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Love and Gender in Medieval Gaelic Saga

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MA (Hons), MRes

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Celtic and Gaelic	|	Ceiltis is Gàidhlig
School of Humanities	|	Sgoil nan Daonnachdan
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Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of love in medieval Gaelic secular tales. In particular, the focus is on tales written before medieval Gaelic literature experiences the influence of chivalric romance from the thirteenth century onwards. The idea that romantic love was not a concern in Gaelic literature before the appearance of chivalric literature from the twelfth century onwards is taken as a starting point for investigation. Beyond solely romantic love, the thesis takes an expansive approach, also examining religious and familial love. Instances of these different types of love in conflict with one another form nexus points for study. Particular attention is paid to how love is gendered. The saga texts being compared are approached through a literary critical lens informed by feminist and post-structuralist scholarship, along with the history of emotions.

The main body of the thesis comprises four areas. The first is a study of love terms in medieval Gaelic, setting out their semantic ranges and investigating their applications. Three types of love are then examined. The first is romantic love, covering phenomena such as men's lovesickness, women's love-in-absence, and interactions between the human and the Otherworldly. Love of the divine is then examined, manifestations of which range from maternal nursing, to fear of God, to sacrificing romantic fulfilment and earthly pleasures. The gendering of love of the divine is also scrutinised, taking in tropes of 'foolish' women and wild men. Finally, familial love is examined. An overview is given of familial and foster relationships in medieval Gaelic saga, followed by discussion of moments of loss in those contexts: through events animated by revenge and lamentation, some of the clearest examples of familial love are expressed.

Overall, it is shown that love was of concern to the creators of pre-chivalric medieval Gaelic saga. Love, in different forms, is portrayed with complexity and nuance in numerous saga texts. Love is also clearly gendered: women's and men's experiences of love are portrayed as different, causing different outcomes. There are also exceptions to gendered expectations in the texts, showing men and women as being capable of experiencing a full range of nuanced emotions relating to love. Further areas for research are then suggested.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Topic

Love, often understood by default as romantic love, is an understudied phenomenon in literary criticism of medieval Gaelic saga. Prominent twentieth-century scholars dismissed love's importance in early saga material. Instead, the notion has been established that it is not until the flourishing of *amour courtois* on the European continent that Gaelic authors became interested in such ideas, and as such, love is only readily apparent as a prominent theme in texts composed after this flourishing.[1] Although more recently a handful of articles have taken love as their theme, this thesis is the only long-form examination of love in early medieval Gaelic saga to date. Furthermore, it extends beyond scrutinising only romantic love, which is frequently seen as the only form of love which merits discussion.

This thesis also investigates the ways in which love is gendered in medieval Gaelic saga. First, a semantic study lays the groundwork for a comparative analysis. Specifically, a three-pronged approach is taken, looking at romantic love, religious love, and familial love. Such a comparative approach is useful: often we find loves in conflict, and examining instances of this conflict can inform us about both or all types of love involved in said conflict. In each chapter, a working definition of its type of love is provided, and used to examine expressions of love in relevant saga texts. Each chapter also investigates these moments of conflict between these three loves, seeing what can be gleaned about the loves in question. Overall, the thesis analyses the extent to which love is prevalent as a thematic concern in medieval Gaelic saga, particularly in texts which pre-date the popularity of chivalric romance in the twelfth century, and its seeming influence on Gaelic literature in the following centuries.

1.2 Context

Literary criticism of medieval Gaelic saga has existed for centuries, but there are particular academic areas that have influenced this thesis. In each chapter, the most relevant secondary literature is highlighted and reviewed. In this introduction, the focus is on broader movements within the field: namely, feminism, queer theory, and the history of emotions, all of which have particular relevance for the examination of love in early Gaelic saga, and have contributed to the approach of this thesis.

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[1] See, for instance, Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, trans., *A Celtic Miscellany: Translations from the Celtic Literatures*, Revised ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 91.

Feminist study of medieval Gaelic saga has risen to prominence in the past fifty years. Numerous articles have taken feminist approaches to saga and their characters, many of which will be referenced throughout this thesis. Key monographs have also been published. Lisa Bitel's *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* in 1996 and Joanne Findon's A *Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle* in 1997 ended the millennium with feminist consideration of medieval Gaelic saga in good health, and since then we have seen books such as Helen Oxenham's *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society* and the collection of critical essays *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*, amongst others.[2] The pinnacle (thus far) in terms of feminist scholarship of medieval Gaelic texts has been the publication in 2002 of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*.[3] The chapters centring on the early medieval period were edited by Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, and Máire Herbert, with Ní Dhonnchadha as the general editor for the medieval to modern section. The text runs to over 1450 pages and covers material from the early medieval to the late twentieth century. For our purposes, the roughly 300 pages of scholarship on medieval Gaelic literature, complete with the primary texts and their translations, make the publication an invaluable resource for the medieval Gaelic scholar. References to the work abound throughout this thesis.

Literary criticism in Celtic Studies is also beginning to see the impact of queer theory, frequently building on post-structuralist approaches. More attention is being afforded examples of texts which explore gender binaries, such as the recent new edition and translation of the tale of the Abbot of Drimnagh.[4] Scholars have offered new readings of key texts, such as examining *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cooley') through the lens of same-sex eroticism between characters such as Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad.[5] While monographs and anthologies have largely not yet materialised centred around queer theory and Celtic Studies, there are completed Masters theses, ongoing PhD theses, blog posts, and conference papers which have or are approaching medieval Gaelic saga through a queer lens.[6] In particular there has been an emphasis on re-reading texts and challenging the established readings upon which scholarship relies. This interest in the post-structuralist treatment of texts, as being open texts capable of supporting multiple readings,[7] is of definite interest to the study of love in medieval Gaelic saga, and forms an aspect of this thesis's approach.

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[2] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Joanne Findon, *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Helen Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016); *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, the New Middle Ages (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[3] *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. by Angela Bourke et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).

[4] *The Case of the Abbot of Drimnagh: A Medieval Irish Story of Sex-Change*, ed. and trans. by Tadhg Ó Siocháin, Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, 2 (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017). Cf. Barbara Hillers, 'The Abbot of Druimenaig [sic]: Genderbending in Gaelic Tradition,' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 15 (1995), 175-97. For comment, particularly on the queer elements of the tale, see Roan Runge, 'Review of Tadhg Ó Siocháin, *The Case of the Abbot of Drimnagh*', *Celtica*, 32 (2020), 274–79.

The history of emotions has also been developing as a field in the past forty years. Work on emotional communities has not been limited to the medieval, nor the Gaelic.[8] Celtic Studies is seeing the impact of this development, most recently in the work of Thomas C. O'Donnell on fosterage,[9] but there has been an interest in the medieval since the study of the history of emotions began:

> The growth of the history of emotions in the Middle Ages is, by now, not a new phenomenon. Since the field emerged in the 1980s, many commentators have taken to extending the history of emotions into the medieval period.[10]

O'Donnell's work on fosterage will inform the study of familial love in this thesis. The idea of tracing an emotion in various forms through texts is one self-evidently of interest when examining love and gender in medieval Gaelic saga. That said, it is to be noted that our focus is on the narrative world of the texts, not the lived reality of medieval Gaels; the emotional communities being examined are the the ones of the narrative world. As such, the ideas behind the history of emotions, rather than its specific methodologies, impact this thesis.

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[5] See, for instance, Sarah Sheehan, 'Fer Diad De-Flowered: Homoerotics and Masculinity in Comrac Fir Diad', in *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Maynooth 24-27 July 2005*, ed. by Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (Maynooth: An Sagart, 2009), pp. 54–65.

[6] See, for instance, Finn Longman, 'The Case for Queer Theory in Celtic Studies', *Finn Longman*, 2020 <https://finnlongman.com/2020/10/27/the-case-for-queer-theory-in-celtic-studies/> [accessed 8 May 2021], wherein they state: 'Queer theory draws on a post-structuralist approach, which tells us that we can have multiple, even contradictory readings of texts, because there is no single true reading.'

[7] On the term 'open text' see Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Advances in Semiotics (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979). As Eco stated: '*Every* work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal *performance*.' Ibid., p. 63.

[8] See Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), particiularly pp. 10-13.

[9] Thomas C. O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

[10] Ibid., p. 25.

This thesis, then, takes feminist scholarship, queer theory, and the history of emotions as fundamental building blocks. All three approaches are impacting Celtic Studies, and in particular, literary criticism of medieval Gaelic texts. That said, though this thesis has been informed by these three schools and their methodologies, it does not solely focus on one in particular. As such, the thesis might not cleave to any one approach as closely as some scholars might like. It is also worth noting that love as a topic has interested scholars in many fields, even specifically medieval love. We turn now to discussions of love in the scholarship of medieval Gaelic saga, and further afield.

1.3 Love in Medieval Gaelic Literature: ‘Received History’[11]

In his popular anthology *A Celtic Miscellany*, first published in 1951, Kenneth Jackson stated: ‘It is remarkable that love in itself plays a very small part in early Celtic literature.’[12] Jackson was not the only prominent twentieth-century scholar to express such an opinion.[13] The idea that *amour courtois* on the continent is responsible for love emerging as a theme in medieval Gaelic literature[14] is one that may answer the question as to why there has been to date no long-form examination of love in our early texts. There has, however, been more scholarship on love in medieval Gaelic literature in recent years: William Sayers’ 2008 article, for instance, on love and the lexicon.[15] Overall, however, love in its myriad forms has largely been neglected.

When scholars do look at love in medieval Gaelic saga it is often only romantic love that is scrutinised. To return to Sayers’ article, for instance, romantic love is its focus (while it does delve into questions of sovereignty and divinity, it does so through the frame of eroticism).[16] Sarah Sheehan's 2009 thesis, 'Gender and Sexuality in Early Irish Saga',[17] might at first glance appear to address the identified gap in discussion of love in the scholarship. Specifically, Sheehan examines 'femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and corporeality in a range of sagas from the mythological and Ulster cycles'.[18] However, while this thesis covers gender and romance, Sheehan's prominent focus on corporeality is not as crucial to our present study. The examination of romantic love, which differs from sexuality, forms a third of this thesis, but the focus on love in many forms here is a clear point of differentiation. The texts examined, as a result, do not frequently overlap. *Tochmarc Emire* ('The Wooing of Emer') and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* are the exceptions to this rule, but both are key texts for the examination of relationships (romantic and familial) and gender, and as such one would expect both to feature in both theses. Overall, love and sexuality are clearly different phenomena, even if in the realm of romantic love they can overlap.

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[11] Extract from a quote by Sorley MacLean: ‘Ever since I was a boy in Ra[a]say, and became aware of the difference between the history I read in books and the oral accounts I heard around me, I have been very sceptical of what might be called received history.’ Quoted in Richard Butt, ‘The Natives Write Back’, *The Films of Scotland Documentaries* <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-our-staff/management/professor-richard-butt/> [accessed 8 June 2021].

[12] Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91.

[13] Jackson’s statement and more will be examined in Chapter Three.

[14] For instance, see Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91: ‘In fact in the early literatures there is practically no real love *poetry*, but only tales about love affairs. Love poetry as such first appears in any quantity under the influence of foreign romantic movements.’

[15] William Sayers, ‘Fusion and Fission in the Love and Lexis of Early Ireland’, in *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), pp. 95–109.

The idea that love is 'invented' as a theme in twelfth-century France and the rest of Europe follows is an overly simplistic look at love, as will be outlined shortly.[19] An interest in romantic love predates chivalric romance, and is felt more widely than solely in Europe. This simplistic understanding on love as a theme does not seem to have been accepted by Gaelic scholars, though one could argue its influence can be found in suggesting *amour courtois* is responsible for love in Gaelic texts. This thesis is also being written at a time when Celtic languages are all minoritised languages in the countries in which they are spoken. As such, this thesis reasserts the existence and sophistication of medieval Gaelic saga, and also challenges the Eurocentric narrative that romantic love is barely noticed in literatures predating chivalric romance. In de-centring the influential literatures of empires, whether they be French or English, in favour of examining what actually lies before us in medieval Gaelic literature, this work challenges historical narratives of dominance.

The attempt to resist defaulting to historical narratives with the most power also lies behind the use of the terms 'medieval Gaelic', 'Old Gaelic' and 'Middle Gaelic' throughout this thesis. The Irish language dominates the Goidelic branch in the twenty-first century, both in terms of number of speakers and international status; and using the term 'Irish' to refer to the precursors to modern Irish, Gaelic, and Manx has become a norm in the field of Celtic Studies. However, Scottish Gaels still have the right to call those languages the precursors to their language too. The language is indistinguishable in Ireland and Scotland during the Middle Ages, and Scottish Gaelic retains and adapts features from Old Gaelic which Irish lost.[20] Hence, 'Gaelic' is used liberally throughout this thesis where scholars from outwith Scotland might expect 'Irish' to be used; namely, in discussing the precursors to the modern Gaelic languages.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Sarah Sheehan, 'Gender and Sexuality in Early Irish Saga' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2009).

[18] Ibid., p. ii.

[19] See Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. xvii-xviii.

1.4 The 'Medieval' 'Invention' of 'Love'

The development of romantic love in literature in the Middle Ages is often framed thus: various influences, from Europe and further afield, converge in the south of France in the eleventh to twelfth centuries where chivalric romance and *amour courtois* grow into prominence, with romantic love being a key theme in the literature of the period. This development then, as C. S. Lewis put it in his 1936 book *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*,[21] for all intents and purposes 'created' romantic love as a point of interest which endured for centuries: 'French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth.'[22] Though Lewis traced possible precursors to romantic love in literature (Arabic, Classical, Germanic and Celtic), he argued that before the eleventh century, romantic love was not a key concern in literature:

> 'Love', in our sense of the word, is as absent from the literature of the Dark Ages as from that of classical antiquity. [...] Germanic and Celtic legend, no doubt, had bequeathed to the barbarians some stories of tragic love between man and woman [...] But the theme claims no pre-eminence, and when it is treated the interest turns at least as much on the resulting male tragedy, the disturbance of vassalage or sworn brotherhood, as on the female influence which produced it.[23]

For Lewis, romantic love as a theme is created and popularised in this period and in this region of the south of France, and some precursors, whose creators range from Ovid to Celtic 'barbarians', may have existed but their interest in (romantic) love is not the extreme interest provoked by courtly love. To summarise, troubadours in France create the notion of romantic love which then dominates (Western) literature for centuries. Lewis's view is one that has dominated in popular discourse for several years.[24]

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[20] See Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Gaelic in Medieval Scotland: Advent and Expansion', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 167 (2010), 349-92 (350 ftn. 7).
[21] C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936).
[22] Ibid., p. 4.
[23] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Another scholar whose work on courtly love has proved influential is Denis de Rougemont. De Rougemont's *L'Amour et L'Occident*, published as *Passion and Society*[25] (or, in America, *Love and the Western World*), centres around the tale of Tristan. For de Rougemont, the passionate, romantic love, *eros*, was to be contrasted with a love of the divine, *agape*, with which he also associated marriage.[26] For our interests it is notable that de Rougemont portrayed (generally romantic) passion in opposition to religious devotion, and used previously established vocabulary from the Classical world in order to do so. The contrast between the romantic and the religious also informed and appears throughout Lewis' work, as well as Peter Dronke's as will shortly be discussed.[27] The conflict between these two loves is explored in Chapter Four. Overall, even leaving aside for the moment the origins of *amour courtois*, the view of a volatile, societally dangerous romantic love has been influential, particularly when paired with the idea of a more sustaining love of the divine.

De Rougemont also asserted that courtly love grew in large part from Catharism,[28] a view which has been thoroughly contested. David Lyle Jeffrey has called de Rougemont's idea of *amour courtois* coming from Catharism 'woefully misbegotten'.[29] Both Lewis' and de Rougemont's views of the origins and nature of *amour courtois* have been challenged,[30] but both have proven influential.[31] Popular discourse and academic consensus are not one and the same, however. Both works were soon superseded in academic circles. In Dronke's *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*,[32] the second edition of which was published in 1968, he contested several established 'truths' about *amour courtois*. Dronke's first chapter challenged and disproved three common theories: namely, that the love represented in *amour courtois* poetry was 'new' (Dronke argued that one can find parallel examples of it dating back to at least the second century BC); that it was *only* courtly and chivalric in nature (Dronke argued for the existence of wider, folk expressions of that love, not solely restricted to courtly contexts); and that researching *amour courtois* must involve researching this invention of a 'new' emotion (Dronke argued instead for tracking the development of '*courtois* themes' rather than trying to track the birth of a supposedly-new emotion).[33] Marina Warner summarised Dronke's argument:

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[24] See, even now, for instance, this blog post from the French-language learning website French Truly, simply entitled 'The French Invented Love!', which posits that France invented courtly love which then changed the world's perception of love. 'The French Invented Love!', *French Truly*, 2013 <https://www.frenchtruly.com/french-invented-love/> [accessed 8 June 2021].

[25] Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. by Montgomery Belgion (London: Faber and Faber, 1940).

[26] Ibid., p. 88; p. 165.

[27] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*; Dronke, *Medieval Latin.*

[28] De Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, p. 97.

[29] David Lyle Jeffrey, 'Courtly Love and Christian Marriage: Chretien de Troyes, Chaucer, and Henry VIII', *Christianity and Literature*, 59.3 (2010), 515–30 (517).

[30] We will see Dronke's contestation of Lewis' argument. See Jeffrey for other critics who have contested the arguments of both Lewis and de Rougemont. Ibid., 518-521. In a letter to Harold Montgomery Belgion, translator of *Passion and Society*, Lewis maintained that his interest was in allegory, and that brought him to courtly love, in the origins of which he had little real interest. Anderson, Gregory M., 'Lewis, Lost Letters, and Love', *Sehnsucht: The C.S. Lewis Journal*, 11 (2017), 15–28 (22-23).

[31] Geoffrey Wall, for instance, calls de Rougemont's work a 'minor classic'; Geoffrey Wall, 'Eros in Europe', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 26:2 (1997), 199–203 (199).

[32] Dronke, *Medieval Latin.*

> far from 'courtly love' originating with the troubadours in France, it developed within a stream of poetry and song from demotic Latin and the Arab world, with deep roots far from Provence — in ancient Egypt, Baghdad, Georgia, India and Iceland.[34]

For Dronke, both Roman poetry and 'Latin learned verse from the sixth to twelfth centuries' serve as precursors to courtly love and anticipate *amour courtois,* even though they differ from them.[35] Even elements of *amour courtois* such as lovesickness have clear predecessors; early Gaelic examples of lovesickness will be examined in the forthcoming chapter on romantic love, and, in recent years, Ruth Rothaus Caston, building on Lewis' work, has examined Classical precedents to the idea of 'love as illness'[36] And in Celtic Studies there is some movement away from an idea of romantic love springing forth in medieval France. Sayers has argued:

> Although conceptions of courtly love are judged to have originated in the south of France, conceivably under Hispanic-Arabic influence, much of the narrative matter of medieval French and other romance, motif as well as plot, has associations with Celtic Britain and Ireland.[37]

Ultimately, the idea that courtly love sees the invention of a new emotion hitherto unseen in literature does not stand up to scrutiny, nor does solely situating that feeling in the realms of the court and chivalry. According to Dronke, there is certainly development of key themes with *amour courtois* (particularly regarding use of language and exploration of theological concepts in discussing love),[38] but it is just that: a development, not an invention. In the foregoing scholarship on the Middle Ages, it also seems love can be successfully split into a stable form and an unstable form. Lewis, Dronke, and de Rougemont all set up a contrast between the disruptive romantic love, and the sustaining nourishment of religious devotion. Such a pattern can be seen governing the most influential scholarly views to date on the medieval conception of love.

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[33] Ibid., pp. xxvi-xxvii.

[34] Marina Warner, 'Peter Dronke Obituary', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/14/peter-dronke-obituary> [accessed 8 June 2021].

[35] Dronke, *Medieval Latin*, pp. xvii-xviii.

[36] Ruth Rothaus Caston, 'Love as Illness: Poets and Philosophers on Romantic Love', *The Classical Journal*, 101.3 (2006), 271–98.

[37] Sayers, 'Fusion and Fission', p. 95.

The scholarship on romantic love and its supposed 'invention' has, then, changed dramatically over the past century. While three scholars in particular have been examined here, they stand in for a wider academic discussion taking place over the twentieth century which redefines how one understands the supposed 'origins' of romantic love in the medieval literary world. This thesis forms part of situating such a change in the context of the understanding of romantic love in medieval Gaelic texts. Certain twentieth-century scholarship discussing love in our saga texts tended to downplay its prominence; these claims will be investigated and challenged in what is to come. And, as stated, romantic love is but one type of love that will be examined here. It is more fitting then to think of the medieval development of earlier, widespread themes regarding romantic love, as opposed to the wholesale 'medieval' 'invention' of 'love'.

Within the study of medieval Gaelic literature specifically, there has been a tendency towards overlooking the importance of love in the early medieval material. Certain twentieth-century scholarship discussing love in our saga texts tended to downplay or outright deny its prominence, such as Jackson's aformentioned comment about love playing 'a very small part in early Celtic literature'.[39] Seán Ó Tuama argued that, 'A romantic concept of love does not seem to have played a large part in pre-Norman Irish literature'.[40] Such claims will be investigated and challenged in the coming chapters; for now, it can be noted that generally, within medieval Gaelic studies, love has been characterised as not forming a key theme within early medieval Gaelic literature.

1.5 The Nature of Loves

Words such as *serc* and *grád* are often translated into English as 'love'. 'Love', however, has multiple meanings in English. In English one can 'love' a romantic partner, a family member, a celebrity, or an article of clothing, and in each of these cases the 'love' is different. For the purposes of this thesis, more precise definitions are needed. When a medieval Gaelic term is translated as 'love', there is still the need to specify what the term 'love' is intended to convey. Using 'love' to translate a range of terms risks losing the specific semantics intended by the text. That is why this thesis contains a semantic study of love terms in medieval Gaelic literature.

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[38] Dronke, *Medieval Latin*, p. xvii; see also pp. 57-97.

[39] Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91.

[40] Seán Ó Tuama, 'Love in the Medieval Irish Literary Lyric', in his *Repossessions: Selected Essays on the Irish Literary Heritage* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 164-195 (p. 164).

Any idea of what constitutes love is hugely culturally dependent and is based on what is or is not considered socially acceptable. Laws can reflect cultural norms, but that reflection is not always accurate, or immediate. As such, in investigating historical cultural norms, laws can be useful but do have their limits. The awareness of the law's deficiencies in accurately portraying a culture is relevant in examining texts dating from any period from the past, and particularly from medieval Gaeldom, for which love has not been subject to the same degree of scrutiny as other regions.

One of the difficulties with approaching love in an historical context can be illustrated with a Classical text. Plato's *Symposium* explores love, explanations for it and attitudes towards it, in Ancient Athens.[41] It takes the form of a group of men arguing about love, each refuting the last, many of whom touch upon what form of love is the most perfect. As Ronald de Sousa points out in discussing the text, however:

> In the *Symposium*, certain norms are taken for granted: the superiority of love between man and adolescent boy; the second-rate nature of love for a woman; the etiquette of erotic pursuit — who should chase, and who should be chased.[42]

The emphasis on love between man and adolescent boy is clearly not an acceptable point of view in modern Western society, even if it was in the past. The social norms regarding subjects and objects of desire have changed. That said, desire being *desire* may still be recognisable, even in a context with which one is uncomfortable. For Dronke, though it may be expressed in different ways, a concept of romantic love exists across societies and cultures centuries before *amour courtois*.[43] Any definition of love reached will therefore be rooted in a cultural understanding of the time and place under examination, and a discussion of what the 'norms taken for granted' of medieval Gaeldom are. The semantic study better defines terms such as *serc* and *grád*, mapping out their semantic ranges. Then, in each subsequent chapter, the 'love' under discussion will be defined.

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[41] Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. by Desmond Lee and Christopher Gill, Penguin Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2006).

[42] Ronald de Sousa, *Love: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 30.

[43] Dronke, *Medieval Latin*, pp. 1-56, particularly p. 46. In discussing the attempt to discern the origins of courtly love, Dronke states: 'It is a garden in which roots can seldom be disentangled, and in which it is far more important to watch the growth of the flowers.' Ibid., p. 56.

Throughout medieval and modern scholarship we see an inheritance of love terms from the Classical tradition. Terms such as the Ancient Greek *agape*, *eros*, and *philia*, and Latin terms such as *amor* and *caritas*, are used far beyond their initial conception.[44] These concepts of love are carried across into Christian scholarship and used throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Such a vocabulary is then carried into the modern day by writers such as Lewis, Dronke, and Denis de Rougemont.

In terms of (European) medieval literature in general, seeking to discuss the nature of types of love is not untrodden ground. For instance, Andreas Capellanus' twelfth-century treatise *De amore* discerned between the affection of spouses, and a more secret, passionate love.[45] In the eleventh century, Ibn Hazm wrote طوق الحمامة ('The Ring of the Dove'), which described several of the aspects of love which will be discussed in this thesis.[46] Namely, amongst others, Hazm discusses those who fall in love through dreams, through first seeing the beloved, and through hearing a description.[47] Hazm also encourages temperance in love, and avoidance of sin.[48] As can be seen, the focus on medieval discussions of love has tended to centre around romantic love, albeit at times in contrast with religious devotion. Scholars such as the Lewis and Dronke have discussed medieval love at length, particularly romantic love. For Dronke, as stated, there existed in numerous places a baseline understanding of romantic love before courtly love became in vogue.[49] For the earlier Lewis, as established, courtly love brought with it a 'new' feeling, one characterised by, amongst other things, adultery.[50]

There is then also a disconnect between our modern-day concepts of love as opposed to (our ideas of) medieval concepts, and, specifically, medieval Gaelic definitions. Nowadays, one might use a definition such as the one created by psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, with love being 'the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.'[51] Love, and hence also interiority, is significant in medieval

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[44] For an overview of the development of these terms, particularly from their earliest conception to their use in early Christian scholarship, see Carter Lindberg, 'The Language of Love', in his *Love: A Brief History Through Western Christianity* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), pp. 1-18.

[45] *Andreas Capellanus On Love*, ed. and trans. By P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), pp. 244-46 (cf. Walsh's summary and comments, pp. 20-22).

[46] Ibn Hazm, *The Dove's Neck-Ring or The Ring of the Dove*, trans. by A. R. Nykl (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1931).

[47] Ibid., pp. 26-27; 31-33; 28-30.

[48] Ibid., pp. 8-11.

[49] Dronke, *Medieval Latin*, pp. 1-56, particularly p. 46.

[50] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p. 12.

[51] M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 85.

Gaelic texts; but neither concept corresponds with our modern definitions of them. Modern definitions of love, such as Peck's, tend to emphasise self-sacrifice, and love as action rather than solely spoken or felt.[52] As will be seen, descriptions and discussions of love being felt give us some of our most clear-cut examples of love in medieval Gaelic literature; love as action is more difficult to discern. That is not to say that a modern definition is useless in informing how best to approach the medieval material; however, its limitations should be borne in mind. Peck's definition for instance is not the definition of love that the creators, audiences or characters of our texts would have used.

1.6 Discerning Love

The ambiguity of 'love' as a term means a strategy must be set out for establishing when love appears in a given text. For this purpose, three situations have been identified as the core approaches to discerning love. The first situation is when the narrative states a character loves another character: 'X loved Y', the tale tells us. The second situation is when a character expresses love for another character: 'I love Y', or 'I loved Y'. For this, the work of Chapter Two on the semantics of love terms in medieval Gaelic will prove useful. The third situation is defined as love-through-action: the reader sees X act in such a way that suggests love of Y. The idea of love as expressed through action was also not unknown to medieval authors: the Bible obviously discusses sacrifice as an expression of love throughout.[53] Love as action is also of concern to modern writing on love. A key aspect of Peck's definition is: 'Love is an act of will — namely, both an intention and an action.'[54] An emphasis on 'love as action' gives us a useful criterion for scrutinising examples of love in medieval Gaelic literature where the text itself does not necessarily use any such words. Even when a text does not explicitly use the word 'love', one can read love as expressed through action.

These three situations range from least ambiguous to the most ambiguous. The last category, love-as-action, relies the most on the reader's interpretation. It is here other scholars' readings can most frequently be challenged: for one scholar, an action might show an adherence to a strict honour code, where for another it shows clear love (and indeed, both readings can be valid). The aim in discussing examples of love-as-action is not to disparage work which argues love is not a motivating factor. Instead, the aim is to show and admit to the ambiguity inherent in the text. One text can offer many readings, and this should be acknowledged, even celebrated.

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[52] See, for instance, bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 44-45.

[53] See, for instance, John 15.13.

[54] Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*, p. 71.

In as much as is possible, the attempt has been made to avoid approaching a text with a preconceived critical notion of what the text will contain, or the ‘true’ meaning behind the text. If one looks only for honour as a motivator, for instance, one will find only it. If instead the text is approached with the intent to allow for meanings to emerge from the text itself, rather than be blurred by preconceptions, this act of reading ‘generously’ or ‘reparative reading’[55] supports multiple interpretations where other critics may see only one. This emphasis on emergence is also seen in the approach taken in this thesis to discovering love: rather than using a work like Lewis’ *The Four Loves*[56] as a starting point, with its use of Classical terminology, our saga texts themselves form the starting point of our definitions and emphases.

Discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five are some texts whose criticism has focused on hidden or implicit meanings. The critical focus has sometimes been drawn away from what the text actually states concerning love, in order to argue that the work in question is really about something else, such as honour, faith or relationships between the human world and the Otherworld, topics for which there is a good deal of precedent in the scholarship. Consequently, at times critics have ignored love as an important element in these works. As Sedgwick states:

> it is possible that the very productive critical habits embodied in [...] the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’—wide-spread critical habits indeed, perhaps by now nearly synonymous with criticism itself—may have had an unintentionally stultifying side effect: they may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller.[57]

The ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ have been the prevailing critical framework of the aforementioned readings, wherein it is argued that a text is actually about another topic.

Furthermore, it has been compellingly argued that at least some medieval Gaelic sagas are intentionally ambiguous. For instance, as Kaarina Hollo states of the late Old Gaelic saga *Fingal Rónáin* (‘The Kin-slaying of Rónán):

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[55] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 144-47.

[56] C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960).

[57] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 124.

> I would argue that *Fingal Rónáin* is an open text [...]. The author is not attempting to transmit a single univocal meaning to the reader. S/he has rather constructed the text as a meditative or argumentative space that resists closed and finite interpretation. The nonresolution of major issues is constitutive of the work, and not the result of the reader's inability to find a pre-ordained fixed meaning.[58]

In a not dissimilar fashion, Thomas Clancy has argued that the ninth-century saga *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir* ('The Encounter of Líadain and Cuirithir') is deliberately ambiguous, in contrast to earlier scholars who lamented its 'fragmentary' and 'incomplete' nature.[59] If some texts are intentionally ambiguous, they are done a disservice by trying to establish the one true meaning of a saga rather than allowing for the multiple readings the text offers. Admittedly, whether a text is *intentionally* ambiguous or not is subjective. However, this thesis approaches many of the saga tales as open texts,[60] capable of supporting multiple readings.

1.7 Scope and Structure of the Thesis

In terms of scope, the focus of the thesis is specifically early medieval Gaelic saga: this thesis examines prosimetric tales written in Old or Middle Gaelic, with a preference for older material.[61] The term 'saga' is used to describe these vernacular prosimetric tales, wherein poetry is framed in a vernacular narrative.[62] Pre-thirteenth century texts are the focus of the thesis, as the aim is to examine texts which predate the flourishing of chivalric romance on the European continent, and its subsequent impact upon medieval Gaelic literature. When a text from outwith this period is cited, that will be made clear, as will the reason for its inclusion in the discussion. This is not to say that the impact of chivalric romance on medieval Gaelic literature was immediate;[63] but focusing on texts which pre-dated *amour courtois* makes the likelihood of its impact on the texts far more unlikely.[64] Focusing on these earlier texts is one reason why the thirteenth-century text *Acallam na Senórach* ('The Colloquoy of the Ancients') is, for the most part, not discussed in meaningful depth here.[65]

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[58] Kaarina Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*: The Medieval Irish Text as Argumentative Space', in *Cín Chille Cúile: Texts, Saints and Places. Essays in Honour of Pádraig Ó Riain*, ed. by John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Kevin Murray, Celtic Studies Publications, 9 (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004), pp. 141–49 (p. 148).

[59] Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Women Poets in Early Medieval Ireland', in *'The Fragility of Her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in Their European Context*, ed. by Christine Meek and Katharine Simms (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 43–72 (p. 68). For the propriety of referring to *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir* as a 'saga', see Ralph O'Connor, *The Music of What Happens: Narrative Terminology and the Gaelic and Norse-Icelandic Saga*, E. C. Quiggin Memorial Lectures, 23 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge, forthcoming).

[60] On the term 'open text', see above n. 6. For its use in the context of considering medieval Gaelic saga literature, see Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*', p. 148.

[61] It has been noted that there are some difficulties with ascribing precise dates to, particularly, Middle Gaelic texts, but also earlier and later medieval texts. Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The Dating of Middle Irish Texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1982), 109–37.

[62] Ralph O'Connor, *The Music of What Happens*.

Additionally, though saga is the main genre being examined, there will be reference to medieval Gaelic law texts, religious texts, and poetry, where relevant. For instance, Chapter Four revolves around religious love and a tale of two poets; as such, religious texts and poetry become more pertinent. Ultimately the thesis focuses upon the narrative world of early medieval Gaelic saga, rather than the lived, historic reality. This narrative world is gendered; the ways in which women and men are portrayed as acting, feeling, and being motivated in our texts differ along gender lines. The ways in which love is felt and expressed are also gendered within the narrative world, as will be shown.

This introduction is followed by a semantic study of medieval Gaelic love terms, the purpose of which has already been stated. After the semantic study, romantic love is scrutinised in Chapter Three. The examination of romantic love involves exploring lovesickness, love-in-absence, and how different Celtic scholars have defined 'romance'. In Chapter Four, the focus turns to religious love. The chapter centres around a key ninth-century text, which is investigated to examine what it means for the understanding of the conflict between religious and romantic love. Chapter Five takes familial love for its theme, beginning with an overview of family relationships in saga literature. After covering the family as a whole, key texts are examined in which familial love is in conflict, frequently with honour, or with romantic love. In all chapters, moments of conflict between loves allow for glimpses into the priorities of the narrative world; when a woman is shamed for choosing her natal family over her new husband, for instance, the text is setting out a vision of how the narrative world is supposed to function. Finally, the thesis concludes by drawing together many of the strands that have appeared throughout the chapters. These strands include the ways in which loves are gendered, the phenomena associated with different kinds of gendered loves, and the existence of love as a theme in medieval Gaelic saga.

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[63] For instance, Jackson discusses the impact of 'romance' on Irish poetry as being seen in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91.

[64] Though, admittedly, not impossible, given that often our texts are being written down in contexts which far postdate their original composition. Still, this influence would presumably be seen in, for instance, editorial choices, as opposed to wholesale alteration of original tales.

[65] Another reason for the *Acallam* not being discussed further here is that the *Acallam* is so rich a text, particularly with regards to love, relationships, and marriages, that it would merit its own substantial discussion for which there is not space here.

Chapter 2 Semantic Study

2.1 Introduction

An issue is quickly encountered when one tries to discuss ‘love’ in medieval Gaelic literature through the medium of English. Other languages can, and do, have more than one word for the emotions covered by the English term ‘love’. The ambiguity regarding love in English can be seen in the preponderance of articles and think pieces listing an arbitrary number of ‘types of love’. Such articles also frequently reach into another language, or into the past (or both); see, for instance, ‘These Are the 7 Types of Love’,[66] one of many easily-found articles featuring a version of the phrase ‘the Ancient Greeks had X words for love’.[67] As seen in Chapter One, medievalists have also reached for Classical terms in order to better explore the concept of love. C. S. Lewis's exploration of Christianity and love, *The Four Loves*, treats the Greek terms *storge*, *philios*, *eros*, and *agape*, which he then defines as different loves.[68] Just as in Ancient Greek, medieval Gaelic had multiple terms which can be translated as ‘love’ but which map onto English terminology — or indeed Ancient Greek or Latin terminology — very imprecisely. As a result, this thesis proceeds in the examination of terminology by working from the Gaelic terms out, rather than assuming any intrinsic relationship between its terms and those of other languages (except where etymologies suggest it).[69]

Similarly, medieval Gaelic has multiple words that are translated to English as ‘love’; but such a translation leaves the semantic ranges of these terms unaddressed. And as Sayers has stated, though medieval Gaelic learned culture had a strong tradition of the analysis of words (what we now term ‘pseudo-etymology’), ‘the learned fascination with native vocabulary proves disappointing when we look to the lexicon of love.’[70] Yet, if we can refine our definitions of the key terms when it comes to love, we can refine our translations of the texts in which they appear; if we can refine our translations, we can improve our criticism, and better inform our interpretations. We need precise definitions of terms, which would facilitate more precise translations: the text we think we have read is not always the text we actually have.

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[66] Neel Burton, ‘These Are the 7 Types of Love’, *Psychology Today*, June 2016 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/hide-and-seek/201606/these-are-the-7-types-love> [accessed 26.11.2019]

[67] Using a search engine to search ‘ancient greek words for love’ will return a plethora of these articles.

[68] Lewis, *The Four Loves*.

[69] That is not, however, the last time we shall encounter individual Greek and Latin words. The validity of a researcher working on Greek and, in particular, Latin equivalences to medieval Gaelic love vocabulary is not being questioned here. An examination of how medieval Gaelic terms ‘map on’ to Latin terms, particularly when glossing them, would be fascinating; but it is not the approach of this thesis.

[70] Sayers, ‘Fusion and Fission’, p. 107.

The most common terms used for love and loving in the Old and Middle Gaelic periods are the nouns *serc* and *grád*, and the verb *caraid* (which employs *serc* as its verbal noun by suppletion).[71] These three terms will form the beginnings of this semantic study, before turning to other terms in the love lexicon: the adjective and noun substantive *inmain*, and the noun *écmais*, both of which are not the most common terms but which do feature heavily in the texts discussed in this thesis. Consideration of the terms *serc*, *caraid*, and *grád* will constitute the bulk of the discussion, reflecting their prominence in the written texts. That said, a nuanced understanding of love in medieval Gaelic literature cannot be achieved without exploring other words for love and other terms often seen in conjunction with these love terms. There are, of course, more terms which could be interrogated; and before this chapter ends, we shall survey some of them. Ultimately, scrutinising the vocabulary of medieval Gaelic love could fill a thesis itself. These key terms have been chosen due to their prominence and relevance in the written texts which form the basis of this thesis.

The key source for the discussion of these terms is the Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (*eDIL*), whose English-language definitions of medieval Gaelic terms both offer a starting-point for analysis, and prompt discussion. As Max Quaintmere outlines, in his semantic study of memory terms in medieval Gaelic, his reasoning for using *eDIL* was:

> firstly, the *eDIL* remains the most access[i]ble and comprehensive reference resource available to those wishing to study the semantics of medieval Irish. The gathered references and examples proved an invaluable tool in collating the raw materials necessary for this study. Secondly, it is hoped that the arguments presented here will provide a measure of useful criticism on the relevant entries in the *eDIL* and contribute to a refinement of the definitions given there.[72]

Unless otherwise mentioned, the references to *eDIL* are to its most recent (2019) revision.

Much like the situation faced by Quaintmere with terms relating to memory,[73] a substantial comparative study of love terms in medieval Gaelic has not been attempted to date. There are individual articles, such as Liam Mac Mathúna's exploration of *cride*, which included a discussion of death from heartbreak,[74] and William Sayers' aforementioned work on 'love and lexis';[75] but no one study as full as this chapter has appeared to date. Wolfgang Meid's analysis of *grád* will form the starting point for this discussion: though a short study, he systematically traces the different meanings the term *grád* can have, as well as arguing convincingly for its origins as a Latin loanword.[76] Meid's discussion will be outlined before comparing *grád* and *serc* in order to better understand the semantic range of both terms.

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[71] *Serc* does not assume any of the quasi-verbal functions of the verbal noun. It is worth noting too that in Middle Gaelic we do also get the development of *carthain* as a verbal noun; *eDIL s.v. carthain.*

[72] Max Quaintmere, 'Aspects of Memory in Medieval Irish Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018), p. 39.

[73] Ibid.

Both *serc* and *grád* are nouns commonly used to express concepts of 'love' in the earlier medieval period, more so than a term such as *gáel*, which becomes the standard for 'love' in Scottish Gaelic;[77] *serc* and *grád* seem to be the go-to nouns for expressing love. *Serc* and *grád* are often paired in doublets. One can see this, for instance, in the early thirteenth-century text *Scéla Suithcheirne ingine Áeda Bennáin ⁊ Rónáin Dícollai meic Fergusa Tuile* ('The Story of Suithchern ingen Áedo Bennáin and Rónán Dícolla mac Fergusa Tuile').[78] At the moment when Rónán falls for Suithchern:

> *Cid tra acht ba lan cach n-alt ⁊ cach n-inn ⁊ cach n-aighe o ind co ruicc ( ) bonnd in rígh* ***da tserc ⁊ da gráth*** *na hinghine ⁊ da tuctha a aonragha do mnaib in betha o tugbail greine co a fuined dó roba hí a ragha doenmnaoi ⁊ nuachar.*[79]

Every part of the king, it reads, was full of *'serc ocus gráth'* for Suithchern. Now, when both terms are used together in this connected way, it is frustrating for the semantic researcher trying to find the difference between them.[80] It also poses a challenge for the translator. Gearóid Mac Eoin opts for:

> Then every fibre and joint and part of the king from top to toe was filled **with love and desire** for the girl and were he to be given his choice of the women of the

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[74] Liam Mac Mathúna, 'Lexical and Literary Aspects of "Heart" in Irish', *Ériu*, 53 (2003), 1–18.

[75] Sayers, 'Fusion and Fission'.

[76] Wolfgang Meid, 'Zu irisch *grád* 'Liebe'', in *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin*, ed. by Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002), pp. 298-299. Cf. Wolfgang Meid, "Freundschaft' und 'Liebe' in keltischen Sprachen', in *Donum Grammaticum: Studies in Latin and Celtic Linguistics in Honour of Hannah Rosén*, ed. by Lea Sawicki and Donna Shalev, Orbis, Supplementa, 18 (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), pp. 255-63.

[77] See T. F. O'Rahilly, 'Varia II [1-25]', *Celtica*, 1:2 (1950, 1950), 328–386 (366).

[78] Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'Suithchern and Rónán Dícolla', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 36 (1978), 63-82 (69).

[79] Ibid., 74. Emphasis my own.

[80] These types of doublets can be seen throughout medieval Gaelic literature. The terms used are not always synonyms, but do often fall under the same semantic field. See Kevin O'Nolan, 'Homer and Irish Heroic Narrative', *The Classical Quarterly*, 19.1 (1969), 1–19 (10).

> world from the rising of the sun to its setting, she would have been his choice as his only wife and spouse. [81]

'Love and desire' does get across the near-synonymous nature of the pairing, but 'desire' is an imperfect translation of *grád*. Truly, until *serc* and *grád* can be more precisely defined, translations of them will be imperfect, or at least imprecise. To discern between the pairing of *serc* and *grád*, one must look beyond this coupling.

2.2 Grád

Meid's examination of *grád*, 'Zu irisch *grád* 'Liebe'', was published in 2002.[82] In this essay, he outlines the semantic range of the word, notes it is a Middle Gaelic term,[83] and presents a hypothesis for its etymology. Meid's list of meanings of *grád* may be summarised (and translated) as:

1. emotional affect, at times with an erotic aspect
2. charity
3. love of God
4. love of a people for their lord or ruler
5. demonstrating a bond of trust.[84]

Meid's work provides a useful schema for the examination of other love terms; shortly, these meanings of *grád* will be compared with *serc* to see where the often-paired duo might differ.

One might first compare Meid's definition of *grád* with that of *eDIL*. It must be noted that the *grád* being examined is not the only *grád* in Old Gaelic; indeed, the better attested *grád* 'grade, degree, rank, order' is given as the first term *grád* in *eDIL*.[85] Our *grád*, listed as '2 *grád*' in *eDIL*, is given several meanings, in the following order: 'love, affection, fondness, charity; Pl. favour, good graces', before listing the phrase *fer gráda* 'a trusted or confidential servant' and *oés gráda* 'confidants, men of trust, retainers'.[86] The entry then gives us examples of its use in compounds, as an element meaning ‘beloved’ or ‘trusted’.[87] It is clear to see that *eDIL’s* initial translation of ‘love, affection, fondness, charity’ covers several of the meanings Meid advances.

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[81] Mac Eoin, 'Suithchern', 80. Emphasis my own.
[82] Meid, '*grád*'.
[83] To be clear, the term is first attested in Middle Gaelic; but examples of the verb grádaigidir predate Middle Gaelic and show that the word was in existence before that period. *eDIL s.v. grádaigidir.*
[84] Ibid., p. 298.
[85] *eDIL s.v. 1 grád.*
[86] *eDIL s.v. 2 grád.*

Meid also argues for *grád* being a Latin loanword. He proposes the two primary meanings of *grád* originate in two separate Latin words. He states that *grád* as in ‘rank, degree’ (henceforth *grád* ‘degree’) is based on the Latin *gradus*, but that there is no sign that *grád* as in ‘love’ comes from the same word and points out that *grád* ‘degree’ and *grád* ‘love’ are also differentiated in inflection.[88] Meid ultimately argues, following a suggestion of Julius Pokorny,[89] that *grád* ‘love’ comes from the Latin *grātum*, a substantivised neuter noun from *grātus* meaning ‘dear, pleasant’, which in itself is a term of praise used in both poetic and religious works.[90] This etymology of *grád* as Latin loanword contrasts with the main other love noun to be examined, *serc*, which derives from Proto-Celtic.[91] Meid argues that the two *grád* words influenced each other in terms of phonology, becoming more similar over time.[92] Therefore, Meid posits that *grád* ‘love’ must have already existed in the Old Gaelic period as well as *grád* ‘degree’, because they influence *each other*, rather than one being entirely influenced by the other.[93] That said, the existence of *grádaigidir* as a verb predates our earliest attestations of *grád*; it is not impossible that *grádaigidir,* then, influenced *grád* ‘degree’. Overall, Meid offers a thorough analysis of the term *grád*, but it is not without its difficulties, as Meid himself acknowledges, such as the potential chronological gap between the meanings, and *grád* not declining as straightforwardly as one might expect given the origins Meid posits.[94]

One question worth considering in the context of *grád* is why, given that *serc* existed as a native term for ‘love’, *grád* was borrowed from Latin. The lexical gap it plugs, as it were, is not immediately apparant. Does the fact that it comes from Latin imply that it had specifically Christian connotations to begin with? Does it carry nuances not present in the native term *serc*? These questions will be further explored in discussing *serc* shortly.

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Meid, ‘*grád*’, p. 299.
[89] Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Bern, Munich: A. Francke, 1959), I (p. 441).
[90] Meid, ‘*grád*’, p. 299.
[91] Ranko Matasović, ‘*sterkā’ in Ranko Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 9 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), p. 355.
[92] Meid, ‘*grád’,* p. 299. See Henry Lewis and Holger Pedersen, *A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar*, 3rd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974).
[93] Meid, ‘*grád*’. In particular, we might expect *grātum* to yield Early Gaelic *grát*, and not *grád*, if borrowed through British.
[94] Ibid.

2.2.1 Grádaigthe

The possibility that *grád* ‘degree’ and *grád* ‘love’ mutually influenced each other could also have implications for terms related to the two words. The term *grádaigthe* appears in the saga literature, where it is taken to mean ‘beloved’; we shall discuss an example of this shortly. *eDIL* gives us *grádaigidir* as a verb meaning ‘loves’, and *grádaigthe* as its adjectival form.[95] *Grádaigthe* functions as a verbal adjective derived from *grádaigidir*, and so ‘beloved’ would seem to be an appropriate translation. That said, there can be some ambiguity in its use. See, for instance, the following extract from *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa* (‘Tidings of Conchobar Mac Nessa’), from the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, which Whitley Stokes identified as ‘a specimen of Early Middle-Irish’.[96] In the tale, the warrior Cathbad has killed all of Ness’s foster-fathers. She then becomes a warrior in order to avenge her foster-fathers, hunting down their murderer (not aware it was Cathbad specifically who killed them). Then the following occurs:

> *Luid-si laa and didu a hoenur dia fothrucud, conid-tecmaing cucci in fennid cétna .i. intí Cathbad, contudchaid-side etarru ⁊ cranna, ⁊ ardagaib commanarnaic dóib, ⁊ co mbái-si do* ***mnái gradaigthe*** *oco-som, ⁊ combert mac dó. Ba hé in mac hí sin didu .i. Conchobar mac Cathbad.*
>
> She went one day there alone to bathe, when to her happened the champion, Cathbad. He came between her and (her) spearshafts and seized her, and they forgathered, so that she became his **beloved wife** and bore him a son. That, then, was the son, Conchobar son of Cathbad.[97]

This ‘seizing’ is uneasy for modern readers, particularly given the detail that Cathbad stands ‘between her and (her) spearshafts’.[98] Ness does not have access to her weapons, and is specifically described as bathing: she is vulnerable. The idea that Ness, who, again, has explicitly set out to get revenge on Cathbad, becomes his ‘beloved wife’ after this encounter, raises some questions.[99]

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[95] *eDIL s.v. grádaigidir.*

[96] ‘Tidings of Conchobar Mac Nessa’, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Ériu*, 4 (1910), 18-38 (18).

[97] Ibid., 22; trans. 23. Emphasis my own.

[98] See Joanne Findon, ‘Mother Knows Best: The Role of Nes in Compert Conchobhuir’, in *Ulidia 3: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, University of Ulster, Coleraine 22–25 June, 2009. In memoriam Patrick Leo Henry,* ed. by Gregory Toner and Séamus Mac Mathúna (Berlin: Curach Bhán, 2013), pp. 25–35 (pp. 27-30). Findon outright states the tale presents Ness as ‘a victim of rape’ in this version of the tale, though notes that ‘at the same time this tale grants Nes different kinds of power.’ Ibid., p. 28. Findon notes in the later, expanded, Stowe version, a degree of negotiation is introduced into the interaction: Ibid., p. 30.

Some might see the discomfort with Ness becoming Cathbad’s ‘beloved wife’ as support for Tatyana Mikhailova’s argument that medieval Gaelic ‘saga characters are not to be spoken of [...] as if they were real people with real human psychology.’[100] However, not affording characters some degree of ‘real human psychology’ is not going to be a sustainable approach in examining love in these tales, as considering the emotional worlds of these characters at all is affording them human psychology. At the very least we are working with the assumption that there is some degree of overall consistency between how love is portrayed in these texts, even if the characters presented are not necessarily consistent in their depictions between tales.

Can one make sense of Ness becoming a ‘beloved wife’, or ‘beloved woman’? There are explanations one can use — for instance, she does not know that Cathbad is the one against whom she has taken up arms. Furthermore, and most importantly, that Ness is ‘beloved’ actually says nothing of her feelings towards Cathbad. Cathbad’s feelings towards her could be summarised by the term *grádaigthe*, but this does not necessitate Ness feeling the same way towards him. In fact, even Cathbad’s feelings might not be being summed up by *grádaigthe* — this is the narrator’s verdict; it could even be the idea of Ness being ‘beloved’ by the general public, adored by those within the tales, or meta-textually, by the audiences of saga tales. Also, the ties between marriage and love are not at all clear-cut, and the existence of the former does not necessitate the latter. It could also be the case that there is a degree of determinism at play: the belief that to be a wife is to be beloved, and that in entering a relationship with Cathbad, Ness is to be considered ‘beloved’ by him. Further evidence would be required for this suggestion to carry weight, however; the word *ben* is sufficiently ambiguous, and what we are taking as ‘wife’ might simply mean ‘woman’. Or else it could suggest merely that there was a sexual encounter between the two. The term could apply to a woman with whom a man has had sex, with *grádaigthe* meaning one who has been ‘loved’, that is, had sex with: Ness is a woman with whom Cathbad has had sex.

We do also have to be aware of our own preconceptions when dealing with medieval material. The literatures of medieval Gaeldom were created in a different culture to our own, with different norms. Projecting our own definitions of sexual relationships, particularly sexual assault, and expecting attitudes to be uniform with those of storytellers and scribes of several centuries ago, will not lead to informed scholarship.[101] Indeed, this is not the only encounter in medieval Gaelic literature we would read as sexual assault in the modern day. In the Old Gaelic tale *Tochmarc Emire*, we see Cú Chulainn entering a sexual relationship with Aífe when he has expressly beaten her in combat and has her at his mercy.[102] In *Tochmarc Emire*, as in the tale being discussed, the narrative does not comment on the propriety or morals of the encounter that has taken place; both tales merely tell us a) how the woman was (made) vulnerable and b) that the hero proceeded to have sex with her. The sexual encounter in *Tochmarc Emire* may also challenge the interpretation of the *ben grádaigthe* solely expressing sexual partners: Aífe is not described in such terms (though, admittedly, this is an *argumentum ex silentio*). That Ness becomes Cathbad's *ben grádaigthe* after the encounter seems to have some relevance, then.

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[99] It is also worth noting that ‘*ben*’ primarily means woman, and we opt to interpret it as ‘wife’ or denoting a sexual partner (or indeed, victim here) when used in situations like this one.

[100] Tatyana A. Mikhailova, ‘Portraying a Person: Description Devices in Ulster Saga Narrative’, in *Ulidia 4: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Queen’s University Belfast, 27-9 June, 2013*, ed. by Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín and Gregory Toner (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), pp. 95-115 (p. 109).

Further information is required before settling for a conclusion of 'different times, different outlooks'. As stated, *grádaigthe* is a verbal adjective; specifically, it is the past participle of the verb *grádaigidir* and is frequently used with adjectival force. One can note *grádaigidir* has an underwhelming level of citations and usage when compared to *caraid*, which dominates as *the* love verb and relates to *serc*, and which will be discussed shortly.[103] If, as Meid supposes, *grád* 'degree' and *grád* 'love' influenced one another, the idea that there could be at the very least some ambiguity in *grádaigthe*'s meaning is not entirely unreasonable. It is not impossible there could be another meaning at play here, more to do with the rank or status of the *ben grádaigthe*. Indeed, even without needing the two terms to have influenced each other, it is not impossible to imagine a development of *grád* 'degree' into a denominative deponent verb meaning something like 'ennobles, honours'. A secondary meaning for *grádaigthe*, as 'enobled, honoured', specifically in the context of this trope, would then build on definitions of marriage terms, as considered in, for example, Liam Breatnach's 2016 article on *cétmuinter* and early medieval Gaelic marriage.[104] Namely, there could be more nuance to both terms than previously thought. It is worth noting that we generally do not see love as a major driver of historical marriage,[105] and that this can be an area of divergence between historical sources and secular tales.

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[101] Indeed, the discussion of what constitutes sexual assault is not one solely limited to the Middle Ages.

[102] 'The Wooing of Emer', ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer, *Archaeological Review*, 1 (1888), 68–75, 150–155, 231–235, 298–307 (300; 301).

[103] *eDIL s.v. caraid.*

[104] Liam Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', *Ériu*, 66 (2016), 1-29.

[105] For more on the historical reality of marriages in medieval Ireland, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', in *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Dublin: College Press, 1985), pp. 5-24.

The notion that the *grád* in *grádaigthe* may refer to 'degree' or 'rank', rather than originally 'love', also allows for us to challenge Meid's assertions on *grád* 'degree' and *grád* 'love' stemming from separate Latin roots. If both *grád* shared the same Latin origin of *gradus*, it is not impossible to imagine how 'grade, rank' could be associated with being esteemed or enobled. 'Esteem, enoble' is not, semantically, impossibly far from 'love, cherish'. As such, Meid's conclusion on the origins of *grád* might not be as certain as first proposed.

One could then reread *Scéla Conchobair* as not having a necessarily loving relationship between Cathbad and Ness, but as a tale in which she is a woman associated with him in a relationship of a specific rank. The '*ben grádaigthe'* could then be considered alongside a term such as '*cétmuinter',* as terms which may have been taken as generic, but actually point to a specific placing within a hierarchy of relationships.[106] Indeed, a comparison between the terms '*cétmuinter'* and *'ben grádaigthe*' could be fruitful for further research. Does the fact that Ness becomes Cathbad's beloved/ranked wife/woman signify a placing of her below his (hypothetical) *cétmuinter*, should he have one? Does the ranking refer to the hierarchy or relationships, or is it a comment on Ness' ranking in society as an aristocrat? Given that the saga literature of medieval Gaelic is largely concerned with aristocratic families and their relationships, it would not be altogether surprising if *grádaigthe* referred to a ranking in society, and yet it was hard for us as scholars to see the wood for the trees, as it were: that is, almost all of the prominent women in our texts are nobles, and so they could all be *grádaigthe*. Or else, we could read *grádaigthe* as a specifically one-sided term, expressing that Ness is beloved of Cathbad, regardless of her own feelings on the matter. As can be seen, there is room for promising future work on the *ben grádaigthe*. Some avenues for exploration have been laid out here, in hopes that the author (or some other scholar) might return to it when time and word count are not at a premium.

Overall, while *grádaigthe* may be translated as 'beloved', there is at least a degree of ambiguity as to what precisely that means. The ambiguity of *grádaigthe* is particularly true in the context of the *ben grádaigthe* trope. A character being beloved may say nothing of their feelings towards the one doing the loving. There may be a degree of publicity at play, as opposed to *grádaigthe* expressing solely emotion; the *ben grádaigthe* could be the figure publicly witnessed and understood to be the man's partner. If this is the case, however, we do not see it expressed clearly in *Scéla Conchobuir*. So the 'beloved wife' or 'beloved woman' may even be a marker of a relationship of a certain status without emotion necessarily underpinning it. Further work on the term could explore these alternate interpretations and prove fruitful in enhancing the understanding of *grádaigthe* as a term, emotional and otherwise.

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[106] Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns'.

2.3 Serc

In moving on to discuss *serc*, Meid's writings on *grád* can be returned to, since no such semantic study of *serc* has been undertaken to date. Though Meid's article is primarily concerned with origins and etymology, his comments on semantics are still useful for comparing *grád* with *serc*. *Serc* has not been completely ignored — see, for instance, Jürgen Uhlich's recent syntactic study of the word[107] — but its semantic range has not been assessed. As such, Meid's *grád* can be compared with citations of *serc* to see where there is overlap, and where there is divergence. Before comparison with Meid, however, it is worth noting that *serc* seems to be the earlier term, appearing in glosses glossing Latin terms such as *amor* and *affectio.*[108] More precisely, we might state that *serc* is the inherited term, cognate with Welsh *serch* and Breton *serch*, and *grád* the borrowed term; but the existence of *grád* in Old Gaelic can be accepted given the existence of *grádaigidir*, as discussed above.

As stated, Meid summarises *grád*'s semantic range as covering:

1. emotional affect, at times with an erotic aspect
2. charity
3. love of God
4. love of a people for their lord or ruler
5. demonstrating a bond of trust.

There are a few immediate comparisons that can be made:

Serc is used to describe romantic love in multiple Old and Middle Gaelic texts. This is clear in, for instance, the Old Gaelic tale *Aislinge Óenguso* ('The Dream of Óengus'), where the lovesick Óengus is described as experiencing *sercc écmaise*, 'love in absence' for Cáer.[109] This tale will be returned to for more thorough discussion both later in this chapter and in Chapter Three, which treats romantic love and lovesickness.

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[107] Jürgen Uhlich, '*Serc mór do Macc Maire*' in *Féilscríbhinn do Chathal Ó Háinle*, ed. by Eoin Mac Cárthaigh and Jürgen Uhlich (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2012), pp. 935-959. Uhlich's findings mainly revolve around the grammar of using *serc* + *do*, and not semantics.
[108] *eDIL s.v. serc.*

Serc is also used to describe religious love, or love of God. *eDIL* translates *serc* in the first instance as 'love (both sacred and profane)'.[110] *Serc Dé*, 'love for God', is a term seen in multiple texts from the Old Gaelic period onwards. For instance, St Brigit is described as *nī bu ūarach im ṡeirc Dé*, 'she was not intermittent about the love for God'.[111]

One could argue that *serc*, like *grád*, can refer to the love felt for a ruler. It is seen in the Old Gaelic *Félire Óengusso* ('The Martyrology of Óengus'):

> *Victor ocus Maxim*
> *im Chríst cota-ruicset*
> *ar ṡeirc ríg ro charsat*
> *inna fuil fotruicset.*
>
> Victor and Maxim, for Christ they have
> brought themselves: for affection towards
> the King whom they have loved they
> bathed them in their blood.[112]

However, this case is not at all clear cut; given that said 'ruler' is God, this might more accurately be described as love of the divine. Having God personified as king here could allow for the suggestion that this does not definitively prove that *serc ríg*, in this case, differs from *serc Dé*. The degree to which ideas of kingship in the period were being modelled on biblical imagery[113] could support the notion of kings deserving a similar kind of love as God. However, from its use here one could argue that *serc ríg* was not an alien concept to the writer and intended audience of this piece, even were it seen as stemming in this example from love of God.

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[109] *Die Suche nach der Traumfrau. Aislinge Óenguso: Oengus' Traum. Eine altirische Sage*, ed. and trans. by Wolfgang Meid, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Neue Folge, 14 (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, 2017), p. 53. See, however, Christina Cleary's argument that *grád n-écmaise* is a Middle Gaelic concept, and Óengus should be seen as experiencing *sercc tecmuis*, a 'chance love'. Christina Joanne Cleary, 'An Investigation of the *Remscéla Tána Bó Cúailnge* and an Edition and Translation of *Aislinge Óenguso* with Textual Notes' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2018), pp. 294-301. I have only become aware of Cleary's argument in the corrections stage of this thesis, else it would have been more fully engaged with throughout discussions of *Aislinge Óenguso.*

[110] *eDIL s.v. serc.*

[111] *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose, and Verse*, ed. by Whitley Stokes and John Strachan 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901–1910), II (1903), p. 332.

[112] Whitley Stokes, *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, Henry Bradshaw Society, 29 (London: Harrison, 1905), p. 123.

[113] Cf. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland', in *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence: Historical Studies XI*, ed. by T. W. Moody (Belfast: Appletree, 1978), pp. 1-35 (pp. 17-19).

Serc might, then, like *grád*, be seen as being used to refer to the love felt for a lord or ruler. Clearer areas of divergence between *grád* and *serc* can now be turned to. Unlike *grád*, examples of *serc* meaning charity are not immediately apparent. It is notable, given that *serc* functions as the verbal noun of *caraid*, which is related to Latin *caritas*,[114] that *serc* itself does not seem to relate to charity. That said, however, the word *deercc* 'charity' stems from a combination of *día* and *sercc* (that is, 'God' and 'love'). [115] And so, while examples of *serc* itself meaning charity are lacking, its existence in *deercc* suggests charity is not alien to its connotations. Unlike *grád*, however, *serc* is not used to convey a bond of trust. Of the 29 citations of *serc* under 'love (both sacred and profane)', none refer to charity or a bond of trust.[116] The lack of *serc* being used for charity might point to a lexical gap that *grád* plugged, potentially (and particularly) given Christian connotations of charity.

