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## CHAPTER 4

### MONOTHEISTIC TO A CERTAIN EXTENT

#### THE 'GOOD NEIGHBOURS' OF GOD IN IRELAND<sup>1</sup>

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##### *Introduction*

In a labourers' cottage in County Tipperary, Ireland, a young woman lies ill in bed. The doctor has diagnosed her as suffering from nervous excitement and a mild bronchitis. Her husband, however, sees things differently. This sick woman is not his wife, he believes, but a changeling. The fairies have taken his wife and he is now stuck with one of them.<sup>2</sup> Michael Cleary, the husband, is getting more and more enraged and desperate. He submits Bridget Cleary to all kinds of ritual and treatment in order to retrieve his wife. In the end, he burns her. Two days later, on a Sunday night, he goes to the fairy fort (a prehistoric ringfort), because he expects to see his wife there, riding a grey horse. If he is able to cut the cords with which she is tied to the saddle, and manages to hold on to her, then he believes he will have her back.

We are writing about the year 1895.<sup>3</sup> Modern Roman Catholicism officially supplies the sources for the worldview of the nineteenth-century Irish. In spite of this, fairy belief appears to be an important seg-

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and extended version of my "De goede burenen van God: Verschillende vormen van inculturatie van het volk van de elfenheuvelds in het middeleeuwse Ierse christendom," in *Veelkleurig christendom: Contextualisatie in Noord, Zuid, Oost en West, Religieus pluralisme en multiculturaliteit* 3 (ed. C. van den Burg et al.; Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2003), 197–210. An earlier version of this revised version was read at the Twelfth International Congress of Celtic Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 24–30 August 2003. I am indebted to Aidan Breen, Proinsias Mac Cana (†), Jan Platvoet, Gregory Toner and especially to John Carey for their valuable comments on this earlier version. I also thank the participants of the Congress and the colleagues of the research group "The Boundaries of Monotheism" for their various suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> When talking about fairies or elves (or, euphemistically, "the good people" or "the good neighbours"), we should not think of Walt Disney's Tinkerbell, but should rather associate them with Goethe's *Erlkönig* (king of the elves).

<sup>3</sup> Angela Bourke, *The burning of Bridget Cleary: A true story* (London: Pimlico, 1999), *passim*.

ment in that worldview. In fact, Christian and fairy belief exist side by side and also interact. In order to understand what exactly happened with regard to the violent death of Bridget Cleary, knowledge about the Christian symbolic universe will not suffice: specific information about the Irish cultural-historical context is needed. I return to Bridget at the end of this contribution; first, I take you to early medieval Ireland. Who were or are the fairies and how did they survive sixteen centuries of Christianity? (The English word "fairy"<sup>4</sup> was, incidentally, not used in medieval Ireland: it was introduced into Ireland by English colonisation in order to refer to the *áes síde*, "the people of the hollow hills" or "the people of the Otherworld."<sup>5</sup>)

The technique of writing manuscripts was introduced in Ireland along with Christianity. As they were produced in monasteries, these documents owe their existence to Christian efforts, even though some of the narrative material has roots in the pre-Christian past. There are, however, no narrative texts that reflect the pre-Christian Irish view of the world in a pristine way.<sup>6</sup>

From an emic point of view,<sup>7</sup> Christianity is a monotheistic religion—a religion which acknowledges only one God.<sup>8</sup> Yet the *Dictio-*

<sup>4</sup> For more about the semantics of "fairy," see Noel Williams, "The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning Out of Thin Air" in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (ed. P. Narváez; New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 457–78.

<sup>5</sup> On the semantics of *síd*, see Eric Hamp, "Varia X: Irish *síd* 'tumulus' and Irish *síd* 'peace,'" *Études Celtiques* 19 (1982): 141; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, "The semantics of '*síd*,'" *Éigse* 17 (1977–79) 137–55; Patrick Sims-Williams, "Some Celtic Otherworld Terms," in *Celtic Language, Celtic Culture: A Festschrift for Eric P. Hamp* (ed. A. T. E. Matonis and D. F. Melia; Van Nuys, Calif.: Ford & Bailie, 1990), 57–81.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, "Pagan survivals: the evidence of early Irish narrative," in *Irland und Europa: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter/ Ireland and Europe: The Early Church* (ed. P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter; Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 291–307.

<sup>7</sup> An emic point of view means from an internal standpoint, i.e. that of the believers or adherents to a religion or culture. In this case, this means from a Christian perspective.

<sup>8</sup> I am aware that orthographically "a God" (as a generic term) is usually not written with a capital G; this way of capitalising has been reserved for the Gods of monotheistic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The word God is in those cases taken as a proper name and is not preceded by an article. In this way, though, a hierarchical message is conveyed by the spelling, according to which Gods in monotheistic religions are perceived to be superior to Gods in polytheistic religions. More bluntly, these latter Gods and Goddesses are often called idols or false deities. Because I do not want to describe the supernatural beings central to this paper in this pejorative way, I will capitalise the terms God and Gods. When I use "idols" or similar terms, this does not reflect my value judgement but represents translations from my sources, in which the Gods of others are considered to be false Gods.

*nary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* is an impressive volume of almost 1000 pages,<sup>9</sup> describing numerous supernatural beings in which Israel and the surrounding peoples believed. The presence of other supernaturals than God within the Christian religion is often explained as a difference between official and popular religion: 'popular religion' is thus understood as an amalgam of pre-Christian remnants and non-Christian accretions, which are not essentially part of the 'real' religion.<sup>10</sup> With so many supernaturals in the Bible, the official sacred book of Christianity, one can wonder however whether this distinction is not sometimes misleading, and how monotheistic Christianity in its many national contexts really is. It should be noted that these observations are made from an etic point of view.<sup>11</sup>

Looking, for instance, at one of the earliest Irish Christian documents—Saint Patrick's *Confessio*—I note that God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Satan, angels and demons are mentioned.<sup>12</sup> Again, from an etic point of view, we could speak of a Christian 'pantheon,'<sup>13</sup> which we also find elsewhere in the early Christian world. Patrick, moreover, hints at other supernaturals: those that belong to the pre-Christian religion of the Irish. The Irish used to venerate *idola et immunda*, "idols and unclean things," he writes in his *Confessio* (§41), until they became the people of God.

Just as the Bible is a witness to unorthodox supernaturals, so is early Irish literature. These supernatural beings may be alien to Christian religion, but have nevertheless found a place in Ireland's literary heritage. Early Irish narratives describe them as influencing events—sometimes side by side with God, sometimes instead of God, and sometimes under God's supervision. This contribution will offer some of the medieval

<sup>9</sup> Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), extensively revised in 1999; henceforth *DDD*. The precise number is 960 pages.

<sup>10</sup> This sentence applies of course to Judaism as well: "Jewish" can equally well be read for "Christian" above.

<sup>11</sup> An etic point of view means from an external standpoint; that is, from the perspective of religious studies and scholars of religious phenomena.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Bieler, ed., *Libri epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi: Introduction, text and commentary* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1993); D. R. Howlett, ed. and trans., *Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi: The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1994). Saint Patrick is credited with Ireland's conversion to Christianity in the fifth century and is, therefore, known as "the apostle of the Irish."

<sup>13</sup> I use inverted commas, because, strictly speaking, angels, devils and demons are of a different category than deities. Nevertheless, the enumeration represents an impressive collection of supernaturals for a monotheistic belief system.

and modern descriptions and evaluations of the specific class of supernaturals known as the *áes síde*, or, popularly, the “fairies.” Central will be the question of how to define these beings—are they the pre-Christian Gods of the Irish<sup>14</sup> and should we, therefore, see Irish Christianity as a type of inclusive monotheism?<sup>15</sup>

*Saint Patrick as ‘Apparition’*

The Irish venerated *idola et immunda*, according to Saint Patrick. Due to the influence of monotheistic scholars, *idola* came to mean “idols,” but the primary meaning of *idolum* is “image, form, spectre, apparition, ghost.”<sup>16</sup> We will see that equivalent terms have been used to refer to Irish supernaturals.

Our starting point is an anecdote from the *Collectanea*, a collection of local traditions about Saint Patrick composed at the end of the seventh century by Bishop Tírechán.<sup>17</sup> There is only one manuscript version of the *Collectanea* extant: the text has been preserved in the Book of Armagh, a codex written *circa* 807 by a scribe named Ferdomnach. We are told that Saint Patrick and his retinue are sitting down by a well, when two daughters of Loíguire, king of Ireland, come to wash themselves. They are the fair-haired Ethne (*Ethne alba*) and the red-haired Fedelm (*Fedelm rufa*).<sup>18</sup> Tírechán describes the reaction of the two sisters when they see the clerics as follows:

Et quo cumque essent  
aut qua cumque forma

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent study into this matter, see John Carey, “The Baptism of the Gods,” in his *Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland* (Andover: Celtic Studies Publications, 1999), 1–38.

