Fled Bricrenn and Tales of Terror

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Abstract. The episode about Úath mac Imomain from *Fled Bricrenn*, 'The feast of Bricriu', occurs only in Lebor na hUidre (s. xi/xii), on a leaf inserted by scribe H (also known as 'the interpolator'). Edgar Slotkin concluded that H invented this episode himself and offers an impressive theory on why H may have done so. This is a fresh study of the relevant texts and a refinement of Slotkin's theory. H inserted the episode, but drew on older traditions, possibly from manuscripts now lost. Moreover, Úath mac Imomain is shown to be part of a larger literary context. The medieval Irish tale type called *úatha* (tales of terror) and the form and function of supernatural beings called *úatha* 'terrors' are discussed.

Key words: Úath(a), 'Terror(s)', *timor nocturnus*, medieval Irish tale types, sagas, Ulster cycle, Finn cycle, hagiography, poetry, medieval etymology, place names, Lebor na hUidre, Interpolator H, supernatural beings, *airdrecha*, *urtrochta*, *fúatha*, *geniti glinne*, *sirite*, Badb, Morrígain, Úath mac Imomain, tests, heroes, kings, status, transformation, distortion, shapeshifting, *fír fer*, Jewish demonology, Irish mythology, sovereignty, *Táin bó Cúailnge*, *Táin bó Regamna*, *Fled Bricrenn*, 'Finn and the phantoms', *Genemain Moling 7 a bethu*, '*Temair Breg, baile na fian*', '*Óebind a tarla ar m'aire*', *Echtrae Fergusa maic Leiti*, *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*.

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Peritia 19 (2005) 173–92 ISBN 2–503–51764–1

On a dark night, the groans of wounded Ulstermen awake the five-year-old Cú Chulainn.[1] He goes to seek his king on the field of battle. When he finds king Conchobar wounded in a ditch, he is chided: *'Cid día tánac isin n-ármag', ol Conchobar, 'co ndeochais úathbás and?'* 'Why have you come to the battlefield' said Conchobar, 'where you may die of terror?'[2] What is meant by this 'death from terror'? Conchobar seems to refer here to the numinous dimension of battle. Elsewhere in *Táin bó Cúailnge*, 'The cattle raid of Cúailnge', we find an enlightening scene. Cú Chulainn, now seventeen years old,[3] defends Ulster on

1. An earlier version of this paper was read on 19 November 2004 at the Tionól of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

2. C. O'Rahilly (ed & tr), *Táin Bó Cúailnge. Recension I* (Dublin 1976; henceforth TBC I) 16, lines 506–507 (text), 139 (translation). I adapted O'Rahilly's translation slightly; she translated *úathbás* with 'fright'. DIL s.v. úathbás reads 'horror, terror', also possibly 'death from terror'. Forms of the verb *téit* in combination with nouns meaning 'death' (*bás*, *éc*) are translated as 'to die' (DIL s.v. T 130.15, 130.58, 134.11).

3. TBC I, 12, lines 379–80 (text); 135 (translation).

his own against its enemies. Standing on a mound, he sees the enemy camp and becomes enraged by their multitude. He brandishes his weapons and utters his hero's shout. A reaction from supernatural beings follows, which leads to death from terror:

> *coro recratár bánánaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinni 7 demna aeóir re úathgráin na gáre dosbertatár ar aird. Cordas mesc ind Némain forsin tslóg. Dollotár i n-armgrith cethri chóiced Érend im rennaib a sleg 7 a n-arm fodessin co n-erbaltatár cét láech díb do úathbas 7 cridenes ar lár in dúnaid 7 in longpairt in n-aidchi sin* 'And the pale creatures and he-goat creatures and female creatures of the valley and [the] demons of the air gave answer for terror of the shout that he had uttered. And Némain [the war goddess][4] attacked the host, and the four provinces of Ireland made a clamour of arms round the points of their own spears and weapons so that a hundred warriors among them fell dead of fright and terror in the middle of the encampment on that night.[5]

Nocturnal noise, fear and confusion are also found in Judges 7. Gideon sees the enemy camp beneath him in a valley. They are a vast, innumerable host.[6] At midnight, Gideon goes down with his men and they make noise with trumpets and pitchers, and they shout. The result is that the enemy either flee or kill each other in confusion. Thus, this narrative describes a rationalised version of death from terror, which is said to take place at the instigation of God.[7]

Apparently, the ancients saw war and its concomitant fear as something numinous. Divine involvement in war is, of course, well known from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In the bible, God is associated with war, and fear appears to be a divine weapon. Here are just a few examples from many; the first two quotations

4. These words are not in the Irish text; O'Rahilly seems to translate a marginal gloss from the parallel passage in the Book of Leinster version: *.i. in Badb* (O'Rahilly, *Táin bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin 1967) 58 n 2).

5. TBC I, 64, lines 2083–87 (text); 182–83 (tr). I adapted O'Rahilly's translation: the first three kinds of supernatural being are in her translation 'the goblins and sprites and spectres of the glen'; for more about *bánánaig* and *boccánaig*, see Borsje, 'Omens, ordeals and oracles: on demons and weapons in early Irish texts', *Peritia* 13 (1999) 224–248: 234–38, and the literature there cited; *geniti glinne* are discussed there, too, but see also below.

6. Jdg 7:12.

7. Jdg 7:2, 7, 9, 14–15, 22. When comparing this nocturnal scene with the previous one, one notices how a solitary hero facing a multitude (in the case of Gideon, with a small group of warriors) receives divine assistance: Gideon is said to be advised by God, and Cú Chulainn appears to be aided by the Némain, who diminishes the number of his enemies and by Lug, who temporarily takes over the battle for him.

are from the Song of Moses and the last one purportedly quotes a saying by God: *Dominus quasi vir pugnator* 'The Lord is as a man of war'; *inruat super eos formido et pavor in magnitudine brachii tui* 'let fear and terror make an attack upon them in the greatness of thy arm'; *terrorem meum mittam in praecursum tuum et occidam omnem populum ad quem ingredieris cunctorumque inimicorum tuorum coram te terga vertam* 'I will send my terror before you and will destroy all the people to whom you shall go and I will turn the backs of all your enemies before you'.[8]

Terror makes people flee, become paralysed and easy to kill, and this emotional state is here connected, and thus personified, with the supernatural.

In medieval Irish literature, several supernatural beings seem to personify the horror of battle as well. Conchobar probably did not worry that Cú Chulainn might die because of war noise but he seems to have feared a supernatural attack. In fact, the readership of *Táin bó Cúailnge* knows that Cú Chulainn has just overcome such a supernatural danger, called *airdrech* 'spectre'.[9] The boy was subdued by a man with half a head and only managed to conquer his opponent thanks to a taunt uttered by a well-known supernatural being, called the Badb.[10]

Supernatural beings are often found on the battlefield, according to Irish texts.[11] Their function varies from instigating warriors to fight better to frightening them to death. This paper is dedicated to a specific kind, called *úath*, 'terror'. It is difficult to distinguish *úath* from *fúath*, 'form; spectre'. Proinsias Mac Cana has pointed out that semantically *úath* and *fúath* converge in the Middle-Irish period.[12] I take them, therefore, together in this survey on the form and function of *úatha* or terrors in medieval Irish texts.[13]

8. The quotations are respectively from the Vulgate translation of Ex 15:3, 16; 23:27.

9. The LU text reads here the genitive singular form *aurddrag*; see DIL, s.v. 1. airdrech, airdrach, 'sprite, phantom'; compare Vendryes, LEIA s.v. airdrech, 'apparition'. This spectre is not merely to be imagined as a visual apparition, because Cú Chulainn is said to wrestle physically with him and later uses its half head as a ball to play with.

