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The Beheading Game:
Transmission from Early Irish Literature to Arthurian Romance

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Tese apresentada para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Doutor em Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas, realizada sob a orientação científica do Professor Dr. Miguel Alarcão e co-orientação do Professor Dr. John Carey.

[DECLARAÇÕES]

Declaro que esta tese é o resultado da minha investigação pessoal e independente. O seu conteúdo é original e todas as fontes consultadas estão devidamente mencionadas no texto, nas notas e na bibliografia.

O(A) candidato(a),

Lisboa, 7 de Abril de 2020

Em memória do meu pai,

que esteja nas estrelas,

a olhar por mim.

O JOGO DE DECAPITAÇÃO: TRANSMISSÃO DA LITERATURA MEDIEVAL IRLANDESA PARA O ROMANCE ARTURIANO

THE BEHEADING GAME: TRANSMISSION FROM EARLY IRISH LITERATURE TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

CARLOS MIGUEL FILIPE CARNEIRO

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RESUMO

ABSTRACT

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arturiano, medieval, literatura, Celta, mitologia, decapitação, Gawain.

KEYWORDS: Arthurian, medieval, literature, Celtic, mythology, beheading, Gawain.

Esta tese de doutoramento pretende estudar a forma como o tema literário do jogo de decapitação foi transmitido da literatura medieval irlandesa para o romance arturiano. O jogo de decapitação é um episódio central da narrativa irlandesa *Fled Bricrenn* e o mesmo tema está presente nos romances arturianos franceses *Le Livre de Caradoc*, *Perlesvaus*, *La Mule Sans Frein* e *Hunbaut*, assim como no romance arturiano inglês *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, onde também é central para a narrativa. Visto que a narrativa irlandesa é a mais antiga, tudo aponta para que seja a fonte das versões arturianas.

O objectivo deste trabalho é então entender quais foram os canais de transmissão que permitiram ao tema ser transmitido desde a literatura medieval irlandesa até ao romance arturiano, e se o significado do tema literário sofreu mudanças na passagem da tradição irlandesa para a arturiana. O estudo deste assunto não é actualizado há bastantes anos, e ocorreram várias mudanças de paradigma e avanços no estudo tanto da

literatura irlandesa como arturiana. É portanto também um propósito desta tese dar uso a esses desenvolvimentos de forma a compreender a transmissão com maior claridade e melhores resultados.

This PhD dissertation intends to study how the story motif of the beheading game was transmitted from early Irish literature to Arthurian romance. The beheading game is a central episode of the Irish narrative *Fled Bricrenn* and the same motif is found in the Arthurian French romances *Le Livre de Caradoc*, *Perlesvaus*, *La Mule Sans Frein* and *Hunbaut*, as well as in the Middle English Arthurian romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where it is also central to the narrative. Since the Irish narrative is the earliest one, it seems to have been the source of the Arthurian versions.

The aim of this work is then to understand the channels of transmission which allowed the motif to travel from early Irish literature to Arthurian romance, and whether the significance or meaning of the motif was changed in the passage from Irish to Arthurian tradition. The study of this subject has not been updated in some years, and there were several paradigm shifts and advancements in the study of both Irish as well as of Arthurian literature. It is therefore also the purpose of this dissertation to make use of those developments in order to understand the transmission with greater clarity and results.

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INTRODUCTION

Born from folktales native to Britain and with obscure mentions in previous pseudo-historical works, Arthurian legend began its rise to literary prominence with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a work written in Latin which set the stories of the legendary King Arthur and his court in a pseudo-historical chronology narrating the history of the foundation of Britain and its several kings, with special emphasis on the Arthurian section. *Historia Regum Britanniae* proved to be highly influential and initiated a British chronicle tradition. Furthermore, it paved the way for loose translations which added new features such as Wace's *Roman de Brut*, written in the Anglo-Norman language, and later Laȝamon's *Brut*, which provided a Middle English version. The *Roman de Brut* also proved to be highly influential, establishing a bridge with the French-reading world, further promoted by the extension of the Angevin empire and the consequent cultural exchange between Britain and France. The influence of Wace's work helped in further spreading the Arthurian lore throughout France and led to a literary explosion around the so-called Matter of Britain. However, in France, Arthurian literature developed from the chronicle tradition and adopted a form of romance which focused on new concepts such as the *amour courtois*, the code of chivalry and the Grail quest as well as characters such as Lancelot, with less emphasis on Arthur and his martial prowess or military conquests and more on the individual quests of his knights.

Arthurian romances such as the ones from Chrétien de Troyes strongly influenced European medieval literature, and in France several continuations to his *Perceval* were produced. Following the popularity of Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Grail was given a new religious dimension through other works, most notably Robert de Boron's *Joseph d' Arimathe* and *Merlin*, and thus became the "Holy" Grail. The popularity of Arthurian romance in France reached its peak with the *Lancelot-Grail* or *Vulgate* cycle, an extensive cycle of prose romances drawing on the romance tradition started by Chrétien de Troyes, but also on other sources of the Matter of Britain, thus presenting a massive body of prose which seemed to aim at being the definitive one by retelling and expanding the Arthurian tales (Lacy, 2010: Vol. 3, I). The *Vulgate* cycle was later partially re-worked and abridged in the so-called *Post-Vulgate* cycle, but the *Vulgate* proper stands as the epitome of French romance. The new forms of romance developed in France soon exerted their influence back to Britain as well, where the Arthurian

tradition had been one of chronicles rather than romances. Elements of Chrétien de Troyes' romances and the later *Vulgate* ones soon entered English (and Welsh) narratives, albeit in different ways.

The English tradition retained many elements which were characteristically native, such as the prominence of Gawain in romances rather than of popular knights in the French tradition such as Lancelot, and the preference for romance in verse, rather than prose. Such preference for native literary traditions became more prominent with the distancing between England and France, and the dissolving of the previous union, both cultural and linguistic, which reigned in the golden years of the Angevin empire, and resulted in the Middle English alliterative revival, of which sprang one of the most acclaimed Middle English works in the shape of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Nevertheless, French romance did still manage to have a strong influence on the English Arthurian tradition in the fifteenth century, when Thomas Malory wrote his *Morte D' Arthur*, an extensive work in prose strongly indebted to the *Vulgate* and *Post-Vulgate* cycle, even though it had a more direct and pragmatic tone, possibly an English characteristic. Malory's book is frequently seen as the paradigmatic expression of the Arthurian legend in the English-speaking world and it is the major source of Arthurian lore for references or representations in contemporaneous popular culture.

Such presence in modern popular culture took its time to arrive though. Although the Matter of Britain was one of the major literary themes in the Middle Ages between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, in the following centuries Arthurian literature progressively lost its prominence. It did not fade completely, however, as the strong Arthurian dimension of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* exemplifies, but only in the nineteenth century did the interest in Arthurian literature truly return, due to the antiquarian interest in medieval literatures and old mythologies which accompanied the rise of Romanticism. Such interest spread also to scholars and created a discipline of Arthurian studies, focused on the search for the origins of the Arthurian legends and providing a scholarly analysis of the narratives. Moreover, the attention to Arthurian literature was accompanied by interest in other medieval literatures, most specifically the vernacular medieval literatures of Ireland and Wales. In Ireland, the Celtic revival movement, which counted among its ranks William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory, brought into public attention the narratives from one of the most extensive vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages (Evans, 2006: 1531-1536). Early Irish literature is indeed

probably the oldest vernacular literature in Europe and one of the most extensive, going through a wide array of genres, as Kim McCone well puts it:

> In addition to a very substantial Latin literature early Christian Ireland boasts by far the most extensive and diverse vernacular literature in medieval Europe. The period from the fifth to the twelfth century A. D. abounds in Latin, Old or Middle Irish and bilingual texts in prose, poetry or a mixture of both covering a wide range of genres such as liturgy, homiletics, biblical exegesis and paraphrase, hymnody and eulogy, Latin and Irish grammar, etymology, onomastics, topography, annals, genealogy, legal tracts concerning the Church and lay society, gnomic literature, prophecy, vision and voyage narratives, saga and history.
> (McCone, 1990: 1)

What McCone calls "saga", or most specifically the native secular narratives (complemented by texts of other nature, such as the *Dindsenchas*[1], *Cóir Anmann*[2], *Sanas Cormaic*[3], *Senchas Már*[4] or the *Trecheng breth Féne*[5]), are often considered repositories of the Irish narrative tradition, and important sources of Irish myth and folklore, even though these are only snippets of pre-Christian Irish mythology and the tales have to be read in the context of early Christian Ireland (Monaghan, 2004: ix).

[1] Meaning the "lore of places", the *Dindsenchas* is a collection of onomastic texts in early Irish literature concerned with the origins of place-names in accordance with events or characters (many of which found in the secular tales) associated with such places. The texts which compose the *Dindsenchas* are found in independent form in verse (*Metrical Dindsenchas*) or in prose (*Prose Dindsenchas*), but they are also found incorporated in tales such as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* or in the *Acallam na Senórach*. E. J. Gwynn has provided an edition and translation of the *Metrical Dindsenchas* in five volumes (1903-1935), while Whitley Stokes delivered editions and translations of several of the *Prose Dindsenchas* (1892, 1893, 1894 & 1895).

[2] Translated as "The Fitness of Names", *Cóir Anmann* is a Middle-Irish etymological list of personal names. It contains an entry on Manannán mac Lir, based on a similar passage from *Sanas Cormaic*. The standard edition and translation is Stokes, 1897, with a more recent edition and translation by Sharon Arbuthnot published by the Irish Texts Society in two volumes, from 2005 to 2007.

[3] Translated as *Cormac's Glossary*, *Sanas Cormaic* is an etymological work which encompasses about 1400 words, with its earliest version dating from c. 900. The work is usually attributed to Cormac mac Cuilennáin (died 908), a king-bishop from Munster. There is a short version (the earlier one), which survives in four manuscripts with dates ranging from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, as well as a longer version found in three manuscripts, of which the earlier ones are from the sixteenth century and a later one is from the seventeenth century. Additionally there are also fragments in two manuscripts from the sixteenth-century. An edition and translation is found in Stokes *et al* (1868). The standard edition however, is that of Kuno Meyer from the copy in the Yellow Book of Lecan (1912).

[4] Roughly translated as "The Great Tradition", the *Senchas Már* is a collection of early Irish law texts, dating from the seventh and eighth century, even though it just survived in manuscripts from the fourteenth and sixteenth century. The collection has many glosses, some of which make allusions to native lore. See Binchy (1978) and Breatnach (2005) for further insight into early Irish law.

[5] Although a most literal translation would be "A Triadic Arrangement of the Judgment of the Irish" or simply "A Triad of Judgments of the Irish", *Trecheng breth Féne* is more commonly called *The Triads of Ireland*, and consists of an arrangement of ideas mostly in groups of three or triads, which deal with several topics such as law, customs, natural phenomena, geography, proverbs, behaviour, aspects of life and society, leading it often to be considered as gnomic or wisdom literature. It survives in nine manuscripts and excerpts from it are also found in other three additional ones with various dates, but the compilation itself is thought to date from the ninth century. The standard edition and translation is still Meyer's (1906b).

Celtic revivalism brought forth loose translations of the medieval Irish tales, along with some of the major stories being reinterpreted as theatrical plays, as well as a renewed interest in Irish folklore, which seemed to include elements in common with many of the ones portrayed in early Irish literature, or at least remnants of the latter. In Wales, Lady Charlotte Guest (1812-1895) did something similar with her translation of native Welsh tales from medieval manuscripts, compiled in the *Mabinogion*[6].

The Celtic revival also had its influence on medieval scholarship, as well as on folklore studies, since an extensive corpus of literature became a relevant subject of study, with several diplomatic translations of the old manuscripts becoming available, as well as scholarly analyses of the texts. The contents of great manuscript collections such as the *Book of the Dun Cow*[7], the *Book of Leinster*[8] or the *Yellow Book of Lecan*[9] proved to be rich sources for medieval secular material and were thoroughly studied, among other manuscript collections. The origins of such an extensive body of literature were soon a matter for debate, and the consensus in face of the evidence provided by the available material is that early Irish literature resulted from some form of interplay between the native narrative material in possession of professional poets, the *filid*, with an ecclesiastical network of monasteries which produced the written texts, although the exact nature of this relationship has been a matter of debate for decades:

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[6] The *Mabinogion* is the name given by Guest to a collection of eleven medieval prose tales which she edited and translated in the nineteenth century. The *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, included in the collection, are the most important extant example of a possible Welsh mythology, and are based on the texts compiled in the *White Book of Rhydderch* and the *Red Book of Hergest*, the first written around mid-fourteenth century and the second between the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth. The tales were most possibly composed from 1060 to 1120 (Cf. Davies, 2006: 1207), or perhaps even later, varying according to the cycle of tales in the compilation. The compilation also includes other Welsh stories, whose dates of creation do not necessarily follow the ones of the *Four Branches*, having been compiled together with those later on. Three of these are Arthurian romances, namely *Owain, neu Iarlles y Ffynnon* (*Owain, or the Lady of the Fountain*), *Peredur ab Efrawc* (*Peredur son of Efrog*) and *Gereint ab Erbin* (*Geraint son of Erbin*). Also included in the *Mabinogion* are the tales of *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys* (*Lludd and Llefelys*), written in either the twelfth or the thirteenth century, and *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic* (*The Dream of the Emperor Maxen*), written in the twelfth century. Most interesting and possibly reflecting genuine native Welsh tales are *Culhwch ac Olwen* (*How Culhwch won Olwen*), probably written down c. 1100, and *Breudwyt Ronabwy* (*Rhonabwy's Dream*), probably written c. 1130–60 or later. *Hanes Taliesin* on the other hand, a tale about the legendary bard *Taliesin*, was included by Guest in her compilation but it is absent from many of the subsequent editions and translations of the group of tales. Evans & Rhys (1887) delivered a diplomatic edition of the text from the Red Book of Hergest, and Evans (1907) made a similar diplomatic edition of the text in the White Book of Rhydderch, however, there have been more recent editions concerning each individual tale in the compilation. For an updated English translation see Davies (2007).

[7] Also known as the *Lebor na hUidre*, Dublin, MS 23 E 25, Royal Irish Academy, from eleventh or twelfth-century provenance.

[8] Also known as the *Lebor Laignech*, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 [H. 2.18], from the second half of the twelfth century.

[9] Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318 [H 2.16], from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

> The literature that survives from the early Irish period, in Irish and in Latin, is the product of an intellectual elite that included ecclesiastical scholars and learned poets (*filid*, singular *fili*). The *filid* were the most prestigious of the *áes dána* ("men of art") in early Ireland: they were highly trained and their power largely resided in their role as purveyors of praise and blame. The *filid* seemed to have arrived at an early accommodation with the church.
> (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 2)

From the corpus of early Irish manuscripts, some manuscripts were found to include tale-lists, extensively studied by Proinsias Mac Cana (1980), who has divided them into list A[10] and list B[11] (Mac Cana, 1980: 33-34). These lists provide us with a view of many of the tales that might have been produced, with list A mentioning that the learning of a poet could include up to three hundred and fifty tales (Mac Cana, 1980: 41). Most importantly in the present context, the lists also allow us to understand the system of classification of these tales into genres used by the early Irish poets, which is quite simple and is actually given by the names of the tales. This original system of classification, in accordance, for example, with list A, placed the tales into genres such as "'destructions' (*togla*),'cattle-raids' (*tána*), 'wooings' (*tochmarca*), 'battles' (*catha*), 'terrors' (*uatha*), 'voyages' (*imrama*), 'death-tales' (*oitte*)', 'feasts' (*fessa*), 'sieges' (*forbassa*), 'adventures' (*echtrada*), 'elopements' (*aithid*), 'plunderings' (*airggne*), with the additional categories 'bursting-forths [of lake/river]' (*tomadmann*), 'visions' (*físi*), 'loves' (*serca*), 'hostings' (*slúagid*) and 'proceedings' (*tochomlada*)" (Sims-Williams *et al*, 2005: 308).

A closer look into the several Irish tales however, led scholars such as Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville (1827-1910) to notice that many of them shared a particular setting and a set of common characters, or had a specific focus in certain themes, but these aspects were not considered in the classification of the tale-lists, and the tales which had these particular affiliations were spread indiscriminately through the several genres. In order to take account of this, Arbois de Jubainville proposed the division of early Irish literature into four cycles of secular narratives (Arbois de Jubainville, 1882:

[10] List A has survived as an independent text complete with introduction and a colophon in the *Book of Leinster* (Dublin Trinity College, MS 1339 [H 2.18] pp. 189b-190b) from the twelfth century, as well as in another extant version in the Dublin Trinity College, MS 1336/6.1 [H 3.17], col. 797, from the sixteenth century (Mac Cana, 1980: 33).

[11] List B on the other hand is inserted in the text of *Airec menman Uraird maic Coise*, which has survived in three manuscripts, namely in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 N 10 [Betham 145 967], pp. 29-32, from the sixteenth century, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512/I [ff. 101-122, 1-36, 45-52], ff. 109 (R) col. 2 – 111 (R) col. 1, from the fifteenth or sixteenth century and in London, British Library, MS Harleian 5280, ff. 47 and 58rv, from the sixteenth century (Mac Cana, 1980: 33).

44-45; 1884: 4-5): a system which, even though it most probably does not reflect the way the tales were categorized by medieval poets (as the tale-lists may demonstrate) is a useful convention for modern scholarship and is still in use by scholars today. The corpus of tales was thus divided into the Mythological cycle, the Ulster cycle, the Fenian cycle and the Historical cycle or Cycle of Kings, together with several other classes of tales from the original classification which do not fit easily into these cycles, such as the *Immrama*.

The Mythological cycle includes mostly the tales concerned with the Tuatha Dé Danann, who for all effects and purposes might have been literary versions of the pre-Christian pantheon of the gods of Ireland (Carey, 2006b: 1695; Carey, 2011: 13; Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 4). The cycle depicts their relations among themselves and their wars with other seeming mythological beings such as the Fomori, best represented in *Cath Maige Tuired*[12]. Although many mythological motifs remain in the cycle which are possibly of pre-Christian origin, the tales are situated within a pseudo-historical scheme featuring several invasions of Ireland up until the Gaels/Milesians, with the Tuatha Dé Danann being one of those invading peoples. The origins of the Gaels, the Gaelic language and the early invasions are linked with biblical motifs as a way to provide a pseudo-history in accordance with Christian tenets, as is best exemplified in the *Lebór Gabála Érenn*[13], and there is a seeming attempt to present the Tuatha Dé Danann as one

[12] The *Cath Maige Tuired* describes the fall of King Nuada of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the ascension of King Bres, who is half-Fomorian. The oppression of King Bres on the Tuatha Dé Danann leads to their rebellion. The Fomori, led by Balor of the Evil Eye, attack the Tuatha Dé Danann in response to the ousting of Bres. The Tuatha Dé Danann, however, once again choose a new king, this being Lugh, another half-Fomorian and grandson of Balor, who manages to lead the Tuatha Dé Danann to victory and to the defeat of the Fomori, vanquishing his grandfather Balor in the process. The narrative was probably written in the eleventh or twelfth century, although the content itself is possibly from the ninth century (Murphy, 1953-1955: 195). The standard edition and translation is Gray (1982).

[13] Translated as "The Book of the Taking of Ireland", *Lebor Gabála Érenn* is a Middle Irish compilation by an anonymous scribe around the eleventh century. There are different recensions found in more than a dozen manuscripts, among them *The Book of Leinster*, *The Great Book of Lecan* and *The Book of Ballymote*. It is a pseudo-historical narrative which describes the origins of the Irish people and language, associated with a biblical context, which goes back to the Genesis, and the several invasions of Ireland by different people: Noah's granddaughter Cessair and her people, Partholón and his sons, the people of Nemed, the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann and finally the Milesians/Gaels. The section which concerns the Tuatha Dé Danann retells some of the most important moments in the Irish Mythological cycle, while the following section resumes the story of the Irish people, namely of the the Gaels, of whom Íth, from the top of Bregon's Tower in the Iberian Peninsula, spots Ireland and journeys towards it, but ends up being killed. The so-called Milesians, sons of Íth's kinsman Míl Espáine, then set out to Ireland to avenge Íth's death and claim the island. They engage in a war with the Tuatha Dé Danann and win it, with the Tuatha Dé Danann hiding in the Irish underground. From there on, the Irish people are supposedly descended from the Gaels/Milesians. The remainder of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* is divided between the telling of the deeds of legendary pagan kings of Ireland and a more accurate record of the deeds and dates related to Christian kings. R. A. S. Macalister edited a five volume diplomatic edition and translation of

of the early peoples of Ireland rather than gods, even though they are described with magical or supernatural traits.

The Ulster cycle, on the other hand, seems to depict a society ruled by a warrior aristocracy which subsists in a state of constant war with the other provinces of Ireland (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 175). The tales in this cycle revolve around the court at Emain Macha of King Conchobar mac Nessa of Ulster and its warriors, among whom is Cú Chulainn, one of the most iconic heroes of early Irish literature and the protagonist of many of the tales of the Ulster cycle, including the great Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge*[14].

The Fenian cycle, or *fíannaigecht*, narrates the tales of the folk-hero Finn mac Cumail and his *fian*[15], a group of wandering warriors. Although such focus on a group of warriors could draw parallels with the Ulster cycle, both cycles are actually different in their portrait of warriors, since the *fianna* were rogue or could be hired, in contrast with the Ulster warriors, who represent a specific court. The *fian* of Finn act at the margins of society, while the Ulster warriors are a component of it (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 175). Maybe due to this marginality, and even though the Ulster cycle is also set in pre-Christian times, the Fenian cycle was used in later texts as a means for contrasting the

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the text for the Irish Texts Society between 1938 and 1956. For some critical analysis of its textual history and pseudo-history see also Carey, 2009.

[14] Possibly composed in the eighth century, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is the centre-piece of the Ulster cycle, sometimes being considered the greatest Irish epic. It survives in two known main recensions, the first one contained in the eleventh/twelfth century *Lebor na hUidre* and in the fourteenth-century *Yellow Book of Lecan*, and the second recension in the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster*. The main tale is preceded by several other tales which provide explanations for events in the main text (such as the presence of certain characters from Ulster in the Connacht side), called *remscéla*. The *Táin per se* narrates the contention between the Connacht army, led by Aillil and Medb, and the still teenager Cú Chulainn, who single-handedly defends the Ulster territory until the Ulster warriors from the court of King Conchobar recuperate from a debility caused by a curse, which is explained in a separate tale or *remscél* (*Noínden Ulad*). The contention is due to a bull from the Ulster territory, Donn Cuailnge, which is coveted by Aillil and Medb (who have in their possession another extraordinary bull, Finnbennach). The story of both bulls is also told in a *remscéla*. Eventually the Ulster army comes to the aid of Cú Chulainn and the Connacht army is defeated. However, Donn Cuailnge goes indeed to Connacht, but enters a fatal duel with Finnbennach, and eventually both bulls die. Diplomatic editions and translations of both the first and second recensions are found in O'Rahilly, 1876 and 1967 respectively.

[15] The *fianna* were an actual reality in early medieval Ireland, although there is not enough information on them to draw a perfect description of their behaviour. A member of the *fianna* was called a *fénnid*. Both the narrative material and ecclesiastical documents seem to point to the *fianna* acting as *díbergaig* (brigands) organized in groups of mostly young men aged roughly 14 to 20 years of age, who engaged in warfare activities, raiding, wild hunting and sexual promiscuity. They acted frequently as a mercenary military force and could receive hospitality and sustenance from a kingdom. If we see the contemporary *fianna* of early Christian Ireland as remotely resembling their romanticized versions of the Fénian tales, it would mean that this military force had a very important role in the *tuath* and in the protection of kings, therefore helping maintain social and political balance, since it was the front line of battle against possible invasions or raids (Nagy, 1997: 295).

ancient pagan way of life with the Christian worldview, as is illustrated by the *Acallam na Senórach*[16].

Finally, the Cycle of Kings is purportedly a historical cycle about the legendary kings of Ireland such as Cormac mac Airt, Niall of the Nine Hostages or Conn of the Hundred Battles, but is in fact a semi-historical, semi-legendary cycle with many elements in common with the other cycles. In fact, the Irish cycles are not isolated from one another and seem to be set in the same continuity, and are actually knitted together through common elements such as the frequent appearance of the Tuatha Dé Danann in every cycle and the continuous overlapping with a parallel realm in the form of the Otherworld[17].

The interest by scholars in the vernacular literature of medieval Ireland brought to light what seemed to be elements in common with Arthurian narratives, especially in what concerns the otherworldly elements and its fantastic and supernatural concepts, as well as story motifs which, in some cases, were incredibly similar. Since early Irish literature seemed to draw on the native Irish oral tradition and the beginning of its written tradition pre-dated the rise of Arthurian literature, it was considered to be the source of many "prototypes" for the latter. As such, Arthurian elements such as the Grail[18] were found to be drawn from Irish motifs, characters such as Gawain were seen

[16] The *Acallam na Senórach* ("Colloquy of the Elders" or "Tales of the Elders") is a Middle-Irish work from the end of the twelfth century and is generally regarded as the longest text in medieval Irish literature. In the *Acallam* Caílte and Finn's son Oisín, former members of the *fian* of Finn mac Cumhail, have survived for hundreds of years, and meet Saint Patrick, leading to a dialogue between both and the saint where they retell many of the stories of the *fian* of Finn mac Cumhail. A modern translation can be found in Dooley et al (1999).

[17] The Otherworld is a common supernatural plane which figures frequently in early Irish Literature. It is usually described as an alternative plane of existence for the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, where there is no death, sickness or aging and where food and drink are in everlasting abundance. Its inhabitants live surrounded by the arts and in a permanent feeling of bliss. The Otherworld is usually found in mounds and valleys, known as *síd*, in most of the Irish medieval literary cycles, although its location is portrayed as being over-seas in the *Immrama* (voyages). Additionally, the frontiers with the Otherworld seem to open in specific times of the year corresponding to two of the four great Irish seasonal festivals, namely *Samhain* and *Beltane*, considered liminal times. In the several tales concerning the Otherworld in the early Irish literary cycles, it has several names, such as *Mag Mell* (Delightful Plain), *Tír na nÓg* (Land of the Young) or *Tír na mBeo* (Land of the Living). (Carey, 2006a: 1403-1406). The Welsh tradition seems to have an analogue of the Irish Otherworld in *Annwn* or *Annfwn*, depicted in the *First Branch of the Mabinogi* and in the *Preideu Annwfyn* poem contained in the *Llyfr Taliesin* (*Book of Taliesin*) (Koch, 2006a: 75).

[18] The connection with the Grail has been made through the establishment of a relationship of the holy relic with the common motif in both Irish and Welsh literature of cauldrons possessing magical properties such as healing or even resurrection, as well as with possible connections between Bran the Blessed from the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi* with the Fisher King of the Grail stories. Scholars such as Alfred Nutt (1888), Roger Sherman Loomis (1927, 1963) and Jessie L. Weston with her *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) have sought to establish these relationships, but have also been criticized for being overly influenced by works such as Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in the case of Loomis and Weston and on

as developed versions of Irish prototypes like Cú Chulainn, and the otherworldly elements of Arthurian romance were likewise found to have parallels in Irish and Welsh traditions, and consequently, the Arthurian stories were taken to have drawn upon these. The "journey" to the Otherworld, or the interference of Otherworldly elements in the affairs of mortals, present in many of the Irish tales, as well as Welsh, appear to have counterparts, although less explicit ones, in Arthurian stories (Cooper, 2004: 173-187; Huot, 2008: 238-243; Saunders, 2009: 201-216). The apparent influence from Irish tradition was not limited to concepts but also included story motifs, as well as entire sequences in some narratives, one of the most prominent of these being the object of our study: the beheading game.

The motif of the beheading game appears in several Arthurian romances, however, there is an earlier Irish version, and we shall review in detail every rendition both Irish and Arthurian. For the time being, however, we may state that the basic plot of the motif is the challenge of a supernatural figure armed with an axe who challenges the protagonist to a game in which the latter beheads the challenger, on the condition that the challenger subsequently has his turn at beheading the protagonist, either immediately afterwards or after a pre-established period of time. The challenger supernaturally survives the beheading and in many versions displays his head talking, even though it is separated from the torso, or his body carries the head away. The protagonist is accordingly doomed to have his own turn at being beheaded. When he is put to the test, the challenger threatens to decapitate him but eventually reveals that it was all a ruse in order to test his courage, and the protagonist is spared. As will be shown in detail below, although this is the basic outline, there are several variations: these can go from the wording used to issue the challenge, to the number of individuals tested, to the number of feigned blows when it is the protagonist's turn to be beheaded, or to the appearance of the challenger, who is most often a churlish, gigantic and impressive figure, but is also portrayed as a knight in some renditions. These variations are highly important in determining the transmission of the motif, but they are also a source of confusion in tracing such transmission.

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placing too much weight on interpretations of the Grail as having a pagan symbolism directly derivate from Celtic tradition, as well as on overly speculating regarding oral traditions and intermediate narratives which could have led to the Grail. More recently, John Carey has provided a modern update (2007) on tracing the relationship between Irish (and Welsh) traditions into the making of the literary Grail motif more focused on what the texts from all traditions involved reveal.

Probably the most widely known example of the beheading-game motif is the one in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, henceforth *SGGK*, a fourteenth-century Middle English alliterative romance, which presents Gawain as the protagonist and the mysterious Green Knight, a supernatural being entirely guised in green, as the challenger who proposes a beheading game. Scholars in the nineteenth century quickly noted that the motif of the beheading game in an Arthurian context was not exclusive to the English poem. French romances from the thirteenth century such as the *Livre de Caradoc*, *Perlesvaus*, *Hunbaut* and *La Mule Sans Frein* also include renditions of the beheading game, albeit with several variations, including differences in the characters involved in the roles of challenger and protagonist. The use of the beheading-game motif in the French romances and their similarity with *SGGK* led early studies like the ones by Frederic Madden (1839), Bernhard Brink (1887-1892) and M. C. Thomas (1883) to look for the sources of the beheading challenge in the French tradition, most notably in the *Livre de Caradoc*. However, when scholarly attention was drawn to early Irish literature, it was observed that *Fled Bricrenn*, a narrative from the Ulster cycle, contained two early versions of the beheading game motif with clear resemblances to the one in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Fled Bricrenn has its main hero in the figure of Cú Chulainn, and he is the one to participate in and to overcome the two beheading challenges, a preliminary one issued by a loch-dwelling shape-shifter named Úath, and another, in the culminating episode, by the wizard Cú Roí in disguise, although both beheading games in this narrative include other participants in the challenge, namely Cú Chulainn's fellow Ulster warriors Conall Cernach and Lóegaire Búadach. Since the Irish version is already attested in the *Lebor na hUidre*, a manuscript dated from c. 1106, and its original date of composition is considered to be earlier, from around the ninth century, it is natural that the Irish version is considered to be older. Adding to the date of the narratives, *Fled Bricrenn* appears to be more archaic (Jacobs, 2000: 40), if we consider "archaic" to mean lacking the courtly overtones of Arthurian romance. Such observations have led the Irish narrative to be regarded as the first source for the beheading game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. However, the dating of the French versions also places them as previous to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, thus creating a debate on whether the Gawain-poet took the beheading game directly from Irish tradition, or via French romance. As we shall see in further detail in our study, such a debate is further

complicated by the accordance of the English version with many aspects of *Fled Bricrenn*. These are the difficulties that the present work proposes to address. The matter goes beyond identifying the sources in each tradition however, for one of the most important goals is to understand through what channels the stories could have travelled between Ireland, Wales, England and France. Furthermore, were these channels of transmission based in written or oral sources?

In addition, not only is the question of the transmission and original provenance a matter for discussion, but also whether the use of the beheading game from an Irish narrative seemingly depicting an Iron Age pagan setting carries any of its original meaning in the world of chivalric, courtly and medieval values which are common in Arthurian romance. In fact, the acknowledgment of the similarity and in many cases most obvious drawing from Irish tradition as in the case of the beheading game was far from being the only aim for early scholars working on the subject. The noticing of the parallels led to a whole set of questions regarding how the transmission of motifs occurred and the significance of the common elements in both traditions, not only in what concerns the beheading game but in the Irish-Arthurian transmission in general. Despite the fact that the material available is of a literary nature and what came to us are written texts, the attention of early scholars was focused on the pre-Christian oral tradition of Ireland from which assumedly early Irish literature took shape. Taking into account that Irish tradition was apparently the point of origin for the shared motifs with Arthurian narratives, most of the interpretations regarding the origins of many Arthurian elements were directly linked with the scholarly understanding of the context surrounding the genesis of early Irish literature.

On this matter, in earlier works, the most generalized view was that early Irish literature was mainly the product of an oral tradition of which the written versions were nothing more than mere records, almost shadows, impoverished in comparison to their oral originals. The pre-Christian nature of the Irish tales was taken for granted, and their contents assumed to be replete of pagan meaning and symbolism. Thus, Irish narratives were interpreted mostly from a mythological point of view rather than literary, and the Christian and medieval contemporary elements were seen as interpolations in what was mainly a written record of the pagan myths of pre-Christian Ireland drawn from oral tradition, with their successors in Arthurian literature being therefore survivals of these same myths. Implicitly, the assumption was made that clerics would have been tolerant

to pagan tradition and were focused on preserving it, unadulterated: "it is well known that early Irish churchmen were remarkably liberal and sympathetic in their attitude to pagan tradition and that were it not for their goodwill and enthusiasm it would have gone the way of most oral tradition in a changing and literate world." (Mac Cana, 1971: 99). Oral tradition was seen not only as the fountain from which most narratives were a derivative but also as the main vehicle for the transmission of Irish motifs which through the *filid* in Ireland, *beirdd* in Wales and the Breton *jongleurs* or *conteurs* in France were spread orally and had an overwhelming influence in the genesis of Arthurian literature, both in Britain as well as in France.

The consequence of these assumptions was for literary criticism of early Irish sagas to become mainly focused on attempts to reconstitute oral versions of the tales (McCone, 1990: 8). The Welsh tradition, itself also seen as a source of material for Arthurian tales and where the Arthurian myth purportedly first took shape, was seen as an intermediary for Irish motifs to become a part of the growing Arthurian *mythos* (Loomis, 1927: 25), with this vital point in the transmission being justified by a common "Celtic" past between Ireland and Wales, and thus similar mythologies and traditional narratives (Loomis, 1927: 29). The Irish *filid*, particularly, were seen by early scholars as the possible successors of the druids and the holders of pre-Christian lore, who managed to keep alive the old myths in Christian times, even though medieval manuscripts were written in monasteries. This idea was supported by the presupposition that Christianity allowed the pagan tradition to be kept intact in some kind of agreement between Church and bardic schools, with the latter being able to keep their lore and authorized to keep spreading it, but on the condition that they incorporated Christian elements. Early works in the development of scientific Celtic studies, such as Douglas Hyde's *Literary History of Ireland*, clearly exemplify this premise:

> That the Bardic schools, which we know flourished as public institutions with scarcely a break from the Synod of Drumceat in 590 […] down to the seventh century, were really a continuation of the Druidic schools, and embodied much that is purely pagan in their curricula, is I think amply shown […] These instances that I have mentioned occurring in the books of the poets instructions, are evidently remains of magic incantations and terrifying magic ceremonies, taken over from the schools and times of the druids and carried on into the Christian era. […] After Christianity had succeeded in getting the upper hand over paganism, a kind of tacit compromise was arrived at, by means of which the bards or *files* and other representatives of the old pagan learning, were allowed to continue to propagate their stories, tales, poems and genealogies, at the price of incorporating with them a small share of Christian

> alloy. […] But so badly has the dovetailing of the Christian and pagan parts been managed in most of the older romances, that the pieces come away quite separate in the hands of even the least skilled analyser, and the pagan substratum stands forth entirely distinct from the Christian accretion.
> (Hyde, 1899a: 241, 243, 250).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century these perspectives were followed by renowned scholars such as John Rhys, Alfred Nutt and Eleanor Hull, who supported many of their interpretations of early Irish and Arthurian literature based on theoretical frameworks concerned with mythology, which at the time were majorly influenced by theories such as Max Müller's solar mythology[19]. In the first half of the twentieth century, scholars such as William A. Nitze, Roger Sherman Loomis and Jessie L. Weston introduced a rhetoric and frame of interpretation highly influenced by the evolutionist[20] theory from James George Frazer[21] linking myth and ritual which is portrayed in his *Golden Bough* (1906-15). The consequence of both these early approaches was for Arthurian motifs which had parallels in Irish tradition to be interpreted as a direct continuation from "Celtic" mythology, with many of the most prominent knights of Arthurian legend being considered as revamped versions of pagan gods and its narratives as following the same mythological scheme. Arthurian enigmatic narratives as the ones involving the Grail, although later strongly connected with Christianity, were tied up by scholars with Irish "myths" from which elements in the Grail stories seemed to draw, and, as such, the Grail story itself was also framed in a

[19] Max Müller (1823-1900) was one of the founders of Western studies in the field of comparative religion. Müller and scholars of his school of thought had a naturalist approach to mythology, which means that they saw myths as being symbolic of natural elements and their behavior. Müller's study of the Vedic culture and religion led him to believe it was the key for understanding the origin and development of European pagan religions. According to Müller's theory, Vedic peoples practiced a form of nature-worship, and Vedic myth expressed such worship by personifying elements of nature into supernatural beings: gods, which represented the natural active forces. Since for Müller Pagan European religions were derivative of the original Indo-European one, gods such as Zeus or Jupiter would be just another representation of the same original Indo-European god. It was this theory that led Müller to consider "solar" gods, since there would be personifications of the Sun in all religions of Indo-European heritage. A similar pioneer of the solar theory was Wilhelm Mannhardt, a German folklorist known for his work in Baltic mythology.

[20] The evolutionist approach followed by J. G. Frazer or Andrew Lang does not see myths as mere hidden symbols of natural elements or seasonal cycles but as a result of specific states of intellectual development, when the lack of explanation for phenomenon gives way to associations ruled by a "savage" state-of-mind and emotionally charged interpretations, rather than with the use of reason more typical of a "civilized" intellect.

[21] James George Frazer (1854-1941) was a highly influential Scottish anthropologist in the studies of mythology and comparative religion. His most famous work, *The Golden Bough,* is a massive collection of magical and religious beliefs from all around the world, which serve as examples for his studies of comparative religion. One of Frazer's main theories is that magic and ritual provide the grounds for myth and religion, leading to a wide array of disciples following his theories and applying them to specific areas of study, as is the case with Jessie L. Weston and her study of the grail legend in *From Ritual to Romance*.

mythological scheme which for scholars like Jessie L. Weston, in her *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), was an ancient pagan myth tied with ritual concerning the "wasteland" motif, which had survived in the Middle Ages through Arthurian narratives.

In what concerns the beheading game motif, these influential theories are also perceived in the scholarly work of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which followed the idea that "such stories as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight cannot be understood unless we are willing to keep our minds open to the idea that, in addition to literary documents, popular ceremonies and rites may be of first-class importance in considering not only the derivation of a story but also the significance or "myth" that originally produced it" (Nitze, 1936: 365). Regarding source-study and the search for oral originals, in his *A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight*, Kittredge demonstrates his reliance in oral tradition by theorizing possible origins in folklore through a large body of comparisons with folktales thematically connected with the written works. The search for origins in oral tradition is indeed a relevant one, and it can be a possible fortuitous enterprise for understanding both the motif and its transmission, nevertheless, Kittredge also seems to do this through the evolutionist perspective, underlining in several instances the origin of the supernatural elements in the tales in a "savage" mindset, from which "superstitions" lead to folktales. Furthermore, Kittredge underlines folktales from several international traditions, with his evolutionist bias leading to the belief that they might contain the same significance despite their different background, based on the argument that "it results from the tendency of savage men to think in identical terms" (Kittredge, 1916: 23). This is especially visible in Kittredge's analyses of the tropes in the stories (Kittredge, 1916: 147-223). Although connections between different traditions may indeed exist, especially when they belong to an Indo-European context, a more in-depth analysis of the context of those traditions must be made before rushing into conclusions. This is all the more notable when we refer to traditions which are far from having a connection to the ones which we are studying, as, for example, the Japanese or Native-American folk traditions. The parallels established by Kittredge are important, as well as his analysis concerning the relationship between the written versions, but it may be argued that he relies too much on the quick comparison with several oral traditions and in the evolutionist perspective in order to establish a meaning for the *topos* of the beheading game.

The clearest example of the early twentieth-century perspectives in what concerns the interpretation of the beheading game however is perhaps found in R. S. Loomis' *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (1927). This work exemplifies the theoretical paradigms of its time, and most of the work is indebted to both naturalist and evolutionist notions[22]. Loomis considers that every single rendition of the beheading game, starting with the Irish one up to the Arthurian tales, represents both a seasonal and solar myth, which is tied to abduction tales which involve the same characters who are challenger and challenged in the beheading-game tales in the respective roles of kidnapper of a woman and rescuer/lover. According to Loomis, the original myth concerning the abduction narratives was a spring-time one, where an old solar god kidnaps a woman who represents spring, while the new solar god rescues this flower-bride, thus bringing about spring. The beheading-game narrative would then be the testing of the young solar god by the older one, with pairs such as Cú Chulainn/Cú Roí and Gawain/Green Knight representing versions of this young/old solar god dichotomy. The validity of Loomis' views has not withstood the passage of time, creating several problems due to the clashing with other subsequent theories in the academic discussion regarding the Irish literary and cultural milieu and to the overwhelmingly speculative character of his theoretical construction.

One of the main flaws of such construction is that even when finding some ground for the search of mythological meanings reminiscent of a pre-Christian past in stories of which we only know the written versions, Loomis' theory would mean that storytellers in thirteenth-century France would still have the same mythological mind-set. According to his view virtually every single Arthurian rendition of the Irish abduction and beheading game patterns is connected into the same mythological net, with the meaning of the tales being carefully and subtly worked in order for all of them to be connected. This would mean that every single scribe, *fili*, bard, storyteller, *conteur* and writer from the eighth century up to the fourteenth in different geographical locations, such as Ireland, Wales and France, had some kind of connection or communication that led all the resultant textual work to be intertwined. This extends to the Arthurian characters themselves, which are almost stripped of original characterisation and are set as derivatives/representations of their "primitive" Irish

[22] However, such accordance results in a rather ill-placed theory, since the evolutionary approach regarding myths is quite different from the naturalist approach. In fact, scholars of the evolutionary school would most generally disprove "solar" mythology theories (cf. Lang, 1897: vii-xxiv).

renditions or counterparts. As it may be easy to deduce, such an inheritance of mythological ideas with basis on an assumed pagan origin would be highly unlikely, and such ideas were probably forgotten by the time these motifs were used in Arthurian texts by bards, *conteurs* or any other class of medieval poet or scribes. The context of *SGGK*, for instance, can provide an example:

> A good deal of earlier criticism on the poem was devoted to uncovering the distant pagan origins and antecedents of those elements in it that do appear to be supernatural green men who renew their lives at the New Year, Morgan le Fay's reputed origins in the Irish pantheon, Gawain's own possible origins in a Celtic sun-god. Such sources can never be more than hypothetical, not only because it is highly unlikely that the *Gawain*-poet could have known them, but because they were almost entirely reconstructed, or invented, on the basis of scraps of evidence that are most widely separated from the poem temporally and geographically. [...], and recent scholarship has tended to move away from seeking out pagan parallels to reading the poem [...]. The poem is not pagan, whatever elements of fertility figures the Green Knight may retain; but its Christianity does not bring with it a defined theological meaning. As a romance, its connotations and range of reference belong with other romances, Arthurian in particular...
> (Cooper, 1999: 286)

In other words, notwithstanding the possibility that the beheading game in *Fled Bricrenn* was originally meant to symbolize the test of a pagan sun-god to another in order for the latter to have success in carrying forward the fertility of the land, the texts themselves do not explicitly express any intention for the tales to be understood as seasonal myth, nor that they were seen as such by medieval authors: "Nor is it helpful to seek connections here [for studying the channels of transmission] in terms of seasonal myth. Such may be the ultimate origin of the exchanges of blows in *Fled Bricrenn*, but nothing in the text suggests that that would have been understood by the audience of the tale, or was intended to be" (Jacobs, 2000: 42). Every supposed mythic element that Loomis points out seems to be exclusively derivate from his own interpretation or from comparative mythology with basis in Frazerian anthropology. The use of such a frame of interpretation for elements that are extra-textual, since they are the result of that same interpretation, rather than what the textual sample indeed contains, ends up being potentially speculative and deviates from what the text indeed offers us: "On the whole, seasonal myth, and Frazerian anthropology in general, appear to be red herrings" (Jacobs, 2000: 43).

However, the assertion of the unsustainable and speculative character of a theoretical frame as the one used by Loomis does not mean that Irish tales, or Arthurian

ones, do not have an underlying mythical content. Criticism towards this theory just means that a pagan seasonal myth with basis on Frazerian anthropology has more arguments going against it that in favour. In fact, there were subsequent alternative interpretations to elements in the Ulster cycle with basis on a seasonal significance, but which do not share Loomis' theoretical frame in order to find such significance, as is the case with the Rees brothers[23] (1961: 150-166), Ó Cathasaigh[24] (2014: 209-217) or Phillip Bernhardt-House[25] (2009: 226-237). It is indeed possible that mythic significances could be found in the beheading-game narratives, and that its origin could be glimpsed in possible pre-Christian traditions, but if clues in that direction are found, such significance has to be understood both in face of its possible ancient meaning, as well as the meaning it had for the contemporaneous context of the written extant narratives. Bernhardt-House exemplifies this point perfectly when referring to this type of approach: "Such investigations are worthy and indeed are of great interest, but they

[23] Far from the solar and vegetation mythology of R. S. Loomis, Alwyn and Brinley Rees argue that there are indeed seasonal significances in the Ulster cycle connected with Conchobar and with several symbolisms associated with the latter representing the several divisions of the year into days or months and with the four seasons. Moreover, the Rees brothers also try to demonstrate the connection of the seasonal Irish festivals such as Samhain and Beltaine with Winter and Summer and their relationship with ancient Irish spiritual (and political) centres such as Tara and Uisnech, as well as a proposed interpretation of the four provinces of Ireland, with the northern ones being associated with Beltaine and Summer, and the most southern ones with Samhain, Winter and the Otherworld.

[24] Ó Cathasaigh analyses the possibility that the debility of the Ulstermen in the *Táin* represent a Winter's sleep, since it begins on *Samhain* and lasts for the entirety of the three months of Winter, and that Cú Chulainn, as the sole defender of Ulster and the one impervious to the debility, represents the archetype of the fecundating hero, the triumph of life, who holds down the forces of the Winter and keeps them from creating a wasteland while Spring brings the return of life (when the Ulstermen are released from their debility). As shall be stated with further details in another chapter of the present dissertation, such a theory is rebutted by Bernhardt-House, who claims that despite Cú Chulainn's defence of life in his resistance to the attack on Ulster, his status as the warrior per excellence does not place him as the symbol of life or fertility.

[25] Bernhardt-House hints at a possible seasonal significance related with the circumstances around the first birth of Cú Chulainn in the tale of the latter's conception (*Compert Con Culainn*), namely that it is accompanied by the falling of heavy snow and occurs nearby the megalithic mound of Bruig na Bóinne (Newgrange), which may point towards the possibility that Cú Chulainn's first birth has a connection with the Winter Solstice. Bernhardt-House arrives at this possibility by going through several other Irish tales which involve snowfall as well as tales related with the Bruig na Bóinne. He notices that the period between Samhain and Imbolc, of which the middle-point is the Winter Solstice, is where snowfall occurs in the narratives, and is usually destructive or negative to the characters involved, with the exception of Cú Chulainn. Bruig na Bóinne on the other hand is associated with "shapeshifting and rebirth" (Bernhardt-House, 2009: 230), which are two characteristics also associated with Cú Chulainn (who has three births), and furthermore the megalithic mound is aligned with the Winter Solstice. It is pointed out by Bernhardt-House however, that Bruig na Bóinne is represented in some Irish narratives as being associated with Samhain rather than the Winter Solstice, and that although both seem to have been included in the ancient Celtic ritualistic calendar and are somehow associated with the new year, nonetheless the "discrepancy between the solar new year at the Winter Solstice and the Celtic quarter-day new year of Samhain is noteworthy" (Bernhardt-House, 2009: 230). Nonetheless, Bernhardt-House does maintain that the Winter Solstice is most possibly the date of Cú Chulainn's first birth but dispels a possible consideration of the latter as a sun deity, rather focusing in the symbolism of the rebirth and comparing Cú Chulainn with the myth of Dionysus.

tend to undervalue the texts we have before us, which were conscious and deliberate literary creations reflecting the aims and interests of authors in specific historical circumstances" (Bernhardt-House, 2009: 226).

All in all, however, theories such as the Loomisian one progressively lost their prominence in both Arthurian and Irish studies, and are here reviewed just for the sake of understanding the history of the study of Irish-Arthurian connections. In the second half of the twentieth century, scholarly work began to explore new possibilities. This shift in attitude was the result of increasing criticism regarding the negligence towards the literary nature of Arthurian works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as their context as part of a literary genre, due a methodology overly focused in the search for the origins and significance of literary works through the study of myth:

> ...the myth critic has shifted the focus of interest away from purely literary values and back again to the most sterile sorts of source-hunting and parallel finding. Just as the typical nineteenth-century academician regarded Sir Gawain and the Green Knight only as a storehouse of information on medieval armor, architecture, and venery, so do the myth critics insist that the poem is only a repository of myth patterns and thus direct their efforts to elucidating Gawain's relationship to the British Jack-in-the-Green, the Celtic sun god, and the omnipresent vegetation god.
> (Moorman, 1956: 158)

Even Loomis progressively distanced himself from the ritualistic school and from scholars such as Jessie L. Weston, focusing himself more in the relation between the Welsh and Arthurian traditions and in the forms of transmission[26]. In fact, Loomis edited *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (1959), an extensive collaborative work with several Arthurian scholars, which, despite having references for the Celtic origins of early Arthurian literature, does not enter into the same level of mythological speculation of the early twentieth-century works and provides an in-depth scholarly survey of the several incarnations of Arthurian literature, as well as their origins and the forms of transmission between different traditions. Actually, *Arthurian Literature* became an important reference for Arthurian studies in the following decades, and is a demonstration of how Arthurian studies in the post-war years started to become more focused on the literary aspect of the chronicles and romances rather than mythological origins and comparisons with the Irish material.

[26] Loomis did, however, maintain some of the beliefs in mythological significances as being the origin of Arthurian elements, including the seasonal interpretations, although with more care regarding the level of speculation, and admitting that other hypotheses could be viable.

This shift in scholarly attitudes was also noted in the study of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and its analogues, and scholars such as Larry D. Benson adopted an approach which does not follow the early mythological viewpoints. Benson pinpoints the similar elements in all the previous beheading game narratives to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both Irish and French, in an attempt to find the textual source, without entering into much speculation regarding any mythological significances, as is observed in his article "The Source of the Beheading Episode in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'" (1961). His later work on the subject, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*[27] (1965), follows a similar line regarding the sources, Benson extracts what can be directly retrieved from the several texts and compares them in terms of both similarities and differences, but within the context of Arthurian romance. In general, Benson is more focused on the poetic art of the Gawain-poet, as well as the reception and understanding of the poem for its contemporary audience. *Art and Tradition* stays quite clear of mythological speculation regarding the Irish version, and in what concerns the meaning of the elements in the narrative of *SGGK*, his focus is more on what can be perceived in the Middle English narrative and how the beheading game is used in the context of a medieval romance, rather than in a mythological scheme. Thus, Benson concentrates on themes of the poem, such as the addressing of the ideals of knighthood, the test of the character of Gawain and the Roundtable, or the satirical critique to Arthurian romance (Benson, 1965: 246-248). He is less interested in oral traditions from where motifs might have been drawn and more on the written tradition, which he considers "primarily clerkly, learned, and though the ultimate origins of a particular romance are probably in folk tales, the romance itself exists in and depends on books" (Benson, 1965: 6).

The comparisons made by Benson are thus mostly with other romances and alliterative poems, since he intends to analyse the literary aspects of *SGGK* and puts less attention on the nature of its sources. He does dedicate a big part of one of the chapters to the Green Knight and the significances his colour and "churlish" aspect might entail, but he goes through several possible hypotheses and then associates the Green Knight with the literary (and folk) trope of the Wild Man. However worthy such association might be, it is one of many, but Benson emphasizes it too much, and the same goes to

[27] However, the book is based upon Benson's doctoral dissertation from 1959: "The Art and Meaning of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", University of Berkeley, California.

his overly attention regarding the "churlish" features of the Green Knight, therefore, he seems to argue too strongly in the direction of a single interpretation (cf. Finlayson, 1967: 153). Nevertheless, Benson makes his analysis of the Green Knight mostly within the context of *SGGK*, not with the Irish version as a constant source for comparison. In fact, despite the similarities of "churlish" features with challengers in other versions, as we shall see in further detail, the Green Knight is an unique feature of the English poem, especially his colour green, which is not attested in the previous French or Irish beheading games.

The approach by Benson towards *SGGK* marks a contrast with earlier scholarship by the fact that he fully concentrates on the written tradition and mainly in *SGGK per se*, and gives little attention to the extra-textual interpretations and speculations regarding oral tradition, with the argument that the romance is a work born of learning, a trait which he associates solely with writing. This might be an extreme point of view, and one quickly pointed out by Benson's critics: "Yet, in most if not all cultures learning antedates writing and a learned oral tradition may exist for centuries independent of writing though contemporary with it" (Malone, 1966: 727). Nevertheless, it is this literary approach that shall be the more pervasive one in Arthurian studies in the following decades: a closer attention to the literary composition of the written Arthurian works and its immediate historical context.

In the same year of *Art and Tradition*, John A. Burrow drew similar conclusions and had a similar approach to Benson (cf. Robbins, 1968: 547) in *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Burrow also focuses his attention on *SGGK* primarily as a romance or, like Benson, as a possible comedy criticizing the romance genre itself (Burrow, 1965: 181), thus interpreting the Middle English poem for its literary value, rather than with basis on its earlier analogues, and dismissing any major influence from oral tradition (Burrow, 1965: 165). Burrow represents a similar shift of approach in Arthurian studies to Benson, which affects the readings of *Sir Gawain* as well. Of course, Arthurian scholars kept on mentioning and working on possible oral traditions as having influenced the origins of early Arthurian literature, especially in the analysis of the early Welsh evidence. Similarly, oral spreading in the transmission to the Continent of Arthurian legend remained a hypothesis frequently addressed, but with much more caution and avoiding the speculation regarding its possible connection with Irish literature, especially in what concerns mythological interpretations. In sum, the

attention shifted to the literary works themselves and more to the view of Arthurian corpus as literature and less to the survival of mythological elements from Irish tradition.

Scholarship on early Irish literature in the second half of the twentieth century also went progressively through some changes and most scholars adopted other stances. Scholars such as James Carney began to claim "that most extant early Irish sagas bore a clear and deep monastic imprint, whatever their remote origins in pagan oral tradition" (McCone, 1990: ix). The on-going study of Irish texts eventually provided further insight into Irish post-Patrician and pre-Norman society, literature and law. Other notable scholars, such as Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh and Liam Breatnach, came to approach the idea that early medieval Irish society did not seem to have a large-scale division between adherents to the pagan tradition and the new monastic order. On the contrary, monastic interests were already deeply rooted in Irish society, and even political interests were already entwined with a monastic hold over the past, reshaped in accordance with the concerns of the present. The evidence that progressively came to be collected by scholars who started to notice that early Irish literature had its fair share of monastic imprint, led to arguments placing in doubt the idea that pre-Christian oral traditions were the exclusive source for the "secular" genres. Moreover, knowledge that political and social forces also had a part to play in the genesis of early Irish literature meant that the writing of the secular genres had behind it a much more complex endeavour than simply recording oral folk tales on vellum. In fact, scholars such as Carney began to stress the nature of early Irish secular literature as a written tradition, rather than to search for assumed oral originals: "The general theory put forward in this book is as simple as this: that early Irish written work has the character of written work. It is a literature based in part upon oral tradition, but the assumption that it is oral tradition in any very full sense cannot be made" (Carney, 1955: 276), an idea that had already been mentioned by Rudolf Thurneysen in the first decades of the twentieth century, but which was at the time relatively isolated:

> …after the old sagas were written down, these texts constituted virtually the only foundation for the later remodellings and new creations. Certainly the sagas fixed in writing were also recited orally in the country by narrators and thereby probably altered in many ways. However, the later compilers and authors hardly ever relied upon this oral transmission, but based their work on the written texts still largely available to us, even if they sometimes incorporate other motifs from folktales. This can often be directly observed,

> since whole prose passages or expressions are taken over. The later development of saga is thus a markedly literary one, just as its language, too, often presents a remarkable mixture of old-fashioned and contemporary forms. (Thurneysen, 1921: 73).

However, other mid-twentieth-century scholars did not concentrate solely on the monastic and written literary character of early Irish literature, many notable scholars like Kenneth Jackson, Proinsias Mac Cana, Myles Dylon or D. A. Binchy kept working on the aspects of early Irish literature which could be derivative of oral transmission and which could represent elements of the pagan past conserved from a continuous tradition through the written works. These scholars maintained the perspective that such continuation was a result of the pagan tradition previously maintained by the druids having been inherited by the *filid*: "much of the traditional teaching and practice of the druids was maintained without interruption by the *filid*" (Mac Cana, 1971: 86). Thus, the classes of poets such as the bards and the *filid* had inherited the priestly functions previously attributed to druids and were responsible for perpetuating the druidic tradition, which found its way to written form.

The basis for this theory was the similarity between druids and their priestly counterparts in other traditions of Indo-European ancestry[28]. Had this been the case, there would have been two claims to the *sacerdotium* in Ireland, by both Christian priests and the *filid*, with the former being forced to accept the latter due to their close connection with native kingship, since the *filid* were, in the words of Mac Cana, "a well-organized class of learned men, independent of the Church, who controlled and maintained the structures and ideology of native kingship." (Mac Cana, 1979: 445). Following this assumption, the presence of the *filid* in early Irish Christian society would have led the clergy to attempt an assimilation rather than conflict: "the clergy were the Christian pendant to the (culturally) pagan *filid* and in many things seem to have adopted them as their model" (Mac Cana, 1979: 478). According to these theories there would have been an on-going pagan tradition, resistant to Christianity, which would have been supported by "a society which was now publicly Christian, but which

[28] In 1947, Myles Dillon provided an example of this theory, by establishing a comparison between different priestly functions in traditions with Indo-European roots, such as the brahmans in India and the druids and considering them as holding the same practices and the same basic beliefs: "If we examine more closely what is known of druidic practices in Gaul and what can be gleaned from Irish evidence, it appears that the brahman and the druid preserved more than a common ancient vocabulary: they preserved common Indo-European traditions of practice and belief, some of which survived in the Gaelic world down to the eighteenth century and have survived in India to the present day" (246).

was still strongly attached to traditional beliefs and practices, still had a rich and learned oral tradition running alongside the written vernacular tradition, and still betrayed a certain nostalgia for the less complicated life that existed before Christianity" (Mac Cana, 1986: 41-2). The implication of this perspective is that the agents for such strong cultural resistance were the *filid*. Their influence would have been so strong, that the monastic men of letters themselves would have drawn mainly from it in order to write the secular Irish tales[29].

Be that as it may, the theoretical constructions of these scholars were entirely different from the naturalist and evolutionist perspectives and from readings solely in search of oral originals which were characteristic of the first half of the twentieth century. In what regards mythology, despite the progressive abandonment of solar and ritualistic interpretations, the matter of the mythological aspects of early Irish literature remained an important subject of study, but different theoretical models concerned with myth were progressively adopted. From the end of the first half of the twentieth century onwards, other approaches to myth such as the functionalist[30] approach of Malinowski, the psychological approach to myth by Freud and Carl Jung[31], the monomyth theory of

[29] A possible influence which lies at the root of this perspective upon the survival of paganism in medieval Irish society is a somewhat romanticized perspective inherited from the Celtic revivalism in the late nineteenth century, carried by early scholars such as Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan, whom, although having been pioneers in recuperating early 'Celtic' literatures and showing them to the wide European public, did it so by presenting a generalizing and romantic picture of the Celts as having been structurally different almost to the point of antithesis from what was considered 'Modern' civilization in Europe, which was already dominated by the paradigms of materialism, industrialism or rationalism. Moreover, such views also put emphasis on the geographical isolation of countries such as Ireland, and its historical early absence of invasions, which would justify a supposed cultural impermeability to influences that would last until today, paving the way for the idea that Christianity itself could not have had such an influence (Sims-Williams, 1986: 72-73).

[30] The functionalist approach originated with the work of Austrian anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski on primitive societies during his internment on the Trobriand Islands during the First World War and was especially influential in British anthropology, with British anthropologists E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown adhering to and further developing the theory. Also called structural-functionalism, this school claims there is an integration of myth, ritual, custom and institutions in the same socio-cultural matrix, with every element corroborating each other. Thus, myth has the function of providing explanation and authority for things being as they are. Jean-Pierre Vernant provides us with an example of the functionalist view of myth in his study of Greek mythology by stating that the role of myth is "to reinforce the social cohesion or functional unity of a group by presenting and justifying the traditional order of its institutions and modes of conduct in a codified form that is agreeable to listen to and easy to remember and transmit from one generation to the next" (1980: 221). Nevertheless, functionalist views eventually came to a decline and were debunked by several schools of structuralism which pointed out its inadequacies and its interpretation of myth as reductionist, since myth is not necessarily just a static and fixed model for reality nor simply a guide, and can also be a vehicle for a dynamic intellectual and philosophical discussion on several aspects of reality, from both positive or negative standpoints.

[31] For both psychologists, despite the extensive differences in their views, myth is an expression of psychological phenomena, namely of the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious is filled by repressed emotions in childhood, together with repressed and aggressive sexual drives (Segal, 2005: 364), and myth

Joseph Campbell[32], the Indo-European tripartite hypothesis of Georges Dumézil's comparative mythology[33], the theories from Mircea Eliade[34] or the structuralist approach from Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology[35] became highly influential

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manifests it in a metaphorical way. Myth can then be helpful to understand what these repressions might be in an individual. However, Freud never wrote extensively on the subject of myth; Jung, on the other hand, dedicated himself extensively to it. His view of the unconscious is rather different, especially in what pertains to the manifestation of myth. For Jung, the unconscious has a storage of innate archetypes, which function as sides of a personality, but which nevertheless are shared by a collective unconscious of mankind theorized by Jung. According to Jung, these archetypes are aching to be realized by the individual, and myth is a form of expressing the need for such realization. Myths can then help the individual to find himself again, by placing him into contact with his unconscious, a contact which may have been severed, and which is, for Jung, one of the main causes for modern anxiety. For both Freud and Jung, myths are to be interpreted as being symbolic, but what it may symbolize is what differs in both theorists.

[32] Joseph Campbell demonstrated the concept of "monomyth" in his *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (2004, 1st edition 1949), which is based on the main idea that many mythologies in the world, including ones from monotheistic religions, contain a pattern revolving around the journey of a hero which seems to evoke an initiation. The hero receives a call to go from the ordinary world to a supernatural world, where he faces several trials and challenges, with or without the assistance of other helping figures or mentors, gains experience and a new sense of clarity of the world, and receives an important and symbolic gift. The hero then returns to the ordinary world if he chooses to do so, and in the journey back he once again faces new challenges. Upon the overcoming of those challenges and the return to his point of origin, the hero can use the important gift he was awarded with to regenerate and improve the world or to prompt it to a new cycle. According to Campbell, this pattern implies 17 stages, not all of them being necessarily present in all myths, and very few, in fact, including them all. Nevertheless, the main stages of the pattern, are, for Campbell, present in most mythologies. The implication of the theory is that myth is universal to mankind, and drawing on influences from Jung, he postulates that it is not myth which can be a tool for psychoanalysis, but the absence of myth which creates the need for psychoanalysis.

[33] The system envisioned by Dumézil is based on the identification of social and mythological schemes in ancient Indian tradition which point to a tripartite social structure which is reflected in mythology, composed by a first function associated with sovereignty (which includes both a magical/religious function and the exercise of law/justice), a second function associated with warfare, and a third one associated with fertility, subsistence and craftsmanship. Through comparison with other Indo-European branches, Dumézil claimed that the tripartite system was ultimately of Indo-European provenance, with all the branches of Indo-European ancestry reflecting it in their mythological corpora.

[34] For Mircea Eliade, myth, either in traditional ritualistic forms tied with religion, or secularized, performs the same function, an escape from time which enacts the possibility of living in an idealized earlier world where man had more proximity with the gods, with "gods" being a figurative idea in the sense of man being closer to its idealized self and idealized place in the world, as well as either any physical or social phenomenon that man needs to approach.

[35] Lévi-Strauss divides the structure of myth into two main components: one composed by the chronological events of the mythological tale, called "sequences", and the other by abstract layers of meaning, the "schemata", which work in a similar way to a musical composition with two axis, a horizontal one and a vertical one (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 161). Myth is expressed through this structure, which, similarly to a language, reveals a pattern composed of constituent units named "mythemes", which are basically the most possible reduced sequences in a mythic narrative and embody certain meanings or relations (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 211). Through the disposition of mythemes in the schemata it is visible that the ones with common relations can be organized into an overall meaning which is opposed to a similar "bundle" of mythemes from the same narrative with the opposite meaning. These two sets of meaning are intermediated by other bundles of meaning used for transition, mediation and correlation between the two opposite ones, ultimately leading the mythological narrative to form a dialectal message composed by a pair of opposites, but creating a contradiction. The solution is never definitely found however, leading myth to be eternally repeated or for new variants to arise. This repetition is visible by the adding of more sequences in a narrative which perform the same function of others already found, making the structure of the myth more apparent and revealing the search for a solution of the contradiction between the two opposites (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 229). It is through the analysis of several variants of the same myth that Lévi-Strauss postulates it is possible to find this dialectal meaning (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 218).

in the study of mythology. During the second half of the twentieth century these approaches to mythology had an influence in the study of early Irish literature as well, particularly the tripartite scheme of Georges Dumézil and in many instances the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss. Since Irish belongs to the *Celtic* group of languages, Ireland is seen as having a Celtic, and consequently, an Indo-European[36] heritage, which led its rich vernacular corpus, assumed to contain elements of ancient mythology and culture, to be prone for comparison, under different theoretical frames of interpretation, not only with its Celtic cousins, like the Welsh, but also with other Indo-European traditions (cf. McCone, 1990: 3).

This notion led early Irish literature to go over an array of comparative data with other Indo-European linguistic and (assumingly) cultural groups (which was already visible in the naturalist and evolutionist approaches to Irish texts) and in the course of the second half of the twentieth century the tripartite socio-mythological theory of Georges Dumézil became the most influential theoretical frame in Irish studies in what concerns comparisons with other Indo-European traditions. Dumézil's theory is not perfectly accurate, and has been the subject of critique as well as praise, nevertheless, despite its flaws, some patterns of a social organization do seem to be reflected in mythologies of different cultures of Indo-European ascendancy, as well as in the social organization of European societies from the Iron Age up until the Medieval Age, if we are to follow the idea of Georges Duby[37] in *The Three Orders* (1981). The impact of Dumézil's system is most visible in its approval by Myles Dillon's *Archaism in Irish*

[36] The genetic relationship between several groups of European languages with ancient Asiatic ones such as Sanskrit, which led to the reconstruction of a common *Indo-European* parent language, was first noted due to European involvement with India in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, however, it was during the flourishing of Romanticism in Germany, and subsequently in the rest of Europe, that growing interest in tracing linguistic origins escalated. In the course of the nineteenth century the advancements in linguistics had already established the relationships between *Indic* and *European* languages and formulated reconstructions of the unattested parent *Indo-Germanic* (called as such by German linguists) or *Indo-European* language. Notwithstanding, the mentioned growing interest in linguistic origins had behind it not only linguistic interest, but also the romantic attraction towards cultural origins, leading to the genetic relationship between languages to be understood as also implying a common cultural heritage covering social structure, law, institutions, traditions (such as an oral literary one), religion and mythology. Up until the end of the nineteenth-century, the language groups defined as having Indo-European ancestry were *Indo-Iranian* (Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian, etc), *Greek*, *Italic* (Latin, Oscan, Umbrian, etc), *Germanic* (Gothic, Scandinavian, German, English, etc), *Celtic* (Irish, Welsh, Cornish, Breton and Continental Celtic languages of which there are only fragments such as Gaulish, Celtiberian, etc), *Slavic* (Old Church Slavonic, Russian, Polish, etc), *Baltic* (Lithuanian, Latvian, Old Prussian), *Armenian* and *Albanian*, with the ancient languages *Tocharian* from Chinese Turkestan and *Anatolian* from Asia minor having been included in the Indo-European fold in the early twentieth century.

[37] Duby characterises the social organization in the Medieval Ages as being tripartite: a priestly class (*oratores*), a warrior class (*bellatores*) and a peasant class (*laboratores*) associated with working the land and providing sustenance.

Tradition (1947) and *Celt and Hindu* (1973) and in the Rees brothers' *Celtic Heritage* (1961), but its influence extended to a wide range of articles and books on early Irish literature, including the work of notable scholars such as Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (cf. 2014).

Lévi-Strauss' structuralism, on the other hand, also exerted a pervasive influence in Irish studies, although more discretely, being visible for instance also in Ó Cathasaigh and in Joseph Falaky Nagy. In what concerns Arthurian studies, the structuralist approach of Lévi-Strauss has been used as a tool to analyse Arthurian narratives, along with Vladimir Propp's Formalism[38]. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been particularly prone to such analyses: Clinton Machann in a small article named "A Structural Study of the English Gawain Romances" (1982) has identified several functions and correspondent sequence in *SGGK* and other English Gawain romances in accordance with Propp's system (629-634), leading Machann to describe such a venture as having defined "...in Proppian terms, a sphere of action for the role which Gawain plays in certain Medieval English romances. Or we may even say that we have been formulating a Gawain myth" (Machann, 1982: 634). Additionally, Machann also associates his results with the existence of oppositions underlying the meaning of the narratives, such as Civilization/Nature, Courtly/Otherwordly or Christianity/Paganism, with Gawain himself as a mediator (Machann, 1982: 635), thus drawing on the theory of Lévi-Strauss. Machann has not been the only one acknowledging the presence of these pairs of oppositions in *SGGK*, other scholars such as W. J. Barron share a similar interpretation (2001: 166) and thus the existence of noticeable oppositions in the narrative remains a matter for interpretation. Notwithstanding, Lévi-Strauss has presented arguments which reveal the flaws in the Proppian system[39], and in what

[38] The use of a formalist approach best exemplified by the one applied by Vladimir Propp to folk narrative in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1958) provides a useful tool for identifying a structure divided in functions which helps us in defining more clearly what are the similarities and the differences in a comparative analysis of separate narratives, especially when filtered through the use of modified systems that are not only aimed at folk narratives but can cover both oral and literary discourse like the one elaborated by Roland Barthes in his essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1977: 79-124). The importance of the Proppian system in identifying fundamental similarities and differences between narratives was approved in modern structuralism through the words of its most iconic figure, Lévi-Strauss (1978: 126-7), for having been a pioneer in identifying certain axioms.

[39] Despite having approved Propp's system as having been pioneering in the analysis of a structure in folk-narratives, Lévi-Strauss himself is also quick to point the shortcomings of the system. Since it relies heavily on the form of the narratives (hence "Formalism"), the content runs the risk of losing meaning, and by doing it so, the object of study (the meaning of the tale) is lost, it becomes empty, and every variation of a tale loses its specific character (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 132-3). Lévi-Strauss contrasts such a shortcoming with his own structural anthropology, which is ultimately based in dialectics: it also

concerns Lévi-Strauss' own structuralist approach, modern critics, such as Wendy Doniger, have demonstrated that there are shortcomings to the system as well[40] (2009: 196-217). Nevertheless, even though it is not a perfect system, structuralism is still a recurring theory even in relatively recent works, such as Ann Dooley's analysis of the *Táin* in *Playing the Hero* (2006), even though the use of structuralist ideas is not uncritical in the latter.

These newer approaches to the matter of mythological significances did not go without criticism however, for they still relied in the assumption that early Irish literature and subsequently Arthurian romance had for the most part a deep mythological or pre-Christian imprint into them owed to an origin in oral traditions. In the 1980s the progressive acknowledgment of monastic influence in the genesis of early Irish literature and the stress on the study of Irish texts as proper literature, rather than simple written versions of oral tradition, represented for some scholars, such as Kim McCone, a clash with scholarship more oriented to the study of possible influences from oral tradition and pre-Christian mythology. Rather than seeing both approaches as complementary, this dualistic view dubbed the studies concerned with the influence of oral tradition and Indo-European mythology as "nativist", a term inherited from James Carney: "In the academic discipline of Celtic studies, the term 'nativism' has been used (first by Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* 276) as a negative label for an approach to texts produced in medieval monasteries which sees these works only as the written reflections of a conservative oral tradition" (Simmons, 2006a: 1344). On the

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contemplates a structure in myth, in fact, it is overly based in it, but the meaning of that structure is seen as a goal to attain upon defining what are the codes which sustain it (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 165).

[40] Doniger argues that some myths might contain an immensely abstract structure which fails the insertion in a structural model. A myth is transmitted through a narrative, and the structural model does not follow that narrative as it is, since the chronological sequence of events ends up being split and we lose the meaning awarded to us by its flow (Doniger, 2009: 199-200). If there is a "play" with the inversions and permutations of sequences, the specific sense or explanation to events in a narrative becomes compromised. This may be due to the starting point for the theory of Lévi-Strauss: the comparison of myths with the functioning of language and its constituents, such as phonemes or morphemes, hence "mythemes". Lévi-Strauss does take into account the search for a meaning in the mythemes, or he would not have theorized about dialectal meanings, but the deconstruction of myth using the same laws of logic applied to language can be insufficient to take into account the whole scope of factors which can be influential such as historical, theological, political, symbolic or psychological ones (Doniger, 2009: 200). The need to take these factors into account may seem to go at odds with the nuclear idea of binary oppositions which makes up Lévi-Strauss's vision of how meaning is performed in myth, for in theory it would contemplate signification. However, the dialectal interpretation implies two possible flaws, it may be limited to analyse the whole myriad of forms myth may take, and it is dependent of specific interpretations. The pairs of opposites *per se* already constitute a problem, for they are concerned with concepts or attributes which may vary immensely in accordance to different cultures or perceptions (Doniger, 2009: 204), moreover, Lévi-Strauss never expresses clearly his criteria for the choice of opposites (Doniger, 2009: 212).

other hand, the reaction of scholars like McCone was dubbed "anti-nativism", with McCone's "Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature" (1990) representing an overview of Irish studies with basis on this anti-nativist stance.

McCone criticizes that "many Old and Middle Irish scholars have been prone to regard 'secular' or 'native' vernacular sources as barely adulterated repositories of ancient oral traditions and pagan beliefs compiled by remarkably complaisant antiquarian clerics and jurists in a backward and only superficially christianised Ireland" (McCone, 1990: ix). According to McCone, the consequence of these assumptions was for literary criticism of early Irish sagas to become mainly focused on attempts to reconstitute oral versions of the tales, thus overlooking what is actually written in the texts: "All too often such attitudes have led to cavalier treatments geared to restoring an assumed older or oral 'original' rather than to interpreting what is actually attested in writing" (McCone, 1990: 8). The results were "patronizing assumptions that in various fields of vernacular literature the artistic and intellectual aspirations of early Christian Irish scribes hardly went beyond the more or less garbled reproduction of alleged oral pagan originals" (McCone, 1990: 7-8). Following on Carney's footsteps, McCone puts more emphasis in the role played by monasteries in the literary reworking of Irish tradition: "early Irish literature as a whole is rooted in a coherent, far-reaching and flexible construct or *senchus* adapted, synthesized and modified by monastic men of letters from the Bible and other Latin writings in conjunction with vernacular traditions both oral and increasingly, as time went on, written" (McCone, 1990: ix). Therefore, for the anti-nativist view, the major concern lies with the contradiction shown by a supposed pre-Christian tradition that was nevertheless produced in monasteries, under Christian religious and social power: "Since all extant early Irish literature was undoubtedly produced in monasteries, this glaring apparent discrepancy in monkish attitudes has become an increasing source of disquiet for some scholars both in the field and outside" (McCone, 1990: ix).

Objections against misconceptions such as an exclusive oral provenance emerged as a consequence of better understanding the monastic origins of early Irish literature. The critics of nativism claim that the nativist attitude of considering the extant texts as impoverished drafts owing their content to a more complete oral tradition commonly led to a depreciative view of the literary material: "The main objection to nativist attitudes towards early Irish literature is that they preclude the appreciation of

this vast material in its own terms by treating it as a more or less haphazard, imperfect and unthinkingly antiquarian inky precipitation out of an infinitely richer and more extensive oral solution" (McCone, 1990: 5). In contrast, McCone underlines parallels in early Irish secular texts with biblical episodes, and considers that the monastic *literati* recreated the native tradition through a conjunction of biblical, Latin and oral traditions, giving origin to a rich vernacular tradition: "the level of scholarship, intellectual analysis and imagination they brought to bear upon this gargantuan undertaking bears striking testimony to the dynamism, creativity, erudition and cohesion of the monastically based civilization that blossomed in Ireland from the sixth-century A.D. onwards" (McCone, 1990: ix-x).

Nonetheless, and despite having underlined important issues in the study of early Irish literature, anti-nativism is an extremist and partial view. Although for McCone "nativism" only sees one side of the coin, the same could be said of his anti-nativism, since it is overly concerned with clerical learning and with the written tradition. Notwithstanding the fact that these are important factors, McCone sees their influence as antagonist to the more than possible influence of native elements from oral tradition, rather than having an approach to both: "Is this material native or borrowed, traditional or monastic? Does it draw on Indo-European roots, or on the Bible and the Fathers? The answer, obviously, is that it combines all of those elements" (Carey, 92: 450). Due to such a dualistic position, anti-nativism and McCone's *Pagan Past* had its fair share of criticism in medieval Irish studies from scholars such as John Carey (1992: 450-452), Patrick Sims-Williams (1996: 179-196) and David Dumville (1996: 389-398). Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the literary value of the written versions, and, very importantly, of the influence they exerted in early Irish medieval culture and literary expression (both oral and written) provides a very important tool for studying further influences such a corpus could have outside Ireland, and to our interests, in Arthurian literature.

The recognition of the need to carefully scrutinize the context of Irish pre-Norman medieval society and of the place of both oral and written tradition in it, together with the notion of the role played by literacy and monastic culture, has led to the renewed analysis of the secular sagas according to the literary work in them as it is in fact demonstrated by the extant written texts other than by extra-textual elements. In consequence of the recognition of the literary value of the written texts themselves,

more questions were raised regarding the oral or written transmission of the secular sagas. Such questions are particularly important for a study on Irish-Arthurian connections since they can help to determine if the transmission was either from oral or written sources, and to have a better understanding of how much we can rely on the extant written versions in order to trace the sources of influence, as well as on possible non-extant written versions or oral tradition. With this said, to see nativism and anti-nativism as opposites is neither the most productive or more positive attitude to interpret them, as Ó Cathasaigh seems to underline: "Some scholars have emphasized those features of the material that reflect an inheritance from Celtic or even Proto-Indo-European culture, while others have chosen to highlight the innovative character of the tales, and the ecclesiastical and Latin influences on their formation. These need not to be mutually exclusive positions" (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 3). What anti-nativism demonstrated, is that there is enough information available in secular, hagiographical and historical sources for us to arrive at different conclusions from the ones claimed by the so-called "nativists".

In fact, the interplay of both approaches can provide a meticulous tool for research on the pre-Christian past in Ireland, since it requires a more scrutinized and rigorous analysis, complemented by a better understanding of what the corpus can offer, as well as of its limitations, and thus, offers more accurate results. A balanced approach seems therefore to be the most fruitful one, as Victoria Simmons points out:

> Anti-nativists (most notably McCone in his *Pagan Past and Christian Present*) criticize this approach [nativism] for failing to appreciate the texts themselves as cultural and literary products, and for demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the social and political realities which produced them, or of the processes of oral transmission. The issue is most usefully seen not as a conflict between two schools of thought, however, but as the natural development of an increasingly sophisticated and multi-layered approach to the corpus as it has become more accessible to scholarly analysis from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The medieval written record is—apart from its own virtues and with an appropriate understanding of its limitations—a primary tool for any investigation of the pre-literate Celtic past…
> (Simmons, 2006a: 1344)

To have such a balanced approach is necessary because even though anti-nativism is right in stressing the importance of the focus on the written texts themselves and the contemporary context in which they were created, we can never rule out other circumstances or elements that might be influential around the production of such a literary corpus as the Irish one. Especially since there is no evidence of pre-Christian

written literature, notwithstanding the *ogam*[41] form of writing: "there is no solid evidence for the existence of a literature of ogam beyond inscriptions and messages, or for any body of "literature" other than oral, in pre-Christian Ireland" (Nagy, 1997: 8). The establishment of the written word as the superior medium of transmission implies a complex process in a society where such a medium had previously been absent:

> The legitimation of literature as a respectable, even superior, medium is never a simple matter, as scholars of other literary traditions have already amply demonstrated. The more a written tradition nurtures notions of its ability to control and impose closure on the materials that seem to "entering" it, whether of purportedly oral, foreign, sacred, or ancient provenance, the more implicated the literary tradition may appear, even to its producers, in the modes of thought it claims to have rendered obsolete. The more literature attempts to present itself as an improvement on past media and even on what was transmitted through those media, the less efficient it may seem as a container of what its producers may well judge in the final analysis to be uncontainable.
> (Nagy, 1997: 7-8).

Thus, extra-textual elements, that might nevertheless be relevant, especially in what regards lost links in the chain of transmission of elements in a literary or cultural milieu or between different literary and cultural milieus might have abounded, extrapolated from the written samples. Therefore, it becomes relevant to examine both "nativist" and "anti-nativist" views on the context which led to the origin of our proposed texts for analysis, with the main topics in question being related to the circumstances in which the Irish written tradition emerged, and how the coalition between the native and Christian traditions worked. However, it is always necessary to bear in mind that the analysis or search for extra-textual elements must always be put into practice having the written sample as the ultimate arbiter. It is the written text that contains the factual and fixed clues. Extra-textual elements can be useful and provide more or less possible scenarios, but are also susceptible to a high degree of speculation, ergo, we must keep that degree at the lowest level possible. A higher degree of attention concerning matters of monastic learning in early Irish literature does not establish that pagan symbolism, reminiscent of the pre-Christian oral narrative tradition, is not present in medieval Irish literature, and to think so would be a misinterpretation. The underlying

[41] *Ogam* is the oldest Irish writing system (in use from the 4th to the 6th or 7th century) and consists of an alphabet or rather, a script, composed by strokes and notches which are found engraved on the edges of standing stones. *Ogam* does not denote any literary content, since it was only used for short and formulaic texts which served a funeral function or denoted land possession, presenting only male personal names with patronymic or familiar affiliation and vocabulary limited to some terms for kinship or other social roles (cf. Forsyth, 2006: 1390-1393).

topics involved in the Irish-Arthurian connection could indeed be of pre-Christian origin, especially in Irish and Welsh traditions, and even as a result of literary influence in the Arthurian one. What is intended is to clarify that it is necessary to dissect claims along these lines, especially in what concerns our case-studies, before considering them plausible. It must be clear that it is highly improbable, not to say impossible, that the reason which led to literary influence between Irish, Welsh and Continental Arthurian traditions was pagan symbolism and some hidden agenda to keep such symbolism intact, maintained by bards and ecclesiastical scholars in the several geographical areas concerned and spanned through an extended time-frame.

The matter of discussion in the nativist/anti-nativist debate is not the single one, however, in what concerns the assumed elements of the pre-Christian past in early Irish literature, for these elements are not limited to possible pre-Christian myths *per se* but also to the possible portrait of the culture and society tied to those myths. Whether the ethnography represented in the secular narratives reflects a genuine pre-Christian Irish society or not is also a matter for debate. From the end of the nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, several studies around this matter followed the tendency to consider that early Irish literature did contain genuine archaisms which could be compared with archaeological examples (cf. Bauersfeld, 1933; Dobbs, 1917; Joyce, 1903; O'Curry, 1873; Powell, 1950; Ridgeway, 1905). In the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, the view that early Irish literature could be seen as a literary gateway to pre-Christian times and to the Iron Age society of the "Celts" became highly influential due to a lecture by Kenneth Jackson in 1964 (University of Cambridge, May 14, subsequently published as *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age*) where he coined the expression "Window on the Iron Age" to classify and interpret the tales of the Ulster cycle, claiming the latter were most probably created around 400 A.D. (Jackson, 1964: 53).

The interpretations put forward by the "Window on the Iron Age" theory were subsequently approved by other scholars such as Cecile O' Rahilly (1967: xii-xiii) and David Green (1968: 96), and are supported by arguments drawn from analysis of the supposed internal evidence of the Ulster cycle, such as: the established chronology in the cycle situating it apparently between the first century B.C. and first century A.D. which, furthermore, seems to be confirmed by the Irish Annals (e.g. *Annals of Tigernach*, *Annals of Innisfallen*); the presentation of Emain Macha as the political

centre of Ulster in a society depicted as pagan where druids and pagan festivals have a relevant role and where the members of such society invoke the "gods of the tribe" (cf. Jackson, 1964: 28); the accordance of the ethnography described in the tales with the classical descriptions of the Iron Age Gauls and Britons around the first century BC; a claimed correspondence between the material culture portrayed in the cycle with the Iron Age La Tène culture. Such a view is of particular interest for us since its proponents commonly invoke *Fled Bricrenn* as one of the examples of a "Window on the Iron Age": "Second only to *Táin Bó Cúailnge* itself, it is *Fled Bricrenn*'s contents that have encouraged the 'Window on the Iron Age' interpretation of the Ulster Cycle, in which the sagas were viewed as recollecting both the institutions and material culture of the pre-Christian Celts" (Koch, 2000: 23-24).

Some of these contents are highly relevant for our case-study, for they are related with the possible significance of the beheading game and the circumstances around it (as we shall see in more detail in the course of this dissertation): the starting point for the challenges which Cú Chulainn and his two rivals face in *Fled Bricrenn*, which includes a middle beheading game and culminates in the final beheading game with Cú Roí, is a feast where all the Ulster warriors are gathered and where the *curadmír*, the champion's portion or best part of the meat, must be awarded to the best warrior, thus leading to a dispute for it between the three warriors. Such a context, also featured in other tales from the Ulster cycle[42], is incredibly faithful to an account by Athenaeus, claiming to use Poseidonios as his source, where he describes single-fights during the feasts of the Celts which could be deadly and the awarding of the thigh portion of the meat to the best warriors, as well as how other Celts, on the other hand, would submit themselves to beheading (*Deipnosophistae*, IV. 40). Moreover, the use of the beheading-game motif also invokes the Celtic practice of headhunting which is described by other classical accounts from Polybius (*Histories*, II.28, III.67, XXI.38), Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, XXIII.24), Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica*, V.29:4-5) and Strabo (*Geographica*, IV.4:5). Such accounts have often been matched with the archaeological record of findings of human skulls, carved human heads and votive pillars with sockets for the placing of human heads in Celtic-associated sites

[42] The motif of the champion's portion in a feast is also featured in *Scéla mucce Meic Da Thó*, a tale surviving in six manuscripts of which the earlier hails from the twelfth century. The standard edition is Thurneysen's (1935). The content of the tale, as well as its comparison with *Fled Bricrenn*, shall be analysed in detail further ahead in our study.

along with possible interpretations of Celtic iconography representing severed heads, leading scholars to engage in a debate over a possible Celtic cult of the head associated with headhunting (Armit, 2005: 86-88, 2012: 69-119; Chadwick, 1997: chap. 6; Cunliffe, 2010: 36, 41-43, 71-72; Löffler *et al*, 2006: 895-898).

Moreover, not only does *Fled Bricrenn* point towards a connection with this Celtic headhunting practice, but other narratives from the Ulster cycle present explicit similarities to the descriptions of this very same practice in the classical accounts, notably including the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (cf. O' Rahilly 1967: 134, 145-147, 1976: 153, 167-170), *Echtra Nerai*[43] (cf. Meyer, 1899: 216-219) and *Scéla mucce Meic Da Thó* (cf. Gantz, 1981: 185-186; Thurneysen, 1935: 14-18). Logically, due to the possible importance to the significance of the motif of the beheading game, both the classical accounts and the passages from the Ulster cycle on this matter, along with the archaeological data, shall be quoted and analysed in detail in the course of this study. For the time being, however, our aim is to contextualise these connections in the discussion regarding the "Window on the Iron Age" theory. The premise of Kenneth Jackson's study has close affinities with nativist theories, since it relies on the interpretation of Irish texts as mainly being of oral provenance and barely changed from the presumed originals, and states that a product of oral composition conserves with reasonably accuracy the social, political and cultural aspects of its epoch of creation[44].

As is the case with nativism, there is a divergent position to the one held by the proponents of the "Window on the Iron Age" theory which puts the arguments of the latter into question. Even in the late nineteenth century, Pflug-Harttung had shown some scepticism, albeit isolated at the time, of the Iron Age dating attributed to the *Táin*, arguing that the material culture portrayed in the tale seemed to be in accordance with the tenth century AD rather than the first centuries AD (Pflug-Harttung, 1892: 172). Some years before Jackson's influential lecture, James Carney also advised against seeing the Ulster cycle as a direct testimony of the Iron Age, stating his opinion that the cycle was most possibly a conscious creation of historical fiction intent on portraying the pagan past (1955: 276-279). More recently, and subsequently to Jackson's lecture,

[43] *Echtra Nerai* is one of the *remscéla* of the *Táin*, and is found in three different manuscripts, the older of which seems to hail from the fourteenth century. Meyer has produced an edition and translation (1889). The content of the tale, as well as its relationship with Celtic headhunting and comparison with the classical accounts, shall be analysed in detail further ahead in our study.

[44] Jackson's approach is the result of applying to early Irish saga theories issued by Albert B. Lord (1960) and Denys L. Page (1959) for the study of Homeric poems in the late fifties.

other scholars such as F. J. Byrne (1974), N. B. Aitchison (1987), J. P. Mallory (1981, 1986, 1992) or H. L. C. Tristram (2009) also presented strong arguments which offer an alternative view mostly sceptic and contrary to the interpretation of the Ulster cycle as a genuine portrait of the Iron Age. This "revisionist" school as Mallory calls it, finds support in several arguments (Mallory, 1992: 112-113): the clear Christian influence in the chronology of the cycle, placing it around the birth of Christ; the lack of historical evidence to support the entries from pre-Patrician times in the Irish annals; the focus of the cycle on a glorified representation of Ulster rather than an accurate portrait of what could have been the political landscape of Iron Age Ireland, as it is reflected by classical works such as Ptolemy's *Geographia*; the interpretation of the pagan society of the tales as being a fictional creation from monastic provenance, not really reflecting an actual remembrance or oral record of that same society; the possibility that the ethnographical elements were drawn from either the classical descriptions of the Gauls/Celts or were outright literary creations reflecting behaviours also common in medieval Irish society; an accordance of the material culture in the tales with early Christian Ireland rather than the Iron Age. These arguments from the "revisionist" school are indeed relevant and must be taken into account when approaching this matter. Nonetheless, this does not mean that we cannot search the texts for clues about the pre-Christian past, it just means that we must be more careful in analyzing the texts and in classifying the elements in them as petrified fossils of the Iron Age: "Even in areas where we might expect least impact from a biblical cum late antique view of the world and the idea of descent from Noah, we cannot merely assume Celtic oral sources, native antiquity and archaism, but must seek some external control" (Koch, 2000: 21).

Furthermore, some scholars such as Bernhard Maier have also claimed that the "Window on the Iron Age" theory also reflects a debatable conception of a cultural "Celtic" unity. Such a notion comes from the premise that classical descriptions of the Celts from several geographic areas and texts such as *Fled Bricrenn* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* reflect a pan-Celtic culture that would be preserved in every description and textual narrative, unchanged despite geographical or chronological differences. The classical texts about the Celts *per se* already create a problem for this theory, since they are spread through different (Greek and Roman) literary conventions and genres, different chronological times in history and different geographical locations, besides

differences in the experience of the authors which can be biased depending on the cultural and historical viewpoint:

> …the extant Greek and Roman descriptions of Continental Celtic culture do not represent a coherent and homogeneous body of texts. They reflect a wide variety of experiences, interests and standpoints, pertain to a number of quite different literary genres, refer to geographical regions as wide apart as Ankara and Lisbon and span a stretch of time comparable to that which separates King Alfred and Queen Victoria or, for that matter, Brian Boru and President de Valera. Moreover, the use of these classical writings as historical sources presents a number of problems which are due not so much to their chronological and geographical diversity, but rather to the literary conventions observed by the Greek and Roman authors and to the textual transmission of their writings.
> (Maier, 2000: 2)

Thus, Maier seems to raise problems in finding the classical texts as trustworthy historical descriptions. Many of the descriptions seem to be based in their authors' individual point of view, besides a tendency to generalize and insert the observations within a schematized label for "Celt" and to be focused on peculiar or curious characteristics that may not do justice to the relevant traits of a tribe. Furthermore, Maier claims that these ethnographic descriptions from classical texts are biased in the sense that they hardly try to be neutral, and thus, the image they present to us is from a Greek or Roman point of view only, leading to a tendency "...to draw general inferences from individual observations, a readiness to schematize and simplify, an undue emphasis on curiosities and oddities, and the stubborn refusal to view and describe foreign peoples as they might have viewed and described themselves" (Maier, 2000: 3). These issues are aggravated by the fact that each piece of classical writing on the subject became influential for later works, with writers using as their source of information not only their individual observations but also previous writings, leading perhaps to the identification of Celtic characteristics whenever some behaviour corresponded to past descriptions. Progressively, this might have created a set of preconceived notions of the Continental Celtic culture: "for just as each generation of Greek and Roman observers was conditioned by the ideas of earlier writers, so did their observations contribute to later developments of literary conventions and philosophical notions" (Maier, 2000: 3).

Maier's stand regarding this matter is possibly the result of a celtosceptical approach, a term coined by Patrick Sims-Williams (1998) to label an approach that led to the dissent from the concept of cultural celticity. Celtoscepticism is the reaction to the

invasionist models used to explain the linguistic celticisation of the British Isles, which see the linguistic unity as the result of a succession of "massive in-migration from the Continent of warlike Celtic speakers in successive Hallstatt and La Tène waves" (Koch, 2000: 17) that would have given origin to an Insular Celtic culture similar to the Continental one. Celtoscepticism does not place in dispute the Celtic family of languages (the less problematic use of the term "Celtic"), or the existence of an original community where Celtic as a language originated and in which peoples composed of speakers of said language invariably had cultural traits in common:

> Within the scholarly consensus of a purely linguistic Celticity, it is generally agreed that a 'Common Celtic' proto-language did exist at some date range in later prehistory. A further implication of the theory is that a proto-language – Celtic in our case – was the property of a particular community. This would be a group of people who existed at a particular time and place. As such, like any group of people in a particular time and place speaking an essentially undifferentiated language, this group would have other cultural attributes in common – technology, a subsistence economy, kinship systems, institutions, and beliefs.
> (Koch, 2000: 20)

What celtoscepticism does place in dispute is for posterior cultures which belong to the same family of languages (Celtic) to have developed in parallel and to have preserved or developed their cultural traits in function of their common prehistoric culture with basis simply in the same linguistic roots. If we take a celtosceptical approach towards Irish literature, then its analysis in function of a celtological interpretation seems to be a long shot, since we cannot ascertain, with the exception of linguistics, what ties may exist between it and a prehistoric Common Celtic culture of which there is no written record. Moreover, there is the aggravating factor that the written vernacular tradition we have in our hands is the product of an already differentiated culture not only because of the distance in time from a culture of origin but also due to the gargantuan shift in beliefs, learning and mentality that invariably came with the conversion to Christianity:

> …to what extent early Irish literature should bear a relation to that non-linguistic Common Celtic culture is not certain, especially so as Common Celtic belongs to the horizon of prehistory and was therefore not a vehicle for written literature of any kind. Furthermore, the writing and transmission of literary texts in Irish was a consequence of the conversion and thus the introduction of new systems of belief and learning.
> (Koch, 2000: 20)

Nevertheless, having a pure celtosceptical approach towards the "Window on the Iron Age" interpretation might be counterproductive. Despite the discrepancies of the classical sources pointed out by Maier and the understanding that both an oral and written tradition might reflect their contemporary context rather than an Iron Age substratum, there are possible counter-arguments to these claims as we shall observe in the course of this dissertation. As in the case of anti-nativism, a complete rejection of the idea of early Irish literature as having some roots in the Iron Age past and even in a cultural Celtic identity would be an exercise of radicalism, and would possibly direct us from one extreme to another: "Though it is potentially misleading to rely uncritically on 'Celtic' interpretations of early Irish literature, a reactionary, uncritical rejection of cultural Celticity as a source of any possible insight would likewise lead to a distortion" (Koch, 2000: 24).

What celtoscepticism and anti-nativism provided us with is the need to carefully scrutinize the vicissitudes through which this literature came to be, and thus come to clearer conclusions: "To the extent that 'Celtoscepticism' or 'antinativism' have questioned the questionable and thus made us think harder, the inter-Celtic comparanda that are not easily accounted for by alternative approaches will remain more securely and with a greater significance" (Koch, 2000: 25). Keeping in mind that there are valid arguments from both positions, the answer lies not in dismissing any critical approach but rather to consider them all and to extract what may be the most valid in function of what has not been already logically dismissed as untenable and unlikely:

> How then should critical study of an Irish heroic tale proceed? Recognition of the necessity of dealing with the transmitted text rather than with an idealized "original" is an evident starting point. Yet, focus on the synchronic aspect of an early Irish heroic tale should not mean that one elides the diachronic dimension. Whatever the nature of the relationship of the written version to the story-telling tradition of pre-Christian Ireland, the existence of a relationship is itself undeniable. It is the task of criticism to seek to discover how each individual tale negotiates between past and present, between its participation in a continuous tradition and its role as the creation of an author and of his time. It is evident that there is no single, simple methodological key to this discovery. Rather, all possible critical approaches must be tested.
> (Herbert, 1992: 54)

Regarding the transmission to other literary traditions such as the Arthurian one, this same attitude is the most apt not only to provide the clearest view possible on the nature of the original literary milieu from where story motifs originated (and thus the possible motives for their transmission) but also in order to provide the same critical

standpoint towards the receiving traditions and their particular context in relation to the one of origin. The thesis that transmissions of an Irish text to other literary traditions are due to a common heritage, which would generate interpretations of the text as being a reflection of the pre-Christian past (thus implying an identification of that same common past from all parties involved), seems unlikely. We may wander through a wide array of themes in the Irish sagas that might be a continuation of an original Common Celtic culture, but we must be careful not to assume anything. Instead, the most advisable approach would be to establish how such continuity survived in the written medium. Nevertheless, embarking on such a task immediately poses the difficulty of finding a methodology for it:

> …the continuity of themes and other traditional elements from Celtic antiquity into a novel medium is to be established rather than assumed. We have no general agreement over what methodology might be employed to recover elements of pre-Christian culture from medieval literature. When we now compare elements of *Fled Bricrenn* with, say, medieval Welsh literature or ancient evidence from the Continent, it is disputable as to what any comparability might mean.
> (Koch, 2000: 22)

It is safer and probably more accurate to see the influential elements of *Fled Bricrenn* in Arthurian narratives as the result of common characteristics in medieval societies such as the Irish, Welsh, English and French ones, which would lead to a similar contemporary understanding of the narratives rather than the result of a common past (and a disputed one at that) creating a channel of transmission fuelled by pre-Christian myth and ideology. We may argue that in Ireland there was a conscious and a purposeful representation of the past in the secular texts, but in terms of transmission, however, such modus operandi would seem displaced in the French and English Arthurian traditions. Old French Arthurian romance and Middle English Arthurian poetry are not explicitly intended to portray the past but rather an idealistic and fantastic age of chivalry. Even if Arthurian narratives are interpreted as such, it is a past which is portrayed through medieval ideals and characteristics, far from the Iron Age: "What became the highly diversified *matière de Bretagne* was a confection of the court cultures of France and England that created a picturesque model owing more to contemporary aesthetics and *mores* than to a distant past" (Jewers, 2011: 49). Therefore, the use of elements from Irish sources has to be interpreted taking into account their value and comprehension in contemporary medieval perceptions, and not the pre-Christian past they might represent.

Everything said up to this point underlines the several factors and points of study regarding the Irish-Arthurian connection, and the progressive developments in the approach to these matters which are highly influential and have necessarily a deep impact in any proposal for a modern study on this subject, with the focus of the present study being the transmission of the beheading game. Taking into account everything that was mentioned, it seems such a study is obliged to go through two main questions: the channels of transmission through which the story motif of the beheading game travelled from Irish tradition to Arthurian literature, and if the motif holds a similar significance, mythological or otherwise, from one literary tradition to another, or, on the contrary, if it changed in its adaptation to a different context. Both these questions may be, and most possibly are, interconnected.

In what concerns the transmission *per se*, in the last decades Arthurian studies have advanced significantly in elucidating the literary and cultural connections between Wales, England and the Continent which saw the rise of both the Arthurian chronicle and romance traditions, as well as investigating possible agents of transmission of Arthurian narratives, such as the Breton storytellers: important work has been done in this area, which is also vital for understanding the transmission of Irish motifs, by Constance Bullock-Davies (1966), J. E. Caerwyn Williams (1991) and Rachel Bromwich (1991). John Carey has exemplified more recently the advantages of tracing the transmission of literary motifs between Irish and Arthurian traditions in his *Ireland and the Grail* (2007), which follows an array of comparative detail as is in fact observable in Irish, Welsh and Arthurian texts, and presents the possibilities of transmission in accordance with a historical and geographical framework, in order to study the influence of Irish elements in the Grail narratives. Additionally, the work of Patrick Sims-Williams in *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (2011) has demonstrated, by analyzing every single evidence of Irish transmission in Welsh sources, that Wales, as we shall see further, is more problematical as a mediator between Ireland and the Continent than some previous studies have assumed. This is not a negative result at all, since it allows for a higher degree of certainty when tracing such channels, at least in what the extant sources are concerned. *Irish Influence* thus provides an important study in what regards the Irish-Arthurian connection, since Wales has commonly been seen as the intermediary for the transmission of Irish motifs to both the Insular and Continental literary traditions.

With respect to the sources, this dissertation is not the first to approach the topic, scholars such as George L. Kittredge (1916), Larry Benson (1961; 1965) and most recently Nicolas Jacobs (2000) have already attempted to provide answers to these questions. We have mentioned the works of both Kittredge and Benson before, and they are indeed valuable and shall be reviewed in the course of our study, but they are rather outdated and lacking in due consideration of the channels of transmission. Both these scholars focused their work either on hypothetical lost sources or on attempting to determine which version could have been the source for the others in the Arthurian context; but, as we shall see, they leave many questions unanswered. Moreover, notwithstanding the importance of their work, although they make allusions to the matter of transmission, and their search for a source does go in that direction, they do not attempt to trace the channels of transmission step by step. On the other hand, the article by Nicolas Jacobs does allude to possible channels of transmission for Irish motifs; but Jacobs' work seems to highlight solely a small piece of the problem, no doubt due to constraints of length. A matter so complex requires a full and thorough analysis, and the utilisation of the most recent research results, such as *Irish Influence* or *Ireland and the Grail*. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of this matter and a thorough tracing of the channels of transmission in modern scholarship are still desiderata. This dissertation proposes to fill such a need, by reviewing the literary connection between early Irish literature and Arthurian romance with the beheading-game motif as a case study, taking into account all the developments in the study of early Irish literature, as well as of Arthurian romance, which have accumulated in the past few decades and which can offer us fresh insights on this subject, starting with the matter of transmission. Such a task, in what concerns the textual or oral mediums of transmission and the channels for that transmission, requires a methodology mostly based on literary criticism and historical context, with a focus on the actual content of the extant written material.

In what regards the meaning *per se* of the beheading-game motif and its interpretation in both traditions, along with questions on whether such a significance did change or not from its passage from Irish to Arthurian tradition, the Irish context has been recurrently influential to uncover how the transmission of Irish motifs to an Arthurian literary context took place and to the interpretation of the Arthurian corpus itself. Therefore, questions regarding the oral or written nature of the Irish narratives, as

well as the context of early medieval Irish society, must come into clarity. These topics may now be seen in a different light, clarified and better explained in face of the latest developments in the study of early Irish literature, especially in what concerns *Fled Bricrenn* or other texts which might be connected to it, such as *Aided Chon Roí*. Such work regarding the Irish-Arthurian connection has been scarce in the last years. Of course, Arthurian studies did not suffer a hiatus at all, the last years witnessed the publication of several new critical editions and translations of Arthurian texts, as well as several *Companion* series dedicated to Arthurian literature and other scholarly publications and articles on the subject. Even the once acclaimed *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* saw its contents being reviewed and re-worked by contemporary Arthurian scholars in several volumes concerned with each Arthurian tradition (Welsh, English, French, German, Iberian, Italian, Norse, Latin), which gave an important contribute to Arthurian Studies. All the Arthurian-related work in the last years has provided further developments in the study of the literary work of Arthurian traditions, its transmission from England to the Continent and vice-versa, as well as on the contemporary contexts in which every branch of Arthurian tradition flourished. However, Arthurian scholarship has been developing with a certain distance from Irish studies, especially when compared with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of course, the matter of Celtic roots, either Irish or Welsh, is frequently addressed in many of the several works concerned with Arthurian literature in the last decades, but mostly as reference and in function of the literary work in Arthurian texts, rather than in full-scale studies dedicated to the transmission of motifs from the Irish narrative tradition to Arthurian traditions and their transformation or significance in the latter. There are exceptions however, such as the aforementioned *Ireland and the Grail* (2007).

Since the study of medieval Irish literature has shifted from early approaches mostly concerned with the reconstitution of assumed oral originals and mythological speculations to a more mindful approach, not only to the matter of pre-Christian oral tradition, but also to the literary attributes of the written tradition itself as well as to the monastic and contemporary context which created such written tradition, it has allowed a different comprehension of the significance of elements which could have influenced Arthurian literature, and how these could have been transmitted. Such a different comprehension, however, has been reached by avoiding the interpretation of the

narratives through an overuse of anthropology and comparative mythology which invariably always runs the risk of extrapolating the literal meaning of the texts *per se*, something that used to be common in earlier scholarship around this matter. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the prevalence of such methodology when addressing the transmission of Irish elements to Arthurian literature, and despite the need to approach the Irish material as proper literature, mythology does constitute an important discipline for the analysis of many elements in the latter.

In the case of the beheading-game motif, for instance, it is rather futile to attempt to escape this discussion, for a motif which includes a shape-shifting churlish character who is able to survive decapitation implies such a supernatural and magical theme that one immediately is led to think that some connection with myth or folklore may be at play. Although one of the most important factors regarding that problematic is the notion that the corpus of written secular texts in medieval Ireland was produced in environments dominated by Christian ideology and probably in many instances by scribes with a Christian mindset, such corpus is also composed of elements which seemingly have native pagan origins. Many of these elements were once possibly part of a native mythology and in a sense still exercise their mythological significance in the Irish corpus of secular texts. One of the earlier approaches to the question of mythology in early Irish literature with a modern methodology was the Rees brothers' *Celtic Heritage* (1961), which, although heavily influenced by Dumézilian comparative mythology and therefore falling excessively in comparisons with the Indian evidence, does identify mythological elements in function of what the texts themselves seem to demonstrate, in contrast with the speculative mythologies envisioned in the early twentieth century. The work of Tomás Ó Cathasaigh in several publications and articles in the last four decades, many of them compiled in *Coire Sois, The Cauldron of Knowledge: A Companion to Early Irish Saga* (2014), has also dealt extensively with this matter and presents a modern approach to the thematic and ideological content of early Irish literature and its relationship with mythology. The matter on how mythological themes are inserted in a written tradition, which, although native, was produced under monastic influence, has been an important subject of study for the American researcher Joseph Falaky Nagy, whom on several works such as *Wisdom of the Outlaw* (1985) or *Conversing with Angels and Ancients* (1997), among others, has systematically been disclosing evidences on the diversity of attitudes to native elements

by the Irish *literati* and how the pagan/Christian and oral/written dichotomies developed in the whole of early Irish literature, including hagiography, and how myth is inserted in such an interplay of influences.

The work achieved by these scholars or others in their lines of research is extremely relevant when approaching the matter of myth in early Irish literature. It is necessary to keep in mind that, focus on the written texts notwithstanding, the context of early Irish literature gives it an inexorable mythic edge which extends to the Ulster cycle. The fact that early Irish narratives as we have them are the product of a written tradition with an extraordinary literary value, regardless of its mythological elements, is not in question, but the underlying mythic values that such product might have in a body of literature which picks up on items of a native tradition, together with the cultural values of that same native tradition, contemporaneous to the written material or otherwise, are, more than just an assumption, a probable deposit of meaning which hovers over the narratives, making them more than objects of a pure textual tradition. The textual ground of early Irish literature seems to arise from the interplay of at least some elements from native oral tradition and a scribal written tradition which came with literacy and supplanted the pre-Christian one. Thus, it often contains pagan elements redefined in light of the contrast with Christian ones and in accordance with the contemporary medieval Irish society, besides the input of monastic interests and the individual literary prowess of the scribes who were the authors of the texts. None of these factors are to be forgotten, on the contrary, we can now address the question of the mythic repository in the narratives with perhaps more insight, despite the large amount of work remaining to be done. To exemplify, Ann Dooley's approach regarding myth in the *Táin* illustrates perfectly this intention, in our case directed at the mythic values of *Fled Bricrenn*:

> These values may not be immediately evident on the surface of the text, if text is understood simply as a record of narrated action, but they may be assumed to exist in the text as a mythic deposit. My focus is still on the written word, but I now want to leave it more open for consideration as a complex, fabricated item of tradition, whose reception nevertheless remains responsive to the values offered by social custom and changing social reality. Hence a reading of the passages in question under the rubric of myth will necessarily view them from a wider and deeper concept of the repository and the usages of culture than the idea of a purely textual tradition alone.
> (Dooley, 2006: 101)

In face of the connections that have been made between Irish narratives and Arthurian romance, the question of a basis of mythological values underlying the borrowed story motifs gains particular relevance. Not only is it useful to determine if the use of the beheading-game motif in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and in the Continental romances was based in the understanding of mythical values, but, if so, what was the nature of those mythical values. It is in the latter that our comprehension of the ambiguous nuances in the context of early Irish literature plays an important part, since it allows us to have a deeper critical view on claims of mythic values in the Irish corpus, and consequently, on their spreading to Arthurian romance. Several theories in the end of the nineteenth-century and in the first half of the twentieth-century were based on interpreting the Irish elements with basis on a presupposed purely pagan significance, with their use in Arthurian stories following the same significance. However, several studies regarding the Irish context and the medieval contexts where Arthurian literature was prolific seems to compromise theories of pure pagan myth spreading through both textual traditions, not to speak of a supposed oral tradition that presupposes knowledge or understanding of that same pagan myth between oral performers in different cultural and geographical positions. Nevertheless, those theories are important in order to bring their points of connection into the light of more recent approaches and understanding of medieval Ireland's society. We may then see if, how and where they fit, leading, or not, to more accurate interpretations, or at least, the most accurate possible. It has to be completely clear, however, that the analysis of mythic content cannot be overlapped either with the question of the medium of transmission or the path for that transmission. This seem to have happened in past scholarly lines, especially when considering transmission mainly by oral channels, but the focus must be in analyzing the mythical content for the purpose of asserting if the motifs were transmitted with mythic connotations and, if so, which ones, and to see if both Irish and Arthurian traditions share mythic and cultural notions that validate the transmission of motifs with basis on myth.

In the case of the beheading-game motif, such an analysis cannot be solely focused on finding a possible mythological significance however, for, as we have seen above in the context of the "Window on the Iron Age" interpretation of the Ulster cycle, this motif is also tied with a possible cultural trait in the form of the Celtic practice of headhunting and an associated cult of the head. Therefore any investigation on the

significance of the beheading game must attempt to understand if there is an underlying mythical significance related to a pre-Christian society or if it just reflects a cultural trait not necessarily mythological, from that same society, or both. On this matter, the stance adopted by Ian Armit on his research regarding the analysis of the significance of headhunting in an Iron Age society is most useful here, for Armit defends that such an analysis must take into account religion, cosmology and ideology (2012: 12-14) as well as the interplay between them: "Cosmology, religion and ideology are thus used here as heuristic devices to enable us to understand some of the different manifestations of the human head in Iron Age practice and belief" (Armit, 2012: 14). As was briefly discussed above in the context of the "Window on the Iron Age", however, there are conflicting interpretations on whether such a cultural trait does reflect a genuine tradition which found its way to the Ulster cycle or is rather a deliberate archaism, and on the matter of the "Celtic" cult of the head being a common trait of Celtic-speaking societies, or not: "Variations on the theme of headhunting, curation and display, can help us to reassess the social and cultural relationship between Iron Age societies without resorting to blanket attributions of shared Celtic ethnicity" (Armit, 2012: 10).

We are thus faced with several questions, amongst which the following: Does the beheading-game motif reflect an ancient Celtic practice, either spiritual or ideological, and thus is its significance related to it? In the event that it does not, what could be its significance then? Does it reflect indeed an Iron Age practice which was associated with other motifs related with supernatural or mythological themes? Is it the result of monastic learning attempting to create a fictional Iron Age setting thus resorting to classical sources for the effect or simply reflecting a practice still current in Early Medieval Ireland? In the case of the latter, does it bear a similar significance to any possible Iron Age one? An answer to these questions implies a review of the classical accounts of headhunting, as well as the analysis of archaeological evidence which may or may not support the ethnographical accounts, and to attempt to determine if there is enough evidence to have some notion of a possible pan-Celtic head-cult, or not. This matter has been discussed by scholars such as Nora Chadwick (1997: chap. 6), Barry Cunliffe (2010: 36, 41-43, 71-72), Löffler and John T. Koch (2006: 895-898) and such discussions must be reviewed. Most recently, the significance of the head and headhunting in Iron Age societies has been discussed in detail by Ian Armit in his *Headhunting and the Body in Iron Age Europe* (2012), which we have quoted above,

and which goes through a wide array of archaeological evidence, classical sources and comparisons with other world-wide traditions of headhunting and head cult, providing us with a valuable work on this matter.

Whatever the result of such discussion, another necessary step is to contextualise the examples from Early Irish literature in it, which are not limited to *Fled Bricrenn*. In order to do that, a comparison must be made between our findings and the examples from early Irish secular texts which may bear some comparison with the classical sources or imply some significance related with headhunting or a head-cult, and an analysis of the Irish own archaeological record must also be a source for comparison. Furthermore, the contemporaneous context of the Irish texts must be taken into account in defining any possible significance we may arrive at, for the monastic milieu of Early Christian Medieval Ireland which originated the written tradition undoubtedly represents an influencing factor. In other words, notwithstanding the possibility of a genuine archaism related to a pre-Christian significance, it must be seen what such significance represents for the contemporaneous epoch of the written texts, for the monastic *literati* who produced them, as well as for the early medieval Irish audiences.

The possibility that the meaning of the beheading-game motif is not necessarily the same one related with whatever cultural background may have been influential in the genesis of the motif has to be a matter for reflection and investigation. Whatever possibilities we may arrive at in what concerns the meaning of the beheading game in *Fled Bricrenn*, they do not represent the end of the discussion, for it shall remain to be seen if the use of these elements from Irish tradition in Arthurian stories retains a similar meaning or significance. On this matter, the question inevitably arises if the motifs from the beheading game are used in Arthurian stories simply for their literary usefulness, in the sense they can furnish some sections of a story with an interesting or catching episode, or if they are imported with some degree of their original significance in Irish narratives, which might imply mythological or cultural values, and if these values are similar or compatible with the Arthurian world(s) or changed altogether. To answer such a question, a similar research to what is intended to be made concerning the connection of *Fled Bricrenn* with the significance of headhunting or the human head *per se* must be made: While in the Irish case we must attempt to understand such significance either as an inherited motif from the Iron Age or as reflecting an early Medieval Ireland motif, in the case of the Arthurian traditions we must contextualise the

motif with Continental and English medieval milieus in order to understand what is the significance of the human head and of beheading in these contexts, and therefore if the motif of the beheading game preserved a similar meaning in the transition from one tradition to the others. A useful instrument for such a task is *Heads will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination* (2012), edited by Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey, and which is a collaboration of several scholars analyzing the meaning of decapitation and the human head in the medieval imagination, from secular narrative traditions to hagiography.

Ever since early approaches such as Loomis' solar and seasonal interpretation of the beheading game, the study on the transition of the meaning of the beheading game from Irish to Arthurian literature has been unfulfilled. We have seen how such an interpretation was deeply flawed, not only for its degree of speculation and fair share of assumptions, but because it ignores the difference of contexts between the Irish material and Arthurian literature, simply assuming the same meaning for the beheading game was carried over from one tradition to another. Additionally, Loomis' mythological interpretation follows specific methodologies and theories on the interpretation of myth, and, as we have mentioned, there were subsequent paradigm shifts and theoretical approaches to the study of mythology which could lead to different results and change the interpretation completely. Moreover, as was extensively discussed, the development of different points of view regarding the relationship of early Irish literature with the pre-Christian past, such as anti-nativism, led to a further understanding of the early Christian Irish context which originated the written tradition. As such, even though anti-nativism itself is also a one-sided point of view, such a context must be taken into account when analyzing the significance of the beheading game in *Fled Bricrenn*. The same could be said regarding celtoscepticism, which, although it also represents an extreme view, has demonstrated that the idea of a "Celtic" cultural unity can be questioned with plausible arguments. Thus, when attempting to unveil the significance of a motif in early Irish literature which may have some connection with cultural traits attributed to the "Celts", such questioning must be made in order to understand if there is indeed a connection with cultural traits attributed to the "Celts" or if there are other factors at play.

There has not been a recent full-scale scholarly work concerned with the transmission of the beheading-game motif from Irish to Arthurian traditions which takes

into account all the developments from the last decades which we have been discussing. Namely: the better understanding of the nature and establishment of both Early Irish and Arthurian literature, due to the continuous study of these themes in the last years, together with the shifts in paradigm which different mythological interpretations, anti-nativism and celtoscepticism may imply for the study of this matter. While the small, but valuable, *Fled Bricrenn: Reassessments* (2000) does attempt to address all these matters, as we have already mentioned, it lacks the scope of an extensive study, which the present dissertation intends to be. To achieve this purpose, this dissertation proposes an investigation focused in four main points of research:

I) The comparison of the several beheading-game narratives in order to assert their points of connection along with the differences. This discussion must moreover be complemented with the analysis of previous relevant works concerned with these same points of connection as well as the respective theories concerning the transmission of the motif of the beheading game.

II) The analysis of the possibility that Wales functioned as the intermediary between Irish tradition and the English and Continental milieus. The focus of this research must be on the evidence of Irish influence in Welsh literature, together with the historical circumstances which may point towards this hypothesis being the most plausible one.

III) The tracing of the subsequent channels of transmission of Irish motifs from the possible intermediary to England and the Continent. As in the previous point of investigation, this must take into account both the literary evidences and the historical context. As we shall see, such research is focused in the circumstances which arose out of the Norman Conquest and the cultural exchange in the courts of the Angevin Empire, as well as the role played by the Bretons in the cultural transmission from the Welsh Marches to the Anglo-Norman/French world. The specific transmission of the beheading game must then be studied in accordance with the hypotheses which we may have arrived at in what regards the possible channels of transmission, in both the Continental and Insular cases.

IV) The study of the possible meaning or significance of the beheading game in the Irish tradition, and on whether such significance was changed or remained similar in the transmission from Irish literature to Arthurian Romance. This implies an interdisciplinary investigation which takes into account several aspects: the study of the relationship between myth/belief and literature; a research into the classical and archaeological record which may reveal some relation with *Fled Bricrenn* and other relevant Irish narratives; the debate between Celtological and Celtosceptical interpretations of the evidence; the analyses of possible evidences found in folk traditions bearing some relation with the figure of the headless challenger; and finally, an enquiry into the significance of the human head and decapitation in the Middle Ages and its contextualisation with Arthurian romance, in order to understand the similarities and differences in relation to the significance of the beheading game in *Fled Bricrenn*.

CHAPTER 1: THE BEHEADING-GAME NARRATIVES

1.1 The Arthurian Beheading-Game Narratives

1.1.1 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

SGGK is a Middle English alliterative poem divided into 101 stanzas, and survives in a single manuscript: the MS. Cotton Nero A. x, Art. 3, a manuscript housed at the British Library, which also includes the poems *Pearl*, *Purity* and *Patience*. The author of *SGGK* is generally called the *Gawain*-poet due to his anonymity, and it is a matter of on-going debate if he is not the same author of the other poems in the manuscript, which, however important, it is not relevant for our present concern. The date of *SGGK* is not something one can be absolutely certain of, even though it might be considered the same date of the manuscript, no later than 1400, but scholars such as J. R. R. Tolkien claim that the manuscript version is not the author's original (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: xxv).

Although it is set in the same fictional background of other Arthurian traditions, including elements such as Arthur's court in Camelot and the knights of the round table or the mention of known characters such as Gawain, Morgan le Fay or Guinevere, as

well as the ethos of chivalry, the poem does not seem to belong or fit in the continuity of any of the known Arthurian cycles, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle tradition, the Chrétien romances or the Vulgate cycle. It is an independent romance from these traditions with a beginning and an end on itself, even though it betrays influence from all of them. The poem starts with a pseudo-historical version of the foundation of Britain, with reference to the siege of Troy, the foundation of Rome by Romulus, and finally Brutus and the establishment of Britain, a myth of origins betraying the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. From then on, the poet goes on to praise King Arthur, and thus begins the narrative: Arthur and his knights, notably Gawain, who stands next to Guinevere, as well as the retinue of the court, and other ladies and lords, are at Camelot during New Year's Day, with an exchange of great gifts happening, as well as a richly described feast, abundant in food, drink, music and animation. Amidst the festivities, King Arthur requests the telling of an adventure before the feasting proceeds. Such an introduction to the story creates the environment where the beheading challenge is to be issued, for immediately after King Arthur's request, the Green Knight enters the court. His description is a long and detailed one, and will be useful for future comparisons:

> For hardly had the music but a moment ended,
> and the first course in the court as was custom been served,
> when there passed through the portals a perilous horseman,
> the mightiest on middle-earth in measure of height,
> from his gorge to his girdle so great and so square,
> and his loins and his limbs so long and so huge,
> that half a troll upon earth I trow that he was,
> but the largest man alive at least I declare him;
> and yet the seemliest for his size that could sit on a horse,
> for though in back and in breast his body was grim,
> both his paunch and his waist were properly slight,
> and all his features followed his fashion so gay
> in mode;
> for at the hue men gaped aghast
> in his face and form that showed;
> as a fay-man fell he passed,
> and green all over glowed.
> All of green were they made, both garments and man:
> a coat tight and close that clung to his sides;
> a rich robe above it all arrayed within
> with fur finely trimmed, shewing fair fringes
> of handsome ermine gay, as his hood was also,
> that was lifted from his locks and laid on his shoulders;
> and trim hose tight-drawn of tincture alike
> that clung to his calves; and clear spurs below
> of bright gold on silk broideries banded most richly,

though unshod were his shanks, for shoeless he rode.
And verily all this vesture was of verdure clear,
both the bars on his belt, and bright stones besides
that were richly arranged in his array so fair,
set on himself and on his saddle upon silk fabrics:
it would be too hard to rehearse one half of the trifles
that were embroidered upon them, what with birds and with flies
in a gay glory of green, and ever gold in the midst.
The pendants of his poitrel, his proud crupper,
his molains, and all the metal to say more, were enamelled,
even the stirrups that he stood in were stained of the same;
and his saddlebows in suit, and their sumptuous skirts,
which ever glimmered and glinted all with green jewels;
even the horse that upheld him in hue was the same,
I tell:
a green horse great and thick,
a stallion stiff to quell,
in broidered bridle quick:
he matched his master well.[45]
(Tolkien, 2006: 20-22)

The Green Knight is thus described as a small giant, bigger than any man yet small enough to fit a horse, his entire garments and weapons, as well as his own skin and hair are green, and the same is said of his horse. If his green complexion was not something unusual enough, his remaining description seems to complement it by describing a presence capable of inspiring awe and fear:

Very gay was this great man guised all in green,
and the hair of his head with his horse's accorded:
fair flapping locks enfolding his shoulders,
a big beard like a bush over his breast hanging
that with the handsome hair from his head falling
was sharp shorn to an edge just short of his elbows,
so that half his arms under it were hid, as it were
in a king's capadoce that encloses his neck.
The mane of that mighty horse was of much the same sort,
well curled and all combed, with many curious knots
woven in with gold wire about the wondrous green,
ever a strand of the hair and a string of the gold;
the tail and the top-lock were twined all to match
and both bound with a band of a brilliant green:
with dear jewels bedight to the dock's ending,
and twisted then on top was a tight-knitted knot
on which many burnished bells of bright gold jingled.
Such a mount on middle-earth, or man to ride him,
was never beheld in that hall with eyes ere that time;
for there

[45] The original language version of each translated citation can be found in Appendix I. In order to consult the original versions each translated citation shall have the indication of the number which identifies its correspondent original in the Appendix. For the present citation see Appendix I, note 1.

his glance was as lightning bright,
so did all that saw him swear;
no man would have the might,
they thought, his blows to bear.
And yet he had not a helm, nor a hauberk either,
not a pisane, not a plate that was proper to arms;
not a shield, not a shaft, for shock or for blow,
but in his one hand he held a holly-bundle,
that is greatest in greenery when groves are leafless,
and an axe in the other, ugly and monstrous,
a ruthless weapon aright for one in rhyme to describe:
the head was as large and as long as an ell wand,
a branch of green steel and of beaten gold;
the bit, burnished bright and broad at the edge,
as well shaped for shearing as sharp razors;
the stem was a stout staff, by which sternly he gripped it,
all bound with iron about to the base of the handle,
and engraven in green in graceful patterns,
lapped round with a lanyard that was lashed to the head
and down the length of the haft was looped many times;
and tassels of price were tied there in plenty
to bosses of the bright green, braided most richly.
Such was he that now hastened in, the hall entering,
pressing forward to the dais--no peril he feared.[46]
(Tolkien, 2006: 22-23)

The Green Knight is thus described as a savage or a wild-man, his glance being terrific, with a beard which is compared to a bush, extremely long hair, and bare feet. The axe he holds in one hand is thoroughly described as a rough and heavy weapon, even though he does not wear armour, shield or helm, which, although it would theoretically make him less of a threatening figure, does exactly the inverse when in conjunction with the rest of his appearance, contributing to his somewhat rather savage presence. The only details that seem somehow to sooth the fearful appearance of the Green Knight are the holly bundle on his other hand, which the Green Knight claims that signifies he desires no peril and that he comes in peace, and his sumptuous clothing, which is an interesting detail which contrasts with his savage features. After his description in the poem, the Green Knight calls for the governor of the gathering, and the poet describes a feeling of astonishment and wonder by the retinue present at the court, knights included. Finally, King Arthur greets the Green Knight, bidding him welcome and asking his purpose, to which the Green Knight replies with the praise of the fame and renown of King Arthur's court and knights, a detail which, as we shall see,

[46] See Appendix I, note 2.

is not an isolated one in *SGGK* and has similarities with other versions. In virtue of such fame, the Green Knight then issues the challenge:

> Then Arthur before the high dais beheld this wonder,
> and freely with fair words, for fearless was he ever,
> saluted him, saying: 'Lord, to this lodging thou'rt welcome!
> The head of this household Arthur my name is.
> Alight, as thou lovest me, and linger, I pray thee;
> and what may thy wish be in a while we shall learn.'
> 'Nay, so help me,' quoth the horseman, 'He that on high is throned,
> to pass any time in this place was no part of my errand.
> But since thy praises, prince, so proud are uplifted,
> and thy castle and courtiers are accounted the best,
> the stoutest in steel-gear that on steeds may ride,
> most eager and honourable of the earth's people,
> valiant to vie with in other virtuous sports,
> and here is knighthood renowned, as is noised in my ears:
> 'tis that has fetched me hither, by my faith, at this time.
> You may believe by this branch that I am bearing here
> that I pass as one in peace, no peril seeking.
> For had I set forth to fight in fashion of war,
> I have a hauberk at home, and a helm also,
> a shield, and a sharp spear shining brightly,
> and other weapons to wield too, as well I believe;
> but since I crave for no combat, my clothes are softer.
> Yet if thou be so bold, as abroad is published,
> thou wilt grant of thy goodness the game that I ask for
> by right.'
> Then Arthur answered there,
> and said: 'Sir, noble knight,
> if battle thou seek thus bare,
> thou'lt fail not here to fight.'
> 'Nay, I wish for no warfare, on my word I tell thee!
> Here about on these benches are but beardless children.
> Were I hasped in armour on a high charger,
> there is no man here to match me--their might is so feeble.
> And so I crave in this court only a Christmas pastime,
> since it is Yule and New Year, and you are young here and merry.
> If any so hardy in this house here holds that he is,
> if so bold be his blood or his brain be so wild,
> that he stoutly dare strike one stroke for another,
> then I will give him as my gift this guisarm costly,
> this axe--'tis heavy enough--to handle as he pleases;
> and I will abide the first brunt, here bare as I sit.
> If any fellow be so fierce as my faith to test,
> hither let him haste to me and lay hold of this weapon!
> hand it over for ever, he can have it as his own--
> and I will stand a stroke from him, stock-still on this floor,
> provided thou'lt lay down this law: that I may deliver him another.
> Claim I!
> And yet a respite I'll allow,
> till a year and a day go by.
> Come quick, and let's see now

if any here dare reply!'[47]
(Tolkien, 2006: 24-25)

The challenge thus becomes clear, the Green Knight proposes for someone to strike him with the axe, in the condition that he will do the same to whoever accepts, a year and a day later. However, despite the renown in knighthood of Arthur's court, the challenge is met with apparent silence by his knights, leading to the scorn of the Green Knight and the anger of Arthur, who then accepts the challenge since no one else seems to be willing to. The acceptance of the king does not seem to impress the Green Knight, who stands still as if he did expect another challenger. Such expectations are met: upon acceptance by the king, Gawain, standing besides Guinevere, speaks and pledges to Arthur to be him to go through with the challenge, instead of the king:

If he astounded them at first, yet stiller were then
all the household in the hall, both high men and low.
The man on his mount moved in his saddle,
and rudely his red eyes he rolled then about,
bent his bristling brows all brilliantly green,
and swept round his beard to see who would rise.
When none in converse would accost him, he coughed then loudly,
stretched himself haughtily and straightway exclaimed:
What! Is this Arthur's house,' said he thereupon,
'the rumour of which runs through realms unnumbered?
Where now is your haughtiness, and your high conquests,
your fierceness and fell mood, and your fine boasting?
Now are the revels and the royalty of the Round Table
overwhelmed by a word by one man spoken,
for all blench now abashed ere a blow is offered!'
With that he laughed so loud that their lord was angered,
the blood shot for shame into his shining cheeks
and face;
as wroth as wind he grew,
so all did in that place.
Then near to the stout man drew
the king of fearless race,
And said: 'Marry! Good man, 'tis madness thou askest,
and since folly thou hast sought, thou deservest to find it.
I know no lord that is alarmed by thy loud words here.
Give me now thy guisarm, in God's name, sir,
and I will bring thee the blessing thou hast begged to receive.'
Quick then he came to him and caught it from his hand.
Then the lordly man loftily alighted on foot.
Now Arthur holds his axe, and the haft grasping
sternly he stirs it about, his stroke considering.
The stout man before him there stood his full height,
higher than any in that house by a head and yet more.
With stern face as he stood he stroked at his beard,

[47] See Appendix I, note 3.

and with expression impassive he pulled down his coat,
no more disturbed or distressed at the strength of his blows
than if someone as he sat had served him a drink
of wine.
From beside the queen Gawain
to the king did then incline:
'I implore with prayer plain
that this match should now be mine.'[48]
(Tolkien, 2006: 25-27)

In an exercise of courteous speech and humility, Gawain justifies his taking over the place of Arthur in the challenge, and carries on to receive the axe from the king, who gives him his blessing. Gawain then exchanges words with the Green Knight, who asks him his name, to which Gawain answers and commits himself with upholding his end of the bargain a year and a day later, after learning from the Green Knight where he could find him after such time had come to pass. In contrast to his previous scorn, the Green Knight is pleased by Gawain's courage, and praises him. Gawain then holds the axe of the Green Knight, and fulfils his part of the game by striking at the neck of the mysterious challenger:

Gawain goes to the great man with guisarm in hand,
and he boldly abides there--he blenched not at all.
Then next said to Gawain the knight all in green:
'Let's tell again our agreement, ere we go any further.
I'd know first, sir knight, thy name; I entreat thee
to tell it me truly, that I may trust in thy word.'
'In good faith,' quoth the good knight, 'I Gawain am called
who bring thee this buffet, let be what may follow;
and at this time a twelvemonth in thy turn have another
with whatever weapon thou wilt, and in the world with none else
but me.'
The other man answered again:
'I am passing pleased,' said he,
'upon my life, Sir Gawain,
that this stroke should be struck by thee.'
'Begad,' said the green knight, 'Sir Gawain, I am pleased
to find from thy fist the favour I asked for!
And thou hast promptly repeated and plainly hast stated
without abatement the bargain I begged of the king here;
save that thou must assure me, sir, on thy honour
that thou'lt seek me thyself, search where thou thinkest
I may be found near or far, and fetch thee such payment
as thou deliverest me today before these lordly people,'
'Where should I light on thee,' quoth Gawain, 'where look for thy
place?
I have never learned where thou livest, by the Lord that made me,
and I know thee not, knight, thy name nor thy court.

[48] See Appendix I, note 4.

But teach me the true way, and tell what men call thee,
and I will apply all my purpose the path to discover:
and that I swear thee for certain and solemnly promise.'
'That is enough in New Year, there is need of no more!'
said the great man in green to Gawain the courtly.
'If I tell thee the truth of it, when I have taken the knock,
and thou handily hast hit me, if in haste I announce then
my house and my home and mine own title,
then thou canst call and enquire and keep the agreement;
and if I waste not a word, thou'lt win better fortune,
for thou mayst linger in thy land and look no further -
but stay!
To thy grim tool now take heed, sir!
Let us try thy knocks today!'
'Gladly', said he, 'indeed, sir!'
and his axe he stroked in play.
The Green Knight on the ground now gets himself ready,
leaning a little with the head he lays bare the flesh,
and his locks long and lovely he lifts over his crown,
letting the naked neck as was needed appear.
His left foot on the floor before him placing,
Gawain gripped on his axe, gathered and raised it,
from aloft let it swiftly land where 'twas naked,
so that the sharp of his blade shivered the bones,
and sank clean through the clear fat and clove it asunder,
and the blade of the bright steel then bit into the ground.
The fair head to the floor fell from the shoulders,
and folk fended it with their feet as forth it went rolling ;
the blood burst from the body, bright on the greenness,[49]
(Tolkien, 2006: 28-29)

However, after the beheading, the supernatural nature of the Green Knight is completely revealed. The decapitation does not cause his death, his body remains firm, and he picks up his head, which opens its eyes and speaks:

and yet neither faltered nor fell the fierce man at all,
but stoutly he strode forth, still strong on his shanks,
and roughly he reached out among the rows that stood there,
caught up his comely head and quickly upraised it,
and then hastened to his horse, laid hold of the bridle,
stepped into stirrup-iron, and strode up aloft,
his head by the hair in his hand holding;
and he set to led himself then in the saddle as firmly
as if unharmed by mishap, though in the hall he might wear
no head.
His trunk he twisted round,
that gruesome body that bled,
and many fear then found,
as soon as his speech was sped.
For the head in his hand he held it up straight,
towards the fairest at the table he twisted the face,

[49] See Appendix I, note 5.

> and it lifted up its eyelids and looked at them broadly,
> and made such words with its mouth as may be recounted.
> 'See thou get ready, Gawain, to go as thou vowedst,
> and as faithfully seek till thou find me, good sir,
> as thou hast promised in this place in the presence of these knights.
> To the Green Chapel go thou, and get thee, I charge thee,
> such a dint as thou hast dealt-indeed thou hast earned
> a nimble knock in return on New Year's morning!
> The Knight of the Green Chapel I am known to many,
> so if to find me thou endeavour, thou'lt fail not to do so.
> Therefore come! Or to be called a craven thou deservest.'
> With a rude roar and rush his reins he turned then,
> and hastened out through the hall-door with his head in his hand,
> and fire of the flint flew from the feet of his charger.
> To what country he came in that court no man knew,
> no more than they had learned from what land he had journeyed.[50]
> (Tolkien, 2006: 29-30)

The first part of the beheading game was then fulfilled, and the second part of the poem unfolds. This second part is more concerned with the theme of temptation brilliantly introduced through a variation of the "Imperious Host"[51] motif, even though it includes the conclusion of the beheading game, with the latter being formidably entwined with the temptation motif. For such reason, we must do a small synopsis of the Imperious Host/Temptation section in order to better focus on its effect on the resolution of the beheading game. Near the ending of the period of a year and one day after the challenge of the Green Knight, Gawain gets ready for his departure, causing much lamentation in the court, since his destination seems to imply his doom: "Much mournful lament was made in the hall / that one so worthy as Gawain should wend on that errand, / To endure a deadly dint and deal no more / with blade."[52] (Tolkien, 2006: 33). When Gawain finally departs, tears are wept: "Many warm tears outwelling there watered their eyes, / when that lord so beloved left the castle that day"[53] (Tolkien, 2006: 37). Gawain then goes in search of the Green Chapel so that he can fulfil his part of the bargain with the Green Knight. After a period of wandering, Gawain stumbles upon a

[50] See Appendix I, note 6.
[51] The "Imperious Host" motif is related to Stith Thompson's folktale motif C836 and is present in several Arthurian works, including French ones (Ruck, 1991: 50), as well as later English ones (Rogers, 2001b: 204-205). Rogers summarizes it most aptly: "The basic plot is that of the visit to the Imperious Host, a very widespread tale, in which the benighted guest (occasionally accompanied by two others), seeking a night's shelter at the Host's castle, is warned in advance that he will not escape without a beating but is not usually told why, or how he might avoid this outcome. He accepts hospitality nonetheless, and is offered the Host's wife as a bed-companion. The next morning he departs, but, remembering the warning, turns back to ask why he has escaped without harm. He is told that it is because he has obeyed his Host in everything, has allowed him to be master in his own hall" (Rogers, 2001b: 204).
[52] See Appendix I, note 7.
[53] See Appendix I, note 8.

comely castle on Christmas night. On such castle, filled with servants, knights, esquires and guests, Gawain is received with all the hospitality he could ask for by the lord of the Castle, whose description is also impressive:

> Gawain gazed at the good man who had greeted him kindly,
> and he thought bold and big was the baron of the castle,
> very large and long, and his life at the prime:
> broad and bright was his beard, and all beaver-hued,
> stern, strong in his stance upon stalwart legs,
> his face fell as fire, and frank in his speech;
> and well it suited him, in sooth, as it seemed to the knight,
> a lordship to lead untroubled over lieges trusty.[54]
> (Tolkien, 2006: 42)

Gawain easily makes an impression upon the retinue present in the castle, and reveals his identity, with his renown as a knight of King Arthur's court earning him further honours by the remaining guests, as well as by his host. He is served a splendid dinner and meets the beautiful wife of his host, who is introduced in the narrative in contrast with an older woman also present at the castle, who seems to be esteemed in great honour by everyone. Carrying on, the lord of the castle, whom we later learn to be called Bertilak de Hautdesert, entertains Gawain with pleasant conversation and enquires him about his quest, and Gawain reveals his search for the Green Chapel. Bertilak then reveals to Gawain that he is close, since the Green Chapel is merely two miles away, and asks his guest to stay for the remaining three days until the New Year, in order for him to completely regain his strength for the confrontation with the Green Knight. Furthermore, Bertilak proposes a game for them to play during those three days, an exchange of winnings: the lord will offer Gawain whatever he catches in his hunting trips, and Gawain will offer in exchange what he may gain during his stay in the castle.

