

Pieces of a literary puzzle: the earliest references to
Diarmaid and Gráinne



MA thesis Celtic studies, 2006
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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the famous tale *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada 7 Ghráinne* (TDG) was for the first time published with an English translation by Standish O'Grady for the Ossianic society, it has attracted attention from scholars and romanticists alike. It triggered many reprints and even school editions of the story, critical acclaim and scholarly analysis. Nowadays, it is one of those stories that are widely known even outside the field of Celtic studies, because of its dramatic quality which appeals to many. Myles Dillon describes it as "the tragedy of a young girl betrothed to an old man and of the conflict between passion and duty on the part of her lover. In... [this] case death is the price of love."¹ R.A. Breatnach followed up saying "[it] belongs to great literature: the story of a tragic love, set in a *milieu* of primeval nature touched with that 'magic of Celtic romance.'"² Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, the latest editor of the tale, sees it as an expression of the classic "Celtic love theme". She draws a parallel with the story of Deirdre, pointing out this early Irish tale also found its way to a wider, English-speaking audience through the adaptations of for example Yeats and Synge. Yet, she states, the greatest adaptation of this theme is to be found in the continental romance of Tristan and Isolde.³

As exemplified above, there has never been a lack of attention for TDG as one of the tales which displayed this 'classic Celtic love theme'. However, I personally think this view is heavily influenced by a modern outlook. I would like to use the example of the so-called 'Deirdre'-story to illustrate this point. First of all, the first source of this tradition is firmly and far removed from TDG and the Tristan and Isolde stories, by many centuries. *Longes mac n-Uislenn* "The exile of the sons of Uisliu" (LMnU) might be as early as the ninth century and was later, in the fourteenth, reworked into *Oided Chloinne Uisnig* "The violent death of Uisnig's descendants" (OCU). When examining these two sources, a shift in emphasis can clearly be seen. LMnU is in fact a typical example of an Ulster cycle tale, in which honour of the warrior is the most important and the woman is not a tragic figure, but rather a troublemaker who is the cause of the strife between the sons of Uisliu and the Ulstermen. OCU, on the other hand, is much closer to TDG in theme, as Deirdre is made the victim of other people's acts and meets a far more tragic end with her lover Naoise than in LMnU. Thus, it would seem that already by the time OCU was written, the contemporary audience perceived the older tales in a wholly different fashion. I suspect something similar might have happened to Diarmaid and Gráinne. Although there

¹ Dillon, Myles. *Early Irish Literature*, Dublin 1948: 42-3.

² Breatnach, R.A. "Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne", *Irish Sagas* 135-147, Cork/Dublin 1968: 135.

³ Ní Shéaghdha, Nessa. *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, Dublin 1967: ix.

is not, like with 'Deirdre', an older source available which offers the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne, we are fairly certain that there once was one, from a source which I shall refer to as the 'Talelists'. These are medieval lists of tales which supposedly catalogued the repertoire of the *fili*. It is believed that tales that are mentioned on both go back to a lost original list of tales which dates to the tenth century.⁴ A story called *Aithed Grainne ingine Corbmaic le Diarmaid ua nDuibne* "The elopement of Gráinne daughter of Cormac with Diarmaid grandson of Duibne" (AGD) is one of these, but, unfortunately for our purposes, lost. Again, we see that the modern tale in terms of time at least is far removed from this 'original', if we may call it that. If we compare this situation to that of LMnU and OCU, I dare doubt Gerard Murphy's assessment that "this puzzling tale [...] may well have been popular always in much the same form" is correct.⁵ Rather, I think it would think that what happened to LMnU over the years to eventually gain its fame by being known as the 'Deirdre'-story, happened in some ways to AGD also. It is quite possible that TDG has retained some elements and themes from the tenth-century tale, but it must at least have been expanded on and altered to fit the contemporary spirit. Apart from that, I would like to draw attention to R.A. Breatnach's observations concerning the structure of the tale. In his opinion, the great weakness of this tale is its rambling structure. He thinks that from this evidence, it may be clear that the author had many traditions from which he could draw, of which only a fraction has survived. Whether these sources were mainly oral or written can not be certain in his opinion.⁶ I think this is an important train of thought to pick up on; this assessment sets the TDG-tradition apart from what we can call the 'Deirdre'-tradition, as OCU, despite its differences from LMnU, can still be regarded a reworking of it, while this is far less certain in the case of TDG. It is obvious from several fragments and excerpts of other stories that the bones of the story were around in a much earlier stage than the Early Modern TDG. We also know for sure that at least one tenth-century tale dealing with their elopement is lost to us. However, there is no certainty regarding the question if these fragments and references, like Nessa Ní Shéaghda has suggested, present us with the general outline of this presupposed original, or if they rather represent us with a range of different traditions surrounding this particular tale. Ultimately, while collecting and analysing these references, this is the issue I will try to keep in mind and if possible try to answer.

What I shall try to do first of all before assessing the questions I have outlined above, is to give an overview of the specific circumstances of the subject of interest. That is, background information on the cycle of tales and tradition it is part of, and the problems that are associated with it. I believe it is important to take a brief look at the history of the so-called 'Fenian literature', to which this tale belongs, in order to put this study in the right framework. Additionally, I will shortly address the particular problems that are associated with the early 'Diarmaid and Gráinne'-tradition and the history of the Early Modern tale, TDG. These elements are in my opinion essential to provide a point

⁴ MacCana, Proinsias. *The learned tales of medieval Ireland*, Dublin 1980: 66. See also 2.2.

⁵ Murphy, Gerard. *Duanaire Finn III*, Dublin 1953: xxxvi.

⁶ Breatnach 1968: 145.

of reference when addressing the actual subject of this thesis, which shall be the earliest references extant to the tale of Diarmaid and Gráinne.

2. THE PARTICULAR SITUATION OF THE 'DIARMAID AND GRÁINNE'- TRADITION

2.1 *The fragmentary state of the early Fenian literature*

The literary tradition surrounding Finn mac Cumail and his *fíana* is a very long-lived one. Finn mac Cumail is traditionally the legendary outlaw who leads a famous band of warriors into many battles, feasts, hunts and adventures. The term *fíán*, plural *fíana* originally simply described a certain group of armed men in Irish historical and legal sources. More specifically, it denotes a band of warriors that lives in the margins of society, i.e. they are not a part of the traditional structure of *túaths*. On their role and place in society according to the law texts, I will elaborate later on. In literature, the specific qualities ascribed to *fíán*-members are skills in music, fighting and hunting. Important story motifs are the preference for life outdoors as opposed to life in court, the destructive nature of women and (fictional) place-name lore.

The earliest written references to Finn and his *fíana* already occur in the seventh century in the so-called 'Leinster'-poems.⁷ However, the arguably most famous and critically acclaimed piece of Fenian literature is *Accalam na Sénorach* (AcS) "The colloquy of the ancients", which was probably written around 1200. This often rambling frame tale in prosimetrum is also the longest text in Old/Middle Irish. It starts off with the *fíana* being scattered and nearly wiped out after three major battles. The only surviving well known heroes are Caílte, Finn's right hand, and Oisín, Finn's son. After they split up, Caílte meets with St. Patrick, and travels with him through Ireland while telling him many tales about the deeds of Finn and the *fíana* in connection with the places they see. In many ways, it can be regarded a watershed; the diabolical pagan associations that were a part of the earlier tradition are disposed off for once and for all on the authority of St. Patrick himself. It signals an important change in Fenian literature; the early period, from 700 onwards to 1100, the tradition is characterized by its scarceness, fragmentary nature and can be called marginal if compared to for example the Ulster-cycle. Yet, quite suddenly, without precedent for as far as we can tell, an enormous work arises that at least in volume surpasses that other great Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* "The cattle raid of Cooley". The question as to how this came to pass has been addressed by various scholars. I will

⁷ Meyer, Kuno. "Über die älteste irische Dichtung I. Rhythmische alliterierende Reimstrophen", Abhandlungen der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil Hist Kl .6 Berlin 1913.
Meyer, Kuno. "Über die älteste irische Dichtung II. Rhythmische alliterierende Reimstrophen", Abhandlungen der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil Hist Kl .10 Berlin 1914.

give an overview of these theories below, since they are relevant in assessing the history of Fenian literature.

In his book "The wisdom of the outlaw", Professor Joseph Nagy describes certain cultural and political circumstances he believes may have led to this reversal. First of all, he draws attention to the synergy between literary and oral traditions in the history of Irish literature which he believes is vital to keep in mind when trying to discuss any such problem as outlined above. He posits that a 'strong and productive oral Fenian tradition'⁸ must have existed both before and alongside the literary Fenian tradition which continually served as a source of inspiration. The remarkable growth of Fenian literature in the Middle Ages may also, as some scholars believe, be a 'southern' initiative, he says. That is to say, the desire of literati from Leinster and Munster, and of course their powerful patrons, to put down in writing a heroic tradition that very probably originated from these parts of Ireland, as if to compete with the 'northern' Ulster cycle about Cú Chulainn and the other Ulster heroes. Thus, the explosion of productivity in the Fenian tradition from the eleventh century onwards reflected political changes, namely the newly-won power of the southern kingdoms, which had for centuries been dominated by the northern Uí Néill kings.

However, the blossoming of Fenian literature may also 'have signalled an aesthetic shift in the interests of the bearers of the literary tradition'.⁹ He refers to Gerard Murphy, who in his edition of *Duanaire Finn* describes how a new 'mentality' came to dominate the Irish literati in the tenth and following centuries, when they turned from making pseudo-history to the inventing of stories in which warrior, mythological, folk, pagan and Christian motifs are all piled together, sometimes in the form of narrative, sometimes in the form of place lore or history, sometimes in a mixed form, as in AcS.¹⁰ Although Nagy objects to the word 'invention', he agrees with Murphy that the literary tradition did remould the oral Fenian tradition into the literary form in which these stories have survived in extant manuscripts. However, he continues, while the oral tradition must have played a pivotal role, the literary characteristics of the medieval Fenian literature cannot be ignored and therefore it is clear that it did not simply come into existence as a written form of a contemporary oral tradition.¹¹

Someone who has tried to pick up this discussion in an attempt to put forward a theory to account for the small corpus of early Fenian material in contrast to the later bulk is Kim McCone. He thinks that the Fenian tradition was already extant and widespread from an early period, but was kept back by the church, which is why we are only left with the fragments we have now. He states that the reason the literature was held back was that the church clashed with the *fíana* in both the spiritual and physical world. The *fíana*, he says, "embodied values that were perceived a threat to the hierarchical, settled society

⁸ Nagy, Joseph Falaky. *The wisdom of the outlaw, the boyhood deeds of Finn in the Gaelic narrative tradition*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1985: 2.

⁹ Nagy 1985: 3.

¹⁰ Murphy 1953: lxxxvi.

¹¹ Nagy 1985: 4.

of the *túath* in which the church had a vested interest".¹² Moreover, it seems likely that the *fiána*, operating on the borders between territories, which were also the exact places where monastic settlements were often located, would have been a literal, physical threat to these monasteries and churches.

