



Scoil an Léinn Cheiltigh · Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
School of Celtic Studies · Maynooth University



The Fifth International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales

18–20 March 2016

John Hume Lecture Theater 4 (North Campus)
Maynooth University



Contact and registration: ulidia5@nuim.ie

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Ulidia 5 Artwork by Niall Fitzpatrick (niadha@eircom.net)

Registration

Registration is through email. Please send a registration note to ulidia5@nuim.ie giving your name and stating if you wish to attend the conference dinner. Payment should be made on arrival and should be made in cash (Euro only) or by cheque. We do not have the facilities to process card payments.

Registration fee: 3 days: €50
1 day: €20

Students/unwaged fee: 3 days: €20
1 day: €10

The fee includes teas/coffees, Saturday and Sunday lunch, and the Saturday evening wine reception.

Conference dinner: €35

The conference dinner will take place at 20.45 on Saturday 19 March in the restaurant *Avenue* on Main Street Maynooth.

As places are limited, early booking is strongly recommended.

Conference Location

Maynooth University has a North and a South Campus. Lectures will take place in the **John Hume Building** on the North Campus. Delegates who are staying on campus should check in at the Conference Centre which is in the South Campus. A map of the campus can be accessed under: <http://www.nuim.ie/campus-life/campus-map>.



Accommodation

Some regular ensuite rooms are available through the Campus Accommodation Service at a cost of €49 per night. College rooms with shared bathroom facilities are also available at a cost of €29 per night. Booking should be made through the University's Conference and Accommodation Centre (<https://www.maynoothcampus.com/>; telephone: +353 (0)1 708 6400), with reference to *Ulidia 5*, using the voucher ULCONF_11/15.

Rooms can also be reserved at the nearby Glenroyal Hotel, a ten-minute walk from the University (<http://glenroyalhotelkildare.com>; info@glenroyal.ie; telephone +353 (0)1 629 0909).

Getting to Maynooth

Maynooth lies 24km west of Dublin, is well served by commuter train and public bus, and is adjacent to the N4 motorway. For those using **public transport**, please consult the following link to the NUI Website which gives fuller information as well as timetables <http://www.nuim.ie/location/>.

For those wishing to **drive** from any of the Dublin ferry ports or from any other location in Ireland, the following link to the Automobile Association's Route Planner should be of use http://www2.aaireland.ie/routes_beta/.

Those who arrive in **Dublin Airport** should take the Airport Hopper: <http://www.airport-hopper.ie/maynooth-route--timetable-page.html>. Alternatively, take the bus to the city centre (O'Connell St.) and from there the train to Maynooth from the nearby Connolly Station. Train timetables and maps are available on the Irish Rail Website: <http://www.irishrail.ie/>. A **taxi service** is available from the Airport to Maynooth at a cost of c. €45.

Parking

Guests staying in the on-campus accommodation can use the parking area at the back of St Mary's House (South Campus) for an additional €2 per day. When entering the South Campus, drive to the right and keep to the left; at the barrier, press the intercom to gain access to the reception. You will receive further information at the reception.

All other guests arriving by car, please note that parking on the North Campus is free on the days of the conference. For further information see: <https://www.nuim.ie/location/parking-traffic-management> and <http://campusservices.nuim.ie/traffic/index.shtml>.

Programme

Friday 18 March

8:30–9:30 Registration
(John Hume Building 1st Floor)

Literary Aspects

9:30–10:00 Abigail Burnyeat (University of Edinburgh)
Last (Wo)man Standing: The Internal Chronology of Ulster Cycle Death Tales

10:00–10:30 Michael Clarke (NUI Galway)
The Barbarity of the Ulstermen (Mesca Ulad)

10:30–11:00 Marion Deane (Dublin)
Feis Tigi Becfholtaig: King Conchobar's Gradual Apprehension of Reality

11:00–11:30 Daniel Watson (Maynooth University)
The Ends of the Earth: Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni and Augustinian Historiography

11:30–12:00 Tea break

12:00–13:00 Plenary
Máire Herbert (University College Cork)
Christianity and the Táin

13:00–14:30 Lunch

Literary Aspects (cont.)