When Bertilak leaves the castle for his hunt, Gawain is visited in his chambers by Lady Bertilak, his host's wife, who attempts to seduce him, however, Gawain refuses her advances with courtliness, and Lady Bertilak only manages to give him a single kiss. When Bertilak returns, he offers a deer to Gawain, his winning in the hunt, and Gawain gives him a kiss, without mentioning how he gained it. In the second day, Lady Bertilak once again visits Gawain's room with the same intent, but Gawain is unwilling to yield to her advances, and gently refuses her again, although she is able to give him two kisses. Upon the return of Bertilak, the latter gives Gawain a wild boar, and,

[54] See Appendix I, note 9.

similarly to the previous day, Gawain gives him two kisses. In the third and last day, Lady Bertilak attempts to seduce Gawain a third time, without success once more, however, in this instance, she also offers Gawain a golden ring, which Gawain also refuses courteously. Upon Gawain's refusal of the ring, she then offers him her girdle made from green and golden silk, which Gawain refuses at first, but then accepts when Lady Bertilak claims that the girdle has protective powers, which could be useful to face the axe of the Green Knight, moreover, Lady Bertilak also gives Gawain three kisses. When Bertilak returns from hunting once again, he gives Gawain a fox, but Gawain only gives Bertilak the three kisses and keeps the girdle with him. Thus ends the exchange of winnings and temptation episode. In the next day, Gawain bids farewell to everyone in Bertilak's castle and departs for the Green Chapel, with the girdle around his waist, and the narrative returns to the matter of the beheading challenge and Gawain's turn in it. In his journey to the Green Chapel, Gawain is accompanied by a squire meant to act as a guide, whom Bertilak has assigned to lead Gawain in the right path to the Chapel. When they draw near the Chapel, this guide warns Gawain against the perils of the Green Chapel and the scourge of the Green Knight upon any man who dares go near it, and provides a further description of the Green Knight:

> The place that you pass to, men perilous hold it,
> the worst wight in the world in that waste dwelleth;
> for he is stout and stern, and to strike he delights,
> and he mightier than any man upon middle-earth is,
> and his body is bigger than the four best men
> that are in Arthur's house, either Hestor or others.
> All goes as he chooses at the Green Chapel;
> no one passes by that place so proud in his arms
> that he hews not to death by dint of his hand.
> For he is a man monstrous, and mercy he knows not;
> for be it a churl or a chaplain that by the Chapel rideth,
> a monk or a mass-priest or any man besides,
> he would as soon have him slain as himself go alive.
> And so I say to you, as sure as you sit in your saddle,
> if you come there, you'll be killed, if the carl has his way.
> Trust me, that is true, though you had twenty lives to yield.
> He here has dwelt now long
> and stirred much strife on field;
> against his strokes so strong
> yourself you cannot shield.[55]
> (Tolkien, 2006: 79-80)

[55] See Appendix I, note 10.

The guide then advises Gawain to escape and swears he will hold secret, but Gawain refuses, since he would be a coward if he did so. Having understood that Gawain is determined, the squire gives him the last directions to the Chapel and then takes leave of Gawain, not daring to accompany him. Gawain thus proceeds alone and comes upon a barrow covered in green grass and hollow inside, with an entrance at the end and others at either side, resembling a cavern. The Green Chapel is then described by Gawain as eerie and devilish and a fitting dwelling for the Green Knight. When Gawain is inspecting the roof of the barrow, he hears the sharpening of a Danish axe in a grindstone, it is the Green Knight sharpening his axe for his encounter with Gawain. The Green Knight becomes aware of Gawain's presence, and is described briefly once more as well as his axe:

> And then he climbed past a crag, and came from a hole,
> hurtling out of a hid nook with a horrible weapon:
> a Danish axe newly dressed the dint to return,
> with cruel cutting-edge curved along the handle-
> filed on a whetstone, and four feet in width,
> 'twas no less-along its lace of luminous hue;
> and the great man in green still guised as before,
> his locks and long beard, his legs and his face,
> save that firm on his feet he fared on the ground,
> steadied the haft on the stones and stalked beside it.
> When he walked to the water, where he wade would not,
> he hopped over on his axe and haughtily strode,
> fierce and fell on a field where far all about lay snow.[56]
> (Tolkien, 2006: 83)

The two knights then meet for the appointed challenge. Gawain is praised by the Green Knight for not breaking their covenant and appearing at the Chapel for his turn in the beheading challenge, and then takes out the helm and bows with his bare neck in order to take his turn at being beheaded by the Green Knight's axe. However, at the first swing by the Green Knight, Gawain flinches, and is taunted by the Green Knight for it, who reminds Gawain he had not flinched in his own turn at Camelot a year and one day before:

> Then the great man in green gladly prepared him,
> gathered up his grim tool there Gawain to smite;
> with all the lust in his limbs aloft he heaved it,
> shaped as mighty a stroke as if he meant to destroy him.
> Had it driving come down as dour as he aimed it,
> under his dint would have died the most doughty man ever.

[56] See Appendix I, note 11.

But Gawain on that guisarm then glanced to one side,
as down it came gliding on the green there to end him,
and he shrank a little with his shoulders at the sharp iron.
With a jolt the other man jerked back the blade,
and reproved then the prince, proudly him taunting.
'Thou'rt not Gawain,' said the green man, 'who is so good reported,
who never flinched from any foes on fell or in dale;
and now thou fleest in fear, ere thou feelest a hurt!
Of such cowardice that knight I ne'er heard accused.
Neither blenched I nor backed, when thy blow, sir, thou aimedst,
nor uttered any cavil in the court of King Arthur.
My head flew to my feet, and yet fled I never;
but thou, ere thou hast any hurt, in thy heart quailest,
and so the nobler knight to be named I deserve
therefore.'
'I blenched once,' Gawain said,
'and I will do so no more.
But if on floor now falls my head,
I cannot it restore.[57]
(Tolkien, 2006: 84-85)

Gawain then vows not to flinch again and to remain still, but the Green Knight merely rehearses a second swing, without actually striking Gawain, and argues that he does this in order to test Gawain's willingness to remain still and his courage, while the latter urges the Green Knight to quickly deliver the blow and end the ordeal, and thus the Green Knight prepares the third swing:

But get busy, I beg, sir, and bring me to the point.
Deal me my destiny, and do it out of hand!
For I shall stand from thee a stroke and stir not again
till thine axe hath hit me, have here my word on't!'
'Have at thee then!' said the other, and heaved it aloft,
and wratched him as wrathfully as if he were wild with rage.
He made at him a mighty aim, but the man he touched not,
holding back hastily his hand, ere hurt it might do.
Gawain warily awaited it, and winced with no limb,
but stood as still as a stone or the stump of a tree
that with a hundred ravelled roots in rocks is embedded.
This time merrily remarked then the man in the green:
'So, now thou hast thy heart whole, a hit I must make.
May the high order now keep thee that Arthur gave thee,
and guard thy gullet at this go, if it can gain thee that.'
Angrily with ire then answered Sir Gawain:
'Why! lash away, thou lusty man! Too long dost thou threaten.
'Tis thy heart methinks in thee that now quaileth!'
'In faith,' said the fellow, 'so fiercely thou speakest,
I no longer will linger delaying thy errand
right now.'
Then to strike he took his stance
and grimaced with lip and brow.

[57] See Appendix I, note 12.

He that of rescue saw no chance
was little pleased, I trow.[58]
(Tolkien, 2006: 85-86)

However, the Green Knight feigns the third swing as he did the others and he does not behead Gawain, although this time he does make a slight cut in Gawain's neck. Considering that the Green Knight drew blood and therefore already had his chance, Gawain rises and adopts a battle stance, warning the Green Knight that the covenant has been fulfilled and he will not allow another opportunity:

Lightly his weapon he lifted, and let it down neatly
with the bent horn of the blade towards the neck that was bare;
though he hewed with a hammer-swing, he hurt him no more
than to snick him on one side and sever the skin.
Through the fair fat sank the edge, and the flesh entered,
so that the shining blood o'er his shoulders was shed on the earth;
and when the good knight saw the gore that gleamed on the snow,
he sprang out with spurning feet a spear's length and more,
in haste caught his helm and on his head cast it,
under his fair shield he shot with a shake of his shoulders
brandished his bright sword, and boldly he spake-
never since he as manchild of his mother was born
was he ever on this earth half so happy a man:
'Have done, sir, with thy dints! Now deal me no more!
I have stood from thee a stroke without strife on this spot,
and if thou offerest me others, I shall answer thee promptly,
and give as good again, and as grim, be assured,
shall pay.
But one stroke here's my due,
as the covenant clear did say
that in Arthur's halls we drew.
And so, good sir, now stay!'[59]
(Tolkien, 2006: 86)

The Green Knight's reaction, however, is not hostile at all, making it plain to Gawain that he desires him no further harm. On the contrary, the Green Knight reveals himself to be Bertilak, the lord of the castle, and the exchange of winnings as having been a test related to the beheading challenge, which Gawain passed, since he always gave Bertilak his winnings, the kisses from Lady Bertilak, and resisted her seduction, which Bertilak himself had set her upon. The single cut he did to his neck was related to the girdle, since Gawain did withhold it from Bertilak, and therefore committed that minor deception, excused by Bertilak on the grounds that Gawain cherished his own life. Bertilak also reveals that the whole appearance at Arthur's court, the issuing of the

[58] See Appendix I, note 13.
[59] See Appendix I, note 14.

challenge and his Green Knight persona had been engendered through arts of magic by Morgan le Fay, the old lady present at the castle. Her purpose had been to test the valour of the Round Table and to attempt to scare Guinevere to death with the gruesome view of the Green Knight holding his beheaded head, as well as with his terrific challenge.

With all revealed, Bertilak then praises Gawain, and assures him both he and his wife, as well as the remaining persons at the castle and his aunt (Morgan) held him in high esteem and would be delighted to receive him in the following New Year. Gawain refuses the invitation, but does depart in good terms with Bertilak, who offers him the girdle to keep. Although Bertilak did praise Gawain and his loyalty and courtly behaviour and offers the girdle as a token of such, Gawain feels shame for his fault concerning the concealment of the girdle, and sees it as a reminder that he should not be too proud for he is not without flaws. Such dismay is not shared by the court at Camelot when they receive Gawain, on the contrary, the telling of Gawain's story leads the King and the Knights of the Round Table to comfort Gawain and to laugh about the whole ordeal, and all of them, from then on, also wore a green girdle in love and honour of Gawain.

1.1.2 *Livre de Caradoc*

The *Livre de Caradoc*[60] is found in the First Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*. Through the analysis of the surviving manuscripts of the First Continuation, Roach has identified three different recensions, namely a short version (A, S, L, P), a long version (E, M, Q, U) and a mixed version (T, V, D) of the two (Roach, 1949: xxxiv-xli). Although it is included in the First Continuation, the *Livre de Caradoc* stands as an

[60] The Continuations of Chrétien's Grail romance written in Old French are found in twelve manuscripts of which most are from the thirteenth century, with the exception of MS (S), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français* 1453 and (U) Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français* 12577, which are from the fourteenth century. Besides the Old French manuscripts, there is also a High German translation from the fourteenth century (MS D), as well as a French prose version from the sixteenth century (MS G), which, since they consist of a translation and a much later adaptation, do not have the same relevance to this work as do the Old French ones. All these manuscripts which include the Continuations have been described in detail by William Roach in the first volume of his edition of *The Continuations of the Old French "Perceval" of Chrétien de Troyes* (1949: xvi-xxxiii). Among these, in what concerns the Old French manuscripts, the First Continuation is included in eleven manuscripts, from which nine are from the thirteenth century, namely MSS (A), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français* 794, (E), Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 19.1.5, (L), London, British Muséum, *Additional* 36614, (M), Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole de Médecine, H. 249, (P), Mons, Bibliothèque publique, 331/206, (Q), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français* 1429, (R), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français* 1450, (T), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français* 12576, (V), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *nouvelles acquisitions françaises* 6614, and two from the fourteenth century, namely the aforementioned (S) and (U).

independent romance in itself. In all the recensions of the First Continuation we find basically the same narrative in what concerns the *Livre de Caradoc*, with differences only in minor details, which shall nevertheless be mentioned. The mixed and short versions are very similar (Brewer, 1992: 24), therefore, we shall focus on the mixed version as illustrative of both, and compare it with the long version.

As in the case of *SGGK*, the story of Caradoc or Carados (nominative form) is not solely concerned with the beheading challenge, and, in fact, the latter is only one of the episodes of the narrative, albeit an important one. The story tells how Carados got his epithet *Briefbras* (short arm), he is portrayed as the son of the King of Nantes, himself also called Carados, and his wife Ysave, who is Arthur's niece. Unknown to Carados, his real father is the enchanter Eliavrés, who had kept King Carados under a spell where he mistook animals for his wife while Eliavrés himself seduced Ysave, with the latter becoming Eliavrés' lover and bearing him a son. Ignorant of such deception, Carados takes up the place of King Carados as a knight of the Round Table. One day, while Carados is at a gathering of Arthur's knights in Carlisle, a mysterious knight enters the hall and issues a challenge directed at the court resembling the one in *SGGK*:

> Mixed Version:
>
> And as Arthur was thus speaking, and the others were holding their peace, they saw a very big knight come through the door of the palace on a warhorse with white hooves. He was dressed in an ermine robe which almost swept the ground. He had on his head a coronet with a golden circlet upon the cloth, and was girded with a long sword which had a hilt of pure gold, and the sword-belt was edged with gold. So he came on the horse right up to the dais and said very loudly in the hearing of all:
>
> 'King Arthur, may God who does not lie grant you honour and long life.'
>
> 'Friend, may he bless you.'
>
> 'King,' said he, 'I ask you a boon.'
>
> 'Knight, name it at once, and what can be, you shall have.'
>
> And he replied:
>
> 'You shall know it: to give a sword-blow without deception, asking another to be received of you.'
>
> 'Friend, what is that? What are you saying?'
>
> 'King, I say to you that without the least doubt, if there is a knight here who can cut my head off with a single blow with this sword, and I can after the blow recover my health and strength, he can be sure to have without fail, a year from today, a similar blow in exchange, if he dares wait for it.'[61]
> (Brewer, 1992: 25)
>
> Long Version:

[61] See Appendix I, note 15.

> Just as they were speaking, lo and behold a knight on a grey horse appeared at the doorway. He had ridden his horse at great speed, and came singing a song. He had a hat on his head because of the great heat, and was clad in a robe of ermine over which he had girded a sword, adorned with a tassel of fine silk, with which to cut off his head. He stopped right before the king and said:
>
> 'King, God save you! I am come to ask a boon of you as the best and highest king on earth, if you please to grant it to me.'
>
> 'Friend,' said the king, 'you are welcome. Your greeting is returned to you. When I have heard the boon that you wish to ask of me, know this, that I shall never fail you.'
>
> 'King,' said he, 'I do not wish to deceive you. The boon is to receive a blow for another blow given.'
>
> 'What? I must get this clear.'
>
> 'King, I shall explain it to you. I shall make the gift of this sword to a knight here before your eyes. If he can cut off my head in one stroke, it is up to him! If I can then recover from the blow, grant me a blow in return in a year from today, here before you.'[62]
>
> (Brewer, 1992: 29)

The beheading challenge itself is therefore quite similar: an unknown knight enters Arthur's hall and issues the challenge with the same rules we have seen in *SGGK*, including the detail of a year between both turns, even though it does not have the extra day of the *SGGK* rendition. Besides this difference, there are others: even though the knight is described as "very big" in the mixed version, the other details of his description are quite different from the Green Knight, in fact, he is described as a proper knight in fine clothing rather than the churlish, menacing and savage aspect of the Green Knight. Moreover, he does not carry an axe as the Green Knight did, but a finely decorated sword, which he proposes as the weapon of choice for the beheading. His speech also seems to be more polite and refined, however, as we shall observe below, as in *SGGK*, the knights present at the hall refrain from accepting the challenge at first, and this leads the knight to taunt them and to threaten the fame of the Round Table, as the Green Knight had done, with especial similarity in the mixed version and a more polite speech in the long one. Such a taunt leads Carados to step forward and accept the challenge.

Mixed Version:

> Then without another word he dismounted. He drew his sword and so held it out to them, but there was no-one there who dared take it. But all the knights said that whoever did would be extremely foolish, for by it he would run into danger, and thus he would have neither reward nor honour.

[62] See Appendix I, note 16.

> ‘Ha, lord!’ said the knight, ‘Is that it? No striking with it? Now you can see, King Arthur, that your court is not so noble as everyone says and swears; there is not a single bold knight there. I testify to you truly, and I say that in future tales will be told about it everywhere that are not at all pretty.’
>
> He was just on the point of going when Carados who was a new knight sprang forward. So he prepared himself for this great exploit and threw his cloak to the ground, whoever he might displease, or whoever might be pleased. He came to him, took the sword and drew it out in his right hand.[63]
> (Brewer, 1992: 25)

Long Version:

> ‘By St John,’ said Kay, ‘I shall not strike for all the wealth in Normandy. Sir knight, he would be a fool who would strike here on such terms.’
>
> The knight dismounted.
>
> ‘King,’ he said, ‘if you have denied me the boon I wish to ask of you, it will be talked about by everyone. Indeed, you could be sure that it was true to say that you would have failed your court on account of this little boon that I request, coming as a stranger from a distance to ask you.’
>
> He drew his sword from his scabbard. The king had a thoughtful look, and both the great and the lowly were taken aback. In their hearts they thought of the honour they might gain by striking him. Carados, who was a new knight, could not bear it any longer. He threw his cloak down and ran to the knight. He took the weapon of steel in his hand. The knight spoke one of his characteristic sayings to him:
>
> ‘Are you chosen as the best?’
>
> ‘Certainly not! But as the most foolish.’[64]
>
> (Brewer, 1992: 29)

The beheading of the knight then takes place, and, as in *SGGK*, although lacking the superb description of the latter, the knight survives it even though his head was severed by Carados. However, the narrative delivers the scene with much more haste in both recensions, the mysterious knight quickly grabs his head and reattaches it to his torso, and therefore the reader is not presented with the same level of awe and the scene lacks the eerie atmosphere of *SGGK*. Nevertheless, the formula is the same, after the supernatural survival of the knight, he urges Carados to keep with his side of the bargain a year later, albeit in this case, the knight will return to the court for Carados’ turn, instead of the latter travelling to an otherwordly chapel:

Mixed Version:

> The king saw it [Carados getting ready to behead the knight], much distressed by it, and said:
>
> ‘Good nephew, you can relinquish this exploit without shame. There is many a good knight here who can strike as well or better than you, if they

[63] See Appendix I, note 17.
[64] See Appendix I, note 18.

wished to do it. They are dumbfounded because the undertaking is so very foolish.'

When Carados heard the king, he felt such shame that he was all red. Not on that account did he wish to give up, so he came close to the knight. In order to strike better he grasped the sword firmly, and the knight turned towards the king, lowered his head, and stretched out his neck. Carados struck so vigorously that he made the head fly towards the dais, but the knight took it by the hair in his two hands just as if he was quite whole. So he joined it on again immediately.

'Carados,' he said, 'you have struck me.'

'Truly,' said Kay,' and little good has it done you. A year from today, however it will turn out, you will not wish to be set in his place, to possess the whole of this country.'

'Carados,' said the knight, 'a year from today, dear good friend, I shall be back here, you may be sure; so do not fail for anything, or not be found here at the right time.'

Then he went off, he stayed there no longer...[65]

(Brewer, 1992: 26)

Long Version:

The knight extended his neck and put his head on the table. You may be sure that the king was very angry, and all the barons in the court. Sir Yvain all but ran to snatch the sword from his hands, but still it was only the desire of an instant, for he could not take it from him. Carados raised the sword and gave him such a blow that he cut almost through the table. The head flew far away, but the body followed it so close that as one looked it was caught, and the body snatched back the head and replaced it in its right place. The knight jumped into the middle, all safe and sound before the king.

'King,' he said, 'do not fail me. As I have received this blow in your court, I shall be back to have my own in a year from today.'

The king made no more delay; immediately the barons agreed, and all the rest both high and low, that just as they were now at his court, so they would be on this particular day the next year, in that same place.

'Carados,' the knight said, 'you have given me a great blow before the king. In a year from today you will have mine in return.'

Then he went on his way.[66]

(Brewer, 1992: 30)

The participation of Carados in the beheading challenge and the approaching of Carados' turn to be beheaded create feelings of mourn and sadness in the court, similar to what is described in *SGGK* concerning Gawain:

Mixed Version:

...and the king was very angry and very sad, and he greatly lamented. So did the other knights; they scarcely wanted to eat, they were so angry and downcast. The court broke up with great grief; together they all went back to the lands where they were before. But first the king gave his orders that a year later each one should come, and the gathering be at Carlisle again.[67]

[65] See Appendix I, note 19.
[66] See Appendix I, note 20.
[67] See Appendix I, note 21.

(Brewer, 1992: 26)

Long Version:

> The knight left the court and the king remained full of anger because his mind was obsessed with this business. No-one could assuage the grief that the knights and the ladies expressed; they had scarcely the heart to eat, and all the court was distressed. [...] Many an eye wept for Carados.[68]
> (Brewer, 1992: 30)

The narrative then tells us that in the meantime Carados had several adventures, but after a year, the court gathered again at Carlisle during Pentecost, a notable difference from the season of Christmas and New Year which is the setting of *SGGK*. The mysterious knight then reappears, as had been agreed, to take his role in beheading Carados, which, as in *SGGK*, is a hoax, the knight prepares to strike in two instances, but he is interrupted in the first attempt, while in the second attempt he either does not strike at all or strikes with the flat of the blade, in the mixed and long version respectively. He never gives Carados the slightest cut and reveals he never had the intention to do so, and is in fact Eliavrés in disguise that came to tell Carados he is his real father. The scene of the feigned blows is, however, rather different from *SGGK*, although it also bears similarities. Eliavrés only feigns the strike twice instead of the three feigned blows in *SGGK*, but, before he feigns the first, he is offered two different propositions for ransom of Carados' life by the king and a further proposition for ransom by the queen before the second raising of his sword in order to (supposedly) deliver the blow, with Eliavrés accepting none. Nevertheless, he does hear the propositions, and after the ones offered by the king and his first raising of the sword, Carados impatiently urges him to be done with his blow and accuses him of being a coward, in a similar fashion to Gawain's impatience when the Green Knight feigns his second blow in *SGGK*:

Mixed Version:

> As soon as they were seated in silence the knight came in through the door - bringing the evil present, he immediately opened the door. He came on horseback, armed with a sword, into the decorated room, to the high table where the king was sitting. Without saying a word he dismounted, drew his sword, took the naked blade, and said in Arthur's hearing:
>
> 'Carados, come here. Where are you?'
> 'You can see I'm here,' said Carados.
> 'Then come forward,' said the knight.

[68] See Appendix I, note 22.

Willingly Carados removed his cloak and immediately came to the spot where he saw the other standing, making a great show of being angry. The king saw him, greatly grieving, but he was never slow to speak.

'Ha, knight!' he said. 'Have mercy on my nephew; do not kill him. You shall have as great a ransom as you know how to devise.'

'Say what, then.'

'You can have all the armour and the churls and the nobles in this court. Never before has anyone been offered so great a ransom.'

'King, that is not much. Can I have more?'

'Yes,' he said, 'all the treasure and the vessels of silver and gold which have been brought here.'

'King,' said he, 'that will be nothing, because however much treasure there is in the world, or there ever will be, I would not take it in exchange for him.'

When the king heard it, he grieved exceedingly, and the others too, on every side.

'Knight, you are a great coward,' said Carados. 'Do immediately what you have to do.'

And he reached out his arm and lifted his sword on high as if he intended to strike a great blow. The king now fainted, and the queen came out weeping from her rooms when she heard the news, and the ladies and girls too. When she saw the naked sword all the blood left her face and fled from it; she was deeply anguished and grieved. She came towards him as one who was not slow and said to him:

'Leave off, knight, a little while. Dear good sir, do not kill him. Instead of him you can have a mistress - lady or girl, whoever she may be - from among the most beautiful here, or else all of them if it pleases you.'

'Lady queen, that is nothing. I will not take all the ladies in the world in exchange for his head, nor all the girls that are here. Go away quickly into your rooms, my dear lady, and pray to God for his soul, that He will send it to paradise.'

The queen covered her face and so turned away weeping, and the others followed her wailing. The knight raised the sword: he threatened to strike a great blow. At that, most of those in the palace fell fainting all in a heap. But he had not the intention of striking, so he took Carados gently by the hand and said:

'Carados, get up. I will not do you any more harm now because you are too valiant a knight, and strong and trustworthy and proud. But come here, and speak to me in private.'

Far away from the king he led him, over to one side, and said:

'You are my son, may God preserve me!'[69]

(Brewer, 1992: 27-28)

Long Version:

Then lo and behold! a knight on his horse, girded with a sword, a knight who did not have a pale complexion, but was red with the heat.

'Sir king,' he said, 'may God save you.'

'Friend, may God bless you too.'

'Carados, I do not see you. Come forward, and thus you will have your feast. Offer me your head here, because I put mine there for you before, so it is quite right that I should see once more how I can strike with the sword; and so you will receive your blow.'

[69] See Appendix I, note 23.

Carados saw and understood clearly that it was now time for him to act. He stripped himself and sprang forward. He offered his head to the knight and said to him:

'Good sir, now you have me; do the best you can.'

'Sir knight,' said the king, 'do not be so little courteous as not to take a ransom.'

'Ransom? Tell me what you will give me.'

'I will gladly tell you it; for I will give you a great ransom. I will give you, and I do not lie, as many vessels as can be found in the court, as ever can be brought in, and the armour of a knight, because this is my nephew who is most dear to me.'

'I shall certainly not take it, but I shall take his head straight away. Let him make no defence.'

'But I will say more: I will give you all the treasure, whether precious stones, silver or gold, which can be found in my realms, in Brittany or in England or anywhere in my domain.'

'I certainly will not accept it, but I am going to cut off his head now. You undoubtedly consider me a mere beast, but I will have it this very moment. It cannot escape me, the head - so let him make no defence.'

'I must say one more word to you - '

But he raised the blade and got ready to strike. The king saw it and swooned with grief. Carados said to him in anger:

'Why don't you strike, sir? You make me die twice. If you make such calculations for a blow I shall strongly suspect that you are a coward.'

The queen came to beg for his life from another part of the castle. She came out of her room, and with her came many hundreds of ladies and girls who were extremely beautiful.

'Sir knight, don't touch him,' she said. 'It would be a sin and a pity if he were to be killed. Have mercy on him for God's sake. When you have given me his death you will be well rewarded. Take advice, if you would act well. Will you do nothing for me? Delay an hour for me: you claim requital for the blow of Carados the king's nephew, for whom a great ransom will be given. See all these young women and beautiful girls with graceful bodies: you can have them all. Leave off, if you would act wisely.'

'Lady,' the knight replied, 'I certainly could not take so many ladies in this world, nor any other living pledge. If you cannot bear to look, go and stay in your room.'

The queen covered her head and her grief broke out again. She went into her room with the ladies of the land, and all together made great lamentation because Carados was so close to death. The king and all those knights did not know what to advise, so they gave vent to grief such that no mortal man could have restrained it. Carados moved towards a table and laid his head down on it, and the other raised the sword and struck him with the flat but did not hurt him at all.

'Carados,' he said, 'get up now, for it will be too great an outrage and a very great pity if I kill you. Come and speak to me over here: I want to give you a little advice.'

He spoke these words to him in private:

'Do you know why I haven't killed you? You are my son, and I am your father.'[70]

(Brewer, 1992: 31-32)

[70] See Appendix I, note 24.

The motive which leads Eliavrés to propose the beheading challenge is therefore quite different from the Green Knight, however, he does have in common the fact that he was in disguise and this might betray a similar formula. Notwithstanding, in other aspects the scene runs differently, the hesitation in striking Carados by Eliavrés differs from the scene with the Green Knight and Gawain. Whereas in *SGGK* Gawain flinches at the first approach of the axe, and in the second the Green Knight taunts Gawain by descending the axe without delivering the blow and then claiming he was testing his will, in the Carados story this seems to be replaced by the attempts of the king to achieve an agreement with Eliavrés in order to ransom Carados' life, and afterwards by the interruption from Guinevere with another attempt at ransom when Eliavrés is getting ready to strike the blow. Nevertheless, in both *SGGK* and *Caradoc*, Gawain and Carados, respectively, lose their patience with the hesitation of their executioner in finally striking the blow, urging the latter to do so. Although different, it may be speculated if both the attempts at ransom by the king in *Caradoc* or the first and second swings of the axe by the Green Knight in *SGGK* do not have the same purpose: a formulaic way of creating suspense, or even a mnemonic survival from a possible oral original.

It is notable that Carados seems to play the exact same role of Gawain in *SGGK*, both Gawain and Carados accept the challenge in front of the court, both are dearly loved by the knights and ladies of the court and thus mourned in face of their impending doom, and Carados is portrayed as a dear nephew to the king, as is Gawain. The remaining of the *Livre de Caradoc* is not concerned with the beheading challenge, it tells other adventures by Carados which include his conflicts with Eliavrés and the latter's summoning of a serpent which leads to Carados' arm being damaged (explaining his epithet of "short arm"), as well as his marriage to a damsel called Guinier and the use of the motif of a drinking horn used for a fidelity test in the context of the marriage. Therefore we must advance to the other French beheading episodes.

1.1.3 *Perlesvaus*

In *Perlesvaus*[71], also called *Le Haut Livre du Graal*, another French romance from the early thirteenth century, we find yet another rendition of the beheading game.

[71] The romance survives in five different manuscripts, all from the thirteenth century, namely the MSS (O), Hatton 82 of the Bodleian Library Oxford; (Br), MS 11145 of the Bibliothèque royale des ducs de Bourgogne, Brussels; (P), Bibl. Nat., f. fr. 1428, (C), MS 626 of the collection of the Duc d'Aumale at

Perlesvaus is mainly concerned with offering a continuation to Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, although it is not included in the other so-called Continuations and stands as an independent story. The narrative of the romance includes not only stories about Perceval, but also digresses into several adventures of knights, such as Gawain and Lancelot, as well as stories regarding Arthur, Guinevere and Loholt, who is their son in *Perlesvaus*. It is in one of the quests of Lancelot that we find a narrative which includes the beheading game, but the setting for it is markedly different from *SGGK* and *Caradoc*. Lancelot comes upon a waste land where he finds a city apparently empty and in ruins. Eventually, he finds the knights and ladies of the city in a palace, which are joined in lamentation and warn Lancelot he is condemned. On further exploration of the city, a knight finally appears down a hall, carrying a great axe, he addresses Lancelot and says to him that since he entered the city, he will have to agree to a beheading challenge, or he will not be able to leave the city:

> The knights and the ladies fainted at his departure. Lancelot heard all this and was greatly astonished, but he could see nothing. Then, look! the knight is coming down into the hall, dressed in a red tunic, girded with a rich belt of silk and gold, and with a very rich brooch at his neck with very rich stones in it, with a golden cap on his head, and holding a huge axe in his two hands. The knight was very handsome and very young. Lancelot saw him come, and looked on him very gladly, for he saw him quite clearly. And he said to Lancelot:
>
> 'Sir, dismount.'
>
> 'Willingly, sir,' said Lancelot. He dismounted and tethered his horse to a silver ring which was in the mounting-block, and removed his shield from his neck and his lance from his hand.
>
> 'Sir,' he said to the knight, 'What is your wish?'
>
> 'Sir,' the knight said to him, 'you must cut off my head with this axe because my death has been appointed with this weapon; or else I shall cut off yours.'
>
> 'Indeed, sir;' said Lancelot, 'what did you say?'
>
> 'You heard me, sir' said the knight. 'You must do it, since you have come to this city.'
>
> 'Sir,' said Lancelot, 'it would be very foolish for one who is in jeopardy not to take what is most to his advantage, but I shall be blamed if I slay you without a fault.'
>
> 'I assure you,' said the knight, 'unless you do, you cannot go away.'
>
> 'Good sir,' said Lancelot, 'you are so noble and so trusty, how is it that you come so willingly to your death? You well know that I shall kill you before you can kill me since that is how it is.'

Chantilly and (Be), MS 113 of the Stadtbibliotek, Bern; as well as in two fragments interpolated in two manuscripts of the Vulgate cycle, one from the fourteenth century and the other from the fifteenth, namely (O), Bibl. Nat., f. fr. 120 and (Ac), Bibl. de l'Arsenal, MS 3480 respectively; and in a Welsh translation from the fourteenth century found in the Peniarth MS 11 of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and named as (W) (Kelly, 1974: n4).

> ‘All this I know to be true,’ said the knight, ‘but you must promise me before I die that you will return to this city in a year’s time, and that you will put your head in the same jeopardy as I put mine in now, without resistance.’
>
> ‘By my own head,’ said Lancelot, ‘I need no more persuading to choose respite from death rather than to die immediately. But I greatly marvel that you are so well disposed to receive your death.’
>
> ‘Sir,’ said the knight, ‘the man who wishes to go before the Saviour of the World ought to purge himself well of all his misdeeds and sins that he has ever committed, and I am truly repentant, so that I wish to die at this moment.’
>
> Then he held out the axe. Lancelot took it and saw that it was very keen and well-sharpened.
>
> ‘Sir,’ said the knight, ‘hold out your hand towards that church that you see.’
>
> ‘Willingly, sir,’ said Lancelot.
>
> ‘Will you swear to me here on the relics of that church,’ said the knight, ‘that you, in one year from today, at the hour at which you have killed me, or before, will return here and put your head in the same jeopardy as I place mine in, without default?’
>
> ‘I swear to you here,’ said Lancelot.
>
> Then the knight knelt and stretched his neck out as far as he could, and Lancelot took the axe in his two hands and said to him,
>
> ‘Sir knight, for God’s sake, have mercy on yourself.’
>
> ‘Willingly sir,’ said the knight. ‘Just cut off my head; otherwise I cannot have mercy on you.’
>
> ‘Such mercy I wish I could refuse you,’ said Lancelot.
>
> Then he held out the axe and cut off his head with so great a flourish that he made it fly seven feet beyond the body. He fell to the ground when his head was cut off, and Lancelot threw the axe to the ground, thinking that he would do ill to remain there. He came to his horse, took his arms, and mounted; and looking behind, saw neither the body nor the head of the knight, nor did he know what had become of them, except that he heard a great lamentation and a great outcry far off in the city, from the knights and ladies; and they grieved for the good knight, and said that he would be avenged, if God willed, at the appointed time, or before. Lancelot went out of the city...[72]
> (Brewer, 1992: 36-38)

The beheading challenge itself is thus similar, Lancelot must cut off the knight’s head and a year later submit himself to be put into the same jeopardy, however, the outlines are quite different, the challenger does not appear in Arthur’s court to issue the challenge, it is Lancelot who walks into a city where the knight forces him to an agreement, there is not any choice by Lancelot to accept the challenge, he must do it in order to leave the city. Furthermore, their dialogue is entirely different, the knight from the wasted city never taunts the worth of the Round Table nor Lancelot himself and the latter actually makes an attempt through words to convince the knight to give up his will to be beheaded, without success. The outcome of the beheading is also quite different, the knight does not survive it, his body falls when his head is cut off and as such, he

[72] See Appendix I, note 25.

does not pick his own head, thus, it lacks the supernatural aspect of the challenger in *SGGK* and *Caradoc*, even though the body and head disappear mysteriously after the beheading.

But there are other aspects which are common both to the story of Lancelot in the waste land and to the other narratives. Besides the obvious similarity in the rules of the challenge itself, the knight carries once again an axe as did the Green Knight, although his appearance is more polished in a similar fashion to Eliavrés, being described as a young and handsome knight richly adorned and dressed and lacking the supernatural, savage and churlish aspect of the Green Knight. Moreover, the knight is said to stretch his neck as far as he could, a detail that as we will see further ahead, is a recurring one in other narratives as well. It remains to be seen how the second part of the beheading game in this narrative unfolds. After a year has passed, Lancelot reminds himself of his agreement to return to the waste city when he is in the company of King Arthur and Sir Gawain, and he informs them of his appointment, to which he must attend by his honour. Upon his return to the waste city, he overhears some ladies and girls whom he cannot see commenting that Lancelot had betrayed them and did not return to be decapitated, and they mention other knights before him who failed to fulfil their part of the bargain. Afterwards, he arrives at the palace where he had beheaded the knight a year before, and another knight appears to deal the returning slash:

> He dismounted, then tied up his horse to a ring which was attached to a marble mounting-block. He had only just done this when a knight came down from the palace, huge and handsome and strong and supple. He was dressed in a short tunic of silk and held in his hand the axe with which Lancelot had cut off the head of the other knight. He came to him sharpening it on a whetstone, so as to cut better. Lancelot saw him coming, and asked him,
>
> 'Good sir, what are you doing with that axe?'
>
> 'By my head,' said the knight, 'you will find out in the same way as my brother found out.'
>
> 'What,' said Lancelot, 'you are going to kill me then?'
>
> 'You will find that out,' said the knight, 'before you leave here. But did you not promise that you would put your head in jeopardy, as the knight whom you killed put his? It was on that condition that you were able to depart. But come on and kneel down, and stretch out your neck so that I can cut off your head. If you do not wish to do it of your own free will, you will soon find that someone will compel you to, even if you were twenty knights. But I know very well that you have not returned for any other reason but to fulfil your pledge, and that you will not argue about it.'
>
> Lancelot thought that he was going to die, and wished to perform without fail what he had promised. He lay down on the ground stretching out his arms in the shape of the cross, and prayed to God to have mercy. He remembered the queen.

> ‘Ah, madam!’ he said, ‘I shall never see you again. If I could have seen you once before I die, it would have been a great comfort to me, and my soul would have departed more gladly; but that I shall never see you again grieves me more than death itself. To die is fitting when one has lived so long, and I firmly promise you that my love will never fail you, and that my soul will love you as much in the next world as my body does in this, if it has the power.’
>
> Then the tears fell from his eyes; and not from the time when he was first a knight, so the story says, did he shed tears out of sorrow, except for this time and one other. He took three blades of grass, and so have himself communion. After he had crossed and blessed himself, he got up and knelt down and stretched out his neck. The knight raised the axe. Lancelot heard the blow coming, so lowered his head, and the axe went past him. The knight said to him,
>
> ‘Sir knight, my brother whom you killed did not do that, but held his head and his neck quite still. And so you ought to do.’
>
> Then two extremely beautiful ladies appeared at the windows of the palace, and recognised Lancelot at once. So when the knight had reached out for another blow, one of the ladies called out,
>
> ‘If you wish to have my love for evermore, throw down the axe, and call the knight quits. Otherwise, you will lose my love for ever.’
>
> The knight immediately threw the axe down on the ground and falling at Lancelot’s feet, begged mercy of him as the truest knight in the world.
>
> ‘But you should have mercy on me and not kill me,’ said Lancelot.
>
> ‘Sir,’ he replied, ‘I shall not kill you; instead, I shall help you against everyone in the world, although you have killed my brother.’[73]
>
> (Brewer, 1992: 39-40)

The ladies then reveal to Lancelot they were two sisters he had helped in another quest, together with Sir Gawain and another knight. They further inform him that by honouring his agreement and returning to put his head into jeopardy, Lancelot had saved the waste city from being lost, and now it could be filled with people again. They also tell him many other knights had come before him but these never honoured the covenant, and due to that, several of their brothers, uncles or cousins who had been the challengers of the beheading game had died in vain. The episode thus ends with the city gaining life again and Lancelot being greatly honoured due to it. As in the scene where it is the knight’s turn to be beheaded, Lancelot’s turn also presents differences from *SGGK* and *Caradoc*: the knight is indeed not the same, but the brother of the original challenger, there is not any disguise involved, both knights were indeed themselves and apparently there is no deception, the narrative seems to indicate that the knight was indeed going to decapitate Lancelot, had not the sisters appeared, or, at least, that’s the impression given, and Lancelot has an inner dialogue where he laments himself for Guinevere, something which has no similarity in the other renditions of the challenge. Be that as it may, certain details do betray similarities; as in *SGGK*, Lancelot is

[73] See Appendix I, note 26.

reproached by the knight on the account of having averted the first swing of the axe when he hears it coming down, with the knight remembering him his brother did not do that the previous year. Moreover, the knight makes his appearance sharpening his axe on a whetstone, something which is also found in *SGGK*, when Gawain finds the Green Knight in the Green Chapel.

All in all, it seems that Lancelot's beheading challenge includes the beheading rules of the challenge itself and some common details, but many differences in context and in setting. Before we analyse the next beheading-game narrative, there is yet another detail in *Perlesvaus* which is potentially significant, but not on the beheading-game episode with Lancelot. In another section of *Perlesvaus*, a spinning castle is mentioned, in the context of a quest where Perceval is the protagonist, rather than Lancelot, which only stops spinning when a knight with a specific set of virtues enters it (Kibbler, 2014: 223). At this point in our study, this is not yet significant, however, as we shall see, this element may betray a connection with some of the beheading-game narratives.

1.1.4 *The Mule Sans Frein*

Another rendition of the beheading game is found in *La Damoiselle à la Mule*, known also as *La Mule Sans Frein* and translated as *The Mule without a Bridle*, a short poem from Paien de Maisières dating most probably from the early thirteenth century and preserved in a single manuscript (Bibliothèque de Bongars à Berne, MS 354). The poem seems also to be a source of the German poem *Diu Crône*[74] (c. 1220), from Heinrich von dem Türlin, which presents a similar narrative and themes (Kittredge, 1916: 50; Lupack, 2005: 301; Pickford, 1959: 362). The narrative is concerned with a girl mounted on a mule who appears in Arthur's court during Pentecost seeking help to get back her bridle for the mule, which had been taken from her. The girl offers herself

[74] *Diu Crône* survives in six manuscripts: Cologne, *Universitäts-und Stadtbibliothek*, Cod. 5 P 62; Heidelberg, *Universitätsbibliothek*, Cod. Pal. germ. 374; Vienna, *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, Cod. 2779; Berlin, *Staatsbibliothek*, mgf 923 Nr. 9; Schwäbisch Hall, *Stadtbibliothek*, (missing); Kiel, *Universitätsbibliothek*, Ms. K.B. 48L. However, the beheading game episode as well as the entire quest for the bridle, similar to *La Mule Sans Frein*, where the beheading challenge is inserted, is only one of the episodes in *Diu Crône*, which is a rather more extensive saga around Gawain, and also includes other stories with common Arthurian themes and motifs, including the Grail quest, where Gawain is the one who asks about the Grail and thus ends the enchantment, contrary to other renditions of the Grail theme. The beheading game in *Diu Crône* has some differences to *La Mule Sans Frein*: the challenger is identified as being Gansguoter and it is explicitly characterised as the villain and as an enchanter behind the magic at the revolving castle. The text was edited in 1852 by Gottlob H. F. Scholl (Türlin, 1966) and a more recent translation was made by J. W. Thomas (Türlin, 1989).

along with the possession of a castle to a knight who dares to go on a dangerous journey in order to recover her bridle, and adds that her mule knows the way and the knight who rides it will reach the castle where her bridle is being held. Kay immediately steps forward and takes the quest, he then mounts the mule and goes through a deep forest filled with dangerous beasts, a dark and fiery valley where there is a foul stench in the air, and finally a plain where he comes upon a great stretch of water which he does not dare to cross, therefore failing the quest and returning to Arthur's castle. Gawain then takes the same quest, he mounts on the mule and makes the same journey through the same forest, valley and plain until he also comes across the same stretch of water, described as a turbulent body of black water with no way to cross it. Unlike Kay, Gawain manages to cross the river using an iron plank, and arrives at a revolving castle with stakes around it displaying the heads of beheaded knights:

> The castle was so very strong that it need fear no attack. It was enclosed all the way round with a great moat, both broad and deep, and in the same way it was entirely surrounded with great stakes, very pointed and big, and on each one of the stakes, except for one, where it was lacking, there was the head of the knight. Gawain had no intention of giving up. The castle did not have a door or a gate - it was turning very rapidly, like a windmill that revolves, or like the top that you spin with a cord.[75]
> (Brewer, 1992: 48)

We have therefore another revolving castle as we did in *Perlesvaus*, although in the latter the motif is not in the beheading-game section *per se*. As we shall see further below, the motif of the revolving castle might be relevant for the connection between these tales, especially with *Fled Bricrenn*. Returning to the present analysis of *La Mule Sans Frein*, when walking near the castle, Gawain catches a glimpse of the door to enter it, although the castle keeps on turning. Eventually Gawain jumps at the right timing to enter the door, with only the tail of the mule getting a cut. Initially, the castle seems to be empty, but Gawain soon meets an enigmatic dwarf who greets him, but does not answer further inquiries and then goes away. Gawain then explores the castle and eventually he arrives at a cellar where a Moorish-looking churl meets him, who makes Gawain his guest and then challenges him for a beheading game:

> Then, lo and behold, he saw, coming slowly up from the cellar, a very hairy churl. It could well be said that Gawain had seen something which made his journey useless. The churl looked very evil, and he was bigger than St. Marcel. On his shoulder he carried a huge, broad axe. Gawain was much

[75] See Appendix I, note 27.

astonished when he saw the churl, who looked like a Moor of Mauretania, or one of those louts from Champagne who are completely tanned by the sun. He stopped in front of Gawain and then greeted him. And Gawain took a good look at his face and his figure.

'May you have good luck!' he said.

'Well may you say that!' said Gawain.

'Yes, indeed, I consider you a brave man to have come in here. Your journey has been a waste of time, for the bridle that you have come here to seek could not be in a safer place. It has very good guards around it. It will be essential for you to put up a great fight, so help me God, before you possess it.'

'You do not frighten me in the least,' said Gawain. 'I shall certainly give you fighting enough, so help me God; I shall die rather than give up the bridle.'

And he delayed no longer, but because he saw that it was getting dark, the churl set about accommodating him and led him straight to a lodging and took the trouble to make him sit down. The mule was well stabled. [...] He provided a huge bed, both high and broad, for Gawain so that he could lie down, because he longed to rest, as befits such a knight. Now the churl came towards him again.

'Gawain,' he said, 'you shall lie alone all night long in this bed, without challenge and without opposition. But, in peace, I ask you this, before you lie down, because I have heard you praised. I now propose to you a test, and because I know my right, undertake it freely.'

And Gawain promised him that he would accept it whatever it was.

'Tell me now,' said Gawain, 'what is it? So help me God, I will take it on. I will not deceive you by any word spoken to my good host.'

'Cut off my head tonight,' he said, 'with this sharp axe; and as you behead me, by the same reckoning I shall cut off your head in the morning, when I come back. Now get on with it without arguing,' he said.

'I should be very ignorant,' said Gawain, 'if I did not know what I am undertaking. I will take whatever comes: tonight I will cut off yours, and in the morning I shall offer you mine, if you wish me to do so.'

'May evil befall anyone who asks for better,' said the churl. 'Now come on then!'

Then he showed him the way. The churl placed his neck on a block, then Gawain took the axe, and he cut off the head with one blow - he lost no time in doing it. The churl jumped up at once on his feet, and took his head; he returned to the cellar and Gawain went back and lay down to sleep straight away. He slept soundly until morning.[76]

(Brewer, 1992: 49-50)

The beheading challenge in the narrative of the *Mule Sans Frein*, unlike *Caradoc* and the Lancelot tale, features a challenger who has characteristics in common with the Green Knight of *SGGK*, instead of the polished knights of the mentioned stories. *La Mule Sans Frein* once again has an opponent with exotic features, and even though he is not as otherworldly as a churlish knight completely green in colour, he is described as churlish in appearance as the Green Knight did, he is giant in size as was the Green Knight, carries an enormous axe, and looks evil, with his appearance

[76] See Appendix I, note 28.

reminding Gawain of a Moor, and therefore also creating the idea of an atypical and mysterious warrior as the Green Knight was, although the latter is described in greater detail in *SGGK* than the Moor in *La Mule Sans Frein*. As with the Green Knight and Eliavrés, and unlike the mortal knight in the Lancelot story, the Moor also survives the beheading and picks his own head, thus having supernatural abilities, although it is a scene treated with haste and lacks the atmosphere from *SGGK*. Notwithstanding, the setting around the beheading challenge is once again different from *SGGK* and *Caradoc*, as it was in the Lancelot tale. The Moor is found in the cellar of a revolving castle and the issuing of the challenge is rather straightforward, and occurs after the Moor had played the host for Gawain, something which is not found in the other tales, unless we make comparisons with Bertilak's hosting of Gawain in his castle, but the latter occurs after the first challenge and is the setting for the temptation episode, which is not found here. Furthermore, the Moor is not in disguise and the hosting lasts for a single night. The beheading challenge is issued in the context of a quest, it is not a challenge issued to the court of King Arthur, nor does the churlish Moor invoke or taunt its prestige and fame, and it seems to be a single episode of the story rather than being the *motto* for it. Proceeding with the narrative, in the morning after the beheading of the Moor, the latter returns for Gawain's turn:

> Next day, as soon as it was light, Gawain got up and prepared himself. Then, believe it or not, the churl came back quite safe and sound, with his axe on his shoulder. Now Gawain might well consider himself a fool when he saw the head that he had cut off. But he did not fear him at all, and the churl who was not in the least the worse for it, spoke.
>
> 'Gawain,' he said, 'I have come to remind you of the agreement.'
>
> 'I do not dispute it in the least, for I clearly see that it must be done; one cannot fight against it.'
>
> And so he had to act bravely, for he did not wish to be disloyal, because of the agreement that he had made. He said that he would willingly keep to it.
>
> 'Come here then,' said the churl.
>
> Out came Gawain from inside. He held out his neck on the block and the churl said to him straightaway:
>
> 'Uncover your neck completely.'
>
> 'I have no more, by God!' he said, 'but strike if you want to strike.'
>
> It would have been a very great pity and tragedy if he had struck him, so help me God! He lifted his axe right up - which he did to frighten him - but he did not intend to touch him because he was so loyal and because he had so well kept his promise to him.[77]
>
> (Brewer, 1992: 50-51)

[77] See Appendix I, note 29.

The second scene of the beheading goes as quickly and straightforwardly as the first, and lacks the sense of a climax of other versions such as *SGGK* and *Caradoc*. The Moor raises his axe in a faux move as did other challengers, and then spares Gawain for his commitment to the agreement he had made, but there is barely a sense of suspense, he only raises the axe once, and there are no attempts at ransom as in *Caradoc* or the sudden appearance of damsels saving the challenger as in the Lancelot story. There are clear connections though: as mentioned, the raising of the axe by the Moor is only a scare and he does not intend to behead Gawain, and he asks Gawain to further stretch out his neck, a detail which we had already observed in the case of the first knight beheaded by Lancelot. The main scheme of the beheading-game motif is nonetheless intact, and its use in such a straightforward manner is perhaps due to the beheading challenge being only one of the challenges Gawain encounters in his quest for the bridle. Following the beheading challenge, the Moor warns Gawain it will be hard to get the bridle and helps him armour himself for a fight with two lions, which Gawain slays. He then meets a knight whom he must fight, and it is explained that:

> ...when a knight from another land came on behalf of the girl to seek for the bridle which was there, he had to fight him. And if he was vanquished by him, the prize for victory would not be given, except to have his head cut off and then fixed on one of the stakes with which the castle was surrounded. And if turned out adversely for him, so that he was overcome by him, another stake would be set up so that another knight could come whom he would vanquish in battle.[78]
> (Brewer, 1992: 52-53)

Although not a part of the beheading game *per se*, the explanation for the heads on the stakes around the castle is also connected with the motif of the decapitated head[79] as well as with an apparent recurring use of beheaded heads as the outcome of duels, and it may be connected with the significance of the beheading game or of the beheaded head in general in Arthurian tales, something which will be assessed elsewhere in this dissertation. In the remaining of the narrative, Gawain battles the knight and defeats him, he then battles two dragons, which he also defeats, and meets once again the dwarf he had met when he first entered the castle, who leads him to a lady who offers him

[78] See Appendix I, note 30.
[79] In fact, this motif in particular mirrors a similar scene in Chrétien de Troyes' *Érec et Énide*, where there is a garden with several heads on display placed in sharp stakes, with the exception of one of the stakes which has a horn hanging from it, and which, as it is explained to Erec, has the purpose of also holding the head of another knight to come, to which afterwards another stake shall be put next to it, awaiting the head of yet another knight (Troyes, 1991: 108), in a similar fashion to the stakes in *La Mule*. Although the context is different, the motif seems to be quite clearly the same.

praises as well as a meal, and who identifies herself as both the keeper of the wild beasts Gawain eliminated and as being the sister of the girl without a bridle. The lady then makes an offer to Gawain to stay in the castle with her as lord of the castle and of thirty eight others, an offer which Gawain refuses, and demands the bridle. The lady gives Gawain the bridle and the churl brings him the girl's mule, furthermore, the lady orders the churl to make the castle stop revolving in order for Gawain to pass, and it seems quite explicit that it was the churlish Moor who had the power to make the castle stop, which, together with his survival of the beheading, makes of him something of a sorcerer, a detail which could prove important further ahead in our study. Gawain then departs from the castle and notices its streets are now filled with people celebrating since they were hiding in the cellars of the castle but could now return to the surface, because the beasts whom Gawain defeated were the ones keeping them hidden. Upon the return to Arthur's court, Gawain restores the bridle to the girl and she departs in her mule once again. The narrative ends and the beheading game is one of many challenges and themes in it, and does not have the same central role as in other narratives containing it, however, together with the heads on the stakes around the revolving castle, it does create a context where beheading seems to be a common element, and the beheading game itself seems to follow the basic structure and rules of the other narratives.

1.1.5 *Hunbaut*

Yet another French romance making use of the theme remains however, for *Hunbaut* also presents a rendition of it. *Hunbaut* dates from the mid-thirteenth century and survives in a single manuscript: Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 472. It is a short-verse romance narrating the quest of Gawain and another knight called Hunbaut to deliver a message to the King of the Isles, demanding his submission to King Arthur. The delivery of such message leads the two knights to go through several quests, and one of these contains a rendition of the beheading test. However, as we shall observe, this beheading game has a different twist from the others, but it does seem to be based on it and it is either parodied or modified in order to present a surprise in comparison with the usual outcome of the challenge in other narratives. Gawain and Hunbaut arrive at a castle where the beheading game is proposed at its entrance:

There was no castle better constructed in the world, nor a more magnificent, nor a better situated one, and they found a churl sitting there on the left, in front of the gate, and a boy brought him an axe in his two hands.

'Hunbaut,' he said, 'if anybody attacks me, I will have my rights with this.'

He stood upright on his feet so that nothing could be seen beyond him. He certainly seemed an evil-natured man; he was big and black, ugly and hideous. He looked at both the knights and barred the way to them. Hunbaut asked him, nevertheless, to wait until they returned. He gave no sign of having understood. He held his axe in both hands. And Gawain said:

'Now we shall have something to do here before we leave. I do not know what right he demands.'

And Hunbaut said:

'One choice is open to you which I can explain to you very well, but it is very dangerous to take it. There is trouble both on the one hand and on the other. You can cut off his head with that axe at once but it will not guarantee your safety. He proffers and gives his neck up to you on the understanding that you offer your neck to him immediately afterwards. And he will keep close to you and will hold the axe in his hand. He will offer no more nor less to you than a single blow - no more. The choice is offered: there is no other. Take whichever will please you. Do not act wrongly in any way towards the churl who offers the choice.'

'And Gawain replied:

'I will never go elsewhere for advice; I will advise myself. I grant you whatever it is he wants. Give me that axe first. I shall not make a mistake when I have placed my life in jeopardy.'

[...]

Gawain said:

'I will do it first because I do not want to strike in the way that the other two agreed, and that I have already noted.'

Then the churl held out the axe to him, and then he extended his neck before him without hesitation, and certainly thought that he would be safe, nor did he think of having any protection. Sir Gawain looked at him - he had seen many a marvel, so that he was not greatly astonished, but felt greatly encouraged; for he felt himself big and strong, and he held a sharp axe. He thought carefully about the stroke, and of the great blow that he was forced to strike - Gawain who summoned all his strength there. Indeed, I can assure you that he did not make a feint; instead, he made the wretch's head fly far away, more than ten paces. And the churl opened both his fists, for he intended to go after it immediately. Sir Gawain, who was aware of the enchantment, kept near. He seized the churl by the clothes, because that was necessary for his purpose, and the magic failed, for the churl fell dead on the spot and the magic was brought to an end, so that the double game was never again offered there.

Then Sir Gawain and Hunbaut left that place, joyous and relieved they had thus passed through the adventure.[80]

(Brewer, 1992: 59-60)

This beheading game clearly follows the same references from other narratives, the rules of the challenge are the same, absent the interval of a year (which was already absent in *La Mule Sans Frein*), and the challenger is once again a big dark churl with an evil-looking appearance who has an axe as his weapon of choice for the challenge. Like

[80] See Appendix I, note 31.

the story of Lancelot in the waste city or *La Mule Sans Frein*, the churl does not challenge the court of King Arthur, he is placed in the middle of a quest, and the challenge is issued in that context. He lacks dialogue however, it is Hunbaut who interprets the challenge, but the outcome is quite different from the other narratives, since in this story Gawain never sees his turn to be beheaded approaching, he beheads the churl with enough strength for the head to fly far away, and then prevents the trunk from getting its head and restoring it, thus breaking some sort of enchantment which, apparently, had a limited amount of time to be effective. The churl then dies right away and there is no double game, as the author himself states, leading us to believe he did know the most common use of the motif but changed it here. Even the statement in the story that Gawain knew the enchantment beforehand could be a reference to previous stories which included the beheading game such as the ones we previously saw. Notwithstanding, it is clearly a use of the same motif, as it was in the other French tales we have been reviewing, which, even though they have differences from one another and from *SGGK* do have many elements in common, especially the rules of the beheading game itself.

1.2 *Fled Bricrenn*: The Irish Beheading Game

Fled Bricrenn is found in several medieval manuscripts[81], which are not all in accordance, with George Henderson having proposed the existence of two different recensions from the analysis of the manuscripts. Henderson produced the diplomatic edition and translation which is still standard in Irish studies to this day, even though it dates back to 1899, and in the critical section of this work he already mentions the similarities he finds between the beheading challenge in *Fled Bricrenn* and in Arthurian tales (Henderson, 1899: 198-207). Nevertheless, although the beheading-game sections

[81] Namely in the *Lebor na hUidre*, MS 23 E 25, Royal Irish Academy (LU); in the MS Egerton 93, British Library (Eg.), in the MSS 1336 and 1337, Trinity College (olim H 3.17 and H 3.18, respectively); in the MS Codex Vossianus latinus in quarto 7, Leiden University Library, also called simply the Leiden manuscript (L); and in the Edinburgh Gaelic MS XL, National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 72.1.40. The LU copy of *Fled Bricrenn* is the oldest, although there may be discrepancies about the date of parts of its content. The date attributed to the LU copy is usually c. 1106, since it is the date of the death of the scribe identified as M, who wrote at least its initial version, and therefore any content written by him was presumably written before that date. The text which arrived to us, however, seems to also be partly the work of one or more later interpolators. It used to be thought it was a single one, identified as scribe H (Ó Concheanainn, 1974: 277-288), but Elizabeth Duncan has recently made a case for six interpolators, with two of them (called H1 and H5 by Duncan) having written parts of the text from *Fled Bricrenn* (Duncan, 2015: 29-52). In what regards the remaining manuscripts, the Eg. manuscript dates from the fifteenth century, the Ed. and the H MSS from either the fifteenth or sixteenth century, and the Leiden manuscript from the sixteenth century.

in *Fled Bricrenn* are closely similar to the Arthurian tales, especially to *SGGK*, the narrative in its entirety is concerned with different themes. *Fled Bricrenn* includes the theme of the challenge and the test of the warrior, but it is also concerned with the theme of the *curadmír* (champion's portion) in a feast, the best piece of the meat, which is to be awarded only to the best warrior. The champion's portion is the pretext for the test, and it is in that context that the beheading challenges are used in the narrative, with some interpretations also detecting an element of satire and parody of heroic/epic narratives (Mallory, 1992: 71).

Summarizing the plot, a feast is organized for the Ulstermen by Bricriu, where the latter creates an intrigue amongst the three most prominent Ulster warriors, Cú Chulainn, Conall Cernach and Loégaire Búadach as well as amongst their wives, regarding who is the one worthy of the champion's portion and whose wife should have precedence entering the hall of the feast. This leads to a series of trials for the three warriors throughout Ireland: battling with a giant, judgment by king Ailill and queen Medb of Connacht, judgment by Ercol and his wife Garmuin, a battle with amazons under the judgment of Samera, a battle on horseback with Ercol, a visit to a revolving castle owned by the wizard Cú Roí where the three warriors must defend the castle at night from supernatural creatures, and the final trial in Ulster where Cú Roí disguised as a *bachlach*[82] issues a beheading challenge clearly similar to the one in *SGGK*. The episodes involving Cú Roí are particularly rich in similarities with the Arthurian stories containing the beheading-game motif which we have been reviewing. A potentially important and subtle detail is Cú Roí's revolving castle[83], since it is a motif also used in *La Mule Sans Frein*, and of which there are vestiges in *Perlesvaus*, as we have seen. Moreover, the sequence where Cú Roí's castle is mentioned also includes some details concerning Cú Roí, even though he himself is absent:

[82] In the Electronic Dictionary of Irish Language (eDIL), *bachlach* is roughly translated as "a) rustic, servant, labourer, serf, bondman, (shep)- herd (?) [...]; b) As term of contempt, clown, churl, ignorant person [...]; c) lay brother (?); monk (perh. derogatory)" (Toner et al, 2019: dil.ie/5094). According to Colmán Etchingham however, there is a more precise definition: "*bachlach* plainly signifies an ecclesiastical counterpart to the secular *aithech*" (Etchingham, 1999: 397). An *aithech* in its turn is "loosely descriptive of a rent-paying commoner" (Etchingham, 1999: 397), meaning that a *bachlach* is a peasant attached to an ecclesiastical institution. The use of the term *bachlach* to describe Cú Roí in his disguise thus represents an anachronism for an Ulster cycle tale of course, and may be related to a broader definition of it, related with the medieval figure/class of the churl, as we shall see further ahead in this dissertation.

[83] Cú Roí's castle, from both this narrative as well as from others such as *Aided Chon Roí*, is popularly associated in Ireland with the remains of a stone ring fort found in a mountain peak in the Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry. Correspondingly, the ring fort is named *Caherconree*.

> On the morning of the morrow the three heroes, Cuchulainn, Conall and Loigaire, then set off to Fort Curoi. They unyoked their chariot at the gate of the hold, then entered the court. Whereupon Blathnat, Mind's daughter, wife of Curoi mac Dairi, bade them warm welcome. That night on their arrival Curoi was not at home. But knowing they would come, he counselled his wife regarding the heroes until he should return from his oriental expedition into Scythian territory. From the age of seven years, when he took up arms, until his demise, Curoi had not reddened his sword in Erin, nor ever had the food of Erin passed his lips. Nor could Erin contain him for his haughtiness, renown and rank, overbearing fury, strength and gallantry. His wife acted according to his wish in the matter of bathing and of washing, providing them with refreshing drinks and beds most excellent. And it liked them well.
>
> When bedtime was come, she told them that each was to take his night watching the fort until Curoi should return. "And, moreover, thus said Curoi—that ye take your turn watching according to seniority." In what airt soever of the globe Curoi should happen to be, every night o'er the fort he chaunted a spell, till the fort revolved as swiftly as a mill-stone. The entrance was never to be found after sunset.[84]
> (Henderson, 1899: 101, 103)[85]

The revolving castle thus functions in a similar way to the one in *La Mule Sans Frein*, it revolves swiftly due to an enchantment, and it is compared with a water mill, just as the revolving castle in *La Mule Sans Frein*. It is not permanently revolving, only when Cú Roí chants an enchantment every night, and in this aspect it is different from the one in *La Mule* (which only stops when the churl ends the enchantment later in the story), or in *Perlesvaus* (which only stops spinning when a knight with certain virtues attempts to enter it), and the context is different since it is a different quest and the challengers are invited into the fort, unlike Gawain who has to find a way to enter the revolving castle at the right timing, or Perceval who only enters it due to his virtues. Nonetheless, the similarity is undeniable, and, as is the case with the beheading game, the dating of the French romance places *Fled Bricrenn* as the oldest version of this motif as well. Thus, as we shall analyse in depth further below, the motif of the revolving castle may also help us in tracing the transmission of the beheading-game motif, since both motifs are included in the same tale from Irish tradition and are also found together in an Arthurian tale.

Returning to the matter of the beheading game, and before we jump to the final scene involving Cú Roí, the *Lebor na hUidre* recension also includes an intermediary beheading challenge. Before the events at Cú Roí's revolving castle, and after yet

[84] See Appendix I, note 32.
[85] Although it is quite old, Henderson's translation is still widely used as the diplomatic edition, and will be the one used here, however, there are modernised versions of his translation in Koch *et al* (1994) as well as in Gantz (1981).

another falling out between the three warriors concerning the champion's portion, Sencha sends them to seek the advice of Budi mac Báin (Yellow son of Fair/White), who in turn sends them to meet Úath mac Imomain (Terror son of Great Fear), a shape-shifting wizard armed with an axe who dwells on a loch. At the loch, Úath issues a beheading challenge to the three contenders, similar to the one of the Green Knight and other challengers from the French versions. More specifically, Úath asks for one of the challengers to behead him so that he might do the same to that challenger afterwards, with the interval between the beheading of Úath and his own turn to behead the challenger being of one day, thus being in agreement with *La Mule Sans Frein* but contrary to the interval of one year in *SGGK*, *Caradoc* and the Lancelot tale:

> A big powerful fellow was Terror, son of Great Fear. He used to shift his form into what shape he pleased, was wont to do tricks of magic and such like arts. He in sooth was the wizard from whom Muni, the Wizard's Pass, is named. He used to be called "wizard" from the extent to which he changed his divers shapes.
>
> To Terror at his loch they accordingly went. Yellow had given them a guide. To Terror they told the cause for which they had sought him out. He said he should venture on adjudgment provided only they would adhere to it. "We will adhere to it," they quoth; whereupon he solemnly pledges them. "I have a covenant to make with you," he quoth, "and whoever of you fulfils it with me, he is the man who wins the Champion's Portion." "What is the covenant?" they said. "I have an axe, and the man into whose hands it shall be put is to cut off my head to-day, I to cut off his tomorrow."
>
> Thereupon Conall and Loigaire said they would not agree to that arrangement, for it would be impossible for them to live after having been beheaded, although he might. Therefore they declined (shirked) that: [although other books narrate that they agreed to the bargain, to wit, Loigaire to cut off Terror's (Uath's) head the first day, and (on the giant's returning) that Loigaire shirked his part of the bargain and that Conall likewise behaved unfairly]. Cuchulainn, however, said he would agree to the covenant (bargain) were the Champion's Portion given to him. Conall and Loigaire said they would allow him that if he agreed to a wager with Terror. Cuchulainn solemnly pledged them not to contest the Champion's Portion if he made covenant with Terror. And they then pledged him to ratify it. Terror, having put spells on the edge of the axe, lays his head upon the stone for Cuchulainn. Cuchulainn with his own axe gives the giant a blow and cuts off his head. He then went off from them into the loch, his axe and his head on his breast.
>
> On the morrow he comes back on his quest. Cuchulainn stretches himself out for him on the stone. The axe with its edge reversed he draws down thrice on Cuchulainn's neck. "Get up," quoth Terror; "the sovranty of the heroes of Erin to Cuchulainn, and the Champion's Portion without contest." The three heroes then hied them to Emain. But Loigaire and Conall disputed the verdict given in favour of Cuchulainn and the original contest as to the Champion's Portion continued. The Ultonians advised them to go for judgement unto Curoi. To that too they agreed.[86]
>
> (Henderson, 1899: 97, 99, 101)

[86] See Appendix I, note 33.

Several aspects are immediately recognized as similar to the Arthurian stories: Úath is described as big and powerful, an image that brings to mind the churlish and gigantic aspects of the Green Knight, the churl from *Hunbaut* and the moor from *Mule*, and his weapon of choice is the axe, as in all other versions with the exception of *Caradoc*. His shape-shifting ability is mentioned, similar to both Cú Roí and the Green Knight, as well as his supernatural power to survive beheading through enchantment, something which he shares with all the challengers in the Arthurian stories with the exception of the knight in the Lancelot story and the churl in *Hunbaut* (although the churl presumably would do so if Gawain had not prevent him from reaching his head). As in *SGGK*, Úath feigns the strike three times, revealing after the last one that it was a test, and that Cú Chulainn was the only one to submit himself to the end of the bargain, while Lóegaire and Conall both denied to submit themselves. This is a very important detail because the three feigned blows are only found in *SGGK* and not in any of the other Arthurian versions of the beheading challenge, therefore the Úath episode in *Fled Bricrenn* is the only one which also includes this detail, even though Eliavrés rehearses two raisings of the axe which are faux moves in the Caradoc story. The attempts at ransom in *Caradoc* could be a replacement for the three feigned blows, but it is not certain. However, the differences of the Úath episode with *SGGK* are also notable. The feigned blows with the edge of the axe reversed are mentioned but they lack the suspense of *SGGK*, without the dialogue between the blows and the tension between the challengers. Furthermore, the context is different, there are three challengers, although Cú Chulainn is the only one who keeps his word in the covenant, and the challengers go to meet Úath in order for him to give judgment concerning who is deserving of the champion's portion, his challenge is not one of the obstacles of some quest nor has he been the one visiting the court of the heroes to issue the challenge. Nevertheless, his dwelling does evoke an otherworldy connection as did the Green Chapel for the Green Knight.

Moving forward, to the final sequence of *Fled Bricrenn*, called *Cennach ind Ruanada inso* (*The Champion's Covenant*), there is yet another beheading game similar to the Úath episode but issued under different circumstances: a *bachlach* appears in the court of Ulster and challenges the Ulaid for the same beheading game described in all the versions, but in accordance with the interval of one day which was present in the Úath episode and in the *Mule Sans Frein* instead of one year which was present in

SGGK, Caradoc and the Lancelot story. In most of the manuscripts, *The Champion's Covenant* is not complete and ends abruptly, being totally absent from the H MSS, and while it is also present in the Leiden manuscript, the relevant page is no longer legible. Only in the Edinburgh MS is it complete, and in fact, this manuscript only contains *The Champion's Covenant* and does not have any other section of *Fled Bricrenn*, as if it stood as an independent story, which it is not since both the champion's portion and the precedence of Emer in entering the hall are awarded in the end, therefore making a reference to the events at the beginning of *Fled Bricrenn*. The appearance of the *bachlach* is quite climatic, and in this aspect it is more similar to *SGGK* than the French versions are. The challenge itself is at first issued differently, since the *bachlach* proposes first to be him who beheads the challenger in the first turn, until Munremar and Dubthach change his mind to the inverse order:

> Once upon a time as the Ultonians were in Emain, fatigued after the gathering and the games, Conchobar and Fergus mac Rōig, with Ultonia's nobles as well, proceeded from the sporting field outside and gat seated in the Royal Court (*lit*. Red Branch) of Conchobar. Neither Cuchulainn nor Conall the Victorious nor Loigaire the Triumphant were there that night. But the hosts of Ultonia's valiant heroes were there. As they were seated, it being eventide, and the day drawing towards the close, they saw a big uncouth fellow of exceeding ugliness drawing nigh them into the hall. To them it seemed as if none of the Ultonians would reach half his height. Horrible and ugly was the carle's guise. Next his skin he wore an old hide with a dark dun mantle around him, and over him a great spreading club-tree (branch) the size of a winter-shed, under which thirty bullocks could find shelter. Ravenous yellow eyes he had, protruding from his head, each of the twain the size of an ox-vat. Each finger as thick as another person's wrist. In his left hand a stock, a burden for twenty yoke of oxen. In his right hand an axe weighing thrice fifty glowing molten masses [of metal]. Its handle would require a ploughteam (a yoke of six) to move it. Its sharpness such that it would lop off hairs, the wind blowing them against its edge.
>
> In that guise he went and stood by the fork-beam beside the fire. "Is the hall lacking in room for you," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue to the uncouth clodhopper, "that ye find no other place than by the fork-beam, unless ye wish to be domestic luminary?—only sooner will a blaze be to the house than brightness to the household." "What property soever may be mine, sooth ye will agree, no matter how big I am, that the household as a whole will be enlightened, while the hall will not be burnt.
>
> "That, however, is not my sole function; I have others as well. But neither in Erin nor in Alba nor in Europe nor in Africa nor in Asia, including Greece, Scythia, the Isles of Gades, the Pillars of Hercules, and Bregon's Tower (Brigantium), have I found the quest on which I have come, nor a man to do me fairplay regarding it. Since ye Ultonians have excelled all the folks of those lands in strength, prowess, valour; in rank, magnanimity, dignity; in truth, generosity and worth, get ye one among you to give me the boon I crave."

> "In sooth it is not just that the honour of a province be carried off," quoth Fergus mac Roich, "because of one man who fails in keeping his word of honour. Death, certainly, is not a whit nearer to him than to you." "Not that I shun it," quoth he. "Make thy quest known to us then," quoth Fergus mac Roich. "If but fairplay be vouchsafed me, I will tell it." "It is right also to give fairplay," quoth Sencha, son of Ailill, "for it beseemeth not a great clannish folk to break a mutual covenant over any unknown individual. To us too it seemeth likely, if at long last you find such a person, you will find here one worthy of you." "Conchobar I put aside," he quoth, "for sake of his sovranty, and Fergus mac Rōich also on account of his like privilege. These two excepted, come whosoever of you that may venture, that I may cut off his head to-night, he mine to-morrow night."
>
> "Sure then there is no warrior here," quoth Duach, "after these two." "By my troth there will be this moment," quoth Fat-Neck, son of Short Head, as he sprang on to the floor of the hall. The strength then of yon Fat-Neck was as the strength of a hundred warriors, each arm having the might of a hundred "centaurs." "Bend down, bachlach," quoth Fat- Neck, "that I may cut your head off to-night, you to cut off mine to-morrow night." "Were that my quest, I could have got it anywhere," quoth the bachlach. "Let us act according to our covenant," he quoth, "I to cut off your head to-night, you to avenge it to-morrow night." "By my people's god," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue, "death is thus for thee no pleasant prospect should the man killed to-night attack thee on the morrow. It is given to you alone if you have the power, being killed night after night (*lit*. to be killed every night), to avenge it next day." "Truly I will carry out what you all as a body agree upon by way of counsel, strange as it may seem to you," quoth the bachlach. He then pledged the other to keep his troth in this contention as to fulfilling his tryst on the morrow.[87]
>
> (Henderson, 1899: 117, 119, 121, 123)

The entrance of the *bachlach* is quite dramatic and draws parallels with the entrance of the Green Knight in *SGGK*, and the same could be said of the strong impression that the *bachlach* makes on his hosts due to his hideous and rough appearance and his enormous size. His challenge exempts Conchobar and Fergus from taking it, and this can also be taken as a parallel, for neither in *SGGK* or in *Caradoc* is Arthur the one intended to accept the challenge. Following the setting of the terms of the challenge, three Ulstermen, including Conall and Loégaire, behead the *bachlach*, but fail to meet up to the challenge the next day, and only Cú Chulainn appears for his own turn, with the *bachlach* feigning only one blow in this version:

> With that Fat-Neck took the axe from out of the bachlach's hand. Seven feet apart were its two angles. Then did the bachlach put his neck across the block. Fat-Neck dealt a blow across it with the axe till it stuck in the block underneath, cutting off the head till it lay by the base of the fork-beam, the house being filled with the blood. Straightway the bachlach rose, recovered himself, clasped his head, block and axe to his breast, thus made his exit from the hall with blood streaming from his neck. It filled the Red Branch on every

[87] See Appendix I, note 34.

side. Great was the folk's horror, wondering at the marvel that had appeared to them. “By my people's god,” quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue, “if the bachlach, having been killed to-night, come back tomorrow, he will not leave a man alive in Ultonia.” The following night, however, he returned, and Fat-Neck shirked him. Then began the bachlach to urge his pact with Fat-Neck. “Sooth it is not right for Fat-Neck not to fulfil his covenant with me.”

That night, however, Loigaire the Triumphant was present. “Who of the warriors that contest Ultonia's Champion's Portion will carry out a covenant to-night with me? Where is Loigaire the Triumphant?” quoth he. “Here,” said Loigaire. He pledged him too, yet Loigaire kept not his tryst. The bachlach returned on the morrow and similarly pledged Conall Cernach, who came not as he had sworn.

The fourth night the bachlach returned, and fierce and furious was he. All the ladies of Ultonia came that night to see the strange marvel that had come into the Red Branch. That night Cuchulainn was there also. Then the fellow began to upbraid them. “Ye men of Ultonia, your valour and your prowess are gone. Your warriors greatly covet the Champion's Portion, yet are unable to contest it. Where is yon poor mad wight that is hight Cuchulainn? Fain would I know if his word be better than the others’.” “No covenant do I desire with you,” quoth Cuchulainn. “Likely is that, you wretched fly; greatly thou dost fear to die.” Whereupon Cuchulainn sprang towards him and dealt him a blow with the axe, hurling his head to the top rafter of the Red Branch till the whole hall shook. Cuchulainn again caught up the head and gave it a blow with the axe and smashed it. Thereafter the bachlach rose up.

On the morrow the Ultonians were watching Cuchulainn to see whether he would shirk the bachlach as the other heroes had done. As Cuchulainn was awaiting the bachlach, they saw that great dejection seized him. It had been fitting had they sung his dirge. They felt sure his life would last only till the bachlach came. Then quoth Cuchulainn with shame to Conchobar: “Thou shall not go until my pledge to the bachlach is fulfilled; for death awaits me, and I would rather have death with honour.”

They were there as the day was closing when they saw the bachlach approaching. “Where is Cuchulainn?” he quoth. “Here am I,” he answered. “You're dull of speech to-night, unhappy one; greatly you fear to die. Yet, though great your fear, death you have not shirked.” Thereafter Cuchulainn went up to him and stretched his neck across the block, which was of such size that his neck reached but half-way. “Stretch out your neck, you wretch,” the bachlach quoth. “You keep me in torment,” quoth Cuchulainn. “Despatch me quickly; last night, by my troth, I tormented you not. Verily I swear if you torment me, I shall make myself as long as a crane above you.” “I cannot slay you,” quoth the bachlach, “what with the size of the block and the shortness of your neck and of your side” (sic!).

Then Cuchulainn stretched out his neck so that a warrior's full-grown foot would have fitted between any two of his ribs; his neck he distended till it reached the other side of the block. The bachlach raised his axe till it reached the roof-tree of the hall. The creaking of the old hide that was about the fellow and the crashing of the axe—both his arms being raised aloft with all his might—were as the loud noise of a wood tempest-tossed in a night of storm. Down it came then . . . on his neck, its blunt side below,—all the nobles of Ultonia gazing upon them.

“O Cuchulainn, arise! . . . Of the warriors of Ultonia and Erin, no matter their mettle, none is found to be compared with thee in valour, bravery and truthfulness. The sovranty of the heroes of Erin to thee from this hour forth and the Champion's Portion undisputed, and to thy lady the precedence alway of the ladies of Ultonia in the Mead Hall. And whosoever shall lay wager

> against thee from now, as my folks swear I swear, while on life he will be in [sore scathe].” Then the bachlach vanished. It was Curoi mac Dairi who in that guise had come to fulfil the promise he had given to Cuchulainn.[88]
> (Henderson, 1899: 123, 125, 127, 129)

Just like the Green Knight, it is revealed that the *bachlach* was another character in disguise (Cú Roí). In fact, besides the most obvious similarities, others are found by comparing the texts: the first addressing of Cú Roí to the court of Ulster when issuing the challenge is quite similar to the one of the Green Knight when he enters the court of Arthur in *SGGK* as well as the one of Eliavrés in *Caradoc*, but closer to the tone of defiance of *SGGK*. Cú Roí is bold in his entrance, and he proposes the challenge on the grounds that the Ulstermen enjoy tremendous fame in what concerns valour, strength and prowess, and as such he hopes to find in Emain Macha a worthy challenger capable of accepting what others have failed to do in several parts of the world. Such a speech is strikingly similar to the praise by the Green Knight of the Knights of the Round Table when he enters the court of Arthur in order to issue the challenge. Such a similarity in the words of the *bachlach* and the Green Knight is also visible in Cú Roí's angry words of contempt and in his taunt regarding the lack of valour and prowess that the Ulstermen reveal after every challenger before Cú Chulainn fails to keep the covenant, which echo the words of the Green Knight when the knights in Arthur's court fail to live up to their fame, since no one seems to accept his challenge (until Gawain finally does). The speech of the *bachlach* is not as eloquent, but it bears the same meaning and produces the same effect, even though there is a difference in the fact that the Green Knight taunts the fame of Arthur's court because no one accepts the challenge, and Cú Roí makes a similar provocation because the warriors who did accept the challenge did not keep their part in the bargain. In the *Livre de Caradoc*, Eliavrés also seems to invoke this same speech when he threatens the fame of Arthur's court due to the absence of a knight willing to accept the challenge, and in the mixed version his reaction is very similar to Cú Roí and to the Green Knight in his provoking taunt of the fame of Arthur's court.

Other aspects of the dialogue in the Champion's Covenant also bear similarities: when Cú Chulainn holds his part of the bargain and is getting ready to be beheaded by Cú Roí, the latter points out that Cú Chulainn is experiencing fear, as does the Green Knight in *SGGK* when Gawain seems to also express fear. Moreover, Cú Chulainn

[88] See Appendix I, note 35.

complains about Cú Roí taking too long to finally land his blow, arguing that he is tormenting him, a complaint similar to the one uttered by Gawain when the Green Knight merely rehearses his blow instead of striking at once. This discomfort is also mirrored in *Caradoc* when Carados calls Eliavrés a coward for not dealing his blow quickly and for stalling, although the similarity is closer in *SGGK* and *Fled Bricrenn*. The context is slightly different, however. In *SGGK*, the Green Knight first feigns his blow due to Gawain's flinching, and feigns the second one to test his resolve. It is in the context of the second feigning that Gawain complains, while in the Champion's Covenant of *Fled Bricrenn*, Cú Roí argues he cannot strike at once because Cú Chulainn needs to stretch his neck further in order for him to cut his head clean by the neck.

The stretching of the neck is a subtle detail but also a possible indication of a connection between these narratives, since it is also used in *La Mule Sans Frein* (and alluded to in *Perlesvaus* as well), where Gawain is asked to further stretch his neck so that the blow may be given, akin to the same request to Cú Chulainn. It is also told in the Lancelot story that both the knight he first beheaded and himself stretched their necks, as does the churl in *Hunbaut*, but these narratives do not offer the same dialogue concerning the request for further stretching. Since we are dealing with beheadings after all, the stretch of the neck might be purely a detail related to the nature of the act, but the use of the same kind of request during the dialogue in the episode of the beheading of the hero may betray the use of a common motif, used to further create the sensation that the decapitation of the protagonist is imminent.

Furthermore, the visual effect of Cú Roí disguised as a *bachlach* also draws comparisons. Although the most obvious detail in the Green Knight is his green colour, in other aspects his description also matches many of the characteristics which describe the *bachlach* as well as Úath in the previous beheading game in the Irish narrative. These same characteristics are also visible in the Moor in the *Mule* narrative and the churl in *Hunbaut*: a gigantic churlish figure carrying an axe. Furthermore, both Úath and the *bachlach* survive their beheading through supernatural means, taking hold of their heads and carrying them away, just as the Green Knight rides away with his head after it was cut off, and as Eliavrés and the Moor do.

Regarding the use of the beheading challenge motif in two instances in the same story, it is something which possibly strikes any reader as being odd and redundant, especially when both have the same purpose of passing judgment on who is worthy of the champion's portion, however, there are possible motives for this occurrence. The two similar episodes may be a result of the different scribes who were responsible for the authorship and/or compilation of the *Lebor na hUidre*, which were identified by R. I. Best in 1912 as scribe A, who first started to write the manuscript, scribe M, who was the main scribe and compiler and has been identified as being Máel Muire Célechair[89] with basis on his possible authorship of two *probationes pennae* (pen trials) found in the codex, and finally scribe H, who is considered to have added several interpolations and modified previous scribal writings and is in fact proposed by Ó Concheanainn to be the true hand of the pen trials (Ó Concheanainn, 1974: 277-288), although other scholars such as H. P. A. Oskamp have subsequently maintained it was Máel Muire after all (Oskamp, 1976: 177-182).

Most recently, Elizabeth Duncan has argued that the *Lebor na hUidre* had more than a single interpolator, and postulated the existence of six different interpolators, with *Fled Bricrenn* including text written by her H1 and H5 scribes (Duncan, 2015: 29-52). Slotkin has argued that the Úath episode results of an interpolation by scribe H (Slotkin, 1978: 71-73), a possibility which we may also consider regarding Duncan's H1 or H5 (or both) if we follow her conclusions, thus, every time we refer henceforth to scribe H, we are considering Duncan's H1 and H5 scribes as well. According to Slotkin, scribe H may have received the Máel Muire's text of *Fled Bricrenn* incomplete in what concerns the final section (and it remains as such in the *Lebor na hUidre* manuscript), but had the notion that the original tale included a beheading game: "It is not unreasonable to assume that H knew that a beheading test was an inherent part of the story. His instincts did not lead him to write a new ending but to insert at what seemed to him the likeliest place for another beheading test" (Slotkin, 1978: 72-73).

Ní Mhaonaigh, following Ó Concheanainn, has speculated that "it was at Clonmacnoise that H undertook his dramatic alterations, in whose library he would have had access to alternative texts" (2005: 268). If it was so, it could be in such library that H got his hand on another lost version of the beheading challenge and included it in this

[89] Máel Muire is reportedly a scholar who was based in the monastery of Clonmacnoise and who was killed in this same place in 1106 (Mhaonaigh, 2005: 268).

version of *Fled Bricrenn*, perhaps unaware that the final episode was also the beginning of yet another beheading challenge, and that would explain why the Úath episode is absent from all the other manuscripts containing *Fled Bricrenn*, and it would also explain Slotkin's noticing of the apparent stylish discrepancies of the episode in comparison with the overall style of *Fled Bricrenn*: "The allegorical nature of Úath, "Horror," and the unusual name of Budi mac Báin, "Yellow son of White," are unlike anything else in the saga and rather unusual features in early Irish saga as a whole. These names are closer to the spirit of some of the twelfth century Finn cycle stories." (Slotkin, 1978: 72). Borsje seems to agree with Ní Mhaonaigh in the opinion that H drew the Úath episode from some source, and there is indeed an allusion in the text of *Fled Bricrenn* to the use of some books as such: when Conall and Loegaire decline Úath's challenge on the grounds that they could not survive decapitation (unlike Úath), the text states that "although other books narrate that they agreed to the bargain..."[90] (Henderson, 1899: 99). In turn, Borsje adds that "...I hesitate at the suggestion that H made up this episode himself. As Slotkin has shown, H had great respect for the textual tradition. Since this esteem is difficult to reconcile with such creative writing, I suggest that he may have used a source in this instance..." (Borsje, 2005: 179).

The matter of this possible source used by scribe H, or any alternative tradition it may represent, is potentially important to the question on which beheading-game episode from *Fled Bricrenn* was connected to the transmission of the motif to Arthurian literature, or if both were. It must be underlined however, that from what the texts can reveal us, the *bachlach* and the Green Knight seem to be the most similar of the churlish figures in their respective descriptions. The Green Knight has the particular characteristic of being entirely guised in green and does have some knightly figures, but it is much closer to a churlish figure than the knightly appearance of Eliavrés, and especially to the *bachlach* in *Fled Bricrenn*. In *Fled Bricrenn* and *SGGK*, there is a great emphasis on the ominous, impressive and shocking description of the *bachlach* and the Green Knight, even though the description of the latter is much more detailed. The parallels in these two particular churlish figures are drawn even from small details such as the description of the fierceness of their eyes as well as their unusual colour, yellow in the *bachlach* and red in the Green Knight.

[90] See Appendix I, note 36.

1.3 The Problematic of the Sources

It thus seem apparent that there are a myriad of points which, besides the obvious similarity in the beheading challenge *per se*, are common to the several narratives and may betray a connection. These points in common are not consistent in all the narratives nevertheless, and are found in some and absent in others, with many differences also present. Having gone through the Arthurian and Irish narratives which include renditions of the beheading game, we may now review them with the help of table 1[91], and have a clearer notion of the differences and similarities in all of them. As we can see from the table, the stories have a basic element in common: the rules of the beheading game *per se*, one contestant to behead the head of the other in exchange for himself to be beheaded afterwards.

In most versions the challenger who proposes the beheading game is the first to be beheaded, although in the *Perlesvaus* story a choice is offered regarding who may be the one beheaded, and in the Champion's Covenant of *Fled Bricrenn* the proposal is inversed for the challenger to behead the acceptant first. Despite these differences in the proposal, both narratives end up following the same order of the others, in *Perlesvaus* Lancelot chooses to be the first to behead his opponent and in the Champion's Covenant the Ulstermen change Cú Roí's mind in order for him to be the first to be beheaded. Likewise, in most versions the challenger has supernatural powers and is able to survive his beheading and to pick up his head and return for his turn, the only exception is the young knight in Lancelot's story, who is mortal. The churl in *Hunbaut* does not survive, but he was on the verge of doing it so by picking up his head, and if he had not been stopped by Gawain he would have shown the same supernatural trait of the other challengers, since the text makes a reference to such enchantment and therefore redirects us to the common pattern from whence *Hunbaut* probably drew inspiration, offering a twist on the theme.

The churlish features and enormous size also seem to be a pattern in what concerns the supernatural challenger, albeit with some variations such as the green colour which covers the Green Knight or the Moorish aspect of the churl from *La Mule Sans Frein*. Many of them are described with a churlish and fearsome appearance as well as gigantic. In the original texts themselves, the word "churl" is not used, but rather

[91] See Appendix II: Table 1.

"bachlach" in the Irish version, and "villain" in the French ones. The use of the term to characterise them is justified however, not only because "churl" is one of the translations for "bachlach" and because the English word "villain" one of its synonyms, (with the etymology of the later being related to the French "vilain"), but also because one of the characterisations of a churl in the Middle Ages corresponds to the characterisation of both the *bachlach* as well as of the churlish challengers from French tradition:

> The courtier's opposite is the churl, bumpkin, low-class country dweller. The names given to him invariably become terms of insult: churl, *villein*, boor, peasant; a 'heathen' was originally someone who inhabits the barren, savage heathlands (the *pagus* in Latin where lives the *paganus*). These rustics are denigrated by the same token that glorifies the courtly chivalric role model. Churls' eating habits and personal hygiene are animal-like, unrestrained, revolting, demonstrating their lower position in the social and natural order. (Leerssen, 1996: 35)

There is some confusion however, in what regards the definition of a churl. Although it is also associated with a boorish, rustic, villainous and savage character, it is also defined as representing a particular social class in the Middle Ages, of a "freeman", a "peasant" or a "husband", who could even be a holder of land (Chadwick, 1905: 77), and in Ireland, Etchingham (1999: 397) has stated that a *bachlach* was an *aithech*, a peasant associated with an ecclesiastical institution to which it paid rent. As it may be clear from the descriptions in the beheading-game narratives however, clearly the figure of the churl to which they refer us to is the rough and savage one. It is hard to know why the beheading-game narratives are associated with such a type of figure, but a conceivable idea is that according to these characteristics which seem to have been ascribed to the figure of the churl, it represents the stereotype of a rough, wild and uncivilized man, being thus ideal to be the antagonist to the heroic Irish hero or the chivalric Arthurian knight, or as the portrayal of the savage opposite of the court to whom he issues his challenge. Moreover, as we may understand from Leerseen's citation, the churl is also associated with a heathen, thus being a favourable figure to be associated with magic and the supernatural. There are exceptions in some beheading-game narratives, however, where the challenger is not a churl nor has churlish characteristics, namely Eliavrés in *Caradoc* and the handsome knight in the Lancelot story, which are described as finely dressed knights, perhaps a way of adapting the motive to a chivalrous version more in tune with romance tradition. Nevertheless, the churlish features are the most common and therefore they seem to form a pattern. In

addition, the challenger carries an axe which is used for the beheading in most of the beheading-game narratives, but there is an exception once again in the figure of Eliavrés, who uses a sword, in accordance perhaps with his knightly appearance. Since it is the only exception, we may claim, as in the case of the churlish features, that the weapon of choice in most of the tales is the axe.

The outcome has similarities in every version as well, the main contestant who is the protagonist of the story always survives his turn to be beheaded, not by supernatural means as his opponent, but because he is spared and his turn to be beheaded is revealed to be a ruse in most stories. There are variations as to why the protagonist is spared however: in *SGGK* it was a test engineered by Morgan Le Fay and Gawain is spared because he keeps his word, his fate is tied with his choices in the exchange of winnings sequence prior to his turn in the beheading game. In both versions of the challenge in *Fled Bricrenn* it is also a test, but the purpose of it is to define who is worthy of the champion's portion. Regarding the French versions, in *Caradoc* Eliavrés seems to be testing his own son and spares him because of such parentage, claiming he never intended to really strike. In *La Mule Sans Frein*, Gawain is spared because it was a test and he kept his word, and the challenge is followed by other quests. The test of the loyalty and courage of the protagonist seems to be the reason for the challenge in all these versions, although the motive for such test seems to vary. The greatest variations are in *Hunbaut*, where there is never a second turn since the challenger does not survive the first one, and in the Lancelot story, where Lancelot is being tested in the sense of whether he returns for his turn, but the real reason is to disenchant the city from a curse. The brother of the first knight does not have the same intention of the challengers in the other versions, he does want to kill Lancelot and to behead him, it is no ruse. Lancelot survives however, due to the intervention of the two ladies, and the outcome ends up being the same, but it alters the pattern significantly.

Despite these differences in slight details of some of the narratives, in the context of the stories as well as in the final explanation of the motivations behind the issuing of the challenge, a basic pattern can be identified in the challenge *per se*: a giant churl with supernatural powers carrying an axe challenges the protagonist for a beheading game, survives his own beheading, and then in his turn to behead the protagonist fakes his intention to deliver the blow and then reveals it was a test. The sharing of the same motif can lead us to wonder if all the narratives follow a common

source, or even if one of the texts is itself the source of the others, as *Fled Bricrenn*, as the earlier one, could be assumed as being. Be that as it may, there are other elements which create a bigger divergence towards finding a common pattern, for they are common in several versions, but contrary to the details we have been mentioning, they are dispersed through some of the narratives but are lacking in others, not in only one, but in several, therefore, are they or are they not a part of a common source? These elements range from minor details such as the use of a whetstone to sharp the axe by the churlish figure before the turn of the protagonist to be beheaded, to major sequences which have a greater impact upon the stories, such as the addressing of the challenger towards a court to which the protagonist belongs.

In the *Champion's Covenant* of *Fled Bricrenn*, Cú Roí addresses the court of Conchobar in search of challengers for the beheading game and evokes the fame of the Ulstermen, and he later rebukes and taunts such fame when no challenger fulfils his part in the covenant. In the *Caradoc* tale, Eliavrés also addresses the court of King Arthur before issuing the challenge, and in the long version he also evokes the fame of Arthur, equally taunting it when no one accepts the challenge at first, a slightly different context from *Fled Bricrenn* but having the same effect. This is akin to what happens in *SGGK* as well, with added dramatic effect due to the superior writing of the Gawain-poet. Such a common beginning in these three tales could lead us to believe it is also an element of the common pattern of the beheading-game motif and the fact that it is absent from *Perlesvaus*, *La Mule Sans Frein* or *Hunbaut* could very well be explained by the use of the most basic elements in other contexts such as disenchantment of castles and lands or other quests, per option of the respective authors. However, the motif is also absent from the other beheading-game episode in *Fled Bricrenn*, since the Úath episode does not involve a court setting, and it might be possible that the latter represents an earlier version of the beheading game, since it is simpler and less developed than the *Champion's Covenant*, therefore being a possible prior version. This would not represent an issue if the *Champion's Covenant* could be considered as the source for the French and English narratives, making the Úath episode irrelevant for the matter, however, the Úath episode includes the three feigned blows, which are absent from the *Champion's Covenant* but are included in *SGGK* and perhaps in *Caradoc*, replaced in the later by the interruptions of the king and queen.

There can be confusion then concerning what is the original source or if both versions in *Fled Bricrenn* are the source, or if they both come from another common, perhaps oral, source which went through Britain and France. Notwithstanding the source from Irish tradition, another major confusion is concerned with the transmission of the motif, was it transmitted to France and then influenced the English tradition as did the Continental romance tradition in general, or did it went through two channels, one for England and other for the Continent? The *Livre de Caradoc* seems to be the most closely related narrative to the Irish narrative and to *SGGK*, but the later has a challenger in the form of the Green Knight which is closer to the description of Cú Roí as an enormous and ominous looking *bachlach* in *Fled Bricrenn*, even though it also has some knightly characteristics, while Eliavrés in *Caradoc* has any churlish features nearly removed. Furthermore, the Middle English narrative, despite the insertion of the Temptation episode, seems to be so close to the *Champion's Covenant* in terms of descriptions, dialogue and general atmosphere, it seems odd for it to have an intermediary in *Caradoc* when the latter has differences from *Fled Bricrenn* which are restored in *SGGK*. This is further complicated when other narratives such as *La Mule Sans Frein* or *Perlesvaus* include reminiscences of details in *Fled Bricrenn* such as the further stretching of the neck or the motif of the revolving castle, which are not in either *Caradoc* or *SGGK* and therefore complicate the matter of the source for the French tradition: was it *Caradoc*, another written lost source or even a rendition of *Fled Bricrenn* which could have been transmitted orally?

Several notable scholars have attempted to answer these questions before, and even though their work reveals some issues and leaves some questions left unanswered, as we shall see, it is valuable to review such work before we make our own approach, in order to have an overview of the scholarship regarding this issue up until the present moment. As we shall see in more detail, this is a matter which involves several other issues concerning both early Irish literature and the Arthurian literary tradition, therefore, for this initial chapter, we shall concentrate solely on past scholarship concerned with the beheading-game narratives themselves and the connection between the texts, akin to what we have been doing up to this point.

1.4 Previous Approaches to the Matter of the Beheading Game

1.4.1 Kittredge's Theory of the lost Anglo-Norman and French Sources

In his *A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight* (1916), George Lyman Kittredge presents a thorough analysis of the several parallels to the beheading game from *Sir Gawain*, and proceeds to attempt to trace the possible sources, from *Fled Bricrenn* to the French versions, a purpose, no doubt about it, analogous to the one of the present work. Kittredge claims that there was "somehow" a transmission of the Irish story to French tradition (Kittredge, 1916: 9). He also assumes that there was a lost French version of *SGGK* right from the start of his analysis, which Kittredge considers as being the source for the Middle English poem (Kittredge, 1916: 3-4). Kittredge does not substantiate his assumption with clear evidences, but his speculation notwithstanding, he does point out to the same relevant details in the comparison of the narratives we did, and delivers pertinent hypotheses. Some of these are quite logical and even obvious, as in his justification concerning the more polished *SGGK* in comparison with *Fled Bricrenn*: "The contrast between the rude savagery of the Irish saga and the refined chivalry of the English romance is notable; but it is a difference of manners only - precisely such a difference as we should expect in a romantic French or English adaptation of an ancient Irish epic tale" (Kittredge, 1916: 15).

The courtly nuances of romance are also used by Kittredge to explain the difference of Eliavrés' knightly figure and his use of a sword in contrast with the churlish-looking figure of the Irish version and his use of an axe (Kittredge, 1916: 34). Moreover, Kittredge also notices that there is a close similarity between *SGGK* and *Fled Bricrenn* which cannot simply be the product of chance: "The close agreement between the stories cannot be fortuitous. Nor can it be due to the common utilizing of a casual bit of vagrant tradition." (Kittredge, 1916: 15), nor from a snippet of oral tradition: "The Irish tale is carefully wrought out in detail with conscious art, and its correspondence with the English poem extends to certain minutiae which are not folk-lore, but literary elaboration" (Idem). He also states that the two beheading games in *Fled Bricrenn* are the result of combining two different narratives into one, with the result being the occurrence of two beheading challenges in the same text (Kittredge, 1916: 20). These are easy conclusions to make, but Kittredge also proposes other less obvious hypotheses. These more elaborate hypotheses can be doubtful however, one of these is concerned with his interpretation that the *Champion's Covenant* section does indeed contain the three feigned blows: Kittredge interprets the refusal of Cú Roí to strike Cú Chulainn before he stretches the neck for two times, together with his feigned blow

when Cú Chulainn finally stretches the neck supernaturally, as being equivalent to the three feigned blows from *SGGK* (Kittredge, 1916: 24-25), thus allowing Kittredge to consider the *Champion's Covenant* as the sole source of the Arthurian versions. His main theory to explain the transmission as well as the similarities of some versions to the Irish version and the differences with it which are nevertheless common between some of the Arthurian versions is that, perhaps with the exception of *Hunbaut*, all are independent from one another (Kittredge, 1916: 25-26), and owe their use of the beheading-game motif to the existence of two lost sources: an Anglo-Norman version (O) and a Continental French version (R).

In accordance to Kittredge, the Anglo-Norman lost version would be a "ruder" version closer to the Irish version, which itself drew directly from the Irish episode of the *Champion's Covenant*, and which retained the more grotesque details such as the neck stretching which is present in *La Mule Sans Frein* and is alluded to in the Lancelot story in *Perlesvaus*, making Kittredge believe that O is the most probable source for both these narratives (Kittredge, 1916: 48, 58-60, 66-67). The French lost source on the other hand, itself a derivative of the Anglo-Norman source, would be a French reworking of the Anglo-Norman source into a polished version more in accordance with the chivalrous characteristics of romance (Kittredge, 1916: 45-47), which would be the immediate source of the French *SGGK* (G), as well as the source of *Caradoc* (C), since both lack the neck-stretching and have very close similarities between them, with *Caradoc* going even further in polishing the story by replacing the churlish figure with a tall knight and the axe with a sword (Kittredge, 1916: 38, 67). The differences in *La Mule Sans Frein* on the other hand, such as the different context of a quest into a castle instead of the whole ordeal beginning with the visit of the challenger to the court, are explained with basis on the use by Paien de Maisières of the motif of the beheading game in order to enrich a narrative which was of another type common in romance: the disenchantment of an enchanted or wasted city through the overcoming of several trials by a knight, frequently releasing a lady from some enchantment who then offers her hand and lands or castle to the knight. In this context, Paien seems to have used the beheading game as one of the trials (Kittredge, 1916: 47-48), a theory which is rather plausible and it seems indeed to have been the case[92].

[92] Kittredge adds the possibility that Paien associated this type of story with the beheading game due to some knowledge of other tales where there is an enchanter capable of displacing his own head and which

A similar motive also seems to be behind the differences in the *Perlesvaus* story concerning the same motif of the enchanted wasteland in need of disenchantment through the actions of a knight, and Kittredge adds that the use of the two mortal knights instead of the immortal churl in the other versions could be an attempt at presenting a more realistic challenge, which also attempts to present a more knightly version by making the challenger a fair knight, even though it retains an allusion to the neck-stretching as well as the axe (Kittredge, 1916: 54-57). In what concerns *Hunbaut*, Kittredge declares the use of the beheading-game motif as too fragmented in this version to take conclusions and sees it as a mixture of part of the beheading challenge with other motifs, although he does mention the possibility of *Hunbaut* having either drawn from *La Mule* or O. However, he considers the narrative irrelevant to the matter of the sources (Kittredge, 1916: 63-66). From these assertions, Kittredge attempts to reconstruct the hypothetical lost Anglo-Norman and French sources, as we can see in table 2[93].

There are, however, major flaws in Kittredge's arguments. One of the most striking issues is concerned with the hypothesis of an Anglo-Norman beheading-game version, or at least one which is already set in an Arthurian context. The reason for this to constitute an issue is that Arthurian romances are very scarce in what Anglo-Norman romance is concerned, despite the fact that Arthurian tales, elements and motifs were clearly known throughout the Anglo-Norman world, as we may attest from the popularity of Geoffrey of Monmouth and from Wace. The scarcity of Arthurian extant romances in Anglo-Norman is thus perhaps an indication that while Arthurian themes might have been used for chronicles written in the Anglo-Norman language such as Wace's *Roman de Brut*, in what concerns the genre of romance these same themes do not seem to have been preferential for Anglo-Norman writers: "Conspicuously absent from Anglo-Norman romance – with the exception of the wayward *Fergus* – is Arthurian romance. Despite the widespread knowledge of Wace, Anglo-Norman authors avoid his most famous protagonist, preferring to build up the prestige of local dynastic heroes and legendary figures" (Field, 1999: 161).

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could have been a further lost source, giving as example of such tales a tale from the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, which is a collection of Indian folktales retold in the Sanskrit language preserved in texts from the eleventh century (Kittredge, 1916: 48-50), but this point in his reasoning becomes harder to take into account since notwithstanding a possible Indo-European matrix of common motifs, to imagine a hypothetical tale similar to the one in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* in the French tradition implies a heavy dose of speculation.

[93] See Appendix II: Table 2.

It cannot be claimed of course that the Anglo-Norman hypothesis is not possible solely with basis on this observation, scholars such as Field have underlined that insular narrative materials were influential in Anglo-Norman literature (Field, 1999: 154-159), and the beheading game could certainly be included in that same category of material if the transmission to an Anglo-Norman audience was made within an insular context, rather than having been transmitted from the Continental tradition. Inserted in an Arthurian setting however, as it is the case of Kittredge's hypothetical Anglo-Norman source, it would not have been a probable choice since the society portrayed in the Arthurian stories was not aligned with the political bias of the aristocratic circles outside of the royal courts, who were patrons to these romances: "The clear implication is that the baronial interests behind the Anglo-Norman romance were not concerned about promoting a legend identified with the validation of centralized monarchy" (Field, 1999: 161). In sum, even though we should not eliminate completely the possibility of an Anglo-Norman source, the rarity of Arthurian examples from Anglo-Norman romance does not seem to place it as the most conspicuous suspect, far from it.

In what concerns Kittredge's views concerning the common elements in the extant beheading-game tales, his theory that the three feigned blows are also present in the *Champion's Covenant* is markedly dependent upon Kittredge's own specific interpretation rather than being explicitly demonstrated by the text, however useful it would be for our purposes to consider this possibility (which would enable the *Champion's Covenant* to possibly be the sole source for the Arthurian traditions). There is only an explicit feigned blow in the *Champion's Covenant* while the Úath episode explicitly mentions three false strikes, and the three feigned blows are equally explicit in narratives such as *SGGK*. While in *Caradoc* the interruptions seem to be more obvious replacements for the three feigned strikes, it is not so clear if this is also the case with the refusals to strike in the *Champion's Covenant*, and we cannot follow such interpretation if it is not explicit, for several doubts would be raised out of it: Why would other writers or storytellers interpret that there were three attempts at a blow in the *Champion's Covenant* if they are so subtle, and why would those supposed blows be turned into three explicit feigned blows in versions such as *SGGK*? Moreover, would it not be quite exceptional for the Arthurian versions such as *SGGK* (and Caradoc if we see the interruptions as substitutes for the feigned blows) to draw the three feigned

blows from a very specific interpretation of the *Champion's Covenant* rather than from a version similar to the Úath episode which explicitly mentions those feigned blows?

Additionally, while the French narratives could indeed be independent from each other, Kittredge's arguments concerning this possibility have other flaws: when comparing *Caradoc* with the hypothetical French *SGGK*, which Kittredge also assumes that contains the same story as the Middle English one, he pinpoints differences such as the travel of Gawain to the Green Chapel in comparison with the return of Eliavrés to the court where he had first issued the challenge, for his own turn at beheading the protagonist, as well as slight changes in the phraseology used, and uses differences such as this to claim the impossibility of *Caradoc* being a possible source for *SGGK*. However, Kittredge also underlines that these were necessary changes to insert the Temptation theme in *SGGK* (Kittredge, 1916: 35-36). If it is so, then why would not *Caradoc* be a possible source to which changes were made due to the Temptation theme? Kittredge may be right about the independence of *SGGK* from *Caradoc*, since the closeness of the former to the Irish version is evident, but this is more visible in other details similar to the Irish version such as the use of the axe or the gigantic and terrible appearance of the Green Knight. Moreover, the reconstruction of the hypothetical French source is on close analysis basically the *Caradoc* tale minus the knightly aspects which replaced the churlish challenger and axe. Kittredge then asserts that *Caradoc* is closer to this source and that "the version in Gawain departs from R in important aspects. Most of these changes are incidental to the process of welding together the Challenge with the Temptation and were undoubtedly made by the French author. The English poet elaborated details, but there is no likelihood that he modified the plot of his immediate original" (Kittredge, 1916: 42). The issue with such statement is that the "elaborated" details put *SGGK* in a much greater similarity with *Fled Bricrenn*, especially in the characterisation of Cú Roí and the Green Knight in very close details such as their gaze or the impact created by their figure when they enter Conchobar's or Arthur's court.

The hypothesis of a common source does not provide an answer for the disparity of differences and similarities in *Caradoc* and *SGGK* in relation to *Fled Bricrenn*. The major source for flaws seems however to be found in Kittredge's framing of *Perlesvaus* in his theory. Although *Perlesvaus* makes an allusion to the stretching of the neck, it also has the detail of the whetstone from *SGGK* and the reproof of Lancelot when he

dodges the first blow, in the same manner that Gawain also flinches and hears similar words of reproof from the Green Knight. To solve this difficulty Kittredge suggests several hypotheses such as the invention of the whetstone and reproof details by the author of *Perslesvaus* himself, or the use by said author of the French *SGGK* as a source, or of both O and the French *SGGK* as sources (Kittredge, 1916: 58-60), although he does point to O as the most probable. The problem is that at this point Kittredge seems to fall in a net of his own build-up of speculations. In the *Perlesvaus* version of the challenge there is not an easy or plausible explanation to fit *Perlesvaus* in his theory of the Anglo-Norman and French lost sources, so he uses theories such as the invention of some common details shared by *Perlesvaus* and *SGGK* as being the result of a coincidence, since the author of *Perlesvaus* had invented such details because they fitted the context. If it was so, then the sharing of many of the motifs in the several narratives could be explained by the same reason, and this can hardly be the case.

Without any wish to be unfair to an early and valuable work on this subject, it may nonetheless be considered that "Many of Kittredge's pronouncements on how these respective [French] analogues might relate to the English poem [*SGGK*] were highly speculative..." (Dalrymple, 2006: 145), even though speculation is unavoidable when there are not more extant sources to provide the links in the transmission. Moreover, Kittredge acknowledges such transmission, but he only vaguely approaches the question on how it could have occurred. His theory is based on two hypothetical written sources, so we may assume he places more emphasis on written transmission, however, he uses examples from folk traditions in several instances, and even if he might have considered both, he never attempts to trace the channels through which the motifs were transmitted. In the case of *Fled Bricrenn*, he simply claims that somehow it was transmitted to France, without further discussion on the subject, and he also does not address the question on how the (itself also speculative) French *SGGK* was transmitted to England.

1.4.2 Benson's Theory of Caradoc as the source for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

In the 1960's Larry D. Benson also approached the matter of the sources in his article "The Source of the Beheading Episode in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'" (1961) as well as in his later work on the subject, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1965). Benson's analysis, however, returns to the opinion of earlier

scholars and claims that *Caradoc*, drawing from *Fled Bricrenn*, was indeed the source for *SGGK*. His approach reviews the claims and comparisons made by Kittredge, and presents an alternative, with the argument that at the time of Kittredge, all the versions of *Caradoc* were not yet available in critical editions and translations (he highlights Roach's 1949 edition), and therefore there was not a clear idea of all the elements and differences between the short, mixed and long redactions, adding to the discussion a much later prose redaction from 1530 (Benson, 1961: 2). This prose redaction is the most important argument in Benson's claims, for he states that the prose version includes details which represent a third version of *Caradoc*, and, together with the long version, the details in question make these versions much closer to *SGGK* than the short version, implying that they demonstrate that *Caradoc* might be or points toward a source for *SGGK*. One of these details is a closeness that Benson sees in the description of both Eliavrés in the long and prose versions and the Green Knight in *SGGK*:

> The long version adds some interesting details to this passage. First, it makes the entry more energetic: "Ses chevaux grant oirre l'aporte" (v. 7140), and the knight suffers from "grant challine," evidently from hard riding. However, the unseemly haste (which perhaps accounts for his sudden and unceremonious entry) is tempered with merriment, for now "il va chantant un sonet" (v. 7141). Not only is he jolly, he has now also become a threatening figure, for his sword is characterized as "l'espee / Dont puis ot la teste copee" (vv. 7145-46). Furthermore, his sword is now decorated with rich cloth "Anrangiee de soie fine" (v. 7147) - like the lace that is lapped about Bercilak's weapon. Thus, the challenger in the long version has something of the same combination of merriment, beauty, and menace that characterizes the Green Knight.
> (Benson, 1961: 3)

With the exception of the detail of the lace and the fact that both enter the court riding a horse, the remaining aspects seem to rely solely on Benson's interpretation and intention to see similarities in both challengers. Their description as a whole does not match at all, even though the Green Knight has some knightly features, his appearance creates more of an effect of awe but also apprehension and menace, but hardly "beauty" and "merriment". On the other hand it is hardly convincing to see the same level of menace in either Eliavrés or his sword, for these elements are rather described as the ones of a knightly figure similar to several others who appear in Arthurian stories, and are difficult to compare with a wild, gigantic and menacing Green Knight carrying an axe, with such a comparison still having a better example in the *bachlach* from *Fled Bricrenn*. However, Benson finds further details in the prose version, some of which had also been noted by Kittredge (1916: 37):

> The prose version adds yet more details. Its challenger wears a chaplet of flowers (that Kittredge, who knew the detail from Madden's notes, considered a counterpart of Bercilak's holly): "Et avoit dessus le bonnet ung cercle ou pendoit ung chapeau de fleurs" (fol. 79v). Jewels, specifically pearls, have been added to his rich trappings: "Fine soie batue en or et force perles semees par dessus." Most important he, like Bercilak, is now richly clothed in green: "Et estoit vestu de satin verd."
> (Benson, 1961: 3)

These details could indeed provide a link between *Caradoc* and *SGGK* which would allows us to entertain the idea that *Caradoc* might be the source for *SGGK*. To these Benson adds other details found in a similar phraseology or in what Benson interprets as being the overall message underlying both stories (Benson, 1961: 4-10). However there is a major argument against certain similarities when they are based on the prose version, since the latter is a more recent redaction from the sixteenth century and therefore it originated a long time after the short/mixed and long versions and most importantly after the Middle English *SGGK*. Notwithstanding its value as a recension of the *Caradoc* story, its date of origin could easily explain the green clothing and the chaplet of flowers as a way of endowing Eliavrés with the same green features and wild connotations which seems to personify wild nature in *SGGK*.

All the other parallels with *SGGK* which Benson underlines could equally represent an attempt of the author of the prose version to approximate the *Caradoc* tale to the Middle English poem, and not the other way around. *SGGK* could be known to this same author, either from a written version or through an oral version. Such a possibility gains even more strength when neither the older short/mixed nor the long versions of *Caradoc* include the green clothing or the chaplet of flowers. It could be argued that since there is only a surviving manuscript containing *SGGK*, this could indicate that there is not an evidence of the text having proliferated, thus making it unlikely that the author of the prose *Caradoc* could have had access to a written exemplar, however, the English rhyming romance *The Greene Knight*[94] (c. 1500), which

[94] *The Greene Knight* is found in the Percy Folio MS, and follows basically the same plot of SGGK. There are however some noticeable and important differences: the alter-ego of the Green Knight is not Bercilak, but Sir Bredbeddle, a knight from the West Country, whose wife has fallen in love with Gawain even though she never met him; Sir Bredbeddle is turned into the Green Knight not by Morgan Le Fay but by his mother-in-law, who is a witch and teaches him the enchantment to survive decapitation; the Green Knight is all dressed in green and his horse is green as well, but the knight is not himself green-skinned, moreover his appearance in Arthur's court lacks the same sense of awe and of causing stir amongst Arthur's retinue of SGGK, with the supernatural, ominous, churlish and otherwordly characteristics of the Green Knight being almost absent, even though he also magically survives decapitation and picks up his head, which talks even when separated from the body, just as in SGGK; the

follows the same tale from *SGGK*, albeit in an abridged version, demonstrates that the tale was indeed known beyond the single recension of the Middle English poem and could be a source of influence for other authors. Benson tries to go around this issue by claiming that the Gawain-poet used a lost manuscript of *Caradoc* which included the added details which now only survive in the prose version (Benson, 1961: 10-11), with basis on the existence of a Middle Scots alliterative romance written in the first half of the fifteenth century, which also shows influence from the First Continuation: *Golagros and Gawane*[95], which would have been based on that same lost manuscript and therefore according to Benson it would prove its existence and use by the Gawain-poet (Benson, 1961: 11).

As Benson himself mentions, lost manuscripts are usual suspects in matters of this kind, but the problem is how much we may rely on their existence, and Benson seems to take the use of a lost manuscript of the First Continuation, with the added details from *SGGK* in the *Caradoc* section, as being altogether "probable" in order to reinforce his theory of *Caradoc* as the source for *SGGK*. Even with evidence of the First Continuation as having been a source of influence in Arthurian Insular tradition through a lost manuscript, with examples such as *Golagros and Gawane* demonstrating it, why would *SGGK* be based on it other than any other possible source? Especially since without knowledge of the text of this version of the First Continuation, there is no way of knowing if it did indeed contain the similar elements to *SGGK* such as the green clothes or the chaplet with flowers. It could indeed be the case, or *SGGK* could have

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conventional motif of the exchange of words with the porter of the castle is inserted in the story, as is the likewise conventional initial irritable response by Sir Kay after the issuing of the challenge; after the Green Knight issues the beheading-game challenge and it is accepted by Gawain, he first dines in the company of Arthur's retinue before his beheading by Gawain and subsequent survival; the episode of the exchange of winnings and temptation by the wife of Bredbeddle occurs in a single day, the wife visits Gawain in his bedchamber under the direction of her mother and kisses him three times in that same instance, accordingly, Sir Bredbeddle also offers Gawain the three hunted prizes (deer, boars and foxes) in that same day; when Gawain refuses the wife's advances, she gives him a white lace with protective properties, a slight different description of the girdle from SGGK; although it had been an axe that was used in the first part of the beheading game, when Gawain goes to the Green Chapel, the Green Knight is armed with a falchion sword rather than with an axe and the second part of the challenge with the slight cut in Gawain's neck is made with that weapon; there are not three feigned moves, only a single one; the purpose of the entire deception was a plan by the wife's mother to bring Gawain closer to her daughter; at the end of the story, Bredbeddle returns with Gawain to Arthur's court and becomes a knight of the round table. An edition of the text can be found in Hahn's *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (1995).

[95] *Golagros and Gawane* is an Arthurian alliterative romance from Scotland with 1362 lines in 105 stanzas, which is based in two episodes from the First Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, minus several details and with many modifications (O'Loughlin, 1959: 527). An edition is available in Hahn's *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (1995) where it is named *The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain.*

picked from both such a version of *Caradoc* and another source which had elements from the Irish narrative, specifically the *Champion's Covenant*. In fact, the Irish elements are the cause for some confusion in Benson's theory. The elements shared by *SGGK* and *Caradoc*, even with the added elements in the prose version, still do not explain the closeness of the Green Knight's appearance and description with the *bachlach* in *Fled Bricrenn*. Benson tackles this issue by claiming they could be the result of other sources as well as of the creativity of the poet:

> The *dois*, later *bloc*, which appears only in the later versions, is apparently the authors' own invention rather than a Celtic feature. Likewise, Bercilak's churlish appearance, his fierce eyes, his axe, and the fact that he carries his head out of the court may be Irish features taken from some other version known to the poet, just as Gawain's flinching may have been suggested by some version such as that in *Perlesvaus*. But the lace on the axe and the courtiers' kicking at the head betray the influence of *Caradoc*. Probably the Irish features of *Sir Gawain*, like the block of the prose version, are the poet's own invention, aided by literary conventions in general rather than by any one specific source. That is obviously the explanation for the Green Knight's fierce red eyes, a common feature of angry churls in medieval poetry. As the differing versions of *Caradoc* show, the Irish features were easily omitted; perhaps those in *Sir Gawain* were as easily added.
> (Benson, 1961: 11)

So, Benson's whole theory is based in claiming *Caradoc* as the source for *SGGK*, but then he comments that features such as the ones closest to *Fled Bricrenn* are the result of other sources, and even features which only appear in Arthurian stories such as the flinching of Gawain are from other sources such as *Perlesvaus*. He then mentions that other elements are definitely an influence from *Caradoc*. This is confusing, if Benson builds up a theory based on *Caradoc* being the source for *SGGK* but then claims *SGGK* has other sources as well, including other Arthurian stories, is he not just claiming that *SGGK* has several sources which include *Caradoc* and others as well? If it is so, it is just business as usual then! *SGGK* has elements which are present in some versions of the beheading game and not in others, we already knew that. Based on that, why is *Caradoc* any different a candidate for a possible source than any other, if it has elements which without a doubt are in *SGGK*, but other narratives have other elements also present in it? Benson seems not to take account, for instance, of the association of the beheading game with Gawain not only in *SGGK*, but also in two of the French examples. Would not three beheading-game narratives with Gawain lead at least to the consideration that there could be another version of the beheading game with Gawain from whence they were drawn rather than from Caradoc?

Moreover, besides the acknowledgment of other sources, Benson seems to mix another justification regarding the Irish elements in *SGGK* which are absent from *Caradoc*, claiming that these elements are the poet's "own invention" or that he is just following "literary conventions", and gives as an example the fierce red eyes of the Green Knight, which for Benson are "obviously" a demonstration of the use of such conventions and not an influence from the *Champion's Covenant*. To support such idea he uses the example of the fierce red eyes being "a common feature of angry churls in medieval poetry" without further examples except for a footnote where he redirects us to W. C. Curry's *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty* (1916) and says Curry provides several examples, however, when consulting this work in what regards red eyes this is what Curry has to say:

> *Red.* Red eyes are a sign of wrath or tears, or they are pictured in descriptions of the strange and wonderful. Henry II is presented with *oculis glaucis, ad iram torvis et rubore suffusis* (Gir. Cam. v. 303; Conq. Ire; 88), and to make the Green Knight appear more terrible and wonderful, we are told that "runischly his rede ygen he reled aboute," Gaw. & Gr. Kn. 304.
> We may compare Chaucer, C. T., A. 2901,
> (Curry, 1916: 59-60)

Curry does indeed provide examples of red eyes in medieval literature, but the examples he provide such as the one describing Henry II are not from "angry churls" with maybe an exception to the Green Knight himself, also, Chaucer's reference regarding the verse "with slakke pas, and eyen rede and wete" from *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1996: 97) is related to the effort put up by the Greeks (characterised as noble and not churlish) which causes their eyes to become red and wet. Benson's reference to the common "angry churls" with red eyes is therefore unsupported, but even if we accept that such characteristic could be common in describing churls in medieval romance, would it not be too much of a coincidence for a text which contains many elements from another source which included a reference to fierce eyes (yellow in the case of Cú Roí) to also have a similar reference towards a similar character and for that reference not to be derived from it but rather from a "common characterisation"? Such an argument sounds as if Benson wants to force *Caradoc* to be considered the source on the mind of the reader, dismissing elements in common with other narratives such as *Fled Bricrenn* as being related either to the poet's invention and use of common motifs or the resort to other sources, but by doing this he is undermining his own theory. He also says that the Irish features were easily omitted from *Caradoc*, but could easily

be added again in *SGGK*, what does this mean? That the Irish features were known all along by both the *Caradoc* authors and the Gawain-poet? But if it is so, then another source for them had to exist, or did the Gawain-poet guessed their existence since they were omitted from *Caradoc*? Benson says that the short version of *Caradoc* probably drew from the same Anglo-Norman source which Kittredge had theorized, and that would explain the omission from *Caradoc*, but we are at a loss in what concerns *SGGK*.

In all fairness, and despite these flaws in Benson's arguments, he also raises strong possibilities such as the improbable existence of Kittredge's French Green Knight (Benson, 1961: 12), and he does point out relevant similarities in *Caradoc* and *SGGK* which must not be dismissed, especially in what concerns the similarity of phraseology. We should not, of course, underestimate the capacity of oral tradition to allow the transmission of dialogue or phrases unchanged when passing along stories, but the closeness of the phraseology used also leads us invariably to contemplate written tradition as a most strong contender for being the source of *SGGK,* through some textual source the Gawain-poet could have had access to. In many aspects, *Caradoc* could be such a source, but in other aspects, specifically the similarity with Irish elements in the description of the Green Knight as well as in his own exclusive characteristics such as the green colour and the bundle of holly, Benson's arguments are not convincing. In fact, following Benson's work, other scholars such as Norman Davis underlined that the differences between *Caradoc* and *SGGK* were too many for the former to be the source (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: xvi). Thus, we maintain the same doubts, with more added, could *Caradoc* be one of the sources together with other sources, perhaps lost ones, or did *SGGK* have other source closer to the Irish one but which also had some elements which were used in other Arthurian stories, similar in plot perhaps to the Anglo-Norman source Kittredge hypothesized?

1.4.3 Jacobs' Reassessment of the Matter of the Sources

In the turn of the millennium, Nicolas Jacobs delivered a small but valuable article in *Fled Bricrenn: Reassessments* (2000), which addresses once again the matter of the sources of *SGGK*. Jacobs' article presents a more contemporary approach to the matter, with a critical look upon the work of his forerunners, and introduces other possibilities. Jacobs quickly dismisses the claim that *SGGK* is based on a French version of the same story, as Benson had done before: "Though virtually no one now

believes that the poem is a translation from French [...] it remains true that, among the French analogues, at least one is close enough in detail to be considered as a probable source. That is a passage from the so-called *Livre de Caradoc*" (Jacobs, 2000: 41). Nevertheless, as we may notice from this quote, the *Caradoc* hypothesis, despite not being entirely convincing as we noted previously when analyzing Benson's defence of it, seems to hold its place as a strong possibility for Jacobs: "the longest of the surviving redactions, and especially (perhaps) the lost version as represented by the late prose text, show such striking verbal similarities to the English work [...] that it is inconceivable that it should not be used by the *Gawain*-poet" (Jacobs, 2000: 41). Be that as it may, this stance is contradicted by Jacobs later when he also mentions verbal similarities between *SGGK* and *Fled Bricrenn*:

> In both texts the challenger in the hall appeals to the high reputation of the court as a prelude to issuing his challenge. The context and function of these two speeches are exactly the same, and there are some parallels of wording, but it is not unnatural that such praise should introduce a challenge, in proleptic contrast with the sluggishness of the eventual response, and too much weight should perhaps not be laid on the similarities.
> (Jacobs, 2000: 49)

Such a contradiction seems to reveal double standards, and it seems to betray some favour by Jacobs to the *Caradoc* hypothesis, furthermore it can be argued against by his own previous argument that it would be "inconceivable" that "striking verbal similarities" would not reveal any influence on the Gawain-poet, with the difference that in this instance the similarities are found in *Fled Bricrenn*. Adding to that argument, even if the praise of the court before issuing a challenge could be a common motif, it seems hard to regard as a coincidence that this same motif is coupled with the beheading-game motif in three instances (*Fled Bricrenn*, *Caradoc* and *SGGK*). Nevertheless, Jacobs does concede that there are "loose ends" regarding the possibility of *Caradoc* as a source for *SGGK* (Jacobs, 2000: 41), while at the same time, he proceeds to dismiss rebuttals of such a possibility with basis on the differences (from the likes of scholars such as Norman Davis) on the grounds that "if no deviation from a source can ever be allowed, then virtually nothing can ever be identified as a source for anything else, which is plainly absurd" (Jacobs, 2000: 43). Such an argument has a ring of truth to it, however, the same could be said of other possible sources such as *Fled Bricrenn* itself.

As has been noted before, *SGGK* has details which approximate it both to *Fled Bricrenn* as well as to *Caradoc*, but some of those details are not shared between *Fled Bricrenn* and *Caradoc*, which is the main obstacle to understanding which one may be the source. Jacobs seems to acknowledge this when he says that specific "details in *Carados*, for example that the weapon is a sword, not an axe, suggest that it is not the only source for the episode" (Jacobs, 2000: 43-44). Despite such acknowledgment however, Jacobs also takes the *Caradoc* hypothesis seriously, underlining obvious similar details such as the year's respite which is a feature only in *Caradoc* and *Perlesvaus* as well as in *SGGK* in order to strengthen the theory of a French source to *SGGK* (Jacobs, 2000: 46), but also calling the attention to subtler details in *Caradoc* and *SGGK* which are indeed relevant and do reinforce the *Caradoc* hypothesis:

> In putting himself forward to accept the Green Knight's challenge in Arthur's place, Gawain makes great play of his own inadequacies, both mental and physical. The object is, by suggesting that his own life is expendable, to spare the king the embarrassing implication that Gawain is really better equipped to undertake the adventure, and this is peculiar to the English poem, but the passage is a clear echo of that in *Carados* in which the hero, asked by his adversary whether he is the best of Arthur's knights, replies that on the contrary he is the most foolish (or foolhardy). Secondly, in both romances, when the adversary is slow to strike the return blow, the hero urges him to strike on and suggests that it is cowardice that prevents his doing so. This looks like an elaboration of the motif represented by the parallel exchange in *Fled Bricrenn*, in which Cú Chulainn complains that his adversary is tormenting him by his delay, but in the Irish text there is no imputation of cowardice."
> (Jacobs, 2000: 44)

These similarities are worth noting of course, and do help the theory that *Caradoc* could be the beheading-game source for the Gawain-poet, however, throughout his entire article, Jacobs also struggles with the fact that in other details such as in the churlish description, *SGGK* is closer to *Fled Bricrenn*. Jacobs attempts to get around this issue by claiming that the churlish features which are combined with knightly ones in the Green Knight could be a result of influence of other French narratives such as *La Mule Sans Frein* and *Hunbaut*, where the churlish features were preserved, rather than from Irish influence (Jacobs, 2000: 45), nonetheless, he is still confronted with the fact that:

> ...the extraordinary detail of the Green Knight's hair and beard, which spread out all round his head and extend almost to the level of his elbows, for all the world like an ivy-tod to go with his holly-bough, is more reminiscent of the

> *dosbile* or bushy tree to which the head of the *bachlach* in *Fled Bricrenn* is compared than of anything in the French analogues...
> (Jacobs, 2000: 45-46)

Although Jacobs does not mention it, to this similarity could be added the detail of the fiery eyes and their colour in the description of both the *bachlach* and the Green Knight as well as the whole eerie and intimidating atmosphere with which both seem to endow their respective appearances in the narratives, which is somewhat lacking in the French narratives featuring a churlish figure and is even less present in the knightly appearance of Eliavrés in *Caradoc*. While Jacobs initially mentions *Caradoc* as the most possible source, as he goes forward in his analysis the other aspects of *SGGK* which are closer to *Fled Bricrenn* but absent from *Caradoc* begin to pile up. Besides the aspects already mentioned which Jacobs acknowledges, he also mentions the detail of the three feigned swings, which are present only in the Úath episode in *Fled Bricrenn* and in *SGGK*, although the latter has the slight cut added due to the conjunction of the beheading-game motif with the temptation theme (Jacobs, 2000: 50-51). Even if the interruptions by the king and the queen in *Caradoc* were meant as a substitution for the feigned blows (and we do not know if this was the case), if *Caradoc* was the source of the Gawain-poet, he would not know how to revert to the detail of the feigned swings if he did not know the Irish source or some other source resembling it. Additionally, Jacobs also draws an interesting parallel between the attitudes of the Green Knight and both Úath and Cú Roí after their respective deceptions are revealed at the end of the beheading challenges. By comparing the outcomes in the Irish, French and English versions of the beheading game and the reaction of the antagonists, Jacobs states that "none is so close to the congratulations offered to the hero and the Green Knight's evident pleasure in his courage as the words addressed to Cú Chulainn by his opponent at the end of both episodes" (Jacobs, 2000: 51).

As is obvious, all these similarities that point to *Fled Bricrenn* make the hypothesis of *SGGK* having been influenced by a French source such as *Caradoc* less clear, although the parallels with the latter cannot be overlooked as well. Jacobs does suggest possibilities that would explain the similarities with the Irish tale without rendering the hypothesis of a French source invalid. With basis on the allusion to a choice offered to Gawain regarding who takes the first turn in *Hunbaut* (even though the choice is not made clear in such text) and the first proposal given by Cú Roí in *Fled Bricrenn* for him to be the first to behead the other challenger, Jacobs argues that "at

least some elements which appear significantly close to the Irish versions may nevertheless have survived as floating elements in the French tradition and may have come to the English poet from there rather than more directly from Ireland" (Jacobs, 2000: 47). This is certainly a possibility worth considering, and one that we shall later return to in the present dissertation, however, it can go both ways, since floating elements from Irish tradition could have gone the way of England either from France or more directly from a Welsh intermediary from whence these motifs might have been transmitted to France in the first place, an intermediary that Jacobs himself also mentions:

> ...it would not be surprising, given the Irish presence in much of South Wales in the first half of the first millennium, if a certain amount of Irish material became assimilated to the local tradition and remained in circulation long enough to become part of the currency of the cultural exchange postulated by Constance Bullock-Davies and others in the south-east.
> (Jacobs, 2000: 41).

In fact, Jacobs never does quite manage to demonstrate that either the possibility of a French source or a more direct source for the Irish elements is more probable than the other, and given the discrepancy of elements shown in *SGGK* that point to either one or another, this is perfectly understandable. Although he does attempt to provide possibilities, worth reflecting about, to consider the French hypothesis, he is constantly faced with similarities in *SGGK* which are exclusively found in the Irish version. In fact, in some instances it is confusing to understand Jacobs' stance, even though he seems to favour the *Caradoc* hypothesis in a first instance, he also seems to take into much consideration the matter of Irish sources. This is especially ascertainable when he proposes not only parallels to *Fled Bricrenn* in *SGGK*, but also suggests that elements from other Irish tales such as *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*[96] might have influenced the

[96] Translated as "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel", *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* is one of the earliest Old Irish narratives, and might be as old as the eight century. The narrative has survived in several manuscripts from which three different recensions can be recognized. Its classification is ambiguous because it contains elements from the Ulster cycle such as the presence of Conall Cernach and references to other characters from said cycle, but could also be classified as belonging to the Cycle of Kings since it is concerned with the life of Conaire Mór, a legendary High King of Ireland. One of the most notable aspects of the narrative is the theme of the break of a king's *geisi*, related to the concept of Kingship, in which specific taboos assigned to a king must not be broken. The title of the tale is related to the dramatic finale, where Conaire Mór, after breaking many of his *geisi*, is placed under siege inside Da Derga's Hostel by Conaire's enemies, together with his retinue, which includes his champion Mac Cécht and the Ulster hero Conall Cernach. During the siege the hostel is put to the fire for three times, but for three times Conaire and his companions manage to prevent the hostel from burning by putting out the fire. Eventually their opponents breach the hostel and Conaire manages to kill six hundred before he gets armed with his weapons, and six hundred more after he is armed, however, he gets affected by a magical

Middle English text as well. Jacobs supports this claim by comparing three red warriors which are mentioned in two instances in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, and which besides being guised entirely in red, have their weapons, horse, skin and even their teeth also coloured in red (Knott, 1936: 9, 40; Gantz, 1981: 69-70, 99-100), in a similar fashion to the Green Knight's description (Jacobs, 2000: 52-53). The change in the colour to green in the Green Knight is justified by Jacobs as being a means to symbolise the menacing power of nature through the wild character of the Green Knight in contrast with the values of civilization symbolized by Arthur's knights and courtly culture (Jacobs, 2000: 53-54). Notwithstanding the similarity in the descriptions of the three red warriors and of the Green Knight, Jacobs' suggestion is of course debatable, since the differences in context and in the characters themselves by far outnumber this single similarity. The three red warriors are cursed by the *síd*, and although this evokes the supernatural or the otherworldly as does the Green Knight, the latter is a supernatural being capable of surviving decapitation who has different purposes and is a challenger to Arthur's court, having nothing else in common with the three red warriors. It seems therefore that there are not enough elements in common to establish a possible relation, and it seems rather rash to assume the existence of Irish influence only with basis on the similarity in their appearance. Be that as it may, the acknowledgment of possible parallels from Irish tradition which are not even found exclusively in *Fled Bricrenn* leads Jacobs to eventually concede that:

> ...if any one motif, as seems to be the case, proves to be of Irish provenance in this sense, that demonstrates the existence of some stage of a more direct cultural pathway between Ireland and North-Western England, and so reinforces the possibility that the French-derived elements of the beheading game in *Sir Gawain* have been conflated with Irish material in less altered form.
> (Jacobs, 2000: 54)

Such a hypothesis is a relevant one, and is an alternative to the single channel of transmission from the Continent, since it suggests two parallel channels of transmission. This theory postulates that one of these channels would be concerned with a more direct

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thirst which he cannot overcome, because all the water was used to put out the fires. Mac Cécht then goes away from the hostel in search of water, but none of the rivers of Ireland provide him with it. Eventually Mac Cécht manages to get some water, but when he returns Conaire has been defeated and Mac Cécht watches as two warriors decapitate his king, nevertheless, he gives the water to the severed head of Conaire, who then recites a poem. After the king's death the battle still rages on, and Mac Cécht is defeated and killed, although Conall escapes. The second and most complete recension has been edited by Eleanor Knott (1936), with a popular translation being available in Gantz (1981). A very important and illuminating study of the tale can be found in O'Connor (2013).

transmission of Irish motifs to England, besides the motifs transmitted from France. Jacobs even suggests some contexts which would be liable to facilitate the transmission of stories: “The importance of Chester as a port of embarkation for Ireland in the later Middle Ages is such that direct contacts cannot be entirely ruled out, though it is uncertain how permeable the linguistic barrier would have been in the fourteenth century” (Jacobs, 2000: 54), and even the possibility of an intermediary between Irish and English tradition: “It is perhaps simpler, given the evidence for intense Scandinavian settlement in the Wirral and on the coast of Lancashire as well as in Ireland from the tenth century onwards, to assume that the material passed to England through the intermediary of Hiberno-Norse tradition” (Jacobs, 2000: 54-55). Unfortunately, Jacobs merely alludes to these possibilities and does not further delve into them, perhaps due to the limits imposed by the small size of the article. At the end of Jacobs’ analysis, in effect we are not entirely in a different standing concerning the matter of the source for *SGGK*. *Caradoc* is a good possibility, but there are undeniable parallels with elements exclusive to *Fled Bricrenn*, and Jacobs’ suggestions to get around this issue are not quite convincing, as he himself admits, therefore we maintain the same doubts.

All in all, Jacobs arguments are somehow inconsistent and inconclusive, but many of his suggestions may indeed point to the right direction towards understanding the matter of the sources in our relevant texts: the channels of transmission. The answers may indeed lie, or there might be clearer hypotheses, in the study of the channels of transmission for the motif from Ireland to France, England or both.

CHAPTER 2: WALES AS THE FIRST CHANNEL OF IRISH TRANSMISSION

2.1 The Possibility of Direct Transmission

Since *Fled Bricrenn* is an Irish narrative, and the Arthurian renditions of the beheading game are French and English, a possible hypothesis one could consider regarding the channels of transmission is the direct transmission from Ireland to the Continent and to England. Ireland must have been linked with England and the Continent not least because of trade. Moreover, the erudition which characterised the Irish monastic system between the sixth and ninth centuries was highly regarded in medieval Europe:

> Cosmopolitan and up to date as it was for the period, early medieval Irish scholarship enjoyed a high international reputation that goes a long way towards explaining the demand for recipients of an Irish monastic education in Carolingian Europe during the eighth and ninth centuries and beyond [...]. Indeed, at various times and in various concentrations Irish connections with Britain, France, the Low Countries, Southern Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Northern Italy and Spain can be established between the late sixth and late ninth centuries of our era...
> (McCone, 1990: 12)

This context could signify that there was quite an amount of Irish visiting scholars scattered around Europe in this period, and that this could enable the transmission of elements and motifs from Irish narratives. There are indeed details from some narratives found in Arthurian and Continental literature which may suggest Irish origins in the opinion of some scholars, and for which Irish direct transmission may indeed be suggested as an explanation. John Carey, namely, has identified some instances where he has considered the possibility for direct transmission. One such instance is related with the supposed grave of Arthur, found in Glastonbury by monks in 1191. Carey argues that the narratives about the discovery of such tomb are based upon an Irish story concerned with the finding of the body of a fairy warrior, buried at the monastery of Clonmacnoise (Carey, 1999: 1-13). Another example given by Carey is the presence of a dog named *Petit Creu* in the French *Folie Tristan*[97], whose name is argued by Carey to represent, respectively, a half-translated half-borrowed name directly from Irish, whose origin lies in elements from stories related with Finn mac Cumail (Carey, 2007: 116-117). Finally, another possibility presented by Carey is related to *Yonec*, one of the lais[98] of Marie de France[99]. According to Carey, *Yonec*

[97] The *Folie Tristan* is an Anglo-Norman poem written in 998 octosyllabic lines which retells a tale from the Tristan cycle of narratives. It is preserved in Oxford MS Douce d 6.

