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**"The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne":  
A historical and morphological look at an Irish folktale**

**By**

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## INTRODUCTION

Irish mythological tales have given us a literary heritage that is as beautiful and varied as that of the Greeks. These mythological stories preserve at their core traces of very ancient paganism, of ancient custom and practices.

All of these tales feature the hero warrior; some are love tales, love which destroys the hero, and often his lover as well; others are tales of a more sinister nature, where the death of the hero is premeditated and predestined, and a sense of foreboding surrounds the characters.

This thesis shall concern itself with "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne", featuring Gráinne as temptress - the woman who will bring about Diarmuid's death, and Diarmuid as the hero warrior. Fionn MacCumhaill plays a part that is unusual for him, as the malevolent pursuer of the lovers. In some oral versions Gráinne is exonerated as seductress by the introduction of a 'love spot' on Diarmuid's forehead, which forces any woman who saw it to fall in love with him. Diarmuid is eventually killed by the treachery of Fionn, and the love of a woman coupled with destiny brings death to the hero. Magic plays an important part in this story, with the aid of Aongus the love god (Diarmuid's foster father) various magical helpers such as Modán, magical instruments and berries. Magic too is a cause of Diarmuid's death.

In this thesis I will explore this tragic love tale in which the death of the hero is predestined and cannot be overcome. Chapter one deals with the importance of myth for early Irish society, and how the myth of the Irish hero warrior came to be of such importance. Chapter two will examine the structure of these tales and analyse the relevance and symbolism of certain characters. Chapter three will briefly survey European fairy tales, comparing

them to Irish folk or 'wonder tales', looking at their similar origins but also at their differences. Chapter four will chronicle the literary form of this literature, the changes that the sixth and seventh century monastic scribes introduced to these myths, the influence the Norman invasion had on Irish storytelling, also the effect of French Romantic tales on Irish Heroic tales, and the oral tradition in Ireland.



## THE NARRATIVE

### The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne

"The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne" is one of the classic love tales and a major epic of the Fenian Cycle. The story goes as such:

Fionn, the legendary leader of the Fianna had been lonely since his last wife died. His son, Oisín, and one of his warriors, Derion, suggest he remarry, and someone to befit his place in life. They suggested Grainne, the daughter of Cormac - High King of Ireland - Fionn is not sure (initially) about this marriage as relations between him and Cormac have not been good. But when the warriors return saying Cormac agreed to the marriage, Fionn goes joyfully to Tara to marry Gráinne.

Gráinne is not happy about this for she has misgivings about marrying a man of Fionn's age. At the wedding feast Grainne falls in love with Diarmuid, a handsome young warrior of the Fianna. As is traditional, she passes around a goblet of wine for each of the guests to drink, this wine has been drugged by her, she excludes Diarmuid when giving around the goblet. When the guests fall asleep, she proclaims her love to Diarmuid. Diarmuid is reluctant to elope with Grainne, so she places a geís on him. As true heroes may not break a geís, the couple elope.

From here on the couple flee all over Ireland never spending more than one night in any place. They are pursued by Fionn throughout the tale, who is determined to have his revenge or 'eric'. Many adventures happen to the couple on their flight around Ireland. In the Forest of Dubhnós, for example, they procure berries from the quicken tree. These berries raise the



characters from super human to almost immortal status, meaning that they will only die a fated death or a death caused by magic.

During the tale Aongus the love god, and foster father to Diarmuid, helps Diarmuid and Grainne out of many difficulties. He also arranges a truce between Diarmuid and Fionn. The couple settle in Kerry and produce five children. Grainne wishes to hold a feast, in order that she, her father Cormac and Fionn be reunited and friends again. She invites them all to a feast in Kerry.

During the long feast a boar hunt is organised by Fionn. Fionn knows Diarmuid has been placed 'faoi géisa' by Aongus never to hunt boar and that Diarmuid is not aware of this particular geís. Diarmuid goes unwittingly on the hunt, during which the wild boar charges and injures him. As Diarmuid dies so too does the boar, their lives are interlinked. Fionn has the power to save him, by giving him water from his cupped hands. But his jealousy overcomes him and when he finally does, it is too late, Diarmuid is dead.





Fig. 1



## CHAPTER 1

### Myth

*"If we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives."* (Bettleheim, 1985 Intro.). To find deeper meaning, we must be able to transcend the narrow confines of our personal lives and look beyond them. As it is not physically possible to live out each others lives, to experience many existences, we must live them in our minds and imaginations, through song, poetry, myth and legend.

Throughout the centuries, in their retelling mythological stories become ever more refined, they came to speak to all levels of human knowledge, communicating in a manner which reaches the child or the adult and all levels of sophistication and education. Myths developed from a need for people to understand their position in the universe, their relationship with their spiritual world and their relationships with each other. They are a universal trend, although each individual country has her own, all myths are interconnected and interwoven thematically and chronologically.

In most countries there was no clear line separating myth from fairy or folk tales. All of these forms of tales comprise together the literature of pre-literate societies. It is only when the tales, and various forms of them, are actually written down, and are no longer submitted to continuous change, that they are separated and defined as fairy tales, folk tales, and mythological tales.

Myths and mythological tales are *"specific accounts concerning gods or superhuman beings and extraordinary events or circumstances, in a time that*



*is altogether different from that of ordinary human experience."*  
( Encyclopaedia Britannica p.794) Myths and mythological tales occur in all human traditions and communities and are a basic part of human culture. People in every culture or tradition have developed a stock of myths in addition to other early forms of literature i.e. folk tales, fables etc..... *"Many myths answer questions about the nature and foundation or ritual and cultic customs."* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, p.795) Myths and mythological tales are believed to have been formulated in order to explain the physical and spiritual world to early peoples.

Just as myths are generated to explain the world to its inhabitants, so too does folklore provide support for the institutions and behaviour patterns of a culture.

*"In non literate societies the central events of human life - birth, attainment of manhood, marriage and death - are invested with elaborate ceremonies by which the social organism marks the mortals progress and final exit to afterlife."*

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, p.464)

of special importance is the relation of all kinds of folk literature to mythology.

*"This is especially true of the highly developed mythologies of India, and the Greek, Irish and German pantheons. All are results of an indefinitely long past, of growth and outside influences, of religious cults and practices, and of the glorification of heroes. But whatever the historical, psychological or religious motivations, the mythologies are a part of folk literature and have been subject to continual changes at the hands of the tale-tellers."*

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, p.456)

Stories of the Gods and Heroes and of supernatural origins and changes of the earth have played an important role in all folk literature. But folk tales are



removed from mythological tales. Where myths and mythological tales were developed to explain the purpose of our existence, and document the origins of many worldwide customs and rituals in an elevated way. Folk tales are more down to earth, they relate more to the specific rituals and customs of the area where they were first told.