Serc does find usage in the specific legal term *altram seirce* 'fosterage of love/affection', denoting a fosterage 'for which no fee is paid'.[117] In this way, if a potential socio-legal meaning for *ben grádaigthe* is posited, there may be a parallel between these legal usages. That said, *altram seirce* is a clear case of a term attested as a legal one. The existence of the term *altram seirce* points towards an understanding of love as part of a the legal world, in addition to the emotional world, of medieval Gaeldom.

As Meid notes, *serc* may also be the noun of choice in describing lovesickness as *serc* is superficially phonologically similar to *serg* ('decline, wasting sickness').[118] The aforementioned *Aislinge Óenguso* would seem to support this; in the tale, *serc* is the noun used to describe Óengus's love(sickness). Meid also notes *grád* is a Middle Gaelic term; *serc* in contrast, is clearly attested in Old Gaelic.[119] That said, and as noted, we presume *grád* existed in Old Gaelic, given the early attestations of the term *grádaigidir.* [120]

Another area of distinction between *serc* and *grád* is that *serc* is used in the title of a tale or group of tales, namely in these four examples from the Middle Gaelic tale-lists:

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[114] See Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary*, p. 191. See also *caritas* in Lewis and Short, I 'dearness, costliness, high price, etc.'; II 'regard, esteem, affection, love (cf. amor)'. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A New Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. 297.

[115] *eDIL s.v. deercc.*

[116] *eDIL s.v. serc.*

[117] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series, 3 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), p. 87. Cf. O'Donnell, *Fosterage*, pp. 15-16.

[118] *eDIL s.v. 1 serg*; Meid, '*grád*'.

[119] See *eDIL s.v. serc.*

[120] *eDIL s.v. grádaigidir.*

1. *Serc Caillige Berre do Fhothud Chanand* 'The Love of the Caillech Bérri for Fothud Canainne'
2. *Serc Créde do Canann mac Gartnáin* 'The Love of Créd for Cano son of Gartnán'
3. *Serc Duib Lacha do Mongán* 'The Love of Dub Lacha for Mongán'
4. *Serc Gormlaithe do Niall* 'The Love of Gormlaith for Niall'.[121]

Here is an area in which *serc* is truly distinct from the other love terms to be examined, as the category of *serca* does not have an equivalent in *grád*, nor *inmain*. Not all of these texts are extant; we have *Serc Duib Lacha do Mongán*, and we may have (a text resembling) *Serc Créde* in having *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* ('The Tidings of Cano son of Gartnán'),[122] and of what we do have (and from what information we have about the characters of the others), these seem to be tales of romantic love. It is also noteworthy that all four titles are formulated as the love of a woman for a man, or, more precisely, the *serc* of a woman for a man.[123]

The difficulties in establishing the semantic ranges of two frequently paired words are many, especially when writing in English, as already discussed. But here are first steps to what is hoped will bring some nuance to *serc* and *grád* in future. In summary, *serc* derives from Proto-Celtic whereas *grád* comes from Latin. *Serc* like *grád* can be used as 'emotional affect, at times with an erotic aspect'; love of God; and, potentially, love of a ruler. Examples of *serc* itself meaning charity, are few, though *deercc* does exist; more clearly, examples of *serc* meaning a bond of trust are not immediately forthcoming. There are further areas of divergence between *serc* and *grád* outside of Meid's schema. There is the use of the word in the legal term *altram seirce*. *Serc* may be the love term of choice in discussing lovesickness given its similarity to *serg* (though it is a superficial similarity). And two other differences warrant further discussion: namely, *serc* functioning as the verbal noun of *caraid*, and the matter of the *serca* tale-type.

2.3.1 Caraid

As stated, *serc* functions as the verbal noun of the verb *caraid*. *Caraid* dominates as the love verb in medieval Gaelic saga. While *serc* and *grád* compete in terms of popularity as nouns from the Middle Gaelic period on, *caraid* is attested far more often than *grádaigidir* as a verb.[124] According to the *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, *caraid* comes from the Proto-Celtic **kar-o*, cognate with the Latin *cārus*;[125] and *serc* from **sterka*, cognate with the Greek *stérgō*, 'love'.[126] *Serc* and *caraid* are in complementary distribution: *serc* acts as a verbal noun to *caraid*. *Caraid*, like *serc* and unlike *grád*, comes from Proto-Celtic.

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[121] Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980), pp. 48, 58-9.

[122] Both of these texts and their relationships to the titles in the tale lists will be examined in more detail shortly. There is some brief discussion of *Scéla Cano*'s relationship to *Serc Créde* in *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin,* ed. by D. A. Binchy (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), p. xv.

[123] For discussion of how *serc* + *do* functions, see Uhlich, '*Serc mór do Macc Maire*'.

It is worth taking a moment to examine *caraid* on its own terms. On a semantic level, there is a good deal of overlap between *serc* and *caraid*, as would be expected. *eDIL* defines *caraid* as '(a) loves (persons)', in which it includes examples of *caraid* being used to discuss love of God; '(b) loves (things)'; and '(c) loves, likes (actions)'.[127] A potential example of '(b) loves (things)' is the character named Cairbre Lifechair. In the late Middle Gaelic[128] *Cóir Anmann* ('The Appropriateness of Names'), one of the explanations of his epithet reads: *Cairpre Lifechair .i. ara méd ro car Lifi* ('Cairpre Lifechair (< Life + -*car* 'loving'), i.e. because of the extent to which he loved Life').[129] While this is one of a number of explanations the text puts forward for 'Lifechair', it does suggest that using *caraid* in this way would at least be plausible to medieval Gaelic readers.

The last category, '(c) loves, likes (actions)' is not apparent when dealing with *serc* and *grád*. An example of *caraid* being used in this way can be seen in the Old Gaelic text Kuno Meyer called 'The Quarrel Between Finn and Oisin', which he dated to the late eighth and early ninth century:[130] *fritecht fóibur ní cara* 'he does not love to meet sword-edges'.[131] *Caraid* applying to the loving of an action is then a potential area of divergence between it and *serc* and *grád*.

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, *caraid* appears frequently in describing the feelings of women experiencing *grád n-écmaise* 'love in absence'. Where *serc* might be tied to (particularly men's) lovesickness, *caraid* is prominent in descriptions of women's *grád n-écmaise*. It is also seen in the aforementioned *Aislinge Óenguso*, in the context of lovesickness.[132]

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[124] Compare *eDIL s.v. caraid* and *eDIL s.v. grádaigidir.*

[125] Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary*, p. 191.

[126] Ibid., p. 355.

[127] *eDIL s.v. caraid.*

[128] Sharon Arbuthnot, 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Cóir Anmann*', in *Studia Celtica*, 53 (2001), 285-98 (285).

[129] Sharon Arbuthnot, *Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names*, 2 vols, Irish Texts Society, 59 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2005), I (2005), p. 90; trans. p. 129.

[130] Kuno Meyer, *Fianaigecht: Being a Collection of Hitherto Inedited Irish Poems and Tales Relating to Finn and his Fiana*, Todd Lecture Series, XVI (London: Hodges, Figgis, 1910), p. xviii. Kevin Murray has argued for a date in the second half of the eighth century. Kevin Murray, *The Early Finn Cycle* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), p. 64.

[131] Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, p. 26.

[132] Meid, *Aislinge Óenguso*, p. 53. This episode will shortly be discussed in the context of *écmaise*.

eDIL's categories are less precise than those at which are being aimed in this present study. In comparison with *grád* and *serc*, one can say that *caraid* is used for emotional (at times erotic) affect, as will be seen throughout Chapter Three; love of God; love of things; and love of activities. Its use in the categories of charity,[133] or demonstrating a bond of trust, are not apparent. The word *caraid* itself is not used as a tale-type,[134] and, unlike *serc* and *grád*, is a verb. Given that *serc* is the verbal noun of the verb *caraid*, it is not impossible to imagine there is scope under *serc* for the love of things and the love of activities. That said, evidence for *serc* being used in these contexts is not immediately forthcoming. Overall, even though *caraid* forms its verbal noun with *serc*, there seems to be a degree of semantic difference even between these two close terms, or a more particularised application of the verbal noun *serc* as compared to the finite verb *caraid*.

2.3.2 *Serca* and Gender

As seen already, another aspect of *serc*'s divergence from other medieval Gaelic words for love is its use as the name for a category of tales: *serca*, the plural of *serc*, are found listed in both of the Middle Gaelic tale lists we have, with a total of four medieval *serca* tale titles attested.[135] Two related tale-types of interest in the Middle Gaelic period are *tochmarca* 'wooing tales' and *aitheda* 'elopement tales'. *Serca* seem distinguished from both of these related tale-types, though, by being descriptive of emotion rather than action; a tale of love and its consequences, rather than the act of wooing or elopement. But here we may be limited by our own understanding of love; without overstating its likelihood, this use of *serc* in a tale title could point to an understanding of *serc* as not only emotion but also act, or as an event. It is possible that love in medieval Gaelic society could be thought of as as much of an activity as wooing, elopement, or violent death for example.

Serca can be considered in comparison with *tochmarca*. As Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha defines *tochmarca*:

> The category of *tochmarc*, or ‘wooing tale’, is well represented in the earliest Irish tale-lists. Typically, wooing tales describe the courting of a quick-witted and strong-minded young woman by a suitor who has to appease a jealous or unwilling

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[133] *Caraid*, like *serc*, differs from its Latin cognate in having no obvious connection to charity. Though consider *trócar* ‘mercy, leniency’, a compound of *tróg* and *car*: *eDIL s.v. trócar*.

[134] Though in a tale-type we would expect the verbal noun, which in this case is *serc*, which we do have.

[135] See Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales*. The three *serca* in List A are found on p. 48; the four *serca* in List B are found on pp. 58-59. We have two twelfth-century lists that are based upon an earlier list dated to the tenth century (Ibid., p. 66.).

> father, husband or other relative and accomplish a series of tasks, normally set for him by the woman herself.[136]

While there might be some overlap between the two tale-types, one can start by considering titles. *Serca* contrast in particular with *tochmarca* in terms of gender. All four of the listed *serca* in the tale lists describe the love of a woman for a man. *Tochmarca*, in contrast, are almost always the wooing of a woman (at times without the wooing man being named):[137] in the *serca* titles the woman functions as the subject of the verbal noun, whereas in the *tochmarca* the woman is the object. Compare then the titles *Tochmarc Emire* and *Serc Créde do Canann mac Gartnáin*: the former, 'The Wooing of Emer', describes a process that happens to Emer; the latter describes the feelings (or action) of the tale's most prominent woman. This gendered aspect to *serca* seems to have gone uncommented upon thus far in scholarship. The gendering of *serca* also applies to *aitheda*; all the listed *aitheda* in the tale-lists feature first and foremost the woman's name,[138] and then they, like *serca*, and occasionally *tochmarca*, feature the name of the man with whom they elope. The tale titles do all give the woman’s name primacy, however.[139]

We are limited in terms of what survives when it comes to *serca*. *Serc Gormlaithe do Niall* does not survive;[140] nor does *Serc Caillige Berre do Fhothud Chanand*, though we do have material connecting the two titular characters.[141] One might say *Serc Duib Lacha do Mongán* survives in the tale *Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán* ‘The Conception of Mongán and Mongán's Love for Dub Lacha’;[142] however, the latter is an Early Modern text as opposed to a Middle Gaelic one, written several centuries after our tale lists. And we do have an Old Gaelic tale featuring Créd loving Cano mac Gartnáin, in *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, though the tale is not referred to as **Serc Créde do Chanann mac Gartnáin* in the text.[143] Discussion of both extant tales follows, in order to better understand what is meant by *serc* in this context, but as can already be seen, there will be problems in looking at *Scéla Cano* and *Serc Duibe Lacha* as representatives of the medieval Gaelic *serca* tale-type. Bearing such problems in mind, both texts will now be examined to see what can be gleaned about *serca* from them.

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[136] Ní Dhonnchadha, ‘Gormlaith and Her Sisters’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. IV: Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, ed. by Angela Bourke et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), pp. 166-249 (p. 206).

[137] Specifically, the difference is that the genitive following *tochmarc* functions as the object of the verbal noun, and the genitive following *serc* functions as the subject of the verbal noun. *Tochmarc Becfhola* is exceptional here as the woman can be seen as taking the initiative in wooing-actions throughout.

[138] Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales*, p. 57, pp. 74-75.

[139] It is worth considering the societal context of these tales; namely, an aristocratic patriarchy in which men’s permission was to be sought for legal unions. This might help elucidate the usage of women’s names in tale titles: they can be the subjects of *serca*, giving love, but are the objects of *tochmarca*, being wooed.

[140] See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature’, *Ériu*, 52 (2002), 1-24 (3).

[141] See ‘The Ban-shenchus [part 1]’, ed. and trans. by Margaret E. Dodds, *Revue Celtique*, 47 (1930), 283-339 (302): *Callech Bérri búan bind bunaid, ben Fhathaid Chanand na cét.*

[142] ‘*Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe-Lacha do Mongán*’, ed. by Kuno Meyer, in *The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal to the Land of the Living*, ed. by Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt, 2 vols (London: David Nutt, 1895-1897), I (1895), pp. 58-84.

[143] Binchy*, Scéla Cano.*

2.3.3 Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán

Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán, henceforth *Serc Duibe Lacha*, is best regarded as a fifteenth-century text that survives in the Book of Fermoy.[144] Regarding the dating of the text, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh states: 'All we can say for definite is that it was in existence about the year 1457, when it was copied into the Roche compilation known as the Book of Fermoy.'[145] The dating of this text places it firmly outwith the scope of this thesis. Time will be spent, however, examining this text in detail. The text merits this discussion as one of only two possible sources for a *serc* tale. It is in service of elucidating the meaning of this Old Gaelic term that a text from outwith the period is being drawn upon. There are obvious drawbacks to such an approach, which will be outlined and reiterated as we discuss the *Compert*. However, without discussion of this text, the discussion of *serca* would be solely reliant on one text, and the discussion would be of more dubious merit.

The tale can be split into two main sections: the first deals with the supernatural intervention by Manannán that results in the birth of Mongán; the second tells of how Mongán loses Dub Lacha, and eventually regains her. Mongán enters into an agreement of *cairdeas gan éra* 'friendship without refusal' with the Leinster king Brandub, as Mongán is so taken with some of Brandub's red-eared (presumably Otherworldly) cows that he must have them.[146] Using this agreement, Brandub is able to take Mongán's wife, the titular Dub Lacha. Though Dub Lacha leaves with Brandub, she makes him agree to spend a year courting her before they are united. Mongán suffers a wasting sickness in Dub Lacha's absence, but the incitement of his *gilla* Mac an Daimh leads to him repeatedly interacting with her. Eventually he uses his supernatural abilities to transform a *caillech* into a beautiful woman, upon whose face he casts a love charm.[147] Seeing the disguised *caillech*,

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[144] Meyer, '*Compert Mongáin*', p. 58.

[145] Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Mongán's Metamorphosis: *Compert Mongáin ocus Serce Duibe Lacha do Mongán*, a Later Mongán tale', in *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, ed. by Fiona Edmonds and Paul Russell (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 207–216 (p. 215).

[146] Otherworldly beings causing desire in male heroes is further examined in Chapter Three.

[147] *bricht serce*, a spell of love, though possibly *blicht serce*, a milk of love, which makes less immediate sense but is how it appears in Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran,* p. 69. See *eDIL s.v. 1 blicht.*

Brandub agrees to swap Dub Lacha for her. Dub Lacha and Mongán escape, while Brandub awakens in the morning with the once-again ugly *caillech* by his side, to laughter from his subjects.

The most extensive scholarship on the tale in recent years has been undertaken by Joseph Nagy[148] and Ní Mhaonaigh.[149] Nagy looks at *Serc Duibe Lacha* specifically in the context of *rómánsaíocht*, the 'romance tales' of the late medieval and early modern period,[150] that is, tales outside the general time-span of this thesis, and tales for which the influence of Continental concepts of romantic love and chivalry cannot be ruled out. Nagy does argue however for a consistency between the later text and the scant earlier materials on Dub Lacha and Mongán.[151] As such, Nagy builds on Alfred Nutt's argument that there is 'strong ground for presumption that our tale does reproduce in essentials, modernise certain details as it may, a genuine episode of the original Mongan legend,'[152] though it should be noted both are discussing Mongán's shapeshifting abilities specifically. Despite sharing the *Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán* title with the tale referenced in the Middle Gaelic tale lists, however, we cannot say that our Early Modern text *is* that tale. As Ní Mhaonaigh states: 'while we may speculate that this is likely to have borne some resemblance to the now lost story entitled *Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán* in the tale-lists, the nature of the relationship is impossible to ascertain.'[153]

What then does that mean for analysis of this tale as one of the two *serca*? Conclusions drawn from this text are (and must be) preliminary only. This would be true even if what one had was the Middle Gaelic text faithfully rendered in Early Modern Irish; only having two *serca* is not enough to build a comprehensive genre schema. It being 'impossible to ascertain' the relationship of this tale to the Middle Gaelic text makes for even shakier ground, upon which one must tread lightly.

With this caution in mind, examining Dub Lacha and her role in the story might give material with which to start thinking about *serc* and how it functions in the context of tale titles. Despite the title, there is no large amount of space dedicated to Dub Lacha's love for Mongán. They are betrothed from birth, and Mongán suffers a wasting sickness upon losing her, and spends much of the tale trying to get her back; but there is little to be seen in terms of her love for him. Thus, despite the title of the tale placing an emphasis on the woman's love, the focus of the narrative is on the exploits of the named male character. Indeed, the fuller tale title might lead us to expect the centrality of Mongán.

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[148] Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'In Defence of *Rómánsaíocht'*, *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 9-26.
[149] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Mongán's Metamorphosis'.
[150] Nagy, '*Rómánsaíocht*', 9.
[151] Ibid., 24.
[152] Meyer and Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran*, pp. 12-13.
[153] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Mongán's Metamorphosis', p. 210.

Mongán, however, spends the majority of the tale as ineffectual, failing to make progress in getting Dub Lacha back, though he does triumph in the end.[154] Ní Mhaonaigh points out how dependent his success is on his two advisors, Dub Lacha and Mac an Daimh,[155] who have to repeatedly spur him on in order for him to take any action; she describes the Early Modern Irish tale as being concerned with 'Mongán's folly',[156] and Dub Lacha as exemplifying 'marital fidelity', in contrast to Mongán and Brandub.[157] As she summarises:

> It is Dub Lacha, for example, who appeals to Mongán's under-active sense of honour in an effort to persuade him to keep his side of his unthinking bargain with the king of Leinster. In addition, it is her quick thinking which wins the couple a year's grace. All of this stands in sharp contrast to her husband's dithering.[158]

This combination of a quick-thinking woman and an 'inexperienced ruler'[159] in need of good counsel is one which will also be seen shortly when examining *Scéla Cano*.

While discussing *serca* and early modern tales, another tale-type merits brief comment. Nagy makes the following point: 'The *serc* (love[-story]) and the *tóruigheacht* (elopement[-story]) were closely connected genres in medieval Irish tradition.'[160] It is notable that a later version of *Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán* written down in the nineteenth century is titled *Tóruigheacht Duibhe Lacha Láimh-Ghile* ('The Pursuit/Elopement of Dub Lacha of the White Hand').[161] The *tóruigheacht* does not seem to have such rigidity when it comes to gender as our earlier tale types do; here we have the *tóruigheacht* of Dub Lacha, and the most famous example of the genre, *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* ('The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne') features both a man and woman in the title, with the man's name foregrounded. It is worth noting however that despite the name change to *Tóruigheacht Duibhe Lacha Láimh-Ghile*, Dub Lacha is still framed as key, even though Mongán is our protagonist. This does make sense; after all, Mongán is not the one being pursued in the text.

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[154] In this way, Mongán is similar to various Continental romantic heroes who need to be spurred into action by other characters, particularly women or advisers. For another insular Celtic example, cf. Pwyll in the First Branch of the Mabinogi. *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet: The first of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, ed. by R. L. Thomson, Mediaeval and Modern Welsh Series 1 (Dublin: DIAS, 1957).

[155] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Mongán's Metamorphosis', p. 211.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid., p. 213. There is a striking difference here between this tale, and Lewis's discussion of romance as being predicated on adultery, as discussed in Chapter One. Instead, Dub Lacha's original partner has to undertake here the scheming we might expect of an adulterer, despite him being her partner, in order to win her back.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Nagy, '*Rómánsaíocht*', 14.

[161] Ibid., 13. Nagy uses 'elopement', but 'pursuit' is the far more common translation. Cf. *eDIL s.v. do-beir*.

If we read *tóruigeacht* as ‘pursuit’, however, the foregrounding of women’s names could be seen as their being the object of a man’s pursuit, the one that has been pursued. It is also worth noting that in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne,* both titular characters are being pursued by Finn, as opposed to being pursued in courting. Ultimately, then, it seems the similarities between the *serc* and the *tóruigheacht* are not as fruitful as comparison with the *tochmarc.*

Overall, *Serc Duibe Lacha* gives us a few things to bear in mind as we move on to our next text: the combination of a smart woman and a naive nobleman; no great description of the titular *serc* as an emotion; and the fact that one cannot know how much *Serc Duibe Lacha* resembles the text named in the Middle Gaelic tale lists. These three facts are all worth considering as *Scéla Cano* is examined.

2.3.4 Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin

Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin is a text which has been dated to the early tenth century,[162] that has most recently been translated by Anouk Nuijten.[163] While it is not known for certain that this is the tale listed as *Serc Créde do Canann mac Gartnáin* in List B (only), the tale does date closer to the creation of the tale lists than *Serc Duibe Lacha*, and it does feature a character called Créd who is portrayed as loving Cano mac Gartnáin. This question of whether *Scéla Cano* is *Serc Créde* will be addressed shortly.

To summarise the tale: Cano is an exiled prince of Scotland who flees to Ireland after the murder of his father. While in Ireland:

> he meets Créd, wife of king Marcán of the Uí Maine. She confesses her love to him and he promises to take her with him after he has regained his position as rightful king of Scotland. To pledge his loyalty to her, he gives her a stone, which contains his soul. Cano eventually returns to Scotland and becomes king. A year later, he sets out for Ireland to meet Créd. [Créd warns him off landing in one specific spot

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[162] Binchy, *Scéla Cano*, pp. ix-xv. Though see Ó Cathasaigh’s reticence to assign a date of composition to it: Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Rhetoric of *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*’, in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, ed. by Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 233–50 (p. 233).

[163] Anouk Nuijten, ‘*Scéla Cano Meic Gartnáin*: A Study and Translation’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Utrecht University, 2014).

> as her male relatives are waiting for him there.] Before he can reach the coast on which Créd is waiting, however, Colcu, son of Marcán, attacks him and he is forced to abandon the ship. When Créd beholds this scene, she presumes Cano is dead. She then kills herself and breaks the stone, effectively killing Cano as well.[164]

Thus are presented the most pertinent aspects of the tale for our purposes.

A matter of scholarship merits a brief discussion here. *Scéla Cano* is frequently discussed as a Gaelic Tristan analogue, particularly given the use of the name Marcán. As such, questions of influence between the *Scéla* and chivalric romance have been asked.[165] D. A. Binchy's dating of the text to the tenth century[166] does posit an origin pre-dating the development of themes associated with courtly love. However, the oldest manuscript containing the tale is the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318), dated to around the turn of the fifteenth century. The Tristan analogues are not a focus here, but it is acknowledged that chivalric romance might have influenced this tale, or its preservation.[167]

When Créd appears (about midway through the tale), she is not the first woman to be portrayed as being in love with Cano within the text. Early in the tale, we meet Ingen Díarmada, 'Diarmaid's daughter':

> *Ingen Díarmada maic Æda Sláne* ***rochar(astar)*** *Cano* ***ara airscélaib*** *cid síu do-(th)ísed thairis.*
>
> [It was] The daughter of Díarmait son of Áed Sláne, who **loved** Cano **on account of his famous stories [/great renown]** even before he came across the sea.[168]

Ingen Díarmada warns Cano of the danger that awaits him by means of poetry, before more clearly setting out the danger he faces in his situation. *Ní faiteach int Albanach*, the poem begins and ends,[169] 'the Albanach is not careful', or 'wary'. Ingen Díarmada also serves as something of a foreshadowing of Créd, who will also love Cano before meeting him (though this is not explicitly said to occur *ara airscélaib*, a term to be discussed in the next chapter), and who will also warn Cano of danger and endeavour to keep him safe. We see then a woman who is romantically interested in Cano,[170] and who gives him advice that protects his life.

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[164] Ibid., p. 3. I have added a sentence in square brackets as the plot point contained within it is pertinent to the following discussion.

[165] See James Carney, 'The Irish Affinities of Tristan', in his *Studies in Irish literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), pp. 189–242. For discussion of Carney's use of *Scéla Cano*, see Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, 'Tristan and Early Modern Irish Romances: James Carney's *Ur-Tristan* Revisited', in *The Matter of Britain in Medieval Ireland: Reassessments*, ed. by John Carey (London: Irish Texts Society, 2017), pp. 92-121.

[166] See above at n. 162.

[167] This is a point which will be more fully explored in Chapter Three.

[168] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 31. Emphasis my own, with some addition in square brackets. Here is an example of *caraid* being used for *grád n-écmaise*, as previously described.

[169] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

The advice of Ingen Díarmada and Créd to Cano has been compared to other warnings in medieval Gaelic saga. The parallels between Ingen Díarmada and Créd's warnings, Cathbad's prophecy of Deirdriu in *Longes mac nUislenn* ('The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu'), and Fedelm's warning to Medb in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* have been examined by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh.[171] In a section of her thesis entitled 'Warning Women', drawing upon Ó Cathasaigh's discussion, Nuijten comments on Créd's warnings to Cano at the end of the tale: 'Since Cano chose to ignore Créd's advice, he made the wrong decision and the consequences are disastrous. His downfall is tied to the woman who loves him more than anyone in the world.'[172] She points out, paraphrasing Ó Cathasaigh,[173] that Ingen Díarmada and Créd both 'damage their loyalty' to their male relatives (father and husband, respectively) when they choose to warn Cano, the object of their romantic affections.[174] Nuijten goes on to state that Créd's 'strong love' of Cano makes her reject the interest of 'all the Irish nobles and her husband.'[175]

This is an area where we might compare *Scéla Cano* and *Serc Duibe Lacha*. Both feature, to borrow Nuijten's phrase, 'Warning Women'. We have seen Dub Lacha, along with Mac an Daimh, advise the 'inexperienced' Mongán; we can draw direct parallels between the advice given to Mongán and the advice given to Cano in this tale. While Ingen Díarmada brings an unknown threat to Cano's knowledge, perhaps highlighting his inexperience, the key parallel for our purposes is Créd's later warning Cano not to land in a particular location because of the threat to his life.[176] If we compare this to Mongán being advised by Dub Lacha in *Serc Duibe Lacha*, we can see the two tales share women who are romantically interested in the hero guiding him through times in which a danger is posed by the woman's other partner (Dub Lacha's husband-to-be in *Serc Duibe Lacha*, and Colcu, son of Créd's partner Marcán, in *Scéla Cano*). Ó Cathasaigh has cited the warnings offered by Cathbad and Fedelm as parallels for those made by Ingen Díarmada and Créd.[177] Yet, that we see in *Scéla Cano* a romantically interested party offering advice is a significant departure from those examples; there is no textual evidence for a romantic interest between Cathbad and Conchobar in *Longes mac nUislenn*, nor between Fedelm and Medb in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. It could be suggested that specifically when women warn men, there is a romantic element to their relationship, but that this may not apply to same-sex warnings. The comparison between Créd and Dub Lacha as advisors of their romantic partners is clearly the more fruitful one here.

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[170] While there is nothing inherently romantic about the *caraid* + *ar airscélaib* formulation, the fact that its use elsewhere is always to express a romantic relationship allows confidence in reading Ingen Díarmada's interest as romantic.
[171] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Scéla Cano',* p. 244.
[172] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 14.
[173] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Scéla Cano*', p. 244.
[174] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 14.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., p. 72.

We turn our attention now more fully to Créd. As mentioned, she also loves Cano before meeting him:

> ***Ro-charastair-side*** *cid síu t(h)ísed thairis anair.*
>
> **She had loved him** (Cano) even before he came across the sea from the east.[178]

Though lacking the *ara airscélaib* formulation of earlier, there is a clear echo in the text here of the love Ingen Díarmada felt for Cano. Also similar to Ingen Díarmada, Créd immediately speaks in verse.[179] The second stanza of her first poem reads:

> *Créd ingen Gúairi madnach,*
> *cóel inber (?) etar-da-beth*
> *ocus [Cano] mac Gartnán,*
> *in mac regad* ***dia tochmarc****.*
>
> Mournful Créd daughter of Gúairi,
> a narrow estuary(?) was between them
> and [Cano] the son of Gartnán,
> the boy would go **to woo her**.[180]

This extract is of interest for its use of the word *tochmarc*, most commonly associated now with the aforementioned tale-type, though very well attested in a general sense. This tale is not itself a *tochmarc*, but the use of the word here also forces more care in the discussion of *serca* below: Créd, at least, sees Cano's action as *tochmarc*, even if the tale is not titled *Tochmarc Créde*.

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[177] See above at n. 153.
[178] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 42. Emphasis my own.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid., p. 43. Emphasis my own.

Créd then states, addressing Colcu, the son of her partner Marcán:

A Cholcu,
bec a fis duid cia dordu;
***mo serc-sa** do-radus d'fir*
nád (f)ocus dam a (f)orbu.

O Colcu,
little thou knows of it although I chant:
I have given **my love** to a man
whose native land is not near to me.[181]

We have then, here, in her own words, a profession of the *serc* of Créd for Cano.

Further on in the tale, we see that Créd's husband needs four people to guard Créd while they feast with Cano.[182] There is here a point of similarity with *Serc Duibe Lacha*, with the female love-interest of the male protagonist being under the guard of her husband(-to-be, in Dub Lacha's case),[183] as an impediment to the hero and the heroine's union. Further on in the tale, Créd and Cano are due to meet, but Marcán's son Colcu is waiting for Cano, with warriors.[184] The situation is similar, then, to the aforementioned Mongán trying to reach Dub Lacha but failing: there is a clear impediment to the lovers meeting.[185] When they do meet, at Loch Créda, Colcu's warriors attack and wound Cano. Seeing his face, and, it is presumed, assuming him dead,[186] Créd smashes her head on a stone,[187] and the stone of Cano's soul smashes by her side, with him dying a while later. The tale ends:

Scéla Cano maic Gartnáin & Crédi ingine Gúaire ann sin. Finit.

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[181] Ibid., p. 44. Emphasis my own.
[182] Ibid., p. 53.
[183] Meyer, '*Compert Mongáin*', p. 67; trans. p. 80.
[184] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 72.
[185] Meyer, '*Compert Mongáin*', p. 67; trans. p. 80.
[186] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 73.
[187] A moment clearly reminiscent of *Longes mac nUislenn*. The parallel might point to an avenue for future comparison between Créd and Deirdriu, along with tale-type conventions. See Theuerkauf, 'Tristan', p. 8.

> Those are the stories of Cano son of Gartnán and Créd daughter of Gúaire. The end.[188]

The tale ends, then, with the statement that this is the tidings of *both* Cano and Créd; they are both given space in the tale's name. And if we read *scéla* literally as stories or tales, as opposed to reading it as news, or one tale, we have another parallel with the extant Dub Lacha story here. Namely, both potential candidates for *serca* we have present a narrative consisting of two tales: here it is the tale of Cano and the tale of Créd; and with Dub Lacha, they are the tales of Mongán's conception, and Dub Lacha's *serc*.

So is *Scéla Cano* the *Serc Créde* from the tale-lists? It is, at least, a distinct possibility. *Scéla Cano* dates from around the period of the tale-lists,[189] and definitely tells the story of Créd's *serc* for Cano mac Gartnáin; and it can be argued that there are several in-text moments that would support a reading of *Scéla Cano* as *Serc Créde*. For one, Créd's love for Cano is explicitly expressed as *serc*, twice;[190] our heroine, in her own words, describes her feelings for the hero as *serc*. That said, she also describes as Cano's wooing as *tochmarc*, yet the argument is not being presented that this tale should be called *Tochmarc Créde*. Both *serc* and *tochmarc* seem to be used in their general sense, as opposed to specifically inviting the connotation of a tale title. The tale title given at the end, *Scéla Cano maic Gartnáin & Crédi ingine Gúaire*, does give a parity of importance to both parties, in a way that may bring to mind the *Serc Créde* title, but this is not unusual. There are also areas of comparison with *Serc Duibe Lacha*, although it is unclear whether our later text can be accurately compared with the tale listed in the *serca* section of the tale-lists. These points of comparison are what will next be discussed; for now, it can be said that *Scéla Cano* portrays the *serc* of Créd for Cano, around the time the tale-lists were compiled. Therefore, it is reasonable to portray *Scéla Cano* as, if not *Serc Créde* itself, a text closely related to the tale listed in List B.

That said, several surviving saga texts have titles which do not sum up the entirety of the tale. The whole of a story was not necessarily encapsulated in the title. For example, *Táin Bó Fraích* ('The Cattle-raid of Fraoch') is as much about the wooing of Findabair as it is about Fráech getting his cattle back. Indeed, Findabair's love for Fráech animates the narrative arguably even more than Créd's for Cano; yet the tale is not called *Serc Findabrach do Fráich*. The same tales can have different titles in different manuscript versions. A title was not necessarily a true reflection of all of a tale's content, but at times, such as with *Táin Bó Fraích*, may highlight one important event that takes place in the tale. It may, therefore, be the case that our tale titles are less markers of distinct genres, and more share tropes or aspects in common. The idea of such markers in common is one we will now turn to for *serca*.

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[188] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 73.

[189] *Scéla Cano* is dated to around the tenth century, as is the original tale list upon which our two twelfth-century tale lists are based. Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales*, p. 58-59. Though do note Ó Cathasaigh's reticence to date the text: Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Scéla Cano*', p. 233.

[190] One of these we have already mentioned. The second case can be seen at Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', p. 45.

2.3.5 Preliminary Analysis of *Serca*

Analysis of the term *serc* necessitates the exploration of its use in the *serca* tale title. However, the challenges involved in attempting an analysis of *serca* have already been stated; the low number of *serca* listed in the tale-lists generally, and the fact that even fewer survive, impairs the ability to compare and contrast the substance of *serca* as opposed to solely the titles. Further impeding the attempt is that one of the two contenders for 'surviving' *serca* is a tale in Early Modern Irish written down centuries after the tale-lists were composed. The other surviving '*serc*' is a tale not even titled as a *serc*, but as a *Scéla*; therefore the following analysis must be preliminary, as we are taking for our two *serca* texts with ambiguous relationships to the tales listed in the tale-lists.

That said, the two *serca*, in as much as we can call them that, do have things in common that allow us to begin an analysis of what *serca* might have contained, even if such analysis is preliminary. As there is an overlap of subject matter between *serca* and *tochmarca*, a logical place to begin is by returning to Ní Dhonnchadha's description of the *tochmarca* tale-type:

> Typically, wooing tales describe the courting of a quick-witted and strong-minded young woman by a suitor who has to appease a jealous or unwilling father, husband or other relative and accomplish a series of tasks, normally set for him by the woman herself.[191]

In comparison with this scheme of *tochmarca*, let us examine the two candidates for *serca*. Both tales definitely feature 'quick-witted and strong minded' young women: Ní Mhaonaigh describes Mongán's wife as 'the feisty, crafty Dub Lacha',[192] and we have seen how Créd warns Cano. *Serc Duibe Lacha* does not 'describe a courting'; Dub Lacha and Mongán are betrothed from birth. In *Scéla Cano*, Créd loves Cano before he even comes to Ireland, and so we might not think of it as 'describing a courting'. That said, this may depend on our understanding of the word 'courting'. Both tales feature women who are either betrothed or married to an antagonist, while loving the protagonist; we could read the outwitting of this antagonist within the context of 'courting' as an unusual wooing. There are definite attempts made by the hero to gain the object of the hero's affection. The heroes outwitting a jealous male to unite with the object of their desires also chimes more positively with Lewis's emphasis on love as a transgressive force in medieval love-tales.[193] It could be the case then that this outwitting of the antagonist is a key part of the *serca* tale type; for our suitors, Cano and Mongán, do not 'have to **appease** a jealous [male relative]'; they have to outsmart or best the men to whom Créd and Dub Lacha are romantically linked.

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[191] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 206.
[192] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Mongán's Metamorphosis', p. 210.

When we come to the question of whether they 'accomplish a series of tasks, normally set [...] by the woman herself', this is an arguable point. It could be argued that the storylines involving Cano coming back after becoming king in Scotland and Mongán finding a way to get Dub Lacha back count as accomplishing a series of tasks. However, these are not tasks set by the women themselves, and they are not part of the aforementioned emotional process of wooing. In the case of Dub Lacha we could perhaps argue this is part of a legal process of courting Mongán is undertaking, legitimately (in the eyes of the law) re-gaining Dub Lacha from Brandub; but there is no reason given in the text for Cano needing to be a king in Scotland before coming to get Créd, other than the mercenary love-triangle trope that is evoked.[194] Indeed, even as king in Scotland, Cano is unable to gain Créd.

There does seem to be some overlap between *serca* and *tochmarca*, then, but they still seem to be distinct. Indeed, Nagy proposes we could think of *serca*, *tochmarca*, and *aitheda* 'to be different strands of a supergenre'.[195] But, bearing in mind all aforementioned caveats, what might it be said then are the possible markers of a *serca* genre?

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[193] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*.

[194] See Anne Lea, 'Love, Sex, and the Mercenary Soldier', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 12 (1992), 207–12. Though Lea does argue that it was Cano being in military service that prevented sexual activity between them: ibid., 208.

[195] Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'The Celtic Literary Love Triangle Revisited', in *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Celtic Studies, held in Maynooth University, 1–5 August 2011*, ed. by Liam Breatnach, Ruairí Ó hUiginn, Damian McManus, and Katharine Simms (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2015), pp. 221–244 (p. 225). His core elements of this supergenre comprise: '(1) there is contention over possession of a sexually desired, potential partner, a 'beloved', whether male or female; (2) the contenders, male or female, may be rivals, both of them vying to win the 'beloved', or they may be working against each other as, respectively, kinsperson to and suitor of the person desired; and (3), one contender plays the role of a relative 'insider' (within a family or, more generally, society) and the other that of a relative 'outsider')': ibid. Nagy, though, builds his argument on *Acallam na Senórach*, the text which stands as the cut-off point for this thesis.

2.3.6 Inexperienced Men, ‘Warning Women’, Excessive Love

Our candidates *serca* each feature an ‘inexperienced ruler’[196] guided and advised by a clever young woman with whom they are romantically involved.[197] The incompetence of these men is highlighted at times. This is particularly true in the case of Mongán, whose folly is a core aspect of the tale as Ní Mhaonaigh states;[198] and Cano learns from his mistakes,[199] but he does still make those mistakes to begin with. We can consider Ní Dhonnchadha’s ‘quick-witted and strong-minded young woman’ from *tochmarca* as a shared character between the two tale types. When Ní Mhaonaigh describes Dub Lacha as ‘feisty, crafty’, we might think of feisty, crafty women who help their heroes overcome adversity as a staple of *serca*, similar to the ‘quick-witted and strong-minded’ young women of *tochmarca*. There is clearly a degree of similarity here with characters from *tochmarca* such as Emer, for instance, who instructs Cú Chulainn on how best to abduct her.[200] There may be a difference in that Dub Lacha and Créd are helping the hero overcome their romantic partners(-to-be) rather than their fathers; but in each case it is a male figure who has control over the woman, as we might expect from tales set in a patriarchal society.

These smart women are coupled with ‘inexperienced’ men. Mongán makes blundering mistakes that lose him Dub Lacha to begin with, and Cano, though he learns from mistakes, fails to outsmart Créd’s stepson Colcu at the end, a failure which results in both his and Créd’s deaths. In both cases, the young women who are romantically interested in the male heroes give them advice that aids them, saving (or at least prolonging) their lives. This combination of smart young women advising inexperienced rulers, with a romantic relationship underpinning said advising, could be seen as a marker of *serca*. The idea of an active, clever heroine guiding a potentially inexperienced, passive, or foolish hero through the dangerous territory of arranging a romantic or sexual union against the inclination of the woman's male guardians becomes a trope also in late medieval ‘popular romance’ in general.[201] That this may be a marker of the *serca* raises fascinating possibilities for the cross-pollination of tropes between various literatures in Western Europe in our time period, rather than solely positing chivalric romance flourishes in France and is responsible for love as a theme emerging in the literatures of Europe. That said, the case must not be over-stated: the only surviving text we can confidently say was titled a *serc* most likely post-dated the emergence of chivalric romance.

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[196] Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Mongán’s Metamorphosis’, p. 213.

[197] Cano is actually guided by two women who love him, but he is only romantically involved with one of them.

[198] Ibid.

[199] See Ó Cathasaigh’s discussion of *ainmne* in *Scéla Cano* in particular; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Theme of *Ainmne* in *Scéla Cano Meic Gartnáin*’, *Celtica*, 15 (1983), 78-87.

[200] Findon, *A Woman’s Words*, pp. 26, 36, 49-50.

[201] For discussion, see Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly pp. 221-25.

Perhaps more fundamentally, given the title of the *serca* tale-type, both of our tales feature women who feel love so strongly for our hero that they need to be placed under guard or protected with warriors. Discussing *grád n-écmaise*, Nuijten argues for its meaning being ‘excessive love’.[202] Both Brandub and Marcán have to keep a close eye on their partners: Brandub makes Dub Lacha tell him when she misses Mongán and thus seems to be able to predict when he will come, and successfully stops him from seeing her until Mongán’s final triumph; and at a feast Cano is attending, Marcán has to have guards assigned to Créd, and her attempts to meet Cano afterwards are foiled by his warriors. The first of these obstacles necessitates Créd outwitting the guards and the other people at the feast by feeding them a drink upon which a sleeping spell has been cast, and the latter obstacle means Créd rearranges her meeting with Cano, warning him that warriors lie in wait. Dub Lacha and Créd both love the protagonists to a degree which worries their partners and relatives, and both advise the protagonists.

2.3.7 *Serca*: Tale-type Characteristics

Two of the characteristics of *serca* proposed here — the advising woman, and her immoderate love — are entwined and may form the basis of the *serc* tale: a clever young woman feels immoderate love for an inexperienced leader; there is a love so strong between them she needs to be guarded to prevent her leaving her current partner for this inexperienced leader; and she advises the hero-leader in ways that either keep him safe, give him a better chance of success in accessing her, or both. It can be summarised:

1. a woman feels love for a leader
2. she feels this love so strongly that her existing partner believes that it necessitates guards
3. this in turn necessitates outwitting guards and partners (with various results)
4. the ‘inexperienced ruler’ has to listen to the woman advising him, and to come-of-age by outwitting these protections

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[202] Nuijten, ‘*Scéla Cano*’, p. 11, n. 38; *eDIL s.v. écmaise*. The case for the phrase meaning ‘excessive love’ would admittedly be stronger were medieval Gaelic literature replete with examples of the phrase being used to describe lovers who are present.

5. this storyline takes place as part of a wider storyline of the young ruler coming into (or failing to come into) their kingship.

What are the problems with such a schema? For starters, all of the caveats we have repeatedly stated when discussing *serca*. It could also be said that there are definitely elements of this schema that apply to other, non-*serca* tales — *Tochmarc Emire* is a tale in which a smart young woman under guard advises a young man how best to obtain her. However, Emer lists a series of tasks for Cú Chulainn to prove himself worthy with, and love does not seem to play as prominent a role: she did not love him before seeing him like Créd, nor was betrothed to him since birth; while she swears a vow of chastity, it is later in the tale that the notion of love emerges. Furthermore, while she advises and sets tasks for Cú Chulainn, she is not advising an 'inexperienced **ruler**' but a young warrior. And so, we can see there are areas of overlap, without a doubt, with our preliminary schema for *serca*, but there are nuanced differences. The tale-types are also not mutually exclusive when it comes to subject matter; we should not expect that *serca* would be entirely alien in their content compared to other tale-types, especially the *tochmarca* which deals with wooing.

2.3.8 *Serca* Conclusion

The meaning of *serc* merited examination in the context of it being a tale title, something not applicable to our other love terms here. It is difficult to say with certainty what the *serca* tale-type looked like, but our preliminary schema discussed above functions as a first step in its analysis. The next step to test whether this schema of immoderate love, inexperienced kings and clever, advisory women under guard holds water would be to search the material we do have linking the Caillech Bérri to Fothud Canainne, another lost *serc*, to see if it hints at any such set-up. What we can see from both our *serca* candidates is the existence of tales wherein gender affects the role each character plays, and the ways their love is expressed therein. Their love functions differently in the actions they take. We also see the word *serc* used to describe, in Créd's case, this love that so threatens her husband, to the extent that she is guarded; perhaps such a love would be considered 'immoderate'. This is well worth bearing in mind in considering the word itself. Ultimately, we have now a potential schema for *serca*, which it is hoped might aid future scholars examining the tale-type.

2.4 Case Study: *Tochmarc Ailbe*

The discussion of love terms can be further nuanced through use of a case study. The Middle Gaelic *Tochmarc Ailbe* ('The Wooing of Ailbe'), is one example of the aforementioned *tochmarca*. *Tochmarc Ailbe* is a Finn Cycle text, dated by Ní Dhonnchadha to the tenth century.[203] The tale specifically takes place after Gráinne has left Finn for Diarmaid, and discusses the relationship between Gráinne's younger sister Ailbe and the now-single Finn. It tells how Finn and Ailbe become romantic partners, and includes: a back-and-forth poem between Ailbe and her father Cormac mac Airt about the advantages and disadvantages of marrying an old man like Finn; a feast where men and women of each rank and station are well-represented; and a riddling contest where Finn asks riddles of Ailbe, which she successfully answers. Ultimately Finn and Ailbe become romantic partners, having proven to be suitable for one another.[204] The text is useful for semantic study as it features various usages of the terms we are examining, and offers reasons one might choose one 'love' over another, lexically speaking.

The text was edited and translated into German by Rudolf Thurneysen in 1921.[205] More recently, building on Thurneysen's work and an unpublished translation by John Carey, Ní Dhonnchadha translated the middle section of the text, including the description of the feast, the initial match of Finn and Ailbe, the back-and-forth poetry between Ailbe and her father, the riddling section, and Finn's proposition to Ailbe.[206] Ailbe's obscure speech to Cithruad the druid, which precedes what Ní Dhonnchadha has translated in the narrative, has been edited and translated by Johan Corthals.[207] At the time of writing, no full translation of the text into English has been published.

Ní Dhonnchadha notes that the text 'is remarkable for the attention it pays to the woman's response to her suitor, and to father-daughter relations'.[208] Indeed, the paternal concern for the choice of romantic partner is an intersection of types of love worthy of further examination. Also of note are the riddles asked of Ailbe, some of which touch on love and will be discussed in further detail below. The riddling contest is a familiar motif from more recent folklore; for instance, it similarly occurs in Child Ballad 1, 'Riddles

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[203] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 206. Kevin Murray agrees, in Kevin Murray, *The Early Fenian Corpus* (Cork: Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, 2021), pp. 10-11.

[204] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', pp. 206-10.

[205] Rudolf Thurneysen, '*Tochmarc Ailbe* (Das Werben um Ailbe)', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 13 (1921), 251–82.

[206] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', pp. 206-10.

[207] Johan Corthals, 'Ailbe's speech to Cithruad (*Tochmarc Ailbe*)', *Éigse*, 34 (2004), 1-9.

[208] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 206.

Wisely Expounded',[209] and its existence specifically in narratives about Finn and Ailbe in Scotland and Ireland has been examined by Sìm Innes.[210] In terms of scholarship on the text more generally, both Lawrence Eson[211] and Daniel Melia[212] have discussed *Tochmarc Ailbe*, both also focusing on these riddles (with the latter also making comparisons with another Child Ballad).[213] We also have Corthals' aforementioned article on a speech Ailbe makes, which is untranslated in Ní Dhonnchadha's excerpt. Findon has written on *Tochmarc Ailbe* as being exceptional amongst *tochmarca*:

> *The Wooing of Ailbe* deviates from two of the patterns observed in the other wooing tales. First, the wooing does not involve a series of tests for the hero; instead, the woman herself is tested [...]. This testing is verbal and intellectual rather than physical. Secondly, neither the hero nor Ailbe herself must be geographically separated from home in order to take part in the wooing process.[214]

For our purposes, in addition to the text being a *tochmarc*, it is noteworthy that several love terms appear within it. Early in the tale, we hear of Gráinne's *miscais* 'hatred' for Finn, and the *grád* she feels for Diarmaid.[215] The riddles between Ailbe and Finn then contain the following:

> *'Cid as meithi saill tuircc mesa?' air Find.*
> ***'Miscais** fir dia-leccar **serc**' air in ingen.*[216]
>
> 'What is oilier than the flesh of a boar raised on acorns?' said Finn.
> 'The **hatred** of a man if one cease to **love** him,' said the girl.[217]

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[209] Francis James Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1882-98), I (1882), pp. 1-6.

[210] Sìm Innes, 'Fionn and Ailbhe's Riddles between Ireland and Scotland', in *Ollam: A Festschrift for Tomás Ó Cathasaigh*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Madison, NJ; Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), pp. 271-85.

[211] Lawrence Eson, 'Riddling and Wooing in the Medieval Irish Text *Tochmarc Ailbe*', *Études Celtiques*, 40 (2014), 101–15.

[212] Daniel F. Melia, '"What are you talking about?": *Tochmarc Ailbe* and Courtship Flytings', in *Celts and Their Cultures at Home and Abroad: A Festschrift for Malcolm Broun*, ed. by Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O'Neill (Sydney: Celtic Studies Foundation, University of Sydney, 2013), pp. 197-211.

[213] Ibid., pp. 200-01.

[214] Findon, *A Woman's Words*, p. 34. It is worth remembering *Tochmarc Becfhola* being discussed as exceptional, given a woman does the active wooing, and here we have *Tochmarc Ailbe* being discussed as exceptional as the woman is being tested. It may be the case that some degree of inversion of gender expectations is part of the *tochmarca*.

[215] Thurneysen, '*Tochmarc Ailbe*', 254; the word *miscin* is used. *eDIL* states: Mid.Ir. g s. *miscsen* […] later *miscen* […] whence arises a new oblique stem *misc(e)n-*; *eDIL s.v. miscais.*

[216] Thurneysen, '*Tochmarc Ailbe*', 268. Emphasis my own.

[217] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 209. Emphasis my own.

Here we have a clear invocation of the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne. The question begins by invoking a boar, the animal responsible for the death of Diarmaid.[218] This is then built upon by Ailbe's answer, which immediately evokes Gráinne, given both its content and the use of the word *miscais*. It is notable also that earlier in the tale, when we hear of Gráinne's *miscais*, it is *grád* she feels for Diarmaid and not *serc*; yet Ailbe's answer can be read as implying that Gráinne felt *serc* for Finn.[219] Two things are raised by this extract in particular: the word *miscais*, relating to both love and hatred, as being worthy of potential future study; and the question of why the word *serc* might be chosen here rather than the aforementioned *grád*.

We can find a potential answer to the latter question by examining another riddle from the tale, one that again directly addresses relationships:

> *'Cid forsna-geib glas na slabrad?' ol Find.*
> *'Roscc desi uma* ***caraid*** *' ol in ingen.*[220]
>
> 'What is it that neither lock nor chain holds fast?' said Finn.
> 'The eye of a pretty girl following her **beloved**,' said the girl.'[221]

The flirtation here might make us think of the most famous *tochmarc*, the aforementioned *Tochmarc Emire*, wherein Emer and Cú Chulainn exchange questions and answers that are symbolically sexual.[222] But in terms of semantics, taking these two riddles together, we might see why both riddles choose the 'love' words they do. Seeing the English translation as 'beloved', we might expect for example the term *inmain*, which we will shortly discuss, to have appeared in the original text; but there is a degree of rhyme and repetition between the question and the answer in both cases here. Thus, in the first quoted example, the question ends with *mesa*, and then is answered with *serc*, both featuring the stressed ‘e’ sound (and with assonance between *serc* and the stressed ‘e’ of the *leccar* which precedes it); *grád* would not flow quite so well. Similarly, Finn’s second riddle here ends with *slabrad*, a disyllabic word with a stressed ‘a’ sound; it is then answered in *caraid*, the dative of *cara*, and another disyllabic word with a stressed ‘a’ vowel sound.[223] This brings us to an important aspect of word choice when trying to parse out the semantics of love terms in medieval Gaelic; namely, that word choice may be influenced by textual requirements (rhythm, rhyme, repetition, for instance) as much as any desire to reflect the nuances of a given term’s semantic range. While such textual requirements may impact most clearly upon poetry, and hence the focus on prose throughout this chapter, it is worth stating that prose is not immune from such concerns.[224]

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[218] See Natasha Sumner, 'Diarmaid and Gráinne in Oral Tradition', in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne: Reassessments*, ed. by Kevin Murray, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 30 (London: Irish Text Society, 2018), pp. 107-58; and Henar Velasco López, 'Diarmaid and Gráinne in the Light of Classical mythology', in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne: Reassessments*, ed. by Kevin Murray, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 30 (London: Irish Text Society, 2018), pp. 72–106. Both sources examine the traditional connection between Diarmaid and the boar.

[219] There are numerous reasons one word might be chosen over the other; but the point is that one word, for whatever reason (semantic, metrical, or other) has been chosen over another.

[220] Thurneysen, '*Tochmarc Ailbe'*, 274. Emphasis my own.

[221] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 209. Emphasis my own. The *desi* is possibly 'desse' in *eDIL*, 'beauty, comeliness', *eDIL s.v. desse.* It is worth noting that the *caraid* here is not our *caraid* as verb, but instead the related noun *cara* 'friend' in the dative. Cf. *eDIL s.v. 1 cara.* The use of *cara* 'friend' to denote a romantic relationship merits further study.

[222] Kuno Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften: IV. Aus Harleian 5280. *Tochmarc Emire la Coinculaind*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 3 (1901), 229–63 (237).

On a literary-critical level, there is an inversion of gender expectations happening within the text. In some tales of men’s lovesickness, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, an aspect of their lovesickness stems from them unintentionally seeing a *síd*-woman in a vision or dream. Here, instead, we have a human woman, Ailbe, purposefully drinking a potion in order to have a vision of the man she is to wed.[225] Ailbe then inverts two love expectations: one, that a man will have a vision of a woman; and two, that said vision will be unintentional on the seer’s part.[226] In terms of characterisation, we get a glimpse of the headstrong nature of Ailbe that will be reinforced throughout the tale; on a more general textual level, we can see in Ailbe having a supernatural vision of a future beloved an inversion of expectations, or another part of the overall gender parity portrayed in the text and mentioned by Ní Dhonnchadha as remarkable.[227]

While discussing the potion, it might be tempting to point to Ailbe’s use of a magic potion as some sort of sororal connection between her and the actions of her sister Gráinne: in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, Gráinne gives the assembled crowd of the *fían* and her own family members a drink that causes them to fall into a deep sleep.[228] It might be tempting to draw connections between these two tales despite the centuries between them, as some sort of hint that an earlier version of a ‘Diarmaid and Gráinne’ story that might have also contained this sleeping potion scene. A more convincing argument, however, is that Gráinne's use of a sleeping potion recalls another tenth-century tale, the aforementioned *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, wherein the character Créd acts similarly in order to secure alone time with the object of her affections, Cano, at a busy feast.[229] Ailbe in this *tochmarc* acts in a way reminiscent of Créd what might be her *serc* tale, utilising potions in the pursuit of love; another reminder of the close potential proximity of the two tale-types.

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[223] *eDIL s.v. 1 cara.*

[224] As seen in these riddles themselves, which could be argued not to be poetry.

[225] Ní Dhonnchadha, ‘Gormlaith and Her Sisters’, p. 206.

[226] Though it should be noted this is not a lovesickness tale, and so the extent to which we can accurately describe these tropes as being ‘expected’ are arguable.

[227] Ní Dhonnchadha, ‘Gormlaith and Her Sisters’, p. 206. It is worth noting that various ways of prophesying a future bridegroom also survive in Scottish Gaelic folklore well into the twentieth century. See, for example, Ceit NicRath, *Dòighean gus Faighinn a-mach Cò Bha Thu Dol a Phòsadh,* Tobar an Dualchais, 20 September 1955, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/gd/fullrecord/1285> [accessed 30 September 2019]

[228] *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne: The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne*, ed. by Nessa Ní Shéaghdha (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1967), p. 8.

Tochmarc Ailbe, then, features two of our key terms (*grád and serc*) as well as pointing us to other terms worthy of future study *(cara* and *(mis*)*cais*). *Tochmarc Ailbe* also subverts some gender expectations in medieval Gaelic love saga. The tale, particularly with its riddles, features both conversations about love, and conversation as a gauge of how suitable a relationship might be. In solving the riddles of Finn, Ailbe not only proves herself on his intellectual level, but in agreement with him on the subject of love. Conveyed through the text is the fact that, at times, word-choice is affected by formal concerns rather than merely by semantic range; care must be taken when making conclusions about semantics from texts wherein other concerns are in play.

2.5 *Inmain*

While not as prominent as a go-to term for love in Early Gaelic, and not frequently (if at all) paired with either *serc* or *grád* in a doublet, *inmain* also merits discussion in the context of this thesis. It is an adjective commonly used to express love, or the potential 'lovability' of a person: *eDIL* gives us its adjectival meanings '(a) dear, beloved' and '(b) worthy of love, loveable, excellent'.[230] *Inmain* also functions as a noun substantive, for which *eDIL* gives us '(a) love' itself and '(b) a beloved person'.[231] According to *eDIL*, *inmain* is related to *muin*, or, more specifically in *eDIL*, '6 muin', a term for 'love, esteem, affection'.[232] *Muin* is a less common term than either *serc* or *grád*, as can be seen by the relatively low number of citations of '6 muin' in *eDIL*.[233]

Tracing an etymology for *inmain* has proved difficult for me. Neither *inmain* itself nor *muin* are represented in Ranko Matasović's *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, for instance. Some other instances of *muin* appear in the *Etymological Dictionary*, such as

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[229] Binchy, *Scéla Cano*, p. 11.
[230] *eDIL s.v. inmain.*
[231] Ibid.
[232] *eDIL s.v. 6 muin.*
[233] Ibid. At the time of writing, '6 muin' features only two distinct examples of the term in use.

muin meaning 'protection' and *muin* meaning 'upper part of the back', but our specific *muin* does not.[234] There may have been some semantic shift from a Proto-Celtic meaning of 'protection' to an Early Gaelic meaning of 'love' and 'esteem'.[235] We also have in Early Gaelic *maín, moín, muín, maen* 'a gift; a treasure',[236] cognate with the Welsh *mwyn* amongst whose meanings are 'loveable' and also 'treasure'.[237] In defining 'in-', *eDIL* states: 'capable of, fit for, proper for, worthy of (the action, thing or person expressed by the substantive)'.[238] *Inmain* could potentially derive, then, 'worthy of a gift/treasure', a meaning whose semantic proximity to 'beloved' is clear. However, we would run into problems of vocalism if we were to argue this being an element of *inmain*, and scholarly consensus seems to rest on it stemming from '6 muin', that is, 'protection'.

We do have *inmain* discussed in medieval Gaelic pseudo-etymologies. These etymologies, while not solving our problem of tracing an etymology for the word, do at times hold useful observations. *Inmain* is featured in the Old Gaelic glossary *Sanas Cormaic* ('Cormac's Glossary'), wherein it is stated: *Inmain .i. inmāinight[h]e é.*[239] With no apparent meaning for *inmāinighthe* forthcoming elsewhere, we might extrapolate a meaning here of something along the lines of '*inmain*, that is, beloved is he'. This does not, however, advance our understanding of *inmain* itself.

We see a more substantial article of interest in turning to *Descriptio de origine Scoticae linguae*, more commonly known as O'Mulconry's Glossary. Though Whitley Stokes dated the text to the 13th or 14th centuries,[240] this dating was refuted by Eoin Mac Neill:

> The compilation, then, consists of two main strata, with later accretions. [...] The second stratum was written originally in Old Irish. The first stratum, I have shown, still preserves traces of its compilation in the early Old-Irish period, before 750.[241]

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[234] Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary*, pp. 276-77.

[235] See Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique Étymologique de l'Irlandais Ancien, MNOP* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique: Dublin, and Paris, 1960), M-72.

[236] *eDIL s.v. maín, moín, muín, maen.*

[237] 'mwyn1' and 'mwyn3' in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru Online* (2016) <http://www.geiriadur.ac.uk> [Accessed: 29 July 2022]

[238] *eDIL s.v. 3 in-. eDIL* also points towards, in '6 muin', *muin* in *Lexique Étymologique de l'Irlandais Ancien*, which suggests a connection to the Welsh *mynawc/mynog* 'noble, dignified; gentle', which would seem to have some overlap in terms of positive connotations with our *inmain*. Vendryes, *Lexique Étymologique de l'Irlandais Ancien*; 'mynog' in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru Online* (2016) <http://www.geiriadur.ac.uk> [Accessed: 29 July 2022]

[239] '*Sanas Cormaic*: An Old-Irish Glossary Compiled by Cormac úa Cuilennáin, King-Bishop of Cashel in the Tenth Century', ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer, in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, ed. by Osborn Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, and J. G. O'Keeffe, 5 vols (Halle and Dublin, 1907-13), IV (1912), pp. i-xix, pp. 1–128 (p. 65).

[240] 'O'Mulconry's Glossary', ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie*, 1 (1900), 232–324, 473–481 (232).

[241] Eoin Mac Neill, "*De origine Scoticae linguae*", *Ériu*, 11 (1932), 112–129 (116).

More recently, Pádraic Moran has dated the origins of the text to the seventh century.[242] We see then in the glossary our term *inmain* is defined as: *inmain .i. is cosmail do seirc mnā*.[243] Though its precise importance depends in part on our own interpretation of this statement, there is something of interest here. We could read this as '*inmain*, that is, it is like a woman's love'. The evocation of women's love as its own, distinct concept is an area to explore. Moran, however, does translate the phrase as '*Inmain* 'beloved, loveable', i.e. it is similar to love for a woman [< *in-* 'worthy of' + *mná,* gen. sg. of *ben* 'woman']'.[244] For Moran, then, it is love **for** and not love **from** a woman.

