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Aspects of Memory in Medieval Irish Literature

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Abstract

This thesis explores a number of topics centred around the theme of memory in relation to medieval Irish literature roughly covering the period 600—1200 AD but considering, where necessary, material later than this date. Firstly, based on the current scholarship in memory studies focused on the Middle Ages, the relationship between medieval thought on memory in Ireland is compared with its broader European context. From this it becomes clear that Ireland, whilst sharing many parallels with European thought during the early Middle Ages based on a shared literary inheritance from the Christian and late-classical worlds, does not experience the same renaissance in memory theory that occurred in European universities from the thirteenth century onwards. Next, a detailed semantic study of memory terms in Old and Middle Irish is provided with the aim of clarifying, supplementing and revising the definitions found in the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish Language*. Whilst the two principal memory nouns, *cuimne* and *mebair*, appear largely synonymous, the verb *mebraigid* appears to lean towards favouring the sense of 'committing to memory,' whereas *cuimnigid*(*ir*) encompasses this sense in addition to that of 'recalling from memory.' The third part of this thesis re-evaluates the dichotomous tension between notions of orality and literacy which some scholars have found in medieval Irish literature, arguing that this aspect has perhaps been exaggerated and that memory was a fluid concept in medieval Ireland embracing and merging both oral and textual forms. Following this, an assessment is made as to the importance and function of memory within the learned culture of the *filid* emphasising its necessary significance in a culture still partly based in an oral world. A wide range of sources including legal texts, grammatical tracts and tale literature is explored to show that the *filid*'s idealisation of memory was, largely, as a broad, comprehensive source supplying the knowledge necessary to acquire prestige through its performance and expression in a social context. The last part of this thesis investigates the notion that memory of the past could be used for the purposes of propaganda in medieval Ireland through the case study of the Ulster Cycle tales. Summarising and criticising some of the key prior scholarship in this area, this final section advocates for a much more cautious approach when claiming Ulster Cycle tales demonstrate political leanings, and that these must include or reconcile other more literary based interpretations of the themes and characters in these texts in order to remain successful as critical readings.

Contents

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In memory of my father.

1.0 Introduction

Memory is not an easy topic around which to form a study. It is a word which encompasses a variety of subtly different meanings and implications. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines memory with no less than ten distinct categories under three primary groupings.[1] These, in very brief summary, variously cover the concepts of the mental faculty of memory, items retained within this faculty and physical objects serving a memorial purpose, as well as acts of remembering, recollecting and committing to memory. Consequently, when taken as a theme in a study of a particular historical culture as preserved in its surviving literature, memory provides many potential avenues for exploration. One option is to study depictions of memory found in a literature through how it portrays actual acts of memorising and recalling, in order to come directly to a clearer understanding of how such acts were viewed and understood in a historical context, and to better define their function and importance according to the consciously professed values held by that culture. A second is to view the texts comprising a literature as memorial monuments in and of themselves and study a culture's attitude to memory almost archaeologically, by examining the nature and uses of the surviving tools through which memory could be preserved.

Literature, amongst its many other possible functions, is often created to serve a memorialising purpose, and it has long been recognised that this is especially true of medieval Irish literature.[2] These two possible approaches to the study of memory in relation to a historic literature do, to a greater or lesser extent, overlap and complement each other. Indeed, it is not possible to do one full justice without considering it in relation to the other. In the context of medieval Ireland, the situation is compounded by the fact that the literature concerned arose in a world where text was not the only nor, indeed, always the primary means of preserving and transmitting memory. Our surviving texts were produced in context of a culture which also relied on and valued an oral means of communicating memory. The question of how best to understand the relationship between the oral and the written within medieval Irish literature is a topic that has greatly preoccupied scholars working with this material. Consequently, it is not possible to study aspects of memory in relation to the

[1] *OED Online*, nb. Memory (http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116363).
[2] H. M. Chadwick and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, repr. 1986), p. 269.

surviving examples of this literature without also considering the relationship between them and the wider cultural and intellectual world which birthed them.

This thesis was born out of a desire to investigate and better understand how medieval Irish writers felt they were able to access the past and how they represented that past in the works they produced. Memory, in this context, provides a general unifying theme. Those who composed and recorded the surviving examples of the literature of medieval Ireland were keenly aware of the passage of time, and of the fragility of human attainments in the face of this. This sentiment is nowhere better reflected than in an illustrative metaphor from the tale known as *Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri*, ('The Adventures of Cormac in the Land of Promise'):

> *Focerd Cormac a magh mor a ænur. Dun mor ar lar in maighi. Sonnach credhumae uime. Teag findairgid isin dun ⁊ se lethtuighthi do eitib en find.* [*Marcsluag side oc tathaiged in tigi ⁊ utlaigi*] *do eitib en find ina n-ochtaibh do thuighi in tighi. Ticeadh athach gaíthi chuici beous, ⁊ gach ní dotuighthi de dobereadh in ghæth as beous.*
>
> […] "*Misi Manandan mac Lir*," *ar se*, "*righ Thíri Tarrngiri, ⁊ is aire doradus alle d'f*[*h*]*echsain Tíri Tarrngire. Is e in marcsluag atconnarcais ic tuighi in tighi, æs dana Erenn annsin ag tinol cruidh ⁊ cethri, ⁊ teit ar neimthní ass.*"[3]
>
> Cormac entered a great plain alone. A great fort [was] in the middle of the plain. An enclosure of bronze encircled it. A silver-white house [was] within the fort and it was thatched with white birds' feathers. A horse-troop of the *síd* [was] fixing the house and [they held] armfuls of the white birds' feathers to their breasts [with which] to thatch the house. A gust of wind would come over it in spite of that, and the wind carried away every piece of its thatching again.
>
> […] "I am Manannán mac Lir," he said, "king of the Land of Promise, and the reason I have brought [you] here is to behold the Land of Promise. The horse-troop you have seen thatching the house, they are Ireland's men of art collecting wealth and cattle, and all of it passes into nothingness."[4]

Although not referring to the decay and loss of memory specifically, this metaphor is a powerful reminder that all human activity, be it the accumulation of knowledge or of material wealth and its attached status, is finite. The explanation provided to Cormac mac Airt, a legendary third-century king of Ireland known for his wisdom and justice, by the

[3] An exact date for this tale remains undetermined. It is preserved in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. From cursory observation the language contains clear Middle Irish elements; however, a detailed linguistic study is desirable before any more precise judgment can be made. W. H. Stokes and E. Windisch, *Irische Texte Mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch*, Vol. 3 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1891), pp. 183-184, 195, 198.
[4] All translations from Irish are my own unless otherwise stated.

mythological sea-being Manannán mac Lir concludes the former's excursion to the otherworldly land of Tír Tairngiri. Cormac not only achieves the return of his wife and daughter, who he had unwittingly permitted be spirited away thence in exchange for a magical gold and silver apple-branch, but also receives a cup with the ability to discern true or false statements pronounced in its presence. It has been argued that similar tales can be read as allegories of the experience of entering monastic life and, in this context, the loss of worldly comforts and status preludes the attainment of a deeper, spiritual existence.[5] The outlook of such tales is inevitably forward-facing and deeply rooted in Christian eschatology, aiming to see beyond the present life in preparation for the next. They are also, however, heavily clothed with characters and motifs seemingly derived from Ireland's ancient mythology repurposed to represent the Christian afterlife. Such texts encapsulate medieval Irish authorial attitudes towards memories of the past in microcosm: they are transient and susceptible to decay, yet also remain a rich storehouse of meaningful lessons, truths, examples and guidance for the present and the future. Memory of the past remains a valuable, if fragile, commodity.

The approach taken in this study attempts to retain something of the breadth which characterises definitions of memory by exploring a broad array of aspects that fall under the general theme of memory. This study is primarily focused on medieval Gaelic literature produced prior to the upheavals in Irish intellectual establishments as a result of ongoing Church reform across the twelfth century. Some Irish language material composed, or preserved in copies, dating to later than the twelfth century are, however, also used or referred to where relevant. Additionally, some early medieval Latin texts of Irish provenance are discussed, particularly in context of the first chapter. A significant range of evidence is, therefore, used in this study as the intention is to take as broad a focus as possible to the topic. At the risk of being overly sweeping, this study hopes to establish the main guiding principles governing medieval Irish depictions of memory. These principles are best taken as indicative of a common attitude rather than comprising a set of hard rules, and so this study will provide some clear conclusions whilst retaining room enough so that possible variant or contradictory evidence is not ignored. Overall, there are a number of tales that are of significant relevance to the discussion of memory in medieval Irish literature such as, to

[5] See, in particular, the opinion of James Carney reproduced in: Kim McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland*: *A Critical Edition with Introduction, Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary* (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, University of Ireland, 2000), pp. 47-50.

reference just one example, the famous late twelfth or early thirteenth-century tale *Acallam na Senórach*, ('The Colloquy of the Ancients'). Due to the nature of this study such tales are, out of necessity, visited on more than one occasion across its course depending on the topic of each individual chapter. The choice to arrange material discussed by theme, rather than sequentially or chronologically, is largely dictated by the sheer range of issues that this study aims to address and will, hopefully, not constitute a significant frustration for the reader.

Firstly, the place of memory in the wider medieval world will be explored in order to provide background and context for discussion of the Irish evidence. This chapter will consider the broader understanding of medieval memory and discuss the relevance of progress made by scholarship in this area to medieval Irish material. As so much of the study of medieval memory, particularly early medieval memory, conducted at a Europe-wide level is focused on literature produced in an ecclesiastic or monastic context, this first chapter will compare primarily with material from Ireland emerging from the same institutional context. Next, a study of the semantics of medieval Irish memory terms will be undertaken with the aim of refining our understanding of the precise range of meanings they are invested with. This second chapter will draw on as wide a range of examples as possible including, where appropriate, a limited amount of material in Early Modern Irish. Following this the focus will move more directly upon Irish language literature of the period up to the twelfth century. The third chapter will begin by exploring scholarship on the relationship between orality and literacy in medieval Irish literature and will reappraise the evidence for this debate in order to argue for a lessening of the dichotomy created between the oral and the literate in medieval Irish learned culture. The fourth chapter will explore medieval Irish depictions of memory in light of the values and outlook of the native learned classes, primarily the *filid*. A key point of interest here is how these individuals understood memory to function, and how they constructed notions of memory on an ideological level as a component of their claims to scholarly or learned authority on matters of the past. Chapter four is by far the longest section in this study and the issues discussed here form the backbone of this thesis. The evidence covered here includes legal material in addition to medieval Irish saga literature. In the fifth and final chapter focus moves to the perceived functions of tale literature as understood by medieval Irish writers, primarily in context of the use of tale literature as political or dynastic propaganda. An assessment and reappraisal of current scholarly directions in this area, towards a wider consideration of the driving needs behind the authorship of these texts, completes chapter five and concludes this study.

2.0 Memory in the Medieval World

The study of memory in the Middle Ages is still a relatively recent area of research and as such the field is somewhat sparsely populated, with a few key broader works underpinning an array of diverse, yet often highly localised and tightly focused, studies. That the term memory itself embraces a multiplicity of subtly differing concepts only broadens these boundaries further. Consequently, many studies in this area cross traditional subject boundaries, tapping into broader historiographical, anthropological, sociological, and even psychological, disciplines far outside the study of medieval literary cultures. There is, as a result, a difficulty in seeking to define the most appropriate focus and methodology for a study of medieval memory. Suitable prototypes are, in the first instance, scarce and then when found often need considerable revision prior to their application in a specific context outside of that of their original use, or require a particular expertise in an area beyond that normally expected of the student and critic of historical literature. In the case of Ireland studies of memory in the Middle Ages are even more recent, with suitable prototypes only just emerging.[6] It is necessary, therefore to explore some of the approaches taken towards the study of memory in a wider medieval European context in order to establish a broader contextual framework.

Several theoretical approaches towards the study of memory in medieval literatures more broadly have already been established. Jan Assmann's concept of 'cultural memory,' in very simple terms, views literature as a tool for the creation of shared memories to foster and promote group cohesion.[7] Cultural memory views memory from a perspective that transcends the individual and in terms of medieval Irish literature, where the authorship of texts is usually unknown and may frequently be collective, this can be a useful and a somewhat naturally fitting approach. There is, however, a very real danger when applying cultural memory as a theoretical tool in literary analysis of providing too synthetic a view of a how a literature represents the values and aspirations of a group, obscuring the potential for

[6] Some key recent studies include: Erich Poppe and Jan Erik Rekdal, eds., *Medieval Irish Perspectives on Cultural Memory* (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2014), Dagmar Schlüter, *History of Fable*? *The Book of Leinster as a Document of Cultural Memory* (Münster, Nodus Publikationen, 2010), Dagmar Schlüter, 'For the Entertainment of Lords and Commons of Later Times: Past and Remembrance in *Acallam na Senórach*,' *Celtica*, 26 (2010), pp. 146-160., Morgan Thomas Davies, 'Dindshenchas, Memory and Invention,' *Lochlann*: *Festskrift til Jan Erik Rekdal på 60-Årsdagen*, ed. by Cathinka Hambro and Lars Ivar Widerøe (Oslo: Hermes Academic Publishing, 2013), pp. 86-104.

[7] For a more detailed discussion of cultural memory in terms of medieval Irish literature, see below: pp. 176-177. Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation*: *Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 5-10.

variation and dissent. Similar to this is the approach towards memory taken by James Fentress and Chris Wickham that they term 'social memory.' This is not a strictly defined theory per-se, Fentress and Wickham never set down an organised set of principals comprising social memory, but an approach which finds traction exploring the tension in how the memory of individuals interacts and integrates with group identities.[8] These studies have all, in one way or another grown out of the ideas of the French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945):

> the first theorist of what he called 'collective' memory, [who] argued that all memory is structured by group identities: that one remembers one's childhood as part of a family, one's neighbourhood as part of a local community, one's working life as part of a factory or office community and/or political party or trade union, and so on – that these memories are essentially group memories, and that the memory of the individual exists only in so far as she or he is the probably unique product of a particular intersection of groups.[9]

From a historical perspective these approaches, particularly Assmann's cultural memory, are interested primarily in exploring what a literature can tell us about the society that created it. Whilst this thesis will briefly discuss one aspect relevant to these sorts of approach, the issue of literature as propaganda in medieval Ireland, it is largely concerned with a different issue: the understanding medieval Irish writers had of memory within their own scholarly processes, on their own terms.

In this respect, one of the most significant bodies of scholarship produced on medieval memory to date is found in the work of Mary Carruthers, arguably the foremost current authority on medieval conceptualisations of the memorising functions of the human mind. Her several works on the subject remain instrumental in elucidating this aspect of the medieval learned world.[10] Her primary work, *The Book of Memory*: *A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, is, broadly speaking, a bipartite study. The first focus of Carruthers' study is upon the psychology of memory, how it is depicted in medieval texts and images, and the available cognitive techniques through which one could populate, organise and access one's memory. The second moves on to the issue of interplay between individual memories and written texts, and explores the place of memory and its contemporarily accorded value within

[8] James J. Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*: *New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. ix-xii.
[9] *Ibid*., p. ix.
[10] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*: *A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For further work, cf. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*: *Meditiation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998).

western European medieval literary culture. One of the primary concerns of Carruthers' study is tracking the development of ideas surrounding memory specifically relating to the 'art(s) of memory' (*ars memorativa*), a formalised scheme for memory training possessing 'general principals and a system which one can apply to a variety of circumstances,'[11] from their genesis in the ancient and classical worlds through to the later Middle Ages. *The Book of Memory* in this respect is similar to the work of Janet Coleman: *Ancient and Medieval Memories*: *Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past*.[12] Coleman's book presents and analyses, in chronological order, the most significant writings on memory from the ancient and medieval worlds and is very similar to the approach taken by Carruthers, with its focus on the life, development and interplay of theories and ideas across a broad span of history. This approach has its merits; these broad studies constitute useful reference works and identify many of the more generally held medieval ideas of memory, however, as this chapter aims to highlight, they also pose some very particular problems when attempting to apply their conclusions to the medieval literature and literary culture of Ireland.

Before doing so, it is useful to gather together some of the key points Carruthers' study makes concerning the place of memory in the medieval world more generally that can be seen as being broadly and safely applicable to Ireland during the same period. The first of these is the place that personal memory held in relation to the written text. Carruthers argues that, although working in a literate culture in which information, and memories specifically, could be and were transmitted as written texts, individual memory was still accorded a high value amongst medieval scholars. A remarkable capacity for memory was perceived very much as a virtue, clearly elevating an individual and marking them out for special praise, not simply as a good scholar but as someone of high moral, or even saintly, qualities[13] This is neatly demonstrated in an Irish context by the fragmentary life of Saint Abbán, *Betha Abáin*, found in two manuscripts both dating to the first half of the seventeenth century. The young Abbán, in spite of being trained in '*cerda luith ocus gaisccidh*',[14] 'the arts of action and skill-

[11] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 163.
[12] Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*: *Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[13] *Ibid*., p. 14.
[14] Charles Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*: *Lives of Irish Saints, Edited from the Original Mss. With Introduction, Translations, Notes, Glossary and Indexes*, Vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), p. 3. Pádraig Ó Riain notes that the Latin life of Saint Abbán, from which the Irish *Betha Abáin* is derived, was most likely composed sometime before 1218 by Albinus O'Mulloy, abbot of a Cistercian monastery at Baltinglass. Pádraig Ó Riain, 'St. Abbán: The Genesis of an Irish Saint's Life,' in: D. Ellis Evans and John G. Griffith, eds., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Oxford: Cranham Press/Oxbow Books, 1986), pp. 159-170 (pp.164-166).

at-arms,' with a view to his inheriting the kingship of Leinster, is marked out for sainthood by his exceptional capacity for remembering religious text:

> *Briathra Dé ro canadh som gibe ní no canta fris*; *7 ro an in scribtúir aicce gan sáethar gan meabhruccadh*. *Ro ba follus grasa Dé fair*; *7 nir bo hiongnadh sin, óir ro thirchan Patraicc he, an tan ro gab port hi lLaignibh ar tús, 7 drem dona naemhaibh ele*.[15]
>
> He recited of the words of God whatever piece was recited to him; and he retained the scripture[16] without effort and without memorization. It was clear that the grace of God was upon him; and that was not strange, for Saint Patrick had prophesied of him, in the time he first made port in Leinster, along with many other saints.

In a specifically Christian context the importance of memory directly relates to the importance of the virtue of truth: a quality the cultivation of which was directly necessary for the salvation of the individual's soul. A sermon on Christian discipline, *De Disciplina*, attributed to Saint Columbanus (*c*.543-614), an influential figure in the early church who left the monastery of Bangor in Ulster for the continent and founded a string of houses in Burgundy, Austrasia and the Lombard Kingdom including the important sites of Luxeuil and Bobbio, makes this connection clear:

> *Ne simus alienae imaginis pictores*; *tyrannicae enim imaginis pictor est qui ferus est, qui iracundus est, qui superbus est. Sicut enim falsa scientia detegitur, sic falsa etiam imago umbrata deprehenditur. Divisa est enim veritas a falsitate, iustitia ab iniquitate, caritas a malignitate, diligentia a securitate, aequitas a pravitate, dilectio a simulatione, et utraque imagines quasdam in nobis pingunt sibi invicem contrarias. Pietas enim et impietas, pax et discordia, contraria sibi sunt. Ne forte itaque nobis tyrannicas introducamus imagines, Christus in nobis suam pingat imaginem, quippe dicendo, Pacem maem do vobis, pacem maem relinquo vobis*.
>
> Let us not be the painters of another's image; for he is the painter of a despot's image, who is fierce, wrathful, proud. For just as false knowledge is detected, so a false image also is discovered as a phantom. For truth is distinguished from falsehood, justice from unrighteousness, love from ill will, enthusiasm from carelessness, rectitude from wrong, affection from pretence, and both paint some images upon us, which are mutually opposed. For righteousness and unrighteousness, peace and disagreement, are opposed to one another. Then lest perhaps we should import into ourselves despotic images, let Christ paint his image in us, as He does by saying, "My peace I give you, My peace I leave to you."[17]

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[15] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[16] Lit. 'the scripture remained with him.'
[17] *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. and trans. by G.S.M Walker (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1957), pp. 108-109. Not all scholars agree that the thirteens sermons attributed to Columbanus were actually his work. Clare Stancliffe has, however, offered a lengthy and convincing defence-in-depth of his authorship of

De Disciplina is primarily concerned with the fostering of brotherly accord between men through the suppression of individual pride and self-interest. The metaphor of one's acts and character painting a picture upon one's self for others to see and judge by is likened to the pursuit of truthful knowledge: our acts make us a text for others to read us by and measure the strength of our conviction. Truth is necessary for both individual salvation and peace within the larger Christian community. As an aid to the pursuit of truth, memory is an important tool in the journey towards salvation.

An example from a more secular context is seen in the *Triads of Ireland*, a collection of gnomic and legalistic maxims found in various manuscripts dating from the late fourteenth century onwards, although thought to have been in existence as far back as the ninth century, in which they are routinely found in association with wisdom texts including *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Audacht Morainn* and *Senbríathra Fíthil*:[18] '*Trí muime ordain*: *delb cháin*, *cuimne maith*, *creisine*.'[19] 'Three nurses of pre-eminence: beautiful form, good memory, piety.' Unlike many others within the collection, this triad does not focus its advice explicitly upon a named social group or class. The use of *ordan*, 'dignity,' 'honour' or 'pre-eminence,' in this context nevertheless suggests that the focus is on those holding high social status as this quality is often associated with such figures both religious and secular, and as a collective noun can also be used to signify a group possessing this quality: namely the nobility.[20] This is reinforced by the inclusion of *delb cháin*, 'beautiful form,' an attribute long associated with just and rightful kingship in early Irish society.[21] It is interesting to speculate upon who the intended recipient of this advice was, if indeed it was intended to be one single category at all. Clearly the recipients were intended to be high status, perhaps kings if the primary position of *delb cháin* in the triad is to be accorded any weight. Good memory and piety, however, seem more the domains of the scholar than the king. The kingly wisdom tract *Audacht Morainn*, whilst making no direct reference to good memory, does, however, place

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these works. This particular excerpt from the sermon *De Disciplinia* is, she argues, most likely influenced by a homily of the Greek writer Origen, if this was indeed available to Columbanus through a Latin translation. Clare Stancliffe, 'The thirteen sermons attributed to Columbanus and the question of their authorship,' in: Michael Lapidge, ed., *Columbanus*: *Studies on the Latin Writings* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), pp. 93-202 (pp. 106-108).

[18] *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. by Kuno Meyer, *Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series*, *Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series*, 20 vols (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1887-1965), XIII (1906), pp. vii, xi.

[19] *Ibid*. n. 246, p. 32.

[20] *eDIL* s.v. *ord*(*d*)*an* (dil.ie/33981).

[21] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 25-26.

great emphasis on the virtues of honesty and true judgement as necessities for just rule, or *fír flathemon*:[22]

> *Apair fris,* (a) *ba trocar,* (b) *bad fírión,* (c) *bad chosmuil,* (d) *bad chuibsech,* (e) *bad fosath,* (f) *bad eslabar,* (g) *bad garte,* (h) *bad fíalainech,* (i) *bad sessach,* (j) *bad lessach,* (k) *bad éitir,* (l) *bad inric,* (m) *bad suthnge,* (n) *bad foruste,* (o) *bad fírbrethach*.[23]
>
> Tell him; (a) let him be merciful, (b) let him be just, (c) let him be proper, (b) let him be conscientious, (e) let him be steadfast, (f) let him be generous, (g) let him be hospitable, (h) let him be noble-faced, (i) let him be enduring, (j) let him be successful, (k) let him be able, (l) let him be worthy, (m) let him be eloquent, (n) let him be steady, (o) let him be true-judging.

Truth, particularly in matters of judgment, is integral to just kingship and in this case must be reliant on an accurate knowledge if justice is to be properly served. These two qualities dwell in an almost symbiotic relationship in *Audacht Morainn*, indeed *fír flathemon* is not only reliant upon but also necessary for knowledge to thrive:

> *Is tre fír flathemon ro-saig cech dán mochtide mind suíthi*. *Is íar suidiu seis fri forcetal fó-rechto ro-dámair*.'[24]
>
> It is through the ruler's truth that each great [man of] art attains the crown of knowledge. It is afterwards that he will sit to teach the good-law he conceded to.

A good memory as an aid to truth and justice may, therefore, not be such an unusual requirement for a king to possess by the standards of early Ireland.

Curiously, good memory is one of the virtues claimed by the pre-eminent heroic figure of medieval Irish literature, Cú Chulainn, during his initial attempt to woo his future wife Emer in the Old Irish tale, revised during the Middle Irish period, *Tochmarc Emire*:

> "*Rom ebail Sencha Sobélraid conidam trén, trebar, án, athlam athargaib*. *Am gáeth i mbrethaib*. *Nídam dermatach. Adgládur nech ria túaith trebair*. *Arfoichlim a n-insci. Cocertaim bretha Ulad uili ₇ nís n-insorg tria ailemain Sencha form*."[25]
>
> "Sencha of the Fine-Speech reared me so I became strong, wise, noble, swift of attack. I am shrewd in judgements. I am not forgetful. I converse with each person before a wise people. I take

[22] The concept of *fír flathemon*, literally 'ruler's truth,' as it is presented in *Audacht Morainn* represents a form of social contract in which the righteousness of the kings rule creates safety and prosperity for his subjects who in turn support and uphold his rule, thus ensuring the strength and success of society as a whole.
[23] *Audacht Morainn*, ed. By Fergus Kelly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), p. 16.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[25] For a detailed study of the dating and transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*, see: Gregory Toner, 'The Transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*, *Ériu*, 49 (1998), pp. 71-88 (pp. 79-88). *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, ed. by A. G. Van Hamel (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), p. 29.

heed of their speech. I settle the judgements of all the Ulaid and do not disrupt them because of Sencha's rearing of me."

Cú Chulainn also emphasises his heroic physical and martial abilities in this excerpt and elsewhere in his dialogue with Emer, as might well be expected of him. Nevertheless, his claims of intelligence and learning are seemingly accorded an equal measure of importance to these more warlike attributes in his tally of virtues. In addition to what is presented here, Cú Chulainn claims skill in panegyrics and occult knowledge:

"*Ro siachtus glún Amairgin filed coro molaim ríg as cach feib i mbí, co ndingbaim óenfer ar gail, ar gaisciud, ar gaís, ar áini, ar amainsi, ar chirt, ar chalmatus*. […]

Rom thecoisc Cathbad cóemainech diag Deichtire. *Conidam fissid fochmairc i cerdaib dé druídechta*. *Conidam éolach i febaib fiss*."[26]

"I attained the knee of Amorgen the poet so that I praise a king for each distinction he possesses, so that I am a match for anyone in combat, in arms, in intelligence, in splendour, in sharpness, in propriety, in bravery. […]

Fair-faced Cathbad taught me for the sake of Dechtire. Thus I am instructed in beseeching through the arts of the god of wizardry. Thus I am learned in the excellences of knowledge."

Memory, however, is only directly mentioned in context of his abilities in matters of justice and law. Again, a distinct association is made here between an ideal of good memory and the responsibility of secular elites to uphold just and legal behaviour, lending further support to the interpretation that the triad *Trí Muime Ordain* has this idea in mind when it links good memory with high status.

Another possibility is that the triad applies not solely to secular nobility, but represents an idealised image of three ways one could be recognised as a pre-eminent individual in medieval Ireland in a broader context: through secular power as a king (beautiful form), secular or religious authority as a scholar (good memory), or through religious power as a churchman or bishop (piety). The famous and much quoted adage from the principal Old Irish legal tract on status, *Bretha Nemed*, provides sound support for this interpretation.[27] There are two distinct versions of this adage found in the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* and the *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* respectively. The *Bretha Nemd Toísech* states that:

[26] *Ibid*., p. 30.
[27] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988) pp. 268-269.

'*Ni tuath cin tri saornemthib samuidter, eclais flaith file*.' [28] 'A *tuath* is not legally established without three nobles of sacred-privilege, a church[man], a lord, a poet.' The *tuath*, the petty kingdom, comprised the principal social unit in early medieval Ireland and *Bretha Nemed* makes it clear here that such an entity could not be legally recognised without possessing these three individuals. In effect the churchman, lord and poet together enable social cohesion to exist. The second version found in *Bretha Nemed Déidenach,* edited by Edward. J. Gwynn under the title 'An Old Irish Tract on the Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets', varies from the first in envisaging a fourfold division of the hierarchy instead of a threefold one:

> *Ni ba tuath tuath gan egna, gan egluis gan filidh, gan righ, ara corathar cuir ₇ cairde do thuathaib*.[29]
>
> A *túath* is not a *túath* without an ecclesiastical sage, without a church[man], without a poet, without a king, in order that they may extend contracts and treaties to other *tuatha*.

In this case, however, the addition of the *ecna,* or ecclesiastical sage, does not fundamentally disrupt the paradigm as he appears to be envisaged here as a religious counterpart to the more secular *filid*. [30] Both figures, therefore, share the memory element in *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* where it is singularly embodied in the *filid* in *Bretha Nemd Toísech*. If this association between the triad and *Bretha Nemed* is valid then memory is taken to be the ultimate measure of one's success as a scholarly authority. Possession of this attribute is distinguished as one specific to the *filid*, poet, or *ecna*, church-scholar, and the necessary measure by which these ranks are judged valuable to society. All of these examples place memory amongst the highest of virtues or personal ideals: *Betha Abáin* and *De Disciplina* as a specific expression of Christian religious piety, even saintliness, and a prerequisite for the virtue of truth, necessary for individual salvation. The secular sources, the *Triads of Ireland* and *Audacht Morainn*, treat good memory as a necessity for just authority. The early medieval Irish legal material relating to the status of poets besides *Bretha Nemed* provides a wealth of further information on the value accorded to memory and its importance in establishing authority, and this topic is revisited in greater depth below.

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[28] *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. by D. A. Binchy, 6 vols, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 1978) VI, p. 2225.
[29] E. J. Gwynn, 'An Old Irish Tract on the Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets', *Ériu*, 13 (1942), pp. 13-60 (p. 31).
[30] The orbit of the *ecna* is not immediately obvious from etymology alone. The word principally refers not to an individual but rather the abstract concept of knowledge, particularly, but not exclusively, religious wisdom. Its use in a substantive sense is infrequent, as apparently is its appearance as a legal definition (See: *eDIL* s.v. 1 ecna(e) (dil.ie/19605)). Context provided by text itself, however, makes it clear that *ecna* refers to one possessed of church learning: '*Niba hegna* [*egna*] *nad coir coiccerta canoin*.' 'An *egna* is not an *egna* who's reckoning of the canon [is] improper.' Gwynn, 'An Old Irish Tract', p. 31.

2.1 Memory, Transmission and Composition

Carruthers also emphasises the importance of memory in the Middle Ages as a means to facilitate the transmission and use of texts in addition to and alongside the physical written copy. In an age when the production of a manuscript was still an expensive and lengthy undertaking and books were highly prized possessions for an individual or institution, their availability not always guaranteed, many texts travelled to new audiences through the medium of memory and speech. This situation changed only following the invention of the printing-press and the advent of mass literature, which heralded the coming of the modern age. In the early medieval world textual transmission was a particular concern for the early Church, especially given the importance Biblical texts held in informing the ritual and even the everyday existence of those living the religious life:

> Accuracy of recollection was a helpful skill to nurture in an age of few manuscripts, many of uncertain quality. The *Regula magistri* counsels that the scriptures be retained in memory partly so that if a codex has lacunae or lacks the commentary (*textum lectionis*), the missing parts could be supplied or expanded from memory. There is no point in debating whether or not their faith in the accuracy of memory was misplaced, for some individuals have highly accurate recollection and others do not. The point to understand is rather that one's memory was *expected* to be not only copious but accurate […].[31]

The anonymous *Regula Magistri* (*Rule of the Master*), a c. sixth-century(?) rule for monastic life and a significant influence upon the rule of St. Benedict, composed during the same century and extremely important in informing the shape of monastic life in much of the medieval West, is not alone in emphasising the importance of memorisation in the early Church.[32] In Ireland the rule of Benedict grew in popularity from the eighth century to the eleventh, and before this point monastic life had developed somewhat independently from the monastic rules of non-Irish origin being composed in mainland Europe.[33] Concern over textual accuracy, particularly in the transmission of Christian scripture is, however, also evidenced in the monastic life of early Ireland. Adomnán of Iona (c. 628—704) in his *Vita Sancti Columbi*, the life of the sixth-century Saint Columba, founder of the monastery of Iona, provides one of the most important written sources describing the literary culture of

[31] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 112.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 113.
[33] Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*: *From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 154-156, 191-193, 208.

early Irish monasticism. Richard Sharpe provides this summary of book copying in the *Vita Sancti Columbi*:

> The copying of texts, especially liturgical texts, was an important occupation in Iona in Columba's day (and thereafter); Adomnán provides a good deal of information about it. For Columba himself it was an almost daily occupation according to the second preface, p. 106, and we several times see him disturbed while so engaged (I 25, II 16, 19, III, 15). At the end of his life he was working on copying the Psalter (III 23, p. 228). Books written by the saint's hand were known in Ireland (II 8-9), and some were kept reverently in Iona (II 44-5). The text most often mentioned is the Psalter, but on one occasion it was a book of hymns (II 9). Books were also used for study (I 24), and [Saint Columba's cousin and successor] Baithéne was expected to record in writing the saint's exposition of the Bible (III 18). Adomnán suggests that, in his expectation, literacy was a part of everyday life for the brethren, who might make notes on waxed tablets of things that seem of moment at the time (I 35) […].[34]

Throughout the middle ages great emphasis was placed on learning, and subsequently chanting or meditating upon, the Psalms in religious and monastic life.[35] It is in this context that we should perhaps view Adomnán's frequent reference to Saint Columba's acts of copying. The act of writing out a text was certainly understood to constitute a useful, if not necessary, aid to memorisation.[36] The fact that the only two texts specifically referred to by Adomnán in this context are the Psalter and a Book of Hymns, both of which a monk would be expected to draw upon in the everyday performance of the monastic life, further reinforces this idea.

The *Regula Magistri*'s advice that memorisation could be a valuable aid to the monk is echoed in the Old Irish text known as *The Monastery of Tallaght*, a collection of rules and parables illustrating the monastic life in Tallaght shortly after its foundation.[37] Tallaght was established by the churchman Máel Ruain, during the late eighth to early ninth-century growth of the movement that has come to be known collectively as the *céli Dé*, 'clients of God,' who have long been credited with re-vitalising religious asceticism in Ireland but appear in fact to be primarily concerned with the provision of pastoral care and the growth of

[34] Adomnán of Iona, *Life of Saint Columba*, trans. Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 284.
[35] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 121.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 195.
[37] The text would appear to have been composed sometime within the period *c*.771—the date accorded to the monastery's foundation—to *c*. 840, the year of the death of the monastery's founder Máel Ruain whom the author of the text apparently knew in person. E. J. Gwynn and W. J. Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*: *Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature,* 29 (1911/1912), pp. 115-179 (pp. 120-122).

an individual's personal relationship with God.[38] *The Monastery of Tallaght* provides great detail on the correct manner in which monks should perform the Psalms, the order in the day and the year in which they are to be sung, as well as the following passage:

> *Fri saltair do géss nogebad mac bethad a salmu. Issed asberedsom desuidiu atat tri foglaide oc mo fogail mo suil ₇ mo tengae ₇ mo menme dosaircelae hule int saltair. Is sed immurgu asrubart maolrúaoin fri maoldithruib ni lugæ mbis ind menme hisin cheill dia gabail ind tsailm de memur indas cid fri saltair.*[39]
>
> By the Psalter will a Son of Life chant his Psalms in prayer. This he used to say concerning this: there are three enemies injuring me; my eye and my tongue and my mind, the Psalter restrains them all. Mael Rúain, however, said to Mael Díthruib that the mind is no less in the meaning when it is considering the psalm from memory than from a psalter.

The recitation of the Psalms from a written copy of the Psalter is clearly assumed to hold precedence here. A monk's soul is imperilled through the unrestrained actions of the physical organs of the eye, tongue and mind. Only engagement with a physical written copy of the Psalms can successfully contain these organs from leading the monk into danger; the eye through following the written words on the page, the tongue by reciting them out loud, and the mind by contemplating their meaning. Meditating on the psalms from memory is, however, an adequate substitute, at least by the measure of some churchmen. This is, presumably, a practical measure guarding against a situation where a Psalter was unavailable. It may also, perhaps, be implied here that if the monk's mind can be engaged with the Psalms, the eye and tongue will be drawn along with it. It is easy to envisage the tongue engaged through reciting the Psalms from memory out loud, but how is the eye to be involved? It is tempting to suggest that this reflects the use of some kind of visualisation process: that the monk uses certain mental images to help recall the Psalms, or that the memory of the Psalms generates images within the mind, which prevent the eye from becoming distracted. An alternative possibility is that the monk would recall with closed eyes and this does not necessarily reflect the use of any imagery, mental or otherwise, in this context.

The collection of monastic rules and penitential texts attributed to Saint Columbanus, used in the monasteries founded by him and his followers on the continent, unfortunately

[38] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c*.800: Aspects of Society,' in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I*: *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 549-608 (pp. 606-607). Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*: *Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 214-215.
[39] Gwynn and Purton, 'Monastery of Tallaght,' p. 142.

does not provide any information on memory in monastic training comparable to that found in the *Regula Magistri* or *The Monastry of Tallaght*.[40] The *Regula Coenobialis*, *Communal Rule*, does, however, provide an interesting insight into the importance of accurate memory in relation to the harmony of the monastic community:

> *Qui fratri aliquid indicanti responderit, Non ita est ut dicis, praeter seniores iunioribus dicentes simpliciter, superpositione silentii aut L percussionibus*; *nisi hoc tantum licet, ut respondeat coaequali fratri suo, si veratius est aliquid quam ille dicit et recordatur, Si bene recolis, frater, et alter haec audiens non adfirmet sermonem suum, sed humiliter dicat, Spero quod tu melius recorderis*; *ego per oblivionem in verbo excessi, paenitet me quod male dixi*.
>
> He who has replied to a brother on his pointing something out, "It is not as you say," except for seniors speaking honestly to juniors, with an imposition of silence or fifty blows; unless this only be allowed, that he should reply to his brother of equal standing, if there is something nearer the truth than what the other says and he remembers it, "If you recollect rightly, my brother," and the other on hearing this does not repeat his assertion, but humbly says, "I trust that you remember better; I have erred in speech by forgetfulness, and am sorry that I said ill."[41]

The sentiments of this rule echo those expressed by Columbanus in his sermon *De Disciplina* that humility and deference are the best means by which to avoid fostering conflict within the community. It prescribes the right course of action to take in settling a dispute between brother monks arising from a conflict of authority, namely: who is right and who is wrong in a certain matter. The potential for disagreements between brothers due to faulty recollection is made clear here, and this emphasises the fact that the most immediate recourse to authority in early medieval monastic life was through the medium of memory. Curiously, this rule does not prescribe the consultation of written text as a means to end the dispute at all, and seems more concerned that the matter is resolved than that the matter is resolved in favour of the more accurate party.[42]

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[40] It should be noted here that the extent to which the monastic writings attributed to Saint Columbanus were known and influential in Ireland is a matter of debate. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín believes that Columbanus' rules were influenced by the now lost rule of the monastery of Bangor, from which Columbanus set out for the continent, and so can be used as evidence in context of Ireland. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin literature to 1169', in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I*: *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 371-404 (pp. 373-375). Elva Johnston, however, is highly sceptical and argues that Columbanus' rule must represent a break with Irish practice and be seen as a product of his own distinctive innovations. Although she notes that Ó Cróinín's argument is speculative hers could be said to be similarly so. On balance, it is hard to judge in favour of one or the other. Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), p. 46.

[41] *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. and trans. Walker, pp. 150-151.

[42] The practicalities implied by this rule present a somewhat confusing picture. It is unclear if the responses provided by the two monks in their dispute must follow those provided in the rule here, and it is the performance of this formula that averts punishment, or if it the case that as long as humility is maintained the purpose of the

The transmission of texts through memory is a feature that persisted late into the Middle Ages across Europe and is exemplified in Carruthers' discussion of the *Dialogus* of William of Ockham (composed c. 1330), a controversial text challenging the limits of Papal power that led to its author being virtually banished from the intellectual institutions of Europe. As Carruthers states:

> Professor Miethke has observed that polemic writing, a genre that requires the utmost currency for its effectiveness, was often composed, even in the fourteenth century, on the basis of a scholar's memory of the work to which he was responding, or even on hearsay accounts of texts, rather than on written copies. Written copies of new work, treatises, disputations and the like, were difficult to obtain, even if one lived close to their origin in both place and time. There are very few fourteenth-century manuscript copies of *Dialogus*, yet it is clear that Ockham's ideas had tremendous currency and occasioned bitter controversy throughout Europe even in his own lifetime.[43]

Ockham's own opinion in this matter, however, appears to have been that his separation from his accustomed libraries was a detriment to his ability to produce the *Dialogus*, and indeed the work itself appears to remain unfinished.[44] Polemic discourses and arguments of a literary nature are much less well observed in medieval Ireland than they are on the continent; however, there is one event, albeit from a much earlier period, that may provide us with an example of memory operating in a comparable role to that it played in the dissemination of Ockham's *Dialogus*. In the controversy over the dating of Easter that gripped the Church in Britain and Ireland during the late sixth to early seventh centuries, scholarly argument and open debate played an important part. The letter *De Controversia Paschali*, *On the Easter Controversy*, written c. 632/633 AD by the churchman Cummian refuting an apparent accusation of heresy made by the abbot of Iona against those in Ireland who had chosen to adopt the new method of dating Easter, provides a window on the situation when the controversy was at its height.[45] The period of crisis that can be glimpsed in the letter followed an inconclusive synod held at Mag Léne c. 630 AD that, prompted by a chastising letter to

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rule has been served. It is also unclear who is culpable for punishment if the dispute cannot be resolved by the rule. The accuser would, in the first instance, seem to be culpable; however, the rule seems to imply that if the accuser delivers his correction in the appropriate manner then culpability shifts to the defender, who must then humbly submit to correction. Presumably if neither party acted with humility in the dispute then both would be liable for punishment. What would happen if the dispute could not be resolved even if both parties maintained the best possible manner throughout is an intriguing, but unanswerable, question. Another point of note is the fact that deference to one's superior trumps any form of appeal, one could not call out a more senior monk even if they were in error.

[43] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 197.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 196.

[45] Maura Walsh and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, eds. and trans., *Cummian's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Conputandi*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988) pp. 3-7.

the Irish church from Pope Honorius I (d. 638 AD), seems to have met for the purpose of putting the matter to rest. Cummian provides a description of the process of this synod:

> *Anno igitur, ut predixi, emenso, iuxta Dueteronomium, interrogaui patres meos ut annuntiarent michi, maiores meos ut dicerent michi, successores uidelicet nostrorum patrum priorum Ailbei episcopi, Querani Coloniensis, Brendini, Nessani, Lugidi quid sentirent de excommunicatione nostra, a supradictis sedibus apostolicis facta. At illi congregati in unum, alius per se, alius per legatum suum uice suo missum, in Campo Lene sancxerunt et dixerunt*: "*Decessores nostril mandauerunt per idoneos testes, alios uiuentes, alios in pace dormientes, ut meliora et potiora probate a fonte baptismi nostril et sapientiae et successoribus apostolorum Domini delata, sine scrupulo humiliter sumeremus*."[46]

> Therefore after a full year (as I said above), in accordance with Deuteronomy, I asked my fathers to make known to me, my elders (that is to say, the successors of our first fathers: of Bishop Ailbe, of Ciaran of Clonmacnois, of Brendan, of Nessan, and of Lugaid) to tell me what they thought about our excommunication by the aforementioned Apostolic Sees. Having gathered in Mag Léne, some in person others through representatives sent in their place, they enacted and said: "Our predecessors enjoined, through capable witness (some living, some resting in peace), that we should adopt humbly without doubt better and more valid proofs proffered by the font of our baptism and our wisdom and by the successors of the Lord's Apostles."[47]

The image we are presented with is that of an argument conducted through various means. A written text, Pope Honorius' letter, formed the centre of the debate and this seems to have contained a certain amount of supporting evidence, presumably in the form of computistical material and supporting scripture in a manner similar to how Cummian's own letter was composed. It is clear, however, that not all the authorities called to the synod had to be present in person, instead appearing through a representative. What is less clear is the role these representatives had in dealing with the matter they had joined the assembly to address. Were they there to actively participate in a dialogue on behalf of the authority who had sent them, using their own knowledge but endeavouring to represent the opinions of their superiors, or were they there to merely report a pre-determined answer? Memory would retain an important place in either of these two scenarios; however, the former would allow it a much greater range of influence, the attendees relying for support on their memory of texts *as well as* the additional layer of commentary and exposition representing their master's voice on the matter. It would also bear a close resemblance to how Miethke envisages the workings of medieval debate, although this alone certainly does not prove that the synod was

[46] *Ibid*., pp. 90,92.
[47] *Ibid*., pp. 91,93.

conducted in this manner. Regardless of the technicalities, the ultimate authority appears to lie with the first fathers, *partum priorum*; understood by context to be the first generation of Irish saints responsible for founding the monastic institutions that their successors now represent. The means by which their authority is transmitted to the present, through reliable eye-witness testimony passed down from the lifetime of the saints themselves, underpins the functioning of authority in medieval Irish culture, as seen with Adomnán in his *Life of Saint Columba*, and is a point that will be revisited in further detail later.

The manner in which Cummian composed his own writings may give some further insight into what capabilities the churchmen attending the Synod of Mag Léne may have had in arguing from memory. The letter *De Controversia Paschali* quotes from a very broad range of sources, including the Bible (both the Old Testament and New Testament) and a number of other patristic and computistical works, and through an analysis of these quotes it may occasionally be possible to glimpse whether the author worked from text or memory.[48] Walsh and Ó Cróinín's analysis of Cummian's biblical quotations, however, paints a more nuanced picture having encountered several difficulties concluding that '[…] it is often difficult to decide whether Cummian is citing from texts or from memory […]' [49] Nevertheless, their discussion of several anomalies identified by Hermann Frede in Cummian's Bible citations may provide three possible examples of identifiable quotation from memory: 'In one instance (27-29) Cummian quotes a passage which he says he found "in Leuitico"; the citation is actually from Numbers 9:13.' [50] This passage also contains several small deviations from the corresponding passage in the Vulgate Bible which may possibly hint at a quotation from memory but, as the editors note, this may also be simple scribal error. Cummian also deviates in reproducing Exodus 12:2, providing '*initium mensium*' in place of the Vulgate '*principium mensuum*,' however, this '[…] is the reading given by Krusch from the letter of Proterius of Alexandria on the Paschal question, and that letter was contained in the southern Irish computus of *ca*. 658. In this case, if Cummian had the letter of Proterius to hand he may have been unconsciously influenced by it when he reproduced Exodus 12:2.' [51] Cummian may, therefore, be quoting Exodus 12:2 through a

[48] For a full listing of the non-Biblical sources Cummian drew upon in his letter cf. *Ibid*., pp. 225-226.
[49] The principal difficulty encountered by Walsh and Ó Cróinín were that many of the quotations in which Cummian deviates in his use of the Vulgate Bible are likely due to his either using a version which retained readings from the Old Latin Bible or being influenced by Old Latin readings retained in Irish liturgical practice. They also note that he occasionally quotes the Bible second hand and that '[…] Cummian, when quoting other authors, tends to reproduce faithfully the form of biblical citation that stood in his source.' *Ibid*., pp. 222-223.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 225.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 225.

secondary source, or with a secondary source in mind. Which option most closely reflects the truth is unclear and it is consequently not possible to say for certain if this shows him working from memory rather than text. Lastly Cummian provides '*ritu sempiterno*' in place of the Vulgate '*ritu perpetuo*' when quoting Exodus 12:17, possibly having accidently conflated this passage with Exodus 12:14.[52] As can be seen, none of these examples offers definitive proof that Cummian was quoting from memory when he wrote his letter. The last may provide the most clear-cut example, yet here again doubt arises as conflating the end of one passage with the end of another could equally be an example of 'eye-slip' whilst copying as that of a confused memory.

Elsewhere in his letter Cummian calls upon the opponents of the revised Easter dating to provide a satisfactory argument against its adoption:

> *Et hoc obsecro*: *diligenter inspicite ut michi ignoscatis uel me dirigatis uerbis uestris uel scriptis fortioribus et certioribus prolatis ad aliud melius intelligendum, si habetis, et ego suscipiam gratanter, ut hoc suscipi. Si uero non habetis, silete et nolite nos hereticos uocare*.[53]
>
> And this I ask: consider diligently how you might excuse me or direct me to some better understanding by your words or with more valid writings and more certain proofs – if you have any – and I will gratefully accept it, as I have accepted this. If, however, you do not have any, be silent and do not call us heretics.[54]

Cummian places equal emphasis on words, *verba*, and writings, *scriptum*, as a tool for persuasive argument; however, the use of *verba* does not necessarily imply an actual oral reply, in person or by proxy, as opposed to a written response. The distinction made is whether it is Abbot Ségéne's own words or some pre-existing textual evidence that is to be supplied in answer. Nevertheless, unlike the courteous abstraction desired by modern academic discourse this debate is viewed as a direct dialogue between the two parties involved, in other words an on-going conversation that will only be decided by the side that speaks with the more eloquent and authoritative voice. It is interesting to note in this context that *Audacht Morainn* is also envisaged as being orally delivered. In the opening lines of the text Morainn entrusts his teachings, to be presented to the king Feradach Find Fechtnach, to his foster-son Neire Núallgnáth whose epithet means literally 'of customary resonance'[55]:

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[52] *Ibid*., p. 225.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 74.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 75.
[55] The element *núall* in Neire's epithet signifies, in its literal sense, a loud noise or sound particularly but not exclusively those produced by the human voice. Its use as a compound element as part of an epithet is not

"*At-ré, tochomla,*	"Rise up, go forth,
A mo Neiri Núallgnáith.	My Neire of Customary-Resonance.
Noíthiut búaid ngoire,	The virtue of dutifulness proclaims you,
Gor intech ara-folmaither,	Dutiful the path that you venture upon,
Fasaich, forbeir fír.	Announce, increase truth.
Finda búana mo bretha no	Fair [and] enduring my judgments or
Mo bríathra rem bás.	My words before my death.
Beir dó búaid ndírge,	Bring to him the virtue of righteousness,
Dligther cech flathemoin,	By which every ruler is bound,
Dia téis sech cech ríg.	If you go past every king.
Ate-midiur-sa ar mo chenéuil clith.	I estimate them for my people's protection.
Ma théisi co rrig,	If you go unto a king,
Reisi co Feradach	[If] you hasten unto Feradach
Find Fechtnach.	The Fair-Fortunate.
Fó, béu,	Good, lively,
Bith sírflaithech,	He will be long-ruling,
Suidiu lánflatho.	A seat of full-sovereignty.
Luifith il-túatha	He will move many kingdoms
Táthat co muir.	Of thieves to the sea.
Moigfith a chomarbe,	He will make his heir greater,
Comlán co ngreit.	Full-up with valour.
Comath mo chosc íarmothá sund.	Let him maintain my admonition following here.
Sluind dó re cech bréithir,	Declare [it] to him before every [other] word,
Beir dó for cech bréithir inso sírchosc."[56]	Bring to him on each word this lasting-advice."

Audacht Morainn, like Cummian's *Letter*, places great emphasis on the authoritative power of the spoken word. Together these examples show that despite a text being preserved, or even deliberately presented, to us in the form of a written document, its true power frequently comes from its being a direct embodiment of the act of speech.

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limited to the example of Neire alone and in this context it comes to denote something significantly important to be heard, or perhaps something widely heard. Again, the power of speech or voice is seen as the key element that lends authority to words in spite of any textual associations. Fergus Kelly translates Neire's epithet as 'accustomed to proclaiming' and this is certainly accurate in reference to his alluded role as the bearer of Morann's teachings, however, my own translation aims to retain more of the word's underlying semantic detail. *eDIL* s.v. 1 núall (*dil.ie/33338*), Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, p. 3.

[56] Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, pp. 2, 4.

Another aspect of medieval memory that Carruthers explores is the notion that there did not exist in medieval scholarly culture, unlike the modern, a complete adherence to the written word, in fixed form and the singular intellectual right of the author who penned it, as the 'proper' means by which to represent a source of scholarly authority. Authority certainly belonged to individuals, however, their work was quite freely used and adapted with the emphasis on transmitting the underlying *res* ('meaning') of the work in question, without the need to simply reproduce as a quote the exact language in which this idea was put to text:

> The *res* or matter of a literary text was considered as something extra- or pre-linguistic, for which words are to be discovered from one's memorial store as one transforms it into present speaking. These words mediate the public appearance of the *res*, rather as clothes may be said to mediate the public appearance of a person […]—they suggest and conceal, they give clues and cues, they reveal but never completely. The notion that a text has both *res* and *verba* posits the idea or meaning that lies within speech as some sort of construct partly independent of and greater than the words from which it is constructed. There is, as it were, *an intention of the text* which can, and indeed must, be translated from one mind to another and adapted to suit occasions and circumstances. This adaptation was not believed to substantively alter the enduring *res* […], which is in a continual process of being understood, its plenitude of meaning being perfected and completed.[57]

This is also reflected in an important distinction, inherited from the classical world, as to how texts were memorised in the Middle Ages; between memorization *ad res*, 'by idea or image', which was considered both the technically and morally superior method by classical orators, and *ad verborum*, 'by word.' [58] Carruthers considers that the former technique of memorization *ad res* underpins, and is indeed necessary in order to understand, medieval attitudes towards textual activity, concluding that:

> [a]daptation, the essential conduct of *memoria ad res*, lies at the very basis of medieval literary activity. It goes without saying that this is a statement with unavoidable implications for the study of any tradition of literature operating within the Middle Ages.'[59]

This particular point is unfortunately not immune to one of the broader difficulties presented by Carruthers' work, as will be demonstrated over the remainder of this chapter: how applicable is her study to the learned cultures of medieval Ireland? It is not immediately possible, however tempting, to identify the concept of *memoria ad res* functioning within the literary culture of medieval Ireland. As will be seen in chapter four, some circumstantial

[57] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 235.
[58] *Ibid*., pp. 92-93, 110-111, 234-235.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 240.

evidence does, however, does point to the use of a practice resonant of the notion of *memoria ad res* in use amongst the medieval Irish learned classes. Nevertheless, how they self-consciously understood and conceptualised the memory techniques that they used, if these were formalised to any extent at all, is an exceedingly elusive topic.

2.2 The *Ars Memorativa* in Medieval Ireland

The Book of Memory, however useful as a study, nevertheless poses certain significant challenges when viewed with the context of medieval Ireland in mind, particularly for the period prior to the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, from which a great deal of medieval Irish literature, both secular and religious, dates. A significant gap exists in the chronological scope of her selected sources; from between the fifth century Christian writers of the late Roman world and the medieval memory texts that begin to appear from the late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries onwards. The early Middle Ages, despite its importance in the formation of the cultures and societies that would come to define the high and later Middle Ages, is not covered in any great depth at all. This is partly an issue of the more limited availability of sources dating from this period; however, it is also influenced in part by Carruthers' broader approach. Her work is primarily focused on tracing the evolution of the 'art(s) of memory' (*ars memorativa*); specific learnable techniques that could be used by scholars to both structure memory and memories, and also facilitate the process of recall. As has been noted these conceptual forms of memory training begin in the world of the orators of classical Greece and Rome before being resurrected by medieval thinkers, principally the German scholar Albertus Magnus in the thirteenth century,[60] and introduced into wider academic circulation. On relating these techniques to the study of memory in the early Middle Ages she concludes: '[…] it seems that in later antiquity and the earlier Middle Ages the memorial *artes* were regarded in standard pedagogy as marginally helpful at best, and that the focus on memory training was on its elements, instilled through practice and discipline, but without emphasizing a universal body of principles.'[61] This leaves the, admittedly scarce, writings concerning memory that have survived from this period little room within her narrative.