Myths and mythological tales can be said to have a common thread running through them. Many of these mythological tales are common to all cultures, the characters names may be different and the place where the tale is set may also be different, but the theme, the characters and the structures of the tales are similar. For example, we can look at the character of Diarmuid in Irish myth and compare him to Adonis in Classical myth. There are several points of similarity between the two. *"As with Adonis, the literature often refers to the beauty of Diarmuid's person and to the lustre of his countenance, and his death fighting a fierce boar is a 'direct parallel.'"* (O'h Ogain: 1990, p.163). In folk tales of different countries there is usually not this common ground. The most obvious characteristic of all folk tales is that originally they were oral. Nearly all known cultures have produced these tales at some point in their history. They have been influenced by myth certainly but they do not hold the authority and weight of myths and mythological tales.

In the seventeenth century educated writers appropriated the oral folktale and converted it to what is known as the fairy tale. The fairy tale is removed from folktales in that it was greatly changed upon being written down. The writers of fairy tales such as Perrault or the Brothers Grimm had to adapt the folk tale to make it acceptable to the higher classes at the time. Thus many elements of the tales have been changed, and where maybe a folk tale may have explained a custom in a roundabout way, its fairy tale equivalent may wipe

the custom from the tale or only use parts of it, and thus reduce the tale to mere entertainment.

*"The fairytale tells of extraordinary beings and events and, in that respect, resembles myth, though it differs markedly in other respects.' The time suggested by the fairy tale is the time of man's ordinary experience. Whereas the typical fairy tale opens with 'Once upon a time.....,' the typical myth beings with: 'In the beginning.....' The fairytale carries no authority, even if sometimes a moral is presented. Its outstanding quality is entertainment."*

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, p.794)

Thus, we can say folk and fairy tales are quite different from myth, even if historically many characters in folk and fairytales, for example ogres, wizards, adventure seekers, werewolves, witches are seen to be transformations of figures from old myths and mythological tales.

Before being written down, these tales were either condensed or vastly elaborated; in the re-telling over the centuries some tales merged into others. All the tales became modified by what the teller considered to be of the greatest interest to his listeners, by relating the tales to the issues of the day or the problems of the era.

Some folk stories evolved out of myths, others were incorporated into them. Both forms embodied the collective experience of a society, as people wished to recall past wisdom for themselves and hand it down to future generations. These tales are the bringers of deep insights that have sustained generations of people through many changes of fortune in their lives.

*"Giambattista Vico claimed, as long ago as 1725, that 'the first science to be learned should be mythology or the interpretation of Fables."*

(O'Cuthasaigh, 1982, p.220) <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Crane Bag, edited by Hederman, but this piece is by Thomas O'Cuthasaigh

*"Irish manuscripts contain mythological texts whose abundance and archaic character make them unique in Western Europe. It is a rich and complex body of material that calls out for clarification and interpretation."*

(O'Cuthasaigh, 1982, p.220) <sup>2</sup>

It is in our ancient mythological tales and not our religious heritage that we discover the native ideology of Ireland. It was in the myths of Ancient Ireland that the nature of men and their gods, and the relationship between them were explored. It is our job to uncover the ideals of their society which are present in their myths to try and understand their ways a little better.

*"If we are to look at the peculiar genius of the Celtic imagination, we will certainly stop and ponder at its magnificent creations of the seventh to the ninth century. This was the age of saints and scholars the age of the great monasteries,"*

(Hederman, 82: p.256) <sup>3</sup>

the golden age of Celtic art.

*"The voyage of the peregrini, the island of settlements on the edge of the world, and the re-Christianizing of Europe, all undertaken in that adventurous spirit of the Celtic hero, had now reached their high point; now the time had come to settle down, to tell the story, to render it in visible form."*

(Hederman, 82, p. 256) <sup>3</sup>

The works of the story tellers and artists are not by any means historical documents, they are further recreations of the spirit that originally inspired the tale. In these tales Christian faith and Celtic magic intermingle and lose their original contour to form a literature of originality and depth.

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<sup>2</sup> The Article by Tomás Ó'Cuthasaigh Between God and Man: The Hero of Irish Tradition p.220-227

<sup>3</sup> The Article by John Hill Archetypes of an Irish Soul (II) p.253-259

Irish myth is concerned above all with the relationship between man and the gods.

*"The myth of the hero is the most common and the best known myth in the world"*

Henderson states,

*"we find it in the classical mythology of Greece and Rome, in the Middle Ages, in the Far East, and among contemporary primitive tribes. It also appears in our dreams. It has an obvious dramatic appeal, and a less obvious, but none the less profound psychological importance."*

(Jung, 1964,p.110)

The myth of the hero is used as a vehicle for exploring this relationship of man and his gods. A basic opposition in Irish mythology between man and god is mediated in the person of the hero. Opposition is used here in the sense of the discrimination of paired categories. It is the structuralist view that every mythical system is based upon a sequence of such oppositions, which are mediated by a third category which is abnormal or unusual. The hero belongs to this third category. He is at once the son of a God and of a human father; he is mortal and lives out his life among men, but otherworld personages intervene at crucial moments of his life. This myth is exceptionally well represented in Irish sources.

*"These hero myths vary enormously in detail, but the more closely one examines them the more one sees that structurally they are very similar. They have, that is to say, a universal pattern, even though they were developed by groups or individuals without any direct contact with each other."*

(Jung, 1964, p.110)

*"Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero's miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant*

*struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (hybris), and his fall through betrayal or a 'heroic' sacrifice that ends in his death."*

(Jung, 1964, p.110)

We can see this pattern, which is common to all tales of mythical hero warriors in "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne. From Diarmuid's birth he is destined to be a heroic warrior. His appearance, his heroic abilities and magical instruments and also his prominence within the Fianna, all mark him out as a higher being. Whilst on the run from Fionn he defeats his enemies with superhuman power and abilities. Having Aongus as his protector and guide and dying then at the betrayal of Fionn, all point to his being a hero warrior. This sequence of events show him to be neither god nor mortal, but somewhere in between, and he like many other mythical heroes is used in Irish mythology to explore the relationship between man and his gods.



## CHAPTER 2

*"The word 'morphology' means the study of forms. In botany the term 'morphology' means the study of the component parts of a plant, of their relationship to each other and to the whole - in other words, the study of a plant's structure."*

( V. Propp 1994 Authors foreword)

This chapter will briefly examine the basic structure of folk/mythological tales and apply this structure to an Irish mythological story, in this case "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne". I will also attempt to look at the main characters in the tale, their relevance to the tale, and the imagery and symbolism they presented to the early Irish audience.

Vladimir Propp in "The Morphology of the Folktale" states that as a general rule all traditional folk and mythological tales follow a set formation. Within that set structure or formation there may be variations, but these are slight. A tale always begins with some sort of initial situation which often presents a picture of unusual, sometimes emphasised prosperity, often in quite vivid, beautiful forms. This prosperity serves as a contrasting background for the ensuing misfortune.