Another example of *inmain* being associated with women's love, however, can be found in the Middle Gaelic *Saltair na Rann* ('The Psalter of the Verses'). In describing Esau and Jacob, it states: '*Issau* […]*/robo serccach la Issác,/is Iacob* […]*/ropo inmain lía mathair*'[245] ('Esau was loved by Isaac, and Jacob was beloved by his mother'). Isaac's love for Esau is described in terms of *serc*; Rebecca's love for Jacob is described as *inmain*. Here we have a clear side-by-side statement of a man's love and a woman's love, and different vocabulary is used to describe said love, here in the context of familial love. This may be stylistic, admittedly; and the text is also in verse, which brings with it its own already-discussed issues.

Our understanding of the term *inmain* relating to women's love can be further expanded through examination of an early saga tale. The Old Gaelic tale *Longes mac nUislenn* was dated by Hull to 'probably in the ninth century, possibly even in the eighth century' before undergoing later revision.[246] The tale features near its end a poem spoken by Derdriu wherein she laments the death of Noísiu.[247] It has been argued by scholars including Tymoczko that this poem is a later addition to the prose tale,[248] but nevertheless, it falls within the timespan of our study. The poem is of note for our purposes as it features several instances of *inmain* to describe Noísiu and his characteristics:

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[242] *De origine Scoticae linguae (O'Mulconry's glossary): an Early Irish Linguistic Tract, Edited with a Related Glossary, Irsan,* ed. and trans. by Pádraic Moran, Lexica Latina Medii Aevi, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), pp. 94-98.

[243] Stokes, 'O'Mulconry's Glossary', 268.

[244] Moran, *De origine Scoticae linguae*, p. 227. The idea of 'love for a woman' will be returned to in discussing *bangrád*.

[245] *Saltair na Rann*, ed. by Whitley Stokes, Mediaeval and Modern Series, 1.3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1883), Canto 26 (p. 41).

[246] *Longes Mac n-Uislenn: The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*, ed. & trans. by Vernam Hull, The Modern Language Association of America, 16 (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1949), p. 32, but see pp. 29-32 for Hull's full reasoning behind dating the text.

[247] Ibid., pp. 48-50.

[248] Maria Tymoczko, 'Inversions, Subversions, Reversions: the Form of Early Irish Narrative', in *Text und Zeittiefe*, ed. by Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ScriptOralia, LVIII (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1994), pp. 71–85 (p. 81-82).

Inmain berthán áilli blai
[...]
Inmain menma cobsaid cáir;
Inmain óclach ard imnáir.
Íar n-imthecht dar feda fál,
Inmain costal i tiugnár.
Inmain súil glass carddais mná;
[...]
Inmain andord tria dub-rœd.[249]

‘Beloved [is] the [little] crop of hair (?) with yellow (?) beauty
[...]
Beloved [is] the desire, steadfast [and] just;
Beloved [is] the warrior, noble [and] very modest.
After a journey beyond the fores’'s fence,
Beloved [is] the [...] in the early morning.
Beloved [is] the gray eye that women used to love;
[...]
Beloved [is] the tenor (?) song through a dark great wood.’[250]

The whole poem is in the voice of a woman, and it supports *inmain* being seen as ‘like the love of a woman’. The penultimate line presented here is of most interest to us while considering the O’Mulconry example: *Inmain súil glass carddais mná*, which Hull translates as ‘Beloved [is] the gray eye that women used to love’. Again, a woman’s love is evoked with the term *inmain*, here using a form of *caraid*.[251]

Women’s love is a standard by which heroic men are judged.[252] When evoked in this way, women form an audience; being beloved by women possesses social worth and value. We might at this point consider the moment in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* wherein Cú Chulainn, after having undergone his *ríastrad*, grooms himself and parades himself in front of the women (and poets) to explicitly reinforce his beauty to them, to (re)gain their admiration.[253] Women's admiration and love as concepts hold social power. Women's love stands apart from men's love: we do not see an equivalent phrasing used to describe women 'beloved by a man', that is, men in general. That women's love dominates as a form of generic descriptor when talking of male heroes points to a degree of heteronormativity: the worth of a man, in part (and there is no reason to suspect it is more than in part), depends on their being beloved by women. This may also tie back into our thoughts on *grádaigthe*, wherein we mentioned it might refer to the 'beloved-ness' not necessarily by an in-text character, but by society at large, both within and outwith the text. That said, there may be limits to what one should do for the love of women, or a woman: thus in the Old Gaelic tale *Serglige Con Culainn* ('The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn'), which we will thoroughly examine in Chapter Three, Emer shames Cú Chulainn for lying in his sick-bed for *bangrád*, 'a woman's love'.[254] And so, while men might be judged by their ability to be loved by women, it seems women's love *should* not be capable of harming them, even if it is.

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[249] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 49.

[250] Ibid., p. 67. The line *Inmain menma cobaid cáir* we might translate more precisely as ‘Beloved is the steadfast, commensurate mind’, though there is room for interpretation particularly of the term *menma*. The square brackets here are Hull’s, not my own.

[251] This will later be examined in the context of the tale *Serglige Con Culainn*, wherein the term *bangrád* is used. A note for now, however: the use of *bangrád* shows this phenomenon of women’s love can be represented by *grád* as it can be by *serc*.

[252] See also Sarah Sheehan, ‘Feasts for the Eyes: Visuality and Desire in the Ulster Cycle’, in *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, pp. 95–114. See also Sarah Künzler, *Flesh and Word: Reading Bodies in Old Norse-Icelandic and Early Irish Literature* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 82-86.

A contrast can also be seen between *inmain* and *serc* with what follows in *Longes mac nUislenn*, where Derdriu addresses Conchobar:

A Chonchobuir, cid no-taí?
Do-rurmis dam brón fo chaí,
Is ed ám [i] céin no-mmair,
Do ṡerc lim *ni-ba romair.*

O Conchobor, what ails you?
For me you have placed (?) sorrow under weeping.
Yes, indeed, as long as I may abide
My love for you will not be of very great account.[255]

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[253] Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge: from the Book of Leinster*, Irish Texts Society, 49 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), p. 63; trans. pp. 203-04. See Künzler, *Flesh and Word,* p. 82 for discussion.

[254] *Serglige Con Culainn*, ed. by Myles Dillon, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 14 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953), p. 14. There is ambiguity in its meaning here: is Emer saying Cú Chulainn is sick due to his love for a woman, or is she identifying lovesickness as a ’feminine’ love? Lovesickness will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

[255] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 50; trans. p. 68. Emphasis my own.

Inmain and *serc* then become tools of contrast in Derdriu's speech acts in order to differentiate Noísiu and Conchobar. *Inmain* is what Noísiu was; her *serc* for Conchobar will not be great (as, it is therefore implied, her *serc* for Noísiu was). The contrast is adjective versus noun to an extent, and we should bear rhyme in mind, but it still merits comment: *inmain* is portrayed as a quality, a defining trait, where *serc* is not. Noísiu was loveable and loved; Conchobar will not be greatly loved. This then raises questions of what constitutes someone being *inmain*; is it something someone can cultivate, is it innate, or is it entirely subjective?

Inmain merits discussion not only as it functions as an adjective and substantive noun, a pairing we have not thus far seen, but because it also compares and contrasts with *serc* and *grád* in other ways. Like our other two terms, and as we have just seen, we see *inmain* used for emotional affect. Take the following example from the ninth-century tale Meyer titles 'Ailill Aulom, Mac Con, and Find ua Báiscne':[256]

> *Nī léic Sadb aní-sein ocus bert robud dó,ar* ***ba hinmuniu lé-si*** *Mac Con andate a secht maic.*
>
> Sadb did not permit that, and gave him warning, for **dearer to her was** Mac Con than her seven sons.[257]

Sadb's warning temporarily saves Mac Con's life, or at least delays his death.[258] Here we can see *inmain* used to discuss familial love (that she loves Mac Con *more* than her sons implies that she loves her sons too, to some extent), though the text itself, as we might expect, does not spell out the nature of Sadb's feelings.

With *serc* and *grád* we had clear examples of their use in religious contexts: *serc Dé*, for instance. We do also get *inmain* used in contexts associated with faith, though the term *inmain* does not seem to be used to refer to God (the Father) directly. Rather, Christ the Son, saints and people of faith can be described as *inmain*. Consider the Old Gaelic text *Félire Óengusso* again.[259] In its prologue, we see Christ referenced as *Íssu inmain áge*, translated by Stokes as, 'Jesus, beloved pillar.'[260] The text goes on to use this '[Name] *inmain áge*' formula several more times, including in the Martyrology proper, wherein, for example, we have *Colmán inmain áge*, and *Iohannis/inmain áge húage* (translated by

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[256] On the date, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, p. xxi.
[257] Ibid., p. 36; trans. p. 37. Emphasis my own.
[258] An act reminiscent of Créd and Dub Lacha in the *serca*.
[259] Stokes, *The Martyrology of Oengus*.
[260] Ibid., p. 31.

Stokes as 'a loveable pillar of virginity').[261] This may suggest a notion we will shortly discuss: that *inmain* may be a trait either possessed or lacked, with no clear way to 'become' *inmain*. This could bring it into focus as having some semantic similarity with the English term 'grace', in a divine sense. However, a stronger interpretation is that of subjectivity; one is beloved by those who call one beloved.For *inmain* is not reserved for the side of Christ; *inmain la diabul cech peccad*, we are told in *The Passions and Homilies from* [the early fifteenth-century manuscript] *Leabhar Breac*, 'beloved by Satan (is) each sin'.[262] This formula of *inmain la X* raises challenges *inmain* being innate: *inmain* is rather in the eye of the beholder, and may mean different things depending on who is describing one as *inmain*? *Inmain* being an innate quality is challenged by such an example. We do then see *inmain* used in the realm of the religious, but not in the explicit connection to God that is attested for *serc* and *grád*. We do not have God the Father described as *inmain*; we do however see Christ (and others) associated with the term.

If we compare *inmain* with *grád*, we find that, like *serc*, uses of *inmain* meaning 'charity' or 'a bond of trust' are not immediately clear. The fact that 'charity' and 'a bond of trust' are not to be found in the semantic ranges of either *serc* or *inmain* points to them being a specific feature of the semantic range of *grád* in the wider group of medieval Gaelic love terms, and may help explain its adoption.

As an adjective, *inmain* appears as a name element in ways that *serc* and *grád* do not, and more like the use of *caraid* or *car-* in Lifechair. Thus in the Annals of Ulster, we see reference to 'Cú Inmain ua Robann, king of Port Láirce', or modern-day Waterford.[263] Intriguingly, in the entry Cú Inmain is described as being killed by his own people in 1037; the irony of 'Beloved' Cú being killed by his own people was possibly not lost on the annalists. We do also see in 944 in the Annals of Ulster a figure named Inmainén, identified in *eDIL* as a diminutive form of the adjective *inmain*.[264] Frustratingly for the purposes of exploring semantics, there is no mention of Inmainén''s exploits in the Annals, merely that they are the parent of a notable king, Flaithbertach of Munster.[265]

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[261] Ibid., p. 126.

[262] Robert Atkinson, *The Passions and Homilies from Leabhar Breac: Text, Translation and Glossary*, Todd Lecture Series, II (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1887), p. 248.

[263] 'U1037.4: Cu Inmain H. Robann, rí Puirt Lairce, a suis occisus est.' ('Cú Inmain ua Robann, king of Port Láirce, was, killed by his own people.') Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), p. 474; trans. p. 475.

[264] *eDIL s.v. inmain.* '*U944.1: Flaithbertach m. Inmhainen, cenn* [gap: extent: unknown] *in pace quieuit.'* ('Flaithbertach son of Inmainén, chief, rested in peace.') Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster,* p. 390; trans. p. 391.

[265] I have opted here for 'they' rather than assuming a gender for Inmainén. Given the discussion of *inmain* relating to women's love, and the general favouring of patrilineal rather than matrilineal names, it might be reasonably assumed that Inmainén is a man. Such would still be an assumption.

Inmain can also be used to refer to things and beings other than people. Thus, in the Middle Gaelic *Metrical Dindshenchas*, we see multiple uses of *inmain* in *Mag Léna I*, in particular in the first verse:

> *Inmain in fert, fichtib slúag,*
> *ocus inmain lecht láech-búan:*
> *inmain marbán cen mire,*
> *dia tuc banbán bith-lige.*[266]
>
> Dear is the monument, visited by scores of crowds, and dear the grave of martial memory; dear is the corpse, now spiritless, to which the swine gave lasting sepulture.[267]

Thus, a monument (object) can be *inmain*, as can a grave (object or landscape-feature), in addition to a corpse. Additionally, the hound Ailbe is described as *inmain* in the final verse of the poem.[268] The semantic range of *inmain* is therefore not limited to human beings, nor living creatures, but includes objects, landscape features and corpses.[269]

Overall, *inmain* has several aspects of interest to us. It has a particular association, at least in certain texts, with women's love. In general, *inmain* has a similar semantic range to *serc*, including both emotional and religious love, and the fact that it does not seem to cover 'charity' or 'trust' points to both of those facets of love being potentially *grád*-specific. That said, *inmain* is more expansive than *serc*, containing the love of objects and landscapes;[270] as such, its semantic range is closer to *caraid*, which includes the love of things. The combination of noun and adjective will also feature as we discuss our next term, *écmais*.

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[266] Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, Todd Lecture Series 8-12, 5 vols (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1903–1935), IV (1906), pp. 192, 194.

[267] Ibid., pp. 193, 195. The construction is very similar to the aforementioned lament by Derdriu.

[268] Ibid., pp. 192-95 (including translation).

[269] In this way, *inmain* is not unlike 'cathexis' as described by Peck, attachment or attraction to a beloved object, ranging from hobbies and physical objects to people. See Peck, *The Road Less Traveled,* p. 87; pp. 105-08.

[270] Though note the aforementioned compound noun *deercc*.

2.6 *Écmais*

The last word to examine in detail here is one of particular interest for the upcoming discussion of romantic love. *eDIL* gives for *écmais* 'absence'.[271] *Écmais(e)* is particularly relevant to our study due to its part in the construction '*grád n-écmaise*', '*grád i n-écmais*', and '*serc écmaise*'. These terms most frequently are translated as 'love in absence', a love of one person for another person who has not been seen. We can see the primacy of this understanding of the term — that is, that *écmais* relating to absence — in scholarship ranging from the early twentieth century to the modern day.

The view of *grád n-écmaise* as 'love in absence' takes *écmaise* as the word '*écmais*' in *eDIL*, that is 'absence'.[272] Yet, there is an adjective '*écmaise'* recorded in *eDIL*. As M. A. O'Brien wrote[273] (and as Nuijten has recently discussed),[274] we must also bear in mind this term meaning 'immoderate', or 'excessive', the negative form of *coimse*.[275] As Sayers states:

> The phrase '*grád écmaise*' 'immoderate love' (of the kind caused by a love potion or love spot), based on the negated form of '*coimse'* 'moderate,' was, as a consequence of contact with other literary motifs, believed derived from '*écmaise'* 'absence,' so that the phrase took on the meaning of love at a distance, usually based on reputation.[276]

Sayers therefore translates the term as 'immoderate love', and indeed, in many places where we have translated 'love in absence' we also see excessive love. Take, for instance, the passage from *Aislinge Óenguso*, where a physician diagnoses the cause of Óengus's illness:

> *'Sercc écmaise ro carais'.*
> *'Ad·rumadar mo galar form', ol Óengus.*[277]

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[271] *eDIL s.v. écmais. eDIL* offers, albeit with a question mark, a secondary definition of *écmais* incorporating affection and love. That said, this is a late development (it cites seventeenth-century writings) and *eDIL* posits that this may have arisen from association with *grád n-écmaise.*

[272] Ibid.

[273] M. A. O'Brien, 'Etymologies and Notes', *Celtica*, 3 (1956), 168-84 (179).

[274] Nuijten, '*Scéla Cano*', pp. 11-12.

[275] *eDIL s.v. écmaise.*

[276] Sayers, 'Fusion and Fission', p. 106.

[277] Meid, *Aislinge Óenguso*, p. 53. Though, again, see Cleary for an alternate reading. Cleary, 'An Investigation of the *Remscéla Tána Bó Cúailnge'*, pp. 294-301.

> ‘(It is) a love in absence that you have loved.’
> ‘My disease has been discovered,’ said Óengus.

Óengus’s love could be defined by absence; alternatively, the thing causing him pain may be the immoderacy of the love. In fact, an immoderate love might be more likely: while this example features a man, most examples of *grád n-écmaise* are women. We will discuss this gendered aspect of *grád n-écmaise* in Chapter Three. That said, when we do encounter *grád n-écmaise*, there is frequently a distance between the two interested parties. We can be open, then, to the notion that, while *écmais* ‘absence’ fits the tales, so too might *écmaise*, ‘immoderate’. Scribes may have had the similarity of the terms in mind when writing the tales, leading to the love depicted being both absent *and* immoderate. We know the writers of medieval Gaelic literature could draw on double meanings at times — see for instance the aforementioned *serc* and *serg* matter when dealing with lovesickness (as Meid has also commented upon).[278] Or else, love for an individual one has never met might be considered ‘excessive’. These two terms can also be considered when we remember Meid’s argument regarding the two *gráds*; namely, that both terms influenced each other, becoming more similar over time.[279] It should also be noted that *écmais* ‘absence’ is far better attested in *eDIL*, and with earlier attestations, than *écmaise* ‘immoderate’, whose examples are all related to love.[280]

The notion that the two terms are in play at the same time is not necessarily new. What might be new are the arguments that this could be A) a knowing ambiguity and B) that this ambiguity leads to the heightening of both things; a love that was originally immoderate is then made absent, or vice versa, over time as the ambiguity of two words is played with. The notion of purposeful ambiguity is a topic which will recur throughout the thesis as saga texts are examined. Ultimately, there may be some degree of blurring between *écmais* meaning absence and *écmaise* meaning immoderate; and frequently love-in-absence is seen to be, at the same time, immoderate love.

2.7 Further love terms and avenues for further research

A study of the semantics of love could comprise a thesis in itself. Those terms that have been explored here are but a selection of the most pertinent terms for our texts. There are several other terms used for, or connected to, love in medieval Gaelic, and terms which could use further exploration.

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[278] Meid, ‘*grád*’, p. 298.
[279] Ibid, p. 299.
[280] *eDIL s.v. écmaise*. All examples given are: *grādh ēcmaisi, cētshercus ēcmaise, grádh éagmais[e], grádh ainmhianach éagmhaise*, and *ghrádha éagmhaise.*

There are several other terms for love and affection itself, spanning the range of fondness or partiality to love. These include *amor* 'love',[281] *ansu* '(more) beloved, dear(er)',[282] *báid* 'affection, fondness' and *ar báid* 'for love',[283] *cais* 'both love and hate',[284] *cin* 'love, affection; esteem, respect',[285] *cride* 'affection, love; dear one',[286] *cuit* 'of partiality, love for a person',[287] *dúil* 'desire, fondness, inclination',[288] *gen* 'favour, fondness, liking',[289] *spéis* 'affection, fondness, regard, esteem; interest, attention, concern',[290] *tnúth*, which means 'affection, love', but also 'rage, fury', 'envy, jealousy', and 'desire, greed',[291] and *tol* 'goodwill, affection, love'.[292] As is clear, these terms span the semantic range of love, from partiality and fondness to, in the case of *tummaid*, 'falls (madly) in love'.[293] There are also other adjectives in addition to *inmain* that could be considered, such as *cáem* 'dear, precious, beloved; belonging to the family',[294] and *dil*, 'dear, beloved, precious, profitable (applied to persons and thing)';[295] ultimately, *inmain* was chosen for its preponderance in the texts cited in this thesis.

There are also several terms which, while not meaning 'love' itself, are connected to love or the process of love. While what a *tochmarc* comprised has been discussed, the word itself, a verbal noun of **do-comairc,* 'asks, requests', offers further insight into the nature of wooing.[296] Similar terms of wooing and love-making include *suirge* 'wooing, courting, love-making',[297] and *lennán(t)acht* 'love-making; concubinage',[298] from *lennán* 'lover, sweetheart, beloved'.[299] Ultimately, in addition to terms meaning 'love' and 'beloved', there exists a whole vocabulary of romantic love pursuits worth exploring.

The common words examined in this chapter are often also found in compounds. We see serc and grád used combined with propositions, often in order to intensify or specify their meaning. Thus we see *comgrád* ‘equal love’[300] and *comṡerc* ‘mutual love’,[301] *frithserc* “counter-love’; rival love (?)’,[302] *imṡerc* ‘mutual love’,[303] *láebṡerc* ‘partial love’[304] *lommṡerc* ‘great love’,[305] *sainṡerc* ‘special love or affection’,[306] *sográd* ‘great love’[307] and *sorbgrád* ‘false love’.[308] Similarly the terms for which there was not ample space to discuss in this chapter are also used in similar compounds, such as *díchin* ‘want of love, dislike’,[309] *imbáide* ‘great love or affection’,[310] *lagbháidh* ‘feeble love’,[311] and *sainamor* ‘special love’.[312]

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[281] *eDIL s.v. amor.*
[282] *eDIL s.v. ansu.*
[283] *eDIL s.v. báid.*
[284] *eDIL s.v. 1 cais.*
[285] *eDIL s.v. cin.*
[286] *eDIL s.v. cride.*
[287] *eDIL s.v. cuit.*
[288] *eDIL s.v. 2 dúil.*
[289] *eDIL s.v. 2 gen.*
[290] *eDIL s.v. spéis.*
[291] *eDIL s.v. tnúth, tnúd.*
[292] *eDIL s.v. tol.*
[293] *eDIL s.v. tummaid.*
[294] *eDIL s.v.1 cáem.*
[295] *eDIL s.v. 1 dil.*
[296] *eDIL s.v. tochmarc; ? do-comairc.*
[297] *eDIL s.v. suirge.*
[298] *eDIL s.v. lennán(t)acht.*
[299] *eDIL s.v. lennán.*

At times, love terms are combined with prefixes which create words semantically more distinct from their original meaning. As discussed, there exists the fascinating word *deercc*, a compound of *día* and *sercc*, meaning both God’s love for man, and man’s love of God.[313] Much like with *dil* and *cáem*, the term is not discussed extensively here as it does not appear in the texts cited for this thesis, but could go on to be the subject of fruitful study. For further examples, *caraid*, in particular, seems to often be part of compounds which expand upon its meaning.[314] We see, for instance, *feólchar* ‘voracious, sanguinary’,[315] *fíalchaire* ‘kindred feeling or affection’,[316] *occoras* ‘a craving (for); desire (for), need (of)’ and later ‘hunger’,[317] and *trócaire* ‘mercy’.[318] An examination of the ways in which love words are used in compounds could yield further semantic discoveries.

Speaking of *caraid*, several words begin with the root *car*- and relate to love.[319] This includes *cara* ‘friend’,[320] *caratrad* ‘friendship; alliance; blood or marriage relationship’,[321] *cairdes* ‘friendship; sexual love; kinship’,[322] *carthach* ‘loving, dear; paramour, concubine of a certain grade’,[323] *carthain* ‘act of loving, cherishing’,[324] *carthanacht* ‘charity, kindness; friendship',[325] and *cartoit* 'charity, love', from the Latin *caritas*.[326] A further, extensive study of *car-*, its uses, and its evolution over time, would make for fruitful work. There is also the term *caracán* '(dear) friend';[327] an exploration of medieval Gaelic hypocorisms would also make for fascinating study.

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[300] *eDIL s.v. 2 comgrád.*
[301] *eDIL s.v. comṡerc.*
[302] *eDIL s.v. frithserc.*
[303] *eDIL s.v. imṡerc.*
[304] *eDIL s.v. 1 láeb.*
[305] *eDIL s.v. lomm.*
[306] *eDIL s.v. 1 sain.*
[307] *eDIL s.v. 2 so, su.*
[308] *eDIL s.v. sorb.*
[309] *eDIL s.v. 1 díchin.*
[310] *eDIL s.v. imbáide.*
[311] *eDIL s.v. lac.*
[312] *eDIL s.v. sainṡerc.*
[313] *eDIL s.v. deercc.*
[314] *eDIL s.v. 5 car.*
[315] *eDIL s.v. feólchar.*
[316] *eDIL s.v. fíalchaire.*
[317] *eDIL s.v. occoras.*
[318] *eDIL s.v. trócaire.*
[319] *eDIL s.v. 5 car.*
[320] *eDIL s.v. cara.*
[321] *eDIL s.v. caratrad.*
[322] *eDIL s.v. cairdes.*
[323] *eDIL s.v. carthach.*
[324] *eDIL s.v. carthain.*

There also exists a plethora of vocabulary around kinship in Old and Middle Gaelic. The term *condalbae*, 'kin-love', will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, when familial love is examined.[328] *Condalbae* is far from the only term connecting love and kinship, however, from the general *doénchaire* 'love of humanity, philanthropy',[329] to the specific *bráithres* 'brotherliness; brotherhood; kinship; kinsmanship'.[330] There are also terms such as *coibne* 'kin, person of the same '*fine*', relation, ally; kinship, consanquinity, relationship',[331] *gáel* 'kinship, relationship',[332] and *commann* 'alliance, pact, union, friendship'.[333] *Coibhne, gáel,* and *commann* also all undergo a semantic shift from their origins meaning 'kinship' to also being used for 'love'. This is a semantic journey undergone by several words in medieval Gaelic, such as *rún*, which primarily means 'a mystery; a secret' and goes on to mean 'darling, love',[334] and the aforementioned *ansu*, which means 'beloved, dear(er)' and goes on to mean 'love, affection' in a later period.[335] There is a clear avenue for exploration here, both in examining why these words go on to be different words for 'love', and when exactly that change takes place (in as much as that can be determined).

On the theme of avenues for exploration, there are several more suggested by examining words of love. There seems to be a semantic connection between words meaning 'heat', 'fire', and 'burning', with people developing feelings. For instance, *lasad* 'act of burning, blazing', also gets used in a transferred sense for the inflammation of love, with phrases such as *lasadh ghradha*.[336] *Tégad*, meaning 'heating, warming', can similarly be used to describe the kindling of emotions, and thus, it is stated in eDIL, 'Hence love, affection'.[337] *Tess*, also primarily meaning 'heat, warmth', can be applied to emotions as 'Of feelings, emotions, etc. warmth, fervour, zeal',[338] leading to the compound noun

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[325] *eDIL s.v. carthanacht.*

[326] *eDIL s.v. cartoit.*

[327] *eDIL s.v. caracán.*

[328] *eDIL s.v. condalbae.*

[329] *eDIL s.v. doénchaire.*

[330] *eDIL s.v. bráithres.*

[331] *eDIL s.v. coibne.*

[332] *eDIL s.v. 1 gáel.*

[333] *eDIL s.v. commann.*

[334] *eDIL s.v. 1 rún.*

[335] *eDIL s.v. ansu.*

[336] *eDIL s.v. lasad.*

[337] *eDIL s.v. tégad, téiged.*

[338] *eDIL s.v. tess.*

tessgrád ‘ardent love, zeal’.[339] The connections between warmth, heat, and love in medieval Gaelic could be further explored.

Ultimately, there are several avenues for further exploration when it comes to the vocabulary of love. This present study is confined by both word space and time, and by the texts chosen and the words they happen to contain.

2.8 Conclusion

The first steps have now been taken in the direction of a more thorough understanding of love terms in medieval Gaelic literature. We have built on Meid's work on *grád*, the word we have compared with other key love words: *serc, grád, caraid, inmain,* and *écmais*. The analysis began by pointing out the dominance of *serc* and *grád* as love nouns, and ones which are frequently paired, making discerning differences between them difficult. Yet, while both can mean love (emotional/erotic; of God; of a ruler), *grád* seems to have the additional meanings of ‘charity’ and ‘demonstrating a bond of trust’, as Meid identified.[340] There remains the question of why exactly the borrowed term *grád* rises to such prominence when the inherited term *serc* existed, and perhaps these additional aspects to its semantic range might be one facet of the answer. *Serc* moreover might be preferred when discussing lovesickness, for its superficial similarity to *serg;* and *serc* also gives its name to the *serc* tale type, something unique amongst our love terms. *Serc* is used too in the legal context of fosterage, in the legal term *altram seirce*. *Serc* also functions as the verbal noun of *caraid*, the most prominent love verb. *Caraid*’s semantic range includes objects and activities in addition to individuals, showing a degree of difference even from *serc*. *Caraid*, while not confined to women and clearly felt by men, is particularly seen as the go-to verb in women’s experience of *grád n-écmaise*. The adjective *grádaigthe*, from *grádaigidir*, on the other hand, has been translated as ‘beloved’ but the possibility has now been raised that there is ambiguity in its precise meaning; it need not refer to reciprocal feelings. Indeed, we might tentatively suggest the ‘*ben grádaigthe*’ might be an institution rather than solely a description of emotion. And while *serc* and *grád* may be difficult to discern from one another in places, *Tochmarc Ailbe* reminded us that the use of one love term over another can be as much about textual demands such as rhyme or metre as it is about semantic range.

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[339] *eDIL s.v. tessgrád.*

[340] Meid, ‘*grád*’.

The gendered nature of the surviving candidates for *serca* tales was also examined. The *serca* tale-type might have revolved around clever young women instructing naive men on how best to obtain them, and immoderate love. It is tempting to speculate on a genre of tales concerned with the incompetence of men, in contrast to more general masculine martial heroism; a speculation that might both explain why there are relatively few surviving *serca* texts (and few, it would seem, were known in the Middle Gaelic period), and also contrasts with the more cautionary tone of some Old and Middle Gaelic tales when it comes to taking advice from women.[341] Suffice it to say, *serca* might have featured pivotal moments of teaching by women that shaped men into heroes. That this was formulated as love in the title may give us another nuance in the semantic range of *serc*; an implication of patience and advice-giving. However, without further corroboration that is difficult to say with any certainty.

It was seen too that the adjective *inmain*, 'beloved' may have particularly been associated with women's love. *Inmain* can also form part of a name. In this way, only *caraid* in comparable, in its possible use in the epithet Lifechair.

The ambiguity between the noun *écmais* 'absence' and the adjective *écmaise* 'immoderate' was highlighted, especially given the notion of *grád n-écmaise* 'love in absence/immoderation'. There are several tales wherein *grád n-écmaise* is both love in absence and a powerful, motivating love; it was suggested that authors might have leaned into this ambiguity between terms, or that both meanings of the phrase heightened the other.

Overall, the semantic ranges of our key terms have been set out and investigated. As we progress through the thesis, there will be more semantic analysis of terms directly relevant to the chapter in which they are situated. For example, we will shortly move on to discussing romantic love, in which we will build upon our work here through analysis of the stock phrase *ara airscélaib*, which is more relevant in the discussion of romantic love. And so, this is not the end of the study of semantics within this thesis. For now, though, the study of semantics with reference to our texts is left behind, in favour of the study of our texts, with reference to semantics.

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[341] cf. Findon, *A Woman's Words*, pp. 13-14. It is also tempting to speculate regarding the authors of tales which specifically endorse the wisdom of women, and their key role in shaping kingdoms, but further work would need done before taking a solid stance on this issue.

Chapter 3 Romantic Love

3.1 Introduction

‘'S i do phearsa dheas ghrinn/A dh'fhàg mi cho tinn le gràdh’
— ‘Iain Ghlinn’ Cuaich’, Anonymous[342]

Romantic love is all-pervasive in contemporary cultural discourse in western Europe. The dominance of romantic love in our overall conception of love has its roots in the Middle Ages, though what led to this flourishing is the subject of debate.[343] That said, the significance of romantic love in medieval Gaelic literature, particularly that predating the dawning of chivalric romance on the continent, has historically been dismissed by prominent Celtic scholars. With some exceptions, such as the attention paid to Gaelic analogues of the Tristan story by scholars such as James Carney,[344] questions about romantic love in medieval Gaelic literature have gone unasked in favour of the suggestion that medieval Gaels are uninterested in love until influenced by the wider European continent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In examining two phenomena in particular — namely, lovesickness and *grád n-écmaise* ‘love in absence’ — the conversation around romantic love can be restarted, with all the progress that has been made in medieval Gaelic literary criticism available to us.

3.2 Review of Celtic scholars

A strain of twentieth-century scholarship downplayed the prominence of love in medieval Gaelic saga. In his popular anthology *A Celtic Miscellany*, first published in 1951, Kenneth Jackson introduced his section of ‘love’ texts by stating:

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[342] *BBC ALBA Bliadhna nan Òran – Iain Ghlinn’ Cuaich* (2015) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/alba/oran/orain/iain_ghlinn_cuaich/> [accessed 22 September 2021].

[343] See, for instance, Henry Ansgar Kelly on Gaston Paris (the originator of the term *amour courtois*), showing Paris considered Celtic literature a cornerstone of the origins of the chivalric romance. Henry Ansgar Kelly, ‘The Varieties of Love in Medieval Literature According to Gaston Paris’, *Romance Philology*, 40.3 (1987), 301–27 (302). The influence of Arthur and Tristan on continental romance is another aspect of the development of chivalric themes, but one which is not our focus here.

[344] James Carney, ‘The Irish Affinities of Tristan’.

> It is remarkable that love in itself plays a very small part in early Celtic literature. Almost without exception the theme is used only as the motive of a tale [...]. There is no attempt to dwell on the subject for its own sake, or to enter into the personal, psychological, side of the question. In fact, in the early literatures there is practically no real love *poetry*, but only tales about love affairs. Love poetry as such first appears in any quantity under the influence of foreign romantic movements.[345]

Where Jackson stated 'love' we can safely assume 'romantic love'; his selection of texts under the theme focuses on romantic love and lovers. He dismissed *Aislinge Óenguso* and *Longes mac nUislenn*, two tales examined in this chapter, as only being interested in how the heroes of the tales gain their romantic partners. Jackson's concern, that the 'personal, psychological side' of love is unrepresented, and the lack of questioning of the nature of love in itself, seem to form the basis of his assertion.

When Seán Ó Tuama stated that 'A romantic concept of love does not seem to have played a large part in pre-Norman Irish literature',[346] it would seem he expressed a position similar to Jackson. Like Jackson, he stated that, despite tales dealing with 'love-encounters', 'the authors do not seem to be much concerned with the feelings of people in love'.[347] However, key to Ó Tuama's argument was the idea of the 'romantic'. For Ó Tuama, no matter its precursors in early Gaelic literature, the romantic was tied to how men and women relate to one another. He stated of love in Gaelic literature after the propagation of *amour courtois*: 'Ideally now man replaced woman as the adoring one, the tearful one, the submissive one, in Irish as well as in western European literature.'[348] For Ó Tuama, 'romantic' love meant an intense love where male lovers adore women, and in doing so allow themselves to become miserable by the experience.

Both Jackson and Ó Tuama's assertions about love are connected to a lack of interiority. Jackson states there is 'no attempt to dwell on the subject for its own sake';[349] for Ó Tuama, 'the authors do not seem to be much concerned with the feelings of people in love'.[350] Both use this lack of interiority to support their primary claims: for Jackson, that love 'plays a very small part' in pre-Norman literature;[351] for Ó Tuama, that romantic love

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[345] Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91.
[346] Ó Tuama, 'Love in the Medieval Irish Literary Lyric', p. 164. Ó Tuama put forward this argument earlier in Irish: see Seán Ó Tuama, *An Grá in Amhráin na n-Daoine* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1960).
[347] Ó Tuama, 'Love', p. 164.
[348] Ibid., p. 194.
[349] Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91.
[350] Ó Tuama, 'Love in the Medieval Irish Literary Lyric', p. 164.
[351] Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 91.

'does not seem to have played a large part'.[352] For both scholars, narrowing their definitions of love allowed them to reach their conclusions. Therefore, it is not love if there is not some pondering of the topic of love itself; or else, it is not romantic love if it is not tied to how the genders relate to one another under the terms of *amour courtois*. As this chapter progresses, however, it will be shown that even under these narrow definitions of romantic love, there is sufficient material to refute, or at least weaken, these claims.

Such blanket statements may explain why, generally, scholarship has not approached love in early medieval Gaelic texts systematically. That said, at the level of individual texts, critics have patently, but perhaps tacitly, accepted love as a motivation, and discussed how it works within individual tales. There are also certain exceptions which examine a cluster of tales. The aforementioned scholarly discussion of the Tristan analogues has been a rich vein for considerations of romantic love, citing some of our earlier tales such as *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* and *Longes mac nUislenn*.[353] Similar tales are discussed in Anne Lea's 'Love, Sex, and the Mercenary Soldier', where she compares love triangles in medieval Gaelic saga and argue they point towards the existence of 'an injunction against sexual activity while in the service of another.'[354] And a key, albeit now outdated, study that focuses on love in Old and Middle Gaelic texts is Sarah Michie's examination of lovesickness, which will be drawn on in what follows.[355] Another two exceptions to the rule of scholarship not approaching love in early medieval Gaelic texts systematically are the essays of Pádraig Ó Fiannachta and Máire Herbert in *An Grá i Litríocht na Gaeilge*, on love in medieval tales (particularly the Ulster Cycle) and medieval lyric poetry.[356] While, perhaps, both are a little limited in scope, and have been built upon in the past decades, both are nevertheless excellent sources for the study of love in medieval Gaelic literature.

Furthermore, the study of romantic love in medieval Gaelic literature is a growing field. In the past twenty years, we have had an overview of the expressions and functions of love in medieval Gaelic literature by William Sayers,[357] specific detailed examinations of topics such as Jacqueline Borsje's work on love magic,[358] and further scrutinising of institutions that relate to the theme of love, like marriage, such as Tomás Ó Cathasaigh's study of Ailill and Medb.[359] The increase of studies relating to love and relationships has taken place in the context of an increased interest in gender and sexuality; it is no coincidence that a feminist approach to medieval Gaelic literature has grown substantially in this time period.[360] Focus on the interplay of genders in these texts then leads to discussion of how men and women relate romantically. Joanne Findon's discussion of Emer, in *Tochmarc Emire* and *Serglige Con Culainn*, inevitably discusses wooing and love triangles,[361] and other articles by her such as 'Looking for 'Mr. Right' in *Tochmarc Becfhola*', show a similar engagement with questions regarding (sexual and marital) unions.[362] A study relevant to this particular chapter is Sarah Sheehan's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Gender and Sexuality in Early Irish Saga'.[363] Sheehan examines specific tales in five chapters in order to 'analy[s]e the representation of femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and corporeality in a range of sagas from the mythological and Ulster cycles.'[364] A search for articles discussing sex in medieval Gaelic literature inevitably brings forth results relating to sexual intercourse, and to sex and gender: as discussion of one area increases, so does the other.

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[352] Ó Tuama, 'Love in the Medieval Irish Literary Lyric', p. 164.

[353] A brief overview of 20th-century engagement with medieval Gaelic texts in the context of Tristan is offered in Lea, 'Love, Sex, and the Mercenary Soldier', 207.

[354] Ibid., 210.

[355] Sarah Michie, 'The Lover's Malady in Early Irish Romance' *Speculum*, 12.3 (1937), 304-13.

[356] Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, 'An Grá sa tSeanscéalaíocht,' pp. 5-15, and Máire Herbert, 'An Grá sa tSeanfhilíocht', pp. 17-31, in *Léachtaí Cholm Cille VI: An Grá I Litríocht Na Gaeilge,* ed. By Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (Má Nuad: An Sagart, 1975).

[357] Sayers, 'Fusion and Fission'.

[358] Jacqueline Borsje, 'The Power of Words: Sacred and Forbidden Love Magic in Medieval Ireland', in *Everyday Life and the Sacred: Re/configuring Gender Studies in Religion*, ed. by Angela Berlis, Anna-Marie

As modern-day readers, we take preconceived notions into reading texts, something that is particularly pertinent in approaching texts examining love at a distance of sometimes a millennium or more. At times, texts have grown in popularity long after their earliest version was produced, affected by biases of the times in which they were mass-received. Examples include *Longes mac nUislenn*: Mathis has convincingly argued that the understanding of the Derdriu story in certain quarters, and perhaps more pertinently, at various times, has been coloured by political and social intent, and rewritings of the story making it more akin to a love tale than one of kidnapping and sexual violence.[365]

All scholarship takes place in a wider context of discourse, and so reacts to other works in its field. Reactive scholarship can, however, run the risk of exaggerating the

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J. A. C. M. Korte and Kune Biezeveld, Studies in Theology and Religion, 23 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 218–48.

[359] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Ailill and Medb: a Marriage of Equals', in *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Maynooth 24-27 July 2005*, ed. by Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (Maynooth: An Sagart, 2009), pp. 46–53. Love are marriage are not, however, synonymous; and this is in addition to our already discussed articles on marriage in Chapter Two.

[360] See, for instance, Sheehan and Dooley, *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*.

[361] Findon, *A Woman's Words*.

[362] Joanne Findon, 'Looking for 'Mr. Right' in *Tochmarc Becfhola*', in *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, pp. 57–74.

[363] Sheehan, 'Gender and Sexuality in Early Irish Saga'.

[364] Ibid., p. ii.

[365] Kate Louise Mathis, 'An Irish Poster Girl? Writing Deirdre during the Revival' in *Romantic Ireland from Tone to Gonne: Fresh Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. by Willy Maley, Paddy Lyons and John Miller (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 29-46.

importance of the view it puts forward. The intent of this chapter is not to argue that every early medieval Gaelic prose tale contains within it a complex portrayal of the intricacies of romantic love — such would be an overreaction. Instead, the intent of this chapter is to make clear that medieval Gaeldom was interested in the question of romantic love, by examining the texts themselves and putting forward an alternative view.

3.3 Definition

Two different versions of *Compert Conchobuir* 'The Conception of Conchobar' may illustrate some of the difficulties in talking about love. As discussed in Chapter Two, in the twelfth-century, early Middle Gaelic tale *Scéla Conchobuir meic Nessa*, Ness becomes Cathbad's *ben grádaigthe* 'beloved wife' after sex at spearpoint. And as stated, the fact Ness becomes Cathbad's *ben grádaigthe* does not necessate love on her part; even if we read this term as relating to marriage, marriage is a legal contract which does not necessitate love.

Sex itself does not equal love either. If we examine the earlier, eighth-century version of *Compert Conchobuir*, we see that, after Cathbad predicts that a child conceived that day would grow to be great: *Tocuirestar-som iarum an ingen ina dochum, o nach aca ferscal ind-ocus dí.* ('Then the maiden invited him to her, as she saw no (other) male near her.')[366] Ness then becomes pregnant. In terms of what the text states, sex comes across as primarily reproductive; the text shows no interest in sexual desire or love. Like marriage, sex might include love but does not have to. We also need to consider any of the implications this may have for desire. If one were to definte love solely as 'powerful desire', it would be clearly problematic: Cathbad's desire for Ness does not mean he feels romantic love for her. These two versions of Conchobar's conception then show that two areas which frequently, but not always, overlap with love — marriage (if, indeed, we read it as marriage) and sex — are not necessarily good indicators for the presence of love itself.

It is clear then that for this chapter in particular, a working definition of romantic love is needed. When Ó Tuama talks of the small part played by 'a romantic concept of love'[367] in early medieval Gaelic literature, his basis for romantic love is derived from later medieval lyrics. This makes sense to an extent; Ó Tuama was a scholar of early modern and late medieval love songs and poetry, and so romantic love's importance in that period, and that period's importance in the history of romantic love, would be his key focus. However, earlier examples of romantic love exist, in verse and prose, even if they do not match the notion of romantic love Ó Tuama's article specifically targets. The poetry from the ninth-century *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir*, to be discussed shortly, gives us a woman's account of her heartbreak. Consider also the ninth- or tenth-century verse in the voice of Gráinne, preserved in the eleventh-century scholia of *Amrae Choluim Chille*:

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[366] *Hibernica Minora, Being a Fragment of an Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter*, ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer, Mediaeval and Modern Series, 8 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), p. 50.

[367] Ó Tuama, 'Love in the Medieval Irish Literary Lyric', p. 164.

> *Fil duine*
> *frismad buide lemm díuterc,*
> *día tibrinn in m-bith m-buide,*
> *h-uile h-uile, cid díupert.*
>
> There is one on whom I should gladly gaze, for whom I would give the bright world, all of it, all of it, though it be an unequal bargain.[368]

There is a clear expression of love here, with an emphasis on the excess of feeling, and a valuing of the lover above all else. Even if later verse and prose are influenced by continental (and further) models, these core tenets of the 'romantic' can be seen even in our early lyrics.

It is difficult to find agreement today on what exactly romantic love is, let alone trying to describe how people interacted romantically in tales written over a thousand years ago. As such, here when we talk of romantic love, we are examining, first and foremost, instances where characters are said by the text to love one another, and the nature of their relationship is (implied to be) sexual. They may show affection for one another, though this is not always forthcoming. Phenomena such as lovesickness or 'love in absence' may be present, though these are not essential. If they desire sexual union with their beloveds, they (are implied to) desire a continuing relationship rather than solely one sexual encounter.[369] They may show sexual desire for one another, but desire alone does not mean romantic love. Distinguishing between desire and romantic love is important for tales such as *Compert Conchobair*, where describing Cathbad forcing Ness to bear him a son as 'romantic love' would not be appropriate.

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[368] *Early Irish Lyrics: Eighth to Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. by Gerard Murphy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 160, trans. p. 161.

[369] Given that sex with the object of one's affects is one cure for lovesickness, as we will shortly discuss, the implication of a relationship further to a one-off romantic encounter could be important.

Approaching romantic love with a fairly open definition will help ensure that the conclusions reached are based as much as possible on the evidence of the texts themselves. A narrower definition of romantic love runs the risk of trying to shoehorn our texts into a preconceived notion of what romantic love is supposed to look like. Romantic love and desire can involve words expressly connected with love — *caraid*, *serc*, and so on — and the text might expressly state that love exists between the two characters; such is often our starting point. That said, keeping the definition broad allows us to examine tales concerned with wooings, marriages, and seductions, even if the text itself never states X loved Y.

3.4 Lovesickness

Jan Ziolkowski states: 'Lovesickness may be defined as the physical and mental agony caused by unhappy, unrequited, or unfulfilled love.'[370] Though well-known from a number of medieval literary traditions, lovesickness has not been studied in any great detail in its Gaelic form since Michie's article published in 1937.[371] We see several characters in the medieval Gaelic tradition suffering physically and mentally, with love being established as the root cause. In examining instances of lovesickness in medieval Gaelic texts, more can be learned about how love was perceived in the world of the texts, its causes, effects, and remedies. Through comparing our examples of lovesickness with the wider tradition of medieval Europe and beyond, we can see the areas where the early Gaelic picture corresponds with and diverges from the wider established norms.

A discussion of lovesickness must also address gender — as Michie has stated of the medieval Gaelic tradition and as others have stated of the wider tradition, lovesickness is an affliction suffered by noble men.[372] While this may be true of our most prominent examples of lovesickness, we do have women characters using the language of wholeness and wellness in discussing their longing, particularly (though not only) in lamentation. These examples of women engaging with or experiencing something akin to lovesickness raise a question of the language around lovesickness. How far can we read lovesickness into texts where it is not diagnosed, but rather evoked? These women characters speaking in the language of lovesickness and showing symptoms of it pose a challenge to the notion that lovesickness only affects men.

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[370] Jan M. Ziolkowski, 'Review of Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The '*Viaticum'* and Its Commentaries by Mary Frances Wack', *Speculum,* 68.4 (1993), 1230-32 (1230).
[371] The closest has been Cleary, 'An Investigation of the *Remscéla Tána Bó Cúailnge'*, pp. 294-301
[372] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady'. Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The 'Viaticum' and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 6.

3.5 Wider Tradition of Lovesickness — Historical and Academic

Further to the discussion of love in general in wider scholarship in the Introduction, we can now specifically explore the trope of romantic love as illness. Lovesickness reaches a new height of prevalence as a trope in the medieval period, though there are examples in the Bible, and in antiquity.[373] Contemporary academic engagement with the topic of medieval lovesickness can take as a starting-point the work of John Livingston Lowes — as Wack states:

> Seventy years ago, in 1913, John Livingston Lowes wrote his classic article on the 'Loveres Maladys of *Hereos*,' in which he brought to light a tradition of medical texts which contain descriptions of an illness called *amor hereos*, or erotic love.[374]

Engagement with the phenomenon can be seen throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, including Mary Wack's seminal monograph *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*.[375] Wack describes a European tradition of love revolutionised by medical texts on love and its causes, symptoms and remedies, starting with Constantine of Africa's eleventh-century *Viaticum*, a translation of Arabic medical texts, which became popular across Europe, and that included an influential chapter on lovesickness.[376] On the other hand, Ester Zago states:

> Many medieval scholars now consider the Arab treatise on love by Ibn Hazm (994-1064), *The Dove's Neck Ring*, as the primary text that shaped the idea of love as pathology in literature [...] The next most prominent text on lovesickness is Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore* (c. 1185).[377]

There is a disagreement here on which text or texts are the most influential or prominent in the medieval period. What is agreed, however, is the idea that the medical study of love and lovesickness is a tradition that is found in Arabic writings and is translated for

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[373] Song of Songs 2.5. See Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, pp. 3-30.

[374] Mary Frances Wack, 'Lovesickness in '*Troilus*'', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 19.1/2 (1984), 55-61 (55).

[375] Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*.

[376] Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[377] Ester Zago, 'Lovesickness', in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Margaret Schaus (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2006), pp. 498-99.

European audiences in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, where it became hugely influential.

If medieval Gaelic scholarship can be said to have at times failed to engage with scholarly discourse on love in the twentieth century, it might also be said that the love conversation has left medieval Gaelic material largely to one side. Wack does mention Cú Chulainn and his wasting sickness in *Serglige Con Culainn*[378] — however, it is a brief mention. Scholarly discourse of medieval love has tended to take chivalric romance as its focus,[379] as opposed to the at times less straightforward Gaelic examples we have of the phenomenon.

Love being coupled with sickness has Classical antecedents. We know there was Gaelic access to texts by Classical authors such as Ovid and Lucretius. Certain medieval Gaelic scholars had access to *Metamorphoses*,[380] and the Irish scholar Dúngal may have corrected one of the earliest surviving manuscripts of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* 'On the Nature of Things'.[381] Brent Miles also mentions a medieval Welsh manuscript containing fragments of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 'The Art of Love' as proof that 'Ovid was not unavailable in Insular centres'.[382] As such our Classical texts are also worth consideration in building the bigger picture of lovesickness influences.

Ruth Rothaus Caston in particular has written on the philosophers Cicero and Lucretius, as compared to elegiac poets, in their views on romantic love-as-illness.[383] She notes there are even earlier examples than the first century BC: 'We find earlier instances of it [love-as-illness] in tragedy and Hellenistic poetry, for example, and in Roman comedy'.[384] Caston categorises philosophers as 'critiquing' love where elegiac poets 'celebrate' it.[385] Both groups portray love as an illness, resulting in misery or, at times, insanity.[386] We see both results in our medieval Gaelic saga texts also. For Cicero, when a lover is driven to madness by love, 'the lover is also described as 'lost', literally 'wandering' (*errans* or *vagans*).'[387] Such a description recalls the wandering Cú Chulainn at the end of *Serglige Con Culainn*, when he has to be administered a potion of forgetfulness along with his wife Emer so both of them forget the woman Fand, with whom he was infatuated.[388]

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[378] Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, p. 27.

[379] This does not apply to Dronke, who does not focus on the chivalric but rather its precursors.

[380] Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*, Studies in Celtic History, 30, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), p. 91.

[381] C. M. Barry, *Correcting Lucretius: Dúngal and Carolingian Cosmology* (2016) <http://www.irishphilosophy.com/2016/06/26/dungal/> [Accessed 01 April 2021].

[382] Miles, *Heroic Saga*, p. 91. See Paul Russell, *Reading Ovid in Medieval Wales* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2017).

[383] Caston, 'Love as Illness'.

[384] Ibid. 272.

[385] Ibid. 271.

[386] Ibid. 281-284.

[387] Ibid. 281.

One aspect of the ill lover seen even in these Classical examples is the image of the man becoming submissive.[389] As Caston states, 'Cicero and Lucretius emphasize the submission of the victim of love'.[390] For Ó Tuama, the appearance of submissive men was one way in which *amour courtois* clearly impacted medieval Gaelic literature.[391] In the upcoming discussion of lovesick men, it will be shown that they are frequently bedbound, tying into this trope of men as submissive: however, it is clear there existed a larger phenomenon of lovesickness, including submissive men, both in terms of a wider Euro-Arabian and a medieval Gaelic precedent, than Ó Tuama covers.

3.6 Michie, *Serglige*, and Lovesickness

Michie's 1937 article on 'the Lover's Malady' is the single most comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of lovesickness in medieval Gaelic studies.[392] As might be expected, given the near-century which has passed since Michie's work, her article has some weaknesses visible now due to, in part, our better access to texts and criticism as a field. This is not to unduly criticise the work: the need for an overhaul would be true of many articles from so long ago, and Michie's analysis of lovesickness is still a full and comprehensive take on the phenomenon in medieval Gaelic literature. Indeed, Michie's work has been added to by scholars since then, often looking at lovesickness as part of a wider interrogation of a text such as Gregory Toner does with *Serglige Con Culainn*.[393] Michie bases her schema of lovesickness around three tales, namely, *Serglige Con Culainn*, *Aislinge Óenguso*, and *Tochmarc Étaíne* 'The Wooing of Étaín'.[394] These three texts will be examined in the course of this chapter. Additionally, two other key texts will be scrutinised — *Echtrae Chonnlai* 'The Adventure of Connla'[395] and *Longes mac nUislenn* — and reference will be made to other texts besides.

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[388] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 29. Such a description will also be relevant in the next chapter when wild men are examined.
[389] Caston, 'Love as Illness', 284.
[390] Ibid. 292.
[391] Ó Tuama, 'Love in the Medieval Irish Literary Lyric', p. 194.
[392] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady'. See, however, Cleary's extensive discussion of lovesickness. Cleary, 'An Investigation of the *Remscéla Tána Bó Cúailnge'*, pp. 294-301. Sadly, I only discovered Cleary's work at the corrections stage of this thesis, otherwise it would have been incorporated and engaged with.
[393] Gregory Toner, 'Desire and Divorce in *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Ériu,* 66 (2016), 135-66.
[394] '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', ed. and trans. by Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best, *Ériu,* 12 (1934–1938), 137–96.
[395] *Echtrae Chonnlai and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland*, ed. and trans. by Kim McCone, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts, 1 (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, 2000).

The concept of *serglige,* found in medieval Gaelic literature, is commonly translated as 'wasting sickness',[396] and provides examples of characters suffering 'physical and mental agony caused by [...] love' to paraphrase Ziolkowski. How much these examples correspond to a wider European medieval tradition is worth exploring, as is examining how much of an overlap there is between lovesickness and *serglige*. As Toner points out, lovesickness is not *serglige*'s most common definition: it means more generally just a wasting sickness.[397] And our examples of potential lovesickness often do not label the phenomenon using the term *serglige* — the word is not found in either *Aislinge Óenguso* nor *Tochmarc Étaíne*. In fact, *serglige* is not a common term. *eDIL* has no entry for the word: in fact, its main appearance is under *lige*, where it is cited with no discussion.[398]

Michie categorises causes, signs of and cures for lovesickness, quoted in full below. She concludes that otherworldly women seek out mortal men renowned for their bravery; that mortal men then fall for these otherworldly women by gazing at them, causing enfeeblement, madness, and occasionally death in the men; and that there are two cures to the affliction: 'eternal union with the beloved'; or the supernatural dissolution of the 'love-spell'.[399] Michie's categories are thus laid out:

> Causa
>
> 1. Contemplation of the physical beauty of the lady through long-looking.
> 2. Contemplation of the physical beauty of the lady through a vision.
>
> Signa
>
> 1. Lover ceases to eat, sleep, or drink.
> 2. Lover keeps his love secret.
> 3. Lover is overcome with weakness and apathy and takes to his bed.
> 4. Physicians are either baffled, or else diagnose the illness by means of (1) respiration and sighs, or (2) physical appearance of lover.
> 5. Lover prefers death to life because of his inability to possess the beloved.
>
> Cura
>
> 1. Lover recovers by removal of the spell.

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[396] *eDIL s.v. 1 lige.*

[397] Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', 144.

[398] *eDIL s.v. 1 lige.* See, however, compounds such as *comluige* 'act of lying, sleeping together', and *crólige* 'lying in gore, state of being severely wounded, bedridden': *eDIL s.v. 2 comluige*; *crólige.*

[399] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 312.

2. Lover recovers by union with the beloved.[400]

Michie thus establishes a narrative paradigm. This approach has its advantages — the information is clearly laid out, in a pattern against which other examples can be measured. The approach as an interpretive methodology is most prominently found in medieval Gaelic scholarship in Ó Cathasaigh's *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*.[401] As this chapter will show, when examples are generalised in order to make conclusions as comprehensive yet simple as possible, nuance and exceptions can be left out. Indeed, this might not be a flaw in producing a schema: doing so often allows for nuance and contrasts to be seen more clearly.

It is notable (and was noted by Michie)[402] that only men seem to suffer from what is here discussed as lovesickness, that is, sickness from first direct interaction[403] with the desired. By contrast, men seem seldom to suffer from *grád n-écmaise*, not falling for women *ar airscélaib* 'for the famous tales' about them, though this may simply be because male martial exploits dominate: you cannot have a man falling for a woman on account of the famous tales about her if there are no famous tales of her martial exploits — if, indeed, that is what *airscéla* are, a point to which we will return. There does then seem to be a gendered difference in terms of experiencing love, at least within the three tales upon which Michie bases her schema.

However, Michie vastly oversimplifies the issue when she states that 'In the Irish tradition [...] women never suffered from the effects of love'[404] — though she is making the point that women, unlike men in our tales, do not have to wait around for love and subsequently grow ill. Though we might not have examples of women laid low by desire upon first seeing a man, we do see women in pain for love. Love, obviously, is not only romantic; but even in the romantic sphere, stating women 'never suffered from the effects of love' is clearly incorrect. In a lyric found in the Old Gaelic *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir*, Líadain describes the pain of losing Curithir in fatal terms:

Deilm n-dega
ro thethainn mo chride-se;

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[400] Ibid., 308.
[401] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1977).
[402] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 313.
[403] I am considering gazing as 'direct interaction' in line with medieval thought on the matter; for discussion of the extramission theory of vision, which Sheehan states is 'discernible in early Irish texts'; see Sarah Sheehan, 'Feasts for the Eyes', pp. 96-97.
[404] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 313.

> *ro-fess, nicon bía cena.*
>
> A roar of fire
> has split my heart;
> without him for certain it will not live. [405]

The lament of Créide, '*It é saigte gona súain*',[406] also Old Gaelic, opens and closes with Créide's sleeplessness, which is listed among Michie's symptoms of lovesickness.[407] The lament genre then, in which women's voices are well-represented, exists in contradiction to, and supplies evidence against, Michie's statement of women never suffering the effects of love. Even if we read Michie's statement as referring solely to the effects of lovesickness, we can see some overlap between the symptoms of *serglige* and those of lamenting romantic partners. Whereas men may be unable to eat or sleepless upon first meeting the person of their affection, women can suffer similarly in grief, or after the death of their partner: a clear example is Derdriu not eating nor sleeping enough in *Longes mac nUislenn*.[408] Not all laments are concerned with romantic love — mothers can lament as well as spouses; and so the effects of love beyond solely the romantic can be seen impacting women in medieval Gaelic saga.

Michie's classification of causes is also not without its problems, even limiting oneself to the texts she discusses. Her description of the cause of lovesickness as always being the '[c]ontemplation of the physical beauty of the lady' is debatable. While this may be the case for the first text she discusses, the Old Gaelic *Aislinge Óenguso*, the other two examples she cites before presenting her list of causes are, at best, ambiguous on the matter. If we look at the episode from *Tochmarc Étaíne* that Michie discusses, we see the following description of the moment that triggers Ailill's love:

> *Carais Ailill Anguba iarom Etain ic feis Temrach iar feis dí la hEochaid . Fo dhaig dognith apairt dia sirshilliudh, uair is deascaidh seirci sirshillidh. Cairigis a menma Ailill don gnim sin dogéne & niba cabair dó. Ba treisi tol aicnidh. Focheird Ailill a sirg dé fo dhaigh nara thubaidhi fri nech & nach erbart frisin mnaí fodeisin.*

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[405] Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 82-84. For discussion of fatal heartbreak, see Mac Mathúna, 'Lexical and Literary Aspects of 'Heart' in Irish'. This passage is discussed in further detail in the next chapter.
[406] Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 86-89.
[407] Michie, 'Lover's Malady', 308.
[408] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 48, trans. p. 66.

> Ailill Ánguba loved Étaín at the Festival of Tara, after she had slept with Eochaid. For he would gaze at her continually, and long-looking is a symptom of love. His spirit [*menma*] reproached Ailill for the thing he had done, but it did not aid him. Desire [*tol*] was stronger than character. Ailill fell into a decline [*a sirg*] lest his honour should be strained, nor had he spoken of it to the woman herself.[409]

Rather than 'long-looking' being a cause, here the text seems to explicitly state this is a symptom of love: *uair is deascaidh seirci sirshillidh*, literally 'because long-looking is a symptom of love'. That said, the better-attested meanings for *descad* are 'dregs, lees, sediment', 'ferment, leaven, barm, yeast'.[410] We might then read this not quite as long-looking being a symptom of love, but a leaven or yeast, something which quickens or transforms the feeling of love. The point remains the same (namely, that long-looking cannot be the cause of the lovesickness, but rather a symptom/leaven), but the nature of the impact of gazing upon a loved one is more ambiguous than the translation first suggests.

What is more, as Michie acknowledges,[411] Midir takes responsibility for causing the lovesickness in Ailill:

> *'Is misi em,' ol Midir, 'dorat for menmain Ailella do sheircsiu co torchair a fuil & a feoil dé, & is mesi thall cach n-ocobar collaidhi n-aire, na beith milliud einich duitsiu and[.']*
>
> 'It was I,' said Midir, 'that put love for thee into Ailill's mind, so that his flesh and blood fell away from him. And it was I that took from him all carnal desire, so that thine honour might not suffer therein.'[412]

This does support the notion that Michie advances of lovesickness being a spell cast by an otherworldly being upon a mortal man,[413] though Midir is not a 'fairy mistress', and his aims are not to cause a mortal man whose bravery has caught his attention to fall in love with Midir himself. He is instead using his ability to cause lovesickness, albeit in order to make someone love someone else, rather than himself.

If we turn to *Serglige Con Culainn*, we can further challenge Michie's classification of causes. *Serglige Con Culainn* is found in *Lebor na hUidre*, dated to the late-eleventh/early-twelfth century. It is a composite text consisting of two recensions: Recension A, dating to the twelfth century, and the older Recension B, dating to the tenth century.[414] In contrast to the idea of 'contemplation of beauty' causing lovesickness, Fand's interaction with Cú Chulainn is more physical (albeit, in a vision):

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[409] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 164, trans. 167.