Concerning the clerical aversion to the *fiána* in a spiritual sense, McCone draws attention to Richard Sharpe's research about hagiographical references to bands of brigands that terrorized both society and the church. McCone ascribes this to the confusion of the *fénnid* and *díberga(ach)*. A *fénnid* is simply a member of a *fián*, which is not necessarily a negative thing, while *díbergaig* were robbers and plunderers who wore diabolical signs and took public vows of evil. It is not surprising that in the law texts *díberga* is listed as one of the ultimate sins for which there could not be any remission or penance and *díbergaig* are put in the same list with druids and satirists, about whom it is said that "it is more fitting in God's sight to spurn than to support them".¹³

He also draws attention to the narrative of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* "The destruction of Da Derga's hostel" (TBDD), in which *díberga* and related activities play an important role. Conaire, the king of Tara, has been fostered together with the sons of Dond Desa the *féindid* or *fián*-champion and they become fast friends. However, the taking to *díberga* is taboo for Conaire during his reign. Therefore, his foster brothers cannot take up their father's profession, without endangering his kingship. Throughout the tale, no distinction is made between *díbergaig* and a *fián*-band; the terms are used interchangeably, which shows that for the author there apparently was no difference between the two. TBDD is no exception in this respect, in several saints' lives, such as Tírechán's Life of Patrick and even in the Annals of Ulster, the exploits of *fiána* and *díbergaig* are confused.

In short, the anti-campaign against the latter influenced and very probably coloured the view of *fiána* in the pre-Norman period, or so McCone argues. The negative attention to the *díberga* activities in ecclesiastical texts by association influenced the *fiána*. McCone further states that this insistent and vehement campaigning against the *fián* and associated practice must mean that the institution was a social reality in the early Christian period that was perceived as a threat for the interests of the church. He cites an entry in the Annals of Ulster for 847 in which the robbing of an island by a *fián*-band, whose members are described as plundering in the manner of pagans, showing that *fiána* were a concern by the second half of the ninth century.¹⁴

However, in time the literary emphasis shifted from the disagreeable to the favourable aspects of the *fiána*, the aspects that were to become motifs and themes in the later Fenian material, such as hunt, valour, service to the king as standing army and skills in martial arts and music. For example, the short text of *Áirem Muintiri Finn* "The enumeration of Finn's household" claims that Finn never denied anyone valuable possessions or food and that he and his followers refrained from seizure of property not rightfully theirs.¹⁵ Kim

¹² McCone, Kim. "Werewolves, Cyclopes, *díberga*, and *fianna*: juvenile delinquency in Early Ireland", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* (winter 1986) 1-22: 2.

¹³ Binchy, D.A. "Brétha Crolige", *Ériu* 12 (1934-38) 1-77: 40.

¹⁴ McCone 1986: 5-6.

¹⁵ O'Grady, Standish Hayes. *Silva Gadelica I*, London 1892: 92-93.

McCone describes this as a 'literary renunciation of the *díberg* aspect'. Moreover, he states that from several law texts it becomes clear that the *fiana* in fact did have a position within the legal system of the *túath*.¹⁶ Even though *fian*-members essentially operated outside the boundaries of the *túath*, they were partially dependant on the settled community, while the *túath* also had its uses for the fearsome warriors. They operated for the community as *aire échta* "lord of blood-vengeance", which meant that, since they were not bound to the territorial divisions of the *túath*, could cross the borders onto the territory of another *túath* to extract vengeance and pursue a blood-feud.¹⁷ This also distinguishes the *fian* further from the *díbergaig*, as it shows the *fiana* were a part of society in this sense and did have a place in the system of law and order, rather than being just a disruptive force.

Moreover, there is the fairly cryptic remark in *Tescosca Cormaic* §31 "The teachings of Cormac", which proclaims that "everyone is a *fian* member until he comes into an estate".¹⁸ McCone furthermore draws attention to a passage in *Críth Gablach* (§9) which states that the minimum age to become a full member of the *túath* is 20, but that in addition one must possess enough property. If one does not, the admission might be deferred or even never take place. Thus, he concludes, *fian*-membership could be temporary, for youths who were not of age or did not possess the necessary property to join the *túath* in one of the free or noble grades. However, he also thinks that the social reality of the *fian* distinguished another type of *fian*-members; apart from the youths for whom it was a phase of age-grading, there were those who spent whole or at least most of their life in the *fian*, like Finn himself.

McCone argues that it was only after the *fiana* had ceased to be a social reality, their power diminished and the threat removed, that the church, which monopolised literary production, was prepared to return to them their 'rightful' place in literature, like had happened to the druids. This in addition to the secularisation of written vernacular learning in the post-Norman period, from 1200 onwards, is what he believes cleared the way for recognition and written cultivation of Fenian literature in that time.

2.2 *Problems associated with the early 'Diarmaid and Gráinne' tradition*

Now, after having briefly discussed the problems associated with early Fenian material, I would like to turn to those specific to the Diarmaid and Gráinne tradition in this early period. It is obvious, in my opinion, that there definitely was one, which will be exemplified later by several sources. Although on many points this tradition must have differed from TDG and everything that was produced afterwards, one would expect TDG in some way or other 'derived' from it and thus TDG should represent or at least reflect older motifs and themes that date back to that tradition. The first problem lies in the fact that it is incredibly difficult to determine what those older motives and themes are, mainly because there is not one tale from the Old or even Middle Irish period which tells the whole story

¹⁶ McCone 1986: 7.

¹⁷ Kelly, Fergus. *A guide to early Irish law*, Dublin 1988: 127

¹⁸ Meyer, Kuno. *The instructions of king Cormac mac Airt*, Dublin 1909.

of Diarmaid and Gráinne, like TDG. Instead, there are several sources that are concerned with different stages in the tale, some of them conflicting with one another.

Nessa Ní Shéaghdha thinks that a tenth-century tale now lost to us, *Aithed Gráinne ingine Corbmaic le Diarmaid ua nDuibne* "The elopement of Gráinne daughter of Cormac with Diarmaid grandson of Duibne" (AGD), was the source for TDG. The aforementioned title is all that has been preserved, occurring in both the Talelists, which are curious documents in their own right; it is thought that they perhaps represent the repertoire of the *fili*.¹⁹ There are two versions, generally referred to as A and B. Two copies of A are preserved, one in the twelfth-century manuscript LL (189 b) and a sixteenth-century one, Trinity College Dublin H. 3. 17 (col. 797). B can be found in the tale *Airec menman Uraird mac Coise* "The stratagem of Urard mac Coise" preserved in three manuscripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth- centuries, RIA 23 N 10 (29), Bodleian Library Rawlinson B 512 (109) and British Library Harleian 5280 (47). Thurneysen concluded from comparing the two that both must be based on an older list, designated by [x], which he dates back to the tenth century.²⁰ Thus, if a tale is included in both the Talelists, it is almost certain that it would have been included in [x], although if a tale is only mentioned on one or on neither, that does obviously not mean it could not have been around during the time [x] was produced.²¹ AGD is in fact mentioned in both and therefore in all probability dates back to [x].

At any rate, using Ní Shéaghdha's theory as explained above solves many problems; it allows us to assume that the general outline of TDG was contained within the lost tale and TDG was indeed modelled on it, much like *Oided Chloinne Uisnig* was modelled on *Longes mac n-Uislenn*. Thus, theoretically, TDG would share the general outline of AGD but have extended on it and been modernised. Ní Shéaghdha furthermore proposes that "certain isolated episodes that presuppose the knowledge of the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne are found in tenth-century texts and from these we can discern the general outline of the tale".²² The episodes she mentions are (1) 'Finn and Gráinne', (2) *Tochmarc Ailbe* "The wooing of Ailbe" (TA), (3) two poems in the commentary on *Amra Cholúim Chille* "Lament for Colum Cille" (ACC) and (4) *Uath Beinne Etair* (UBE) "The hiding at the hill of Howth". I intend to test this theory as fully as possible, that is to say, I will try and list the sources referring to Diarmaid and Gráinne before TDG and analyse these to see if it is indeed possible to form one coherent story that may reflect the content of the lost tale that has been reworked into TDG. I have included one more source than Ní Shéaghdha from the early period, (5) *Úar in Lathe do Lum Laine*, and will also briefly discuss (6) the references to the tale in *Acallam na Sénorach*.

¹⁹ Mac Cana 1980: 33.

²⁰ Thurneysen, Rudolf. *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, Halle 1921: 22.

²¹ Thurneysen 1921: 22.

Mac Cana 1980: 66.

²² Ní Shéaghdha 1967: x.

2.3 *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne "The pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne"*

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, it is the Early Modern Irish tale *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* "The pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne" that in a sense revived the tradition of Diarmaid and Gráinne and has made it the popular story that it still is. Although my concern here will be the early tradition that we assume preceded TDG, it is worthwhile at this point to consider for a moment the 'end product' that TDG essentially is.

In the beginning of the tale, Oísín is sent to Tara to seek the hand of Gráinne in marriage for Finn. Cormac, her father, is eager for this marriage to come to pass and thus Gráinne consents. A great banquet at Tara ensues. However, she had thought that Finn sought her hand for Oísín and not for himself and she is very distraught when she is told the truth by the druid Daighre Duanach. With the help of a sleeping potion, Gráinne causes Finn, her father and several others attending the feast to fall asleep and creates such chaos she is able to have a private conversation with Oísín and Diarmaid úa Duibhne. She tries to persuade one of them to elope with her. Oísín declines and so does Diarmaid at first, but she threatens to lay a taboo on him if he does not come with her. When the other *fíán*-members and even Oísín advise him to pay heed to these taboos and to do her bidding, he obeys and elopes with her. They are pursued wildly by Finn and his *fíana*, but manage to stay ahead of him with the help of Diarmaid's supernatural fosterfather, Aonghus of Brug. Finally, Aonghus also establishes a peace between the two parties that we are told lasts for sixteen years. Diarmaid and Gráinne live peacefully at Ráith Gráinne and she bears him four sons and one daughter. At last, Finn arranges the chase of the magical boar of Beann Ghulban. Diarmaid becomes mortally wounded in combat with the pig and lies in agony until Finn and his *fíana* arrive. Finn has the power of healing, but refuses to save his rival even when the other *fíán*-members threaten him with the penalty of death, ultimately allowing Diarmaid to die. The news is brought back to Gráinne, who divides his heritage between her children and exhorts them to avenge his death.