10. TBC 1, 16 lines 492–502; 139.

11. W. M. Hennessy, 'The ancient Irish goddess of war', *Revue Celtique* 1 (1870–72) 32–55; W. Stokes, 'The ancient Irish goddess of war: corrections and additions', ibid. 2 (1873–75) 489–92; J. Carey, 'Notes on the Irish war-goddess', *Éigse* 19 (1982–83) 263–75; W. Sayers, '*Airdrech*, *sirite* and other early Irish battlefield spirits', *Éigse* 25 (1991) 45–55; M. Herbert, 'Transmutations of an Irish goddess', in S. Billington & M. Green (ed), *The concept of the goddess* (London & New York 1996) 141–51; Borsje 'Omens'.

12. P. Mac Cana, *The learned tales of medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1980) 95 n 72.

13. My paper is only a brief summary of my findings. I hope to publish an extensive description

I. HEROES AND TERRORS

In *Fled Bricrenn*, 'The feast of Bricriu',[14] *úatha*, 'terrors', are mentioned in the context of tests imposed upon the three contestants for the hero's portion: Loegaire Búadach, Conall Cernach and Cú Chulainn.[15] The three famous warriors must fight with humanoid supernatural beings, called *geniti glinne*, '(female) creatures of the valley'.[16] Sáméra, one of the judges of the three heroes, sends each of them to *geniti* of the valley during three consecutive nights. Both Loegaire Búadach and Conall Cernach return defeated. The same fate threatens Cú Chulainn, who goes to the *geniti* on the third night:

> *No sgrechat na geniti dó. Immacomsinitar dóib. Brútir a gai 7 bristir a sciath 7 rebthair a étach immi. 7 nos curat 7 nos traethat inna geniti hé. Amein a Cu Chulaind or Láeg. a midlach thruag. a siriti lethguill dochóid do gal 7 do gaisced in tan ata urtrochta*[17] *not malartat. sía[ba]rthar co urtrachta*[18] *im Choin Culaind andaide 7 imsoi cusna húathaib ocus nos cerband 7 nos bruend*[19] *iat combo lán in glend día fulriud.*[20] 'The *geniti* screech at him. They wrestle with each other. His spear is fragmented and his shield is destroyed and his clothes are torn around him. And the *geniti* beat and subdue him. 'Well then, Cú Chulainn', said Lóeg, 'doomed coward, one-eyed sprite/shapeshifter (*sirite*), your fury and your valour have gone since it is spectres (*airdrecha*) that ruin you'. Thereupon Cú Chulainn is contorted in a spectral way and he turns towards the terrors (*úatha*) and he hacks and fragments them so that the valley was full with their blood'.

and analysis in a monograph entitled *Signs of doom: supernatural attendants of Fate in medieval Irish texts.*

14. The tale was edited and translated by G. Henderson (ed & tr), *Fled Bricrend: the feast of Bricriu*, ITS 2 (London 1899). The extant text is dated to the eleventh century, although there are older layers (G. Mac Eoin, 'The dating of Middle Irish texts' *Proc Br Acad* 68 (1982) 109–37: 119, 121). A good Dutch translation of the text from Lebor na hUidre, complemented with the ending from Edinburgh, NLS, Advocates, 72.1.40 olim Gaelic XL was published by M. Draak & F. de Jong, *Het feestgelag van Bricriu: een heldenverhaal* (Amsterdam 1986).

15. An earlier mention in the tale of an *úath* or terror destroyed by Cú Chulainn, which will be discussed in *Signs of doom*, is too brief to be of use for this analysis; see LU line 8354.

16. *Fled Bricrenn* §§66–68.

17. London, BL, Egerton 93 reads: *urtraig* (see E. Windisch, *Irische Texte* i (Leipzig 1880) 288).

18. cp. another description of Cú Chulainn's battle distortion: *Ríastartha a bél co úrtrachta* (TBC I, 69, line 2259) 'His mouth was distorted in a spectral way'.

19. Egerton 93 reads: *Siabartha im C. and ide ocus imsaig na hurtracha ocus nos cerband ocus nos bruigend* etc. (Windisch, *Irische Texte*, 288). This manuscript, therefore, does not refer to *úatha* but to *geniti glinne* and *airdrecha* only.

20. LU lines 8875–82.

These *geniti* are also called 'dark enemies'.[21]

We are informed about the sound, time, and place associated with these supernatural beings: *geniti* are screaming, nocturnal beings, living in a valley. They are furthermore called *úatha* and *airdrecha.* This latter term was also used to designate the spectre that opposed Cú Chulainn as a five-year-old. In both cases, they turn out to be more powerful than Cú Chulainn, but when the warrior is taunted, either by the Badb or by his charioteer Lóeg, he is able to overcome them. They might have a dark appearance, but otherwise we do not know what these nocturnal valley fighters look like. It could be that the term *geniti*[22] indicates their female gender, because not only a gloss in LU by scribe H but also glossaries explain *genit* and *gen* as 'woman'.[23]

This episode is probably part of a variant tradition. It only occurs in two manuscripts: LU in the hand of scribe H and Egerton 93.[24] Edgar Slotkin made a

21. *Traithaid nerta lochnamat* (LU line 8894) 'He [.i.e. Cú Chulainn] subdues the powers of dark enemies'.

22. See also L. Breatnach, 'Varia II. Irish *geined* and *geinit*, Gaulish *geneta*, Welsh *geneth*', *Ériu* 45 (1994) 195–96.