<sup>15</sup> “Inclusive monotheism” can be defined as the belief in a Creator God together with belief in invisible beings of various natures, from deities to medicine. The Creator God is qualitatively different from the other Gods and invisible beings, and yet there is a fluid connection between this God and all the other beings (see J. G. Platvoet, “De eigenheid van godsdiensten van volken zonder schrift,” in *Het kosmisch patroon: Het vele en het ene in de godsdiensten* (ed. T. Chowdhuri, W. Claessens and W. Logister; Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1989), 21–48; 36).

<sup>16</sup> The same is true of Greek εἰδωλον, which is used for “idol” in the Septuagint.

<sup>17</sup> Ludwig Bieler, ed. and trans., *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), 124–63.

<sup>18</sup> See Joseph Falaky Nagy, “Myth and Legendum in Medieval and Modern Ireland,” in *Myth: A New Symposium* (ed. G. Schrempf & W. Hansen; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 124–38, for a different and fascinating reading of this anecdote, in which the king’s daughters are compared with women of the *síd*.

aut qua cumque plebe  
 aut qua cumque regione non cognouerunt,  
 sed illos uiros side  
 aut deorum terrenorum  
 aut fantassiam estimauerunt. . .<sup>19</sup>

And they [the daughters of the king] did not know from which place or of which shape or from which people or from which region they [*Patrick cum suis*] were, but they thought that they were men of the *sid* or of the terrestrial Gods or an apparition. . .<sup>20</sup>

Presumably it is the differences in clothes, haircut and language<sup>21</sup> that give rise to the confusion that the young women experience when they consider the origin of the strangers. It is remarkable, though, that they arrive at an identification of them as supernatural beings.<sup>22</sup> It is worthwhile to pay more attention to several details in this quotation.

<sup>19</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 142.

<sup>20</sup> My translation is based on Bieler's. Translations in this article are mine, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>21</sup> The Irish translation of this anecdote in *Vita Tripartita* describes how the girls wonder about the shape (*delb*) of the clerics, their white garments and books (Kathleen Mulchrone, ed., *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1939), 60–63; Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with other documents relating to that saint* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1887), I, 100–01. *Vita Tripartita* is dated to c. 900; it was revised in the eleventh century (G. Mac Eoin, "The Dating of Middle Irish Texts," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 109–37: 115, but see also David N. Dumville, "The dating of the Tripartite Life of St Patrick," in David N. Dumville et al., *Saint Patrick, A. D. 493–1993* (Woodbridge: the Boydell Press, 1993), 255–58.

<sup>22</sup> There is a variant version of the identification in our anecdote in the later *Vita Sancti Abbani*, caput xiii (Charles Plummer, ed., *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 10–12, dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century; Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish saints' Lives: An introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 353, 363.) Saint Abbán and a group of clerics arrive in Britain, where people are astonished about their clothes and language (*de habitu et loquela eorum*). Some citizens take them to be phantoms (*fantasmata*); according to others, they are men from a faraway land (*homines de terra longinqua*; Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 11). The parallel with our anecdote holds even further: they are led before the king, who questions them about their origin, about the nature of their God and about their opinion of the British Gods. A variant Latin version refers to their different clothes, gestures and language (William W. Heist, ed., *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1965), 260–61.) The Irish version locates this event in Padua and does not refer to the identification of them as phantoms (Charles Plummer, ed. and trans., *Bethada Náem nĒrenn: Lives of Irish Saints* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), I: 5, II: 4–5.) Jesus Christ, incidentally, is also taken to be a phantom (*fantasma*), in the narrative where he is described as walking on the sea (Matt 14:26; Mark 6:49). My references to the Bible are to the Vulgate, because this was the version of the Bible mostly used in medieval Ireland.

The king's daughters' first guess is that they see men of the *síd*. A *síd* is a hill, a megalithic tumulus or pre-Celtic grave-hill. Its inhabitants look like human beings but they are different. In general, they are superior to humanity: they live longer or are even immortal; they are more beautiful and possess supernatural powers. Time passes at a different pace in the Otherworld, compared with human time. It is a kind of parallel universe, which is located in, beneath, or behind our world. Entrances to that Otherworld are through a *síd*, water, a mist or fog.

The second guess of the king's daughters is that they see terrestrial Gods. According to Whitley Stokes and John Gwynn, the first and second guesses correspond with each other: "Gods of the earth" would be synonymous with "men of the *síd*."<sup>23</sup> Maartje Draak has pointed out that the third possibility—an apparition or a phantom—is forgotten in this interpretation.<sup>24</sup> The scribe of the Book of Armagh has indicated the threefold interpretation explicitly, she says, by putting every guess on a new line.<sup>25</sup> She concludes that the identification of the *áes síde* with the Gods is unjustified.

<sup>23</sup> Stokes (*Tripartite Life*, II, 315) writes in a footnote at *aut deorum terrenorum: firu síde*, "males of the *síde*," or terrestrial gods, corresponding perhaps with the θεοὶ χθονίοι or Inferi'. Stokes incidentally reproduces the line-by-line layout of the Book of Armagh in his edition. Gwynn writes in *Liber Ardmachanus* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & co. and London: Williams & Norgate, 1913), cclxxxv: "*uiros síde: Síde* were believed to be male elves, terrestrial deities." He appears to (mis-) quote Stokes. Elves were also believed to be female; the male element is represented by Latin *viros*. Compare furthermore Edmund Hogan, *The Latin Lives of the Saints as Aids towards the Translation of Irish Texts and the Production of an Irish Dictionary*, Todd Lecture Series 5 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1894), 25, 137, who equates *fir shíthe* with *dij terreni*.

<sup>24</sup> Maartje Draak, "Áes síde. Een aspect van het bovennatuurlijke in de Ierse letterkunde," in her *Schimmen van het wester-eiland: Verkenningen in de Keltische traditie van het oude Ierland* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1977), 25–42, 173–77: 27–28. In 1949, Maartje Draak gave this public lecture on the *áes síde* on the occasion of her appointment as lector in Celtic Language and Literature at the University of Amsterdam. She furthermore stated that James F. Kenney also omitted the third identification in his standard work *The sources for the early history of Ireland: ecclesiastical: An introduction and guide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 340, n159.

<sup>25</sup> See page 11 (fol. 12) of the facsimile: *Book of Armagh: The Patrician Documents*, introduced by Edward Gwynn (Dublin: The Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1937).

*Elves, Gods and Apparitions: Overlaps*

Maartje Draak carefully studied the text, but is she right in stating that three distinct categories are mentioned? As scholars, we strive to work with sharply defined concepts, but medieval Irish texts are sometimes too unruly for our classification systems. In the present case, it can be shown that either of the two other categories is applicable to the *áes síde* as well.

We read, for example, in *The Hymn of Fiacc*, one of the earliest hymns in the Irish language:<sup>26</sup>

For tūaith Hérenn báí temel · tūatha adortais síde:<sup>27</sup>  
ní creitset in firdeacht · inna Trindōte fire.<sup>28</sup>

On the folk of Ireland there was darkness: the peoples used to worship *síde*:  
they believed not the true Godhead of the true Trinity.<sup>29</sup>

The poem was glossed in the eleventh century: *teimel*, "darkness," is explained as the worship of *idal*, "idols," and *síthaige*, "dwellers in a *sid*."<sup>30</sup> The *áes síde* are here the objects of veneration and thus the equivalent of the Trinity. The terms "idols" and "Gods" are obviously two sides of the same coin: the supernaturals of "others" are "idols," those of "ourselves" are "Gods."

The third guess of the royal females is that they see an apparition. An Irish derivation of Latin *fantasia*<sup>31</sup> is *fantais*, "ghost, phantom." This word occurs in the Irish *Life of Patrick*, also known as *Vita Tripartita*. It is interesting at this stage to look at how the later versions of our anec-

<sup>26</sup> This hymn is dated to the eighth century; it may have undergone some interpolations in the ninth century (Kenney, *Sources*, 340).

<sup>27</sup> The form "*síde*" stems from the editor: T (= Manuscript E. 42, TCD) reads *sidi*; F (= Franciscan Convent, Dublin) reads *idla*, "idols." Both manuscripts are dated to the end of the eleventh or the twelfth century; the latter may be somewhat later than the former (Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, ed., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901–1903), Vol. II, xxxvi).

<sup>28</sup> Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II, 317.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> To be precise: *teimel* is explained in Manuscript T as the worship of *idal*, "idols," and in Manuscript F as the worship of *idal*, *síthaige*, "dwellers in a *sid*," and then an illegible term follows, starting with *a. . .* (Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II, 317.37–38). Could it be that the manuscript read *arrachta*, "idols, idolatrous images; apparitions, spectres, monsters," here?