In this case the initial situation is the prospective marriage of Gráinne to Fionn. After the initial situation is stated the main characters are introduced and their social status is indicated, for example at the wedding feast Gráinne, (who is the daughter of Cormac High King of Ireland) asks Dáire (one of Fionn's druid poets) about Fionn's warriors the Fianna, and so each one is introduced to us and their position is explained. Oisín son of Fionn, Oscar son of Oisín, Gaul MacMorna the terrible in battle, Kylta MacRonan the swift footed, Dering the son of Dobar O'Baskin and finally "*Diarmuid O'Dyna of the*

*Bright Face, the favourites of all maidens, and beloved of all the Fianna for his high-mindedness, his bravery and his generous disposition."* (Joyce, 1978 p.279)

Different categories of characters are introduced in different ways. Fionn as the central villain in this tale is introduced at the very beginning, separate from everyone else; he is a lone character and the instigator of evil deeds. The truly heroic characters are introduced together as a whole, with Diarmuid singled out as the primary hero because of the listing of his great heroic qualities. Each of these characters has an already defined function to play in the structure of the tale.

The functions of these characters serve as stable, constant elements in the tale, they constitute the fundamental components of a tale. "*Function is understood as an act of character defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.*" (Propp, 1994, p.21) The number of functions known to the mythological tale is small, whereas the number of personages is extremely large. Take the next part of the tale for example, Grainne (as we know), has been betrothed to Fionn, and is due to marry him. If she were to marry him, the families of Fionn and Cormac would be united and peace would ensue, everyone would benefit. But she wishes to take Diarmuid as her husband, they elope and marry, and there is ultimately a tragic ending. Thus the function of marriage gives two totally different endings, depending on the characters involved. We have two morphologically different elements, in spite of the identical action (Grainne marrying) in both cases.

So far in the tale two things have happened. ① The scene has been set and the main characters have been introduced and their social position indicated. ② We know Grainne and Fionn are to wed, but that she is unhappy at the

prospect of this marriage, and that she is interested in Diarmuid, a handsome and brave young warrior. The next point in the tale is where Grainne administers a sleeping draught to the whole of the company, excluding Diarmuid. When the rest of the crowd fall asleep, she announces her love to Diarmuid, who initially refuses, but then is obliged to do as she says she places him "faoi géisa" (under bonds) to elope with her.

The character of Grainne shows some of the characteristics of the sovereignty goddess in this tale. The most important part is that she not only chooses her husband, but also that she is portrayed as a dispenser of liquor. Many sagas refers to the cup of liquid which the woman, in the role of the goddess, brings to the king, her prospective husband. The king must marry his goddess before he is recognised as a king. The goddess of sovereignty is a symbol of the land, whose union with the prospective king ensures his sovereignty. Without union with her he cannot become a king acceptable to this people. Without her rightful ruler she is lost, old and occasionally deranged. When united with her sovereign she frequently changes from her former shape of an ugly old woman to a beautiful young girl.

In all Irish hero tales, there is an initial falling in love period (which is short), followed by a long period of testing. The hero (in this case Diarmuid) is placed under one or more géisa, which he cannot break, he would have had a few géisa placed on him during infancy and childhood which now affect him (e.g. not killing a boar, leaving by a wicket gate etc.). All heroes in these tales are put through tests, which involve not only fighting but two kinds of rigorous prohibition. The breaking of these prohibitions, solemn promises or géisa, calls into operation the destructive fate that awaits the hero. All heroes are destined to die eventually, and all of them die a heroic and fated death because of géis they failed to keep.



These géisa (singular géis) or prohibitions may be placed on a person in the form of druidical bonds, love spells or solemn promises which true heroes may not break. These taboos were an important part of the mores of the Celts, governing both things done and not done. In heroic sagas (such as Chú Chulainn or Diarmuid and Gráinne) the violation of géisa is a sure omen of approaching death. When Diarmuid for example breaks the géis and tries to kill the wild magical boar of Ben-Gulban, he dies by the boar's tusks as the boar itself dies.

It is the nature of géisa that they are guaranteed to trap their victim between themselves and the more general prohibitions of etiquette and propriety. When Grainne places a géis on Diarmuid to take her for his wife and in so doing prevents her marriage to Fionn, Diarmuid is torn between the géis (which he cannot break) and his duty to his leader Fionn. Gráinne is betrothed to Fionn, something which Diarmuid knows he should not interfere with, but he has fallen in love with Gráinne, and she has placed a géis upon him, so he does what his heart and friends tell him, he elopes with her. This géis goes against his loyalty to Fionn and Grainne's duty to marry Fionn.

In the subsequent part of the tale, the first place they stay is at Doire dá Bhoth. The function of this place-name in the story (oakgrove of two bothys) was doubtlessly to make clear that they did not sleep together on account of Diarmuid's loyalty to Fionn.

They are pursued by Fionn, who is intent on killing Diarmuid. Diarmuid, being a hero-warrior, already possesses the special abilities needed to thwart the wily Fionn, but as a hero (this is a morphological element) he obtains (or has already obtained) some magical object or ability, often associated with a sacrifice or an initiation. Diarmuid has two magical spears and two magical

swords. The great spear called the Gá-dearg or Crann-dearg (red javelin) and the small one called Gá-buí or Crann-buí (yellow javelin). The two swords are called Mórallta (big fury) and the Beagallta (little fury). These spears and swords he got from Mannanan MacLir and from Aongus of the Bruga (god of love and Diarmuid's foster father). He carried the great spear and sword in affairs of life-and-death, and the smaller in affairs of less danger. Diarmuid comes up against many enemies, all of whom are instigated by Fionn, all of whom would be difficult to overcome without his swords and spears. Diarmuid uses his 'champion feats', swords and javelins in different ways to defeat his opponents. At one point in the tale he is trapped in the Wood of two tents, in a hut surrounded by a strong fence with seven doors in it. This fence is surrounded by his enemies. Diarmuid has no choice but to exit by one door and chooses the one guarded by Fionn and his Fianna. So rising *"on his two spears with a light and airy bound over the fence, and running swiftly forward, was in a moment beyond the reach of sword and spear, and so he escaped."* (Joyce, 1978, p.295)

At another point in the tale he comes up against the three sea champions, their three venomous hounds and around three hundred men. On the first day he uses the Gá-buí to kill fifty men. The second day the Mórallta to kill one hundred men. The third day he brought out the Mórallta *"which never left anything for a second blow,"* and both the Gá-dearg and the Gá-buí *"from whose wounds no-one ever recovered."* (Joyce, 1978, p.301) With these three instruments he kills the remainder of the sea-men. The three sea-champions he bound in iron-hard bonds to leave them in torment until they died.