According to Nessa Ní Shéaghda, who edited the tale and translated it, TDG is the Early Modern version of AGD, that is to say, it was re-cast in the more modern language and given a new title, but apart from some minor differences essentially the same as the older tale.²³ Furthermore, she is convinced that even though the earliest extant copy of TDG survives in a manuscript dating back to 1651, the original composition must be earlier than that. She bases this theory on the fourteenth-century compilation of poems by Gearóid Iarla, earl of Desmond (†1398) in which there are constant allusions to Diarmaid and Gráinne. These references seem to agree with TDG rather than the older sources, for example the manner of Diarmaid's death. Additionally, there is a late thirteenth/early fourteenth-century poem in the *Duanaire Finn* "The lays of Finn" collection which seems to agree with the TDG tale rather than the older tradition. Therefore, Ní Shéaghda says, it is certain that the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne in the TDG form was known in the

²³ Ní Shéaghda 1967: xiii.

fourteenth century at least, perhaps even in the thirteenth.²⁴

There are, all in all, forty-one copies of TDG, ranging in date between 1718 to 1850, with the exception of the oldest extant copy RIA 24P9 which was written in 1651. On this copy, Nessa Ní Shéaghdha based her edition and translation, with five other manuscripts used for variant readings. Due to the loss of leaves, the beginning of the tale is missing in the oldest copy and several others. Most copies, however, agree on the beginning of the tale in which Oisín and Diorraing are sent to Tara to seek the hand in marriage of Gráinne daughter of Cormac for Finn. The events leading to the elopement and consequent pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne are in all copies more or less the same, as is the account of his death, but not what follows after. There are five distinct different endings to the tale in the manuscripts; i. the most popular one in which Gráinne is told that Aonghus an Brogha will not permit her and her people to take the body of Diarmaid with her to their home in Ráith Gráinne, and she sends messengers to her children in Corca Dhuibne (co. Kerry) because she admits she has no power over Aonghus in this matter; ii. five copies end by claiming Gráinne's people return without the body of Diarmaid and recount how Gráinne spent the rest of her days in sadness until she died; iii. four copies break off the tale at the point where Aonghus laments the passing of Diarmaid; iv. three copies, including the oldest copy which Ní Shéaghdha used, show how the children of Diarmaid return to avenge him at Gráinne's urging; and finally v. an addition to the text in two copies gives a completely different ending in which Gráinne marries Finn and through Gráinne's intervention Diarmaid's children are persuaded not to extract vengeance and are given his status in the *fíana*.

Nessa Ní Shéaghdha considered most of these endings to be unfit to the tale, as it seems they break off rather abruptly. She refers to an Early Modern poem in *Duanaire Finn* "The lays of Finn" which tells of a fierce war between Diarmaid's children and Finn that results in the killing of Diarmaid's daughter Éachtach and Finn being badly injured. Considering this to be a more fitting ending to the tale, she suspects this might be the original ending of TDG.²⁵ Whether this is a correct assumption or not is still open to question, and I shall leave it open for the time being, as it is not part of the questions this thesis is concerned with. Yet, it is interesting to note and keep in mind while assessing other sources dealing with this material. Other things to keep in mind is Ní Shéaghdha's conviction that the tale has been directly inspired by AGD (she calls it 're-cast' in the Early Modern age) and must be older than the first manuscript it survives in. Even if this is true, I imagine that TDG is far longer than AGD would have been. A comparison with *Longes mac n-Uislenn* "The exile of the sons of Uisliu" and *Oided Chloinne Uisnig* "The violent death of Uisnech's offspring" might be useful at this point; in that case, there is a ninth or tenth-century original which is reworked in the Early Modern age. *Oided Chloinne Uisnig* is far longer than *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, however, with added episodes concerning their flight and a far more 'tragic' ending is devised, with Derdriu sacrificing herself over Noisiu's grave. It is plausible something like this happened to TDG. If AGD was indeed the source for the

²⁴ Ní Shéaghdha 1967: xiv.

²⁵ Ní Shéaghdha 1967: xviii.

tale, episodes might have been added and altered to fit a contemporary audience.

3. THE EARLIEST REFERENCES TO DIARMAID AND GRÁINNE

3.1 'Finn and Gráinne'

This fragment concerning the decidedly unhappy marriage between Finn and Gráinne has only one known copy, in the Book of Lecan. It has been published and translated by Kuno Meyer²⁶, who, although he believes the language of the copy can be hardly earlier than the thirteenth century, places the original in the tenth, or perhaps even as early as the ninth century.²⁷ In his introduction to *Duanaire Finn* III "The Lays of Finn", Gerard Murphy dates it to the eleventh or possibly tenth century, since according to him "the frequent use of *ro*-forms in narrative suggests that a 9th century date is too early".²⁸ Máirin O'Daly, even though she agrees that in general this may be true, believes like Meyer that it may have derived from an earlier version considering the rhetoric verses that seem to have been added to the ending.²⁹ More recently, the fragment has been edited and translated again, in German, by Johan Corthals, who was also able to translate the obscure *roscada* that Meyer deemed unintelligible.³⁰ Corthals argues that while the text is definitely not Old Irish, neither prose nor *roscada*, it is certainly not Early Modern Irish either. Because of the highly modernized orthography, he says, it is very difficult to date the text with any degree of certainty.

As a general outline, the story describes how Finn woos Gráinne, who wants nothing to do with him and therefore demands an impossible bride-price, namely, a pair of every wild animal in Ireland to be brought to Tara. Yet Finn perseveres and with the help of his right-hand man Cailte he manages to raise the bride-price she has demanded. They are wed, but Gráinne still very much hates him, even so much she sickens of it. At the feast of Tara her father sees her distressed and asks what ails her. When Finn hears how she feels about him, he says: "It is time for us to separate".³¹

At this point, the translation of the obscure poems spoken by Cormac and Finn by Johan Corthals offers a new dimension to the tale not considered previously, and I shall discuss here briefly. Both verses seem more or less concerned with the legal implications of Finn and Gráinne's separation. Cormac speaks of how he is obliged to compensate for

²⁶ Meyer, Kuno. "Finn and Gráinne", *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* I (1897) 458-461.

²⁷ Meyer, Kuno. *Fíanaigeacht*, 1910, reprint 1993: xxiii.

²⁸ Murphy 1953: lix.

²⁹ O'Daly 1968: 107.

³⁰ Corthals, Johan. "Die Trennung von Finn und Gráinne", *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 49-50 (1997) 71-91.

³¹ Meyer : 460.

Gráinne's behaviour, and that she must return to her paternal kin as soon as they are separated, which was common practice in Irish laws. In the speech Finn utters, subsequently, he claims it is vital for him to put her before a judge, so that they can be separated without treachery. Most interesting, perhaps, is the following quotation: *mór miscais malartaig conscara cétmuinterus itir lánamnai lucht* "Gross ist der Hass gegen den Übeltäter, der das Eheband zwischen verheirateten Leuten zerstört."³² In its particular context, the sentence does not seem to refer back to someone or something that broke down the marriage of Finn and Gráinne, yet, with the knowledge of the reader who has more information to his disposal it would appear as though Gráinne's lover could be meant, Diarmaid. That is to say, I do not wish to discard the possibility that Diarmaid is indeed implied here, because a medieval audience could also be aware of the tale of their elopement. However, I think it should be kept firmly in mind that this interpretation is based on background knowledge, and perhaps expectance; therefore one needs to take care not to look for things that are perhaps not even there. Personally, I am reluctant to put that much emphasis on just one word. Yet, it is interesting to note the possibility.

Returning to the tale, it ends in a very anti-climactic way. There is no (obvious) mention at all of Gráinne's unfaithfulness, simply of her hatred for Finn. Apparently, the separation is also fairly peaceful; even if Finn's cryptic speech casts some doubts. It is remarkable how the last piece of the story concentrates on the legal implications of separation. The details given are in tune with the legal reality as we find in the Irish laws. This makes the tale a bit of a curious one; one could wonder if the piece concerned with law was something stuck rather oddly on the end of a pre existing tale, or if it was the tale that was added. There is no way of knowing for sure if either happened, yet either possibility could serve to explain why the fragment does not mention the elopement of Diarmaid and Gráinne. If we assume here that the author's prime interest were the laws concerning separation, it is possible that he rather randomly selected Finn and Gráinne's tale as an example. However, we must acknowledge the fact that the bulk of the tale is absolutely not concerned with law. Therefore, it is also possible that the rhetorics spoken by Cormac and Finn might originally have had a legal context which was lost by the time this story was written down. Yet, as I have pointed out above, possibly neither of these scenarios happened and the fact that it seems to have such legal connotations is merely accidental.

The piece also seems isolated, in so far that the circumstances described are not found in other material, except two poems. One is an Irish poem in the Hodges and Smith collection and a similar Gaelic poem is to be found in the Book of the Dean of Lismore.³³ In both, the theme of Cailte collecting animals for Finn to deliver in the hands of Cormac is recounted. Only in *Tochmarc Ailbe*, which shall be discussed at length later on, there is a reference to the separated status of Finn and Gráinne. Yet, in that tale it is made clear that the separation is an immediate result of Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement, and Finn

³² Corthals 1997: 79.

³³ Wilde, William R. "A descriptive catalogue of the antiquities of animal materials and bronze in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy", *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* VII Dublin 1861: 184-191. Cameron, Alexander. *Reliquiae Celticae I: Texts, papers and studies in Gaelic literature and philology*, left by Alexander Cameron, Inverness 1892 (ed. Alexander Macbain and John Kennedy): 73-75.

and Cormac are very nearly at war with one another as a result.

Possibly, considering the two poems on Caílte's quest for the animals, though I admit it is a far stretch demanding some degree of imagination, this fragment could represent a theme in Fenian material that initially had nothing to do with the disastrous love of Diarmaid and Gráinne. Perhaps the more important theme in the tale here is the difficult task Finn is assigned to by Gráinne, which he fulfils with the help of Caílte, who in this fragment is made his cousin. So, if we take this to be true, the fragment is part of a stage in a tradition of Finn and Gráinne of which Diarmaid was not (yet) part. Admittedly, however, the fragment is short and obscure, certainly the rhetoric parts, and as I have mentioned before, isolated in the sense that this particular situation is not described in other sources known to me. Therefore, there is simply no way of knowing if the way in which the fragment has come down to us is the original form or even if it is complete. The possibility is nevertheless interesting to note, certainly if we regard the fact that Diarmaid also plays a part in Fenian material other than in the role of Gráinne's lover, of which we shall have examples later, for instance in AcS.

So, for all the possible interpretations of this short tale, it remains fairly obscure. There do not seem to be clues as to which tradition we should place it in and in what context it was written. This makes it, perhaps, even more interesting, even though the myriad of possibilities do not make matters simple. It offers information which often does not seem to agree with other sources and thus offer a whole new view on the tradition. I have tried to offer several theories and explanations and although it seems at this point quite impossible to prove or disprove one or more of them once and for all, they should be kept in mind for the time being as they represent much of the problems with the early sources on Diarmaid and Gráinne.

However it may be, at this point it may be worthwhile to once more draw attention to several things in this fragment. Namely, the fact that Finn and Gráinne are actually married and live together, apparently, for a longer period of time, before Finn learns from her father that she finds him hateful and they separate. There is no mention of Gráinne's unfaithfulness, a bitter feud between the two of them or any of the details that have such a dramatic impact in the tales in the TDG-tradition. For these reasons, I find it hard to say indefinitely that in some ways it reflects the lost tale from the Talelists, as loosely suggested by Nessa Ní Shéaghda in her introduction to TDG.³⁴ Again, it is certainly a possibility, yet I find it unlikely considering the fact that Diarmaid is not once even mentioned. Indeed, I think the thought that this fairly isolated fragment preserves in itself some Fenian tradition, not necessarily even on the topic of Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement, not recorded elsewhere, should not be discarded too quickly. Considering the nature of the early Fenian material, as generally outlined above, I find it is quite possible that the different fragments about Diarmaid and Gráinne from the earlier period do not necessarily represent just one tradition that predated the TDG-tradition. By that, I do not only mean that there were minor discrepancies between them that were smoothed out eventually, resulting in the tale so well known to us now, but also that it is possible that

³⁴ Ní Shéaghda 1967: x.

throughout the country, different tales on the topic were known which could have differed from each other more than slightly, like with many other Fenian tales of which we find abundant examples in AcS. Therefore, it is in my opinion entirely likely that this fragment in fact had nothing to do with the lost tale *Aithed Gráinne ingine Corbmaic le Diarmaid ua nDuibne*.