<sup>31</sup> In order to find Hiberno-Latin examples of *fantasia* and *fantasma*, I consulted the *Royal Irish Academy Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature: First (Preliminary) CD-ROM Edition (ACLL-1)*, compiled by Anthony Harvey, Kieran Devine and Francis J. Smith (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994).

dote have treated the three categories. I repeat the source text and quote the later variant versions afterwards. All versions consist of three elements: a description of the girls wondering at what they are seeing; their guesses about the identity, and their questions about the origin of Saint Patrick and his company.<sup>32</sup>

### *Collectanea*

Et quo cumque essent aut qua cumque forma aut qua cumque plebe aut qua cumque regione non cognouerunt,  
sed illos uiros side aut deorum terrenorum aut fantassiam estimauerunt,  
et dixerunt filiae illis: "Ubi uos sitis et unde uenistis?"<sup>33</sup>

And they did not know from which place or of which shape or from which people or from which region they were,  
but they thought that they were men of the *sid* or of the terrestrial Gods or an apparition  
and the girls said to them: "Whence would you be and whence have you come?"

### *Vita Tripartita*

Ro ingantaigset deilb inna cléirech.  
Doruimenatar bádis fir shíthe nó fantaissi.  
Imcomaircet scéla do Patraic: "Cía can duib 7 can dodechobair? Inn a síthib in do déib dúib?"<sup>34</sup>

And they wondered at the shape of the clerics,  
and thought that they were men of the elves or apparitions.  
They asked tidings of Patrick: "Whence are ye, and whence have you come? Are ye of the elves or of the gods?"<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> As Aidan Breen kindly pointed out to me, it is possible that the *Vetus Latina* text of the Book of Jonah 1:8–9 may have served as a model for this part of the text, as it reads: *Unde uenis, et quo vadis? Et ex qua regione es, et ex quo populo es tu? Et dixit ad eos: Servus Domini ego sum, et Deum caeli ego colo qui fecit mare et aridam.* The question concerning where the man of God (the prophet Jonah) comes from and whither he goes is voiced by sailors who have taken him on board. Jonah's reply about being a servant of God, who is God of heaven and Creator of sea and earth indeed bears reminiscence of Saint Patrick's hymnal statement. (For the use of the Old Latin translation in Irish and Welsh liturgy, see Aidan Breen, "The liturgical materials in Ms Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct.F.4./32," *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 34 (1992): 121–53; 148.) It has also been argued that questions of this structure are a traditional part of descriptions of meetings between supernatural and human beings (see Proinsias Mac Cana, "On the 'Prehistory' of *Immram Brain*," *Ériu* 26 (1975): 33–52; 38–40; Carey, "Baptism," 28).

<sup>33</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, 61.

*Vita Quarta*

Et cum puellae eos non cognoscerent eorumque inusitatum habitum ualde mirarentur,  
deos esse estimabant.

Quapropter interrogauerunt dicentes: "Qui estis uos et unde uenistis?"<sup>36</sup>

And when the girls did not know them and wondered exceedingly at their unusual appearance,  
they thought that they were Gods.

On which account they asked, saying: "Who are you and whence have you come?"

*Vita Tertia*

Et non cognouerunt unde essent aut qualem habitum haberent.

Putabant enim quod fantasmata essent uel de uiris side.

Et interrogauerunt eos dicentes: "Unde estis? Et ubi semper habitatis?"<sup>37</sup>

And they did not know whence they were or what kind of appearance they had.

They supposed indeed that they were apparitions or from the men of the *síd*.

And they asked them, saying: "Whence are you? And where do you always dwell?"

*Vita Auctore Probo*

Sed unde essent aut de qua plebe uel regione non cognouerunt aestimantes eos deorum terrenorum sacerdotes aut phantasiam esse.

Quapropter interrogauerunt eos dicentes: "Unde estis et unde uenistis?"<sup>38</sup>

But whence they were or from which people or region they did not know, thinking that they were priests of the terrestrial Gods or an apparition.

On which account they asked them, saying: "Whence are you and whence have you come?"

<sup>35</sup> Stokes, *Tripartite Life*, 101. "Or" is absent in the Irish text; literally they ask: "are you from the *síde*, are you from the Gods?"

<sup>36</sup> Ludwig Bieler, *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick: Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 8 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1971), 100. *Vita Quarta* is dated between the first half of the eighth and the eleventh century (ibid. 12).

<sup>37</sup> Bieler, *Four Latin Lives*, 152. *Vita Tertia* is dated between c. 800 and c. 1130 (ibid. 26).

<sup>38</sup> Bieler, *Four Latin Lives*, 210; the text is dated between the ninth to the eleventh or twelfth century; Probus's identity is uncertain (ibid. 40).

It is only in the Irish text that we find the three terms from the *Collectanea*, but they are differently arranged. Two pairs of guesses are given: first, men of the *síd* or apparition and, second, men of the *síd*, the Gods. *Vita Quarta* brings the identification back to a single category: the Gods. *Fantasia* is replaced by a synonym in *Vita Tertia: fantasmata*, "apparitions, spectres, phantoms." This version has retained the combination of Latin and Irish in its *de viris síde*. Probus, who probably did not know Irish, omitted the men of the *síd*. He changed the second identification into "priests of the terrestrial Gods," and retained Tírechán's *fantasia*. *Fantaisi* in *Vita Tripartita* is glossed *spirait*<sup>39</sup> in Dublin, Trinity College, Manuscript H.3.18.<sup>40</sup> It is in this sense of "spirits, ghosts" that we find most of the early Irish examples of *fantais* when referring to a supernatural being.<sup>41</sup> There is no further overlap between the terms *fantais* and *áes síde*, but there are several examples in which synonyms of *fantais*, such as *siabair*, "a spectre, a phantom, a supernatural being," and *taidbsiu* in the sense of "vision, dream, phantasm; ghost, apparition, image,"<sup>42</sup> are applied to the people of the *síd*.

For instance, the last sentence of the following colophon at the end of the tale entitled *The wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn* equates the *áes síde* with "apparitions" (using a dative plural form of *taidbsiu*):

<sup>39</sup> *Spirut* (sg.) means "incorporeal being, angel; ghost, apparition; spirit, soul."

<sup>40</sup> *Doruimenatar (. . .) bedís fir síthi no fantaisi (.i. spirait). Imchomaircet scela do Pátraic cia can dúib 7 can dodechobair (. . .), inn a síthib, in do deib dúib?*, "They thought they were men of the elves or apparitions [that is: ghosts]. They ask tidings of Patrick: 'Whence are ye, and whence have ye come? Are ye out of the elf-mounds or of the gods?'" (W. Stokes, "Glossed Extracts from the Tripartite Life of S. Patrick. (H.3.18, 520-528)," *Archiv für celtische Lexicographie* 3 (1907): 8-38: 20-21).

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, the Irish translation of Lucan's *Civil War* (J. D. Duff, ed. and trans., *Lucan: The Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), I.570, VII.179): twice *fantais* is used—together with other terms—to translate Latin *umbra*, "shade, ghost" (Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., "In Cath Catharda: The Civil War of the Romans: An Irish Version of Lucan's Pharsalia," in *Irische Texte* (ed. W. Stokes and E. Windisch; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1909), Vol. IV.2, ll. 898, 4802). A third occurrence (at line 4357) does not have a parallel in the Latin source text. It is likely that this instance should be translated "ghosts" as well: it is part of the multiform supernatural battle host that is said to hover in the air before and during battle. (For more about this supernatural battle host, see my "Omens, ordeals and oracles: On demons and weapons in early Irish texts," *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 13 (1999): 224-48 and the literature there cited.)

<sup>42</sup> Irish *taidbsiu* and *tadbás*, "vision, hallucination, apparition, image," are equivalents of Latin *fantasma*. It is glossed (*Hoc fantasma. tadhais*; W. Stokes, *Irish Glosses* (Dublin: Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1860), 27, nr 846) and translated as such in *Vita Sancti Abbani*, caput xl (*in campo, qui in scotice dicitur Magh na Taibhse, latine uero fantasmatum campus*; Charles Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, I, 26).

Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídī sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach riá cretim, 7 ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doinib 7 co taisféntais aibnīusa 7 díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde 7 áes síde.<sup>43</sup>

That is the vision of destruction [shown] to Cú Chulainn by the people (*áes*) of the hollow hill(s) (*síde*). For the demonic power was great before the faith, and it was so great that the 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 apparitions that the ignorant call *síde* and *áes síde*.

There is a considerable number of terms that refer to supernatural beings in early Irish texts. The meaning of each term needs to be studied and because of the overlaps, this is not an easy task. What is clear, though, is that these beings were seen in different ways. The above-quoted colophon not only calls the *áes síde* "apparitions" but also "demons." This was one of the ways in which supernatural beings were given a place within the Christian symbolic universe. We will now briefly look at the different evaluations of the supernaturals in medieval Irish literature.<sup>44</sup>

#### *From Demonic to Divine*

Another, broadly contemporary,<sup>45</sup> colophon expresses a contrasting view. According to the colophon quoted above, the ignorant call the (demonic) apparitions *áes síde*; according to the second colophon, the learned say that these apparitions are divine messengers:

<sup>43</sup> Myles Dillon, *Serlige Con Culainn* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953), 29, §49. The narrative was probably first written in the ninth century and revised in the eleventh. This colophon belongs to the eleventh-century revision (see John Carey, "The uses of tradition in *Serlige Con Culainn*," in *Ulidia* (ed. J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman; Belfast: December Publications, 1994), 77–84: 77–78). For a translation into English, see Myles Dillon, "The wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn," *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 7 (1953): 47–88; and into Dutch, see Marianne Harbers, *De slopende slaap van Cú Chulainn* (Amsterdam: Tabula, 1983).