23. *Genaiti* is glossed *mná*, 'women', by hand H in LU line 3520. *Genit glinde .i. ben inglinn*, '*Genit glinde* [creature of a valley], that is: a woman in a valley', is a lemma §640 in *O'Mulconry's Glossary* (Whitley Stokes (ed & tr), 'O'Mulconry's glossary', *Archiv für celtische Lexicographie* i (1900) 232–324, 473–481 (from Dublin, TCL, 1318 al. Yellow Book of Lecan al. H. 2. 16). It is an Old-Irish compilation with a few Middle-Irish entries (Eoin MacNeill, 'De origine scoticae linguae', *Ériu* 11 (1932) 112–29: 119); §640 belongs to the first stratum, dated to the middle of the seventh century (ibid. 113). *Genit* is thus explained as *ben* 'woman'. There is, however, an interlinear gloss, that reads *gen .i. benglynnon .i. foglaid .i. banfoglaid bid anglinn, 'gen*, that is: a *glynnon* [valley?] woman; that is: a robber; that is: a female robber, who is in a valley' (I am indebted to Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh for the transcriptions from the Yellow Book of Lecan). This interlinear gloss explains *gen* as 'woman', albeit a special type: the rather mysterious *glynnon* woman. The latter in its turn is glossed as a robber, to be precise, as a female robber dwelling in a valley. The explanation *gen* as *ben* 'woman', seems to be inspired by the two previous lemmata in the glossary (§§638–39), in which *gene*—representing the Greek word for 'woman' γυνή—is explained with Latin *mulier* 'woman'. In another glossary, found in Dublin, TCL, 1318 olim H.3.18, *genit glinne* is explained as *gen* and then two further explanations are given, one seemingly in Latin and one in Irish: *Genit glinde .i. gen .i. mulier glynoon; ben bid hi nglinn* (D. A. Binchy, CIH, 628, line 17; Binchy has a comma after *mulier*), '*Genit glinne*, that is: *gen*, that is: *glynoon* woman; that is a woman who is in a valley'. It seems to me that *glynnon* and *glynoon* are fake Latin (or Greek?) terms (cp. Welsh *glyn* = Irish *glenn*) which are used here to specify *gen*, which does not simply refer to 'woman' as it did in §§638–39 of *O'Mulconry's Glossary*, but which is here used to explain *genit*, a supernatural type of woman (see also my 'The 'terror of the night' and the Morrígain: shifting faces of the supernatural', forthcoming in: Mícheál Ó Flaithearta (ed), *Studia Celtica Upsaliensia*).

24. E. M. Slotkin, 'The structure of *Fled Bricrenn* before and after the *Lebor na hUidre* inter-

meticulous study of the manuscript tradition of the tale. He presumes that this episode may also have been part of the version in Leiden, Codex Vossianus.[25]

Another terror in the tale is Úath mac Imomain 'Terror son of Great Fear', who is also designated *sirite*, 'shapeshifter, sprite'.[26] If we compare this Terror with the previous ones, the following differences are striking. The female terrors live in a valley; the male Terror lives near and under a loch. The frightening females shriek; Terror communicates with the heroes through words. The fight with the terrors forms the test; and Sáméra functions as judge. Úath combines the two functions: his challenge represents the test and he is judge at the same time. Courage and martial skills are being tested in the former case, courage and truthfulness in the latter. Úath's test is a beheading 'game'. Only that other *sirite*, Cú Chulainn, is able to pass the test.

Slotkin has shown that this episode occurs only in LU, on a leaf inserted by H.[27] His reasoning why H inserted this episode is both intriguing and impressive. Most of the famous final episode of *Fled Bricrenn* is missing in LU. It deals with a *bachlach* or churl, who presents the last test. He lets his head be cut off and demands that he should do the same to the person who did that to him. This churl turns out to be the supernatural Cú Roí who functions, like Úath, as test and judge at the same time. Because Úath represents the same test, Slotkin suggests that H wrote this episode himself to fill the remaining part of his inserted leaf. H thus re-introduced the common ending, but now in an abridged form and at an earlier stage in the narrative.[28] In Slotkin's view, the episode about Úath is redundant.[29]

polations', *Ériu* 29 (1978) 64–77: 66.

25. ibid. 72.

26. *Fled Bricrenn* §§75–78.

27. Slotkin, 'Structure', 66.

28. ibid. 72–75. This simplified summary does not do justice to Slotkin's extensive reconstruction, in which the removal of an episode about a meeting with a giant in the mist to the beginning of the adventures of the trio plays an important part. Slotkin (ibid. 74–75) suggests that H may have found the narrative order of an encounter with a *sirite*, a giant (*scálfer mór*) in the mist on the way to Cú Roí, and the churl (*bachlach*) near Cú Roí's fortress one ogre too many. I do not think that a *sirite* is an ogre (see below) and would suggest that H may have thought that the giant in the mist disturbed the following climactic sequence: 1. the *sirite* with the private beheading game; 2. the huge, horrible *scáth*, 'shadow, phantom', addressed as *bachlach* by Cú Chulainn, who promises Cú Chulainn's recognition as supreme hero; 3. the huge, horrible *bachlach*/Cú Roí with the public beheading game, which fulfils the previous promise. That 2 and 3 both are huge and horrible is not a meaningless repetition but a sign of their being linked one to the other.

29. Slotkin, 'Structure', 77 n 25.

Although this theory is attractive, I hesitate at the suggestion that H made up this episode himself. As Slotkin has shown,[30] H had great respect for the textual tradition. Since this esteem is difficult to reconcile with such creative writing, I suggest that he may have used a source in this instance, just as he seems to have used an alternative source in the case of the *geniti glinne* or *úatha* mentioned earlier. I try to point out two things: firstly, there seem to be some textual clues that indicate that the Úath episode is an alternative tradition from which H drew. Secondly, even though the structure of *Fled Bricrenn* is problematic, from a modern point of view, we can see that the weaving together of different traditions was done with skill.[31]

I begin with my first point. I see three clues that may hint at the Úath-episode as part of an alternative *Fled Bricrenn* tradition. The tale type called *úatha,* mentioned in Tale List A, usually consists of this word for 'terror' in the singular, followed by a place name in the genitive.[32] When Úath is introduced in the tale, he is connected with a placename:

> *Fer cumachta mori dano in tUath mac Imomain sin no dolbad in cach richt ba halic leis ⁊ no gniad druidechta ⁊ certa commain. Ba sé sin dano in sirite on ainmnigther Belach Muni in tSiriti. ⁊ is de atberthe in siriti de ara met no delbad i n-ilrechtaib*[33]
> 'That Úath mac Imomain was a man of great supernatural power[34]and he used to transform himself into each shape that was desirable to him and he used to perform druids' arts and supernatural arts.[35] He then was the *sirite* [sprite, shapeshifter] from whom *Belach Muni in tSiriti* [the pass of the bush/trick/neck of the *sirite*] is named. And it is from this that he used to be called *sirite*: because of the number of the many shapes into which he used to transform himself'.

30. ibid. 71.

31. Compare also the comments of Maartje Draak (Draak & De Jong, *Het feestgelag*, 65), pointing out that because the 'interpolator' had expanded the second part of the tale with so many variations that the structure suffered from it, it becomes even more convincing that this same 'interpolator' did not want anything of this tradition to go to waste.

32. There is one exception to the rule; see Mac Cana, *Learned tales*, 96; and §3 below.

33. LU lines 9005–9.

34. A misunderstanding of Úath as ogre or giant (L. C. Stern, '*Fled Bricrend* nach dem Codex Vossianus', *Z Celt Philol* 4 (1903) 143–77: 145; Slotkin, 'Structure', 74–75; W. Sayers, 'Úath mac Imomain (*Fled Bricrend*), Óþinn, and why the Green Knight is green', *Mankind Q* 30 (1990) 307–16: 309; id., '*Airdrech*', 52) is to be traced back to Henderson, who translates *Fer cumachta mori dano in t-Uath mac Imomain sin* (LU lines 9005–6) as 'A big powerful fellow was Terror, son of Great Fear' (Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, 97 §75).

