snakes wound around the waist of a horned god figure. She reminds us that Cernach contains the word *cern*, which is related to horn, and suggests that the above scene of Cernach carrying the snake in his belt is an echo of the horned god and snake depictions (22). This could make the snake the protector of the warrior, or possibly just a warrior's symbol.

In this connection it may be worthwhile to refer to Kim McCone's comments on the Gundestrup cauldron here (23). His analysis focuses on the importance of the wolf as a warrior symbol. He notes that the wolves appear above the heads of the warriors who go towards the cauldron into which a much larger, possibly divine figure throws the approaching men. Just above is another line of men facing away from the cauldron. McCone reckons that the line going towards the cauldron are the youthful, not yet settled *díberga* 'brigands' who, after their initiation, become the mature and settled farmer-soldiers. While he deduces that the wolf is particularly associated with the *díberg*-type warriors he does not comment on the snakes situated above the second line of men. However, following the same line of interpretation, the snake could be seen as the symbol of the mature warriors.

The above evidence establishes the eel as a 'water-snake' with clearly martial associations. It could, in fact, be a symbol of warrior-hood in the same way as the

dog/hound represents warriors.

However, Cú Chulainn is never said to be an eel in the same way as he is a dog or wolf and, on first sight, it is only by virtue of him being a warrior that the connection with the eel/snake can be made. When looking at the stories very closely it is possible to see a more specific link. We noticed how Cú Chulainn catches the eel between his toes. This place is called *ladair* and just happens to be the same body part with which he operates his magical weapon, the *gáe bolga*. This weapon, as Nagy points out, has a great similarity to an eel: 'Functional only in water, the *gáe bolga* makes an appearance in the fight with Loch almost as a variation on the mysterious underwater threat encountered by the hero immediately before he throws his special weapon: the threat posed by the goddess Morrígan in the shape of a twisting, enveloping eel' (24).

It seems that both Cú Chulainn's most vicious enemy and his most effective weapon are not only close in appearance but are also associated with the same part of Cú Chulainn's body. So while Cú Chulainn is never said to be an eel in the same way as he is a dog/wolf he is nevertheless intimately associated with a weapon that is suspiciously close to an eel. I don't think it is too far fetched to see eel pitched against eel in the same way as wolf is pitched against wolf.

Finally, it may be interesting to point out that the Morrígan herself is associated with serpents in the story of the place Berba. Here she has a monstrous son, Meche, whose heart contains three serpents (*...co ndelbaib tri natrach treitlib*). 'Now if death had not befallen Meche the serpents in him would have grown, and what they left alive in Ireland would have wasted away' (25). Mac Cecht kills Meche and burns the serpents to ashes (*berba*). Even these remnants are so vicious that the river into which they are thrown boils up and kills all the fish in it.

In the third attack she comes in the shape of a red, hornless (literally 'shorn') heifer (*samaisc [ff]*). The study of this animal is more complicated than the previous ones because cattle were an extremely important part of Irish life with the effect that the vocabulary and the associations attached to each type of cattle are much more detailed. The other animals, wolf and eel, have not been examined according to

gender differences because no detailed information is available in their case. However, in the case of cattle, it makes a great deal of difference whether one speaks of a female or a male. Cows are docile, domesticated creatures important for their ability to give milk, while bulls are renowned for their fights, unpredictable and better watched from a distance. Additionally, the Morrigan appears as a wolf and eel only once while she is associated with cattle numerous times. The investigation of the heifer thus has to proceed on slightly different lines from the above, and the following steps are taken: First of all, some introductory comments on the importance of cattle are necessary. Secondly, the symbolism of the heifer is approached. Thirdly, some comments on bulls are necessary because of the close relationship between heifers and bulls on the one hand and warriors and bulls on the other. Finally, the Morrigan's connection with bulls is examined.

The cow is usually a beneficial creature. As A.T. Lucas writes in his study of 'Cattle in Ancient Ireland': '... in ancient Irish society cows were not merely one kind of domestic animal but ... they were of such overweening importance that they almost had a status as a member of society' (26). The importance of cows lies in the fact that they yield milk as 'Milk and its products accounted for a large part of the national diet.' Not surprisingly, therefore 'The cow was the measure of everything: it was the unit of value; the ultimate in poverty was the man with only one cow; the wealth of the richest consisted of a vast herd of them' (27). Given the importance of the cow, how does the heifer (*samaisc*) figure in this scheme? Wolfgang Meid explains the term *samaisc* as 'summer-dry' from *sam* meaning 'summer' and *sesc* meaning 'dry, barren' and therefore she is a cow '*die noch kein Kalb gehabt hat und daher 'im Sommer trocken ist'* (a cow which has not yet borne a calf and is therefore 'summer-dry') (28). *Sesc* also features in the term *sesc-slabrae* 'small and still unproductive cattle' (DIL). Heifers are listed among this group, together with *dairt*, *dartaid*, *colpthach*, etc. Although a heifer would naturally be dry due to its young age and obviously contain within itself the potential of becoming a useful cow it is quite possible that the term may have unpleasant overtones, particularly if we note that *seisc* can also mean 'dead' (29).

Additionally, the term *seisc* possibly surfaces amongst the names of Cailb, the hag foretelling Conaire's death. The word is *seiscleand* which Sayers interpretes as *seisc* 'dry' and *lann* 'ground', although he also offers *seisc* 'rushy place' (30). We can surmise that while the animal is at the heifer stage, there is no way of knowing whether she will turn out to be a beneficial, milk-giving cow or a barren, unproductive one. Thus, the heifer may be regarded as ambiguous.

When examining the stories featuring heifers we find that the connotations are mainly sexual. In context of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* we immediately think of the Donn Cúailnge who is constantly surrounded by heifers. While Recension 1 simply mentions their presence, Recension 2 emphasizes their role as sexual mates - after the Morrígan's warning is received by the Donn, he takes his heifers away to the mountains and fertilises fifty of them every day. If they do not calf within twentyfour hours, they burst (31). Any dangerous overtones in these examples derive from the bull, not the heifers.

Another famous *samaisc* is Deirdriu. Maria Tymoczko points to the sexual inuendo in the first conversation between Deirdriu and Noisiu: 'Fair,' he said, 'is the heifer that goes past me.' 'Heifers,' she said, 'are bound to be big where bulls are not wont to be.' Tymoczko writes: 'In the original Noisiu doesn't just call Deirdriu a 'heifer' but a *samaisc*, a 'two-year-old heifer', one well able to be bred' (32). Noisiu, in turn, is referred to as a young bullock and contrasted with 'the bull of the province', ie king Conchobor and Deirdriu's husband-to-be. Again, it is not the heifer who carries an air of danger but the 'bull of the province', in conflict with the young bullock.

It seems, therefore, that an analysis of the heifer continually leads back to the bulls, as if they could not be seen separately. This is due to the fact that heifers, in order to become mature cows, need to be fertilised. Consequently, the heifer carries mainly sexual overtones. A certain ambivalence may be expressed through the term *sec*, 'dry, barren' in the term *samaisc*.

Bulls are equally seen as sexually potent, as the examples from the *Táin* make clear. However, they are also notoriously dangerous, as mentioned above, and for

that reason they are associated with warriors (33). A few examples will suffice. Connud mac Morna, one of the Ulster warriors, is described as 'fierce and bull-like' (*... is é derisc tarbda*) (34) while another one, Mend mac Sálcholgán, is called a 'mad bull' (*tarb dásachtach*) (35). Finally, an episode in the final battle involving the young son of Cairpre Nia Fer is described wholly in bovine terminology: 'Bravely will those powerful bulls roar as they rescue the calf of their own cow in the battle on the morrow's morn.' (*Is ferda conbúrfet in damrad dermór oc tessargain laíg a mbó issi[n] chath issin matin se imbárach*) (36). Bull imagery is also apparent in Longes Mac nUislenn, as quoted above, where both Noisiu, a young warrior, and the king are called bulls. This latter example brings to mind the expression used for the reign of a violent and war-like king, which is *tairb-flaith*, 'bull-reign' (37). Finally, the fight of the bulls in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* mirrors the struggle between the Ulstermen and the Connachta, with the Ulster bull bearing victory but dying of his efforts, so that nothing is gained, exactly as in the human conflict.

Being a warrior, Cú Chulainn obviously shares the same conceptual background as a bull. Just like Cú Chulainn, the Donn Cúailnge is a protector, as *Táin Bó Cúailnge 2* makes clear: 'It was one of his virtues that no spectre or sprite or spirit of the glen dared to come into one and the same canton as he' (*Ba do búadaib Duind Chúailnge ná laimed bánanach nó bocánach nó geniti glinni tascud d'óentríchait chét friss*) (38).

However, Cú Chulainn is never directly called a bull, nor are there any further signs of a special relationship between him and the Donn in the *Táin*. *Táin Bó Regamna.*, on the other hand, brings Cú Chulainn's 'bovine nature' out into the open because the Morrígan links a calf's life-span to Cú Chulainn. When the calf is a year old, she claims, it will die, and so will Cú Chulainn. Moreover, the calf is the son of the Donn Cúailnge and the Morrígan's cow (39).

It is suggestive that the Morrígan herself is very closely linked to the Donn Cúailnge. First of all, she seems to be especially concerned for his welfare as she warns him of Medb's approaching armies. It is because of her that he moves on to a safer place (40). In all other instances, the Morrígan takes no positive interest in

any particular figure. Secondly, the cow driven by the Morrígan in *Táin Bó Regamna* and *Echtra Nerai* has been bulled by the Donn himself (41). Thirdly, her partner in *Táin Bó Regamna* is called Dáire mac Fiachna who is the owner of the Donn Cúailnge (42). The name Dáire itself appears as Dáire Donn, suggesting a close relationship of the two figures (43).

It seems to me that the martial symbolism of bulls, the close connection between the Morrígan and the Donn Cúailnge, her transformation into a heifer and Cú Chulainn's association with a calf clearly expresses an overlap between the natures of Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan. They are inseparably intertwined, a fact which is also communicated through their appearance as wolves and the similarity of Cú Chulainn's most powerful weapon with the Morrígan's eel manifestation. I would conclude, therefore, that the three animal shapes are far from being arbitrary choices. Every one of them challenges an aspect of Cú Chulainn's nature and one gains the impression that his whole existence as a warrior is at stake.

Returning to Dumézil's research it can be said that the model of fighting the three-fold enemy is not followed exactly in this incident because the foe has to be killed in order to complete the initiation into warrior-hood. A fight which ends so ambiguously could hardly be construed as a triumph. Glory lies not in killing the Morrígan, but in resisting her.

With regard to the three-fold nature of the Morrígan we may fare slightly better because it is expressed in other ways and outside this particular tale as well. First of all, her name appears in the plural. Cormac's explains '*guidemain*' as '*úatha 7 mórígna*' (44) while O'Mulcrony describes Macha as '*badb .i. nó así na tres mórigan (Macha, ie badb, or she is the third mórigan)*' (45). We noticed her association with cows which fits in well with her offer of cattle and treasure, as well as her love. All these are examples of the third function. Her interest in war and conflict is undisputed - every tale in which she features bears witness to this, as does her appearance as a carrion crow. Finally, she is also skilful with words - she identifies herself as a satirist and demonstrates her skills as a seer when she speaks, for example, to the Donn Cúailnge (46) or to the Dagda in *Cath Maige Tuired* (47).

We can conclude that the three-fold nature of the Morrigan appears in different ways all through the tales, even though the details are not always consistent. This could possibly be read as an indication that the Morrigan may have had a much wider role than appears from the tales. What exactly this role may have been is open to speculation. However, by the time the Morrigan is portrayed in the texts her different aspects are continually set in a context of deceit and clearly played out on a martial background and it is the martial context which is of interest to this study.

Notes to Chapter 3:

- 1) Scott Littleton, C. 'The New Comparative Mythology' (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966) for a summary and discussion of Dumézil's approach.
- 2) Dumézil, G. 'The Destiny of the Warrior' (Chicago, 1970) p.10
- 3) McCone, K. 'Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen' in Meid, W. (ed) 'Studien zum Indogermanischen Wortschatz' Universität Innsbruck (1987) p.101
- 4) TBC1 ll.540-604
- 5) ie this is not a case where the hound 'does not know friend from enemy' as E. Grey suggests in 'Lug and Cú Chulainn : King and Warrior, God and Man' *Studia Celtica* vol 24-25 (1989-90), p.38. As far as the hound is concerned, all friends have arrived, otherwise the fort would not have been locked.
- 6) Ó Cathasaigh, T. 'The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt' (Dublin, 1977), p.14-6
- 7) McCone, Kim 'Aided Cheltchair Maic Uthechair: Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers in Early Irish Myth and Story' *Eriu* 35 (1984), p.6-11
- 8) O'Rahilly, T.F. 'Early Irish History and Mythology', (Dublin, 1946), p.121-4
- 9) 'The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt' p.14-16
- 10) 'Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers' p.9
- 11) *ibid.* p.18
- 12) 'Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers' p.14
- 13) Stokes, W. 'The Voyage of the Húi Corra', RC14 (1893), 48.57. 'sruth do escanguibh' - a river of eels. Interestingly, it is devils in the shape of otters, eels and black swans. Todd, J.H. 'The Irish Version of the *Historia Britonum* of Nennius' (Dublin, 1848), p.206 which tells of the blind man who brings out eels from the Shannon. Interestingly he catches them in the 'forks of his hands and feet' which, presumably, is the same place with which Cú Chulainn holds his *gáe bolga*. (Also noted by Nagy, J.F. see note 16)
- 14) Bray, D.A. 'Motival Derivations in the Life of St. Samthann' SC 20-21 (1985-6), p.82
- 15) Meid, W. 'Die Romanze von Fróech und Findabair' (Innsbruck, 1970) p.215, note 337
- 16) Stokes, W. 'O'Mulcrony's glossary' *Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie* vol.1 (Halle, 1900), p.259, ref. found in Nagy, J.F. 'Otter, Salmon and Eel in Traditional Gaelic Narrative', SC 20-21 (1985-86) p.137.
- 17) Sjoestedt-Jonval, M.L. (ed. and transl.) 'Forbuis Droma Damhghaire', RC 43 (1926), p.1-123, and RC 44 (1927), p. 157-186. Contest found in RC 43, p.86 but the spell is not given. Translation in O'Curry, E. 'On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish', (London, New York 1873) p.280ff
- 18) 'Otter, Salmon and Eel' p.139 and p.141, note 9.
- 19) Meyer, K. 'Über die älteste Irische Dichtung', (Berlin 1913-14), p.43
- 20) Windisch, E. 'Tochmarc Ferbe', in Stokes, W. and Windisch, E. (ed) *Irische Texte, Dritte Serie, 2. Heft*, (Leipzig, 1897), 1.309, p.486 '...ba nathir nemi' transl. p.487 '...war eine Schlange voller Gift'.
- 21) Meid, W. 'Táin Bó Fraích', (Dublin, 1967) pp.13-16, §§ 25-31
- 22) Ross, A. 'Pagan Celtic Britain - Studies in Iconography and Tradition', (London, 1993), p.127ff
- 23) 'Hund, Wolf und Krieger' p.112-3
- 24) 'Otter, Salmon and Eel' p.130
- 25) Stokes, W. 'The prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas' RC15 (1894), No.13, p.304-5
- 26) Lucas, A.T.: 'Cattle in Ancient Ireland' (Kilkenny, 1989), p.3
- 27) *ibid.* p.4
- 28) 'Die Romanze von Fróech und Findabair', note to line 207, p.185.
- 29) The story of the river Odras (Gwynn, E. 'The Metrical Dindsenchas' vol.4 (1924) p.196-201) tells of a woman, Odras, who meets death at the hands of the Morrígan and is subsequently transformed into a river. Despite this 'watery' fate, the Metrical Dindsenchas express her death as 'sicce' ie dryness. The same metaphor can also be found in *Tochmarc Ferbe* where Mane is said to be 'secmarb' (l.471, p.496) - translated by Windisch as 'starr-tot' (p.497) but literally 'dry-dead'. In his notes (p.539) he quotes two further cases of this usage.
- 30) Sayers, W. 'Supernatural Pseudonyms' *Emania* 12 (1994), p.56.
- 31) For example TBC1 1.963, .1492, etc.

- 32) Tymoczko, M. 'Animal Imagery in Loinges Mac nUislenn' *Studia Celtica* 20-21 (1985-86), 145-166
- 33) *ibid.* p.151; also Rees A. and Rees B. 'Celtic Heritage' (London, 1961) p.124
- 34) TBC2 ll.440-1
- 35) *ibid.* ll.451-5
- 36) *ibid.* ll.455-8-9
- 37) Kelly, F. 'Audacht Morainn' (Dublin, 1976), p.18-19.
- 38) TBC2 ll.1326-8
- 39) see chapter 4 for details
- 40) TBC1 ll.954-62; TBC2 ll.1303-17
- 41) Windisch, E. 'Táin Bó Regamna' *IT* 2,2 l.53, p.244; Meyer, K. 'Echtra Nerai' *RC*10 (1889) p.222, l.121
- 42) 'Táin Bó Regamna' l.39 and l.54. In 'De Chophur in dá Muccida' Dáire is the owner of the cow who becomes mother of the Donn Cuailnge. (Windisch, E. *IT* 3, p.243-247)
- 43) Ó hÓgáin, D. 'Myth, Legend and Romance - An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition' (London, 1990) p.147 'Elsewhere we find the name Dáire being given to the owner of the great bull, the Donn Cuailnge, and appellations of characters such as Dáire Donn and Dáire Dearg indicate that the name was originally on a functional par with others such as Donn and Dearg.' He further suggests that the Donn Cuailnge is a reflex of Donn, the god of the dead, which would make the relationship between the Morrígan and the Donn particularly appropriate. Also suggested by T. Ó Cathasaigh in 'The Eponym of Cnogba' *Éigse* 23 (1989), p.35 'The use of 'The Bull' (an island off the coast of Kerry) as equivalent to 'Donn's House' has given rise to the plausible notion that the eponymous Donn is to be identified with the great bull as In Donn Cuailnge. Dáire is a taurine name; the ancestor of the Corcu Luigde is also called Dáire Donn, and seems to be identical with Donn.'
- 44) Stokes, W. 'Three Irish Glossaries' (London and Edinburgh, 1862), p.24
- 45) Stokes, W. 'O'Mulcrony's Glossary' *Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie*, vol.1 (Halle, 1900) p.271, para.813
- 46) TBC1 ll.954-56
- 47) CMT ll.362-3

Chapter 4:
THE MORRÍGAN'S CHALLENGE TO CÚ CHULAINN IN
TÁIN BÓ REGAMNA

Cú Chulainn's quarrel with the shapeshifting lady is not confined to the context of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. One tale, *Táin Bó Regamna*, (1) offers another opening scene to the conflict. In all likelihood, *Táin Bó Regamna* was known before the *Imacallam* episode became interpolated because the former is referred to after the fight in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (2). Further, the conception of the calf which plays such a significant role in *Táin Bó Regamna* is also told in *Echtra Nerai* (3) and relevant evidence will be quoted throughout this chapter.

As the story is very important for a proper understanding of the encounter between Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan, as well as providing further details about the Morrígan herself, it is necessary to quote the whole text rather than just a summary of it.

'When Cuchullin lay in sleep in Dún Imrid, he heard a cry sounding out of the north, a cry terrible and fearful to his ears. Out of a deep slumber he was aroused by it so suddenly, that he fell out of his bed upon the ground like a sack, in the east wing of the house.

He rushed forth without his weapons, until he gained the open air, his wife following him with his armour and his garments. He perceived Laegh in his harnessed chariot coming towards him from Ferta Laig in the North. 'What brings thee here?' said Cuchullin. 'A cry that I heard sounding across the plain,' said Laegh. 'From which direction?' said Cuchullin. 'From the north-west,' said Laegh, 'across the great highway leading to Caill Cuan.' 'Let us follow the sound,' said Cuchullin.

They go forward as far as Ath da Ferta. When they arrived there, they heard the rattle of a chariot from the loamy district of Culgaire (4). They saw before them a chariot harnessed with a chestnut horse. The horse had (but) one leg, and the pole of the chariot passed through its body, so that the peg in front met the halter passing across its forehead. Within the chariot sat a woman, her eye-brows red, and

a crimson mantle round her. Her mantle fell behind her between the wheels of the chariot so that it swept along the ground. A big man went along beside the chariot. He also wore a coat [of crimson], and on his back he carried a forked staff of hazelwood, while he drove a cow before him.

'The cow is not pleased to be driven on by you,' said Cuchullin. 'She does not belong to you,' said the woman; 'the cow is not owned by any of your friends or associates.' 'The cows of Ulster belong to me,' said Cuchullin. 'You would give a decision about the cow!' said the woman; 'you are taking too much upon yourself, O Cuchullin!'

'Why is it the woman who accosts me?' said Cuchullin. 'Why is it not the man? 'It is not the man to whom you addressed yourself,' said the woman. 'O yes,' said Cuchullin, 'but it is you who answer for him.' 'He is *Uar-gaeth-sceo Luachair-sceo*' (5). 'Well, to be sure, the length of the name is astonishing!' said Cuchullin. 'Talk to me then yourself, for the man does not answer. What is your name?' 'The woman to whom you speak,' said the man, 'is called *Faebor beg-beoil cuimdiur folt scenb-gairit sceo uath* (6). 'You are making a fool of me!' said Cuchullin. And he made a leap into the chariot. He put his two feet on her two shoulders, and his spear on the parting of her hair. 'Do not play your sharp weapons on me!' she said. 'Then tell your true name,' said Cuchullin. 'Go further off from me then,' said she. 'I am a female satirist, and he is Daire mac Fiachna of Cúailnge; I carry off this cow as a reward for a poem.' Let us hear your poem,' said Cuchullin. 'Only move further off,' said the woman. 'Your shaking over my head will not influence me.' Then he moved off until he was between the two wheels of the chariot. Then she sang to him ... Cuchullin prepared to spring again into the chariot; but horse, woman, chariot, man, and cow, all had disappeared.

Then he perceived that she had been transformed into a black bird on a branch close to him. 'A dangerous enchanted woman you are!' said Cuchullin. 'Henceforth this *Grellach* shall bear the name of the 'enchanted place' (*dolluid*), said the woman; and *Grellach Dolluid* it was called. 'If I had only known that it was you,' said Cuchullin, 'we should not have parted thus. 'Whatever you have done,' said she, 'will bring you ill-luck.' 'You cannot harm me,' said he. 'Certainly I can,' said

the woman. 'I am guarding your death-bed, and I shall be guarding it henceforth. I brought this cow out of the *Sídh* of Cruachan so that she might breed by the bull of Daire mac Fiachna, namely the Donn of Cúailnge. So long as her calf shall be a yearling, so long shall thy life be; and it is this that shall cause the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.' 'My name shall be all the more renowned in consequence of this Táin,' said the hero (7).

'How wilt thou manage that?' said the woman; for, when thou art engaged in a combat with a man as strong, as victorious, as dexterous, as terrible, as untiring, as noble, as brave, as great as thyself, I will become an eel, and I will throw a noose round thy feet in the ford, so that heavy odds will be against thee.

'I swear by the God by whom the Ultonians swear,' said Cuchullin, 'that I will bruise thee against a green stone of the ford; and thou never shalt have any remedy from me if thou leavest me not.' 'I shall also become a grey wolf for thee, and I will take (...?) from thy right hand, as far as to thy left arm.'

'I will encounter thee with my spear,' said he, 'until thy left or right eye is forced out; and thou shalt never have help from me, if thou leavest me not.'

'I will become a white red-eared cow,' said she, 'and I will go into the pond beside the ford, in which thou art in deadly combat with a man, as skilful in feats as thyself, and an hundred white red-eared cows behind me; and I and all behind me will rush into the ford, and the 'Faithfulness of men' will be brought to the test that day, and thy head shall be cut off from thee.'

'I will with my sling make a cast against thee,' said he, 'so that thy right or thy left leg will be broken, and thou shalt never have help from me, if thou dost not leave me.'

Thereupon the Morrighu (8) departed into the *Sídh* of Cruachan in Connacht, and Cuchullin returned to his dwelling.'

(Dia m-bai Cuchulaind ina cotlad i n-Dun Imrind co cuala in gem a-tuaid cach n-direoch ina dochum 7 ba granda 7 ba haduathmar lais in gem. Co n-diuchrastair triana codlad conid corustair cor n-asclaind asa imda for lar i n-airrthiur in tigi. Luid cen armu amach iartain co m-bai forsín faithci, conid ben ruc ina diaid imach a armu do 7 a edach ina diaid. Co n-aca Laeg ina charbad indelti o Ferta

Laig a-tuaid. 'Cid dot-uca?' ol Cuchulaind. 'Gem dochuala tarsa mag' ar Laeg. 'Cid leth?' ar Cuchulaind. 'An-iarthuid amne' ar Laeg, '.i. iar sliqid moir do Chaill Cuan. 'Ina n-diaid dun' ar Cuchulaind.

Tiagaid as iarum corici Ath da Ferta. In tan badar ann iarum i suidiu co cualadar culgairi in charbaid do thaeb Grelcha Culgairi. Co n-acadar in carpad remib 7 aenech derg fai. Oenchos on fan each oculus sithbi in carpaid tria sechnach inn eich co n-dechaid gend trit fri fosad a edain anair. Ben derg and cona dib braaib dercaib 7 a brat 7 a edach. A brat itir di fert in charpaid siar co siged lar ina dedaid 7 fer mor i comair in charpaid: fuan forptha imbi 7 gaballorg findchuill fria ais, ic imain nam-bo faithi...

'Ni fa lib in bo occa himain' ol Cuculaind. 'Ni dir deit' ol in ben, 'ni bo charad na choicele duit.' 'Is dir dam-sa' ol Cuculaind 'bai Ulad.' 'Eitircertaisiu an ba' ol in ben, 'ba romor ara-curther laim lat a Cuculaind.' 'Cid arindid hi in ben adomgladathar?' ol Cuchulaind. 'Cid na bu in fer?' 'Ni fer sin adgladaithe-su' ol in ben. 'hIa' ol Cuchulaind, 'orus tusu ara-labradar.' 'hUar gaeth sceo Luachar sceo he' ol si. 'Amae is amra fat in anma' ol Cuculaind. 'Bad tusa tra adomgladadar ol nim agailnide or in fer. Cia do comainm-siu fen?' ol Cuculaind. 'In ben sin adgladaithe-su' ol in fer 'Febor begbeoil cuimdiur folt scenb-gairit sceo uath.'

'Mearaigi dognithi dim-sa' ol Cuculaind. Lasodain lingthi Cuchulaind isin carbad. Forrumai a di chois air sin for a dib guaillib 7 a cleitine for a mullach. 'Na himir imrindi form.' 'Nod sloind di firslondud' ol Cuchulaind. 'Scuch dim di' ol si. 'Am banchainti-sea em' ol si '7 is e Dairi mac Fiachna a Cúailnge, dofucus i m-boin-sea i n-duais n-airchedail.' 'Cluinem intaircedal di' ol Cuchulaind. 'Scuich dim nama' ol in ben 'amal no chrothai uas mo chind.' Teit iarum, co m-bai itir di fert in charbaid, gaibthi od iarum:...

Focert Cuchulaind bedg ina carpad, ni facai in ech na in mnai na in carpad na in fer na in m-boin. Co n-acca ba hen-si dub forsin craib ina farrad. 'Doltach ben adadcomnaic' ol Cuchulaind. 'Dolluid beos forsin n-grelraig' ol in ben, .i. Grelloch ... Dolluid iarum.

'Acht co fesind ... bid tu' ol Cuchulaind, 'ni bad samlaid no scarfamais.' 'Cid a n-

darignisiu' ol si 'rod bia olc de.' 'Ni cuma dam' ol Cuchulaind. 'Cumcim eicin' ol in ben, 'is ac diten do bais-siu atusa 7 biad' ol si. 'Dofucusa in m-boin-sea a sith Cruachan, co n-da-ro-dart in Dub Cúailnge lim i Cúailnge .i. tarb Dairi maic Fiachna. Ised aired bia-su i m-beathaid corop dartaig in laeg fil i m-broind na bo so, 7 i e consaithbe Tain bo Cúailnge.

Bid am airdercu-siade din tain hisin' ol Cuchulaind.

'Gegna a n-anrada

brisfe a morchatha

bid a tigba na tana.'

'Cia cruth conicbe so' ol in ben, 'ar tain in tan no m-bia-sa icomrac fri fer comtren comcernda coimclis comfobaid coimescaid coimceniuil comgaiscid comed frit, biad-sa im escaing 7 fochicher curu im do chosa isinn ath co m-ba hecomlond mor duit.'

'Tongai do dia toingthe Ulaid' ol Cuchulind, 'for-da-nesiub-sa fir glasleca inn atha, 7 ni cod bia icc uaim-sea co brath, manim derga-su.'

'Bid am sod glas dono duid-seo' ol sisi, '7 gebad breth dit doit n-deiss corici do rigid cli.' 'Nad benab-sa secum' ol esium 'cosin cleitiniu combeba do suil cle no dess it chind, 7 ni cot bia icc uaim-sea co brath, manim dergaither.' 'Biat-sa am samaisce find oghdeirg di' ol si '7 dorag isin lindid i fail inn atha i m-bia-so icomrac fri fear, 7 cet m-bo find n-oderg im deoid, 7 mebusmet uile im dedaid-sea isin ath, 7 conbibustar fir fer in la sin 7 gettair do chend dit.' 'Fochicher-sa erchor as mo thabaill fort-su' ol esium 'combeba do ser n-deis no chli fout, 7 ni con bia do cobair uaim-sea, manim dergaisse.'

Luid ass in badb iarum 7 dointa Cuchulaind dia treib fodesin, conad remscel do thanaid bo Cúailnge sin. Finit amen.)

'When Cuchulinn lay asleep in Dun Imrid...' - after witnessing Cú Chulainn's unceasing efforts in the *Táin* it is curious to find him asleep for once. Obviously times are peaceful and Cú Chulainn must have assumed that the province did not need guarding. However, when the hero sleeps, he himself, the land and the people are in danger. Even while still a boy, Cú Chulainn's sleep caused the Ulstermen to be defeated and left the king as good as dead (9). In *Serglige Con Culaind* his

sleep nearly costs him his life and sanity (10) while another hero, Nera, falls asleep and allows the Morrígan to steal a cow, again with disastrous consequences (11). Even a woman, Odras, loses one of her cows, and ultimately her life, because of sleep (12). Sleep means vulnerability and being laid wide open, particularly to otherworldly attack. So Cú Chulainn could not have been more mistaken in assuming that all was peaceful. The otherworldly intrusion tears him out of his sleep with such vehemence that he falls out of bed and rushes into the open, naked and without thinking straight.

While his nakedness is due to him being caught unawares, it has to be remembered that it is also the sign of a man who is at the height of battle frenzy. Numerous examples bear witness to this. Stark-naked men roam the countryside in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* while fires rage everywhere, the connection surely being no accident (13). In the death-tale of Finn fierce, naked men, hot from battle, announce Finn's apparent treachery (14), while *Táin Bó Flidais* features warriors who have left the battle because of injuries but are taunted to such an extent that they jump up in a fit of frenzied strength and throw themselves back into the fight stark-naked (15). One of the reasons for men in this state to be naked is because warrior ardour is often expressed by the metaphor of heat. Consider, for example, a passage in *Táin Bó Cúailnge I*: 'Cú Chulainn had taken off his shirt and was sitting in the snow up to his waist while around him the snow had melted a man's length, so great was the fierce ardour of the warrior.' (*Is and ro boí Cú Chulaind iar [m]béim dei a léned 7 in snechta immi ina sudiu co rici a crís, 7 ro lega in snechta immi fercumat fri méit brotha in míled*) (16). As Cú Chulainn is in the midst of conflict it is no surprise to find him exuding this heat even while just sitting around. P.L. Henry writes about the heat of the warriors: 'These accounts cannot have sounded quite so weird in an Irish context, since the O.Ir. verb *fichid* links up the meanings 'fights' and 'boils', and the associated term *gal* combines the meanings 'steam, vapour, mist' with 'valour'. *Gal* is verbal noun to *fichid* 'fights' while *fí(u)chud* is verbal noun to *fichid* 'boils'. The association of 'seething' with 'valour' is assured by the further term *bruth* which combines these meanings with 'intense heat' and 'fiery glow' (17). It is also worth mentioning that Norse and

Germanic warriors used to go to war naked (18).

However, frenzy is inappropriate in this situation as Cú Chulainn is not going to battle. As the story unfolds it becomes apparent that clear thinking rather than warrior ardour is needed in order to understand the Morrígan's elusive conversation. Further, Cú Chulainn acts very much as the protector of Ulster and in a frenzied state distinctions between who is to be attacked or protected fall by the way-side. Cú Chulainn's wife seems to have a better grasp of the situation than he has himself and aids him by preparing him properly for the dispute to come. She clothes him and gives him his weapons which presumably changes him from a frenzied force, raw, wild, uncivilized, to a proper warrior who knows his task as a protector. Her initiative could be seen as functionally equivalent to the actions of the women showing themselves naked to Cú Chulainn when in his distorting fury, thus calming him down.

Focusing on Cú Chulainn's wife for a moment we notice that a dangerous female figure is here juxtaposed to a helpful one. The dangerous one belongs to the wild, the helpful one to the domestic sphere. One could speculate that Cú Chulainn's wife, by clothing him, prevents Cú Chulainn from being lost from the ordered social sphere to the wild realm, the realm of the Morrígan, where divisions into friend and foe no longer apply. This dual notion of women is a theme which appears frequently in Irish stories and will be commented upon throughout this study.

Cú Chulainn's violent reaction is, of course, induced by the cry. The *Egerton Manuscript* makes the extraordinary character of the shout particularly clear by the way the sentence is constructed: '*...gu g-cuala ni an geim*' (Then they heard something, a cry) (19). The question as to its origin poses itself. Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux suggest that it is the Morrígan herself who utters the cry (20) which seems feasible, given her association with shrieking crows.

However, when analysing the language, their case is no longer quite so convincing. The word used here is *geim*, the verbal noun of *geisid*, meaning a shout or a roar. It is particularly associated with the lowing of a cow or the bellowing of a bull and also the technical term for a fool's roar, the *geim druth*. According to the DIL,

a deep, resonant, muffled sound is implied.

If we examine the words for the sounds the war-goddesses make the following facts appear. The Morrigan is associated with a cry only once more, ie. in *Cath Maig Rath*, where the expression is '*fuil osa chind ag eigmig ... in Morrighu*' (21). *Eigmech* is translated as 'screaming', 'crying out' in the DIL, while Hennessy translates it as 'shrieking' (22). The noise is coupled with her hopping over the points of the spears and one assumes that she is in bird-form.

The most common term for war-cries, uttered by warriors, is *gáir*. Pádraig Ó Riain writes: 'Another active contributor to the din of battle was the ceremonial shout or *gáir* which formed an important part of the Irish pattern of warfare. Furthermore, in accordance with the strong tendency to arrange in threes, the shouts uttered as a preamble to engagement in battle - or indeed in other activities involving assembly - generally numbered three, the usual Irish term being *trí gáire*. No doubt one of the functions of the *trí gáire* was to cause confusion among the opposing party. Therefore,..., it also served to inspire the terror necessary to cause defeat' (23).

Badb, Bé Neit and Nemain make this sound in *Táin Bó Cúailnge1*, (24) while Badb on her own appears shouting over the ford in *Táin Bó Cúailnge2* (25). The whole, horrible horde of spectres are equally vocal. *Táin Bó Cúailnge2* relates that: 'Such was the closeness of their encounter that sprites and goblins and spirits of the glen and demons of the air screamed from the rims of their shields ...' (26). In *Fled Bricrend*, the spirits of the glen (*geniti glinni*) on their own shriek at Cú Chulainn (*Nosgrechat na geniti dó...*) (27), but a different word is used, ie. *grechaid* which also means 'cries out, screams, shouts' (DIL). It is echoed by the battle-field spirits in the battle of Clontarf (28) and the badba themselves (29). Finally, the Badb emits a shout of victory (*foceird ilach*) in *Cath Almaine* (30), which is a different expression altogether.

We can conclude from this that the audible manifestations of the war-goddesses are mainly expressed by the words *gáirid*, in common with the warrior's war-cries (31), and *grechaid/screchaid*. *Geim* is obviously not among the words denoting the war-goddesses' cries. It may be worthwhile to point out that any scream, no matter from

which source, can have a startling and confusing effect, as illustrated by Deidriu's scream from the womb: 'At that scream (*scréich*) each man within arose from the other so that they were opposing each other in the house' (32). This supports the assumption that the screaming does not have to originate with the war-goddesses in order to wreak havoc.

So who is responsible for the sound? A close reading of a parallel story, *Echtra Nerai*, suggests a more suitable explanation. In this tale, *géim* and *tri géim* figure prominently: when Nera brings his family and his cattle out of the *síd* before the Connachtmen raid it, the bull calf, offspring of our cow in question and the Donn Cúailnge, bellows three times. Fergus hears it while playing *fidchel* and the sentence runs as follows: '*Co cualatar ni, géim in tairbini hissin mag.*' meaning 'They heard something, the bellowing of the bull calf in the plain' (33). Fergus interprets the bellowing as a bad omen because it foreshadows the events of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. In other words, it is also a terrible cry. So both the construction of the sentence in *Echtra Nerai* and the ominous nature of the sound fits in very well with what we know about the cry in *Táin Bó Regamna* I would suggest, therefore, the Morrígan's cow as the originator of this cry in *Táin Bó Regamna*, not the Morrígan herself. Just as the calf warned Fergus of things to come, its mother may also have alerted Cú Chulainn to the danger the Morrígan poses to him.

Properly prepared, Cú Chulainn meets with the strange figures near a ford, again a liminal place involving water. They are clearly otherworldly - even the cow is from the *síd* of Cruachain. The well-known feature of just having one leg, a component of the one-leg/eye/arm configuration, is manifested in the one-legged horse who is additionally skewered onto a pole which could be read as adding to the theme of mutilations. The figures themselves are not described as distorted. However, the woman's self-definition through her string of names suggest at least the theme of distortion: 'wasted body', 'thorny hair', 'stumpy and terrible' are hardly signs of beauty, while her 'sharp small mouth' is reminiscent of the crows. A second important feature is her red colouring, giving us an important clue as to her nature (34).

Given the strong presence of the colour red, it is appropriate to examine its symbolism, particularly as it is a constant in the tales of the war-goddesses (35). The word used here is *derg* one of main words denoting red, the other principal ones being *corcra*, *ruadh* and *flann*. All are used occasionally for wounds, blood, slaughter, but *corcra* is least frequently used in this way. It is mainly used for dyes and dyed garments and translated as purple. *Flann*, on the other hand, is almost exclusively used for blood and seems to have the connotations of freshly shed blood, ie. it is bright red. *Ruadh* and *derg* are broader in usage. *Ruadh* has the colour of old blood, blood stains and as it also denotes the colour of faded vegetation we get a picture of brownish red. It is used for 'war' *ruadh cathaib*, for 'blood' *crú ruadh* etc. but also for 'hair' and the colour of cheeks, particularly when blushing, the latter giving rise to *ruadruce* 'red shame'. *Ruadh* has also taken on the meaning for 'strong', 'powerful'.

Derg is a bright red again, used for blood, slaughter, weapons etc., but also for flames, heat, for ale and gold and for a ruddy complexion and red or tawny hair. It must be a colour close to orange and its brightness seems to have given rise to the use of it as an intensifying term. The DIL quotes *derg lomnocht* meaning 'stark naked' or *derg dásachtach* 'raging mad'. The colour terms are often combined, eg. *corcu derga*, *derg chorcra*, *derg ruadh*, *ruad derg* etc.

Returning to our story, the impression conveyed by this term is that of an intense, fiery red which has overtones, not only of blood and battle, but also of heat and flames, and therefore of overall danger. This is a bright, blazing, bloody lady Cú Chulainn has to deal with. It may not be too far fetched to suggest a conceptual connection with the metaphors of heat used to describe warrior ardour. If so, the appearance of the war-goddess as a red lady is most appropriate.

Not surprisingly, the woman appears to be the dominant character as she takes the initiative and speaks to Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn's surprise signals that the conversation does not comply with ordinary rules of behaviour. Evidently, the man should have been the first to speak. The Morrígan's position as main actor in the scene is supported by the parallel incident in *Echtra Nerai* where the male companion is omitted altogether. It is not quite certain what this man's name is. In

Leccan he is called *Dáire mac Fiachna*, but in the *Egerton Manuscript* this is the name of the cow's original owner.

The conflict between the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn arises because Cú Chulainn suspects the woman of stealing a cow, and as he is responsible for all cows in Ulster, this is very much his concern. However, the red lady sees this differently: 'You are taking too much upon yourself, O Cuchulinn.' In other words, she challenges one of the main aspects of Cú Chulainn's role, that of protecting Ulster's cows and therefore its wealth.

It may be as well to pause for a moment and note the frequency with which the Morrígan is associated with cows or cattle. In *Táin Bó Cúailnge* alone she offers cattle during her first appearance, she drives cows, as well as being a heifer, during her second appearance, and she milks a cow during her third appearance. *Echtra Nerai* echoes *Táin Bó Regamna* and in the place-lore of Odras the same theme appears again (36). As all these tales belong together it could be said that the frequency of association is probably slightly artificial - after all, the image could have moved from one tale to the next. However, the initial connection between the war-goddess and a cow can still be significant, even without the repetitions.

One explanation is put forward by Ó hÓgáin who suggests that the Morrígan is associated with cows because of the fact that much bloodshed takes place during cattle raiding. A connection between a goddess of war and a cow would therefore be quite natural (37).

However, the association may be more general still because women and cows are classed together. It was mentioned already that the cow served as a unit of value and it is equally true that a *cumal*, 'slavegirl', was also used in this way. Further, note how Sualtair describes the fate of Ulster to the incapacitated Ulster warriors: 'Men are slain, women carried off, cattle driven away' (*Fir gontair, mná bratter, baí aghtar*) (38). And a little later he says: 'Their cows, their womanfolk and their cattle have been carried off' (*Ructha a mbaí 7 a mná 7 a n-éti*) (39). Both Maria Tymoczko and Patricia Kelly have noted that cattle can be a metaphor for humans, and in particular cows for women (40). Thus, the link between the Morrígan and a

cow could be simply due to the fact that the Morrígan is female.

There follows a skillful exchange of words which hinges on the problem why the woman talks to Cú Chulainn and not the man, and words are just twisted and turned around without ever giving away any real information: 'Why is it the woman, who accosts me (*adom- gladathar*)... and she says: it is not the man to whom you addressed yourself (*adgladaithe-su*). Cú Chulainn replies: yes, but it is you who answers for him (*ara-labradar*)... and then demands: talk to me then yourself (*adom- gladadar* - amended, MS reads *adongladadar*) because the man does not speak to me (corrupt in MS, Windisch suggests *nim agailli in fer/nim agalladar in fer*) whereupon the man says: the woman to whom you speak (*adgladithe-su*)... When Cú Chulainn wants to know something about the man, the woman speaks for him, but as soon as Cú Chulainn accepts that he has to deal with the woman, the man begins to talk. In other words, they do exactly the opposite from what Cú Chulainn expects them to do. The whole conversation is totally confusing, and although Cú Chulainn holds his ground, he does not manage to gain any real information. The conversation goes nowhere. The same applies when he requests to learn their names because all he is offered is a string of apparently nonsensical words. However, Cú Chulainn's sarcastic reply to the man's names shows that he is no new-comer to the craft of words either: '*Amae is amra fat in anma*' which translates 'Alas, amazing is the length of the alias' (41).

After the woman's 'names' have been uttered, however, Cú Chulainn can no longer ignore the fact that he is being made a fool of. The word used here is most illuminating: he calls himself a *meraige* which the DIL defines as 'one whose wits are confused or disordered, a muddle-headed or scatter-brained person'. One could not ask for a better expression to describe the end-product of the Morrígan's activities! It is worth noting that *meraige* is related to the word *mer* which the DIL translates as 'off one's head, demented, crazy' which is interesting in view of what has been said about *nemain* and *dásacht*.

To regain control over the situation Cú Chulainn resorts to his weapons, in other words, he attempts to change from a verbal contest to a martial one. The woman counters with further words, again alliterated to heighten the impact: '*Na himir*

imrindi form.' meaning 'Do not play your sharp weapons on me!' However, she then yields and tells him at least that she is a satirist (and possibly also the name of her partner, see comments above). Of course, her story is a lie, if *Echtra Nerai* is to be believed, because there she actually stole the cow.

It is interesting to see how the skill with words and the skill with arms are juxtaposed in this story. Cú Chulainn is able to use both, but his competence is more than matched by the woman which is why Cú Chulainn attempts to move from the verbal to the physical level. The red lady is at a disadvantage here and appears to yield just enough for Cú Chulainn to stop using his weapons. No sooner is she back on her own ground, so to speak, than she hurls another insult at Cú Chulainn. A second physical attack is countered by her powers of transformation which leaves Cú Chulainn looking somewhat foolish. All along, the game is played according to her rules and Cú Chulainn, the great hero, is unable to take control of the situation. He is in the demeaning position of having to react to ever changing circumstances which are masterminded by his elusive opponent.

While the woman's skills are obviously due to her otherworldly origin, she further elaborates on these by claiming to be a female satirist. It is well known in Irish stories that satire can destroy a person's honour and thus his social standing, a fate considered much worse than death through combat. At the same time, satire is described in terms which suggest weapons. Both these issues are clearly exemplified by Fer Diad's reaction to Medb's messengers: 'For the sake of his honour Fer Diad came with them for he deemed it better to fall by shafts of valour and prowess and bravery than by the shafts of satire and reviling and reproach' (42).

Other instances further support the close association between weapons and satire. In the story of Caier and Néde, for example, Néde describes his craft as 'reddening a countenance, piercing flesh' (*romna rossa, rind feola*) and a glossator left us this explanation: 'the edge of his satire like a point in the flesh' (*faebur a aire hi feoil amail rind*) (43). Aithirne, the vitriolic satirist, is said to have '..had a spear which would slay a king' (44) while the laws tell us that the points of satire were more feared than the points of weapons (45). Finally, a *rinntaid* is defined as 'a man of

satire who wounds or cuts each face' (46), the face of course standing for a man's honour. Just as in the English language now, a man could suffer from 'loss of face' (*meth n-enech*) if he was dishonoured (47).

Not surprisingly, satire is used in war-fare. Note how Caipre in *Cath Maige Tuired* weakens the army 'I will make glám díceind against them. And I will satirize them and shame them so that through the spell of my art they will not be able to resist warriors' (*Degén-sai gláim ndícind dóuib, 7 nus-óerub 7 nus-anfialub cona gébat frie hócu trie bricht mo dána-sa*) (48).

Satirists were regarded as disreputable, certainly by the Church. Katherine Simms writes that a division into justified and unjustified satire took place early on. The latter encompassed everything the professional satirist pronounced. She describes the satirist's role in war: '...he may have been employed on occasion by warriors to kill, weaken or demoralize their enemies by the force of his satire,...' and emphasizes that they were 'vigorously condemned by the Church' (49). As to female satirists, Elliot writes: 'Women satirists are treated with particular harshness in the laws; sometimes they are equated with common scolds (although in saga, as we shall see, they had most uncommon powers); at other times they were classified with liars, thieves, and road-side trollops' (50).

The satirist thus carries an air of danger which makes it a most appropriate 'profession' for the war-goddess, particularly as it implies fighting without weapons and yet is equally or even more effective. As it serves to weaken the opponent it fits in well with the strategies the war-goddesses employ in general.

Also pertinent to our story is the way in which someone can resist being satirised without endangering his honour. A good example of this is an episode in Aithirne's 'career'. Aithirne was one of the most famous and most poisonous satirists in Ireland. He was so greedy that he never wanted to share food but was caught out one day when a stranger passed by while Aithirne was eating. The satirist demanded to know his name so he could compose a satire on the man and thus get rid of him, but the stranger gave him a string of nonsensical words which could not be rhymed and gained a share in the meal (51).

The Morrígan, being a satirist herself, knows the rules only too well and would thus be most hesitant to disclose her name. Withholding it means that she deprives Cú Chulainn of beating her at her own game.

At the same time many names could also be an indication that the person concerned cannot be defined by any one name, just as she is not limited to any one particular form. This latter ability is one she draws on in the second part of our story. When Cú Chulainn demands proof of her skills as a poet, she promptly delivers it. Unfortunately, the poem is not available but one can surmise that it contained something insulting because Cú Chulainn launches himself at the woman a second time. However, the evasive techniques demonstrated so skillfully before are brought to their climax now. Everything, cow, horse, man and woman, disappears, leaving only a black bird (*én dub*) on a branch. No matter how clever Cú Chulainn is with his words and weapons, ultimately the red lady remains (literally) beyond his grasp!