The three venomous hounds were set on Diarmuid, Grainne and Modán (their helper) by the green-clad knights. Modan kills the first. Diarmuid the second

with the Ga-dearg, and he kills the third by dashing it against the rocks. He then kills the green-clad knights with his blades.

When Fionn's old nurse (the witch hag) promises to kill him, and then proceeds to throw deadly poisonous darts at him. He kills her too with the Ga-dearg.

On the day of Diarmuid's death he is not carrying the larger instruments, but has brought instead the Beagallta and the Ga-buí. The instruments are for specific use, and as he has brought the less powerful sword and javelin, and the hunting of the boar turns out to be a matter of life or death. Diarmuid dies.

The next stage in the structure of the heroic tale is an optional one, not a function always required in order that the tale proceeds. The hero must prove that it was he and not a false claimant who overcame the enemy or the hero meets a supernatural being, it is elusive or extremely horrible, and has to be tricked or forced before it helps the hero in his pursuit of supernatural power. Successful, the transformed hero returns home.

In "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne", the supernatural being is Sharvan the Surly. Sharvan,

*"who was a giant of the race of the wicked Cain, burly and strong, with heavy bones, large thick nose, crooked teeth and one broad, red fiery eye in the middle of his black forehead. He had a great club tied by a chain to an iron girdle which was around his body. Fire could not burn him, water could not drown him, and weapons could not wound him, and there was no way to kill him but by giving him three blows of his own club."*

(Joyce, 1978, p.351)

Sharvan guarded the quicken tree in the Wood of Dooros. The quicken tree had sprung up from a red quicken berry that one of the Dedannan's had accidentally dropped in the wood. The berries from this tree had magical qualities. When a person ate a berry, they felt happy, and if old, were restored to youth.

Diarmuid went to live with Graínne in this wood, for he knew Sharvan did not let any of the Fianna in. For a while the couple lived peacefully there, until Graínne got a sudden urge for the quicken berries. Diarmuid awakened the Giant, fought with him and killed him. Then picked berries for Graínne and himself to eat. They are thus elevated into more than mortals. Diarmuid does not return home directly after this. But undergoes more perils, which he overcomes before he returns to Graínne (who has since been spirited away by Aongus).

As an Irish hero warrior, Diarmuid is not strictly human. True he is in human form and possesses human needs and desires, but he also possess supernatural qualities. He is an almost invincible warrior (owning powerful instruments) and a truly noble man, who also has, for his guide, the protection of Aongus, the god of love.

According to Jung,

*"In many of these stories the early weaknesses of the hero is balanced by the appearance of strong 'tutelary' figures or guardians, who enable him to perform the superhuman tasks that he cannot accomplish unaided. Among the Greek heroes, Theseus had Poseidon, god of the sea, as his deity' Perseus had Athena, Achilles had Chevron, the wise centaur, as his tutor."*

(Jung, 1964, p.110)

In Irish myths we have Cu Chulainn who had Lug as his protector and Diarmuid who had Aongus, to name but two.

In Celtic mythology Aongus, the god of love is also god of the Tuatha De-Danann (the race of Danu). He is sometimes referred to as Aongus Mac Ind Óg. His father was the Dagda and his mother Boand, from whom the Boyne river is named. Harper to the Gods and a friend to poets, Aongus was probably conceived at the fertility rites during Samain at Bruig na Boínne. He intervenes at crucial moments in Diarmuid's life.

The first time is when Diarmuid is a young child. Diarmuid's father kills Diarmuid's foster brother. The boy's father wishes for the life of Diarmuid as 'eric' for his son's life. Diarmuid's father - Donn will not do so, so the young boy's father turns the boy into a magical boar whose destiny is to eventually kill Diarmuid. But his (Diarmuid's) death will only come about when Diarmuid tries to kill the boar and in doing so his own life will end. Aongus then places a géis on Diarmuid never to hunt a boar. He gives the couple advice while they are fleeing from Fionn. *"Go not into a tree that has only one channel of approach: where you cook your food, there eat it not: where you eat, sleep not there, and where you sleep tonight, sleep not there tomorrow night."* (Joyce 1978, p.296) When Diarmuid is trapped in the Wood of two tents by Fionn and his men, Aongus helps him be secretly spiriting Gráinne away to safety. While Diarmuid is in the Wood of Dooros having eaten some of the quicken berries, Fionn and his warriors find him. Diarmuid is trapped in the quicken tree, and Fionn's warriors are sent up the tree one by one to kill him. As each one appears Diarmuid hits or kicks them and they fall from the tree. Where upon Aongus changes their appearance to make them look like Diarmuid. Then Fionn's warriors thinking each one is Diarmuid kills them as they fall down. On death each one returns to their own shapes. Eventually,



Aongus acts as a peace broker between Diarmuid and Fionn and Diarmuid and Cormac, he also arranges the conditions of that peace. When Diarmuid dies Aongus is not there to assist him. After Diarmuid's death Aongus brings him to his home and each day he breathes life into him and talks to him for a little while. Gráinne, though she grieved for a while *"in the end she was content, knowing how Aongus loved Diarmuid."* (Joyce, 1978, p.350)

T Jung in "Man and his Symbols" suggests that these godlike figures such as Aongus and Lug in Irish myth and Athena and Poseidon in classical myth *"are in fact symbolic representations of the whole psyche, the larger and more comprehensive identity that supplies the strength that the personal ego lacks. Their special role suggests that the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness, his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses, in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him. Once the individual has passed his initial test and can enter the mature phase of life, the hero myth loses its relevance. The hero's symbolic death becomes, as it were, the achievement of that maturity."*

(Jung, 1964, p.112)

Although Diarmuid and Fionn are supposed to have made peace, Fionn still bears a grudge against Diarmuid for eloping with and marrying Gráinne. Fionn plans a boar hunt and includes Diarmuid, knowing well that Diarmuid may not hunt boar, something Diarmuid is not aware of himself. Diarmuid kills the boar, and is wounded and dying himself. Only Fionn can cure him, he has the magic gift that if he gives water from the palms of his hands to anybody, that person will be young and fresh and sound from sickness. Fionn is persuaded by Diarmuid and Oscar to go and fetch the water, but his jealousy overcomes him on thinking of Gráinne, he stalls for a while, and then goes to help him, but it is too late and Diarmuid dies.

Fionn and Diarmuid share the status of being hero warriors. Both these men and the rest of the Fianna perform a function which can be best defined as follows. They act as mediators between the gods of the underworld and men, between the beyond and the earth; they inhabit intermediate or common regions, all the places that are damp and ambiguous, the beaches, the swamps, the estuaries, the wild valleys which open up the entrances to the caverns. These Fianna of Erin live in close affinity with the beyond, particularly with the spirits, and there naturally develop marriages and military alliances.