There is, to my knowledge, only one example of the use of the phrase *ars memorativa* in a medieval Irish text. Whether or not this represents evidence for the use of such arts in medieval Ireland, or indeed demonstrates any understanding at all of the deeper concepts behind their composition and use beyond the mere awareness of the phrase, is not easy to answer. The phrase occurs in Latin during an episode in the fifteenth-century Irish text on the

[60] *Ibid*., p. 137.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 145.

life of Hercules, edited by Gordon Quin under the title *Stair Ercuil Ocus a Bás*, from MS, Dublin, Trinity College, H.2.7 (1319.2.7):

> *Do smuain Ercuil ina menmain nach testa do threigib righachta uadha acht amain a beith gan eladhain dó, 7 do-cualaidh se co roibe rí isin domun in n-inbhaidh sin 7 gurb ardmaigistir isna secht n-eladhnaibh somaisecha saera he, 7 co ndenadh se* ars memorativa *.i. eladha na cuimni, do cach a coitcinne*.[62]
>
> Hercules thought in his mind that nothing of the qualities of kingship was lacking from him except that he was without the arts, and he heard that there was a king in the world at that time and that he was an arch-master in the seven very-beautiful noble arts, and that he taught the *ars memorativa*, namely the art of memory, to all in general.

Quin, who remains the most recent editor of this text, identifies it as an Irish language version, although '[t]he Irish is a paraphrase rather than a translation, with expansion here and contraction there,'[63] by Uilliam mac an Leagha of the first printed book in the English language: William Caxton's translation, begun March 1st, 1468, and completed September 19th 1471, of Raoul Lefevre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troyes*, itself completed in 1464.[64] The equivalent section of Caxton's *Recuyell*, however, telling of how Hercules comes to conquer the wise and learned King Athlas and demand his instruction in matters of science, differs from *Stair Ercuil* quite significantly in the nature of the education that Hercules obtains. There is, indeed, no mention of the *ars memorativa* in Caxton's text at all; neither in this episode nor, apparently, the entirety of the second book of the *Recuyell*, which focuses on the life of Hercules. Instead of the *ars memorativa* Athlas is noted in Caxton's heading to this particular section as practicing, in addition to the '*feven feiences lyberall'*, the '*feyence of aftronomye*',[65] and he is described in the narrative as living upon a high mountain that bears his name (inferring undoubtedly towards the Atlas Mountains of north-west Africa) precisely for this purpose.[66] The Irish version retains the association of character with mountains; however, some of the significance of the link is diminished as a result of this adaptation.

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[62] *Stair Ercuil Ocus a Bás*: *The Life and Death of Hercules*, ed. by Gordon Quin, (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1939) p. 52.
[63] *Ibid*., p. xvii. More recent analysis by Erich Poppe notes that *Stair Ercuil* is broadly faithful to the *Recuyell* in terms of plot, however, it makes significant departures in terms of forms and style. Erich Poppe, '*Stair Ercuil Ocus a Bás*: Rewriting Hercules in Ireland,' in: Kevin Murray, ed., *Translations from Classical Literature*: *Imtheachta Æniasa and Stair Ercuil Ocus a Bás* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 2006), pp. 37-68 (pp. 65-68).
[64] *Stair Ercuil Ocus a Bás*, ed. by Quin, pp. xiv, xxii-xxiv.
[65] Heinrich Oskar Sommer, ed., *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*; *Written in French by Raoul Lefevre, Translated and Printed by William Caxton* (*About A.D. 1474*): *The First English Printed Book, Now Faithfully Reproduced with a Critical Introduction, Index and Glossary and Eight Pages in Photographic Facsimile*, (London: David Nutt, 1894) p. 355.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 357.

Furthermore, Caxton's *Recuyell* tells us that Hercules, as a result of this instruction: '*becam the befte philofopher and the most parfyt aftronomyen of all the world.*' [67] Hercules' motivation for seeking out this knowledge is also presented differently, and arguably with less sophistication, in the *Recuyell*. Rather than resulting from any self-reflection over the attributes of kingship, Hercules is simply '*coueytous of the feyence of Athlas*.'[68]

There is nothing to suggest that Quin was incorrect in naming Caxton's *Recuyell* as the key source for *Stair Ercuil*; apart from these key differences already noted, the narrative of the latter very much adheres to the former in terms of the fundamental points of its structure. It is even possible to recognize *Stair Ercuil*'s '*secht n-eladhnaibh somaisecha saera*' as a close approximation of Caxton's '*feven feiences lyberall*' maintaining, on its own terms, the alliterating initial 's' sounds of the English phrase. The author of *Stair Ercuil* is also consistent in his use of the Irish word *ealdha* to translate the concept of the English '*feyence*', the single term used to denote the learning that Athlas possesses in the *Recuyell*, and this is a good match in meaning. So why then did the author of *Stair Ercuil* replace the '*feyence of aftronomye*' with '*ars memorativa*', where, if not from the *Recuyell*, did he obtain knowledge of this concept, and what did he understand by it? The unique nature of this example may not allow for these questions to be answered, however, they do make one thing certain. It is highly unlikely that this singular, late example is in any way reflective of an established awareness or active use of the *ars memorativa* in Gaelic Ireland during the Middle Ages.

[67] *Ibid*., p. 360.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 356. This seems to me to be consistent with the overall treatment of the *Recuyell* by the author of *Stair Ercuil*, 'gaelicising' the material of this text by recasting it in the language, forms and norms of an Irish heroic tale. The introduction of Irish kingship concepts into this narrative suggests a fairly agile mind behind the author of *Stair Ercuil*, quite aware of the influence of the cultural expectations Irish heroic narrative upon his own recasting of the text.

2.3 Classical and Medieval: Problems of Transmission and Chronology

The Book of Memory is, furthermore, a very broad work in terms of scope, both temporally, discussing texts composed as far back as Classical Antiquity through to the late Middle Ages, and also geographically. This involves authorities from across high medieval Europe, including such figures as Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus and John of Garland, as well as some of those Classical texts that were transmitted into medieval Europe via the Arabic-speaking world during, roughly, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Many of these medieval texts postdate, or arrive comparatively late in, the period in which this study is interested. There are also further difficulties that arise from the question of the transmission and availability of these texts and the specific ideas that they contain. Many of the *ars memorativa* and the thoughts surrounding them that are formulated in medieval texts appear, based on how they are discussed by modern scholars, to be very much linked by an identifiable chain of influence proceeding from earlier textual sources.[69] Given the lack of evidence for the formalised *ars memorativa* in medieval Ireland the question essentially becomes one of how much of an impact these earlier works had on a broader understanding of memory in the Middle Ages? This is difficult to answer for a number of reasons. The necessary starting point is to investigate the availability in medieval Ireland of some of the key Classical texts that Carruthers' discussion identifies as being highly influential upon the formulation of *ars memorativa* of the high and later Middle Ages. As shall be shown some of these sources cannot be demonstrated to have had any circulation at all in medieval Gaelic Ireland, a point emphasised by their total absence from the surviving literary record as a whole as well as material detailing the nature of memory more specifically.

Two key Classical texts in Carruthers' discussion of development of the medieval understanding of mnemonic functions, and creation of systems for memorisation, from the twelfth century onwards are Aristotle's work *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, of uncertain authorship but attributed in the Middle Ages to the Roman statesman, author, rhetorician and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero, and the actual works of Cicero, principally his *De Oratore*.[70] If these texts are also to be considered as having influenced the understanding of memory in Ireland in the Old and Middle Irish periods their

[69] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 153-155.
[70] *Ibid*., pp. 25-27, 62-65.

availability in, or influence upon, that setting must obviously be established. This inevitably touches upon the broader discussion concerning the extent and nature of the availability of Classical works, especially those of a Greek origin, in Ireland at this time, an area in which there is still much systematic study to be done. Aidan Breen, in a recent summary of the issue, notes that '[c]urrent dogma on the status of classical influence on medieval Irish scholarship varies from extreme scepticism to mild optimism.'[71] It can be stated with some certainty, however, that Aristotle's *De Memoria* is highly unlikely to have been known in Ireland in any form during the Middle Ages. Mario Esposito, in a series of essays published across the first half of the twentieth century,[72] still provides one of the most comprehensive studies in this area. Analysing the corpus of medieval Latin texts of an Irish provenance, he argues strongly against any extensive knowledge of Greek in Ireland prior to the ninth century, scuppering the antiquated and somewhat romantically motivated narrative that Ireland became a beacon of Classical and Christian learning following the flight there of scholars from the dying Western Roman Empire during the dark fifth century.[73] Indeed, even discussing the ninth century, and the revival of interest in Classical Greek texts on the continent during the Carolingian Renaissance, Esposito takes a restrained view on the nature of the Irish involvement with this phenomenon. Of the following centuries Esposito states simply: 'After the ninth century we can find little or no trace of any Greek studies among the Irish.'[74] This picture of the knowledge of Greek language and literature in medieval Ireland as portrayed by Esposito makes it singularly unlikely that the works of Aristotle could have had any impact there upon the understanding of memory.

The first medieval Irish author who can be cited with any certainty as displaying a sound knowledge of Greek, as well as the works of Aristotle, is Johannes Scottus Eriugena (c.815—c.877). Eriugena participated in the revival of Classical learning on the continent during the ninth century and is credited with (re-)introducing some of the works of Aristotle into western scholarship. Esposito, however, again sounds the note of caution against any attempt to relate the intellectual output of Eriugena, and other Irish scholars working on the continent during and subsequent to the ninth century, to any school of learning present in Ireland at the same time. Their knowledge '[…] was obtained from books found within the

[71] Aidan Breen, 'Classical Influence', in *Medieval Ireland*: *An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sean Duffy (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 89.
[72] Collected in the volume: Mario Esposito, *Latin Learning in Mediaeval Ireland*, ed. by Michael Lapidge, (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988)
[73] Esposito, 'The Knowledge of Greek in Ireland during the Middle Ages', in: Lapidge, ed., *Latin Learning*, pp. 665-674.
[74] *Ibid*., p. 682.

libraries of the Frankish Empire, and not at home in the schools of Ireland.'[75] A further difficulty comes when attempting to gauge if this continentally oriented activity fostered any reciprocal transmission of learning back to Ireland. The lack of any significant body of evidence for knowledge of Greek in Ireland after the ninth century, cited from Esposito above, would suggest not. This remains an important topic, and a very difficult one, on which more systematic study needs to be conducted before any truly definitive conclusions can be drawn. It has, however, been pointed out that Esposito's study does have limitations. Pádraic Moran highlights one significant gap in Esposito's work; his use of only the Latin sources from medieval Ireland in constructing his assessment of the knowledge of Greek.[76] There is valuable evidence to be found also amongst the Irish language sources that cannot be excluded.

Taking this into account, a more up-to-date reassessment of the knowledge of Greek in early medieval Ireland conducted by Paul Russell, and followed up by Pádraic Moran has, for all intents and purposes, drawn largely similar conclusions. Discussing the use of Greek, or purportedly Greek, words for etymological purposes in various early medieval Irish glossary texts, Russell poses the question of whether or not the compilers knew Greek:

> The answer is almost certainly not—not least because they make use of material labelled as Greek which is barely recognisable as anything at all and certainly not as Greek of any period without a great deal of lateral thinking and some sense of the possible corruptions which the words could undergo. The compilers might have thought they knew some Greek because they were dealing with material labelled as such, but that is a different question. There is no doubt that as one of the *tres linguae sacrae* Greek had a high status and that it was important to retain such labels in these glossaries, even if their knowledge of Greek did not match such aspirations.[77]

Russell is most interested, however, in establishing how this etymological material, where it is indeed genuinely utilising Greek words, found its way to Ireland. One prominent source, previously identified, is the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636). Based, however, on apparent similarities in some of the more obscure and unlikely etymologies found in the Irish glossaries, and an overall correspondence in form, Russell also suggests that the compiles had access to some form of the text known as variably as the Harleian glossary or Pseudo-Cyril, a substantial Greek-Latin dictionary found in an eighth-century Italian

[75] *Ibid*., p. 674.
[76] Pádraic Moran, 'Greek in Early Medieval Ireland', in *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds*, Alex Mullen and Patrick James, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 172-192 (p. 174).
[77] Paul Russell, '*Graece ... Latine*: Graeco-Latin glossaries in early medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), pp. 406-420 (p. 408).

manuscript, and also as a copy in a manuscript associated with the expatriate Irish scholar Martin Hiberniensis (c. 819-875) based in the Frankish monastery of Laon.[78]

Pádraic Moran has since questioned this conclusion. Working specifically with the text known as O'Mulconry's glossary, found in the manuscript known as the *Yellow Book of Lecan* (compiled during the fifteenth century, however, the language of the text 'has been dated to the late seventh or early eighth century'),[79] Moran argues statistically that access to the Harleian glossary is not necessary to explain the entries Russell is interested in, instead suggesting a smaller, older, and far less well known continental glossary text:

> [i]t seems likely […] that the *hermeneumata* text available to the author of O'Mulconry was much more similar to that represented in Goetz's Glossarium Leidense/Fragmentum Bruxellense than to the Harleian lexicon.[80]

Regardless of whether or not the Harleian glossary was available at some point in early medieval Ireland, although the issue obviously has significant ramifications for any understanding of the availability of practically utilisable Greek materials in that context, the conclusions drawn by Russell and Moran on the understanding of Greek are largely identical. Significantly, they do not simply identify where knowledge of Greek is demonstrated in these texts, but also provide a qualitative assessment of it. Moran, like Russell, identifies a strong interest in Greek vocabulary present in O'Mulconry's glossary, however, the interest he identifies is again primarily concerned with points of comparative etymology, and how the Greek terms embellish their Irish counterparts. More specifically, moreover, Moran finds no display of any extensive knowledge of Greek grammar, nor the ability to compose, or even comprehend, any continuous text in Greek. Moran concludes:

> [t]he overall picture, therefore, points to some passive knowledge and at best very basic reading ability. […] The main challenge for anyone attempting to acquire a reading knowledge of Greek in this period was the absence of sources for grammatical information, particularly in relation to the verbal system.[81]

Whilst this is perhaps more lenient in outlook than the conclusions drawn by Esposito, proof of the expertise required to engage with such a difficult Greek text as Aristotle's *De memoria* remains entirely absent. As David Bloch, the most recent editor, translator, and interpreter of

[78] *Ibid*., pp. 411-414.
[79] Moran, 'Greek', p. 178.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 189.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 191.

Aristotle's *De memoria*, concludes: 'Aristotle must be read in the original Greek, or at the very least the reader will have to know some Greek, if the text is not accompanied by a commentary. Otherwise it simply is not possible to grasp the distinctions that Aristotle makes concerning remembering, recalling, and recollecting.'[82]

The history of the transmission of Aristotle's *De memoria* in the medieval west, furthermore, itself renders this text highly unlikely to have had any presence in the medieval Gaelic world. In fact, it appears that the *De memoria* was almost universally unknown in any form in the Latin West before the twelfth century, and the context of its emergence onto this scene appears to be twofold. The first is the transmission into the Latin world of the works of the Arabic scholars Avicenna (c. 980-1037), who used Aristotle in his own writing on the nature of the soul and its related senses, and Averroes (c. 1126-1198), known for composing various and extensive commentaries of the works of Aristotle, during the twelfth, and the first half of the thirteenth, centuries respectively.[83] The second stimulus was the translation of the complete text of Aristotle's *De memoria* from Greek into Latin; the first of these, known as the *translatio vetus*, was completed by James of Venice, a significant translator of Aristotle's works active during the twelfth century; the second, the *translatio nova*, largely based on James' *translatio vetus*, was produced in the thirteenth century by the Flemish churchman and scholar William of Moerbeke. These translations appear comparatively late for the purposes of this study and we can, regarding the picture of the understanding of Greek already discussed, with complete certainty rule out any possible Aristotelian influence in Ireland before their creation. It is, however, very difficult to quantify what presence, if indeed any at all, these translations had in the medieval Gaelic world. Whilst this issue is of considerable importance to the discussion at hand, a full and thorough study is not possible within the confines of this thesis. Suffice to say there are, to my knowledge, no direct manifestations of either of these translations found in the surviving material produced in medieval Ireland; nor does there seem to be any obvious Aristotelian influence at all in the few texts dealing with memory that were produced in medieval Ireland.

David Bloch in his recent edition, translation and discussion of Aristotle's *De Memoria* has, moreover, questioned the importance placed upon Aristotle in the development of medieval memory theories, particularly in the work of Mary Carruthers. Although Bloch

[82] David Bloch, *Aristotle*: *On Memory and Recollection*: *Text, Translation, Interpretation and Reception in Western Scholasticism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007) p. 137.
[83] *Ibid*. p. 143.

does recognise the importance of Aristotle as a figure of authority to medieval scholars of memory, he argues that the actual content of the philosophical material being claimed to derive from Aristotle in fact owes more to the Arabic modifications of the *De Memoria* represented by the works of Avicenna and Averroes, and as a result parts from Aristotle's original conceptualisation of memory at a number of significant points: '[…] perhaps I might even venture the conclusion that Aristotle was *not* in fact, despite appearances, the major influence on theories of memory in the Latin West; ordinary linguistic usage and well established traditions could not be eliminated by a theory like Aristotle's, which did not cover the required conceptual territory as did, for instance, the theories of Avicenna and Averroes'.[84] Taken as a whole the nature of this evidence, specifically the comparatively late transmission of Aristotle's *De Memoria* in the medieval Latin West and the apparent absence in Ireland of the expertise necessary to access it, thoroughly excludes this text from having any direct impact upon the intellectual understanding of memory in medieval Gaelic-speaking Ireland.

The Roman orator, statesman and scholar Marcus Tullius Cicero is a second authority that figures large in medieval memory studies. He is of particular interest to Carruthers' study as it is he who most fully gives realisation to the 'architectural mnemonic', that is the use of specific images placed within an imagined architectural setting, such as the interior of a house, in order to stimulate the recollection of certain points of information. According to Cicero this technique was discovered by the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (c. 556-c.468) who found that he was able to remember the guests present at a banquet, during which they all perished in a freak accident, by visualising their respective locations within the banqueting house whose roof most unfortunately fell in.[85] Carruthers sees Cicero's formalising of this method in his *De Oratore*, and more fully in the anonymous text *Rhetorica ad Herennium* widely considered in the Middle Ages to have been authored by Cicero, as highly influential in the development of later medieval mnemonic techniques.[86] Cicero, unlike Aristotle, is primarily concerned with the function of memory as an aide to the art of oration; hence his focus on learnable techniques by which the aspiring orator can enhance his particular craft.

[84] Bloch, p.226. Bloch also criticizes Carruthers' approach more broadly, arguing that her conceptualization of the development of memory theories across the Middle Ages and beyond is altogether too simplistic and perhaps also influenced by modern memory theory. Space does not permit a full and thorough intervention into this debate and, for the purposes of this paper, there is not the need to do so as the consequences of these conclusions do not hold direct implications for the present study; however, they are of significance in the wider field of medieval memories and must at the very least be acknowledged here. See: *Ibid*. pp. 225-227.
[85] Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, p. 39.
[86] *Ibid*., p. 39. Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 172.

The interests of both *De Oratore* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* are, however, highly specified towards the culture of the political classes of the late Roman Republic. It is perhaps no accident that their medieval revival was orchestrated by the growing circle of intellectuals and lecturers of Europe's new universities, developing significantly from the thirteenth century onwards, aware of a similar need to deliver sophisticated arguments and ideas through the medium of oration to a large audience.

Turning now to assess the evidence for the circulation of Cicero in medieval Ireland, the picture is, perhaps, less easy to define than that for Aristotle. The preface to the aforementioned Old Irish period O'Mulconry's Glossary names Cicero specifically as one of a number of sources used by the compilers to identify the Greek roots of the Irish language:

> *incipit discreptio de origine Scoticae linguae quam congregauerunt religiosi uiri, adiunctis nominibus ex Hebr<ae>icano Hi<e>ronimi et tractationibus, i.e. Ambrosi et Cassiani et Augustini et Eisiodori. Virgili, Prisciani, Commiani, Ciceronis, necnon per literas Graecorum, i.e. Atticae, Doricae, Eolicae ling<u>ae, quia Scoti de Graecis originem duxerunt, sic et ling<u>am.*
>
> Here begins a description of the origin of the Irish language which religious men compiled, having combined Jerome's Hebrew names and [other] discussions, i.e. by Ambrose and Cassian and Augustine and Isidore, Virgil, Priscian, Commianus, Cicero; and also by means of Greek literature, i.e. in the Attic, Doric and Aeolic language, because the Irish derive their origin from the Greeks, and thus too their language.[87]

Pádraic Moran's conclusions, however, only identify one of the named authorities from this list as having a recognisable influence on the Greek-derived content of the glossary; unsurprisingly this is the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville.[88] Despite this reference to Cicero as an authority of etymological interest there is no explicit evidence in the makeup of the text itself demonstrating the use of any of Cicero's works. The attribution, especially when considered as one of a long list of claimed authorities including a number of widely famous intellectual figures from Classical Rome and the early Christian period, most likely represents nothing more than a claim of intellectual pedigree for the material being presented. That Cicero was known in this context as a source of, perhaps specifically Greek related (although the text is by no means explicit on this point), etymological interest in the Old Irish period is significant, but it is impossible to quantify from this passing allusion alone any specifics of

[87] Moran, 'Greek', p. 178.
[88] *Ibid*., p. 180.

what, if anything, was available of Cicero's works to the compilers of O'Mulconry's Glossary.

As previously mentioned the vast majority of the medieval authorities on memory and mnemotechniques discussed by Carruthers belong to the high and later Middle Ages, and worked within the network of universities spreading across Europe during that period of history. These scholars had access to the Classical texts discussed previously and, as Carruthers demonstrates with a number of examples, made extensive efforts to re-integrate this material into their own understanding of memory. Aside from the fact that they largely postdate the period with which this study is concerned, many of these authors were working in a scholastic environment quite apart from that of their contemporary Gaelic-speaking counterparts in Ireland: that of the medieval university. Irish (though it should be mentioned not necessarily demonstrably Gaelic-speaking, particularly as the Middle Ages progressed) students and scholars certainly joined and participated in this growing phenomena; examples bearing the epithet *scot* or *scotus* abound, although this was also used as much for individuals from Scotland as from Ireland. Espositio's warning, however, that the reciprocal effects for these areas from having their brightest studying abroad appear to have been negligible, should again be born in mind. The composition of these institutions, as well as how they functioned and their scholarly output, was also vastly different compared with the schools of the hereditary scholarly families of Gaelic Ireland. Indeed, the university as an institution arrived in Ireland with limited success. Only a single example was established during the high Middle Ages, at Dublin (firmly within the English-speaking pale) in 1320 by the archbishop of the city, enjoying limited success before being dissolved during the reformation. It cannot be assumed that this institution facilitated any sustained and stable connection between the Gaelic-speaking men of learning and the thinking developing in universities across Europe.

The most likely period in which the ideas of Classical thinkers on memory could have found their way into medieval Gaelic learned culture is that prior to the processes of separation between Church Schools and the secular learned orders resulting as part of the widespread, ongoing Church reforms across the twelfth century. Withdrawn from this broader network of intellectual exchange the secular men of learning would subsequently have had much less opportunity to access such material. Before the reform, however, access to the necessary texts, and even to the basic linguistic skills necessary to understand them, is

not demonstrated by the available evidence. By contrast to the formalised high and later Medieval *ars memorativa,* indebted in some form to their Classical predecessors:

> [i]n the early Middle Ages, *memoria,* is discussed most often not in the context of rhetoric but rather in writings on meditation and prayer, in which a diagram-like "picture" is created mentally which serves as the site for a meditational *collatio*, the "gathering" into one "place" of the various strands of a meditational composition.[89]

Although this describes a more solitary, reflective process easily envisaged as belonging within the particular environment of the early medieval monastery, whose communities often formed the principal centres of learning and education during this period, Carruthers again places primary importance upon the use of images in memory composition. This is not a feature that is as easily demonstrable in early Irish Christian writers' discussions of the processes of memory; nevertheless, it does seem to underlie their understanding. The *Monastary of Tallaght* in particular views recalling from memory as an act that occupies the eyes, even when no physical text is present. More often than not it is memory that, conversely, becomes an image itself. This is seen in the number and range of examples where good memory signifies an individual's personal virtue. In a specifically religious context the image created is one of devotion to God, however, this virtue also extends to more secular individuals in whom it emphasises the qualities of justice and truth in leadership. This chapter has avoided discussing directly the place of memory within the culture of Ireland's learned classes in favour of establishing important context in the broader schools of memory thought in the Middle Ages, and their Classical predecessors. Before this topic is addressed it is desirable to investigate the terminology and semantics associated with memory words in Old and Middle Irish.

[89] *Ibid*., p. 123.

3.0 Memory Terms in Medieval Irish

The following study of the semantics of medieval Irish memory terms has been conducted primarily through the use of the Royal Irish Academy's online *Dictionary of the Irish Language*.[90] The reasons for this are twofold: firstly, the *eDIL* remains the most accessable 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. A few additional examples have, however, been included here where it is felt they can contribute further to the definitions concerned. A dedicated and fully detailed study of the semantics of medieval Irish memory terms has not been attempted before. Joseph Nagy has very much pointed the way towards the present study, conducting some brief preliminary assessments of the terms *mebair* and *mebraigid*.[91] Nagy's studies, however, remain limited in scope discussing only memory terminology deriving from *memair*, and not from other memory terms. He has, moreover, not explored the full range of grammatical forms the term can be found in, nor considered the possibility of semantic variation between verbs, nouns and adjectives derived from the same root. There is also, as he recognises, potentially fertile ground in considering the possible semantic variation between memory terms originating in different root forms.[92] It is the aim of this study to take the path sketched out by Nagy and explore further, and to a fuller extent, the use of memory terminology in medieval Ireland.

There are, broadly speaking, two families of terms used to cover the concepts of memory in the Irish language; one native, and one a borrowing of the Latin *memoria*. The latter is represented by the noun *mebair*, and the associated verb; *mebraigid,* and adjective: *mebrach*. The noun *cuimne* represents the native memory term and seems to have enjoyed a greater degree of linguistic currency than *mebair*, if simply comparing the number of terms derived from each can be taken as an accurate measure for this. *Cuimne* is, in the first

[90] Hereafter abbreviated: *eDIL*. All references to this dictionary are to the online version over the print edition (http://www.dil.ie/).
[91] For *mebaraigid*, see: Joseph Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*: *Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 16. For *mebair*, see: Joseph Nagy, 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative: An Overview,' *Oral Tradition*, 1/2 (1986), pp. 272-301. (pp. 290-296).
[92] *Ibid*., p. 295.

instance, a formation from the adjective *cuman*; a compound of the preposition *com*, 'with,' (Proto-Celtic **kom*) and a Proto-Celtic verbal element deriving ultimately from an Indo-European source, *men*, having the meaning 'to think, retain in mind.'[93] The noun *cuimne* subsequently gives rise to a further adjective, *cuimnech*, which is itself back-formed into a further noun: *cuimnige*. In addition to this *cuimne* was also used in the negative formations *díchuimne* and *éccuimne*, and provided the basis of the verb *cuimnigidir*. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the semantic range of these terms and reaffirm or redefine the definitions that are accorded to them.[94] Both these words, *mebair* and *cuimne*, were present in Irish language from at least the Old-Irish stratum as represented by the Würzburg and Milan Glosses, conventionally dated to the late eighth century, as they are evidenced in various forms within these texts. The preeminent philologist and grammarian of the medieval Irish languge, Rudolf Thurneysen, assigned the formation of *cuman* to the 'earliest period' of the Old Irish language based on the elision of the two individual *m* sounds in the elements *com* + *men* into a single sound,[95] indicating that the word was in parlance some time before its earliest written attestations in the Glosses. The *Lexique Étymologique de l'Irlandais Ancien* further proposes that this formation developed as a common form in early insular Celtic, following Thurneysen in citing Middle Welsh *couein* as a parallel.[96] The recently compiled *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic* goes a step further by including an entry on the hypothetical Proto-Celtic form **kom-men*.[97] Although there are no direct attestations of this formation in any continental Celtic language, the earliest linguistic evidence being medieval and entirely insular, Matasović points to a possible occurrence of the element *men* in the form *monimam* in a Celtiberian inscription implying that the key element of *com+men* at least was in use from a very early period.[98] A shared Proto-Celtic origin for Irish *cuman* would necessitate an even earlier date than that Thurneysen himself was willing to suggest; it would certainly demonstrate the presence of a significantly established vocabulary for the conceptualisation of the concepts of memory amongst Celtic-speaking peoples well into pre-history.

[93] Édouard Bachellery and Pierre-Yves Lambert, eds., *Lexique Étymologique de l'Irlandais Ancien*, 7 vols, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1959-1996), C (1961), p. 287. See also: Ranko Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 215, 256.
[94] As such no definitions for these terms, however loose, shall be provided here in order to avoid fostering any preconceptions in the reader's mind.
[95] Rudolf Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1949; repr. 2003), p. 503.
[96] Édouard Bachellery, *Lexique Étymologique*, C, p. 287-287. See also *GPC* s.v. *cof*, p. 536.
[97] Ranko Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 215.
[98] *Ibid*. p. 256.

Exactly when *mebair* passed into the Irish language is uncertain. The word does not display any of the distinguishing features, as discussed by Damian McManus in his article on Latin loanwords in medieval Irish,[99] which would enable a precise dating of the borrowing to within the Primitive and Archaic Irish periods, c. 400-550 AD. As a result, it is most likely that *mebair* was borrowed into the language after this period. Certainly, based on the evidence provided by the word *mem*(*m*)*ra* discussed in detail below, *mebair* could not have been borrowed before the loss of final syllables in Primitive Irish at around 500 AD. As Mc Manus notes this 'main body of Latin loan-words' borrowed during the Old Irish period is:

> […] relatively impossible to date for two reasons: (a) Most of them are of a learned nature and were probably transferred to Irish through a literary, non-oral medium. [Therefore not evidencing any datable sound changes resulting from an adoption through the spoken language.] (b) The relative stability of the language once syncope had run its course makes it difficult to set up *termini* whereby an approximate date, relative or absolute, might be established.[100]

There may, nevertheless, be one small clue that hints at a context for this borrowing. Thurneysen ascribes the change of the medial voiced bilabial *m* in Latin *memoria*, into the medial voiced labiodental spirant *v* in Irish *mebair*, to the influence of native words, citing *mebul*; 'shame', as an example of such.[101] It is worth, however, noting the similarity of Welsh *myfyr*, also a borrowing of *memoria*, in displaying the identical sound change. A possible scenario, therefore, is that *memoria* entered Irish under Brittonic influence from sometime around the mid-sixth century onwards as part of an intellectual vocabulary associated with written Christian learning.[102]

I have so far refrained from assigning any specific definition to these terms and there is good reason for this. The *eDIL* provides broadly reliable definitions; however, the information that it presents occasionally fails to fully represent, or even occasionally misrepresents, the full semantic range manifested in these terms and so should not necessarily always be accepted uncritically. A case in point is the *eDIL*'s primary definition of the noun *cuimne* as 'faculty of memory; remembrance, memorial,'[103] and subsequent offering of examples under this heading, including an excerpt from a verse alluding to Christ's harrowing of Hell from the poetry of Blathmac: '*a chuimne la Críst*,' 'Christ's memory of

[99] Damian McManus, 'A Chronolgy of the Latin Loan-Words in Early Irish', *Ériu*, 37 (1983), pp. 21-71 (pp. 30-31).
[100] *Ibid*. p. 66.
[101] Thurneysen, *Grammar of Old Irish*, p. 574.
[102] *GPC* s.v. *myfyr*[1], pp. 2527-2528.
[103] *eDIL* s.v. 1 *cuimne* (dil.ie/13561).

it,'[104] that demonstrate the word being used to denote the stuff of memory itself, rather than the intellectual capacity of human memory or any process of formalised remembering or memorialising.[105] It remains highly important to attempt to reach as precise as possible a definition of the specific concepts covered by these two families of terms in order to build up a more forensic understanding of them. Indeed, the very fact that there are two separate nouns covering concepts that in English usage could all quite happily be fitted under the label 'memory' should caution us against viewing the two terms, and by extension their verbal and adjectival offshoots, with any preconceptions at all with regard to their semantic range. Therefore, it is necessary to inquire as part of the process of reaching a more secure set of definitions if one held any meaning, or collection of meanings, exclusive from the other, or whether the two terms are essentially interchangeable. Whilst this can be partly achieved through an intertextual approach, this study will also assess instances where examples from both sets of terms occur within the same text. This question has important consequences; however, it is not simple to answer. The use of the two terms together in one text is, in the first instance, uncommon and where they are found together, not always in close proximity, it is frequently in a combination of a noun form of one term and adjectival and verbal forms from the other. Additionally, there still remains the possibility that their use in this context was the result of a particular individual's personal, regional or institutional vocabulary, and therefore not representative of any larger trend. Despite its difficulties the *eDIL* still remains a broadly stable foundation from which to conduct a semantic survey of memory terms in Old and Middle Irish and the present study seeks to build upon and, where it is thought necessary, suggest emendations to these entries rather than begin again from the ground up.

[104] The full verse reads: '*Ce ro-chés galar n-endaig is chath isnaib hifernaib, a chuimne la Críst ní mó bith aibritiud cotulto*.' 'Though he endured undeserved torment and battle in the Hells, Christ's memory of it was no more than if it had been a wink of sleep.' James Carney, ed. and trans., *The Poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan together with the Irish Gospel of Thomas and a Poem on the Virgin Mary*, (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1964) p. 60.
[105] *eDIL* s.v. 1 *cuimne* (dil.ie/13561).

3.1 Nouns Denoting Memory in Medieval Irish

The *eDIL* makes three divisions of the noun *mebair*; a), b) and c). The last of these, c), reflects an Early Modern Irish development of the word's meaning to encompass the broader concepts of 'reason', 'intelligence' and 'sense', and as such does not merit discussion here. Divisions a) and b) cover medieval usage and are interesting in that they are differentiated along syntactical lines, focusing on the structures in which *mebair* appears within the language, rather than strictly semantically. The noun *mebair* is defined under a) as 'recollection, memory' and the examples presented comprise entirely of variations on its common usage in the phrasal construction '*is mebair la* X, Y,' with the indirect object (X) either following or incorporated through conjugation of the attached preposition, and the subject (Y) subsequent to the indirect object.[106] The copula is usually evidenced as part of this construction in some form but is, on occasion, omitted (although the presence of the copula is still implicit and it would perhaps be better to describe this as elision rather than omission). The preposition *la* is integral to this construction and the whole belongs to a family of similar constructions based upon these two elements that are used to express the possession of various physical or mental states, such as '*is cumang la* X…,' 'X is able/X can…,' and opinions, '*is lór*/*mór*/*bec la* X…,' 'X thinks it enough/a lot/a little…'.[107] The use of *mebair* in this construction signifies, and is very specifically limited to, therefore, the stuff of an individual's personal memory as a formation of past experience. This is exemplified by the use of the plural form of the noun, *mebra*, when the subject of the construction is in a plural. Thus the number of memories accords to the number of subjects being remembered. The *eDIL* notes that *mebair* acquires an almost adjectival force in this construction with the sense of 'remembered'.[108] Whilst this syntactic shift is, in my opinion, not necessary to make sense of the construction, and is perhaps slightly overstated in the *eDIL*, it remains entirely consistent with the definition outlined above; this sense of *mebair* remains one of a personal memory attaching to a specific subject.

The *eDIL*'s division b) is perhaps the most intriguing, embracing as it does every instance of the noun *mebair* outside of the construction detailed under division a). Here then

[106] *eDIL* s.v. *mebair* (dil.ie/31707). Lit. 'it is a memory with X, Y', thus: 'X remembers Y'. Thurneysen, *Grammer of Old Irish*, p. 492-494.
[107] *eDIL* s.v. *la* (dil.ie/29233).
[108] *Ibid.*, s.v. *mebair* (dil.ie/31707).

exists the material with which to explore the full range of possible meanings that the word possesses, however, the *eDIL* is unusually conservative at this point and hesitates to assign any definition to *mebair* b) at all. The examples provided under this heading are, therefore, worth exploring in more detail before the semantic spread of *mebair* can be defined with any greater certainty. One can be dealt with quickly; this is found in the first verse of a poem from the fragmentary *Betha Cholmáin Eala* describing the principal *oenaighe*, gatherings/fairs, of Ireland, part of the collection of saints' lives from a manuscript penned by the seventeenth-century annalist and antiquarian Mícheál Ó Cléirigh:[109]

Tri haonaighe Erenn búdhéin,	The three fairs of Ireland itself,
innisim si daoibh fa scceimh,	I will relate them to you in order,
ata a meabhair agam, '*s ni gann*	I remember them, and 'tis not meagre
a faisnéis, fios a nanmann.[110]	to recount them, the knowledge of their names.

This phrase, '*ata a meabhair agam*,' appears to be synonymous with the '*is mebair la*' construction as the meaning is fundamentally identical.[111] Certainly *mebair* likewise refers here, although as there is no accordance in number between it and the items being remembered it appears in this instance to hold a collective quality, to the same concept of memory outlined in the preceding paragraph. This form of construction is most commonly used in the Irish language to phrase concepts of possession or the ownership of physical objects. What this particular example demonstrates, whether or not it was the product of conscious reasoning or was essentially subconscious in nature, is an attitude towards the concept of memory as a quantity which one could possess, in the same manner as any other physical possession. The treatment of memory in this sense, particularly in conjunction with the substantive verb as if it were a physical object to be possessed like any other, suggests that this formation developed in a more vernacular context, outside of the possible influence of the broader medieval philosophical tradition which, influenced by Aristotle's thinking, understood memory as a sense impression made upon the mind, possessing in of itself no possible physical element at all. Why exactly the substantive verb construction has been adopted in this instance is uncertain. Perhaps this form was chosen in order to meet the demands of the verse and thus represents an innovation unique to this poem. It is also possible that this example represents a shift towards the modern Gaelic languages in which

[109] Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, I, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.
[110] *Ibid*. p. 178.
[111] Lit. 'their memory is at me'.

the phrase 'X remembers' is commonly constructed using the substantive verb and the preposition *ag*/*aig*, however, with the noun *cuimne* rather than *mebair* used to denote the subject.[112] Perhaps Ó Cléirigh writing, as he was, in the seventeenth century went so far as to partially upgrade, consciously or not, this construction with a more familiar phrase during copying. This hypothesis entirely depends on the antiquity of *Betha Cholmain Eala* itself which considering it only survives through Ó Cléirigh's copy is not easy to define. The *eDIL* offers no further examples of *mebair* being used in a substantive verb construction to denote the possession of memory in a medieval context and I have yet to locate any further instances. As shall be discussed below, however, a comparable construction can be found when *mebair* appears in association with the preposition(s) *di*/*do*.

The substantive verb plus *ag*/*aig* construction which comes to supplant '*is mebair la*' in modern Scottish Gaelic useage; '*tha cuimhne agam*,' 'I remember,' does occur in medieval examples, one of which can be found on line 7261 of *Acallamh na Senórach*, describing Caílte's departing gift from the *Túatha Dé Danann* after his stay with them in the *Síd* of Assaroe:

> "*Ocus fil cobair accainde duit*," *ar in ingen*. "*Ca cobair sin*?" *ar Cailte*. "*Deoch cuimnigthe céille d'indlucud duinde duit co Temraig connach tecma duit es nó abhann nó indber nó a cath nó a comlann nach bia a cuimne accut*."[113]
>
> "And we have help for you," said the girl [Bé Binn]. "What help is that?" said Caílte. "A remembering drink of the mind to bear sealed with you to Tara so that you may never happen upon a stream or a river or an estuary without having memory of it or of its [attendant] battle or combat."

The *eDIL* does not include any example of the use of this substantive plus *ag* construction at all in its entry for *cuimne*, an oversight that certainly needs correcting.[114] Judging on the textual evidence alone, however, this construction appears much less prevalent in Old and Middle Irish than in the modern languages as a means of expressing the possession of memory. For example in *Acallamh na Senórach* the '*is mebair la*' construction occurs at least six times; examples can be found on lines 132, 2491, 2542, 4774, 5341, and 6814, as opposed

[112] This is certainly well established by the Early-Modern Irish period. See: Rev. Patrick Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedilge agus Béarla*: *An Irish-English Dictionary, Being a Thesaurus of the Words, Phrases and Idioms of the Modern Irish Language* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1972), s.v. *cuimne*, p. 285.
[113] Ernst Windisch and Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*: *Mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch* IV (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1900), p. 202.
[114] *eDIL* s.v. 1 *cuimne* (dil.ie/13561).

to only the one use of '*atá cuimne ag*' on line 7261.[115] Along with the instance of '*atá mebair ag*' noted above, these examples may highlight a period of shift from the prevalent medieval usage towards the more modern, although without a full study the chronology here is indeterminate. The one very limited example of a 'hybrid' phrase discussed above does not constitute enough evidence on its own to suggest that substantive and copula constructions were freely interchangeable; it appears very much as an exception and not the norm. Conversely, however, this does not rule out the possibility of one influencing the other on a more isolated basis and this is perhaps what is evidenced in the example from *Betha Cholmáin Eala*. It nevertheless remains decidedly difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from the available examples as to why these varying modes of expression should exist, if they denote any difference, conscious or otherwise, in the nature of the depiction or if they show a shifting understanding of how memory is possessed. The shift towards the use of the substantive verb replacing a periphrastic construction otherwise formulated around the copula is an interesting phenomenon, and one that deserves to be explored further, however, as there is a lack of necessary scholarship on the use of these phrases within the medieval language more broadly, particularly on exactly what concepts can be expressed by use of the substantive and copula respectively, such a study is not yet fully possible. These examples are, perhaps, valuable evidence of an otherwise unrecognised shift within the Gaelic languages towards favouring the substantive construction over that of the copula in the expression of possessing memory.

The majority of the subsequent examples given by *eDIL* under division b) are grouped into a cluster focused on the use of *mebair* following the preposition *do*, 'to', and possibly also *di*/*de*, 'from/out of'. These examples are slightly less clear-cut than those in division a) and require slightly more attention. Although *eDIL* translates this phrase '*de*/*do mebair*' as 'by heart/by rote' this is somewhat misleading and does not do justice to the full range of examples in which it appears. Firstly, for reasons that shall be discussed more fully elsewhere, any introduction of the idea of learning 'by heart' should be avoided. The notion of the heart as the sense organ primarily responsible for the retention of memory, from which the English phrase of learning something 'by heart' arose, does not seem to have held as greater a place in medieval Ireland as elsewhere, if it was indeed present at all.[116] It is, therefore, inappropriate to introduce this concept into our understanding of medieval Irish

[115] Windisch and Stokes, *Irische Texte* IV, pp. 5, 71-72, 130, 146, 189, 202.
[116] See below, pp. 128-129.

thinking on memory when its presence within that culture is uncertain. In order to better understand the meaning of this phrase it is obviously necessary to determine exactly which adjective is used in these examples; is there simply one phrase represented here, or multiple? In fact, all but one of the examples provided make clear use of the preposition *do*: only one is divergent. This exception is found in the previously mentioned text edited by Gwynn and Purton in 'The Monastry of Tallaght:'

> *Is sed immurgu asrubart maolrúaoin fri maoldithruib ni lugæ mbis ind menme hisin cheill dia gabail ind tsailm de memur indas cid fri saltair*.[117]
>
> Mael Rúain, however, said to Mael Díthruib that the mind is no less in the meaning when it is considering the psalm from memory than from a psalter.

As opposed to Gwynn and Purton's translation I have purposefully chosen to keep mine as literal as possible whilst retaining good sense as is it necessary, in order to correctly understand what is meant here, to stay as close as possible to the original sense. Gwynn and Purton translate '*gabail* […] *de memur*' with the phrase 'reciting […] by rote,'[118] and this has clearly influenced the definition given in *eDIL*. This translation, however, misrepresents the action occurring here. Rather than describing an act of recitation '*gabail* […] *de memur*' may, in this instance, be more satisfactorily interpreted as an act of internal meditative contemplation, a common enough practice in medieval monastic experience.[119] It is, moreover, somewhat unnecessary to extend this one translation to cover all occurrences of *de*/*do mebair* as a rule, as *eDIL* appears to do. Indeed, it is unhelpful to associate *de mebair* and *do mebair* at all, or even to understand the former as a fixed expression in any way, as the latter is most often used for a specific purpose, one that *eDIL* does not adequately represent.

The majority of examples demonstrating the use of *mebair* in conjunction with the preposition *do* evidence an alternative means by which the possession of memory can be expressed, aside from the constructions *is mebair la* and *atá cuimne ag* discussed above. *Acallamh na Senórach* again provides an example, in this instance from the opening of the

[117] Gwynn and Purton, 'Monastery of Tallaght,' p. 142. See above, pp. 16-17.
[118] *Ibid.* p. 142.
[119] Examples of similar acts of meditative reading or contemplation of a text in a monastic context are discussed in detail by Mary Carruthers. *Gaibid* is, however, used to describe acts of singing and other acts of recitation so Gwynn and Purton's translation remains linguistically acceptable. See Carruthers, '*Book of Memory*,' pp. 202-212. *eDIL*., s.v. *gaibid* (dil.ie/25119).

poem in which Caílte describes Finn's otherworldly entertainer, the dwarf Cnú Deróil, to Saint Patrick:

Abhuc do fuair Finn ferdha	The dwarf that manly Finn acquired,
do bhí d'f[h]eabus a mheabra	his memory was of excellent quality,
gacha cluinedh tiar is tair	everything that he heard from West and East
do bhídh aigi do meabair.[120]	he used to have committed to memory.

A similar construction occurs in the legal text *Lebor na Cert*, in the first verse of a poem on the privileges accorded to the kingship of Tara, this time using the preposition *la* to denote the indirect object:

Temair teach a mbuí mac Cuind	Tara, the house in which the son of Conn was,
forad na laech a Liathdruim;	seat of the warriors of Liathdruim;
atá limsa do mebair	I have committed to memory
a díre dá deigf[h]earaib.[121]	what the honour-price of her good-men [is].

Unlike the constructions used to communicate the possession of memory previously discussed, *mebair* in these phrases is not acting as the possessed quantity in of itself. Instead the quantity, in these examples a piece of specific knowledge concerning the honour price of the ruler of Tara and every single thing heard by Cnú Deróil respectively, is stated to be possessed, or more literally to simply be, 'to memory.' It is clear in these instances that *mebair* carries the meaning of 'faculty of memory' as the receptive capacity to which specific knowledge is committed, and the *eDIL* does ultimately but belatedly arrive at this definition. The latter example also coincidently demonstrates that *mebair* possesses this meaning in a standalone capacity, outside of any specific phrasal construction. In conclusion *mebair* can, in addition to its later usage as represented under division c), be best understood under the following definitions: a) 'memory', a psychological formation of an individual or group's past experience; b) 'memory', the faculty of memory, the human capacity to retain and recall information about past experience.

As has been demonstrated, *cuimne* can, like *mebair*, also hold the meaning of memory in terms of the stuff of an individual's personal memory, and this is not adequately represented in the definition provided for *cuimne* in *eDIL* as: 'faculty of memory;

[120] Windisch and Stokes, *Irische Texte* IV, p. 18.
[121] *Lebor na Cert*: *The Book of Rights*, ed. and trans. by Myles Dillon (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1962), p. 122.

remembrance, memorial.'[122] As is clear from the following example from the short tale *Genemain Áeda Sláne, The Birth of Áed Sláne*, in *Lebor na hUidre*, a 'memory' in this sense can apply to multiple people in the same instance: '*Conid do chumnigud in gnima sin 7 día thaiscid hi cumni do chách ro chan in senchad inso .i. Fland Manistrech* […]',[123] 'In order to record that deed[, the miraculous conception of Áed by his mother Mugain on the intercession of Saint Finnen of Mag mBíle,] and to keep it in the memories of every person he, that is Fland Manistrech, sang this history.' Again, however, as is seen in the case of *mebair*, the plural form is used when there is more than one individual involved. Although there is one memory being imparted, presented here in the form of a written verse, those who receive and retain it are envisaged as doing so individually. In addition, *cuimne* can similarly refer to the faculty of memory, and this is clearly reflected in *eDIL*'s definition. Its use in the aforementioned triad, number 246, from the *Triads of Ireland* alongside *delb chain*, 'beautiful form', and *creisine*, 'piety', to denote a desirable quality which one can possess rather than an individual recollection, provides a good example of this.[124] Which precisely of these two meanings is being used in any particular instance is, unlike *mebair* with its more distinguishable constructions, often difficult to define, and this suggests a certain degree of mutual melding between these two meanings. This is seen in a line of verse from the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* as preserved in *Lebor na hUidre*: '*Airliter cumni cóich comarbai cré*',[125] 'Let memories advise who is [to be] the inheritor of land.' It is unclear to which sort of memory the appeal to learned authority is here directed: is it the faculty or the content contained within? An argument could be made for either and, most likely, both are implied together in the use of the term here. The point to take away from this, however, is that *cuimne* is a flexible term and could be freely applied when wishing to impart both of the senses so far discussed, without any conscious awareness on behalf of the user that these distinctions in meaning were necessarily present.

The final two meanings assigned to c*uimne* by the *eDIL* are, however, harder to identify in the available instances where this word appears in text. Firstly: 'memorial.' It is unclear from a cursory glance at this entry whether the use of memorial here is meant to signify an event of commemoration or remembering, as its juxtaposition with the word 'remembrance' would seem to suggest, or a physical monument erected for the

[122] *eDIL* s.v. 1 *cuimne* (dil.ie/13561).
[123] *Lebor na hUidre*: *Book of the Dun Cow*, eds. Bergin and Best (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929), p. 135.
[124] *Triads*, ed. by Kuno Meyer, p. 32.
[125] *Serglige Con Culainn*, ed. by Myles Dillon (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953), p. 9.

commemoration of an individual or event. From the available evidence, however, it appears that *cuimne* was not used directly to denote a physical monument or memorial; certainly none of the examples provided in the *eDIL* demonstrate its use in this way, and I have yet to encounter any further examples that do. Putting aside words that in their primary sense describe a stone or rock, such as *lía* and *ail*, the term in Irish that encompasses the concept of a physical memorial, an object that is a focus for remembering, and meaning by extension a grave or tomb, is *mem*(*m*)*ra*. According to the *eDIL* this is another borrowing from Latin *memoria*, however, given the difficulties already discussed, the chronology of this borrowing in relation to that of *mebair* is unclear. The medial m is presented in the *eDIL*'s entry for *mem*(*m*)*ra* as a bilabial *m*: hence the presentation of the form as *mem*(*m*)*ra* in the entry heading although in the written examples this appears as single *m* or *mb*. This implies a pronunciation for the word in accordance with its Latin root, as opposed to the shift into the voiced bilabial spirant *v* evidenced in *mebair*. Based on the retention of the final syllable comprising the original Latin case ending, in the form of final 'a' in *mem*(*m*)*ra*, Damian McManus assigns this borrowing to before the final stage of the Primitive Irish period which saw the loss of these endings roughly around 500 AD (stage 4 in his chronology).[126] It is highly likely therefore, that *mem*(*m*)*ra* constitutes an earlier borrowing of *memoria* than does *mebair*. The fact that *memoria* was apparently borrowed twice to form two separate words is significant in itself and betrays a certain resistance within the Irish terms for memory and remembering against incorporating the concept of a physical focus for the actuation of memory in the form of a memorial or burial marker. If *mem*(*m*)*ra* was indeed the earlier borrowing then there would simply be no need to for the semantic range of *mebair*, and by extension *cuimne*, to encompass this meaning. Conversely, however, it is also significant that the reverse of this process did not occur, seeing *mem*(*m*)*ra* accrue the concepts of memory and remembering.

'Memorial' must, therefore, be understood in this entry as being synonymous with the second meaning ascribed to *cuimne* by the *eDIL*: 'remembrance'. This is perhaps a difficult term to put forward as a suggested translation for *cuimne* as it is a word which in English holds a wide array of meanings, not all of which may be entirely applicable. Putting aside these difficulties, however, (this is certainly not the place for a full analysis of the semantic range of the English term) there are some principal uses of remembrance that are relevant to assessing its applicability in translating Irish *cuimne*. Remembrance can, in many instances,

[126] McManus, 'Latin Loan-Words,' pp. 30, 58.

be used almost synonymously with the term memory itself; meaning both the material of memory and the faculty of memory. As has been demonstrated both these meanings are clearly present in *cuimne*. It is the sense of remembering or preserving the memory of, in a more or less formalised act, a particular individual or event that is worth investigating further here: can this meaning be seen operating in any example of the use of *cuimne*? In this instance the example given by *eDIL* from the *Pais Petair ocus Póil*, *The Passion of Saints Peter and Paul*, found in the early fifteenth-century *Leabhar Brecc* rewards investigation. The relevant section is that describing a version of the death of Simon Magus in an act of divine punishment by the wish of Saint Peter:

> *Do-ro-chair Símón focetoir is-in inad di-a n-ad ainm 'saccra uia,' ₇ do-roinded a chorp i cethri blogaib, ₇ do-rónta cethri clocha dib i cúimne in coscair apstalacda cus-indíu.*[127]
>
> Simon at once fell down dead in the place which is named '*Sacra Via*' and his body was divided into four bits, and four stones were created from them in commemoration of the apostolic triumph [and these remain] until this day.

Here *cuimne* is used not to denote a physical monument directly, but the action that such an object performs. The broken and petrified corpse is literally memorialized, and this object serves as a physical conduit through which is accessed the memory of the precise moment at which the divine power of God channelled through Saint Peter overcame the demonic force wielded by Simon Magus. It is fair in this context, therefore, to ascribe a definition of 'memorial' to *cuimne*. The particular sense concerned, however, can perhaps be better captured by a translation of 'commemoration' as it both covers the relevant concept, yet avoids the potential confusion arising from the use of 'memorial' and its problematic connotations of a physical monument. This would also serve to bring the definition of *cuimne* closer into line with that given for the verb *cuimnigid*(*ir*), discussed below.

The use of *cuimne* to translate the Latin phrase *ars memorativa* is worth revisiting at this point. As has been previously discussed this phrase, although translated as 'the art of memory', refers specifically to the formalized techniques of memorising and recalling information. Regardless of what the author of *Stair Ercuil*, discussed previously, understood personally by the phrase *ars memorativa* it is nonetheless important to assess if the noun *cuimne* is used elsewhere to denote the processes of memorisation or recollection. With a cursory look at the *eDIL* it might appear that it is. Interestingly, however, in order to cover

[127] *The Passions and the Homilies from the Leabhar Breac*, ed. and trans. By Robert Atkinson, *Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series*, 20 vols (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1887-1965), II (1887), p. 93.

these concepts *cuimne* seems to have been adapted into and used as a verbal noun, however, one not associated with any specific verbal stem. Textual examples of this are very rare with *eDIL* only noting two: one from an Old-Irish gloss on a Latin gloss on chapter VII of the *Enchyridion* of St. Augustine of Hippo and another, this time more closely resembling a Modern Irish verbal noun in the form of *ag cuimhne*, from the sixteenth-century *Leabhar í Eadhra*.[128] The former is found in a manuscript housed at the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin: here the Irish form *dochuimni* is used to gloss the Latin *inluminari*, 'enlightened.'[129] Although *eDIL* has interpreted this as a verbal noun construction it is, owing to its isolation from any syntactical context, very hard to assess if indeed it was intended to stand as such here. The verb *cuimnigid*(*ir*) takes the verbal noun *cuimniugud* and there is no other apparent verb based upon *cuimne* or *cuman* to which this form *ag cuimhne*/*dochuimni* could belong.[130] It may perhaps be the case that the use of *cuimne* in this way, if it indeed can represent a verbal noun form, represents a rogue back-formation influenced by the verb *cuimnigid*(*ir*). Given the uncertainties, however, it is altogether uncertain if *cuimne* on its own can describe remembering or memorization, casting further doubt on what the author of *Stair Ercuil* understood of the *ars memorativa*. As is also the case for *mebair*, these meanings appear limited by syntactic necessity to the verbal form.

The additional noun *cuimnige*, derived from *cuimne* through its adjectival form *cuimnech*, is another form for which only very limited textual examples can be found. The *eDIL* provides only two, the first of these is from the appendix to the *Lebor Gabála*; *Do Fhlathiusaib hÉrend*, *On The Rulers of Ireland*, as found in the *Book of Leinster*, in the first verse of a poem attributed to Senchan Tórpeist on the legendary figures of Fergus mac Róig and one Rudraige, grandfather of the hero Conall Cernach:

> *Ro fích Fergus fichit catha co cumnigi*
>
> *la fiansa feirt oc saigid cheirt ba Rudraigi*.[131]
>
> Fergus fought twenty memorable battles
>
> with wondrous warrior-bands seeking [his] due of the cattle of Rudraige.

