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# THE MOVEMENT OF WATER AS SYMBOLISED BY MONSTERS IN EARLY IRISH TEXTS

JACQUELINE BORSJE

**ABSTRACT.** Several early Irish texts describe monsters that pose a threat to people who enter water. Their names and/or activities sometimes indicate sucking, swallowing and spewing, verbs that could refer to the movement of water, for instance, vortexes and tides. One may, therefore, connect one layer of textual symbolism with the movements of water: monsters partly personify these phenomena. This paper describes the chronological and conceptual development of this personification. Two lines of development are distinguished. The older consists of early Hiberno-Latin texts that use a name from classical mythology (Charybdis) as a technical term for whirlpools, and that do not connect the motif of the swallowing and spewing monsters with the movement of water. The later is represented by Middle-Irish texts and seems to begin with the Old-Irish *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti* where a water monster (*muirdris*) inflates and contracts itself. This symbolism appears to climax in a small late Middle-Irish text that describes a monster in the Indian Ocean that causes the tides. The symbolism in this text has become explicit, and more complex because of external influence.

**KEYWORDS:** classical mythology, Odyssey, Aeneid, Charybdis, Hiberno-Latin, Columba, Adomnán, Muirchú, *Altus prosator*, *Hisperica famina*, *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti*, *Amra Choluim Cille*, *Dindshenchas*, *Acallam na senórach*, *Duanaire Finn*, *Tenga bithnúa*, Coire Breacán, Loch Rudraige, water, whirlpool, tides, monsters, *muirdris*, personification, symbolism.

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This paper describes a motif in early Irish texts: the idea that water movement is caused by monsters.<sup>1</sup> Since this idea can also be found in other cultures, the survey will start with examples from classical texts. The first part of this paper deals with Charybdis, as described in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* and mentioned in some Hiberno-Latin texts. The second part

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 10th International Congress of Celtic Studies at Edinburgh, July 1995 and parts of its findings were earlier published in J. Borsje, *From chaos to enemy: encounters with monsters in early Irish texts: an investigation related to the process of christianization and the concept of evil*, *Instrumenta Patristica* 29 (Turnhout 1996) 52-58. This paper was written when I was based at the Department of Theology of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. I should like to express my thanks to Professor Tjitze Baarda for his comments, to Professor Ruairí Ó hUiginn for sending me information about Loch Rudraige, to Dr Michelle O Riordan and Micheál Ó Cearúil for taking me to Dundrum Bay on a stormy St Patrick's Day in 1995, and to Bob Ordish for correcting my English.

gives a survey of early Irish texts about monsters that cause the movement of water. Some monsters do this in a specific way—with their mouths, by swallowing and spewing. The third part will focus upon the monster called *muirdris*, from the Old-Irish tale *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti*.<sup>2</sup> It is here suggested that one of the characteristics of the *muirdris* could be explained with the aid of this motif.

### I. CHARYBDIS

In the famous classical voyage tales, Charybdis forms a great danger. Who or what is meant by this name remains uncertain. The danger is clearly presented as a whirlpool, but is it the whirlpool itself? Or is it a creature that causes the waters to swirl and that sucks everything down to the depths of the sea? It is worthwhile having a closer look at a few texts.

The Greek hero Odysseus is warned about Charybdis by the Goddess and enchantress Circe. Circe tells him how to travel and behave in order to avoid this great danger. She describes a cliff where a large fig-tree grows:

τῶ δ' ὑπὸ δῖα Χάρυβδις ἀναρροιβδεῖ μέλαν ὕδωρ.  
 τρῖς μὲν γάρ τ' ἀνίησιν ἐπ' ἡματι, τρῖς δ' ἀναρροιβδεῖ  
 δεινόν· μὴ σύ γε κείθι τύχοις, ὅτε ῥοιβδήσειεν  
 οὐ γάρ κεν ῥύσαιτό σ' ὑπὲκ κακοῦ οὐδ' ἐνοσίχθων<sup>3</sup>

under it, awesome Charybdis sucks the dark water down. Three times a day she belches it forth, three times in hideous fashion she swallows it down again. Pray not to be caught there when she swallows down; Poseidon himself could not save you from destruction then.<sup>4</sup>

Circe does not really tell what or who Charybdis is, but it is obvious that Charybdis is more dangerous than the monster Scylla who dwells opposite in a cave.

Odysseus forgets Circe's command<sup>5</sup> when he and his companions sail into the strait with Scylla on one side and Charybdis on the other. Here is another description of this monstrous creature:

2. *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti* was edited and translated by D. A. Binchy, 'The saga of Fergus mac Léti', *Ériu* 16 (1952) 33–48. For the spelling 'Leite', see R. Ó hUiginn, 'Fergus, Russ and Rudraige: a brief biography of Fergus Mac Róich', *Emania* 11 (1993) 31–40: 35; cp. Borsje, 17 n 37.

3. *Od.* xii 104–07; A. T. Murray (ed), *Homer: The Odyssey* (2 vols, London & Cambridge MA 1919), i 438.

4. W. Shewring, *Homer: the Odyssey* (Oxford 1980) 145.

5. This command entails keeping closer to the cliff of Scylla, not attempting to fight Scylla, as well as rowing hard and invoking Crataeis (Scylla's mother).

.... ἐτέρωθι δὲ διὰ Χάρυβδις  
 δεινὸν ἀνερροΐβδησε θαλάσσης ἀλμυρὸν ὕδωρ.  
 ἦ τοι ὅτ' ἐξεμέσειε, λέβης ὡς ἐν πυρὶ πολλῷ  
 πᾶσ' ἀναμορμύρεσκε κυκωμένη, ὑψόσε δ' ἄχνη  
 ἄκροισι σκοπέλοισιν ἐπ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔπιπτεν·  
 ἀλλ' ὅτ' ἀναβρόξειε θαλάσσης ἀλμυρὸν ὕδωρ,  
 πᾶσ' ἔντοσθε φάνεσκε κυκωμένη, ἀμφὶ δὲ πέτρῃ  
 δεινὸν ἐβεβρύχει, ὑπένερθε δὲ γαῖα φάνεσκε  
 ψάμμῳ κυανέῃ...<sup>6</sup>

(that side,) in hideous fashion, fiendish Charybdis sucked the salt water in. When she spewed it forth, she seethed and swirled throughout all her depths like a cauldron set on a great fire, and overhead the spray fell down on the tops of the two rocks. But when she sucked the sea-water in, one might look right down through the swirling eddy while the rock roared hideously around her and the sea-floor came to view, dark and sandy.<sup>7</sup>

From this passage it is clear that Charybdis is a creature that causes the water to move, but no descriptions of her appearance are given. Her actions are once more described as swallowing (ἀνερροΐβδησε)<sup>8</sup> and vomiting (ἐξεμέσειεν)<sup>9</sup> when Odysseus encounters her a second time.<sup>10</sup>

There is no further information on the nature of Charybdis in the *Odyssey*, even though there may be an etymological word play on the name.<sup>11</sup> There seems to be an echo of the two last syllables of the name Charybdis in the verbs<sup>12</sup> that mean 'to suck down' and 'to suck down again'—*ροιβδέω* and *ἀναρροιβδέω*.<sup>13</sup> Two elements are important here: the personification of the

6. *Od.* xii 235–43; Murray, i 448.

