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OMENS, ORDEALS AND ORACLES: ON DEMONS AND WEAPONS IN EARLY IRISH TEXTS¹

JACQUELINE BORSJE

ABSTRACT. The account of a sword ritual in *Serglige Con Culainn* involves references to two different kinds of divination, reflected in two consecutive sentences in the text: the first describes the ritual as an ordeal, the second as an oracle. The supernatural source of the oracle is identified as 'demons' by the text. It is here argued that the religious and literary background of these demons is formed by certain types of supernatural battle creature, especially the Irish war goddesses.

KEYWORDS: divination, omens, oracles, ordeals, prophecy, demons, war goddesses, Furies, lamia, Lilith, weapons, Semitic mythology, Classical mythology, Irish glosses, medieval Irish literature, Jerome, Eriugena, Isaiah, *Aeneid*, *Thebaid*, *Pharsalia*, *Serglige Con Culainn*, *Cath Maige Tuired*, *Táin bó Cúailnge*, *Brisleach mór Maige Muirthemne*, *Togail na Tebe*, *In cath catharda*.

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When people seek insight into the future or the unknown in a 'supernatural' or 'metaphysical' way, they may make use of several types of divination. They observe certain phenomena from the natural world and interpret these as messages from the supernatural world about hidden things or the future. A sword ritual, described in *Serglige Con Culainn*² is connected with divination in that it deals with human declarations about deeds in the past, the truthfulness of which apparently cannot be tested in the natural way (by the five human senses). Therefore, supernatural sanctions are hinted at to test the truth of the verbal utterances.

This paper is an attempt to reconstruct some of the religious ideas upon which this description of the sword ritual may have been based. Part I focuses upon the passage in which the ideas about this ritual are described. They will be put

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Tionól of the School of Celtic Studies, DIAS (21 November 1998). I thank Proinsias Mac Cana, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Micheál Ó Cearúil for their help. I am especially indebted to John Carey for giving me ample bibliographical information and advice. Translations in this paper are mine, unless otherwise stated.

2. Myles Dillon (ed), *Serglige Con Culainn*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 14 (Dublin 1953, repr. 1975) [hereafter SCC]; id. (tr), 'The wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn', *Scott Gael Stud* 7 (1953) 47–88. This is considered to be an eleventh-century compilation of ninth-century texts. See further R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle 1921, repr. 1979) 413–16; Myles Dillon, 'On the text of *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Éigse* 3 (1941–42) 120–29; and T. K. Salberg, 'The question of the main interpolation of H into M's part of the *Serglige Con Culainn* in the *Book of the Dun Cow* and some related problems', *Z Celt Philol* 45 (1992) 161–81.

within the broader scope of similar phenomena in early Irish literature, which entail ordeals, oracles and omens. Parts II and III are an inquiry into the background of the supernatural creatures mentioned in this passage. Part II focuses upon supernatural battle creatures; Part III deals with some aspects of the war goddesses.

I. THE SWORD RITUAL: ORDEAL AND ORACLE

Serglige Con Culainn begins with a description of the fair of Samain (§1). At this time of the year, the men of Ulster declare their victories (§2). They bring as evidence the tongues of the men that they have killed. Some of them also bring the tongues of cattle in order to increase the amount. Each of them boasts in turn, literally 'with their swords on their thighs'.³ The text explains:

*Ar imsoitis a claidib fríu in tan dognítis gúchomram. Deithbir ón, ar no labraitis demna fríu dia n-armaib conid de batir comarchi forro a n-airm*⁴
 'For their swords used to turn against them when they would declare a false victory. That [is] right, for demons used to speak to them from their weapons, so that their weapons were thus guarantees for them'.

This section gives the impression that two voices are speaking here. The first sentence describes the usual course of events and the second sentence comments upon this. Each sentence represents a different belief system, in my opinion, and I will deal separately with them.

A sword turns against its owner when this person does not speak the truth about the acts performed with it. This first sentence should be read against the background of ideas about *fír*, 'truth, justice', a religious ethical norm in early Irish literature. A person who utters a statement that is discordant with the truth or justice, runs the risk of being struck by a supernatural sanction.⁵ There are many well-known examples of this idea in the literature. Kings who pronounce unjust judgments cause the land to become infertile and the social order to be disrupted.⁶ Visionaries of the *tarbfeis*, 'bullfeast, bullsleep', who lie about their

3. SCC §2, line 14: *a claidib fora sliastaib*.

4. SCC §2, lines 15–17.

5. See further 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) 73–75.

6. See, for instance, M. Draak, 'Some aspects of kingship in pagan Ireland', *Studies in the history of religions*, *Supplements to Numen* 4: *The sacral kingship* (Leiden 1959) 651–63; C. Watkins, 'Is tre fír flathemon: marginalia to *Audacht Morainn*', *Ériu* 30 (1979) 181–98; K. McCone, *Pagan past and christian present in early Irish literature*, *Maynooth Monographs* 3 (Maynooth 1990) 121–23.

vision will die.⁷ Thus, the sword of the man lying about his acts with this sword will no longer bring victory to its owner.

This idea is found in a positive way in a Middle-Irish poem addressed to the sword of Cerball mac Muirecáin, king of Leinster:⁸

*Ní rabadais lá madma
ac Cerball na cáemgarda,
nir athuig⁹ lugi n-éthig,
ni thánic dar a bréthir.¹⁰*

You were not [on] a day of defeat
with Cerball of the beautiful gardens
he did not swear a false oath
he did not break his word.

King Cerball did not suffer any defeat, for he did not commit perjury and kept

7. This is a type of oracle to discover the identity of the new king of Tara. It is found in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* §11 (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The destruction of Dá Derga's hostel', *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901) 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437. Stokes's edition and translation of §1 to the first five words of §21 is based on the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318, olim H. 2. 16) and the rest on *Lebor na hUidre*; E. Knott (ed), *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 8 (Dublin 1936, repr. 1963). Knott's edition [hereafter TBDD] is based on the Yellow Book of Lecan; translated into Dutch by M. Draak & F. de Jong, *Van helden, elfen en dichters: de oudste verhalen uit Ierland* (Amsterdam 1979, repr. 1986) 148–201; and into English by J. Gantz, *Early Irish myths and sagas* (New York 1981) 61–106. The text is an eleventh-century compilation of ninth-century versions (Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 627). The outcome of the oracle is disputed in this text, but the future king is able to convince his audience of his right to rule (§15). The *tarbfeis* is also described in SCC §§22–23. However, here the reference to the supernatural sanction is absent. The future king announced by the visionary of the *tarbfeis* in SCC is Lugaid Réoderg. Interestingly, the outcome of the oracle is not disputed in this text but elsewhere. In the Old-Irish *De síl Chonairi Móir* (L. Gwynn (ed. & tr.), 'De síl Chonairi Móir', *Ériu* 6 (1912) 130–43: 134, 138–39; dated to the eighth century, Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 619), several oracles of the kings of Tara are described and the text explicitly says that Lugaid is not acknowledged in this manner. Moreover, in the Middle-Irish *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* §§309, 326, 361 (R. A. S. Macalister (ed. & tr.), *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: the book of the taking of Ireland* [hereafter LG] iv, ITS 41 (London 1941, repr. 1987), 110–13, 144–45, 174–75) one of these ordeals of the kings of Tara is described: the stone of Fál, imported by the Túatha Dé Danann, which cries out under a future king. This text states that the stone did not cry out under Cú Chulainn and his foster-son Lugaid Réoderg. LG relates furthermore that Jesus Christ's birth ends this ordeal by breaking the 'powers of the idols' (*cumachta na n-idal*, *ibid.* 112). For more about *cumachta(e)*, see below.

8. Ascribed to Dallán mac Móire, *ollam* of Cerball; because it refers to the king's successor (§21), it cannot have been composed before the death of the king in 909 (K. Meyer (ed. & tr.), 'The song of the sword of Cerball', *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899) 7–12: 7).

9. This form seems to be a contamination of *ad-thuichethar* and *luigid/lugaid*. I am indebted to Proinsias Mac Cana for this suggestion.

10. Meyer, 'The song', 12 §17.

his word.¹¹

The supernatural sanction involved here does not concern simple lies but it is connected with public announcements, which are more or less official.¹² The visionary of the bullfeast announces the new king. The judging king gives a verdict of social importance. I interpret the boasting men with their swords on their thighs as men who swear an oath on their weapons.¹³

There are numerous examples of this kind of oath in early Irish sagas.¹⁴ One is found in *Táin bó Froích*,¹⁵ in which the hero Froech says: *Do-tung-se tarmo sciath ocus tarmo chlaideb ocus tarmo threlam*,¹⁶ 'I swear on my shield and on my sword and on my equipment'.

The meaning of the first sentence that refers to the sword ritual in the passage from *Serglige Con Culainn* is clear. The false oath calls forth a supernatural sanction. The sword as guarantee of the truth will be the instrument through which this sanction will be implemented. What we have here is a reference to the ordeal by battle: the next battle fought by the lying boaster will end in his defeat, for his sword will no longer serve him.¹⁷

The second sentence in the passage from *Serglige Con Culainn* could be taken as a possibly christian rationalisation. The author or compiler would not

11. For more about *briathar* in oath formulas, see R. Ó hUiginn, 'Tongu do Dia toinges mo thuath and related expressions', D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach & K. McCone (ed), *Sages, saints and storytellers: Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney*, Maynooth Monographs 2 (Maynooth 1989) 332–41: 335. It should be noted that according to one tradition, Cerball died from a wound caused by a fall from his horse onto his own lance (see FA², 166–67). The fact that this did not happen during combat argues against an interpretation of this event as an example of the idea that a weapon turns against its owner. There are of course also examples in the literature in which historical reality contradicts religious ideology. Another tradition about Cerball's death exemplifies this: according to a stanza in the same annals (FA², 164–65: 'Olc orm-sa ...'), this king was killed by a foreigner.