[128] *eDIL* s.v. 1 *cuimne* (dil.ie/13561).
[129] Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, MS lat. qu. 690. Ludwig Christian Stern, 'Altirishe Glossen zu dem Trierer Enchiridion Augustins in der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin,' *Zeitschrift für Celtishe Philologie*, 7 (1910), p. 479.
[130] *eDIL* s.v. 1 *cuimnigid*(*ir*) (dil.ie/13568) and *cuimniugud* (dil.ie/13573)
[131] *The Book of Leinster*: *Formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, eds. Bergin, Best and O'Brien, 6 vols. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1954-1983) I (1954), p. 89.

Although we can establish a satisfactory understanding of the meaning of *cuimnige* in this example as 'the quality of being memorable/remembered', there are simply not enough instances available to enable any broader a study on this word. As a consequence, it is not possible to assign the creation of this term to a desire to encapsulate any particular meaning not covered by *cuimne* itself. From the overall evidence collected it appears that the nouns *mebair* and *cuimne* are overall synonymous and this is evidenced from the earliest textual examples dating to the Old-Irish period. Certainly it is possible that the two terms influenced each other, and this is discussed further below, so that if there was any initial difference between *cuimne* and *mebair* it became blurred and consequently obscured at an early date subsequent to the borrowing of the latter into the language. Both denote a general concept of memory that can be broadly bisected into: a) 1: a memory (belonging to an individual); the stuff of memory, 2: remembrance, commemoration; a memory relating to a particular individual now deceased or otherwise absent or a specific occasion, b) memory, the faculty of memory.

3.2 Verbs Expressing Memory Actions in Medieval Irish

Only by turning towards the verbs associated with each of the two memory terms; *mebraigid* for *mebair* and *cuimnigid*(*ir*) for *cuimne* respectively, can a concrete difference in semantic range be identified, and this produces some interesting conclusions. Firstly, however, there are again some creases in the definitions given in *eDIL* that need ironing out before any analysis can precede. The *eDIL* defines *mebraigid* under three headings as 'a) commits to memory; learns: […] b) rehearses, recites (?) and by extension hands down, records: […] c) excogitates, devises (mod.)'[132]. As with the noun *mebair* we can put aside division c) here as this usage simply reflects the development in meaning evidenced in that noun occurring after the medieval period. It is important to note that these definitions would seem not to include the activities of remembering or recalling to mind at all; certainly not in division a) and not with any certainty in division b), although the precise implications of 'recites (?) and by extension hands down' are unclear and warrant closer investigation in this regard. On face value, therefore, *mebraigid* as a verb refers only, or with overwhelming priority, to the acts of memorization or preservation of knowledge. The associated verbal noun *mebrugud*, however, is defined immediately subsequent to the entry for *mebraigid* as 'a) the act of remembering, committing to memory, learning: […] b) recalling, recording.'[133] This introduces the very concept that the entry for the full verb apparently excludes and creates a somewhat confusing impression, to say the least. It is most unlikely that a verbal noun could contain a meaning exclusive from its parent verb in this manner; therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether or not any examples of the use of the verb *mebraigid* evidence this meaning as well.

The examples of first interest are those under division b) as these could possibly contain the sense which is concerned here; as noted the precise implications of the definitions that *eDIL* provides under this heading are somewhat opaque without deeper context. That taken from the works of the seventeenth century poet Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille can be discarded as this falls beyond the chronological scope of this study, leaving three of interest. The first example given is from a *dindshenchas* poem, ascribed to the ninth-century poet Fland mac Lonnán, on the hill of Cnogba in the kingdom of Brega. The final verse runs:

[132] *eDIL*., s.v. *mebraigid* (dil.ie/31714).
[133] *Ibid.* s.v. *mebrugud* (dil.ie/31715).

Fland sunna, solus a dán,	Fland here, bright his craft,
innises sin, ní sóeb-rád:	recounts this, not a false speech:
rogu sceóil, scáilid mná is fir,	a choice tale, spread it men and women,
mebrugaid beóil oc buádaib.[134]	recall it lips with victories.

It is very difficult indeed to define a satisfactory translation for this use of *mebraigid*. Edward Gwynn, the editor and translator of this poem and whom the *eDIL* follows in its understanding of this verse, translates this here as 'make mention', taking the meaning of the verb, as with *scáilid* in the preceding line, as an imperative: '[…] spread it abroad, men and women! lips, make mention of it among excellences!'[135] The linking of the verb *mebraigid* with the noun *bél*, 'lip' or 'mouth', is crucial here and this has no doubt influenced Gwynn's understanding of the word: this kind of *mebraigid* must be possible to perform by the action of the mouth or lips. Although the usage here could be poetic in origin and thus unique to this instance, a consequence of the composer prioritizing meter over meaning, a simple translation of 'recounts' or, as Gwynn chooses, 'makes mention' is not satisfactory as this ignores, without due consideration, the integral 'memory' component of this term. So if a form of memory action must be considered here, what exactly is the kind of memory action that should be envisaged and, most importantly for the question at hand, is this an act of internalizing or externalising memory? As the narrative intent of this statement is certainly linked with that of the proceeding one in which the text claims that 'men and women spread it [the tale]' (highlighting its fame, popularity and also, by the authority of both virtues, its truth), we can also state that the action of *mebraigid* here must aid in this process of dissemination. Although this could be explained away by reasoning that the process of memorisation would, ultimately, aid in the dissemination of this text, it does seem overwhelmingly likely that an act of recalling information to mind is being described here. Joseph Nagy has also accepted this interpretation of the Cnogba poem, seeing in it: 'ample reason to believe that the Irish literati viewed remembrance and speaking as mutually implicated or even inseparable.'[136]

The second example provided for division b) is taken from a short tale, found in Royal Irish Academy manuscript, Stowe D. iv. 2., fol. 51a 1, edited by Kuno Meyer in 1918

[134] The poem is found in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, Trinity College MS H. 3. 3 (1322), Royal Irish Academy, Stowe MS D. ii. 2. and Royal Irish Academy, Stowe MS B. iii. 1. See: *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and trans. by Edward Gwynn, 5 vols (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1991), III, p. 46.
[135] *Ibid*., p. 47.
[136] Nagy, *Angels and Ancients*, p. 16.

under the title of *Senadh Saighri, The Synod of Saighir*.[137] The tale tells of how the king Donnchad mac Flaind meic Máel Sechlaind[138] set out to the church of St. Ciaran at Saighir, in modern county Offaly, in order to build a wall around the church on behalf of his wife Sadb, the daughter of Donnchad Remuir, 'the stout,' king of Osraige, who is possessed of a jealousy that all the great churches of Ireland should possess a fitting enclosure whilst her own kingdom's church of Saighir remains wanting. During the completion of this work Donnchad's host receives a nocturnal visitation from nine demonic poets whose verse afflicts those who hear it with a night-long 'song-sickness.' This sickness is removed through the intercession of an angel of God and the performance of a Mass which sees the poets, revealed to be nine of the clergy of the Úa Congeóid sentenced to Hell for neglecting the Lord, transformed into black-backed birds and forbidden from ever alighting on the Earth again. The tale's final paragraph states that:

> Is annsin robúi in crossán Find húa Cinga ₇ Mac Rinntach húa Con Odráin ann, conid íat na crossána sin romeabraidhset in dúan ₇ in airfidiudh ó cléir hú Congeóid. Conidh hí sin ealada rofodhain dóib ó sin amach ₇ do chrossánaib aile na hÉrenn otá sin anall fós.[139]
>
> It was in that time that the poets Find úa Cinga and Mac Rinntach úa Con Odrán [were] there, and those poets remembered the song and the entertainment from the clergy of the Úa Congeóid. Thus that [was] the art used by them from since then and by the other poets of Ireland from thence until the present day.

As opposed to the first example, the use of *mebraigid* here more appropriately reflects the usage detailed under division a). This passage clearly describes an act of reception, of 'committing to memory' or 'learning' rather than an act of 'bringing to mind' or 'recalling,' and therefore this example would seem to belong perfectly comfortably under the aegis of division a) rather than illustrating any of the concepts outlined under division b).

The third and final example is taken from Maghnus Ó Domhnaill's *Betha Colaim Chille*, completed in 1532, from the manuscript Rawlinson B. 514 in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. This occurs in an account of a miracle performed by Saint Columba wherein he prophesises upon the ceremony of baptism the spiritual course that the child's life will follow. At the end of this account Maghnus states that: '*Acus do firadh gach ní dib sin amail*

[137] Kuno Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus Irischen Handschriften', *Zietschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 12 (1918), pp. 290-291.
[138] Presumably Donnchad Donn, son of Fland Sinna of the Cland Cholmáin sept of the Uí Néill dynasty, High King of Ireland who died c. 944. Although the remit of his kingship is not explicitly given the text refers to his host as the '*fir Midhe*,' 'men of Meath,' which supports this identification.
[139] *Ibid*., p. 291.

adubairt C. C., mar mebruighes Adamnan naemh air […],'[140] 'And each part of that [prophesy] came true as Saint Columba had said, just as Saint Adomnán recollects/records it.' The editors of the *Betha Colaim Chille*, O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, translate this phrase: 'according as holy Adamnan maketh mention.'[141] This is an almost identical choice of phrase to that chosen by Gwynn in his translation of the *dindshenchas* on Cnogba. Unlike the latter, however, this example of the usage of *mebraigid* describes a textual process as opposed to an oral one. Whatever Adomnán accomplishes in his act of *mebraigid* concerning this miracle it is achieved through the written word of his own *Vita Sancti Columbani*, which Maghnus certainly knew and used in composing the *Betha*.[142] Again, as this is a memory term being used here, we must be careful not to simply synonymize the meaning with that of an act of speech by means of a translation along the lines of 'makes mention' as this misses the fundamental point of the choice of a memory term in the first instance. It is less clear in this instance whether this constitutes an example of an act of externalisation or internalisation of memory. An act of internalisation, of 'preserving in memory' or 'recording,' nevertheless seems the most likely option here. Adomnán here is being described by Maghnus undertaking the preservation of this miracle through the act of writing his *Vita*. The novelty of this example lies not in the type of memory act that it describes but rather the means by which it is accomplished: memorizing through text as opposed to with the mind.

In conclusion division b), which defines *mebraigid* as 'rehearses, recites (?) and by extension hands down, records' can, based on the evidence of its own examples, be seen to be rather problematic. [143] Firstly, the specifically vocal elements of this definition should be questioned. As shown only one of the examples provided demonstrates *mebraigid* being achieved through a verbal act, however, due to the poetic nature of this example it alone does not constitute enough evidence to warrant construction of the definition 'rehearses, recites.' Indeed, the principal interest of this example lies in the fact that it diverges from the meanings listed under division a) by using *mebraigid* to describe an act of recalling to mind rather than committing to memory. The examples provided under division a), with one exception, adhere as a group to the definition they have been chosen to evidence. The

[140] *Betha Colaim Chille*: *Life of Columcille, Compiled by Maghnas Ó Domhnaill in 1532*, ed. by A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois 1918), p. 276.
[141] *Ibid*., p. 277.
[142] Manus O'Donnell, *The Life of Colum Cille*, ed. and trans. by Brian Lacey, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998) pp. 13-14.
[143] *eDIL*., s.v. *mebraigid* (dil.ie/31714).

exception in question is the example taken from the *Féilire Oengusso*, specifically its entry for the second of March:

Ma memraigther féli	If you remember feast-days
hi pais Lucilíae,	on the passion of Lucilla,
gein sen Phóil, slán doe,	[there is] the birth of old Paul, a solid defence,
féil find Fergnai Íae.[144]	[and] the fair feast-day of Fergna of Iona.

The meaning of *mebraigid* here is difficult to define, however, as the verse itself serves to bring forth the knowledge of what feasts occur on the second of March, and due to the subjunctive nature of the verb, it makes most sense as plea for bringing knowledge to mind: '*if* you recall, then you will have…' rather than the comparatively cumbersome, but not altogether impossible, meaning of 'if you learn, then you shall have…' It seems best, therefore, to propose that the two examples of division b) from the *Senadh Saighri* and *Betha Colaim Chille* be removed and attached to division a), and that division amended: 'commits to memory; memorizes, learns, records.' Meanwhile division b) should be rewritten: 'remembers, recalls (an apparently uncommon and irregular usage)' and retain its remaining examples as well as receiving that from the *Féilire Oengusso* currently under division a).

By contrast to *mebraigid*, *cuimnigidir* is defined more simply as 'a) remembers, recalls: […] records,' with a secondary meaning, as part of the construction '*cuimnigidir* X *do* Y,' of 'reminds,' and the verbal noun *cuimniugud* as 'a) act of remembering, commemorating; record, memorial: […] b) act of reminding.'[145] This would appear almost as a direct contrast to the definition given by the *eDIL* to *mebraigid* in excluding the sense of memorizing or committing to memory. In this instance, however, it is the offering of the translation 'records' which suggests a possible crossover into the sense of a process of retaining information. Again we find the need to work through textual examples in order to affirm or deny the suitability of the terms that *eDIL* chooses to apply. As shall be shown, however, *cuimnigidir* is much harder to assess in terms of the dichotomy of committing to memory/recalling from memory. In terms of the primary definition provided for *cuimnigidir* in e*DIL*, its application to acts of externalising memory is clearly evidenced from a very early date. The verb appears in the Würzburg Glosses on the Pauline Epistles where it is used to gloss the Latin *reminiscentis*, 'recollecting/recalling' in the phrase '*reminiscentis omnium*

[144] Oengus the Culdee, *Féilire Oengusso Céli Dé*: *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. by Whitley Stokes, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1984) p. 80.
[145] *eDIL*., s.v. 1 *cuimnigid(ir)* (dil.ie/13568), *cuimniugud* (dil.ie/13573).

uestrum obedientiam.'[146] The appearance of *cuimnigidir* in the construction '*cuimnigidir* X *do* Y' can also be taken to further highlight its use in this way, in this instance referring to the act of externalising the memory of another individual rather than one's own, literally 'remembering to' someone. An interesting example appears in the longer *Betha Máedóc Ferna*, another saint's life preserved through the work of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, a work noted for its overt advancement of the saint and his church's more worldly agenda:[147]

> *Ocus as cuma do bhái aga radha, 7 dorinne an duan so, do dherbadh a thoccha 7 a thiomna, do cuimneachad a chíoscána do Dhallán fadeoidh, amhail ro cuimnigh da gach aon ele conuicce sin* […].[148]
>
> And it is thus he spoke, and he made this verse, to affirm his wish and his will, to remind Dallán his dues to the last, like he had reminded everyone else hitherto […].

This highlights, however, the aforementioned difficulty that is encountered when trying to define *cuimnigidir* through the same dichotomist approach that has been applied to the verb *mebraigid*. It is unclear in this phase whether the sense is in fact one of externalising another's memory, or internalising it on their behalf: 'remembering for' rather than 'reminding.' This ambiguity renders it impossible to establish any definitive boundary between these two senses and pushes the distinction towards obsolescence. In this way *cuimnigidir* perhaps more closely resembles the usage found in the modern English verb, 'remembers,' where the intended meaning, whether 'memorises' or 'recalls,' is governed by the differing subtleties of tense and context.

Apart from the verbs formed from *mebair* and *cuimne* there are also a handful of others concerned with concepts of memory: *ad-muinethar* and *do-aithminedar*, later replaced by a simplified form *taithmetaid*, and *for-aithminedar*. All these verbs originate from the same base elements *aith* + *muin*, *aith*- being a common prepositional prefix comparable to Latin and English re-, and *muin* from the same Proto-Celtic element **men* discussed previously, however, they appear to exist independent from any noun form **aithmen*, carrying the meaning of remembering or memory. The identical root of these verbs means that a close look is needed at their semantic range in order to determine precisely what effect the prepositional element plays in constituting the meaning of these two compound verbs. It is, however, not immediately apparent if there is indeed any difference in meaning between

[146] Seamus Kavanagh, *A Lexicon of the Old Irish Glosses in the Würzburg Manuscript of the Epistles of St. Paul*, ed. by Dagmar S. Wodtko, (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001) p. 248.
[147] Plummer, *Lives of Irish Saints* I, p. xxxv.
[148] *Ibid.*, p. 267

them at all. The *eDIL* defines the former as 'Lit. remembers, calls to mind,' the middle '[c]alls to mind, recalls, mentions,' with the simple form *taithmetaid* as 'remembers, refers to, mentions,' and the latter as 'remembering, calling to mind.'[149] These definitions present them to be largely similar in meaning to *cuimnigidir* discussed above. Unlike *cuimnigidir* and *mebraigid*, however, the examples provided demonstrate these verbs possessing an obvious priority towards denoting actions of remembering and recalling. This collection of verbs, unlike *cuimnigidir*, provides the most affirmable counterpoint to *mebraigid* and its focus on acts of memorizing. These verbs are clearly a native construction, however, their origin is unclear. It is possible to speculate that they were formed in a scholarly context to fill a void created by the specific focus of *mebraigid* on acts memorizing, and which could not be satisfactorily filled by the more general *cuimnigidir*, although this cannot be proven any more definitively here.

[149] *eDIL*., s.v. *ad-muinethar* (dil.ie/505), *do-aithminedar* (dil.ie/17170), *taithmetaid* (dil.ie/39906).

3.3 The Scope of Medieval Irish Memory Terms: Conclusions and Further Directions

On the other side of memory, remembering, memorization and learning are the concepts of forgetting, and we must take these into account if we are to evaluate memory terminology in complete detail. Although the negative formation *díchuimne* has already been mentioned, its use, if the relatively small entry accorded the word in the *eDIL* is an accurate measure, was less than common. *Díchuimne* appears in the *Triads of Ireland* in one of a cluster of three triads in close proximity that mention the virtues of memory: '*Trí adcoillet gáis*: *anfis, doas, díchuimne*.' [150] 'Three [things] that destroy intelligence: lack of knowledge, lack of understanding, lack of memory.' All three of the words comprising this triad are negative formations. It is difficult to disentangle the meanings of *anfis* and *doas* as these are both formed from the noun *fis*, 'knowledge/information', with the negative prefixes *an-* and *di-* respectively, and are fundamentally synonymous.[151] The presentation of *cuimne*, alongside *fis*, as an element necessary for the existence of the virtue of *gáes*, 'intelligence/sagacity', encapsulates the importance of memory for the learned individual. No verb with the sense of 'to forget', however, was created from a negative formation of the nouns *mebair* or *cuimne*. The principal verb possessing this sense is *do-ruimnethar*, from the verbal noun of which, *dermat*, is formed the adjective *dermatach*, 'forgetful', the simplified Middle-Irish verb *dermataid*, and the noun *dermatche*, 'forgetfulness'. As a compound verb *do-ruimnethar* was certainly in use from at least the Old-Irish period. The etymology of this verb is entirely native; Pedersen in his *Grammar* provides this as *di-ro-muin*, the literal sense of this formation being to 'un-re-mind,' making it a negative formation closely related to the group of verbs *ad-muinethar*/*do-aithminedar*/*for-aithminedar* discussed above. Why exactly *do-ruimnethar* became the principal verb carrying the meaning 'to forget' is unclear, especially as no positive formation **ro-muinethar* appears to have existed. It is perhaps best to consider this verb as having arisen in the same circumstances as those proposed for the eclectic group *ad-muinethar*/*do-aithminedar*/*for-aithminedar* in the previous chapter.

[150] Meyer, ed., *Triads of Ireland, n*. 245, p. 32.

[151] Some degree of independent meaning must have been present between these two words, however, if the triad is to maintain its overall coherence and impact. Given the legalistic leanings of a number of the triads, as well as their tripartite nature itself, it does seem unlikely that their use together was intended as a poetic pleonasm. This issue complicates the translation of this passage and has considerable importance for the present discussion. If *anfis* and *doas* are synonymous then it must consequently increase the emphasis accorded to *díchuimne* as an element within the triad.

Over the course of this chapter I have endeavoured to re-examine and expand upon the definitions and semantic range of the various Irish language terms relating to memory and its operation, with particular attention to how the two main families of terms relate to each other. As was mentioned at the outset the principal difficulty in investigating the semantic range of these two families, based on *mebair* and *cuimne* respectively, in relation to each other is threefold; firstly the paucity of sources where both can be found together, secondly the extreme rarity if not outright nonexistence of examples from both in meaningfully close proximity within a text, and thirdly that where both do appear it is often in the form of the noun of one and a verbal or adjectival form of the other. As we have seen, however, the primary differences in semantic range lie within the verbs derived from the respective terms and so the final point may not be the impediment that it initially appears. A prime example which affirms these points is the comedic and satirical text *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, dated on linguistic grounds by its most recent editor Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson to 'somewhere in the last quarter of the eleventh century.'[152] This text contains exactly one example of the noun *cuimne*, on line 421, and one of the verb *mebraigid*, on line 192.[153] Both these examples conform to the definitions established here, with *cuimne* referring to the faculty of memory and *mebraigid* describing an act of memorisation.

To achieve any meaningful conclusions on the exclusivity of the semantic range of memory terms, therefore, an intertextual approach is not only desirable, but fundamentally necessary. This approach has demonstrated that, whilst the nouns *mebair* and *cuimne* are largely synonymous, the verbs *mebraigid* and *cuimnigidir* do show definable differences in their semantic range, with the verb *mebraigid* referring in overwhelming priority to actions of memorizing. On the other hand, *cuimnigidir* can cover both the concepts of memorizing and recalling in a more generalized manner, any tendency towards one concept or the other being much harder to identify and therefore not likely present. Although these broader observations are valid they are certainly not completely definitive, the rare examples of *mebraigid* being used to describe acts of recalling are proof enough of this, and the possibility of aberrant usage by a particular individual or locality, poetic licence, and the merging or blurring of sense between the groups must always remain. It is uncertain to what extent the passage of time and the concordant evolution of the Irish language influenced these factors. I have identified no discernible patterns in the data gathered from *eDIL*, further systematic study is

[152] *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, ed. by Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990) p. xxiii.
[153] *Ibid*., pp. 7, 14.

certainly needed before a firm conclusion can be reached and the scope of this investigation does not allow for the degree of dedicated investigation that would be required to address this fully.

4.0 Orality, Literacy and the Role of Memory in Transmission in Medieval Ireland

So far this study of memory in medieval Ireland has restricted itself to focusing on those texts originating from a primarily religious context. This discussion of material deriving from the world of early medieval monasticism sought to provide a backdrop and a broader context for those following. Henceforth, the focus of this thesis will largely centre on how memory was understood and appreciated amongst the native learned classes, specifically the professional poets: *filid*. In this chapter, and those following, the discussion will relate primarily to their role as those responsible for the transmission of the poetry and saga literature of medieval Ireland. Before arriving at this issue properly, the present discussion will explore the relationship between orality and literacy as it is reflected in the texts. This is a topic that, whilst not directly related to medieval depictions of memory, has come to colour a great deal of modern academic thinking on how medieval Irish authors understood processes of recording, composition and transmission. This, in turn, has deeply affected how some scholars approach and use the surviving medieval literature. As these surviving texts are our only direct sources for the study of the place of memory in the culture and practice of the *filid*, it is necessary to address this issue in order to define the terms on which it is best to utilise this material. Scholars of medieval Irish literature have long argued over exactly what processes underlie the production of the surviving texts: are these compositions purely reflective of an academic scribal practice concerned with producing a homogenous and accurate text? Might they, on the other hand, constitute a few surviving echoes of a much deeper, now lost, oral tradition? If so, has their transference to text changed them, and how? The debate over the interplay between orality and literacy has become a key point of access towards an understanding of medieval Irish attitudes over the use of text as a tool to preserve or reconstruct the past. Any understanding of the conceptualisations of memory, as a source and a store of information on the past, derived from these texts will unavoidably be influenced by a position taken on the orality/literacy debate. The reasons behind this diversion may not be fully clear at the outset of this chapter but will, however, hopefully become clear by its end.

Before addressing this debate directly, it is useful context to briefly review the nature of the relationship between the *filid* and the early church. To an extent the history of memory amongst the *filid* can be said to be one and the same as that of the religious men of learning

and monastic schools discussed in the previous chapter. The Church in Ireland was involved with the secular learned orders from a very early date, most likely from the point at which Christianity first began to ingrain itself into the structures already present in Irish society: 'Hiberno-Latin and vernacular texts share the same cultural background; already by the ninth century Irish begins to oust Latin. Until the twelfth century the transmission of texts was the domain of ecclesiastical environments.'[154] The nature of this relationship has, however, been the subject of varying opinions. Kathleen Hughes noted the disjuncture between the morality of Christian law and the 'popular literature' of hagiography and saga: 'The secular tales may have been written down by churchmen, but they were composed by the *filid* for a lay audience. And they reflect a traditional secular morality. […] The morality of these stories is in direct contradiction to some of the monastic rules, but they must have commanded the sympathy and delight of the audience.'[155] Hughes argues that this melding of secular interests into religious life occurred in context of the stabilisation of Christianity in Ireland towards the end of the conversion process and the full emergence of the monastic community as part of the Irish social fabric.[156] This situation persisted more or less unabated until the widespread reforms of the Church in Europe, begun in the eleventh century, reached Ireland in the twelfth century and led to the decline of Irish monasticism in favour of newer, European monastic orders.[157] This effectively separated the *filid*, by this stage fully merged intellectually with the world of the early-medieval Irish ecclesiastical scholars, from monastic patronage and instigated their transformation into the hereditary learned families that came to dominate secular intellectual life in the Gaelic world throughout the rest of the Middle Ages.[158] The possibility of subsequent divergence between the secular learned orders and the

[154] Patrick Sims-Williams and Erich Poppe, 'Medieval Irish literary theory and criticism', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. II*: *The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 291-309 (p. 302).

[155] Kathleen Hughes, 'The Church in Irish Society, 400-800', in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I*: *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 301-330 (pp. 314-315).

[156] The monastic community in early medieval Ireland contained a significant secular element in the *manaig*, a body of lay tenants and farmers attached to, and legally as well as spiritually subservient to, the ordained community. It is the presence of the *manaig* that may well have provided the conduit through which aspects of secular culture made inroads into monastic life. Hughes, 'The Church,' pp. 313-316.

[157] For an overview of the impact of the introduction of Cistercian and Augustinian monasticism on the pre-established Irish institutions, cf. Marie Therese Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 161-168.

[158] Hughes saw the so-called ascetic revival of the latter half of the eighth century, commonly associated with the *Céli Dé* ('clients of God') as one significant exception to this trend, although Hughes notes: 'The ascetic reform in Ireland has aspects in common with Carolingian monastic reform—the stress on the observance of the *opus dei*, on learning and writing, on a stricter regime. But no new constitutional measures were introduced, and once the period of enthusiasm has passed we find the new 'anchorites' following many of the old patterns of life, having sons who succeed them in office. But the interest in learning remained even when other standards

ecclesiastical schools in terms of how they understood memory is an interesting possible avenue of inquiry but is not one that will be pursued any further here as the focus will remain principally on the literature produced in the period up to the twelfth-century break.

More recent opinion, however, holds that the potential scope for interaction between monastic text-producing centres and the broader secular world in which the tale literature circulated was not necessarily as narrow as Hughes' picture suggests: monasteries were not ideologically isolated from the larger culture in which they existed and participated. Elite positions within early medieval Irish society including those amongst the secular elite, the church hierarchy and the secular learned orders, were all dominated by individuals from related dynastic families.[159] Elva Johnston's more recent study on this topic notes that the problem posed by the presence of secular material in a Christian institutional context was not one limited to Irish society alone, but arose somewhat regularly elsewhere across late antique and early medieval western Europe.[160] In addition, Johnston emphasises the fact that the circulation of secular literature does not necessarily *have* to be theologically justified in every single instance:

> There can be no doubt that monasteries were central to the transaction [between Christian literature and native learning] but they were not monolithic. Their engagement with lay society was on the level of culture as well as politics. Vernacular literature did not have to be overtly political to function on the former level. Thus, narrative tales had the ability to underpin social cohesion and elite identities. These were the very identities that Irish churchmen showed themselves keen to articulate in other genres such as hagiography. It seems clear that the Church was so deeply embedded within Irish society that social solidarity trumped theological purity. The celebration and re-calibration of the pagan past within a Christian framework provided a shared ground where the world of the aristocrat and the world of the ecclesiastic were creatively joined.[161]

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were relaxed.' Hughes, 'The Church', p. 320. Proinsias Mac Cana, 'The Rise of the Later Schools of Filidheacht', *Ériu* 25 (1974), pp. 126-146 (pp. 134-135, 140-144). p. 320. Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Literary Theory', p. 302. More recent work by Westley Follett has questioned the validity of viewing the *Céli Dé* as having an interest in reforming monastic practice at all, and that there had never truly been a departure in the standards of monastic practice that would have warranted such a reform. Follett, *Céli Dé*, pp. 98-99.

[159] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 272-276. A clear case study on the intersection between secular dynasties and church elites is provided by Donnchadh Ó Corráin's survey of the rise of the Dál Cais across the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais—Church and Dynasty,' *Ériu* 24 (1973), pp. 52-63 (pp.62-63).

[160] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 131-132.

[161] *Ibid*., p. 134.

Johnston's interpretation reflects the current consensus that a larger and more open degree of exchange between secular and religious learned authorities prevailed in the period up to the twelfth century, an age the ending of which may be marked in the more hostile tone taken towards the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* in the Latin colophon from the *Book of Leinster*.[162]

[162] *Ibid*., p. 133.

4.1 Orality and Literacy: Framing the Debate

The role, importance and function of memory within the intellectual classes of medieval Ireland is a topic that has attracted a good deal of debate over the last half-century. Much of this debate, however, has centred around various interrelated issues concerning the role played by men of learning in the composition and/or transmission of literature often from the viewpoint of how best to understand the nature and history of the literature itself. Memory, as a component of scholarly or textual authority, has been much alluded to but little studied in its own right. Before this can be addressed, however, it is necessary to explain and explore some of these issues as they present significant implications for any study of memory in the culture of the *filid*. The problem in this context that most frequently touches upon aspects of memory is the debate over what pre-literate, oral elements survive and can be seen in the fabric of the medieval literature, and to what extent did the medieval culture producing this literature adopt, adapt or otherwise continue the attitudes and practices of the pre-literate age. One prominent point of view on this topic postulates the existence of a tension between the literate, textual elements of medieval Irish literature and literary culture and elements of the older oral, pre-literate backdrop against which the former was subsequently built. This idea primarily belongs to, and is developed in, the works of Joseph Falaky Nagy, particularly his essays 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative: an Overview', 'Representations of Oral Tradition in Medieval Irish Literature'[163] and are perhaps expressed most explicitly in a lecture entitled 'Oral Life and Literary Death in Medieval Irish Tradition.'[164] This proposition is important to the study of memory in that it suggests that different forms of media, through which memories are transmitted, held differing values in medieval Irish culture, and that, therefore, the form in which memories took mattered.

[163] Nagy, 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative', pp. 272-301, Joseph Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition in Medieval Irish Literature', *Language and Communication*, 9 (1989), pp. 143-158.
[164] Joseph Nagy, 'Oral Life and Literary Death in Medieval Irish Tradition', *Oral Tradition*, 3/3 (1988), pp. 368-380. This discussion focuses primarily on these three works for Nagy's views on orality and literacy. His longer and more recent work, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*: *Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland*, is approached only where it becomes directly applicable to the primary source material utilised in this discussion. Although Nagy's exploration on the theme of dialogue, particularly that between pagan and Christian, secular and religious, is very relevant to the present discussion there are methodological difficulties in his approach which necessitate much more detailed engagement than is possible here before it can be engaged with directly. Thomas Owen Clancy has noted, in particular, that his driving line of enquiry often seems to pre-determine his reading of the source material, and occasionally does violence to the meaning and messages carried by these texts as a consequence. Thomas Owen Clancy, Review of *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*: *Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland*, in: *Éigse*, Vol. 33 (2002), pp. 245-251.

In describing the attitudes towards literacy and orality held by the medieval Irish learned classes, Nagy has claimed that:

> The Irish *literati* and *semi-literati*, like any other people faced with the prospect of writing, theorised about and agonised over the repercussions of the shift from the oral mode verifying and perpetuating cultural "truth" to the written mode of so doing, a shift of which these elite members of their society were keenly aware.[165]

This statement, however, seems perhaps surprising considering the level of social and cultural integration proposed by Johnston's picture of the Church in Irish society, although these two positions are by no means mutually exclusive. Complicating this matter further, Nagy aligns his idea of a tension between orality and literacy with another tension present in medieval Irish literature:

> The tension between oral and literary that underlies the scribal understandings of the origins of the Irish literary tradition and the assertions of its authority is usually to be found interlaced with other equally disparate tensions faced by the bearers of this tradition. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these coordinated tensions, and the one with which it made the most sense historically to link the tension between oral and literary, is that between pagan and Christian.[166]

Two principal questions arise from Nagy's proposals and these will constitute the focus of the following chapter: is this tension as visible and present in medieval Irish literary conceptualisations of the past, and how to remember the past, as Nagy argues? Secondly, does this tension really align neatly along lines demarcated by the tension between pagan and Christian?[167] This issue is compounded again due to, by necessity, being one of two parts: orality and literacy as they functioned historically in medieval Irish culture, and orality and literacy as they were perceived to function, or have functioned, in the literature that culture produced. Nagy's own discussions seem to shift variously from a viewpoint encompassing both these aspects, to one that focusses on the latter.[168] Any discussion on issues of orality is, to an extent, forced to address both issues. The presentation of orality in literature is essential

[165] Nagy, 'Oral Life and Literary Death', p. 368.
[166] *Ibid.*, p.369.
[167] The fullest exploration of these tensions between elements of the Pagan and the Christian in medieval Irish literature is undoubtedly the seminal work of Kim McCone, however, this is at times a difficult and problematic work. John Carey, for example, has characterised it as a particularly 'polemic' and 'ideological' work, focusing disproportionately on deliberately contentious issues. Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: Maynooth Monographs, 1990, repr. 2000). John Carey, Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: Maynooth Monographs, 1990), *Speculum*, 67/2 (1992), pp. 450-452.
[168] Compare in particular; Nagy, 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative', 1986, p. 272 and 'Representations of Oral Tradition', 1989, pp. 144-145., as opposed to: 'Oral Life and Literary Death', 1989, p. 368.

evidence for any attempt in understanding Ireland's medieval oral practices, and one cannot understand how the literature constructs orality without reference to historical context. It is, however, the case that these two aspects need not always appear in alignment with one another, as will be seen in both this and the following chapter.

At this juncture it becomes necessary to provide a note on the terminology used throughout the rest of this section. When dealing with concepts of orality in medieval literature the precise use of terminology becomes an important area to define. If any single tale such as the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* evidences a number of textual forms, some more or less distinct than others, and distinct in differing ways, as well as possibly having a non-written existence beyond what is now accessible, how are we best to term this phenomenon? For want of a better term 'tale' will be used in order to describe this. 'Narrative' as a term is problematic here as its connotation of a connected series of events does not comfortably fit with the observation that different renditions of a tale can happily re-order, or even remove, various events in an overall sequence without much difficulty. Any attempt to save this term through a reductionist re-defining of what events in a tale actually qualify to be considered part of its central narrative risks doing unacceptable damage to a full appreciation of the tale's component parts, in this case its various extant forms. Use of the word 'text' is restricted to the specific meaning of an identifiably distinct written form of a particular tale: one tale can, therefore, have several texts. Equally problematic to term are the processes by which tale material travels back and forth between an oral and literary state. Karl Reichl notes that a common scholarly terminology has not been established to describe these processes and terminology tends to be a matter of personal choice on behalf of the scholar.[169]

Discussions of orality in the secular tales of medieval Irish literature have frequently arisen in context of attempts to pin down how old they are, whether they existed in the pre-literate era and if so how has this informed the textual forms that we now possess. The earliest life of secular tale material as written texts undoubtedly begins much later than the period in which literacy was introduced into Ireland as part of Christianity. This process appears to begin in the eighth, or perhaps the late seventh, century.[170] Despite this, scholars have argued extensively over whether or not the medieval tales preserve elements of an even

[169] Karl Reichl, 'Plotting the Map of Medieval Oral Literature,' in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. by Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 3-67 (p. 9).
[170] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Literature of Medieval Ireland to c.800: Saint Patrick to the Vikings', in: *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, 2 vols., ed. by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) I pp. 9-31 (pp. 24-25).

earlier, pre-Christian culture, with the general consensus inclining towards scepticism or, at the least, a recognition of the primacy of their firmly medieval orientation.[171] Although there is not the space to explore the complexities of these particular arguments here, they must be acknowledged as pertinent to the question of orality. Namely: medieval literature should *not simply* be seen as the fossilised remnant of a pre-Christian oral tradition.[172] As Nagy notes, however, the presence of aspects of orality do not necessarily have to be excluded as a consequence: medieval culture contained its own functioning oral traditions.[173] The next question then becomes how to characterise and understand the nature of the oral culture which existed in medieval Ireland. Unfortunately, scholars have here tended to revert to the assumption that medieval orality reflects, or can at least be understood by reference to, the oral culture present in Ireland before the introduction of literacy in how it regarded and enacted the transmission of knowledge. This is, however, a complicated topic made opaque by the fact that our understanding of Irish oral culture, whether medieval or pre-Christian, necessarily relies on written literature as the only source through which it can be accessed. There are numerous opinions on this issue and multiple avenues through which to approach the problem. For Edgar Slotkin the conclusion was to see little actual difference at all between the processes of the pre- and post-literate attitudes to memory and transmission:

> […] it is more than likely that before the introduction of writing to Ireland and its acceptance by the literati, a high regard was put on retentive memory and it was the chief means of transmitting law, religion, medical lore, and *senchus*. When the art of writing entered Ireland with Christianity, it was taken up by minds well accustomed to careful preservation of words.[174]

This 'careful preservation of words' can, Slotkin states, be seen reflected in the 'deserved reputation for accuracy' accorded to the earliest Irish manuscripts.[175] Slotkin's solution effectively eliminates the problem but remains grounded in supposition rather than observation. The attitudes of Ireland's pre-literate culture to memory cannot now be accessed

[171] For a good summary of these arguments in relation specifically to the Ulster Cycle tales and the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, see: Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Mythology in Táin Bó Cúailnge', in: Hildegard Tristram, ed., *Studien zur Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Script Oralia* Series, No. 52. (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993). A broader, more methodologically orientated summary is given in: Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 16-18.
[172] James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955) pp. 276-277. Carney's general approach to the tale literature, particularly in relation to his studies of *Táin Bó Fraích*, whilst certainly correct in its scepticism of what he termed the 'nativist' view of the tales as fossilised remnants of pre-Christian tradition, certainly swings too far in the opposite direction. In particular, his assertion that pre- and post-literate societies exist on 'different planes of existence' annihilates the possibility of engaging many of the subtleties picked up on subsequently in studies such as Elva Johnston's, particularly in respect of her concept of the 'secondary-oral' society.
[173] Nagy, 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative,' p. 277.
[174] Edgar Slotkin, 'Medieval Irish Scribes and Fixed Texts, *Éigse*, 17 (1977-9), pp. 437-450 (p. 440).
[175] *Ibid*., p. 440.

directly and it is not possible, as Slotkin chooses here, to project judgments made on the basis of an observation of the medieval evidence, written long after the introduction of literacy, back on the pre-literate past with any degree of certainty.[176]

Nagy takes a different path towards solving this problem, and inclines toward the view that the introduction of literacy into Ireland was much more of a distinct and profoundly altering cultural break, as opposed to Slotkin's preference for continuity. Nagy's understanding of learned culture in pre-literate Ireland is constructed through reference to Julius Caesar's accounts of the druids of Gaul, written during and subsequent to his conquest of the area in the mid first century BC:

> It is said that these pupils have to memorize a great number of verses – so many, that some of them spend twenty years at their studies. The druids believe that their religion forbids them to commit their teachings to writing, although for most other purposes, such as public and private accounts, the Gauls use the Greek alphabet. But I imagine that this rule was originally established for other reasons – because they did not want their doctrine to become public property, and in order to prevent their pupils from relying on the written word and neglecting to train their memories; for it is usually found that when people have the help of texts, they are less diligent in learning by heart, and let their memories rust.[177]

From this Nagy proposes the presence of a fundamental resistance to textualisation existing within the secular oral culture of medieval Ireland:

> This cultivation of esotericism as well as the insistence on the internalisation of the transmitted word (whether it be from human or supernatural source) are still to be found in the ideology of the *filid* (singular *fili*), the praise poets of Christian Ireland who in the post-pagan world succeeded to many of the functions of the druids.[178]

There are some fairly obvious and quite fundamental difficulties raised by this approach. Most importantly, is it logical to ascribe the druidic attitudes of pre-Roman Gaul described by Caesar to the learned culture of Ireland's pre-literate period? To say yes here requires one to assume that this phenomenon amongst the Gauls also extended as far as Iron-Age Ireland, that Caesar understood and reported it correctly, that it persisted in Ireland over the next four

[176] The validity of Slotkin's generalizing, and in this essay entirely un-evidenced, claim for the accuracy of Irish manuscripts is another matter entirely. It is unclear as to how he is measuring 'accuracy' in this context, it is not even clear what manuscripts he includes in this judgment, and his claim lacks any supporting evidence. A dedicated study on this question does not yet appear to have been undertaken and it is difficult, therefore, to provide any sound remedial comments against this claim. It is certainly suspicious, however, that his portrayal looks alarmingly similar to modern scholarly notions of textual accuracy.
[177] Gaius Julius Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul* (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 141.
[178] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition', p. 143.

to five centuries to still be present at the time literacy began to take hold there, and that the nature of druidic authority was such that this view dominated intellectual attitudes towards writing before the coming of the Church. These are huge assumptions and there are clear and obvious difficulties with all of these points.

Putting aside the significant chronological and historiographical problems of Nagy's use of this source, there are some specific aspects of Caesar's account of learning and memory amongst the druids that are problematic to Nagy's viewpoint in and of themselves. Caesar observes that the druids do not commit their religious doctrine to writing according to their beliefs, however, it is certain that writing was known and used in Gaul before the Roman conquest and Caesar himself acknowledges the use of writing for non-religious matters.[179] Caesar's interpretation that the druids may have wished to promote and strengthen the faculty of memory by avoiding an over-reliance on the written word seems to echo the concerns of Roman oratorical practice: Caesar's contemporary, Cicero, extolled the virtues of memory in this respect and made clear that, in his estimate, a true orator spoke spontaneously with the aid of a trained memory and not from a written text, memorised or otherwise.[180] Whether the druids also genuinely shared this concern is not possible to ascertain, however, it certainly betrays the perspective of a Roman cultural outlook and should only be ascribed a place in Celtic society, ancient or medieval, with a great degree of scepticism. In addition to this it must be remembered that Caesar notes the use of Greek script amongst the druids for certain tasks, including accounting (coincidentally the oldest use for writing known), confirming the ability of such figures to utilise literacy when occasion demanded.[181]

Jane Stevenson has explored this issue further and argued strongly against viewing the introduction of literacy to Celtic societies, both in the case of Iron-Age Gaul and medieval Ireland, as constituting a significant cultural break. In both of these examples Stevenson suggests that our understanding of the process of the introduction of literacy is coloured by the notion of invasion. In the case of Gaul, the introduction of literacy is associated with the Roman conquest, and the subsequent remoulding of social structures in Gaul prioritising Latin literacy as the means to access political power structures through the Roman state. In

[179] Caesar, *Conquest of Gaul*, p. 141.
[180] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Orator*: *Books 1-2*, trans. by E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942) pp. 15, 107-9. Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 93, 115.
[181] Jane Stephenson, 'Literacy and Orality in Early Medieval Ireland', Doris Edel, ed., *Cultural Identity and Cultural Intergration*: *Ireland and Europe in the early Middle Ages* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), pp. 11-22 (p 18).

the case of Ireland, the introduction of literacy is cast against the backdrop of Christianisation and the decline of pagan culture:

> One way of looking at the question is to suggest that literacy *per se* is not necessarily transformative. When a culture has not been conquered, and is still inhabiting the lands of its ancestors, its people may take a highly discriminatory attitude towards literacy. The continental Celts' adoption of literacy was limited, carefully contextualised (this is shown by the fact that it was rejected for some purposes), and occurred long before Caesar's conquest.[182]

Another point Stevenson makes is that literacy does not necessarily always result in the production of extensive written narratives, and this may constitute an issue of restricted access to technology, skills and materials as much as ideology:

> It is certainly not automatically the case that the ability to write lists, tables and censuses will result in the redaction of culturally significant data. The unromanized Celtic tribes of the Helvetii were sophisticated list-makers in the first century BC, though their druids presumably preserved their culture orally. They kept a census of their own numbers broken down into fighting men, children, old men, and women, separated into the various races of the Helvetian federation, and written on tablets, in Greek letters.[183]

Attitudes towards literacy, therefore, in societies only partly literate do not necessarily have to be understood as governed by ideological thinking, they can equally be dictated by technological restraints, or limited access to the necessary materials and skills.

It seems highly doubtful that Caesar can in any way be taken as a useful, accurate source in understanding the attitudes of Ireland's native men of learning towards oral and literary media. It should not be assumed that the attitudes of the *filid* originated in circumstances the same, or even broadly equivalent to those of Caesar's druids. Although the term *fili* originates, as Nagy notes, in a root meaning 'to see' which suggests a possible religious or priestly origin for this class, Patrick Sims-Williams cautions that:

> […] it is unlikely that the term *fili* was understood etymologically in early Ireland, since the root did not survive in Irish with the meaning 'to see'. […] Despite the etymology of his title, it may be more helpful to see the *fili* as a 'professor of literature and man of letters' than to compare him with the ancient druids. Why the terms *fili* and *bard* had come to be placed in the hierarchy in

[182] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[183] *Ibid.*, p. 18. Stevenson views the Irish Ogham script in this context and conjectures that the impetus for its inception arose from the desire to perform these same list-making functions. Given, however, the overwhelmingly memorial nature of Ogham inscriptions in the archaeological record and its seemly having been designed for inscription on stone, this proposal seems rather limiting in its consequences and seems to stem more from the theory of written language development rather than observation of available evidence.

> which they are found in Ireland cannot now be known, and may have nothing to do with their etymologies.[184]

Despite this note of warning Sims-Williams acknowledges that the *filid* did possess some association with acts of an esoteric or arcane nature. The principal evidence for this nature are the 'three things which qualify a poet', three obscure abilities associated with *filid* in various legal and literary texts: *imbas forosnai,* 'illuminating foreknowledge', *teinm laedo*, 'incanting of lays',[185] *díchetal di chennaib*, 'chanting of heads'.[186] John Carey notes, however, that although these terms did have magical connotations they were not stable and the various appearances of these terms demonstrate differing attitudes towards magic by the authors involved.[187] Identifying any fossilised attitudes belonging to a pre-Christian or pre-literate incarnation of the *filid* in the medieval appearance and use of these terms is confounded by their textual history.[188]

The common problem arising here is that the nature of pre-literate attitudes in Ireland towards the place of the written word, as opposed to the spoken, in the transmission and preservation of knowledge cannot now be known. These attitudes cannot, as Slotkin assumed, be known by reference to and backwards projection from later literary productions, nor are they clearly prefigured, as Nagy implies, in the attitudes of Caesar's Iron-Age druids. As such it is incredibly difficult to map out any clear picture of the attitudes of the *filid* towards the transmission of knowledge that they may have inherited from the period prior to the introduction of Latin-based literacy. Ultimately, as has been shown, this approach cannot lead to any certainties; however, it has attracted continued attention and remains a crucial premise underlying much scholarly discussion of attitudes towards the oral and the literary in medieval Ireland. In Nagy's view the issue of orality as opposed to literacy is inseparably bound up with another problematic dichotomy: the tension in how to reconcile native learning, with its integral and problematic pre-Christian baggage, with the intellectual world of the Latin Christian culture which became the keystone of intellectual life in Ireland from the sixth century onwards. In Nagy's words:

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[184] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition,' p. 143. *eDIL*. s.v. *fili* (dil.ie/22070). See also Middle Welsh: *gweled*, 'sees'. Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Literary Theory', p. 293.

[185] The phrase *teinm laedo* has also been translated 'breaking of marrow' by T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1974) pp. 337-8, and this interpretation is followed by Kelly, *A Guide*, p. 44, and Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, p. 148.

[186] The history and semantics of these terms are covered in depth in: John Carey, 'The Three Things Required of a Poet', *Ériu*, 48 (1997), pp. 41-58.

[187] *Ibid*., p. 50.

[188] The etymology and the implications of these terms for how the knowledge and authority of the *filid* was understood in medieval Ireland are revisited in greater depth below. See below, pp. 154-155.

> If […] the consciousness of the difference between the oral and literary traditions was crucially brought into focus in Ireland, if not actually established, as a result of the overwhelming advent of a religious culture of the written word, then it should come as no surprise that the oral tradition, for scribes and oral performers alike, came to be associated with the pagan heritage of the Irish.[189]

This is a simple association of the tensions acting between two different dichotomies: oral equating to pagan versus literary equating to Christian. It must, however, be asked if this is indeed a fair observation to make. Are these dichotomies really associated in this way in the medieval literature and, in our own understanding of the intellectual workings of the *filid,* can these concepts be exclusively partitioned in this way with any degree of success? At what point did orality come to be associated with paganism and was this association universal, if indeed it was widespread at all? Furthermore, the assumption that there existed in medieval Irish thinking specific 'conceptualizations of the relationship between the oral and the written, and of the respective merits of the two media,'[190] must also be explored and questioned.

Before going further, it is necessary to ascertain what exactly Nagy means when he deploys the phrase 'oral tradition' and decide upon the relative utility of this term in relation to the elements that make up medieval Irish literature. His interest in this instance is focused on 'the modes of transmission and composition traditionally utilized by the Celtic peoples both ancient and modern.'[191] This statement seemingly incorporates in his term 'oral tradition' both a broad concept of a non-literary means for the continuation of knowledge, and by extension specific forms and structures within the literature that can be identified as originating in oral practice, and through which this continuation was accomplished. It is clear that he understands this oral tradition to operate both prior to the introduction of Christianity, and subsequently alongside it.[192] Thus, in his view, it must predate the introduction of Latin literacy but is certainly not superseded by it. A significant problem with this conceptualisation is that it envisages oral tradition as being an essentially timeless feature of Irish society. It allows one to speak of the pre-Christian and medieval Christian eras in the same breath as modern 'tradition bearers with amazingly large story-repertoires […] found amongst Gaelic-speaking peasants and fishermen in Ireland and Scotland.'[193] Again this is a huge assumption to make and carries the additional problem of distorting the argument down one line of inquiry: 'to what extent is this oral tradition reflected in substance and style in

[189] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition,' p. 146.
[190] *Ibid*., p. 145.
[191] *Ibid*., p. 143.
[192] Nagy, 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative,' p. 272.
[193] *Ibid*., p. 272.

extant medieval Irish narrative texts?'[194] This leaves little room for the process of re-oralisation, a widely attested and recognised phenomenon whereby material from a textual source is received and re-absorbed into oral circulation.[195]

Nagy's line of inquiry must be recognised as being partly inevitable when studying any oral culture in a medieval context due to the constraints imposed on us by our inability to directly access our subject in any way. As a tool for the study of oral cultures it is often termed 'oral-formulaic theory' or 'oral theory' and is heavily indebted to the methodology of Albert Lord and Milman Parry's pioneering work on the study of orality in epic poetry.[196] When, however, it is clear that literary forms can infiltrate and influence orally transmitted forms as well as the opposite, especially in a society in which these two modes are both equally entrenched, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine what signifiers can demonstrate aspects of orality or literacy. Karl Reichl neatly sums up these problems:

> Two vulnerable points in the Oral Theory are that what Parry and Lord identified as typical of oral tradition (formulaic style, composition in performance) is not in the same way characteristic of all oral traditions of which we have some knowledge […]. Secondly, even if a text shows all the signs of orality, there is no guarantee that it actually belongs to an oral milieu. In societies in transition from orality to literacy, literary productions, if not directly imitated from (foreign) written literature, may show the same stylistic traits as native oral works. The poetic idiom of one's own tradition is used for new forms of literary expression.[197]

Stevenson's argument is worth recalling here as it is essentially against viewing the introduction of literacy as a simple act of colonialism that necessarily conflicts with the pre-

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[194] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[195] This has been discussed in an Irish context by both Edgar Slotkin and Alan Bruford. Slotkin recognises three conditions under which this process may occur:

'1. The literary work must occur in a form capable of assimilation to oral performance. Most often it will be a literary work meant to be performed in the first place. Of course, in the case of medieval literatures this may well apply to a great deal of it since much of medieval literature was intended to be read aloud.

2. The literary work must convey meanings or an ethos capable of assimilation into oral tradition. Since relatively modern literature tends to focus on and explore new values or values inherently subversive to social norms, it is not surprising that such pieces do not enter into oral performance.

3. The way in which form and matter emerge as discourse must conform to a large extent to traditional oral discourse. In Irish and Scottish Gaelic prose this has meant that the greater fluidity between oral and written literature has existed on the level of the romance.'

Edgar Slotkin, 'What Allows Fixed Texts to Enter Gaelic Oral Tradition?', in (*Re*)*Oralisierung*, *Script Oralia* 84, ed. by Hildegard Tristram, (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1996) pp. 55-65 (p. 65). Slotkin's categories are a useful guide towards understanding the circumstances surrounding re-oralisation, however, they should not be seen as comprehensive set of laws. His tendency to present the process of transmission from written text to oral as something governed by the requisites of 'traditional' form and function of the oral culture tends towards the same timeless view as Nagy, with its implications that oral culture tends towards the static and regresses rather than innovates.

[196] Reichl, 'Plotting the Map,' p. 16.

[197] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

established oral order. To the contrary, however, this scenario seems implicit in Nagy's understanding of the event:

> The proponents and of the new religion and the culture that came with it defined and asserted themselves through the written (sacred) word. The problems they (and those they converted) faced were how to dispel or incorporate elements of the vast orally transmitted system of knowledge already in place, and then how the relationship between the new and the native cultures and that between their two respective media.[198]

Elva Johnston modifies this viewpoint by arguing that the type of literacy is an important factor here and that it is Latin literacy, allowing access to broader European cultural networks, rather than literacy itself *per se* that should be seen as 'powerfully transformative.'[199] Whilst the impact of Christianity upon the literature of medieval Ireland cannot and should not be denied it must be remembered that, as early Church organisation structured itself to inhabit pre-existing Irish social paradigms, it is equally conceivable that Latin-based literacy was able to facilitate the representation of pre-existing oral material in addition to introducing new forms and influences into Ireland. The point here is that the introduction of Latin literacy must certainly have influenced oral culture, and *vice versa*, but the presence of the former does not *require* the complete transformation of the latter.

This last point could be seen to come dangerously close to contradicting the previous warning of the dangers of attempting to understand any historical circumstance through chronologically distant evidence. If literacy is not transformative why is it unfair to view medieval literature as representative of earlier oral tradition? The answer to this must be that both literacy and orality existed hand in hand with one another, and both innovated together over time through the sheer necessity of being a significant part of a living, active culture. Johnston has defined medieval Ireland as a 'secondary oral' culture, namely, a society:

> […] in which orality is supported, challenged, enriched, and surrounded by literacy. This orality is constituted by the range of activities practiced and experienced through speech, gesture, expression, and a whole gamut of non-verbal representation. Such settings are frequently defined by educated literate minorities who articulate official ideologies and histories. These groupings are faced by a multiplicity of voices, representing the non-literate majority, who express themselves orally. Neither the literate elites nor the non-literate majorities are likely to be monolithic in composition. The latter may include people who are themselves representatives of elite elements. Depending on circumstances, official and unofficial cultures can be in rapport,

[198] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition,' p. 144.
[199] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 14-15.

> conflict or coexistence. […] It should not lead to the assumption that literacy and non-literacy form a binary opposition as unbridgeable as heaven from hell. They are sometimes in dialogue, not all of which is gentle, and sometimes in opposition, not all of which is fierce.[200]

A second question arising here is whether or not medieval Irish literature should be regarded, in whole or in part, as reflecting an oral literature.[201] As a caveat, this question is far too large to answer in any sufficient depth here and these remarks must be taken as cursory. Ruth Finnegan has argued convincingly that all literature, but especially that produced in a society where literacy is not fully universal, falls somewhere on a continuum between orality and literacy and as such social context alone is not a sufficient measure to determine the orality of a literature.[202] Instead she defines four means of measuring orality: '[t]hese are: mode of composition; mode of transmission; actualization in performance; and perhaps sources. […] Each is a helpful and illuminating one, but at the same time involves some difficulties in application, if only because there are occasions when they conflict […].'[203] It is certainly the case that the difficulties that Finnegan identifies as arising from these measures appear in force if they are applied to medieval Irish literature.