7. Shewring, 148.

8. *Od.* xii 431.

9. *Od.* xii 437.

10. *Od.* xii 426–46.

11. This opinion is given by J. Rendel Harris, 'Scylla and Charybdis', *Bull John Rylands Libr* 9 (1925) 87–118: 93–94; see also A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra, *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (3 vols, Oxford 1989), ii 124: 'Χάρυβδις: etym. unknown (although certainly not Greek); the verb which follows immediately after is intended to explain the derivation of the name—hence the less well attested reading ἀναρροιβδεῖ 'she swallows' should be preferred .... Charybdis is 'the swallower'. The reading -ροιβδεῖ ... probably emerged at a time when the pronunciation of *οι* and *υ* was identical (as 'ü') ...'.

12. They occur five times; four of them are found in the quotations above; see *Od.* xii 104, 105, 106 (Circe's speech), 236 (the first encounter), 431 (the second encounter).

13. A second meaning of ἀναρροιβδέω is 'to swallow back'.

movement of water which is indicated by the verbs: swallowing, spewing, sucking, belching and vomiting, and furthermore, the image of the cauldron.

Aeneas also encounters Charybdis. The prophet Helenus warns him about 'the insatiable Charybdis'<sup>14</sup> and advises him to make a detour. The danger that Charybdis presents is indicated by a repetitive movement in this text as well:

... imo barathri ter gurgite vastos  
sorbet in abruptum fluctus rursusque sub auras  
erigit alternos et sidera verberat unda.<sup>15</sup>

Three times a day with the deep vortex of her whirlpool Charybdis sucks great waves into the abyss and then throws them upwards again to lash the stars.<sup>16</sup>

Even though Aeneas and his companions sail carefully they suffer the perils of Charybdis:

tum procul e fluctu Trinacria cernitur Aetna,  
et gemitum ingentem pelagi pulsataque saxa  
audimus longe fractasque ad litora voces,  
exsultantque vada atque aestu miscentur harenae.  
et pater Anchises 'nimirum haec illa Charybdis;  
hos Helenus scopulos, haec saxa horrenda canebat'.<sup>17</sup>

tollimur in caelum curvato gurgite, et idem  
subducta ad manis imos desedimus unda.  
ter scopuli clamorem inter cava saxa dedere,  
ter spumam elisam et rorantia vidimus astra.<sup>18</sup>

Then from far out at sea we sighted Mount Etna in Sicily and heard a loud moaning of waters and grinding of rocks and the voice of breakers beating on the shore, as the sea began to rise and swirl the sand in its surge. Father Anchises cried out: 'This must be the deadly Charybdis. These are

14. *Aen.* iii 420: 'inplacata Charybdis'.

15. *Aen.* iii 421–23; O. Ribbeck & G. Ianell (ed), *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneis* (Leipzig 1930) 55.

16. D. West, *Virgil. The Aeneid: a new prose translation* (Harmondsworth 1991) 70.

17. *Aen.* iii 554–59; Ribbeck & Ianell, 58.

18. *Aen.* iii 564–67; Ribbeck & Ianell, 59.

the cliffs Helenus warned us against. These are the terrible rocks.' ... A great arching wave came and lifted us to the sky and a moment later as the wave was sucked down we plunged into the abyss of hell. Three times the cliffs roared between their hollow rocks. Three times we saw the foam shoot up and spatter the stars.<sup>19</sup>

Again the movement of water is personified. It is Charybdis who sucks and throws. In these texts Charybdis remains mysterious: nothing is said about her appearance. Later texts give her an origin tale: she is a daughter of Ge and Poseidon and becomes a mysterious water creature as a result of a punishment by Zeus.<sup>20</sup> She is the one who causes the water to move dangerously. The *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* mention the movement of a whirlpool. The temporal indication of three times a day brings a tidal phenomenon to our mind.

Charybdis is also found in four early Hiberno-Latin texts. In these texts, the word *carubdis* is used to designate a whirlpool. In *Altus prosator*,<sup>21</sup> a poem ascribed to St Columba, whirlpools choke giants who are punished in the Underworld.<sup>22</sup> In the preface to his *Life of St Patrick*,<sup>23</sup> Muirchú uses the word *carubdis* for 'whirlpool'.<sup>24</sup> Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae*<sup>25</sup> refers to

19. West, 74.

20. See, for instance, the commentary on *Aen.* iii 420 by Servius (G. Thilo and H. Hagen, *Servii grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii* (Leipzig 1881), i 417–18). For further references see RE iii 2195.

21. *Altus prosator* with its preface and notes was edited, translated and provided with a commentary by J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum* (2 vols, London 1898), i 62–83, ii 23–26, 140–69.

22. *ecce gigantes gemere sub aquis magno ulcere / comprobantur incendio aduri ac suplicio / Cocitique Carubdis strangulati turgentibus / Scillis obiecti fluctibus eliduntur et scropibus* (Bernard & Atkinson, i 75) 'Lo! the giants are recorded to groan beneath the waters with great torment, to be burned with fire and punishment; and, choked with the swelling whirlpools of Cocytus, overwhelmed with Scillas, they are dashed to pieces with waves and rocks' (id. ii 152).

23. A. B. E. Hood (ed. & tr.), *St. Patrick: his writings and Muirchu's Life* (London & Chichester 1978). The *Life* is dated to the later seventh century (Hood, 19).

24. ... in hoc periculossimum et profundum narrationis sanctae pylagus, turgentibus proterve gurgitum aggeribus, inter acutissimos carubdes per ignota aequora insitos, a nullis adhuc lintribus, excepto tantum uno patris mei Coguitosi, expertum atque occupatum, ingenioli mei puerilem remi cymbam deduxi '... so I have brought the child's rowing-boat of my poor intellect onto this deep and dangerous ocean of hagiography, with the waves surging in wildly swirling walls of water, among whirlpools and jagged rocks in uncharted seas—an ocean never yet attempted or embarked on by any barque except only that of my father Cogitosus' (Hood, 61, 81).