[98] The Breton lais or lays were a form of medieval French, Anglo-Norman and English short-rhymed tales concerning common themes from medieval romance such as love and chivalry, as well as supernatural motifs reminiscent of Brythonic and Irish narrative traditions and folklore. It is thought that the lais were originally more lyrical in style and were sung by Breton minstrels or other kind of performers, although they later became a written genre as well through the work of writers such as Marie de France.

[99] Marie de France was a medieval poetess from the twelfth century, with her work possibly having been written between 1160 and 1215, and whose name is given by Marie herself in the *Lai de Guigemar* (France, 1925: 5; France, 1954: 3). Likewise, according to her own written words in the epilogue to her translation of Aesop's fables, she was born in France, but she seems to have lived in England, and was responsible for a collection of twelve written Breton lais, along with the aforementioned translation of Aesop's fables into Anglo-Norman. Not much is known from Marie de France since both her name and geographical context are given in her own work, however, she most probably lived and wrote her work in some court, although there is no information on which one. The dating of her work makes her contemporary with the Angevin court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and her lais were most probably known in this court and a part of the literary and cultural exchange instigated by it, leading to speculation on whether she was a part of such court herself.

contains many parallels with an Irish narrative named *Tochmarc Becfhola*, and may therefore be a demonstration of Irish influence (Carey, 2015: 73-85).

Nonetheless, the truth is that although there are a few details which could indicate a possible direct influence, as seen by Carey's suggestions, the evidences regarding the hypothesis of direct transmission are scarce, and lack further arguments. When the similarity in some elements found in both Irish and Arthurian narratives is so explicit, as in the case of the beheading game, a link in the transmission supported by more pieces of evidence of said transmission seems necessary. This is not to say that direct transmission did not occur as well, only that taking into account that we only have suggestions regarding it, rather than strong evidences, we may consider the possibility that it might not have been the most influential channel of transmission, and that a possible intermediary might be worth looking for. On this matter, alternatively to the idea of a direct transmission, we do have literary evidences, and historical and cultural circumstances, which may point towards Wales as such an intermediary for the transmission of Irish motifs, and which provide quite a stronger case for when and how the transmission may have occurred. Even some of the examples given by Carey in connection with the possibility of direct transmission may instead reveal a connection with a Welsh intermediary, as he himself underlines: "…the toponymy of Yonec is Welsh; might Marie have derived the latter part of her plot from a Welsh version of Tochmarc Becfhola?" (Carey, 2015: 83). Therefore, this dissertation will focus on the hypothesis of the Welsh intermediary, an option which shall be justified by the analysis of the aforementioned pieces of evidence and context, as will be shown in this and the next chapters.

To be somewhat more specific, and before we enter into the details, there are several factors in what the hypothesis of the Welsh intermediary is concerned. First, Welsh medieval literature contains in itself direct references to Irish characters and narratives. Second, the Arthurian legend may have started to take shape in the Brythonic-speaking kingdoms of Great Britain, and after many of these kingdoms had disappeared and were replaced by Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the preservation and further development of the Arthurian tradition seems to have happened in Wales, since it is in Wales that we can find pre-Galfridian Arthurian material. Since what we are attempting to understand is the transmission of an Irish motif to Arthurian traditions, we must understand if this happened in Wales, especially taking into account the previous factor.

Third, as we shall see, the literary material which we have been mentioning is tied with historical connections and circumstances which point towards a context which was favourable for the transmission of Irish literary motifs and elements to Wales. Fourth, and finally, the context of Wales and of the Welsh Marches, in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, seems to have been a crucial factor for the transmission of the Arthurian tradition to Anglo-Norman, Old French and Middle-English literatures. Since the Irish motifs we are interested in are found in French and English Arthurian traditions, which were formed after the Norman invasion and in the aforementioned context, logically we must arrive at the conclusion that Wales was most probably the intermediary for the transmission of such motifs. The fourth factor which we have mentioned is a matter for chapter 3, since it is already related with the transmission to Continental and English contexts *per se*. In the current chapter, what is proposed is to collect and analyse the evidences which support the hypothesis that Wales was the most probable intermediary for Irish transmission. In order to do that, we must start by first making a brief presentation of the context of medieval Welsh literature, as well as of the Arthurian material of such literature, since these subjects are connected with our research.

2.2 The Context of Medieval Welsh Literature

Wales has its own specific context, related to having been a part of the larger Brythonic-speaking world, which included the lost kingdoms of *Yr Hen Ogledd*[100] ("The Old North"), which eventually succumbed to Anglo-Saxon aggression. The legacy of the Old North provides some of the earlier themes of Welsh literature, based on the alleged compositions of sixth-century court-poets from the kingdoms of the Old

[100] The Old North is a term for the northern Brythonic-speaking kingdoms in areas of what today is northern England and southern Scottish Lowlands, which were inhabited by Britons who spoke a variety of Brythonic known as Cumbric, which from the meagre evidence available, differed linguistically little from Old Welsh. The major kingdoms which composed the Old North were the Kingdom of Strathclyde, located around the Firth of Clyde, Gododdin in what nowadays is Lothian and around the Scottish borders, Rheged in the area of Galloway and Elmet in western Yorkshire, along with a number of smaller kingdoms. These kingdoms were populated by a specific branch of the Brythonic-speaking peoples of Britain, obviously differentiated in language and culture from their neighbours the Anglo-Saxons, the Scoti and the Picts, although they must have had a greater cultural and ethnic proximity with the Welsh and the Cornish due to being of the same Brythonic stock, and this may be evinced by the legacy of the Old North in Medieval Welsh literature. Around 800 most of the kingdoms of the Old North had been conquered by either the Anglo-Saxons or the Picts, with the exception of Strathclyde, which nevertheless became a part of the Gaelic-speaking Kingdom of Scotland in the eleventh century and therefore lost its full Brythonic identity.

North, which gained semi-legendary status and are called the five *cynfeirdd*[101]. Two of these poets, Taliesin[102] and Aneirin[103], both have respective works such as the compilation in *Llyfr Taliesin* (*Book of Taliesin*) or the heroic elegies known as the *Y Gododdin* attributed to them. Additionally, there are other extant texts associated with the *cynfeirdd*[104], including praise and prophetic poetry and saga *englynion*[105], as well as

[101] A Welsh term for the first or early poets from the Brythonic-speaking areas of Britain in the sixth century and which commonly refers to five renowned poets. However, only work ascribed to two of these named poets seems to have survived, namely from Taliesin and Aneirin.

[102] The legendary tradition of Taliesin portrays him as a bard/poet with knowledge of arcane arts and the gift of shape-shifting and prophecy, and he makes appearances in Welsh native tales, including Arthurian-related ones. The inverse is also verifiable in works attributed to Taliesin such as *Llyfr Taliesin*, a collection of 60 Welsh poems which includes references to native Welsh tales. In reality, *Llyfr Taliesin* was written down by an anonymous professional scribe (or scribes), most probably in the twelfth century, but many of the elements included in it may be drawn from the authentic Taliesin tradition. Some of the poems may even be based on original versions from Taliesin himself, if he did indeed exist (Koch, 2006d: 1176-77). Furthermore, Taliesin is also associated with the Myrddin legend, since he features in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* and in *Ymddidan Myrddin a Thaliesin* (The Colloquy of Myrddin and Taliesin), contained in *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (The Black Book of Carmarthen). (Cf. Haycock, 2006: 1653-56). The historical Taliesin was supposedly a court poet who lived in the sixth century, and is associated with the court of several Brythonic kings, although such associations and even his historicity are hard to be proved as authentic (Koch, 2006e: 1652-53). Genealogies and works such as *Historia Brittonum*, *Ystoria Taliesin* or *De Excidio Britanniae* provide us with several hints for the existence of a historical Taliesin, but also present problems. For a further discussion of these matters see the introduction in Ford's edition of *Ystoria Taliesin* (1992), as well as a more recent analysis in the introduction to Haycock's edition of the legendary poems in *Llyfr Taliesin* (2007).

[103] Aneirin fab Dwywai is generally considered as being a genuine historical poet who was active in the Brythonic kingdoms from the mid sixth to early seventh centuries. However, there are not enough contemporary sources to indisputably confirm his existence, although there are mentions to him in the *De Excidio Britanniae* and in *Historia Brittonum*. What is certain is that, as with Taliesin, a poetic tradition around the name of Aneirin survived in Wales in the early Middle Ages. The *Y Gododdin*, a series of elegies which form an extensive poem partly written in Old Welsh and Middle Welsh, and which is a part of the thirteenth-century manuscript known as *Llyfr Aneirin* (*Book of Aneirin*), is traditionally attributed to Aneirin. Its original date of composition is a disputed matter, with opinions varying on whether the poem is as early as the seventh century, which means it would have been originally composed in the Cumbric language, perhaps with Aneirin himself as the source, or as far as the eleventh century by Welsh poets using his name. The extant version seems to have been the work of two scribes, named scribe A and scribe B, who seem to have drawn from different sources, since scribe A first wrote in Middle Welsh, and scribe B later added stanzas in Old Welsh, betraying a possible older source. Additionally, the poem has several interpolations and additions which seem not to be related with the original content concerned with Gododdin. The standard edition of the text is found in Ifor Williams' *Canu Aneirin* (1938).

[104] The *corpus* of tales that might be associated with the *cynfeirdd* has been summarized by Koch as follows:

"1. *Marwnad Cunedda* 'The elegy of Cunedda' [commemorating an occasion of ad 383×490]
2. The *Llyfr Aneirin* corpus, including:
(i) The *Gododdin* [Battle of Catraeth, mid to late 6th century]
(ii) The *awdl* on the battle of Srath Carruin [December 642]
(iii) 'Reciter's Prologue' [probably post-dating *obsesio Etin* 'the siege of Dùn Èideann/ Edinburgh' 638]
(iv) The cradle song *Peis Dinogat* 'Dinogad's cloak'
3. *Trawsganu Cynan Garwyn* [commemorating events of 575×610]
4. *Awdlau* addressed to Urien Rheged [commemorating events of 570×595]
5. *Enaid Owain ab Urien* 'The soul of Owain son of Urien' [commemorating events of 570×595]
6. *Awdlau* addressed to Gwallawg fab Lleënnawg of Elfed [commemorating events of 570×610]
7. *Moliant Cadwallon* 'The praise of Cadwallon' [commemorating events of 630–4]
8. *Marwnad Cynddylan* 'The elegy of Cynddylan' [commemorating events of 5 August 642– 15 November 655]"

elements in compilations such as the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*[106] (*Black Book of Carmarthen*) or in the *Trioedd Ynis Prydein*[107] (*The Triads of the Island of Britain*). This corpus of texts seems to demonstrate that the heritage of the lost northern kingdoms was a source of inspiration for Welsh poets: "The 'backward look' of medieval Welsh literature is a prevailing feature of its modes of expression, its content and terms of reference. The ambition of the court poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was, they claimed, to sing as did Aneirin and Taliesin, the poets of the sixth/seventh-century north-British kingdoms of Gododdin and Rheged" (Roberts, 1999: 186). The result of the heritage of the Old North, together with Wales' own independent development of its traditions, is a flourishing body of Welsh native material. Works such as *Llyfr Taliesin* and the Triads seem to point to elements, allusions and snippets of native narratives and myths which are more fully expressed in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. The preservation, maintenance and further development of this native lore seems to have been in the hands of learned poetic classes, such as the bards, and of professional storytellers, such as the *cyfarwyddiaid* (sing. *cyfarwydd*). Some of the members of these classes might have been court-poets, who kept native cultural unity by keeping the circulation of traditional material in the courts, either in verse or in prose. The traditional material of the bardic order and the *cyfarwyddiaid* must also have been a matter of interest for the monastic literate classes

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(Koch, 2006b: 536)

[105] *Englynion* is the plural form of *englyn*, which is a type of Welsh metre. There are several kinds of *englynion*, and some of them are "…characteristic of the saga, gnomic, and nature poetry of the 9th and 10th centuries" (Johnston, 2006: 699), although Johnston also considers that there might be older examples, such as the ones from the *Y Gododdin*.

[106] The *Black Book of Carmarthen* is a thirteenth-century compilation of texts whose extant manuscript is NLW Peniarth MS 1. The compilation includes a group of triads (concerning the horses of Welsh heroes) as well as a collection of poetry from the period of the ninth to the twelfth century from different categories including englynion, elegies, odes, and poetry concerned with both religious and secular themes. Other important themes in poems in the collection include the Old North, Welsh heroes, as well as Arthur and Myrddin. Of the most importance are the *Englynion y Beddau* ("The Stanzas of the Graves") concerned with the graves of legendary Welsh figures, the poems concerned with Myrddin, and *Geraint uab Erbin* ("The Elegy of Geraint son of Erbin") which mentions Arthur. An edition is available by A. O. H. Jarman (1982).

[107] Triads are texts organized in groups of three which evoke three examples which in turn share some likeness, and which are a part of both Irish and Welsh tradition. The Welsh triads make allusions and contain references to several elements of Welsh folklore, mythology and legendary or pseudo-history, many examples of which are the extant remaining fragments. The organisation in triads seems to originate in a form of rhetoric and to function as a mnemonic device for the Welsh bards or storytellers, almost as a catalogue of the corpus of native tales and lore. Many of the triads are found in specific collections of the genre, the oldest of which are found in NLW Peniarth MS 16 and MS 45, perhaps as old as the thirteenth century, while a more extensive and later collection is found in both the fourteenth-century *White Book of Rhydderch* and *Red Book of Hergest*. Additionally there are even later collections from the fifteenth-century found in NLW Peniarth MS 47 and 50. Nevertheless, some triads are also found embedded in prose narrative, as is the case in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. The standard edition and translation is Bromwich (2014, 1st edition 1961).

as well, leading to parts of such material being used for the written extant texts we have available.

It might have been in this context that the Arthurian legend first developed from folk hero to its early literary expressions, for there is no doubt that it was in Wales such development occurred. This is made obvious due to several evidences from Welsh literature (either early sources in Latin or in Welsh) which either predate Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* or clearly continue a native tradition at least partially independent from it, namely the first mentions of Arthur in a (pseudo) historical[108] sense or works which seem to evoke a native tradition of folklore around Arthur such as the early prose narrative of *Culhwch ac Olwen* and many allusions in the Welsh triads[109]. The so-called Arthurian romances later included in the *Mabinogion* compilation, namely *Owain*, *Gereint* and *Peredur*, notwithstanding the everlasting debate on whether they are derivative from the Chrétien de Troyes' romances or rather if they are derivative from a shared common source (Foster, 1959b: 192-205; Bromwich, 1991: 282-285), also present several distinctions from their Continental counterparts which point towards these distinctions as being yet other possible evidences of a native Welsh tradition of Arthurian lore, despite the existence of parallels with Continental tradition as well. Such evidences include established Arthurian characters from Welsh tradition in their Welsh name-forms rather than Continental versions, elements seemingly in common with the native tradition represented by *Culhwch* instead of elements from the French tradition, formulaic sentences and tropes which seem to reflect a native Welsh oral tradition, along with a narrative style which seems to be more characteristically Welsh (Middleton, 1991: 150-156; Thomson, 1991: 161-168; Lovecy, 1991: 174-178).

[108] Arthur is associated with accounts of the Battle of Mount Badon, where the Saxons were defeated and their invasions halted for several years. This association originated in supposed historical reports that in several instances mention not Arthur but other names such as Ambrosius Aurelianus in the account of Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, which might have been a source for Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* which also does not mention the name Arthur even though it presents the names of Vortigern and Constantine, later associated with Arthur by Geoffrey Monmouth. Later accounts of the battle already including the name Arthur are given firstly in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*.

[109] Many triads in *Trioedd Ynis Prydein* include Arthur associated with references or allusions to episodes or events in other early associated references to him such as *Culhwch* or poems in *Llyfr Taliesin*, along with other obscure references which may indicate lost native traditions or narratives. On the other hand, other references in the later collections of triads reveal the influence from Geoffrey of Monmouth and, indeed, French romance, since some of the triads refer to elements such as the Round Table, Lancelot, etc. For in-depth discussions regarding Arthuriana in the triads and their significance and relationship with early Welsh tradition see Bromwich (1959: 44-51) and Roberts (1991: 80-93).

In what concerns the historical mentions to Arthur in Welsh tradition, these include annals and pseudo historical works such as the *Historia Brittonum*[110] and the *Annales Cambriae*[111], or most controversially epic poems such as the *Y Gododdin*[112]. The early Arthurian tradition in Wales might possibly also be demonstrated through examples from early Welsh poetry[113] and other literary works which feature Arthur (Jackson, 1959a: 12-19; Sims-Williams, 1991: 33-71). Some of these are poems in *Llyfr Taliesin* such as *Preideu Annwfyn*[114], *Kat Godeu*[115], *Kadeir Teÿrnon*[116], *Canu y*

[110] *Historia Brittonum* is a pseudo-historical work in Latin, most probably compiled in Wales c. 830, and containing several Old Welsh names and glosses. It is found in several recensions (the Vatican recension, the Chartres recension, the Sawley recension, the Durham recension, the Harley recension, the Nennian recension, the Gildasian recension and the free Middle-Irish translation *Lebor Bretnach*). The most common attribution of authorship used to be given to Nennius due to a prologue in one of the recensions. Dumville, however, has concluded that the authorship should be considered anonymous, a theory which became the consensus (Koch, 2006c: 926-927). *Historia Brittonum* contains a list of twelve battles of Arthur against the Saxons where he emerged victorious, ending up in the Battle of Mount Badon (chapter 56). In the *Mirabilia* (chapter 73) it also makes references to Arthur's hound Cabal and the hunting of Twrch Trwyth (the same hunt narrated in *Culhwch ac Olwen*), as well as a reference to Arthur's son, named Amr. (Charles-Edwards, 1991: 16). These references are associated with places in the British landscape, leading Kenneth Jackson to see this as evidence that Arthur was already a part of Welsh folklore and legend in the ninth century (Jackson, 1959b: 1). David Dumville has delivered scholarly editions for the Vatican recension (1985), the Sawley and Durham recensions as well as for the Chartres recension (1988). An edition and translation of the Harley recension can be found in Morris (1980).

[111] Translated from Latin as *The Annals of Wales*, *Annales Cambriae* is a compilation of Cambro-Latin chronicles recording events in Wales for the most part, but also in Cornwall, England, Scotland and Ireland. The work purportedly was based on several sources and was produced at St. David's in Dyfed, Wales, possibly in the middle of the tenth century, even though the earlier extant manuscript, from the extant five which have survived, dates from the twelfth century. The annals mention the victory of Arthur and his carrying of a cross at the Battle of Badon, as well as the Battle of Camlann between Arthur and Mordred. David Dumville has provided an edition and translation of three of the manuscripts (2002).

[112] *Y Gododdin* contains a reference to Arthur in the description of the deeds of Gwawrddur, one of the Brythonic heroes, in section CII, vv. 5-6, which states that "*gochore brein du ar uur / caer ceni bei ef arthur*" (Williams, 1938) (trans (Clancy, 1970): "He brought black crows to a fort's / Wall, though he was not Arthur."). The controversy regarding the mention of Arthur on *Y Gododdin* is due to doubts on whether this reference betrays the earliest reference to Arthur and possibly the formation of his legend early in the "Old North", since there has never been a definitive consensus on the date of origin of the poem, furthermore, there are interpolations in the extant texts, and there is the chance that the reference to Arthur could be one (Jackson, 1959: 3). More recently Charles-Edwards maintained similar doubts regarding the matter and points out evidences regarding the hands of the two scribes (A and B) in the extant manuscript which do not go in the direction of considering the reference as being older than *Historia Brittonum* (Charles-Edwards, 1991: 15).

[113] Our definition here for early Welsh poetry follows the one of Kenneth Jackson: "'Early' means here poetry of the native Welsh tradition older than the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth; or, if not demonstrably older than the late twelfth or first half of the thirteenth century, evidently uninfluenced by him" (1959a: 12).

[114] Referenced as *Preideu Annwfyn* in Haycock's latest edition of *Llyfr Taliesin* (2007: 433-451), but widely known as *Preiddeu Annwn*. The poem can be translated as *The Spoils of Annwfn* and deals with an expedition by sea of none other than Arthur to the Otherworld, a journey from which seemingly only seven returned (including Arthur). Several cryptic messages and references seem to characterise such journey and elements from the Otherworld, such as the imprisonment of Gwair in Caer Siddi, several forts with strange characteristics or suggestive names and items such as the cauldron of the "Head of Annwn", leading to several possible interpretations regarding the purpose of the Otherworld journey, like the release of Gwair or the obtainment of the cauldron. Additionally the poem also contains Taliesin's critique of ecclesiastic scholars and his boasting of his higher knowledge (or of the bardic class) in relation to the former.

Meirch[117] and *Marwnat Vthyr Pen*[dragon][118]. Uther Pendragon, who has been portrayed as Arthur's father in many Arthurian traditions (even though such association is fragmentary in Welsh tradition and not certain) is also mentioned in *Madawc Drut*[119], besides the title of the aforementioned *Marwnat Vthyr Pen*[dragon]. Even the origins of the mage/prophet Merlin, first associated with Arthurian stories by Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (although Merlin leaves the narrative after Arthur is conceived) and popularized in subsequent Arthurian narratives, seem to have their roots in Welsh tradition, most specifically in the legends of the Welsh wild man and seer Myrddin[120] which are found in early Welsh verse[121]. Although many of these earlier

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[115] *Kat Godeu* or *The Battle of the Trees* is a symbolic and enigmatic poem from *Llyfr Taliesin* (Haycock, 2007: 167-239) which is chiefly concerned with a legendary battle where the magician Gwydion animates the trees of the forest in order for them to become his army. Notwithstanding, the poem is concerned with many other themes, which are often enigmatic, such as an enumeration of several transformations or metamorphoses by Taliesin, details on his creation, several boasting passages and also seemingly prophetic ones, one of which mentions Arthur in an ambiguous passage (Haycock, 2007: 186), which may refer to his return (Sims-Williams, 1991: 51-52).

[116] Translated as *The Chair of the Sovereign*, *Kadeir Teÿrnon* is yet another enigmatic poem from *Llyfr Taliesin* (Haycock, 2007: 295-311) which seems to be a praise poem which follows a triadic structure, with some prophetic allusions as well, and which culminates with the release of Elffin, presumably Taliesin's patron (Sims-Williams, 1991: 52). In the boasting and praising passages, Taliesin mentions Arthur and a song which had been sung to bless Arthur, who used such blessing to his defence in battle and trampled nine at a time (Haycock, 2007: 296).

[117] Translated as *The Song of the Horses*, *Canu y Meirch* is an incomplete poem from the *Llyfr Taliesin* (Haycock, 2007: 387-403) dedicated to the horses of traditional figures or heroes in Welsh tradition, which includes a reference to the horse of Arthur as well as the mare Llamrei, which even though it is not associated with Arthur in the poem, it is mentioned as his mare in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Sims-Williams, 1991: 53).

[118] Translatable as *The Elegy of Uther Pen[dragon]*, this poem is a composite of both prophetic poetry and elegy (Haycock, 2007: 503-515). Despite its title, Uther Pendragon himself is not named in the verses, although it may be assumed that he is its speaker (Sims-Williams, 1991: 53). Arthur is mentioned in one single verse (line 14), where the speaker claims that Arthur possesses a ninth of his valour (Haycock, 2007: 505).

[119] This poem from the *Llyfr Taliesin* is possibly a fragment of an elegy, consisting of six lines only (Haycock, 2007: 459-465). It seems to be concerned with Madog, who is mentioned as Uther's son, and comparison with the *Dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle* seems to confirm that Madog was Arthur's brother (Sims-Williams, 1991: 53-54; Haycock, 2007: 459).

[120] Myrddin Wyllt is a figure described as a chief bard, a prophet and a madman in several poems mainly from the *Black Book of Carmarthen* and the *Red Book of Hergest*. His legend has an element of pseudo-history, since Myrddin is said to have been a bard of king Gwenddoleu ap Ceidio (died c. 573) who went mad after his lord's defeat at the hands of Rhydderch Hael of Strathclyde in the Battle of Arfderydd. After the battle, Myrddin fled to the woods of Caledonia and lived with the animals, an echo of the "Wild Man of the Woods" motif, and received the gift of prophecy. He is also associated with Lailoken, a similar figure who is often identified as another name for Myrddin. Lailoken is mentioned in the twelfth-century *Life of Kentigern* and in the *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei Chwaer*, Gwenddydd also calls Myrddin *Llallwg*, which could be an abbreviation for *Llallwgan* and maybe refer to Lailoken. However, only in the fifteenth century is Myrddin specifically identified as also being Lailoken in the Scottish *Lailoken and Kentigern*. It is a matter for on-going discussion on whether Myrddin was an independent legend to the one of Lailoken, later conflated with it due to similarities in both figures.

[121] The earliest poetry related to Myrddin is contained in the poems *Yr Afallennau* ("The Apple Trees"), *Yr Oianau* ("The Greetings") and *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* ("The Dialogue of Myrddin and Taliesin") from the *Black Book of Carmarthen* and in the poems *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei Chwaer* ("The Conversation of Myrddin and his Sister Gwenddydd"), *Gwasgargerdd Fryddin yn y Bedd*

Welsh works survived in manuscripts compiled later, they point towards a pre-Galfridian Welsh Arthurian tradition, which was probably the original fountain from which the subsequent Arthurian chronicle tradition started by Monmouth drank, leading consequently to the furnishing of material which gave way to Arthurian romance:

> Many Welsh Arthurian poems must have been lost. The few that survive display remarkable variety and vitality. They all happen to be anonymous, but we are not required to treat them as the work of pure tradition-bearers rather than as creations by individual court-poets or clerics. They can be read as works of imaginative literature in their own right as well as reflections of possible 'sources' for Arthurian romance. None of them seems to owe much to Geoffrey of Monmouth's realism; indeed, many of them may have been composed before the *Historia Regum Britanniae* appeared. Their affinities are more with the native *Historia Brittonum*, the Welsh-Latin saints' Lives, and above all with the early heroic poetry.
> (Sims-Williams, 1991: 61)

It is this body of native literature from Wales, including the Old North-related material, the native lore exemplified in the *Four Branches* or the Arthurian-related tales, which led to comparisons with Irish tradition due to similar elements or patterns in both Irish and Welsh examples, and even direct references to Irish tradition, as we shall see.

2.3 The Difficulty in Tracing Irish Influence in Welsh Sources

In past scholarship there used to be the conviction that Ireland and Wales shared a common pagan mythical past and culture, which allowed for a continuous borrowing of mythical material from Ireland to Wales, even long after the pagan period, due to the spreading of oral traditions among similar cultures. This point of view led to the assumption that several elements in Welsh literature were of Irish origin, regarding every single story detail that could bear some verisimilitude to Irish stories as a signal of being derivative from Irish tradition. This view, together with the theory that Wales was the intermediary between Ireland and the Continental Arthurian tradition, generated a search for Irish myth in Arthurian romance, which led to the inference that French romance was also a repository of pre-Christian Brythonic and Irish traditions:

("The Diffused Song of Myrddin in the Grave") and *Peirian Faban* ("Commanding Youth") from the *Red Book of Hergest*. Although the manuscripts where Myrddin is present hail from the thirteenth century forward "the poems contain matter which is older, and in many cases considerably older, than the date of the written texts" (Jarman, 1991: 118). Additionally, in the *Armes Prydein* prophetic poem from the *Llyfr Taliesin*, Myrddin is most possibly the mentioned "Merdin". For a lengthy discussion regarding the early Welsh literature associated with Myrddin and Lailoken as well as its association with the Arthurian Merlin legend see A. O. H. Jarman (1959; 1991).

> Nor one can say how far back in that past the Irish possessed in common with the Welsh such venerable deities as Govannon and Goibniu, Don and Dana, Manawyddan and Manannan. In the second century A.D. Tacitus witnessed to a general community of traditions between Britain and Ireland, between Brythons and Goidels. Such a community of traditions is doubtless due in large measure to their common Celtic inheritance. But there is general agreement among scholars that at a later time the Welsh borrowed largely from the Irish. Probably the earliest datable borrowing can be set about 795 A.D., when the South-Welsh compiler of the *Historia Brittonum*, which goes under the name of Nennius, used three Irish documents. But there must have been more fundamental borrowings from Irish oral tradition much earlier, at a time when Ireland was scarcely Christianized or was still quite pagan. This conclusion is confirmed over and over again by the discovery that French Arthurian romances, which are ultimately derived from Brythonic and Irish traditions, preserve with startling clarity of outline, as we shall see, the ritual and the myths of pre-Christian Ireland.
> (Loomis, 1927: 25)

However, some recent studies have uncovered some issues regarding this question, which may also affect our tracing of the travelling of the beheading-game motif from Ireland to the Matter of Britain. In his work *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (2011), Patrick Sims-Williams demonstrates that the influence from Irish sources in Welsh material is not as clear or as extensive as usually stated in past studies[122], by presenting a profound analysis of the several sources commonly claimed to be of Irish derivation. According to Sims-Williams, the Latin and French influence was quite widespread, but Irish influence was scarce: "When compared with the extensive and unequivocal evidence for Latin and French influence on medieval Welsh literature, in the shape of allusions and direct translations into Welsh, Irish influence on Medieval Welsh literature is slight, and medieval Irish literature is more often a rich and indispensable quarry for analogues than for sources." (Sims-Williams, 2011: 334). This does not signify that Ireland and Wales did not have a relationship, nor that Sims-Williams denies it. Actually, the common cultural background shared by both countries is acknowledged in his work, leading Sims-Williams to accept justification for the several solutions which ascribe to literary borrowing the answer for the similarities between both literatures, besides the long-standing discussion on common Indo-

[122] Scholars such as Matthew Arnold and his *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) created the trend in the mid nineteenth century of grouping Irish and Welsh literature as "Celtic" literature, with the similarities between both literatures being further noted by scholars such as John Rhys and Kuno Meyer. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the thesis of an overly amount of Irish influence on Welsh literature flourished until the century's late mid-years, with celebrated scholars in its defense such as A. C. L. Brown, A. H. Krappe, Cecile O'Rahilly, Proinsias Mac Cana or W.J. Gruffydd. This view was also taken almost for granted by scholars studying the Celtic and Arthurian connection such as T. P. Cross, G. W. Kittredge, Roger Sherman Loomis and Jessie Weston, who tended to view Wales as the intermediary in a channel of influence from Ireland to France.

European origins and mythological patterns (and subsequently common Celtic roots) which would have reflections on a similar mythology and motifs:

> Students of Irish and Welsh literature, faced with definitive similarities between the vernacular literatures and mythologies of Ireland and Wales, have come up with a similar range of solutions, ranging from Indo-European heredity via Common Celtic […] to direct literary borrowing from Irish to Welsh in medieval scriptoria or to common influence from a shared biblical and patristic textual environment.
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 9).

The view that a similar culture provided the origin for Irish and Welsh literary borrowings had already been maintained by Cecile O'Rahilly (1924: 96) and by her successor, the eminent Proinsias Mac Cana: "…one can scarcely doubt that most of the similarities between Welsh and Irish literary use and content are to be ascribed to common origins" (1966: 246). The same cultural background seems a common argument for resemblances between both literatures since both countries constituted two of the remaining Celtic[123] fringes in the British Isles. History tells us that Ireland and Wales were both Celtic-speaking regions, and this can lead us to consider that there could have been certain cultural similarities such as mythology or some traditions, although not necessarily an exact equivalent. Due to this point, the (apparent) verification of a similar imaginary world in both Irish and Welsh vernacular literatures can easily lead (or mislead) to conclusions of literary inter-borrowing: "There are […] not only individual themes which are common to Welsh and Irish literature, but styles, conventions and motifs which are shared by both traditions […] In these wide categories it is impossible to tell who is the originator and who the borrower." (Chadwick, 1970: 66). Curiously, Sims-Williams quotes O'Rahilly, Mac Cana and Chadwick on this subject, even though they were the proponents of a theory proposing an immense channel of literary borrowing from Ireland to Wales, something that the former is not quite in accordance with. The reason for such is because the common origins are indeed undeniable as being one of the bases for similarities, but this relationship may result in literary analogues, rather than sources. Furthermore, the possible Irish sources were also in competition with the favoured Latin and French ones: "Medieval Wales, in literature, as in much else, was linked to Ireland by

[123] Defining the term "Celtic" is problematic, and is best considered as a linguistic term since both countries had spoken Celtic languages, namely Irish Goidelic and Welsh Brittonic, rather than being used as an assertion of Irish and Welsh cultures as having undeniably the exact same characteristics.

inheritance; but by choice she threw in her lot with the Latin and, later, the French Middle Ages, or maintained a splendid isolation" (Sims-Williams, 2011: 334).

Besides the hegemony of Latin and French, further problems in the Irish-Welsh connection are stated by Sims-Williams, such as the incongruence in considering both as Celtic literature, since Irish and Welsh languages were already quite different by the time both literatures emerged (in written form at least): "…it became customary to group Irish literature and Welsh literature as 'Celtic literature', a term which tended to obscure the fact that by the early Middle Ages the two languages had diverged so far that they were not in a position to share a common literature in the way that the Romance languages or even the Germanic languages could." (Sims-Williams, 2011: 2). Taking this fact into consideration, Irish and Welsh literatures could only be grouped as "Celtic", with basis in the aforementioned similarities in motifs, style and in reminiscences from a common past culture and mythology, possibly resulting once again in analogues rather than borrowings. Even when recurring to the possibility of a previous oral tradition which was shared in both countries, we are faced with the problem that there is not enough knowledge on when did both languages diverge, since a common language would be necessary for a common oral tradition to flourish for so long and to be perceptible in the written tradition: "…even today there is no agreement as to how many millennia ago the Celtic languages diverged, nor whether 'Common Celtic' was succeeded by an intermediate, mutually comprehensible dialect of 'Insular Celtic' confined to Ireland and Britain" (Sims-Williams, 2011: 5). However, a shared language, although it does make the process substantially easier, is not necessarily an imperative for the transmission of story motifs, an alternative explanation would be the existence of bilingual speakers, which can be perfectly common in certain contexts. Notwithstanding, the problem is that we do not have clear factual evidences regarding this matter, despite the existence of some possible analogues. A possible oral tradition from the past is something which cannot be reached, and although it is hardly undeniable that it existed and must be a hypothesis that cannot be dismissed for the sake of possibilities in specific case-studies, it is not possible to be used as proof for borrowings. Even some elements which would normally be seen in light of the inheritance of a common pre-Christian cultural or linguistic past, such as cognates[124],

[124] For example: Manawydan mab Llŷr in the Welsh *Mabinogion* and Manannán Mac Lir in several Irish texts. There has been a long disagreement on whether both names are cognates or borrowings, with the question of the correspondence between them being complicated. Nevertheless, the striking similarity in

can be misleading, because the on-going cultural contact in the Irish Sea in the early times after Christ could also produce such elements:

> So, to say that two names are cognate is *not* proof that the reconstructed shared name, and the myth, cult, or story that it represents, are necessarily a common inheritance as old as the Celtic languages themselves (whatever that might mean), rather than the product of cultural contact in the Irish Sea Province, or over a still wider area, in, say, the first few centuries after Christ. (Sims-Williams, 2011: 11).

Another issue on the Irish and Welsh connection is that Ireland and Wales were not isolated in a single channel of communication. Besides the presence of Latin and French influences on Wales, there is also the question of other contacts that could provide borrowing of stories and its motifs and themes, a point also addressed by Sims-Williams:

> It is impossible to decide what proportion of the story motifs and themes shared between Ireland and Wales is inherited from the period when the languages were merely dialects (or even earlier) and what is due to recent intercourse across the Irish Sea or independent contact with third parties such as mercenaries, traders, and itinerant scholars, not to mention Vikings and other settlers. […] However, since it is well known that the simplest forms of folk literature, such as proverbs, riddles, and folktale motifs, travel freely from one country to the next, it would be perverse even to think of attributing all the similarities between Irish and Welsh narrative literature to remote common origins, rather than to a mixture of common origins and later intercourse – besides coincidence, indirect contact (via Scotland, for instance), and (in the case of international motifs and tales), independent contact with third parties. (Sims-Williams, 2011: 15).

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the names does point out to several possibilities. One such possibility is related to the mythological meaning attributed to the name for both Irish and Britons which is suited to the cultural background of Wales and Ireland presently discussed in the main text: "There can be no doubt that Welsh *mab Llŷr* corresponds directly to Irish *Mac Lir*. It is in this context that the Irish bishop, king and lexicographer Cormac mac Cuilennáin (died 908) stated that both 'the Irish and the Britons called [Manannán] a god of the sea, and thence they said that he was "son of the sea" (filium maris)'" (Carey, 2007: 63). On the other hand, Mac Cana affirmed: "When we try to sum up the evidence, we find that it falls short of being conclusive; but taken as a whole, it seems to indicate, first, that one of the two names, *Manannán Mac Li*r and *Manawydan fab Llŷr*, has been derived from or influenced by the other, and, secondly, that it is the Welsh form which is derivative" (Mac Cana, 1958: 122-129). With good arguments based on solid linguistic grounds, Sims-Williams has disagreed with the possibility of tracing the influence from one language or from the other in *mab Llŷr* but shows that in the formation of *Manannán* and *Manawydan* there is borrowing in the other way around in the genitive *Manann* and once again from Irish in the diminutive *–an* in *Manawydan* (Cf. Sims-Williams 2011: 11). Despite the cognate or borrowing possibilities, further connection between both names is hard to trace in terms of the characters they portray. Apparently, and unless we recur to some kind of muddy or obscure symbolic far-fetched mythological meaning, Manawydan mab Llŷr and Manannán Mac Lir seem to be two quite different characters, with Brân's brother in the *Mabinogion* being quite different from the possibly euhemerized sea-deity and Otherworld king present in the Irish stories.

Furthermore, this conjecture also reminds us of the existence of several story-motifs which are common in international folklore, and this phenomenon is also verifiable in medieval literature, aggravated by the fact that folklore and this type of literature, at least in their initial phase, are based on oral tradition, (as is the case with Irish and Welsh medieval literature). This kind of literature tends to easily provide for the spreading of motifs, themes and even entire narrative sequences due to the nature of oral storytelling, which enables narratives to be told from one person to another, and so on to others. Most mythologies were originally also spread this way, and this characteristic is one of the proposed answers for some coincidences between myths from different traditions. The fact that the special relationship between Ireland and Wales had been taken for granted in several past studies, may have led scholars to easily relate common motifs only in the sphere of the so-called "Celtic literature", without searching for possible similarities in other literary traditions, either oral or written. However, this could be justified on the fact that Ireland was one of the earliest European countries to register its narrative traditions in written form, and to have produced such an extensive and vast collection of texts. Being it so, it was only natural that it would be in Ireland that certain themes, structures or motifs would first be visible, and more easily spread to Wales. This has been noted by Kenneth Jackson, whose *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (1961) is a key work for understanding the spreading of similar story motifs in different traditions such as the Irish and Welsh. As Sims-Williams points out: "Kenneth Jackson also accepted that there were borrowings from Irish literature but argued that many similarities were due to the use of internationally circulating folktales and motifs which happen to occur in Ireland first" (Sims-Williams, 2011: 3), exactly because "early Irish literature is unusually rich and well preserved by comparison with all other vernacular European literatures" (Jackson, 1961: 115). An example is *Branwen uerch Lyr*[125], the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*, which although extensively studied by scholars such as Proinsias Mac Cana[126] as showcasing the borrowing from Irish motifs, can also be compared with elements in international tales: "Further examination showed that even

[125] *Branwen uerch Llyr* is the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*. The story tells a conflict between the Welsh and the Irish, culminating in a battle in Ireland, where the giant Brân is fatally injured and tells his seven surviving comrades (including the mythical Taliesin) to cut off his head and gives instructions to journey to specific places. The seven men bring the head back to Harlech, where they stay for seven years in Brân's company since the head keeps on speaking. After those seven years, the men move to Gwales, a form of the Otherworld located on an island, where they stay for eighty years in a supernatural hall, forgetting sorrow, without aging and in joyous feasting with Brân's head.

[126] See Mac Cana's work *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr* (1958).

the most striking similarity between *Branwen* and an Irish saga might be explained away as an international motif" (Sims-Williams, 2011: 4).

It must be clarified that the possibility of comparison with international motifs does not mean that every analogue or similar motif can be rendered invalid as an example of connection or borrowing from Irish stories to Welsh. Regarding the *Second Branch*, John Carey has built a concise and solid argument in *Ireland and the Grail*[127] (2007) that demonstrates strong possibilities of connection between *Branwen* and Irish sources, and subsequently in Arthurian stories concerning the Grail. Carey's work is useful to understand that despite Sims-Williams' work and the acknowledgment of the issues he presents regarding the Irish and Welsh claimed channel of literary communication, there are strong evidences in Welsh literature which demonstrate a link with Ireland. Sims-Williams' work is the result of thirty years of research and he analyses the several claimable sources of possible Irish influence, but his purpose seems to be the separation of what can actually be an evidence of influence, and what has been over-stated as undeniable proof in more speculative and perhaps heedless studies, when arguments exist which might point otherwise. The extensive work done by Sims-Williams does not seem to be meant to nullify the Irish-Welsh literary relationship. As previously mentioned, Ireland and Wales do have a connection and a common past, despite third-party influences.

Welsh medieval literature probably had much more material which did not survive the centuries, and even what did, shows notable resemblances in themes and motifs, such as a concept of Otherworld[128] (Carey, 2006: 1403-1406), and further mythological resemblances, besides a notable residue of name cognates (even with the divergences in language between Irish and Welsh already in an advanced stage when

[127] Carey establishes a comparison and evidence of borrowing from the Irish Bran Mac Febul tales *Immram Brain* and *Immacaldam in Druad Brain* in chapter 4 (Cf. Carey, 2007: 43-66). In chapter 10 he connects this relation with Arthurian motifs such as the Fisher King from the Grail cycle (Cf. Carey, 2007: 133-149).

[128] There are differences however, even if both the several Irish *Sidh* and the Welsh *Annwn* originated from the same concept, they evolved in different directions. Many of the characteristics of the Otherworld, as they are depicted in Irish Literature, were lost in the Welsh tradition. For example: the Welsh *Annwn* seems to be a single kingdom, making it different from the Irish analogue, which seems to be divided into several independent kingdoms. Nonetheless, there are examples in Welsh literature which seem more close to the Irish concept: the otherworldly island in the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*, where the supernatural feast around Brân's head takes place, is a possible analogue or even borrowing from the Irish Otherworld, since it retains many of its characteristics and specially, parallels with *Immram Brain* (Cf. Carey, 2007: 60-61). In folk traditions in both Ireland and Wales there is a further possible relation, since the folktales related to fairies in both countries have parallels and are both connected to the Otherworld (cf. Minard, 2005: 727-732).

both literatures were registered in written form) and analogues. Patrick Sims-Williams himself declares this fact, giving the deserved credit to previous scholars that although highly sympathetic to a theory of exaggerated borrowing from Ireland to Wales, did point out significant relations between both literatures: "however, Cecile O'Rahilly, Proinsias Mac Cana, and other scholars steeped in both literatures uncovered significant new evidence, and no doubt more remains to be discovered. Irish influence never dominated Welsh literature, it seems, but neither was it negligible" (Sims-Williams, 2011: 339). What Sims-Williams' work provides us with is a narrowing of the possibilities which can indeed signify that there was Irish influence. He does not deny the claimed examples of such influence completely, but presents evidence that it is not as obvious or pervasive as it was previously thought to be. Although his studies make the task of tracing the sources of influence a more difficult one, such as in the present question of the beheading motif, this can only be seen as an advantage rather than a complication, because it allows us to elaborate possibilities with perhaps more accuracy.

Taking Sims-Williams' work into account, let us analyse the possibilities for borrowing or influence from Ireland to Wales that could subsequently serve as a source for the use of the beheading challenge motif in Arthurian stories. As we have discussed at some length, the beheading-game sequences in *Fled Bricrenn* (in the several versions) have too much of an higher similarity with the beheading game in the Middle English *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* to be a coincidence or just a repetition of a common motif in epic medieval sagas, due to the minutiae of the details shared in both narratives, besides similarities with the French *Livre de Caradoc*, *La Mule Sans Frein* or *Perlesvaus*. However, Sims-Williams makes it clear that it is hard to trace a really major and enormous Irish influence on early Welsh literature. And this creates a problem in tracing how did the motifs travelled to Arthurian romance, if we are to give credit to Welsh literature as an intermediate. Nevertheless, he does give us possible sources, but these same sources provide clues that are themselves a root for further questions. As we shall see, an example of such possible sources are contained in the tales presented in the Welsh *Mabinogion*, since throughout its entire content, from the *Four Branches* to the Arthurian stories, several elements have been the target of

extensive analysis in search of possible evidences of both derivation from Irish sources and Welsh influence in the Matter of Britain[129].

2.3.1 The Irish names in *Culhwch ac Olwen*

Culhwch ac Olwen, one of the Arthurian tales in the *Mabinogion*, is frequently examined in Irish and Welsh studies as a possible source of evidence regarding the Irish influence in Welsh literature[130]. An incomplete version is known from the *White Book of Rhydderch*, together with a more complete version in the *Red Book of Hergest.* Several sections of the story contain motifs which have been seen as possibly borrowed from Irish sources[131], together with Irish names. It is not relevant in this study to analyse every single motif which may possibly indicate borrowing from Irish sources. Sims-Williams already performed that task with splendid results, demonstrating the possible knowledge of Irish elements such as geography, language and certain names and motifs by the writer. However, the similarities and the mentioning of Irish elements are not to such an extent that could prove there was a mastery of Irish literature and context by the Welsh *literati*.

In other words, there are allusions to Irish motifs and names but there are not clear demonstrations that there was a notion of their original meaning or of the Irish stories from where they originated: "The way the Welsh scribes handled the Irish names in *Culhwch ac Olwen* shows that they were ignorant of Irish and Irish literature. We

[129] Just to cite some examples, the *Second Branch* containing the story of Branwen has been extensively studied as containing a possible relationship between its main character Brân and the Irish Bran Mac Febuil from *Immram Brain*, besides the presence of Mannanán Mac Lir's Welsh cognate Manawydan mab Llyr in the story (Cf. Carey, 2007: 43-66). On the other hand, Brân's character and the *Assembly of the Noble Head* in the tale have also been claimed as containing a connection with both the Otherworld theme in Irish literature and the Arthurian stories concerned with the Grail (Cf. Carey, 2007: 133-149). Similarly, the remnant *Branches* have also been the target of studies connecting them with Irish and Arthurian motifs, with Pwyll's journey to *Annwn* in the *First Branch* showing reminiscences of Irish Otherworld story-motifs (Koch, 2006a: 75), besides other Otherworld comparisons with the *Third Branch*, and the treacherous wife motif in the *Fourth Branch*.

[130] Kuno Meyer noticed the presence of several Irish personal names and place names in the tale, in "Early Relations Between Gael and Brython" (1895: 55-86). Meyer's noticing led to subsequent studies of the tale, not only on the names, but also on motifs in the narrative reminiscent of similar ones in Irish sagas.

[131] Such as: a parallel between the hurling of a stone-spear by Olwen's father three times at Culhwch and Arthur's warriors, which required servants to lift the giants eyelid in order to see them, and a similar sequence involving Balor of the Evil Eye against Lugh in the Irish *Cath Maige Tuired* (Cf. Sims-Williams, 2011: 137); The wild boar chased by Arthur and his knights, called Twrch Trwyth, as pointing to an Irish origin to its name (Idem: 39-44); Knowledge of the geography of Ireland and its place-names (Idem: 139-152); and several other possible derivations related to names and elements such as the magic cauldron of Diwrnach the Irishman or Arthur's sword Caledfwlch (Idem: 152-166).

should be wary of assuming that the authors who created the tale were any more knowledgeable" (Sims-Williams 2011: 187). Nevertheless, there is a specific point in the analysis of *Culhwch* which is of particular interest to our study, related to the eleven-column list of names of heroes enumerated by Culhwch as being Arthur's warriors. Surprisingly, this list includes specific and well-known names from early Irish literature, and more importantly to our study, five names of some of the most important characters in the Ulster cycle, grouped together. *Fled Bricrenn* belongs to this cycle, so the mentioning of characters from it in a Welsh narrative is highly important because it can give us clues on the transmission of Ulster cycle stories to Wales. Sims-Williams has analysed this matter in depth and his analysis is so complete that we cannot add much to it. For the present purposes we must review it however, therefore we shall follow his work closely.

The names mentioned in *Culhwch* are even more notable for our study since they are five of the main characters in the Ulster cycle and are all present in *Fled Bricrenn*: Conchobar mac Nessa; Cú Roí mac Daíre; Fergus mac Roich; Conall Cernach and Lóegaire Búadach. The mentioning of these names in *Culhwch*'s list shows that the author had at least some knowledge of the Ulster cycle. However, there is a significant absence in the list. It seems rather strange, that the author displays such important names for the Ulster cycle, but leaves out the central character of it: Cú Chulainn is mysteriously absent. A possible explaining for this absence is that the five entries in the list may have been taken from tales in the Ulster cycle where Cú Chulainn has yet to enter Conchobar's court, posterior to his death, or simply not present in them. The tale of *Compert Conchobuir* (*The Conception of Conchobar*), which narrates Conchobar's birth and rise to kingship, is previous to Cuchulainn's own birth and entrance into the Red Branch of Ulster, in the same way that *Aided Chonchobuir* (*The Death of Conchobar*) is set after Cú Chulainn's death. Fergus also features in the tale of his conception, and has a death tale of his own, *Aided Fergusa maic Róich,* where Cú Chulainn is no longer present as well, since the story is also set after his demise. Death tales for both Lóegaire and Conall (*Aided Lóegairi Búadaig* and *Aided Ailella 7 Conaill Chernaig*, respectively) also follow this same pattern since they are also posterior to Cú Chulainn's death.

It must be said that Conall the Victorious might be one the greatest warriors of Ulster, it is Conall who avenges Cú Chulainn's death, and the same Conall participates

in a tale of the Ulster cycle which is also peculiar for the absence of Cú Chulainn: *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* (*The Tale of Mac Datho's Pig*), which also portrays the contention for the champion's portion, this time between the Ulaid and the warriors from Connacht. If the entries in *Culhwch*'s list are indeed related to stories previous to Cú Chulainn's appearance, or where he no longer is present, this could point us to the possibility that the scribe could eventually have heard the death tales, or tales related to the earlier times of Conchobar's court, or by having access to written versions. It is striking that all of the figures in the list do have Middle Irish death-tales; so has Cú Chulainn, but his is unlike the others in not having *aided* in its standard title.

The Irish names are in a corrupt form in the list, being written as *chnychwr mab nes* (Conchobar mac Nessa), *chubert .m. daere* (Cú Roí mac Daire), *fercos .m. poch* (Fergus mac Róich), *lluber beuthach* (Lóegaire Búadach) and *choruil beruach* (Conall Cernach), although there is some variation between the manuscripts concerning these last two names. Nevertheless, the names do seem to emulate the way the names sound like, with the exception of *poch* for *Roich* which strongly seems to be a scribal error, and appear to have been adapted to Welsh orthography. This detail may hold meaning for the possible sources of transmission, since oral transmission would provide the author or scribe who inserted the names with the way they sounded, but possibly not with a correct written form. Nonetheless, this does not discard the possibility of a written source: "The person who wrote them down [the five names] clearly knew what they sounded like, perhaps because he heard them from the lips of an Irish-speaker or, if he was using a source written in traditional Irish spelling, because he knew what values to assign to the Irish letters." (Sims-Williams, 2011: 171).

Another possibility is that the scribe could have had access to a Latin work with Irish elements, providing a phonetic standard. Notwithstanding, the main issue around these possibilities is that they still strike us as odd ones, since it is rather strange that a discussion involving Ulster tales (considering the oral transmission hypothesis) would not include Cú Chulainn. Even if there was some oral source responsible for the transmission of the death tales, Cú Chulainn's death is strikingly impressive among Ulster cycle's death tales, and an Irish scholar versed in early Irish secular literature would most probably refer to it. This may lead us to the hypothesis that the Welsh scribe who included these entries in *Culhwch*'s list was not well versed in Irish literature at all, and perhaps only had access to written versions of Conchobar's early

stories or a compilation of Irish death tales. If written word was indeed the medium for transmission, Ifor Williams suggested a hypothesis, namely, the possible existence of Welsh heroic tales adapting some Irish elements:

> In order to enhance the glory of Arthur, the narrator forced Welsh heroes of many centuries to make their way to his court, and become his men: they belonged to saga literature, and so they had to belong to the Arthurian circle. We can therefore confidently infer that he found these Irish names also in Welsh heroic tales, adaptations of Irish sagas; and he enlisted the Irish heroes too with the others.
> (Williams, 1944: 24).

However, as Sims-Williams warn us, the use of Irish names could be used in entirely new contexts, giving us no clue as to whether their authors knew anything about the Irish stories and respective story-motifs or just used known Irish names for their exotic flavour:

> Moreover, even if Conchobar and the rest were the heroes of Welsh heroic tales, those tales could have been more or less new creations, rather than adaptations of Irish sagas. The coupling of exotic heroic names with new stories is a common phenomenon in Arthurian romance, and there are at least two late medieval Welsh pieces of evidence for stories not attested in Irish being attached to Irish heroic names.
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 185).

Although deserving of consideration, this theory therefore has its faults in what concerns evidence of Irish influence, as Sims-Williams has pointed out[132], and still does not explain Cú Chulainn's absence, because it is equally odd that Welsh adaptations would not include him, being that they include the other five names. Furthermore, it would also be quite strange for these specific five to be the source of Welsh adaptations. Sims-Williams proposed other written sources, which seem to provide a more plausible hypothesis, even if they also do not betray a great knowledge of Irish literature. These possible sources are the Hiberno-Latin ones, composed by annals, legends of origin or other pseudo-historical works, and which may have acted as intermediaries for the Irish material to reach Wales (Sims-Williams, 2011: 20-24). Despite being more plausible, this is not the most convincing hypothesis however. There are indeed extant Irish annals that refer to Ulster Cycle figures, but none that would provide just the names that are

[132] Sims-Williams uses the example of Caílte, another Irish name in Culhwch's list, which belongs to the Fenian cycle, but whose reference in the list does not go in accord with Irish sources (Cf. Sims-Williams, 2011: 173-180). Moreover, the fact that Caílte is mentioned raises a similar question to Cú Chulainn's absence, how can a Fenian hero be mentioned but Finn mac Cumail, the main character in the Fenian cycle, be absent?

present in *Culhwch*; and there are plenty of other names in these annals that could equally well have been used, but are not. Why? To postulate an annalistic source which has left no trace is not demonstrably preferable to postulate stories which have left no trace. Therefore, although not impossible, it would be highly speculative to consider an annalistic source to which we do not have any evidence whatsoever, nor any clue that it may have existed.

Since the possibilities based on written transmission do not seem to provide us with evidence of the meaning of the Irish names in *Culhwch* being known by the Welsh author, we may find ourselves once again wondering if the transmission by word of mouth could give us more clues. Sims-Williams compares the use of Irish names in *Culhwch* with the names of heathen kings[133] referred to in a list in Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (Books XV and XVI), since they also appear to be used with the purpose of giving an exotic flavour to the narrative, chosen from a source which included Classical lore, or even invented, in order to correspond to stylistic properties, such as rhythm and alliteration. This source, Sims-Williams wonders, could be an informant who provided Wolfram with random pieces of information, and the same phenomenon might have happened with *Culhwch* (Sims-Williams, 2011: 187). If the names in *Culhwch* are from an Irish informant who, similarly to the hypothesis relative to *Parzival*, only gave some snippets of information, this could direct us once again to the possibility that this informant might have just told some death tales concerning the five names, or early stories of the Ulster cycle where Cú Chulainn was yet to make his appearance, or simply just some names relevant to a context of conversation we shall never know about. These would perhaps be used by the author(s) of *Culhwch* in order to give an Irish flavour and exoticism to the list, a common feature, as we have seen, in Arthurian legends.

Nevertheless, all these possibilities seem to always lead us to the same conclusion: the source being an oral informant or a written work is irrelevant to the question of the scribe's knowledge of Irish literature. None of the mentioned possibilities give us the impression of *Culhwch*'s author as having knowledge of the names' original significance in the Ulster cycle, much less that *Culhwch*'s audience had it, a conclusion Sims-Williams also agrees with: "Enough has been said, however, to

[133] Which are derived from Classical Works, such as Solinus and Pliny, but are given different terminations by Wolfram, perhaps to make them sound more "heathen". (Sims-Williams, 2011: 186).

show that it is unreasonable to argue from the presence of Irish names in the list that the Welsh author(s) had any real knowledge of Irish literature, still less that the inclusion of such names implies any knowledge on the part of the audience for which *Culhwch* was composed." (Sims-Williams, 2011: 187). Being it so, *Culhwch ac Olwen* does not provide us with any clue regarding the transmission of *Fled Bricrenn*. The absence of Cú Chulainn was already notable, but since the names in the list do not seem to bear any meaning concerning knowledge in Wales of Irish literature, the narrative cannot be seen as evidence of the transmission of Irish motifs to Wales, just a display of names which happen to be notable ones in the Ulster cycle.

2.4 The Elegy on Cú Roí mac Dáire and the Taliesin Tradition

Of the names in *Culhwch*'s list, only Cú Roí makes his appearance in another Welsh source, and this source might give us a stronger evidence of transmission, since it also includes the name whose absence was so notable in *Culhwch*: Cú Chulainn. This possible source is found amongst the Taliesin tradition, namely in the *Llyfr Taliesin*, from the early fourteenth century, with some of its poems (including three which might point to Irish influence) supposedly composed c. 900, or as later as the twelfth century. Besides two poems which might point to Irish influence, connected with *Kaer Sidi*[134], a third poem betraying Irish influence in the Book of Taliesin is quite important for our study: *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry* (*The Elegy on Cú Roí mac Dáire*). The poem apparently alludes to some portions, albeit with a certain obscurity, of the events leading to Cú Roí's slaying by Cú Chulainn in *Aided Chon Roí* and other related texts such as *Brinna Ferchertne*[135].

Aided Chon Roí tells the story of the abduction of Bláthnat by Cú Roí mac Dáire, who becomes her husband, and of her later rescue by Cú Chulainn with the help

[134] Two of these poems might indicate Irish influence due to their reference to a form of the 'Celtic' Otherworld named as *Kaer Sidi*, and *Sid(i)* seems like a borrowing from the Irish *síd*, which is frequently associated with the lairs of the Tuatha Dé Danann, which are often themselves forms of the Otherworld. The Irish borrowing is made more possible since the Otherworld in Welsh tradition is usually called *Annw(f)n*, and a Welsh source naming it with a term similar to the Irish nomenclature raises the possibility of Irish influence. Also, it is linguistically impossible that a native Welsh cognate of Irish *síd* would have the form *sidi*. However, Sims-Williams is inclined to the conclusion that the Irish-derived term is not significant as a possible evidence of strong influence, but just a minor element in Welsh sources which came from Irish. Furthermore, the evidence thoroughly analysed by Sims-Williams seems to show that although both are possible renditions of the 'Celtic' Otherworld, the concept of *Annwfn* is already differentiated from the Irish *síd* (Cf. Sims-Williams, 2011: 53-78).

[135] *Brinna Ferchertne* is an Irish poem which survived in MS. Laud 610, and represents a vision which retells the same events of *Aided Chon Roí* and *Amrae Chon Roí*, with Cú Roí's bard Ferchertne as its narrator. For a diplomatic edition and translation see Meyer (1901a).

of Bláthnat herself and the consequent betrayal of Cú Roí, ultimately leading to his demise at the hands of Cú Chulainn. Modern scholarship considers that there are three different versions of the tale with basis on the extant manuscripts where the story is available, namely version 1 which is based on a corrupt version found in the MS Egerton 88 [*c*. 1564] f. 10ra, London, British Library, version 2, composed by a prose fragment together with the *Brinna Ferchertne* poem and the third version which seems to be an expanded version found in the Yellow Book of Lecan (MS 1318/16, cols 573-958, H 2. 16, Dublin, Trinity College) together with a version of *Amrae Chon Roí*[136], as well as in the MS Egerton 88 where it follows version 1 and in the Book of the Ó Duibhgeannáin (MS B iv 1a, 236a, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy). For our purposes however, which imply to know the elements of the story in order to compare them with the allusions in *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry*, it is more useful to follow Thurneysen's classification of two different recensions of the tale, namely *Aided* I based in the Egerton 88 version and *Aided* II based in both the Yellow Book of Lecan version and the other version 3 example also from Egerton 88, a scheme which Sims-Williams also seems to prefer. Thurneysen presented an edition and German translation of the first recension in 1913, while R. I. Best had an edition of the second recension back in 1905, and these are still the standard editions to this day. A critical analysis of the different recensions has also been presented by Petra Hellmuth (1998b).

The two recensions have substantial differences, in *Aided* I, Bláthnat is the daughter of Conchobar and is said to love Cú Roí right from the start, but she is carried away by Echde Echbél, who goes with her to Scotland, where Echde Echbél had three great cows and a valuable copper cauldron. The Ulstermen, together with Cú Roí (disguised in grey attire), organize a raid to get Bláthnat as well as the other treasures from Echde Echbél, and they succeed, with Cú Roí slaying Echde Echbél when the

[136] *Amrae Chon Roí* (*The Eulogy of Cú Roí*) recounts briefly the events that led to the death of Cú Roí at the hands of Cú Chulainn due to the betrayal of Bláthnat and describes a scene where Cú Roí's poet Ferchertne follows Conchobar, Cú Chulainn and Bláthnat and finds them standing near the promontory of Cennbera. Conchobar recognizes Ferchertne and asks him about Cú Roí, to which Ferchertne replies he cannot answer for he is broken due to the killing of Cú Roí, but says he will kill himself if not another as well, followed by the utterance of the phrase "Ní hada dom anmuin / apairt ro-m-nét" ("Not due/meet to/for my soul is the deed that has quelled me"). He then leaps forward in the direction of Bláthnat and grabs her by his arms, breaking her ribs, and throws himself along with Bláthnat down the cliff, his jump loosens a rock, which then crushes them down below, effectively killing them both. *Amrae Chon Roí* is usually found in the context of *Aided Chon Roí*, in both the Egerton 88 MS as well as in the *Yellow* Book of Lecan version, thus providing a dramatic epilogue for the tale, but it also has an independent version in MS 1337/3, pp. 15-58, H 3.18, Dublin, Trinity College. Stokes (1905b) made a first edition and translation, but a more recent edition and translation is found in Henry (1995).

latter goes in pursuit of the Ulstermen. However, when they return to Ireland, the Ulstermen trick Cú Roí and do not give him his share of the spoils, by delaying the deliverance of such spoils for several years. Cú Roí then realizes the deception and takes Bláthnat by force, along with the cows and the cauldron, and brings them to his fortress, making Bláthnat his wife. However, Cú Chulainn goes in disguise to Cú Roí's fortress and meets Bláthnat, who betrays Cú Roí and reveals to Cú Chulainn that there is a salmon which contains inside it a golden apple containing Cú Roí's soul, and Cú Roí can only be killed if such apple is cut with Cú Roí's own sword. After seven years, the time required for the salmon to appear, the Ulstermen lay siege to the castle of Cú Roí, but cannot approach because Cú Roí has great strength and keeps throwing great stones at them, but Cú Chulainn finds the salmon and destroys it (it is not clear how Cú Chulainn got Cú Roí's own sword, presumably Bláthnat delivered it), leading to the depletion of Cú Roí's strength. Cú Chulainn then returns to the fortress and kills Cú Roí. Following the death of Cú Roí, his charioteer Luach jumps on the chariot of Conchobar's son Coirbre and leads them both to the rocks, thus killing them. Ferchertne, as in *Amrae Chon Roí*, kills Bláthnat, but in a different way, by driving a spear through her chest, and is killed immediately afterwards.

In *Aided* II, on the other hand, the Ulstermen, together with Cú Roí once again disguised in gray, lay siege to the Fir Fálgae in the Isle of Man, and from them they take three cows along with three birds who used to sing to make the cows give milk, a cauldron used to hold the milk of up to thirty cows which was full of silver and gold, and Bláthnat, who in this recension is the daughter of Iuchna, the king of the Fir Fálgae. When the spoil is being divided, Cú Roí is betrayed and prevented from having his legitimate share by the Ulstermen, and in response he steals the cauldron, the cows and birds, and kidnaps Bláthnat as well. Cú Chulainn goes in pursuit, but is put to the ground by Cú Roí, who then cuts his hair with his sword and rubs cow-dung in his head, thus humiliating Cú Chulainn. Cú Roí then goes to his lands and Cú Chulainn disappears for a year. After that time Cú Chulainn approaches the stronghold of Cú Roí, who had taken Bláthnat as his wife. However, Cú Chulainn also loved Bláthnat and manages to speak and engage in a romance with her, convincing her to betray Cú Roí. In the meanwhile, the Ulstermen started to approach Cú Roí's stronghold together with Cú Chulainn. Bláthnat then convinces Cú Roí he has to reinforce his stronghold with every pillar-stone in Ireland, and he sends his followers to gather the stones for the

reconstruction, remaining alone with Bláthnat. The deception arranged between Bláthnat and Cú Chulainn then becomes clear, she is to pour the milk of Iuchna's cows into the river in the direction of the Ulstermen as a signal for their attack to commence. She pours the milk and convinces Cú Roí to give him a bath inside his stronghold. Before entering, he is able to see the host of Ulster approaching, but Bláthnat deceives him by claiming that what he is seeing in the distance are his own people carrying the stones and oaks for the rebuilding, and that the horses are cattle. Cú Roí then finally enters his stronghold and Bláthnat starts bathing him, while simultaneously she bounds his hair to the bedposts and rails and disarms him of his sword. The Ulstermen then enter the stronghold, opened by Bláthnat, and Cú Roí, despite his weakened position, still fights back and slays a hundred of the invaders, to which are added thirty others slain by an attendant within Cú Roí's fortress. Cú Roí's army and allies hear the commotion and return to the stronghold, but eventually they are overpowered, and Cú Roí is slain by Cú Chulainn, who beheads him. Following the slaying of Cú Roí the events take a similar turn to the other recension: Cú Roí's charioteer, Fer Becrach in this version, jumps to the chariot of Cairbre, the son of Conchobar, and leads them both against rocks, causing their death, and such tragic event is followed by *Amrae Chon Roí*, where Ferchertne kills himself along with Bláthnat, by throwing himself down a cliff with Bláthnat in his grasp, and getting them both crushed by a falling stone. Although the manuscripts where we do have extant versions of the tale were all copied and compiled between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century, the narrative itself seems to be much older, possibly as old as the eighth century, with *Aided* I probably belonging to the ninth century (Thurneysen 1913: 221) and *Aided* II resulting from a compilation from the twelfth-century (Sims-Williams, 2011: 48).

With our knowledge regarding the narratives of *Aided Chon Roí* thus clarified, here follows the text of *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry*:

> From the wide sea-fountain flows the tide,
> it advances, it retreats, it smashes, it surges.
> The death-song of Corröi has agitated me;
> the sad silencing of a man of tempestuous qualities:
> scarcely have I heard of one whose misfortune was greater.
> Dayry's son used to hold a rudder on the southern sea;
> Incorrupt was his fame before his burial.
>
> From the wide sea-fountain flow the currents,
> [the sea] advances, it retreats, it surges, it smashes,
> The death-song of Corröi affects me too;

> the sad silencing of a man of tempestuous qualities:
> scarcely have I heard of one whose misfortune was greater.
>
> From the wide sea-fountain flows a flood,
> swiftly-coursing currents strike, attack the shore.
> One who conquers, one of great treasure,
> and after Man, making from homesteads;
> do the monks know about the passionate treasure-chief?
> While the swiftly victorious one was alive, the fierce one in the morning
> tidings are made known to me in truth throughout the Earth -
> [there was] contention between Corröi and Cocholyn
> [and] frequent [were] their conflicts for their borderlands.
> The Lord descended swiftly on the [Hell-]swamp of the host in torment.
> God has a citadel which shall not fall, which shall not shake:
> blessed the soul who shall secure it.[137]
> (Haycock, 2007: 467-468)

Although mixed in the midst of the poem's obscurity and esoteric contours, with the elegy's praising intertwined with references to the flow and ebb of the tides, there is no doubt that some of the details described in the elegy are drawn from Cú Roí's death tale. The conflict with his slayer Cú Chulainn is referred to, and there are unquestionable allusions to the events that led to the main contention between Cú Roí and Cú Chulainn, and ultimately to the former's death, which are described at least in recension II of *Aided Chon Roí*:

> The Welsh author would seem to have known some version of *Aided Con Roi* ('The Death of Cú Roí'), a tale at least as old as the eighth century. […] According to every version Cú Roí helped Cú Chulainn and the Ulstermen to capture a woman, a magic cauldron, and other spoils from a location overseas, and fought and defeated Cú Chulainn because he was not given his fair share; then Cú Chulainn surprised Cú Roí in his Munster fortress and slew him. No doubt these were their conflicts mentioned in the *Marwnat*. In most versions of the story (though not in *Aided* I) the location overseas is the land of the Fir Fhálgae, which was sometimes identified as the Isle of Man: hence, surely, the Welsh author's reference to *Mynaw*, an acceptable variant of *Manaw* 'Man'…
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 48)

The elements which compose the elegy may betray further knowledge about Cú Roí beyond the ones already mentioned. But these same elements are the ones that might cause complication on ascertaining which version(s) were known to the author(s) of the elegy. The elements of the siege on the Fir Fálgae, Cú Roí's treasure taking, and his contention with Cú Chulainn, are all present in the Yellow Book of Lecan's (*Aided* II) version, for example, but in this version, there is no mentioning of certain elements

[137] See Appendix I, note 37.

which seem to be known about Cú Roí, from what can be inferred from his elegy in the Book of Taliesin, as Sims-Williams points out:

> The allusion to Cú Rói's holding a rudder on the *southern sea* will not suit his journey by ship (*í noí*) with Cú Chulainn, if Man was their destination, but could suit the episode where he carried off the woman from Ulster to Munster 'in the hide of a coracle' (*fri curach codail*). More probably, however, it refers to Cú Rói's Oriental expeditions, which are frequently mentioned in Irish literature.
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 48)

If the Welsh author did know some version of *Aided Chon Roí*, it is hard to pinpoint which one(s), since the siege on the Isle of Man, and the mentioning of Cú Roí's expeditions are not present simultaneously in the written versions which arrived to us. In the Egerton 88 version (*Aided* I), for example, Cú Roí's looting of other lands is mentioned: "He (Curoi) had a copper vessel, from which he used to beat (loot) Albion and the other islands of the sea up to the "great world""[138] (Stohellou, 2011), but in this version, Bláthnat is the daughter of Conchobar, and is kidnapped by Echde Echbél, from *Cenn Tire Fer Ecencaill* (possibly the former Kintyre in southwest Scotland). It was Echde Echbél who had in his possession the cauldron and cows which were otherwise spoils from Man in the other versions. However, *Aided* II does not mention Cú Roí's fame of travelling to other lands, but *Aided* I does. These are the details that may cause confusion on which version was the source to *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry* (if it was a written one), aggravated by the fact that another version may have existed, previous to the ones we have available: "The earliest extant version (*Aided* I) belongs to about the ninth century. A later version (*Aided* II), compiled in the twelfth century from various *disiecta membra*, and allusions in the *Dindshenchas* and elsewhere show that there must have been at least one other early version of the tale which is now lost" (Sims-Williams, 2011: 48).

There is no way to know which written version may have been the source or whether there were copies available of the two known recensions or even if it was a written source and not some oral version of the story, or an oral version based on a written version, or the inverse scenario. Nevertheless, it could be more probable that the source (either written or from an oral informant) was indeed based in a version more closely resembling *Aided* II. This possibility gains more ground due to the already

[138] See Appendix I, note 38.

mentioned fame of Cú Roí as a traveller elsewhere in Irish literature, despite Sims-Williams' doubt about the Welsh author's knowledge on Cú Roí being that extensive (Sims-Williams, 2011: 52). If there was any further knowledge of other Irish tales, Cú Roí's fame as a traveller had more than a fair chance to have reached Wales. Some examples may be relevant to acknowledge this: in *Mesca Ulad*[139] (*The Intoxication of the Ulstermen*), Cú Roí is referred to as "King of the World, the fair-visaged Cu Roi mac Dairi"[140] (Hennessy, 1889: 25), as well as the "man who traverses the streams of the ocean"[141] (Gantz, 1981: 202); in another poem put in Ferchertne's mouth (besides *Brinna Ferchertne*), Cú Roí is explicitly portrayed as having plundered the south of the World, with Africa specified: "He plundered the south of the world, he smashed the army of the Dog-heads, Cú Roí over the Red Sea: Africa feasted him out of fear."[142] (Sims-Williams, 2011: 50). Curiously, the mentioning of Cú Roí's expeditions is also in the most important Irish text for our study: *Fled Bricrenn*. When Cú Chulainn, Loégaire and Conall return from the beheading contest with Terror, they are advised to go to Cú Roí's stronghold in order to once again find a way to end the dispute for the champion's portion. They are received by his wife Bláthnat[143],who tells them that Cú Roí is absent in a journey to the east, in the lands of Scythia:

> That night on their arrival Curoi was not at home. But knowing they would come, he counselled his wife regarding the heroes until he should return from his oriental expedition into Scythian territory. From the age of seven years, when he took up arms, until his demise, Curoi had not reddened his sword in Erin, nor ever had the food of Erin passed his lips.[144]
> (Henderson, 1899: 101)

Further in the text, when Cú Roí appears in the court of the Ulstermen, disguised as a *bachlach*, in order to challenge the Ulster warriors to the beheading game, his

[139] In *Mesca Ulad*, the Ulster heroes, after a dispute concerning the division of the Ulster province, agree to drink in both Conchobar and Cú Chulainn's households. However, they take the wrong road, and end up in Cú Roí's stronghold, where he is together with Ailill and Medb from Connaught. The Ulstermen are apparently well-received, and a house is set for them to feast. It is a trap though, conceived for the Ulstermen to burn inside without the chance to escape. Eventually they do escape due to Cú Chulainn's prowess. The house on fire is a representation of the "burning iron-house" theme, which has Welsh analogues in the tale of *Branwen ferch Llyr* (Sims-Williams, 2011: 262-277). The standard edition of *Mesca Ulad* to this day is Watson's (1941), while popular translations are found in Gantz (1981: 199-211) as well as the most recent provisional translation in Koch *et al* (1994: 95-116).
[140] See Appendix I, note 39.
[141] See Appendix I, note 40.
[142] See Appendix I, note 41.
[143] Apparently the same Bláthnat from *Aided Chon Roí*, but *Fled Bricrenn* shows discrepancy in relation to Cú Roí's death tale, since there is apparently no remembering on the part of Cú Chulainn of the kidnapping and offense by Cú Roí, as well as the inverse, as if there is no connection between both Ulster tales, although Bláthnat is the same.
[144] See Appendix I, note 42.

overseas exploits are described by himself, and are even more exalted due to the naming of the several lands throughout the world where Cú Roí had been: "But neither in Erin nor in Alba nor in Europe nor in Africa nor in Asia, including Greece, Scythia, the Isles of Gades, the Pillars of Hercules, and Bregon's Tower (Brigantium), have I found the quest on which I have come, nor a man to do me fairplay regarding it"[145] (Henderson, 1899: 119). This part of Cú Roí's speech might even represent a further indication of some knowledge in Wales of Cú Roí's fame as a traveller or even of some version of *Fled Bricrenn* itself, since a passage from *Culhwch* seems to be reminiscent of Cú Roí's words, namely when Arthur's gatekeeper Glewlwyd announces to Arthur the presence of Culhwch at the gate:

> I was once in Caer Se and Asse,
> in Sach and Salach,
> in Lotor and Ffotor.
> I was once in India the Great
> and India the Lesser.
> I was once in the battle of the two Ynyrs
> when the twelve hostages were taken from Norway.
> And I was once in Europe,
> I was in Africa,
> and the islands of Corsica,
> and in Caer Brythwch and Brythach and Nerthach.
> I was once there when you killed the wardband of Gleis son of Merin,
> when you killed Mil Du son of Dugum.
> I was once there when you conquered Greece in the east.
> I was once in Caer Oeth and Anoeth,
> and in Caer Nefenhyr Nawdant:
> fair kingly men did we see there -
> but never in my life saw a man as handsome as the one who is at the entrance to the gate this very moment.[146]
> (Davis, 2007: 182)

The reminiscence might be a coincidence and the type of speech just a literary device, nevertheless, taking into account that *Culhwch* was already a suspect for Irish influence due to its inclusion of Irish legendary names, including the name of Cú Roí, it is hard not to raise an eyebrow and to suspect it could indicate a further Irish derivate. Moreover, prior to the episode in *Fled Bricrenn*'s story where Cú Roí mentions his travels, when the spell Cú Roí uses to keep his fort revolving is described, it is implied that Cú Roí travels frequently around the globe, which together with the previous reference to his oriental expedition, points toward the fame of Cú Roí's travels as also

[145] See Appendix I, note 43.
[146] See Appendix I, note 44.

being alluded to in this section: "In what airt soever of the globe Curoi should happen to be, every night o'er the fort he chaunted a spell, till the fort revolved as swiftly as a mill-stone."[147] (Henderson, 1899: 103).

As we can see from the aforementioned examples, *Fled Bricrenn* is particularly rich in allusions regarding Cú Roí's travelling. If we consider the hypothesis that the story was also known to the Welsh author(s) of *Marwnat*, it would explain the knowledge about Cú Roí's overseas exploits. We have already noted the reminiscence in Glewlwyd's speech of Cú Roí's speech, but what further evidence can we find which would point towards that hypothesis? The best course of action might be to find yet more evidences of Irish influence in more Welsh texts, which could be related. A possible source of evidence could be found in the specific motif of the revolving castle, mentioned in *Fled Bricrenn*, since this motif has analogues elsewhere in Welsh literature. One such analogue is *Y Seint Greal*[148], where there is the description of a revolving castle:

> And they rode through the wild forests, and from one forest to another until they arrived on clear ground outside the forest. And then they beheld a castle coming within their view on level ground in the middle of a meadow; and around the castle flowed a large river, and inside the castle they beheld large spacious halls with windows large and fair. They drew nearer towards the castle, and they perceived the castle turning with greater speed than the fastest wind they had ever known.[149]
> (Williams, 1876: 649)

In a manner which can remind us of Cú Roí's castle, the castle which Peredur, Gwalchmei and Lancelot encounter is turning as well. Be that as it may, the Welsh version is an adaptation from Continental Arthurian tales, namely from a combination of *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and thus the turning castle in this instance comes from Continental tradition. Therefore, *Y Seint Greal* cannot be considered as being evidence of direct influence from Ireland to Wales. In 1876, John Rhys, clearly failing to take account of *Y Seint Greal*'s derivative character, attempted to establish a

[147] See Appendix I, note 45.
[148] *Y Seint Greal* is a Middle Welsh translation/adaptation of the thirteenth-century Old French Arthurian romance *Perlesvaus* combined with the *Queste del Saint Graal*. For an edition and translation see Williams, 1876.
[149] See Appendix I, note 46.

connection of this revolving castle with the *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*[150] poem in *Llyfr Taliesin*. The verses of the poem which led him to such connection are the following:

> Harmonious is my song in Caer Siddi;
> sickness and old age do not afflict those who are there,
> as Manawyd a Phryderi know.
> Three instruments/organs around a fire play in front of it
> and around its turrets are the wellsprings of the sea;
> and [as for] the fruitful fountain which is above it -
> its drink is sweeter than the white wine.[151]
> (Haycock, 2007: 277)

According to Rhys' theory, *Sidi* in the poem relates to the Welsh word *sidyll*, which means spinning wheel, and in a rather rash conclusion, Rhys claims that *Sidi* is then a reference to a revolving castle similar to *Y Seint Greal*'s castle (Rhys, 1886: 301-302). However, Rhys' theory is entirely undermined and rendered valueless by his failure in recognizing that *Y Seint Greal* is only an adaptation/translation of Continental Arthurian romances, and not an original Welsh work. Another poem in the *Llyfr Taliesin* also raises suspicions for a revolving-castle analogue, namely *Preideu Annwfyn*, which includes the following description: "in the four quarters of the fort, revolving [to face] the four directions."[152] (Haycock, 2007: 435). Marged Haycock points out that this description could indeed be an echo of Cú Roí's revolving castle, but she also refers to the textual difficulties of the translation, and suggests other possibilities (Haycock, 2007: 442). Therefore this is an obscure line on the poem for which we cannot be certain in what regards its correct translation. There is however other element in *Preideu Annwfyn* which might reveal Irish influence, and which is also present in *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*, as we can observe in the initial verses of *Preideu*:

> I praise the lord, the Ruler of the kingly realm,
> who has extended his sway over the extent of the world.
> Maintained was Gwair's prison in Caer Siddi
> throughout Pwyll and Pryderi's story.
> No-one went there before he did -

[150] Named *Kerd Veib am Llyr* and translated as "Song Before the Sons of Llyr" in *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (1858). The naming of this poem is problematic, because apparently it has no title. In *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (1858), it was named *Kerd Veib am Llyr* and translated as "Song Before the Sons of Llyr". John Carey refers to it as *Golychafi gulwyd*, and Haycock also names it *Golychaf-i Gulwyd* in her edition and translation of the *Llyfr Taliesin* (2007: 273-292) which is preferred here, since the poem starts with these words in the first line (Cf. Carey 2007: 52), but discussion about its name possibly being *Kadeir Taliessin* (consequently creating a conflict with other poem in *Llyfr Taliesin* with the same name) can be found in Haycock's edition and translation of *Preideu Annwfyn* (1983: 176, 187, 197), as well as in her aforementioned edition of the Book of Taliesin (2007: 273).

[151] See Appendix I, note 47.

[152] See Appendix I, note 48.

into the heavy grey chain guarding the loyal lad.
And before the spoils/herds of Annwfn he was singing sadly,
and until Doom shall our poetic prayer continue.
Three full loads of Prydwen we went into it:
save seven, none came back from Caer Siddi.[153]
(Haycock, 2007: 435)

The element in question is the name *Kaer Sidi*, which appears in both *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*, and may reveal a relevant possibility for Irish influence, but due to a possible relation to the Otherworld in Irish literature. More specifically, this possibility is based on the suspicion that the use of the word *Sid(i)* in the poem is due to the knowledge or borrowing from the Irish word *síd,* which refers to the Otherworld, and such suspicion is strengthened by the mention in *Golychaf-i Gulwyd* that sickness and old age do not plague those who are in *Kaer Sidi*, since the Irish Otherworld is usually characterised as a place of immortality from where death and disease are absent. Another detail given in the poem may also lead us in that direction, since it is mentioned that "and around its turrets are the wellsprings of the sea", which might remit us to versions of the Otherworld located overseas, such as the one in the Irish *Immram Brain*[154], and in the Welsh *Branwen uerch Lyr.* Moreover, Taliesin's supposedly own *Llyfr Taliesin* also makes mention of the events in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, creating a full-circle intertextuality between the *Four Branches* and the Taliesin tradition. *Preideu Annwfyn* mentions Pwyll and Pryderi, notable characters in the *Four Branches*, and in the previously quoted *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*, several references to the *Branches* are also found, including the cauldron of Ceridwen, allusions to the stories of Gwydion and Lleu, and the names of Manawydan and Pryderi once again, but most importantly for our question, several references to the *Second Branch*:

I sang in a feast over sad drink,
I sang before Llŷr's sons in Ebyr Henfelen.
[…]
I was with Brân in Ireland:
I witnessed the slaying of mighty-thighed warriors;
I heard the clash of the fierce men

[153] See Appendix I, note 49.
[154] In *Immram Brain*, Bran mac Febuil and his retinue go in search of a paradisiacal island overseas called (*Emain*) *Ablach*, the Land of Women. This land is described as a marvelous and beautiful place, filled with music, joy, games and abundant with the best food and wine. But what really sets it apart from the mortal realm is the statement in the poem that the island is devoid of death, disease or even feelings of grief and sorrow. It stands then as one of the many forms of the Otherworld, located overseas instead of the more common parallel plane located through mounds, hills or fountains. For edition and translation see Meyer (1895b) and Mac Mathúna (1985).

with the Irish devils, a wily lot.[155]
(Haycock, 2007: 275-276)

These references are important, because they are in the same poem which refers to Taliesin's song in *Kaer Sidi*, said to be an island fortress in *Preideu Annwfyn*, and here too described as being surrounded by the streams of the ocean. If we remember the *Second Branch*'s narrative, Brân's head and his seven companions travel to the island of Gwales, where they live unaffected by the passage of time in a great hall, during eighty years, feasting continuously in a state of joy which make us think of Gwales as having the same attributes which are usually described in renditions of the Otherworld in Irish literature. Furthermore, in *Preideu Annwfyn*, seven men are said to be the only ones to escape from *Kaer Sidi*, and the companions of Brân were also seven. Nonetheless, the question remains on how these connections can explain the use of the Irish word *síd*. We have already seen that *síd* is a word which is commonly associated with the Otherworld in Irish literature, which despite being an underground/parallel realm in many stories it is also placed overseas in others. If the author(s) of *Golychaf-i Gulwyd* and *Preideu Annwfyn* had some type of contact with a source of transmission for the tales, oral or written, related to the Irish Otherworld or *síd*, and if this source also mentioned its overseas version, it would not be completely far-fetched to consider that they had related it with Brân's story.

In his search for Irish influence on the Grail legends, John Carey also hints at the possibility that the *Second Branch* itself already had a possible influence of Irish motifs, related to Irish tales concerning Bran mac Febuil and Conn of the Hundred Battles (Carey, 2007: 43-66). If this is so, *Kaer Sidi* is indeed related to the Irish *síd*. Moreover, being mentioned in *Preideu Annwfyn* could also hint at the possibility that the Welsh author(s), being in contact with some source relating tales concerned with the *síd*, might associate it with their own version of the Otherworld: *Annwfn*. Let's not forget that our concept of a "Celtic" culture, common to the Celtic fringes' past, is a fairly recent one, and the Welsh *literati* did not have the same notion of a common cultural past, they probably would not associate the *síd* with their own culture, but could see it as an analogue to their own *Annwfn*. Ó Cathasaigh did conclude that *Annwfn* is a concept which has developed independently from the "Celtic" Otherworld: "there can be little doubt that for the most part the Welsh conception of Annwfn derives independently

[155] See Appendix I, note 50.

from the Celtic Otherworld" (Ó Cathasaigh, 1977-79: 150), and Sims-Williams also points out the several differences between the concept of *Annwfn* and *síd*[156], however, they do share some Otherworldly characteristics, that might have been enough for making an association. This would prove to be more probable if we take into account Sims-Williams' conclusion that there is no evidence that the word *síd* as an influence for the name *Kaer Sidi* betrays any real knowledge of the meaning of the Irish Otherworld, but might just have been derived from an occasional source which would not give any insight on its real meaning:

> The first point to note is that *sidi* may have meant little or nothing to the poems' audience, in view of their deliberately esoteric nature, which seems to extend to the list of *kaereu* in *Preiddeu Annwn*. Certainly, while there are many more allusions to Annwn in medieval Welsh, there are few to *kaer sidi*. A second consideration is that these references to *kaer sidi* do not show that the Irish word *sid* had passed into Welsh speech. […] The word could have passed into Welsh in a bilingual centre, such as that which produced the Juvencus manuscript, but never have gained any real currency. Finally, we cannot be sure that the author(s) of the two poems came across the Irish word in a vernacular Irish context. He might, for instance, have come across it in an explanation of one of the many place-names containing *síd.* […] Or our Welsh author(s) could have met the word used as a technical term in a Hiberno-Latin work and have adopted it because of its esoteric potential. […] A possible source might be some Hiberno-Latin work describing a voyage to the Otherworld, though not the *Navigatio Brendani* itself, which uses Latin names…
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 68-69).

If we consider the last possibility raised by Sims-Williams, of a source relating an Otherworld voyage, which might have mentioned *síd*, and also keep in mind the more than possible ignorance about its complete meaning, its association with their closest analogue in the form of *Annwfn* would be perfectly plausible despite the differences in both concepts of Otherworld. If we also take into account the mentioned relations, studied by Carey, between the *Second Branch* and the tales concerning Bran

[156] "Although the Irish *síd* and the Welsh *Annwfn* are both basically chthonic Otherworlds, there is an important difference between them. *Annwfn* seems to be a single realm, which can be entered from many places on earth and sea; in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* we hear of '*a* king from Annwfn' (*Hafgan brenhin o Annwuyn*, Red Book text) making war on '*the* king of Annwfn' (*Arawn urenhin Annwuyn*), whose realm is contiguous with his, just as Annwfn is itself contiguous with the terrestrial land of Dyfed. (Indeed Arawn brings the hero there by an ordinary mode of overland travel.) Apparently, then, Annwfn was a single kingdom, divided into separate sub-kingdoms and dominated, with opposition, by a king claiming overlordship under the title 'king of Annwfn' – a fair reflection of medieval Welsh politics. The Irish fairy mounds or *side*, by contrast, are independent kingdoms, which enjoy more or less friendly relations with one another, like the mortal *tuatha* of early Irish law. They are not entrances to a single underground kingdom." (Sims-Williams, 2011: 58-59).

mac Febuil (including *Immram Brain*), this would prove to be an even stronger possibility.

We may only conclude that although the relations we have been seeing cannot be completely proved, the question that *síd* in *Kaer Sidi* derives from the Irish *síd* seems almost undeniable. Notwithstanding, the question on how the Welsh author(s) of *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry* had some knowledge about Cú Roí's travels remains unanswered, and although *Fled Bricrenn* is indeed the text which contains more references to Cú Roí's fame, we have already seen other examples in Irish literature which also mention it. It would be highly speculative to pinpoint which one. Furthermore, we know there were more texts concerning Cú Roí due to the Irish tale lists (Mac Cana, 1980: 45, 51, 63), such as *Echtra Chon Roí*, *Cathbúada Con Roí* and *Orgain Chathrach Chon Roí.* Unfortunately, these did not survive in any extant versions, and we can only guess if they also boasted about Cú Roí's travels, or alternatively if they were not just other names for the stories we already know. For example, *Echtra Chon Roí* could also be another version of the raid on the Fir Fálgae, or *Orgain Chathrach Chon Roí* could refer to *Aided Chon Roí*. The key point is that without knowing their content we have our hands tied in what concerns the possibility of these stories having been further sources of knowledge to the Welsh author(s) of *Marwnat*. We have been tracing clues however, that point to Irish influence in Welsh sources, such as the allusion to Cú Roí's travels in *Marwnat*, along with details from *Aided Chon Roí*, and a possible derivation from the Irish Otherworld in the use of the word *Kaer Sidi* (in both *Predeu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*). Furthermore, we have noticed that these poems also reveal some knowledge of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, which as mentioned, were also found by John Carey to betray Irish influence. These elements seem to be quite enough to keep following this trail in order to understand the possible channels of transmission of Irish motifs to Wales, and consequently of *Fled Bricrenn*.

2.4.1 *Aided Chon Roí's* First Recension as an Influence for Continental Tales

The importance of *Marwnat Corroi* for our purposes in searching for a channel of transmission for Irish motifs to the Continent through Wales is further highlighted by the fact that *Aided Chon Roí* also has a parallel in Arthurian literature, which, although

not as close in the details as the analogues to *Fled Bricrenn*, might indeed point out to *Aided Chon Roí* as another Irish story which might have influenced the Continental Arthurian tradition. Since *Marwnat Corroi* contains allusions to this same Irish story, it may be another step towards establishing Wales as an intermediary. The Arthurian tale in question is a part of the Vulgate Cycle, and more specifically of the *Vulgate Lancelot* and the episode concerning Gawain's kidnapping by a knight called Caradoc[157], the lord of the Dolorous Tower. Lancelot goes in rescue of Gawain and slays Caradoc with his own enchanted sword, which had been placed within Lancelot's reach by a maiden who had been abducted besides Gawain. This very same maiden is perceived as being Caradoc's intended mistress, who did not love him and ultimately betrays him. According to the text, Caradoc had placed this sword, enchanted by his mother, in the maiden's trust, due to his love for her, and the sword was the only weapon which could slay him:

> This damsel was a prisoner of Caradoc's, taken away from a knight, a very handsome young man, whom she loved more than anyone else, which is why she could not love Caradoc. He however, loved her more than any other creature on earth and was indeed so smitten by her that he had put into her keeping something that he would have entrusted to no one else: an enchanted sword. His mother, who was a very skillful sorceress, had foretold that he would not die by any means other than this sword, and she had guarded it for a long time. Lately, though, Caradoc had given it to the young woman, believing that she would love him as much as he did her.
>
> She now pondered how she might put the sword into Lancelot's hands […].
>
> The young lady had come to the door at the top with the right sword in her hand. From the top of the tower she had seen King Arthur's army camped around the castle, and it was plain to her that Caradoc was dead the moment his foe had the enchanted sword in hand. She raised it high up, as a sign that he should come take it.
>
> Once she was sure he had seen it, she laid it on the top step and closed the tower door, she was so eager for the death of the man she hated more than any other that she was putting her life at risk. Caradoc had not noticed when Lancelot's sword broke, because all he could think about was dodging his strikes. Now Lancelot dashed up the stairs, seized the young lady's sword, and threw down at the door what remained of his own. Then he held up in front of his face what remains of his shield and ran back to the knight. Caradoc flung his hands forward to seize him, but he missed, since Lancelot jumped aside. At once Lancelot hit him on the right arm, striking with such power that he

[157] It is rather interesting that the name of the villain in *Vulgate Lancelot* is Caradoc, which, as we may remember, was the name of the protagonist of the French *Livre de Caradoc* which is one of our beheading game narratives. This detail may however be nothing more than a coincidence, since the two characters seem to be absolutely different both in context and in their characterisation, not matching on any characteristics except for the name, which was a common Welsh name and in this instance might be the result of the transmission of names from Welsh to Continental tradition.

> sliced right through it, and both hand and sword fell to the ground. Caradoc let out a cry so loud that the whole courtyard echoed with it.
>
> With that, three man-at-arms came to rescue him, but they found the way barred, as the young woman had lowered the portcullis to keep them from falling upon the knight. When Caradoc saw that he would have no help, he made a last, wild attempt to defend himself, trying to catch Lancelot with his left hand; but Lancelot quickly sprang back and then, with good sword held high, lunged forward again. Caradoc recognized the sword and cried out, "Ah, God! Now my death has come! I am betrayed by what I loved the most![158]
> (Lacy, Vol. IV, 2010: 160-61)

Caradoc's last words reflect his sense of betrayal. As we may remember, these particular details find resemblance in *Aided* I, when Bláthnat reveals to Cú Chulainn that Cú Roí's source of strength is his soul, which is hidden in a golden apple inside a salmon, and can only be destroyed by the latter's own sword. Cú Chulainn carries out the destruction of Cú Roí's soul with his own weapon, and when Cú Roí comprehends what has happened, he also utters his last words, although different from Caradoc's, with reference to his betrayal:

> Then the woman betrayed him. As he told to the woman, in his simplicity, to comfort her in her grief, that a spring was in the west at the side of Sliab Mis, in which a salmon used to appear at the end of seven years, a golden apple is in its interior, this apple can (only) be cut with his own sword, his soul was in it. […] Then the salmon was killed (?) by Cuchulainn. This soon took the force and the bravery from Curoi. And he said: "No secret for women! No jewel for slaves!" Then Cuchulainn killed him. And they were victorious over him.[159]
> (Stohellou, 2010).

It would be perfectly legitimate to argue that both the unfaithful wife and external soul motifs are widespread throughout several traditions, and are therefore international story types. With the support of Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-literature* (1955-1958), Sarah Pfannenschmidt has rightly identified these types in *Aided* I: "Bláthine's act of learning the secret of his external soul through deception is an example of motif K975.2, "the ogre's heart in the egg." The existence of a hidden soul is part of a related motif, namely E70, "the ogre's external soul."" (2009: 251), and she adds an assertion by Kenneth Jackson from the aforementioned *International Popular Tale*, concerned with international tale type 302 (the kidnapping of a damsel by an ogre), in which he states that the protagonist in such tales learns from the damsel that the "ogre's life is not in himself but hidden in some external object, and that if the

[158] See Appendix I, note 51.
[159] See Appendix I, note 52.

object is destroyed the ogre will die" (Jackson, 1961: 61). Moreover, Arthurian tradition is full of episodes where a knight is slain with his own sword. Nevertheless, the way the motifs are intertwined and presented in *Vulgate Lancelot* and in *Aided* I show striking coincidences. In the *Vulgate Lancelot*, the soul quest is suppressed, and from only the motif of the slain by own sword *per se*, we could be led to believe that the theory of a possible connection is due to a search for derivation with basis on wishful thinking. However, the pairing of the sword motif with the uttering of last words demonstrating disgust towards the betrayal of the loved one, together with the other abduction circumstances which find similarity in both stories, arouses a strong suspicion of influence from the Irish tale. Furthermore, the Irish story also displays Bláthnat as loving another, in this case Cú Chulainn, and as knowing the secret for the demise of her keeper, as did the damsel in *Vulgate Lancelot*. In both stories, this secret is based on magic: the golden apple which could only be destroyed by Cú Roí's sword, and the enchanted sword of Caradoc, which embodies in itself both the motifs of the "slain by own sword" and the magical secret. Nonetheless, the possibility to argue that these similar points are a result of international tale types is still a valid one. Pfannenschmidt has also identified the "slain by own sword" motif as international folktale motif Z312.2, equally related to ogre creatures (Pfannenschmidt, 2009: 252), something which Thurneysen had also noted (1913: 231).

Similarly, the uttering of final words related to the betrayal also has international parallels, namely in one of the versions of a Russian tale which is incredibly similar to *Aided* I: the death-tale of Koschei, a magician (as Cú Roí also appears to be), who "also possesses an external soul, one so obscurely hidden that it renders him virtually immortal. His only danger is his willingness to trust a woman" (Pfannenschmidt, 2009: 253). Just as Cú Roí, Koschei also holds a princess imprisoned, to whom he is persuaded to tell the location of his external soul: "upon this island there grows a green oak, and beneath this oak is an iron chest, and in this chest is a small basket, and in this basket a hare, and in this hare a duck, and in this duck an egg" (Dietrich, 1857: 22). The princess, like Bláthnat, betrays Koschei by telling her lover, a prince, where is the egg with Koschei's soul, and the prince manages to find it and goes to the presence of Koschei along with the princess. When Koschei sees the egg he utters the words "was it not out of love that I told you where my death was? And is this the return you make?" (Dietrich, 1857: 24), and enraged he attacks the princess, but the prince crushes the egg

and Koschei dies. Pfannenschmidt rightly states that "Koschei's downfall is very similar to the Aided I account; his female prisoner is persuaded to reveal the location of her abductor's hidden soul to another man" (2009: 254), and the uttering of the last words also bears similarities to Cú Roí's and Caradoc's own.

Taking these undeniable parallels in consideration, the main motive for considering the possibility of Irish influence in the *Aided* I/*Vulgate Lancelot* matter, rather than the use of common international motifs, is the acknowledgment that *Golychaf-i Gulwyd, Preideu Annwfyn* and *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry* do point to Wales as an intermediary for the transmission of Irish motifs to the Continent. In other words, if we have several possible evidences that Wales was an intermediary between Irish and Arthurian traditions, and if we have clues provided by *Marwnat Corroi* regarding the knowledge about *Aided Chon Roí* in Wales, and *Aided Chon Roí* has common motifs with the *Vulgate Lancelot* episode in question, is it not quite logic to suspect that the latter features such motifs due to Irish influence, through the Welsh intermediary, rather than international tropes? The fact that the motifs in question are characteristic of international tale types is not an impediment to consider that, in this particular case, we do have enough elements to suspect what was the channel of transmission. Therefore, the possibility that the episode in *Vulgate Lancelot* which features elements in common with *Aided Chon Roí* is the result of the Welsh intermediary, as *Marwnat Corroi* seems to support, is the possibility we shall follow in order to understand the Irish-Welsh-Continental relationship.

Notwithstanding, in what such possibility is concerned, confusion may still be caused by the discussion on if it was whether *Aided* I or some version resembling *Aided* II (at least in what concerns the raid to the Isle of Man) that was the source for the Welsh author(s) of the elegy of Cú Roí (in the hypothesis of a written source). *Marwnat Corroi* might provide an evidence for some knowledge of the story, but it cannot be considered as the written source which influenced the Caradoc episode in *Vulgate Lancelot*. If they were indeed influenced by the Irish tale, the motifs displayed show a much more detailed knowledge of *Aided* I than the inferences about the story which can be drawn from *Marwnat*. This leads us once again to the question regarding what version was in circulation in Wales (if whether *Aided* I or II), in written form or from oral informants. Moreover, there is a problem in understanding how this tale travelled to the Continent: if *Marwnat Corroi* was the source, it does not reveal any detail related to

Cú Roí's soul being destroyed by his own sword nor his last words. In order to help us unveil this problem, an important path to follow is to understand the context where the transmission of Irish motifs to Wales might have occurred. Bearing this in mind, we might imagine a possible centre for the transmission of Irish tales in Wales, and the most obvious place to search would be among the Welsh high classes or in the royal courts. Although the traditional lore connected with Welsh medieval literature was in the hands of the classes of secular poets such as the bards, both their need for patrons and for maintaining the relevance in mainstream Welsh culture of the corpus of native tales would lead these classes to orbit around the royal courts, where they would interact with other learned classes such as clerics. The interplay between these classes around courts would be essential for giving rise to secular native literature in a written medium, and at a certain point we may suspect that these classes began to be deeply connected and responsible for a rich cultural environment:

> The transmission of a unified Welsh culture was the responsibility of learned classes: bards (who may also have been storytellers), lawyers and mediciners as well as the more generally knowledgeable in the community. They it was who ensured the continuity of Welsh literature and its linguistic standards from pre-Norman to medieval Wales, but in the development of a written literature from the oral medium their association at courts and *clasau* with administrators and clerics would have been crucial. The interaction of native learning with Latin literacy lies at the heart of the development of a native, Welsh and Latin, literature.
> (Roberts, 1999: 185)

The centre of cultural knowledge such a court would represent would most possibly also be the same where external influences such as Irish ones would also be felt and contribute to the literary tradition, since both floating pieces of Irish tradition in Welsh oral tradition as well as Irish visiting scholars would be attracted to such centre, as we shall see. It could be in such a context that *Llyfr Taliesin* originated, thus also showing signs of Irish influence. *Aided* II's most probable dating creates a conflict with the supposed date of composition of most of the poems in *Llyfr Taliesin*, but this could be explained by some other version being known previously to the extant version that included the raid on Man, or by knowledge of the tale from a Manx source. This would be possible if the court in question was the one of Merfyn Frych[160], a hypothesis supported by further evidence as we shall see more closely down below. There is no way of achieving a secure hypothesis but if *Llyfr Taliesin* is in fact the result of a centre

[160] King of Gwynedd in Wales, from 825 to 844, according to the *Annales Cambriae*. Merfyn Frych was originally from the Isle of Man.

of Irish influence in Wales located in a court, which led it to be the intermediary for Irish motifs passing to the Continent, then, taking into account the similarities we have seen in *Vulgate Lancelot*, some version of *Aided* I would be a most stronger candidate than II for transmission (with the exception of the raid on Man which is alluded to in *Marwnat*). Additionally, the possible existence of a court where there was a presence of Irish stories could mean that either oral or (other) written versions of Cú Roí's death tale might have been in circulation, and some of these could have travelled to the Continent.

The motif of the treacherous wife, for example, who knows the secret for her husband's death, can provide us with strong arguments for the possibility of the circulation of *Aided Chon Roí*, since similarities of the story with the *Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi* have been constantly discussed and have received full treatment in W. J. Gruffydd's old but still pertinent *Math vab Mathonwy: An Inquiry into the Origins and Development of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi with the Text and Translation* (1928), however, they do cast some doubts once again on whether the known version was *Aided* I or II, for Gruffydd's arguments regarding the similarity highlight certain details which seem to point to *Aided* II. These similarities are specifically found in the sections of the *Fourth Branch* concerning Blodeuwedd[161] and Lleu. In the same way as Bláthnat in *Aided Chon Roí*, Blodeuwedd does not love Lleu Llaw Gyffes, and falls in love with Gronw Pebr. As both Bláthnat and the *Vulgate* maiden, Blodeuwedd discovers the way for Lleu to be killed, with the intention of telling such secret to her lover Gronw, just as Bláthnat tells Cú Chulainn. Lleu's way of being slain also obeys to several specific requirements: he can only be slain at dusk, with one foot on the edge of a vat/tub, and another on top of a goat, and the weapon for his demise must be a spear forged during a year, in the hours when everyone is at mass, moreover, this must be done in the context of a bath nearby a riverbank, to which the vat or tub is used, and a round roof or arch must be placed above the vat. Blodeuwedd tricks Lleu into putting himself into these exact conditions, and Gronw strikes at him with the mentioned spear, making Lleu turn into an eagle and flee, injured. Gwydion finds Lleu and turns him back into human form, and they prepare Lleu's revenge. At the end of the story, Blodeuwedd is punished by Gwydion for her betrayal by being turned into an owl, while Lleu kills Gronw with a spear, making the spear pierce through a large stone that Gronw had placed between him and Lleu.

[161] Written "Blodeuwedd" in the White Book of Rhydderch and "Blodeuedd" in the Red Book of Hergest.

In all versions of *Aided Chon Roí*, Bláthnat is also punished for her betrayal as a wife, although differently, by being killed by Ferchertne, Cú Roí's poet. In fact, there are also other differences from *Aided Chon Roí*: Blodeuwedd is not kidnapped, she is created by Gwydion and Math in order for Lleu to have a wife. Lleu is not an abductor, and is actually the protagonist of the story. Contrary to Cú Roí in the Irish tale and Caradoc in the Arthurian one, even though Lleu appears to suffer a symbolic death in his transformation into an eagle, he returns from death to confront his betrayer. These differences may give us a hard time trying to understand if the story of Blodeuwedd is another example of the same treacherous wife motif, and if it is so, the result of *Aided Chon Roí's* influence in Wales. Nevertheless, in the aforementioned work by Gruffydd, the latter has underlined parallels between the two women which may point out to a further connection and may explain the differences. More specifically, Gruffydd underlines the similarity in their names: both *bláth-* in Irish and *blawd-* (s.) or *blodeu-* (pl.) in Middle Welsh mean *flower* (*flowers* in the *blodeu-* case), and although *-edd* or *-wedd* cannot as easily be equated with *-nat* (Gruffydd, 1928: 253), both maiden names, "Little flower" and "Flower face", for Bláthnat and Blodeuwedd respectively, are too similar and it becomes hard to regard such similarity as a coincidence, especially when both are "treacherous wives" in their stories. In fact, this same similarity in names and roles is what led other scholars such as Roger Sherman Loomis to postulate the existence of a vegetation myth which would include Bláthnat and Blodeuwedd as well as Arthurian maidens with their names connected with flowers (Loomis, 1927: 12-23), a proposal which is nonetheless dismissed nowadays.

For Gruffydd, the similarity in the names, in conjunction with their roles in the respective stories, led to the conclusion that "When, therefore, we find later that a part of Blodeuwedd's history corresponds to that of Bláthnat, and that a part does not correspond, we are forced to the conclusion that two different women have been synthesized into one" (Gruffydd, 1928: 253). As we have mentioned, there are differences which do not correspond indeed, especially in the origin story of both women, since Bláthnat is always described as the daughter of a king, while Blodeuwedd is described as having been created from woodland elements by Gwydion and Math's magic: "And then they took the flowers of the oaktrees, and the flowers of the broom and flowers of the meadow-sweet, and with those made by enchantment the fairest maiden above all and the most beautiful that man had ever seen, and baptized her with

the baptism which they practised at that time, and placed "Blodeuedd" upon her"[162] (Gruffydd, 1928: 27). Such an origin fits perfectly with her name "Flower face", even though it is a name given to owls in Middle Welsh, possibly since "the feathers which surround the eyes of the common owl have a striking resemblance to the flowers of the Composite Order [Flower-Face], and it is indeed strange that its appearance has not suggested the name in languages other than Welsh" (Gruffydd, 1928: 256). However, such origin story also sets Blodeuwedd apart from Bláthnat, which despite her name also having a connection with flowers, is never portrayed as having originated from them. Be that as it may, Gruffydd also points out that Blodeuwedd is not portrayed exclusively in the *Fourth Branch*, she is also present in other sources from popular Welsh tradition. In these versions, Blodeuwedd is described as having had a normal birth and as being the daughter of a lord of the isle of Anglesey called Meirchion (Gruffydd, 1928: 253-256). Additionally, she is married to Gwydion in these stories, not Lleu (Gruffydd, 1928: 262), although her infidelity with Gronw Pebr also leads to the punishment of transformation into an owl. Awareness of this discrepancy leads Gruffydd to assume that:

> The story of Blodeuwedd is an intrusion. It has no connection at all with the original story of Llew, which, as far as the three destinies are concerned, ended with the acquisition of a wife made from flowers. The accidental similarity of *Blodeuedd*, the flower-wife, the more common form in *Math*, to *Blodeuwedd*, the name of the owl, and that (conjecturally) of Gwydion's wife, inevitably drew the story of Blodeuwedd the Owl into the orbit of Llew's history.
> (Gruffydd, 1928: 258-259)

If there was, as Gruffydd implies, an original independent version of *Blodeuwedd* disentangled from Lleu's tale and her creation out of flowers, where Blodeuwedd is a woman of normal birth who is punished for her infidelity, this would make it similar to Bláthnat's context, especially because these alternative Welsh tales seem to imply that Gwydion is the husband, not Lleu. This is relevant because Gwydion is a wizard, as Cú Roí seems to be, making the parallel even more evident. Gruffydd claims that this is the result of a common pattern, from which both the *Aided Chon Roí* and the *Fourth Branch* drew, albeit with many changes in the latter, which is connected to the "Samson and Delilah" pattern in which the husband is always a wizard/giant with supernatural powers who can only be killed in specific conditions, and which is avenged

[162] See Appendix I, note 53.

by the husband's friend (Gruffydd, 1928: 262-263, 269-270, 285-292), just as Ferchertne avenges Cú Roí. Such theme is further connected by Gruffydd with tales which concern the transformation of the husband into several animals due to the betrayal of the wife, with emphasis on the "Werewolf's Tale" theme (Gruffydd, 1928: 272-280, 285-292), and which go back, according to Gruffydd, to stories involving Balor[163], among other parallels underlined in his arguments.

According to Gruffydd, Lleu's transformation into an eagle is a modification of the transformation tales, which replaces the eagle for the wolf in order for the punishment of Blodeuwedd to be a fitting one since Lleu had also been turned into a bird (Gruffydd, 1928: 280-283). Elements such as the bath on the other hand are an important detail also tied to transformation narratives, since it is often a necessary element for the transformation to occur (Gruffydd, 1928: 290-291, 303-307), leading to another parallel with *Aided Chon Roí*. In *Aided* II, Cú Roí is also taking a bath when Bláthnat ties his hair and disarms him, leaving him vulnerable for Cú Chulainn to kill him, just as Lleu becomes vulnerable to Gronw in the context of the bath near the riverbank, even though there is no transformation context in *Aided Chon Roí*, no doubt due to a modification from the original theme, if we follow Gruffydd's logic. In the several parallels he describes, Gruffydd even manages to find a possible hint to Lleu and Blodeuwedd's residence being a revolving castle, as was Cú Roí's: "it is said of her

[163] Balor, also known as Balor Béimnech/Beimenach, Balor Balcbéimnech, Balor Birugderc and in the anglicized version as Balor of the Evil Eye is a traditional figure in both the Mythological cycle of early Irish literature as well as in Irish folklore. He is portrayed as the king of the Fomori and the antagonist of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and is the maternal grandfather of Lugh, who is destined to kill him. Balor is described as a giant with an eye in the middle of his forehead capable of immense destruction when he opens it. He is eventually defeated and killed by Lugh with a spear through his eye, in narratives such as *Cath Maige Tuired* (Gray, 1982) and the events described are also referred to in the Tuatha Dé Danann sections of the *Lebór Gabála Érenn* (Macalister, 1941: 91-314). Collectors of Irish folklore such as Jeremiah Curtin have also collected folk-tales regarding Balor (1894), which include either folk retellings of the Lugh/Balor conflict or entirely new stories where Balor is considerably different from his Mythological cycle persona, although he still is frequently characterised as a wizard with magical powers and often as a villain or antagonist to the main hero. One of the stories collected by Curtin is the one used by Gruffydd as one of the examples of the "Werewolf's Tale" (1928: 272-275), namely the tale of "Art, the King's Son, and Balor Beimenach, Two sons-in-law of King Under the Wave" (Curtin, 1894: 312-334), in which Balor, who is loosely described as possessing great strength due to the ownership of the "Sword of Light", tells Art his tale after the latter has managed to get hold of his sword. In such tale, Balor's wife had been unfaithful with a cripple who lived in Balor's castle, and when Balor went in pursuit of his wife, she turned him into a white horse with a magical rod and gave him to a servant, however, the horse escaped, and Balor's wife then transformed him once again, this time into a wolf, who joins a pack of wolves in the mountains, but is eventually caught by the hunters of the King Under the Wave, who was Balor's father in law, and who takes the wolf as his pet. After more attempts of mischief by his wife, who recognizes him in his father's castle, the King strikes the wolf with the magical rod, and he recovers his human form and tells the King his story. The king intends to punish both the cripple and his daughter, but Balor asks for her wife to be spared, and only the cripple is burnt alive.

[Blodeuwedd] that 'on the day that he went to Caer Dathal, she turned within the court' […] I suggest that we have here the vestiges of some phrase which described her as being kept in her husband's revolving castle, and when he had gone, she turned it round so as to be able to go out" (Gruffydd, 1928: 267-268), although in this case, Gruffydd's suggestion seems to be quite farfetched. There is however yet another detail that makes Bláthnat and Blodeuwedd closer, on account of Blodeuwedd's alternative tales in popular tradition which we have mentioned before, where she is the daughter of the king of the isle of Anglesey, since the Welsh name for such island is *Ynys Môn*. If we may remember, in the *Aided* II recension, Bláthnat is the daughter of the king of the island of Man, and Gruffydd alludes to another possible connection due to this:

> Now the confusion between Môn and Man dates from the time of the Roman writers, as the Latin name of both islands is traditionally Mona. After the thirteenth century we find few references in Welsh literature to Man, and an Irish tradition, as this seems to be, in which Bláthnat is the daughter of Mend or Mider, King of Man, would almost inevitably be developed in Wales to represent her as the daughter of a lord of Môn.
> (Gruffydd, 1928: 267)

Blodeuwedd can be seen nonetheless to retain characteristics which differentiate her from Bláthnat, specifically her transformation into an owl and the fact her own name reflects this transformation. Gruffydd works around this issue by first underlining that *Blodeuwedd* "is a natural and traditional name for the owl, and that the belief that the owl "Flowerface" was once a woman is widely spread. Llew's wife was made of flowers and her name *Blodeuwedd* or *Blodeuedd* drew to itself the similar story connected with the owl. The owl version therefore is peculiar to Wales" (Gruffydd, 1928: 263), and secondly by claiming that the name *Blodeuedd* might have been a derivation from *Bláthnat* after all, which got attached to it the story of the woman turning into an owl due to the similarity in the names:

> In *RB* and *WB*, final *d*, meant *d* only, and final *dd* was represented by *t*. Of this there is ample evidence which is well known to scholars and to which there is no need to refer here. In many cases, especially in uncommon words and in proper names, the later scribes blundered in reproducing this *-t*; they sometimes copied it as *-t* which of course in their orthography denoted *d*, instead of copying it correctly as *d*. A scribe therefore who came across an Irish *Bláthnat* in the old Irish form would inevitably, (unless he committed the blunder above mentioned), copy it down in its Welsh adapted form as *Blodnad* or *Blodeunad*, according as to whether he took the stem *blod-* or the full form *blodeu*. The letter *n* then as now was regularly miscopied as *u*, and in some scripts was absolutely indistinguishable from *u*. So it would be very largely a matter of chance whether the word were copied as *Blodeunad* or as

> *Blodeuuad*. But the matter is not ended here. The final *t* of *Bláthnat* is the old Irish written equivalent of what would be later written and pronounced *d*, as for instance in old Irish *cét*, "hundred"=Mod. I. *cead*. If, as is most probable, judging from the treatment of other names, the word came from Irish into Welsh through spoken tales, the final consonant would be correctly heard as *d*, and written down as either *d* or *t* according to the age and style of the script; the vowel of the second element was a modified *a*, that is *ai*. I make no apology therefore for equating not only the undoubted first element of the name, but the second element also, which I take to be represented by Welsh -*ned* written -*ned*, and miscopied as -*ued*, thus giving rise to the full MS form *Blodeued* which naturally became confused with *Blodeuwedd*, the owl's name. (Gruffydd, 1928: 264-265)

The arguments presented by Gruffydd, therefore, present a strong case for Irish influence in the *Fourth Branch*, and to our interests, relevant parallels with *Aided Chon Roí*. Notwithstanding, we cannot take his theory as absolutely certain, since the parallels regarding our relevant narratives are inserted in his main theory in the book, concerned ultimately with the derivation of the *Fourth Branch* from Irish stories revolving around the conflict between Lugh and Balor, and its transformation with the addition and modification of several other tales and themes in several stages of development (Gruffydd, 1928: 350-363), of which the treacherous wife motif is one. As such, Gruffydd's work, even though it presents a brilliant deconstruction and association of pieces of tradition, narratives and literary development, is also supported in many instances by attempted reconstructions of possible source-narratives and several in-between narratives, as well as assumptions concerned with the development of other narratives and how they got mixed into yet other narratives, having as tools for such purpose extant tales either from literature or folklore which survived to this day. Therefore, as brilliant as Gruffydd's theoretical scheme might be, his methodology implies quite an amount of speculation, since we cannot be sure if the development did occur as such, and we do not know what other possible tales might have been lost in time which could alter such development significantly. The same problem with speculation can be pointed out in assumptions regarding scribal errors or misunderstandings resulting from translation, as in the case of the Bláthnat/Blodeuwedd possibility. Of course, an aim such as Gruffydd's always implies a certain degree of speculation, and his arguments are strong indeed, but we must keep in mind that we are dealing with possibilities. Be that as it may, the parallels underlined by Gruffydd between Bláthnat and Blodeuwedd are indeed too striking to simply be a coincidence, and even if the influence of the Irish story did not occur exactly in the form that Gruffydd claims, it seems that some influence did occur somehow. On the basis alone

that Bláthnat and Blodeuedd have names beginning with the same Celtic word, and that they play the same part in versions of the same story, it seems likelier than not that some version of *Aided Chon Roí* found its way to medieval Wales.

On this matter, and as mentioned before, Gruffydd comparisons nevertheless create confusion regarding which version of the death-tale of Cú Roí influenced Welsh tradition. If the tradition of Blodeuwedd being the daughter of a lord of Môn is indeed the result of influence from the Irish story, then it would be from the *Aided* II recension or other version resembling it, since it is in this version that Bláthnat is the daughter of the King of Man. Furthermore, the parallel regarding the context of a bath for Lleu's "killing" only finds resemblance in *Aided* II as well, since only in this version is Cú Roí described as having a bath prepared by Bláthnat, in which context she ties his hair to the bedposts and leaves him more vulnerable to be killed by disarming him of his sword. The *Vulgate Lancelot* tale of Caradoc however, has a parallel with *Aided* I, not *Aided* II, and since Wales would have been the assumed intermediary for the transmission of *Aided Chon Roí*, something is obviously amiss here. Moreover, as we have seen, in *Marwnat Corroi*, there is indeed the allusion to Man, from the *Aided* II version, but there is also the mentioning of Cú Roí's travels, which could have been taken either from *Aided* I or from *Fled Bricrenn*, or other unknown oral or written versions of Cú Roí's tales, but not from the *Aided* II recension as we know it.

We can conjure up several possibilities to solve this debacle: more than one version of *Aided Chon Roí* could have been circulating in Wales, one would have been more similar to *Aided* II, which exerted influence in the *Fourth Branch* as well as in *Marwnat Corroi*, and another would have been less visible in Welsh written tradition but would have been the one nevertheless to be transmitted to the Continent and would have included the death by own sword motif through the "Samson and Delilah" pattern (excluding the external soul details in its adaptation to *Vulgate Lancelot*) and the uttering of last words regarding the treacherous wife/lover. Another hypothesis is that the combined motifs of the external soul, wife betrayal, death by own sword and uttering of last words could have been pieces of floating oral tradition that could have been attached to a version of *Aided Chon Roí*, but could have been used in another stories as well, as the Russian story of Koschei demonstrates. Such hypothesis can place the origin in Ireland as well, since it is the most probable tradition we know to have influenced Welsh tradition, and afterwards the Continental Arthurian tradition, where it

was once again attached to other tale (*Vulgate Lancelot*) minus the external soul detail, while another version resembling *Aided* II without the addition of such floating tradition would have been the one influencing the *Fourth Branch*. Unfortunately, at this point in our understanding, and concerning the versions we have available of the relevant tales to this matter, we may only speculate. Notwithstanding, what we do know is that some of the parallels between the *Fourth Branch* and *Aided* II underlined by Gruffydd are undeniable, that *Marwnat Corroi* does refer to a version of Cú Roí's death tale, and that *Vulgate Lancelot* also has striking parallels with *Aided* I. Therefore, despite the confusion regarding the *Aided* I or II issue, we do have elements pointing to transmission that might be related to the same hypothesis of a centre for the transmission of Irish motifs in Wales which would have provided the snippets of Irish knowledge displayed in *Llyfr Taliesin* and possibly in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. In order to get further clues regarding this hypothesis, perhaps we can analyse yet again questions such as the knowledge in Wales of Cú Roí's famous travels.

2.5 Gwynedd as the Welsh Centre for the Transmission of Irish Motifs

Previously, we have seen examples which describe Cú Roí as a traveller, and it seems hard to overlook that the character was probably characterised as such, together with some evidence that this characterisation seems to have been known in Wales. If the Welsh scribe gained knowledge about this characteristic from a written source besides any version of *Aided Chon Roí*, it would be hard to trace which one. The Irish tale *Mesca Ulad* has possible analogues in the *Second Branch* of the *Mabinogi*, related to the burning iron-house[164] theme, and contains one of the references to Cú Roí's world travels. This could lead us to think that it was a possible source for the house-trap motif

[164] *Mesca Ulad* has been compared with *Branwen ferch Llyr*, and seen as a possible source of Irish influence in it due to the use of the motif of the burning house theme. In *Branwen ferch Llyr* there are two instances where a similar motif is used: The most striking one, since it concerns a burning house as well, is given in the story of the giant Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid told by Brân and Matholwch, in which Matholwch describes the building of an iron-house in order to lure Llasar, his wife and their children to the house through the offering of food and drinks inside it. When the giant and his family were inside the mentioned house, and it was clear that they were drunk, the Irishmen heated charcoal around the house, turning it into a burning red-hot house, in order to kill them, however, the giant and his wife managed to break free since the iron was easier to break when heated, and they escaped to Wales. Another close example in *Branwen* is provided when the Welshmen led by Brân are invited by Matholwch to feast in a house, built to accommodate Brân (a giant), in order to thwart the threat of war and to join both Welshmen and Irishmen together in peace. Just as in *Mesca Ulad*, it is a trap, but not devised to burn the Welshmen and rather to kill them by the sword. An hundred armed Welshmen are concealed in hundred bags around the house. However, just as in the Irish story, the plan is thwarted, although in an entirely different way. For a discussion on whether *Mesca Ulad* had an influence in *Branwen ferch Llyr* or if the iron house theme is just a common theme in the medieval context with several analogues in different traditions, see Sims-Williams (2011: 262-277).

in *Branwen uerch Lyr* and a further example that Cú Roí's fame as a traveller could have been known through Irish sources that mention his travels, which would explain the rudder on the southern world mentioned in *Marwnat Corroi*. But, however, given that there are several references to Cú Roí's travels, some of them being allusions in poems to what was clearly a familiar idea, it would probably be a mistake to insist on finding a specific textual source for echoes of the concept in Wales. With the exception perhaps of the first recension of *Aided Chon Roí*, it is hardly reasonable to believe that tales such as *Fled Bricrenn*, *Mesca Ulad*, or other Irish texts which show Cú Roí being characterised as a traveller might have been the sole source of his fame as a traveller in Wales, since that would mean that Welsh scribes would have searched through these texts to find specific snippets of information about Cú Roí, and there would not be a strong motive for this unless Cú Roí was already a known character worth looking into.

As mentioned some pages above, there are Cú Roí stories mentioned in the Irish tale lists of which there are no extant texts. It is true that these could have been just alternative versions of the extant tales but they could also represent a body of stories concerned primarily with Cú Roí which was lost, but which could have travelled to Wales, and which would include his characterisation as a traveller. Texts such as *Mesca Ulad* could then reflect this characteristic, but since Cú Roí's role in it is secondary, it seems more probable that a Welshman gathered the information from a cycle of stories dedicated to Cú Roí. Being it so, this would mean these stories could also have been a source for Welsh scribes, and consequently, an influence on the author(s) of the elegy of Cú Roí. If we think about oral spreading, there is also a multitude of possibilities. Since his characterisation as a traveller is present in several Irish sources, it would hardly escape mentioning in oral transmission. Several sources can be seen as possibilities, as Sims-Williams points out:

> I see no way of telling how the Welsh author came to know about the Cú Roí story. In view of the apparent connection with Cashel, perhaps it travelled with the *Glossary* of Cormac, king-bishop of Cashel (d. 908). Or perhaps it reached Wales via the Isle of Man, which is apparently mentioned in the text, for the family of Merfyn Frych, the ninth-century king of Gwynedd, was from Man. Or it could have come directly from Ireland; we know that learned Irishmen came to Merfyn's court, for instance, from the surviving letter about a cryptogram in Greek numerals 'which Dubthach left in the fortress of Mermin, king of the Britons, in order to test the Irish sages, since he thought himself the most eminent man of all the Irish and Britons' – the Irish writer of the letters wishes to warn 'our ignorant and simple Irish brothers who want to sail across the Irish sea, so that they do not blush before Mermin, the

> illustrious king of the Britons, because they do not understand that text'. Or a Welshman could have brought it back from Ireland… There is no point in listing all the possibilities.
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 50).

One of these possibilities is specially worth looking into, namely, the possibility related to King Merfyn Frych's court in Gwynedd, since its context can provide us with clues regarding the transmission of Irish motifs, Cú Roí's story among them. Even though it is not the first example of contact between the Irish *literati* and Brythonic culture[165], the particularity that learned Irishmen are known to have come to Gwynedd gives us a strong hint that whatever intellectual activity may have existed there, it could surely have suffered influence from these "learned Irishmen". Furthermore, Merfyn Frych's rule, with his throne in Gwynedd, was the beginning of a dynasty, which his son Rhodri Mawr (d. 878) extended, since Rhodri "...was the figure who oversaw the rise to dominance of Gwynedd in the ninth century. His inheritance of both Gwynedd (844) and Powys (855), and his marriage to Angharad of Ceredigion, saw Rhodri, on the death of Angharad's brother Gwgon (872), gain control of the greater part of Wales" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 75). Thus Gwynedd became quite powerful in the Welsh context: "Merfyn's son and successor Rhodri Mawr appears to have extended his authority over adjacent kingdoms: the dynasty remained the most powerful lineage in the land until the killing of the last of its princes in 1282" (Carey, 2007: 122). Being it so, if Merfyn's court was a place of visit for Irish scholars, it may have maintained this status during his son's rule and subsequent ones, possibly continuing the same level of intellectual activity which may have included Irish influence.

[165] John T. Koch points out that the context of Northumbria in the seventh century, which included contact with the Irish monastery at Iona, may have been "the cultural context in which Brythonic poetry took the leap into writing" (Koch, 2005: 23), and further adds that the Irish may have had an important role in this process: "On the intellectual and ecclesiastical side, I think that the stimulus was primarily Irish, specifically the Columban federation based at Iona. After overseeing Northumbria's second conversion in 635, Iona's Irish clergy dominated Northumbria's church till the Synod of Whitby in 664" (Koch, 2005: 23). The result of Irish dominion in Northumbria's church seems to have been "...an intellectually ambitious and resourceful outfit, self-confident masters of Insular computistics and home of the first Irish annals, freely recombining existing literary genres and cultivating both Hiberno-Latin and vernacular writings, as seen in the challenging and highly learned and ecletic archaic Old Irish elegy to Iona's founder, known as *Amrae Choluimb Chille*" (Koch, 2005: 23). Nevertheless, there is no clue in what regards any possible influence from Irish secular tales due to the contact with Iona, and even considering that it may have existed, we do not have any texts demonstrating it, not to mention that the seventh century seems to be an early date in what concerns the flourishing of Irish secular literature, notwithstanding that there was probably some degree of literary tinkering with secular narratives already. The evidence we have for both Old North narrative and poetic traditions and the influence of Irish tales and motifs in Brythonic culture is extant solely in Welsh texts, and therefore, it is in those that we must focus.

One of the most important sources for evidence of the Irish presence in Wales, and specifically in the court of Gwynedd, is the surviving letter from Dubthach mentioned in the quote from Sims-Williams above: "The cryptogram itself is evidence for the presence of Irish scholars in Gwynedd, a presence that serves to give a context to education and literary ideas at the royal court" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 75). The letter is concerned with a cryptogram in Greek numerals, and has survived in two manuscripts, located on the Continent[166]. What is relevant for our study is that the letter is addressed to an Irishman named Colgu, and the text himself provides us with clues concerning the Irish influence in Gwynedd's court:

> This is the inscription which Dubtach, in the stronghold of Merfyn king of the Britons (*in arce Mermin Brittannorum regis*) sent to test the wise among the Irish (*Scottorum sapientes*), believing himself to be the most excellent of all the Irish and the Britons, so that he thought that none among the scholars of the Irish, let alone of the Britons, would be able to read and understand that writing in the presence of Merfyn the king. But, with God's help, that writing was not obscure to us – Cainchobrach, Fergus, Dominnach and Suadbar…
> […]
> Be it known to your sagacity, most excellent Colgu and our most learned teacher, that we do not send you this little exposition as if you were ignorant; but we beg most earnestly that, in your benevolent charity, you communicate this explanation to the ignorant and the more simple among our Irish brethren who wish to cross the British sea, lest perchance they be put to shame by not understanding that inscription in the presence of Merfyn, the glorious king of the Britons.[167]
> (*apud* Carey, 2007: 124-125)

Dubthach's letter provides us with certainty that the presence of Irish scholars in Gwynedd's court was real, and Dubthach might have been one of the most important of these Irish scholars, since there are other sources which mention the name Dubthach and locate him as a contemporary of Merfyn Frych. Most importantly, some of these sources are from the Continent, which could point us to a bridge of transmission from Wales. In such case, Dubthach may possibly be an example of an Irishman being responsible for the transmission of Irish elements in the Welsh context, and his reputation as an eminent scholar in the Continent would have made it easier for the transmission of such elements:

> Several manuscripts belonging to the circle of Sedulius Scottus, a celebrated Irish teacher who flourished on the Continent in the region of Charles the Bald

[166] One of the extant manuscripts is located in Bamberg, and the other in Brussels. The cryptogram has been named the "Bamberg cryptogram". The text is composed by a cipher, containing characters which can only be read by replacing Greek numerals with letters from the Roman alphabet.
[167] See Appendix I, note 54.

> (died 877), make marginal references to one Dubthach: is this the same man who was responsible for devising the cryptogram? The name was not uncommon, but the identification would certainly fit: thus one note, identifying the writer as Dubthach and proceeding to give an elaborate calendrical calculation indicating that he was writing at half past three in the afternoon of 11 April 838, reflects both contemporaneity with Merfyn (who died in 844) and a weakness for laborious displays of cleverness. Yet another reference to the cryptographer may occur in the *Annals of Ulster* for 868 (*recte* 869), where there is a record of the death of Dubthach son of Mael Tuile, 'most learned of the Latin scholars of the whole of Europe' (*doctissimus Latinorum totius Europae*).
> (Carey, 2007: 125)

Taking into account the apparent prestige of Dubthach, due to the confidence he displays in the letter and the elaboration of the cryptogram, together with his death record where he is mentioned as *doctissimus Latinorum totius Europae* (if it is indeed the same Dubthach, but the date certainly points towards that possibility), it is more than probable that Irish scholars such as him, who were in Wales, had a high level of scholarship in several areas. One of these areas could certainly have been Irish secular literature, since, as we have mentioned earlier, it was a product of Irish monastic learning, from whence these Irish scholars most probably got their education. Be that as it may, we cannot simply assume that these Irish scholars would therefore tell their native tales to their Welsh hosts, not without further arguments. However, such arguments may be found in the suspicion that these visiting Irish scholars seem to have been eager to share their knowledge, obtained from Irish monastic learning:

> There is therefore, ample evidence that Irish scholars regularly visited Wales – in particular Gwynedd – during the reigns of Merfyn Frych and Rhodri Mawr. The learning which these men brought with them was typical of the Irish monastic culture of the time, including computistics, exegis, hagiography, Latin, and a smattering of Greek, as well as antiquarian speculation. Some of these Irish visitors were evidently fond of showing off their erudition, and of using verbal ingenuity in order to compete for preeminence. Their Welsh counterparts were eager to assimilate this knowledge, and Ireland appears to have exercised considerable influence on Welsh intellectual life during this period.
> (Carey, 2007: 127)

This seems to point to a scenario where Gwynedd could have held the necessary conditions for being the main root of Irish influence on Welsh intellectual life. If we reflect about Dubthach's letter to Colgu, we can presume that the Irish scholars on the Welsh court might have been on their way to the Continent, but visited Gwynedd in the meanwhile, and left some legacy there. Taking into account the whole array of different areas of knowledge most possibly shared with the Welsh, which were mentioned in the

quote above, the prospect that Irish narratives were also amongst such a diversity of subjects transmitted to the Welsh may indeed make sense. This lead us to the hypothesis that it could have been through the presence of these Irish scholars in Gwynedd that the motifs concerning Cú Roí's travels, and the elements in *Aided* I related to Cú Roí's soul and his death by his own sword, were spread through Wales, even though they are not mentioned in *Marwnat Corroi*. In addition, these Irish scholars apparently were not on a quick visit, since there are hints that Dubthach, besides having extensive knowledge of Latin or Greek, also tried to learn Welsh: "It is particularly telling that Dubthach is chided by Suadbar for a mistake in spelling a Welsh name: these itinerant Irishmen seem not to have prided themselves on their knowledge of Latin and Greek alone, but also to have sought to gain some familiarity with at least the rudiments of Old Welsh" (Carey, 2007: 126). If more Irish scholars such as him did so, or at least developed some mastery of the vernacular (allowing for easier communication with their Welsh counterparts), this would explain how they transmitted story-motifs and snippets of Irish lore which are in the vernacular in the Irish written extant versions. Thus, it would also justify how the transmission might have occurred without Latin intermediaries, providing an answer to Sims-Williams' interrogations on how Irish influence on Wales was exerted since Irish and Welsh languages were almost unintelligible by the time such transmission is claimed to have occurred (Sims-Williams, 2011: 2, 5).

It must also be pointed out that these scholars seemed to have some kind of intellectual rivalry amongst themselves: "The letter to Colgu indicates that Irish scholars, most of them presumably on their way to the Continent, regularly visited the court of Merfyn Frych. But that is not all. A spirit of competition seems to have prevailed among these travelers, as well as between themselves and their British counterparts" (Carey, 2007: 126). An atmosphere of intellectual rivalry would further stimulate the exchange of knowledge on all fields, including the rich Irish lore which the scholars were more than likely to possess. Additionally, this is not an exclusive context to Merfyn's court, and seems to have been extended to Rhodri's rule. Being it so, we can more or less safely establish Gwynedd as a centre of intellectual exchange which was maintained for a rather long time, possibly leading to the establishment of a channel of communication of literary motifs, from Ireland to Gwynedd. There is even some evidence which can provide us with further knowledge concerning the familiarity and rather close connection that Gwynedd had with Ireland, since it was the place of

choosing by Rhodri to escape from the Vikings the year before he died. This could be due to other reasons of course, but nevertheless it is another coincidence in an already fairly established connection:

> The hospitality of the Gwynedd kings to Irish scholars appears to have lasted for at least another generation. Thus Sedulius composed a poem in praise of a defeat inflicted on Viking Raiders by one *Roricus*, apparently referring to Rhodri Mawr's victory over the Danes in 856; and the note *Ruadri adest* 'R. is present', added in the margin of the Irish manuscript of Priscian's *Grammar* preserved in the library at Sankt Gallen, has been seen as evidence that this codex passed through Rhodri's court on its way to the Continent. In 877, the year before his death, Rhodri took refuge from the Vikings in Ireland.
> (Carey, 2007: 126)

There is another possibility in what concerns knowledge about Cú Roí's story, but curiously it also involves the king of Gwynedd: at least one version of *Aided Chon Roí* relates a siege to the Fir Fálgae in Man, and Merfyn Frych's provenience was from Man. King Merfyn could have knowledge of the story, and himself have spread it to the Welsh scholars, giving us another hypothesis for the transmission of Cú Roí's story (Sims-Williams, 2011: 50). However, this hypothesis is problematic and ungrounded due to several reasons: there is a discrepancy with the supposed dates of composition of the extant *Aided Chon Roí* recensions. The time-frame for Merfyn's rule was the ninth century, and if the spreading of the story was based on any of the written sources, the candidate would be *Aided* I, since it belongs approximately to the ninth century, but this version does not include the raid to the Isle of Man. Nevertheless, it is once again worth mentioning that such acknowledgment does not rule out the possibility of oral spreading or even the presence of other written versions which have not come down to our days. Along the same lines, *Aided* II results from a twelfth century compilation, but this does not mean the motifs included in it were not already present in earlier versions. Even so, the theory that Merfyn could have brought knowledge of the tale from Man does not have much ground to hold itself onto. There is no evidence that the tale was known in Man at all, and to advance this hypothesis solely on the basis of Man being mentioned in *Aided* II seems to be of little sense.

In addition, besides *Marwnat Corroi* there are several other hints of Irish influence in both the Taliesin tradition and in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. In light of this, it seems much more plausible that the Irish monks/scholars, such as Dubthach, who were present in Merfyn's court, were the ones to have spread some of

the stories about Cú Roí, including a death-tale which would include the siege to the Fir Fálgae, since the approximated date for *Aided* II's composition in the twelfth century does not eliminate the chance that a previous version could have existed, spread orally or otherwise. Moreover, as was previously mentioned, the presence of the Irish scholars could explain other questions already mentioned, such as Cú Roí's fame as a traveller being apparently known, which would go beyond a possible influence from just *Aided Chon Roí* and puts us once again questioning if a possible body of stories around Cú Roí was also known, besides other tales such as *Mesca Ulad* or *Fled Bricrenn*. Furthermore, this scenario could also explain the knowledge of Irish lore exemplified by "Taliesin" in *Llyfr Taliesin*. Taking all these arguments into account, we may consider the hypothesis that Gwynedd might possibly have been one of the most important centres of Irish influence in Wales. As we shall further see, there are even more hints that strengthen this hypothesis.

2.5.1 The Connection of the *Historia Brittonum* with the Irish Influence in Gwynedd

In *Ireland and the Grail* (2007), John Carey traces the Irish motifs that may have influenced the Arthurian tales related to the Grail. This tracing leads him to Wales as the most probable intermediary, and to the tales in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the poems of *Llyfr Taliesin*. Perhaps not surprisingly, considering the evidences already quoted from his work, Carey arrives at the possibility of spreading through the court in Gwynedd. Carey's research follows mainly the texts from the *Book of Druimm Snechtai* (besides other Irish references), that contain elements which seem to have played a huge part in the genesis of the Grail legends. By questioning how these story-type elements from the *Book of Druimm Snechtai* had arrived at the French-speaking world, Carey also finds evidence in Welsh texts of Irish influence, and arrives at the possible court where such influence was exerted, located in Wales, from where it spread to France. We have already been quite attentive to *Llyfr Taliesin* as one of the most striking examples of Irish influence on Welsh literature, due to poems such as *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry*, *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*, and Carey finds further evidence which

connects *Historia Brittonum*[168] with *Llyfr Taliesin*, and with Merfyn Frych's rule in Gwynedd or North Wales.