Composition as a measure of orality is problematic because, as Finnegan rightly points out, an oral act of composition can occur prior to, and even with the sole intent of, committing the piece to writing.[204] In an Irish context this is well evidenced by the oft-repeated description of poetic composition from Thomas O'Sullevane's account of a Gaelic poetic school from the *Memoirs of the Marquis of Clanricarde* published in 1722:

> The Qualifications first requir'd were reading well, writing in the Mother-tongue, and a strong Memory. It was likewise necessary the place should be in the solitary Recess of a Garden or within a Sept or Enclosure far out of reach of any Noise, which an Intercourse of People might otherwise occasion. The Structure was a snug, low Hut, and beds in it at convenient Distances, each within a small Apartment without much Furniture of any kind, save only a Table, some Seats, and a Conveniency for Cloaths to hang upon. No Windows to let in the Day, nor any Light at all us'd but that of Candles, and these brought in at a proper Season only. The Students upon thorough Examination being first divided into Classes, wherein a regard was had to every one's Age, Genius, and the Schooling had before, if any at all, or otherwise. The Professors (one or more as there was occasion) gave a Subject suitable to the Capacity of each Class, determining the

[200] *Ibid*., pp. 1-2.
[201] For an introductory discussion of some of the difficulties implied by such an apparently contradictory term as Oral Literature cf. Reichl, 'Plotting the Map,' pp. 3-4.
[202] Ruth Finnegan, 'How Oral is Oral Literature?', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 37 (1974), pp. 52-64 (57-60).
[203] *Ibid*. p. 60.
[204] *Ibid*., p. 61.

> number of Rhimes, and clearing what was to be chiefly observed therein as to Syllables, Quartans, Concord, Correspondence, Termination and Union, each of which were restrain'd by peculiar Rules. The said Subject (either one or more as aforesaid) having been given over Night, they work'd it apart each by himself upon his own Bed, the whole next Day in the Dark, till at a certain Hour in the Night, Lights being brought in, they committed it to writing.[205]

This account is mentioned by Nagy as demonstrating the importance of composition in an environment that artificially prohibits composition in writing, however, there may also be a memorative aspect to this practice as well.[206] Memorising and composing in the dark is a fairly commonly attested practice in the middle ages and the process described by O'Sullevane may certainly have intended as a means of memory training or of fixing a composition in a poet's mind.[207] Whilst it would be problematic to in any way suggest that this account can be taken to reflect earlier, medieval practice it does clearly demonstrate, in an Irish context, the difficulties in separating what is oral from literary in acts of composition. Although she distinguishes them as two separate categories Finnegan is inclined to view the categories of transmission and source material together.[208] These are especially problematic measures of orality in the study of medieval literature because, as has already been said, we are limited by the sources we have available and this is all written material. Nevertheless, there are depictions in medieval literature of acts of oral performance, if not transmission, and these will be discussed further below. Finnegan's categories provide no firm measure of orality, only the guidelines with which to explore aspects of orality, but this is precisely her point. Her intent is to break down any hard lines between how orality and literary are defined.[209] In the case of medieval Irish literature it is hard to avoid falling back on social context as a measure of orality and return to the safety of Johnston's secondary oral environment as the defining factor.

As Nagy notes, it cannot simply be assumed that the importance of oral methods of transmission and performance were wholly supplanted in function in Ireland by the introduction of the written text.[210] The learned classes may well have been operating in a literate culture but the majority of the society to which they belonged, including secular elites,

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[205] Trans. Osborn Bergin, in: David Green and Fergus Kelly, eds., *Irish Bardic Poetry*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1974) p. 6.
[206] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition,' pp. 145-146.
[207] See, in particular, the account of Thomas Aquinas' habits of composition. Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 4-8.
[208] Finnegan, 'Oral Literature?,' p. 60.
[209] *Ibid*., pp. 63-64.
[210] Nagy, 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative,' p. 277.

would certainly have been illiterate and therefore receptive only to oral forms of performance regardless of whether the material so presented had been preserved primarily through an oral or literary medium.[211] Elva Johnston notes that although the *filid* themselves were on the whole expected in legal texts to possess literacy the very lowest grades of the order were not. She also notes that we should not imagine the *filid* operating in a vacuum completely isolated from the rest of society as a whole, although their overall participation occurred almost exclusively in the context of elite circles.[212] Their principal role as authorities in learning necessitated, in spite of the professed exclusivity of their profession, a degree of interaction with those beyond the limits of their learned circles and this is demonstrated in a number of tales.[213] The *filid,* therefore, inhabited a learned culture that, in spite of its literacy, existed and operated within a world which was largely oral. Returning to the issues of orality and literacy in transmission and performance, it may be of importance to at least consider the question of how this was viewed and valued from the perspective of those other than the *filid*. Such depictions of oral performance are rare in the literature, however, they provide an interesting counterpoint through which to view the role of the *filid* in these areas.

During the opening of the tale *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* we are introduced to the person of Feidlimid mac Daill who, the text tells us, was '*scélaigi Chonchobuir,*'[214] 'Conchobar's storyteller.' This figure is interesting if enigmatic. Where, in particular, does he stand in relation to the learned classes? We are not told if Feidlimid was considered a member of the *filid,* or merely belonged to one of the grades of *bard* and thus his art limited solely to performance as opposed to composition. The patronymic mac Daill, 'son of the Blind-One' is suggestive of some link to an inherited position of learning as blindness is routinely associated with individuals of intellectual, poetical and musical ability in the Gaelic world.[215] It is unclear, however, if this should be seen as placing Feidlimid in a learned family of the kind that came to monopolise the learned professions increasingly as the Middle Ages

[211] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 20-21.
[212] *Ibid*., p. 21.
[213] A standout example here is found in the tale *Airec Menmain Uraird meic Coise*. See below, pp. 173-176.
[214] *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*: *The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*, ed. by Vernam Hull (New York, NY: The Modern Language Association of America, 1949), p. 43.
[215] Patrick Ford suggests that this phenomenon reflects a remnant of the pre-Christian religious associations possessed by the poets. As has been noted above, however, the persistence of this religious association as a conscious part of how the *filid* was conceptualised in medieval Ireland has been questioned by Patrick Sims-Williams. It is a question for further research whether the association of poets with blindness can be best explained by reference to Pagan ritual or, as seems more likely, poetical insight is more commonly linked with physical disability. Another possibility, if O'Sullivane's account of poets composing in the dark can be taken as relevant to the medieval *filid*, is that the trope reflects the literary personification of a commonly practiced mnemonic technique. Patrick Ford, 'The Blind, the Dumb, and the Ugly: Aspects of Poets and their Craft in Early Ireland and Wales,' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 19 (1990), pp. 27-40 (pp. 37-39).

progressed, or an invention based on the premise that it is appropriate for someone with an ability for performance to be associated with blindness in some way. He is clearly an individual of no small social importance: he possesses a dwelling big enough to accommodate king Conchobar and his company[216] and provide for their drinking needs. That his house serves as a gathering point for the *Ulaid* must mean that his *scéla* constituted an oral performance delivered to the assembly present there. It is possible to envisage the position of *scélaige* as an office within the king's household, the principal duty of which was to see to the king's need both to be entertained and be seen to be a patron of entertainment for himself and his followers. Feidlimid's wealth and status would, in this case, be both a suitable reward for his service to the court and a necessity for the execution of his duty. One example alone may not be enough to propose that the term *scélaige* signified such a position, however, it appears to be an exceedingly uncommon word and parallel examples are thus in short supply.[217]

In medieval Irish literature as a whole there is a great deal of affection expressed for the public performance of *scéla* and other forms of aural entertainment by those characters belonging to the ruling classes of society. Another example worth discussing, and one situated firmly in the Christian era as opposed to the ancient world of king Conchobar's Ulster, is the figure of Donn Bó from *Cath Almaine*. This tale belongs to the *bóruma Laigen* series of tales dealing with the recurring feud between the Uí Néill and the kings of Leinster over the latter's right to levy the cattle-tribute of Leinstermen, and tells of how Fergal mac Máel Dúin king of the Cenél nEogain was slain in battle attempting to force the tribute from a resistant Leinster on the 11th December, AD 722.[218] Fergal requests the presence of Donn Bó after the assembling host makes it clear that they will not undertake the foray without his presence, and the text describes Donn Bó's virtues and performing abilities: '[*n*]*í raba i nÉirinn uile bud gríbda nó bud ségainne inás, ocus is uad bud ferr ran espa ocus ríg-scéla for doman.*'[219] 'There was no one in all Ireland more valorous or more accomplished than he,

[216] There is no precise description of the size and makeup of this company outside of the rather vague: '*Ulaid*,' 'Ulstermen.' Apart from Conchobar, Feilimid and Feilimid's wife the only other individual known to be present is the king's magician Cathbad. It must be assumed that the assembly consisted of the 'usual suspects' of the Ulster court: the principal heroes and champions, possibly in the company of their wives, whose presence constitutes the *Ulaid* in the numerous outings of Conchobar's court known from other Ulster Cycle tales.
[217] Indeed, *eDIL* lists only five attestations of the term. *eDIL*., s.v. *scélaige* (dil.ie/36388).
[218] *Cath Almaine*, ed. by Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), pp. xii-xix.
[219] *Ibid.*, p. 2. The compound *ríg-scéla* appears twice in the list of Donn Bó's repertoire. Ó Riain glosses this term 'king-tales' (p. 80), however, the slightly looser 'kingly-tales' may be more appropriate as it is uncertain if this term refers to tales about kings, as Ó Riain's 'king-tales' seems to imply, or a broader concept of tales that are appropriate to kings and the company of kings.

and it is from him that the world's better entertaining verse and kingly-tales might be [had].' Besides this Donn Bó's physical beauty is emphasised, as well as his ability in providing military service for his lord through the handling of horses, fixing of spears and (somewhat obscurely) the braiding of hair. Later, on the campaign itself, Fergal requests Donn Bó '*déna airfited*,' 'make entertainment,' for the host: '*fo bíth is tú as dech airfitid fail i nÉirinn .i. i cúisig ocus i cuislennaib ocus i cruittib ocus rannaib ocus ráidsechaib ocus ríg-scélaib Éirenn*.'[220] '[S]ince you are the best at entertaining in Ireland, that is, in whistling and in flutes and in harps and verses and discourses and the kingly-tales of Ireland.' The emphasis in all of Donn Bó's powers of *airfitiud* is upon acts which produce sound, the art of oral or musical performance.

As with the case of Conchobar's storyteller Feidlimid, the text offers no insight into the source of Donn Bó's oral repertoire. There is no suggestion that he was considered as part of the *filid*, or received any training on the part of a formally recognised learned class at all. Indeed, Donn Bó's performance abilities seem to stem more from an innate marvellous or miraculous ability than any system of learning.[221] This is particularly evident when his severed head is heard singing for the slain Uí Néill army in fulfilment of his promise to entertain them on the night after the battle, and after his head is retrieved from the field when his '*dord fiansa attruag*,' 'mournful warrior chant,' reduces the victorious Leinsterman to sorrow.[222] Despite Donn Bó's much broader range of skills in entertainment and the miraculous episode of his surviving decapitation made possible through his mother's invocation of Saint Columba, both these individuals share many similarities in their basic role. Both serve to provide a king and his followers with suitable entertainment, thereby strengthening the bonds of social cohesion. There is, furthermore, no suggestion that literacy is involved in any part of this art, their primary medium is oral performance and its importance and vitality is clearly expressed; however, their material must have been learned somewhere and it is possible that written copies of texts, whether read or heard, played a part.[223] Although these individuals do not seem to be part of the learned classes, we must

[220] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[221] In this he is similar to the figure of Noíse in *Longes mac nUislen* who is likewise noted for his gift of tune-whistling.
[222] *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.
[223] Nagy has interpreted the presentation of Donn Bó's abilities as: 'a career representing oral tradition that will not, should not, or cannot be recorded in a literary form.' Without diverting too far into the reasons behind this claim, Nagy again seems to primarily understand orality and literacy as acting as a dichotomy. Although the orality of Donn Bó's abilities are certainly emphasised, he is specifically noted for his *ríg-scéla* and tales of kings are no small feature on the map of medieval Irish writing. Nagy, *Angles and Ancients*, p. 163.

always be aware of the possibility that these figures merely represent the attitudes of the *filid* expressed beneath the camouflage of an individual seemingly independent from them. These examples are, after all, both secular tales with which the *filid* are intrinsically associated in legal literature, and it is no leap of the imagination to suggest a *fili* may have had a hand in their composition. Nevertheless, the fact that these figures are presented as independent must reinforce the point that there was space in Irish society beyond the *filid* for the circulation of tale material, and that the learned classes may have been passive players in the shaping and transmission of this material as much as they were active.[224] These individuals could be seen to fall, in medieval Irish law, under the category of *bard*, a composer and performer not part of the *filid*:

> The *bard*, unlike the *fili*, was not expected to have studied or undergone professional training, but had to rely on innate ability alone. While not necessarily illiterate, the *baird* evidently operated in an oral environment, without the benefit of formal study; according to *Bretha Nemed*, "although knowledge of letters and metrics is not required of the bards, it is required of them to perceive and recognise their proper measure by ear and nature. It is thus that the free bards make their bardic poetry" ('Old-Irish Tract on Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets', pp. 43-4). In the modern world we could perhaps compare the distinction between musicians who play "by ear" and those who can read music and have studied the theory of music.[225]

Although Sims-Williams is here concerned with the poetic aspect of the *baird*'s repertoire, but is equally applicable to their role as reciters of tales.

Another significant problem with aligning a dichotomy of oral against literary with pagan against Christian, besides the dangers it poses in blurring our understanding of the semi-oral culture in which secular learned men worked, is the implicit dissociation this creates between oral forms of composition, transmission and performance and entire areas of Irish intellectual culture as it existed in the post-conversion era. It suggests that Christianity must have come to disdain oral transmission in favour of the primacy of literacy. Whilst Christian learned culture was irrevocably rooted in the study and promulgation of the written

[224] Worth considering as a parallel example in context of this claim is Patrick Sims-Williams' discussion of the four Metrical Tracts (edited together by Rudolph Thurneysen under the title *Mittleirische Verslehren*). Across these four texts, composed across the tenth to eleventh centuries, Sims-Williams notes a shift in emphasis away from the older forms of alliterative verse associated with the *filid* to the *óig-rechta*, 'new-rules' of the rhyming, syllabic verse associated with the *baird* in the First Metrical Tract. This tract, tenth century in date but possibly containing material from the ninth, makes clear that the *filid* used these newer metres but received lower payment for them than compositions in the older metres. By the mid eleventh century, however, when the third tract was composed, the older forms disappear entirely in favour of the new. Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'literary theory', pp. 295-298.
[225] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

word of scripture, it is important to remember that the vast majority of discourse between churchman and layman from the conversion period until the enlightenment would, by necessity, have been through the spoken word. The sermons and homilies that have been preserved in text are one example of texts intended for oral delivery being produced by the medieval church. *Lebor na h-Uidre* contains two such works *Scéla Laí Brátha* and *Scéla na Esérgi*, 'Tidings of Doomsday' and 'Tidings of the Resurrection.'[226] Stylistically, it has been noted, these two homilies show many similarities with the saga literature that they have been interpolated into the midst of.[227] This suggests that they were intended for oral performance and the importance of this performance in relation to other forms of *scéla* is, as has been shown, clearly visible within the literary tradition. It is not clear, however, whether or not Nagy's definition of 'oral tradition' would allow such works to be seen as having any relation to the 'oral' at all: they are undoubtedly dependent on material transmitted through religious text and may even have been composed solely by written means but, nevertheless, they possess a form suggestive of their intended orality.

[226] Elizabeth Boyle has conducted the most recent work upon these two texts. See Elizabeth Boyle, 'Eschatological Justice in *Scéla Laí Brátha*,' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 59 (2010), pp. 39-54.
[227] Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The literature of medieval Ireland, 800–1200: from the Vikings to the Normans', in *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, 2 vols., ed. by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I pp. 32-73 (p. 41).

4.2 Approaching the Dichotomy: Ogham and Literary Attitudes towards Orality

As should be clear from the discussion so far, the ways in which orality and literacy interacted in medieval Irish culture are incredibly complex, hard to access, and neither can be seen as a static or immutable element. Is it fair, therefore, to understand the presentation of aspects of orality and literacy in medieval Irish literature as breaking down along the lines of pagan past versus Christian present? Nagy himself highlights one possible problem for this dichotomist point of view: the early development of the Ogham alphabet in the early Gaelic-speaking world.[228] It is frequently suggested that Ogham arose at an early point of contact between Irish culture and that of the literate Latin world, however, the exact dates and circumstances proposed have varied. It is widely accepted that a knowledge of how the Latin grammarians of the late Roman Empire classified the letters of the Latin alphabet influenced the creation of the Ogham alphabet.[229] Thus the late fourth or early fifth centuries AD is the most commonly suggested period in which Ogham developed. There has, however, been some significant and convincing dissent from this trend such as James Carney's argument that Ogham could have developed as early as the first century BC.[230] Anthony Harvey likewise argues on both linguistic and historical grounds that Ogham most likely developed early and this, hypothetically, could have begun even before the first century BC.[231] The precise relationship between the Ogham alphabet and Christian or pre-Christian forms of self-identity in early Ireland has likewise been a point of debate.[232] The key issue at stake is whether or not the development of Ogham coincided with the period during which Christianity began to take root in Ireland or prior to it, if one accepts an earlier dating. Pope Celestine's famous commission of Palladius as the first bishop of the Irish in 431, as recorded in the Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine, demonstrates the presence of a Christian community large enough to warrant the interest of the Bishop of Rome is the first solid evidence for the presence of Christianity and provides a useful measure here.[233] If the late fourth to early fifth-century date for the development of Ogham is accepted, then the script would be

[228] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition,' pp. 144-5.
[229] Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam,* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1997), pp. 27-29.
[230] James Carney, 'The Invention of the Ogom Cipher', *Ériu,* 26 (1975), pp. 53-65 (pp. 56-57).
[231] Harvey seems reluctant to pin the genesis of Ogham down to a specific date or even century due to ongoing debates around the dating of certain sound changes within lenition in the Celtic languages, however, he certainly sees the fifth century as a rather late possibility. Anthony Harvey, 'Early Literacy in Ireland: The Evidence from Ogam,' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 14 (1987), pp. 1-15 (pp. 3-4, 9).
[232] McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 55-61.
[233] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 182.

developing alongside the earliest Christian presence in Ireland. If an earlier dating is followed then, as Harvey proposes, Latin literacy must have been present in Ireland from a very early, certainly pre-Christian, period and the presence of Christianity is inconsequential in this process.[234] Catherine Swift has surveyed the historical context in which this could have occurred, noting the literary evidence of raiding, trading and cultural contact between Ireland and the late Roman Empire in the third and fourth century, as well as archaeological evidence suggesting the presence in Ireland of individuals familiar with Romano-British cult practices, perhaps former mercenaries employed in the Roman army.[235]

Damian McManus argues that the totality of the available linguistic evidence suggests that Ogham's heyday lay firmly within the Christian era, specifically from the mid fifth to early seventh centuries.[236] Similarly, the form in which Ogham inscriptions most commonly occur; in a memorial function on burial markers also often possessing Christian imagery, further reinforces this context.[237] To what extent Ogham could have been useful as a means of writing outside of this context is, however, uncertain. Whilst it is possible to accept that Ogham may have had uses now lacking physical evidence in the archaeological and literary record, it does not represent a medium easily able to facilitate the production of an extensive literature.[238] The complexities present in this situation have caused significant difficulty for some scholars seeking to understand why Ogham was developed in the first place: how could Ogham, cumbersome, unwieldy and hopelessly restrictive in comparison to the Latin alphabet, possibly develop in an Ireland with access to Latin literacy?[239] McManus himself, however, has made the point that Ogham should not be interpreted as a marker of religious identity:

> The notion of the writing system as the hallmark of a particular intellectual or religious environment is clearly evident in this context in the case of the Inchagoill stone […], the inscription on which, though grammatically akin to the Ogams and not bearing any specific Christian sentiment, is automatically accepted as Christian owing to its use of the Latin alphabet. The bilingual inscriptions of Britain, however, completely undermine any such

[234] Harvey, 'Early Literacy,' pp. 9, 13-15.
[235] Catherine Swift, *Ogam Stones and the Earliest Irish Christians* (Maynooth: The Cardinal Press, 1997), pp. 3-10, 13-21, 25-26.
[236] McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 96-97.
[237] *Ibid*., pp. 51-52, 54-55. Swift likewise agrees that the surviving body of Ogham inscriptions are a specifically Christian form of commemoration. Swift, *Ogam Stones*, pp. 127-128.
[238] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 14-15.
[239] John MacNeill, 'Notes on the Distribution, History, Grammar, and Import of the Irish Ogham Inscriptions,' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*: *Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 28 (1908/1909), pp. 329-370.

> compartmentalization and show the true alignment as being between Ogam and the Irish language on one hand and Latin on the other, without reference to any particular intellectual tradition or religious persuasion.[240]

This leaves Ogham in an interesting position, certainly influenced by some level of contact with Latin literacy that possibly pre-dates the conversion process and yet perfectly permissible as a form of expression within Christian culture, but not implicitly associated with a pagan context either. It suggests that the desire to create written literature as opposed to oral material cannot be best understood by a neat divide along the lines of Christian as opposed to pagan. This is further reinforced by how later medieval texts retrospectively characterise the context for the creation of Ogham. *Auracept na nÉces*, drawing on the Old-Testament inspired history of the Irish language also represented in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, understands the creation of Ogham to be co-terminous with the creation of the Irish language by Fénius Farsaid and his compatriots following their study of the languages resulting from the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel.[241] As McManus notes, this understanding may be oddly reflective of the actual circumstances in which Ogham arose: as fundamental to a desire to express the respectability and merits of the Irish language as a valid vehicle for expression alongside Latin.[242] Ogham's creation belongs within the pagan past, and can be seen as the emblematic form of expression for the learning of that age, however, this past came to be understood through the structures of world history creation provided by Old Testament Christianity and the late-Antique Latin scholarship that accompanied it.

Although it cannot be claimed with complete confidence that Ogham either represented, or was devised as, a specifically pagan form of literacy rather than a specifically Irish one, it was certainly possible for a medieval Irish writer to imagine the presence of literacy amongst his pagan predecessors. Muirchú's *Life of Saint Patrick*, written in the late seventh century, describes the confrontation of Patrick with the magicians of king Loegaire at Tara culminating in a series of contests in which the latter party attempts to assert the dominance

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[240] Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1997), p. 59.

[241] *Auraicept na n-Éces, The Scholar's Primer*: *Being the Texts of the Ogham Tract from the Book of Ballymote and the yellow Book of Lecan, and the Text of the Trefhocul from the Book of Leinster*, ed. by George Calder (Edinburgh: Grant, 1917). It is worth noting, however, that an alternative account found in the Old Irish *In Lebor Ogaim* does ascribe the creation of Ogam to a divine figure, namely Ogma mac Elathan, known from the mythological tale of *Cath Maige Tured* to be one of the Túatha Dé Danann. It does not necessarily follow from this that Ogam must, consequentially, be understood as a pagan form of expression. Although Ogma has been associated with the Gaulish deity Ogmios, described by the classical author Lucian writing in the second century AD, this link is by no means certain. See McManus, pp. 150-152. It is equally possible that Ogma could represent an eponymous literary figure created in order to provide a primogenitor for Ogam rather than a genuine memory of a pagan deity whose name became associated with Ogam.

[242] McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 147-150.

of their pagan powers. Part of this is a test, proposed by the king, of the resilience of the respective parties' books:

> Now when all this had taken place between the wizard and Patrick before the king's eyes, the king said to them: "Throw your books into the water, and we shall venerate the one whose books come out unscathed." Patrick replied: "I shall do so." And the wizard said: 'I refuse to undergo a trial by water with this man; for he considers water to be his god." […] And the king replied: "Then pass them through fire." And Patrick said: "I am ready." But the wizard refused, saying: "This man worships in turn in alternate years now water, now fire as his god." And the saint said: "Not so. But you go yourself, and one of my boys will go with you into a house which stands apart and is closed up, and my garment will be about you, and yours about my boy, and you will then be burned together."[243]

What is interesting here is that Muirchú imagines a written textual form for Pagan religious authority, in a manner comparable to how Christian authority stems from Holy Scripture, writing during a period in time relatively close to, or perhaps even during, the final stages of the conversion process. Although Muirchú certainly re-enforces the perception that Christianity in medieval Ireland was seen as a religion which draws its power and its authority from the written word, he also assumes that paganism must have done the same. Nagy, in his own analysis of this episode, notes this point as well as the curious fact that this proposed test never actually takes place.[244] His interpretation of this event, however, as being perhaps reflective of Muirchú's own anxiety as an author, a sentiment openly expressed in the prologue to the *Life*, dodges discussing why exactly Muirchú felt it appropriate to depict pagan magicians with books.[245] As Nagy rightly notes, there is no evidence to suggest that such books ever existed in actuality, however, in spite of this fact, and perhaps because of it, this depiction needs to be explained in some capacity.[246]

The most obvious interpretation is that Muirchú's understanding of religious authority as something linked inextricably to written text is so ingrained that he unconsciously assumed that the advocates of paganism in the time of Saint Patrick must have possessed religious scripture in a manner comparable to Christianity. But why then does the proposed trial of texts not actually occur? It is the pagan *magus* Lucetmail who opposes this trial, whereas Patrick is willing to consent, and this point must be significant. Also important to consider here is the role of the king in proposing this trial in the first instance. His desire must be to

[243] A.B.E. Hood, ed. and trans., *St. Patrick*: *His Writings and Muirchu's Life*, (London: Philimore, 1978) p. 92.
[244] Nagy, *Angels and Ancients*, p. 95.
[245] *Ibid*., pp. 95-96.
[246] *Ibid*., p. 95.

test the respective merits of the two faiths' representative texts in order to decide which he should follow. This is to be accomplished not through any actual reading of the texts but by subjecting them to the proposed trial, one very reminiscent of two miracles, already mentioned, concerning books from Adomnán's *Life of Saint Columba*. These miracles attest that books believed to be copied by Columba are able to survive undamaged after being accidentally dropped into water, seemingly protected through their association with him.[247] As is made clear by Patrick earlier in their confrontation, Lucetmail's abilities appear able primarily to cause harm rather than to resolve or prevent it:

> The Wizard said: "Let us bring snow upon the land." And Patrick said: "I refuse to bring what is contrary to God's will." And the wizard said: "I shall bring it in the sight of all." Then he began his magical spells and brought snow upon the whole plain, deep enough to reach men's waists; and all saw and were amazed. And the saint said: "Right, we can see this; now take it away." He said: "I cannot take it away before this time tomorrow." And the saint said: "You can do evil, and not good. It is not like that with me." Then he gave his blessing over the whole plain round about, and the snow disappeared quick as a flash, without any rain, clouds or wind.[248]

His reluctance, therefore, to engage in a test seemingly designed to measure his ability to protect something from harm can be quite reasonably understood. Why, however, does Muirchú allow the pagan *magus* the indulgence of declining this test rather than make an obvious statement affirming the superior power of Christian scripture? It must be stated that although Lucetmail evades this trial, the subsequent challenge counter-proposed by Patrick, and to which the *magus* agrees, leads directly to his death.[249] That Patrick must, and indeed does, triumph over the representatives of the old faith cannot be in doubt but perhaps by dodging the issue of directly addressing whose literature is superior, in a trial that could only lead to the destruction of the pagan text, Muirchú avoids a situation in which he is forced to proscribe the circulation of this pre-Christian material in the new Christian world. In this

[247] The exact nature of these books is not made clear in the text, however, given that Columba is elsewhere seen copying the Psalter as well as a hymnal they were presumably Christian texts. In the first instance it is made clear that Columba's work is part of a number immersed, indeed only comprising one page in the entire collection, and it is only this which survives. In addition, Adomnán mentions hearing numerous other miracles of this type attributed to Columba, beside the two examples he specifically mentions, suggesting that this was a widespread and fairly popular miracle tale. Another comparison between the book-protection miracles in Adomnán's *Life of Saint Columba* and the book-trial in Muirchú's *Life of Saint Patrick* is their mention with regard the saints' ability to protect from both water *and* fire. Adomnán explicitly associates these miracles with another describing how a block of salt blessed by Columba protected a small portion of the house it was kept in from burning down in a chance fire. This again suggests that these episodes may have been drawn from a fairly popular type of miracle tale, reasonably widespread in early medieval Ireland. *Life of Saint Columba*, trans. and intro. Sharpe, pp. 159-161, 284.
[248] Hood, ed. and trans., *St. Patrick*, pp. 91-92.
[249] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

context perhaps his representation of this pre-Christian material as existing in a textual form, in the same manner as Christian scripture, is a subtle and implicit recognition of its continuing importance in Irish society.[250]

[250] John Carey has recently argued that Muirchú's *Life* evidences a degree of familiarity with secular tale material including, most likely, and early version of *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. If Muirchú was engaging with and appropriating aspects of heroic literature for his own work, this further suggests that may have been unwilling to condemn it out of hand. John Carey, 'Muirchú and the Ulster Cycle,' 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 Publications, 2013), pp. 121-126 (pp. 125-126).

4.3 Orality versus Literacy? Reconsidering *Acallam na Senórach*

The discussion so far has attempted to explore and test Nagy's idea of a dichotomy between orality and literacy, associated with the pagan past and Christian present, underlying the attitudes of medieval Irish writers. This has been undertaken through highlighting evidence problematic to this picture, both in terms of authorial attitudes as they are expressed in the medieval texts and by examining the context in which such texts were created as it is understood through the works of social historians such as Johnston. It is important to stress, however, that these problematic aspects to Nagy's dichotomy do not deny the fact that, in some texts, such tensions are very much present and actively inform the text's outlook as regards the preservation and transmission of knowledge. *Acallam na Senórach*, in particular, is a text that has been much discussed in relation to this issue and a key foundation stone in Nagy's argument that orality and literacy came to be associated with the dichotomies of pagan and Christian.[251] *Acallam na Senórach*, composed around the year 1200 AD, tells the story of how Saint Patrick encountered the last surviving members of the famous *fían*, the roving warrior-band, of Finn Mac Cumhaill.[252] These exceptionally long-lived survivors, Caílte and Oisín, proceed to relate a series of accounts of the heroic and tragic undertakings of Fionn's *fían* in response to the questioning of Patrick and others. Throughout, these accounts of the deeds of the past are tinged with nostalgia and express a profound sense of sadness and loss on behalf of the surviving members of the *fían*. The episode of interest here is that in which Saint Patrick, after an initial resistance, is won over to the cause of the *fían* survivors' tales:

> *Ocus doriachtadar a dhá aingel f*[*h*]*orcoiméta cum Pátraic ann sin .i. Aibelán 7 Solusbreathach, 7 fiafraighios dibh in budh móid le rígh nime 7 talman beith dosom ag éisdecht re scéla na Féinne. Frecrait na haingil dosom co comnart cubaidh*: "*A anum, a naeimchléirigh*!" *ar siat*, "*ní mó iná trian a scél innisit na senlaeich út ar dáigh dermait 7 dichuimhne orra. Ocus scríbhthar na scéla*

[251] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition,' p. 146.
[252] Various dates for the composition of the *Acallam* have been proposed on both linguistic and textual grounds during the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. For a concise summary of the relevant arguments cf. Ann Dooley, 'The Date and Purpose of *Acallam na Senórach*', *Éigse*: *A Journal of Irish Studies*, 34 (2004), pp. 97-126 (pp. 98-100). Anne Connon has also provided a more recent response to Dooley's argument, see: Anne Connon 'The Roscommon *locus* of *Acallam na senórach* and some thoughts as to *tempus* and *persona*,' in: *In Dialogue with the Agallamh*: *Essays in Honour of Seán Ó Coileáin*, ed. by Aidan Doyle and Kevin Murray, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014) pp. 21-59.

sin letsa i támlorguibh filed 7 i mbriathraibh ollaman, ór budh gairdiugudh do dronguibh 7 do degdáinib deridh aimsire éisdecht frisna scéluib sin."[253]

And Patrick's two guardian angels came to him then, that is Aibelán (Little-spark) and Solusbreathach (Clear-judging), and he questioned them whether it would be the will of the King of Heaven and Earth for him to be listening to the tales of the Fianna. The angels answered him with equally firm agreement: "[Dear] soul, holy cleric!" they said, "Those old warriors recount no more than a third of their tales on account of their forgetfulness and bad memory. And let those tales be committed to writing with your blessing in the tablet-staves of poets and in the testimony of sages, since listening to those tales shall be an entertainment for the masses and for noblemen for the remainder of time."

The worth of these tales, which Patrick has to be convinced of, lies in their value as entertainment. The conclusion to the angel's statement plays with the notion of time and the apocalypse of Christian cosmology in which time will find its end, in order to justify this value. *Gairtiugud*, the word here that appears in this passage to signify entertainment, literally means a shortening. Implied within this use here is a notion of the shortening of time specifically and thus any activity which causes time to feel shortened, hence an entertainment or pastime. Erich Poppe followed this same logic in his own discussion of this term, however, he did not explore the apparent scarcity with which *gairtiugud* is deployed to denote the concept of entertainment, nor the particular importance of its use here.[254] Those whose time shall be made to feel as though it passes quicker are the people both common and noble of *deridh aimsire*, literally the 'remainder of time'. Here we get a sense of how the leniency of the angel's judgment can be justified in the context of Christian thinking and the religious life; these tales will figuratively, if not literally, shorten the road to final judgment at the conclusion of God's creation. Dagmar Schlüter notes that this episode within the *Acallam* also serves to legitimise the role of the Church in preserving vernacular literature in the face the attitudes of the twelfth-century Church reform: 'Preservation of the ancient lore and the young Irish church personified by Patrick thus go hand in hand. Therefore it may be possible to read here the carefully constructed origin-myth of the beginning of the close connection of the Irish Church and the preservation of the ancient lore in the monasteries.'[255] At the same time, however, it is clear that this close connection was coming to an end, in the words of

[253] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV p. 9.
[254] '*Gairtiugud* literally means 'shortening' and is derived from *gairt* 'short'; the meaning 'entertaining, entertainment' would be arrived at via a notion of shortening time.' Erich Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Lesson of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 37 (Summer 1999), pp. 33-54 (p. 37).
[255] Dagmar Schlüter, ''For the Entertainment of Lords and Commons of Later Times': Past and Remembrance in *Acallam na Senórach*', *Celtica*, 26 (2010), pp. 146-160 (p. 147).

Maire Ní Mhaonaigh: 'With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the *Acallam*'s eloquent justification constitutes a defiant last gasp.'[256]

Nagy, whilst accepting the interpretation that this passage represents a strong defence of the early Church's role in the transmission of vernacular material, remains inclined towards maintaining a sense of distance between these two worlds:

> The Scribes in Patrick's retinue can represent what Caílte and Oisín tell them—indeed, what we read is that very representation—but the new medium and its bearers cannot actually incorporate the oral 'message' or the bearers of that message into their world, or the bearers refuse to be so incorporated. The two streams of verbal expression—the pagan and the Christian, or the oral and the literary—do not merge and form a single stream. Of course, we are not concerned here with historical truth, but ideological formation.[257]

This interpretation, however, appears problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, one of the main reasons for suggesting that the *Acallam* maintains this separateness is the fact that Caílte and Oisín wander away from Patrick during the course of the narrative to undertake a number of adventures on their own, unaccompanied by the saint. Whilst this is certainly true, Caílte and Patrick remain aware of and in contact with one another even when they are apart. [258] It is not clear that the fact the *fían* survivors and Patrick are capable of spending time apart, if these figures are indeed acting as metaphors for the literary traditions to which they belong, must represent a fundamental incompatibility between 'the two streams of verbal expression.' As for the incorporation of Caílte and Oisín into the Christian world of Patrick, this is a more complex problem than Nagy presents here. Ann Dooley notes that the two *fían* members' paths diverge radically: 'The one, Oisín, retreats […] to the farthest recesses of imaginable time, namely to the otherworld refuge of his fairy mother; the other, Caílte, embarks on the more difficult track of Patrician instruction […].'[259] Caílte is the first to meet Patrick and the

[256] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The literature of medieval Ireland, 800–1200', p. 59.
[257] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition', p. 149. For a more recent work in which he recognises the validity of viewing the *Acallam* as offering a defence of the Irish Church's role in the transmission of secular literature, cf. Nagy, 'Life in the fast lane: The *Acallam na Senórach*', in: *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. Helen Fulton, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005) pp. 117-131 (p. 118).
[258] For example, Caílte's sending ahead of him the gifts of Finn's sword and drinking-horn, as well as the carcass of the magical healing pig the *fían* had recently killed, for Patrick and the king of Ireland before they re-unite is one example. *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, ed. trans. and intro. by Ann Dooley and Harry Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 68-73.
[259] Dooley interprets this divergence as a comment on attitudes towards church reform contemporary to the early thirteenth century as part of her argument that the *Acallam* exhibits a positive and progressive outlook towards circumstances in Ireland present at the time of its composition. Her comment is, however, equally applicable to the present problem. Dooley, 'Date and Purpose,' pp. 100-101.

very first act performed upon their meeting is his exorcism along with that of his followers from the *fían*:

> *Is and sin do éirigh in t-éo flaithemhnais ₇ in t-uaithne airechais ₇ in t-aingil talmaide .i. Pátraic mac Alprainn .i. apstal na nGaoidhel, ₇ gabhus in t-esríat do chrothad uisci choisrictha ar na feraibh móra, uair ro bhúi míle léighionn do dheamhnaibh uas a ceannaibh conuic in lá sin, ₇ dochuatar na demhna i cnocaibh ₇ i scalpaibh ₇ i n-imlibh na críche ₇ ind orba uatha ar cach leath* […].[260]
>
> Thereupon the champion of Heaven, the pillar of pre-eminence, and the earthly angel arose, namely; Patrick son of Calpurnius, apostle of the Gaels, and took up the sprinkler to dispense holy water upon the large men, since there had been a thousand legions of demons above their heads until that day, and the demons went from them on every side into hills and into rock-clefts and into the margins of the districts and territories.

The ultimate expression of Caílte's inclusion into the world of Saint Patrick is his subsequent baptism:

> *Is and sin docuas ó Pátraic arcenn Cáilti, ₇ tucadh dá innsaigid hé in nónbar óclaech do bí* […]. '*In bfedubair cidh fa tucad dom acallaim sib don chur so*?' *ar Pádraic*. '*Ní fedumar immorro*,' *ar Cáilte*. '*Ar dáigh cu ro sléchtadh sibh do soiscéla rígh nime ₇ talman .i. in fírDia forórda*.' *Is ann sin tucad tonn baitsi Críst tairsibh ac Pátraic, ag cinn baitse ₇ creidme bhfer n-Eirenn. Is ann sin tuc Cáilte a láimh secha i comhraid a scéith ₇ tucustar lia druimnech dergóir don ór órlasrach tíri na hAraipi a rabutar trí cóecait uingi, do Pátraic ar baisted in nónbair do bhí*. '*Tuarastal déidhinach na flatha Finn damsa sin*,' *ar Cáilte*: '*do raith mh'anmasa ₇ do raith anma in ríghfeinneda duitsi, a Phatraic*.' *Ocus is ed do ghabhudh in lia do Phátraic, ó bhárr a meoir medhóin co mulluch a ghualann, ₇ do bhí ferchubut ar lethet ₇ ar reme innti, ₇ do cuired in t-ór sin ar findcheolanuibh tráth in Táilcinn ₇ ar saltrachaib ₇ ar lebraib aithfrinn*.[261]
>
> Thereupon Patrick sent for Caílte and asked him to bring the group of warriors who were [with him]. 'Do you know why you have been brought to converse with me?' Said Patrick. 'Indeed we do not know,' said Caílte. 'For reason that you might bow down before the Gospel of the King of Heaven and Earth, namely the true glorious God.' Thereupon Patrick, the head of baptism and the faith of the men of Ireland, brought the wash of Christ's baptism over them. Then Caílte put his hand behind the boss of his shield and he took out a ridged column of red-gold of the flame-bright gold of the land of the Arabs weighing a hundred and fifty ounces, it was for Patrick on account of [his] baptism of the group. 'That is the final payment to me from the lord Finn,' said Caílte, 'for sake of my soul and for sake of the soul of the king of the *fían* [I give it] to you, Patrick. And this was [the measure of] the stone given to Patrick; from the tip of his middle finger to the top of his

[260] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV, p. 3.
[261] *Ibid*., pp. 9-10.

> shoulder, and it was a man's breadth in width and thickness, and that gold was put to use in the fair canonical bells of the Adze-head, and for [embellishing] Psalters and Mass-books.

Again, this event occurs early on in the narrative, happening immediately after Patrick's attention to Caílte's tales is justified by the visit of his two angels and emphasises integration between these two individuals and the worlds they represent. The image of Caílte's *fían*-gold, the very last manifestation of his place in the social order of Finn's heroic age, being re-wrought into embellishments for the literary manifestations of the Christian world of Patrick in exchange for his patronage is surely a powerful metaphor for this integration.[262] Geraldine Parsons has explored these issues further and notes that Finn himself, although long dead by the time Patrick and Caílte meet, pre-emptively recognises, accepts and prepares for the coming of Christianity to Ireland, thereby enabling the reconciliation not just of the few survivors, but also of himself and the *fian*, with Christianity and with Patrick.[263]

John Carey in a recent study on perceptions of time in the *Acallam* proposes a threefold division, rather than a duality between past and present; between time of Patrick, the heroic age of the *fían*, and the mythic past of the otherworldly *Túath Dé Danann* and the people of the *síde*.[264] He notes that how these worlds interact is a very complex issue and may indeed, particularly when it comes to the *Túath Dé Danann*, be deliberately portrayed in confusing and contradictory terms.[265] In terms of Caílte Carey notes that, having moved towards the Christian world of Patrick, he becomes reluctant to engage in the world of the *síde*, as exemplified in the episode in which he refuses the offer of the *síd* of Assaroe to grant him back his youth through their magic for fear of losing his newfound Christianity.[266] This Christian time, the time of Saint Patrick, is, however, as much a part of the past as is the time of the *fían* heroes:

> While we might have a half-unconscious predisposition to associate the text's 'pagan past' and 'Christian present' respectively with myth (to whatever extent modified by transmission and

[262] The term *túarastal* which Caílte uses to describe this golden gift is significant here. It carries a legal meaning and signifies the retaining fee that Finn, as Caílte's superior, paid in return for his military service making it literally emblematic of their social bond. *eDIL*. s.v. *túarastal* (il.ie/42220).
[263] Geraldine Parsons, 'The Structure of Acallam na Senórach', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 55 (2008), pp. 11-39 (pp. 32-33).
[264] John Carey, '*Acallam na Senórach*: a conversation between worlds', in: *In Dialogue with the Agallamh*: *Essays in Honour of Seán Ó Coileáin*, ed. by Aidan Doyle and Kevin Murray, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014) pp. 76-89 (pp. 83-84).
[265] See in particular: *Ibid*., pp. 84, 86-89.
[266] *Ibid*., p. 85.

> reinterpretation) and with history (to whatever extent idealised and reconstructed), in fact the latter is at least as fabulous as the former.[267]

In terms of the *Accalam*'s conceptualisation of orality and literacy, it is consequently unclear if it can be broken down into a dichotomist association with the themes of past vs. present and pagan vs. Christian as Nagy suggests. Finally, it is also not clear what Nagy means by the tales' oral 'message' as he does not define what this quality is, or how and why it resists transference into text. It does not appear to be related to the content or context of what Caílte and Oisín have to say as this, in terms of its secular or pagan connotations, the *Acallam* takes by the horns and justifies fairly thoroughly. Nor, as Nagy himself notes, does the resistance in this 'message' appear to relate to form as there is no suggestion that Patrick's scribes will struggle or fail to represent them properly in text. One is left to assume that the oral 'message' is that these are persistently and self-consciously oral tales for sake of the notion of orality itself, and this does not seem to be supported by their treatment in the *Acallam*.

The transmission of Caílte's tales is evidently of value to society as a whole, the '*druing*' and '*degdóini*' representing the 'base' and 'noble' classes that lay either side of the single most important social dividing line in medieval society.[268] Is the nature of this coming transmission, however, to be bound to an oral or a literary means of communication? One way of investigating this may be to examine the terminology used in the *Acallam* itself. It is certainly true, as has been seen, that up until the point of Patrick becoming directly involved in the dissemination of these tales they must certainly have been restricted to oral transmission, existing only in the minds and words of Caílte and Oisín. But does this mean that their transmission from henceforth is to be equally confined to the medium of written text? The use of the verb *scríbaid,* intrinsically bound to the act of physically writing down, would initially seem to suggest that this is the case. Nevertheless, this does not have to be to the exclusion of a continuing oral transmission and this may, indeed, be suggested by the forms in which the tales are to be written down. The first of these, the *támlorga filed*, must refer to a physical act of writing, although what precisely a *támlorg* is and what exactly its capacity for receiving written text was is not clear. The word is a compound of *taball*, a borrowing of the Latin *tabula*, and *lorg*, meaning a stave or shaft, and signifies an object comparable in size and shape with a sword.[269] It is perhaps tempting to link such an object

[267] *Ibid*., p. 76.
[268] Dooley, 'Date and Purpose,' p. 102
[269] *eDIL*., s.v. *taball, tabaill* (dil.ie/39365).

with the descriptions of Ogham being used to record extensive text in various saga tales.[270] It is certainly true that Ogham, suited as it is for carving onto the edges of stone or wood, would be well suited to such a form, however, it is questionable whether the practicalities involved would have allowed the creation of extensive texts in actuality.[271] The second means of 'writing down,' the *briathra ollaman*, 'testimony of scholars,' opens up more directly to the possibility of oral transmission. *Bríathar* is a term with a broad range of meaning covering the notions of words, speech and verbal communication.[272] Its use in this context seems to demonstrate a blurred boundary between notions of oral and written communication: spoken words (*bríathar*) can be transmitted through writing (*scríbend*) without problem. It may be possible, in this passage, to understand *scríbaid* as denoting a broader act of recording or transmitting words certainly including, but perhaps not exclusive to, the creation of writing.

The formula of Patrick's endorsement is repeated later in the *Acallam*, this time from the mouth of Díarmait mac Cerball, the famous sixth-century Uí Neill king of Tara the text somewhat anachronistically and uncharacteristically places in the role of high king of Ireland during the time of Patrick:

> […] "*₇ caid a filet sin ₇ senchaide Eirenn*? *Scribhthar i tamlorgaib filed ₇ a slechtaib suad ₇ a mbriathraib ollaman sud, co mbere cach a chuid lais da crich ₇ da ferann bodein da cach ní dar' indis Cailti ₇ Oissin da morgnimarthaib gaile ₇ gaiscid, ₇ do dinds*[*h*]*enchus Eirenn*." *Ocus dogníd amlaid sin*.[273]
>
> […] "And where are the poets and historians of Ireland? Let everything of what Caílte and Oisín have told us of the great deeds of valour and of arms, and of the place-lore of Ireland, be committed to writing in the tablet-staves of poets and in those scholars' recensions and testimonies of sages, so that each may carry his share with him to his own region and territory." And thus was that done.

Here again are found the *tamlorga filed* and *briathra ollaman* that Patrick mentions, but alongside these has been added a third means of transmission, the *slechta suad*. *Sui*, of which *suad* is the genitive plural form, is a fairly common term that is used of a wide variety of

[270] Notable examples include Cú Chulainn's use of Ogham to leave a message to the Connacht army on a forked branch early in *Táin Bó Cúailgne*. *Táin Bó Cúailgne*: *Recension 1*, ed. and trans. by Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2006) pp. 11-12, 134. *Immram Brain* makes the claim that its verse elements were recorded in Ogham by those who heard it related by Bran himself during his brief return to Ireland after voyaging to the otherworldly Land of Women over the western sea. A. G. van Hamel, *Immrama* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1941).
[271] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, p. 12.
[272] *eDIL*., s.v. *bríathar* (dil.ie/6796).
[273] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV, p. 73.

individuals and covers a broad range of intellectual associations, including both ecclesiastical and secular interests.[274] *Slicht*, however, is a very interesting term in this context as it appears elsewhere as the word used to describe an individual variation of a text or a narrative event, and can be translated by 'version' or 'recension'.[275] Its use in this way is demonstrated in the *Aided Órláim*, 'Death of Órlám', episode from the *Lebor na hUidre* version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*:

> *Mád iar n-araili slicht immorro is fertas carpait Con Culaind. ro maid 7 is do béim fertas dochóid in tan cotránic fri araid nÓrláim. Is é in t-ara ros ben na fertsi mad íarsin tslicht sa.*[276]
>
> Following another version, however, it is the shaft of Cú Chulaind's chariot that broke and he had gone to cut a [new] shaft when he happened upon Órlám's charioteer. Following this version, it is the charioteer who cut the shaft.

Again, like the *briathraibh ollaman*, the *Acallam*'s use of *slicht* does not seem specific to an oral or literary means of transmission and could include both forms. This is a further suggestion that the *Acallam* operates in a mind-set in which the borders between oral and literary forms of transmission and communication can be blurred. The use of *slicht* suggests that the life of these tales as written texts does not begin and end with their creation. Whether this is in written form or remembered, the assumption texts will enter a plurality of forms is certainly implied, and indeed seems to be actively expected as a part of their dissemination in aid of their stated purpose. Whilst it is certainly true that the tales of Caílte and Oisín transition from an entirely oral mode of transmission to a primarily literary one, there is no suggestion that their form or meaning have to be fundamentally altered by this transition. Indeed, the *Acallam* itself, though a written text and, as far as can be ascertained, a written text from the moment of its inception, consists largely of dialogue.

The most important result of these two commands to record Caílte and Oisín's tales, the first made by a religious authority then echoed in the second by a secular power, both in a position of influence over the whole of Ireland, is to enact a continuation and growth in the life of the tales. If oral transmission as a media for communication is presented as failing in the *Acallam*, then the remedy is an elite-sanctioned and socially coordinated re-collectivisation of the material, moving it from personal memory to social memory. Writing plays such an important part of this this process not because it fails to capture the 'oral

[274] *eDIL*., s.v. *suí* (dil.ie/39179)
[275] *eDIL*., s.v. *slicht* (dil.ie/37930)
[276] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: *Recension 1*, ed. and intro. by Cecile O'Rahilly, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2006) p. 27.

message' but because it so successfully can. As an analysis of the terminology has shown, this may not entail by necessity the limitation of these tales to a fixed textual form, indeed the proliferation of variants and versions is seen as a part of the process, if not to be actively encouraged.[277] There is almost an awareness that, as soon as the narratives are detached from the memory of their tellers, Caílte and Oisín, who know the events through first-hand experience, this process is an inevitable one, regardless of whether the tales find their way into the written word or an oral retelling. Nagy's approach towards the *Acallam* is influenced by much later developments in the representation of dialogue between Patrick and Oisín, as found in various poems from the sixteenth-century Scottish *Book of the Dean of Lismore* and modern recorded folktales:

> Some have suggested that the hostility expressed by the Fenian Survivors toward the ecclesiastic milieu and the contemporary world is a later development of the amicable relationship proposed in the *Acallam*. While this theory certainly has its merits (e.g. the bitterness is expressed in poems ostensibly later in date of composition than the earliest *Acallam*), it is important to note that the hostility, if a later literary invention, develops out of a distinct sense of separateness and autonomy already operative in the world of the *Acallam*.[278]

Although it is not possible to discuss this later material in any depth here, it must be said that it will inevitably have arisen from very different social contexts from that of the *Acallam*. It is not beyond possibility that the later portrayals represent a reaction to these themes, rather than a development.

Nagy proposes that attitudes towards the relationship between oral and literary in medieval Irish literature fall somewhere on a scale starting at what he defines as the 'metaphoric' view on the one hand, and the 'metonymic' on the other:

> At the metaphoric extreme we find the notion that the relationship between oral and written is that between two separate modes: despite correspondences that allow a mutual representation (one can mean, describe, or refer to the other) and even a mutual translatability (something from one can be 'translated' into the terms of the other), they do not form a whole—that is, they should be kept apart because they occupy different positions in a hierarchy of values or functions, or they just naturally stay apart despite attempts to merge them. On the other end of the conceptual continuum, the metonymic, the relationship between the two modes, if they are at all distinguished, is

[277] This is reminiscent of the distinction Mary Carruthers makes between learning '*ad res*' and '*ad verborum*' in the medieval intellectual world more widely: memorising '*ad res*' allowed one to capture the fundamental meaning of a work but did not necessarily limit one to a fixed textual form. See in particular: Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 110-112. Given what is discernible about the memorial practices of the *filid*, it is likely that they followed a technique similar to memorising '*ad res*.' See below, pp. 150-151,155.

[278] Nagy, 'Representations of Oral Tradition', p. 149.

> complementary, with the literary form representing the continuation, completion, or ultimate expression of the oral. The literary and the oral represent each other as a part represents a whole. Oral composition and/or transmission represent the first stage of a process that inevitably includes the literary mode, if whatever is being produced is of any 'worth'. The oral and literary are therefore part of an expressive whole, and one implies the other.[279]

Whilst this method provides a convenient framework by which texts can be understood, there are difficulties when it comes to the application. There is a very real danger that, by applying this formula too rigorously, the conceptualisation of ideas around orality and literacy in medieval Irish texts come to be seen as a dichotomy when this is not appropriate or the situation is far more complex. In cases where a metonymic view is expressed, for example in the case of Muirchú's imagined druids' books, or the depiction of Donn Bó in *Cath Almaine*, it is unclear if this formula would have held any meaning to those behind the creation of these texts, and it is questionable in these instances whether it actually facilitates a deeper understanding of the intricacies of the depictions involved. Nor, in these instances is there much evidence to illustrate the notion that there was a conscious and active discussion on 'the respective merits of the two media' tied into this, those involved simply did not perceive this as an issue. The metaphoric view, although arguably present in some texts such as the eighth-century *Immacallam Choluim Chille ocus ind Óglaig*, is in fact very hard to identify in Irish literature from the period up to the twelfth century once it has begun to be detached from the other issues of pagan vs. Christian, or past vs. present.[280] As has been demonstrated, the problem arising from Nagy's emphasis on the association between these differing groups of dichotomies is that they cannot be simply correlated with each other in this manner without misrepresenting aspects of the individual depictions involved, particularly so in relation to a large and complex text such as the *Acallam*.[281]

[279] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[280] Nagy equates that the failure of communication between Saint Columba and an otherworldly youth, identified as Mongán mac Fiachna, in *Immacallam Choluim Chille* as a play on this same set of issues: oral vs. written and pagan vs. Christian. Nagy, 'Oral Life and Literary Death', pp. 369-370. Johnston, however, argues that the primary issue at stake here results, again, from the latter tension rather than the former: 'Oral knowledge is imperfectly captured in a written text, not because the two modes are irreconcilable, but because, to use a cliché, knowledge is power.' Elva Johnston, '*Immacallam Choluim Chille ocus ind Óglaig*: Language and Authority in an Early-Medieval Irish Tale', in: *Clerics, Kings and Vikings*: *Essays on Medieval Ireland in Honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin*, eds. Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan and John Sheehan, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015) pp. 418-428 (p. 427).

[281] Geraldine Parsons has explored the complexities in the structure of the *Acallam*, concluding that the 'sub-tales' are often presented within the overarching 'frame-tale' as presenting contradictory or counter viewpoints in order to develop a subtle and nuanced picture of certain themes. Parsons, 'The Structure', pp. 13, 28.

Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has argued strongly for a similar interweaving of the oral and literary in Anglo-Saxon culture, emphasising the importance of memory as the unifying force: '[…] it is clear that social reliance on prestigious feats of memory is the shared territory of both oral and literate people and the arena in which they approximated one another's functions.'[282] Both orality and literacy worked together in the transmission of knowledge: 'Bringing these two together is the teaching practice of the early medieval English classroom. In its call upon the eyes, ears, and mouths of its pupils, it performed its understanding of the relation of oral and literate ways of knowing. To know a text by reading is, before all, to hold it in memory. To truly know a text one must hear it.'[283] In the case of the *Acallam,* both the oral presentation of the *fian*-stories and their subsequent literary manifestations have a common source in the memory of Caílte and Oisín. Literacy does not replace the oral, but allows it to extend its reach, both in terms of space and time. It is not clear that a medieval Irish secular man of learning or indeed Christian scholar, and it should be remembered that in the early Middle Ages these two positions were by no means exclusive, saw oral transmission as inherently associated with a pre-Christian era. In terms of the *fili*, both 'oral tradition' and 'textual tradition' went into the construction of such individuals and neither aspect appears to be entirely divisible from the other. This view certainly swings strongly towards the 'metonymic' view on Nagy's scale. His own understanding, however, is frequently intrinsically 'metaphoric' in its assumption that a dialogue over the 'respective merits of the two media' was active in medieval Irish literature, an idea that when detached from the issue of how to treat the pagan past in a Christian age become much harder to identify with any certainty, if, in the case of some of the texts discussed here, it can actually be identified at all.