12. cp. P. O'Leary, 'Verbal deceit in the Ulster cycle', *Éigse* 21 (1986) 16–26: 22–23.

13. cp. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 30, note to 15.

14. See Ó hUiginn, 'Tongu do Dia', 333 (8), 335 (16), 336 (22). Endnote 8, which refers to example (8) on p 333, should read: Patrick M. MacSweeney (ed. & tr.), *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, ITS 5 (London 1904) 26.7–8.

15. W. Meid (ed. & tr.), *Die Romanze von Froech und Findabair: Táin bó Froích* (Innsbruck 1970); the text is dated to the first half of the eighth century (W. Meid (ed), *Táin bó Fraich*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 22 (Dublin 1967, repr. 1974) xxv).

16. Meid, *Die Romanze*, 36.150.

17. See also the impressive theory of R. M. Scowcroft ('Abstract narrative in Ireland', *Ériu* 46 (1995) 121–58: 127–30) about the creative wordplay and metaphors in SCC §2. Central are the 'points that speak', which refer to the human tongues and the swords. See further J. F. Nagy, 'Sword as *audacht*', A. T. E. Matonis & D. F. Melia (ed), *Celtic language, Celtic culture: a festschrift for Eric P. Hamp* (Van Nuys CA 1990) 131–36, for another example of a 'speaking' sword: in *Scél na fir flatha, Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri ocus ceart claidib Cormaic* (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The Irish ordeals, Cormac's adventure in the Land of Promise, and the decision as to Cormac's sword', W. Stokes & E. Windisch (ed), *Irische Texte* III.1 (Leipzig 1891) 183–229), the play is on oral and written testimonies. See, however, J. Carey, 'The testimony of the dead', *Éigse* 26 (1992) 1–12: 7–8, where he convincingly argues for a late Middle-Irish legal

have recognised the image of swords turning against their owners as something taking place in a future combat but instead would have interpreted it literally as 'speaking swords', which immediately would have commented upon the lie. The next step would have been the ascription of this speech to demonic activity, because speaking objects might have been considered incredible.

However, this is an unacceptable simplification. Firstly, a christian author or compiler would probably know of the type of ordeal, in which the result of a battle is decided by a supernatural power. The morally good warrior would win, the evil one—here, the liar—would lose. The controlling supernatural power could be characterised as fate or God, but that is not of much importance here. The way this ordeal is phrased in *Serglige Con Culainn* does not say anything about its religious origin: it could have just as well have its roots in pre-christian as in christian culture. Secondly, the reference to demons who speak through swords is not unique. There are more speaking weapons to be found in early Irish literature, whether or not inspired by demons. It seems as if this latter idea has superseded the association with the ordeal in the mind of the author or compiler.

*Cath Maige Tuired*¹⁸ gives an example of these 'living' or demonic weapons, which bears some resemblance¹⁹ to the instance in *Serglige Con Culainn*:

Isan cath-sin didiu fúair Oghma tréfer Ornai, claidiomh Tet[h]ra ri Fomore. Tofoslaicc Ogma in claideb 7 glanais hé. Is and sin roindis an claideb nach ndernad de, ar [ba] béss do claidbib an tan-sin dotorsilcitis doadhbadis na gnimha dogníthea díb in tan-sin. Conid de sin dlegaid claidme cíos a nglantai íarna tosluccad. Is de dano forcométar brechda hi cloidbib ó sin amach. Is aire immorro nolabraidis demna d'armaib isan aimsir-sin ar noadraddis airm ó dainib isin ré-sin 7 ba do comaircib na haimsire-sin na hairm 'Now in that battle Ogma the champion found Orna, the sword of Tethra, king of the Fomoir. Ogma unsheathed the

background of the text, in which the status of the claimant is more important than the question whether testimonies are written or oral.

18. E. A. Gray (ed. & tr.), *Cath Maige Tuired: the second battle of Mag Tuired* [hereafter CMT], ITS 52 (Naas 1982, repr. 1995); the text is an eleventh-century redaction of ninth-century material (ibid. 11).

19. J. Carey, 'The uses of tradition in *Serglige Con Culainn*', J. P. Mallory & G. Stockman (ed), *Ulidia: proceedings of the first international conference on the Ulster cycle of tales* (Belfast 1994) 77–84: 78) has drawn attention to verbal correspondences between these two texts: *no labraitis demna fríu dia n-armaib conid de batir comarchi forro a n-airm* (SCC) and *no labraidis demna d'armaib ... 7 ba do comaircib na haimsire-sin na hairm* (CMT). He notes the univerbation and Middle-Irish usage of the independent personal pronoun in the passage from CMT (quoted below). Moreover, he kindly pointed out to me that Middle-Irish forms can also be found in other retrospective passages in CMT. For more about Carey's views on the historicist perspective of the Middle-Irish redactor of CMT, see his 'Myth and mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*', *Studia Celtica* 24–25 (1989–90) 53–69: 54, and on romanticising and rationalising tendencies in Middle-Irish texts, see his 'The three things required of a poet', *Ériu* 48 (1997)

sword and cleaned it. Then the sword told what had been done by it, because it was the habit of swords at that time to recount the deeds that had been done by them whenever they were unsheathed. And for that reason swords are entitled to the tribute of cleaning after they have been unsheathed. Moreover spells have been kept in swords from that time on. Now the reason why demons used to speak from weapons then is that weapons used to be worshipped by men and were among the sureties of that time'.²⁰

Like the passage from *Serglige Con Culainn*, this piece of text seems also to consist of a narrative part and a commentary. The commentary both explains and creates a distance. The commentary interprets the cleaning as a tributary ritual performed by people in gratitude for the revelations of a sword. This ritual is further interpreted as veneration. The speaking by swords is ultimately ascribed to demons, which would be based upon the veneration of weapons. The commentary creates a distance from what is described by stating explicitly no less than five times²¹ that these things took place in another period.²² This text affirms some ideas found in the passage from *Serglige Con Culainn*: weapons are guarantees for the truth about battle deeds. Weapons know what has been done with them and either they or demons can report that.

There are also weapons described in the literature that seem to be 'alive' in a different manner. In *The death of Maelodrán mac Dimma Cróin*²³ one can read the following about a spear:

*cech oén ná fácbad ni lee, nolinged fothib co-cuired a n-ár*²⁴ 'everyone who did not leave anything with it [the spear]—it would leap among them and make a slaughter of them'.

This spear thus fights on its own accord. Moreover, it expects a tribute. It is interesting to note that in the version in Rawlinson B 502, the spear receives demonic help:

Nach oen arthiagdais secce meni facbaitis ni lee, nosluaded demun 7 nolinged foitheib co cuired a n-ar 'And whenever any one went past without leaving anything with it, a demon would move it, and it would

41–58.

20. Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 68–69 §162.

21. '... an tan-sin ... in tan-sin ... isan aimsir-sin ... isin ré-sin ... na haimsire-sin ...'.

22. The sentence about the tribute of cleaning is in the present tense and the sentence about the spells refers to a custom that has existed *since* that period.

23. Kuno Meyer (ed. & tr.), 'The story of the death of Maelodrán mac (or húa) Dimma Chróin', *Hibernica minora, Anecdota Oxoniensia* (Oxford 1894) 76–81, re-ed. by David Greene, *Fingal Rónáin and other stories, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 16* (Dublin 1955, repr. 1975) 51–54. The text is Old Irish (*ibid.* 47). Meyer prints the text from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 512, and Rawlinson B 502.

leap among them and make a slaughter of them.²⁵

The idea that demons cause weapons to be alive forms an integral part of the narrative in this manuscript. It is not part of a commentary upon the narrative. In the two versions of this text, the ideas exist independently: in one manuscript, the spear itself moves; in the other, a demon moves the spear.²⁶

There are other weapons in early Irish sagas that are more or less 'alive' without the intervention of a demon. There is an instance in *Mesca Ulad*,²⁷ in which not only Cú Chulainn jumps, but also his weapons: *forróebling a gaisced forsind aurochut*,²⁸ 'his weapons jumped on/over the fore-bridge'.²⁹ Another example is from *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, where we find a more or less 'living' lance, called the *Lúin* ('the Lance'), to which personifying terms are applied.³⁰ When this lance is ready to shed blood, it has to be quenched regularly in a cauldron with poison; otherwise the lance will catch fire. Used in battle, this weapon is extremely dangerous. In the same text, weapons fall on the ground three times,³¹ and then make a *grith*, 'shout, din, uproar'.³² In the

24. Meyer, 78 §6 (from Rawlinson B 512).

25. Meyer, 78 (text), 81 (translation).

26. This spear is also mentioned in the prose *dindsenchas* about Móin Gai Glais (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), 'The prose tales in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*', *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894) 272–336, 418–84: 305–06). Here, it is said that only a demon would move it. (Stokes translates 'the devil', which is also possible, but considering the other examples of this motif, 'a demon' seems to be a more likely translation.) It could very well be that the motif of the movement by a demon is secondary, inserted in Rawlinson B 502 and from there taken over in the prose *dindsenchas*. My point, however, is the existence of different religious ideas side by side in the literature, either within one text or distributed over variant versions of a text.

27. J. C. Watson (ed), *Mesca Ulad* [hereafter MU], Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 13 (Dublin 1941, repr. 1983) §56; J. T. Koch (tr), 'The intoxication of the Ulstermen', J. Koch & J. Carey, *The Celtic heroic age: literary sources for ancient Celtic Europe and early Ireland and Wales* (Andover MA 1994, repr. 1997) 95–117 (dated to the twelfth century by Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 473).