The key to the connection between *Llyfr Taliesin* and *Historia Brittonum* is related to *Preideu Annwfyn*, where there is an allusion to *Chaer Wydyr*, which translates as "glass fort": "I don't rate the pathetic men involved with religious writings, / Those who hadn't seen Arthur's feat beyond the Glass Fort:"[169] (Haycock, 2007: 436). As Carey points out (Carey, 2007: 122), in *Historia Brittonum*, and specifically in the section about the Irish origins (§13), there is a similar allusion to a glass tower: "Later, three sons of a warrior of Spain came with thirty keels between them, and thirty wives in each keel, and stayed there for the space of a year. Later, they saw a glass tower in the midst of the sea, and saw men upon the tower, and sought to speak with them, but they never replied..."[170] (Morris, 1980: 20). Not only is this glass tower reminiscent of the one mentioned in *Preideu Annwfyn*, but also its characterisation, for it is said in this same section of *Historia Brittonum* that the sons of the Spanish warrior attempted to speak with the men they saw on the tower, and that these men never replied, invoking yet another verse from *Preideu Annwfyn*, which mentions that in Arthur's expedition, when facing the Glass Fort "six thousand men were standing on its wall / it was hard to communicate with their watchman."[171] (Haycock, 2007: 436).

Furthermore, the pseudo-historical Irish section in *Historia Brittonum* leads us to the same Irish lore which was later included in the eleventh century Middle Irish *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (Charles-Edwards, 1991: 19). Partholón is mentioned, in the form of Partolomus, and the plague which wiped out his people, and Nemed in the form of Nimeth. Moreover we can definitely associate the mentioning of the Spanish warrior and his three sons with Míl Espáine and the Milesians. Additionally, *Historia Brittonum* also traces back the ancestry of the Irishmen to the same biblical context of a Scythian nobleman who resided in Egypt, together with the mentioning of the Exodus and the eventual migration to the Iberian Peninsula, from where they travelled to Ireland a millennium later to settle. Besides the use of specific Irish references, *Historia*

[168] The compilation in *Historia Brittonum* relates several accounts of the origin of the Britons, but also discusses the settlement of Ireland, with certain resemblances to *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, although in a less elaborated way, possibly being a demonstration of an early lost version of the pseudo-historical scheme later used in *Lebor Gabála* (Koch, 2006c: 925).
[169] See Appendix I, note 55.
[170] See Appendix I, note 56.
[171] See Appendix I, note 57.

Brittonum may even reveal Irish influence conceptually, since it seems to make use of the same idea of synthetic history or pseudo history common in early Irish literature: "It is claimed that the *Historia Brittonum* falls into a genre of historical writing well exemplified in early medieval Ireland, the synthetic history. This form of historical writing is an expression of a sense of national unity projected back into a legendary past" (Charles-Edwards, 1991: 17). It can equally be claimed of course, that the *Historia Brittonum* simply makes use of a genre of historical writing common in medieval literature and not necessarily a concept borrowed from Ireland, however, when the work has elements from Irish tradition and this same genre was popular in Ireland, it is easy to suspect that this concept too was borrowed together with the Irish legendary elements. What there is no doubt is that the events described in *Historia Brittonum* are in the same context of *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, and being it so, *Historia Brittonum's* Irish section is one of the strongest examples of knowledge about Irish material in Welsh circles: "this section of the *Historia* is significant as evidence for the transfer to ninth-century Wales of legendary lore from Ireland, including a story which finds an echo in the poem *Preiddeu Annwn*" (Carey, 2007: 123).

The glass-fort motif in both *Historia Brittonum* and *Preideu Annwfyn* already provides us with a hint that both may have been the product of the same Welsh circle where Irish motifs circulated, namely in Gwynedd: "But in fact there is evidence that the court of Merfyn Frych was a regular port of call for itinerant Irish scholars: this being the case, it is not at all unlikely that it was just such a scholar who passed on the story of the glass tower" (Carey, 2007: 124). Moreover, *Historia Brittonum* reflects the importance of Taliesin in Welsh tradition, since "Taliessin" is referred to in the work (§62) as one of the five *cynfeirdd*: "At that time Outigern then fought bravely against the English nation. Then Talhaearn Tad Awen was famed in poetry; and Aneirin and Taliesin and Bluchbard and Cian, known as Gueinth Guaut, were all simultaneously famed in British verse"[172] (Morris, 1980: 37). This reference might mean that the same lore was common to the authors of both works, with both sharing the Taliesin tradition and the Irish lore which is displayed in *Historia Brittonum*, even though they are referent to different snippets of Irish tradition (only connected by the glass fort). The display of Irish motifs in *Historia Brittonum* related to the legendary origins of Ireland, together with the Taliesin reference, seems too coincidental, and may provide us with

[172] See Appendix I, note 58.

answers regarding the centre for transmission of Irish motifs in a not so Irish-influenced Welsh literary world as the one Sims-Williams demonstrated in *Irish Influence*. John Carey also shares the opinion that *Historia Brittonum* may be one of the links which can give us the Welsh background where Irish motifs flourished, such as the knowledge about Cú Roí, the name of Kaer Sidi, other *Llyfr Taliesin* related motifs, the pseudo-historical Irish motifs in *Historia Brittonum* and the *Druimm Snechtai* tale-types[173]:

> The key consideration here is the parallel […] between the allusion to a 'Glass Stronghold' (*Kaer Wydyr*) in *Preiddeu Annwn* and the account of a mysterious 'glass tower' (*turris uitrea*) in the Irish section of *Historia Brittonum*. There is general agreement that the two passages are related, and that the later reflects Irish pseudohistorical lore which had found its way to Wales. Since the *Preiddeu Annwn* reference occurs, as we have seen, in association with several other indications of Irish influence which have a bearing on the present study, it seems a distinct possibility that all of the borrowings in question may go back to the same milieu. The background of *Historia Brittonum* may, in other words, reveal the route by which the stories of Bran and Conn came to Wales. (Carey, 2007: 122)

Besides the presence of Irish pseudo-historical lore, *Historia Brittonum* also provides us with another answer for the question on how did Irish motifs spread to Wales. The section §15 of *Historia Brittonum* specifies that the knowledge about Ireland's pseudo-mythical origins came directly from Irish scholars: "If anyone wants to know when Ireland was inhabited and when it was deserted, this is what the Irish scholars have told me"[174] (Morris, 1980: 21). If we can trust the author's words, this is an astonishing passage in the text, since it gives the student of the Irish-Welsh literary connection a strong piece of evidence that Irish scholars were indeed in Wales sharing their native lore to their Welsh counterparts. Moreover, there are further details in the text of *Historia Brittonum* which led scholars to believe that this transmission was not made exclusively through Latin as an intermediary language, due to the corruption of Old-Irish words:

> Not only this: the author, if we are to take him at his word, derived at least some of his information from 'what the most learned of the Irish have related to me': he would, in other words, have learned of these matters from Irish scholars, presumably visitors to Wales. That their discussions were not conducted exclusively in Latin is evident from the presence in the text of the

[173] According to Carey's work, *Druimm Snechtai* tale-types strongly influenced the genesis of the Grail stories. Carey establishes connections between the tales of Bran Mac Febul such as *Immram Brain* and *Immacaldam Druad Brain*, and Conn Cetchathach's ("of the Hundred Battles") tale *Baile in Scáil*, whose approaches to the motif of the Otherworld in Irish literature shall eventually exert an influence in the Grail stories.

[174] See Appendix I, note 59.

> Old Irish phrase *dám ochtair* 'a company of eight', misinterpreted by the author as a personal name *Damhoctor*.
> (Carey, 2007: 123)

Furthermore, the evidence for the transmission of Irish motifs shown in *Historia Brittonum* is quite possibly also connected with Merfyn Frych's court in Gwynedd, which was already pointed out as having had the presence of Irish scholars. Dumville, with basis on a passage at the beginning of the text in *Historia Brittonum*, has established a date for its composition in the beginning of the ninth-century, around the year of 829 or 830 (Dumville, 1972-1974: 439). This same year was the fourth of Merfyn Frych's rule of Gwynedd or North Wales. Taking into the account the inferences we have already made about Gwynedd as being most possibly a significant centre of intellectual activity where Irish influence proliferated, together with *Historia Brittonum* being contemporary with Merfyn Frych's court, connecting both seems like an obvious step to make, and indeed it is not far-fetched at all. There are even clues that might provide us with the context which facilitated such presence and exchange of knowledge with Irish scholars, and which once again point to Gwynedd: "these works may owe their Irish content to the influence of Elfoddw, the 'archbishop in Gwynedd' who had died in 809. By inducing the Welsh churches to accept the Roman reckoning of Easter in 768, Elfoddw may have reinvigorated their contacts with their Irish counterparts, which had adopted it well before then" (Carey, 2005: 36). If such suggestion does point to an authentic scenario, it would further explain how the literary exchange in Merfyn's court possibly have included Irish motifs, since the groundwork for Irish presence had already been laid decades ago by Elfoddw. The seeming influence that Merfyn Frych attained, and consequently, his court, would have made such Irish influence further visible in Welsh literary production. Even if the author of *Historia Brittonum* was not linked with the court of Gwynedd, the intellectual climate such court provided could eventually have led the author to have contact with it:

> That the author of *Historia Brittonum* implicitly dates his work with reference to the reign of Merfyn Frych may, but need not, indicate that he himself was connected with the latter's court. He may simply have been writing somewhere in Gwynedd, or indeed – since Merfyn would have been the most powerful Welsh ruler of his time – elsewhere in Wales.
> (Carey, 2007: 124).

Some authors go even further and plainly consider that *Historia Brittonum* must have been commissioned by Merfyn Frych himself: "It was completed in Gwynedd, the

north-western kingdom of Wales, at the behest of its monarch, Merfyn, during the year 830. Merfyn was no ordinary Welsh ruler of the age, but an able and ruthless newcomer, an adventurer who had just planted himself and his dynasty on the throne of Gwynedd, and had ambitions to lead all the Welsh" (Hutton, 2009: 21). A work which praises the history of the Welsh/Britons, as well as their rightful ownership of Britain, would surely be in accordance with the ambition of a ruler who wants to lead the destinies of Wales (Hutton, 2009: 21). Considering that Merfyn Frych's court seems to have had considerable influence, this seems to be quite a strong possibility, and one which gives us one more argument towards locating Gwynedd as the main source of Irish influence in Wales, or at least where it blossomed. In fact, there are more sources betraying influence from this same Irish presence in Wales, which may ultimately be traced to Gwynedd:

> There is also evidence for continuing contacts between Welsh and Irish scholars in Wales itself. A manuscript of the *Libri evangeliorum quattuor*, by the fourth-century poet Juvencus, was written in a Welsh scriptorium in the second half of the ninth century; the scribe was an Irishman named Nuadu, who names himself in a brief colophon written in Old Welsh (*araut di Nuadu* 'a prayer for N.'). The glosses in the manuscript draw heavily on exegetical works of Irish origin, especially the *Liber quaestionum in evangeliis*. The glossators wrote in Latin, Old Welsh, Old Irish and – in one case – perhaps in Old Breton: four of them used both Welsh and Irish, with the former language preponderating. The manuscript is most celebrated for the series of *englynion* written in Old Welsh which appear in its margins; interest in Irish matters is reflected in the fact that the scribe responsible for the *englynion* appears also to have added some Latin verses referring to Fethgna, an abbot of Armagh who died in 874.
> (Carey, 2007: 126-127)

What may connect this manuscript with Gwynedd is the apparent adding to a margin of the manuscript of a cipher similar to the one Dubthach used on the Bamberg cryptogram, and, if we may remember, Dubthach was connected to Merfyn's court. Additionally, the cipher seems to have been added by a scribe whose name is Welsh, thus leading to the possibility of Welsh scholars having become aware of such knowledge:

> Most intriguing of all, perhaps, is the circumstance that this manuscript contains another specimen of the cipher used in the Bamberg cryptogram. This has been added in the upper margin, and is now only partly legible; but enough can be read to see that it is a quatrain of Latin verse, whose author boastfully names himself as *Cemelliauc prudens prespiter* 'Cyfeiliog the intelligent priest'. Cyfeiliog is a Welsh name: evidently, knowledge of the solution to Dubthach's cipher did not remain confined to the Irish expatriate community, but spread in Welsh circles where Irish influence was strong.

(Carey, 2007: 126-27)

Additionally, there are several details in the glosses of the manuscript which seem to betray knowledge from exegetical works of Irish origin[175], in addition to the use of Old Irish among Old Welsh and Latin. All the evidence we have been analyzing certainly seems to point, again and again, to the existence of a centre of intellectual activity in Gwynedd, where the main exchange between the wandering Irish scholars and their Welsh counterparts seems to have occurred. This intellectual climate had the consequence of spreading at least at some level to the rest of Wales. In fact, even Sims-Williams acknowledges that the ninth-century, the time-frame for the presence of Irish scholars in Merfyn Frych's court, was the most propitious time in History for the contact between Irish and Welsh scholars which could have left traces of Irish influence in Welsh literature:

> …the ninth century is the earliest period at which we can do more than speculate about Irish influence. Significantly, this was the very period when Ireland suffered a 'brain drain' of scholars, tempted to the Continent by the opportunities and patronage available there, and perhaps discouraged at home by the effect of Viking depredations. […] Wales, with its own Viking problem and relatively poor economy, may not have been a particularly inviting place of exile for Irish scholars, but it was the nearest port of call on the way to the Continent, and our limited sources reveal a surprising amount of evidence for Irish scholars in Wales.
> (Sims-Williams, 2011: 29)

As we have previously alluded to, Irish monastic education was highly regarded throughout Europe between the sixth and ninth centuries. The travels of the Irish *literati*, taking into account the knowledge they seemed to hold, must probably have given them further renown as scholars in Medieval Europe: "The ninth century is the one era when the typical Irishman in mediaeval Europe was the 'scholar', not the 'saint'" (Kenney, 1929: 488-89). Wales would also be interested in hosting them, and it just may have been what happened in Gwynedd through Merfyn Frych's patronage, since the ninth century provided the ideal context: "Already in the ninth century Welsh and English rulers such as Merfyn Frych of Gwynedd and Alfred the Great can be seen as the patrons of learned men of international origin, active in their royal courts"

[175] However, this view is rebuked by Patrick Sims-Williams, who analyses the claimed examples of Irish influence in the religious *englynion* (Cf. Sims-Williams, 2011: 30-39), and states that "…this is speculation. It is difficult to believe that clerics in England, Wales, and Ireland were entirely unaware that religious poetry was being written in each other's vernaculars, but whether they were ever directly influenced by such poetry has yet to be shown." (Sims-Williams, 2011: 35).

(Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 73). Relating this context with the evidences of Irish presence in Wales, such as Nuadu and Dubthach, together with Nennius' remarks on the contact with Irish scholars, we can build a strong scenario which seems ideal for the phenomenon of Irish influence to have happened.

2.5.2 The Influence of Gwynedd in Clynnog Fawr

Although we already have a strong hint about the context where some story motifs could have easily been spread, together with examples of such spreading, there are still missing links, namely the ones related to how this influence reached the authors of the tales later known as the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and most importantly for the motifs which interest us, to *Llyfr Taliesin*, since its authors seemed to have shared of the same lore which gave origin to the former. The dating of the tales in the *Four Branches* and *Culhwch*, deduced to be between the eleventh and thirteenth century, create a distance in time which may be an obstacle to our study. Be that as it may, we might get some clues by tracing the place where the tales were composed.

Sims-Williams has argued that the place of composition might have been the monastery of Clynnog Fawr (Sims-Williams, 2001: 123), and this may provide us with some help, since "there is charter evidence that Clynnog had connections with several of the kings of Gwynedd, Rhodri Mawr among them" (Carey, 2007: 128). The connection with Gwynedd and specifically with Rhodri is a very important indication. If the *Four Branches* or even *Culhwch* were indeed composed in Clynnog Fawr, its connection with Gwynedd would justify the several traces of Irish influence the tales seem to hold, such as the iron house motif, the apparent influence of the Bran mac Febuil tales in the *Second Branch*, the appearance of Welsh cognates to Irish names, such as Manawydan mab Llyr, the tale concerning Blodeuwedd (if indeed it is the result of influence from *Aided Chon Roí* and not just the use of a common international 'treacherous wife' theme) and the Irish names in *Culhwch*'s list. Taking into account the seemingly verifiable existence of Irish influence in Gwynedd, it would be perfectly possible that the lore travelled to Clynnog, seeing that the monastery is located in Gwynedd and seems to have had connections with its rulers. In addition, Rhodri has been seen to have held the same intellectual climate of Irish presence in Gwynedd which began with his father. Even if the tales were composed later and thus were not contemporaneous to

Rhodri's rule, it is not improbable that a monastery, where literacy has its domain, would have kept such lore which had been transmitted previously from Gwynedd, whether by a continuous oral transmission or in written records, until it eventually influenced the writing of the tales of the *Four Branches* and *Culhwch*.

If the intellectual activity in Gwynedd had indeed flourished for more than one single reign, it may have been enough time for the Irish lore to have made its presence well established. Besides the original transmission by the Irish scholars, it would eventually enter the repertoire of elite Welsh bards, due to their interest and to a possible contact with Welsh scholars versed in the Irish lore transmitted in older times by Irishmen such as Dubthach. The bards would fuel the presence of the Irish motifs even more, and help them enter Wales' own lore, making it possible for such motifs to be kept circulating (although probably changed) in Welsh literate circles such as Clynnog, which had a connection with the Gwynedd court. As is known from the Taliesin tradition, the legendary Taliesin is characterised as boasting of having knowledge of all kinds of natural matters and lore, such as the ones Sims-Williams mentioned as being evidenced in the Clynnog material, namely the interest in Irish "bursting-forth" and flood legends. Besides these same ones, Taliesin was also characterised as mastering several other areas such as biblical and classical knowledge. What is relevant about this is that the stance attributed to Taliesin may reflect the presence of the Irish scholars in Wales (if Dubthach provides an example of their general posture) and their pedant attitude of boasting about their level of scholarship and knowledge, just as it is exemplified in Dubthach's letter to Colgu. This is an inference which seems to be implied by Carey, and which certainly makes sense. If the Taliesin tradition, as we have been seeing, had the influence of the intense intellectual activity put forward by the wandering Irish scholars such as Dubthach, with Gwynedd as its centre, it would be only natural that Taliesin himself reflected the agents which spread the lore which influenced his poetry, especially poems such as *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*. If we consider the possibility mentioned before, which attributed to Welsh bards, poets or *cyfarwyddiaid* the more profound establishment of the Irish lore in Welsh circles, it would be only natural they would look to the Irish scholars with much interest. This might lead us to a further step into seeing Taliesin as an embodiment of both the Irish lore and the Irish scholars themselves:

> As will be clear from earlier discussions, there are other aspects of the pseudo-Taliesinic corpus which indicate a predisposition to be interested in just those matters in which the Irish visitors to Wales claimed expertise. Besides native legend and history, 'Taliesin' asserts his knowledge of matters described in the Bible and the apocrypha, draws upon such sources as Orosius and Isidore, and boasts that he can resolve all of the mysteries of the natural world. There are scraps of more or less garbled Latin, and some passages which seem to be pure gibberish, as well as signs of interest in (if not knowledge of) Greek and Hebrew. Some of the lore of this sort which we find in the surviving corpus may well have reached the poets from Irish sources, but whether or not it did so is not the primary point: rather, it is important to recognize that these unknown writers would have been fascinated by the full spectrum of what the *peritissimi Scottorum* had to offer.
>
> Also significant in this connection is the agonistic character of the pseudo-Taliesinic poetry, a quality well-illustrated by *Preiddeu Annwn*. In vaunting his knowledge, the speaker does so as often as not at the expense of others, notably the monks who despite their claims to be learned are ignorant of innumerable mysteries to which 'Taliesin' holds the key. […] in claiming to be the supremely knowing one, 'Taliesin' naturally pits himself against that class in contemporary society which was assumed to be the most erudite. We may compare Dubthach, with his conviction that he was 'superior to all the Irish and Britons', and the rather hollow mystification to which he resorted in order to assert that superiority
> (Carey, 2007: 129-30)

Arguably, it may even have been the elite bards or poets, present in the court, that assimilated all this lore, gained through contact with the other Welsh *literati* which had it in their knowledge due to what was previously passed on from the Irish scholars. By means of the Taliesin tradition and poetry, they may have deposited all this same knowledge into a persona which would embody the founding-fathers of their "native" lore. Such lore, in fact, had also a huge amount of influence of the wandering Irish scholars which had left their mark in Welsh circles (as Gwynedd and possibly by influence Clynnog) where there was an intellectual climate of exchange and transmission. Being it so, Taliesin and the Irish lore which is evidenced in his poetry became a key symbol of the bards, and a way of asserting their place in the court. Such a scenario seems to be the one advocated by Marged Haycock:

> …the skilful composition, coupled with the fact that it has been preserved at all, implies that we might well be dealing with the trained court poets who are in this instance wearing a different hat. In other words, court poets might have composed poems such as 'Preiddeu Annwn' with an eye to providing entertainment of a fairly sophisticated kind; they chose to do so by setting aside their ceremonial *gravitas* and assuming the persona of a poet who was regarded by them as one of their founding fathers. By stressing the omniscience of the Taliesin figure, his familiarity with mythology and legend, his Otherworld connections, his mastery of exotic learning, they would, in a way, be swelling their own prestige and emphasizing the archaic origins of

> their poetic order. This would indirectly increase their standing and even enhance their authority in the society.
> (Haycock, 1983-84: 57-58)

In such atmosphere, contacts between such bards and the rest of the *literati* such as the monks, clerics and scholars in the Clynnog monastery, would no doubt exert an influence, if it was not exerted already due to the presence of the Irish scholars. Moreover, the Taliesin tradition, if it had such strength due to the establishment of Taliesin as an embodiment of knowledge, would eventually agglutinate (just as it did) Wales's own native lore, but would ultimately mingle snippets of Irish lore with it. This would explain the motifs in the tales of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* which seem to be of Irish provenience, and it would have been through the Taliesin tradition and works such as *Llyfr Taliesin* that they would have been spread to the native Welsh tradition, since *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd* also include elements which are present in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. It is through this connection we may get some conclusions about *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry*:

> If we imagine such poetry being composed in a spirit of intellectual self-assertion in (let us say) the royal court of Gwynedd in the tenth century, it is easy to see an analogy with the pedantic posturing of Dubthach in the same court in the ninth. I suggest that more is involved here than mere analogy. The Welsh bards may have seen the Irish scholars as being in some sense their predecessors. They may have drawn freely on what was remembered of what these men had brought with them, and have preserved in their schools considerably more of this lore than has survived in the relatively meagre manuscript remains of early medieval Wales.
> (Carey, 2007: 131)

As was previously mentioned, poems such as *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd* have several references to the events in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, with special emphasis on the *Second Branch*, although elements from the others are mentioned as well. It is unquestionable that the lore shared by the author(s) of both was similar or at least was composed of snippets of knowledge concerning the same tradition. Clynnog provides answers concerning the *Llyfr Taliesin*'s poems connection with the tales of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. Sims-Williams, as Carey also acknowledges, analysed some literary material from Clynnog and found elements which also characterise the Book of Taliesin, namely in the *Englynion y Beddau*[176], which

[176] Translated as "Stanzas of the Graves" (Carey, 2007: 128), the *Englynion y Beddau* is a series of verses in Middle Welsh concerned with the graves and final resting places of Welsh traditional heroes or legendary figures, which is found in the *Black Book of Carmarthen*.

manifest "a preoccupation with graves in rivers and under the sea – which recalls the interest in the underwater world in the Book of Taliesin, the various submerged kingdom legends, and the existence of the Irish tale-type known as *tomaidm* 'bursting forth (of lake or river)'" (Sims-Williams, 2001: 123). In other chapters of his *Ireland and the Grail* (2007), Carey had pointed out that elements concerning Brân's story in the *Second Branch* had most possibly been the result of influence from the Irish Bran mac Febuil stories, which were concerned with travels to an over-seas Otherworld, as in the case of *Immram Brain*, and most significantly, in tales regarding Bran and the legends of the Lough Foyle, such as *Immacaldam in Druad Brain* (Carey, 2007: 43-66) or *Tomaidm Locha Febuil* (Carey, 2007: 335). These tales depict the same thematic concerning underwater worlds or submerged-kingdom legends mentioned by Sims-Williams, with *Tomaidm Locha Febuil* being one of those "bursting forth" type of tales.

Taking these elements into account, and the possible composition of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* in Clynnog, we have further evidence of a connection with the *Llyfr Taliesin*, or more exactly, of the interest in the same lore that is evidenced in the Taliesin tradition. This goes into accord with what has been mentioned about the Taliesin tradition: if the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* were composed in Clynnog, having a connection with Gwynedd, the lore which may have had its reputation being strengthened due to Taliesin's embodiment of knowledge would have influenced the scholars from Clynnog and the composition of the *Four Branches*. The dates of composition of *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golichaf-i Gulwyd* could provide further clues on this matter, however, such dates are not a settled question. Several scholars have situated the dates of both poems around the ninth or tenth century, exactly the timeframe which we have been analyzing as the possible high point of Irish influence. One such scholar is John T. Koch, who states that in relation to *Preideu Annwfyn* "The poem probably dates back to the 8th or 9th century, which makes it one of the earliest pieces of Arthurian literature" (Koch *et al*, 1994: 287). This is also in the same line of Sims-Williams' considerations regarding the *Kaer Sidi* poems which according to him "may be of about the same tenth-century date as the (copying of the) Juvencus *englynion*, but could belong to a century on either side" (Sims-Williams, 1982: 243). Additionally, Carey points out that the dates and place point to Gwynedd:

> Whether we put them early or late within this time-frame, the two poems seem likeliest to have been written shortly after (or perhaps during) the period of

> active Irish influence, and prior to the first written composition of prose narratives in the vernacular.
>
> For what is worth, *Golychafi gulwyd* – and, by extension, very possibly *Preiddeu Annwn* as well – appear to have been composed in Gwynedd.
>
> (Carey, 2007: 130)

On the other hand, more recently, Marged Haycock has argued for c. 1200 as a likelier date for the corpus of *Llyfr Taliesin* (Haycock, 2007: 21-41), although in previous studies she had found similarities of *Preideu Annwfyn* with a poem composed around the year of 875 (Haycock, 1983-1984: 53). This does not mean that we cannot make the connection, since enough clues seem to point to a channel of communication between Gwynedd and Clynnog, where the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* seem to have been composed. Even if the date of composition of the poems from *Llyfr Taliesin* is indeed c. 1200, the tradition or lore connected to Taliesin, along with other native elements which are contained in the poems, are possibly much older, thus explaining the sharing of elements between the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the Taliesin poems which evoke elements from it. Most possibly, the native lore which composes the *Four Branches* was also in circulation in Gwynedd, together with the Irish motifs which left a legacy in this same court due to the presence of Irish scholars such as Dubthach. The Taliesin tradition eventually might have been a reflection of both, with the Welsh bards which came to have possession of this combined lore strengthening it and creating poems such as the ones in *Llyfr Taliesin* or similar to them. The link with Clynnog provided for this tradition to reach the scholars in Clynnog's monastery, and we may possibly then have the answer for the connection between the *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd* poems and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, and more importantly for us, for the presence of Irish elements in them.

The reader may wonder on how the connection between the Taliesin poems and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* is important on tracing the spreading of the *Aided* I motifs which are found in the *Vulgate Lancelot*, and if *Marwnat Corroi* can be seen as the evidence of a Welsh intermediary or not. This can be clarified by looking at Carey's work related to the Irish motifs which went through Wales. Carey puts forward the well-argued hypothesis that these motifs had an influence in both *Llyfr Taliesin* and the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*, and subsequently, from this Welsh tradition with traces of Irish influence, towards the formation of the Continental Arthurian Grail tradition. Making a quick synopsis, Carey demonstrates a plausible theory which identifies traces

of influence from the Irish tales of Bran mac Febuil and Conn of the Hundred Battles, together with certain Irish Otherworld motifs, in the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*. The Welsh tale seems to have had an influence in the Grail tales, with the character of Brân and the several story motifs concerning the raid to Ireland and the travelling to the Otherworldy island of Gwales, as having exerted a strong influence in the formation of the character of the Fisher King, crucial to the Grail stories, and in several other details surrounding the iconic Grail itself. Such transportation of motifs seems to have happened through the channel of transmission we have been analyzing: from the Irish scholars' presence in Gwynedd to the genesis of the Taliesin tradition associated with *Llyfr Taliesin* and further spreading in Wales, leading to the composition of the traditional tales included in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the transmission to the Continent of this Irish-influenced Welsh tradition centuries after its arrival and formation in Wales.

What is relevant for us is concerned with this tracing of the channel of communication between Ireland, Wales and the Continent. If it was in this way that the motifs which brought forth the Continental stories related to the Grail travelled, it is most possible that it was in this way as well that the stories concerning Cú Roí also travelled and influenced tales such as the one described in the *Vulgate Lancelot*. Specially since the Taliesin tradition, at least the one which we can correlate with *Llyfr Taliesin* (and which is very important for the travelling of the elements which influenced both the tales in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the Grail stories, as we can deduce from poems such as *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Golychaf-i Gulwyd*), also seems to include the knowledge related to the events in *Aided Chon Roí*, as shown in *Marwnat Corroi*. As we have seen, *Marwnat* does not include some of the motifs of *Aided Chon Roí* (specifically the ones in the *Aided* I version) which are found in the tale of Lancelot and Caradoc. However, as mentioned before, the Welsh bards "may have drawn freely on what was remembered of what these men had brought with them [the Irish scholars], and have preserved in their schools considerably more of this lore than has survived in the relatively meagre manuscript remains of early medieval Wales" (Carey, 2007: 131).

We do not know to what extent the stories concerning Cú Roí and *Aided Chon Roí* were known. Nonetheless, the details concerning stories such as *Branwen uerch Lyr* (the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*) are not mentioned in their totality nor are the

stories surrounding them told in their entirety (or with all the story motifs which compose them) in the *Llyfr Taliesin* poems as well, but the whole story (at least the versions we know from the *White Book of Rhydderch* and the *Red Book of Hergest*) did find a way to be written in Clynnog, possibly showing us that a fuller knowledge of the Welsh native tale existed in the Welsh literate circles or was possibly a part of the bardic tradition. The same could perhaps be said of *Aided Chon Roí*. Furthermore, this seems to be the most probable and plausible hypothesis. Even if it did not find its way to be completely described in an elusive and obscure poem such as *Marwnat Corroi*, keen on also maintaining the esoteric Taliesin tradition, certain motifs related to the tale, such as Cú Roí's soul vulnerability to his own sword, and the treacherous wife motif as it is used in *Aided* I, could also be in circulation in Wales. These motifs would then have found a way into the Continent through the same channel of communication on which the Irish elements which influenced the Grail travelled, and exerted an influence in a story such as the one in *Vulgate Lancelot*.

It may be noted that some pages behind, it was mentioned that the Irish scholars who had their presence in Gwynedd, were most possibly wandering scholars, on their way to the Continent, and the possibility that these wandering Irishmen may have spread the motifs directly may come to mind. If the texts from the Continent mentioning Dubthach are related to the same Dubthach who wrote the letter regarding the Bamberg cryptogram, this could explain how the mentioned motifs from *Aided* I travelled to the Continent, and eventually influenced the tale in *Vulgate Lancelot* about the conflict between Lancelot and Caradoc. However, since the transmission of the elements which influenced the Grail stories, according to Carey's work, have the undeniable mark of Wales as the intermediary, due to the influence of elements which are exclusive to the Welsh adaptation of the motifs, and since *Marwnat Corroi* made his appearance in one of the works which had an influence in this process (*Llyfr Taliesin*), betraying knowledge of the tale depicted in *Aided Chon Roí*, then the most probable medium of transmission was indeed this same channel of transmission which had Wales as an intermediary rather than direct transmission. As we shall discuss further ahead, the popularity of Arthurian stories in the Continent was a phenomenon which drew from contact with Brythonic traditions, and therefore it seems rather more probable that Irish influence came indirectly through such contact.

2.5.3 The Absence of a Welsh Version of the Beheading Game

Since the hypothesis of a channel of transmission of Irish motifs into Wales, through Gwynedd, seems to be the most conspicuous one for which we can find evidence, it remains to be discussed if this same hypothesis can apply to the transmission of the beheading-game motif. Some issues might be raised concerning this matter, since there is not a clear analogue or reference in Wales to *Fled Bricrenn* or any beheading-game narrative. *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet* (the *First Branch of the Mabinogi*) does contain an episode which could be interpreted as an exchange of blows, but any parallel of this episode with the beheading-game motif might be too vague for us to consider that it is the result of Irish influence. We must briefly refer to it nonetheless, to underline why it cannot be considered as a credible possibility. The narrative tell us that Pwyll, in the form of Arawn (the king of the otherwordly kingdom of Annwn), is warned by the latter that he shall meet his rival Hafgan a year later in order to fight him, but that he must only deliver one single blow to Hafgan instead of several blows, even if he begs for more, otherwise Hafgan will be fighting against him the next day unscathed, as if he had never been struck by a blow in the day before (Davies, 2007: 4; Williams, 1951: 3). When a year has passed, Pwyll, still in the form of Arawn, finally meets Hafgan, and deals a single lethal blow to the latter, which throws him out of his horse, splits his shield in half and destroys his armour. As predicted by Arawn, Hafgan asks for Pwyll to finish him with a final blow, but Pwyll refuses, and thus Hafgan declares that he will then surely die, and is taken away by his noblemen (Davies, 2007: 6; Williams, 1951: 5-6).

It could be argued that the period of one year before the actual duel is indeed reminiscent of some Arthurian versions of the beheading game, such as the *Caradoc* tale or *SGGK*. However, this same detail was absent from *Fled Bricrenn*, therefore, if *Pwyll* was indeed a possible example of Irish transmission, then the detail of the year's respite cannot be used as an evidence for it. Furthermore, the other elements from the tale do not seem to bear that much of a similarity to the beheading-game motif. The challenge is not about the beheading of the opponent, and therefore imminent death from decapitation and the shock factor associated with it are not elements in it, even though Hafgan apparently perishes if Pwyll only gives him one blow. Additionally, it is not clear if the confrontation between Pwyll and Hafgan can indeed represent an alternate exchange of blows with the same rules of the beheading game, only that one of

the contestants was the first to deal a blow. It does not seem to be more than the common setting of any regular duel.

In what regards yet another possible parallel, it may be considered that Cú Roí and Hafgan could be compared due to their supernatural character, since Hafgan also seems to have some supernatural traits (according to Arawn, he always return uninjured in the next day if he receives more than one blow in the fight). Be that as it may, the aforementioned traits are completely different from the ones of Úath/Cú Roí. Hafgan does not demonstrate a supernatural ability to survive decapitation, and therefore the nature of the challenge is completely different and materializes into a different motif. Additionally, Hafgan is not described with any other characteristics found in Cú Roí or Úath, he does not use a sword or an axe, nor is he a churlish or gigantic figure. A parallel with *Fled Bricrenn* seems therefore to be quite a far-fetched idea. In sum, the exchange of blows in *Pwyll* lacks the specific details of the beheading game, and to find a parallel only in one opponent giving a blow first seems to be a weak hypothesis with nothing else to stand for it, as Jacobs puts it:

> Because of the central importance attached in it to a test of chastity, the first episode in *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*, which is indeed set in an area of intense Irish settlement, is intermittently canvassed as a parallel to *Sir Gawain*, as the test is combined with something resembling an exchange of blows, it could conceivably be thought to represent a missing link in the chain. If the motives are compared that seems unlikely. In particular the duel between Pwyll and Hafgan involves an exchange of blows only in the trivial sense that all duels do, and presents a parallel to the Irish tale merely in that one blow and no more is to be struck by the champion. If there is any connection between the motif of a beheading from which one kind of adversary can instantly recover and that of a second blow which would bring another back from the dead, it lies deep in antecedent tradition and has nothing to do with *Fled Bricrenn.*
> (Jacobs, 2000: 41-42)

Thus, it seems rather futile to attempt to find a parallel here; the slight reminiscences of the beheading game in *Pwyll* are not enough for us to consider it seriously as an example of Irish influence, not without having to apply a heavy dose of speculation. Nevertheless, the lack of a Welsh version of the beheading game does not prevent one to consider that *Fled Bricrenn* could have been transmitted to Wales, through the channel of transmission we have been discussing in the previous subchapters. It is a given fact that Welsh medieval literature, in contrast with early Irish literature, has not been as well preserved throughout the centuries in what extant written manuscripts are concerned, and many written works were most possibly lost. Due to this

context, to lack an analogue with an Irish motif which has parallels in Arthurian tales does not necessarily mean it did not exist: "Nothing significantly resembling the beheading game survives in Welsh, but that narrative tradition is so fragmentary in comparison with its Irish counterpart that its absence is no surprise and not necessarily significant" (Jacobs, 2000: 41).

Moreover, we cannot claim a complete absence of clues which could point to the transmission of the motif to Wales, since the links we have underlined between Irish and Welsh literature may be meaningful for this matter. Namely, what prevents us from being absolutely clueless is the *Aided Chon Roí/Marwnat Corroi* connection, which may lead us to consider some possibilities in what the beheading game is concerned. It is curious for instance that both *Aided Chon Roí* and *Fled Bricrenn* have the same antagonists: Cú Chulainn and Cú Roí, and both tales have parallels in Arthurian tradition, although *Fled Bricrenn* has more examples of its influence in said tradition. To plainly claim that this could bear significance on the matter of the transmission of the beheading game implies a certain degree of speculation; nonetheless, due to the absence of a Welsh analogue, this is unavoidable. If the previous discussion about the transmission of *Aided Chon Roí* to Wales may be remembered, we suspected that a possible cycle of tales around the figure of Cú Roí could have been popular in Wales, and that this could be a possible source for the aforementioned transmission of *Aided Chon Roí*. The same suspicion applies in the case of *Fled Bricrenn* as well, since it also features Cú Roí as the main antagonist. Alternatively, the fact that *Aided Chon Roí* contains the same antagonists of *Fled Bricrenn* may lead to the possibility that such a body of tales could be not only dedicated to Cú Roí but to Cú Chulainn as well. Both possibilities make us suspect that the beheading-game story with Cú Chulainn and Cú Roí which we know could indeed have been the one originally known in Wales. Whatever the case, there are further observations which we can make pointing towards the same possible conclusion.

It is clear that in its transmission to Arthurian literature, the motif of the beheading game became freely associated with other characters and contexts, as the several Arthurian renditions demonstrate. But this process may not have been what first happened in Wales. While the use of two different beheading-game episodes in *Fled Bricrenn* possibly indicates that there could have been multiple versions of the beheading game in Ireland, whether written or oral ones, this does not mean that there

was a transmission of several versions to Wales. In fact, it could have been a single one, or very similar ones in the case that there were several indeed. The reason for such suspicion is the correspondence to several elements from *Fled Bricrenn* found in the Continental versions and in *SGGK*. A most notable and possible demonstration is the preservation of both the beheading-game and revolving-castle motifs simultaneously in French narratives, particularly in *La Mule Sans Frein*, although vestiges are also found in *Perlesvaus*. The fact that these two motifs remain together in a Continental narrative such as *La Mule Sans Frein*, and in *Perlesvaus* (although not in the same episode) demonstrates that its source must have been close to the narrative of *Fled Bricrenn* which we know. Other incredibly similar details to *Fled Bricrenn* found in other Arthurian narratives, such as the praising of the court and subsequent scorn regarding the lack of willing participants in the challenge, the rules of the challenge itself, or the supernatural survival of the challenger, amongst all the others which we have underlined, further strengthen this idea.

In light of these observations, if Wales was indeed the intermediary for the Arthurian narratives, as we have been discussing, then the beheading-game narrative known in Wales most possibly was a single coherent narrative quite similar to the extant versions of *Fled Bricrenn*. Otherwise, if the beheading game had become a floating motif associated with several narratives in Wales, there would be an inevitable dispersion of the elements we know from *Fled Bricrenn*. In other words, there might have been a written version of *Fled Bricrenn* or an Arthurian adaptation of the same narrative which was very close to it, because even though medieval manuscript culture also implies variation, it is "...less dramatic than, the variability of texts produced by oral tellers of tales who, individually, recount a different version of a given story at each performance and, collectively, through tales being passed down through generations of storytellers, produce radically different versions that can scarcely be considered the same 'text'" (Hult, 2011: 16). Therefore, if transmission was solely through oral tradition, it would be odd and improbable for the many elements in common with *Fled Bricrenn* to have been preserved and reunited in either French of English narratives. Furthermore, the fact that not one single extant Welsh version of the beheading game remains makes it all the more unlikely for the existence of several versions of the story in Wales.

Unfortunately however, our reasoning is based only in the scarcely available evidence. We cannot ever plainly affirm that this was definitely the case without a Welsh beheading-game narrative, but it does seem to be a possibility which makes sense of the evidence we have been collecting, along with the observations we have been making. We may never know for sure unless new Welsh manuscripts are discovered, what we do know is that we have Arthurian parallels to *Fled Bricrenn* in both Insular and Continental traditions, and that there are enough evidences of a channel of transmission of Irish elements connected with Gwynedd allowing us to consider Wales as the most possible intermediary, thus also being the most probable point of transmission for the beheading-game motif. Additionally, the agreement demonstrated between the elements found in *Fled Bricrenn* and their appearance in the Arthurian renditions seems to point towards the possibility of a single version of the beheading game transmitted to Wales, which must have been quite close to the extant *Fled Bricrenn* which we know.

These observations and the possibility they imply raise many questions nevertheless, especially in connection to the two versions of the beheading game present in *Fled Bricrenn*. If there was possibly a single version of the beheading game transmitted to Wales, which one was transmitted, or were they both after all? While the *Champion's Covenant* is the version which contains most of the elements found in the Arthurian renditions, the detail of the three feigned blows from the Úath episode creates some confusion. The three blows appear in *SGGK*, and may have possible variations in the interruptions of the King and Queen in the *Livre de Caradoc*, or in Lancelot's dodge of the blow at the first try in *Perlesvaus*. Nevertheless, as we have seen, other details in versions such as the *Livre de Caradoc* and *SGGK*, such as the addressing to the court and praise of the latter by the challenger, followed by scorn when no challenger immediately appears, are undeniably similar to the *Champion's Covenant*. We could wonder if the tale transmitted was a version of the *bachlach*/Cú Roí episode which included the three blows. Possible answers for this question may be found however by continuing our study concerning the channels of transmission.

Up until this point we have been searching for the channel of transmission in Wales as the intermediary, however, the transmission does not stop in Wales, and it remains to be seen how it went from Wales to both England and France. This is particularly relevant in what concerns the beheading-game motif, since it appears in

both the Continental tradition and later in the English tradition with *SGGK*. As we have seen, *SGGK* is close in many details to *Fled Bricrenn*, as is the beheading-game episode in the *Livre de Caradoc*, but what could this mean in terms of transmission? Was the motif spread to the Continent and then back to England? Or was there a two-way transmission, from Ireland to Wales and then to both the Continent and to England?

To study such channels of transmission to France or to England implies the study of the transmission of Arthurian tradition from Wales to the Continent as well as its spreading through English literary tradition and culture, since it is in Wales that stories about Arthur first developed. We might wonder whether Irish motifs were transmitted already merged in Arthurian stories, or in independent stories closer to their original Irish versions, which would have later been adapted and reused in Arthurian stories already in the context of Continental and English traditions. Furthermore, we do not know for sure if such transmission happened through oral tradition, textual tradition, or both, even though we may suspect that the interplay of both forms of transmission must have played a part. Either way, since we do know that Arthurian tradition was spread to the Continent and that English Arthurian stories also use Irish motifs, clearly it must have been through the same channels used for the transmission of Arthurian material that Irish motifs also travelled. This becomes even more obvious when it is in Arthurian tradition that motifs which betray Irish influence are displayed, such as the beheading game or the Irish elements that John Carey found in the Grail narratives. What remains to be seen is how such material was transmitted from Wales, if it was so directly through contact with the Anglo-Norman world or if there were further intermediaries in their transition to a Continental context.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSMISSION TO THE CONTINENT AND TO ENGLAND

3.1 Wales in Post-Norman Britain and the Rise of Arthurian Literature in Anglo-Norman and Continental Culture

Wales was one of the last independent Brythonic regions after the fall of the Old North (c. 800 AD) and Cornwall/Dumnonia (Battle of Hingston Down, 838 AD) to the Anglo-Saxons, and thus had marked differences to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in terms of language and culture, notwithstanding that there was an inevitable cultural contact and exchange between both cultures. The Norman invasion of Britain however, had a considerable effect on Wales, connecting it even further with the rest of Great Britain:

"To a much greater degree than Scotland, Wales had felt the impact of the Norman invasion of England. Within ten years of the battle of Hastings Norman warriors had established powerful lordships and built massive castles along the uncertain border between Wales and England and had penetrated far into indisputably Welsh territory" (Barrow, 2008: 596), even though Wales was not immediately subdued by the Normans, nor fully lost its independence up until the Edwardian conquest in 1282 (Roberts, 1999: 183). The advance of the Normans on the Welsh Marches resulted in a long stand-off on which Wales was slowly being absorbed into Norman influence: "By 1120 three of the four Welsh bishoprics were in Norman hands" (Bromwich, 1991: 274), even though Wales frequently regained territory due to the actions of the kings of Gwynedd such as Gruffudd ap Cynan and his successors Owain Gwynedd and Rhys ap Gruffudd (Roberts, 1999: 182). The context of the Welsh-Norman conflict, with its advances and retreats around the Marches of Wales from both parties inevitably brought both cultures into contact, especially on a linguistic level and through inter-marriage, even though Wales maintained its native language and identity as well:

> Welsh was spoken throughout the country by all classes and in most contexts. Certain functions required the use of Latin or Anglo-Norman: clerics, court clerks and some lawyers would have occasion to use Latin, while the lords and their administrators used both Latin and Anglo-Norman as the languages of diplomacy and administration. There was a considerable degree of intermarriage between aristocratic Welsh and Anglo-Norman families which would have led to some bilingualism, and knowledge of English was widespread among the general populace.
> (Roberts, 1999: 183)

The Norman Conquest thus placed Wales into the Anglo-Norman cultural sphere, since intermarriage in the aristocratic classes was often accompanied by the progressive sharing of a similar culture: "The princes, while often termed "native," were native in the sense only of being independent of the English crown, while still intermarried with Norman families and in material terms often indistinguishable from their Norman neighbors" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 80). Notwithstanding, it is most natural that Norman culture would absorb native Brythonic elements as well, especially because the Welsh not only kept their own native language on parallel with Anglo-Norman but also a strong consciousness of their ethnic identity and roots: "Medieval Welsh people had a well-established sense of their national past. They were the Britons, the original settlers of the Island of Britain who had been masters of it 'from shore to shore' before the Saxons came." (Roberts, 1999: 184).

Pre-Norman Wales had a fairly established literature with basis on Welsh native traditions or even Brythonic in a wider sense, since many of its themes and narratives had originated in the "Old North", and this body of lore seems to be what survived in the Welsh *Triads*, as well as in poetry attributed to Taliesin and Aneirin and perhaps in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. In what concerns Arthurian stories and themes, pre-Galfridian Arthurian Welsh references in verse as well as the prose tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen* seem to have origins in pre-Norman times, either in oral or written traditions. Even though the surviving manuscripts where some of these stories survived were produced in post-Norman times, they betray much older traditions, not to mention pseudo-historical sources such as *Historia Brittonum*, where Arthur is mentioned. The psychological effect of the invasion of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons lived on in the consciousness of the Britons, leading to the flourishing of the trope of the returning "saviour" or "returning king", and its association with the figure of Arthur, possibly in folklore initially:

> From 'Nennius's' prophecy of the victory of the Red Dragon over the White in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* to the political vaticinations of Welsh poets during the Wars of the Roses, the theme of the returning hero – variously named as Cynan, Cadwaladr, Owain, and in popular folklore Arthur – who would restore the Crown of London to the remnants of the Britons was one of the most characteristic features of Welsh literature and consciousness.
> (Roberts, 1999: 184)

The contact of Wales with the Normans might have led the latter to have contact with these Welsh traditions as well, and for them to have been absorbed since Norman approach to culture, in what literature is concerned, seemed to be extremely open to multi-cultural influences, despite their native or even nationalistic character:

> Indeed, one of the most striking features of the literary scene in post-Conquest England is its assimilative nature. Literary resources from pre-Conquest England, Anglo-Saxon and Viking, from the Old French *chansons de geste* as well as the *roman courtois*, from clerical Latin sources and from Celtic tradition are plundered, mingled and reworked with an evident indifference to any feeling of national identity or cultural integrity.
> (Field, 1999: 153)

In Wales, the transmission might actually have been facilitated, since the bards had already laid the groundwork for these traditions to be a part of Latin learned culture: "They [bards] it was who ensured the continuity of Welsh literature and its linguistic standards from pre-Norman to medieval Wales, but in the development of a written literature from the oral medium their association at courts and *clasau* with

administrators and clerics would have been crucial" (Roberts, 1999: 185). Such a development might actually have been further assisted in post-Norman times due to the growing influence of religious orders seemingly interested in the native traditions: "The growth of Cistercian houses in terms of wealth, literary activity and political influence and activity is one of the key aspects of Norman-era Wales. The Augustinians and Cistercians, regardless of patronage, evinced a general interest in the Celtic past, a pattern also seen in Ireland" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 80). Indeed, this is a similar scenario to what happened in Ireland with the *filid* and their ecclesiastical counterparts at a considerably earlier period, and means that in Wales "The interaction of native learning with Latin literacy lies at the heart of the development of a native, Welsh and Latin, literature" (Roberts, 1999: 185). Of course, such developments would be crucial for Norman contact with these traditions since Latin worked as an international language for the higher classes (Ziolkowski, 2008: 658-661), along with the bilingual context provided by the progressive use of Anglo-Norman in some contexts. Such bilingualism without a doubt played a part in the subsequent literary development in Post-conquest Britain: "What is evident is that most of the authors were bi- or trilingual, indeed that a monolingual author is something of an improbability throughout this period. The first appearance of romance in England after the Conquest is apparently confined to the one vernacular, that of the new French-speaking rulers" (Field, 1999: 153).

What is certain is that "Irrefutable evidence for the transmission of Celtic stories to the Normans at an early date is to be found in the large number of personal names of Brythonic derivation which have come down in the work of French and Latin writers. A number of these are clearly recognizable as belonging to Welsh traditional characters..." (Bromwich, 1991: 276). Notwithstanding, Norman interest in Arthurian material was probably first demonstrated in the Latin *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth: "...his [Geoffrey of Monmouth] foregrounding of the links between the Britons and the Bretons and the unifying myth of Arthur provided convenient political justifications for Anglo-Norman, and then Anglo-Angevin, territorial ambitions on both sides of the Channel." (Jewers, 2011: 51-52). Moreover, the fact that the *Historia* was written in Latin ensured that the work could reach an international audience instead of being restricted to Britain: "It is not easy to conceive what the success of Arthurian romance would have been had Geoffrey of Monmouth (*c*. 1100–54) not produced his *Historia regum Britanniae* in a *lingua franca* that facilitated its promulgation to the

intelligentsia throughout Europe" (Ziolkowski, 2008: 660). Geoffrey did not write for the Welsh, his *Historia* was dedicated to King Stephen and other Anglo-Norman nobles (Barron *et al*, 2001: 13) and his allegiance and intended audience were the Normans: "For Geoffrey's Norman patrons it [the *Historia*] provided legitimization of their conquest by putting it into historical perspective, showing Brutus as an invader bringing a superior culture, Cadwallader accepting the end of British rule as God-ordained, the Saxons as perfidious and brutal, unfit to rule" (Barron *et al*, 2001: 17). In fact, even though its origins lay in Brythonic tradition, at a certain point the Arthurian legend had become appropriated by the Norman rulers, progressively feeling more at home in their conquered territory of England and looking for a way to legitimize their conquest, thus further explaining its success in the Anglo-Norman world: "The legends of Arthur's conquests on the continent would have served to justify the goals of Norman expansion, while the glowing portrayal of Arthur's resistance against Germanic invaders would have encouraged Celtic peoples in Brittany, Scotland and Wales to support the progress of the Norman Conquest" (Ziolkowski, 2008: 679).

3.1.1 The Patronage of the Angevin Courts

The success of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* among the Latin-reading elites is undeniable, but it was its re-writing and adaptation to Anglo-Norman in the form of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, together with the writings of the Tristan narratives through Thomas of Britain and Béroul, that brought to Anglo-Norman audiences a better acquaintance with British narrative material. Wace's work was not only influential in the Anglo-Norman courts of Britain, but was most possibly one of the main agents for the spreading of the Arthurian legend into the courtly world of France (Jewers, 2011: 51), since Wace was based at Caen, which represented an important link between Normandy and England. His translation into Anglo-Norman of the *Historia* allowed it to be read in the Continent in a language available to a non-clerical audience: "Wace's work became an instant success on both sides of the Channel: twelfth-century Normandy and England shared the same ruler, their élites spoke the same language, and Caen was at the time an important intellectual and political centre which had many links with England, notably through land ownership" (Barron *et al*, 2001: 18). Therefore, such a context seems to place the *Roman de Brut* as one of the catalysts for the emergence of Continental Arthurian Romance: "The translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin *Historia* into vernacular octosyllabics by Wace gives a new courtly

gloss to the Matière de Bretagne which propels it into the *roman courtois* of Chrétien and his followers" (Field, 1999: 154).

A fundamental factor for creating the ideal context for such development was the fact that a large part of French-speaking territory was at the time of the Angevin Empire under Norman influence: "In the middle of the [twelfth] century the marriage of William's great-grandson Henry II to Eleanor of Aquitaine led to Henry's overlordship of an empire which encompassed not only England, Normandy and Brittany, but nearly the whole of France south of the Loire" (Bromwich, 1991: 274). Intelligibility was without a doubt an influent agent in the spreading of cultural elements throughout a large sway of territory. This goes hand in hand with one of the key aspects of Post-conquest Britain: the changes in language:

> "When the Normans replaced the English ruling class with their own men, French replaced English as the regular spoken language of the powerful in England. Anglo-Norman (as linguists term the French used by the settlers in England) was spoken in the court, and often in schools and monasteries, and provided a medium for secular or lay literature."
> (Scase, 2009: 16)

Therefore, although the vernaculars did not disappear in Britain, there was a period where both the Angevin Empire and even the other French-speaking territories were united through language, offering an ideal context for the advent of romance: "The growth of the romance genre in medieval Europe coincides with the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, and the subsequent period of bilingualism and close interrelation between England and the Continent, with the coexistence of two Francophone and rival kingdoms, the Capetian and the Angevin" (Field, 1999: 153). The formation of a large territory united through a main language (or at least of the ruling elites in what the territory of Britain is concerned) and the subsequent arising of bilingualism providing access to the vernaculars, together with the specific context of feudal society created the conditions for the proliferation of romance: "The feudal world provides the ethos and the setting of medieval romance, and the courtly class of the French-speaking world, on either side of the Channel, provided patrons, audience and subject matter for a new literature of entertainment" (Field, 1999: 153). It is in such context that the interest in the traditional or "Celtic" material from Britain arises, especially in the Continent, since it provides an exotic world of wonders which goes beyond the historical or political intents of the introduction to Arthurian legend in Monmouth's *Historia*:

> The adventures of the quasi-historical Arthur and his traditional companions may have had a challenging political relevance for Geoffrey's readers in Norman Britain, but viewed from across the Channel the same material would evoke the distant and the exotic, infused with the additional fascination of the Celtic supernatural to provide an alternative to the serious matter of the history of France.
> (Batt *et al*, 2001: 60)

A further element which led to the transmission of Arthurian material, along with such interest in traditional Brythonic or "Celtic" narrative material, was the patronage of the aristocracy, in both sides of the channel, and most importantly, of the royal court, which most probably established itself as a dynamic centre of cultural transmission. Without a doubt one of the factors leading to such establishment is the fact that the monarchs of the Angevin court were highly educated and thus more prone to cultivate a cultural and literate environment: "A feature of the Norman court in the reigns of Henry I and II is the degree of education of both monarchs – both were learned in Latin and law. Henry II's wife Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204) was educated in Europe's most cultivated court and was proficient in Latin and music" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 79). The royal court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine must have included learned clerics, bards, professional storytellers and *jongleurs*, leading to a rich cultural life, not only through oral poetry and storytelling but also with the patronage of written works. This seems to have been the case with Wace: "The *Roman de Brut*, his translation of Geoffrey's *Historia*, was made under the patronage of Henry II, who later rewarded Wace with a prebend at the Norman abbey of Bayeux" (Barron *et al*, 2001: 18).

Further evidences, even if indirect ones through the testimony of subsequent authors such as Laʒamon, point to Eleanor of Aquitaine as also being a patron along with further requests from Henry II: "...according to the later English poet Laʒamon, [Wace] presented a copy of the *Roman de Brut* to Eleanor of Aquitaine, then Queen of England. No copy of the *Roman de Brut* dedicated to Eleanor is extant, but we know that he later undertook the *Roman de Rou* at the request of Henry II" (Barron *et al*, 2001: 18). What is most significant about Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine's patronage is their status as the rulers of the extensive Angevin Empire, and their enmity with the rest of France, which would fuel further interest in the Arthurian myth as being a useful piece of literary propaganda: "Henry II became more powerful than the king of France, thanks to his wife, and consolidated an empire that stretched from England to

the Pyrenees; so while the French Capetian kings could encourage the resurrection of the myth of Charlemagne and his twelve peers, Arthur and his knights provided a perfect foil" (Jewers, 2011: 53). Their patronage of a work such as the *Roman de Brut*, along with all its other characteristics we mentioned regarding language and context, facilitated the spreading of the Arthurian legend beyond what Geoffrey's *Historia* already had accomplished. Even though Wace's work is still largely indebted to the chronicle format of Monmouth's *Historia*, it paved the way for a new literary genre around Arthur: "If Geoffrey expanded and codified a now pseudo-historical myth, then Wace vulgarises it in his adaptation of the *Historia* into vernacular poetry" (Jewers, 2011: 52). Moreover, Wace introduced new elements which would prove crucial for the development of the legend: "Wace prepares the way for subsequent romances by imbuing Arthur's court with even more chivalry and *courtoisie*, and is the first to mention the Round Table, fusing idealised leadership with a sense of fraternity and equality among his principal knights" (Jewers, 2011: 53).

The Arthurian material which the *Roman de Brut* introduced, together with the growing influence of Ovidian themes, the Occitan lyric poetry of the *troubadours* and the French courtly culture, laid the groundwork for the rise of Arthurian Romance in the Continent, no doubt also due to such mix of influences converging in the Angevin court, since they were in tune with Eleanor of Aquitaine's interests: "Eleanor's fondness for troubadour lyric and courtly love inspired the poets and *romanciers* at Henry's court (among them should probably be counted Thomas and Marie de France) and contemporary tastes in England and France found a natural outlet in the *matière de Bretagne*" (Jewers, 2011: 53). The evidence of Henry II and Eleanor's patronage of literary works, amongst them works related to Arthurian legend such as the *Roman de Brut* and also with the Tristan stories, which would later be associated with Arthurian material, as well as the apparent interest of Eleanor of Aquitaine in contemporaneous literary expressions such as the troubadours' lyric poetry, seems to point to the Angevin royal court as a fundamental pillar for the transmission of the Arthurian legend: a centre of cultural exchange and literary development which attracted as a magnet several influences which would shape Arthurian Romance.

Some of the seeds that later flourished into the creation of the full romance renditions of Arthurian stories might even have been planted already in the context of this court, since even Chrétien de Troyes might have been among the courtly retinue of

Henry II, despite his work having only been developed later in association with Marie de Champagne's court, as we shall see below: "Similarities between the coronation scene at the end of *Erec* and Henry II's court at Nantes (Christmas 1169), when his son Geoffrey was recognized as the future duke of Brittany, suggest that Chrétien may have been associated with the Anglo-Norman court at that stage of his career" (Bruckner, 2008: 79). Even the later Vulgate cycle, the height of French Arthurian Romance, is still associated indirectly with it in the Vulgate Lancelot: "The Cycle claims, significantly if spuriously, to have been written by a cleric called Walter Map, who lived, quite historically (d. 1209/10), in England in the reign of Henry II, as if the readers might find it reassuring to have the corroboration of an authentic, and verifiable, voice from Anglo-Norman England" (Taylor, 2009: 60). The authorship of Walter Map[177] is quite improbable, nevertheless, the claim of his authorship is a way of associating it with a royal court that certainly must have had a high degree of prestige in what concerns literary patronage, and testifies to its importance.

The establishment of the Angevin court as an important centre of literary refinement and cultural exchange did not stop with the end of its generation, and it seems that Eleanor of Aquitaine's children kept the same tradition, as might be demonstrated with the court of Marie de Champagne: "Her [Marie de Champagne] court was also a haven for lyric poets, debates on love casuistry (*cours d'amour*) and perhaps Andreas Capellanus, author of the Ovid-inspired treatise *On Love* (c. 1185), which includes a fashionable light-hearted episode in which one of Arthur's knights ('the Breton') braves danger to win a hawk for his lady" (Jewers, 2011: 53). It thus seem that in what concerns Arthurian material, the transmission in a courtly *milieu* that might have begun in Eleanor of Aquitaine's court seems to have continued with Marie de Champagne, and it is indeed the latter who is explicitly associated with the patronage of Arthurian works: "Eleanor herself is often cited as a key figure in the literary patronage

[177] Walter Map (1140-c.1210) was a clergyman, a medieval writer and a courtier to Henry II. The only work which can be ascribed with certainty to Map is the Latin *De Nugis Curialium*, even though the French Prose Lancelot claims him as an author under the name of Gauthier Map. Walter Map was possibly of Welsh origin, most possibly from the Welsh Marches, which would be a helpful explanation to the use of "Celtic" elements (including Irish ones through Wales arguably) in the Vulgate cycle which are not present in precedent works such as Monmouth's or Wace's. However, such authorship is highly questionable: "The text itself informs us that Walter Map was the author – or at least one of the authors – of the cycle. That the putative authorship of this fiction is itself a fiction is undeniable: Walter, a jurist and writer at the court of Henry II Plantagenet, inconveniently died in 1209, that is, some years before the earliest possible date for the romances" (Lacy, 2000: 170). Moreover, the work is unquestionably of French tradition: "If the author of the *Lancelot-Grail* had indeed been Walter Map, as it claimed, then the *Cycle* itself would have been English in that broader cultural sense" (Cooper, 2003: 147).

of Arthurian material on the Continent, but specific evidence of such patronage relates not to Eleanor but to Marie de Champagne, her daughter by her first husband" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 79). Such explicit evidence involves one of the most important figures for the advent of Arthurian Romance in the person of Chrétien de Troyes, who identifies Marie de Champagne as his patroness for his *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*:

> Since my lady of Champagne wishes me to begin a romance, I shall do so most willingly, like one who is entirely at her service in anything he can undertake in this world. I say this without flattery, though another might begin his story with the desire to flatter her, he might say (and I would agree) that she is the lady who surpasses all women who are alive, just as the zephyr that blows in May or April surpasses the other winds. Certainly I am not one intent upon flattering his lady. Will I say, "As the polished gem eclipses the pearl and the sard, the countess eclipses queens"? Indeed not; I'll say nothing of the sort, though it is true in spite of me. I will say, however, that her command has more importance in this work than any thought or effort I might put into it. Chrétien begins his book about the Knight of the Cart; the subject matter and meaning are furnished and given him by the countess, and he strives carefully to add nothing but his effort and careful attention.[178]
> (Troyes, 1991: 207).

The explicit dedication to Marie de Champagne and to her active suggestions in the writing of Chrétien's romance further strengthen the idea that "...the Arthurian romance's diffusion at the courts of Eleanor's children played a key role, especially Marie de Champagne (Eleanor's daughter by her first husband, King Louis VII of France), mentioned by Chrétien de Troyes in the prologue to *Le Chevalier de la charrette*" (Jewers, 2011: 53). Therefore, in a similar manner to the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, the patronage of literary works seems to provide a testimony to the role that Marie de Champagne's court might have had in literary development, and such patronage was probably extended to more than just Chrétien himself: "The court of Champagne was known for its literary patronage: two other names associated with Chrétien - Godefroi de Leigni, the writer who finished his *Chevalier de la charrette*, and Guiot, the scribe who copied all five romances in Bnf, fr. 794 - are connected to places located in Henry's principality" (Bruckner, 2008: 79). Furthermore, Chrétien de Troyes seems to have been not only associated with the court of Champagne, as was Wace before him associated with her mother's court, but also associated with other courts such as the one of Philip of Alsace, the Count of Flanders (Campbell, 2008: 212), who is praised and explicitly identified as patron in the opening lines of Chrétien's *Perceval*: "Chrétien sows and casts the seed of a romance that he is

[178] See Appendix I, note 60.

beginning, and sows it in such a good place that it cannot fail to be bountiful, since he does it for the most worthy man in all of Rome: that is, Count Philip of Flanders, who surpasses Alexander, whom they say was so great"[179] (Troyes, 1991: 381). In fact, Philip is said by Chrétien to be the provider of a book about the Grail on which Chrétien bases his work: "Therefore Chrétien's efforts will not be in vain, since he aims and strives by command of the count to put into rhyme the greatest story that has ever been told in royal court: it is the Story of the Grail, the book of which was given to him by the count"[180] (Troyes, 1991: 381-382). The identification by Chrétien de Troyes of Marie de Champagne's and Philip of Alsace's patronage of his work testifies to the popularity of Arthurian literature among the courtly world, and the establishment of these same courts as important centres of cultural and literary transmission:

> Chrétien names two patrons, Marie de Champagne (wife of Henry the Liberal, count of Champagne) and Philippe d'Alsace, count of Flanders: they place him, c. 1160s-1191, at two important political and cultural centres of Northern France, located along significant commercial axes connecting northern and southern Europe, England, and the Continent.
> (Bruckner, 2008: 79).

In other words, the patronage of Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian works by the court of Marie de Champagne is an indirect demonstration of the undeniable importance of the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, since the latter led to a major development in the spreading of Arthurian material due to their patronage of Wace's Anglo-Norman Arthurian version. The success of the *Roman de Brut* created further demand which materialized in Chrétien de Troyes' romances under the patronage of other royal courts which had been established in Northern France and which functioned in a similar way to the one of Henry II, by being centres of patronage and cultural interchange. This must have been the case with the courts of the Count of Champagne as well as of the Count of Flanders, which were thus crucial for the development of Arthurian Romance and its transmission throughout the Continent.

3.2 Possible Insular Sources for Continental Arthurian Traditions

3.2.1 *Bleheris* and Professional Storytellers in the Welsh Marches

A further element in the development of Arthurian romance however, is connected with the further use of Celtic motifs, which, as we mentioned, exercised a

[179] See Appendix I, note 61.
[180] See Appendix I, note 62.

deep interest in the Continent due to its supernatural and exotic features. Neither Geoffrey nor Wace however, use many of the motifs which are later featured in Continental romances such as the ones from Chrétien de Troyes, the continuations of the latter's *Perceval* or the ones from the Vulgate cycle, with some of these motifs being the ones which interest us in our research. This would mean that the material transmitted from Wales to the Normans was not solely introduced into the Continent through Geoffrey or Wace; more elements had to be transmitted somehow, most possibly orally.

A conspicuous possibility concerning this oral transmission is the existence of professional storytellers, which would also be present in important courts such as the one of Eleanor of Aquitaine, and which would communicate with learned clerics, thus transmitting material which would subsequently be reflected in the written traditions. We have a direct evidence for the availability of such material to French speakers in the form of the lais, as we shall discuss below. In what concerns the transmission of such material from Wales, this class of storytellers might go back to the development of bilingualism in the Welsh Marches in the aftermath of the Norman conquest, a theory advocated by Constance Bullock-Davies (1966). The demonstration of her thesis is based upon the emergence of bilingual interpreters in the Welsh Marches, named *latimarii* (Bromwich, 1991: 287), which would provide the very first transmission of Welsh elements:

> It is necessary to distinguish between first transmission and subsequent repetition. The latter can be regarded as primarily the work of minstrels, but it is to be questioned whether they were generally responsible for transmitting the tales in the first place, because original transmission of Celtic stories presupposes translation; and if minstrels were the only people responsible for transmission, then it has to be assumed that they were very capable linguists. (Bullock-Davies, 1966: 5)

The premise of Bullock-Davies' theory is that these bilingual interpreters would likely create a bridge between Welsh and Anglo-Norman, allowing for a flow of information between languages, and amongst such information narratives and traditional elements from Wales would be included as well. In view of this context, these interpreters would often be storytellers, especially if storytelling was sought after. Taking into account the apparent thirst for narrative material in courts such as the one of Henry II or later in Champagne, it is a logical step to imagine that these storytellers would travel beyond the confines of the Welsh Marches to the Continent. At least one

such storyteller is identified in the extant material by the name of Bleheris, who is mentioned in one of the manuscript-versions of the Second Continuation[181] of Chrétien's *Perceval* as having been born in Wales and as being a storyteller with great knowledge regarding the Arthurian Grail stories, which he told to the Count of Poitiers (Roach, 1971: 539; Bromwich, 1991: 286). Taking into account the early twelfth-century date ascribed to the Second Continuation, it is generally assumed that this Count of Poitiers was William VII[182] (Bromwich, 1991: 296n69), who became William IX of Aquitaine after 1086, thus giving us an indication not only of another patron of Arthurian tales in yet another court, but also another link to Eleanor of Aquitaine, since William was her grandfather.

The link between William and Bleheris suggested by the passage in the Second Continuation thus provides us with an example of the transmission of Arthurian tales to the courtly culture of Continental Europe, and the fact that Bleheris is said to have been born in Wales carries with it some meaning in light of the theory concerning professional interpreters in the Welsh Marches. Additionally, the Second Continuation is not the sole mention about Bleheris, in the mid-twelfth century a similar storyteller is mentioned in Thomas of Britain's *Tristan* under the name of Breri, which is associated with Bleheris and might be the same person (Bromwich, 1991: 286-287). As in the case of the Second Continuation where Bleheris is said to have a vast knowledge regarding the Grail stories, Thomas claims that Breri has in his knowledge the tales of every deed of every king and count from Britain's past, as well as being the source of his own Tristan tale[183].

[181] The Second Continuation is considered an early twelfth-century work which survives in eleven manuscripts along with a sixteenth-century prose version and a Middle High-German verse translation (Roach, 1971: xi-xiv). Of these manuscript-versions only one (named L and corresponding to a manuscript housed in the British Museum, London) mentions Bleheris, with seven other versions replacing it by "li escriz/escris" (Roach, 1971: 539-540), even though the Count of Poitiers is mentioned in five of the manuscripts. The passage which mentions both Bleheris and the Count of Poitiers, along with Bleheris' Welsh origins and his knowledge of the Grail tales is the following: "Deviser vos vuel sa faiture / Si con le conte Bleheris / Qui fu nes et engenuis / En Gales dont je cont le conte / Et qui si le contoit au conte / De Poitiers qui amoit lestoire / Et le tenoit en grant memoire / Plus que nul autre ne faisoit / Li chevaliers qui la venoit" (Roach, 1971: 349).

[182] William IX, Duke of Aquitaine or William VII, Count of Poitiers (1071-1127) was also called "The Troubador", since he was one of the earliest troubador, a form of lyric poet who performed their poetry in the vernacular Occitan language, and some of his work as a troubador has survived. Besides his importance to Occitan medieval culture, William also had political and military importance since he was one of the leaders of the Crusade of 1101 and fought in the "Reconquista" of the Iberian Peninsula.

[183] See Appendix I, note 63.

The acknowledgment of the allusions to a man called Bleheris or Breri as being one of the main sources for Brythonic stories, either Arthurian or related to the tales of Tristan, led scholars to identify every similar-looking name as possibly also being a reference to the same individual, especially when a similar description to Bleheris accompanies such similar names. This is the case with another addition to Chrétien's *Perceval*, namely the prologue *Elucidation*, which contains a reference to a certain Blihis as being a master on the secrets of the Grail[184], therefore being comparable to the description of Bleheris in the Second Continuation and leading to the possibility it could be a corrupt form of the same name (Loomis, 1959a: 57-58). Even the figure of Blaise, who is present in connection to Merlin and the Grail story in the *Didot Perceval* (Roach, 1941: 238, 242, 277, 307), and in the *Prose Merlin* from the vulgate cycle (Sommer, 1908: 19, 28, 35) as well as in the *Suite de Merlin* from the Post-vulgate (Paris *et al*: 1886: 32, 47, 61), is considered by scholars such as Loomis as being a reference to Bleheris "...under the disguise of the saintly name Blaise as an omniscient source for the early history of Arthur and Merlin" (Loomis, 1959a: 57-58). The reason for such association is that Blaise is portrayed in the stories as a testimony to the events surrounding Perceval and the Grail, as well as being Merlin's confident, thus becoming the ultimate authority on the Grail as well as on the reigns of Uther and Arthur. Moreover, these narratives also describe Merlin requesting Blaise to write a book compiling the events related to both Arthur and the Grail (Roach, 1941: 96-97; Loomis, 1942: 172-173). It is Blaise's status as an authority on the Grail which raises parallels with Bleheris/Blihis: "Evidently Maistre Blaise was the authority on the vessel and its quest. Now it is precisely as such that the *Elucidation*, prefixed to the *Conte del Graal*, cites a certain Maistre Blihis. And scholars agree that Blihis must be the Bleheris or Breri invoked by other romances..." (Loomis, 1942: 173). Loomis' conclusion is a bit hasty, since Blaise is presented as a character in the stories rather than as an account of a storyteller who was the source of the tales, as is the case of Bleheris/Breri/Blihis, nevertheless, it could be indeed a fictional avatar reflecting this same source.

A most pertinent example is the case with a *Bledhericus* who is mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis as being a famous storyteller[185], and who Loomis also identifies as Bleheris (1959: 57), as Gaston Paris (1879: 425-428) and John Rhys (1891: 370-373)

[184] See Appendix I, note 64.
[185] See Appendix I, note 65.

had already done half a century before, although Bromwich presents some scepticism regarding such identification: “This is an attractive speculation, but unfortunately it can be no more than a speculation, for although the Welsh name *Bleddri* [...] is easily discernible as underlying all three of these name-forms [...], the name is not by itself sufficiently distinctive to be understood as denoting any specific individual of the early twelfth century” (Bromwich, 1991: 287). Nevertheless, Bromwich also presents possible alternatives which may point towards such identification not being entirely speculative after all, by referring to W. J. Gruffydd’s noticing of the name of a certain *Bleddri ap Kadifor ap Gollwyn* in a genealogy and his identification with Bleheris (Gruffydd, 1912: 180-183), and further associating this identification with other evidences: “A certain *bledri latimer* (‘interpreter’) *ap Kadifor* is listed in a Carmarthen cartulary as having made a gift of land to the Priory of St John at Carmarthen about the year 1130, and he is said to have been the guardian of a nearby castle for King Henry I” (Bromwich, 1991: 287). This Bleddri seems clearly to have been the same person in both the genealogy and the cartulary, and his identification as an interpreter certainly inserts him in the theory of Bullock-Davies, especially if it is indeed the same Bleheris who is described as a famous storyteller and the Bledhericus mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis: “Evidently Bleddri was a supporter of Norman interests in the neighbourhood of Carmarthen in the early years of the century, and the date would certainly agree with his conjectural identification with the *Bledhericus* of Giraldus - whether or not he could also be the *Breri*/*Bleheris* of the poets” (Bromwich, 1991: 287).

Notwithstanding the uncertainties in identification, the mention in the Second Continuation and the reference made by Thomas to a Bleheris who was knowledgeable in Brythonic and Arthurian lore already gives us important testimonies of a Welsh storyteller spreading his native traditions. The possibility that there is indeed a correct identification in the more speculative case of the *Elucidation* or the mention by Giraldus Cambrensis, only strengthens the thesis that there were interpreters spreading Welsh lore beyond the Welsh Marches, as Bullock-Davies seems to believe. If this was indeed the scenario, then men such as Bleheris would prove influential for the development and spreading of the Matter of Britain in the Continent:

> What we know of Bleddri *lladmerydd* or *latimarius* suggests that he and men like him could have been key figures in the transmission of Arthurian stories, as representatives of a class of highly trained and cultured professionals, capable of translating both into and out of their own first language, and

> therefore in the best possible position to act as liaison officers on every kind of level between the Normans and their neighbours, whether in England, Wales, Scotland, or Brittany.
> (Bromwich, 1991: 287)

For some scholars, the acknowledgment of a Welshman spreading Welsh material in the Continent, or the existence of bilingual interpreters such as him that would act similarly, together with the influence of the courts of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine and other courts in the Continent such as the one of Marie de Champagne, and their enthusiasm and patronage in what concerns Arthurian lore, seems to provide a clear scenario which would explain the transmission of the Arthurian stories and "Celtic" elements to Continental tradition. According to such a point of view, the transmission of Arthurian lore would result from the contact of Wales with the Normans, and would be further spread by professional interpreters as Bleheris might have been. Notwithstanding, many loose ends seem to persist in such a view. There is hardly any doubt that the figure of Arthur and both his pseudo-historic references and first folktales must have developed in a Welsh context, and the extension of the Angevin Empire united through a *lingua franca* due to the establishment of the Anglo-Norman as an elite language in Britain seems to have provided the ideal context for further transmission upon Norman contact with Wales. Likewise, it seems the interest of the courts of the Angevin Empire in Arthurian matters would sponsor such transmission.

Nevertheless, there are of course further doubts regarding this entire matter. If Wales was the direct source through which Arthurian lore was spread through the Anglo-Norman world including the Continent, why would Welsh narrative material arouse such a deep interest in France and other parts of Europe? This is a question that Roger Sherman Loomis already raised in the second half of the twentieth century:

> Why this exaltation of an alien king and court by the most sophisticated men of letters of Western Europe, men who, so far as one can tell, had not the slightest incentive to popularize a figure of so remote a time and people? How did poets who knew no Celtic language come into possession of a fund of story, full of Welsh and Breton names, localized at Caerleon, Caerwent, Cardigan, Tintagel, Edinburgh, and the city of Snowdon (Caer Seint near Carnarvon), and embodying numerous Irish and Welsh motifs and story patterns? The influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace affords no explanation, for these authors supply only a small fraction of the Celtic elements in the early romances. Surely this knowledge was not acquired by continental poets through a visit to Great Britain. [...] Knowledge of Celtic tradition cannot be due, then, to travel in Celtic lands; it cannot be due to the

> export of Celtic manuscripts since they would have been unreadable outside of Brittany; it cannot be due to books in other languages written by natives of Wales, for even the most influential of these books, Geoffrey of Monmouth's works, made little impression on the verse romances. What, then, could have been the transmitting agency?
> (Loomis, 1959a: 52)

Despite the mentioned political interests that the Normans had in the Arthurian legend, and even though the patronage of figures such as Eleanor of Aquitaine or Marie de Champagne without a doubt led their respective courts to become great centres of cultural learning and exchange, where narratives and motifs would have been introduced, something is amiss to explain the tremendous popularity of Arthurian romances in the Continent and all the elements of foreign origin contained in them. Moreover, evidence such as the relief in the Archivolt of the Modena Cathedral[186] which displays Arthurian characters and seems to evoke an Arthurian narrative, dated c. 1120-1140 (Stokstad, 1991: 324-326), roughly contemporaneous with *Historia Regum Britanniae* and previous to the advent of Arthurian Continental romance, reveals an early and quick spread of the Arthurian legend even before the peak of the Angevin Empire and beyond the boundaries of France: "The diffusion of the Arthurian stories was not coterminous with the limits of the Angevin Empire, for there is evidence that during this century, and occasionally even before 1100, the stories of Arthur had become known in Italy and Sicily" (Bromwich, 1991: 276). How could that have spread so fast? In some instances years before the formation of the supposed contexts which led to the transmission of Arthurian material throughout Continental Europe?

3.2.2 The Arthurian Tradition in Cornwall

[186] The Modena Archivolt is located in the North Portal of the Cathedral, also known as *Porta della Pescheria*, and features high-relief carvings on the marble which represent an Arthurian tale, with the names of the Arthurian characters also carved and thus identifying the several carved figures. The carvings feature a castle with towers at the centre of the archivolt, with two figures inside named "Mardoc" and "Winlogee", the left tower is being guarded by a warrior wielding what seems to be an axe and is identified as "Burmaltus", who is facing the attack of figures riding horses identified as "Artus de Bretania", "Isdernus" and an unidentified knight, with all three wielding lances against Burmaltus, the right tower on the other hand is being defended by a figure identified as "Carrado", who is crossing lances with a figure on horse identified as "Galvagin", who is followed by two other riders wielding lances, identified as "Che" and "Galvariun". This representation thus seems to evoke a version the tale of the abduction of Guinevere, who is featured in subsequent Arthurian renditions, with the archivolt being both one of the oldest renditions of the tale, as well as possibly the earliest monumental sculpture related to Arthurian motifs and tales.

Another possible source of Arthurian material for the Continent, and a possible explanation which we could consider in regard to the questions and doubts we have been discussing, is related with the other areas of Brythonic heritage such as Cornwall:

> ...let us observe that Wales was not the only Celtic territory which possessed a tradition about Arthur. Like the Welsh, the people of Cornwall were descended from the Britons, and though the Saxon victory of Dyrham in 577 and the conquest of Devon in the next century drove a wedge between the Cornish and their kinsmen of Wales, there can be no doubt that relations were maintained across the Bristol Channel.
> (Loomis, 1959a: 53)

It is true that there are allusions to an Arthurian Cornish tradition, namely in connection with possible local traditions in Cornwall, which we know through Welsh testimonies: "Several Welsh writers who mention Arthur's court at Kelliwic in Cornwall seem to be reflecting a local tradition" (Loomis, 1959a: 53). Kelliwic or Celliwig[187] may indeed represent an example of these traditions, one which is reflected in Welsh literature, as Alan Kent points out (Kent, 2006: 128). A conspicuous example regarding this matter is found in *Culhwch ac Olwen*[188], where Celliwig is mentioned several times and is indeed portrayed as the chief court of Arthur and as being located in Cornwall (Davies, 2007: 291). Another example which also seems to follow this same tradition of placing Arthur's seat at Cornwall, even though not being particularly early, is given in another Welsh text, *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr* ("The Dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle"), which explicitly states that Arthur is "head of the battalions of Cornwall"[189] (*apud* Sims-Williams, 1991: 58), thus prompting the conclusion that "...the Cornish setting is reminiscent of Arthur's association with 'Celli wig in Cornwall' in *Culhwch* and elsewhere" (Sims-Williams, 1991: 58).

As these examples already demonstrate, the arguments concerning the existence of Arthurian traditions in Cornwall are based in the mentioning in Arthurian early

[187] Also called Kelliwic or Gelliwic and translatable as "Forest Grove", it is possibly the earliest mentioned location of Arthur's court. Its actual site is a motive for contention, for several locations in Cornwall are considered possibilities. Opinions diverge on whether it corresponds to the old fortifications of Castlewich Henge and Cadson Bury in Callington, to somewhere in Penwith, Cornwall, or to the hill fort of Kelly Rounds in Egloshayle.

[188] In *Culhwch ac Olwen* Celliwig is often used as a reference to the skills of Arthur's warriors, who from Celliwig could see into a far distance and shoot a projectile with great aim (Davies, 2007: 186, 188), thus leading to our understanding it was their main site. Celliwig is also described as the place to where Arthur and his warriors return after a quest (Davies, 2007: 206). Moreover Celliwig is also portrayed as the place from where Arthur issues commands (Davies, 2007: 208). Additionally, the iconic episode of Arthur's pursuit of the gigantic wild boar Twrch Trwyth ends up in Cornwall and involves Celliwig once again as the place to where Arthur returns (Davies, 2007: 212).

[189] See Appendix I, note 66.

literature of Cornish locations as being the setting of Arthurian stories or indeed as Arthur's seat of power. Additionally, the mention of some Cornish personal names in some of the relevant Arthurian works is also significant, as Loomis further exemplifies when he states that Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his account of Arthur's birth and death "not only localizes these events in Cornwall but consistently uses Cornish place and personal names: Tintagol, Ridcaradoch, Dimilioc, Gorlois, Modredus" (Loomis, 1959a: 54). Nevertheless, the hypothesis that Cornwall could be an additional link in the chain of transmission is not supported by enough clear evidences.

The possible Cornish tradition which may have existed did not leave us any surviving Cornish written examples of pre-Galfridian Arthurian narratives which could lead us to have a clear picture of it, or of its connection to the Welsh one: "As for secular tales, in contrast with Wales where there are abundant medieval texts, in Cornwall we are dependent primarily upon external sources for evidence" (Padel, 2005: 99). In fact, there is virtually no early Cornish literature of any kind. The only exception, indirectly, would be the poem in Latin hexameters *Prophetiae Merlini*[190] by John of Cornwall[191], which calls for Arthur's defence of Britain, and seems to especially direct this call to Cornwall (Curley, 1982: 231-240). What makes it a possible indirect source to Cornish tradition is that "John of Cornwall's notes and glosses reveal that his sources were in Old Cornish, including reference to Periron (an earlier name for Tintagel) and Brentigia (Bodmin Moor)" (Kent, 2006: 128). Notwithstanding, it is a single source, and an indirect one at that. Every other mention of a Cornish location as the setting for an Arthurian tale or event occurs in a tradition other than the Cornish one, as in the examples from Welsh tradition and from *Historia Regum Britanniae* which we have pointed out.

[190] *Prophetia Merlini* is a twelfth-century poem containing 139 Latin hexameters as well as 105 lines of prose commentary, which has survived in a single manuscript. Its content is focused on Merlin's legendary prophecies, applied to events which were contemporaneous of the poem, although some of the prophecies also seem to be directly taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*.

[191] John of Cornwall was a theologian, a scholar and a teacher, who lived and studied in Paris c. 1176 but who was originally from St. Germans in Cornwall. Works attributed to him include books and texts on theological themes, Christian doctrine and other ecclesiastical matters. Also attributed to John of Cornwall is the poem *Prophetia Merlini*, a twelfth-century poem in 139 Latin hexameters as well as 105 lines of prose commentary, which has survived in a single manuscript. The poem is focused on Merlin's legendary prophecies, applied to John of Cornwall's contemporary events, such as the conflict between Stephen of Blois and Empress Matilda, although some of the prophecies also seem to be directly taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*. Most importantly, John of Cornwall claims that the poem is based on another manuscript in the Cornish language, and does contain in fact some notes and commentaries in the margins which seem to represent one of the earliest written examples of the Cornish language.

It is possible that a thriving oral tradition did exist that never found its way into Cornish written texts, in fact, the allusions to these oral traditions are our main sources of evidence: "So far as this indirect evidence goes, their subject-matter consisted mainly of local legends, often attached to particular landmarks such as archaeological features" (Padel, 2005: 99). A particular good example of possible Cornish oral traditions around Arthur which are in line with the literary tradition of placing Arthur's seat in Cornwall is given by the Frenchman Herman of Laon[192], who relates an episode in a narrative from *De Miraculis S. Mariae Laudunensis* (c. 1146) concerning a voyage in 1113 of some canons from Laon through England where "From Exeter they made their way to Danavexeria, by which is apparently meant Devonshire, and here they were told that they were upon the very land of the famous King Arthur, and were shown Arthur's Chair and Arthur's Oven"[193] (Chambers, 1927: 18). Moreover, the same testimony also mentions a Cornishman who believed that Arthur still lived, thus making an allusion to the tradition of Arthur's return (Chambers, 1927: 18, 249). All such indirect evidence does reflect early Brythonic traditions rather than the polished ones of chronicle and romance traditions, in a similar way to Wales, including Arthurian ones: "The three known focal points of this body of legends were Arthur, presumably (at least to begin with) as huntsman and strong-man rather than the chivalrous king of romance; Tristan, as the lover of Iseult the queen of King Mark of Cornwall; and the theme of the Sunken City, drowned beneath the sea" (Padel, 2005: 99). Indeed, in the case of the Tristan legend, strong arguments have been given for its early development in Cornwall (Padel, 1981: 53-81). Nonetheless, and even though it is indeed most likely that Cornwall did have Arthurian traditions, due to its proximity to Wales and its Brythonic background, the references to Cornish place-names or names are not necessarily an evidence that Cornish storytellers were responsible for transmission, only that such traditions and Arthurian episodes which are set in Cornwall were transmitted to the Continental milieu, as were Welsh places and names. Further evidence seems to be necessary to understand Cornwall's role in the transmission of Arthurian motifs, and while the evidences do point out to the existence of Cornish Arthurian traditions, it does not seem enough to establish it as the main intermediary.

[192] Also called Hériman of Tournai or Herman of Tournai, Herman of Laon (1095-1147) was an abbot who lived in Tournai, and later in Laon after being expelled from Tournai, having also travelled to Spain. Herman wrote works on hagiography and miracles, chronicles, history and discussions regarding the doctrines of the Church. His *De Miraculis S. Mariae Laudunensis* helped re-launch the ecclesiastical power in Laon and the cult of the Virgin Mary, with basis on local miracles attributed to her.

[193] See Appendix I, note 67.

3.3 The Role of Breton Storytellers in the Transmission of Arthurian Tales

In fact, there is another strong candidate for playing a role in transmission to be found in the Bretons from Brittany, which may have been an important intermediary between the same Brythonic culture which flourished in Wales and the Anglo-Norman world. Although Brittany is located in the Continent rather than in Great Britain, it was connected with the Brythonic world by language, and perhaps by culture as well. The Bretons of Brittany are the result of a large migration of Britons from Britain from around the fifth to the eighth century, in order to escape Anglo-Saxon aggression (Williams, 1991: 249-250). Such migration led to the establishment of a Brythonic-speaking cultural community, and it is perhaps with basis on this ethnical and cultural connection that the Bretons might have played a role in establishing the groundwork for the spreading of Brythonic stories and motifs, including Arthurian lore, to the Continental territories which belonged to the Angevin Empire, and even beyond.

In what concerns language "...Breton was similar enough to Cornish and Welsh for the three to be considered fundamentally one and the same language, and for their speakers to feel themselves to be related for a long time after the British settlement of Brittany" (Williams, 1991: 254), and this is especially true in the earliest period, when Old Welsh, Old Cornish and Old Breton are often indistinguishable. There are indeed clues that the linguistic connection may have endured in the following centuries, Caerwyn Williams presents several examples which point towards the sharing of a common language between Brittany, Cornwall and Wales (Williams, 1991: 253-254), well after the early immigration of the Britons: one version of the Life of St. Magloire of Dol, a Breton saint from the sixth century who had both Breton and Welsh blood and who crossed the English Channel from Britain to Brittany, states that the people he found in Brittany spoke the same language he had learned amongst the Welsh (Fleuriot, 1987: 12); a Welsh prince named Guidnerth, from around the second half of the ninth century, is described in the *Liber Landavensis* (a Latin twelfth-century compilation of documents concerned with the history of the diocese of Llandalf in Wales) as going to Dol to do public penance, since both the Bretons and the archbishop of Brittany spoke his language, even though Wales and Brittany were separated by sea (Evans *et al*, 1893: 181); Giraldus Cambrensis (c. 1146-c. 1223) also provides an example, by stating that the language spoken by the Bretons was similar to the one spoken in Cornwall, and both were fairly understandable to the Welsh as well (Dimock, 1868: I. VI), meaning that

between the twelfth and the thirteenth century there was still intelligibility between the Brythonic-speaking countries. The sharing of language, together with geographical proximity might have allowed for an on-going cultural connection and might have assured that Brythonic lore was most easily transmitted between the Welsh and their Breton kin, especially in the context of the Norman Conquest, which, as we will see, involved the Bretons.

The role of the Bretons in the development of Arthurian romance has long been discussed, due to several mentions in the contemporaneous sources that seem to point towards them as having been main transmitters of Arthurian lore, perhaps more so than the evidences pointing towards Bleheris. From the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century several scholars such as W. J. Gruffydd (1913: 36) or T. Stephens (1876: 399-405), among many others (cf. Loomis, 1959a: 53), underlined these evidences, with their findings leading R. S. Loomis to formulate a theory which attributed the oral diffusion of the Arthurian legend to the Bretons (1959: 52-63). We must review the Loomisian theory on this matter, but we must take into account that many of his conclusions have been challenged by other scholars, and such disputes shall also be analysed further ahead in the course of this chapter. Notwithstanding, for other modern scholars, many of the said evidences are still valid points of research. Their significance for the question of the transmission of Arthurian tales to the Continent has been analysed by Caerwyn Williams (1991: 249-272) and Rachel Bromwich (1991: 273-298), to which we shall often resort, since they present pervasive arguments and evidences. The reports of Breton storytelling in what Arthurian tales are concerned are present in the extant literature and in the words of the authors themselves, as well as in the descriptions of contemporaneous observers.

William of Malmesbury[194] provides one of the first testimonies to the circulation of Arthurian stories among the Bretons in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*[195] (1125), by stating that "He is that Arthur about whom the trifles of the Bretons (*nugae Britonum*) rave even today, a man worthy not to be dreamed about in false fables but proclaimed in

[194] William of Malmesbury (c. 1095-c. 1143) was a monk and the most notable historian of twelfth-century England, associated throughout most of his life with Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire, England.
[195] The *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (translated as *Deeds of the Kings of the English*), and originally titled *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* (*On the Deeds of the Kings of the English*) is an early twelfth-century Latin work concerned with the history of English kings, written by William of Malmesbury with the purpose of being a complement to his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (*Deeds of the English Bishops*), and which was followed by his *Historia Novella*.

veracious histories, for he long upheld his sinking fatherland and quickened the failing spirits of his countrymen to war"[196] (*apud* Loomis, 1959a: 55), and thus giving us an Anglo-Norman testimony. Another Norman testimony is given by Wace himself in his *Roman de Brut* (1155), who seems to attribute to Breton storytellers the tales about the Round Table which makes its first written literary appearance in his own work: "Because of these noble lords about his hall, of whom each held himself to be the best, and none would count himself the least praiseworthy, Arthur made the Round Table, concerning which the Bretons tell many stories"[197] (Biddle, 2000: 10). In 1216 another testimony is given by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Speculum Ecclesiae*, thus providing us with a Welsh testimony. Giraldus mentions the tale of Arthur being carried away by "Morganis" (Morgan Le Fay) to "Avalloniam" (Avalon) in order to be healed, and attributes such tale to the "fabulosi Britones", whom Loomis considers as being the Bretons (1959: 55), and who according to Giraldus seem to have a strong belief in Arthur's return and in Morgan as a kind of Goddess: "For this reason the fabulous Britons and their bards have long been telling the tale that a fantastic goddess, also called Morgan, brought Arthur's body to the isle of Avalon for the healing of his wounds. When they have been healed, as they suppose, the king will return to rule the Britons, strong and mighty as he was before."[198] (Newman, 2013: 101). Loomis considers that the mentioned Britons are the Bretons, on the grounds that "The crucial word in both passages is *Britones*. When referring to Arthur's time the word, of course, meant the insular Britons, but by the twelfth century, as applied to contemporaries, it always meant the emigrants to Armorica and their descendants, the Bretons" (Loomis, 1959a: 55). This identification of the *Britones* in these mentions as being the Bretons is one of the crucial points in Loomis' hypothesis indeed, and as such, must be further investigated, since it is one of the points of his theory which may be challenged, as we shall see later. For now however, let us keep following this same reasoning.

The apparent widespread evidence of Breton storytelling which we have been highlighting is attributed by Loomis to a special class of professional storytellers, the *conteurs*: "It seems safe, therefore, to make the generalization that it was Bretons of a quite different species of talent, the *conteurs*, who successfully adapted their heritage of romantic tales to French taste and acquired such a reputation as entertainers that even in

[196] See Appendix I, note 68.
[197] See Appendix I, note 69.
[198] See Appendix I, note 70.

England they had little competition from the Welsh and Cornish" (Loomis, 1959a: 57). Loomis' conclusion arises from his acknowledgment of the existence of learned men of letters in twelfth-century Brittany, from which he gathers the idea that "Brittany produced in abundance clerics of genius, devoted to liberal arts" (Loomis, 1959a: 57), which led to the development of the class of the *conteurs*. Although some of the testimonies regarding storytellers of Arthurian tales view them with disdain, as we will see, they do seem to portray a class of storytellers which frequented the courts and the noble houses, and which made a living out of storytelling. These storytellers could well have been the Breton *counters*. An example of such testimonies is found in Chrétien de Troyes, when he states in regards to *Érec et Enide* that it is a tale "which those who try to live by storytelling customarily mangle and corrupt before kings and counts"[199] (Troyes, 1991: 37), and a further allusion to these storytellers is found in the prelude to Chrétien's *Perceval*, where it is said that *Perceval* is "...the greatest story that has ever been told in royal court"[200] (Troyes, 1991: 382), thus stating that the story was originally told orally in a courtly context. The description given by Chrétien of these court storytellers is also mirrored, with more details, in the *Second Continuation*, which states the following:

> Now there are many vassals going from court to court telling tales, who distort the good stories, stretch them out, and add so many lies that the tales are entirely spoiled and thus throw discredit on the good books. Those who listen and hear do not know what good stories are worth, but they say, when these minstrels spend a night in their lodging and are made to tell a little of an adventure without rime, that they have heard the whole authentic history, which they will never hear in the course of their lives. Thus they are led to believe falsehood and are told spurious history and lies are spread.[201]
> (*apud* Loomis, 1959a: 59)

These testimonies seem to show some rivalry between learned writers and these storytellers, nevertheless, through their critique the former have given us a description of the latter. Such description seems to imply that they were wanderers influent in courtly culture and that they told prose tales "without rime". However, neither Chrétien nor the Second Continuation's excerpt characterise the storytellers as Bretons, nor are they identified as Welshmen such as Bleheris, but they do testify to the existence of storytellers that may have been important transmitters of Arthurian lore. To understand if these storytellers were indeed the Breton *conteurs* further investigation is necessary.

[199] See Appendix I, note 71.
[200] See Appendix I, note 72.
[201] See Appendix I, note 73.

In the modern reassessment series of the original *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, many of the evidences concerning Breton sources of Arthurian lore in the Continent are still claimed as valid and used as relevant arguments: Caerwyn Williams reinforces the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis on the primacy of Breton storytellers over Welsh ones in what Arthurian motifs are concerned: "Giraldus Cambrensis testifies that it was the *fabulosi Britones*, not the Welsh, who told that Arthur had been borne away by the *dea phantastica* called Morganis to the isle of Avalon" (Williams, 1991: 262). Nevertheless, Williams also adverts (1991: 262) that one of the manuscripts[202] containing the *Historia Regum Britanniae* includes a commentary in the *Prophetiae Merlini*[203] (Hammer, 1940: 409-431), which claims that the story of Arthur's final voyage to Avalon was a superstition not only exclusive to the Bretons but also shared with the Welsh and the Cornish[204]. A relevant advise, no doubt, but the possible prominence of the Bretons as transmitters of Arthurian motifs does not place into question the development of the Arthurian legend first and foremost in Wales, but rather that the Bretons were also at a certain point participants in the same tradition and were in a key position for its transmission and for it to gain a role of relevance in the Anglo-Norman world. Notwithstanding his advert concerning the example given by the commentary in *Prophetiae Merlini*, Williams also shares this opinion, underlining that "On the other hand, the Breton belief was so vivid that it assumed a political aspect" (1991: 262). Williams statement is supported by the Latin verse chronicle *Draco Normannicus*[205], written c. 1168 by Étienne de Rouen[206], which describes an expedition of Henry II to Brittany, in the context of his claim to the dukedom of Brittany (1166) and to the hand of its heiress Constance, in order to marry her to his son Geoffrey. The poem approaches the subject of the ensuing conflict between Henry II and the leaders of Brittany, who rebel against the Angevin King. It is one of those leaders who makes a plea to Arthur for him to return (Howlett, 1885: 696), and in response Arthur sends a letter to Henry II which announces his return, while making an extensive account of Arthur's conquests and conflicts with adversaries such as the Romans and Mordred (Howlett, 698-703). Most importantly for our argument, the letter makes mention to

[202] British Musem Ms. Cotton Claudius B VII (thirteenth century).
[203] Book VII of *Historia Regum Britanniae*.
[204] See Appendix I, note 74.
[205] Edition of the full Latin text available in Howlett (1885: 589-786).
[206] Also known as Stephen of Rouen, Étienne de Rouen (died c. 1169) was a Norman Benedictine monk from the Bec Abbey, with his most famous work being the Latin chronicle in verses *Draco Normannicus*, which retells events from Norman history from the eleventh century up to 1169.

Arthur's stay with his sister Morganis in Avalon and his healing, which allows him to return[207] and confront Henry II, warning him that he has an army ready in the woods of Cornwall to attack Henry II if he does not cease his attack on the Bretons[208].

Therefore, it seems that the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis can be corroborated since the belief that Arthur was not dead and would one day return after being healed in Avalon, as well as the political use of such belief, seems to have been widespread in Brittany: "...it is still in Brittany that during the later part of the twelfth century the belief appears to have been most vivid and to have assumed a political aspect" (Chambers, 1927: 109). Chambers provide us with another example from the twelfth-century *Prophetia Anglicana*[209]:

> That it was most true is proved today by the varying opinions of men on Arthur's death and life. If you do not believe me, go to the realm of Armorica, which is lesser Britain, and preach about the market-places and villages that Arthur the Briton is dead as other men are dead, and facts themselves will show you how true is Merlin's prophecy, which says that the ending of Arthur shall be doubtful. Hardly will you escape unscathed, without being whelmed by the curses or crushed by the stones of your hearers.[210]
> (*apud* Chambers, 1927: 110)

The acknowledgment that a belief related to an Arthurian legend was prominent in Brittany most certainly testifies to the circulation of Arthurian tales in the region, and reinforces the idea that Brittany could have been a source of transmission in the Continent. In what Wace is concerned, there is a similar reinforcement by Williams of the validity of his testimony in underlining the Bretons as transmitters of Arthurian motifs (Williams, 1991: 263), in fact, Williams also underlines other aspects of Wace which further point towards his familiarity with the Breton context: "We know that Wace was a native of Jersey - as such he has been claimed by Fleuriot as a 'demi-breton' - and that he was familiar with Brittany and especially with the forest of Brocéliande, and with its famous fountain of Barenton, which he mentions in the *Roman de Rou*..." (Williams, 1991: 263). Even in what regards Geoffrey of Monmouth, who does not name his informants but rather claims to have as his source an ancient book,

[207] See Appendix I, note 75.
[208] See Appendix I, note 76.
[209] *Prophetia Anglicana Merlini Ambrosii Britanni* is a Latin twelfth-century text attributed to Geoffrey of Monmouth, of which some parts used to be wrongly ascribed to the French theologian and poet Alanus de Insulis (Alain de Lille), as is the case with the relevant testimony regarding Arthurian beliefs in Brittany. According to De Lage (1951: 13-15), the work is dated c. 1167-1174.
[210] See Appendix I, note 77.

Williams speculates about a possible relation with the Bretons, on the basis that Geoffrey himself might have been a Breton (or a descendant of) and would prefer Breton sources:

> It is well known that Geoffrey had no high regard for the Welsh people of his day and presumably he would not have been anxious to use whatever material they could have given him. There is on the other hand, ample evidence that he esteemed highly his compatriots the Bretons, that he was prepared to promote their fame, and that he would have used any material concerning Arthur that they could provide. It is therefore rather surprising that until recently few have been concerned to show how much Breton material could have been absorbed in Geoffrey's *Historia* and in the Arthurian Legend, especially as there is reason to believe that he knew Brittany personally.
> (Williams, 1991: 263)

Such speculation is not without the support of possible evidences however, and with basis on the work of Fleuriot (1980: 269-286) Williams notes that many of the names used by Geoffrey on the *Historia* are Breton-influenced names rather than Welsh: "...Geoffrey's use of proper names shows the influence of Breton, for, whereas in Welsh after the tenth century a prosthetic y- appeared before words beginning with *st*, *sp*, *sq*, it did not appear in Breton, so that when Geoffrey uses such forms as *Spaden*, *Stadhiald*, he uses the Breton forms, not the corresponding Welsh ones" (Williams, 1991: 264). At the same time of course, there can be no question that Geoffrey also used Welsh sources, since many of the names and references he uses in both the *Historia* and in the *Vita Merlini* have direct counterparts in surviving Welsh texts. Notwithstanding this observation, the fact that Geoffrey also makes use of Breton forms is indeed a possible further testimony of Breton influence in the transmission of Arthurian lore. Indeed, according to Loomis the presence of Breton-looking names is also noticed in important romances such as the ones of Chrétien de Troyes:

> Chrétien de Troyes earliest extant romance assigns to the hero the Breton name Erec, and contains seven other names of the same origin - Brien, Gandeluz, Rinduran, Guerehes, Graillemer, Guigamor, Guivret. Yvain is the Breton Ivan, recorded in the eleventh century and substituted for Welsh Owain, and Lancelot has been recognized by Zimmer, Lot, and Bruce as influenced by the name Lancelin, recorded in Brittany in the same century.
> (Loomis, 1959a: 56)

Of course, it goes without saying that ultimately many of these names might have originated in Welsh tradition, or, in the case of other names and place-names, Cornish, as we have seen above, but the fact that they appear in what apparently are Breton forms in many of the relevant texts (or at least how these scholars interpret those

names), with some of them possibly having origins outside of Wales and Cornwall as in the case of Lancelot, might point towards their passage through a Breton "filter" from whence it spread throughout the Anglo-Norman world and subsequently the Continent. There are nevertheless many arguments which dispute these considerations, as we shall see below. First, however, we must analyse further possible evidences, namely, the Breton lais.

3.3.1 The Breton Lais

Even outside the immediate sphere of Arthurian literature there are other possible evidences for the influence of the Bretons in literary developments in the Anglo-Norman world. Another source of evidence on the spreading of Breton traditions are the Breton lais, made famous by Marie de France, whose own lais included an Arthurian themed one (*Lanval*) and another on Tristan (*Chevrefoil*), with the Tristan legend also being significant since it is also of Brythonic provenience and was later absorbed into the Arthurian legend. The lais seem to have originally been transmitted in a musical context and therefore to have been a form of oral entertainment, and Marie de France seems to have been keen on capturing them in order to place them into written form: "...it appears that there existed in Marie's time Breton *lais*, some reputed to be of great antiquity, which could be heard or read, and which comprised a melody and a narrative of some kind, the melody being carried by the Breton *rote* (a sort of harp). Marie's object is to retell the story, to reproduce the narrative content..." (Ewert, 1944: xi). Marie de France herself alludes to having heard these tales in a musical format and to have the aim of preserving them in writing: "Then I called to mind those Lays I had so often heard [...]. Many a one, on many a day, the minstrel has chanted to my ear. I would not that they should perish, forgotten, by the roadside. In my turn, therefore, I have made of them a song, rhymed as well as I am able..."[211] (France, 1954: 1-2). In fact the action of authors such as Marie de France led to their transition to a written form of short narrative poems (Hoepffner, 1959: 112-113).

A rather significant aspect of Marie de France's lais is that she makes allusions to the Bretons as being the minstrels responsible for the lais, as mentioned in the *Lai de Guigemar*: "Hearken, oh gentles, to the tale I set before you, for thereof the Bretons

[211] See Appendix I, note 78.

already have made a Lay"[212] (France, 1954: 3), and a similar claim is repeated in many of the other lais (France, 1925: 86, 113, 146). This may lead us to believe that those lais might have been directly transmitted to Marie de France by these Breton minstrels, who might have been members of a professional class of Breton entertainers, the *jongleurs*[213]: "The propagators of the Breton *lais* [...] were clearly the Breton jongleurs of whose activity there is ample evidence in the twelfth century and even much earlier" (Ewert, 1944: xi). Since Marie de France's collection of lais include an Arthurian one, this may constitute yet another testimony of the Bretons as transmitters of Arthurian tales, notwithstanding any uncertainties regarding her mentions: "...some of her [Marie de France] references to *li Bretun* may have been made under the influence of the conventions of her day, but these references cannot be ignored in any attempt to assess the Breton contribution to the *matière de Bretagne*" (Williams, 1991: 260). There are indeed hints in the lais that seem to point towards Marie de France having actually recollected her lais directly from the performance of Breton *jongleurs*. Hoepffner had already noted this (1959: 113), and more recently Williams also noticed the same: "The fact that two of the titles Marie de France gives are Breton and that the alternative title given to *Eliduc* is 'Guildeluec ha Gualadun', which contains the Breton conjunction *ha*, 'and', suggests very strongly that she had heard *jongleurs* announce their songs in this way, and that they may have sung them in Breton, giving a resumé in French" (Williams, 1991: 260).

Furthermore, besides the lais of Marie de France which are explicitly associated with either the Arthurian or Tristan legends, there are others such as Robert Biket's Anglo-Norman *Lai du Cor*[214], and the anonymous *Lai del Desiré*[215] and *Lai de Tyolet*[216]

[212] See Appendix I, note 79.

[213] The *jongleurs* were a class of medieval entertainers in medieval France and probably Anglo-Norman England, who were popular between the twelfth and the fourteenth century and were able to perform different forms of entertainment: they were musicians able to play several instruments as well as acrobats, jugglers and storytellers. Their performances were usually made in market places, abbeys, noble-houses and castles, as well as in royal courts. In what concerns storytelling or reciting, the *jongleurs* were claimed to recite several forms of oral narrative such as lais, fables, chansons de geste or lyrical romances, often combining their storytelling with music. As might be deduced, this made them similar to other classes of performers such as the minstrels and the *trouvères* (northern-French counterparts to the Provençal troubadours), and some *jongleurs* most probably became minstrels when they were employed permanently by some court or noble house. Williams even claims that it is possible that the boundaries between poet/bard and *jongleurs* were not clearly defined in the Breton tradition (Williams, 1991: 256). There is indeed a list by Fleuriot which mentions *jongleurs* and poets and bards from both the eleventh and twelfth century without properly distinguishing them (Fleuriot, 1987: 12, 15-16).

[214] *Lai du Cor* is an Anglo-Norman lai written by Robert Biket (possibly a *jongleur*) in the twelfth century, which narrates that Arthur organized a feast at Caerleon during Pentecost, attended by several knights and ladies, including Caradoc. At such feast, a gift from King Mangounz is presented in the form

which present a similar association, leading to yet another possible evidence that the Bretons were influential in the development of Arthurian romance:

> Further confirmation of Breton transmission of Arthurian matter to the French and Anglo-Normans is supplied by the marked resemblance between certain romances and the Breton lais. There is an intimate connection between the episode of the testing horn in the *Livre de Caradoc* and Biket's *Lai du Cor*, between Chrétien's *Yvain* and *Desiré*, between the hunt of the white stag in the Second Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval* and the same theme in *Tyolet*. (Loomis, 1959a: 56).

The use of similar patterns and elements in the lais and in the romances, although both are different literary forms, might point out to a common pool of motifs, of which the source was the Bretons. Further evidence that the Breton lais were popular and that they might have a connection with the literary development of Arthurian themes is found in some of the Arthurian narratives themselves, where the singing of Breton lais is mentioned. In Wace's *Roman de Brut*, the *jongleurs* are mentioned as being present at the court of Arthur and as singing lais accompanied by musical instruments such as harps and flutes (Wace, 1938-1940: vv. 9103-9116). Even specific characters are described by Wace as being similar to a *jongleur*, as is the case with King Blegabred, whose name is Breton according to Williams (1991: 261), said to be skilled in musical instruments as well as in singing (Wace, 1938-1940: vv. 3694-3702), and the warrior Baldulf, who, although he is a Saxon, rather than Breton, is described as disguising himself as a musician and being able to sing lais and playing melodies in the harp (Wace, 1938-1940: vv. 9101-9104), thus directing us to the figure of a *jongleur*.

Hoepffner also finds similar mentions in the Tristan legend: "The poet Thomas, in a charming scene, presents Isolt singing the lai of Guiron" (1959: 112), which are also echoed more recently by Williams: "In Thomas's version of *Tristan* (*Tristran*),

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of a magical drinking horn which would spill its content whenever it was in the hands of a cuckold. When Arthur has its turn with the drinking horn, it spills, but his queen excuses herself by claiming she once gave a ring to another. When it is the turn of Caradoc, he drinks from the horn without spilling anything, thus proving the fidelity of his unnamed wife. Due to this episode, Caradoc is awarded both the drinking horn and the lordship of Cirencester. An edition of the Anglo-Norman text is available in Erickson, 1973.

[215] Probably composed at the end of the twelfth century, the *Lai du Desiré* is set in Scotland and its content seems to be somewhat based in Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval* with some elements from the *Lai de Guigemar*, along with influences from Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Tristan tales.

[216] *Lai de Tyolet* is estimated to have been written in the early thirteenth century, and narrates the tale of Tyolet, a young naive knight who goes to Arthur's court and sees himself involved in a magical quest, in order to win the hand of a maiden. The tale presents several parallels to the story of Perceval, especially in what concerns the origins of Tyolet and his naivety. Additionally, Tyolet's quest also includes the search for a white stag while following a hound, which also has a parallel in the Second Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*.

Iseut (*Ysold*) is said to compose 'un lai piteus d'amour'" (Williams, 1991: 261). Furthermore, Williams also underlines aspects of the description of Tristan in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* which demonstrate that the popularity of the Breton *jongleurs* would have been strong enough to be pervasive even in the German tradition: "According to this version of the romance, the words of the *lai* of Guirun and his paramour were composed by Bretons and its music was played by Welsh harpists. Elsewhere in the poem, Tristan played the *lai* of Grallon on the harp in the Breton manner, so wonderfully that many who heard it forgot their own names" (Williams, 1991: 261). Additionally, besides the apparent prestige of the musical performance and poetic content of the Breton *jongleurs*, von Strassburg's *Tristan* also seems to make allusion to the pervasiveness of the Breton language and to a multilingual context which would offer an important insight as to how the Bretons could have been privileged transmitters of Welsh material to both the learned Latin circles as well as the vernacular French, if the description of Tristan in the text is reflective of the contemporaneous reality of the *jongleurs*: "Then he [Tristan] sang the *lai* of Thisbe in Breton, Welsh, Latin and French. When asked whether he knew the four languages, Tristan answered, 'Yes, tolerably well'. Later in the tale, Tristan's friend speaks to him in French, and is answered in Breton" (Williams, 1991: 261).

Evidently, if the Breton lais were popular and common in the twelfth-century medieval courts of England and France, it would not be out of the ordinary that the lais themselves or their performers the *jongleurs* would be mentioned or portrayed in the contemporaneous literature, but coupled with actual lais which use an Arthurian setting and others which use motifs also used in Arthurian stories, it may have some significance. If adding to the matter of the lais and the portrayal of Breton *jongleurs* in Tristan stories we consider the testimonies of Wace or Giraldus Cambrensis on the transmission of Arthurian tales from the Bretons, there seems indeed to have reasons to agree with both Loomis and Williams in stating that "there is reason to believe that Breton story-tellers enjoyed a reputation second to none, and there are several considerations which suggest that the French heard the tales of Arthur and his knights from them rather than from the story-tellers of the other Celtic nations" (Williams, 1991: 261).

3.3.2 Possible Flaws in the Theory of Breton Transmission of Arthurian Tales

Despite all the considerations and possible evidences we have been analysing, the role of the Bretons in the transmission of Arthurian tales to the Continent is not completely clear, for several doubts can still be raised. Notwithstanding the arguments concerned with the possibility that the Breton lais might provide an evidence of the Breton transmission of Arthurian motifs, other arguments might be raised in defence of the opposite opinion: "But in spite of their thematic importance with respect to lost Breton literature, the lays are only marginally 'Arthurian', and they played no part in disseminating Arthurian nomenclature" (Bromwich, 1991: 289). In comparison with Geoffrey of Monmouth or Chrétien de Troyes, it is true indeed that the few written examples of lais which could be considered Arthurian do not provide as many names and details of Arthurian characters or its setting, and as such they cannot be used as such strong pieces of evidence for sources of Arthurian lore, at least in what the written tradition is concerned. Adding to that, there is also the consideration that the lais may have been mainly a form of musical entertainment, with less importance given to their themes: "Various scholars have urged, no doubt rightly, that the *lais bretun* were chiefly famous as musical compositions and that their narrative content was merely auxiliary" (Bromwich, 1991: 289). Such arguments cannot be easily dismissed, it is true that, at least in what extant texts are concerned, we only have a few lais which are either Arthurian (or related to the Tristan legend) or have motifs in common with Arthurian tales, and their content is not as rich in Arthurian references as Geoffrey's and Wace's chronicles or Chrétien's romances.

The strength of the argument claiming that the lais reflect Breton transmission of Arthurian tales lies in the fact that other sources such as Wace or Giraldus Cambrensis claim that the Bretons were responsible for such transmission, and by association the lais are seen as further evidence. It may be possible that the lais were indeed simply musical acts which reflected some of the contemporaneous themes, and were not a part of the transmission *per se*, but this would not invalidate Breton transmission, only that the lais could have had no specific part in such transmission despite their "Breton" origin. Perhaps, rather than the *jongleurs* which were possibly the performers of the Breton lais, the storytellers alluded to by Wace and Giraldus were indeed what Loomis calls the *conteurs*, which told tales in prose rather than through verse accompanied by a musical performance, although there is no evidence that the *jongleurs* did not do the same, on the contrary: "The latest reference known to me is in the Provençal *Flamenca*,

which possibly postdates 1272. During the wedding festivities of Flamenca at Bourbon, the *jongleurs* are described as reciting tales, among which the five Arthurian poems of Chrétien are recognizable, as well as other themes from the same cycle" (Loomis, 1959a: 63). Nevertheless, this statement implies repetition of established themes, Chrétien romances in this case, and cannot be used as evidence, however, it seems a bit of a coincidence that the famed originators of an influential type of performance, the lais, are Bretons, thus being of the same stock of the storytellers mentioned in extant testimonies as the transmitters of Arthurian tales or motifs. Notwithstanding, Bromwich is right in the sense that the Breton lais cannot be used as indisputable evidence for Breton transmission.

Moreover, there are other issues in the evidences around the possibility of the Breton transmission of Arthurian lore, more specifically on how to accommodate the matter of Bleheris, a Welshman, in such possibility. A possible viewpoint is that Bleheris is an exception, as Loomis considered it (1959: 57-58), and that the Arthurian or Brythonic material of which Bleheris was apparently a source were in fact ultimately derived from the Bretons as well: "Apparently his [Bleheris] stories were not derived from his native inheritance but were polished and stirring versions of Breton tales, and there is no hint anywhere that any other Welshman crossed over into England or France to exploit his wares in a wider market" (Loomis, 1959a: 58). This can indeed be a plausible argument to deal with Bleheris' Welsh rather than Breton identity, however, there are still other doubts which may prevent certainty that the Bretons were the transmitters of Arthurian stories to the Continent. One of these doubts is related to the interpretation of the mentions regarding these storytellers as being directed at the Bretons rather than the Welsh.

As we have mentioned above, Loomis bases his theory of oral diffusion on the strong assumption that the references from the likes of Giraldus Cambrensis or William of Malmesbury we have quoted above are directed at the Continental Bretons (Loomis, 1959a: 55). Notwithstanding Loomis' certainty, such an assumption leaves some space open for ambiguity, for *Britones* could also mean the insular Britons, and this ambiguity is extended to the supposed references to Brittany: "The great emphasis which has been placed on Breton *conteurs* is due to a misunderstanding which is increased by the complete ambiguity as to the meaning of the words *Bretaigne* and *Bretun* in twelfth-century usage: they may equally well relate either to Britain or to Brittany" (Bromwich,

1991: 288). Nevertheless, this ambiguity always leads one to consider the Bretons as being the ones referred to due to the context in which the mentions are used. An example is the mention given by Wace: "Notwithstanding the ambiguity in Wace's use of the word 'Bretun', and the possibility that the reference to *li Bretun* and the Round Table may be an allusion to insular rather than to Continental Britons, the reference to *li Bretun* in connection with the return of Arthur seems to be the latter" (Bromwich, 1991: 263), since, as we have seen from several examples, the theme of Arthur's return seems to have been particularly strong in Brittany, even though it was not, of course, limited to it.

The strongest evidences however that support the idea that during the twelfth century the use of the word *Britones* or *Bretun* meant the Bretons are given by Loomis himself on defence of his statement. Loomis uses the contemporary testimony of Herman of Laon, where, in the same episode concerning the Cornishman who believed that Arthur was alive, the latter states that his belief is "Just as the Britons are wont to wrangle with the French on behalf of King Arthur"[217] (*apud* Chambers, 1927: 18). Besides providing yet another example of the apparent widespread belief in Arthur's return in Brittany, the relevant about this passage is the use of the word "Britones" in the Latin original in contrast with previous passages where Herman uses the term "Britanni": "Herman's careful distinction between *Britanni* and *Britones* makes it clear that the former were insular Britons, the people of Cornwall and Wales, and the latter their cousins across the Channel, neighbours of the French" (Loomis, 1959a: 54). Furthermore, Loomis adds other important contemporaneous statements which seem to corroborate the argument "that the word *Britones* was no longer applied to Welshmen" (Loomis, 1959a: 55), namely the one given by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia*: "As the foreign element around them became more and more powerful, they were given the name of Welsh instead of Britons: this word deriving either from their leader Gualo, or from their Queen Galaes, or else from their being so barbarous"[218] (Monmouth, 1966: 284). Giraldus Cambrensis, on the other hand, does not say that the old term ceased to be used, but he does claim that after the Anglo-Saxon conquest, the Saxons had indeed a new term for the Welsh: "The Saxons, when they seized upon Britain, called this nation, as they did all foreigners, Wallenses; and thus the barbarous name remains to the people

[217] See Appendix I, note 80.
[218] See Appendix I, note 81.

and their country"[219] (Cambrensis, 1908: 165). Therefore, it seems there are enough clarifications in contemporary testimonies regarding the *Britones* as being a word designating the Bretons, and thus it seems the mentions are probably directed at them, although the ambiguity cannot be completely dispelled.

But there is yet another doubt, which lies in the almost complete lack of pre-Galfridian Breton Arthurian texts, especially in comparison with the Welsh evidence. There are only a handful of texts which mention Arthur, and two of them are saints' lives not in the vernacular but in Latin, namely the *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii*[220] (c. 1019) and the *Vita S. Euflami*[221] (c. 1090). The oldest text in the Breton language which finally mentions Arthur is the *Dialog etre Arzur roe dan Bretounet ha Guinglaff*[222], which is a very late text dated c. 1450, much later than the time-frame where Breton transmission could have occurred. There is however, a fragmentary text named the *Livre*

[219] See Appendix I, note 82.

[220] Translated as the *Life of Goeznovius*, the *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* is an hagiographic text which narrates the story of Saint Goeznovius, also called Goueznou, who is a patron saint of the region around Brest and the County of Léon in the High Middle Ages, corresponding nowadays to the diocese of Léon in what the territorial administration of the Catholic Church is concerned. Goeznovius was originally a bishop of Léon before being considered a saint. His feast day is the 25th of October. The *Legenda* narrates that Goeznovius was born in Cornwall, and was a part of the Brythonic migration to Armorica due to Anglo-Saxon aggression in Britain, therefore being one of the Britons who established the Brythonic settlement in what became Brittany. However, the *Legenda* includes a prologue which is concerned with the legendary history of Britain, which narrates the traditional usurpation of the British throne by Vortigern, who invites the Saxons into British territory, and the subsequent suffering of the Britons at Saxon hands, until Arthur takes the throne and defeats the Saxons, driving them out of Britain. Arthur then proceeds to have a sequence of battles in Britain and Gaul, but eventually disappears and the Saxons return to Britain, leading to the escape of the Britons to Armorica. The author of the *Legenda* names himself as William, a Breton chaplain associated with the Bishop Eudo of Léon, and is the one who establishes the date of 1019 to the work. Geoffrey Ashe has a translation of the relevant text from the prologue (1985: 103).

[221] Translated as the *Life of Efflam*, the text narrates the life of Efflam, a Breton saint, who was the son of a king from Ireland and left his wife without consummating the marriage, instead boarding a boat with other holy men which is steered by God into Britanny, where they arrive at a beach near a cave. The appearance of Arthur occurs nearby the cave, where he is armed with a shield and a club fighting a serpent, but always fails to defeat it. He then approaches the holy men asking for water, and Efflam performs a miracle making the water pour out of a rock, which revitalizes Arthur. Although strong again due to the water, Arthur withdraws from the fight with the serpent, declaring that Efflam is the one who might defeat it. Efflam then asks God to help him draw out the serpent by quoting biblical passages, and the serpent appears, vomits and disappears into the sea, never returning again. No other information on Arthur is given other than he was hunting monsters in Brittany at the time.

[222] The *Dialog etre Arzur roe dan Bretounet ha Guinglaff* is concerned with a dialogue between King Arthur and a clear representation of the trope of the Wildman, who goes by the name of Guinglaff and lives in a forest. Guinglaff has the gift of prophecy, and the dialogue consists in Guinglaff making prophecies about future catastrophes and Arthur questioning what will happen afterwards. The features of Guinglaff as a wildman, a hermit and a prophet invoke associations with Merlin/Myrddin/Lailoken (Williams, 1991: 263, Constantine, 2006: 127), although he is never called by any of those names in the text. The standard edition is Le Bihan's (2013).

des Faits d'Arthur[223], contained in Pierre Le Baud's *Histoire de Bretagne*, which is dedicated to Arthur II of Brittany (1261-1312), and may hold some significance, since some authors claim that Le Baud used a source which could be as old as the tenth century (Le Duc, 1972: 825; Fleuriot, 1980: 246; Constantine, 2006: 126), thus predating Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and perhaps pointing us to an old Breton tradition. However, in what concerns the saints' lives, scholars such as Tatlock (1939: 345-365, 1950: 193) have raised suspicions that despite the early dating (1019) given by its author William to the main text, the Arthurian preface of *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* may be a later addition which owes its content to Geoffrey of Monmouth, while *Vita S. Euflami* barely presents any knowledge of the Arthurian legend other than the use of Arthur as an heroic character. Likewise, the dedication in the *Livre des Faits d'Arthur* to Arthur II may also point towards a later date of composition if the dedication implies that the work was composed during Arthur II's reign (1305-1312), notwithstanding Le Duc's and Fleuriot's arguments that it may have been a reutilization of an older source by Le Baud. Furthermore, given the testimonies and possible evidences of Breton storytelling of Arthurian tales, it seems rather odd that there are not more examples of Breton Arthurian texts.

Several possibilities may be used as explanations for this scarcity: "Explanations range from the literal loss of manuscripts (especially during Viking ravages of the 9th century; [...]), which might have preserved such material, to the strength of a vernacular oral tradition which never committed it to writing in the first place" (Constantine, 2006: 126). Moreover, there are divergent opinions to Tatlock's concerning the nature of *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii*'s Arthurian prologue. Fleuriot (1974: 1-6) underlines that there are differences between Geoffrey's version of the events and the one in the prologue, which Williams also mentions when he states that the prologue "contains material additional to and in some respects different from that of the British source, the *Historia Brittonum*, and the use of that source by Geoffrey in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*" (Williams, 1991: 265). An example of these differences is that while in the

[223] Although only fragmentary, the *Livre* seems to also be a chronicle of Arthur's legendary deeds. Its title is only known through Pierre Le Baud's *Histoire de Bretagne*, which had two versions, one from 1480 and another from 1505. In the second version Le Baud mentions the *Livre* and demonstrates acquaintance with it, quoting directly from it on several instances and thus providing the fragments we have available and which were transcribed and studied notably by Le Duc (1972). The complete source of Le Baud is therefore unfortunately lost. The citations seem to point to an original Latin source, according to Faral (1929, Tome 1: 301), which the latter points out that may be a certain *Liber de gestis inclyti regis Arturi* mentioned by an interpolator of William of Malmesbury's *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae*, although such reference could also be to Geoffrey's *Historia*.

Historia Vortigern's reign is followed by the reign of Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon, with Arthur only taking the crown after Uther, in the prologue Arthur succeeds Vortigern directly. This may mean that the Arthurian section in the *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* does indeed follow an earlier source, which may have some relation with the *Livre des Faits d'Arthur*, since its "fragments show that the history they relate differs from Geoffrey's in some places and supplements it in others" (Williams, 1991: 265-266), thus agreeing with Fleuriot's and Duc's suspicions that Le Baud used an old source for his fragments of the *Livre des Faits d'Arthur*. Indeed, both the differences found between these texts and Geoffrey's *Historia* and the claims to their antiquity (although their dating is not certain) have led Fleuriot to reflect on the possibility that they followed an older Breton source independent of Geoffrey, which in fact may have been one of the latter's sources: "nous avons dans ce fragment, qui représente l'état ancien de beaucoup de légendes, et peut-être quelques détails historiques, une des sources de Geoffroy de Monmouth" (Fleuriot, 1980: 245-256).

A rather significant statement by William in the prologue to *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* claims that he had as his source an ancient book called *Historia Britannica*, a claim which no doubt mirrors the one of Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* when he states that his source was a certain *Librum Vetustissimum*, an ancient book written in the British language and given to him by Archdeacon Walter of Oxford. If we take these hints from the Arthurian prologue in *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* and the *Livre des Faits d'Arthur* as pointing to an ancient Breton book previous to Geoffrey's *Historia*, which could have been the source of the latter (given that there are hints that he may have preferred Breton sources), then Brittany would represent an important intermediary between the Arthurian Welsh tradition represented by *Historia Brittonum* and Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, at least in what the Latin written tradition is concerned, as is the opinion of Ana Donnard: "...tous les éléments d'analyse relevés à partir de la Vita Saint Goueznou et du Livre des Faits d'Arthur font croire à l'existence de l'Historia Brittanica intermédiaire entre l'Historia Brittonum et l'Historia Regum Brittaniae et le roi Arthur comme partie intégrante de cette tradition continentale" (Donnard, 2008: 8-9). Therefore, if this theory could be further substantiated it would mean that despite the scarcity of Arthurian texts from Brittany there may have been lost works which were extremely influential and which may have been at the core of the development of Arthurian literature: "From such sources, it can

be argued that Arthur was already a key figure in conceptions of native Breton history before Geoffrey; certainly, the idea of a returning Arthur as the 'Breton hope' remained strong, and between the late 12th century and the middle of the 15th century, three different Breton leaders would bear the name" (Constantine, 2006: 126-127).

However, with basis on the evidences, and despite Fleuriot's and Donnard's theory, it cannot be completely proven that it was so, for only these hints are too fragmentary and therefore not enough, and the doubts regarding the dates of composition do complicate matters. As Donnard herself states: "...une conclusion définitive ne soit pas envisagée" (Donnard, 2008: 8), despite her cited claims above on the strong possibility that these evidences point towards a pre-Galfridian Breton book. Nevertheless, it also cannot be claimed that these few Arthurian texts demonstrate that Arthurian traditions were not predominant in Brittany. The fact is that taking into account all the evidence gathered, even though there are doubts concerning the importance of the Breton lais in spreading Arthurian motifs, with arguments claiming it might have had a large role and others sceptical about such role, and despite the scarcity of Arthurian written texts from Brittany, the fact remains that many of the mentions which portray storytellers as the sources of Arthurian tales state that these storytellers were Bretons, with the exception of Bleheris. Any doubts raised due to ambiguity still lead us to analyse the contemporaneous context, and such analysis still gives us the Bretons as being the ones the mentions are most probably referring to.

Furthermore, it is rather significant that the Bretons are mentioned as a people rather than a single named individual as is the case with Bleheris, which may lead us to assume that these stories were widespread amongst the Bretons, while Bleheris may indeed have been a single exception, and one that might himself have drawn from Breton tales, as we have alluded to above. Notwithstanding, and despite these considerations, there are some other issues in the theory of the Bretons as the original transmitters of Brythonic and Arthurian narratives to the Anglo-Norman and French-speaking world, at least if we interpret such theory as implying that transmission was based solely in major oral diffusion, as Loomis seems to defend (1959). The focus solely on a widespread phenomenon of oral transmission by the Bretons may be liable to leave many questions unanswered, notwithstanding the testimonies regarding Breton storytelling, and these questions concern the nature of such transmission, whether oral or written. Sims-Williams has attempted to demonstrate (1998b) that there are

alternative possibilities to the theory of oral transmission and that arguments can be made which may dispel such idea. The lack of written sources which could reveal a intermediary state between Brythonic and Continental traditions for many of the Arthurian elements and motifs, together with the testimonies claiming that Bretons or Bleheris were sources, may lead to the temptation to assume that oral transmission was first and foremost the one responsible for the extensive spreading of Arthurian literature throughout western Europe, but Sims-Williams questions this:

> In view of the paucity of surviving Old French manuscripts from the twelfth century, it would be rash to argue that lost works can only have existed in an oral state. If we accept (as we rightly do) that several of Chrétien de Troyes' writings have been lost, whether by chance or changes in fashion, we have to allow that the same fate has probably overtaken the writings of earlier, less gifted poets.
> (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 76)

Indeed, it has to be remembered that the absence of more manuscripts than the extant ones which could represent lost links in transmission does not mean these manuscripts did not exist, and many circumstances in the medieval ages could lead to their loss: "It is also undoubtedly the case that many of the material links in the transmission of these texts have simply been lost due to wars, revolutions and other events that have destroyed books and libraries over the centuries" (Hult, 2011: 14). Bearing this in mind, could there have been lost written sources for Arthurian elements besides the oral Breton ones which we have been analyzing? The theory of oral diffusion implies that the transmission of tales was led by storytellers who belonged to classes devoted to entertainment such as the *jongleurs* or Loomis' *counteurs*, however, Sims-Williams raises another question which points towards other possibility: "Why should not Breton clerics devoted to the liberal arts have performed this service too?" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 76). The pertinence of such question is of course connected with the fact that the clerics were learned men of letters who could put into writing any literary material, not only in Latin, but also in the vernacular: "Insofar as they constituted the literate elite, the clergy were responsible for written documents of all kinds, from record-keeping and the redaction of legal documents to the production of literary texts. Clerics were thus behind much of the literary output that has come down to us from the Middle Ages in both Latin and the vernacular" (Campbell, 2008: 211). Let us not forget that many of the writers involved in the extensive body of medieval romance were themselves clerics: "With some notable exceptions (e.g. Wolfram von

Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Malory's *Morte Darthur*), the literature of knighthood was in the Middle Ages the creation of clerics who could read and write at a time when these skills were still rare" (Putter *et al*, 2009: 5). In fact, these clerics were associated with the courts where such literature flourished and included some of the authors responsible for some of the great written works of Arthurian literature:

> Clerics also lived at court and were incorporated into their everyday workings. For example, John of Salisbury, Walter Map, and Gerald of Barri were associated with the Anglo-Norman court of the Plantagenet king Henry II. Andreas Capellanus - another well-known, if enigmatic, clerical writer - can be associated with Marie de Champagne's court and possibly also that of France. Finally, one of the most famous medieval authors - Chrétien de Troyes - was in all likelihood a cleric associated with the courts of Marie de Champagne and Philippe d'Alsace.
> (Campbell, 2008: 212)

Although different vernaculars could create a problem in transmission, contrarily to Latin, which was a *lingua franca* of the learned classes, the truth is that "...some vernacular literary genres travelled almost equally well and had considerable stimulating effects" (Smith, 2008: 77). This is no doubt the case with Old French or similar forms of French such as Anglo-Norman, which could be found in large swaths of territory comprising both the French kingdoms and the Angevin Empire as well as beyond (Gaunt *et al*, 2008: 3). Since clerics were learned and literate men, and dealt with the written word, why would they not use other written sources, either in Latin or in the vernacular, rather than solely basing themselves in oral storytelling? Besides the testimonies of Breton storytelling, another argument in defence of oral sources is the variation found in both the narratives and in the writing of the proper names in them, which could be explained by the nature of oral recitation and the attempt to place into writing names heard from another language (as could be the case with Brythonic names written in Anglo-Norman or Old French with a different spelling), an argument also used by Loomis (1959: 63). What such an explanation overlooks is that such variation can also be a consequence of medieval manuscript culture:

> The nature of individual handwritten copies is such that no two copies of the 'same' text can possibly be identical. Copyists make mistakes; furthermore, spelling was not fixed and therefore scribes would silently (and perhaps unconsciously) convert individual words into their own dialect. If a scribe does not understand a passage, he or she might rewrite it according to the way it is construed. [...] The essential variability of manuscript copies is analogous to, but less dramatic than, the variability of texts produced by oral tellers of tales who, individually, recount a different version of a given story at each performance and, collectively, through tales being passed down through

> generations of storytellers, produce radically different versions that can scarcely be considered the same 'text'.
> (Hult, 2011: 16)

Therefore, the possibility of written sources, which would be produced most probably by clerics or clerks, cannot be simply dismissed if the argument is variation due to oral transmission: "Another possibility, which I would favour myself, is that the intermediaries were clerks, of the same ilk as Geoffrey of Monmouth and Walter Map" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 111). Taking into account these considerations together with Sims-Williams' suggestion, we cannot simply overlook the possibility that Breton clerics could have been possible sources of Arthurian material which was then used by clerics associated with other courts. Moreover, such a possibility would be quite in line with the suspicions regarding a lost Breton *Historia Britannica* predating Geoffrey of Monmouth to which we made mention above. Nevertheless, it is a possibility based upon hypothetical lost written sources, while there are testimonies, as we have seen, that seem to make a reference to oral storytelling by the Bretons rather than identifying written sources. Sims-Williams attempts to work around this issue by dismissing such testimonies as not necessarily implying contact with Breton storytellers but simply awareness of Breton traditions concerning Arthur, by claiming for instance that in the case of the testimonies concerning the Breton belief in Arthur's return "...this messianic belief was so extraordinary that knowledge of it could easily have been spread by word of mouth among the clerical circles which refer to it without the intermediary of Loomis's professional Breton storytellers. Knowledge of it outside the Celtic countries does not prove knowledge of a cycle of tales about Arthur" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 81).

A similar argument is given in what concerns other pieces of Arthurian lore claimed as having been transmitted by Breton storytellers, as is the case with the Round Table, first mentioned by Wace: "Wace could have come across reports about Breton storytelling about the Round Table, or have heard informal references by Bretons to the Round Table in the same way as he perhaps heard of the marvels of the Forest of Brocéliande" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 83). Additionally, Sims-Williams even presents an alternative which considers that written tradition could have been the origin of such testimony: "Alternatively, he could be referring to lost Latin works written by Breton clerks (persons of the same sort as Geoffrey of Monmouth, his principal source), or to lost Old French lays or romances in which belief in the Round Table was already ascribed to 'les bretons'" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 83-84). Notwithstanding the purpose

of these arguments in presenting alternatives to the Breton oral diffusion theory, they have their flaws as well: if the Breton belief in Arthur's return arrived through word of mouth to the clerical circles, this does not dispel the idea that the Bretons were the original source, only that they did not transmit such idea directly, but if that is so why would some testimonies specify that their information came from direct contact with Breton sources?

In the case of Wace a similar argument can be made, if Wace came upon reports or heard informal references, then the original source still continues to be the Bretons. Even in the case of the alternative proposal of written lost Latin sources which could have been made by Breton clerks, it still implies that Breton tradition would have been the source nonetheless. The same goes for lost sources in the vernacular which already ascribed to the Bretons tales about the Round Table, the only difference once again is that the reference would come from a second-hand source, and not from a direct contact with a Breton storyteller. Thus, it seems that Sims-Williams' alternatives, based themselves in hypothetical contexts, could only invalidate the theory of the Breton *conteurs* as having been direct oral sources, and not the theory that Breton tradition was the intermediary source between Insular Arthurian traditions and Continental ones. Sims-Williams himself seems to explicitly demonstrate that his target is the theory of Breton storytellers spread throughout France: "...none of these allusions to beliefs and stories current among the Bretons/Britons imply that the writers knew that Breton storytellers were promulgating them outside Brittany" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 87). In fact, Sims-Williams goes through several of the mentions in medieval literature about professional storytellers, *jongleurs* or *conteurs* (1998b: 87-98) in order to demonstrate that "...that there is no direct evidence that Breton conteurs transmitted the *matière de Bretagne* outside Brittany" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 98).

It is indeed true that it would be quite unrealistic to assume that every kind of storyteller or *jongleur* would be a Breton, and Sims-Williams is absolutely right in this instance, with some of his examples demonstrating this idea quite clearly, as when he mentions that in regards to the *conteurs* mentioned by Chrétien de Troyes in some of his works: "...there is no reason to regard these *conteurs* (assuming they are more than a literary fiction) as radically different in kind from Chrétien himself, who had a vested interest in differentiating his own work from theirs as being more authentic, literary and coherent. Nothing suggests that they were Bretons reciting from memory" (Sims-

Williams, 1998b: 96). Notwithstanding the possibility of the Bretons being the original intermediaries between Brythonic and Anglo-Norman and French traditions, by the time of the Angevin Empire and of the intensive literary and cultural life in courts such as the one of Henry II or of Champagne, *jongleurs*, poets and professional storytellers most probably could have had a French or Norman background, besides Breton (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 96-97, 105).