[282] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Orality and Literacy: The Case of Anglo-Saxon England. In *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. by Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 121-140 (p. 134).
[283] *Ibid*., p. 137.

5.0 Textual Evidence on Memory, Authority and the *Filid*

It has become clear from the previous discussion on issues of orality and literacy in medieval Irish thought that both oral and written sources were understood as contributing to, or constituting, the stuff of memory each in their own respective ways. Modern scholars may hold concerns over the ability of the human mind to preserve a text accurately and this is certainly a concern evidenced in some of the literature of medieval Ireland. It should be remembered, however, that an equally strong concern could be, and occasionally certainly was, entertained over the fallibility of textual preservation. This chapter will continue to discuss and develop the picture of medieval Irish attitudes towards memory as they are expressed in literature. The discussion in this chapter will be directed towards two principal questions which have begun to take shape over the course of the investigation so far. Firstly: how was memory understood to function on a physical or psychological level? Secondly: what was the importance and function of memory, whether in the form of written text or oral recitation, within the medieval Irish conception of literary theory and learned authority. These two questions are closely interwoven, as will become clear. It should be stated now that where the following investigation touches upon the physical mechanics or psychology of memory it is categorically *not* conducted with any reference to modern scientific thinking on these issues. Such a discussion, aside from being beyond the author's expertise, would not be productive: how memory is shown to function in medieval Irish literature is motivated far more by concerns of literary theory than it is by objective scientific observation. Again, like the previous chapter, this discussion deals primarily with the literary output of the *filid*, although, as has been amply demonstrated, this was by no means isolated from the realm of Latinate, ecclesiastical learning in the period prior to the twelfth-century.

5.1 The Fallibility of Text

As a preamble to looking specifically at literary depictions of acts of remembering, memorising and forgetting it is worth returning to the issues posed to the memorial aspirations of medieval Irish men of learning by the potential failure of text and its ability to preserve. This is an issue which has been touched upon within the previous chapter and, again, must be considered in light of Elva Johnston's classification of medieval Irish society as 'secondary-oral.'[284] As is known from a number of literary sources, including hagiography, saga and annals, books could be lost or stolen, damaged or destroyed and were expensive, time consuming and required specialist expertise to produce.[285] The dangers experienced by physical text as described in Adomnán's *Life of Saint Columba*, particularly in the form of exposure to water, have already been mentioned.[286] The reality of these dangers has been amply confirmed by archaeological evidence. As recently as 2006 a psalter dating to the second half of the eighth century with an accompanying pig-skin bag and wrapped in a white calf hide was discovered in Faddan More Bog, Co. Tipperary, not too distant from the important monastic site of Birr.[287] The Fadden More Psalter appears, on the basis of scientific analysis of the remains of contemporary local flora, to have been deposited in a watery area within the bog not long after its creation.[288] Although the exact circumstances of deposition will remain unclear it is a real possibility that the book was lost in a manner comparable one of the incidents described in the *Life of Saint Columba*, such as the following:

> […] A young man fell off his horse in the Irish River Boyne and was drowned, lying for twenty days under water. At the time of the fall he was carrying a leather satchel of books under his arm, which he was still clutching when the body was found so many days later. When his body was brought to the bank, the satchel was opened and the pages of all the books were found to be ruined and rotten except one page, which St Columba had written out with his own hand. This was found to be dry and in no way spoilt as though it had been all along in a book case.[289]

[284] Refer to pp. 78-79 for a definition of this concept.
[285] For a discussion of the resources and skills needed to produce the early insular Gospel books cf. Leslie Alcock, *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in North Britain AD 550-850* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph Series, 2003), pp. 357-359.
[286] See above, pp. 88-91.
[287] Not a great deal of published information is yet available on this find: for a brief introduction on the circumstances of discovery cf. Anthony Read, *The Faddan More Psalter*: *Discovery, Conservation and Investigation* (Dublin: The National Museum of Ireland, 2011), pp. 17-18, 75.
[288] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[289] Adomnán, *Life of Saint Columba*, trans. and intro. by Sharpe, p. 160.

Aside from the Fadden More Psalter, several other finds have emerged from bogs and other waterlogged sites including the Springmount Bog Tablets, dated on palaeographical grounds to the early seventh century, and book bags such as the sixth or seventh-century example from Loch Glashan, Argyll.[290] This last example, however, appears to have been purposefully decommissioned rather than lost during use.[291] These finds demonstrate the fact that books travelled in the early medieval world as a necessary means, presumably, of sharing and disseminating written text, and were subjected to various perils in the process.

Aside from loss or damage during transportation, books could be equally vulnerable at home. Fire, in particular, posed a significant threat. The Annals of Ulster record numerous instances of church sites, the most important repositories of written text in early medieval Ireland, suffering damage by fire from a number of causes both natural and man-made. In the entry for the year AD 996, for example, the Annals of Ulster state that:

> *Tene di ait do ghabail Aird Macha conna farcaibh dertach na dam liac na herdamh na fidnemedh ann cen loscadh*.[292]
>
> Lightning assailed Armagh so that no prayer-house nor stone-church nor vestibule nor wooden-sanctuary was left unburnt.

Alternatively, in another incident recorded in the entry for AD 1031, human error is to blame: '*Ceall Dara do loscadh tria anfaitces drochmna*.'[293] 'Kildare burned through the negligence of an evil-woman.' Warfare was also a contributing threat with important church sites the target of military aggression in Ireland both before and during the 'Viking-Age'.[294] Despite the high frequency of burnings at monastic sites in the Annals of Ulster, the destruction of books is only mentioned in relation to two incidents in the period prior to the Anglo-Norman conquest, in the entries for the years 1095 and 1097:

> *Cenannas cona templaibh, Dermach cona lebraibh, Ard Sratha cona tempall ₇ ilcella aile archena cremáte sunt*.[295]

[290] Martin McNamara and Maurice Sheehy, 'Psalter Text and Psalter Study in the Early Irish Church (AD. 600-1200)', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 73 (1973), pp. 201-298 (pp. 213-214).
[291] Ewan Campbell, 'The archaeology of writing in the time of Adomnán,' in: *Adomnán of Iona*: *Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker*, ed. by Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), pp.139-144 (pp. 141-142).
[292] *Annals of Ulster*, ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983, repr. 2004), p. 426.
[293] *Ibid*., p. 468.
[294] Hughes, 'The Church', p. 317
[295] *Annals of Ulster*, p. 528.

> Cenannas with its churches, Dermagh with its books, Ard Sratha with its church and many other monasteries besides were burned hereupon.
>
> *Cloicthech Mainistrech cona lebraibh 7 taiscedhaibh imdhaibh do loscadh*.[296]
>
> The bell-tower of Mainistir with its books and many treasures burned.

These two entries, dating to the period in which the style of Irish annalistic writing was developing beyond its terse origins into a form more permissive of embellishment, may be a rhetorical flourish, however, they are broadly illustrative of the threat fires posed to the objects in church keeping.[297] Theft was a further possibility, as the entry for AD 1007 recording the loss and recovery of an important Gospel book thought to be the Book of Kells, demonstrates:

> *Soiscelae mor Coluim Cille do dubgait isind aidhci asind airdom iartharach i ndaim liac moir Chenannsa*; *primh-mind iarthair domain ar ai in comdaigh doendai*. *In soscela sin do foghbail dia fichit adaig ar dib misaib iar ngait de a oir 7 fot tairis*.[298]
>
> The great Gospel-Book of Saint Columba was illicitly stolen in the night from the western vestibule in the great stone church of Cenannas; [it was] the chief relic of the western world because of the finely-wrought cover. The Gospel was found twenty nights and two months after its theft without its gold with a clod of earth covering it.

This final example is certainly not a typical case as the theft of this book was seemingly undertaken for the value of the precious metals used to ornament it as opposed to its value as a text.[299] The attention given to this episode in the Annals of Ulster is no doubt due to the item's status as a *mind*, here meaning a secondary relic or personal item associated with a

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[296] *Ibid*., p. 532.

[297] It is somewhat unclear if the details of books being burned in these two incidents can be taken as representative of other, earlier incidents in which monasteries suffered damage by fire. Where books commonly lost in this way but this simply was not recorded in the Annals of Ulster due to the generally terse style of its entries? Or where these two examples recorded *because* the loss of books occurred and, therefore, they were more exceptional in nature? The sheer number of fires or burnings reported at monastic sites certainly suggests the possibility that church property, including books, was regularly subjected to circumstances in which it could be destroyed by fire. Why these two entries specifically mention the destruction of books is uncertain, however, it seems unwise to attribute it to new or otherwise exceptional historical circumstances.

[298] *Ibid*., p. 438.

[299] Hilary Richardson attributes this act to the depredations of Viking raiders. Whilst she is undoubtedly correct in stating that many books must have been lost in Viking raids, this particular example does not seem to fit into that category. The peculiar use of the term *do dubgait*, a compound of the verbal noun of *gataid*, 'steals', and the adjective *dub*, 'black/dark', to describe the act of theft suggests criminal subterfuge more than open plunder. See: *eDIL*, 'nefarious stealing,' s.v. *dub* (dil.ie/18985), although *dub* can carry a variety of meanings including an intensitive force, and evil or moral darkness as well as literal darkness or obscurity. It is possible to suggest other interpretations of the term *dubgait*, however, there is nothing in this episode, nor in its surrounding context, which directly suggests Viking involvement. Hilary Richardson, 'Visual Arts and Society', in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 680-713 (pp. 711-712).

saint, and it must be cautioned that not all books were treated with the same reverence.[300] Nevertheless, monasteries, as centres for the accumulation of wealth, clearly had the capacity to become the targets of theft and this certainly could include the theft of books.

Furthermore, once a book had been compiled or a text composed it was not necessarily fixed into a final form which placed it beyond adjustment by the men of learning themselves. Commiting memory to text, therefore, did not necessarily result in a form of static preservation. The type of emendation or addition a text could be subject to varied depending on its type and nature. On the more conservative end of the spectrum is the treatment of legal and biblical works which received additional text through extensive glossing, commentary and annotation, often in copies written solely with the aim of accommodating this material.[301] Whilst contributing new text, in the case of the legal material often in formidable quantities, and influencing the sense of the original work through the layering on of additional interpretation, these forms of addition prioritise the retention of the base textual form upon which they are built. In some instances, however, it is clear that texts were subject to more extensive re-working. The work of the hand that has come to be known as H in *Lebor na hUidre*, dubbed the 'interpolator' by the editors Bergin and Best due to his addition of several texts to the manuscript, provides an interesting case study into how significant alterations could be made to the fabric of a book, and individual texts within it, after its initial assembly. Bergin and Best most famously, however rather unfairly, characterise the work of this hand:

> [t]he intervention of **H** is throughout rude and violent. Not only single words and lines, but whole columns and pages have been erased by him, and leaves intercalated, to make way for the particular recensions he favoured. […] The membrane of many leaves has been rubbed down into holes and is exceedingly fragile in places. Even the three shorter leaves intercalated appear to have been cut down, scraped, and prepared for his purpose.[302]

Although they do admit in the midst of these unashamedly derisory remarks that: 'He set to work with great determination and, it must be said, with no small interest in the texts.'[303] H made a number of alterations to the original manuscript of *Lebor na hUidre* in several different ways. The first means by which this was achieved was through the adaptation of texts already in the manuscript in the form of interlinear glosses, marginal notations and the

[300] *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *mind, minn* (dil.ie/32297).
[301] With regard to the form of legal texts, see: Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 331-370 (pp. 331-332, 338).
[302] *Lebor na hUidre*, eds. Bergin and Best, p. xvi.
[303] *Ibid*., p. xvi.

re-writing of some text on space cleared for the purpose by the erasure of pre-existing material.[304] An example of the latter is found on p. 47b of the manuscript, where the additions to the Ulster-Cycle tale *Serglige Con Culainn* overlap into the margin due to lack of space.[305] H also added several entirely new tales to the book, including the eschatological texts *Scéla Laí Brátha* and *Scéla na Esérgi*, the Fenian tale *Fotha Catha Cnucha*, and the tales *Aided Echach meic Maíreda*, *Cath Cairnd Chonaill* and *Comthoth Lóegairi co Cretim ₇ a Aided* dealing with historical kings and mythological figures.[306] All of these acts display an attitude in no way averse to the adaption of pre-established textual memory, but how typical was this of medieval scholarly practice and what, if any, qualifying circumstances were required for such changes to be made?

Bergin and Best's rather negative characterisation of H through the physical evidence of his contribution to the manuscript has rightly been criticised by a number of subsequent authorities. To this end, much ink has been spilt attempting to (re-)define the motivation, interests and even the personality behind the nature of H's additions to *Lebor na hUidre* and it is not possible to cover the entirety of these arguments in depth here. Tomás Ó Concheanainn was inclined to emphasise H's role as a scholarly reviser, unrestrained by any notion of sentiment towards the object of his attentions:

> The reviser overhauled the manuscript in quite a drastic manner (adding to it in several ways) and left it a finished edition from his own hand. He certainly did not regard the original manuscript as an object of veneration, for it was yet no such thing, having been merely the work of two scribes who lived possibly only a short time before (or who may have been older contemporaries of his).[307]

Ó Concheanainn's discussion, however, gives little thought as to what exactly motivated H's work upon the manuscript beyond what must be assumed to be a need to provide scholarly correction based on his access to superior copies.[308] Gearóid Mac Eoin has argued that something of H's identity can be gleaned from various references which he makes in his additions hinting at an interest in material connected with the territory of the Uí Maol

[304] Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'The Reviser of Leabhar na hUidhre', *Éigse*, 15 (1973-1974), pp. 277-288 (p. 277).
[305] Elizabeth Duncan, 'The Palaeography of H in Lebor na hUidre', in: *Lebor na hUidre*: *Codex Hibernenses Eximii 1*, ed. by Ruairí Ó hUiginn (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015), pp. 29-52. (37-38).
[306] Ó Concheanainn, 'The Reviser', pp. 282-284.
[307] *Ibid*., p. 288.
[308] *Ibid*., p. 277.

Chonaire, a learned family based near the modern town of Elphin in County Roscommon.[309] Mac Eoin's approach ascribes some level of political, or perhaps more broadly, familial or genealogical motivation to H's work.[310] Ann Dooley in perhaps the most extensive investigation into H's amendments to the manuscript, although one limited solely to his work on *Lebor na hUidre*'s version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, emphasises his literary involvement with the subject material:

> First, he is an engaged and responsive reader of his master reading copy U (AM). His favourite literary activity is the creation of syllabic etymologies which often rely for their effect on the appreciation of a pun. […] Secondly, he does not avoid the challenge of poetic interludes.[311]

Dooley also argues that H was an individual aware of the social mores and political concerns of his age and was not afraid to reflect this in his treatment of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.[312] John Carey's recent discussion of H and his additions to *Lebor na hUidre* characterises him as an individual who:

> […] had a taste for antiquarian narratives knitted together from pre-existing materials, and enlivened by poetic interludes; in this respect, and in his enthusiasm for the Finn cycle, he appears to have been a man of his time. That he may indeed have thought of himself as belonging to a sort of new wave of Irish antiquarianism could explain his readiness to erase the work of his predecessors […].[313]

It is apparent from these varying contributions that the circumstances which motivated and justified H's often fairly extensive adaptation of pre-existing textual memory are, in fact, not easy to define and run the gamut from political or genealogical investment through impartial scholasticism to artistic and creative engagement.

It is worth sounding a caution here that, to echo Hildegard Tristram's warning on attempts to find a 'purpose' behind the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, there are almost as many characterisations of H as there are scholars who have written about the context of his

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[309] Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The Interpolator H in Lebor na hUidre', in: *Ulidia*: *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. by J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast: December Publications, 1994), pp. 39-46 (pp. 43-44, 46).
[310] Noting the scale of the task H undertook, Mac Eoin reasons: '[…] it is fair to assume that H went about his work with seriousness of purpose and that he was not merely a pedant who wanted to impose his own favourite versions of the tales on the readers of LU.' *Ibid*., p. 42.
[311] Ann Dooley, *Playing the Hero*: *Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 95-96.
[312] *Ibid*., pp. 76-77, 98.
[313] John Carey, 'H and his World', in: *Lebor na hUidre*: *Codex Hibernenses Eximii 1*, ed. by Ruairí Ó hUiginn (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015), pp. 101-114 (p. 113).

additions to *Lebor na hUidre*.[314] All are relevant to how his treatment of the original manuscript is to be understood and, importantly, contextualised in terms of the scholarly treatment of pre-existing texts in the middle-ages. Yet all these discussions fold back onto the premise established by Bergin and Best that his work on the text can best be explained by some defining feature of his character or interests, and that it is these which will elucidate the circumstances in which he felt justified in modifying pre-existing textual memory. These types of approach inevitably run into the block that attempts to define these interests are somewhat subjective and vary based on the values the modern scholar chooses to emphasise. By viewing his contributions through the lens of such analyses scholars run the risk of creating more individuals out of H than may have ever existed historically.[315] Elizabeth Duncan, in an interesting turn to this discussion, has argued on palaeographical grounds that the work attributed to H was not the work of one single hand at all, and that H may in fact represent no less than six individual hands at work.[316] This raises the possibility that the changes made by H may not result from any special interest on one individual's behalf at all and are perhaps indicative of medieval scholars' attitudes towards textual amendment more broadly. Nevertheless, Duncan remains undecided as to: 'whether one can think of a group of scribes representing H who collaborated on LU, or whether different scribes stepped in here and there over a period of time […], a mixture of the two seems possible.'[317] As the material removed by H in order to make way for his additions is currently inaccessible, it is not possible to make any clear assessment of his editorial processes aside from the fact that he was comfortable making fairly substantial interventions upon the original manuscript including the removal and re-writing of parts of its original content.

Memory preserved in the pages of a written text was not, therefore, guaranteed preservation as books faced a variety of physical dangers including loss, damage and destruction. Nor, somewhat paradoxically due to the investments in time and material required for book production, was it immune from emendation, revision and in some cases, as the work of H in *Lebor na hUidre* implies, criticisms of inadequacy. It would be surprising,

[314] 'There are as many purposes to *Táin Bó Cúailnge* as there are *Táin* scholars and their respective cognitive interests.' Hildegard L. C. Tristram, 'What is the Purpose of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*?', in: *Ulidia*: *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. by J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast: December Publications, 1994), pp. 11-21 (p. 21).
[315] Carey's broad view of H's activities are undoubtedly safer in this respect but even this approach necessitates making a judgment on what *specifically* H's 'main interests' were with regard the texts he chose to add to *Lebor na hUidre*. *Ibid*., pp. 101, 112.
[316] Duncan, 'The Palaeography of H,' pp. 29, 44-45.
[317] *Ibid*., p. 49.

therefore, if some reflection of this did not appear in the literature itself and find some echo in medieval Irish concepts of memory and its preservation. The concerns over textual loss expressed in the *Life of Saint Columba* have already been discussed, however, a further example, and one which allows the discussion to bridge the gap between literary depiction and literary theory, is found in the tale *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge, On the Finding of Táin Bó Cúailnge*. This tale is a preamble to the *Táin* proper and describes, briefly, how full knowledge of the *Táin* was restored to the poets of Ireland after it had become lost and fragmented. Several different versions of this tale survive, two of which are of primary importance to the discussion here. These are the versions classified by James Carney as A.1., found in the *Book of Leinster*, and A.2., from Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS D IV 2.[318] Each of these two versions present a slightly different account of the recovery of the *Táin* and each refers to the narrative of the other as an alternative telling of the tale. The main differences between these versions lie, as shall be shown, at the beginning of the tale in how the need for the *Táin*'s recovery is presented and contextualised. Both versions conclude with the recovery of the full *Táin* from the ghost of the Ulster hero Fergus mac Róich at the site of his grave. Version A.1. has been dated by Kevin Murray to the Old Irish period on linguistic grounds and, he argues, the composition of the tale is best understood in context of a ninth-century date:

> Though the omission of *Do F*[*h*]*allsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* from the medieval tale-lists might seem to indicate a date of composition *c*.1000 or later, this does not accord with the linguistic evidence. Apart from a light veneer of Middle Irish, the language of the narrative is Old Irish. […] It seems probable that the composition of the *Finding of the Táin* should be dated to the late Old Irish period (that is, to the ninth century). […] This dating would accord well with the standard position (first proposed by Thurneysen) that Recension I of the *Táin* 'was a conflation of two parallel 9th-century versions of the whole tale, now lost'—that a text purporting to record the rediscovery of the *Táin* should date to the same period as the writing down of 'complete versions of the story would be entirely consistent.'[319]

[318] James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), pp. 166-168. Carney's terminology regarding the classification of these tales is adopted here for the sake of convenience. Version A.1. has received a fairly recent edition and translation by Kevin Murray, however, its usefulness is somewhat compromised by its having been undertaken in isolation from other versions of the tale: Kevin Murray, 'The Finding of the *Táin*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 41 (2001), pp. 17-23. Version A.2. lacks a modern critical edition but can be found in: Kuno Meyer and Whitley Stokes, eds., *Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie*, 3 vols (London: David Nutt, 1900-1907), III (1907) pp. 4-6.

[319] Murray, 'The Finding', pp. 18-19. For the internally quoted passage cf. *Táin Bó Cuailnge*: *Recension I*, ed. by Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), p. ix.

Version A.2. has, unfortunately, not received the same critical attention as version A.1. and so a firm date is much harder to propose. Carney implies the existence of A.2. in the Old Irish period, however, he refrains from making any direct assessment based on the language of the text which appears, from cursory observation, more firmly Middle Irish in its makeup than A.1.[320] Furthermore, as Carney notes, A.2. seems to imply the existence of a more extensive version of A.1. than now exists.[321] It is currently unclear which of the two versions, if either, pre-dates the other.

Both versions of the tale open with the same premise, namely, a crisis arising due to the inability of the poets of Ireland to recount the *Táin* in its entirety:

> (A.1.) *Con-comgartha trá filid hÉrend do S*[*h*]*enchán Torpéist dús in ba mebor leo Táin Bó Cúailnge inna ógi ₇ as-bertatar nád fetar di ach bloga nammá. As-bert iarum Senchán ria daltu dús cia díb no ragad ara bennacht i tíre Letha do f*[*h*]*oglaim na Tána berta in suí sair dar éis in chulmeinn*.[322]
>
> The poets of Ireland were summoned together by Senchán Torpéist to find out if they remembered *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in its entirety and they said that they knew it not but in pieces only. Thereupon, Senchán asked his students to find out who of them would go for his blessing to the Continent to learn the *Táin* the sage took eastwards in exchange for the *cuilmen*.

> (A.2.) *Do Faillsiugud Tána Bó Cuailngni in remscél sa sís, iarsinní dia raibi etarport isna dáinib móraib robátar i nÉrinn; ar nír'-mair don Tháin acht blogha dí namá robói ac cách co coitcenn*.
>
> *Is hé tra fotha dia raibe in scél sa .i. Gúairi Aidhni mac Colmáin .i. ríg Connacht ₇ Senchán Torpéist rob airdfili Érenn in tan sin. Is ann sin rothotlaigh Gúairi for Senchán .i. Táin Bó Cúailnge do faisnéis. Is éiside dano forcaemnacair la Meidb ₇ Ailill ₇ fri hUltu im Concobar. Is becc nár'díbaidh uili a Hérinn in scél sin, co ná raibi acht mádh foraithmed bec ₇ mod cuimne dí i nÉrinn in tan sin.*
>
> *Atbert Senchán fri Gúairi .i. eadh ₇ cairde do lécud dó fri hiaraidh in scéoil sin. 'Rodbia-su ón,' ar Gúairi. Is ed tra forúair dó-sum cuingid d' iarraidh in scéoil sin, dáig ní búi aici-sim féin in scél sin .i. do ceist ₇ do ances for Senchán in scél sin ₇ dia aimsiugud. ₇ bo geis dono don f*[*h*]*ilidh isin aimsir sin anfis do beith fair*.

[320] Carney, *Studies*, pp. 165, 187-188. One obvious Middle Irish form found in the text is the use of the independent 3rd pl. pronoun *iat* (p. 5, l. 28).
[321] *Ibid*., p. 168 (see footnotes).
[322] Murray, 'The Finding', p. 21.

Is ann sin tra roforcongradh ó S[*h*]*enchán for filedaibh Érenn torachtain chuige, gurraf*[*h*]*iarfaigh dóib inar'meabor léo Táin Bó Cúilngi ina hóige imlán. Adrubradar uile na filid nárbo mebhor acht mádh tirúarsi 7 blogha beca dhí.*[323]

The fore-tale *On the Finding of the Táin Bó Cúailnge* is given here below, for [it is] as if it were a portent among the great peoples who were in Ireland;[324] for the *Táin* did not survive excepting only pieces of it everyone held in common.

This, moreover, is the cause from which was this story came to be, namely Gúaire the Aged son of Colmán, that is the king of Connacht, and Senchán Torpéist who was chief-poet of Ireland in that time. Thereupon Gúaire made a request of Senchán, namely to narrate *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. This [event] was brought about by Medb and Ailill against the Ultermen and Conchobor. Little of that tale had not died out entirely in Ireland, so there was naught but only little recollection and a limit of memory of it in Ireland in that time.

Senchán spoke to Gúaire, that is [he requested] an interval and respite from reading to him in order to seek out that tale. 'You shall have that,' said Gúaire. This, moreover, is what it had caused to him: [a desire] to seek out and discover that tale, since he himself did have that tale, because that tale was a problem and a doubt for Senchán and testing him. And it was taboo, moreover, for a poet in that time to suffer a lack of knowledge.

Thereupon, Senchán commanded the poets of Ireland to attend him, so that he might ask of them if they had memory of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in its complete entirety. All the poets said they had no memory of it except only remnants and small pieces.

It is immediately clear that he narrative exposition of A.2. is far more extensive and detailed than that of A.1., and this is true of the text as a whole. Whereas A.1. implies that the reason for seeking out the *Táin* originated with a fairly impromptu initiative on Senchán's behalf, A.2. recasts Senchán's character at a fundamental level. The need to relearn the tale is given a much more pressing sense of urgency by moving the context of the *filid*'s failure of knowledge into the public sphere through having a king, Gúaire son of Colmán, request the tale be recounted to him. Senchán and the *filid* are, therefore, not failing to preserve knowledge in some abstract and introspective sense but in their fundamental societal duty as keepers and transmitters of tradition for the rest of society as a whole. The text of A.2. makes this clear by introducing the notion that this failure represents a *geis*, taboo, for both the *filid*

[323] Meyer and Stokes, *Celtische Lexikographie*, III p. 4.
[324] The precise meaning of this phrase is somewhat obscure but seems to hinge around the notion that *Do Faillsiugud Tána Bó Cuailngni* is to be seen as constituting an *etarport* for the people of Ireland. *Etarport* is a highly uncommon word and seems to imply some sort of miraculous or magical occurrence embodied with symbolic meaning. *Sanas Cormaic* glosses this term: '*etarbort nomen* [*do*] *seón lasna druide*,' '*etarport*: the name of a sign used by the druids.' See: *eDIL*, s.v. 2 *etarport* (dil.ie/20735).

as an institution and Senchán specifically.[325] This crisis is precipitated by the realisation that the *filid* can only remember fragments (*bloga*) of the tale and not a complete version. A.2., in addition to this, notes that the pieces that had been remembered were done so because they were held as common knowledge (*co coitcenn*).[326] The implication seems to be that these were some of the more memorable or widely known episodes within the *Táin* and were retained as excerpts isolated from the narrative whole.

Why, however, had this situation come about? What caused the *filid* to loose memory of the whole of the *Táin* resulting in its present fragmentary state? This is a slightly harder issue to get to grips with. The more hostile attitude that the text of A.2. takes towards the *filid* and Senchán, as has begun to become apparent, perhaps suggests a simple act of collective negligence towards the tale. Apathy towards the subject matter does, however, seem a highly unlikely explanation given the sheer volume of Ulster Cycle material surviving from medieval Ireland. Indeed, that the *Táin* was remembered, albeit in fragmentary form, is a central premise of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*. Returning to the use of *co coitcenn* in A.2., it may be implied by this phrase that the *filid* were responding to audience tastes, or became complacent in their practice, by limiting their engagement with the *Táin* to those parts in most popular demand.[327] The comment made in A.1., however, that *Táin* was exchanged for a copy of the *cuilmen*, the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, reintroduces the issue of textual fallibility, as well as that of the relationship between orality and literacy in medieval Irish literary theory. A.2., describing the narrative of A.1. (or a very similar version of that narrative), provides some more details on this exchange:

> (A.2.) *Atberat araile dono comadh iat a daltadha doberta ar amus Sencháin dús cia dhíb noraghadh ar bennachtain a tírib Leatha do foglaim na Tána rucc in sái rómánach á hArdmacha*

[325] A *geis* is a specific form of taboo or prohibition often featured to dramatic effect in medieval Irish saga literature, the violation of which usually heralds dire consequences for the individual to whom the *geis* is applied. See: *eDIL* s.v. geis (dil.ie/25555)

[326] 'The idea that underlies *coitcheann* is the sharing of a thing with another (or others) […].' T. F. O'Rahilly, 'Notes, Mainly Etymological', *Ériu*, 13 (1942), pp. 144-219 (p. 158).

[327] This observation on behalf of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* version A.2. potentially offers some insight into how the *Táin* would have been performed in the middle ages if, as suggested above, the use of the term *bloga* can be taken to apply to the individual 'episodes', or groups thereof, which make up the tale's whole. It is possible this shows that performers 'dipped into' the tale, recounting particular episodes and sections as and when they or their audience liked, rather than always working through the tale following chronological progression. In this light the insertion of variant narratives into the *Lebor na hUidre* copy of the *Táin* by H that break the natural flow of events, criticised by some authors, may not be so inappropriate or problematic. *Táin Bó Cuailnge*: *Recension I*, pp. xii-xv.

> *dar cend in cuilmin. Is ann sin ro aem Muirghein mac Sencháin do thecht tairis dar cend bennachtan Sencháin*.[328]
>
> Others say, however, that it was his pupils Senchán brought before him in order to see which of them would go for a blessing to the Continent to learn the *Táin* the Roman sage took from Armagh in exchange for the *cuilmen*. Thereupon, indeed, Murgen son of Senchán went over in exchange for Senchán's blessing.

Here two additional pieces of information are provided. First: that the mysterious sage (*suí*) was a 'Roman,' whatever exactly is meant by this, and secondly: that the *Táin* was in residence at Armagh at the time of the exchange.[329]

Before going further, it must be noted that the pre-existing now lost copy of the *Táin* referred to in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* must be envisaged as a written text. This is necessary for the idea of the complete copy passing out of Ireland in an exchange of books to work. Returning to the issue of this tale's conceptualisation of the failure of memory on behalf of the *filid*, the fact that A.1. links their loss of access to a *written* copy to this failure has important implications for the place of memory in medieval Irish literary theories of transmission and authority. Have the *filid* become over-reliant on text and negligent in maintaining their own memory of the tale? This is, indeed, how Nagy reads this version of the tale:

> Hence, at least from the perspective of afforded us by this twist to the story, the poets clearly are the nouveau intelligentsia, the literati of early Christian Ireland, or they have revamped themselves and their profession so thoroughly that they have become, as the story shows, hopelessly and helplessly "modern." The challenge to recollect the *Táin*, then, is not a contemporary questioning of the authority of traditional poets and other men of art corrupted by their status but an attempt to get them back to their roots, unwritten and based in the living context of performance.[330]

Nagy's is a valid and convincing reading of A.1., and makes partial sense of the peculiarity that although Senchán's proxies in the task of retrieval, Émíne úa Ninéne and Murgen mac

[328] Meyer and Stokes, *Celtische Lexikographie*, III p. 5.
[329] As Murray notes, *tíre Letha* can refer to specifically to Brittany ('Armorica') or a concept of 'Latium' more widely. Murray, 'The Finding', p. 23. I have chosen to use the unspecific, and rather more neutral term 'the Continent' here. It is unclear exactly what to take from the use of term *rómánach* ('Roman') in A.2. in this context as a variety of options present themselves. It is possible that Roman in the strictest sense as 'an individual from Rome' is meant here (see: *eDIL* s.v. *letha* (dil.ie/30037), however, another—and in my opinion the most likely—interpretation is to view it as denoting an individual from within the orbit of the Roman Church. Tomás Ó Máille demonstrates that the *Etymologies* of Isidore were likely transmitted to Ireland around the middle of the seventh century, around twenty to thirty years after its completion. Tomás Ó Máille, 'The Authorship of the Culmen,' *Ériu* 9 (1921/1923), pp. 71-76 (pp. 75-76).
[330] Nagy, *Angels and Ancients*, p. 309.

Sencháin, are apparently dispatched on instruction to retrieve the written copy taken overseas, they immediately and without any comment or setup on behalf of the narrative arrive at Fergus' grave where Murgen decides to commune with his spirit.[331] The original written copy is never actually retrieved. What, then, is the significance of the mention in A.2. of Armagh as the place at which this text was kept? Armagh, as a highly important church site, the self-professed home of the cult of Saint Patrick and located within Ulster not far from the ancient earthworks of Navan Fort (the Ulster Cycle's Emain Machae, home to Conchobor's court and the site of much dramatic action within this body of literature), might seem the natural place to find a written copy of the *Táin*.[332] Following Nagy's reading, there may be a comment embedded in this observation: have the *filid* become too closely aligned with the type of book-based learning associated with the monastic centres? There are, however, problems in Nagy's interpretation. If the aim of A.1. is to advocate the re-engagement of the *filid* with their oral roots, why is this not Senchán's stated goal, why the sudden and unremarked switch from retrieval through obtaining written text to retrieval through Fergus' oral recitation? A solution is to view the *filid*'s incomplete memory and the loss of the written copy as synonymous of a general decline in knowledge of the *Táin* rather than necessarily causally linked. Indeed, the latter option is never overtly stated in the text of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* itself. In this context memory preserved in text and memory recounted from an oral source gain equal force and validity. The abandoning of the original initiative of book retrieval is consequently less jarring as a course correction: Fergus' words simply invalidate the need to return to a written copy at all as they, in essence, *are* this text. The addition made by A.2.'s synopsis of A.1. appears, in this context, to be more a comment on the shifting interests of Irish intellectual culture as a whole, towards the more international Christian and European trends, than critical of the influence of Church-style book learning on the oral roots of the *filid*.

Whilst version A.1. of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* may not be openly supportive of the *filid*, rather taking a more neutral or ambivalent stance towards them, the narrative of A.2. borders on the overtly hostile. As has already been seen, A.2. emphasises that the loss of the *Táin* represents a failure of the poet's duty by reframing the issue in a social context. This version also expands upon the method by which Senchán enables the retrieval of the

[331] Murray, 'The Finding', pp. 21-23.
[332] Koch, *Celtic Culture*, p. 80.

complete *Táin* from Fergus, contrasting sharply with the more spontaneous picture given in A.1.:

(A.2.) *Is ann sin didu dorónadh tech la Gúairi do Senchán ótá Durlus nGúaire co Clúain Ferta Brénaind ⁊ Senchán i medón in tighi sin, co ná rísadh gemlóichet hé ná gaeth ná fleochud. In uair tra nobenadh bainne don gemlóichet dar a aighid, nothócbadh builcc chorcra fair. Rosoich Senchán iar sin co Clúain Ferta ⁊ fúabrais troscud fa chétóir for Brénaind .i. glámadh digcenn ⁊ aera do dhénum dó, co túarcaibh Brénaind cenn in oidhchi sin dí araile céili Dé bói isin baile* (*ar nír'mhair Brénaind in inbhuidh sin*) *⁊ atbert Brénaind*: '*Abair fri Senchán*,' *ar sé*, '*coisced a ghlámadh ⁊ a aerad, ⁊ in eitchi connaigh, ní sunn atá dhó, acht a Clúain mic Nois ⁊ la Cíarán mac in tsáir ⁊ tabred hé budhéin ⁊ a clann ⁊ a cinél co bráth do Chiarán*.' *Atbert in céle Dé fri Sencán inní sin*.

Dothaet Senchán roime co Clúain mic Nois ⁊ fúabrais iar sin ic troscadh for Ciarán fon samla cétna. Is ann sin tra rofaillsighed Cíarán di araile anmcharait bói isin baile ⁊ itbert fris: '*Éirgidh Senchán co fert Fergusa mic Róigh fil ic Findloch i Connachta ⁊ geibedh láidh dó amail nobeith béo ar a chind, co raf*[*h*]*aisneide do scélaib na Tána dhó amail dorónadh ó thús co deredh. Ar robói Fergus féin isin gliaid sin ⁊ atát a scéla do léir aigi ⁊ abradh fris co ná tardad gráin ná hirf*[*h*]*úath leis ina dochum, acht amail nothísadh do dháil nó aenach*.'

Atbert in t-anmchara fri Senchán feib atbert Cíarán fris, conadh ann sin ro idbair Senchán é fein do Chiarán ⁊ a s[*h*]*íl ⁊ a s*[*h*]*éimedh dia éis. Conid de sin itbert Senchán Ciaráin fris*.[333]

Thereupon, moreover, a [covered] structure was built by Gúaire for Senchán from Gúaire's Daurlus (Oak-Enclosure) to Clonfert of Saint Brendan and Senchán [was] in the middle of that structure, so that no winter-lightning nor wind nor rain reached him. When, however, drops of the winter-lightning struck past him, it would raise up red lumps upon him. Senchán afterwards reached Clonfert and set about fasting against Saint Brendan straight away, namely preforming extreme reviling and satirising against him, so that Brendan in the middle of that night appeared to a certain monk [lit. client of God] who was in the settlement (for Brendan was no longer alive at that time) and Brendan said: 'Tell Senchán,' he said, 'to desist [from] his reviling and satirising, and the boon he demands, it is not here for him [to find], but from Clonmacnoise and Ciarán son of the joiner and let he himself and [all] his offspring and his kindred until judgment day attend upon Ciarán.' The monk told this to Senchán.

Senchán went onwards to Clonmacnoise and afterwards set about fasting against Ciarán in like manner. Thereupon, moreover, Ciarán revealed himself to a certain confessor who was in the settlement and said to him: 'Send Senchán to the grave of Fergus mac Róich which is at Findloch in Connacht and to deliver a verse to him as though he was alive before him, and he will recount the stories of the *Táin* to him from beginning to end as they were made. For Fergus himself was in

[333] Meyer and Stokes, *Celtische Lexikographie*, III pp. 4-5.

that conflict and he knows his stories diligently and he is to speak to him so that he may approach towards him without terror and dread, but like he comes to a gathering or a fair.'

The confessor spoke to Senchán just as Ciarán spoke to him, it was thus then that Senchán dedicated himself and his seed and descendants after him to Ciarán. Thus from that Senchán called Ciarán[']s aid] to him.

In this account Senchán is forced to win his resolution through the acquiescence of Saints Brendan and Ciarán, both of whom are of '*Síl Fergusa*,' 'the Seed of Fergus,' according to A.1.[334] His position in this context is presented as much less autonomous and subservient to the will of the saints and, by extension, God. This version of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* sits more directly alongside other tales in which a saintly authority, standing as a metaphoric representation of the larger church, mediates over the transmission of knowledge from a pagan, heroic (or otherwise 'past') context to a more contemporary ('present') Christian one.[335] Senchán's character is, overall, not presented in a very flattering light and this seems consequentially linked with the concept of him having violated his *geis*. The unusual description of him being scourged by lighting on his journey to Clonfert, in spite of the protection offered by Guaire's purpose built construction, certainly suggests some form of supernatural retribution. Physical blemishment, being in some way representative or a direct side-effect of a loss of personal honour, was a serious concern in early medieval Ireland and, interestingly, was one of the malign effects attributed to the act of poetic satire.[336] Senchán's own disfigurement by lightning strike prefigures and pre-empts the acts of '*glámadh digcenn ₇ aera*,' 'extreme reviling and satirising,' he is about to perform as part of his '*troscud*,' 'fast,' against the saints.[337]

If the A.2. narrative of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* can be read as a comment on the relationship between church and *filid* in the transmission and mediation of accounts of the past, in a manner similar to that proposed by Elva Johnston for the similar Middle-Irish tale

[334] Murray, 'The Finding', pp. 22-23.
[335] Other tales in this vein include, amongst others: *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* (discussed below, pp. 156-162), *Siaburcharpat Con Culaind*, *Immacallam Choluim Chille ₇ ind Óglaig*, *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill* and, of course, *Acallam na Senórach*. The tone these tales take towards such acts of memory transmission vary, with *Siaburcharpat Con Culaind* and *Immacallam Choluim Chille ₇ ind Óglaig* taking the most critical stance and advocating the most intervention. Cf. Elva Johnston, 'The Salvation of the Individual and the Salvation of Society in *Siaburcharpat Con Culaind*,' in: Joseph Falaky Nagy, ed., *The Individual in Celtic Literatures*: *CSANA Yearbook 1* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 109-125 (pp. 116-117). Johnston, '*Immacallam Choluim Chille ₇ ind Óglaig*,' pp. 427-428. As has been argued above (see pp. 92-102), *Acallam na Senórach* holds a fairly benevolent and relaxed attitude, as does *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* and *Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill*. For the latter cf. John Carey, 'Scél Tuáin Meic Chairill,' *Ériu*, 35 (1984), pp. 93-111 (p. 97).
[336] Roisin McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2008), pp. 1, 4-5.
[337] Meyer and Stokes, *Celtische Lexikographie*, III p. 4. A *troscad* is a legal procedure of fasting against someone with the intent of securing a favour in acquiescence. See: *eDIL*., s.v. troscad (dil.ie/42058).

Siaburcharpat Con Culaind, it is not entirely clear what conclusions exactly are being made here.[338] Indeed, they seem to be mixed. Senchán, particularly in his aggressive behaviour towards the church and violation of his *geis*, is certainly not shown in a particularly admirable light.[339] Roisin McLaughlin notes the form of satire termed *glám dícenn*, one of the two named as being employed by Senchán in A.2., was seen as a very severe, even evil, act with the power to potentially kill the recipient.[340] In a short tale inserted into the early Irish glossary *Sanas Cormaic*, describing the disastrous consequences of a satire composed by Néide mac Adnae upon his uncle Caíer mac Guthái̇r, king of Connacht, *glám dícenn* has the power to raise three blisters on the unfortunate king's cheek.[341] If such an effect was commonly ascribed to this kind of satire it is likely that Senchán's blemishment is directly linked to its use against the saints. Whether this represents a pre-emptive strike on behalf of the saints or a retributive act by Senchán is unclear. Yet despite this rough start he is ultimately successful in winning back knowledge of the *Táin* and reconciles not only himself, but his family and future descendants as well, with the foundation of Clonmacnoise. It is perhaps safest to say that although A.2. does ultimately allow this retrieval of knowledge to take place, it does so on very guarded terms and certainly advocates the need for saintly or church involvement in the process. Overall both the versions of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* discussed here, in spite of some significant differences on the issue of how the retrieval of knowledge is conceptualised and authorised, emphasise some important points on the place of memory in medieval Irish literary theory. Personal memory, as is clear from the fact that retrieval of the *Táin* is required in the first place, is subject to degradation and confusion, however, textual memory as constituted by written accounts of the past are seen as equally vulnerable. Individual memory, particularly that of a direct eye-witness to the events concerned, is capable of representing and, therefore, superseding a pre-existing written account: a point made most clearly in A.1., although perhaps implicit in A.2. as well. There does not seem to be any conception of irony or paradox in the depiction of memory in both

[338] Johnston, 'The Salvation,' pp. 116-117.
[339] There is certainly precedence for this view. Paul Russell notes the critical portrayal of Senchán in the tale of how he gained his epithet *Torpéist*, resulting from an encounter with the spirit of poetry in the form of a monster (see below, pp. 132-134), recorded in *Sanas Cormaic*. Russell seems inclined to ascribe this instance to a hostility against poets in general, however, the fact that Senchán is singled out by name, even if he is acting as a representative or an embodiment of the poets as a class, suggests that his persona was commonly a butt for such criticisms. See: Paul Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possessions in Medieval Ireland: Some Stories from *Sanas Cormaic*,' in: Joseph F. Eska, ed., *Law Literature and Society*: *CSANA Yearbook 7* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), pp. 9-45 (pp. 20-21).
[340] *Aer*, at least in the Old Irish tract describing the divisions of satire ('*Cis lir fodlai aíre*?'), seems to be the general or 'catch-all' term for satire containing within it specific categories of which *glám dícenn* is one. McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire*, pp. 52-53, 82-84.
[341] Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possessions,' p. 34.

versions as, at the same time, failing and fallible and also the best means of retrieving lost knowledge, even if this has to be effected either magically or miraculously.

Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge presumably leads us to understand that it is Fergus' account that should be seen as underlying the versions of the *Táin* being committed to writing in Ireland from sometime in the ninth century onwards. This conclusion is, indeed, implicit in Murray's understanding of the context in which *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* was first composed.[342] In order to convince the medieval reader that the material constituting the written *Táin* was authoritative, this process of transmission must have been believable, or otherwise acceptable if it is not to be taken *too* literally. In both versions, therefore, personal memory is advocated as a source for textual memory and can provide content, meaning and authority for the latter. Although A.2. avoids the notion of a pre-existing written copy of the *Táin*, and therefore does not openly collate textual memory and personal memory in the same manner as A.1., the process of transmission is, nevertheless, presented as complete with Senchán hearing the tale recounted by Fergus. The resulting written accounts must, therefore, in some way be synonymous with this performance, if not literally then in meaning and intention. This overall lack of awareness for a hard distinction between textual memory and personal memory recalls the activities of H in *Lebor na hUidre*. Textual memory, in so far as such a concept can be at all distinguished as a distinct category of memory theory in medieval Irish thought, does not entail stasis. Both H's reworking of a pre-established text, whatever the motivating factor or qualifying circumstances which lie behind them might be, and *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* demonstrate that the keeping of memory is an ongoing, active process which does not begin or end with its recording in text or inclusion in a book. Indeed, the underlying attitudes expressed here accord with how Mary Carruthers describes the book as an ancillary component of memory in medieval culture more widely:

> A work is not truly read until one has made it part of oneself – that process constitutes a necessary stage of its textualisation. Merely running one's eyes over the written pages is not reading at all, for the writing must be transferred into memory, from graphemes on parchment or papyrus or paper to images written in one's brain by emotion and sense.[343]

It is worth stating clearly here that the major concern expressed in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* with regards to the quality of memory, textual or personal, has more to do with completeness over strict, objective accuracy. The power of Fergus' memory is to enable a

[342] See above, p. 111.
[343] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 11.

recovery of the tale '*ó thús co deired*,' 'from beginning to end.' [344] This is the main objective Senchán's mission sets out to achieve, and does indeed achieve in the end.

[344] Meyer and Stokes, *Celtische Lexikographie*, III, p. 5.

5.2 Cenn Fáelad's Unusual Headwound

One collection of sources of central importance to any study of memory in medieval Ireland are those texts which tell the story of the scholar Cenn Fáelad and the unusual consequences of his suffering a head injury during the Battle of Moira.[345] It is hard to overstate the significance of these sources to this investigation as they deal with ideas of memory both directly and openly. This is, as has become apparent, a rarity in a literature that leaves so much detail surrounding the importance of memory in learned culture either unstated or implied through subtext and context. The stories surrounding Cenn Fáelad have been much discussed already in terms their portrayal of memory, particularly in respect of its importance as a source of scholarly authority amongst the learned classes of pre-Norman Ireland and its place in their overall concept of literary theory. In addition to this, there is one other key topic that this set of sources shines light upon with regards the theory of memory, namely: how memory was understood to function on a physical and psychological level. This latter point is one that has not been fully explored in relation to the Cenn Fáelad sources and is a rare gateway into a subject concerning which almost no other literature survives from medieval Ireland. The following discussion of the significance of Cenn Fáelad to medieval Irish memory studies consequently covers a number of topics that branch off in various different directions and do not necessarily provide for an easy or cohesive progression of themes. It is, unfortunately, necessary to break from the established flow at some point in order to accommodate discussion of the psychology of memory. As such this topic will be dealt with first and discussion of the relationship between memory, authority and literary theory in medieval Ireland, which have begun to be developed in the previous section, will be resumed subsequently. Before approaching this topic, however, it is pertinent to provide a summary of the material relating to the story of Cenn Fáelad's injury and its unusual effect upon his memory.

[345] The Battle of Moira (*Mag Roth*) was a highly significant political event fought in AD. 637 between Domnall mac Áedo, king of the northern Uí Néill, and an alliance of the king of the Ulaid, Congal Clóen, with Domnall Brecc, king of Dál Riata. This event marked a sharp downturn in the political ambitions of the Ulaid and '[…] established the effective supremacy of the Uí Néill in the north […].' Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800,' in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I*: *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 182-234 (p. 218). The Battle of Moira is also significant for its subsequent development in later literature and the remarkable events which came to be associated with it. Besides the unusual incident with Cenn Fáelad, the battle is most notable for being the event in which the widely known madman Suibne Geilt lost his mind and began his period of peripatetic madness, as told in the Middle Irish tale *Buile Shuibne*. John Koch, ed., *Celtic Culture*: *A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), pp. 1239-1240, 1634.

There are three principal versions of the tale describing Cenn Fáelad's head injury: the first is found in preface of a law tract on criminal offence entitled *Bretha Étgid*, the second in the preface to the grammatical text *Auraicept na n-Éces*, and the third in the historical saga *Cath Muighe Rath*. For the sake of convenience and ease of comparison all these versions shall be reproduced here. The law tract *Bretha Étgid*, *Judgments on Offence*, contains a prologue, a later addition to the original text, detailing the circumstances surrounding its creation. The attribution of this text to Cenn Fáelad is the second of two possible authorships detailed in the prologue. The first ascribes the tract to Cormac father of Cairbre Lifechair and details, in a much longer account than that dedicated to Cenn Fáelad and the battle of Mag Rath, how the creation of the work resulted from the fallout of an abduction committed by Cormac's son Cellach.[346] Although the content of the first ascription seems more appropriate to the nature of the tract as a whole, it is unclear in what order these two prologues came to be associated with this text. Cenn Fáelad's ascription follows the first immediately and with little direct introduction, however, suggesting a secondary or supplementary position. The version of *Bretha Étgid* used here is that reproduced by Binchy from Royal Irish Academy, Dublin Manuscript E 3.5, part of the *Yellow Book of Lecan*:

> *Mad iar Cind Faelad im, loc do Daire Lurain, ₇ aimser do Domnaill meic Aedha meic Ainmire, ₇ persa do Cinn Faelad, ₇ tucait a denma a incind dermait do buain a Cind Faelad iarna scoltad a cath Maigi Raith. Teora buada in catha-sin*: *maidm ar Congal Claen ina anfir re Domnall ina firinne, ₇ Suibne Geilt do dul ar geltacht, ₇ a incinn dermait do buain a cind Cind Faelad*; *can ed-sin is buaid ann Suibni do dul ar geltacht, s ar facaib do scelaib ₇ do laidib dia eis i nEirind*; ₇ *nocan ed is buaid a incind dermait do buain a cinn Cinn Failad s a neoch rofacaib do deghsairi lebarda dara heis i nEirind*; *co rucad he da leiges co teg Bricin Drecain, ₇ tri scola dobi isin baile, scol leigind ₇ scol feinechais ₇ scol filed*; ₇ *cach na docluined-som da mistisi na tri scol cach lae dobid do glain mebru aice cach naidche, ₇ docuir-sium glonsnaithi filed fuithib ₇ do scrib-sum iat a lecaib ₇ i taiblib ₇ rocuired-seic i cairt liubair*.[347]
>
> If it accords to Cenn Fáelad, however, the place [was] Daire Lurain, and the time that of Domnall son of Aed son of Ainmire, and the person Cenn Fáelad, and the cause of its creation his brain of forgetting being cut out of Cenn Fáelad after his wounding in the battle of Mag Rath. The three triumphs of that battle: the defeat of Congal Claen in his untruth before Domnall in his righteousness, and Suibne the Wild going into frenzy, and his brain of forgetting being struck out of Cenn Fáelad's head. How is it that it is a triumph in Suibne going into frenzy? It is on account of what stories and poems he left behind him in Ireland; and how is it that his brain of forgetting

[346] *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. by D.A. Binchy, 7 vols. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), I p. 250.
[347] *Ibid.*, I pp. 250-251.

being struck out of Cenn Fáelad is a triumph? It is from all that he left behind him in Ireland of well-crafted books; and he took his healing at the house of Bricin of Drecain, and three schools were in the town, a school of reading and a school of law and a school of poetics; and all of what he heard of the fruits of the three schools each day used to be in his clear memory each night, and he put into them a poetic arrangement and he wrote them in inscriptions and in tablets and he put them into parchment-books.

Auraicept na n-Éces, *The Scholar's Primer*, is a grammatical tract for the instruction of poets dealing with the basic components and construction of language, as well as more complex topics such as the correct forms of meter and verse.[348] The story of Cenn Fáelad's brain injury is included as a prologue to the *Auraicept* explaining the circumstances of its creation.[349] The text tells us that Cenn Fáelad was responsible for composing the final book of the *Auraicept* as a result of the exceptional learning gained from losing his *inchinn dermait*:

Caidi log ₇ aimser ₇ perso ₇ tugait scribind in Uraicepta? *Ni oenlog tra lasna cethri libro, amal atbert in fili*: *a n-as tuiseach, is ed is deghenach, a n-as dedhenach, is ed as toisseach .i. a n-as toisseach iar n-urd lebhurda, is ed as dedhenacho arricht .i. lebor Cindfaeladh mic Oilella*. *Log ₇ aimser ₇ perso ₇ tucait scribind in libhuir sin Cindfaeladh, log do Daire Luran, aimser do aimser Domnaill mic Aeda mic Ainmireach*. *Perso do Cendfaeladh mac Oilella, tugait a scribind a hinchind dermait du beim a cind Chindfaelad i cath Muighi Rath*. *Ceithri buadha in catha sin*: *Maidm for Conghal ina gaei re nDomnall ina firindi*; *et Suibni i ngealtacht, acht is ar a mhed du laidib duroni*; *in fear d'Alabanachaib do breith in Erennaich 'na chois dar muir gen airiugudh .i. Dubhdiadh a ainm*; *et a inchind dermaid du bhem a cind Cindfaeladh ar a mhed do fhilideacht ₇ do bhriathraibh ₇ do legeand rothaisigh*.[350]

What is the place and time and person and cause of the writing of the *Primer*? The four books have, however, no one place, as the poet said: that which is first/sooner, it is this that is last/the latest, that which is last, it is this that is first. Namely, that which is first following book-order, it is this that was created last, namely the book of Cenn Fáelad son of Oilill. Now, the place and time and person and cause of the writing of that book of Cenn Fáelad: the place Daire Luran, the time that of Domnall son of Aed son of Ainmire. The person Cenn Fáelad son of Oilill, the cause of its writing, his brain of forgetting being cut out of Cenn Fáelad's head in the battle of Mag Rath. The four triumphs of that battle: the defeat of Congal in his falsehood before Donmhall in his righteousness; and Suibne in frenzy, but it is on account of his measure of poems he composed; the man of the Scots bearing the Irishman with him across the sea without being noticed, his name

[348] Deborah Hayden, 'Poetic Law and the Medieval Irish Linguist: Contextualising the Vices and Virtues of Verse Composition in *Auraicept na nÉces*,' *Language and History*, 54/1 (2011), pp. 1-34 (p. 9).
[349] As Anders Ahlqvist has highlighted, *Auraicept na n-Éces* has an exceedingly complex manuscript tradition and lacks a definitive, comprehensive modern edition. This makes the dating of various parts of the text, including the prologue, an uncertain and challenging process. Anders Ahlqvist, 'The Early Irish Linguist,' *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum*, 73 (1982), pp. 1-81 (pp. 17-19, 22-24).
[350] *Auraicept na n-Éces*, ed. Calder, p. 6.

was Dubdiad; and his brain of forgetting being cut out of Cenn Fáelad's head on account of his measure of poetry and of words and of reading he stored up.