The conversation between the bird and Cú Chulainn is more or less the same as between the Morrígan in 'human' form and Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, with threats and counter-threats being uttered. The red-eared cow is substituted for the heifer, and the injuries are slightly different. The most noticeable difference for our purposes is Cú Chulainn's statement that he would never heal her if she did not leave him alone. Unlike the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, blessing is not mentioned and *bráth* only appears in the usual phrase *co bráth*, meaning 'until judgement', ie. for ever. What exactly this healing (*iccaid*) consists of is not divulged. Wendy Davies suggests that the meaning of *iccaid* 'to heal' tends to relate to preservation from death and with salvation rather than with medicinal remedies; hence the noun *icc* glosses '*salus, salvatio*' (52). That no ordinary, medicinal healing is envisaged is perfectly clear from our story and thus fits in with the use of *iccaid*. It is also implied that the Morrígan would be in need of healing after the encounter. Unfortunately, no further information about this healing is given in the passage. In other respects, however, *Táin Bó Regamna* contributes greatly to an understanding of the relationship between the two. Instead of just meddling in a particular conflict, the Morrígan claims that she can determine the length of Cú

Chulainn's life and the moment of his death.

First of all, she links his lifespan to that of a calf which will be born to the cow she is driving along with her and whose father is no other than the Donn Cúailnge. Heroes' lives are frequently connected very closely to animals. Cú Chulainn himself is born at the same time as two foals (53). More than that, however, this same calf is responsible for the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, according to *Echtra Nerai*. There, it is told that the calf fights the big bull of Connacht, the Finnbennach, and is defeated by him. The calf bellows, which arouses the curiosity of Medb and Buaigle interprets the bellow for her: 'if its father came to fight with it, viz. the Donn of Cúailnge, it would not be seen in Ai, and it would be beaten throughout the whole plain of Ai on every side.' Then said Medb in the manner of an oath: 'I swear by the gods that my people swear by, that I shall not lie down, ..., nor drink red ale nor white, nor shall I taste food, until I see those two kine fighting before my face' (54). There cannot be any doubt that the calf's existence is directly due to the machinations of the Morrígan, as the Irish text makes quite clear: '*Dofucusa in m-boin-sea a sith Cruachan, co n-da-ro-dart in Dub Cúailnge lim i Cúailnge .i. tarb Dáiri maic Fiachna.*' Amending Hull's translation this reads: 'I brought this cow out of the Sídh of Cruachan so that, because of me, she might breed by the Dub Cualinge in Cúailnge which is the bull of Dáire mac Fiachna.' And, of course, it is in this conflict that Cú Chulainn is meant to die.

The Morrígan seems to have a vested interest in his death. While any enemy obviously poses a threat to someone's life it is quite a different matter to involve all of Ireland in the plan. As well as being amazed at the extent of her machinations we also note the degree of importance this confers onto Cú Chulainn. Even if he had died in the conflict one could have said that it took a full-scale war to achieve his death. Yet it is still not enough glory for the favourite hero. Cú Chulainn has to survive against all the odds, whether from this world or the other. Exactly what her words are has been a matter of puzzlement and controversy. As we have seen, E.Hull writes: 'I am guarding your death-bed, and I shall be guarding it henceforth.' Similarly, Windisch translates '*Deinen Tod behütend bin ich und werde ich sein*' (55) while Hennessy adds a reference to the past: 'it is

protecting thee that I was, am, and will be' (56). The sentence, however, does not make sense because she does not protect him in these stories. Rolf Baumgarten (57) has suggested that the word *diten* should be read as *diden*, the verbal noun of *do-feid* which means: 'leading (in the sense of escorting) from one point to another, bringing (about), and (without reference to the starting point) leading (to)'. The sentence would then translate: 'I am and I shall be bringing about your death.' This certainly fits the tale and the character of the Morrígan much better. He also points out that the 'only difference remaining between the *imacallaim* and *Táin Bó Regamna* is the Morrígan's reason for being hostile. Whether this particular misunderstanding of *Táin Bó Regamna*, ie that Cú Chulainn is protected by the Morrígan, has given rise to the *imacallaim* or not is difficult to say. Baumgarten seems to think so and bases it on the fact that the Morrígan offers help to Cú Chulainn just before she turns on him, but we have already seen that this bears resemblance with the sort of help Medb is involved in, with both episodes sharing the sexual aspect. As Medb is the other main female character in the *Táin* and shows certain similarities with the Morrígan in that she is the overt cause of the big war, one could plausibly argue that the interpolated *imacallaim* arose in the wake of Medb's story. I don't think this particular problem can be resolved easily.

Apart from the problem about how the passages are connected there is no doubt that *Táin Bó Regamna* introduces much wider issues. The Morrígan not only foretells exactly when and in what circumstances Cú Chulainn will die, but she actually sets up this elaborate scheme to bring about his death and, just to make sure, she actively interferes when the time has come. Note how she emphasizes the fact that she will only arrive when Cú Chulainn is fighting a warrior 'as strong, as victorious, as dexterous, as terrible, as untiring, as noble, as brave, as great as thyself'. She picks a moment when Cú Chulainn is already stretched to the limit in order to enable Loch to strike the fatal blow. The Morrígan, it seems, is not just a prophet of doom, a seer, she is very much involved in the events and fully aware what is happening. To plan someone's death so carefully is obviously quite different from simply taking part in a battle. Instead of the vague threat in *Táin*

Bó Cúailnge, *Táin Bó Regamna* shows us the length she is prepared to go to make her threats come true. She is here portrayed not just as a phenomenon which forms part of battle like Badb and Nemain in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* but an active protagonist of war and death (58).

It is significant in this connection that Kim McCone has derived the Morrígan's name from Indo-European **moras*, meaning death (59). Her name would thus translate as **Moro-rigni*, Queen of Death. It seems that the Morrígan's danger and power stems from her connection not just with war but with death, albeit violent death, not the peaceful death after a long and fulfilled life. The reverberation of the Morrígan as Queen of Death can still be felt throughout the texts despite their much later date.

Despite all the extensive preparations for his death, however, Cú Chulainn survives and, in fact, remains quite unperturbed by all her threats. Instead of cowering in fear and dread, Cú Chulainn sees the event as a challenge and states: 'My name shall be all the more renowned in consequence of this *Táin*.' This response is crucial for the understanding of the interaction between Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan.

Fame, for a warrior, is more important than death itself. Cú Chulainn makes this quite clear at the beginning of his career. One of the tales relates how Cú Chulainn overhears Cathbad's teaching: 'Cathbad said that if a warrior took up arms on that day, his name for deeds of valour would be known throughout Ireland and his fame would last forever' (*As-bert Cathbad óclaeach no gébad gaisced and for-bíad a ainm Héirind co bráth ar gním gascid 7 no mértáís a airscéla co bráth.*) Cú Chulainn is given the king's arms and learns only afterwards that the prize for fame is death at a young age. Cú Chulainn answers: 'Provided I be famous, I am content to be only one day on earth' (*Acht ropa airderc-sa, maith lim cenco beind acht óen-lá for domun*) (60).

Fame arises from victory over enemies and the more important the enemy, the more prestigious the victor. To resist the war-goddess herself could be seen as the ultimate claim to fame. If Cú Chulainn had her help and protection, in the way she offers it in the *imaccalaim* episode, some of the credit for his achievements would

be attributed to her. To reject her and survive a contest with her, on the other hand, means that all the credit must go to him alone. He achieves the unachievable by himself, a point which is brought home again and again in the *Táin*, as well as in other stories. In this way, 'great tales' (*airscéla*) will be told about him and he will be remembered forever. Fame thus confers immortality (61).

It is only now that the scale of the Morrígan's failure becomes apparent: despite planning his death in such an elaborate way all she achieves is that his fame becomes even greater, that he, in fact, becomes immortal through holding out against her assault.

Táin Bó Regamna ends on this triumphant note. We know from *Táin Bó Cúailnge* that, indeed, he does not die. But we also know that he is damaged quite severely and while he can resist her, he cannot rid himself of her. Why does the Morrígan have to remain as well? Would it not have been even more glorious if she were killed?

One gains the impression that the two simply cannot be seen separately. For Cú Chulainn to remain such a great hero, the Morrígan has to be there as his greatest challenge. The importance of the one thus automatically reflects on the importance of the other. The more power is attributed to her the more glory can be gained from resisting her, yet the more amazing a hero Cú Chulainn is perceived to be the greater the surprise that he can still be manipulated by this dangerous lady.

Apart from the Morrígan being Cú Chulainn's greatest challenge there may be a deeper reason why Cú Chulainn 'needs' the Morrígan, and I believe this stems from the ambiguity inherent in this great hero. On the one hand, Cú Chulainn is a saviour figure who protects his land, his king, his people from hostile intrusions, whether human or otherworldly. This is clearly exemplified in several stories. His birth brings to an end the activities of otherworldly birds responsible for laying waste the land. During his youth he saves the royal line from certain extinction by carrying the badly injured king and his son from the battlefield; in the *Táin* he saves his people from being taken over by Connacht. As saviour and protector he cannot have the Morrígan, who symbolises the principle of death and destruction, as an ally. His opposition has to be unswerving, his awareness of the danger must

never stray because one lapse and she sneaks in over the borders, threatening him and his land.

On the other hand Cú Chulainn himself is in the business of destruction, and occasionally the destructive impulse overwhelms him. When this happens, he falls into one of his famous contortions called *riastrad*. This state is characterised by a frenzy which, as we have seen, is described by the metaphor of heat. Paul Henry notices the overtones of sacredness present: 'The etymology of O.Ir. *nia* 'champion, hero' throws light on the relation between the heroic act and the phenomenon of heat, light and sanctity'. As J. Vendryes puts it: '*Cette racine (*nei-) exprime la force active (v.nith 'combat, ardeur combative, colere), l'eclat lumineux sous la forme *nei-m- (v. niam 'lustre, eclat, beaute') et l'inspiration sacree sous la forme *nei-bh- (v.noib 'saint, sacre'). Cp. O.Ir. te 'hot' and O.Indic tapas- 'heat' (62)*. In this frenzied, otherworldly state he recognizes neither friend nor foe and kills anyone in view. Such behaviour matches the interest in carnage and the disregard for matters of allegiance displayed by the war-goddesses in general. The Némain, as we have seen, is the personification of this state while the Morrígan's behaviour just before the great battle at the end of the *Táin* is in keeping with this general trend. Whispering false prophesies to both sides only serves to make the warriors fight all the harder, providing ever more bodies for the crows. Her appearance at dusk and her position in between the armies heightens the impression that the Morrígan is unconcerned with divisions into friends and enemies. It is clear that she is only interested in death and destruction. The glory gained through war, the triumphant elevation of one tribe over the other, questions of who has the rightful cause and who has not, courage, sacrifice, in other words, all the other aspects of war are not for her. One could say, therefore, that both Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan are personifications of the destructive impulse. Consequently, he cannot be without her or be seen to kill her because she, or better, what she stands for, is part of his very nature (63). Eliade sums up this phenomenon as follows: 'We reach here the final paradox of war and the warrior: a corollary to the pattern we have observed whereby one must dehumanize one's enemies in order to employ force against them. In practice, it appears that the warrior must also dehumanize himself

before he can become an instrument of slaughter, effectively eradicating such human tendencies as guilt, fear, and compassion' (64). The interrelationship between Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan seems to be an awareness of this mechanism, as well as a realisation that, if war is inevitable, death and destruction cannot be overcome. Thus the Morrígan has to remain.

One way to explain the closeness of the warrior and the war-goddess on the one hand and yet acknowledge the differences as well is to see the two in the way Marie-Louise Sjoestedt does: 'The goddesses in whom the destructive and inhuman powers of slaughter are personified contrast ... with gods who preside over warfare as a human activity, an art and a profession. ... a double principle is in balance, the female governing the natural event, the male governing the social event' (65).

Undoubtedly there is a sense of the war-goddesses being a natural, as opposed to a cultural phenomenon. Not only is it the natural realm which forms a backdrop for their activities, but nature also provides some of the shapes the war-goddesses take on, for example the various animals. In later chapters it will become clear that the appearance of war-goddesses as death-messengers in some of the king tales goes hand in hand with upheavals in nature. In fact, the strings of names associated with some of these figures refer particularly to natural phenomena, the favourite one being rough weather-conditions. Finally, the war-goddesses habit of screeching characterises them 'as an unsocialized and disruptive force' (66). However, they don't only screech. As *Táin Bó Regamna* bears witness to, the Morrígan at least is an expert at sophisticated speech, with speech being clearly a product of culture. The speech may be threatening, dangerous, but it is still speech and it is more skillful than anything Cú Chulainn utters. In fact, Cú Chulainn is defeated on the verbal level. The distinction here is not on the lines of culture versus nature but on the lines of hostility or friendship, of danger or benevolence, of help or hindrance, of enhancing life or taking life. This division is the basic pattern apparent throughout the entire study. No matter what context the fierce females manifest themselves in they polarise towards the dark: if the choice is that of poetry to delight or poetry to cause damage, they choose the latter. If a situation calls for supporting or hindering, they hinder, if courage and fear are an issue, they

inevitably cause fear. If a tale shows differentiation between the domestic and the wild, they are found in the wild. And so on.

This polarisation is also an issue in the next story, 'The Fight between Eógán mac Durthacht and Conchobor' (67). It exemplifies Cú Chulainn's success against the dark forces through his special quality of being able to look death in the eye and not shrink away in fear. When fear strikes a warrior's heart, he is lost and becomes a victim of the Morrígan but if fear is held at bay, he has a chance. Numerous episodes from Cú Chulainn's career could be mentioned to illustrate this impression but in the aforementioned tale it is actually spelled out, and the war-goddess' response in this case is interesting.

The tale has been mentioned already as an example of the hero's sleep and its fateful consequences. While all the Ulstermen are fighting, Cú Chulainn sleeps and is only woken by the groaning of wounded warriors. Fergus, covered in blood, tells him that the king is lost and Cú Chulainn sets out to find him. The atmosphere of the tale becomes increasingly eery: not only is it night, but a dark one at that and Cú Chulainn walks on the battle-field, a place of horror and death. Moreover, a ghostly figure (*airdrech*) appears, a man with half a head carrying half of another man on his back. He is obviously an otherworldly being, grossly distorted as so many of them are, and neither dead nor alive. The man asks Cú Chulainn to help him carrying his brother but Cú Chulainn refuses. 'Whereupon the other threw the burden he was carrying to him, but Cú Chulainn cast it off. They wrestled then and Cú Chulainn was thrown. He heard the war-goddess crying from among the corpses: 'Poor stuff to make a warrior he who is overthrown by phantoms!' (*Lasodain focheirt in n-aire dó. Focheird-som de. Immasínithar dóib. Doscarthar Cú C[h]ulaind. Co cuala ní, in [m]boidb dinib collaib. 'Olc damnae láich fil and fo chossaib aurddrag!')*) Cú Chulainn overcomes the *airdrech* and plays hurley with his head as if everything had just been a game! He calls for Conchobor and finds him in a rather undignified situation: 'Cú Chulainn went towards him and saw him in the ditch with earth around him on all sides, hiding him. ' 'Why have you come to the battle-field' said Conchobor, 'where you may die of fright?' He lifted Conchobor out of the ditch then. Six of our strong men of Ulster could not have

lifted him out more courageously' (*Frisgair-side dó. Téit chuci conid n-acca issin c[h]lud, 7 ro boí ind úir imbi do cach leth día dí[h]lith. 'Cid día tánac isin n-ármag,' ol Conchobar, 'co ndeochais úathbás and?' Tanócaib asin chlud la sodain. Ní thurcébad sesser linni di t[h]rénfheraib Ulad ní bad chalma.ll.504-09).*

Two aspects of this scene are crucial for an understanding of Cú Chulainn.

Conchobar's question proves beyond doubt that the battle-field, at night, with the Badb and other weird creatures at large, is enough for any man to die of fear.

Conchobar, cowering in the ditch, certainly seems close to suffering just this fate.

Cú Chulainn, however, is unaffected by terror and therefore the only one who can save his king. Cú Chulainn actually gains the Badb's help. Unlike the Morrígan in

Táin Bó Regamna the Badb does not exploit Cú Chulainn's weakness but comes to the rescue. It is important to remember, however, that it takes a most unusual hero

to hear the war-goddess calling from among the corpses on a battle-field and

survive the experience. An ordinary warrior would be unable to stand the terror of

the whole scene. Many die just from hearing them screech above their heads. The

Badb's helpful gesture has to be interpreted as a response to a fearless, exceptional

hero who can stand the terror of death. Fergus comment lends weight to this view:

'Six of our strong men in Ulster could not have lifted him out more courageously.'

One could imagine that it takes a fair amount of strength to lift another man out of a ditch but there does not seem to be any reason why it should be such an

important feat. Any strong warrior may have done the same. However, physical

strength is not the issue, but courage. Six strong warriors would not have been able

to withstand the horrors of the situation to come to the rescue of their king. One

begins to wonder exactly what sort of a ditch, with four walls of earth around it, is

involved. The Irish term is *clad* which means 'ditch, trench', but also dyke and

earthen rampart. It can surround a dwelling and function as a boundary between

territories (DIL). While Conchobar was obviously hiding in the ditch, in other

words, went there to seek protection, one wonders whether the word in this

particular situation intended to conjure up the image of a boundary trench, a

boundary between this world and the otherworld, or even a grave? Conchobar is

obviously as good as dead by the time Cú Chulainn comes to the rescue and the

image of the ditch may have emphasized the fact that he was nearly lost to the Otherworld and/or dead.

While this is rather speculative, Conchobor's closeness to death is confirmed by his own comments. After Cú Chulainn had lifted him out and brought him to the safety of a house, the king orders Cú Chulainn to make a fire and says: '...if I now had a roast pig, I should live' (*Díanom thísad mucc fhonaithe robadam béo. l. 513-4*). In other words, he is still in danger of dying right up to the point he receives the roast pig. Food is here clearly equated with life. In order to obtain the pig, Cú Chulainn has to leave the safety of the house, the light and warmth which stands in such sharp contrast to the dark and fearsome battlefield and the wild wood which he has to enter. 'He went off then and saw a man at a cooking-pit in the middle of the wood, with one hand holding his weapons, the other cooking a pig. Great was the fearsomeness of the man. Nevertheless, Cú Chulainn attacked him and carried off his head and his pig' (*Téit ass iarom. Co n-accai in fer ocond fhulucht i mmedón ind fheda, indara lám dó cona gaisciud inti, ind lám n-aill oc funi in tuircc. Ba mór a úathmaire ind fhir. Fanópair-som arapa 7 dobeir a chend 7 a muice lais*).

The fearsomeness and the wilderness setting points to the man also being otherworldly, just like all the other opponents so far. His description defines him as being both warrior and provider of food. Cú Chulainn overcomes this foe with ease and brings both the head of the adversary and the pig back from the wilderness so that the latter becomes of use to king Conchobor. In other words the hero claims from the wilderness the sustenance which ensures the life and well-being of the king. Interestingly, Cú Chulainn thus becomes the counterpart of the fearsome warrior in the wood because we have to imagine Cú Chulainn also with pig in one hand and weapons in the other as he returns to the house. His superiority over the guardian of the pig is symbolised by the head he carries additionally yet in order to overcome the otherworldly man he has to incorporate aspects of him into his own nature. We have seen the same mechanism with regard to the war-goddesses. In connection with the cooking-pit it is interesting to note that such pits are particularly associated with the cooking of the *fianna* and, strangely enough, with

the Morrígan because the small ones are called *fulacht fian*, while big ones are *fulacht na Morrígna* (68). While these terms do not appear in our tale it is still a significant detail in that it underlines her association with wild nature as opposed to the domestic sphere yet again.

After having been released from the terror of the battle-field into the safety of a warm and bright indoor setting and fed, Conchobor has regained his strength and life and is ready to return home. On the way they meet the severely wounded son of Conchobor. As if final proof were needed that Cú Chulainn is indeed the protector of king and tribe, we see him here shouldering the king's son, which seems to symbolise his willingness to safeguard his king and tribe in the present and in the future. Instead of bearing a burden for an otherworldly figure Cú Chulainn bears first the king, then his son on his shoulders.

In a way this tale sounds like a martial version of the sovereignty tale. Usually, a good sovereign lives in peace with the otherworld and depends on this harmonious relationship for his people to prosper. Plentiful harvest, plenty of milk, fine weather, rivers teeming with fish are the results of such a reign, as well as justice, proper social order, correct relationships. The figure who symbolises the good aspects of the Otherworld is the sovereignty goddess whose marriage to the king confirms the link between the worlds. In our tale, however, Cú Chulainn rejects the Otherworld and is no longer dependent on an otherworldly, benevolent female who brings the gifts of her own free will. Instead he forces his way into the Otherworld to wrest the life-giving food for his king from fearsome creatures. As the king is representative of the tribe, Cú Chulainn's martial activities cause his people to prosper. The gifts of the Otherworld are no longer given freely, nor is the relationship a harmonious one. Instead, there is a magnificent warrior who walks between the worlds with the power to take what he needs and to reject what he does not. The only female figure who features large in this type of scenario is the war-goddess, gruesome and ambivalent.

The evidence of *Táin Bó Regamna* confirms as well as expands the knowledge gained from *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. It confirms the interdependence of the hero and the war-goddess, the cause of which can be sought in the ambivalence of the great

hero as both protector and destroyer. It expands our knowledge in that the Morrígan is shown to plan Cú Chulainn's death with great care, thus bringing to the fore her ancient role as Queen of Death. Cú Chulainn has to prove himself in the face of death, a risk which carries the ultimate reward: immortality through everlasting fame. Tales such as 'The Fight between Eógan mac Durthacht and Conchobor' reaffirm that Cú Chulainn can indeed resist the fear of death and even rescue his king from certain demise. He ensures the welfare and continuing existence of his people through his courage. In this situation a strange thing happens: the war-goddess, here the Badb, refrains from compounding his difficulties and actually comes to the hero's assistance. There is no knowing in advance, however, when she is going to pose as an enemy and when as a helper, and her position among the corpses serves as a clear reminder for Cú Chulainn to beware. Other signs of danger are also established, again confirming and expanding the evidence gathered in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. These are her red and black colouring, her association with the wild, her ability to confuse through words, fitting for a satirist, her many, dangerous names and her various shapes. Significantly, her evasion of armed conflict deprives the martial hero of a chance to measure himself against her with the skills he has developed best. The Morrígan's effectiveness lies in being elusive and unpredictable, in surprising the hero when he is vulnerable and disappearing again when he has composed himself, leaving behind a sense of dread which only the bravest can withstand.

Notes to Chapter 4:

- 1) Windisch, E. 'Táin Bó Regamna' *Irische Texte* 2, 2; p.239-254. Translated into English by Hull, E. 'The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature' (London 1889), p.103-107 The Irish text is taken from Windisch, but the translation is Eleanor Hull's in order to facilitate understanding by English readers. (The latest translation by J. Corthals was not available to me. For ref. see note 5) The story exists in two versions which are closely related yet not identical, one found in the Book of Leccan, one in Egerton 1782. Text and translation follow the Leccan version.
- 2) TBC1, 2025
- 3) Meyer, K. 'Echtra Nerai', RC10 (1889), p.212-228.
- 4) Windisch does not translate the term 'grellach' but takes it as part of the place-name, Grellach Culgairi, p.248.
- 5) Corthals writes 'Úargóeth sceo lúachair sceo ... and translates 'cold wind and rushes and...'. Corthals, J. 'Táin Bó Regamna: Eine Vorerzählung zur Táin Bó Cúailnge', (Vienna, 1987) quoted in Sayers, W. 'Supernatural Pseudonyms', *Emania* 12 (1994), p.53.
- 6) Corthals writes 'fóebar becbéoil, coimm díúir, folt scenb, gairit sceo úath a hainm' and translates 'sharp small mouth, wasted body, thorny hair, stumpy and terrible, this is her name'. *ibid.* p.53
- 7) Windisch has more details on Cú Chulainn's words here. He says: 'Ich werde ihre Krieger tödten, ich werde ihre grossen Schlachten brechen, ich werde die Táin überleben!' (I will kill their warriors, I will break their big battles, I will survive the Táin!)
- 8) Although Hull translates the Leccan text, she omits the name 'Badb' here and substitutes it with 'Morrigu' which belongs to Egerton. Morrigu, of course, fits much better as it corresponds with the evidence of TBC. The names are obviously interchangeable.
- 9) TBC1 'Cath Eógain meic Derthacht fri Conchobar inso' ll.481-523, transl. p.138-9
- 10) Dillon, Myles 'Serglige Con Culainn' (Dublin, 1953); transl. in *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 7 (1951), p.47-88
- 11) 'Echtra Nerai', ll.120-123, transl. p.223
- 12) Story of Odras found in Gwynn, E. 'The Metrical Dindsenchas', vol.4 (1924), p.196-201; and Stokes, W. 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas', RC16 (1895), p.64. For further discussion, see chapter on CMT.
- 13) Stokes, W. 'Togail Bruidne Da Derga' RC 22 (1901), p.32
- 14) Meyer, K. 'Cath Finntrága' *Anecdota Oxoniensa, Medieval and Modern Series 1*, part 4 (Oxford, 1885) p.355
- 15) Windisch, E. 'Táin Bó Flidais' in 'Irische Texte' 2,2, p.214, l.57; transl. p.220.
- 16) TBC1, ll.1578-80, transl. p.169.
- 17) Henry, P.L. 'Furor Heroicus', ZCP 39 (1982) p.236
- 18) McCone, K. 'Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen' in Meid, W. (ed) 'Studien zum Indogermanischen Wortschatz', (Innsbruck, 1987), p.99, p.100, p.106.
- 19) IT2.2, p.241
- 20) Le Roux, F. and Guyonvarc'h, C.J. 'Mórrígan - Bodb - Macha: la souveraineté guerrière de l'Irlande', *Ogam-Celticum* 25, (1983), p. 19, also p.36-37.
- 21) O'Donovan, J. 'The banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Mag Rath' (Dublin, 1842), 198.2
- 22) Hennessy, W.M. 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War', RC1 (1870-72) p.39
- 23) Ó Riain, P. 'A study of the Irish legend of the wild man', *Eigse* 14 (1971-2), p.190.
- 24) TBC1, ll. 3942-44. The word is 'cotagart', pret. and perfect sg.3 of do-gair, meaning 'calls, summons, calls out, cries, shouts, names etc' according to DIL. The sg. here should not perturb us because the trio is obviously seen as a unity.
- 25) TBC2, l.2808; cf. TBC1, l.2838?
- 26) TBC2, ll.3326-29, transl. p.228
- 27) Henderson, G. 'Fled Bricrend' (London, 1899), p.84; transl. p.85
- 28) Todd, J.H. 'Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib' (London, 1867; reprinted New York 1965) p.174 The word here is 'screchaid', a later form of 'grechaid' according to Thurneysen.
- 29) *ibid.*

- 30) Ó Riain, P. 'Cath Almaine', (Dublin, 1978), ll.96-7, p.8
- 31) Cornelius Buttimer points out that sometimes *gáirid* also occurs in a more positive way, for example at feasts, see 'Longes Mac nUislenne Reconsidered' *Eigse* 28 (1994-5) p.5. which does not detract from the fact that it is the main word for war-cries.
- 32) *ibid.* p.5
- 33) 'Echtra Nerai', l.157-8, p.224.
- 34) The Book of Leccan version has the man in a red mantle as well, but the sentence is stuck on awkwardly at the end of the paragraph and does not seem to belong to the passage. Leccan emphasizes the red colour in the woman as she has red eyebrows, a red mantle and a red dress, while Eg. misses out the dress.
- 35) All evidence is taken from DIL.
- 36) A similar process also takes place with regard to Cú Chulainn. In the place lore Cú Chulainn's mother Dechtire has a hornless cow which is stolen by Lindgadan who is promptly killed by the hero. Stokes, W. 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas' RC16, p.72
- 37) Ó hÓgáin, D. 'Myth, Legend and Romance' p. 308
- 38) TBC1 l.3425
- 39) *ibid.* l.3433
- 40) 'Animal Imagery in Loinges Mac nUislenne' *Studia Celtica* 20-21, (1985-6) p.150; Kelly, P. 'The Táin as Literature' in Mallory, J.P. 'Aspects of the Táin' (Belfast, 1992) p.76-77
- 41) Own translation. *Anma*, of course, means name but as it is not the man's true name, *alias* fits as far as the meaning of the sentence and the sound of the word is concerned. Cú Chulainn's skill at words, and deception using words, has been dealt with at length by P.O'Leary who summarizes the situation thus: 'Cú Chulainn surpasses his fellows in his use of words as much as in his use of weapons, and is perhaps even more elusive verbally than physically.' *Verbal Deceit in the Ulster Cycle*, *Eigse* 21 (1986), p.24.
- 42) TBC2, ll.2625-7, transl. p.212
- 43) From 'The Colloquy of the Two Sages' as translated by Meroney, H. 'Studies in Early Irish Satire', *Journal of Celtic Studies* 1 (November, 1950), p.217.
- 44) Elliott, R.C. 'The Power of Satire', (Princeton, 1960) p.31, quoting Stokes, W. 'The Wooing of Luaine and the Death of Aithirne Here', RC24 (1903)
- 45) *ibid.* p.25, quoting O'Curry, E. (and others) 'Ancient laws of Ireland', (Dublin, 1865-1901) vol. 5, p.513.
- 46) *ibid.* p.25
- 47) see DIL on *enech*
- 48) CMT ll.507-8, transl. p.53
- 49) Simms, K. 'Satire in Later Medieval Ireland: The Church and the Poets'. Off-print of a lecture given at the 9th International Congress of Celtic Studies, Paris 1991.
- 50) 'The Power of Satire', p.25
- 51) Thurneysen, R. 'Aithirne vom Geiz geheilt', ZCP 12, p.398-9
- 52) Davies, Wendy 'The Place of Healing in Early Irish Society' in Ó Corráin, Breatnach, McCone (eds) 'Sages, Saints and Storytellers' (Maynooth, 1989) p.49
- 53) van Hamel, A.G. 'Compert Con Culainn', (Dublin, 1933), p.4
- 54) 'Echtra Nerai', p.227; text ll.181-89.
- 55) IT 2,2, p. 251.
- 56) 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War', p.47.
- 57) Baumgarten, R. 'Varia' *Eriu* 34 (1983), p.189-193.
- 58) In view of her unceasing hostility and the specific evidence of TBRg. it seems strange that in Cú Chulainn's death tale the Morrígan tries to prevent his final journey by breaking his chariot. Maybe she is always set to interfere and do the opposite from what Cú Chulainn wishes to do?
- 59) Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen' p.141
- 60) TBC1, ll.609-641; transl. p.142-3
- 61) see Eliade in 'Encyclopaedia of Religion' vol.15, p.339-349
- 62) 'Furor Heroicus', p.236-7
- 63) Viewed like this it is no longer surprising that her animal manifestations reflect aspects of Cú

Chulainn's own character.

64)Eliade, Encyclopaedia, vol. 15 p.344

65)Sjoestedt, M.L. 'Gods and Heroes of the Celts'(Dublin, 1994), p.33

66)Herbert, M. 'The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story' in Byrne, C.J. et. al. 'Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples' Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies, 1989 p.57

67)TBC1 ll.481-523; not in TBC2

68)'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War', p.54-5. Note the necessity for water to be present near a fulacht na murrigha, just as she always appears near water herself.

Chapter 5:

THE MORRÍGAN IN CATH MAIGE TUIRED AND HER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DAGDA

After having outlined the relationship between the Morrígan and Ireland's most famous hero and her role in the cattle-raid, we have to concern ourselves with her actions in yet another important battle which, according to the Irish view of history, happened in an era different from the one just examined. I am referring to *Cath Maige Tuired*, the 'Battle of Moytura' (1). Both *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Cath Maige Tuired* share the theme of a great battle but the purpose and outcome of each differs markedly.

Táin Bó Cúailnge is a cattle raid, and, more precisely, a dispute over a particular bull which Connacht wants and Ulster is not prepared to give up. While cattle, women and children are taken and the Ulster people are plundered, the land itself does not seem to be the object of dispute. The Ulster warriors, once recovered from their illness, fight to defend their possessions and to avenge the insult thus aiding Cú Chulainn who, until then, has managed to do so by himself. When the bulls eventually fight and kill each other the object of dispute disappears and neither side has gained anything at all. The status quo is maintained.

Cath Maige Tuired, on the other hand, is about land and sovereignty. It recounts the struggle of two rival people, the Fomoiri and the Túatha Dé Danann, for Ireland. When the Túatha Dé first arrive in Ireland, there is an alliance between them and the Fomoiri which is sealed by intermarriage. So when Núadu, the king of the Túatha Dé is injured in battle, Bres, son of Elatha of the Fomoiri and of Ériu of the Túatha Dé becomes king. Though chosen as rightful ruler, Bres misuses his power and keeps the Túatha in a condition of servitude. He proves himself an unrighteous king which by itself disqualifies him from the kingship. When his subjects rebel and he is ousted, rather than accepting it gracefully, he continues to pursue the wrong cause by mustering the Fomorian army and challenging the Túatha Dé's sovereignty. In the meantime, Núadu's arm is mended and he holds a big feast for all his people in Tara. A newcomer called Lug Samildánach 'of many arts' arrives uninvited and demands entry to the feast. After he has proved that he

is indeed a man of many skills he is accepted and Núadu allows him to act as leader in this hour of great need. Lug musters all the forces available to the Túatha Dé and through his co-ordination and superior leadership the Túatha Dé win the big battle against the Fomoiri. In the process of this struggle, various ordering principles are established such as proper behaviour of kings, proper ways of forging alliances and dispensing hospitality, proper relationships between fathers and sons, mothers and sons, men and women, etc. Favourable results validate proper behaviour, just as disaster follows wrong behaviour, and throughout the tale, the Túatha Dé Danann are blessed with success, establishing their righteous ways (2).

E. Gray mentions the principle of *fír catha*, the 'truth of battle' (3) whereby battle establishes who has the rightful cause. The equivalent principle in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is *fír fer*, the 'truth of men' which basically means single combat and is the most important activity in Cú Chulainn's career as a warrior (4). It is in single combat he proves his superiority again and again and when the Connachta send more than one warrior against him the fact is nearly always commented upon in phrases such as '*fír fer* was violated against Cú Chulainn' (5). We could conclude that while *Táin Bó Cúailnge*'s focus is on the individual warrior, Cú Chulainn, *Cath Maige Tuired*'s focus is on the tribe as a whole. While the motivation behind *Táin Bó Cúailnge* seems to be to glorify one particular hero - which could explain why it is not necessary to show any gain for either of the warring parties - the motivation behind *Cath Maige Tuired* is to justify the sovereignty of one tribe. The achievements of the individual heroes are important, too, but there are many of them working together rather than one who does it all alone.

How does the Morrígan fit into this scheme and what light does this throw on her character?

The Morrígan appears before, during and after the big battle. A very brief episode shows her speaking to Lug, urging him to 'undertake the battle of overthrowing', which is followed by an obscure poem the aim of which seems to be to fire the ardour of whoever is present (6). The passage is unusual in that Lug does not ask for skills or prophecy, as in the episodes before and after the one under examination. In fact, the Morrígan's words and Figol's just afterwards fit very

awkwardly into the context and consequently it would be difficult to draw any conclusions from its position within the story. Suffice it to say that it shows the Morrígan as a figure inciting warriors to do battle. We cannot be sure whether she does so to support the warriors or simply because she loves the fighting. It is only after the Dagda has met her that she is clearly enlisted as one of the Túatha Dé in the second muster of the warriors. Although this encounter is of crucial importance I want to postpone its interpretation for the moment and firstly deal with the Morrígan's subsequent behaviour, that is, subsequent to having become the Dagda's lover. This is what happens:

'Then she told the Dagda that the Fomoiri would land at Mag Ceidne, and that he should summon the áes dána of Ireland to meet her at the Ford of the Unshin, and she would go into Scétne to destroy Indech mac Dé Domnann, the king of the Fomoiri, and would take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valor. Later she gave two handfuls of that blood to the hosts that were waiting at the Ford of the Unshin. Its name became 'The Ford of Destruction' because of that destruction of the king.' (*Itbert-si iarum frisin Dagdae deraghdís an Fomore a tír .i. a Maug (S)cé[t]ne, 7 ara garudh an Dagdae óes ndánu Érionn aro cend-si for Ádh Unsen; 7 noragad-si hi Scétne od admillid [ríg] na Fomore .i. Indech mac Déi Domnann a ainm, 7 dohérudh-si crú a críde 7 áirned a gailie úad. Dobert-si didiu a dí bois den crú-sin deno slúagaib bátar ocon indnaidhe for Ádh Unsen. Baí 'Áth Admillte' iarum a ainm ónd admillid-sin an ríog*) (7).

We notice once more that the Morrígan has knowledge of events which lie in the future and which nobody else knows, here the exact location of the Fomoiri's landing-place.

Secondly, she promises the destruction of Indech. On first reading one could be excused for thinking that she actually kills him as she seems to have his blood on her hands and the ford is named 'The Ford of Destruction'. It is only when reading further on and finding him still alive and well that the act reveals itself to be a 'magical' destruction. This is well in keeping with a passage in Lebor Gabála which defines the Morrígan by her use of 'magical' powers: Badb and Macha, greatness of wealth/Morrígan - springs of craftiness/ sources of bitter fighting/were the three daughters of Ernmas. (*Badb is Macha, mét n-indbais/Morrígan, fátha*

felbais/tindrema aga anmuis/ingena ána Ernmais) (8) Felbas, according to DIL, means 'enchantment, sorcery, spell, charm' rather than craftiness, which would fit her behaviour in *Cath Maige Tuired* rather well.

What could the expression taking the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valour mean? The blood of the heart, a well-known phrase, could well mean his actual life-blood and would refer to the foretelling of his physical death. Note how the second sign of his doom occurs during the final battle when Balor's head strikes Indech's chest and brings blood over his lips (9). In his lecture entitled '*Lexical and Literary affairs of 'the Heart' in Irish*', given at the 10th International Celtic Conference in Edinburgh, Liam Mac Mathúna surveyed Irish and Welsh literature for the meanings of *críde*. He listed *críde* as the physical heart, as courage, as the seat of emotions in general and of love and affection in particular, and in the sense of middle, centre, focus. If we check the three skills associated with warriors as exemplified in Figol's speech (10), ie *gal* 'valour, courage, fury', *ner* 'strength' and *gaisced* 'weapon-skill' it seems that *gal* is the most fitting for the heart, given MacMathúna's survey. However, *gal* is here connected with the kidneys, and *gaisced* is hardly fitting for being located in the heart, which means that *ner* could conceivably be the quality which, in this expression at least, is associated with the heart. Taking away the blood of his heart could be a metaphor for draining his strength which corresponds with the Morrígan's activity in other tales. It is also worthwhile remembering that *ner* 'strengthens' is the term used when an army is encouraged to fight, as for example in the case of the Fomorian leaders: 'These were the kings and leaders who were encouraging the Fomorian host...' (*Robtar íet-so ríog 7 toísich rouhátar og nertadh slúag na Fomorie...*) (11). Why might *Cath Maige Tuired* associate *gal* with the kidneys? The word *airne* has two meanings according to the DIL, 'gland', and 'sloe'. Whitley Stokes, however, suspected that *airne* may be referring to testicles (12) on the evidence of O'Davoran's glossary: '*Airne toile .i. magarrla, ut est airne toile fóenan cuma fri toilfeith [in margin .i.bod]*' which means 'airne toile ie testicles ut est glands of desire the same as for the sinew of desire [in margin ie the penis]' (13). This would clearly associate valour with manhood itself. Such an association can also be seen in the word *ferda* meaning 'manhood, virility, manliness' as well as the 'male

sexual organ'. P.O'Leary affirms that *ferda* is more or less the same as *láechda* (warrior-like) and he states that 'A coward was not only less than a warrior, but less than a man' (14). The Morrígan thus strikes at the heart of Indech's warrior- and manhood, a fact which will become more significant once we discuss her relationship with the Dagda. It is also reminiscent of the fate of Fergus who, through the theft of his sword, loses both warrior-status and manhood (15).

We note that, in line with what we know about the Morrígan's reluctance and/or inability to have anything to do with weapons, she does not attack the third aspect of the warrior, ie his *gaisced*, 'weapon-skill'.

We should also remember that her appearance at the ford with blood on her hands is reminiscent of the famous 'Washer at the Ford' of other stories, a similarity E. Gray has pointed out (16). In these stories a woman appears by a river and washes bloodstained clothes and other belongings of warriors before a battle takes place. The onlookers realise that it is their own belongings they are seeing and, needless to say, their fate is sealed. In these tales, however, it is the victims who bear witness to the spectacle, not the victors, as in *Cath Maige Tuired*. It could be argued, however, that despite his absence at the ford Indech may well have been aware of the Morrígan's actions because she went into the Fomorian camp beforehand, in other words there may have been some contact between the war-goddess and the victim within the context of the showing of blood. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly what happened at the camp (17).

The Morrígan's next appearance occurs during the mustering of the forces. We note that there are two such occasions, one before the Dagda woos the Morrígan (18) and a more detailed one later on (19). She does not feature in the first one but appears in the second one. We find that the participant's contributions are fairly straight forward, eg the physician would heal warriors, the smith would make weapons, the champion would fight etc. The Morrígan's support, on the other hand, remains obscure: 'I have stood fast; I shall pursue what was watched; I will be able to kill; I will be able to destroy those who might be subdued' (*ar-rosisor; dosifius do-sseladh; ar-roselus, aros-dibu nos-riastais*) (20). She is obviously fighting in one way or another, she is pursuing, killing and destroying, but how? One can only surmise that it is not by direct force but according to her usual otherworldly

methods. It is also noteworthy that the implications of the above phrase seem to be that only those are destroyed who are able to be subdued, in other words, there is a limit to the Morrígan's ability to destroy. The word used is *ríastraid*, an expression well known in connection with Cú Chulainn where it is usually translated as 'to distort'. However, another, and according to Zimmer (21) the original meaning, is 'to hinder' or 'to frustrate', which fits well here. The word appears again in connection with Indech's daughter: 'She said that she would hinder the Fomoiri, and she would sing spells against them...' (*Atbert-si dano noríastrabadh-si no Fomore, 7 docachnopad forrai,...*) (22). It seems, therefore, that only the people who are susceptible to her 'hindering', in other words to her otherworldly powers, are hopelessly lost. The tale of Indech's daughter, of Cú Chulainn's fight against the Morrígan and of Fothad Canainne's resistance to fear bear witness to the fact that the Morrígan is not all-powerful and that her onslaught can be resisted.

The next question to consider is her actual contribution to the final battle. It seems she mainly incites the warriors and urges them to fight all the harder. However, a closer look at her overall role is in order here. As already pointed out, she magically destroys Indech before the battle even starts. The death of a king spells the defeat of his people which would imply that the Morrígan is the cause of the Túatha Dé's victory before the battle ever takes place. Where does this leave Lug and his heroic efforts? A brief discussion of his role in comparison with the Morrígan's in the final battle shows that despite his high profile in *Cath Maige Tuired* the Morrígan has an influence on the final outcome which is just as important.

Lug is at his most active at the beginning of the fight. Here he 'was urging the men of Ireland to fight the battle fiercely...' (*Boí Lug og nertad fer n-Érenn co roferdais go dícrá an cath...*) (23) and after that he chants spells, going around the men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye closed, which is a well known posture used by poets and otherworldly figures. These two measures are followed by the army giving the customary shout (*gáir*) and going into battle.

The most famous and much discussed event of the battle is when Lug meets the main champion of the Fomoiri, Balor, who could have disabled the whole of the Túatha Dé host with one glance of his poisonous eye. Lug's feat of destroying that

eye with his slingshot and killing Balor could well be seen as the decisive event of the conflict, particularly as another sign of Indech's demise occurs in this connection, ie a gush of blood spouting over his lips when Balor's head strikes Indech's chest.

The text, however, does not tell us that victory is decided at this stage. Instead the Morrígan appears: 'Then the Morrígan the daughter of Ernmas came and she was strengthening the Túatha Dé to fight the battle resolutely and fiercely' (*Táinic in Morrígan ingen Ernmusa anduidhe 7 boí oc nertad Túath nDéa co fertois an cath co dúr 7 co dícráí*) (24). The words are exactly the same as Lug's at the beginning of the battle. Notice also the similarity between their subsequent action: 'Then Lug chanted the spell which follows...' (*Conid and rocan Lug an cétal-so síos*) (25) while in the case of the Morrígan: 'She then chanted the following poem...' (*Conid ann rocachain in láid-se sís...*) (26). Both incite the army. After the Morrígan's poem the text goes on to say: 'Immediately afterwards the battle broke, and the Fomoiri were driven to the sea' (*Romebhaid íerum in cauth íer sin, ocus roslech[t]ait na Fomore co muir*) (27). Thus the appearance of the Morrígan is crucial to tip the balance of the battle in favour of the Túatha Dé.

Given the fact that Lug is the most prominent figure on the Túatha Dé side it is interesting to note how many parallels there are within the context of the final battle. Firstly, Indech's death is foreshadowed twice, once as a result of the Morrígan's machinations and once as a result of Lug's activities. Secondly, they both incite and strengthen the army through their chanting, and thirdly, both make a special and decisive appearance in the battle. It seems that they are equally responsible for the victory. Undoubtedly, the text focuses on the young male saviour, Lug, but the Morrígan remains a powerful presence in the background and her importance can only be appreciated when reading closely and comparing her actions with those of the more prominent figures.

In the light of these comments it may not come altogether as a surprise that the Morrígan has the final word in *Cath Maige Tuired*: 'Then after the battle was won and the slaughter had been cleaned away, the Morrígan, the daughter of Ernmas, proceeded to announce the battle and the great victory which had occurred there to the royal heights of Ireland and to its síd-hosts, to its chief waters and to its

rivermouths' (*Íar mbrisiud íerum an catha 7 íar nglanad ind áir, fochard an Morrígan ingen Ernmais do táscc an catha-sin 7 an coscair móair forcóemnochair ann do rídingnaib Érenn 7 dia sídhcairib, 7 dia arduiscib 7 dia inberaiph*) (28).

This announcement establishes yet another precedent: 'And that is the reason Badb still relates great deeds' (*Conid do sin inneses Badb airdgníomha beus*) (29). Badb as the bringer of tidings reminds us of the expression *badbscél* (DIL s.v. 'badb') which is translated as 'a tale of slaughter', the implication being that any tale the badb might tell is by necessity about war.

The news/story does not only concern the victory, ie the beginning of a new era, but also a prediction of what this will be like. It refers to the harmony that pervades everything when rightful rule is established, harmony in the social and the natural/cosmic order (30). It is most unusual to hear the Morrígan utter a prophecy which has a positive content, particularly after what was said about the *badbscél* just now. However, this impression is quickly erased as it is not the final word yet: 'She also prophesied the end of the world, foretelling every evil that would occur then, and every disease and every vengeance; and she chanted the following poem...' (*Boí-si íarum oc taircetul deridh an betha ann beus, 7 oc tairngire cech uile nobíad ann, 7 cech teadma 7 gac[h] díglau; conid ann rocachain an laíd-se síis:...*) (31) What follows is the exact opposite of peaceful and harmonious rule: we find seasons out of joint, lack of food and milk, false judgements, wars without kings, men and women with flawed characters and improper social relationships. In other words, total chaos (32).

E. Gray suggests that the two prophecies summarise what *Cath Maige Tuired* deals with at great length, ie order versus chaos and the continuing struggle to maintain order, usually involving loss (33).

John Carey brings a more historical perspective to the text: 'The story is a parable of Ireland in the ninth century, concerned primarily with the erosion of traditional values. In the story, the threat is recognized, opposed and thwarted; but we are not allowed to take much comfort in this paradigmatic view. At the very moment of triumph, the war-goddess looks into the future and sees the same dangers resurgent in the Ireland of the author, the 'present' in which *Cath Maige Tuired* was written. What she beheld may indeed have seemed, to many of those writing, to be the end

of the world' (34).

The question that arises from this episode in connection with the Morrígan is whether she has any role to play in the coming events or whether she simply sees into the future and relates her vision. On the whole, prophets do not become involved in the events they foretell. Compare, for example, the prophesy in *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad*. The same pattern is evident in that a positive vision is followed by one of the end of the world, both spoken by poets who have no role in what happens in the future (35). On the other hand, the poets in question are not otherworldly war-goddesses who delight in destruction and are known to meddle in events they themselves have foretold. However, would the Morrígan bring about circumstances which even she does not like to see, as is intimated in her opening phrase: 'I shall not see a world which will be dear to me' (*Ni accus bith nombeo baid*) (36)? The matter has to remain undecided. One thing is certain: there is no figure more suitable to utter this prophesy than the Morrígan. I am sure it is no coincidence that after all the heroic deeds, all the great words, all the joys of the new order the last image a reader takes away from the story is of a shadow which suddenly creeps in and which originates with the Morrígan. Hers is the very last word in the tale, and this last word describes chaos.

Summarising the role of the Morrígan in the struggle we can state that her contribution is crucial in the downfall of the Fomoiri by magically destroying the king before the battle and by tipping the balance in favour of the Túatha Dé during the final conflict. It is only after her appearance that victory for the Túatha is assured. Her role in this final event is not unlike Lug's. Finally, she is chosen to proclaim the victory and foresee both peace and renewed destruction in the future. We notice that her behaviour is in line with what is expected of the Túatha Dé, in other words she applies her skills to strengthen the Túatha and to harm the Fomoiri. She is thus firmly on one side which is unlike what we have learned about the war-goddesses so far. Our next step, therefore, has to be the examination of how she came to be in that position. Is she simply a member of the Túatha and therefore obliged to help her own side?