[410] *eDIL s.v. descad, descaid.*

[411] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 307.

[412] Bergin and Best, *'Tochmarc Étaíne*', 171-172; trans. 172-173.

[413] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 311-13.

> *Dotháet Cú Chulaind iar sin co tard a druim frisin liic, & ba h-olc a menma leis, & dofuit cotlud fair. Co n-accai in dá mnaí cucai. Indala n-aí brat úaine impe. Alaili brat corcra cóicdíabail im shude. Dolluid in ben cosin brot úane chucai, & tibid gen fris, & dobert béim dind echfhleisc dó. Dotháet alaili cucai dano, & tibid fris, & nod slaid fón alt chétna. Ocus bátar fri cíana móir oca sin .i. cechtar dé imma sech cucai béus dia búalad combo marb acht bec. Lotir úad íarom.*[415]
>
> Cú Chulainn went then and leaned his back against the pillar, and his *menma* (spirit, mind) was troubled, and he fell asleep. He saw the two women approaching him. One had a green cloak around her. The other had a five-folded crimson cloak around her. The woman with the green cloak went to him, and she smiled at him, and she hit him with the horse-switch. The other one went to him too, and smiled at him, and gave him a strike in the same manner. Agus they were for a long time, that is, both of them in turn hitting him until he was nearly dead. They left then.

It is this violent assault upon Cú Chulainn that Toner identifies as the root of Cú Chulainn's illness, as opposed to any contemplation of Fand's beauty. Toner describes the incident as 'part of a stratagem to bind him to Fand among the forces of female lust',[416] and states that Fand and Lí Ban 'attacked [Cú Chulainn] in order to subjugate him to their own desires.'[417] He points to a complete lack of desire for Fand on Cú Chulainn's part in Recension B, the older text of the two, as evidence for a notion of *serglige* not based in romantic love. Toner compares this passage with instances of *serglige* in other tales, and argues that '*serglige* does not exclusively, or even predominantly, indicate a malady arising from passion'.[418]

Toner's view, that Fand put Cú Chulainn under a spell, can be reconciled with Michie's understanding of the depiction of lovesickness as the result of a love-spell: for

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[414] Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', 135-36.
[415] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 3.
[416] Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', 143.
[417] Ibid., 144.
[418] Ibid.

Michie, the physical beating by Fand represents the casting of a spell on Cú Chulainn.[419] We can see both *Serglige Con Culainn* and *Tochmarc Étaíne,* then, having examples of *serglige* not stemming from 'long-looking' or the contemplation of a lady's beauty, but from direct intervention from Otherworldly forces. Michie's attribution of Cú Chulainn and Ailill's illnesses to contemplating beauty is flawed. Ultimately, the actions of Otherworldly beings are responsible for both.

Furthermore, while Michie sees 'fairy women' as seeking out brave heroes, it should also be noted they are far from the only women in medieval Gaelic literature to do so. Women without explicit ties to the Otherworld love warriors for their renown, *ar airscélaib,* in tales. An example is Findabair in the Old Gaelic *Táin Bó Fraích*: *Carthai Findabair, ingen Ailella & Medba, ara irscélaib* ('Findabair, daughter of Ailill and Medb, loves him for his great renown').[420] There is a similar occurrence involving Findchóem in the late Old Gaelic *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait* 'Bricriu's Feast and the Exile of the Sons of Dóel Dermait':

> *'Cía saigi?'*
> *'Cú Chulaind mac Sóaltaim,' or sí, 'ro-charus ara airscélaib.'*
>
> 'Whom do you seek?'
> 'Cú Chulainn mac Súaltaim,' she said, 'whom I have loved on account of the marvelous stories concerning him.'[421]

We will return to examine *grád n-écmaise*, and women loving men. Michie does reference some such examples of *grád n-écmaise* in passing, though they do not seem to contribute to her conclusions.[422] These examples serve to highlight that women seeking out heroic men is not a solely otherworldly phenomenon: it seems an accepted part of the wooing process in medieval Gaelic literature. These examples also serve to convey a lexical point. These women's feelings are described using the verb *caraid*, and Óengus and Ailill's feelings for Caer and Étaín respectively are described using its verbal noun *serc.* '*Grád n-*

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[419] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 310-13.

[420] *The Romance of Froech and Findabair, or, The Driving of Froech's Cattle: Táin Bó Froích*, ed. and trans. by Wolfgang Meid, ed. by Albert Bock, Benjamin Bruch, and Aaron Griffith, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Neue Folge, 10 (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, 2015), p. 43; trans. p. 67.

[421] *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait and its Place in the Irish Literary and Oral Narrative Traditions*, ed. and trans. by Kaarina Hollo, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts, 2 (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2005), p. 53, trans. p. 98. The precise meaning of *airscél* is ambiguous; here I have followed Hollo's translation.

[422] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 310.

écmaise,’ then, is a phenomenon which utilises *serc* and *caraid* as it does *grád*. The repeated formulaic expression of women’s feelings here also raises questions. Is there an accepted paradigm of love and lovesickness here, where this is simply how such a love is expressed in these texts as audiences would understand; and to what extent is there imitation or intertextual referencing happening?

Questions can also be asked of Michie’s *cura* category. In her chart she lists union with the beloved as a cure, but later states: ‘The afflicted heroes could be saved from this love-spell only by (a) eternal union with the beloved, or (b) by the removal of the spell through some supernatural agency.’[423] Clearly, however, there are some methods understood to lessen the illness short of curing it, as seen in *Tochmarc Étaíne*:

> *An tech a mbith Ailill a ngalar dotheigead Etain cach dia dia athreos, &* ***ba lugaide a galarsom ón do suidiu, & cein no bith Édain isin maigin sin no bithsom oca deicsin****. Rathaighis Edain anni sin & focheird a menma in aire. Asbert Edain frissom la n-and a mbatar ina tigh dib línaib, cid día mbai fochonn a galair do Ailill. ‘****Ata dit seircsiu,****’ ol Ailill. ‘Dirsan’ a fhad co n-erbort, or sisi. ‘Ropsat slan o chianaib dia fesmais.’ ‘Cid andib badam* ***slansa*** *mad ail duitsiu,’ ol Ailill. ‘Bid ail ecin,’ or si.*
> *Doteged iar sin cach dia* ***do folcad a chind & do tinbi a chodach dho & do urgabail usce fora lamaib.*** *Día teóra nomad iarom* ***ba slan Oilill.*** *Adbertsom fri hEdain: ‘Ocus a testo dom iccsa cuin rom bia?’ ‘Rod bia amarach,’ ol si, ‘acht niba isin tsosudh na firflatha dogentar an col. Dotuisiu ambarach am dailseo cusan tulaigh uasin liss.’*

Every day, Étaín went to the house where Ailill lay sick to talk to him, and thus his sickness was alleviated, and as long as Étaín remained there he would be gazing at her. Étaín observed this and she set her mind [*menma*] on it. Étaín asked Ailill on a day they were in the house what had made him ill. ‘**My love for you,**’ Ailill answered. ‘A shame you did not tell me sooner,’ Étain said, ‘for had I known, you would long since have been well.’ ‘I can be **well** at once if you so desire,’ said Ailill. ‘Indeed, I do,’ Étaín answered. Every day then she would come to bathe his head and to carve his meat and to pour water on his hands. After thrice nine days Ailill was healed. He said to Étaín: ‘and when shall I have from thee what is still lacking to cure me?’ ‘Thou shalt have it to-morrow,’ said she;

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[423] Ibid., 313.

'but not in the prince's dwelling shall he be put to shame. Come to me to-morrow on the hill above the court.'[424]

Clearly, there are more than Michie's two *curae* when it comes to abating symptoms of lovesickness. The text can be read as suggesting that seeing Étaín improves Ailill's condition, worth bearing in mind as we go forward. Washing his head, cutting his meat, and pouring water over his hands for 27 days, as well as hearing, talking to and seeing her, leads to Ailill being *slán* 'whole, healthy', the word Derdriu in *Longes mac nUislenn* and Óengus in *Aislinge Óenguso* use to describe what they are not.[425] Then with the 'final part of his healing' — he is already *slán*, so we have to wonder what *slán* is being taken to mean if his healing is not complete[426] — there is no suggestion of their union being 'eternal', as Michie states as a cure.[427] If we take Ailill's words to imply sex, there is nothing in their talk that necessarily suggests an ongoing affair — Ailill's asking for the 'final part', and Étaín's statement that he 'will have it tomorrow' can be read as a one-off event. Furthermore, both seem relieved at the end of this part of the tale that Ailill's desire has faded.

> *Tig iarom dia tig. 'Is maith ar comrac' or Ailill; 'sech rom ícadsa in fechtsa, ní fil immlot n-einig duitsiú and.' 'Is amra amlaidh,' ol Édain. Tainic Eochaid día chuaird iar tain, & atlaigestar beathaid a brathar & buidighthe fri hEdaín co mór a ndórigné co tainicsom.*
>
> Then she comes to her house. 'We are well met,' said Ailill. 'Now am I healed, and yet thine honour had not suffered.' 'It is well thus,' said Étaín. After that Eochaid returned from his circuit, and rejoiced that his brother was alive, and Étaín received thanks for what she had done until he had come again.[428]

Ailill and Étaín can both be read as relieved at this outcome to Ailill's predicament. This raises questions of 'love' — if both are relieved that they did not sleep together, and that Ailill's desire has ended, can we describe the feelings they may have for each other as romantic love? It is possible — but there is ambiguity here as to the dividing line, or overlap, between romantic love and sexual desire.

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[424] Translation based on Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 166-69, with some amendation for clarity. Emphasis my own.

[425] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 45; Meid, *Aislinge Óenguso*, p. 53.

[426] We could read this as Ailill chancing his arm, as it were, or else there being a spectrum of *slán*.

[427] To be fair to Michie however, it is entirely possible that writing in an academic journal in 1937 restricted the terminology she could use when discussing sex.

[428] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 172; trans. 173.

The possibly sexual connotations of Ailill's statement '*Is maith ar comrac*'[429] are not reflected in the above translation; we can read him as saying *this* meeting (as opposed to a sexual union, which *comrac* can also imply) is good.[430] This phrase appears first, is foregrounded, possibly in order to emphasise that this is not the kind of meeting the text was building us up to expect before here. Or do we read love in Ailill's original unwillingness to discuss his desire, or in Étaín's willingness to tryst with a man she seemingly does not desire, her husband's brother, in order to save his life. This may be an area where one could argue for love as motive, but one could equally argue for honour.[431]

Overall, Michie's article is a good starting point for examining lovesickness but is not without its problems. Its broad-scope approach brings together many tales but digging in a little deeper to the tales she cites shows her conclusions to be overly schematic. In the following discussion, mainly through further examination of the examples Michie herself uses, with an eye to more recent scholarship and advances in gender studies in medieval Gaelic scholarship in particular, it is hoped this chapter will advance on her work, recognising more nuance in the tales than is first thought, and reaffirm the value of approaching these texts with love in mind.

3.7 Visuality and Desire

There is a key element of romantic love and desire to be discussed: namely, beauty. Visuality, specularity, and physicality have been fruitful subject areas for recent medieval scholarship; indeed, there has been a growing, wider sense-based discourse in medieval studies in general. In the past twenty years we have seen books published such as *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*,[432] *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*,[433] and *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*.[434] There is a clear ongoing engagement with ideas of specularity and gaze theory in modern medieval scholarship. This is also true of scholarship looking at medieval Gaelic literature, in which works by several scholars over the past twenty years have carved out an area for the discussion of the visual and the physical in medieval Gaelic scholarship. In terms of physicality, Amy Mulligan's discussions of kingship, politics and the body have been influential,[435] and Sarah Künzler's recent monograph *Flesh and Word: Reading Bodies in Old Norse-Icelandic and Early Irish Literature* approaches our heroic characters in particular with a comparative approach.[436]

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[429] *eDIL s.v. 1 comrac.*

[430] Ibid.

[431] The question of love, or honour, or both, motivating action is fully explored in Chapter Five.

[432] Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages,* The New Middle Ages (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[433] Madeline Harrison Caviness, V*isualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

[434] E. Campbell and R. Mills, eds., *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Visuality has recently been explored in the Ulster Cycle in particular, in articles by Sheehan, Jessica Hemming, and Mikhailova. Sheehan's article 'Feasts for the Eyes: Visuality and Desire in the Ulster Cycle' is perhaps the most immediately pertinent article to our current analysis.[437] It centres on three texts in particular — *Táin Bó Fraích*, *Longes mac nUislenn* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* — and argues that men are most often the 'objects of the gaze',[438] though this is not without caveat:

> Analysis of these scenes in their narrative contexts suggests that although gender is an important structuring element in the erotics of vision, it figures only tangentially in the politics of visuality. If anything, specularity ('to-be-looked-at-ness,' a naturalized imperative to function as spectacle) is gendered masculine in the sagas, but this need not mean that spectatorship is gendered feminine. The principle behind the politics of saga visuality is not gender but fame[439]

She states: 'Both *Táin Bó Fraích* and *Longes mac nUislenn* incorporate love stories that linger on scenes of female desire in which a male body is fragmented under a woman's desiring gaze.'[440] This would seem to challenge Michie's argument, already examined, that men 'contemplate the beauty' of women; but it is worth remembering Michie was specifically talking about causes of lovesickness, not talking about medieval Gaelic saga as a whole.

Jessica Hemming has examined also *Longes mac nUislenn* and *Táin Bó Fraích* for their use of the trope of a man of three colours being gazed upon by a woman, and concludes:

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[435] Amy C. Eichhorn-Mulligan, '*Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and the Politics of Anatomy', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies,* 49 (2005), 1–19; Amy C. Eichhorn-Mulligan, 'The Anatomy of Power and the Miracle of Kingship: the Female Body of Sovereignty in a Medieval Irish Kingship Tale', *Speculum,* 81.4 (2006), 1014–54.

[436] Sarah Künzler, *Flesh and Word: Reading Bodies in Old Norse-Icelandic and Early Irish Literature*, Trends in Medieval Philology, 31 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

[437] Sheehan, 'Feasts for the eyes'.

[438] Ibid., p. 95.

[439] Ibid., p. 96.

[440] Ibid., p. 98.

> Both Irish tales predate the emergency of courtly love as a literary phenomenon and would therefore be utilizing the folk material for reasons unconnected with the stunned lover character-type [...] The Irish authors, or redactors, may be drawing [...] on a folk tradition in which the female gaze, the tricolour as symbol of extraordinary beauty, and transfressive female activity are *already* associated as a kind of linked set of colour motif plus distinctive plot elements.[441]

Hemming's focus on, in particular, visuality as it is expressed in pre-courtly love texts is particularly pertinent for our discussion.

Mikhailova examines descriptions of women's beauty in the Ulster Cycle in particular.[442] She examines moments where narrative space is given to long descriptions of female beauty, and notes, like Sheehan and like Damian McManus,[443] that men are more often the visually described party. Mikhailova concludes:

> The sagas of the Ulster Cycle present a gallery of shapely warriors whose wives are practically never described. [...] Women can be wise, modest, skillful and sometimes perfidious, yet earthly women are never described. Moreover [...] the very fact of presenting an introductory description of a woman in an Irish saga signals that she is a malevolent otherworldly being.[444]

Mikhailova argues, then, for the existence of both an earthly/Otherworldly divide in this matter and a gender difference, with men being more frequently described at length. She also references Caer from *Aislinge Óenguso* as exceptional as an Otherworldly woman, as we only get a 'brief reference to the beauty of the enigmatic girl'.[445] However, she argues that Caer's benevolence and that her wooing of Óengus is done without 'the intention of hurting [him] or stirring up conflict' as a 'possible explanation' for why Caer is an Otherworldly woman who does not get extensively described.[446]

While this may explain the lack of visual description of Caer, Mikhailova's blanket statement of feminine Otherworldly malevolence being signalled by an introductory description has clear exceptions, such as the earthly Derdriu in *Longes mac nUislenn*, whose future beauty is arguably her 'introductory description.'[447] We can also consider Étaín in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel', whose appearance Ralph O'Connor describes as 'rightly famed as the finest and most detailed description of a woman in mediaeval Irish literature'.[448] Despite this introductory description of an Otherworldly woman, it would be difficult to argue for Étaín being considered a malevolent force in the tale. Thus, while visuality and desire are clearly linked, the link between visual description and Otherwordliness, even in the Ulster Cycle, is not as straightforward as Mikhailova portrays it.

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[441] Jessica Hemming, '"I could love a man with those three colours": Gazing and the Tricoloured Beloved', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 68 (Winter, 2014), 51–67.
[442] Mikhailova, 'Portraying a person'. See 107-108.
[443] Damian McManus, 'Good-looking and Irresistible: the Hero from Early Irish Saga to Classical Poetry', *Ériu,* 59 (2009), 57–109.
[444] Mikhailova, 'Portraying a Person', 113.
[445] Ibid., 109.
[446] Ibid.

We find another linking of visuality and desire in turning to the Old Gaelic poem *Amrae Choluim Chille* ('Poem for Colum Cille'). In eulogising Colum Cille, Dallán states: *Rir accobur a súla, suí slán cres Chríst* ('The perfect austere sage of Christ / gave up his eye's desire').[449] His rejection of his eyes' desire is being praised, and *accobur* is the same word as was above used by Midir to describe the desire, translated as 'desire', he took from Ailill to prevent Étaín's honour being blemished.[450] We will specifically return to the question of the senses and love in Chapter Four in a similar context to this eulogy of Colum Cille; namely, the relationship between religious love, romantic love, and the aural and visual.

It might be tempting, in light of the discussion of men and *serglige*, and women and *grád n-écmaise*, to point to a visual/aural divide between men and women in our texts, where men experience desire by seeing the object of their desire (often through a vision) and women through hearing about the object of their desire. However, as we have firmly established at this point, it is not only the 'contemplation of beauty' that causes male desire in our texts. Furthermore, the line between visuality and desire is not entirely clear cut. In her article, Sheehan concludes that Derdriu, in her relationship with Noisiu, is '[a]t once an object of desire and bearer of the desiring gaze'.[451] The gendered gaze may differ from text to text; in *Longes mac nUislenn* both Derdriu and Conchobar's desiring 'gaze'[452] lead to problems, as will shortly be discussed.

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[447] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 43. Admittedly, this may not disprove Mikhailova's point: that the earthly Derdriu is introduced with an extended description might not mean anything about how Otherwordly women are introduced. The point here is that, more generally, in terms of women, not always does an introductory description signal them as being a) Otherworldly or b) malevolent.

[448] Ralph O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 57.

[449] Jacopo Bisagni, *Amrae Coluimb Chille: a Critical Edition*, Early Irish Text Series 1 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2019), p. 272; trans. p. 273.

[450] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 170; trans. 171.

[451] Sheehan, 'Feasts for the eyes', 104.

[452] Note we do not necessarily read Conchobar's desire here as sexual (particularly given Derdriu is a foetus at this point). He seeks to possess she who will become the most sought-after woman; this could be the desire to increase his status. Or it could be anticipatory sexual desire; he does not desire Derdriu as she is now, but the promise of her beauty is enough for him to sexually desire the image of what Derdriu will become.

3.8 Aislinge Óenguso

Discussion of visuality and desire in medieval Gaelic literature brings us to *Aislinge Óenguso*. *Aislinge Óenguso* is an Old Gaelic tale, written in British Library MS Egerton 1782 at the start of the sixteenth century. Thurneysen put forward a date of sometime in the eighth century for its composition.[453] The tale concerns Óengus, the son of the Dagda. One night while sleeping, Óengus sees a beautiful woman coming towards him, making music. Óengus cannot talk to her. He sees her each night for a year. Because of the love he feels for her, he falls ill. Conchobar's physician diagnoses *sercc écmaise* 'love in absence'[454] as the *galar* 'sickness, disease', after which Óengus becomes active once more.

With the help of family and allies, the woman is eventually found — Caer of the *síd* of Connaught. The Dagda, Ailill, and Medb attack the *síd*, but Caer's father says he cannot give Caer to Óengus. Caer and her companions change into swans. Óengus eventually meets Caer, bringing her back with him to his home. This, the tale tells us, is the reason Óengus fights for Ailill and Medb in the *Táin*.

We aren't given an extensive description of the lovesickness Óengus suffers, but we can see that it does meet many of Michie's criteria. A few things further stand out, however. One such thing is shame. It seems like either shame or silence is connected to the sickness — or, possibly, both. Óengus does not disclose to anyone the reason for his illness. Before the physician's diagnosis, he seems either unwilling or incapable of uttering that love has him thus afflicted. This can be contrasted with a similar moment in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, where Ailill will not talk of his illness or act upon his love for shame and in fear of injuring honour.[455] *Aislinge Óenguso* offers further information. No reason for Óengus to feel the shame Ailill would feel is made explicit in the text — his desire for Caer does not in any obvious way risk him offending the honour of himself or anyone around him.

Silence, then, may be more important than previous scholarship has expressed. The silence can be read as being a part of lovesickness itself, as a symptom. The narrator themselves and the physician name lack of speech with the beloved as part of the illness; the physician can be read as telling Óengus it is this silence that has allowed him to diagnose the illness as *sercc écmaise*. The silence places the illness in the middle of the visual/aural divide we will speak of when it comes to love and gender, as it can be read as an instance of a visual phenomenon causing an aural change. This notion of shame or silence (or both) is one to which we will return.

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[453] Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Zu irischen Texten', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie,* 12 (1918), 398–407.
[454] Though see Cleary, who argues convincingly for not reading this as *sercc écmaise*. Cleary, *An Investigation of the Remscéla Tána Bó Cúailnge*, pp. 294-301.
[455] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne'*, 164.

There is also no ambiguity in the world of this text when it comes to what exactly is causing Óengus's affliction:

> *'Ate! Nítat béodai do imthechta,' ol Fingen. 'Sercc écmaise ro·carais.'*
> *'Ad·rumadar mo galar form,' ol Óengus.*
> *'Do·rochar i ndochraidi ocus ní-ro·lámar a epirt fri nech,' [ol Fingen].*[456]
>
> 'Aye, not great your situation,' said Fingen. 'It is love in absence you have loved.'
> 'You have diagnosed my illness,' said Óengus.
> 'You have fallen into difficulty and you did not dare to say it to anyone,' [said Fingen.]

It is made explicit that desire for someone who is absent is making him ill: '*Sercc écmaise ro·carais*.' We can clearly see parallels between this and the *grád n-écmaise* women are portrayed as feeling for our heroic male characters. The obvious points of divergence here are that Óengus does not love this woman on reputation or '*ar airscélaib*', but from having seen her in a dream. This too is something to which we will return, particularly in discussing *Echtrae Chonnlai*. Moreover, this being away from the object of his desire is causing him physical illness — we do not see women suffering the same when they experience *grád n-écmaise*.[457] It could, however, be argued that that is because we do not see these women before they appear in the locus of the narrative, loving the person they are shortly to meet. That is, we might not see women suffering physical effects of *grád n-écmaise*, because the absence from their partner (to-be) does not last long enough in the narratives for any symptoms to present themselves.

A love-based approach also raises questions of the character of Caer. Caer may be seen as innocent or 'not malevolent', as Mikhailova states,[458] on a first reading. However, taken in the context of other Otherworldly women such as Fand 'binding' heroes to their will, some element of such an action can be seen in Caer. Her own father states he does not have the power to give her to Óengus, an ambiguous statement, but one which suggests she is outwith his control;[459] she is capable of shapeshifting into a swan;[460] and, through attracting Óengus, she solidifies alliance between Óengus, Medb and Ailill, as well as putting into motion the tale *Aislinge Óenguso,* in which numerous people are killed in battle.[461] While it might be argued to read the tale as such is to give Caer more agency than she has, or to misread events to make them her fault, it can clearly be read that attracting Óengus is an act of will on her part — with Fand we have established the ability of an Otherworldly woman to appear in the dreams of a hero in order to bind them. As such, though Caer does not come to the fore in the scholarship as a dangerous, capable woman, we can read the effects of her actions as more ambiguous than a first reading gives us. It is entirely possible she is not as 'benevolent' as has been thought.

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[456] Meid, *Aislinge Óenguso*, p. 53. Translation is my own.
[457] This is Michie's meaning when she says women did not suffer from love. Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 313. Women suffering lovesickness-like symptoms will shortly be discussed.
[458] Mikhailova, 'Portraying a Person', p. 109.

Visuality and desire are also clearly linked in *Aislinge Óenguso*. Óengus's experience is one of seeing, with the phrase *co n-accae ní* 'he saw something' appearing throughout the description of his dream. His first dream ends in illness: *Do-génai galar ndó in delb ad-condairc cen a haccaldaim*[462] 'It made him ill to have seen the shape without conversing with it.' We might read into the 'but not conversed with' as suggesting that speaking to the figure would have had some impact upon desire, possibly even helped him not be so ill, or worsened his condition, reminiscent of *Tochmarc Étaíne*.[463]. The idea of seeing but not talking to someone one desires also appears in the aforementioned *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir*. Again, there is a lack of communication between the two romantically linked characters, this time enforced by a saint:

> *[Cummine Fota:] 'In ba déicsiu dúib ná himmacallam?'*
> *'Immacallam dúin', or Cuirithir. 'Is ferr a mbía de. Immanaccæ dún ríam.'*
> *Intan íarum notéged som timchell martra , no-íata a tech fuirri-si. No-íata dno fairsom, intan notéged sí.*
>
> [Cummine Fota:] 'Whether for you shall it be seeing, or talking together?'
> 'Talking for us!' said Curithir. 'What will come of it will be better. We have ever been looking at each other.'

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[459] Meid, *Aisling Óenguso*, p. 56.
[460] Ibid.
[461] This attraction of a hero for the purposes of a future battle can be seen as a parallel with Fand's actions in *Serglige Con Culainn*, wherein she enlists Cú Chulainn to fight through her infliction of the *serglige*.
[462] Meid, *Aislinge Óenguso*, p. 53.
[463] This could strengthen the idea that Óengus's silence is a key symptom, as identified by the doctor. Óengus has not spoken to her, and so is potentially unable to speak to anyone else until the physician diagnoses him; until Óengus's desire is given speech.

> So whenever he went around the grave-stones of the saints, her cell was closed upon her. In the same way his would be closed upon him whenever she went.[464]

Thomas Clancy has written about this incident as Cummine 'imposing a harsh and perhaps foolhardy regime on those whose devout, but passionate hearts would break beneath it'.[465] Though Cuirithir states *Is ferr a mbía de* 'What will come of it will be better', the tale nevertheless ends with Cuirithir abroad and Líadain's death. There is a limitation placed upon the couple, as in *Aislinge Óenguso* where Óengus does not talk to Caer in his vision, and the idea is present that this has some impact on desire. We might read into this the suggestion that a union or a consummation of desire involves both the visual and the aural. This may be relevant in discussing men falling in love — if that is what it is — through visual experience as opposed to women's *grád n-écmaise*, which is based on their *hearing* of men's reputations. *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir* will be thoroughly examined in the next chapter.

Overall, *Aislinge Óenguso* raises several points of interest to our discussion. It raises the question of shame and love, and the possibility of silence being a symptom of lovesickness. Approaching the text with love in mind also introduces the possibility of reading Caer as, if not explicitly malevolent, at least not as benevolent or passive as she has been read to date. Caer can be seen as part of a wider trope of the ambiguous motivations and morality of Otherworldly women, a point to which we will return in discussing *Serglige Con Culainn* and *Echtrae Chonnlai*. Visuality is also clearly tied to desire — here in *Aislinge Óenguso* is the most clear-cut example of Michie's argument that seeing a beautiful form can cause lovesickness.

3.9 Tochmarc Étaíne

Tochmarc Étaíne can be considered a tale in three parts, or as three connected tales.[466] *Tochmarc Étaine* is a Middle Gaelic text found in numerous manuscripts, including Lebor na hUidre (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25) and the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318). The first part describes the birth of Óengus, and the union of Midir and Étaín. The second part most concerned Michie and most immediately concerns us[467] — this is the tale of how Étaín is reborn and marries the king of Tara, Eochaid Airem. It is followed by a third part in which Midir, through deception and *fidchell*-playing skills, gains Étaín back and tricks Eochaid into having a child with his own daughter.

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[464] *Liadain and Curithir: An Irish Love-story of the Ninth Century*, ed. and tr. by Kuno Meyer (London: Nutt, 1902), p. 16; trans. p. 17.

[465] Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Saint and Fool: The Image and Function of Cummíne Fota and Comgán Mac Da Cherda in Early Irish Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1991), p. 210.

[466] See Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne'*.

Ailill and Étaín's desire (or lack thereof) for one another has already been discussed, but the text also has other points for consideration. *Tochmarc Étaíne* can be read overall as a story concerned with romantic love, deception, and visuality. It begins with an affair that results in a child between the Dagda and Eithne, wife of Elcmar:

> ***Atacobair*** *an Dagda dó a* ***cairdeas collaidi****.* ***Aroét*** *an ben on Dagda acht nibad oman Ealcmaire, ar med a c[h]umachtai.*
>
> The Dagda **desired** her in **carnal union**. The woman **would have yielded** to the Dagda had it not been for fear of Elcmar, so great was his power.[468]

Furthermore, Étaín is a figure of interest in discussing visuality. As stated, at the beginning of the aforementioned *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Étaín's beauty is described in an extensive passage, seemingly unmatched in length by any description of a woman's beauty in the early medieval Gaelic saga corpus.[469] Problems with visual perception and misunderstanding what one is seeing can be seen throughout the *Tochmarc Étaíne*. The most obvious of these come with Midir's magic disguise — he appears to Étaín first in disguise, having caused Ailill to love her in order to lure her into the woods, away from the public eye. When later he offers the king a chance to win Étaín back, all the king must do is discern which of the fifty identical women before him are his wife. He chooses poorly, taking his daughter instead.[470] The text also features animal transformations, particularly of Étaín;[471] Ailill gazes long at Étaín (*sirshillidh*, as discussed) but this is actually Midir's enchantment he is under;[472] and Midir is deceptive and the king fails to see him for what he is until it is too late.[473] What you see with your eyes is not to be trusted in the world of *Tochmarc Étaíne*.[474]

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[467] Much as it does Ó Cathasaigh, in Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, '*Tochmarc Étaíne* II: A Tale of Three Wooings', in *The Land Beneath the Sea: Essays in Honour of Anders Ahlqvist's Contribution to Celtic Studies in Australia*, ed. by Pamela O'Neill (Sydney: Celtic Studies Foundation, University of Sydney, 2013), pp. 129–142. In particular, Ó Cathasaigh interprets any potential union between Étaín and Ailill as 'incest', and his reasons for doing so are convincing; ibid., pp. 135-39. Ó Cathasaigh also reads Étaín in line with the sovereignty goddess trope; ibid., p. 132.

[468] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*'., 142; trans. 143. See *eDIL s.vv. ar-foím* and *ad-cobra*, related to our earlier term *accobar*. Emphasis is my own. For *cairdeas collaidi*, 'carnal union', see *eDIL s.vv. cairdes* and *colnaide*.

[469] 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel', trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 22 (1901), 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437 (14-17). Cf. O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, pp. 51-60.

[470] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne'*, 188, trans. 189.

[471] Ibid., 152; trans. 153.

[472] Ibid., 164; trans. 165.

The tale also raises questions of on whose side the audience should be. The predicament Ailill is in, and his desire not to dishonour his brother could be seen as one in which Ailill is initially morally righteous. The usefulness of lovesickness as a storytelling device here is similar to Wack's discussion of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*:

> Through *amor hereos*, [Chaucer] can focus on the point where psychology, morality, and erotic love intersect, without determining the moral outcome of their interplay. The moral neutrality of the medical tradition of love grants the audience the freedom to judge, correct, and supplement from its own experience and good intent the story [...].[475]

Allowing for lovesickness to be a medical condition, 'moral[ly] neutral', then allows for the tale portray Ailill as more of a victim, than had he simply desired and sought union with Étaín without the medical condition. Lovesickness is an effective dramatic device, giving Ailill the seeming choice between death or dishonouring his brother. Initially, he would seem to choose death over dishonour; however, this might not actually be a choice on Ailill's part, if we take silence as a symptom.

For as soon as the love is spoken, Ailill wants his cure. Perhaps the physician diagnosing love as the symptom is public enough an utterance to mean he cannot but dishonour his brother. If we return to the notion of silence as a symptom of lovesickness, as discussed in the context of Óengus, we may find more support here. There does seem to be something of a breaking of the seal when it comes to discussing lovesickness. When Óengus is undiagnosed he is ill, like Ailill, and neither party pursues their desire before the cause of their illness is identified in speech. They may remain debilitated, but a shift seems to have occurred. This is a point to which we will shortly return.

3.10 Serglige Con Culainn

Attention can now be turned fully to *Serglige Con Culainn.* As stated, the earlier Recension B with which the scholarly edition of the tale starts has been dated to the tenth century, and the later Recension A with which the tale ends has been dated to the twelfth.[476] The tale centres around the interactions between Cú Chulainn and Fand, an Otherworldly woman who desires him.[477] It begins around Samhain. Cú Chulainn hunts birds for the Ulsterwomen, excluding his wife (in this part of the tale called Eithne). The Ulsterwomen desire the heroes so much that they disfigure themselves to resemble them.[478] He later hunts two beautiful birds for Eithne (despite her telling him not to), wounding one eventually, before sleeping. As Toner states:

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[473] Ibid., 174; trans. 175.
[474] A comparable message regarding how much stock to put in what you see arises in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*; O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, pp. 311-12.
[475] Wack, 'Lovesickness in 'Troilus'', 60.

> He falls asleep by a pillar stone whereupon two women appear to him and beat him with whips until he is nearly dead. The women turn out to be no ordinary females but rather denizens of the Otherworld, Fand and her sister Lí Ban.[479]

Cú Chulainn then suffers *serglige* for a year. Again, Toner is keen that we do not read Cú Chulainn's *serglige* as lovesickness, but as a result of Fand's Otherworldly abilities.[480] The text states that he does not speak to anyone. An Otherworldly figure, Óengus, son of Áed Abrat, comes to him and recites verse (in the presence of several other Ulster folk), that expresses Fand's desire for Cú Chulainn and that he should fight for Labraid Lúathlám. Óengus reports that Lí Ban has said:

> *robad chridiscél la Faind*
> *coibligi fri Coin Culaind.*
>
> [I]t would be a delight to Fand to lie with Cú Chulainn[481]

The silence is broken. Cú Chulainn tells of his dream and gets up. Cú Chulainn's charioteer Láeg goes to see Fand, and upon his return, with the help of Cú Chulainn's wife (who the text now names Emer),[482] he gets Cú Chulainn to go to the Otherworld. The latter travels there and fights for Labraid Lúathlám, wins, and spends time with Fand. Upon his return there is a confrontation between himself, Fand and Emer, which resolves with Fand returning to Manannán and Emer and Cú Chulainn staying together. On seeing Fand leave, Cú Chulainn leaps into the mountains and goes without food or water. Both Cú Chulainn and Emer are fed potions to forget what has transpired. Moreover, Manannán's cloak is shaken between Cú Chulainn and Fand so they never meet again.

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[476] Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', 136.

[477] Toner characterises the tale as revolving around binaries and pairs 'based on gender and nature', and its ending restores the separation between the worldly and Otherworldly, which had threatened the natural order of Ulster. Gregory Toner, 'A Tale of Two Wives: Sense and Senselessness in *Serglige Con Culainn*' in *Ulidia 4: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Queen's University Belfast, 27–9 June,* ed. by Micheál B. Ó Mainnín and Gregory Toner (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), pp. 129-138 (pp. 137-38).

[478] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 2.

[479] Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', 137.

[480] Ibid.

[481] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 4. See also *eDIL s.vv. cridiscél* and *coiblige*. Translation is from 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', trans. by Myles Dillon, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7 (1953), 47-88 (51).

[482] For detailed analysis of what occurs in which recension of the tale, including who Cú Chulainn's wife is, see Toner, 'Desire and Divorce'.

Serglige Con Culainn is a text of interest in examining silence as a symptom of lovesickness, and its possible connections to shame. Like *Tochmarc Étaíne* this is a case where shame can be read into Cú Chulainn's silence. One could say he would not necessarily be keen to disclose a desire for Fand as his source of illness, particularly in the presence of his wife. However, even if we were to disregard Toner's argument completely, and argue that Cú Chulainn does earnestly desire Fand throughout the text, Cú Chulainn seems to express confusion near the end of the text that Emer is not willing for him to tryst with Fand, asking why she will not let him.[483] This challenges any reading of Cú Chulainn as ashamed of his desire for Fand. That said, there could be a change in his feelings over the course of the narrative;[484] in particular, there does seem to be a change between Cú Chulainn before he goes to the Otherworld, and afterwards.

It is true that Emer provokes Cú Chulainn on his sick-bed, and this might be seen as key to spurring him into action in the text. However, by this point, Cú Chulainn has already begun to speak and to move; his silence is broken. Indeed, he sends Láeg to get Emer *because* he is feeling better.[485] In *Aislinge Óenguso*, Óengus's conversation with the physician is the speech act that 'breaks the seal' of silence, as it were.[486] The pursuit of Caer then follows. In *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Ailill does not speak with the physician out of shame; it is to Étaín's direct question of why he is ill that Ailill replies.[487] He is not immediately healed, and the fact that Étaín then begins treating him for his illness makes it unclear how much impact breaking the silence has on his recovery. Still, he does begin to recover after speech. Emer's provocation of Cú Chulainn may not be as vital as thought; it may in fact be the diagnosis, breaking the silence, that brings Cú Chulainn back to functionality.

As in *Aislinge Óenguso* and *Tochmarc Étaíne*, here in *Serglige Con Culainn* a speech act (whether by physicians, others, or the sick themselves) ends the silence, and lessens the other symptoms of a man’s lovesickness. Once the silence is broken, the man can and does act. Breaking the silence, talking to people about the illness, may signal a change in the sufferer. One might even here have a precursor to modern notions of the importance of talking for good mental health; lovesickness does seem to be an illness of the mind as well as of the body. Ultimately, silence may be a key symptom of men’s lovesickness in medieval Gaelic literature.

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[483] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 25.

[484] What begins as Cú Chulainn's shame could develop instead into immoderate love which overcomes his previous shame; but this does stray into the realm of conjecture.

[485] Ibid., p. 8.

[486] Meid, *Aisling Óenguso*, p. 53.

[487] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 166.

3.11 *Echtrae Chonnlai*

Another text discussed by Michie, the Old Gaelic tale *Echtrae Chonnlai*, or *Echtra Chondla*, is found in the aforementioned Lebor na hUidre. The text has most recently been edited and translated, and its place in vernacular narrative writing in medieval Gaelic examined, by Kim McCone.[488] In the tale, Connla, son of Conn, is on the Hill of Usnech when a woman approaches. She is a supernatural woman who loves Connla — *ro:carus Condla* ‘I have loved Connla[489] — though her reasons for loving Connla are left obscure. Only Connla can see her — those about him are only able to hear the woman's speech (and they do not fall for her). She tries to entice Connla away to the Otherworld. Connla's father Conn gets his druid to send her away. Before she leaves, she gives Connla an apple. For a month Connla does not eat or drink, apart from eating the apple, which stays as full as ever it was. The text tells us: *Gabais éolchaire íarom inní Condla imon mnaí atconnairc.* 'Longing then seized Connlae for the appearance of the woman that he had seen.’[490] After this month, the woman returns, and tries to entice Connla away again, denouncing the druids and seemingly prophesying the coming of Christ, or St Patrick. A key interaction for examining love then takes place between Connla and Conn:

> *‘In:dechaid’ ol Conn ‘fot menmain-siu a rrádas in ben, a Chonnli?’*
> *As:bert Connle: ‘Ní réid dam, sech caraim mo doíni. Ro-m:gab dano éolchaire immun mnaí.’*
>
> ‘Has what the woman said penetrated (lit. gone/got under) your mind [*menma*], o Connlae?’, said Conn.

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[488] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*. See also Leonie Duignan, *The* Echtrae *as an Early Irish Literary Genre* (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH, 2011).
[489] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, p. 121.
[490] Ibid., p. 122; trans. p. 163.

> Connlae said: ‘It is not easy for me and besides I love my people. Yet longing for the woman has seized me.’[491]

The woman then speaks, trying to entice Connla away again. This time she succeeds — Connla leaps into her boat, and is never seen again. Hence his brother Art is known as Art Óenfer, 'Art the Lone One'.

The tale brings a few things to mind in the context of our current study. Firstly, we can diagnose Connla with lovesickness. As Michie states: ‘Connla the Brave is clearly the victim of love-sickness.’[492] He is a noble male, who has seen a beautiful woman (as she identifies herself), he does not eat nor drink save the inconsumable apple she has given him, and he does not speak, of his ailment (nor, we gather, of anything else):

> *Ba hingnad la Cond nicon:taibred Connla taithesc do neoch acht tísed in ben.*
>
> Conn thought it strange (lit. it was strange with Conn) (that) Connlae would not give answer to anyone except when (lit. that) the woman should come (i.e., be present).[493]

As seen above, Conn questions if Connla’s *menma* has been affected by the woman — a word seen throughout this chapter; for instance, *menma* is used in *Aislinge Óenguso* in connection with Óengus’s sickness.

Other characters, and Connla himself, state he feels *éolchaire*, for which *eDIL* gives '(a) longing, yearning; esp. longing for home' and '(b) regret, grief in general; mourning, lamentation'.[494] The semantic range here gives it a possible tragic connotation. To McCone, the connotations of *éolchaire*, specifically in the way it can mean longing for land or home, may link it to the sovereignty goddess trope; there is a similarity in the dynamic between man and woman in *Echtrae Chonnlai* and that found in sovereignty goddess stories.[495] When Connla states he loves his people (using a form of *caraid*), but feels *éolchaire* for the woman, we can see a differentiation is being made in the text, possibly a conflict between two types of love. This could be seen as a differentiation between familial love and romantic love; though we might tend towards seeing this as an area where love is being marked differently from desire, with possible tragic connotations.

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[491] Ibid., p. 123; trans. pp. 183-184.

[492] Michie, ‘The Lover’s Malady’, 309.

[493] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai,* p. 122; trans. pp. 182-183.

[494] *eDIL s.v. eólchaire.*

[495] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai,* p. 83. See also, Duignan, *The* Echtrae *as an Early Irish Literary Genre*, pp. 132-33.

The fact that Connla is not speaking is also noteworthy. As mentioned above, Conn asks his son why he only speaks when the woman is around — his answer is one of only two speech acts Connla undertakes in the tale (the other being asking the woman whence she comes).[496] Another interaction in the tale can be read as symbolic of what is happening with the lovesickness Connla feels: Conn asks Connla to whom he speaks, and the woman replies in his stead.[497] This symbolic taking of Connla's voice by the woman, by replying to the question asked of him, may lend more credence to our reading that the silence is part of the lovesickness the woman has caused in Connla. The woman taking Connla's role in this conversation brings to mind Ó Tuama's discussion of 'men as submissive' in later *amour courtois* literature.[498]

Connla's lack of speech, lack of eating, and troubled *menma*, allow us to diagnose him with lovesickness. He is also experiencing *grád n-écmaise*, here described using the more unusual term *éolchaire*. Like Óengus, for whom this is made explicit, he is desiring someone absent. On this basis, it can be argued that *grád n-écmaise* can be experienced by both men and women — there is no obvious gender divide discernible in the depictions of someone desiring another who is absent. Indeed, this observation has been pre-empted somewhat by McCone:

> In other words, we are presented with the reverse of the woman's love in absence for a man she has not seen: here the man experiences longing in absence for a woman he has seen.[499]

Where a gendered difference can be seen, however, is that neither Óengus nor Connla desire the far-off object of their affection because of *airscéla*, but because of their vision of the woman.

In the symbol of the apple that cannot be consumed we may glimpse the eternal life the woman promises in her far-off land; but we may also read it as a symbol of the union (or lack thereof) between Connla and the woman. No matter how Connla tries to consume the food, he cannot. As Michie states: 'Connla's love-sickness, it appears, is partly motivated and sustained by his consumption of the apple given him by the fairy woman who desires his love'.[500] The apple as a symbol of seduction and of knowledge has clear Biblical parallels, of note in a tale which according to McCone prophesies the coming of Patrick.[501] The argument that the woman is an embodiment of the church has also been advanced.[502] Apples as alleviating a form of lovesickness also has Biblical precedent: 'Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love.'[503] How are we to read the tempting Otherworldly woman with the magical apple, whose 'woman's spells'[504] Conn dislikes — traits that would tend towards a reading of malevolence — when she turns around and predicts the coming of Patrick? Or else, is Connla's fear the pagan fear of Christianity, as Carney suggests the Marian figure of the woman represents?[505]

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[496] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai,* p. 121.

[497] Ibid. For discussion of speech-acts and (non-)communication in the tale, see John Carey, 'The Rhetoric of *Echtrae Chonlai*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies,* 30 (Winter, 1995), 41–65.

[498] Ó Tuama, 'Love', p. 164.

[499] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai,* p. 83.

With *Echtrae Chonnlai* we then see a few things pertinent to our discussion. An Otherworldly (or otherwise supernatural) woman desires and wins a mortal man, though we do not get a reason for her desiring him. A man suffers from lovesickness, diagnosable by its symptoms thus far established, and desires someone who is far from him. A differentiation is also made in the tale, possibly between love and desire. With all this in mind, it is clear *Echtrae Chonnlai* is a text worth discussing in detail in the context of desire and love in medieval Gaelic literature; and its value in doing so applies regardless of whether the tale is read as Christian allegory.

3.12 Women and Lovesickness

The idea that lovesickness is a male phenomenon deserves scrutiny when discussing medieval Gaelic literature. True, our most prominent examples of lovesickness are men — Óengus, Ailill, Cú Chulainn, and Connla, as Michie identifies them. However, there are clear examples of women suffering physically or emotionally for love. When we see women assert they will not be *slán* without their desired figure, such as Derdriu does in *Longes mac nUislenn*,[506] we hear an echo of the language of lovesickness. While they might not lie in bed for a year over love, it is clear that love has the power to move women physically and emotionally; women can suffer from love. The fact that we cannot perfectly map ‘lovesickness’ onto *serglige* also opens up avenues for discussion in this regard.

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[500] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 309.

[501] McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai,* p. 84. It is worth noting that an apple is not specifically described in Genesis itself.

[502] McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 157-58. Hollo describes 'the debate between two of the foremost scholars of *Echtrae Chonnlai*, Kim McCone and John Carey, with the former arguing for an allegorical reading and the latter against'. Kaarina Hollo, 'Allegoresis and Literary Creativity in Eighth-century Ireland: The Case of *Echtrae Chonnlai*', in *Narrative in Celtic Tradition: Essays in Honor of Edgar M. Slotkin*, CSANA Yearbook 8-9 (New York: Colgate University Press, 2011), pp. 117-28 (p. 120).

[503] Song of Songs 2.5.

[504] McCone, *Echtra Chonnlai,* p. 122, note pp. 155-56.

[505] James P. Carney, 'The Deeper Level of Irish Literature', *The Capuchin Annual*, 36 (1969), 160–71 (162-65). Carney's discussion is further explored in Hollo, 'Allegoresis', pp. 122-23.

[506] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 45.

We may however return to the example of Étaín, Ailill and Midir in *Tochmarc Étaine*. Midir is capable of causing lovesickness, as the text establishes. If women can suffer lovesickness, why then does he not cause a lovesickness in Étaín, the object of his pursuit? Why is it he goes after her brother-in-law, in an overly complex scheme to eventually reunite him with Étaín? This could be answered with the notion that Étaín is Otherworldly, as the text establishes, and Otherworldly figures are not seen suffering from the effects of lovesickness (though we do see them experiencing *grád n-écmaise*, to which we shall return shortly). Here we risk running into wild speculation about rules and sense behind the texts, particularly when it comes to Otherworldly beings.

The absence of descriptions of women suffering the more traditional effects of lovesickness could be tied to men’s prominence in our tales. Women are often not the key characters in our texts, in terms of how much time the narrative spends focusing on them. Indeed, in *Aislinge Óenguso*, how do we know whether the reason for Caer approaching Óengus is not a longing on her part for him?[507] This argument does not mean women cannot suffer lovesickness, merely that the narrative focus does not linger on their suffering unless in their own speech (whether in prose or in verse form). The question is raised however: if women can suffer lovesickness, why do we not see it clearly expressed as such? We see women suffer similar symptoms, such as Líadain, but never is it named as such in our early medieval saga texts. This language of lovesickness, evoking concepts such as *slán*, can also be seen in laments. While women do suffer from love, we do not see them experience some of the more characteristic symptoms of lovesickness. Women are shown to experience love differently from our discussed men.

3.13 International Model of Lovesickness

Before turning to *grád n-écmaise* and further discussion of how women are shown to love in the saga texts, it is worth checking our findings so far against the wider Euro-Arabian model discussed at the beginning of the chapter. It can be seen that in many areas there is a correspondence. As already established, noble males most commonly suffer lovesickness. As can be seen in *Serglige Con Culainn*, there is a power dynamic that appears in later chivalric romance: a love triangle between a figure of authority (Manannán in *Serglige Con Culainn*), their romantic interest (Fand), and a mercenary soldier fighting on the figure of authority's behalf (Cú Chulainn); indeed, we can consider *Longes mac nUislenn* in a similar light.[508] Beauty is a recurring theme also, something which fits with the wider model — as Wack states: 'The sight of a beautiful form may cause the soul to go mad with desire, as Constantinus says.'[509]

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[507] Indeed, in *Serglige Con Culainn*, Fand is described as loving (*serc*) Cú Chulainn being her motivation for approaching him. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 5.

However, there are two large divergences between the Gaelic and the continental models. It cannot be claimed that gender divides are 'erased' due to lovesickness in medieval Gaelic literature, as has been claimed for other literatures.[510] The labour pains of the Ulaid are more likely to be read in such a gender-erasing way, expressly tied to femininity but experienced by men. We do have characters being chastised for becoming weak for love — such as Emer chastising Cú Chulainn in *Serglige Con Culainn*[511] — but we do not get the sense a gender divide is in being 'erased' here. Where it might be seen is in the aforementioned similarities between lovesickness and lamenting, depictions of which show that women can describe their symptoms of grief at losing a loved one. The two phenomena differ in respect to their aural dimensions, in particular: one is expressly silent and the other explicitly vocal. Lamentation will be further examined in Chapter Five.

Another way in which medieval Gaelic lovesickness differs from the wider model can be seen when it comes to cures. Wack discusses cures in medieval thought:

> [C]ures for lovesickness fall into two categories, psychic and somatic [...]. Somatic cures include intercourse, wine, baths, and evacuation while psychological remedies involve music, conversation, and various types of pastimes. The somatic cures in these treatises tend to take precedence over the psychic [...]. Most efficacious among the somatic remedies is intercourse with the desired person; if that is not possible, then with another. All the authors recommend it highly; Avicenna and Gerard claim that the disease cannot be cured perfectly without it.[512]

There is commonality between these general medieval cures and the cures described in *Tochmarc Étaíne* — bathing, in particular, and conversation (which may be key to our understanding of the aural/visual divide). 'Intercourse with the desired person' is also implicitly a cure in our texts. Turning to Classical texts, Caston discusses potential cures for lovesickness in Classical sources, and there is some degree of overlap with medieval thought. Caston states the three ‘standard cures’ shared between philosophers and elegiac poets are ‘separation from the object of desire, change of scenery, and finding sexual satisfaction without romantic attachment.’[513] However, the cure of intercourse with another partner, cited in both medieval and Classical sources, is absent in the medieval Gaelic saga tradition.

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[508] See Lea, 'Love, Sex, and the Mercenary Soldier'.
[509] Wack, 'Lovesickness in 'Troilus'', 56.
[510] See, for instance, Zago, 'Lovesickness', 498-99.
[511] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths*, p. 164.
[512] Wack, 'Lovesickness in 'Troilus'', 56.

It is never recommended to Ailill, Óengus nor Cú Chulainn that they seek intercourse with someone else to relieve their symptoms. This is a significant point of divergence, as our European texts on lovesickness from the eleventh century onwards frequently list this as a possibility. There may be a legal aspect to the exclusion of sex with others in our Gaelic texts; the society envisioned by legal texts such as the *Cáin Lánamna* ‘The Law of Couples’[514] might be further complicated by medically advised intercourse. Sex with the beloved themselves can be seen to be advanced as a cure — a cure above all others, in *Tochmarc Étaíne,* which aligns with Wack’s description of Avicenna and Gerard’s views — but there is no suggestion of sex with any partner as solving the problems presented by lovesickness. It is not even commented upon — it is absent from the tradition.

3.14 Women Falling for Men

We turn now to what tends to draw women to men in medieval Gaelic saga. A woman falling for the stories about a man, as opposed to her direct experience of him, is common. It is not so much ‘love at first sight’ as love by renown or reputation. As already indicated, a stock phrase is used to denote this phenomenon in many of these tales, namely that these women loved these men ‘*ara airscélaib*’, often translated as ‘because of the stories or the famous stories around them’, or ‘for their famous deeds’. Indeed, *eDIL* gives ‘famous tale’[515] for *airscél*, so ‘for the famous tales about them’ would for now seem to suffice. To our earlier examples, we can add the following illustrative examples, from *Aided Derbforgaill* (‘The Violent Death of Derbforgaill‘), which is dated to the tenth century, and *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, dated to the early tenth century:

> *Derb Fhorgaill ingen ríg Lochlainne ro charastar Coin Culaind ara urscélaib.*

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[513] Caston, ‘Love as Illness’, 284.

[514] *Cáin Lánamna: an Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law*, ed. and tr. by Charlene M. Eska, Medieval Law and Its Practice, 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[515] *eDIL s.v. airscél.*

> ‘Derbforgaill, daughter of the king of Lochlann, loved Cú Chulainn on account of the famous stories about him.’[516]
>
> *Ingen Díarmada maic Æda Sláne ro-char(astar) Cano ara airscélaib*
>
> ‘(The) daughter of Diarmaid son of Æda Sláne loved Cano for the famous tales about him.’[517]

It would seem the case that frequently, when it comes to women desiring men in these specific texts, it is more a question of feats and reputation than outward beauty. As Michie states:

> Physical beauty seems to have appealed to these damsels less than to their lovers, however, for their own desires were customarily inspired by great prowess and bravery, or by the reports of noble deeds. *Grád ecmaise*, or *amor in absentia*, appears as a regular feature of the Irish treatment of love.[518]

A question is then raised of what constitutes an *airscél* ‘famous tale’. If we take them as the stories surrounding individuals, we might compare them to the clusters of stories we have called *scéla*. For example, in the above mentioned *Scéla Cano* the titular Cano undertakes several adventures, in the course of which two women have pre-fallen for him.[519] We might also consider the groups of short stories such as *Macgnímrada Con Culainn* (‘The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn’) in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*[520] where we get several short examples of extreme martial power by the young boy Cú Chulainn at an early stage, as examples of the tales told about him. Furthermore, there is an emphasis in certain texts on the acquisition of feats — Cú Chulainn, for example, learned:

> the ball feat and the blade feat and the shield feat and the javelin feat and the rope feat and the body feat and the cat feat and the hero’s salmon leap

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[516] ‘*Aided Derbforgaill* ‘The Violent Death of Derbforgaill’: a Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation and Textual notes’, ed. and trans. by Kicki Ingridsdotter (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University, 2009), p. 82; trans. p. 83. Dating of the text on p. 67.

[517] Binchy, *Scéla Cano*, p. 2. Translation is my own.

[518] Michie, ‘The Lover’s Malady’, 310.

[519] Binchy, *Scéla Cano*.

[520] *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. and trans. by Cecile O’Rahilly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), pp. 13-26. It is perhaps notable these are not called the *scéla* of Cú Chulainn.

> and the wand throw and the leap across [something presently untranslatable] and the bending of a hero and the gae bolga feat and the quickness feat and the wheel feat and the eight-man feat and the breath feat and the bruising with a sword and the mass of shouting and the hero's war cry and the well-measured blow and the return-stroke and the mounting on a spear and straightening the body on its point with the bond of a valiant champion.[521]

If we are to understand *airscéla* specifically as 'famous tales', they may be these sorts of tales, examples of clever thinking or, more often, martial excellence by the object of the woman's affections. There are also other possibilities; *scéla* could be understood in a non-narrative sense, as 'news' or 'information', wherein we might understand *airscéla* as 'the important information' about a person. This is an idea to which we will return; for now, let us examine the possibilities of what might constitute a 'famous tale', if that is how we are to read *airscéla*.

3.15 'Finn and the Man in the Tree'

A possible example not hitherto examined in the context of *airscéla* is the Old Gaelic tale known as 'Finn and the Man in the Tree'. In the tale, Finn and his men have kidnapped the unnamed woman character of the story. The unnamed woman character is intended for Finn, but falls for Derg Corra, one of Finn's men, causing a love triangle around which the story revolves. We have a description of the precise reason why she falls for Derg Corra:

> *Focairdd sí* ***menmain*** *for in gilla búi léo .i. Dercc Corra mac húi Daigre. Ar ba hé a abras-side. Céin fonnuithea fulacht léo léim & doléim in gilla tarsin n-indiu. Tre sin didiu carais an ingen é*[.]
>
> She set her **spirit** [*menma*] upon the lad she was with them i.e. Derg Corra the son of Ua Daigre. For this was his practice. While food was being cooked by them, the lad jumped to and fro across the cooking hearth. It was for that the maiden loved him.[522]

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[521] William Sayers, 'Martial Feats in the Old Irish Ulster Cycle', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies,* 9 (1983), 45–80 (47-48). I have adapted and amended Sayers' list for clarity.

[522] 'Finn and the Man in the Tree', ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique,* 25 (1904), 344–49 (346; trans. 347). I have supplied an alternative translation for the first sentence.

The scene has been written about in the context of liminality by Nagy.[523] Consider the possibility that this may be us seeing an example of a famous deed in action, with this leaping over the fire possibly expressing virility and masculinity. If we look at extant real-world examples of fire-leaping, we may be further informed. There are midsummer rituals across Europe that involve leaping over flames, particularly for couples — for examples, the Klidonas in Greece and Kupala day in Eastern Europe. While practises differ from ritual to ritual and event to event, fire leaping has in some places been linked with masculinity.[524] Leaping through or over flames is also seen as a sign of bravery in Old Norse literature, such as the *Saga of the Volsungs*.[525]

If we do take this leaping to and fro as an example of something which could constitute an *airscél*, even though the tale does not use that term anywhere, a clear link could be established between famous deeds and masculinity. Let us not overstate the case: it is clear we are straying into the realm of conjecture here. Obviously, the woman sees Derg Corra doing it, but if it is a deed worthy of renown and *airscél*, that might explain her sudden shine for him.[526] Furthermore, if we return to the aforementioned feats, we can see some of them are to do with leaping.[527] For example, Cú Chulainn knows the hero's salmon leap and the leap across something, as mentioned above in the list of feats Sayers analyses. Sayers states: 'The image is that of the salmon mounting a waterfall to reach spawning grounds.'[528] He discusses this as the most prominent feat in 'the epic literature'[529] and mentions how it is frequently key in one text in particular, *Tochmarc Emire*, which, for our purposes is fascinating, and could potentially lend credence to the thought that these feats have some role in causing desire.

We might then consider Cú Chulainn's *ríastrad* in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* as something of an antithesis to these feats that inspire love. The morning after his transformation and slaughter midway through *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Cú Chulainn makes a point of appearing beautiful:

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[523] Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'Intervention and Disruption in the Myths of Finn and Sigurd', *Ériu,* 31 (1980), 123-31 (125).

[524] See the purported non-fiction writings of twentieth-century Pole Kasimir Czerniak for an example of fire leaping being tied to masculinity in the twentieth century. *The Wisdom of Uncle Kasimir,* ed. by Gabi Czerniak and William Czerniak-Jones (London, 2006), p. 30.

[525] *Vǫlsunga Saga: The Saga of the Volsungs*, ed. by R. G. Finch (London: Nelson and Sons, 1965), p. 48.

[526] A clear issue is, though, that love from *airscéla* is out of sight; it is on hearing of *airscéla* that one tends to fall in love, as it were.

[527] For further discussion of leaping and its roles in courtship, see Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'Tristanic, Fenian, and Lovers' Leaps', in *Diasa Díograise: Aistí i gCuimhne ar Mháirtín Ó Briain*, ed. by Mícheál Mac Craith and Pádraig Ó Héalaí (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2009), pp. 157–72.

[528] Sayers, 'Martial feats', 53.

[529] Ibid., 54.

> *Dotháet Cú Chulaind arnabárach do thaidbriud in tslóig & do thasbénad a chrotha álgin álaind do mnáib & bantrochtaib & andrib & ingenaib & filedaib & áes dána, uair nír miad ná mais leis in dúaburdelb druídechta tárfás dóib fair in adaig sin riam reme. Is aire sin dano tánic do thasselbad a chrotha álgin álaind in lá sin.*
>
> Cú Chulainn came on the morrow to survey the host and to display his gentle, beautiful appearance to women and girls and maidens, to poets and men of art, for he held not as honour or dignity the dark form of wizardry in which he had appeared to them the previous night. Therefore he came on that day to display his gentle, beautiful appearance.[530]

In order to replace the horrific image of the previous night, Cú Chulainn displays himself in all his beauty.[531] We can read into this Cú Chulainn wanting to appear in a form inspiring female desire, in contrast to his *ríastrad* appearance. This might suggest the *ríastrad* as something of an anti-feat — 'not as honour or dignity' as O'Rahilly translates — or possible too that, while beauty is not given as a primary reason for women loving men in our texts, the grotesque can discourage love. Again, the importance of women's love to a man's social capital, as discussed regarding *inmain*, is clear.

While the focus is at the moment on *airscéla*, it is not to say that the men we are discussing are not beautiful. They frequently are, as established earlier in quoting Sheehan.[532] And we have examples of men's bodies being fragmented under a woman's gaze, such as the following extract which Sheehan discusses in detail, from *Táin Bó Fraích*:

> *Ba hed íarum aithesc Findabrach, nach álaind at·chíd, ba háildiu lee Fróech do acsin tar dublind, in corp do rogili ocus in folt do roáilli, ind agad do chumtachtai, int ṡúil do roglassi, os é móethóclach cen locht cen anim, co n-agaid ḟocháel ḟorlethain, os é díriuch dianim, in chráeb cosna cáeraib dergaib eter in mbrágit ocus in n-agid ngil. Is ed as·bered Findabair: 'Nicon·acca ní ro·ṡáissed leth nó trían dia chruth.'*

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[530] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: from the Book of Leinster*, pp. 63-64; trans. pp. 203-204.

[531] We might compare this with Conchobar in Version A of *Aided Chonchobair*, wherein after combat the women of Connacht entreat him to show off his body to them as he is so perfect in every way. See 'A Critical Editon of *Aided Chonchobair* 'The Violent Death of Conchobar': With Translation, Textual Notes and Bibliography', ed. and trans. by Chantal Kobel (unpublished doctoral thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2015), p. 222.