28. MU, lines 911–12.

29. cp. also how in the YBL version of TBDD, weapons jump towards a warrior: *La sodain for-ling a gaiscead dia chobair* 'Thereupon his weapons leap to his aid' (TBDD §57, lines 510–11). The other manuscripts read *dia cobair*, which results in the translation: 'Thereupon he leaps to his weapons in order to help them' (i.e. his people whom he believes to be under attack). According to Knott (TBDD 82), YBL represents the original idea. Another example is found in *Fled Bricrenn* (G. Henderson (ed. & tr.), *Fled Bricrend: the feast of Bricriu* [hereafter FB], ITS 2 (London 1899) §15; dated to the eleventh century with older strata by G. Mac Eoin, 'The dating of Middle Irish texts', *Proc Br Acad* 68 (1982) 109–37: 119, 121): *taurlaingset a claidbi a triúr* (FB, line 23), 'their three swords (lit.: their swords, the three of them) jumped down'. In Henderson's translation (*Fled Bricrend*, 15), the three main characters seize their swords (compare also the edition *claidbiu* (acc. pl.) LU line 8200; but the Codex Vossianus version (L. C. Stern, '*Fled Bricrend* nach dem Codex Vossianus', *Z Celt Philol* 4 (1903) 143–77: 153) reads: *taurlingid a claidmi a triar*. For *claidbi* as a nom. pl. form, see DIL, s.v. *claideb*. I am grateful to John Carey for his helpful advice on this FB passage.

30. TBDD §§128–29.

31. TBDD §§55, 109, 110.

older translation,³³ the weapons utter a cry, while they clatter according to the more recent translations.³⁴ The Irish is ambiguous: when weapons make a noise, both din and cries can be understood by it.

If one applies this information to the passage from *Serglige Con Culainn*, then two lines of reasoning emerge. The first is conveyed by the first sentence. Weapons are an instrument of a supernatural power, while serving in an ordeal that testifies to the truth. The result of an ordeal by battle³⁵ gives a clear message, even though it is not verbal. The second sentence changes the concept: the scene moves from an ordeal to an oracle. The instrument that is the guarantee of truth pronounces a verbal message in a supernatural way. The text explicitly names the supernatural power involved as ‘demons’. Who or what are these demons?

II. DEMONS AND BATTLE CREATURES

Demons are mentioned once more at the end of *Serglige Con Culainn*. When the story has been told, the text concludes as follows:

*Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, 7 ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib 7 co taisféntais aibniusa 7 diamaíri dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no cretea dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde 7 áes síde*³⁶ ‘That is the vision of destruction [shown] to Cú Chulainn by the people of the fairy mound(s) (*áes síde*). For the demonic power was great before the faith, and it was so great that demons used to fight bodily with the human beings and they used to show pleasures and secret places to them, as if they were permanent. It is thus that they used to be believed in. So that it is those visions that the ignorants call “fairy mounds” (*síde*) and “people of the fairy mound(s)” (*áes síde*)’.

This final section appears to be a commentary on the preceding story. The first sentence is perhaps a built-in title of the narrative.³⁷ Then the commentary fol-

32. DIL s.v. *grith* gives as general translation ‘shout, outcry’, but adds that it is often confused with *crith*, ‘trembling’ (for the meaning quoted in the main text, see sub (e); see also J. Vendryes, ‘Hibernica’, *Revue Celtique* 28 (1907) 137–43: 138–41). In TBDD §55, the hostel is shaken: therefore here the meaning ‘trembling’ could be implied as well; the context of §§109–10 makes it clear that here a sound is meant, since the weapons are already moving in the air before they clatter on the ground.

33. Stokes, ‘Destruction of Dá Derga’s hostel’, 54, 286–87.

34. Draak & De Jong, *Van helden, elfen en dichters*, 165, 190; Gantz, *Early Irish myths*, 75, 95 (cp. Knott, TBDD, 82).

35. John Carey draws my attention to the possibility of another type of ordeal here: the swords could be meant to wound the lying boasters on the spot. See, for instance, how the ordeals mentioned in §§14–15, 17, 21, 23–24 of *Scél na fir flatha* harm guilty or lying persons.

36. SCC §49, lines 844–49.

lows, which both offers interpretation and creates a distance. The interpretative part, introduced by *ar*, 'for', serves to distance the author on the one hand from events in the pre-Christian past and on the other hand from ignorant contemporaries. The latter should know better: since the advent of Christianity, such supernatural apparitions should not be called *áes síde* but *demna*. It is interesting to note that the text has just been concluded by a title which employs this condemned term *áes síde*.

Nevertheless, the commentary links up closely with the preceding narrative. The greatness of the pre-Christian power of demons is stated. The word for 'power', *cumachta(e)*,³⁸ occurs once before in the text. Cú Chulainn wants to catch two birds that are connected by a golden chain and that have alighted on a lake. He is warned against this: *ar itá nách cumachta fora cúl na n-én sa*³⁹ 'for there is some power behind these birds'. By now, the reader knows that the 'birds with power' are women of the *síde*. This is, therefore, a subtle equation of the *áes síde* with demons. Then, the commentary refers to fighting, which was one of the occupations of Cú Chulainn in the Otherworld. 'Pleasure' characterises his second type of occupation there. The story describes several journeys to the Otherworld, and it seems to me that this is meant by the showing of 'secret places'. The text makes it clear that Lóeg and Cú Chulainn, who travel to the Otherworld, have to be accompanied by some kind of escort, someone from the Otherworld.⁴⁰ The last sentence refers once more to both the places (*síde*) and the people (*áes síde*) of the Otherworld, the main themes of the preceding narrative.

This final commentary, especially the use of the term 'demons', implies that the author or compiler must have had ambivalent feelings about the narrative. John Carey suggests that the author may have written the two references to demons in this text in order to 'disarm criticism of the keen interest in the Otherworld evinced in the body of the text, or perhaps even to atone for it'.⁴¹ Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, however, sees the final commentary as an 'adroit underpinning of the narrative'.⁴² He points out that the criticism is directed at the contemporaries who use religiously incorrect language. The events told in the story remain authentic: they were not created by a storyteller but by demons at a time when they were still powerful.

37. T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Reflections on *Compert Conchobuir* and *Serglige Con Culainn*', Mallory & Stockman, *Ulidia*, 85–89: 89.

38. For *cumachta(e)* in the sense of supernatural or magical powers, see DIL s.v.

39. SCC §7, line 62.

40. SCC §§14, 32, 35.

41. Carey, 'Uses of tradition', 83.

42. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Reflections', 89.

The ambivalent attitude also concerns how the demons were viewed. The demons in *Serglige Con Culainn* are not so utterly evil as, for instance, the demons in Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae*.⁴³ In the sword ritual, the demons ultimately serve the Truth⁴⁴ and in the final commentary, they are equated with the *áes síde*.

The main representatives of the *áes síde* in the narrative are likewise characterised in an ambivalent way. The two women have an ambivalent role in that they almost kill Cú Chulainn, while their aim is to invite him to the Otherworld for love and for fighting. The general terms which refer to them are neutral: they are called *mná*, 'women', and *ingena*, 'girls, daughters'. The text is more specific on five occasions. Firstly, Cú Chulainn calls them *mná síde*, 'women of the fairy mound(s)',⁴⁵ which indicates their supernatural character but says nothing about their benevolence or malevolence. Secondly, Lóeg calls them in the same section *genaiti*.⁴⁶ This term seems to refer to dangerous battle creatures.⁴⁷ However, a gloss in the text explains *genaiti* by the neutral term *mná*.⁴⁸ Thirdly, after a visit to the Otherworld, Lóeg is absolutely positive: they are 'Adam's sinless seed'.⁴⁹ Fourthly, the amorous woman describes herself by a neutral term: *sidaige*, 'dweller in a *síd*'.⁵⁰ At the end of the narrative, they appear again in a bad light when they are referred to as *demna*.

43. A. O. & M. O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (Edinburgh 1961, rev. ed. Oxford 1991); for a more recent translation, see R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth 1995); completed between 697 and 704, J.-M. Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 160–77: 167–69. In this *Vita*, demons attack saints, cause diseases and drag unfortunate souls to hell, thereby sometimes fighting with angels. They moreover inspire or help druids and violent men to do evil deeds (Borsje, *From chaos to enemy*, 102–05, 110–11, 166–68).

44. cp. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Reflections', 89. Note that the final passage of *Scél na fir flatha* §80 uses—like SCC—*taidbsiu* to refer to visions or apparitions of supernatural persons (a *scál*, 'a supernatural being, phantom, giant, hero') and supernatural places (*Tír Thairngiri*). Unlike SCC, these visions or apparitions are qualified as divine instead of demonic (note also the contrast between the *ecnaidi*, 'the wise, learned people', and the *anéolaig*, 'the ignorant', in SCC): *Acht adberaid na hecnaidi cach uair notaisbenta taibsi ingnad dona righflathaibh anall—amal adfaid in Scal do Chund, ⁊ amal tarfas Tír Thairngiri do Cormac—, conidh timtírecht diada ticedh fan samla sin, ⁊ conach timthírecht deamnach. Aingil immorro dos-ficed da chobair, ar is firindí aignidh dia lentais, air is timna Rechta rofoghnamh doibh* 'The wise declare that whenever any strange apparition was revealed of old to the royal lords, —as the ghost appeared to Conn, and as the Land of Promise was shewn to Cormac,— it was a divine ministration that used to come in that wise, and not a demoniacal ministration. Angels, moreover, would come and help them, for they followed Natural Truth, and they served the commandment of the Law' (Stokes, 'Ordeals', 202 (text), 220–21 (translation)).

45. SCC §28, line 313.

46. SCC §28, line 318.

47. see below.