Cath Muighe Rath is a tale that has to date still received very little academic attention. The only available edition and translation of the tale remains that of John O'Donovan, published in 1842, and this work is unsatisfactory in a number of ways. The main fault of O'Donovan's edition is that it is based solely on the witness of the fifteenth century Trinity College, Dublin MS 1318 (formerly H. 2. 16), supplemented by an early eighteenth century paper manuscript of unclear catalogue designation held in the British Museum. He was aware of additional witnesses for this text but unable to obtain access to any of them.[351] O'Donovan's edition also lacks any detailed linguistic analysis and dating of the text, although he notes that a date earlier than the late twelfth century is unlikely on the grounds of terminology.[352] As such it is not possible to rely on his edition for a complete and unqualified understanding of the text, language and structure of *Cath Muighe Rath* in whole or in part. The following is from O'Donovan's edition of the text with his Irish font transliterated into Latin script:

Ro eirigh an laech laidir, laimthenach luath-ghonach, ocus an beithir beodha, braith-béimniuch, .i. Congal Claen, go d-tarla chuige Ceannfaelad, mac Oilellae, ocus tug beim cuimsidh cruaid-ledarthach cloidhimh do, gur bhris an cathbarr, gur theasg an ceann fo a chomhair co n-urrainn do'n indchinn ina fhoirleanmuin; acht ceana do thuitfeadh Ceannfaeladh le Congal 'sa n-ionadh sin, mina aincedh Crunnmhael, mac Suibhne, ocus Maelodar Macha é, ocus ar na anacul doibh ro iodhnaiceatar e co Senach, go Comharba Patraic, ocus ro iompaidheatar fein do congbail a g-coda do'n chath. Ocus ro íodhnaic Senach Ceannfaeladh iar sin go Bricin Tuama Dreaccan, ocus do bhi aicce go ceann m-bliadhna ag a leigheas; ocus do shil a inchinn chúil as ris an re sin, co nach be ní da g-cluineadh gan a bheith do ghlain-meabhrae aige; doig amh an t-aiceapt do nidh Bricin do tri scolaib do bhiodh sin do ghlain-mheabhra aige-sium, gur bo fear tri scol iaromh Ceannfaeladh, mac Oiliolla, gur ab é do athnuadaidh Uraiceapt na n-Eicces, i n-Doire Lurain ierttain.[353]

The strong, daring, swift-wounding warrior, and the vigorous, doom-striking bear, Congal Claen, rose in attack and he encountered Cenn Fáelad son of Oilill, and he gave a powerful hard-cutting sword's blow to him, so that he broke the helm, and hewed the head beneath it with a part of the

[351] *The Banquet of Dun na n-Ged and the Battle of Magh Rath*: *An Ancient Historical Tale*, ed. and trans. by John O'Donovan (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society, 1842), pp. v-vii. These additional witnesses supposedly include Royal Irish Academy Manuscript 23 E 29, *The Book of Fermoy* (also known as *The Book of Roche*), and a manuscript from the British Library Stowe collection, however, it does not appear that either of these contain a copy of the tale as they exist now. A shorter, older version of the tale is found in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, however, this does not include any mention of Cenn Fáelad. See: Carl Marstrander, 'A New Version of the Battle of Mag Rath,' *Ériu*, 5 (1911), pp. 226-247.
[352] *Ibid*., pp. vii-viii.
[353] *Ibid*., pp. 278-284.

> brain following it out; however, Cenn Fáelad would have been laid low by Congal in that place, if Crunnmael son of Suibne and Maelodar Macha had not protected him, and on protecting him they delivered him to Senach, to Patrick's successor, and they themselves returned to maintain their commitments to the battle. And after that Senach delivered Cenn Fáelad to Bricin of Túaim Drecain, and he was with him to the end of a year healing him; and his rear brain dripped out during that time, so that there was not a thing that he heard without it being [retained] in his clear memory; indeed because of the instruction Bricin made to the three schools, that was in his clear memory, so that Cenn Fáelad son of Oilill was a man of three schools afterwards, and it was he who renewed the *Poet's Primer*, in Doire Lurain thereafter.

All three accounts agree in depicting Cenn Fáelad's injury in the Battle of Moira of having the remarkable effect of improving his memory so much that he became a storehouse of learning.[354] *Cath Muighe Rath* differs in describing the part of the brain that was damaged as being the *inchinn chúil*, the 'back' or 'rear brain,' rather than the *inchinn dermait*, 'forgetting-brain.' Why this difference occurs is unclear, however, it may simply be that the unusual nature of the *inchinn dermait* motif prompted a scribe, somewhere in the development of *Cath Muighe Rath*, to abandon it in favour of a more physically tangible description. It terms of how these three sources depict the quality of Cenn Fáelad's post-wound memory, there are some subtle but significant differences. Both the prologue to *Bretha Étgid* and *Cath Muighe Rath* use the rare phrase *glain-mebair*, 'clear-memory,' or perhaps most literally: 'mirror-glass-memory.'[355] As a point of comparison, Caílte also claims to possess the attribute of *glain-mebair* in *Acallamh na Senórach*.[356] The precise connotations of this term are tricky to define definitively but notions of clarity and purity are seemingly implied. In other words, Cenn Fáelad's memory is attributed some form of qualitative superiority. *Auraicept na n-Éces* does not mention *glain-mebair* and instead focuses solely on the quantitative improvement gained from the loss of the *inchinn dermait*. This distinction between the quantitive and qualitative properties of memory, however minor it seems, is present in these texts and, as will be demonstrated, reappears elsewhere in medieval Irish memory theory.[357]

David Georgi, in an article discussing the meaning and the literary theoretical framework behind Cenn Fáelad's injury, provides the most up-to-date summary of the arguments that have attached to the tale over the course of its interpretation by modern

[354] As Kim McCone notes, Túaim Drecain was a monastic school and so Cenn Fáelad's knowledge would have combined both secular and ecclesiastical elements. It also places the historical context for the origin of this tale firmly in the period before the twelfth-century Church reform. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 23-24.
[355] *eDIL*., s.v. *glain* (dil.ie/25945).
[356] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV p. 106.
[357] See below, pp. 145-155.

scholars. His own explanation is conducted primarily in context of the narrative's relationship to the wider theoretical outlook of *Auraicept na n-Éces*.[358] Following the lead of Proinsias Mac Cana, Georgi convincingly disapproves the notion, originating in 1922 with Eoin Mac Neill and subsequently embedded in scholarly discourse by Edgar Slotkin, that Cenn Fáelad was the scholar credited with first committing the vernacular learning of Ireland to the written word.[359] Intrinsic to this idea was the notion that the story of Cenn Fáelad should be taken as fundamentally historical in nature, a point Georgi and Mac Cana reject. In terms of what these stories can tell us of memory, this approach created problems. Slotkin in particular struggled to smooth out the logic of the narratives: how could a serious head injury have improved Cenn Fáelad's memory, and why would this perfect memory then lead to his committing vernacular lore to writing? 'Whatever does a head wound have to do with the foundation of secular scribal activity in Ireland?'[360] This would seem to be the exact opposite to the effect that one would expect to result from a head wound and, indeed, Slotkin's solution was to propose that the details surrounding the injury, specifically the unique notion of the *inchinn dermait*, were a later addition to the story serving only to obscure the original sense.[361] Instead, following the logic of cause and effect, Cenn Fáelad's injury must originally have damaged his brain to the extent that it rendered him unable to participate in the oral, memory-based learned culture responsible for the preservation of secular lore:

> It does not seem unlikely in light of these considerations that Cenn Faelad suffered some sort of specialised aphasia from his wound which made it impossible for him to retain for any length of time oral instruction. He *had* to write it down […].[362]

As Georgi demonstrates, Slotkin's argument is unsatisfactory in a number of ways. Firstly, the very premise on which it is built, that Cenn Fáelad was responsible for the first act of writing down the vernacular learning of Ireland, can be shown to be incorrect. Mac Cana disapproved this idea based on the disjuncture between the time in which Cenn Fáelad would have been historically active, during the mid-seventh century, and the consensus that the secular learning began to be written down perhaps as early as the sixth century.[363] Secondly,

[358] David Georgi, 'A Stunning Blow on the Head: Literacy and the Anxiety of Memory in the Legend of Cenn Faelad's Brain of Forgetting,' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquim*, 16/17 (1996/1997), pp. 195-205 (pp. 202-205).
[359] *Ibid*., pp. 196-197. Proinsias Mac Cana, 'The Three Languages and the Three Laws', *Studia Celtica*, 5 (1970), pp. 62-78. (pp.64-66). Eoin MacNeill, 'A Pioneer of Nations', *Studies*: *An Irish Quarterly Review*, 11 (1922), pp. 435-446 (435-438). Slotkin, 'Fixed Texts,' pp. 437-438.
[360] *Ibid*., p. 438.
[361] *Ibid*., p. 439.
[362] *Ibid*., pp. 439-440.
[363] Mac Cana, 'Three Languages', p. 65.

to adopt without criticism MacNeill's view that these sources represent a fundamentally historical narrative is unwarranted.[364] Attempting to reconcile this position with the peculiar nature of the wound seems the principal cause of Slotkin's difficulties regarding the logic behind the narratives' portrayal of causality in injury and effect. Lastly, and as a consequence of the second point, Slotkin's 'correction' does a great deal of violence to the narratives themselves, all of which are consistent in their depiction of the results of the head injury as beneficial to Cenn Fáelad's powers of memory: 'It seems to me that to base an interpretation on a version of a legend is one thing, but to use your own corrected version is quite another.'[365]

Georgi is undeniably correct in stating that the depiction of Cenn Fáelad's head wound must be discussed in its own right and not dismissed out of difficulty in spite of or, indeed, because of its unique nature.[366] In order to focus on the implications of this tale for an understanding of the knowledge surrounding the physical elements of memory psychology in medieval Ireland, it is necessary to temporarily put aside Georgi's own conclusions here. These will be picked up and discussion resumed in a subsequent section.[367] Slotkin's attempt to understand the causality of injury and effect in the Cenn Fáelad narrative through reference to a modern understanding of how physical trauma to the head can affect brain function is innovative, however, it remains mired in his misguided historicising approach to the narrative.[368] It is not at all certain that we have represented here any identifiable or even medically possible physical condition at all. The uniqueness of this injury within medieval Irish literature as a whole, as well as its particular association with Cenn Fáelad, certainly suggests a specifically literary innovation rather than an observed medical phenomenon. Nevertheless, the construction of this narrative must demonstrate some underlying understanding of the function of mind and memory present in early medieval Ireland. To salvage something of Slotkin's discussion, the depiction of Cenn Fáelad's injury certainly must have arisen from a genuine observation that damage to the brain can affect memory. It is clear, moreover, that the head is envisaged as the principal seat of memory. This may seem

[364] Georgi, 'A Stunning Blow', pp. 196-197.
[365] *Ibid.*, p. 197.
[366] *Ibid.*, p. 198.
[367] See below, p. 141-145.
[368] This discussion will make no attempt to relate the medieval Irish understanding of brain function and the physical psychology of memory to modern psychological theory or neuroscience. The technical abilities required to undertake such a study are beyond the present author. Furthermore, this would not necessarily be profitable avenue to pursue as the intention here is to get to grips with and understand the medieval Irish understanding on its own terms. In this process the application of modern scientific theory may serve only to muddle or obscure.

like an obvious point but it should be borne in mind that the longstanding idea, originating in certain schools of classical medical discourse, that the heart functioned alongside the brain as a sense organ responsible for memory persisted in limited form elsewhere in medieval Europe.[369] It does not appear, from a cursory investigation, that any example of this belief can clearly be demonstrated in any Irish language textual source from the medieval period. Classical medical theory, of the school followed by Aristotle, emphasised the receptive function of the heart in a two-stage process of memory creation with sense impressions received through the heart before transmission to and storage in the brain.[370] In medieval Ireland the heart, *cride*, is certainly associated with the reception of emotion, however, the semantic evidence discussed above does not display any clear examples demonstrating an association of the heart with concepts of memory or learning.[371] To contextualise the depiction of Cenn Fáelad's injury and its effect on his memory it is necessary to examine other examples of injuries to the head found in medieval Irish literature. Decapitations, despite being fairly commonplace, will not be discussed here as they do not directly damage the structural integrity of the head or brain: only wounds possessing this quality will be explored.[372] It is, unfortunately, not possible to include any discussion of the few dedicated medieval Irish medical texts here due to the constraints of space, therefore, this investigation is limited to the depiction of head-wounds in narrative literature.

Whilst there are no direct comparisons to Cenn Fáelad's brain injury in medieval Irish literature, other similar head-wounds and their effects upon the functioning of the human body and mind are described, providing some interesting points for comparison. One widely-known example is found in the tale *Aided Chonchobuir*, *The Death of Conchobor*. This story is preserved in its longest and most detailed version in the *Book of Leinster* but also has four other manuscript witnesses. The fifteenth-sixteenth century Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS. 72.1.40., contains a close copy of the *Book of Leinster* version with a differing ending, and these together constitute Kuno Meyer's version A of the tale: its earliest

[369] The remains of this idea are still evident in certain phrases such as the English 'learning by heart.' See: Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 59-60.
[370] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[371] *eDIL*., s.v. *cride* (dil.ie/12925). See. above, pp. 46-47.
[372] It is, however, worth mentioning the widespread examples of individuals' heads retaining life and the ability to communicate and reason after decapitation, such as in the story of Donn Bó from *Cath Almaine* (See above, pp. 82-83 and also below, pp. 154-155.). The removal of the head whole seems to be a prerequisite for these types of event and must be underlain by a notion that direct damage to the integrity of the head or brain would otherwise jeopardise cognitive function.

form.[373] In this tale the death of Conchobar is brought about through the agitation of a wound sustained after being shot in the head by the Connaught warrior Cet Mac Mágach with the preserved brain of the deceased Leinster king, Més Gegra. The brain had been previously stolen by Cet from the possession of Conall Cernach who had kept it as a trophy:

> *Nos-indlethar Cet inchind Mesgegra isin tábaill ₇ nosteilc conidtarla immullach Conchobuir co mbátar a dā trīan inna chind ₇ co torchair-seom isa cend, co tarla fri lár*.[374]
>
> Cet readied the brain of Més Gegra in the sling and loosed it so that it landed in the crown of Conchobar's head so that two thirds of it was in his head and he fell headlong, and he landed upon the floor.

Conchobar survives the initial wound, however, the brain cannot be extracted safely and he is told that he will be unable to exert himself in a number of ways without it killing him:

> *Doberar tra a liaig co Conchobur .i. Fingen. Iss ēside nofinnad don dīaid nothēiged don tig in līn nobīd i ngalur 'sin tig ocus cech galar nobīd and*. "*Maith*," *or Fingen*, "*dia taltar in chloch as do chind biat marb fo chétōir. Mani tucthar ass immorro, not-ícfaind ₇ bid athis duit*." "*Is asso dún*" *ar Ulaid* "*ind athis oldás a éc-som*."
>
> *Ro-īccad īarum a chend ₇ rofúaged co snáth óir, ar ba cumma dath fuilt Conchobuir ₇ dath inn óir. Ocus asbert in liag fri Conchobar co mbeth i fomtin .i. ar nā tísad a ferg dó ₇ nā digsed for ech ₇ nā etraiged mnāi* [*₇ nā rocaithed biad*] *co anfeta ₇ nā rethed*.[375]
>
> His physician, namely Fingen, was brought then to Conchobar. It is he who knew from the smoke which departed from a house the number of those who were in sickness in the house and each sickness that was therein. "Right," said Fingen, "if the stone is removed from your head you will die at once. If it is not taken out, however, I will heal you but it will be a disfigurement upon you." "It is easier for us" said the Ulaid "[to suffer] the disfigurement over his death."

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[373] National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Adv. MS. 72.1.40., was known to Meyer as the 'Edinburgh MS. xl.' The other three witnesses; Royal Irish Academy MS. 23. N. 10, the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* and Stowe MS. D. 4. 2., constitute Meyer's B, C and D versions respectively. These are much shorter and less detailed than the A version, differing primarily in their description of the context in which Conchobar hears of Christ's death. Of these only D contains a description of the wounding, and this lacks any of the detail of the A version, reading: '*Ceat mac Mādach rotheilg in cloich .i. inchind Miscedhra rīgh Laighen for Concubur hic Āth Dhaire Dá Bhœth. Finghen fāthliaig Concobuir is é ná rolēig in cloich do thabairt asa chind. Muma immorro in cerd iss é dorat cumdach impe ria cenn amuich*.' 'Cet mac Mágach loosed the stone, i.e. the brain of Més Gegra, upon Conchobar at the ford of Daire Dá Báeth. It is Fingen, Conchobar's seer-physician, who did not let the stone be taken out of his head. It is Muma the craftsman, moreover, who put ornament around it on the outside of his head.' Kuno Meyer (ed.), *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1993), pp. 2-3, 18. Helen Imhoff has more recently re-evaluated Meyer's fourfold distinction between the different versions of this tale and instead advocated for a division into two broad groups distinguished by who acts as messenger in informing Conchobar of the Crucifixion. Helen Imhoff, 'The Different Versions of "Aided Conchobair,"' *Ériu*, 62 (2012), pp. 43-99 (pp. 95-96).

[374] *Death-Tales*, ed. Meyer, p. 6.

[375] *Ibid*., p. 8.

Thereupon he healed his head and stitched it with thread of gold, for the colour of Conchobar's hair and the colour of the gold were alike. And the physician said to Conchobar that he should be wary, namely that anger did not come upon him, and that he should not travel on horseback, and not have dealings with a woman, and not eat food with voraciousness, and not run.

Conchobar's wound to the head is susceptible to the aggravation brought on by various forms of strenuous physical stimulation: horse-riding, gratuitous eating and sexual intercourse, but also, however, by the emotional state of being angry. The *Book of Leinster* version of *Aided Chonchobuir* breaks off before the climax of the tale and the actual description of the death is, therefore, missing. Other versions of the tale, Meyer's versions B, C and the Edinburgh copy of version A, tell us that the wound is fatally re-opened when Conchobar was compelled to take up arms in revenge for Christ's crucifixion. Both B and C agree in depicting the physical vigour of this military action as the cause of the wound re-opening:

B: *Is iar sin cotnoscrastur amail bid oc techt hi rōi cathai ar bēlaip Crīst co sesceand asa c*[*h*]*inn an inc*[*h*]*inn Meisgedra 7 conidebilt ind ar sin*.[376]

It is then he stirred himself up as if he was going into a battlefield before Christ and the brain of Més Gegra burst out of his head and he died there afterwards.

C: *Is iarsin attraacht 7 rosgobh forsin deargail cur'sceinn incinn Mesgeagra as a cinn 7 conearbailt Concubur fochētōir*.[377]

Thereupon he rose up and took to the oak-wood so that the brain of Més Gegra sprung out of his head and Conchobar died at once.

The Edinburgh version A, however, differs in also putting emphasis on Conchobar's anger as part of the crucial factor:

"*Dofaetsat mile fer n-armach lim-sa ac tesarcain Christ*." *Roling iarsin 'chum a di gai 7 rusbertaig co tenn gurromuigiter ina dorn 7 rogab iarum a chlaidem ina laim 7 rogab don caillid uime co ndernaig mag don caill .i. Mag Lamrigi a Feraib Rus 7 ised atbert*: "*is amlaid so do digolainn-si Crist for Iudalaib 7 for in lucht rochroch he da roisind iat*." *Lasin feirg sin roling incinn Miscegra asa cinn co tainic a incind fein fair gurbo marb de 7 conid aire sin aderait cach*: "*is nemedac*[*h*] *Conchobar trit an durtacht doroine Conchobar*."[378]

"A thousand armed men will fall by me in protecting Christ[!]" Thereupon he leapt towards his two spears and he brandished them with strength until they were broken in his fist and he afterwards seized his sword in his hand and took to the wood round about him and he made a

[376] *Ibid*., p. 14.
[377] *Ibid*., p. 16.
[378] *Ibid*., pp. 9-10.

> plain out of the wood, namely Mag Lámraige in Fir Ross and he said: "it is thus I would revenge Christ upon the Jews and upon the people who crucified him should I reach them." With that anger the brain of Més Gegra leapt from his head and his own brain came out because of it so that he was killed because of it and it is on account of that everyone says: "Conchobar gained heaven through the wish that he made."

The state of physical excitement which causes Conchobar to succumb to his wound is envisaged here as being intrinsically bound up with an angry emotional response on his behalf. It is unclear if it is his anger alone that acts upon the brain in some way so as to cause the wound to open through some sort of physical effect such as swelling, or if it is merely the physical exertion in response to his anger by which he fatally aggravates his wound, dislodging the brain. Although it is not possible to claim on this evidence alone that the brain is being understood here as the seat of the emotional faculties, over simply being affected by them, this provides an interesting counterpoint to the association of physical functioning of the brain and the more reason-orientated capabilities of memory and learning found in the Cenn Fáelad material. This suggests that not only the heart, but the brain as well, was viewed as receptive to emotional stimuli, although it remains unclear if there was any perceived link between the two organs in medival Irish medical theory.[379]

Other injuries to the head, and specifically the brain, in medieval Irish literature are, on the whole, more immediately fatal. Indeed, depictions of a head or brain injury leading to immediate death appear rather frequently. A few standout examples are the brief and rather unceremonious death tale of the Ulster warrior Lóegaire Buadach and the tragic death of the ill-fated Deirdriu at the end of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* as she takes her own life by leaping from Conchobar's chariot, breaking her head against a passing stone in order to escape the sexual humiliation to which he aims to subject her.[380] *Aided Lóegaire* is unusual in its rather gratuitous depiction of a head injury and is noteworthy in that it contains some suprising similarities to how the wound of Cenn Faelad is described. Lóegaire's death occurs as a result of Conchobar condemning to death by drowning a poet of his court named Áed for having slept with his queen, Mugain. The poet is sentenced to be drowned in every body of water in Ireland, however, his magic prevents this from being accomplished by causing the water to dry up before he can be brought into it. The one exception to his ability turns out to be Loch Laí in immediate proximity to Lóegaire's house:

[379] See: Imhoff, 'Different Versions,' pp. 76-79.
[380] *Longes mac n-Uislen*, ed. Vernam Hull, pp. 51, 69.

Rofēimid som in bricht forsin loch. An tan didiu robás ac a bādud, as ann doriacht rechtairi Lōegaire asin lis amach. 'Fē amai, a Lōegaire!' *or sē*, '*ní frith a nĒrinn baile a mbāit*[*e*]*a in file co rāinic in baili si*.' *Atracht intí Lōegaire 7 geibid a chlaidem ina lāim 7 ac lēim dó imach benaid a mullach imon fordorus go ruc in leth iartharach do cloicenn de, co mbōi sprethach a inchi*[*n*]*de for a brot 7 romarb som iardain trīchait do lucht in bāiti 7 roēlo Aod ūatha 7 atbath Lōegairi iartain.*[381]

He was unable [to put] the charm upon the lake. Then at that point as they were drowning him, Lóegaire's steward came out from the enclosure. 'A calamity indeed, Lóegaire!' he said, 'No place in Ireland was found in which to drown the poet until they reached this place.' Lóegaire rose up and took his sword in his hand and leaping outside he struck the crown of his head about the door-lintel so that the rearmost half of his skull was taken off because of it, and his brain was splattered over his cloak and thereupon he killed thirty of the people overseeing the drowning and Aed escaped from them and then Lóegaire died.

Like Cenn Faelad's injury, Lóegaire's wound occurs on the back part of the head and causes the loss of a quantity of his brain matter. Furthermore, Lóegaire's death is not completely instantaneous as the tale refrains from complete bathos and allows him to manage a reasonably heroic account of himself upon Conchobar's men, and at least fulfil his intention of rescuing the poet, before he expires. The proximity of his injury and his death, however, are immediate in a way that Cenn Fáelad's and Conchobar's are not. Despite the close similarities between the form of the head-wounds that Lóegaire and Cenn Fáelad suffer, aside from the former being caused by blunt force and the latter by sword-blow, the outcomes are very different indeed. Although, as can be argued from the case of Conchobar, character-changing head wounds were clearly a theme in medieval Irish literature, this is clearly not necessary to every example.

Comparatively, the depiction of an individual surviving a head wound is far rarer than that of dying as a result of one. In the case of *Aided Conchobair* it can be argued that Conchobar does not truly *survive* his wound as his death as a result of the injury is merely postponed. This is further compounded by the conditions under which it will eventually prove fatal being exceedingly hard for anyone, let alone a warrior king belonging to the heroic world of the Ulster Cycle, to avoid. The activities he must avoid, feasting, fighting, riding and sexual intercourse, are all intrinsic to the conduct of kingly activity in the Ulster Cycle. By becoming unable to participate in these activities he is effectively un-kinged by his wound, a type of death in itself and a point the Ulstermen choose to ignore when they decide keeping

[381] *Death-Tales*, ed. Meyer, p. 22.

Conchobar with an *athis*, a blemish or disfigurement, is better than a new king entirely. His wound is, furthermore, bound up with how *Aided Conchobair* constructs the passing away of this time of heroes and the beginning of the new Christian era. The occurrence which prompts the emotional response that eventually kills Conchobar is his hearing the news of the execution of Christ in the holy land. Conchobar is here associated with Christ, not only in the fact that the Saviour's death prompts his own, but also in their shared age.[382] In this sense Conchobar's wound was always inescapably going to bring about his death for if he received news of the crucifixion with anything other than outrage he would not be capable of the pre-emptive salvation the Edinburgh A text tells us has since become anecdote. The B and C versions go further and envisage his head wound bursting open as the metaphorical baptism which facilitates his being saved:

> **B** *Ised isber*[*at*] *dee iarum is ē cēt-gentilde docōid hi flait*[*h*] *nimea, fobit*[*h*] *robad bat*[*h*]*ais dō ind fuil donescmacht 7 rocreit ē do Chrīst*.[383]
>
> It is on account of this that they say he was the first pagan to go to the Kingdom of Heaven, because the blood he shed was a baptism for him and he believed in Christ.
>
> **C** *Conadh* [*d*]*esin adber*[*a*]*t na Gœidhil conadh hē Concubur cēt-geinntlide docōidh docum neimhi a nĒirinn, fobīth robo baithis dōin fuil dobidg as*[*a*] *cinn*.[384]
>
> Thus from this the Gaels say that Conchobar was the first pagan to go to Heaven from Ireland, because the blood which shot out of his head was a baptism for him.

Conchobar can be read in this tale as being emblematic of the world of the Ulster Cycle as a whole. As a figure within the Ulster Cycle, Conchobar's centrality in terms of his social status and as a focus for narrative action makes him a fitting embodiment of the world of these tales. His reaction to hearing of the death of Christ redeems both himself and, by extension, the heroic past he embodies and the society he represents through a sympathy with Christ's suffering for humanity. Yet, at the same time his death also serves to close the book on that chapter of the past for good. So far in the accounts of *Aided Conchobair* and *Aided Lóegaire* the fatality of brain injuries has been their most prominent feature. In the case of Conchobor's headwound he is not immediately killed, however, is severely curtailed in his ability to participate in heroic society and, therefore, perpetuate it. Neither of these two examples demonstrates any effects on the faculty of memory, remembering or forgetting.

[382] For a discussion of severa; various interpretations made over the nature of Conchobar's redemption, see: Imhoff, 'Different Versions,' pp. 86-89.
[383] *Death-Tales*, ed. Meyer, p. 14.
[384] *Ibid*., p. 16.

Conchobar's leaking brains, as well as Cenn Fáelad's, contrast with another highly unusual and symbolically charged episode found in the glossary text, *Sanas Cormaic*, in a narrative used to explain the obscure Irish adverb *prull*, 'greatly.'[385] This story describes how the *fili* Senchán Torpéist, who has already been encountered in context of the tale *Do Faillsiugud Tána Bó Cuailnge*, obtained his unusual epithet.[386] Setting out on a trip to the Isle of Man, Senchán and his party are hailed by a youth of hideous appearance who requests to be taken along with them. Senchán permits the stranger to come aboard and the others, cowering in terror at the far end of the boat proclaim:

> 'A monster has reached you, Senchán; it will be your only retinue, if only we could escape to land'. It is on account of that that Senchán Torpéist (< *do·rorban* 'reach' + *péist* 'monster') i.e. Senchán whom the monster reached.[387]

This being accompanies the party to Man where he steps up to Senchán's defence when the latter, in his pride, fails to recognise and pay due respect to a noted woman poet from a prestigious family fallen upon hard times who challenges and outmatches him in demonstrating knowledge of correct forms of verse. Upon their return to Ireland with the woman the being adopts a noble, kingly form and the tale ends with a suggestion that he must have been the spirit of poetry itself.[388] In the description of his prior, monstrous form he bears a number of unpleasant physical deformities, including in the regions of his head and brain:

> They did not wish to let him join them, for they thought that he was not a bird fit for their flock because his appearance was hideous. To begin with, when someone would put their finger on his brow, a spurt of putrid matter would pour down the back of his neck. He had a rough caul over the crown of his head as far as the cartilage of his two shoulder-blades. Anyone who saw it would think that clots of his brain had broken through his skull. His two eyes were as bulbous as a blackbird's egg, as swift as a (?), as black as death. The points of his teeth were as yellow as gold, their bases as green as a holly-trunk. Two bare, skinny legs, two pointy dark-speckled heels beneath him. If the rag he wore were stripped off him, it would not be difficult for it to move by itself, unless a stone were put on it, on account of the number of its vermin.[389]

There is also a slightly longer and somewhat variant version of this description from the B version of *Sanas Cormaic*, found in *Leabhar Brecc* (Dublin RIA MS 23 P16), which provides additional details of the monstrous youth:

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[385] *eDIL*., s.v. *prull, prúll* (dil.ie/34622).
[386] See above, pp. 110-121.
[387] Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possesions,' p. 41.
[388] *Ibid*., pp. 41-43.
[389] *Ibid*., p. 41.

> The dripping of his brain which had been poured (?) over his ears was like a continual stream. As for the join of his head and his skull, it did not cease from gushing out stench. His two eyes were as bulbous as a blackbird's egg; his glance as swift as a millstone, his face as black as death, his two cheeks more bulbous than a lifting-crane. His nose was as long as the spout of a smith's bellows. Like the blowing of bellows smelting ore was the inhaling and exhaling of his breath. Hammers would not strike from a red-hot mass of metal what his lips would strike forth of fire. He was as swift as a swallow or hare over the ground. The tips of his teeth were as yellow as gold, the base as green as holly. His two shins bare and thin, covered in spots, beneath him; his two heels spiked, yellow with dark spots; his shin like a distaff, his thigh like an axe-handle; his buttock like a half-cheese; his belly like a bushel-sack; his throat like the neck of a heron; his head the size of the massive round head of a soldier; his hands as long as pitch-forks; his fists as big as the fists of a slave.[390]

Both of these descriptions depict the supposed spirit of poetry in its ugly aspect with leaking, stinking, rotten brains. What is to be made of this? The unpleasantness of this image and the details provided make it likely that this description is symbolically charged and was chosen for more than just its ability to shock and disgust. One of the negative aspects of practicing the art of poetry, the description seemingly implies, is leaking brains and it is very hard to resist reading this as a comment on the fallibility of memory. As has begun to become clear, this was a widespread concern in medieval Irish thought. Indeed, Senchán's poetical *faux pas* in this episode results directly from a failure in his own knowledge which, by rights, one in his position should be expected to know. The degradation of the knowledge held in Senchán's memory may be further implied by the putrid state of the matter leaking from the youth's head, with the condition of the latter serving as a sort of mirror to the mental state of the former. In other words: memory decays but when well-maintained is a source of prestige. This description from the *prull* entry is perhaps the closest analogue to that of Cenn Fáelad's losing his *inchinn dermait* in describing an actual loss of brain matter without a directly consequential fatality. Both recognise the fundamental importance of the brain as the vessel of memory, however, whereas Cenn Fáelad's damaged brain leads to an improvement of memory, that of the youth reflects and symbolically embodies it fragility and its susceptibility to degradation.

[390] *Ibid*., p. 43.

5.3 The Legal Element to Head and Brain Injury

So far a number of head and brain wounds comparable to Cenn Fáelad's injury and the loss of his *inchinn dermait* have been identified from the tale literature, and the implications of their depictions for an understanding of medieval Irish notions of memory physiology explored. In the process it has become clear that these notions are only partially influenced by some very basic scientific observations regarding the functions of the brain and the effect of trauma upon it. In all cases this boils down to a broad recognition of the cognitive role of the brain and the expectation that head and brain injuries are likely to be fatal. When the literature presents exceptions to this norm they are, to a much larger extent, motivated by the exploration of literary themes and ideologies through the medium of metaphor. In addition to this, it is worth very briefly exploring how such depictions in tale literature are presented in context of the treatment of head and brain injuries by early Irish law. Head injuries in particular seem to have been a point of specific concern amongst the cultures of early medieval Europe. In a recent overview of head and face wounds in medieval law, conducted primarily from Anglo-Saxon, Frankish and other continental Germanic legal codes, but considering Irish and Welsh material as well, Patricia Skinner notes that:

> On the head, attention was focused on breaking the skull (and degrees of exposure of the brain), striking out or damaging eyes and eyelids, cutting off or maiming the nose, cutting off or maiming ears, and causing wounds to other facial features such as the chin and the lips. Almost all early medieval codifications of law in the West contain such lists of injuries: in all cases, the perpetrator of the injury was fined rather than physically punished.[391]

Bretha Déin Chécht, one of the two principal early Irish law texts dealing with sickness and injury, is no exception and devotes a great deal of attention to head and face wounds with fines increasing for the damage of more prominent features and in accordance with the size of the injury.[392] Skinner notes, however, that there is a disjunction between the law texts' focus on financial reciprocation for head and face injuries, and the responses to such injuries found within literature more widely. On how to read these wounds she concludes:

[391] Patricia Skinner, 'Visible Prowess?: Reading Men's Head and Face Wounds in Early Medieval Europe to 1000CE', in: *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, eds. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 86.
[392] 'Bretha Déin Chécht,' ed. and trans. by D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), pp. 1-66 (pp. 28-29, 40-45).

> [a]according to the evidence, many wounds to the head and face injuries seem to have been a source of shame or humiliation […]. The latent or open reciprocity of masculine violence in early medieval European society meant that, far from being markers of a warrior's prowess, scars bore testimony to being hit or failing to defend oneself. And the younger a man was, the longer he would have to bear the stigma of his wounds. The only way out of such disgrace was to be able to point to the worse fate (preferably death) of the victim's assailant […].[393]

William Sayers in a dedicated, if somewhat problematic, study of wounds and scars in medieval Irish literature draws similar conclusions:

> [e]ach wound bears witness […] and subsequently has a history that may be preserved in the archive of communal memory or in praise poems with a propagandistic agenda, even in satirical verse recalled with relish. But stories age and are transformed, just as wounds heal into scars and these scars become even more unreliable narrators of past events. Still, the visible scar is always a prompt to memory, and wounds and their consequences are always seen through the prism of honour. Their originating circumstances are always relevant and pertinent: who dealt the blow, when and why and to which part of the body? Wounds generate artful stories and poems but art also creates wounds, such as the telltale, self-condemnatory facial blemishes raised by satire. In the final analysis, pre-battle panic and post-battle dishonour are more to be feared than the mere physical wounds that battle may bring.[394]

Sayers is correct in seeing wounds as a form of physical monument to the events of their creation; however, there are some unnecessary ambiguities in how he contextualises this subject, perhaps reflective of a desire to salvage some notion of the 'honourable scar' from the evidence.

There are two key points in the quoted paragraph that must be contested. Although he claims that 'scars become even more unreliable narrators of past events,' the evidence he discusses is clear in portraying wounds and scars as something that *can* be read, often with great clarity, after the event. In fact, the clarity with which they can be read is essential to their importance as a representation of an individual's honour in combat. The most explicit example of this is how the *fáithliaig*, 'seer-physician,' Fíngin reads the wounds of the Ulster warrior Cethern in the *Caladgleó Cethirn*, 'Cethern's Hard Wounding' episode from *Táin Bó Cūalgne*.[395] Sayers rightly points out that Cethern ultimately chooses to reject a long-term treatment of his wounds in favour of a short term cure that will enable him to re-join the

[393] Skinner, 'Visible Prowess?', p. 100.
[394] William Sayers, 'The Laconic Scar in Early Irish Literature', in: *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, eds. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 494.
[395] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: *Recension I*, ed. and trans. by O'Rahilly, pp. 96-101, 209-213.

conflict at hand.[396] Cethern's choice not to live with the wounds he has sustained even though they clearly show that he has not been idle in the conflict, and to instead die in battle, undoubtedly arises from fear of the dishonour of perishing on his sickbed from the physical marks of his opponents' superiority rather than on his own terms in glorious combat. This leads on to the second contentious point: Sayers' suggestion that physical wounds were of lesser concern than, and perhaps in some way stood disconnected from, an individual's honourable conduct in battle is not upheld by the evidence. In relation to *Aided Conchobuir*, Sayers states that although Conchobar's wound '[…] obviously would have constituted a severe impediment, real and symbolic, to a lesser ruler […] there is nothing inherently shameful in such a wound.'[397] This ignores the tale's identification of Conchobar's wound as an *aithis* upon him: something specifically and unconditionally dishonourable. Wounds, but particularly head wounds, have very serious consequences for the long-term standing of an individual participating in a society where high status is oriented with acts of violence. Cenn Fáelad's wound and the motif of the *inchinn dermait*, in this context, constitutes an unusual and, seemingly, a conscious, deliberate reversal of the expected norms. By enabling the development of his powers of memory, the brain injury allows Cenn Fáelad to retain status and reputation, albeit as a scholar rather than a warrior, whereas Conchobar is reduced to an ignoble shadow of his former self until dying in a final redemptive act of sympathy.

Some concluding points can be made in context of the various depictions of head wounds discussed in this section and their physical and psychological consequences, upon both the functions of memory or otherwise. Whilst injuries to the head are seen to have a significant effect on an individual even, in the case of *Aided Conchobuir*, to the point of fundamentally altering an individual's physical abilities, their consequences are most usually fatal. This is reinforced by *Bretha Déin Chécht*'s list of '*da dorus* .x. *anma*,' 'twelve doors of the soul' or 'twelve portals of life,' found in the human body.[398] These seem to be areas noted as being particularly vulnerable to mortal injury and the first three listed are all part of the head: the crown of the skull, the back of the head and the hollow of the temple.[399] Certainly, the narrative of Cenn Fáelad is unique in depicting an individual not only surviving a head wound without any apparent negative consequence, but with an actual positive benefit as a result. That this benefit was linked to his faculty of memory demonstrates a clear, but

[396] Sayers, 'The Laconic Scar,' p. 484.
[397] *Ibid*., p. 485.
[398] 'Bretha Déin Chécht,' ed. and trans. by Binchy, pp. 24-25.
[399] *Ibid*., pp. 24-25, 51-52.

unspecific, observation that the memorial faculties were the preserve of the brain. By contrast, Conchobar's injury is restrictive in nature as opposed to facilitative: it limits him rather than enabling him, however, it likewise connects the brain with sense reception, in this instance, the reception of emotional stimuli. An association between memory and the brain may also underlie the unusual appearance of the Spirit of Poetry in *Sanas Cormaic*'s account of how Senchán Torpéist obtained his epithet. In spite of these observations, the unique nature of the tale of Cenn Fáelad's loss of his *inchinn dermait*, and the differences between this and other descriptions of head and brain injuries, suggest an innovative literary creation rather than a widely held point of medical theory. Certainly, medieval Ireland was a long way from the development of a complex theory of memory psychology, although the fundamental observations necessary for such an endeavour were clearly in place.

5.4 Memory and the Authority of the *Filid*: Cenn Fáelad

Having demonstrated the unique nature within medieval Irish literature of the head wound inflicted upon Cenn Fáelad and explored what notions of memory psychology and theory may possibly lay behind it, it is necessary to return to David Georgi's discussion of this topic. Georgi's interpretation of Cenn Fáelad's wound emphasises the need to look for a symbolic or ideological reason behind it, rather than a literal or historical one, in opposition to the approach taken by MacNeill and Slotkin. He thereby avoids the difficulty faced by the latter author in particular in trying to reconcile the nature of the wound with an actual medical state in which these unusual effects occur. As has become clear over the previous section the *inchinn dermait* does not appear to be a widespread concept in Irish literature, even if it does tap into a broader undercurrent of observation linking memory, sense reception and the brain, and is very likely an innovation in context of this particular story. This leads on to the problem of what exactly the text is trying to tell us: why is Cenn Fáelad's wound constructed in this unusual way and what intent lies behind this? Georgi's discussion focuses on the Cenn Fáelad narratives primarily in context of their relationship to the grammatical text *Auraicept na n-Éces*. The *Auraicept* is, as has been seen, in part attributed to the authorship of Cenn Fáelad who added his final *lebor*, 'book,' to the beginning of the work. Although this authorial contribution is strictly limited to the one book according to the *Auraicept* itself, *Cath Muighe Rath* clearly envisages an additional editorial aspect to his work on the text. Anders Ahlqvist likewise adopts the position that Cenn Fáelad's contribution to the text must have comprised more than just the addition of a prologue.[400] Georgi concludes that the tale of Cenn Fáelad's *inchinn dermait* was attached to the *Auraicept* to provide a source of authority for the material contained within it by emphasising that the process of its transmission, from oral teaching into written text, was achieved with complete accuracy.

In his assessment Georgi states that what is found in the legend of Cenn Fáelad: '[…] is a medieval ideal or fantasy of full presence and absolute preservation: the full head, the infallible memory.'[401] This intriguing statement, however attractive it may be as a means of understanding this particular narrative, raises as many questions as it seems to answer. As has been seen, the idea an *inchinn dermait* seems to have been strictly limited and does not

[400] Ahlqvist, 'The Early Irish Linguist,' pp. 18-19.
[401] Georgi, 'A Stunning Blow,' p. 205.

appear outside the tradition of Cenn Fáelad's injury in the battle of Moira. If this idea is so restricted, how widespread were the ideological implications Georgi identifies? Can this 'ideal or fantasy' of perfect memory be identified elsewhere in medieval Irish literature? Furthermore, what are its implications for our understanding of the theory or of the practicalities behind the craft of the learned classes, particularly the *filid*? And why, if this faculty for perfect memory was truly seen as an ideal, does Cenn Fáelad come to attain it only through his brain being fundamentally altered, and in a manner that legal and literary pretext suggests should be seen as significantly detrimental? Before going further, it is necessary to unpack the terms 'full presence' and 'absolute preservation' with which Georgi defines this concept of perfect, or 'infallible,' memory. Are these terms appropriate to the process implied in the Irish phrase *glain-mebair*, used to describe the state of Cenn Fáelad in the *Bretha Éitgid* and *Cath Muighe Rath* versions of the narrative? 'Absolute preservation' is certainly an adequate description for what Cenn Fáelad achieves: a thorough record of his instruction in the native school at Daire Lurain. His memory as represented by the completed text of the *Auraicept* is, as Georgi seems to correctly identify, also claimed to be bipartite in terms of the qualities it possesses. It contains both remarkable powers of clarity or accuracy, as implied in the phrase *glain-mebair*, and is also 'absolute' in terms of its scope. Both these qualities are found elsewhere in medieval Irish writing concerning the powers of memory. As has been demonstrated by the evidence of other tales, however, the latter concern is by far the most widespread across the evidence as a whole.[402]

What Georgi means by 'full presence' is more complex, and his thinking behind this term ties into several of the stands of argument pursued elsewhere in the present work. In using this term, he is, in part, suggesting that the *Auraicept* is tapping into the importance of direct personal witness as a means of constructing authority in early Medieval Ireland. This is an idea that has already been encountered in the motif of the summoned revenant or exceptional survivor lending their memory to supply or reinvigorate the knowledge of later generations.[403] The text of *Auraicept na nÉces* is, therefore, claiming to be a fully 'present' representation of the learning Cenn Fáelad acquired as a result of his injury:

[402] See above, pp. 126. See also below, pp. 145-155.
[403] For discussion of this motif in terms of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* see above, pp. 110-121. See also below for discussion in relation to *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* and *Acallam na Senórach*, pp. 156-162.

> The text aims to pass on words that were said at some other time by a person who is not here now to explain or defend them, to pass off its own presence for that of a live teacher who is absent.[404]

In addition to this, Georgi points out a tension in the *Auraicept* over the transient nature of speech and time, and over the importance acceded to the present tense over other tenses in its grammatical theory:

> In other words, how can the present time absorb all times when all speech, even in the present tense, is constantly rehearsing the division of past and future? All speech is a moving frontier dividing past and future, and all spoken knowledge is gone before you are done speaking it.[405]

The solution through which this quandary is resolved is, Georgi argues, hinted at by how the *Auraicept* presents this problem in the first instance:

> Not hard. Owing to the nobility of the time he said it, that is, the present time, for he puts the present time for all times: *ut dixit*: *Praesens tempus pro omnibus temus ponitur*, i.e., the present time is put for all times. How is that, since he says of the one word in which are two syllables, that they are not spoken at one time, *ut dicitur, lego*, I read, *quando dicis le- futurum est –go* [*quando dicis –go*] *praeteritum est le-*, i.e. when you say the first syllable the last syllable is future to you, and [when you say the last] the first syllable is preterite to you.[406]

Georgi argues that by using the example *lego*, I read, to illustrate the finite nature of speech the *Auraicept* is in fact providing the answer as to how this disadvantage can be overcome: through reading. In his assessment of this passage, however, Georgi unfortunately steers towards the notion of a tension between orality and literacy, a tension the present work argues should not be taken for granted as a directing concern in medieval Irish literary theory:

> Writing replaces the act of speech, which is performed through time, with a mark that has corporeal presence and occupies space. The absent air-thin speech of a present human speaker is traded in for the present, visable speech of an absent author.[407]

It is not at all necessary to argue here that the *Auraicept* is advocating writing as a replacement for speech, as Georgi suggests. Rather, it is simply telling us that writing allows finite speech to be continually present in the eyes and mind of the reader. It may perhaps be safer to say the writing embodies or represents the act of speech as opposed to replacing it, as Georgi himself seems to perhaps unconsciously recognise: his absent author is still producing speech. It is worth remembering that, as seen in the case of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*,

[404] Georgi, 'A Stunning Blow,' p. 203.
[405] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[406] *Ibid*., pp. 203-204.
[407] *Ibid*., p. 205.

the reverse of this situation is also possible: speech can embody or represent material contained in writing.

5.5 The *Filid* and Ideals of Memory

Returning to the issue of memory and authority, the principal question raised by Georgi's discussion is whether or not we are dealing with an 'ideal' or a 'fantasy' in the tale of Cenn Fáelad, and to what extent such a notion was held amongst medieval Ireland's learned classes. The notion of an 'ideal' of perfect or 'infallible' memory is, in particular, an attractive one to ascribe to the intellectual sphere of the medieval Irish learned classes, however, the peculiarities of the story of Cenn Fáelad and its uniqueness within the literary corpus necessitate an attempt to investigate this notion in a broader context. As has been seen the term *glain mebair* may, indeed, cover such a concept but its appearance is limited.[408] Moreover, medieval Irish literature detailing the desirable qualities of memory is just as likely to express concern over the content, range or scope of memory rather than strict accuracy. For further important information on this issue it is necessary to turn to legal material seeking to define the determination of rank and status amongst the *filid*. First and foremost, it can be stated unequivocally that memory was accorded a high place amongst the qualities embodying the ideal representative of scholastic culture. Indeed, a member of the secular learned classes in early medieval Ireland was, at least in theory, legally defined by the capacity and makeup of his memory.

Uraicecht na Ríar, the principal Old-Irish law tract on poetic status, prescribes the number of *drécht*, compositions, required to be known by each of its seven grades and three subgrades of poet. The number of these necessary for one to belong to the upper echelons of the poetic grades is considerable: three hundred and fifty for an *ollam* and a hundred and seventy-five for an *ánruth*, eighty-seven for a *clí*, sixty for a *cano*, fifty for a *dos*, forty for a *macfhuirmid* and thirty for a *fochloc*. The sub-grades of poet are also covered: twenty compositions for a *taman*, ten for a *drisiuc* and, lastly, five for an *oblaire*.[409] The numbers roughly double as the text ascends through the successive grades of *ollam*, *ánruth* and *clí*, having been limited to a simple addition of ten compositions for each of the preceding ranks. *Uraicecht na Ríar* certainly demonstrates a strong desire to distinguish the upper end of the scale from the bottom, and does so in a number of ways. It is important to note the significant

[408] See above, p. 126. Outside of the collected Cenn Fáelad narratives, *eDil* lists only two attestations of this term: one, as noted above, from *Acallam na Senórach* and one from the sixteenth-century bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn. See: *eDIL* s.v. *glain* (dil.ie/25945).

[409] *Uraicecht na Ríar*: *The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, ed. and trans. by Liam Breatnach, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987), pp. 102-113.

disparity in the quantity of known material between the top three grades and those below: the top grades are disproportionally expected to display an exceptional capacity for memory beyond the rank of *clí*. A poet's rank is notionally defined by the scope of his memory, however, as shall be seen, there are other factors at play in determining the status of a poet, specifically individual family background, making memory as a strict measure somewhat ambiguous at times.

The desired qualitative aspects to the memory of those holding the highest status within the seven grades of poet is also distinguished in other, more particular, ways. Out of all the grades discussed in *Uraicecht na Ríar* the *ollam* alone is also required to possess several additional exemplary qualities. These vary slightly depending on an *ollam*'s circumstances, as envisaged by the tract, relating to the particulars of his background, education and means of appointment. Firstly, the *ollam*, whose honour-price is forty *sét*'s or seven *cumal*'s worth: '[…] *is éola i cach coimgniu, 7 is éola i mbrithemnacht fénechais*.'[410] '[…] he is learned in each proper-art, and he is learned in the laws of Ireland.' Here the breadth of the *ollam*'s *éola*, learned knowledge, is again a defining feature, however, what this relates to in terms of content is more defined. Although 'each proper-art' is recalcitrantly vague, special emphasis is placed on legal knowledge by its being singled out for specific mention. The tract then tells us the *ollam* should be:

> *Fili ón at óga fíríana folad, óná ainces berar inna dána dlúim, tria nath, tria laid, tria éicsi, tria idnai for úaisli-osnai, os é mac filed 7 aue araili*.[411]
>
> A poet whose practice is complete and just, since doubt is not brought into the substance of his art, through his poetry (*nath*), through his lays (*laid*), through his poetic wisdom, through his purity which illuminates with nobility, he is the son of a poet and the grandson of another.

Here, however, the focus shifts from a notion of completeness towards a more qualitative assessment of the *ollam* as a practitioner of poetry. The underlying desire here must be to establish the superiority of the *ollam* at the pinnacle of the grades of poet, and this is achieved in several ways. Firstly, the quality of the *ollam*'s memory is emphasised in terms of, again, its breadth or completeness, but also in its being free from being clouded by personal doubts or confusion. The term used here to express this point, *ainces*, is worth exploring in more depth as it seems to carry some interesting implications for the place of memory in authority.

[410] This seems to be the standard expected honour-price for an *ollam* and can be affected by these varying circumstances. *Ibid*., pp. 96-97, 102-103.
[411] *Ibid*., pp. 102-103.

Although the choice of language here may simply be rhetorical, this phrase seems to imply that the presentation of authority is of primary importance to the *ollam*. *Ainces*, it is worth remembering, is used to describe Senchán's mental response to his inability to remember the *Táin* in the A.2. version of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* .[412] Senchán's *ainces* is linked not only to his failure to remember the past, but also his consequent inability to deliver knowledge of the past to others. Memory, therefore, underpins the authority of the *ollam* but that authority is by necessity manifest in the presentation and delivery of knowledge. In this context, the use of the adjective *fírían* to describe the *ollam*'s *folud* (his status, but here referring to the means by which he maintains his status: namely his poetic craft) is a further point worth discussing.[413] The tract is most likely claiming, as Liam Breatnach's translation of the passage affirms, that the poet must not have attained his position fraudulently: that his position is genuinely earned through the merits of his poetic craft.[414] It is also possible, however, to read this clause as suggesting that the substance of the *ollam*'s knowledge itself possess some superior moral quality of truthfulness. This may seem like an unusual claim but the importance of *brithemnacht* as part of the *ollam*'s knowledge is emphasised in *Uraicecht na Ríar*, as has been seen. The importance of an *ollam* in constituting an authority in matters of law, through direct knowledge of legal literature or with historical information pertinent to a case at hand, would certainly be cause enough to merit this requirement. As shall be shown, the concept of a poet's knowledge possessing a moral quality in-of-itself is a recurrent concern in *Uraicecht na Ríar*.[415]

Secondly, *Uraicecht na Ríar* emphasises the necessity for the *ollam* to belong to a poetic family with his father and grandfather having been poets before him. A poet outside of this three generaion umbrella is worth half the standard honour-price regardless of rank.[416] The monopoly over various prestigious positions, including kingships, bishoprics, abbacies, and other important positions within the church and the secular learned classes, held by a core of aristocratic and royal families is a well-known feature of medieval Irish society, and this three generation limit to the inheritance of rank is echoed in status laws concerning other

[412] Meyer and Stokes, *Celtische Lexikographie*, III p. 4.
[413] *eDIL*., s.v. *folud* (dil.ie/23188). See also: Eoin MacNeill, 'Ancient Irish Law: The Law of Status or Franchise,' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*: *Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 36 (1921-1924), pp. 265-316 (n. 2 p. 275): 'a frequent term for the means, material or otherwise, by which a person sustains his functions or liabilities.'
[414] 'That is a poet whose qualifications are complete and genuine […]' *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Breatnach, p. 103.
[415] See below, p. 150.
[416] *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Breatnach, pp. 104-105.

medieval Irish institutions.[417] Social status was an extremely important measure in early Irish society and had the capacity to legally define the entire scope of an individual's existence:

> In any inegalitarian society there is a need to have a comprehensive hierarchy of status, namely a system by which one person's status can be related to anyone else's. If rank is a [*sic*.] essential part of any person's social identity, no one can be left outside the system. When someone was injured or killed, compensation was due, and the value of the compensation, including the conditions in which an injured person was treated, depended on the status of the victim and the rank of his kinsmen and lord.[418]

The requirement that an *ollam*, and indeed a poet in general, belong to a hereditary family of poets is, therefore, far from unusual. It is, however, clear that inherited status does not dilute or circumvent the requirement for genuine ability in the poetic art. *Uraicecht na Ríar* expects a poet to have undertaken a course of formal study in order to attain a poetical grade, but makes exceptions for those with genuine ability.[419] Likewise, a family background in poetry is no protection for a poet who lacks this ability, as Sims-Williams notes:

> The *nemed* class was a meritocracy as well as an aristocracy; a poet could be elevated to it on the basis of his art (*dán*) and the fraudulent poet who overcharged or composed inadequately could be degraded to a commoner.[420]

According to *Uraicecht na Ríar*, a non-poetical scion of a poetic dynasty loses access to his inherited status upon the deaths of both his father and grandfather.[421]

After discussing the *ollam* directly *Uraicecht na Ríar* moves on to discussion of how a poet more generally is confirmed in his rank and provides more information about what was to be expected of their knowledge:

> *Ceist, cía cruth do-berar grád for filid*? *Ní hansae, taisbénad a dréchtae do ollamain—*$_7$ *biit na secht ngráda fis occa—*$_7$ *gaibthi in rí inna lángrád, inid-focladar int ollam asa dréchtaib* $_7$ *asa enncai* $_7$ *asa idnai, .i. idnae foglaime,* $_7$ *idnae béoil,* $_7$ *idnae lámae* $_7$ *lánamnais,* $_7$ *idnae inracuis ar gait* $_7$ *brait* $_7$ *indligiud,* $_7$ *idnae chuirp arna roib acht óenséitig lais, ar at-balar coibligiu chíbair acht óenairchinn i n-aidchib téchtaib*.[422]
>
> A question; in what form is grade bestowed upon a poet? Not difficult, he displays his compositions to an *ollam*—and he has the seven grades of knowledge—and the king confirms him

[417] *Ibid*., pp. 94-96.
[418] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 124.
[419] *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Breatnach, pp. 106-107.
[420] Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Literary Theory and Criticism,' p. 292.
[421] *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Breatnach, pp. 106-107.
[422] *Ibid*., p. 104.