35. For more on the supernatural art, called *cerd cumain*, see J. Borsje & F. Kelly, '"The evil eye" in early Irish literature and law', *Celtica* 24 (2003) 1–39: 22 n 144–45.

The place name *Belach Muni in t-Siriti* also occurs in the annals.[36] Only in *Fled Bricrenn*, however, is the place name explained. If we take the genitive *Muni* as not only referring to *muine* 'bush', but also as hinting at *muin* 'neck', 'wile, ruse, trick', then the name appears to be significant in this narrative context.[37] Úath is playing a trick with his neck and challenges the contestants to do the same, so that their necks are at stake. This place name is a first clue that perhaps there was a tale of the *úath* type or a *dindshenchas* tradition used here.[38]

Secondly, *Fled Bricrenn* itself refers in this episode to variant versions on whether or not Loegaire and Conall enter Úath's covenant. When Úath shows his axe and proposes to cut off the head of the man tomorrow who will cut off his head today,[39] Conall and Loegaire refuse to take part. They say they lack the *cumachtae* or supernatural power to survive this.[40] Then the text refers to other books *(araili libair)*, according to which both Loegaire and Conall agree with the covenant *(cennach)*, cut off Úath's head, but then break their word by refusing to be themselves beheaded.[41]

Before Úath lays down his head for Cú Chulainn, there is another intriguing detail, my third clue. The leaf written by H covers pages 109 and 110. The glosses on these pages are also in H's hand. Almost all of them explain words in *retoric*s. Only one marginal gloss refers to the prose tale. In this gloss, H explains that Úath first puts spells on the edge of the axe.[42] It is possible that he had forgotten to write this detail down and adds it at a later stage. It could also be that he takes this from one of the 'other books', and adds it to expand the text of his source.

I turn now to my second point: I will try to show that H wove his interpolation on Úath skilfully into the tale. We have to look somewhat differently at the text than one usually does: instead of seeing certain repetitions as doublets we consider them to be thematic echoes.[43] These repetitions are not literal quota-

36. AFM 1144; AT 1144; see further D. Ó Murchadha, 'A reconsideration of some place-names from the *Annals of Tigernach*', *Ainm* 7 (1996–97) 1–27: 4. I am indebted to Kevin Murray for this reference.

37. For a different view see Sayers, 'Úath', 311.

38. cp. for example, *Úath Belaig Con Glais* (Mac Cana, *Learned tales*, 43; see further D. Ó Murchadha, 'Belach Conglais: one or two?', *Peritia* 16 (2002) 435–43: 435).

39. *Fled Bricrenn* §76.

40. ibid. §77.

41. LU lines 9020–22.

42. LU line 9027, gloss a: *iar cor dó brechta hi fáebur in bélae*.

43. For another example of this approach, applied to episodes of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, see

tions; they show a considerable amount of variation. It is as if we are guided from Úath the *sirite* via the *scáth*, 'shadow, phantom' (addressed as *bachlach*) at the fortress of Cú Roí to the climax at the end, when Cú Roí appears as *bachlach*.

Comparing the two beheading games, the following points are striking. Úath's test consists of entering into a covenant, in which today a contestant may cut off Úath's head and tomorrow Úath will cut off that contestant's head. The horrible (*úathmar*) huge (*mór*) ugly (*grainne)* churl (*bachlach*) at the end of the tale whose first appearance occurs during the absence of our three contestants demands the opposite: he wants to cut off a warrior's head the first night, and then offers his own neck on the next. Here the tale in LU ends. In this manuscript, then, the same test is described twice, but the proceedings are in inverted order. Another important variation is that Úath's test takes place somewhere 'privately': the contestants need a guide to find him.[44] The test of the churl takes place publicly in Emain Macha before all the Ulster people, and is therefore a climax. Moreover, the churl introduces the concept *fír fer*, 'the truth or justice of men', for the covenant:

Úath	*Cú Roí*
cennach (covenant):	*cennach & fír fer*
X cuts off Úath's head & then	*bachlach* cuts off X's head & then
Úath cuts off X's head.	X cuts off the *bachlach*'s head.
Private test	Public test at Emain Macha [LU ends]

The Scottish manuscript[45] that gives the end of the tale then continues with a 'new' hero.[46] In the absence of our heroic trio, Munremor mac Gerrcinn, 'Fat-neck son of Shorthead', takes up the challenge. It looks as if the narrator chose him for his name. The reference to his neck alerts the audience or readers to the character of the test, just as the place name *Belach Muni in t-Siriti* may have done. Munremor, however, refuses the order of the test. Dubthach Daeltenga refers, then, to the *cumachtae* or supernatural power to revive oneself that the

my 'Approaching danger: *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and the motif of being one-eyed', in J. Nagy (ed), *Identifying the Celtic,* CSANA Yearbook 2 (Dublin 2002) 75–99.

44. *Fled Bricrenn* §76.

45. Edinburgh, NLS, Advocates, 72.1.40 olim Gaelic XL; see K. Meyer (ed & tr), 'The Edinburgh version of the *Cennach ind rúanado*', *Revue Celtique* 14 (1893) 450–59. LU ends at §94, Codex Vossianus at §99.

46. He is not new to the literary tradition (e.g. see the stone throwing fight between Cú Roí and Munremor in TBC I, lines 1609–25), but he is a novelty in *Fled Bricrenn.*

churl apparently possesses but which Munremor lacks. The churl then gives in (*Fled Bricrenn* §95). Munremor cuts his head off; the house is filled with his blood, he walks off carrying his head, block and axe, and the people of Ulster are filled with *adúath*, 'great terror'(§96).

Munremor's refusal in the Scottish manuscript is both similar to, and different from, the previous refusals of Loegaire and Conall in LU. They refuse to enter the covenant with Úath because of their lack of *cumachtae*; Munremor enters the covenant with the churl but demands that the order be changed on the same ground, namely, his lack of supernatural power.

There is not only a difference in the proposed order of the test, but the description is also different. In the case of Úath, there is a sense of trickery because of the remark about the spells that he puts on the axe; but the axe of the churl is impressive by its enormity (§96). Cú Chulainn enters the covenant with Úath without hesitation, but with the churl he does not want to make a covenant at first (§98). He is tricked into the covenant when the churl taunts him, calling him a doomed fly *(cuil trúad)* that is afraid of death.[47] Cú Chulainn proves his courage and truthfulness in the test imposed by Úath. The emphasis seems to shift more towards truthfulness in the test embodied by the churl. Cú Chulainn is clearly frightened during this last test (§§99-100). Moreover, the concept of *fír fer* is used here as in the part extant in LU. Even though it is clear that Cú Chulainn is afraid, he keeps his word. He is the only hero who does not hide but offers his neck to the churl on the next night. This is what makes him the true hero, which is now publicly acknowledged in the presence of all (§102).