48. SCC §28, note a.

49. SCC §34, line 558.

50. SCC §45, line 800.

While the identity of the so-called ‘demons’ in the concluding commentary is more or less clear, the identity of those from the sword ritual is still vague. I will now proceed in trying to discover something of their background. I begin with some examples from *Táin bó Cúailnge*,⁵¹ in which we find two types of cries: first, demonic cries specifically coming from armour and weapons, and second, more general demonic cries. The following is said about Cú Chulainn in Recension I:⁵²

Is and so ro gab a chírchathbarr catha 7 comraic 7 comlaind ima chend asa ngáired gáir chét n-óclách do sírégem cecha cúlí 7 cecha cerna de, dáig is cumma congáirtis de bánánaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinne 7 demna aeóir ríam 7 úaso 7 ina imt[h]imchiull cach ed no téged re testin fola na mmíled 7 na n-anglond sechtair ‘Then he put on his head his crested war-helmet of battle and strife and conflict. From it was uttered the shout of a hundred warriors with a long-drawn-out cry from every corner and angle of it. For there used to cry from it alike bánánaig, boccánaig, geniti glinne⁵³ and demons of the air before him and above him and around him wherever he went, prophesying the shedding of the blood of warriors and champions’.⁵⁴

There are several interesting points to observe in this passage. First, the impression is given that it is the helmet itself that shouts, but then the explanation is offered that demonic creatures are responsible for the noise. The demons that shout from weapons are here named: *bánánaig* could mean ‘pale creatures’,⁵⁵ *boccánaig* ‘he-goat creatures’,⁵⁶ and *geniti glinne* ‘female creatures of the valley’.⁵⁷ The function of these demonic creatures is rendered in O’Rahilly’s trans-

51. C. O’Rahilly (ed. & tr.), *Táin bó Cúailnge: recension I* [hereafter TBC I] (Dublin 1976), dated to the eleventh century by Thurneysen, ‘Zur keltischen Literatur und Grammatik’, *Z Celt Philol* 12 (1918) 271–89: 282; C. O’Rahilly (ed. & tr.), *Táin bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* [hereafter TBC L] (Dublin 1967), dated to the twelfth century by Thurneysen, *ibid.* 282; C. O’Rahilly (ed), *The Stowe version of Táin bó Cúailnge* [hereafter TBC S] (Dublin 1961), compiled in the fifteenth century according to O’Rahilly, *Stowe version*, p xxxi–xlvi; part translation by J. Dunn, *The ancient Irish epic tale Táin bó Cúailnge* (London 1914). All three versions have older strata.

52. cp. TBC L, lines 2255–59, TBC S, lines 2292–97. It should be noted that the passages from Recension I, quoted here in this context of cries from battle demons, are from the H-interpolations (*In carpat serda 7 Brisleach mór Maige Murthemne* and *Comruc Fir Diad*) and belong to a later stratum (see O’Rahilly, TBC I, p ix, n 2).

53. O’Rahilly translates ‘goblins, sprites, and spirits of the glen’. For my suggestion of translations that are somewhat closer to the Irish words, see below.

54. TBC I 68, lines 2237–42 (text), 186–87 (translation).

55. cp. *bán*, ‘white, bright, pale’, and *bánaid, bánaigid*, ‘turns pale, lays waste’; cp. P. L. Henry, ‘The goblin group’, *Études Celtiques* 8 (1958–59) 404–16: 406, and W. Sayers, ‘*Airdrech, sirite* and other early Irish battlefield spirits’, *Éigse* 25 (1991) 45–55.

56. cp. *boc, bocán*, ‘he-goat’.

57. W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), ‘O’Mulconry’s glossary’, W. Stokes & K. Meyer (ed), *Archiv für celtische Lexicographie* i (Halle 1900), 232–324, 473–481: 264, §640; the glossary is an Old-

lation as ‘prophesying bloodshed’. Since prophecy is strictly speaking a verbal message, whereas the demons are merely shouting, I suggest that we stay closer to the Irish, which literally reads: ‘before the shedding of the blood of warriors and champions (besides)’. Their shout should therefore be characterised as an omen of bloodshed.

Another example of these creatures mentioned as the source of noise from weapons occurs in the BL and the Stowe versions only. During the fight between Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad, the same four kinds of demon are said to scream from the rims of their shields, from the hilts of their swords and from the butt-ends of their spears.⁵⁸ In this example, an image is portrayed of the demonic creatures inhabiting weapons and shouting therefrom at the height of the fight.

This image of demons making sounds from armour and weapons is very similar to demons speaking from swords, with one important difference. The shouting demons do not give a verbal message but function as an omen (in the case of the helmet) and as a sign of intense fighting (in the case of the shields, swords and spears): they do not serve as an oracle. The principal function of the cries of the demons seems to be the heightening of the chaos and frenzy of battle.

The second type of demonic cries in *Táin bó Cuailgne* is not so closely connected with weapons but it does also occur in battle contexts. When Cú Chulainn sees the large number of enemies, he shakes his shield, spears and sword, and utters a hero’s shout. The *bánánaig*, *boccánaig*, *geniti glinne* and demons of the air respond in terror to this.⁵⁹ Thus, they seem to cry in fear of Cú Chulainn. This example is found in all recensions but another example is not present in Recension I. When Cú Chulainn mounts his chariot in order to fight Fer Diad, the four types of demon shout around him. They are now equated with the Túatha Dé Danann, who make Cú Chulainn more dread-

Irish compilation with a few Middle-Irish articles; according to E. Mac Neill (‘De origine Scoticae linguae’, *Ériu* 11 (1932) 112–29: 119, 113) §640 belongs to the Old-Irish stratum. §640 explains *gen(it)* as *ben*, ‘woman’: *Genit glinde .i. ben i nglinn. (gen .i. ben, glynnon .i. foglaid .i. banfoglaid bid a nglinn)* ‘*Genit glinde*, that is: a woman in a valley. (*gen*, that is: a woman; *non*, that is: a robber, that is: a female robber, who is in a valley’). cp. also a gloss in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1337 (olim H. 3. 18), edited by E. O’Curry: *Genit ghlinne, .i. gen .i. mulier glynnon. ben bid hi nglinn* (O’Curry (ed. & tr.), *Cath Mhuighe Léana: the battle of Magh Leana, together with Tochmarc Moméra, or the courtship of Momera* (Dublin 1855) 120–21, note c). Some modern etymologies connect *genit* with *gen*, ‘a smile, a laugh’ (see K. Meyer, ‘Zur keltischen Wortkunde, VI’, *Sitz-Ber K Preuss Akad Wiss* 35 (1914) 939–58: 942; Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 64; A. Heiermeier, *Indogermanische Etymologien des Keltischen* II, Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Keltologie und Irlandkunde an der Universität Würzburg (Würzburg 1956) 59–60). Liam Breatnach (‘Varia II. 1. Irish *geined* and *geinit*, Gaulish *geneta*, Welsh *geneth*’, *Ériu* 45 (1994) 195–96), however, rejects this and connects it with *geined*, meaning ‘someone or something created/brought into being; offspring, person, creation’. I follow the medieval etymology and Breatnach.

58. TBC L, lines 3326–29, TBC S, lines 3143–45.

inspiring in battle by their shouting.⁶⁰

These battle creatures occur in many other early Irish texts, often in the company of similar beings, like *ammaiti*, *badba*, *gelliti glinne*, *arrachta*, *siabra* etc.⁶¹ They hover above fighting armies, incite or frighten warriors; they shriek and they fight. Seldom do they give a verbal message. In my collection of texts so far, there are only four instances. Firstly, the three *ammaiti* or witches in *Brislech mór Maige Muirtheimne*⁶² who intend to make Cú Chulainn break his *geis* by forcing him to eat dog's flesh⁶³ are also called *geniti*.⁶⁴ They talk with

59. TBC I, lines 2081–84; TBC L, lines 2130–33; TBC S, lines 2168–71.

60. TBC L, lines 2845–49; TBC S, lines 2843–48. Note that not only is there ambivalence in the way the demons are described, but the demons also show ambivalent attitudes towards Cú Chulainn: they are afraid of him (cp. also the fear of the *bánánaig*, *bocánaig* and *geniti glinne* of the Donn Cúailnge in TBC L, lines 1326–28 and TBC S, lines 1362–64); they cry ominously from his helmet; they help him by shouting around him which makes him more frightful and they intensify the fighting by their screams.

61. To mention a few examples: *geniti glinne* scream at (*scréachaid*) and fight with Cú Chulainn in FB §§66–68, after his two competitors have been put to flight by these dangerous women. The *geniti*, also called *urtrochta* (LU) or *urtraig* (Egerton 93), 'sprites, phantoms' (see DIL s.v. *airdrech*), and *úatha*, 'horrible beings', beat and overpower Cú Chulainn, just as the *mná/geniti* in SCC. Only after a taunt by his charioteer which brings his heroic fury upon him is he able to conquer them and to fill the valley with their blood. Furthermore, in the late Middle-Irish *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* (J. H. Todd (ed. & tr.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib: the war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (London 1867) 174–75 (the text was probably composed between 1103 and 1113; M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib: some dating considerations', *Peritia* 9 (1995) 354–77), a *badb*, 'scaldcrow, or a form of a war goddess', arises, screaming (*scréachaid*; v.l. *gressacht*, 'inciting, egging on') and fluttering above the heads of fighting men. Pale creatures, he-goat creatures, mad creatures of the valley (*gelliti* or *geilte glinne*, see also DIL s.v. *genit*), witches (*ammaiti*) of destruction, spectres (*siabra*), hawks, (v.l. destructive) demons of the air and firmament and the inauspicious demonic host of spectres (*siabarsluag*) also arise; they incite and wage battles and strife among them. Finally, wherever Finn mac Cumhaill goes into battle, pale creatures, he-goat creatures, red-mouthed *badba*, female creatures of the valley, demons of the air and fluttering apparitions (*arrachta*) of the firmament shout (*gáirid*) and wage battles and strife above his head (Kuno Meyer (ed. & tr.), 'The chase of Síd na mBan Finn and the death of Finn', *Fianaigeacht*, Todd Lecture Series 16 (Dublin 1910, repr. 1993) 52–99 §40; dated to the 13th–14th centuries, *ibid.* p xxxi).