3.2 *Tochmarc Ailbe "The wooing of Ailbe"*

While this is one of the longer texts among the earlier Fenian material, with interesting, uncharacteristic content and many stylistic figures such as rhetoric, poems and riddles, this tale thus far has not received much attention from scholars. Rudolf Thurneysen made an edition of the text in German already in 1921, yet he is also thus far the only one.³⁵ Thurneysen did, however, leave out the obscure, rhetoric speech in which Ailbe addresses Cithruad the druid. Recently, Johan Corthals discussed this part and translated it into Dutch and later into English.³⁶ I acquired the translation of the entire tale into English by John Carey attending Kevin Murray's colleges on 'The Finn cycle' at University College Cork during the first semester of 2004-2005. This translation, which is thus far still forthcoming, is the one I shall refer to here, unless indicated otherwise.

Thurneysen regarded the poor way in which the tale has been handed down to us as the reason for the lack of attention previous to his own edition. There is only one full version of it, in the manuscript H. 3. 17 from Trinity College, Dublin. He believed that this tale even at the time it was copied was already considered so difficult because of the *roscada* and obscure riddles, that it found no following among authors and scribes, resulting in the single copy we have left. However, some riddles given to Ailbe by Finn are recounted in two other manuscripts, H. 1. 15 (653-4) which gives 27 of the 30 riddles in our tale, and H. 3. 9 (58) in which 20 of the riddles are to be found.

According to Thurneysen, the text is corrupt. He thinks this is a direct result of the scribe whose manner of writing unfortunately obstructs reconstruction of the original even more because of his unusual abbreviations, which make it difficult to make out the endings of words.³⁷ The same is pointed out by Johan Corthals in his Dutch article, who mentions the rhetoric style, unusual spelling, drastic abbreviations and faulty division of words by the scribe as the reason Thurneysen did not take on the task of translating the problematic *roscad* by Ailbe mentioned earlier.³⁸

As to the date of the original tale, Kuno Meyer puts it in the tenth century, with which Thurneysen is inclined to agree.³⁹ He points out that the tale certainly must have been known in the first half of the twelfth century, as Gilla Mo Dutu in a poem from 1147

³⁵ Thurneysen, Rudolf. "Tochmarc Ailbe 'Das Werben um Ailbe'", *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 13 (1921): 251-282.

³⁶ Corthals, Johan. "Ailbe zoekt een man", *Kelten* 4 (1999) 4-5.
Corthals, Johan. "Ailbe's speech to Cithruad (*Tochmarc Ailbe*), *Éigse* 34 (2004) 1-9.

³⁷ Thurneysen 191: 251.

³⁸ Corthals 1999: 4.

³⁹ Meyer 1910: xxiv. Thurneysen 1921: 253.

(LL 139), refers to *Ailbi Gruadbrec* as Finn's wife. Moreover, it is mentioned in both the Talelists, meaning it was in the original [x] which dates back to the tenth century, like AGD. This could indicate the tales existed and functioned next to each other. On its own, the fact that both in all probability go back to [x] does not prove anything. However, I think we must at least regard the fact that there was very little Fenian material mentioned in the lists. Taking into account that TA and AGD represent two tales that date back to roughly the same period and are at least partly concerned with the same themes, it does seem likely that the information in *Tochmarc Ailbe* reflects some of the content of the lost tale.

The tale starts by explaining that Finn and Cormac had a falling out as a result of Gráinne's elopement with Diarmaid. Finn has in fact been banished by king Cormac and the *fíana* removed from his command. Interesting to note at this point is that the *fíana* are explained as the standing army of the king; they are by no means bands of roving brigands or exiles, but regarded champion soldiers of the king of Tara. The men of Ireland are very concerned by this outlawed status of Finn, as he is seen as the authority directly below Cormac who would mediate between the king and his men in times of need. Also, Finn had been the chief of the warriors of Art, Cormac's father. For these reasons, Cormac returns the authority over the *fíana* to Finn and makes sure he and Gráinne are formally divorced. Additionally, he permits any of his other daughters to marry Finn. Ailbe, one of his daughters, goes to the druid Cithruad to find out what her future will hold, and he tells her the man that is to be her husband will come to the green of Tara the day after. He gives her a draught so she will have a vision as to what man will come to her. After she has the vision, she recites a long poem in which the life of the *fíán* outdoors, in free nature, is praised above all else, and especially the court. Then, as the feast of Tara begins and Finn comes, she becomes distracted and her father finds out she is infatuated by him. They converse in poetry, with Cormac arguing she should not be marrying an older man, and certainly not a *fénnid*, while she replies that it is better to have an older man than a young one, and life outdoors is to be preferred above that of the court. Very striking here is of course that the roles seem to be reversed; it is the father and not the young woman who objects to her wedding an older man. Cormac even tries to turn Finn away from Ailbe, even though earlier in the story it is said that he blessed his daughters to marry him. Nevertheless, Finn and Ailbe exchange riddles and answers and they resolve to marry, even if Cormac does not consent of it. Finn pays seven *cumala* to Cormac as her bride-price and Ailbe comes with him to live the *fíán* life. She bears him three sons and Finn also gains a more youthful appearance because of his marriage to her.

The marriage is in many ways the opposite of that of Finn and Gráinne as we have seen it in the fragment discussed above. Ailbe herself chooses Finn, an older man, even when her father is reluctant to have them married. Also, while Gráinne's main asset is her beauty, Ailbe's seems to be her intelligence, as she is the one who can correctly answer all of Finn's riddles. Theirs is a fruitful marriage: they conceive three sons who all go on to claim their own fame in the form of *dindshenchas*; it is said that all three have places in Ireland named after them. On top of that, Finn regains a more youthful appearance which is a clear indication of the success of their marriage. Overall, the portrayal of the woman

is very positive throughout the tale; Ailbe is praised for her intelligence, level-headedness and her sense of duty. This is quite uncharacteristic for medieval Irish literature, in which women were often seen as troublemakers, like Derdriu and Medb, or at the best as a necessary evil. It is perhaps even more so for Fenian literature, in which women are hardly even mentioned and if they are, as with Gráinne, it is in a negative sense. The fact that Ailbe is also Gráinne's sister seems to add another dimension. Both ends of the scale, perhaps, are personified in the two sisters who are both paired up with Finn.

Though much more may be said on the topic of Ailbe and Finn and this remarkable story, I will concentrate here on the information that can be extracted concerning Gráinne and Finn. It seems to pick up where a particular tale about Finn, Diarmaid and Gráinne presumably left off; quite possibly *Aithed Gráinne ingine Corbmaic le Diarmaid ua nDuibne*. In any case, we are told that Finn and Gráinne have separated bitterly because of Gráinne's elopement with her lover. It is said specifically that Gráinne had been given in marriage to Finn even though she hated him, and had therefore given her love to Diarmaid. As a result, there is a conflict between Finn and Gráinne's father Cormac mac Art and Finn has even been banished. This situation is only resolved when Finn and Gráinne are officially divorced. This seems curious: in a way Finn is also being punished for Gráinne's unfaithfulness. Of course, that makes us wonder at the lost tale TA presumably refers back to and what happened therein between Finn, Cormac and Gráinne for Finn to get banished.

Unfortunately, TA does not reveal how the story it refers to ended. From the context, it appears that Gráinne at least is still alive. The fate of Diarmaid is unsure. At the very least, there are no explicit allusions made to his death. This allows some speculation on the ending of the lost tale; it seems possible that it had a completely different ending than 'Finn and Gráinne' and TDG.

At this point, I would like to draw a comparison between TA and 'Finn and Gráinne' to address Nessa Ní Sheaghda's statement that both of these texts represent some of the lost content of AGD. TA and 'Finn and Gráinne' definitely have some parts in common. For example, in both it is claimed that Gráinne was given to Finn against her will, for she hated him. Also, she was not only promised to him but married and it was during the course of that marriage that they had a falling out and separated.

There are also, however, two striking differences. The first is, obviously, the absence of Diarmaid in the fragment. Still, it could be argued that in the fragment Finn and Gráinne are still in the process of getting divorced, being only separated, which is the case when TA starts. Perhaps her elopement with Diarmaid is only after the fragment ends and is thus lost to us. Yet, as I have explained extensively above, it does not appear that the fragment is at all concerned with that part of the tradition as we know it, and simply because we expect it to be a part of the tradition does not necessarily mean it has always been that way. I believe it is possible Diarmaid did not come in at any stage in 'Finn and Gráinne'.

Secondly, I think that the relationship between Finn and Cormac as described in the fragment and TA is very different; after all, the fragment does not mention any form of strife between them. Admittedly, again, the speeches by Cormac and Finn are both obscure and we cannot know for sure that some form of argument between the two of them did

not follow the end of the fragment as we have it. More importantly, perhaps, is that the relationship between Finn and Cormac throughout the fragment is wholly different than the situation described in TA. There is no mention of Finn being a part of Cormac's retinue or household with his *fíana*. Instead, in 'Finn and Gráinne' we seem to be presented with the supposedly 'older' view of the *fíana*, that is, a band of outlaws, while in TA the element of the *fíana* as the standing army of the king is present. This in addition to the striking absence of Diarmaid in 'Finn and Gráinne' makes it doubtful as far as I am concerned that TA is a direct sequel to the aforementioned. It does seem entirely likely, however, that they do share some common source, whether it was written or oral. The fact that in both texts it is explicitly mentioned that Finn and Gráinne were married to each other but that Finn was hateful in the eyes of the maiden suggests this possibility.

If we were to assume this common source was also reflected in AGD, or was perhaps AGD, we could finally be presented with information that at least reflects some of the content of AGD. If this is true, we are able to more or less discern the beginning and the ending of the lost tale. That is, Gráinne was given in marriage to Finn even though she hated him (an element which is reflected in both TA and 'Finn and Gráinne') and they eventually separate. Possibly, a falling out between Finn and Cormac followed. Another important notion is that Finn here is presented as a warrior of the king, with his *fíana* as the standing army of Tara. It seems uncharacteristic for the early period, taking into account the problems with the early Fenian material as outlined in 2.1.

I would like to point out again that I think it is plausible that TA and AGD were more closely related than AGD and 'Finn and Gráinne', if those were related at all. It is clear that TA is the sequel to some tale that told the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne. It seems fairly certain that this tale was not 'Finn and Gráinne', because although there are similarities, there are also discrepancies in content of such a nature I do not think it is probable TA was the follow-up to 'Finn and Gráinne'. What little we know for sure about AGD, on the other hand, is that it goes back to the tenth century, like TA, and was one of the few Fenian tales mentioned in the Talelists, like TA. Therefore, I think it is likely that the story that TA is a sequel to was indeed AGD.