We have noticed already that the Morrígan does not make a significant appearance before she meets the Dagda - the brief mention she gets does not fit into the

context and one wonders whether it belongs somewhere else. The crucial event, therefore, is the meeting with the Dagda which progresses as follows:

'The Dagda had a house in Glen Edin in the north, and he had arranged to meet a woman in Glen Edin a year from that day, near the All Hallows of the battle. The Unshin of Connacht roars to the south of it. He saw the woman at the Unshin in Corann, washing, with one of her feet at Allod Echae (that is, Aghanagh) south of the water and the other at Lisconny north of the water. There were nine loosened tresses on her head. The Dagda spoke with her, and they united. "The Bed of the Couple" was the name of that place from that time on. (The woman mentioned here is the Morrígan)' (*Boí tegdas den Dagdae a nGlionn Edin antúaithe. Baí dano bandál forsin Dagdae dia bliadhnae imon Samain an catha oc Glind Edind. Gongair an Unius la Connachta frioa andes. Co n-acu an mnaí a n-Unnes a Corand og nide, indarna cos dí fri Allod Echae (.i.Echuinech) fri husci andes alole fri Loscondoib fri husce antúaithe. Noí trillsi taitbechtai fora ciond. Agoillis an Dagdae hí 7 dogníad óentaich. Lige ina Lánomhnou a ainm an baile ó sin. Is hí an Morrígan an uhen-sin isberur sunn*) (37).

The story is pervaded by a sense of danger. First of all the meeting occurs in the north which, according to E. Gray, has distinctly sinister overtones (38). And secondly, the time of year is just before *Samain* which is an eery and uncanny time. One could conclude that an encounter with the Morrígan is not without risk even for the Dagda. Her appearance is suitably awe-inspiring: a gigantic woman with one foot on either bank of a roaring (*gongair*) river and her loosened hair tumbling from her head. As we shall see when the hags are under scrutiny loosened hair is a frequent feature of dangerous and liminal figures.

The imagery of straddling a river and washing has given rise to several interpretations. E. Gray suggests that the Dagda came upon the Morrígan while she was washing herself, ie vulnerable, which implies that it is only due to this vulnerability that the relationship can be established (39). In the tales there are instances where a woman bathing makes her vulnerable to attack - I am thinking particularly of Cathbad and Ness and of Conchobor and Medb (40). However, while both these figures are actually in the water, the Morrígan straddles it. Thus I am not convinced that the Morrígan only agrees to be the Dagda's lover from a

position of weakness.

I would like to point out that all the encounters with the Morrigan so far have taken place at, near, or even in rivers, a feature she shares with many other otherworldly females. It does not follow that the Morrigan is a river-goddess because, on the model of Sinand and Boand, one would expect her to have given her name to a river at some stage and there is no indication of this anywhere. One related figure, the Washer at the Ford in *Togail Bruidne Da Choca*, demonstrates power over the water in that she can dry up the river by raising her hand (41) but it is difficult to draw any further conclusions from that. A more useful angle on the problem may be to see rivers as boundaries and thus natural places for fights to take place. A death- and war-goddess is bound to appear in such locations. With regard to our story it would be supportive of the argument if the river she straddles were an actual boundary. Checking the ordinance survey map of the area reveals that the river Unshin, which runs between Loch Arrow and Ballysadare, is, nowadays at least, a boundary between the townlands of Doorly (Allod Echae obsolete as a name but referring to Doorly townland) in the barony of Corran and Lisconny in the barony of Tirerril, both in Sligo (see map) (42). Having a foot on each side of a boundary river could conceivably be interpreted as 'having a foot in each camp', ie not being on one side or another. And, as we have observed, before the Dagda's interference there is no indication which side, if any, she may support. E. Gray comes to the same conclusion, not with regard to this particular incident but when talking about the Morrigan's role in general: 'Throughout Irish literature, the Morrigan represents the destructive and chaotic violence of warfare. Because the powers she symbolizes inevitably inflict losses on both sides in any conflict, the Morrigan is an ambiguous figure; and the extent of her support for any given cause can never be simply assumed' (43).

The meeting with the Dagda from then on is a straightforward affair - they talk and they make a union. No physical force, no coercion is implied and it seems that both agree to the union freely. It is a well-known principle in many Irish tales that a woman transfers her loyalty to a man with whom she has a sexual relationship, even to the detriment of her own family. The relationships between the Dagda and Indech's daughter and that between Elatha and Ériu are examples of this principle.

Some scholars suggest that this scene establishes the Morrígan as a fertility figure. Anne Ross, for example, writes: 'Again, the connection between the fertility aspects of the goddesses and rivers is suggested by the description of the ritual mating of the Irish raven-goddess, the Mórrígan, with the father-god, the Dagda, across a river, the goddess having one foot on either bank' (44). Charles Bowen takes this a step further, attributing sovereignty status to the Morrígan: 'If he (ie the Dagda) mates with a goddess at the time of year when important festivals were held, including such inaugural rites as that of Tara, it is certainly safe to see this encounter as a divine analogue of the sacral marriage between king and goddess' (45). He further suggests, in a most interesting theory, that the water has to be envisaged as coming from between the Morrígan's legs. After a discourse on the story of Derbfogail and Medb he establishes that passing water/urine could be a symbol of great sexual potency, with the bladder being a synonym for the uterus and vagina (46). It would certainly make the Morrígan a most fitting partner for the Dagda who is renowned for his sexual powers. To establish a link between the Morrígan and mother- or fertility-goddesses on account of this, or, for that matter, on account of the union with the Dagda, however, is not warranted. Sexuality does not necessarily imply fertility, and all the evidence so far has pointed to the Morrígan's concern with the taking of life. In this respect the above notes on 'un-manning' Indech are relevant - again the emphasis is on depriving a person of something, be it his warrior-hood, his man-hood or his life. Even the few positive gestures such as the giving of a drink of milk or the concern with the birth of a calf have always been in the context of trickery or as a means to cause trouble. Thinking about the nature of the Morrígan's sexuality we could say that a female figure whose sexual capacity is affirmed but who does not have off-spring represents the reversal of everything expected from a woman. A woman holds the key to the future through her ability to bear children. To have sex and no children is to deliberately deny the future and thus much more lethal than to kill all the men of present times. Such a figure is the direct opposite to one like the daughter of Olc Aiche who sleeps with Art son of Conn on the night before he dies in order to continue the royal line (47). Sexuality, as John Carey points out, could simply be seen as a 'given' for a woman. He writes: '...the primary role of women in any male-

oriented literature is a sexual one. The nature of a female figure's sexual relations may be significant to an understanding of her character, but their mere existence is not particularly so. The Morrígan's liaison with the Dagda is ... the most basic narrative expression of communion with a female deity' (48). And, one could add, it is the only way the Dagda can assure her allegiance, given the rules which transpire from the stories. As fertility is closely linked to sovereignty the attribution of sovereignty status to the Morrígan can also be refuted. Further, it also has to be said that the Dagda, though portrayed as a king in some tales, does not assume the kingship in *Cath Maige Tuired*. The theme of kingship revolves clearly around Níadu and Lug.

Summarising the above we can say that the Morrígan's ambivalence is symbolised by her straddling a boundary river which can be read as having a foot in each camp. As her destructive power is highly dangerous the Dagda takes it upon himself to 'make her safe' by binding her to himself through sexual intercourse which transfers her allegiance firmly to him and the Túatha.

While we have established why the Dagda would wish to enter into a relationship with the Morrígan, the question remains as to how he is able to do it. Why is it the Dagda, rather than anyone else, who approaches her?

First of all we could point to the fact that the Dagda is probably the most powerful warrior of the Túatha Dé who has at his disposal both 'magical' and physical means of fighting. When Lug musters his supporters for the first time and enquires after their powers the Dagda reveals that he can work all the powers mentioned by cupbearers, druids, etc himself alone - he is good at everything and thus the 'Good God' (49). Here, it is 'magical' skills that are under scrutiny. At the second muster physical skills are added to the list and again he appears at the very end, saying: 'I will fight for the men of Ireland with mutual smiting and destruction and wizardry. Their bones under my club will soon be as many as hailstones under the feet of herds of horses, where the double enemy meets on the battlefield of Mag Tuired' (*Dugén-sa leath fria feru Érenn eter cáemslecht 7 admilliud 7 amaidichtai. Bud lir bomonn egai fua cosaib gregai a cnáimreth fum luirg an fecht-sie, áit a comraicid díabulnámód for raí Muige Tuired*) (50). Although it is not stated explicitly, one gets the impression that again he combines all the powers in himself. This makes

him a formidable character indeed, well able to wreak great destruction. His enormous strength and capability is also brought to light in the meeting with Indech's daughter. After their sexual encounter Indech's daughter tries to prevent the Dagda from joining the battle through magical means: 'Then the girl said to him, 'You will not go to the battle by any means.' 'Certainly I will go,' said the Dagda. 'You will not go,' said the woman, 'because I will be a stone at the mouth of every ford you will cross.' 'That will be true,' said the Dagda, 'but you will not keep me from it. I will tread heavily on every stone, and the trace of my heel will remain on every stone forever.' 'That will be true, but they will be turned over so that you may not see them. You will not go past me until I summon the sons of Tethra from the síd-mounds, because I will be a giant oak in every ford and in every pass you will cross.' 'I will indeed go past,' said the Dagda, 'and the mark of my axe will remain in every oak forever' (*Is and sen atbert an ingen fri[s]-siem, 'Ní ragae ám den cath cipé toucht,' al in phen. 'Ragat écin,' ol in Dagdae. 'Ní rogaie,' ol en ben, 'ar boam cloch-sou a mbéulai gech áthau nod-ragau.' 'Bid fír,' or ion Dagdae, 'acht ním-gébou dei. Ragat-so go trén tar cech n-alach, 7 biaid látraoch mo sáulu-sau i ngech ailic go bráth.'* 'Bid fír, acht bud síos consúfiter cona aicither. Ní rago torm-sai gom m-árail maccu Tethra hi sídaib. Ar bon rail-sie daruch i ncech áth 7 i ngech belaig not-ragai.' 'Ragat écin,' al in Dagdae, 'ocus bieid látrach mo bélo-sai io ncech dair go bráth') (51). The woman then gives in and promises to help him. It is clear that he overcomes her 'magical' ploys simply through sheer physical strength. It is interesting to remember the similarities with the Morrígan who tries to hinder Cú Chulainn while he is at the ford. Notice how Cú Chulainn survives and injures her but suffers himself while the Dagda copes effortlessly once he has regained his strength.

While the destructive side of his character is thus affirmed, it is important to remember that he employs it for the sake of order only. Unlike Cú Chulainn, he never turns against his own people, is never overwhelmed by the destructive impulse. He can deal with it in the proper way and always remains in the service of his tribe. Further, the Dagda has numerous characteristics which are life-affirming. First of all, he has several children, among them Brigid and the Mac Óc which are the result of his affairs with various women (52). Indeed, one of his

many names is Eochu Ollathair, the last word meaning 'All-father' (53). Thus he takes and he gives life which is neatly brought out in the description of his iron club: it kills with one end and revives with the other (54).

He is also a taker and giver of food. On the one hand he has an enormous appetite, best illustrated by the porridge incident in the Fomorian camp (55), but on the other he is the owner of a cauldron from which nobody goes away dissatisfied (56), and further, he even looks like such a cauldron because his huge belly is described in these terms (57). Generosity could be seen as his very nature. As is well known from many Irish stories it is by means of giving and receiving food that hospitality is expressed and mutual hospitality in turn establishes alliances. Thus it is not surprising that one of his main functions is the manipulation of customary conventions and the negotiation of treaties. The Dagda's interaction with Cridenbél and his dealings with the Fomoiri exemplify these principles. While the Dagda is in service with Bres, '...in the house he used to meet an idle blind man named Cridenbél, whose mouth grew out of his chest' (*...atclighed daul esba isin tech, Cridenbél a ainm, a béola di suide asa brundie*). This man demands the three best bits of the Dagda's food every day. As Cridenbél is a satirist he cannot be denied anything for fear of being dishonoured and the Dagda complies and rapidly loses weight and strength. Eventually, his son the Mac Óc, comes to his aid: 'Put,' he said, 'these three gold coins into the three bits of Cridenbel in the evening. Then these will be the best on your dish, and the gold will stick in his belly so that he will die of it; and Bres's judgement afterwards will not be right. Men will say to the king, 'The Dagda has killed Cridenbél with a deadly herb which he gave him.' Then the king will order you to be killed,...' (*Tapair-si, 'ol sé, 'na trí scittle-si isna trí mírinn deog láei do Cridenbél. Is ed iarum is srúitium bioas fort més, 7 asdoife ant ór ina broinn co n-epili de; 7 níba maith a cert do Bres iarum. Athéantar frisin rígh, 'Romarb an Daghae Cridenbél tre luib éccinéol derat dóu.' Ispérae iarum an rí de marbad*)

The Dagda then tells his story and claims that he put the three gold coins into his serving. 'Then I gave it to Cridenbél, because the gold was the best thing that was before me. So the gold is now in Cridenbél, and he died of it' (*Dorautus iarum do Cridenbél, ar is edh is dech bhuí ar mo bélaib, and ór. As dae iarum ind ór a*

Cridenbél, co n-erbailt de). The Dagda proved right and saved once the satirist's stomach is cut open and the gold is found (58). Thus the king has pronounced a wrong judgement which is the beginning of his end. The Dagda, on the other hand, has done nothing wrong but simply interpreted the demands literally. He manipulates the rules in order to extract himself from a damaging situation without losing face, beating Cridenbél at his own game as skill with words is the domain of the poet-satirist.

A parallel incident is his mission to the Fomoiri. He is sent by Lug to negotiate a delay in hostilities until a day which is auspicious for the Túatha Dé which he accomplishes. However, 'The Fomoire made porridge for him to mock him, because his love of porridge was great. They filled for him the king's cauldron, which was five fists deep, and poured four score gallons of new milk and the same quantity of meal and fat into it. They put goats and sheep and swine into it, and boiled them all together with the porridge. They then poured it into a hole into the ground, and Indech said to him that he would be killed unless he consumed it all; he should eat his fill so that he might not satirize the Fomoire. Then the Dagda took his ladle, and it was big enough for a man and a woman to lie in the middle of it. These are the bits that were in it: halves of salted swine and a quarter of lard. Then the Dagda said, 'This is good food if its broth is equal to its taste.' But when he would put the full ladle into his mouth he said, 'Its poor bits do not spoil it,' says the wise old man.' Then at the end he scraped his bent finger over the bottom of the hole among mould and gravel. He fell asleep then after eating his porridge. His belly was as big as a house cauldron, and the Fomoire laughed at it' (*Degníther lite dó lasna Fomori, 7 ba dia cudbiud ón, oir ba mór serc liten la[is]-sium*).

Noslíntar core cóecduirn an ríog dóu a ndechotar cetri ficet sesrai do lemlacht 7 a cubat cétnai de men 7 béoil. Doberthar gabair 7 cóerig 7 mucau indtie, 7 nos-combruithiter lei. Noslórtiter a nderc talman dóu, 7 abert fris noimbérthau fair bás mono tomledh ule; ar dáig ná berud écnach Fomore co rocaithed a sáidh. Gabois íer sin a léig, 7 ba himaircithe go tallfad lánomain ina lige foro láur na léghie. It é didiu m[í]rjionn fordu-rauhotar inde: lethau tindei 7 cethromthu bloinge. Is ann adbert in Dagdae, 'Fó bioath ind so má rosaigh a broth an rosaig a blas.' An tan immorro noberid an léig láun ina béolu, is adn adberedh, "Nís-

collet a mícuirne, 'ol in sruith. 'Dobert-sium immorro a mér cromm tar domain an dercu fo derid iter úr 7 grioan. Dolluid coltud foair ierum ar caitem a litem. Ba méidithir scabol tige a bolc fair, gon tibsíd im sodain na Fomóire) (59). The Fomóire hope to trick the Dagda by offering pseudo-hospitality in form of a huge quantity of porridge with the idea behind it that even the Dagda could not consume such an amount. His inability to eat everything could be interpreted as an insult to the host with the Dagda's death as the inevitable and legitimate consequence. However, the Dagda manages - but he suffers for it. After he leaves the Fomorian camp he meets Indech's daughter, desires her but is impotent on account of his huge belly. She gains power over him until the food has passed through him and things revert to normal (60). So here it is too much food rather than the lack of it which causes the Dagda to suffer, and again as a consequence of the violation of the rules of generosity and hospitality. At the same time he manages to deal with the situation and ultimately returns to his original state without having to endure permanent damage.

Apart from the social aspects of food he also seems concerned with the natural source of food. In *Tochmarc Étaíne* he is said to regulate the weather and ensure a fruitful harvest (61).

The same story shows him in a role which is maybe his most creative in the sense of creating order from chaos: in one night he clears twelve plains and in a second night he drains twelve rivers, thus transforming uninhabitable wilderness and bogland into arable land, into places fit for people to live and meet and play (62). Further, to create order seems to be the function of his wheeled fork: 'He trailed behind him a wheeled fork which was the work of eight men to move, and its track was enough for the boundary ditch of a province. It is called "The Track of the Dagda's club" for that reason' (*Gabol gicca rothach feidm ochtair ina diaid, go mba lór do clod coicrice a slicht 'na degaidh. Gonad dei dogaror Slicht Loirge an Dagdai*) (63). Although the image seems to be employed in order to emphasize his huge size and strength one could speculate that making a boundary ditch is not a function which is chosen arbitrarily. Making boundaries means separating one province from another, creating distinct areas from what was previously undefined. Again, he establishes order.

The evidence could be summarized by saying that the regard for order and balance is expressed through the Dagda's implements (fork, club, cauldron), through his activities (clearing plains, making boundaries, regulating weather and harvest, giving and taking food, giving and taking life) and ultimately through his physical features and condition (cauldron-shaped belly, physical well-being or wasting away, sexual potency or impotence). Such thinking may well underlie his position at the centre of Ériu as is described in *Tochmarc Étaíne*: 'And they came to Uisnech of Meath in the centre of Ireland, for 'tis there was Eochaid's house, Ireland stretching equally far from it on every side, to south and north, to east and west' (...*co mbadur i nUisneach Midi a medon Érenn, ar ba hann bai teach nEachdach, daig ba comfadai uad for cach leth ind Éiriu fodeas 7 fotuaid, sair 7 siar*) (64). It would be difficult to conceive an image which expresses balance and wholeness in a better way. Here the Dagda, also called Eochu Ollathair, is a king and is described as sitting in the assembly, passing judgements and allocating land. In fact, all his attributes so far discussed are attributes typical of a king.

However, *Cath Maige Tuired* allots him a role secondary to Lug, the youthful, shining newcomer who also incorporates many skills (*samildánach*) within himself. While a detailed comparison of the king who is good at everything and the king who has many skills goes far beyond this study, one very general comment is in order as the contrast between the two further highlights the character of the Dagda. My impression of the differences is that the Dagda is meant to come across as a much more earthy, basic, even crude fellow (note his appearance) who is comfortable with the raw powers of the natural world including bodily functions, compared to Lug who is sophisticated and whose skills are well defined and refer particularly to the many functions within society. This emphasis on the natural and physical may well be reflected in the explanation of his name in *Cóir Anmann*: 'Dagda, that is dag dé 'fire of god'. He was a beautiful god of the heathens, for the Túatha Dé Danann worshipped him: for he was an earth-god to them because of the greatness of his (magical) powers' (*Dagda .i. dagh dé .i. día soinemhail ag na geintibh é, ar do adhradáis Túatha Dé Danann dó, ar bá día talmhan dóibh é ar mhét a chumachta*) (65). The Dagda is specifically associated with fire and earth, powerful natural elements. One of his names is Aed which means 'fire' (66) while

Uisnech was particularly associated with fire (67). With regard to the earth the harvest has already been mentioned but I also wonder whether *Cath Maige Tuired* may point to an earth connection in a very subtle way. Note how the Dagda is visited by the Mac Óc while standing in a trench (*clad*) because he builds the earthwork around Bres' fort, how he eats his porridge from a hole in the ground (*nderc talman*) and how he himself gets stuck in the ground (*tolam*), also called 'furrow' (*fuithirbe*) or just 'hole' (*derc*), when he wrestles with Indech's daughter - could this be seen as a special affinity with the ground? It certainly would not contradict what we have learned about him so far.

William Sayers summarises the Dagda on account of his many names which are featured in *Cath Maige Tuired* as someone whose functions are related to 'the cycles of life and death, creation and destruction, plenty and dearth ... sexual potency and impotence' (68). The same conclusion can be reached by looking at the Dagda's stories and the attributes and characteristics which are featured in them.

Before closing the investigation of the Dagda one final observation has to be made. For this we return once more to the stories of the Dagda and Bres and the Dagda and the Fomoiri. A suggestive detail appears in his encounter with Bres. When Bres finally pays the Dagda for his labours all the Dagda demands is one particular heifer because only he and his son know that all the cows of Ireland answer to this heifer's lowing. 'That seemed foolish to Bres. He had thought that he would have chosen something more' (*Ba héccomhnart la Bres annísín. Deménair-side ba ní pudh móo dogegadh*) (69). The word translated by E. Gray as 'foolish' is *éccomhnart* which literally means 'a weakness, a task for which one's powers are not equal' (DIL). The context suggests that the powers of judgement, ie mental rather than physical powers, are in question here. And yet his apparently foolish behaviour turns out to be the best choice he could have possibly made. One wonders whether the Dagda has anything in common with fools, particularly as access to hidden or superior knowledge is a characteristic of fools in many stories (70). This seems particularly apt when viewed in context of the second story quoted above, the Dagda's visit to the Fomorian camp. After the consumption of porridge, the Dagda falls asleep and, 'His belly was as big as a house cauldron, and the Fomoiri

laughed at it.' E. Gray explains that being laughed at because of appearance constitutes a legal injury because it damages a person's honour (71). P.O'Leary summarises the meaning of laughter in the sagas in the following way: 'For the protagonist of Irish heroic literature, laughter was almost never a spontaneous outburst of inclusive amusement, but rather a conscious condemnation of unacceptable behaviour. It was also a judgement, direct, personal, and unambiguous...' And further on: '... almost all Irish laughter is meant to mock and ridicule' (72). A parallel story involving a fool springs to mind, ie. the tragic fate of Mael Fothartaig's jester, Mac Glas, in *Fingal Rónáin*. When Mac Glas is killed with a spear, his entrails spill out: 'A raven was taking the fool's entrails from him on the steps. He was contorting his mouth. The churls were laughing. Mael Fothartaig was ashamed. Then he said: 'Mac Glass/gather in your bowels/why have you no shame/Churls are laughing at you.' (*No bered immorro in fiach a inathar ón drúth for irdrochiut. No fhencad a beolu. No thibtís ind athig. Mebul la Mael Fothartaig. is and asbert-som: A Mic Glais/ timthais t'inathar iniut,/cid ná fetar-su náire?/athaig oc gáire immut*) (73). It is interesting to note that both episodes involve the abdomen. While it seems at first that the crowd is laughing at the twisting face, Mael Fothartaig's reaction clearly identifies the spilled entrails as the shameful aspect. The Dagda's abdomen is still intact but hugely and abnormally distended. I think it is justified to see the two events as parallel, both dealing with malformed, abnormally extended abdomens attracting laughter and mockery. Ó Cathasaigh comments on the scene in *Fingal Rónáin*: 'In it he fulfils his role as the purveyor of 'the great primal joke of the undignified nature of the human body' which 'forms the most important part of the stock-in-trade of the buffoon' (74). This reading of the image would fit equally well for the Dagda.

The focus on the abdomen could be connected with the well-known characteristic of fools as being gluttonous (75) and love of food is certainly something the Dagda shares. However, apart from the visit to the Fomoiri, the Dagda eats a lot but not more than his system can cope with, while the very word 'gluttony' infers that the fool eats more than he can reasonably digest. This points to the possibility that the fool-analogy only fits with regard to this particular episode, not in general, and of course it is only here that the Dagda is laughed at.

Finally, we have to consider a third issue which is closely related to food, ie sexuality. Thomas Owen Clancy quotes secular and ecclesiastical texts which group the three characteristics together (76). In the example of Mac Glas the association with sexuality is very subtle. The fool himself is not sexual but, as Dr. Clancy points out, 'In Fingal Rónáin, Mac Glas can perhaps be seen as the blemished obscene alter-ego of the honour-bound and shame-fearing Mael Fothartaig. To the extent that the story is about sex, full of sexual innuendo, and involves a king's son's attempt not to break what he considers sexual morals, it is appropriate that the fool, often portrayed as sexually obscene or exaggerated, highlights symbolically the climax of the crisis in which Mael Fothartaig has been struggling...' (77).

The clearest image of the connection between food and sex with regard to the Dagda is his ladle which is large enough for a man and a woman to lie down together (78). This combination typifies the Dagda's overall character as well - his appetite has been mentioned frequently and references to his long penis and his testicles, as well as his various alliances with women both in *Cath Maige Tuired* and in other stories, make up the other half of the equation. In the episode in question, it is the presence of desire and the absence of actual sexual performance due to an excess of food which is portrayed. We can see a difference here between the fool and the Dagda - while food and sex are definitely linked in both, the fool displays exaggerated love of food and exaggerated sexuality, while the Dagda, though blessed with a huge appetite, usually only consumes as much as he can safely handle. If it is too much, his actual sexual performance decreases although it has to be said that his sexual desire remains the same.

Summarising the above we could say that the Dagda and the figure of the fool share three characteristics: their love of food, their love of sex and the fact that they are mocked and laughed at. These three characteristics occur together in a clear way only once, in the story set in the Fomorian camp and the subsequent episode with Indech's daughter. (The earlier incident where Bres considers him weak in the head is less clear, though a possibility.) I suspect there is a particular reason for this motif to occur in this particular episode. As we have seen, the Dagda and the principles he stands for are damaged through the malicious pseudo-

hospitality of the Fomorians, in other words, things are not as they should be. Further damage and suspension of a normal state of affairs comes in form of a mere woman being more powerful than the Good God who has been established as superior to almost every other figure. Suspension of the norm, of order, means chaos, even if only for a short time. We could summarise, therefore, that the appearance of the Dagda as a fool is a sign of chaotic circumstances. This is in line with T. Clancy's assessment of the fool's role in *Fingal Rónáin*. While the context is obviously quite different the contorted fool is taken to herald the collapse of the kingdom and the chaos and disorder that follows (79).

Ultimately, the Dagda reverts the chaotic state of affairs through his own strength and here, I believe, lies the secret of the Dagda's skill to cope with the Morrígan. Within him there is a balance of killing and giving life, of taking and giving food, of accepting and offering hospitality. He can create arable land from wilderness and provinces from an amorphous entity, in other words culture from nature. While remaining vulnerable to the imposition of chaos, he, thanks to his formidable nature, rectifies the situation and re-establishes order. Chaotic violence never overwhelms him, he never becomes an instrument of it. Thus the Morrígan has found her master.

To my mind, *Cath Maige Tuired* addresses the problem of chaotic destruction and violence just as *Táin Bó Cúailnge* does but arrives at a different answer. In *Táin Bó Cúailnge* we have learned that Cú Chulainn, as the defender of the tribe, can resist the Morrígan, yet he is also like her, thus remaining an ambivalent and always dangerous figure. The lesson seems to be that a superb warrior is an enormous asset to a society, yet the very fact that he is a specialist in violence and that violence has a habit of escalating beyond all originally intended limits also poses a very real danger to that same society. Carried away by the destructive impulse it takes outside agents (the naked women) to make him safe again.

Cath Maige Tuired stays with the theme of vulnerability to this chaotic violence, a fact which speaks for the wisdom and the subtlety of these early texts as any other view could hardly be taken seriously given long human experience of such tremendous forces. The central character chosen to face it, however, is the embodiment of balance and order who manages to encompass it, to transform it, to

make it temporarily safe through his extraordinary strength and bend it to the advantage of his people. Given this influence the Morrígan reacts in the fashion expected from a woman: she sleeps with the Dagda and transfers her power and her loyalty to him. The awareness that safety from the onslaught of chaos does not last forever is expressed in the final prophesy, put in the mouth of the woman who personifies these forces.

On account of the relationship with the Dagda the Morrígan becomes known as the Dagda's wife in later stories. One example can be provided in the place-lore attached to the river Odras (80) which picks up the themes of stolen cattle and sleeping guardians, referred to already in chapter four.

Odras is wife of Buchat, a cattle lord. While watching the cows one day she falls asleep and 'the Dagda's wife found her: in this wise came the shape-shifting goddess. The envious queen (or: the breeder of strife) (81) fierce of mood, the cunning raven-caller, brought off with her the bull that lived in Liathmuine' (*...dosrocht ben in Dagda, ba samla díá sóach. Tuc léi tarb in tnúthach, in rígan garb gnáthach, baí i Liathmuine láthach, in fíachaire fáthach. ll.19-24*) The Morrígan is further described as 'horrid' (*Mórrígan úathmar l.53*) and as 'the mighty Morrígan, whose pleasure was in mustered hosts' (*in Mórrígan mórdá, ba slóg-dírmach sámáda ll.135-6*). Following the familiar pattern, the bull is brought to Síð Cruachu to fertilize one of the Morrígan's own cows. Odras follows the Morrígan to challenge her to battle but again she falls asleep and thus becomes the Morrígan's victim: 'The owner of kine chanted over her, with fierceness unabating, towards huge Sliab Bodbgna every spell of power: she was full of guile' (*Rochan fuirre ind agda, tria luinde cen logda, cach bricht dían, ba dalbda, fri Sliab mBadhgna mbrogda. ll.57-60*). Odras thus becomes transformed into a stream, a tributary to the river Segais.

The authors of the *Dindshenchas* drew from well-known stories to compose their place-lore, as well as inventing new ones, often through etymologizing the name of a particular place (82). Thus, the information gained from these tales has to be used with great caution. Fortunately, the above tales do not present us with great difficulties because they pick up several familiar strands of the Morrígan's story: she is associated with cows and bulls, particularly with stealing bulls to fertilize

cows. The themes of disguise, shapeshifting and hostile 'spells' appear prominently, as does the equation between sleep and a character's vulnerability to her attack. She is portrayed as delighting in battle and associated with carrion birds. The story itself follows the well-known pattern of a woman being transformed into a river because of some mistake and subsequently the river is known by her name (83). The most interesting feature of this story is the fact that the Morrígan kills a beautiful and married woman, particularly associated with the land and with cattle, and transforms her into a river. The grouping of spouse, beauty, land, cattle and river could easily suggest the type of figure commonly associated with fertility and plenty. The Morrígan's aggression towards Odras may contain the same message as *Cath Maige Tuired* where she has sexual intercourse without producing offspring (84).

A similar sentiment may be perceived in the place-lore of *Bile Tortan* which deals with the falling of the ancient tree in the land of the people of Tortan near Ardraccan (85). A most intriguing stanza could possibly refer to the Morrígan: 'Beldame, though thou breakest faggots from its bole on thy hearth, there was many a fair youth that has slept under its bright branches. The woman who loosed their fair locks, many a trim sandal hath she loosed: gleefully she laughed at the felling of Tortu's Tree' (*Cía nodbena-su, a chaillech, broсна dia ind fort tellach, is mór do maccaib cóemaib, conatail foa glan-chróebaib. In ben roscaíl a moing find, roscaíl mór cuarán cóem-grind: in cass conatbi a gen, iar fuirmed Bili Tortan*) (86). Gwynn wonders: 'Who is this woman? the Morrigan, who laughs amid carnage?' (87). While it is impossible to be certain, the description would fit the Morrígan perfectly, particularly if we take into account Gwynn's observation that loosening sandals was a preparation for washing the dead (88). I would add that the presence of the hearth, though not called *fulacht*, may be derived from the association between cooking pits and the Morrígan (see below). Further, one could speculate about the image of the faggots broken from the bole. Kings are frequently likened to branches of trees and breaking faggots from the bole of a tree, in other words, the part of the tree where young shoots grow from, may well be a metaphor for killing young princes, snapping them off in their prime, so to speak.

While being on the subject of place-names the places associated directly with the Morrígan deserve attention here. A poem about *Brug na Bóinne*, found in the *Prose Dindshenchas* (89), mentions *Mur na Morrígna*, the 'Rampart of the Morrígan', as well as *Dá Chích na Morrígna*, the 'Two Paps of the Morrígan'. This instantly reminds us of the famous 'Paps of Anu', particularly as Anu and Morrígan are interchangeable in some sources. However, Carey suggests that this text is derived from a poem in the Book of Leinster where *Dá Chích na Morrígna* corresponds to *Dá Chích Rígna ind Ríg*, meaning 'the Breasts of the King's Queen', '... in a context which strongly suggests that Boand is the personage referred to' (90).

Fled Bricrend mentions *Áth na Morrígna* (91) the 'Ford of the Morrígan' and *Tochmarc Emhíre* features *Gort na Morrígnai*, the 'Garden of the Morrígan' (92) as well as *Ross Bodba .i. na Mórrígnae*, the 'Wood of the Badb or Morrígan' (93).

Hennessy adds *Crich na Morrígna* (94) and also points out that certain ancient cooking sites are associated with the Morrígan and termed *fulacht-na-Morrígna* (95). The 'Triads of Ireland' give us the following information about the latter:

'Three things that constitute a blacksmith: Nethin's spit, the cooking hearth of the Morrígan, the Dagda's anvil' (*...fulacht na Morrígna, inneoin in Dagda*) (96).

Do these associations with the land warrant the conclusion that the Morrígan is an earth-goddess in origin and her war-like aspects reflect battles for territory? (97)

Judging from the evidence of place names alone I think the answer has to be in the negative. If we look through the sagas we find that practically every figure and every event has given rise to a place-name. This shows us how important it was for the Irish to explain features of the landscape and how it was firmly linked with events in the past, giving rise to a mythical geography (98). As for the individual example, however, it would be nonsensical to assume that every figure who gave his or her name to a place would therefore be an earth-god or earth-goddess.

There is no reason to assume that the Morrígan was seen as anything other than a goddess of death and war.

To summarize this chapter we can say that *Cath Maige Tuired* adds a new dimension to our enquiry in that it shows the benefits of having the Morrígan on one's side. Her ability to have knowledge of hidden facts, so detrimental to Cú Chulainn, lends great advantage to the Tuatha Dé. Further, she actively destroys the

enemy king through her otherworldly powers while strengthening and inciting her own warriors. Both activities contribute to the triumph of the Tuatha Dé. The Morrígan's importance thus rivals Lug's even though she only appears briefly and the focus of *Cath Maige Tuired* remains firmly on the young male hero. This confirms an impression already gained in previous tales: while the male warriors maintain their position in the foreground of the story, the female powers connected with war remain mysteriously in the background but are forces to be reckoned with. At the same time, it is an extraordinary male warrior, able to balance extremes within himself and extricate himself from situations of chaos by his own strength, who manages to 'tame' the Morrígan. However, despite the emphasis on the Morrígan's service to the Tuatha Dé, *Cath Maige Tuired* insists on her essential ambivalence, both at the beginning of the story and at the end, and exposes that any 'taming' is temporary at best.

Notes to Chapter 5:

- 1) Gray, E.A. 'Cath Maige Tuired' (Dublin, 1982). All references are to this work, abbreviated as CMT.
CMT is found in the sixteenth century manuscript Harleian 5280. It is taken to be a tale of the 11th or 12th century with a core that goes back to the 9th century. (E.A.Gray 'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure' *Éigse* 18 (1980-81) p.184, also note 3)
- 2) For details see E.A.Gray's series of articles: 'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure' *Éigse* 18 (1980-81) pp.183-209; *Éigse* 19 (1982-83)pp. 1-35; pp.230-62
- 3) *Éigse* 18, p.193 describes warfare '...as an ordeal, a process of judgement through which one tribe or another was justified by victory.' see also note 22 on same page.
- 4) O'Leary, P 'Fír Fer: An internalized concept in Early Irish Literature?' *Éigse* 22 (1988-9), 1-14
- 5) TBC1 1552-4
- 6) CMT, paragr.83, ll.342-45
- 7) CMT, paragr. 85, ll.362-68
- 8) Macalister, R.A.S. 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn'(Part 4),ITS 41(Dublin, 1941), p.216-7
- 9) CMT ll.646-48
- 10)CMT ll 328-33 Confirmed by McCone, Kim 'Pagan Past and Christian Present' (Maynooth, 1990) p.127: 'Activities and qualifications...of the láech or warrior (are covered) by gal (valour), gaisced (bearing arms) and nert (strength).'
- 11)CMT ll. 575-6; also see examples below in connection with Lug and the Morrigan.
- 12)RC 8 (1887) p.57, note 10
- 13)Stokes, W. 'Archiv für Celtische Lexicographie' (vol.2) (Halle,1904) , p.223
- 14)O'Leary, P. 'The Honour of Women in Early Irish Literature' *Ériu* 38 (1987) p.27 (27-44)
- 15)It is interesting to relate these findings to another expression which occurs in CMT as part of Figol's war-efforts where he promises to bind the urine (fúal) in the warrior's bodies and in the bodies of their horses.(CMT ll 330-1) I always wondered whether the early Irish knew about the connection between kidneys and urine formation but it seems that this expression also centres on testicles if 'The Story of Mac Dathó's Pig' is to be believed. Celtchair is shamed by Cet, son of Magu into giving up his claim to the champion's portion because Cet tells the story when he he threw a spear 'so that it went through your thigh and through the upper part of your testicles. You are with a malady of urine from that time, so that no son or daughter was borne to you.'(... co ndechair tret slíasait ocus tre húachtar do macraille. Atá co ngalur fúail ónd úair-sin, nicon rucad mac na ingen duit)(Thurneysen, R. 'Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó' (Dublin, 1986), para.13, p.12-13) Thus binding the urine can be seen as synonymous with un-manning the warriors. According to Charles Bowen's evidence, fúal is also related to a woman's sexual potency. See below
- 16)'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure', *Éigse* 19, p.241

17)William Sayers thinks that the hostile behaviour of Indech's daughter is an act of revenge following the Morrigan's magical attack on her father. ('Supernatural Pseudonyms', *Emania* 12 (1994), p.52) While this would lend more weight to the argument that Indech and the Fomoiri were aware of her actions I find it difficult to read the text in this fashion. The woman, it seems to me, mocks him because of his appearance, just like her people did, and more specifically because of his impotence. After he cannot defend himself against the mockery, she takes her chances and wrestles with him, then humiliating him further by making him carry her on his back. It is also true to say that she would be hostile towards him anyway on account of his belonging to her enemies.

18)CMT II 311-335

19)CMT II 467-519

20)CMT II 492-3

21)Zimmer, H.: 'Beiträge zur Erklärung Irischer Sagentexte' *ZCP* 3 (1899-1901), p.299n

22)CMT II 452-3

23)CMT II 584-5

24)CMT II 681-2

25)CMT I 587

26)CMT II 682-3

27)CMT I 694

28)CMT II 814-17

29)CMT II 817-8

30)CMT II 819-27

31)CMT II 828-30

32)CMT II 831-40. For another edition and translation of the second prophesy see Carey, John 'Myth and Mythography in Cath Maige Tuired' *Studia Celtica* (1989-90), p.67-8

33)'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure' *Éigse* 19 (1982-3), p.261

34)'Myth and Mythography', p.62

35)Stokes, W. 'The Colloquy of the two Sages' *RC26* (1905) p.32-49

36)CMT I. 831

37)CMT II 354-361

38)CMT (notes) p.74 'The sinister associations of the north are reflected in many sources.' see examples

39)'Myth and Structure' *Éigse* 19(1982-3), p. 240: 'As a woman at her bath, the Morrigan is completely unprotected;...'

40)One of the stories surrounding Conchobor's birth tells about the enmity between Ness and Cathbad because the latter had killed all the girl's tutors. Bent on revenge Ness sets out to find the perpetrator of this evil deed but while bathing in a pool, Cathbad surprises her and comes between her and her weapons. He rapes her and Conchobor is the result of the union.(Stokes, W. 'Scéla

Conchobair Maic Nessa', *Ériu* 4 (1910), p.22, transl.p.23) Similarly, Conchobor is said to be the husband of Medb, but she leaves him, only to be raped by him later on in the tale while she is bathing in the Boyne. (O'Neill, Joseph 'Cath Boinde', *Ériu* 2 (1905), p.178 and 180, transl. p.179 and 181.)

41)Stokes, W. 'Togail Bruidne Da Choca' RC 21 (1900) p.157

42)In CMT 'Index of Places' pp.138-141 we find the following information: 1)Alloed Echae, a name now obsolete, referring to Doorly townland, Kilmorgan parish, Corran barony. 2)Loscondoib, now Lisconny townland, Drumcolumb parish, Tirerril barony. 3)The river Unius is the river Unshin, between Loch Arrow and Ballysadare.

43)'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure', *Éigse* 19 (1982-83), p.240

44)Ross, A. 'Pagan Celtic Britain - Studies in Iconography and Tradition' (London, 1993), p.48.

45)Bowen, C. 'Great-bladdered Medb: Mythology and invention in the TBC' *Éire- Ireland*, vol.10, no.4 (1975), p.25-8

46)ibid. p.28

47)Ó Cathasaigh, T. 'Scéla Éogain in so 7 Cormaic' (Tidings of Éogan and Cormac) in 'The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt' (Dublin,1977), p.125

48)Carey,J. 'Notes on the Irish Wargoddess', *Éigse* 19 (1982-83), p.269

49)CMT II 334-7

50)CMT II 516-19

51)CMT II 438-450

52)In CMT, the Mac Óc is not specifically called the son of the Dagda but this relationship is well-known from stories such as Tochmarc Étaíne (The Wooing of Étaín). Bríg is called the daughter of the Dagda in CMT, paragraph 124, p.56, transl.p.57

53)Best, R.I. and Bergin, O. 'Tochmarc Étaíne', *Ériu* 12 (1938), p.142, transl.p.143.

54)Gantz,J. 'The Intoxication of the Ulaid' in 'Early Irish Myths and Sagas' (London,1981) p.206-7

55)CMT II 376-83, for greater details, see below.

56)'From Murias was brough the Dagda's cauldron. No company ever went away from it unsatisfied.'(A Murias tucad coiri an Dagdai. Ní tégedh dám dindach úadh) CMT I 12

57)'His belly was as big as a house cauldron, and the Fomoire laughed at it.'(Ba méidithir scabol tige a bolc fair, gon tibsíd im sodain na Fomóire.) CMT II 391-2

58)CMT II 89-122

59)CMT II 377-392

60)CMT II 393-437

61)'Tochmarc Étaíne': 'He was also named the Dagda, for it was he that used to work wonders for them and control the weather and the crops.' (p.143) ('Ainm n-aill do dano an Dagda, ar ba hé dogníth na firta 7 conmidhedh na sina 7 na toirthé dóib.' p.142)

62)In Tochmarc Étaíne, Ailill demands three tasks from the Mac Óc, two of which are relevant for

this study. The first one is phrased in the following way: 'Thou shalt clear for me twelve plains in my land that are under waste and wood, so that they may be at all times for grazing cattle and for habitation to men, for games and assemblies, gatherings and strongholds.' ('Dá magh dég do slaidhi uaidsiu damsá im ferandsa do neoch fil fo dithraib 7 fedaib, co rabad dogrés fri geilt do ceithrib 7 fri trebad do dainib, fri cluichi 7 ceiti, fri dala 7 dunadha indtib.')

p.150, transl.p.151) The second task is not complete '...until thou draw out of this land to the sea twelve great rivers that are in wells and bogs and moors, so that they may bring produce from the sea to peoples and kindreds, and drain the earth and the land.' (...co ruga da primusce déc asin ferand sa docum mara do neoch fil a tibradaib 7 mointib 7 seiscnib, do thabairt thoraíd o muirib do thuathaib 7 cenelaib, do thirmugudh thiri 7 talman.')

p.150, transl.p.151. Both tasks are accomplished by the Dagda, each one in a night.

63)CMT II 395-7

64) 'Tochmarc Étaíne', p.144, transl. p.145.

65)Stokes, W. 'Cóir Anmann', in Stokes, W. and Windisch, E. *Irische Texte, Dritte Serie, 2.Heft* (Leipzig, 1897)p.354, transl. p.355.

66)Rees, A. and Rees, B. 'Celtic Heritage', (London, 1989), p.30

67) *ibid.* p.156-7

68)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p.53, quoting from a previous article Sayers 1988, 344.

69)CMT II 131-2

70)Welsford, E 'The fool: his social and literary history', (London, 1935), p.76-121. (Reference kindly provided by Thomas Owen Clancy)

71)O'Leary, P. 'Jeers and Judgements - Laughter in Early Irish Literature' *CMCS* (21-22), 1991, p.15-6. He also mentions Cú Chulainn's death-tale where spilled entrails elicit laughter. When the raven pecks at Cú Chulainn's intestines 'Cú Chulainn burst out laughing at that.' (...do maidh a gear gáire for Coin Chulainn ime sin...)

72)'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure', *Eigse* 19 (1982-3), p.234

73)Greene, D. 'Fingal Rónáin' (Dublin, 1975) II.153-155

74)Ó Cathasaigh 'The Rhetoric of Fingal Rónáin' *Celtica* 17 (1985), p.142, quoting Welsford, *The fool*, 51)

75)see Alan Harrison 'The Irish Trickster' (Sheffield 1989) p.301, for a comment on the stomach referring to gluttony

76)Clancy, T.O. 'Fools and Adultery in some Early Irish Texts', *Eriu* 44 (1993), p.105-124

77)*ibid.*, p.119

78)CMT II 384-5

79)'Fools and Adultery', p.119

80)Gwynn,E. 'The Metrical Dindshenchas' vol.4 (Dublin, 1924) p.196-201. (Prose version differs in details but the course of the story is practically the same. Stokes, W. 'The Prose Tales of the Rennes Dindshenchas' *RC* 16 (1895), p.64ff)

81)ibid. p.429, note 21 of 'Odras'

82)Ó hÓgáin, D. 'Myth, Legend and Romance: an Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition' (London, 1990) p.363

83)see Gwynn,E. 'Metrical Dindshenchas' vol.3 (1913), p.94-5 and p.289-95;

84)To say that the Morrígan never has any off-spring is not true, strictly speaking. Some late texts mention various sons and daughters in passing. (For example see CMT 'Index of Persons' p.129) The temptation to invent family even for someone like the Morrígan was obviously too great. One of the more interesting ones refers to her son Meche, who is born with three snakes in his heart. These creatures are so vicious that, if they had been allowed to grow, they would have devastated all of Ireland. Mac Cecht kills Meche and throws the ashes of his heart into the river. All the aquatic creatures die from the poison. (Place lore of 'Berba' RC15 (1894), p.304-5)

85)Gwynn, E. 'Bile Tortan' in 'The Metrical Dindshenchas' vol.4 (notes) p.440

86)ibid. p.240 and 242 (text); p.241 and 243 (translation)

87)ibid. p.441

88)ibid.

89)RC15, p.292

90)Carey,J. 'Notes on the Irish War-goddess' Éigse 19 (1982-3)p.274 (263-275)

91)Henderson,G. 'Fled Bricrend' ITS 2 (Dublin, 1899) para.37, p.44 and 46; transl.p.47

92)v.Hamel, A.G. 'Compert Con Culainn and other stories' (Dublin,1956), para.37, p.35

93)ibid. para.50, p.42

94)Hennessy,W.M. 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' RC1 (1870-72), p.55 (p.32-55)

95)ibid. p.54

96)Meyer,K. 'The Triads of Ireland' TLS 13 (Dublin,1906), No.120, p.17

97)'Myth, Legend and Romance' p.307

98)Mac Cana, P. 'Placenames and Mythology in Irish Tradition: Places, Pilgrimage and Things' in Proceedings of the First North American Congress of Celtic Studies, Ottawa, 1986, p.319ff

A R
208 2 9
Including 4 0 20 water

R L E Y
R P
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Lough
Stepping Stones
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L I S C O N N Y

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A R P
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Including 1 2 4 water

RIVER BOUNDARY

Lackagh School

L A C K A G H

A R P
240 0 20
Including 5 2 15 water

E E N
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2 4 water
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Liab to

Chapter 6:

WASHERS AT THE FORD,

HAGS AND OTHER FIERCE FEMALES

In the tales so far discussed there was no question about the Morrigan's identity other than an overlap with other 'war-goddesses'. This chapter, on the other hand, will look at instances where it is not quite clear who we are dealing with. In order to set these figures into context and to make the connection with previous ones, the poem *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* (1) is dealt with first because it features the Morrigan in a grim picture of carnage.

Meyer relates the events leading up to this scene: Fothad Canainne, a *fianna* leader, eloped with the wife of a rival *fianna* chieftain, Ailill Flann Beag, which caused a battle at the pool of Feic on the river Boyne. There Fothad Canainne was beheaded and the head speaks the content of *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*, addressing its words to the wife of Ailill who had come to the battle-field to find her lover. The first significant passage for our purposes is Fothad Canainne's warning to the woman:

'Do not await the horror of the night on the battle-field among the graves of the hosts; it is not worth while to speak to a dead man; go home and take my spoils' (*Ná tuinite aidche úath/ i lleirg eter lechta cúan;/ní fíu sobra fri fer marb;/fot-ruim dot daim, beir latt m'fhadb*) (2). The battle-field as place of dread confirms

Conchobor's words in 'The Fight between Eógán mac Durthacht and Conchobor', discussed in previous chapters where Conchobor speaks of the danger of dying from terror there. The equivalent of the Badb's appearance in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is

the Morrigan's gruesome activity in our tale: 'Here and there around us are many spoils of bloody appearance; frightful are the great guts the Morrigan is washing. She has descended on us, a gloomy guest; it is she who hurls us into struggle.