62. BL ii 442–57; R. Thurneysen (ed. & tr.), 'Aided ConCulainn', in 'Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern ii', *Abh K Ges Wiss Göttingen*, philol-hist Kl. NF 14 (Berlin 1913) 13–19 (ed. from Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1337, olim H. 3. 18); translation by M. Tymoczko, *Two death tales from the Ulster cycle: the death of Cu Roi and the death of Cu Chulainn*, Dolmen Texts 2 (Dublin 1981) 37–83 and John Carey, 'The death of Cú Chulainn', Koch & Carey, *The Celtic heroic age*, 124–33; dated to the 11th century with older strata (Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 548–49).

63. BL ii, lines 13881–93.

64. They are called *ammaiti* and *genite* in *Nuallguba Emire*, 'Emer's loud lamentation' (see BL lines 14233–34). Emer laments that the witches have destroyed (*millsit*) Cú Chulainn. One could compare this with Cú Chulainn's complaint that the women of the *síd* have destroyed him (SCC, line 313: *rom admilset*), just before they are called *genaiti* (line 318). It is also interesting to note that the Early Modern Irish version *Aided Con Culainn* (A. G. van Hamel (ed), *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 3 (Dublin 1933, repr. 1978)

the hero in order to make him break his *geis* so that he will be less powerful in battle and doomed to die. Their words cannot be seen as prophecies or oracular messages.

Secondly, three *badba* are described in an Early Modern-Irish interpolation⁶⁵ in the Stowe version of *Táin bó Cúailnge*.⁶⁶ They seem to fly around three moveable battle towers and they predict future events in battle in a verbal message.

The third example deals with a later form of the *geniti glinne*: the *gelliti glinne*. Two of them occur in what may be late Middle-Irish text about Cormac mac Airt.⁶⁷ They are two very beautiful, very destructive women. They want Cormac to worship them and the seven demons (*demna*) that are around each of them. Cormac puts himself under the protection of the true God, so that a terrible fate is averted: only spectres (*arrachta*) and idols would have been venerated in Ireland till Doom. These women converse with Cormac; they have some insight into the future but their utterances are not prophetic.

The last example is found in *Cath Maighe Léna*, an Early Modern-Irish text.⁶⁸ The text introduces Conn Cétchathach's three lovers from the *síd*, called At,

72–133, see §12) calls the three dangerous women *ingena*, *badba*, *ammaiti* and *fúatha* (= Old-Irish *úatha*).

65. O'Rahilly, *Stowe version*, p. xiii.

66. TBC S, lines 4591–4685: 4637–45; for a translation into German, see E. Windisch, *Die altirische Heldensage Táin Bó Cúailnge nach dem Buch von Leinster in Text und Übersetzung mit einer Einleitung*, W. Stokes & E. Windisch (ed), *Irische Texte* (Extraband, Leipzig 1905) 808–21: 816–17.

67. K. Meyer (ed. & tr.), 'Anecdota from Irish MSS I: Inmael and Inecen', *Gaelic J* 4 (1891) 69–70 (from the Book of Lecan and London, British Library, Egerton 92); R. M. Smith (ed), 'Cormac and the *geiltí glinni*', J. Fraser, P. Grosjean & J. G. O'Keefe (ed), *Irish texts iv* (London 1934) 16–17 (from Edinburgh MS V (Kilbride Collection 1). These women, who come from Alba, say that they are from the *Glaisdig* peoples and the race of the *geiltí glinne*. Meyer takes *Glaisdig* to be Glasteing or Glastonbury. However, this place is spelled *gloinestir*, *glastingibeira* in, for instance, glosses on *Féilire Óengusso* (Stokes, 'On the Calendar of Oengus', *Trans Roy Ir Acad* 1 (1880) p. cxxxii, n. 24). It is more likely that this word is connected with a creature from Scottish-Gaelic tradition, called *glaisdig*, *glaestig* or *glastig*. This is a dangerous female, sometimes half-woman, half-goat (cp. the *bocánaig*), at other times shaped as a beautiful woman, who offers sexual favours to a male victim, whose throat she cuts and whose blood she drinks afterwards (J. MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic mythology* (Oxford 1998) 224). See also E. Dwelly, *The illustrated Gaelic-English dictionary* (Glasgow 1901–11, repr. 1994) s.v. *glaisrig*, defined as a female fairy, half-human, half-beast, or a Gorgon, or a pale person (cp. the *bánánaig*), and the descriptions of the *glaisdig* in A. A. MacGregor, *The peat-fire flame: folktales and traditions of the Highlands and Islands* (Edinburgh & London 1937) 59–66, where mention is made of her loud yell (59) and piercing cry of premonition (60).

68. E. O'Curry, *Cath Mhuighe Léana*; K. Jackson (ed), *Cath Maighe Léna* [hereafter CM], *Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series* 9 (Dublin 1938, repr. 1990); dated to the last half of the 13th or the beginning of 14th century (xxiv). It should be noted that the texts of these two editions differ considerably.

Lann and Léna, who incite him to fight a battle.⁶⁹ They turn up again later in the story,⁷⁰ but now they have a horrible, hideous appearance. They are designated like battle creatures: *badba*, *arrachta*, *geniti*,⁷¹ *caillecha* and *fiúatha*. Like them, they cry and they shriek.⁷² Unlike them, they speak as well. They go to Conn's enemies to show and prophesy them their deaths.⁷³

In conclusion, the interpolation in *Táin bó Cúailnge* and *Cath Maighe Léna* describe battle creatures who utter a prophetic message connected with fights. The two examples are, however, rather late to serve as a possible background for the sword demons in *Serglige Con Culainn*. Therefore, another class of battle creatures will be investigated: the war goddesses.

III. DEMONS AND WAR GODDESSES

As in Part II, I start with an investigation of *Táin bó Cúailnge*. The war goddesses⁷⁴ in this narrative appear to have several functions in common with the above-described battle creatures. They shout in a battle context, which may serve as an omen for or a sign of a fight; their screaming leads to confusion and fear, and they incite warriors to strife and conflict.

An example of the divine shout as an omen for or a sign of a fight is given in a poem uttered by Fer Diad. He announces that the Badb will cry above the ford in which he will fight Cú Chulainn.⁷⁵

There are several references to an attack upon the armies by the war goddess (the) Nemain, sometimes glossed 'Badb'. This attack creates confusion and fear.⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that in these sections dealing with the divine attack, references to the noise of weapons and to battle creatures are sometimes also found; moreover, the context may be one of prophetic utterances about war.

The first mention of the attack by (the) Nemain or the Badb is found in Recension I only.⁷⁷ It is preceded by a prophetic trance vision. The result of the vision is a restless night for the army; the result of the attack is the army being

69. CM §§68–69; O'Curry, 90–95.

70. CM §§87–90; O'Curry, 118–25. The magical power of these women is designated *cumachta* (CM §88; O'Curry, 120), just as in the case of the women in SCC.

71. This designation is only given in O'Curry's edition.

72. This is designated *éigem* 'cry, scream' (CM §87; O'Curry, 120), *gréchaid*, 'cries out, screams, shouts', and *sgairt*, 'cry, shout' (in O'Curry only, 124).

73. Note that the last two examples give variant versions of motifs from SCC: beautiful, supernatural women who are destructive and lovers from the *sid* who make their favourite man fight.

74. See further, for instance, W. M. Hennessy, 'The ancient Irish goddess of war', *Revue Celtique* 1 (1870–72) 32–55, with an additional note by C. Lottner (55–57); Carey, 'Notes on the Irish war-goddess', *Éigse* 19 (1982–83) 263–75; M. Herbert, 'Transmutations of an Irish goddess', S. Billington & M. Green (ed), *The concept of the goddess* (London & New York 1996) 141–51.

75. TBC I, lines 2835–38; TBC L, lines 2805–08.

76. *Mescaid for*, 'attacks' (O'Rahilly, TBC I, 267); cp. the alternative rendering (ibid. 245): 'war-frenzy seized them'.

77. TBC I, lines 189–213: 210; for O'Rahilly's views on this passage, TBC L p xxxiii–xxxiv.

thrown into confusion until queen Medb calms them down.

The second mention⁷⁸ is in a passage already referred to in Part II: it concerns the scene where Cú Chulainn shakes his weapons in fury when he sees the multitude of his enemies. His shout is answered by the shout from the *bánánaig*, *bocánaig*, *geniti glinne* and demons of the air, which is followed by an attack by Nemain. This results in the enemy army making a clamour of arms (*armgrith*). A hundred warriors die from fright and terror. Thus Cú Chulainn frightens the battle creatures and the war goddess inspires fear in the warriors.

The phrase that describes the battle creatures' fear of Cú Chulainn⁷⁹ is echoed in the BL and Stowe versions of the third passage that deals with the attack of the war goddess.⁸⁰ Recension I relates the attack by (the) Nemain in a piece entitled *Aislinge Dubthaich*; the result of this is the death of 100 men, but no further details are given. In the BL version, which also gives a prophetic context, the attack is followed by the *armgrith* of the army. Then 100 men die because of the shouts they raise.⁸¹ The night is restless because of the prophecies, predictions, horrible beings or spectres (*fúatha*), and visions. We have here, therefore, another hint of the battle creatures, designated *fúatha*. The cries of fellow warriors are the cause of death of the frightened ones. In the Stowe version, we find a description of the scene similar to that in BL but here it is the shout of (the) Nemain that frightens the hundred to death.⁸²

The last two, almost identical, references to divine shouts are only found in the Yellow Book of Lecan-text of Recension I: the Badb, Bé Néit and Nemain shriek above the armies and thus cause a hundred men to die from fear.⁸³ No mention is made of an *armgrith*, nor is there any prophetic context in these instances.