3.3 *The quatrains in the commentary on Amra Choluim Chille "The eulogy of Saint Columba"*

The copy and edition of Amra Choluim Chille "The eulogy of Saint Columba" (ACC) I will refer to here is that of Bodleian Library Rawlinson B 502 (ff. 54a1- 59b2), edited by Whitley Stokes.⁴⁰ As the title reveals, it deals with the life, death and works of one of Ireland's best known saints.

It is divided into ten chapters on i. the news of Columba's death and the sorrow of the Gaels, ii. his ascent to heaven, iii. his place in heaven, iv. his sufferings on earth,

⁴⁰ Stokes, Whitley. "The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille", *Revue Celtique* xx (1899): 31-55, 132-83, 248-89, 400-37.

Stokes, Whitley. "The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille", *Revue Celtique* xxi (1900): 133-36. (corrections)

v. his wisdom and gentle nature, vi. his charity and abstinence, vii. his knowledge and foresight, viii. king Aed's commission to the author, ix. the grief of the Úi Neill who were his kinsmen and finally x. the virtues of the *Amra*.

However, our concern here is not with the eulogy itself, but with the eleventh century commentary and glosses. These often have little or nothing to do with the actual text and are concerned with a variety of subjects. Here, I want to draw attention to two quatrains dealing with Diarmaid and Gráinne that are said to be the oldest references to the tale. I will reproduce them below in order to be able to discuss them in detail.

Ocus Gráinne cecinit:

Fil duine. fris mad buide lemm diuderc

*ara tibrind in mbith nhuile. a maic Maire*⁴¹, *cid diubert!*

"And Gráinne sang: There is one for a long look from whom I would be thankful; for whom I would give the whole world, o son of Mary, though it be a privation."⁴²

Gerard Murphy edited the quatrain as follows;

Ut dixit Gráinne ingen Chormaic fri Finn:

Fil duine

frismad buide lemm díuterc

día tibrinn in mbith mbuide

huile huile, cid dúpert

"As Gráinne daughter of Cormac said to Finn: there is one on whom I should gladly gaze, to whom I would give the bright world, all of it, all of it, though it be an unequal bargain".⁴³

The second quatrain concerned with Diarmaid and Gráinne reads;

Ut Diarmaid dixit:

is maith do chuit, a Gráinne. is ferr duit inda ríge,

sercoll na cailech feda. la banna meda mine.

"As Diarmaid said: Good is thy share, o Gráinne, better for thee than a kingdom the dainty flesh (*sercoll*) of the woodcocks, with a drop of smooth mead."⁴⁴

Gerard Murphy remarked in his edition of the first quatrain that the language can

⁴¹ R gives *huile huile*. Most other copies give a variation of *maic Maire* which I suppose must have been Stokes' incentive for changing the quatrain in his edition.

⁴² Stokes 1899: 155-7.

⁴³ Murphy, Gerard. *Early Irish Lyrics*, Oxford 1956: 160-1.

⁴⁴ Stokes 1899: 264-5.

hardly be any older than the tenth-century. He also calls it "the earliest reference extant to Gráinne's love for Diarmait".⁴⁵ Murphy is not the only scholar who takes this point of view. It is especially this first quatrain that scholars have often referred to as the proof that the Diarmaid en Gráinne tradition must have been established by the tenth century, such as Kuno Meyer and Nessa Ní Shéaghda.⁴⁶

This point of view does raise an important question; why do these scholars put so much weight on such a short quatrain, which tells us preciously little (in some copies, Finn is not even mentioned, and Diarmaid is never mentioned). I believe most of this is due to what we know about the tradition in hindsight. When we read these quatrains we are aware of the tradition that came after. Thus, I think, an interpretation is always more or less influenced by our knowledge of other sources, which is indeed inevitable and not necessarily purely a bad thing. After all, it is possible that the contemporary audience was also aware of whom Gráinne was talking and thus aware of the tradition surrounding Diarmaid and Gráinne, as the quatrains suggest. Additionally, there are other sources such as *Tochmarc Ailbe* "The wooing of Ailbe" and the lost tale of *Aithed Gráinne le Diarmaid*, which supposedly are from roughly the same period as we think these quatrains are. From this point of view, Meyer and Ní Shéaghda's interpretations do make sense; after all, if the author assumes the contemporary audience knew what he was talking about, the tradition must have been fairly established. However, the question as to what exactly these quatrains can tell us about the so called 'early' Diarmaid and Gráinne tradition has not been addressed properly in my opinion. Ní Shéaghda suggests especially the first quatrain reflects some of the content of the lost tale AGD. I certainly agree this is possible, but the question as to how the two are connected cannot be answered without any degree of certainty about the lost contents of AGD. If the quatrain(s) are indeed the oldest references to Diarmaid and Gráinne's tale in written literature, as Murphy suggests, it is possible that one or both of them were added to the AGD tale. Naturally, it is also possible they were a part of AGD first before they were added to this commentary, or even that they had an entirely different origin altogether.

However it may be, these speculations unfortunately cannot be confirmed or ruled out, as I have said above. What we are left with, then, is the content of the quatrains and the question in what way they could reflect the lost tale. Unfortunately, they do not tell us very much. They are both obviously concerned with the love Diarmaid and Gráinne bear for one another, but no further information can be extracted. Thus, it would seem the quatrains should be acknowledged simply for what they are; at the very least, they show that the tradition surrounding Finn, Gráinne and Diarmaid had to be fairly well known by the time this commentary was written down; if we assume the contemporary reader could fill in the blanks like we do in hindsight. Whether that was an oral tradition or refers back to an earlier written tradition we are not aware of, or indeed refers actually to AGD and TA, remains a guess at best.

⁴⁵ Murphy 1956: 236.

⁴⁶ Meyer, Kuno. "Uath Beinne Etair", *Revue Celtique* xi (1890): 125-6.
Ní Shéaghda 1967: xi.

3.4 *Uath Beinne Etair "The hiding at the Hill of Howth"*

This tale, concerning a certain episode in Diarmaid and Gráinne's flight from Finn, has been published in 1890 by Kuno Meyer from the fifteenth-century manuscript Harleian 5280, which was at that time the only known copy.⁴⁷ The story describes how Diarmaid and Gráinne are in hiding in a cave at the hill of Howth after their elopement. An old woman is watching over them since Finn still chases the two lovers. One day Finn, described as *rígfeindid* "king of the *fíán*, the warrior king", comes towards her and asks her to betray Diarmaid to him, in exchange for which he will marry her and keep her as his only wife. Believing him, she returns to the cave and pretends to Diarmaid and Gráinne that the weather outside is so dreadful they cannot leave the cave. Then she sings the aforementioned poem concerned with the terrible weather. Gráinne, however, discovers the deceit when the old woman goes out and warns Diarmaid just in time. They flee the cave and are carried off over the water to safety by Oengus of Brug, Diarmaid's foster-father.

Meyer identifies it as an isolated episode from TDG, presumably from the lost tale of the Talelists. Furthermore, he claims that while the story has come down only in a modern form, the sources or main motif have been around far longer, referring to the poem discussed earlier in the commentary of ACC. He also points out that a poem very similar to that in UBE occurs in an Ossianic tale that is preserved in two twelfth-century manuscripts, LL 208 a and Rawlinson B 502 fo. 59 b. That story is about Finn who gets separated from his *fíana* with his servant Mac Lesc, i.e. "the lazy lad". He orders him to fetch water, but the boy excuses himself because of the terrible weather in several verses that are reminiscent of those in UBE. Meyer claims it is hard to determine to which story the poems originally belonged, though he suspects they in fact belonged to neither. In the tale about Finn and Mac Lesc the poems seem very general, only the verses with descriptions of the weather have been inserted, with the story functioning as a frame-tale. In the case of *Uath Beinne Etair*, even though there the poems do serve an important function, it seems odd that the places mentioned are so far away from the scene of action. Meyer thinks this suggests that the tale was made up to fit the poem and that they did not originally belong together. As the tradition progresses, the poem is (at least partly) remembered while the prose part is forgotten or at any rate no longer considered interesting.⁴⁸

In his "Four Old Irish songs of summer and winter", he noted that there were in fact two other copies of the tale in C iii 2 and RIA 23N10, the latter being edited in Appendix D of Nessa Ní Shéaghdha's TDG. The poem has also been translated by Kenneth Jackson and by Meyer again later with the help of the second copy.⁴⁹

Although Meyer in his first edition dates the tale back to the eleventh century on basis

⁴⁷ Meyer 1890: 125-134.

⁴⁸ Meyer 1890: 127-8.

⁴⁹ Jackson, Kenneth. *Studies in early Celtic nature poetry*, Cambridge 1935: 27.
Meyer, Kuno. *Selections from ancient Irish poetry*, London 1911: 57.

of Harleian 5280, in *Fianaigeacht* he places it in the tenth century, as does Ní Shéaghda.⁵⁰ As mentioned, however, the language is late Middle Irish. Nevertheless both authors were convinced that there must have been an earlier original. It is mentioned in *Talelist A* and the tale of Finn and Mac Lesc in which the poem also appears shows that at least the poem must be earlier, as well as the main motive, i.e. Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement, Meyer argues.⁵¹

I am inclined to agree with Meyer that it seems likely that the prose of the tale was invented around the poem, which in all probability existed on its own previous to it. Yet, I am slightly puzzled by his further reasoning. While I also think his scenario of the poem (partly) surviving and the prose being lost is valid, I do not understand his or Ní Shéaghda's incentive for putting it boldly in the tenth century as an episode of the lost pre-TDG tale, presumably AGD. In my opinion, the fact that the poem must have an earlier date than the prose does not mean there was also an earlier original of the prose tale that dates back to the same period as the poem. Also, although clearly related, the poems in UBE and the tale of Finn and Mac Lesc are hardly mirror images of one another. Thus, the fact that these poems are very alike does not suggest anything more than that the poem was in some way associated with Finn and as such appeared in two stories concerning him. There is no real way of knowing which one of the two is the oldest, although 'Finn and Mac Lesc' appears in two considerably earlier manuscripts than UBE. The title is preserved in both copies of *Talelist A* which tells us that it, in whatever form, must be earlier than the manuscript it survived in. That being said, I would like to point out "in whatever form" is an important addition. After all, the *Talelist* only gives us a title and it is possible that the tale was altered, maybe only slightly, perhaps significantly, over the course of time. Thus, we must be careful when we take the 'evidence' of the *Talelists* to hand. The only thing it tells us here for sure is that the story was known previous to the manuscripts in which we find it, which in itself is not that much of a surprise. Again, we cannot know either in what way or how much the tale was altered for it to become the late Middle Irish tale we are presented with now.

It is true, as Meyer remarked, like Ní Shéaghda⁵², that the motive of Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement was around as early as the tenth century- yet, that does not mean that this particular episode must date back to that period also. After all, as we have seen discussing the older sources, the tale of their actual elopement is not preserved in that period as far as we know. There are references to Finn and Gráinne's bad marriage, their separation, Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement in general, but no evidence as to the episodes during their flight from Finn which we are presented with here. There is, nevertheless, the possibility that the tale was around in perhaps an altered form much earlier and used to model our tale on.