<sup>44</sup> See also John Carey, "Uses of Tradition," idem, "Baptism," 12–38; Pádraig Ó Néill, "The Latin colophon to the 'Táin Bó Cúailnge' in the Book of Leinster: A critical view of Old Irish literature," *Celtica* 23 (1999): 269–75.

<sup>45</sup> The colophon is late Middle Irish (see John Carey, "The testimony of the dead," *Eigse* 26 (1992): 1–12: 1, 7).

Acht adberaid na hecnaidi cach uair notaisbenta taibsi ingnad dona righ-flathaibh anall—amal adfaid in Scal do Chund, 7 amal tarfas Tír Thairngiri do Cormac—, conidh timtirect diada ticedh fan samla sin, 7 conach timthirect deamnach. Aingil immorro dos-ficed da chobair, ar is firindi aignidh dia lentais, air is timna Rechta rofoghnámh doibh.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup>

The colophon gives two concrete examples of such an apparition (Irish *taidbsiu*). First, we read of a *scál*, which may mean both “a supernatural being” and “a phantom” in this context. This apparition reveals the identity of the future rulers to King Conn. The second example refers to the Otherworld, which in this case is the apparition (*taidbsiu*), which was shown (*tarfas*) to King Cormac. *Taidbsiu* and *tarfas* derive from the same verb: *do-adbat*, “shows, displays; demonstrates; appears (of a vision, apparition, or other sight).” The supernatural person, who reveals the Otherworld to the king, is Manannán mac Lir, King of the Land of Promise.<sup>48</sup>

These two examples are further instances not only of overlaps between supernatural categories but also of attempts to give supernatural beings a place in an inclusive monotheistic view of the world. In the case of Lug, the text that the colophon refers to seems to be a witness to a struggle as to how to define him, for there is some internal contradiction. This text—*Baile in Scáil* “The Vision of the Scáil”—introduces Lug as a *scál* (§6), but then lets the apparition speak, saying that he is not a *scál*. He identifies himself as Lug son of Ethniu, descendant of Adam, and adds that he has died (§7).<sup>49</sup> Lug is, however, also known elsewhere in the literary tradition as belonging to the supernatural inhabitants of Ireland (the *Túatha Dé Danann*) and as the supernatural

<sup>46</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., “The Irish Ordeals, Cormac’s Adventure in the Land of Promise, and the Decision as to Cormac’s Sword,” in *Irische Texte* III.1 (ed. W. Stokes and E. Windisch; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1891), 183–229: 202, §80.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 220–21.

<sup>48</sup> Stokes, “Irish ordeals,” 198, 216.

<sup>49</sup> See Kuno Meyer, “Baile in Scáil,” *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 3 (1901): 457–66; “Der Anfang von Baile in Scáil,” *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 13 (1921): 371–82. A new edition and translation was published after the submission of this contribution. See now: Kevin Murray, *Baile in Scáil: ‘The Phantom’s Frenzy’* (London: The Irish Texts Society, 2004).

father of Cú Chulainn. Lug is thus identified as a ghost, a deceased human being, a supernatural being, perhaps even a God. Manannán, alluded to in the second colophon, is elsewhere identified as the God of the Sea.<sup>50</sup> This is not a contradiction with the title "King of the Land of Promise." The Land of Promise is one of the designations for the Otherworld, sometimes located across or under the sea. The sea itself may even be identified with the Otherworld in some cases: in yet another text, Manannán drives a chariot across the sea and says that to him the sea is a plain full of flowers.<sup>51</sup>

The colophon describes Lug and Manannán as having an angelic function, in that they are divine messengers, but we cannot simply identify them as angels, for the last sentence tells us that, in addition to these messengers, angels came to help the pre-Christian Irish.<sup>52</sup> Both Lug and Manannán may have originally been seen as Gods, but their identification in this text fits within the demands of Christian (inclusive) monotheism in that they are called a ghost of a descendant of Adam and a king respectively.

The idea that the inhabitants of the Otherworld can utter divine revelations to human beings is also found in narratives. In the Old Irish *Adventurous Journey of Connlac* a woman from the *síd* invites the king's son Connlac to go with her to the Lands of the Living, a place without old age, death and sin.<sup>53</sup> "Lands of the Living" is another designation for the Otherworld. Interesting in the light of our Patrick anecdote

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Kuno Meyer, "Sanas Cormaic: An Old-Irish Glossary," in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts IV* (1912): 78, nr. 896; translated by John O'Donovan and Whitley Stokes, *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac's Glossary* (Calcutta: Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1868), 114.

<sup>51</sup> See the Old Irish *Voyage of Bran*, edited and translated by Séamus Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain: Bran's Journey to the Land of the Women* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985), 33–58.

<sup>52</sup> John Carey ("Baptism," 37–38) translates the last sentence differently: "It was an angel which used to come to their assistance. . . ." This would argue for an identification of them as angels. There is, however, a grammatical error in the Irish. *Aingil* is the plural form of *aingel*, "angel," but the verbal form is in the singular. Crucial is the meaning of *immorro*, which can be "however, moreover, then." Stokes's translation seems more likely to me, in the light of the early Irish subtlety with regard to supernatural classifications, overlaps notwithstanding. Compare for instance, such categories as "demons of a special order" (Carey, "Baptism," 22) and "half-fallen angels" (*ibid.* 23–26).

<sup>53</sup> Kim McCone, ed. and trans., *Echtrae Chonnlai and the beginnings of vernacular narrative writing in Ireland* (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2000); the text is dated to the eighth century (see *ibid.* 29–47). For a translation into Dutch, see Maartje Draak and Frida de Jong, *Van helden, elfen en dichters: De oudste verhalen uit Ierland* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1979), 208–11.

dote is the mention of her strange clothes (§1).<sup>54</sup> This woman predicts the advent of Saint Patrick, whom she calls the righteous man of the Great High King (§11). We see here an immortal, eternally young woman from a *síd*, who prophesies about the future and who speaks well of Christianity. The reference to God as a “high king” is especially interesting.<sup>55</sup> The high king was considered to be king over all Ireland, whereas local kings were contemporaneously governing the various Irish peoples (*túatha*). It is as if she acknowledges the God of the Christians as the supreme deity among other, local deities by using this symbol. If this were so, then this instance would be a good example of early Irish inclusive monotheism.

We thus find supernatural beings of various type and designation in the early Irish literary tradition. Some of them may very well be part of Ireland’s traditional inheritance, adapted and revised according to the tastes and designs of the monastic composers of the texts.

#### *Saint Patrick at the Well*

We have now seen how the *áes síde* in general have received different labels, ranging from demonic to divine. Moreover, we have seen that the three supernatural categories mentioned in the anecdote about Saint Patrick at the well overlap to a certain extent. Other details in the anecdote are not so vague. We know the names of the girls and their father. The location of the event is also clearly indicated by Tírechán: the well is called Clébach and is situated near Ráth Crúachain.

Ráth Crúachain is well known from the literary tradition as the location of a royal fortress, a *síd*, a cave and a burial place. The burial place is sometimes explicitly qualified as “pagan.” Prehistoric burial mounds have indeed been found there.<sup>56</sup> We can read in the Old Irish *Adventure*

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<sup>54</sup> Compare also “The voyage of Bran” §2, in which the Otherworld woman suddenly appears in the royal house, dressed in “unusual attire” (Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain*, 33, 46).

<sup>55</sup> For another example of God as High King, see Liam Breatnach, “3. *Ardri* as an old compound,” *Ériu* 37 (1986): 192–93: 192. There appears to be a chiasmic opposition between the *Adventurous Journey of Connlae* and our anecdote. In our anecdote, foreign, probably strangely dressed men are sitting and are approached by native, royal females. The females ask them about their place of origin. In *Echtrae Chonnlai*, native, royal men are sitting and one of them (Connlae) sees a strangely dressed, “foreign” female approach. The king’s son asks her: “Whence have you come, o woman” (McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, 131).

of Nera of the experiences of the hero Nera at this place at Samain.<sup>57</sup> Samain or Halloween (the eve of 1 November) marks the beginning of winter in Ireland. According to this tale, demons always appear during this night (§2) and the hollow hills (*side*) are open (§14). It is, therefore, not surprising that Nera not only encounters the people of Síd Crúachain, but also dead people or ghosts. An interesting detail is that he enters the *síd* through the cave of Crúachain. From this cave—called “Ireland’s gate to Hell” in another Old Irish narrative—monstrous swine and birds have appeared.<sup>58</sup> The cave and *síd* seem to have a link with divination too. Nera sees a vision of what will happen the following year, unless he intervenes in the course of events. This prophetic information he owes to his wife, who is a woman of the *síd* (§§6, 8). According to the Second Recension of *The cattle raid of Cúailnge*, the prophetess Feidelm comes from Síd Crúachain.<sup>59</sup> Last but not least, the Mórrígan, the supernatural female who prophesies about and appears at battles, is said to have her abode in the cave of Crúachain.<sup>60</sup> In short: the place is associated with supernatural apparitions, such as the people of the *síd* and ghosts, and the dead are buried in its earth. The princesses’ conjectures concerning the supernatural origin of the strange men sitting in this place make sense in this context.