25. A. O. & M. O. Anderson (ed. & tr.) *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (2nd ed. Oxford 1991) [hereafter VC]; R. Sharpe (tr.), *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth 1995). It was completed between 697 and 704 (J.-M. Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita*

the surging tides of a whirlpool known as Coire Brecáin. Instead of the Irish word *coire*,<sup>26</sup> Adomnán writes *carubdis*.<sup>27</sup> The last relevant Hiberno-Latin text is the first Latin Life of Ciaran.<sup>28</sup> In this Life, the whirlpool Coire Brecáin also occurs and is indicated by the words *carubdis* and *vorago*.<sup>29</sup>

I shall not discuss further *Altus prosator* with its many biblical and classical reminiscences; for the present study, it is enough to note that *carubdis* is used as a noun (in the plural) which refers to whirlpools.

Muirchú uses a metaphor for the dangers in writing a saint's Life when he refers to 'the deep dangerous ocean of hagiography'. Among the dangers are *carubdes*, 'whirlpools'. There is no personification in this image nor are monsters mentioned.

The danger of the whirlpool in *Vita Sancti Columbae* is neither personified nor connected with a monster.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, a monster in *Vita Sancti Columbae*<sup>31</sup> that deserves attention. The motif of the advice to make a detour, which was also found in the *Aeneid*, is present here too. Columba advises a monk that unless he does so he will be terribly frightened by a monster that will surface from the deep. The monk does not heed this advice and, faced with the monster, he and his companions become terrified. They are barely able to escape from the wash caused by the beast. Here we have a monster moving water, but it is not exactly the type of monster that I am looking for. The beast only moves; there is no mention of spewing and swallowing. Coire Brecáin in *Vita Sancti Columbae* is nothing more than a whirlpool; there is no evidence of personification, although a name from classical mythology is

*Columbae*, *Peritia* 1 (1982) 160–77: 167–69).

26. DIL s.v. *coire* 'cauldron, pot; whirlpool'.

27. in undosis *carubdis* Brecani aestibus 'in the surging tides of the whirlpool of Brecán' (i 5; Anderson, 28–29).

28. This Life is not dated but all four extant versions seem to depend on a text or a collection of texts compiled at Clonmacnoise, probably not later than the ninth century (Kenney, *Sources*, 378–79).

29. Cumque sanctus Columba in mari nauigas[s]et, orta est tempestas in mari, et naus trusa est ad carubdem, qui locus scotice Cori Bracayn dicitur; in quo est vorago periculosissima marina, in qua si que naues intrant, non euadunt (C. Plummer (ed), *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (2 vols, Oxford 1910, repr. 1968), i 216), 'When Saint Columba was voyaging on the sea, there arose a storm in the sea, and the ship was thrust towards the whirlpool which is in the Scotie tongue called Cori Bracayn, in which is a sea-whirlpool most dangerous, wherein if ships enter they come not out' (R. A. S. Macalister (tr), *The Latin and Irish Lives of Ciaran*, Translations of Christian Literature, Series V: Lives of the Celtic Saints (London & New York 1921) 42).

30. It should be noted that the danger of the whirlpool is overcome in the same way as the danger presented by the monster mentioned below (see VC i 19) is overcome: both are blessed by a saint. For more about this, see Borsje, 168–69.

31. VC i 19.

used.

In *Vita Sancti Columbae*, it is St Colmán who is endangered by Coire Brecáin; in the *Life of Ciaran*, it is St Columba himself who faces this danger. This first Latin Life refers to the danger of the water by using the same name from classical mythology as technical term for ‘whirlpool’, *carubdis*. However, the second Latin Life<sup>32</sup> makes this implicit reference explicit by separating it into a factual description of the danger and comparing this with the creatures from classical mythology. It says that this dangerous place is ‘rightly compared to Scylla and Charybdis’. This text does not give a term for whirlpool. The danger is personified when the text mentions the fear ‘to be devoured by the horrible jaws of the abyss’. We have here therefore an implicit reference to classical mythology which develops into an explicit reference, accompanied by the phenomenon of personification.

Finally, two more texts which show classical influence need some attention. First, there is another description of Coire Brecáin in *Cormac’s Glossary*:<sup>33</sup>

Coire Brecáin .i. saobhc[h]oire mór ... .i. comruc na n-ilmuire. ... 7 suigthe<sup>34</sup> síis i fudomhoin co mbí a coire obéle nosuigfedh cid Éirind [7] foherad ind for aonchói. Scéid iterum in loimm sin súas 7 rocluinte a torandbrúcht 7 a breisimnech 7 a esgal iter néllaib fo c[h]osmuiless ngaluigedar coire mbís for tein.<sup>35</sup>

32. In parte enim maris que tendit uersus lense monasterium, est maximum transeuntibus periculum, tum propter fluminum impetuositatem, tum propter maris angustiam, itaque naues circumuoluntur, atque in rota mouentur; ac frequenter sic submerguntur. Scille enim atque Caribdi merito asi[m]latur, uelim periculositate perfecta tristisque [-teque MSS.] nautis malum ibi subministratur. Ad hoc eurippum ipsi peruenientes, repentino ceperunt in eum delabi cursu; quumque nil preter mortem [Quumque uelut propter mortem R2] sperantes, et quia iam quasi tetris essent abyssi faucibus deuorandi, ... ‘For in the part of the sea which bears towards the monastery of Í, there is a very great danger to those who cross, partly because of the vehemence of the currents, and partly because of the narrowness of the sea; so that ships are whirled round and driven in a circle, and thus are often sunk. For it is rightly compared to Scylla and Charybdis; I mean that by its grave and unmitigated dangerousness, evil is there the lot of sailors. When they were coming to this strait, they suddenly began to glide into it in their course: and when they looked for nothing but death, and because they were as though apt to be devoured by the horrible jaws of the abyss, ...’ (Macalister, 182 (text), 57 (translation)).

33. K. Meyer (ed), ‘*Sanas Cormaic: an Old-Irish glossary*’, O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, K. Meyer & J. G. O’Keeffe (ed), *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* iv (Halle & Dublin 1912); J. O’Donovan & W. Stokes (tr), *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac’s glossary* (Calcutta 1868). The greater part of this text, ascribed to Cormac mac Cuilennáin (831–908) king of Munster and bishop of Cashel, ‘was written, if not in the time of Cormac, at least within a century or so after his death’ (W. Stokes (ed), *Three Irish glossaries* (London & Edinburgh 1862) p xviii).