14:30–15:00 Elizabeth Gray (Harvard University)
Raven and Wolf, Satirist and Fénnid: Defining Deirdre in Longes mac n-Uislenn

Cú Chulainn

15:00–15:30 Tiziana Soverino (University College Dublin)
Bid Glondáth a ainm co bráth: Place-Iore in Cú Chulainn's Heroic Biography

15:30–16:00 Mary Leenane (Maynooth University)
Tracing Cú Chulainn's Characterisation in the Ulster Cycle

16:00–16:30 Tea break

Cú Chulainn (cont.)

16:30–17:00 Thomas O'Donnell

Cú Chulainn and the Child's Body in Táin Bó Cúailgne

Contextualising the Ulster Cycle

17:00–17:30 Ulrike Roider (Universität Innsbruck)

Táin Bó Froích and Cáin Lánamna



Saturday 19 March

Comparative Mythology

9:30–10:00 Phillip Bernhardt-House (Skagit Valley College, WA)

Cracked Cosmology, Escaped Eschatology: Averting Apocalypse in Echtra Nerai

10:00–10:30 Gaël Hily (Université de Rennes 2)

Lug and Cú Chulainn, Performing Magical Acts during Warfare

10:30–11:00 María Lezama Eirín (Venezuela)

Hero, War and Society in the Táin Bó Cuailnge

11:00–11:30 Tatyana Mikhailova (Moskovskij Gosudarstvennij Universitet)

White Birds of Ulster: Some Germanic and Slavonic Parallels

11:30–12:00 Tea break

12:00–13:00 Plenary

Ralph O'Connor (University of Aberdeen)

The Ulster Cycle as Historiography or Fiction: Theoretical Challenges and Literary-Historical Reflections

13:00–14:30 Lunch

Comparative Mythology (cont.)

14:30–15:00 Garrett Olmsted (Bluefield State College)

Earliest Origins of the Táin

Linguistics

15:00–15:30 Patricia Ronan (Université de Lausanne)

The Presentation of Conflict Talk in Texts from the Ulster Cycle of Tales

Reception

15:30–16:00 Cameron Wachowich (NUI Galway)

Anglo-Norman Uses of the Ulster Cycle: The Case of John de Courcy's Irish Lay

16:00–16:30 Tea break

Reception (cont.)

16:30–17:00 Kate Louis Mathis (University of Edinburgh)

Rewriting the 'Compassionate House-wife': Two Radical Lives and Two Plays about Deirdre

17:00–17:30 Breandán Ó Cróinín (Mary Immaculate College Limerick)

Modern Irish Retellings of Tales from the Ulster Cycle

17:30–18:00 Susan Gallagher (Houston, TX)

Too Young, Too Brave and Too Beautiful. Telling the Ulster Cycle

18:30–20:00 Reception and Launch of Ollam. Festschrift for Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (Staff Common Room, Arts Building)

20.45 Conference Dinner

The Avenue, Main Street Maynooth



Sunday 20 March

Contextualising the Ulster Cycle

9:30–10:00 Ralph Kenna (Coventry University)

Maths Meets Myths: Network Analysis of the Táin Bó Cúailnge

10:00–10:30 Denis Casey (Maynooth University)

Textual Problems with Mathematical Assessments of Relationship Networks in Medieval Literature (or Why the Numbers Don't Add up in Táin Bó Cúailnge)

10:30–11:00 Patrick MacCafferty (Universität Leipzig)

Aided Conchobair and Solar Eclipses

11:00–11:30 Kay Muhr (Queen's University Belfast)

Dáire, St Patrick and the Bull: Person, Place and Time

11:30–12:00 Tea break

12:00–13:00 Plenary

Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (Harvard University)

Comram na Tarb in Táin Bó Cúailnge

13:00–14:30 Lunch

Contextualising the Ulster Cycle (cont.)

14:30–15:00 Ulrike Roider (Universität Innsbruck)

Táin Bó Froích and Cáin Lánamna

15:00–15:30 Maxim Fomin (University of Ulster)

Dá síortha gus an Innia soir: What Did Cú Chulainn Say to Conchobhar?