Fionn, being one of these supernatural beings, a highly noble character, is not expected to seek revenge on Diarmuid to the point of causing his death. It appears to go against his character. Especially since a good deal of time has elapsed since the initial elopement, marked by the fact that Grainne has borne Diarmuid five children. But this tale has a formal pattern which must be adhered to. What you have is an old husband, young wife, unwilling young lover, flight from the husband, vengeance by the husband on the two lovers, and finally death. It is basically the story of an attempt to defeat a decree of fate. But fate and destiny cannot be eluded.

The tale deals with the problem of a beautiful young wife who forces her love on a man bound in loyalty to her husband (or almost husband). The flight to the forest, the pursuit, their living off the rivers and land are typical and found in other similar tales such as the story of Deirdre and Naoise, and a British version, the romance of Tristan and Isolde. Typical also to all of these tales is that the jealousy of the husband leads to the death of the hero, and sometimes (but not in Diarmuid and Gráinne) the heroine.



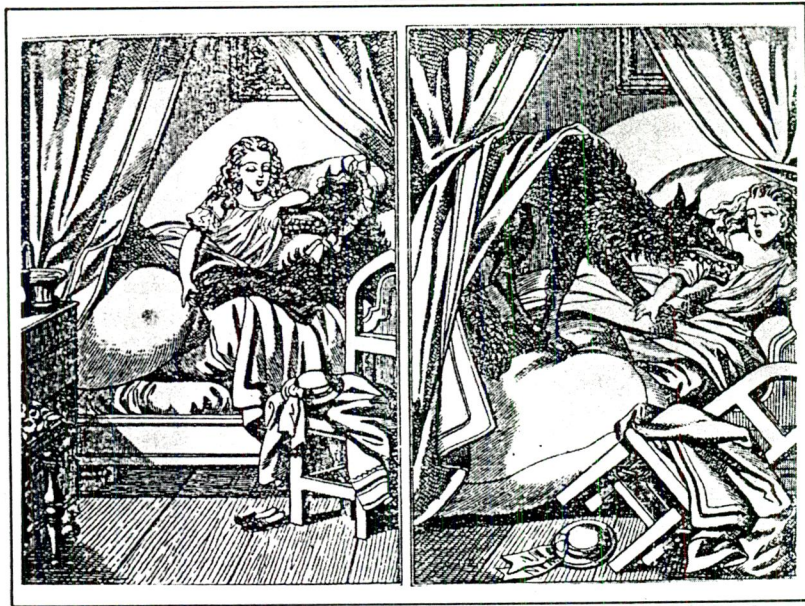


Fig. 2 & Fig. 3

### CHAPTER 3

It is a belief held by writers such as Zipes and Bettelheim that myths and fairy stories have much in common, they hold that not only are there similarities but also essential differences (as outlined in Chapter 1). A myth may express an inner conflict in a symbolic form and suggest how it may be solved. But this is not necessarily the myth's central concern. *"The myth presents its theme in an elevated way, it carries spiritual force, and the divine is present and is experienced in the form of super human heroes who make constant demands on mere mortals."* (Bettelheim, 1985, p.37) Much as we the mortals may strive to be like these heroes, we will remain always and obviously inferior to them. The dominant feeling a myth conveys is: *"this is absolutely unique, it could not have happened to any other person, or in any other setting. Such events are grandiose, awe inspiring and could not possibly happen to an ordinary mortal like you or me."* (Bettelheim, 1985 p.37)

In this respect fairy tales are quite different from mythological tales. Unlike mythological tales, fairy tales are geared specifically for children. Fairy tales are unique, not only as a form of literature, but as works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child, as is no other form of art.

Bruno Bettelheim in "The Uses of Enchantment" makes the point that consistent with all great art, the deepest meaning of the fairy tale will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life. Children will extract different meanings from the same fairy tale, depending on their interests and needs of the moment. When given the chance, they will return to the same tale when they are ready to enlarge on old meanings, or replace them with new ones.

Fairy tales do not pretend to describe the world as it is, nor do they try to present unrealistic goals for the child to try and attain, nor advise what one ought to do in a particular circumstance. The fairy tale clearly does not refer to the outer world, although it may begin realistically enough and have everyday features woven into it. The unrealistic nature of these tales is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual.

The folktale was the staple of what was to become the literary fairy tale for children. Before this could occur however, it was necessary to prescribe the form and manner in which the tales could be adapted to entertain and instruct children. The original folk tales from which the fairy tale evolved, presented the stark realities of power politics without disguising the violence and brutality of everyday life, such as starvation of children, rape and corporal punishment. Some of these conditions, which at the root of the folktale, were conditions which were so overwhelming that they demanded symbolic abstraction.

Fairy tales which developed from Folk tales were written at the time with the purpose of socializing children to meet definitive normative expectations at home and in public life.

*"At its point of origin for children, the literary fairy tale, was designed both to divert as amusement, and instruct ideologically as a means to mould the inner nature of young people and, in this respect fairy tales for children were no different than the rest of literature (fables, sermons, biblical stories) which conveyed a model of the exemplary child that was borne in mind while reading."*

(Zipes, 1983, p.9)

The fairy tale writers of the seventeenth century adapted folk tale material to make it socially acceptable to the requirements of higher class society at the time.

*"The first writers of fairy tales had to demonstrate the social value of the genre to the upper classes, before literary fairy tales could be printed. In doing that, the morality and ethics of a male-dominated, Christian, civil order had to become part and parcel of the literary fairy tale."*

(Zipes, 1983, p.10)

Writers such as Perrault, Tenéze, the Brothers Grimm and Andersen are responsible for the literary gentrification of the oral folk tale, paving the way for founding a children's literature which would be useful for introducing manners to children of breeding.

However these writers are also guilty of setting stringent standards of comportment which were intended to regulate and limit the nature of children's development. The intention was to give children the idea that virtue was to be rewarded and vice punished. So the folk tale developed or changed from being a tale of morals and ritual into a fairy tale which was intended as an educator in the niceties of society.

In "Fairy tales and the Art of Subversion" Zipes argues this case with two commonly known fairy tales "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Cinderella".

"Little Red Riding Hood" is a tale with a long tradition, and has been told in France as an oral folk tale since the Middle Ages.



"Little Red Riding Hood" or "The Story of Grandmother".

"There was a woman who had made some bread. She said to her daughter: 'Go carry this hot loaf and bottle of milk to your granny' So the little girl departed. At the crossway she met a wolf, the werewolf, who said to her: 'Where are you going?'

'In taking this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my granny.'

'What path are you taking,' said the werewolf, 'the path of needles or the path of pins?'

'The path of needles,' the little girl said.

'All right, then I'll take the path of pins?'

The little girl entertained herself by gathering needles. Meanwhile the werewolf arrived at the grandmother's house, killed her, put some of her meat in the cupboard and a bottle of her blood on the shelf. The little girl arrived and knocked at the door.

'Push the door', said the werewolf, 'it's barred by a piece of wet straw.'