> in his full grade, in which the *ollam* declares him on account of his compositions, and for his innocence from guilt and for his purity, namely purity of learning, and purity of mouth, and purity of hand and of marriage, and purity of integrity in respect of theft and plundering and illegality, and purity of body in that he has but one wife, for one perishes through immoral (lit. dark) intercourse excepting one true (wife) on legally prescribed nights.

The process of ordination for a poet echoes contemporary church organisation, with the *ollam* here acting as the bishop of the *filid* by judging the worth of his subordinates and maintaining overall authority within the poet classes by exercising control over the status of those beneath him. As Sims-Williams notes, the very notion of seven grades of poetic rank seems directly influenced by the sevenfold structure of ecclesiastic office in the early Irish Church.[423] The knowledge of the *ollam* is once more seen to stand above that of the poet through its completeness, in this instance through the *ollam*'s possession of all the '*secht ngráda fis*,' 'seven grades of knowledge,' each grade representing one of the poetic ranks in turn. As Breatnach notes:

> The distinction between one grade and another is the extent of the poet's learning, not one of function or office (except in the case of the *ollam*[…]).[424]

This idea of each of the grades of poet corresponding to an appropriate subsection of poetical knowledge is further demonstrated by a collection of metrical tracts which describe and demonstrate the 'proper' form of meter appropriate to each of them in turn.[425] In the case of the *ollam* it is important to note that their acquisition of this knowledge is not simply cumulative in terms of the expected number of *drécht* required to qualify as each of the grades. *Uraicecht na Ríar* states of an *ollam* that: '*secht cóecait drécht lais, .i. cóeca cach gráid*.'[426] 'he possesses seven fifties of compositions, namely a fifty for each grade.' Given the numbers of *drécht* the text stipulates for attaining the status of the lowest four ranks of poet; the *cano, dos, macfhuirmid* and *fochloc*—sixty, fifty, forty and thirty respectively, the *ollam* is clearly expected to possess a far greater mastery of each individual grade of knowledge than a lesser poet would need to demonstrate in order to pass from one grade to the next. This suggests that despite each grade having its own proper poetical form, this was not necessarily put aside when one graduated from one grade to the next, but continuously developed over a poet's career. Again, although these exact figures may be more ideological

[423] Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Literary Theory and Criticism,' p. 293.
[424] *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Breatnach, p. 87.
[425] Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Literary Theory and Criticism,' pp. 295-299.
[426] *Ibid*., p. 102.

than a strictly practical measure, memory is envisaged as a cumulative measure of a poet's ability which is expected to increase in accordance with status.

Uraicecht na Ríar's description of the *ollam*'s role in assessing, grading and confirming the ranks of poets places great emphasis on the candidate's possession of the quality of *idnae*: 'purity' or 'integrity.' *Idnae* is used to denote a moral virtue possessed by men and women similar in meaning to the English usage of 'integrity'.[427] The *idnae* desired of aspirants to the poetical grades comes in several different forms. Some of these, 'purity of integrity in respect of theft and plundering and illegality' (*idnae inracuis ar gait 7 brait 7 indligiud*) and perhaps also 'purity of mouth' (*idnae béoil*), express purity or integrity in relation to legal matters and further reinforce the notion that the importance of the role of the *fili* as a source of authority necessitated his being free from all possibility of impropriety in the performance of his art. A desire for moral purity is also expressed in the stipulations for his being physically pure as well: these are fairly stringent and focus primarily on his marital situation. A poet is to maintain one principal wife and refrain from indulging in sexual intercourse outside of this relationship, and must even limit the nights on which he is to sleep with his one true wife. Part of the Old-Irish Penitential, a moral rule regulating the behaviour of both monks and secular monastic tenants, dealing with the sin of *luxuria*, 'lust,' demonstrates in particular that such legalistic and moralistic interference into private affairs was by no means uncommon or exceptional in early medieval Ireland.[428] The existence of these sorts of stipulations in *Uraicecht na Ríar* must be due, again, to the modelling of poetic rank on the structure of early Irish church and from the influence of canon law and monastic rules. It is, therefore, not altogether unsurprising to find that in amongst the requirements that a *fili* must adhere to a high standard of moral behaviour with respect to criminal offences and sexual conduct, the stipulation that he also possess *idnae fhoglaime*, 'purity' or 'integrity of learning', expanded in a gloss on the text as *fis foirbthi*, perfect knowledge.[429]

As a *fili*'s status within the sevenfold hierarchy is legally determined by the scope of his accumulated knowledge, and this knowledge is dependent on his powers of memory whether trained through study or the product of natural endowment, it may be tempting to link *idnae fhoglaime* with a concept of perfect memory. In this interpretation the superiority of the

[427] *eDIL*., s.v. *idnae* (dil.ie/27210).
[428] Aideen O'Leary, ed. and trans., *Tallaght, Bishop Mael Ruain, and the Culdees*: *Six Texts on Discipline and Memory* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, Cambridge University, 2003), pp. xvi-xvii, 14-25.
[429] *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Liam Breatnach, p. 104.

poet's learning would thereby be established through its unquestionable truthfulness as a source of authority. Another possibility is that *idnae fhoglaime* refers once again to the completeness of the poet's learning instead, and that it is this which qualifies him in his art. This explanation may be supported by a reference, noted by *eDIL*, in the thirteenth or fourteenth-century manuscript, Trinity College Dublin 1316 (H 2. 15a), to the four *idnae*, 'integrities,' possessed by the *ollam* which includes: '*idhna foglome .i. um dá rann déc na filidechta*' 'integrity of learning namely concerning the twelve divisions of poetry.' [430] It also accords with other texts on the nature of poetical learning such as that detailing of the expected course of study for the various levels of poet, edited by Rudolph Thurneysen as text number III in the third volume of *Irische Texte*, which place the emphasis on the completeness of the *ollam*'s knowledge in encompassing all the divisions of the poetic art. [431] As a note of caution, however, it is worth keeping in mind that the other stipulations regarding the necessity for a poet's adherence to the various categories of *idnae* largely relate to moral and lawful conduct. Consequently, *idnae fhoglaime* may simply express the need for a *fili* to have genuinely attained the level of education appropriate to his rank and is not acting fraudulently in terms of his academic credentials. It is, therefore, most likely that the term *idnae fhoglaime* does not refer to an ideal of perfect memory and that *Uraicecht na Ríar*, whilst defining the expected scope of a poet's memory quite elaborately according to the various grades, cannot be shown to make any further detailed stipulation regarding its quality as a faculty. Nevertheless, the desire to establish authority remains a key objective in *Uraicecht na Ríar*, and memory remains the definitive measure by which a poet is ranked amongst his peers.

Details of the expected capacity of the memory of the secular scholar are also found elsewhere, specifically in the two tale lists edited together by Proinsias Mac Cana in his volume *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland*. His List A, an independent list found in the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster* and Trinity College Dublin, MS. H. 3. 17., claims that:

> *Do nemthigud filed i scélaib ₇ i comgnibaib inso sís da nasnís do rigaib ₇ flathib* .i. uii. *coícait scél* .i. *coic cóicait de primscélaib ₇ dá cóicait do foscélaib ₇ ní hármiter na fosceóilsin acht do chethri grádaib tantum* .i. *ollam ₇ anrath ₇ cli ₇ cano*. [432]

[430] *eDIL*., s.v. *idnae* (dil.ie/27210).
[431] Stokes and Windische, *Irishe Texte*, III pp. 67-105.
[432] Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980), p. 41.

> Here below is what qualifies a *fili* as *nemed* in tales and historical knowledge to be told to kings and nobles, namely: seven fifties of tales, namely: five fifties of primary-tales and two fifties of secondary-tales, and these secondary-tales are proper only to four of the grades, namely: the *ollam*, *ánruth*, *clí* and *cano*.

As Mac Cana notes, however, the actual list given only comprises a hundred and eighty seven titles.[433] This is closer to the number *Uraicecht na Ríar* stipulates for an *ánruth* rather than an *ollam*. The second list forms a part of the tale *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*, *Uraird mac Coise's Ploy*, surviving only in fifteenth and sixteenth-century copies, and is presented as the mental repertoire of the tales known by the poet Urard mac Coise, the tale's eponymous protagonist. This list, though differing versions vary slightly, contains in the region of a hundred and seventy-eight items, not far off the number of list A.[434] At this point it is necessary to sound a note of caution, although of comparable length and containing a number of tales enticingly close to that required of the *ánruth*, they cannot be taken at face value as a simple inventory of the tales that a poet could produce. Mac Cana notes that those who compiled these lists were not necessarily familiar with the individual tales recorded in them to any extent beyond simply the name of the title:

> It follows that lists A and B are not to be thought of as indexes of the living repertoire of the *filid* at any particular time. By their very nature they tend to be antiquarian and unrealistic […].[435]

As is the case with *Uraicecht na Ríar*, the details provided by these two lists should be taken as an idealised expression of the capacity and makeup of a poet's memory, rather than necessarily a literal one.

Nevertheless, the prefatory paragraph to list A can potentially shed more light on what was expected of the memory of the *filid*. Unlike *Uraicecht na Ríar*, list A does not stipulate defined numbers of tales appropriate to the knowledge of each of the grades and, for the most part, seems to treat its own contents as a pool appropriate to the *filid* as a whole. The only division made is between the two categories of *primscéla* and *foscéla*, 'primary-tales and secondary-tales.' Mac Cana argues convincingly that this is an entirely artificial distinction innovative to tale list A, with the category of *foscéla* a secondary development from the pre-existing phrase *primscéla* which originally denoted a broad sense of primacy or significance

[433] *Ibid*., p. 33.
[434] *Ibid*., pp. 50-63.
[435] They do, however, provide evidence that some tales known only in much later forms did exist, in some capacity, at an earlier period. *Ibid*., pp. 84-87.

and did not imply any categorical division.[436] Consequently, it cannot be assumed that this method of classifying a *fili*'s knowledge of tales was widely accepted. It may certainly have been known about, however, as Mac Cana identifies a very similar scheme in commentary from the legal tract *Uraicecht Becc*, another tract on poetic status.[437] One important aspect of list A's *primscéla*/*foscéla* classification system remained perplexing to Mac Cana:

> As to what—if anything in particular—may have given him the idea of assigning the *fo-scéla* to the four highest grades of *filid*, I can at the moment make no suggestion.[438]

An explanation for the assignation of secondary-tales only to the highest four grades of poet may lie, again, in notions that comprehensiveness is the most desirable trait of memory for a poet to possess. If, as Mac Cana argues, the *prím-* prefix was understood here to denote importance or primacy: 'the most important tales,' then it may perhaps be appropriate that these were the most widely known.[439] *Foscéla* would then represent supplementary, less widely-known or even obscure or superfluous tales unnecessary for a lower-ranked poet to know but a highly significant mark of breath of learning for a member of the higher grades.

A final question arising in the context of how the laws of poetic status and the tale lists attempt to quantify a poet's memory remains. What is the precise nature of the individual items stored in a poet's memory: what constitutes memory of a *scél* or a *drecht*? This is an extremely complex question to attempt to answer touching on oral theory more widely and cannot, unfortunately, be explored here to the full extent it deserves. A very brief mention of the problems raised by this question, however, remains highly pertinent to the present discussion. It is clear from *Uraicecht na Ríar*'s saying of a *fili* that: '*taisbénad a dréchtae do ollamain*,'[440] 'he displays his compositions to an *ollam*,' in order to be assessed fit for appointment to a poetic rank, that these *drecht* are, at least theoretically, quantifiable as distinct, individual entities. But even if this does accurately reflect, and this is by no means a certainty, what a medieval Irish poet could hold in memory, what are the mnemonic processes that were involved? Are these compositions, to use an extreme dichotomy as a scale of reference, bespoke individual entities memorised and recalled exactly, word by word, or a selection of key characters, events, and themes woven together off the cuff through use of a set of conventional vocabulary, stylistic formula and common motifs? This is very hard

[436] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-120.
[437] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[438] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[439] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
[440] *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, p. 104.

to answer without further dedicated study. Studies of oral cultures have moved away from the notion, established as a consequence of Parry and Lord's pioneering work on modern Slavic oral culture, that methods of composition and performance adhere to a universal pattern and, instead, highlight the immense variation found between them.[441] In the context of medieval Ireland, Edgar Slotkin has wrestled with this question, approaching it primarily through the evidence of scribal practice. He highlights, in particular, clear evidence that individual tales transmitted in writing had the potential to exist in 'multiform,' possessed of an underlying core 'meaning' but not tied into a 'fixed' textual form, as would be expected of tales transmitted orally.[442] More systematic investigation is needed, however, before any more precise assessment of the role of memory in performance and its relationship to issues of transmission and composition. As a consequence, it remains very difficult to precisely discern what mnemonic techniques and methods of recollection the *filid* used in displaying their *scéla* before an audience. Nevertheless, in neither the laws of poetic status, nor the tale lists, does any notion or ideal of 'perfect memory,' reflective of that Georgi identifies operating within the tale of Cenn Fáelad's *inchinn dermait*, appear to be found.

The terms used in Irish legal writing to define or detail the knowledge the *filid* as a class are often obscure or invested with deliberately arcane interpretations in the glosses and commentary attached to them. John Carey's discussion of the terms *teinm laedo*, *imbas forosnai* and *díchetal di chennaib* illustrates this point well.[443] These terms are particularly difficult to translate and seem to have exercised the imaginations of medieval readers as well, the latter term being a case in point.[444] Amongst the various explanations of this phrase, roughly translating as 'incantation from heads', that are found in the Legal literature is the interpretation that it refers to some form of poetical communication with the severed heads of the dead.[445] Unlike these terms, *idnae fhoglaime* does not appear to have been the subject of magical or esoteric interpretations. Carey's discussion of *díchetal di chennaib*, and its relationship to the terms *teinm laedo* and *imbas forosnai*, proposes that it originally applied to aspects of the poetic art rather than arcane practices, only gaining the latter associations at the time *Sanas Cormaic* was composed.[446] There is no evidence that any of the terms discussed by Carey incorporate any form of an ideal of perfect memory. Indeed, it has so far not been

[441] Finnegan, 'Oral Literature,' p. 60.
[442] Slotkin, 'Fixed Texts,' pp. 442-444, 449-450.
[443] Carey, 'Three Things,' pp. 41-58.
[444] *Ibid*., pp. 46-47, 50.
[445] *Ibid*., pp. 45-46.
[446] *Ibid*., pp. 49-50.

possible to find any trace at all of such a concept in the legal literature concerned with the status of poets. Given that many of the other abilities ascribed to the *ollam* in these texts were understood to be remarkable, even magical, in nature it is surprising that, if a concept of perfect memory was a widely held intellectual ideal in medieval Ireland, it should not find any clear manifestation therein.

It is very important to question what meaning exactly actually lies behind the legal prescriptions regarding the knowledge and abilities of poets, however difficult a task this may be. Aside from the problem of deliberately obscure terminology, the precise numerical requirements found in these texts should not be taken as mandatory legislation, but rather an idealised representation. Sims-Williams notes that the legal division of the poets into seven grades occurred 'probably under the influence of the seventh-century church's seven ecclesiastical orders from bishop down to doorkeeper,'[447] highlighting the significance of convention and formula in the construction of these legal texts. The conclusions of this investigation into the legal material are in no way intended to undermine those of Georgi's study of the Cenn Fáelad story. The unusual nature of the wound, and consequential inability to forget, seems most logically to have been devised in order to present Cenn Fáelad as an unquestionable source of accurate authority. It must, however, be recognised that the unique nature of this wound is compounded by the unique nature of the intellectual agenda behind it. By and large, representations of the idealised memory emphasise breadth of capacity linked to an idea of comprehensiveness. In these depictions the accuracy of a poet's memory must either be assumed or constitute an issue that was left unstated for a number of possible reasons. In context of the semi-oral world of the *filid*, it seems likely that strict accuracy was less a concern than the ability to convey, or indeed create, meaning from the stuff of memory. This is implied by Mac Cana's study and may explain the emphasis placed on knowledge of the techniques of verse-craft and poetic composition rather than any kind of mnemonic abilities. This is not to discount the importance of memory to the *filid*, this is clearly evident in the texts and must necessarily have been so in a culture with limited access to literacy and writing, but strongly suggests strict accuracy in memory was less desired than the ability to compose and communicate.

[447] Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Literary Theory and Criticism,' p. 293.

5.6 The Authoritative Witness: Fintan mac Bóchrai in *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*

Cenn Fáelad also makes a fleeting appearance in another tale concerning memory and intellectual authority: *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' This is a Middle Irish text found in the early fifteenth-century *Yellow Book of Lecan* and the roughly contemporary *Book of Lismore*. The tale certainly post-dates the consolidation of the *Lebor Gabála* narrative represented by the twelfth-century version contained in the *Book of Leinster*, on which it is heavily dependent. *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* provides further insight into the legitimizing role played by memory in establishing learned authority. The tale is set during the reign of Diarmait mac Cerball who historically held the kingship of Tara between 544 and 565, and was great-grandson to Niall Noígiallach the eponymous founder of the powerful Uí Néill dynasty.[448] The tale tells how during Diarmait's reign the Uí Néill sought to re-determine the extent of the *tellach*, the 'household' or perhaps 'land-holding,' of Tara, thinking it overly large.[449] Specifically they desire the reduction of the *faithche*, the 'green' or the open public space associated with a settlement: '*ar ba díḿáin leo in cutruma sin do f*[*h*]*erond occaib cen tech cen trebad fair, ₇ cen f*[*h*]*ognam tellaich Temrach*', 'for they thought it un-profitable for that proportion of their territory [to be] without house or farm upon it, and without rendering service for the household of Tara.'[450] The implication here seems to be that the Uí Néill have come to subject too much territory to the kingship of Tara and, as a consequence, are mis-using the land causing discontent. In its resolution to this problem *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* is as much concerned with an ideological division and use of territory as with a practical, physical one. Although the tale goes on to define locations which belong to each of the five provinces of Ireland, not just the *tellach* of Tara, it also associates the provinces with more abstract divisions: '*Íaruss fis. tuadus cath. airthis bláth. teissus séis. fortius flaith.*'[451] 'Knowledge in the west [of Ireland], battle in the north, bounty

[448] Koch, *Celtic Culture*, pp. 586-587.
[449] The noun *tellach* appears in two forms originating with different roots and holding similar, but notably distinct, meanings. The first originated as a term for a 'hearth' or 'fire-place' and developed the secondary associations of 'household,' 'family' and 'kin-group.' The second is a legalistic term describing a process of land seizure or the occupation of territory viewed to be held by another without legal right. As Richard Irving Best recognised, it is consequently unclear exactly which *tellach* is actually meant here. Best, Whitley Stokes and *eDIL* all choose to associate this tale with the first meaning; however, it seems, given that the nature of the dispute amongst the Uí Néill is almost precisely what the second term describes, most fitting to go with the latter. *eDIL*., s.v. 1 *tellach* (dil.ie/40466), 2 *tellach* (dil.ie/40467). 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 4 (1910), pp. 121-172 (p. 165).
[450] *Ibid.*, p. 124. *eDIL*., s.v. *faithche*, *faidche* (dil.ie/21214).
[451] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, p. 146.

in the east, melody in the south: kingship in the centre.' In this way, *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* presents and ideological layout of Ireland within which Tara and Uisnech, famously known in the Middle Ages as the 'navel' of Ireland, sit: '*amail bit a di áraind a mmíl indile*.'[452] 'like how a beast's two kidneys are arranged.' Although the place of Tara is clearly ascribed a position of authority in Ireland, it is implied toward the end of the tale that its encroachment into the territory of the other four provinces of Ireland is unjust.[453] Ultimately, the ideal relationship between Tara and the provinces is presented as symbiotic and not one of unproductive domination.[454]

Of interest to the subject of memory is the method by which *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* has the knowledge required to resolve the dispute, which has unfortunately been lost, restored to the men of Ireland. Diarmait, prompted into resolving this issue when the noblemen of Ireland refuse to partake of the feast of Tara held there by the Uí Neill every third year, seeks out one of authority to advise him on how the division should be determined. The subsequent process in which a series of learned experts are called into the tale, sequentially defering the privilege of judgment on to the next highest authority until the most senior can be found, shows us something of how knowledge and authority are here legitimized. The king asks first that either of the saints Fland Feabla mac Scandláin or Fíachra mac Colmáin, both bishops of Armagh and successors to saint Patrick, be summoned to advise him.[455] Fíachra arrives and announces that: '*ná bérad breth forsin caingin sin dóib co ndechasta húaithib ar cend neich bid éolchu ⁊ bid sine andás*.' 'he would not give them judgment concerning that case until they sent for one who might be more learned and older than he.'[456] Fíachra requests the presence of Cenn Fáelad who likewise defers, this time to the '*cóic sinser*', 'five elders' of all Ireland.[457] The now familiar description of the wound to the 'brain of forgetting' and his consequent amassing of secular lore are found again here:

[452] *Ibid*., p. 152. Koch, *Celtic Culture*, pp. 1705-1706.
[453] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, pp. 154-155.
[454] It is not possible without further dedicated study, the remit of which lies beyond the present study, to make any more detailed claims about the political ideology espoused by this tale.
[455] The Irish text as edited by Best gives the name, '*Cendfáelad mac Scandláin meic Fingin*', the name Fland Feabla being supplied in a footnote as a variant reading from the *Book of Lismore*. As Best notes, this must represent an error of the scribe of the *Yellow Book of Lecan* who seems to have confused or conflated the names of Cenn Fáelad mac Scandláin meic Ailill with Fland Feabla mac Scandláin meic Fingin. Like Cenn Fáelad, Fland Feabla's presence in the tale is an anachronism. Fíachra mac Colmáin and Diarmait mac Cerball were roughly contemporary figures both flourishing during middle of the sixth century. Fland Feabla, however, lived well into the eighth century. *Ibid*., pp. 126, 165.
[456] *Ibid*., p. 126-127.
[457] These are Finnchad from Falmag, Leinster, Cú-Alad from Cruachu Conalad, Bran Bairne from Bairenn Dúban son of Deg from Fir Olnegmacht and Tuán son of Cairill from Ulster. *Ibid*., p. 126-127.

> *is asa chind side* […] *do comgned a hinchind dermait i cath Muigi Rath .i. conid cumain leis cach ní rochúala do senchas hÉrend o s*[*h*]*in alle cosinndi*.
>
> it is from his head […] that his brain of forgetting was smashed out in the battle of Magh Rath, that is, he remembers everything he heard of the history of Ireland from then until today.[458]

Cenn Fáelad's appearance in *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, as Best notes, is clearly anachronistic: the battle of Mag Rath, in which his prestigious memory and thus his reputation as a learned authority, occurred in 637, long after Diarmait's death in 565.[459] All these authorites ultimately defer to the most superior authority available: Fintan mac Bóchrai, an antediluvian survivor and great-grandson of Noah who, the tale tells us, has lived in Ireland from the time of its very first settlement by mankind by the people of Cessair, granddaughter of Noah. Not all of the 'five elders' summoned after Cenn Fáelad appear to be well known figures, however, they do include Tuán mac Cairill. Emma Nic Cárthaigh notes the similarities between Tuán and Fintan: both are survivors from Ireland's mythical past, both survive to pass down knowledge of that time to later generations, and both have associations with shapeshifting into various animal forms.[460] The intention of *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* in amassing this collection of learned authorities, sequentially passed over in favour of the superior source represented by Fintan, must be to proclaim the utmost superiority of the tales' imparted knowledge as to the proper division of Ireland.

So what quality or attributes establish Fintan as the superior source of authority, and what role does memory play in this process? It terms of his expertise in learning, Fintan makes the following claim:

> "*am éolach ina fesaib 7 ina táintib 7 ina toglaib 7 ina tochmarcaib do neoch dorónad díb ó dílind ille*"[461]
>
> "I am learned in her [Ireland's] feasts and in her raids, in her destructions and in her wooings, in all of them that might have happened since the Flood to the present"

This expertise seems to be relatable to that of the secular scholar: *fesi*, *tánae*, *togla* and *tochmarca* ('feasts,' 'cattle-raids,' 'sieges/destructions' and 'wooings') are all categories of the heroic tale literature known by the *filid* as demonstrated by the laws on poetic status and

[458] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, p. 126.
[459] *Ibid.*, p. 165.
[460] Emma Nic Cárthaigh, 'Surviving the Flood: Revenants and Antediluvian Lore in Medieval Irish Texts,' in: Kathy Cawsey and Jason Harris, eds., *Transmission and Transformation in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 40-64.
[461] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, p. 128.

the tale lists previously discussed.[462] Fintan himself, however, is refered to as *senchaid*, a 'historian,' rather than a *fili*.[463] As with the concern expressed over knowledge of the *Táin* in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*, emphasis is placed on the completeness or comprehensiveness of Fintan's memory. In this instance his field of expertise is Ireland's history. His first display of the content of his knowledge before the assembled men of Ireland is the recitation of a poem listing the legendary invasions of Ireland by the likes of the Fir Bolg, Tuatha Dé Dannan and the peoples of Parthalon, Nemed and Míl: this verse is also contained in *Lebor Gabála Érenn* itself and attributed to him therein.[464] The host then declares: '*is maith lind a f*[*h*]*is úait caidi tairisiu do chuimne fén*,' 'we desire to know from you of the trustworthiness of your memory.'[465] In response Fintan tells a story that emphasizes his great age, of how he once grew a yew tree from a berry to an enormous size until a hundred warriors would fit beneath its branches. After the tree died he cut it down and turned it into seven each of seven different sized vessels, these all fell to bits through age and were rebuilt by him, each reduced in size, since which they have all rotted away to nothing.[466] Nic Cárthaigh has discussed the significance of this description of the planting of a yew tree, a motif also associated with Fintan in the late ninth or early tenth-century tale *Airne Fíngen*: 'Fíngen's Night-Watch.'[467] She places Fintan's claim of having outlived the yew tree in context of a brief poem, found in the *Book of Lismore*, listing the lifespans of various living beings which increase in length by multiples of three of the lifespan of the previous being.[468] This poem ends: '.iii. *saeguil in iubbuir don bith* (*ó athosach*) *co a dereadh*,' 'three lifetimes of the yew for the world from its beginning to its end,' and demonstrates the extreme age that Fintan must be understood to reached.[469]

As Nic Cárthaigh recognises, great age, memory and eye-witness testimony are all drawn together in Fintan to produce an authority of exceptional precedence. In addition, she shows that Fintan depicts his relationship with the land of Ireland in terms of the bond between a foster-son and foster-mother, suggesting a more intimate aspect to his learning: '[…] we can compare his great knowledge of the native way of life of the island with the

[462] See above, pp. 151-152.
[463] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, pp. 144-147.
[464] *Ibid*., pp. 128-133. *Lebor Gabála Érenn*: *The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ed. and trans. by R. A. Stewart MacAlister, 2 vols. (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1938-1939), II (1939) pp. 210-215.
[465] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, p. 134.
[466] *Ibid*., pp. 134-135.
[467] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Surviving the Flood,' pp. 42, 50-51.
[468] *Ibid*., pp. 51-52.
[469] *Ibid*., pp. 51-52. (See also: footnote p. 52.) For the full text of this poem, see: Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), p. xli.

knowledge a son might have of his foster-mother's nature and personality.'[470] There remain, however, more aspects to explore in relation to how *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* conceptualises memory in relation to authority: how is Fintan's memory authoritative? Fintan's tale of the yew tree clearly linkes his great age with the notion that his memory is reliable and thus it seems, as Nic Cárthaigh implies, that age predetermines good memory as a matter of course. Indeed, after hearing Fintan's narration Diarmait exclaims; '*At arrsaig sin samlaid*, […] *is tíachtain tar breith senórach tíachtain tar do breith*,' 'You are venerable indeed, […] to impugn your judgment is to impugn the judgment of an elder.'[471] Fintan's age alone, it would seem, is enough to satisfy the gathering of the reliability of his memory, at least in terms of his ability to derive correct judgment from it, and this must presumably satisfy the audience too. Aside from his knowledge of secular tales already mentioned, Fintan makes two further statements about his ability; '*am éolach in cech breithemnos fírén dorónad ó thosuch domuin cosinndiu*,' 'I am acquainted with every true judgment that might have been made from the beginning of the world until this day,'[472] and: '*Am mebrach-sa ém* […] *i sreathaib senchusa hÉrend indus robas indte cosin n-uair-se 7 indus bether indti béos co bráth*,' 'I am versed, indeed, in the arrangement of the history of Ireland, as it has been unto this hour, and as it will be until Doomsday.'[473] His claims over *senchas* and *breithemnas*, 'history' and 'jurisprudence,' accord with the expertise he expresses earlier, that of the intellectual domain of the secular scholar, and again the breadth or completeness of his memory is emphasised. In addition, the truthful nature of Fintan's memory is built upon by the introduction of a legal element in his knowledge. The most remarkable claim here, however, is that he holds knowledge of events not only in the entirety of the near and distant past, but also of those that are yet to occur. In other words, he has the miraculous ability to remember the future.

The source of Fintan's knowledge, and his supernatural powers of remembering, is somewhat difficult to determine. It partly arises from the mysterious figure of Tréfhuilngid Tre-eochair, whose name possesses a literal meaning along the lines of 'Three-edged Upholder,' a marvellous giant who encounters Fintan whilst passing through Ireland from the farthest west having desired to converse with the Sun.[474] We are later told that; '*ba haingel*

[470] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Surviving the Flood,' p. 47.
[471] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[472] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, p. 134.
[473] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[474] *Ibid.*, pp. 138-141. See: *eDIL* s.v. *trefhuilngid* (dil.ie/41720), *tre-eochair*, *treochair* (dil.ie/41710). McCone, however, translates: 'Three-sufferer Three Key.' McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, p. 75.

Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin.' 'he was an angel of God, or was God himself.'[475] This encounter takes place roughly around the time of Christ's crucifixion during the reign of king Conaing Bec-eclach.[476] Tréfhuilngid Tre-eochair chooses Fintan to be the one to impart knowledge of the division of Ireland, however, it is clear that Fintan is already an old and esteemed *senchaid* by this point.[477] Is Fintan's memory, therefore, an exceptional personal quality which recommends his selection for this task, or the more direct result of divine intervention? In its search for an absolute scholarly authority the tale up to this point has moved through a series of figures reaching ever further back in time from the historic to the mythic, and ultimately touches upon a divine source. After hearing the division of Ireland from Tréfhuilngid Tre-eochair, Fintan receives a gift of berries from a branch carried by the mysterious giant and used by him as his only source of sustenance.[478] As Nic Cárthaigh notes, this is '[…] a great honour for Fintan […].'[479] There is certainly, however, more to say here on the symbolism of this act. By providing Fintan with some of his own magically sustaining berries which he then goes on to plant in suitable locations around Ireland, Tréfhuilngid Tre-eochair confirms him in his newly appointed role as the disseminator of divine truth. This is no doubt reflective of the biblical metaphor of seeds representing the word of God expressed by Jesus in Parable of the Sower.[480] Fintan's role is consequently cast into the pattern represented by the ghost of Fergus in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* A.2. or Cú Chulainn in *Siaburcharpat Con Culaind*: a bearer of memory born of eye-witness testimony whose knowledge can only be accessed through divine sanction or mediation.[481]

In *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* the key to Fintan's authority is firstly his age, as has been shown. Underlying this is the precedence given to eyewitness testimony in establishing a truly authoritative transmission of the past, a perspective found in other medieval Irish tales dealing with miraculous access to knowledge. When Fintan describes his authority over tales, history and judgments with claims of '*am éolach*' and '*am mebrach-sa*,' he is demonstrating direct experience of the events involved. Fintan is able to give a true judgment concerning the division of Ireland because he was present when Tréfhuilngid Tre-eochair gave this

[475] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, p. 152.
[476] Best notes that there seems to be some confusion over the exact date of this encounter. Although Tréfhuilngid Tre-eochair alludes to the crucifixion as a contemporary event, Conaing Bec-eclach is elsewhere ascribed a much earlier orbit. *Ibid*., pp. 140-141, 167.
[477] *Ibid*., pp. 144-147.
[478] *Ibid*., pp. 142-143, 150-151.
[479] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Surviving the Flood,' p. 50.
[480] Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:1-15.
[481] See above, pp. 110-121.

knowledge to men. Indeed, the text strongly implies that he has been kept alive by God singularly for this purpose: once his judgment is delivered he is promptly overcome with weakness and dies.[482] The ultimate ascription of Fintan's role as a bearer and communicator of memory to divine predestination places him outside the regular flow of time in a manner comparable to the other summoned revenants and long-lived survivors who function as exceptional bearers of memory in Irish literature. As Kim McCone notes, it also brings the attempt to find the highest learned authority full circle through historical Church leaders of the 'recent' past, through semi-historical and outright legendary scholars, back to the highest power and font of all: God himself.[483] *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* provides an insight into the methodology behind such figures as Fintan mac Bóchrai, Tuán mac Cairill, Caílte and the ghosts of Cú Chulainn and Fergus through the details Fintan provides about his role as an authority. This point is emphasised in the nature of his contact with the divine: if the nature of the division of Ireland was ordained directly by God, presumably carrying with it permanence unrestrained by time, why is there a need to set its communication to men so far in the past, and why keep Fintan miraculously alive solely for this purpose? From a purely practical point of view this places the claim beyond the 'near' past into more remote and less easily contestable territory. Moreover, it may stem from a wish to utilize the particular person of Fintan, known through a number of tales for his great age and wisdom. Regardless, *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* demonstrates the strength of the theme of creating in literature a living link with the events of the past, enabling a tale to present itself as an accurate and authoritative recollection of knowledge gained from first-hand familiarity.

[482] 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara,' ed. and trans. Best, pp. 154-161.
[483] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 76-77.

5.7 Authority, Remembering and Forgetting in *Acallam na Senórach*

Eye-witness testimony and the idea of a living link to the past embodied in an individual, kept alive through miraculous means, who is representative of the past and who can act as a source of authority on the past is, as noted previously, also a key feature of *Acallam na Senórach*. This text has already been approached here in terms of its relevance to the debate over the interplay of notions of orality and literacy in medieval Irish literary theories, however, the *Acallam* also offers a great deal of interesting detail on how memory was understood to function.[484] The importance of eye-witness testimony in *Acallam na Senórach* has been highlighted by Dagmar Schlüter:

> Remembrance of past events, frequently in the form of an eyewitness account, and the desire to reconstruct and record them are recurrent features of medieval Irish literature. But seldom in prose are these features so freely employed and commented upon as in the twelfth- or early thirteenth-century work *Acallam na Senórach*, 'The Colloquy of the Ancients.'[485]

As has already been noted, Caílte serves as a living link between the newly christianised Ireland of Saint Patrick and the heroic age of the Fían by virtue of his surviving from the time of the former into the time of the latter. He is here fulfilling the same function as the ancient survivor Fintan does in *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, as well as that of the summoned spirits of the dead Fergus in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* and Cú Chulainn in *Siaburcharpat Con Culaind*. Indeed, some particularly close similarities are found in the depictions of Caílte and Fintan besides the immediately obvious points that both are long lived and survive outside of their own age to bear knowledge of that age to others. Caílte's memory, like that of Fintan, benefits from a measure of divine approbation, demonstrated by the urging of Patrick's two angels for the saint to record his stories, even if it is not ultimately the direct product of a heavenly source, as is the case with Fintan's memory.[486] In Fintan's case his divinely approved longevity seemingly expires once his purpose as an authority for the knowledge represented in *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* has been fulfilled, providing a sense of completeness and closure for his characterisation here. There may even be some echo of this

[484] See above, pp. 92-102.
[485] Dagmar Schlüter, 'For the Entertainment of Lords and Commons of Later Times: Past and Remembrance in *Acallam na Senórach*,' *Celtica*, 26 (2010), pp. 146-160 (p. 146).
[486] See above, pp. 159-161.

inevitable death that awaits Fintan once the event of his testimony has past in the *Acallam*'s treatment of Caílte, Oisín and the other surviving members of the *fían*. Schlüter notes:

> That the dialogue [between Patrick and the *fían* survivors] is not simply an important element for the structure of the *Acallam* but the necessary condition for the existence and survival of the warriors of old becomes evident towards the end of the preserved parts of the text. When the remaining warriors recognise that they lost so much of their former strength and that in the future no one will talk to them, they lie down on the ground and die.[487]

The cessation of their ability to communicate the past here prefigures, and seemingly prescribes, the ending of their own lives.

It is, however, not possible for us to know for certain if Caílte's life comes to an end at the conclusion of the *Acallam* in a direct parallel to Fintan's own as the final part of the tale does not survive. Fintan's unusually long life and inevitable death is seemingly the product of God's intervention, but does God play a similar role as the patron of Caílte's longevity in the *Acallam*? This is, doubtless intentionally, left somewhat ambiguous in the text. Caílte and the other *fían* survivors move between the world of early Christian Ireland in the time of Patrick and the mythical realm of the Túatha Dé Danann and have a foot in each, so to speak, as well as their own past heroic age. The idea of long-lived ancients is not limited to Ireland alone and, despite prominent examples from the Old Testament, may not necessarily be tied into a notion of divine blessing. Nevertheless, Patrick, God's servant and symbolic representative of the Church in Ireland, certainly plays a crucial role in enabling the realisation of Caílte's testimony on the encouragement of his guardian angels and, we must therefore presume, by God's direct authority. When questioned by Patrick as to the cause of the *fían* survivors' longevity, Caílte replies:

> *Ocus ro frecair Cáilte* .i. "*fírinde inár croidhedhaibh 7 nertt inár lámhaibh, 7 comall inár tengthaibh*."[488]
>
> And Caílte answered thusly: "[by the] truth in our hearts and strength in our hands, and [the] fulfilment in our tongues."

The emphasis placed on truth here, as well their ability and duty to communicate it, again suggests that their continuing survival is directly linked to their ability to serve as the bearers of authoritative memory of the past. Furthermore, as John Carey notes, towards the end of the

[487] Schlüter, 'Past and Remembrance,' p. 152.
[488] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV, p. 4.

tale Caílte explicitly distances himself from the Túath Dé Danann for fear of jeopardising the possibility of his salvation.[489] In this episode Caílte approaches the beings dwelling in the *síd* of Assaroe in order to seek healing for his leg which is suffering from a multitude of injuries sustained during life in the *fían*. In addition to the healing of his leg, however, the Túath Dé Danann also offer to return him to a state of physical youth analogous to their own immortal existence. This latter offer Caílte rejects with the pejorative dismissal that to accept would be: '*do gabail deilbe druidechta umum*,' 'to take a shape of wizardry upon me.'[490] It is tempting, albeit entirely speculative, to claim by force of the parallels between Caílte and Fintan that the missing ending of the *Acallam* concluded with Caílte accepting that his time has passed and his purpose on earth fulfilled, drawing a line under his twilight years as an authority on the lost age of Finn's *fían*. Regardless, as Carey recognises, his ultimate fate has already been predetermined through the act of his baptism.[491]

Although Caílte is wary of jeopardising his bond with Patrick and compromising on his newly accepted faith he does ultimately accept one other gift from the Túath Dé Danann, a magical potion to assist in the restoration of his memory:

> "*Ocus as mithig damsa imthecht*," *ar Cailte*, "*₇ bennacht ar lucht in tsida, ₇ atá dail fer nEirenn a cind bliadna do Temraig, ₇ ní fetaim-si gan dul d'accallaim mo choiccli ₇ mo chomalta* .i. *Oissin mac Find, ₇ tre forchongra in Tailgind do aichin dim dul ann, ₇ maithe fer nEirenn a n-aeninadh d'indissin mod ₇ morgnim gaili ₇ gaiscid na Feinde ₇ Find meic Cumaill ₇ fer nEirenn archena, ₇ do lesugud údar ₇ olloman dona scelaib indesmait-ne ann co dered aimsire*." "*Ocus fil cobair accainde duit*," *ar in ingen*. "*Ca cobair sin*?" *ar Cailte*. "*Deoch cuimnigthi céille d'indlucud duinde duit co Temraig conach tecma duit es nó abhann nó indber nó a cath nó a comlann nach bia a cuimne accut*."[492]
>
> "And it is time for me to travel on," said Caílte, "and a blessing on the folk of the *síd*, there is a gathering of the men of Ireland at Tara at the end of the year, and I cannot refrain from going to converse with my companion and foster-brother Oisín son of Finn, and because of the summons of the Adze Head who commanded me to go there, and to tell the nobles of the men of Ireland in one place of the honour and great-deeds of valour and arms of the *fían* and Finn mac Cumaill and the men of Ireland as well, and so authorities and chief-poets preserve the stories we tell there to the end of time." "And we have help for you," said the girl [Bé Binn]. "What help is that?" said Caílte. "A remembering drink of the mind to bear sealed with you to Tara so that you may never

[489] Carey, 'a conversation,' pp. 84-85.
[490] *Ibid*., p. 85.
[491] *Ibid*., pp. 85-86.
[492] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV, p. 202.

> happen upon a stream or a river or an estuary without having memory of it or of its [attendant] battle or combat."

The Túath Dé Danann, although they never come into contact with Patrick directly, do hold a degree of influence in the process of transmission that the *Acallam* envisages for Caílte's tales by means of this magical drink. Nevertheless, this gift is entirely subordinate to the plan of action that has already been determined by Patrick on the urging of his two guardian angels. The Túath Dé Danann are presented as enacting God's will here, and seem to be conscious and willing in doing so. Eye-witness testimony is, as has been seen, a key concept in several tales dealing with access to knowledge of or from the past besides the *Acallam*, including *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* and *Siaburcharpat Con Culaind*. The memory of an eye-witness present at the time of the events that latter generations wish to access is, in all these cases, the source from which authoritative knowledge is gained. In all cases, however, this source is maintained by God and access to it is either permitted directly or through an earthly representative. God authorises the preservation of Caílte's tales and enables the delivery of Fintan's testimony. Likewise, his representatives allow the retrieval of the *Táin* in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* version A.2. and Cú Chulainn to communicate from beyond the grave in the *Siaburcharpat*. In a very real sense, therefore, God is envisaged as the ultimate author and the source of all authority as the preserver of memory in its rawest form.

Acallam na Senórach also brings into focus one final theme reoccurring within medieval Irish depictions and discussions of memory, namely, the tensions caused by the negative reverse of memorising and remembering: the capacity to forget. The failure of memory, perhaps unsurprisingly, underlies many of the depictions of memory discussed so far. It is certainly a key factor in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*, precipitating the crisis of the tale: the possibility that the complete *Táin* is in danger of being lost. Whilst remaining highly distinct within medieval Irish depictions of memory as a group, the notion of Cenn Fáelad's lost *inchinn dermait* is, as is clear in the very name of this peculiar organ, also motivated by the desire to overcome forgetfulness. In all these cases memory is linked to the issue of authority and, consequentially, a crisis of failing memory is also inextricably a crisis of jeopardised authority, if not one of potentially lost knowledge in a more abstract sense. The potential crisis waiting to be caused by memory failure in the *Acallam* is framed in

similar terms, but perhaps leaning towards the latter.[493] This failure is defined in the angels' exhortation for Patrick to record Caílte's tales: '*ní mó iná train a scél innisit na senlaeich út ar dáigh dermait 7 dichuimhne orra*,' 'those old warriors recount no more than a third of their tales on account of their forgetfulness and bad memory.'[494] For Joseph Nagy, as has been discussed, faulty and failing memory is here emblematic of a declining oral tradition stymied by competition from literacy.[495] It has hopefully become clear over the course of this study that anxiety over scholarly authority, grounded as it is in the claim of being able to retrieve, order and disseminate memory of the past, is a much broader concern of medieval Irish literature and remains bigger than any potential tension between the oral and literary media.

There is, however, a potential paradox to be seen in the *Acallam*'s overall approach to memory and its place in the ongoing concern of establishing authoritative accounts of the past. A similar paradox has been encountered earlier in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*'s depiction of memory as both simultaneously having the capacity of causing knowledge to become lost when it fails, but also being the best (perhaps the only) source to turn to in order to restore knowledge. In the *Acallam*'s case the paradox can be framed thus: why do Patrick's angels describe Caílte and the *fían* survivors as suffering from *dermait*, 'forgetfulness,' and *díchuimne*, 'bad memory,' when all the acts of remembering they perform during the tale are consistently proven to be nothing but accurate? One example of many is the opening of the grave of Sálbuide:

> "*Cia ata isin chinn-sa thes don tulaig, a Cháilti*?" *ar Pátraic*. "*Sálbhuidi mac Feidleacair, mac rígh Muman, fuair bás ann a ndegaidh fhiadha sídhe* .xxx. *con 7* .xxx. *gilla 7* .xxx. *óglach, 7 ro muiredh in tulach orro*:" *ut dixit Cáilte*:
>
> *Atá isin chinn-sa thes . mac Sálbuidhi na n-eceas,*
>
> *ní háirimthi mar mháin bhic . cóeca conghlann finnaircit.*
>
> "*Do ba maith linn," ar Benén*, "*na seoit sin d'fagh*[*b*]*ail*." "*Foghébha-sa sin*," *ar Cáilte, 7 ro oslaic in fert, 7 do bhí lán crainn a shleigi d'fhailghibh ann*.[496]

[493] It should be remembered, however, that the *Acallam* does assume that the material of Caílte's tales will eventually constitute the matter of learned memories and thus the potential loss of these tales will ultimately one day constitute a crisis of jeopardised authority. See above, pp. 92-102. See also: *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, trans. by Dooley and Roe, p. 220.
[494] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV, p. 9. For the full quote see above, pp. 92-93.
[495] Nagy, 'Oral Life and Literary Death,' p. 376.
[496] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV,.p 31.

> "Who is [buried] in the south end of the mound, Cáilte?" Said Patrick. "Sálbuide son of Feidlecar, the son of the king of Munster: he died seeking a deer of the *síde* [along with] thirty hounds and thirty servants and thirty warriors, and this mound was raised over them:" and Cáilte said:
>
> There lies in this southern end, the lad Sálbuide of the scholars,
>
> not reckoned as a small treasure; fifty fine-silver clasps.
>
> "We would be pleased," said Benén, "to obtain that wealth." You will have that," said Cáilte, and he opened the grave and it was full of rings [to the depth of] his spear's shaft.

Caílte's memory in this episode is not only accurate but profitable leading to the recovery of lost wealth and, in return, a posthumous redemption for the interred warrior through Patrick's intercession. This contradictory aspect to Caílte and Oisín's memory is even implicit within the dialogue between Patrick and the angels itself: why would such bearers of divine truth command the preservation of knowledge from a source they themselves recognise as inefficient? A simple solution, and one which ties in neatly to the picture of medieval Irish concepts of an ideal memory developed earlier in this chapter, is that the concern is again quantitative rather than qualitative. This is not to say the accuracy of Caílte's memory is not a concern for the *Acallam*, it clearly is. Rather, what is endangered by his *dermait* and *díchuimne* is not the accuracy of his memory but its breadth or ability to be comprehensive. What is remembered is preserved with perfect clarity but what is lost is entirely irretrievable.

Morgan Thomas Davies has suggested a relationship between the construction of *dindshenchas*, the large body of medieval Irish place-name lore, and a form of mnemonic structuring reminiscent of the classical style of architectural mnemonic, in which specific locations form a mental backdrop upon which the items of an individual's memory are imposed and ordered.[497] For Davies, the process of etymological explanation, that was integral to the nature of *dindshenchas*;

> sets off [memorial] reverberations that echo and re-echo throughout the wide plains of early Irish *senchas* and its innumerable caverns and hollows filled beyond reckoning with varieties of countless things.[498]

Following Davies' lead, Dagmar Schlüter has discussed the importance of the associations made between place and memory, specifically Caílte's acts of remembering and their attached stories, within *Acallam na Senórach*:

[497] Davies, 'Memory and Invention,' pp. 103-104.
[498] *Ibid*., p. 103.

> Normally, the dialogue is triggered by the various places or items from Caílte's past, such as weapons or jewellery, that randomly appear during Caílte's travels in changing company across Ireland. His retinue then asks about the origin of the name of these places and the 'memorative unit,' as we may call these dialogues for the sake of convenience, begins. Generally speaking, these things or places serve as mnemonic devices, when they stimulate the dialogue between past and present.[499]

The process that Schlüter describes here can be clearly seen in the episode, quoted above, detailing the opening of Sálbuide's grave. The relationship between memory, remembering and place identified by Davies and Schlüter in *dindshenchas* and the *Acallam* is also reflected more widely in medival Irish literature, including some of the texts already discussed. In *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* memory of the *Táin* is retrieved by accessing the site of Fergus' grave. In the context of *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, Davies has reiterated the central importance of Tara in medieval Irish cosmological conceptions.[500] Additionally, as mentioned above, Nic Cárthaigh has highlighted the text's depiction of the close, even intimate, nature of the relationship between Fintan and the land of Ireland itself, with the latter described as his foster mother: '*buime*.'[501] There are certainly many more such associations between memory and place in medieval Irish literature besides these few and it is not possible to pursue these further here. The potential offered by such a topic deserves a dedicated study in its own right and lies beyond the limitations in scope of the present work.

In conclusion, through the importance placed by *Acallam na Senórach* on the relationship between acts of remembering and specific geographical localities, it is possible to define a second possible explanation for why Caílte's memory is seen as susceptible to failure but also evidently very accurate. This explanation is concerned with the activation of memory rather than its internal qualities: his memory is in danger of failing because of the possibility Caílte will no longer be able to access the locations which serve to trigger his reminiscences. Age is a frequent source of both physical and emotional discomfort for Caílte and the *fían* survivors:

> *Is si sin uair ₇ aimsir tangadur tri nonbair d'iarsma na Feinde ro bói iffarrad Chailti ar in tulaig leth aniar do Themraig, ₇ tucsat da n-úidh ₇ da n-aire beith a n-ingnais a luith ₇ a lánchoiblidh, ₇ gan a eith do rath orro nech ac comrad ríu, ₇ tucsat a mbel re lár talman issin tulaig sin, ₇*

[499] Schlüter, 'Past and Remembrance,' pp. 149-150.
[500] Davies, 'Memory and Invention,' pp. 95-96.
[501] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore,' pp. 47-48.

> *fuaradur bás ann, 7 ro cuired fo thalmain iat, conid Cnoc na nonbur ainm in chnuic sin dia n-eis.*[502]
>
> On that hour and at that time three nines of the remnant of the *fían* who were in Caílte's company arrived upon the hill on the west side of Tara, and they gave heed and attention to there being a loss of their sprightliness and their vigour, and without there being the fortune of anyone to converse with them, and they put their lips to the surface of the earth on that hill, and they died there, and were buried, and thus Hill of the Nines is the name of that hill because of it.

Returning to the drink gifted to Caílte by the Túath Dé Danann to assist his memory, it may perhaps be significant that this is granted as a follow-up to the original reason for his visit: the healing of his injured leg. The failure of Caílte's memory is a product of his age and physical decline not due to forms of mental degredation as would be understood in a medical or scientific capacity today, but rather in his inability to access the physical localities which prompt his acts of recollection. As he laments upon setting out to seek the *síd* at Assaroe: '[…] *bo gairit m'eolus 7 mo tsligi da maired Find mac Cumaill 7 Oissin 7 Diarmaid 7 Oscur*,' 'my paths and my roads were short when Finn mac Cumaill and Oisín and Díarmait and Oscar were still alive.'[503]

[502] Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte*, IV p. 221.
[503] *Ibid*., p. 189.

5.8 Memory and Authority in Medieval Irish Texts: Conclusions

This chapter has covered a wide range of issues associated with medieval Irish depictions of memory and their relationship to contemporary thinking on poetic or scholarly authority. Its sheer length is a testament to the potential of these issues to provide material for discussion. The particular aims of this investigation were purposefully not tied into any specific theoretical approach in the hope that the sources discussed would be allowed to speak for themselves, and a faithful picture of medieval Irish learned attitudes to memory developed. The previous chapter discussing the debate around notions of orality and literacy in the medieval literature has, hopefully, highlighted some of the problems that can occur when an overly limiting methodological approach is applied to a literature which varies vastly in terms of its scope and chronology. Due to the nature of the approach taken here, however, it is necessary to provide some concluding remarks to gather together the threads pursued, and the need remains for these to possess a degree of synthesis in order to draw any coherent picture of the consequences of this study. It is hoped that some of these will have begun to become apparent to the reader during the course of the discussion. These conclusions, due to the nature of the source material, will remain broad in scale, establishing the most prevalent and general attitudes governing depictions of memory and the attendant attitudes towards its role in the establishment of learned authority.

Firstly, memory was, unquestionably, an important attribute to the medieval Irish learned classes. In the semi-oral society in which these individuals lived and worked, memory retained a significant role in the retention of knowledge, which in turn formed the basis of scholarly authority. Fintan mac Bóchrai is established as the only existing source of authority on the division of Ireland in *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra* because he is the only living individual whose memory holds the required knowledge. The failure of memory, in the case of *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*, the *prull* entry in *Sanas Cormaic* and *Acallam na Senórach*, directly results in either an actual or potential danger to learned authority. In spite of this importance, however, actual theoretical discussions of the mechanics of memory or of mnemotechnical practices are rare to non-existent. The former is only sketched out in the most general terms through observations that memory is a function of the brain, and that damage to this organ can influence both memory and other mental and psychological functions. As Mac Cana suggests, the creation of lists of tales and categories of genre was

likely conceived as a form of mnemonic aid.[504] Further precise information on the memory techniques used by the *filid* is scarce; however, given the prevalence of performance or recitation as a necessary part of knowledge accumulation, they most likely contained a significant oral and aural component. It is also likely that notions of strict accuracy were somewhat eclipsed by the need for flexibility during the all-important act of performance, the crucial measure of poetic authority. With the significant exception of Cenn Fáelad's *inchinn dermait*, the medieval Irish idealised memory is exceptional for its breadth rather than for notions of strict accuracy. An exceptional scholar is one who possesses a comprehensive memory above all else, and this is even holds true in the case of Cenn Fáelad in addition to the notion of perfect accuracy introduced in his unique injury. This is not to discount accurate memory completely as a concern of medieval authors: the desire for a truthful representation of past events underlies many of these depictions of memory. The truth concerned, however, is often subjective rather than objective and it is this theme that will be taken up in the final chapter of this study. It is hoped that the points that have been presented here will serve as sound foundations for any potential further study of memory in medieval Ireland.

[504] Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, p. 73.

6.0 Memory as Propaganda? Manipulating the Past for the Purposes of the Present in Medival Ireland: The Case of the Ulster Cycle

The final chapter of this study of aspects of memory in medieval Irish literature will explore the question of how knowledge of the past was manipulated by medieval authors in order to serve as a platform for commentary on their contemporary circumstances. In this case the focus will be on the Ulster Cycle more broadly, and its central epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* specifically, and the potential for these tales to be infused by vested interests with what might be termed 'dynastic propaganda.' As has been seen already, knowledge of the past was a vital component of learned authority. To this extent, the creation of a link between past and present through which knowledge could be conveyed was a widespread and acceptable form of authorization, even when achieved through miraculous means, as in the case with Fintan mac Bóchrai's remarkably long life in *Do Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, or the downright necromantic, such as the retrieval of the *Táin* in *Do Fhallsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge*. Yet it is also clear that the *filid* retained, and seemingly valued, creativity in their art as an integral part of the crucial act of displaying or performing knowledge. Consequently, notions of an objectively accurate or 'perfect' memory are less prevalent than those of a broad-ranging, 'comprehensive' memory. As such, it is not an unreasonable proposition that the *filid* did interpret and represent the past in relation to contemporary political and social issues. The questions that will be explored here, however, centre on the extent to which the *filid* were comfortable with manipulating the past in this way. What boundaries limited the exploitation of the past as intellectual and political capital and how consciously were these integrated into the learned culture of early-medieval Ireland. This is, potentially, an enormous undertaking due to the sheer volume of relevant source material. By necessity, the present investigation will centre on *Táin Bó Cúailnge* as a case-study, and focus on issues relating to the politicisation of this particular heroic episode in Ireland's past.