Many are the spoils she washes, dreadful the twisted laugh she laughs. She has

thrown her mane over her back, the heart in my former shape hates her; though she is not far from us, do not let fear assail you' (*Ataat immunn san chan/mór fodb asa forderg bal;/ dremun inathor dímar/ nodus nig an Morrígan/ Don-árlaid, dobail oígi/ is sí cotan-assoídi;/ is mór di fhodbaib niges/ dremun in caisgen tibes/ Ro lá a moing tar a ais/ cride im aithrecht noda ais/ cid gar di shunn úann i mbé/ná fubthad úaman do gné*) (3).

The Morrígan appears much like a so-called Washer at the Ford washing spoils and bodies, presumably in the Boyne or, more exactly, the pool of Feic as this is where the battle takes place. Why would the Morrígan be interested in spoils and bodies? Daithí Ó hÓgáin mentions in 'Myth, Legend and Romance' that the word for spoils (*fodb/fadb*) is a phonemic parallel to *bodb/badb* and 'a stylistic connection was made between the two words within the overall context of war' (4). I would speculate, however, that the connection is not solely stylistic. It appears from *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* itself that a warrior would prefer his equipment to remain amongst his own people: Fothad Canainne asks his lover specifically to carry his spoils home (5). Given the expression of hatred towards the Morrígan, she is obviously not a friend but an enemy. If we remind ourselves that material gain is one of the aims of war, one of its incentives, and that to be seen with plentiful spoils adds to the prestige of the victors, one wonders whether her possession of spoils may signify that it is she, not any human agent, who is the true victor in the conflict. It reminds us of the Morrígan's shout of triumph in 'The Battle of Allan' (6) and the passage where the heads of the slain are referred to as Macha's mast (7) - heads, of course, being valued as trophies. Badb's joyfulness after battle also springs to mind just as her feeding habits find a resonance with this story. The reason is that both feeding on the slain and washing entrails signifies the dissolution of the body which can be seen as a transition from order into chaos. The washing motif itself remains somewhat mysterious. One strand in the development of this image could well be the actual practice of washing the dead after the battle and before their burial. In *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* itself Fothad Canainne refers to his unwashed head ('my unwashed head is among warriors in rude slaughter') (8), while in 'The Death of Muirchertach Mac Erca', for example, the clerics wash Muirchertach's body in the Boyne (... (they) carry him to the Boyne and wash his corpse therein) (9). In 'The Battle of Mag Rath' Congal's body is brought into the fortress 'and they washed him and his head was placed upon the mound of the rath' (10). In the *Bóroma* the death of two girls elicits the following response: 'Thereafter the washing of the two maidens was performed in *Áth Toncha* (Ford of Washing) so that everyone said: Rough is this washing' (*Doringned iarsin a tanach na da ingen i-nÁth Toncha, co n-aprad cách 'is garb in*

tonach sa') (11). This phrase appears as one of the examples in DIL for the word *tonach*, the verbal noun of *do-nig*, which is defined as 'act of washing the dead, preparing for burial'. One would expect the family or friends to perform this service, however, and the Morrígan hardly falls into this category. As in the case of the spoils themselves the washing may be an indication that everything to do with the victim belongs to her now. In a way, her washing of the body could be interpreted as the final insult to the victim. Indeed, washing someone can be seen as a hostile action. The DIL mentions in the context of *nigid*: 'To wash a person against his will is regarded as an insult, hence in threats, etc. *drub*, thrash.' The dictionary also quotes examples from other languages, eg. in German: '*ich will ihm den Kopf waschen*'; and in French '*je vais lui laver la tete*' which is translated as 'I'll give him a sound rapping'. It is conceivable that the hostile undertones of washing may have influenced its incorporation into the imagery surrounding the war-goddesses.

The horrific scene of washing bodies and spoils is amplified by her hateful laughter, '*dremhan an caisgen tibhes*'. The DIL translates *caisgen* as 'a short, sarcastic laugh' (s.v. *gen*) which connects again with her mocking, satirizing aspects. It is worthwhile remembering P.O'Leary's comments about laughter being a judgement, a condemnation and a mockery all in one (12). If we see the Morrígan as the true victor in the conflict her laughter could be interpreted as a laugh of triumph in the face of the hapless victim. This is particularly cruel in view of the fact that the Morrígan is held responsible for having incited the men to battle. As far as her appearance is concerned we are only told that her hair is unbraided and thrown over her back which reminds us of portrayal in *Cath Maige Tuired*. The overall effect is probably that of a rather wild-looking woman.

Despite the horror, some hope is expressed in the advice Fothad Canainne gives to his lover. It corroborates what was suggested in connection with the *Macgnímrada* episode quoted above: the Morrígan can be resisted if a person remains courageous and keeps fear at bay. This is one explanation why Cú Chulainn can resist her attack in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, why Fothad Canainne's lover is safe for the moment, and presumably also one reason why some people survive battles and others do not.

The description as 'Washer at the Ford' has occurred twice with regard to the Morrigan, once in *Cath Maige Tuired* and now, in connection with *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*. It seems appropriate to investigate the Washers of the Ford more closely at this stage and to compare the accounts (13). This is particularly appropriate as the connection between *fadb* and *badb* implies that female figures involved with spoils, even if unnamed, are seen as *Badb*, although it always has to be remembered that *badb* became a general term for any hostile female in later texts. Most of the Washer tales are late and fall outside the period specified in the introduction. However, it is important to see the development of this figure as the contrast it gives us interesting clues to the understanding of the earlier ones. The criterion for naming a woman as a Washer at the Ford is that she appears by a body of water and washes bloody items. Such females appear in *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* 'The Destruction of Dá Choca's Hostel' (14), *Aided Con Culainn* 'The Death of Cú Chulainn' (15), and two figures in *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* 'The Triumphs of Turlough' (16).

The following questions need to be asked for the sake of comparing the three accounts:

- 1) what is being shown/washed and whose is it?
- 2) when does it take place?
- 3) who does it?
- 4) what does this figure look like?
- 5) any other information about the figure?
- 6) at what location does the washing take place?
- 7) who watches?
- 8) what is the reaction of the onlookers?
- 9) does the figure take part in the battle?

Let us turn to *Cath Maige Tuired* first. There are certain difficulties with this episode as the washing episode is separated from the showing of blood by the crucial event of intercourse with the Dagda, which brings the Morrigan over to the Túatha side. While the washing points towards the washer at the ford type, I take the story here from the showing of blood by the ford and see how it compares with the rest.

Two handfuls of blood are shown belonging to Indech, the loser of the battle (1). It happens quite a long time before the battle (2), it is done by the Morrígan (3), she presumably still has loosened hair (4), she gives away information about the Túatha's enemies, she is the Dagda's lover (5), the blood is shown by a river-ford (6), the *aés dána* of the victorious party watch (7), no reaction is given (8), the Morrígan does take part in the battle (9).

In *Reicne Fothad Canainne*, bloody spoils and entrails of the losers are washed (1). This takes place after the battle (2), the Morrígan is named as the washer (3), she has a mane thrown over her back (4), she laughs (5), she washes in the river Boyne (6). She appears to the loser of the battle who is a (dead) *fianna* leader and his (living) wife (7). The dead man advises not to be afraid and to hate the Morrígan (8), the Morrígan has been active in the battle (9).

Thirdly, we turn to *Togail Bruidne Da Choca*. As the tale has not been reviewed so far, it is necessary to set the Washer episode in context. *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* relates the downfall of Cormac Conloingeas in a very similar fashion to Conaire in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: both kings are given numerous *gessa* which they eventually break, one after the other, until death becomes inevitable. Towards the end of Cormac's life he meets a woman, a Washer at the Ford. She not only foretells his death but also ensures that he breaks yet another geiss, ie crossing the Shannon dryfooted.

This is what happens: 'As they (ie Cormac and his host) were there (ie at *Druim Airthir* on the Shannon) they saw a red woman on the edge of the ford, washing her chariot and its cushions and its harness. When she lowered her hand, the bed of the river became red with gore and with blood. But when she raised her hand over the river's edge, not a drop therein but was lifted on high; so that they went dryfoot over the bed of the river. 'Most horrible is what the woman does!' said Cormac. ... And then, standing on one foot, and with one eye closed, she chanted to them and said 'I wash the harness of a king who will perish, etc' The messenger came to Cormac and told him the evil prophecy which the Badb had made for him.' Cormac then finds out that the king she talked about is himself and says: 'Evil are the omens that thou askest for us....Grimly thou chantest to us' (*Ai mbatar ann confacatar mnái ndeirc for ur ind atha 7 si ag nige a fonnad 7 a fortche 7 a*

fodbae. In tan no toimed a laimh sin ba derg sruthair na habae di chrú 7 d'fuil. In tan immorro no toghad al-láim oss ur na habae, ní bid bannae isin abainn na tochad a n-airde, co rachtae cossaib tirmaib tar sruthair na habae) (17).

Just afterwards he is plagued by terrible nightmares - obviously the Badb has succeeded in striking fear into his heart, an emotion which inevitably spells his ruin.

Applying the above list of questions to *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* the following can be said: In *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* a chariot **with** all its attachments is being washed (1), before the battle (2), a woman is the actor (in one version the Badb) (3), she is red, and in the longer version she has one eye, arm, foot (4), she has power over the water (5), she washes in the river Shannon which turns bloody (6), she appears to the loser (7), the king is afraid; in the longer version he needs clarification before he understands (8), the woman does not appear in the actual battle (9).

Cathréim Thoirdealbhaigh features two Washers, one which appears to Donnchad O'Brien just before the battle of Corcomroe Abbey, Co. Clare in 1317, and one which forebodes the death of Richard de Clare, leader of the Normans and therefore a foreigner, in the battle of Dysert O'Dea in 1318.

The first one is Brónach of Burren, 'The Dismal One of Burren': '...they looked over the shining mere and there they saw the monstrous and distorted form of a lone, ancient, hideous hag that stooped over the bright loch's shore' (*do silletar na sluaigh ar an solaslind gu coitcenn i coimnéinfecht, co bfacatar ann ós bruachaib in bánlocha arracht adbalcrom aighedhghorm abachtruagh fiacalglas findfadgarb ingencromárd chaolruadh énachailighi..*)The attributes that follow are too numerous to copy, suffice it to say that they are all horrible and refer to her grey matted hair, her pustulous skin, her crooked form, and so on. The hag washes limbs, heads and weapons and the whole lake (Lough Riasc) is full of blood and brains. On questioning she says: 'the Dismal of Burren' I am named always; 'tis of the *Túatha dé Danann* I declare myself and, royal chief (the withered crone went on), this carnage here stands for your [army's] heads with, in their very midst, thine own head' (*brónach Bóirne mo buanainmsi agus do tuaith dé Danann mo degsloindedh; agus bar cindsi in cosairsi a caomáirdrigh bar an crínaimid, agus do cennsa na*

certmedhón.) Donnchad dismisses her as a friendly Badb of Clan Turlough (*badb bancharad do briancloind Torrdelbaig*) but nevertheless he and his army are slaughtered (18).

Using the above scheme we note that parts of the body and spoils are washed (1), before the battle (2), an old hag does it (3), she has a most repulsive exterior (4), she is friendly with the enemy (5), the washing takes place at a lake (6), the losers watch (7), the king talks to her, then dismisses the vision (8), the woman does not appear in the battle (9).

The second Washer, called *dobarbrónach* 'the Water-Doleful One', is so similar to Brónach that a brief summary of the event is sufficient. She appears at the river Fergus, is described with numerous alliterative adjectives, and washes armour and robes until the blood is squeezed out, reddening the river. On questioning, the robes are revealed to be those of Richard and his people whose death is predicted. Richard recognizes her as a being friendly with his enemies. She is also said to be originally 'of Hell's túatha' (*do tuath iffirnd*). Needless to say, Richard is doomed (19).

Finally, we find this motif in Cú Chulainn's 15th century death-tale where the Washer at the Ford is one of the many omens heralding Cú Chulainn's demise: '...they had not gone far from the fortress, when they encountered a beautiful, white-bodied, well-proportioned maiden in front of Áth na Foraire on the Plain of Emain, who was moaning and complaining and squeezing and washing purple, hacked, wounded spoils on the bank of the ford' (*ní cian rángatar ón dúnad, an tan tarrla dóib ingen cháem chorpgéal chubhaidh ar bél Átha na Foraire ar Mag na hEamna, 7 sí ac torrsi 7 ac truaghnemélai, 7 faidhbh corcra cirtha créchtnaighthi aca fásgadh 7 aga fuarnighi a heocharimlibh in átha aici*) The woman is identified as 'Badb's daughter' by Cathbad (20).

The Washer squeezes purple, hacked, wounded spoils. The presence of the adjective 'wounded' implies parts of the body, the purple seems to be referring to bloodied things (1). The event takes place when Cú Chulainn is on his final journey, before the last battle (2). The woman is Badb's daughter (3), and she is beautiful (4), white-bodied, well-proportioned and moaning (5), she is at the bank

of the ford (6), watched by the doomed hero and his friend, the druid (7), Cú Chulainn seems to need the druid to interpret the scene, then carries on regardless although he fully understands the threat(8), the Badb is not involved in the battle (9).

The stable elements amongst all the variations is that a woman shows blood or bloody things by a body of water to a group of people involved in a conflict and that the blood or bloody things belong to the losers of the battle.

All but one of the accounts are consistent with regard to the fact that spoils are washed, with or without body parts being present. As heads count as spoils, this detail is probably not important. *Cath Maige Tuired*, however, stands out in that blood is handed over, nothing is washed.

In most accounts the activity is a foreboding of violent death. *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* is an exception in that the washing occurs after the battle and after the victim's death, which could be interpreted as the vision coming true in every respect rather than just signalling that some warriors are going to die.

The identity of the woman, if stated at all, is either Morrígan or Badb, or even a *badb*. As *badb* becomes a summary term for all nasty and hostile women, we cannot necessarily assume that the later Washers are identical to the war-goddesses as we meet them in earlier texts.

Her appearance varies. There is only one case of a beautiful *badb* (Cú Chulainn's *badb*) and one clearly ugly one (the Brónach and her double). *Cath Maige Tuired* and *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* only refer to her hair which is loose. Again, redness certainly spells danger in *Togail Bruidne Da Choca*, but it does not necessarily imply ugliness. Overall we could say that she is fear inspiring but not necessarily ugly.

The additional information varies, there are no common features other than that the threatening and eery nature of the woman is further emphasized.

The scene is always set by water as otherwise there could be no washing.

However, the washing always takes place outside, in a natural source of water, not indoors, in a washing tub or similar. The woman always comes from the natural realm.

The loser watches the scene with only one exception, *Cath Maige Tuired*, where the winning party watches. Another feature with regard to the onlookers is their lack of clear understanding. In every case someone needs to clarify what is happening. *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* could be regarded as the only exception as Fothad Cannaine has no doubts about what he is seeing, but then he is a dead man and he comments on the scene for the sake of his (living) lover. In *Cath Maige Tuired* the *aés dána* are prepared for the Morrígan's actions through the Dagda as she had already told him what was going to happen. In *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* Cormac needs to talk to the woman (at least in the longer version) before he grasps the situation, in *Cathréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* Donnchad does the same while Richard needs an Irish interpreter, and in Cú Chulainn's death tale the druid comments on the vision. We are reminded of Cú Chulainn's various encounters with the Morrígan where we noticed that Cú Chulainn never recognizes her immediately and only afterwards realises the full implications of their conversation.

Finally, the question of whether the woman is involved in the actual battle can be answered positively in the case of *Cath Maige Tuired* and *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*, negatively in the others.

In this respect it is interesting to have a brief look at the question of allegiance. *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* and *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* portray the woman as hostile to the victims but do not associate her with the winning side. The Washer in Cú Chulainn's death-tale is more ambiguous. Her action is hostile in the sense that she prophesies Cú Chulainn's death but the fact that she is moaning and complaining seems to indicate that there is an element of regret or even mourning present. *Cathréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* clearly associates the woman with the enemy forces and thus shows a profound shift in the conception of these figures. Being attached to one particular family has resonances with the sovereignty goddess theme and the two, Washer at the Ford and Sovereignty, seem to be moving closer in this late tale.

Cath Maige Tuired, however, remains a special case because the washing scene is split from the showing of blood. I have argued above that at the stage of the

washing, the Morrígan is not yet aligned with the Túatha while afterwards, ie when she shows the blood, she clearly is.

Summarising the above findings we notice that *Cath Maige Tuired* is the most atypical story of all of them. While it features both washing and showing of blood by a ford and therefore hints at the Washer at the Ford, the fact that the two episodes are split and that she gives the blood to the victors clearly sets this tale apart from the others and makes it questionable whether we can attribute the title 'Washer at the Ford' to the Morrígan in this case.

Reicne Fothaid Canainne fits in all respects except that the scene is set after the battle and the emphasis which is put on the Morrígan's active involvement in the battle. She is accused of inciting the warriors which does not exactly make her responsible for the battle but shows that she desires a battle and actively promotes it.

We notice, then, that the two stories which feature the Morrígan, as opposed to Badb or a *badb*, show that the figure which delivers the warning also actively takes part in the hostilities which bring about the person's death. In the other tales the woman is dissociated from the actual battle and only foretells what is in store for the onlookers.

Within this second group of tales, ie the ones featuring Badb or a *badb*, however, a further distinction needs to be made between *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* on the one hand and *Aided Con Chulainn* and *Cathréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, both much later tales, on the other. While it is true that the washer woman in *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* does not take part in the battle we notice that she actively assists in Cormac's downfall by enabling him to cross the river dryfooted which, of course, breaks another one of his *geiss*. Therefore we could say that she still has some active involvement in the death of Cormac. This sets her apart from the later Washers who take no active role, as far as we can tell, in the death of the main hero. One can thus discern a development from an active role to a passive role in these stories featuring the Washer at the Ford and as time goes on she becomes further removed from the active war-goddess of the early texts until she disappears altogether after the 14th century (21). Hand in hand with this development is a

certain sympathy with one side or the other. This is only hinted at in Aided Con Chulainn, but definitely present in *Cathréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*.

Given this change in emphasis the portrayal of the washers still remains the same in that the stories describe her as dangerous, as foreboding the hero's death, as fear-inspiring through her looks, her words and her deeds. She still appears in the wider context of war and maintains her association with water. Her washing activity is prophetic but also hints at who the real winner of the war will be.

Apart from the Washers at the Ford there are otherworldly women who herald the death of a hero in different ways, and who are sometimes called by one of the war-goddesses names, sometimes by another name. *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* mentioned above features one of them in a later episode, and so does *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (22), (probably) its model. The latter tells of the rise and fall of King Conaire. Conaire's mother is Mes Buachalla who has all the attributes of a sovereignty goddess. Just like Cú Chulainn, he has two fathers, one from the Otherworld who visits Mes Buachalla in form of a bird, and one human one, king Earscele, who marries Mes Buachalla just after this event.

On his way to assume the kingship he is taught various *gessa* which he may only transgress at his peril. He is accepted as king because he appears just as it was foretold and proves himself even more worthy by a correct judgement. While he reigns the land flourishes and people live in peace. The king rules with the consent of the Otherworld provided he rules justly and observes his *gessa*. This 'contract with the Otherworld', to use T. Ó Cathasaigh's terminology (23), is broken when one day he passes a wrong judgement and it soon becomes obvious that 'the Otherworld dimension of kingship has its dark side. What the gods bestow, they can also take away, and the story of Conaire's downfall in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* shows a succession of malevolent Otherworld beings drawing him inexorably to his doom in the *bruiden Da Derga*, which is itself, as O'Rahilly persuasively argued, a localization of the Otherworld' (24).

The Otherworld's involvement is clearly indicated by the prophesy of the Red Riders: 'Through ancient men's enchantments a company of nine yields' (*tri doilbtiu fer forsaid fordáim dām nónbair*) (25). As an outward sign the land is thrown into turmoil so that destruction and strife are the rule of the day, powerfully expressed

by raging fires and naked men roaming around the country. The breakdown of the law is accompanied by the deterioration of Conaire's mental state. Not only does he appear quite helpless in the face of this destruction - he has to ask his people where to go next rather than deciding himself (26) - he is also overcome by great fear (27). This dread is enhanced by strange and eery beings appearing to him. Firstly, he spies three red riders who break one of his *geiss* by riding before him and also deliver three prophecies of doom (28).

Later on he encounters a weird couple: 'Tis then the man of the black, cropt hair, with his one hand and one eye and one foot, overtook them. Rough cropt hair upon him. Though a sackful of wild apples were flung on his crown, not an apple would fall on the ground, but each of them would stick on his hair. Though his snout were flung on a branch they would remain together. Long and thick as an outer yoke was each of his two shins. Each of his buttocks was the size of a cheese and whithe. A forked pole of iron black-pointed was in his hand. A swine, black bristled, singed, was on his back, squealing continually,... (*Is and dosn-araid in fer máeldub cona óenláim 7 óensúil 7 óenchoiss. Mael gárb fo[r]suidiu. Cía focerta míach do fíadublaib for a mulluch ní foicherd ubull for lár acht no gíulad cach ubull díb for a fhinnu. Cía focerta a srúb ar géisce immatairised dóib. Sithremithir cuing n-imechtair cehtar a dá lurgan. Méit mullaig for gut cach mell do mellaib a dromma. Gabollórg iarinn inna láim. Muc máel dub dóthi for a muin, 7 si oc síregim,...*) (29). This huge and ugly churl reminds us immediately of the companion of the Morrígan in *Táin Bó Regamna* (30), as well as the Dagda in *Cath Maige Tuired* (31), and the man with the pig in 'The Fight between Eógan mac Durthacht and Conchobor' (32) and Cú Roí in Bricriu's Feast (33). He seems to be a threatening, otherworldly male without a specific identity. William Sayers briefly comments on the churl in *Táin Bó Regamna*: 'The male of the couple is a typical *bachlach* or churl figure, but his affinities are not only with base social station but also and fundamentally with nature, as is more evident in his other reflexes as Lord of the Animals' (34). This interpretation of the churl as being the embodiment of a raw natural force is supported by my own examination of the *macgnímrada* episode where the man roasting a pig is clearly associated with the

natural realm, and further by the observations in connection with the Dagda who is also closer to nature than, for example, Lug.

His female partner is no less threatening: '... a woman big-mouthed, huge, dark, sorry, hideous, was behind him. Though her snout were flung on a branch, a branch would support it. Her lower lip would reach her knee' (... *ben bélmar már dub dúabais dochraic ina diaíd. Cia focherta dano a srúb ar gesce folilsad.*

Tacmaicced a bél íchtarach co a glún) (35). Their names are Fer Calliu, 'Man of the woods' and Cíchuil, meaning 'teated one' or 'many teated' (36).

Later on in the story, when Conaire has settled into Dá Derga's hostel at last, a lone woman comes to the door who, by virtue of her practically identical features and functions, is the same as Cíchuil, though now called Cailb (according to Sayers from *calb* 'rigour, harshness' or *calb* 'head') (37). The fact that Cailb possesses numerous names makes it even more probable that Cíchuil is simply another name amongst many and has little importance in itself. So I will treat Cíchuil and Cailb as one and the same and immediately proceed to tell Cailb's story: 'When they were there they saw a lone woman coming to the door of the Hostel, after sunset, and seeking to be let in. As long as a weaver's beam was each of her two shins, and they were as dark as the back of a stag-beetle. A greyish, woolly mantle she wore. Her lower hair used to reach as far as her knee. Her lips were on one side of her head. She came and put one of her shoulders against the doorpost of the house, casting the evil eye on the king and the youths who surrounded him in the Hostel. He himself addressed her from within. 'Well, O woman,' says Conaire, 'if thou art a wizard, what seest thou for us?' 'Truly I see for thee,' she answers, 'that neither fell nor flesh of thine shall escape from the place into which thou hast come, save what birds will bear away in their claws.' 'It was not an evil omen we forboded, O woman,' saith he: 'it is not thou that always augurs for us. What is thy name, O woman?' 'Cailb,' she answers. 'That is not much of a name,' says Conaire. 'Lo (i.e. not dark, i.e. manifest), many are my names besides.' 'Which be they,' asks Conaire. 'Easy to say' ...(Numerous names follow, including Badb, Noenden, and Macha)...On one foot, and (holding up) one hand, and (breathing) one breath she sang all that to them from the door of the house. ... 'What doest thou desire?' says Conaire. 'That which thou, too, desirest,' she answered. 'Tis a tabu of mine,' says

Conaire, 'to receive the company of one woman after sunset.' 'Though it be a tabu,' she replied, 'I will not go until my guesting come at once this very night.' 'Tell her,' says Conaire, 'that an ox and a bacon-pig shall be taken out to her, and my leavings: provided that she stays tonight in some other place.' 'If in sooth,' she says, 'it has befallen the king not to have room in his house for the meal and bed of a solitary woman, they will be gotten apart from him from some one possessing generosity - if the hospitality of the Prince of the Hostel has departed.' 'Savage is the answer!' says Conaire. 'Let her in, though it is a tabu of mine.' Great loathing they felt after that from the woman's converse and ill-foreboding; but they knew not the cause thereof' (*Intan bátar and conaccatar a[n]n óenbandscáil dorus na Brudne, iar funiud gréne, oc cuinchid al-leicthe issa tech. Sithidir claideb [n]garmnai cechtar a dá lurgan. Bátár dubithir druim ndáil. Brat ríabach rolómar impi. Tacmainged a fés ichtarach cor-rici a glún. A béoil for leith a cind. Totháet co tard a lethgúalaind fri haursaind in taige, oc admilliud ind rig 7 na maccóem ro bátár imbi isin tig. Ésseom feisin ataraglastar astig. 'Maith, a banscál,' or Conaire, 'cid atchí dúnd massat? fissid?' 'Atchiusa daitsiu, immorro,' ol sisi, 'noco n-érnába ceinn ná cárna dít asind áit hi tudchad acht 'na mbérat éoin ina crobaib. Ní bu dochél célsammár, a ben or ésseom, ní tú chélas dún dogrés.' 'Cía do chomainm-siu.' or se, 'a banscál?' 'Cailb,' or sisi. 'Ni forcraid anma son,' ol Conaire. 'Eche (.i. ni dorcha .i.is follus) it ili mo amand chena,' ol si. 'Cade iat-sede?' ol Conaire. 'Ni anse,' or si: 'Samon, Sinand, Seisclend, ...' For óen choiss 7 óenlaim 7 óen anáil r[och]achain dóib insin uil[e] o dorus in tige. ... 'Cid as áil dait?' ol Conaire. 'A n-as áil daitsiu dano,' or sisi. 'Is gess damsa,' ol Conaire, 'dám óenmná do airtin iar funiud gréne.' 'Cid gess', or sisi, 'ní ragsa co ndecha mo aigidecht dí ráith isind áidchi-se innocht.' 'Apraid fria,' ol Conaire, 'bérthair dam ocus tinne di immach, 7 mo fuidell-sa, 7 anad im-magin aile innocht.' 'Má dothanic ém dond rí,' or sisi, 'co praind 7 lepaid óenmná inna thig, fogébthar 'na écmáis o neoch aile ocá mbía ainech, ma ró scáig coible na flathafil isin Brudin.' 'Is feochair in frecre' ol Conaire. 'Dos-leic ind, cid gess damsa.' Búi gráin mór foraib iarsin día haccallaim na mná 7 míthauraras, acht nad fetatár can bóí dóib) (38).*

It is immediately obvious that Cíchuil/Cailb is present solely for the purpose of forcing Conaire to break another *geiss*, Cíchuil, by going into the hostel before him, partner in tow, and Cailb, by entering the hostel after nightfall which corresponds to his *geiss* of not letting a lone woman into the house after sunset. In the case of the latter Conaire is put into a position that no matter what decision he takes, he offends against his duties as king. Either he refuses hospitality, which is simply impossible for a king to do, or he lets the woman in, which breaks his *geiss*.

As to her appearance we notice not only her generally ugly features but particularly her mouth or snout and her lower mouth/lower hair. The description of the snout adhering to a branch conjures up an image of a huge organ, as well as being horribly distorting. Earlier in the passage she has already been termed 'big-mouthed'. We also note that her mouth is at the side of her head, and Sayers points out that 'Notions such as 'crooked, skewed, biased, partial' were central in comment on royal justice' (39) which could explain the crooked mouth as a symbol of royal justice gone wrong. Blind Cridenbél with his greedy mouth in the middle of his chest (40) also springs to mind and one wonders whether greed could be one of the qualities of the hag. After all, the big-mouthed woman does demand food from the king and in view of what this entails for him, ie nothing less than the loss of his life, the demand for food is indeed excessive.

The woman also has an especially prominent 'lower mouth' (Cíchuil) or 'lower hair' (Cailb) which is generally taken to mean her sexual organs. M. Breathnach points out (41) that these sexual overtones reappear again in the dialogue between the woman and the king: 'What doest thou desire' and the woman answers: 'That which thou, too, desirest.' The woman is thus demanding food and sex, as she confirms herself later on when she asks for a meal and a bed. As the corresponding organs are prominent one is reminded of the same element of greed which has been discussed in connection with the Dagda. While the Dagda is injured by greed which breaks the normal conventions surrounding hospitality, Cíchuil/Cailb uses it to injure the king. He tries to extricate himself from this situation by offering pseudo-hospitality in the form of food which is brought to out to her but, needless to say, the woman is not satisfied and attacks his honour, thereby pulling her trump

card, so to speak. She claims that the king's hospitality has departed. The overtones of satire are unmistakable and the king has to yield.

Despite the use of satire, her profession is not that of a satirist but of a seeress.

However, *Táin Bó Regamna* shows that the two go together - the Morrígan satirises and prophesies to Cú Chulainn. Conaire also says that the woman is not his usual seeress, in other words, a seeress must normally be attached to a king's household.

How is it, then, that he recognizes her straight away? Sayers (41) seems to think that it is her position - leaning at the doorpost which is a liminal place in between the inside and the outside - which gives her away. One could add that the woman comes on her own, from the natural realm and after nightfall which is not what a woman would ordinarily do. Further, she has a special, or magical eye - she is said to cast an 'evil eye' onto the king. It is interesting to look at the expression a little more closely. The Irish expression is *oc admilliud ind rí*g which is translated in the DIL (s.v. *admilliud*) 'at blighting the king', in other words, there is no mentioning of the eye. *Admilliud* is the verbal noun of the verb *admilled* which has the sense of completely destroying something (DIL). It is related to *milliud* where we find also the sense of 'injuring by magic, casting the evil eye' (DIL). Cormac's glossary comments on *milled* in the following way: '*milled quasi mi-silliud ie drochsilliud*' (42) thus linking destruction with the 'evil glance' and the 'bad glance'. Yet another example can be found in *Acallam na Senórach* '...a sore lung disease attacked Fer Óc, through the (evil) eyes of the multitude (*tre tsuilib na sochaide*) and the envy of the great host, and it killed him, soulless, at the end of nine days' (*...is and ro gabusdur slaetan tromgalair Fer óc tré tsuilib na sochaide 7 tre fhormat in morsluaig, corus-marb gan anmain i cind nómaide hé*) (43). It seems from this evidence that it is correct to translate 'casting the evil eye' in the above passage. There is also evidence to support the fact that we are dealing with one eye in particular. Compare the second character in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* in connection to whom the word *milled* appears, ie Nár Thúathcháech. Here it is definitely an eye that is meant, as already evident from his name: '*At-condarc and fer tuathcháech co súil millethaig...*'. 'I saw a man there, blind in the left eye with a blighting eye' (44). Mac Mathúna comments on this: 'The power of sight was no doubt regarded as being all the greater for being concentrated in one organ.'

Single-eyedness merged early in people's mind with the possible human condition of having sight in one of the two eyes. The awesome nature of the one-eyed otherworld being may be emphasized by specific reference to *túath*: 'left, northern, evil, wicked' (45). This is echoed by Sayers with reference to the one-eyed, one-armed, one-legged phenomenon: 'These reductions of the binary to the unitary for the purpose of enhanced magical ability, suggestive of the accrued powers that an Odin won through the sacrifice of one eye, serves as a counterpoint to the combined elements acting against their victim or the fateful single grains or animals that multiply to exact vengeance' (46). Finally, the Rees brothers interpret this feature as a sign that duality, which is normal for human existence, has been overcome (47).

There is no doubt that the evil eye which Cíchuil casts onto the king can be as much an instrument of destruction as a means to conveying special knowledge such as future events and when she stands on one foot and recites her names in one breath, there is no need to mention the eye again as it has been a feature all along.

Putting together all these observations, ie her spacial and temporal position, the fact that she travels on her own and her magical eye, Conaire can not have been left in any doubt as to what sort of woman he is faced with. The prophesy of destruction and death comes as no surprise.

Reading this tale with the knowledge we have gained from other stories featuring a female prophesying doom we note the absence of the characteristic river or lake in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, at least on first sight. However, when reading on we learn that Conaire is afflicted by a magic thirst and we are told that not even the river Dothra which flows through the house has any water left in it. In other words, the river is, as usual, part of the scene.

A further feature of interest is the fact that Cailb has so many names. This prompts comparison with the Morrígan in *Táin Bó Regamna* (48), the Dagda's many names in *Cath Maige Tuired* (49) and with Sin's in *Aided Muirchertaig Maic Erca* (50). While the male heroes are incapable of using the names to their advantage, it is interesting to see how easily Indech's daughter remembers them and thus gains

control over the Dagda. It affirms that the power of language is one which comes naturally to female figures.

William Sayers has studied these names in detail and has come to the following conclusion: 'On the basis of these admittedly tentative identifications, the following motif categories or thematic epicentres in the list can be proposed: conflict and destruction, the non-normative (evil, faulty, uncultured, neglected), emotional severity (inflicted and suffered), female sexuality, land and the natural world. ... Yet the thematic movement appears to conform to no overall pattern, seems a technique of evanescence, enigma and delay, intentionally disconcerting, like the perversely alternating voices in Cú Chulainn's encounter. ... this recital of names within the narrative could be called an exercise in self-definition, but also one intended to have a quite specific effect on its audience, the king Conaire. Yet after more than thirty names for the harsh face of the goddess, we seem caught in two dimensions, no closer to the complete nature of their supernatural bearer. In this potentially unstable relationship with the divine, the human subject stands in jeopardy' (51).

After the last *geiss* has been broken, the episode ends with the following sentence: 'Great loathing they felt after that from the woman's converse and ill-foreboding; but they knew not the cause thereof' (52). It comes as a bit of a surprise that the host does not know where the fear stems from when previously they had no difficulty in relating terror to the horrible prophesies received from the Red Riders. Maybe general confusion is spreading, making it difficult for people to assess the situation properly. Of course this renders the effect of the woman's presence and words all the more powerful - to the host it seems that fear comes on them out of nowhere which makes it hard to resist.

Several of Cailb's characteristics sound familiar in the light of what we have learned about the Morrígan, so much so that Thurneysen suggested *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* as model for *Táin Bó Regamna* (53). Comparing the two women, the following facts emerge: First of all, both appear at night. Both look peculiar and frightening, though this is expressed in different ways: *Táin Bó Regamna* features the red colour with its overtones of danger, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* uses the way of monstrous distortion, blackness and semi-nakedness which allows for a display

of pubic hair. Note, however, that the Morrígan in *Táin Bó Regamna* is closely associated with the one-legged horse, as well as having names which intimidate ugliness and distortion. Thus, the theme of distortion can be included among the characteristics of the Morrígan in *Táin Bó Regamna*. The women's danger is accentuated by other fearsome phenomena, ie. the warning cry in *Táin Bó Regamna*, the baleful eye in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. Both are poet-seers who turn and twist a conversation, liberally using satire and mockery to aid them in their cause. They also share the feature of having many names. The apparent cause of their appearance is different but both present a challenge to the essential function of the hero in question: the Morrígan steals a cow in an attempt to defy Cú Chulainn who is the protector of cows and therefore Ulster's wealth, while Cailb looks for bed and food, thus testing Conaire's obligation to be hospitable. In both cases, one of the hero's *gessa* is in question. While this feature is not made explicit in *Táin Bó Regamna*, it occurs in *Echtra Nerai* instead. There, Cú Chulainn has a *geiss* not to let any woman leave Ulster without his knowledge (54). Given the association of women, cows and wealth, this is not a surprising or unreasonable prohibition. Further, both Cailb and the Morrígan predict their respective hero's death. In *Táin Bó Regamna* Cú Chulainn still has a year to live, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* Conaire's death is imminent and in fact hastened by the woman's appearance.

However, the two heroes' reaction is different. Although both attempt to rid themselves of her - Cú Chulainn, in true warrior-fashion, by attacking her with his weapons, Conaire by offering pseudo-hospitality - only Cú Chulainn resists her consistently and successfully. Conaire, on the other hand, overcome by fear and giving into her demands is definitely doomed.

The main differences cluster around sexuality and involvement in war. The exposure of the seer's sexual organs and her sexual interest in Conaire also set Cailb apart from the Morrígan in *Táin Bó Regamna*. It is this feature which made M.Breathnach reluctant to identify Cailb with the war-goddesses. She writes that the sexual organs of the war-goddesses are not alluded to anywhere in the stories (55). This is certainly true. The only other example where pubic hair is a feature of a figure at least vaguely related to the war-goddesses is Indech's daughter in *Cath*

Maige Tuired. Her showing of pubic hair arouses the Dagda's desire and signals her willingness to sleep with him (56), which supports the interpretation that Cailb is challenging Conaire sexually. However, this does not lead us much further with our problem.

Focussing on the Morrígan for the moment, it is true to say that she is well capable of having a sexual relationship with a male, as *Cath Maige Tuired* bears witness to. It is also suggestive that she is associated with a male partner in *Táin Bó Regamna* even though sexuality is not explicitly mentioned. It may well be that the sexual element is emphasized in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* because the tale is about a king. Just as a sexual relationship formed an integral part at the beginning of this tale, marking Conaire as a special king, it may also have suggested itself at the end. I am not implying that the sovereignty goddess is the same as the death-goddess, but simply that the structure and content of the tale influenced which details were emphasized and which ones neglected.

I would therefore argue that the presence of explicit sexuality does not necessarily disqualify the war-goddesses from being considered the same as Cíchuil/Cailb. Supportive to the view that the presence of sexuality may not be crucial to these particular figures is the evidence of *Togail Bruidne Da Choca* which follows *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* very closely indeed and yet lacks the sexual element in the description of the corresponding hag: '...they saw coming to them towards the hostel a big-mouthed, swarthy, swift, sooty woman (*mnaoi mbelmair, nduib,...*) and she lame and squinting with her left eye. She wore a mantle, threadbare (?) and very dusky. Dark as the back of a stag-beetle was every joint of her from crown to ground. Her filleted grey hair fell back over her shoulder. She leant her shoulder against the door-post and began prophesying evil to the host, and uttering ill words,...' (*A mbator and immorro connacotar mnaoi mbelmair nduib ndedgair, detaide 'na ndocum, docum na bruidne, so losc túathcoech. Brat longach roriabach immpe. Duibithir druim ni dail cech n-alt di o mullach go talmain. A mong gip nech greliath dar a formna síer. Atnaig a gualainn frisin n-aur sáinn 7 gabais for micelmoine din tslúag 7 for mifocul, ...*) (57). It seems from this example that the general disfigurement is at issue here rather than exactly which parts are distorted.

M. Breathnach's second objection is that the war-goddess trio always appear on the battle-field or as omens of battle (58). However, the above comparison with *Táin Bó Regamna* has shown that sometimes the Morrígan appears in other locations than the battle field, though still as an omen of battle and ultimately involved when the battle is in progress. The difference between Cailb and the Morrígan is not that the Morrígan cannot appear off the battle-field, as she clearly does. The difference lies in the fact that the Morrígan becomes involved in battle or in one-to-one combat while Cailb is content just to announce the hero's death. Her only active involvement is that she forces the hero to break his final *geiss*; apart from that the events rush to their inevitable conclusion by themselves.

The question remains whether this point is important enough to postulate a difference in nature between the Morrígan and the other war-goddesses on the one hand, and Cailb and other death-messengers on the other. Sayers does not seem to be concerned about identifying the two when he writes: 'As in Cu Chulainn's future fight at the ford, the hag will not be directly involved in the king's death, no more than she was earlier involved in the mechanics of just and unjust rule; her role is judgemental, the selection of the royal candidate and verdict on the failed ruler' (59).

However, I do not agree that *Táin Bó Regamna* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* can be interpreted in this way. Her role in these two stories is more than judgemental, she becomes actively involved in the fight. True, the Morrígan does not pose as an opponent who takes up arms and fights Cú Chulainn in the way men fight each other. She comes in disguises and affects the hero mentally, enabling the human opponent to gain an advantage. The fact is, however, that she is very much present in the conflict and actively influences it. It is Cú Chulainn's survival which is the 'judgement' that he is the best hero. Equally, the final battle in *Cath Maige Tuired* is strongly influenced by the Morrígan. Badb, on the other hand, mainly indicates the loser of the battle after everything has been decided. Different stories and different figures focus on the war-goddesses' active involvement in someone's demise to a greater or lesser degree; however, their presence in battle can be taken for granted.

One way of taking care of all the features discussed is to say that just as the Morrígan/Badb can change herself into a crow, a heifer, an eel, a wolf, an old hag, a young girl, a charioteer and a Washer at the Ford, she may occasionally appear as a prophet of doom only, without an active role in the subsequent war. Further, no matter what culture one cares to look at one finds that figures who are essentially the same do vary in some details from tale to tale. One could also point to the fact that Némain and Badb are featured in the string of names Cailb utters which lends weight to her identification as a war-goddess.

If one chooses to emphasize the feature of the involvement or non-involvement in battle, another possible theory suggests itself. It takes into account the knowledge obtained through studying the Washers at the Ford. There, it was noticed that the later tales do not show the Washer involved in the battles which ensue after the prophesy. Going forwards in time and taking into account the development of the death-messengers of later texts and folklore as outlined in the excellent study of the banshee by Patricia Lysaght (60) the same feature emerges: these figures are content with predicting a death while having nothing to do with the actual event of it. It seems that a shift in emphasis took place where the goddess of death and war in her dual role of foreboder of, as well as active protagonist in war, became gradually relegated to the period before a person's death, first in an active capacity, forcing the hero to break his *gessa*, then simply as a sign of impending doom without any active role.

When discussing figures like Cíchuil/Cailb the term 'hag' is frequently used to denote them and the picture of an old woman springs up in the imagination. In fact, William Sayers assumes that Cíchuil/Cailb is old when he says that 'the king quickly absorbs ... the symbolism of the woman's age and ugliness...' (61).

However, there is no indication in the text that the woman is actually old, she is simply very ugly. If we look to *Togail Bruidne Da Choca*, on the other hand, we find that the woman has grey hair, in other words, it is likely that she is an old woman. It would be quite appropriate to have an old woman as a prophet of death. Is there any correlation between old hags, death messengers and war-goddesses? I have searched the sagas for figures who are specifically called *sentainne* or *caillech* without being too concerned about the date of the texts and gathered what is

hopefully a representative sample. The hag's position in the text is examined, as usual, but more emphasis has been placed on listing their attributes, their activities, who they meet etc, in much the same way as the Washers at the Ford. This will provide a better basis for comparison within a rather large group. The same scheme as for the Washers is used, but their activities are obviously more varied:

- 1) activity of the hag: does she trick/mock (a), predict disaster(b), attack actively (c), compete (d)
- 2) what time of day does she appear at?
- 3) what is her name?
- 4) what does she look like?
- 5) does she appear in a battle context, or not?
- 6) where does she appear?
- 7) who encounters her?
- 8) reaction of the male - opposition (a) submission (b) terror (c)
- 9) does anyone die - hag or warrior?

We remind ourselves of the Morrigan (3) in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (62) who assumes the shape of a *caillech*, blind in the left eye and lame (4), milking a three-teated cow. Time and place are not specified (2,6) the encounter occurs in a battle context (5). Cú Chulainn, the warrior hero encounters her. (7) She milks a cow, offers Cú Chulainn a drink under false pretenses (1a) in order to gain Cú Chulainn's blessing and healing (8). She then mocks him (1a) The episode is the continuation of a conflict in which neither wins or loses (9).

The Morrigan also appears as a *caillech* in *Cath Maige Rátha* 'The Battle of Mag Rath' (63). The story tells of the conflict between Donmall, son of Aed, grandson of Ainmire with his foster-son Congal Caech. Dubhdiadh from Congal's camp goes to see Domnall's army and among the long account of what he has seen he speaks the following lines:

'There is over his head shrieking/ A lean hag, swift at leaping/Over the points of their weapons and shields/ She is the grey-maned Morrighu' (*Fuil os a chind ag eigmigh/ caillech lom, luath ag leimnig/os eannaib a n-arm sa sciath/ is i in Morrighu mong-liath*).

Note that Domnall's head is meant here, and we have the unusual situation of the Morrígain (3), here presumably in shape of a crow (4) and certainly behaving like one with her shrieking and leaping (1), hovers over the head of the winner, not the loser. It reminds us of the late passages in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* where the *badba*, together with other creatures, call from the helmet of Cú Chulainn, thus forming part of his fear-inspiring apparel. The time is not specified (2), the place is an army camp (6), the encounter takes place in a battle-context but we do not know whether the Morrígain takes part in it (5). The main characters are obviously warriors (7). The onlooker, Dubhdiadh, is terrified and so are the warriors he relates the tale to (8), and they are the ones who lose the battle (9).

Cú Chulainn encounters several hags in different stories. After his training time with Scáthach and on his journey home from her island Cú Chulainn is attacked by a *caillech* bent on avenging her son, one of Cú Chulainn's numerous victims:

'On the path before him he met an old blind woman, blind in her left eye. She said to him to beware and not be in her way. There was no footing on the cliff of the sea. He let himself down from the side of the path, and only his toes clung to it.

When she passed over them she hit his great toe to throw him down the cliff. Then he leapt the chariot-chief's salmon leap up again, and struck her head off. She was the mother of the last chariot-chief that had fallen by him, viz. Eiss Enchend

(Birdshead)' (*Tofornic sentainde caich tuathchaich ar a chind forsint [s]jet. Asbert fris ar ferchaire arna beith ar a chind. Nacha boi dochoissed issind au moro.*

Tolleic sis dint [s]jet 7 giuil a ladair aire namma. A n-doluid si hraise, fornessa a orddain arancorath foan allid. Focherd iarom ich n-erred de s`uas afrithissi 7

benaithe a cend dissi. Ba si ind sin mathair ind erred dedenaich docher leis-seom .i. Eiss Enchend) (64).

The half-blind *caillech* (4) appears to Cú Chulainn, the warrior (7) outside a war-context altogether (5). Time is not specified (2), the place is a cliff on the sea, ie near water (6). She threatens Cú Chulainn, then tries to kill him actively (1c), rather than predicting his death, but he in turn attacks her (8a) and kills her (9). Her identity is revealed at the end as Eiss Enchend (3). (65)

The second encounter with a hag occurs in his death-tale (66). I have decided to include this story here although the woman is not identified as a *caillech* or

sentainne but as *aimid* (also written *amaid*), meaning witch, sorceress and also hag.

On his final journey Cú Chulainn encounters the following fearsome characters who put him in a no-win position, comparable to what Cailb does to Conaire:

'Then he saw somewhat. Three crones, blind on the left eye, before him on the road. They had cooked (?) on spits of rowantree a dog with poisons and spells' (*Connaccai ni nateora ammiti tuathchaecha arachind fortsligid. Orca conemib 7 epthaib fono iset forberaib cairthind*) (67) Cú Chulainn is neither allowed to stop at a cooking hearth nor can he eat dog's meat because dogs are his namesake. He tries to get by but the crones challenge him: 'The food is only a hound,' quoth she. 'Were this a great cooking hearth thou wouldst have visited us. But because it is little, thou comest not. Unseemly are the great who endure not (or who take not) the little.' Then he drew nigh to her, and the crone gave him the side of the hound out of her left hand. And then Cú Chulainn ate it out of his [left] hand; and put it under his left thigh. The hand that took it and the thigh under which he put it were seized from trunk to end, so that the same strength abode not in them' (*Atá inbiad cu olsi. Diam bad fhulocht mór nobeth and orsi roadelta. Úair is bec fil and nithaidle. Nitualaing mór nadfhulaing no na dgeib inmbec.' Ataellasom iarom 7 toningnaig indammait leithi inchon dó assa laim chlí. Adetha Cuchulainn iarom assaláim 7 dambeir fosliasait clí. Indlám rodgab 7 intliasait fotarat rogabtha ochund cofond connarabi annert cétna indib*) (68). She is clearly attacking his honour which forces him to accept the dogmeat. Note the hags' association with a *fulacht* or 'cooking-pit' which is interesting in view of the Morrígan's association with the same. In true war-goddess fashion the crone deprives the hero of his strength. While this does not kill him there and then, it seriously compromises his fighting abilities when it comes to the final battle and thus contributes to his death. In other words, the crones herald his death but also contribute to it by partially disabling him. They are equivalent to figures like Cailb or some of the Washers who inspire fear which handicaps the king in the final battle.