Fled Bricrenn thus portrays two quite divergent forms of *úatha*: on the one hand, screaming, fighting, female nocturnal valley creatures and, on the other, a shapeshifting male who is powerful in supernatural arts. They all function as a test. We will now consider other examples.

II. FINN AND TERRORS

Finn Mac Cumaill, Caílte, and Oisín are lured into a trap by *úatha* for revenge, according to a Middle-Irish tradition known as 'Finn and the phantoms', extant in prose and poems.[48] The three men are engaged in a horse race. When the sun

47. Before this, the churl asks where *in síartha* (*síabarta* in Cod. Voss.) *claontrúad*, 'the squinting doomed distorted one', is (§98). This is once more a reference to Cú Chulainn's battle transformation, during which his eyes change as well. cp. Lóeg's taunt—*sirite lethguill* 'one-eyed sprite/shapeshifter'—during the fight with the *úatha*, quoted above.

48. For the prose version see L. C. Stern (ed & tr), 'Le manuscrit irlandais de Leide', *Revue*

sets they seek shelter for the night. They enter a strange house in a valley, inhabited by a grey churl (*aithech*),[49] an old woman (*caillech*) with three heads,[50] a headless man with one eye in his chest, nine headless bodies and nine loose heads. They are welcomed but the entertainment and food offered to them are perverse.[51] The 'music' performed by the household appears to be horrible shrieks and the meal is their own horses roasted on rowan branches.[52] They endure the music, but Finn refuses the horseflesh which is still raw.[53] This is taken as an insult; the fire goes out and in the dark they are beaten up. The fight lasts the whole night. When the sun rises, the three guests are lying on the ground as if dead, and when they arise, the house and its household have vanished,[54] and they and their horses are well again. By divination[55] Finn finds out the identity of their opponents: they were the three *úatha* of Yew Valley who wanted to avenge the killing of their sister. In the later poems three or nine *fúatha* of Yew Valley are mentioned.

These *úatha* thus live in a valley, they shriek, they excel in fighting, they operate at night, and vanish at sunrise. They are capable of verbal communication

Celtique 13 (1892) 1–31, 274: 5–7, 12–17, 274 (from Leiden, Cod. Voss., s. xvi); see Stern, 'Nachträge und Berichtigungen', *Z Celt Philol* 1 (1897) 503; J. Pokorny, 'Erläuterungen und Besserungen zu irischen Texten. 4. Finn und die Gespenster', *Z Celt Philol* 13 (1921) 194). It is dated to the eleventh or twelfth century (G. Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* iii, ITS 43 (Dublin 1953) 26). Poem I, inc. 'Oenach indiu luid in rí' (in W. Stokes (ed & tr), 'Find and the phantoms', *Revue Celtique* 7 (1886) 289–307, from LL), is dated to 1100–40 (Murphy, *The Ossianic lore and romantic tales of medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1961) 20 n 19). Poem II, inc. 'Áonach so a Moigh Eala in rí' (in Eoin MacNeill (ed & tr), *Duanaire Finn* i, ITS 7 (London 1908) 28–30, 127–30: from Dublin, University College, OFM, A 20, formerly in Killiney) is dated to the second half of the twelfth century or later (Murphy, *Duanaire Finn*, iii 25). For an unpublished version and a version without the phantoms, see ibid. 26. It should be noted, however, that John Carey ('Remarks on dating', in J. Carey (ed), *Duanaire Finn: reassessments*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 13 (Dublin 2003) 1–18: 16–18) has recently argued on the basis of these poems that Murphy's dates may often be too late.

49. Another translation of *aithech* is 'giant, monster'.

50. This woman is lacking in Poem II.

51. This is where the prose version begins.

52. The churl kills Finn's horse (prose) or the three horses of the guests (poems). The head of Finn's horse is put on the fire with branches of rowan, according to the prose, or joints of the horses are put on spits of rowan in the fire (poems).

53. In the prose, he says that they are not used to such food, which is specified in Poem I as raw food, in Poem II as horseflesh.

54. For parallels to the motif of the disappearance of a house and its household in the morning, see Murphy, *Duanaire Finn*, iii 29.

55. See J. F. Nagy (*The wisdom of the outlaw: the boyhood deeds of Finn in Gaelic narrative tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1985) 21–24) for the divination methods used by Finn.

and shapeshifting, in common with Úath mac Imomain. They tried to harm the heroes but failed. It is possible that this failure is due to Finn's refusal to eat horseflesh. The scene reminds us of the fatal one in the tale of Cú Chulainn's death where he was offered dog's flesh on rowan spits by witches who wanted to avenge their father's killing.[56] Cú Chulainn's *gessi* are explicitly mentioned; he does not eat but touches the flesh, which weakens him seriously. The witches *(ammaiti)*, also referred to as *geniti*,[57] who offer the flesh to Cú Chulainn appear to be signs of doom. Apparently, Finn was not confronted with conflicting *gessi* as Cú Chulainn was, and hence he could choose the right way out of his predicament. Admittedly, the text does not mention the *gessi* of Finn here, but the audience and readership of this narrative would have associated this scene with the scene from Cú Chulainn's life. They would have recognised the imminent threat. The women offering rowan spits with dog's flesh to Cú Chulainn were signs and instruments of doom; the churl with his rowan spit could have had a similar function with regard to Finn, but he managed to escape the fate that threatened him. In fact, it makes perfect sense that *geis* is not mentioned, because tales involving *geis* often end in a tragic death. The danger of breaking a *geis* will have been in the minds of the audience because of the similarities with the tale about Cú Chulainn, but without the explicit presence of a *geis*, the tale can end well.[58] The *úatha* in this tale about Finn thus represent revenge and a test.

Another poem in *Duanaire Finn*, beginning 'Domhnach lodmair tar Lúachair', opens with a scene at nightfall.[59] Having hunted all day, Finn and his men have made camp. One boy stays outside, falls briefly asleep and then awakes in terror (*úathbás*). His hound is killed by a monstrous pig, designated *mucc* 'pig', *fúath*,

56. W. Stokes, 'Cuchulainn's death', *Revue Celtique* 3 (1876–78) 175–85 (= BL lines 13881–93; for recent translations, see Maria Tymoczko, *Two death tales from the Ulster cycle: the death of Cu Roi and the death of Cu Chulainn* (Dublin 1981) 37–107, and John Carey in J. T. Koch & John Carey, *The Celtic heroic age: literary sources for ancient Celtic Europe and early Ireland and Wales* (Andover MA 1994) 124–33). The extant incomplete text in LL is an eleventh-century redaction of eighth- and ninth-century material (R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle 1921) 548–49).

57. BL line 14234. The Early Modern Irish recension refers to them by many terms, among which *fúatha* (A. G. van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*, MMIS 3 (Dublin 1933) 72–133: 80 §12).

58. For a different interpretation that puts the horseflesh in the context of mantic processes and of traditions on food of the *áes síde* as dangerous for humans, see N. K. Chadwick, 'Imbas forosnai', *Scott Gael Stud* 4 (1935) 97–135: 115–18.