[532] Sheehan, 'Feasts for the Eyes', pp. 95-6. Cf. McManus, 'Good-looking and Irresistible'.

> This was Findabair's response thereafter whenever she would see anything beautiful, that it was more beautiful to her to see Froech (swimming) across the blackpool — the body of extreme whiteness, the hair of extreme beauty, the face for shapeliness, the eyes of shining blue, and he a gentle youth without fault, without blemish, with face narrow below, broad above, and he straight and flawless, the branch with the red berries between the throat and the white face. This is what Findabair used to say: 'Never have I seen anything which would reach half or one third of his beauty.'[533]

Findabair describes Fráech in desirous terms, but this only comes after the text has already established she loved him for the famous tales about him. These men are often beautiful; but their beauty is not given as the first cause of the desire women feel for them.

Instead, it is for these 'famous tales' that women love men in these instances. We have explored a potential example of a deed that might constitute one of these tales. Or else, we might consider that the heroes in these tales are people who are already, in their livetimes, having tales told about them; for example, the way in which the *Macgnímartha Con Culainn* in the *Táin* are recounted as tales-within-a-tale. That said, even in such instances, it is worth examining what kinds of activities can constitute an *airscél*, and their relationship to manifesting masculinity in particular.

It should be noted, that even if Derg Corra's leaping does not constitute an *airscél*, it is still clearly an act considered worthy of inspiring love. In his article on leaping in Tristan tales and medieval Irish saga, Nagy cites 'Finn and the Man in the Tree' amongst other tales wherein men leaping is directly tied to women's desire, such as in the Middle Gaelic tale *Feis Tighe Chonáin* ('The Feast of the House of Conán').[534] In *Feis Tighe Chonáin*, a young Finn's leaping back and forth over a dangerous precipice inspires love in Áthnait, who claims that whosoever were to perform such leaps would receive her *cidh gránna h'eireadh-sa ocus h'éadach ocus do c[h]ulaidh* 'no matter the horribleness of your equipment and your clothing and your attire'.[535] Finn does so, and receives the woman, who goes on to place a *geis* upon him that he must complete this same leap every year.[536] There is a clear link between women's desire for men, and men's ability to complete leaps, and this holds true even if leaping is not considered to constitute an *airscél*.

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[533] Meid, *Táin Bó Froích,* p. 47; trans. pp. 71-72.

[534] Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'Tristanic, Fenian, and Lovers' Leaps', p. 165.

[535] *Feis Tighe Chonáin*, ed. by Maud Joynt, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 7 (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1936), p. 6.

[536] Ibid, pp. 6-7.

3.16 Possible Problems

The examples presented thus far would point then to a dichotomy between the depiction of women and men in tales, where men fall for women based on appearance, and women based on reputation and renown. We can complicate this: ‘Finn and the Man in the Tree’ raises the possibility also of women falling for men on seeing them perform the feats that then go on to form their reputation. One might also ask how intrinsic these paths to desire are to the genders in this literature, and how much they are impacted by the society depicted in the tales. Take the matter of *airscéla* — when a male martial ethic lies at the heart of heroism in these tales, one could argue the opportunities for women to perform famous deeds, particularly if these famous deeds are tied to masculinity or virility, are fewer, and unlikely to be shared as the heroic feats of men are. Women are less likely to perform feats of battle or suchlike, which are possibly being praised in their male counterparts through this ‘*airscél*’ term. We do have women warriors in medieval Gaelic literature who perform impressive martial acts[537] — Medb is the most prominent example thereof. But we do not encounter men who desire Medb because of her famous deeds — that part of the equation, as it were, is left out. That said, in *Tochmarc Emire*, Cú Chulainn actively initiates sex with the warrior woman Aífe (even after having exchanged a vow of chastity with Emer).[538] This and Medb’s many sexual partners might make us think women who performed martial feats were not then necessarily undesirable, and in fact could be desirable; this is a topic which merits further study. However, Cú Chulainn’s sexual encounter with Aífe seem less to do with sexual attraction, and more to do with power. He overpowers Aífe, and outlines three wishes of her, including that she give hostages to Scáthach, and that she sleep with him and bear him a son.[539] This reads more like Cú Chulainn making his victory complete rather than fulfilling an ambiguous, unspoken desire. In any case it is not quite as clear-cut as women warriors being desirable.

The idea of extraordinary feats being gendered is also worth further exploration. We do have examples of the power of female bodies — Medb is an example, with her urination or menstruation literally changing the landscape in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.[540] Another is the character of Derbforgaill mentioned above, who loved Cú Chulainn for the *airscéla* about him, in *Aided Derbforgaill*.[541] The reason for her violent death is that she beats the women of Ulster in a literal pissing context:

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[537] See Robbie MacLeòid, 'Female Alterity in Medieval Gaelic Literature' (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018).

[538] ‘The Oldest Version of *Tochmarc Emire*’, ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique,* 11 (1890), 433–57 (450; trans. 451).

[539] Ibid.

[540] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: from the Book of Leinster*, p. 133.

> *Laa n-and didiu i nderiud gemrid, snechta mór and. Do-gníat ind fir corthe mór dint shnechtu. Lotar na mná forna corthe. Ba hé a tuscurnud.*
> *'Tabram ar mún isin coirthe dús cia as sia regas ind. In ben ó ría triit is í as fherr ergaire uainn'.*
> *Ní röacht didiu uadib. Con-gairther Der[b] F[h]orgaill uadib. Nírbo áill lea ór nírbo báeth. Téit araí forsin corthe. Ro selaig uade co talam.*
> *'Dia fessatar trá ind fhir so nícon grádaigfider i fail na hoínmná. Gatair a súile assa cind ocus a sróna ocus a da n-ó ocus a trilis. Níba so-accobraite ón.'*
> *Do-gníther a pianad amlaid sin ocus berair iar tain dia tig.*
>
> One day then, at the end of winter, there was heavy snow. The men make a big pillar from the snow. The women went on the pillars. This was their device.
> 'Let us make our urine into the pillar to ascertain who will make it go into it the furthest. The woman from whom it will reach through, it is she that is the best match of us'.
> It did not reach through from them, however. Derbforgaill is summoned by them. She did not desire it, because she was not foolish. Nevertheless she goes on the pillar. It slashed from her to the ground.
> 'If the men discover this then, no (one) will be loved in comparison with this woman. May her eyes be snatched out of her head, and her nostrils, and her two ears, and her locks. She will not be [desirable] then'.
> Her torture is done thus and she is brought to her house afterwards.[542]

If these gendered acts can comprise some part of *airscéla*, if these are the kinds of feats about which stories get told and on which reputations are built, it would add to the questions regarding what *airscéla* truly were, and whether manifesting gender roles was a trait deemed desirable in the world of these texts. It could be argued this has the same problem as Medb's battle prowess — that we don't see anyone actively desiring the figure because of these feminine feats. And while that's true, the potential impact of Derbforgaill's feat upon the desires of the Ulstermen is seen as significant enough that the

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[541] Ingridsdotter, '*Aided Derbforgaill*', p. 82; trans. p. 83.
[542] Ibid.

Ulsterwomen torture her and leave her for dead.[543] Manifesting gender roles does seem to impact positively upon one's desirability. That said, we do not have clear evidence that these gendered acts truly were specifically *airscéla* as considered by the author, or the audience. Additionally, we also have no clear evidence that *airscéla*, despite the *-scél* element, were specifically tales; it could merely refer to the 'important information' about a person.

3.17 Longes mac nUislenn

One example of a man desiring a woman possibly based on aural experience as opposed to a visual one is Conchobar in *Longes mac nUislenn*. Conchobar's actions — not killing the child Derdriu and instead imprisoning her with the intention of later uniting with her — are inspired by Cathbad's description of how she will look, which begins:

'Fot chriōl bronn bécestair
Bé fuilt buidi buide-chass
Ségdaib súilib sell-glassaib.
Sían a grúade gorm-chorcrai;
Fri dath snechtai samlamar
Sét a détgne dīānim.
Níamdai a béoil partuing-deirg—
Bé dia-mbiāt il-ardbe
Eter Ulad erredaib.'

'In the receptacle of your womb there cried out
A woman of yellow hair with yellow curls,
With comely, grey-blue irised (?) eyes.
Her purplish-pink cheeks [are like] foxglove;
To the color of snow I compare
The spotless treasure of her set of teeth.
Lustrous [are] her scarlet-red (?) lips—
A woman for whom there will be many slaughters

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[543] See Ann Dooley, 'The Invention of Women in the *Táin*', in *Ulidia, Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha 8–12 April*, ed. by J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast: December, 1994), pp. 123-34 (pp. 131-33).

> Among the chariot-fighters of Ulster.'[544]

The Ulaid urge the slaughter of the girl, given Cathbad's prophecy that she will cause destruction to them. Conchobar refuses:

> *'Bérthair lim-sa ind ingen i mbárach,' ol Conchobor, 'ocus ailebthair dom réir féin ocus bid sí ben bías im farrad-sa.'*
>
> 'I shall carry off the girl tomorrow,' Conchobor added, 'and she will be reared according to my own will, and she will be the woman who will be in my company.'[545]

Conchobar has not physically seen Derdriu, and presumably will not see her as a woman for several years, if ever — when the story continues, Derdriu is *ingen as mór-áillem ro-boí i n-Hérinn*, the most beautiful girl who had been in Ireland.[546] Based on Cathbad's description, Conchobar desires her (whether sexually, for prestige, or some mixture of the two), and it is that desire that motivates his taking possession of the child. The text itself calls out the injustice of what Conchobar is doing, stating the Ulaid did not 'correct' his conduct (by killing the child): the word in question is *coicert*, which *eDIL* gives as 'act of judging, adjusting, correcting'.[547] The king is moved to this unjust decision by his desire, and that desire is based on hearing rather than seeing the woman in question.[548]

However, though it is experienced aurally, it is, at least on the surface visual description that Conchobar hears of the woman. Such an instance arguably recalls Óengus seeing Caer in his dream — he has not looked upon her in the flesh, but has had some vision of her. In this case, we may ask how powerful Cathbad's words are, and how effective this long description that introduces Derdriu's eventual beauty is in allowing Conchobar to see the future woman as Cathbad divines she should look. Though Cathbad is attempting to warn of eventual disaster, the power of his description alters the world and elicits a fatal attraction. Cathbad's magical abilities may contain within them the potential for chaos seen in the projection skill we ascribe to Caer and Fand. This is a possible avenue for further discussion; but from the text, it seems Cathbad primarily describes Derdriu and predicts her future, as opposed to using magic — excepting, of course, Cathbad's prophesying, and the inherent magic of spoken word and responsive imagination.

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[544] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, pp. 43-44; trans. p. 61.

[545] Ibid., p. 45; trans. p. 62.

[546] Ibid., p. 45.

[547] *eDIL s.v. coicert.*

[548] Findon discusses this tale amongst others as 'likely hav[ing] much to say to late medieval audiences about kingship and the fraught roles that women can play in public and private life.' Joanne Findon, 'Nes, Deirdriu, Luaine: Fated Women in Conchobar's Life', in *Gablánach in Scélaigecht: Celtic Studies in Honour of Ann Dooley*, ed. by Sarah Sheehan, Joanne Findon and Westley Follett (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 154-170 (p. 170).

That said, we again return to the question of what constitutes *airscéla*. It would seem that Conchobar does not hear 'famous tales' of Derdriu, but he does hear her described. If we return to the notion of *airscéla* potentially being 'the important information' about a person, Conchobar does seem to desire Derdriu here based on said important information. Even if one solely focuses on *scél* as a tale, and not as news or information, Derdriu is prophesied to cause many deaths, a cause of fame for many a hero in medieval Gaelic saga.

What then are we to make of this instance of a man desiring a woman not at the sight of her, but on hearing her described? While at first it may seem to better fit into the *grád n-écmaise* category of desire upon hearing of someone, again it depends on whether we consider *ar airscélaib* as referring to tales or reported qualities. The context of Óengus's dream and the idea that Cathbad conjures Derdriu up with his words makes for a reading of the scene that is not as revolutionary as first thought. The power of description here may point to a different understanding of what comprises 'sight' in the medieval Gaelic world. Sheehan has written on the extramission theory of vision,[549] for example, in medieval Gaelic literature, the theory that sight is achieved in part by the emission of light from the eyes. Said theory is however insufficient to explain our current situation, for which we would need a better understanding of to what extent visions and dreams, and visual descriptions, were considered sight.

Longes mac nUislenn also gives us an example of a woman potentially desiring a man based on beauty, rather than famous deeds, further adding to the discussion of an aural/visual divide, and, perhaps, of the potential of *airscéla* not to be restricted to narrative. When Derdriu first 'calls up' Noísiu as it were, to quote Dooley,[550] she does not describe a man of famous deeds but instead focuses on three aspects of beauty:

> *'Ro-pad inmain óen-fher forsa·mbetis na tri dath ucut .i. in folt amal in fíach ocus in grúad amal in fuil ocus in corp amal in snechta.'*
> *'Orddan ocus tocad duit!' ar in Lebarcham. 'Ni cían úait. Atá is'taig it arrad .i. Noísi mac Usnig.'*
> *'Ni-pam slán-sa ám,' ol-si, 'conid-n-accur-saide.'*

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[549] Sheehan, 'Feasts for the Eyes', p. 96.
[550] Ann Dooley, *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 172.

> ‘Beloved would be the one man on whom might be yonder three colors — that is, hair like the raven, and a cheek like blood, and a body like snow.’
> ‘Dignity and fortune to you!’ said Leborcham. ‘He is not far from you. He is inside near to you, even Noisiu son of Uisliu.’
> ‘I shall, indeed, not be well,’ she said, ‘until I see him.’[551]

This instance of Derdriu focusing on beauty rather than *airscéla* may tie into the reading of Derdriu as a character that does not follow societal norms — ‘the female epitome of uncivilized nature’, to quote Herbert.[552] That said, if we read *airscél* as referring to the ‘important information’ about an individual, or their reputation, Leborcham’s informing Derdriu of the existence of the figure she describes may constitute loving *ar airscélaib*.

Alternatively, we might read into this calling forth of Noísiu that Derdriu wants what lies behind the beauty; such a beautiful man would presumably be noble, and potentially possess the power to free her. It is also worth noting that Derdriu is not saying 'I will love this man'. She speaks passively, saying he will be *inmain*, ‘beloved’, with its potential connotations of women’s love, as discussed in Chapter Two. It is also worth noting that Derdriu’s calling forth of Noísiu shares some similarities with Cathbad’s prophecy; not only is it a spoken description of a visual spectacle, they even are to an extent visually similar. Both Derdriu and Noísiu are characterised with the colours white (specifically snow-white) and red.

With both Conchobar seeming to experience desire on hearing of a woman, and Derdriu seeming to experience desire when imagining the beauty of a man, we can read *Longes mac nUislenn* as playing with our expectations of male and female desire. The tale can be read as a nuanced exploration of how desires are felt and realised in both genders: our expectation based on the other saga texts thus far examined is that women fall in love hearing of men, and men upon seeing beauty. Here the visual/aural divide is made ambiguous, and is done so within a wider picture of societal dysfunction.[553] The text invites its audience to see that falling in love with an imagined person can happen to a person regardless of their gender.

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[551] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 45; trans. pp. 62-63. Cf. Hemming, ‘“I could love a man with those three colours”’.

[552] Máire Herbert, ‘The Universe of Male and Female: a Reading of the Deirdre Story’, *North American Congress of Celtic Studies,* 2 (1992), 53-64 (57). See also, on this scene in particular, Maria Tymoczko, 'Animal Imagery in *Loinges Mac nUislenn*', *Studia Celtica,* 20–21 (1985–1986), 145–66.

[553] See Radner’s discussion of social dysfunction in the Ulster Cycle. Joan N. Radner, ‘“Fury Destroys the World”: Historical Strategy in Ireland’s Ulster Epic’, *Mankind Quarterly*, 23.1 (1982), 41–60. Cf. Thomas Owen Clancy, ‘Court, King and Justice in the Ulster Cycle’, in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 163-82.

In her discussion of *Longes mac nUislenn*,[554] Sheehan also highlights Cathbad's description of what Derdriu will look like,[555] and later discusses Leborcham's informing Derdriu of the existence of Noísiu:

> When Leborcham identifies this man as Noísiu, Derdriu articulates her desire as a lovesickness curable only by seeing the object of desire: the term *slán* (*Ni-pam slán-sa*, 'I will not be well') connotes wholeness, pointing to the conception of desire as lack.[556]

Sheehan's implication of Derdriu invoking lovesickness directly challenges Michie's assertion that lovesickness is an affliction solely suffered by men at the hands of *síd* women. Derdriu's wording here brings to mind *Aislinge Óenguso*, where it is stated, *Nípo shlán laiss a menmae*[557] 'his spirit was not well'. However, Derdriu might be seen as invoking lovesickness as opposed to suffering from it: we do not get any of the symptoms we have thus far explored, at least before Noísiu's death. There may be ambiguity here; one's response depends upon how much faith is put in Derdriu's words. If we believe her to be speaking the truth, and the text does not give us explicit reason not to, we can argue she is suffering from lovesickness.[558] A question is also read of our expectations from the narrator in these tales: the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and it is possible Derdriu's statement represents an actual description of her health.

Mathis describes the events following Leborcham's identification of Noísiu for Derdriu as follows:

> With her newly acquired knowledge of Noísiu's existence, Derdriu steals out of her enclosure to confront him, but her motives for doing so are unexplored by the text, beyond the fact that she wishes to see for herself what Leborcham has described (an instance of *grád écmaise*, 'love-in-absence', is suggested but not confirmed).[559]

'Suggested but not confirmed' ties back into the question of to what extent the interiority of our characters is depicted, and the question how appropriate it is to ascribe 'love' as a motivating factor when a text does not make it explicit that love is being experienced. It is also worth noting that, as Sheehan states, this articulation comes only after Leborcham's identification of Noísiu.

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[554] Sheehan, 'Feasts for the Eyes', pp. 102-04.
[555] Ibid. p. 102.
[556] Ibid. p. 104.
[557] Meid, *Aisling Óenguso*, p. 53.
[558] Though, admittedly, we do not see her here suffering the symptoms thus far identified with lovesickness in men.
[559] Kate Louise Mathis, 'The Evolution of Derdriu in the Ulster Cycle' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2011), p. 82.

Where Sheehan asserts Noísiu's impact is a visual one, Michie describes Derdriu falling for Noísiu upon hearing about him from Leborcham. After discussing examples of *grád n-écmaise*, Michie states: 'Deirdre's great love for Naisi, in the earlier versions, was inspired by Leborcham's description of him.'[560] Michie's description could also be applied to Conchobar, on hearing of Derdriu from Cathbad. Now whether or not Derdriu feels 'great love' for Noísiu is debatable, as is Michie's implication that this constitutes an example of loving *ar airscélaib*, considering Leborcham tells Derdriu nothing regarding Noísiu save that his appearance matches what she desires in a partner.[561] Strictly speaking, 'Leborcham's description of him' is inaccurate; Derdriu describes the vision she would want a partner to embody, and Leborcham states she knows someone like that; she never herself describes the man. What is clear however is that there is a degree of ambiguity between what can be considered aural and visual here.

Ultimately, *Longes mac nUislenn* plays with aural-visual ambiguity. In both Cathbad's description of Derdriu, and Derdriu's description of an ideal partner, we have the visual expressed through sound. The text uses this aural-visual ambiguity to play with expectations of men and women's desires. If we expect men to feel romantic love upon seeing beauty, there is an echo of that in Conchobar's desire for Derdriu; we might even consider Conchobar desiring her for her future, potential reputation.[562] At the same time, Conchobar is actually hearing this visual description, and it is unclear whether his desire is romantic, or sexual, or whether the prestige of having the company of the most beautiful woman in the world is also a factor in his decision-making. Likewise, if we expect women to fall for men on hearing of their great deeds, Derdriu subverts this by focusing through speech on the physicality of her ideal partner, which is then pinned to Noísiu by Leborcham. Though Derdriu does the description, it is Leborcham whose speech act sets Derdriu on her path to Noísiu, just as Cathbad's speech set Conchobar on his own path to Derdriu. There is a blurring and ambiguity between the visual and the aural in the text, and of our expectations regarding how men and women first experience romantic love. It is unclear to what specific extent the visual and the aural impact upon romantic love; though it is clear that they do. To this topic we will return in the next chapter.

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[560] Michie, 'The Lover's Malady', 310.
[561] Though this ultimately depends on how we interpret *airscéla*.
[562] The presence of such an echo is true even if we interpret Conchobar's desire as solely sexual, or solely for prestige; it still evokes the more straightforward romantic examples.

3.18 Conclusions

Overall, there broadly seems to be a difference in how men and women are shown to fall in love in the texts. Lovesickness tends to be suffered by noble men,[563] and can be caused by experiencing women's beauty — but this is not its only source. *Grád n-écmaise* seems mainly to be experienced by women — though men such as Óengus suffer from being in absence of a beloved, and it is expressed in terms very close to *grád n-écmaise*, Ailill Angubae suffers similar symptoms with the beloved close at hand. The question of what exactly *ar airscélaib* means in the context of *grád n-écmaise* was also raised; whether it refers to specific feats and deeds, potentially manifesting gender roles, or the 'important information' about a person, has a significant impact upon our understanding of the phenomenon in medieval Gaelic literature.

We see areas of overlap and of divergence with the wider natural-philosophical Euro-Arabian model of lovesickness seen in Europe in the medieval period. There is also Classical precedent, as discussed.[564] Lovesickness in our tales is the domain of noble males, and shares symptoms and cures with the wider tradition. However, there is not a suggestion of gender divides being eroded in the same way it has been in other literatures as discussed, and sex with someone else is entirely absent as a cure in the Gaelic tradition. Silence may also be a symptom of medieval Gaelic lovesickness.

And while this chapter started with attempts to distance this early Gaelic tradition of love from the influence of the continent, this is not to say there is no influence between chivalric romance and the Gaelic tradition. It is possible that the impact of chivalric romance, in the centuries since its flourishing, influenced the choices of editors to edit texts, or translators to translate, or scholars to analyse them, due to the dominance of romantic love in modern Western European society. The point is that this influence from chivalric romance is after the creation of these texts, as opposed to before and informing them; and the influence, if any, would be on the scholarship and preservation, not on the original compositions. There is the possibility of influence from older sources, such as the Latin lyric tradition discussed by Dronke[565] and lovesickness in Classical philosophy and poetry as examined by Caston. These older sources may have laid the groundwork for chivalric romance, and might also have influenced our medieval Gaelic saga tales. And via the matter of Arthur and the Tristan tales (and their analogues), it could even be argued that 'Celtic' tropes found their way into the continental model.

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[563] That said, our tales predominantly feature nobles; as such, it may be the case that non-noble people are equally as capable of being struck by lovesickness, but we lack stories featuring them as primary characters.

[564] See Caston, 'Love as Illness'.

[565] See Chapter Two.

It is furthermore the case that a detailed analysis of the vocabulary around love needs to be done. This is true of several of the terms, but one in particular is *airscél*, if we are to better understand some of the ways in which love in medieval Gaelic literature is gendered.[566] 'Famous tales' may not suffice for our purposes without better understanding of what exactly constitutes *airscéla*. In tales such as 'Finn and the Man in the Tree' and *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir* we can see that there are exceptions to generalisations about how men and women love, and there is nuance to be considered in how love is depicted in the texts. The term *menma* also appeared in numerous texts connected with desire, and may be worth further exploration.

What is also clear is that desire and the Otherworld are connected. Midir has the power to cause lovesickness in Ailill, and Fand appears to Cú Chulainn in a dream and binds him to her will. This observation, and the examination of Fand in particular, may allow us to ascribe to the Otherworldly the ability to project themselves into the imagination of others as a conscious act. Such an ability then may change our reading of *Aislinge Óenguso* — Caer, rather than the by-chance observed from afar party, becomes the instigator of change, and her actions put in motion several battles and deaths. Caer then becomes a more ambiguous — and active — character than traditional readings have allowed, and certain notions (like her father having no power over her) could also be seen to fit such a reading. This analysis points to a love-based approach allowing for different interpretations of the texts and of the wider narrative worlds.

Taking a gendered approach when dealing with romantic love in medieval Gaelic texts yields results. There is a clear differentiation being made between men and women in terms of how they tend to fall for one another, so to speak, made clear in vocabulary, actions, and their roles in the narratives. Overall, however, any generalisations we might make about the ways in which men and women desired one another in medieval Gaelic literature has its exceptions and caveats. This is because this literature presents romantic love in many shapes. It is not the case that every text is a nuanced discussion of love, desire, and seduction. Some are, however. And taken as a whole one can see a literature grappling with many of the questions about romantic love that the literatures of the past millennium have explored, questions such as 'what is desirable?', 'how are we seduced?', and 'why do we love those we love?'.

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[566] It is worth noting *airscél* alone, as a word itself, has no inherent romantic association.

Chapter 4 Love of the Divine

4.1 Introduction

Romantic desire is not the only form of love to be found in medieval Gaelic saga. Medieval Gaelic literature abounds with depictions of religious life, and its conflicts and compromises with secular ways of living. Surviving medieval Gaelic written literature was often written in ecclesiastical settings, in a Christianised country.[567] As such, it is no surprise that love of the divine can be seen in these texts. The ways in which this love is gendered can be seen in how it is expressed and felt in medieval Gaelic literature. It can be gauged too how love of the divine compares to romantic love, and how religious figures sometimes intervene in the course of romantic love. One saga in which all these aforementioned matters can be seen clearly is the text which will form the core of this chapter's analysis, *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir*, 'The Encounter of Líadain and Cuirithir' (*L&C*).[568] The tale gives a view into what love of the divine is, how it can be defined, and the ways in which love of the divine is gendered. *L&C* also exhibits great tension between the romantic and the divine, and this tension is embodied in its two main characters. Throughout the chapter, the concept of love of the divine will emerge from the analysis presented. That said, we might begin with a basic definition of love of the divine as 'devotion to God'. This is, by necessity, an open definition. It contains within it those who are happily devoted to God, and those who can be seen as less enthusiastic but still do follow religious orders and pathways. As such, love of the divine encompasses those striving for a personal, physical connection with the divine; those embarking on pilgrimages; those prioritising their relationship with the divine over their personal relationships; and other examples as will shortly be discussed. Love of the divine can also encompass fear of God, as will be examined.

Throughout the chapter, other tales and poems will be used to tease out threads found in *L&C*. Some of these texts serve as comparisons, others as contrasts; all share questions about the role of clergy, love of the divine, and sex, folly, and sin. As we saw in our semantic study, love terms such as *serc* and *grád* were also used to describe love of God the Father and Christ, and Christ was described as *inmain*.[569] In addition to the uses of

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[567] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p. 19. Cf. Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 49.

[568] Meyer, *Liadain and Curithir*.

[569] See Chapter Two.

inmain for Christ and saints discussed in Chapter Two,[570] we see in *The Passions and Homilies, er grad Dia* 'for the love of God';[571] and in the Old Gaelic *Würzburg Glosses*, *caritas Dei* is glossed as *serc dǽ dúibsi et farserc si do dia* 'God's love to you and your love to God'.[572]

While we will be looking here at love of God, we will not be examining the love of God for humanity to any great extent. Of the two, love for God dominates in our saga texts; an examination of depictions of God's love would require a fuller study of religious materials and texts outwith the saga genre. The love of humanity for God has at times been characterised as the love of a son for a father; in other instances, love of God is preceded by fear, a fear which breaks the resistance of the human spirit and allows love in.[573] Also of interest for our purposes is the idea of the relationship with Christ being similar to that of marriage; indeed, this has Biblical precedent.[574] As Ní Dhonnchadha states of medieval Gaeldom, 'Veiled virgins were regarded as being "married" to Christ. Therefore, any subsequent sexual liaison left them open to the charge of adultery rather than simple fornication.'[575] Theological questions of the nature of the fear and love of God, and how they are represented in medieval Gaelic saga, will be examined in more depth when they arise.

In scrutinising gender and the love of the divine in medieval Gaelic saga, gender stereotypes, mental illness, and the sensual nature of love are all reckoned with. Religious characters are examined, and the ways in which they interact with love. Fittingly, in primarily examining a tale concerned with poetry, the richness of emotional language in poetic utterances in prosimetra is clear. Overall, many expressions of love of the divine in medieval Gaelic saga and beyond will be seen, as will the many ways in which it is gendered.

4.2 Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir

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[570] Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso,* p. 31.
[571] Atkinson, *The Passions and Homilies*, p. 256.
[572] Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, I (1901), p. 618.
[573] See St Augustine, *In Iohannis epistolam ad Parthos Tractatus*, Tract. IX, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (1841), 35.2047-8.
[574] John 3:29.
[575] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, '*Caillech* and Other Terms for Veiled Women in Medieval Irish Texts', *Éigse*, 28 (1994), 71–96 (81).

Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir, 'The Encounter of Líadain and Cuirithir', is a ninth-century prosimetric tale set largely in West Munster.[576] The tale is preserved in two manuscripts: the sixteenth-century London, British Library MS Harleian 5280; and the seventeenth-century Dublin, Trinity College MS 1337 (H.3.18).[577] The tale follows the doomed relationship between two poets, the woman Líadain of the Corco Dhuibhne, and the man Cuirithir of the Connachta. The text is one of a few that form a small literary cycle centring around West Munster.[578]

The tale's narrative can be split into three sections:

The encounter and Cuirithir pursuant

> We are introduced to Cuirithir, a poet of the Connachta, and Líadain, a poet of the Corco Dhuibhne, West Munster. Cuirithir propositions Líadain, stating that their child would be magnificent. Líadain refuses until she has finished her tour of performing poetry, but says she will meet him after.
>
> Cuirithir travels towards Líadain's home with a servant and meets the holy fool Mac Da Cherda, and enlists his help in getting Líadain to meet him. Mac Da Cherda speaks obscurely in verse in front of Líadain and her companions, in a way in which only Líadain can interpret. Líadain joins Cuirithir, and they both set off to see the saint Cummíne Fota.

Together at the monastery

> Cummíne asks if the couple would rather speak or see one another; they choose speaking to each other (as we might expect from poets). Líadain and Cuirithir speak through a wall to one another in poetry. Cummíne then demands that they spend the night together, albeit with a servant between them. Cummíne interrogates the servant, threatening him with death if he does not tell the truth; but it is revealed to us that the boy has *been* threatened with death. Cuirithir goes to another church.

Líadain pursuant and the encounter

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[576] Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 9.
[577] Ibid., p. 8, n. 1.
[578] See Seán Ó Coileáin, 'The Structure of a Literary Cycle', *Ériu*, 25 (1974), 88–125.

> Líadain denies that she and Cuirithir slept together when Cummíne calls her *ben Cuirithir* ‘Cuirithir's woman/wife’; Cummíne also implies Cuirithir may be mad. Cuirithir goes on pilgrimage, and Líadain goes after Cuirithir. Líadain utters the poem that forms the most famous part of the tale, ‘*Cen áinius*’, as examined in Chapter Three. We are told what had vexed Cuirithir was that Liadain had become a nun, though it is unclear *when* she became a nun. Cuirithir hears Líadain is coming and flees from her. She dies on the flagstone on which he used to pray, and is buried under it (and her soul goes to heaven); that is the Encounter of Líadain and Cuirithir.

As can be seen when the tale is laid out, it has a mirrored structure: Cuirithir pursues, they are together, Líadain pursues. Even the structure of the tale points to an unhappy ending for our duo: ideally (speaking in romantic terms), the pursuit would precede the time together, and that time would not be at a monastery (particularly under the instructions of Cummíne Fota). It is also worth noting that Líadain’s final poem has gained a popularity beyond the tale itself, being collected in many poetry collections in the past century,[579] including a translation by Ruaraidh MacThòmais into modern Scottish Gaelic in the collection *Bàrdachd na Roinn-Eòrpa an Gàidhlig*.[580] Líadain’s poetry transcends the tale in which it is contained.

4.2.1 Summary of Criticism

The view taken in this chapter is that *L&C* is a deliberately ambiguous text, in which romantic love and love of the divine are in conflict, and in which gender is a key concern. These three notions can be seen in scholarly criticism of the text to date, albeit with differing degrees of support. There are a few themes that recur in some scholarship on *L&C*. One is the notion that the tale lacks coherence, or is incomplete. William Sayers calls the tale ‘composite, potentially inconsistent’, and states ‘the narrative framework is […] rudimentary, so that the story line is not assured.’[581] Those who contest this reading argue for a complete tale, albeit one that trades in ambiguity. Another idea that scholarship

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[579] See, for instance, Murphy, *Early Irish* Lyrics, pp. 82–85; pp. 208–211; *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry: A.D. 600 to 1200,* ed. by David Greene and Frank O’Connor (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 73-74; *Dánta Ban: Poems of Irish Women, Early and Modern*, ed. by P. L. Henry (Cork: Mercier Press, 1991), pp. 52-59.

[580] *Bàrdachd na Roinn-Eòrpa an Gàidhlig*, ed. by Ruaraidh MacThòmais (Glasgow: Gairm, 1990), pp. 70-71.

[581] Sayers, ‘Fusion and Fission’, p. 103.

(generally) agrees upon is that at the heart of this tale is a conflict between love of the divine and romantic love. As Kuno Meyer stated:

> The theme of the story is the love of a poet and poetess. After an engagement to marry him she takes the veil. It cannot be said to be clear at what point this occurs. If early, her act makes the plot a conflict between love and religion.[582]

As is about to discussed, some extend the reading of this tale as centred on the conflicting demands of various types of love to the tale being considered part of a Tristan tale-type. Líadain's active role is often noted as being worthy of comment, pointing to a larger notion of the tale as playing with medieval Gaelic gender stereotypes.

James Carney situates *L&C* in the context of analogous tales to the complex of narratives about Tristan and Iseult,[583] though he does point out there is some degree of inversion when it comes to gender expectations in the tale.[584] Carney argues that the tale is incomplete or incoherent to an extent.[585] He also states that divine and human love are at the heart of the tale.[586] Carney's arguments have proven influential.

Of scholars who have examined *L&C*, Thomas Clancy has examined the tale the most comprehensively, with two publications[587] that look at the tale and a chapter of his PhD thesis examining it.[588] Clancy disputes earlier readings of the tale that discussed it as incomplete: he argues *L&C* is a 'finely wrought, integrated work'.[589] Clancy builds on Carney's work in several places, situating *L&C* amongst other tales of the Tristan tale-type; he describes the tale as 'an idiosyncratically monastic version of the Tristan story.'[590]

Clancy highlights *L&C* as a tale dealing with conflict between love of the divine and romantic love in multiple places; he describes the tale as being about the following:

> holy folly in love, two poets trying to do the opposite of worldly wisdom. [...] Thus Líadain and Cuirithir, in struggling to subject their love to love of God, are

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[582] Meyer, *Líadain and Cuirithir*, p. 8.
[583] Carney, 'The Irish Affinities of Tristan'.
[584] Ibid., p. 221.
[585] Ibid., p. 220.
[586] Ibid., pp. 220-221.
[587] Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery in Some Early Irish Texts', *Ériu*, 44 (1993), 105–124; Clancy, 'Women poets'.
[588] Clancy, 'Saint and Fool', pp. 195-210.
[589] Clancy, 'Women Poets', p. 68.
[590] Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', 120.

> following not the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom of God, which is folly to the world.[591]

Clancy states that *L&C* has 'an atmosphere of folly', placing it in context with the other texts he examines in his article on folly (including *Fingal Rónáin*).[592] *L&C* shares another feature with *Fingal Rónáin:* Kaarina Hollo argues for considering *Fingal Rónáin* as a text which is 'open', or deliberately ambiguous.[593] Recognition of the deliberate ambiguity in these two texts enhances the literary readings of both tales.

Clancy also emphasises and builds upon Carney's comments about the gendered aspect of Líadain and Cuirithir. This is particularly apparent in his 1996 article, 'Women Poets in Early Medieval Ireland', in which Clancy examines *L&C* alongside other texts such as the poems '*Ísucán*' ('Jesukin') and '*Aithbe dam-sa bés moro*' (known in English as 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare') as evidence for challenging the assumption of male authors for all of our medieval Gaelic material.[594] The combination of *L&C* and '*Aithbe dam-sa*' in particular is a theme that recurs in literary criticism of *L&C,* in part prompted by the medieval prose introduction to '*Aithbe dam-sa*' which makes reference to Líadain. Like Carney, Clancy argues that *L&C* is a text that challenges gender assumptions inherent in other medieval Gaelic texts, namely the connection of women with folly. Clancy states:

> Unlike tales where the sexually unstable woman ruins a man's career, the woman is here portrayed as the stable one, despite the assumptions of the men in the story. [...] it is Líadain, the woman, who is sane and Cuirithir who is depicted as mad. It is her sanity and stability which lead Cuirithir, eventually, to holiness.[595]

We will return to the identification of Cuirithir's 'madness'.[596] Overall, Clancy argues for *L&C* being a complex, complete tale, portraying love of the divine and romantic love in conflict, whose ending we are to understand as ultimately happy with Líadain's entry to Heaven and, seemingly, Cuirithir's.

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[591] Ibid., 122.
[592] Ibid., 118-120.
[593] Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*: The Medieval Irish Text as Argumentative Space'.
[594] Clancy, 'Women Poets'.
[595] Ibid., pp. 69-70.
[596] Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', 120-122.

Maeve Callan has built on Clancy's work on female authorship, discussing not only '*Aithbe dam-sa'*, *L&C*, and '*Ísucán'*, but also the *Life of Darerca*.[597] In addition to arguing for nuns' authorship as 'probable if not provable for several texts',[598] including Líadain's poetry, Callan also suggests the actual existence of a women's school of poetry existing around the time of the tale's composition, as mentioned in the prose prologue to '*Aithbe dam-sa'*.[599] For Callan, the tale's ending 'reads as a critique of choosing the religious life over marriage when truly in love'.[600]

Heather Larson examines Líadain's place in the early medieval Gaelic tradition as a woman professional poet,[601] arguing that while love of the divine and romantic love are in conflict in the tale, it is foremostly a tale about poets, and poetic terms.[602] She argues that Líadain, like the Caillech Bérri 'the Old Woman of Beara' and the daughter of Ua Dulsaine in the tale of Senchán and the Spirit of Poetry, gains a powerful voice by taking the veil and being in a 'hidden state'.[603] She argues the text is chiefly about poets, and that in taking the veil and becoming 'hidden', Líadain and other such women poets occupy a place outside society, speaking 'from beyond its boundaries'.[604] Being able to view society from the outside comes at a high cost, Larson argues, and Líadain uses her newly-gained voice to question whether or not 'it's worth it'.[605]

Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha's analysis of the term *banscál* allows for a better understanding of when in the tale Líadain might have taken the veil.[606] It has been proposed that Líadain and Cuirithir have taken religious orders by the time the tale even begins,[607] but Ní Dhonnchadha's reading disputes this. By means of the use of the term *banscál* in Mac Da Cherda's poetry to Líadain, Ní Dhonnchadha argues we can see that at this point in the story Líadain is a laywoman.[608] This pushes the moment when she took the veil forward in the story's timeline, and effectively rules out the theory that they are in religious life at the tale's beginning.

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[597] Maeve Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*, Darerca's *Life*, and Íte's *Ísucán*: Evidence for Nuns' Literacies in Early Ireland', in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue*, ed. by Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara and Patricia Stoop, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.), pp. 209–27.

[598] Ibid., p. 211.

[599] Ibid., p. 216.

[600] Ibid., p. 217.

[601] Heather Feldmeth Larson, 'The Veiled Poet: *Líadain and Cuirithir* and the Role of the Woman-Poet', in *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition: A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*, ed. by Joseph Falaky Nagy and Leslie Ellen Jones, CSANA Yearbook, 3-4 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 263–68.

[602] Ibid., p. 264.

[603] Ibid., pp. 263-64. See also Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, '*Caillech* and Other Terms'.

[604] Larson, 'The Veiled Poet', 268.

[605] Ibid.

[606] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Semantics of *Banscál'*, *Éigse*, 31 (1999), 31–35.

[607] Greene and O'Connor, *A Golden Treasury*, p. 72.

[608] Ní Dhonnchadha, '*Banscál*', 34.

Overall, the relatively limited scholarship on *L&C* centres on a few issues: that the tale is, at times, ambiguous is beyond doubt; that love of the divine and romantic love are in conflict in the tale is well-established; the tale can be compared and contrasted with other love triangles of the Tristan type; and that Líadain's role challenges certain medieval Gaelic gender stereotypes (and that this might point to woman authorship). We have then a tale of love of the divine and romantic love in conflict, and one in which gender is a key concern.

4.2.2 Intersections

L&C is a tale of intersections: secular-religious; aural-visual; saint-fool. The most obvious of these, the first, has been characterised by scholars as a conflict between loves divine and romantic. Without devotion to God, as embodied both in Líadain taking the veil and in Cummíne's demands, there would be no obstruction to Líadain and Cuirithir's ultimate union.[609] Cummíne literally places impediments before the couple by having them decide whether they would rather see or hear one another, and then by placing a servant between them, and, potentially, by sending Cuirithir away.

The nature of love of the divine contrasts with romantic love in the text. There is no prose statement of 'Líadain loved God', as we see with romantic love in other texts; and in Líadain's poetry, eloquent expressions of inner emotion, she never refers to a 'love' of God. If anything, the emotion associated with God in this text is fear:

Ba mire
ná dernad a airer-som,
manbad ***oman*** *ríg nime.*

'Twas madness
Not to do his pleasure,
Were there not the **fear** of the King of Heaven.[610]

It would be madness not to sleep with Cuirithir, Líadain states, *if not* for the fear of God. We do not get the sense that Líadain *feels* a love for God; Líadain is miserable by the tale's end, and this (and Cuirithir's potential madness) is laid squarely at the feet of the decision for her to become a nun.

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[609] That said, it should be noted that the initial impediment in the way of their relationship is put there by Líadain, and is secular in nature: her poetic tour.
[610] Meyer, *Liadain and Curithir*, p. 22; trans. p. 23. Emphasis my own.

Love of the divine in *L&C* is closer in nature to loyalty than the romantic love at which we have already looked. Líadain's love of the divine is expressed by her *not* fulfilling her romantic desires, and by her (and Cuirithir's) potential adherence to Cummíne's tests. We should remember that Líadain outright denies sleeping with Cuirithir that night (though admittedly this is ambiguous; if they did not sleep together, why did someone threaten the servant?). Her actions may speak to love of the divine, even if she does not speak to it herself. This is clearly a different expression of love of the divine to a text such as *'Ísucán'*, which we will shortly discuss: in that text, the speaker's affection for Christ is palpable. Here Líadain's devotion shows through what she does not do; love of the divine and romantic love intersect and are at irreconcilable odds.

The question then arises: can we call this love? As already discussed, most scholarship seems to think so. Clancy describes the couple as 'struggling to subject their love to love of God'.[611] Even Larson, for whom the sexual aspect of the tale is not the primary concern, states the tale is at least in part about 'sexuality and celibacy'.[612] If we are saying that love can be seen through: A) the narrative telling us that X loved Y; B) speech acts by characters stating their feelings, and; C) love as action, then only the last-named applies to Líadain's 'love of the divine'. Líadain's love of the divine is defined by her loyalty to her duties. That said, there is a fact that seems to have gone uncommented upon thus far in scholarship: when Líadain goes in pursuit of Cuirithir at the tale's end, she presumably goes in order to choose romantic love over divine duty. The text is an ambiguous one, arguably a deliberately ambiguous one, and Líadain's motive here is not explicit. That said, she does leave the setting wherein her love of the divine has been situated in order to pursue Cuirithir, and in doing so, echoes Cuirithir's earlier pursuit of her. Cuirithir's motives then were romantic; it is far from unlikely that Líadain's here are too. This does not change Líadain's expression of her love of the divine, but rather suggests that that love might waver in the face of romantic love.

In Líadain's own words, the emotion associated with God is fear.[613] Loyalty through fear does not immediately seem to merit the term 'love'; or else, it is an alternative to other examples of love of the divine we will shortly examine. We might consider how appropriate the term 'devotion' may be when discussing love of the divine, with its implicit trait of commitment. However, it is worth considering the broader context of fear of God. Proverbs 1:7 gives the fear of God as the starting point of wisdom, and the opposite of folly.[614] Such a proverb is fitting for *L&C*, a tale concerned with folly, wisdom, and the fear of God.

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[611] Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', 122.

[612] Larson, 'The Veiled Poet', p. 266.

[613] See also, in Líadain's poem, the line where she wishes *ascnam sech péin hi pardos* (Meyer gives 'To go past the pains of Hell into Paradise', but we could potentially read it as 'towards avoiding punishment in Paradise'). Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 24; see *eDIL s.vv. pían, ascnam,* and *sech.*

Indeed, Líadain, a woman poet, might be seen to choose between (enduring) wisdom and (transient) pleasure. For St Augustine, *timor Dei* 'fear of God' formed a key part of the journey to wisdom, a component of the path of love of the divine. Augustine specified that fear of God was a particular type of fear: *timor castus*, a 'chaste fear', in contrast to the more general *timor seruilis*, 'servile fear'.[615] As recently explored by Thomas Vozar, Augustine's thoughts on *timor Dei* were influential in medieval thought, impacted upon individuals such as Peter Lombard and St Thomas Aquinas, and continued to influence thought beyond the Middle Ages.[616] As such, we can understand fear of God not as necessarily opposed to love of the divine in medieval thought; in fact, the former is seen as a component of the latter. With such an understanding it can be seen that, though Líadain may not express verbally a love of God, we can fit her actions within a wider framework of love of the divine.

4.2.3 Seeing Versus Hearing

The tale also features an intersection of the visual and the aural. In addition to the conflict of the divine and the romantic in the tale, we get further insight into the nature of romantic desire itself. As mentioned previously, Cummíne separates Líadain and Cuirithir. After they have placed themselves under his spiritual guidance, Cummíne asks of them:

> *'In ba déicsiu dúib ná himmacallam?'*
> *'Immacallam dúin', or Cuirithir. 'Is ferr a mbía de. Immanaccæ dún ríam.'*
>
> 'Whether for you shall it be seeing, or talking together?'
> 'Talking for us!' said Curithir. 'What will come of it will be better. We have ever been looking at each other.'[617]

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[614] Proverbs 1.7.

[615] 'XLIII, 7', in *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, ed. by R. Willems, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 36 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1954), p. 375.

[616] Thomas Matthew Vozar, '*Timor Dei* and *Timor Idololatricus* from Reformed Theology to Milton', *Reformations*, 26.1 (2021), 62–72.

[617] Meyer, *Liadain and Curithir*, p. 16; trans. p. 17.

It is perhaps unsurprising that our two poets opt for verbal communication rather than visual spectacle. Clancy has written on the basis of this practice in ecclesiastical texts, stating that it ‘seems to resemble some of the practices found in the literature of the ascetic reform.’[618] Clancy cites an example from the ‘Monastery of Tallaght’ wherein one figure talks to young nuns but does not look upon them, and Clancy goes on to write:

> It would not be unreasonable to see a piece written in the mid-ninth century taking Cummíne as representative of the ascetic reforms, imposing a harsh and perhaps foolhardy regime on those whose devout, but passionate hearts would break beneath it.[619]

Clancy furthermore discusses the penitential attributed to the historical Cummíne Fota (†642), which ‘devotes a great deal of space to discussions of sex’,[620] including an aspect that directly ties into the seeing/hearing question we are examining: ‘He who loves her in mind only, seven days. If, however, he has spoken but has not been accepted by her, forty days’.[621] Penitential practices could be at play in the decision to cut off one of their senses. This, however, does not preclude the possibility that the religious element answers the initial desirous one: that both seeing and hearing can incline one to sin, therefore, religious protocol is enacted to counteract that initial element.

The lovers’ separation evokes again the concept of the visual/aural divide in romantic love. In *Aislinge Óenguso*, seeing but not hearing Cáer is identified as a component of Óengus's lovesickness: *Do-génai galar ndó in delb* ***ad-condairc cen a haccaldaim***[622] ‘It made him ill to have seen the shape without conversing with it.’ Cuirithir’s choice that he and Líadain hear and not see each other — and it is explicitly Cuirithir who makes this decision — is framed as wanting something new, as they have 'ever been looking at each other'.[623] But if we recall *Aislinge Óenguso*, Cuirithir's decision may in fact be based on an insecurity as to the potential effect on a man of seeing but not hearing an object of desire. Cuirithir may be attempting to stave off emotional crisis, or harm. Cuirithir’s mental state will shortly be discussed, but it is possible that the educated poet Cuirithir is well aware of the dangers that befall other men in medieval Gaelic saga who gaze upon their beloved without speaking. Whatever might be theorised about

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[618] Clancy, ‘Saint and Fool’, p. 209.
[619] Ibid., p. 210.
[620] Ibid., p. 209.
[621] *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. by Ludwig Bieler and D. A. Binchy, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 5 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), p. 117.
[622] Meid, *Aislinge Óenguso*, p. 53.
[623] Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 17.

Cuirithir's motives, there does seem to be evidence here for an understanding of romantic desire as being dependent on (or increased by) the act of both seeing and hearing the beloved.

Larson argues that there is a motif of lacking visibility, or being in disguise, in *L&C*, and that this ties into the notion of the veil that Líadain takes.[624] For Larson, Líadain, like the daughter of Ua Dulsaine and the Caillech Bérri, are 'professional poets [who] become hidden, and are referred to as a *caillech*. All three have a powerful voice when they are in this hidden state, and their poems are valued and memorable.'[625] This moment of not being able to see one another ties into the motif Larson has identified, that of the 'powerful voice' that comes from being 'in this hidden space'; this may be a precursive, foreshadowing moment to Líadain's taking of the veil, if she has not already.

The heard-but-not-seen motif does seem to connect to desire, and to the senses. The aural-visual aspect has been highlighted here, but is not the only sense evoked in depictions of desire. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Old Gaelic tale *Echtrae Chonnlai* features eating being tied to desire.[626] The supernatural woman in the tale throws Connla an apple, which he eats for a month without it ever being finished. At the tale's end, Connla leaves with the woman to an eternal life elsewhere. It seems clear that the continual eating of the apple connects Connla with the woman, forging a tie between them not wholly unlike the dreams of Óengus. We can argue then that medieval Gaelic saga treated desire as sensual, that is, relating to the senses, and that thus far we have seen this in sight (even in dreams), hearing (even of the deeds of another, such as in instances of *grád n-écmaise*), and taste, involved in depictions of desire.

4.2.4 Wild Men and Cuirithir

Cuirithir's flight and disappearance from the narrative in its third section are referenced in terms of anger or madness. In her poem at the end of the text, Líadain states, *an rocharus rocráidius*, 'the one whom I loved I have tormented',[627] and goes on to say, as we have already examined in the context of fear of God:

Ba ***mire***
ná dernad a airer-som,

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[624] Larson, 'The Veiled Poet', p. 266.
[625] Ibid., p. 268.
[626] See Kim McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai,* pp. 29-41.
[627] Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 22; trans. p. 23 but amended for clarity; though see Anders Ahlqvist, 'Note: A line in Líadan and Cuirithir', Peritia, 1 (1982), 334.

> *manbad oman ríg nime.*
>
> ‘Twas **madness**
> Not to do his pleasure,
> Were there not the fear of the King of Heaven.[628]

This is not the only example of *mire* or *mer* being used in the text. In an earlier discussion between Líadain and Cummíne, the saint states:

> *Ní maith lim aní atbir,*
> *a Líadain ben Chuirithir,*
> *robói sunnæ, nirbó* ***mer****,*
> *cid síu tísed Cuirither.*
>
> I do not like what you say,
> Líadain, wife of Curithir.
> Curithir was here, he was not **mad**,
> Any more than before he came.[629]

While not explicit, one implication of *nirbó mer*, he was not mad, is that Cuirithir now is, or that he is not **more** mad than he previously was (saying nothing of how mad he used to be); Líadain is arguing Cuirithir is now of an unsound mind, and Cummíne is refuting that by saying Cuirithir was no more mad than when he first came to the monastery. *Mer* is translated by *eDIL* as meaning ‘off one's head, demented, crazy, both of temporary condition due to excitement, intoxication, anger, etc., and of permanent quality’.[630] Cummíne is however ambiguous and suggestive in his precise wording: he addresses only the time Cuirithir was at the monastery, and the past more generally, but not the present. We could read into Cummíne’s statement that Cuirithir might now be considered *mer*, ‘crazy’. And as Clancy states: ‘Terms for the madman include *geilt, dásachtach, fulla* and also *mer* and *foíndelach*, terms which can apply to the fool.’[631] We could then suggest a reading of *robói sunnæ, nirbó mer* as ‘[Cuirithir] was here, he was not a madman’. Again, he ‘was not’ could be taken to imply he is now; though the text is ambiguous, and this could be speculation.

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[628] Ibid. Emphasis my own.
[629] Ibid. Emphasis my own. The first line has been amended for clarity.
[630] *eDIL s.v. mer.*
[631] Clancy, ‘Saint and Fool’, p. 11.

The specific term *mer* warrants further discussion. Fergus Kelly has discussed categories of such characters in the laws, stating:

> [T]he meaning of the three most frequent terms [...] seems clear. The *dásachtach* is the person with manic symptoms who is liable to behave in a violent and destructive manner. The *mer* (lit. ‘one who is confused, deranged’) poses less of a threat to other people, and is normally permitted into the ale-house [...] The *drúth* appears to be a person who is mentally retarded [sic]. (The term *drúth* is also used of the professional clown or buffoon whose act would include imitations of the insane [...]).[632]

As such, while Cuirithir may be a person of unsound mind, he is not the most dangerous of those suffering mental illness in medieval Gaelic law, being seen as ‘confused’ as opposed to, for instance, violent. That said, Laura Matheson, who approaches persons of unsound mind as suffering mental illness as opposed to mental illness in medieval Gaelic texts being entirely allegorical,[633] has argued for a degree of ambiguity:

> Within the narrative literature and legal texts it is possible to find a number of different terms used to describe the madman, but the definitions associated with these terms appear to be less distinct than might have been first hypothesised.[634]

While Matheson’s focus is on *dásachtach*, *fulla*, and *geilt*, she also addresses *mer*, describing it as ‘a much more general word denoting mental or physical wandering which can apply to the madman as well as the fool, and to ordinary unwise behaviour’.[635]

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[632] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 92. See also for discussion of *mer* and *dásachtach*, particularly regarding their development in modern Scottish Gaelic, R. Ó Maolalaigh, ‘Am Buadhfhacal Meadhan-Aoiseach Meranach agus Mearan, Mearanach, Dàsachdach, Dàsan(n)ach na Gàidhlig’, *Scottish Studies: The Journal of the School of Scottish Studies University of Edinburgh / Craobh nan Ubhal: A Festschrift in Honour of John MacInnes*, 37 (2014), 183-206.

[633] Laura Matheson, ‘Madness and Deception in Irish and Norse-Icelandic Sagas’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2015), p. 215. Matheson cites Robert Crampton on *mer* being related to wandering, specifically; see Robert Crampton, ‘The Uses of Exaggeration in *Merugud Uilixis meic Leirtis* and in *Fingal chlainne Tanntail’*, in *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, ed. by Ralph O’Connor, Studies in Celtic History, 34 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 58–82 (p. 58, n. 1).

[634] Matheson, ‘Madness and Deception’, p. 44.

[635] Ibid., p. 11.

Cuirithir is far from the only man in medieval Gaelic saga who takes to wandering when possibly of an unsound mind.[636] Perhaps the most prominent wanderer in this fashion is Suibhne Geilt, about whom more will be said shortly. In 'Finn and the Man in the Tree',[637] we see Derg Corra wandering in the forest after his expulsion from the *fían*, possibly half-animal in form, in a scene ripe with Christ-like imagery.[638] Cuirithir's pilgrimage at the end of *L&C* (the key word, used twice in describing Cuirithir after his leaving Cummíne Fota, is *ailithre*, 'pilgrimage'),[639] might be compared with the journey of another man in medieval Gaelic saga who is separated from his love. In *Serglige Con Culainn*, after separating from Fand:

> *ro ling Cú Chulaind tri ardlémend & tri deslémend Lúachra co r-rabi fri ré fotá cen dig cen bíad sechnón na slébte, & is and no chotlad cech n-aidchi for Sligi Midlúachra.*[640]
>
> Cú Chulainn made three high leaps and three southerly leaps, towards Lúachair; he was a long time in the mountains without food or water, sleeping each night on Slige Midlúachra.[641]

Cú Chulainn is in such a state of emotional distress he tries to kill those sent after him, until he is restrained and the following takes place:

> *Tucsat na druíd dig n-dermait dó. Amal atib in n-dig nírbo chumain laiss Fand & cech ní doróni.*[642]
>
> [T]he druids brought a drink of forgetfulness, and, when he drank that, he forgot Fand and everything he had done.[643]

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[636] Cf. Feargal Ó Béarra, 'Buile Shuibhne: Vox Insaniae from Medieval Ireland', *Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 15 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 242–89. Ó Béarra specifically compares Suibhne's journey to a pilgrimage; here we can see a further potential parallel between Suibhne and Cuirithir. Ibid., p. 288.

[637] Meyer, 'Finn and the Man in the Tree', 344–49.

[638] Kaarina Hollo, "Finn and the Man in the Tree' as Verbal Icon' in *The Gaelic Finn Tradition*, ed. by Sharon J. Arbuthnot and Geraldine Parsons (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), pp. 50–61.

[639] *eDIL s.v. ailithre.* Meyer, *Liadain and Curithir*, pp. 22, 26.

[640] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 29.

[641] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, p. 178.

[642] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 29.

[643] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, p. 178.

While we get some insight into what exactly the nature of Cuirithir's journey is since it is described as a pilgrimage, he is part of a wider pattern of men dealing with emotionally troubling situations through travel. The similarity here can be noted between Cuirithir's state and the lovesick; as stated in discussing international lovesickness examples, Cicero described the lovesick as "lost', literally 'wandering' (*errans* or *vagans*)'.[644] Cuirithir may be on pilgrimage, and the extent to which pilgrimage and wandering are alike is questionable, but the similarity between his behaviour and others' is striking.

The idea of Cuirithir as mad, or even as a Wild Man, is under-explored. In an influential study, Pádraig Ó Riain outlined the paradigmatic Wild Man of early Gaelic literature, including a curse by a saint, restlessness, a flight into the wilds, and the loss of a lover.[645] Suibhne Geilt, from the Middle Gaelic text *Buile Shuibhne*,[646] is the best-known character identified with this trope. Clancy deploys this paradigm to examine Mac Da Cherda,[647] but it can also illuminate the figure of Cuirithir. The notion of the Wild Man, often cursed by a holy figure, is worth bearing in mind when thinking of this poet. If the text as is read as having both Cummíne and Cuirithir threaten the servant, and then Cummíne sending Cuirithir away (implicitly 'mad'), parallels can be drawn between Cuirithir and other Wild Man figures. The Wild Man is a figure, cast out from society and sent journeying in a wilderness by a saint, whose journey ends in reconciliation and entry into Heaven. Admittedly, for some reading Cuirithir as a Wild Man will be a step too far in the direction of conjecture; the argument here is that Cuirithir is not a Wild Man, but that there are elements of the Wild Man trope we can see as being evoked.

As the name implies, the Wild Man does seem to be a gendered trope. We do get 'wild women' in medieval Gaelic literature — one who has been considered in the context of *L&C* is the woman poet, the daughter of Ua Dulsaine,[648] for instance — but they are not a saint's cursed outcasts who enter heaven at the tale's end. Rather, for some, they are restored to their wits through interaction — or intercourse — with a masculine figure.[649] This holds true for two types of wild woman — the *mer* kind, the woman who has lost her mind, such as the aforementioned daughter of Ua Dulsaine; and the *banfénnid*, the woman warrior, who, in the case of Ness, is returned to society after rape by Cathbad.[650]

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[644] Caston, 'Love as Illness', 284.

[645] Ó Riain, Pádraig, 'A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man', *Éigse*, 14.3 (1972), 179–206.

[646] *Buile Shuibhne*, ed. by J. G. O'Keeffe, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 1 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1931).

[647] Ibid., 113-15.

[648] See Larson, 'The Veiled Poet', and Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Prull Narrative in *Sanas Cormaic*', in *Cín Chille Cúile: Texts, Saints and Places / Essays in Honour of Pádraig Ó Riain*, ed. by John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Kevin Murray, Celtic Studies Publications, 9 (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004), pp. 163–77.

[649] Here we can see overlap with the lovesick man in the wider European and Arabian tradition, restored to health by intercourse (regardless of who with). The question of whether women of unsound minds can, legally or morally, consent to sex is a question worth further study.

It is not being argued that Cuirithir is a Wild Man, or that there is a 1:1 correspondence with Ó Riain's paradigm: there is not. But *L&C* is a self-aware text, which draws upon other medieval Gaelic texts; see, for instance, how Cuirithir's opening statement to Líadain that they should unite echoes how two saints will often greet each other in hagiography.[651] An intertextual reading of *L&C* suggests that it could be knowingly drawing on the Wild Man trope in its presentation of Cuirithir.

Cuirithir dominates the early section of the tale, propositioning Líadain and following her, enlisting the aid of Mac Da Cherda. Building on Ó Riain's paradigm, Clancy has added that frequently the Wild Man has transgressed or shown a flaw that will be corrected through time in the wilderness.[652] In the context of some original sin, so to speak, setting the to-be Wild Man on the path to conflict with a saint, we might think of *L&C*'s beginning. Cuirithir comes across as proud, brash, and well-spoken at the tale's opening. It could be the case that the reason we are focused on Cuirithir at the tale's beginning rather than Líadain is so we see some foreshadowing of a moment of transgression or sin. We might, for instance, consider the brandishing of spears inappropriate if Líadain is already a nun at this point; but given Ní Dhonnchadha's work on *banscál,*[653] we can say Líadain does not seem to be a nun at this moment, and Cuirithir's behaviour does not seem therefore to be overly transgressive. The behaviour for which Cuirithir is sent away might seem to be the threatening of the servant — if, indeed, Cuirithir did. Any sin being foreshadowed when the tale begins remains ambiguous, then.

We can see a similarity between Cuirithir and Wild Men through Cuirithir displeasing a saint. It is after the tense exchange between the novice and Cummíne about whether or not Líadain and Cuirithir had sex that Cuirithir leaves the monastery. Why exactly is unclear: the text states *Rucad som íarum do chill aili* 'After that [he] was taken to another church',[654] but this does immediately follow the servant being threatened. Cummíne sends Cuirithir away — admittedly, not cursed, as far as we know, and strongly arguing he is not madder than when he arrived.[655] Moreover, when Líadain goes after Cuirithir at the tale's end, he takes to the ocean. *Mer* is frequently applied to the sea.[656] We might then read the sea as a potential site of madness, and Cuirithir's voyage as, at least partly, a metaphorical one; whether it represents pilgrimage, mental ill-health, lovesickness, or a combination of all three, though the text itself does state it is the former of the three.