'Good day, Granny. I've brought you a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk.'

'Put it in the cupboard, my child. Take some of the meat which is inside and the bottle of wine on the shelf.' After she had eaten, there was a little cat which said 'Phooey.....a slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her granny.'

'Undress yourself, my child,' the werewolf said, 'and come lie down beside me.'

'Where should I put my apron?'

'Throw it into the fire, my child, you won't be needing it anymore.'

And each time she asked where she should put all her other clothes, the bodice, the dress, the petticoat, and the long stockings, the wolf responded:

'Throw them into the fire, my child, you won't be needing them anymore.'

When she laid herself down in the bed, the little girl said: 'Oh Granny, how hairy you are!'

'The better to keep myself warm, my child!'

'Oh, Granny, what big nails you have!'

'The better to scratch me with, my child!'

'Oh, Granny, what big shoulders you have!'

'The better to carry the firewood, my child!'

'Oh, Granny, what big ears you have!'

'The better to hear you with, my child!'

'Oh, Granny, what big nostrils you have!'

'The better to snuff my tobacco with, my child.'

'Oh, Granny, what a big mouth you have!'

'The better to eat you with, my child.'

'Oh, Granny, I've got to go badly. Let me go outside.'

'Do it in bed, my child.'

*'Oh, no, Granny, I want to go outside!'*

*'All right but make it quick!'*

*The werewolf attached a woollen rope to her feet and let her go outside. When the little girl was outside, she tied the end of the rope to a plum tree in the courtyard. The werewolf became impatient and said: 'Are you making a load out there? Are you making a load?'*

*When he realised that nobody was answering him, he jumped out of bed and saw that the little girl had escaped. He followed her but arrived at her house just at the moment she entered."*

(Zipes, 1986, p.228-229)

In this the older pre fairy tale version of Little Red Riding Hood, the little girl, who meets a werewolf on the path to her granny, and then drinks the blood and eats the flesh of her grandmother,

*"acts out an initiation ritual which has two aspects to it: the pattern of the ritual reflected a specific French peasant tradition and a general 'archaic' belief. In those regions of France, where the tale was popular, the tale related to the needlework apprenticeship, which young peasant girls underwent, and designated the arrival of puberty and initiation into society. The girls' proves that she is mature and strong enough to replace the grandmother."*

(Zipes, 1982, p. 28-29)

The 'archaic' belief refers to the part of the story where the young girl faces the werewolf, knows what he is and overcomes him.

*"In facing the werewolf and temporarily abandoning herself to him the little girl sees the animal side of herself. She crosses the border between civilization and wilderness, goes beyond the dividing line to face death in order to live. Her return home is a move forward as a whole person. She is a wo/man, self-aware, ready to integrate herself in sociey with awareness."*

(Zipes, 1982, p.30)

Zipes maintains that these symbolic rituals which were present in the original tales about a strong young woman *"confused and irritated Perrault. His*

*hostility towards the pagan folk tradition and fear of woman were exhibited in all his tales."*

(Zipes, 1982, p.31)

When Perrault wrote his literary fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" using this the oral folk version as his starting point, he made many drastic changes to the original. To begin with "Little Red Riding Hood" was never capped with a red hood at all. Perrault donned the child with a red hat or hood, making her into the type of girl tainted with sin "*since red, like the scarlet letter A, recalls the devil and heresy.*" (Zipes, 1986, p.230). This seemingly unimportant addition of a red cap changes the underlying message of the tale. Instead of the tale being about an adolescent girl coming to an awareness of herself as a young woman, with the rituals and beliefs of the time associated with this her coming of age, in the tale. We have a tale about a young girl who almost asks' to be attacked or raped. It is true to say that Perrault did not retain the folk qualities of the tale, for he totally changed the perspective of the warning tale. The brave little girl of the oral folk tale, who can fend for herself and is shown to be courageous and clever, is transformed into a helpless, naive, gullible child.

*"In the folk tale the girl displays a natural, relaxed attitude toward her body and sex and meets the challenge of a would be seducer. In Perrault's literary fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood is chastised because she is innocently disposed toward nature in the form of the wolf and woods, and she is raped or punished because she is guilty of not controlling her natural inclinations."*

(Zipes, 1982, p.29)

Zipes also uses the fairy tale "Cinderella" as an example of Perrault's changing of an oral folk tale to an upper class orientated fairy tale. It is important to know that in Cinderella "*the different folk versions emanated*

*from a matriarchal tradition which depicted the struggles of a young woman to regain her stature and rights within society."* (Zipes, 1984, p.30) After Cinderella has been humiliated and reduced to a servant girl in her own home, she does not bite her tongue and put up with it, but rebels and struggles to bring herself back up.

*"She is not clothed in baroque manner, nor does she wear a glass slipper which could easily break. Rather, she is dressed in a way which will reveal her true identity. The recovering of the lost leather slipper and marriage to the Prince is symbolically an affirmation of her strong independent character. In Perrault's literary fairy tale, Cinderella is changed to demonstrate how submissive and industrious she is. Only because she minds her manners is she rescued by a fairy godmother and a prince. Perrault ridicules the folk version while projecting another model of passive femininity which was to be taken seriously by the audience for which he was writing."*

(Zipes, 1982, p.30)

Thus we can see that the literary fairy tale was used as a kind of warning for children to behave well, according to the dictates of the era. In the case of Little Red Riding Hood, it was a tale of the dangers of illicit sex, or a warning about rape. In Cinderella a model of the ideal woman is placed before us. Both tales emphasise the image of perfect, passive, innocent femininity which was the ideal woman of the seventeenth century. Both these fairy tales and many others of their type are very much removed from the original folk tales, and very, very different to the type of tales common in Ireland during this era.

When we consider the kind of tale that was found in Ireland during Perrault's time, we enter a literary world quite different from that on the Continent. We find that only a few examples of European fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood or Tom Thumb are known in Ireland, but these tales are not important in Ireland. Because they are removed from the society in which they were written, they no longer hold their 'social values', they are reduced

to tales for entertainment only. Like England, Ireland as an island was often isolated from the Continent. Elliott B. Gose in "The World of the Irish Wonder Tale" believes this isolation may explain a great deal. Many European fairy tales seem to have begun in India or the Middle East and to have been carried by word of mouth over hundreds of years into Europe. While the early Celts probably brought many to Ireland, gaps in contact may then have prevented the Irish from receiving tales which developed later on the continent. However several Irish tales do have German counterparts recorded by the Grimm brothers. German 'fairy' tales and Irish 'wonder tales' are therefore only two different sets of a type of folk tale known in many countries.