In this connection, it is interesting to note a similar overlap between supernatural categories in the Bible. I draw your attention to the famous necromantic scene in 1 Sam 28. When King Saul fears for his life on the eve of a battle, he consults God as to its outcome, but God does not answer: neither by dreams, nor by priests, nor by prophets.<sup>61</sup> The king, who has put away all magicians (*magi*) and soothsayers (*harioli*), now turns for help to a woman with a divining spirit.<sup>62</sup> This woman, known

<sup>56</sup> See John Waddell, “Rathcroghan — a royal site in Connacht,” *Journal of Irish Archaeology* 1 (1983): 21–46; Ruairí Ó hUiginn, “Crúachu, Connachta, and the Ulster Cycle,” *Emania* 5 (1988): 19–23: 21.

<sup>57</sup> Kuno Meyer, ed. and trans., “The adventures of Nera,” *Revue Celtique* 10 (1889): 212–28; translation into Dutch: Draak and De Jong, *Van helden*, 60–67.

<sup>58</sup> Máirín O Daly, ed. and trans., *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1975), 48–49. For more textual references to monstrous creatures and supernatural beings coming from this cave and *síd*, see Waddell, “Rathcroghan,” 21–23.

<sup>59</sup> Cecile Ó’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), 6, 143. This supernatural characterisation of the prophetess is “new”: we do not find it in the older First Recension.

<sup>60</sup> See the *dindshenchas* on Odras: Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* IV, Todd Lecture Series XI (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1924), 196–201: 200–01.

<sup>61</sup> The Hebrew source text reads “dreams, *urim* and prophets.”

in later tradition as “the witch of Endor,”<sup>63</sup> calls forth the prophet Samuel, who has just died. When she sees Samuel, she tells Saul: *deos vidi ascendentes de terra*, “I saw Gods rising from the earth” (1 Sam 28:13), after which Saul asks her about the shape (*forma*) of this apparition. Apparently, Saul could only hear and not see Samuel.<sup>64</sup> We have here the ghost of a human being, who is being called a God<sup>65</sup> and who is ascending out of the earth (rising from the Underworld) to prophesy about the future.<sup>66</sup>

In Classical tradition, we also see this association between divination, Gods of the earth or underworld, and the dead.<sup>67</sup> People went to crypts or caves to consult an oracle, where the dead and the Gods of the Underworld were invoked.<sup>68</sup> In mythology, consultation of the dead sometimes took place at the entrance of the Underworld.<sup>69</sup> Tertullian, quoting Nicander of Colophon (second century BC), gives the information that the Celts spent the night at the tombs of their famous men, in order to receive special oracles.<sup>70</sup> Philip Freeman points out that we

<sup>62</sup> Literally, the text calls her a woman with a *pytho*, “a familiar spirit, the demon possessing a soothsayer.”

<sup>63</sup> She is called a “lady (or: mistress) of the dead” in the Hebrew source text.

<sup>64</sup> See also K. A. D. Smelik, “The witch of Endor: I Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian exegesis till 800 A.D.,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1977): 160–79: 162–63, who quotes the rabbinic tradition: “. . . three things have been said about the one who resuscitates a dead person by necromancy: he who resuscitates, sees him, but does not hear his voice; he who needs him, hears his voice, but does not see him; and he who does not need him, does not hear or see him.”

<sup>65</sup> The plural is probably due to the Hebrew source text, which reads *’elōhīm*, a plural form, meaning not only “Gods” but also “God.” Compare also the translation in the Septuagint (θεοὺς, “Gods”) and K. van der Toorn in *DDD*, 353: “Since the Israelite concept of divinity included all praeternatural beings, also lower deities (in modern usage referred to as ‘spirits’, ‘angels’, ‘demons’, ‘semi-gods’, and the like) may be called *’elōhīm*.” For the exegesis of the plural, see Smelik, “Witch of Endor,” 168–69.

<sup>66</sup> Compare Sir 46:23, which says of the dead Samuel prophesying to Saul: *et exaltavit vocem eius de terra in prophetia*, “and he raised his voice from the earth in prophecy.”

<sup>67</sup> See Jan N. Bremmer, “Ancient Necromancy and Modern Spiritualism,” in his *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>68</sup> See Bremmer, *Rise and Fall*, 73–76; Bremmer refers to the possibility of the production of “apparitions” in this context.

<sup>69</sup> Homer tells us that Odysseus travelled to the end of the world in order to consult the dead Tiresias. Bremmer (*Rise and Fall*, 71) argues that this necromantic consultation takes place either just before the entrance of or within Hades. The dead are said to rise up from Hades and the living are praying to Hades and Persephone. Another necromantic example includes an invocation of Earth, Hermes and Hades in order to raise Darius from his grave (ibid. 72). In Greek mythology, the categories of the “dead” and “Gods” do not seem to overlap; but both are associated with necromancy, and thus with the earth, be it as cave, crypt or grave.

have a close parallel in a tale in the Book of Leinster: the son of a poet recites a poem at the tomb of one of the Ulster heroes, Fergus mac Róich. A great mist suddenly envelops him, and then Fergus appears to recite the great epic *The cattle raid of Cúailnge*, which had been lost up to that time.<sup>71</sup> It is thus possible that the Irish had rituals similar to those of the Greeks.<sup>72</sup> Another overlap between supernatural categories is present in this tale: the mist through which the dead Fergus appears is one of the ways by which the world of the *áes síde* can be entered.

We return to the quotation from Tírechán's *Collectanea*, for there is a problem in the Latin. The words meaning "men of the *síd*" and "apparition" are in the accusative case, whereas "the terrestrial Gods" are in the genitive. Ludwig Bieler ignored this in his translation; Maartje Draak solved the problem by translating *viros*, "men," as "representatives" and by implicitly combining this with the second identification. But if this is correct, why did Tírechán not simply write an accusative, *deos terrenos*? Why would he refer to "men of the terrestrial Gods"? We could emend the text to: *sed illos aut uiros síde deorum terrenorum aut fantassiam estimauerunt*.<sup>73</sup> Placing *aut* behind *illos* results in a guess consisting of two alternatives: "either men of the *síd* of the terrestrial Gods or an apparition." I prefer, however, to make another attempt at understanding the text in the way it was handed down to us.

I greatly admire Draak's work, but in this case I doubt her interpretation. In further support of her view that the text did not identify *síde* with the Gods, she points out that *síde* is marked in the manuscript by dots or tiny strokes above the word. This marking, she states, was used in this part of the manuscript for words that could not be translated into Latin.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *De Anima* 57.10, quoted in Philip M. Freeman, "Visions from the Dead in Herodotus, Nicander of Colophon, and the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*," *Emania* 12 (1994): 45–48; the Greek source is lost.

<sup>71</sup> Freeman, "Visions," 47.

<sup>72</sup> Freeman, "Visions;" John Carey ("Baptism," 21, n32) mentions an annalistic reference to the consultation of an oracle in the megalithic tomb of Newgrange in 1084. Newgrange is traditionally known as Brug na Bóinne and is a famous *síd* in early Irish literature. Other tumuli or *síde* have been designated *úaim*, "cave; cellar, crypt, vault; underground passage or souterrain; grave, tomb. . ." in the Annals (see John Carey, "Eithne in Gubai," *Eigse* 28 (1994–95): 160–64: 161).

<sup>73</sup> I am indebted to Ingrid Sperber for this suggestion.

<sup>74</sup> Draak, *Schimmen*, 28 ("het woord [wordt] in het manuscript gekentekend door enige er boven geplaatste puntachtige streepjes of streepachtige puntjes waarmee in dit gedeelte alleen woorden onderscheiden zijn die niet in het Latijn vertaald kunnen worden").