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[650] Stokes, 'Tidings of Conchobar mac Nessa', p. 22; trans. p. 23; see also MacLeod, 'Female Alterity', pp. 42-70.

[651] See Clancy, 'Saint and Fool', p. 198.

[652] Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', 113-114.

[653] Ní Dhonnchadha, '*Banscál*'.

[654] Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 20; trans. p. 21. Translation amended to restore the ambiguity of the original.

[655] Though as has been discussed, 'madder' could imply a consistent degree of madness.

[656] *eDIL s.v. mer.*

There are far more elements of the paradigm that do not apply to Cuirithir than that do, including whether pilgrimage and wandering can fruitfully be compared. That said, there is some degree of crossover, enough to propose that there is a knowing comparison being made. It is not to say Cuirithir is a Wild Man by the end of the text, or even mad. However, given that he is seemingly sent off by a holy figure, in the form of Cummíne, and then never again interacts successfully with our main woman character for the rest of the tale, we can see some similarity with the Wild Man trope. Even Cummíne's denial that Cuirithir is *mer* could be seen as a clarification on the part of the author that, while evoking the Wild Man paradigm, Cuirithir is not one of them. Cuirithir potentially evoking the Wild Man trope supports the idea of *L&C* being a knowingly intertextual tale, at ease playing with tropes such as the Tristan-esque love triangle.

In the discussion of lovesickness, it was noted that only men were seen explicitly suffering lovesickness. Though some women echoed the language of lovesickness, the specific ailment seemed only to impact men. This also seems true of the madness inflicted by saints. As stated, women can be mad in medieval Gaelic literature, even women poets as the daughter of Ua Dulsaine exemplifies. But when it comes to figures cursed by saints to madness, all the examples known to me are men.

This madness is, however, a step on a journey of love of the divine. The Wild Man's story often ends, after all, with reconciliation and entry into Heaven. The path of the Wild Man — one which we might simplify as pride, sin, madness and roaming, followed by penitence, reconciliation, and death — is a journey in finding love for the divine. The Wild Man ends his story as a lover of the divine. A *tochmarc* might be described as recounting steps a hero must take in order to unite with the beloved; we can consider the tale of a Wild Man in similar terms, wherein the subject must be humbled before they can experience love of the divine. Lovesickness can be thought of as a physical and mental-emotional illness which ends with physical union between the sufferer and the source; madness inflicted by a saint is a mental-emotional illness (with physical elements, see Suibhne) which ends with the divine union between the sufferer and God. This journey to love of the divine is one specifically undergone by men, and a path being potentially echoed in *L&C*. Cuirithir either transgresses or is suspected of transgression by Cummíne; he flees the scene, sent on pilgrimage, which includes fleeing from his beloved; and at the tale’s end, Líadain is explicitly said to enter Heaven, which may have led to some, at times, ascribing an entry to Heaven to Cuirithir.[657] Cuirithir journeys towards love of the divine as a Wild Man does, indeed as many holy men do, even if the narrative does not ultimately focus on his journey.

Cuirithir's love in *L&C* is generally less clearly articulated than Líadain's. Cuirithir's romantic love comes across in his hurt, as discussed, and his potential madness; this contrasts with Líadain's sorrow. Líadain is more vocal about her feelings for Cuirithir, though this is a consequence of the latter half of the narrative following Líadain more closely than Cuirithir. We hear multiple references in Líadain's voice to her loving Cuirithir, including her famous poem. Cuirithir's explicit words of love for Líadain are few, although he does praise her voice as *'inmain'* at one point in their separation.[658] Similarly, his love of the divine goes verbally unexpressed in the tale; his praying, and his fleeing from Líadain on pilgrimage at the tale's end, are the actions that express this devotion. Cuirithir is never described as, and never describes himself as, feeling love for God, but devotion to God can be read in a number of ways, from pilgrimage, to restraint, to depriving himself of the company of the woman he loves.

4.2.5 Women's Folly and Líadain

Líadain also merits discussion in terms of gender and love. Intellectual rationality, as opposed to emotional impulsiveness, is one of Líadain's defining characteristics. We begin the tale with her refusing to unite with Cuirithir until her tour is done; she takes the veil, at some point, framed in a Christian setting as a sensible and noble decision; and her seeming adherence to Cummíne's demands further reinforces this image of Líadain as sensible, and sensible in love. Líadain's sense places her in stark contrast to the depictions of several other women characters in medieval Gaelic saga.

Many have commented upon the strain of sexism running through medieval Gaelic literature.[659] This includes women sacrificing themselves or being sacrificed for the sake of men (whether romantic partners or family relations),[660] women's honour being based on the honour of their partners,[661] and the outright condemnation many (at times, all) women face from both men and women in the literature.[662] The misogyny also extends to the repeated portrayal of supernatural women as predominantly malevolent.[663] The strain of misogyny is clear in the Old Gaelic *Tecosca Cormaic* 'The instructions of Cormac', dated by Meyer to 'not later than the first half of the ninth century'.[664] In this wisdom text, the imparter-of-wisdom, Cormac, has the following conversation with Cairpre:

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[657] See, for instance, Clancy, 'Saint and Fool', p. 198, wherein he references Líadain and Cuirithir's 'mutual salvation', and p. 205, wherein he states that Líadain 'saves not only herself but Cuirithir as well.'

[658] Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 18; trans. p. 19.

[659] See, for instance, Philip O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women in Early Irish Literature', *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 27-44; Gilbert Márkus, 'Early Irish 'Feminism'', *New Blackfriars*, 73.862 (1992), 375-88; Erica Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism', in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8–12 April 1994*, ed. by James P. Mallory and Gerard Stockman (Belfast: December, 1994), pp. 135–38; and, Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women*. See also, Máirín Nic Eoin, *B'ait Leo Bean: Gnéithe den Idé-eolaíocht Inscne i dTraidisiún Litreartha na Gaeilge* (Baile Atha Cliath: An Clóchomar, 1998).

[660] Márkus, 'Early Irish 'Feminism'', 378.

> *'A húi Chuind, a Chormaic,' ol Carpre, 'cia etargén mná?'*
> *'Ní hansa,' ol Cormac. 'Nosnetargén & nísnetargléim.'*
> *Serba sirgnáse,*
> *mórda tathigthe,*
> ***drútha*** *follaigthi,*
> ***báetha*** *comairle,*
> *santacha tormaig* [...]
>
> 'O grandson of Conn, Cormac,' said Carpre, 'how do you distinguish women?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'I distinguish them, but I make no difference among them.'
> They are crabbed as constant companions,
> haughty when visited,
> **lewd** when neglected,
> **silly** counsellors,
> greedy of increase [...][665]

This misogynistic diatribe continues for over 120 lines. It contains the abhorrent phrase '*ferr a ndinge a ngrádugud*' ('better to oppress them than to love them').[666]

A key aspect of the misogyny found in many medieval Gaelic texts is the idea of women as *báeth*, a word meaning both 'foolish' and 'lustful', and one often translated as 'folly'.[667] *Báeth* also meant 'legally incompetent, senseless', according to Kelly, and was as such applied to women and other people such as children and slaves.[668] Specifically, *eDIL* states that *báeth* can be ‘applied to one not fully responsible either through nonage or mental deficiency’.[669] That *báeth* can mean both ‘foolish’ or ‘senseless’ and ‘lustful’ suggests the possibility that lustfulness could be considered foolishness, or that at least some authors would like readers to think so; or else, that those considered ‘foolish’ or ‘senseless’ were associated with a lack of inhibition, or capable of being sexually exploited. Both *báeth* and *drúth*,[670] appearing as they do above in discussing women but also used for men, share meanings as ‘lustful’, ‘reckless’, and ‘legally incapable’, but also as descriptors for fools, jesters, and those seen as lacking sense, as it were.

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[661] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 28-29.
[662] See, for instance, Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb'.
[663] Mikhailova, 'Portraying a Person'.
[664] Kuno Meyer, *The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt*, Todd Lecture Series, 15 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Company, 1909).
[665] Ibid., p. 28; trans. p. 29. Emphasis my own.
[666] Ibid., p. 34; trans. p. 35. Translation amended for clarity, the original being 'better to crush them than to cherish them'. One example of the lesser-used *grádugud* in action.
[667] *eDIL s.v. 1 báeth.*

The connection of lust to foolishness could relate to the elevation of chastity and virginity in medieval Gaelic society, and beyond.[671] In his thesis on holy fools, Clancy states:

> Terms for the fool include *drúth, óinmit, mer, báeth, foíndelach*. Again, the terminology is flexible, *báeth* for instance implying stupidity or naiveté rather than actual mental illness[.][672]

The word is of particular use for us as Líadain is sensible, not *báeth* in her actions; as such, Líadain contrasts with several other women characters. As Bitel states: ‘In keeping with the gender ideology of Christians on the Continent, Irish clerics associated women by nature with sex, pollution, and sin’.[673] We see women described as *báeth* in various saga, wisdom, and religious texts. In *Fingal Rónáin* for instance, which we shall discuss in further detail in the next chapter, the fault in the bloody narrative is placed solely at a woman’s feet by the men of the tale. As Clancy states: ‘We should note [...] that Rónán in the lament for his son says he died *i cin mná baíthe*, ‘through the crime of a foolish/wanton woman’.[674] In *The Triads of Ireland*, dated by Meyer to the second half of the ninth century,[675] we see two unflattering instances of women described as *báeth*:

> 83.

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[668] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 68.
[669] *eDIL s.v. 1 báeth.*
[670] *eDIL s.vv. 1 drúth and 2 drúth.*
[671] See Márkus, ‘Early Irish ‘Feminism”, 379.
[672] Clancy, ‘Saint and Fool’, p. 11. See pp. 11-20 for Clancy’s full discussion of these terms.
[673] Bitel, *Land of Women*, p. 33.
[674] Clancy, ‘Fools and Adultery’, 120.
[675] Kuno Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, Todd Lecture Series, 13 (London: Hodges, Figgis & Company, 1906), pp. x-xi.

> *Trí buidir in betha: robud do throich, airchisecht fri faigdech,* ***cosc mná báithe do drúis***.
>
> ‘Three deaf ones of the world: warning to a doomed man, mocking a beggar, **keeping a loose woman from lust.**’[676]
>
> 238.
>
> *Trí luchra ata mesa: luchra tuinde,* ***luchra mná bóithe****, luchra con foléimnige.*
>
> ‘Three worst smiles: the smile of a wave, **the smile of a lewd woman**, the grin of a dog ready to leap.’[677]

A similar sentiment is expressed in the short poem dated to the early ninth centuryknown as ‘Clocán binn’:

> *Clocán binn*
> *benar i n-aidchi gaíthe:*
> *ba ferr lim dul ina dáil*
> *indás i n-dáil mná baíthe.*
>
> Bell of pleasant sound ringing on a windy night: I should prefer to tryst with it to trysting with a wanton woman.[678]

In *Tecosca Cormaic* and its misogynistic diatribe, we see women connected with the state of being *báeth* multiple times. As well as being *báetha comairle* ‘silly counsellors’,[679] women are said to be *cétludcha báise* ‘ever in the company of folly’,[680] and:

> *tórachtcha báise,*
> *brassa airnadma,*
> *airlama forgill,*

---

[676] Ibid., p. 10; trans. p. 11. Emphasis my own. The original contains both *báeth* and *drúis*, though this is lost somewhat in the translation. Similar sentiments are expressed in Triad 91 (Ibid., p. 12; trans. p. 13).

[677] Ibid., p. 32; trans. p. 33. Emphasis my own.

[678] Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, p. 4; trans. p. 5.

[679] Meyer, *The Instructions of King Cormac*, p. 28; trans. p. 29.

[680] Ibid., p. 32; trans. p. 33.

> *foille foichlige,*
> *sóera ainme [...]*
>
> on the pursuit of folly,
> quick to engage,
> ready to pledge,
> neglectful of earning,
> ready to injure [...][681]

This association extends to Eve herself. In the Middle Gaelic poem '*Mé Éba ben Ádaim uill*',[682] Eve blames herself for not only the expulsion from Eden, but also the eternal folly of women:

> *in céin marat-sam re lá*
> *de ní scarat mná re baís.*
>
> For that [i.e., eating the apple], women will not cease from folly as long as they live in the light of day.[683]

Not only is Eve chastising herself, but her criticism extends to condemnation of women for eternity as *báeth*. There is a doomed inevitability here; Eve's transgression means that women will forever be *báeth*. This inevitability is arguably also seen in the aforementioned Triad 83; it is pointless to try and keep a *báeth* woman from *drús*. Of the three translations *eDIL* offers for *drús*, 'In bad sense, lust, concupiscence, incontinence' seems most fitting to the tone of the triad.[684] It is also worth noting *drús* as being the abstract noun created from the aforementioned *drúth*.[685] Whether this triad is as condemning as Eve's words is contestable, however; the triad says it is futile to keep a *báeth* woman from *drúis*, but stops short of explicitly stating women are *báeth* as Eve does. Eve not only condemns herself, but all women, as forever indulging in *báes*, 'folly; incapacity; wantonness'.[686]

Eve's self-chastisement is worth further considering in the context of Líadain. Eve begins the poem, identifying herself as the wife of Adam, before stating:

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[681] Ibid., p. 30; trans. p. 31.
[682] Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 50–53.
[683] Ibid., p. 50; trans. p. 51.
[684] *eDIL s.v. drús.*
[685] Ibid.
[686] *eDIL s.v. báes , baís.*

Mé Éba, ben Ádaim uill;
mé ro sáraig Ísu thall

I am Eve, great Adam's wife;
it is I that outraged Jesus of old.[687]

This self-blame and phrasing are familiar. In it can be seen an echo of Líadain's own apportioning of blame to herself for what has happened to Cuirithir. Both Líadain and Eve blame themselves for harming a man, using a similar structure in verse. But, despite this similarity between their utterances, Líadain's character stands as a contrast to Eve *and* to Eve's words; Líadain is deliberately not *báeth*. Líadain's self-blame also pales in comparison to Eve's as '*Mé Éba*' reaches its final stanza:

Ní bíad eigred in cach dú;
ní bíad geimred gáethmar glé;
nó bíad iffern; ní bíad brón;
ní bíad oman, minbad mé.

There would be no ice in any place;
there would be no glistening windy winter;
there would be no hell; there would be no sorrow;
there would be no fear, were it not for me.[688]

A woman is then blamed for all of the above, including 'hell', 'sorrow', 'fear', and cold weathers. This blaming a woman for all the world's ills brings to mind the Greek myth of Pandora's Jar, but even that myth had the upside of hope, following all of the ills of the box.[689] There is no such redemption here. Even the role of Christ, the ultimate redemptive figure in such a tradition, or Mary, through obedience to God's commands, can be read as being undercut by Eve's claim that it is she who should have been crucified for her misdeeds. In this poem, a woman's voice is used both to blame women for all the world's ills, and to condemn all women after Eve as being *báeth*.

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[687] Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics,* p. 50; trans. p. 51.
[688] Ibid., p. 52; trans. p. 53.
[689] Though the reading of 'hope' as remaining has been challenged (See Franco Montanari, Christos Tsagalis, and Antonios Rengakos, eds., *Brill's Companion to Hesiod* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 77.)

It is in the context of such misogyny that we should read Líadain as remarkable. As mentioned, Clancy highlights Líadain's role as 'the stable one' in the tale, and notes: 'It is her sanity and stability which lead Cuirithir, eventually, to holiness.'[690] Líadain exists as a counterpoint to the stereotype of the *báeth* woman. Líadain is particularly noteworthy as she is a woman whose story *revolves around romantic love*, albeit with a strong focus on love of the divine. This is one obvious domain in which we would expect *báeth* behaviour, particularly with the 'lustful' connotation. Líadain stars in an, at least partly, romantic story and is neither foolish nor lustful; she is sensible every step of the way. Her being sensible is not to say she lacks emotion; she evidently does not. But she stands distinct from the categorisation of women we see in texts such as *Tecosca Cormaic,* or even texts less harsh, but which still portray an assumption of women's weakness or sinfulness.

Not only does Líadain serve as a contrast to the *báeth* women seen elsewhere, she manages to avoid the misogynistic trappings attached to many of the other prominent women in medieval Gaelic literature. Unlike the way in which some scholars have viewed Medb in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Líadain is not a powerful fighting figure undermined both by the narrative itself and by being called out by men.[691] Her conflict with Cummíne does not stem from her being a supernaturally powerful seductress, as does the conflict between Sín and the priests in the late Middle Gaelic *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* ('The Violent Death of Muirchertach mac Erca'),[692] even though Cummíne can be seen as being disparaging of Líadain as we might expect him to be of a more chaotic woman character, such as in calling her Cuirithir's woman. Líadain does, maybe unfairly, blame herself for what has happened to Cuirithir, but she does not go as far as Eve's blaming herself for absolutely everything. When *Tecosca Cormaic* describes women as *dermatcha seirce* 'forgetful of love',[693] Líadain's story and lament stand firmly in opposition to that condemnation. In the context of the misogyny and stereotyping present in many medieval Gaelic texts, Líadain's stability and well-rounded humanity shine through.

4.2.6 Prosimetra and Love

As is to be expected of a tale of two poets, poetry plays a significant role in *L&C*. This is true from the beginning narrative: not only are Líadain and Cuirithir poets, but the reason to delay their union is so that Líadain can finish her tour. Then Mac Da Cherda uses poetry to convey Cuirithir's message to Líadain in secret, as Clancy examines in the context of holy fools.[694] Key conversations are held through poetry; the text is prosimetric, after all, and so even Líadain and Cummíne's argument is rendered in verse.[695] The importance of poetry is so clear that Larson argues that *L&C* is primarily a tale about poetry, in which there is conflict between love of the divine and romantic love, as opposed to the other way around.[696]

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[690] Clancy, 'Women Poets', pp. 69-70.

[691] See Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb'. This view of Medb has been disputed: see, for example, Doris Edel*, Inside the Táin: Exploring Cú Chulainn, Fergus, Ailill, and Medb* (Berlin: Curach Bhán, 2015).

[692] *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*, ed. by Lil Nic Dhonnchadha, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 19 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1964). See p. xix for the language of the text.

[693] Meyer, *The Instructions of King Cormac*, p. 28; trans. p. 29.

Líadain's poetry at the end of the tale is of particular interest. As discussed, Líadain's poem has earned a renown that exceeds that of the tale itself. In the poem, Líadain expresses her own love for Cuirithir; this differs from many of the tales we have thus far examined. In those tales the narrator tells us that X loved Y: here the words of love are Líadain's own. The poem ends:

Ní chela!
ba hé-som mo chrideserc
cía nocarainn cách chenœ.

Deilm ndegœ
rotetaind mo chride-sœ,
rofess nícon bíad cenœ.

Conceal it not!
He was the love of my heart,
If I loved every other.

A roaring flame
Dissolved this heart of mine,
However, for certain it will cease to beat.[697]

Líadain's words offer insight into love, and its challenges; in particular, she uses powerful, negative imagery to explore love's destructive power. She explores love through verse, and specifically refers to Cuirithir as *mo chrideserc*, translated by Meyer as 'the love of my heart'.[698]

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[694] Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', 121.

[695] See Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Prosimetrum in Insular Celtic literature', in *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 99–130.

[696] Larson, 'The Veiled Poet'.

[697] Meyer, *Liadain and Curither*, p. 24; trans. p. 25.

What's more, Líadain's lament can be compared to another instance of poetic reflection on love. Fand's verses in poetry in *Serglige Con Culainn*, and Emer's prose dialogue reflections, are another example of love and its challenges being explored, in characters' voices. Findon states of the tale: 'As this text plays with the expectations of the audience [...] it opens up a new zone of women's discourse which functions on an emotional level rather than a simply structural one.'[699] She highlights in particular the end of the tale: 'This female discourse finds its fullest expression in the extraordinary final scene with its verbal struggle between Emer, Cu Chulainn, and Fand.'[700] Emer discusses the nature of desire:

> *'Acht chena is álaind cech n-derg, is gel cach núa, is caín cech ard, is serb cach gnáth. Cáid cech n-écmais, is faill cech n-aichnid, co festar cach n-éolas.'*[701]
>
> 'But what's red is beautiful, what's new is bright, what's tall is fair, what's familiar is stale. The unknown is honoured, the known is neglected — until all is known.'[702]

Again, we hear a woman's voice talking about the nature of desire in a complex and emotionally rich way.

After it is decided that Cú Chulainn will stay with Emer, Fand discusses her own relationship with her husband, and in verse. We receive from Fand reflection on the nature of love itself:

> *Mád indíu bá dígrais núall,*
> *ní charand mo menma múad:*
> *is éraise in rét int serc:*
> *téit a h-éol cen immitecht.*[703]
>
> As for today, (my) lament is keen,
> my proud spirit [*menma*] does not love him [Manannán]:

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[698] Again, *cride* is often used in the context of love. See *eDIL s.v. cride.*
[699] Findon, *A Woman's Words*, p. 122.
[700] Ibid., p. 124.
[701] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 25.
[702] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, p. 175.
[703] Dillon, *Serglige*, p. 27.

Love [*serc*] is a vain thing
knowledge of it vanishes quickly.[704]

Fand describes *serc* as *'éraise',* for which *eDIL* gives 'useless, insignificant; void'.[705] Not only do we get Fand's thoughts on her own experience of love, but a full condemnation of love itself.[706]

Fand goes on to place the blame on the 'folly' of women, in a verse in which we can see parallels with '*Mé Éba*':

Mad messe bá dethbir dam,
dáig at báetha cíalla ban:
intí fo charus co holl
domrat sund i n-écomlond.

As for me, it was natural,
for the senses of women are foolish [*báeth*]
he whom I loved greatly
has brought me here into unequal combat.[707]

Once again, we see here women as a whole condemned as being *báeth*.[708]

Though Fand laments the situation and blames it on the folly of women, there is a rebuke of Cú Chulainn in the second half of the stanza. The 'unequal combat' mentioned could refer to the fact that Emer comes to the meeting well-armed, with a small army at her back; but it could also refer to the fact that Emer is an unparalleled orator, and one whom Cú Chulainn, it seems, loves deeply. We can note too the construction being used, 'the one that I loved did X', in which we see an echo of Líadain's famous line of poetry *an rocharus rocráidiu*s, 'the one whom I loved I have tormented'.[709] The construction is similar in '*Mé Éba*', as discussed. Though the construction is similar, if we compare the two, the blame is shifted. Even though Fand blames the folly of women initially, there is a rebuke of Cú Chulainn when we reach this construction. As for Líadain (and, later, Eve), she blames herself.

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[704] Findon, *A Woman's Words*, p. 128.
[705] *eDIL s.v. éraise.*
[706] For discussion of Otherworldly women including Fand, and their experience of love, see Joanne Findon, 'A Good (Mortal) Man is Hard to Find: Fand, Macha, Becfhola and Bad Romance', in *Ulidia 4: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Queen's University Belfast, 27–9 June*, ed. by Micheál B. Ó Mainnín and Gregory Toner (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), pp. 116-128.
[707] Ibid., pp. 128-129.
[708] Cf. Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Irish Jezebels: Women Talking. Gendered Discourse in Early Irish Literature', in *Saltair Saíochta, Sanasaíochta agus Seanchais: A Festschrift for Gearóid Mac Eoin*, ed. by Dónall Ó Baoill, Donncha Ó hAodha, and Nollaig Ó Muraíle (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 199-210.
[709] Though see for an alternate reading of the line Ahlqvist, 'A Line in Líadain and Cuirithir', 334.

We get, then, insight into the frames of mind of these three characters (Emer, Fand, and Líadain), one through prose, and two through their poetry. All three additionally give us a view of love in personal terms: Emer espouses the difficulties in a love that lasts a long time and the decay of men's desire for their female partner; Fand chastises both the nature of women and the short-lived nature of love itself; and Líadain confesses her love and takes the blame for what has happened, even while portraying to us the conflict between living a religious life and a life of love. Fand and Líadain are far from the only characters speaking in poetry in medieval Gaelic saga, where prosimetrum abounds, but the degree of similarity in constructions they use, along with Eve in *'Mé Éba'*, allows for comparison between them. Emer, Fand, and Líadain's instances of speech, two of them poetry, from three women in these two tales give us not only a better sense of each character and their situations, but offer us reflections on the nature of love, especially love in conflict, whether the issue is conflicting romantic desires, or the conflict between romantic and divine love. The language of divine love, and eternal folly, as expressed by Eve, finds itself a parallel in the ways in which romantic love is discussed.

4.2.7 Líadain: A Wider Context

Let us refocus more fully on love of the divine. Líadain can also be placed within a wider medieval poetic context, both in Ireland and beyond. In discussing early medieval Gaelic texts relating to the church, Ní Dhonnchadha states:

> A favourite theme is the residency of former wives, or former seculars, in the monastery. It is found in some of the most highly regarded texts, including the poem by Digde ['*Aithbe dam-sa*'], the tale of the Union of Líadan and Cuirither, and the poems attributed to Queen Gormlaith[.][710]

We can see in the seventh-century Insular Latin poem discussed by Peter Dronke and Michael Lapidge, '*Ad deum meum convertere volo*' ('I want to turn to my God'), a similar question regarding romantic love and love of the divine as is raised by *L&C*.[711] Lapidge summarises the poem as examining 'the question of divorce by casting the debate as a dialogue between a man resolutely determined to abandon his wife and enter a monastery, and the wife, who pleads with him in heart-rending terms not to leave her.'[712] While the situation differs from that of Líadain and Cuirithir, with the roles somewhat reversed, this poetic dialogue also explores the potential impact of the desire for a religious life on a romantic relationship.[713] Dronke argued that the dialogue nature of the poem should be considered in light of other early Gaelic poetic dialogues, and stated:

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[710] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church, c. 600-1800', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. by Angela Bourke et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), pp. 45–165 (p. 55).

> I would suggest that the alternating quatrains for man and woman, lover and beloved [...] in which they each give utterance to their own impassioned feelings, were a deeply rooted tradition in ancient Irish lyric, and that the Latin lyric [...] most probably reveals to us an exceptional early reflection of that tradition.[714]

The idea of these utterances having pre-medieval roots in the Gaelic tradition, and in particular the religious context of '*Ad deum meum convertere volo*', are relevant for placing our tale in a wider context in the Gaelic-Latin world.

A wider European medieval context for the nun being tempted by a lover can be seen in the eleventh-century Latin and German poetic dialogue '*Suavissima nunna*' ('Sweetest nun').[715] In the dialogue, a man attempts to convince a nun to sleep with him. She initially resists, citing the eternity of heaven and her loyalty to Christ. The man uses this loyalty in some way to convince the nun (precisely how is unclear),[716] and the poem ends:

> *Laus sit Amori thaz her si bekere*
> *Quam penetrabit ut sol, also si minnen gerno nu sal.*
>
> Praise [be to Love] that he is converting her, [her whom] he will penetrate [like the sun], as [now] she is eager [to love].[717]

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[711] Peter Dronke, "*Ad deum meum convertere volo'* and Early Irish Evidence for Lyrical Dialogues', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (Winter, 1986), 23–32; Michael Lapidge, 'A Seventh-century Insular Latin Debate Poem', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 10 (Winter, 1985), 1-23.

[712] Lapidge, 'A Seventh-century Insular Latin Debate Poem', 1.

[713] Indeed Lapidge notes the similarities and differences between the wife and Líadain's lament. Ibid., 21-22.

[714] Dronke, "*Ad deum*", 32.

[715] Dronke, *Medieval Latin*, pp. 353-55.

[716] Ibid., pp. 280-81.

[717] Ibid., p. 355. The square brackets are Dronke's, and represent 'probable but uncertain readings' from the badly damaged original manuscript.

The nun here then is explicitly said to be tempted by the lover, whereas in *L&C* what exactly happens between Líadain and Cuirithir is more ambiguous. That said, Líadain can clearly be seen as part of a wider medieval trope, best known today in the story of Abelard and Heloise, wherein the effects of a religious life upon a romantic relationship are explored. That Líadain and Cuirithir are poets could be a conscious choice on the author's part to place them within a wider context wherein that discussion takes place through verse.

4.2.8 Caillech Bérri

Discussion of Líadain and reluctant nuns brings us to consider the Caillech Bérri, the old woman[718] of Beare. The examination of *L&C* is often paired with discussion of '*Aithbe dam-sa bés mora*', the Old Gaelic poem known as 'the Lament of the Old Woman of Beare'.[719] The two figures — Líadain and the Caillech — have a few things in common, and indeed Líadain is referenced in a prose prologue which precedes the Caillech's lament.[720] Digde, to whom the poem is ascribed, is of the Corcu Duibne much like Líadain. The poem reads as the lament of an old woman for her youth, and for the world(s) that has passed with her aging; she has hope, however, in the redemption of Christ and the heaven to come. Ní Dhonnchadha categorises the Caillech as a 'revenant', a long-lasting individual who has lived a supernaturally long life.[721] As Ní Dhonnchadha states:

> In the poem, she has become at last an ordinary mortal who cannot postpone death, and is living out her span in a monastery of women: she is now the 'Caillech Béirre that was' [...], the *former* Caillech Béirre. Her bleak vision of the transience of all worldly pleasure is tempered by belief in the Christian heaven.[722]

Much like *L&C*, the tone of '*Aithbe dam-sa*' is ambiguous. There is some degree of celebration of Christ and the heaven that awaits; but the poem also foregrounds what the

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[718] For discussion of the term *caillech* see Ní Dhonnchadha, '*Caillech* and Other Terms'.

[719] Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery'; Larson, 'The Veiled Poet'; Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*'. For edition and translation, see 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare', ed. and trans. by Donncha Ó hAodha, in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, ed. by Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim R. McCone, Maynooth Monographs, 2 (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 308–31.

[720] Ó hAodha, 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare', p. 309.

[721] Cf. Joseph Falaky Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997); Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', pp. 111-14.

[722] Ibid.

Caillech has lost in her old age. The pleasures of a secular life are on full display.[723] In *L&C*, we might expect the entry of Líadain into Heaven to be a happy ending in Christian thought, but we are left touched by the tragedy of the tale; similarly, '*Aithbe dam-sa'* is at its most emotionally affecting when discussing what has been lost with the passing of time and the aging of its primary character. While imagery of Christ and redemption abounds in the poem, one would be hard pressed to argue it is a celebratory poem of future bliss. The Caillech's love of the divine does not stop her loss of secular pleasure being painful.

In terms of criticism of the poem, it has frequently been compared with *L&C* for differing purposes.[724] For Clancy, and for Callan building on Clancy, '*Aithbe dam-sa'* offers another text like Líadain's poetry where we can think of women's authorship as 'probable, if not provable'.[725] Larson highlights the fact that the Caillech 'speaks of and to Christ', in a manner not dissimilar to Líadain addressing Cuirithir.[726] We might consider this an instance wherein direct speech with the divine beloved is possible; love of the divine is here being expressed verbally, like a Líadain might address her Cuirithir.

Given the existence of the tale title *Serc Caillige Berre do Fhothud Chanand,* the Caillech does seem to have experienced romantic love beyond the confines of this poem. The poem is attributed to Digde, and Ní Dhonnchadha states that there is support to 'argue strongly that the poem was indeed composed by a female poet named Digde, of the Corco Duibne, who, at some stage in her life, became a nun.'[727] A woman-poet, now nun, lamenting the past is familiar to us, and in one instance we are given the detail the Caillech is veiled by Cummíne.[728] The past in the Caillech's lament is vivid and lively, in a way in which leaves the depiction of heaven somewhat lacking. We might read the Caillech's lament, for all its talk of heaven, as showing the wonders and pleasures of the secular life, which salvation fails to transcend. This reading could also be applied to *L&C*; we end with the reader asking what heaven is worth sacrificing for.

For John Carey, however, the Caillech's regret, while 'clearly an important feature' is not the crux of the poem. Instead, Carey argues that the poem is about eternal Christian salvation.[729] He states:

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[723] Ibid., p. 114.
[724] For discussion of general 20th-century scholarship on the text, see John Carey, 'Transmutations and Immortality in the Lament of the Old Woman of Beare', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 30–37.
[725] Clancy, 'Women Poets'; Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*'.
[726] Larson, 'The Veiled Poet', p. 268.
[727] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', p. 111.
[728] See Callan, p. 209.
[729] Carey, 'Transmutations and Immortality', 35.

> The poem's Christian argument is expressed almost wholly in negative terms, in the laying bare of the tragic character of the merely temporal. Its conception of the world, where the visible is a snare and only the unseen is of lasting worth, is reflected on the level of structure and diction: what is most important is what we do not see and are not told.[730]

For Carey, then, the true focus of the poem is the meditation on the eternal nature of salvation, as opposed to the temporary nature of the secular world. Such a reading might be applied to *L&C*: while a tragic romance is at its heart, or 'clearly an important feature', the eternal salvation of Líadain at the tale's end is key. The idea of the seen and unseen, as Carey expresses it, is possibly another area in which L&C plays with expectations: for so much of the tale, Líadain and Cuirithir cannot see each other, whether because they are in different locations entirely, or are separated in their shared location. Whereas in '*Aithbe dam-sa'*, 'the visible is a snare and only the unseen is of lasting worth',[731] in *L&C* our two main characters go between states of being seen and unseen, as part of a wider context of ambiguity in the tale. It is unclear whether, had Líadain lived on without Cuirithir, she would resemble Carey's interpretation of Digde, appreciating salvation. Or might she have more resembled the nameless nun in the pre-twelfth-century Latin lyric '*Plangit nonna*' ('A nun laments'),[732] who outlines her sorry state as a nun, and ends with:

> *Iuvenis, ne moreris!*
> *faciam quod precipis;*
> *dormo mecum!*
>
> Young man, please don't delay! I'll do your bidding; sleep with me![733]

4.2.9 Emotional Ambiguity

One might then ask, what is *L&C*'s purpose? Or, to specifically address one aspect of purpose: how is one supposed to feel at the end of *L&C*?[734] For some, this tale stands as a statement of the importance, or even superiority, of spiritual union relative to romantic reunion. Such a reading suggests one should feel happy with the story's conclusion: though Líadain and Cuirithir do not get what we now would consider a 'happy ending', that is, romantic union, they are united through the divine, and may both achieve entry into Heaven through opposing worldly desire. And one might even feel proud of Líadain for remaining ‘faithful’, even in spite of her own desires.

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[730] Ibid.

[731] Ibid.

[732] For date, see Dronke, *Medieval Latin*, p. 360.

[733] Ibid., pp. 358-59.

[734] There is also the question of whether how we are *supposed* to feel is of more intrinsic value than the question of how we actually feel. One is an attempt to reconstruct the expectations of the author(s) and original audience, and the other is clearly not.

For others, *L&C* gives them the lack of closure Líadain and Cuirithir themselves suffer. Modern readers, but also arguably an early medieval audience familiar with Derdriu and others, might expect the completion of a romantic relationship in the tale, even one with a tragic ending. Religion, particularly as signified by Cummíne, but also by Líadain, whose choice forms a pivot on which the tale turns, is the enemy of romantic fulfilment in the tale. If this follows the Tristan paradigm, Carney argues, God, signified by Cummíne, is Mark, the impedimentary character to the young lovers;[735] religion is the obstacle in the way of the lovers that here, ultimately, they cannot overcome.

One might even read *L&C* as a cautionary tale of the harm done to society when religious figures are turned to for their tutelage regarding romantic love: as Cuirithir states at the beginning, the child of Líadain and Cuirithir would have been an excellent poet.[736] The (secular) world loses not only Líadain and Cuirithir, but the potential outcome of their union, which is set up in the beginning lines of the text. That Cuirithir interacts with a saint and then disappears could be read as the power wielded by saints (for example, creating Wild Men) harming society.

The loss to the secular world of the potential of a child of Líadain and Cuirithir is reminiscent of the late ninth-, early tenth-century tale[737] *Aided Óenfhir Aífe* (‘The Death of Aífe’s Only Son’), in which Cú Chulainn kills his own son after failing to recognise him. The youth makes clear this waste of potential:

> *‘Dīa mbeinn-sea etraib co cend cōic mbliadan, no silfind-se firu in betha reimib for cach leth [ocus] congabthai rīghi co Rōim.’*[738]

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[735] Carney, ‘The Irish Affinities’, p. 221.

[736] Here we are accepting the logic of the narrative world.

[737] Meyer dated the tale to the ninth century (‘The Death of Conla’, ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer, *Ériu,* 1 (1904), 113–121 (113)), but van Hamel argues for ‘the later ninth or tenth century’ (*Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, ed. by A. G. van Hamel, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 3 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1933), p. 9.). Dillon accepted a ninth century date: Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 16.

[738] Meyer, ‘The Death of Conla’, 120.

> ‘If I were among you to the end of five years, I should vanquish the men of the world before you on every side, and you would hold kingship as far as Rome.’[739]

While time is not spent in the text on the loss to the world from the lack of romantic union between Líadain and Cuirithir, it is given some prominence as one of the opening lines of the tale. While the tale may be a spiritual success story, the secular world suffers from Líadain and Cuirithir being kept apart. This is particularly true of the world of poetry, lending some credence to Larson's argument that this is ultimately a tale about poetry.

How we are supposed to feel after *L&C* is, then, a complex question. Ultimately, like the tale itself, how we should feel about the final union of Líadain and Cuirithir is ambiguous. The tale can be both a parable of saintly ideals in secular characters leading to their eternal salvation, *and* a cautionary tale of the dangers to society of religion overreaching into personal relationships. Both readings have evidence for them, as discussed, and evidence against them. For if one is to read the tale as pro-salvation, not anti-religion, it is remarkable how poorly Cummíne comes across in the tale, as Clancy has noted.[740] There is also the fact that, despite talk of salvation, only Líadain is explicitly said to enter heaven.[741]

On the other hand, modern readers are arguably much more likely to emphasise the importance of romantic love in a text. One must be aware of this and other biases in engaging with *L&C*. The influence of the church is also presumed in much of our medieval Gaelic literature; the image of these texts being written down is that of an ecclesiastical scribe. One would not necessarily expect a text written in an ecclesiastical setting to be showing a story of salvation as tragedy simply because a secular love was not fulfilled.

We might return to hermeneutics, however. If one assumes from the outset that A) the tale must be in favour of love of the divine given its presumed place of writing, and that B) the romantic aspects of the text were therefore less important in readings of the text in the past than they are today, one might ignore what is in front of one in favour of what best suits one's preconceptions about the period. If one reads *L&C* and is struck by the tragic love tale within it, but then tempers one's conclusions about the text based solely on one's (albeit educated) presumptions of the text’s background, one risks not seeing the woods for the trees. We should not let our assumptions and preconceptions cloud our interpretation of the tale.

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[739] Ibid., 121.

[740] Clancy, ‘Saint and Fool’, p. 206.

[741] Meyer, *Líadain and Curithir*, p. 26.

4.3 *L&C* Conclusion

Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir is an intertextually rich work that shows a familiarity with and playfulness towards the tropes and trends of medieval Gaelic literature. It draws on traditions both hagiographic and relating to saga; it may evoke the Wild Man trope; it gives us Líadain as a character, a woman in love who is expressly not *báeth* but a well-rounded, human woman. It gives us a key text in our understanding of medieval Gaelic love: as many scholars state, it is a text in which we see divine and romantic love in conflict. Going further than that, however, it also explores the nature of love of the divine. The emotion towards God expressed by Líadain is fear, yet she stands up to the stand-in for God, Cummíne; we see her devotion through action instead. Líadain sacrifices her own happiness with Cuirithir, and his with her. Cuirithir's experience with love of the divine is altogether different, as is his experience of romantic love. In terms of romance, Líadain is sorrowful when discussing her relationship with Cuirithir, but the events of *L&C* might be read as leaving Cuirithir *mer*. In terms of devotion, Líadain becomes a *caillech*, and Cuirithir might become something reminiscent of a Wild Man en route to a life of Christian devotion, such as we see with Suibhne. The two figures as representative of men and women have different experiences of love, both romantic and divine. The text gives us an insight into how people of different genders may experience love of each other and of God.

4.4 Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca

A tale worth considering in the context of *L&C* is the Late Middle Gaelic tale *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*.[742] The tale will be discussed further in the next chapter; as such, only the most pertinent elements for the current discussion will be highlighted here. In the tale, Sín, a woman with Otherworld-like qualities, seduces Muirchertach, a king. Muirchertach is married when his association with Sín begins; Sín gets him to send his wife and family away. Muirchertach's wife, Dúaibsech, tells a saint, Cairnech, what is going on.[743] The saint curses Muirchertach's dwelling. Sín goes on to poison

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[742] *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*, ed. by Lil Nic Dhonnchadha, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 19 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1964).

[743] As Williams points out, 'From the compulsive, destabilizing relationship of a king with an apparent goddess, we turn (with a reversal of the axes of gender and authority), to the wholesome interaction between a woman and a holy bishop, her confessor.' Mark Williams, 'Lady Vengeance: A Reading of Sín in *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 62 (2011), 1–32 (11).

Muirchertach, feeding him enchanted food and drink. Muirchertach hallucinates, goes mad, and loses all his strength, at various points. At one point through his torment Muirchertach goes to see clerics, who feed him the Eucharistic Host and holy water, which clears his mind; but Sín again feeds him enchanted food and brings him back under her sway. Muirchertach dies, but not before confessing to Cairnech. Sín reveals her identity: she is the last living member of her family, whom Muirchertach killed. His ruin and death are her revenge. Sín confesses to the clerical characters who have been present in the tale and dies of remorse for killing the king. The tale ends with a list of saints and one king (Túathal Máelgarb) who have transmitted the tale.

Mark Williams argues persuasively for a reading of Sín as a supernaturally gifted human: 'The ending of the tale makes it clear that Sín is as human as Muirchertach, and is what other texts would call a *bandruí* or *banthúaithech*, a druidess or witch.'[744] For Ralph O'Connor, 'Muirchertach is led away from effective rulership and Christian faith by a sorceress.'[745] For Herbert, the tale, though set in the sixth century, has a 'vantage point [which is] firmly contemporary',[746] concerning the (mis)conduct of twelfth-century king Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn.[747] Regarding the characterisation of Sín, Herbert states: 'His portrayal of the evil-initating female [...] may be regarded as subverting whatever positive image the pre[-]Christian sovereignty goddess may have retained.'[748] Ní Dhonnchadha states that Sín is 'undoubtedly a witch rather than a demon or one of the *áes side*.'[749] If Sín is seen as a sorceress or witch, she can be seen to employ the motifs of Otherworldly women in order to appeal to the king. That she uses these tropes points to her role in desire and desirability; as was established in the chapter on romantic love, the Otherworldly woman is a particular paragon of desirability, especially to kings and heroic men. Thus *Aided Muirchertaig*, in evoking an aspect of the traditions of romantic desire in medieval Gaelic texts, both conveys and reinforces the idea that women of the Otherworld were considered desirable.

Regarding Muirchertach, we might then recall the notion of the Wild Man, and, as Clancy formulates, the transgression that leads to madness.[750] Cairnech does explicitly curse Muirchertach's *baile*, and makes a grave for the king.[751] While most have read the tale as being about Sín's revenge, given the context we are examining, this saint's curse is not to be underestimated.

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[744] Ibid.

[745] Ralph O'Connor, 'Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*', *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 117–43 (140).

[746] Máire Herbert, 'The Death of Muirchertach Mac Erca: a Twelfth-Century Tale', in *Celts and Vikings: Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, ed. by Folke Josephson (Göteborg: Meijerbergs institut för svensk etymologisk forskning, Göteborgs universitet, 1997), pp. 27-39 (p. 36).

[747] Ibid., p. 34.

[748] Ibid., p. 31.

[749] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 213.

[750] Clancy, 'Saint and Fool', p. 198.

[751] Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*, p. 7.

Aided Muirchertaig can even be characterised as a tale of conflict between love of the divine and ruinous secular desire, centring on the titlular Muirchertach. The tale is not so much a conflict between Muirchertach's wife Dúaibsech and Sín.[752] Sín demands that Dúaibsech be sent away, and she is; Dúaibsech later tells the clerics what has happened to Muirchertach; and then, after Muirchertach's own death, Dúaibsech dies of grief.[753] The extent to which she is in active conflict with Sín is negligible. In comparison, the clerics try (with temporary success) to weaken Sín's grip on the king, and at the end they hear Muirchertach's confession, and the prayer that Cairnech composes in the king's memory grants him entry to Heaven. The tale is not a tug-of-war over Muirchertach between two women, but rather between Sín and the church. Williams describes the tale as 'the story of a young woman's implacable and **successful quest** to avenge the murder of her family by humiliating and destroying no less than the King of Ireland himself.'[754] While Sín does destroy Muirchertach, the degree to which she is successful in her revenge depends on our definition of successful revenge; Sín does also die, of grief. With Sín's confession at the tale's end not only is the church the ultimate winner in the case of Muirchertach's soul, but it is also triumphant over Sín's fate too. The tale ends with the reminder that this text has been kept and propagated by the clergy.

We will return to *Aided Muirchertaig* in Chapter Five. For now, we note the clerics of *Aided Muirchertaig* are the victorious side in the tug-of-war over devotion to God and secular desire. They are the 'good guys' to Sín's obvious malevolence. Only through God is Muirchertach redeemed, and such is His power that even the seemingly unstoppable Sín cannot ultimately win. She confesses, and dies of grief, and the king she set out to ruin may have been ruined in the secular world, but will enter Heaven. In the battle of love of the divine and secular desire, *Aided Muirchertaig* can be read as saying, one is truly sustaining; the other is only illusory. The question of what is truly sustaining versus what is false shall return as we examine the poem '*Ísucán'*.

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[752] There may be some significance, even if solely in terms of contrast, in the meanings of Sín and Dúaibsech's names: 'bad weather, storm', and 'gloomy; sad; ill-starred', respectivaly. *eDIL s.v. 1 sín; dúaibsech*

[753] See Mac Mathúna, 'Lexical and Literary Aspects of 'Heart' in Irish', 15, for discussion of Dúaibsech's death.

[754] Williams, 'Lady Vengeance', 25. Emphasis my own.

4.5 *'Ísucán'*

'*Ísucán'* is a late Old Gaelic poem, dated by Murphy to 'perhaps about A.D. 900'.[755] The poem is in the voice of St Íte.[756] Ó Riain writes that Íte, or Íde, of Killeedy was a sixth-century saint who, after Brigit, 'was perhaps the best-known of all Irish female saints'.[757] In the poem, Íte talks of Ísucán, 'Jesukin', the Christ-child in fosterage with her. At one point the speaker addresses *ingena,* 'girls/maidens' specifically, and argues for the superiority of a personal relationship with Christ. Such a relationship is praised over the secular riches and relationships, in such an absolute way we can see it as contrasting with *L&C* and '*Aithbe dam-sa'*:

Maic na ruirech maic na ríg
im thír cía do-ísatan
ní úaidib saílim sochor
is tochu limm Ísucán.

Though princes and princelings
Come to my country
Not from such do I look for a sound contract;
I set higher hopes on Ísucán.[758]

The work was often transmitted with a prose anecdote containing a prefatory tale to the poem. In the short tale, Íte fosters a beetle which eats her breast; the nuns kill the beetle in error; and Íte receives the Christ-child as her (new) foster-child. [759]

As already established, '*Ísucán'* has been a poem of interest to many scholars who have discussed *L&C*, and '*Aithbe dam-sa',* particularly given that all three have in common women speakers discussing religious matters. The areas of contrast and comparison between the three texts are illuminating. For our purposes, it is also notable as another example of a poem wherein emotions are expressed in the speaker's own words: a recurring theme of this chapter is the richness of poetry, wherein we hear about feelings directly, as opposed to prose wherein it is asserted that 'X loves Y'.[760] '*Ísucán'* also offers a take on love of the divine that we have not encountered so far, one grounded in physical affection and evoking the familial love of fosterage. While there has been writing on the love of Íte for the Christ-child in terms of the emotions of fosterage, and on the trope of saints fostering as a whole,[761] we are here focusing on Íte's fostering as an expression of love of the divine.

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[755] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', p. 80; Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, p. 183. Quin cites Murphy on this front, and states that the poem is 'substantially in Old Irish'. Quin, 'The Early Irish Poem *Ísucán',* 41.
[756] For more on St Íte, see Jenny C. Bledsoe, 'St Ita of Killeedy and Spiritual Motherhood in the Irish Hagiographical Tradition', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 32 (2012), 1–29.
[757] Pádraig Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), p. 375.
[758] Quin, 'The Early Irish Poem *Ísucán'*, 43; trans. 49.
[759] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', p. 80.

In '*Ísucán'* we see a different take on love of the divine; we see a personified Christ-child and physical bond with the divine. The love Íte feels is all-consuming, and elevates the relationship with Christ above riches, nobility, and (implicitly) sex. Overall, '*Ísucán'* offers a view of love of the divine that is very personal, which contrasts with our saga text *L&C* in its clear-cut elevation of love of the divine over romance. And through comparison with another saga text, *Aided Muirchertaig*, we see the potential for love of the divine to be expressed differently along gender lines.

4.5.1 Physicality

As mentioned, Christ is personified in the poem as the Christ-child Ísucán 'Jesukin'. The poem begins:

Ísucán
  alar limm in dísertán

Ísucán
who is in fosterage with me in my hermitage.[762]

As the poem goes on, we get two instances of Ísucán being described as at Íte's breast: Jesus and *fir nime* 'the people of heaven' are *frim chride cach n-oénadaig* 'beside my heart every night', and *cía beith im ucht Ísucán* 'even though he be in my bosom'.[763] The bond between Íte and Ísucán is physicalised.

We have seen in Cummíne in *L&C* a stand-in for God. Ísucán is different, for a few reasons. The child at the speaker's breast is Christ. And unlike with Cummíne, we are seeing the personification of the divine receiving physical affection. It is not only a divine bond between Íte and Ísucán, but an explicitly physical one: we see love of the divine expressed through physical intimacy with the divine. While other characters may express love of the divine in physical ways (for example, through fasting), in '*Ísucán'* we see direct physical link between the lover of the divine and the divine itself.

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[760] This is true of this chapter's examples, but should not be taken as a comment on all poetry and prose in medieval Gaelic literature.
[761] See, in particular, O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland,* pp. 131-72; Lahney Preston-Matto, 'Saints and Fosterage in Medieval Ireland: A Sanctified Social Practice', *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies*, 5 (2011), 62–78.
[762] Quin, 'The Early Irish Poem *Ísucán*', 43; trans. 46.
[763] Ibid., 43; trans. 46, 50.

That Ísucán is 'beside my heart' and 'in my bosom' (the operative word is *ucht*, 'breast' or 'bosom')[764] conveys a physical closeness with Christ. It also evokes the image of a mother nurturing their young, a gendered expression of love we will shortly discuss. Reid in particular has written on '*Ísucán'* and the wider image of suckling in 'insular culture'.[765] She points to the ability of women other than Mary to play the role of Christ's mother in medieval Gaelic literature, particularly Brigit.[766] Callan has also written of 'mystical motherhood' in the medieval Gaelic tradition in the context of '*Ísucán'*, including 'other virgins [...] nursing Christ', and again, 'St. Brigid is hailed as the mother of Christ.'[767] Íte is not alone in the medieval Irish tradition. For our purposes though, the evocation of (foster-)mother and child in '*Ísucán'* gives a glimpse of physical affection for the personified divine.

A striking element of the love Íte expresses for Ísucán is its all-consuming nature. *Is bréc uile acht Ísucán* the first stanza ends, 'all is false save Jesukin.'[768] Later in the poem we hear of the 'kings' sons' coming to stay with Íte, but *is tochu limm Ísucán* she states.[769] This is translated by Ní Dhonnchadha as 'I've hopes of more from Jesukin',[770] and by Murphy as 'I love little Jesus better.'[771] Literally, the line is '*tochu* with me (that is, in my opinion) is Ísucán'. *Tochu*, from *doich*, may be translated as 'more desirable', 'preferable'.[772]

The two outright statements of emotion regarding Ísucán are powerful, and point to a powerful love. Not even the sons of kings are preferable to Íte, and 'all is false' in comparison with the child. Íte's words convey a powerful, all-consuming love on her part. Íte's love contrasts boldly with the fear of God discussed in Líadain in *L&C*. If fear is a first step on the path to the love of the divine, Íte is much further along said path than Líadain. This might be expected, given Íte is living a life that would earn her sainthood. That all else is 'false' to Íte suggests the superiority of the spiritual life.

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[764] *eDIL s.v. ucht.*
[765] Jennifer Karyn Reid, 'Human Frontiers in Medieval Irish Religious Literature', in *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, The New Middle Ages (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 133–52 (p. 147).
[766] Ibid. The idea of Brigid being like Mary in medieval Ireland is examined in Diane Peters Auslander, 'Gendering the '*Vita Prima*': An Examination of St. Brigid's Role as 'Mary of the Gael'', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 20/21 (2000), 187–202.
[767] Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*', p. 219.
[768] Quin, '*Ísucán'*, 43; trans. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', p. 80.
[769] Quin, '*Ísucán'*, 43.
[770] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', p. 80.
[771] Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, p. 29.
[772] *eDIL s.v. doich.*

Indeed, the relationship with Christ is elevated in the poem above riches, nobility, and (implicitly) sex. Íte prefers Ísucán to 'rich clerics';[773] this spiritual link with Christ is more important than riches. Íte also prefers Ísucán to 'sons of kings',[774] suggesting nobility. We can also read in an implicit rejection of a sexual, romantic life for a spiritual one. The 'sons of kings' line evokes similar ideas to '*Aithbe dam-sa'*, wherein the Caillech looks back on her previously sexual life, and kings are explicitly mentioned. Even Íte's rejection of 'rich clerics' can be read as a rejection of sex and romance. For Callan:

> Although priests may here serve simply as humans par excellence, whom Christ easily overshadows, this may have been an argument presented to women for choosing virginal motherhood of the Christ-child over romances with priests.[775]

Read in this way, one can see Íte rejecting a sexual-romantic life in favour of a spiritual one, with much more zeal than either Líadain or the Caillech.

Íte is not *báeth*. Like Líadain, she stands in marked contrast to the portrayal of other women in medieval Gaelic literature. And like both Líadain and the Caillech, we have her own words,[776] in poetry, setting forth her world view. Within that world view, we see the spiritual life portrayed as superior to the secular and sexual. Like Colm Cille being praised for resisting *accobar*, Íte here addresses *ingena* and urges them to resist the lures of wealth, nobility, and sex, for an ultimately more fulfilling relationship.

4.6 The Gendering of Love of the Divine

In '*Ísucán'*, Íte's love of the divine is expressed in keeping with ideas of motherly love. The bond between Íte and Christ is a physical one of nurturing. Íte is also nurtured by the connection, as conveyed through her rejection of various symbols of the secular love. It is worth noting too that Íte is not actively portrayed as a bride of Christ, but as his foster-mother. While we have come across the idea of love of the divine being like that of the love of a son for their father, we here have that contrasted. The human Íte plays the parental role, and she does so in a way which is expressly tied to womanhood. It is not only that Ísucán's position can be seen to suggest suckling; repeatedly throughout the poem, men are rejected from this contact with the divine. As Callan states:

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[773] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', p. 80.
[774] Ibid.
[775] Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*', p. 219.
[776] As a character; I am not stating the actual St Íte wrote *Ísucán*.

> Significantly, all those who are found lacking in some way — priests, sons of kings, or base-born churls — are males, whereas females are invited to share the inclusive intimacy of the motherhood of God, to become, like Mary, both virgin and mother.[777]

The motherhood of God is not a connection, the poem suggests, that men can share with Christ. The men of the poem are, in Callan's words, 'found lacking'. We have here a unique way in which gender and love interact; only women can hope to express their love of the divine in being Christ's foster-mother.

There is, however, a clear tradition of male saints in medieval Gaelic literature nursing the Christ-child. As Jenny Bledsoe states:

> Ita is the only Irish woman whose tradition features such an episode, while several male saints — Moling (d. 696), Adomnán of Iona (d. 704), Colmán Elo (d. 611), Fregius (who suckles St Berach (d. 595)), and Findchu (d. 655) — either engage with the Christ child or breastfeed saintly infants.[778]

Caroline Walker Bynum has written on the wider 'Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother' trope from the twelfth century onwards,[779] but Bledsoe points out 'Ita's spiritual motherhood predates the Cistercian trend'.[780] The phenomenon of nursing the Christ child or other saints, and that Ite is the only Irish woman who does the same, points to a distinct feature of '*Ísucán*': Íte physically nursing the Christ child does not exclude men from a similar relationship with Christ. This is fascinating given that breastfeeding is a gendered act, but it is not outwith the abilities of men in the tradition. Instead, it is Íte's words which convey the ways in which men can be 'found lacking'.

The peaceful nurturing of '*Ísucán*' and other saints in religious material contrasts sharply with some instances of love of the divine we see from laymen in tales. In the Early

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[777] Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*', pp. 219-20.
[778] Bledsoe, 'St Ita', 1.
[779] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,' in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 110-69.
[780] Bledsoe, 'St Ita', 1.

Gaelic tale *Aided Chonchobair*, 'The Violent Death of Conchobar',[781] we see Conchobar's reaction to hearing of the crucifixion. In all four recensions of the tale (Recensions A and B are Old Gaelic, and C and D Middle Gaelic),[782] Conchobar dies upon hearing of Christ's death. Conchobar has Mes Gegra's calcified brain lodged inside his own; he is instructed not to over-exert himself, or he will die. The eventual over-exertion comes, as it was always going to.[783] When Conchobar is told of Christ's crucifixion, Conchobar becomes so enraged that Mes Gegra's shrunken head bursts from him, killing him. In certain tales, Conchobar also shares a birth date with Christ; Recension C makes this explicit:

> *ro fíarfaig Conchobar immurgu do Chathbad dús cid ro mbátar na dúili. 'Do chomalta-sa', olsé, 'in fer ro génair i n-óenaidchi frit, innossa martrae do-cuirthe fair' [...] [Conchobar:] 'Is é sin éim', ol se, 'mo chom alta-sa ⁊ mo chomas ⁊ is é ro génair i n-óenaidchi frium'.*
>
> Conchobar asked of Cathbad what ailed the elements. 'Your own foster-brother,' said he, 'He who was born on the same night as you, just now has been martyred. [...]'. [Conchobar said:] 'He is indeed my foster-brother and coeval, and it is He that was born in the same night with me[.]'[784]

We have then, in one recension of the tale, the tie between Christ and Conchobar being made explicit as one of foster-brotherhood.

The idea of fosterage also rears its head in Cinaed ua hArtacáin's poem, Recension D of *Aided Conchobair*. In the poem, Mes Gegra's calcified brain, lodged in Conchobar's head, is portrayed as an unruly guest in a Christan host. Addressing the brain, the poem reads:

> *Ciapsat náma dó rot-chelt, secht mbliadna lána rot-alt.*
>
> Though you were an enemy to him, he sheltered you, he nourished you for seven full years.[785]

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[781] Kobel, '*Aided Chonchobair*'. See also Helen Imhoff, 'The Different Versions of '*Aided Chonchobair*', *Ériu*, 62 (2012), 43-99.

[782] Kobel, '*Aided Chonchobair*', 'Summary'.

[783] Clancy notes the ways in which Conchobar's life once the brain is in him in Recension A resembles that of a penitent, foreshadowing his ascension at the tale's end. Again we see restricting one's own wants and activities as a part of love of the divine. Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon/Means of Grace: Mess-Gegra's Brain in *The Death of Conchobor*', *Æstel*, 4 (1996), 87–115 (99).

[784] Kobel, '*Aided Chonchobair*', p. 378 (trans. p. 380).

[785] Meyer, *The Death Tales*, pp. 18-19.

Though translated by Meyer as ‘he nourished you’, *rot-alt* can also mean ‘he fostered you’.[786] The brain, as Clancy states, ‘commits treachery upon its Christian host Conchobar’,[787] acting as something of an unfaithful fosterling. Of particular interest to us is this framing as fosterage: the warrior-king Conchobar might not be expected to host an enemy, but the Conchobar who will go on to be redeemed does. The good Christian that the tale is setting Conchobar up to be is a fosterer, with all the positive connotation that implies in medieval Gaelic, of even his enemies.

For some, the idea that Conchobar’s rage is an expression of love of the divine might not be convincing. However, if one accepts fear of God as part of medieval thought on love of the divine, as discussed in the context of Augustinian thought, it is not going too far to take to consider that another emotion which seems unlinked to love (namly, (justified) rage) could be seen as connected to love. Conchobar hears of Christ’s death and reacts like one might expect him to on hearing of the death of a loved one; a brother, even. In the next chapter ideas of rage and revenge for loved ones, and when one might say they can be read as love, will be further explored. For now, it can be accepted that love of the divine might not be the *only* reading of Conchobar’s rage, but that it is a possible reading.

Indeed, this argument might be bolstered by the examples of relationships between men and the divine thus far discussed. The idea of madness, torment, or hurt as part of a man’s love of the divine has been a recurring theme in this chapter, from Suibhne to Cuirithir and now to Conchobar. This ties back into the wider notion of extreme emotion moving men to extremes, whether madness like the Wild Men, or wasting sickness like Óengus. Conchobar’s rage, like a Wild Man’s madness, is tied to a love for the divine; Conchobar already, it seems, feels that love, whereas madness seems to be a step on the journey for Wild Men.[788]

Conchobar’s rage could not contrast more with Íte’s serene nurturing. With the two examples, one has vivid glimpses of love of the divine split along a gendered line. Íte’s foster-motherhood shows a physical and spiritual connection to the divine, a direct link, in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. Conchobar’s extreme rage, at a distance from Christ (having heard only through a druid of what happened), conveys an image of men unable to access that direct connection to the divine. There is often madness in this lack of connection, or in the attempt to connect to the divine. In contrast to Íte, and even in contrast to Líadain and the Caillech, men can be 'found lacking' in trying to connect with the divine.[789] It is Líadain, after all, who becomes a nun, presumably before Cuirithir takes up an ecclesiastical life; and the Caillech may not be whole-heartedly loving of the ecclesiastical life, but can still access it, and specifically contrasts it with days surrounded by kings. Despite the portrayals of women as *báeth* in early medieval Gaelic literature, these three texts show an altogether different image. We see in them the potential of women connecting to Christ on a level above their male counterparts, being better able to express that connection, and being able to love the divine without being destroyed by it.

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[786] *eDIL s.v. 1 ailid.*

[787] Clancy, ‘Lethal Weapon/Means of Grace’, 111.

[788] Clancy also examines the role of fools in *Aided Conchobair*, along with the ‘thin but distinct tramline of madness which runs through the tale’. Ibid., 101.