These examples of divine shouts are non-verbal messages, functioning as an omen or a sign and creating confusion and fear. Verbal messages from the war goddesses are also attested in *Táin bó Cúailnge*. Two examples of verbal incitement by a war goddess occur. The first one takes place early in the *Táin* (and only in Recension I), when Cú Chulainn is still a boy. On a battlefield at night, he becomes engaged in a fight with a man with half a head. This spectre (spelled *aurddrag*)⁸⁴ overpowers him. Then the voice of the Badb sounds from among the corpses on the battlefield, inciting Cú Chulainn to fight. Thereupon, the young warrior overcomes the spectre (lines 492–502; cp. also how Cú Chulainn has to be incited by his charioteer when he has been overpowered by

78. TBC I, lines 2078–87; TBC L, lines 2127–36, TBC S, lines 2164–74.

79. TBC I, lines 2083–84: 're úathgráin na gáre dosbertatár ar aird'; TBC L, lines 2132–33: 're úathgráin na gáre dosbertatar ar aird'; TBC S, lines 2170–71: 're huathghrain na gaire do-rinde'.

80. TBC I, line 3537; TBC L, lines 4148–54; TBC S, lines 4058–63.

81. TBC L, line 4151: 're úathgráin na gáre rabertatar ar aird'.

82. TBC S, lines 4060–61: 're huatgráin na gaire do-bert ar aird'. According to O'Rahilly (TBC L, 335), Stowe's reading is perhaps to be preferred.

83. TBC I, lines 3942–44, 4033–35.

the *geniti glinne* in FB (see above), a female kind of *airdrech*).

The second example is found at the end of the *Táin*. When the enemy camps are pitched very close to each other on the eve of the battle, the Morrígan goes between them and utters poetical words, which refer to the battle, birds of slaughter, and blood. Recension I (lines 3877–83) presents this as a mixture of prophecy and incitement; in the BL (lines 4600–08) and Stowe versions (lines 4727–29) her words are an incitement, characterised as sowing strife (BL) and dissension (BL, Stowe).

Furthermore, there is an important encounter between the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn, in which threats are uttered which have a prophetic dimension. A beautiful woman, daughter of king Búan, offers Cú Chulainn her love, treasures and cattle. Cú Chulainn mentions his difficult position (facing a large number of enemies on his own). She offers her help, but the warrior refuses her, saying that he has not come for a woman's body. They then exchange a series of threats: the woman—in the title of the piece identified as the Morrígan—will attack Cú Chulainn while he is fighting his enemies in the form of three animals (an eel, a she-wolf and a heifer). Cú Chulainn replies that he prefers these shapes to the king's daughter; he will give her a wound that can only be cured by a 'judgment' blessing.⁸⁵ These threats have a prophetic character⁸⁶ in that they will be carried out later. The meeting between Cú Chulainn and the beautiful woman is described only in Recension I (lines 1845–71), the non-verbal encounter between the hero and the animal forms of the goddess are found in the three versions,⁸⁷ just as the final part⁸⁸ in which the Morrígan appears as an old woman (*sentonn*, *sentuinne*),⁸⁹ a witch or crone (*caillech*),⁹⁰ whose wounds are healed each of the three times she gives Cú Chulainn a drink of milk for which he blesses her. He does this without recognising her, but her last remark makes him acknowledge her identity.

The last example of a verbal message by a war goddess is a clear example of prophecy: the Morrígan foretells future events to the bull, the Donn Cúailnge, while she sits on a pillar stone (in Recension I in the form of a bird).⁹¹

84. DIL s.v. *airdrech*.

85. This seems to mean: by Cú Chulainn's own blessing.

86. TBC I, lines 2024–25, uses *do-airngir*, 'promises, foretells, prophesies', for Cú Chulainn's threats to the Morrígan. In TBC L, line 1990, and TBC S, line 2027, the verb *gellaid* is employed, which means 'pledges oneself, vows, promises', but also 'foretells' (see DIL). The three versions refer here to *Táin bó Regamna* (see below).

87. TBC I, lines 1982–2025; TBC L, lines 1989–2094; TBC S, lines 2026–132. For the differences between the versions, see O'Rahilly, TBC L, 309–11. The Morrígan is called 'the Bodb' in the poetry (TBC L, line 2058; TBC S, line 2097).

88. TBC I, lines 2038–55; TBC L, lines 2103–13; TBC S, lines 2141–51.

89. TBC I, line 2040; TBC L, line 2103; TBC S, line 2142.

90. TBC I, line 2040.

91. TBC I, lines 954–62; TBC L, lines 1303–17; TBC S, lines 1343–55. TBC L and TBC S then describe some virtues (*búada*) of the Bull. One of them is that neither pale creature nor he-

This survey from the *Táin* shows that war goddesses appear in battle contexts, in which they utter ominous, terrifying and inciting shouts, just like the battle creatures from Part II. The battle creatures are sometimes referred to in the same context and they are somewhat closer to the sword demons of *Serglige Con Culainn* in that they, too, are directly connected with weapons. This connection is more indirect in the case of the war goddesses: the most striking example is the *armgrith* caused by an attack by a war goddess, but this is less similar than the shouts from weapons and armour. However, what brings the war goddesses closer to the oracular utterances of the sword demons are their prophetic words in battle contexts.⁹² This prophetic function of the war goddesses is not only found in the *Táin* but also in other early Irish texts.⁹³

With regard to a possible background for the sword demons, some evidence is now needed concerning the characterisation of battle creatures and war goddesses as ‘demons’ in early Irish texts. The occurrence of ‘demons of the air’ as battle creatures has already been noted in Part II. I will now argue that the war goddesses were also sometimes designated ‘demons’. Several glosses indicate this and furthermore, there appears to be a line of reasoning in glosses and early Irish narrative texts that connects war goddesses with female deities of the underworld from classical mythology, who could also be classified as ‘demons’.

In two glossaries, the Morrígan in a plural form is equated with (false) demons. First, in a glossary on *Bretha nemed déidenach* it is said:⁹⁴

Gudomhuin .i. fennóga l bansigaidhe; ut est glaidhomuin .g. .i. na demuin. goacha, na morrigna. l go conach deamain iat na bansighaide, go conach

goat creature nor female creature of the valley dares to come in his district (TBC L, lines 1326–28; TBC S, lines 1362–64).

92. It seems that in the Early Modern-Irish period, there is an interchange between the functions of these two classes of battle creatures: cp. the prophetic messages of the supernatural women in TBC and CM, mentioned above, and how the Morrígan, called *caillech*, shrieks above the head of a king and hovers above the points of weapons and shields in the Early Modern-Irish version of *Cath Maíge Rath* (J. O’Donovan (ed. & tr.), *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the battle of Magh Rath* (Dublin 1842) 198–99; dated to the 14th century by Dillon, *The cycles of the kings* (Oxford 1946, repr. Blackrock 1994) 65).

93. For prophecies of the Morrígan, see, for instance, CMT §§166–67 (see also the edition and translation by Carey, ‘Myth and mythography’, 66–69) and *Táin bó Regamna* §5 (J. Corthals (ed. & tr.), *Táin bó Regamna: eine Vorerzählung zur Táin bó Cúailnge* (Vienna 1987), dated to the early Middle-Irish period (ibid. 15); for more about the relationship between this text, *Echtra Nerai* and TBC, see ibid. 15–22; it should be noted that in the YBL-text, the Badb is mentioned instead of the Morrígan); the Badb prophecies in, for instance, version B of *Bruiden Da Chocae* §§15–17 (W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), ‘Da Choca’s Hostel’, *Revue Celtique* 21 (1900) 149–65, 312–27, 388–402, dated to the 12th century by D. Ó Corráin, ‘Early Ireland: directions and re-directions’, *Bullán* 1/2 (1994) 1–15: 10–11, on historical grounds and by G. Toner, *Bruiden Da Choca*, editions, composition and development, PhD diss. (Queen’s University of Belfast 1990) 86, on linguistic grounds).

94. For this text and the glossary see F. Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law*, Early Irish Law

demain iffrinn iat ƿ .d. aeoir na fendóga. 1 eamnait a nglædha na sin-naigh, 7 .e. a ngotha na fennoga ‘*gudomain*, i.e. scald-crows, or fairy women; ut est *glaidhomuin goa*, the false demons, the *morrigna*; or it is false that the *bansigaidhe* are not demons; it is false that the *fendoga* (scald crows) are not hellish but aery demons: the foxes double their cries, but the *fennóga* double their sounds’.⁹⁵

The word *gúdemain*, which may mean ‘false demons’,⁹⁶ is here explained as *fennóga*, a synonym of *badba* in the sense of ‘scaldcrows’, and as women of the *side*. This is compared with ‘false howlers’,⁹⁷ which are explained as false demons or *morrigna*. An alternative explanation seems to be the equation of women of the *side* with demons. Moreover, the scaldcrows are said to be infernal demons instead of demons of the air.⁹⁸ The second collection of glosses, *Sanas Cormaic*,⁹⁹ explains *gúdemain* as *morrignae* and as ‘horrible creatures’ (*úatha*).¹⁰⁰

These glosses therefore classify the Morrigan in a plural form as a kind of demon, together with scaldcrows, women of the *side* and *úatha*. The first gloss rejects the classification of these creatures as ‘demons of the air’ and calls them ‘infernal’ instead. There is another relevant gloss, which on the one hand refers to ‘demons of the air’ and on the other to infernal beings: the Furies from classical mythology. This is a Middle-Irish gloss on *Amra Choluim Cille*:¹⁰¹

Rodom-sibsea sech riaga .i. rom-fuca sech dem[n]ju ind aeoir ad requiem sanctorum. Nó sech riaga .i. sech ingena Oircc, tres filiae Orcci, quae [uocantur] diuersis nominibus in caelo et in terra et in inferno. In caelo quidem .i. Stenna. Euriale. Medussa. IN terra .i. Clothos. Lacessis. Antropus. IN inferno. Allecto. Micera. Tessifone ‘May he waft me past tortures! i.e. may he bear me past the demons of the air *ad requiem sanc-*

Series 3 (Dublin 1988) 268–69.