If a writer uses a foreign term, however, it is quite common to have it followed by an equivalent in the language of the text as a whole. As a literal translation was not possible, it seems not unlikely to me that Tírechán (or his source) tried to approach the meaning of the preceding word with his “terrestrial Gods.” The Latin genitive would then nicely correspond with Irish *side*, which is also a genitive. “Earth Gods” would in that case be a gloss on *side*. A difficulty with this interpretation is the presence of *aut* before the gloss instead of *id est*, which usually precedes a gloss. On the other hand, we sometimes come across *vel*, “or,” in glosses when an alternative explanation is offered. *Vel* may be synonymous with *aut*. Reading the text in this way, I tentatively suggest that “of the terrestrial Gods” glosses “of the *sid*,” and that the last term, “apparition,” glosses the whole of the preceding: the men of the *side*/Earth Gods. We still have to account for the fact that *aut* was used instead of *id est* or *vel*, and here it seems important to note that *aut* occurs four more times in the quotation. I suggest that the author had chosen to embellish his text by using repetition. Repetition is also to be seen in the words *quocumque*, *quacumque*.

With this repetitive style in mind, I return to the layout of the manuscript. According to Draak, the layout of the passage under consideration was used to indicate the three identifications. Another interpretation is also possible. People used to fill out the lines in manuscripts if they were writing prose, but when writing metrical texts and poetry they sometimes allowed the texts more space. John Bagnell Bury studied the two earliest Patrician Lives—Tírechán’s *Collectanea* and Muirchú’s *Life of Patrick*—in the Book of Armagh.<sup>75</sup> This more spacious layout is noticeable in different places, and these passages appear to possess a certain rhythm, although it is not metrical.<sup>76</sup> Because of these characteristics, Bury posited a poetic source in Irish. He saw the presence of the Irish word *side* as an indication of such an Irish source.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> J. B. Bury, “Sources of the Early Patrician Documents,” *English Historical Review* 19 (1904): 493–503.

<sup>76</sup> Bury notes this different layout in nine cases: six of them are lists, two occur in Muirchú’s *Life of Patrick*, and the ninth is in Tírechán’s anecdote, discussed here (Bury, “Sources,” 494–95).

<sup>77</sup> Bury, “Sources,” 494–495, 501. His hypothesis concerning a poetical source in Irish has been convincingly rejected by Ludwig Bieler (*The Life and Legend of St. Patrick: Problems of Modern Scholarship* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1949), 113–14), who points out that these graphic characteristics (or, in Bieler’s words, this stychic arrangement) can be found twice in the text of Sulpicius Severus in the Book of Armagh (fol. 209<sup>b</sup> and 222<sup>a</sup>).

The idea that a literary source was used for our anecdote on Patrick is nowadays generally accepted.<sup>78</sup> According to James Carney, however, this was a Latin source, similar to a baptismal hymn.<sup>79</sup> Patrick's words when he describes God in reply to a series of questions posed by the older girl indeed sound like a hymn. The first and longer part of his description of God<sup>80</sup> goes as follows (the second, short part deals with the Trinity):

Deus noster Deus omnium hominum  
 Deus caeli ac terrae  
 maris et fluminum  
 Deus solis ac lunae  
 <et> omnium siderum,  
 Deus montium sublimium  
 ualliumque humilium  
 Deus super caelo et in caelo et sub caelo habet habitaculum  
 erga caelum et terram  
 et mare et omnia quae sunt  
 in eis  
 inspirat omnia  
 uiuificat omnia  
 superat omnia  
 sufultat omnia  
 solis lumen inluminat  
 lumen noctis et notitias ualat  
 et fontes fecit in arida terra  
 et insolas in mari siccas  
 et stellas in ministerium maiorum luminum posuit.<sup>81</sup>

Our God is the God of all people  
 God of heaven and earth  
 Of sea and rivers  
 God of sun and moon  
 [and] all the stars  
 God of high mountains  
 And deep valleys.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 223.

<sup>79</sup> James Carney, "Patrick's Creed," in his *The Problem of St. Patrick* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1961), 123–37: 128.

<sup>80</sup> Compare also how Saint Paul describes God as the Creator and the giver of rain, fertility and food when he and Barnabas are taken to be Gods after miraculously curing a lame man (Acts 14:10–18).

<sup>81</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 142; layout approximately in accordance with the manuscript.

<sup>82</sup> It is as if this is also an implicit answer to the guess about the Gods of the earth.

God above heaven and in heaven and under heaven has [as] habitation  
 Heaven and earth  
 And sea and everything in them  
 Inspires everything  
 Makes everything alive  
 Rises above everything  
 Supports everything  
 Illuminates the light of the sun  
 Fortifies the light of the night and the signs (=stars)<sup>83</sup>  
 And made springs in the dry earth  
 And dry islands in the sea  
 And put the stars in the service of the greater lights.

Carney stretches the evidence when he says that this presents a twelve-syllable metre, even though he admits that it has not been preserved in all lines.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, in order to support his view, he changes the layout of the manuscript, whereas we have seen that the layout has a meaning. The text shows stylised, rhythmical language, using repetition, assonance and alliteration. Bieler calls it a “quasi-hymnical’ homiletic style, a sort of rhetorical prose with a strong poetical flavour,” and he compares it with the solemn sermon style of Saint Augustine and others.<sup>85</sup> This does not explain, however, why there is also cadence, assonance and repetition in the series of questions posed by the elder girl. Here as well, the layout is more spacious:<sup>86</sup>

Quis est deus  
 Et ubi est deus  
 Et cuius est deus  
 Et ubi habitaculum eius?  
 Si habet filios et filias, aurum et argentum deus uester?  
 Si uiuus semper,  
 Si pulcher,  
 Si filium eius nutrierunt multi,  
 Si filiae eius carae et pulchrae sunt hominibus mundi?  
 In caelo an in terra est,

<sup>83</sup> See Bury, “Sources,” 502, footnote.

<sup>84</sup> Carney, *Problem*, 130. He posits that the second part on the Trinity shows “signs of quatrains with lines of nine syllables.” This is, again, stretching the evidence in order to fit his theory.

<sup>85</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 223.

<sup>86</sup> Bieler’s qualification of her first few questions as “a young girl’s chatting away” (*ibid.*) is strange: the daughters of the king are presented throughout the narrative as dignified, serious conversation partners. He immediately modifies this judgement however by pointing out a parallel with a passage in the *Periphyseon* (*De divisione naturae*) of Johannes Scottus Eriugena. He also refers to *Vita Abbani* (see above) in this context.

In aequore,  
 In fluminibus,  
 In montanis  
 In conuallibus?  
 Dic nobis notitiam eius,  
 Quomodo uidebitur,  
 Quomodo delegitur,  
 Quomodo inuenitur,  
 Si in iuuentute,  
 Si in senectute,  
 inuenitur.<sup>87</sup>

Who is God  
 And where is God  
 And whose God is he  
 And where is his dwelling-place?  
 Has your God sons and daughters, gold and silver?  
 Is he ever-living,  
 Is he beautiful,  
 Have many fostered his son,  
 Are his daughters dear and beautiful in the eyes of the men of the earth?  
 Is he in the sky or in the earth  
 Or in the water,  
 In rivers,  
 In mountains,  
 In valleys?  
 Give us an account of him;  
 How shall he be seen,  
 How is he loved,  
 How is he found,  
 Is he found in youth,  
 In old age?<sup>88</sup>

An important and convincing suggestion of Carney's is that a rhythmical passage occurs when the speaker is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>89</sup> Stylised, poetic language is also found in Irish sagas, law and liturgical texts, especially in direct speech. It is used in certain situations in which one pronounces a law, a prophecy, a satire, a curse, a prayer or parts of a sermon.<sup>90</sup> It is a tool to express solemnity and inspiration. Tírechán writes explicitly that Patrick is full of the Holy Spirit<sup>91</sup> when he gives his poetic answer. In my opinion the text communicates the same message as regards the royal daughters—but now implicitly, by

<sup>87</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 142. The layout is approximately in accordance with the manuscript; the interpunction is Bieler's.

<sup>88</sup> Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 143.

way of the language and the layout. This would link up with a familiar early Irish tradition that some pre-Christian Irish received divine revelations from the Holy Spirit.<sup>92</sup>

This raises the question whether the text also presents the king's daughters as inspired by the Holy Spirit when they were guessing about the identity of Patrick, for the repetitive style and alternative layout start at this point in the narrative. I see this passage as a prelude to the conversation between the females and Patrick. There is a variant version of our anecdote in Muirchú's *Life of Patrick* (I.27).<sup>93</sup> Muirchú tells of a meeting between Patrick and another king's daughter: Monesan, daughter of a British king. There is no rhetorical, poetical prose in this tale, but the girl is explicitly described as being full of the Holy Spirit.<sup>94</sup> Muirchú says that she seeks, like Abraham, the Creator through nature.<sup>95</sup> Her question as to who created the sun is a prelude to the meet-

<sup>89</sup> Carney (*Problem*, 128) in fact refers here to what he supposed was present in the lost original, which he saw as the source of this anecdote and a similar tale in Muirchú's *Life* (see below). Bieler (*Patrician texts*, 223 and footnote) disputes several of Carney's statements: first, that the source of Tírechán's anecdote resembled a metrical baptismal hymn; second, that this hypothetical source was the original version of Muirchú's Monesan tale (see below); and third, that Saint Patrick's elevated tone should be connected with his being inspired by the Holy Spirit (Bieler sees the mention of the Holy Spirit merely as emphasising the view that Patrick's success was due to charismatic influence). I agree with Bieler on his first two objections, but in my view he is wrong concerning the third point.