Abstracts

Phillip A. Bernhardt-House

Cracked Cosmology, Escaped Eschatology: Averting Apocalypse in Echtra Nerai

Comparisons between the Greek epic tradition and the Irish *Táin Bó Cúailnge* have been a mainstay of modern scholarship, as well as noteworthy parallels noticed by the medieval Irish writers themselves. However, one aspect of it that has been absent thus far is the possibility that both of these wider traditions have in them eschatological implications. The tossing of Eris' golden apple, which sets off the events which lead to the Trojan War, takes place at the wedding-feast of the Titanic goddess Thetis and the mortal Peleus, who are the parents of Achilles; but, they are married because it was prophesied that if Zeus or Poseidon had a child by Thetis, that child would overthrow the Olympian gods. Zeus skillfully averts the eschatological overthrow of his own generation of deities by doing this, but then causes the Trojan War, which is extremely costly to humanity. So, too, in *Echtra Nerai*, the eventual result of one of the most unusual tales of otherworld interaction results in the birth of one of the bulls of the great cattle-raid. Nera's adventure is a series of gradual transgressions against ritual protocols that serves to undermine cosmic reality itself, and the breaking down of linear time is the result of these transgressions, rather than a feature of the otherworld in a particularly creative and vivid form. Not unlike the marriage of Thetis, so too does Nera's adventure result in a hieros gamos between him and his otherworldly lover, to heal the damages caused by the unrightful kingship and ritual offenses of Ailill of Connacht and maintain the integrity of the cosmos where it had been earlier compromised.



Abigail Burnyeat

Last (Wo)man Standing: The Internal Chronology of Ulster Cycle Death Tales

Thomas Clancy's exploration (2008) of the anthology of death tales of Ulster Cycle heroes in NLS MS 72.1.40 developed previous structural and genre-based approaches to the *aideda* to place new emphasis on the manuscript collection as a locus for linked and interrelated tales. In this paper I will extend this approach to the 72.1.40 anthology to consider the relative chronology expressed in the tales in the collection and their intertextual relationships. I will explore the sequencing of deaths across the group of texts as a key to reading the tales within this specific compilatory context, and as a potential witness to the ways in which both compilers and audience engaged with the broader contextual setting of Ulster Cycle narrative.

Denis Casey

Textual Problems with Mathematical Assessments of Relationship Networks in Medieval Literature (or Why the Numbers Don't Add up in Táin Bó Cúailnge)

This paper seeks to highlight some methodological problems that arise during attempts to statistically analyse character networks within medieval literature — as observed from the vantage point of literary and historical scholarship. Using the example of a statistical analysis of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* published in 2012 (P. MacCarron and R. Kenna, 'Universal properties of mythological networks', *EPL* 99 (2012), DOI: 10.1209/0295-5075/99/28002), I will demonstrate that failure to properly define the narrative under scrutiny results in incorrect character totals and incorrect character-link totals. This renders the comparison of the narrative's construed networks with those of other narratives or real world networks dubious, and speculation of the historicity of the narratives null and void.



Michael Clarke

The Barbarity of the Ulstermen (Mesca Ulad)

The depiction of heroic action in the Ulster Cycle includes much that seems grotesque and bombastic. A case in point here is *Mesca Ulad*. On the face of it, the chaotic and disorderly behaviour in this narrative seems like a burlesque parody of heroic conventions. Strikingly, within the tale the word *barbarda* 'barbarous' and its derivatives are repeatedly applied to the Ulaid.

This paper will examine the uses of *barbarda* and related words against the background of the fact that the characters of the Ulster Cycle were assigned to a precisely-defined stage of pseudo-historical time. In terms of the traditional parallelism between the ages of the world and the ages of man, these people belong on the cusp of the Fifth and Sixth Ages; but they can be seen as a throwback to the adolescent 'swollenness' (*borrfad*) of the Third Age, the time of the exploits of Samson and Hercules, the Trojan War, and (e.g. in the *Annals of Inisfallen*) the warlike exploits of the Tuatha Dé at Mag Tuired. More broadly, this approach may shed a useful sidelight on the literary relationship between the Ulster Cycle and *Togail Troí*.