In Germany the brothers Grimm came upon these tales through nursemaids and old wives, who told them to children more than to adults. The situation was quite different in late nineteenth century Ireland. Here the men and women were the proud bearers of an active oral tradition. These tellers were usually unable to read or write and spoke only Irish, they were well known in their neighbourhoods and valued as guests during the winter nights. Often one teller in a locale would be a conscious literary, taking a deep pleasure in telling his tales in a clear and vigorous language. These tales were aimed at all of the community, who wanted to be entertained, to escape their situations for a while to live and experience a different life, but who were also possessed of considerable aesthetic sensitivity and intellectual curiosity. Thus their content and form exercised both the mind and the heart. In such stories the emotions are touched by human kindness and by valour, the spirit is also touched by a tale which allows a person to integrate with the gods.

In Irish tales that have been in common use for centuries, such as "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne" we envisage a noble life. These are not

'warning' tales, they go far beyond that. They are tales of people at their best and their worst. We hear of people of great wisdom, strength, cunning, we come to understand the meaning of loyalty and of love and hate, these tales introduce us to magic and mystery. In short they push us beyond ourselves, and force us to 'experience' aspects of our personality which we might normally repress.

## CHAPTER 4

It is in the nature of things that myths and mythologies sooner or later lose their relevance to society. When this occurs they become a mere pastime, a source of entertainment and eventually with the coming of writing, the stuff of literature. This kind of cultural change which reduces old myths and creates new ones in their place, may be a matter of evolutionary change over a long passage of time or it may come rapidly through for example, great political or social change.

During the fifth and sixth centuries Ireland experienced such a change. In this period Christianity became prevalent in Ireland, bringing with it, its Latin culture, its morality, canon law and the use of writing. The literature which survives in Irish from the following centuries is profoundly marked by the effect of this new culture.

Sometime during the sixth century a number of monastic scholars adapted the Latin alphabet for the writing of Irish. It is a given fact that traditional literature undergoes change when committed to writing, not only because of the transfer to a new medium, but also because of the cultural values and associations that are bound up with the new medium and which tend to be introduced with it.

In Ireland writing was the child of Christianity, and continued to be so until the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the twelfth century was a time of transition. The traditions of velum and ink making which previously had been the knowledge of the monks only, and the use of writing for the taking down of Irish literature were passed onto the bards or filí. The remarkable thing is that even though up until this point (the twelfth century) the writing of these

pagan myths was down to monastic writers, they did not suppress these myths and tales. Instead they preserved a remarkable amount of native pagan, folklore, story and art. Without these compilers of our native literature, a lot of it would be lost. Having said that, they were selective in what they preserved and how it was preserved. The gods of the old Irish mythological cycle, which would have no longer been worshipped as gods but recognised as divine beings were reduced to mythological heroes, that is to say their divine status was lowered. For example Fionn, whom we knew as an heroic figure, originated as a God in pagan times. A good part of this change came from the desire of the monastic scholars to soften traditions of native myth and ritual, especially those that clashed too much with the central doctrines of Christianity. It was in the Church's interest not to totally suppress the native literature and myth, for doing that would alienate the Irish people, instead they preserved it to a certain degree, allowing the literature to remain but also be influenced by Christian thoughts and ideals.

Thus we can say that the arrival of Christianity had a definite effect on Irish traditional storytelling. The general effect is that native tradition was considerably transformed from the fifth and sixth centuries although we don't know how much of a transformation took place, since the written texts only date as far back as the fifth and sixth centuries.

Oral literature did not cease with the coming of writing. On the contrary, it continued as abundantly as ever, independent of the written literature though not necessarily unaffected by it. Oral literary traditions were mainly carried on by the ordinary people and also the *filí* and bards. These lay scholars learned all they knew by memorising, keeping all the old tales intact in their memories. Oral storytelling had an influence on the written literature of that period. Obviously the tales originated from an oral source of sources, but

also different styles of narration effected the way the tales were written down. For example the Fenian ballad which originated as an oral tradition developed fully as a written form of literature from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. Also the style of writing found in Middle Irish texts is very close to the style of the oral narrative of the time, its a relatively full, extended style almost conversational, unlike the prose of the old Irish texts which is more formalised. This shows an influence of the oral tradition on the written literature. The oral tradition, unlike the written, was at the disposal of all and enjoyed free passage from province to province and class to class. Both the traditional oral storytelling and the written tales continued more or less uninterrupted until the old Gaelic order gave in to the Normans during the twelfth century.

The coming of the Normans at the end of the twelfth century greatly affected the development of the art of storytelling in Ireland.

In traditional gatherings, held under the patronage of the great families of Medieval Ireland, traditional mythological tales of an ancient and heroic Ireland and her people were told. These tales continued to interest the tellers and the listeners because they still had relevance for them. However with the Norman invasion of the twelfth century, the original sponsors or patrons of the storytellers were gone. The traditional story gatherings ceased to be held, and Ireland, which, culturally at least, had been a unit, became an area of largely disconnected lordships, lacking the old organisms through which its ancient kingly and heroic culture had been perpetuated. Thus the regal nature of the tales gave way to tales of a less executed nature. In the post-Norman versions of the tales everything heroic is toned down. Kings become lords, heroes become adventure seekers, gods become fairies.

The Fionn Cycle of which "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne" are part of was still developing when the Normans came and wholly new tales were freely added to it in the post-Norman period. The Fionn cycle had ancient roots in popular tradition, its development as a literary cycle of tales had been late when compared with the development of other cycles of tales such as the Ulidian (of which Cú Chulain is part) or Mythological cycles. The characters of the Fionn cycle were largely developed in the pre-Norman period. Thus we have mythological hero figures such as Fionn and Diarmuid who are believed to have evolved from ancient Irish Gods in tales which span the pre-Norman to post-Norman times.

After the late Gaelic reverses of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, a Gaelic recovery began in Ireland towards the end of the thirteenth century. A couple of factors initiated this turnabout. During the twelfth century there was a transferring of the writing of these traditional manuscripts from the monasteries to the filí or bards (lay scholars). This came about with the decline of the old Columbian monasteries during the coming of the Normans. The old order of filí, were the custodians of poetry, history and law, and their traditions were mainly oral, that is to say that their learning and teaching was by recitation and memorisation. The making and preserving of the great manuscripts became the work of these laymen from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries onwards. This shift of tradition occurred at around the same time as the emergence of a standard bardic language in the thirteenth century uniform throughout Ireland and Scotland, and then in use for over three hundred years. The introduction of the Fenian ballad during the eleventh century also had an effect on Irish literature, these ballads are composed in rimed quatrains, in which internal rhyme and alliteration are added ornaments, this form of literature was in use for over six hundred years, the last Fenian ballad being composed by Michael Comyn in 1760

called 'Laoi Oisín i dTír na nÓg'. Between the change in the writers of this literature (from monks to bards), the emergence of a bardic language, the introduction of the Fenian ballad, the influences of French Romantic tales and also the translation of the Siege of Troy, the Story of the Illiad and the Destruction of Thebes from Latin to Irish (twelfth and thirteenth century) there was a huge change in traditional literature in Ireland from the eleventh century onwards.