34. The manuscripts read: *co suidet* and *suigthe*; Stokes (in O’Donovan and Stokes, 41, note f) considers these forms to be corrupt and proposes *co suigetar*.



‘Breccán’s caldron’ i.e. a great whirlpool ... in the meeting of the various seas, ... they are sucked into the depths so that the caldron remains with its mouth wide open; and it would suck even the whole of Ireland into its yawning gullet. It vomits *iterum* that draught up, so that its thunderous eructation and its bursting and its roaring are heard among the clouds, like the steam-boiling of a caldron on the fire.<sup>36</sup>

It is clear that this whirlpool is described in a personifying way. The verbs to suck<sup>37</sup> and to vomit<sup>38</sup> are used, just as in the descriptions of Charybdis from the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*. Moreover, the image of a cauldron is given, as in the *Odyssey*. The parallels between the texts of Homer and Cormac have been pointed out by some scholars<sup>39</sup> but the difficulty remains of how to explain the transmission from Greek into Irish.<sup>40</sup>

The second text is a poem called *De mari* from *Hisperica famina*,<sup>41</sup> which are dated to the seventh century.<sup>42</sup> There are several references to classical mythology<sup>43</sup> in this Hiberno-Latin poem. The sea with its movements and inhabitants is described. The poem mentions large sea monsters (*c[o]etia*)<sup>44</sup>

35. Meyer, ‘*Sanas Cormaic*’, 27–28.

36. O’Donovan and Stokes, 41.

37. *súigid*, ‘sucks, draws in, absorbs, attracts’.

38. *sceid*, ‘vomits, spews, ejects’.

39. Rendel Harris, 94–95 and W. B. Stanford, ‘Monsters and Odyssean echoes in the early Hiberno-Latin and Irish hymns’, J. J. O’Meara & B. Naumann (ed), *Latin script and letters AD 400–900: Festschrift presented to Ludwig Bieler on the occasion of his 70th birthday* (Leiden 1976) 113–17: 117.

40. Rendel Harris (op. cit. 103–05) believes he has identified Scylla and Charybdis: the former is a sea rock, the latter a sea cauldron like Coire Breccáin and both had their origin in the Hebrides. He suggests that perhaps Phoenician sailors or Norsemen brought the story of the great whirlpool to the Mediterranean, or it travelled overland from the Baltic (103, 106–15). Stanford does not invert the influence. He mentions possibilities for contact: ‘Greek merchants coming to Ireland from Spain or Gaul, or Irish travellers to a Greek colony on the continent of Europe’ (117), and after business the Irish may have heard the Homeric stories. It should be noted, incidentally, that the image of the sea moving as a boiling cauldron is also found in Job. Here it is a monster that causes the movement of water: Leviathan will make the deep sea boiling like a pot or as boiling ointments (‘fervescere faciet quasi ollam profundum mare ponet quasi cum unguenta bulliunt’, Job 41:22).

41. M. W. Herren (ed. & tr.), *The Hisperica famina i: the A-text* (Toronto 1974) 92–97.

42. M. Lapidge & R. Sharpe, *A bibliography of Celtic-Latin literature 400–1200* (Dublin 1985) 93.

43. For instance, Anfitridis in line 381, Tethis (spelled Tithis) in line 393, Neptune in lines 396 and 421, and Nereus in line 410. Two lines, moreover, resemble Charybdis’s actions (as quoted above): *infimas bomboso uortice miscet glarias, / astrifero spargit spumas sulco*, ‘[it] churns the pebbles at the bottom in a noisy vortex, and shoots its spray to the furrow of the stars’ (Herren, 94–95, lines 386–87).

44. According to Herren (14), lines 416–22 ‘depict the playful activities of a school of dol-

that eat sea-life, suck in<sup>45</sup> salt water and swallow fish. They sweep the water of the sea with their scaly heads.<sup>46</sup> The beasts thus swallow water, and move the water of the sea with their heads. The tidal movement of water is connected with a personifying image of the sea itself. The poem says that when the tide flows backwards, it is enfolded in the ancient womb of the sea.<sup>47</sup>

To conclude this first part: we have seen how, in the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*, the movement of water was caused by a mysterious creature. The Hiberno-Latin and Irish texts thus far mentioned bear signs of influence from classical texts but most of them do not describe the movement of water in the way of Charybdis: either *carubdis* is a technical term for 'whirlpool' without a monstrous connotation or they describe monsters that move the water with their bodies instead of using their mouths. The second Latin *Life of Ciaran* compares Coire Breacán with Scylla and Charybdis, and personifies it by referring to its devouring jaws. The only parallel for sucking and vomiting is connected with this whirlpool, described in *Cormac's Glossary*.

## II. IRISH TEXTS ABOUT MONSTERS MOVING WATER

This second part of the paper will show how the motif of monsters moving water can be found in texts in Irish. In the third part I hope to show that the *muirdris* might be at the beginning of this line of development. Therefore, the first group of monsters that will now be described share either the first or the second part of the compound *muirdris*. The second group is formed by beasts that are called *súgmairi*, 'sucking creatures'. The last group consists of two beasts, named *míl*, 'beast, animal'.

The first group consists of four monsters: a *muiriasc*, a *muirselche*, a *muir-bech* and a *sm(e)irdris*. The *muiriasc*, or sea fish, also known as the Rossualt, lives in the sea.<sup>48</sup> Its special characteristic is that it spews, which is indicated

phins'. The dolphins are indeed mentioned in the line preceding the sea monsters, but dolphins cannot really be referred to as enormous beasts. I suggest therefore that the sea monsters are a species other than dolphins.

45. The verb *sugillo*, 'to beat black and blue', is used; it is the verb *sugo* that means 'to suck'.

46. *inormia uastum litigant c[o]etia per isthmum,/ erummosos ruminant gurgustos,/ uitreumque sugillant faucibus salum/ ac tornos guttoricant piscellos; neptunia squameis uerrunt cerula gigris* 'large sea monsters struggle through the wide strait; they eat up unfortunate sealife, suck in smooth salt water through their mouths, and swallow wriggling fish; they sweep the Neptunian blue with their scaly heads' (Herren, 96–97, lines 417–21).

47. *Gemellum neptunius collocat ritum fluctus:/ protinus spumaticam pollet in littora adsisam/ refluamque prisco plicat recessam utero* 'Neptune's flood has a double movement: continually it propels the foamy tide to the shore and enfolds it within its ancient womb as it flows backwards' (Herren, 94–95, lines 396–98).