Marion Deane

Feis Tigi Becfholtaig: *King Conchobar's Gradual Apprehension of Reality*

The tale of Cuchulainn's conception and birth, *Compert Con Culainn* (CCC), comes in two recensions, versions 1 and 2. Version 2, though also referred to as CCC, has the alternative title *Feis Tigi Becfholtaig* (FTB). FTB is an enlarged form of version 1. The first version recounts a triple sequence of death and reincarnations. FTB illustrates, within one conception and birth episode, how a king comes to terms with his own political and spiritual rebirth.

It to this process, conveyed by means of an *acallam*, that my paper is addressed. The convention of a dialogue between a human and supernatural being is exploited to express an internal debate during which the king arrives at a knowledge of what truth entails. This knowledge has both a personal and a public character: it is at once internal and a necessary preliminary to his public proclamation of truth. My emphasis is to illustrate how his encounter with the supernatural in the pagan otherworld reflects concepts about the nature of truth that have striking affinities with Christian orthodoxy. I will examine how the correspondence of understanding and reality - as it is defined in classical and Christian theology - is offered as a model of truth.



Maxim Fomin

Dá síortha gus an Innia soir: *What Did Cú Chulainn Say to Conchobhar?*

The Early Modern Irish saga *Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh* is a challenging task for its researchers. The saga owes much to its Old Irish antecedent *Longes mac nUislenn*, yet presents a different view on the story of Deirdre and has been a subject of much debate. The narrative is contained in ninety manuscript copies, with a further thirty-four fragmentary ones, divided by its editor into six major recensions. For the purposes of my talk, I will look at the conversation between Conchobhar and Cú Chulainn in the tale when the latter declines the Ulster king's request to fetch the exiled sons of Uisneach for him. Cú Chulainn's reply to the king's question contains an intriguing collocation *Dá síortha gus an Innia iartharraig soir* "If you were to search as far as the distant India in the east". In my talk, I will discuss the *variae lectiones* of the collocation contained in the extensive MSS tradition of the text, as well as I will also look at the different ways India was depicted in the late medieval and early Modern Irish literary tradition which had been reflected in these readings.



Susan Gallagher

Too Young, Too Brave and Too Beautiful. Telling the Ulster Cycle

No one can really know the Ulster Cycle without hearing it told aloud. To be appreciated fully, the stories must be encountered in the immediate, shared, person-to-person experience of oral storytelling. The tales demand to be told. Ulster Cycle stories were born in the oral tradition and developed over many years by the learned class, who preserved them in manuscripts and proclaimed them in formal assemblies. The tales endure today not only in written form, but also in a living tradition of oral telling. These stories, told aloud, are powerful.

Even when presented to an audience that is unaware of the cultural and historical context of the Ulster Cycle, the stories work as pure narrative — as myth. They continue to speak to universal human concerns, remaining vital and able to enthrall. Scholars and experts also will find that listening to the Ulster Cycle is valuable and offers fresh insights.

I propose to tell a 15-minute story excerpted from my retelling of the Ulster Cycle, then to speak for 10 minutes on my approach to adapting this material for modern listeners, and to conclude with 5 minutes for questions.



Elizabeth A. Gray

Raven and Wolf, Satirist and Fénnid: Defining Deirdre in Longes mac n-Uislenn

At key turning points in her life, Deirdre operates as satirist and *fénnid*, challenging Conchobor and calling into question his judgment and capacity as king. Closer examination of these categories and their associated imagery illuminates Deirdre's complex narrative role. One persistent characteristic of her identity is the union of opposites: Deirdre appears repeatedly as both victim and aggressor, both prey and predator. Employing direct imagery as well as 'virtual' imagery evoked within a cloud of cultural associations, the tale can be read both forwards (for plot) and backwards (for interpretation of imagery and events). This analysis compares and contrasts aspects of animal imagery, the function of satire, and implicit references to age-grade customs in relation to the central tension between Deirdre and Conchobor. Examples include a riddling element in Celtic marriage ritual and the association of *fíanas* (as a way of life for young men preceding marriage and *trebad* 'settlement on land') with wolf-imagery. Attention is also given to the symbiotic relationship between ravens (and other corvids) and wolves in the natural world as an external field of reference for the tale's audience.



Miranda Hales [Cancelled!]