As for the matter of UBE being a part of the pre-TDG story lost to us, is possibly even harder to assess. It is certainly possible that UBE reflects some of the lost content of AGD,

⁵⁰ Meyer 1910: xxiv.

Ní Shéaghda 1967: 131.

⁵¹ Meyer 1890: 125-6.

⁵² Ní Shéaghda 1967: xii.

it even seems likely. Yet, as with the other sources discussed above, it is simply impossible to discern for once and for all if it does. Both tales may also stand on their own, albeit both using a well known theme from either oral or written literature. I only wish to point out that, once again, these are all mere possibilities. Even though they are all valid in their own right and interesting to note, we must avoid being carried away by them. Therefore there are, in my opinion, no pressing arguments to assume that UBE must be as early as the tenth century and can represent nothing else but an episode from AGD.

To return to the content of the tale, we are here presented with an episode that takes place during Diarmaid and Gráinne's flight. *Uath Beinne Etair* seems to represent an entire different stage in the tale that we have not seen before; while the beginning of it (their getting married despite Gráinne's hate for Finn) and the end (their separation) are contained within the sources discussed so far, the middle seems to be missing. Except, of course, that the elopement of Gráinne with Diarmaid was at least in some sources regarded the reason of her separation from Finn and there is the general assumption of scholars nowadays that this motif was contained within the lost story of AGD.⁵³

It seems that the tale draws closer to the later tradition to which TDG belongs as several elements seem to testify: Finn's pursuit of the lovers, their hiding in the wilderness and Oengus coming to their aid. This, of course, raises several interesting questions. Does this tale present us with the parts we assume are missing in the older tradition, i.e. the tale on which TDG was presumably modelled, or, do we see here a transition phase towards the end product that TDG may represent?

Unfortunately, these questions do not come with easy answers. First of all, it seems difficult to connect it with the sources discussed earlier. There is no indication to whether or not Finn and Gráinne were married when she eloped with Diarmaid, which is a trait at least shared by two other tales; *Tochmarc Ailbe* and 'Finn and Gráinne'. In many ways, it seems isolated in its own right as we cannot connect it to any of the other sources with a degree of certainty. The second problem is the dating. I have briefly outlined above what Kuno Meyer and Nessa Ní Shéaghdha had to say on this topic and what my objections are to their theories. Obviously, if we were to assume that *Uath Beinne Etair* does have its origins in the tenth century, it would be far more likely that it was closely related to AGD and TA. It still might be and if so, we are close to uncovering what may have been recounted in AGD. However, alterations and innovations might have taken place even if the story had a tenth-century original, which should be kept in mind when assessing the tale.

Unfortunately, I feel there is no definitive answer to give concerning the issues involved with this tale. There is one undoubtedly attractive solution, which is to indeed assume there must have been a tenth-century original of this tale which was very closely related to AGD and TA and it thus reflects the missing stage in the early tradition as we know it. On the other hand, it is possible that this tale had little to do with either of those stories and it in fact represents a transition phase towards the creating of TDG, albeit possibly based on something older, yet not necessarily as old as the tenth century.

⁵³ As discussed in paragraph 2.2.

3.5 *Úar in lathe do Lum Laine "Cold the day for Lom Laine"*

This little poem, surviving only in one manuscript (LL 145b) is perhaps one of the most ambiguous and complicated sources on Diarmaid and Gráinne, if it can be called that. It was for the first time printed with a translation and notes by Eugene O'Curry, who regarded it a poem spoken by Ailbe, daughter of Cormac mac Airt, grandson of Conn.⁵⁴ Earlier in his book, discussing the tale *Scél Baili Binnbérlaig* "The tale of Baile the Sweetspoken", he points out that two stanzas of the poem have been added to what was originally a poem spoken by Ailbe. However, it should be noted at this point that *Scél Baili Binnbérlaig* has been transmitted in two manuscripts, H. 3. 18 and British Library Harleian 5280, and that only the copy in Harl.5280 specifically ascribes the poem to Ailbe; the other simply gives *ingen Cormaic ui Quinn* "daughter of Conn's grandson Cormac". Furthermore, he writes that he believes that the poem, even though spoken by Ailbe, refers to the elopement of her sister Gráinne with Diarmaid úa Duibhne.⁵⁵

More recently, the poem has been edited and analysed by Máirin O'Daly.⁵⁶ She places it in the Old Irish period, as did O'Curry, dating it to the ninth century and drawing special attention to the deponent form *fritotsamlur* in verses 2 and 4 and the final vowels. O'Daly, unlike O'Curry, regarded the poem in fact a dialogue, resulting in a rather different, and as I believe, more correct translation, which for the sake of convenience I shall reproduce below.

1 [Tethna] *Úar in lathe do Lum Laine, i lleith leinne oc aige áin;*
 [Lum Laine] *is úar cid d'ingin ú[i]Chuind, foilces a moing a lloing lain*
 "Cold the day for Lom Laine competing in splendid horse-racing (?), clad only in (?) a mantle; cold too for the daughter of Conn's grandson who is washing her hair in a full vessel.

2 [T] *Is fris samlain Lom Laine fri ibar Rátha Baili*
 [LL] *fritot-samlur, a Thethna, frisín [n]abaill a hA[i]li*
 "To this I liken Lom Laine- to the yew tree of Ráth Baili;
 I liken you, Tethna, to the apple-tree of Aile

3 [T] *Aball Ailinne ardae, ibar Baili, bec n-orbba*
ce dobertar I lláidi nis-tucat daíni borbba[i]
 "The apple-tree of noble Alenn, Baile's yew, small the heritage;
 if they be put into songs, ignorant people do not understand them

4 [T] *Is fris samlain Lom Laine, fri dam [n]dubartach [n]Drigrend*
 [LL] *fritot-samlur, a Thethna, fri eilit [n]Dromma Drigrend*
 "To this I liken Lom Laine- to the combative ox of Drigriu;

⁵⁴ O'Curry, Eugene. *The Manuscript materials of ancient Irish story*, Dublin 1861: 476-8.

⁵⁵ O'Curry 1861: 467. For the edition of *Scél Baili Binnbérlaig*, see Meyer, Kuno. "Scél Baili Binnbérlaig", *Revue Celtique* 13 (1892): 220-7.

⁵⁶ O'Daly, Máirin. "Úar in Lathe do Lum Laine", *Celtic Studies* (edited by Carney and Greene) London 1968, 99-108.

I liken you, Tethna, to the hind of Druimm Drigrend

5 [T] *Is fris samlain Lom Laine, fri slatta(ib) findchuill Aille*

[LL] *is fris samlain-se Tethna[i], [f]ri scatha(ib) uachtair bainne*

”To this I liken Lom Laine- to the branches of the whitebeam of Aille;
to this I liken Tethna, to the sheen (?) on top of the milk

6 [T] *A Luim Laine, in ránac co lLic da Berg ac Srúb Brain?*

[LL] *ránac co Ferta Magen, fri Suide Lagen anair*

”O Lom Laine did you reach as far as (or have you come from(?)) Lecc Da Berg at Srúb Brain? I reached as far as (or I have come from(?)) Ferta Maigen to the east of Suide Laigen

7 [T] *A Lum Laine, nacham lúaid, nacham thaidlet meschoin múaid*

[LL] *mainbad leca Luigdech lis, eoin bic Baili rot betisz*

”O Lom Laine, do not (seek to) sway me; let not the eyes of a jealous husband light on me;

were it not for *leca Luigdech lis* you would have the little birds of Baile (or the little birds of Baile would beguile you(?))

8 [T] *Cridserc mo menman míne ingenrad Temra túade*

[LL] *7 cridserc mo anman gillanrad Alman úare*

”Dear to my gentle mind are the maidens of the people of Tara;
and dear to my soul are the youths of cold Allen

9 [T] *A Luim Laine, nacham lúaid, a grain gaile, a greit slúaig,*

ma rop samlaid-seo ar sét, fo-d-irfe ar n-éc (i n)nach úair

”O Lom Laine, do not (seek to) sway me, o valiant terror-inspiring one, o champion of the host; if this is to be our path, it will some day bring about our death.”

According to O’Daly, the poem is presented in a dialogue between a man and a woman who address each other as ‘Lom Laine’ and ‘Tethna’. Additionally, Lom Laine also calls Tetha *ingen úi Chuind* ”daughter of Conn’s grandson”. ‘Conn’s grandson’ is understood to be Cormac mac Airt, father of several daughters among whom Gráinne and Ailbe. In LL we find a list of Cormac’s daughters twice; *deic n-ingena do Chormac... Ailbe Gruad-bec Treithne Lethléor 7 Gráne. Lemuin Letherthe la Scéithi Admor Ainge Fásse Talinne... Innerb* (4917 f.) and *Ailbe Treithne Grane gle...*(7020).

At first glance, it would seem that our poem belongs to some lost tale about ‘Tethna’, who could perhaps be identified with ‘Treithne’ of the LL list. However, some circumstances described in the poem have led Máirin O’Daly to believe that ‘Tethna’ and ‘Lom Laine’ are pseudonyms for Diarmaid and Gráinne, rejecting O’Curry’s suggestion that it was spoken by Ailbe, on account of Ailbe’s fame for wisdom and judgement rather than any romantic

episode.⁵⁷ However, she overlooked the fact that O'Curry, as I have mentioned above, did in fact think that the content of the poem, even though spoken by Ailbe, is concerned with the elopement of Diarmaid and Gráinne. Certainly, some elements in the poem are reminiscent of Diarmaid and Gráinne's tale, most notably the quatrains 7, 8 and 9.

I agree with O'Daly that quatrain 7 definitely seems to suggest that Tethna is already married and now speaking to her lover in an (arguably half-hearted) attempt to discourage him. O'Daly points out that in the fragment 'Finn and Gráinne' they are indeed married to each other. This is in contrast to the later tradition, which for the sake of convenience I shall henceforth refer to as the TDG-tradition, in which she is 'only' promised to Finn, but not yet married to him. This fact, in addition to the small stanza in *Amra Choluim Chille* where Gráinne obviously speaks of her lover, seems to indicate that both of the aforementioned sources and this poem belong to a same, pre-TDG-tradition, possibly the lost tale of the Talelists, or so O'Daly argues.⁵⁸ However, it needs to be pointed out that in 'Finn and Gráinne' there is no mention at all of Diarmaid, or even a lover of Gráinne who causes the rift between them, rather, it is simply said that she hates him as the reason for them to separate. Similarly, in the quatrain in ACC, even though it may be clear Gráinne is speaking of her lover, it is not possible to discern whether or not Finn and Gráinne are married. Only in *Tochmarc Ailbe* it is said that "Gráinne had been given in marriage to Finn even though she hated him, and had given her love to Diarmaid descendant of Duibne".⁵⁹ Yet, I find it quite impossible to say that in the tradition that presumably predated the TDG-tradition, Finn and Gráinne were married while Gráinne eloped with Diarmaid. I certainly cannot regard that as a given fact and I am therefore not as thoroughly convinced as O'Daly that the married woman in the poem can be no other than Gráinne.