95. CIH 603–04: 604.1–4 (text); Hennessy, ‘Ancient Irish goddess’, 36 (translation).

96. DIL s.v. translates ‘spectres’.

97. DIL s.v. *glaidem*; the word may mean ‘wolf’; literally, it means ‘howler’.

98. The previous gloss explains *glaidomuin* as foxes and wolves. They are apparently the true howlers (cp. also the final remark about the double cries and sounds in the gloss under discussion; see Hennessy, ‘Ancient Irish goddess’, 36–37, for the etymological background), whereas the ‘false demons’, i.e. the scaldcrows, the women of the *side* and the *morrigna*, are the false howlers. This raises several questions: are there ‘true demons’ to be presupposed in opposition to these ‘false demons’? Is the expression ‘false demons’ another form of the ambivalence of demons in the early Irish context? Obviously, the glossators (see Binchy’s edition for references to additions in margins and by different hands) were considering different possibilities. More study is needed on this subject.

99. K. Meyer (ed), ‘*Sanas Cormaic*: an Old-Irish glossary’, O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best et al. (ed), *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* iv (Halle & Dublin 1912); J. O’Donovan & W. Stokes (tr.), *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac’s glossary* (Calcutta 1868).

100. ‘*Gúdemain .i. úatha morrignae*’ (Meyer, *Anecdota*, 58).

101. W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), ‘The Bodleian *Amra Choluimb Chille*’, *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899)

torum. Or *sech riaga*, i.e. past the daughters of Orcus, three daughters of Orcus, who are called by different names in heaven, on earth and in hell. In heaven Sthenyo, Euryale, Medusa: on earth Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos: in hell Alecto, Megaera, Tesiphone'.¹⁰²

The first explanation of *riaga*, 'punishments, tortures', as 'demons of the air' refers to the type of demons who carry people's souls to hell after they die. They are described in the *Apocalypse of Paul*¹⁰³ and we find them in Irish texts like *Vita Sancti Columbae* (for instance III 6, 10, 13) and *Cath Maige Muccrama*.¹⁰⁴ But, as we have seen, the term 'demons of the air' is also used in Irish texts to designate battle creatures.

The second explanation of *riaga* in this gloss is that they are the daughters of Orcus, Roman God of the Underworld and death. The names of these daughters are respectively those of the Gorgons; the Moirai, Parcae or Fates, and the Erinyes or Furies. I hope to show now that the third group of goddesses with their demonic aspects are an important clue in the characterisation of the war goddesses as demons.

A variety of demon mentioned in the Vulgate (Is. 34:14, Lam. 4:3) is the lamia. The lamia is a female demon, sometimes characterised as a kind of vampire, from classical mythology. Originally she was a beautiful woman, but grief turned her into an ugly, restless, child-murdering demon. One of her characteristics is that she can appear in different shapes. She is also referred to in a plural form.¹⁰⁵ Relevant here is the reference in Is 34:14, where waste land is described (as a divine punishment):

*et occurrent daemonia onocentauris
et pilosus clamabit alter ad alterum
ibi cubavit lamia et invenit sibi requiem*

And demons will meet ass-centaurs
and the hairy creature shall cry out, the one to the other
There the lamia has lain down and found rest for herself.

The Hebrew original¹⁰⁶ reads *lilit* instead of *lamia*, who is a female demon from Semitic mythology. Lilith is able to fly; she is dangerous to men, whom she

30–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–37; 21 (1900) 133–36.

102. *ibid.* 414–17.

103. T. Silverstein & A. Hilhorst (ed), *Apocalypse of Paul: a new critical edition of three long Latin versions* (Geneva 1997) §§14–18; M. R. James (tr), *The apocryphal New Testament, being the apocryphal gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses* (Oxford 1924, repr. 1989) 526–55: 531–35.

104. M. O Daly (ed. & tr.), *Cath Maige Muccrama: the battle of Mag Muccrama*, ITS 50 (Dublin 1975) §51; the text is Old Irish (*ibid.* 18).

105. For more about the lamia, see, for instance, RE xxiii 544–46.

106. In the RSV translation: 'And wild beasts shall meet with hyenas, the satyr shall cry to his

seduces, loves and kills, and to little children.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, the translator Jerome comments upon the lamia, originally Lilith, in his *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* that some of the Hebrews believe her to be 'an Erinys, that is: a Fury'.¹⁰⁸

This Lilith creature, first adapted for the public of the Latin bible as lamia, was later adapted again, but now for an Irish public.¹⁰⁹ A ninth-century gloss in Vatican, Reg. lat. 215, dated to 876 or 877 and ascribed to John Scottus Eriugena,¹¹⁰ on this verse from Isaiah explains this creature as follows: *Lamia monstrum in feminae figura .i. morigain*,¹¹¹ 'Lamia is a monster in the form of a woman, that is: a *morrigan*'. The *Morrigan* is here equated with a female demon; the basis of comparison is presumably the ability to change shape.¹¹²

The *Morrigan* is thus qualified as a false demon and equated with a dangerous female demon from Semitic and classical mythology in the above-mentioned glosses. My last point is the identification of the war goddesses with the classical Furies. That these goddesses of the Underworld were considered to be demonic in early Irish texts can be deduced from the adjective *demnach* applied to them (see below) and from the following development. In the early version

fellow; yea, there shall the night hag alight, and find for herself a resting place'. The Hebrew word, here rendered as 'satyr', is *so'ir*, 'hairy; he-goat (lit. the hairy one); demon in the form of a he-goat, satyr, living in the desert; rain'. 'Night hag' is the translation of *lilit*, 'a female evil demon'; folk etymology gave the word its meaning as night (*laylā*) demon (F. Buhl (rev.), *helm Gesenius' hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Berlin, Göttingen & Heidelberg 1915, repr 1962) s.v.). The Septuagint diminished the number of supernatural creatures in this verse: demons meet ass-centaurs and the latter cry out and rest in the desolate land.

107. For more about this demon, originally from Mesopotamia, who becomes the arch-mother of witches in the middle ages, see M. Hutter, 'Lilith', K. van der Toorn, B. Becking & P. W. van der Horst (ed), *Dictionary of deities and demons in the bible* (Leiden, New York, Cologne 1995) 973–76.

108. M. Adriaen, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera*, i: *Opera exegetica*, 2: *Commentariorum in Esaiam libri I–XI*, CCSL 73 (Turnhout 1963) 422, lines 76–78.

109. J. J. Contreni, 'The biblical glosses of Haimo of Auxerre and John Scottus Eriugena', *Speculum* 51 (1976) 411–34; 424; P. P. Ó Néill, 'The Old-Irish words in Eriugena's biblical glosses', G.-H. Allard (ed), *Jean Scot écrivain: actes du IVe Colloque international Montréal, 28 août–2 septembre 1983* (Montreal & Paris 1986) 287–97; 290–91.

110. Contreni, 'Biblical glosses, 413–14'; Ó Néill, 'The Old-Irish words'.

111. TP i 2. In this collection of glosses the *pilosus* is explained as well: *Pilosi* [Is. 13:21] *demonum genera vel geltig (ibid.)*, '*Pilosi* (Hairy ones): kinds of demons, or: wild, (battle-)crazy persons in the wood'. According to DIL s.v. *geltech*, *geltig* is the nom. pl. of *geltech*, meaning 'satyrs'; according to Ó Néill ('The Old-Irish words', 295), it is an adjectival formation of the noun *geilt*.

112. In the 'First synod of St Patrick' (L. Bieler (ed. & tr.), *The Irish penitentials*, SLH 5 (Dublin 1963) 54–59 §16), belief in the lamia is condemned. Bieler translates 'vampire'; the text itself explains the word with *striga*, 'a woman that brings harm to children, a hag, witch' (cp. also *strix*, 'a screech-owl, which, according to the belief of the ancients, sucked the blood of young children'). This is in line with the tradition given by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae* VIII xi 102 (W. M. Lindsay (ed), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum* i

of *Cath Maige Rath*,¹¹³ Congal Cáech is said to get his evil inspiration from Satan (lines 76–77). The Middle-Irish text *Fled Dúin na nGéd*¹¹⁴ replaces this by possession by *in fúir demnach*, ‘the demonic Fury’, called Tesiphone.¹¹⁵ The Early Modern-Irish version of *Cath Maige Rath* describes his whole life as having been under the influence of the three infernal Furies Allecto, Megaera and Tesiphone.¹¹⁶

A well-known example of an identification between a war goddess and a Fury is found in Recension I of the *Táin*, in the passage referred to above, in which the Morrígan prophesies in the form of a bird, sitting on a pillar stone, to the Black Bull. The text literally reads: *Allechtu ... , noch is í in Mórrígan són* (line 955), ‘Allechtu ... , that is to say, that is the Morrígan’. Rudolf Thurneysen¹¹⁷ pointed out that Allechtu is the same as the Fury Allecto from Virgil’s *Aeneid* (vii 323ff). The basis for the association would be the bird form of the Irish and the wings of the classical goddess. Recently, Johan Corthals has argued that there are also references to the *Aeneid* in the Morrígan’s prophecy in *rosc*.¹¹⁸ Firstly, there is the phrase *cluiph Cualngi coigde dia* (TBC I, line 961), which he translates: ‘the Goddess from the Cocytus (one of the rivers in the Underworld) will overturn Cuailnge’ (24). *Coigde* would be an Irish analogy of Latin *Cocytia*; *Cocytia virgo* refers to Allecto in the *Aeneid* (vii 479). Corthals suggests, secondly, that the prophecy about the bull eating very green grass of bogland in May which will be followed by battle (TBC I, lines 959–60) could be a reminiscence of the deer that cools itself on a green bank of a river (*Aeneid* vii 495) just before being hunted by dogs, maddened by Allecto, which also is an introduction to battle.