Standing Stones in the Ulster Cycle

This paper adds to the recent body of literature that analyses how Ireland's prehistoric past was understood by the Early Medieval Irish by examining the symbolic meanings attributed to standing-stones within the Ulster Cycle. It becomes apparent that there is a rich seam of information to be mined within these tales which can both illuminate our understanding of how the Irish sited their myths within the prehistoric landscape, and further nuance our readings of certain episodes within the Ulster cycle tales. From a close reading of key passages involving standing-stones in *Táin Bó Cúailgne*, I suggest that standing-stones are definitively associated with single combat, in a motif of similar significance to 'combat at the ford'. Standing stones are sites of metamorphosis, persistently identified with the human body, and there are layered associations with illusion and deception, royalty and the Otherworld, (as well as a more obvious association with death and burial) woven through the text, which an educated medieval audience would have been expected to perceive. By 'reading in' standing-stones as a motif with these symbolic connotations we can deepen our understanding of the significance of place and the prehistoric landscape to the Ulster Cycle.



Gaël Hily

Lug and Cú Chulainn, Performing Magical Acts during Warfare

The biography of god Lug and hero Cú Chulainn, father and son, reveals a number of common elements on which Elizabeth A. Gray sheds some light in a study published in 1989–90. The aim of this paper is to go one step further in this comparison, with a focus on the well-known Irish literary feature of standing on one leg, with one eye and one arm. Actually Lug takes this particular posture during the battle of Mag Tuired when he performs the ritual of *glám dícénn* (CMT §129 and CMT2 741–45); as regards Cú Chulainn, he appears in this posture during the cattle-raid of Cooley when he makes *ogam* (TBC LL 457-60). While these two magical acts are not identical in essence, a precise analysis of the context and of this posture could reveal similarities in the behavior of both characters in a situation of warfare.



Ralph Kenna

Maths Meets Myths: Network Analysis of the Táin Bó Cúailnge

In recent years, statistical physicists have developed new techniques to study a wide variety of complex systems, including social networks. Here, we explain what statistical physicists mean by 'complex system' and why the Ulster Cycle may be considered as such. After a very brief outline of the long relationship between statistical physics and the social sciences, we contextualise network theory as opening a new bridge to interdisciplinary collaborations between statistical physics and the humanities. We explain the techniques involved in complex network theory and report on an application to study networks of characters appearing in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. We determine a number of mathematical characteristics of the social network underlying the society depicted in the narrative. This allows us to make quantitative comparisons to other networks, some real, some fictitious and some coming from other epic traditions. In this manner, we introduce a new way to analyse old material and to develop new perspectives which may help shed mathematical light on the society underlying *The Táin*.



Mary Leenane

Tracing Cú Chulainn's Characterisation in the Ulster Cycle

Cú Chulainn is somewhat unusual in that he appears, fairly prominently, in a substantial number of texts composed at various times across a 600-year period. Unsurprisingly, we find that his characterisation evolves and develops in the context of a changing societal, religious, and political environment. All of this makes for the creation of a relatively complex figure, presenting challenges to those attempting to appreciate him. This paper will look at how best we might decipher the essence of his personification with specific reference to the narrative expression of key life-events in texts such as *Compert Con Culainn*, *Tochmarc Emire*, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The development of his persona outside of this context will be briefly considered with a view to providing an insight into the textual creation of characters in the medieval period.



María Gabriela Lezama Eirín

Hero, War and Society in the Táin Bó Cúailnge

The investigation that gives form to the paper we wish to present at *Ulidia 5* intends to approach Irish epic literature through the analysis of tales such as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and other stories that serve as context to it. We have selected this particular set of texts because in our opinion they evidence certain matches with some of their Indo-European counterparts. The paper is divided in two main parts, the first one consisting of a theoretical approach to the matter of orality and literacy in the epic, because by examining the most significant aspects of Indo-European epic tradition and marking their specificity against other traditions, we try to understand its relation to the Irish phenomenon and the literary tradition that it entails.

On the other hand, the second part focuses on some of the features that represent the epic genre, since it is, in a way, a product of its own time and context and by being so, it shows, through its tales, how heroic societies were organized and their attitude towards war, scope within which the Hero, often protagonist, grows and thrives.