48. The word *muiriasc* is referred to in the *dindsenchas*: the Book of Leinster *dindsenchas* (R. I. Best & M. A. O'Brien (ed), *The Book of Leinster formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*

by the verb *scéid*. It spews three times and this is taken as an omen for three future disasters. This beast is of marginal importance: it spews not sea water but the contents of its stomach. This happens once; there is no repetitive movement.

More interesting is the *muirselche*, a 'sea turtle' or 'sea snail'.<sup>49</sup> This beast lives in a magic sea and is said to have the power of great suction.<sup>50</sup> It can suck a man in armour into its treasure bag.<sup>51</sup> Both monster and sea are expelled and their vanishing is described by the verb *traigid*, which means 'to ebb, to recede'. The *muirselche* does not move water, but it is closely connected with it. The beast ebbs away, probably together with the magic sea. Moreover, the formula with which the *muirselche* is expelled has aquatic allusions.<sup>52</sup>

(Dublin 1957), iii 746–47; translation of the prose only: S. H. O'Grady (ed. & tr.), *Silva Gadelica: a collection of tales in Irish with extracts illustrating persons and places* (2 vols, London & Edinburgh 1892), ii 527); the Bodleian *dindshenchas* (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The Bodleian Dinnschenchas', *Folklore* 3 (1892) 467–516: 507–08); the Rennes *dindshenchas* (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The prose tales in the Rennes *Dindshenchas*', *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894) 272–336, 418–84: 476–77) and the metrical *dindshenchas* from several manuscripts (E. Gwynn (ed. & tr.), *The metrical Dindshenchas*, iii, Todd Lecture Series 10 (Dublin & London 1913) 426–31). The Rossuait is also described in the Middle-Irish glosses on the Old-Irish *Amra Choluim Chille* §60 (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*', *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899) 30–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–37: 256–57; R. I. Best & O. J. Bergin (ed), *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin & London 1929) 11–41), and mentioned in a plural form in the Middle-Irish *Cath Ruis na Ríg* (E. Hogan (ed. & tr.), *Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn*, Todd Lecture Series 4 (Dublin & London 1892) 14–15).

49. The *muirselche* is described in two texts: first, in §34 of the long version of *Tochmarc Emire* (A. G. van Hamel (ed), *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 3 (Dublin 1933, repr. 1978) 20–68; K. Meyer (tr), 'The Wooing of Emer', *Archaeol Rev* 1 (1888) 68–75, 150–55, 231–35, 298–307). The language of this long version is dated to the tenth or eleventh century (Van Hamel, 17–18). This tradition concerning the *muirselche* also occurs in the *dindshenchas* (E. Gwynn, (ed. & tr.) *The metrical dindshenchas* iv, Todd Lectures Series 11 (Dublin & London 1924) 294–95). According to Gwynn (454). the entry has been borrowed from *Tochmarc Emire*.

50. DIL s.v. *súigthech* 'sucking, drawing, pulling', where this instance is translated 'with magnetic properties'.

51. This is called *istad-bolc* (DIL s.v. *etsad/estad/autsad/itsad* 'treasury, storehouse, abode, dwelling-place, residence, retreat').

52. The formula is as follows: 'Toí do chend cúasachtach, toí do chorp cisachtach, toí do thul' (Van Hamel, 36); 'taí do bath, taí (D. Edel, *Helden auf Freierfüßen: 'Tochmarc Emire' und 'Mal y kavas Kulwch Olwen'. Studien zur früheren inselkeltischen Erzähltradition*, Verh Koninkl Nederlandse Akad Wet, Aft Letterkunde, nieuwe reeks 107 (Amsterdam & Oxford 1980) 222, 'Turn your hollow head. Turn your tribute-exacting body. Turn your forehead/wave crest. Turn your death/sea. Turn'. The aquatic allusions may be present in several ambiguous expression in this formula. First, 'tribute-exacting' could refer to the dangerous beast demanding tribute sucking it into its treasure bag. In a wider sense it is the sea (either this magic one or the sea in general) that exacts tribute from humanity, sucking people into its

The *muirbech* seems to be related to the movement of water by its name. It might mean 'sea breaker'.<sup>53</sup> The beast is mentioned in an episode in *Acallam na senórach*.<sup>54</sup> This episode is narrated in prose and verse.<sup>55</sup> The prose refers to the monster as *piast*, 'beast, monster', and the poem uses the term *muirbech*. The beast lives in a lake and the poem says that the wave rises after the monster. The water is thus moved, although not by swallowing or spewing.

The last beast of this group, the *sm(e)irdris*, is also found in *Acallam na senórach*.<sup>56</sup> The *sm(e)irdris* lives in a spring. When a woman, Scáthderc, daughter of Cumall, looks into the spring, the water rises and Loch Lurgan comes into being. In the end, the whole province of Leinster is flooded. This is, therefore, a beast that does indeed make water expand.

depths. A second allusion might be present in *tul*. *Tul* means 'protuberance, projecting part, swelling'; *tul étain* is 'forehead', also expressed by *tul* only. Edel (222–23) believes that *tul tuinne* 'crest of a wave' may also be intended here as the whole utterance seems to address both beast and sea. A third allusion could be in the ambiguous word *bath* (also *baath*, *báth*), which means both 'death' and 'sea'. Van Hamel notes about the last three words ('taigi baig thaig' in his edition (36)) that they are obviously corrupt. Following Edel (222) I give the text of Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 967 (olim 23 N 10), which was not used by Van Hamel. Finally, the translation of *cisachtach* needs some attention. DIL gives s.v. *cisachtach* 'resorbent', but this seems to be a misquotation of Gwynn's translation of the word in the next line (*toghuidhe/toisúigthe*; see Gwynn, *Metrical dindshenchas*, iv 454). Gwynn (295) translates 'ravening' in the parallel section of the *dindshenchas*, emending *cisachtach* to *ciccarach* 'ravenous'. Meyer ('Wooing of Emer', 153) translates 'dirty'; Edel (222) 'schlüpfend'.

53. The compound is translated in DIL s.v. *murbach*, *muirbech* 'breakwater', or 'a level strip of land along the sea-coast' (see also GOI 461: enclit. verbal noun of *bongid*, 'breaks, reaps': *-bag -bach -bech*; for instance §724: *con-boing*, 'breaks': *combag, combach*). Moreover, as Ruairí Ó hUiginn kindly pointed out to me, Modern Irish *boilg* means 'submerged reef' (N. Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Dublin 1978), s.v.), which phenomenon can also be viewed as something which breaks the movement of sea water. On the other hand, if one compares this word with the *muirmíl* and *muirselche* treated here, and considering the fact that aquatic beasts are named in analogy with terrestrial ones (for instance, sea horses, sea cows, sea elephants), it is interesting to note that the word *bech* means 'bee'. This would result in the translation of *muirbech* as sea bee. However, a bee is not a terrestrial but a flying animal. Since it is not clear what was meant by *muirbech* I will leave the word untranslated.