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990), 38–46 on *rosc* and *retoiric*.

<sup>91</sup> *Respondens autem sanctus Patricius Spiritu Sancto plenus dixit*, "Replying, holy Patrick, full of the Holy Spirit, said" (Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, 142–43).

<sup>92</sup> McCone, *Pagan Past*, 84–106.

<sup>93</sup> Bieler, ed. and trans., *Patrician texts*, 62–123. Carney, *Problem*, 124 suggested a common source for the two narratives; he maintained that Tírechán's anecdote was an imitation or adaptation of Muirchú's version of the common source. Because the posited source is no longer extant, there is no evidence whatsoever which text is closest to this source. Moreover, because there are various tales about righteous non-Christian people, who are converted and baptised by a saint, we can safely assume that Tírechán (or the author of his source) and Muirchú knew this type of tale and its characteristics. They apparently played with details in an intertextual way. More research should be done into this story type, especially where "baptism" is connected with "death" (see also *Collectanea* §40: the narrative about the dead giant, who is resurrected and baptised by Patrick, before he dies again; Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 154–55).

<sup>94</sup> *Spiritu Sancto repleta*. . . (Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, 98, ll. 13–14); *luculentissimo Spiritu Sancti illustrata <consilio>* (ibid. ll. 21–22; on the grammar, see ibid. 205–07).

<sup>95</sup> *Quaerebat namque per naturam totius creaturae factorem in hoc patriarchae Abraham secuta exemplum*, "For through nature she searched the maker of all that is created, following in this the example of Abraham the patriarch" (Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 98–99).

ing with Patrick. Carney points out that this question refers to "Christ the True Sun," whom Patrick contrasted in his *Confessio* §60 with the natural sun.<sup>96</sup> I think that the prelude in Tírechán's anecdote has just such a function of reference and contrast. After their guesses on an origin from *síd*, earth or grave, the king's daughters literally ask where the men have come from. Saint Patrick chides them: instead of asking about the origin (*genus*) of his company, they should acknowledge the true God.<sup>97</sup> If I render this quite freely, what they ask is: are you Gods? To which Patrick replies: you should ask about the true God. The nature of the supernatural beings is very interesting for us, but completely irrelevant to Patrick and Tírechán: for them, only the God of the Christians counts. The others are *idola*—illusions, not the real thing.

*The Others: are Elves Gods? A Definition Problem*

I find, in the end, the explanation that the layout has been influenced by the rhetorical style<sup>98</sup> more convincing than the hypothesis of Maartje Draak. The interpretation of the rhythmic speech, marked by this style and layout, as inspired speaking is confirmed by other early Irish examples and makes sense within the context of the narrative central here.

There is one final point that I need to discuss. The sharp denial by Maartje Draak that the *áes síde* can be classified as Gods is not only due to a different reading of the text, but is also connected with her view on the Irish Gods in general. In this she followed her teacher Anton van Hamel, whose main publication on this subject is "Aspects of Celtic

<sup>96</sup> Carney, *Problem*, 125. The remark of Tírechán that the girls came to the well "just before sunrise" may perhaps not only be read as a realistic feature but also as a symbolic message. Compare how he tells previously (§19) that the foster-fathers of the girls, who were druids, produced nocturnal darkness and dense fogs over the land in order to prevent the conversion of the sisters by Patrick. Patrick goes on a fast, accompanied by prayers to God and genuflections and thus this darkness is dispelled. Presumably, the conversion of the sisters (and their two foster-fathers!) takes place when the sun has risen.

<sup>97</sup> *Melior erat uos Deo uero nostro confiteri quam de genere nostro interrogare*, "It would be better for you to profess our true God than to ask questions about our race" (Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 142–43).

<sup>98</sup> See also L. Bieler, "Tírechán als Erzähler: Ein Beitrag zum literarischen Verständnis der Patrickslegende," *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse* (1974) Heft 6, 19: "ihre [referring to Tírechán's anecdote] rhetorische Struktur: den reichlichen Gebrauch von Anaphora und Epiphora (. . .) und das Vorherrschende symmetrisch gebauter Kola, die auch im Schriftbild anschaulich gemacht werden."

Mythology."<sup>99</sup> I have several objections to Van Hamel's line of argument in this article, but I will concentrate here on one specific problem: how do we define the concept "God"?

Van Hamel distinguished between two kinds of supernatural being—Gods and divinities. For Van Hamel, the Irish supernaturals are "divinities." They are different from Gods, says Van Hamel, because of their aloofness, their temporary existence, and their occasional, infrequent contacts with human beings. In contrast with this, he defined "Gods" as eternal beings, who are approached through sacrifices and prayers, and who are believed to influence people's lives. Van Hamel pointed out that traces of veneration and sacrifice are seldom found in Irish sources.<sup>100</sup> He concluded that Irish Gods were scarce.<sup>101</sup>

Maartje Draak worked with the same distinction, but used instead of "divinities" the term "supernatural beings." She built on Van Hamel's theory and went a step further, positing that the pre-Christian Irish had no Gods at all.<sup>102</sup> She proposed a theory according to which the first

<sup>99</sup> *Proceedings of the British Academy* 20 (1934): 1–44. This was the Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture.

<sup>100</sup> Taking a late Middle Irish tale as paradigmatic for Irish pre-Christian religion, he even posits their absence: "Adoration, the usual form of reciprocity for divine favour, is altogether absent. So is sacrifice. (. . .) Secrecy, mystery, and privacy are what their activity is based upon, not reverence or worship ("Aspects," 8).

<sup>101</sup> At the outset of his article, Van Hamel gives two definitions ("Aspects," 6: "A divinity is a supernatural being, exercising power in a world not identical with ours; it may influence human society, man will occasionally feel and realize its existence, but this contact was never intended by either of the two parties. The god, on the other hand, acts upon human affairs and intervenes whenever it is deemed necessary; man, from his side, seeks to approach him"), but these do not convey all of the characteristics that he ascribes to the two concepts respectively. I have therefore summarised his view, which can be illustrated by numerous quotations, for example: "The real god, as known from the mythology of other peoples, is always there; he cannot but exist and is bound to spend his favour or to exert his wrath until the moment when everything shall cease to be. What we find in Ireland is different. These immortals are but moved by the mechanism of magic, their personality is but little developed, and their presence is only temporary. Thus the use of the word 'a god' would be misleading and prejudicial to a deeper understanding of the facts" (ibid. 6–7). As the reader can see, the presuppositions in this line of reasoning are many.

<sup>102</sup> M. Draak, "Some Aspects of Kingship in Pagan Ireland," in *La regalità sacra: contributi al tema dell' VIII congresso internazionale di storia delle religioni (Roma, aprile 1955)* = *The sacral kingship: contributions to the central theme of the VIIIth international congress for the history of religions (Rome, April 1955)* *Studies in the History of Religions: Supplements to Numen* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 651–63; 652, n3: "A god can be approached by prayer and by sacrifice. A supernatural being holds aloof—only occasionally and as by accident he (or she) takes an interest in human affairs; he demands no worship. If one agrees to this distinction the Irish had no gods."

Celts who settled in Ireland lost some of their Continental Gods because of their migration over sea. These settlers felt that they should approach the new supernatural powers of the Irish earth with care. This is why, she concludes, their rituals were more based on avoidance than on approach.<sup>103</sup>

Van Hamel was influenced by Western-Christian concepts of religion and by Western ideas about Gods. The great emphasis that he puts on *cultus* or veneration has its roots in the view on religion held by Cicero. From the work of the historian of religion Jan Platvoet on the semantic history of the terms *religio* and "religion," one may deduce that the Ciceronian view of religion gained currency among modern Western scholars of religions.<sup>104</sup> The occasional contacts between supernatural and human beings, and the mortality of some of the former, are not decisive arguments against a qualification of them as Gods. Moreover, there are several references to veneration in early Irish texts, although the objects of veneration are often called "idols" instead of "Gods."<sup>105</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, the discipline of Comparative Religion, also known as the History of Religions, was born. Fascinated by the many similarities between various religions, scholars compared and classified a wealth of details from different religious texts, rituals and so on. They had no problems calling Goddesses "Mother Goddesses;" nor with pointing out "Sky Gods," who usually were located at the top of a pantheon. We now know that they were influenced by their own cultural contexts: often, Classical or Biblical models were unconsciously followed. Nowadays, we have become more careful when it comes to applying labels. An important, but very difficult, question is how we should define the concept "God."

Another is: how to deal with Tírechán's terrestrial Gods? A first step is to look at medieval Irish equivalents. I have found two examples so

<sup>103</sup> M. Draak, "Migration over Sea," *Numen* 9 (1962): 81-98.