All in all, what Sims-Williams arguments and a deeper look at medieval manuscript culture show us is that transmission cannot be as easily explained as scholars such as Loomis propose: a phenomenon of oral transmission carried by Breton storytellers and *jongleurs*. This does not mean such oral transmission did not occur, only that we must be aware of other possibilities, and this awareness seems to be the purpose of Sims-Williams: "This paper does not aim to present an alternative to the 'Breton conteur' theory. To do so would require a more precise definition of the nature and extent of the Brittonic materials which entered the *matière de Bretagne*. Nevertheless, I should note that the theory does not have to be accepted merely for want of alternatives" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 111). At a certain point in the transmission, the picture gets blurred, not only in what concerns the nature of the assumed original Breton sources, or the variation in medieval manuscripts, but also in regard to the role of the oral/written dynamic in further transmission throughout the Continent. Written and oral traditions were not isolated from one another: "Many assume that the oral transmission of vernacular literature continued well into the thirteenth century, either through the performance of minstrels or the reading aloud of works from a codex" (Hult, 2011: 14). In fact, analysis of the written texts seem to point towards the conclusion that its structure was aimed at oral recitation: "Most Old and Middle French works, for example, are scripted for oral delivery, featuring a first-person voice who addresses an audience of listeners in the second person, and uses spatial and temporal deictic markers to locate delivery 'here' (*ci*, as in 'at this place in the book') or 'now' (*or*, as in 'at this stage in my narration')" (Gaunt *et al*: 2008: 6). It goes without saying that this reveals that written literature itself was a medium whose goal was ultimately the spoken word, and shared the same audience with other forms of entertainment, including the one of the *jongleurs*:

> ...most Old and Middle French texts were composed to be recited to an audience (for a variety of reasons the norm – even in Latin – was to read aloud) or indeed to be sung, possibly with accompanying instruments

> (*trouvère* lyrics, the *chansons de geste*), or to be performed or mimed by a group (like drama). 'Reading' medieval literature was thus a social, public activity, sometimes committed to professional performers, either travelling troupes of *jongleurs* or else minstrels attached to a particular court. In the case of narratives recited from a book, the figure of the narrator would have been physically embodied by the reader, and thereby distinguished from the author, who tends to be referred to in the third person as the absent authority behind the text.
> (Gaunt *et al*: 2008: 5)

What such a context implies is that storytellers who told tales from memory could either know those stories from a genuine oral tradition, or from hearing them being read from a manuscript (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 87-99). Of course, this implication means that any testimony concerning oral transmission could be related to a storyteller who actually heard a tale being recited rather than knowing it from oral tradition, thus creating further confusion in the matter of the sources. Nonetheless, the fact of the matter is that the testimonies concerning for example the Breton belief in Arthur's return seem to be directed specifically at a Breton tradition. The same could be said about testimonies such as Wace which specifically mention the Bretons as telling tales about the Round Table. If the Bretons were mere storytellers or *jongleurs* who could have heard the tales recited as could other French or Norman storytellers, why specify that they were the ones who told tales of the Round Table or of Arthur's return? Even Sims-Williams seems to acknowledge that despite his alternatives "The ubiquitous Breton *conteur* retains his attraction as a universal explanation of the undoubted Brittonic element in European literature..." (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 111).

Notwithstanding, the whole array of Sims-Williams' arguments does complicate matters and prevent us from having more certainties regarding the theory of the Breton intermediaries and the possibilities of oral or written transmission (or both). Therefore, in order to better understand how the Bretons might have been key transmitters of Arthurian tales and motifs, and their relationship with the rest of the Brythonic world, namely Wales, and Cornwall, we must then analyse the context of Brittany and its role in the Norman Conquest. By doing it so, perhaps we will find further evidence that such a context was the ideal one to place the Bretons as the most probable intermediaries.

3.3.3 The Breton Connection to the Anglo-Norman World

We have mentioned that the Bretons shared a very similar language with their insular kin in Wales and Cornwall, and this certainly did help the Bretons to easily

absorb Welsh traditions, however, the spreading of Arthurian themes through Breton channels cannot be solely attributed to language, nor to a possible conscience of their Brythonic identity and origins, especially when the Breton corpus of Arthurian texts is meagre to say the least. The substantial body of literature from Wales which demonstrates the development of Arthurian narratives may point towards a closer level of contact between the Bretons and Wales in order for the former to have been transmitters of such lore to the Continent. It is possible that a greater contact of the Bretons with Welsh traditions could have occurred in the context of the Norman invasion, and in subsequent settlements in Britain around the Welsh Marches. In order to understand how the Norman invasion might have been a factor in the Breton role in the spreading of Arthurian elements, the context of the Bretons in the Norman world must be understood.

The geopolitical position of the Bretons in the Continent inevitably brought them into close contact with the Normans and progressively connected them: "...Normans and Britons lived in close proximity and were continually involved in each other's affairs. Ever since the original settlement of Normandy, which had taken place more than a century before the conquest of England, the Norman and Breton duches had been closely interlocked both on hostile and on friendly terms" (Bromwich, 1991: 274). This does not mean that the Bretons lost their particular identity in the Continental context where they were inserted, probably on account of their language, and such resilience possibly led to a bilingual culture in Brittany:

> The Breton dukes may have patronized the Breton language in the previous centuries but by the eleventh century they had long been accustomed to the French language and its culture. This, however, should not be taken to mean that many of the Breton leading families, those who remained in Brittany as well as those who settled in Britain, were not bilingual in Breton and French. Indeed, it may well be that the fact that they spoke Breton as well as French was what distinguished them in the eyes of contemporary observers from the Normans and the French.
> (Williams, 1991: 259)

The development of the Bretons in the Continent and their rapport with the Normans must be without a doubt due to their prominence in Continental affairs: "Of all the Celtic peoples in the eleventh century the Bretons were probably the most advanced economically and the most flourishing politically. By the middle of the century their possessions south of the Loire had reached La Roche-sur-Yon and Les Sables-

d'Olonne" (Williams, 1991: 259). It is more than likely that such status held by Brittany earned them influence with the Normans. In fact, the Bretons became the most important auxiliary troops in the Norman invading army of Britain, with the subsequent awarding of lands to Breton lords: "...they [Bretons] were used as auxiliaries by the Normans not only in their conquests of Italy in the south but also of England in the north; indeed, they are said to have had more land in England after the Conquest than the native English. This is not surprising, if, as it has been said, they were William the Conqueror's chief auxiliaries" (Williams, 1991: 259).

An example of the possession of territory being awarded to the Bretons due to their role in the invasion, often with strategic purposes, is given to us by Rachel Bromwich in the form of Alan Rufus, a commander of the Breton auxiliary troops: "Often the Conqueror's most faithful followers were given property in places of strategic importance. One of these was the lordship of Richmond in Yorkshire, which William bestowed on Alan Rufus, a cadet of the Breton ducal house, who may have been the leader of the Breton contingent which formed a third division of his army at Hastings" (Bromwich, 1991: 274). The holding of property would of course give political and cultural power to these Breton lords: "With the addition of separate territorial holdings in Lincolnshire and East Anglia, Alan Rufus became one of the most wealthy and powerful of landowners in the whole of England" (Bromwich, 1991: 274), and this might have been crucial for their connection or re-connection with Brythonic culture. Besides Williams, the large presence of Bretons in the Norman contingent is underlined by several scholars, Bromwich claims the same: "It appears that the largest group of auxiliaries in the Conqueror's army was the one which came from Brittany, and that this had long-lasting consequences both in England and in Wales" (1991: 273). In fact, the consequences were of the most importance due to the mentioned awarding of lands to the Bretons, since it is in the return to their ancestor's lands that the Bretons might have had a reawakening of their old traditions or a renewal in their interest: "At the time when the Conqueror's army brought young Breton aristocrats and junior members of the ducal house to settle here with their followers, the Continental Britons still remembered their ancestral origins in Wales and Cornwall" (Bromwich, 1991: 275).

From the establishment of the Bretons in Britain it follows that in the same manner as the Normans seemed to have the wish to incorporate the native Brythonic

traditions into their own, so did the Bretons wish to reclaim their ancient traditions: "Evidently a strong urge was felt by Normans and Bretons alike to nurture a sense of 'belonging' to their new country, by investigating its traditions, imaginatively re-creating its legendary history, and collecting its ancient stories and the Lives of its early church-founders, or 'saints' (Bromwich, 1991: 275). This might have been particularly relevant for the Bretons, since they were ethnically and culturally linked to such traditions, perhaps more so than the Normans due to their legitimate Brythonic heritage. It may have been in fact the presence of the Bretons which fostered a further interest of the Normans in the narratives of Brythonic tradition by acting as intermediaries: "...there had been a sizeable Breton element in the Conqueror's original army and it was at the courts of the Norman marcher lords and amongst the Breton diaspora that the tales of the Celts would have become available to the Anglo-Normans" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 59). An amount of factors seems to point in this direction, first and foremost the bilingual nature of the Bretons, which would facilitate communication with their Brythonic kin from Wales and Cornwall: "Much bilingualism must have still existed among the post-Conquest Breton settlers who came to Britain in the wake of the Conqueror's ally Alan Rufus and his like" (Bromwich, 1991: 288).

An additional factor towards this possibility is that many of the settlements of the Bretons, in line with the strategic awarding of lands we mentioned above, included the border regions around the Brythonic areas: "These Bretons settled in England, in Cornwall, on the Welsh Marches and in south-east Wales (for instance at Monmouth), and, as Giraldus assures us, they could have communicated easily enough with the indigenous inhabitants in their own language" (Bromwich, 1991: 288). The Bretons would then clearly be in a privileged position to be the transmitters of Brythonic culture to the Normans, and notwithstanding the progressive development of bilingualism in Wales in the following years to the conquest and the possible appearance of professional interpreters such as Bleheris, the Bretons must have been the early intermediaries. Moreover, taking into account their kinship with the Welsh, they must have been quite interested in the cultural elements they were the intermediaries for. Such a privileged position might explain the diversity of testimonies regarding Breton storytellers throughout the Anglo-Norman world and its close neighbours as pointed out by Loomis: "Thus the Norman Wace, the Anglo-Norman William of Malmesbury, and

the Welshman Giraldus agree in attributing to the Bretons circulation of stories about Arthur, his Round Table, and his passing to Avalon" (Loomis, 1959a: 55).

Therefore, and although some of them must have been Welsh, as in the case of Bleheris, it is quite sensible to suspect that the professional interpreters postulated by Constance Bullock-Davies could also have been Bretons, and these Breton *latimarii* might have been more than just a few. This would be perfectly in line with their privileged position in the Welsh Marches, their bilingual nature, and with the wide array of testimonies and hints concerning Breton storytelling of Arthurian and other tales of Brythonic origin. Of course, the development of such class was probably not immediate, but the appearance of Breton storytellers drawing from their renewed contact with the Welsh might have been quite early. In fact, it must be said that the interest of the Bretons in the narratives of their Brythonic kin and its transmission might have begun as early as during the initial occupation in the context of the Norman invasion, where stories might have circulated amongst the Breton auxiliary troops, and perhaps amongst learned clerics as well: "It may be, however, that in emphasizing the role played by Breton *jongleurs* in spreading Arthurian traditions, we are doing less than justice to two other classes in the Breton population, the soldiers and the clerics" (Williams, 1991: 261).

This hypothesis would perfectly explain the early transmission of Arthurian tales beyond the boundaries of the Angevin Empire, since soldiers and clerics could easily be in a context where they would travel beyond Brittany and the newly occupied territory, and help spread stories they may have learnt among the Welsh or the Cornish. In the case of the clerics, such spreading could even include written traditions, for they could carry Latin or Old French Arthurian texts with them as well. Although Loomis, as we have seen, attributes to the Breton *conteurs* the central role of such transmission, in fact several classes of people could have been disseminators: "For the popular, oral dissemination of the stories we may conclude that informal social contacts were in large measure responsible: in addition to the cultural results of intermarriages, stories would have been carried abroad by merchants, soldiers, Crusaders, and, no doubt (remembering Chaucer), by pilgrims on their extended travels" (Bromwich, 1991: 289). To this "oral dissemination", written dissemination may be added as a possibility as well, for even assumed evidences for oral transmission, as is the case of the Modena Archivolt, could perfectly be a result of written dissemination as well, as Sims-Williams

demonstrates, when he claims that the tale displayed in the Archivolt "...may reflect the literary interests of the Francophone colony gathered around the foundress of Modena cathedral, Matilda of Tuscany (d. 1115); among them was an Artusius, a benefactor to the Cathedral in 1125. This community could have known the story of Arthur and his queen in a written Latin or even French version" (Sims-Williams, 1998b: 75). It thus seems, that despite the acknowledgment that a professional class of Breton *conteurs* must have existed, along with other classes such as the *jongleurs*, what Loomis considered the *conteurs* must have included a wide range of persons telling tales throughout Europe and beyond, or writing them as well in the case of clerics or other learned classes. Many of these persons were most possibly Bretons indeed, but not necessarily professional storytellers, thus helping to the extensive spreading of the Arthurian legend beyond the confines of a courtly and learned atmosphere.

Acknowledgment of the possibly large role of the Bretons in the spreading of Arthurian romance thus begs the question on whether Arthurian-related lore was transmitted solely from Breton storytellers or more directly from Wales. The most sensible approach toward such question is of course to acknowledge that it is actually most probable that both forms of contact with Brythonic material were responsible for the spreading of Arthurian tales, which were "...transmitted to Chrétien de Troyes and other French poets by two routes. One led from Wales to Anglo-Norman or Latin writers and singers who lived nearby. The other radiated from Brittany, if we accept the hypothesis that a substantial number of Breton singers and storytellers travelled to the courts of northern France and England" (Ziolkowski, 2008: 678). Notwithstanding, even though it seems, as we have seen, that the Welsh (as well as the Cornish) most probably did transmit material directly through progressive contact with the Normans in the Welsh Marches, there is quite an overwhelming amount of arguments which seem to point to the Bretons as the facilitators of such transmission and as the further disseminators of Arthurian stories to the Anglo-Norman and French-speaking world: "Though one might imagine that Wales would be a mediator of Celtic material under the Normans, it is important to note the large proportion of Bretons, who clearly shared with the Welsh a common pool of pseudo-historical material, among the incoming Norman nobility" (Jankulak *et al*, 2009: 79).

This does not minimize the role of Wales or Cornwall in the development of Arthurian literature in any way, since it is in these territories that the Arthurian legend

must have first gained form through the preservation of Brythonic traditions, which were then transmitted either directly or through the seeming prevalent Breton intermediaries. Such a process must have occurred through popular oral transmission, but in a learned environment and through writing as well, since many of the interpreters must have been clerics: "Not all of the *latimarii* were ecclesiastics, though no doubt some of them were, and ecclesiastics must have played a very important part, if not the crucial part, in the dissemination of Arthurian stories" (Bromwich, 1991: 289). This possible scenario would accommodate both the theory of oral diffusion as well as the argument put forward by Sims-Williams that clerics and written transmission could also have been responsible. Acknowledgment of the several factors we have gathered which may have been influential in the transmission of the Matter of Britain to the Continent, such as the development of bilingualism in the Welsh Marches both by the Welsh and the Bretons, the Breton presence in the Norman army and subsequent lordships around the Welsh Marches, the evidences of Breton storytelling and the establishment of the influential courts of the Angevin Empire seem to draw a scenario which allows us to understand how Arthurian tales might have been spread to the Continent. Rachel Bromwich summarizes such scenario quite clearly:

> Inevitably we are drawn back to the contemplation of the widely extended Norman and Angevin Empire of the twelfth century, whose cultural centre was to be found in the courts of Henry II and of Eleanor of Aquitaine, whether in England or at Poitiers. Political alliances, intermarriage, Norman conquests and the Crusades, all enhanced the need and the desire for movement, from Britain to Europe, and from north to south of the Continent. Extended travel carried in its wake the Arthurian stories and the men of every kind who propagated them; from Wales to Flanders and to Poitiers, from Scotland to Brittany, from Britain to the Alps and to Italy and Sicily. Norman French was the *lingua franca* of this whole world; and in the twelfth century it was a French dialect of considerable cultural prestige. Before the century began Brythonic traditions from both Devon-Cornwall and the 'Old North' were in process of being drawn together in Wales, particularly in the south, the area of Wales first to be Normanized. Though it is right to regard insular Britain as the birthplace of the Arthurian Legend, the colony settled by the Britons in Armorica was at least as much responsible as Norman and Angevin Britain for its development. As the saga developed, the much-travelled Bretons were in a particularly favourable position to blend new themes and new stories with the names of Arthur and others of the old traditional insular heroes which the emigrants had at various periods carried with them overseas. Both in Brittany itself, and after the Norman Conquest in Britain as well, the Bretons enjoyed an especial advantage in the field of transmission by reason of their consequent ease of communication, not only with their Norman neighbours, but also with their Welsh and Cornish-speaking compatriots in this Island.
> (Bromwich, 1991: 290)

3.4 The Transmission of the Beheading Game

3.4.1 The Continental Context and Variations in the Beheading Game

The context we have been attempting to reconstruct allow us to have a possible collective explanation for the *Matière de Bretagne* as a whole, however, it remains to be seen how to contextualise the transmission of the beheading-game motif in such scenario. The beheading game is a part of a single story motif, and what would be necessary for its transmission would be a particular set of circumstances. We cannot completely reconstruct the exact context, but the channels of transmission we have been attempting to discern seem to constitute the most auspicious hypothesis for such circumstances to have come together. We must now focus therefore on the possibilities of transmission which may be tied specifically with the beheading-game narratives.

In a previous chapter, we have managed to trace an outline of the context in Wales where the Irish transmission might have occurred, in connection with the courts of Gwynedd, now we must see how this context is linked with the transmission to the Continent in regard to specific narratives. If we once again remember the example of *Marwnat Corroi m. Dayry*, this tale must have been transmitted to Wales, became a part of Welsh tradition, and was consequently transmitted through the Bretons (or even bilingual Welshmen such as Bleheris) to the Anglo-Norman world, thus finding its way to Continental tradition, leading to some of its motifs to appear in the Vulgate cycle. Since the Dolorous Tower episode does not simply contain the outline of the *Aided Chon Roí* story as it is loosely given in *Marwnat Corroi*, but rather specific elements from one of the original Irish versions of *Aided Chon Roí* such as the betrayal using the antagonist's own sword to kill him or the uttering of last words towards the traitorous woman, we may assume it was not from *Marwnat Corroi* directly that knowledge was gained concerning the tale, but rather from a more complete knowledge of the tale either from a lost written source, or from oral tradition. The case with the beheading game might have been the same, albeit with the absence of a Welsh written tale functioning as undeniable testimony of the motif having been known in Wales.

Some of the indications which may provide evidence of Breton transmission do bear some relationship with the Continental beheading-game versions, more specifically in connection with the name of the protagonist of the *Livre de Caradoc*. The first appearance of Caradoc Briefbras (French for short arm) or Vreichvras (Welsh for strong

arm) is not on the First Continuation, the character hails from Welsh tradition and is mentioned in the Welsh triads: in Triad 1[224] he is mentioned as the chief elder of Celliwig and as being one of the three tribal chiefs of Britain under Arthur's rule (Bromwich, 2014: 145); in Triad 18 he is one of the three battle-horseman of Britain in one of its versions and one of the three favourites of the court of King Arthur in another (Bromwich, 2014: 185), with the latter triad mentioning Arthur as singing an *englyn* where he considers Caradoc as the pillar of the Welsh (*Cymry*). The triads also include indirect allusions to Caradoc by making a reference to his horse *Lluagor* as one of the Three Bestowed Horses of the Island of Britain in Triad 38 (Bromwich, 2014: 271), and to his bond with his wife *Tegau Eurfron* as one of the Three Surpassing Bonds of Love in Triad 71 (Bromwich, 2014: 392). Besides the triads, Caradoc also makes an appearance in the Welsh vernacular tales, most notably in *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, where he is portrayed as the chief advisor to Arthur and is said to be his nephew (Davies, 2007: 218).

Further mentions are found in the Welsh Latin hagiographical tradition, more specifically in the *Vita Sancti Paterni*, which places Caradoc as the king of Britannia and Letavia (Wade-Evans, 1944: 260), and as a patron king to St. Padarn who commands for the city of Vannes to honour the saint. Additionally, the Welsh genealogies also make a mention to Caradoc in connection with saints, more specifically in the *Bonedd y Saint*, a genealogy tract dedicated to saints, where he is described as having fathered several saints, namely Saints Cadfarch, Tangwn, Maethlu and Cawrdaf (Bartrum, 1966: 59, 62). Caradoc's status as an ancestor to saints seems to have been a tradition in Wales which continued throughout the centuries, since the later *Buchedd Collen*, which survives in two manuscripts from the sixteenth century describing the life of St. Collen, portrays Saint Collen as a descendant of *Caradog Freichfras* as well (Siddons, 2006: 800). In what concerns the early Latin and Anglo-Norman Arthurian works however, he is not included in Geoffrey's *Historia* nor in Wace, and therefore these works cannot have been responsible for his introduction in the Anglo-Norman and Continental traditions, where he is first mentioned in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and in the aforementioned Anglo-Norman *Lai du Cor*, before his appearance in the *Livre de Caradoc*. The clues to the transmission of the character from

[224] Welsh triads' numbering in accordance with Bromwich's edition (2014), the same applies to all mentioned Welsh triads henceforth.

Welsh tradition to Anglo-Norman/Continental traditions are given by the form of his name in the different texts, Bromwich points out that the form of *Karadués Briébraz* used by Chrétien de Troyes (*Erec*, line 1719) corresponds to the Breton spelling of the *Caradawc Freichfras* of the Welsh triads (Bromwich, 1991: 293n28), which is "a well-known instance of misinterpretation, in which the Old Welsh epithet *brecbras* (*breichfras*), 'Strong Arm', was misread and misunderstood as containing the French *bras*, 'arm', and *brie(f)*, giving the meaning 'Short Arm'" (Bromwich, 1991: 293n28).

Taking this evidence into consideration plus the fact that Caradoc has his own dedicated romance in the *Livre de Caradoc*, Bromwich arrives at the possibility that along with Yder, which has a similar context since he also has a complete poem of his own, these romances "suggest that very much more may once have been known and told about these heroes in Wales, and that both are figures who have declined in status in the existing Welsh records. This points to a very early date (before 1100?) for the transmission of their names, and the vestiges of narratives concerning them to Brittany" (Bromwich, 1991: 280). According to Bromwich, names such as Caradoc transmitted in this context do not seem to have travelled exclusively through oral channels, since the changes "show orthographical evidence of having been early written borrowings" (Bromwich, 1991: 281), but Bromwich also adds that "oral transmission, at least in the first instance, is likely to have been mainly responsible for the large number of enigmatic and unrecognizable name-forms which proliferate in the poems of Chrétien and, to a lesser degree, in those of his successors" (Bromwich, 1991: 281). As we may already have guessed, the most probable agents of such oral transmission are the Bretons, and after the initial transmission the names must also have gone through written tradition. The changes in the spelling of Caradoc's name in the different texts where it makes an appearance seem to offer a perfect example of the channels of transmission.

Besides the name itself, other details concerning the portrayal of Caradoc along with tales around him in Continental tradition seem to be consistent with what Welsh tradition transpires regarding this Arthurian knight: in the *Livre de Caradoc* he is Arthur's nephew, as he was in *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, and his horse *Lluagor* from the triads also seems to make a reappearance in the *Livre* under the forms of *Loriagor* (Roach, 1949: 169) and *Lorïagort* (Roach, 1950: 296), depending on the version; in both the *Lai du Cor* and in the *Livre de Caradoc*, Caradoc's wife is portrayed as being

faithful to his husband and such fidelity is proven through a magical object, a drinking horn in the lai and a magical mantle in *Caradoc*, which is consistent with one of the versions of triad 66, where Tegau Eurfron is one of the three faithful wives of Britain (Bromwich, 2014: 370), as well as with the reference to Tegau Eurfron's magical mantle in some of the later versions of the *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Prydain*[225] ("The Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain"), which has the property of not fitting a woman which was either unfaithful or was not chaste (Bromwich, 2014: 464); even though Caradoc's wife is unnamed in the *Lai du Cor* and her name is *Guinier* in the *Livre de Caradoc* instead of Tegau Eurfron, in the narrative of the latter Guinier's nipple is accidentally sliced and is later replaced by a magical gold one, which is in accordance with Tegau's soubriquet *Eurfron* in Welsh tradition (which translates as "Gold-Breast"). All these agreements between elements from both the Welsh and Continental traditions seem to suggest that transmission in what concerns Caradoc was not confined to his name but also to the tales which involved the character, thus providing a rare example of preservation of the association between character and tales:

> Various motifs or episodes found in French romances of this period do have counterparts in surviving Welsh texts, and personal names or epithets often appear to be related, but it is highly unusual to find in French sources the same marriage between story and protagonist as in Welsh. The tale of the Welsh Caradog Freichfras (Caradoc great-arm), which reappears as that of Caradoc Briefbras (Caradoc short-arm) in the first continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, is a rare, if not the only, exception...
> (Lloyd-Morgan, 2006: 1765)

Taking into account this notable accordance between elements associated with Caradoc from both the Welsh and Continental traditions, along with the appearance of Caradoc in a Continental beheading-game narrative, it is tempting to consider the possibility that the beheading-game motif could have travelled to the Continent along the same channels as Caradoc's name or other Arthurian names and motifs. There is however an important difference in the fact that that the mentioned elements in association with Caradoc along with the Arthurian-related names have extant examples

[225] The *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain* is a list of thirteen magical items in Brythonic traditional narrative material which has survived in fifteenth and sixteenth-century manuscripts, with Tegau Neurfron's mantle being added in some of the later versions, replacing other items. Even though the "Thirteen Treasures" only survives in late texts from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the apparent reflection of traditions connected with the Old North in such texts seems to point to older traditions. The fact that Tegau's mantle is included in the list only in the later versions complicates matters however in what concerns the antiquity of this specific item from the list in Wales, but on the other hand it may be indeed reflective of an older tradition related to Tegau Neurfron, whom is also described as faithful in the triads. Rachel Bromwich has included an edition of the list in her treatment of the Welsh triads (2014).

and references in both the Welsh and Continental texts, while the beheading game has not survived in any extant example from Welsh tradition. As we have discussed previously however, this does not prevent it from having been a transmitted element (which obviously was since we have the Arthurian beheading-game narratives). Since Wales is more than likely the intermediary, the motif may have been absorbed by the Bretons after the Norman conquest, who transmitted it to the Normans and to a Continental *milieu*, in a similar way to the transmission of names: "The Brythonic names themselves are the survival of an oral literature which was presumably still very much alive in Britain in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, when parts of it were carried overseas to Brittany" (Bromwich, 1991: 281).

Be that as it may, this possible context for transmission raises several questions of course, namely in what concerns the original association of the beheading game with an Arthurian context, and which characters were first associated with it, especially since we have several Continental versions with differences between them. Due to the fact that we have evidences of the transmission of many elements associated with Caradoc, can we consider the hypothesis that the beheading game was associated with Caradoc still in Wales and transmitted alongside a body of Caradoc-associated tales? Or was it associated with both Caradoc as well as with other Arthurian characters already in the context of the Continental tradition? As we shall see, the differences of *Caradoc* with the other Continental tales of the beheading game seem to point towards the idea that Caradoc was not the first Arthurian association with the beheading game. There are several reasons for this scepticism, which are found in the aforementioned differences. The first reason is the absence of the axe-wielding churlish features of the antagonist in the *Livre de Caradoc*, which are present in the *Mule sans Frein* and *Hunbaut* and evoke elements from *Fled Bricrenn*. Even the *Perlesvaus* version with Lancelot, which is the closest to *Caradoc* in what regards the presentation of the antagonist as a knight without the churlish features, retains the axe as a weapon rather than the sword as in *Caradoc*. Another reason for doubting that Caradoc was the first Arthurian character to be associated with the beheading game, is the fact that Gawain is present in three renditions of the motif, namely *La Mule Sans Frein* and *Hunbaut* in the Continental context and *SGGK* in the insular context, and this fact positions Gawain as the favoured hero for the motif, and perhaps the original Arthurian one.

The most conspicuous reason, however, for considering the prominence of Gawain in association with the beheading game in the Arthurian tradition, is the juxtaposition of beheading game and revolving fortress in both *Fled Bricrenn* and *La Mule Sans Frein*. These motifs have no intrinsic connection with one another: for them to appear both in an Irish and in a French story, the most plausible hypothesis is to postulate their having been transmitted as parts of a single coherent narrative similar to *Fled Bricrenn*, something which we had already stated when discussing Wales as the intermediary. In what our present discussion is concerned however, this is relevant because the beheading game together with the revolving castle in the same narrative may point to a closer proximity with *Fled Bricrenn*, and thus with the original transmitted source. On the other hand, it is true that the *Caradoc* version includes the addressing to the court and its praise, along with the scorn to it when no one initially accepts the challenge, an element of the motif also present in *Fled Bricrenn*. However, the fact that *Caradoc* has a knight as the challenger, wielding a sword rather than an axe, thus constituting a more "polished" presentation, may suggest a version of the beheading game which had already been modified, and would therefore be more distant from the first transmitted version, in contrast with what the closer details to the Irish version found in the Gawain narratives seem to indicate. Once again, this aspect also points to Gawain as possibly being the original Arthurian protagonist associated with the beheading game, although we cannot be certain on whether this association first occurred in Wales and was then transmitted to both the Continent and England, or if this association occurred in the Continent and then influenced *SGGK*.

What would explain the changes in the other Continental versions then? The most plausible hypothesis is that elements such as the ones which were modified in the *Livre de Caradoc* were so in order to be in accordance with a chivalric context. The choice of Caradoc as protagonist could represent an alternative variation to Gawain, since, as we have seen, many elements associated with him seem to have travelled to the Continent as well, and he may therefore have been a popular character. The same could be said of the Lancelot story in *Perlesvaus*, which shifted the leading role to Lancelot perhaps to follow the progressive increase in popularity of the latter in Continental tradition. The adjustment of stories and motifs to a Continental courtly audience is something altogether probable, and if we take into account Bromwich's suspicion stated above that the initial transmission of names was through oral means, and then put into

writing, we may equally suspect that the same happened to story motifs, changed in accordance to such adjustment: "As the stories were appropriated by clerics and redefined for courtly audiences, the genuinely oral tradition lost its significance as a form of entertainment and edification for the courts" (Ziolkowski, 2008: 679). Furthermore, this would not prevent some of the original elements to be retained in the French romances (while others such as the protagonist/antagonist pair and the overall context were changed). Different clerics and storytellers could have variable stances in regards to these adjustments, and preserve some elements which others would consider inadequate for courtly romance.

The discussion so far raises a lot of questions which remain unanswered however. It is hard to know how or when did a story of which the first known version had Cú Chulainn and Cú Roí/Úath as antagonists shifted its characters to other ones, as in the Arthurian versions, and whether such shift happened first in Welsh tradition or in the Continent, but we do know that story motifs do not always maintain their association with the original characters: "...it is exceptional for names and stories to pass in combination from one culture into another: in the field of Arthurian romance, as in that of folklore, it is far more usual for story-themes to move about freely, and to become associated with a succession of characters" (Bromwich, 1991: 281). It might have been in this manner that the beheading-game motif became associated with an Arthurian character in the first place. On this matter, Gawain's status as the nephew of Arthur placed him in a similar position to Cú Chulainn as the nephew of Conchobar, and this could easily lead storytellers to pick him as a protagonist of the beheading game. Taking into account that Caradoc, another protagonist in an Arthurian version of the beheading game, is also the king's nephew (as is stated in *Breudwyt Ronabwy*), as was Cú Chulainn, then it most probably was a detail that became an important part of the beheading-game motif. Since Gawain is much more frequently attested as Arthur's nephew, and he is the protagonist of most of the beheading-game stories, it seems once again rather more plausible to consider that he was indeed the original Arthurian character to become the hero in such stories, rather than Caradoc. This does not invalidate that the beheading-game motif could have travelled along the same channel of transmission of the Caradoc-associated elements which we underlined, only that it was not necessarily associated with Caradoc. If we are correct about Gawain having been the original hero of the beheading game in an Arthurian context, to understand if

such association first occurred in France or in Wales is extremely important to understand if *SGGK* is the result of a channel of transmission from Wales to England or rather from France. This is due to the fact of course, that *SGGK* features Gawain as the protagonist, as *La Mule Sans Frein* and *Hunbaut* do. In order to attain further clues concerning this matter, we must therefore shift our attention to the insular context, and to the possibilities around *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

3.4.2 The Possibilities of Continental Influence on the Insular Context

The Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* raises further doubts concerning the matter of transmission: is the use of the beheading game in *SGGK* the result of influence from the beheading-game French romances? Or is it the result of the motif having been transmitted directly to Anglo-Norman England from Wales through professional interpreters or bilingual Bretons, having subsequently become an element of English tradition as well? The particular context of the rise of Middle English literature does not offer a clear scenario in tracing the sources, since it is a later literary tradition (let us remember that *SGGK* hails from the fourteenth century) and several other literary traditions were influential in its genesis: "Many Middle English romances translate or draw from French, Anglo-Norman, or Latin works, and in fact Middle English writing in general is a latecomer to medieval culture" (Chism, 2009: 58). Christine Chism further points out that this variety of sources means that they could have been drawn not only from a body of tales in circulation throughout England, but from wherever there were works in the aforementioned languages: "These writers drew, naturally enough, from the stories already circulating both in England and elsewhere in Anglo-Norman, French, and Latin" (Chism, 2009: 59). It goes without saying that these stories could indeed include the Arthurian French romances, and the context of the Angevin Empire in the previous century could have perfectly allowed for the transmission of the French tales to England. Therefore, the fact that a Middle English romance such as *SGGK* has a late date in comparison with the French analogues does not mean that French literature was not influential since "the fourteenth century inherited an accumulation of romance types, with a simultaneous, not sequential, awareness of *chanson de geste*, French and insular traditions, all such material still being in circulation and production well into the century" (Field, 1999: 169). As it might be easy to deduce, this signifies that "The ongoing complexity of literary

borrowings makes it difficult to define what sets off Middle English romances from their continental counterparts" (Chism, 2009: 59).

In what concerns *SGGK* for instance, Ad Putter has presented a dedicated work to the relationship between the Middle English romance and Arthurian French romance in his *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* (1995), which despite its title and focus on intertextuality is not simply a source-study of the relationship with the French analogues, but rather an analysis on the use of themes and conventions derivative of French romance in general, leading Putter to conclude that "The *Gawain*-poet was following conventions that can be found in many courtly romances, as well as in the courtesy books with which they share a significant but underexplored common ground" (Putter, 1995: 245). The comparisons in Putter's work as well as his arguments seem to demonstrate that the paradigms, concepts and courtly conventions in what concerns the setting, the landscape, the supernatural and the role of the hero followed by the *Gawain*-poet are similar to the ones of Continental authors, with focus on Chrétien de Troyes. Putter's main argument regarding the comparison of the *Gawain*-poet with Chrétien de Troyes is that both result from "a symbiosis of clerics and knights at court, reflected in a literature that could appeal to laymen, a literature [...] which insisted on moral and religious obligations without altogether denouncing the ways of the world" (Putter, 1995: 152). The conclusions arrived at in Putter's work as well as the difficulty mentioned by Chism to differentiate Middle English romances from Continental ones do not imply nonetheless that differences cannot be verified: "Where French romances tend to centralize issues of literary authority and authorship, Middle English romances often thematize the tribulations of literary transmission and the exigencies of their own copying, compilation, and performance; they are more audience-centered" (Chism, 2009: 59). In fact, other scholars claim the English traditions were not simply derivative and see yet other differences with basis on the origins of the English tradition, due to vicissitudes in the transmission of French-speaking traditions after the Norman conquest and the influence of the native tradition in the English authors in addition to the French one:

> In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest England inherited the French tradition, but inherited it piecemeal without discriminating between the various subject-matters, between early versions and late, between aristocratic idealism and popular adventure stories. Nor was the English tradition merely derivative; its makers showed their independence in selection of source

> material, in the radical nature of their redactions, and the freedom with which they intermixed them with native folklore.
> (Barron, 1987: 8)

Furthermore, W. R. J. Barron adds that it is quite difficult to trace the continuity between the French and English tradition since "The random selection and chance survival of English versions, their uncertain dating and unknown authorship, the undefined nature of their audience make the establishment of any evolutionary tradition impossible in the present state of our knowledge" (Barron, 1987: 9). Such difficulty is connected with the fact that it is hard to verify "...the extent to which the continental French romances of Chretien and his successors in the field of French Arthurian romance were available and known in England" (Field, 1999: 163). Of course, as Rosalind Field states, the linguistic connection of Anglo-Norman and French meant that translations were not of the utmost necessity, and only a few French romances are translated, but this means that other forms of evidence have to be analysed in order to gain a notion of which works of French literature could have circulated in England: "it was not necessary for Old French to be translated until the Middle English period and then of Chretien's works only *Yvain* and *Perceval* appear in English versions. Any further information available has to be gleaned from internal evidence of influence on insular writers and external evidence of ownership" (Field, 1999: 163).

The evidence of ownership is particularly important for this discussion: "our sense of the availability and accessibility of French romance evinced in the intertextuality of later English versions, can only be supported by the evidence of ownership" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 69). On this matter, Scattergood and Sherborne (1983: 32-35) along with Rosalind Field (1999: 163-164) have underlined the evidence of ownership of Arthurian romances by members of the aristocracy, either associated with the nobility or with the royal courts[226], thus creating the perception that Arthurian

[226] Reports of ownership include: the possession of a romance about Arthur, two on Merlin and a Lancelot version by Thomas of Woodstock; the ownership by Margaret, the Countess of Devon, of a romance on Tristan, other on Merlin and yet other on Arthur; Elizabeth la Zouche had a Lancelot romance and a Tristan one; Isabel, the duchess of York had in her possession a romance on Lancelot (Scattergood *et al*, 1983: 32; Meale, 1992: 139). Additionally, Guy de Beauchamp is said to have had a Lancelot romance as well, which he bequeathed to the Bordesley Abbey (Blaess, 1957: 511-518; Meale, 1993: 139). In what concerns the royal court, Henry III is said to have "owned a 'magnum librum' of romances" (Field, 1999: 164), and a religious work dedicated to Eleanor of Provence mentions Arthurian heroes such as Arthur himself, Ywain, Gawain and Perceval, who were thus presumably known by the Queen (Field, 1999: 164); Edward I had a book with a compilation of Arthurian romances, which is considered to have influenced Italian Arthurian romance, and Eleanor of Castile had an Arthurian

romance was particularly cherished in those circles: "The picture that emerges from this scattered information is surprisingly clear – that French Arthurian romance was a taste fostered by royal readers and those of their immediate circle, a literary fashion that was, from the twelfth century on, a feature of royalist and continental culture" (Field, 1999: 164). The ownership of French romances is a phenomenon that most likely continued even up until the time of the *Gawain*-poet, since it was not exclusive to a single generation: "...a royal interest in Arthurian romance is apparent in copies of French romances passed down from one generation to another" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 69). Such an acknowledgment is quite relevant when analyzing a specific work and respective author and the influences on such author as in the case of the *Gawain*-poet, more specifically in what concerns his associations.

The *Gawain*-poet is an anonymous author but this does not prevent us from having a fairly reliable notion of his provenience: "Although the identity of the author is unknown, his dialect of English shows him to have been brought up in the north-west Midlands, somewhere near the borders of Cheshire and Staffordshire" (Burrow, 2009: 79), and such location seems to be further verifiable by an apparent knowledge of this very same region demonstrated in the work of the *Gawain*-poet, particularly in *SGGK*: "The quest for the Green Chapel brings Sir Gawain into Cheshire from Wales, and then across the county to the forested ridges that form its eastern boundary. The *Gawain*-poet knows this countryside well. In his description he uses dialect words which have left their mark on the local toponymy" (Bennet, 1999: 71). Moreover, from his work it is also possible to draw some considerations concerning his education and professional activity: "The author – learned, familiar with both the Bible and with the liturgy as well as with continental romances, dream visions, and lyric forms – must have been a cleric, almost certainly one who was attached to a baronial or even royal house" (Stanbury, 2009: 149-150).

The region of the north-west Midlands from where the *Gawain*-poet apparently hailed from does create some doubts however, more specifically, on how he might have come into contact with Arthurian literary motifs (such as the beheading game), since "the region scarcely seems an auspicious milieu for a strong literary culture. Men of learning were thin on the ground, and there is no clear evidence of any school

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romance dedicated to her (Salter, 1988: 88-96); Richard II owned three Arthurian romances, including a Grail romance, and Isabella of France had another three (Field, 1999: 164).

functioning at this time. A few monasteries represented the only real institutional supports for higher culture" (Bennet, 1999: 76-77). The north-west Midlands were not totally impermeable to literary culture however, there were monasteries where the *Gawain*-poet might have been educated: "While Cheshire monasteries were not as well-endowed as their counterparts in the south-west Midlands, their libraries would have included the main Latin works used as sources by the alliterative poets" (Bennet, 1999: 77). Furthermore, in what concerns further literary sources, the north-west Midlands may have been progressively influenced by the literarily richer south-west Midlands where the alliterative revival was probably first developed: "In any case the north-west Midlands may have been the beneficiary of traditions preserved and developed to the south" (Bennet, 1999: 77). Notwithstanding, further possible hypotheses of literary influence may be found in the aforementioned courts or households with which the *Gawain*-poet may have been associated, especially in what concerns the influence of Arthurian tales. Opinions diverge on this matter, but have in common an association with patrons belonging to the royal court rather than with the households of the gentry: Sheila Fisher for instance considers that in regards to the *Gawain*-poet "Despite his provincial dialect, the sophistication of his intricate style and his range of literary and cultural references suggest that he may have been associated with one of the country courts of Edward III or John of Gaunt" (Fisher, 2000: 151).

Other scholars however point towards other possibilities of patronage: John Bowers has placed the hypothesis that the descriptions of a luxurious material culture, together with the manners, habits (such as great feasts) and behaviours which are present in the work of the *Gawain*-poet seem to be aimed at an aristocratic *milieu*, and this could point out at Richard II as being the patron, since he had the fame of having a particular fondness for the luxuries of the aristocratic lifestyle (Bowers, 2001: 158). Such a hypothesis is also supported by Sarah Stanbury with additional arguments, namely in connection to the possibility that *SGGK* may reflect a political context: "The striking contrasts between two courts, one a distant baronial court in north Wales and the other a royal castle, between a wild man and a knight, between wilderness and hall, suggest the poem may be commenting as well on tensions between centralized authority and baronial power, between London and the northwest Midlands or Wales" (Stanbury, 2009: 149). According to Stanbury this could signify a connection to Richard II on the grounds that "If the poems emerged within the patronage system of Richard II's court,

their disappearance may also have been a strategic erasure following Richard's murder in the Lancastrian usurpation" (Stanbury, 2009: 149). Any of these hypotheses would allow for the possibility of access to French works since the courts of both Edward II and Edward III are said to have borrowed a large number of French romances (at least fifty-nine) from a lending library in the Tower of London, of which only a copy of *Brut* and *Perceval* have been identified (Vale, 1983: 49; Field, 1999: 164), and "Richard II owned at least three Arthurian romances, including Chretien's *Conte del Graal* inherited from his grandfather" (Field, 1999: 164). Even in what concerns John of Gaunt, his status as one of the sons of Edward III and uncle of Richard II can certainly allow us to suspect that he may have shared of this same ownership or borrowing of romances, especially since we know that French romances were "often handed down from one generation to another" (Field, 1999: 163). Moreover, the interest of John of Gaunt in literature may be attested by his patronage of and friendship with Geoffrey Chaucer, and Chaucer himself demonstrates awareness and knowledge in what concerns the genre of romance: "The associations Chaucer (1340?–1400) held with the courts of John of Gaunt and Richard II are well known, as is the fact that romance has a complex place within his vast and varied work" (Fisher, 2000: 151).

In face of all these observations, if the *Gawain*-poet was indeed associated with any of these courts, he could have had access to French romances and used them as his source for many elements of his *SGGK*. This could certainly be the reason for his use of French romance conventions which Putter points out (1995), but could it be that amongst these French romances circulating in the royal courts were also copies of the French beheading-game romances from where the *Gawain*-poet could have drawn the motif? We know for instance that manuscripts containing *Perlesvaus* seem to have been in circulation in England between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as Nitze and Jenkins have acknowledged (Nitze *et al*, 1932-37: I.3-4, II.3-11), and James Carley has also discovered a fragment of the text from the fourteenth century in an English manuscript from the library at Wells Cathedral (1992: 35-61). Could a copy of a manuscript containing texts such as *Perlesvaus* have thus found its way to the royal court or libraries associated with it?

To answer this question is far from being an easy task because only a small number of the works which were owned or circulated in the described context above are identified, the vast majority are not. This is the case for instance with the romances

borrowed from the aforementioned lending library at the Tower of London, the larger number of which are unidentified. Notwithstanding, it is exactly this lack of identification of the romances in circulation which could lead us to speculate that "It may be amongst such unidentifiable volumes that the independent romances whose influence has been detected in later English versions are to be traced" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 69). The possibility that one or more of the French beheading-game romances were the sources of the *Gawain*-poet would certainly fit in this scenario. However, notwithstanding the relevance of the hypotheses of association of the *Gawain*-poet and the region where he must have been active, the lack of identification of the French romances which might have been in circulation also has the effect of not providing us with concrete evidence:

> These speculations, provocative as they are, have as yet no solid evidence to support them. The authorship and history of the manuscript before its appearance in the library of a Yorkshire collector in 1614 remain a major unsolved literary mystery. It is thus even more tempting to search for the patron and writer in the techné of description: textiles, armor, hairstyles, and castle ornament. Yet even here evidence is slippery. The poems offer an extraordinarily rich picture of fourteenth-century aristocratic life, but whose life, exactly, or when it was lived remains uncertain, except to say that the poems were produced in Cheshire between the middle and the end of the fourteenth century.
> (Stanbury, 2009: 149)

There are nevertheless enough coincidental elements available to provide us with possible hypotheses, which are not completely speculative and that we must at least acknowledge. It is notable for instance that the beheading-game version contained in the Lancelot episode of *Perlesvaus* is exactly the one French version of the beheading game which contains certain details which are found in *SGGK* but not in *Fled Bricrenn*. If we may remember, in *Perlesvaus* the second knight to whom Lancelot returns to receive his turn on being beheaded is sharpening his axe on a whetstone, as is the Green Knight in the Green Chapel when he is waiting for Gawain, a detail which is only present in these two versions of the beheading game. The same is true of the flinching and dodging of the blow and subsequent reproach, which is a detail included in both *SGGK* and *Perlesvaus* but not on any of the other versions. In *SGGK* Gawain flinches in the first rehearsal of a blow by the Green Knight, leading the Green Knight to remind Gawain he did not flinch a year before, and in *Perlesvaus* Lancelot lowers his head in the first swing of the axe, making the swing miss and leading the knight to state that his brother had not attempted to escape from the swing of the axe when Lancelot beheaded

him. Additionally, *Perlesvaus* also includes the period of one year's respite before the returning blow is to be dealt, and it could be from *Perlesvaus* as well that such a detail was taken from. While we may claim that these details, of the whetstone as well as the flinch/dodge and respective reproach, may have been floating elements which did not necessarily originate in *Perlesvaus* and in French tradition, it seems to be rather coincidental that precisely the one French text which has elements found in *SGGK* but not on any other version is a text known to have been in circulation in England. Taking into account such a coincidence, we may infer or at least suspect that even though we cannot have solid evidence that *Perlesvaus* was one of the works which were owned by members of the royal court or associated lending libraries, it may have been so indeed. The *Gawain*-poet could thus have had access to it, or have heard it being recited, and this would explain the whetstone and flinching details, all the while demonstrating an instance of a French work being a source for *SGGK*.

Since in the case of *Perlesvaus* we do have some clues concerning its circulation in England, it becomes easy to speculate if the other French texts containing renditions of the beheading game were not in circulation and influential as well. As we have seen, *La Mule Sans Frein* and *Hunbaut* feature Gawain as the protagonist, as does *SGGK*, and the *Livre de Caradoc* is the most similar French rendition to *SGGK* in many aspects. Could they have been in circulation as well? In what concerns *Caradoc*, while most of the elements lacking from *Fled Bricrenn* which are found in *SGGK* are present in *Perlesvaus*, the way some of these elements are contextualised seems to be more similar to *SGGK* in the *Livre de Caradoc*, namely the initial entrance of the challenger into the Arthurian court and the issuing of a year's respite between beheadings in the context of that same court. The entrance of the challenger of the beheading game into a court and many details of his dialogue have of course a parallel in *Fled Bricrenn*, as we have observed, but the fact that a previous French text to *SGGK* already transposes the context to the Arthurian court, and also includes the detail of the year's respite later found in *SGGK*, makes one wonder if *Caradoc* or a similar version was not a possible source as well. As mentioned, *Perlesvaus* also includes the year's respite, but such an arrangement is not agreed to in the context of the Arthurian court but rather on the castle of the challenging knights. In sum, the *Livre de Caradoc* does not contain the details of the whetstone or the dodge/flinch, but *Perlesvaus* does, additionally, neither one of these romances feature Gawain as the protagonist, but *La Mule Sans Frein* does.

Therefore could we consider that both a version of the First Continuation and *Perlesvaus*, as well as a version having Gawain as the protagonist such as *La Mule Sans Frein*, could have been known by the *Gawain*-poet?

Although there are evidences that *Perlesvaus* was in circulation in England, it seems to be too much of a speculative jump to postulate that all the other beheading-game French narratives would too. Moreover, even such conjecture does not provide us with a possible scenario where the source of the *Gawain*-poet could have been solely based in the extant French works, for they lack other elements from *SGGK* which are closer to *Fled Bricrenn*, as we have discussed on our first chapter. Thus, on the basis of the hypothetic circulation of French romances alone, or of a single piece of evidence of the circulation of French romances as in the case of *Perlesvaus*, we cannot invalidate the hypothesis of direct transmission of some form of the beheading-game motif. As we shall see in the next chapter, there are evidences which may give us indications that the beheading game could have been preserved in the English tradition, independently from French influence. What we may suspect however is that French sources may have provided some elements indeed, but perhaps not the whole structure.

3.4.3 Insular Native Traditions as a Source of the Beheading Game for the *Gawain*-poet

On the matter of possible insular sources, several aspects influential in the genesis of Middle English literature, both historical and literary, do point to specific characteristics in Middle English Arthurian romance which differentiate it from the Continental tradition. In what concerns the historical context, the distance which was progressively created between England and France led to the further development of an insular identity distinct from the Continent, especially after England lost its connection with Normandy and the Magna Carta was signed (Field, 1999: 154). Such a context cannot be separated from the emergence of Middle English Arthurian romance: "It can be no coincidence that the appearance of English Arthurian literature accompanies the gathering strength of English as a literary language and the growing sense of national identity most sharply felt in relation to France" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 69). Adding to this context is the background of a literary development which saw the Anglo-Norman romance tradition laying some of the grounds which are later visible in Middle English romance: "For many of the characteristics discernible in the Anglo-Norman romance of

the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are evident in the Middle English romances that follow them" (Field, 1999: 162). As we have previously mentioned in regard to Kittredge's Anglo-Norman theory, Wace notwithstanding, there is a notable absence of Arthurian material in Anglo-Norman romance, however, with the advent of Middle English literature, the aforementioned specific characteristics of Anglo-Norman romance were joined with a different perception of the Arthurian material in England: "From the fourteenth century onwards French romance is re-interpreted for an English audience for whom Arthurian material is inescapably historic and iconic" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 69).

The result of these developments is the use of elements in English romance which are more distinctly native and have their roots in insular tradition rather than the ones characteristic of French romance: "The legendary locations of French romance - Camelot, Logres, Astolat - become recognizable English places - Carlisle, Winchester, London, Guildford - the lone knights of preference are local heroes - Perceval of Wales, Gawain of Galloway or Orkney, Tristram of Cornwall" (Batt *et al*, 2001: 69-70). It could be argued that Geoffrey of Monmouth had done the same for *Historia Brittonum*, however, there is quite a difference between returning to distinct English elements after the changes which inevitably left its mark in Arthurian literature in general due to the establishment of the Continental Arthurian tradition, than before. These arguments do not have the intention to establish that the differences *per se* between *SGGK* and the French romances, such as the inclusion of the Temptation episode, can be simply interpreted as signifying that *SGGK* did not use a French source. To embrace such idea would be misleading, since Middle English romances "...were not simple translations but rather free reimaginings of their sources turned to the needs of new situations and audiences" (Chism, 2009: 59). Field for example considers that the *Gawain*-poet "...approaches the Arthurian legend via the French romances, that are apparently also familiar to his audience. The teasing penumbra of inter-textual reference is particularly effective in its exploitation of the dual character of Gawain, by which the English Gawain is confronted by the seductress who appeals to his French reputation" (Field, 1999: 171). In other words, it seems that rather than betraying the influence of either one or the other, the *Gawain*-poet managed to produce an interplay in *SGGK* between both the French and English traditions, which is even visible in concepts which are paramount to Arthurian romance such as chivalry: "The poem produces a particularly

English picture of chivalry that is both contemporary and nostalgic, both native and continental" (Stanbury, 2009: 148).

The English elements are also strongly felt in the choice of elements which are distinctively native, thus demonstrating that such an interplay "shows a close knowledge of French romance, while the presence of insular traditions can be felt in the choice of Gawain as protagonist, and the strong depiction of locality" (Field, 1999: 171). The use of Gawain, rather than the use of popular knights from French tradition such as Lancelot, could indeed be an indication of the following of an English convention: "In the English tradition, Gawain remains the top knight of the Round Table; Lancelot is a peripheral French invention, and his affair with Guinevere, if it registered at all, seems to have been dismissed as a French slander on the great British hero" (Cooper, 2004: 34), notwithstanding the fact that Lancelot is in fact mentioned in *SGGK* (Tolkien, 2006: 33), but he does not get more of a role than simply being mentioned. Of course, arguments could be raised against the view of the primary use of Gawain as a return to a distinct English tradition, since he also has his share of prominence in French narratives. A relevant case for this matter is connected with our interests, since Gawain is the protagonist of *La Mule Sans Frein* and is a prominent figure in *Hunbaut*. Notwithstanding, while Gawain marks his presence in the aforementioned romances, it cannot be denied that, in general, characters such as Lancelot progressively replaced Gawain as the Arthurian knight *par excellence* in French tradition. Furthermore, we should consider the hypothesis that *La Mule Sans Frein* or *Hunbaut* are French examples which simply retained Gawain as a protagonist, because these narratives were more faithful to a possible original material, transmitted from insular sources, rather than to the alterations that French romance effected upon Arthurian material.

Whatever the case, the use of Gawain by the *Gawain*-poet still remains a possible evidence of his attention having been focused in distinctive English elements, especially because there are further considerations about the use of Gawain in English literature from the fourteenth century onwards. Not only did Gawain became once more the favoured protagonist of Arthurian narratives in the English tradition, his characterisation is clearly a break with his French version: "Rejecting for the most part the 'epic degeneration' that overtook Gawain in later French romance, English poets enthusiastically embraced the traditional image of him as the loyal supportive vassal,

the perfectly courteous knight, upholder of the reputation of the Round Table..." (Rogers, 2001a: 198). The fact that the *Gawain*-poet chooses (or maintains) Gawain as a protagonist thus seem to indicate a departure from French tradition and an approximation or faithfulness to a distinct English tradition, especially because notwithstanding the aforementioned intertextuality with his French persona, the portrayal of Gawain in *SGGK* as a whole seems to be more aligned with his characterisation in the English tradition: "Gawain was thus open to an almost iconographic treatment as the embodiment of certain social values. As such, he seems to have touched a nerve deep in the English psyche, as the representative man, at home in all levels of society, successfully undertaking tests and trials to enhance the reputation of his king" (Rogers, 2001a: 198). In other words, his aforementioned dual-character in *SGGK* tends more to be faithful to his English characterisation, all the while making a reference to his French one and stating a departure from it and a focus on the English Gawain.

Another one of the characteristics which further aligns *SGGK* with a distinctive English tradition is the choice of alliterative verse for the romance rather than the use of Chrétien's rhyming eight-syllable couplets, or the prose text characteristic of the later French Vulgate cycle: "The Englishness of the poem is reinforced by the fact that the poet writes here as in his other poems in forms of the alliterative verse which represent a peculiarly English tradition. There is no model among the possible French sources for the elaborate stanza-form which he used" (Brewer, 1999: 254). The choice of the alliterative verse as the format for the romance is yet another possible demonstration that, notwithstanding the apparent influence of French tradition, there were distinct elements of the English tradition observable in *SGGK*. It thus remains to be seen if the inclusion of the beheading-game motif is a result of knowledge of the French analogues or was also somehow present in the English tradition independently from these analogues. The use of elements or similarities with the Irish *Fled Bricrenn*, which are not present or are less evident in the French romances, could indeed signify that the use of the beheading-game motif was not simply drawn from French sources, but had more direct ones. Barron for instance is quick to consider that, even though French tradition provides analogues, nevertheless "close dependence upon a French original seems unlikely, less because of the structural complexity than the subtle verbal control on

which the operation and meaning of the poem depend from line to line" (Barron, 1987: 167).

There is the possibility that a beheading-game narrative circulated through oral tradition and was used by the *Gawain*-poet, with such a narrative having its origin in either a hypothetic written source closer to *Fled Bricrenn* or in an oral version of it, which had first been spread to Wales, associated with the Arthurian legend, and then transmitted to England after the Norman conquest. Such a possibility arises out of the phenomenon of popular folktale versions of Arthurian stories parallel to the literary ones, or even from written romances being adopted into oral traditions, becoming themselves a piece of folklore, due to the popularization of Arthurian heroes: "The courage, quickwittedness, and physical strength which they displayed as popular heroes persisted in their chivalric adventures, giving them wide appeal once the literary trappings of courtly romance were stripped away" (Barron, 1987: 154). W. R. J. Barron claims that the English context was especially favourable for these occurrences: "Such popularization took place very readily in England where vernacular romance was already at one remove from *roman courtois* and oral traditions of Arthurian heroes survived to become the subject of folk-romance, just as elements of chivalric romance were detached to become part of the literature of the folk" (Barron, 1987: 154). This was accompanied by a progressive change in the audiences of romance, which were not confined to the upper levels of the aristocracy or royal courts, and at the time of the alliterative revival the extension of readership to a less exclusive audience also began to include the lesser gentry or even lower classes: "It is likely enough that the audience of even the finest works of the alliterative revival included people who were not lords and ladies. Indeed there were many armigerous families in Cheshire and Lancashire who in terms of wealth and culture would scarcely be regarded as 'gentle' at all in other parts of the realm" (Bennet, 1999: 78).

Furthermore, the growing popularity of vernacular romance seems to have led to a progressive expansion of manuscript circulation: "The Alliterative Revival, in the second half of the fourteenth century, and a growing literate readership, expands this range, and many more manuscript copies of texts are found, showing that writing and reading were spreading, and were not limited either to the capital city, London, or to highly educated readers" (Carter et al: 1997: 26). The fact that a growing tradition concerning popular folk versions of Arthurian stories coincides with the approximation

of manuscript culture and readership to lower and less learned classes may be an indication that the transmission between folk narratives and learned ones could have been facilitated. Nevertheless, the *Gawain*-poet seems to be an exception in what concerns this characteristic of the alliterative revival, since, as we have discussed, many hypotheses concerning his patrons are connected with the royal court, and this seems to be verifiable in his work, since the *Gawain*-poet "...assumes a courtly audience. In his descriptions of aristocratic and courtly life, he does not seek to impress or presume to educate the people for whom he wrote. Indeed in his account of Gawain's quest he adopts, to a surprising degree, the view-point of the royal court rather than the baronial household" (Bennet, 1999: 81). Indeed, in what concerns *SGGK*, Bennet considers that it was "...a poem to be recited in the great hall for the entertainment and edification of the entire court at a Christmas feast" (Bennet, 1999: 81).

Nevertheless, even if the *Gawain*-poet was indeed connected to a royal court rather than simply to a provincial or baronial household, and even if such connection allowed the already learned poet to have access to the Arthurian French tradition, this does not mean that he was impervious to whatever popular or folk traditions were current in his time and in his region concerning Arthurian traditions, nor to the trend in returning to Arthurian features typical of the English tradition. It is undeniable indeed that the literary prowess demonstrated by the *Gawain*-poet in *SGGK* surpasses other fourteenth-century and post-fourteenth-century English Arthurian works. Furthermore, the poem also demonstrates an acquaintance with French literature, as Ad Putter has argued (1995). Both the talent of the *Gawain*-poet and the debt to French Arthurian romance are indeed verifiable in the structure of *SGGK*: "The fabric in which it is clothed combines themes, motifs, conventions found in the most sophisticated French romances, notably those of Chrétien de Troyes and his continuators and contemporaries, deployed with a structured ambivalence, humour, irony and verbal dialectic reminiscent of the expressive techniques of Chrétien" (Barron, 2001: 165). Nonetheless, the fact is that it also displays elements which seem to point out at a revival of an English-specific tradition, as we have underlined. This could mean nothing more than a stylistic choice of the author, but in the context of the alliterative revival, it could also be following a particular pattern.

As we underlined, the choice of the alliterative verse *per se* already indicates the Englishness of the poem. Therefore we are faced with the question on whether elements

in *SGGK*, such as the beheading game, were included in the poem deriving from an English tradition (either popular through versions which had entered the realm of folklore, or learned through unknown written renditions) or from the French tradition. The character of the Green Knight represents a perfect analogy of this dilemma: his description contains both knightly features reminiscent of the characterisation given to some of the challengers in the French versions, as well as the more savage, ominous and brute characteristics which are reminiscent of the Irish challengers found in the earliest examples from *Fled Bricrenn*. It is not impossible, of course, for the *Gawain*-poet to have had access to both the French renditions as well as to a folk rendition closer to *Fled Bricrenn* found in the English tradition.

A possible parallel example for clarifying such a hypothesis, in what concerns a possible folk rendition of the beheading game in England, may be found in Wales, although we must keep in mind that different contexts do not necessarily mean the exact same development. If, as we have suspected, Wales was the intermediary for Irish elements to be transmitted to the Anglo-Norman *milieu*, including the beheading game from *Fled Bricrenn*, and if it was from Wales as well that Arthurian traditions were first transmitted, such a transmission most possibly occurred at a popular level as well. If we may remember, it was in the context of the Norman invasion that a phenomenon of bilingualism progressively took place in the Welsh marches, and the transmission to both England and the Continent must have occurred in this context. Welsh traditions must have thus entered the English tradition in this way, and the geographical proximity between England and Wales must have strengthened such a cultural sharing for far after the dismemberment of the Angevin Empire and the fallout between England and France. The transmission of Welsh elements must have thus become more consolidated in England, with these elements becoming a part of English traditions as well. In fact it is curious that the early fourteenth century represents an "...increasing political, economic and social integration between Wales and England..." (Lloyd-Morgan, 1991: 194).

In what concerns the transmission to the Continent, Wales was not impermeable to the inverse as well, in other words, to the influence of the French adaptations, which was also felt in Wales, most notably through translations of French works into Welsh or the evident use of French conventions, since "Combining new narrative motifs and a fresh group of characters with familiar Welsh Arthurian tradition not only extended the

repertoire of available stories, it also opened new possibilities in other ways" (Lloyd-Morgan, 1991: 198). However, as Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has demonstrated in her study on the subject (1991: 193-205), these works were adapted into Welsh in accordance with a native setting and characters: "It is significant that the redactors not only recognized that King Arthur and the knights in the imported romances could be identified with the characters with similar names in their own traditions, but were also able to relocate them in the Welsh story-telling context" (Lloyd-Morgan, 1991: 205). In sum, rather than simply translating the Arthurian works of French origin, there was a combination of both traditions which testifies to the enduring continuity of the native Welsh tradition: "Whereas the traditional Welsh Arthurian stories would be passed on from one generation to the next, more or less intact, if subject to minor variation, combining native and foreign elements gave the redactor scope for providing something more than a story as an end in itself" (Lloyd-Morgan, 1991: 198). While this is a specific development in the Welsh context, and we cannot simply equate two different contexts for we cannot ignore possible different circumstances, such a context is remarkably similar to what has been stated regarding the apparent interplay and intertextuality between English and French tradition in *SGGK*.

As we have stated, elements such as the dual character of Gawain, the approach to the concept of chivalry or most notably, a combination of knightly and churlish features in the Green Knight, do seem to illustrate a combination of different traditions. Therefore, it is easy to wonder if in the aftermath of the fallout between England and France, and the progressive revival of native features, there was not in the English context a similar phenomenon to the one just described in Wales in what concerns the use of French influences in combination with the native tradition. What is most relevant in this idea is that it would imply a continuous circulation of native traditions that would not be disrupted by French influence and would continue alongside it, as it seems to have happened in Wales: "From the thirteenth century onwards, therefore, evidence appears of increasing interest in Continental versions of the Arthurian legend, an interest which persists well beyond the medieval period, whilst at the same time the earlier native traditions continued to circulate" (Lloyd-Morgan, 1991: 204). Moreover, such circulation seems not to have been exclusive to learned and aristocratic circles, but to have been pervasive on a popular level: "Meanwhile, amongst the common people, *y*

werin, Arthurian stories continued to circulate orally well into the nineteenth century" (Lloyd-Morgan, 1991: 204).

If we remember once again the original context of transmission from Wales to the Anglo-Norman kingdoms post-Norman conquest, we underlined and quoted Rachel Bromwich's remarks on how such transmission must have happened not solely through the Welsh, Breton and Anglo-Norman elites, but also through "...merchants, soldiers, Crusaders, and, no doubt (remembering Chaucer), by pilgrims on their extended travels" (Bromwich, 1991: 289), thus pointing out at a popular transmission through the common people. The transmission between Wales and England most possibly had a popular level as well, leading to a progressive corpus of tales in the folklore of England which had its roots in Wales, where Arthurian ones (including the ones with Irish elements such as the beheading game) would be included. While during the golden years of the Angevin Empire the aristocracy would be more focused in the Anglo-Norman and French traditions, and consequently in the French Arthurian tradition, in the fourteenth century the growing sense of an insular identity and language, along with the progressive cultural and political distance and animosity with the Continent, led to a literary activity that turned itself to these folk traditions, notwithstanding the fact that French traditions also remained influential. Poets and learned clerics now paid attention to these folk traditions along with the learned ones, especially since, as we have underlined above, there was a progressive change in the audiences of romance, which were now not necessarily aristocratic, thus leading to an even greater proximity with folk traditions.

We cannot simply speculate without examples the developments we have been hypothesizing however, if there was indeed a popular transmission between Wales and England of elements which were later used in the formation of a native English Arthurian tradition, at a popular level, we must seek out possible clues which may reinforce this idea. It must be clarified at this point however, if it is not so already, that such possible developments are not meant to say that English authors used Welsh sources as an alternative to French ones, only that Wales may have been the original source of transmission of some elements. By the fourteenth century certainly these elements had already become a part of native English tradition independently of Wales, and it is this native English tradition which could be the source for English poets, not the Welsh one. A possible demonstration of these developments may be found in the

use of elements from Arthurian folk traditions as a pervasive feature of other English Gawain romances composed between the fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, which are considered "folk romances"[227] (Rogers, 2001a: 197-199). Although they are part of a flourishing English Arthurian literature composed between these centuries, mainly comprising prose and rimed romances, which still betray some influence from French sources, it is also true that "in their adaptations and often in their translations as well, the English writers, who were addressing a later audience, tended to create a type of romance quite distinct from the French" (Ackerman, 1959: 481). Additionally, it is notable that in the case of the Gawain romances the distinction from French romance is even more observable: "One peculiarity of the English Gawain poems is that, as a group, they are far more independent of earlier French literature than the English works devoted to other heroes" (Ackerman, 1959: 493).

What is most relevant about this distinctive form of English romance is that one of the characteristics which create such distinction is a structure which resembles the one of folktales, rather than the more literary French romance: "The consequent exposure of narrative patterns highlights the extent to which the English romances share the structures, motifs and expressive means of folk-tale. Its narrative circularity, tripartite structures and formulaic characters feature in French romance also, but there such stereotypes are disguised by art and rhetoric" (Rogers, 2001a: 197). Taking into account what has been said about a possible progressive use of folk and popular narratives by poets and clerics in the English context, the proximity of these romances with a folktale structure seems to reflect this exact same phenomenon.

As we have stated regarding the alliterative revival, the use of English-specific elements may indicate that such a process could have begun in the fourteenth century.

[227] These folk romances comprise poems from the fifteenth century found in several different manuscripts, such as *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle* (MS Brogynton II ff. 12-26, formerly NLW Aberystwyth MS Porkington 10), *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C. 86), *Sir Corneus* (Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Ashmole 61) and *The Avowynge of King Arthur, Sir Gawan, Sir Kaye, and Sir Bawdewyn of Bretan* (Ireland Blackburne MS). Other folk romances and ballad versions however, are found in a single manuscript, the Percy Folio MS, a book of English ballads and poems compiled in the seventeenth century although it includes material composed in previous centuries, as is the case with *The Greene Knight*, *The Turke and Gowin*, *King Arthur and King Cornwall* and *The Boy and the Mantle*. The Percy Folio also includes later ballad versions of *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle* and *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*, named in these versions as *The Carle off Carlile* and *The Marriage of Sir Gawaine*, respectively. Most of them feature Gawain as the main protagonist, as is the case in both versions involving the *Carle of Carelyle* and both versions of the Wedding/Marriage of Gawain, as well as *The Greene Knight* and the *Turke and Gowin*.

In fact, even though what we have concerning these folk romances are texts from manuscripts from between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is quite probable that they have earlier origins: "About a dozen of these narratives survive; they almost certainly circulated from the thirteenth century on, but extant manuscripts (all of which show signs of modest origins and constant use) date from the fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries" (Hahn, 2000: 222). With this scenario in mind, is it possible that *SGGK* followed a similar pattern to these folk romances and included elements which were drawn from native folklore? As we have underlined, *SGGK* is quite sophisticated however, and such literary sophistication would hardly place it amongst the modest fifteenth and sixteenth-century folk romances. Nevertheless, as we have stated, *SGGK* also includes distinct English elements which may point towards the use of motifs also found at the level of folklore, and this could include the beheading game. W. R. J. Barron seems to arrive at a similar conclusion, when commenting on the possibilities surrounding the intended audiences for the poem:

> Any judgment on the make-up of the audience must take into account the multiple levels on which the poem may be read and the wide variety of materials on which it draws. Among the latter are many types of folk-lore, from major plot motifs, such as the Beheading Game, to trifling but significant details like the flint-fire which springs from the hooves of their horses as the Green Knight rides away from Camelot...
> (Barron, 2001: 166)

In fact, by further studying the structure of *SGGK*, Barron has identified a deliberate "...fusion of the linear structure of romance with the ring structure of oral literature, folk-tale, ballad..." (Barron, 2001: 181), in order to subvert the anticipations of the audience. Therefore, while we may identify the French influence and literary sophistication characteristic of romance in the structure of *SGGK*, rather than the folktale structure of the aforementioned folk romances, an in-depth analysis of the poem and a deconstruction of its structure does reveal indeed that there are reminiscences of a folktale structure in *SGGK* as well. Furthermore, it is quite significant that many of the motifs used in the folk romances involving Gawain seem to be related to some of the ones in *SGGK*, along with others also suspected of being of Irish provenance or Welsh. Both the *Turke and Gowin* and *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle*, as well as the latter's ballad version *The Carle off Carlile* contain similar motifs to *SGGK*, while *The Greene Knight* is a clear retelling of the same tale.

The two versions of the tale of the Carl of Carlisle are quite similar, although the Percy Folio's later version *The Carle off Carlile* (henceforth *Carle*) contains particular details which connect it even further with the Middle English narrative in comparison with *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle* (henceforth *Carelyle*). Both versions are mainly concerned with the motif of the "Imperious Host", thus leading to immediate comparisons to *SGGK*'s variation of this same motif. The main plot is basically the same in the two versions, Gawain, Kay and Baldwin (a bishop in this tale) stray away from a hunting party led by King Arthur, and have to look for shelter to spend the night, and decide to go to the castle of the Carl of Carlisle, even though the Carl is known for mistreating his guests. On the Carl's castle the three are put to the test by the Carl in terms of their obedience and courtesy to the host. Kay and Baldwin demonstrate rudeness and are awarded some buffets by the Carl, while Gawain always follows the latter's requests and behaves in accordance to the rules of courtesy, and is thus treated with fairness. In the two versions the test in what concerns Gawain culminates in the latter being led by the Carl to share a bed with his wife, although the Carl orders Gawain to stop his advances on his wife just before they have sex, with Gawain obeying and then being offered the Carl's daughter to spend the night instead. Such a treatment of the Imperious Host theme, with emphasis on the obedience of guest to host is strongly similar to certain French romances such as *Le Chevalier à l'épée*[228] and curiously in another episode of *Hunbaut*[229] (unrelated to the beheading-challenge

[228] *Le Chevalier à l'épée* is a thirteenth-century anonymous French romance with Gauvain (Gawain) as its main protagonist, and survives in a single manuscript (MS Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 354, f. 16rb-26va). In the section of the narrative which presents similarities to the Carl tales, Gauvain is riding out in search of adventures and he meets a fellow knight who invites him to his castle, but says to Gauvain he must go in advance in order to prepare everything for his guest, and so he does. On the way to the castle Gauvain passes by four shepherds and they say that no guest returns from the castle to which Gauvain is headed, because the lord of the castle kills every guest who does not obey him. When Gauvain arrives at the castle he is well received, and tries to always follow the commands of his host in regular courtly activities such as dining and being courteous to damsels. The host eventually introduces Gawain to his beautiful daughter, who warns Gawain not to be disobedient to his father in any way. Later on, Gauvain's host insists that Gauvain sleeps in his own bed with his daughter, whom warns Gauvain however that there is a magical sword which will slash him if he attempts that have sex with her. Gauvain nevertheless attempts to do so twice but receives two slight cuts and gives up. On the morning the host is disappointed by seeing Gauvain alive, and being impressed, offers his daughter in marriage to Gauvain, who sleeps undisturbed with the maiden on the next night, and after a while on the castle departs with her for the Arthurian court. The tale then has further episodes, but this is the one related with the Imperious Host motif and the one comparable with the Carl narratives. An edition of the original text may be found in *Two Old French Gauvain Romances* (Johnston, R. C. et al, 1972) and modern English translation in *Three Arthurian Romances* (Arthur, 1996).

[229] The Imperious Host episode in Hunbaut is concerned with the visit by Gawain and Hunbaut to a castle whose rich lord demands of his guests to obey him. While on their way there Hunbaut informs Gawain that he must obey the castle's lord in every way, because hanging is this lord's punishment to every guest who defies his commands. Hunbaut also warns Gawain that this lord will sit him besides his beautiful

episode), with both including Gawain as well. This may lead to assumptions that there is French derivation at play, and there may have been some influence indeed, however, there is an important element which differentiates the Carl's tales from the French ones, namely the description of the Carl, which presents a potential parallel to the beheading-game narratives. Contrarily to the tales of the *Chevalier* and *Hunbaut*, where the hosts are ordinary knights, the description of the Carl resembles the gigantic and churlish characterisation of many of the beheading-game challengers. In the two versions, the Carl is first introduced in the company of his pets, a bull, a boar, a lion and a bear, which could point towards a wildling nature, an interpretation which can be made also of Cú Roí in *Fled Bricrenn* and of the Green Knight in *SGGK*, but it is the description of the Carl himself who provides the most comparable characteristics. The earliest *Carle of Carlyle* version thus presents him in the following manner:

> The Carl looked at the knights with a stern, fierce expression; he seemed a fearsome man. With great cheeks and a broad face, an aquiline nose and generously proportioned, he had a large expanse between his brows, his mouth was huge and his beard gray. His hair lay over his breast as broad as a fan. Between his shoulders, anyone who could judge properly could see that he was two tailor's yards broad. Sir Kay was greatly astonished then.
>
> He was nine tailor's yards in height, and so it would be very surprising if his legs had not been long and powerful, too. Of the largest of all the posts in that hall, there was none but that his thighs were thicker. His arms were huge, without a doubt, and indeed his fingers, too, which were as big as any one of our legs. Whoever stood up to a blow from his hand was not weak, I know - I can safely swear to it.[230]
>
> (Brewer, 1992: 172)

In the case of the *Carle* version, it likewise includes most of the same features in the characterisation of the Carl observed in the *Carle of Carlyle* rendition, even though it is slightly less detailed:

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daughter, who loves Gawain but is terrified of her father, and thus Gawain must be careful in his conduct towards her. Gawain claims that he shall behave courteously and obey the host. When they arrive at the castle, both knights are well received, with Gawain being complimented by the lord of the castle and placed near his daughter at dinner as Hunbaut had predicted, while the latter stays in the company of the host. During dinner Gawain and the host's daughter become enamoured however, and Gawain forgets Hunbaut's warnings, but this does not seem to disturb the host. At bedtime, the host follows her daughter when she retires for her chamber and detains her before she enters, reproving her for leaving such courteous company, and tells her to accept a goodbye kiss from Gawain. However, Gawain gives not one but four kisses to the damsel, making the lord of the castle furious since he had solely authorized a single kiss, and therefore Gawain had disobeyed his orders. The host then orders his knights to imprison Gawain and pluck out his eyes, but his knights protest against such misdeed due to Gawain's status as nephew of Arthur, and the lord of the castle yields and accepts the apologies of Gawain, just warning him to be careful the next time. In that same night the host's daughter visits Gawain in secret and they spend the night, and in the early morning both Gawain and Hunbaut depart from the castle without further trouble and without seeing the lord of the castle again.

[230] See Appendix I, note 83.

Heere the Carle sate in his chaire on hye
With his legg cast over the other knee.
His mouth was wyde and his beard was gray;
His lockes on his shoulders lay.
Betweene his browes, certaine,
Itt was large there a spann.
With two great eyen brening as fyer,
Lord, hee was a lodlye syer.
Over his sholders he bare a bread
Three taylors yards, as clarkes doe reede.
His fingars were like to teddar-stakes,
And his hands like breads that wives may bake.
Fifty cubitts he was in height.
Lord, he was a lothesome wight!
(Hahn, 1995: lines 175-188)

The Carl is therefore described as a gigantic and rough bearded man, with a hideous and fearsome appearance capable of causing a strong impression upon his guests, thus drawing a parallel to the gigantic and ominous-looking appearance of the churlish challengers[231] of the beheading-game narratives, especially Cú Roí/*bachlach* and some aspects of the Green Knight. Of course, such a description is not exclusive to the beheading-game churlish challengers, the Carl represents a familiar figure which is not unusual not only in Arthurian romance but in other traditions in general, as G. Rogers points out: "The Carl is a folk-tale ogre, and an exemplum Imperious Host, and a typical Arthurian antagonist, who ends up being accepted into the world of the Round Table" (Rogers, 2001b: 207). The context where this ogre-figure is placed however, with particular details which seem reminiscent of some beheading-game narratives, is what may point to a possible connection with the ogre-like figure of the churlish challengers rather than the conventional ogre. The affinities with other examples do exist indeed, and we may highlight several, including many narratives which are relevant for our study: "the Carl has affinities with such characters as Curoi in *Bricriu's Feast*, and the giant Yspaddaden Pen Kawr in *Culhwch and Olwen*. The King of Man in *Turke*, King Cornwall in *Cornwall*, and the hosts in *Le Chevalier à l'Epée* and *Hunbaut* are likewise brothers under the skin" (Rogers, 2001b: 206). Nevertheless, the mentioned affinity with Cú Roí immediately stands out, not because it is the most relevant comparison for our subject, but because there are striking details strongly similar between the Carl and Cú Roí in his *bachlach* form, namely in their churlish appearance.

[231] The word "Carl" itself has an etymological connection with "Churl", with the Middle English "Carle" being a possible borrowing from the Old Norse "Karl", which is a cognate to the English "Churl". Both words thus refer to the same meaning (Hensleigh, 1862: 131, 150).

All the mentioned affinities by Rogers in what concerns the Imperious Host motif are indeed correct, but all these other Imperious Hosts lack the churlish and gigantic description. The exception is the giant from *Culhwch and Olwen*, who does indeed share the gigantic characteristic, however, he is used in the context of a pure "Giant's daughter" motif, and this seems to be the main motif rather than an Imperious Host one or a churlish shapeshifter. Ackerman argues that the motif of the Giant's daughter has indeed been combined into the plot of the Carle narratives as well (1959: 494), since the Carl's daughter ends up becoming the bride and wife of Gawain. Notwithstanding, the Carl does not die because of giving away his daughter (as is a characteristic of the motif), and the use of the motif seems to result from a combination indeed rather than being the main motif. Moreover, the characterisation of the Carl points to a churlish supernatural figure, which although gigantic it is not a full-fledged giant as is Yspaddaden Pen Kawr, and this reminds us of Cú Roí/*bachlach*. The churlish nature of the Carl is of course the main point of connection, but even very particular details in his description may lead us to a comparison: in *Carelyle* it is said that the fingers of the Carl were "as big as any one of our legs"[232] (Brewer, 1992:172), whereas in the Percy Folio it is mentioned that "His fingars were like to teddar-stakes" (Hahn, 1995: line 185). While it is not too much of a close resemblance, and may be purely coincidental, it is interesting that in *Fled Bricrenn*, there is also a reference to the fingers of the churlish challenger, where it is said in the description of the *bachlach* that "Each finger as thick as another person's wrist"[233] (Henderson, 1899: 117). There are however other instances in the context of the narratives which make the Carl closer to Bertilak/Green Knight rather than Cú Roí, not in what concerns their description, but in a similar context as Imperious Host. Coupled with the obedience of the requests of the Host, the temptation of the Carl's wife seems reminiscent of Bertilak's requests for the exchange of winnings and the temptation posed to Gawain by his wife. The Percy Folio *Carle* presents a further reminiscence by mentioning that Gawain is awarded three kisses to the Carl's wife:

> The Carle said, "Gawaine, of curtesye
> Gett into this bedd with this faire ladye.
> Kisse thou her thrice before mine eye:
> Looke thou doe no other villanye."
> (Hahn, 1995: lines 335-338)

[232] See Appendix I, note 84.
[233] See Appendix I, note 85.

If we might remember the Imperious Host/Temptation section in *SGGK*, Gawain receives the visit of Bertilak's wife three times, in the first visit he receives a kiss, in the second two kisses and finally three kisses in the third time. While the context is obviously different, the fact that in *Carle* Gawain is allowed three kisses to the host's wife does seem to be hinting at a possible connection. Such a suspicion is further strengthened by the resonance of Bertilak found in some aspects of the Carl: "The most intriguing parallels however, lie with that other Imperious but Hospitable Host, Bertilak, in *Sir Gawain*. Both have castles with strong Otherworld overtones, both have designs on Gawain, and both employ an ironic, epigrammatic mode of speech when addressing him. Both have alternative personalities" (Rogers, 2001b: 206). There are however, explicit differences as well, since Bertilak, as Rogers mentions, does not mistreat his guest, and his Bertilak persona, which is the one to play host, is differentiated from his Green Knight one, which in terms of behaviour and aspect could be closer to the Carl. Rogers further underlines how this is a striking difference: "whereas Bertilak's Mr. Hyde personality is neatly stowed in the figure of the Green Knight, the Carl has to suffer his good and bad aspects within the same body" (Rogers, 2001b: 206).

The coincidental aspects nevertheless still resonate strongly due to the similar context, especially in the Percy Folio version where the detail of the three kisses is strongly reminiscent of *SGGK*. Furthermore, the Percy Folio version has further details which might reinforce the possibility of some connection with *SGGK*, as we shall presently see. In the *Carelyle* version the Carl eventually reveals to Gawain he had made a vow twenty years prior that he had to kill every guest who did not show obedience to his host, until one appeared who did so completely, and Gawain is the first to finally do so. The Carl then shows Gawain the bloody remains of his former victims, and vows to build a chantry in their honour (which eventually became the cathedral of Carlisle) and to treat future guests with fairness. The three men are then offered gifts, with Gawain being offered the hand of the Carl's daughter in marriage, and King Arthur himself is invited to the Carl's castle. The tale then ends with a feast hosted by the Carl, where Arthur makes him a knight of the round table, Gawain marries his daughter, and all is well. The *Carle* version however, even though the ending *per se* is similar, has an important difference in the Carl's revelation regarding his motives for mistreating and killing the guests who did not show obedience, since it is not a vow but a curse which has plagued the Carl for forty years. In order to break the curse the Carl presents

Gawain with a sword and orders the latter to behead him, for the only way to break the curse is decapitation by the hand of a knight of the round table:

> The Carle tooke Gawaine to a chamber gay
> Where were hanginge swords towe.
> The Carle soone tooke one of tho
> And sayd to the knight then,
> “Gawaine, as thou art a man,
> Take this sword and stryke of my head.”
> “Nay,” said Gawaine, “I had rather be dead.
> For I had rather suffer pine and woe
> Or ever I wold that deede doe.”
> The Carle sayd to Sir Gawaine,
> “Looke thou doe as I thee saine,
> And therof be not adread.
> But shortly smite of my head:
> For if thou wilt not doe itt tyte
> For ssooth thy head I will ofsmyte.”
> To the Carle said Sir Gawaine,
> “Sir, your bidding shall be done.”
> He stroke the head the body froe:
> And he stood up a man thoe
> Of the height of Sir Gawaine -
> The certaine soothe, withouten laine.
> The Carle sayd, "Gawaine, God blese thee!
> For thou hast delivered mee
> From all false witchcrafft -
> I am delivred att the last.
> By nigromancé thus was I shapen
> Till a knight of the Round Table
> Had with a sword smitten of my head,
> If he had grace to doe that deede.
> Itt is forty winters agoe
> Since I was transformed soe.
> Since then none lodged within this woonn
> But I and my whelpes driven them downe.
> And but if hee did my bidding soone
> I killed him and drew him downe,
> Every one but only thee.
> Christ grant thee of his mercye:
> (Hahn, 1995: lines 380-416)

This version thus introduces the motif of the “Disenchantment by Decapitation”, folktale motif D711 from Thompson’s Index, which is based, as the name indicates, in the breaking of an enchantment upon a bewitched person through that person’s decapitation. Therefore, it presents an important difference in comparison with the beheading-game motif, however, the fact that it also implies decapitation, and that the beheaded character reveals himself to be a shapeshifter, in a narrative which also displays the Imperious Host motif with similar outlines in what concerns the role of the

Carl's wife, creates the suspicion that the use of the motif is somehow related with the beheading game, especially in connection with *SGGK*. In comparison with the *Carelyle* version, the Percy Folio version is undoubtedly closer to *SGGK* and the differences pointed out by Rogers between the Carl and Bercilak are less evident, for while in *Carelyle* there is not an alter-ego to the Carl, in *Carle* the Carl is transformed by beheading into a normal man of regular stature, thus having an alter-ego to his "Mr. Hyde", as did Bercilak/Green Knight. Coupled with the Imperious Host motif and the detail of the three kisses, together with the use of a motif which is also based upon a supernatural result from beheading, even though it is not a beheading game, there are more than enough reasons to suspect a connection. This connection however seems to be confusing, for there are elements which point out towards the Carl being based upon a Cú Roí-figure, while others point towards Bercilak/Green Knight.

A similar confusion is found in the combination of motifs used and from where they might have been drawn from. Even though the insertion of the temptation of the Carl's wife does seem indeed to be drawn from *SGGK*, the Imperious Host motif as it is presented in both narratives is quite more similar with the mentioned French narratives of *Le Chevalier à l'épée* and *Hunbaut*, since it is focused in obedience to the host in a much closer similarity to these narratives than with the request for the exchange of winnings of Bercilak. Moreover, both these French Gawain romances involve the host's daughter, who is connected to the obedience tests and who becomes a lover of Gawain, an element which is also present in the Carl's narratives. The similarity with the French romances coupled with the particular details of the tempting wife and the three kisses may lead to the possibility that the Carl narratives were influenced by both the French narratives and *SGGK* or a similar version such as *The Greene Knight*. The French narratives provided the motif of the Imperious Host and a modification of the Giant's daughter motif, while the detail of the tempting wife was drawn from *SGGK*, with the Percy Folio version further strengthening it with the three kisses detail.

On this note it is particularly interesting that the Percy Folio *Greene Knight* includes the three kisses motif in a single moment, similarly to the *Carle* and in contrast with the more complex ascending awarding of kisses during three visits in *SGGK*, thus hinting at a possible drawing of this detail from its Percy Folio companion rather than from *SGGK*. This would not be the only clue to borrowing from the other Percy Folio narratives, since there is a suspicion that the motif of the Disenchantment by

Decapitation added in the *Carle* version in relation to the *Carelyle* one may be a result of influence from the *Turke and Gowin* tale (which as we will see also includes this motif) rather than from a common influence: "*Carle* introduces the motif of Disenchantment by Decapitation, a motif possibly borrowed from its Percy Folio Companion, *Turke*, by a redactor unhappy with the idea of such bloodshed ensuing from a mere vow" (Rogers, 2001b: 207).

With this being said, it would seem that the *Carl* narratives can be a combination of influences from the Imperious Host French narratives with elements from *SGGK* and from other Percy Folio narratives in the case of the *Carle* version. The Carl has closer aspects to Cú Roí however than with the Green Knight, since the Carl lacks the knightly aspects which are mixed in the half-churlish half-knightly characterisation of the Green Knight, and seems to retain uniquely the churlish aspects. It is curious however that such a figure also drew to itself a decapitation motif, and the use of elements from *SGGK* also implies the notion of a parallel with Bercilak/Green Knight. It is possible that the Carl himself is not based on the Green Knight after all but rather on a popular churlish/gigantic figure, which was then re-used in the Carl narratives. While in the *Carelyle* narrative this figure is mostly combined with the Imperious Host motif, with the tempting wife being added due to noticing the similarity with *SGGK*'s own Imperious Host-like motif, in the *Carle* the use of the Disenchantment by Decapitation motif may result from the notion that such a figure should be associated with some form of beheading, thus picking this variant motif of magical decapitation rather than the beheading game from *The Greene Knight*. This is however a hypothesis which requires further support, and the other Gawain folk romances may reveal similar possible connections which might reinforce it.

In the *Turke and Gowin* (henceforth the *Turke*), the character of the Turk is represented as a broad figure, although not high in stature, who is not knightly and enters the court of Arthur asking for an exchange of blows, in a clear parallel to *SGGK*, although in here these buffets are weaponless and do not imply decapitation:

> He was not hye, but he was broad,
> And like a Turke he was made
> Both legg and thye;
> And said, "Is there any will, as a brother,
> To give a buffett and take another?
> And iff any soe hardy bee?"
> (Hahn, 1995: lines 13-18)

As in *SGGK*, eventually Gawain accepts the challenge and gives the Turk the blow. The return buffet is not handed however, nor is there an established agreement to when will it be, and adding to the lack of decapitation or even a weapon, the parallel of the Turk's entrance with *SGGK* ends here. Moreover, in order to receive the return blow Gawain ends up departing in the company of the Turk and together they sail to the Isle of Man and to the castle of the King of Man, who is a heathen sultan and has giants as his followers. In the castle they go through several trials and adventures, which include a game of tennis with the giants, the lifting of an enormous iron fire-place, and the defeat of a giant holding a cauldron of boiling lead. In all these challenges it is the Turk who plays the leading part: he is the one to be decisive in the tennis game, he is the one to lift and swing the fireplace, and finally, with the help of a magical garment of invisibility, he is the one to throw the final giant into the boiling cauldron and to throw the King of Man into the fire after he refuses to embrace Christianity.

The role of the Turk as the helpful companion of Gawain, not to say the true hero who overcomes most of the trials and tests which both face, seems to be an instance of the folktale motif of the helpful dwarf (motif F451.5.1 of Thompson's Index), which has in here been combined with an initial challenge for an exchange of blows. Other motifs seem to also have been combined into the narrative and possibly drawn from other sources, as is the case with several episodes in the castle of the King of Man, which are recognized by Ackerman as presenting a parallel to and most possibly as having been drawn from the twelfth-century non-Arthurian *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*[234]: "the lifting of the brass tennis ball by the Turk corresponds to William

[234] The *Pèlerinage* was found in a single manuscript (MS London, British Library, Royal, 16. E. VIII, f. 131ra-144ra), which has been lost since 1879, and its date of composition was possibly c. 1140. The tale is concerned with a journey by Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers to Jerusalem under the pretence of a pilgrimage. The true reason for the journey however is that when asked if Charlemagne was the most handsome king in the world, Charlemagne's wife answers that Byzantine Emperor Hugo is the most handsome, leading to Charlemagne's outrage and to his decision on meeting such emperor. Charlemagne's retinue do indeed go to Jerusalem where they meet the Patriarch, however on their way back they stop in Constantinople and meet Hugo who is indeed handsome and welcomes them courteously on his palace, which is built over a pole and revolves with the wind. Charlemagne and his Peers are then hosted in a beautiful room, where they start to drink and to boast about their abilities, claiming that they are capable of marvellous and impossible feats. Unknown to them there was however a spy on the room, and in the next day Hugo confronts them with their boasting, making them return in shame to their chambers. After some praying by Charlemagne and his men an Angel appears, and tells them he will help them accomplish the claimed feats. Charlemagne then informs Hugo that they can perform the feats they have boasted about indeed, and Hugo puts them to the test. Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers accomplish all the deeds they said they could do with the help of the Angel and impress Hugo, who becomes a vassal of Charlemagne. Charlemagne and his retinue afterwards return home and Charlemagne reconciles with his wife and vows to become more pious. An edition and translation can be found in Burgess et al (1988).

of Orange's feat with the huge *pelotte* in the *Pélerinage*, the tossing of the giant into the cauldron is reminiscent of the boast of Ernalt to the effect that he can sit in a bath of molten lead, and the Turk's invisible garment is similar in function to Aimer's 'chapel' or cap" (Ackerman, 1959: 496). Even the role of the Turk as the helpful attendant is seen by Ackerman as being a possible reminiscence of this same narrative: "the role of the Turk in this series of tasks is roughly the same as that of the angel in the *Pèlerinage*" (Ackerman, 1959: 496).

Perhaps not coincidently, the tale of *King Arthur and King Cornwall*[235], also present in the Percy Folio MS, also presents undeniable parallels to this same French tale, thus presenting yet other example of relationship between the narratives found in this manuscript. In fact, it is curious that Sir Bredbeddle, the Green Knight from the Percy Folio tale of the same name, is one of Arthur's knights in this narrative, and the one to have the most relevant role in overcoming the challenges in the tale, thus further pointing to intertextuality between the narratives of the Percy Folio.

Returning to the matter of the *Turke*, the use of the helpful dwarf motif together with the possible influence from the *Pèlerinage* seems to be completely unrelated to the beheading-game narratives. However, there is the presence of both an initial challenge and, as we will presently see, a decapitation episode in the narrative which redirect us to our subject of study: after the tests and trials placed by the King of Man, eventually Gawain and the Turk kill the Heathen King and emerge victorious, in large part due to the actions of the Turk, and at that point the latter dismisses his right to a return blow, and rather presents a sword to Gawain in order for the latter to behead him:

> He tooke forth a bason of gold
> As an Emperour washe shold,
> As fell for his degree.

[235] Another tale from the Percy Folio MS, *King Arthur and King Cornwall* presents a narrative which describes the voyage of Arthur and four of his knights (Gawain, Bredbeddle, Tristrem and Murramiles) in disguise to the castle of King Cornwall, due to the provocation of Guinevere, who claims that King Cornwall's possessions surpass Arthur's. Upon arrival at this castle, King Cornwall boasts of his superiority to Arthur and of having fathered a daughter with Guinevere, and mentions the possession of a magical horse and magical items (a horn and a sword), together with a fire-breathing creature with seven heads called Burlow Beanie. This enrages Arthur who wishes to kill his rival, and Gawain who desires to abduct his daughter. During the night King Cornwall conceals Burlow Beanie in order for the latter to spy on the Arthurian knights, but the creature is discovered and a battle ensues. Sir Bredbeddle manages to subdue the creature with a holy book and the creature afterwards obeys him. With the help of Burlow Beanie, Bredbeddle then takes control of a golden wand which controls all the other magical possessions of King Cornwall, the horse, the horn and the sword, and presents the sword to Arthur, who uses it to behead his rival, while Gawain abducts his daughter, and the Arthurian retinue returns home. An edition of the text can be found in Hahn's *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (1995).

He tooke a sword of mettle free,
Saies “If ever I did any thing for thee,
Doe for me in this stead:
Take here this sword of steele
That in battell will bite weele,
Therwith strike of my head.”

“That I forefend!” said Sir Gawaine,
“For I wold not have thee slaine
For all the gold soe red.”
“Have done, Sir Gawaine! I have no dread.
But in this bason let me bleed,
That standeth here in this steed,
“And thou shalt see a new play,
With helpe of Mary that mild mayd
That saved us from all dread.”
He drew forth the brand of steele
That in battell bite wold weele,
And there stroke of his head.

And when the blood in the bason light,
He stood up a stalwortht Knight
That day, I undertake,
And song “‘Te Deum Laudamus’ -
Worshipp be to our Lord Jesus
That saved us from all wracke!
(Hahn, 1995: lines 268-294)

The beheading thus has a different result from the beheading-game narratives, a curse was set upon the Turk, who after decapitation becomes the knight Sir Gromer, thus being yet another example of the “Disenchantment by Decapitation” motif which had been observed in the Carl narratives, and indeed perhaps the source of the latter. The breaking of an enchantment together with the particular figure of the Turk as the helper of Gawain are two of the elements which set the tone reminiscent of folktales which hovers over the narrative: “Central to the poem’s appeal is the unlikely pairing of the flower of English chivalry and a mysterious ‘Turk’ or dwarf, the Marvellous or Helpful Attendant common to folk-tale, but actually the spellbound Sir Gromer, who helps Gawain through a series of tests and is then rewarded with freedom from enchantment” (Griffith, 2001: 201-202). As in the case of *The Carle off Carlile*, even though the “Disenchantment by Decapitation” motif has differences from the beheading game proper, we cannot but help to think in some association with it, especially since the beginning of the tale is clearly reminiscent of the beginning of *SGGK*, as Ackerman also acknowledged: “The early part of the story and the concluding incident, involving a challenge and the beheading of the challenger (a Turk or dwarf) by Gawain, are

obviously connected in some way with the beheading in *The Carl* and *Gawain and the Green Knight*" (Ackerman, 1959: 496).

The challenge is in understanding this connection "in some way". While the circumstances are different and there is not a beheading game *per se*, there is still a beheading which ends in a supernatural result with the survival of the beheaded, and as in *Fled Bricrenn*, *SGGK* and the *Carle* the beheaded is a shapeshifter. Furthermore, the entire structure seems reminiscent of *SGGK* and presents similarities to the *Carle* as well: "As in *Sir Gawain*, and its Percy Folio derivative *The Greene Knight*, the agreement between Gawain and the challenger provides the basic frame for the narrative, eventually leading to the concluding disenchantment by decapitation that returns the Turk to his true identity, a transformation comparable to that in the Percy Folio *Carle*" (Griffith, 2001: 202).

Can these parallels, observed in the *Carle* narratives and in the *Turke*, demonstrate the use of a common popular source which was first visible in *SGGK*? Or are they simply drawing on *SGGK* with modifications resulting from the use of several influences or popular retellings? Due to their late date in comparison with *SGGK*, there is of course the hypothesis that both the composer of the *Turke* as well as the composer(s) of the tales involving the *Carle* simply drew elements from *SGGK* and modified them. On this same note, it is rather noticeable that the *Turke* seems to have been composed in the North-West Midlands (Ackerman, 1959: 495; Griffith, 2001: 201), and *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle*, the earliest version of the *Carle* narratives (c. 1400), seems to have been composed in the North-West Midlands as well (Rogers, 2001b: 204), the same region which is ascribed to the *Gawain*-poet. This might not represent an evidence of influence however, but perhaps the possibility that a similar pool of motifs was in circulation throughout the North-West Midlands.

It must be considered that *SGGK* is our first source for the specific elements which compose its version of the beheading game, with *The Greene Knight* being a later version, and this can lead to assumptions that the latter is drawn from the former, with such assumptions being extended to other later narratives with shared motifs such as the *Turke* and the Carl narratives. Be that as it may, *SGGK* only survives in a single manuscript, which may be a hint that the availability of the text was scarce: "The relative obscurity of *Gawain* meant that even an insatiable reader like Malory would not

have encountered it" (Hahn et al, 2007: 344), and the assumed influence over the later folk romances is our only clue regarding how widely read or recited it was. Hahn, for instance, is quick to consider that "In medieval England, however, *Gawain* seems to have found only a tiny readership" (Hahn et al, 2007: 344). Further reasons for believing that there was possibly a low readership of *SGGK* is tied with the progressively popular nature of the audience for romance in England, since "...no live audience has the wherewithal to answer the demands of this supremely literary poem" (Hahn et al, 2007: 344).

The hypothesis that both *SGGK* and the folk romances drew from a common popular source thus seems to be on an equal footing with the hypothesis of *SGGK* being the source for the folk romances, since, as Hahn states "The great majority of romances that circulated in medieval England resembled *The Greene Knight* and *Sir Tristrem* much more than they did *Gawain*" (Hahn et al, 2007: 352-353). Is it not then possible that *SGGK* drew elements from such a popular folk version of the same story rather than having been itself the source for subsequent popular versions? It is particularly interesting that *The Greene Knight*, the most obvious one amongst the folk romances to lead to assumptions of derivation from *SGGK* has several differences, and while some are minimal, others create quite a change in the perception of the story: "It scraps the atmospherics and set pieces, the connoisseur descriptions and subtle dialogue that give every reader pause in *Gawain*. The transformed figure of Sir Bredbeddle (aka the Green Knight) seems scarcely a vegetation god, an ogre or a moral inquisitor" (Hahn et al, 2007: 345). The Green Knight does get stripped of his ominous, terrifying and churlish half indeed in this narrative, and seems to be solely a knight dressed in green: "He saith, "Heer is a venterous knight. / All his vesture is greene!"" (Hahn, 1995: lines 104-105), whose effect on the audience seems simply to come down to "That was a jolly sight to seene," (Hahn, 1995: lines 79).

The featuring of a knight without the churlish characteristics in a beheading-game narrative brings to mind the French *Caradoc* and *Perlesvaus*, and might be indeed a legacy of the French influence. However, if *The Greene Knight* was based on *SGGK*, while making part of a group of folk romances which seem to follow a distinct English popular tradition, would it not retain the churlish overtones of the Green Knight rather than just his knightly ones? Or is it possible that both *SGGK* and *The Greene Knight* are based on another version from popular tradition which lacked the closer aspects to Cú

Roí of the Green Knight? In this scenario the *Gawain*-poet could have mixed the knightly Green Knight (a legacy from French tradition indeed), with the figure of the churlish challenger associated with a beheading game, in the spirit of a distinct English narrative with elements from popular tradition. Such a figure could have been rescued from popular English folklore by the *Gawain*-poet, and to be itself a remnant of the figure of Cú Roí which had been transmitted centuries before through Wales. In favour of such scenario let us remember the affinities of the Green Knight with Cú Roí in meticulous details such as the fiery eyes and his overall haunting effect over the court, which are lacking in *The Greene Knight*, together with the presence of a similar churlish figure in the Carl of Carlisle narratives, whose affinities with Cú Roí are also felt in his overall churlish description.

It may be potentially relevant for this matter to underline that other narratives from the same group of English folk romances centred on Gawain also feature elements possibly drawn from Irish tradition which are closer to the Irish analogues than any example from French tradition. This is the case with the fifteenth-century *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnall* (Sumner, 1924) and its ballad version *The Marriage of Gawain* found in the seventeenth-century Percy Folio. Such tales represent a rendition of the motif of the *loathly lady*, indexed by Stith Thompson as motif D732 of folk themes and which makes its appearance in other Middle English works such as the tale of Florent in Book I of the fourteenth-century poem *Confessio Amantis* by John Gower, as well as in other Arthurian tales, one of the most famous of which is found in Chaucer's late fourteenth-century *Canterbury Tales* in the form of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, of which the folk-romance versions may be considered variants. These versions follow the general outline of a knight having to discover what women most desire in the space of a year due to some predicament, and in such quest encountering an old hag who says she will help in exchange for anything she may ask. This leads to the hag stating that what women most desire is sovereignty over their husbands, which satisfies the parties involved in each variant, ending the predicament, however, the old hag asks for marriage with the knight in exchange for her help. During the wedding night the hag asks the knight a question, with the knight answering it is her choice, which leads her to transform into a beautiful young woman after being kissed. There are subtle differences in the Chaucer version and in the two Gawain romances, in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, a knight is sentenced to death by Arthur due to having raped a maiden, but is allowed to

be spared if in a year's time he is able to answer the question of what women most desire. It is this same knight who encounters the loathly lady who helps him and then marries her, followed by the episode of the transformation and of the choice being given to her.

In the *Weddynge* version, it is King Arthur himself who is challenged by Sir Gromer to find the answer in a year's time, and he meets the loathly lady named Ragnell, Gromer's sister, who provides the answer, but in return she asks to marry not Arthur but Sir Gawain, who consents. It is then Sir Gawain who witnesses the transformation in the wedding night and is confronted with a choice, but gives that choice to Ragnell herself, thus granting her with sovereignty and ending her enchantment. The ballad version of the *Marriage* has some differences from the *Weddynge*, Arthur is also captured and challenged by a baron to find the answer to what women most desire in a year's time, and he finds an old crone who is the baron's sister and who gives him the answer as well, in exchange for marrying Gawain. An important detail found in this version however, is that after Arthur had given the answer to the baron, a choice concerning who from Arthur's knights will marry the old hag seems to be implied, with Gawain, Kay and the other knights being portrayed discussing who shall marry her, and all of them refusing, with the exception of Gawain, who accepts.

The remaining of the story in this version is similar (notwithstanding some minor differences), but this particular difference is important because the loathly lady motif in Arthurian literature is suspected of being a derivate from Irish tradition (Ackerman, 1959: 503; Withrington, 2001: 208), where the motif also takes the form of an old hag whose advances are refused by every man in a party of several others, with the exception of a single one who dares to either kiss or have intercourse with her, causing a metamorphosis of the old hag into a beautiful woman. In her beautiful form the loathly lady then reveals herself to be the embodiment of the sovereignty of Ireland, with the kingship of Ireland being thus granted to the man who consented to her advances[236] (Simmons, 2006b: 1621-1622; McCone, 1990: 109, 128, 132). This plotline evokes clear parallels to the Arthurian stories and is a possible source for the latter, with the main differences being related to which kind of sovereignty the tales deal with, a change which according to Ackerman was a result of the passage of the motif to

[236] Notable examples are found in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (Stokes, 1903b: 172-207) as well as in a story told in *Cóir Anmann* (Stokes, 1897: 318-321).

Arthurian literature: “Of course, one must further assume that, at some point, the theme of winning the Sovereignty of Ireland, which appears in Celtic literature, was reduced to the notion of domestic sovereignty” (Ackerman, 1959: 503).

For our purposes, what is relevant about the use of this motif in the English romances is that there are also Continental renditions of the motif, but as in the case of *SGGK* or even the *Carle* certain elements of the English versions are also closer to the suggested Irish originals, possibly hinting at direct transmission rather than French influence. The Continental use of the motif is connected with the Grail romances: in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, as well as in subsequent versions and continuations of the Grail story, the loathly lady appears as the messenger of the Grail, who goes to Arthur’s court and reproaches Percival for failing on asking the Fisher King the question regarding the Grail, and who places upon Arthurian knights the quest of travelling to the Grail’s castle. This very same representation of the loathly lady is not exclusive of the French tradition and also extends to the German Arthurian tradition: in Wolfram Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, she is named Kundry, with her hideous appearance contrasting with another Kundry in the same narrative, who is Gawain’s sister and has the soubriquet *la Belle*. While the example of Kundry does seem to contain a reminiscence of the hideous/beautiful dichotomy found in both the Irish and Insular Arthurian versions, it seems indisputable that the Continental renditions are quite different, using mainly the hideous-hag aspect of the loathly lady as yet another uncanny and supernatural element in association with the Grail but without exploring her role as an embodiment of sovereignty (either at a national or domestic level), and most importantly, without her transformation into a beautiful bride. Therefore, the extant Continental tales would hardly be the source for Chaucer and the English folk romances, and we may ponder upon the possibility that they represent a popular motif found in English folk traditions, which had originally been transmitted through the same circumstances that the beheading game may have been.

The fact that two different themes/motifs displayed in the English folk romances have elements which demonstrate a closer similarity to the Irish analogues rather than anything which could be of French derivation may be a further indication that there was indeed a corpus of popular narratives which were closer to the stories originally transmitted in the Welsh-Norman contact after the Norman conquest. This corpus may have been a cohesive one in terms of motifs and elements, as certain coincidences may

imply: the use of similar motifs and characters interchangeable between narratives, as is the case of the beheading game with Gawain, or other variant motifs implying decapitation such as the disenchantment by decapitation, the churlish figures or challengers, the loathly lady and others. It is curious for instance that the knight who challenges Arthur to find an answer to women's desire in the *Weddynge* is Sir Gromer, the same knight who is enchanted as a Turk in the *Turke* narrative. While we have attributed a similar type of coincidences amongst the ballads from the Percy Folio as a case of inter-borrowing between narratives in the same manuscript, the *Weddynge* is found in another manuscript and may highlight instead that there was indeed a pool of specific motifs circulating in England which is reflected in the folk narratives. As we have been discussing, the alliterative revival seems to also have had the characteristic of returning to English-specific traits, and these may have been found in this pool of folk traditions containing closer narratives to the ones originally transmitted from Wales. This may thus have been the case with *SGGK*, with its similarity with certain elements from *Fled Bricrenn* which are not present in the French renditions presenting a similar case to the loathly-lady narratives found in English tradition, which are much more similar to the Irish ones than the Continental ones.

In what concerns the figure of the churlish challenger for instance, folk narratives such as the *Carle* may be a further indication of the progressive use of motifs found in English popular traditions which represent better preserved versions of the Irish originals, the same pool of motifs from where the *Gawain*-poet might have drawn many motifs as well, including the churlish details and perhaps even the beheading game itself, French influence notwithstanding. It is important to acknowledge that we cannot obtain a definitive answer to these questions, since we lack all the possible sources which could provide one: "The exact relationship between the version of the beheading in the *Turk* and those in *The Carl* and *Gawain and the Green Knight* cannot be established with any certainty because of the absence of intermediate documents" (Ackerman, 1959: 496). We may however, through a close analysis of the elements in the narratives, their context and structure, arrive at useful hypotheses which may shed some light on the subject. Additional details can be found for instance in the *Turke*, namely in two important parallels detected by Ackerman: "...*The Turk* is closer than *The Carl* to *Gawain and the Green Knight* in at least two respects: first, the fact that Gawain must journey to a far country to receive a return blow, and second, the suggestive detail

that the Turk lives in or near a hollow hill" (Ackerman, 1959: 497). The detail concerning the dwelling of the Turk is particularly important in conjunction with his namesake, for being named as a Turk seems to underline his "otherness", his nature as different and exotic in accordance with a medieval Christian stereotype. The use of such stereotypes to create a sense of otherness was common in popular romance, as Hahn exemplifies with the Charlemagne romances:

> Popular romances habitually intensify the element of spectacle through recourse to the exotic. Such details may colour the nature or the context of the hero's encounters, or the behaviour and appearance of his enemies. This is a particular staple of the Charlemagne romances, because the enemies are 'Saracens', opponents who are religiously, culturally, linguistically and racially distinct from their European rivals.
> (Hahn et al, 2007: 350-351)

Together with an abode that consists of a hollow hill, just as the "Green Chapel" is a barrow covered in green grass in *SGGK*, there seems to be a further characterisation of the Turk (as with the Green Knight) as not belonging to the regular knightly world, and while the Green Knight is explicitly more "otherwordly", the "otherness" and exoticism of the Turk in association with an Orientalist stereotype seems to aim at the exact same purpose. The narrative of the *Turk* in fact replicates this same plot device in the figure of the King of Man, a heathen sultan, although his exotic "otherness" is used for a villainous characterisation. Curiously, and perhaps not coincidentally, this was already observed in the *Mule Sans Frein*, where the challenger is characterised as "Moorish" with apparently the same objective. Therefore, while the appearance of the Turk is "dwarfish", rather than the gigantic and churlish aspect of most antagonists in the beheading-game tales, he seems to retain an "otherness" which characterised Terror, Cú Roí/*bachlach* and the Green Knight. This may be because every single one of these characters represent a different expression of this "otherness", but all of them became common in medieval romance and overall have a similar significance whatever the stereotype used: "The young and untested knight of medieval romance typically proves his martial ability through the defeat of a fierce opponent, a monstrous 'Other' such as a wild man, ogre, or a gargantuan Saracen" (Ward, 2012: 159).

Ultimately, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen demonstrates in his *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (1999), all these variants seem to be a derivation of the "otherness" which was common in medieval romance to be applied to giants: "The giant is at once a seemingly monolithic representation of otherness..." (Cohen, 1999: xiv).

Indeed, the figure of the giant seems to represent the paradigmatic "Other", since it "…reveals the limits of selfhood, reveals that identity is intersubjective, ex-centric, suspended across temporalities, as historically contingent as it is monstrously incomplete. If the giant is the Other, then he is the Other as something 'strange to me although...at the heart of me.'" (Cohen, 1999: xv). More important is the association of this "Other" with decapitation. The giant, as a representation of the Otherworld, needs to be beheaded, since its head represents the ultimate proof of death of an otherwordly threat: "The display of the severed head reinforces this balance between threatening otherworld and court by reassuring the medieval audience that the monster is truly dead" (Boyer, 2012: 138). In fact Úath, Cú Roí in his *bachlach* form, and in general the churlish figure seem to be themselves a variant of this giant "Other", evinced by their common characterisation as either gigantic or quite tall as in the half-churlish, half-knightly incarnation of the Green Knight. The headless churl is however a particular version of the giant/other, seemingly originating in Irish tradition, who does not die by decapitation and hence its impressive power for an audience, since the balance between court and the Otherworld is not restored. Even the lack of churlishness and dwarfish appearance of the *Turk* does not signify that he was not originally drawn from such a churlish figure, only that the specific combination of motifs in the *Turke* led to certain modifications:

> We can probably assume, then, that the first portion of *The Turk* represents a free adaptation of a tale fairly close to the original source of both *Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Carl*, and that the remainder, as already suggested, comes from a story about a king's visit to his rival's palace which had already, perhaps, been attached to Arthur. In combining his two sources, however, the poet changed the bespelled knight, the challenger, from the monster required by the original beheading tale to a helpful attendant.
> (Ackerman, 1959: 497).

The Green Knight on the other hand retains some churlish characteristics, and his otherwordly overtones are quite evinced in his terrifying, menacing and supernatural nature, which underlines his "otherness", observable even in minimal details such as the warning of Gawain's guide to the Green Chapel when he mentions the evil deeds of the Green Knight: "the guide's rehearsal of the Green Knight's cruelty feeds another self-serving chivalric fantasy: that the enemy is evil, a diabolical 'other'" (Gustafson, 2007: 627). Likewise, the otherwordly features of the Carl may also be hinted at in his fearsome, gigantic and hideous appearance, along with his dominion over several beasts (his four animals) and his enchanted nature in the *Carle* version. The warning by

Baldwin of the mistreatment by the Carl of his non-obeying guests seems to parallel the warning of the guide in *SGGK*, a similar way of representing the Carl as the evil "other". In sum, although the otherwordly tones surrounding these figures are sometimes reinterpreted with Orientalist, foreign or non-Christian stereotypes, mixed with knightly features or resultant from the combination with other motifs, they still seem to follow a tradition of challengers associated with the Otherworld, which are often characterised as a gigantic churl.

These characteristics redirect us to Cú Roí as the earliest known beheading-game challenger in the extant narratives which is described in the same manner. Both his representation in *Fled Bricrenn* as well as in *Aided Chon Roí* present him as a wizard and a shapeshifter, whose revolving fort has supernatural overtones. Even the role as an Imperious Host is not completely strange to Cú Roí, since the three challengers who arrive at his revolving fort in *Fled Bricrenn* are also placed under the orders of Cú Roí, who leaves them instructions to watch over the fort and leads them to fight giants (and other enemies in Cú Chulainn's watch), and thus to overcome trials as well (Henderson, 1899: 101-113), with Cú Roí revealing afterwards that of the three Cú Chulainn had earned the right to the Champion's Portion by being the one able to defeat both the giant as well as the other enemies. Although there are notable differences, such as the absence of Cú Roí from most of the episode, transmitting the orders through his wife Bláthnat and only appearing at the end, there are also important similarities, not only in the detail that there are orders to be fulfilled by the lord of the revolving fort, but also due to the number of challengers, which are three just as in the Carl narratives there are three guests being tested on their humility towards the host. Moreover, they are received by the wife of Cú Roí, and even though there is not the slightest hint of temptation concerning Bláthnat, it is perhaps interesting to remember that Bláthnat explicitly becomes Cú Chulainn's lover in *Aided Chon Roí*.

Additionally, it is rather interesting as well that the King of Man in the *Turke*, even though not a giant himself, has gigantic henchmen in his castle, echoing Cú Roí's revolving fort surrounded by menacing giants. Furthermore, he is a king, as is Cú Roí, and while Bercilak/Green Knight is not, he is the lord of a castle, as is the Carl from the *Carle* narratives, a characteristic which is notably absent from the Continental renditions, thus presenting yet another detail which makes the English renditions closer to the Irish one. To these particular similarities we may add others, since the King of

Man is characterised as a sultan, thus resorting to an Orientalist stereotype, as was also the case with the Moor from *La Mule*, as we have discussed, and both examples could allude to an echo of Cú Roí's "oriental expeditions" (Henderson, 1899: 101). It is also notable that Man is the stage for the kidnapping of Bláthnat and the humiliation of Cú Chulainn by Cú Roí in one of the versions of *Aided Chon Roí*.

All these details might be purely coincidental, but they all happen to be included in a narrative such as the *Turke*, which also includes a modified version of a beheading-game challenge in its beginning and the disenchantment by decapitation motif together with a challenger who also has echoes of an otherwordly character, and all these characteristics can ultimately be traced to Cú Roí. Since our clues regarding the transmission of such a motif are tied with knowledge about Cú Roí through examples such as *Marwnat Corroi*, we may infer that the figure of Cú Roí himself as a *bachlach* was indeed transmitted through Wales. What we may not be sure about is if it was the character of Cú Roí which reached the Arthurian traditions in the post-Norman context we have extensively described, or rather the churlish figure he represents in his *bachlach* form. Arguably, rather than betraying direct knowledge from *Fled Bricrenn*, the transmission of the figure of the churlish otherwordly challenger at a given point in time possibly became an indirect one. Such a figure most possibly entered the English imaginary and became a motif of popular (and learned) traditions which was used by the learned and poetic classes in their narratives. Its use in several narratives which are concerned with a beheading game do seem to indicate however that the figure of the churlish giant maintained an association with the beheading challenge throughout its transmission in oral tradition, which is reflected in the extant literary versions.

By the time of the alliterative revival and most possibly even before, the use of the motif of the churlish challenger and the beheading game was therefore not necessarily retrieved from *Fled Bricrenn* since several different narratives had most probably already used the motif as well. Be that as it may, the closer aspects to *Fled Bricrenn* found in *SGGK* as well as in the later folk romances may indicate that in what concerns these aspects, they were indeed better preserved through popular and folk traditions which were developed in England following a possible original transmission centuries before, rather than being a result of French influence. This would explain the close similarity of *SGGK* with many elements from *Fled Bricrenn* which are absent from the French beheading-game renditions, including subtle details such as the

description of the fiery eyes and their colour, the enormous size of the challenger, and the particular closeness between the entrances of Cú Roí and the Green Knight, as well as their dialogue with the court.

In sum, despite the clear learned background of the *Gawain*-poet and his possible royal or aristocratic associations, he could have had contact with oral folktales or oral recitations of popular written versions in the context of the North Midlands, which he could have used in order to introduce a specific English flavour rather than a copy of a French version. This is not unlikely at all, Hahn for instance, in discussing the difference and even antagonism between the learned literary tradition and the popular one aimed at folk entertainment during the Middle English phase (Hahn et al, 2007: 345-350), has underlined that despite the contrast there was in fact exchange between both forms of culture:

> Although the guardians of high culture frequently condemned popular narratives outright, such censure itself confirms their familiarity within all ranks of society. Even writers invested in producing an elite literary culture in English – and who were perforce hostile to mere 'rhyming' or entertainment – might 'stoop' to appropriate or refurbish characteristic features of the genre. (Hahn et al, 2007: 350)

Therefore, even though the *Gawain*-poet undoubtedly represents high culture, not for his possible aristocratic relations, but for the supreme literary art of his *SGGK*, nevertheless he might have drawn elements from stories from popular tradition: "as exceptional poetic efforts like *Gawain* and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* strikingly illustrate, elite writers were not only aware of the omnipresence of such stories, they sometimes tried to appropriate or reshape them for their own purposes and audiences" (Hahn et al, 2007: 345). The result of such interplay between learned poets and native oral traditions is especially observable in the alliterative revival: "Alliterative romances, for example, frequently exploit this dialectic, flaunting idioms, techniques and themes explicitly linked to native oral traditions, yet drawing on literate, often Latinate, sources, and in this way at once bridging and deepening the gap between high and low" (Hahn et al, 2007: 345). Such described phenomenon seems exactly to be what we may grasp from *SGGK*: an exceptional literary achievement which reworks popular folk materials along with possible influences from Continental tradition into a literary masterpiece. One of the elements retrieved from these folk materials may very well have been the beheading game.

The explicit number of the feigned blows in *SGGK* being three poses a problem however in what concerns the hypothesis of the beheading-game motif having been transmitted solely in association with Cú Roí as the paradigmatic churlish challenger, because that specific detail in *Fled Bricrenn* is not associated with the *bachlach* episode but is instead found in the Úath episode. And as we may remember, although characterised as a giant and as a supernatural figure as well, Úath is not explicitly a churlish figure. The detail of the three blows may not be significant however, and two main possibilities can be considered.

The first possibility is related to the fact that we do not know what version(s) of *Fled Bricrenn* was transmitted, or if it was transmitted through oral or written tradition. What we do know is that many characteristics and details associated with the *Champion's Covenant* from *Fled Bricrenn* and with the churlish challenger are present in some Arthurian narratives. On the other hand, the fact that there are three blows in at least one Arthurian version in the form of *SGGK* (and perhaps a reminiscence of this detail in the interruptions from the *Caradoc* version) could lead us to think that the Úath episode was transmitted as well, but no other specific characteristic of Úath has remained in any Arthurian version other than the three blows. It can be argued that Úath shares some characteristics with Cú Roí, since he is also a shapeshifter, is called a wizard, and is said to be a giant, and thus it would be hard to differentiate which one could have influenced tales with similar figures. However, as we have seen extensively, many of the churlish challengers from Arthurian tales do have other features which are shared exclusively with Cú Roí. Furthermore, if the Úath episode is found uniquely in the *Lebor na hUidre*, and if, as we have seen, there are suspicions that scribe H included that same episode in that manuscript, it seems rather fortuitous that it was this same manuscript that was transmitted. If it was so, the similarities with Cú Roí are exactly what would have made Úath redundant, and perhaps the *Champion's Covenant* became the version mostly transmitted, due to its greater complexity and as being the *de facto* ending of the tale, with the three blows being merged with the churlish figure represented by the *bachlach* throughout subsequent transmissions of the tale. As pointed out however, such a hypothesis is solely based on the assumption that the version of *Fled Bricrenn* with the Úath episode was the one transmitted to Wales and then to England and perhaps the Continent. Perhaps a more sensible consideration would be to suspect that the three blows from Úath's episode represent a feature associated with the

beheading game which was not included in the extant *Champion's Covenant*, but the version H had access to on which he based his Úath episode did so.

We do not know to what extent there were other beheading-game tales from Irish oral and popular traditions and even written traditions, but the inclusion of two different versions in *Fled Bricrenn*, which have two different settings and antagonists, may be demonstrative that it was a pervasive motif. The three feigned blows may have been a common element of the beheading-game tales, although not necessarily included as the extant *Champion's Covenant* demonstrates. A hypothetic transmitted version may have included them however, either an unknown written version of *Fled Bricrenn*, or through oral transmission. Let us not forget that we only have a complete version of the *Champion's Covenant* in the Edinburgh MS, and cannot know if the other versions would not include the three blows in the final challenge with Cú Roí. Even if the Úath tale represents an earlier development of the beheading-game motif and most specifically of its challenger, it would not prevent the detail of the three feigned blows to be associated with the churlish-challenger versions, and of the three feigned blows having been transmitted already in association with the *bachlach*. Unfortunately we are not equipped with further evidence which would allow us to verify these hypotheses, and therefore can only arrive at these useful speculations. Nonetheless, as the example of *Marwnat Corroi* and the divergence of elements from *Aided* I and *Aided* II demonstrate, extant texts do not tell the whole tale in what concerns knowledge of the transmitted versions of Irish narratives and motifs to Arthurian traditions. If the interruptions in the *Caradoc* tale are indeed a modification of the three feigned blows, then this detail was not lost in transmission to the Continent, initially at least, however, it seems to have become absent in the other Continental versions. Additionally, if one did not have *Fled Bricrenn* or *SGGK* to make a comparison, the three interruptions would not provide an explicit idea of three feigned blows. Together with the absence of the detail in the other Continental extant beheading-game tales, nothing point towards this particular detail having been re-transmitted to England and subsequently to the Gawain-poet through French influence, unless there was some unknown French version which did preserve it. In conjunction however with the apparently lasting preservation of the figure of the gigantic churl and other distinctly English characteristics which are closer to the Irish versions and seemed to have characterised both the Middle English romances and the folk romances, it could be that the detail of the three feigned blows is

yet another example of a preserved detail in English tradition which was used in *SGGK*, perhaps in association with the churlish challenger, rather than being a result of French influence.

The second possibility in what the detail of the three blows is concerned is rather simpler and perhaps more obvious, and is altogether the most probable. We must consider that the presence of three blows in both the Úath episode and *SGGK* does not mean necessarily that there was a transmission of the detail or even some connection between both renditions in what this particular matter is concerned. Our reasons for this consideration is that the number three is a particular number which is common in this type of literature, especially when there is a possible connection with traditional narratives. The use of the number three is pervasive in the structure and aesthetics of folktales (Lee, 2016: 727), with its presence in the patterns and form of folktales leading it to be included as one of the "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative" as formulated by Axel Olrik (1965: 133-134). As Olrik states "The number three has been tenaciously retained though, in the great mass of popular tradition - Greek, Celtic, Germanic in *Märchen,* myth, ritual, and legend […]. The Law of Three extends like a broad swath cut through the world of folk tradition, through the centuries and millennia of human culture" (Olrik, 1965: 134). László for instance, calls the role of three on traditional narrative structure "the triple rule", and exemplifies such a role by using the form of folk ballads as an example: "In folk ballads there is often no starting point, and the triple rule (three sons, three tests) consistently shows up in western folk tales, so instead of the EPISODE = TEST + GOAL rule the EPISODE = TEST + TEST + TEST + GOAL rule is valid in this case" (László, 2008: 21). It is quite striking how this formula of the use of the number three in the structure of tales could apply to our relevant narratives. And the role of the number three seems indeed to have extended to early Irish literature and other medieval traditions such as the Arthurian one. In *Fled Bricrenn* for instance, there are three contenders for the champion's portion and this leads to several instances where three once again marks the structure of several of the motifs and episodes throughout the narrative, and this could mean that the three feigned blows in the Úath section are simply yet other instance of this same pattern.

In *SGGK* the pattern of three is equally present in the structure of the poem, in several of its sections and scenes in fact: "The number three is equally important in the poem. Threes are everywhere, as no reader can fail to notice" (Gardner, 2011: 84). We

may remember the three visits to Gawain's room from Bertilak's wife, the three hunts of Bertilak and his three offers, amongst other examples, and of course, the three feigned blows at the end. This seems to have been consciously architected by the *Gawain*-poet: "But nowhere do we find a more ingenious use of threes than in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" (Gardner, 2011: 84). From Gardner's point of view, the interpretation for the use of three in *SGGK* is tied with Christmas symbolism and with the Holy Trinity: "This use of the number three throughout the Gawain is relevant to the poem's purpose if the poem is, as I believe, a Christmas celebration. From a medieval Christian point of view, in which the Three Persons are always separate but inseparable […] Christ's birth represents a triple extension of grace […]. And man escapes the grave" (Gardner, 2011: 84). This is in line with medieval symbolism and is present in several other examples as Gardner himself states: "This use of the number three in connection with Christmas can be found outside the work of the Gawain-poet. It occurs in carols, sermons, and, as I have shown elsewhere, in the Second Shepherds' Play" (Gardner, 2011: 84). Notwithstanding, the obvious conscious use by the *Gawain*-poet of the number three can also be simply yet another example of the law of three inherited from folk traditions. Whatever the case, the use of number three seems to be such a common trope that *SGGK* could simply be an example of its usage as was the Úath episode, without the former including the three feigned blows due to transmission of the latter. If we may remember, the three feigned blows in *SGGK* had a connection to the temptation episode, since the last feigned blow included a slight cut, due to Gawain having accepted the girdle in the last visit from Bertilak's wife to his chambers. It was then a useful use of the number three for the *Gawain*-poet, in order to construct the connection between different instances of the plot, and it differs in this point from the Úath episode where the three feigned blows do not have such a connection or a similar one. The same could be said of *Caradoc*, where the three swings and the interruptions in between may be yet another example of the widespread usage of the number three in these narratives. All in all, what all this means is that while the *Champion's Covenant* remains a strong candidate for representing a direct transmission of the beheading game to English tradition, the Úath episode does not necessarily, at least not solely on account of the three blows.

Returning to the possibility of a channel of transmission from Ireland to Wales and then directly to English tradition, through the preservation in folklore, with many

details from *Fled Bricrenn* finding their way to *SGGK*, it must also be stated that not all the details from the latter confirm this possibility. The details of the whetstone and the flinching from *Perlesvaus* for instance, together with the transposition to an Arthurian court first found in the *Livre de Caradoc*, are an entirely different matter and do point towards French influence, thus making the matter confusing. As we have mentioned, there is indeed evidence of French influence in *SGGK*, as there seems to be of popular and folk traditions as we have extensively discussed, therefore where may we stand in what concerns the transmission of the beheading game to the insular context and more specifically *SGGK*? The most sensible answer to this question is that both sources seem to have been influential. French Arthurian romances seem indeed to have been known by the *Gawain*-poet, from where he could have drawn elements directly from manuscripts containing *Perlesvaus* or the First Continuation, or even from English romances betraying French influence as might have been the case with the popular *Greene Knight*. Other elements however which are closer to *Fled Bricrenn* such as the half-churlish otherwordly characteristic of the Green Knight and his particular similarities with Cú Roí, seem to have been preserved and to have influenced the *Gawain*-poet through folk and popular traditions.

What does this all mean for the matter of the Continental versions then? We have previously discussed the uncertainties regarding the first Arthurian association with the beheading game, and whether such association occurred in the Continent or in Wales. Taking into account the considerations we have gathered from the insular context, what answers may we now have regarding those discussions? If we had doubts about Gawain being the preferred and possibly original Arthurian protagonist of the beheading game, rather than Caradoc, the insular context seems to reinforce the idea that he was indeed. The inclusion of the beheading game together with the revolving castle in *La Mule Sans Frein* already suggested a closer proximity of such version to *Fled Bricrenn*. The acknowledgment of several English Arthurian folk romances which include elements usually associated with the beheading game and which are closer to *Fled Bricrenn* than the polished ones found in some French versions, and which seem to follow a tradition of Gawain as the protagonist, corroborate the idea that Gawain was indeed the original Arthurian hero to be associated with the beheading game. The choice of Gawain as the leading character, together with the elements closer to *Fled Bricrenn*,

in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, most possibly demonstrate that the *Gawain*-poet was also influenced by such tradition.

In addition, the idea of the preservation of a popular tradition concerning Gawain and the beheading game in England also implies that the association must have first occurred in the insular context, possibly in Wales, or in the contacts established in the Welsh Marches. Either way, the transmission would then have happened in the scenario we have been attempting to reconstruct: Breton interpreters, storytellers, or even other classes such as soldiers, clerics or merchants, would have had contact with the motif in the years following the Norman conquest, namely in the Welsh Marches, and would have made its transmission possible throughout the Angevin Empire. *La Mule Sans Frein* is possibly the closest French rendition to the original transmitted version, due to its combination of both the beheading-game and revolving-castle motifs. *Hunbaut* also preserves some aspects, such as Gawain as the prominent figure in the beheading-game episode, and the churlish description of the challenger. *Perlesvaus* and *Caradoc* on the other hand, represent a distancing from some of the aspects from the original source, and feature a more polished presentation of some elements in order to better fit the tropes of French Arthurian romance, with knightly challengers and different protagonists which were perhaps also popular in the Continent. In the case of *Perlesvaus* however, although it represents an example which is already different from the possible original source for Arthurian traditions, this does not mean that it was not possibly influential on *SGGK*, since, as we have seen, there are indications of the circulation of manuscripts containing *Perlesvaus* in England, and the latter contains the details of the whetstone and the flinching, which are found in *SGGK*, but in no other version.

Caradoc, along with stories related to him, seems to have been one of the transmitted elements from Wales, as we have discussed, and this may indicate that the character and associated tales were somehow popular in the Continent, thus justifying its use as a protagonist in the *Livre de Caradoc* version. This does not mean that the beheading game was transmitted to the Continent in a version where Caradoc is already the protagonist, as we have wondered. As stated above, Gawain most probably was the first Arthurian character associated with the beheading game. Examples such as *La Mule Sans Frein* seem to testify that this association reached the Continent as well. These observations do not invalidate the hypothesis, however, that the beheading game

could have been transmitted through the channel of transmission from Wales to the Continent which the Caradoc-associated elements demonstrate. This is something which we have stated before, and our analysis of the insular context does not affect such a possibility.

In sum, the preservation of a Gawain beheading-game tradition in England through popular narratives, along with the Continental beheading-game narratives, seems to suggest that there were therefore two channels of transmission, one which reached the Continent, and another which transmitted the motif through England. This does not mean that they were isolated from one another. Both seem to have been influential in the composition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As we have argued, *SGGK* demonstrates some influence from the French tradition and includes some elements which were first featured in the French beheading-game narratives. On the other hand, *SGGK* also seems to include closer aspects to *Fled Bricrenn*, which may have resulted from preserved elements in popular tradition, of which the Gawain folk romances seem to constitute an example. Additionally, the preservation through popular traditions of some aspects and elements which seem to retain some closeness to *Fled Bricrenn*, with the same being said of *SGGK*, seem once again to suggest that there might have been a single coherent narrative very similar to *Fled Bricrenn* which functioned as the source for the two channels of transmission.

CHAPTER 4: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BEHEADING GAME

4.1 Myth and Literature

We have seen that the use of the beheading-game motif in Arthurian literature is indisputably tied with *Fled Bricrenn*, which displays the exact same motif in the context of early Irish literature. The similarities do not seem to give much space for doubt in what that connection is concerned. We have also attempted to trace and analyse the several possibilities of transmission of the motif from early Irish literature to Arthurian traditions, however, there are further questions regarding such transmission. Namely, although the motif itself has been transmitted, more or less modified depending upon which Arthurian version we are talking about, does the motif hold the same significance or meaning in both literary expressions? Or, in other words, can a different literary tradition change the significance of a given motif, even when it is used in a most similar fashion, as it occurs with the beheading game from *Fled Bricrenn* and some of the

Arthurian renditions of that same motif? As we have mentioned in the introduction such a discussion brings into the table complex questions regarding myth or the expression of a belief or ethnographic trait. These questions arise due to two motives, the first being related to the supernatural and fantastic nature of the motif, and the second being the insertion of *Fled Bricrenn* into a context related with the study of "Celtic" ethnography as it is expressed, or not, through early Irish literature. We shall address the latter matter afterwards for both discussions may be connected, but for now we will focus on the question of myth and its relation with the literary worlds implicated in this study in general and with the beheading game in particular.

As we have addressed in quite some detail in the introduction, the matter of mythology in the study of early Irish literature is especially complex and troubling. It has been the target of frameworks of interpretation rather flawed and speculative, and it has gone through the application of most of the approaches to the interpretation of myth which were progressively developed in the field of anthropology. Moreover, with the rise of anti-nativism it has been shown to be a subject which needs to take into account the literary nature of early Irish texts and its creation in monasteries, in the context of a medieval Christian society. Notwithstanding these complex discussions, the matter of mythology remains unavoidable when approaching early Irish literature, due to the presence of elements in the narratives whose significance seems to be undeniably mythological. This matter around mythological elements goes way beyond the discussion regarding the identification of the Tuatha Dé Danann as possible representations of the old pre-Christian pantheon of Ireland, and into more subtle elements which nevertheless seem to convey a cosmogonic function, or are at least reminiscent of one, with such a function being a characteristic which is ascribed to myth:

> …myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*.
> (Eliade, 1963: 6)

Taking the iconic *Táin* as an example, James Carney is quick to point out that "The material of 'Táin Bó Cuailnge' - and indeed the whole cycle - contains elements that are obviously mythic, such as the origin of the bulls and their final conflict"

(Carney, 2005: 478). The example given by Carney is of course the story of the two bulls Donn Cuailnge and Finnbennach, whose origin is told in a *remscél*[237] and whose confrontation finalizes the *Táin*. Both bulls were once two swineherds with shapeshifting powers, one the servant of the king of the *síd* mounds of Munster, and the other of the king of the *síd* mounds of Connacht. Although friends at the beginning of their tale, they soon enter into a violent rivalry, leading to an exchange of spells making their pigs unable to go fat. Their conflict continues afterwards with the shapeshifting into several animals such as hawks, sea creatures, stags or into other forms such as *fían*-warriors, ghosts and dragons, who engage in violent fights in both their respective territories. Eventually they both shape-shift into two worms who fall into a well and into a spring, from which two cows respectively drink, and these cows later give birth to the two bulls, one in Cooley, the other in Connacht. The bulls are the main motif for the contention between Ulster and the forces of Ailill and Medb in the *Táin*, and they mark the end of the tale with a bloody confrontation between them. Donn Cuailnge kills Finnbennach in that final confrontation, but is mortally wounded. Before he finally dies of exhaustion however, Donn Cuailnge wanders throughout Ireland scattering the remains of his rival and several place-names are created in the process.

In the words of J. P. Mallory "The duel of the divine bulls serves the function of explaining how certain features of the Irish landscape came into being. As such it is a cosmogonic legend of a type found in many other traditions, and seeks to explain aspects of creation" (Mallory, 1992: 61). Other aspects of early Irish narrative seem to convey a similar explanatory function regarding other elements, Ó Cathasaigh for instance points out that "Tales of the gods tell of the origins of institutions and customs, and serve as exemplary texts" (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 129). Through several examples from early Irish literature, Ó Cathasaigh underlines the use of explanatory and exemplary myths which are aimed at demonstrating the ideal behaviour of the hero or explain other aspects of society such as laws (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 130, 135-154). This seems to follow the idea of myth as establishing models of behaviour, both ritualistic and otherwise: "the foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities – diet or marriage, work or education, art or wisdom. This idea is of no little importance for understanding the man of archaic

[237] *De chophur in dá muccida* ("On the quarrel of the two swineherds"). Extant texts can be found in the Book of Leinster, in MS Egerton 1782 as well as in MS 1337 (Trinity College).

and traditional societies" (Eliade, 1963: 8). In what regards the aforementioned contention about the bulls in the *Táin*, Ó Cathasaigh also sees in it a clear mythological tale, which may reflect an ancient Indo-European myth (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 205-209).

These discussions are tied of course to the interpretation of myth as representing a sacred tale which fulfils a cosmogonic function, William Bascom for instance claims that: "Myths account for the origin of the world, of mankind, of death, or for characteristics of birds, animals, geographical features, and the phenomena of nature" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). Additionally, Bascom expressly associates that function with supernatural events or the action of supernatural beings such as gods: "Their main characters are not usually human beings, but they often have human attributes; they are animals, deities, or culture heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, when the earth was different from what it is today, or in another world such as the sky or underworld" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). All these elements are then further explained through the use of narratives that depict gods, semi-gods or other kinds of supernatural beings interacting between themselves: "They may recount the activities of the deities, their love affairs, their family relationships, their friendships and enmities, their victories and defeats" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). The most defining trait of myth for Bascom however, is his interpretation of a myth as being a narrative which is considered to be veracious in the context of its society of origin: "Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). Even recently, other scholars seem to share this same view of myth, as is the case with Antone Minard: "Another category of traditional narrative, the 'myth', includes stories of a sacred or cosmically important character. Myths are held to be true, although the setting of a myth is likely to be at an earlier stage of the world where different rules apply, so that otherwise impossible events are taken seriously" (Minard, 2012: 349). This definition of myth is closely related with religion and spirituality, with myth being conveyed through "sacred" narratives: "They [myths] are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). John Stephens also emphasizes the sacred and cosmogonic aspects of myth, when he states that "...an essential premiss for the identification of myth is that it deals with the irruption of the sacred, and especially supernatural beings, into the

world. The effect of such irruptions is to bring something into the world, to be a beginning" (Stephens, 2000: 332).