54. S. H. O'Grady, *Silva gadelica*, i 94–233 (text), ii 101–265 (translation); W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), *Acallam na senórach*, in W. Stokes & E. Windisch (ed), *Irische Texte*, ser. 4, 1. Heft (Leipzig 1900) 1–224 (text), 225–71 (part translation) It was written about the end of the twelfth century; its language is late Middle Irish (M. Dillon (ed), *Stories from the Acallam*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 23 (Dublin 1970) p ix).

55. O'Grady, i 147–48; Stokes, 68–69. O'Grady (ii 163) translates the prose; of the poem he gives the translation of the first few lines only. I am indebted to Máirtín Ó Briain, who drew my attention to the *muirbech* in the poem and to Ruairí Ó hUiginn for a draft translation of the verse.

56. Stokes, 123. A recent translation is given in J. F. Nagy, *The wisdom of the outlaw: the boyhood deeds of Finn in Gaelic narrative tradition* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1985) 116.

In this little episode a representative of the second group can be found too: the *súgmair*e. The flood, caused by the *sm(e)irdris*, is cleared away thanks to Finn mac Cumail. He gets a *súgmair*e, together with druids and female warriors, to suck up the water. Therefore, one monster causes the flood and the other makes it disappear. An interesting detail is that the *súgmair*e comes from India.

Nine specimens of the *súgmair*e kind are mentioned in a late Middle-Irish or early Modern-Irish poem, *Tiagait trí haibne inár dtír*, 'Three rivers flow into our land'.<sup>57</sup> These creatures live throughout the world and they cause the currents to ebb and flood alternately in every harbour.<sup>58</sup> The repetition of movement is important<sup>59</sup> and the word *tráigh(i)us*, 'ebb', occurs twice. It is related to the verb *tráigid*, which is used in combination with the *muirselche*.

The last group consists of two single monsters, designated by the word *míl*. The first is mentioned in *An tenga bithnúa*.<sup>60</sup>

Toaitne iarum airbe in mil tindnaig na ilmúiri im toibu talman di cach leith, shuiges na ilmhuire aitherruch, co faoib na trachtu tirma di cach leith.<sup>61</sup>

Then it [the sun] shines upon the enclosure of the beast who brings the many seas around the flanks of the earth on every side, who sucks the

57. This poem, to be edited by J. Carey, is found in the following manuscripts: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MSS 30 (olim 23.B.38, 18th cent.), 147 (olim 23.M.46, 19th cent.), 344 (olim 23.M.39, 19th cent.), 707 (olim 23.H.18, 18th cent.), 786 (olim 23.A.32, 18th cent.), 1169 (olim 24.C.39, 18th cent.?); Dublin, Trinity College Library, MSS 1360 (olim H.4.19, c. 1742), 1399 (olim H.5.28, AD 1679; Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MSS G 137 (18th cent.), G 436 (19th cent.); London, British Library, MS Add. 30512 (15th-16th cent.); Dublin, University College Library, Morris MS 11 (1737); University College Cork, MS 7 (1853). For a translation of the version in this last-mentioned manuscript, see J. Carey, 'The rivers of Paradise and Hell, and the nine suckers of the sea', J. Hogg (ed), *The road to Parnassus: homage to Peter Russell on his seventy-fifth birthday* (Salzburg 1996) 425-28: 426-28.

58. I am indebted to Dr John Carey for sending me his transcription and translation of the quatrains about the 'suckers' (pers. comm. 2-8-1993). The relevant part reads: Cad linus 7 tráighius ann? ... .9. súghmure at[h]á fan mbith/ líonus 7 tráighus 'na rith: 7 líonus *gach* re nuair 7 tráighus *gach* aoncuán 'What causes flood and ebb? ... There are nine suckers throughout the world who cause the currents to flood and ebb: who cause flood and ebb alternately in every harbour'.

59. Indicated by *re nuair*.

60. W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The evernew tongue', *Ériu* 2 (1905) 96-162. The text is dated to the tenth century or earlier (D. N. Dumville, 'Biblical apocrypha and the early Irish: a preliminary investigation', *Proc Roy Ir Acad (C)* 73 (1973) 299-338: 337).

61. Stokes, 'Evernew tongue', 124.

many seas back again so that he leaves the beaches dry on every side.<sup>62</sup>

This beast obviously causes the tides. The verb *súigid* indicates ebb.<sup>63</sup>

I believe that a climax of the development of this set of ideas about the movement of water connected with water monsters can be found in an anecdote in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502. Here, aspects mentioned above are combined and ascribed to a beast that is a form of Leviathan. Elsewhere I have argued for this identification;<sup>64</sup> here I will concentrate upon the theme central to this paper. The relevant part of the anecdote reads as follows:

Ad-fét Augustín míl do bith i fudumnaib in mara 7 in talman Indecdai co ndeilb adhuathmair is gránnu 7 is áigestu for anmannaib in bethad, 7 dano co n-áiget aingil nime cid in [n]deilb-sin, 7 co ndíbdai srotha ind aiceoin móir ina oéndig, et is adbar in sin dond aithbe. Ocus in tan s[c]eas in [n]dig-sin, is ann tuiles.<sup>65</sup>

Augustine relates that there is a beast in the depths of the sea and land of India with a very frightful appearance, which is the most horrible and dreadful of any living animal; and moreover, that the angels of Heaven fear even that appearance, and that it swallows<sup>66</sup> the currents of the great ocean in one draught, and that this is the cause of the ebb-tide. And when it spews that draught, then the tide floods.<sup>67</sup>

A combination of aspects mentioned above is found here. The *súgmair* in *Acallam na senórach* also swallows water and was located in India. Furthermore, the *súgmairi* in the above-mentioned poem and the *míl* in *An tenga bithnúa* cause the tides as well. The following aspects are important in this context: the idea of a beast swallowing large amounts of water and spewing them out again, and the causing of the tides in this manner. These Irish texts are now listed chronologically and the text central to the third part of this paper is added:<sup>68</sup>

62. J. Carey, 'The sun's night journey: a pharaonic image in medieval Ireland', *J Warburg Courtauld Inst* 57 (1994) 14–34: 15.