<sup>104</sup> Jan Platvoet, "Contexts, concepts & contests: Towards a pragmatics of defining 'religion,'" in *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (ed. J. G. Platvoet and A. L. Molendijk; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 463-516: 466-87, esp. 466-70, 481-87, and nn13-29.

<sup>105</sup> But, as I mentioned above, these two terms are two sides of one coin. Van Hamel and Draak also pointed out that we read very little on priestly ritual; but looking, for instance, at examples of divination I have to disagree with them. Whether these descriptions are genuine, or Christian reconstructions of the past, is a different matter.

far. When King Conchobar separates fighting men, the following comment is made in the *Feast of Bricriu*:<sup>106</sup>

ar is é d'ia talmaide ro boí oc Ultaib ind inbuid sin Conchobar.<sup>107</sup>

For he, Conchobar was an earthly God among the Ulster people at that time.

Why is he called a God? His mother is a king's daughter; his father is either a druid or a king. Worms play a role in a version of his conception.<sup>108</sup> Is this a supernatural indication? Or does this mean: he was obeyed on earth as the heavenly God is obeyed?<sup>109</sup> Possibly, some read Tírechán's reference to Gods of the earth in this sense: there are many (false) Gods on earth, but only one (true) God in heaven. One could also think of a similar pair of opposites later in Tírechán's anecdote (see below), when Saint Patrick expresses his wish to join the daughters of the earthly king to the heavenly king.<sup>110</sup>

Another God of the earth is the Dagda, according to the late Middle Irish *Fitness of Names*:

Dagda .i. dagh dé .i. d'ia soinemhail ag na geintíbh é, ar do adhradháis Tuatha Dé Danann dó, ar bá d'ia talmhan dóibh é ar mhét a chumachta.<sup>111</sup>

*Dagda*, that is *dagh dé* [good God].<sup>112</sup> He was a beautiful god of the heathens, for the Tuatha Dé Danann worshipped him: for he was an earth-god to them because of the greatness of his (magical) power.<sup>113</sup>

This is easier to understand: here we have a man from the *side* and the Irish owe their grain and milk to a contract with him.<sup>114</sup>

Does this mean that indeed the *áes side* were considered Gods of the earth? Looking again at Draak's theory on the migration over sea, it strikes me that she in fact hints at them being exactly that: having lost

<sup>106</sup> G. Henderson, ed. and trans., *Fled Bricrend: The Feast of Bricriu* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1899); translation into Dutch by Maartje Draak and Frida de Jong, *Het feestgelag van Bricriu: Een heldenverhaal* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1986); the text is dated to the eleventh century but has older layers (Gearóid Mac Eoin, "The Dating," 119, 121).

<sup>107</sup> R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1929) 250, lines 8209–10.

<sup>108</sup> See "The conception of Conchobar," Kuno Meyer, ed. and trans., "Anecdota from the Stowe Ms. N<sup>o</sup> 992," *Revue Celtique* 6 (1883–85): 173–86; 173–82.

<sup>109</sup> Compare this with a possibly parallel usage in the Old Testament of 'ēlōhīm, "God, Gods": "A metaphorical use of the term — metaphorical from our point of view — occurs when it is applied to living human beings, such as Moses (Exod 4:16; 7:1) and the king (Ps 45:7)" (K. van der Toorn in *DDD*, 353).

<sup>110</sup> *Ego uero uolo uos regi caelesti coniungere dum filiae regis terreni sitis credere* (Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 142, ll. 35–36).

the Gods of the earth that the settlers had left behind in their original home, they found new Gods of the earth in Ireland. These would be the people<sup>115</sup> living in the hollow hills and under water. A meeting with them could mean wealth, a long life, or death and disappearance, according to the tales. The scribes who committed these narratives to manuscripts kept guessing about their identity: devils, angels, demons, half-angels—idols or Gods. . .

*The End*

Ironically, the two females who wondered whether the men came out of the earth ended up in the earth themselves. When Saint Patrick has expressed his wish to join them to the heavenly king, they consent. He asks them a series of baptismal questions, and in answering they confess their faith. They are baptised, after which they want to see the face of Christ. Patrick tells them the conditions: they have to taste death and receive the sacrament. They are willing to undergo this, because they want to see their bridegroom. They die immediately and, after the period of mourning, they are buried beside the well of Clébach in a pre-Christian manner; but the grave is given to Patrick and his heirs. Patrick,

<sup>111</sup> W. Stokes, "Cóir Anmann (Fitness of Names)" in *Irische Texte* III.2 (ed. Stokes and Windisch; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1897), 285–444, 557: 354.

<sup>112</sup> Stokes translates here "fire of god," but the name *in Dagda* is usually translated as "the good God." As John Carey kindly pointed out to me, the etymology of his name seems to be implicit in two early Irish texts (Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best, "Tochmarc Étaíne," *Ériu* 12 (1938): 137–96: 142–43, §1; Elizabeth A. Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, Irish Texts Society LII (London: The Irish Texts Society, 1982, 44–45, §81) in which his name is connected with his impressive supernatural power. The former text also mentions his control of the weather and the crops.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 355.

<sup>114</sup> The tale about this contract is Old Irish (Vernam Hull, ed. and trans., "De gabáil in t-shída (Concerning the seizure of the fairy mound)," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 19 (1931): 53–58). The great supernatural power of the Dagda is also mentioned in this older tale, according to which the Dagda is the king of the Túatha Dé, "the peoples of [the] God/Goddess/Gods." He is not only connected with the earth in that he secures the grain and milk, but he also is the one who distributes the hollow hills among the supernatural beings. The oldest version from the Book of Leinster calls the latter also the *fír Déa*, "the men of [the] God/Goddess/Gods" (see *ibid.* 55). This could be another equivalent of our *viros side*, in that the word *side* sometimes refers to the supernatural beings themselves (instead of the hills). *Déa*, *dé* and *dee* are older forms of *día*, "God," and often refer to pre-Christian Gods/Goddesses.

<sup>115</sup> Male and female: the female dwellers in the *side* would, according to this line of reasoning, be Goddesses of the earth.

finally, builds an earthen church there—on the pre-Christian burial mound, the sort of place where the *áes síde* are said to dwell, and where one is believed to be able to enter Hell.

Bridget Cleary received the last sacrament as well, during a visit by the priest on 13 March 1895. He explained later that he did this in the expectation of a dangerous development of her illness.<sup>116</sup> Bridget underwent the Christian ritual just as involuntarily as the rituals prescribed by the ‘fairy doctor.’ At his next visit, on 15 March, the priest celebrated Mass in Bridget’s room. Bridget, however, took the Eucharist out of her mouth, which was seen by somebody. This event became yet another link in the fatal chain. In the Middle Ages, the beings from the Otherworld were sometimes believed to be on good terms with Christianity. In the nineteenth century, however, “fairies” and Christianity were mainly in opposition to each other.<sup>117</sup> Bridget’s refusal to receive the Eucharist was new evidence that there was something odd about her. On that Friday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, she was burned to death.<sup>118</sup>

### Conclusion

At the outset of this article, we asked about the identity of the “fairies” and how they survived sixteen centuries of Christian monotheism. Classifying and defining the multitude of supernatural beings in early Irish texts turned out to be a difficult task. There are many overlaps between the various categories in the sources. Apparently, the question of how to classify them has been on the minds of the scribes and authors of the texts. We find evaluations ranging from demonic to divine. Thus, there have been various attempts to include them in the Christian ‘pantheon,’ and in those cases we can say that Irish Christianity promoted an inclusive type of monotheism. In this way the supernaturals, some of whom were probably among the pre-Christian Gods and Goddesses, were sometimes said to descend from Adam, or revelations about Christianity were ascribed to them.

Returning to the oldest Irish designation of these beings—*áes síde*—it is important to note that this means “the *people* of the *síd(e)*.” This

<sup>116</sup> Bourke, *Burning*, 69.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>118</sup> For more details concerning the political, social and religious factors in this tragedy, see the excellent study of Bourke, *Burning*.

designation obviously suits inclusive monotheism very well, and reflects the idea that they are the *neighbours* of the Irish, living on the same island or in its vicinity, but at the same time in a 'parallel universe': under the ground, or under or across water. These neighbours, appearing as human beings, could be met on this earth; yet, they were believed to be essentially different from human beings—in this sense, they are the neighbours of the God of the Christians. 'Good neighbours' is their euphemistic designation, which hints at their sinister characteristics; and, looking at their 'history' as recorded in the sources, we have to conclude that they were treated as 'bad neighbours.' Early Irish (pseudo-) historians euhemerised them, classifying them as previous inhabitants of Ireland, who had to go 'underground' because of the immigration of the Irish. On a theological level, they were driven into the background when Christianity established itself on the island. With the introduction of "Christ the True Sun," they were condemned to 'the darkness.' They did not disappear, however. Not only is the Irish manuscript tradition a rich witness of beliefs and tales about them, but they also survived in the symbolic universe of the Irish people.