Examining the tale according to the above categories we notice that the hags have no name (3), they simply show the left-eyed blindness (4) with which we are so familiar by now. Time is not specified (2), the place is by the roadside, unusually

not near water (6), the general context is just before the hero's death in battle, in which the hags do not take part (5). The hag offers food which is forbidden to Cú Chulainn and tricks him into eating it (1a). Cú Chulainn is obviously a warrior (7) and despite his efforts he has to give in (8a) and eventually he dies (9).

Other heroes also encounter hags in a hostile context. In *Echtra Art Maic Cuinn*, Art, a king's son and warrior (7) meets seven wicked perverse hags without a name (3) or any details of appearance (4) on his journey to find Delbchaem (5). They wait for him in a dark wood (6) and attack him with a bath of molten lead and weapons (1c). The encounter obviously takes place at night (2) because the text says that they were 'piercing and hacking at him till morning' and then states that this was 'not a fair encounter.' He wins after a long fight (8a) and kills them all (9). (69)

A more interesting case is that of the hag of the mill in *Buile Suibhne* (70).

Suibhne, who has gone mad during a battle and consequently lives in the wilderness half human, half bird, enjoys a period of sanity after he has been caught and exposed to his former life. However, one day Loingseachan, his guardian, has to leave him alone and locks him into the bedroom to be looked after only by the hag of the mill (*caillech an mhuilinn*) whose appearance, unfortunately, is not described. It was this hag who had given him food while he was still in the wilderness and therefore seems well-disposed towards Suibhne. However, instead of keeping silent as she was instructed to do she starts talking to him, taunting him, making him think of the past: 'A curse on your mouth, hag!' said Suibhne; 'ill is what you say; God will not suffer me to go mad again' (*Mallacht for do bhél, a chaillech, ar Suibhne, 'as olc a n-abra, ni léigfi Día mo bheith-si for gealtacht doridhisi*) (71). The hag carries on goading him: '... leap for us now one of the leaps you used to leap when you were mad.' Thereupon he bounded over the bed-rail so that he reached the end of the bench. 'My conscience!' said the hag, 'I could leap that myself,' and in the same manner she did so. He took another leap out through the skylight of the hostel. 'I could leap that too,' said the hag, and straightway she leaped' (... *ling duinn leim dona leimennuibh sin anois rolingthea it ghealtacht.* 'Rolincc-siomh iarumh leim tar colbha na tuilgi co rainic cenn na hairidhni síos. 'Mo chubhuis éimh,' ar an chaillech, 'rolingfinn-si féin an léim sin.'

Roling sí ón fón ccuma cedna. Roling-siomh leim eile dar forles na bruighniu amach. 'Rolin[g]finn-si dono sin,' ar an chaillech, 7 roling fo cedóir) (72).

Wherever Suibhne leaps to, she is right there behind him. When he perches on a tree, she sits in a tree next to him. So time goes by and the two leap all over the country until eventually they reach Dun Sobairce. Suibhne leaps off the fort. 'She leaped quickly after him, but dropped on the cliff of Dun Sobairce, where she was broken to pieces, and fell into the sea. In that manner she found death in the wake of Suibhne' (*Roling sí co hionhathlómh ina dheaghaidh co ttorchair do aill Dhúine Sobhairci co ndernadh mionbhrúar 7 minchomairt di ann co ttorchair isin bhfairrge, conadh amhlaidh sin fúair bás i ndedhaidh Suibhne) (73).*

Unlike the other stories, the hag presents herself first indoors, but then the scene shifts quickly to the natural realm (6). The time is harvest time during the hours of daylight, as people are still outside (2). We do not learn her name (3), nor do we find anything about her looks. We can only surmise that she must be a bird-like creature, too, as she can leap like Suibhne (4). The hag is charged to look after Suibhne in his confinement without actually communicating with him (5) but instead the hag encourages Suibhne to leap again (1d) which is a sign of his madness, and he eventually submits (8b). While the hag is killed in the end due to lack of skill (9), she has managed to damage Suibhne, originally a king and warrior (7), by driving him back to his bird-like life.

The Suibhne story is a complex tale with many layers of meaning and therefore does not lend itself well to a simple analysis. It is questionable, for example, whether the hag is doing damage to Suibhne by encouraging him back to the wilderness or whether she is doing him a favour - after all, his bird-like existence leads to him being forgiven by St. Moling and God. Had he just returned to the old ways of being a warrior-king, he may never have received forgiveness.

Additionally, his poetry often suggests that the natural realm is infinitely preferable to courts and the society of men. It is also true to say, however, that the hag is perceived as threatening, no matter what the long-term benefits may be. After all, Suibhne tries to resist her, stop her from talking about the past as he senses the danger, and I think we have to stay with this sense of danger for the purpose of our analysis. Suffice it to say here that the goading, the competition

between the hag and the hero, as well as their likeness - they are both leaping, bird-like characters - remind us of the interconnection between the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn.

Finn's earliest death-tale also features a hag in a very suggestive role, but unfortunately the story is in two parts and crucial parts are missing (74). The first fragment tells us of Finn growing old and finding that all his men are leaving him one by one. He decides to do his leaping feat over the Boyne to test whether old age had really come to him. The fragment ends with his meeting with a woman: 'There in Mullaghamast he found a woman making curds...' (*Is ann fuaír an mnaí ag tath an grotha a Maistiu...*) (75). The second fragment begins with a reference to a drink from a poisoned horn which his wife had predicted would be responsible for Finn's death. It was thus one of his prohibitions not to drink from a horn. It seems that in the missing part he broke this prohibition and seemingly an old woman (*caillech*) reminded him of it because the text continues by him agreeing with her and giving her his brooch. He then leaps over the Boyne and smashes his head on the rocks (cf. Suibhne's hag). It looks as if the hag was somehow involved or even responsible for his death but as we do not know exactly what happened, it is difficult to draw conclusions. The only elements we have is the hag itself, without a name or description, the place, ie the river Boyne (6), some conversation related to his leaping feat (5), Finn's agreement with whatever the hag says (8b), and his subsequent death (9).

Another tale of the Finn cycle featuring a hag is found in *Acallam na Senórach*, the 'Colloquy of the Ancients' to explain the name 'Glen of the Caillech': 'It was a day that Finn and the Fianna were here, and we saw a daft thing of a crooked-shinned grimy-looking hag (*...atchonncamar amuit chailligi corrluirgnigi círdhuibhi cucainn*) that made for us. She challenges us to a race with her on condition that the Fianna risk their customary stake on the event, and the terms concluded accordingly are that from him who shall be left behind his head be taken. We, three of the Fianna, ran against her: Ossian and Diarmaid, son of Duibhne and myself; and we ran to Áth Mór, which at this time is called Áth Mogha. I was first

crossing the ford westwards; I turned therefore to face the beldame behind me and lent her a swordcut that put her head from her carcase, since which time to this present 'tis from her that the glen is named' (76).

Again, we find the hag (nameless (3)) in the role of hostile adversary, challenging the fianna warriors (7) to a race (5) with death as the inevitable fate of the loser (1d). Her physical distortion lacks the more usual feature of half-blindness. Instead, her crooked shins seem to be related to her speed (4). Time is not specified (2), though the place is at a ford (6). Three men rise to the challenge (8a) and one wins and kills her (9).

Finally, the *caillech* of Bile Tortan should be included even though her exact role remains somewhat mysterious. We know that she mocks (1a) and it seems she has something to do with the death of people (9), possibly young princes (7). Exactly what context the poem refers to is impossible to make out. It seems that her activity is aggressive which is probably the most we can say (77).

When exploring the stories featuring hags we notice the following points:

1) Activity: three of the hags (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Aided Con Culainn*, *Bile Tortan*) use trickery and/or mockery in a familiar fashion, one terrifies the enemy in a typical crow fashion (*Cath Maige Rátha*), two attack outright (*Tochmarc Emire*, *Echtra Art Maic Cuinn*), and two challenge the hero to a competition (*Acallam na Senórach*, *Buile Suibhne*). The hag in Finn's tale speaks but we do not know any more.

2) The time of day or year does not seem to be very important.

3) The names vary, six of them have no name at all.

4) Their appearance, if it is commented upon, is deformed, three times in the familiar half-blind/lame fashion, once she is called crooked and has deformed legs. Twice she is in bird-form/has bird overtones. In other words, she is never of an ordinary human shape. While colours are rarely mentioned, it is noteworthy that if a colour does occur, it is grey. 5) The general context differs, four times the scene is set in a battle context, five times it is not connected to a battle.

6) The location, if mentioned, is always in the natural realm with the exception of *Suibhne*, where it is set indoors at first but ends up outside.

7) All males are warriors, sometimes kings as well.

8 and 9) The warriors' reactions vary, and so does the outcome of the episode: it seems that if they actively attack or challenge the hero to some competition, the hags die and the hero survives (*Accalam na Senórach, Tochmarc Emire, Buile Suibne, Echtra Art maic Cuinn*), if they just appear or the challenge is more indirect, for example the Morrígan's interaction with Cú Chulainn, the hag survives while the outcome for the hero could be either way.

What becomes clear from this summary is that all hags are hostile adversaries, not just challenging the warrior but positively threatening his life. In most stories it is the case that when a hag appears, a death occurs, be it her own or the hero's. The major exception, as usual, is Cú Chulainn in the *Táin* where both hag and hero survive. Another common denominator is the natural setting of the scene and the presence of water.

Finally, the abnormal appearance of the hag is common to all. It seems that old, ugly and deformed all belong together, or even that old age is in itself regarded as a deformity. As John Widdowson writes about witches: 'They are all abnormal in some way and their abnormalities are central to the frightening aura that surrounds them' (78). When he lists the typical characteristics of witches he finds the same attributes that have been discerned here: ugliness, bodily deformity, old age, wrinkled skin, warts, dark and ragged clothes, abnormal and antisocial behaviour. William Sayer's assumption that the hag in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* is also old can thus be justified.

How do these findings relate to the other figures we have discussed so far?

Turning to the hags who survive first, we find that three of them have strong similarities with the figures already discussed. They are all involved with the demise of the hero. The three are:

The Morrígan in *Cath Maige Rátha* is just like an ordinary badb excepting her appearance over the victor's head.

Finn's hag is involved with his death in some way.

In Cú Chulainn's death-tale, which fits in with the pattern of foreboding death and breaking *gessa*, the hag is called *aimid*, but otherwise she has all the features of the half-blind *caillech*.

The fourth survivor is, of course, the Morrígan herself. Here, we have the unusual situation where both hero and hag survive which is due to their special relationship which does not find a parallel in any other story.

The fifth one, the hag *Bile Tortan* seems to threaten death or even cause it and survives herself.

Turning to the hags who are killed outright, we find that three of them, ie in *Echtra Art Maic Cuinn*, *Acallam na Senórach* and *Tochmarc Emire*, lack many of the features we have become familiar with while dealing with the war- and death-goddesses: trickery, satire and mockery, shape-shifting, prophesy. They are simply hostile, though obviously otherworldly beings, just one of the many adversaries a hero has to face. *Eiss Enchenn*, the *caillech* of *Tochmarc Emire* has still some traits which are reminiscent of the war-goddesses in that there is an element of trickery in her dealings with Cú Chulainn, she has a bird's head and she is partially blind.

Amongst the hags who are killed it is Suibhne's *caillech* of the mill who is closest to the ones we have identified as war-goddesses, particularly the Morrígan in relationship with Cú Chulainn. She comes to Suibhne when he is alone and vulnerable, taunts and goads him, forcing him to do something he does not wish to do, she competes with him, the half-bird, half-human nature is common to them both and so is the leaping. This last characteristic is particularly suggestive in that leaping/flying usually takes place when a person is overcome by what he sees and hears on the battle-field and submits to madness. As we remember, madness and frenzy are closely related to the war-goddesses.

However, the meeting takes place completely outside any context of war which has been one of the main characteristics of the war-goddesses so far. Further, one wonders whether there is a threat of death. At first sight the hag seems to be only interested in driving Suibhne mad. However, the pursuit is so relentless that the reader gains the impression that if the hag did not die, Suibhne would eventually be driven to death as he could not keep up the leaping forever. It is only through

his superior leaping skills that he gets away. This is obviously quite different from anything the war-goddesses have done, yet a real threat to life remains.

I would suggest that the hags who come at the hero directly and are subsequently killed cannot be identified with the war-goddesses of our previous tales, ie *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*, *Cath Maige Tuired*, *Táin Bó Regamna*. One of the war-goddesses most prominent features is their indirect involvement in battle, their association with phenomena surrounding the actual fighting with weapons, such as fear, foreboding, inciting, tricking, and then afterwards, the disposal of the bodies. Even when they are in direct contact with the hero, such as Morrígan and Cú Chulainn, it is in the shape of animals, not as just another adversary. It seems that some of the hags are portrayed simply as otherworldly opponents who fight or compete with the hero in a straight-forward manner and are just part of the many obstacles he has to overcome. We could thus say that while the war-goddesses can appear in the shape of hags, not every hag is necessarily a war-goddess and each has to be judged on her own merit. However, it could well be that these hostile adversaries are a 'toned down' version of the war- and death-goddesses proper and that the atmosphere of danger is recognizable precisely because of the similarities with more powerful and deadly figures.

It is crucial to remember at this stage of the discussion that the story revolves around a male hero (on the whole) with the otherworldly females having an importance only in their relationship to the male. The focus of this study on these females is thus somewhat artificial as it is the need of the tale which decides which figure is chosen and her features change accordingly. There seems to be a 'pool' of attributes from which features could be chosen in order to portray a figure as hostile, with the old hag, as well as many others, being one of these attributes.

What the above study has achieved is to show how the hag-shape could be combined with other elements to create a certain being which fits the needs of the tale. The hag-shape serves as a signal for danger - when a being, old or distorted, appears the hero has to watch out. It does not give us a clue as to the exact nature or the outcome of the encounter, but it sets up a particular atmosphere which is always one of violence and danger.

It would be impossible to understand exactly the intent behind choosing one figure over against another. However, with some tales the reason maybe more transparent than with others and a little speculation may be in order here. One such example is the story of Suibhne. All through his tale the themes of madness and the imagery of the bird are paramount. Given the already existing connection between hostile otherworldly females with madness and the bird-shape, it comes as no surprise to find just such a female in his story. To signal to the reader/listener as well as to Suibhne that danger lies ahead, this being appears as a hag. Equally, one of the particular characteristics of the *fiana* is their speed. Thus, an appropriate challenger in a race of life or death is a swift hag, with the hag-shape contributing the threat of death. *Tochmarc Emire* shows Cú Chulainn on his journey to and from the Otherworld where women teach him all he needs to know to become a great hero. The journey is difficult and full of challenges which all form part of his training. A war-goddess fluttering over his head or a figure prophesying his death would be totally inappropriate as he is a young hero in the ascendant. Thus, when a hag appears, she has to be yet another opponent, but one he can overcome. In his final journey, the situation is exactly the opposite and here the hag appears in her most deadly manifestation, forcing him to make a choice between breaking his *geiss* or his social obligations, either of which seals his fate.

We can conclude this section by saying that hostile otherworldly females is an umbrella term for all the figures discussed so far. Within this group are figures appearing mainly in a war-context, figures heralding the death of a hero, hags which are simply adversaries, easily dispatched, hags which compete with heroes, and others, not so far discussed, who are hostile and ugly but are not called *caillech* or *sentainne*, with Dornoll in *Tochmarc Emire* as one example. Within this large bracket it is frequently futile to ask whether one particular figure can be identified with another unless the texts use the same name, and even this is not totally water-tight as we noticed with the term *badb*.

Instead of being too concerned about whether a figure is truly the same or different, it may be better and more productive to view them by using the analogy of a 'family-connection', provided it is not taken too literally. We could say that they all belong to one type or class of being, one 'family', sharing various

characteristics which make them recognizable as belonging to that 'family', here of course to that of the hostile otherworldly females. The important point is that they do not always have to share exactly the same stock of characteristics. One figure may have the characteristics A,B,C, while another one only shares B and C, with other additions, D, E, F. Because of the similarity between the first two figures, a third which may only show D and F, (plus others), can still be related to figure one through the sharing with figure two. Marie-Louise Sjoestedt's idea of the single generative impulse which has given rise to diverse manifestations, to figures who are equivalent but not identical, seems to me to be the best explanation for this phenomenon (79).

This brings us to the final group of hags which are best called 'sovereignty hags'. They are all ugly and hostile to begin with but then change, through sexual intercourse, to become beautiful women, wives and mothers of kings. The sovereignty goddess has been discussed in numerous articles. Here, two examples will suffice to illustrate the type.

In the 'Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid' a hag, called both *caillech* and *sentainne*, guards a well from which the sons of Eochaid wish to have a drink: 'The lad went seeking water, till he chanced on a well and saw an old woman guarding it. Thus was the hag: every joint and limb of her, from the top of her head to the earth, was as black as coal. Like the tail of a wild horse was the gray bristly mane that came through the upper part of her head-crown.' After a whole string of horrible, distorted features, the passage ends: 'Loathsome in sooth was the hag's appearance' (*Doluid in gilla for iaraid usci, conuss-tarla dochum thopuir 7 facais seantuindi og comet in topuir. Is amlaid bui in chaillech, co mba duibithir gual cech n-alt 7 cach n-aigi di o mullach co talmain. Ba samalta fri herboll fiadeich in mong glas gaisidech bai tria cleithi a cheandmullaich. ... Ba grain tra a tuaraschail na cailligi*) (80). The hag demands a kiss in exchange for water. All the young men refuse with the exception of Niall, who both kisses and lies with the hag. She transforms into the most beautiful woman and identifies herself as the sovereignty.

A similar tale is told about Lugaid. Lugaid and his brothers hunt in the wilderness when snow forces them to look for shelter. In a house they encounter a huge old

hag (*sentainne* in IT3, *caillech* in *Dindshenchas* of Cairn Mail) who is every bit as horrible, ugly and distorted as Niall's hag. Her predominant colours are grey and black. Cairn Mail stresses the fact that the brothers would rather die than sleep with her, giving themselves over to a death of shame. In the same text the *caillech* also threatens death in the form of devouring them. Lugaid, however, sleeps with her and she transforms into a beautiful woman, the sovereignty (81).

How do these sovereignty hags relate to the war-goddesses and death-messengers above?

Their horrible form and threatening attitude is certainly no different from all the other hags described so far, and if the scene were set at the end of a king's or hero's life, one would immediately class them with all the others. However, the scene is set at the beginning of a king's career which is unusual. Yet the connection with war is definitely made, as the first story testifies. Here, the hag explains her transformation in the following way: 'As thou hast seen me loathsome, bestial, horrible at first and beautiful at last, so is the sovereignty; for seldom it is gained without battles and conflicts; but at last to anyone it is beautiful and goodly' (*Acus amail adcondarcais misi co granna connda aduathmar artus 7 alaind fodeoid, is amlaid sin in flaithius, uair is annam fogabar he cen chatha 7 cen chongala, alaind maisech immorro ria nech e fodeoid*) (82). It would be difficult not to see this as an allusion to the war- and death goddesses. Yet her role has changed dramatically. Instead of the death-goddess being an active adversary, a figure to be reckoned with, a figure whose proximity means certain death, the encounter with her is now merely one of the tests, one of the steps on the way to assuming the kingship. This kingship, moreover, has already been determined by all the special events which have happened to the hero in question. The meeting with the hag is only the final confirmation of what has been evident all along. Further, the hag cannot be overcome by force, but by submitting to her wishes. If we were to translate this principle into the tales of Cú Chulainn it becomes clear that submission to the Badb or Morrígan would mean one thing only - death. Even in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* it is clear that the king's consent to the hag's demands seals his fate. While the outer appearance of the hag still suggests the war- and death-goddess, her relationship with the hero has changed dramatically. As Máire

Herbert puts it: '... she functions once more as an object to be appropriated - in this instance her appropriation being the necessary condition for the recuperation of her form and appearance.' (83) And further: 'The feminized political status and power which the ruler assumes may present an initially uncompromising face, but the perspicacious rightful king could convert disorder to harmony' (84). We have noticed a beginning of this dependence on the hero in the case of the Morrigan. However, the hero had to be tricked to obtain the necessary healing and the goddess continued to present an uncompromising face. *Cath Maige Tuired* offers a message which is related to this in that the Dagda manages to convert the chaotic and destructive potential of the Morrigan into channels which are beneficial for people, albeit temporarily. However, the Morrigan does not turn into a beautiful young maiden, she remains the way she is, powerful and a truly equal mate of the Dagda, destructive and heavily involved in war. To transform this deadly female into a beautiful mate must surely be the ultimate triumph of the male hero!

It is also obvious that the beautiful sovereignty goddess has been brought into direct relationship with the ugly goddess of death, in fact, the story seems to express that they are one and the same. I am not certain that this scheme can be applied to all the figures discussed, in other words, that all the goddesses revolve around the sovereignty theme. While connections can be made, the ominous and friendly figures appear separately outside the above two tales and it is difficult to know in exactly what way the bearers of the tradition understood the different figures. Rather than betraying an interest in the goddesses' nature for its own sake I suspect that the tales are concerned about the relationship between male hero and female goddess, and that the appearance of the goddess is dictated by the importance and character of the male hero, as stated above. Attitudes changed over time, or even from one tale to the next, and this change is apparent in the different portrayals of the goddesses.

Finally, there is the question why the hag has been chosen as an appropriate shape for these nasty women. While it is impossible to be certain why a tradition has focussed on a particular symbol it is still interesting to speculate.

Firstly, the connection between the features of old age and distorted appearance was mentioned above, with old age giving rise to 'normal' deformities such as

skinny arms, wrinkled skin, grey hair, etc. The two themes thus belong together quite naturally. In a tradition which describes the beauty of young women so frequently and eloquently an old and ugly person forms a truly stark contrast to what must be considered the norm. It may be worthwhile noting in passing that a crooked physical shape often goes with incomplete or dishevelled dress which again stands in sharp contrast to beautifully dressed ladies. Finally, dishevelled hair, often grey, has been a feature of the hags and the Morrigan in particular, and it is noted that beautiful, light coloured hair is often singled out for particular praise in the beautiful, otherworldly ladies. An example of all of this is Étaín, the paragon of feminine beauty as conceived in medieval Ireland (85). In other words, old age and deformity are only one aspect of a whole group of features, all denoting deviation from the norm.

Secondly, an old woman is herself close to death and would thus be an appropriate representative of death. Indeed, it seems that at least one *caillech* is closely associated with the the realm of the dead. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has pointed out that a *caillech* called Buí (who is the same as the Caillech Beare of the famous poem) gives her name to an island Inis Buí which is the same as or in the vicinity of Tech nDuinn, 'the House of Donn', generally taken to be the house of the Dead (86). So here we can see a relationship, through two placenames, of a *caillech* and the place of the dead.

Finally, the poem mentioned above 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare' (87) provides us with at least one reason why an old woman would be regarded as dangerous. In this poem the old woman (*caillech*) mourns her lost youth when she was the lover of many kings, beautiful and sought after while now nobody comes to see her because she is ugly and old. Ó Cathasaigh writes: 'The dominant mood is of anger and regret at the passing of her youth,...' (88). and indeed one of the lines in this poem speaks of the woman's anger: 'Praying to you, O God, may my body's blood turn from anger.' (*oc do guidisiu, a Dé bí/do-raa cró clí fri feirg*) (89). The anger is obviously directed against the men who no longer desire her. As has been mentioned before, one of the most common reasons for women to turn against

men is unrequited love. If the two pieces of evidence are seen together, it is no longer quite so surprising to find old women hostile towards young males. Given the association of the hag with anger, danger and death the reason why the Morrigan, who already has overtones of a goddess of death, has attracted the hag-shape to herself becomes much more transparent.

Notes to Chapter 6:

- 1)Greene,D. and O'Connor, F. 'A golden treasury of Irish poetry' (Dingle, 1990) p.86-92 (RFC). (See also Meyer,K. 'Reicne Fothaid Canainne', in 'Fianaigeacht' (Dublin, 1910) p.1-21.Text dated to the late 9th to the early 10th cent. (Meyer, p.5)) The term 'reicne' refers to a poetical composition, perhaps originally a rhapsody or an extempore poem. (DIL)
- 2)ibid. p.88
- 3)ibid. p.89
- 4)Ó hÓgáin,D.'Myth, Legend and Romance - An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition' (London, 1990) p.309
- 5)RFC, p.88
- 6)Ó Riain, P. 'Cath Almaine' (Dublin,1978), p.21, ll.56-7
- 7)O'Mulcrony's glossary, p.271, paragr.813
- 8)RFC, p.86
- 9)Stokes, W. 'The Death of Muirchertach mac Erca' RC 23 (1902) p.395-437. paragr. 42, p.424; transl.p.425 (...berid in rig leo gusin mBoin[d] 7 dogn[i]at a thonach indti)
- 10)Marstrander, Carl 'The new Battle of Mag Rath' Eriu 5 (1911), p.244, transl. p. 245 (...7 dorigned a tonach occa 7 tucad a cheand fora duma na ratha)
- 11)Stokes, W. 'The Boróma' RC 13 (1892) para.5, p.38; transl. p.39
- 12)O'Leary,P. 'Jeers and Judgements - Laughter in Early Irish Literature', CMCS 21-22(1991), p.15-29
- 13)These texts have been studied by P.Lysaght in 'The Banshee' in connection with finding origins for the later folk-tradition. My interest is exactly opposite - to my mind the Washers are developments of the earlier war-goddesses. In order to illustrate this, the texts have to be mentioned in detail, hence the repetition of Lysaght's material.
- 14)Stokes, W. 'The Destruction of Da Choca's Hostel'(TBDC) RC 21 (1900)p.156 (text), p.157 (transl.). Thurneysen (IHK p.587) suggests the beginning of the 13th century for the saga although the original core may go back as far as the 9th. century. Two copies exist whereby the later and more elaborate one (TCD MS H.1.17), mentions the name Badb, the earlier one (TCD MS H.1.18) only describes the Washer without a name.
- 15)v. Hamel, A.G. 'Aided Con Culainn'(ACC) in 'Compert Con Culainn and other stories' (Dublin, 1968) p.69-71 Thurneysen suggests a 15th. century date for the second version of Aided Con Culainn which is discussed here.(IHK p.557)
- 16)O'Grady, S.H. 'Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh' (CT)ITS 21-22, vol.1 and 2,(London, 1929)
- 17)TBDC, p.157
- 18)CT, text vol.1 p.104-5; transl. vol.2, p.93
- 19)CT, text vol.1, p. 140-1; transl. vol.2 p.124-5
- 20)Aided Con Culainn, p. 95-6; transl. P.Lysaght 'The Banshee', p.198
- 21)Lysaght, P. 'The Banshee', p.201
- 22)Stokes, W. 'Togail Bruidne Da Derga'(TBDD) RC 22 (1901) 9-61, 65-215, 282-239, 390-437; RC 23 (1902), 88.
- 23)Ó Cathasaigh, T. 'The semantics of síd' Eigse 17 (1977-78), p.142
- 24)ibid. 144-5
- 25)TBDD, para.34, p.38
- 26)ibid. para.26, p.32
- 27)ibid. para.27, p.33
- 28)One of the prophesies is relevant to our inquiry as it clearly links a female with slaughter. After announcing the arrival of Ingcel and the sons of Dond Desa, the riders say: 'Be find for(s)ndestetar deirindlid air' meaning 'A fair woman upon whom the red embroidery of slaughter has settled.' (translated by J. Gantz 'Early Irish Myths and Sagas' (London,1981) p.70; not translated by Stokes.) The passage reminds us of a sentence uttered in connection with Deirdriu: 'the birth of a fair woman for whom there will be much slaughter.' While Deirdriu's story bears out this prophesy one wonders who the woman is in TBDD. The only fair ones which appear are Étain and Mes Buachalla, both sovereignty figures, symbolising the land, and one could imagine that the chaos and fighting which rules the land at that moment could well be expressed poetically as slaughter having settled on a fair

woman.

29)TBDD, para.38, p.41-2

30)Windisch, E. 'Táin Bó Regamna'(TBRg.) IT.2.1, ll.19-20, p.243

31)CMT ll.393-99

32)TBC1 ll.498-9

33)Henderson, G.'Fled Bricrend' ITS 2 (London,1899)*

34)Sayers, W.'Supernatural Pseudonyms', Emania 12, p.54

35)TBDD, para.38, p.41-2

36)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p.54; Liam Mac Mathúna suggests 'man of one-eyedness, the one-eyed one' as an alternative translation. ('On the Expression and Concept of Blindness in Irish' SH 19 (1979) p.58)

37)ibid. p.55

38)TBDD, para.61, p.57

39)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p.54

40)CMT, l.90

41)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p.54

42)example found in DIL

43)Stokes, W. 'Accallamh na Senórach', IT 4.1 (Leipzig, 1900), l.5848-5851, p. 161; transl. p.234

44)TBDD, para. 140, p.312; transl. p.313

45)'On the Expression and Concept of Blindness in Irish', p.60

46)Sayers, W. 'Guin agus crochad agus gólad - the earliest Irish threefold death' in C.Byrne, M.Harry and P.Ó Siadhail (editors) 'Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies', (Halifax, 1989), p.70

47)Rees, A. and Rees, B. 'Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales' p.336 and 340.

48)TBRg. l.32-33, p.244

49)CMT, ll.422-27

50)AMME, p.400

51)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p.56

52)TBDD, p.61

53)IHK, p.310, note 1

54)Meyer, K. 'Echtra Nerai' RC10 (1889), p.222; transl.223

55)Breathnach, M. 'The Sovereignty Goddess as Goddess of Death?' ZCP 39 (1982), p.251, note 50 (243-60)

56)CMT, ll.434-436

57)Stokes, W. 'Togail Bruidne Da Choca' (TBDC) RC 21(1900) p.314; transl. p.315

58)'The Sovereignty Goddess as Goddess of Death?' p.251, note 50

59)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p.57

60)Lysaght,P. 'The Banshee' (Dublin, 1986)

61)'Supernatural Pseudonyms' p. 57

62)TBC1, ll.2038-2053

63)There are two independent recension, one shorter and much more straightforward, dating probably from about the 10th. cent. (Marstrander, C. (ed. and transl.)Eriu 5 (1911), p.226-247), and one long and convoluted one from about the 13th. cent. (ed. and transl. by John O'Donovan 'The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Rath.' (Dublin, 1842)(Information found in Dillon, M.'The Cycles of the Kings' (London, 1946), p.65) The quatrain appears in the latter, p.198.

64)Meyer, K. 'Tochmarc Emire', RC11 (1890), (p.433-457) ll.133-140, p.450 and 452; transl. p.451 and 453

65)Eiss Enchend reappears as Eisin Chinne in Foglaim CC, 'The Training of CC', which is basically a reworking of Tochmarc Emire (see Thurneysen, IHK, p.396) Text and Translation by W. Stokes in RC29, 109ff. She carries a pot full of molten iron and also tries to kill CC but again it turns out that she is the loser. I am not dealing with this story separately.

66)Stokes, W. 'The Death of Cu Chulainn' RC 3 (1887), p.175-185.

I am referring here to the earlier death-tale whose core is dated by Thurneysen to the 8th/9th century and possibly finished about the 11th century. The more elaborate 15th. cent. death-tale which features the beautiful Washer women instead, has already been mentioned.

- 67) *ibid.* p.166
- 68) *ibid.* p.167
- 69) Best, R.I. 'The Adventures of Art son of Conn' *Eriu* 3 (1907), p.149-173. Written in Early Modern Irish and dated to the 15th century, but probably earlier core.
- 70) O'Keeffe, J.G. 'Buile Suibhne' *ITS* 12 (London, 1913) Story known in 9th.cent, but text in its present form from the 12th. cent. (see O'Keeffe's introduction)
- 71) *ibid.* para.37, p.60; transl. p.61
- 72) *ibid.* para.39, p.62; transl. p.63
- 73) *ibid.* para.41, p.82; transl. p.83
- 74) Meyer, K. 'Death tale of Finn' *ZCP* 1 (1896-97) p. 462-465
- 75) *ibid.* p.464
- 76) Irish text in Stokes, W. 'Accallamh na Senórach' ll.3960-3975, p.112-113; translation in O'Grady, S.H. 'Silva Gadelica', vol.2 (Dublin, 1892) p.204
- 77) Gwynn, E. 'Bile Tortan' in 'The Metrical Dindshenchas' (Dublin, 1924) vol.4, p.240 and 242 (text); p.241 and 243 (translation)
- 78) Widowson, J. 'The Witch as Frightening and Threatening Figure' in Newall, V. (ed) 'The Witch Figure' (London, 1973) p.200-220. With regard to *caillech* in general, refer also to M.Ní Dhonnchadha's article: 'Terms for veiled women in medieval irish texts' *Éigse* 28 (1994-5) 74-98.
- 79) Sjoestedt, M.L. 'Gods and Heroes of the Celts' (Dublin, 1994), p.26
- 80) Stokes, W. 'The Death of Crimthann, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid', *RC* 24 (1903), p.196, paragr. 10/11 (Irish text), p.197 (translation) (172-207)
- 81) Stokes, W. 'Cóir Anmann' *IT* 3, p. 319. Another version in the place lore of Carn Mail (Gwynn, E. 'The Metrical Dindshenchas' vol.4 (Dublin, 1924) p.134-143; description of the encounter p.140)
- 82) 'The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid', p.200; transl. p.201
- 83) Herbert, Máire 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland' in 'Women and Sovereignty' ed. L.D. Fradenburg (Edinburgh, 1992), p.271
- 84) *ibid.* p.271
- 85) *TBDD*, para.1,2; p.14-16
- 86) Ó Cathasaigh, T. 'The Eponym of Cnogba' *Éigse* 25 (1999), p.34-5 (p.27-38)
- 87) Greene, D. and O'Connor, F. 'The Nun of Beare' in 'A Golden Trasury of Irish Poetry', (paperback edition, Dingle, 1990)
- 88) 'The Eponym of Cnogba' p.36
- 89) 'The Nun of Beare' p.51; transl. p.54

Chapter 7:

MACHA - WAR-GODDESS, MOTHER-GODDESS OR BOTH?

The question whether the Morrígan and her sisters display signs which could be linked to motherhood, fertility and prosperity has arisen several times throughout this study. So far I have been reluctant to affirm such a link, either because of the context of trickery or because it did not seem meaningful to automatically make the connection between sexual traits and fertility, particularly as the emphasis has been firmly on the taking of life in the stories reviewed so far. When discussing Macha, however, the link to motherhood/prosperity becomes considerably stronger. Before addressing this issue it is necessary to list the evidence which defines her as one of the war-goddesses.

Macha is often cited as the third of the war-goddesses when they are listed as the daughters of Ernmas. Instead of the triad Badb, Bé Neit and Nemain, as seen in the *Táin*, we find Badb, Macha and Morrígu in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (1) Macha is also linked to the other war-goddesses in O'Mulcrony's glossary (2): '*Machae .i. badb, nó así an tres morrigan unde mesrad Machae .i. cendae doine iarna n-airlech*' which means 'a scald crow; or she is the third Morrígan (great queen); Macha's fruit crop, i.e. the heads of men after their slaughter.'

We noticed in passing that Macha is mentioned in the *Táin* in one of the trance speeches 'Arise, valiant kings of Macha' (3) which Carey has interpreted as a significant element in the Irish mythology of war (4) but could also be seen as simply referring to the kings of Emain Macha, capital of Ulster. Further, one of Cú Chulainn's horses is called 'The Grey of Macha' (5) which suggests some link between the hero and Macha. *Cath Maige Tuired* tells us that Macha, the daughter of Ernmas and one of the Túatha Dé, was killed in the great battle (6).

Very little insight can be gained from these references and other sources are needed to fill in the picture. Three Machas are mentioned together in the *Dindsenchas* of Ard Macha (7) telling the stories of Macha, wife of Nemed mac Agnomain, Macha Mongruad and Macha, wife of Cruinn mac Agnomain. Each of the tales appears in other sources as well, but the listing of the three together has

been interpreted by Dumézil (8) as an example of a tri-functional goddess.

On first sight it is difficult to discern the links with the war-goddesses as we know them from the *Táin* and other tales. Macha, wife of Nemed, is a seeress. This may strike a chord with the Morrígan's ability to prophesy. On the other hand, her death is caused by horrific visions, something which would not perturb the war-goddesses at all. As Carey states, it is the only instance which recalls her death like that (9). Otherwise, Macha, wife of Nemed, dies on a plain cleared by her husband and gives her name to this clearing (10). Together with the other place-names such as Ard Macha and Emain Macha one is probably safest to see Macha as a figure associated with the land, particularly as her name may denote a pasture (DIL s.v.Macha 3).

The second Macha, Macha Mongruad, depicts a more violent character. The story, taken from the *Rennes Dindsenchas*, relates the fate of three kings who should rule jointly, each one for seven years. When one of them (Aed) dies, he only leaves a daughter, Macha Mongruad, who demands to be treated like her father but is rejected by the other two. She defeats them in battle and rules the country. When another king dies and leaves five sons, Macha denies them their right to kingship because she has won it now by battle rather than by agreement. She marries the last king and sets out to overcome the five sons by a trick: '...Macha went to seek Dithorba's sons in the guise of a lepress - that is, rye-dough and red bog-stuff were rubbed all over her - and she found them in Boirenn Connacht (around a fire), cooking a wild boar.' (... *luid Macha do farair mac nDithorba ir-richt chclaimsige .i. táes secail 7 rota racomled impe, conos-fuair i mBairind Connacht oc fune tuire allaid.*) They converse and one of them says: 'Beautiful is the hag's eye! let us lie with her.' He carries her off through the wood. She binds that man by dint of her strength and in the wood she leaves him.' (*Is álaind rosc na calligi: óentaigem fria.' Nos-beir-side leis fon caillid. Cenglaid-si in fer sain al-lus nirt, 7 fácbaid é sin cháillid.*) The other brothers suffer the same fate and she brings them back to Ulster. The people want them killed but: 'Nay,' quoth she, 'since it would be for me a violation of the prince's truth.' (*Ní thó,' ar sisi, 'ar is col fír flatha damsa, ...*) Instead, they dig a rath around the city along the line which 'Then she marked out by her brooch (*eó*) that was on her neck (*muin*). Hence Emuin, that is, eo-muin, the

eó that was at Macha's muin.' (*Coro thóraind-si dóib in dún cona heo (.i. delg) óir imma muin .i. Emuin .i. eo muin .i. eó imma muin Macha*) (11).

As Carey points out, (12) Macha's tale could be described as a variation on the sovereignty theme. The hunt, the hag and the sexual liaison with the contenders to the kingship distinctly recalls the pattern set by the adventures of Niall and Lugaid (13). In both stories, a group of brothers are hunting in the wilderness and chance upon an ugly hag who insists on sexual intercourse in exchange for water from a nearby well. All but the main contender for the kingship refuse. When intercourse takes place, the ugly hag transforms into a beautiful girl and confirms the young man's right to the kingship. The brothers in Macha Mongruad's tale obviously assume a similar outcome to their adventure but their assessment of the hag is quite wrong. It seems, the usual pattern is deliberately manipulated to produce quite a surprising outcome - instead of becoming kings they end up as Macha's slaves. The fact that Macha regards it as a violation of the prince's truth (*ffir flatha*) to kill the men confirms that sovereignty is indeed the issue in this tale. Macha pretends to be a sovereignty hag when in fact she is the sovereign. She is not the otherworldly woman who bestows sovereignty, as the brothers assume, but the this-worldly queen who takes sovereignty herself and defends it with weapons and trickery, in other words, by whichever means suitable. Thus, she resembles Medb as portrayed in the *Táin* rather than the sovereignty or war-goddesses. Finally we turn to the most important of the stories, important because it is directly linked to the *Táin* and explains the mysterious weakness of the Ulstermen. The story tells of a wealthy farmer who lived in the wilderness. His wife died but one day 'he saw coming towards him into the main building a shapely woman excellent in appearance, apparel, and aspect' (... *co n-acae óc-mnaí cruthaig isa tech mór cuccai co febus delbae et errid et ecuisc.*) She instantly sets about kindling the fire, preparing food, milking the cows, tidying up before nightfall and finally, sleeping with him and eventually falling pregnant. 'Now from union with her, his wealth [was all] the greater'. (*Móide dana a indbus-som dia hóentaid-si*) One day, Crunnchu goes to the assembly of the Ulstermen but his wife warns him not to talk about her there. Despite his assurance, however, he boasts about her speed after the king's horses have won all the races. The king seizes Crunnchu and demands to

have proof of the boast. The woman is fetched and forced to run a race against the horses despite her being in labour. She pleads with the king: 'Wait for me but a little [while],' said she, 'until I have been delivered' (*'Anaid frium biucán trá,' ol sisi, 'corom-asaither'*. 1.49) [In another version of this story (found in Knott, E. 'The Cuchulinn saga') she appeals to the crowd to spare her because: 'A mother bore each one of you'] Her plea is refused and she races with the horses, wins but screams out in pain. 'Forthwith God cleared it (ie the pain) away from her, and she bore a boy and a girl at one birth. As soon as all the people heard the scream of the woman, it laid them low so that the strength of all of them was the same as [that of] the woman who was in travail.' (*Ro-glé Día dí fo cét-óir, ocus berid mac 7 ingin i n-óen-tairbirt. Amail ro-cólatar in slúag uile a screit inna banscáile, fosceird fúo combo inann nert dóib uli 7 in banscál boí isin galur.ll.55-8*) She curses the Ulstermen: "The shame that you have inflicted upon me," [she said, "shall be indeed a disgrace to you from now on. When things shall be most difficult for you, all those of you who guard this province shall have only the strength of a woman in childbirth; ..."] (*Bid aithis trá dúib ond úair-se ind enechruice fo-rrurmíid-si form-sa. In tan bas ansam dúib, nicon bia acht nert mná séolae lib do neuc thaircella a cóiced-sa; ... ll.59-61*) This period of weakness was to last five days and four nights and the curse would last for nine generations. Only women, boys and Cú Chulainn are exempt, the latter because he originates from outside Ulster (14). Here we have a story where an obviously otherworldly woman appears to a man who lives in the wilderness, a common meeting point of the two worlds. Her coming increases Crunnchu's wealth and the relationship flourishes, provided it is not spoken about with others. The promise not to speak is like a *geiss*, a contract with the Otherworld. While it holds, both worlds are in harmony, and wealth and abundance are the rule of the day. Once broken, however, conflict is inevitable. The woman turns vengeful due to her unjust treatment and curses the Ulstermen. Two elements in this tale correspond to the initial meeting of Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan. Carey cites the advance of the Morrígan as a beautiful girl, bringing cattle and treasure, in support of his view that Macha is a war-goddess (15). He sees this as one piece of evidence which leads him to the following conclusion: 'While Dumézil is certainly correct, therefore, in maintaining that the third Macha

exemplifies wealth and maternity, it is surely significant that she does so only in ways attested of the war-goddesses elsewhere in the literature' (16). However, it has already been noted that an otherworldly woman approaching a man and offering love and treasures is a feature of many stories and not specific to that of the Morrigan as war-goddess. Further, the woman is deceiving Cú Chulainn, as he notices fairly quickly, and therefore he rejects, rather than accepts her. While it may be appropriate for a farmer to accept love and plenty in times of peace from a woman who means well, the same is not true for a warrior in times of war, and the same offer, but this time out of context, instantly sounds dubious.

Secondly, both women become aggressive when rejected/treated wrongly and it is their method of revenge which is particularly suggestive. Whatever the specific meaning of *ces noínden* may have been, it is a fact that it expresses a weakness, a wasting, a diminution of strength, an inability to fight. Carey, Sjoestedt and the findings of this study have demonstrated the war-goddesses' ability of weakening both armies and individuals. It is interesting that Macha's scream is the direct cause of the weakness. The confusing and weakening effect of these cries has been pointed out frequently. However, *screit*, which is the Irish word for her scream, is not usually attested as one of the words describing the shouts of the war-goddesses. While the Morrigan's methods in the Cú Chulainn story are unusually direct in that she is actually involved in the fight, albeit not in the form of a human foe, the result remains the same: the warrior is weakened both physically and mentally. Inflicting weakness is a method of waging war, as we have seen, which explains why it strikes the Ulstermen at the time of greatest danger. Further, Sjoestedt has pointed to the occurrence of the term Noenden (as well as Macha and Badb) in the list of Cailb's names which strengthens the link between Macha and the war-goddesses (17).

It seems, therefore, that Macha's hostility and her way of avenging herself defines her as a war-goddess, even though she started her 'career', so to speak, as a benign figure. Her character lacks any sign of cherishing slaughter for its own sake or of using benevolent characteristics as a disguise. Instead, her story seems to be an expression that the harmonious relationship between this world and the otherworld has gone wrong and Macha's hostility is a sign of it.

One wonders whether the above tale could also be an example of the mechanism which was raised as a possibility to explain the immacalam episode in the *Táin*: somehow, the hostility between otherworldly woman and hero had to be explained and once again, the theme of the wronged woman suggested itself. The difference in the case of Macha, however, is that she is firmly associated with the land, not just on a rare occasion or with an obscure place but with one of the most famous and prominent locations in the sagas, Emain Macha and Ard Macha. I find it inconceivable that two of the most famous places of Ulster received their names as a result of such an unpleasant and unflattering event. After all, why would the Ulstermen remind themselves of something which amounts to criticism of their society by naming two places after the woman who voiced that criticism for the first time? Nor would a place at the heart of a tribe be called after a figure who was merely destructive, or, for that matter, snatched the sovereignty for herself, as Macha Mongruad did. For this to make any sense Macha must have been associated with these places before the relationship with the Ulstermen went wrong and if anything can be deduced from these tales it is that she exemplifies a figure who can both give and withdraw her favours, depending on the behaviour of the people who live on the place she personifies. This is in keeping with what is known about the Otherworld as a whole, as Ó Cathasaigh explains: 'The Otherworld interventions in the affairs of men are not always benign, and the Otherworld dimension of kingship has its dark side. What the gods bestow, they can also take away...' (18). It also fits in with the fact that the Irish female figures, whether benevolent or sinister, mainly comment on the efforts of the male heroes. However, there is a further aspect to this story which concerns the suspicion that the criticism of the Ulstermen stems from a Christian point of view. While the story makes perfect sense in terms of a disrupted relationship between the world of humans and the Otherworld, the following points also need to be considered: first of all, God intervenes to ease the woman's pain in the above version. And secondly, the concern for the woman is strongly reminiscent of the views expressed in *Cáin Adamnáin* the 'Law of Adamnán': 'For a mother is a venerable treasure, a mother is a goodly treasure, the mother of saints and bishops and righteous men, an increase of the Kingdom of Heaven, a propagation on earth' (19). Macha, driven

into contest despite her labour pains and dying in childbirth at the end of the race, reminds us of the description of the slavegirl going to war, with her provisions on one side and her baby on the other (20) or even of the woman Adamnán and his mother see on the battle-field: 'Though they beheld the battle-field, they saw nothing more pitiful than the head of a woman in one place and the body in another, and her little babe upon the breast of the corpse, a stream of milk upon one of its cheeks, and a stream of blood upon the other' (21). Finally, as mentioned above, another version of the tale mentions how Macha appeals to the crowd: 'A mother bore each one of you! Help me! Wait till my child is born.' In a similar way an angel commands Adamnán: 'Thou shalt establish a law in Ireland and Britain for the sake of the mother of each one, because a mother has borne each one' (22). The story seems to be an indictment of the warrior society in which women can no longer do what they should be doing, ie supporting their husbands, increasing men's wealth and bearing children. If they are allowed to do that, all is well, if not, the consequences are dire. If it is true that Macha is associated with war-goddesses because of the hostility resulting from this incident one could say that the existence of the war-goddesses is, in itself, 'proof' of the degenerate state of the warrior society, at least from the point of view of this story. Interestingly, Joan Radner has come to a similar conclusion with regard to the *ces noinden* in the *Táin* itself. She sees it as 'the tangible and persistent symbol of a radical flaw in the Ulstermen' (23), a view which can be supported by the story of Macha, the originator of the *ces noinden*. We have noticed already that the war-goddesses in the *Táin* exemplify the destructive and chaotic qualities of war only, without reference to glory, material gain, supremacy over other tribes, truth established through battle and other, more positive outcomes of war. She remains, on the whole, a fearsome and unpleasant character. While this is true for all stories, we note a difference between her portrayal in the *Táin* and, for example, in *Cath Maige Tuired*. Despite her ambiguity in *Cath Maige Tuired*, once she has been seduced into helping the Túatha, her activity is crucial for their success. War is seen as a means to an end, determining who is the rightful ruler of Ireland. The concept of *fir catha* is important in *Cath Maige Tuired* and the Morrígan is part of the group with a justified claim to the land. Any such positive signs are absent in

the *Táin*. While Cú Chulainn benefits from the activity of the war-goddesses Nemain and Badb, he has only himself to thank for it. He elevates himself to their level and is formidable enough to be likened to them rather than the war-goddesses coming to his support. The feeling in the two stories is quite different. Maybe the presence of the war-goddesses in the *Táin* functions partially as a criticism of the warrior mentality in the same way Macha's tale suggests and forms part of P.Kelly's observation that 'whole-hearted approval of war is withheld' (24). How are we to understand the fact that a figure, identified as a war-goddess, acts both as benevolent and destructive, no matter how it comes about? This adds a new dimension to our inquiry, although it is not unusual when dealing with otherworldly female figures. J. Preston affirms that most goddesses are connected, directly or indirectly, with motherhood. He claims that: 'Even goddesses not directly associated with motherhood are connected to the nurturant function through other deities. This is often the case in pantheons of deities that include numerous goddesses; for instance, in complex pantheons where feminine functions are divided and specialized among several sister deities the nurturant function may be represented by only one of the divinities' (25). While I do not wish to claim that the female figures in the Irish tales are an accurate reflection of deities as they used to be, the paradoxical nature of the female seems such a basic trait that it is adhered to no matter what the exact status of the figure in question may be. As the daughters of Ernmas include Macha as well as Morrígan and Badb a similar process as the one described in Preston's quote seems to have taken place, in other words, the sinister war-goddesses are linked to the qualities of nurturing via the figure of Macha, wife of Crunnchu. By extension, we can state that they are linked to sovereignty via the figure of Macha Mongruad and to the land via the figure of Macha, wife of Nemed, depending which Macha is focused upon.