That said, the depictions of gender as it relates to love of the divine is dependent on genre. When we focus on Cuirithir and Conchobar, we get a different image of men's interactions with the divine than were we to examine hagiographies of male saints. On a similar note, Conchobar can be considered something of an outlier, even compared to Cuirithir. Of the characters we have discussed in this chapter, Conchobar is not living in a Christian Ireland. Though his life is tied to Christ's, this difference in setting impacts his ability to access Christianity more generally.

Overall, '*Ísucán'* offers a view of love of the divine that is particularly personal. The physical and motherly nature of the love contrasts with the saga text *L&C* in its elevation of love of the divine over romance. There is no doubt here, no ambiguity. And through comparison with this other saga text, *Aided Conchobair*, the potential for love of the divine to be expressed differently in men and in women is again seen. Both may tie into fosterage and familial love; but madness, or hurt, it seems, may be a necessary aspect of some men's love of the divine.

4.7 Conclusion

Love of the divine in medieval Gaelic saga differs in several ways from romantic love; especially if we consider even fear comprising an aspect of faith. An emphasis is placed on adherence to duty. Romantic love and love of the divine do share loyalty, and even rage, as elements of their spectra. When one sees characters torn between fulfilling religious duty and following their romantic desires, one can see a conflict between two loves, and one can see love of the divine expressed through action. But this is not the only way in which love of the divine appears. Love of the divine is also seen expressed as closer to familial love:

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[789] See Callan, 'Líadain's *Lament*', p. 219. Men can be 'found lacking' in the sagas in particular, which are our primary focus.

not only the notion that love of God is love of a son for the father, but also, the idea of Christ as a figure of familial love.

The intertextuality of medieval Gaelic saga comes to the fore when discussing love of the divine. Our main case study, *L&C*, may draw on hagiographic tradition, poetry, and other sagas in particular. This intertextuality does not end at allusions or references however, but full-on challenges to orthodoxy. Líadain, like many of the women we have examined in this chapter, stands in marked contrast to the misogynistic portrayals of women in general as *báeth* in medieval Gaelic literature. The ways in which characters challenge or affirm orthodoxies of gender — whether Líadain and Cuirithir, Íte, Conchobar, or male saints nursing the Christ-child — convey nuance amongst the generalisations of frequent misogyny.

Men and madness, and how they tie to love of the divine, have been key themes in our discussion. For men, we can see madness and wandering as steps on the journey towards reconciliation and love of the divine. It is not that Cuirithir fits the Wild Man paradigm exactly, but that one could argue it asbeing evoked. We can see Cuirithir's flight at the end as part of his journey towards a spiritual life, away from a romantic one. We might expect at some point in his story a restoration such as Suibhne experiences before entry to Heaven, or a situation like Muirchertach in *Aided Muirchertaig* experiences wherein he confesses, and eventually his soul is saved for heaven. Even for Conchobar, his final fatal rage at hearing of Christ's death can be seen as an expression of love.

The notion of madness and love of the divine is not far removed from lovesickness and romantic desire.[790] Altogether there is an image here of men who are struck with physical, mental, or emotional illness when a strong emotion has been stirred. Just as an Otherworldly woman can inspire lovesickness, so too can a saint's curse invoke madness in a man. Excessive emotion, as Conchobar's death shows, can be deadly for men. This is a thought to which will be returned when examining familial love, revenge, and (death by) grief in the next chapter.

Also reinforced is the notion of love and desire being connected to the senses. In *L&C* was seen the would-be lovers choosing whether to be separated along sight or hearing lines. While not generally the case for love of the divine in any obvious way — seeing or hearing God is not common in our saga texts — there is also a physicality to certain interactions with the divine. Generally, the relationship with God contrasts with romantic love in that it is not sensual, or evoking the senses; however, that is not the only expression of love of the divine we have seen. In '*Ísucán'* one sees a clear physicality to the connection between Íte and the Christ-child, with the latter being nursed by the former. Also one can think of fasting, for instance, as a physical act: depriving oneself of the pleasure of tasting things in penance or worship as strengthening faith. Thus, through fasting, and acts of depriving the senses, a love of the divine can be shown.

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[790] Indeed, we see women cured of their madness through sex, a cure for lovesickness in the medieval Euro-Arabian tradition.

There is a range of views in our texts on the question of whether the ecclesiastical or the secular life is more fulfilling, and how it is so. Frequently, the answer comes down to love and desire. The depiction of love of the divine ranges from fear of God, to sacrificing one's personal romantic fulfilment in the name of God, to the maternal nursing of the Christ-child. Along gender lines, love of the divine is expressed differently. For women, there is Líadain's careful attempt to navigate the divide between love of the divine and romantic love. There is the Caillech's reminiscing about a life of desire, while now being, it is implied, a nun. There are also women blamed as lustful and incapable of controlling their desires, straying from the path of spiritual love; women such as Íte and Líadain stand in bold contrast to such depictions. Íte's nursing of the Christ-child, an act gendered feminine, is a notably nuanced case; more often we see men doing so. In saga literature, there are men gone divinely mad, whether through a saint's curses, through grief for Christ, or through the attempt to reconcile the divine and the romantic. There are also men like Cummíne made inflexible by a love of the divine, forcing earnest lovers to undergo trials to prove their own love of the divine.

In the study of love of the divine it is clear that various loves share not only vocabulary, but other aspects. Conflict is as capable of occurring between love of the divine and romantic love, as it is between two individuals in love with the same person: the comparison between *L&C* and Tristan-ic love triangles shows this. Love of the divine, like romantic love, can also at times felt through the senses, particularly through physical acts such as fasting, or even, in Íte's case, nursing, though generally love of the divine is not as sensual as romantic love. And, as has been seen, love of the divine is gendered. Not only is it expressed in different ways between the genders, but it seems it is felt in different ways too, with some men leaning towards anger and madness in their experiences of this love. We have seen two very different kinds of 'love causing madness' in men in this chapter: Conchobar's love for Christ is read as causing his fatal fury; whereas Cuirithir is sent away as a result of a conflict between love of God and romantic love of Líadain.

Unlike romantic love, however, love of the divine is overseen by an unseen but frequently felt inescapable presence above it all. That the object of affection in loving the divine generally *cannot* be experienced with the physical senses is a point of divergence from romantic love. However, from wise nuns to wandering ex-monks, the love of the divine is as capable of bringing ruin as romantic love. And even when this love brings salvation, we as readers are at times left wondering if we are really witnessing a happy ending.

Chapter 5 Familial Love

5.1 Introduction

The last broad category of love for consideration is familial love. Familial love includes love between parents and children, siblings, extended families, and kin-groups. The working definition of familial love here is the emotional bond between families and foster-families wherein care, affection, and respect are afforded one another. As a concept, familial love interacts with honour, loyalty, duty, and fealty. In terms of discerning the presence of love in the nexus of other possible emotions and motivations, three broad manifestations have been thus far pursued: love is stated in the narrative; love is stated by a character; and love is seen through actions. There is overlap, clearly — after all, a statement by a character is a statement in narrative, and speaking is also an action — but this Venn-diagram of love has sufficed thus far. Love seen through action, in particular, has, at times, been difficult to discern: saga texts can be ambiguous when it comes to character motivation. As stated, ambiguity has been argued by scholars such as Hollo to be intentional in certain texts to be discussed.[791] The difficulties with determining love as a motivation continue into the examination of familial love; for in dealing with familial love in medieval Gaelic literature, honour must also be examined.

A discussion of familial love must first examine the family, and, importantly in medieval Gaelic literature, the foster-family. This chapter begins with an initial overview of parental, sibling, and extended family relationships, and the ways in which they are gendered. Legal texts are referred to, but as always the focus is on our saga tales. There will be absent fathers, self-sacrificing mothers, sons prioritised and daughters misused. Kin-killing is discussed as the ultimate betrayal of familial love, destroying the family unit and the wider social order. The extended family unit and kin-group are also examined: how far do honour and love restrict or encourage our heroes' actions? The question of fealty is raised, as is the avuncular relationship. The purpose of the overview is to set out the typical representation of the medieval Gaelic family unit in saga texts, before then turning to examining familial love proper.

The overview is followed by a discussion of broader themes relating to familial love and gender in medieval Gaelic saga. Familial love is frequently seen expressed in moments of loss. While saga texts may not be particularly rich in terms of articulating the bonds of familial love in narrative, we can see through grief, lamentation, and the act of revenge the expression of familial love. Discussing these three categories of reactions to loss also requires the examination of honour. When one's kin is killed, and one retaliates with violence, is one answering the demands of a strict honour code, or expressing love for the departed? Indeed, both can be true; though, in this chapter, we will encounter scholarship which has firmly planted its flag in favour of using honour alone to explain motivation. In cases where texts are potentially less clear in terms of motivation, that ambiguity of motive should be re-asserted: a love reading is as valid as an honour reading when the text itself does not explicitly endorse either motivation. In a truly ambiguous text, either motivation is possible, and neither is provable.

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[791] See Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*: The Medieval Irish Text as Argumentative Space'.

As in other chapters, familial love can also be seen in conflict with other loves. Familial love and romantic love can frequently be opposed, and religious devotion can find itself in conflict with the loyalties and duties of the family. Such moments of conflict can serve to give the reader insight into the priorities of the narrative world. When one woman is condemned for betraying her husband for the good of her kin, and another who betrays her kin for the sake of her husband-to-be goes without comment, one learns about the ethical and cultural assumptions informing the text. When two foster-brothers who trained together meet, reluctantly and fatally, in a ford, and express their grief at the situation, it gives insight into the bonds of foster-brotherhood, and the difficulty of adhering to honour. Once again, moments of love in conflict are illuminating. Throughout the chapter, other aspects of familial love will also be examined as they emerge. There is not space here to fully explore all that relates to familial love. As such, issues such as incest, to which there will be reference, will be footnoted with the work already done on them.

Any definition of familial love in medieval Gaeldom must also include fosterage. Fosterage formed a vital part of medieval Gaelic society, and its importance is also seen in our saga literature. Foster-fathers and foster-brothers, in particular, appear in the saga texts with striking regularity, and some of the closest familial relationships we will discuss are between foster-kin. As Thomas O'Donnell states in his thesis, currently the most extensive exploration of fosterage in medieval Ireland:

> The emotional life of fosterage in Ireland during the central Middle Ages touches on the full range of emotional expression. Fosterage was such a common facet of medieval Irish life in this period that it occurs throughout the literature. […] Beyond the legal definitions of fosterage, the bonds could be created through a

> fosterage of affection, by nurturing and caring for infants and children, without recourse to the law.[792]

Going forward we shall make frequent reference to foster-family; when discussing fathers, we will also discuss foster-fathers, and so on. A distinction can be seen in the texts between the relationships between natal family and foster-family; this will be also be explored.[793]

The family is also a legal entity. Fergus Kelly describes the *túath* as the 'basic territorial unit' in medieval Gaelic law.[794] Within the *túath*, the *derbḟine* is the kin-group 'most commonly referred to in the law-texts'.[795] The *derbḟine* is a kin-group comprising 'descendants through the male line of the same great-grandfather'.[796] While there are individuals defined by a close relationship with their *máithre* 'maternal kin',[797] the father dominates legal texts. The emphasis on the male line continues with the notion of *goire*, defined by Kelly as 'filial duty'. Sons who are not *gor* suffer legally: they are only entitled to a quarter of their father's honour-price, as opposed to half (according to *Críth Gablach* ('Forked Purchase'));[798] they cannot be protected by others; and their contracts are invalid.[799] The legal texts portray society as centred around fathers, and its responsibility to and dependency upon fathers.

That said, O'Donnell's conclusion regarding the law and the narrative world raises a key point for analysing literary texts:

> [M]any of the examples of fosterage [in the narrative literature] examined fall outside the medieval Irish legal definition of fosterage. [...] The narrative texts show us a fosterage based on affection, an *altram serce* if you will, that still affects how relationships function, even if the fosterage is not legally recognised.[800]

Law and life as depicted in the sagas do not have a one-to-one relationship. This has implications both for the understanding of honour in saga texts, and for the understanding of family relationships: law is not all in the world of the tales. O'Donnell's observation points to a divergence between law and the emotional reality of the narrative texts, a clear interest for our present purposes.

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[792] O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland*, p. 216.

[793] Examining the precise boundaries between natal familial love and foster familial love could, however, span a chapter of its own. Due to space constraints, such a full exploration as might be liked is not undertaken here.

[794] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 3.

[795] Ibid., p. 12.

[796] Ibid.

[797] Ibid., p. 14.

[798] Ibid.

[799] Ibid., p. 80.

[800] O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland*, p. 205.

5.2 Overview of the Family

5.2.1 Fathers

Medieval Gaelic saga foregrounds tales of aristocratic men.[801] As such, we might expect fathers to feature prominently. In these tales, however, fathers, particularly of our main heroes such as Cú Chulainn, or Finn, are frequently notable for their absence. This is true at least of blood-related or natal fathers; foster-fathers appear frequently, as will shortly be discussed. Sons were expected to be *gor* 'dutiful' towards their fathers;[802] the rearing of children is the legal responsibility of both parents, and the father is only solely responsible for child-rearing in few select cases.[803] While this is the legal case, we can see a lack of paternal duty in the narrative world in the absence of fathers in our texts. The absence or loss of a father can give the hero a challenge to which to rise.[804] The death of Cumall in the overall narrative of Finn's life can be seen to set our hero at a disadvantage that he must overcome, to claim and inherit his birthright in texts such as *Fotha Catha Cnucha* ('The Cause of the Battle of Cnucha') and *Macgnímartha Find* ('The Boyhood Deeds of Finn').[805] The killing of Cumall also sets up a rivalry between Finn and Goll that lasts throughout many of the tales of the *fían*. The absent father makes sense as a dramatic technique or narrative trope for a young hero. However, in trying to examine the familial love of fathers, their absence does pose a challenge.

We do occasionally glimpse paternal intervention in the lives of their sons. In the *Táin*, for instance, Lug appears to Cú Chulainn, revealing himself as Cú Chulainn's father, and healing the wounded young warrior:

> *'Dabér-sa dano cobair dait,' 'ar in t-ócláech.*

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[801] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women in Early Irish Literature', 27.
[802] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 80.
[803] The father is only solely responsible for the rearing of children in cases where his illegal acts led to the child's conception. See Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 85.
[804] Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*. See p. 38 on Art's function as Cormac's father, and subsequent mentions of patrimony (see, for instance, p. 56): the hero's inheritance of his patrimony features prominently in Ó Cathasaigh's framework.
[805] 'The Battle of Cnucha', ed. & trans. by William M. Hennessy, *Revue Celtique*, 2 (1873), 86–93. '*Macgnímartha Find*', ed. by Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*, 5 (1882), 195–204 (197).

> *'Cía tai-siu eter?' 'or Cú Chulaind.'*
> *'Iss messe do athair a s-sídib .i. Lug mac Ethlend.'*
> *'It tromda dano na fuli form-sa. Ba h-éim dam mo íc.'*
> *'Cotail-siu sin bic, a Chú Chulaind,' 'or in t-ócláech,' 'do thromthorthim cotulta h-icond ferta Lerga co cend teóra láa 7 teóra n-aidchi, 7 firfat-sa forsna slógaib in n-airet sin.'*
> *'Canaid a chéle ferdord dó, contuli friss co n-accae nách crecht and ropo glan.'*
>
> 'I shall help you,' said the warrior.
> 'Who are you?' asked Cú Chulainn.
> 'I am your father, Lug mac Ethlend, from the fairy mounds.' [Literally: 'I am your father from the *síd*, that is, Lugh mac Ethlend.']
> 'My wounds are indeed grievous. It were time that I should be healed.'
> 'Sleep now for a little while, Cú Chulainn,' said the warrior, 'your heavy slumber at the mound in Lerga for three days and three nights, and during that time I shall fight against the hosts.' Then he chanted a low melody to him which lulled him to sleep until Lug saw that every wound he bore was quite healed.[806]

Lug then speaks the *Éli Loga*, 'The Incantation of Lug', which instructs Cú Chulainn to arise and attack his enemies, stating: *slig delb silsa ríut* 'Strike … and I shall strike with you'.[807] Overall, Lug's intervention is a moment of conspicuous tenderness, made stark by the complete absence of Lug in Cú Chulainn's life elsewhere.

In contrast to natal fathers, foster-fathers are frequently involved in the lives of male heroes. Elsewhere in the *Táin*, Fergus's interactions with Cú Chulainn show support and an unwillingness to come to blows, even though they are on opposite sides of the battle (this will be discussed below in the context of Ó Cathasaigh's writings on *condalbae*, 'kin-love').[808] A clear image of a supportive foster relationship can also be found in the late Old Gaelic/early Middle Gaelic tale *Esnada Tige Buchet* 'The Songs of Buchet's House'.[809]

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[806] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 64-5; trans. p. 183. The literal translation of Lug's words are given, as there is an ambiguity in them: is Lug his father, from the *sìd*, or his father-from-the-*sìd* (that is, in addition to his natal father)? It is ambiguous.

[807] Ibid., p. 65, trans. p. 184. O'Rahilly leaves *delb* untranslated.

[808] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son in Early Irish Literature', in his *Coire Sois: The Cauldron of Knowledge*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 65–94. It is worth noting that Cú Chulainn has several foster-fathers. Bart Jaski has examined Cú Chulainn's position as a foster-son and its wider implications for medieval Irish society, in Bart Jaski, 'Cú Chulainn, *Gormac* and *Dalta* of the Ulstermen', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 37 (1999), 1–31.

[809] 'The Songs of Buchet's House', ed. & trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 25 (1904), 18–38, 225–27.

The relationship between the titular Buchet and his foster-daughter Eithne is one of mutual respect. In particular, Eithne's deep devotion to her foster-father is apparent. Not only does she give him the best part of the produce she collects, as it is right to honour him, we see her ensure that her bride-price be paid to Buchet.[810] Buchet cares for the woman, but does not overstep his legal authority: when Cormac seeks Eithne's hand in marriage, Buchet states he cannot give it as he is not the woman's father.[811]

The mutually enriching relationship between Eithne and Buchet contrasts with the poor treatment of several daughters by their natal fathers in medieval Gaelic saga. In *Fingal Rónáin*,[812] the daughter of Echaid marries Rónán, an old king past his prime. The daughter of Echaid attempts to seduce Rónán's son, Mael Fhothartaig, unsuccessfully. Around halfway through the tale, Mael Fhothartaig and Echaid speak, with the latter stating:

> *Is olc duit-siu, a Mael Fothartaig, nác[h] ruí fri ar n-ingin-ni. Is duit dos-ratsam, ocus ní dont Senaithiuch ucut.*[813]
>
> 'You do wrong, Mael-Fothartaig, that you do not go with our daughter. To you we gave her, and not to that old churl [i.e. Rónán].'[814]

There is ambiguity here.[815] The text could be read as there has been some miscommunication; Echaid's family thought they were sending his daughter to marry the young prince rather than the old man. A less charitable reading posits that Echaid intended to sow chaos and discord by sending his daughter to Mael Fhothartaig as an intended spouse, without regard for her well-being; or that Echaid's ultimate goal was the marriage of his daughter and Mael Fhothartaig, and that he did not think (or care) about the harm caused en route to that destination. Echaid knew, presumably, that Rónán had a sexual interest in his daughter; him sending her to Rónán in order to marry Mael Fhothartaig could suggest either malice, or a lack of care for the well-being of his daughter in Rónán's land. Erich Poppe posits that Echaid is seen as at least partly responsible for Mael Fhothartaig's death: 'Echaid appears inculpated in his daughter's scheming when he is later killed [...] apparently in revenge and punishment.'[816]

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[810] Ibid., 31.

[811] Ibid.

[812] *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, ed. by David Greene, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 16 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), pp. 3-12.

[813] Ibid., p. 5.

[814] '*Fingal Rónáin*', ed. & trans. by Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*, 13 (1892), 368–97 (378). Translation amended for clarity.

[815] *Fingal Rónáin* has been seen to be ambiguous on several points including to whom the titular kin-slaying refers (see Sheila Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration in *Fingal Rónáin*: The Role of Foster-Kin in Structuring the Narrative', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47 (2004), 1–16 (14-16)) and what motivates the characters (see Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Fingal Rónáin*', 123). See also Hollo, '*Fingal Rónáin*: The Medieval Irish Text as Argumentative Space'.

If Echaid instructed his daughter to pursue Mael Fhothartaig, she could be seen as a dutiful daughter, as opposed to self-motivated. That said, the matter is ambiguous. Ultimately, unless Echaid's confusion is read as as due to miscommunication, a prominent theme in the text, he has actively put his daughter in harm's way; and, even if miscommunication is the intended reading, his ignorance has done the same. She can be read as a daughter treated poorly by her father. Again, though, the text is ambiguous; Echaid's plan for his daughter to marry Mael Fhothartaig might have been thwarted by Rónán taking her for himself, as opposed to Echaid intending chaos.

However, Echaid's relationship with his daughter does take place within a wider context: elsewhere, we see a disregard for or neglect of daughters by fathers. *Tochmarc Étaíne* notably ends with a king being unable to discern his daughter from his wife due to *síd*-trickery, and impregnating the former.[817] The story of the woman warrior, Creidne, meanwhile, relates how her father, to whom she bears three children, denies her sons their inheritance after prompting by his wife. She becomes a *fénnid* for years until the situation is resolved, and her sons are given their dues.[818] Creidne's hand is forced, as it were, by her father's unreasonable behaviour (albeit prompted by his wife) following the violation of the father-daughter relationship through incest. We see a presumably dutiful daughter turning to rebellion against her father due to his conduct.

Compare this to Findabair, who, in *Táin Bó Fraích*, aids Fráech in the face of parental resistance. After Ailill and Medb make Fráech engage in battle with a water monster, Findabair is the only person who goes to help him. When she does, her father Ailill, enraged, throws a spear at her, missing her only barely (cutting her hair).[819] Both Creidne and Findabair seem dutiful until they are pushed too far by their fathers and mothers,[820] and in both cases the reason they are pushed too far involves other men. They rebel when they feel they have no other choice. The rebellions of mistreated daughters point to an understanding in the narrative world that fathers can mistreat their daughters, and their daughters can (successfully) rebel against them.

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[816] Erich Poppe, 'A Note on the Jester in '*Fingal Rónáin*'', *Studia Hibernica*, 27 (1993), 145–54 (146).
[817] Bergin and Best, '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 188; trans. 189. Admittedly, whether this counts as disregard or neglect on the king's part depends in part on whether one thinks the *síd*-trickery could have been overcome if he knew his daughter better, something about which one can only speculate.
[818] Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, pp. xi-xii.
[819] Meid, *Táin Bó Fraích*, p. 48.
[820] In Findabair's case, her father is trying to have her romantic partner killed.

Ailill's actions in *Táin Bó Fraích,* in particular, tie into the trope of the 'reluctant male relative' who stands between a woman and her romantic interest, as has been recurrent in other chapters. Elsewhere husbands, and brothers, have been seen standing between women and the objects of their affections. But this is also now seen with fathers, as Ailill clearly illustrates, and as will later be discussed in *Tochmarc Emire*. More generally, fathers are seen being neglectful or actively harmful towards their daughters in medieval Gaelic saga. In this context, Echaid's daughter can be read as another daughter whose interests are not adequately protected by her father. Negligence or malice can turn even devoted daughters towards rebellion, as Creidne and Findabair show.

5.2.2 Kin-slaying and Paternal Conflicts

Natal fatherhood is prominently featured in cases of kin-slaying. As Kelly states, *fingal* was 'particularly abhorred' in legal texts.[821] Two of the most prominent acts of kin-slaying in medieval Gaelic saga occur in the late Old Gaelic texts *Aided Óenfhir Aífe* and *Fingal Rónáin*. In both tales, renowned warrior sons are killed by their natal fathers.[822] Both fathers come to regret their conduct, and lament their sons. In *Aided Óenfhir Aífe*, Cú Chulainn's slaying of Connla is doubly his own fault, having placed a *geis* on Connla that he not reveal his name, and ignoring his wife Emer's advice not to engage the youth in battle.[823] In *Fingal Rónáin*, Rónán listens to his wife, the aforementioned daughter of Echaid, believes her insinuation that his son tried to sleep with her, and has him killed for it.[824] Cú Chulainn ignores his wife's advice, whereas Rónán listens to his wife over his son's advice and protestations throughout the tale. In both cases, the women are not the parents of the son who is killed; the act of kin-slaying is ultimately the natal father's decision. These moments of kin-slaying, along with Lug's miraculous appearance to Cú Chulainn in the *Táin*, are some of the most prominent interactions between sons and fathers in medieval Gaelic saga.

The idea of contention between natal father and son more generally can also be seen. As Meyer states, the theme of natal fathers and sons in conflict occurs internationally in multiple literatures.[825] One of our early Finn texts, the Old Gaelic poem beginning '*Is*

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[821] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 13.

[822] Note that Connla is directly killed by Cú Chulainn, whereas Rónán orders Mael Fhothartaig's death. Ranero discusses *Aided Óenfhir Aífe* in the context of tales with similar instances of fathers killing sons in 'German, [...] Persian, Russian and Indian heroic legends': Anna M. Ranero, '"That Is What Scáthach Did Not Teach Me"': '*Aided Óenfir Aífe*' and an Episode from the '*Mahābhārata*'', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 16/17 (1996), 244–55 (244).

[823] van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, p. 14.

[824] Greene, *Fingal Rónáin*, p. 7.

[825] Meyer, *Fíanaigecht*, p. 22.

derb lem-sae, cia domaimse in fer líath', known as 'The Quarrel between Finn and Oisín', features another of medieval Gaelic saga's prominent father-son duos at odds.[826] We are told Finn seeks out Oisín, who was angry with him. Finn strikes Oisín, and then the two speak back-and-forth in poetry, outlining a conflict of age rooted in their respective statuses as old and young. Ultimately, the two reconcile, but not before throwing some barbs each other's way.

The nature of the conflict between natal fathers and sons in these instances is, by definition, intergenerational. The new generation of warrior men are put in conflict with the older generation of heroes. In *Fingal Rónáin* and '*Is derb lem-sae'*, Rónán and Finn are old men, and Mael Fhothartaig and Oisín are the current generation of heroes. In *Aided Óenfhir Aífe*, Connla is explicitly the new hero that can bring the Ulaid even greater glory than they have ever had before. Of the three texts, two of kin-slaying and the other also featuring violence of a natal father to a son, only '*Is derb lem-sae'* ends in reconciliation between both parties (as would be expected, given the storylines of each). In '*Is derb lem-sae'*, violence is largely confined to verbal acts. The other two end in kin-slaying, the ultimate breakdown of the father-son relationship; in both tales, there are problematic speech acts which lead to acts of physical violence. In Rónán's case there is a further speech act of a regretful father expressing love through regret. The relationship between natal fathers and sons is, at times,dysfunctional, and nowhere is this clearer than in such acts of kin-slaying.

5.2.3 Mothers

The relationship between mothers and their children tends to be less confrontational than that of children and natal fathers. In terms of their sons, we frequently see supportive mothers, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Philip O'Leary, on this point, cites Ness as an example: she delays her own labour to ensure her son is born on the same day as Christ in *Compert Conchobuir*.[827] Ness also goes on to politically manoeuvre on her son's behalf, a series of actions that end with Conchobar on the throne in Fergus's place. There is a lack of comparable material of mothers supporting their daughters; this might be expected from texts that tend to prioritise the actions of young aristocratic men.[828]

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[826] Ibid., pp. 22-27. The poem was mentioned in Chapter Two.

[827] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 32. We see a similar situation with Moncha, mother of Fíacha Muillethain, who also delays the birth of her son based on a prophecy in *Compert Fíachach Muillethain* 'The Conception of Fíacha Muillethain'. Fíacha is called *Muillethain* meaning 'broadcrown' we are told, because of the effect of the stone on which Moncha sat to delay the labour on Fíacha's skull. 'A Note about Fiacha Muillethain', ed. & trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 11 (1890), 41–45 (42). A similar instance of a mother delaying childbirth by a day for prophesied greatness occurs in *Cath Maige Muccrama* ('The Battle of Mag Mucrama'). See *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, ed. and trans. by Máirín O'Daly, Irish Texts Society, 50 (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1975), §42.

A striking example of a mother's love for her son is found in the twelfth-century text *Macgnímartha Find*.[829] Finn is raised by two foster-mothers apart from Muirne, his natal mother, as his late father's enemies are numerous and dangerous. When Finn is six, Muirne travels *as cach fasach i n-a cele*[830] 'from each wilderness to another' to reach Finn. She finds Finn:

> *Ocus tocbaid si an mac i n-a hucht iardain ocus timsaige fria he, ocus si trom iarum. Conid and sin doroin na ranna ic muirn ím a mac:*
> *Codail re suanan saime etc.*
> *Timnas an íngin celebrad do na banfeindedaib iar sin ocus atbert friu no in-gabdaís in mac comad infeíneda é.*[831]
>
> And she lifts the boy in her lap then and she brings him to her, and she is pregnant. It was there she made the verses, giving her son affection:
> Sleep in peaceful sleep etc.
> Then the woman took her leave of the women-warriors and gave to them charge of the boy until he was a warrior.

It is a moment of tenderness — the absence, the traveling to get there, the physical connection, the lullaby-like poetry, the farewell to the child's foster-mothers — that stands out: Muirne's actions form a clear expression of the familial love of a mother for her son.[832]

On the other hand, we also see mothers using their children to achieve their own ends. Medb embodies the use of one's children to one's own ends best. In the *Táin*, Medb offers Findabair to multiple men as a reward if they should defeat Cú Chulainn, leading to the deaths of 700 men in battle; when Findabair learns of this, she dies from shame.[833] Elsewhere, in the late Middle Gaelic *Ferchuitred Medba* 'Medb's Husband Allowance', on hearing that a 'Maine' will kill Conchobar, she nicknames all her sons Maine, 'in the hope that Conchobar might fall by him.'[834] In both cases, Medb is willing to use her children to advance her own ends. In what might be considered typical fashion, she uses her daughter to a far greater (and fatal) extent, whereas her sons are, if anything, inconvenienced. Her sons might also share in Medb's wish here; though it is not stated in the text, Medb's children may want to kill her rapist.[835] In Findabair's case, we might assume she wants the Connachta to prevail over the Ulaid, but given her reaction to the news about how she has been used, it is a clear abuse of the familial bond by Medb.

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[828] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 27.
[829] Meyer, '*Macgnímartha Find*'.
[830] Ibid., 199.
[831] Ibid.
[832] The association of women with lullabies in medieval Gaelic tradition has been explored, with reference to Muirne's lullaby, in Heather J. Larson, 'Keening, Crooning, and Casting Spells', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 18/19 (1998), 134–49.
[833] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 101-02; trans. pp. 214-15.

In *Compert Con Culainn*, a mother-to-be faces a predicament of honour. Deichtine is pregnant, but there are rumours that her brother, Conchobar, is the father.[836] Faced with the shame of this situation (presumably her, her husband's and her brother's honour stand to be compromised), Deichtine terminates her pregnancy. Shame is a powerful force in medieval Gaelic saga; we have seen it kill Findabair, and here lead to abortion. This case is clearly different to Medb's use of her children — Deichtine is terminating a pregnancy, and not using a child. Instead, here we have a sister and mother-to-be prioritising her own cause or that of her close male relative. Again, it is unclear whether Deichtine is concerned only with her own honour, or with Conchobar's and her husband Súaldam's as well.[837] It is also worth considering to what extent her own honour and Conchobar's are interlinked; if her own honour is based on that of her closest male relative, it is in her interests to preserve Conchobar's honour.[838]

Foster-mothers must be examined in discussing motherhood, particularly given the examination of St Íte's fosterage of Ísucán in Chapter Four. Scholars such as T. M. Charles-Edwards, Bronagh Ní Chonaill, and O'Donnell have thoroughly examined fosterage in medieval Gaelic society. The importance of foster-fathers and foster-mothers can be seen through the most common terms for them (*aite* and *muime*) being 'hypocoristic terms. That is to say, these are the 'daddy' and 'mummy' types of words, whereas *athair* and *máthair* are the more formal words used for 'father' and 'mother''.[839] O'Donnell goes on to characterise foster-fathers as responsible for a child's education, with foster-mothers responsible for their nutrition.[840] He discusses Scáthach, the woman warrior who teaches Cú Chulainn, and Cáma, fosterer of the *fían*, as the clearest examples of 'the role of the foster mother as guardian of the fosterage bond and unifier',[841] noting Scáthach as an example of a foster-mother who educates her children.[842] For O'Donnell, the foster-mother's role in creating the bonds of fosterage is key:

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[834] The text is referred to as *Cath Boinde* 'The Battle of the Boyne' by O'Neill. '*Cath Boinde*', ed. & trans. by Joseph O'Neill, *Ériu*, 2 (1905), 173–85 (185). The text then reveals that it is another Conchobar that the prophecy concerned.

[835] Conchobar has, like his father with Ness, specifically approached Medb when she is bathing, and sexually assaulted her: see Ibid., p. 181. Kelly discusses the penalties for rape in *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 135, centring around paying compensation.

[836] This is made none the easier by the interchangeability of Deichtine/Deichtire, a notion we will shortly discuss (in different versions of the text, she is said to be Conchobar's sister or daughter).

[837] It is worth noting that Deichtine's abortion of the foetus does not have the moral controversy seen in aspects of modern Western society. The text does not condemn Deichtine for the act, nor is abortion (here or elsewhere) treated as kin-slaying. In Kelly's examination of Medieval Gaelic law, abortion is listed as being a reason a man can legally separate from his wife, but that is the extent of its appearance (Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 75).

[838] This can be compared with Charles-Edwards' analysis of Rónán in *Fingal Rónáin*, where part of his predicament is that his wife's accusation must be properly considered as her honour is based upon his own; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Honour and Status in Some Irish and Welsh Prose Tales', *Ériu*, 29 (1978), 123–41 (138-39).

> [Foster siblinghood] was created through the actions of the foster parent, most often the foster mother. When a fosterling was taken in at a young age it would have been nursed at the same breast and slept in the same bed as its foster siblings.[843]

In *Macgnímartha Find*, there is another example of women warriors fostering a young hero.[844] *Bodbmall bandrai* 'Bodbmall the druidess' and *in Liath Luachra* 'the Grey One of Luachair', *na banfeneda* 'the women *fénnidí*/warriors', take Finn from his mother Muirne after Cumhall's death, *air nir lam a máthair a beth aicce* 'for his mother dared not let him be with her'.[845] They rear him in secret, and the text tells us how essential this is given that many want him dead.[846] After Muirne's aforementioned visit and lullaby, she instructs the foster-mothers to look after Finn until he is a capable warrior.[847] When he goes adventuring, they come and find him and return him home.[848] His final interaction with his two warrior women foster-mothers comes when they spot wild deer and lament that they cannot catch them. The two warrior women are explicitly identified as old women at this point.[849] Finn catches two of the deer, and then:

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[839] T. M. Charles-Edwards, Early Irish and Welsh Kinship (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 78; Bronagh Ní Chonaill, 'Fosterage: Child-rearing in Medieval Ireland', History Ireland, 5:1 (Spring, 1997), 28–31; O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland*, p. 18.

[840] Ibid., p. 37.

[841] Ibid.

[842] Ibid., p. 97.

[843] Ibid. In this way, we might re-contextualise Íte's fostering of the Christ-child as making Him a foster-sibling of all other fosterlings.

[844] O'Donnell examines Cáma's relationship with Finn (Ibid., pp. 120-121), but does not mention his other foster-mothers we are here examining.

[845] Meyer, '*Macgnímartha Find*', 189. Translated in 'The Boyish Exploits of Finn', trans. by Kuno Meyer, *Ériu,* 1 (1904), 180–190 (181). Translation amended for clarity.

[846] Meyer, '*Macgnímartha Find*', 198-99; trans. Meyer, 'The Boyish Exploits', 181-82.

[847] Meyer, '*Macgnímartha Find*', 199; trans. Meyer, 'The Boyish Exploits', 182.

[848] Meyer, '*Macgnímartha Find*', 200; trans. Meyer, 'The Boyish Exploits', 183.

[849] The word used is *sentuinn*, see *eDIL s.v. sentonn.* I emphasise this point as part of foster-childhood was caring for foster-parents in their old age; see O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland*, p. 121.

> *Dogni-som sealg co gnatach doibh iar sin. 'Erid uain festa, a gille,' or na banfeneda fris 'air atait mic Morna for aicill do marbta.'*
>
> After that he would hunt for them constantly. 'Go from us now, lad,' said the women-warriors to him, 'for the sons of Morna are watching to kill thee.'[850]

We see between Finn and his foster-mothers a mutually enriching relationship. They raise him, they keep him secret and therefore safe, and they allow access from Muirne and follow her instructions regarding when he is to be let go. Finn, when he is old enough, also helps them, hunting for them. The women warriors have raised the young hero, and he has grown able to support them in turn. Like Scáthach for Cú Chulainn, there is the influence of warrior women through fosterage for the male hero. Finn's relationship with Bodbmall and in Liath is less confrontational than Cú Chulainn's, however, evoking more of an idyllic situation than Cú Chulainn's rearing, even despite Finn's fosterage taking place entirely in hiding.

5.2.4 Sisters

Like mothers, sisters also mediate or advance the causes of others. In the late Middle Gaelic tale of Lugaid Riab nDerg's conception, *Cath Bóinde* 'The Battle of the Boyne', Lugaid's mother Clothru sleeps with her three brothers:

> *Ceathrar mac lais .i. na tri findeamna (.i. Eamain rœd nach dealaigther), ⁊ d'œntairbirt rucad .i. Breas ⁊ Nár ⁊ Lothar a n-anmand, ⁊ is iad dorigni Lugaid tri riab n-derg rena siair bodein in agaig reim chath Dromacriadid do thobairt da n-athair, corthoitsead and na triur le h-Eochaid Feidleach.*
>
> [Eochaid's four sons were] the three Findeamna ('eamain' meaning 'a thing which is not divided'), and they were born of one birth, Breas, Nár, and Lothar their names; it is they who made Lugaid-of-the-three-red-stripes with their own sister the night before giving the Battle of Druimcriad to their father. The three of them fell there by Eochaid Feidleach.[851]

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[850] Meyer, '*Macgnímartha Find*', 200; trans. Meyer, 'The Boyish Exploits', 183.

[851] O'Neill, '*Cath Boinde*', 174; trans. 175. Clothru's incest also features in *Aided Meidbe*; '*Aided Meidbe*: The Violent Death of Medb', ed. & trans. by Vernam Hull, *Speculum*, 13 (1938), 52–61 (59).

Clothru's situation raises the question of where loyalties lie; in a conflict between your brothers and your father, with whom do you side? And again, here is a natal father killing his son(s). For Ingridsdotter, Clothru's role is that of mediator and protector of bloodline: 'the aim of her actions in all texts seems to be her acting to prevent strife, mediate violence and ensure the continuation of her bloodline.'[852]

A woman worth examining in the context of sisterhood is Ferb. In the Middle Gaelic tale *Tochmarc Ferbe*, 'The Wooing of Ferb',[853] Ferb is a romantic lover, a daughter, and a sister. *Tochmarc Ferbe*, as the name suggests, centres around Ferb's romantic union with Maine Mórgor,[854] son of Ailill and Medb. The tale is tragic; by its end, both lovers have died in yet another conflict between the Connachta and the Ulaid. It is a tale in which several issues of family are brought to the fore: Maine's foster-brothers rush out ahead of the rest of the Connachta to come to his aid;[855] Medb is portrayed, as Rebecca Shercliff puts it, as a 'fiercely loving mother';[856] and we see mass death and individual deaths from grief (both Ferb and her mother, Nuagel, along with 150 other women, after they are all carried off by Conchobar's forces).[857] O'Leary has argued for us to extrapolate, from the fact of the women being abducted, that these are actually deaths from shame rather than grief.[858] Though our approach supports multiple readings of the same text, O'Leary's argument here is unsupported by the text itself. As Shercliff points out, the text explicitly states it is from grief that they die.[859] The text reads:

> *Do-rat dano leis in rígain .i. Nuagil ingin Ergi, ⁊ a hingin .i. Feirb, ⁊ na trī coīcait ingen immalle fria. At-bath fo chétōir Ferb ⁊ a trí coícait ingen immalle fria* ***do chumaid*** *na macraide; at-bath dano Nuagel* ***do chumaid*** *a fir ⁊ a dā mac.*
>
> Then he brought with him the queen, namely Nuagel daughter of Erg, and her daughter, namely Ferb, and the one hundred and fifty maidens together with her. Ferb died immediately, and her one hundred and fifty maidens together with her,

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[852] Kicki Ingridsdotter, 'Motivation for Incest: Clothru and the Battle of Druim Criaich', *Studia Celtica Fennica*, 10 (2013), 45–63 (61).

[853] 'A Critical Edition of *Tochmarc Ferbe*: With Translation, Textual Notes and Literary Commentary', ed. and trans. by Rebecca Shercliff (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2019)

[854] Notice the previously discussed term *gor* in Maine's epithet: Maine the very filial, or dutiful. Maine is a good son.

[855] Shercliff, '*Tochmarc Ferbe*', p. 47.

[856] Ibid., p. 184.

[857] Ibid., p. 83.

[858] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 42.

[859] Shercliff, '*Tochmarc Ferbe*', p. 188. O'Leary also points this out, but dismisses it; O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 42.

> **from grief** for the youths; Nuagel died moreover **from grief** for her husband and her two sons.[860]

Homing in on the character of Ferb, three aspects stand out for discussion. The first is her interactions with Maine's foster-brothers, whom she incites to battle to avenge him,[861] along with the 'youths of Connacht'.[862] Through the bond of romantic union with Maine, we see Ferb treating his foster-brothers and his collective kin-group as she might her own (she is not originally of the Connachta). The second aspect is found in Ferb's second lament for Maine. Ferb expresses concern for Maine's natal family and how they will cope with the news of his death, and her first and most thorough concern is for Findabair, his sister:

> *'Olc in scél bērthair síar*
> *co Finnabair na ṅglangīall:*
> *tāsc a brāthar dī co feirg,*
> *is a esbaid ar glan-Ḟeirb.'*
>
> 'Terrible is the tale which will be carried westwards
> to Finnabair of the pure hostages:
> the news of the death of her brother [will be carried] angrily to her,
> and his loss for fair Ferb.'[863]

Having lost her own brother in the events of the text, Ferb is well placed to empathise with Findabair. It is a striking moment of sympathy between two women who never meet, expressing a pseudo-sororal bond.

The final aspect of our discussion of *Tochmarc Ferbe* is the following line, which precedes Ferb's second lament for Maine:

> *'Bam marb dot chumaid, cid tréot ro marbad m'athair ⁊ a mac'.*
>
> 'I will die out of grief for you, although it is on account of you that my father and his son were killed'.[864]

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[860] Ibid, p. 82; trans. p. 83.
[861] Ibid., p. 75.
[862] Ibid., pp. 71-75.
[863] Ibid., p. 80; trans. p. 81.
[864] Ibid., p. 78; trans. p. 79.

Ferb makes it explicit that when she dies from grief, as she shortly will in the text, it is not (only) for the loss of her brother and father that she will die. In her second lament she further places the blame for her father and brother's deaths at Maine's door,[865] and so it is all the more notable that she explicitly states that it is grief for Maine that will kill her. Her prediction ties into the motif of prophecy and prediction that is present throughout the tale, but it is also striking that here grief for a romantic lover seems to supersede grief for family. It might not, however, be a question of superseding, but rather accumulation; Maine's death was the last of the three to occur and was the final straw, as it were. Overall, Ferb is a sister who places a great deal of value on her romantic lover, placing him above her own family; Ferb also places Maine above his family and kin, with her incitement of his foster-brothers and the youths, though this is less surprising. At the same time, she expresses her sympathy for Ailill and Medb on losing their son, and empathises with Findabair's loss, as a sister who has lost a brother herself.[866]

We also briefly see, at the tale's beginning, Ferb and her foster-sister Findchóem. Ferb sends Findchóem to see who is coming towards them,[867] and Findchóem then relates the beautiful sight of the host coming towards them.[868] This use of the watchman device, wherein one character reports the descriptions of numerous characters approaching, is similar to the Old Gaelic tale *Tochmarc Emire*, wherein Cú Chulainn finds Emer 'with her foster-sisters around her'.[869] Emer is teaching them *druine ⁊ deglamda* 'needle-work and fine handiwork', and we are explicitly told that her skills in such arts are part of the reason she is so desired by Cú Chulainn.[870] This suggests that such skillfulness is valued in a romantic partner. That we see Emer instructing her foster-sisters in 'handiwork' conveys that Emer is supporting her foster-sisters' future prospects.

While women do advance the causes of their kin, in doing so they often advance their own interests at the same time. It is an overgeneralisation to say that medieval Gaelic saga features supportive mothers and daughters without acknowledging that often that support is in their own interests. Even this slight re-framing of the trope allows for more agency to be read into the actions of women. Aside from their relationships to men, there are also moments of tenderness and care between sisters, foster-sisters, and sisters-in-law. We will shortly discuss the sororal bond further, in the context of shame and Fithir and Dáiríne. For now, we can say sisters express love for one another whether through words, through care or instruction, or through grief, even as, on the whole, they are relegated to the background in favour of their brothers.

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[865] Ibid.

[866] It might seem notable that Ferb does not mention her mother here, but there is a simple explanation for this: her mother is not dead at this point in the text.

[867] Shercliff, '*Tochmarc Ferbe*', p. 43; trans. p. 35.

[868] Ibid., p. 36; trans. p. 37.

[869] *Lebor Na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow*, ed. by R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1929), p. 309. Meyer, 'The Wooing of Emer', 71. Cf. Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Riddling Treatment of the 'Watchman Device' in *Branwen* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Studia Celtica*, 12–13 (1977–1978), 83–117.

[870] Ibid.

5.2.5 Interchangeability and Brothers

Men can be interchangeable in medieval Gaelic saga. This is generally not true of the major heroes,[871] though an example of visual interchangeability will shortly be discussed regarding the protagonist of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. Brothers of main characters can be lacking in characterisation; take Noísiu's brothers in the Old Gaelic tale *Longes mac nUislenn*, for instance, whose individual characterisation comes only in Derdriu's laments after their deaths.[872] The brothers are more like a collective unit, as opposed to characterisable individuals. Brothers can also be seen as stand-ins for one another, particularly foster-brothers.[873] We see Mael Fhothartaig's foster-brother Congal in *Fingal Rónáin* for instance undertaking several actions on his behalf. As Boll states, 'We may regard Congal as Máel Fhothartaig's alter ego'.[874] Congal even lures the daughter of Echaid away under the pretence of Mael Fhothartaig wanting to tryst with her, only to physically beat her.[875] After Mael Fhothartaig's death, his other foster-brother (and Congal's brother), Donn, murders the family of the daughter of Echaid, an event Boll describes as '[fitting] in with the common representation of foster-kinsman in the role of avengers in the literature.'[876] Here we see foster-brothers acting to advance their brother's cause; though notably, foster-brothers tend to be read as having more agency than sisters or mothers, who also act to advance their male relatives' causes. There is a question of independence: to what extent are Congal's actions, for instance, endorsed by Mael Fhothartaig? Is there a notion of 'plausible deniability' here? The question of independence also ties into moments where we see foster-brothers in conflict, as will shortly be discussed in the context of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.

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[871] Though even then, there is the issue of stand-ins and alter egos, as will shortly be discussed.

[872] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 48; trans. p. 66.

[873] It is worth noting here Mícheál Ó Flaithearta's analysis of the name Fer Diad, wherein it has been suggested he is to be seen as a shadow or second of Cú Chulainn. Such a reading supports the point we have already set out: namely, that foster-brothers can be reflections of one another. Mícheál Ó Flaithearta, 'The Etymologies of (Fer) Diad', in *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Maynooth 24-27 July 2005*, ed. by Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (Maynooth: An Sagart, 2009), pp. 218–25.

[874] Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration', 4. In the context of foster-brothers as alter egos, see also Ó Flaithearta, 'The Etymologies of (Fer) Diad', on the idea of Fer Diad being 'the second man' to Cú Chulainn.

[875] Greene, *Fingal Rónáin*, pp. 5-6.

[876] Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration', 11. Boll gives three further examples of foster-kinsmen avenging foster-kin, and one example of a woman, Ness, doing so, as we will shortly discuss. Ibid.

We see bands of brothers travelling together, particularly in dynastic tales. As such, in the Middle Gaelic *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, 'The Adventure of the Sons of Echu Muigmedóin', the tale of Níall Noígiallach and the sovereignty of Ireland, we see Niall with his half-brothers; how they interact with the Loathly Lady then determines their fortunes when it comes to gaining and maintaining sovereignty.[877] The idea of brothers as comprising a unit is also reinforced by the dreams mother sometimes have of their children, foreseeing their interactions with sovereignty (Mongfind, the mother of Níall's half-brothers, has such a dream, as does Áimend in the eighth-century text 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde').[878] Frequently, in dynastic tales, one brother in particular stands out; indeed, this may be the point. As such, the brothers they distinguish themselves from are interchangeable. We see this with Níall Noígiallach himself; he is differentiated due to his interaction with sovereignty. Even in the aforementioned dreams of mothers we can see one brother standing out, as Níall does. In the narrative that opens the Éoganacht genealogical compilation edited in *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*,[879] Óebfhinn dreams of giving birth to four wolf-cubs, and then:

> *Tárraid in cóiced cuilén chuicce dianechtair inna lige ⁊ ro fothraic-side h-i fuil. Ipse est Cairpre Cruitnechán ⁊ am-soí immorro é-side fria co n-duaid a cíche dia bruinnib ⁊rl.*[880]
>
> The fifth cub came to her in her bed from without and she bathed him in blood. This same was Cairpre Cruithneachán 'The Little Pict' and he turned on her and gnawed her breasts from her body [etc.].[881]

Cairpre is a clear illustration of the trope of the single exceptional brother within a group and serves to remind us that the 'band of brothers' topos contains a degree of differentiation between its members. As such the band of brothers can be contrasted with the trope of the wider kin-group, as will be seen.

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[877] 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', ed. & trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 24 (1903), 172–207, 446 (196-200).

[878] Ibid, 174; trans. 175. 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', trans. by Vernam Hull, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 62 (1947), 887–909 (898).

[879] *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, ed. by M. A. O'Brien (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1962), see pp. 195-96.

[880] Ibid., p. 196.

[881] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 181. Scholars have discussed this dream. See F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2nd edn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p. 193; and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Legend as Critic', in *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence*, ed. by Tom Dunne, Historical Studies, 16 (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), pp. 23–35 (pp. 33-35). Cf. MacLeòid, 'Female Alterity', p. 26 for discussion of both this dream and Áimend's dream.

5.2.6 Foster-brothers in Conflict

As seen above, in the idea of the fifth cub that came ‘from without’ and inflicted harm, there can be a degree of conflict and competition between foster-brothers, or between natal brothers and a foster-brother in that particular case. Conflict between foster-brothers is most prominently expressed in Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad’s combat in the *Táin*, one of the most iconic battles in medieval Gaelic saga. Before their fatal martial engagement, Fer Diad and Cú Chulainn recall the time they spent together as youths, training under Scáthach.[882] There is a harkening back to a shared experience, and an emphasis on the equality between them, and the bond between them. Cú Chulainn’s lament will shortly be discussed. For now, Fer Diad and Cú Chulainn offer a notable example of foster-brothers in conflict, and one which is well-known.

Foster-brothers need not be in literal conflict for them to be at odds. In the tenth- to eleventh-century text *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, we initially see a degree of interchangeability between Conaire and his foster-brothers, the sons of Donn Désa; that is, they act as a unit, rather than one being distinguished over others.[883] This initial unity and interchangeability changes into two warring factions when Conaire is crowned. Conaire becomes king and is faced with what to do with his foster-brothers who are plundering the kingdom. Conaire ultimately opts to pardon his foster-brothers, but then changes his decision to having them exiled instead:

> *‘Oircead cách a mac 7 ainciter mo daltaiseo’.*
> *‘Cet, cet’, or cách. ‘Do-géntar airiut’.*
> *‘Náte, ém’, olseiseom. ‘Ní h-aurchor saegail damsa in breath ron-ucus . Ní crochfaider ind fir acht eirced senóire leósom co rolát a n-díbearg for firu Alban’.*[884]
>
> ‘Let each man slay his son, but let my foster-brothers be spared.’
> ‘Indeed, indeed,’ said everyone, ‘that will be done.’

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[882] O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 93; trans. p. 206.

[883] For dating the text, see O’Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel,* p. 20.

[884] *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. by Eleanor Knott, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 8 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1936), p. 7.

> ‘Indeed not,’ replied Conaire. ‘No lengthening of my life the judgement I have given. The men are not to be hanged — rather, let elders go with them that they may plunder Albu.’[885]

O’Connor summarises Conaire’s initial decision as Conaire ‘placing his affection for his delinquent foster-brothers above his responsibilities as sovereign’.[886] Conaire’s initial ruling is striking in its evocation of *fingal*, with his call to ‘let each man slay his son’, and it brings to mind the examples of fathers doing just that. Conaire’s foster-brothers also refer to Conaire as *ar n-aitine*, ‘our foster-father’, before they commence their attack; O’Connor argues for this to be read as a sign of the strong affection they still feel for their foster-brother.[887] And as O’Connor states:

> His people declare themselves ready to commit such a *fingal* if he commands it (line 215), but Conaire at once retracts his command, realizing (too late) that it is unjust and shows him unfit to rule. This connection between *fingal* and false judgement calls to mind the short tale *Fingal Rónáin*, in which the old king finally shows his unfitness to rule by ordering his own son to be killed.[888]

The conflict does not end there: at the tale’s end the foster-brothers are responsible in part for Conaire’s death. Conaire’s pardoning of the foster-brothers is something of a tipping point, a moment where his judgement is flawed which begins a series of bad decisions from the new king. Even when one member of a band of brothers becomes king, as happens in several tales of such bands, that does not mean there is no conflict between them going forward. *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* shows how such a change in dynamic between foster-brothers can actually lead to further conflict. Conaire’s familial feeling clearly impacts upon his judgement, and upon his ability to be a good king; and his foster-brothers, even though spared by his feeling, perpetuate the conflict between them.

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[885] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, p. 67. Though Conaire is referring to his foster-brothers, he uses the term *dalta*, translated by Stokes as ‘fosterling’. O’Connor argues this is indicative of Conaire’s strength of feeling, and is ‘the medieval Irish equivalent of a Freudian slip’. ‘The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel’, ed. & trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 22 (1901), 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437 (30); O’Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel*, pp. 99-100.

[886] Ibid., p. 2.

[887] Ibid., pp. 99-100.

[888] Ibid., pp. 70-71. For discussion of the precise dynamics of Conaire's downfall, see Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *‘Gat* and *Díberg* in *Togail bruidne Da Derga’*, in *Celtica Helsingiensia: Proceedings from a Symposium on Celtic Studies*, ed. By Anders Ahlqvist, Harri Nyberg, Glyn Welden Banks, and Tom Sjöblom, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, 107 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), pp. 203–13.

Sheila Boll has thoroughly examined fosterage relationships in medieval Gaelic saga, and comments on the difficulty in turning foster-kin against one another:

> [L]iterary foster-kinsmen were not easily turned into enemies. [...] foster-kinsmen were frequently shown to maintain their amicable bond either by continuing to act as allies or by avoiding acting directly to one another's detriment. Even when foster-kinsmen were forced into enmity, animosity between them was rarely depicted as total — rather, hostilities might be depicted as one-sided or mutually regretted.[889]

Conaire's foster-brothers are shown to be reluctant to attack him, with Ingcél having to appeal to their honour to get them to do so. Boll comments on this instance as an illustration of the power of honour to motivate action, stating 'They carry out the destruction against their foster-kinsmen, despite their reluctance, thus showing the considerable strength of this motivating factor.'[890]

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* we see the emotional bond between foster-brothers being so strong it changes a king's judgement. Emotion is explicitly a motivating factor in the tale. Love pulls against honour, however, with conflict growing between the two parties over hereditary rights and promises made in exile. We see here another prominent example of foster-brothers in conflict, a conflict made literal by the end of the tale, where honour compels the reluctant foster-brothers to aid in the killing of Conaire.

5.2.8 Collective Political and Kin-groups

Medieval Gaelic saga also features the phenomenon of collective groups and kin-groups. This is when a large group is referred to as a whole, often acting or speaking as one. One of the most prominent examples is the Ulaid in the Ulster Cycle, who frequently act as a whole. At times, we are given the collective opinion of the Ulaid.[891] They even express emotion collectively at times: in 'The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn' in the *Táin*, upon everyone thinking that the young Sétanta has been killed, we are told:

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[889] Sheila Boll, 'Foster-kin in Conflict: Fosterage as a Character Motivation in Medieval Irish Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2002), Conclusion (p. 4).

[890] Ibid., Chapter Four (p. 25).

[891] See, for instance, Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre*, p. 307.

> *Fochertar armgrith mór leó .i. mac sethar ind ríg do folmaisiu a báis.*
>
> A great alarm was raised by them at the thought that the son of the king's sister had almost been killed.[892]

Here is seen an extended group, comprising many related kin-groups united in political allegiance, expressing their concern for an individual, part of the tapestry of familial love in medieval Gaelic saga.

The collective can also be referred to along gender lines. There are references to *mná Ulad*, 'the women of the Ulaid', for instance. Mass groups of women, whether related by kin or not, are particularly at risk of death in medieval Gaelic saga. Such a mass death is found in *Tochmarc Ferbe* with the death of the 150 women from grief. There is another mass death of women in *Aided Derbforgaill*, wherein the women (a faceless group which acts and speaks without individual characters) who torture Derbforgaill are then all killed by Cú Chulainn:

> *Luid immorro Cú Chulaind isa tech cosna mná co tarat a tech forthu conná tudchid fer ná ben i mbethaid assin tig sin .i. dona trí coícdaib rígan acht ros-marb uile.*
>
> Cú Chulainn went then into the house to the women so that he knocked down the house upon them so that no man or woman came out alive from that house, that is, of the three fifties of queens but he killed them all.[893]

The notion of the mass group, particularly when it is a collective kin-group united by political allegiance, gives us a faceless family unit which can react collectively to the events of the text. Such collectives might bring to mind the Classical Greek chorus, 'a group of actors who described and commented upon the main action of a play with song, dance, and recitation.'[894] The kin-group does not respond in song or dance, but they do react to the events of the text and offer their collective opinion, as seen with the Ulaid and Sétanta. The 'passivity of the [Greek] chorus' in contrast to the actors as a key part of their role in Greek tragedies has also been pointed out.[895] The collective in medieval Gaelic saga is not always passive; indeed, we see them fairly active in several texts, particularly in battle with other collective kin-groups. This propensity for action and impacting the plot of a text, even in a tragedy, separates these collectives from the Greek chorus. Mael Fhothartaig returns home in *Fingal Rónáin* at the behest of the men of his province, speaking as a collective. Specifically, the men of Leinster threaten Rónán with death if Mael Fhothartaig not return: *Beat marb-so lin-ni mani thora a-ridisi.* 'You will be killed by us unless he is returned.'[896] Mael Fhothartaig returns specifically after hearing this; the wider group impacts the plot.

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[892] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 19; trans. p. 141.

[893] Ingridsdotter, '*Aided Derbforgaill*', p. 86; trans. p. 87.

[894] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 'Chorus', *Encyclopedia Britannica* (18 May 2020) <https://www.britannica.com/art/chorus-theatre> [accessed 15 February 2021]. For comment on the Ulaid speaking as a group in the Ulster Cycle, see Clancy, 'Court, King and Justice', pp. 167-68; 177-78.

[895] Britannica, 'Chorus'.

That said, the words of a collective can go unheeded. In *Longes mac nUislenn*, upon hearing Cathbad's prophecy that Derdriu will bring calamity to them, the Ulaid call on Conchobar to kill the baby.[897] They go ignored, and the tragedy unfolds. In this way we might compare them to a more passive group witnessing tragedy; however, the Ulaid do not only witness the tragedy of Derdriu, Noísiu and Conchobar, but actively suffer and die because of it. While the collective can react and express opinions and emotions in response to various acts, it can ultimately also be ignored. The collective is also not omniscient. As O'Connor states:

> In mediaeval sagas, as in the chorus of Greek tragedy, internal audiences help to modulate the real audience's interpretation of events. [...] Yet, like the Greek chorus, this audience is not infallible. It simply adds one more level of response and evaluation to the other voices in the saga: unlike (for instance) the internal audiences of Icelandic saga, its judgements do not provide a key to the view of the implied author.[898]

In summary, the collective group, at times a collective of kin-groups interlinked through pollitical alliance, often acts as a whole, expresses emotion, and comments upon and at times actively engages in the events of a tale. Collective groups can be formed along gender lines, and mass groups of women at times suffer death by grief or violence. In tales such as *Fingal Rónáin*, the desires of the collective impact the choices of the main characters; in others, such as *Longes mac nUislenn*, their comments go unheeded. And as O'Connor states, they give an interpretation of what is happening in a saga, but are 'not infallible'.

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[896] Greene, *Fingal Rónáin*, p. 4.

[897] Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, p. 45.

[898] O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, p. 102.

5.2.9 Sister's Son

Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has thoroughly examined the relationship between the uncle and the 'sister's son' in medieval Gaelic saga.[899] He argues that the maternal uncle's relationship to his nephew was important in medieval Irish society and that this can be seen reflected in saga texts. In particular, he compares Bres, from *Cath Maige Tuired* 'The (Second) Battle of Moytura', and Cú Chulainn. Bres's father is Fomorian, and his mother is of the Túatha Dé Danann.[900] The failings of Bres's kingship in the tale conveys, for Ó Cathasaigh, the fact that sister's sons should not be made kings.[901] The sister's son can be beneficial to the kin-group as a whole (such as Cú Chulainn), or else destructive (à la Bres), and the question of which way they will go comes down to the abidance, on both the part of the uncle and the nephew, to a strict social contract.[902] Such a social contract, and the need to be dutiful and respectful of it, can be seen in the word *goire*, 'dutifulness', and *gormac*, meaning 'dutiful son', 'adopted son', and 'sister's son (who would normally be adopted by his maternal kindred)'.[903]

It is worth noting that the decision whether or not to make Bres king splits the Túatha Dé Danann along gender lines. The women of the Túatha Dé want Bres on the throne, and indeed it is through his mother that he is related to them and thus eligible for kingship. For Ó Cathasaigh, this is bad advice that should not have been listened to;[904] it is worth recalling the trope of the bad advice of women in medieval Gaelic saga, as illustrated in tales such as the Old Gaelic *Scéla Mucce Meic Da Thó* 'The Tale of Mac Da Thó's Pig' in this regard.[905] For present purposes, it is worth both noting *Cath Maige Tuired's* example of women's judgement being portrayed as poor and partial, and also that the collective group is divisible along gender lines into two smaller collectives: the men of the Túatha Dé, and the women. *Cath Maige Tuired* portrays a world wherein men and women are at odds with each other, even within the same group; and it gives the women the role of bad advisors, in contrast to other women characters we have considered throughout this thesis.