Such a definition is not set in stone however, myth can be a term used in a very broad sense, being applicable to different types of stories characterised as "traditional" or specific of a cultural group. In fact, the definition of myth is a very complex matter, since it cannot be easily defined: "The epistemological question that arises is that the concept of 'myth' in itself cannot be clearly demarcated. It has too many links with religion, ritual, politics and psychology to be treated as an aesthetic genre." (Schwimmer, 2009: 168). As such, it goes behind the scope of this dissertation to go through all the several interpretations which can be made of it, and we must therefore perhaps focus on the aspects of myth which may be applicable to our case. We should however, take into account some of these interpretations, especially because we must understand how we may talk of myth in a literary context when some of these definitions imply that myth has a sacred character. On this matter, scholars such as Bruce Lincoln claim that the sacred character of myth is exaggerated and misleading, since myths are a creation of the human mind just as any other kind of narrative, although they do have certain peculiarities: "myths are not sacred narratives. Although many myths claim sacred status, in this they misrecognize their own nature, for they are human stories, like any other. They simply make more exaggerated claims to a more elevated kind of authority" (Lincoln, 2006: 242). Kirk also seems to agree with Lincoln on this matter, since myth can take on many forms which go far beyond religion, even when it had a sacred function originally:

> There is however, a different and in some ways more specific basic definition that is much favoured by anthropologists at present: it is that "myths are sacred tales." […] In my opinion this added exclusiveness has no advantages. It is true that many traditional tales are "sacred" in that they concern gods or spirits – for example most cosmogonical myths, a well-known class, are sacred in that sense. But other tales are not primarily about gods at all, and have no ancillary implications of sanctity or tabu. It is not helpful to regard many of the tales about Heracles as sacred, even if he is persecuted by Hera or helped by Athena; Deucalion's re-creation of men by throwing stones over his shoulder is not usually specified as a sacred tale, even though the action is suggested by a god, is set in the early days of the world, and is the result of a divinely-caused flood. Most traditional tales in non-literate societies (which are usually highly religious) contain supernatural elements, and often "supernatural" will mean "divine" in these circumstances. But not everything that is supernatural is sacred. Nor should we be confused by specialized anthropological applications of the term "sacred." In short, although many myths in many different cultures concern gods and other sacred beings, or the

> period of creation, not all do so in any essential way, and therefore it can be misleading to focus on this quality as primary.
> (Kirk, 1984: 57)

Following this logic, myth does not necessarily account for an unquestionable truth, it just tries to establish values, behaviours or beliefs that may or may not be successfully assimilated, leading them to be potentially seen as a truth in a given context or fiction in another: "myths are neither false stories, nor true, but simply stories that claim to speak with authority about issues of deep importance. Sometimes these claims succeed and sometimes they fail, and the same story can change its status over time from myth to fable and back again, since such status is a function of reception" (Lincoln, 2006: 242). For Lincoln, myth is used to convey an ideological model that organizes the human perception of things and the relation between them in a hierarchical categorization:

> Myth is ideology in narrative form. More precisely, mythic discourse deals in master categories that have multiple referents: levels of the cosmos, terrestrial geographies, plant and animal species, logical categories, and the like. Their plots serve to organize the relations among these categories and to justify a hierarchy among them, establishing the rightness (or at least the necessity) of a world in which heaven is above earth, the lion the king of beasts, the cooked more pleasing than the raw. Sometimes issues of human society are given explicit attention-in stories that treat the relations of men and women, uncles and nephews, our tribe and its neighbours, etcetera-and sometimes these are left implicit, as when stories about lions serve to make points about royalty. But always this concern to rank (or to recalibrate the ranking of) human groups is present, and this is the most consequential aspect of any mythic story.
> (Lincoln, 2006: 242:243)

The purpose of presenting this alternative view is to underline that myth may have different properties and take different forms than solely being an element of a religious/sacred system. This is especially important when addressing the use of myths in fiction and literature, which is our case, notwithstanding the possible reminiscence of myths which may once have formed a part of a belief system. Kirk for instance mentions a "basic quality as traditional oral tales", but even he himself admits that "Even this will exclude whatever is meant by a "modern myth," as well as partly literary and historical developments…" (Kirk, 1984: 57). Even in our contemporary times, Western culture, as an example, tends to create tales, which even under the label of "fiction" seem to embody characteristics we can identify as myth, even though they come from no sacred or "traditional" background whatsoever. Be it the veil of

inspiration from old mythologies giving rise to a new creation as Tolkien did with *Lord of the Rings*, or the placement in a science-fiction scenario of what would be considered a mythical structure by Joseph Campbell in *Star Wars,* or the superheroes in comic books which despite being given an origin story for their powers which distances them from any religious or purely supernatural connotations, still display characteristics that makes them stand above the common man in a similar manner to gods. This is something which Robert Segal noticed in Mircea Eliade's theories regarding modern myth: "How modern myths, which do not involve gods, can still provide access to gods, Eliade never reveals. Likely for him, the agents in modern myths are merely human heroes, but heroes so elevated above ordinary mortals as to be virtual gods" (Segal, 2005: 362). Just as it is attributable to "traditional" myths, these modern fictional tales embody values, social meanings or codes of behaviour which reflect an idealized vision of the culture where they were produced through the use of supernatural motifs, of the fantastic, and of heroes which are either as powerful as gods or as outstanding in their feats as legendary heroes: "The characters of the comic strips present the modern version of mythological or folklore Heroes. They incarnate the ideal of a large part of society, to such a degree that any change in their typical conduct or, still worse, their death, will bring on veritable crisis among their readers" (Eliade, 1963: 185).

These "modern myths" then stand as a problem for the basic characteristic of "traditional" as being applicable to myth. Kirk answers this problem by stating that these are secondary expressions of myth, and that for the fundamental essence of myth it makes more sense to go for what he calls the "primary phenomenona", further arguing that "Specific authorship and the use of writing affect not only the form but also the imaginative and emotional content of the tales, and any kind of scholarly and self-conscious approach to myths […] tends to be destructive of some of their essential qualities" (Kirk, 1984: 57). However, Kirk's argument just puts aside what he considers "secondary forms" of myth, but fails to acknowledge that myth is therefore also present in those forms. Mircea Eliade, on the other hand, seems to acknowledge this fact when he observes that modern literature is also endowed with the property of allowing the reader to escape from his chronological context into an imaginary and fantastic world where different rules apply, a trait also observed in "traditional" myth, even though in a different context:

> But it is especially the "escape from Time" brought about by reading – most effectively by novel reading – that connects the function of literature with that of mythologies. To be sure, the time that one "lives" when reading a novel is not the time that a member of a traditional society recovers when he listens to a myth. But in both cases alike, one "escapes" from historical and personal time and is submerged in a time that is fabulous and trans-historical. The reader is confronted with a strange, imaginary time, whose rhythms vary indefinitely, for each narrative has its own time that is peculiar to it and to it alone. The novel does not have access to the primordial time of myths, but in so far as tells a credible story, the novelist employs a time that is *seemingly historical* yet is condensed or prolonged, a time, then, that has at its command all the freedoms of imaginary worlds.
> (Eliade, 1963: 192)

The "escape from time" of Eliade cannot be seen as a definable trait of myth, since it is a trait shared by both novel and myth, but we cannot state that every novel is mythological. Myth might indeed have the same property, however, certain narratives in literary form will be more prone to be mythological than others, and this is dependable of other characteristics besides this one. A literary narrative can be easily recognized as having a mythical structure when his characters and setting belong to an overly imaginative world which represents mythical paradigms we identify instinctively, and there is no lack of this genre of literature in modern times. The world where such narratives take place may vary, the names of its characters may change as well, indeed even the motifs and events used to carry forward the story, but the structure of all these elements remains reminiscent of the same one we could find in ancient mythologies, something which has been discussed by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and *The Secular Scripture* (1976). This is an important aspect to take into account when reflecting on the relationship between myth and literature:

> …it is well known that, like the other literary genres, the epic and the novel continue mythological narrative, though on a different plane and in pursuit of different ends. In both cases it is a question of telling a significant story, of relating a series of dramatic events that took place in a more or less fabulous past. There is no need to go over the long and complex process that transformed some particular "mythological material" into the "subject" of an epic. What we consider important is the fact that in modern societies the prose narrative, especially the novel, has taken the place of the recitation of myths in traditional and popular societies. More than this – it is possible to dissect out the "mythical" structure of certain modern novels, in other words, to show the literary survival of great mythological themes and characters. (This is true especially in regard to the initiatory theme, the theme of the ordeals of the Hero-Redeemer and his battles with monsters, the mythologies of Woman and of Wealth.) From this point of view we could say, then, that the modern passion for the novel expresses the desire to hear the greatest possible number of "mythological stories" desacralized or simply camouflaged under "profane" forms.

(Eliade, 1963: 191)

Of course, our subject of study is not concerned with modern narratives, however, these very same ideas which we have been discussing apply to the possible reminiscence of myth in both the Irish written tradition as well as in Arthurian romance. Taking into account what has been said and quoted up to this moment, it seems reasonable to consider that myth may change upon its passage to written form. One major factor for such change upon the transposition to another medium of transmission is the control of the content of the narrative which may contain myths by a single author or a group of authors considerably less vast than the collective creation of oral transmission. The implication of this change in the control of the narrative is the creation of certain characteristics one must be aware of when analyzing mythic discourse through this medium, but not that myth necessarily loses its essence: "myth may never be decanted cleanly from the form of its telling; many discursive genres can be implicated in myth, each delivering it according to its own generic norms" (Dooley, 2006: 102). Many mythologies are only accessible through the written versions, and such is the case with the Irish one, although we must address it as being a mythology which is also a result of layers of monastic authorship and Christian input.

The way myths and associated beliefs or concepts may be conveyed through literature in the Irish context is furthermore important to understand how or if similar ideas were transmitted to Arthurian literature in what shared motifs are concerned. The study of such matters requires of course the acknowledgment of the different context of Arthurian narrative. Even if the stories around King Arthur and his knights began as a set of oral tales depicting folk or mythic motifs, it was far from other oral traditions that went far back to old pre-Christian mythologies and were deeply connected with religion, social structure or ritual. Moreover, despite the most probable circulation of oral versions in geographical areas such as Wales, Britanny and consequently France, the advent of the Arthurian tales in the form of romance was accompanied by a proliferation of the written word where the written stories eventually set the standard and became the ultimate source. This was visible with Chrétien de Troyes, and later in the massive Vulgate cycle that came to be an influence on Thomas Malory, without mentioning the earlier chronicle by Geoffrey of Monmouth, which, influenced by oral traditions or not, led to the adaptations of Wace and Laȝamon, and was also a source of influence in the beginnings of French romance. Even so, the Arthurian legend is filled

with mythic content which establishes a set of values, idealized characters and a world which reflected the need for them in that age and filled the medieval imaginary.

Much of the aforementioned mythic content can be attributed to the influences on Arthurian literature, which are possibly what leads the latter to be a possible depository of mythological significances, and one such important influence is the Irish one. Saunders for instance associates the notion of the supernatural in the Middle Ages, which is thoroughly featured in Arthurian literature, with several influences including "Celtic": "The thought-world of the later Middle Ages included a complex mix of ideas of magic and the supernatural, which stretched back through classical and Judaeo-Christian as well as Germanic and Celtic belief and ritual" (Saunders, 2009: 201). Other scholars such as Caroline Jewers for instance are even more explicit and directly associate Arthurian narrative with the use of "Celtic" myth. When writing about Geoffrey and subsequent authors, Jewers states that: "He and other medieval authors based their reinventions of the realm of Celtic myth, Arthur, and Tristan on much earlier Celtic traditions that had filtered through oral and learned cultures in the intervening centuries" (Jewers, 2011: 49). An example may be given by the presence of elements in medieval romance which are reminiscent of the notion of the Otherworld, which plays an important part in Irish narrative (Cooper, 2004: 173-187; Huot, 2008: 238-243). In fact, Arthurian literature may be seen as a containing a similar dichotomy to what is found in Irish literature concerning the supernatural and the Christian context of the narratives: "Some of the central tensions in Arthurian romance, however, arise from the clash between different sorts of supernatural, in particular between the secular (with its origins in the pagan) and the sacred…" (Saunders, 2009: 201). Interestingly enough, medieval romance in general also seems to display the reconciliation between the two extremes of this dichotomy: "In the world of medieval romance, however, the Celtic otherworld is integrated with the Christian supernatural. Magic is treated as a real force – dangerous if misused, but also with positive virtues. Supernatural powers can be wielded by both God and devil in the battle over men's souls..." (Saunders, 2009: 216). While out of the scope of our study, the question on how the possible inherited concept of Otherworld had changes in its significance from the transmission from other contexts such as the Irish one to the Arthurian one is a similar one to our subject of study: did the beheading game or some of its elements such as the headless challenger suffer changes in its significance in the passage from Irish literature to Arthurian narratives? To

understand that we must also see how such subject has been treated in the past as well as the specific context of early Irish literature in what myth and meaning are concerned.

4.1.1 The Solar and Seasonal Interpretation of the Beheading Game

As we had previously discussed early on the introduction to this dissertation, early interpretations of the secular Irish tales were focused on mythological significances which were seen as having been preserved from the pagan past. The result of these interpretations was for many of the elements of the tales to be considered as inherited myths from pre-Christian religion, which were preserved through oral tradition until they were written down. In other words, these myths were assumed to represent the pre-Christian mythology of the Irish "Celts", and were associated with Indo-European and Celtic myth and ritual. As we have also discussed in the introduction, an interpretation of the possible significance of the beheading game with a strong emphasis on the possible myth behind it, which was influential in the early twentieth century, was found in the theories of R. S. Loomis in his *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (1927). Although we have previously underlined the flaws with this approach, it represents such a paradigmatic example of a specific attitude towards the study of myth and significance in a literary context, that we must take a further look at it, especially because it places a lot of emphasis on the beheading-game motif.

The Loomisian analysis of the beheading game is tied with the abduction motif[238] of a damsel in Arthurian romance, which he ultimately traces as having its origins in *Aided Chon Roí.* Loomis follows the interpretation of early Irish and Welsh literature as a barely changed inherited corpus of tales from the pagan oral traditions of the pre-Christian past and he sees the abduction tale in Arthurian stories as the expression of a seasonal myth rooted in Irish tradition (Loomis, 1927: 17). As we have discussed previously, *Aided Chon Roí* narrates the abduction of a maiden called Bláthnat by Cú Roí, who becomes her lover, and her subsequent betrayal of Cú Roí and rescuing by Cú Chulainn. In accordance with other studies which might have influenced him[239], he insinuates the presence of a pre-Christian spring-time myth in the story,

[238] The abduction motif refers to the Arthurian kidnapping tale of Guinevere, present in several renditions of Arthurian stories, most notably in the *Knight of the Cart* (Loomis, 1997: 6-9).

[239] The work of John Rhys in *Studies on the Arthurian Legend* (1876) also addresses the Arthurian body of literature in relation to early Irish literature with the approach of establishing it as being connected by myth, however, Rhys interpretation of the abduction tale is slightly different: "Several allusions have been made to the queen being seized by Arthur's foes. From the mythological point of view, these last

which was continued in the Arthurian abduction tales, not only of Guinevere, but also in variations such as the Dolorous Tower episode from *Vulgate Lancelot*, where a villain named Caradoc abducts Gawain and is betrayed by a damsel in his possession, seemingly against her will, who assists Lancelot in rescuing Gawain.

Loomis bases his vegetation-myth theory in the etymology of the names of the women abducted in these stories, he points out that both Bláthnat ("little flower"), the kidnapped damsel in *Aided Chon Roí* and Floree[240] ("flower"), which seems to be the name of the lover and betrayer of the antagonist (Caradoc) in the Dolorous Tower episode from *Vulgate Lancelot*, have their name connected with flowers (Loomis, 1927: 15). As is easily guessable, such a connection strengthens a seasonal myth theory, with the maidens easily being seen as analogies of vegetation deities or mythical personas such as Persephone. In fact, they are taken to represent what Loomis considers to be the "flower maiden", the personification of vegetation which shoots forth in spring and then decays in the winter. The presence of a representation of vegetation in such stories is associated by Loomis with the nature of the characters who play the parts of rescuer and kidnapper in the stories, specifically in what Loomis identifies as being representations of solar deities. This theory leads us almost inevitably to interpretations which remind us of the Max Müller school of "solar" mythology[241], which Loomis seems to propose to once again reopen in the light of what he sees as evidence of a solar myth in early Irish literature. Such reopening by Loomis of the solar myth question is apparently in accord with the seasonal myth, resulting in tales such as the abduction one being used as an analogy for pagan seasonal rituals, a theory ultimately derivative of J. G. Frazer and his *The Golden Bough*. According to the Loomisian theory, there are two sun-gods in a tale such as the abduction one. The Flower Maiden is the motive for a dispute between rival-gods, who fight for her possession, and such dispute extends to the Arthurian

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may be said to reduce themselves to various expressions of the one idea of a god of darkness and death carrying away the goddess of the dawn and the gloaming" (50-51).

[240] Loomis arrives at the conclusion that Caradoc's loved damsel is Floree by linking a passage in *Vulgate Lancelot* which says that she was married to Melyans le Gai (Sommer, 1911: 136) with the account in the *Livre d' Artus* of Gawain's "amie" Floree being the one given in marriage to Melianz de Lis (corresponding to Melyans le Gai) (Sommer, 1913: 115). The *Livre d' Artus* is a fragment contained in manuscript No. 337, which was written in France in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and was possibly part of a set of volumes which tried to include the whole Vulgate cycle.

[241] Loomis seems to consider the solar myth theory once again relevant in the light of the work of English classicists such as Gilbert Murray (1866-1957), Arthur Bernard Cook (1868-1952) and Jane Harrison (1850-1928). Both Gilbert Murray and Jane Harrison were associated with the so-called "Ritualists" in Cambridge, due to the nature of their approach to classical mythology, with Jane Harrison being its central figure. A. B. Cook, on the other hand, was considered a disciple of J. G. Frazer, with his approach also being in the myth-ritual vein.

legends, where the Irish characters are replaced by Arthurian characters (Loomis, 1927: 51).

The seasonal myth impression is, of course, given by the dates which function as marker points between the abduction and the subsequent rescuing, with the possession of the flower-maiden being an analogy for vegetation or fertility of the land, passing from one sun-god to the other. This seasonal myth represents the rescuing god as the sun in the spring, rejuvenating the vegetation, while the kidnapper is the winter-sun. This leads to the idea of a "new" sun replacing the "old" sun, who had the "flower-maiden" in its possession, and the "young" sun must take possession of her, in order for the natural cycle to continue. It is an idea supported by Loomis with the examples provided by several ritualistic celebrations in several world traditions, and more importantly to the case in question, in the Irish one[242] (Loomis, 1927: 80-81).

Such theory has consequences for the interpretation of the characters involved in the Irish story: Cú Chulainn (the rescuer) and Cú Roí (the kidnapper), making Cú Chulainn the young sun-god and Cú Roí the old one in the tale of the abduction of Bláthnat, and this is extended to the Arthurian versions of the abduction theme, and consequently to the interpretation of the kidnapper/hero symbolism in them. Loomis finds support for the young/old god view by interpreting the characteristics of Cú Chulainn[243] and Cú Roí[244] as demonstrative of their solar nature and by perceiving them

[242] Loomis points out the evidence for the existence of heliolatry in Ireland, arguing that sun-worship was in such a scale that it survived and mingled with Christianity (Loomis, 1927: 41). Such evidence is given, in Loomis view, by several pieces of hagiological lore. Saint Patrick himself seems to provide evidence with his condemnation of sun-worship in Ireland and acclamation of Christ as the true Sun, given in the *Confession* (cf. White, 1905: 252). A similar discourse was given by Gildas a century later, probably due to similar sun-worshipping by the Brythonic Celts (cf. Loomis, 1927: 42). Such type of discourse was typical of Christian missionaries to pagan sun-worshippers, and as such, this provides Loomis with hints that heliolatry was indeed present in Ireland (Loomis, 1927: 42). This shift from pagan sun-worshipping to seeing Christ as embodiment of the sun is evidenced, according to Loomis, with the Celtic cross, which seems to provide an example of the convergence between sun-worship and Christianity, and by reports of Christian ceremonies still maintaining invocations of the sun (cf. Loomis, 1927: 42, 43). Furthermore, reports are also given of the pagan sun-worship itself in hagiological works, saints lives and several works of compilation made in an ecclesiastical context. An important report mentioned by Loomis regarding the worship of Crom Dubh (cf. Dalton, 56-59), goes even further, since it relates a pagan ritual of sun-worship (including the sacrifice of animals), still recurrent in the eighteenth century (Loomis, 1927: 42).

[243] With the support of Eleanor Hull's *Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature* (1898), Loomis points out several characteristics on the description of Cú Chulainn which he interprets as providing evidence of Cú Chulainn's solar nature: Cú Chulainn's taboo of not rising at Emain Macha later than the sun (cf. Hull: lxxvi), the heat his body seemed to generate, which melted the snow around him for thirty feet (cf. Hull: lxv-lxvi) and his physical description: "Three crowns of hair he had: next his skin, brown; in the middle, crimson; that outside formed, as it were, a diadem of gold, for like the shining of yellow gold was each glittering, curling, beauty-colored thread as free and loose it fell down and hung between his shoulders" (Hull, 1898: lxiii).

as alter-egos to Lugh, considered the "original" Celtic sun-god[245] (Loomis, 1927: 46), and, as a consequence, as being sun deities as well (Loomis, 1927: 55). It is such conjecture that also allows the beheading game to be inserted in this frame of mythological interpretations, due to the fact that both Cú Chulainn and Cú Roí are also the antagonists in *Fled Bricrenn*: "The Beheading Game would then be simply the tale of the encounter of the old and the young sun-god, when the old god is beheaded on condition that the young god shall himself lose his head a year later" (Loomis, 1927: 61). The function of such encounter would be for the old god to test the worth of the young god, in order to acknowledge if the young god, who is his own counterpart, will be capable of gaining possession of the flower-maiden and thus continue the seasonal cycle[246] (Loomis, 1927: 100). Thus, as seen in his treatment of the abduction tale, the beheading game in Irish tradition, would be repeated in the Arthurian romances, giving

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[244] As with Cú Chulainn, Loomis highlights certain passages in the texts where Cú Roí appears, as being the evidence of his solar nature. In *Fled Bricrenn*, it is stated that Cú Roí was in an "oriental expedition" and that in whatever part of the planet he would be, his fort would revolve, together with the detail that the entrance was never found after sunset (Henderson, 1899: 100-103), and this leads Loomis to have suspicions regarding the movement of the Sun, and with Cú Roí's fort as having some relation to it. In yet another passage from *Fled Bricrenn*, Cú Roí disguised as a gigantic *bachlach* is questioned on why he has positioned himself near the "fork-beam" if not because he wishes to be the "illuminary" of the house-hold, to which he answers that "What property soever may be mine, sooth ye will agree, no matter how big I am, that the household as a whole will be enlightened, while the hall will not be burnt [Cid hé mo dán dano, bes cotmidfider cacha bé dim airddi, co m-bad coitcenn a suillsi don tegluch ocus conná bad loscud don tig]" (Henderson, 1899: 118-119). The statement by Cú Roí that he enlightens the house, rather than burning it down, together with the previous description of his fortress, and his subsequent statement that he travelled all around the world, not finding worthy challengers for the beheading game, led Loomis, albeit hastily, to consider these as analogies to the patterns of behavior of the sun, and his fortress, as a representation of the sky: "Doubt there can be that Curoi is a solar deity and that his home that revolves by night is the sky" (Loomis, 1927: 50).

[245] The theory of Lugh being a solar hero was shared by John Rhys as is stated in his *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom* (cf. 1886: 383-431) and by Eleanor Hull in her *Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature* (cf. 1898: lvii-lix). Even though such theories related to "solar" mythology were characteristic of late nineteenth-century scholarship and later debunked, with emphasis shifting to the influence exerted by evolutionary theories spread by *The Golden Bough*, they still managed to influence Celtic studies at least up to the late 1940's, with T. F. O'Rahilly's *Early Irish History and Mythology* (1946) still showing its influence. Many of the arguments of this theory were related with interpretations of Lugh's description in Irish literature: hints at the solar nature of Lugh are given in *Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann* ("The Fate of the Children of Tuireann"), when Lugh arrives at the assembly of the Tuatha Dé Danann: "…and like to the setting sun was the splendor of his countenance and his forehead; and they were not able to look in his face from the greatness of its splendour. And he was Lugh Lamh-fada" (O' Curry, 1863: 161), and when Lugh approaches the Fomorian camp and Bres confuses him with the sun itself due to his radiance: "Finally when Bres utters his astonishment that the sun should be rising in the west, the direction from which Lug was approaching, the druids replied that it was the splendor of the face of Lug Lamfada". (Loomis, 1927: 46).

[246] As Loomis himself admits (cf. Loomis, 1927: 78), the main root for his interpretation, and which proves to be highly influential on his views, is James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The test pattern and the replacement of the old god by a young god in a ritualistic myth is seen by Loomis as reminiscent of the study of the King of the Wood, the Priest of Nemi, which constitutes an important chapter in the *Golden Bough*. The King of the Wood was a title attributed to a priest who served Diana, and which was ritualistically replaced by having a violent end, killed by the next Priest of Nemi who would become the new King of the Wood, with his queen being, in a sense, Diana (cf. Frazer, 1906: 1-43)

continuity to the myth of the old god finding and testing the young one (Loomis, 1927: 115), and with Arthurian characters such as Gawain[247] now fulfilling the role of sun-gods.

If we may remember, there are a whole lot of issues in this interpretation, as we have underlined in the introduction to this dissertation. We should now further specify some of the problems raised by this theory. An analysis of Loomis' views, as well as of those of other scholars of his school of thought such as Jessie Weston and her analysis of the Grail legends in *From Ritual to Romance*, shows quite clearly that Frazer's work exerts an influence of such order in them, that any case-study seems to be inserted in a pattern established by the cases documented by Frazer, making their analysis biased[248]. The same could be said of "solar" mythology and on how every single major character in the Irish tales who concerns us with seems to be encased in a classification of "solar" god/hero by Loomis (cf. 1927: 46-116). This interpretation of Irish characters such as Cú Chulainn as being solar deities was not accepted by other scholars such as T. F. O' Rahilly (1946: 514) or Marie-Louise Sjoestedt (1949: 60), and even more recently there are still rebuttals of such a view by scholars such as Phillip Bernhardt-House (2009: 233-235). Additionally, some of the characteristics of Cú Chulainn which are associated with solar symbolism were shown to be prone to different interpretations, as is the case with the Rees brothers' interpretation of the heat released by Cú Chulainn during his battle rage:

[247] For Loomis, Gawain's trait of having his strength increased until noon sets him as a solar hero: "The solar nature of Gawain has often been pointed out. Again and again in the romances it is said that his strength increases until noon and then decreases. And in Crestien de Troyes's *Ivain* it is explicitly said that Gawain is the sun." (Loomis, 1927:63), and, as we can already predict, as the hero of several renditions of both the abduction and beheading game, with emphasis on the latter and his role in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This makes of him an equivalent to Cú Chulainn, with his Welsh version of Gwalchmai being an intermediary, through several other names who operated transformations until arriving at the name of Gawain (Loomis, 1927: 62). Lancelot, another of the heroes in the Arthurian renditions of the abduction and beheading game, is also interpreted as having been derivative from Irish prototypes and his supposed solar traits are also pointed out, although in his case the comparison is more focused in his supposed similarity with Lugh (cf. Loomis, 1927: 90-97).

[248] Loomis goes as far as assigning the King of the Wood pattern to the social functioning of Ireland in ancient times, seeing the replacement of Irish Kings as an example of this pattern, which would extend beyond mythical meaning and be in fact put into practice in the way kingship was dealt with. The more plausible explanation that succession through violence was due to blood-feuds is dismissed by Loomis, who justifies it by the historian's ignorance of the priesthood of Nemi: "Doubtless the 'official historians were puzzled by the regularity with which each king met his death at the hands of his successor, and felt obliged to explain it. Not knowing the system of the Arician priesthood, they had to cast about elsewhere, and they found a blood-feud as the easiest way of accounting for the perplexing fact" (Loomis, 1927: 79). This way, just as in the tales of abduction and beheading games, the kings of Ireland were like solar gods which were replaced by a young solar god: "Thus we have evidence that in Ireland the royal representative of the god was a "slayer who shall himself be slain. […] The kings of Ireland were, like Cuchulinn, solar beings who slew and then after a period of time were themselves slain" (Idem).

> The battle fury in which he returns to his people is analogous to the "extreme heat" and "rage" which, on other levels of sacrality, characterizes the incarnation of power. This association of heat with the warrior's frenzy has been shown to exist both among Indo-European peoples and among peoples who cannot be shown to have any historical connection with them.
> (Rees, 1961: 249)

In fact, the assertion that Cú Chulainn's heat during his battle frenzy could be symbolic of his status as a warrior led Bernhardt-House to argue that Cú Chulainn could not be a solar deity on the grounds that he represents the warrior and brings death in opposition to the symbolism of fertility associated with the sun, and refers to the *Táin* as an example: "...the results of the *Táin* in particular can scarcely be said to be the triumph of life, as countless warriors on both sides are killed, large parts of the land laid waste, uncounted resources expended..." (Bernhardt-House, 2009: 234). It seems that, in the case of Loomis' theory, the constant placement of characters and story motifs into specific patterns seems to be a consequence of a mixture of naturalist and evolutionist approaches to mythology. Loomis' internalization of these approaches provides an explanation on how he seems to constantly disregard the possible circumstantial nature of many of them, as well as the use of narrative techniques and stylistic means and the possible elements which could be derived from the social and cultural context of their time. The fact that the material which Loomis has in his hands is the written one produced by a monastic culture is dismissed, since what Loomis is keen on finding is the original myth behind it. Naturally, this leads to speculation, and to a reductionist view: "his [Loomis] zeal for Celtic origins outran the material on which he was working, and his arguments rely on a series of assumptions and analogues that scarcely hang together" (Barber, 2006: 27).

Loomis seems to always place the narratives in his pattern of a seasonal myth whose parts are played by solar gods. Therefore, the narratives become a simple analogy for natural forces struggling for the seasonal cycle to keep going, as a result of being the product of a "savage" or "primitive" mind[249]. The textual creation and the way

[249] This conception of the origin of the tales is rooted on the idea that what we have in our hands is a form of mythological literature which transmits the stories ultimately from a "primitive" society belonging to the pre-Christian past. The root for such idea was possibly based in the premise of E. B. Tylor, which considers that myth has a similar role to the one operated by science in modern societies, in the sense it has the function to explain natural phenomena, and as such, it is the counterpart of natural science in an archaic society and in an underdeveloped or "primitive" stage of human intellect: "When the attention of a man in the myth-making stage of intellect is drawn to any phenomenon or custom which has to him no obvious reason, he invents and tells a story to account for it..." (Tylor, 1871: 392). The naturalist school of Max Müller and the evolutionist school of scholars such as J. G. Frazer, while having substantial

the narrative flows, the several elements in them as characters, dialogues, places, rhetoric, meanings, structure, descriptions of social hierarchy, tradition and culture, seem to be interpreted as mere superficial interpolations or are otherwise utterly ignored in order to just put emphasis on the more simplistic view of solar and seasonal myth. Loomis goes even further than Jessie L. Weston in her treatment of the beheading-game narratives in *The Legend of Sir Gawain* (1897), who, despite the constant comparison of Gawain with Cú Chulainn, does attempt to trace the development of the beheading-game motif without the same level of speculation. Furthermore, many of Loomis' connections, especially the establishment of derivations between Irish and Arthurian characters, are argued through etymological interpretations in a most speculative fashion, often with recourse to "scribal errors" as an argument for explaining how certain names became other ones.

Loomis' theory is an example of attempting to analyse a written corpus which may have mythological elements having in mind the concept of myth as dependent of a previous religious and ritualistic tradition which may have given origin to it, in sum, the sacred definition of myth. Nevertheless, Loomis ignores that both the texts from early Irish literature and the Arthurian romances which contain his speculated mythological pattern are written traditions with their own specific context. The main issue with early Irish literature for instance is how little Loomis considers the Christian and medieval context where these tales were written, placing more focus on a possible seasonal pre-Christian myth. Many approaches to early Irish literature with basis on theoretical schemes around Indo-European mythologies fall in the same mistake of overlooking such context. This is also verifiable for instance in the contextualisation of early Irish literature with Dumézil's tripartite interpretation of Indo-European mythology. While it may be true that reminiscences of Indo-European or "Celtic" myth may provide the roots for many of the apparent mythological elements in early Irish literature, the fact is that we are dealing with a written tradition which furthermore was written in the Middle Ages and under Christian ideology. These are important considerations which have

differences from one another, still follow Tylor's conception of mythical thinking. Frazer's view makes a turn from simply seeing myth as explanatory, and attributes to myth the function of also trying to control natural phenomenon (such as the success of crops) through ritual. However, it still sees myth as fundamentally based in natural phenomenon, disregarding the possibility that it may also cover complex phenomena such as the social dimension of man: "For both Tylor and Frazer, the events explained or effected by myth are those in the external world such as rainfall, not social phenomena such as customs, laws, and institutions. Myth is the primitive counterpart to natural, not social, science." (Segal, 2005: 355-378).

been underlined by anti-nativism, as we shall now discuss, and which must be taken into account when attempting to discern the significance of a motif such as the beheading game.

4.1.2 The Christian Context of Early Irish Literature

Anti-nativism on the other hand, with Kim McCone as its main proponent, represents a total opposite view, since it associates many of the significances (mythological or otherwise) of the narratives with monastic and biblical learning. It proposes therefore to focus the search for meaning of the Irish tales in biblical analogues rather than in oral traditions or pre-Christian mythology, even though it does not disregard the latter completely. Of course, the emphasis that McCone puts on the monastic production of the Irish texts places into question the role of the poetic classes as the main transmitters of traditional material and of their pagan heritage. McCone addresses this matter by contrasting assumptions regarding the *filid* as grand continuators of a pagan tradition with medieval Irish texts such as *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé*[250] which describe the proliferation of monasteries and the desolation in the ancient pagan royal forts with an explicit tone of triumphalism (McCone, 1990: 21), thus indicating, for McCone, that paganism could not thrive in the figure of the *fili* if it also did not for secular rulers.

In fact, for McCone, the *filid* were not pagan at all, but the opposite, they were learned poets associated with the same monastic milieu which produced early Irish literature. McCone's arguments regarding this claim are constituted by the references to the learned classes in Irish sources from the pre-Norman period, such as annals and obits: "Four categories of learned persons seem to have chiefly interested the monastic compilers of annalistic obits in the pre-Norman period, namely the scholar in *ecnae* or scripturally based Latin learning, the *brithem* or jurist, the *senchaid* or genealogist-cum-historian, and the *fili* or poet-cum-storyteller" (McCone, 1990: 22), as well as from associations with the ecclesiastical network mentioned in the annals: "Of the fifty or so *filid* or poets mentioned in the annals of the pre-Norman period, nine are explicitly attached to monasteries" (McCone, 1990: 22). From references such as these, McCone

[250] *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé*, translated as "The Martyrology of Óengus", is a martyrology written in Old Irish, a record of the several saints and their corresponding feast days. Its authorship is attributed to Óengus mac Óengobann, an Irish bishop who flourished in the beginning of the 9th century as a reformer and a writer. An edition and translation was published in 1905 by Whitley Stokes.

thus proceeds to postulate that the combination of the four learned categories, where poetry is included, was a symbol of Christian learning in the monasteries and that the four acted as the major areas of learning. McCone uses as an example the legendary Cenn Fáelad[251], who is described as a *sapiens* and consequently the leading scholar in a monastic school of Latin: "…he combined the disciplines of the Latin scholar, the poet and the jurist…" (McCone, 1990: 23). In fact, many annalistic obits seem to describe monastic types as being versed in more than one of the disciplines of learning from monasteries[252]. By analyzing the Old Irish *Míadslechta*[253] tracts (Binchy, 1978: vv. 582.32-589.32; Breatnach, 2005: 264-265), McCone finds evidence that the ecclesiastical classes were expected to have at least a reasonable competence in every single category of learning, poetry included, further testifying to the importance of the schools of poetry. In other words, the association of poetry with other branches of monastic learning seems to place poets in the monastic context, rather than in secular bardic[254] schools. Moreover, even if there were comparable secular schools of knowledge, McCone underlines that the literary product which has come down to our days is without a doubt of monastic provenance (McCone, 1990: 26).

[251] Cenn Fáelad mac Ailella (death in 679) is a legendary Irish scribe, to whom several literary accomplishments are attributed, such as the *Auraicept na n-Éces* ("The Scholars' Primer") and several pieces of legal, grammatical and poetic works. Furthermore, he features as a character in *Suidiugud tellaig Temra* and in *Cath Maige Rath*. Cenn Fáelad is frequently characterised by his "brain of forgetfulness", which was supposedly removed due to a head wound he received in the battle described in *Cath Maige Rath*, allowing Cenn Fáelad to gain an excellent memory.

[252] In the story of the Battle of Mag Roth (Binchy, 1978: vv. 250.33f), Cenn Fáelad is taken after the battle to a site called Túaim Drecain, which is described as having schools for Latin learning, law, and also poetry. The nature of Túaim Drecain is obscure, but the description matches what seems to be a common characterisation of monasteries at the time. Latin learning and the study of law occurred in monasteries, and from what this example can give us, so did the learning of poetry: "…Cenn Fáelad was taken for convalescence to Bricín's establishment of Túaim Drecain, where there were three schools for Latin learning, native law and poets respectively (*scol léigind 7 scol fénechais 7 scol filed*), the teachings of which Cenn Fáelad is supposed to have memorized by day and written up at night in poetic form." (McCone, 1990: 23).

[253] The *Míadslechta* tracts are an Old Irish law document concerned with passages of rank. See Binchy (1978: vv. 582.32-589.32, 676.17-677.27 and 1567.1-1567.35) for a transcription of its contents.

[254] In pre-Norman times the secular bards were distinguished from the *filid* since they did not have a higher (possibly monastic) learning as was characteristic of the *filid*. From the conclusions that can be taken from the Old Irish tract on poets *Bretha Nemed Déidenach*, transcribed in *Ériu* 13 (cf. Gwynn, 1940), the art of composition of the bards was based mostly in orality, possibly resembling the pre-Christian methods of composition. Due to the difference in prestige, bards would be rewarded half the price in comparison to the reward of a *fili*. Such differences are stated in the Middle Irish metrical tracts, known as *Mittelirische Verslehren* due to Thurneysen's classic edition (1891), including the *Córus bard cona bairdni* ("The Hierarchy of Bards with its Bardic Composition") which is concerned with the several grades of the bards as well as the metric composition accordingly to each grade. (Thurneysen, 1891: 1-182). After the Norman conquest both *fili* and bard started to be considered as belonging to one single class of poets known as the *fir dhána*, composed mostly of bards and consequently characterised as following bardic practices (Nagy, 1997: 11).

By analyzing some famed poets or *filid* of pre-Norman Ireland, McCone gathers more substantial evidence regarding what he considers to be the nature and affiliation of a *fili* in Irish medieval society. Both obits related to Máel Mura Othna and Ruman mac Colmain in the *Annála Uladh*[255], celebrated poets of Ireland in pre-Norman times, name them as respectively the chief poet of Ireland (*rígfili Érenn*) in 887 and a *poeta optimus* ("most excellent poet") in 747. What is relevant about these two figures, is that such renowned Irish *filid* were connected with monasteries, with Máel Mura being affiliated with the monastery of Othain and the descendants of Ruman mac Colmáin being important members of the clergy, as well as poets (McCone, 1990: 24). Additionally, the annalistic sources, such as the aforementioned Annals of Ulster and the *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann*[256], attribute to these poets the same interdisciplinary knowledge which seemed to be characteristic of monastic learning as seen in the description of Cenn Fáelad and as stated in several annalistic-obits related to monastic scholars. The purpose of McCone by underlining these examples is to demonstrate that "Neither of these gentlemen [referring to Ruman and Máel Muru] […] give grounds for belief in the so-called '(culturally) pagan *filid*' of pre-Norman Ireland" (McCone, 1990: 25), and to reinforce an idea that had already been claimed by Thurneysen: "very soon after the introduction of Christianity these *filid* entered into a close connection with monastic learning" (Thurneysen, 1921: 66-7). Therefore, the oral performances and tradition of the *filid* would have probably been given a central role in the re-organization and reformulation of Irish ideology in accordance to Christian axioms rather than an unadulterated continuation of their pre-Christian roots. McCone argues that even the seven grades of *fili* seemed to be in tune with the clerical ones as can be observed in the *Uraicecht na ríar*[257] (cf. Breatnach, 1987: 81-89).

[255] The Annals of Ulster are a collection of annals of Medieval Ireland with the entries spanning the years from 431 AD to 1540 AD. Diplomatic edition and translation in Mac Airt *et al*, 1983.

[256] The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland or Annals of the Four Masters are an important compilation of annals and documents from the 17th century which provide a chronicle of medieval history: "The Annals of the Four Masters represent the immense attempt of the Irish Franciscans and their fellow workers, in the short space of three years, to gather together and then publish all the extant Irish annals they could find, as a record of Irish civilization. [..]. The text runs from Noah's Flood to 1616. It contains a vast range of historical and historicist materials and is by far the most copious Irish annalistic collection. For large areas of Irish history, early and late, these annals are the only authority" (Ó Corráin, 2006: 74). Edition and translation by O' Donovan (1856).

[257] The "Primer of Stipulations" is an Old Irish legal tract on the seven poetic grades from the second half of the 8th century (from top to bottom, *ollam*, *anrúth*, *clí*, *cano*, *dos*, *macfhuirmid* and *fochloc*). Edition and translation in Breatnach (1987).

The apparent link between poets and ecclesiastics goes against the theory that early Irish literature was a direct account of the tradition spread by a hypothetical class of pagan *filid*. Rather, following this line of reasoning, the *filid* seem to have been themselves an ecclesiastical class that held both the most significant role in the new oral and poetic tradition as well as in the written tradition. Both mediums would then be in accord with monastic teaching, even if the original material was possibly of pre-Christian origin. Therefore, in the anti-nativist view, early Irish literature is not a product of the pre-Christian oral tradition, but of an already differentiated tradition, despite much of the core material possibly having origin in pre-Christian times. At the time of its literary output, the native poetic and narrative tradition was fixed in written versions produced in a monastic environment, of which the oral counterpart transmitted by the *filid* was itself connected with that same monastic environment.

The anti-nativist stance extensively exemplified by McCone thus places early Irish literature as primarily the product of ecclesiastic learning, and this, of course, affects other areas in the study of early Irish literature, including the study of mythological elements. Since anti-nativism puts more emphasis on the influence of biblical and Latin learning in the treatment of native material rather than pagan oral tradition, approaches to early Irish literature concerned with the continuation of pre-Christian mythological elements or Indo-European patterns are as vigorously attacked by anti-nativists, such as McCone, as are the assumptions regarding the pagan nature of the *filid*. McCone underlines the flaws of early twentieth century theories of solar "mythology" and he criticizes the tripartite Indo-European ideology of Dumézil. The tripartite system relies heavily on the original Indian evidence which served as the starting point for Dumézil, and, as a consequence, the comparison of Ireland with India is often made, with the previous being seen in function of the later. Therefore, for McCone, the comparison of the Indian evidence with the traditions of other branches does not provide an overriding demonstration of the Indo-European origins of Irish elements (McCone, 1990: 3). In other words, McCone considers that relying solely on Dumézil's system to analyse Irish texts may lead the scholar to have always the tripartite ideology in mind and the horizon of an Indo-European ancient society which supposedly forged the structure of all its subsequent branches. Thus, Irish tradition is constantly juxtaposed against a fixed structure in order to fit the idealized Indo-European tripartite one, which, even if it makes sense due to Irish heritage, points more

towards a presupposed past than the present that may actually be reflected in the extant textual renditions: "…the fact that the tripartite ideology in question was primarily seen as an Indo-European inheritance or survival meant that early Irish texts were still tending to be laid on an imported bed of Procrustes relating to their assumed past rather than their present." (McCone, 1990: 59).

McCone is indeed persuasive in his arguments, but his anti-nativism does not represent a flawless approach to Irish literature. One of the main flaws of McCone's thinking is that his hypothesis of biblical and Latin parallels ends up being as polemical and potentially speculative as the uncritical assumption of pagan origins:

> A particularly curious suggestion is advanced toward the end of the chapter "'Pagan' Myth and Christian 'History.'" Noting that patristic exegesis used allegorical interpretations to account for apparently unedifying biblical passages, McCone proceeds to opine that "the intriguing possibility presents itself that allegorical values could be 'remythologized,' so to speak, as constituents of new narratives" (p. 79). In other words, a technique used to explain away objectionable parts of Scripture could be thrown into reverse, to generate ostensibly secular tales in which what "nativists" take to be violence, sexual license, and pagan magic are actually the coded components of a monastic parable. The vindication of such a startling proposal would surely require the minute analysis of several texts, not the impressionistic paraphrases provided by McCone.
> (Carey, 1992: 451)

McCone is right when he underlines that the material available to the scholar is the written text, and that the latter was undoubtedly produced in monasteries, however, to conclude that this definitely means that native tradition was interpreted in accordance with biblical tradition is as speculative as to claim that there was a major predominance of influence from a pagan oral tradition. Either way, there is not enough information concerning how influential the role of oral tradition could have been: "oral tradition must have dominated in Ireland before the fifth century and for some time thereafter, but the extent of its influence on the extant literary canon is unknowable without *a priori* assumptions (p. 5). This surely means that we are obliged to be agnostic rather than sceptical about the extent of its influence" (Sims-Williams, 1996: 187). Such lack of information is extended to the matter of the role of the *filid* in the making of early Irish literature: even though there is information on both the lore supposedly expected to be in the knowledge of the elite poets, as well as in the affiliation of at least some *filid* to ecclesiastical institutions, we do not know if such scenario extended to all the *filid* nor if their oral tales completely correspond to what we find in the written evidence:

"The indications are that in early Ireland storytelling was a function of the *filid*, but we cannot say what the relationship may have been between the stories narrated by the *filid* and those that survive in the manuscripts" (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 3).

In fact, if, as McCone claims, the most certain existence of a previous rich oral tradition does not mean it would be a pervasive influence on the secular written tradition, since it was produced in monasteries, the inverse is also true: "But it does not follow from the fact that literacy reached Ireland through Christian-Latin channels that the entire vernacular literature that resulted was bound, whatever the genre, to be permeated by biblical and classical influences" (Sims-Williams, 1996: 189). The result of such a stance, as Sims-Williams highlights, are parallels that could be considered as dim as the parallels McCone criticizes concerning comparisons with Indo-European models: "...it is remarkable that McCone's thorough comparisons with the Bible and some of the classics fail to produce any convincing evidence of their pervasive influence on the ostensibly secular parts of early Irish literature, but merely amass vague parallels..." (Sims-Williams, 1996: 189). Furthermore, McCone contradicts himself in several instances. He is quick to criticize the Indo-European Dumézilian approach, as well as other theoretical frames concerned with the presence of myth in Irish literature, but he himself makes use of these ideas, albeit with his own different interpretation:

> For all his criticism of 'nativists', McCone tends to modify rather than reject the extra-linguistic Indo-European hypothesis. He argues that parallels between India and Ireland have been overused, by Dumézilians and by the Rees brothers, and that 'a wider range of Indo-European literatures should be compared simultaneously in the interests of a more balanced socio-mythological reconstruction' (p. 3). He argues that Irish literature should be understood in terms of the 'actually attested contemporary tripartition [hospitallers, warriors, men of art] rather than the Dumézilian model ascribed rather doubtfully to the ancient Indo-Europeans two or more millen[n]ia previously' (p. 125; cf. pp 161-4). Yet he is quite prepared to contemplate Indo-European origins; in connection with his own work on 'hounds, heroes and hospitallers', for instance, he argues that 'since ... significant parallels can be adduced from Germanic, Indian and, above all, Greek literature ... it seems probable that an appreciable part of this material has pagan, oral or even Indo-European roots' (p. 64). Business as usual then!
> (Sims-Williams, 1996: 185)

Moreover, the Indo-European tripartite scheme which McCone criticizes but then makes wide use of is not his single contradiction regarding the interpretation of pagan or mythological elements. McCone also falls into the same level of speculation which was ascribed to "solar mythology" by interpreting figures from hagiographical

works as Christianized fire deities, an ironic view taking into account that McCone, in the early chapters of his *Pagan Past*, is quick to dismiss the recourse to "solar mythology" and pagan origins as credible frames of interpretation: "gods aplenty are invented in chapter 7, 'Fire and the arts', where McCone visits those wilder shores of fantasy on which T. F. O' Rahilly and the Rees brothers have already erected their standards. Fire-deities spring from the sparks of his enthusiastic exposition" (Dumville, 1996: 393). When reading the section mentioned in the quote from Dumville, one cannot help but to form comparisons with earlier uses of solar mythology by scholars such as Loomis and his wide array of sun gods in early Irish and Arthurian literature, and to observe a similar speculative character in McCone's interpretation: "here he [McCone] has passed beyond the normal bounds of sober scholarship - his assertion that saints whose names are redolent of fire are on that account to be recognized as humanized and Christianized gods simply invites derision. Not only is this nativism run riot but it is quite breathtakingly old-fashioned" (Dumville, 1996: 393).

Actually, several of McCone's statements in many instances approach similar ideas to the "nativist" view as long as it is not assumedly so, therefore leading to a partial discourse: "McCone's overt message is that Irish philologists' inherited intellectual framework of 'nativism' is absurd and to be rejected; the sub-text is that any form of nativism is acceptable as long as it is approved by McCone and does not bear that party-label" (Dumville, 1996: 389). This is particularly troubling when reading McCone's attacks on notable and well respected scholars such as Proinsias Mac Cana, when the latter was actually quite moderate in his "nativism", perhaps more so than in McCone's often contradictory nativist views: "*if* Mac Cana is the arch-nativist, then McCone drinks by turns from the same fountain and outdoes his master in nativist enthusiasm; but I cannot remember Mac Cana inventing any fire-gods during his long and distinguished career" (Dumville, 1996: 394). Contradictions aside, the consideration of scholars which McCone sees as nativists as being extremist in their view of the influence of oral tradition and "pagan" myth in early Irish literature seems to be a projection of McCone's own anti-nativist extremism (cf. Sims-Williams, 1996: 192). As Sims-Williams (1996: 182) points out, Mac Cana himself, so much accused by McCone for being a leader of nativist ideas, did also agree with the monastic provenance and classical training of the authors of early Irish secular narratives: "the men who redacted the old tales and formed new ones from the debris of tradition were

for the most part members of the communities in certain well known monastic seats of learning. It was in the monasteries that the judgment and taste of the classical scholar were united with an enthusiasm for native tradition and literature" (Mac Cana, 1958: 182).

The extreme anti-nativism of McCone and his contradictions has led his work in *Pagan Past* to fail his purpose in some sense: "Despite broad learning, imaginative flair, and an enthusiastic iconoclasm which many will find exhilarating, Pagan Past and Christian Present fails to transcend its polemical mission and consequently to do justice to the scope and subtlety of the sources" (Carey, 1992: 452). However, in spite of the harsh treatment of nativists by McCone, on the one hand, and the pointing of his flaws by his peers in Irish studies on the other hand, the matter of nativism and anti-nativism did contribute for important developments in the study of Irish medieval vernacular literature. New and groundbreaking insights into the nature of this extensive and complex literary corpus were attained, as well as a better comprehension of the society into which it was (re)created. Although McCone was too extreme in his analysis of the intellectual classes of pre-Norman medieval Ireland in what concerns ecclesiastical allegiance, further studies do point out that the *filid* did occupy an important place in the intellectual elites of Irish society in the early Christian period, by fulfilling the role of storyteller and of jurist every so often, in addition to the making of praise poetry for the members of the upper classes of Irish society: "The poet figured prominently in the intellectual elite of early Irish Christian society, especially the most distinguished kind of poet, the *fili*. The poet functioned as the provider of praise to kings and other important members of society and also as storyteller and jurist." (Nagy, 1997: 8-9). Actually, J. F. Nagy also agrees that the *filid* did indeed have some sort of connection with the ecclesiastical classes: "available evidence indicates that the Irish church and the higher poetic orders formed a working alliance early on, perhaps because poets saw possibilities in the innovation of writing as introduced by the church and its missionaries" (Nagy, 1997: 20). However, this does not mean the *filid* lost their traditional roles: "Poets, moreover, although they embraced literacy, continued at least in theory to be characterised as performers and bearers of an oral tradition" (Nagy, 1997: 20). Notwithstanding, it is true that it is hard to measure exactly up to what extent did Christianity alter the way of life in Ireland, but it does seem to be true that a powerful monastic network was established: "The extent to which Christianity affected

everyday life in Ireland of the sixth and seventh centuries remains unclear, but the spread of monasticism and the establishment of a network of politically and economically powerful monasteries during this period are indisputable" (Nagy, 1997: 9). To understand the interplay between the *filid* and such a monastic network is deeply relevant, since the *filid* could have been indeed the holders of native tradition, and as such their connection with the monastic network would be crucial in the genesis of early Irish literature:

> In general, he [the *fili*] appears to have served as the repository and disseminator of cultural truths, and poetry in oral performance was the paradigmatic medium for the expression of those truths. At least this is the conceit promulgated by the creators of medieval Irish literature, many of whom were *filid* 'poets' themselves. The centrality of poets and poetry to the collective formulation and reformulation of ideology is still to be readily observed in the Christian era, especially since at least the higher orders of poets appear to have joined forces with the church early on. Perhaps the most important result of this alliance between native knower/performer and ecclesiastic was the creation of a literature in both Latin and Irish.
> (Nagy, 1997: 9).

Anti-nativism did help to establish the notion that the written tradition must have been the result of a self-conscious class of clerical men of letters who knew that, with the establishment of literacy, the conversion of an oral native body of narratives to a written one needed for the latter to find its own identity and authority within the new Christian reality and to impose itself as the main source for other forms of transmission, its flaw, however, was to overlook that the attitudes of these *literati* towards oral tradition were most probably quite diverse: "The self-consciousness of the medieval Irish literati reveals how an emerging written tradition attempted to find its own identity and authorize itself, assuming in the process various postures toward other modes of transmission, especially the ongoing oral tradition from which it distinguished itself" (Nagy, 1997: 7).

The possible pre-Christian mythological elements which were inherited from that same oral tradition had to be a part of the aforementioned process, and diverse approaches to how they would be represented in the written tradition were taken by the Irish *literati*. A relevant example can be observed in the approach to the Tuatha Dé Danann in the secular literature. The origins of the Tuatha Dé Danann can most probably be found in the pre-Christian pantheon of Ireland (Carey, 2006b: 1695; Carey, 2011: 13; Ó Cathasaigh, 2014: 4), and their supernatural character is well attested in the

Irish narratives. Their insertion into a literature created in a monastic milieu was thus dealt with and explained in a variety of ways, as John Carey has noticed (2011: 12-38), which goes from euhemerism to demonization, or even more sophisticated approaches such as considering the Tuatha Dé Danann as "half-fallen angels" stranded on Earth, or as a different branch from the bloodline of Adam, which remained untainted by the Fall of Man.

These different approaches seem to represent a clear intention to both reinterpret and harmonise Christian learning with pre-Christian traditions: "...in Ireland scholars and bishops were also busy with the old traditions, seeking to create a hybrid, composite culture which would be both wholly Irish and wholly Christian" (Carey, 2011: 11). The pseudo-historical scheme demonstrated in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* which links biblical cosmology with seeming pre-Christian elements (such as the Tuatha Dé Danann) is an obvious example (Koch, 2000: 21), but there are further examples. The framing of an old tradition and stories within the cosmological and pseudo-historical world as depicted in the Bible is echoed through details found in several other narratives, including some from the Ulster cycle. In what concern certain dates for instance: "the death of Cú Chulainn was to be placed at 2 A.D. The choice of that date – like 33 A.D. for the death of Conchobar – was clearly to associate these heroes with Christ." (Kelleher, 1971: 121). The intention of inserting the Ulster cycle into a biblical frame is further demonstrated by the circumstances in which Conchobar dies in *Aided Chonchobuir*[258] (cf. Meyer, 1906: 4-11, 16-17). This tale demonstrates how the death of Christ is used as a mile-stone which provides an intersection between the Ulster cycle and the Bible, by depicting the repercussions of the death of Christ as also being felt in pagan Ireland (McCone, 1990: 198). Further links are found in the Ulster cycle connecting it to biblical themes, specifically in its main hero: Cú Chulainn. In one of the versions of the death of Cú Chulainn, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne*[259] (cf. Best et al,

[258] One of the death tales in the Ulster cycle, *Aided Chonchobuir* relates how Conchobar is killed due to an injury received from the Connacht warrior Cet Mac Mágach. This was due to Cet having stolen the petrified brain of a Leinster king which was in possession of the Ulaid. Cet uses this same petrified brain to sling it at Conchobar, and it gets inserted into Conchobar's own brain without chance of removal by Conchobar's druids and physicians. However, the wound is sewed up, and Conchobar is told he will live if he does not get overly excited. But seven years later, on learning of the death of Christ, Conchobar gets angry and the brain bursts out of his head, killing him in the process. Be that as it may, the blood from the wound baptizes Conchobar, and he goes to Heaven, even though he lived a pagan life.

[259] Roughly translated as "The Great Defeat on the Plain of Muirthemne", *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* is one of the earlier extant versions of *Aided Con Culainn*, possibly from the mid-8th century, and preserved in the Book of Leinster.

1956: 13763-14295), Cú Chulainn returns after his death in a prophetic appearance where he foretells the salvation of mankind by Christ. Furthermore, in the same narrative, Cú Chulainn also prophesies the coming of Patrick and of Christian monks coming from Europe, with the subsequent foundation of the monastery of Armagh (cf. Best *et al*, 1956: 14179-14197; cf. McCone, 1990: 197).

The several approaches on how to explain, classify and portray the Tuatha Dé Danann in the secular narratives, along with the linking of the narratives with the chronological world history and events of the Bible, are not the only examples of the diversity in the attitude of the Irish *literati* towards native traditions. Yet another approach was the establishment of an explicit communication between the pre-Christian traditions and the Christian present, where Christian figures are explicitly depicted as the agents of preservation of the past. A good example is found in the *Acallam na Senórach*, where a dialogue is established between old *fianna* members Caílte and Oísin with Saint Patrick, who tell the Saint tales of Finn and the *fianna*. Although Finn mac Cumail and the *fianna* represent the pagan past in contrast with the Christian present represented by Saint Patrick, the *fianna* are nonetheless described as having high ethical values and a noble behaviour, as a way of safekeeping the lore of Ireland and respecting the past. In fact, in the narrative Patrick is visited by two angels, who actually instruct him to write down the tales told by Caílte (O'Grady, 1892: 107-108). By preserving the tales, Saint Patrick and Christianity are the agents of salvation of the old lore, in risk of being lost due to the forgetfulness of the heroes, a metaphor of the old tradition being cast into the past: "those marvelous heroes are not what they used to be, their utterances now constitute but a faded synecdoche of their memories and experiences, but acts of writing sponsored by Patrick and sanctioned by God do measure up the task of conveying those miraculously audible utterances, salvaged parts of an indescribable whole" (Nagy, 1997: 325).

The contact of figures from the pre-Christian past with figures from hagiography such as saints was indeed yet another way to link pre-Christian tradition with a Christian context, although not always was such a contact benevolent towards the pagan figures as it is in the *Acallam na Senórach*. An example is afforded by *Síarburcharpat Con Culainn*[260]: The tale concerns the conversion of King Lóegaire mac Néill by Saint

[260] Translated as "The Phantom Chariot of Cú Chulainn", it was possibly written in the 9th or 10th century and is preserved in the *Lebor na hUidre* as well as in the Egerton 88 manuscripts. It tells the tale of how

Patrick, who summons Cú Chulainn from hell to demonstrate the power of God (Best *et al*, 1929: 9438-9466). As one of the greatest champions of the pagan past, Cú Chulainn is the perfect vehicle for showing that Christianity is the right path, by having his speech demonstrate a broken pride, and all his marvelous and glorious feats as having been futile in face of the torments of Hell. This interplay between pagan past and Christian present, with the calling upon pagan figures to appear in works of a more hagiographical nature bowing to the saints' power, made it perfectly legitimate for poets and scribes to compose and write narratives based in the pagan times, even if these narratives had elements drawn from the pre-Christian oral tradition. Since small pieces of Christian doctrine were included in secular works (as in Cú Chulainn's prophetic appearance following his death), and pagan heroes were featured in hagiographical works attesting to the rightful way and power of Christianity, the pagan past had the way opened to be fostered by the ecclesiastical written tradition.

Many other examples could be found of the diverse attitudes of the Irish *literati* towards early Irish literature, besides the ones aforementioned. The resultant literature from this diversity of processes linking pre-Christian tradition and Christian learning cannot therefore be seen as a remnant of pre-Christian mythology then, but rather as a whole new mythology. As Scowcroft exemplifies with the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*: "...this fusion of fact and fiction, of native and Latin (pagan and Christian) tradition furnishes the Irish *literati* with their own mythology – a history and re-enactment of the order of things – and with a historical framework for the sagas, the annals and the chronicles" (Scowcroft, 1987: 81). Therefore, any attempt at an analysis of the significance of a motif from early Irish literature, such as the beheading game, must take into account this context and should not simply be interpreted as having a mythological "Celtic" meaning, a mistake which can be noticed in the Loomisian theory for instance. This does not mean that possible roots for that motif cannot be found in pre-Christian belief, and that we should not search for it. On the contrary, we should indeed, but the influence of the contemporaneous context must be searched for as well, and crossed against it. In other words, any analysis of a motif from early Irish literature with a possible mythological significance must take into account the specificities of this very

St. Patrick summoned Cú Chulainn from hell, so that he could testify to the yet pagan king Lóegaire Mac Néill the horrors of hell for punishment of paganism, and the assertion of the Christian God as the true one. Editions of the tale are available in the diplomatic edition of the *Lebor na hUidre* by R. I. Best and O. Bergin (1929) and Kuno Meyer's rendition based on the Egerton 88 version with additions from the Additional 33992 manuscript (1910).

same literature and how myth may convey or even create meaning in it, rather than solely search for its origins:

> The question one might then ask of these saga texts is not whether recoverable overarching meanings and constructs may be embodied in the texts, but rather, how does the early Irish culture world enable each narrative tale to write itself? We have generally been inclined to trust a myth approach to yield significant insights as to the deep, almost passive reservoir of meaning in texts, but how does one invert this relation and discover what the operations of 'myth' on the surface are? Does it also enable the rhetorical resources of Irish sagas to present such meanings, and what enhanced sense of structuring major narrative units does predicating the presence of myth supply? Can one actually catch these texts in the process of constructing meaning on mythic lines, and what is the level of self-consciousness or even artificiality attendant on that process?
> (Dooley, 2006: 16)

4.1.3 Myth as Language and its Relation with Belief

The particular context of early Irish literature already poses therefore a challenge on ascertaining the significance of certain elements or motifs, in the sense on whether these elements are connected in some form to a possible pre-Christian mythology or if they must be seen in the context of the Christian monastic milieu where such literature was produced and of its contemporary medieval Irish society. The most sensible approach seems to consider both. Subsequently it must be understood if the transmission of these elements to Arthurian literature means that they maintained their significance or somehow changed it, in accordance to yet another different context. Arthurian romance became a significant aspect of medieval culture, addressing several issues and traits of medieval western society, establishing models and being liberating by presenting an idealized view of the medieval world. The narratives had an appealing force which made them liable to circulate throughout all Europe, from France to England, Germany, Spain, Scandinavia, etc, despite the differences between those societies. To study therefore the raised questions regarding the significance of any borrowed elements in Arthurian literature from other traditions such as the Irish one, we must delve once again in some aspects concerned with the nature of myths. The myth in Arthurian romance is driven by a narrative structure which is more or less fixed, but which nevertheless can be re-interpreted and re-used to different contexts as they change, giving it an adaptable edge which allows it to retain its appealing and pertinent character throughout the ages and makes it comparable to what Kirk considers to be one of the basic traits of myth in its "traditional" form:

> The basic idea of the myth as traditional tale has its own important implication, which tends to be concealed if the definition is elaborated. Whatever the particular kinds and uses of such tales, their traditional quality and their narrative force cannot be infringed. In other words, in order to become traditional and remain so, a tale must have an appeal that continues from generation to generation (although perhaps with slight alteration of emphasis): either simply as a tale, because it is particularly neat and forceful (and so on), or as a tale with a special application or set of applications – as explanatory, problem-palliating, confirmatory, psychologically liberating and so on. If the applications are varied somehow from generation to generation, or in the passage of a myth from one society into another; then its narrative core or plot must be such as to allow different emphases and interpretations according to different customs, needs and preoccupations. In one sense, a myth is always changing; in another, its narrative structure persists.
> (Kirk, 1984: 58).

The notion of what is "traditional" is then an ambiguous one in the context of myth. If we consider it in the sense of a set of elements which characterise a specific culture traditionally, it stands as an incomplete conclusion, since we can identify myth through certain motifs or elements that might be identifiable in different cultural and chronological contexts, and in that sense those models could be considered "traditional", even though they appear in different traditions. Perhaps it would be more sensible to consider that myths arise from a human need to find narratives where these elements do appear: "No less significant is the fact that people feel the need to read "histories" and narratives that could be called paradigmatic, since they proceed in accordance with a traditional model" (Eliade, 1963: 191). We could then advance the hypothesis that the characteristics Kirk mentions are not exclusive to traditional forms, but to tales which have a narrative which can be adaptable to different societies and ages without losing its appeal, with a meaning which might be related to the time and context of their creation or development but which nevertheless might retain its validity, thus becoming "traditional" in the process. Myth then does not have to be "sacred", but many myths can indeed be so in origin, it does not have to reflect ritual, but many myths can indeed be related to it, and the same to social structure, psychological archetypes or other commonly referenced traits of myth. Each of these characteristics may or may not apply, but there might be one trait that can be present both when myth is tied to a sacred or ritualistic character and when it no longer has those ties (or never had them). For discussion of this trait, let us see what are the qualities Jung endorses myth with, when he addresses the hero myth:

> The universal hero myth, for example, always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters,

> demons, and so on, and who liberates his people from destruction and death. The narration or ritual repetition of sacred texts and ceremonies, and the worship of such a figure with dances, music, hymns, prayers, and sacrifices, grip the audience with numinous emotions (as if with magic spells) and exalt the individual to an identification with the hero.
> If we try to see such a situation with the eyes of the believer, we can perhaps understand how the ordinary man can be liberated from his personal impotence and misery and endowed (at least temporarily) with an almost super-human quality. Often enough such a conviction will sustain him for a long time and give a certain style to his life. It may even set the tone of a whole society.
> (Jung, 1978: 68)

Clearly, Jung seems to be addressing the sacred and ritual forms of myth, since he mentions sacred texts, describes ritualistic behaviour and names the receiver of mythic content as the "believer". Logically, when myth is either a traditional or sacred tale, and is conveyed through "ritual repetition of sacred texts and ceremonies, and the worship of such a figure with dances, music, hymns, prayers, and sacrifices", it has a strong force of influence, since it implies spiritual belief and a deep play of the senses, and is usually deeply rooted in the cultural identity of the individual. Nevertheless, if we retain just the "narration" aspect of myth, and consider the "believer" as simply an individual of a cultural community where a given myth arose, we might expect for a similar form of identification with the hero and liberating effect to happen in relation to that myth, even if there is no attribution of a value of "truth" to the narrative or there is no apparent ritual repetition of the narrative. The justification for such expectation, is that even when dispossessed of its sacred and ritualistic character, an oral or written tale can still depict a "psychologically liberating" world which is idealized in relation to the factual world and where the boundaries of reality do not apply, but which still retains enough mimetic properties in relation to the factual world for one to identify with. In this world, larger than life characters, events, scenarios, even objects, are endorsed with symbolism, and are used to convey ideals, values, codes of behaviour, social structures, morals, religion, ritual or even political interests. By being endowed with these characteristics, the tale portrays a myth in the sense that it reflects certain aspects of the experience of an individual in a society and in the contact with Nature, but raises those aspects to an idealized view through characters which can go much further than the individual can and which cross the limitations of the human being, or go through places filled with fantasy and with the supernatural, never to be found in the real world except with an imagined or spiritual sense.

In other words, we find myth in tales which simultaneously appeal to the imagination and are created by it, psychologically allowing for the wandering through an idealized place which, either through entertainment or spirituality, is better assimilated by the individual and might become a source for his own cultural identity and for awareness of his context. Such a process is common not only to that single individual but to many individuals in the same community who share a common culture and thus are inclined to a similar imaginary. Therefore, we could say that myth can be seen "as the re-play of the imaginary at any given stage of the usage of narrative by a participating culture community" (Dooley, 2006: 102). This might be what drove the Irish *literati* to recognize the importance of the use of native myth and to place it into written literature, even if recreated, reorganized or even created from root in relation to an assumed pre-Christian oral body of tales. Moreover, it might also be what lies behind the tremendous success of Arthurian narratives throughout the medieval European world, especially when the Arthurian "heroes" are idealized versions of a medieval warrior class such as the knights. We could then surmise that even dispossessed of its sacred and ritualistic character, myth in the form of either written or oral narratives can induce identification and a liberating effect in a given culture.

Such a "replay of the imaginary" does not need to be restricted to that culture however, as we can see from the points of similarity in world mythologies and possible transmission of motifs between them, as in our case regarding Irish elements in Arthurian stories. Myth may in fact go beyond a specific culture, and even if it does not cause identification due to some specific trait of that given culture, it has some property which allow us for the understanding of mythic meaning in a narrative. We have discussed that in order for a myth to have continuity, its narrative must exert an appeal to different generations, but we did not discuss why this happens in certain narratives, and why we easily identify myth in them. A possible answer lies in the interpretation of myth as implying a symbolic language, which imprints on man models of interpretation which may go beyond the realm of consciousness and become part of his perception of both the world and man itself. Therefore, through a symbolic language, myth either establishes or reminds man of the way he sees the world, of his modes of behaviour and social organization, becoming an essential part of a culture or society and actually one of the key elements for holding it together:

> …a community – a given culture – comes into being through a system of mutual recognition, an implicit symbolic pact by which a social order and an order of the world are instituted. What secures the strength of this pact, and the stability of the social ties it creates, is that this symbolic order is 'effective', in the sense defined in what precedes. It draws us into its networks and its processes; this is its function and without it there would be no community and no society in general. This is why it operates neither at the level of conscious will, nor even that of unconscious affects, but at the level of those instruments of figuration – symbols – which, at the same time as they are articulated to one another, bind us together. They ensure that affects constitute effective devices. This is also why symbolisms (and some symbols more than others) have a long memory; our cultures remember them beyond changes of time and place.
> (Hénaff, 2009: 193)

At this point Lévi-Strauss' idea of myth as a language might be useful. For the latter, myth acts as a language but is quite different from it, and basing himself in Saussure, he envisions a further level in language where myth acts:

> …myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech. In order to preserve its specificity we must be able to show that it is both the same thing as language, and also something different from it. Here, too, the past experience of linguists may help us. For language itself can be analyzed into things which are at the same time similar and yet different. This is precisely what is expressed in Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, one being the structural side of language, the other the statistical aspect of it, *langue* belonging to a reversible time, *parole* being nonreversible. If those two levels already exist in language, then a third one can conceivably be isolated.
> (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 209)

For Lévi-Strauss, such a language results of a combination of Saussure's two levels of language. The relation of myth with linguistic properties may be disputed, but the idea of myth as a language, an idea Eliade also agreed upon (cf. Eliade, 1963: 141) might be perfectly valid. Due to the several forms or origins a myth may take or have, it is hard to define in perfection a pattern, and as we mentioned previously, all must be taken into account. But if we see myth as a form of language, we may understand why we can identify that pattern even when we cannot categorize it. On the other hand, a myth always implies a narrative, and it is through such a narrative that the myth is expressed, however, a mythological tale differs from other forms of narrative, because such a narrative is endowed with this language. It is perhaps such language what allow us to identify myths not only in ancient mythologies but also in contemporary fiction, and what makes us understand perfectly when we are before a mythic tale from any cultural background:

> Poetry is a kind of speech which cannot be translated except at the cost of serious distortions; whereas the mythical value of the myth is preserved even through the worst translation. Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells. Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at "taking off" from the linguistic ground on which it keeps on rolling.
> (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 210)

We may then consider that this same language is universal, and adaptable to different genres and cultural contexts: "A myth can never be transformed into anything but another myth. On the other hand, as a depository of a strongly synthetic kind of possible experience, relevant to all aspects of the lived-in universe, myth is a vehicle of ontic and moral knowledge in all provinces of life" (Schwimmer, 2009: 169). This does not mean that myth and any significance conveyed by it do not suffer changes in its meaning or in the interpretation a changing society gives to it. While many myths maintain a perennial relevance since their original significance remains "true" for a given society, not all myths remain unchanged over time. We have seen how the passage for a written tradition of elements from a mythology previously based on an oral tradition, together with a societal change (such as a pre-Christian society becoming a Christian one) may lead to reinterpretations of those same elements. Myth may not be completely impervious to the development of a society, and rather than disappearing when losing its relevance, it may accompany the changes which the cultural paradigms undergo in such society, changing as well. In fact, it is its ability to change that also leads the language of myth to be adaptable to different contexts. In the case of the beheading game, we must thus understand if it carries such a perennial relevance in what its significance is concerned, or rather if it underwent changes not only in relation to any possible pre-Christian myths which might have been in its origin, but also in the transition from early Irish literature to Arthurian romance.

Having said all these considerations regarding myth, we must therefore concentrate in a specific aspect of myth which may be the most relevant for studying the motif of the beheading game, and which may be conveyed through the language or symbolism of myth which we have considered. The motif of a gigantic churlish figure armed with an axe who survives decapitation and returns afterwards with his head reattached to his torso suggests mythic connotations due to the supernatural nature of the episode. However, what may interest us to ascertain in order to understand the

significance of the motif are the possible underlying aspects which are behind such myth. We are not completely lost in that matter however, since the Irish context may tie the motif of the beheading game with the significance of beheading and of the human head, which redirect us to the question of pre-Christian "Celtic" traditions regarding these matters: "The reverence for the human head in Western tradition dates back to the age of the Celts and there has been a great deal of discussion among archaeologists and historians about the persistence of religious cults devoted to the worship of preserved severed heads" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 5).

We shall discuss this matter in the subsequent chapters, for now we must then consider that the aspects which may be relevant for our subject matter may be concerned with an underlying belief, whether connected or not with ritual or religion. The presence of "belief" through myth has been especially underlined by Malinowski, who considers that myth functions as a charter for belief: "Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensible function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief" (Malinowski, 1926: 101). Further ahead in his *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, Malinowski provides additional arguments for his connection of myth with belief: "There is no important magic, no ceremony, no ritual without belief; and the belief is spun out into accounts of concrete precedent. The union is very intimate, for myth is not only looked upon as a commentary of additional information, but it is a warrant, a charter, and often a practical guide to the activities with which it is connected" (Malinowski, 1926: 107-108). Malinowski is of course referring to societies where myth is alive as a part of a religious system, however, as we have extensively discussed, myth has further expression through literature as well, since its "symbolism" or "language", as Lévi-Strauss advocates, is adaptable to narrative forms which do not hold a religious value necessarily. These mythological narratives may convey beliefs through the presence of supernatural forces which account for the underlying significance of values, institutions, social classes, and even ontological explanations, which can become characteristic of a specific culture, society or cultural group. Belief, whether previously tied to a religious/ritualistic system or not, may be a part of the significance held by myth and expressed through its language and symbolism, as Malinowski believes. As we shall see, the beheading game is particularly relevant for this question, since it may bear some relationship with beliefs around the significance of the human head.

The establishment of such a relationship is not the end of the discussion in what regards the significance of the beheading game however, since other factors are relevant for such matter. As we have discussed, early Irish literature is the result of monastic learning dealing with a pre-Christian tradition, and this resulted in a specific mythology, where both pre-Christian elements and the Christian context are an important influence. Taking into account our purposes, what we want to ascertain is if the beliefs expressed in such mythology are reminiscent of any pre-Christian ones, since, despite the Christian context of its authorship, there was an "...ability of the Irish church to find a place for much – in some cases, startlingly much – of the older beliefs of the people" (Carey, 2011: 10). Or, on the contrary, if such a change in context represents a change in the significance of these beliefs, and they reflect their contemporaneity rather than any pre-Christian meanings. Such a question is related of course with the beheading game, which is what we are interested in. Whatever conclusions we may reach, our question also extends to the transmission to Arthurian literature, since the development of the latter and the world(s) it depicts also represents yet another specific context. In other words, did the significance of the beheading game change from its passage from Irish to Arthurian traditions? In order to understand that, we must first analyse the proposed associations of the beheading game with the theory of the "Celtic" head cult, as we shall subsequently see in the next chapter.

4.2 The Celtic Head Cult

The significance of the beheading game in the Irish context and in *Fled Bricrenn* is tied with the discussion regarding the survival of Iron Age elements, most specifically "Celtic" traits, especially due to the comparison with classical accounts (Greek/Latin) which contain descriptions of which *Fled Bricrenn* seems highly reminiscent. Additionally, *Fled Bricrenn* is not a sole example for such comparison and is amongst other Irish texts seemingly reflecting what is described in the classic texts as apparently the practice of headhunting and an associated cult of the head, as we shall see. When we refer to a "cult of the head", we are making reference to a pan-Celtic concept which has been pervasive in the study of Celtic cultures, based on the idea that for the Celts the human head was the seat of the soul and was therefore a motive for the practice of the decapitation of defeated enemies in order to keep their heads as trophies, as well as for some form of ritual practice and veneration. This idea was the result of a Celtological interpretation of the collective evidence gathered from several sources: the classical

ethnographic accounts on Celtic headhunting and possible ritualistic use of severed heads; the associated archaeological record to the classical descriptions, as well as any archaeological evidence which may be revealing of the practice of headhunting or veneration of the human head; and the Irish and Welsh narratives which may seem to reflect the classical records.

The possible association of the human head with ancient spiritual or religious beliefs could mean that the significance possibly implied by the supernatural overtones of the headless challenger may point towards an example of a myth which contains an underlying set of old beliefs. Such a possibility is the result of the idea that headhunting may be more than simply the violent act of severing a head, and have thus a deeper meaning. Janet Hoskins for instance states that "We define headhunting as an organized, coherent form of violence in which the severed head is given a specific ritual meaning and the act of headtaking is consecrated and commemorated in some form" (Hoskins, 1996: 2). Ian Armit also underlines that "Decapitation, like other acts of violence, may be ritualised as a means of accommodating it within a religious, cosmological, or ideological framework. [...] The ritual element here is not a post hoc rationalisation of violence: it is the prime motivating factor" (Armit, 2012: 15). As it may be understandable, if there are evidences of such a notion associated with a cultural context of which Irish tradition might be a part of, that may have survived from the Iron Age and reached the Middle Ages, such evidences would cast an important light over the significance of the beheading game from *Fled Bricrenn*.

Nevertheless, as we have discussed in the introduction, there are several complex questions pertaining to this matter. First and foremost, as we shall analyse in further detail, there are Celtosceptical arguments which question the reliability of the classical sources as providing a genuine portrayal of a "Celtic" cultural unity amongst all Celtic-speaking peoples, and which cast doubt on whether the beheading game and other practices involving decapitation associated with "Celts" appear in the Irish texts due to a genuine remembrance through oral tradition or simply reflecting an Early Middle-Ages context. Additionally, as shall be noticed, it is not completely clear when these evidences are solely making a reference to the practice of headhunting without any relation with spiritual beliefs, or if they also imply a ritualistic trait around the human head which may be connected with headhunting. Finally can we retrieve from the aforementioned sets of possible evidences a specific Celtic concept, or does it reveal

an universal trait which may be found in warrior societies in certain circumstances? And if it is so, does the transmission of a motif such as the beheading game from one narrative tradition to another preserves the original significance then?

In order to address these matters, we must cover mainly the very same three aspects which lead to the idea of a "Celtic" head cult: the classical descriptions of Celtic headhunting and practices concerned with severed heads, the archaeological evidence which may be associated with these descriptions, and the Irish and Welsh texts which seem to portray the same ethnographic traits: "Indeed, wherever human skull fragments have been found on Iron Age settlements, the Celtic 'cult of the head' has been a popular explanation [...], drawing on a powerful blend of classical and medieval literature, as well as archaeological and iconographic material from across much of Europe" (Armit, 2012: 8).

4.2.1 The Classical and Archaeological Evidence

In regards to *Fled Bricrenn* and the feast which serves as the starting point of the narrative, the most obvious comparison is with the description made by Athenaeus, quoting Poseidonios as his source, who mentions duels during the feasts of the Gauls/Celts to award the best portion of meat to the most worthy warrior, and sometimes the submission to throat cutting:

> In the twenty-third book of his Histories, Posidonius says that the Celts sometimes engage in single combat during their feasts. Arming themselves, they engage in mock-fights and sparring sessions with each other. Sometimes, however, wounds are inflicted and these mock-battles lead to real killing unless the bystanders restrain the combatants. Posidonius also says that in ancient times, the best warriors received the thigh portion during feasts. If another man were to challenge his right to the choicest portion, a duel was fought to the death. Others in former days would collect silver, gold, or a number of white jars. Having received gift-pledges and distributed gifts among friends and family, they would stretch themselves out across their shields on their backs and then someone standing near would cut their throats with a sword.[261]
> (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, IV.40)

The matter of the challenge connected with the "champion's portion" from *Fled Bricrenn* clearly echoes the challenge related to the portion of meat corresponding to the thigh found in Athenaeus' description. And although not as explicit, the submission to the stretching and cutting of the throat also seems reminiscent of the submission of Cú

[261] See Appendix I, note 86.

Roí and Cú Chulainn to have their heads beheaded in the course of the beheading game, even though it is not a beheading *per se*. Despite the similarities with *Fled Bricrenn* however, the description by Athenaeus does not specify decapitation but rather throat slashing. The inclusion of beheading and decapitated heads in *Fled Bricrenn* may have however a connection to other ethnographic traits of the Celts found in the classical descriptions, namely headhunting and the use of heads as trophies. In order to ascertain that possibility we must approach other classical descriptions which describe this trait. Polybius for instance describes how Gallic warriors presented to their chieftain the severed head of a Roman Consul: "In the midst of it the Consul Gaius fell, fighting with reckless bravery in the thick of the battle, and his head was brought to the king of the Celts"[262] (Polybius, *Histories*, II.28:10). In yet another example, Polybius also describes how the Gauls would cut off the heads of vanquished enemies in the aftermath of a battle and take those heads with them:

> When the men within the rampart of the camp had taken their supper and were gone to bed, the Celts let more than half the night pass, and just about the time of the morning watch armed themselves and fell upon the Romans who were quartered nearest to them; killed a considerable number, and wounded not a few; and, finally, cutting off the heads of the slain, departed with them to join the Carthaginians, to the number of two thousand infantry and nearly two hundred cavalry[263]
> (Polybius, *Histories*, III.67)

Finally, Polybius also provides an account of yet another episode involving the Gauls where once again the head seems to be the ultimate trophy in what an enemy is concerned, or its taking as the ultimate retribution to an offense:

> It chanced that among the prisoners made when the Romans won the victory at Olympus over the Gauls of Asia, was Chiomara, wife of Ortiago. The centurion who had charge of her availed himself of his chance in soldierly fashion, and violated her. He was a slave indeed both to lust and money: but eventually his love of money got the upper hand; and, on a large sum of gold being agreed to be paid for the woman, he led her off to put her to ransom. There being a river between the two camps, when the Gauls had crossed it, paid the man the money, and received the woman, she ordered one of them by a nod to strike the Roman as he was in the act of taking a polite and affectionate farewell of her. The man obeyed, and cut off the centurion's head, which she picked up and drove off with, wrapped in the folds of her dress. On reaching her husband she threw the head at his feet; and when he expressed astonishment and said: "Wife to keep faith is a good thing," she replied: "Yes;

[262] See Appendix I, note 87.
[263] See Appendix I, note 88.

> but it is a better thing that there should be only one man alive who has lain with me!".[264]
> (Polybius, *Histories*, XXI.38)

Other classical authors make further descriptions of this apparent Gaulish fixation on the heads of enemies. Marcus Junianus Justinus describes how the Gauls used the decapitated heads of their enemies as an instrument of fear, in the aftermath of a battle between Gauls and Macedonians: "Some days after a battle was fought, and the Macedonians were defeated and cut to pieces. Ptolemy, after receiving several wounds, was taken, and his head, cut off and stuck on a lance, was carried round the whole army to strike terror into the enemy. Flight saved a few of the Macedonians; the rest were either taken or slain[265]" (Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum*, XXIV.5). But fear was not the only purpose of the Celtic head-hunters, Strabo offers further insight into how the Gauls carried the heads of their enemies in their horses and displayed them as treasured trophies of which they bragged about and which seemingly held a great value for them:

> In addition to their folly, they have a barbarous and absurd custom, common however with many nations of the north, of suspending the heads of their enemies from their horses' necks on their return from battle, and when they have arrived nailing them as a spectacle to their gates. Posidonius says he witnessed this in many different places, and was at first shocked, but became familiar with it in time on account of its frequency. The heads of any illustrious persons they embalm with cedar, exhibit them to strangers, and would not sell them for their weight in gold.[266]
> (Strabo, *Geographica*, IV.4:5)

Diodorus Siculus offers a similar description of the exact same behaviour described by Strabo with further details, perhaps due to both having as a common source Poseidonios (Armit, 2012: 25). His description explicitly compares the Gaulish custom with the taking of trophies by a hunter:

> When their enemies fall they cut off their heads and fasten them about the necks of their horses; and turning over to their attendants the arms of their opponents, all covered with blood, they carry them off as booty, singing a paean over them and striking up a song of victory, and these first-fruits of battle they fasten by nails upon their houses, just as men do, in certain kinds of hunting, with the heads of wild beasts they have mastered. The heads of their most distinguished enemies they embalm in cedar-oil and carefully preserve in a chest, and these they exhibit to strangers, gravely maintaining that in exchange for this head some one of their ancestors, or their father, or

[264] See Appendix I, note 89.
[265] See Appendix I, note 90.
[266] See Appendix I, note 91.

> the man himself, refused the offer of a great sum of money. And some men among them, we are told, boast that they have not accepted an equal weight of gold for the head they show, displaying a barbarous sort of greatness of soul; for not to sell that which constitutes a witness and proof of one's valour is a noble thing, but to continue to fight against one of our own race, after he is dead, is to descend to the level of beasts.[267]
> (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, V.29:4-5)

The Gaulish ethnographic trait of headhunting as it is described in the classical descriptions seems to find echo in archaeology (Armit, 2010: 91), namely in engravings such as the one in the pieces of a broken vase found in Aulnat (Fig. 1)[268], which shows a horse-rider armed with a spear and a severed head tied to the neck of his horse, thus corresponding to Strabo's and Diodorus Siculus' description of this same practice. Other examples are also common: "Elsewhere a diverse range of disembodied human heads appears on brooches, rings, mounts and other fragments of metalwork" (Armit, 2010: 91). Particularly interesting are some findings which direct us to further connections with the classical accounts, namely the ones which describe the exhibition of severed heads: "…human crania themselves, sometimes perforated for display, have proved to be a recurrent find on Iron Age archaeological sites right across Europe…" (Armit, 2010: 91). A good example of these findings are the perforated skulls found in a sanctuary amidst the site of a Gaulish *oppidum* in Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise) in France (Armit, 2010: 91), which of course seem to corroborate the accounts of the Gaulish habit of nail-fastening human heads into their houses or gates, as Strabo and Diodorus Siculus mention.

Yet another surviving testimony of the importance of heads as trophies, in this case for the *Belgae*[269], is given by the finding of the remains of around four hundred beheaded warriors in the archaeological site of Ribemont-sur-Ancre in Somme (France), which were probably displayed collectively as trophies of war, with their personal adornments and weapons still in their decapitated corpses (Armit, 2010: 91). Ian Armit, further commenting on Ribemont-sur-Ancre, suggests that: "The sheer scale of this monument suggests the institutionalisation of headhunting within the La Tène communities of northern France, although of course we have no idea where the heads

[267] See Appendix I, note 92.
[268] All figures can be found in Appendix III.
[269] The *Belgae* were a group of tribes who inhabited an area in northern Gaul located between the English Channel, the west bank of the Rhine and the northern bank of the river Seine, although there were also tribes in Britain bearing the same name and probably having a connection.

themselves ended up" (Armit, 2010: 91-92). Furthermore the head seems to have been a core symbol in the iconography of La Tène art, as Lambrechts first noticed (1954).

The most striking examples for this focus on the human head are the so-called *têtes coupées* found in sanctuaries in ancient Gaulish *oppidum* located mostly in south-eastern France, which consist of human skulls and pillars and porticos with sockets to place the human skulls and display them, along with head sculptures (Chadwick, 1997: 160). One of the most notable of these sanctuaries is located at the Celto-Ligurian *oppidum* of Entremont (Aix-en-Provence, France) which includes "...carved stone elements, including a pillar with representations of severed heads along its length and another piece with a realistic depiction of a severed head adjacent to niches in which real severed heads would have been placed" (Cunliffe, 2010: 43). The whole sanctuary seems to have had a strong focus on severed heads in its structure and in several of its original characteristics, as Chadwick describes:

> In the Celto-Ligurian oppidum of the Salii (or Salurii) at Entremont, referred to by Strabo as a πσλιό, a sanctuary of the third century B.C. destroyed by the Romans in 124 B.C., a long path, bordered by statues of warriors, led upwards to the highest ground where stood the sanctuary, built at two different periods. Here a number of carvings of human heads have been found. One which later formed the threshold to the 'Hall of the Heads', the earlier Celto-Ligurian sanctuary, originally consisted of twelve heads carved on a single vertical pillar. These heads are very primitive, consisting only of eyebrows and nose, and occasionally a slit-like mouth; other similar groups of heads on a single stone are to be found elsewhere. The 'Hall of the Heads' was contemporary with the last period of the oppidum, shortly before its destruction. The later sanctuary, built in part from stones of the oppidum, yielded a much more sophisticated body of free-standing statuary. It comprised a number of *têtes coupées*, and also a child's head, men's heads with curly hair, a woman's head complete with veils and earrings, and a whole company of armed warriors, some statues being almost complete.
> (Chadwick, 1997: 161)

Some of the sculptures representing *têtes coupées* from the sanctuary at Entremont (Fig. 2) also offer a particularly interesting detail due to their original placement, namely being held by the statues of seated human figures (Fig. 3), presumably warriors (Cunliffe, 2010: 43). The positioning of the head sculptures in these statues might mean that whatever the overall meaning of the heads in the sanctuary, it seems that their value as trophies might have been a part of such meaning. Besides the example from Entremont, yet another demonstration of the focus on heads in a similar type of sanctuary is found in the Acropolis of Roquepertuse (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), whose location is not too far from Entremont, and which also

includes "…the stone and timber architecture of a temple comprising columns, with niches carved out to contain human skulls…" (Cunliffe, 2010: 42). The remains of the portico in this sanctuary are particularly impressive (Fig. 4), especially when seen in reconstituted form (Fig. 5).

It seems therefore that Roquepertuse and Entremont represent a similar type of sanctuary, and to the exuberant details described may be added other important ones, as observed by Chadwick, who draws to our attention that amongst the findings in the Lower Rhone Valley sanctuaries "In addition to stone heads, real human heads appear. Some of these seem to have been cut off shortly after death, others have been found scattered in the debris of the road..." (Chadwick, 1997: 161-162). Thus, taking into account all the characteristics from these sanctuaries which have been described so far, we may consider that we are standing before a possible material testimony to the classical descriptions concerning the Gaulish practices related with the human head (Chadwick, 1997, 162). Additionally, there are further inferences and evidences which can be taken from these same archaeological sites. Besides the similarities with Entremont, Roquepertuse also mixes the display of heads with iconography related with animals, suggesting perhaps a deeper meaning to these heads other than simply trophy display:

> Similarly, the sanctuary at Roquepertuse (Bouches-du-Rhône), dating from La Tène II times, was divided into two superimposed terraces (to which access was gained by five steps). It was decorated by a portico of quadruple stone pillars containing niches to hold and display human skulls or *têtes coupées*, and on the cross beam which joined the pillars was perched a stone bird over half a metre in height, about to take flight. There was also a double human head with the beak of a bird of prey between the two heads.
> (Chadwick, 1997: 161)

Such an iconographic mixture between heads and other symbols such as animals and beasts seems to be further attested by the statue of the *Tarasque de Noves* (Fig. 6), which represents a monster eating a severed human arm, with its paws over two severed heads (Chadwick, 1997: 161). The statue was found under a Church in Noves (Avignon, France), and is associated with the Gallic tribe of the *Cavares*, who were located in the lower Rhone Valley and thus not far from the previously described sanctuaries. It thus seems that at least in this region we may draw a pattern in what expressions around the human head are concerned. All the described characteristics of these archaeological sites may therefore lead us to draw the idea that "The sanctuaries at the mouth of the

Rhône reveal, indeed, besides a classical building technique, a definite cult of the human head" (Chadwick, 1997: 161-162). Such observations lead us of course to question the nature of this seeming cult of the head. Ian Armit calls into attention that in general "It could be argued that a good deal of human trophy-taking, at other times and places, has had less to do with spiritual beliefs than with the brute demonstration of power and the dehumanisation of the enemy" (Armit, 2012: 11).

In other words, the practice of headhunting attributed to the Celtic peoples could have been solely a trait associated with warfare or the heads solely seen as trophies of war: "...headhunting, in its widest sense, need not have an overtly religious dimension" (Armit, 2012: 11). However, the evidence we have been describing concerning iconographic examples of the human head and sanctuaries apparently dedicated to the display of severed heads might indicate that there is more to it. Indeed, beyond the evidences related to the practice of headhunting, the described sanctuaries also seem to demonstrate an apparent veneration and ritualization of everything related with the human head, which may perhaps point towards a religious or spiritual significance. It is true that most of the classical descriptions do not dwell on this aspect: "The classical texts are also remarkably light on any mentions of a religious or cosmological basis for headhunting. Instead, they focus on the seemingly secular exploits of Celtic warriors who collect heads primarily to demonstrate their own prowess and to intimidate their enemies" (Armit, 2010: 91). Nevertheless, there is yet another description from the classical sources, which describes the headhunting practice of the Celts as we have already seen in other examples, but also mentions an association with certain practices which might point at a sacred or religious purport, as Armit also notices (2010: 91). We are referring to an allusion by Livy, whom in the context of an ambush made by the Gaulish tribe of the *Boii* to two roman legions and the ensuing decapitation of the Roman Consul Lucius Posthumius, describes the following behaviour in what concerns the beheaded head:

> The Boii having cut off his head, carried it and the spoils they stole off his body, in triumph into the most sacred temple they had. Afterwards they cleansed the head according to their custom, and having covered the skull with chased gold, used it as a cup for libations in their solemn festivals, and a drinking cup for their high priests and other ministers of the temple.[270]
> (Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, XXIII.24)

[270] See Appendix I, note 93.

The implication of such a description is that the head may have had a deeper significance indeed, which goes beyond simply being a trophy of war, not only due to Livy's account, but together with the archaeological evidence we have been gathering. We shall further dwell on the possible spiritual significance of this head cult in the next subchapter, but for now we must add that it seems not to have been exclusive to ancient Gaul: "The native temple sites in southern Gaul provide direct evidence of the central position played by the cult of the severed head, and isolated human skulls are found in archaeological contexts throughout Gaul and Britain" (Cunliffe, 2010: 71).

In fact, such a possible cult around the human head does seem to have been observable beyond Gaul and Britain, and to have been common to other Celtic-speaking peoples as well. In what concerns headhunting, Diodurus Siculus mentions a similar custom amongst the Celtiberians: "They mutilated even the dead according to the practice of their people, some carrying bunches of hands about their bodies and others heads which they had spitted upon their javelins and spears"[271] (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, XIII.52:2). Gabriel Sopeña, specifically speaking about the Celtiberian context, underlines a similar notion regarding the head as a prize of war:

> As far as the practice of decapitation is concerned, it can be regarded as the final act of the war performance. The more offensive the humiliation imposed on the enemies, if they experienced it personally, the more honorable the victory. According to various texts, to gain a skull meant to appropriate the qualities of the defeated person […] and to obtain a prestigious trophy that proved one's *uirtus*.
> (Sopeña, 2008: 378)

Many archaeological findings connected with the Celtiberians seem indeed to reflect Sopeña's conclusions regarding severed heads being considered a trophy as in other cultures described in the classical descriptions, and also seem to match these same descriptions. This is the case with the remains of skulls pierced with nails found around the territory of ancient Celtiberia, with notable examples found in Ullastret (Gerona) (Simón, 2008: 334) and in the *oppidum* of Puig Castelar (Chadwick, 1997:162), which of course remind us of Strabo's and Diodorus Siculus' description of the Gaulish custom to nail heads to gates and houses, and thus leads to the idea that such a custom was shared with the Celtiberians. Moreover, the archaeological evidence on this matter also extends to crafted objects, with some fibulae and the detachable end of either a

[271] See Appendix I, note 94.

guidon pole (Sopeña, 2008: 378-379) or sceptre/wand (Aldhouse-Green, 2004: 141), both made in the form of figures, representing what seems to be a rider in a horse accompanied by trophy heads (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8). These representations are compared by Sopeña with the description from Diodorus Siculus of the Gaulish custom of hanging the severed heads of fallen enemies in the horses of Gaulish warriors (Sopeña, 2008: 378), an interpretation which is also made by Francisco M. Simón with regard to these objects (2008: 317). Miranda Aldhouse-Green sees these Celtiberian figures and the severed heads under the hooves of the horses as representations of power characteristic of headhunting and directly associates them with the iconography in Entremont and Roquepertuse (Aldhouse-Green, 2004: 141). Sopeña further adds that in the archaeological exploration of ancient Celtiberian dwellings "...both villages and necropoli have yielded a generous number of heads in all kinds of forms (weapons, ornaments, jewellery, ceramic paintings, *tesserae*, sculptural applications)" (Sopeña, 2008: 378). Some findings in this context even point towards the hypothesis that the Celtiberian obsession with heads was not only connected with the heads of enemies but also with some members of the tribes themselves: "The analysis performed in recently uncovered necropoli reveal that on some occasions only certain bones were cremated and preserved (the head and the extremities), while on others, Celtiberians kept the skulls, not only those belonging to the enemy but also those of the members of the community" (Sopeña, 2008: 379). According to Sopeña, this may imply some connection with the spiritual worship of their ancestors: "There is enough evidence to demonstrate that the Celtiberians deliberately preserved human skulls in domestic areas to suggest that they practiced ancestor veneration" (Sopeña, 2008: 378).

In the *Castro* culture of the ancient Gallaecians from the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, yet another Iron Age culture which seems to betray some Celtic or Proto-Celtic aspects (Lorrio *et al*, 2008: 221-227; Quintela, 2008: 497-570), the presence of the severed head as a significant symbol is also noticeable. These observations seem to be aligned with the richness of the *Castro* culture in stone sculptures of severed heads, found throughout Iron Age archaeological sites from Galicia to the North of Portugal[272],

[272] González-Ruibal provides a good catalogue of many of the examples of sculptures of severed heads in the Gallaecian context, with respective descriptions of the most notable (2008: 135-138). Some of the *castros* (*oppidum*, hill-forts) and archaeological sites where sculptures of severed heads have been found are located in Santa Iria (Minho, Portugal), Monte Mozinho (Porto, Portugal), Chaves (Trás-Os-Montes, Portugal), Gaxate (Pontevedra, Galicia), Moreira Nova (Pontevedra, Galicia), Ocastro (Pontevedra, Galicia), Remesar (Pontevedra, Galicia), Santa Trega (Pontevedra, Galicia), Armeá (Ourense, Galicia),

in what was once the territory of *Gallaecia* (González-Ruibal, 2008: 135), some examples of which can be seen in Fig. 9, 10 and 11. These sculptures are quite similar to the French *têtes coupées* made from stone (Cuevillas, 1988: 267; González-Ruibal, 2008: 135), and thus may be yet another example of the obsession with heads which seems to be described in the classical accounts, which apparently went beyond the Gaulish context into other geographical and cultural areas.

By directing our attention to the British isles, which are of course of the most importance for us in what our study is concerned, we also find a fair amount of evidence in what the possible existence of a head cult is concerned. Ian Armit underlines how the human head was amongst the findings of what were apparently ritual offerings in British territory: "Human heads and weaponry were placed in the waters of the Thames even during the Roman period and human skulls were among the votive deposits in Coventina's Well on Hadrian's Wall" (Armit, 2005: 86). In English archaeological sites in the region of Wiltshire such as All Cannings Cross and a similar site at Potterne, in what Ian Armit classifies as middens[273] or midden sites (Armit, 2012: 5-7), several cranial fragments have been found with certain peculiarities. In All Cannings Cross around 30 cranial fragments were found, some of which had been shaped into tools for scrapping (Armit, 2012: 6), while others were perforated for different purposes: "Judging from the wear marks, it had apparently been carried or worn for some time, perhaps as a charm or amulet" (Armit, 2012: 6). Potterne furnishes different findings, but also peculiar: "None of the cranial fragments from Potterne seem to have been worked into objects but at least two had a 'polished' or 'ivoried' appearance [...] Because there is no sign that any of the human bones were butchered, boiling may have formed part of the preparation of heads for display rather than consumption" (Armit, 2012: 6-7).

In Iron Age forts in England the scenario seems to be even more revealing and to be aligned with the classical descriptions, with a most pertinent example being found in the Iron Age fortifications of Stanwick, in North Yorkshire, thought to have been the

San Cibrán de Las (Ourense, Galicia), A Graña (A Coruña, Galicia), Barán (Lugo, Galicia), Cortes (Lugo, Galicia), Narla (Lugo).

[273] These sites apparently mark the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in Britain (500 BC) and their classification as "middens" is due to their archaeological content being apparently consistent with the dumping of rubbish and the lack of evidence for permanent occupation. However, the middens seem to be more than dumping sites and rather to have been used for feasting and celebrations, which led to the assemblage of debris found in them (Armit, 2012: 6). Many of the findings in midden sites consist of many examples of pottery and bronze/iron tools, along with animal and human bones.

most important settlement in Brigantia, the kingdom of the Brigantes[274]. The aforementioned example refers to a cranium found together with an iron sword and respective scabbard in a ditch, with the cranium presenting evidences which lead to the possibility "...that this was the head of a warrior killed in battle and subsequently decapitated. The association of the cranium, mandible, and vertebrae shows that it was a fleshed head that was originally deposited in the ditch" (Armit, 2012: 7). Armit refers to the hypothesis that "...both the sword and the severed head may have formed parts of a trophy, displayed over the gateway, which subsequently tumbled into the ditch terminal when the site was destroyed" (Armit, 2012: 7), and although he also mentions the ambiguity concerning this hypothesis, he also underlines that more cranium fragments were found in the same archaeological site (Armit, 2012: 7). Moreover, Stanwick is only one of the Iron Age British sites which seem to support the possibility of human heads having been put on display in the British Iron Age, with Armit underlining more examples (Armit, 2012: 7-9).

Scotland also provides a whole lot of examples. In Lochend in East Lothian a communal cist was found which was lacking seven skulls from their respective sets of bones, and other six "were apparently found in the loose earth at the opening, perhaps placed there for display. Neck vertebrae within the cist showed damage consistent with (in the evocative words of the bone analyst) 'a deep sword cut to the neck at the time of death'" (Armit, 2005: 86). In the Iron Age remains of a wheelhouse in Cnip, Lewis, a "...skull fragment had been shaved with a knife and later dumped in a midden, while yet another had been drilled with an hourglass perforation to enable suspension" (Armit, 2005: 87). In an Atlantic roundhouse in Hillhead, Caithness, yet another cranial fragment was found with three drilled holes, which "...suggest that the skull, or fleshed head, like the drilled fragment from Cnip, might have been strung up for display [...] Interestingly, this fragment was also found at an access point into a building, in this case on the floor of the entrance passage leading into the roundhouse" (Armit, 2012: 4). In another roundhouse, the Dun Vulan Broch, in South Uist, dated from the Iron Age, yet more cranial fragments were found, some of them carefully curated, which point towards their use for votive purposes (Armit, 2012: 5). Another possible settlement in Orkney, the Rennibister Earth House from the early Iron Age, had four skulls which

[274] The Brigantes were the one of the most powerful Celtic tribes in pre-Roman Britain, most notably in Northern England, with their kingdom of Brigantia including what today are territories belonging to Yorkshire, Lancashire, Northumberland and Durham.

seemed to have been displayed around a pillar (Armit, 2012: 5). This particular attention to the human head in Scotland may even go back to the Late Bronze Age, taking into account possible burial customs related to the findings of human remains in places such as the Sculptor's Cave[275], which reveal that some of the dead had been beheaded (Armit, 2005: 82).

The evidence in what concerns the display of heads is not as conspicuous in Ireland however, which would be of the utmost importance taking into account the subject of our dissertation. There are nevertheless some examples which point towards the practice of beheading in Iron Age Ireland and some form of ritualistic use of the skulls. The practice of decapitation may be attested for instance by the finding of two headless bodies buried in an Iron Age burial ground at Knowth (O'Brien, 1990: 38), or the finding of the "Old Croghan Man", a decapitated corpse found preserved in an Irish bog in County Offaly, which is dated from between the fourth and second centuries BC (Armit, 2012: 31). But in what concerns a possible ritual use of the severed head, a possible piece of evidence is the finding of several human skulls amongst the recovered items in Loughnashade, an almost dry lake near Navan Fort, which include four ornamented La Tène style ceremonial horns and many animal remains, thus placing the findings into a context of Iron Age votive offerings (Mac Shamhráin, 2005: 388). Other examples seem to suggest a similar idea, in the archaeological site of the "King's Stable", in Armagh, consisting of a boggy earthwork, there were found sword moulds, pottery, utensils of bone and wood, animal remains, and the facial portion of a human skull, and once again, according to Mac Shamhráin there is a "...case for ritual deposit..." (2005: 388). At Raffin Fort, an Iron Age site which may have been a royal or ceremonial one, in accordance to its similarities with Tara, Emain Macha (Navan Fort) or Cruachan (Conor, 1998: 133), an enclosure contained a skull burial (Mac Shamhráin, 2005: 388). All these findings in Ireland seem to "…clearly point to the ritual deposit of bodily remains…" (Mac Shamhráin, 2005: 388), and it seems quite significant that some of these remains are skulls.

[275] As Armit describes "The Sculptor's Cave is a deep natural cleft cut into a sandstone coastal cliff near Covesea on the Moray Firth. This dark recess was used for ritual purposes over many centuries, though perhaps interminttently, from around 800 BC through to the sixth or seventh centuries AD when a series of Pictish symbols was carved around the entrance" (Armit, 2005: 82). Armit also states that the cave was probably used as an ossuary due to the findings of 2000 human bones, besides bronze artefacts (Armit, 2005: 82).

Additionally, the apparent focus on the human head which these examples from England, Scotland and Ireland may demonstrate is not limited to human remains. Anne Ross has described dozens of sculpted heads and heads in relief found throughout Britain/Scotland (an example of which can be observed in Fig. 12) and Ireland as well, which seem reminiscent of the findings in other countries which we have described, along with the representations of heads in pottery and metalwork (Ross, 1958: 23-35). As in the other areas, this has led Ross to conclude that "It is clear then that in Celtic and Romano-Celtic contexts, the human head was deeply symbolic" (Ross, 1958: 35). What seems certain in accordance with the archaeological evidence, as Armit states, is that "...Iron Age communities across Britain engaged in a range of practices relating to the removal, curation and display of the human head" (Armit, 2012: 8).

4.2.2 The Pan-Celtic Theory

All the evidence gathered regarding both the classical descriptions and the archaeological material on headhunting and a possible head cult has been a matter for study and theorization for decades. On this matter, commenting on the classical descriptions of the taking of head trophies by the Gauls, Aldhouse-Green sees the practice of headhunting as ultimately a form of humiliation of the enemy, based on the premise that the head is important for the passage for the afterlife, and decapitation would prevent it: "Such action constitutes a consummate insult, for heads encapsulate identity and despoiling corpses in this way served to deny the victims proper burial and incorporation in the next world" (Aldhouse-Green, 2004: 142). Such a notion implies however that the human head was more than simply the part of the body which guarantees the death of the enemy, but also that it contains some spiritual importance. Taking into account Livy's description of the care given to certain skulls and their ritual use, or the focus in human heads observable in the south-eastern French sanctuaries, the human head may have been an object of reverence for the Gauls, rather than simply being a way of insulting the enemy and preventing its passage to the afterlife. Barry Cunliffe, for instance, suggests that the head may have had a special meaning for the Gauls or Celts: "Clearly the head was perceived to be a special body part, perhaps one that contained the power of the deceased" (Cunliffe, 2010: 36).

These suggestions are related to the concept of the head as the seat of the soul, an idea which has been pervasive in Celtic studies, and which has been seen as a pan-

Celtic characteristic. Commenting on this concept, Armit observes that "The Celts, it was thought, saw the head as the seat of the soul, and thus severed heads could retain special powers after death. By cutting off and keeping the heads of their enemies, warriors could gain control over the spirits of the dead" (Armit, 2012: 8-9). Armit, Cunliffe and Aldhouse-Green are not the first to comment on this idea. In 1913, Adolphe Reinach, in his *Les têtes coupées et les trophées en Gaule*, was perhaps the earliest pioneer in the study of a possible Gaulish head cult, with basis on the classical accounts, Gaulish iconography and the same southern-French archaeological evidence we have underlined (cf. Armit, 2012: 32). Later works expanded on this idea and effectively defined the idea of a "Celtic" head cult. Pierre Lambrechts presented a study of La Tène art in his *L'exaltation de la tête dans la pensée et dans l'art des Celtes* (1954), in which he placed emphasis on the severed head as an element with a primary status in Celtic imagery. Lambrechts' study on "Celtic" art was complemented by other early studies on the subject such as the ones by Anne Ross, who puts emphasis on the idea that for Celtic cultures the head was the vessel of the human soul. Commenting on the Gaulish examples, Ross claims that "We are led to conclude, mainly from the Gaulish evidence, that the head was the bodily member which was especially venerated by the Celts, that the head was regarded by them as the seat of the soul, the centre of the vital essence, symbolic of the regenerative forces of life" (Ross, 1958: 11). The works of both Lambrechts and Ross therefore gave currency to the idea that the traits of headhunting and veneration of the human head had a spiritual and religious symbolism for the Celts:

> For Lambrechts and Ross, the Celts were clearly no mere headhunters. Rather, they practiced the 'exaltation' or 'veneration' of the head, which manifested itself in the display of enemy heads, the depiction of gods and of the dead, and a range of other practices, where the disembodied head stood for the whole being. Heads were apotropaic and prophetic and contained the individual's spiritual force; they were associated with regenerative powers and fertility and could mediate between this world and the next. They lay at the core of Celtic cosmology and religious practice.
> (Armit, 2012: 36)

Regarding the connection of this idea with the significance of the head as a trophy, Ross proposes that heads "…had a dual significance for their owners, *i.e.* as irrefutable evidence of military prowess, and as amulets" (Ross, 1958: 11). Her conclusions do not rest upon the Gaulish evidence however, and on the context of an analysis of the iconographic and literary evidence of Ireland and Britain, Ross maintains

a similar idea, and states that the human head: "…was clearly believed by the Celts to be the bodily member in which the life force was situated, and possession of the head gave the owner access to the powers of the living man. This "decapitated" head could avert evil, and foretell events" (Ross, 1958: 22). With basis on these ideas, the interpretation of the evidences regarding the human head in archaeological findings associated with any culture prone to be considered "Celtic" thus became tied with the concept of a "pan-Celtic" head cult: "Human heads, whether real or carved, came to be seen as an archaeological signature of the Celts. [...] Headhunting and the idea of a head cult became, in other words, an inalienable part of the 'Celtic package'" (Armit, 2012: 36). And indeed, this is an idea which permeates the study of the archaeological record of other cultures associated with the "Celts". Referring to the attribution of a spiritual or religious significance to the head in the Celtiberian context, Gabriel Sopeña also interprets it as possibly being the vessel of the soul in Celtiberian spiritual ideology:

> As a matter of fact, the head was not only a metaphor of victory and of the fighter's personality, but a complex spiritual sign. Its importance was enormous and lasted long after the disappearance of ancient Celtic peoples as independent entities. It was the abode of the soul, the part symbolizing the whole, a reflection of personality and a compendium of feelings, the exponent of both death and subsistence, a talisman, and a bond with ancestry.
> (Sopeña, 2008: 378)

Likewise, interpretations regarding the symbolism of the human head for the ancient *Gallaecians* also claim that, although clearly a symbol of victory over the enemies, the head also seems to have held a spiritual power: "The severed head, or its representation, could simultaneously attract the power of the vanquished enemy, serve as a protection against bad spirits and as an image of the power of the community" (González-Ruibal, 2008: 136). In fact, besides its significance as the severed "soul" of the enemy, these interpretations also raise the possibility that the human head may have had yet a further symbolism in the *Gallaecian* culture. González-Ruibal, commenting on the sculptures of severed heads which are prominent in the iconography of the *Castro* Culture, proposes the hypothesis that the head could often represent a deity: "On the other hand, not all heads can be related to severed human heads, some of them probably represent gods, perhaps a local genius (*Genius Castelli*), a protector of the village" (González-Ruibal, 2008: 136). Returning to the Celtiberians, F. M. Simón seems to share the very same idea that González-Ruibal attributed to the Gallaecians, and sees it as a "Celtic" trait, rather than solely a Celtiberian one: "The head, which is

omnipresent in Celtic three-dimensional art, may be interpreted as representing the presence of the divinity" (Simón, 2008: 317). The Iberian examples thus seem to share a similar conception of a pan-Celtic spiritual ideology concerning the human head in the eyes of some researchers, which is correlated with Gaulish or British examples: "Identifications of 'head-hunting' or the 'veneration of the head' in the archaeological record have thus tended to be seen as indicating local adherence to a perceived pan-Celtic tradition, linking the islands of northern and western Scotland, and the chalklands of southern England, to the Mediterranean coasts of France and Spain" (Armit, 2012: 9). There are however issues with this idea of a pan-Celtic cult of the head, as we shall subsequently see.

4.2.3 The Celtosceptical View on the Classical/Archaeological Evidence

Notwithstanding the apparent coherence between the classical accounts and the archaeological evidence, there are nevertheless obstacles to plainly claim that the symbolism and belief associated with the head which we have described are a specific trait of Celtic cultures. A particularly troublesome matter regarding this question is related to Celtoscepticism, since the latter calls into doubt a unified Celtic culture which would imply similar ethnographic traits, and consequently this includes headhunting and the head cult: "The concept of a culturally unified Celtic people in prehistory has been vigorously questioned in recent times [...], and there has been an increasing awareness of marked regional variants within the traditionally Celtic world of the European Iron Age" (Armit, 2012: 9). The regional variations are particularly important for they imply cultural differences in many of the Iron Age societies which provide examples of a possible cult of the head. Scotland for instance is a good example: "Iron Age communities of Atlantic Scotland were, in many ways, very different from their contemporaries in Wessex [...], and neither need have much in common with the continental communities described in the classical literary descriptions of the Celts" (Armit, 2012: 9).

A similar thought may be applied to the Irish Iron Age "Celts", who may not have necessarily shared the same traditions of the Gauls, including the head cult and headhunting. Even in what regards the Gauls and the general "Celts", this perspective is a sceptic one in what the classical accounts are concerned. Maier for instance considers

the classical sources unreliable due to his comparison of Greek[276] and Roman[277] descriptions of the Gauls and/or Celts. From these comparisons he draws the conclusion that passages from classical works used as historical sources may provide us with an erroneous image originating in the pre-Aristotelian tradition: an initial source for a description of the Celts, of which the original context is unknown, was the target of later embellishments, which had no qualms in overlooking chronological, graphical or even ethnographic differences. Indeed, as Armit also underlines "Most of the writers lived long after the events they describe, which are concentrated in the century or so between 295 and 190 BC" (Armit, 2012: 24).

The exception was Poseidonios, who did in fact visit Gaul around 90 BC (Armit, 2012: 25). His writings were lost, but reached us since they were used as a source for many of the subsequent classical writers, thus explaining the similarities between descriptions such as the ones by Strabo and Diodorus Siculus. Poseidonios' account also presents us with some questions however, for his descriptions seem to be based upon a specific region which may not reflect a widespread practice throughout all of Gaul: "There is nothing, therefore, to suggest that Poseidonios travelled beyond the area of direct Roman control. Indeed, his observations need relate only to a localised set of practices in the region around Massalia itself" (Armit, 2012: 29). Furthermore, the

[276] By comparing notes written by Aristotle (cf. Rackham, 1934: 159, 1935: 321) in the fourth century BC, who described the Celts as fearless peoples driven by passion who march against the waves, with Nicolaus of Damascus' (Jacoby, 1926-29: 389; Zwicker, 1934-36: 42) description of Celts in the first century B.C. holding their ground against the threat of giant waves even if it meant their death, Maier reaches the conclusion that this does not necessarily represent an on-going tradition, and that Nicolaus' account might be no more than a late embellishment of that of Aristotle (Maier, 2000: 4-5). Moreover, both accounts seem to be disparate regarding both geographical and ethnic differences, since Aristotle's account seems to be directed towards peoples in the Mediterranean, while Damascus specific reference to proximity to the ocean seems to be aimed at other peoples that might be erroneously called Celts but which linguistically would be considered Germanic (Maier, 2000: 5). Furthermore, the collection of accounts put together by Nicolaus is issued from a standpoint of cultural superiority, which is also expressed in other classical works of ethnography such as Philo's *On Dreams* (cf. Colson *et al*, 1934: 496-99), and sees the characteristics of other peoples as curiosities and peculiarities, ending up exalting them especially when they are of a picturesque character (Maier, 2000: 5).

[277] Maier compares the mentions of the Celts in the work of the Roman historian Livy with Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, which reveal that Livy may have used Caesar's work as a source for narrative purposes, rather than witnessing himself what he describes (Maier, 2000: 8). A vivid example is his reference to the tripartite nature of Gaul, and of only one third being occupied by Celts (cf. Foster, 1924: 116), which is clearly inspired by Caesar's similar description (cf. Edwards, 1917: 2-5), but creates an anachronism in geographical history, with the reference being used in Livy's account of Celtic migrations rather than an assessment of the contemporary situation of Gaul prior to the Roman conquest (Maier, 2000: 8-9). This is just an example among several which are detected by Maier (cf. Maier, 2000: 7-11) of the use of Caesar's account by Livy, which Maier sees as an evidence of the scarcity of sources related to the Celts which were used in Greek and Roman classical accounts, with a tradition being established based on these few sources and then embellished and re-used without taking into account chronological and geographical discrepancies (Maier, 2000: 11-12).

continuous use of a similar characterisation of the Celts "...makes one suspect that the number of stories from which Greek and Roman authors could choose was in fact quite small.…" (Maier, 2000: 7). As our remarks regarding Poseidonios already underlined, this idea is further aggravated if we take into account that the descriptions may have been the result of observations from a smaller geographical extension rather than what the idea of a "pan-Celtic" trait may transmit. These observations may then have been used for literary purposes, and thus their historicity can be questioned: "All of the events took place around the northern fringes of the Greek and Roman world (mostly in northern Italy, northern Greece, and Asia Minor [...]), and many have a dramatic or literary logic, which need not relate to any strictly historical truth" (Armit, 2012: 24).

The implications of this view of the classical tradition on the Celts is that the latter becomes devoid of reliability as a source for comparison and for the assertion of later literary narratives like *Fled Bricrenn* as a faithful description of the "Iron Age" culture of the Celts (Maier, 2000: 14). The aforementioned issues with the matter of the classical sources present further problems, for the generalisation they imply places into question many of the archaeological findings concerning the cult of the head and their value as a proof of a generalised "Celtic" head cult. In other words, some findings may not be enough to determine that there was a generalised cult only due to their association with the classical accounts, but may rather point out only at an isolated instance where they do coincide. Cunliffe underlines this possibility when commenting on the south-eastern Gaulish sanctuaries:

> The emphasis on the severed head is notably prevalent in southern Gaul and may reflect a belief system particular to the area of the Celto-Ligurian tribes. It is worth remembering that it was this region of Gaul with which writers like Posidonius would have been familiar – their generalizations about the Celts may therefore have been biased to the areas they knew.
> (Cunliffe, 2010: 43)

The arguments against the generalisation of the Celtic practices concerning severed heads have led some authors to emphasize the differences between the archaeological findings in southern France with other archaeological sites relevant for the matter of the head cult in other areas. This is the case with John Collis, who points out at an inconsistency between the findings at Ribemont-sur-Ancre in Northern France with the southern examples such as Entremont. His observation is based on the contrast between the findings of a hundred headless corpses in Ribemont-sur-Ancre in

comparison with the focus on the exuberance of a collection of heads displayed in pillars found in Entremont, rather than an amount of headless bodies, thus revealing a different practice (Collis, 2003: 216). Maier seems to follow a similar line of thought in this regard to Cunliffe and Collis, and points the finger at the classical descriptions as the culprit for the incoherence in the archaeological interpretation. If at least some generalisations were made by classical authors, this could affect the comprehension of the archaeological evidence in what the cult of the head is concerned. Moreover, Maier underlines several other contradictions found in the contextualisation of classical descriptions and the archaeological record:

> Inevitably, the classical image of the Celt is in many respects at variance with the archaeological record. Thus Greek and Roman authors clearly regard Celtic human sacrifices as much more important than offerings of animals and inanimate objects, whereas archaeology suggests that for the Celts themselves it was exactly the other way round. On the other hand, Celtic art is not mentioned at all by classical authors, whereas in the archaeological record it is one of the most conspicuous features of Continental Celtic civilization. In view of the most recent philological and archaeological research, it is probably safe to say that the classical image of the Celt is even more narrow and lopsided than used to be assumed, and that the reality of Continental Celtic culture was probably even more diversified and sophisticated than we are just now beginning to realize.
> (Maier, 2000: 12).

The matter of Celtic art is particularly troubling in some aspects. Some scholars point out that its interpretation might at some instances have been affected by the generalisation created by the contextualisation of the archaeological findings with the classical descriptions and by the generalised view of a Celtic head cult. In Great Britain and Ireland for instance, Ian Armit points out that many of the findings of stone sculptures representing severed heads along with head carvings are of a late date corresponding to the early modern period and may have no association with the Celts, although they have been misinterpreted as such (Armit, 2012: 37). Even in art expressions which can indeed be traced to the Iron Age or Roman periods and to peoples which fall under the generalised category of "Celts", the significance of the severed head has been questioned. Paul Jacobsthal for instance considers that the proliferation of depicted severed heads in Celtic art such as the stone ones are nothing more than a favoured decorative motif due to influences from Greek and Etruscan models (Jacobsthal, 1944: 12-24), an opinion shared by Ronald Hutton in what the British examples are concerned (Hutton, 1991: 194-195).

There are counter-arguments to these views nonetheless. The misinterpretation of some evidence in the British Isles in what concerns stone heads does not invalidate the ones which are indeed traceable to the Iron Age or the Roman times, only that the examples which are indeed from those periods are fewer than what was initially thought. Likewise, the Mediterranean influence in Celtic Art may not reduce the meaning of the sculpted severed heads to simply a decorative motif, but may rather signify that the Greek and Etruscan models "...were adapted to embody wholly indigenous ideas regarding the special status of the human head" (Armit, 2012: 32). In what regards Maier's arguments on the reliability of the classical sources, they could be interpreted in the exact opposite way: if Greek and Roman sources, in the midst of their incoherence in matching some aspects of their accounts, do at times point towards similar descriptions of Celtic/Gaulish ethnography, then it is precisely this same similarity which may indicate their reliability. A similar argument can be formulated about the comment by Collis on the inconsistencies between archaeological sites such as Ribemont-sur-Ancre and Entremont. Although factually there are contrasts, both sites do reflect a similar attention to head cutting and some associated rituals, therefore there is indeed a connection: "...surely the painstaking decapitation of hundreds of corpses at Ribemont displays a concern with heads just as clearly as their collection and display at Entremont. The specific practices may be reflections or reversals of one another, but the ritual grammar is patently linked" (Armit: 2012: 42).

It could be argued that this same "ritual grammar" would apply to other sites as well, and such an argument can be extended to Cunliffe's remark on the southern France area: if there are other findings which also present a focus on the same attention to decapitation or severed heads, notwithstanding the possible differences in presentation or practice, a link seems indeed to exist, even if the classical accounts are seemingly limited to observations from a specific region. Additionally, it cannot be denied that the classical accounts do seem to reflect a genuine view by Greeks and Romans of the Celts as headhunters: "At the very least, however, they do indicate, that the collection of human heads as battle trophies was regarded as a characteristic Celtic practice by Greek and Roman writers from at least the mid-second century BC (in the writings of Polybius), and probably rather earlier (in his lost sources)" (Armit, 2012: 25). Maier would answer to this by claiming, as he does, that classical writers drew on each other for their portrayals of the Celts, but not always is such a dependency proven

as factual, and if there is the possibility that some of the accounts could be independent from previous ones, it is enough to maintain the hypothesis that they could be fairly reliable accounts. This is especially important for the idea that the classical accounts may indicate a head cult rather than simply the practice of headhunting. Returning to Poseidonios, despite the limitations previously pointed out regarding the use of his testimony as an evidence of a pan-Celtic trait, there are arguments towards the consideration that Poseidonios may have provided a reliable testimony indeed. Additionally, the absence of spiritual symbolism in his description of the practices related with heads may not be an indication of the lack of such symbolism, as Ian Armit concisely argues:

> The Poseidonian account, filtered as it is through later copyists, describes a firsthand encounter with trophy heads, embalmed in cedar oil and displayed above the entrances to Gallic houses, close to first-century BC Massalia. It describes a society where heads were curated and could be ransomed, retaining their value over generations. Poseidonios presents these practices as essentially secular, implicitly linking them to the broader picture he paints of the Celts as violent and boastful, with the preserved heads representing nothing more than mementos of victories in combat. Any religious or cosmological basis to headhunting may simply have escaped them, given the brevity of his visit. Or perhaps it simply did not accord with his somewhat idealised view of druidic religion to allow that these people venerated severed heads of their enemies or ancestors. Even if we trust his observations, however, there is no reason to follow his interpretations of such practices. Like the earliest accounts of European writers describing headhunting in Southeast Asia, the classical accounts can often tell us what happened but rarely why.
> (Armit, 2012: 43)

4.2.4 Celtoscepticism and the Head Cult in Other Cultures

Notwithstanding the fact that the uncertainty on the reliability of the classical sources and the doubts concerning the interpretation of the archaeological record are main arguments given by the celtosceptical views, they are not the only sources of their scepticism. Yet another core argument arising out of celtoscepticism in regards to the cult of the head amongst Celtic peoples is related with the fact that practices such as headhunting and the importance given to the human head were not exclusive traits of the Celts, as Maier points out as well (2000: 12-14). And herein lies perhaps one of the fundamental reasons for the celtosceptical stance towards the idea of a pan-Celtic head cult. Examples of a similar behaviour to the Celts in what concerns headhunting are found worldwide throughout human history, and can be found for instance in Libya (Durou, 1993: 31), where rock carvings depicting ancient Libyan warriors show them

holding what appears to be a severed head (Fig. 13). There are even examples as far east as China. John T. Koch has pointed out that in the Chinese annals of the Han dynasty there is a description of a war between two nomadic tribes, the Yueji and the Xiongu, which ends up with the victorious Xiongu making a drinking cup from the skull of the Yueji king (Koch *et al*, 1994: 30-31). Koch adds that this may be linked with the possibility that such tribal groups were speakers of either the Tocharian or Iranian language, which would place them amongst the wide linguistic group which includes the Scythian and Celtic languages (Koch *et al*, 1994: 30-31), thus hinting at perhaps an Eurasian connection. However, China's archaeological record contains further evidence which predates the Celtic one (Armit, 2012: 38). Drinking cups made out from human skullcaps dating from between 2600-1900 BC have been found in the archaeological site of Jiangou, associated with the Chinese Longshan Neolithic culture (Underhill, 2006: 261). Moreover, the Eurasian possibility does not account for other examples of skull cups around the world associated with cultures which had no connection whatsoever with the Eurasian context. This is the case with the finding of similar prehistoric skull cups in Fiji (Carneiro, 1990: 204), and in examples from Pre-Columbian times found in the American continent which include cases from the Andes (Arkush, 2006: 295) and the North-American southeast (Jacobi, 2007: 321-324) and mid-continent areas (Speal, 2006: 119-131).

Furthermore, such examples are not exclusive to the prehistoric past, even more recent examples can be found, as Ian Armit exemplifies: "Head-hunting has also of course been practised in more recent times in many parts of the world, notably south-east Asia, where there is an especially rich ethnographic literature on the subject" (Armit, 2005: 87). Further recent examples can be found in the practices of nineteenth-century Berber warriors from North Africa (Durou, 1993: 45), as can be seen from the depictions of said warriors holding the severed heads of enemies on their camels (Fig. 14), in a similar way to the descriptions of the Celts carrying severed heads on their horses. These similarities in entirely different cultures may point towards a human behaviour which seems to occur in certain societies, when such societies face particular conditions whatever the cultural context. Moreover, as in what apparently is the Celtic case, the reason for such aforementioned behaviour may go beyond the simple taking of trophies: "In many societies where warfare is endemic the removal of heads can symbolize the completeness of the enemies' subjugation rather than the simple

collection of gory battle trophies" (Armit, 2005: 87). In other words, the occurrence of similar ethnographic traits in other cultures for which there is not an established nor probable association with the Celts leads to the argument that these examples "...do not prove any kind of historical continuity, but merely serve to confirm the truism that similar circumstances are likely to produce similar results: if you want to prove that your enemy is dead, you cut off his head and take it with you, and if you need both hands for fighting, you attach the head to your riding animal" (Maier, 2000: 13). Such an argument is extended to Europe in the Iron Age as well, for other peoples besides the Celts did seem to have particular customs regarding the heads of their enemies which have some similarity with the Celtic ones, as Armit also underlines:

> The collection of heads, however, is by no means a trait restricted to the Celts, however defined. Even within Iron Age Europe, the taking and display of heads is known well beyond the supposed extension of Celtic territory. Trajan's Column in Rome, for example, depicts the display of human heads on stakes outside a Dacian town.
> (Armit, 2005: 87).

Even the stronger proponents of the idea of the head cult as a particular Celtic trait have observed that other European traditions of the ancient world had similar manifestations, with Anne Ross commenting that there were archaic expressions of a head cult which were previous to Celtic culture as is the case of the Greeks (Ross, 1967: 162). Lambrechts goes further and underlines that besides the Greek example, in Germanic, Iberian, Scythian and even Roman cultures there were also instances of headhunting and a possible head cult (Lambrechts, 1954: 23-25). In the case of the Romans, ironically the greatest enemies of the Celts, Armit points out that "Indeed, as we can see from the state-sponsored monumental art in Rome, the imperial army itself not only took heads but curated and displayed them" (Armit, 2012: 43). A Germanic example is given by Tacitus, who describes the nailing of severed heads in the trunks of trees after the Germans won a battle at the Teutoborg forest, in 9 AD (Tacitus, *Annals*, I.68). Another particular good example is the one of the Scythians, who according to Herodotus (*Histories*, IV. 64-65), flayed the skin of the heads of their enemies and hung it from their horses' reins, and afterwards often displayed them as trophies for their guests, as Maier (2000: 13) and Riedlberger (1996: 53-60) underline as well. There are archaeological findings which seem to support these descriptions, since skulls pierced, possibly in order to be suspended and displayed, have been found in Scythian burial sites (Armit, 2012: 38).

The case of the Scythians leads Maier to once again pinpoint the same argument: "Although the similarity between the two descriptions may reflect a genuine affinity between Scythian and Continental Celtic customs, it may just as well be due to the fact that similar circumstances are likely to produce similar results" (Maier, 2000: 14). These examples and arguments are a further complication for the idea of a pan-Celtic head cult, since they establish the idea that such obsession with human heads is transversal to several historical contexts and cultures rather than specifically Celtic:

> More fundamentally, however, special treatments of the head are present in chronologically disparate archaeological contexts in Europe, from Mesolithic 'skull nests', as at Ofnet [...] and Kaufertsberg in southwest Germany [...], to the relics of medieval Christian saints. In fact, similar practices can be documented from the earliest times through to recent centuries in most parts of the world [...]. In such circumstances, it is difficult to explain headhunting, and head veneration, by reference to some Celtic cultural milieu.
> (Armit, 2012: 9)

4.2.5 The Sharing of Common Beliefs in "Celtic" Cultures

The implication of the arguments in the previous sub-chapter is the idea that the head cult may not have been a generalised characteristic amongst the several peoples who could be considered "Celtic", only that some may have expressed that characteristic as other ethno-linguistic groups did, but perhaps in an entirely different manner: "...speakers of early Celtic languages were hardly the only head hunters that the world has ever seen. Therefore, decapitation, in and of itself, is of dubious value as a distinguishing feature of cultural Celticity" (Koch, 2000: 35). The celtosceptical disbelief in the idea of common traits in the different peoples who spoke Celtic languages may be questioned however. There is a certain fallacy to the argument that other examples of head taking or possibly veneration in other cultures would invalidate the idea of a pan-Celtic trait, for the existence of these examples does not invalidate that Celtic peoples did not share such practice due to a common culture. Although it is sensible to be sceptical about the idea that several communities in a large spectrum of land throughout Europe shared the exact same material and immaterial culture, it also cannot be said that speakers sharing the same language group (Celtic) do not have something in common besides this very same language. Indeed, the amount of evidence pertaining to other geographical areas associated with Celtic language or cultures does seem to form a pattern in what cultural similarities are concerned. The fact that

differences may also be found in archaeological findings and art, and in many aspects of the material cultures, does not nullify the similarities which are also found.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in the complex discussion of Cultural Celticity Vs Celtoscepticism, that alone would fill more pages than a single monograph, however, some examples could be relevant in what these similarities are concerned. The sharing of similar beliefs for instance is aptly relevant for our main question regarding the head cult, and while this too requires an extensive discussion, some quick remarks on some aspects may be underlined. The archaeological record regarding Celtic religion reveals the same inconsistencies which may be pointed out in relation to the head cult, although, once again, points of similarity are found. The classical accounts on the druids are also prone to similar questions regarding the reliability of the testimonies and up to what point they may be used for a generalisation. There are nevertheless further pieces of evidence which reveal that there were common elements in the different "Celtic" traditions, as we may observe from evidences ranging from toponymy to epigraphy. Place-names associated with Celtic deities, for instance, are spread throughout several regions which had a Celtic-speaking culture in the Iron Age and Roman period. The most widespread examples are probably the toponyms and epigraphic inscriptions associated with the god Lug/Lugus (Sopeña, 2008: 351). Toponyms derived from Lugus are spread throughout Europe, with some of the most notable being *Lugdunum*, (present-day Lyon, France) and *Luguvallum* (present-day Carlisle, England) (Cunliffe, 1999: 185). The territory of Asturias in Spain presents an impressive number of these toponyms, which remain as the official names of the localities, such as *Llugones*, *Lugones*, *Santa Maria de Lugás* and *Lugo de Llanera* (Pedreño, 2008: 632-633), not to mention the presence of an ethnonym associated with the ancient Asturian tribe of the *Luggones* (Simón, 2008: 301). The epigraphic record is also impressive, inscriptions about Lugus are found in France, along with Switzerland and Germany (Simón, 2008: 301), and in the Iberian Peninsula as well, which is actually the territory with the greater number of inscriptions (Simón, 2008: 301-302; Pedreño, 2008: 633-634).

Interestingly, the Iberian Peninsula provides a similar record in regards to other Celtic deities: Taranis has five associated toponyms in the region of Asturias (Simón, 2008: 304). Cernunnos, well-known from his representation in the cauldron of Gundestrup, also has a toponym in Asturias, as well as in another region (Ávila) (Peña,

2008: 198-199). Belenus, of which there are about 51 epigraphic inscriptions throughout the regions of ancient Gaul and in Great Britain, also has a toponym in Spain (Peña, 2008: 202). A votive inscription to Epona, who is amply represented in statuary and epigraphy in Central Europe and Great Britain, can be found in the territory of the ancient Celtiberia (Sopeña, 2008: 351). The amount of toponyms and epigraphic inscriptions in the Iberian Peninsula is particularly significant, for it demonstrates that throughout all the extension of the territories where we may find cultures possibly associated with the "Celts" we find points in common, even if it is outside the main area of influence of the Hallstatt and La Tène material cultures. Furthermore, the fact that the toponyms and inscriptions are related to the same deities, seems to inform us that some religious references were indeed common in several "Celtic" regions, from the Iberian Peninsula to Gaul and the British Isles.

Further evidence may be acquired through toponymy, namely in what regards the *Nemeton*, the Celtic sacred spaces which seem to correspond to the descriptions from Lucan (*Pharsalia*, III.412) and Pliny (*Naturalis Historia*, XVI.6) of natural spaces, such as certain clearings within woods and forests, where the Celts believed that the deities manifested themselves. The concept of *Nemeton* seems to have been spread as far as the Galatians, with the toponym of *Drunemeton* being found in the ancient territory of Galatia (Aldhouse-Green, 1996: 448). In the territory of ancient Gaul and in Great Britain we find several toponyms derived from *Nemeton* such as *Vernemeton* (Ekwall, 1936: 320). In Germany we find both an ethnonym and a theonym, *Nemetes* and *Nemetona* (Coe, 2006: 1351), respectively, with the latter also being found in Britain (Maier, 1997: 207). *Nemeton* also produced several toponyms in Scotland, such as *Medio-nemeton* (William, 1926: 246). Apparently, this trait also extended to the Iberian Peninsula, as is demonstrated by the toponym of *Nemetóbriga* in Galicia, Spain, as well as with the ethnonym of the *Callaicians Nemetati* (Simón, 2008: 297). In Ireland, Christianity apparently attempted to Christianise ancient *Nemeton* by building chapels under the name of *Nemed*, which reveals their etymological origin (Hogan, 1910: 2315). In the Electronic Dictionary of Irish Language (eDIL), it is stated that *neimed* in "The orig. sense is prob. that of a consecrated place [...] which prob. represents an indigenous word used of sacred groves" (Toner et al, 2019: dil.ie/33032).

Of course, all these pieces of evidence are not enough for us to assume that they signify a sharing of the exact same religious practices, rituals or beliefs throughout all

the regions and respective peoples where they are found. But they do suggest that certain religious references may have been shared, such as the deities and even concepts which may indicate similar beliefs as is the case with the *Nemeton*. If this is the case with these traits, why may we not consider that particular beliefs around the human head were shared between these peoples as well? Notwithstanding that there may have been indeed ritualistic differences, or even different interpretations of a belief, and despite the fact that other cultures may have shared such a belief. In what concerns the "cult" of the head, the truth is that of the several Celtic cultures analysed, it is a trait which does stand out. As Anne Ross claims: "A study of the confused corpus of religious representations and epigraphical material does, however, indicate certain patterns and tendencies which, if not unique to Celtic religious idiom and temperament, are distinguished by the emphasis laid upon them. One of these recurrent and predominant themes is the human head" (Ross, 1958: 12). A close analysis of La Tène art for instance provides some important insights on the subject:

> Certain recurring motifs in La Tène art hint at shared concepts across wide geographical areas, and these can be useful for giving us insights into the broad cosmological background. They tell us that the human head was important, and shared points of details can suggest that more specific ideas were held in common at different times and places.
> (Armit, 2012: 43)

Furthermore, as stated before regarding the reliability of the classical accounts, we have seen that there are archaeological pieces of evidence throughout other "Celtic" regions which also seem to point out towards a head-related cult, extending beyond its apparent high prevalence in southern Gaul. If there are such pieces of evidence beyond southern Gaul, even if less prolific, do they not demonstrate that even if the classical accounts may have been limited to a certain area, such a cult was common in other Celtic-like cultures as well? Therefore, is it really so absurd to consider that it may indeed have been a pan-Celtic trait such as certain deities or religious concepts apparently were?