63. The many seas were, incidentally, also mentioned in the description of Coire Breacán in *Cormac's Glossary* (see above).

64. J. Borsje & D. Ó Cróinín, 'A monster in the Indian Ocean', *Nederlands Theol Tijdschr* 49/1 (1995) 1–11: 3–10.

65. Borsje & Ó Cróinín, 2.

66. Literally: 'exterminates' (see DIL, s.v. do-bádi).

67. Borsje & Ó Cróinín, 2.

68. The following abbreviations are used here. AA=*Ad-fét Augustín*, AS=*Acallam na*

- EF Old Irish (8th cent.), *muidris*, lives in loch, expands & contracts  
 SC 9th/10th cent., whirlpool, sucks & vomits (*súigid* & *sceíd*)  
 TB 10th cent. or earlier, *míl*, causes tides, brings (water) & sucks (*do-indnaig* & *súigid*)  
 TE 10th/11th cent., *muirselche*, lives in magic sea, ebbs away (*tráigid*), power of suction (*súigthech*), sucks (*súigid*)  
 DS Mid. Irish, *muiriasc*, lives in sea, spews (*sceíd*)  
 AS Late Mid. Irish (12th cent.), *muirbech*, lives in lake, =seabreaker, wave rises after it  
 AS Late Mid. Irish (12th cent.), *sm(e)irdris*, lives in spring (drowns people), causes flood=expansion of water  
 AS Late Mid. Irish (12th cent.), *súgmair*, ends flood=contraction of water, sucks (*súigid*)  
 AA Late Mid. Irish (11th–12th cent.), *míl*, lives in depths of ocean and land, causes tides (*aithbe* & *tuile*), swallows (lit. exterminates) and spews (*do-bádi* & *sceíd*)  
 TT Late Mid. Irish or early Modern, 9 *súghmure*, cause tides (*líonus* & *tráighus*), they probably suck and spew (not explicit)

### III. THE *MUIRDRIS*

The texts referred to in the first part of this paper are older than *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti*, with the exception of *Cormac's Glossary* and the *Life of Ciarán*. The texts from part II are all later than *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti*. I will now advert to the *muidris* as described in this Old-Irish text.

The *muidris* is a water beast or a water monster (*piast uiscide*). It lives in Loch Rudraige and, when king Fergus mac Leite sees it, it is described as follows:

A lluid fon loch con (f)aca[e] in muidris and peist uiscide uathmar. ala nuair rosraige in uair naili nosnimairced amal bolg ngobenn.<sup>69</sup>

When he dived under the loch<sup>70</sup> he saw there a *muidris*, a fearful water-monster which kept alternately inflating and contracting itself like a smith's bellows.<sup>71</sup>

*senórach*, DS=*Dindsenchas*, EF=*Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti*, SC=*Sanas Cormaic*, TB=*An Tenga Bithnúa*, TE=*Tochmarc Emire*; TT=*Tiagait trí haibne inár dtír*.

69. Binchy, 38.

70. Literally: 'When he went under the loch ...'. Binchy translates *loch* by 'lake', but in the light of the identification of Loch Rudraige as Dundrum Bay (see below), the translation 'loch' seems to be preferable.

71. Binchy, 42.

This passage is fairly cryptic. I should emphasise that my explanation is only one among others.<sup>72</sup> The description of expansion and contraction is compared with the movement of the bellows of a smith. This instrument moves air. One could compare this with how our chests expand and contract when we breathe and thus move air. However, the *muirdris* lives underwater. The same movement under water moves water.

The *muirdris* makes this movement continually. Breathing is a continuous movement. The texts referred to in part II also give the repetition of movement, but there it is connected with the tides. The words with which this repetition is indicated are the following ones:

72. Nagy ('Beowulf and Fergus: heroes of their tribes?', *Old Engl Colloquium Series 2* (1983) 31–44: 40) discusses the characteristic of expansion and contraction in an article in which he compares Fergus with Beowulf and attempts to explain why these kings perish in a fight with a monster. He compares the expanding and contracting of the *muirdris* with a characteristic of the hero Cú Chulainn in his battle fury. Cú Chulainn closes one eye and opens the other very wide (C. O'Rahilly (ed. & tr.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge. Recension I* (Dublin 1976) 14, 137) or, in another description, he sucks (*imslo[i]c*) one eye into his head and the other springs out on to his cheek (*ibid.* 69, 187). Nagy also compares Fergus with Cú Chulainn in his battle fury: both men are described by the verb *siabraid*, 'arouses to fury, distorts, transforms; enchants, bewitches'. Nagy furthermore refers to M.-L. Sjoestedt ('Légendes épiques irlandaises et monnaies gauloises: recherches sur la constitution de la légende de Cuchulainn', *Études Celtiques 1* (1936) 1–77: 13), who compares the way in which both men have their mouths stretched wide open, Cú Chulainn again in his battle fury. Nagy ('Beowulf and Fergus', 40) then links the two parallels (the *muirdris*:Cú Chulainn and Fergus:Cú Chulainn), concluding the following: 'Thus the monster in effect inflicts a second-function condition upon Fergus, facial distortion, which shows him for what he is and disqualifies him from kingship' (i.e. Fergus is too much of a warrior to be a good king). Carey also connects the motif of battle fury with the *muirdris*. In the context of the etymology of *bolg*, Carey ('*Fir Bolg*: a native etymology revisited', *Cambridge Medieval Celt Stud 16* (1988) 77–83: 81) refers to the Germanic verb *\*belgan* which seems to mean 'to swell with anger'. He connects this with the fact that the *muirdris* is compared with a *bolg ngobenn* and mentions that Fergus's distortion is indicated by *ro siapartha*. Carey (82) points out: 'It is interesting that the monster's distension is here linked with a facial distortion reminiscent of Cú Chulainn's *riastrad*' (i.e. distortion). He then quotes from the late Old-Irish *Triads of Ireland* in which a monster (the Beast (*Mil*) of Leittir Dallán) with a human head and a body like a smith's bellows (*builc gobann*) is mentioned (K. Meyer, *The triads of Ireland*, Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin & London 1906) 30–31), and concludes: 'I would suggest that these bellows-like water-monsters represent an oblique survival of the concept of the distended warrior ...' (Carey, '*Fir Bolg*', 83). Although the findings of these scholars are interesting, I believe that more research has to be done into these motifs. For instance, I would like to point out that the movement of the *muirdris* is a continuous repetition, whereas the warrior fury of Cú Chulainn is a temporary state with a useful function (to fight better) which comes over him when needed and, moreover, Fergus enters a permanent state with a disqualifying function (he should no longer be king) for which there seems to be no solution. Carey calls the Beast of Leittir Dallán a water monster, but the text does not say this. The monster's father is a water monster (a water horse, or *ech usci*). Furthermore, it is not the *muirdris* itself that is compared with a smith's bellows but its expansion and contraction.