I would like to argue now that the author of Recension I borrowed the name Allecto, the adjective *Cocytia* and the reminiscence of the deer because of certain parallels between the Furies in the *Aeneid* on the one hand and the Morrígan in *Táin bó Cúailnge* on the other. The parallels that will be discussed now cannot be seen as borrowings. They could, however, have appeared so striking to the author of Recension I that this author may have decided to use

(Oxford 1911, repr. 1971), who tells that lamias carry off and lacerate young children (his next item, incidentally, is the *pilosus*).

113. C. Marstrander (ed. & tr.), ‘A new version of the battle of Mag Rath’, *Ériu* 5 (1911) 226–47. Dillon (*Cycles of the Kings*, 65) dates it to the early tenth century and he characterises the language as ‘Old Irish save for a few later forms’.

114. C. Marstrander (ed), *Fleadh Dúin na nGéadh ocus Cath Muighe Ráth. I. Fleadh Dúin na nGéadh* (Christiania 1910) and R. P. M. Lehmann (ed), *Fled Dúin na nGéd*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 21 (Dublin 1964); R. P. M. Lehmann (tr), ‘The Banquet of the Fort of the Geese’, *Lochlann* 4 (1969) 131–59. Dillon (*Cycles of the Kings*, 57) dates it to the eleventh century.

115. Lehmann, *Fled Dúin na nGéd*, 9, lines 289–91; eadem, ‘Banquet of the Fort’, 140.

116. O’Donovan, *Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh*, 166–69.

117. ‘Zur *Táin Bó Cúailnge*’, *Z Celt Philol* 10 (1915) 205–08: 208.

118. ‘Early Irish *retoirics* and their Late Antique background’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic*

the above-mentioned borrowings in order to hint at the parallels between the goddesses. For the sake of the argument, I will only point out the similarities and leave out the differences, which are numerous.

We find a parallel image of the Morrígan, perching on a pillar stone in the form of a bird and uttering a prophecy, in the description of the Harpy Celaeno, who calls herself the greatest of the Furies (*Furiae*) (*Aeneid* iii 252). The harpies are described in this passage as birds with girls' faces, claws and wings (iii 216–17, 226). Celaeno perches on a lofty rock and prophesies to Aeneas and his retinue (iii 245–57).

Other images of the Morrígan are similar to descriptions of the Fury (*Erinys*) Allecto in book vii. Allecto's wings are mentioned a few times (vii 408, 476, 561). She loves war and anger; she has many faces and appears in frightening shapes (vii 325–29). One could compare this with the different shapes the Morrígan takes on: the bird, the young woman, the animals and the old woman. Especially interesting is the comparison of Allecto's encounter with the warrior Turnus and that between the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn. Allecto appears as an old priestess of Juno to Turnus. She gives a message from the goddess in which she reveals hidden things and instigates the warrior to war. However, he is mocking her: she—old woman that she is—should guard the statues of the gods and the temples. War and peace are men's business. Enraged at this, she shows her real form and announces her true identity: she is a Fury and in her hands she carries war and death (vii 413–55). One could compare this with the king's daughter who offers military assistance to Cú Chulainn, which he refuses.¹¹⁹ The king's daughter is identified with sex and the old priestess with religion: both are told to stay away from war because of their gender. Both then show their true identity: the two warriors are encountered by furious supernatural women, who are closely connected with war and strife.

Turnus and Cú Chulainn die in the ensuing battle and at their deaths, a bird appears. Jupiter sends a Fury¹²⁰ as an omen for the death of Turnus. She takes on the shape of a small bird of evil omen that perches on tombs and the roofs of deserted houses. This bird screeches, flies against Turnus's face and shield. The warrior knows that he is doomed. The dread goddess hinders his courage to surface and soon Turnus dies (*Aeneid* xii 853–68, 894–918). Cú Chulainn's end is not in *Táin bó Cúailnge* but in *Brisleach mór Maige Muirthemne*; just before his beheading, a scaldcrow (*ennach*) perches on his shoulder. The comment is then made that it is unusual for birds to alight on that 'pillar'.¹²¹ Could this be an allusion to Allecto/the Morrígan alighting on the pillar stone in the form of a

Studies 31 (1996) 17–36: 23–25.

119. For the references to TBC, see above.

120. The name of this creature is not mentioned, but from the description, it is clear that it is one of the three sisters Allecto, Megaera and Tesiphone. *Aeneid* xii 845–52 refers to two *Dirae*, 'Dread Ones', born together with Megaera; their mother is the Night; they have snaky coils and wings. On Jupiter's command, they bring disease, death and war to humankind.

bird? It should be noted that the Morrigan takes the form of an *ennach* after her healing in *Táin bó Cúailnge* in the versions of manuscripts H. 2. 17 and Egerton 93.¹²²

In addition to this Irish text that uses classical texts as sources of inspiration,¹²³ there are also Irish texts that are adaptations of classical texts. From these, the last examples of the equation of war goddesses with Furies will be given.

In the Middle-Irish text *Togail na Tebe*,¹²⁴ several goddesses from the source text, the *Thebaid* by Statius, are referred to as the Badb. The most important of these is the Fury Tesiphone, in *Fúir demnach dásachtach*, ‘the demonic, furious Fury’ (line 182, for the demonic aspect, see also lines 193–94) who is called the Badb in several places (lines 193, 3452, 3460, 3464, 4313) just as her sister Megaera is (lines 4336, 4348). Sometimes *Togail na Tebe* refers solely to *badba* or the Badb without identifying them more precisely, but then the source text often mentions the Furies in the parallel passage.¹²⁵ Finally, it is interesting to note that *Togail na Tebe* calls queen Iocaste a *morrigan* (line 88) while the source text, albeit in a different place, compares her with the most ancient of the Furies (*Eumenides*) (*Thebaid* vii 477). There is a huge, demonic, furious monster in *Togail na Tebe* (line 521) who resembles a lamia in her actions; the source text (*Thebaid* i 597–98) tells that she has been conceived in the lair of the Furies (*Eumenides*). *Togail na Tebe* thus offers ample evidence of the Furies being referred to by designations of an Irish war goddess and their demonic aspects are obvious.

Finally, when in the Middle-Irish narrative *In cath catharda*¹²⁶ the Badb of battle (*in Badb catha*) incites warriors to fight, we find in the source text *Pharsalia* in one place a Fury (*Erinys*),¹²⁷ and in the other place the war goddess

121. BL ii, lines 14056–57.

122. Windisch, ‘Altirische Heldensage *Táin bó Cúailnge*’, 334 n 1.

123. See also, for instance, J. F. Nagy, ‘The rising of the Cronn river in the *Táin bó Cúailnge*’, A. Ahlqvist, G. W. Banks et al. (ed), *Celtica Helsingensia: proceedings from a symposium on Celtic Studies*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 107 (Helsinki 1996) 129–48.

124. G. Calder (ed. & tr.), *Togail na Tebe: the Thebaid of Statius* (Cambridge 1922).

125. Lines 2741–42 refer to the confusing, red-lipped *badba* and horrible demons of the Underworld, where *Thebaid* vii 467 gives Tesiphone. Lines 3018–19, 3024 describe *badba* and chief demons (*airdemna*); these are Thesiphone and the war goddess Bellona in the parallel passage in the *Thebaid* (viii 344–49). The demonic, furious Badb of line 4418 reflects the Fury in *Thebaid* xi 383 (*Erinys*) and xi 388 (*Eumenis*). Tesiphone and Megaera are called ‘witches’ (*ammaiti*) in lines 4444–46; the source gives *Furiae* (*Thebaid* xi 403). Bé Néit is found in line 4447, where the *Thebaid* describes how several gods leave the battle, while the sisters of the Styx remain (xi 415). Elsewhere in line 3247 Bé Néit is identified with Enyo, sister of Mars.

126. W. Stokes (ed. & tr.), ‘In cath catharda: the civil war of the Romans, an Irish version of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*’, W. Stokes & E. Windisch (ed), *Irische Texte*, IV.2 (Leipzig 1909) [hereafter ICC].

127. *Pharsalia* i 572, corresponding with ICC, line 902.

Bellona.¹²⁸ When a prophecy about the outcome of the battle is wanted, a soul from the Underworld is summoned and the infernal deities are invoked. Among them are the three Furies (*tri dásachtaide*) Allecto, Tesiphone and Megaera.¹²⁹ The infernal deities are later summarised in *In cath catharda* as the infernal demons.¹³⁰ Therefore, this is an example of ‘demons’ employed for a prophecy about a future combat.¹³¹ Our starting point was the employment of demons for an oracular message about fights in the past. I hope to have shown that the Irish war goddesses are likely candidates for supplying a background for these demons.

128. *Pharsalia* vii 567–68 (Mars is also referred to), corresponding with ICC, line 5955.

129. ICC, lines 4179–80, corresponding with *Pharsalia* vi 695 (*Eumenides*).

130. ICC, line 4196; the corresponding passage in *Pharsalia* (vi 730–44) mentions the names of the deities explicitly again.

131. cp. also ICC, line 3967, which refers to infernal demons as *the* source for prophecy.