59. G. Murphy (ed & tr), *Duanaire Finn* ii (London 1933) 184–93; he dates the poem to about the middle of the twelfth century (*Duanaire Finn*, iii 120).

and *arracht*. This beast is thus associated with nightfall, it is deep black, and utters three cries. The men hunt the beast for a whole day, and it slays many warriors and even more hounds. It arouses horror *(gráin)* and terror *(úath)*, but is finally killed. This dangerous and frightening beast is not a shapeshifter, but we could see it as a test of the valour of Finn and his men.

III. A SAINT AND TERRORS

Fúatha play a part in a pivotal episode in the Middle-Irish *Genemain Moling ocus a bethu*, 'Birth and Life of Moling'.[60] As a boy, the saint is called Tairchell.[61] He is fostered by a priest. One day, when he is sixteen years old, he wanders through Luachair, singing his prayers. He then has an encounter with robbers. The whole company consists of the wicked *Fúath*, his wife, his servant, his dog and a group of nine persons.[62] Their leader is an unshapely *(dodelbda)*, ugly (*dochraid*) monster *(torathar)*, explained by the text as the wicked *Fúath*.[63] His dark *(dub)*, ugly *(dochraid)*, unshapely *(dodelbda)* household is explained as people in the shape of spectres *(arrachta)*. After a hostile dialogue between the saint and the leader, Tairchell is allowed to make three leaps. With these enormous leaps, he reaches the wall of his church. The *fúatha* raise a loud cry and pursue him, but to no avail. The priest hears of his adventure and concludes that the angel Victor has prophesied about this boy. He changes Tairchell's name into Moling of Luachair, which hints at his leaps from Slíab Luachra.[64]

60. Whitley Stokes (ed & tr) 'The birth and life of St. Moling [*Geinemain Molling ocus a bhetha*]', *Revue Celtique* 27 (1906) 257–312 (from Dublin, RIA, 476 olim 23 O 48 al. Liber Flavus Fergusiorum (LFF); Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 4190–4200); cp. ibid. 28 (1907) 70–72); rev. ed. in W. Stokes (ed & tr), *The birth and life of St Moling*, Specimens of Middle-Irish literature 1 (London [privately printed] 1907); the Life is dated to the twelfth century but it contains older material (Mac Cana, *Learned tales*, 96 n 75). For a modern translation, see M. de Paor, *Saint Moling Luachra* (Blackrock 2001) 158–215.

61. *Genemain Molling* §10.

62. ibid. §15.

63. The Brussels MS reads here a corrected form *aingidh* and LFF has *aingide* (Stokes, *Birth*, 14). Stokes (ibid., 15) translates *in Fúath aingeda* as 'the Evil Spectre', taking *aingeda* as *andgedae*, sister form of *andgid*, derived from *andach*, 'evil' (see DIL s.v. an(d)gaid, 'wicked, cruel, merciless'). Mac Cana points out that the first title of the *úath*-group in Tale List A is *Úath Angeda*, which seems to be the only *úath*-title in which *úath* is not followed by a place name in the genitive (*Learned tales*, 96). Mac Cana suggests that this refers to an earlier form of the Moling tale, which may have been about a hag. He bases this upon a Middle-Irish poem ascribed to Moling, in which the saint has a female adversary, called Aingid (ibid. 95–96).

64. *Genemain Molling* §22.

These *fúatha* live in a wild place;[65] they speak, shout, and fight as robbers. They also seem to be shapeshifters: they are said to be human beings *(doíni)* with the appearance of *arrachta*, 'phantoms'. Throughout the tale, however, they are referred to as *fúatha* and not as human beings. The test element is also present in this tale. By his miraculous escape the saint shows himself to be the prophesied one. He gets a new name and enters the church: immediately after the adventure, he receives the tonsure and becomes a monk.[66] Moling is, incidentally, offered horseflesh as food as well, but his blessing changes it into mutton.[67]

IV. KINGS' SONS AND TERRORS

The next two examples of *úatha* are found in two poems. The first, *Temair Breg, baile na fían*,[68] deals with the five sons of Eochu Muigmedón, king of Ireland, who are in the wilderness, where they have hunted a boar. Because there is no well in the area, one son leaves to seek water.[69] The well that he finds, however, is guarded by an old female seer *(écess)*.[70] She has a terrible mouth (a dog would fit in it) and her teeth are more hideous than the *úatha*[71] of Ireland. She asks the

65. The episode about the *fúatha* takes place at 'the extensive marshy rush-land of Luachair in the Sliabh Luachra area which today covers parts of the three counties Cork, Kerry and Limerick' (De Paor, *Saint Moling*, 67).

66. *Genemain Molling* §29.

67. ibid. §53.

68. This poem occurs in LL and in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 502 (Maud Joynt (ed & tr), 'Echtra mac Echdach Mugmedóin', *Ériu* 4 (1910) 91–111). It is ascribed in LL to Cúán Ó Lothcháin, who died in 1024 (ibid. 91). A prose version occurs in YBL (Whitley Stokes (ed & tr), 'The death of Crimthann son of Fidach, and the adventures of the sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903) 172–207: 190–203) and in the Book of Ballymote (S. H. O'Grady (ed & tr), *Silva gadelica* (London 1892), i 326–30 (text); ii 368–73 (tr)). It is not older than the eleventh century (Stokes, 'Death of Crimthann', 173). The term *úath* is not used in the prose version.

69. *Temair Breg, baile na fían* §§29-34.

70. Joynt, 'Echtra', 101 translates this as 'a sibyl', adding that *écess óenmná* literally means 'a poet (*vates*) of a single woman'.

71. LL reads here literally *anathu*, which should be *ina uatha*, according to the editors of the diplomatic edition (BL i 149 n 7). The variant reading is *fúatha* (Rawl.). Joynt ('Echtra', 101) translates *fúatha* as 'goblins', but this English word does not seem to translate the Irish term properly. 'Goblin' derives from Middle-English *gobelin,* French *cobalus*, Latin *cobalus* and *gobelinus*, and ultimately from Greek κόβαλος 'an impudent rogue, arrant knave'; κόβαλοι were also a set of mischievous goblins, invoked by rogues. The cognate in German is *Kobold* and in Dutch *kobold* and *kabouter*. This appears to be a mischievous dwarf-like diminutive being connected with the house, a kind of 'house spirit' (J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, ed. E. H. Meyer (4th ed. Berlin

prince for a kiss on her mouth in exchange for water, but the young man flees in horror (§§35–37). Two of his brothers set out, see the 'terror of the cliff'[72] *(úath ind alla)*, and return without a drop (§38). Then the eldest, Brian, goes to the terror. He gives her a hasty kiss, and she tells him that he will pay a hasty visit to Tara (§§39–40). When Níall the nine-year-old is sent to her,[73] her horrible appearance is described in full: *in deilb ndochruid coscháil cennléith clúmchoch-laig*, 'that hideous shape, thin-shanked, gray-headed, bushy-browed'.[74] She has 27 rows of long teeth or tusks like buffalo's horns that are twisted round to her old shoulders (§45). Her bitter eyes blaze; her form is foul *(drochdelb)* (§46). She invites Níall to her couch and he embraces her and kisses her mouth. At this, she is transformed into a girl more beautiful than the sun (§§47–53). She prophesies to him that he will be king at Tara.