EF	TB	TT	(SC)
<i>ala nuair—</i>	<i>aitherruch</i>	<i>re nuair</i>	<i>iterum</i>
<i>in uair aili</i>			
<i>muirdris</i>	<i>míl</i>	<i>súgmairi</i>	whirlpool
—	tides	tides	whirlpool

The repetition is also given in the text about the monster in the Indian Ocean, because the swallowing and spewing are directly connected with ebb and flow, although there is no specific word that indicates the continuous movement.

The bellows of a smith, or *bolg ngobenn*, presents another clue in this line of reasoning. The word *bolg* has many meanings:<sup>73</sup> it is a bellows, a bag, a belly, a bubble, a blister, and so forth. One of the monsters from part II is not compared with a *bolg* like the *muirdris*, but it has a *bolg*. The *muirselche* sucks people into its treasure bag (*istad-bolc*). As I mentioned in that context, the beast is closely connected with water: it ebbs away together with the magic sea in which it lives. In *Duanaire Finn* another interesting *bolg* occurs, which is connected with the movement of water.<sup>74</sup> The bag is called *Corrbholg*, ‘crane-bag’, and contains several treasures. The treasures are visible when the sea floods, and the bag is empty when the sea is in ebb. Finally, the word *muirbolc*<sup>75</sup> means ‘sea-bag’, and designates an inlet of the sea. This is a place where the movement of the tides is well visible. The seawater flows in and out of it as if into and out of a ‘bag’. The place where the *muirdris* lives is an inlet of the sea.

The location of the *muirdris* forms the last part of my line of reasoning in which I try to connect the *muirdris* with the movement of water. Loch Rudraige has been identified as Dundrum Bay.<sup>76</sup> This inlet of the sea consists of an inner and outer bay. The inner bay is not very deep when the tide is

73. Carey, ‘*Fir Bolg*’.

74. E. Mac Neill, *Duanaire Finn* i, ITS 7 (London 1904–08) 21–22 (text), 118–20 (translation); dated to ‘the 13th century, or perhaps the very late Middle Irish period’ (G. Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* iii, ITS 43 (Dublin [1941] 1953) 20). I am indebted to John Carey for this reference.

75. See DIL, s.v. *muir*: — *bolc* (*bolg*), ‘a sea bag’, inlet of the sea. It is mentioned as a place name in, for example, VC i 12 (*Muirbolc paradisi*) and VC iii 23 (*Muirbolc már*). Cp. Sharpe’s notes (275) on these two places: about *Muirbolc paradisi* he says ‘the obvious candidate is the beautiful, enclosed Kenra Bay: its shape, and the fact that at low tide it is almost empty of water, make it fit the term *muirbolc* ...’ and *Muirbolc már* he also connects with this tidal phenomenon: ‘the emptying out of the sea at low tide may be the characteristic of a *muirbolc*’ (308). For other references to *muirbolc*, see DIL.

76. Binchy, 42.

out. As the king in the story needs a magic instrument to go underwater,<sup>77</sup> the location seems to be the outer bay.<sup>78</sup> The inner and outer bay are separated by a sandbank which would be Fertas Rudraige.<sup>79</sup> Fertas Rudraige is mentioned in the final quatrain of *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti*<sup>80</sup> and in a tenth-century poem called *Aidheda forni do huaislib Ereann*, 'The deaths of some of the nobles of Erin',<sup>81</sup> which refers to Fergus and the monster. Both Fertas and Loch Rudraige are described in the Irish annals as places where people drowned;<sup>82</sup> perhaps one can conclude that this place was dangerous because of certain currents and/or the sandbank.<sup>83</sup> The monster is thus located in a possibly dangerous inlet. Here the search for the *muidris* and the movement of water ends.

### CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to distinguish two lines of development in Irish texts which give examples of the personification of the movement of water. The first part dealt with the older line: early Hiberno-Latin texts used a name from classical mythology (Charybdis) as a technical term for whirlpools. These older texts in Latin did not connect the theme of swallowing and spewing monsters with the movement of water. A later text in Irish, *Cormac's Glossary*, described a whirlpool in personifying terms. The later Hiberno-Latin *Life of Ciarán* showed a development from *carubdis* as term for whirlpool to a reference to classical Charybdis accompanied by a personifying image of the whirlpool itself. In the second part, Middle-Irish texts about monsters moving water

77. This is either herbs to put in his ears (EF §4) or a mantle to put around his head (§5).

78. However, according to OG 'L. Rudraige was the old name of the inner bay of Dundrum'.

79. OG 'f. rudraige; ... prob. the passage betw. the inner and the outer bay at Dundrum, c. Down, *Fertas* signifying a ford, crossing, or passage'.

80. Binchy, 39 §9.

81. W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'On the deaths of some Irish heroes', *Revue Celtique* 23 (1902) 303-48: 304.

82. Both Rudraige and Fergus mac Leiti drown in Loch Rudraige (AFM i 6-7; ATig=*Revue Celtique* 16 (1895) 404); in 924 a fleet of foreigners drowned in Loch Rudraige (AFM 922 [=924]) or they foundered and drowned at Fertas Rudraige (AU 924).

83. Opinions differ about the dangers of Dundrum Bay in more recent times. I was told by elderly local shopkeepers (17-3-1995) that it used to be very difficult to bring a boat from the outer into the inner bay, not only because of the sandbank but also given the dangerous 'swirls' in the outer bay. However, as environmental consultant David G. Erwin wrote to me (pers. comm. 5-9-1995): 'Making an entrance to the inner bay at low tide is always relatively difficult due to lack of water and the residual current. This is particularly true during an easterly gale when conditions can become severe. I know of no 'swirls' or whirlpools in the area and most of the time it is relatively sheltered and quiescent. Much more difficult conditions with very strong currents, whirlpools etc. exist close by at Strangford Lough'.

were given. Several beasts are characterised as swallowing and spewing, a motif that some texts explicitly connect with causing the tides. In the final part I suggested the possibility that one might place the *muidris* from *Echtra Fergusa maic Leiti* at the beginning of this second line. This monster, with its characteristic of expansion and contraction, living in an inlet of the sea and compared with a *bolg*, could perhaps be seen as embodying the later ideas in a nutshell, although the aspects are not yet explicit.