The development of Irish literature continued on until the middle of the fifteenth century, by which time the Norman Lords were well established in Ireland, had intermarried and had begun to exert a positive effect on Irish storytelling.

It was during this the post-Norman period that the Fionn cycle of tales were further developed. These new tales from the sixteenth century onwards often show, not only the falling off in grandeur which resulted immediately from the destructive effect of the Norman invasion, but also the merging of Irish story telling with the French Adventure Romances. The latter was one of the positive contributions of Anglo-Norman culture to Irish culture during this period.

The merging of old Gaelic tales with those of continental origin can be seen in the tale of Diarmuid and Gráinne. Many of the features of this tale (old king, young wife, reluctant lover, solemn promise, fleeing, living off the land, king seeks revenge and their death) are continental, mainly French, in origin. The pattern of this tale is French not old Irish, the characters in the tale are of ancient Irish mythological source, but the structure of the tale is heavily influenced by continental stories brought in by the Normans at this time.

During that period French adventure romances and French Arthurian romances were translated into Irish. New Irish tales were also composed, more or less unconnected with the older Irish cycles and in many ways resembling the French tales, although native learned tradition and folklore supplied many elements in them. This period or class of literature is known as the Romantic Cycle of Irish literature and dates from mid thirteenth century to late sixteenth century.

During the advent of Christianity Celtic Art and literature flourished, with the invasion of the Vikings and then the Normans it was temporarily slowed down, but later took off again with great fervour. It was only when the English conquered the country that it really began to diminish. This took a long time but from the beginning of the English invasion Celtic Ireland was in retreat. It was a slow and stubborn retreat and until the end of the eighteenth century most features of the Celtic way of life still persisted, especially in the west and north-west of the country. Although the Irish way of life was waning, many of its traditions did not. The art of storytelling persisted throughout the country, spoken in both Irish and English, but predominantly Irish.

According to Cuív up until 1800 there were more than two languages spoken in Ireland, there were actually six distinct speech communities on our island. Obviously Irish and English made up two, but the old English dialect (called Yola) could be heard in Co. Wexford. There were established German speaking communities in Ballymena, Tipperary and Limerick. French at Portarlinton, Lisburn and Dublin and also a Gallic Scotch called Lallands spoken in many parts of the North. But the language that would have been most commonly used was Irish or Gaelic. This helped sustain the tradition of Irish storytelling.

There are many reasons for the decline of the Irish language. It is often said that the Irish language was suppressed by the English. This cannot be said to be strictly true. Although the language had been in decline since penal times. The famine really brought the common use of the Irish language to an end. The famine had been such a cultural shock that post-famine Irish people (they that survived) did not want Irish, they wanted to learn English. They wanted to emigrate without the disadvantage of learning the language of the country they were going to after they arrived.

Thus by the middle of the last century, after the famine, a great many people were shifting from one language to the other. There was still a fundamental knowledge of Irish tales, but all that was Irish was put down by the Irish themselves for it had the taint of poverty and famine. So even though there still was the knowledge of these myths and legends it was not passed on with the same fervour as before, resulting in a break in the oral tradition. This break did not take place everywhere, but these traditions were kept on in more remote rural areas in the South, South-West, West and North-West.

Irish cultural traditions towards the end of the nineteenth century were changing, but had not totally vanished. At this point a literary and cultural revival began in Ireland. There can be little doubt, it seems to me, but that anyone now looking back on the Irish Literary Revival at the turn of this century must see it in the context of the general nationalist movement of the time. A movement towards independence, economically, politically and culturally from Britain. Douglas Hyde invented a phrase for what he wanted done in the Ireland of his time, he called for the "de-Anglicization" of Ireland. Like many other leaders of his time he looked for a new Ireland modelled on the independent Ireland of old, a nation with its own language, literature and traditions. The wish was to make her live again in all her individuality as a

Celtic country, different in race, in ancestral glories from her neighbour and oppressor, Britain.

The writers of the Celtic Revival maintained that the development of Irish literature, history and character was distinct and separate from the development of the English; that the Celtic perception of life was different from the English, and that the Irish people constituted a nation with a distinctive cultural and spiritual heritage. Ireland, they maintained, was one of the last spiritual strongholds in Europe, and the Celt, they held, still retained contact with the mystery and imagination of the Ancient world. In Celtic folklore and mythological stories they found evidence of the existence of an invisible world, of the continuance of life after death, and proof of the immortality of the soul. Rejecting the earlier traditions of Irish writing in the English language, the writers of the Celtic Revival turned to poetry, folklore and myth.

The aim of the leaders of the Celtic Revival was to combine the imagination that is expressed in folklore and legend with the imagination of modern literature. To bridge the written and unwritten traditions and to establish a modern literary tradition in order to instil Irishness into the Irish. They wanted to give the Irish people a vision of life which came from the mythology of Ireland. To give them a sense of their cultural history, and to combine the modern and ancient into something that instilled in Irish people the greatness of their past and the possible greatness of their future.

Even though the original society in which the old Irish myths had flourished has vanished today, the myths still exert an influence on our minds, thoughts, art, literature and understanding of our culture. Because of the work done in reviving our literary past by men such as Yeats, O'Grady, Shaw and Wilde,

we know a little of our past, and take considerable pride in it. The myths and legends explored the heroic side of the Irish nature and thus influenced the Irish in more than literature and the arts. Heroic characters present in these myths, such as Cu Chulainn, provided a hero for Irish men and women to emulate in their lives, where previously there had been none.

## CONCLUSION

There is a universality about the tradition of storytelling. It is part of the rituals of all countries and is done regardless of education, class, age or culture. Tales pass from one culture to another with ease, adapting themselves to encompass already existing tales and figures of their adopted culture. This is the case with "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne". "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne" is part of a group of early Irish tales whose roots lie in Ancient Irish tradition, but which have been heavily influenced by Arthurian Romantic tales such as "Tristram and Isolde" which were introduced in Ireland during the post-Norman period. This group of tales also includes the tale of "Deirdre and Naoise", "Cano and Créd", and Cuinthir and Liadáin", to name but a few.

All literature, be it written or oral reflects its creators, its background and the changes wrought upon it over the years. Irish literature is no exception. It has changed vastly from its beginnings as ancient myth and ritual and has been influenced by all manner of people and customs in both positive and negative ways. The characters in "The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne" originated from Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Pagan Ireland and have been changed down the ages to fit in with Irish culture as it changes. This tale has been influenced like many other traditional tales by the early Irish monks and the coming of Christianity, the Norman invasion, the Medieval Bards, and the English invasion amongst others. Despite these changes, our mythological and folk tales retain great potency and beauty. In reviving them, we touch upon secret motives underlying human conduct. It is important to know and understand these tales and their background, to understand where they came from, what influenced them and of what importance they had and continue to have for the Irish people.

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