Patrick McCafferty

Aided Conchobair and Solar Eclipses

In *Aided Conchobair*, the Ulster Cycle king, Conchobar mac Neasa, was with his druids when the sun darkened and the moon turned red. Conchobar asked how the sun could possibly go dark on the day of a full moon. When told that the elements were changing because of Christ's crucifixion, Conchobar became angry, forcing the brain-ball to burst from his head and baptising him with his own blood. The tale clearly has a Christian origin, transforming one of Ulster's legendary heroes into Ireland's first Christian martyr. *Aided Conchobair* also demonstrates an awareness of the causes of solar eclipses. Further examination shows that the tale contains further symbols of eclipse. This paper will explore the significance of eclipses to early Irish society – both Christian and non-Christian – as reflected in computistics, literature, art and archaeology. In doing so, the paper will help to contextualise *Aided Conchobair*.



Kate Louise Mathis

Rewriting the 'Compassionate House-wife': Two Radical Lives and Two Plays about Deirdre

Between 1880 and the onset of the First World War more than twenty plays, novels and narrative poems were composed in which Deirdre's earliest role within the ninth-century Ulster Cycle tale *Longes mac n-Uislenn* was re-shaped by the writers of the Irish Literary Revival. Best-known in this regard from the work of W.B. Yeats (for whom she was Ulster's 'wise, compassionate house-wife'), Augusta Gregory and J.M. Synge, Deirdre's portrayal was also central to two highly unusual plays composed by London-based dramatist Michael Field – pseudonym of Katherine Harris Bradley (1846–1914) and her niece Edith Cooper (1862–1913) – and Eva Gore-Booth (1870–1926), sister of Constance Markievicz and campaigner for women's suffrage. The women shared an acquaintance with Yeats, and were influenced initially by his own enthusiasm for medieval literature, but the work they produced drew greater inspiration from personal circumstance and, in the case of the Fields, from their highly complex relationship with the creation and maintenance of their literary persona. This paper will assess their *Deirdre*, published posthumously in 1918, alongside Eva's play *The Buried Life of Deirdre* (1930), whose presentation of its central character epitomizes the radical feminist ideology espoused in the journal *Urania*, co-founded by Eva in 1916.



Tatyana A. Mikhailova

White Birds of Ulster: Some Germanic and Slavonic Parallels

The saga *Serglige Con Culainn* begins with an episode 'white birds of the Otherworld', present also in *Compert Con Culainn*, *Aislinge Óenguso*, *Aided Lugdach ocus Derbforgaill* etc. (cf. Cross T. P. Motif-index: B 172). In his edition of the *Death of Lugaid*, ALD, (*Ériu* 5) C. Marstrander gives a comparison between the realization of this motif (esp. 'swan-maiden') in ALD and *Serglige Con Culainn*, supposing that "the idea of human beings in the form of animals, more especially birds in the case of women, and their return to human shape when struck by a missile, is characteristically Germanic <...> and we must conclude that the Celts had brought it with them into Britain from the Continent, where they had acquired it from their Germanic neighbors". I presume, it is only one aspect of the 'white-birds motif' in Irish saga narrative. Its function in the Ulster cycle of tales is really more complicated.

We have to analyze a strange reaction of Cu Culainn to Leborcham's 'simple' words: "The women of Ulster would be well pleased if younder birds were given to them by thy hand" ("Cannot the harlots of Ulster find any other but us...!!!"). We have to make a comparison of white birds from SCC with strange birds from *Compert Con Culainn*: the transformation-motif in this text is implicit, but the birds are represented as mediators

with other words. Even more, with any doubt the first function of the birds in CCC is to bring a marvel boy. So, we have to make a comparison with Old Germanic folk rite 'to kill a swan' the marriage day and with traditional Russian tale *Swans-geese*. We have to demonstrate old Indo-European roots of the beliefs that white birds bring children, but at the same time they could take them away in their Otherworld realm. The main focus of the paper is directed to the narrative technic and strategy of the compiler: in SCC it is based on the background knowledge of the listener who does not know a 'stork innovation', but for whom a white bird represents a symbol of fertility and sexual attraction. The sub-motif 'white birds with a golden chain' will also be analyzed.