Quatrain 8 offers more information as to the origins of Tethna and Lom Laine. Tethna speaks of the maidens and the people of Tara, where she presumably grew up. This connects to her father, Cormac mac Airt, who was king of Tara. More interesting, perhaps, is Lom Laine's connection to Allen, often the headquarters of Finn and his *fíana*. It seems as if here Lom Laine indeed refers to his fellow *fían* (?) members in Allen, whom he knows he will not be able to see again if he elopes with the wife of the *fían* leader. Yet, it could easily be argued that this much cannot be extracted from one sentence that could possibly be explained this way, but certainly is not crystal-clear. For the sake of argument, however, I shall for the moment preserve this take on the quatrain.

Last, but not least, quatrain 9 shows that Tethna is aware that this dalliance or perhaps even elopement might cause the death of the both of them. As in quatrain 7, it is Tethna, Gráinne in O'Daly's theory, who expresses reluctance at the prospect of an elopement while it is Lom Laine, Diarmaid in O'Daly's theory, who tries to persuade her. This does not seem to be in tune with the Gráinne of the later tale, who definitely is the instigator of the whole affair. This is a relatively minor objection, but if this poem is really a part of

⁵⁷ The tale *Tochmarc Ailbe*, which shall be discussed at length below.

⁵⁸ O'Daly 1968: 99-100.

⁵⁹ Carey, John. *The Wooing of Ailbe*, forthcoming.

the Diarmaid and Gráinne tradition, this element would set it apart from the tradition we are familiar with. Finally, in this quatrain an allusion is made to the idea that the lovers will meet their death because of the elopement. This seems, at this point, to be more in tune with the later tradition than the earlier in the sources discussed so far, since in the latter ones there are only references to Finn and Gráinne's separation as opposed to Diarmaid and Gráinne's death.

Naturally, the objections I have made do *not* mean the poem could not be about Diarmaid and Gráinne. It certainly could be, yet it could also be about one of Gráinne's many sisters, whose tale has been lost. Of course, this raises the question how likely it is for Cormac to have two daughters who have similar problems with their marriage. Nevertheless, Eugene O'Curry suggested that the poem dealt with Ailbe. At this point, I agree with O'Daly that this would not fit in with the tradition of Ailbe and Finn represented in *Tochmarc Ailbe*, as mentioned previously. Moreover, if the poem is really meant as a dialogue, which I accept, the notion that it was spoken by Ailbe becomes even more unlikely. I think that O'Curry's reasoning mainly was a result of his finding the two stanzas in *Scél Baili Binnbérlaig*, a poem clearly ascribed to Ailbe, not considering the many ways in which this transmission could have taken place, and the question as to why these two particular stanzas have been placed in that particular context is even more open. It is by no means obvious that if the two stanzas in the tale are to be ascribed to Ailbe, the whole poem should be also. Additionally, as I have pointed out above, only in one manuscript is the poem indeed ascribed to Ailbe, in the other the only indication is that it was spoken by a "daughter of Conn's grandson", like in the poem itself. Therefore, O'Curry's reasoning for considering the poem as spoken by Ailbe in any case, regardless of what the content may refer to, is in my opinion not wholly feasible.

While Máirin O'Daly's analysis of the poem offers many interesting insights and notions, I cannot agree with her on all counts. It is true that from the poem details can be extracted that bear a remarkable resemblance to what is known about Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement, yet they can hardly be called explicit or unique. In short, it simply could be argued either way whether or not this poem is indeed about Diarmaid and Gráinne. There are no definitive arguments to say this poem cannot represent a dialogue between Diarmaid and Gráinne, possibly reflective of a tradition lost to us. Yet, there are no definitive arguments either to say that it is not, and that it in fact belongs to a wholly different tale that has not survived the centuries, possibly about one of Gráinne's sisters.

If we are to assume O'Daly is right and this poem does represent a dialogue between Diarmaid and Gráinne, the question in which tradition we are to place it arises. Of O'Daly's assessment that it should be regarded a part of a pre-TDG-tradition, which 'Finn and Gráinne' and the quatrain in ACC also belong to, I am not convinced. For example, it is in my opinion not at all certain that ACC and 'Finn and Gráinne' belong to the same tradition. Also, some elements in this poem do not seem to correspond with the traditions we have previously considered. An allusion is made to the death of the lovers, which is not present for as we know in the earlier sources that we have so far discussed. Yet, it is also not perfectly in tune with the 'TDG'-tradition. 'Gráinne', here, has a different attitude than is common in the later tradition. Therefore, I think that to accept O'Daly's theory

that this is a source on Diarmaid and Gráinne, one should also consider the possibility that the poem does not necessarily correspond directly to any of the other sources that we have discussed. It might also represent another version of the tale in a written or oral tradition.

3.6 *Acallam na Sénorach* "The colloquy of the ancients"

Naturally, when discussing a Fenian tradition, it would be hard to not at least refer to this great work, which, as I have explained in 2.1, was somehow both the final piece of an early tradition and yet more than that also a beginning of an entirely new tradition within Fenian literature. It is a grand epic which in a rambling frame tale recounts many Fenian stories. However, the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne is not one of those. In fact, AcS recounts precious few tales that feature any women at all. As said elsewhere, women were usually portrayed very negatively throughout Fenian literature, the exception being Ailbe in *Tochmarc Ailbe*. AcS is perfectly in keeping with this theme, perhaps even shunning women more than other Fenian tales previously. The question whether this is due to the fact St. Patrick plays an important role throughout the epic has never been thoroughly assessed, but it is an interesting point.

The reason I want to discuss AcS briefly here, even though the story of Diarmaid en Gráinne is not mentioned, is because Diarmaid is, in his role as one of the *fíán*-members close to Finn, and of special interest is the mention of his death, which we have not encountered before.

I would like to refer here to the recent, excellent translation of the whole tale by Anne Dooley and Harry Roe, who have written extensively on the dating, manuscripts and origins of AcS in their introduction.⁶⁰ They think it was composed in the early thirteenth century, rather than late twelfth as other scholars argue. That is to say, the frame tale at least. They do acknowledge that elements within it could be older, drawing on Fenian literature previous to AcS.⁶¹ This, of course, removes it firmly from the period of TA and AGD, but places it before TDG. I shall leave UBE out of the equation here since, as I have explained above, the dating from my point of view of that tale is open to question.

It seems quite strange AcS does not even mention the tale of Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement, while Diarmaid is mentioned a couple of times on separate occasions. It is hard to say for sure if this was intentional or that the author would not have known about it, which seems odd. Yet, the author (for the sake of convenience I refer to 'him' in the singular) has made other strange choices throughout the tale. For example, the single most well-known tale about Finn's death is the one in which he falls at Brugh on the Boyne through the hands of rivalling *fíána*. This is not the tale taken up in AcS. Rather, it is the less popular version of him falling somewhere in Muskerry, co. Cork. Whether the author was simply not familiar with this other tradition or that he preferred the latter over the former for whatever reason, is entirely unclear. It could be thus with Diarmaid and

⁶⁰ Dooley, Ann and Harry Roe. *Tales of the elders of Ireland*, Oxford 1999.

⁶¹ Dooley&Roe 1999: viii.

Gráinne; he may very well have been aware of it, yet for whatever reason (possibly the reason hardly any women feature in it) he chose not to mention it, while he did choose to recount how Diarmaid died, even though that was not a tale well known previous to it.

However that may be, Diarmaid úa Duibne is mentioned on separate occasions throughout AcS. I will refer here to the page numbers as in Ann Dooley and Harry Roe's translation. He first occurs on page 9, as one of the nine warriors that are chosen to retrieve the hounds stolen by Artúir the king of the Britons. His lineage is explained as follows: "Diarmait, son of Donn, son of Donnchad, son of Dubán, of the *Érainn* of Munster". On another instance, Diarmaid travels with Oisín, his son Oscar and Goll mac Morna, when they find Artúir and bring him as a captive to the Hill of Howth (p.95). These examples show that Diarmaid in one way or another was one of the more important members of the *féana*, fit to put in with the likes of Oisín, Oscar and Goll. Perhaps they also give us a glimpse of a tradition in which Diarmaid's role was not just to elope with Gráinne, but that he also functioned in the literature elsewhere.

The most interesting and revealing references to Diarmaid, however, are those that deal with his death. The first reference is when Caílte with what is left of his *féana* comes to Benbulbin, a mountain in co. Sligo, where, the author states, Diarmaid úa Duibne was felled by a boar. Caílte professes his grief for the death of his foster brother and brother in arms and his children. Subsequently, Flann asks if Diarmaid did indeed have children, and Caílte recites the following quatrain: "The sons of brown-haired Díarmait by the daughter of Cormac ua Cuinn, Donnchad, Illan, and Úath, Selbach, Sercach and Irúath."⁶² On page 194 we learn slightly more about the manner in which Diarmaid died; namely killed by an "enchanted swine of druidry".

These pieces reveal that whoever wrote these particular passages must have been familiar to a certain extent with the tradition of Diarmaid and Gráinne, since the 'daughter of Cormac ua Cuinn' can hardly be anybody else but Gráinne herself. This also more or less shows the author probably left out their story on purpose, yet referred to it since he was aware the contemporary reader would know it. Moreover, this reference has certain ties with TDG, in which the death of Diarmaid by the magical boar is an important element. From the very nature of AcS, it would not be that hard to imagine that the motif in fact was older than this composition. Yet, it is striking that in none of the other sources there is even the mention of Diarmaid's death. Admittedly, it is not made explicitly clear in TA whether or not Diarmaid is still alive, but that this motif is not even once mentioned seems odd. So, we are presented with the problem how it is possible that Diarmaid's death from AcS appears to be a well-known tale while there is no evidence of it in earlier sources for as far as we know. Of course, the author of AcS could be drawing from a well known oral tradition, or a written source we are not aware of that has not been handed down to us. At any rate, we can gather that the tradition of Diarmaid being killed by a magical boar must have been known as a story motif in whatever form by the early thirteenth century. AcS provides us here with at least a glimpse of a transitional phase between the 'old' Diarmaid and Gráinne tradition (best exemplified by TA and 'Finn and Gráinne') and the new one,

⁶² Dooley&Roe 1999: 47.

from TDG onwards. I think it is very well possible that in time, elements were added to the tale, whether that was in an oral or a written tradition, that eventually found their way into TDG as well. UBE might also be a part of this transition phase, as I have said before; Diarmaid and Gráinne's flight from Finn and their being saved by Aengus of Brug is a recurring element in TDG.

In any case, through AcS we acquire one last piece of the puzzle from the tradition previous to TDG. We are finally presented with a record of Diarmaid's death, which is a key element in TDG. It is however important to keep in mind that AcS is firmly removed from sources such as TA, 'Finn and Gráinne' and the quatrains found in the commentary on ACC and therefore the possibility that AcS draws from another tradition or traditions, oral or written, seems very realistic.