The second example also deals with a sovereignty figure, who is designated *caillech* and *úath*. The narrative is told in a poem, beginning *Óebind a tarla ar m'aire*.[75] The first nine stanzas form the *dindshenchas* of Carn Máil; the concluding twenty-six tell the tale of the king's sons meeting the sovereignty. According to E. J. Gwynn, this second part of the poem was written in imitation of our previous poem, *Temair Breg, baile na fían*.[76] Just as in the case of our previous example, there is a prose version (in *Cóir anmann*) that does not use the term *úath*.[77]

The seven[78] sons of king Dáire of Ireland are all called Lugaid, because of a prophecy.[79] The poem does not give any further details; in *Cóir anmann* we read that it had been foretold that a son of the king, called Lugaid, would hold the sovereignty. The king's druid furthermore predicts that this will be the son who catches a fawn with a golden lustre. The poem does not refer to this druid, but

1875–78; repr. Graz 1968), i 414–7, iii 145). Thus this supernatural being is also believed to frighten people, but appears to be of a type different from the *úatha* discussed here.

72. Joynt ('Echtra', 101) translates 'the spectre of the cliff'. LL reads *cúath na halla*; I cannot make sense of this. The editors of the diplomatic edition gave here Rawlinson's reading (*úath*) in the footnote.

73. This is Níall Nóigíallach, according to convention, king of Ireland (379–405) (Joynt, 'Echtra', 91).

74. Joynt, 'Echtra', 102–3, §44.

75. E. J. Gwynn (ed & tr), *The metrical dindshenchas* iv, TLS 11 (Dublin 1924) 134–43.

76. ibid. 409–10 for his theory on the development of this poem.

77. Whitley Stokes (ed & tr) '*Cóir anmann* (Fitness of names)', in W. Stokes & E. Windisch (ed), *Irische Texte*, iii 2 (Leipzig 1897) 285–444, 557: 316–23 §70.

78. The literary tradition varies on the number of the sons (Gwynn, op. cit. 409).

79. *Óebind a tarla ar m'aire*, lines 37–40.

tells that the king owns an enchanted fawn *(lóeg doilbthe)*, which is hunted, killed, and divided by the his sons.[80] Then the scene suddenly shifts to the interior of a house, where they are sitting at the fire.[81] Presumably night has fallen and they are in a hunting booth.[82] An ugly old woman *(caillech)* enters. She is much more elaborately described in the poem than in the prose. Her appearance is gigantic and her form is dark *(duibe a delb)*.[83] She has a broad row of teeth, a long nose, enormous fists, big black bony knees, a bulging belly, a dark scabby head full of wens, and the looks she casts upon the young men are horrible. The sight of that obese lustful terror *(úath olair abbáeth)* frightens and shames them; they prefer being buried alive to looking at her. She tells them her evil message *(aithesc olc)*: one must sleep with her, or she will devour them all, together with their dogs.[84] Lugaid Laígde replies that he will be the one, and she is transforms into one of radiant form, beautiful and young. She identifies herself as the Sovereignty of Ireland and Alba, but will not sleep with Lugaid. This is the destiny of his son, she prophesies, who will be named Lugaid mac Con, who will be a druid, a prophet *(fáith)* and a poet *(fili)*. The poem ends with a prophecy by Dáire.[85]

Again, we see a frightening female *úath*, who appears at nightfall and functions as a test for king's sons. This solitary terror communicates verbally with her visitors, just as Úath mac Imomain did. Another recurring characteristic is the shapeshifting ability. In this case, only a change between two forms is mentioned: the dark, repulsive appearance is transformed into a radiant attractive woman that is said to be a symbol of the rule of the land. This woman is furthermore connected with divination.

80. ibid. lines 41–68. The prose version furthermore mentions a druidic mist that separates the king's sons from the men of Ireland during the hunt.

81. *Óebind a tarla ar m'aire*, lines 69–70.

82. According to *Cóir anmann*, they have hunted in the wilderness and suddenly heavy snow starts to fall. One by one they go looking for a house, and they all find a wonderful house, inhabited by a huge old woman (*sentuinne*, *caillech*) with large protruding teeth and dressed in old foul clothes who offers a bed on condition that the man seeking it sleep with her. Lugaid Laígde is the only one willing, and the old woman is transformed into a radiant young beauty. Lugaid gathers his brothers; they enjoy a feast in the house, and are served drinks by self-moving drinking horns. The sovereignty gives them all nicknames, and promises the kingship to Lugaid Laígde who sleeps with her. In the morning, they awake on the plain and the house has vanished. The end of this adventure is similar to that of Finn and the phantoms.

83. *Óebind a tarla ar m'aire*, line 75.

84. ibid. lines 71–104.

85. *Óebind a tarla ar m'aire*, ibid. lines 105–140.

V. A KING AND A TERROR

The last two examples to be discussed are Old Irish. It should be noted that some of the characteristics of *úatha* found thus far in Middle-Irish texts seem to be more implicit in these Old-Irish texts. The first of these is *Echtrae Fergusa maic Leiti* 'The adventure of Fergus mac Leite'.[86] The prose tale tells how king Fergus mac Leite sees a monster under water, which frightens him so much that his face becomes distorted:

> *La diuderc do fuire rosiapartha a beoil doa culadaib 7 doluid as for tir ar omon.* (...) *is olcc do gne ol int ara*, 'At the sight of it [i.e. the monster] his mouth was wrenched back as far as his occiput, and he came out on land in terror. ... 'Ill is thy aspect', said the charioteer.[87]

This monster is referred to as *píast uiscide* 'water beast', *muirdris*,[88] and *úath*.[89] The shapeshifting aspect is not clear in this instance, unless we should see the beast's continuous expanding and contracting as such.[90] This *úath* appears to be a test for a ruling king.[91] Fergus fails the test: the physical damage done to his

86. D. A. Binchy (ed & tr), 'The saga of Fergus mac Léti', *Ériu* 16 (1952) 33–48. He dates the text to the eighth century (ibid. 45).

87. ibid. 38 (text), 42 (tr).

88. For more about these first two designations, see my *From chaos to enemy: encounters with monsters in early Irish texts: an investigation related to the process of christianization and the concept of evil*, Instrumenta Patristica 29 (Turnhout 1996) 27–65.

89. The designations *píast uiscide* and *muirdris* are mentioned in *Echtrae Fergusa maic Leiti*, §6 and §8; *úath* is mentioned in §9.

90. See also my 'The movement of water as symbolised by monsters in early Irish texts', *Peritia* 11 (1997) 153–70: 166–69.