Before discussing Macha and her inclusion amongst the war-goddess trio any further it is worthwhile to check whether any other traces of benevolence can be found or whether Macha is merely an isolated example. In this context Anu/Anann and Búanann have to be mentioned.

The connection between Morrígan and Anann or Macha and Anann has been mentioned by Hennessy and Carey, the latter devoting several paragraphs to this

figure and the implications of the connection. It will suffice to quote some passages to demonstrate the various combinations of war-goddesses. One variation is to substitute Anu for Morrigan: 'Ernmas had other three daughters, Badb, Macha and Morrighu, whose name was Anand' (*Tri ingena aile dana oc Ernmais .i. Badb 7 Macha 7 Mórrigu, .i. Anand a hainmside*) (26). A second variation is to add Anu to the usual names: 'Eriu and Fotla and Banba, three daughters of Fiachna s. Delbaeth ... Ernmas d. Etarla was mother of those women ... Ernmas had three other daughters, Badb, Macha, Morrighu: and Ana, of whom are called the Paps of Ana in Urluachair, was her seventh daughter.' (*Hériu 7 Fotla 7 Banba, trí ingena Fiachna meic Delbaith ... Hernmass ingen Etarlaim a mathair na mban sin ... Trí hingena aile hic Ernmaiss, .i. Badb 7 Macha 7 Mórrígu: 7 Anann, diatát cicha Anand in Urluachair, in secht mudh ingen dí*) (27). Sometimes, only Badb, Macha and Anand are mentioned, missing out the Morrigan altogether (28), and other times Macha is equated with Morrigan, making way for Anand as the third sister (29). As Carey points out: '... her association with the mountains named the Breasts of Anu shows her to have been identical with the goddess Anu, subject of the famous entry in *Sanas Chormaic*: 'Anu, that is, the mother of the Irish gods; for it is well that she nourished the gods. From whose name ána, that is 'abundance', and the Breasts of Anu in West Luachair are named' (30). Why Anand/Anu became included with the war-goddesses is impossible to say. Carey suggests that she must have had association with war already as '... it is considerably more difficult ... to account for a land-goddess with martial traits' (31). It is partially on this evidence that he suggests the paradoxical nature of the goddesses, encompassing both warfare and the land in a symmetrical opposition rather than in an amorphous 'wholeness', as some other scholars have suggested. (He quotes Anne Ross, Sjoestedt) (32). However, the concepts of warfare and the land are not opposites, in fact, they very often go together in that many wars are fought because of the land, or rather, the possession of land. A land-goddess with martial traits seems, therefore, a plausible option. Additionally, I do not think it is permissible to juxtapose a human activity with an object, or better, a natural phenomenon. Blighting the land and helping it to flourish would be opposites, as would warfare and peace, but warfare and the land belong to different classes of things.

Returning to our investigation of Morrigan and Anu, it seems surprising that the war-like nature of the Morrigan, where all the emphasis is on the taking of life, is mentioned together with a figure like Anu, who is mother of the gods and who has nourishing, life-enhancing qualities, symbolised by her breasts.

In this context it is worthwhile to mention another name connected with the war-goddesses in an equally elusive manner. Casting our mind back to the first encounter between Cú Chulainn and the Morrigan, we remember her identification as King Búan's daughter. Búan means 'The Eternal/Lasting One', from *búa* lasting, enduring, constant, firm, persevering, according to DIL. Búanann, a person, is also listed in DIL and defined as 'nurse of warriors', her name probably derived from 'búa' and 'find'. It is Búanann who provides the link to Anu, as Cormac testifies: 'Búanann, 'the foster mother of the Fiana, similar to the lady Anu; just as Anu was the mother of the gods, so Búanann is described as a sort of mother of the fiana.' ... 'a good mother who taught them the use of arms.' (33) Sjoestedt describes her and Scáthach as mothers and teachers of heroes (34), and Anne Ross links her with the war-goddesses: 'The warrior goddess, who is also a mother figure, clearly underlies the two powerful women whom Cú Chulainn trains under in Britain ... They are called Scáthach, 'The Shadowy One', and Búanann 'The Lasting One'...' (35). Anne Ross does not give any reference as to why she equates Scáthach and Búanann as teachers of Cú Chulainn. On the whole, the tales only mention the name Scáthach. Búanann appears as a descriptive term in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*², in a poem spoken by Cú Chulainn after Fer Diad's death: '*Mad dá mmámar all anall/ac Scáthaig búadaig búanand*' (36). Cecile O'Rahilly's translation does not take this term into account: 'When we were yonder with Scáthach the victorious' (37). 'The lasting/eternal one' should be added to her description. Otherwise, Scáthach is once referred to as Scáthach nÚanaind, daughter of Airdgame, (38) which may conceivably be a scribal error. The word *úan* means 'foam' (DIL) and Meyer suggests that *úanaind* may come from *úanfind*, the foam-white one (DIL). None of these terms fit very well with a figure otherwise known as 'the Shadowy One'. However, whether Scáthach and Búanann are identical or not is immaterial for this study. More important is the fact that Búanann and Scáthach are of a similar type and one wonders whether the Morrigan has anything to do with them, particularly

in view of her initial identification as King Búan's daughter. The problem with this link is that Scáthach/Búanann are teachers of weapon skill (*gaisced*): Tochmarc Emire clearly states that Scáthach taught Cú Chulainn '*míllte .i. imon ngaisced*' with *míllte* meaning 'militia, warfare, warriorship' (DIL) (39). This assertion is repeated in *Aided Óenfir Aife*, 'The Death of Aife's Only Son: '*Luid Cu Chulainn do forsetul gaiscid la Scáthaig*' (40) meaning: 'Cú Chulainn went to be taught weapon skill by Scáthach.' Weapon-skill, however, is the only skill of a warrior which has been consistently dissociated from the war-goddesses. Given this important detail, I would conclude that Scáthach must be understood as a different type of figure, and, by implication, so must Búanann.

When searching the literature for other occurrences of the name Búan we find two main clusters. One, exemplified by *Fled Bricrend* and the *Metrical Dindshenchas*, portrays Búan as a young woman, daughter of Samera and in love with Cú Chulainn. When Cú Chulainn leaves her father's house, she follows: 'The girl at last leapt a fearful leap, following him behind in his chariot's track till she struck her forehead on a rock, whereof she died. From this is named Búan's Grave' (*Rolebling ind ingen trá léim n-úathmar ina diaid-sium for furis in charpait, co n-ecmaing a tul immon n-all, co m-bo marb de, conid de ainmnighter Úaig Búana*) (41).

The other refers to Búan as a river, again with a special connection to Cú Chulainn because in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Búan is one of the rivers in which Cú Chulainn's wounds are bathed and healed (42). *Táin Bó Cúailnge*2 adds otherworldly involvement: 'For the Túatha Dé Danann used to put herbs and healing plants and charms on the streams and rivers in Conaille Muirthemne to help and succour Cú Chulainn' (43).

The evidence found in connection with Búanann can be summarised as follows: firstly, Búanann is likened to Anu who in turn has some connection with the Morrígan. Secondly, Búanann comes from the same stem as Búan, and the Morrígan identifies herself as King Búan's daughter, which establishes a second connection. Thirdly, Búanann can be likened to Scáthach, also an otherworldly lady concerned with warriors, and the question of similarities with the Morrígan has been raised. On consideration, however, they were found to be spurious. Fourthly,

Búan appears as a woman in love with Cú Chulainn which has a parallel in the Morrígan's disguise when she pretends to be King Búan's daughter. Finally, the river Búan is associated with healing Cú Chulainn wounds and the issue of healing reappears in the encounter between the hero and his female foe.

It is clear from this summary that the links are very vague indeed and it is doubtful whether anything concrete can be deduced from them. The stumbling block is yet again the fact that the Morrígan is not King Búan's daughter but only disguises herself as such. Why the author of the story has chosen this name is impossible to say. One could speculate that Búan was already associated with Cú Chulainn, either through the healing river or through a woman in love with him. Maybe it suggested itself readily when the *immacallam* episode was introduced but what exactly was in the author's mind will never be revealed.

With regard to the war-goddesses' link to more positive, benevolent qualities it is safe to say that the figure of Macha, whatever she may have been, provides the best case for such a link. The association with Anu and Búanann is too vague to allow for any conclusion and can only be considered significant in the light of knowledge gained through Macha. As said above, it is likely that she is a figure connected to a place, to the land and that she could grant and withdraw favours, depending on the behaviour of the people settled on that land. Two possibilities present themselves at this juncture: on the one hand, Macha could have been counted among the war-goddess trio as a land goddess. This would lead to the conclusion that the war-goddesses as a whole show paradoxical attributes and that it is unwise to call them war-goddesses at all. One would come to a view which is similar to that of Dumézil who saw Macha as a tri-functional goddess, only it could be argued, that the threesome as a whole is tri-functional, or trans-functional, with both Macha and the Morrígan showing all three functions while Badb remains simply a second-function figure. The war-goddess could thus be truly a 'Great Queen'.

On the other hand, one could speculate that Macha was added to the war-goddess trio at a later stage, ie once she was perceived as hostile, and that she belongs to them solely due to her hostility. This would explain why Macha is not classed among the war-goddesses in the *Táin*. We also have to remember that Macha is not

associated with the weakness of the Ulstermen in the *Táin*. There, the fact is simply stated and nobody is made responsible. Further, the tale of Macha and her curse is not even listed among the *remscéla* of the *Táin* (44) which implies that it was composed later than these, when it became important to find an explanation for the mysterious disease of the Ulstermen. The story of Macha's revenge may well have been constructed on the model of the war-goddesses which paved the way for an inclusion amongst them. The puzzle is unlikely ever to be solved and nothing more can be done than to state the dilemma and leave it at that.

Throughout this study there have been hints as to how the war-goddesses are perceived by the authors of the stories, particularly when comparing their role in different texts. The issue of attitudes has emerged prominently in the analysis of Macha and it is opportune to deal with attitudes in general.

The earliest instance where a definite opinion is passed on one of the war-goddesses occurs in the now famous gloss in the MS Vaticanus Regina 215 (876/877AD) to Isaiah 34:14: 'And wild beasts shall meet with hyenas, the satyr shall cry to his fellow; yea, there shall the night hag alight, and find for herself resting place' (45). *Lamia* is the Latin term used in this instance for 'night-hag' and it is glossed with '*monstrum in femine figura .i. morígain*' (46).

The first question in need of investigation is: What did people mean when they used the term *lamia*? A *lamia* is a figure from classical literature which, according to Pauly's '*Real-Enzyklopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*' denotes '*ein vampyrartiger Dämon, der Wortbedeutung nach 'die Verschlingerin'*', (47) meaning 'a vampire-type demon whose name means the devourer'. The same source states that the most famous tale of her origin, found in Diodorus and Strabo, tells of a beautiful queen from Libya who is a lover of Zeus. Jealous Hera strikes her with madness and kills her children. Her grief turns her as ugly as a wild beast and prevents her from ever sleeping again. Ceaselessly she roams around snatching and killing other women's children (48).

The *lamia* became part of medieval beliefs or superstitions and seems to have merged with another figure derived from classical literature, the *strix* 'screech owl' (49). This creature was believed to fly about at night, to screech and to live off the

flesh of humans. It was no mere bird, however, but a transformed woman who was also able to offer her breast to infants and feed them with poisoned milk. Other stories relate that the *strix* robbed people of their strength. Men are in particular danger as she was responsible for stealing their potency. Amongst German speaking people the belief was so strong that laws were devised to punish people who accused others of being a *striga* and this belief seems to have developed there quite independently of Latin literature even though a derivation of the Latin name was used for her (50).

The main activity of the *lamia/strix* ie that of attacking and devouring children has no parallel in the case of the war-goddesses as far as we can deduce from the still existing texts and she most certainly was no vampire. This led Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux to dismiss the gloss as Christian vilification of a pre-Christian deity (51). All otherworldly hostile females may have been susceptible to identification with figures from medieval 'superstition'. The fact that the war-goddess devoured victims of battle and adversely affected men's potency may have contributed to the classification as *lamia* or *strix*. Possibly the most prominent similarity was her shape-changing abilities from bird to woman. In the course of aligning the Irish past with medieval culture one could imagine that any bird-woman brought the *lamia/strix* to mind. It is impossible to tell from just one gloss exactly what characteristics a '*monstrum in femine figuram*' had to have in order to warrant the description 'Morrígan'.

The word *monstrum* poses another problem. While a modern English speaker would instantly think of 'monster', meaning some sort of horrible, distorted creature, the original meaning of *monstrum* is quite different. C.J.Fordyce writes that *monstrum* '... is originally a religious term used of a supernatural phenomenon which conveys a portent or an omen... Hence it comes to be applied to any uncanny creature or thing, usually with the sinister application of a threat of evil' (52). One wonders exactly what meaning the glossator had in mind when using this word for the Morrígan. Was she seen as an apparition heralding some future event, or was she a nasty and evil creature? Given the unpleasant overtones of the *lamia*, the latter is probably the most likely.

Apart from the *lamia* in this early source there are some further instances of

identification with classical female figures and one wonders what prompted the writer to choose a particular name and whether his choice may tell us anything about the general attitude towards the Irish war-goddesses.

Probably the most famous and most discussed case is the occurrence of the Fury Allecto in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Thurneysen (52) suggested that the Irish must have known and been influenced by the *Aeneid* at the stage the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* was written to be able to use the term. He also lists other similarities like the so called 'Watchman motive', the rising of the river Cronn and the waiting for favourable omens before departing for war. His conclusion from this evidence is that the importance of the *Táin* arose from the need to create an epic which could stand side by side with the antique epics (53). It is well known that Virgil's *Aeneid* was extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages and exerted an influence both on the learned traditions and on the popular imagination (54). However, thorough knowledge of the classics need not be presupposed to allow for the occurrence of these motives. Dorothy Dilts Swartz says: 'The question of classical influence in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is not simple, since the name Allecto could indicate only a superficial borrowing, and the Watchman device is known to have had a continuing existence in the oral literature of Europe for millenia' (55).

For someone with a special interest in ferocious otherworldly women the question arises whether the character of the fury has anything in common with the Morrígan and whether it can be assumed that the choice was an informed one, or not, as the case may be. Only a most cursory glance is intended, given my lack of knowledge about classical matters.

Pauly informs us that the Furies (*dirae*) are the Latin version of the Greek Erinyes. Their characteristics and functions differ widely from writer to writer, forming a complex topic in Greek and Roman mythology. '*Fast endlos ist die Vielseitigkeit der Aufgaben der Erinyen, entsprechend der Vielzahl von Dämonen, aus denen ihre Gestalt, und von Ideen, aus denen ihr inneres Wesen zusammengeflossen ist*' (56). Their functions range from presiding over oaths, regulating people's fate, causing madness, stirring up fights and persecuting wrong-doers, particularly when a crime has been committed within the family, to more beneficial tasks such as the fertility of crops and the fertility of people. The usual number of Furies is three, most often

called Allecto, Tisiphone and Megeara.

In Virgil's *Aeneid* Allecto ('*die nimmer rastende*', according to Pauly) appears extensively in Book Seven where she is in the service of Juno and instructed to cause trouble between the Trojans and the Italians. She is a creature from the underworld and described as 'maker of grief, who revels in war, in open and underhand violence, in damaging quarrels' (57) and she is so ferocious that even the other inhabitants of Hades fear her. Juno addresses her as 'daughter of Night' (58) and comments on her ability to take on many different forms. Allecto's first deed is to attack the Latvian queen Amata by letting one of her (Allecto's) snakes slither under the queen's dress, into her bosom and heart and infecting her with maddening poison. As a consequence, the queen not only tries to prevent the marriage of her daughter Lavinia to Aeneas, she also runs around the city raving mad, enticing the other women to join her in wild revelry in the woods in honour of Bacchus. After having sent the queen mad, Allecto flies 'on her sombre wings' (59) to Turnus, Lavinia's ex-fiancee, and appears to him in form of an old crone, the aged priestess Calybe of the Juno temple. She attempts to rouse Turnus to fight the Trojans and when he does not respond, she reveals herself in her true shape: her eyes flaming, her snake-hair hissing, cracking her whip and with a mouth like a mad dog.

'Look at me, then. I am come from the place where the Furies are. War and death I bear in this hand' (60). She throws a flame at Turnus which causes intense terror in him. He awakes from a sleep - or so he thinks - and, crazy with bloodlust, he clamours for arms and arouses his men for war. Allecto, still not satisfied, goes over to the other camp, the Trojans, some of whom are hunting. 'Here, the devilish hag cast a sudden frenzy upon those hounds' (61) who race off and kill a pet deer of the royal gamekeeper's daughter. The peasants rise to defend the insult while Allecto perches on the roof of a house like an evil bird and blows the crooked horn, a sign of alarm. More peasants arrive and a battle ensues. 'While they fought over the plain there, with neither side prevailing, Allecto, her promise fulfilled now she had given the war its baptism of blood and opened its first encounter with killings, took leave of Hesperia' (62) and, flying back, reports to Juno with 'insolent triumph' in her voice, keen to cause more trouble. Dismissed by Juno, she

returns to her home, the Underworld, the entrance of which is a cave in a remote and thickly wooded valley.

We notice in this passage that there is nothing that may remind us of the Furies' moral purpose in hounding criminals which is prominent in other stories about her. Here, she simply delights in causing strife, a feature we also recognize in the Morrígan's case. Both are experts in causing confusion, frenzy and terror although the imagery differs (notice the terror inspired by the fury's true shape, the maddening poison of the snake, etc.). Both are obviously beings from the Otherworld which, interestingly enough, can be reached in the same way, which is through a cave as mentioned in *Táin Bó Regamna*. Both are part of a triad as well as being shapeshifters, including amongst their many shapes that of an old crone. However, we are never told what the Morrígan's true shape is - is it the beautiful maiden, the old hag, the bird, the red woman? We also notice that Allecto flies like a bird and sits on the rooftop 'like an evil bird', though she is also more than a bird. Note that the occasion which prompts the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* author to choose the name Allecto for the Morrígan is her appearance in bird-shape. She warns the bull of Medb's approach which causes him to move on. While she does not stir up strife in this instance, her action could be interpreted as prolonging the conflict which obviously results in further casualties.

Even this cursory look at the similarities shows that the choice of Allecto as a name for the Morrígan is quite appropriate. It could point to the fact that the writer of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* knew the *Aeneid* well enough not to make the choice in a haphazard fashion. In this context it may be interesting to note that he was likely to have had knowledge of other furies because Book Six was the best known part of the *Aeneid*, capturing the popular imagination more than any other. Book Six, however, features Tisiphone in her role as avenger of evil deeds which obviously does not fit in with the activities of the Morrígan or the Irish war-goddesses in general. In other words, the author of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* did not choose just any fury but singled out the one which seemed closest to the native figure.

It is not suggested here that the Irish war-goddesses were simply a straight borrowing from the classical literature. While the similarities are interesting, the

Morrígan and her sisters have numerous other attributes which clearly denote them as different. Note particularly the imagery involved, the fury's cracking whips and hissing snakes, which are also her instruments to cause madness, have no place in Irish literature. Further, the fury directly causes a war, whipping up the emotions in all participants, while the war-goddesses act much more indirectly, just forming part of the many phenomena surrounding battle and doing their work when a conflict is already established. The Irish war-goddesses are also 'real' birds, springing into action after a conflict, they prophesy and enter into relationships with individual warriors, even support one side against the other, if persuaded to do so, and so on. It seems that the crucial feature rendering the substitution of Allecto for the Morrígan meaningful is the love of strife, terror and madness, coupled with the bird-imagery. If Thurneysen's assessment of the situation is correct, the willingness to incorporate classical elements, coupled with a figure like the fury proved too tempting for the name not to be included.

At a later stage (63), an Irish version of the *Aeneid*, *Imtheachta Aeniasa*, was written. There, interest in the fury and her actions is less pronounced. Detailed characteristics, information on how she causes strife and exactly what impact she has are not entered into, and the episode is much shorter which is characteristic for the work as a whole (64).

The most interesting passage is the translation of the events of Book Ten which is when Tisiphone, Allecto's sister, emerges from the underworld and rages among the armies. Here, the Irish version has the following: '*ba feilid badb derg dasachtach ac imchosait etir in da cath*' which Calder translates as 'joyous was red mad War a-stirring up mutual strife between those two batallions' (65). I would prefer to leave the name Badb here and note the similarity with *Cath Almaine* where the joyful redmouthed Badb is contrasted with the sorrowful mothers in what must be a well-known formula. The whole scene in fact, from the mustering of the troops, the rousing speech of Aeneas, the equivalent on Turnus' side and the description of the war is thoroughly Irish with few references to the *Aeneid*. Calder picked this scene to illustrate the additions found in the Irish *Aeneid* thus disclosing the primary concerns of the writer whose 'main purpose was to produce a *scél*' (66). With regard to the two images under consideration, in other words, that of the

raging Tisiphone and that of the joyous Badb, we notice that the concepts are not all that different and yet the latter is most definitely an Irish image, set in a typically Irish description of a battle and thus translating a figure from another culture into its own, just as we observed in the case of the Fury Allecto in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Not surprisingly there is no mention of mortals watching from above. The equation between *badb* and the furies remains in other translations of classical works. The Irish version of Lucan's *Pharsalia* Books 1-7, *In Cath Catharda* (67) substitutes the Erinys with Badb. One example is sufficient to point out the same process as in the works already quoted. Before the great battle between the Romans and their enemies the following apparition can be seen: 'The mighty Erinys was encompassing the city, shaking her pitch-tree torch downturned with flaming top and her hissing locks...' (68) and then follow three references to other instances where she appeared. The Irish version translates: 'The Badb of battle was seen every night, with her torch of pine red-flaming in her hand, and her snaky, poisonous tresses rattling around her head, urging the Romans to battle. (*Atcithea in badb catha gach n-aidchi, ocus a haithin(n)i giuis for derglassad ina laimh ocus a trillsi natharda nemidi ic dresechtaigh immo cend ic aslach in catha for na Romanchaibh*) (69). Later on, in Book Seven, Bellona, the Roman war-goddess, is also translated as *badb catha* (70). Badb *bélderg* appears as well, in the midst of a host of horrible creatures including wolves, madmen, witches, spectres, phantoms with dishevelled hair, and so on. This description has no parallel in Lucan's work. There are some phenomena which foreshadow the battle but they differ in content and also appear in a different place in the tale. The passage is obviously an Irish invention and recalls the entourage of the Badb occurring in many other battle scenes.

Finally, in *Togail na Tebe*, a translation of the *Thebaid* of Statius, Tisiphone as red-mouthed *badb* cries her terrible cries, urges on the warriors, fuels their anger, spreads fear and horror in various shapes and keeps company with her sister Megaera and other 'demons of hell' (71).

This brief discourse shows that the role of the furies as war-mongers was recognized by the Irish writers as similar to their own war-mongering females and on account of this the substitution of one name for the other took place. The Irish

translators could have left the classical terms as they stood, which, in fact they often did, but every now and then they substituted a term from their own tradition in order to create a properly Irish *scél*. Not being concerned with the figures in their own right other aspects of both the furies and the Irish war-goddesses were left out.

Finally, attitudes are, on rare occasions, stated directly. Kim McCone has analysed the attitudes towards figures in the sagas. He discerned four main types of attitude: firstly, the existence of the saga figures were doubted altogether or, secondly, the heroes and gods were understood as being great men in origin. Thirdly, there was the possibility of sanctification and finally, and most importantly for this study, they were accepted as supernatural figures and explained as either angelic or demonic apparitions (72). The verdict on the war-goddesses is predictably negative, as the identification with lamia showed already. Sometimes, divine status is attributed to them without any further qualification, as for example in Cormac's glossary where Neit is said to be '*dia catha la géntib Gaedel. Nemon .i. uxor illius.*' meaning Net, the god of war of the pagan Gael. Nemain is his wife' (73). The word *géntib*, however, is in itself a condemnation. Hennessy quotes a passage which seems to be an extension of the above. There, the two are definitely classed as 'evil' (74). We also note the 'demons of the air' amongst the many beings surrounding the Bodb. Occasionally, all of the Túatha Dé are explicitly made responsible for stirring up strife, as the story 'The Intoxication of the Ulaid' bears witness (75). One of the very late Washers at the Ford identified herself as belonging to 'Hell's Túatha' (76). Finally, the otherworldly women who attack Cú Chulainn in *Serglige Con Culainn* 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn' are identified with the war-goddesses even though their portrayal in the text does not really bear out this comparison. This could be support for the assumption that any hostile female tended to be identified with the war-goddesses, an assumption made already in connection with Macha. This is the gloss: '*Mian mna Tethrach atened/suba luba fo lubaib/slaide sethnach iar sodain/ugail troga du drogain.*' which Stokes translates: 'The she-scallow's longing is her fires/slashing of sides thereafter/Blood, body under bodies/eyes, heads, a meet word' (77). Stokes renders the '*mná Tethrach*' not as 'wife of Tethra' but as 'the she scald crow', presumably

because the text glosses Tethra as *badb*. Within the text itself, the female figures are classified as *genit* which again points towards the war-goddesses (78).

This purely negative attitude is understandable in view of the fact that heroes are hindered, ridiculed, eaten, incited and terrified by these beings. However, the stories themselves are not always so definite. One gets the impression, particularly with the battle-manifestations, that these otherworldly beings are simply part of the scene, without any overt value judgement attached to them. Even the Morrígan herself seems to be at least useful in stories like *Cath Maige Tuired* and the overall impression is quite different from a tale like *Reicne Fothaid Cannaine*, where her horror and hostility is unmitigated.

Summarising the above we could say that an investigation of Macha yields rather surprising results in that a strong anti-war, anti-heroic attitude seems to be conveyed, especially in the third tale of Macha, wife of Crunnchu. These findings have led to a very brief examination of attitudes towards the war-goddesses and it has been concluded that, on the whole, they are viewed negatively. The war-goddesses are likened to horrible females of medieval superstitions, they are suitable figures to translate furies and other war-mongering female figures of classical literature and, if Christian terminology is directly applied to them, they are described as evil, demonic or hellish.

Notes to chapter 7:

- 1) Macalister, R.A.S. 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn' ITS 41, (Dublin 1941) p.130,154,161,188,216
- 2) Stokes, W. 'O Mulcroy's Glossary' Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie, vol 2, p. 271 paragr.813
- 3) TBC1 I.3905,3912,3918,3930
- 4) Carey, J. 'Notes on the Irish War-Goddess' Éigse 19 (1982-3), p.265
- 5) Prominent, for example, in Stokes, W. 'CC's Death' RC3 (1876-78) p.175
- 6) CMT 1.617
- 7) Stokes, W. 'The Edinburgh Dindsenchas' Folk-lore 4, 62-3.
- 8) Dumézil, G. 'Mythe et épopée' (1968), 602-612
- 9) 'Notes on the Irish War-Goddess' p.262-3
- 10) Place Lore of Ard Macha in Gwynn, E. 'The Metrical Dindsenchas' (Dublin, 1924), pp.124-131. Poem contains a short reference to two of the Machas and a longer one to the tale of the third Macha, wife of Crunniu.
- 11) Stokes, W. 'The Prose Tales of the Rennes Dindsenchas' RC 16 (1895) p.281
- 12) 'Notes on the Irish War-Goddess' p.266
- 13) Niall's encounter in Stokes, W. 'The Death of Crimthann, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid', RC 24 (1903), p.196, paragr. 10-11 (Irish text), p.197 (translation) (172-207); Lugaid's encounter in Stokes, W. 'Cóir Anmann' IT3, p. 319. Another version in the place lore of Carn Mail (Gwynn, E. 'The Metrical Dindsenchas' vol.4 (Dublin, 1924) p.134-143; description of the encounter p.140)
- 14) Hull, V 'Noinden Ulad: The Debility of the Ulidians' Celtica 8 (1968) Text p.28-9, transl.p.36-8
- 15) 'Notes on the Irish war-goddess', p.267
- 16) *ibid.* 267-8
- 17) Sjoestedt, M-L. 'Gods and Heroes of the Celts' (translated by Myles Dillon) (Dublin, 1994) p.35.
- 18) Ó Cathasaigh, T. 'The Semantics of 'Síde' Éigse 17 (1977-78), p.144.
- 19) Meyer, K. 'Cáin Adamnáin' Anecdota Oxoniensia 25, (Oxford 1905), p.5
- 20) *ibid.* p.3
- 21) *ibid.* p.5
- 22) *ibid.* p.23
- 23) Radner, J. 'Fury destroys the world: historical strategy in Ireland's Ulster epic', Mankind Quarterly 23(1982), p.49
- 24) Kelly, P. 'The Táin as literature' in Mallory, J.P. 'Aspects of the Táin' (Belfast, 1992) p.86
- 25) Preston, J.J. 'Motherworship - Themes and Variations' (Chapel Hill, 1982), p.331.
- 26) Macalister, R.A.S. 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn', Part 4, ITS 41, Dublin 1941, p.130/transl.p.131
- 27) *ibid.* p.154/transl.p. 155
- 28) *ibid.* p.122/transl.p.123
- 29) *ibid.* p.161/transl.p.162
- 30) 'Notes on the Irish War-Goddess', p.270
- 31) *ibid.* p.271
- 32) *ibid.* p.271-2
- 33) Quoted in Nagy, J.F. 'The Wisdom of the Outlaw' (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985) p.265, footnote 13; Irish text in Stokes, W. 'Sanas Cormac' in 'Three Irish glossaries' (London and Edinburgh, 1862) p.5-6
- 34) Sjoestedt, M.L. 'Gods and Heroes of the Celts' (Dublin, 1994) p.26
- 35) Ross, A. 'Pagan Celtic Britain - Studies in Iconography and Tradition' (London, 1993 2nd edition), p.291
- 36) TBC2 II.3444-5
- 37) TBC2 translation p.231
- 38) v.Hamel, A.G. 'Aided Óenfir Aife' in 'Compert Con Culainn' (Dublin, 1956), p.11
- 39) v.Hamel, A.G. 'Tochmarc Emire' in 'Compert Con Culainn' p.52 paragr. 72
- 40) 'Aided Óenfir Aife' p.11
- 41) Henderson, G. 'Fled Bricrend' (The Feast of Bricriu) ITS 2 (London, 1899), p.90 (text), p.89 and 91 (translation). Story repeated in the place lore of Úaig Búana Gwynn, E. 'Metrical Dindsenchas' vol.4 (Dublin, 1924) p.294-5

- 42)TBC1 l.3145-7, transl.208.
- 43)TBC2 ll.3602-06, transl.235
- 44)IHK
- 45)Translation taken from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.
- 46)Stokes, W. and Strachan, J. 'Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus', vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1901) p.2. (morigain in MS)
- 47)Pauly, A.A. 'Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften' vol 12, p.554
- 48)ibid. p.558
- 49)Cohn, N. 'Europe's Inner demons - an enquiry inspired by the great witch-hunt' (London, 1975) calls the lamia a 'classical equivalent of striga', p.219
- 50)ibid. p.206-210
- 51)Fordyce, C.J. 'Vergil's Aeneid', Book 7 and 8 (Glasgow 1977), p.58, note 21
- 52)IHK, p.96
- 53)Other authors suggesting classical influence in the Táin are James Carney 'Studies in Early Irish Literature and History', p.66 and Myles Dillon in 'Early Irish Literature'
- 54)Randi Eldevic 'A Vergilian Model for the Immrama?' in Harvard Celt. Coll., vol.4, 1984, p.1
- 55)Dilts Swartz, D. 'Repetition in the Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge and in Neo-classical Rhetoric' Harvard Celtic Coll. vol.4 (1984) p.46-7
- 56)Pauly's Real-Enzyklopaedie, Supplement 8 s.v. Erynnien
- 57)Lewis, C. Day 'The Aeneid of Vergil' (1952), p.151
- 58)ibid, p.151
- 59)ibid, p.154
- 60)ibid, p.155
- 61)ibid, p.156
- 62)ibid, p.157
- 63)So far I have not found a definite date, the Calder edition simply states that it is a translation into Gaelic before 1400.
- 64)Calder, G. 'The Irish Aeneid' (Imtheachta Aeniassa) (Cambridge, 1907), ll 1625-1735
- 65)ll 2480-2481; translation p.155-6.
- 66)Calder, p. xv
- 67)Windisch, E. 'In Cath Catharda' IT4.2 (Leipzig, 1902)
- 68)Lucan 'The Civil War' Books 1-10 with an English Translation by J.D.Duff (London and New York, 1928) ll.572-574; transl. p.45
- 69)Calder, ll.902-4; translation p.71
- 70)ibid. ll 5955-7, transl. p.435. Calder refers to the Battle of Mag Rath and The Battle between the Irish and the Foreigners for parallels.
- 71)Calder, G. 'Togail na Thebe' (The Thebaid) (Cambridge, 1922), for example l.1365, l.1875, l.3460, l.3017, etc.
- 72)McCone, K. 'Pagan Past and Christian Present' (Maynooth, 1990) p.149
- 73)Stokes, W. 'Sanas Cormac' p.31
- 74)'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' p.36
- 75)Gantz, J. 'The Intoxication of the Ulaid' in 'Early Irish Myths and Sagas' (London, 1981) p.190, p.207
- 76)O'Grady, S.H. 'Caithréim Thoirdhealbháigh', text vol.1, p. 140-1; transl. vol.2 p.124-5
- 77)Stokes, W. 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' (Additions to Hennessy's article) RC 2(1873-75) p.491
- 78)Dillon, M. 'Serglige Con Culainn' (Dublin, 1953), l.318, p.11.

Chapter 8:

KĀLĪ - THE DARK GODDESS OF INDIA

Kālī, 'the dark one' (1) has drawn to herself descriptions such as 'goddess of death' (2), 'demoness of destruction' (3) while to worshippers she is just 'Mother Kālī'. So far I have not seen her described specifically as 'war-goddess'. However, she frequently partakes in battles, a fact which has prompted the comparison with the Irish war-goddesses. Some preliminary observations are necessary to allow an appreciation of Kālī's background before her actual story is told.

Kālī does not belong to the Aryan phase of Indian religious history as far as we can establish (4). She appears together with other, similar goddesses, in the Middle Ages, seemingly out of nowhere, with a fairly elaborate story and a definite role. Scholars put forward the theory that the impulse for goddess worship originated in areas which lay outside the mainstream tradition until then, ie. the tribal areas of the Vindhya Mountains, Rajasthan, South India, and others, with which she is often associated in the texts and which are sometimes reflected in her name, for example through the epithet *Vindhyavāsīnī*. Archaeological evidence supports what can be gleaned from the texts. The latter range from the epics and *purāṇas* over Sanskrit dramatic works to South Indian material (5). None of these give us a 'pure' and coherent picture of the goddesses in their original setting, unspoiled, so to speak, by ideas stemming from the mainstream tradition. The evidence is often confusing due to the multitude of names, of themes and stories. It appears that *Durgā* and *Kālī*, as well as others, are composite figures who draw on more than one specific goddess from these outlying areas. We cannot isolate every feature and point to an antecedent - what we find is a general background from which both *Kālī* and *Durgā* emerge. What seems to remain from these origins even when the goddesses are fully integrated is their predilection for war, their destructiveness, their association with peripheral places, peoples and practices, and the tension between them and any male deity with whom they are associated.

With this it is apt to consider the evidence of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, an insertion into the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which recommends itself as a starting point for the study of *Kālī* for several reasons: first of all, it is the earliest text which supplies a

coherent story of Kālī. We learn where she comes from, what she looks like and what deeds she performs. Although her relationship with other deities and her particular role in various events changes from text to text the *Devī-Māhātmya* certainly sets the pattern with regard to her outer appearance and general characteristics.

Secondly, due to the great popularity of the *Devī-Māhātmya* right up to the present day Kālī's appearance in it rates amongst the most widely known. It is also easily accessible to a western student without the knowledge of Sanskrit as a good translation and study of the text exists (6).

Finally, the *Devī-Māhātmya* portrays ultimate reality as female and as part of this theology it both gathers together earlier evidence on goddesses and forms the basis of later goddess speculation. As Coburn puts it: 'One trend is toward viewing the *Devī-Māhātmya* as the integration of fragmented evidence for Goddess-Worship in archeological remains and in Vedic and epic literature: it is the culmination of a long, earlier process. Another trend is toward viewing it as a statement, in nascent form, of the basic principles which were later made explicit in Śakta and Tantric philosophy and practice: it is the threshold of a long, subsequent process. Part of the *Devī-Māhātmya*'s significance obviously lies in the fact that it stands at the juncture of these two processes' (7). To see what such a significant text has to say about Kālī is thus a worthwhile pursuit.

At the same time, however, certain problems arise from the theological concern of the *Devī-Māhātmya* which are a peculiarity of Indian myth in general: stories about the gods rarely exist just as stories, they are nearly always intertwined with more abstract, theological considerations. In our case these considerations are with establishing the supremacy of the Goddess which obviously colours Kālī's 'biography'. Other texts have different aims and as the perspective changes from text to text Kālī's role within it changes as well. So while we will establish features which are clearly Kālī's it is important to remember at all times that Kālī cannot be plucked from her background and looked at in isolation.

The *Devī-Māhātmya* deals with the salvific activities of the Great Goddess, Devī. Coburn understands the dynamic of the text as moving from the transcendent, cosmic and creative role in the first part via her establishment as a secular ruler

and therefore her immanence in the second part to the continuing exploits on earth in the last part (8). In the first part she appears in a reworking of a well-known myth of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu lies asleep at the end of time and two *Asuras*, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, spring from his earwax and threaten the universe. Viṣṇu is impotent to act while afflicted with sleep which is regarded as a manifestation of the Goddess. Only once she withdraws he can defeat the two demons.

The second episode tells of Devī's creation in a myth normally attached to Durgā which now has become an alternative name for Devī. The *Asura* Mahiṣa threatens the universe this time and Durgā is born from the combined anger of all the gods and defeats Mahiṣa, succeeding where all the gods fail. Kālī's entrance into the drama of the fierce struggle between the Goddess and yet another set of *Asuras* occurs in the third part of the *Devī-Māhātmya*. Śumbha and Niśumbha are the main attackers but they first send Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. When Devī finds herself hard pressed by the aforesaid demons the following occurs:

'Ambikā then uttered a great wrathful cry against them,
And her face became black as ink in anger.

From the knitted brows of her forehead's surface immediately
Came forth Kālī, with her dreadful face, carrying sword and noose.

She carried a strange skull-topped staff, and wore a garland of human heads;

She was shrouded in a tiger skin, and looked utterly gruesome with her emaciated
skin,

Her widely gaping mouth, terrifying with its lolling tongue,

With sunken, reddened eyes and a mouth that filled the directions with roars.

She fell upon the great Asuras in that army, slaying them immediately.

She then devoured the forces of the enemies of the gods' (9).

After chewing, trampling and crushing the demons as well as wielding staff and sword against them, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, the leaders of the demon army, attack her themselves. However, all the weapons they throw at her simply disappear in her mouth where they shine like the sun disappearing into the clouds.

'Then Kālī, her ugly teeth gleaming within her dreadful mouth,
Angrily cackled with terrible sounds.

Mounting her great lion, the Goddess ran at Caṇḍa,

And having seized him by the hair, she cut off his head with her sword' (10).

Muṇḍa is equally dispatched with ease and the rest of the army flees, overcome by fear.

'Picking up the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, Kālī

Approached Caṇḍikā and spoke words mixed with loud and cruel laughter:

'Here, as a present from me to you, are Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, two beasts

Slain in the sacrifice of battle. Now you yourself can slay Śumbha and Niśumbha!' (11).

As a reward for her deeds the Goddess gives her the name Cāmuṇḍā (12). Coburn's research into previous occurrences of Devī's epithets has shown that Cāmuṇḍā was not known to the tradition and he writes that: 'In the case of Cāmuṇḍā, we seem to have the explicit assimilation of a non-Sanskritic goddess to the Goddess...' (13).

In the one instance where Cāmuṇḍā is described rather than just named we find her exactly like Kālī : 'O you whose mouth is terrifying with its teeth, who are ornamented with a garland of skulls, O Cāmuṇḍā, O crusher of Muṇḍa, O Nārāyaṇī, praise be to you.' (14).

The fact that Kālī is called Cāmuṇḍā and that Cāmuṇḍā is a non-Sanskritic goddess seems to allow the conclusion that ferocity has always been an integral part of Kālī's character, wherever she may have come from.

The second time Kālī helps out is when the *Asura* Raktabīja seems invincible due to his ability to replicate himself from drops of his own blood (15). The *Māṭṛs* ('Mothers'), here the collective name for the group of *śaktis* which emanated from the gods as helpers of Devī (16), are sent against him first, making matters worse by wounding him, thus creating more and more Raktabījas. Once the battlefield is filled with these replicas, Devī calls on Kālī, who is obviously nearby as she does not need to be created again, and asks her to solve the problem.

'On seeing the gods quaking, Caṇḍikā immediately laughed aloud.

She spoke to Kālī: 'O Cāmuṇḍā, open wide your mouth.

With this mouth of yours, quickly take in the drops of blood produced from the fall of my weapons

and the great demons who are born from that blood.' (17).

And while the Goddess wounds Raktabīja fatally with her weapons, Kālī drinks

up all the blood and chews up the demons already formed.

This shows us that devouring is not just an incidental feature but her very strength. After Raktabīja is brought under control: 'the band of Mothers danced about, intoxicated by his blood' (18).

For the rest of the story Kālī fights side by side with the Devī until she gets reabsorbed into the great Goddess together with all the saktis, the 'powers' of the gods.

What can we learn about Kālī from these passages?

There is no doubt that Kālī is truly horrific. The sense of horror is achieved using various techniques.

First of all there are the weapons, sword, noose and skull-topped staff. Weapons, of course, are nothing unexpected in a warrior but it may be worthwhile to point out that the noose and skull-topped staff are frequently associated with Yama, the god of the dead. The similarities with Yama will be dealt with in greater detail later on.

However, the real horror arises with the realisation that the weapons are quite superfluous as Kālī kills mainly by devouring her enemies like a carnivorous animal. In all the quotes above the gaping mouth features prominently and swallowing enemies and blood is her very strength. One gets the impression that Kālī is ever hungry, can never get enough, the significance of which will become clear below. In contrast to Kālī's methods of killing enemies, Devī uses her weapons more or less like an ordinary warrior, the only difference being the great number of arms with which she can wield a multitude of implements at the same time.

As far as Kālī's shape is concerned the carnivorous animal seems the model once more and clearly a distortion of the human shape is intended: fangs, a gaping maw, lolling tongue and strong teeth are hardly human features, particularly when they are coupled with the terrific howling that is so characteristic of Kālī. Blood-shot eyes are always an indication of anger -the literature frequently describes furious warriors with wide and red eyes. Kālī thus can be classed among the angry beings and a close connection exists between anger and hunger.

To this is added the distortion of clothes and ornaments: what should be a necklace

of precious stones appears instead as a necklace of skulls, and in place of beautiful clothes Kālī is covered by a tiger skin. It is worthwhile mentioning here that tiger skins were usually worn by tribal hunters in what was perceived as the wild and peripheral areas of India and it is also a garment worn by another wild deity, Rudra (19). The tiger is, of course, the lord of the forest, known for its strength and thus a fitting title for warriors who are often addressed as 'tigerlike' (20). Thus Kālī's tiger skin points both to her wild and her war-like nature.

Overall, she seems to display a mixture of animal and human traits which stands in stark contrast to Devī whose beauty is praised frequently and underlined by the descriptions of her ornaments and wonderful clothes.

Finally, Kālī's laughter surpasses all the other manifestations of her monstrosity because it conveys that what is so horrible to us (and presumably the *Asuras*) is just a big joke to her, thus turning normal appreciations of what is serious and what is fun completely upside down. It gives the episode the flavour of black comedy although from the human perspective the events are too awesome to be laughed at. The uproarious quality of this laughter also reminds us of the wild laughter which, according to Sanskrit dramaturgists beginning with *Bhārata's Natyaśāstra* (2nd century AD), is typical of crude, low-caste, disreputable folk which fits in well with Kālī's links to people living at the margins of society. In contrast, noble and refined people only smile gently (21).

Having stressed the horrific nature of Kālī it also has to be said that the whole incident is set in the context of the sacrifice of battle, as Kālī herself points out. Although the war is gruesome and cruel, it serves order, serves the world, serves humankind as well as the gods. We are reminded of similar ideas in the *Mahābhārata*, particularly when the battle field at Kurukṣetra is described as a woman, bloody, yet strangely beautiful (22). Just like Viṣṇu, the goddess is the protector of order and again just like him she promises to return to the world whenever she is needed and do whatever is necessary to eliminate the threat. Within this framework Kālī's activities are well controlled and confined to the purposes of defence rather than aggression in its own right. Light and dark are ultimately balanced within the Goddess which is not just expressed through the emanation and reabsorption of Kālī but in many other ways: Devī is both

Mahāmāyā and Mahāvidyā, 'Great Illusion' and 'Great Knowledge', (23) she is the great Goddess (*mahādevī*) and the great Demoness (*mahāsurī*) (24) she is Lakṣmī and Alakṣmī (25), she is eulogised as 'the one who is exceedingly gentle and exceedingly terrible' (26), she is *śiva* in the sense of 'auspicious' and *śiva* meaning 'jackal', the most inauspicious creature (27) and so on.

Given this framework one could say that Kālī is Devī's fiercest aspect or form.

That she is only a form, like all the other figures, becomes clear from an episode during which Śumbha accuses Devī of being successful only because she has more warriors on her side:

'O Durgā, puffed up with misplaced pride in your own strength or arms, don't be so haughty!

It is by relying on the strength of others that you fight, with this inflated sense of your own importance!'

The Goddess said:

'I alone exist here in the world, what second, other than I, is there?

O wicked one, behold these my manifestations of power entering back into me!'

(28)

With these words the scene changes from a battlefield teeming with goddesses to one where only Devī herself remains.

Kālī is clearly treated in the same way as the saktis who originally emanated from the gods to help Devī in battle but who are now reabsorbed into the Goddess rather than returning to the gods. Kālī herself is never called a *śakti* even though she emanates from the Goddess. In nature, however, she is very close to the Goddesses' own *śakti*, Śivadūtī:

'Then from the body of the Goddess came forth the very frightening Śakti of Caṇḍikā herself, gruesome and yelping like a hundred jackals' (29).

Her terrible form and loud shrieks are mentioned again in the reverence to Śivadūtī after the battle (30). In combat we learn that Kālī makes the loudest noise of all (31) followed by Śivadūtī's 'inauspicious cackling sound' which frightens the demons and sends Śumbha into a rage (32). Further, Kālī, Śivadūtī and the lion devour everything, a fact which is stated twice. (33). With regard to origin another similarity emerges: both Kālī and Śivadūtī spring directly from the goddess, Kālī

from her brow, Śivadūtī from her body. Contrast this with the emergence of the other śaktis who originate with the gods.

It also has to be stated that Kālī's origin is very similar to that of the Goddess herself because, unlike Śivadūtī, Kālī is born from Devī's anger just as the latter is born from the anger of the gods. The occasions of their appearances are also parallel: when the gods could no longer fight off a threat themselves their anger produced Devī and when Devī needed extra help Kālī came into being. This marks Kālī as especially angry, especially dangerous.

The closeness of Devī's own śakti with Kālī, together with the parallels in Kālī's and the Goddesses' origins, mark Kālī as special. She has a distinct character and a specific story and can be regarded as a goddess in her own right, a fact which is born out by other texts (34).

As noted above, early material about Kālī usually just mentions her name and very few examples exist. Coburn mentions that the earliest occurrence of her name is in the *Kathaka Grhya Sūtra* 19.7 (35) in a list of various deity names. The passage lacks any description or characteristics. An example which is quoted frequently is *Mundaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.4 and here Kālī is named as one of the seven tongues of Agni which, as Kinsley points out (36) could possibly be significant as both Agni and Kālī are important in the context of the cremation ground and destruction in general.