While there are other examples of headhunting and a possible head cult in other cultural contexts, early proponents of the idea of a particular Celtic "head cult" such as Lambrechts may have been right in considering that the Celtic culture was particularly complex in that sense: "For Lambrechts and others, however, Celtic practices differed in both quantity and quality. Nowhere else, in his view, was the human head displayed

with such frequency, subtlety, and complexity as among the Celts" (Armit, 2012: 38). Nevertheless, we cannot reach a conclusion which is not ambiguous on this matter. The classical accounts do present some issues in what their reliability is concerned, and while the archaeological record does seem to indicate that in at least some peoples which may be classified under the "Celtic" umbrella, there was some form of headhunting/head cult or obsession with decapitation, we still cannot plainly claim that it was a widespread belief or practice, although there are evidences which seem to point out that it indeed was, as we have seen. This an important point for our interests, since we must ascertain if such possible practices were common to Ireland as well, and if they subsequently exerted some influence in the later medieval literature in some form, most specifically in *Fled Bricrenn*. In order to do that we must analyse other narratives of the Irish corpus (and Welsh) and to contextualise them with the questions which we have been discussing, to understand if there is a connection.

4.2.6 Irish and Welsh Narratives associated with the Cult of the Head

The notion of a pan-Celtic head cult which we have underlined previously was not solely based upon the classical descriptions and archaeological record, but also supported by Irish and Welsh medieval literature: "The occurrence of head-taking in the medieval written versions of earlier Irish oral tales has been compared explicitly to the accounts of Poseidonios and others [...]. Although the earliest surviving manuscripts only rarely predate the twelfth century AD, the origins of these stories are often thought to go back many centuries..." (Armit, 2012: 29). *Fled Bricrenn* is not the sole example of a narrative where beheading and the severed head have central roles. Other texts depict elements related with headhunting and veneration of the head that seem to support the idea of a Celtic head cult. In fact, in what the Ulster cycle is concerned for instance, James Mallory has counted thirty instances of headhunting or head taking (Mallory, 1981: 108). In what concerns the description by Athenaeus of duels for the champion's portion for instance, *Fled Bricrenn* is not the only Irish narrative which seems to represent an allusion to it. *Scéla mucce Meic Da Thó* is similarly concerned with a feast and the dispute for the champion's portion, but on this instance the competition is based upon the bragging of feats and of the slayings of members of the other party. Most interestingly is that many of those feats bragged about include the taking of heads as trophies and the dispute is ultimately settled by the display of a severed head as well:

> ‘You are a better warrior than I, it is true,’ said Cet. ‘If Anlúan were here, he would give you another kind of contest. It is our misfortune that he is not in the house.’ ‘Oh, but he is,’ said Conall, and taking Anlúan’s head from his wallet he threw it at Cet’s breast so that a mouthful of blood splattered over the lips. Cet left the pig, then, and Conall sat down to it, saying ‘On with the contest!’ The Connachta could not find a warrior to equal him...[278]
> (Gantz, 1981: 186)

Although it is thus different from the beheading-game challenge from *Fled Bricrenn* in this point, it is interesting to notice that *Scéla mucce Meic Da Thó* also involves a feast where there is a dispute for the champion’s portion and the resolution of that same dispute entails a decapitated head. We have thus a narrative where the awarding of the champion’s portion is given to whom has the courage to submit to decapitation in a beheading game and another where it is the display of a decapitated head which leads to the settlement on who must receive it. Therefore, both examples do involve decapitation despite the differences. This might not be a coincidence since both narratives are concerned with a feast and the champion’s portion. As in the case of the account of the feast by Athenaeus and the parallels with both *Fled Bricrenn* and *Scéla mucce Meic Da Thó*, the descriptions regarding the practice of headhunting also seem to find correspondence in several other Irish texts. In many of the confrontations between warriors found in Irish narratives it is commonplace for decapitation to be the final strike, and for the head of the defeated to be taken afterwards as a prize or proof of victory over the enemy. There are examples throughout several narratives, with special emphasis on the Ulster cycle (Ó Huiginn, 2006: 1711-1712), where the battles involving Cú Chulainn represent a paragon of headhunting in early Irish literature since the Ulster hero often decapitates his enemies (Löffler, 2006: 897).

The *Táin* is notably rich in the depiction of decapitations at the hand of Cú Chulainn, with some of these depictions containing certain details which are a striking match to the classical descriptions. In the section concerned with the Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn in the *Táin* (*Macgnímrada Con Culainn*), a confrontation with the three sons of Nechta ends with every single one being beheaded by Cú Chulainn and the latter taking their heads (O’Rahilly, 1967: 167-170; 1976: 145-146). It is mentioned in the narrative that afterwards Cú Chulainn carried the three heads in his chariot: “He has in the chariot the bloody heads of his enemies”[279] (O’Rahilly, 1967: 170), thus evoking the

[278] See Appendix I, note 95.
[279] See Appendix I, note 96.

Celtic practice described by Strabo and Diodorus Siculus of carrying the heads of their enemies fastened to their horses. The first recension of the *Táin* is especially descriptive of this episode and of the significance of the carried heads as trophies: "He carried off the spoils and brought the three heads with him in his chariot and said 'I will not part from these tokens of my triumph until I reach Emain.' Thereupon they set forth with their trophies"[280] (O'Rahilly, 1976: 11, 146). In another example found in both the first (O'Rahilly, 1976: 134) and second recensions of the *Táin*, Cú Chulainn is described setting up a pole/branch with four prongs, being approached by four men of the enemy host, killing them by beheading them, and using the pole to display the decapitated heads. The most detailed version of this episode is found in the second recension:

> Then Cú Chulainn went into the wood and descended from his chariot and cut a forked pole of four prongs, whole and entire, with one stroke. He pointed it and charred it and put an ogam inscription on its side and cast it out of the back of his chariot from the tip of one hand so that two thirds of it went into the ground and but one third of it was above ground. Then it was that the two lads mentioned, the two sons of Nera mac Nuatair meic Tacáin, came upon him engaged in that task, and they vied with one another as to which of them would first wound him and first behead him. Cú Chulainn attacked them and cut off their four heads from them and from their charioteer and impaled a head of each man of them on a prong of the pole.[281]
> (O'Rahilly, 1967: 153)

The display of the four decapitated heads stuck in the prongs of the pole seems once again reminiscent of the classical descriptions, signifying both a manner of trophy display as in the Gaulish habit described by Strabo of nailing enemies heads to the gates of their homes or forts, and the intention to send a message or create fear, as in Justinus' description of the decapitated head of Ptolemy being stuck in a spear and carried around by the Gauls. Indeed, the ogam inscription placed by Cú Chulainn in the pole is quite illustrative of the intention of sending a message which also has the function of providing a frightening warning, given by the four beheaded heads displayed in such a fashion. This form of display is repeated again in the *Táin* when Cú Chulainn encounters Ferchú Loingsech and his men, a total of twelve warriors in the second recension and thirteen in the first (O'Rahilly, 1976: 77, 194), and decapitates all of them, and afterwards displays their heads above either twelve or thirteen stones, depending on the recension. The second recension again provides the most detailed version:

[280] See Appendix I, note 97.
[281] See Appendix I, note 98.

> Ferchú took counsel with his men. 'What better plan could we carry out' said he, 'than to go and attack yonder man who is checking and holding back the four great provinces of Ireland and to bring back with us his head in triumph to Ailill and Medb. Though we have done many wrongs and injuries to Ailill and to Medb, we shall obtain peace thereby if that man fall by us'. That is the plan they decided on. And they came forward to the place where Cú Chulainn was, and when they came, they did not grant him fair play or single combat but all twelve of them attacked him straightaway. However Cú Chulainn fell upon them and forthwith struck off their twelve heads. And he planted twelve stones for them in the ground and put a head of each one of them on its stone and also put Ferchú Loingsech's head on its stone.[282]
> (O'Rahilly, 1967: 209)

Moreover, it is notable that Ferchú and his men wanted themselves to decapitate Cú Chulainn and bring his head to Ailill and Medb, underlining once again the symbolic nature of the severed head as the ultimate prize in the victory against enemies. In yet another example, in *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne*[283], the death-tale of Cú Chulainn, also known as *Aided Con Culainn* as well as *Oidheadh Con Culainn* in the early Irish modern rendition, Cú Chulainn's final opponent, Lugaid, the son of Cú Roí, decapitates Cú Chulainn, and later on Conall Cernach avenges Cú Chulainn by beheading Lugaid and delivering the severed head to Cú Chulainn's wife Emer (Armit, 2012: 30). All these examples from the Ulster cycle however, contrarily to *Fled Bricrenn*, lack an important aspect concerning a possible belief related with the human head. Although the taking of heads in the mentioned narratives draws an approximation to the classical descriptions of Celtic headhunting, its emphasis is solely in the martial aspect of decapitation rather than any supernatural or spiritual symbolism: "Most of the references to headhunting in these insular tales depict the practice as a form of martial display, reflecting the prowess of individual heroic warriors. Heads are taken generally for revenge, to denigrate the enemy, to prove a kill, or in a burst of uncontrollable ferocity" (Armit, 2012: 30). In what regards the beheading game, the taking of heads as trophies as seen in these other examples from the Ulster cycle does imply some significance in what heroic competition is concerned. However, what is impressive in the beheading game is not solely the fact that the game is based on two participants beheading each other in turns, but also the survival of the decapitated challenger, whose head remains animated after decapitation. This element of the motif might be connected

[282] See Appendix I, note 99.
[283] *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* is found in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster as well as another manuscript from the sixteenth century. According to Pokorny, it may have been composed around the eight century (1921: 123). The early modern Irish *Oidheadh Con Culainn* is found in four different manuscripts with the older hailing from the sixteenth century.

to a further meaning in what severed heads are concerned. The absence of an explicit spiritual association with severed heads in many of the narratives may have a justification however: "The paucity of references to the veneration of severed heads is hardly surprising when we consider that these tales were being transcribed by Christian monks, unwilling to give credence to pagan belief" (Armit, 2012: 30).

Nevertheless, there are other examples from Irish literature which may point at a deeper meaning regarding the human head. It is notable for instance that in *Cath Maige Tuired*, the healer Dian Cécht of the Tuatha Dé Danann claims that he can heal any injury, except for some cases which include the head having been cut off: "'Any man who will be wounded there, unless his head is cut off, or the membrane of his brain or his spinal cord is severed, I will make him perfectly whole in the battle on the next day.'"[284] (Gray, 1982: 51). This example of course could be interpreted as simply exemplifying that decapitation of the head symbolizes a final death. However, there are other narratives, of which *Fled Bricrenn* itself is an example, where the head is endowed with other properties. As Ian Armit once again underlines "...there are a few instances where, even through the distorting mirror of later transcription, it is clear that certain heads had supernatural powers" (Armit, 2012: 30). Talking or living heads which seem to survive after decapitation for instance may be a reflection of a particular conception regarding the head. This is particularly relevant for our main narratives of course, with the survival of both Úath and Cú Roí after beheading being our focus, but other Irish narratives also display severed heads being able to retain consciousness and speech, thus possibly being a widespread motif rather than exclusive to *Fled Bricrenn*. A relevant case is found in *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, when Conaire Mór's head is cut off, but after decapitation and being given a drink of water it still recites a poem:

> When Macc Cécht reached the third ridge from the house, he saw two men striking Conare's head off. He struck the head from one of the two men, but the second made to escape with Conare's head. On the floor of the hostel, near the entrance, there happened to be a pillar stone at Macc Cécht's feet. He cast this stone at the second man; it struck the man in the small of the back, and his back broke. Macc Cécht struck off the man's head. Then he poured the cup of water into Conare's throat, and Conare's head recited this poem:
>
> A good man Macc Cécht!
> Welcome, Macc Cécht!
> He brings drink to a king.
> He does well.[285]

[284] See Appendix I, note 100.
[285] See Appendix I, note 101.

(Gantz, 1981: 104-105)

Another example is found in *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*[286], a poem which later had a prose introduction added to it, which testifies to the symbolism of the head as the ultimate trophy in a conflict, and features a talking severed head as well. *Reicne Fothaid Canainne* narrates the conflict between two leaders of the *fianna* (Fothad and Ailill) from different provinces, over Ailill's wife, whom Fothad covets. After Fothad abducts the woman away, both he and his men are chased by Ailill, and in the ensuing conflict Fothad's men are slain and Fothad himself has his head cut off (Meyer, 1910a: 9). Although Ailill also perishes in the battle, J. F. Nagy notices that "Worth noting here is the traditional function of the severed head kept by the victor as a victory trophy, even though, according to the poem to follow, Ailill too is slain in battle, and so there would appear to be no one left to "use" the trophy" (Nagy, 1997: 300). There is therefore yet another hint at the presence of the severed head as a trophy in early Irish literature, but in what the present topic of talking heads is concerned, it is notable that Fothad's head also speaks after being severed: "The woman who comes to a tryst with Fothad carried his head to him in the grave where it is. Then the head of Fothad sang the reicne to the woman…" (Meyer, 1910a: 9). The poem in verse is in fact that same recitation by Fothad's severed head to the woman, proclaiming his sorrow for the events that led him to the state of being a disembodied head and to the fate of his men, due to his desire for a woman. On this aspect of the poem, Nagy comments that "we remain aware of the literal and metaphoric isolation of both the head and the intelligence it contains" (Nagy, 1997: 301), as a nod to the conception of the head as the vehicle for Fothad's conscience. It must be noted of course that both Conaire's and Fothad's speeches are farewell speeches, which might be significant for our discussion, as we shall see. Be that as it may, life and consciousness do appear to linger in the head after its separation from the body.

Another story, connected with the Fenian cycle, is found in *Sanas Cormaic* (Stokes *et al*, 1868: 129-131), and also includes a severed talking head, namely the one of Lomna, described as Finn's fool. Lomna caught Finn's wife committing adultery with another warrior named Coirpre, and warns Finn through an ogam message, who gets disgusted with his wife. Due to having warned Finn, Coirpre kills and beheads

[286] The poem in verse itself is written in Old Irish, having been possibly composed around the 8th century, while the prose introductions are Middle Irish and were added later.

Lomna, and brings his head with him. Finn finds Coirpre cooking salmon together with his retinue, and sees that Coirpre had stuck Lomna's head upon a spit near him. When Coirpre divides the meal he does not give any to Lomna's head, and the head starts uttering some verses complaining of his ill treatment, this happens a second time, and at the third time Lomna's head is placed outside the house but still nags his captors. This story depicts yet another head whose consciousness and even life-force seems to be embodied in the head, and it remains "alive" even after beheading. Even the *Táin*, which is mostly a source of examples pertaining to the decapitation of heads as a form of trophy-taking rather than the display of supernatural properties in severed heads, also contains another example of a talking severed head as well, namely the one of Sualtaim, Cú Chulainn's adoptive father. Sualtaim goes to the Ulstermen to give warning that Ulster is being ravaged by Ailill and Medb, with only Cú Chulainn stopping them, but is ignored until his head is accidentally cut off, but the severed head still talks and delivers one final warning which is finally heard:

> Sualtaim went his way in anger and wrath since he got not the answer which sufficed him from the Ulstermen. Then the Líath Macha reared under Sualtaim and came forward opposite Emain, and his own shield turned on Sualtaim and its rim cut off his head. The horse itself turned back again into Emain, with the shield on the horse and the head on the shield. And Sualtaim's head spoke the same words. 'Men are slain, women carried off, cattle driven away, O Ulstermen!' said the head of Sualtaim.[287]
> (O'Rahilly, 1976: 247)

Once again however, this example concerns a dying utterance, in the same manner as Conaire and Fothad. These examples present therefore important differences from beheading-game challengers such as Úath and Cú Roí, since there is no indication that the body remains animated after the head has been severed, and the heads themselves remain animated only briefly. Nevertheless, these talking heads may point towards a symbolism of the severed head as a messenger which is especially important, with Nagy considering that it "is perhaps the most venerable supernatural source of statements that are to be heeded" (Nagy, 1997: 301). Additionally, the presence and symbolism of the severed head does not seem to be confined to the texts concerning the pre-Christian times of Ireland, hinting perhaps at the hypothesis that it was not seen or used solely as a form of portraying a belief from pagan times, but rather a pervasive motif throughout medieval culture.

[287] See Appendix I, note 102.

In *Cath Almaine*, a narrative from the so-called Historical Cycle found in four manuscripts including the Yellow Book of Lecan and the Book of Fermoy, there are two instances where the motif of the severed head is featured. A conflict between the Leinstermen and the Uí Néill commanded by king Fergal mac Maíle Dúin which culminates in the battle of Allen sets the tone of the story. In the night before the battle, a minstrel called Donn-bó is unable to sing for Fergal but pledges to do so in the following night wherever they may be. However, in the next day the Uí Néill are defeated and Fergal ends up being slain and his head cut off, and Donn-bó also falls in the battle. Later that night one of the warriors belonging to the victorious side returns to the battlefield in order to fetch a head as a trophy for displaying in the feast where the Leinstermen are celebrating. He finds Fergal's body and comes across several fallen minstrels which although dead are playing music to the body of Fergal, and from amongst these corpses the most beautiful voice comes from the severed head of Donn-bó, which is brought by the warrior to the feast on the condition that he later rejoins head with body (Stokes, 1903a: 58-61). The most relevant part of this episode occurs when Donn-bó's head is placed on a pillar in the place of the feast and sings a powerful song capable of making the ones around it weep:

> So the warrior went to his house and the head with him and on arriving he found the Leinstermen carousing that same night. «Hast thou brought anything from the battlefield?», says Murchad.
> «I have brought Donn-bô's head», the warrior answered.
> «Put it on the pillar yonder», says Murchad.
> The whole army recognised the head, and they all said:
> «It was no luck for thee, O Donn-bô, to be like that, for thou wert the best and most beautiful minstrel in Erin!»
> «Well», says the warrior who brought the head from outside, «make minstrelsy for us, O Donn-bô, for the sake of God's Son, (to wit, Jesus Christ, into whose presence he had gone). Amuse the Leinstermen tonight as thou amusedst thy lord not long ago».
> Then Donn-bô turned his face to the wall of the house so that it might be dark to him, and he raised his *cruinsech* (?) on high so that it was sweeter than any melody on the earth's sward; and all the host were weeping and sad at the piteousness and misery of the music that he sang.
> Now when the host was weary of the sorrow caused by listening to the music, the same warrior went with the head till he reached its body. «Good indeed!» says the head to the warrior: «join my head to my body». Then the warrior fitted the head to the body and straightway it adhered thereto.[288]
> (Stokes, 1903a: 61, 63)

[288] See Appendix I, note 103.

Not only does the placing of the head on a pillar seems ritualistic, but the power with which is imbued seems to be symbolic of the venerable meaning of the human head: "In this tale then, a decapitated head is placed on a pillar, it entertains at a feast, and sings with such power that all who listen weep. It has the power of speech, and of movement, turning away from the audience to which it does not wish to sing" (Ross, 1958: 39). Yet another instance of a severed head which is venerated is Fergal's own head, which is brought from the battlefield as a trophy by the Leinstermen to provoke Fergal's ally Cathal, who had been absent from the battle. Cathal manages to capture the head, and a ritual around it seems to be described, with a series of offerings and the opening of the eyes by the head:

> Then Fergal's head was washed and plaited and combed smooth by Cathal, and a cloth of velvet was put round it, and seven oxen, seven wethers and seven bacon-pigs – all of them cooked - were brought before the head. Then the head blushed in presence of all the men of Munster, and it opened its eyes to God to render thanks for the respect and great honour that had been shewn to it.
> (Stokes, 1903a: 65)

The revival of the severed head of Fergal seems to point towards the concept of the human head as the seat of the soul, because when it blushes and opens its eyes it "…thus indicates that it is capable of life independent of its body" (Ross, 1958: 39). On the other hand the sense of ritualized worship is most notable in this passage: "It is significant that in this same tale we have another example of a decapitated head treated with utmost reverence, decked and adorned, the finest of animals cooked and placed before it as an offering" (Ross, 1958: 39). But what is also potentially relevant is that the narrative is situated already in a Christian context, and yet the whole scene seems to show a strong reminiscence of a pagan ritual around the human head which resembles sacrificial offerings, as Anne Ross underlines: "Although concerned with characters living well within the Christian era, and although the episode is given a Christian slant (the head giving thanks to God), this strange episode suggests earlier traditions of the actual worship of heads evidenced by the placing of animal offerings before it" (Ross, 1958: 38). Together with the episode involving Donn-bó's severed head singing, this leads Anne Ross to consider that in what *Cath Almaine* is concerned "It seems undeniable therefore that this tale, dealing with historical characters in a historical context has attracted to itself elements belonging to a purely pagan society, which show

genuine traces of the veneration which was at one time accorded to the human head" (Ross, 1958: 39).

Welsh literature also contains a very important allusion to the very same concept of the head as the seat of the soul we have been referring to, or which can be easily interpreted as such. The aforementioned example is found in the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi* and in the story of Brân, who after the battle in Ireland is mortally wounded and asks for his head to be cut off and carried to Wales by the other survivors of the battle. The notable aspect of this episode is that Brân claims that the head will not perish and will still talk even after decapitation: "And you will find the head to be as good company as it ever was when it was on me. And you will stay for eighty years in Gwales in Penfro. And so long as you do not open the door towards Aber Henfelen, facing Cornwall, you can remain there and the head will not decay" (Davies, 2007: 32). And Brân's head is indeed taken first to Harlech and then to Gwales, and during the time where both the survivors and Brân's head are in these places, the head does maintain its ability for speech and entertains them. Of the stay in Gwales it mentions: "Having the head there was no more unpleasant than when Bendigeidfran had been alive with them. Because of those eighty years this was called The Assembly of the Noble Head" (Davies, 2007: 34). In the context we have previously discussed of Irish influence in Welsh literature, it becomes debatable if such a similar use of the motif of the living and talking decapitated head results from Irish influence, or if it is yet another example of survival of an ancient belief common to Celtic-speaking cultures. When commenting on this narrative, Ross is quick to conclude that it does indeed reflect the reminiscence of an old belief around the human head:

> Bran is clearly a god in origin, and the story of the decapitation is probably a later rationalisation of an original cult legend about a wonderful supernatural head. In this head are combined all the powers with which the human head was accredited by the Celts. It is apotropaic (it averts danger of invasion); it is prophetic (it reveals future events); it is divine (it presides over the Otherworld feast at which the wonderful birds of Riannon, the Great Queen, British equivalent of the Gaulish horse goddess Epona, sing ceaselessly).
> (Ross, 1958: 38)

Not only does Ross consider this, but she also makes a direct connection with the archaeological record by stating that "This legend, appearing in a medieval Welsh tale, is unique in containing verbal verification of all that is implicit in the material representations of the human head" (Ross, 1958: 38). What then does all this evidence

gathered from Irish and Welsh sources means? Taking into account all the parallels with the classical texts which we have seen, these examples concerning Irish literature and the relevant example from Welsh literature "...have been seen as preserving vestiges of the same Celtic head cult glimpsed through the classical accounts" (Armit, 2012: 29), having thus contributed to the same generalised idea which we have previously discussed. Proinsias Mac Cana even uses the evidence from medieval literature as a further proof of the reliability of the classical testimonies: "It should not be forgotten that a number of observations by the same classical authors on matters of Celtic custom and social organisation are corroborated by Irish literature" (Mac Cana, 1983: 15). These ideas would place *Fled Bricrenn* as one of such "preserving vestiges" of the Celtic head cult and we would have an idea of what lies behind the significance of the beheading game and the survival of the severed head. As we have seen however, there are some issues concerning such a generalised idea. In the particular case of the medieval literary evidence, as we will discuss next, Early Irish literature could be seen as a further contribution to strengthen the theory of the Celtic head cult in association with the "Window to the Iron Age" theory defended by Kenneth Jackson. But as we shall also subsequently see, there are some issues arising out of that interpretation as well. First, however, there are further examples from other traditions which must be taken into account on this discussion.

4.2.7 The Severed Head in Other Literary and Mythical Traditions

Perhaps in reflection of the role that the severed head also seems to have had in other cultures rather than being solely a Celtic trait, as we have commented previously, Irish and Welsh literature are not the only ones to provide examples of severed heads being taken or having supernatural behaviours, these can be found in other literary and mythological milieus as well. Even in Oriental cultures there are examples. In *The Thousand and One Nights*, whose tales may be traced to Persia circa 850 AD (White, 1972: 128), there is an episode where a doctor called Duban cures his King, named Yunan, of leprosy. However, due to the jealousy of one of Yunan's viziers, Duban is condemned to death by beheading. Before his death, Duban offers Yunan one of his books in order for the latter to heal himself in case he becomes ill again, and tells the King that his severed head will speak the instructions for the book if some of his blood is placed upon it. After the execution the King attempts to read the book but the pages are blank, and upon complaining on this, the severed head speaks indeed and urges the

King to keep turning the pages, until he reaches a poisoned page, which kills the King (Dawood, 1954: 85-86). In the Chinese tradition, a cycle of legends from the seventh century was written down by Wu Ch'êng-en in the sixteenth century, which includes a similar episode to the beheading game. The tale narrates the pilgrimage of Tripitaka and his three most devoted followers, which include Monkey, the protagonist. During the journey they stumble upon a land where they are challenged to a contest of decapitations, Monkey survives the competition however, and beheads his opponent (Ch'Êng-En, 1961: 277-278).

Most relevant for us however is the European context, which, perhaps in accordance with our previous discussion concerning the presence of headhunting and a head cult throughout other European peoples in the Ancient world, provides literary and mythic examples beyond Irish and Welsh literature. This is visible in classical myths such as the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus, betraying a possible view of the head as the source of power (Lambrechts, 1954: 25), or the oracular severed head of Orpheus. The story of Orpheus tell us that after his head was torn from his body by the female followers of Dionysus, it remained singing verses and was carried by a river and subsequently by the waves of the sea to the Island of Lesbos, where a shrine was built for his head. In the shrine however, the head kept uttering prophecies (White, 1972: 123). In Europe the most prolific source of examples may be however found in Norse/Icelandic mythology and literature. A particular interesting one is the figure of the mythical Mimir, whose severed head provided counsel to Odin even after decapitation. Mimir is mentioned in the *Poetic Edda*[289] (Thorpe, 2004: 7, 12, 42, 290), the *Prose Edda*[290] (Sturluson, 2005: 24-5, 72) and in the *Heimskringla*[291] (Sturluson, 1964: 8, 11), which provides the most interesting account of his story: after a truce between the *Aesir* and the *Vanir*[292], hostages are exchanged between the two sides, with

[289] The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of several anonymous Old Norse poems which includes Norse/Germanic mythological poems and heroic lays. It is based upon the *Codex Regius*, an Icelandic medieval manuscript written during the thirteenth century. There is no certainty concerning the date of origin of the included poems, and they probably vary in their date, but some may have been composed in the tenth century.

[290] The *Prose Edda* is an Old Norse collection of prose narratives written by Snorri Sturluson in Iceland during the thirteenth century. It is one of the main sources of Norse mythology together with the *Poetic Edda*.

[291] The *Heimskringla* is a collection of Icelandic sagas written by Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century. It includes sagas about Norwegian and Swedish kings and it is also connected to Norse mythology.

[292] The *Aesir* and the *Vanir* are the two pantheons of Norse mythology, who enter into a war and eventually get joined into a single pantheon, which includes figures such as Odin, Thor, Freyja, Baldr or

Mimir being taken by the *Vanir* on account of his celebrated wisdom. The *Vanir* eventually get displeased with Mimir however, and behead him and send his head to Asgard. Odin then embalms the head and charms it with magic, giving it the power to speak and to provide Odin with advice and the revelation of secrets and prophecies. Mimir's head has led to comparisons with the head of the Welsh Brân, and thus to the idea that the veneration of the severed head was not an exclusive "Celtic" trait: "The similarities between Bran and Mimir perhaps suggest echoes of a broadly similar myth across much of northern Europe in the medieval period and perhaps earlier" (Armit, 2012: 31).

Indeed, besides the head of Mimir, Icelandic texts on Norse/Germanic myths and sagas provide a whole plethora of examples which remind us of a similar attention to the severed head to what we see in Irish literature. Beheading is for instance the only way to eliminate *draugars*, an undead mythic creature in the Norse tradition, similar to a revenant, and this is exemplified in texts such as *Grettir's Saga*[293] (Fee, 2001: 107). In the *Eyrbyggja Saga*[294] the same decapitation of revenants is frequent, and there is also the description of a talking trunkless head resting near a scree which utters prophetic verses (Ólason, 2003: 71-200), thus reminding us of the Irish talking heads. In the *Orkneyinga Saga*[295], Sigurðr, the first earl of Orkney, is described as defeating a Scottish earl and cutting the heads of both the earl and his followers, and subsequently attaching them to the saddle of his horse, and carrying them as trophies (Palsson *et al*, 1978: 27), thus being reminiscent of both the classical sources concerning the Celts and the examples from Irish literature where this same behaviour is described. Heads which seem to be reattached or regrow from the torso also make an appearance: In *Njal's*

Loki. In Norse literature, they are the main concern of both the *Eddas*, and make appearances in other Norse sagas and narratives such as the *Heimskringla*.

[293] *Grettir's Saga* is one of the Icelandic sagas written between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries written by an anonymous author. The saga is concerned with the life of an Icelandic warrior outlaw called Grettir Ásmundarson and his family and the depiction of events which supposedly happened between the ninth and eleventh centuries in Iceland.

[294] Translatable as *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, the *Eyrbyggja Saga* is an Icelandic saga which has survived in fragments from manuscripts from both the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while the setting of the saga is concerned with events set between the ninth and eleventh centuries. The saga is focused on the conflict between two Norse chieftains in Iceland, with the main protagonist being Snorri Þorgrímsson, one of the warring chieftains, who also appears in other sagas.

[295] The *Orkneyinga Saga*, also called *The History of the Earls of Orkney* or *Jarl's Saga*, is an Icelandic Norse Saga which tells a historical narrative about the line of Jarls who ruled the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, with the text having been written in the thirteenth century.

Saga[296], King Brian Boru is decapitated in the course of a battle, but when his body is laid out the head has reappeared in the torso again (Cook, 2001: 432-433). Sigurd Sigurdsson has even called the attention to an explicit analogue to the beheading game in an Icelandic tale called *Sveins rimur Múkssonar*: "In the *rimur* a certain Gramann arrives at court and invites those present to cut off his head, if he can in return, cut their heads off the following day!" (Sigurdsson, 2000: 70). The amount of examples from Icelandic literature certainly point towards the idea that "…beheading is a prolific motif in Old Norse/Icelandic literature, and in many instances the heads take on lives of their own" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 3), and this would place early Irish (and Welsh) literature as simply another set of examples regarding severed heads without necessarily reflecting a specific "Celtic" trait.

However, there are suspicions that many of those examples in Icelandic literature may be a result of Irish influence, a proponent of which is Anne Ross (1962: 41; 1967: 61). Sigurd Sigursson provided a more in-depth study on this matter more recently (2000), and he analyses a whole array of factors concerning contacts between Gaelic and Icelandic culture that may have led to literary influences. On the matter of severed heads he mentions that there are "…numerous references in Icelandic sources about a head-cult of some sort and related folkbeliefs. Many of these are believed to be due to Gaelic influence and some are so well established that they are most likely to have developed within Iceland" (Sigurdsson, 2000: 45). Other scholars seem to agree, commenting on the episode from the *Orkneyinga Saga* for instance, Bo Almqvist comments that "…some such Gaelic story, perhaps in a more primitive form and without the hagiographic ingredients, seems likely to lie behind it" (Almqvist, 1981: 99). The most obvious example of the ones mentioned which may betray Gaelic influence is the beheading-game episode which we have mentioned, which, although it hardly came from a direct Irish source, may have been so through an intermediary: "The Irish story is closest to the Icelandic one but influence from Arthurian works indicates that the *rimur* could not have derived their material directly from Irish tradition. A now lost source, possibly written in England might therefore have served as an intermediary" (Sigurdsson, 2000: 70). The example of Mimir's head, which seems to be the most

[296] The *Njal's Saga*, or *The Story of Burnt Njáll* is an Icelandic saga written around the end of the thirteenth century and depicts supposed events between 960 and 1020. The saga tells the story of feuds amongst the Icelandic Commonwealth, with the main protagonists being the titular Njáll Þorgeirsson, a lawyer-sage and a warrior named Gunnar Hámundarson, whose wife is the instigator of the main feud in the saga which lasts for decades until the burning of the co-protagonist Njáll.

prone to reflect a mythical background, has also been suspected of betraying external influence, although Welsh rather than Gaelic: “This tradition may have had its roots in Celtic legend. Mimir’s head (that spouts wisdom in Norse poetry) could have been influenced by the Welsh Bendigiedfran whose severed head happily keeps his men company for eighty-seven years in the Otherworld where the head is…” (Tracy, 2012: 211).

Nevertheless, it is hard to plainly claim that the Icelandic examples are solely on the account of Irish or Welsh influence, although the closest analogues may indeed be. We have seen previously that traditions and beliefs regarding severed heads were verifiable in other cultures as well and that may have been true to the Norse one as well. Mimir’s head has also been compared to the oracular head of Orpheus (White, 1972: 123) as has Brân’s, and as stated above this may reflect a common myth or idea regarding severed heads in different European cultures, which the given classical examples also exemplify. Together with other examples from around the world, this may reveal the general manifestation of a trait which is common to human culture in general, when a society is in a similar context, thus reinforcing the arguments from Maier which we have discussed previously. Literature and mythology then reflects this same trait. Nevertheless, Irish literature seems to be specifically rich on the matter of severed heads and their symbolism, and this may not be wholly unrelated with the classical and archaeological record concerning “Celtic” cultures.

In comparison for instance, although there are also evidences of headhunting in Norse/Germanic cultures, it does not seem to be enough for a comparison with the Celtic case, as Kenneth Jackson states when referring to the Germanic peoples of northern Europe: “there is nothing really to suggest that the special refinements known among the Celts were familiar to them” (Jackson, 1964: 36). Together with the suspicions regarding at least a partial Gaelic influence in Icelandic literature, the same contextualization of Icelandic literature with both ancient descriptions and archaeological record is far from being the same of Irish literature, and the same can be said of other traditions. This is somewhat debatable of course. If, as we have extensively commented previously, other cultures did demonstrate instances of headhunting and possible head cults as certain myths seem to reflect, then it was a trait of those cultures as well. The point is that the Irish case has more examples, many of which provide a parallel with the classical descriptions on the Celts. Taking these observations into

account, it may be sensible indeed to consider, as White does, that "…it is in Celtic territories that tales of the severed-yet-living head abound and persist…" (White, 1972: 130). There are however, as we shall subsequently see, further issues concerning the contextualization of early Irish literature with an ancient head cult of the Celts.

4.2.8 The "Window on the Iron Age" Theory

The similarities between the depictions of headhunting in Irish literature and the classical accounts along with the associations of the supernatural severed heads who remain animated and talking with a possible ancient religious/spiritual significance have certain implications of course. One such implication is the possibility that the memory of these practices and beliefs surrounding the human head were retained and expressed in medieval Irish literature, and this is extremely important in what regards *Fled Bricrenn*. This idea directs us to Kenneth Jackson's theory of a "Window on the Iron Age", which interprets the political structure, civilization, customs and way of life as they are portrayed in the Ulster cycle as the intact picture of a period set several centuries before the time of its writing, a period set in the Iron Age:

> …the immediate setting of the oldest hero tales, that is to say the state of endemic warfare between Ulster and the rest of Ireland and various other features of the Irish political construction, material civilization, and way of life, which are very archaic in appearance, very circumstantial, and on the whole very consistent, belong to a period some centuries older than the time when they were first written down – belong in fact to a *pre*historic Ireland. (Jackson, 1964: 4).

Logically, this theory has implications for the matter of headhunting, since the latter can also be included in Jackson's theory. Nevertheless, similarly to the matter of the head-cult as a specific Celtic belief, there are some arguments which complicate the consideration that the use of the severed head in Irish narratives reflects that same belief. Jackson's view implies an intact view of pre-Christian Ireland and its preservation through oral tradition. Be that as it may, in the aftermath of the nativist and anti-nativist discussion it became a generally accepted idea that the transition for the written word in Ireland was accompanied by a complex literary endeavour under the net of monastic learning, giving rise to a corpus of vernacular texts which were probably the result of the use of elements from pre-Christian tradition in coalition with the Christian Latin one. Such interpretation also allows us to draw the conclusion that, while native pre-literate elements are present in this material, these were subjected to

considerable reworking and transformation, and we can even recognize the strong probability that much of the content of these tales was indeed created outright. Such a context leads to questions regarding the influence exerted by the contemporary context in the written tradition, since any possible pre-Christian elements could have been transformed to fit a medieval Christian world-cosmology and vision of history, in accordance with their contemporary society.

In addition to the fact that the transition to a written form in the Irish context would invariably change it, even the nature of oral traditions may not be as static as Jackson interprets them. Although an oral tradition may indeed preserve many ideas across great lengths of time, some anthropological studies on non-literate societies, whose tradition is, of course, oral, have come to the conclusion that contemporary political and social factors most probably manage to influence the transmission of an oral corpus: "oral traditions are conditioned by the society in which they flourish. It follows therefore that no oral tradition can transcend the boundaries of the social system in which it exists" (Vansina, 1965: 172). This phenomenon happens due to the nature of oral transmission: even when intended to reach out to the past, it may progressively be reshaped in accordance with the present, since there is no fixed form of the corpus that might be used as a chronological and factual reference (Goody, 1968: 34). Consequently, there is no way to even detect the difference from a version of some story or myth from the original one, for the original one is already lost in the past. Thus, elements that might not be of importance to the contemporaneous context are prone to be modified or even erased, and others which might provide a better reflection of this same context might be introduced: "traditions are altered, more or less consciously, to fit in with the cultural values of the time" (Vansina, 1965: 96). This process goes unnoticed by the members of a given non-literate society, because it happens in symbiosis with the passing of time and with change in the society, so that each generation is always being transmitted an already altered version of the oral "tradition":

> Myth and history merge into one: the elements in the cultural heritage which cease to have a contemporary relevance tend to be soon forgotten or transformed; and as the individuals of each generation acquire their vocabulary, their genealogies, and their myths, they are unaware that others have changed their meanings or been replaced.
> (Goody, 1968: 34).

There is no reason to suppose this same process did not happen in the pre-Christian oral tradition of Ireland, and this would mean that whatever oral narratives became known to the first Irish *literati* and served as a base for their writing down of the secular sagas, they would hardly contain a fully intact "Window on the Iron Age". Furthermore, at the time of their writing, whatever oral versions were in existence were already redirected towards a different society than the one the original tales might have been directed to, and as can be inferred from the comment on the nature of oral transmission above, this too would be a factor for their alteration:

> …was Celtic literature which originated in the pre-Christian period preserved meaninglessly? I think not. It had an audience which appreciated and understood it at some level other than pre-Christian myth. Our perfectly legitimate interests in the pre-Christian codes have tended to blind us to the codes tales carried at the time they were written down.
> (Slotkin, 1983: 222)

Taking into account this view on the matter, we might question how the Ulster cycle of tales could possibly contain a perfectly preserved literary transcription of an oral original from the Iron Age. Naturally, this is extended to the several elements in the Ulster cycle which are claimed to serve as evidence that the cycle is a "Window on the Iron Age", from material culture to ethnography: if these elements offer a genuine portrait on the Iron Age, how could they have been preserved? The question of the material culture has been especially illustrative of the disagreement with the "Window on the Iron Age" theory, and was thoroughly analysed by J. P. Mallory, whose research results do not point towards the Ulster cycle faithfully representing the Iron Age. While earlier studies from O'Curry (1873) to Powell (1950) did claim a correspondence between the material culture of the Ulster cycle and archaeology, Mallory points out that these studies often used as examples of comparison archaeological items from several different periods other than the Iron Age, or used as evidence any piece of material culture from the Continental La Tène Iron Age that presented similar features to the ones portrayed in the cycle, rather than what is evidenced by the actual Irish archaeological record (Mallory, 1992: 103-111).

Mallory, on the other hand, by analyzing the different aspects of Irish society featured in the Ulster cycle (and specifically in the *Táin*), such as economy, settlements, architecture, burial, warfare, clothing, ornaments, technology and transport, and comparing them with what the archaeological evidence and research tell us about actual

Iron Age Ireland, concludes that the evidence gathered demonstrates that "...the material culture of the *Táin* is either demonstrably or probably later than the 4th century AD" (Mallory, 1992: 152). J. P. Mallory admits however that there are archaeological limitations in what concerns this time-period (1992: 113-115) and that many of the results of his research turned out to be inconclusive since "Much of the remaining material either lacks useful description or cannot be set archaeologically to one period or another" (Mallory, 1992: 152). Nonetheless, when clearer results are achieved the evidence points towards the Early Medieval Age: "Where we have both good literary description coupled with decisive archaeological evidence, in almost all instances the items identified will be of Early Mediaeval rather than Iron Age date" (Mallory, 1992: 151). These analyses of the material culture of the Ulster cycle, coupled with the aforementioned characteristics of oral transmission, as well as to the literary work of the Irish *literati* who wrote down the tales, may lead us to rethink the view that the Ulster cycle genuinely portrays the Iron Age, and to wonder if what the extant literature might provide us with is a view of the pre-Norman Irish society which gave us the written versions:

> …these sources are neither the literary transcriptions of Iron Age oral traditions, nor do they offer a 'window' on Iron Age society. Instead, the study of the processes behind the composition and transmission of this literature represents a remarkable potential addition to our knowledge of secular and religious affairs in north-eastern Ireland during the second half of the first millennium A.D.
> (Aitchison, 1987: 87).

The clerics who created the extant written literature had in their power the manipulation of native elements, thus being able to determine, at least up to a certain point, what was "native". Therefore, it is hard to discern what was created in accordance with their frame of reference, based in a Christian context, and what could be factual preserved elements from the Iron Age:

> Even when dealing with a tale like *Fled Bricrenn* – peopled by native Irish characters with native names and set in Ireland in the pre-Conversion period – we cannot be assured of direct vantage onto a Celtic fore-world. We must remember that the Irish writers, who created this 'native' setting for their fictionalized (or at least semi-fictionalized) saga age, placed it firmly within a universal framework that was based upon, or at the very least substantially harmonized with, Christian Latin learning.
> (Koch, 2000: 21).

What is certain is that the task of treating the native tradition was not taken lightly, nor could it be. Seemingly genuine portrayals of the past[297], as the Ulster cycle is intended to be, were necessary and desired in order to connect them with the present: "This search for faithful and effective representations of the past is motivated by the desire to integrate the past into the present, at least in the controlled environment of textual space, and to keep the present organically rooted in the past" (Nagy, 1997: 3). The Irish *literati* must have had a notion of this dynamic, and must have understood that they held in their hands the power to introduce a view of the past in any manner they saw fit:

> …this caste of hereditary or quasi-hereditary scholars quite self-consciously held themselves in the highest esteem and discharged duties of very considerable political and social importance: they were the custodians of the past – the *mos maiorum* (in church as in lay society), the royal pedigree, dynastic (and ecclesiastical) genealogy and *origo gentis*. Their powers, as the arbiters of good custom, as provers of pedigree (and thus of claim to role and property), as panegyrists of the great and, above all, as makers of the past who re-shaped it to accord with the pretensions and ambitions of the contemporary holders of power, were extensive and jealously guarded.
> (Ó Corráin, 1986: 142)

It goes without saying that, adding to the natural metamorphosis of oral transmission, this dynamic, through the written word, could have changed the original oral tradition in accordance to the contemporary present. This does not mean however, that the *literati* did not have the genuine intention of portraying the Iron Age past, on the contrary: "Those who contributed to the formation of the *Táin* were engaged in producing an historical fiction and unlike mediaeval artists who had little qualms painting scenes from the Bible or events of their own earlier history in contemporary garb, the Irish *literati* did attempt to portray a past world" (Mallory, 1992: 153). Tristram, for instance, give us an illustrative view of this interpretation of the Irish writers' mindset: "The issue of the imagined setting of the events portrayed in the *Táin* begs a large number of questions. The events are located in the pre-Patrician period and are as such a medieval appropriation of construction of the Irish past. In analogy to

[297] Examples of these intended representations of the past are found in dialogues in early Irish literature with legendary and immortal figures of the past as is the case of Fintán mac Bóchra in *Suidigud Tellaich Temra* ("The Settling of the Manor of Tara") (edition and translation by R. I. Best 1910): "the most durable and trustworthy witness to the knowledge in the past is Fintan himself, who has miraculously survived since the time of Noah, his grandfather, and the Flood" (Nagy, 1997: 5-6). In a similar mould is the story of the ancient sage/shape-shifter Tuán mac Cairill in *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* (editon and translation in Carey 1984).

present day 'medievalism', they could be considered to be instances of medieval 'iron-ageism'" (Tristram, 2009: 33).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these considerations, we cannot know if many of the original elements did not withstand the passage of time. Oral tales do have some degree of fixed elements which constitute the nucleus or base of the narratives, either when these elements maintain a perennial relevance, or when they can be adaptable to different contexts. With this said, it is possible that some elements did originate in the first renditions of the stories, perhaps even in an Iron Age society, as Jackson claims. What is very difficult is to discern which ones these are, and to ignore the changing nature of oral transmission, besides the transformation and even creation which a monastically-produced written corpus implies. This is all the more troublesome when we are faced with a written literature which might contain elements that have origins in a previous oral tradition, but which simultaneously seems to be running along a parallel oral tradition based on that same new written corpus: "At times, literature depicts itself as emerging from oral tradition; at other times, it appears to be running alongside it, intersecting with it, running counter to it, or all the above simultaneously" (Nagy 1997: 7).

Now, what do these arguments mean where the topic of headhunting is concerned? Could the presence of headhunting in the Irish narratives be an evidence of the preservation of a pre-Christian practice, which would have survived throughout the Middle Ages until the early modern period due to Irish literature faithfulness to native culture? Some perspectives sees it as such: "The conservatism of the Irish literary tradition meant that sagas which reflected the headhunting practices of the pagan Celts retained their currency into the early modern period" (Palmer, 2007: 29). It must be considered however if it was not the other way around, and headhunting retained its presence in Irish sagas due to having remained a reality in medieval Ireland, if not the explicit practice of headhunting, then the widespread practice of beheading in several contexts. In other words, although the headhunting in the Ulster cycle may be a reflection of a preserved tradition, it may also have been understood in the contemporary age of the texts as a common happening in medieval Ireland. By analyzing the annals of Ireland, J. P. Mallory has noticed that there are a significant number of decapitations mentioned, either amongst the Irish or associated with the

Vikings, and that most of these mentions date back to the ninth and tenth centuries (Mallory, 1992: 139).

Such acknowledgment thus creates a doubt on whether the presence of beheadings in the Ulster cycle is a genuine archaism or reflects a common characteristic of war which also happened in Medieval Ireland: "...it is very difficult to imagine that an Early Mediaeval writer, composing an account of warfare, would omit references to beheadings. The head-trophy, consequently, would seem to be of extremely dubious value in assigning any particular date to the composition of the *Táin*" (Mallory, 1992: 141). McCone goes even further on the analysis of this matter, for he underlines not only the familiarity that monastic authors might have had with beheadings in their present time, but that their Christian learning also provided biblical examples, rather than a preserved memory of pagan times:

> To take a trivial enough case, the early Irish heroes' notorious habit of decapitating enemies and then keeping their heads, calcified brains or tongues as trophies for display at dinner and other gatherings almost certainly continues pagan Celtic usage as described by various classical authors [...]. However, the medieval Irish cannot have been affected by this consideration since they were quite unaware of their Celtic antecedents [...], and mere conservative inertia hardly accounts for the vigorous survival and propagation of this motif in monastic literature. Evidence that the decapitation of enemies continued to be practised in early Christian Ireland seems more to the point [...], and there was little reason for clerics and their literary associates to be squeamish about this when, for instance, the regal paragon David had deliberately severed Goliath's head for display [...] ...while the zealous Jehu had Ahab's seventy sons murdered and their severed heads put on public show [...]. The beheading of enemies for display would hardly, then, have struck a medieval churchman as an intrinsically pagan or, as he would have put it, 'gentile' practice.
> (McCone, 1990: 30)

McCone fails to explain however the close similarity with the classical authors' accounts, as do the arguments presented by Mallory. The parallel with the biblical accounts may explain displayed heads, but they do not present the same similarity with the classical records. If these arguments imply that the descriptions were used without any pagan meaning attached to them, it does not place into question their survival in Irish tradition nonetheless, only that their appearance is not explicitly associated with paganism, and were understood by the *literati* as a common past practice since they witnessed decapitations on their own time as well. On the other hand, although beheadings may have been a common practice in medieval Ireland, could they have been so in a manner which so closely resembles the classical testimonies on the Celts? It

hardly seems like a possibility. *Fled Bricrenn* for instance demonstrates an impressive closeness with the classical account of Athenaeus which makes it highly improbable not to be connected in some way to said account "For, not only does Athenaeus relate the two central themes of *Fled Bricrenn*, but he gives them in the same order" (Koch, 2000: 32).

It could be argued that the extensive Latin learning in Irish monasteries could have included the Greek and Latin sources on the Celts, and that therefore the Irish authors of the tales used such sources in order to attempt to portray the Iron Age past. Mallory underlines for instance that it is probable that "...by the eighth century some Latin literature would have been know..." (Mallory, 1992: 54) by the Irish *literati*, could the classical accounts be amongst such literature? John Koch is sceptical about this idea however: "We can perhaps rule out the possibility that *Fled Bricrenn* has been affected by direct knowledge of the Posidonian tradition in medieval Ireland" (Koch, 2000: 39). Koch does propose an alternative for knowledge by the Irish of the depictions in the classical accounts nonetheless, by pointing out that throughout the several centuries from Iron Age times to literate Christianity, Ireland was never "...in cultural isolation from Gaul and Britain, where the transition from the Celtic Iron Age passed through several Romano-Celtic centuries" (Koch, 2000: 39). The implication of this statement is that the classic accounts may have influenced Iron Age perceptions on these regions in the Roman period and these may have been reached medieval Ireland by consequence: "I am less sure that we can rule out the possibility that classical ethnographies of the Celts had popular provincial reflexes in the parts of the Roman Empire closest to Ireland" (Koch, 2000: 39).

All the previous arguments do not mean the end of the discussion however. Koch's possibility for instance is quite a speculative one, since we do not know the extent of the "provincial reflexes" of the classical ethnographies in Roman Gaul and Britain. More importantly, would the classical accounts have been known in such a detail up to the Middle Ages that would allow for such close parallels with the examples from Irish literature? The idea that the classical accounts could have been known by the Irish *literati* directly from Greek and Latin sources is another matter altogether, however, we do not have enough clues regarding that possibility. Moreover, there are further arguments on the opposite side of the question on whether the presence of headhunting and supernatural severed heads in Irish literature represent a genuine

memory of practice or belief from the Iron Age. In what concerns the elements pointed out by Jackson, John T. Koch has highlighted seven main features which are similar to accounts of other Celtic-speaking cultures or are supported by archaeological evidence:

> (1) the theme of contention at feasts and the champion's portion […]
> (2) head-hunting and the beheading game […]
> (3) chariot warfare […]
> (4) oaths sworn to pagan gods […]
> (5) druids as prophets and interpreters of omens […]
> (6) the political geography of Ulster before the rise of the Uí Néill and Airgialla […]
> (7) Emain Machae as the chief centre of assembly for the power élite of pagan Celtic Ulster […]
> (Koch, 2000: 25)

The doubt, as we have been discussing, is on whether these elements reached the written record directly from the Iron Age or due to the factors we have underlined regarding Latin learning and sources. The features themselves are indeed recognizable in Ulster tales such as *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Fled Bricrenn*, and Koch argues that they do seem to be faithful at some level to a possible factual reality. His notion of an added credibility to these features is given by some details of their depiction in the Ulster tales which do not appear to have been drawn from the classical descriptions and thus seem to reflect an individual testimony more likely to be veracious. Taking the element of the druids as an example, Koch underlines that "...the remarkable fact that medieval Hiberno-Latin consistently uses the Latin word *magi* for druids. The fact that *druids*, common in classical literature, and the variant *drysidae* seem to be unknown is a further strong indicator that the testimony of Irish literature on this subject has the value of an independent witness" (Koch, 2000: 26). Considerations such as these should be taken into account indeed, and thus it seems that despite the valid arguments presented by the celtosceptical field, there are also valid arguments concerning a possible survival of Iron Age elements. Could the headhunting and the survival of severed heads then be one of these elements rather than a conscious portrayal of an Iron Age trait obtained from classical sources? Neither side of the discussion can be taken without reservations, the features selected by Koch as possible genuine survivals of the Iron Age for instance are still liable to be questioned, as the arguments which we have underlined regarding the presence of headhunting in Irish literature demonstrate.

The archaeological record related to this matter for instance places several doubts on a genuine portrayal of Iron Age practices in Ireland. By analyzing Iron Age

Irish swords, J. P. Mallory has concluded that they were shorter than the ones described in the Irish texts, which seem to be based on medieval swords instead (Mallory, 1992: 132-137). The implication is that such an acknowledgment complicates the idea of headhunting and frequent beheadings in the Ulster cycle as resulting from an authentic rendering of the Iron Age: "...a survey of the Early Iron Age swords from Ireland leaves us hard-pressed to find a weapon capable of cutting off a hand much less separate a stiff-necked Irishman from his head" (Mallory, 1981: 108). Mallory does concede however, that "the cultural behaviour or motif of decapitation could well go back to the Iron Age" (Mallory, 1992: 139). The latter statement is based on the fact that despite their shorter size, Irish Iron Age swords could have indeed been used for decapitation: "As I have been made graphically aware, a pen-knife is sufficient for removing the head of a cow and hence there are no *a priori* grounds for assuming that a determined Iron Age Irishman couldn't have acquired a suitable trophy of his deeds with an Iron Age short sword" (Mallory, 1992: 139). Armit shares a similar opinion: "Decapitation, using a typical sword of the Irish Iron Age, would have been possible, but it would have required a certain amount of time and patience" (Armit, 2012: 31). Furthermore, we must not forget the archaeological findings of headless bodies in burials from the Irish Iron Age which we have also pointed out previously, and which both Mallory (Mallory, 1992: 139) and Armit also acknowledge (Armit, 2012: 31).

Although these arguments do point towards the idea that beheadings may indeed have been practised in the Irish Iron Age, it still does not constitute an argument for the examples from Irish literature to have been genuinely preserved elements from the Irish Iron Age, since the very same Irishman used as an example from Mallory "...could hardly have accomplished this task [decapitation] with the same *élan* as depicted in the *Táin* where a single stroke would seem to do the job, a task probably too difficult for anything less than a Viking sword" (Mallory, 1992: 139). Armit also reinforces this same idea "...the swift and elegant swipe with the hero's sword, as described in the tales, would simply not have been possible with the swords available during the Irish Iron Age" (Armit, 2012: 31). On the other hand, as we have underlined before, there are indeed parallels to the classical accounts which are just too close to simply believe that they are the result of a reflexion of early Christian Ireland. As we have discussed as well, deliberate archaisation with basis on knowledge from Latin sources is also not certain. Despite these uncertainties, the fact is that although the Ulster cycle seems to

reflect early Christian Ireland in many elements, as J. P. Mallory has demonstrated, it also contains true archaisms:

> There are numerous features in medieval Irish literature which bear striking resemblances to customs and practices observed among the continental Celts. There are others – such as the nature of early Irish kingship – which can be reconciled with similar features in other Indo-European traditions and it seems reasonable to view them as archaic inheritances which have been preserved by the tradition.
> (Mallory, 1992: 52)

Even Mallory admits that "There is no doubt that inherited native material also played some part in the formation of these tales" (Mallory, 1992: 55). Could these archaisms therefore not have been indeed transmitted through oral tradition? It may be sensible to conclude that the Ulster cycle represents a mishmash of several elements which are anachronistic: "Now it is quite evident that the events and society portrayed in the Ulster cycle do not reflect a picture of Irish society at the time of Christ, and indeed no modern scholar would claim that they do. Neither, however, are they an accurate picture of life in Early Christian Ireland..." (Mallory, 1992: 51). It seems therefore that we have an issue on our hands regarding the descriptions of headhunting in early Irish literature, and we are faced with several hypotheses. It could be an element indeed which remained relevant in oral tradition and thus it reached the epoch of the *literati*, who used such descriptions drawn from old stories in conjunction with their own learned background and elements from their own contemporaneity to create a view of the past. Descriptions of headhunting could therefore reflect ancient practices indeed, but they were embellished or described in accordance to their own epoch and hence why there are discrepancies such as the one demonstrated by the Iron Age Irish swords which could never have been used with the same swiftness in decapitations as we see in the Ulster cycle. On the other hand, would such stories inherited from oral tradition reflect such a striking parallel with the classical accounts? Or did the *literati* have access indeed to those same accounts? Or, remembering Maier, there is yet another hypothesis, based on the simple idea that similar circumstances lead to similar behaviours, and therefore the *literati* could indeed just have used contemporary observations as their source. As we shall see discuss further ahead in this dissertation, there were indeed episodes of headhunting and even the carrying of trophy heads throughout the Middle-Ages (Kaeuper, 2000: 101). But in this case, would it not be much of a coincidence to

include it in an attempt to portray the Iron Age past when this same practice is described indeed in accounts pertaining to the Iron Age?

All these doubts, contradictions and different possibilities reveal that this is not an issue which can be easily solved. Be that as it may, all these questions have a flaw, since they are overly focused on the parallel with the classical accounts, but the use of the motif of the severed head in Irish literature goes beyond the episodes of headtaking and the carrying of head trophies in chariots and feasts with beheading competitions. We are talking of course of the episodes where the head remains animated and talking post-decapitation of which we have previously presented several examples. The severed head in these narratives seems to hold a different value, which cannot simply be retrieved from any classical account, and thus we could include it in Koch's underlining of elements which cannot simply be explained by a possible drawing from the classical accounts. Remembering some of the citations previously made, these stories seem to attribute to the decapitated head which remains speaking the value of a metaphor for the human intelligence and essence (Nagy, 1997: 301; Ross, 1958: 39), along with prophetic or oracular properties (Ross, 1958: 38), or as carriers of an important message (Nagy, 1997: 301). Furthermore, there are several of these examples throughout early Irish literature, and certainly they are not always tied with the portrayal of the pagan past, as the episode from *Cath Almaine* exemplifies. The amount of examples throughout several of the Irish cycles of tales may indicate its relevance and presence in the culture of early Christian Ireland, rather than simply being the result of an attempt to portray "past" pagan beliefs.

Keeping this in mind, we may suspect that the talking severed head therefore could represent a genuine Irish tradition concerning a particular conception of the head, or one which was at least quite popular as a literary motif. Since they are not necessarily tied with the classical accounts, these narratives of animated severed heads seem to diminish the relevance of the question of the Iron Age origins for the instances of headhunting. Of course, the importance of the discussion on whether the provenience of the motif of headhunting is indeed related to beliefs or practices from the Iron Age or with a pan-Celtic ancient cult which could also have existed in Ireland retains its importance nonetheless. Furthermore, these "talking" heads do seem do fall in line with the idea of the head as the "vessel" for the soul, but perhaps we should focus on the fact that this seem to have been embedded in Irish lore by the time early Irish literature was

produced, be it from Celtic inheritance or simply a widespread concept. In other words, for our main interests, what we may keep in mind is that the proliferation of these severed heads in Irish narratives means that this very same conception may have indeed been carried through Irish tradition, independently of its ultimate origin, and herein lies its value. Likewise, what we must keep in mind is that a similar significance to what these severed heads seem to hold could perhaps be found in *Fled Bricrenn*, in the survival of the head and of the headless challenger. Notwithstanding, there are other questions which arise out of this possibility, namely, was the motif of the animated severed head then an inherited element from oral tradition which retained its cultural importance? And how do we fit the motif of the headless challenger, who also remains animated along with his head and manages to reunite head and body, in this entire discussion? A possible source for further answers to these questions may be found in yet another set of evidences which may be tied to this entire discussion, namely, in the folkloric material from Ireland or the possible associations with popular tradition, a matter into which we must now dwell as well.

4.3 The Headless Challenger

4.3.1 The Role of Folklore

Throughout our search for the transmission of motifs from Irish to Arthurian tradition we have frequently stumbled upon folk narratives as a potential source of evidence for such transmission, including for the beheading-game motif. We have observed that *SGGK* seems to contain a structure which is reminiscent of folk narratives, notwithstanding its place as a superior literary text. We have also entertained the possibility that even though French influence might have been a factor for the inclusion of the beheading-game motif in *SGGK*, such a motif might have been preserved in English tradition through folklore as well, and this might indeed have been one of the sources for the *Gawain*-poet. Such promiscuity between a written learned tradition and popular narratives is something that can also be observable in the Irish context. For example, in recension I of *Aided Chon Roí*, the external hidden soul motif seems to be characteristic of a folktale, which found its way to a written narrative of the Ulster cycle. These examples are already related to the written version of a story of the Ulster cycle and the record of a folktale however, we can only imagine what would be the amount of overlapping in pre-literate times.

Kaarina Hollo seems to underline this exact situation in her study of *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*[298] (henceforth *LMDD*): "it is not always possible to determine whether a certain feature is specifically characteristic of literary works of the period on the one hand or, on the other, common to both the oral storytelling tradition and the contemporary literature" (Hollo, 2005: 2). The presence of a folktale structure in certain Irish narratives is even tested by Hollo, who attempts a Proppian structural analysis of *LMDD* (Hollo, 2005: 16-22), in order to assert if "the text is based on a folktale narrative model" (Hollo, 2005: 19), and her results conclude that "The suitability of the Proppian analysis for *LMDD* is noteworthy. There is no major narrative element which is not accounted for in the schema suggested above. Clearly, this is not inconsistent with the claim that the story is based on a folk-tale model" (Hollo, 2005: 22). This does not mean that early Irish literature as a whole is always defined by the influence of folk narratives, Hollo herself demonstrates this as well by comparing *LMDD* with other Irish narratives such as *Tochmarc Emire* which are demonstrably of a more literary nature (Hollo, 2005: 27-31), not fitting into a folktale model when applying her methodology based in structural analysis. But it does mean that some narratives do so, and that folklore may have provided elements and motifs in many instances. In what concerns the beheading-game motif and its significance, we have suggested that at least in what concerns *SGGK*, the transmission of the motif through folklore might have been a possibility. Could the motif in its original Irish context have been so as well? Keeping this question in mind, in the context of the carrying of meaning or significance of the motif from one tradition to another, where do forms of narrative such as folktales and other genres from oral tradition fit in?

In a similar way to myth, folktales and legends are associated with traditional aspects of a given culture or society. In fact, the frontiers between the definitions of what is myth, folktale or legend are frequently crossed and thus it is a problematic

[298] *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*, is present in the Yellow Book of Lecan, and according to Kaarina Hollo, the date of composition of the text may be set around the late Old Irish period (Hollo, 2005: 49). Despite the homonym, *LMDD* must not be confused with *Fled Bricrenn*, for it is a different narrative, however, Hollo has suggested that *LMDD* might have drawn inspiration from *Fled Bricrenn* indeed (Hollo, 2005: 2). *LMDD* also begins in Emain Macha with a feast organized by Bricriu, who calls for the performance of great deeds before the feast may begin, and Cú Chulainn is also the main protagonist, as one of the Ulstermen who goes in a series of quests and adventures in order to accomplish a great deed. Besides the feast, other parallel details are discussed by Hollo (2005: 3-8), nonetheless, the challenges and quests which Cú Chulainn faces in *LMDD* are quite different from *Fled Bricrenn*, and there is no beheading game.

question. Attempts at making a differentiation between these types of tale can be prone to give way to mutually exclusive definitions. A pervasive example of such definitions can be provided by William Bascom (1965b), whom, if we may recall from previous quotes, considers that myth serves a cosmogonic function through sacred narratives which involve the actions and interactions of gods or similar supernatural beings, in order to explain the origin of several elements in the world or the world itself (1965b: 4). Moreover, Bascom underlines that myths are narratives which are considered "true" in the context of their societies of origin, and therefore considers these traits as presenting a contrast with other types of traditional story such as folktales to which he gives a different interpretation: "Folktales are prose narratives which are regarded as fiction. They are not considered as dogma or history, they may or may not have happened, and they are not to be taken seriously" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). Folktales are further differentiated from myth in Bascom's definition in the sense they can be placed in any chronological and spatial location and lack the truthful and sacred aspect attributed to myth (Bascom, 1965b: 4). Legends, on the other hand, retain the characteristic of being considered a depiction of true events, but have several distinctions from myth: "Legends are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today. Legends are more often secular than sacred, and their principal characters are human" (Bascom, 1965b: 4). Such definitions of myth, folktales and legends and their subsequent insertion into specific categories seem to find echo in the work of other scholars besides Bascom. Antone Minard for instance mentions a similar definition in what folktales are concerned: "In the academic study of folklore, 'folk-tale' is the name given to those tales that are understood to be fictional, told purely for entertainment. They are characterised by linear plots and the presence of casual magic" (Minard, 2012: 349), and the same can be said about his definition of legends: "The term 'legend' has come to denote a wider variety of tales, from saints' legends [...] to urban legends, that are plausible according to the worldview of traditional society, even though they may contain supernatural or magical elements" (Minard, 2012: 349).

Nevertheless, although useful to distinguish between all three forms of narrative, these distinctions can be debatable depending on the context. Minard seems to be aware of this when he mentions that "All of these categories are analytical ones imposed by

scholars. Native terminology varies from language to language, and does not necessarily maintain the same distinctions" (Minard, 2012: 349). In fact, the relationship between these forms of narrative may not be as strictly differentiated as these definitions seem to imply. As Bascom himself exemplifies, the frontier between myth and folktale is not as delimited as it would seem by his classification, since a myth may become a folktale when it loses its sacred character and thus the belief it portrays a truth, with the same happening to legends in what their value as being true is concerned: "In passing from one society to another through diffusion, a myth or legend may be accepted without being believed, thus becoming a folktale in the borrowing society; and the reverse may also happen. It is entirely possible that the same tale type may be a folktale in one society, a legend in a second society, and a myth in the third." (Bascom, 1965b: 7). There are further differences of course, since folktales may take the form of a simpler narrative which is less reflective of a particular time-frame in what its cultural context is concerned: "In other words, we never find in folk tales an accurate memory of a particular stage of culture; cultural styles and historical cycles are telescoped in them. All that remains is the structure of an exemplary behavior - that is, one that can be vitally experienced in a great number of cultural cycles and at many historical moments" (Eliade, 1963: 196-197). This is especially noticeable when we compare the simplistic world of folktales with heroic legends[299] set in a mythological world. While the former would at first instance seem more suitable for a closer expression of man's idiosyncrasies, due to the absence of supernatural beings such as gods, what happens seems to be the opposite:

> In the saga the hero is placed in a world governed by the Gods and fate. In contrast, the protagonist in folk tales appears to be emancipated from the Gods; his protectors and companions suffice to bring him victory. This almost ironic detachment from the world of the Gods is accompanied by a total absence of the problematical. In the tales the world is simple and clear.
> (Eliade, 1963: 199)

[299] Legends do have some differences to both folktale and myth in the attempted definition of Bascom, which considers that legends are in origin a popular and oral depiction of historical events set in a not-so-distant past: "They tell of migrations, wars and victories, deeds of past heroes, chiefs, and kings, and succession in ruling dynasties. In this they are often the counterpart in verbal tradition of written history, but they also include local tales of buried treasure, ghosts, fairies and saints" (Bascom, 1965: 4-5). Despite these differences, legends can also be placed under the umbrella term of "folklore", and are often found together with folktales as a genre characteristic of popular and oral traditions. Bascom identifies two forms of legend: local tales about supernatural beings, many of them common to folktales as well, and tales which are characterised by a heroic or epic narrative. These epic narratives are often the heroic legends set in a mythological background which are being mentioned.

Therefore, even though folktales depict a world where the supernatural also exists in the form of magic or magical beings and events, the absence of elements more commonly associated with a complex or previously sacred mythology, such as gods, seems to also be accompanied by less focus on the complexities of man and existence. Folktales do address problematic questions, for many folktales have an implicit moral lesson related with human issues (pride, greed, envy), but they present it with an uncomplicated tone and thus stray away from the further complexities those issues have in factual reality: "To be sure, the same archetypes – that is, the same exemplary figures and situations – appear alike in myths, sagas, and tales. But while the hero of the sagas ends tragically, the tale always has a happy ending" (Eliade, 1963: 199). Nevertheless, the themes and tone of folktales might frequently overlap with those of myths, so there might be some instances where we might attribute the value of myth to a folktale: "Many traditional oral tales […] tend not to assume practical or emotional and intellectual applications; they are what we term folktales or *Märchen*. It is sensible not to deny these the general title of "myths," since their themes interact with those of more imaginative and pregnant types" (Kirk, 1984: 58). To sum up then, differentiating myth from folktale can be useful to understand how one can be more inclined to certain characteristics than the other, either complex and inserted in a major narrative line or more simplistic and independent, or specially in what concerns their values as "true" or "sacred", but that does not mean that both cannot overlap, and legends are included as well in this possibility: "The sanctified dimension of myth makes it distinct from other genres of narrative such as folktales or legends that are not perceived as sacred, even though in some instances these forms of expression may overlap" (Goldberg *et al*, 2012: 125).

Despite the factors argued for differentiation between these types of traditional narrative, the aforementioned overlapping may in fact point towards the idea that both folktales and legends, either heroic, local, supernatural or otherwise, may be connected to myth or continuous to it, or outright able to be considered "myths" if not for the necessity of finding their points of differentiation. An example can be given by Stephens, who also considers the aforementioned connection between myth and religion, and sees it as point of differentiation with folktales, however, he also puts further emphasis on the continuity between both forms of narrative: "Hence it can be claimed that well known tales such as 'Sleeping Beauty' or 'Rapunzel', in which the

main character undergoes a long period of dormancy which is perhaps a figurative death, reflect a fertility myth pivoting on images of death and rebirth. What has disappeared from the folk tales, in this view, is some anterior religious significance" (Stephens, 2000: 332). Therefore, notwithstanding the differences which have been pointed out between myth and folktale, the notion that some reminiscences of the complex significance of myths seem to have persevered through folktales does remain a relevant one: "...ever since the Grimm brothers proposed that *Marchen,* or folk tales, were vestiges of ancient myths, the thought has persisted that these tales often preserve in their story structures elements of an older, intuitively figurative vision of being and existence, and have an innate cultural value for that reason" (Stephens, 2000: 332).

Such continuity does not seem to be exclusive to folktales and legends. In some instances, even local festivities are connected with the narratives of some legends or folktales and echo an old ritualistic character or myth, thus alluding to what Stephens had underlined as a continuity or a reminiscence of old myths found in folk narratives, and this may be true to many facets of folklore. Maíre MacNeill provides a perfect example of this phenomenon in her seminal study of the *Lughnasa* celebrations in Ireland (2008), where MacNeill links all the aspects of the tradition of the festival of *Lughnasa* with Irish mythology and the mythic figure of *Lug* as well as with what we can gather about old Celtic societies such as the Gaulish one. MacNeill's in-depth research demonstrates the possibility of continuity or at the very least reminiscence of old myths and rituals through the several elements of the folklore associated with *Lughnasa*. Her connections include not only the customs associated with the festival *per se* such as its ritualistic character, its locals of assembly, pilgrimages and dates but also the legends, tales and songs around it and its origins. A work such as MacNeill's is exemplary of a connection or even continuity not only between myth and other forms of traditional narratives such as folktales and legends, but with folklore as a whole. Another very pertinent example is all the lore pertaining to the Irish fairies, which seem to provide an example of the survival of old myths, namely of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, which seem to be a representation of old mythological deities:

> Anyone who has some acquaintance with medieval Irish literature will have encountered descriptions of immortal beings with supernatural powers: the *aes side*, or 'folk of the hollow hills'. Usually thought of as dwelling beneath the earth or under water, they are portrayed as the guardians of territories and the ancestors of royal lineages, controlling the weather and the crops, presiding over the practice of the arts and the frenzy of battle. In other words, they

> appear as gods; and in fact they are sometimes called 'gods' outright or, somewhat more circumspectly, the *Tuatha Dé* 'Tribes of the Gods', or *Tuatha Dé Donann* 'Tribes of the Goddess Donann'. Occasionally we can compare them directly with the divinities worshipped by pagan Celts elsewhere: thus Lug, the possessor of all skills, is clearly the *Lugus* whose cult is attested on the Continent; while Nuadu, the warrior of the silver arm, can be identified with a god *Nodons* whose temple stood beside the Severn in Roman times. These immortals outlasted even the Middle Ages, surviving down to our own day as the fairies or 'good people' (*daoine maithe*).
> (Carey, 2011: 12-13)

In sum, the fairies are then considered to represent a continuity of old myths, although they are a part of folklore: "Thus, for example, the Tuath Dé of Legendary History and the Mythological Cycle of early Irish literature are for the most part susceptible to interpretation as mythological beings or even pre-Christian gods, though clearly forming a continuum with the fairies of modern Irish folk belief" (Minard, 2006: 728). Such an example is a challenge to Bascom's arguments regarding the transformation of myths into folktales when going from one society to another, where the value of myth as "true" is lost, and myths are used in a more simplistic or changed form, because the value of "true" is ambiguous in this case, since there is an actual belief in fairies by many individuals in the rural areas of Ireland (cf. Minard, 2006: 727-729). The fairies are a very particular example, with an identified proposed origin which goes back to a pre-Christian mythology, but it is interesting to ponder on whether other supernatural beings of tale and legend found in popular tradition do not have similarities, there are reports of the belief in werewolves for example (Minard, 2006: 729).

Furthermore, these supernatural beings of folklore can be said to comprise a mythology in the general sense of the word. Figures of folklore such as werewolves, witches or the devil all belong to the same popular imaginary, even though they are not elements in an extended narrative which correlates relations between them. In fact, they do have references to one another in some tales and legends, including the fairies: "Not all supernatural beings are fairies: witches, ghosts, and revenants were once ordinary humans, and gods, devils, and demons are mythological rather than legendary beings, and were understood to exist in a different sphere. There is, nevertheless, a good deal of overlap in lore relating to fairies and to witches, devils, and the rest" (Minard, 2006: 727-728). This might provide a demonstration that myths and mythologies may be terms used in a more general sense, which do not seem to be exclusive to specific

genres, form, social layer (popular or aristocratic), or dependent of a sacred character. In other words, the overlapping of myth, legend and folktales does not set a clear picture which could allow us to distinguish them as clearly demarked genres. Trying to define these types of tale ends up in isolating specific characteristics in order to attempt to classify them, but this is counterproductive in certain instances, such as trying to understand myth, and the analysis of mythological purport in tales that are not exclusively defined as myth:

> Formalistic definitions (e. g., "myths are tales that are believed to be true," or "myths are tales that are set outside of historical time") are favoured by folklorists in particular and, once again, tend to exclude important blocs of *prima facie* mythological material for no particular reason. Moreover they tell us little about the nature of myths themselves; they simply isolate, not very accurately, one characteristic.
> (Kirk, 1984: 55)

It seems then rather more reasonable not to distinguish myth from folktales and legends in an extremely differentiated way, but to acknowledge the points of connection between them, especially in what refers to myth. Perhaps a possible stance to take is the one proposed by William Bascom himself: "Myth, legend, and folktale are not proposed as universally recognized categories, but as analytical concepts which can be meaningfully applied cross culturally even when other systems of 'native categories' are locally recognized" (1965b: 5). The most relevant idea concerning the continuity between myth and folktales or other traditional narratives, is that this might mean that concepts, ideas and beliefs which were transmitted through myth could be transmitted through folklore as well, although modified or transfigured in the combination with other motifs and significations. Through folklore "the structure of an exemplary behaviour" inherited from myth may remain, as Eliade says (1963: 197), and this may be extended to the structure of a specific popular belief. Alan Dundes, on the introduction to an article by Bascom, seems to underline that such a preservation of belief might happen through folklore, by commenting on Bascom's interpretation of Malinowski: "Malinowski emphasized that myth served as a charter for belief. […] What Malinowski said about myth is also applicable to other folkloristic materials" (Bascom, 1965a: 279). The examples given by Stephens (2000: 332) concerning the survival of myths through folktales also seems to reinforce this idea, as does Maíre MacNeill's work mentioned above. Taking into account these considerations, if folk narratives were influential in the transmission of the beheading game, this preservation

of beliefs and ideas through folklore may provide us with further ideas on its significance. This is especially important to understand on whether such significance is indeed connected with the idea of the human head as the seat of the soul, which may have been combined with other motifs in popular tradition, hence giving origin to the beheading game and elements in it such as the headless challenger. In other words, if our relevant narratives as well as the other literary narratives concerning animated several heads which we have referred to do reflect a particular belief around the human head, we also need to understand how the reminiscence of this belief reached them. In doing it so, we may find possible confirmations that folklore can be an agent for the preservation of such beliefs and perhaps of their development into the story-motif of the beheading game.

Besides what we have underlined already regarding the influence of folklore on the transmission of narratives and story motifs throughout this dissertation, a starting point for the suspicion that folk traditions may have a connection with the development of the beheading game is the fact that, apart from medieval literary examples, the motif of the talking head seems also to have been present in popular tradition, up to present day folklore. Anne Ross for instance describes a tale told around 1956 by a woman from Vatersay in Scotland (Ross, 1958: 40), which is about a man, who is going to bury his three murdered sons. The man carried the heads of his sons in a bag, but when he comes across a standing stone, the heads start speaking and give instructions to the man in order for their deaths to be avenged. The man must find his yet unborn grandchild, a boy, who later avenges his father and uncles by decapitating their murderer and leaving his head on a well. It is notable that in this legend the heads also issue an important message, in a similar way to some of the talking heads from early Irish literature which we have mentioned. Moreover, in Anne Ross' interpretation, the fact that the heads start speaking when they are near a standing stone might mean "There may have been an earlier tradition, confused in transmission, that the head was taken to the stone pillar and placed upon it and that it spoke" (Ross, 1958: 40), reminding us of a ritual of veneration for a severed head.

A further interesting example is found not in Scotland nor Ireland, but in the folklore of Galicia and Northern Portugal, which despite the geographical distance, may help us understand if and how the view of the head as the seat of the soul or the ancient remembrance of head trophies might have been inherited from pre-Christian Western

European societies, and could have found new forms of expression through ethnographic traditions and folklore. This example concerns the so-called *cocas*, a very similar tradition to the Jack-O-Lanterns of Irish and American Halloween traditions, based upon carving two eyes and a mouth in a pumpkin or a gourd in order to light them up with a candle inside and create a scary figure in the dark of the night. Traditionally, these *cocas* are placed upon wooden stakes and are carried by the local boys in villages and small towns in rural Portugal and Galicia especially in the days before and during the eve of All Saints' Day. This practice is curiously reminiscent of a custom of the ancient Iberians mentioned by Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica*, XIII.57:3), who describes Iberian warriors hanging the heads of fallen enemies in their spears, after the battle of Selinute in 469 BC, a custom which is also associated with the Celtiberians by scholars such as Guadalupe Monteagudo (1987: 249). Logically, this analogous description is far from enough to establish a connection, however, it is quite interesting in conjunction with this comparison that the word *coca per se* also indicates a connection with heads, since one of the meanings for it, most specifically for the masculine form *coco*, is exactly "head" (Taylor, 1958: 164). The Galician word for these carved pumpkins/gourds on the other hand is *crouca*, which also means "head", and etymologically, the word comes from proto-Celtic **krowkā*- (Meyer-Lübke, 1911: 185), and has several cognates in Celtic languages, such as Cornish *crogen* (Williams, 1865: 73), Breton *krogen ar penn* (Le Gonidec, 1847: 178), and Irish *clocan* (Windisch, 1882: 150), with all these cognates having the similar meaning of "skull". Scholars such as Rafael L. Loureiro have thus associated these traditions of carved pumpkins with the cult of the head for which there are also evidences amongst the pre-Christian cultures of the peninsular peoples (Loureiro, 2007: 449), as we have underlined before regarding the Gallaecians and the Celtiberians. This idea gains further strength because the tradition of the *cocas* is associated with the *Samhain* and therefore with yet another reminiscence of "Celtic" culture (Loureiro, 2006: 3-5). Such an example does not provide enough clues to prove without doubt that it is indeed a survival of the Celtic head cult, of course, but it is an example on how there are hints throughout popular culture which often seem to point towards reminiscences of such a concept regarding the human head.

Even amongst Christian religious traditions we may find heads having a special significance throughout Europe. In Portugal once again for instance, some strong

examples can be found regarding a cult of the head, namely in connection with the *Nossa Senhora das Cabeças*, which literally translates as Our Lady of the Heads, and to whom heads of wax are offered (Pinto, 2013: 448). Most interestingly is that the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Heads is situated in the proximity of 50 ms to the ruins of an older temple (dedicated to Our Lady of the Heads as well) from Roman times, which according to the research of Pedro Carvalho (2003: 153–182), shows evidence of having previously been a site of pagan worship in pre-Christian times, due to pre-Roman findings and its location in a hillfort. Taking into account the unusual offering of heads of wax to Our Lady of the Heads and the location of her place of worship in a possible continuum with pre-Christian times, one may wonder if the practice was adapted from the pre-Christian cult of the head, of which there is enough evidence in the Iberian Peninsula, or if it results from a spontaneous Christian creation. A most pertinent and interesting example connected with this topic is a legend associated with the head of Saint Brigit, which claims that the head was brought to Portugal by three Irish knights in the thirteenth century, and that to this day it is kept in the Church of John the Baptist in Lumiar, Lisbon (Alarcão, 2019: 57-58). According to the legend, the head of Saint Brigit also had supernatural properties, since the head always appeared near a specific tree located in Lumiar, despite attempts made to move it, and due to that the Church was built there in order to keep the head of Saint Brigid (Alarcão, 2019: 60-61). We cannot establish a direct connection of these examples with the ancient head cult of Celtic cultures of course, but it does seem indeed that examples which might express a belief in some special properties concerning heads was present under Christian culture as well.

4.3.2 The *Dullahan*

Besides the presence of talking and post-mortem animated heads in folktales and legends or the ethnographic traditions which may redirect us to a possible reminiscence of the cult of the head and the practice of headhunting, the development of such concept into a feature of tales involving headless figures is also found throughout folklore. And taking into account our relevant narratives, this development is of high importance for our study. An example recorded in Scotland (Tolmie *et al*, 1911: 186-187) tells the tale of a man from Skye who was banished to mainland Scotland due to his wickedness to other creatures, but was decapitated by his new neighbours when they understood that he was evil. He then became a spectre in the form of a headless body who would throw

his head at people in a narrow pass, until one man finally caught his flying head with the point of his sword and forced him back into Skye, on the condition that otherwise he would not return the head to the ghost. A most prominent example of these headless creatures is found in the Irish *Dullahan*[300], defined by John O' Hanlon as "Irish hobgoblins, represented as appearing without heads" (O' Hanlon, 1870b: 90). The *Dullahan* is characterised as being either a headless horseman or the headless rider of a black carriage (known as the Coach-a-bower) which usually appears "covered with funeral trappings" in places where a murder or deadly accidents took place (O' Hanlon, 1870b: 90) and who represents a bad omen to those who see him or to a household by which he passes by, associated with the impending death of a member of that household (O' Hanlon, 1870b: 90). This figure has been associated by Yeats with the *Banshee* or *Ben Síde*, yet another figure from Irish folklore which also represents a harbinger of death, and whom the *Dullahan* accompanies in some tales (Yeats, 1888: 108). The head of the *Dullahan* is carried either under its arm or in one of its pockets and in many tales it speaks, even though it is detached from its body. Its horse is often headless as well but its head sometimes flies supernaturally near the body. Since the *Dullahan* was a piece of Irish oral tradition until some of the tales involving it were finally collected and put into writing in the nineteenth century, its origin as well as its antiquity is of course hard to trace.

As it may be obvious, however, the features of the *Dullahan* may lead us to wonder if there is some connection with the headless churls from the beheading-game stories. According to O' Hanlon "The etymology of the word [*Dullahan*] appears referable to a dark, angry, sullen, fierce or malicious being" (O' Hanlon, 1870b: 90), which associated with the figure of a supernatural headless creature who is able to move around and whose detached head is able to speak, leads us invariably to draw comparisons. Additionally, Croker's collected tale of the *Headless Horseman* (Croker, 1834: 229-239), who tells the encounter of an Irishman with a *Dullahan*, seems to evoke a similar atmosphere to the appearances of the churlish challengers in *Fled Bricrenn* or *SGGK*. In this tale the *Dullahan* appears riding a headless horse, whose head flies ahead of its body, and the *Dullahan* carries its own head as well, who speaks.

[300] Also called "Dulachan, Dubhlachan or Durrachan" (O' Hanlon, 1870b: 90). The description of the *Dullahan* along with corresponding folk tales has been collected by nineteenth-century folklorists such as the already quoted John O' Hanlon (1870b: 85-91), W. B. Yeats (1888: 108) and Thomas Crofton Croker (1834: 209-240). Although having origin in Irish folklore, the figure of the *Dullahan* has also influenced works of literature such as Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

Both the *Dullahan* and his horse are described as being enormous, and are the target of adjectives such as "extraordinary", "hideous", or "supernatural", thus inspiring in the protagonist a sensation of "vexation" and "horror", leading him to "feel his nerves a little shaken by this unexpected visit from the headless horseman" (Croker, 1834: 232-235).

A especially interesting aspect of this *Dullahan* tale is the description of "Two fiery eyes of prodigious circumference, with a strange and irregular motion, flashed like meteors upon Charley" (Croker, 1834: 234), since, as we may remember, both the eyes of the *bachlach* as well as the eyes of the Green Knight were similarly described. Even a challenge is included in the tale in the form of a horse-race, and although completely different from a beheading game, it is rather interesting that a tale about a headless figure also includes a challenge. Moreover, it is also notable that the *Dullahan* claims that "A hundred years it is since my horse and I broke our necks at the bottom of Kilcummer hill, and ever since I have been trying to get a man that dared to ride with me and never found one before" (Croker, 1834: 238), which, as we may remember, is a similar claim to the one made by Cú Roí, who states that never did he find someone who would accept his challenge. We can never be absolutely sure regarding the development of narrative elements which were preserved through oral traditions, since we lack the written sources which would allow us to trace that development, and it would be out of the scope of this study to draw a full-scale comparison, but it is tempting however to see the *Dullahan* as a further development throughout folk traditions of the figure of the churlish/headless challenger, and of the same derivation of the belief in the head as the vessel of the soul. This can lead us to wonder on how such belief became entwined with a beheading game and with headless and churlish challengers. Perhaps it could have been through oral traditions that the concept of the churlish challenger of the beheading game came to be.

4.3.3 The *Úatha* Tale Type

Clues regarding the development of the motif of the headless challenger may be found by starting with the Úath episode from *Fled Bricrenn*, which may represent an example of the narrative genre which Jacqueline Borsje identifies as *úatha* ("terrors") (Borsje, 2005: 178), included as a tale type in the Irish tale lists, most specifically in Tale List A (Mac Cana, 1980: 43). As Mac Cana underlines when referring to the tale

type of the *úatha*, the "...narratives in question deal with caves, and one or two with lakes, but this is hardly surprising considering that throughout Irish tradition caves and lakes have been commonly conceived of as entrances to the domain of the supernatural" (Mac Cana, 1980: 96). Furthermore, on account of what Mac Cana considers an exception (which we shall refer to further ahead) in the title of one of the *úatha* tales, he states that "the title *Uath Angeda* cannot mean 'cave' or 'concealment', but rather 'terror', 'horror', 'horrible being' or 'monster', a range of meaning which also suits those of the remaining titles in the group which can be given a context in the literature" (Mac Cana, 1980: 96). Taking into account that Úath from *Fled Bricrenn* dwells on a lake and has supernatural powers, thus being in accordance with the "entrances to the domain of the supernatural" associated by Mac Cana, besides caves, with lakes, and that he also agrees on the meaning of the word "Uath" as signifying "terror", everything points towards an agreement with Borsje's identification of Úath from *Fled Bricrenn* as an example of these figures. The association with lakes is particularly notable since it may be related to Kittredge's theory concerning the origins of the figure of the headless axeman, of which both Úath and Cú Roí may be an example, along with many of the analogues from the Arthurian renditions of the beheading game:

> The axeman belongs to a large class of supernatural beings whose heads return to their bodies after decapitation. Such creatures occur in popular tradition in almost every part of the earth—in Ireland, Scotland, the Faeroes, Brittany, Holland, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Russia, India, the Philippines, Papua, and among many tribes of the American aborigines from the North Pacific coast to Salvador. In origin they are doubtless serpent-monsters, or elemental water-demons with serpentine characteristics, and their peculiar ability to unite head with trunk may well come, in part, from that naive scientific observation of the folk which is responsible for the widespread belief, well documented in the Scottish Highlands and still common among American boys, that a snake's head will join its body again after being cut off. Ireland believed in such monsters in common with the rest of the world, though their serpentine origin had long been forgotten there, for obvious reasons, not unconnected with St. Patrick.
> (Kittredge, 1916: 20)

Of course, Kittredge's suggestion for the origins of these creatures implies quite a high degree of speculation for we do not have any clues regarding snake-like characteristics in the beheading-game challengers. As we have commented extensively, the trope of the beheaded head which remains "alive" after decapitation may have some relation with the belief ascribed to "Celtic" cultures of the head being the vehicle of the soul, rather than with any serpentine-related belief. However, we do have clues indeed

for a possible aquatic origin of the challengers, or at least of some association with water, since Úath, who may represent a previous version of the challenger, has a loch as his lair (Henderson, 1899: 96-97), something which Kittredge also notices: "The association of snakemen, ndgas, dragons, and other ophidian beings with lakes or tarns and, in general, with the element of water, is one of the most familiar of all traits of popular mythology. [...] The residence of Uath in a loch is manifestly a very archaic survival" (Kittredge, 1916: 20-21).

There are indeed certain creatures from Irish (and Scottish) folklore which are indeed connected with water, but are associated with other types of animals such as seals or horses, as is the case with the *Selkies*[301] and the Scottish *Kelpies*[302]. If we replace the "snakemen, nagas, dragons" with these examples from Goidelic tradition, Kittredge's statement may indeed reveal a possible connection, and could tie Úath to these traditions of watery supernatural beings. In addition, beings such as these are shapeshifters, something which is also stated in *Fled Bricrenn* to apply to Úath: "he used to shift his form into what shape he pleased..."[303] (Henderson, 1899: 97). The fact that Úath's lair is a loch together with his supernatural and shape-shifting nature may then lead us indeed to consider the hypothesis that his origins lie in a figure from Irish folklore that inhabits lakes, in a similar league to the *kelpies*. Such a hypothesis is not without its shortcomings though, for beings such as the *selkie* or the *kelpie* do not seem

[301] The *selkies* are shape-shifting creatures from Irish, Scottish, Faroese and Icelandic folklore who live as seals in the sea but are able to shed their seal-skins and become human when on land. They can be either male or female but most stories portray them as female. If the seal-skin is captured by a human man when the *selkie* is in human form, then she is obliged to marry him, and cannot return to sea, in most stories eventually the *selkie* steals or regains her seal-skin and returns to sea, never coming back to her human husband or even forgetting him, except if she has had children, which she might visit sometimes.

[302] The *kelpies* are water spirits from Scottish folklore, who live in rivers and lochs and have the form of a horse, although they have shape-shifting abilities and are able to turn into a human male (only rarely a female). Most folk-tales about the *kelpie* portray him as appearing to humans in a loch, in his horse-form, leading the humans (very often children) to pet him, but their hands get stuck in the *kelpie* and the latter drags them to underwater, drowning and then devouring them, with only their entrails being left and later appearing in the surface waters of the loch. Sometimes some human survives because he cuts his own fingers or hand. In other reports, the *kelpie* simply lets unaware humans ride him and then brings them to his lake and drowns them, producing the same effect. When in his human form, however, the tales usually take another direction, where the *kelpie* either has the form of an old man, who is eventually discovered to be a *kelpie* and is attacked, retreating to a pond or lake, or of a handsome young man, who intends to take a human woman as a bride. In the latter stories, the *kelpie* usually has a silver necklace corresponding to his bridle when in horse-form, which is taken by the woman, leading the *kelpie* to revert to horse-form, subsequently the horse is put to work in the woman's farm but eventually his silver necklace is returned to him and he marries the woman by choosing to become a mortal man. The *kelpie* is suspected of having a great antiquity, being a reminiscence of human sacrifices to water gods during pagan times, with the association with horses also being related to equine sacrifices (rather than human), additionally, the *Pictish Beast* often portrayed in some Pictish stones may be a possible early ancestor to the *kelpie*.

[303] See Appendix I, note 104.

to have any connection whatsoever with beheadings nor are they ever characterised as headless or as having the ability to survive decapitation. Therefore, the only similarities which Úath shares with these beings are the shape-shifting abilities and the fact that he also inhabits a lake.

There is the possibility however that Úath is the result of the combination of floating folktale motifs such as the shape-shifting aquatic creature and the supernatural ability to survive decapitation, which got associated with the figure or narrative genre of the *úatha*. Moreover, there are even further characteristics from these tale types which connects them with Úath from *Fled Bricrenn*: the aforementioned exception of *Uath Angeda* mentioned by Mac Cana refers to the fact that, while *Angeda* is an adjective ("evil, wicked"), in all the other *uatha* "...the word *uath* is followed by the name of a place in the genitive"[304] (Mac Cana, 1980: 96). As Borsje notices (2005: 179), such an association with a place-name also occurs with Úath in *Fled Bricrenn*: "He in sooth was the wizard from whom Muni, the Wizard's Pass, is named"[305] (Henderson, 1899: 97). Borsje further adds that the place-name *Belach Muni in t-Siriti* is indeed referenced in the *Annals of the Four Masters* and in the *Annals of Tigernach*, even though "Only in *Fled Bricrenn*, however, is the place name explained" (Borsje, 2005: 180). In fact, besides the explanation given in the text of *Fled Bricrenn* which states that the *siriti* from the place-name in question refers to Úath, Borsje also provides a further interpretation regarding its connection with the tale: "If we take the genitive *Muni* as not only referring to *muine* 'bush', but also as hinting at *muin* 'neck', 'wile, ruse, trick', then the name appears to be significant in this narrative context. Úath is playing a trick with his neck and challenges the contestants to do the same, so that their necks are at stake" (Borsje, 2005: 180). If Borsje's interpretation is correct, this could mean that at least one tradition regarding the motif of the beheading game or at least some allusion to it could have had an association with a place-name tale or *Dindshencha*, and these tales are suspected of having origin in Irish folklore. Notwithstanding, we cannot be sure if *muine* is indeed hinting at *muin* as Borsje suggests, but we do seem to have enough clues to point towards the possibility that "This place name is a first clue that perhaps there was a tale of the *úath* type or a *dindshenchas* tradition used here" (Borsje, 2005: 180).

[304] As can be confirmed by the listings in Tale List A (Mac Cana, 1980: 43).
[305] See Appendix I, note 105.

Further clues may be found by returning to the matter of the insertion of the Úath episode in *Fled Bricrenn* which we have addressed previously, an episode which is oddly redundant when there is also the *Champion's Covenant* in the same text. As stated before, scholars such as Ní Mhaonaigh (2005: 268) and Borsje (2005: 179) do seem to point at the use of some written source by H from where he had gained knowledge of the Úath episode or the inspiration to it. Borsje further states that "...there seem to be some textual clues that indicate that the Úath episode is an alternative tradition from which H drew" (Borsje, 2005: 179). Taking into account everything said until this point concerning the Úath episode, it seems that such "alternative tradition" most possibly was the narrative genre of the *uatha*, and most specifically, a possible "*Uath Belach Muni in t-Siriti*" which H included in *Fled Bricrenn*. The possibility of direct influence from oral tradition seems to be a narrow one, despite the fact that the elements of a watery supernatural creature or headless one, along with the possible place-name origin, all seem to ultimately be derived from oral folktales. The reason for suspecting a written source rather than oral is of course related with the possibility that H drew the episode from some book(s) and the support for that possibility is found in the text's statement concerning alternative versions from other books. Such a written source seems to have kept the unpolished nature of the possible oral original however, since the characterisation and context of Úath, along with his apparent connection with the *Dindsenchas*, still seems to be closer to a tale and to a figure from folklore than the more complex final episode with the *bachlach*.

There are important similarities though, according to Borsje, Úath's function is to be both a challenger and a judge, in order to test the "courage and truthfulness" (Borsje, 2005: 178) of the contestants. Together with the fact that both use a beheading game for the same effect, this makes of Úath basically the same as the *bachlach* in terms of his function in the narrative, hence the redundancy of having both episodes in *Fled Bricrenn*. It is possible of course that the beheading game was a popular motif in both oral and written traditions, which spawned different versions, and in that case, this would mean that the two versions from *Fled Bricrenn* were simply different variations of the motif gathered from different sources. On the other hand, taking into account what we have been gathering concerning Úath and how he was inserted in *Fled Bricrenn*, it may represent an older tradition than the one of the *bachlach*, although we cannot be certain.

4.3.4 The Churlish Figure and the Development of the Headless Challenger

We seem therefore to be faced with a confusing situation, but we may consider some hypotheses. If Borsje is correct in her assessment of the Úath-episode as an example of an *úatha* tale-type based upon a place-name tradition, which had a written version to which scribe H had access, and if the figure of Úath is indeed the result of floating folklore traditions concerning aquatic shapeshifting creatures being combined with other motifs, then it is perfectly possible that it represents an older strand of tradition concerning the beheading game and its challenger. This older strand would constitute a previous step in the development of the "headless axeman" as Kittredge names it. The fact that Cú Roí is also a shapeshifter and is known as a wizard, two characteristics which are also told of Úath, could have led the former to become associated with the beheading game and to become another incarnation of the beheading-game challenger. This incarnation seems to be based on the figure of the otherwordly churl, of which Cú Roí in his *bachlach* shape seems to be a representation of. Cú Roí's alter-ego as a *bachlach* who is gigantic and able to survive decapitation represents such a supernatural character that it is surprising that he is not described as arising from a *síd* or plainly as one of the Tuatha Dé Danann. His position as a King of Munster places him as belonging to the mortal realm however, thus creating a contrast which presents Cú Roí as what the Rees brothers interpret as the figure of the giant herdsman who is between both worlds: "As the high-king of Temair Luachra, he belongs to Ireland, and yet he is not of it" (Rees, 1961: 138). This type of figure might represent yet another Irish tradition: in an episode from *The Chase of Síd na mBan Finn and the Death of Finn*[306], a similar churlish figure surrounded by otherwordly overtones and suggesting a supernatural atmosphere is found by Finn mac Cumail and his retinue:

> And in the early morning we went to the same hunting-mound and found a black, misshapen, enormous, huge churl sitting on the mound before us, who rose up before us and greeted us. And putting his hand into his bosom he brought out two golden pipes and played a tuneful, harmonious strain of melody for us, so that wounded men or women in travail or a host in sickness, or wounded warriors or lacerated heroes would have fallen asleep at the exquisite music which he made. And when he had ceased with the music he

[306] This narrative corresponds to fo. 20b1–24a2 of the MS Egerton 1782 from the British Library, London (sixteenth century), and it is named as *The Chase of Síd na mBan Finn and the Death of Finn* by Kuno Meyer in his edition and translation of the tale (1910a: 52-100). Although found in a sixteenth-century manuscript, it is thought to have been composed between the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The narrative follows several events and retelling of events which go from a context of a hunting chase by Finn and his *fianna* up until the death of Finn.

> took a drinking-horn adorned with gold out of the hidden shelter of his dress and put it into my hand, and it full of intoxicating mead pleasant to drink.[307]
> (Meyer, 1910a: 59)

Although not appearing in the context of a beheading game, it is undeniable that this black churl shares the same characteristics of Cú Roí as a gigantic and dark churlish figure who somehow seems to appear associated with some form of otherwordly expression, in this instance with music, a traditional sign of an otherwordly presence in Irish tradition, and with a magical drinking horn, which we are informed afterwards that every time that it is filled with water turns it into delicious mead (Meyer, 1910a: 62-63). Furthermore, later in the narrative the very same churl is revealed to share yet another characteristic with Cú Roí as well as with the Arthurian churlish figures: the one related to shape-shifting:

> As the light of day came there came upon the churl a beautiful form and shapeliness and radiance, so that there was a delightful beauty upon him, so that there never came from the rise of the sun to its setting a man of better mien and aspect than he, both as to size and [...] and proportion and cheerfulness and wisdom and speech [...] and he had the demeanour of a high-king, and there was the charm of a youth in his figure.[308]
> (Meyer, 1910a: 63)

The comparison with Cú Roí in the *bachlach* form thus seems to be quite appropriate due to the number of similarities. Yet another detail that bears comparison with Cú Roí is that the churl from the *Chase* later identifies himself as being Cronánach and hailing from a fairy-hill on Femen (Meyer, 1910a: 63), the *Síd ar Femuin*, which is the *síd* of Munster (Rees, 1961: 136), and moreover he is described as having the "demeanour of a high-king". As we may remember, Cú Roí was the king of Munster, one of the four provinces of Ireland which is interpreted by the Rees brothers as being an otherworldly land of the dead and of ancient supernatural figures in Irish lore (Rees, 1961: 133-139). Together with all the other characteristics of the churl from the *Chase* in common with *Fled Bricrenn*'s *bachlach*, this coincidence may point towards either a folk or literary tradition of churlish otherwordly characters with shapeshifting abilities often associated with Munster, of which Cú Roí is himself a paradigmatic example.

A possible tradition of otherwordly churls, which may have been associated with Munster, and therefore associated with Cú Roí, as his *bachlach* form from *Fled*

[307] See Appendix I, note 106.
[308] See Appendix I, note 107.

Bricrenn demonstrates, can lead us to two possible scenarios concerning the tradition of headless challengers from the beheading game. The elements from a tradition of *úatha* with a beheading game and challenger could have become combined with the figure of the otherwordly churl, leading to the version of the churlish challenger which we can see in the *Champion's Covenant*. Or both the latter and the *uatha* traditions represent two different variants of a theme which may be older and go back to the paradigmatic giant as the "other", who, as we have analysed previously, is a representative of the Otherworld and commonly associated with decapitation as a narrative device: "…the decapitation of such a fearsome foe not only proves the worth of the individual and his ability to fulfil his role as a warrior (or knight), but also it proves that his abilities outstrip those of his more experienced peers or companions" (Ward, 2012: 162). Such characteristics are easily suited to be naturally associated with a motif such as the beheading game, and it is possible that a generic giant is in the origin of the beheading-game motif. Both a lake-dwelling gigantic figure and a churlish axe-wielding character who also displays gigantic features can easily represent two further variations of the giant "other", which could have become established traditions, as it is most obviously observable in the tradition of the churlish challenger, which spread to Arthurian narratives.

Regarding the connection with Cú Roí, as we have alluded to previously, Cú Roí was evidently a prominent figure in Irish tradition, if the presence of more tales related with him in the tale lists may be any indication. These tales, along with his frequent appearance in the Ulster cycle, may point towards the existence of a body of stories concerned with Cú Roí. The popularity of a group of narratives around specific themes or characters in both folklore and medieval literature frequently leads it to draw to itself several other narrative traditions and motifs, which may be adapted to better fit certain conventions associated with that same group of narratives, and therefore, this is indeed a strong possibility. In other words, Cú Roí may have been himself a variation of the churlish figure as one of his disguises, or have been associated with it a posteriori, and eventually with the beheading-game motif. The variations in the figure of the "other" and more specifically of the beheading-game challenger in this case is a process for which we have examples in some of the Arthurian renditions of the beheading game, with the figure of the churlish challenger being either completely replaced with a knightly challenger, an Orientalist stereotype, or a half-churlish, half-knightly

challenger as in the case of the Green Knight. These differences possibly reflect the popularity of the more polished chivalric and courteous romance or other possible symbolisms which were influential in the representation of headless challengers. John Gardner for instance sees the Green Knight as a "...symbolic representation of the force of Nature" (Gardner, 2011: 82), visible in details such as the colour green or certain characteristics in his lair, and associates the role of such symbolism with a Christian worldview (Gardner, 2011: 81-83).

Whatever the context, circumstances or influences which lead to the changes in these examples, they seem to represent yet another variation or another step in the development of the "headless axeman", which may build upon but also drastically change the established churlish tradition which seems to have been the most widespread. Of course, such developments of the headless/churlish challenger through folk traditions and/or literary ones are hard to be perfectly clear, thus, our hypothesis is just a possibility. The fact that folktales and legends are based upon oral tradition leads us to be unable to achieve more than an elaborate speculation as the one we have just presented. Nonetheless, the possible associations with folk traditions which we may find in literary episodes such as the Úath section from *Fled Bricrenn*, together with other folkloric expressions up until this day such as the *Dullahan* or tales of post-mortem talking heads, do seem indeed to point towards a continuous presence of the motif of the headless figure. If we might recall the proposed preservation of motifs closer to *Fled Bricrenn* in English traditions which might have been influential in *SGGK* having closer similarities to *Fled Bricrenn* in certain aspects, then it seems indeed that oral and folk traditions had a role to play in the development and transmission of the beheading game.

What might then we make of the belief in the head as the vessel of the soul in association with the headless challenger? Let us underline that the figure of the giant "other" is a motif which often portrays the defeat of the giant by a hero, often by beheading, as we have commented previously, but the giant is most often definitely killed with the decapitation. The challengers in the beheading-game motif however, represent a variation where the giant does not die, and herein lies its specificity. Together with the instances from both early Irish literature as well as from folklore featuring talking heads post-decapitation, it is possible that such specificity is a result of the reminiscence of a belief in the head as the vessel of the soul which combined with

the motif of the giant "other" led to the motif of the beheading game, where the giant does not die and becomes a headless yet still animated figure. Although we know the motif through literature, it may have been indeed through folk traditions that the belief in the head as the vessel of the soul was entwined with these other figures from popular traditions, leading to the development of the headless axeman and eventually the churlish challenger, thus retaining a reminiscence of that same significance associated with the head.

4.3.5 The Cephalophore

As the figure of the *Dullahan* which we may still find in Irish folklore demonstrates, these headless figures are not confined to the beheading game however. In fact, in the Middle Ages we seem to find headless figures in the most diverse forms and contexts. An iconic example is found in the figure of Bertran de Born as he is depicted in Dante's *Inferno*, holding his severed head in his hand and using it as a lantern, and speaking through his head even though it is severed. We cannot assume a connection of the headless Bertran with our headless challengers, since, as Coleman underlines, Dante seems to have used such a horrific character due to: "the potential for horror and symbolism inherent in device of severed, talking heads and places those images at some of the most crucial episodes in the *Inferno*" (Coleman, 2012: 114). Nevertheless, it is a testimony to the recurrent utilization of this type of figure in the Middle Ages, and its significance may indeed be somehow similar, since "...the punishment of archvillains recurrently focuses on the functions of the head, the seat of reason and the gateway between the internal and the external for the body. In Western culture, the corporeal seat of the soul or being is most often regarded as either the head or the heart" (Coleman, 2012: 114). Such an example may indicate that headless creatures were a figure quite present in the medieval imaginary, and this may be one of the factors which led the beheading game to be repeatedly reutilized and to make the transition from Irish tradition to Arthurian literature.

Surprisingly, a most pertinent example is found in Christian hagiography, more specifically in the figure of the cephalophore, which is a saint who was decapitated, often in the context of that saint's martyrdom, but who remains animated and carries his severed head afterwards, usually still speaking. There are several examples in both hagiographic literature and Christian art (Fig. 15), with the most iconic one probably

being the story of St. Denis, the patron saint of Paris, who was martyred by decapitation due to his Christian faith during the Roman persecution of Christians in the third century AD. According to his legend as depicted in hagiographic compilations such as the *Golden Legend*[309], St. Denis carried his head in his hands for a distance of 11 kms, from Montmarte to his burying place, in what is today the Basilica of Saint-Denis, while his severed head was preaching a sermon regarding repentance (Voragine, 1993: 622-627). Another cephalophore is found in the *Golden Legend*, namely Paul the Apostle, who was also beheaded at his martyrdom, and after the head was severed from the body, it spoke and said "Jesus Christus" fifty times (Voragine, 1993: 50-55, 350-363). Yet another famous cephalophore is found in the legend of the English Saint Edmund, who was a king of East Anglia from c. 855 to c. 869. His legend narrates that Hinguar, who leaded the Danish Vikings who ransacked Northumbria, sent a message to Edmund demanding for the king to become his vassal and to pray tribute, but Edmund refused. As a consequence, Edmund was captured and brutally tortured, until he was finally beheaded, and his head was separated from his body and thrown into the woods in order to prevent a proper Christian burial. Edmund's followers searched for the head however, and the severed head spoke "here, here, here", and was found protected from the perils of the forest by a wolf. Body and head were then buried, but years later an exhumation revealed that the corpse was in pristine preservation, and that the marks upon his body of the torture inflicted by the Vikings had disappeared, and the head was attached to the body, with only a slight line around his neck (Hervey, 1907: 6-59). The legends are extended to female saints as well, such as St. Osyth in England, Essex, who died c. 700 AD and whose legendary account claims she was beheaded near a fountain and then carried her own head until she reached the door of a convent where she collapsed (Bethell, 1970: 88-89).

Many other examples could be described for the figure of the cephalophore was quite widespread, with studies such as the one of Émile Nourry having presented a count of not less than 134 cephalophore saints in hagiographic French literature alone (Nourry, 1929: 158-231), a number which would be even larger if other territories and languages were included. As with our churlish/headless challengers from the beheading-

[309] The *Golden Legend* is a collection of several hagiographies by the Italian Archbishop of Genoa Jacopo de Fazio, best known as the Blessed Jacobus de Voragine, and which was very popular in late medieval Europe. The original compilation is attributed to circa 1260, although there were additions to it throughout the subsequent centuries. A translation by William Granger Ryan is available (Voragine, 1993).

game narratives, the figure of the cephalophore, even though a legendary figure associated with Christian lore, is considered by some scholars to possibly also result from the reminiscence of the ancient Celtic head cult along with other headless figures up to present day folklore (Fromage, 1987: 15-27; White, 1972: 123, 129-131). In the hypothesis it is so, it would be interesting on this context to understand if the figure of the cephalophore was carried as an influence from Celtic-speaking territories to the rest of Western Europe, as we suspect in what concerns the beheading game narratives.

There are indeed cephalophoric saints connected with Wales, Cornwall, or Brittany: St. Wyllow, a Cornish saint who is said to have been born in Ireland, is associated with a legend which claims he was martyred by decapitation, and then carried his own head until he reached St. Willow's Bridge (Farmer, 1978: 460). A fifth-century female saint, from both Cornwall and Brittany, St. Noyale, said to be of Irish origin in the older accounts of her legend, supposedly fled from England to Brittany, to escape an arranged marriage by her father, but a local Breton lord also wanted to marry her and beheaded her due to her refusal, but she picked up her head and walked from Beignan to Pontivy, where there is a chapel in her honour (Baring-Gould, 1898: 137-140). A very interesting example is the Welsh St. Winifred, yet another female saint who is a virgin martyr and is said to have lived in the seventh century. The oldest accounts of her legend hail from the twelfth century (Burns, 2007: 511), and narrate that she was the daughter of a Welsh nobleman, who decided to become a nun, against the wishes of her suitor Caradog, who decapitated her in rage. Where her head fell, a healing spring appeared, and due to the efforts of St. Beuno, her head was rejoined to her body and she was revived, while her killer died by divine punishment (Rees, 1836: 295-297). It is rather interesting that the killer name was Caradog, since it is yet another instance of this name in a story entailing a beheading, but it may be mere coincidence due to the commonality of the name. The fact that the cult is Welsh could also be significant for as we may remember, there were not any instances of an analogue to the beheading game in Wales, an issue in tracing Wales as the intermediary for the motif, and the legend of St. Winifred could represent the presence of a reminiscence of the head cult in Wales after all. Nonetheless, since cephalophores and other headless figures abound in other medieval traditions, it cannot be said that this is significant. The same could be thus said regarding the Cornish and Breton cephalophores, their existence could point us toward the same channels which we have analysed concerning the

transmission of Arthurian motifs, and it is interesting that these saints are said to have been born in Ireland. Notwithstanding these particular details however, the relationship between the several cephalophoric tales is not quite established and therefore a conclusion in what concerns their origin is not a conspicuous one.

All in all, the cephalophore is a figure who seems to have appeared in the Christian Western imaginary without an obvious origin, notwithstanding a possible reminiscence of pre-Christian head cults. Whatever the case, there are parallels in both the significance of the headless/churlish challengers and the cephalophores in what the impression they can create is concerned, for both focus on the animation of the decapitated body and its severed head, although one is associated with the supernatural and the other is charged with Christian religious connotations: "To the Middle Ages such sights as severed heads were familiar in daily life, and when talking, singing, or oracular, were commonly met with in the regions of miracle as well as of magic" (White, 1972: 123). Most importantly, the significance of the cephalophore and of decapitation in hagiography in general may betray a similar notion of the soul or "spirit" contained in the head: "Hagiography records decapitation as the final execution method for virgin martyrs whose bodies otherwise withstand the most gruesome and cruel torments imaginable - their final spiritual release coming only when the head is severed from the corporeal body" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 4). This leads us to ask the question: was such a reminiscence of the belief in the head as a vessel of the soul still present throughout the Middle Ages?

4.4 Medieval Perceptions of the Severed Head and the Beheading Game

Up until this point in our study, we have been following extensively the evidences regarding what could have been a pan-Celtic cult of the head, and have attempted to understand if the possible reminiscences of beliefs associated with such a cult, such as the concept of the head as the embodiment of the soul, could have found its way into early Irish literature. The aim of such a task has been to ascertain if this belief could have been related with the significance of the beheading game from *Fled Bricrenn*. The analysis of the aforementioned evidences has also led us to several issues on whether we may indeed speak of a "pan-Celtic" head cult or not, and whether early Irish literature does indeed contain examples which can be associated with it. In this same process, we have also been attempting to describe and understand the literary and

popular developments which possibly led such reminiscence to become a part of a semi-mythic or folkloric figure in the form of the headless challenger from our beheading-game narratives. As a result, although we must be careful in taking as certain our hypotheses on this matter, elements such as the talking heads in early Irish literature and the possible development of the headless challenger does seem to demonstrate that some similar significance is seemingly present in the Irish milieu which produced *Fled Bricrenn*.

Our ultimate purpose nevertheless is to establish if such significances are also present in the medieval context where Arthurian romance has flourished, in order to understand if the Arthurian versions of the beheading game betray similar notions around the severed head. As we have observed regarding cephalophoric figures, Christian culture in the Middle Ages also features what could be interpreted as possibly a similar concept about the human head and even analogous figures to the ones we have been studying. In what other aspects of medieval culture such as literature are concerned, as Larissa Tracy states, decapitation can be seen "…as a literary and artistic motif that often reflects and embellishes historical practice, that takes a grisly event and embodies it with magical properties and/or cultural significance" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 4). We may then ask ourselves whether such cultural significance and magical properties contain a possible derivation from pre-Christian "Celtic" beliefs and practices.

In terms of the beheading-game motif, if we take the stance of answering affirmatively to the previous question, *Fled Bricrenn* seems to contain the most direct derivative of what could have been a pre-Christian cult of the head, not only due to the beheading-game episodes themselves but also due to their headless challengers. Such a statement is based on certain acknowledgments: that *Fled Bricrenn* is a part of a cultural continuum closer to the pre-Christian culture where such cult could have been present, even though the narrative itself is already the product of Christian medieval culture; that independently of having been purposely so by its authors with basis on the classical records or through a genuine survival through oral tradition in what some elements of the story are concerned, the narrative intends to portray the pre-Christian past. Did the Arthurian narratives retain such significance concerning the idea of the head as the vessel of the soul? It is on this matter that the perception of the significance of the human head in the Middle Ages might be important to understand, in order to comprehend if the Arthurian rendition of the beheading game reflects the very same

reminiscence of the cult of the head found in the Irish precursor or other resulting from a different cultural context, or if they could be coincidental somehow.

There seems to have been in the medieval Christian context a similar notion to pre-Christian times in what regards the head as the ultimate symbol of victory over the enemies. A perfect illustrative example of this can be found for example in Portugal, in a statue depicting Gerald the Fearless, a Portuguese knight and folk hero who conquered back from the Moors the city of Évora around 1165, in the context of the Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula (Lay, 2009: 128). The statue depicts Gerald holding the decapitated head of a Moorish enemy in his hand in a triumphant stance, along with more decapitated Moorish heads at his feet (Fig. 16), and throughout Europe certainly more examples can be found. Indeed, certain accounts from the Middle Ages seem to further testify to an incredible similar behaviour concerning the heads of enemies to what the classical sources tell us of Celtic practices. Kaeuper, when commenting on the descriptions by Ambroise[310] of Normandy of the deeds of Richard Lionheart, points out that "The historian of Lion-Heart's crusade more than once records Richard hewing off enemy heads and displaying them as trophies in camp, or riding into camp after a night of skirmishing with more Muslim heads hanging from his saddle" (Kaeuper, 2000: 101). Facing such description, it is unavoidable to recall Strabo's and Diodorus Siculus' description of an analogous behaviour by the Gauls, or the depiction of Cú Chulainn demonstrating similar practices in the Ulster cycle.

Furthermore, besides the Irish and Icelandic examples which we have described previously, these occurrences of trophy-taking of heads in the Middle Ages seem to find echo in other episodes from medieval literature as well. A striking example can be found in the a-historical Dietrich[311] cycle, in one of the versions of the *Eckenlied*[312],

[310] Ambroise of Normandy was a late twelfth-century Norman poet who chronicled the feats of Richard Lionheart in the Third Crusade, in a work called *L´Estoire de la guerre saint*, written in rhyming verse in the Old French language. Gaston Paris has an edition of the text (1897).

[311] Dietrich von Bern is a legendary hero based upon the historical Gothic King Theodoric the Great, whose legends probably arose out of a long-standing oral tradition that influenced a literary cycle most prominently in Middle High German literature, although it also marks its presence in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon examples. Two major strands of Dietrich's cycle are perceivable, a historical and a fantastic or a-historical cycle. The historical cycle is a pseudo-historical one, mainly focused on Dietrich's conflict with Ermenrich and his status as an exile at Etzel's court (Heinzle, 1999: 23-58), while the fantastical cycle has strong overtones of folklore and depict Dietrich adventures where he battles giants and other fantastical beings such as dragons (Boyer, 2012: 139).

[312] *Das Eckenlied* (The Song of Ecke), also known as *Ecken Ausfahrt* (Ecke's Quest), is a Middle High German poem from an anonymous author whose earliest version seems to hail from c. 1230. The narrative of the poem is concerned with the fight between the hero Dietrich and the giant Ecke, who is

when Dietrich decapitates the giant Ecke and hangs the head from the saddle of his horse (Boyer, 2012: 146). Although it is tempting to establish a connection due to the similarity of these descriptions, in both the records of supposedly real-life events and in fictional narratives, it would be too much of a stretch to consider that this trophy-taking of heads in medieval times is related with the ancient Celts. Notwithstanding the possible *de facto* ethnographic trait of Celtic-speaking peoples being head-hunters, the use of heads as trophies seems to hold a symbolic value which may be transversal to many human cultures and perceptions, and this may indeed be the case for Western culture in general: "Beheading itself, and the image of the severed head - whether lifeless and silent or imbued with supernatural properties of rejuvenation - has become one of the most enduring symbols of power in Western civilization and remains the topic of extensive critical analysis" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 5). Additionally, Boyer further reminds us that "…the severed head has been employed ritualistically as an emblem of the strength and vitality of the entire human body since antiquity…" (Boyer, 2012: 137), and this may explain why heads hold value as trophies in general. In medieval romance for instance, as in the case of the fantastic Dietrich cycle, in what the decapitation of the giant/monster is concerned "the hero gains fame and honor from the performance of displaying the monster's severed head" (Boyer, 2012: 138). As Regina Janes underlines, this may be due in part to the effort which is necessary to decapitate an adversary: "severing heads in battle or after required and demonstrated considerable power - physical strength to perform the action and psychic steel to overcome the innate aversiveness of handling the head" (Janes, 2005: 23). Most important however, is the value as a trophy that the severed head gains when it is presented to others: "Presented, a head is reduced from symbol to sign. No special power inheres in the head or accrues to the taker from it. The taker expects reward or recognition from the person to whom he presents the head" (Janes, 2005: 17).

In other words, in certain examples of medieval literature, the severed head still seems to retain a value which is analogous to the Celtic behaviour of displaying severed heads, especially when the adversary was a worthy one, such as a monster or giant:

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under the orders of three queens who have sent him to capture Dietrich. The giant forces Dietrich to a duel, and Dietrich kills Ecke, subsequently having to fight Ecke's brother Fasold and other members of his family. There are divergent versions but in at least one of these versions, Dietrich confronts one of the queens and attributes the fault for Ecke's death to her, throwing the giant's head at her feet. There are seven manuscripts containing this tale, with three major variations in the story being recognizable amongst them. The mentioned detail is contained in the so-called E_2 version (MS Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, Cod. Donaueschingen 74. Parchment), from c. 1300.

"Beheading the monster, and displaying the severed head, gives the hero the reward of social recognition and fame" (Boyer, 2012: 150). Nevertheless, on the mentioned examples solely the value as a trophy which instils pride seems to be imprinted on the severed head. Any spiritual belief in the head as the vessel of the soul, as it may have been the case in Celtic-speaking societies, is not blatantly clear in what concrete evidences are concerned. After all, the decapitation and presentation of the severed head may result from a rather basic human notion: "Beheading is still the clearest proof of death - facial identity remains intact after disembodiment, and the severed head, held aloft by its remover, can be recognized" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 4). On the other hand, there seems indeed to have been another intrinsic notion to decapitation which may point towards the importance of the severed head as being more than a mere proof of defeat of the enemy, but also as something which is gained "…for the sake of a power [it] confers and continues to possess even after it is severed, a power that can be appropriated, possessed, and transferred to the taker…" (Janes, 2005: 15), and such a notion is no doubt closer to the concept of an essence contained in the head.

Taking into account these considerations, what can we make of the view on the severed head in the Middle Ages in what the significance of the beheading game in the Arthurian renditions is concerned? Could the Arthurian narratives retain a possible connection towards the conception of the head as a vessel of the soul, or are other interpretations possible? In terms of the reminiscence of possible pre-Christian beliefs and ritual, there are early examples in Arthurian literature which may indeed lead us to an association, namely in the Welsh tradition. In the Welsh *Peredur*, the homonymous protagonist observes a mysterious procession which includes a severed head being ceremoniously carried: "After a short silence, suddenly two maidens entered with a large salver between them, and a man's head on the salver, and much blood around the head" (Davies, 2007: 73). It is not explained immediately what is the significance of this head, but at the end of the narrative it is said to Peredur by a grey-haired man that "...I brought the head on the salver, all covered in blood, and the spear with the blood streaming along it from its tip to its hilt. And the head was your cousin's, and it was the witches of Caerloyw who killed him..." (Davies, 2007: 102). *Peredur* is a Welsh narrative entwined in the discussion on whether the Welsh Arthurian romances later included in the *Mabinogion* are either native narratives or Welsh adaptations of Chrétien de Troyes' romances, however, the detail of the head included in the procession is

exclusive to the Welsh version, and may be an inclusion derivative of native tradition. Although no certainties can be attained, the fact is that even though this example is not as illustrative of a possible symbolism of "vessel of the soul" as is the talking head of Brân in the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi* for instance, the inclusion of the decapitated head in a ceremonious context seems to echo Livy's account of the ritualistic character associated with severed heads in Celtic cultures.

We cannot simply associate other instances of beheading in Arthurian literature with such parallels however, because, as we have commented, beheadings and severed heads were not uncommon in medieval literature. Boyer tells us that "Beheading is a brutal form of violence, one often reserved in medieval literature for encounters between human heroes and their monstrous adversaries" (Boyer, 2012: 138), however, contrarily to Boyer's claim, it is not solely reserved for monstrous adversaries, but as the final blow in a wide diversity of depicted duels between knights as well. Indeed, beheading seems to have had a strong cultural presence in medieval culture: "Beheading is one of the most persistent and enduring images of western culture. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, beheading was the final punishment, the symbolic death, the climax of myriad conflicts if not necessarily the actual mode of killing" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 13). This is quite verifiable in Arthurian literature, one does not has to search for too long to find decapitations as the ending strike in duels between rival knights in the pages of either Chrétien de Troyes' romances, the Vulgate cycle or Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, where it is common for the warring knight to either pledge himself to the Round Table after his defeat or to be beheaded by his opponent. To understand therefore if the Arthurian renditions of the beheading game reflect its purported original significance may present itself as a confusing task, especially since the beheading game seems to fulfil different functions in the several narratives where it has been used, or the narratives themselves seem to aim at different purposes and themes. *Fled Bricrenn* uses it in a tale about determining who is worth of being considered the best warrior, or as a form of parody and satire to the exaggeration of the violence in the Ulster cycle, as some authors have considered (Mallory, 1992: 71). In what the French tradition is concerned for instance, Friedrich Wolfzettel considers that the beheading game is used for "unmasking the weakness of the courtly partner and as a means of mutual social levelling" (Wolfzettel, 2006: 136).

In *SGGK*, as yet another example, the beheading game together with the temptation motif could be considered as a plot device for a narrative which explores the penance of Gawain upon failing to live up to Christian and chivalric ideals (Stanbury, 2009: 142-143). But the conception of the head as containing the soul may nevertheless be an intrinsic notion which pervades the beheading game whenever it is used, and it may be perhaps due to this that it is such an impressive plot device. Larissa Tracy, quoting Naoko Shirai (1997: 316) argues that "The supernatural powers of the talking head in *SGGK* suggest that the head itself is regarded as the 'most important part of the human body, a container of human power having a perfect function to live'" (Tracy, 2012: 211). This is most possibly why the motif creates such a sense of awe and is so impressive for its audience. The truth is that beheading always carries a certain meaning as the ultimate strike which definitely causes the death of the victim, and as such it is powerfully symbolic: "Because beheading seems such a final act, it makes a suitably grave challenge for fledgling knights and serves as a potent reminder of mortality or immortality" (Tracy, 2012: 209). Immortality is an apt word towards considering that it may possibly have been so, since this quote implies that if a beheaded knight survives decapitation, he may then be immortal for his vital essence is in the head. On the other hand this also leads to a strong impression upon an audience, which is aware that beheading marks a definitive end to life, and the talking head inverts such notion in a terrifying manner: "The spectacle of the severed head, particularly one that refuses to remain silent, is a monstrous encounter with our mortality" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 5-6). This powerful effect upon an audience may be one of the reasons why the beheading game was reutilized in so many instances and why its transmission occurred. Similarly to the head-as-trophy case, although such significance does not have to be necessarily tied with a transposition of meaning from the original Irish source for the beheading game, it may point towards a common perception of the head as containing the soul: "Nothing is as final as beheading. The separation of the head from the body insures the locus of the soul is removed from its corporeal agent" (Tracy, 2012: 207).

As we have commented, it is indeed possible that taking into account all the references to the classical accounts on the "Celts" which seem to be reflected in *Fled Bricrenn*, then the latter may indeed represent a reminiscence of a pre-Christian head cult, since, as White says: "Any consideration of the ubiquity of the severed-yet-living head motif must eventually raise the question of its probable ultimate origin in ancient

religious ritual" (1972: 129). This process could have occurred either as the survival of a belief which travelled through myth and subsequently folklore until it got mingled or materialized itself through the figure of the headless axeman and eventually found its way into early Irish literature, or was purportedly utilized by the Irish *literati* in order to better represent the Iron Age. However the case, it would be naive and utterly improbable to believe that the motif was used in the Arthurian narratives with a conscious notion of the reminiscence of a pre-Christian head cult which may have given origin to it. Nonetheless, the use of the motif does seem to hold its meaning due to the intrinsic human notion that the head is vital and thus easily interpreted as the "seat of the soul": "…fascination with the severed head goes far beyond simple recognition; it is generally regarded as the seat of life and the seat of power. There is a sense that all human functions derive from it, and its removal marks the final end of life - in theory" (Tracy *et al*, 2012: 5).

The pre-Christian Celts seemed to view decapitation and the taking of the head, of the "vessel of the soul", as the ultimate prize. Even though it is not as explicit in the Arthurian or medieval context, this also seems to hold true in it. The beheading game retains its value as a useful narrative motif due to this notion, although inversely: the "prize" of the decapitated head is not awarded, for both head and body of the challenger remain alive, and hence why, notwithstanding the poetical prowess of authors such as the *Gawain*-poet, the motif creates such a powerful impression on its audience, justifying its reutilization. These considerations lead us to the idea that even devoid of possible religious connotations, indirectly the Arthurian narratives do seem to transmit a similar significance in what the beheading game is concerned. Christopher Fee exemplifies this notion with *SGGK*, by mentioning that the "...magical properties manifested in the form of the bodiless head of the Green Knight echo ancient Celtic and Germanic practices concerned with accessing and appropriating the wisdom and power of an enemy through his or her decapitated head" (Fee *et al*, 2001: 198).

Whether we consider it as either a mythological or literary motif (or perhaps most reasonably, as both), the beheading game seems to correspond to what Lévi-Strauss considered a "mytheme" and to his concept of *bricolage*, which is well explained by Wendy Doniger (2009: 203-209). Such a concept implies the idea that mythemes can be used and re-used in different narratives, and it is what the storytellers of mythic narratives use to fill their tales, in a similar way, as Wendy Doniger points out

(2009: 205) to the *clichés* of B-movies. The rich corpus of Greek myth and legend provides a good example, it is frequently a source of motifs for narratives, particularly in Western culture, even up to our days: "Each telling of a myth draws upon a network of these rags and bones, a kind of Erector-set of prefabricated pieces, an identikit with which to construct all the faces of a myth. (A colleague of mine once told his undergraduate class that the Odyssey was like the Parts Department of Western literature.)" (Doniger, 2009: 203). This borrowing and recycling of mythemes might not always be used, since myths can be original of a culture, and others might not be compatible with that same culture or lose their validity due to some change in the cultural context or by simply fading way, nonetheless, it might be a possible phenomenon as well: "Storytellers can build a potentially infinite number of stories by rearranging a limited number of known mythic themes. Each culture chooses the scraps that it wants to keep; some have proved more recyclable than others" (Doniger, 2009: 203). Perhaps a similar concept in literary terms would be what Helen Cooper calls a "meme", not the Internet phenomenon, but rather a type of literary motif which is "…a unit within literature that proves so useful, so infectious, that it begins to take on a life of its own. There is a word for such things now: a 'meme', an idea that behaves like a gene in its ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion to adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures" (Cooper, 2004: 3).

If we were to try and apply either the concept of "meme" or the theory of mythemes to our stories, we could not help but to perceive that the beheading-game episode in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* is a borrowed mytheme from the beheading-game episode with Cú Roí/*bachlach* in *Fled Bricrenn*, and the latter on the other hand might be itself a borrowed mytheme from some other unknown oral or lost written narrative, and the same is valid for the idea of "meme". The use of similar mythemes presupposes a hypothesis on how to discern why some elements might be borrowed and how others are not. If there is the borrowing of a myth in different cultures, as in the Irish cultural milieu and French and English medieval ones, then it may be possible that there are common structures on the narratives of both imaginary worlds: "the borrowing takes place because of the similarity in structure between myths in the culture that 'lends' them and myths in the culture that 'borrows' them" (Doniger, 2009: 208). Such a hypothesis may provide a hint for the specific use of some motif in a different context and an indication of what might be shared in the mentality of the

storytellers in one culture and in another: “And what explains this similarity of structure? He [Lévi-Strauss] is unwilling to say, but his other writings imply the ‘internal connections’ of a shared mental structure, that is, a ‘common origin’ not of the myths themselves (as Jung has argued) but of the mental structures that create the myths” (Doniger, 2009: 208-209).

We have previously underlined the intrinsic notions regarding decapitation and the human head which seem to have been transversal to the Irish context as well as to the medieval English and French context, and the figure of a headless giant, warrior, rider, or saint also seems to have been able to been adaptable to different contexts, perhaps because it is connected with that same underlying notion regarding the human head. Notwithstanding its apparent origin in Irish tradition, the beheading game seems to be based on these notions, and whether or not its ultimate origin is related to a pre-Christian cult of the head, the idea that the head contains the soul or essence may have been in the origin of such cult and not the other way around. This same idea may be shared amongst different cultures simply because it is an intuitive one, and if the beheading game is a reflection of it, then it may be adaptable to those same different cultures. A “mythologist” from the English and French milieu would then easily pick up this mytheme, since it fits with his world-view as well. However, the most meaningful results we can gather from this idea is not in the similarities of the motifs *per se* but in the variations around them in the different versions: “difference itself becomes a basis for comparison – a comparison made possible only by the assumption that difference has ‘a meaning for all men’ (and, presumably, for all women)” (Doniger, 2009: 207). It is through the difference in the narratives we can better understand the cultural context where that narrative arose, and the difference from the one from where a myth might have been borrowed: “Often the best way to understand a myth is by understanding how it differs not only from other myths in the same culture but also from variants in other cultures” (Doniger, 2009: 207). Such a variation implies another interplay with different motifs, which may change the meaning of the borrowed myth altogether, and as such it is extremely useful for us to understand if a myth was borrowed simply as an appropriate filling sequence, if it carried its original mythological significance, or another changed one. In fact, this transformation may occur from the conjugation with other mythemes in another structure, and those mythemes are the ones who might give meaning to the borrowed one, either similar to the culture of origin or a new one: “In

comparing two myths, from two different cultures or within a single culture, we may use another myth (from that culture, or from another) to supplement our understanding of a given text." (Doniger, 2009: 207).

The reason for the use of other myths as tools for understanding the meaning of a single myth is related to the effect myths can have on one another: "Myths are self-explanatory, transformations of one another; one myth translates another, or, perhaps, one myth psychoanalyses another." (Doniger, 2009: 208) Our narratives of study provide once again an example for this effect. In both *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and in *Fled Bricrenn* we find similarities in the beheading-game sequence, the hero is challenged, accepts the challenge, beheads the antagonist, and when it is the latter's turn, he strikes three times, all of which are feigned and do not behead the hero. However, the narrative where these sequences are inserted changes altogether the meaning of them. In *Fled Bricrenn* the beheading game is the ultimate test for Cú Chulainn and his two rivals to gain the champion's portion, one in which the hero succeeds. In *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* the beheading game is the result of Gawain accepting a challenge in the place of his king, and of his word of honour and chivalry being tested. When Cú Chulainn puts himself at the mercy of the axe, he is following his pride and courage, in a story where he wants to prove himself the worthier of having the champion's portion, when Gawain does the same, the game is a direct reflection of him having resisted to the advances of Bercilak's wife. In other words, the beheading game is a test of worth in both tales, but in one it is used for proving the right of Cú Chulainn to the champion's portion and in the other it is used to demonstrate that even with all his chivalry, Gawain might fail, since he does get a little cut in the neck due to his acceptance of Lady Bercilak's girdle. Cú Chulainn proudly receives the champion's portion, but Gawain returns in shame to the round table, a shame symbolized by the girdle and his cut in the neck. If we consider it as such, the temptation sequence we find in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* can arguably be perceived as a different mytheme, which has an influence in the beheading-game mytheme, giving it another depth and signification, and making it different from the same mytheme in *Fled Bricrenn*, although the sequence itself is fairly the same.

In other words, a concept which might have its origin either in a mythic or religious significance, or simply in an intrinsic notion to certain human societies, seems to have gone through a progressive transition to folklore and literature. The beheading

game seems to have behaved as a myth which carries a specific meaning or belief and which is adaptable to different contexts and societies as long as that meaning or belief still remains relevant or holds true for that society, notwithstanding some changes in the understanding of that same belief. As Regina Janes states, decapitation "always signifies differently within specific codes supplied by culture" (Janes 2005: 12), and that is plainly obvious by the difference between the strong ritualistic connotation that the human head apparently had for pre-Christian culture in comparison with the meaning it had in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it did had some significance, and it is in connection with that significance, related to an intrinsic notion of the vital importance of the head, that we find a similar meaning in the Arthurian renditions of the beheading game. To do this, in the words of Nicola Masciandaro "…it is to seek the poietic space wherein beheading becomes and stays sign, to address beheading as an *original* significance, as a meaning that happens in phenomenal proximity to its origin or coming-to-be" (Masciandaro, 2012: 15).

CONCLUSION

Having arrived at the end of the journey which this dissertation has been, it is time to analyse all the data and arguments presented in order to understand which conclusions we may draw from this investigation. As we have seen in the first chapter, the comparison of the Irish *Fled Bricrenn* with the French beheading-game narratives found in the *Livre de Caradoc*, *Perlesvaus*, *La Mule Sans Frein* and *Hunbaut*, along with the Middle-English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, demonstrate without a shadow of doubt a connection between the narratives. The chronology of the texts, along with the elements which they have in common, points to derivation of the Arthurian renditions from the Irish source. This implies therefore a careful research into the possible channels of transmission. Previous works which addressed this matter, such as the ones from Kittredge or Benson did not arrive at satisfactory conclusions regarding the channels of transmission, due to several flaws in their arguments which leave many questions unanswered. Jacobs presented a recent effort which provides good arguments, but the small size of his article did not have the necessary extension to explore this matter in all its complexity.

We have then proposed that the search for the channels of transmission had to go through an investigation which implies the study of the relevant texts possibly

containing evidences related to this matter, as well as the historical circumstances around them. Although the possibility of direct transmission has been considered, due to the fact that Irish learning was prestigious between the sixth and ninth centuries, and therefore there certainly were visiting Irish scholars throughout Europe, we have seen that there are scarce evidences supporting this hypothesis. The hypothesis of Wales as an intermediary was then suggested, due to two main factors: the existence of literary evidence of Irish influence in Welsh literature, including in notable Welsh texts such as *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* or some poems from *Llyfr Taliesin*; and a set of historical circumstances in Wales which favoured the transmission of Irish narratives, most notably the establishment of Gwynedd as a centre of transmission of Irish motifs to Welsh literature in the reign of Merfyn Frych, and which had continuation in the reigns of his sons. Gwynedd seems to have been such a centre due to several evidences, which point to its court as having been a place of visit for Irish scholars, as well as the connection of this court to monasteries such as the one of Clynnog Fawr, which is suspected of having been the place where Welsh works such as the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* were composed, which, as we underlined, contain some elements which seem to reveal Irish influence.

The set of evidences and circumstances which were presented throughout the second chapter do seem therefore to establish Wales as a plausible intermediary. Unfortunately however, we do not have a Welsh beheading game to plainly claim that the beheading-game motif travelled through this channel. As we have seen, however, *Marwnat Corroi*, one of the poems from *Llyfr Taliesin* which provides one of the clearest evidences of Irish influence on Welsh literature, is especially important for the question of the transmission of the beheading game. *Aided Chon Roí*, which is the Irish narrative on which *Marwnat Corroi* is based, also seems to have provided elements for an Arthurian narrative found in the French *Vulgate Lancelot*. Additionally, *Marwnat Corroi* also includes Cú Chulainn and Cú Roí, and this could raise the possibility that narratives concerned with both these characters were known in Wales, which could include *Fled Bricrenn*. Indeed, the very existence of the Arthurian renditions together with the evidences supporting the idea that Wales was the intermediary tradition point in the direction that although an extant version has not survived, the beheading game was indeed transmitted through Wales.

The transmission did not stop in Wales however, since it had to somehow be transmitted from Wales to both England and the Continent. On this matter, we have seen that the idea of Wales as the intermediary is further reinforced due to the context of the Welsh Marches after the Norman Conquest, where Wales and the Anglo-Norman world progressively became closer and therefore the cultural exchange became more intense. As we have investigated in the third chapter, many of the evidences in regard to this process seem to identify the agents of transmission of Welsh culture and of Arthurian narratives to England and the Continent as having been the Bretons. There are several reasons for this strong suspicion: the Bretons were an important part of the Norman contingent which participated in the Norman Conquest, and many Bretons settled around the Welsh Marches. Since the Bretons shared a similar language with the Welsh they were the ideal ones to act as bilingual interpreters. Rather than being solely a useful hypothesis, this possibility is supported by several other indications, namely several mentions to Breton storytellers in Arthurian texts which claim that Bretons were the sources for Arthurian stories. While it may be suspected that this included professional interpreters and classes connected with storytelling and entertainment such as the *conteurs* and the *jongleurs*, it most possibly included other classes as well, such as merchants, soldiers and clerics.