4. CONCLUSION

Now, after having tried to collect and discuss the relevant material related to the early Diarmaid and Gráinne tradition, I will try to answer the question I spoke about in the introduction. As I have outlined in 2.1 and 2.2, there are several problems associated with the Fenian material and also with the Diarmaid and Gráinne tradition in particular. I find that it is indeed important to realise that the Fenian material has an essentially different background than for example the Ulster cycle. We can be fairly certain that the Fenian literature must have had a long history of oral tradition from all over the country. It seems that it survived for a long time and kept influencing the literary tradition. It's also clear that because of these localised beginnings, which were eventually merged (the best example of this is of course AcS), some traditions can be conflicting, like the stories surrounding Finn's death.

Secondly, it is worthwhile to point out that for some reason the material from the period previous to 1200 is very scarce. There might be several different reasons for this; it could be, as Kim McCone has proposed, that it was indeed the church that held the literature back because the *fíana* were a threat to the society in which the church had many interests, politically and economically. This is probably also connected to the confusion of *fíana* and *díberg*, as we can see that the terms are used interchangeably even though the two groups are essentially different from one another: *díbergaig* are mostly brigands and robbers that took public vows of evil while *fían* members could still come back into society when they inherited land and are named in the law texts as a part of society. In any case, it is obvious from the literature that at a certain point there was some kind of renunciation from this brigand aspect and the *fíana* were turned into the standing army of the king rather than outlaws. Eventually, the Fenian tradition became dominant, mainly because of AcS, in which all the pagan associations of Finn and his *fíana* were cleansed through St. Patrick.

Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne "The pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne" is a tale that belongs to the late period in which the Fenian material was already popular, which seems to be stressed by the enormous amount of manuscripts, 41 in two centuries. Because of the subject matter, which, on a superficial level, can be compared to the story of Deirdre and Naoise and that of Tristan and Isolde, it has always been thought that there must have been a much earlier original of the tale. From the Talelists, it appears that there indeed was such a tale, *Aithed Gráinne ingine Corbmaic le Diarmaid úa Duibne* "The elopement of Gráinne daughter of Cormac with Diarmaid grandson of Duibne". Unfortunately, the title is all we have left of this tale; the content itself has been lost. Therefore, it would seem we are unable to determine whether or not there was a direct relation between AGD and TDG, the latter, according to its editor Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, even being a reworking

of the former. However, she suggests that other sources that are still available to us allow us to piece together the general outline of this lost tale.

I have tried to follow this train of thought throughout my research, and have found I do not agree with Ní Shéaghdha's assessment. One of the main problems is that it does not appear that all sources agree with one another or certain points. Keeping in mind the background of the Fenian literature, with its widespread traditions all over the country, I have come to find it more likely that we are not in fact represented with sources that all draw in some way or other from the tale that was supposedly recounted in AGD, but rather that what we are left with here represents a larger range of traditions. Of course, as long as we don't have AGD at our disposal, any statements regarding the relationship between the lost tale and TDG remain educated guesses at best. Therefore, what I wish to achieve here is to chart which story elements we can find in which sources at what time. This may allow us to follow the development of the literary tradition to a certain extent. An index table of story motifs can be found in the appendix.

The source that is generally regarded the earliest reference to our tale are the two quatrains in the commentary on *Amra Cholúim Chille*. What makes them important is the fact that with them we have a very early reference to the tale (probably tenth century) which seems to imply that the tale was well known and that the contemporary audience could have filled the blanks that the quatrains leave. Therefore, it is not surprising that scholars such as Kuno Meyer and Gerard Murphy have taken these quatrains as proof that the tradition of Diarmaid and Gráinne was established by the tenth century, either in oral or written form. Unfortunately, we are unable to discern from the very short references any more than that there must have been some tale surrounding the love of Diarmaid and Gráinne, and that Gráinne in some way was also connected to Finn, probably either promised to him or perhaps married.

A very interesting digression at this point is the poem *Úar in lathe do Lum Laine*. It might be older than the quatrains (its editor, Máirin O'Daly, places it in the ninth century) but the problem with it is, as I have discussed at length above, whether this poem is actually about Diarmaid and Gráinne. Putting aside this question for the moment, if the poem is indeed about them, it tells us that Gráinne was married when she eloped with Diarmaid. Furthermore, it is interestingly enough the woman who tries to dissuade the man from going through with the elopement, prophesizing that it will bring about their death. This is very intriguing point, since Gráinne is generally regarded the instigator, rather than Diarmaid. Moreover, the other early sources do not speak about their death. Obviously, the idea that the lovers die is something that fits the theme well, certainly if we recall Deirdre and Naoise, who do indeed both die because of their love for one another. Yet, while their stories are similar, they are not mirror images of each other. It does seem the tales drew closer in theme and motif in the later period, but the question whether they always were remains, as far as I am concerned, open. Thus, it is possible that if this poem indeed is about Diarmaid and Gráinne, we catch a glimpse of a tradition that may in some ways have differed from what we see in other sources, if perhaps only marginally. Alternatively, it might also be a different take on the same tradition that we see later on in for example TA. Either way, this suggests that at this early period, ninth or tenth century,

the tradition was anything but fixed and still in a process of developing.

If we then turn to the fragment of 'Finn and Gráinne', we are presented with an entirely different view of the tale, perhaps even the most puzzling source discussed here. In this thirteenth-century tale, which according to Kuno Meyer was probably based on a ninth- or tenth-century original, there is no mention at all of Diarmaid or Gráinne's unfaithfulness. Instead, it is recounted how Finn won Gráinne's hand in marriage with the help of Caílte from her father Cormac. However, for some reason the maiden hates her husband and as soon as he discovers this, they separate. Some obscure poems conclude the tale, which seem to be concerned with the legal implications of their separation. This strange structure calls forth many questions, which I have outlined above and therefore will not repeat. I do think it is important to once more draw attention to the fact that this source seems to hint at the existence of traditions concerning Finn, Gráinne and Diarmaid outside of the context we are aware of. That is to say, apart from the tale of Diarmaid and Gráinne's elopement. It is sure that at least Diarmaid featured in other tales and it is possible that Gráinne might have also once have been part of a Fenian tradition that did not feature Diarmaid.

A source that appears to be one of the most revealing about what may have been recounted in AGD, is *Tochmarc Ailbe* "The wooing of Ailbe". Like AGD, TA is a tale that appears in both the Talelists, which suggests both at least date back to the tenth century. Moreover, it seems as if TA is a sequel to a tale that told the story of Finn, Gráinne and Diarmaid. The beginning explains there was strife between Finn and Cormac mac Airt, Gráinne's father, because Finn and Gráinne had separated after Gráinne had come to loath him and had instead given her love to Diarmaid úa Duibne. We do not learn more about the fate of Diarmaid and Gráinne, but there seems to be no reason to assume that they are dead. From the fact that the beginning of the tale describes Finn and Gráinne are separated, it seems to follow that Gráinne at least is still alive.

From the scarce information we have about AGD, we know that it goes back to the same period (tenth century) as TA does. Also, that it is, like TA, one of the few Fenian tales mentioned in the Talelists. If they therefore were somehow more closely related to each other than to the other sources discussed, we could also for a moment assume that AGD is the tale that TA refers back to. This would give us some clues to uncovering the contents of the lost tale, namely; that Finn and Gráinne were indeed married, and Gráinne was not merely promised to him, that they separated because Gráinne hated him and eloped with Diarmaid and finally, that something must have happened after this elopement to explain the strife between Cormac and Finn. Another interesting point is that Finn and his *fiána* are said to be Cormac's army, which appears a strange concept in this early period, and there certainly is no such relation between Finn and Cormac in 'Finn and Gráinne'. Additionally, TA and AGD belong to the few stories of Fenian literature that are mentioned on the Talelists. This may or may not be significant; at the very least, it suggests that the tale had a certain amount of status already in the tenth century.

A tale which has been identified by Kuno Meyer and Nessa Ní Shéaghda as an episode from AGD, is *Úath Beinne Etair* "The hiding at the hill of Howth". It recounts a part of Diarmaid and Gráinne's flight as they are being pursued by Finn. However, as I have

discussed earlier, I doubt if this tale can actually be dated back to the tenth- or eleventh century. It is possible, not necessarily probable. Similarly, it is possible, not probable, that this represents an episode from AGD. It certainly may reflect some of the latter's content, but there may have been many alterations and innovations. What I believe UBE in fact reflects is a tale that certainly could have its roots in an earlier tradition, but at the same time is also in accordance with the later traditions, exemplified by TDG.

Lastly, I felt it was important to at least discuss the references to Diarmaid and Gráinne in AcS. Although of course it definitely signified the beginning of a new period, it also signalled the end of the previous period. On top of that, I feel it has been slightly neglected by other scholars because essentially the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne does not play a part in it. Nevertheless, the allusions to them and their tale are very interesting. What AcS offers us that we cannot find in the other sources, is Diarmaid's death. As I have mentioned, Diarmaid's death is never explicit and therefore it might even be possible it was not a part of the tradition(s) that we have examples of. From the references in AcS, we can be sure that the tale of Diarmaid's death was known at least by the late twelfth, early thirteenth century. From what we know of the background of AcS, it is possible that the sources the author drew on are much older and could be either oral or written. We also know that AcS not always necessarily drew on the most well-known sources or tales, but often the more obscure ones, for whatever reasons. It is definitely possible this tale of Diarmaid's death by the magical boar is one of those. At any rate, I feel this once again confirms the idea that TDG drew on many different sources and that the tale of Diarmaid and Gráinne was therefore altered throughout the centuries quite thoroughly, so that TDG cannot, in my opinion, be strictly seen as a reworking of an older tale with some added elements. Instead, it seems as if the traditions, whether oral or written, influenced one another and eventually emerged to form the tradition which we can call the 'TDG-tradition'. In a way, it reminds us of the process of AcS on a smaller scale; an enormous corpus arises out of something of which only scraps are preserved. This, I think, can also be regarded the reason that TDG often is lacking in structure; while it is nowhere near as rambling a tale as AcS, the author of the former must also have struggled with uniting many different traditions into one. Thus, while the sources we have at our disposal already seem to confront us with puzzling contradictions and problems, it seems this is only a fraction of what TDG's author would have dealt with.

5. APPENDIX

Abbreviations:

F&G: 'Finn and Gráinne'

TA: *Tochmarc Ailbe* "The wooing of Ailbe"

ACC: *Amra Cholúim Chille* "The eulogy of Saint Columba"

LL: *Úar in lathe do Lum Laine* "Cold the day for Lom Laine"

AcS: *Accalam na Sénorach* "The colloquy of the ancients"

TDG: *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada 7 Ghráinne* "The pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne"

The boxes marked 'x' indicate whether a story motif is contained within the tale.

Story motifs	F&G	TA	ACC	UBE	LL	AcS	TDG
Finn seeks the hand of Gráinne from Cormac	x	x					x
Finn and Gráinne are married	x	x			x		
Finn is hateful in the eyes of the maiden	x	x					
'peaceful' separation	x	x					
Gráinne falls in love with Diarmaid		x	x	x	x		x
Gráinne elopes with Diarmaid				x	x (?)		x
Flight from Finn				x			x
Intervention by Aonghus				x			x
Diarmaid's death (by a magical boar)						x	x

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