Coburn also connects Kālī with the masculine noun *kāla*, 'time'. He writes: 'Etymologically, kālī is simply a feminine adjective, 'the dark or blue-black one,' but to the extent that it has undertones of the masculine noun *kāla*, it shares that noun's meaning of 'time,' or 'the fullness of time,' and, by implication, time as 'that which brings all things to an end, the destroyer' (37). He further tells us that *kāla* is seen as male in the *Atharvaveda* while a feminine form appears only later, in the *Sankhayana Aranyaka* 11.3.4 (38). In this interesting passage we learn about a man who is to die before the end of the year. He is said to have dream-visions, one of which is that of a yellow-looking or black woman, with loosened hair or even a shaved head. Note the contrast to the normal way of wearing hair, ie. braided. The combination of a black woman and dream-visions, both in the context of

death, suggests another early passage about Kālī that can be found in the *Sauptika parva* of the *Mahābhārata* (39).

In order to set the passage into context it is important to mention that visions in dreams are commonplace in the Hindu tradition. Two examples from the *Mahābhārata* illustrate the point. Karṇa foresees the demise of the Kurus and the victory of the Pāṇḍavas. Men with red turbans are doomed to die, those with white ones will survive (40). Another person who foresees events in her dreams is the friendly *Rākṣasī* Trijatā, guardian of Sītā. Her visions of Rāvaṇa's death console her captive: 'Kumbhakarṇa and others, naked and dishevelled, with red garlands and ointments, were dragged towards the south' - the latter being the direction of Yama (41).

The *Mahābhārata* tells of the great conflict between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas which comes to a climax at the great battle of Kurukṣetra. The battle marks the triumph of the Pāṇḍavas with all but three Kauravas killed. These three are Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman. It so happens that the three set up camp in the woods, close to that of the victorious army who are all present except Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍava brothers themselves. While in the forest Aśvatthāman watches a bird of prey kill a flock of sleeping crows which inspires him to stage a surprise attack at night. This, of course, is totally out of order - normally all war-like activities cease at night. Aśvatthāman, however, justifies his plan to his companions by pointing to the noisy celebrations of the victors and the Kuru's misery and he regards this as a reversal of Time in which ordinary rules are suspended. So the three attack and at first are warded off by an image of Kṛṣṇa Janārdaṇa which, however, is dispelled when Aśvatthāman prays to Śiva. Śiva then possesses Aśvatthāman who is already said to be an incarnation of Śiva, Antaka (the Ender, a companion of Yama), Krodha (Wrath) and Kama (42). Additionally, Aśvatthāman has received Śiva's sword at an earlier occasion, so that the connection between the two is emphasized several times over.

Aśvatthāman proceeds to trample and kick his victims to death so that they lie 'slain like animals in a sacrifice.' This again violates normal practices because it deprives the victims of a decent and honourable warriors' death. In the second phase, Aśvatthāman uses his sword to cruelly mutilate and kill the remaining

warriors. It is at this stage that the dying men see Kālī :

Kālī (or the black one) of bloody mouth and eyes, smeared with blood (and) garlands, With reddened garment, alone, crested (and) noose in hand,
The night of death (kālāratri), laughing derisively (and) standing firm, did the (Pāṇḍavas) see.

Binding men, horses, and elephants with terrible snares did she sally forth,
Carrying off various spirits who were bound with snares, their hair dishevelled.
And, good sir, on other nights, in (their) dream(s), the leaders of the troops
constantly saw her

Carrying off those who were asleep (and) the sons of Drona (Aśvatthāman) slaying
(them).

Ever since the battle between the Kuru and the Pāṇḍava armies had broken out,
they had seen (her) activity and (that of) the son of Drona.

Recalling their former vision, the (Pāṇḍava) heroes,
Tormented by fate, thought, 'This is it!' (43).

The attack is a total success - the warriors are either paralysed with fear or so
confused that they start killing each other thus complementing Aśvatthāman's grisly
work. Kālī then drags the dead away, making it abundantly clear to everyone still
alive that there is no hope of escape. As if Kālī and Aśvatthāman were not enough,
Rākṣasas and *Piśācas* also join in the carnage, eating the bodies, drinking the blood
and dancing with delight.

When the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa hear about the death of their sons they follow the
enemy and an amazing duel takes place between Aśvatthāman and Arjuna. Both
possess a weapon which can destroy the world, the so-called *Brāhmaśiras*, the
'Head of Brahma'. Aśvatthāman releases it simply to destroy the Pāṇḍavas, no
matter what the consequences are while Arjuna, on the other hand, only releases
his in self-defence and in order to appease and neutralize the other one - thus their
attitude to warfare is quite different. Two *munis* (sages) interfere with the
proceedings and manage to divert Aśvatthāman's weapon so that it does not hit the
Pāṇḍavas but their wives' wombs, ie it completely destroys the Pāṇḍava line.
Fortunately, Kṛṣṇa intervenes and promises to revive one of the babies (44).

The first piece of information we can gather is that Kālī is associated with Śiva through Aśvatthāman and acts as a helper. Nothing more can be said about the relationship but it is one which appears also in later texts and will be dealt with below.

Secondly, her status is not clarified. She may be a goddess but could conceivably belong to the *Asuras*. Presumably she is regarded as a fairly minor being at this stage.

Thirdly, she can appear in visions or dreams and what is seen there comes true in real life. The visions influence the reaction of the people involved - note how many warriors simply accept their fate rather than continuing to fight. There are also indications that Kālī IS sleep in a similar way as the Goddess is *yoganidrā-nidrā*, the sleep of Viṣṇu. Coburn points out that Aśvatthāman's success is partially attributed to the power of sleep. He refers us to an interesting tale in Harivaṃśa which features the goddess Nidrā, 'Sleep'. She is resident in the otherworld and in her waters sleep the six embryos who are going to be born to Devakī. This goddess is not only said to resemble death but is also called Kālarātrī and her actions bear out this name (45).

Fourthly, Kālī does not kill in the same way as she does in *Devī-Māhātmya*. She does not crush, trample, swallow and decapitate her victims but confines herself to fettering their spirits which seems to imply a separation of body and spirit, causing death.

Such a method is used by Yama, the original man and god of death (46). The tale of Sāvitrī in *Mahābhārata* will serve as an example: Sāvitrī accompanies her husband Satyavat into the woods where he is overcome by a headache and exhaustion and falls asleep in her lap. As he is lying asleep '... a person in a yellow robe and a turban, a handsome man resplendent like the sun, smoothly black and red-eyed. He had a noose in his hand and looked terrifying...'. After explaining that due to Satyavat's virtue he had decided to come himself rather than sending any messengers '... Yama forcibly drew from Satyavat's body a thumb-sized person, who was fettered with the noose and in his power.' The body thereupon changes, stops breathing, and is obviously dead. Yama sets out southward, having tied the spirit but Sāvitrī follows and achieves her husband's release. When Yama

relinquishes his hold on Satyavat he loosens the noose and the 'spirit' is returned to the body. Satyavat wakes up and is not sure whether he just dreamt about this terrible figure who dragged him away or whether it really happened (47).

Even before Yama employed this particular technique Varuṇa, the protector of *ṛta* in the earliest parts of the Vedas, availed himself of bonds or fetters by which he bound evil-doers. Although Varuṇa's fettering was considered a righteous activity overall, from the human point of view it often remained awesome and mysterious as the criteria by which he judged were not totally revealed. Not surprisingly he was associated with darkness (48).

Another dark deity, Nirṛti, 'destruction', was equally adept in the use of bonds (49). Binding is thus a powerful image which has a long-established association with 'dark' deities who display destructive tendencies (50).

Apart from the implements she uses we also notice her ornaments, a bloody garland, and her dress, a red garment. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty comments that red garments are worn by people condemned to death as well as Buddhists and other heretics (51) presumably because they are 'dead' to the Hindu tradition (note again the association with people at the margins of ordinary society). In other words, both dress and weapon have strong allusions to death.

Fifthly, of all the many battles and deaths described in the *Mahābhārata*, Kālī appears in one that stands out for its unfairness, its horror, its carnage, and its far reaching implications. This in itself could be taken as a statement about what sort of being she is considered to be. This impression is further augmented by the meaning of her alternative name in this episode: Kālarātrī, 'the dark night or the night of death/time' (52). The night of the attack is truly a night of death for the Pāṇḍavas so that the name of this ferocious being matches the circumstances she appears in perfectly.

Further, just as her name conjures up the ultimate destructiveness of time, the story itself presents us with allusions to the end of all Time which means the end of a *yuga* when everything is totally destroyed. Aśvatthāman, for example, denotes this period as a reversal of time when, to him at least, an ordinarily unacceptable strategy is now permissible. Again, reversal of time is a metaphor for the chaotic circumstances at the very end.

That this connotation may indeed be intended is suggested by the description of the scene at dawn: '...having left his foes without a trace, Aśvatthāman shone forth in this human habitation like the fire at the end of the yuga, having turned all beings into ash' (53). And as Hildebeitel points out, for the Pāṇḍava side the attack and the subsequent duel with Arjuna really means the end of an era because all of Draupadī's sons, including those not even borne yet, are killed (54). The Pāṇḍava line is thus truly destroyed by Aśvatthāman. Only Kṛṣṇa's personal intervention achieves a reversal of this fact. Surely, Kālarātrī is a fitting companion to a warrior like Aśvatthāman and each emphasizes the destructive, chaotic aspect in the other. It is interesting to observe Kālī's activities in two different settings. In *Devī-Māhātmya* she is the fiercest form of the Great Goddess, involved in the struggle between *Devas* and *Asuras*. There she presents herself as a female warrior who crushes and tramples, decapitates and eats up any number of *Asuras*. Her howling and laughter makes her enemies tremble in fear while to her the whole affair is just sport. Her emaciated state, her huge maw and her method of fighting allude to a being which is ever hungry, thus pointing to her all-destructive and chaotic character but in *Devī-Māhātmya* she is not allowed to run amok - the whole episode is in the context of the Devī establishing order. Fighting the *Asuras* is necessary for order to return as the *Asuras* themselves are forces of darkness and disorder. Devī balances light and dark aspects perfectly within herself and uses whichever form is appropriate for a given situation. On a higher level still the whole affair lacks reality, is *māyā*, is caused by the Goddess playing. Kālī is therefore embedded into a highly philosophical system which gives meaning to her actions and subordinates her to a greater being.

The *Mahābhārata* account, on the other hand, has a much more immediate impact - although many philosophical arguments are built into the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, Kālī is not 'explained' in a coherent way. She is not portrayed as a warrior herself but as the helper of a warrior and the conflict is on the human level (or at least mainly on the human level), not between *Devas* and *Asuras*. She bursts onto the scene as a force of death and destruction without any further justification such as being on the side of order. She is a personification of death as the enemy, the

slayer, rather than death as an ordering force. Many of her characteristics allude to death and the end of time (55).

While there are differences in the two accounts of Kālī they are mainly differences in emphasis. Note how Kālī in *Devī-Māhātmya* holds a noose, alluding to Yama, while Kālī in *Mahābhārata* has a bloody mouth which betrays her love for eating enemies. While Kālī in *Devī-Māhātmya* rushes into battle like a warrior and then employs methods which are nothing like a warrior's fighting skills, Kālī in *Mahābhārata* seems to be only concerned with death and yet appears clearly in a conflict between warriors. The differences between the accounts mainly concern the context into which Kālī's activities are set.

The picture which emerges is that of a goddess concerned with war, death and destruction. Her appearance and her activities mark her as a fierce and horrific goddess who has more in common with her entourage of blood-drinking and flesh-eating demons than with other deities. Would it be more correct, therefore, to see Kālī as a demoness? This comment begs the question, what exactly does demonic mean in the Hindu tradition. As it turns out, it is not an easy one to answer, particularly when coming from a western perspective.

'Demon' is frequently used to translate both *Asuras* and *Rākṣasas*, *Piśācas* and other monstrous beings. However, it seems that *Asuras* are particularly opponents of the gods while *Rākṣasas* etc. are opponents of human beings. Macdonel, in 'Vedic Mythology', translates the former as 'celestial demons' and the latter 'terrestrial demons or goblins' (56). The literal meaning of *Asura*, however, is 'spiritual power' (57) and originally no division into 'gods' and 'demons' existed.

Deities like Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra, Agni, Soma, and others were called *Asuras* in the *ṚgVeda* (58). By the time of the Brāhmaṇas the transformation of the *Asuras* into opponents of the gods was complete. This process is frequently expressed in myth as *Asuras* and *Devas* being created equally at first and for some reason or other the *Asuras* lost their divine status and enmity arose (59).

It does not follow from this separation that *Asuras* are always evil which is another assumption underlying our western understanding of demon. Frequently demons are virtuous, pious, great ascetics, gaining boons for good deeds etc. while gods are well able to do wicked deeds for which they are punished - or not, as the case may be. *Asuras*, it seems, are condemned for no other reason than being *Asuras*, no matter what they do. Only two criteria apply to the relationship between *Devas* and *Asuras*: one is that they have to be opposed to each other, the other is that the gods must win, and both cases are true by definition rather than by virtue of their actions, characteristics, etc. As Wendy D. O'Flaherty puts it: 'The fact that gods and demons do not differ is the very basis of their strife; it is only through battle that they can be made distinct, and the distinction consists in no more and no less than that quality which distinguishes winners from losers' (60).

In the two stories we have considered so far, Kālī cannot be called an *Asura*. In the divine-demonic conflict of the *Devī-Māhātmya* she is clearly on the side of the gods (61) while in the human conflict *Asuras* do not have a place anyway. Instead, it is *Rākṣasas* and *Piśācas* which appear as part of the scene in Aśvatthāman's night-time attack. Do we therefore have to look towards the 'terrestrial demons' in order to classify her?

Rākṣasas and *Piśācas* are already known in the *Vedas* and remain prominent throughout the texts. Their characteristics include eating humans, drinking blood, animating dead bodies, haunting wild places, disturbing sacrifices, causing diseases and generally posing a threat to people. Their danger is enhanced as they can take on any shape they please, or be invisible for that matter, just like other supernatural beings. Again, they are more powerful at night. Their true form is, generally speaking, ugly and distorted: they often have more than the normal number of eyes, heads, hands, feet, tongues, etc., again not unlike the gods except that gods are generally beautiful. However, some *Rākṣasas* can be beautiful as well and, in fact, take on any form they like. According to John Dowson in his '*Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*' there are numerous epithets of *Rākṣasas* which give a clue to their activities such as 'killers', 'stealers of offerings', 'night-walkers', 'cannibals', 'carnivores', 'blood-drinkers', etc. (62).

Piśācas are very similar beings though even lower in the hierarchy than *Rākṣasas*. Again, they are responsible for devouring human beings, eating flesh, drinking blood, animating dead bodies, haunting cremation grounds, etc. We can see from this that certain activities are similar to both *Kālī* and terrestrial demons: the love for blood, for devouring meat and human flesh, for violence and for night-time activities. When it comes to outer appearance one could easily point to the sharp fangs, the mouths always ready to devour and the distorted shapes. However, these similarities still do not allow us to classify *Kālī* as a *Rākṣasa* or *Piśāca*; she is never called by that name and she is more distinctive and individual than them - note how she appears and acts on her own in the *Mahābhārata* story while the demons form only part of the general background. So the problem of classification remains. It is only when reading a myth of the origin of all beings, including the ferocious ones, that a deeper common denominator becomes apparent. The tale appears in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*: Demons, gods, ancestors and men are all created from Brahmā's body. The *Asuras* are born from the quality of darkness in Brahmā's body and when he leaves that body night is created from it. This is why demons are powerful at night. The gods, on the other hand, are created from a body of light. When Brahmā takes on a body the essence of which is passion, hunger and anger are born. 'The Lord then created in darkness beings that were emaciated with hunger, deformed, bearded, and they ran to the Lord.' These were the *Rākṣasas* and *Yakṣas*. Brahmā becomes angry and 'he created creatures who had anger as their essence; because of their tawny (*kapisa*) colour, these fierce ones are eaters of flesh (*pisitasanas* or *Piśācas*)' (63).

Comparing this myth to what we know about *Kālī*, it is interesting to see that just like *Kālī* the goblins are born of a deity's anger and because they are angry they eat flesh. Hunger and anger are closely linked and the beings which follow the creation of these qualities are hungry and deformed. Hunger, just as devouring, is clearly a demonic trait from very early on. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty writes: 'In the *Brāhmaṇas*, hunger is demonic; the demons create hunger as a weapon against the gods, but it rebounds against them. Elsewhere, hunger is a demonic part of men.... In many creation myths of this type, the first evil creatures that the creator produces are hungry, and they trouble the universe until they are assigned suitable

food' (64).

Overall it seems that darkness, hunger, anger, deformity and flesh-eating are all interconnected. I would suggest that the very same connections are also expressed in Kālī. She is black and red, created from anger, her emaciated state points to her hunger and therefore she devours her victims. Her big mouth, her fangs, her red eyes and generally horrific appearance could be seen as outer signs of her character.

So one could summarise by saying that the quality of anger gives rise to the horrific appearance and activities of the beings under consideration, no matter how exactly they are classified. At the same time, however, there seems to be an attempt to split the angry side off a deity and give it a separate existence rather than leaving it all as part of the one. Brahmā is angry himself, yet he does not become horrific, he produces horrible creatures. Devī gives rise to Kālī in the same way and we shall see this process repeated with Pārvatī and Kālī .

Before dealing with this in greater detail, however, it is worthwhile to continue our survey of angry beings, and the more we examine, the clearer it becomes that some of Kālī 's features are actually quite stereotypical. Consider the following myth in the *Mahābhārata*. which is one of the many versions of the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice. Śiva attacks the sacrifice with his 'terrifying servants': 'Some of them emitted roars; some laughed; others sprinkled the fire with blood. Some with deformed faces uprooted the sacrificial stakes and whirled them about; some swallowed up in their great mouths the priests performing the sacrifice.'

Presumably his companions here are demons themselves. After the sacrifice transforms itself into a deer, Śiva grows angry and a drop of sweat comes from his forehead: '... and as soon as that drop of sweat had fallen on the earth, an enormous fire like the fire of doomsday appeared. In it was born a man with extraordinarily red eyes and a tawny beard; he was gruesome and his hair stood on end;... he had a gaping mouth with monstrous teeth; he was hideous, dark-complexioned, and wore red garments.' The man turns out to be Fever which, due to the intervention of Brahmā, is divided into many different phenomena assailing men, animals and nature in general (65).

Again, anger creates an excessively destructive being who has the now well-known

characteristics of red and black colours, a hideous exterior featuring particularly the gaping mouth and horrible teeth.

Finally, Skanda in the *Mahābhārata* tale of the war against Mahiṣa (66) is an example where the angry and horrible side does not split off. He wears a blood-red robe, a blood-red garland and jewelry, he is blood-mouthed and strong-armed, but also golden-armoured (67) as below. His companions, just like Śiva's, eat up the dead demons: 'They feasted on the Danavas and gulped their blood; and in no time they cleaned the world of Danavas and made very merry' (68). Earlier in the story Skanda is also surrounded by *mātrkās* who have equally unsavoury habits (69). Interestingly, the story of his birth in *Mahābhārata* mentions the Mothers again who first want to kill him but then protect him. One of them is his special wet-nurse who is characterised as born of anger, 'the cruel daughter of the blood sea, who feasts on blood' (70).

When looking at the gods mentioned above the division into divine and demonic becomes quite difficult - the gods either have so-called demonic features themselves or they are surrounded by demonic beings even when they are involved in a battle against other demons. It seems that whenever a particular figure is seen as destructive, for whatever reason, these demonic features occur either as part of his or her outer appearance or as actual demonic beings in his or her company. Depending on his role, a god can thus be demonic while a demon can be godlike. After this brief survey we can conclude that many of Kālī's features are not new in the tradition. There seems to be a rich store of angry, red, black, devouring, sharp-toothed, bloody-mouthed, horrific and destructive beings amongst gods and demons alike from which Kālī could possibly have drawn some of her characteristics in the process of being fitted into the main tradition. Or put another way: if a new goddess was meant to be recognized by the main tradition as being dangerous and fierce she had to accumulate certain characteristics which were an expression of danger and fierceness in this tradition.

Another strand in this complex process may also be the tendency to regard women as evil and this may have prepared the ground for a goddess like Kālī to enter the mainstream tradition. Wendy O'Flaherty says about the increasing trend of misogyny: 'As this tendency developed, abstract goddesses were cited with

increasing frequency as the cause of evil on earth. Death, originally a male god, began to appear as a goddess; the stallion, the symbol of Aryan supremacy in the Vedic period, was now replaced by the dangerous mare, in whom the doomsday fire lurked, ready to destroy the universe. In the Epic myths of the origin of evil, the goddesses of disease and destruction initiate the downfall of mankind; the vague 'natural tendencies' of corruption are replaced by anthropomorphic (perhaps one should say gynecomorphic) goddesses of doom' (71).

For an illustration of this view in general, consider the following myth from the *Mahābhārata*: Men, being full of *dharma*, are close to becoming gods and the gods are terribly alarmed at this. 'The lord Grandfather,..., created women by a magic ritual in order to delude mankind. ... the Grandfather gave them all the desires that can be desired and those wanton women, lusting for sensual pleasures, began to stir men up. Then the lord of gods, the lord, created anger as the assistant of desire, and all creatures falling into the power of desire and anger, began to be attached to women.' Thus, as it was said at the introduction of this myth, '... there is nothing more evil than women; a wanton woman is a blazing fire; she is the illusion born of Māyā (ie. the originator of the demons, as explained in note 21); she is the sharp edge of the razor; she is poison, a serpent, and death all in one' (72). Although desire is stressed as the main cause of trouble, anger is as important and both are combined in women who are obviously demonic and resemble death (73).

Death as female can be located in a myth from the *Mahābhārata* (74). Again a god, this time Brahmā, becomes excessively angry. From this anger is born a dark woman with red garments and red eyes who is death. She is ordered by Brahmā to kill people but refuses to do so because she does not want to accrue bad *karma* to herself. Brahmā persuades her that killing is not an evil deed but just the opposite: death is necessary to prevent the evils of overpopulation. In order to ensure that no blame falls on her he tells her to employ anger and desire, as well as diseases formed from the tears she sheds, to corrupt people when their time has come and once corrupt, they have to be killed for order to be maintained. Note how anger and desire are linked again to death irrespective of the moral context.

Other goddesses, such as Jyeṣṭhā and Nirṛti, can be quoted as examples of goddesses of doom. Jyeṣṭhā, 'the Eldest', is a dark goddess of misfortune who

originates from the poison in Śiva's throat at the time of the churning of the ocean (75).

Nirṛti is the Vedic goddess of death and destruction who still occasionally appears in the epics and *purāṇas*. The *Mahābhārata* features her in a context significant for our enquiry: 'From the creatures who, hungry for food, began devouring each other Adharma was born, destroyer of all beings. His wife was Nirṛti, whence the *Rākṣasas* are known as Nairṛtas. She had three loathsome sons, forever bent on evil deeds, Fear, Panic, and Death, destroyer of all creatures' (76).

Some scholars see Nirṛti as a direct precursor of Kālī (77), a view David Kinsley disputes on account of some differences between them (78). He points out, for example, that Kālī is always black-haired, while Nirṛti is sometimes described as golden-haired. Equally, he claims that Nirṛti is always clothed while Kālī appears naked, a point which is only partly correct -as we have seen, in all the early examples Kālī is also clothed albeit in somewhat unusual garments. Both these points do not strike me as sufficiently important to make the question of identity dependent on them - as we have seen, variations in deeds, appearance, etc. are commonplace when dealing with different myths. One important point, however, is the fact that Nirṛti does not appear in a battle-context which is obviously one of the most distinguishing of Kālī's features.

Overall, the biggest problem in trying to establish Nirṛti's character is that the Vedic hymns are not given to dwelling on dark forces but concentrate on warding them off. Thus Nirṛti is most frequently asked to go away: *ṚgVeda* 1,24.9 has a 'chorus' to four verses which runs 'Let Nirṛti depart to distant places' (79). Thus we simply lack sufficient information about Nirṛti and it is probably safer to say, with Kinsley, that the Hindu tradition may have been more receptive to a being like Kālī on account of Nirṛti, which is all I want to suggest with the whole of this section.

Finally and interestingly, there is the goddess Brahminicide who arises when Indra slays Vṛtra, a *brahmin* in later tales. It seems a perfect illustration of Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's point that the need arose to personify abstract notions. Stories of the expiation of *brahminicide* are attached to several gods and told in many versions, making perfect sense without personifying the deed. And suddenly a tale

appears where a female deity personifies this most heinous of crimes within the Indian system.

She arises when Vṛtra lies dead: '... the Fury of Brahminicide came forth; she was terrifying and hideous, striking fear into people, for she had enormous, sharp teeth and was frightfully deformed. She was dark and tawny; her hair was dishevelled and her eyes were gruesome. She wore a garland of skulls and she was emaciated, smeared with blood, clothed in rag garments' (80).

If this were set in a context of war we would have no difficulty recognizing this goddess as Kālī and one wonders, due to the closeness of the description, whether it has not been directly taken from Kālī .

The above section demonstrates that the Hindu tradition was well accustomed to seeing forces of destruction in feminine form and one wonders whether this tendency has not fed into the shaping of figures like Kālī . I hasten to add at this stage that of course she has her distinctive role to play which cannot be explained simply as a conglomerate of features from other beings.

So what is it that makes Kālī truly different? The most striking feature is Kālī 's involvement in battle, striking, that is, when comparing it with female figures before her, not when comparing it with other 'newcomers' such as Durgā. As a rule, neither women nor goddesses have any role in war; it is a particularly unwomanly thing to do.

The tradition knows about female figures who are used in a conflict and usually employ their female wiles to fool the opposing party. Neither Kālī nor Durgā ever seduce or trick their opponents; theirs is a straight forward strategy where superior power leads to victory (81).

Secondly, Kālī, certainly at first, has no male consort. Given the great importance of marriage in India, not to be married is certainly an exceptional and abnormal state and immediately locates a personage, divine or human, at the margins of society, if not right outside it. An unmarried man is usually regarded as incomplete. Women on their own are even less acceptable once they have gone past the marriageable age. They are believed to bring bad luck to anyone in contact with them. Widows in particular are feared and shunned. Female humans as well as deities are regarded as highly dangerous because they are lacking the control of a

male. Marriage is the answer to this danger. L. Babb comments on the value of marriage as follows: '...deities of this kind (ie. married ones) seem to embody certain key values of Indian civilization. It is as if the imposition of a basic vehicle of social order - marriage - on the relationship between god and goddess creates the possibility for the elaboration of divine attributes in accordance with basic order-producing values - hence the great variety in this sector of the pantheon....An appetite for conflict and destruction is thus transformed into the most fundamental of social virtues, that of wifely submission whichmakes the continuation of society possible. The basis for this transformation is the dual notion of divinity, a duality which in turn is linked to the opposition between male and female' (82). For further illustration of Kālī acting on her own, an incident in *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* can be added to the examples obtained from *Devī-Māhātmya* and *Mahābhārata*. Here, Kālī is worshipped by thieves who offer her human sacrifices to gain boons. When their leader brings an innocent *brahmin* before her she is burnt by his saintliness and, leaping from her image, turns on her own worshippers, decapitates them and gets drunk on their blood. Her retinue of demons join in the feast and play with the heads of the thieves. With her dreadful face, big teeth and wild laughter she is instantly recognizable (83).

Kinsley also quotes the *Agni* and *Garuḍapurāṇas* where Kālī is described in all her horror: of gaunt shape, with horrible fangs, laughing diabolically, dancing frantically, adorned with garland of corpses, sitting on the back of a giant ghost, her customary vehicle, and living in the cremation ground (84).

It is clear from these examples that when Kālī is on her own her terror remains unmitigated and she remains at the very periphery of the Hindu pantheon, being associated with wild places, wild people and unacceptable practices. She can be seen as the most extreme example of the destructive forces intrinsic in a lone female, unmediated by the balancing presence of a male. Thus, the principles expressed in Kālī challenge some of the tradition's most fundamental tenets and somehow the tradition had to find ways of dealing with her.

This leads us to the third point, though to call it 'unique' is, strictly speaking, not true. It concerns the method of assimilating this dangerous female into the tradition by subordinating her to a greater being. While the method itself is used over and

over again, the unusual (rather than unique) feature in the case of Kālī is that all the efforts of fitting her into the general scheme never quite succeed. Tension and ambiguity remain to a greater degree than with most other deities.

One mechanism employed in this assimilation process is, as we have seen clearly in *Devī-Māhātmya*, to subordinate her to a greater Goddess who herself is formed on the model of the great gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva although still maintaining many of her non-orthodox features. The problem of the destructive goddess is solved by changing the perspective to a higher level, the level of totality which incorporates both creative and destructive aspects. The problem of Kālī thus dissolves in the lap of the Great Goddess. Remember, however, that the passage is not altogether smooth as Kālī maintains a level of individuality which sets her apart from other forms of the goddess.

A second way is to bring her into contact with another ambivalent but well-established deity, Śiva. We have already noted one stage in their gradual coming together, ie. Kālī's indirect connection with Śiva through Aśvatthāman in *Mahābhārata*. Scanning the *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇas* reveals other variations on this theme.

In the *Śiva-purāṇa* we find yet another version of Dakṣa's sacrifice: snubbed by Dakṣa, Rudra (ie. the destructive form of Śiva), the destroyer of the world, plucked out a cluster of his matted hair and struck the top of a mountain with it.' The handful of hair splits into two, one half forming Virabhadra, who leads the army, '... from the other half of the cluster of matted hair, Mahākālī was born. Oh dear one, she was very terrible and was surrounded by crores of goblins' (86). In other instances she is simply mentioned among the retinue of his warriors and busy gobbling up demons and drinking their blood (87). It is interesting to see that Kālī is created directly from Śiva (in his destructive form) and at the same time as a male army leader. Both go to war, both are needed, yet while Virabhadra fights like one would expect a proper warrior to fight, Kālī's methods are obviously different, and the contrast shows up the extreme destructiveness Kālī personifies. A version of another famous battle, the destruction of the triple demon city, can be found in the *Līṅga-purāṇa* (88). The victory here is accomplished by Gaṇeśa, son and military leader of Śiva. Kālī is one of his retinue: 'At that time Kālī went

ahead of Gaṇeśa along with the intoxicated Piśācas and Gaṇas. She had skulls for her ornaments. She was whirling in her hand a trident that shone like Kālarātrī. She was intoxicated by drinking the blood of Asuras which tasted like wine (unto her). She made the leading Asuras tremble. She had the gait of the elephant in rut. Her eyes were tremulous due to inebriation. Her body was covered with the hide of an elephant' (89).

As mentioned above, horrible beings like *Piśācas* are here clearly associated with her, reeling around drunkenly just like their mistress. The theme of drunkenness is particularly stressed in this account which again emphasizes Kālī's unusual nature as drinking, as well as eating meat, was a forbidden practice. The image of an inebriated goddess with such destructive powers at her disposal is a truly frightening one. There is no knowing what she may do next, whatever attracts her attention may be up for destruction in a completely haphazard way, control and order have no meaning any more. This impression is enhanced by the similarity to a dangerous animal, an elephant in rut. The connotation seems to be that such an animal stops short of nothing to reach the object of his desire and thus we can imagine Kālī mowing down anything in her way. As in the case of the tiger, elephants are frequently invoked when praising the strength of warriors.

Her fighting methods are familiar by now, comprising both weapons and her mouth and teeth. The trident reminds us of Śiva's favourite weapon and thus accentuates the link between the two deities. Through the comparison of her weapon with Kālarātrī we gain the same connotations of destructive time and the end of time as appeared in the *Mahābhārata* account.

Despite these clear references to Kālī as we know her she is eulogized as the 'daughter of the mountain of snow' by the gods which clearly implies Pārvatī, Śiva's spouse. Making Kālī a vicious form of Pārvatī is by far the most widespread method of linking her to Śiva. We have to distinguish the application of the word '*kali*', meaning dark as a descriptive term for Pārvatī's dark complexion from the use of Kālī as a proper name for Pārvatī's vicious side. Both are used and I would guess that the confusion this causes is probably deliberate. The dark skin of Śiva's otherwise beautiful and generally demure wife can be read as a warning sign, a warning of the dangerous potential she holds which can manifest as Kālī whenever

necessary. Devising Kālī as a dark aspect of Pārvatī, on the other hand, functions as a safeguard, tentative though it may be, to the threat of wild destruction being set loose at any time. A certain constraint is placed on her in a way similar to *Devī-Māhātmya* except that now male control is brought to bear on Kālī as well. In this way the two goddesses influence each other, with Kālī adding a dangerous dimension to Pārvatī, and Pārvatī calming Kālī .

The above passage in the *Liṅga-purāṇa* just accepts this relationship, but other purāṇas are at pains to dissociate the two goddesses to a greater degree. This usually takes the form of Pārvatī shedding her dark complexion to become Gaurī, the golden one.

One example is *Vāmana-purāṇa* where Pārvatī's desire to change her appearance is a response to Śiva's teasing. She rids herself of her dark complexion through austerities but her black sheath remains as a separate goddess called Kauśikī, also known as Kātyāyanī. Kauśikī then goes to the Vindhya mountains and slays Śumbha and Niśumbha and thus earns the name Vindhyavāsinī. This same goddess, Kauśikī-Kātyāyanī-Vindhyavāsinī is also called Durgā and from Durgā emanates Kālī to slay Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa and Raktabīja as in the *Devī-Māhātmya*. Once transformed into Kālī proper, so to speak, she has all the familiar characteristics: a frightful face, a skull-topped staff, a mighty sword, a garland of skulls and an emaciated body which is smeared with blood. In this way Kālī is effectively removed from Pārvatī by several 'stages' as is the war-like and destructive aspect in general. Gaurī can thus remain the beautiful, dutiful wife of Śiva without being sullied by fighting and carnage. This technique also allows a whole range of deities to be brought under Śiva's sphere of influence. Among them Kālī still emerges as the fiercest type (90).

Finally, we find stories which show Kālī directly as the wrathful side of Pārvatī.

One of these can be found in one of the *Mahābhārata* versions of Dakṣa's sacrifice where she is born from Umā's wrath to help in the destruction of the sacrifice much as she is born from the great Goddess in *Devī-Māhātmya* (91). It is interesting to see that both Śiva and Pārvatī are equally able to emit fierce forms: Śiva's is called Rudra while Pārvatī's is called Bhadrākālī. Eventually, however, it is Pārvatī who intervenes and asks for the carnage to be ended thus clearly

revealing her benevolent side as a counterpart to her horrible Kālī-side.

It seems that whenever Pārvatī needs to fight she takes on the form of Kālī and in this way the pattern established in the *Devī-Māhātmya* which characterises Kālī as the darkest aspect of the goddess continues in other *purāṇas*. Whether as personified wrath or as the dark sheath with its own independent existence, it is clear that some distance is perceived between Pārvatī and Kālī - Pārvatī rarely fights in this brutal way under her own name. She usually acts as a calming influence and her petition brings the horrors of war to an end.

However, whenever Kālī is involved there is no guarantee that events progress in an orderly fashion. Her destructive potential is so great that not even Pārvatī's intervention always yields the desired outcome. A complex story in *Līṅga-purāṇa* illustrates just that (92). A demoness called Dārūkā threatens the gods and gains ground because the gods do not want to fight a woman. In their helplessness the Devas propitiate the goddess Pārvatī. Part of her enters into Śiva's body and makes a new body for herself from the poison in Śiva's throat. This new goddess then appears, by the grace of Śiva, from his third eye as Kālī. (Note the parallels her to the *Mahābhārata* version of the churning of the ocean where Jyeṣṭhā 'the Elder' is fashioned in the same way). Kālī here is blue-or black-necked, with matted hair, three eyes, with a trident and ornaments, in other words just like a female version of Śiva without her familiar and individual features. Accompanied by flesh-eating *Piśācas* she goes into battle, 'resembling fire', and needless to say, Dārūkā is defeated.

The story seems to be at pains to convey that only one part of Pārvatī is vicious and even then only through the agency of Śiva's poison which is contained safely in his throat. It has to be with Śiva's permission that she is allowed to appear looking just like a female Śiva. The whole incident is necessary to save the gods and thus re-establish order. Thus Kālī is firmly contained within a Śiva context with hardly an identity of her own. However, the myth then shows two interesting twists at the end by letting a seemingly controlled event run amok: instead of just dispatching the demon and restoring peace Kālī's fighting stirs up the whole cosmos and it seems she has no intention of bringing her destructive activities to an end.

Eventually, Śiva resorts to an ingenious trick: he transforms himself into a young

child and appears crying in the cremation ground (of which there has not been any mention so far - is the whole world already a cremation ground through Kālī's activities?). The idea behind this seems to be that he makes himself utterly vulnerable to her, thus appealing to her motherly instincts, rather than attempting to compete with her or subdue her by force (93). Kālī picks up the baby and suckles him, and with the breastmilk Śiva drinks away her anger. This anger is presumably contained in the same way as the original poison.

But even this is still not the end of the story: in order to please her, Śiva dances his destructive *Tāṇḍava* dance, the dance with which he obliterates the universe at the end of time. And Kālī, as well as goblins, *yoginis* and ghosts dance along with him. The universe is threatened to a far greater degree than it ever was from any *asura*.

The myth, therefore, explores three types of the Śiva-Kālī relationship: first of all Kālī is a portion of Śiva's spouse combined with the dangerous portion of Śiva himself. The whole process is tightly controlled by him. Once created, however, she has a life of her own and her unbridled lust for destruction threatens the whole universe. By implication, she has the same status as Śiva himself, the great destroyer at the end of time. However, the difference between Śiva and Kālī is that the former destroys at the correct time while Kālī destroys just when she feels like it. With Śiva, destruction of the universe is a necessary and even welcome phenomenon because immediately before the end mankind and nature itself are totally corrupt. Kālī has no such consideration - she simply gets carried away and a battle that was originally controlled and purposeful escalates into full-scale annihilation of everything that is. Śiva, in his mercy and concern for the world, is the only one able to intervene. He tames her by wit rather than force - only to succumb to her influence in the next passage when he dances his *Tāṇḍava* dance for her. This shows that Śiva's controlling power can not always be relied upon. Kālī is clearly Śiva's equal and encourages his destructive side just as he enhances hers. Together, they form an utterly horrific pair.

It seems that despite all the 'safeguards' Kālī remains a threat to humans, to the gods, to the universe as a whole. Knowing about Kālī means knowing that there is no security. She could strike at any time, thus emphasizing the perilous nature of

existence. As Kinsley writes: 'Meditation upon Kālī as an image of this world calls into question the stability, order, and destiny of the phenomenal world. Confronted with the reality of a world either as embodied by Kālī or as ruled by Kālī, one is compelled to question seriously a vision of the world as dependable, stable, and predictable. There is a chaotic dimension to the world, an unpredictable, frightening, 'other' dimension to this world that undercuts attachment to it. Kālī confronts one with a vision of the world as chaotic and out of control and thereby urges one to see beyond it to what is permanent and eternal. In this sense Kālī is both the embodiment or mistress of this ephemeral, magically created world and the stimulus to resolve to transcend it' (94).

To transcend the world and gain *mokṣa*, 'liberation', from the endless cycle of rebirths is the aim of most religious movements and philosophies in India. To see this terrible vision of the world in the form of Kālī can thus jolt the believer out of complacency and seek for ways to final release. The human response to Kālī has taken essentially two forms in India. One can be observed in Tantrism, particularly the left-handed, esoteric type. The central concern of this form of Tantrism is the path of the hero (*vira*) who is not daunted by Kālī's horrific appearance but heroically embraces her and thus gains victory over death and destruction. Kālī is no longer the personified anger of another deity active on the battle-field and slaying demons. Instead she is worshipped as a great or even the supreme deity, her importance eclipsing that of all the others (95).

The second movement is Bengali Śakta devotionism where the devotee relates to Kālī like a child does to its mother. Just as a helpless child has no other choice but to cling to its mother, no matter how negligent and horrible she is, so the devotee has no choice but to cling to Kālī because apart from her there is nothing else. By making himself utterly vulnerable to her, by accepting her for what she is, the devotee overcomes death (96).

Notes to chapter 8:

- 1) Coburn, Thomas B. 'Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition' (Delhi, 1984), p.108
- 2) O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger 'Hindu Myths' (Harmondsworth, 1975), p.252
- 3) Brockington, J.L 'The Sacred Tread', (Edinburgh, 1981), p.123
- 4)'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition', p.7 for a summary of this view and further details.
- 5)Details can be found in Kinsley, 'The Sword and the Flute - Kālī and Kṛṣṇa' (Berkeley, 1975), p.93-101. Also Mazumdar, B.C.'Durgā, her origin and history' JRAS 38 (1906-7) 355-38; The following articles in Sircar, D.C. (ed) 'The Śakti Cult and Tara' (Calcutta, 1967): Mahalingam, T.V.'The Cult of Śakti in Tamilnadu' pp.2-33, Bhattacharya, A.K. 'A Non-Aryan Aspect of the Devī' pp.56-60; Majumdar, P.K. 'Śakti-Worship in Rajasthan' pp.92-100; Sircar, D.C.'Śakti Cult in Western India' pp.87-91
- 6)Coburn, Thomas B. 'Encountering the Goddess - A translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a study of its interpretation'(DM) (Indian edn.,Delhi 1992). All references to the text follow this translation. For another translation, see Agrawala, V.S. 'The Devī-Māhātmya - the Glorification of the Great Goddess' (Varanasi, 1963)
- 7)DM, p.52
- 8)Coburn, Thomas B. 'Consort of None, Śakti of All: The Vision of the Devī-Māhātmya' in Hawley, J.S. and Wulff, D.M. 'The Divine Consort, Rādhā and the Goddesses of India' (Boston, 1986), p.154
- 9)7.5-8
- 10)7.18-19
- 11)7.22-23
- 12)7.25
- 13)DM, p.135
- 14)11.20
- 15)8.39-62
- 16)8.12; for further information on the māṭrs or māṭrkās in Coburn, 'The Crystallization of the Goddess-Tradition', p.313-330, Kinsley,D. 'Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition' (Berkley and Los Angeles, 1986), p.151-160.
- 17)8.52-53
- 18)8.62
- 19)see Gonda, J.'Religionen Indiens' vol.1 (Stuttgart, 1978),p.85-89
- 20)Buitenen, J.A.B van 'The Mahābhārata' vol.2 (Books 2 and 3)(Chicago and London, 1975) 2(23)26 'tiger among princes', 'tiger of the Bharātas'(p.80), 27 'tigerlike man' (p.81)
- 21)Siegel, Lee 'Laughing matters', (Chicago and London,1987), p.46
- 22)Mbh.6(53)21-22
- 23)1.58
- 24)ibid.
- 25)12.37
- 26)5.11
- 27)see 'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition' p.138 for discussion on wordplay
- 28)10.2-3
- 29)8.22
- 30)11.19b
- 31)9.20
- 32)9.21
- 33)9.35,39
- 34)The theme of the many and the one is not exclusively associated with the Goddess but runs through Hinduism as a whole, in one form or other. From the Ṛg Veda onwards we can distinguish a strong monistic strand which relegates multiplicity to an inferior plain of existence. Emily Kearns writes: "Thus into a system which is formally polytheistic is woven a strand which insists that polytheism is relative or apparent only; it is an element which frequently enters into the apprehension or even the actual narrative of polytheistic myth, and shifts its perceived meaning to another level." (Kearns, E.'Indian Myth' in Larrington,C 'A Feminist Companion to Mythology'

(London,1992) p.191)

35)'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition' p.110

36)Kinsley, David 'Freedom from Death in the Worship of Kālī', Numen 22 (1975), p.185

37)'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition' p.108; See also Macdonnell, A.A. 'Vedic Mythology' (Strassburg, 1897), p.120.

Examples for time as destructive from Mbh. (all ref. from v.Buitenen's edition of Mbh.):

Mbh.1(59)7 'Kāla's renowned sons were, like Time itself, destructive.' Mbh. 1(4)8 Fate of Pramadvāra: '... she failed to notice a sleeping snake and stepped on it with her foot - she was prompted by Time as she was due to die. The snake, pressed by the decree of Time, sank its venom-smearing fangs sorely into the body of the careless girl.' See also the frequent descriptions of Duryodhana in the Mbh. He is said to be 'destructive as Time, Death and Yama'. (eg.Mbh.3.28.23; 6.50.42d; etc.)

Another example is Kurma-purāṇa 1.27.16-57; 28.1-7 (translated in Dimmit,C and van Buitenen, J.A.B. 'Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas,' (Philadelphia, 1978), p.38ff) where we learn that originally everyone was pure and happy but then things began to change for the worse. Again there is no reason why the state of the universe becomes more and more degenerate other than the passage of time. Each new change is introduced by 'In the course of time' or 'After a time'. In one story in the Mahābhārata, absence of time (as well as desire and rain) is a characteristic, or one might say a precondition, of the original age of perfection: 'No one desired another man's wife; everyone was born and died in equal proportions; the clouds did not rain, and there was no development of time.' (quoted in O'Flaherty,W.D. 'The origin of Evil' p.29.) At the other extreme, the time of dissolution is frequently described as the Fire of Time, sometimes in a personified form as in Kurma purāṇa 2.44.1-24 (translated in 'Classical Hindu Mythology' p.43-4): "After the second half of Brahma's life-span, Time, counting down the world, makes up his mind to reduce everything to ashes as the Fire of Time." (p.43)

Not surprisingly, Śiva, who is frequently seen in the role of the great destroyer, is also called Kāla. Kurma-purāṇa 1.29.22-54, 60-65(translated in 'Classical Hindu Mythology' p.330-1) again exemplifies this view: Śiva, speaking about the virtues of Varanasi, says: 'Becoming Time, there I destroy the world.' It has to be noted, however, that here destruction of the world is not regarded as a disaster but as a means to liberation from the world. When dealing with destruction we always have to keep these two views in mind: from the worldly point of view, destruction of the world is obviously horrific and disastrous but from the ascetic point of view, the world is a place of illusion anyway and destroying it is necessary to be released.

Further, time is not always just destructive. Once the four ages have passed and the universe has been destroyed, everything lies quiet for some time until eventually the whole process begins all over again. Thus destruction becomes a purifying event and Time becomes creative. Kurma-purāṇa 1.11.1-47, 63-75, 211-220, 326 (translated in 'Classical Hindu Mythology' p.229-232) sees Śiva as Kāla in just this fashion: "Lord Māhesvara is called Kāla, Prāna and Hari. On him is this whole world woven. He is hymned as Kāla, Agni, Hara and Rudra by those who know the Veda. Kāla pours forth beings; Kāla destroys creatures; everything is subject to Kāla, but Kāla is subject to no one." And just below: "The master of all powers, the magician Kāla is the lord who fabricates time. Time produces everything and destroys it as well; Time supports the universe; this whole world depends on Time." (ibid. p.230)

38)'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition' p.110

39)Mbh.10.8.64-68. According to Coburn the Mahābhārata is especially important to an enquiry into goddesses who appear in Devi-Māhātmya because it, together with the Harivamsa, forms the literary context to the Devi-Māhātmya.(The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition, p.45) The same writer takes the passage in question as the earliest Sanskrit passage in which Kālī actually has a story (ibid.p.112), a view also held by David Kinsley ('Freedom from Death', p.185).

40)Mbh.5 (55)141 (p.450 vol.3)

41)Mbh.3(42)264; p.740 (volume 2)

42)Mbh.1:61,66

43)Translation by Coburn in 'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition,' p. 111-112. For another

translation see Roy, Pratap Chandra 'The Mahābhārata'

44) Alf Hiltebeitel analyses this story in view of what he calls a companion tale, that of Śiva's destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice. ('The Ritual of Battle; Krishna in the Mahābhārata', (Ithaca 1976) p.312ff) This tale is inserted into the text after the question is posed to Kṛṣṇa how it could possibly be that Aśvatthāman managed to succeed with his attack. Kṛṣṇa explains that it is due to Śiva's assistance and then illustrates his point by telling tales about Śiva, one of which being the aforesaid myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice. Hiltebeitel points to numerous parallels between the two narratives which only partially concern us here. The most important one is his comment on Kālarātrī who is obviously equated with Umā/Pārvatī but only gets short shrift in his scheme: 'Just as the myth can do without the goddess in this role, so it is easy to imagine the Saptikaparvan without this brief intrusion of Kālarātrī.' (p.326) Coming at the story with an interest in Kālī this hardly does justice to the fact that here we have the only significant appearance of Kālī in all of the Mahābhārata. Even with regard to the tale of Dakṣa's sacrifice itself an interest in the goddess allows us to see that in numerous versions it is not Śiva himself who is particularly concerned with the sacrifice but his consort; it is her anger or her sense of insult which spurs Śiva into action and thus it is ultimately due to her that Śiva enters the pantheon. So while both stories may do without her it also has to be conceded that when she is present she plays an important part in it, a fact which should not be overlooked. It certainly gives us a good indication what sort of being we are dealing with. It may be worthwhile to point out at this stage that Hiltebeitel may have overlooked an asymmetry in his scheme: while the male actor is a portion of Śiva but in human form, Kālī has not been transformed but remains a supernatural being.