Kay Muhr

Dáire, St Patrick and the Bull: Person, Place and Time

In the Ulster Cycle a significant character called Dáire is the keeper of the Brown Bull in Cúalnge, while in the Lives of St Patrick Dáire holds and then gives the saint the territory of Armagh. In the preface to the *Senchas Már*, Dáire appears again, as a king, apparently of Ulster, while in recent Armagh folklore he is still linked to the bull. Who is he, why does he appear in the stories, and what does he signify there?



Breandán Ó Cróinín

Modern Irish Retellings of Tales from the Ulster Cycle

Although there have been many attempts at producing Modern Irish versions of various texts from the Ulster Cycle, until recently nothing has been produced in Irish that could be said to match the achievement of Thomas Kinsella's celebrated English language version of *Táin Bó Cúailgne* (*The Táin*, 1969) which, of course, is at once a translation and a reimagining of that renowned text. This paper, however, will focus on the remarkable work of Pádraig Ó Cíobháin whose Modern Irish retellings of tales from the Ulster Cycle in *Dréachta Chrích Fódla* (2007) are surely amongst the finest and most imaginative prose texts written in Irish in recent years. I hope to show that in producing distinctive new versions of these Rúraíocht texts Ó Cíobháin is continuing the long tradition of those scribes and scholars who, over the centuries, have rewritten and reimagined many such texts and, in so doing, he reclaims them for readers of literature in Irish.



Thomas O'Donnell

Cú Chulainn and the Child's Body in Táin Bó Cúailgne

As Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has pointed out “the body is a pervasive focus of attention in *Táin Bó Cúailgne*”. The most central body in the *Táin* is that of Cú Chulainn, the beautiful boy loved by all who can transform into a hideous monster when in his *riastrad*. In this paper I wish to examine this body through the lens of its childish nature. The actions of the hero stand in contrast to the way in which other characters refer to him as a ‘beardless boy’ and ‘only the age of a grown girl’. However, viewing his body as that of a child and in light of their physiological imbalances and pathologies, allows us to view this much studied character in a new way. This paper will also address the way other children in the *Táin* are presented. Cú Chulainn has many coeval pro- and antagonists in the tale. As well as this, we can trace changes in his own the body by comparing his younger self, presented in the *macgnímrada*, with the hero as he appears during the raid itself. Understanding the way the young body is presented in the *Táin* helps us to understand the way this young character acts.



Garrett Olmsted

Earliest Origins of the Táin

Approximately half of the episodes of the LU/YBL versions of the *Táin* can be dated to the ninth century. Although the language of the other episodes is clearly later, the ninth-century episodes of the *Táin* do not represent the beginning of the history of the tale. Crucial episodes of the *Táin* are outlined in earlier seventh-century Archaic Irish poems: *Conailla Medb michuru*, *Mórrígan rosc*, and *Verba Scáthaige*. However, these seventh-century poetic references do not form the earliest extant version of the tale. A narrative portrayal of a Gaulish version would appear to be engraved on the inner plates of the Gundestrup cauldron datable to around 80 BC, just as an earlier Gaulish version of *Fled Bricrend* would appear to be paraphrased briefly by Poseidonios. To determine what may be of earlier mythological origin in the Ulster Cycle a comparison is made between the names of the Irish characters in these tales and the apparently cognate names of Gaulish deities. Here one must include all of the tales of the Ulster Cycle and the *Dindsenchas*, and not just the few tales of the Túatha Dé Danann. The early Irish themselves made no such distinction in their stories between mythological and heroic categories. From the merger of the information from both Irish and Gaulish sources, a rich and complex picture of pagan Celtic religion emerges, which may in turn be compared to mythologies around the Indo-European world.



Jan Erik Rekdal [Cancelled!]

Aided Celtchair meic Uthechair: *Blaí and Celtchar and their Relation to King Conchobar*

In my paper the following questions will be discussed: What function do Blaí and Celtchar have in the tale? What does the tale's sophisticated construction tell us?