The uncle issue is more complex than solely blood-relations, however. Any kinsman of a woman can play the uncle role, as it were. As Ó Cathasaigh reads it, a character such as Cairbre Nia Fer is so-called because his father's kin are supernatural, but his mother's kin are human. As such, he is the *nia*, sister's son, of man in general.[906] As he states:

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[899] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son'.
[900] Ibid., p. 81.
[901] Ibid., p. 82.
[902] Ibid., p. 94.
[903] Ibid., p. 72.
[904] Ibid., p. 82.
[905] *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó*, ed. by Rudolf Thurneysen, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 6 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1935).

> It is nevertheless conceivable that the Irish equivalent of the Latin *avunculus* could have been any adult male of the mother's kindred. There is certainly an inherent ambiguity in the notion of 'sister's son' as it is found in early Irish literature.[907]

Overall, he concludes: 'the relationship between sister's son and maternal kindred is an important theme in the literature.'[908] Ó Cathasaigh's overview of the trope of sister's son shows a particular emphasis placed on said relationship in medieval Gaelic saga. Kelly's analysis supports Ó Cathasaigh's argument to an extent: Kelly states that maternal uncles were 'probably' particularly invested in the upbringing of their nephews.[909]

The sister's son also calls to mind the issue of mother's kin. As Ó Cathasaigh points out, legally most children of recognised unions were seen as belonging to their father's kin.[910] This legal emphasis on the father's kin may help elucidate an issue: the legality of a grandson killing his maternal grandfather, as Lug kills Balor in *Cath Maige Tuired*.[911] Lug is considered part of the Túatha Dé Danann as his father is, and Bres is seen to advance the cause of the Fomorians, his father's kin, despite both having mothers from the opposite kin. For Ó Cathasaigh, this ties into the sister's son motif.[912] Lug and Bres' heritages also tie into the fealty owed to kin-groups, particularly the question of what is owed to one's father's kin as opposed to one's mother's kin.[913] If, legally, Lug is seen as being of the Túatha Dé Danann despite having a Fomorian mother, does he *legally* owe his maternal grandfather anything? Emotion, as opposed to law, would see him balk at the notion of killing his maternal grandfather, if he did (he does not). .

The question of what is owed to a maternal grandfather addresses another aspect of law. As stated, in the discussion of the *derbfine*, the paternal line was prioritised in most cases in medieval Ireland. While there were some children for whom maternal kin (*máithre*) were responsible,[914] the standard allegiance to paternal kin in the law may be reflected in the Lug's lack of inner conflict at the prospect of killing their maternal grandfather. It might be speculated that he would have faced a more difficult moral choice had his paternal grandfather, or even his father, stood in the way of his objectives.

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[906] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son', p. 78. The extent to which beings such as the Túatha Dé Danann were conceptualised as supernatural is explored by Carey in John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland*, Celtic Studies Publications, 3 (Andover, MA, and Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 1999), pp. 34-36.

[907] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son', p. 77.

[908] Ibid., p. 93.

[909] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 15.

[910] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son', p. 78.

[911] Ibid., p. 85.

[912] Ibid.

[913] For more on Lug and Bres' heritages, see Elizabeth A. Gray, '*Cath Maige Tuired*: Myth and Structure (1-24)', *Éigse* 18 (1981), 183-209; Elizabeth A. Gray, '*Cath Maige Tuired*: Myth and Structure (24-120)', *Éigse* 19:1 (1982), 1-35; Elizabeth A. Gray, '*Cath Maige Tuired*: Myth and Structure (1-24)', *Éigse* 19:2 (1983), 230-262.

Ó Cathasaigh also raises an important issue of familial love, and re-frames a key text around it. For Ó Cathasaigh, the *Táin* features *condalbae* 'kin-love' as a theme.[915] Kin-love, he argues, particularly as embodied by both Fergus and Cú Chulainn, saves the Ulaid from ruin. After listing three instances where Fergus acts in the Ulaid's interests out of kin-love, despite being in exile, Ó Cathasaigh continues:

> It is the strength of kin-love, then, which ultimately defeats the destructive forces which are unleashed upon Ulster in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The collapse of social order is stemmed and ultimately reversed, thanks to the prodigious efforts of a sister's son who responds to the needs of his maternal kin, and who discharges the obligations which were laid upon him when he entered into a contractual relationship with his mother's brother.[916]

The love of the individual for the larger kin-group can motivate action in medieval Gaelic saga. The responsibility to the larger kin-group can also be read as duty, or honour; but reading such actions as motivated by honour does not negate a reading of emotion. Notably exemplified in both Cú Chulainn and Fergus is the fact that these individuals can even be liminal or peripheral to the kin-group in some way; for Cú Chulainn, the Ulaid is his mother's kin (though this might not be as relevant, given he has entered a 'solemn contract' with Conchobar according to Ó Cathasaigh),[917] and for Fergus, he is in exile from them. And yet both act in the interests of the kin-group, ultimately ensuring its survival.

Overall, there are myriad familial relationships between people (and non-people) in medieval Gaelic saga, central to which are love and *condalbae*. Parental, sibling, uncle, and extended family relationships all differ and are gendered differently. The law and notions of contract and honour impact upon familial relationships in our texts, and the question of fealty is particularly pertinent. Fathers can be supportive, absent, or murderous, while mothers frequently put their sons first; both can tend to neglect or use their daughters. The family and kin-group are interwoven in complex ways with questions of law, honour, and emotion.

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[914] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 15.
[915] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son', p. 90.
[916] Ibid.
[917] Ibid., p. 94.

5.3 Reactions to Loss

Tales revolving around family relationships often feature high drama: conflicts of honour and love, or moments of loss. With this overview of the family complete, examination can begin of these most emotive of moments. Clear expressions of familial love often come when the object of that love is lost. As such, familial love is frequently seen in the context of, or in answer to, violence. The three areas for consideration here are lamentation, grief, and revenge, all three of which are frequently tied to bloodshed. In terms of lamentation, the laments of men and women are examined, as are the ways in which they differ, and how they interact with notions of masculinity and femininity. In terms of grief, the notion of death by grief in particular is scrutinised. Death by grief ties into death of shame, and the ambiguity in some tales around whether grief or shame has caused a death. It is also noted that while death by grief is frequently associated with women, there is at least one example of a heroic man dying from grief.

Revenge is then discussed. When one who is loved is killed, revenge is sometimes undertaken by those who felt familial love towards them. Revenge ties into the question of honour, and what reaction is demanded by the honour code; but honour does not negate love. In contrast to death by grief, revenge is frequently seen as a masculine pursuit, but there are notable examples of women pursuing vengeance. Women's vengeance is particularly notable: the honour of women is not based on their violence. O'Leary's examination of the honour of women highlights beauty, lineage, and particularly chastity as cornerstones of women's individual honour.[918] The idea of women being 'honour-bound' to avenge a family member, then, is less relevant a reading; women's role in revenge may be more to do with inciting men to carry revenge out.

Key to the discussion of honour and love is the notion that the two are not mutually exclusive concepts. As Barbara Rosenwein states:

> Many historians of emotions accept, however, a distinction between 'real' and 'expressed' emotions, preferring to speak of the 'performance' of emotions. They thereby (sometimes, perhaps, unintentionally) distance themselves from the claim

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[918] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 34-36.

> that these are the same as 'felt' emotions. But 'performed emotions' are also felt[.][919]

Thus answers to loss, such as lamentation and revenge, may be 'performed'; there may be a social expectation from emotional world of the texts that these acts be undertaken. That said, they can still be *felt*: an emotion being 'performed' does not exclude the possibility of felt emotion. Honour and love as motivators not always being at odds is a concept key to this discussion; honour can demand action, but love can also be motivating a character at the same time.

5.3.1 Lamentation and Cú Chulainn

Lamentation features heavily in medieval Gaelic saga, particularly in response to violence. We see both men and women lamenting deaths of their kin. Kaarina Hollo has looked at laments in early medieval Gaelic more broadly,[920] and Angela Bourke has examined the tradition through the centuries with a particular focus on the eighteenth century.[921] As Hollo states: 'lamenting the dead was a cultural practice strongly associated with women, [...] it was probably considered on some level a form of verbal art.'[922] Shercliff recently examined women's laments in particular as part of her analysis of *Tochmarc Ferbe*, and suggested that while lamenting has been read as a passive activity, laments can be read as active, particularly when they inspire or incite further action.[923]

Gender can be key in examining lamentation and how it functions in the context of familial love. One of the most renowned laments from medieval Gaelic saga is by one man for another. Cú Chulainn's lament for his foster-brother Fer Diad in the *Táin*, slain at his own hand, stands out as one of the most emotionally affecting moments in the saga.[924]

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[919] Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 5.

[920] Kaarina Hollo, 'Laments and Lamenting in Early Medieval Ireland', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 83–94.

[921] Angela Bourke, 'The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11.4 (1988), 287–91. See also Angela Partridge, 'Wild Men and Wailing Women', *Éigse*, 18.1 (1980), 25–37.

[922] Hollo, 'Laments and Lamenting', p. 86.

[923] Shercliff, '*Tochmarc Ferbe*', pp. 187-189. For discussion of Derdriu's actions (including lamentation) following the deaths of the sons of Uisliu, see Kate Louise Mathis, 'Mourning the Maic Uislenn: Blood, Death & Grief in '*Longes Mac n-Uislenn*' and '*Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*'', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 29 (2013), 1–21.

[924] Many have written on the account of Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad's conflict at the ford. At time of writing, the '*Comrac Fir Diad 7 Con Culaind*' page on CODECS lists 14 separate secondary sources on this text. 'Comrac Fir Diad Ocus Con Culaind • CODECS: Online Database and e-Resources for Celtic Studies' <https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Comrac_Fir_Diad_ocus_Con_Culaind> [accessed 15 February 2021]. Of particular relevance here is Amy C. Mulligan, 'Poetry, Sinew, and the Irish Performance of Lament: Keening a Hero's Body Back Together', *Philological Quarterly*, 97.4 (2018), 389-408.

Sarah Sheehan has read the lament as having romantic and homoerotic overtones.[925] My focus, however, is on the aspect of familial love present in the text. Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad's conflict is an external one between two men, but at the same time it is a classic internal struggle between love and duty. Fer Diad has said he will fight for the Connachta against the Ulaid, putting him in Cú Chulainn's way. Cú Chulainn is bound by both love for his kin and honour to protect the Ulaid. And thus, their conflict is irreconcilable.

Cú Chulainn shows clear reluctance to fight Fer Diad. When Fergus comes to warn Cú Chulainn that it is Fer Diad who will come to face him the next morning (arguably another act of love from Fergus), we see the following in Recension I:

> *'Dar ar m-bréithir ám nochon ina dáil is dech lend no ragmais,' 'ar Cú Chulaind,' '7 nochon ara omun chena acht* ***ar mét a gráda lind****.'*
>
> 'I vow that he is not the one we would prefer to meet,' said Cú Chulainn, 'not through fear of him indeed, but rather **because of our great love for him**.' (Literally, 'because of the greatness of his love with us').[926]

Cú Chulainn's precise word is *grád*, as examined in Chapter Two; he explicitly states the love he feels for Fer Diad. This is not a case of ambiguity; Cú Chulainn's reluctance is explicitly due to love. We can note too that Cú Chulainn uses the first-person plural here; he evokes not (only) one foster-brother's love for another, but potentially evokes a cohort, all who love Fer Diad.

We see Fer Diad equally reluctant to engage Cú Chulainn in combat, suffering insomnia the night before because of it.[927] Fer Diad and Cú Chulainn speak in verse back-and-forth before the combat. Between incitements and threats, their shared youth with Scáthach is referenced, with Cú Chulainn stating:

> *Dá m-bámar ic Scáthaich*
> *a l-los gaiscidh gnáthaig*
> *is amaráen imríaghmais*
> *imtíagmais cach fích.*
> *Tú mo* ***choicli cridi***
> ***tú m-acme tú m-fine***

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[925] Sheehan, 'Fer Diad De-Flowered'.
[926] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 83; trans. p. 199. Emphasis my own.
[927] Ibid., p. 86; trans. p. 201.

> *ní fúar ríam ba dile*
> *ba dirsan do díth.*

> When we were with Scáthach, by dint of our wonted valour we would fare forth together and traverse every land. You were my **loved comrade, my kith and kin**. Never found I one dearer to me. Sad will be your death.[928]

Cú Chulainn identifies Fer Diad as his *coicli cridi*, which O'Rahilly translates as 'loved comrade';[929] and his *acme* and *fine*, terms of kinship.[930] Ultimately, Cú Chulainn stresses their time together and the explicitly familial bond between them.

There are two aspects of the fight itself that might not seem unusual but do take on a different tone when we consider the great love Cú Chulainn feels for Fer Diad. The first is that Cú Chulainn needs to be incited by Láeg to succeed in the combat;[931] the second is that Cú Chulainn's final attack explicitly and literally breaks Fer Diad's heart (Fer Diad states: *mo chride is crú* 'my heart is gore'[932]). This is not the only place in the literature where Cú Chulainn needs incitement to complete a task (see *Tochmarc Emire* for example),[933] nor the only place in medieval Gaelic saga wherein someone's heart is broken, literally in Fer Diad's case, though the heartbroken trope is more usually seen in women.[934] But if Cú Chulainn's love for Fer Diad is kept in mind whilst reading, further reluctance on his part can be read in the former, and tragic poetry in the latter.[935] A generous reading, focusing on bonds of love, elevates these two details in terms of significance as not solely being literal, or coincidental.

Against the background of their shared youth and the familial connection between them, Cú Chulainn begins his lament by listing the virtues of his fallen friend. We hear Fer Diad's beauty, valour, and possessions eulogised. Cú Chulainn praises their *comaltas* 'foster-brotherhood, (intimate) friendship'[936] which Cú Chulainn describes as *cóem* or *cáem*, 'dear, precious, beloved; belonging to the family'.[937] Cú Chulainn refers to Fer Diad as *a lóeg*, translated by O'Rahilly as 'my loved one'.[938] Cú Chulainn ends with the notion that he thought *Fer dil Diad is am diaid no biad co bráth* 'dear Fer Diad/would live after me for ever.'[939] It is worth bearing in mind here Cú Chulainn is prophesied to live a short life in the same text.[940]

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[928] Ibid., p. 93; trans. p. 206.
[929] See *eDIL s.vv. coicéile and coicell.*
[930] *Fine* has already been discussed; for *a(i)cme*, see *eDIL s.v. aicme.*
[931] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 93; trans. p. 207.
[932] Ibid., p. 94; trans. p. 207. It is worth remembering this is shortly after Cú Chulainn has used the word *cridi* to describe Fer Diad.
[933] Meyer, 'The Wooing of Emer', p. 150.
[934] Indeed, Líadain was seen stating her heart was broken in the previous chapter. See Mac Mathúna, 'Lexical and Literary Aspects of 'Heart' in Irish', for discussion of heartbreak in medieval Gaelic.
[935] It is worth stating that the heart as a metaphor for love existed in medieval Gaelic also. Ibid.
[936] *eDIL s.v. comaltas.*
[937] *eDIL s.v. 1 cáem.*

There is a strong emotional bond between Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad, based on *comaltas* and expressed using the language of kinship (*aicme* and *fine*, even over his true *fine*). One of the biggest tragedies portrayed in medieval Gaelic saga as a whole is the fight between these two foster-brothers with such love between them. Some have read their bond as romantic. The event does not need to be read as romantic for the tragedy to be powerful. This conflict of familial love is tragic and emotional even when read as being between two foster-brothers.[941] The present-day, Western assumption that romantic love is the pinnacle of emotion is not necessarily true in medieval Gaelic saga, where we have seen instances of familial and religious love can be just as emphasised. The familial dimension at play in the relationship between Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad does nothing to lessen the intensity of emotion between the pair; if anything, medieval Gaelic saga finds one of its most powerful expressions in the familial bond between these two foster-brothers.

5.3.2 Masculinity and Femininity

Cú Chulainn's lament does not compromise his masculinity. Neither here, nor in Rónán's lament for his own murdered son, is there any sense of lamentation and expressing grief being inappropriate for a man and warrior. In the later *Acallam na Senórach* ('The Colloquy of the Ancients'), the key warrior Caílte frequently weeps and laments for his lost kin,[942] and again this is not presented in the text as impacting negatively upon his masculinity. The notion that expressions of sadness and love compromise the masculine ideal is not relevant to medieval Gaelic saga texts. Men lament in Old Gaelic literature.[943] That said, as Mulligan states, 'in the Irish sources it is primarily women who lament over the body and lead the poetic declamations that are an important part of the rituals of death.'[944]

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[938] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 94-95; trans. pp. 207-8. See *eDIL s.v. lóeg.*

[939] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 95; trans. p. 208.

[940] Ibid., p. 20; trans. p. 143.

[941] See O'Donnell, *Fosterage in Medieval Ireland*, pp. 86-87.

[942] Dooley and Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*. See Kristen Mills, 'Sorrow and Conversion in *Acallam na Senórach*', *Éigse*, 38 (2013), 1–19.

[943] See also Kristen Mills, 'Death, Women, and Power: Theme and Structure in *Reicne Fothaid Canainne'* *Ériu*, 68 (2018), 65–98.

Women lament fallen family members such as (foster-)brothers and sons, as the men do, but they also lament romantic partners, and lament their own situations.[945] Women also mention other women in their laments, even if examples of women lamenting women are lacking. In *Tochmarc Ferbe*, we see several laments from multiple women. Ferb laments her romantic partner Maine, which includes her sympathy for Maine's mother and sister, and Ferb's mother laments Ferb's father.[946] For Shercliff, lamentation is particularly 'active' when it encourages or causes further action; in her laments, Ferb incites others to fight.[947] The image of a fallen hero being lamented by his wife recurs. We see Emer do this in the Old Gaelic *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni*, also known as 'The Death of Cú Chulainn'.[948] Lamentation can be seen as part of a woman's role in heroic society, especially given Hollo's argument that lamentation was particularly associated with women.[949] That said, Rosenwein's point must be borne in mind: performance does not negate feeling. That performing a lament may be part of a woman's role does not mean that she does not feel the emotions she expresses. Another expression of women's grief will shortly be discussed: namely, death.

5.3.3 *Aided Óenfhir Aífe*

Several of the issues thus far discussed — particularly the laments of men, the words of women, and collective responses of kin — can be found in *Aided Óenfhir Aífe*. Emer advises Cú Chulainn against confronting Connla, but is ignored.[950] Emer's speech act here has been examined in great detail by Findon;[951] Emer's words would have averted disaster, were she listened to. Emer in fact clearly tells Cú Chulainn Connla is his son, only for Cú Chulainn to respond: '*Cid é no beth and, a ben,' ol sé, 'na ngénainnse a inchaib Ulad.*' 'Even though it were he who is there, woman,' said he, 'I would kill him for the honour of Ulster.'[952] Thus, Cú Chulainn's act of kin-slaying is not without choice or knowledge of the situation. His *Cid é no beth and* 'Even if it were him' suggests he is not completely convinced by Emer's recognition of Connla, but even still he states in no uncertain terms he would kill even his son for the *enech* 'honour' of the Ulaid. For Cú Chulainn, his duty to his kin, his *condalbae*, and the *enech* of the Ulaid, supersede the familial bond with his son.

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[944] Mulligan, 'Poetry', 392. Indeed, Mulligan points to Cú Chulainn's lament for Fer Diad as 'transgressive', as Cú Chulainn takes up the role we would expect from a 'powerful female agent'. Ibid., 402.

[945] Derdriu laments both Noísiu (her romantic partner) and her own situation in *Longes mac nUislenn*. Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, pp. 48-50; trans. pp. 66-68. See Mathis, 'Mourning the Maic Uislenn'.

[946] Shercliff, '*Tochmarc Ferbe*', pp. 78-80; pp. 48-50.

[947] Ibid., pp. 187-189.

[948] *The Death of Cú Chulainn: A Critical Edition of the Earliest Version of Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni*, ed. & trans. by Bettina Kimpton, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts, 6 (Maynooth: School of Celtic Studies, National University of Ireland, 2009), pp. 30-34. There is sadly not space here to examine in any great depth this most affecting and powerful of our saga laments.

[949] Hollo, 'Laments and Lamentation', p. 86.

[950] van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, p. 14.

[951] Findon, *A Woman's Words*, pp. 84-106.

Following Cú Chulainn's slaying of Connla, he carries his son to the Ulaid and presents him to them.[953] Cú Chulainn does not eulogise his son. Instead, Connla describes his own wasted potential, and the glory he would have brought the Ulaid.[954] Here then is another element of the text wherein things are not as they should be: expectations are that a hero dies, and they are lamented by a lover or comrade. Here, a fledgling hero dies without having accomplished the deeds a lament would catalogue (albeit having bested many of the Ulaid), including taking a partner or fighting alongside foster-brothers, either of whom might lament his passing.

While explicit grief from Cú Chulainn is not seen, the collective response of the Ulaid as a kin-group is presented:

> *Ro lád tra a gáir gubai ⁊ a fert ⁊ a liae ocus co cend trí tráth nícon reilcthea loíg dia mbuaib la h-Ultu in diaid.*
>
> Then his cry of lament was raised, his grave made, and his stone set up, and to the end of three days no calf was let to their cows by the men of Ulster, to commemorate him. [955]

The enforced separation of calf and cow adds to an atmosphere of grief, and is a clear symbolic evocation of Cú Chulainn's separation from Connla. The cattle become proxies for the Ulaid themselves, having to undergo these days of separation and mourning.[956] At the same time, the separation of cattle is gendered feminine; the mothers suffer the outcome of this (hyper)masculine conflict, along with their children. This action, taken by a male figure, badly impacts upon all those around him, even the female animals and their young. Cú Chulainn's desire to gain honour for the Ulaid surpasses even the familial connection between father and son, and the text ends with the Ulaid in mourning.

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[952] van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, p. 14; Meyer, 'The Death of Conla', 119.
[953] van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, p. 15.
[954] Ibid.
[955] Ibid.; Meyer, 'The Death of Conla', 121.
[956] Vernam Hull, 'The Death of Conla', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie,* 29 (1962/64), pp. 190-1.

5.3.4 Death by Grief

In Chapter Four, the potential for rage to kill men was seen, such in the case of Conchobar's death. Women in medieval Gaelic saga can also die from excess of emotion. Death from grief is not altogether uncommon in the saga texts; and women can die from shame. Again, there is an overlap between love and honour in medieval Gaelic literature. The line between the honour-based death of shame, and the love-based death of grief, is not always clear-cut. Ambiguous cases, such as Deirdriu's death in *Longes mac nUislenn*, invite comment and disagreement.[957] Again, Deirdriu's death is a moment where purposeful ambiguity could be argued for. There are times when shame or grief is explicitly mentioned in a text as the cause of the death. As discussed, *Tochmarc Ferbe* features the deaths of Ferb and 150 women from grief for their fallen kin, after being captured.[958]

It is worth noting the utility of death by grief as a narrative tool. In a literature focusing on aristocratic men, one would expect to see their wives, even if only as status symbols and eulogists of their husbands. Upon the husband's death, however, death by grief allows an author to wrap up the tale of the couple (occasionally after a lament to reiterate the man's heroism). If one seeks to highlight the deeds of the husband, having a wife avenge him would risk overshadowing his accomplishments, in our period at least. And being able to quickly write out the widow of a hero is no doubt useful in composing a literature with a high body count.

Even in deaths from shame, the overlap between honour and emotion is worth bearing in mind. When Findabair dies in the *Táin* on hearing how her parents have offered her as a prize to multiple champions should they defeat Cú Chulainn, and how this has led to the deaths of 700 men,[959] it is a response to the impugning of her honour. She explicitly dies of *féle*, 'that which causes shame, nakedness, *pudenda*'. [960] But shame is not only an aspect of honour but an emotion itself, and one which can contain the betrayal of familial love that Findabair may be feeling.

The story of Fithir and Dáiríne offers an example of a tale wherein a woman dies of grief and another of shame. Fithir and Dáiríne appear in the Middle Gaelic text *Bóroma*

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[957] For an overview of various interpretations of Derdriu's death/suicide and its motivation, see Mathis, 'Evolution of Deirdriu', pp. 104-111. Note that Mathis is discussing the ambiguity of Derdriu's death, not necessarily shame; but if we read her death as suicide, that does have implications for our potential understanding of her death as one of shame.

[958] Shercliff, '*Tochmarc Ferbe*', p. 83.

[959] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 102.

[960] *eDIL s.v. féle.*

Laigen ‘The Cattle-tribute of the Leinstermen/Laigin’, wherein they are the daughters of Tuathal Techtmar, king of Tara.[961] Leinster’s Eochaid mac Eochaid Domlén wants to marry Dáiríne, the younger of the two, but Tuathal insists he marry the elder Fithir. Eochaid does so, but later tricks Tuathal into thinking Fithir has died. Eochaid then marries Dáiríne. Eochaid takes Dáiríne home with him, Fithir sees her and realises what has been done, and dies of shame. Dáiríne dies then of grief for her dead sister:

> *dos-rat leis co Ráith Immil, áit imbái ind ingen aile ara cind. Amal atchondairc immorro Fithir Dárine atbail Fithir* ***de náre*** *fochetóir. Amal atchondairc sede éc a sethar atbail* ***de chumaid****.*
>
> [He] brought her to Raith Immil, the place wherein the other daughter was before her. But when Fithir beheld Dárḟine she **dies** at once **of shame**. When Dárḟine beheld her sister’s death she **dies of grief**.[962]

Tuathal then laments, a notable case of a father lamenting his daughters’ deaths.[963]

In his lament, Tuathal outlines the reasons for the daughters’ deaths. Fithir dies of shame (*náre*) upon seeing her husband married to her sister, and Dáiríne of ‘grief/sorrow’(*cumaid*).[964] The latter of these shows a sisterly bond expressed in grief; this bond is worth noting as the power of emotion between sisters represented is not often represented. The former, death by *náre*, brings up the topic of shame. Betrayal by a lover and/or family member can shame a character, but as stated shame is not only social and legal dishonour, but also an emotion. Being shamed by the public actions of your romantic partner also appears in *Serglige Con Culainn*, wherein Emer readies herself to attack Fand after Cú Chulainn plans to keep them both as romantic partners.[965] Toner argues it is not so much that Cú Chulainn has been unfaithful to Emer that upsets her, but that he has publicly shamed her with his actions.[966] In Toner's argument again is seen the betrayal of a woman's honour by a romantic partner, and on a public stage; though emotion ought not to be entirely dismissed. In *Serglige Con Culainn* we also see Fand's crying and lamenting at being left by Cú Chulainn being explicitly stated as resulting from *náre*, 'shame'.[967]

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[961] ‘The *Bórama’*, ed. & trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 13 (1892), 32–124, 299–300 (36). Fithir and Dáirine also appear in the thirteenth-century *Acallam na Senórach*, amongst other texts. See Elín Ingibjörg Eyjólfsdóttir, ‘The *Bórama*: The Poetry and the Hagiography in the Book of Leinster’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2012), pp. 38-41. Eyjólfsdóttir states the tale of Fithir and Dáirine was clearly a standalone text incorporated into both the larger *Bóroma* and *Acallam* (Ibid., p. 43).

[962] Stokes, ‘The *Bórama’*, p. 38; trans. p. 39. Emphasis is my own. A brief note on the differences between *náire* and *féle*, given that both are discussed as ‘shame’ here. Féle in the sense in which we are encountering it, is translated by *eDIL* as ‘that which causes shame, nakedness, *pudenda’*. As such, there is a specific element of exposure in *féle* not necessarily present in *náire*, ‘Feeling of shame or humiliation; shame, disgrace (in objective sense)’. *eDIL s.v. féle; náire.*

[963] Eyjólfsdóttir states: ‘The third verse indicates that they were twins and because of this they were destined to die together.’ This may be a closer relationship than the average sibling relationship, then. Twins in medieval Gaelic saga would be worth examination (Conchobar and Christ’s connected births and deaths might fall under such a study also), but there is not space here to dedicate to the issue. Eyjólfsdóttir, 'The *Bórama*', p. 67.

[964] *eDIL s.v. 1 cuma.*

[965] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 24-25.

Crucially for this chapter, however, it is not only romantic partners who betray women's trust: kin can too. Medb's misuse of Findabair in the *Táin* results in her death from shame as discussed.[968] And discerning between kin and romantic partner becomes blurred when marriage is involved. D. A. Binchy has written on women and marriage, and stated that 'the more formal the marriage, the greater the separation' from the married woman's former kin.[969] The line between the romantic and the familial then becomes less clear, when a woman's romantic partner in a formal marriage becomes her kin.

There are also clearly ambiguous cases where a woman's death may be for grief, for shame, or for some other reason. The daughter of Echaid in *Fingal Rónáin* dies by suicide after the heads of her father, mother, and brother are thrown at her.[970] The text does not give further information regarding what element of this experience causes her suicide, though Boll suggests three plausible explanations: a death from grief; a death from guilt and shame; or 'to prevent a more painful outcome'.[971] If there were to be 'a more painful outcome' forthcoming, such as her being killed by Mael Fhothartaig's relatives, one might expect that to have happened by this point in the narrative.[972] A death from grief, shame, or shock, might seem more likely. That said, given the horrible nature of the situation, trying to discern which one emotion dominates is fruitless.

It is worth here noting that it is not only women who die from grief.[973] While typically men might respond to loss through seeking vengeance, there are occasions where men's deaths can be seen as coming from grief or sorrow. It might be inferred that the aforementioned Lugaid Riab nDerg, born of Clothru's incest with her three brothers, dies from grief for Derbforgaill in the tale of her violent deaths:

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[966] Toner, 'Desire and Divorce', 150-151.

[967] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 25.

[968] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, p. 102.

[969] D. A. Binchy, 'Appendix: Family Membership of Women', in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, ed. by Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power and Myles Dillon (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1936), pp. 180–86 (p. 182).

[970] Greene, *Fingal Rónáin*, p. 9.

[971] Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration', 12-13.

[972] Though, admittedly, medeival Gaelic saga is not renowned for its narrative predictability.

[973] We might even read Conchobar's death, which we discussed in the previous chapter, as a death from grief: his rage at hearing of Christ's death ultimately kills him, albeit due to the calcified brain embedded in his skull.

> *Is ed at-berat-som ní baí a hanim inti-si in tan tancatar-som is tech innund. As-berat dano ba marb Lugaid a chétóir oca déscin.*
>
> This is what they say: that her [Derbforgaill's] soul was not in her when they came into that house. They say then that Lugaid died immediately upon seeing her.[974]

That Lugaid dies immediately may point towards a reading of death by grief. There is ambiguity about what precisely has killed Lugaid, as the text does not state a cause of death, but it is not unreasonable to read Lugaid's death as a death from grief or sorrow upon seeing his romantic partner thus injured.

Overall, ties of familial love can lead to death by grief or shame, just as ties of romantic love can. Both causes of death tend to affect women more than men; this is another area in which love in medieval Gaelic saga is gendered, as so often grief or shame are interlinked with love in the texts. That said, men too can die from the deaths of loved ones, even if it is not the norm. The proportional roles of honour and emotion in shame are not always clear-cut. One is particularly able to read emotion into deaths by shame as often they involve some betrayal of familial or romantic trust, as well as transgression against honour; and it is far from impossible to read an emotional reaction even to a simple transgression of honour itself. The complex interactions of familial love and honour rear their heads once again.

5.3.5 Revenge

Nowhere is the line between honour, law, and familial love harder to discern than in the matter of revenge. Ambiguity is at its zenith in this facet of the discussion. Your brother is unjustly killed, and you avenge him; this honour demands. But were one to suggest that your act of vengeance does not include in it any familial love, and is solely or primarily honour-based, the idea would be hard to believe. Men — and we shall focus primarily on men here as revenge is more often, but not always, their domain — can express their emotions of familial love and loss eloquently, as we have seen. When men enact revenge, avenging the object of their familial love, it is not unreasonable to read the same depth of emotion being felt by the characters.

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[974] Ingridsdotter, '*Aided Derbforgaill*', p. 86; trans. p. 87.

There is a legal aspect to be considered here.[975] As Kelly outlines, if the compensation following a killing was not forthcoming, there could be an obligation to avenge a kin-member: 'If a non-paying killer is at large, the victim's kinsmen are obliged to carry out a blood-feud to exact vengeance (*dígal*) on behalf of the dead man.'[976] Similarly, foster-fathers are expected to avenge their foster-sons 'if necessary'.[977] Such potential legal obligations can form a tool in the analysis of revenge, with caveats: again, the fact that an act carried out is duty- or honour-bound does not mean that an emotion is not felt.[978] Alongside legal obligation or familial duty, the possibility of emotional motivation cannot be ignored; one being 'legally bound' to carry out a certain act does not mean there is no emotional motivation informing them. If we accept that the world depicted in the laws and the one depicted in our sagas differ, we must also resist the impulse to immediately ascribe a legal motivation to actions if the text itself is ambiguous.

Aided Derbforgaill further provides us with relevant material here. After Derbforgaill and Lugaid's deaths, as stated, we see Cú Chulainn take revenge:

> *Luid immorro Cú Chulaind isa tech cosna mná co tarat a tech forthu conná tudchid fer ná ben i mbethaid assin tig sin .i. dona trí coícdaib rígan acht ros-marb uile.*
>
> Cú Chulainn went then into the house to the women so that he knocked down the house upon them so that no man or woman came out alive from that house, that is, of the three fifties of queens but he killed them all.[979]

Cú Chulainn then laments the pair.

Cú Chulainn here massacres members of his own collective group, the Ulaid. Cú Chulainn's relationship to Derbforgaill must also be examined; by his own reasoning, they cannot have a romantic relationship.[980] In setting her up with Lugaid, who is his foster-son, we can imagine some degree of foster relationship between Cú Chulainn and Derbforgaill, despite the latter's longing for Cú Chulainn.[981] Cú Chulainn's lament includes verses eulogising both Lugaid and Derbforgaill,[982] strongly suggesting it is not only Lugaid whom he is avenging. After both Lugaid and Derbforgaill's deaths, Cú Chulainn responds with violence. He avenges his loved ones, even, potentially, against the kin-group into which he has been accepted.[983] At the same time, Derbforgaill was under Cú Chulainn's protection, a protection violated by the women of the Ulaid. Cú Chulainn can therefore be seen as motivated by both duty and emotion.

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[975] See Boll's discussion of Donn's 'revenge' in *Fingal Rónáin*. Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration', 11. Boll also discusses the legal obligations of revenge regarding foster-kin: Ibid.
[976] Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 127.
[977] Ibid., p. 89.
[978] Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 5.
[979] Ingridsdotter, '*Aided Derbforgaill*', p. 86; trans. p. 87.
[980] Ibid., p. 84; trans. p. 85.
[981] Ibid.
[982] Ibid., p. 86; trans. p. 87.

Men can seek revenge when their own honour is impugned, as in the Yellow Book of Lecan version of the Old Gaelic tale *Aided Con Roí* ('The Violent Death of Cú Roí'), wherein Cú Roí's shaming of Cú Chulainn motivates the latter's revenge.[984] In this section, however, the focus is on revenge occasioned by the loss of a loved family member. People of different genders can tend to react differently. To suggest that men seek revenge in response to outraged honour or loss, whereas women die, would not be accurate: we have characters such as Ferb using incitement to use men in order to (attempt to) get revenge. In the Middle Gaelic *Aided Meidbe*, we see again Clothru, Medb's sister, and the story of the conception of her son Lugaid Riab nDerg. After said conception, Medb kills Clothru, and *tucsat na claidib in Furbaide mac Conchobair* 'the sword brought forth Furbaide mac Conchobair', effectively a caesarean section.[985] Furbaide later, upon being informed of Medb's identity, throws hard cheese at her and kills her *i n-digail a mathar* 'to avenge his mother'.[986] *Dígal* is found in *eDIL* as 'avenging, punishing; vengeance, punishment'[987] with examples primarily, but not only, coming from laws as one might expect. This legal aspect may blur the line between what Furbaide is doing for love and what he is legally obliged to do, even if he never knew his mother. The point still stands; the idea that Furbaide acts only as law dictates without any hint of personal familial feeling would not bear scrutiny. Whether Furbaide is acting out of emotion, or legal obligation, or both, is ambiguous, though.

Furbaide's situation can be seen as a fairly standard set-up for revenge. Someone is killed; a male relative violently avenges them. Violent vengeance is far more common in medieval Gaelic saga than the seeking of *éraic* or 'body-price', though the latter is well attested in medieval Gaelic law.[988] This discrepancy is another divide between medieval

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[983] This is not the first time the women of the Ulaid and Cú Chulainn are at odds. In *Serglige Con Culainn*, he is extremely dismissive of the women of the Ulaid as a group: see Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. 2. This is also not the only example of Cú Chulainn killing multitudes of people: I am not arguing that his violence here is excessive due to the extent of his love for the pair, merely that his love for the pair can be seen to motivate his reaction.

[984] 'The Tragic Death of Cúrói Mac Dári', ed. & trans. by R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 2 (1905), 18–35 (22).

[985] Hull, '*Aided Meidbe*', 55; trans. 60.

[986] Ibid., 56. Translation my own.

[987] *eDIL s.v. dígal.*

[988] See Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, pp. 13-15. As discussed, when *éraic* has not been paid, the certain members of kin and foster-kin are entitled to seek vengeance. Saga and law are not always at odds: a version of *Aided Óenfhir Aífe* is used to elucidate a point of legal conflict, namely who is owed recompense when *fingal* is committed. 'Cuchulinn and Conlaech', ed. & trans. by J. G. O'Keeffe, *Ériu*, 1 (1904), 123–27 (126-27). That

Gaelic law and saga: as has been seen, revenge is a far more common path for the saga heroes than the seeking of monetary compensation.

However, while violent revenge is seen as mostly a male pursuit, there are examples of women undertaking fatal vengeance. As will shortly be discussed, there are tales where women are accessories to murder, such as *Aided Con Roí*, where Cú Roí could not be killed without Bláthnait's intervention. But even leaving such examples to one side, women are seen pursuing violent revenge for their killed kin. In *Scéla Conchobuir meic Nessa*,[989] Ness undertakes violent activity after the murder of her foster-fathers:

> *Orta leiss issind oenaidchi a da haite dec na ingine, 7 nicon fess cia ro ort in n-orggain. Luid iarum iar suidiu ind ingen for fennidecht 7 gabaid gaisced ocus luide trib nonbaraib fo Herind, co ffessed nech ro marb a haiteda, ocus ro chrin na tilatha. Is cumma nos-crinad uili daig ni fitir sainriuth a bidbada.*
>
> The girl's twelve [foster-fathers] were all slain by [Cathbad] in a single night, and no one knew who had wrought the slaughter. After this the girl went a-championing, and took arms and fared forth with three enneads throughout Ireland that she might know who had killed her [foster-fathers]. And she laid the tribes waste, she devastated all equally, because she knew not her foes in particular.[990]

Ness is ultimately unsuccessful, and ends up bearing Cathbad's child, Conchobar. Still, Boll is right to include Ness's thwarted revenge in her list of examples of 'foster-kin as avengers', [991] and Ness can be seen as part of the larger trope of violent responses from women to the murders of kin and foster-kin.

Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca gives potentially a more successful instance of violent revenge from a woman.[992] As discussed in the previous chapter, Sín undertakes a thorough revenge against Muirchertach, not only enabling his death but also isolating him from his family, his church, and inducing hallucinations in him in order to thoroughly ruin him.[993] When asked for her motive by the clerics at the tale's end, Sín states:

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vengence is more common in saga is not necessarily surprising, given how it gives the opportunity to show off a character's skill in violence.

[989] Stokes, 'Tidings of Conchobar Mac Nessa'.

[990] Ibid., 22; trans. 23.

[991] Boll, 'Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration', 11.

[992] Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig*.

[993] See Mark Williams, 'Lady Vengeance'.

> *'Muirchertach mac Erca', ol sí 'ro marb m'athair 7 mo máthair 7 mo derbráthair 7 mo derbshiur i ccath Chirb for Bóinn 7 ro dicheann Sentuatha Temrach 7 m'atharda uile isin cath sin fós,'*[994]
>
> 'Muirchertach mac Erca killed my father, my mother[, my brother] and my sister in the battle of Cerb on Boyne, and also destroyed in that battle all of the Old-Tribes of Tara and my fatherland.'[995]

In what follows, there is a poetic back-and-forth between the cleric Cairnech and Sín in which Sín states she will die of 'grief and guilt/crime' (*Atbélsa féin dia chumaid [...] i cinta).*[996] Cairnech asks where and who Sín is from, and Sín outlines her family as she does in the surrounding prose,[997] after which Cairnech states:

> *Nirb annsa duit t'athair féin*
> *iná Muirchertach hua Néill*[998]
>
> Not dearer to thee was thine own father
> than Muirchertach, Niall's descendant[999]

Cairnech states that Sín's father was not more beloved by her than Muirchertach. The particular word is *annsa* '(more) beloved, dear(er), etc […] Hence in later lang. *annsa* love, affection'.[1000] If we take Cairnech at his word, it would make sense of Sín dying of grief for Muirchertach: it reframes the tale as one wherein Sín is obligated to ruin Muirchertach even though she does (come to) hold him dear. This would firmly tie the tale into a more honour-based reading. That Sín does have affection for Muirchertach is also seen in her own words in this poetic back-and-forth. She states: *Atbélsa féin **dia chumaid**,* I 'will die of **grief for him**'.[1001]

Though Sín does express affection for the man she has ruined and killed, arguing that Sín's murder of Muirchertach is based solely on honour or obligation is questionable. As a woman there is no legal obligation upon her to avenge her family, though the narrative world of the sagas does not absolutely adhere to the laws of medieval Gaeldom. The honour of women however tends not to be based on their capacity for violence,[1002] and, were one to suggest that Sín would have had no emotional reaction to her family's death, the notion would be suspect. Indeed, Cairnech's words, while highlighting Sín's feelings for Muirchertach, do at the same time imply Sín dearly loved her father; his statement only makes sense if Sín loved her father. Familial love can justifiably be read as a clear motivating factor in Sín's revenge.

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[994] Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig*, p. 31.
[995] Stokes, 'The Death of Muirchertach Mac Erca', 429.
[996] Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig*, p. 32; Stokes, 'The Death of Muirchertach', 429.
[997] Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig*, p. 32.
[998] Ibid.
[999] Stokes, 'The Death of Muirchertach', 429.
[1000] *eDIL s.v. ansu.*
[1001] Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig*, p. 32. Stokes, 'The Death of Muirchertach', 429.

Ultimately, love can clearly be seen as a motivation for vengeance taken for the death of a family member. Revenge is another key area in which familial love can be seen through character actions. Men's revenge dominates medieval Gaelic saga, much as men's violence does. However, women are shown to be motivated to take revenge, and familial love can frequently be read as a motivator for doing so. Revenge forms a nexus point for familial love and legal or honour obligations, and at times it is tempting to read texts only one way or the other. However, when it comes to discerning love from honour, multiple readings must be encouraged, and an expansive approach should be taken to texts rather than limiting them to one text, one answer. Crucially, the topic of revenge further reminds us that emotion and honour are not mutually exclusive concepts; one can be compelled by honour to take revenge, and also be motivated by familial love.

5.3.6 Discerning Love from Honour

As has been seen thus far, at times it is unclear whether a character's actions are motivated by love or the demands of honour. The point stands that an act being necessary, legally or honourably, does not mean it is not also emotional. Revenge and death by shame are two key examples of responses that are tied to honour, but into which emotion can be read. Love and honour are not mutually exclusive concepts; this is particularly true when it comes to familial love, as the family unit is both an emotive and a legal entity. Shame can be both a concept regarding duty and an emotion deeply felt. Ultimately, acts do not have to be narrowly defined as solely answering questions of honour, or solely being related emotional reactions. Multiple readings are encouraged, and love and honour have considerable overlap.

In the Introduction, the issue of influential twentieth-century scholars asserting that love's role as a theme is limited in early medieval Gaelic saga was raised. It is clear how only reading honour or legal responsibilities as motives could allow such an opinion to perpetuate. If one reads every act of violent revenge, and every death by grief or shame, as a character solely answering what is asked of them in terms of honour, one is not acknowledging the emotional states of these characters. A lack of attention to love in scholarship of medieval Gaelic saga could be seen as keeping scholars focused on legal duties and honour when discussing vengeance, for instance, rather than examining it as an emotive concept. Focusing exclusively on honour discourages reading the emotional richness of medieval Gaelic saga. Again, multiple readings are encouraged: our literature's ambiguity need not be a hurdle, but an opportunity, an invitation for expansive, generous reading.

[1002] See O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women'.

5.3.7 Further Conflicts: Wives and Kinswomen

Aided Con Roí has thus far been mentioned only in passing, but now is the time to give it our full attention. Examining *Aided Con Roí* in comparison with a few other texts may point towards a better understanding of questions that have occurred throughout this chapter: namely, the limits of familial love in conflict with romantic love, and the question of the proper conduct of women towards their original kin once married.

In the version of *Aided Con Roí* contained in Egerton 88, Bláthnait[1003] is the daughter of Conchobar, and is of the Ulaid.[1004] She is taken by Cú Roí and becomes his romantic partner. Later, when Cú Chulainn comes to kill Cú Roí, his stance is bolstered by the Ulaid also endorsing that Bláthnait betray her romantic partner.[1005] Bláthnait does, thus acting as her family wants, but is then killed for betraying her husband. As Sarah Pfannenschmidt states:

> The reason for Bláthnait's betrayal in *Aided I* [the version in Egerton 88] concerns family and clan loyalty. Cú Chulainn convinces her that it is her father's will to give up Cú Roí 's secret, and she is in the position of having to choose loyalty to her family over her husband.[1006]

[1003] Here called Bláithini.

[1004] 'Die Sage von CuRoi', ed. & trans. by Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie*, 9 (1913), 189–234 (190).

[1005] Ibid., 192.

[1006] Sarah L. Pfannenschmidt, "From the Shame You Have Done': Comparing the Stories of Blodeuedd and Bláthnait', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 29 (2009), 244–67 (250).

In the other versions of the text, lacking this explicit familial motive, she is shamed for betraying Cú Roí.[1007] As Pfannenschmidt points out, in the longer version of the text found most extensively in the Yellow Book of Lecan, Bláthnait's 'role is more active, as she goes to greater lengths to betray her husband', including sexual infidelity.[1008]

Certain caveats should be borned in mind in analysing Bláthnait and shame, lest the case be overstated. In both versions, Bláthnait has been stolen by Cú Roí, [1009] and so one does not necessarily assume deep romantic affection from her for him. That said, abduction does not always mean unwillingness on a party's behalf in medieval Gaelic saga. Cú Chulainn abducts Emer, after all. [1010] Cumhall abducts Muirne specifically *for aithed leis*, 'in elopement with him', in the eleventh-century tale *Fotha Catha Cnucha*.[1011] In other versions of the *Aided* then, even though the Ulaid do not egg Bláthnait on, one might read Cú Chulainn coming from the Ulaid as suggesting some form of endorsement of betraying Cú Roí coming from her kin. Bláthnait also engages in a romantic relationship with Cú Chulainn, and this adultery might be at least partly the cause of her being shamed. The notion that a romantically engaged woman should prioritise her partner (in Bláthnait's case, Cú Roí) over her family is also apparent in Cairnech's words to Sín in *Aided Muirchertaig*. One can also think of *Tochmarc Emire* here, wherein Emer's desire for Cú Chulainn brings her to act against her kin.[1012] Emer chooses lover over kin and is rewarded; Bláthnait chooses kin over lover and is chastised (though, admittedly, not by said kin). And in *Tochmarc Ailbe*, discussed in Chapter Two, Ailbe's father Cormac advises her against marrying the old man Finn.[1013] Ailbe responds to Cormac and they have a poetic dialogue, by the end of which she seems to have convinced Cormac of her argument.[1014] Ailbe mediates the issue of kin versus lover early on, and as such the tale ends happily.

There is a legal aspect here also worth considering. We return to Binchy's point discussed earlier: namely, that 'the more formal the marriage, the greater the separation' from the woman's original kin.[1015] Bearing this fact in mind as *Aided Con Roí* is considered might further add weight to the idea that Bláthnait is stuck in a position of conflict. Cú Roí has abducted her; it is not a formal marriage. In consequence, legally, her separation from her kin is far from absolute; it would not be recognised at all. And so when it is conveyed to her that her kin wishes for her to act against her partner, even if she is devoted to him, she is in a difficult position. Familial love and romantic love are in conflict. Muirne, for instance, suffers in *Fotha Catha Cnucha* for having eloped with Cumhall; her father refuses to accept her back after Cumhall's death since she is pregnant, and orders that she be burned.[1016]

[1007] Best, 'The Tragic Death of Cúrói mac Dári', 32; trans. 33.

[1008] Pfannenschmidt, "From the Shame You Have Done", 250.

[1009] The Ulaid have slighted Cú Roí in refusing to give him the spoils of a raid. In the Egerton *Aided*, Bláithini has been kidnapped and Cú Roí helps return her, but is not justly rewarded. In the Yellow Book of Lecan *Aided*, Cú Roí helps the Ulaid raid Iuchna, and they take with them his daughter Bláthnait. The Ulaid again are ungenerous, and so Cú Roí abducts Bláthnait.

[1010] Meyer, 'The Wooing of Emer', 305.

[1011] For date, see Meyer, *Fíanaigecht*, p. xxv. Hennessy, 'The Battle of Cnucha', 88; trans. 89.

[1012] Meyer, 'The Wooing of Emer', 305.

[1013] For discussion of Finn as an old man, and the theme of 'youth versus age' in *fíanaigecht*, see Geraldine Parsons, 'A 'Youth Versus Age' Tale-cluster in the Early Finn Cycle and Depictions of Finn in Old Age', in *Fenian Tradition and Gaelic Identity from Past to Present,* ed. by Natasha Sumner and Joseph Falaky Nagy (forthcoming).

[1014] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and Her Sisters', p. 208.

Ultimately, the image we get from medieval Gaelic saga could be viewed as that women are to be loyal to their husbands, even against their own kin, but that this can have consequences. Thus, Emer is 'right' to act against her kin for Cú Chulainn in *Tochmarc Emire*, and Sín and Bláthnait are 'wrong' to act against their romantic partners on their kin's behalf, even if both unions are less than formal.[1017] Observing this divergence between law and saga could help elucidate meaning in further texts. For example, in *Táin Bó Fraích*, when Findabair acts against Medb and Ailill, her kin, for Fráech, her romantic partner, we can compare this with the texts we have just discussed and discern that our loyalties as readers 'ought to' lie with Findabair, reductive as such an approach might be. That said, Muirne suffers after eloping with Cumhall; after his death she is separated both from her romantic partner, and her family. There is still ambiguity, then, regarding the proper conduct of women in this situation, but its possibilities for informing better comparative analysis of our saga texts going forward are many.

5.4 Conclusion

Overall, the family is a complex social unit in medieval Gaelic saga. The complexity of familial ties then leads to complexities in discussing familial love. Several conclusions emerge, however. In terms of the family unit, sons are prioritised by their mothers and sisters. This is of little surprise given the prominence of young men in medieval Gaelic saga.[1018] Sons are prioritised in particular by their mothers, but also at times by their sisters. Foster-fathers tend to be supportive, perhaps best encapsulated in Fergus's aid of Cú Chulainn even after turning against Conchobar and the Ulaid; natal fathers can tend to be absent, or the perpetrators of kin-killing (some, like Cú Chulainn, are both). Our most prominent examples of kin-killing are instances of intergenerational conflict between fathers and sons; such conflict exists elsewhere without ending in murder, such as between Finn and Oisín. Some might argue that in the family, men get to act on their own, whereas women's acts advance the causes of others. Yet, this is an overgeneralisation. On the contrary, at times foster-brothers and other men act to advance the causes of others, and women act on their own initiative. The sagas might suggest, however, that wives should act against their former kin if it is in the interest of their romantic partner, and that this should be the case even when a marriage is not completely formal.

[1015] Binchy, 'Family Membership of Women', p. 182.
[1016] Hennessy, 'The Battle of Cnucha', 88, trans. 89.
[1017] Though this is more debatable in Bláthnait's case.
[1018] O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 27.

Some of the clearest displays of familial love come at times of violence and loss. Through grief, lamentation, and revenge different examples of familial love enacted by various parties are seen. It might be tempting to state that men get revenge, where women lament and die, but that would be a gross oversimplification. Women are capable of getting revenge: even if this revenge involves men, the woman inciting a man to violence is still an example of women's agency. Men also lament at great length, and can die from excessive emotion as we have established elsewhere: here, that excessive emotion is grief. We have also noted that lamentation and crying by men does not compromise their perceived masculinity.

A frequent motif throughout this chapter has been discerning love from honour, and that the two are not mutually exclusive. The approach, as it has been throughout this thesis, has been the encouragement of multiple viewpoints and ways of reading our selected texts. Honour is key to the literature, as O'Leary states.[1019] This is not disputed here. The suggestion being made in this thesis, and in this chapter specifically, is that a sole focus on honour, particularly as a socio-legal concept as opposed to an emotive one, risks neglecting the emotions of medieval Gaelic saga.[1020] Honour is accepted as a motivator, even at times when seemingly contradicted by the text itself.[1021] Such readings do not capture the whole of medieval Gaelic saga. Law and love can and do exist side-by-side in the literature, as one might expect of a society, fictional or otherwise; and honour is where the two concepts overlap, particularly regarding close kin. Defaulting to only reading honour when a text is ambiguous is no more valid than defaulting to only reading love: these interpretations of ambiguous texts are valid, but cannot be all-consuming, and honour and love do not negate one another. Even some examples of honour motivating action are in reality ambiguous, and we could equally read love as a motivator. Love can be an implicit part of honour, and honour can be seen as an aspect of love in medieval Gaelic saga. Even when an action answers the demands of honour, as has been shown in this chapter, that does not preclude emotion also motivating that action.

[1019] Ibid.

[1020] Such an approach to criticism we addressed in the Introduction when discussing the hermeneutics of suspicion.

[1021] Again, see O'Leary on Ferb: O'Leary, 'The Honour of Women', 42.

Familial love has appeared in conflict with romantic love and religious devotion at times in this chapter. Not only is love a theme in medieval Gaelic saga, it is a complex one, a creator of conflict and drama. Fealty can cause familial love to be in conflict. The medieval Gaelic notions of kin-group, and the closeness of fosterage, mark a different understanding of family to twenty-first-century Scotland. Keeping this difference in mind is key to examining familial love in medieval Gaelic saga. And with the closeness of kin, kin-slaying is the ultimate betrayal of familial love and breaks society down. Allegiance to kin, though, could come second place to allegiance to a lord, or to a spouse.

Overall, familial love is complex in medieval Gaelic saga, and it is an issue which touches on several other topics: fealty, marital duty, kin-slaying, fosterage, revenge, loss, and gender. Discerning love through action opens possibilities for the understanding of the range and depth of familial love in medieval Gaelic saga, but even relying upon character's own words we have touching accounts of care. The ways familial love is gendered have been noted: how women are supposed to put either their kin or spouse before themselves, and how that leads to problems when both are at odds; how sons are prioritised, how foster-fathers and uncles support their wards, and how fathers neglect their paternal duties. In common with other chapters, male relatives have been seen intervening in women's relationships, moments of conflict between different loves have been seen highlighting the involved emotions, and there is a clear relationship between love and violence. Kin is key in medieval Gaelic saga, and it has this in common with medieval Gaelic law. There is some divergence from medieval Gaelic law, however, particularly regarding the importance of the formality of unions in women separating from their kin. The shared narrative universe of these saga texts, as stated throughout this thesis, differs from legal and historical visions of medieval Gaeldom, and is worthy of its own scrutiny.

Chapter 6 Thesis Conclusion

The narrative world presented in medieval Gaelic saga features nuanced personal relationships. It is not always the least obscure of worlds; ambiguity is a clear feature of several of our saga texts. In this context, it is possible to understand how the role of love has been neglected in scholarship. The dominance of the idea that chivalric romance created romantic love, combined with the occasional ambiguity of medieval Gaelic saga, has meant that many scholars can and have dismissed love as a theme in our texts. However, through a comparative approach, and allowing for multiple readings of texts, this thesis has shown that love does exist as a theme in early medieval Gaelic saga. Love is portrayed in its complexities, and it is explored as a rich vein of narrative conflict. Considering love while approaching the texts has proven fruitful. Furthermore, love in medieval Gaelic saga is clearly gendered. The ways in which men and women are shown to feel and express love generally differ, though there also tend to be exceptions to any given rule.

In the semantic study, Meid's work on *grád* was built upon and used as a point of comparison for other terms such as *serc*, *caraid*, and *inmain*. *Serc, caraid* and *grád* were examined in particular, given their dominance as terms of love in medieval Gaelic; *inmain* was examined as an adjective, and for its preponderance in texts examined in this thesis. Time was spent establishing where *serc* and *grád* overlapped and diverged. One such divergence is the existence of the *serca* tale-type, for which a provisional schema was created based upon our surviving *serca* tales. It would seem there was a gendered aspect to the *serca* tale-type. It was also noted that *inmain* might have had particular associations with women's love at one point. This initial semantic study, aside from better informing the rest of the thesis, also highlighted potential areas for future research.

Chapter Three examined romantic love, and it was established that men and women tend to fall in love differently. There are exceptions to the general rules, but, for instance, men generally can suffer lovesickness, whereas *grád n-écmaise* is more likely to be experienced by a woman. It was seen that the medieval Gaelic saga model of lovesickness, while overlapping with a wider medieval model, has some clear points of divergence. For example, nowhere was it seen in our texts sex with a third party being advocated for as a cure for lovesickness. Furthermore, it was established that desire and the Otherworld are connected, and it was suggested that Otherworldly women might have the power to project themselves into men's imaginations. Silence, it was also argued, may be seen as a potential symptom of lovesickness; only once the silence has been broken can the sufferer act. The focus on texts that predated the flourishing of chivalric romance on the European continent allowed it to be established that romantic love was of interest in medieval Gaelic saga before that flourishing. It was shown too that taking a gendered approach to romantic love is fruitful for discussion: our texts feature a wealth of opportunities for analysis.

In Chapter Four, the differences between romantic love and love of the divine were explored. Love of the divine can incorporate duty, loyalty, fear, and rage, in addition to affection and care. This love also varies, ranging from maternal nursing, to fear of God, to sacrificing romantic fulfilment and earthly pleasures, and grief. Love of the divine is a clear area of intertextuality, where hagiography, saga, and poetry overlap; further research on the depiction of the emotional lives of holy characters could be fruitful. This is particularly true given how widely saints and holy characters vary. We see lovers of the divine mediating romantic unions, and see love of the divine compared to familial love, particularly regarding Christ. How love of the divine is gendered was also considered, with the ways in which Líadain in particular challenges the trope of women as *báeth*, and the examination of wild men and fools, being major concerns. Excessive emotion can be deadly in medieval Gaelic saga, for men as well as women, and a parallel can be drawn between the wild man and how he relates to love of the divine, with the lovesick man and how he relates to romantic love.

The idea of consummation of love of the divine clearly differs from that of romantic love; and in this chapter, as in the discussion of romantic love, the idea of love and desire being connected to the senses was prevalent. Questions of seeing and hearing the beloved were explored. But while love of the divine's object of affection generally cannot be experienced in the physical way in which romantic love can be, acts such as fasting and nursing the Christ-child can be seen as evoking that physicality. Like romantic love, love of the divine has its own specific uses of vocabulary, is capable of generating conflict, can be felt through the senses at times, and is gendered, being felt and expressed in different ways between the genders. Love of the divine is just as capable of bringing a tale's protagonist to ruin; and even when a tale ends in salvation, how exactly audiences are meant to feel at the tale's end can be ambiguous.

In Chapter Five, the complexities of familial love were laid bare. Within the family unit, sons are often prioritised by mothers and sisters, and fathers are often absent. Fosterage plays a key role, with relationships between foster-families at times being where we get the clearest scenes of familial affection. While women's roles in the family tend to be seen as being supportive, we do see women acting on their own initiatives; and we see men acting in the interests of other men. Certain texts were seen as suggesting that wives ought to prioritise their husbands over their former kin, even if their marriage is informal.

Where romantic love often comes into sharpest focus at the moment of falling in love, familial love tends to find its clearest expression at times of loss. It was established that grief, lamentation, and revenge are three domains in which familial love can be identified, and the three are gendered differently. That said, while revenge for instance tends to be the domain of men more often than women, it is not exclusively so. Women die of grief, but so too does at least one man (which relates to the point we have seen throughout of men being susceptible to dangerous excessive emotion). That said, the matter of revenge also raised questions of love and honour. Discerning love through action can be key in looking at familial love, and it is one of the most ambiguous methods of establishing love. That said, love and honour need not be diametrically opposed; honour and shame have clear emotional dimensions. And as stated throughout the thesis, the ambiguity of our texts is an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

Recurring themes appeared across the thesis as a whole. The idea of male relatives interfering in women's relationships was one, whether it be fathers opposing love matches or jealous husbands attacking would-be lovers. Moments of love in conflict, whether religious, divine, or familial, emerged as key nexus points for study. Conflict, and particularly violence, are a key part of the portrayal of love in its myriad forms in medieval Gaelic saga. Each area of love examined contained its own key terms worth considering. At times, a clear divergence was noted between the narrative world of our saga texts and the world portrayed in our law texts.

There are several areas which would benefit from further research. In addition to the host of suggestions for further semantic research stated at the end of the semantic study, the term *airscél* in particular would benefit from dedicated research. When we have a better idea of what the scope of an *airscél* was, we will be better informed not only about medieval Gaelic love, but also about notions of heroism. Scholarship of medieval Gaelic literature would also benefit from further research on the emotional worlds of saints; as stated, we have a range of saintly characters with a range of characteristics, and the emotional worlds of these divinely devoted characters would be a fruitful area for exploration. And while our approach has been focused on gender, for the most part we have examined men and women; as queer theory continues to impact upon Celtic Studies more generally, more research will be needed on the gender spectrum as it appears in medieval Gaelic saga. It is hoped this thesis is a step on the path towards further scholarship, and will be of use to those plumbing the depths of medieval Gaelic saga.

The intent of this thesis was to examine the extent to which love was a concern in pre-chivalric texts, and the ways in which different loves were gendered. The focus was to be specifically on medieval Gaelic saga literature, its narrative world, and the emotional community contained within. It may have similarities to our knowledge of medieval Gaelic law and historical medieval Gaeldom, but it is a distinct narrative universe worthy of examination in and of itself. This thesis has shown the same is true of love in medieval Gaelic saga: it is worthy of examination in and of itself. Love is of clear interest as a concept in medieval Gaelic saga, and it appears in many forms. These many forms of love are then gendered in different ways. In examining its presence in medieval Gaelic saga, we see a nuanced, complex exploration of love. Not only can it withstand our scrutiny; it rewards it.

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