Additionally, the Norman Conquest, along with the marriage of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, led to the formation of the extensive Angevin Empire, which extended from England to a huge swath of land in France. The Breton relationship with the Normans possibly allowed them to spread Arthurian narratives throughout an extensive territory. This may have occurred on a popular level, but may also have reached the high levels of society as well, most notably the royal courts as well as other noble and baronial households. The evidences and reports of an intense cultural life in the courts of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine seem to support this idea. Moreover, this atmosphere seems to have been continued by Eleanor's daughter, Marie de Champagne. The royal courts thus most possibly included the presence of Breton *conteurs*, *jongleurs* and other storytellers and poets, who may have transmitted many of the Arthurian stories. The interest in Arthurian romance, and most possibly what helped its development, may be demonstrated by the apparent patronage of Arthurian works by this very same royal court and associated households. Examples are the works by Wace and Laȝamon, which seem to have had as patrons Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine,

respectively. Chrétien de Troyes, on the other hand, identifies Marie de Champagne as his patroness, and he seems to have been associated with other noble households such as the one of Philip of Alsace, the Count of Flanders.

The role of the Bretons in the transmission of Arthurian narratives and elements, along with the interest of the royal courts of the Angevin Empire in Arthurian stories, seems to have provided a favourable context for the transmission from Wales, and may explain the extensive success and reach which the Arthurian stories had throughout Europe. The transmission of the beheading game has its own specificities in this context. As we have seen, Caradoc, one of the characters associated with the beheading game in the Continental renditions, along with a body of stories connected to him, is one of the best examples of transmission from Wales to the Continent, with a notable accordance between the Welsh and Continental material. It may have therefore been through this or a similar channel of transmission that the beheading game reached the Continent. There are however doubts in what concerns the several Continental versions and on which version may reflect the original transmission. Due to the notable reunion of both the beheading game and revolving fort in *La Mule Sans Frein*, which suggests a closer version to *Fled Bricrenn*, it is possible that this version is the one which is more similar to a possible original Arthurian beheading-game version, even though other narratives, such as the one of the *Livre de Caradoc*, present other well preserved elements such as the addressing of the challenger to the court.

Further inferences on this matter are given by the insular context. The particular similarities of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with *Fled Bricrenn* also caused some difficulties in understanding the channels of transmission, and on whether the *Gawain*-poet had knowledge of the beheading-game motif from Continental sources, or from other source which would point to an English channel of transmission, independent of the French one. Our conclusion seems to point towards the idea that both a popular tradition which preserved elements from the original Arthurian beheading game in England, including some which are closer to *Fled Bricrenn*, as well as the knowledge of French tradition, may have been influential in the composition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The indications concerning the preservation of elements closer to *Fled Bricrenn* are given by the Gawain English folk romances, which include details that we might recognize immediately as related to the beheading game, such as churlish challengers portrayed in a similar manner to Cú Roí/*bachlach*, contrarily to what seems

to have been the tendency in France: the modification of the challenger in accordance with a courtly aesthetic. Certain details in these folk romances seem to point towards an older tradition closer to either *Fled Bricrenn* or a first Arthurian version which might have been quite similar to it. Additionally, this possible version must have been based on the *Champion*'s *Covenant* episode, rather than the Úath one. The three feigned blows in the Úath episode are the only characteristic which would place a doubt on which beheading-game episode from *Fled Bricrenn* was the original source. As we have argued, however, the use of the number three is both a literary and popular convention used in narratives, and since all the other elements found in the Arthurian renditions are found in the *Champion's Covenant*, then the latter is the most likely candidate.

The information gathered from the English context has an influence on the Continental questions. These folk romances, along with the characteristics in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which still retain proximity with details from *Fled Bricrenn*, seem to reveal that there were indeed two channels of transmission. Notwithstanding, both channels seem to have as its original source a single coherent narrative, which may have been a written one. The reasons for this statement are, once again, based on the fact that most of the elements which compose the beheading game in *Fled Bricrenn* are spread throughout the several Arthurian renditions, and therefore all these elements seem to have been preserved. The fact that the motifs of the beheading game and of the revolving castle, which could easily be seen as independent and separated, are still reunited in Arthurian renditions is a strong argument for this possibility. If the narrative had been spread through oral tradition, the elements and details which compose the beheading game would have been spread throughout multiple different narratives, and hardly reunited or preserved as they are in the Arthurian renditions. This does not mean that the motif did not enter oral tradition as well. The English folk romances, even though they still retain some details (some quite reminiscent of *Fled Bricrenn*), are an example of this, since they already present many changes. The Continental narratives however, along with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, do seem to be closer to a possible original Arthurian source which was quite coherent and in accordance with *Fled Bricrenn*, although some of these Arthurian renditions are closer than others to this source. Additionally, this first Arthurian version most possibly had Gawain as the protagonist, since he is the main character in most

beheading-game narratives, and since the English folk romances seem to point at an older tradition which features Gawain as the hero, as we have argued.

On the whole, taking into account the characteristics which we have seen preserved in the several Arthurian renditions, we may now be in a position to hypothesize which were the elements preserved from *Fled Bricrenn* which most possibly were present in the original Arthurian version: a) the shapeshifting challenger armed with an axe and its churlish description, including the detail of the fierceness of the eyes; b) the addressing of the challenger to the court and praise of the fame of the latter, followed by the issuing of the challenge, together with the subsequent scorn when there is no immediate acceptance of it; c) the rules of the beheading game, the challenger to have its head cut off, and afterwards the protagonist to be put to the same test; d) the supernatural survival of the challenger to decapitation; e) the stretching of the neck and the feigned blow; f) the insertion of the revolving fort in the narrative, perhaps as the dwelling place of the challenger; g) the revelation that the beheading game was solely a test. On the other hand, certain aspects such as the year's distance between the beheading of the challenger and the turn of the protagonist to be put to the test, along with details such as the variations in the description of the challengers, the sharpening of the weapon by the challenger and the flinching or hesitation of the protagonist in his turn to be beheaded, all seem to have originated in Arthurian tradition and to have been modifications which were inserted in subsequent versions, most possibly in Continental tradition.

Having reviewed all these considerations, we may now put our arguments into perspective and draw an outline of our hypothesis concerning the transmission of the beheading game in several steps:

1) A version of *Fled Bricrenn*, probably similar to the ones we know, and definitely containing the *Champion's Covenant*, was transmitted to Wales, possibly from a visiting Irish scholar in Gwynedd. He may have provided a written version or recited the narrative, which may have been written down.
2) In the context of the Norman Conquest and the Welsh Marches, the narrative was transmitted to the Bretons, possibly through oral tradition, but also through some written version, due to the accordance of many elements in the Continental renditions. This version might have gained form already in

Wales, or at the most in the context of the Welsh Marches, and might have been quite similar to *Fled Bricrenn*, although with an Arthurian setting and characters, most notably with Gawain as the hero. A written version may imply that the transmission involved learned classes, either *conteurs* or perhaps learned clerics. If it was written in Welsh it would have needed a translator to possibly translate it into Anglo-Norman. A learned Breton could have done this. Alternatively, it could have been transmitted through oral tradition but have then been written by the Breton receiver. Either way it must have reached the high classes as well since the amount of written renditions indicates some popularity.

3) Two channels of transmission might have thus gained form, one through England which taking into account the later folk romances might have been based in oral tradition, at least in a later phase, although we should not doubt the possibility that a written copy could have existed; and a Continental one, which may have had the written source we have previously suggested. The Continental channel of transmission might have been the same through which the knowledge about Caradoc and Caradoc-associated elements travelled, but the motif itself was not originally associated with Caradoc. *La Mule Sans Frein* is probably the closest French rendition to the possible original source, with some elements being also kept in *Hunbaut* such as the churlish challenger. Nonetheless, due to the popularity which the knowledge about Caradoc in the Continent seems to indicate, he is later associated with the beheading game in the *Livre de Caradoc*, and this very same narrative modifies some aspects of the original, especially in the description of the challenger, perhaps to adapt it to courtly tastes. A similar process seems to be what happened in *Perlesvaus*: the use of Lancelot as the protagonist due to his increasing popularity, and the description of the challenger as not only a mortal but also as a knight, rather than a churl.
4) In England, the progressive distance from France led to an approximation and return to English conventions and traditions in what regards Arthurian narratives. The *Gawain*-poet, clearly a learned poet, had knowledge of the French versions, perhaps of some version of *Perlesvaus*, as there are evidences of the circulation of a manuscript containing it in England, and he might have known other Continental renditions as well. On the other hand,

> in the Northwest Midlands, perhaps the *Gawain*-poet also had access to a pool of popular traditions, of which the Gawain folk romances are an example, which might have included some elements closer to *Fled Bricrenn* than the ones from French tradition. The use of both sources led to the creation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Logically, as we have been discussing throughout the course of the dissertation, this is a hypothesis which takes into account the evidences available and the most plausible possibilities. We do not however have all the links in the chain of transmission, more specifically we lack more written works which could enable us to avoid the recourse to speculation. Due to this it is inevitable to consider hypothetic pieces of the puzzle, as for instance our proposition for the original Arthurian beheading-game version, taking into attention however that these hypothetic elements must be based on what the concrete evidences and plausible possibilities seem to point to. Notwithstanding, although the present work has attempted to reduce speculation to the maximum possible, focusing on the evidence available and the associations which seem to be plausible and logical, some assumptions have to be considered in order to fill the blanks where we have incomplete information. This is unavoidable when dealing with the medieval manuscript culture. A work such as this therefore, is an on-going process, one to which hopefully our investigation may have contributed with the evidences, discussions, hypotheses and considerations which we have been drawing. The discovery of new manuscripts or the further investigation of the ones available may shed new light on these matters.

In what the significance of the beheading game is concerned, as we have seen, the idea that the examples from early Irish literature which put emphasis on headhunting or in supernatural talking heads reflect an ancient "Celtic" cult of the head, is a matter for academic discussion and fosters many disagreements, with ambiguous results and conclusions. As it may be obvious, this is a discussion which includes the motif of the beheading game. Although the evidences found in the classical ethnographies of the Celts, along with the archaeological record, do reveal many instances either of headhunting or of some special attention given to severed heads, there are also many arguments against objectively affirming that there was a definite cult of the head, which range from questioning the reliability of the classical accounts, to pure Celtoscepticism in what a Celtic cultural pattern is concerned, and to the comparison with other cultures

which have instances of headhunting or some veneration around severed heads. Additionally, the differenciation between what are the evidences of simply the practice of headhunting and the ones that may indicate a ritualistic or religious cult around the human head is not clear, nor is the possibility of both being connected. In the case of early Irish literature, these arguments are reinforced with scepticism concerning the genuine portrayal of an Iron Age society in the relevant narratives, which include *Fled Bricrenn*.

As we have seen however, there is also a myriad of arguments which do indeed point to the idea that there is a possible special signification around the human head which seems to be present in all the collective evidence which includes the classical accounts, the archaeological record, and the Irish narratives which seem to reflect aspects of both, including *Fled Bricrenn*. Neverthless, as we have seen, this signification seems to also be present in medieval culture in general, therefore a concept such as the head being the vessel of the soul may be a universal one. This concept could then constitute an underlying significance in the beheading game which was indeed maintained from the passage of the motif from early Irish literature to Arthurian romance, regardless of whether the beheading game contains reminiscences of an ancient Celtic head cult or not. In other words, the emphasis on decapitation, the supernatural survival of the challenger and its talking severed head, which we can observe in both *Fled Bricrenn* and the Arthurian renditions, may refer to an intrinsic human notion about the vital importance of the head and its encasing of the human conscience, or should we say, "essence".

An interesting point of the investigation around the matter of the significance is related to the possibilities which arose out of the research of this thematic in folklore, especially in what concerns the development of the headless challenger or headless figures in general. To this may be added the fact that even in the research related to the channels of transmission, popular and folk traditions were often the source of important evidences. This becomes even more interesting when taking into account other important investigations for the subject of this dissertation, which rather than just being focused in the literary study *per se*, also included insights from history, archaeology or anthropology. The reason for this being an interesting point is that it can be interpreted as evidence that an interdisciplinary research which includes many areas of study such as literature, mythology/folklore, history and archaeology can provide many important

clues and foster important discussions on the study of a literary motif like the beheading game. In the study of early Irish literature and Arthurian romance, this seems to be extremely important, for all these disciplines can help to gather all the pieces of the puzzle or to understand which ones are missing. Rather than being focused on a paradigm such as nativism or anti-nativism, Celticism or Celtoscepticism, which frequently oblige to put emphasis in specific approaches and ignore others, the best course of action may be perhaps to find a balance between these opposites, and to be open to all the sources of information which can be useful for the study of a subject such as the transmission of a motif from early Irish literature to Arthurian romance. Of course, this must be made with an objective eye and without falling into heavy speculations, but it seems indeed to be the most sensible stance when approaching a study such as this. Hopefully this dissertation also demonstrated the advantages and results from having such a stance.

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APPENDIX I

Original Versions of Translated Citations

1. For vneþe watz þe noyce not a whyle sesed, / And þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued, / Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster, / On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe; / Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik, / And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete, / Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were, / Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene, / And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myȝt ride; / For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne, / Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale, / And alle his fetures folȝande, in forme þat he hade, / ful clene; / For wonder of his hwe men hade, / Set in his semblaunt sene; / He ferde as freke were fade, / And oueral enker-grene. / Ande al grayþed in grene þis gome and his wedes: / A strayte cote ful streȝt, þat stek on his sides, / A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne / With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene / With blyþe blaunner ful bryȝt, and his hod boþe, / Þat watz laȝt fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes; / Heme wel-haled hose of þat same, / Þat spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures vnder / Of bryȝt golde, vpon silk bordes barred ful ryche, / And scholes vnder schankes þere þe schalk rides; / And alle his vesture uerayly watz clene verdure, / Boþe þe barres of his belt and oþer blyþe stones, / Þat were richely rayled in his aray clene / Aboutte hymself and his sadel, vpon silk werkez. / Þat were to tor for to telle of tryfles þe halue / Þat were enbrauded abof, wyth bryddes and flyȝes, / With gay gaudi of grene, þe golde ay inmyddes. / Þe pendauntes of his payttrure, þe proude cropure, / His molaynes, and alle þe metail anamayld was þenne, / Þe steropes þat he stod on stayned of þe same, / And his arsounz al after and his aþel skyrtes, / Þat euer glemered and glent al of grene stones; / Þe fole þat he ferkkes on fyn of þat ilke, / sertayn, / A grene hors gret and þikke, / A stede ful stif to strayne, / In brawden brydel quik-- / To þe gome he watz ful gayn. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 5-6).

2. Wel gay watz þis gome gered in grene, / And þe here of his hed of his hors swete. / Fayre fannand fax vmbefoldes his schulderes; / A much berd as a busk ouer his brest henges, / Þat wyth his hiȝlich here þat of his hed reches / Watz euesed al vmbetorne abof his elbowes, / Þat half his armes þer-vnder were halched in þe wyse / Of a kyngez capados þat closes his swyre; / Þe mane of þat mayn hors much to hit lyke, / Wel cresped and cemmed, wyth knottes ful mony / Folden in wyth fildore aboute þe fayre grene, / Ay a herle of þe here, an oþer of golde; / Þe tayl and his toppyng twynnen of a sute, / And bounden boþe wyth a bande of a bryȝt grene, / Dubbed wyth ful dere stonez, as þe dok lasted, / Syþen þrawen wyth a þwong a þwarle knot alofte, / Þer mony bellez ful bryȝt of brende golde rungen. / Such a fole vpon folde, ne freke þat hym rydes, / Watz neuer sene in þat sale wyth syȝt er þat tyme, / with yȝe. / He loked as layt so lyȝt, / So sayd al þat hym syȝe; / Hit semed as no mon myȝt / Vnder his dynttez dryȝe. / Wheþer hade he no helme ne hawbergh nauþer, / Ne no pysan ne no plate þat pented to armes, / Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwue ne to smyte, / Bot in his on honde he hade a holyn bobbe, / Þat is grattest in grene when greuez ar bare, / And an ax in his oþer, a hoge and vnmete, / A spetos sparþe to expoun in spelle, quoso myȝt. / Þe lenkþe of an elnȝerde þe large hede hade, / Þe grayn al of grene stele and of golde hewen, / Þe bit burnyst bryȝt, with a brod egge / As wel schapen to schere as scharp rasores, / Þe stele of a stif staf þe sturne hit bi grypte, / Þat watz wounden wyth yrn to þe wandez ende, / And al bigrauen with grene in gracios werkes; / A lace lapped aboute, þat louked at þe hede, / And so after þe halme halched ful ofte, / Wyth tryed tasselez þerto tacched innoghe / On botounz of þe bryȝt grene brayden ful ryche. / Þis haþel heldez hym in and þe halle entres, / Driuande to þe heȝe dece, dut he no woþe, (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 6-7).

3. Þenn Arþour bifore þe hiȝ dece þat auenture byholdez, / And rekenly hym reuerenced, for rad was he neuer, / And sayde, 'Wyȝe, welcum iwys to þis place, / Þe hede of þis ostel Arthour I hat; / Liȝt luflych adoun and lenge, I þe praye, / And quat-so þy wylle is we schal wyt after.' / 'Nay, as help me,' quoþ þe haþel, 'he þat on hyȝe syttes, / To wone any quyle in þis won, hit watz not myn ernde; / Bot for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyȝe, / And þy burȝ and þy burnes best ar holden, / Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde, / Þe wyȝtest and þe worþyest of þe worldes kynde, / Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykez, / And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp, / And þat hatz wayned me hider, iwyis, at þis tyme. / Ȝe may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here / Þat I passe as in pes, and no plyȝt seche; / For had I founded in fere in feȝtyng wyse, / I haue a hauberghe at home and a helme boþe, / A schelde and a scharp spere, schinande bryȝt, / Ande oþer weppenes to welde, I wene wel, als; / Bot for I wolde no were, my wedez ar softer. / Bot if þou be so bold as alle burnez tellen, / Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask / bi ryȝt.' / Arthour con onsware, / And sayd, 'Sir cortays knyȝt, / If þou craue batayl bare, / Here faylez þou not to fyȝt.' / 'Nay, frayst I no fyȝt, in fayth I þe telle, / Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylder. / If I were hasped in armes on a heȝe stede, / Here is no mon me to mach, for myȝtez so wayke. / Forþy I craue in þis court a Crystemas gomen, / For hit is Ȝol and Nwe Ȝer, and here ar ȝep mony: / If any so hardy in þis hous holdez hymseluen, / Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede, / Þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer, / I schal gif hym of my gyft þys

giserne ryche, / Þis ax, þat is heué innogh, to hondele as hym lykes, / And I schal bide þe fyrst bur as bare as I sitte. / If any freke be so felle to fonde þat I telle, / Lepe lyȝtly me to, and lach þis weppen, / I quit-clayme hit for euer, kepe hit as his auen, / And I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on þis flet, / Ellez þou wyl diȝt me þe dom to dele hym an oþer / barlay, / And ȝet gif hym respite, / A twelmonyth and a day; / Now hyȝe, and let se tite / Dar any herinne oȝt say.' (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 8-9).

4. If he hem stowned vpon fyrst, stiller were þanne / Alle þe heredmen in halle, þe hyȝ and þe loȝe. / Þe renk on his rouncé hym ruched in his sadel, / And runischly his rede yȝen he reled aboute, / Bende his bresed broȝez, blycande grene, / Wayued his berde for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse. / When non wolde kepe hym with carp he coȝed ful hyȝe, / Ande rimed hym ful richly, and ryȝt hym to speke: / 'What, is þis Arthures hous,' quoþ þe haþel þenne, / 'Þat al þe rous rennes of þurȝ ryalmes so mony? / Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes, / Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes? / Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table / Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyȝes speche, / For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!' / Wyth þis he laȝes so loude þat þe lorde greued; / Þe blod schot for scham into his schyre face / and lere; / He wex as wroth as wynde, / So did alle þat þer were. / Þe kyng as kene bi kynde / Þen stod þat stif mon nere, / Ande sayde, 'Haþel, by heuen, þyn askyng is nys, / And as þou foly hatz frayst, fynde þe behoues. / I know no gome þat is gast of þy grete wordes; / Gif me now þy geserne, vpon Godez halue, / And I schal bayþen þy bone þat þou boden habbes.' / Lyȝtly lepez he hym to, and laȝt at his honde. / Þen feersly þat oþer freke vpon fote lyȝtis. / Now hatz Arthure his axe, and þe halme grypez, / And sturnely sturez hit aboute, þat stryke wyth hit þoȝt. / Þe stif mon hym bifore stod vpon hyȝt, / Herre þen ani in þe hous by þe hede and more. / Wyth sturne schere þer he stod he stroked his berde, / And wyth a countenaunce dryȝe he droȝ doun his cote, / No more mate ne dismayd for hys mayn dintez / Þen any burne vpon bench hade broȝt hym to drynk / of wyne. / Gawan, þat sate bi þe quene, / To þe kyng he can enclyne: / 'I beseche now with saȝez sene / Þis melly mot be myne. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 9-10).

5. Gawan gotz to þe gome with giserne in honde, / And he baldly hym bydez, he bayst neuer þe helder. / Þen carppez to Sir Gawan þe knyȝt in þe grene, / 'Refourme we oure forwardes, er we fyrre passe. / Fyrst I eþe þe, haþel, how þat þou hates / Þat þou me telle truly, as I tryst may.' / 'In god fayth,' quoþ þe goode knyȝt, 'Gawan I hatte, / Þat bede þe þis buffet, quat-so bifallez after, / And at þis tyme twelmonyth take at þe an oþer / Wyth what weppen so þou wylt, and wyth no wyȝ ellez / on lyue.' / Þat oþer onswarez agayn, / 'Sir Gawan, so mot I þryue / As I am ferly fayn / Þis dint þat þou schal dryue. / 'Bigog,' quoþ þe grene knyȝt, 'Sir Gawan, me lykes / Þat I schal fange at þy fust þat I haf frayst here. / And þou hatz redily rehersed, bi resoun ful trwe, / Clanly al þe couenaunt þat I þe kynge asked, / Saf þat þou schal siker me, segge, bi þi trawþe, / Þat þou schal seche me þiself, where-so þou hopes / I may be funde vpon folde, and foch þe such wages / As þou deles me to-day bifore þis douþe ryche.' / 'Where schulde I wale þe,' quoþ Gauan, 'where is þy place? / I wot neuer where þou wonyes, bi hym þat me wroȝt, / Ne I know not þe, knyȝt, by cort ne þi name. / Bot teche me truly þerto, and telle me how þou hattes, / And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me þeder, / And þat I swere þe for soþe, and by my seker traweþ.' / 'Þat is innogh in Nwe Ȝer, hit nedes no more', / Quoþ þe gome in þe grene to Gawan þe hende; / 'Ȝif I þe telle trwly, quen I þe tape haue / And þou me smoþely hatz smyten, smartly I þe teche / Of my hous and my home and myn owen nome, / Þen may þou frayst my fare and forwardez holde; / And if I spende no speche, þenne spedez þou þe better, / For þou may leng in þy londe and layt no fyrre-- / bot slokes! / Ta now þy grymme tole to þe, / And let se how þou cnokez.' / 'Gladly, sir, for soþe', / Quoþ Gawan; his ax he strokes. / Þe grene knyȝt vpon grounde grayþely hym dresses, / A littel lut with þe hede, þe lere he discouerez, / His longe louelych lokkez he layd ouer his croun, / Let þe naked nec to þe note schewe. / Gauan gripped to his ax, and gederes hit on hyȝt, / Þe kay fot on þe folde he before sette, / Let him doun lyȝtly lyȝt on þe naked, / Þat þe scharp of þe schalk schyndered þe bones, / And schrank þurȝ þe schyire grece, and schade hit in twynne, / Þat þe bit of þe broun stel bot on þe grounde. / Þe fayre hede fro þe halce hit to þe erþe, / Þat fele hit foyned wyth her fete, þere hit forth roled; / Þe blod brayd fro þe body, þat blykked on þe grene; (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 11-12).

6. And nawþer faltered ne fel þe freke neuer þe helder, / Bot styþly he start forth vpon styf schonkes, / And runyschly he raȝt out, þere as renkkez stoden, / Laȝt to his lufly hed, and lyft hit vp sone; / And syþen boȝez to his blonk, þe brydel he cachchez, / Steppez into stelbawe and strydez alofte, / And his hede by þe here in his honde haldez; / And as sadly þe segge hym in his sadel sette / As non vnhap had hym ayled, þaȝ hedlez he were / in stedde. / He brayde his bulk aboute, / Þat vgly bodi þat bledde; / Moni on of hym had doute, / Bi þat his resounz were redde. / For þe hede in his honde he haldez vp euen, / Toward þe derrest on þe dece he dressez þe face, /

And hit lyfte vp þe yȝe-lyddez and loked ful brode, / And meled þus much with his muthe, as ȝe may now here: / 'Loke, Gawan, þou be grayþe to go as þou hettez, / And layte as lelly til þou me, lude, fynde, / As þou hatz hette in þis halle, herande þise knyȝtes; / To þe grene chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte / Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt--disserued þou habbez / To be ȝederly ȝolden on Nw Ȝeres morn. / Þe knyȝt of þe grene chapel men knowen me mony; / Forþi me for to fynde if þou fraystez, faylez þou neuer. / Þerfore com, oþer recreaunt be calde þe behoues.' / With a runisch rout þe raynez he tornez, / Halled out at þe hal dor, his hed in his hande, / Þat þe fyr of þe flynt flaȝe fro fole houes. / To quat kyth he becom knwe non þere, / Neuer more þen þay wyste from queþen he watz wonnen. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 13).

7. Þere watz much derue doel driuen in þe sale / Þat so worthé as Wawan schulde wende on þat ernde, / To dryȝe a delful dynt, and dele no more / wyth bronde. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 16).

8. Wel much watz þe warme water þat waltered of yȝen, / When þat semly syre soȝt fro þo wonez / þad daye. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 19).

9. Gawayn glyȝt on þe gome þat godly hym gret, / And þuȝt hit a bolde burne þat þe burȝ aȝte, / A hoge haþel for þe nonez, and of hyghe eldee; / Brode, bryȝt, watz his berde, and al beuer-hwed, / Sturne, stif on þe stryþþe on stalworth schonkez, / Felle face as þe fyre, and fre of hys speche; / And wel hym semed, for soþe, as þe segge þuȝt, / To lede a lortschyp in lee of leudez ful gode. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 24).

10. Þe place þat ȝe prece to ful perelous is halden; / Þer wonez a wyȝe in þat waste, þe worst vpon erþe, / For he is stiffe and sturne, and to strike louies, / And more he is þen any mon vpon myddelerde, / And his body bigger þen þe best fowre / Þat ar in Arþurez hous, Hestor, oþer oþer. / He cheuez þat chaunce at þe chapel grene, / Þer passes non bi þat place so proude in his armes / Þat he ne dyngez hym to deþe with dynt of his honde; / For he is a mon methles, and mercy non vses, / For be hit chorle oþer chaplayn þat bi þe chapel rydes, / Monk oþer masseprest, oþer any mon elles, / Hym þynk as queme hym to quelle as quyk go hymseluen. / Forþy I say þe, as soþe as ȝe in sadel sitte, / Com ȝe þere, ȝe be kylled, may þe knyȝt rede, / Trawe ȝe me þat trwely, þaȝ ȝe had twenty lyues to spende. / He hatz wonyd here ful ȝore, / On bent much baret bende, / Aȝayn his dyntez sore / Ȝe may not yow defende. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 58).

11. And syþen he keuerez bi a cragge, and comez of a hole, / Whyrlande out of a wro wyth a felle weppen, / A denez ax nwe dyȝt, þe dynt with to ȝelde, / With a borelych bytte bende by þe halme, / Fyled in a fylor, fowre fote large- / Hit watz no lasse bi þat lace þat lemed ful bryȝt- / And þe gome in þe grene gered as fyrst, / Boþe þe lyre and þe leggez, lokkez and berde, / Saue þat fayre on his fote he foundez on þe erþe, / Sette þe stele to þe stone, and stalked bysyde. / When he wan to þe watter, þer he wade nolde, / He hypped ouer on hys ax, and orpedly strydez, / Bremly broþe on a bent þat brode watz aboute, / on snawe. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 61).

12. THEN þe gome in þe grene grayþed hym swyþe, / Gederez vp hys grymme tole Gawayn to smyte; / With alle þe bur in his body he ber hit on lofte, / Munt as maȝtyly as marre hym he wolde; / Hade hit dryuen adoun as dreȝ as he atled, / Þer hade ben ded of his dynt þat doȝty watz euer. / Bot Gawayn on þat giserne glyfte hym bysyde, / As hit com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende, / And schranke a lytel with þe schulderes for þe scharp yrne. / Þat oþer schalk wyth a schunt þe schene wythhaldez, / And þenne repreued he þe prynce with mony prowde wordez: / 'Þou art not Gawayn,' quoþ þe gome, 'þat is so goud halden, / Þat neuer arȝed for no here by hylle ne be vale, / And now þou fles for ferde er þou fele harmez! / Such cowardise of þat knyȝt cowþe I neuer here. / Nawþer fyked I ne flaȝe, freke, quen þou myntest, / Ne kest no kauelacion in kyngez hous Arthor. / My hede flaȝ to my fote, and ȝet flaȝ I neuer; / And þou, er any harme hent, arȝez in hert; / Wherfore þe better burne me burde be called þerfore.' / Quoþ Gawayn, 'I schunt onez, / And so wyl I no more; / Bot þaȝ my hede falle on þe stonez, / I con not hit restore. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 62-63).

13. 'Bot busk, burne, bi þi fayth, and bryng me to þe poynt. / Dele to me my destiné, and do hit out of honde, / For I schal stonde þe a strok, and start no more / Til þyn ax haue me hitte: haf here my trawþe.' / 'Haf at þe þenne!' quoþ þat oþer, and heuez hit alofte, / And waytez as wroþely as he wode were. / He myntez at hym maȝtyly, bot not þe mon rynez, / Withhelde heterly his honde, er hit hurt myȝt. / Gawayn grayþely hit bydez, and glent with no membre, / Bot stode stylle as þe ston, oþer a stubbe auþer / Þat raþeled is in roché grounde with rotez a hundreth. / Þen muryly efte con he mele, þe mon in þe grene: / 'So, now þou hatz þi hert holle, hitte me bihous. / Halde þe now þe hyȝe hode þat Arþur þe raȝt, / And kepe þy kanel at þis kest, ȝif hit keuer may.' / Gawayn ful gryndelly with greme þenne sayde: / 'Wy! þresch on, þou þro mon, þou þretez to longe; / I hope þat þi hert arȝe wyth þyn awen seluen.' / 'For soþe,' quoþ þat oþer freke, 'so felly þou spekez, / I wyl no lenger on lyte lette þin ernde riȝt nowe.' / Þenne tas he hym stryþe

to stryke, / And frounsez boþe lyppe and browe; / No meruayle þaȝ hym myslyke / Þat hoped of no rescowe. (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 63).

14. He lyftes lyȝtly his lome, and let hit doun fayre / With þe barbe of þe bitte bi þe bare nek; / Þaȝ he homered heterly, hurt hym no more / Bot snyrt hym on þat on syde, þat seuered þe hyde. / Þe scharp schrank to þe flesche þurȝ þe schyre grece, / Þat þe schene blod ouer his schulderes schot to þe erþe; / And quen þe burne seȝ þe blode blenk on þe snawe, / He sprit forth spenne-fote more þen a spere lenþe, / Hent heterly his helme, and on his hed cast, / Schot with his schulderez his fayre schelde vnder, / Braydez out a bryȝt sworde, and bremely he spekez- / Neuer syn þat he watz burne borne of his moder / Watz he neuer in þis worlde wyȝe half so blyþe- / 'Blynne, burne, of þy bur, bede me no mo! / I haf a stroke in þis sted withoute stryf hent, / And if þow rechez me any mo, I redyly schal quyte, / And ȝelde ȝederly aȝayn- and þerto ȝe tryst- / and foo. / Bot on stroke here me fallez- / Þe couenaunt schop ryȝt so, / Fermed in Arþurez hallez- / And þerfore, hende, now hoo!' (Tolkien *et al*, 1967: 63-64).

15. Et que que il parloit einsi / Et li autre sisent en pais, / Parmi la porte del palais / Virent venir un chevalier / Molt grant, sor un bauchant destrier, / Vestus d'un peliçon hermine / Qui près de terre li traïne. / S'ot sor son chief un chapelet / A un cercle d'or de bonet; / Et ot chainte une longue espee / Qui de fin or ert enheudee, / Et les renges de fin orfrois. / Si vint a cheval trusqu'al dois / Et dist oiant toz hautement: / "Rois Artus, cil Diex qui ne ment / Vos doinst honor et longue vie." / —"Amis, et il te beneïe." / —"Rois, fait cil, un don vos demant." / —"Chevalier, nomez le avant; / Et tels puet estre, vos l'arez." / Et cil respont: "Vos le sarez: / Colee doner sanz dechoivre / Vos demant por autre rechoivre." / —"Amis, qu'es[t] ce? Que dites vous?" / —"Rois, je vos di tot a estrous / Que s'il a çaiens chevalier / Qui la teste me puist trenchier / A un sol cop de ceste espee, / Et je me puis de la colee / Après resaner et garir, / Seürs puet estre et sanz falir / D'ui en un an autel reprendre / La colee, s'il l'ose atendre." (Roach, 1949: 90-91).

16. An ce qu'il aloient parlant, / Ez vos seur un cheval ferrant / Un chevalier parmi la porte. / Ses chevaux grant oirre l'aporte, / Et il va chantant un sonet. / S'ot une coife de bonet / An son chief por la grant challine, / S'avoit vestu robe d'ermine, / S'ot par desus çainte l'espee / Dont puis ot la teste copee, / Anrangiee de soie fine. / Jusque devant lou roi ne fine, / Et dist: "Rois, Damediex vos saut / Con le meilleur et le plus haut / Rois qui hui cest jor soit an terre. / Un don vos suis venuz requerre, / S'i[l] vos plaist que le me doigniez." / —"Amis, fait li rois, bien veigniez. / Vostre salu vos e randu, / Quant j'avré le don antandu / Que vos demander me voudrez, / Ce saichiez que ja n'i faudrez." / —"Rois, fait il, ne vos voil deçoivre. / Li dons est colee reçoivre / Por une [autre] collee prandre. / —"Conmant? Ce me devez aprandre." / —"Rois, et je le vos aprandrai. / Ceste espee vos baillerai / Devant vos a un chevalier. / S'il me puet la teste tranchier / A un cop, si pant dou ferir. / Se je me puis dou cop garir, / Rande le moi a ancouan / Ci devant vos." (Roach, 1950: 210-211).

17. Atant sanz plus dire descent. / L'espee trait et si lor tent, / Mais n'i a nul qui l'ost baillier. / Ainz dïent tuit li chevalier / Molt seroit fols cil qui ferroit, / Qu'en aventure se metroit, / Si n'i aroit pris ne honeur. / "Ha! fait li chevaliers, seigneur; / Iche que ert? N'en ferois plus? / Or poëz veoir, rois Artus, / Que vostre cors n'est pas si riche / Corne chascuns dist et affiche; / N'i a nul chevalier hardi. / Por voir le vos tesmoing et di / Que l'en dira mais tels noveles / Par tot qui n'ierent mie beles." / Aler s'en revoloit atant, / Quant Carados sali avant / Qui noviax chevaliers estoit; / Si se desfuble a grant esploit / Et jecte a terre son mantel. / Qui qu'il anuit ne qui soit bel, / A celui vient, si prent l'espee / Et li a del poing destre hostee. (Roach, 1949: 91-92).

18. —"Par Saint Jouan, / Fait Kex, je nou feroie mie / Por tot l'avoir de Normandie. / Sire chevalier, fox seroit / Qui an tel maniere i ferroit." / Li chevalier met pié a terre. / "Rois, fait il, le don vos voil querre. / Se m'an avïez escondit, / Par tot le monde seroit dit; / Certes que bien dire savroie / Qu'a vostre cort failli avroie / A un petit don que j'e quis, / Si vos ai molt de loing requis." / Hors dou fuerre a s'espee traite. / Li rois pansive chiere a faite. / Esbaïs sont grant et menor, / An leur cuer pansent quelle honor / Pueent avoir de lui ferir. / Caradoc nou puet plus soufrir / Qui chevalier estoit noviaux. / Tost fu gitez jus ses mantiaux, / Si vet corant au chevalier; / An sa main prant le branc d'acier. / Cil li a dit un de ses diz: / "Estes vos au meillor esliz?" / —"Certes, nenil, mes au plus fol." (Roach, 1950: 211-212).

19. Li rois le voit, molt par l'en poise, / Si dist: "Biax niez, ceste prooise / Peüssiez sanz honte laissier. / Çaiens a maint bon chevalier / Qui ausi bien ou miex ferissent / Com vos, se faire le volsissent. / Tuit le tienent a musardie / Qu'emprise avez trop grant folie." / Quant Carados le roi oï, / Tel honte en ot toz enrogi, / Mais por ce n'en volt rien lessier, / Ains se trait pres del chevalier. / Por miex ferir l'espee atorne, / Et cil devers le roi se torne, / Le chief baisse, le col estent. / Cil fiert si viguereusement / Que la teste voler li fist / Devant le dois, mais cil la prist / Par les treches a ses deus mains / Ausi come s'il fust toz sainz, / Si le rajoinst isnellepas. /

"Caradot, fait il, feru m'as." / —"Voire, dist Kex, mais poi vos chaut. / D'ui en un an, coment qu'il aut, / Ne volroie estre en son liu mis / Por tot l'avoir de cest païs." / —"Caradot, fait li chevaliers, / D'ui en un an, biax amis chiers, / Reserai chi, ce sachiez bien; / Si ne laissier por nule rien / Que chi ne te truisse a tele eure." / Atant s'en part, plus n'i demeure. (Roach, 1949: 92-93).

20. Li chevalier estant lou col / Et met sa teste seur un dois. / Saichiez molt fu iriez li rois / Et tuit li baron de la cort. / Par po messire Yvains ne cort / L'espee saichier de ses mains; / Mais ancor n'est ce que dou mains, / Car il pas ne li ostera. / Caradoc l'espee hauça, / Si l'an done une tel collee / Que jusqu'au dois an est collee. / Li chief li volle nom pas pres, / Mais li cors le suit de si pres / Q'ainçois que garde s'an soit prise, / Ra li cors sa teste reprise; / Rasise l'a an son droit leu. / Li chevalier saut ou mileu / Devant lou roi toz sains et saux. / "Rois, fait il, or ne soiés faux. / Se j'ai collee receüe, / An vostre cort resoit reüe / La moie ancoan a cel jor." / Li rois n'i fait plus de sejor; / Trestout lou barnaige i semont, / Et ceus d'aval et ceus d'amont, / Que tuit einsint com il estoient / A sa cort a l'autre an i soient, / A icest jor nonmeemant / Et an cel leu demeinemant. / "Caradoc, fait il, grant collee / M'avez devant lou roi donee. / D'ui an un an ravroiz la moie." / Atant a tenue sa voie. (Roach, 1950: 212-213).

21. Et li rois toz iriez remaint / Et toz dolens, et molt se plaint. / Si font li autre chevalier; / A pairies volrent puis mengier / Tant sont irié et amati. / A grant dol la cors departi; / Communement tuit s'en revont / Arriere es terres dont il sont. / Mais anchois fist li rois banir / Qu'en l'an aprés qui doit venir / Resoit a Cardueil l'assamblee. (Roach, 1949: 93).

22. Li chevaliers de cort s'an vet, / Et li rois an ire remest / Tot som pansé et son afere. / Nuns ne porroit le duel retrere / Que font dames et chevaliers; / N'ont gaires ris a ce mangier, / Tote la cort fu esbaïe. [...] Por Caradoc plorent maint oil. (Roach, 1950: 213).

23. Et en ce qu'il sissent em pes, / Cil est entrez parmi la porte / Qui le malvais present aporte. / Tot a cheval, l'espee çainte, / Parmi la sale qui fu painte / En est alez au maistre dois / La ou estoit assis li rois. / Sanz dire mot a pié descent, / S'espee trait, nue la prent, / Et dist oiant le roi Artu: / "Caradot, cha vien! Ou es tu?" / —"Veez me chi," fait Carados. / —"Dont vien avant," ce dist cil lors. / Volentiers son mantel osta, / Et tot maintenant en vint la / Ou celui vit ester sor piez / Qui fait grant samblant d'estre iriez. / Li rois le voit, s'est trop dolens, / Mais de parler n'est mie lens. / "Ha, chevalier! fait il, merchi / De mon neveu; pas ne l'ochi. / Si grant raençon en avras / Com tu deviser le saras." / —"Dites dont coi."—Tot le harnois / Et as vilains et as cortois / De ceste cort en pués avoir. / Ainc mais ausi tres grant avoir / Por raenchon ne dona nus." / —"Rois, peu i a. Arai ent plus?" / -"Oïl, fait il, tot le tresor / Et les vaissiax d'argent et d'or / Que cist ont aporté chaiens." / —"Rois, fait cil, ce seroit noiens; / Car trestot li tresor del mont, / Ne qui jamais nul jor seront, / Por lui ne prendroie en eschange." / Quant li rois l'ot, doel fait estrange, / Et li autre de totes pars. / "Chevalier, molt par iez coars, / Dist Caradeus, fai erranment / Ce que tu dois. "Et cil estent / Le bras et lieve en haut l'espee, / Si esme a ferir grant colee. / Li rois se pasme maintenant; / Et la roïne ist fors plorant / Des chambres, qui set les noveles, / Et les dames et les puceles. / Quant ele vit l'espee nue / Toz li sanz li fuit et remue; / Molt est angoisseuse et dolente. / Come cele qui n'est pas lente / En vient vers lui et si li dist: / "Tien coi, chevalier, un petit, / Biax sire chiers, ne l'oci mie. / Por lui pués avoir a amie, / Qui qu'ele soit, dame ou pucele, / De çaiens tote la plus bele, / Ou ains totes se il te plest." / —"Roïne dame, noiens est. / Totes les dames de cest mont, / Ne les puceles qui i sont, / De son chief ne prendroie pas. / Alez vos ent plus que le pas / En vos chambres, ma doche dame, / Et si priiez a Dieu por l'ame, / Qu'il le mete en son paradis." / La roïne coevre son vis / Si s'en est tornee plorant, / Et les autres aprés crïant. / Li chevaliers hauche l'espee, / S'esme a ferir si grant colee / Que li plus de ceus del palais / Chaient pasmé tôt a un fes. / Mais il n'a de férir talent, / Ainz le prent al poing docement / Et dist: "Caradot, lieve sus. / Ne te ferai or nul mal plus, / Car trop es vaillans chevaliers / Et hardis et seürs et fiers. / Mais vien cha, si parole a moi / Priveement." Bien loi[n]s del roi / L'en a mené a une part. / "Tu iez mes fix, se Dix me gart, (Roach, 1949: 94-96).

24. Atant ez vos un chevalier / Seur son cheval, l'espee çainte; / N'a pas la fresche color tainte, / Ainz fu rovelanz por le chaut. / "Sire rois, fait il, Diex vos saut." / —"Amis, et Diex vos beneïe." / —"Caradoc, je ne te voi mie; / Vien avant, si avras ta feste. / Met moi ci am presant ta teste, / Car je t'i mis antan la moie, / Si est bien droiz que l'an revoie / Conmant je sai ferir d'espee, / Et si recevras ta collee." / Caradoc voit bien et antant / Que ses afaires ja l'atant. / Desfuble soi, si saut avant, / Sa teste li met am presant / Et li dist: "Biau sire, or m'avez; / Faites au miauz que vos savez." / —"Sire chevalier, fait li rois, / Ne soiés pas si po cortois / Que vos n'am preigniez reançon." / —"Reançon? Nomez la moi don." / —"Volantiers la vos nomerai, / Grant reançon vos an donrai. / Donrai vos [an], que je n'an mante, / Trestote la vaiselemante / Qui an ma cort sera trovee, / Qui c'onques l'i ait aportee, / Et le harnois au chevalier, / Qu'il est mes niés, si l'ai

molt chier." / —"Certes je n'am prandroie pas, / Ainz am panrai isnellepas / La teste, n'am parost ja nus." / —"Ancore vos dirai je plus: / Je vos donrai tot les tresor, / Soient pierres, argent ou or, / Qui seront trové an ma terre, / Am Breteigne n'en Angleterre / Et par tote ma seignorie." / —"Certes je n'an panroie mie, / Ainz li trancherai ja la teste. / Certes vos me tenez por beste, / Ainz am panrai isnellepas, / Que eschaper ne me puet pas, / La teste, n'am parost ja nus." / —"Et si vos dirai ancor plus." / Hauce la paume, si eesme. / Li rois lou voit, de duel se pasme. / Caradoc li a dit par ire: / "Por quoi ne ferez vos, biau sire? / De deus maus me faites morir / Qui tant aesmez a ferir; / Molt vos an tieng or a coart." / La roïne de l'autre part / Por lui proier i est venue. / De sa chambre [s']an est issue, / Et o lui dames et pucelles / Tiex cent qui assez furent belles. / "Sire chevalier, ne toichiez, / Fait elle; ce seroit pechiez / Et domaiges s'il iert ocis. / De lui aiez por Dieu mercis. / Quant vos sa mort m'avroiz donee, / Bien vos sera guerredonee. / Creez consoil, si feroiz bien. / Ferïez an vos por moi rien? / Faites an ore tant por moi: / Carado le neveu lou roi / Clamez quite de la collee; / Grant reançon an iert donee. / Vez ceanz mainte damoiselle / Gentes de cors, belles pucelle; / Totes les am poëz avoir. / Quitez le, si feroiz savoir." / —"Dame, li chevalier respont, / Trestotes les dames dou mont / Certes n'am prandroie je mie, / Ne autre gaige que la vie. / Se vos ne l'osez esgarder, / Alez vostre chambre garder." / La reïne cuevre son chief, / Son duel conmance derechief. / An sa chambre s'an est antree / O les dames de la contree; / Ansamble o li tel duel demeinent, / Par po qu'a la mort ne se meinent. / Li rois ne tuit cil chevalier / Ne s'i savoient conseillier, / Ainz demenoient un duel tel / Que il par nul home mortel / Ne porroit pas estre retraiz. / Vers un dois s'est Caradoc traiz, / Desus a sa teste couchiee. / Et cil a l'espee hauciee, / Dou plat le fiert, point ne li grieve. / "Caradoc, fait il, or te lieve, / Car ce seroit trop grant outraiges / Se t'ocioie, et grant domaiges. / A une part parole a moi, / Un po voil consoillier a toi." / A conseil l'a raison mis. / "Sez por quoi je ne t'e ocis? / Tu es mes filz, je suis tes pères." (Roach, 1950: 215-218).

25. Li chevalier et les dames se pasment desus lui, au départir. Lanceloz a tout ce oï, si s'an merveille mout, mès il n'an peut nul véoir. Atant ez-vos li chevalier qu'il descent parmi la sale et estoit vestuz d'une coste vermeille courte; et estoit ceinz d'une riche ceinture d'or, et avoit un riche fermail à son col, où mout avoit de riches pierres; et avoit un grant chapel, an son chief, d'or; et tenoit une grant hache. Li chevaliers iert de grant biauté et de jeune aage. Lanceloz le voit venir, si l'esgarde mout volentiers, car il le voit apert. Et li chevaliers li a dit: "Sire, descendez." - "Certes, set Lanceloz, volentiers." Il descent et atache son cheval à un annel d'argent qui estoit el perron, et oste son escu de son col et son glaive de sa main. "Sire, fet-il au chevalier, que plest-vos?" - "Sire, il couvient que vos me copez la teste de ceste hache; car de ceste arme est ma mort jugiée, ou je vos an trancherai la vostre." - "Avoi, sire, fet Lanceloz, qu'est-ce que vos me dites?" - "Sire, fet li chevaliers, ce que vos oez à feire le couvient ainssint, puisque vos estes venuz en ceste cité." - "Sire, set Lanceloz, il seroit mout fox qui de.cest jeu-parti ne panroit le meillor à son eus; mès je an serai blamez se je vos oci sanz nul meffet." - "Certes, fet li chevaliers, vos n'an povez partir autremant." - "Biau sire, fet Lanceloz, vos estes si genz et si apris; conmant vet ce que vos venez si cointement à vostre mort? Vos savez bien que je vos occirai ainçois que vos moi, puisque ainsint est." - "Ce sai-je bien de voir, fet li chevaliers; mès vos me créanteroiz, ainçois que je muire, que vos revendroiz dedanz ceste cité antre ci et un an, et que vos metroiz vostre chief an autretel abandon sanz chalonge conme li miens iert mis." - "Par mon chief, fet Lanceloz, vos ne m'i sauriez chose mestre que je ne préisse ainçois respit de mort que morir orandroit. Mès de ce me merveil-je que vos estes si bel atornez por recevoir la mort." - "Sire, fet li chevaliers, cil qui veust aler devant le Sauvéour del monde se doit apareillier au plus bel qu'il peut. Je me sui par confession espurgiez de toutes les vileinies et de toutes les mauveisliez que je onques fis; si en sui veraiement repentanz, si veil morir en tel point." Après, li tant la hache et Lanceloz la prant et la voit mout tranchant et mout aguisiée. "Sire, fet li chevaliers, tandez vostre main vers cel mostier que vos véez ilec." - "Sire, fet Lanceloz, volentiers." - "Ainssint me jurez-vos, sor les seintes reliques de cest mostier, que vos, d'ui cest jor an 1 an, à l'eure que vos m'aurez ocis, ou einçois, revenroiz ici méimes et metrez vostre chief an autretel péril conme li miens iert jà mis, sans desfans." - "Je le vos jur et créant, fet Lanceloz, ainsint." Atant s'ajenouille li chevaliers et estant le col au plus qu'il peut; et Lanceloz prant la hache à deus mains, puis li dist: "Sire chevaliers, por Dieu, aiez merci de vos méimes." - "Leissiez-vos la teste coper, fet li chevaliers, car autremant n'an puis-je avoir merci." - "En non Dieu, fet Lanceloz, ce vos veil-je refuser." Atant entoise la hache et li tranche le chief de si grant aïr qu'il li fet voler VII piez en sus del cors. Cil chéï à terre quant ces chiés fu copez, et Lanceloz geta la hache jus et se pensse qu'il feroit là dedanz mauveis demorer à son eus. Il vient à son cheval et prant ces armes et monte et regarde derier soi et ne voit pas le cors del chevalier ne le chief, ne ne sot que tout fu devenu, fors que tant que il ot un grant deul et un grant cri, loing en la

cité, de chevaliers et de dames, et dient qu'il iert vengiez, se Dieu plest, au terme qui mis i est ou ainçois. Lanceloz ist fors de la cité… (Potvin, 1866: 103-104).

26. …il descendi, puis areinna son cheval à un anel, qui estoit fichiez el perron de marbre. Il n'i out geires esté quant uns chevaliers descent, granz et biaus et fors et délivres, et estoit escourciez en I bliast de soie mout haust, et tenoit la hache en sa main, de quoi Lanceloz avoit tranchiée la teste à l'autre chevalier; il la venoit aguisant d'une cueuz, por mieux tranchier. Lanceloz li demande: "Que feroiz de cele hache?" - "Par mon chief, fet li chevaliers, ce sauroiz-vos autresint con mes frères le sot, qui vos en tranchastes le chief, se je puis esploitier." - "Conment, fet Lancelot, occirois-me-vos donc?" - "Ce sauroiz-vos, fet cil, ainçois que vos partoiz de ci. Dont ne créantastes-vos loiaument que vos metriez vostre chief en autretel abandon conme li chevaliers mist le sien sanz desfans, que vos océistes? ne autrement ne vos en povez-vos partir. Or si venez avant sans arest et si vos ajenoilliez, et estendez le col aussint conme mes freres fist; si vos trancherai la teste; et, se vos ce ne volez feire de vostre gré, vos troveroiz bien qui le vos fera feire à force, se vos estiez XX chevaliers autretel con vos estes uns. Mès je sai bien que vos n'estes ci venuz por el mès que por aquiter vostre fience et que vos n'i metroiz nul contenz." Lanceloz cuide mourir et veust atendre san faille ce qu'il ot en convenant; si se couche à terre en croiz et crie à Dieu merci. Il li menbre de la réine et crie à Dieu merci et dit: "Ha, dame, fet-il, jà mès ne vos verrai; car, se je vos éusse une foiz véue ainçois que je fusse morz, ce me fust mout grant confort, et si s'en partist m'âme plus à eise. Mès ce que je ne vos verrai jà mès, si com moi est avis, si me desconforte plus que la mort, dont morir me couvient; car mourir couvient-il quant l'an a tant vescu. Mès je vos créant bien que m'amor ne vos faudra jà et jà ne sera que m'âme ne vos aint autretant en l'autre siècle conme li cors a fet en cestui, se ele en a povoir." Adonc li chéirent les larmes des euz, ne onques, puis qu'il fu chevaliers, ce dit li contes, ne larmoia por riens qui li avenist ne por pesence, que cele foiz et une autre. Il prant trois pens d'erbe, si s'aconmenia, et puis si s'est seigniez et bénéiz; puis, se dresce, si se met à jenoillons et estant le col. Li chevaliers entoise la hache; Lanceloz ot venir le cop, si beisse le chief et la hache passe outre. Il li dist: "Sire chevaliers, ainsint ne fist mie mes frères que vos océistes, ainz tint le chief et le col tout quoi, et ausint vos couvient-il feire." Deus damoiseles s'apèrent aus fenestres del palès, de mout très grant biauté, et connurent bien Lancelot. Si conme li chevaliers ot entesé l'autre cop, l'une des damoiseles li escrie: "Si vos volez avoir m'amor à toujors mès, gitez jus la hache et si clamez quite le chevalier, ou, ce non, vos avez à moi failli." Li chevaliers giète tantost la hache jus et chiet à Lancelot au piez et li crie merci conme au plus loial chevalier del monde. "Mès vos, aiez merci de moi que vos ne m'ocioiz, fet Lanceloz, car à vos en doi-je la merci requerre." - "Sire, fet li chevaliers, certeinnement non ferai-je; ainz vos aiderai à mon povoir à garantir envers touz homes, encor aiez-vos ocis mon frère." (Potvin, 1866: 232-233).

27. Li chastiaus si tres forz estoit / que nul asalt ne redotoit, / que clos estoit a la reonde / d' une eve grant, lee et parfonde. / Et si estoit tot entor clos / de granz pieus, bien aguz et gros; / et en chascun des pieus avoit / — mes qu'en un seul ou il failloit — / une teste de chevalier. / Gauvains ne vost mie laissier. / Ne huis ne porte n'i avoit; / li chastiaus si fort tornoioit / con muele de molin qui muet, / et con la trompe que l'en suet / a la corgiee démener. (Maisières, 1911: 161).

28. Atant, ez vos que issir voit / de la cave amont, un degré, / un vilain trestot herupé. / Bien deïst qui l'eüst veü / qu'il eüst son oirre perdu. / Moût sanble estre li vilains fel, / plus estoit granz que saint Marcel; / et sor son col a aportee / une jusarme grant et lee. / Mes mout se mervelle Gauvains / de ce que il vit lo vilain / qui mor resanble de Moretaigne, / ou de ces vilains de Champaigne / que li solaus a toz tanez. / Devant Gauvain s'est aprestez, / si l'a maintenant salué. / (Et Gauvains a mout regardé / sa contenance et sa figure.) / «Et tu aies bonne aventure.» / Fet Gauvains: «Se por bien lo diz?» / «Oïl certes, mes a hardi / «te tieng, quant çaiens ies venuz. / «Mout as or bien tes pas perduz, / «qu'il ne puet estre en graignor serre / «li frains que tu i es venuz querre, / «que bones gardes a entor. / «Mout t'estuet rendre grant estor, / «si m'aït Dieus, ainz que tu l'aies.» / «De noient» fet Gauvains, «t'esmaies, / «que certes assez en rendrai; / «si m'aït Dieus, ainz i morrai, / «que je lo frainc n'aie tot quite.» / Et cil onques plus ne respite; / mes por ce qu'il voit aserir, / cil s'entremet de lui servir; / et tot droit a l'ostel lo moinne, / de lui aseoir moût se painne. / La mule ra bien ostelee. / Une blanche toaille lee / et deus bacins prent li vilains, / si li done a laver ses mains, / (que laienz n'a plus de maisniee). / Ja estoit la table dreciee / Gauvains assist au mengier, / si menja qu'il en ot mestier. / Et cil l'en done a grant plenté, / si lo sert a sa volenté. / Tot maintenant que mengié a, / et li vilains la table osta / et si li a l'eve aportee. / Une grant coche haute et lee / li a fete, por lui cochier, / car mout lo vialt bien aïsier, / con a tel chevalier covient. / Maintenant delez lui revient. / «Gauvains» fet il,» enz en cest lit / «sanz chalonge et sanz contredit / «girras tu toz seus anuit; mes / «ice te demant tot en

pes: / «ançois que tu t'ailles cochier, / «por ce que t'ai oï prisier, / «te partis orendroit un jeu, / «et por ce que je voi mon leu, / «si pren tôt a ta volenté.» / Et Gauvains li a creanté / qu'il en prendra loquel que soit. / «Di,» fet Gauvains, «que orendroit? / «Si m'ait Deus, l'un en prendré, / «ne de mot ne te mentiré, / «que je te tieng a mon bon oste.» / «Anuit» fait il «la teste m'oste / «a ceste jusarme trenchant; / «si la m'oste par tel convant, / «que la toe te trencherai / «lou matin, quant je revenrai... / «Or pren», fet il, «sanz contredit.» / «Mout savré» fait Gauvains, «petit, / «se je ne sai louquel je preigne. / «Je prendré conment qu'il aviegne: / «anuit la toe trencherai, / «et lou matin te renderai / «la moie, se viaus que la rende.» / «Mal dahez ait qui miaus demande;» / fet li vilains, «or en vien donc.» / Lors lou moinne. Desor un tronc / li vilains lo col li estent. / Maintenant la jusarme prent / Gauvains, si li coupe la teste / a un cop, que plus n'i areste. / Li vilains resalt maintenant / sor ses piez, et sa teste prent; / dedenz la cave en est entrez. / Et Gauvains s'en est retornez, / si s'est couchiez isnelement; / jusqu'au jor dort seürement. (Maisières, 1911: 163-165).

29. Lendemain des qu'il ajorna, / Gauvains se lieve et atorna. / Atant ez vos que li vilains / revint toz haitiez et toz sains, / et sa jusarme sor son col. / Or se puet bien tenir por fol / Gauvains, quant il ot regardee / la teste que il ot coupee; / mes ne lou redota noiant. / Et li vilains parole atant, / qui n'estoit de rien esperduz. / «Gauvains,» fet il, «je sui venuz, / «et si te rapel de covent.» / «Je nel contredi de noient, / «que bien voi que fere l'estuet, / «ne conbatre pas ne se puet.» / Et si lou deüst il bien faire, / mes desloiauté ne viaut fere; / por ce que covent li avoit, / dist que volentiers li rendroit. / «Or venez donc» fet li vilains. / Fors de laienz s'en ist Gauvains, / lou col li estent sor lo tronc. / Et li vilains li dist adonc: / «Lesse col venir a plenté.» / «Je n'en ai plus,» fet il, «par De, / «mes fier i, se ferir i viaus.» / Ce seroit domache et diaus, / si m'aït Dieus, s'il i feroit! / Sa jusarme hauce tot droit, / qu'il lo fet por lui esmaier, / mes n'a talant de lui tochier, / por ce que mout loiaus estoit, / et que bien tenu li avoit / ce qu'il li avoit creanté. (Maisières, 1911: 165-166).

30. quant un chevalier d'autre terre / por la pucele venoit querre / lo frainc qui ladedenz estoit, / a lui conbatre se devoit, / et s'il estoit par lui vaincuz, / ja eschanges n'en fust renduz, / se de la teste non trenchier / et puis en un des piez fichier, / de coi li chastiaus clos estoit. / Et se autrement avenoit, / que cil refust par lui vaincuz, / un autres pieus seroit feruz. / tant qu'autres chevaliers venist, / que cil par bataille vainquist. (Maisières, 1911: 170-171).

31. Tot droit vers le castiel amont. / Il n'ot mius atorné el mont / Ne plus rice ne mius seant, / Et trovent .I. vilain seant / A senestre devers le porte, / Et .I. garçons la li(a) aporte / Entre ses .II. mains .I. hace. / "Hunbaus," fait il, "qui qui me hace, / De cestui vel avoir mes drois." / Deseur (mes) ses piés se drece drois, / Si ne vit point de l'autre part. / Bien sanble honme de male part, / Grans ert et noirs, lais et hideus. / Les chevaliers esgarde ansdeus, / Si lor devie[e] mout la voie. / Hunbaut li prie tote voie / Que dusqu'al (al) revennir atende. / Cil ne fait sanblant qu'il l'entende. / Il tint se hace entre ses mains. / Et dist Gauvains: "U plus u mains / En ferons ici orendroit, / — Cil demande ne sai quel droit — / Ains que de ci soiens parti." / Et dist Hunbaus: ".I. ju parti / Vos part, que bien vos sai aprendre, / Mais il est mout sauvage au prendre. / En l'un et en l'autre a mescief: / Vos li poés trencier le cief / De cele hace tot avant, / Ja nus ne vos serra garant. / Son col vos abandonne et livre / Par covent que tot a delivre / Le vostre li tendés aprés. / Et il de vos se tenra pres, / Et si tenra le hace as mains, / Ne vos fera ne plus ne mains / Que seulement .I. cop sans plus. / Li gius est partis, n'i a plus. / Le quel que vos plaira, prendés, / De nule rien n'i mesprendés / Vers le vilan qui le ju pa[r]t" / Et Gauvains respont: "D'autre part / Je m'en irai ja a consel, / A moi mëisme me consel. / Conment qu'il voist, je vos creanc. / Bailliés moi cele hace avant, / Ja n'en ferai nule aramie, / Quant a l'asise met ma vie....." / Dist Gauvains: "Je ferrai premier, / Car je ne veul mie trencier / Si con li doi l'ont devisé / Et je devant l'ai recordé." / Adont le hace li tendi / Li vilains, et si f'estendi / Le col avant tot a sëur, / Et cuide bien estre sëur, / Ne n'i cuide avoir nule garde. / Mesire Gauvains le regarde, / Qui a vëu mainte mervelle, / Que cil forment ne s'en mervelle, / Et c'il est de si biel confort; / Car il cuide estre grant et fort / Et tient une hace trencant. / Bien se avisse dou trencant / Et de grant [cop] ferir s'esforce / Gauvains qui tot [i] met sa force. / Bien vos di qu'il ne se faint pas, / Ains fait voler plus de dis pas / La teste au pautonir en loins. / Et cil ouvri ans .II. ses puins, / Si cuide aler tantost aprés. / Mesire Gauvains se tint pres, / Qui d'encantement ert apris. / Le vilai[n] a par les dras pris, / Et por ço a son esme faut / Et li encantemens defaut; / Car il caï mors en la place / Et li encantemens s'esface, / C'onques puis n'i ot ju parti. / Maintenant sont d'iluec parti / Mesire Gauvains et Hunbaut, / Maintenant sont et lié et baut, / Que l'aventure ont si passee. (Stürzinger *et al*, 1914: 44-46).

32. Dollotar iar sin sin matin arnabárach a triur churad co cathraig Conroi, i. Cuculainn ocus Conall ocus Loegaire. Scorit a carptu i n-dorus na cathrach iar sin ocus tiagait isa rígthech, ocus ferais

faelti móir friu Blathnat ingen Mind ben Conroí maic Dairi, ocus ní rabi Cúroí hi fus ar a cind ind aidchi sin, ocus rofitir co ticfaitis, ocus foracaib comarle lasin mnái im réir na curad, co tísad don turus, dia n-dechaid sair hi tirib Scithiach, fo bith ní roderg Curui a claideb i n-Erind, o rogab gaisced co n-deochaid bás, ocus nocho dechaid bíad n-Erend inna beólu, cein rombói ina bethaid, o roptar slána a secht m-bliadna, úair ni rothallastar a úaill nach a allud nach a airechas nach a borrfad nách a nert nach a chalmatus i n-Érind. Bói immorro in ben día reir co fothrocud ocus co folcud ocus co lennaib inmescaib ocus co n-dérgodaib sainamraib, comtar budig. O thánic dóib iarom co dérgud, asbert in ben friú iar sudiu, cach fer díb a aidchi do fairi na cathrach, co tissad Cúruí, "ocus dano," or si, "is amlaid atrubairt Cúruí, a fari dúib íar n-aesaib." Cipé aird do airdib in domain tra i m-beth Curui, dochanad [bricht] for a chatraig cach n-aidchi, co m-bo déinithir bróin mulind, conna fogbaithe addorus do grés iar fuinud n-grene (Henderson, 1899: 100, 102).

33. Fer cumachta mori dano in t-Uath mac Imomain sin, notolbad in cach richt ba halic leis ocus no gniad druidechta ocus certa commain. Ba sé sin dano in siriti on ainmnigthir Belach Muni in t-Siriti, ocus is de atberthe in siriti de ar a met nodelbad i n-ilrechtaib.

Rancatár iarom co Úath co a loch, ocus fíadu o Budi leó. Atfíadat iarom do Úath aní má tud-chatar día saigthin. Asbért Úath friu, nodlemad a mbrethugud, acht co n-daimtis nammá for a breith. "Fodémam" or iat. Fonaiscid iorro. "Atá cennach lim-sa," for se, "ocus cé bé uab-si comallas frimsa hé, bid he beras in curadmír." "Cinnas cennaig sin?" for siat. "Biáil fil lim-sa," for sé, "ocus a tabairt illáim neich uaib-si, ocus mo chend do béim dím-sa indiu, ocus me-si dia béim de-sium imbárach."

Asberat immorro Conall ocus Loegaire, na dingentais in cennach sin, ar ni bói occo-som do chumachta a m-bith beó iarna n-dichennad, acht mani rabi oca-som. Obbsat iarom fair Conall ocus Loegaire in cennach sin. Cíatberat araili libair, co n-densat cennach fris, i. Loegaire do beim a chind de in cétla ocus a imgabáil dó, ocus Conall día imgabail ón mud chetna. Atbert immorro Cuculainn, co n-dingned cennach fris, dia tuctha dó in curadmír. Atbertsat immorro Conall ocus Loegaire, co leicfitis dó in curadmír, dia n-dernad cennach fri Úath. Fonaiscid Cuchulainn forro-som cen curadmír do chosnam, dia n-dernad cennach fri Uath. Fonaisccit-sium fairsium dano a dénam in cennaig. Dobeir Uath a chend forsin lic do Choinculaind (i. iar cor dó brechta hi faebur in belae), ocus dounsi Cuculainn béim da biáil féin do, co topacht a chend de. Luid íarom fon loch uadib, ocus a bial ocus a chend na ucht.

Tic íarom arabarach dia saichtin ocus nonsinethar Cuculainn dó forsin licc. Tairnid fo thri in m-bial for a munel ocus a cúl rempi. "Atrai a Cuchulainn!" for Úath, "rigi laéch n-Erenn duit ocus in curadmír cen chosnam." Lotar dó a triur churad co hEmain iar tain, ocus nirdaimset ind fir aili dó Coinculainn in breth rodnucad dó. Bói in t-imcosnam cetna beius imón curadmír. Ba si comairli Ulad forro dano a cur do saigid Conroí dia m-brethugud. Fáemitsium dano ani hi sin. (Henderson, 1899: 96, 98, 100).

34. Fect n-and do Ultaib i n-Emain Macha iar scís óenaig ocus cluchi dolluid Conchobur ocus Fergus mac Róig ocus mathi Ulad ol chena asin cluchemaig ammuig, co n-desetar thall isin Craebrúaid Conchobuir. Ní rabi Cuculainn and na Conall Cernach na Loegaire Búadach ind aidchi sin. Batár immorro formna lath n-gaile fer n-Ulad ol chena. Amal robátar and trath nóna deód lái, co n-accatar bachlach mór forgrainne chucu isa tech. Indar leó, ní rabi la Ultu láth gaile rosassad leth méite fair. Bá úathmar ocus bá granni a innas in bachlaig. Senchodal fría chnes ocus brat dub lachtna imbi, ocus dos bili mór fair, méit gamlías hi tallat trichait n-gamna. Súili cichurda budi inna cind, méit chore rodaim cechtar de na dá sula sin fria chend anechtair. Remithir dóit láma neich aile cach mér día méraib. Cepp ina láim chlí irraibe ere fichet cuinge do damaib. Biáil ina láim deis i n-deochatár tri coecait bruthdamna, búi feidm chuinge sesrige ina samthaig, nothescbad finna fri gaith ar altnidecht.

Dolluid fond ecosc sin, corrabi inna sessom i m-bun na gabla robói hi ciund tened. "In cuimce in taige duit ale" or Dubthach Dóeltengad frisin mbachlach, "in tan nád fagbai inad aile and, acht beith i-m-bun na gabla, manid caindleóracht in tige as áil duit do chosnam, acht namá bid mó bas loscud don tig oldás bas suillse don tegluch." "Cid hé mo dán dano, bes cotmidfider cacha bé dim airddi, co m-bad coitcenn a suillsi don tegluch ocus conná bad loscud don tig.

Acht namá," or se "ni hé mo dan do grés, atát dána lim chena. Aní día tudchad cuingid immorro," ol se, "nocon fúar i n-Érind nach i n-Alpain nach i n-Eoroip nach i n-Affraic nach i n-Assia co Grecia ocus Scithia ocus Insi Orc ocus Colomna-Ercoil ocus Tor m-Bregoind ocus Insi Gaíd nech no chomollad fir fer frim imbi. Uair roucsaid-se for n-Ulaid" or se "do slúagaib na tíri sin ule ar grain ocus greit ocus gaisced, ar airechas ocus uaill ocus ordan, ar fírinne ocus féle ocus febas, fagabar uaib óenfer chomallas frim-sa in ceist immátú."

“Ni cóir ém enech cóicid do brith” or Fergus mac Róich “arái óenfir dothesbaid díb oc denam anenig, ocus bes nipe nessu éc do suidiu oldás daitsiu.” “Ní oc a imgabail sin dano atúsa” ol se. “Finnamár dano do cheist” ol Fergus mac Róig. “Acht cordamthar fír fer dam “ol se “atbér.” “Is cóir fír fer do chomollod immorro” or Sencha mac Ailella, “ar ní fír fer do slúag mór muinterda brisiud for óenfer n-anaichnid etorro, ocus bád dóig lind dano,” ol Sencha, “mád cos trath-sa fogebthá óenfer, dotdingbad- su sunna.” “Facbaim Concobur fri láim,” ol se, “ dáig a rige, ocus fácbaim Fergus mac Róig, dáig a cotéchta, ocus cipé díb” or se “lasmis-étar cen mothá in dís sin, taét co tallur-sa a chend de innocht ocus co talla [sa mo cenn dím-sa imbarach dadaig].”

“Is derph tra ebectsa,” or Dubthach, “ni fuil ann nech bis fiu laoc dith.. ut... a n-degaid na deisi sin.” “Bed cusindosa on ém,” ar Munremar mac Gérrginnt. Dosgenn sithen for lar an tighe lasodain. Ba he tra a calmatus an Muinremair hisen: nert cet cathmiled antt 7 nert cét cetluigh a ccechtar a dao righedh. “Tair sis a pachlaigh, go ttallar-sa do cenn dit anocht 7 go ttallai-si ampuoruch dimb-sa dadoig,” ol Muinremur. “Fogeauhainn-si in gec mpaile anni sin, diamad edh bud al dam,” ol an baclach. “Amail rocinnsim“ ol se, “as amlaid dogniamm: misi da gaod do cenn did-sa anocht, tusa [dia gaod dim-sa] ampuo- rach dadaigh dia dighail.” “Tongai mo thuaith” ar Dubthach Daoltengoi, “ni hadlaice duid eacc sam- laidh, an fer muirfe anocht dia lil ambuaragh fort. Is ogott-sa t'oinar mata do cumachta do maruhad gach n-oidghe hocus do digail arnaparauch.” “ln comairli ém or ataid-siu uile ass ingnadh lip dogen-sa,” ol an bachlach. Fonaisce for a cele iarsuidiu a fir, orangabaigtiur im comallnad a dalai fris iarnaparag. (Henderson, 1899: 116, 118, 120, 122).

35. Lasogin gepte Munremar an m-bial a laim an bachlaig. Secht traighid iaram etir di aul in biela. Adaigh an bachlach iaramh a bragaid dar an ccip. Dombeir Muinremor bem don biail tar a bradaid go rogab an cep fris anis go rotebisstur a cenn gompoi a mpun ina gabla, compa lan an tellach dia cru. Atfraid suas la sodain 7 doecmallai suas iarsuidiu 7 tegmallai a ceann 7 a cep 7 a biail inda uct 7 as amlaid docuaid asin tigh, 7 sreatach na fola asan medea, gurlin an Craephruaid for gach leth 7 ba mor a n-adhuath ar machtath ar sceoil adtaorfas doib. “Tonga 7 r.” or Dubthach Doiltengo, “dia tti an baclach ambuaruch iarna marpad innocht, nifuicfea fer m-pethad la hulltu.” Tarmcuir tra an mpatlach iarnabarach dagaid 7 luid Muinnremar for inggauhal. Gabais an baclach ag car a achta ris. “Ni fir em do Muinnremur gin comallnadh cennaig frim-sa.”

Bai dīo Laogaire Búadach hifus ind adaig sin. Cia dīo curadaiph cosnus a cauradmír” or se, “Uladh, firfus ceandach frim-sai indocht? Cadi Laogaire Búadach?” or se. “Sunna,” or Lóegaire. Fonaisc fon innus cétna 7 ni tanaig Laogaire. Tig dīo iarnamarac 7 fonaisg ar Conall Cernach mur an cétna, 7 ni tanaig amur dotoing.

Tic dio an. IIII. hadaigh 7 ba lonn 7 bá uechell fair hisodain, Tarnecctar mna Ulad uile ind adaig sin do descin ind sgeoil iongnaith tanaic issin Croauhruain. Boi dono Cúchulaind hifuss innd adaigh sin. Rosngap an mpachlach griseth la sotthaind. Rosgaith pur n-gal 7 uur n-gaisgedh, a Ullti,” or se. “Mor menma bar ccurad impa curathmir,” ar se, “7 nittad tuolaing a cosnema. Caiti in siartha claontruad ucad,” ol ce “frisanapur Cuculaind, im pa ferr a priathar olttas an fianlaig naell.” “Ni hadlaig dam cennagh frit itir,” ol Cuchulaind. “Doig lium, a cuil truad, ar mór attadar ecc.” Toscenn Cúchulaind cuice la sodoin. Adaig sithi beimm ndo don piail co roben a cenn fri clethi na Croiphrúade, go ruscraith an deoch n-uile. Gapdi Cúchulain a cenn dofritisi 7 dommbeir buille nde ndonn imbialach connderna sligrich de. Atfraig suas iarsuithiu.

Iarnapuaruch a mpattur Uolaid o[c] caimcomet Conqlaind duss ind regad for imgapail an patlaig amail docodur an fiallach naill. Ottcondcadur Ulaid tra aurnuide an baclaig” do Coincculaind rosgaph mifri go mor 7 ba techto maruhcaoindi tid doradsact foir 7 roba cemin leo rapatne fod a hsaogail acht gu ttisad an paclach. Conid andsin ampert Conchobur fri Qoincualaind tairus naire: “Tar mo sciath 7 tar mo cloidim, ni ragh go racomallnar mo preidir frisin m-bachlach, uair ata ecc ar mo Cenn 7 as ferr limp ecc comm inchaib.”

Ammbadur and iarum deugh loi confacadur an mpaclach qgo. “Cadi Cúchulaind aile?” ar ce. “Atu a sonda immorro,” bur Cúchulaind. “Is issil o rad anocht, a truadan,” or se, “as mor attaidir-si ecc. Gib mor ataigther ecc, ni imgapail anattruiglus.” Toteit Cúchulaind cuge iarsuidiu 7 rigid a pradoid darsan ccepp. Boi do meat an cipp go nach ruacht a braidi gid gonuiciu a let. “Rig uaid do pratait, a trogoin,” ol an baclach. “Is confere dombere form,” or Cucculaind, “d[éna?] mo marbad giluath. Nimba coinpere em tucius fort arer,” or se. “Toingtea em,” ar Cúchulaind, “dia m-be og mu conferi pidam sitigthir coir uasatt.” “Ni fedaim t’airrlech” [ol an] baclach, “mett an cipp hocus gairdi do pratad 7 gairdi do taoiph.”

Rosini Cúchulaind arsuidiu ann m-braduid gu n-dechsad fertraig ferocloic idir gach da assnoi do 7 rosinit a prathoid go n-dechaid tar an ccepp don oile taiph. Tocpaidh an mbachlach an m-bial suas go ruacht clethi na domo. Trostt inna sencodla rommbaoi umon m-bachlach ocus trostt mbielao 7 nert in da lamha doddnuarguib bad mett fuamom fidbuidiu fortreghe a n-oidhce

gaoithi. Tairnich sis doridisiu coma co ... irig friaa pradhut 7 a cul reme. Mati fer n-Uladh uili oc a n-decsin innus sin.

"Attfraid suas, a Cúchulaind.. sbies do lataiph gaoile ufer n-Ulad nó Erenn beth ar a menmain beth im coipeis frit do ghoil na gaisged no firinde. Rige laech n-Eirenn duit on tratso 7 in curadmir gen chosnum..... s dod mnoi ria mnaim Ulad dogres a tteach n-oil 7 dīa," ar se, "cep ce nosda ceanai friut on trathsa. Tonga a toingti mo thuath, bid se fod a hsoegoil..... ph iaramh an patlach 7 as e Curui moc Daire dodeachoigh issin riucht sin do comallad na bretre rodnuc do Coinculaind. (Henderson, 1899: 122, 124, 126, 128).

36. Cíatberat araili libair, co n-densat cennach fris (Henderson, 1899: 98).

37. Dy ffynhawn lydan dylleinw aches, / dydaw, dyhebcyr, dybris, dybrys. / Marwnat Corröy a'm kyffröes; / oer dewi gwr garw y anwyteu: / a oed voy y drwc nys mawr gicleu. / Mab Dayry dalei lyw ar vor Deheu; / dihathyl oed ei glot kyn no'e adneu. / Dy ffynhawn lydan delleinw nanneu, / dydaw, dyhebcyr, dybrys, dybreu. / Marwnat Corröy genhyf inheu; / oer dewi [gwr garw y anwyteu: / a oed voy y drwc nys mawr gicleu]. / Dy ffynhawn lydan dylleinw dyllyr, / dysaeth, dychyrch traeth diuwg dybyr. / Gwr a werescyn, mawr <>varanhed, / a wedy Mynaw, mynet trefyd; / a wdant wy ffr(atr)es ffraw unwynouyd? / Tra uu uudugre, vore dyrawr - / chwedleu a'm gwydir o wir hyd lawr - / kyfranc Corröi a Chocholyn / lliaws eu teruysc am eu teruyn. / Tardei Pen am wern gwerin goredwyn / Kaer yssy Gulwyd ny gwyd, ny gryn: / gwyn y vyt yr eneit a'e harobryn. (Haycock, 2007: 467-468).

38. Boí náu humi, asa slaided Albu 7 innsi mara olchene con-rici in mbith mór (Thurneysen, 1913: 192).

39. rí in domain, Cú Ruí mac delbchaín Dári. (Watson, 1941: 21).

40. a fhir im-théit sále sreb (Watson, 1941: 21).

41. Rochroid descert domain, / cath Conchend roblogaig / Cū Rúi dar Muir Robuir: / ar dágin a homuin / inn Afraic rombīad. (Meyer, 1901: 38).

42. ní rabi Cúroí hi fus ar a cind ind aidchi sin, ocus rofitir co ticfaitis, ocus foracaib comarle lasin mnái im réir na curad, co tísad don turus, dia n-dechaid sair hi tirib Scithiach, fo bith ní roderg Curui a claideb i n-Erind, o rogab gaisced co n-deochaid bás, ocus nocho dechaid bíad n-Erend inna beólu, cein rombói ina bethaid, o roptar slána a secht m-bliadna. (Henderson, 1899: 100).

43. nocon fúar i n-Érind nach i n-Alpain nach i n-Eoroip nach i n-Affraic nach i n-Assia co Grecia ocus Scithia ocus Insi Orc ocus Colomna-Ercoil ocus Tor m-Bregoind ocus Insi Gaíd nech no chomollad fir fer frim imbi (Henderson, 1899: 118).

44. Mi a uum gẏnt ẏ|ghaer se. ac asse. ẏn sach a salach. ẏn lotor a fotor. Mi a uum gẏnt ẏn ẏr india uaȯr a|r india uechan. Mi a|uum gẏnt ẏn ẏmlad deu ẏn·ẏr pan ducpȯẏt ẏ deudec gȯẏstẏl o lẏchlẏn. a mi a uum gẏnt ẏn ẏr egrop. a mi a|uum ẏn ẏr affric. ac ẏn ẏnẏssoed corsica. ac ẏ|ghaer brẏthȯch a brẏtach a|nerthach. Mi a|uum gẏnt pan ledeist ti teulu gleis mab merin. pan ledeist Mil du mab ducum. Mi a uum gẏnt pan wereskẏnneist groec vrth parth ẏ dȯẏrein. Mi a|uum gẏnt y|g·haer oeth ac anoeth. ac ẏ|ghaer neuenhẏr naȯ naȯt teẏrndẏnẏon tec a|welsam ni ẏno. nẏ weleis. i. eirmoet dẏn kẏmrẏt a|r hȯnn ẏssẏd ẏn drȯs ẏ|porth aȯr* aȯr honn (Luft *et al*, 2013: NLW MS. Peniarth 4 - Columns 457-458).

45. Cipé aird do airdib in domain tra i m-beth Curui, dochanad [bricht] for a chatraig cach n-aidchi, co m-bo déinithir bróin mulind (Henderson, 1899: 102).

46. A rnarchogaeth awnaethant drwy y fforestyd diffeith. ac o fforest pygilyd y doethant yny doethant y tir tec odieithyr fforest. Ac yna wynt aarganuant gastell yn ymdangos udunt ar tir gwastat ymperued gweirglawd. ac yngkylch y castell ydoed avon uawr ynkerdet. ac or tu vywn yr castell wynt awelynt neuadeu mawr ehalaeth. a ffenestri mawrdec arnadunt. wynt adynessaassant parth ar castell. ac wynt awelynt y castell yn troi yn gynt nor gwynt kyntaf awelsynt eiryoet. Ac ywch benn y castell wynt awelynt saethydyon yn saethu yn gynffestet ac nac oed aryf yn y byt a vei amdiffyn rac un or ergydyeu a vyrynt. (Williams, 1876: 325-26).

47. Ys kyweir vyg kadeir yg Kaer Sidi: / nys plawd heint a heneint a uo yndi, / ys gwyr Manawyt a Phryderi. / Teir oryan y am tan a gan recdi, / ac am y banneu ffrydyeu gweilgi; / a'r ffynhawn ffrwythlawn yssyd oduchti - / ys whegach no'r gwin gwyn y llyn yndi. (Haycock, 2007: 277).

48. yg kaer pedryuan pedrychwelyt. (Haycock, 2007: 435).

49. Golychaf Wledic, Pendeuic gwlat ri, / ry ledas y pennaeth dros traeth Mundi. / Bu kyweir karchar Gweir yg Kaer Sidi, / trwy ebostol Pwyll a Phryderi. / Neb kyn noc ef nyt aeth idi - / y'r gadwyn tromlas kywirwas <> ketwi. / A rac preideu Annwfyn tost yt geni, / ac yt Urawt, parahawt yn bardwedi. / Tri lloneit Prytwen yd aetham-ni idi: / nam[yn] seith ny dyrreith o Gaer Sidi. (Haycock, 2007: 435).

50. Keint yn yspydawt uch gwirawt aflawen, / keint rac meibon Llyr yn Ebyr Henuelen. […] Bum y gan Vran yn Iwerdon: / gweleis pan ladwyt <> mordwyt tyllon; / kigleu gyfarfot angerdolyon / a Gwydyl diefyl diferogyon. (Haycock, 2007: 275-276).

51. Caradoc tenait cette demoiselle en prison, il l'avait ravie à un tout jeune homme, un trés beau chevalier qu'elle aimait passionnément: aussi ne pouvait-elle aimer Caradoc qui lui vouait un amour exclusif: elle régnait si bien sur lui qu'il lui avait donné à conserver un object qu'il n'aurait confié à personne, une épée enchantée; sa mére, un experte sorcière, avait obtenu en jetant un sort qu'il ne mourrait que par cette épée et elle l'avait trés longtemps gardée. Mais finalement Caradoc l'avait remise à cette demoiselle, s'imaginant qu'elle l'aimait en retour. 10. La demoiselle réfléchit à la façon dont elle mettra Lancelot en possession de cette épée [...] La demoiselle était venue à la porte du haut, la bonne épée en main; du haut du donjon elle avait vu l'armée du roi Arthur, campée autour du château et elle se dit que Caradoc est mort, si ce chevalier dispose de la bonne épée: elle la lui montre donc, en l'élevant très haut, pour qu'il vienne la prendre. 13. Quand elle est certain qu'il l'a vue, elle la dépose sur l'escalier et ferme la porte d'en haut du donjon, risquant la mort, tant elle désire celle de l'homme qu'elle hait le plus sur terre. Caradoc ne s'est pas du tout aperçu que l'épée de Lancelot s'est brisée, absorbé qu'il était à èviter ses attaques. Lancelot bondit sur l'escalier, se saisit de l'épée et jette à la porte du bas ce qui lui restait de la sienne; il protège alors son visage des morceaux encore intacts de son écu et se rue de nouveau sur Caradoc qui jette les poings en avant por le maîtriser, sans y réussir, car Lancelot saute sur le côté et l'atteint au bas si fougueusement qu'il le lui tranche de part en part, le poing tombant à terre avec l'épée. Caradoc pousse un cri dont tout l'enclos retentit. 14. Trois hommes d'armes viennent à son secours, mais ils trouvent la porte fermée: la demoiselle avait fait descendre la herse, afin que Lancelot ne fût attaqué à l'improviste par aucun d'eux. S'apercevant qu'il manquera d'aide, Caradoc joue son va-tout pour se défendre et pense attraper Lancelot par la main gauche, mais celui-ci, après un bond instantané en arrière, revient à la charge; il hausse la bonne épée pour en frapper Caradoc qui, à sa vue, la reconnaît et s'écrie: "Ah, Dieu, l'heure de ma mort est venue! Ce que j'aimais le plus m'a trahi!" (Micha, 1983: 395, 397).

52. Merti in ben íarum. as·bert frie tria diuiti do dídnad a bróin, tipre boí i toib Slébe Mis aníar, héo da·n-aidbded and dia secht mblíadne, uball óir boí inna medón. no·teinfide) a n-uball sin cona chlaidiub fadeisin, is and boí a anim. […] doyede CúChulinn ineol-.) birt sin a nert a CoinRoi 7 a gail fochétoir 7 as·bert som: 'ni run mnáib, ní maín mogib'. gegni CúChulinn íarum 7 do·bertatar a búaid. (Thurneysen, 1913: 192).

53. Ac yna y kymerassant hwy blodeu y deri, a blodeu y banadyl, a blodeu yr erwein, ac or rei hynny, asswynaw yr un uorwyn deckaf a thelediwaf a welas dyn eiryoett ae bedydyaw or bedyd a wneynt yna, a dodi Blodeued arnei. (Gruffydd, 1928: 26).

54. Hec est inscriptio, quam Dubtach in arce Mermin Brittannorum regís demisit ad probandos Scottorum sapientes, se ipsum excellentissimum omnium Scottorum Brittonumque opinans, scilicet putans nullum Scottigenarum quanto magis Brittonum doctorum in presentia Mermin regis istam scripturam perlegere atque intelligere potuisse. Sed nos Caunchobrach, Fergus et Dominnach et Suadbar opitulante Deo illa scriptura non latuit... [...] Notum autem sit tuę prudentię, optime Colgu nosterque doctissime magister, quod non quasi tibi ignoranti istam expositiunculam transmittimus; sed suppliciter poscimus, ut istam explanationem ignorantibus et simplicioribus nostris Scottigenis fratribus trans britannicum mare nauigare uolentibus per tuam beniuolam caritatem insinues, ne forte in presentia Mermin gloriosi Britonum regis illam scriptionem non intelligentes erubescant (Derolez, 1952: 368-369).

55. Ny obrynaf-i lawyr llen Llywyadur, / tra Chaer Wydyr ny welsynt wrhyt Arthur: (Haycock, 2007: 436).

56. et postea venerunt tres filii militis Hispaniae cuni triginta ciulis apud illos et cum triginta coniugibus in unaquaque ciula et manserunt ibi per spatium unius anni. et postea conspiciunt turrim vitream in medio mari et homines conspiciebant super turrim et quaerebant loqui ad illos et numquam respondebant... (Mommsen, 1898: 155).

57. tri vgeint canhwr a seui ar y mur; / oed anhawd ymadrawd ae gwylyadur. (Haycock, 2007: 436).

58. Tunc Dutigirn in illo tempore fortiter dimicabat contra gentem Anglorum. tunc Talhaern Tataguen in poemate claruit et Neirin, et Taliessin, et Bluchbard, et Cian, qui vocatur Gueinth Guaut, simul uno tempore in poemate Britannico claruerunt. (Mommsen, 1898: 205).

59. Si quis autem scire voluerit, quando vel quo tempore fuit inhabitabilis et deserta Hibernia, sic mihi peritissimi Scottorum nuntiaverunt (Mommsen, 1898: 156).

60. Des que ma dame de Chanpaingne / Viaut que romanz a feire anpraingne, / Je l'anprandrai mout volantiers, / Come cil qui est suens antiers / De quanqu'il puet el monde feire, / Sanz rien de

losange avant treire. / Mes teus s'an pöift antremetre / Qui i vossist losange metre, Si dëist, et jel tesmoignasse, / Que ce est la dame qui passe / Totes celes qui sont vivanz, / Tant con li funs passe les vanz, / Qui vante an mai ou an avril. / Par foi, je ne sui mie cil / Qui vuelle losangier sa dame. / Dirai je: Tant com une jame / Vaut de pelles et de sardines, / Vaut la contesse de rëines? / Nenil, je n'an dirai ja rien, / S'est il voirs maleoit gre mien; / Mes tant dirai je que miauz oevre / Ses comandemanz an ceste oevre / Que fans ne painne que j'i mete. / Del Chevalier de la Charrete / Comance Crestiiens son livre; / Matiere et san l'an done et livre / La contesse, et il s'antremet / De panser si que rien n'i met / Fors sa painne et s'antancion; (Troyes, 1899: vv. 1-29).

61. Crestiiens seme et fet semance / D'un romanz que il ancomance, / Et si le seme an si bon leu / Qu'il ne puet estre sanz grant preu, / Qu'il le fet por le plus prodome / Qui soit an l'anpire de Rome: / Cest li cuens Phelipes de Flandres, / Qui miauz vaut ne fist Alixandres, / Cil que l'an dit qui tant fu buens (Troyes, 1932: vv. 7-15).

62. Donc avra bien sauve sa painne / Crestiiens, qui antant et painne / A rimoiier le meillor conte / Par le comandemant le conte / Qui soit contez an cort real: / Ce est li contes del Graal, / Don li cuens li bailla le livre (Troyes, 1932: 61-67).

63. Entre ceus qui solent cunter / E del cunte Tristran parler, / Il en cuntent diversement: / Oï en ai de plusur gent, / Asez sai que chescun en dit / E ço qu'il unt mis en escrit, / Mes sulun ço que j'ai oï, / Nel dient pas sulun Breri / Ky soit les gestes e les cuntes / De tuz les reis, de tuz les cuntes / Ki orent esté en Bretaingne (Thomas, 1902: 377).

64. Pour le noble comencement / Comence un romans haulement / Del plus plaisant conte qui soit: / C'est del graal dont nus ne doit / Le secret dire ne chonter; / Car tel chose poroit monter / Li contes, ains qu'il fust tos dis, / Que teus hom en seroit maris / Qui ne l'aroit mie fourfait. / Por ce fait ke sages ki lait / Et s'en passe outre simplement; / Car, se maistre Blihis ne ment, / Nus ne doit dire le secré (Troyes, 1932: 417).

65. Unde famosus ille fabulator Bledhericus, qui tempora nostra paulo praevenit (Dimock, 1868: 202).

66. Arthur peń kadoed kernyw (Williams, 1925).

67. Exinde [de Essecestra] venimus [1113] in provinciam quae vocatur Danavexeria, ubi ostenderunt nobis cathedram et furnum illius famosi secundum fabulas Britannorum regis Arturi, ipsamque terram eiusdem Arturi esse dicebant (Chambers, 1927: 249).

68. Hie est Artur de quo Britonum nugae hodieque delirant; dignus plane quem non fallaces somniarent fabulae, sed veraces praedicarent historiae, quippe qui labantem patriam diu sustinuerit, infractasque civium mentes ad bellum acuerit... (Malmesbury, 1889: 342).

69. Pur les nobles baruns qu'il out, / Dunt chescuns mieldre estre quidout, / Chescuns se teneit al meillur, / Ne nuls n'en saveit le peiur, / Fist Artur la Roünde Table / Dunt Bretun dient mainte fable (Wace, 1938-1940: vv. 9747-9752).

70. Propter hoc enim fabulosi Britones et eorum cantores fingere solebant, quod dea quaedam phantastica, scilicet et Morganis dicta, corpus Arthuri in insulam detulit Avalloniam ad ejus vulnera sanandum. Quae cum sanata fuerint, redibit rex fortis et potens, ad Britones regendum, ut ducunt, sicut solet (Brewer, 1873: 47).

71. Que devant rois et devant contes / Depecier et corronpre suelent / Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent (Troyes, 1934: vv. 20-22).

72. A rimoiier le meillor conte / Par le coraandemant le conte / Qui soit contez an cort real (Troyes, 1932: vv. 63-65).

73. Mais il sont ore maint vassal / qui fabloiant vont par ces cors, / qui les bons contes font rebors / e des estoires les esloignent / e des mençonges tant i joignent / que li conte tout emperissent / e les bons livres en honissent; / e cil qui oent e escoutent / ne sevent que bon conte coustent. / ains dient, quant cil menestrel / gisent la nuit en lor hostel / e il lor font .I. poi conter / d'une aventure sanz rimer, / qu'il ont toute l'estoire oie / que ja n'orront dedens lor vie; / si lor fait on mençonge acroire / et en dient la fausse estoire / et metent la mençonge avant (*apud* Weston, 1906: 265).

74. Omnium scilicet haec est superstitio, Britonum, Guallorum et Cornubiencium (Hammer, 1940: 414-415).

75. Saucius Arturus petit herbas inde sororis, / Avallonis eas insula sacra tenet. / Suscipit hic fratrem Morganis nympha perennis, / Curat, alit, refovet, perpetuumque facit. / Traditur antipodum sibi ius; fatatus, inermis, / Belliger assistit, proelia nulla timet. / Sic hemispherium regit inferius, nitet armis, / Altera pars mundi dimidiata sibi / Hoc nec Alexandri potuit, nec Caesaris ardor, / Ut superuin tellus sic sua jura ferat. / Antipodes hujus fatalia jura tremiscunt; / Inferior mundus subditus extat ei. / Evolat ad superos, quandoque recurrit ad ima; / Ut sua jura petunt, degit

ubique potens. / Quis fuit Arturus vel quis sit, cernis. At ista / Non jactando loquor, sed tibi pando sacra (Howlett, 1885: 703-704).

76. Splendida bella scio, risus at inde meis. / Nunc igitur mando, Britonum castella relinque, / Respuit alterius gens mea ferre jugum. / Nuper ab antipodum pro te tellure recessi, / Per Cycladas veniens proelia multa tuli. / Indus cum Parthis, itiner nostrum prohibentes, / In campia Arabum fudimus, hosque tegunt. / Nam fatata cohors, at impenetrabilis armis, / Quaelibet obtruncat, pervia cuncta facit. / Sic ferus Aeacides, si corporis inviolata / Pars sibi quoque foret, degeret ipse diu. / En mea classis adest, sed classis tota perennis / Littoribus notis appulit, arma gerit. / Quod mea jura tenes simul et rex Francigenarum, / Hoc innatus amor fert pictasque mea. / Id quare patiar, tam longo tempore farer? / Sed mihi nota quidem coelica fata vetant. / Bellis antipodum pacatis atque sopitis, / Apparebo ferus, orbis et ipse fremet. / Mundanae molis tunc nobis climata cedent, / Imperium nostrum terra subacta tremet. / Ne tamen id videas, te jussis supprime nostris, / Ut tibi vel natis regna quieta sinam. / Ipse quidem silvas, fessas refovens legiones, / Incolo Cornubiae, proxima castra loco. / Si mea jussa times et amas, et pronus obedis, / Jam valeas; si non, nuntio bella tibi (Howlett, 704-705).

77. Et addit: Exitus eius dubius erit. Verissime quidem, sicut hodieque probat varia hominum de morte ejus [Arturi] et vita opinio. Quod si mihi non credis, vade in Armoricum regnum, id est, in minorem Britanniam et praedica per plateas et vicos Arturum Britonem more ceterum mortuorum esse, et tunc certe re ipsa probabis, veram esse Merlini prophetiam, qua ait: Arturi existium dubium fore; si tamen immunis evadere inde potueris, quin aut maledictis audientium opprimaris, au certe lapidibus obruaris (Monmouth *et al*, 1603: 12).

78. Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie. […] Plusurs en ai oïz conter, / nes vueil laissier ne obliër. / Rimé en ai e fait ditié, / soventes feiz en ai veillié (France, 1925: 4).

79. Les contes que jo sai verais, / dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais (France, 1925: 5).

80. Sed, sicut Britones solent iurgari cum Francis pro rege Arturo (*apud* Chambers, 1927: 249).

81. Barbarie etiam irrepent, jam non vocabantur Britones, sed Gualenses: vocabulum sive a Gualone duce eorum, sive a Guales regina, sive a barbarie trahentes. (Monmouth, 1854: 175).

82. Saxones enim, occupato regno Britannico, quoniam lingua sua extraneum omne Wallicum vocant, et gentes has sibi extraneas Walenses vocabant. Et inde, usque in hodiernum, barbara nuncupatione et homines Walenses, et terra Wallia vocitatur (Dimock, 1868: 179).

83. The Carle the knyghttus can beholde, / Wytt a stout vesage and a bolde. / He semyd a dredfull man: / Wytt chekus longe and vesage brade; / Cambur nose and all ful made; / Betwyne his browus a large spane; / Hys moghth moche, his berd graye; / Over his brest his lockus lay / As brod as anny fane; / Betwen his schuldors, whos ryght can rede, / He was two tayllors yardus a brede. / Syr Key merveld gretly than. / Nine taylloris yerdus he was hyghtht / And therto leggus longe and wyghtht, / Or ellus wondor hit wer. / Ther was no post in that hall, / Grettyst growand of hem all, / But his theys wer thycker. / His armus wer gret, wyttoutyn lese, / His fyngeris also, iwys, / As anny lege that we ber. / Whos stoud a stroke of his honde, / He was not wecke, I undurstond, / That dar I safly swer (Hahn, 1995: lines 247-270).

84. As anny lege that we ber (Hahn, 1995: line 268).

85. Remithir dóit láma neich aile cach mér día méraib (Henderson, 1899: 116).

86. Ποσειδώνιος δ᾽ ἐν τρίτῃ καὶ εἰκοστῇ τῶν ἱστοριῶν ‘Κελτοί, φησίν, ἐνίοτε παρὰ τὸ δεῖπνον μονομαχοῦσιν. ἐν γάρ τοῖς ὅπλοιςἀγερθέντες σκιαμαχοῦσι καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀκροχειρίζονται, ποτὲδὲ καὶ μέχρι τραύματος προίασιν καὶ ἐκ τούτου ἐρεθισθέντες, ἐὰν μὴἐπισχῶσιν οἱ παρόντες, καὶ ἕως ἀναιρέσεως ἔρχονται, τὸ δὲ παλαιόν, φησίν, ὅτι παρατεθέντων κωλήνων τὸ μηρίον ὁ κράτιστοςἐλάμβανεν εἰ δέ τις ἕτερος ἀντιποιήσαιτο, συνίσταντομονομαχήσοντες μέχρι θανάτου, ἄλλοι δ᾽ ἐν θεάτρῳ λαβόντεςἀργύριον ἢ χρυσίον, οἱ δὲ οἴνου κεραμίων ἀριθμόν τινα, καὶπιστωσάμενοι τὴν δόσιν καὶ τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις φίλοις διαδωρησάμενοιὕπτιοι ἐκταθέντες ἐπὶ θυρεῶν κεῖνται, καὶ παραστάς τις ξίφει τὸνλαιμὸν ἀποκόπτει᾽ (Athenaeus, Deipnosophistae, IV.40).

87. ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τῷ καιρῷ συνέβη Γάιον μὲν τὸν ὕπατον παραβόλως ἀγωνιζόμενον ἐν χειρῶν νόμῳ τελευτῆσαι τὸν βίον, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοὺς βασιλέας ἐπανενεχθῆναι τῶν Κελτῶν (Polybius, Histories, II.28:10).

88. δειπνοποιησαμένων δὲ καὶ κατακοιμισθέντων τῶν ἐν τῷ χάρακι, παρελθεῖν ἐάσαντες τὸ πλεῖον μέρος τῆς νυκτὸς καθωπλισμένοι περὶ τὴν ἑωθινὴν φυλακὴν ἐπιτίθενται τοῖς σύνεγγυς τῶν Ῥωμαίων παραστρατοπεδεύουσι. καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτῶν ἀπέκτειναν, οὐκ ὀλίγους δὲ κατετραυμάτισαν: τέλος δὲ τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀποτεμόντες τῶν τεθνεώτων ἀπεχώρουν πρὸς τοὺς Καρχηδονίους, ὄντες πεζοὶ μὲν εἰς δισχιλίους, ἱππεῖς δὲ μικρῷ λείποντες διακοσίων (Polybius, Histories, III.67).

89. Χιομάραν δὲ συνέβη τὴν Ὀρτιάγοντος αἰχμάλωτον γενέσθαι μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων γυναικῶν, ὅτε Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ Γνάιος ἐνίκησαν μάχῃ τοὺς ἐν Ἀσίᾳ Γαλάτας. ὁ δὲ λαβὼν αὐτὴν ταξίαρχος ἐχρήσατο τῇ τύχῃ στρατιωτικῶς καὶ κατήσχυνεν. ἦν δ᾽ ἄρα καὶ πρὸς ἡδονὴν καὶ ἀργύριον ἀμαθὴς καὶ ἀκρατὴς ἄνθρωπος, ἡττήθη δ᾽ ὅμως ὑπὸ τῆς φιλαργυρίας, καὶ χρυσίου συχνοῦ διομολογηθέντος ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικὸς ἦγεν αὐτὴν ἀπολυτρώσων, ποταμοῦ τινος ἐν μέσῳ διείργοντος. ὡς δὲ διαβάντες οἱ Γαλάται τὸ χρυσίον ἔδωκαν αὐτῷ καὶ παρελάμβανον τὴν Χιομάραν, ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ νεύματος προσέταξεν ἑνὶ παῖσαι τὸν Ῥωμαῖον ἀσπαζόμενον αὐτὴν καὶ φιλοφρονούμενον, ἐκείνου δὲ πεισθέντος καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποκόψαντος, ἀραμένη καὶ περιστείλασα τοῖς κόλποις ἀπήλαυνεν. ὡς δ᾽ ἦλθε πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῷ προύβαλεν, ἐκείνου θαυμάσαντος καὶ εἰπόντος “ὦ γύναι, καλὸν ἡ πίστις” “ναί”, εἶπεν “ἀλλὰ κάλλιον ἕνα μόνον ζῆν ἐμοὶ συγγεγενημένον” (Polybius, Histories, XXI.38).

90. Igitur Galli duce Belgio ad temptandos Macedonum animos legatos ad Ptolomeum mittunt, offerentes pacem, si emere velit; sed Ptolomeus inter suos belli metu pacem Gallos petere gloriatus est. Nec minus ferociter se legatis quam inter amicos iactavit, aliter se pacem daturum negando, nisi principes suos obsides dederint et arma tradiderint; non enim fidem se nisi inermibus habiturum. Renuntiata legatione risere Galli, undique adclamantes brevi sensurum, sibi an illi consulentes pacem obtulerint. Interiectis diebus proelium conseritur; victi Macedones caeduntur; Ptolomeus multis vulneribus saucius capitur; caput eius amputatum et lancea fixum tota acie ad terrorem hostium circumfertur. Paucos ex Macedonibus fuga servavit; ceteri aut capti aut occisi (Marcus Junianus Justinus, Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum, XXIV.5).

91. πρόσεστι δὲ τῇ ἀνοίᾳ καὶ τὸ βάρβαρον καὶ τὸ ἔκφυλον, ὃ τοῖς προσβόρροις ἔθνεσι παρακολουθεῖ πλεῖστον, τὸ ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης ἀπιόντας τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν πολεμίων ἐξάπτειν ἐκ τῶν αὐχένων τῶν ἵππων, κομίσαντας δὲ προσπατταλεύειν τοῖς προπυλαίοις. φησὶ γοῦν Ποσειδώνιος αὐτὸς ἰδεῖν ταύτην τὴν θέαν πολλαχοῦ, καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀηθίζεσθαι, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα φέρειν πράως διὰ τὴν συνήθειαν. τὰς δὲ τῶν ἐνδόξων κεφαλὰς κεδροῦντες ἐπεδείκνυον τοῖς ξένοις, καὶ οὐδὲ πρὸς ἰσοστάσιον χρυσὸν ἀπολυτροῦν ἠξίουν. καὶ τούτων δ᾽ ἔπαυσαν αὐτοὺς Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὰς θυσίας καὶ μαντείας ὑπεναντίων τοῖς παρ᾽ ἡμῖν νομίμοις (Strabo, Geographica, IV.4:5).

92. τῶν δὲ πεσόντων πολεμίων τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀφαιροῦντες περιάπτουσι τοῖς αὐχέσι τῶν ἵππων: τὰ δὲ σκῦλα τοῖς θεράπουσι παραδόντες ἠμαγμένα λαφυραγωγοῦσιν, ἐπιπαιανίζοντες καὶ ᾄδοντες ὕμνον ἐπινίκιον, καὶ τὰ ἀκροθίνια ταῦτα ταῖς οἰκίαις προσηλοῦσιν ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν κυνηγίοις τισὶ κεχειρωμένοι τὰ θηρία. τῶν δ᾽ ἐπιφανεστάτων πολεμίων κεδρώσαντες τὰς κεφαλὰς ἐπιμελῶς τηροῦσιν ἐν λάρνακι, καὶ τοῖς ξένοις ἐπιδεικνύουσι σεμνυνόμενοι διότι τῆσδε τῆς κεφαλῆς τῶν προγόνων τις ἢ πατὴρ ἢ καὶ αὐτὸς πολλὰ χρήματα διδόμενα οὐκ ἔλαβε. φασὶ δέ τινας αὐτῶν καυχᾶσθαι διότι χρυσὸν ἀντίσταθμον τῆς κεφαλῆς οὐκ ἐδέξαντο, βάρβαρόν τινα μεγαλοψυχίαν ἐπιδεικνύμενοι: οὐ γὰρ τὸ μὴ πωλεῖν τὰ σύσσημα τῆς ἀρετῆς εὐγενές, ἀλλὰ τὸ πολεμεῖν τὸ ὁμόφυλον τετελευτηκὸς θηριῶδες (Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca historica, V.29:4-5).

93. L. Postumium consulem designatum in Galliaipsum atque exercitum deletos. silva erat vasta Litanam Galli vocabant, qua exercitum traducturus erat. eius silvae dextra laevaque circa viam Galli arbores ita inciderunt, ut inmotaestarent, momento levi inpulsae occiderent. legiones duas Romanas habebat Postumius sociumque ab supero mari tantumconscripserat, ut viginti quinque milia armatorum in agros hostium induxerit. Galli oram extremae silvae cum circumsedissent, ubi intravit agmen saltum, tum extremas arborum succisarum impellunt. quae alia in aliam instabilem per seac male haerentem incidentes ancipiti strage arma viros equos obruerunt, ut vixdecem homines effugerent. nam cum exanimati plerique essent arborum truncis fragmentisque ramorum, ceteram multitudinem inopinato malo trepidam Galli saltum omnem armaticircumsedentes interfecerunt, paucis e tanto numero captis, qui pontem fluminispetentes, obsesso ante ab hostibus ponte, interclusi sunt. ibi Postumius omni vi, ne caperetur, dimicans occubuit. spolia corporiscaputque praecisum ducis Boi ovantes templo, quod sanctissimum est apud eos, intulere. purgato inde capite, ut mos iis est, calvam auro caelavere, idque sacrum vas iiserat, quo sollemnibus libarent, poculumque idem sacerdotibus esset ac templiantistitibus (Livy, Ab Urbe Condita Libri, XXIII.24).

94. ἠκρωτηρίαζον δὲ καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς κατὰ τὸ πάτριον ἔθος, καὶ τινὲς μὲν χεῖρας ἀθρόας περιέφερον τοῖς σώμασι, τινὲς δὲ κεφαλὰς ἐπὶ τῶν γαίσων καὶ τῶν σαυνίων ἀναπείροντες ἔφερον (Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca historica, XIII.52:2).

95. ‘Is fír’ ol Cet, ‘at ferr do láech indó- sa. Mad Ánlúan no-beth is'taig, do-bérad comram ar araile duit. Is anim dún nad-fil is'taig.’ ‘Atá immurgu’ ol Con- all, oc tabairt chinn Ánlúain assa chriss; ocus do-léici do Chet dara bruinni co-rróemid a loim fola fora béolu. Ro-gab side immurgu ón muic, ocus dessid Conall acci. ‘Tecat don chomram a fecht-sa!’ ol Conall. Ni-fríth ón la Connachta láech a thairisme (Thurneysen, 1935: 16).

96. Cind a bidbad fordergga 'sin charput aice (O’Rahilly, 1967: 32).

97. Dobeir a fodb di sudiu & dobeir na trí cind laiss inna charput, & asbert:' 'Ní fuicéb trá mo choscur,' 'ol sé, co r-ríus Emain Macha.' 'Documlat ass íarom cona coscor (O'Rahilly, 1976: 23-24).

98. Luid Cú Chulaind fón fid and sain & tarmlaing asa charput & tópacht gabail cethri mbend bun barr dóenbéim. Ros fúacha & ros fallsce & dobreth ainm n-oguim 'na táeb, & dobretha rót n-urchair di a iarthur a charpait do ind a óenláime co ndechaid dá trían i talmain connach boí acht óentrían úasa. Is and sin tarthatar in dá gilla chétna .i. dá mac Nera meic Uatair meic Tacáin é icond auropair sin & ba tetarrachtain dóib cia díb no bérad a chétguine fair & no benfad a chend de ar tús. Impádar Cú Chulaind friu & tópacht a cethri cinnu díb colléic & tuc cend cech fir díb ara beind do bennaib na gabla (O'Rahilly, 1967: 16).

99. Da mídair-sium a chomairle aice ra muntir. 'Cid bad ferr dún in chomairle dagénmais,' bar ésium, 'ná dul d'fópairt ind fir út fail ic fostúd & ac imfuirech cethri n-ollchóiced Hérend & a chend & a choscor do breith lind d'indsaigid Ailella & Medba. Cid mór d'olcaib & d'écóraib daringsem ri hAilill & ra Meidb, dagébam ar síd fair acht co táeth in fer sain lind.' Is hí-sein comairle ba nirt leó-som, & táncatar rempo go airm i mbaí Cú Chulaind, & and úair tháncatar, ní fír fer ná comlond óenfir ra damsatar dó acht imsáiset na dá feraib déc fóe fa chétóir. Imsóe Cú Chulaind friu-som 'no & eiscis a dá cend déc díb fá chétóir & sádis dá lia déc leó i talmain. Acus atbert cend cach fir díb bara líic & atbert cend Ferchon Longsig 'no bara líic (O'Rahilly, 1967: 69).

100. "'Nach fer géntor ann, acht mona bentor a cedn de, nó mani tesctar srebonn a inchinde nó a smir smentuinde, bodh ógsláun lim-su 'sin cath arabhároch'" (Gray, 1982: 50).

101. In tan didiu do-deachaid Mac Cécht darsan tres fuithirbi dochum in tige is and ro baí dias oc bém a chind do Chonaire. Benaid íarum Mac Cécht a chend dondala fir ad-comaicc a chend do Chonaire. Ro baí an fer aili ac élúd as cusan cend lais. Ad-chomnaccair a chend do Chonaire. Ad-comnaiccc corthi cloiche foa chosaib Meic Céchd ar dorus nó lár na Bruidne. Dol-léci dond fir aili oco m-baí in cenn dara choeldruimb cu r- roímid a druimb n-ann. Benaid Mac Cécht a chend de íar suidiu. Dortais Mac Cécht in chúach n-usce ina arsci & ina méde Conaire. As-bert a chend Conaire íarum íar tabairt ind usci isin méde: Maith fer Mac Cécht, / fó fer Mac Cécht, / do-beir digh do rígh. / & do-ní échd (Knott, 1936: 45).

102. Tánic Sualtaim reme tria lunne & anseirc dáig ná fúair in frecra ba leór leis ó Ultaib. And sein driuchtrais in Líath Macha ba Sualtaim & tánic reme fa urdreich na hEmna. Is and sain imsuí a scíath féin bar Sualtaim co tópacht bil a scéith féin a chend de Sualtaim. Luid in t-ech féin bar cúlu aris i nEmain & in scíath barsinn eoch & in cend barsin scíath. Agus rabert cend Sualtaim na briathra cétna: 'Fir gondair, mná berdair, báe aegdair, a Ultu,' bar cend Sualtaim (O' Rahilly, 1976: 111-112).

103. Dochuaid immorro in t-oclaech dia thig 7 in ceand lais. [7 fuair Laighin og ól ara chenn 'sin aidhchi cétna, B.] Na tucais lat ni asan armuig, ar Murchad. Tucus tra, ar in t-oclaech [cenn Dhuinnbo, B.] Tobair ar an uaitni thall, ar Murcad. Dorat in slog uili aichni ar in ceand, 7 raidsead uli: Nirb [s]irsan duid, a Duind bo, bith amlaid sin. IS tu is ailli 7 is fearr airfidid bai i n-Erind! Maith, ar in laech das-bert a maig in ceand, dena airfided duind, a Duind bo, fodaig Maic De .i. Isa Crist, i ndea- chaid gnúis. Airfid Laignin anocht feib ro airfedis do thigerna o chianaib. IMpais [Donnbó, F.] iarum a aiged re fraighidh in tigi ardaig cumad dorcha do, 7 tocbais a chruisich os aird co mbo bindi [oldas F.] cach ceol ar tuind talman, co mbadar in slog uili ag cai 7 ac toirrsi ria truaigi 7 ri taidiuiri in ciuil ro chan. INtan tra ba scith in sluagh ac toirrsi ac estechd frisin ceol, luid in t-oclaech cétna lasin cend co riacht an corp. Maith em, ar in ceann risin oglaech, tuidmi [dam F.] mo cheand rim chorp. Coraigis didu in t-oclaech in cend risin colaind, 7 leanaid de fochétoir (Stokes, 1903a: 60, 62).

104. ...notolbad in cach richt ba halic leis... (Henderson, 1899: 96).

105. Ba sé sin dano in siriti on ainmnigthir Belach Muni in t-Siriti... (Henderson, 1899: 96).

106. ...7 dochúamur-ne hi mucha lái arnamárach gusin duma sealga cétna ocus fúaramar aithech dub dodhealbda dífrecra dímór isin dumha ar ar gcind ina suidhi 7 dorinne coimérghi romuinn 7 ro fer fáilti rinn 7 tug a láim ina chuim ocus tug dá chuislinn órda as 7 do sinn slithi senma cuir ocus puirt 7 adhbuinn dúinn, innus co coiteólad aés gonta no mná re lamnad nó fiallach galrach no curaid créchtnaide nó láeich leónta frisin ceól soinemail dorinne. 7 ar sgur don cheól dó tug corn co n-ór a clithar diamuir a édaig 7 tuc am láim-si in corn 7 a Ián do midh somesga soóla ann... (Meyer, 1910a: 58).

107. soillsiugud dothiced don ló rofás dealb 7 dénum ocus coimlí for in athech, innus co raibe cruth r ... álaind fair con nách tánic ó thurcbáil gréne co fuin ... dob ferr inneall 7 écusc iná é, iter mét 7 co ..... ime & chutruma 7 áine 7 ergna 7 urlabra ... atha faí 7 inneall airdrígh air 7 áinius óglaig ina delb (Meyer, 1910a: 62).

APPENDIX II

Tables

Table 1: Comparison of the Beheading Game Narratives							
	Sir Gawain and the Green Knight	**First Continuation: *Livre de Caradoc***	***Perlesvaus:* Lancelot in the Wasteland**	***La Mule Sans Frein***	***Hunbaut***	***Fled Bricrenn:* Úath Episode**	***Fled Bricrenn:* The Champion's Covenant**
Context	The Green Knight enters Arthur's court riding a horse and challenges the knights for a beheading game, evoking the fame of the knights of King Arthur.	Eliavrés enters Arthur's court riding a horse and challenges the knights for a beheading game, evoking in the long version the fame of King Arthur.	Lancelot finds a Waste City where a knight challenges him for a beheading game.	Gawain goes on a quest to a revolving castle and is hosted by a Moor who challenges him for a beheading game.	Gawain and Hunbaut go on a quest and a churl at the entrance of a castle challenges them for a beheading game.	The three Ulster champions ask Úath for judgment and Úath challenges them for a beheading game.	Cú Roí enters Conchobar's court and challenges the Ulstermen for a beheading game, evoking the fame of the warriors at Emain Macha.
Rules	The challenger (Green Knight) to be beheaded in exchange for beheading the contestant (Gawain) a year and one day later.	The challenger (Eliavrés) to be beheaded in exchange for beheading the contestant (Carados) a year later.	A choice is offered to either behead the challenger (young knight) in exchange for the contestant (Lancelot) to be beheaded a year later, or the other way around. Lancelot chooses the former.	The challenger (Moorish Churl) to be beheaded in that night in exchange for beheading the contestant (Gawain) in the next morning.	The challenger (churl) to be beheaded in exchange for beheading the contestant (Gawain) immediately afterwards.	The challenger (Úath) to be beheaded in exchange for beheading the contestant (either Loégaire, Conall or Cú Chulainn) in the next day	Originally, the challenger (Cú Roí/*bachlach*) to behead the contestant (any Ulstermen except Conchobar and Fergus) in exchange for the latter to behead the challenger in the next day. Then changed for the inverse order.
The challenger	A horseman entirely guised in green, with a giant size and churlish appearance, and fierce red eyes, but wearing fine garments, although lacking shoes and armour. He carries a monstrous axe in one hand and a holly bundle in another. He is later known to be Bertilak in disguise, a shape-shifter.	A big and well-dressed knight riding a grey horse, he has a coronet with a golden circlet in his head (a hat in the long version) and he is clad in an ermine robe. He is later known to be Eliavrés.	A handsome young knight well dressed in fine garments.	A hairy and tanned churl with a Moorish appearance and big of size, who seems to be a magician who controls the revolving castle.	A big, black, ugly and hideous churl	Úath, a shape-shifting wizard of giant size who dwells on a loch.	A *bachlach*, a giant churl of ugly appearance with fierce yellow eyes, covered with an old hide and a dark mantle, and having over him a great branch. He carries a big axe in one hand and a stock in another. Later he is known to be Cú Roí in disguise, a shape-shifting wizard who owns a revolving castle.
Weapon	Axe	Sword	Axe	Axe	Axe	Axe	Axe
Initial Reaction	No knight steps forward at first, leading the Green Knight to taunt the fame of Arthur's court as undeserving. Consequently King Arthur prepares to accept the challenge but Gawain steps forward in his stead.	No knight steps forward at first, leading Eliavrés to taunt the fame of Arthur's court as undeserving. Carados gets angry and accepts the challenge.	Lancelot attempts to persuade the knight to forfeit the challenge but accepts it when faced with no other choice.	Gawain promptly accepts the challenge.	Hunbaut interprets the challenge of the churl and Gawain promptly accepts it.	Loégaire and Conall both refuse the challenge, and the author mentions that in other versions they do accept but do not return for their turn. Cú Chulainn accepts.	Several Ulstermen accept the challenge and behead the *bachlach* (Munremar, Loégaire and Conall), who survives every time and carries his own head, axe and block away, always returning unscathed in the next day. However, the challengers do not return for their turn. In response the *bachlach* taunts the fame of Emain Macha's warriors as undeserving. Cú Chulainn then accepts the challenge after the *bachlach* accuses him of being afraid.
Outcome of the first turn	Gawain beheads the Green Knight with the axe. The Green Knight does not perish however, his body gets up and picks his own severed head. He then mounts his horse and the head in his hand opens its eyes and speaks, reminding Gawain of the bargain. Arthur's court is mesmerized. The Green Knight then departs and the court mourns Gawain, the dear nephew of the king, for his impending doom a year later.	Carados beheads the knight (Eliavrés) with the sword. Following decapitation, Eliavrés immediately picks up his own severed head and rejoins it to the torso. He then reminds the king and Carados of the bargain, mounts his horse, and rides away. The court mourns Carados, the dear nephew of the king, for his impending doom a year later.	Lancelot is made to swear upon a Church that he will hold the bargain, and then beheads the young knight, who effectively dies and whose body falls afterwards. Lancelot then departs in his horse, and the body and head of the knight vanish.	Gawain beheads the Moorish churl, who jumps to his feet in an instant and picks his own severed head. The churl then goes away to his cellar, while Gawain goes to sleep until the next morning.	Gawain beheads the churl, whose body attempts to get up to pick his severed head. However, Gawain is aware of the enchantment, and grabs the body, preventing it from getting to the head, thus breaking the enchantment. The churl effectively dies and the beheading game ends in its first turn.	Úath puts spells on the edge of the axe, and places his head on a stone to be beheaded. Cú Chulainn beheads Úath with the axe. Úath survives the beheading and returns to his loch carrying his head near his chest as well as the axe on another hand.	Cú Chulainn sprang towards the *bachlach* following his taunt and gives him a blow with the axe, hurling the head to the top rafter of the hall. He then gets the head once again and smashes it with the axe. Despite this action, the *bachlach* still survives, and his body rises and goes away once again, to return the next day.

Location of the second turn	The Green Chapel, a mound (possibly Otherworldy)	Arthur's court, where the entire challenge occurs.	The Waste City, where the entire challenge occurs.	The Revolving Castle, where the entire challenge occurs.		The loch where Úath dwells (possibly Otherworldy), where the entire challenge occurs.	Emain Macha, where the entire challenge occurs.
Stance of the challenger	The Green Knight awaits Gawain in the Green Chapel, sharpening his axe with a whetstone. He praises Gawain for keeping his word.	Eliavrés returns to Arthur's court and calls for Carados.	The brother of the knight of the first blow awaits Lancelot while he sharpens his axe with a whetstone. He then lets Lancelot know that he will behead him as he had done his brother a year before.	The Moorish churl returns in the morning and reminds Gawain of the covenant.		Úath returns in the next day to take his turn in beheading Cú Chulainn.	The *bachlach* returns in the next day and calls for Cú Chulainn, taunting him for his lack of words and fear of death, while praising him at the same time for keeping his word.
Delivery of the blow in the second turn	The Green Knight rehearses three swings. In the first Gawain flinches and the Green Knight remembers Gawain he did not in his own turn. In the second, Bertilak only rehearses the swing and claims he is testing Gawain's will, while Gawain urges him to and angrily says that he lacks the heart to do it. In the third swing the Green Knight actually makes a slight cut in Gawain's neck but does not behead him.	Eliavrés raises the sword for cutting Carados head (long version, in the mixed version only the ransom) but is interrupted by the king who offers ransom, which he refuses. Carados gets angry at the delay and calls Eliavrés a coward. He then raises his sword a second time (first in the mixed version) but is interrupted by the queen who also offers ransom, which he also refuses. Carados then raises his sword to strike again but he then either does not swing the sword (mixed version) or he strikes with the flat of the sword (long version).	Lancelot cries due to memories of Guinevere and blesses himself. He then kneels down. The knight raises his axe and gives the blow, but Lancelot hears it coming and lowers his head, making the blow miss. The knight reproaches Lancelot for his stunt and reminds him his brother did not do the same. The knight then raises his axe again for another blow, but two ladies interrupt him and make him quit his intention to behead Lancelot.	Gawain holds his neck on a block for the Moorish churl to behead him. The churl urges him to uncover his neck completely and Gawain claims he is already stretching as much as he can and urges the churl to strike. The churl raises the axe to frighten Gawain but does not touch him because he had been loyal and kept the covenant.		Cú Chulainn stretches himself out on a stone for Úath to cut his neck. Úath draws down his axe three times on Cú Chulainn's neck, but always with its edge reversed, thus sparing his life.	Cú Chulainn stretches his neck across the block, but the *bachlach* urges him to stretch it further. Cú Chulainn complains that the *bachlach* is tormenting him and tells him to be quick, reminding him he was swift in the previous day. Cú Chulainn then stretches his neck even further. The *bachlach* raises his axe, but it comes down with the edge reversed, thus sparing Cú Chulainn.
Outcome of the second turn	Gawain gets up to fight the Green Knight, but the latter reveals he is Bertilak disguised as the Green Knight and that the challenge was a test engineered through arts of magic by Morgan Le Fay. The slight cut in the last swing of the Green Knight was due to Gawain's slight mischief in the exchange of winnings theme, since he kept the girdle.	The knight reveals that he is Carados father, Eliavrés, and that he never intended to cut Carados' neck.	The knight begs mercy of Lancelot after the two ladies convince him not to behead Lancelot out of love for them, he then swears he will help Lancelot even though he killed his brother.	The Moorish churl warns Gawain it will be hard to get the bridle and leads him into further quests in the castle.		Úath orders Cú Chulainn to get up and declares that he is the one worthy of the Champion's portion. The three heroes then return to Emain but Loégaire and Conall still dispute the verdict.	The *bachlach* declares that Cú Chulainn is the one who deserves the Champion's portion and that his lady should have precedence entering the Mead Hall over the others. It is thus revealed that the beheading covenant was a test and that the *bachlach* was Cú Roí in disguise

Table 2: Kittredge Hypothetic Sources	
Anglo-Norman Source (O)	**French Source (R)**
King Arthur is holding high court (IO) at Carduel one Pentecost season, and knights and ladies have assembled in great numbers (IO). The feast is ready, but he refuses to begin until some strange news comes or some adventure happens, for such is his custom (O). Suddenly there enters the hall (IO) a huge giant, ugly and black, with fierce eyes and bushy hair (IO). He advances to the high dais (O) I on horseback (O?), but greets nobody in the hall (IO). He carries a huge axe in one hand and an enormous block in the other (IO). There is consternation among the knights (IO). The stranger announces that he has come to challenge some knight to a game which he has never found anybody willing to play with him; here, however, he hopes to meet with better success, because of the renown of the court, which he celebrates in a more or less formal speech (IO). Arthur assures him that he is not likely to fail of his request, and asks for particulars (IO). The stranger then offers a *jeu parti*: "I will cut off the head of one of your champions to-day, and he may cut off mine a year hence; or he may cut off my head now, and I shall have the right to cut off his in a year" (IO). The champions all hesitate (IO). Somebody remarks that he would be a fool who did not take the more favorable alternative in such a choice (O). The stranger taunts the court, declaring that its renown is lost because of cowardice; it by no means deserves the reputation it enjoys (IO). Arthur, in shame and wrath, springs forward and grasps the axe, but Gawain begs the adventure and the king resigns it (O). The challenger lays his neck on the block and Gawain beheads him with a single blow (IO). The challenger picks up his head (IO) and departs, carrying it with him, as well as the block and axe (IO). Before he leaves the hall, the challenger's head speaks, promising that he will come back at the year's end and warning Gawain to be ready for him (O?). Gawain spends the year in knight-errantry (O). When the day comes round, a great court assembles to see Gawain fulfil his compact (O, cf. I). All are sorrowful for Gawain (IO). The giant enters, as before, with axe and block (IO), his head standing safe and sound on his shoulders (IO) "Where are you, Gawain?" he cries out (IO). "Come forward and offer me your head as I offered mine to you!" (O). "Here am I!" replies Gawain (IO). The challenger commends him for keeping his word (IO). Then Gawain lays his neck on the block, (IO), but it is too wide for him, and the challenger, after preparing to strike (or making a feint or half-stroke), bids him stretch his neck that he may hit him properly (IO). Gawain tries to obey, and another refusal or feint or half-stroke follows; but the challenger still bids him stretch his neck to fit the block (IO). "This is the best I can do," replies Gawain (O), making another effort (IO). He upbraids the challenger for tormenting him (IO), calls him coward (O), and urges him to strike without more delay (IO). Thus there are two feints or half-strokes or refusals before the challenger actually hits Gawain (IO). The third time the challenger raises the axe, but brings it down on Gawain's neck in a harmless blow, back uppermost (IO). The challenger then bids Gawain rise (IO), and hails him as the best of knights for his valor and loyalty (IO). (Kittredge, 1916: 67-72)	King Arthur (CG) is holding high court (ICG) at Carduel (C, Camelot G) in the Pentecost season (C, at New Year G). The feast is ready, but he refuses to begin until some strange news shall come or some strange adventure happen, for such is his custom (CG). Then there rides (CG) in at the hall door a gigantic man (IG, very tall knight C) in green attire (CG) with a garland of flowers on his head (C, a bob of holly in one hand G). He is armed with a huge battle-axe (IG, a very long sword C). Riding up to the dais (CG), he challenges the court to the beheading game (ICG), declaring that he has come hither for that purpose on account of their brilliant reputation, which he celebrates in elaborate terms (IG). He will submit to the first stroke (CG, cf. I). If he survives it, he is to have the right to deal a blow in return (ICG) after a year's interval (CG). The knights are in consternation (ICG). One of them remarks that only a fool would accept such a proposition (C, cf. I). The visitor taunts the court: its reputation is lost forever (ICG). Arthur accepts the challenge, but gives way to Gawain (G; cf. I, in which the king is particularly exempted). The stranger dismounts (CG) and lays his head on a block (IC; he has brought the block with him in I but not in C). Gawain decapitates him with a single stroke (ICG) and the head falls to the floor (IG, the dais C). The stranger picks up his head (ICG) by the hair (CG), and departs without replacing it (IG; he replaces it in C). But before he goes, he rehearses the covenant (CG), promising to come back in a year (C) and warning Gawain not to fail him (CG). The knights are much concerned at their comrade's danger (ICG). After a year (CG) the court assembles again (ICG). The challenger returns, as he had promised (IC). "Where are you, Gawain?" he cries. "Come forward and endure a blow, as I did" (IC). "Here I am," replies Gawain (IC), and extends his neck for the stroke (ICG). Twice the stranger makes ready to smite but refrains (ICG), and Gawain grows impatient (ICG). "Strike," he cries, "and do not keep me in suspense! (ICG). I think you are afraid to give the blow" (CG). At last the stranger strikes (ICG), but with the back of the axe (I, flat of the sword C, cuts Gawain slightly G). "Rise up, Gawain!" he cries (IC). "I have no wish to strike you (C), for you are the best of knights (IG, a very valiant knight C). (Kittredge, 1916: 39-40)

APPENDIX III

Figures

Fig. 1. Reproduction and attempt at a full reconstruction of an image found in four broken plates (catalogued as 1, 3, 8 and 9) belonging to the remains of a vase from the Iron Age settlement of Aulnat (Auvergne, France). Reproduced by Ian Armit (2010: 91-Fig. 9.3). Original drawing of the reconstruction by Dan Bashford.

Fig. 2. *Têtes Coupées* from the *Oppidum* of Entremont, 2nd century BC. Musée Granet à Aix-en-Provence, France. Image is Public Domain.
Available in:
https://common.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Têtes_coupées_Entremont.jpg

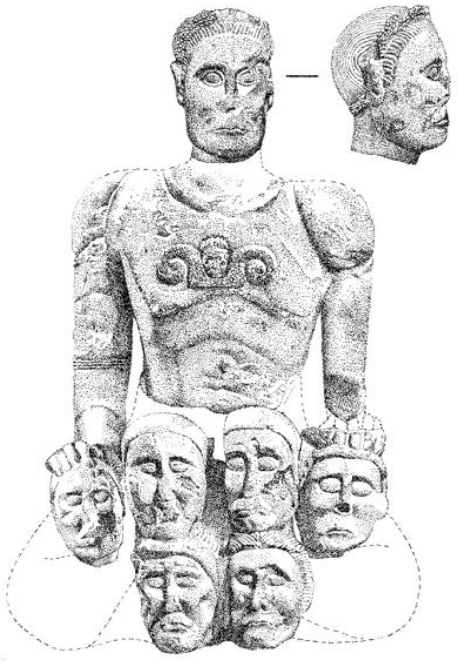

Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the statue of seated figure/warrior(?) with *têtes coupées* on its lap from Entremont (Armit, 2010: 96-Fig. 9.10). Reproduction and reconstruction by Ian Armit (2010: 96-Fig. 9.10).

Fig. 4. Remains of the Portico de Roquepertuse, 3rd century BC. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de la Vieille Charité à Marseille. Image is Public Domain.
Available in:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Roquepertuse#/media/File:
Roquepertuse_Portique.jpg

Fig. 5. Reconstitution of the Portico of Roquepertuse, 3rd century BC. Musée Borelli, Marseille, France. Reproduction by Barry Cunliffe (2010: 42-Fig.5).

Fig. 6. The *Tarasque de Noves*, 3rd century BC, found buried 2.5 metres deep underground beneath a Church in Noves, France. Musēe Calvet, Avignon, France. Image is Public Domain.
Available in:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Musée_lapidaire_Avignon-Tarasque_de_Noves.jpg

Fig. 7. *Signa equitum* (detachable end of a guidon pole), or perhaps a sceptre (Aldhouse-Green, 2004: 141), found in the ancient Celtiberian fort of Numancia, with two trophy heads displayed under the horses hoves or chests (Aldhouse-Green, 2004: 141; Sopeña, 2008: 379). Museo Numantino, Soria, Spain. Author's Photograph.

Fig. 8. Fibulae found in a necropoli in Numancia, interpreted as representing a human head under the horse's muzzle (Sopeña, 2008: 379). Museo Numantino, Soria, Spain. Author's Photograph.

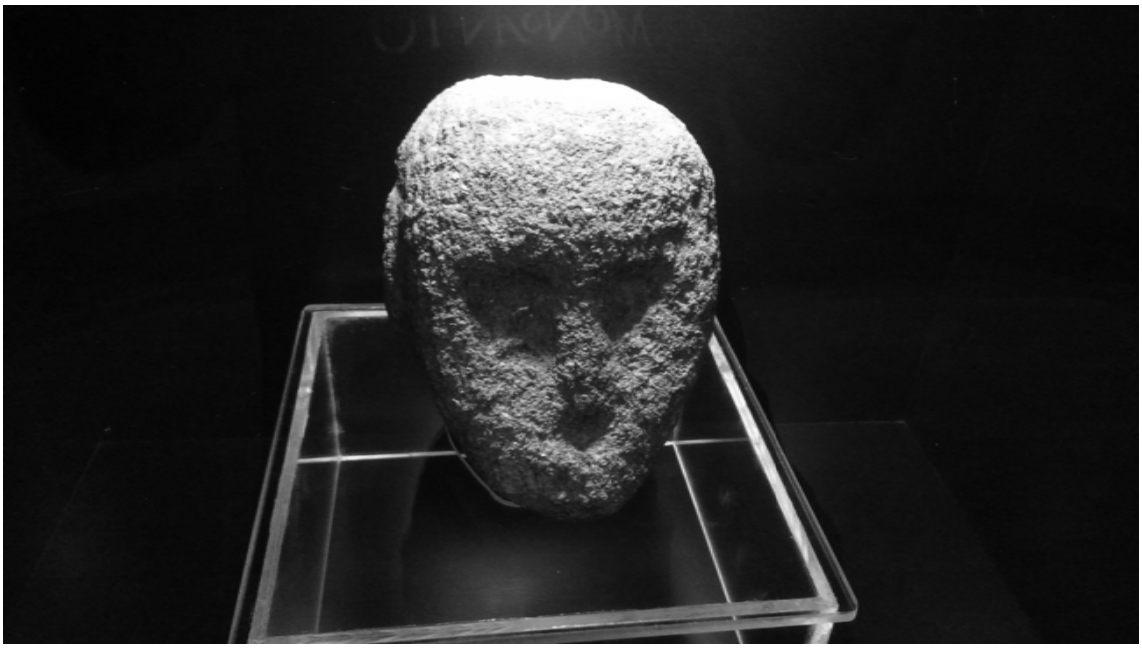

Fig. 9. Sculpture of a severed head characteristic of the *Castro* culture, 1st century BC, found in the Castro de Santa Trega, Galicia. Museo del Castro de Santa Trega, Galicia, Spain. Author's photograph.

Fig. 10. Sculpture of a severed head found in the Castro de Santa Iria, 1st century BC, Póvoa de Lanhoso, Portugal. Museu da Cultura Castreja, Briteiros, Portugal. Author's photograph.

Fig. 11. Sculpture of a severed head, 1st century BC, found in Castro de Monte Mozinho, Penafiel. Museu Municipal de Penafiel, Portugal. Author's photograph.

Fig. 12. Sculpture of a head found in the fort of Coria, Corbridge, England. Reproduction by Anne Ross (1958: Plate V).

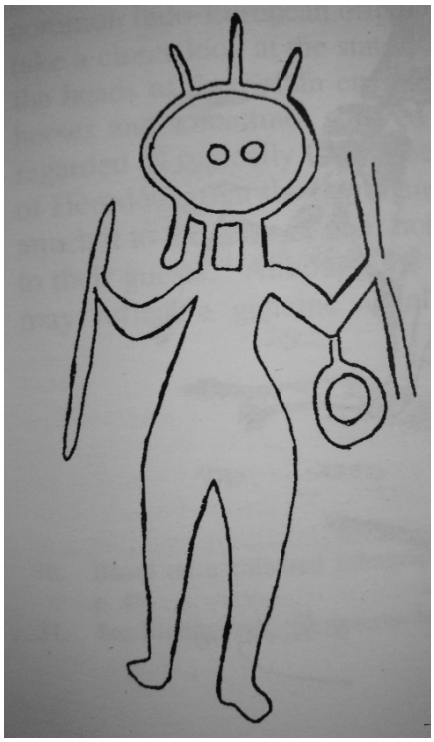

Fig. 13. Lybian ancient warrior drawn from a North-African rock carving. Reproduction by Bernhard Maier (2000: Fig.4), with basis on Durou (1993: 31).

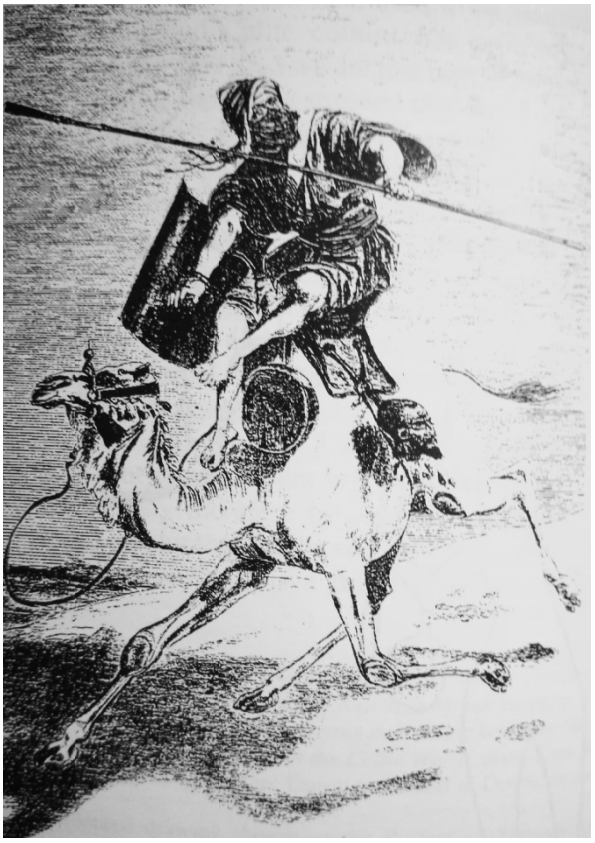

Fig. 14. Nineteenth-century depiction of a Berber warrior carrying a severed head in his camel. Reproduction by Bernhard Maier (2000: Fig.6), with basis on Durou (1993: 45).

Fig. 15. Statue of a Cephalophore (left) from the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Reims, France. Image is Public Domain.
Available in:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reims_Cathedrale_Notre_Dame_017.JPG

Fig. 16. Sculpture of Gerald the Fearless, Évora, Portugal. Author's photograph.