91. The version of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* in Dublin, TCL, 1319 olim H.2.17, mentions Úath as one of the names listed by Cailb, when she is asked to identify herself (variant readings are: Huae (LU), Huaet (YBL), Hua (RIA, D iv 2), Uae (BL, Egerton 1782). Other recognisable names are Némain and Badb (see Whitley Stokes (ed & tr), 'The destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901) 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437; Eleanor Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, MMIS 8 (Dublin 1936)). Cailb has an asymmetrical appearance and, because she mentions Badb among her names, we can assume that she is also a shapeshifter because of the bird form of this supernatural woman associated with war. Just as the witches in Cú Chulainn's death tale, she appears as a sign of doom and tests king Conaire in two ways: she asks to be admitted to the house in which he is and, when he refuses because this would mean breaking his *geis*, she threatens him with satire. Just as Cú Chulainn, Conaire has to choose between two evils: he breaks a *geis* in order to avoid being satirised. Just as Fergus mac Leite, Conaire fails the test because he is no longer fit to be a king: he has passed an unjust judgement and breaks several of his *gessi* (see also my 'Approaching danger'). We could conclude that for doomed kings there is no hope of passing the test presented them by an *úath*.

face shows that he is no longer fit to be king.[92] This is the conclusion of the charioteer: after telling Fergus that his face looks bad and advising him to sleep for a while, he notifies the elite at Emain Macha in the meantime that a new king should be installed.[93] The final quatrain of the text connects the designation *úath* directly with the disfigurement:

Fergus mac leidi in ri(g)
luid i fertus rudraigi
huath do[d]narfas fa gann (n)gle
ba he fochond a ainme.[94]

King Fergus, son of Leite[95]
Went on the sandbank of Rudraige;
The terror that appeared to him—fierce was the conflict—
Was the cause of his disfigurement.[96]

VI. A WOMAN AND THE TERROR OF THE NIGHT

Our last example is the Old-Irish poem *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*, 'The *reicne* (a certain type of poem) of Fothad Canainne'.[97] The leader of a *fían*, named Fothad Canainne, appears as a phantom to his lover and addresses her in the form of a poem. One of his messages for her is a warning of the terror of the night, present on the battlefield, where he has just been killed:

92. See *From chaos*, 65–88, for an interpretation of the supernatural rule concerning the water in which the beast lives as a *geis* 'tabu' for Fergus: this water, named after his ancestor and in his own territory, is forbidden him. When he breaks this *geis*, he should have reacted to the sight of the monster neither with fear nor flight but with fight. Breaking the *geis*, becoming disfigured because of fear, and fleeing from danger are all signs of his being unfit for kingship, for a king should keep his *gessi*, should have no blemishes in his physical appearance, and should not flee.

93. *Echtrae Fergusa maic Leiti* §7.

94. Binchy, op. cit. 39.

95. For more on Leite (or Let) and the spelling of this name, see R. Ó hUiginn, 'Fergus, Russ and Rudraige: a brief biography of Fergus mac Róich', *Emania* 11 (1993) 31–40: 35–36.

96. Binchy, op. cit. 44; I slightly changed his translation, which reads: 'a horror which (…)'.

97. *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* in Kuno Meyer (ed & tr), *Fianaigecht being a collection of hitherto inedited Irish poems and tales relating to Finn and his fiana*, TLS 16 (Dublin 1910) 10–21. Meyer dates the poem to the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century (ibid. 1), although he also assigns it to the eighth century (ibid. xviii–ix).

Ná tuinithe aidc[h]e úath
illeircc eter lectaibh cúan,
Ní fiu cobraim fri fer marb,
fodruim dot daim, ber lat m'fadb.

Do not wait for the terror of night
On the battle-field among the resting-places of the hosts;
One should not hold converse with a dead man,
Betake thee to thy house, carry my spoils with thee![98]

Elsewhere, I have argued that we should see this terror not only as one of the early Irish supernatural beings designated *úatha* and discussed in this paper, but also as a demon from the bible.[99] Moreover, this terror of the night seems to refer to the well-known supernatural woman called the Morrígain as well, who is described as Washer at the Ford[100] in this poem.

If I am right in this identification, then the shapeshifting aspect is clear: the Morrígain takes on many forms. It should also be noted that the last name of the red woman alias the Morrígain in *Táin bó Regamna* is *úath*.[101] The test element seems to be present as well. The phantom warns his lover:

cid gar di sund úan i mbé,
ná fubthad uaman do gné.

Though it is near us here where she is,
Let not fear attack thy shape.[102]

The fatal effect in the narrative about Fergus mac Leite of fear (*omun*) disfiguring his countenance or appearance *(gné)* is here phrased as a warning. It seems as if not only the male elite should have a 'stiff upper lip' in the face of frightening appearances, but so should the female elite. This woman is the wife of the leader

98. Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, 12–13 §23.

99. 'The "terror of the night" and the Morrígain' (forthcoming).

100. This is item D1812.5.1.1.7 in T. P. Cross, *Motif-index of early Irish literature* (Bloomington IN 1952). See also, for instance, G. Schoepperle, 'The washer of the ford', *J Engl Germ Philol* 18 (1919) 60–66; G. Jones, 'A washer at the ford', *Aberystwyth Stud* 4 (1922) 105–09.

101. Johan Corthals (ed & tr), *Táin bó Regamna: eine Vorerzählung zur Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Österreichische Akad Wiss, philosoph-hist Kl, Sitz-Ber 478, Veröffentlichungen der keltischen Kommission 5 (Vienna 1987) 30 line 34. It should be noted, though, that this is the reading of YBL. This manuscript identifies the red woman as the Badb, whereas according to Dublin, TCL, 1318 olim H.2.16, she is the Morrígain.

102. Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, 16–17 §43.

of a *fían* and the prose version makes it clear that she could demand a high brideprice because of her beauty.[103] As she had lost two partners at the time of the poem, loss of face would mean loss of status for her. She is, therefore, tested as well with regard to courage. Despite the fact that her lover sends her repeatedly away, she is supposed to remember his poem for posterity and, therefore, hear him out. This means that she must stay on the dread-inspiring battlefield.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Úatha and relevant *fúatha* are frightening supernatural beings living in the wilderness; some of them appear to be robbers. Groups of these beings are often said to be merely shrieking whereas solitary specimen, are usually able to communicate verbally. They can be female and male, human and bestial. Many of them are associated with the night and darkness and most of them are shape-shifters. They all present a test to those who encounter them, and these are all members of the elite. They are tested on their aristocratic behaviour: do they possess courage, truthfulness, and do they make the right choices? It is interesting to note that only a saint does the right thing by fleeing (or rather leaping) from them; warriors and kings, however, should fight them, show no fear, and refuse their food. Kings-to-be must go further: they should embrace a terror, because this transforms the dark creature into a radiant being, more beautiful than the sun.

103. There are two recensions of this text. The Old-Irish version was edited and translated by Vernam Hull, 'The death of Fothath Cananne', *Z Celt Philol* 20 (1936) 400–04 (from Dublin, NLI, G 7 olim Phillipps MS 9748), who dates its archetype to the first half of the eighth century or even earlier (ibid. 400). For an edition and translation of the later recension see Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, 4–9 (from Dublin, TCL, 1336 olim H. 3. 17).