Ulrike Roider

Táin Bó Froích and Cáin Lánamna

The tales of the Ulster Cycle and the Irish law tracts frequently shed light on each other. Several scenes in the tale *Táin Bó Froích* become more understandable for the present day reader when we take into consideration what is known from the Irish law tract *Cáin Lánamna*. This is a tract on partner relationship of various kinds such as parents and children, foster parents and foster children, brothers and sisters, teachers and students, the ruler and his clan, church and laymen. The tract particularly focuses on marriage and divorce, listing and elaborating a series of possible marriage types ranking from high status marriages in the aristocracy down to low status marriages with an illegal character. Looking at the Irish law of women, some of the behavior of the characters in the tale becomes more transparent. That way, we can also resolve the inconsistency that at the beginning of the tale Fróech is said never to have married, whereas later on we hear that his wife and three sons have been carried off together with his cattle.



Patricia Ronan

The Presentation of Conflict Talk in Texts from the Ulster Cycle of Tales

This paper investigates how conflict talk is presented in texts pertaining to the Ulster Cycle of Tales. On the basis of select tales which represent verbal confrontation in the Ulster Cycle texts, the proposed paper analyses the conversational patterns that are used in the relevant Early Irish texts and determines in how far they correspond to known strategies in conflict talk (e.g. Grimshaw 1990) or in how far they must be seen as exaggerations or examples of satire (McLaughlin 2008).

References:

Grimshaw, A. D. 1990. *Conflict talk: Sociolinguistic investigations in conversations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McLaughlin, R. 2008. *Early Irish Satire*. Dublin: DIAS

Tiziana Soverino

Bid Glondáth a ainm co bráth: *Place-lore in Cú Chulainn's Heroic Biography*

Tochmarc Emire (henceforth TE) is a courtship tale which signals Cú Chulainn's coming of age. TE contains twenty-three place-name explanations — a striking amount. Both O'Curry and Sayers remarked the importance of *dindshenchas* material in the narrative. This onomastic material may be divided into three groups, which correspond to distinct stages in the development of Cú Chulainn as a martial hero.

However, the crucial role of onomastic episodes in TE is illuminated by an episode from the *Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn*. Cú Chulainn's complete ignorance of place-names in the *Boyhood Deeds* stands in stark contrast to his intimate knowledge of obscure toponyms in TE. Those onomastic passages, it will be argued, are part and parcel of Cú Chulainn's heroic biography, whose early stage they help to mark.



Cameron Wachowich

Anglo-Norman Uses of the Ulster Cycle: The Case of John de Courcy's Irish Lay

This presentation will deal with a poem in Classical Irish headed *Fuaigh an ceann ris an méidhe* that is preserved in *Leabhar Ua Maine* and was until recently unedited and untranslated. The poem, which runs to nearly two hundred quatrains, is descriptive of an invasion of Ireland by one Ioruath mac Adhnuaidh, identified as the *rí na hAfraice*. The poem is framed as a lament put into the mouth of Conall Cearnach concerning the decapitation of Cumhsgraidh Meann Macha, the son of Conchobhar. It begins with an elaborate account of the pre-Patrician conversion of the druid Cathbhaidh and goes on to recount the repulsion of Ioruath's invasion by the heroes of the Ulster Cycle. This presentation shall delve deeply into the literary and historical context of the poem. External evidence shall be presented in order to suggest that the text could possibly have been composed about one John de Courcy, a 12th century Anglo-Norman lord. Structural and thematic parallels with contemporaneous French *chansons de geste* will be highlighted and, finally, the uses of such a text by the Anglo-Norman establishment will be discussed in detail.



Daniel Watson

The Ends of the Earth: Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni and Augustinian Historiography

The typological connexions that *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* traces between Cú Chulainn and Christ have often been invoked in scholarship on the saga. By this point the Christological elements of its portrayal of Cú Chulainn have already been carefully described. Yet, while it remains an important contribution to demonstrate that its author saw a likeness between Cú Chulainn and Christ, this is not yet to say anything about the actual character of this likeness or its function within the world of the saga. One cannot assume the equality of likenesses simply because they are both, in some way, reminiscent of the same object. Progress in this direction requires that figure of Cú Chulainn in the saga be contextualized within the developments of Augustinian historiography in which it participates. By looking at *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* in light of the eschatology of St. Augustine and his various mediaries, such as Bede and Isidore of Seville, we will not only gain a more definite understanding of what Cú Chulainn's Christ-likeness means in the context of the saga, but how the saga contributes to the development of Augustinian historiography in medieval Ireland.