Firstly, however, mention must be made of one key study discussing the broader considerations over if and how medieval Irish depictions of the past could be invested with social and political commentary. This is the assessment made by Erich Poppe of the significance of the tale *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise* in terms of understanding literary theory in medieval Ireland.[505] The tales describes how the poet Urard mac Coise, having

[505] Poppe, 'Medieval Irish Literary Theory,' pp. 33-54.

suffered the destruction of his home by men of the Cenél nEógain, travels to their king Domnall mac Muirchertaig who holds the kingship of Tara. Once there, Urard offers the king a story from his extensive repertoire and lists of the tales he knows ending with the unusual title:

> *Orgain Cathrach Mail Millscothaigh maic Anma Airmitin maic Sochoisc Sochuide maic Ollaman Airchetail maic Dana Dligedaig maic Lugdach Illdanaigh maic Rua Rofesai maic Creidme in Spirdai Naimb Aithar sceo Maic*.[506]
>
> The Destruction of the Fort of Máel Milscothaig (Honey-Blossom) son of Soul of Honour son of Host's Humility son of Ollam of Poetry son of Lawful Art son of Lugaid the Very-Gifted son of the Mighty-One-Who-May-Be-Known son of Faith in the Holy Spirt, Father and Son.

This is, of course, the tale Domnall chooses to hear and turns out to be an allegorical re-telling of Urard's own misfortunes prompting the king to enact restitution for the losses Urard suffered at the hands of his kindred. Poppe notes that *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise* shows, quite clearly, that a tale such as *Orgain Cathrach Mail Millscothaigh* should be read as an allegory for appropriate behaviour and actively endorses this view through, once again, the literary trope of angelic legitimisation:

> Urard, in the consciously learned and literary discourse of his text, uses this convention to legitimate a specific reading of the narrative, namely its explicit applicability to the author's present, in that parallels between characters of the tale's past and the author's present are established by the angel, and the in-tale is thus authorized to be understood as an exemplum for appropriate present conduct on the basis of a past model.[507]

Poppe, however, argues that *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise* demonstrates a somewhat different aim in terms of how it conceptualises itself, as opposed to the 'in-tale' Urard composes to influence the king. Drawing inspiration from the approach of what has been termed the 'Cork school' towards the study of hagiography as a literature 'which rewrites the past for its own particular purposes,' he suggests that *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise* is making the case that tale literature can serve near identical function.[508] Rather than simply making a strictly internal ideological point, the tale is making a wider literary-critical, metatextual one:

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[506] *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, ed. by O.J. Bergin, R.I. Best, K. Meyer and J.G. O'Keeffe, Vol. 2. (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co., 1908), pp. 42-76 (p. 47).
[507] Poppe, 'Reconstructing,' p. 47.
[508] *Ibid*., pp. 40-41, 44-47.

> It does not teach conduct proper for a king—as its in-tale and other tales similar to it would do; rather it teaches a proper way of understanding the meaning and implication of a performance of historical narrative. The message to the audience is that a tale is not just a tale about the past, but has some application for the present. It legitimates an allegorical—or at least a non-literal or non-historical—understanding of the events narrated, similar to the reading of hagiography practiced by the Cork school.[509]

In other words: the interests of secular tale literature were not solely invested in the representation of what was understood, by some or by all, to be historical events. The past could be reconstructed for the purposes of propaganda.

Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise is, however, only one tale and, as Poppe himself recognises: 'not an ordinary tale of the medieval Irish corpus.'[510] It is both open and self-aware in terms of the point that it is making, and seems to have been deliberately composed with this sole purpose in mind. What, however, of a tale as broad, as deep and as complex as *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, could it ever be read in the terms that are set by Poppe's assessment of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*? Certainly many scholars of the *Táin* have attempted such readings. Hildegard Tristram has conducted a concise survey of these arguments which remains a useful and reliable guide in spite of being in print for a little over two decades at the time of writing.[511] Such arguments have been made by James Carney, Alan Bruford, Nicholas Aitchison, John Kelleher, Pádraig Ó Riain, Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Eamon Greenwood, identifying elements in the *Táin* suggesting a relevance to certain political circumstances, both secular and ecclesiastical, during a whole range of dates from the fifth century to the twelfth.[512] As Tristram notes, the authors of these studies all follow a similar methodology:

> The method is that a number of salient discourse/plot features, which strike their attention, are singled out intuitively from this extraordinarily complex macrotext. Then these features are related to a specific political situation, which the analyzing scholar is, for one reason or other, particularly familiar with. The next step is to carefully countercheck the parallels of the chosen

[509] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[510] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[511] Tristram, 'The Purpose,' pp. 18-19.
[512] James Carney, 'The history of early Irish literature: The state of the research,' in: G. Mac Eoin, ed., *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983) pp. 113-130. Alan Bruford, 'Cú Chulainn – an illmade hero?,' in: Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ed., *Text und Zeittiefe* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1994), pp. 185-215. Nicholas B. Aitchison, 'The Ulster Cycle: Heroic image and historic reality,' *Journal of Medieval History*, 13 (1987), pp. 87-116. John, V. Kelleher, 'The *Táin* and the annals,' *Ériu*, 22 (1971), pp. 107-127. Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Táin: A clue to its origins,' in: *Ulidia 1*, pp. 31-37. Eamon M. Greenwood, 'The Ulster Cycle and the place of Armagh in the tradition,' in: A. J. Hughes and W. Nolan, eds., *Armagh*: *History and Society* (Dublin: Geography Publications, 2001), pp. 99-120.

> political situation with the data of the respective *Táin* text (LU *Táin*, LL *Táin* or *Urtext*). If the hypothetical parallels are confirmed, then they can be accepted as proof of the original hypothesis. This is, of course, a prime example of hermeneutics coming full circle and only works, to be sure, with a very complex macrotext, which offers a rich choice of flexible discourse/plot features.[513]

In her assessment and criticism of this method of interpreting the *Táin*, Tristram hits upon its key weakness: the circular nature of the analytical process involved. In other words: are these identified convergences between details in the *Táin* and historical circumstances genuinely reflective of direct and derivative connection rather that a coincidental or merely general similarity? The sheer fact that so many varying correlations have been put forward should be enough to caution the scholar against accepting outright the methodology involved in producing these studies: which, if any, actually reflect genuine authorial intent? It is not the aim of this discussion to engage with the content of these arguments individually in depth: such a collective assessment would be a lengthy affair and, due to the difficulties in the methodological approach identified by Tristram, may not necessarily yield any conclusive or otherwise useful results. The themes of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Tristram's 'salient discourse/plot features,' may be resonant of circumstances as they happened to be during various periods of Ireland's early medieval past, but perhaps only because they emerged from the same social ideals and cultural institutions.

One more recent study relevant to the use of memory as propaganda in relation to *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is, however, worth exploring in depth. Dagmar Schlüter has discussed various features of the Ulster Cycle material found in the *Book of Leinster* as part of a study attempting to prise some of the historical and social context of that manuscript's creation from its contents.[514] Her approach to mining the Ulster Cycle material for the evidence required to placing it within a specific context is largely identical to those of the studies criticised by Tristram and, therefore, is constrained by the same limitations. Schlüter is, moreover, working within the specific framework provided by the notion of 'cultural memory.' The development of this concept of cultural memory is primarily the work of Jan Assmann who defines it as, to provide a very concise paraphrasing of his work; an externalised act of human memory transcending the realms of the personal and practical to

[513] Tristram, 'The Purpose,' pp. 19-20.
[514] Schlüter, *History or Fable?* For a concise version, see: Dagmar Schlüter, 'Medieval manuscripts and cultural memory. The case of the *Book of Leinster*,' in: Rekdal and Poppe, eds., *Medieval Irish Perspectives on Cultural Memory*, pp. 61-80.

create a 'ritualised' form of group memory.[515] More recently the notion of cultural memory has received heavy and salient criticism by Maria Tymoczko who identifies some fundamental problems with the construction of this concept.[516] In context of the points she makes that are particularly relevant to this discussion, Tymoczko notes that Assmann's theory of cultural memory is inclined to prioritise text as the primary means of memory articulation, leaving little room for the exploration of other forms of memorial media, and overstates the resilience of the ability of text to communicate a worldview with very little change over time.[517] The fact that medieval Irish tale literature is the product of a secondary-oral culture means that the texts in which it is preserved cannot be considered entirely divorced from this context. Tymoczko recognises this problem but argues that the notion of cultural memory could be expanded to encompass other forms of media.[518] There are, however, some more general methodological criticisms that can be made of the usefulness of cultural memory as a tool to explore medieval literature and these will be returned to at the end of this chapter.

Schlüter's discussion of the *Book of Leinster* centres in part on the prominence of the important hero Conall Cernach in the Ulster Cycle material it contains. Building on a theory concerning the authorship of *Book of Leinster* version of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, first proposed by Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, she concludes that the manuscript originated from a scriptorium within the territory of the Loígis, an important *fortuath* (an 'outside-people' not part of the same lineage as their ruling over-king) located in north-western Leinster, most probably Clonenagh, but possibly Núachongbáil.[519] Before discussing her analysis of the Ulster Cycle tales from the *Book of Leinster* and the role that they play within the weave of twelfth-century Ireland's memories of its past in depth, it is necessary to explore Mac Gearailt's original argument, for this underlies much of her approach towards these texts. Mac Gearailt suggests that the significant divergences between the *Book of Leinster* version of the tale *Cath Ruis na Ríg* and its other surviving forms can be explained by viewing it as a deliberate, though not entirely successful, re-composition of the tale's original form on the initiative of one of the scribes behind the *Book of Leinster*. The aim of this exercise was the elevation of Conall Cernach to the role of principal hero within the tale, a position taken by Cú Chulainn in other

[515] Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, pp. 5-10.
[516] Maria Tymoczko, 'The nature of tradition and cultural memory. Evidence from two millennia of Irish culture,' in: Rekdal and Poppe, eds., *Medieval Irish Perspectives on Cultural Memory*, pp. 15-60.
[517] *Ibid*., pp. 15-17, 23-28.
[518] *Ibid*., pp. 36-37, 54-55.
[519] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 224.

versions of the tale, in order to compensate for his relative lack of presence in the *Book of Leinster* version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.[520] Mac Gearailt explains this exceptional interest in Connal by highlighting his position as progenitor of the Loígis, in whose territory the manuscript was most likely produced, as evidenced by his pedigree given within the manuscript itself. This is reinforced by the scribe of the manuscript: '[…] placing Conall's pedigree second only to that of Míl Espáine and before those of Óengus Turbech, Cathair Már and Ailill Ólom.'[521] Connal, in this proposed re-write of *Cath Ruis na Ríg* is accorded responsibility for this initiative, and takes up the suitably important role of avenger of the Ulaid upon their enemies following the *Táin* in place of Cú Chulainn.

Central to Mac Gearailt's conclusions on the nature of the *Book of Leinster* version of *Cath Ruis na Ríg* are two premises. The first of these is that the tale as it appears here is a very poor quality piece of writing. He levels a number of criticisms against the work including: an overly formulaic style derivative of and intended to imitate the *Book of Leinster* version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the deliberate use of poorly realised imitations of archaic word forms to provide a veneer of authenticity, and an inconsistent and imbalanced plot the first part of which places a great deal of emphasis on themes and characters which cease to be relevant in the second.[522] His second premise is the prior existence of a superior version of the tale from which the *Book of Leinster* version was so catastrophically adapted. This Pre-existing version is, in Mac Gearailt's opinion, the archetype for what he sees as the superior versions of *Cath Ruis na Ríg* found in fifteenth to seventeenth-century manuscripts. The existence of this archetype is, however, self-admittedly based on supposition rather than conclusive evidence.[523] Although Mac Gearailt is dismissive of the idea, it remains possible that the later versions of *Cath Ruis na Ríg* were, in fact, composed long after the *Book of Leinster* version, as Thurneysen was inclined to believe.[524] More comparative editorial work is certainly required before further conclusions are made with respect to this issue.

With regard to Mac Gearailt's criticisms of the structure and plot of the *Book of Leinster* version of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, these are often distinctly unfair and seem designed to demean the aesthetic capabilities of whoever wrote the tale in order to make their portrayal as

[520] Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, '*Cath Ruis na Ríg* and twelfth-century literary and oral tradition,' *Zeitschrift für Celtiische Philologie*, 44 (1991), pp. 128-153 (pp.147-149).
[521] *Ibid.*, p. 149. These figures are all legendary pre-historic kings of Ireland. The latter three are associated with the same time period as Conn Cétchathach, the eponymous primogenitor of the Connachta.
[522] *Ibid.*, pp. 130-141.
[523] *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.
[524] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

an insensitive, inept and politically motivated hack more convincing. It is true that the Scandinavian mercenaries summoned by Conall to participate in the battle on Conchobar's command are not mentioned again after their reception in Ireland; however, neither are the old retired Ulster warriors who Cú Chulainn refuses to summon to act as counsel for the Ulstermen. Conversely, there is no suggestion that either of these groups were not present at the battle.[525] Mac Gearailt also criticises the tale for having an overly long preamble placing far too much emphasis on the build-up and manoeuvring before the battle, and far too little on the concluding battle itself.[526] It is possible, however, to argue that this interest is not misplaced at all and this build-up is a crucial part of how the tale presents the battle of Ros na Ríg. Of particular difficulty to Mac Gearailt is the role of Conchobar's nemesis queen Medb of Connacht in relation to the battle. Conchobar's desire in this tale is to revenge himself upon Medb and kill either her or her husband Ailill, however, they never actually meet in battle, with Conchobar fighting their allies the Galían and the Luaigne:

> After playing such a prominent role up to this halfway stage and arousing the expectation that she will appear in a final showdown in which Conchobar will gain revenge for the *Táin*, there is no further reference to Medb in the tale.

Mac Gearailt's expectations in this respect are entirely unwarranted. The reader's expectations are, however, conditioned at the very beginning of the tale by the magician Cathbad's advice that Conchobar's desire for revenge is ill-advised considering the exhausted and depleted state of the Ulster army and the poor spring weather.[527] Indeed, Cathbad's advice to Conchobar for him to seek reinforcement before undertaking such an endeavour ensures the presence of Conall Cernach at the battle that, along with the intervention of Cú Chulainn, narrowly prevents a total rout for the Ulstermen. Contrary to Mac Gearailt's presumption, the *Book of Leinster* version of *Cath Ruis na Ríg* presents a coherent and subtle tale of strategic engagement, in which the actual battle is well underway long before the two armies ever meet in the field. The notion that such a tale represents a conscious but crude reworking of a hypothetical original with the principal aim of aggrandising Conall Cernach does not, therefore, seem warranted and the motives for its composition must remain undetermined for the present. They may be no more political than the composition of a tale exploring Conchobor's folly and its narrow aversion through the timely and logical

[525] Edmund Hogan, ed. and trans., *Cath Ruis na Rig for Boinn*: *Also a Treatise on Irish Neuter Substantives*, Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series, IV (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co., 1892), pp. 18-23.
[526] Mac Gearailt, '*Cath Ruis na Ríg*,' pp. 130-131.
[527] Hogan, *Cath Ruis na Rig for Boinn*, pp. 6-13.

intervention of a popular Ulster hero not otherwise present during the main events of the *Book of Leinster* version of the *Táin*.[528]

Schlüter, however, takes Mac Gearailt's conclusions a step further and proposes that other Ulster Cycle texts in the *Book of Leinster* can also be shown to demonstrate, in various ways, a similar interest in the aggrandisement of Conall Cernach as the primogenitor of the Loígis, and even goes as far as to suggest that the inclusion of certain texts within the manuscript was dictated by this interest.[529] In addition to *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, Schlüter also explores *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Táin Bó Fraích*, *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó*, *Talland Étair*, *Mesca Ulad* and *Brislech Mór Maige Murthemni* in relation to this agenda of aggrandisement for Conall Cernach. *Táin Bó Fraích*, like the *Book of Leinster* version of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, is another tale that has been interpreted as a somewhat crude fusion of two different parts; however, unlike the latter the evidence in support of this is much greater. The change in narrative direction between the two halves of *Táin Bó Fraích* is much more drastic, and the second half includes material that seems to openly contradict that of the first. The tale describes how the warrior Fróech wooed Findabair, daughter of Ailill and Medb, and then subsequently how he recovered a heretofore unmentioned, pre-existing wife, his sons and cattle after their carrying off to the region of northern Lombardy in the Alps with the assistance of Conall Cernach.[530] Schlüter notes: 'The appearance of Conall Cernach in *Táin Bó Fraech* belongs to a part of the tale that has only very loose connections to the preceding courtship of Fráech and Findabair, but this rather perplexing second part, which gives Conall such a prominent role, is better understood within the manuscript context.'[531] Unlike *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, however, there does not seem to be any clear evidence to argue that the *Book of Leinster* version of *Táin Bó Fraích* represents a deliberate creation or re-construction of a Fráech narrative on behalf of a scribe working to an agenda of promoting the figure of Conall Cernach.

Táin Bó Fraích survives in several manuscripts; however, the *Book of Leinster* version remains the oldest surviving copy of the tale. The language is accepted by Wolfgang Meid as dating the composition of the archetype of the text to the Old-Irish period, perhaps the first half of the eighth century, with only a very limited and early influence from Middle

[528] This discussion does not take into account the recent contribution of Patrick Wadden on the historical elemnts of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*. Patrick Wadden, '*Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn*: History and literature in twelfth-century Ireland,' *Aiste*: *Rannsachadh air Litreachas Gàidhlig*, 4 (2014), pp. 1-34.
[529] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 113.
[530] *Táin Bó Fraích*, ed. by Wolfgang Meid (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. x-xi.
[531] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 102.

Irish.[532] Furthermore, the second half of the tale, in which Conall is so prominently featured may, indeed, be its oldest layer.[533] Another similarity between *Táin Bó Fraích* and *Cath Ruis na Ríg* is that the material of both tales are found in other forms, preserved in later manuscripts, which vary significantly from the versions given in the *Book of Leinster*. Similar to Mac Gearailt's approach to *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, Meid argues that these later forms are reflective of an underlying collection of Fróech narratives circulating in an oral context from a very early date.[534] Meid, however, maintains that: '[t]his would imply that TBF in the form in which it has come down is not a novel literary creation, but only one of several variants of an already pre-existing story.'[535] One of Mac Gearailt's key arguments in favour of reading *Cath Ruis na Ríg* as a conscious literary creation with the aim of aggrandising Conall Cernach is the comparative length of the sections of the tale in which he appears.[536] The same is not true of *Táin Bó Fraích* with the final section featuring Conall Cernach taking up only the final sixty nine lines of the total three hundred and eighty six of the edited edition.[537] If the compilers of the *Book of Leinster* were working to promote Conall Cernach out of a desire to elevate the status of the Loígis dynasty and, if Mac Gearailt is accepted, were apparently comfortable making drastic alterations to a pre-existing tale in order to do so, why did they not here? Given this accumulated evidence, it is difficult to perceive how the final section of *Táin Bó Fraích* could be better understood in the specific context for the *Book of Leinster* posited by Shlüter, as the tale likely existed before that manuscript was composed and there is no evidence that its scribes made any effort to rewrite or adapt the tale with the aim of featuring Conall Cernach more prominently.

The remaining Ulster Cycle tales that Schlüter discusses as demonstrating the pro-Loígis leanings of the *Book of Leinster* are approached slightly differently. Here her focus shifts towards considering elements within the texts' narratives that would render them likely to be included in a manuscript compiled with the aim of glorifying the figure of Conall Cernach. *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* is mentioned for its depiction of Conall as the triumphant victor for the *Ulaid* over the *Connachta* during the contention over the apportioning of Mac Dathó's gigantic pig amongst themselves. *Talland Étair* is, likewise, referenced for its depiction of Conall, here found avenging his brothers' deaths upon Mess Gegrai, king of

[532] *Táin Bó Fraech*, ed. Meid, pp. xxiv-xxv.
[533] *Ibid*., p. xi.
[534] *Ibid*., pp. viii-x.
[535] *Ibid*., p. x.
[536] Mac Gearailt, '*Cath Ruis na Ríg*,' p. 130.
[537] *Táin Bó Fraech*, ed. Meid, pp. 13-16.

Leinster, following the siege of the Ulstermen at Howth.[538] Lastly, *Brislech Mór Maige Murthemni* again shows Conall as the avenger, this time for the fallen Cú Chulainn.[539] On the reverse of this promotion for Conall, Schlüter also sees a deliberate attempt by the manuscript's scribes to downplay the importance of Cú Chulainn. This is manifest most explicitly in the tale *Mesca Ulad*: '[…]Cú Chulainn is here the cause of all misfortune. Had he not lost his way home, the Ulaid would not have been in foreign territory; and had he not chosen the wrong house, they would not be in mortal danger.'[540] Schlüter concludes: 'Thus, Cú Chulainn's position in the heroic Ulster tales in the *Book of Leinster* is at best ambiguous. His acknowledged standing as the greatest Ulster hero is somewhat undermined by other tales and is finally assumed by Conall Cernach who avenges his death.'[541] This reading of the Ulster Cycle tales, however, is highly restrictive with regards to interpreting Cú Chulainn's role in these narratives. All Schlüter's observations here are subjective, and stem from the desire to prove Mac Gearailt's thesis applicable in a broader context. Without delving into specifics here for the sake of space constraints, the question must be asked: is supposing a politically motivated desire to downplay Cú Chulainn necessary to understand his varying depictions in these texts? The nature of the material in question seems much too rich and complex for such an overreaching proposition to be taken seriously.

Perhaps the most problematic text in Schlüter's argument is the longest and most important text of the Ulster Cycle, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* itself. *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the *Book of Leinster*, otherwise known as recension II of the *Táin*, does not at all support the suggested pattern, read into the texts, of the glorification of Conall Cernach at the expense of Cú Chulainn. Conall's role in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, when compared with some of the tales discussed above, is very small. Conall Cernach is introduced in the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge* as: '*Conall Cernach curate comramach mac Amargin rí laech Herend*'[542], 'Conall Cernach the brave and contentious, son of Amargin, king of the warriors of Ireland.' This is the voice of Conchobar's charioteer Ibar, describing Conall to Cú Chulainn, shortly before the pair encounter him on guard duty at Áth na Foraire on the borders of Ulster, during the young Cú Chulainn's first chariot expedition. Annoyed by Conall's apparent desire to accompany him out of concern over his youth and inexperience, Cú Chulainn smashes Conall's chariot-shaft preventing him from going any further. Schlüter highlights a variation

[538] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 109.
[539] *Ibid*., p. 106.
[540] *Ibid*., p. 109.
[541] *Ibid*., p. 109.
[542] *Book of Leinster*, ed. Best, Bergin and O'Brien, p. 289, ll. 8555-8556.

in the descriptive terms associated with Conall between recensions I and II of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* during his appearance in this episode: 'Here his role is expanded in contrast to recension I: in recensions I and II he is referred to as the guard of the province, but recension II characterises him additionally as 'king of the warriors of Ireland.'[543] It is worth pointing out, however, that from the logical standpoint of the narrative Conall Cernach is indeed at this point the finest warrior in Ireland, Cú Chulainn only just having set out to prove his worth. Conall's somewhat inglorious removal from the action of the narrative through having his chariot shaft smashed by a well-aimed sling shot from Cú Chulainn, concerned that there be no one to prohibit him from proving his valour on that day, seems intended to emphasise the ultimate superiority of the latter, even if his means are not always above board.

Cú Chulainn's replacement of Conall as the preeminent warrior of the Ulstermen on his very first military outing certainly speaks more about his prowess than that of Conall and makes clear narrative sense as part of the events marking his coming of age. It should also be remembered that the character assessments provided by Ibar in his dialogue with Cú Chulainn during the *Book of Leinster* version of this section are frequently proven inaccurate or premature by Cú Chulainn's subsequent heroic actions. Thus Ibar's descriptions of the special abilities possessed by each of the three sons of Nechta Scéne, that have made them the infamous opponents of the Ulaid in the past, are refuted by Cú Chulainn's almost effortless victory over them. Conall Cernach's unhorsing, which in the *Book of Leinster* version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* has him thrown to the ground and, indeed, badly injured as a result, can be read as a symbol of his displacement by Cú Chulainn from the position of 'king of the warriors of Ireland.' Moreover, no mention is made of Conall falling from his chariot and receiving any injury as a consequence of Cú Chulainn's actions in recension I of the *Táin* from *Lebor na hUidre*.[544] This detail is not, therefore, an integral element of the episode. It would seem an odd thing to incorporate into recension II of the *Táin* if the scribes of the *Book of Leinster* truly were working to promote Conall as a heroic figure. There is, therefore, no imperative to understand this comment as having arisen specifically from the context proposed by Schlüter.

This type of embellishment is, moreover, not unique to Conall Cernach in the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Following the removal by Fergus of the four pronged branch, cut down remarkably with on sword-stroke and driven into the ground by Cú Chulainn at Áth

[543] '[*R*]*í laech Herend.*' Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 99.
[544] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: *Recension I*, ed. O'Rahilly, pp. 21-22, 143-144.

nGrena to block the path of the advancing Connacht army, a dialogue occurs in which Ailill inquires as to the identity of who could have placed it there listing, in turn, a few big figures in the Ulster camp. All these candidates are rejected by Fergus before he reveals Cú Chulainn as the man behind the deed. Those listed are Conchobor himself, Celtchar mac Uthidir and Eógan mac Durthacht.[545] This list appears in both recensions I and the *Book of Leinster* version of the tale. The latter, as with the description of Conall Cernach, offers greatly embellished attributions to the heroic credentials of the characters involved. The additions to Celtchar's name are a case in point: '*Bráthlecc bidbad in chóicid 7 cend a costuda uili 7 comla catha Ulad*,'[546] '[He is] the doom-stone of the enemies of the province, the supporting leader of all and the gateway of battle for the Ulaid.' Likewise Fergus, shortly prior to this section, upon his successful removal of the branch from the ford, gains additional praise: '*in cathmílid 7 in chliathbern chét 7* [*in t-*]*ord essorgni 7 in bráthlec bidbad 7 in cend costuda 7 in bidba sochaide 7 in cirriud mórslúaig 7 in chaindel adantai 7 in toísech mórchatha*'[547], 'The warrior, the line-breaker of the multitudes, the hammer of smiting, the doom-stone of enemies, the sustaining chieftain, the enemy of hosts, the mauler of great companies, the lighted candle and lord of great battles.' The additional attribution given to Conall Cernach appears fairly modest in comparison. Given the nature of the evidence presented, it seems most likely that the additional attribution to Conall Cernach in the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge* arose as a product of the enriched narrative style of that text over that of recension I, as opposed to a specific attempt to promote his fame.

A further interesting point concerns the exclusion from the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge* of the scene between Conall and Fergus, when the two meet in the tale's culminating battle, found in recension I:

> *Imsoí as Fergus. Arsligi cét lóech di Ultaib lasin cétna comroc cosin claideb co comairnic fri Conall Cernach. "Ba ramór in brig sin," ar Conall Cernach, "for túaith ₇ cenél ar thóin mná drúithi.' 'Ceist, cid dogén, a fírlaích?" or sé. "Slig na tulchu tairrsiu ₇ na dusu impu," or Conall Cernach. Sligis Fergus na tulchai íarom coro ben a teóra máela Midi dá thrí béimennaib*.[548]
>
> Fergus moved on. He slew by the sword a hundred warriors of the Ulaid in the first encounter until he met Conall Cernach. "That would be a very great force" said Conall Cernach, "against

[545] This is the order given for the names in LU, the list in LL also includes Cuscraid Mend Macha mac Conchobuir following Conchobor and reverses the position of Celtchar and Eógan.
[546] *Táin Bó Cúailnge from The Book of Leinster*, ed. by Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), p. 21.
[547] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[548] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: *Recension I*, ed. by O'Rahilly, p. 122.

[your own] people and race for the sake of the backside of a wanton woman." "Tell then, what will I do, truthful warrior? Said he. "Cut down the hills past them and the brush about them," said Conall Cernach. Thereupon Fergus sheared the hills so that cut out the Three Bald [Hills] of Meath by his three blows.

This episode, which serves to both remove the exiled Fergus from the action by appealing to his kinship with those against whom he now fights, and to draw Cú Chulainn back into the action from where he lies wounded, occurs in recension I immediately following a very similar scene:

Gaibid Fergus a suidiu a gaisced ⁊ imasaí isin chath ⁊ glanais berna cét isin chath cona c[*h*]*laideb ina díb lámuib*. […] "*Ní fetar*," *ol Conc*[*h*]*obar fria muintir bátar imme*, "*cia resa maid in cath frind atúaid*. *Geibid-si sunn in cath didiu co ndechar-sa fora chind*." "*Gébma-ne íarom i mbale i tám*," *ar na hóca*, "*acht mani maidi in talam found nó an nem anúas foraind*, *nícon memsam-ne de sund*." *Farrumae íarom Conc*[*h*]*obar ar cind Fergusa*. *Tócbaid in scíath fris .i. ind Óchaín*, *scíath Conc*[*h*]*obar*. *Cetheóra benna óir fair*, *ceithre sethnecha óir thairrse*. *Benaid Fergus trí bémind fair nád comairnic cid bil a scéith dó-som for a cend*. "*Cia di Ultaib argab in scíath*?" *ol Fergus*. "*Fer as ferr ⁊ ...*"[549] *ol Conchobar*, "*⁊ rodatuc for longes i nn-adba con alltai ⁊ sindach ⁊ dotningéba anndiu ar gail gaiscid fiad feraib hÉrend*." *Inmidir Fergus la sodain bém ndígla dá díb lámaib for Conc*[*h*]*obar co comránic gráinni in chloidib fri talmain iarna chúl*. *Focherd Cormac Con Longes láma for suidiu ⁊ íadaid a dí láma 'ma rigid*. "*Ainbchellach ainbchellach, a mo popa a Fergais*!" *ol Cormac*. "*Foichleach n-airfoichlech insin, a popa Fergais*. *Náimtidi in chairdine, huise for náimde*. *Ro called for cairde*. *Olcai bémend benai, a popa a Fergais*," *ol Cormac*. "*Ceist, cóich bíu*?" *ol Fergus*. "*Ben a trí telcha tarsiu*. *Toí do láim*. *Slig immud do cach leith ⁊ nísnairle*. *Imráid ainech nUlad nádcon fárcbad*. *Nícon fáicébthar muna fácabtha triut-sa indiu*." "*Airg-siu 'na leath n-aill, a Chonchobair*," *ol Cormac fria athair*. "*Nícon méla in fer sa a baraind for Ultu ní bus móo sund*."[550]

Then Fergus took up his arms and moved on into the battle and he cleared out a gap of a hundred [men] in the battle with the sword in his two hands. […] "I do not know," said Conchobar to his household about him, "who presses the battle against us from the north. You will hold the battle here so that I may go against him" "We will hold, then, in the place that we are," said the youths, "but unless the earth breaks beneath us or the sky down upon us, we will not flee from here." Thereupon Conchobor brought himself against Fergus. He raised his shield against him, namely the Óchaín, the shield of Conchobar. [There were] four peaks of gold upon it, [and] four ribs of gold around it. Fergus struck three blows upon him [but] they did not connect as his shield was over him. "Who of the Ulaid lifts [this] shield?" said Fergus. "A man better than you" said Conchobar, "and he who has put you into exile in a den of wolves and foxes and who will restrain

[549] This part of the text is corrupt. O' Rahilly suggests: 'as ó oldaí.' This is followed in my translation. *Ibid*., p. 122, footnote 2.
[550] *Ibid*., pp. 121-122.

> you today by force of arms before the men of Ireland." With that Fergus aimed a vengeful blow [from both] of his two hands upon Conchobar so that the tip of [his] sword reached the ground behind his back. Cormac Con Longes set his hands upon him and fasten his two hands around his forearm. "Thoughtless, thoughtless [that], oh my foster-father Fergus!" said Cormac, "premeditated, overly premeditated that, oh Fergus. A friendship of hostility: gentleness upon enemies. Peace fails. You strike an evil blow oh foster-father Fergus," said Cormac. "Tell then, at what will I strike?" said Fergus. "Strike the three hills beyond them. Turn your hand. Hack about you on each side and heed them no more. Think of the reputation of the Ulaid that you have not forsaken. It will not be forsaken if it is not forsaken by you today." "Go in another direction, Conchobar," said Cormac to his father, "This man will not grind out his anger here upon the Ulaid anymore."

Gregory Toner regards these two scenes, which both serve to progress the narrative in exactly the same manner, and both describe how the Máela Midi (the Bald Hills of Meath) got their name, to be two different but otherwise unmarked variants describing the same part of the narrative of the *Tochostul Fear nÉrend* episode.[551] This eliminates the contradiction arising from reading the two scenes as one continuous narrative wherein Fergus, after being pacified by Cormac, then confusingly turns straight back into battle with the Ulaid to encounter and be pacified again by Conall Cernach. Both scenes are given in line with the practice seen in the rest of recension I of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, which goes out of its way to record, sometimes lengthy, variant episodes within the narrative where these were known to the compliers. The *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge*, however, provides an expanded version of the fight between Fergus and Conchobar, likewise resolved by the intervention of Cormac con Longes, thereby entirely omitting any mention of Conall Cernach at this important point in the narrative. If the goal of the manuscript's scribes really was the blind promotion of Conall Cernach wherever the opportunity arose, why, when given the possibility provided by the existence of a perfectly valid variant episode of including him at a crucial point in the narrative, did they not choose to do so? This is especially perplexing given that recension II of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* has been widely accepted as an attempt to formalise and fix the narrative of the tale, with the aim of eliminating inconsistencies and incoherency within the varying forms in circulation at the time.[552] This is strongly suggested by the Irish colophon following *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the *Book of Leinster*: '*Bendacht ar cech óen mebraigfes go hindraic Táin amlaid seo ⁊ ná tuillfe cruth aile furri*.'[553] 'A blessing upon everyone who will

[551] Gregory Toner, 'The Ulster Cycle: Historiography or Fiction?,' *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 40 (2000), pp. 1-20 (pp. 17-18).
[552] *Ibid*., pp. 18-19.
[553] *Táin Bó Cúailnge from The Book of Leinster*, ed. O'Rahilly, p. 136.

remember the *Táin* as [it is given] here and not add any other form to it.' The scribe, if this colophon is to be attributed to him rather than having been copied out with the text from an earlier source, displays a genuine concern over the form that the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge* is presented in, and that alternate forms of the tale were readily available at the time. The need to stipulate such a blessing also certainly implies that his authorial intentions were not universally shared in twelfth-century Ireland. It remains a possibility the scribes of the *Book of Leinster* could simply have been unaware of this variant. Amongst the manuscripts that contain the texts comprising Recension I, the variant appears only in the *Yellow Book of Lecan* and thus far no direct link between this manuscript and the *Book of Leinster* has been made. Direct influence is, therefore, unlikely. Thurneysen has argued, however, that the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge* used the *Lebor na hUidre* text of recension I, based on the apparent borrowing of interpolations, made by hand H, from the latter manuscript into the former.[554] The scribes of the *Book of Leinster* would appear to have had access to at least one other version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and so it remains highly probable, especially given the significance of the point in the narrative at which it appears, that this variant was known about. The question, therefore, remains: why was this variant not used by the scribes of the *Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge* if the promotion of Conall Cernach, and thus their own fame, really was their desired aim behind their selection and presentation of texts?

[554] *Ibid*., p.xxv, O'Rahilly argues against such a direct influence between these two manuscripts and instead proposes a third text, anterior in date and acting as a common source of this material for both. pp. xxvi-xxvii. This, however, is not entirely convincing and she herself admits that: '[n]either theory is capable of proof.' p. xxvii. She, nevertheless, concludes: 'I assume then that the LL-version [of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*] was based on a version like recension I.' p. xlv.

6.1 Memory, Propaganda and the Ulster Cycle: A Critical View

At this point individual and specific criticisms can be put aside in order to return to the main issue, namely the methodology behind the use of medieval tale literature in these types of analysis. As much as the exploration of Schlüter's opinions on the use of Ulster Cycle material in the *Book of Leinster* may seem unduly picky, or the exercise of a contrarian, there is an important reason underlying all these discussions. Schlüter's arguments fall into the same trap identified by Tristram's assessment of scholarship which approaches Ulster Cycle material with the aim of identifying specific historical and political resonances. It is simply not possible to identify with complete certainty when a particular feature of a text has been included or emphasised by an author for political reasons, out of a desire to express the concepts covered by modern academics' use of the term 'cultural memory,' or for another reason entirely. As some of the tales in question are known in their earliest forms from the *Book of Leinster* alone, with other versions surviving only in comparatively late manuscripts, the material required to provide an adequate secondary check to such an assessment of the evidence is occasionally lacking. Alternative explanations for the inclusion of these features hold the possibility to be many and varied, including: the use of specific characters and themes for solely literary, conventional or aesthetic reasons. Underlying Schlüter's approach to the Ulster Cycle tales are a few assumptions worth exploring in more depth, for they pertain strongly to how these types of argument interpret the memorial processes operating within and behind such texts.

First and foremost, it places significant emphasis on genealogy as a link between past and present: this, indeed, is seen as the principal force governing the direction of scholarly interest in these texts. This is certainly not an unreasonable premise given the importance of genealogy and its unequivocal role in the creation of a sense of history, hierarchy and group identity in medieval Irish society.[555] How this genealogical imperative interacts with other potential motivating factors behind the writing down of Ulster Cycle literature in the *Book of Leinster* is, however, an issue that needs further definition. If, for example, Mac Gearailt's understanding of the *Book of Leinster* version of *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, as a crude and heavy reworking of a pre-existing tale with the aim of aggrandising an ancestor figure, is correct then genealogical imperative would seemingly overrule aesthetics and even the need for, in

[555] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition,' *Peritia*: *Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland*, 12 (1998), pp. 177-208 (pp. 206-207).

his view, fundamental plot coherency. For this genealogical imperative to hold then this text must also have been accepted as possessing at least a measure of fundamental historicity by its author. As has been shown Mac Gearailt's view is by no means necessary to understanding this tale, however, his interpretation raises some serious questions for how the activities of medieval Irish writers should be considered in a broader context. Is this kind of extensive intervention into the makeup of an example of tale literature for the proclamation of a group identity evidenced elsewhere at all? In other words: if Mac Gearailt is correct, is this case a one off unique to a particular writer or reflective of a fairly common authorial attitude? Schlüter's argument that similar attitudes underlie other texts in the *Book of Leinster* suggests the latter, however, the evidence for this is, as has been demonstrated, by no means clear-cut. The extent to which a medieval Irish writer would go in order to provide a politically motivated, adjusted view of the past specifically through Ulster Cycle tale literature has, therefore, not yet been satisfactorily determined.

As has been seen, Schlüter, in conjunction with the pride of position accorded to the genealogical texts that establish Conall Cernach as the ancestor of the Loígis, as well as the genealogies of several saints also descended from that hero, argues that this focus on Conall Cernach in the Ulster cycle tales from the *Book of Leinster* manifests a vested interest on behalf of the manuscript's compilers: 'By carefully selecting and combining relevant tales in the manuscript, the scribes thus glorified the fame of their own tribe.'[556] What is harder to grasp with this approach is how it was meant to have been realised through the use of the manuscript itself. Schlüter's use of the verb 'glorify' in the above quotation seems to suggest a propagandistic function for the manuscript, elsewhere this is expressed more explicitly: 'The use of the past for the sake of propaganda is a well-known device in medieval Irish literature.'[557] If this was so how was this achieved? How was the propaganda disseminated beyond the sphere of Loígis territory? Perhaps a milder alternative would be to substitute 'glorified' with 'celebrated', thus dampening the sense of aggressive self-aggrandisement otherwise implied and proposing a more internal, reflexive agenda for the manuscript's scribes, with a focus on strengthening the fabric of their identity from within, as opposed to the more aggressive notions implied by the term 'propaganda.' As has been stated, in terms of the Ulster Cycle material the term propoganda raises one major problem: how does this political function sit in relation to the tales' other functions as literature? History can, as

[556] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 113.
[557] *Ibid*., p. 100.

Schlüter rightly notes, be used to justify the present status-quo, however, it can also be used to comment on it, to criticise it, and to provide moral and ideological directions for the future. Many of the themes of the Ulster Cycle are clearly motivated by such a critical outlook, such as, to name but one example, the exploration and critique of the place of violence in Irish society and the ideals of 'heroic' behaviour.[558] The questions must be asked: are these two goals mutually exclusive; is there room enough in this literature for the expression of both?

Implicit throughout her argument is the assumption that were the manuscript to have originated from a territory whose people had no special reason to remember the past that the Ulster Cycle represents, the nature and, particularly, the quantity of this material within the manuscript would be drastically different: '[…] it is curious that nobody seems to have shown any surprise at the fact that so many tales with an Ulster background are transmitted in what is seen to be a Leinster manuscript.'[559] The underlying assumption here seems to be that Ulster Cycle was considered 'regional' material by the medieval scribes, the transmission of which was of interest only to those within Ireland inhabiting the same geographical scope as the tales' principal protagonists or having an otherwise pre-established connection with this area. In short, that the local prejudices of manuscript scribes would always govern any larger interest they may have had in the shared literary heritage of their culture as a whole. There is, however, no clear reason as to why this should have been the case. That the medieval scribes held a concept of an Ireland united culturally if not politically, primarily by the medium of the Irish language, is beyond any doubt. Indeed, this idea finds one of its most tangible realisations in the *Lebor Gabala Érenn*: an attempt at providing a national, synthesised history and origin narrative rooted firmly in the biblical past.[560] This is a text also contained within the *Book of Leinster*. The apparently high levels of standardisation seen in written language produced during the Old Irish period has also been interpreted as the product of a set of culturally unified elite institutions, conscious of a shared identity in spite of the often fractious nature of early medieval Irish society.[561] If we appreciate the Ulster Cycle material as forming a constituent part of this shared culture, as is most likely considering the sheer volume of this material within the surviving textual tradition, then to treat it as largely

[558] An excellent, if somewhat cursory, overview of these themes remains: Patricia Kelly, 'The *Táin as Literature*,' in: J. P. Mallory, ed., *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast: December Publications, 1992), pp. 69-102. Cf. in particular, pp. 85-88.
[559] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 85.
[560] Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland 400-800,' pp. 182-185.
[561] Paul Russell, 'What was best of every language:' the early history of the Irish language,' in: *A New History of Ireland Vol. I*: *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 405- 450 (pp. 439-443).

subservient to the whims of regional interest, as do Mac Gearailt and Schlüter, seems grossly unfair. Their approach necessarily prioritises the reading of local political realities into the texts over an appreciation of the larger social, moral, cultural and historical resonances that they also certainly held. To use a general analogy: a classical Greek reader of the *Iliad* does not need to have been of Trojan descent to sympathise with the plight of Priam.

Social memory can, therefore, be an exceedingly problematic tool to take to an appreciation of the Ulster Cycle tales as literature in its historical context and this may, potentially, also be true in respect of medieval Irish literature more widely. As Tymoczko notes, the place left within cultural memory for the engagement of the individual with literature is exceedingly limited and ambiguous.[562] In terms of medieval Irish literature, a largely anonymous literature that is not always easy to pin down geographically and chronologically, it is easy to see the temptations provided by a methodology which prioritises the perspective of a somewhat timeless group over that of the individual. Using this notion of group perspective, however, to try and resolve these particular difficulties both stumbles upon the same core problems of ambiguity which gave rise to these difficulties in the first place and risks ignoring or doing violence to many aspects of the surviving literature. The sheer range and quantity of the material further compounds attempts to view it from the perspective of a singular group identity: as a whole the Ulster Cycle is simply too rich and complex to be viewed solely as a vehicle for the expression of a politically motivated group outlook. Overall, and as a consequence of the criticisms made here, this thesis has largely avoided the notion of cultural memory with the aim of approaching the place and importance of memory in medieval Irish literature with as open a mind as possible. The is not to completely disavow the usefulness of the concept, it certainly provides interesting insights into the role of literature in forming group identities in the Middle Ages, however, it is clear that there is a real risk here of methodology dictating results. The use of history as propaganda is one way to characterise medieval Irish authorial attitudes towards the past, however, history as parable held an equally important place as well, perhaps more so in context of certain genres within the surviving literature. Toner's warning that ignoring the potential historical aspects of Ulster Cycle texts when subjecting them to literary analysis risks distancing us from the minds of their authors is certainly still valid.[563] It is also true, however, that placing too much emphasis on the historical aspects, which when it comes to the Ulster Cycle are frequently

[562] Tymoczko, 'Tradition and Cultural Memory,' pp. 26-28.
[563] Toner, 'Historiography or Fiction?,' pp. 19-20.

hard to define with any degree of certainty, without due consideration of the literary aspects, is equally problematic. Indeed, it is not always clear in this respect where precisely the line between the historical and the literary can be drawn.

This chapter set out to review the most recent developments in academic discourse regarding the potentiality for the use of Ulster Cycle tales as vehicles for the dissemination of politically motivated ideology in medieval Ireland. As has become clear, this is a large, complex and knotty issue. It has, consequently, not been possible to provide a completely thorough investigation of this topic: there is more than enough material here to form the base for a dedicated thesis-level study in its own right. By focusing on one specific, recent example of a study conducted along these lines as an exemplar for these types of approach as a whole it is possible to develop some pertinent criticisms of these arguments and suggest some directions for further study. The main issue concerned throughout this chapter is, therefore, primarily one arising from scholarly methodology: how possible is it to reconcile an understanding of Ulster Cycle tales as political commentary or propaganda with their other functions as works of literature? It is clear that, in future, studies attempting such a reading must make greater efforts to address this question or risk remaining highly ambiguous interpretations at best. Overall, this chapter has posed many questions about the various motivating factors behind the texts of the Ulster Cycle literature, and how these factors interacted with one another in the minds of those responsible for recording them. It has not been the intention to provide answers for all these questions, if indeed it is at all possible to do so, however, these are certainly issues that would reward further attention in future. The construction of memory in medieval Ireland is clearly a complex exercise and, as such, those creating accounts of the past simultaneously managed several different imperatives. These undoubtedly varied not only from individual to individual, but also presumably between different types of text and between literary ‘genres’ or themes. It remains a task for further study to continue to refine our understanding of the political uses memory could have to medieval Irish authors.

The discussion in this final section has taken a somewhat divergent path from that of the other chapters of this thesis. Up to this point, any application of any specific memory theory has been intentionally avoided in order to attempt to come as close as possible to the medieval Irish understanding of the place of memory within their intellectual culture, uncoloured by any modern preconceptions. This section, however, considers more directly the applicability of memory theory in context of medieval Irish literature, partly as a point of

contrast and partly as a defence of the overall approach by highlighting the difficulties that can arise through a theoretical approach to the study of memory. In this instance social memory was chosen as the theory to explore as it has found a lot of currency in recent studies of memory in a medieval Irish context. Furthermore, social memory is specifically applicable to one very important aspect of memory: why institutions such as the *filid* remember, what purposes can memory and remembering serve in their social context. Until this final section this thesis has chosen not to tackle head-on the political aspects that the past, and therefore memory, could be invested with in medieval Ireland. Any comprehensive study of memory would be incomplete without at least some consideration of this issue, however problematic and contentious it remains. The Ulster Cycle, specifically the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, was chosen as a case study in this instance as it highlights some key difficulties involved here: is memory always subservient to political need, how far can memory be manipulated, restructured or rewritten and how influential could recorded memory be as a tool for advancing political agendas in medieval Ireland? In many ways the *Táin* resists interpretation in this way: it may simply be too large, complex and composite a text for social memory to adequately handle. Such questions necessitate delving into matters of interpretation into historical and literary context for specific texts that deviate far from the topic of how memories were composed and used in textual form, however, it remains necessary to address these in order to come to any clear understanding of what agenda, if any, these individual examples are trying to advance through their use of the past. It has become clear over the course of this final chapter that a full study on this aspect of memory would require far more detailed study than can be undertaken here, this remains only a preliminary foray with the intention of setting out a prototype and defining some of the key difficulties such a work would face. In my opinion, however, Assman's theory of cultural memory is, without significant revision, too reductive and cumbersome to be usefully applied to the study of memory in medieval Irish literature and learned culture from the broad perspective that this study takes. An alternative approach to the interaction between memory and social, institutional or political agenda is needed, otherwise it must be acknowledged that the individual interests are too diverse to be subject to one overarching theory.

7.0 Aspects of Memory in Medieval Ireland: Conclusions

This study of aspects of memory in medieval Irish literature has been a work of many parts and, as such, there is a need here to draw together the various threads that have been discussed in order that the key points of each section be gathered together and reiterated. The first chapter discussed the broader state of memory studies focused upon the Middle Ages, and the picture of the place of memory within medieval culture that these studies have drawn. The work of Mary Carruthers, being the most comprehensive study on this topic, provides they key point of reference in this section. Her assessments do not discuss any medieval Irish material in depth and so a key feature of this chapter is the reconciliation of what she describes of the place of memory in medieval culture at a European level, with the situation in Ireland more specifically. The main point to emerge from this exercise is that Ireland's unique historical circumstances set it upon a different path from that of the rest of Europe. In particular, it seems that Ireland was largely excluded from participation in the intellectual culture that led to the creation of formalised theories of memory training from the thirteenth century onwards. The reasons for this are several. Firstly: these theories arose in the institutional context of medieval universities, which did not make any lasting inroads into Irish society in the Middle Ages. Secondly, they are dependent on classical texts, re-introduced into medieval Europe from Arabic culture from the twelfth century onwards, that were unkown in Ireland and innacessable due to the lack of linguistic skills necessary to access them. Lastly, this must be seen against the history of the Irish-speaking learned classes, which, with the advent of twelfth-century Church reform, became separated from the ecclesiastical institutions that had enabled their access to the larger world of European intellectual culture. By the time these theories were emerging in the thirteenth century, the Irish-language learned classes were no longer in a position to engage with them.

Carruthers' study does not explore material from the early Middle Ages to the same extent that it explores evidence from classical Antiquity and the later Middle Ages. Where it does, however, there are much clearer points of contact between Ireland and the rest of Europe. The place and importance of memory with the religious and monastic life is one good example. Monastic life, in particular, placed a great deal of importance upon memory as a space in which meditative contemplation upon the meanings of scripture could help an individual come to a closer relationship with God. There are also some general observations

in Carruthers' work on how memory was perceived and valued in medieval Europe, which are also reflected by the Irish evidence. The value placed on memory as a marker of both high intellectual and social status, as well as moral standing, is clearly displayed in early medieval Irish wisdom literature and status law. Perhaps the most interesting point of Carruthers' discussion is the distinction she identifies in the medieval idea of remembering between the concepts of *memoria ad res* and *memoria ad verborum*: remembering by meaning or image, and remembering by rote. As is explored in this chapter, and further in chapter four, some aspects of medieval Irish ideas of memory echo the concept of *memoria ad res*. On the other hand, whilst it may underlie the story of Cenn Fáelad's *inchinn dermait*, the notion of remembering with complete textual fidelity, word by word, does not seem to have had much currency amongst the *filid*. It is suggested that the importance of performance to their profession necessitated a more flexible attitude towards memorising and remembering.

Chapter two studied the semantics of memory terminology in medieval Irish, primarily through the use of evidence provided in the Royal Irish Academy's online *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (*eDIL*). This investigation considered the semantics of the two primary families of memory terminology, those deriving from the nouns *mebair* and *cuimne*, as well as a few of the additional terms outside of these two main groupings. The chronologically rather disparate nature of the source material in which these terms are evidenced, as well as the general scarcity of their use, must be borne in mind when considering the conclusions of this chapter. Overall, there seems to be little to distinguish between the semantic range of the nouns *mebair* and *cuimne* and the two terms, one originally a Latin borrowing and the other of native origins, appear broadly synonymous. In terms of the verbs *mebraigid* and *cuimnigidir*, however, some distinctions in semantic range are identifiable. The former seems to focus largely on acts of memorising, internalising things in the store of memory, whereas the latter is a much broader term covering a range of concepts include those covered by *mebraigid*, as well as concepts of recalling from memory, reminding and commemorating. Whether this distinction was originally also seen in the nouns to which these verbal forms belong, therefore giving a reason to the borrowing of a term for which there may already have been a native equivalent, is unclear and may not now be possible to determine with any certainty. Conversely, whether the semantic range of the native term *cuimne* was in some way modified by the indroduction of the Latin term remains another uncertain point. Although it is highly tempting to speculate on the specific intellectual context for the introduction of the term *mebair* into Old Irish, and this must have

certainly been Christian and likely monastic, this is obscured by the nature of the evidence. In conclusion, the use of memory terminology in the medieval Irish language remains a topic that is difficult to pin down precisely to anything other than a very general series of observations and is, in large part, dependent on the exploration of meanings in context of the specific texts in which they are found.

Chapter three reassessed the debate surrounding the relationship between notions of orality and literacy as represented within medieval Irish literature. The aims of this section were to determine the context surrounding how notions of memory interacted with the various media for transmission available in Ireland during the Middle Ages. It appears that these tensions are, in fact, often quite difficult to identify with any degree of clarity and, where they do appear, are very much bound up with another very present tension; that between elements of residual pre-Christian material and those of the contemporary Christian world, and are hard to detach into a specific concern of their own. Oral and literary modes of communication, contrary to some arguments that have been advanced before, do not seem to have been placed in any clearly defined hierarchical relationship in a majority of texts. Instead, these two modes of transmission and means of composition, although distinct from one another and certainly different in the literary output they enable, are frequently viewed as complementary or even mutually compatible means of literary expression. Following on from the initial observations of chapter one, this section provides further background towards understanding the intellectual world of professional learned classes of medieval Ireland, the *filid*, as context for the environment in which their notions of memory and remembering were shaped. This 'semi-oral' society, as Elva Johnston has aptly termed it, produced notions of memory that, whilst they certainly allowed for memory to live through textual form, do not seem to have outright prioritised text over oral transmission and communication.

These arguments are explored further in chapter four, in which Irish language depictions of acts of remembering and memorising are discussed in depth. This material allows for an attempt to access theories of memory, and its place in their learned culture, as expressed by the *filid* themselves. Again, this task is somewhat limited by the scarcity and the disparate nature of the evidence. Firstly, this chapter explores the physical aspects of depictions of memory in medieval Irish texts. These are scarce, however, they demonstrate a generalised recognition that memory is located in the head and that the brain is the organ with responsibly over this faculty. Although most commonly viewed as fatal, wounds to the head can influence the functioning of memory, as seen in the unique case of Cenn Fáelad's *inchinn*

dermait, or have other effects on character and emotion, demonstrated in *Aided Conchobuir*. Next, the importance of memory to the role and status of the *filid* is explored in relation to various legal and poetic material. Memory was certainly a highly important part of the *filid*'s scholarly identity and a significant source of prestige in this respect. The *filid* appear to have judged the value of an individual's memory for its breadth and comprehensiveness, as opposed to a concept of strictly accurate or photographic memory. One significant exception to this last point is the nature of Cenn Fáelad's memory as a consequence of his unusual wound. This does seem to move towards an ideal of perfectly accurate remembering, however, here again comprehensiveness is still seen a significant part of what makes memory authoritative. The reason why these attitudes towards memory prevailed amongst the *filid* is likely best explained by the semi-oral nature of their profession: authority comes from memory, but is only manifest through the performance and expression of memory. It is, perhaps, the need for a degree of flexibility within these acts of expression that prioritises a view of memory as a wide pool of knowledge to draw upon rather than valuing it for any notions of strictly accurate preservation.

The fifth and final chapter of this work briefly reassessed the methodology behind studies which have sought to interpret Ulster Cycle texts as having been composed as political allegory or for the purposes of propaganda. Although the overall tone taken here is very sceptical of such arguments, and advocates that studies of Ulster Cycle texts ascribing political motivations to the composition of these tales must not lose sight of other potential aspects, there is much room here for further study. More needs to be done to determine how medieval authors prioritised and reconciled the various different motivating factors behind the literature they were creating. This will certainly be an exceptionally difficult task for a number of reasons: in most cases the general lack of knowledge about individual authors will constitute a significant impediment. As Dagmar Schlüter's study of the *Book of Leinster* demonstrates, such a study conducted in context of a whole manuscript runs into the problems created by the sheer size and diverse content of the source material. Other possible areas of further research arising from this study are several: the nature of this thesis is such that it has not been able to fully explore all the areas upon which it has touched. Early medieval Latin material produced in Ireland is a source not covered in depth here and may offer further possible insights into what notions of memory were introduced into Ireland along with Christian learning. Many aspects of this discussion, particularly concerning the actual mnemonic practices of the *filid* and how exactly they composed texts, remain obscure

due to a lack of direct evidence. Was this process of composition governed primarily by the semi-oral culture of the *filid*, more literate impulses or, as this works argues is the most likely situation, some form of compromise between the two? More needs to be done to determine the relationship between our surviving texts and the compositional practices of the *filid*: how representative are the former of the latter? These are all issues grappled with here, yet the conclusions drawn are by no means final. Many of these questions may not be answerable; however, further investigations will certainly lead to additional insights on the subject of memory in medieval Ireland.

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