45) 'The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition', p.112-3

46) Yama was not always death personified, it seems, but the first man and thus the first who died. He then became the king of the dead. Death is described as the path of Yama and only once is death (mṛtyu) identified with Yama. According to Macdonell, it was from the AV onwards that Yama became closely associated with the terrors of death and then death itself. He is often mentioned beside Antaka, the Ender, Mṛtyu, Death, and Nirṛti, Decease. Even in later texts, however, the relationship between Yama and death can be ambiguous; they are not always totally identical. Macdonell, A.A. 'Vedic Mythology' (Strassburg, 1897) p.172-3

47) Mbh.3(42)281, p.768-775

48) 'The Sacred Thread', p.12-14 for summary on Varuna

49) Agrawala, P.K. 'Goddesses in Ancient India' (New Delhi, 1984) p.111-113

50) for a detailed discussion of the snare, see 'The Origin of Evil', p.168-173

51) 'Hindu Myths', p.121, n.9

52) translated by J.L. Brockington, personal communication

53) Mbh.10(8)136, quoted in 'The ritual of battle' p.327

55) There are some further references to Kali in Mbh. which are not very useful for this study. See 'DM', p.111 for details.

56) 'Vedic Mythology', p.156, p.162

57) Wyatt, N. 'Devas and Asuras in Early Indian Religious Thought' Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 7, (1986), p.61-77

58) 'Devas and Asuras' p.61-2

59) see O'Flaherty, W.D. 'The Origin of Evil in Hindu Mythology', (Berkeley, 1976) p.60

60) ibid. p.62

61) While this is true on one level, it also has to be remembered that at the ultimate level of reality, Devi transcends the traditional division between Asuras and Devas. She is both the Great Goddess and the Great Demoness, as we have seen.

62) Dowson, J. 'Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology', see Rākṣasas.

63) 'Hindu myths' p.44-46

64) 'Origin of Evil', p.30

65) 'Hindu Myths' p.121

66) Mbh.3(37)214-221; vol.2, pp.650-664

67) ibid. 220, p.663

68) ibid. 220, p.664

69) ibid. 217, p.653-4

- 70)ibid. 215, p.652
- 71)'Origin of Evil' p.27
- 72)'Hindu Myths' p.36-7 Mbh.13.40.3-10
- 73)It may be worthwhile to point out that in the Vedas death was treated much like a demon, explicitly associated with evil and frequently opposed by Prajāpati, the Creator, although sometimes Prajāpati himself is identified with Death. Later texts put death more often on the side of order as a necessary evil. ('Origin of Evil' p.224) But the merely frightening and negative aspect can often still be sensed, as in the tale above and also below, quoted in connection with Nirrti.
- 74)'Hindu myths', p.37ff Mbh.12.248.13-250.41
- 75)'Hindu myths', p.277 Mbh.1(15)5-13 ff.
- 76)Mbh.1(60)1
- 77)Bhattacharji, Sukumari 'The Indian Theogony' (Cambridge, 1970), p.85. Noted in 'Sword and Flute',p.88
- 78)'Sword and Flute', p.87-88
- 79)translated in Panikkar 'The Vedic Experience'
- 80)'Hindu myths', p.87 Mbh.12.272.28-31, 273.1-58
- 81)In the case of Durgā only, sexual overtones do appear but they are always projections by the Asuras onto the goddess rather than originating with her.
- 82)Babb,L.A. 'The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India' (Columbia University Press, 1975), p.225-26. Numerous books have been written on the issue of women, marriage, relationship to men, both on the human and divine plain, etc. Here are just a few examples: Babb,L.A.'Marriage and Malevolence: The uses of sexual opposition in a Hindu Pantheon' Ethnology 9 (1970) pp.137-48; Jacobson, D. and Wadley, S.S. 'Women in India: Two Perspectives' (Delhi, 1977); O'Flaherty, W.D. 'Women, Androgynes and other mythical beasts' (Chicago, 1980); Harper, E.B. 'Fear and the Status of Women' Southwestern Journal of Asia 25, p.18-95; Marglin, F.A. 'Concepts of Power in Hindu Thought and Action' Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Los Angeles (1978)
- 83)'Freedom from Death', p.189; Bhagavatapurana 5.9.12-20
- 84)ibid., Agni-purāna 133,134,136; Garuda-purāna 38 - neither available to me to check evidence.
- 85)for examples see 'The Sword and the Flute'
- 86)Śiva-purāna, Translated by a Board of Scholars, Ancient Indian Tradition and Myth Series (Delhi,1969). Vol.1, Rudrasamhita ii.32.25;
- 87)Rudrasamhita ii.23.11-12;Rudrasamhita v.33.36-44
- 88)Liṅga-purāna, Translated by a Board of Scholars, Ancient Indian Tradition and Myth Series (Delhi, 1973)
- 89)Liṅga-purāna i.72.66
- 90)Vāmana-purāna 29-30;cf. cf. Matsya P.155.5-9; Padma P. 5.41.5-9; Skanda P. 1.2.27.63-8
- 91)Appenix to book 12 Mbh.218.1-247
- 92)Liṅga-purāna 1,106.
- 93)While the motherly instincts seem to come as a surprise in a vicious being like Kālī the idea is not new - not only is Kālī closely associated with the Mothers who are both benevolent and malevolent, called the Mothers but she may also be the special nurse-maid of Karttikeya, born of anger and a drinker of blood, see above. Van Buitenen comments that the title 'mother' is used euphemistically, 'expressing the hope that the demoness will act as a loving mother to the child.' (Mhb. vol.2, p.207n)
- 94)'The Sword and the Flute'p.136
- 95)Note to the tantric heroic tradition: I wonder whether seeds of this idea can already be found in the idea that battle is a sacrifice and through offering oneself glory can be gained. Heroes are seen as the ones 'who poured out their bodies into the [sacrificial] fire of battle' (Mbh. 18:2,2; found in Hiletebeitel 'The sacrifice of battle', p.318) In another passage or Mbh.5:57,12 which briefly likens battle to the sacrifice in Duryodhana says: 'Having offered up ourselves in war to Vaivasvata, oh King, we shall triumphantly return, covered with glory, our enemies slain.' Vaivasvata is another name for Yama, god of the dead, and the implication is that the sacrifice of battle is performed for the god of death rather than a deity with pronounced protective qualities like Visnu. While I am concerned with overinterpretation of a single passage it may be worthwhile to hazzard a guess at the

implications of Duryodhana's words. My guess is that the reality of death was very much taken into account when fighting a war and not eclipsed by other considerations. At the same time, however, it was just because of this reality that glory could be obtained, as the passage says. Given the closeness of Yama and Kālī in some respects at least, one wonders whether a connection exists between these ideas.

96)'The Sword and the Flute', give some further references.

Chapter 9:

COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION:

Kālī, with her gaping, bloody mouth and skull-topped staff, her horrific laughter and her entourage of demonic beings, is truly a 'personification of death, woe and destruction', as the Rees brothers claimed, but is she like the Irish war- and death-goddesses?

The comparison cannot proceed without some preliminary remarks. The first one concerns the nature of the texts. Saga tales of Ireland are obviously totally different from an Indian text which glorifies a Great Goddess or others which recount the salvific activity of a deity. However, the same objection could be raised within each tradition as well. For example, the message of the *Devī-Māhātmya* shows Kālī as one of the forms of the Great Goddess while the *Mahābhārata* depicts her as an independent being of uncertain status. Each text has a specific message and it is important to attempt to understand this message and set a figure into context. At the same time Kālī remains recognizable in each text. It is possible, therefore, to arrive at a 'portrait' of a particular figure, at a set of characteristic features regarding appearance, behaviour, relationship with others, and so on, through careful study of the texts. It seems a valid undertaking to compare this 'portrait' with another even though the type of text differs.

This statement brings another issue to the foreground: is it a 'portrait' or 'portraits', in other words, are we talking about one or many goddesses? In India, this question has given rise to a vast amount of philosophical texts and it would be futile to survey them in the present context. Suffice it to say that the different deities are usually seen as a form of ultimate reality which is sometimes named Śiva, sometimes Viṣṇu, sometimes Devi. The 'many' exist at a lower level of reality only; hence different philosophical systems differ in how exactly this level is related to the higher level where all distinctions disappear. No such philosophical analysis emerges in the Irish case. It is uncertain whether one goddess has different forms or whether there are separate ones. The three war-goddesses have different names but they are also described as the three *morrígna*. And, as we have seen, there are many other figures who could conceivably be the same as, or related to,

the war-goddesses. Names are used interchangeably, for example when the Morrígan or Nemain is also called Badb. One particular figure can have many names, as for example Cailb, or appear in many different forms, such as the various animal forms of the Morrígan. The Irish figures remain essentially beyond our grasp. This, of course, is one of their main characteristics and it turns out that neither the characters in the tales nor the readers are able to fully understand what these shadowy beings are all about. It is true to say, however, that a concept such as the one and the many can be explained by philosophy as well as story. While the philosophical analysis explains why a figure can be both one and many, stories in both Ireland and India simply present the fact and allow the listener/reader to draw his/her own conclusions.

Just imagine for one moment the episode of Pārvatī's dark sheath in the Vāmanapurāṇa without the philosophical underpinnings. There we have a goddess, Pārvatī, who sheds her dark complexion which remains a separate being called Kausikī, also known as Kātyāyanī. After going to the Vindhya mountains she acquires the name of Vindhyavasinī, also known as Durgā, who eventually emits Kālī to slay Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa and Raktabija. If we had no idea of the history of these beings, or the philosophy giving rise to such multiple forms, it would be an utterly confusing picture indeed. Attempts to solve the question of identity or difference would fail fairly quickly. All one could say in the end is that the goddess remains elusive.

I am not suggesting that there once was a philosophical system to 'explain' the Irish war-goddesses, nor that the same stories would have developed in India if the philosophical system had not been in place. All I am trying to say by using this hypothetical example is that the imagery of stories on their own can express the elusive nature of the divine just as effectively as deep philosophical analysis. The presence of philosophy need not deter us from comparing Kālī to the Irish war-goddesses although it obviously has to be taken into account. The strategy of dealing with the one-and-the-many in both philosophical and mythical form may therefore be taken as a way of expressing the mysterious nature of the divine, rather than a way for answering a literal question: one or many.

Thirdly, the goddesses of war and death can be observed at a time of transition in both cultures. In Ireland, native Irish tradition assimilated medieval Christian

culture and it is obvious that the war-goddesses were perceived to be belonging to the pre-Christian past. Their relevance certainly diminished as time went by and the only vestiges which can be found are those of the banshee in later folk tradition. Thus one can say that the war-goddesses are in decline and it was noted how some of the texts at least are interested in showing that the Morrígan and her sisters are superseded by the male hero. As already stated in the introduction, the term 'goddess' is a useful term as this is how the figures in question have become known among scholars. Additionally, there are some hints that the impulse for the fierce females stems from figures who were goddesses in the past. In the stories themselves, however, they range among the beings regarded as 'otherworldly' whereby it is not clear how exactly the Otherworld was regarded. Rather than explaining this Otherworld, the stories simply assume its presence and its influence on the lives and activities of warriors, kings, poets and other personages.

In India, the situation is exactly opposite. Kālī's appearance in the texts is a direct result of the dominant, literary Sanskritic culture's assimilation of elements from peripheral, non-sanskritic traditions. Kālī is thus in the ascendant, though not accepted by everybody straight away. She is very much a force to be reckoned with. Doubtlessly, this difference in general outlook influences the portrayal of the fierce females within the text and may go some way to explain certain differences, one of the most important being the uncertainty regarding divine status.

It could be objected that not just the texts but the types of conflict featuring the Irish and Indian figures are quite different. Kālī interacts with a human hero only once, in the *Sauptika-parvan* of *Mahābhārata*, while the Morrígan and her sisters forever interfere in human battles. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of the war-goddesses in Irish literature is the way they interact with heroes. There is no direct equivalent in the Indian case. Kālī's opponents and allies are to be found on the supernatural plane. These differences certainly affect the details of each case. The subtlety of the relationship between, for example, Cú Chulainn, the mainly human hero, and the Morrígan, the otherworldly female, has no exact parallel in the Indian tradition. However, several points need to be made to counter this objection. First of all, the study is not concerned with exact parallels but with more general trends. Secondly, the line between the two realms, divine and human or

otherworldly and human, is fluid. In the Indian tradition, heroes can be deities incarnate (as is the case in *Mahābhārata*), or they can be possessed by deities, as the case of Asvatthaman illustrates. Equally, humans can be reborn as gods, and so on. The Irish tradition frequently illustrates the overlap between heroes and otherworldly beings. Note the many stories of dual parentage, note the genealogies which begin with an otherworldly figure and end with a historical king, note Cú Chulainn himself. Finally, while the relationship with male figures, human or otherwise, affects the exact role the goddesses take on in both traditions, it does not affect their activities as such. Put differently, we observe that Kālī and the war-goddesses are always ferocious and destructive, but sometimes it is for the benefit of one side, sometimes it is just for the sake of destruction, sometimes it happens on the divine plane, sometimes on the human, and so on. However, the essential fact, which is their love of violence, remains. And it is this quality which can be compared, irrespective of the exact context.

A related problem is that of the exact position of the fierce females within a conflict, in other words, their allegiance, or lack of allegiance, to one side. It is quite clear that Kālī, on the whole, fights for one side. She is for the gods and against the demons, for the establishment of order and against the forces of darkness and chaos represented by the Asuras. This particular position can be compared with the Morrígan's role in *Cath Maige Tuired* after the Dagda has persuaded her to join his cause. Not only is she instrumental in destroying the opposing king, she also sways the battle in favour of the Túatha Dé Danann by her appearance at a crucial point. While allegiance to one side becomes commonplace in later tales, it is unusual for the earlier ones. On the whole the war-goddesses remain much more ambiguous, are a 'third party' in human conflicts, concentrating on the loser once the battle has been decided, or the gessa have been broken, or whatever action precipitates the heroes' doom. After the battle, the victims, no matter which side they belong to, are valuable to them as source of food. One could say that the war-goddesses have their own agenda which is quite separate from that of the male participators. This is true also for the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn. While the emphasis lies on the direct hostilities between the two, it has to be remembered that when the actual fight comes about, the Morrígan poses, not as

a direct opponent, but again as a 'third party', interfering in the armed combat of the two warriors. This portrayal as 'third party' which transcends the division between friend and foe emphasizes the war-goddesses' interest in violence per se. Returning to the Indian stories, the same is expressed at those occasions where Kālī is swept away in a destructive rampage. Gods, demons, humans, the world, everything falls prey to her gaping maw. Kālī, destructive Time and mistress of Death knows no bounds. We can conclude that the war-goddesses' elusive, shadowy, unpredictable nature, which puts them outside the dynamic of human conflict, is as effective in signalling their utter destructiveness as the brutally visible, all-consuming rage of Kālī. The images, the technique of portraying this state of affairs is different, but the outcome is the same.

After these general points it is necessary to turn to a more detailed comparison. The first theme to be investigated is the fierce females' ability to inspire fear. It is an important and frequently occurring topic in Irish tales. We examined the shrieking and fluttering badba which appear above fighting armies. On the whole, the badba do not cause wars, they simply appear when a conflict takes place. Their shrieks, even more than their appearance, cause confusion, madness and fear to the point where the warriors die of dread. While the general din of battle is scary enough, the badba could be said to form the otherworldly component of this noise. What a modern witness would describe as a psychological reaction to a stressful event has been given an external reality, symbolised by the screeching badba. Fear also forms a large component of the tales which feature figures prophesying doom, such as *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* where the king and his host are gripped by fear. This is brought about by the strange appearance of the otherworldly woman (and other figures as well), by her prophesy of death and by her demands which break the king's final geiss. Thus her looks, words and deeds combine to inspire fear. Being fearful saps the strength of the heroes and signals certain death. It is possible to resist the Morrígan by not being fearful, as *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* clearly shows. This is one of the main themes in Cú Chulainn's career. He is unaffected by fear which is one reason, amongst others, why the Morrígan cannot overcome him. If we read *Táin Bó Regamna* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* together, we notice again that looks, words and deeds are all intended to inspire

fear.

Augmenting the fearful effect of the war-goddesses is their use of trickery and deceit. Words are twisted, rules manipulated, identities hidden, tricky situations brought about, traps laid until the warrior is utterly confused, playing a game in which he no longer knows the rules.

The theme of inspiring fear finds an echo in the Indian tradition but while it is the main strategy of the Irish figures it forms only a part of Kālī's fighting techniques. She wins, not by frightening her enemies to death but because of her superior fighting powers, using weapons as well as somewhat more unusual methods. She does not work indirectly but openly and in a straight-forward manner, being directly the cause of her enemies downfall. Words have no place here - we notice that Kālī never threatens her enemies, in fact, she talks very little, unlike the Irish figures. Equally, there is no need for trickery and deceit because Kālī is so superior that nobody can resist her. Resisting fear would neither save the Asuras nor Aśvatthāman's victims.

Having said all that, fear is still an element in their downfall. This is achieved using various means.

First of all we notice that Kālī inspires fear in her victims through loud noise. We remember how Śivadutī's loud shrieks are mentioned twice in the *Devī-Māhātmya* and how she is only bested by Kālī who makes the loudest noise of all. The Asuras are extremely frightened by these sounds which presumably puts them at a disadvantage.

Further, the story of Aśvatthāman's night-time attack shows how fear paralyses the Pāṇḍavas who become easy prey for Kālī's noose. Just like in the Irish battles, confusion and fear can conquer warriors even before the enemy has used his weapons on them. The Pāṇḍavas, who have been plagued by nightmares for many weeks, rush up in such confusion that they either kill each other or simply accept their fate without resistance. While this effect is not solely due to Kālī, her appearance in their dreams certainly affects their mental state and contributes to their demise.

Kālī's horrible appearance obviously causes fear, particularly the body parts which she wears as ornaments. This clearly signals to any opponent that here is a being

that has won battles before and shows off the trophies to prove it.

While talking about appearance it is as well to take a closer look at this topic. On first sight very few obvious similarities emerge between the Irish and the Indian figures. One of the problems is that relatively little is known about the looks of the Irish war-goddesses. Her animal forms, the colour red, her loosened hair, her big size in one case, her hag-shape and, possibly, one beautiful shape, the theme of mutilation - this is the extent of information we possess. All this has very little similarity with Kālī's huge mouth and teeth, her tiger skins and weapons, her ornamental heads and body parts.

Nevertheless, there are some common themes which are worth mentioning. One very obvious theme, given the nature of the females in question, is that of the colour red, the colour of blood and death. Both traditions have liberally adorned their fierce ladies' bodies and clothes with this colour. Another colour featuring prominently is black. As Kālī means 'dark/black' this colour could be seen as a summing up Kālī's character as well as being a detail of her appearance. A similar process seems to be at work in the Irish black birds - as Maria Tymozko has shown, it is the black colour of the birds rather than the habits of a particular species which associates them with unpleasant phenomena. Further, black features are part of the goddesses' outer appearance, particularly the hags although it is rivalled by grey.

Equally striking are their distorted forms which has precipitated their portrayal as hags with the features of old age supplying at least some of the horrible attributes although even those are exaggerated. Note that Kālī's human counterpart in Kṣemendra's *Samayanmāṭṛkā* is an old woman, Kankalī, 'skeleton' or, as Lee Siegel translates it 'Madam Bagabones' (1)

Their garments deserve mentioning as unusual dress complements unusual physical features. Kālī's tiger skin or elephant hide replaces the beautiful clothes a woman normally wears. Brahminicide, in the *Mahābhārata* story, is described as being in rags. Being naked or dishevelled seems to be the condition of people who are dying or grieving (2). The Irish females are frequently in rags and can have a generally dishevelled appearance, particularly with their long hair loosened rather than braided, which is the norm.

Thus there is some common ground with regard to appearance although each tradition uses it in its own particular way. The desired effect is to portray the figures as unusual, extraordinary, signalling to both hero and reader that danger lies ahead.

It seems to me that in both traditions the imagery expresses perfectly the chaotic character of these fierce females. The distortion of the human form indicates that the being in question is 'other' - while the basic shape is still recognizable as human, the distortions and deformities make them only barely human, in other words, the norm is violated, and violation of the accepted norm means chaos. Another way this can be expressed is through the dissolution of the body, which ties in with the goddesses' preference for body parts, heads, blood, etc., again a characteristic of chaos. Disshevelled dress again violates norms, this time social norms, and together with behaviour which flies in the face of any socially acceptable ways, the fierce females emerge as true outsiders which threaten structure and order.

A point which was mentioned in passing above and is closely related to the topic of fear is the ability of the war-goddesses to prophesy or to appear in visions or dreams. Visions, prophecies, prophetic dreams and similar phenomena are well known in many traditions and are often connected with a person's time of death or the circumstances surrounding it. It is thus not surprising to find such phenomena associated with the figures specialising in death.

The Irish tradition, in connection with the war-goddesses, is more concerned with spoken prophecies rather than visions. Whether the appearance of a figure like Cailb or the Washers at the Ford can be classed as vision even though the onlookers are in a waking-state is a moot point.

In the Indian tradition we are reminded that a man's death is heralded by a dark woman appearing in his dream. In connection with Kālī herself only one example can be quoted which is her appearance in the Pāṇḍava's dreams. The real event mirrors the dream-vision exactly and, as has been stated already, contributes to the Pāṇḍavas simply accepting their fate. However, there are hints that more than just a dream-vision is at issue here. It seems that the delusive power of sleep itself is hinted at. This fits in more with the Irish war- and death-goddesses' influence on

people's minds, muddling the mind, confusing clear thought to the point of losing control over one's circumstances. While this is a more general connection, *Echtra Nerai*, *Táin Bó Regamna* and the story of Odras focus on the problem of the sleeping hero or heroine itself. It seems that while the main hero or heroine is awake, the Otherworld is kept at bay but when they fall asleep and are not longer watchful, otherworldly figures can enter the hero/heroines territory, with unfortunate consequences. In some Indian texts, sleep itself is personified as a Goddess called Nidrā or Yogā-nidrā which refers to the special sleep of Viṣṇu during the phase when the universe is dissolved. At least one scholar, Wendy O'Flaherty, has postulated identification with Kālī, though without further comment (3). The issue is complex in Indian thinking and goes much further than anything the Irish tradition offers. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile pointing out that the concept of the delusive power of sleep occurs in both tradition and that the mental effect of the fierce females is also a shared characteristic.

With regard to spoken prophesy there is no example in connection with Kālī. This illustrates yet again her lack of interest in words.

After having discussed some of the phenomena which are intended to cause fear, it also has to be said that fear is only one response to the sights and sounds of battle and the horror of the war-goddesses. The opposite is rage, anger, battle-frenzy. Depending on the nature of the warrior the same phenomena can have completely different results. The *Táin* offers examples of either response - death from fear after the *badba's* screeching on the one hand, warriors bursting out of their tents, naked and furious after a prophesy which mentions their names on the other hand. Cú Chulainn, of course, thrives on the visual and aural manifestations which kills lesser warriors. It is partially for this reason that he is compared to the war-goddesses and in several different ways, as we have seen in the case of Nemain and the Morrígan. His frenzied, distorted, otherworldly state comes over him when he is excessively angry as *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (4) clearly shows: '...because of the greatness of his anger he became distorted.' While in this state he is out of control recognizing neither friend nor foe. Not surprisingly anger is recognized as a force which has no limits. Cú Chulainn himself states that 'Anger destroys the world' (*Conscar bara bith*) (5).

The war-goddesses themselves are frenzied and mad - Nemain's name and expressions like 'red, mad badd' clearly testify to this. In other words, they are both frenzied and mad as well as causing frenzy and madness.

Kālī is frequently called mad as well as being the personified anger of Durgā. Her methods of killing are certainly frenzied. We also notice that she can be described as out of control, her destructive force transforming the whole universe into a cremation ground. Even Śiva is carried along with her and no longer performs his protective role.

It may also be permissible to cite the similarity between Aśvatthāman's methods of killing in *Mahābhārata* to those of Kālī in *Devī-Māhātmya*, even though Aśvatthāman is possessed by Śiva, not by Kālī. It was noted in the chapter above that both kick and trample many of their victims to death before using a sword to dispatch the rest of them. Further, Aśvatthāman is compared to the fire at the end of time and Kālarātrī, the night of death/time embodies all the destructive aspects of time. The conclusion was drawn that Aśvatthāman and Kālī were fitting companions indeed, each enhancing the destructiveness of the other.

On a more general level we notice how the Asuras frequently react with rage and anger to Kālī's onslaught. Note, for example, Śumbha and Niśumbha's reaction to the slaying of Raktabija: 'When Raktabija was killed, and the others slain in battle, Śumbha and Niśumbha entered into an unparalleled frenzy. On seeing the great army being wasted, blustering with outrage, Niśumbha rushed forward, with the very best of the demonic army' (6). A little later on we notice that a phenomenon which causes fear in some can cause rage in others. Following Śivadūtī's and Kālī's noisy display it is said that 'These noises terrified the demons, and Śumbha went into a rage' (7).

We can conclude that the war- and death-goddesses are angry, frenzied beings who are quite out of control. They are, so to speak, the supernatural dimension of the warriors' rage. Putting it another way one could say that the warriors are overcome by frenzy and pass over into the supernatural sphere, becoming like the goddesses in some respects. Male partners can be swept along with the destructive, chaotic females and forget their usual protective role.

Finally, a discussion of fear-inspiring elements would not be complete without

mentioning the fierce female's laughter although this leads far beyond the theme of just intimidating the enemy.

In the Indian evidence laughing occurs both during and after the battle. Both Durgā and Kālī laugh uproariously in *Devī-Māhātmya* while fighting and at this stage it could well be interpreted as a deterrent on a par with howling and other loud noises.

After the battle, Kālī laughs when she hands over the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa as her offering or her trophy to Devī. Now the laugh takes on quite a different flavour as there is no longer an enemy to frighten. The sense one gets from this scene is that Kālī truly has the last laugh in this conflict and we can see it as a comment on the whole gruesome battle - to her it is nothing but a joke. Equally, Kālī laughs during Aśvatthāman's attack and her laugh is described as derisive - it is a laugh that belittles the opponents, counts them for nothing, respects nothing. It is a laugh only the true victor can laugh.

Kālī also laughs an intoxicated, drunken laugh when she had her fill of blood. She is so exhilarated by the carnage that she reels like a drunk, laughing uproariously. While the connotations are slightly different the common denominator is still the fact that battle and carnage and death are just good fun for her.

The Irish tradition portrays the war-goddesses in a similar fashion. While there is no evidence for the laugh being used during a battle it certainly comes into play just afterwards: we remember how the Morrigan laughs a horrible laugh when she washes spoils in *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*. The laugh is called a *gascen* with all its overtones of mockery, again belittling the opponents.

The drunken laugh does not exist in the Irish tradition but the *badba* are being described as joyful after a battle because of all the bodies they have gained which may well be a similar phenomenon. Note also the women in *Serlige Con Chulainn* who laugh when they beat Cú Chulainn senseless. The gloss to this passage, as we have seen, identifies the women with the war-goddess. This identification is not borne out by the rest of the story which is why it was not included in this study. In the case of Kālī this aspect is well summarised by Lee Siegel in 'Laughing Matters': 'Kālī is the archcomedienne of the universe, ever-laughing, the atrocious incarnation of black comedy, the source of macabre tricks and sinister pranks that

are *māyā*. Her laughter at old age, disease and death, fills the Buddha's silence. She laughs no less at birth and youth and health. She laughs at joy and sorrow, despair and hope, at striving and surrender. She laughs at one and all, makes fun of life and death, of men and gods. The laughter gushes from her throat like blood from the lungs' (8).

While it would be questionable to take the implications of the Morrígan's laugh quite as far as Kālī's, we can still be sure that her laugh is one that derides the pityful state of the warriors, mocks their deaths, shows no mercy. The laugh is not a device to attempt intimidation of the enemy, the laugh states a fact because the victim of the war-goddesses is indeed reduced to nothing.

The war-goddesses in the Irish tradition truly have the 'last laugh' because the victims of war are theirs to consume. This aspect of their nature probably stems from the behaviour of 'real' crows. The *badba* are forever feeding on bodies, frequently depicted as bloody-mouthed and sometimes heard as calling from among the corpses. If we spin this image along a little further, it could be said that such a preoccupation with food points to a being who is forever hungry and, in its search for food, causes devastation as nothing is enough. It is thus of great interest to read Maria Tymoczko's research where examination of the term *lon* meaning 'blackbird' yields some interesting results. She notices that *lon* means more than just 'blackbird' and that there is an overlap of the semantic field of *lon* with that of the terms for the *corvidae*, to which *badb* 'crow' belongs. The term *lon* has many negative associations which are more characteristic of the *corvidae*. She quotes from the Middle Irish *Aislinge mac Conglinne* where the beast which is exorcised from Cathal's throat is called a *lon craís*, translated as 'demon of gluttony' by Meyer but could also be translated as 'blackbird of gluttony'. This demon, moreover, is the ruin of Munster and the Southern half of Ireland, causing hunger, devastation and destruction. It is definitely a bird, or bird-like creature, as it is said to fly from the roof beam of a house, joining other figures originating from hell. Tymoczko relates this demon to other female personifications of destruction and writes: 'The avian *lon craís*, the figure of the woman as famine or blight, the *fennóc* as *banshee* who can prophesy death of an individual or defeat of a tribe, the war goddesses who prophesy disaster and gorge themselves on the defeated of the

battlefield - all of these together form a significant mythological complex in the Irish tradition of voracious consumption and devastation' (10).

The imagery of voracious consumption is particularly interesting in comparison with the Indian material. Kālī, while not averse to playing around with dead bodies, is usually depicted as eating her victims while they are still alive. Kālī wins her battles against the *Asuras* in *Devī-Māhātmya* by throwing them into her gaping maw and only secondarily by using her weapons. Her huge mouth is a standard feature, commented upon in every story about her. Thus, devouring can be seen as a strategy during battle rather than as an activity after everything has been decided. It is also the feature which grants her superiority over other deities, a fact which becomes particularly clear in the Raktabija episode where the more traditional methods employed by Durgā and the *matṛkas* fail. Only Kālī can bring victory through swallowing the demons. Behind the imagery lies the concept of the ravages of Time and the all consuming nature of Death which is an ever recurring theme in the Indian tradition as a whole.

It becomes apparent when investigating the meaning of devouring, both in Kālī and other dangerous beings in the Indian literature, that insatiable hunger drives these beings to eating their victims, which, in turn, denotes total destructiveness. If my tentative interpretation is correct, there is some similarity between this way of thinking and the destructive, gluttonous, devastating activity of the carrion crow and other 'black birds' in the Irish tradition. Devouring is more than just killing, it is total annihilation as nothing, no remains, no signs are left. Seeing the fierce females as devourers is to see them at their most destructive (11).

Another aspect of this issue is the relationship of the war-and death goddesses to animals which feed on carrion. The *badba* are practically identical with crows and many of their characteristics are directly derived from the habits of crows or from the beliefs surrounding the *corvidae* on the whole. No such close relationship exists in the Indian case although Kālī is frequently surrounded by jackals and vultures which can be regarded as fulfilling the same function as the crow. However, Kālī never becomes such an animal, they are simply part of the scene. As we noted, devouring is a demonic rather than a 'natural' feature.

Before leaving the topic of eating victims the significance of the head needs to be

mentioned. We notice how the heads of the slain are seen as trophies, as spoils of war, in both traditions. We are reminded of Macha's mast being the heads of the slain and how the head is singled out for special notice when the Washer at the Ford washes bodies and equipment. Numerous stories depict warriors bringing back heads from their forays into enemy territory which boosts their importance amongst their own people as well as acting as a deterrent to their enemies. The important point about trophies, as we have seen, is that where warrior ethic prevails, the enemies death signals the life of oneself and one's tribe. The warrior surrounded by heads and other trophies of war looks very similar to the Washer at the Ford with her slaughter-heap. Both are bringers of death who survive because others are killed.

Heads do not play the same important role in Indian warfare, as far as I am aware. However, Kālī is frequently depicted as wearing garlands of heads or skulls which could conceivably be interpreted as trophies and deterrents. In Kālī's stories, heads can also be offerings, such as Kālī presenting the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa to Devī in *Devī-Māhātmya*. Finally, Kālī can be seen kicking the heads of her victims around in sport, as part of her drunken orgy after a battle.

Returning to the subject of devouring it can be noticed that while it forms a central theme in *Devī-Māhātmya* and many other stories, it is not the only way Kālī kills. In *Mahābhārata* she kills by binding the spirits of men and dragging them away, thus separating them from their bodies. This is the way Yama operates.

While there is no equivalent in the Irish tradition to binding it is worthwhile at this stage to examine the connection with death in both Ireland and India. Kālī's role is obviously much more far-reaching than that of a 'war-goddess' even though most of her stories are set in the context of battle. Her use of the noose which reminds us of Yama as well as her connection with destructive time introduces a wider significance. Her favourite place outside the battlefield is the cremation ground, surrounded by jackals and other horrible beings, and *Liṅga-purāṇa* hints that she can transform the whole world into a cremation ground if she so desires.

Nothing quite so dramatic can be associated with the Irish fierce ladies who are largely confined to a battle context. However, it is unlikely for any hero to die

other than in a violent context, most often in battle and there seems to be a difference between the fierce females simply appearing as part of a battle-scene and being concerned with the individual death of a hero in the way Cíchuil and the Morrígan are. With the latter, the hero's individual death is prophesied by these fearsome figures and there is some active involvement, certainly on the part of the Morrígan, less so in the case of Cíchuil although even she at least speeds up the king's downfall by making him break his last *geiss*. One could add the Morrígan's role in the death of Indech which is decided well before Indech fights his last battle. Finally, the Indoeuropean root of her name *Moro-rigni, queen of death, points to her involvement in death rather than just in war.

In both traditions there is an understanding that the fierce ladies are goddesses of violent destruction and violent death. They do not concern themselves with an old person dying peacefully in bed, having lived his or her life to the full. Instead, it is the violent and premature death of young heroes which is their concern, the death which makes mothers keen for their sons as in *Tochmarc Ferbe*, the utter destructiveness which can eradicate a whole lineage as in *Mahābhārata*.

Their destructiveness is not limited to a particular individual or an army, it can affect the whole world. This is only hinted at in the Irish material when, at the end of *Cath Maige Tuired*, Morrígan utters her double prophesy, first the reign of peace and order, then the final plunge into destruction and chaos. While it is significant that the Morrígan has the last word and that this last word describes the end of the world, there is also a sense that this final cataclysm sweeps everything away, including her. Why else would she call the vision one that is not dear to her when in other stories her delight in carnage is unequivocal? Her exact role in connection with the collapse of all that is known remains therefore unclear.

Kālī's effect on the world is totally devastating. The *Liṅga-purāṇa* clearly shows that there is no limit to Kālī's destructive ability. We remind ourselves how Kālī, after being created from the poison in Śiva's throat, not only kills Dārūkā whom she is supposed to kill but continues in her rampage until the cosmos is in more danger from her than it ever was from the Asura. While Śiva manages to pacify her at first, he is eventually drawn into this orgy of destruction by being inspired to perform his *tāṇḍava* dance, the dance with which he obliterates the universe at the

end of an era. Kālī, of course, dances with him quite competently! Notice how Kālī inspires Śiva to employ his destructive dance, not when it is time to end the universe, but out of time, when she feels like it, thus breaking the normal order of things.

Their association with or participation in the destruction of the world indicates more than any other role that the fierce females are essentially chaotic figures who do not respect any order. They thus form a constant threat which has to be dealt with somehow. Both traditions have resorted to the powerful male as a safeguard against female chaos. The male figures must incorporate creative and destructive aspects and balance them within themselves in order to 'qualify' as a suitable partner for the chaotic females. Only exceptional males are able to achieve this; any ordinary man is simply destroyed.

The prime example of this in the Irish case is the Dagda in *Cath Maige Tuired* -the Morrígan's destructive potential is utilised for the benefit of the Tuatha side through him. Just as he uses his club which kills with one end and revives with the other, he can make use of the Morrígan's skills without letting them run out of control. His enormous strength and capability allows him to deal with chaotic circumstances and revert them to order. It appears from this that there are two forms of destruction, one which is done in the name of some greater good and which is controlled - the Dagda only kills when it is necessary - one which is not controlled and not for any reason other than for its own sake, which can be seen in the case of the war-and death-goddesses, and also in the case of Cú Chulainn in his frenzied state.

The latter also has a role to play in safeguarding against the Morrígan. Even though he can fall prey to the destructive impulse at times, he also manages to repel the Morrígan at other time by steadfast refusal to enter into any relationship with her. His method is resistance, keeping the destructive forces at bay through enormous physical and mental effort rather than balancing and utilising them.

The difference between controlled and uncontrolled destruction is a theme mentioned already in the Indian context. Śiva destroys the whole universe at the end of the era but he is also the creator and the maintainer of the universe, balancing all these aspects perfectly within himself. He is thus in an ideal position

to be a partner for Kālī and manages to pacify her and restore order. Remember how he transforms himself into a crying child in order to stop her wild rampage which threatens the whole world. We notice here that his method of pacification is quite different from the Dagda's: the Dagda has a sexual relationship with the Morrígan which, according to Irish ideology, transfers the female's loyalty to the male. Śiva, on the other hand, appeals to Kālī as a child to his mother, making himself utterly vulnerable to her which seemingly appeals to a more tender streak in her nature and softens her approach. It is worthwhile to point to a development of this theme of male vulnerability, designed to check Kālī's excesses. It occurs in later literature and is also frequently depicted in Bengali iconography. Again the scene is utter carnage due to Kālī's wild dancing. Śiva throws himself down among the corpses, looking like a corpse himself. When Kālī recognizes him in this position she is so taken aback that she stops her wild rampage and transforms herself into a more benign form. Śiva thus successfully limits the extent of Kālī's destruction and restores order by effecting a transformation of the wild aspects of her nature to the more benevolent, caring aspects. This is yet another step on the way to taming this fearsome lady.

In a similar fashion, the tradition shapes Kālī in such a way that she becomes a part of Śiva's wife, Pārvatī, who is completely devoted to her husband. Here, the sexual element comes into play but it is not with Kālī directly. While Kālī is part of Pārvatī, she is controlled and only springs into action when needed in battle. Otherwise she 'lies dormant', so to speak, within Pārvatī. Thus, Kālī appears only when it is appropriate, in other words, there is an overall order which determines when it is proper for Kālī to do her work and when it is proper for her not to appear. This higher order is Śiva who incorporates all aspects within himself and represents ultimate reality. The problem of Kālī is thus resolved at the highest level of reality.

The same process is in action in *Devī-Māhātmya*, except that ultimate reality is pictured as female rather than male.

However, in both traditions, tension remains. In the Irish stories this is expressed by the temporary nature of the Morrígan's allegiance in *Cath Maige Tuired* and the open hostility and peculiar interdependence between her and the hero in *Táin Bó*

Cúailnge. In the Indian tradition we noticed how Kālī's relationship with Śiva is rarely an easy one. When involved with her, there is always a chance that his control fails and she carries him away in a wild rampage rather than being calmed by him. In both traditions it has been recognized that destructive events can occur at any time, that security is illusion, that life can never be predicted, that human beings always walk at the edge of an abyss, hovering between life and death at any given moment. How can the embodiment of such forces ever be truly controlled without denying the very nature of existence?

The aim of this comparison was to gain a new perspective on the Irish war- and death-goddesses. The question remains whether this has been achieved. To my mind, it can be answered in the affirmative provided it is general trends rather than specific details which are at issue. The existence of the fierce females expresses an awareness of some major themes centred on death and destruction.

First of all, the character and behaviour of the fierce goddesses in both cultures bear witness to a recognition of the awesome nature of violence, with anger as its cause and death at its natural result. Violence, even if limited originally, always bears the threat of intensifying until it is quite out of control. As René Girard puts it when he talks about the communicable nature of violence 'The slightest outbreak of violence can bring about a catastrophic escalation. ... There is no universal rule for quelling violence, no principle of guaranteed effectiveness. ... Inevitably, the moment comes when violence can only be countered by more violence. Whether we fail or succeed in our efforts to subdue it, the real victor is always violence itself. ... Violence is like a raging fire that feeds on the very object intended to smother its flames' (12). And about anger he writes 'Anger shows no distinctions in its dealings with men; it is at one with reciprocity, with the irresistible tendency of violence to turn against the unfortunate beings who have sought to shape it exclusively to their own uses' (13). Such a description of violence seems quite consistent with some of the features discussed in connection with the fierce females. While there are controls in place, some stories or parts of stories show that the controls are not always effective and that their wild behaviour can sweep them away. The very being who was called upon to defend order turns against order itself and causes chaos. The destruction of all there is seems only a natural

extension from the observations of the dynamic of violence. The only victory lies with the violent female herself.

The second theme concerns fear. It has been noticed that a greater or lesser part of the war-goddesses strategy depends on inspiring fear and we have observed the different responses of the warriors who are either overcome by it or become enraged and double their efforts. Some of the techniques used by the war-goddesses could well stem from the actual experience of war itself. One example is noise. Noise is a practically universal method, serving 'to unman one's opponents and invigorate one's supporters', to use P. Mac Cana's words (14). It has become apparent from the above study that the war-goddesses in both cultures are very noisy beings indeed and the effect can be devastating. Another example is the attempt to create a horrible and frightening exterior to deter the enemy which is used to this very day - I noticed with great surprise the painted fighter-jets used by the US airforce in the gulf war. The painting transformed an ordinary plane into a monstrous apparition. And monstrous means ugly, abnormal, exaggerated - just like the fierce females with their hag-like looks, their weird postures, their half-human, half-animal features. Further, the enemy has to realise that killing has been done before - hence the custom of displaying trophies. The fierce females are closely associated with spoils and skulls and bloody limbs. The signal is clear to anyone who is unlucky enough to observe. Words are important, too, and seem to have a power to destroy as much as weapons. Threats and mockery as well as more supernatural techniques such as spells are widely attested in the Irish stories though absent in the Indian tales. It can be argued that the fierce female's eery laughter can be classed as mockery, although it has wider ramifications. We could say, therefore, that the techniques of intimidation and the responses of the observers/participants are similar in both cultures.

It is also significant that both traditions have associated female beings with these forces of violence. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the origin of the Indian fierce deities on the one hand, and the Christian influence on the Irish otherworldly females on the other hand, any possibility of ever coming to a satisfactory explanation as to why these figures are female is far removed. Many different strands must have come together in the making of these images. We have certainly

testified to misogynist tendencies within both traditions which would hint that it may have been relatively easy to associate negative characteristics with female deities.

At another level altogether, the fierce females could also be regarded as the dark mirror-image of the nurturing, benevolent female figures. Taking life is the reverse of giving life, death the other side of birth. As Kinsley writes in 'The Encyclopedia of Religions' about Kālī: 'She represents the other face of the divine feminine in Hinduism, namely, the insatiable hunger of the many fecund and life-giving goddesses whose energies must be constantly replenished and re-invigorated by blood-sacrifices' (14). The Irish material does not explicitly make this deep connection of life actually feeding on death, although the example of the crows may be a hint of such understanding. However, even the most cursory reading of Irish tales shows that females are understood as belonging to two main types: the benevolent, often beautiful, nurturing, life-giving female and the hostile, often ugly, weakening female whose business it is to take life. Some of the stories deliberately 'play' with the aspects of one to express the other. Morrigan as beautiful girl and giver of milk in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* seems benevolent until she laughs at the hapless hero who believed her while the ugly hags threaten death but reveals her beauty if treated well.

In other words, there is a sense in the Irish tradition that the two forms are connected at a deep level, even if it is only because one extreme implies its opposite.

Connected to this issue is another characteristic which is shared by both traditions. It is the lack of definition evident in female deities/figures as a whole. Kinsley is adamant in his denial of the idea that femaleness is in itself a defining characteristic and that completely different goddesses can be reduced to manifestations of a Great Goddess, while such a process does not take place in the case of male gods. He writes: 'Kālī can be shown to have an identity of her own, quite distinct from all other deities in the tradition, and this identity may not be reduced to her sex' (15). However, I would agree with Emily Kearns who writes: 'But his case has met with reservations from many scholars, and rightly so. It is a useful corrective of the view which seeks to identify any goddess willy-nilly with

the Goddess, which certainly will not be sufficient for analytical purposes. At the same time, we must recognize that precisely that view has been influential in forming the Goddess tradition, from the *Devī-Māhātmya* to the present day' (16). After stating the case that goddesses are and are not differentiated from each other she asks the question: But why should it be that the divine feminine is more easily perceived as unitary than the masculine? The answer may be that from a male-dominated perspective, to be female is in itself a sufficient divergence from the norm, without considering distinctions of individuality' (17).

A similar impression can be gained from the Irish material. While the male heroes are clearly defined and rarely present us with difficulties of identification, the same cannot be said of the female figures. Not only are all the names interchangeable, but it was also found that the strings of names attached to female beings do not reveal any more information but simply reinforce their hostile role, while the string of names attached to the Dagda passes on more details regarding his nature and function. This becomes quite clear through the response of the other characters present. While Cú Chulainn is simply more bewildered, Indech's daughter manages to grasp who the Dagda is and make use of her knowledge (18). The Irish female figures remain essentially elusive, out of control.

This quality may have contributed to making them candidates for the personification of chaotic, destructive forces. Someone who cannot be named or clearly defined cannot be controlled and it is clear that the two issues go together quite naturally. If being female signals being potentially out of control it is not surprising that the method of trying to impose some restrictions onto the forces they represent is through the agency of a powerful male.

One model is to create relationship of equality where both are equally powerful but no excesses are allowed. The Dagda and the Morrígan are an example of this model, as is Śiva and Kālī when the latter is a form of *Pārvatī*. This allows the male protagonist to enlist the fierce females as helpers when appropriate. Another model is for the male to be capable enough to submit to her wishes without being obliterated and thus bringing out her benevolent form. This can be clearly seen in the scenes where Śiva becomes a baby and pacifies Kālī, or when the contender to the kingship submits to the hag's wishes and transforms her into a beautiful

woman. A third way is to see the male in strenuous opposition, ever vigilant, ever protective. Cú Chulainn and the Morrígan exemplify this position. The Indian tradition does not seem to have a direct example involving Śiva and Kālī although it is implied that Śiva protects the world from Kālī's excesses. This last model is one which would only apply if Kālī were truly an Asura, which she is not, despite her demonic features. Finally, there is the possibility of subduing her altogether which occurs in the later tales involving hags on the Irish side, but again has no Indian equivalent involving Kālī.

After having arrived at some parallels between the traditions the question of how to understand the Irish figures at a deeper level spring to mind once more. If my interpretation of the material has any validity, it is clear that the Otherworldly females concerned with death and war in the Irish textual tradition express deep, existential concerns. Some perennial wisdom may be on offer here about the way humans should deal with violence, destruction, anger and fear, how both resistance and co-operation is dangerous and how the outcome, when faced with these powerful forces, can never be predicted. Given the fact that the Indian stories are part of a fully functional religious system, it is interesting to see the broad similarities with what is usually termed 'literary figures' on the Irish side of the comparison. One wonders whether these 'literary figures' may be perfect images to express such deep existential issues, lending these figures a validity which is religious in the broadest sense of the word.

Notes to Chapter 9:

- 1) Siegel, L. 'Laughing matters' p.110
- 2) see Saptika-parva where the dying men are described as dishevelled. Also the description of the grieving Kaurava women in Mbh.2(28)71; p.166.
- 3) O'Flaherty, W.D. 'Hindu Myths' (London, 1975) p.205-6
- 4) TBC2 ll 1736
- 5) TBC1, l. 4076
- 6) DM 9.3-4
- 7) *ibid.* 9.21b
- 8) 'Laughing matters', p.96
- 9) Tymoczko, M. 'The Semantic Field for Early Irish Terms for Black Birds' (Celtic Language, Celtic Culture)
- 10) *ibid.* p.161-2
- 11) In the analysis of the Indian material we noted another component in the cluster of ideas comprising hunger-devouring-devastation, ie the role of anger as a causal factor. While rage and anger certainly comes into the picture in the Irish evidence, it could not conceivably be related to the hunger and devouring in the same way as has transpired from the Indian texts
- 12) Gerard, R. 'Violence and the Sacred' p.30/1
- 13) *ibid.* p.255
- 14) Eliade, M. (chief-editor) 'The Encyclopaedia of Religion' vol.6, p.52
- 15) Kinsley, D. 'The Sword and the Flute' (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1975) p.84
- 16) Kearns, E. 'Indian Myth' in Larrington, C. 'The Feminist Companion to Mythology' (London, 1992) p.222
- 17) *ibid.* p.223
- 18) see discussion in Sayers, W. 'Supernatural Pseudonyms' *Emania* 12 (1994) p.49-60

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ABBREVIATIONS:

CMT	Cath Maige Tuired
CT	Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh
DM	Devī-Māhātmya
DIL	Dictionary of the Irish Language
IHK	Irische Helden und Königssage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert
IT	Irische Texte
ITS	Irish Text Society
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
Mbh	Mahābhārata
RC	Revue Celtique
RFC	Reicne Fothaid Canainne
SC	Studia Celtica
SGS	Scottish Gaelic Studies
SH	Studia Hibernica
TBC	Táin Bó Cúailnge
TBDC	Togail Bruidne Da Choca
TBDD	Togail Bruidne Da Derga
TLS	Todd Lecture Series
ZCP	Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie