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THE OLDEST NARRATIVE ATTESTATIONS OF A CELTIC MYTHICAL AND TRADITIONAL HEROIC CYCLE¹

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The Roman annalists consciously borrowed, introduced into their pseudo-history, and transformed for their own benefit, Gaulish mythical materials, as the French Latinists Raymond Bloch and Jean Bayet have already suggested. These materials primarily concern a warrior-hero strongly resembling the Irish Cú Chulainn, to whom are attached two corresponding mythical motifs: magical contortions and the intervention of a war-deity in the shape of a crow. Secondly, they concern what I suppose to be a hunter and warrior-hero, with wolfish aspects, whose siding with one of two parties decides the outcome of a 'gigantic' battle. This figure corresponds to the Irish hero Finn. What I shall try to show here is that these materials, also illustrated in ancient iconography, allow us to discern the oldest narratively attested elements of a Celtic traditional heroic cycle, in its Gaulish state, and, in this cycle, the distinctive opposition between two types of mythical heroes – one 'of', the other 'outside' the tribe – belonging probably to two different *gesta* or sub-cycles.

Aspects of the Celtic hero 'of the tribe': Cú Chulainn and his Gaulish parallels

The Irish elements of our comparison are found in the Ulster Cycle, more precisely in *Táin Bó Cúailgne*. Here it is important to state that we agree with those who think that the content of *TBC* is essentially mythic (cf. C. O'Rahilly 1967, ix). By 'mythic' I mean events located in an unhistoric primitive past,² where the heroes in the strict sense³ are living in contact with deities and other supernatural beings. Moreover, I think that this content is for the most part traditional, i.e. inherited. Of course, this content has been constantly adapted during its preliterate transmission to accommodate the prevailing ideological context (the last one being that of early Irish Christianity); the cultural and material *realia* have also been adjusted to the historico-geographical context – these ideological and 'ecological' contexts being themselves subject to perpetual change. But the 'renovations', affecting the more transitory elements than the general pattern of the narrated stories, have probably never been complete (because a story which is supposed to have happened in a distant past must show contrastive distortions with the present), and they took place especially before the 'composition' of the primitive *TBC*, the so-called *Ur-Táin* (seventh century? cf. Thurneysen 1933). This composition, which implied a written form (still permeated with processes peculiar to oral performance), tended to fix matter which in the oral context had never stopped evolving. The successive rewritings (still influenced by oral techniques) in the manuscript transmission of *TBC* led to the three different 'recensions' or 'versions'.

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the *Cinquième Journée Belge d'Études Celtiques et Comparatives*, Brussels, 13 February 1993. A French version, more detailed on the Roman annalistic point of view, should be published in the next issue of *Études celtiques* (Vielle 1994). I wish to thank the editors and my old neo-Pythagorean friend Godefroid de Callatay for correcting my clumsy English, and John Carey for his helpful critical comments.

² Of course, the early Irishmen never cast doubt on the general historicity of their traditional stories, and the *literati* located the great heroes in their 'historical' chronologies. But I do not think that it is particularly useful to try to find, as in the case of Troy, a historical nucleus which would have underpinned the Ulster Cycle, because the general content of this kind of traditional heroic cycle (i.e. the patterns of the stories) is obviously without any historicity.

³ In my opinion, these kinds of heroes do not need to be considered as early real humans 'promoted' (even if they could borrow their name from some historical character) or as former gods 'decayed' (*contra* T. F. O'Rahilly 1946, 271; Olmsted 1979, 10, 1992b, 11) since they appear sometimes in the same stories as the heroes but are distinguished from them by peculiar 'identity features' (even if the Christian context does not allow them to be called 'gods').

While these have affected the form or *narration* through retelling, they have had little impact on the content, i.e. the narrated *story*, except for the absorption of episodes from previously autonomous tales (Edel 1992, 168–69).

Confining myself solely to the question of content, I would now like to focus attention on some aspects of the central hero of the Ulster Cycle, Cú Chulainn, the warrior-type ‘of the tribe’ (*túath*), as he has been regarded by scholars since Sjøestedt (1940, 79–108).

In *TBC*, Cú Chulainn is alone on a ford to challenge and fight one by one the warriors of the enemy army. He is described as an extraordinary fighter by his strength, his size (*TBC* I 85, 382–92) and his youth (*TBC* I 379–80, 396–97). His body shines under his adornments – golden crown and necklaces, red mantle (*TBC* I 67–74, 2342–60) – and under his weapons (*TBC* I 87–91, 2213–44, 2360–63). He shakes his shield (*TBC* I 2081: *crothís a scíath*) and sometimes he brandishes his two spears (*TBC* I 2082: *cresaigís a slega*), one of them being the famous *gáe bolga* (*TBC* I 89); sometimes he waves his sword (*TBC* I 2082: *bernaigís a chlaidem*), ivory-hilted (*TBC* I 90, 2230, 2261), by means of which he decapitates his defeated opponents. He is able to utter a terrible shout which, taken up again by the deities who support him, terrifies his enemies (*TBC* I 2082–85, 2238–42). But above all, two supernatural phenomena occur to make him stronger on the battlefield.

The first one is his magical contortions: Cú Chulainn, the ‘distorted’ or ‘contorted’ (*riástartha*), is indeed able to enter into an altered state where he becomes physically deformed; he becomes ‘horrible, many-shaped, strange and unrecognizable’ (*TBC* I 2245–46: *úathbásach n-íleachtach n-ingantach n-anaichnid*), and among other deformations ‘his mouth was twisted back fearsomely’ (*TBC* I 2259: *riástartha a bél co úrtrachta*), ‘so that every stream of fiery flakes which came into his mouth from his throat was as wide as a ram’s skin’ (*TBC* I 2262–63: *comba méitithir moltchraicand cech slamsrúam thened doniged ina bél asa brágit*), and ‘the loud beating of his heart against his ribs was heard like the baying of a bloodhound’ (*TBC* I 2264: *roclos bloscbéimnech a chride ré chliab imar glimnaig n-árchon*); ‘he was filled with rage as he wielded the shields’ (*TBC* I 2273–74: *coro dechrastár oc imbirt na scíath*); ‘then he performed the thunderfeat of a hundred’ (*TBC* I 2292–93: *is and so focheird torandchless cét...*).

The other phenomenon is the intervention of the furious war-goddess – reduced in Christian context to the status of simple ‘Fury’ – Bodb (or Nemain). In my opinion, she was originally (i.e. in her non-Christian context), and in spite of the confusion in early Irish texts, a character completely distinct from the goddess Morrígan, who is, I think, a much more complex figure and the truly clever enemy of Cú Chulainn (cf. Vielle 1994, n. 44, *contra* Leroux and Guyonvarc’h 1983). Bodb appears traditionally (and probably exclusively) in the shape of a crow (as her name indicates) and supports Cú Chulainn with her shout, usually in terrifying the enemy army (*TBC* I 210–11: *dosfóbaí thrá ind Némáin [i. Badb] la sodain 7 níp sí sin adaig ba sámam dóib*; 2084–7: *cordas mesc ind Némáin forsín tslóg... co n-erbaltatár cét láech díb do úathbas 7 cridenes ar lár in dúnaid 7 in longpairt in n-aidchi sin*; 3537: *cotmesca ind Némáin forsín slóg. Adbail cét fer díb*; 3942–44 & 4033–35: *cotagart Badb 7 Bé Néit 7 Némáin forru ind aidchi sin... conidapad lóech díb úathbás. Nírbo hísín adaig ba sámam dóib*).⁴ But she seems to have especially intervened in his most famous single combat, against Fer Diad. Here it is important to notice that, even if the episode has been inserted late in the body of *TBC* (in the eleventh century, cf. C. O’Rahilly 1976, 275), after an autonomous narrative life, its content is attested by earlier sources⁵ and seems to be traditional within the Ulster Cycle. It is also interesting to note that

the episode is incomplete in Recension I, and that in Recension II from the Book of Leinster ‘there is a tendency to exclude what might lessen Cú Chulainn’s prestige by attributing his success to magic help’ (O’Rahilly 1961, xxix). Thus, of this divine intervention there only remain a few allusions. However, in the song of Fer Diad which precedes the fight, it is said that ‘above the ford the Bodb will shriek’ (*TBC* I 2838: *áthforscara in Badb*); thereafter, when the duel begins, the Book of Leinster gives a Christianized description of divine intervention in favour of Cú Chulainn (*TBC* II 2845–46, cf. *supra* *TBC* I 2082–5: *gura gáirsetar imme bocánaig 7 bánanaig 7 geniti glinne 7 demna aeóir*) and specifies that ‘the Túatha Dé Danann used to raise a cry about him so that the fear and terror and horror and fright that he inspired might be all the greater in every battle and field of conflict and in every encounter to which he went’ (*TBC* II 2846–49: *dáig dabertis Túatha Dé Danand a ngáriuð immi-sium combad móti a gráin 7 a ecla 7 a urúad 7 a urúamain in cach cath 7 in cach cathrói, in cach comlund 7 in cach comruc i téiged*); finally, at the death of Fer Diad, reference is made to ‘the breach made by the red-mouthed Bodb’⁶ (*TBC* II 3431–32: *níba búriuð berna Baidbi béldergi do scoraib sciathcha scáthbricci*).

We also notice in Cú Chulainn’s contortions mention of the ‘torches of the Bodb’ (*TBC* I 2266: *na coinnli Bodba*) which appear above his head, and the fact that Cú Chulainn is described at the dawn of the battle as the ‘Bodb’s [possessive genitive?] marshalled fence of all the men of earth [genitivus rei?]’ (*TBC* I 2213–14: *in t-indellchró Bodba fer talman*) and effectively after that, with his chariot, ‘he made this Bodb’s encirclement of the four great provinces of Ireland’ so that no enemy might flee from him (*TBC* I 2303–05: *Is aire focheird in circul m[B]odba sin mórthimchull cethri n-ollchóiced nÉrend ammaig anechtair arná teichtis úad 7 ná scailtís immi*) – and this apart from the fact that the genitive *bodba* is also used in locutions (runs) where it simply connotes the warrior’s fury.

The elements we have just underlined for Cú Chulainn also occur in two episodes of Roman ‘history’. These two episodes, which we will now analyze, are supposed to have happened during the so-called Gaulish wars, respectively in 361 and 349 BC. For the first one, the subject of which is a duel between an anonymous Gaulish champion and Titus Manlius Torquatus, the main sources are (Aa) Claudius Quadrigarius, an annalist living at the time of Sulla (quoted by Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* IX, 13, 7–19), and (Ab) Livy (VII, 9–10). For the second, also a duel between an anonymous Gaulish champion and, this time, Marcus Valerius Coru(in)us, the main sources are (Ba) an annalist supposed to be Valerius Antias (also quoted by Aulus Gellius IX, 11, 3–9), (Bb) Livy (VII, 26) and (Bc) Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Exc.* XV, 1, 1)⁷.

The presentation of these two episodes of single combat will allow us to observe: 1) the perfect agreement of the narrating sources (which probably all depend *in fine* on the *corps de la tradition* fixed by Fabius Pictor, cf. Poucet 1985, 54–57); and 2) the similarities in the portrait of the Gaulish champion, who each time rises from the ranks, *grandia egrediens* as Ba specifies, and challenges a Roman opponent.

The Gaulish champion who is anonymous (but *dux Gallorum* for Ba; Bc: *τινος βασιλέως*) is in both cases described as a fierce warrior (Ab: *ferox*; Ba: *ferocissimum*), extraordinary by his strength, his size (Aa: *uiribus et magnitudine... simulque uirtute ceteris antistabat... magnitudinem facies*; Ab: *eximia corporis magnitudine... corpus magnitudine eximium... uelut moles superne imminens... ingens in spatium*; Ba: *uasta et ardua proceritate*; Bb: *magnitudine... insignis*) and his youth (Aa: *adulescentia*). His body is shining (Ab: *corpus... refulgens*; *nudus* adds Aa) under his adornments –

⁴ The identity of Bodb, Nemain and Bé Néit is much more obvious (cf. Leroux and Guyonvarc’h 1983, 37–44).

⁵ A written form of the episode was probably in existence as early as the tenth century according to the mention of an *Aided Fhir Dead* in the LL A-list. It is also possible that some allusions in the seventh-century archaic poems (e.g. *Verba Scáthaige*, vv. 21–26, *contra* the identifications of Olmsted 1978, 538–41; 1979, 197–99 –cf. Henry 1990, 206, n. 27 –; and 1992b, 9–10) refer to the Fer Diad episode.

⁶ Cf. the *teora Badba belderca* in the *TBC* IIb (4637) interpolation (with linguistic archaic features) which describes three war-machines. Just before mentioning them, it is said that *teora hialla ingnathacha go ro-examlacht eacaisc uasta. An cetna hialla dercc uile. An iall tanaise it gilihar gési. Antres iall duibhithir faich* (4635–37).

⁷ Cf. the later allusions in Valerius Maximus (III, 2, 6), Appian (*Celt.* 10), Florus (*Epit.* I, 8), Dion Cassius (Frg. 31 M.), Aurelius Victor (*Vir. ill.* 29), Eutropius (*Brev.* 26), Sergius (*Expl. Donat.* II, cf. Keil, *Gram. lat.* IV, 536) and Suidas (s.v. *Κελτοί* and *ἀμύσειν*).

golden torque and bracelets (Aa: *torque atque armillis decoratus*), ruddy mantle (Ab: *ueste uersicolori*) – and under his weapons (Ab: *pictis et auro caelatis armis*; Ba: *armis auro praeferentibus*; Bb: *armis insignis*).

But in the first episode, he brandishes his shield (*scutum*) and two swords (Aa: *duos gladios*) which he waves (Ab: *armorum agitatio*); in the second he flourishes his spear (Ba: *manu telum reciprocans*) and strikes it against his shield (Bb: *quatiens scutum hasta*).

In the first episode, which is supposed to have happened in the middle of a stream, the Gaulish champion, after having shouted out with all his strength (Aa: *cum uoce maxima conclamat*; Ab: *quantum maxima uoce potuit... inquit*) and so having aroused great fear (Aa: *nemo audebat*; Ab: *diu... silentium fuit*), sees his challenge finally accepted by Titus Manlius only. Then the Gaul starts contorting himself: his appearance becomes monstrous (Aa: *inmanitatem facies*; Ab: *beluae*), he dances out exultantly (Ab: *praesultat... laetum... exsultatio*), sings (Aa: *cantabundus*; Ab: *cantus*), provokes by mocking (Aa: *inridere coepit*; Ab: *ab inrisu*) and – *id quoque memoria dignum antiquis uisum est* (Ab) – sticks out his tongue (Aa: *linguam exertare*; Ab: *linguam etiam... exserentem*). Then he advances his shield (Aa: *scuto proiecto*; Ab: *proiecto laeua scuto*) and delivers a mighty slashing stroke with his sword (Ab: *caesim cum ingenti sonitu ensem deiecit*). In vain, for the Roman, whose ‘ferocity was reserved for the crisis of the combat’ (Ab: *omnem ferociam in discrimen ipsum certaminis distulerat*), ‘relying on courage rather than skill’ (Aa: *animo magis quam arte confisus*) and armed ‘with weapons serviceable rather than ornate’ (Ab: *armis habilibus magis quam decoris species*), strikes shield against shield (Aa: *scuto scutum percussit... iterum scuto scutum percutit*; Ab: *cum scuto scutum imum perculisset*) and slips in between the weapon and the body of the Gaul (Aa: *sub Gallicum gladium successit*; Ab: *insinuasset se inter corpus armaque*) who is pierced and overthrown (Aa: *hausit... incidit... subuertit... euerit*; Ab: *hausit... porrexit*). After he has been overthrown, the winner cuts off his head (Aa: *caput praecidit*), tears off his torque, and puts it, covered with blood as it is, around his own neck (Aa: *torquem detraxit eamque sanguinolentam sibi in collum inponit*; Ab: *corpus... uno torque spoliavit, quem respersum cruore collo circumdedit suo*).

It is after this single combat that Titus Manlius received his surname *Torquatus*, first heard in military songs (Ab: *inter carminum prope modo incondita quaedam militariter ioculantes, Torquati cognomen auditum*), then consecrated and used by descendants of his family (Aa: *posterique eius Torquati sunt cognominati*; Ab: *celebratum deinde posteris etiam honori fuit*). The dictator gave him a golden crown (Ab: *dictator coronam auream addidit*). And the army of the Gauls withdrew in trepidation from their camp (Ab: *proxima nocte relictis trepide castris*) for ‘the combat was of so great consequence to the issue of the whole war’ (Ab: *tanti ea ad universi belli euentum momenti dimicatio fuit*).

The rest of the second episode, which is supposed to happen on a field, is rather different. This time the Gaulish champion, who also arouses great fear (Ba: *inter metum pudoremque*), sees his challenge accepted by Marcus Valerius only, ‘regarding himself as no less worthy of that honour than Titus Manlius had been’ (Bb: *qui haud indigniorem eo decore se quam T. Manlium ratus*). When the fight begins (Ba: *conserebantur iam manus*; Bb: *conserenti iam manum*; Bc: *ὡς δὲ συνήεσαν ὁμόσε*), a divine power intervenes (Ba: *uis quaedam diuina fit*; Bb: *numine interposito deorum*): a raven suddenly alights on the Roman’s helmet, facing fiercely his adversary (Ba: *coruus repente inprouisus aduolat et super galeam... insistit*; Bb: *coruus repente in galea consedit, in hostem uersus*; Bc: *κόραξ καθεζόμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ κράνους αὐτοῦ ἐκεκράγει τε δεινὸν εἰς τὸν βάρβαρον ὄρνιν*); then the bird begins to harass and lacerate the Gaul (Ba: *inde in aduersari os atque oculos pugnare incipit; insilibat, obturbabat et unguibus manum laniabat et prospectum alis arcebat atque, ubi satis saeuierat, reuolabat in galeam*; Bb: *quotienscumque certamen initum est, leuans se alis os oculosque hostis rostro et unguibus appetit*; Bc: *πηδῶν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τοτὲ μὲν τοῖς ὄνυσιν ἤμυττε τὰς παρεϊάς, τοτὲ δὲ τῷ ῥύγχει τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔκοπτεν ἐπιπτάντος αὐτῷ τοῦ κόρακος καὶ τὰς ὄψεις ὀρύττοντος*), and

prevents him from fighting, disturbed and terrified as he is (Bb: *territum prodigii talis uisu oculisque simul ac mente turbatum*; Bc: *ἔξω γενέσθαι τῶν φρενῶν*). Thanks to the bird (Ba: *opera alitis propugnatus*; Bb: *praepetem [alem]*; Bc: *συναγωνισαμένου ζῶου*), the Roman easily manages to kill his adversary (Ba: *uicit interfecitque*; Bb: *obtruncat*; Bc: *ἀναιρεῖ*)⁸ then begins to despoil him (Bb: *spoliare corpus caesi hostis... coepit*) while the raven disappears from the battlefield (Bb: *coruus ex conspectu elatus orientem petit*).

Thereafter, ‘so clearly had each side foreseen the result implicit in the outcome of the single combat’ (Bb: *adeo duorum militum euentum... utraque acies animis praeceperat*), ‘they fought the battle out with the Gauls to a conclusion that was never doubtful’ (Bb: *depugnatum haudquaquam certamine ambiguo cum Gallis est*). And Marcus Valerius took his surname *Coru(in)us* (Ba: *ob hanc causam cognomen habuit Coruinus*; Bb: *Coruum, id enim illi deinde cognominis fuit*; Bc: *ἐπωνυμίαν θέμενος αὐτῷ Κορβίνον*) and continued, from that time on, to have his helmet decorated with a raven as his emblem (Bc: *διετέλεσεν ἐξ ἐκείνου συμβόλῳ κατὰ τοῦ κράνους κοσμούμενος κόρακι*). The consul also honoured him with a golden crown (Bb: *aurea corona donat*; Bc: *χρυσέῳ τοῦτον στεφάνῳ ἐκόσμησεν*), and the sculptors and painters from that time on always placed a fetish-bird on his head (Bc: *ταῖς εἰκόσιν αὐτοῦ πάσαις οἱ πλάττοντες καὶ γράφοντες τοῦτο τὸ ζῷον ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐφήρμοσσαν*).

For R. Bloch, the first of these two episodes refers to a real Celtic military custom which astonished the Romans, who were accustomed to collective military discipline and who reported it (and mocked it) in their history. But the second episode represents a wonder which does not enter any series of *prodigia* admitted in Rome (Bloch 1963, 77 sq.). It might be ‘une tradition en provenance des épopées celtiques’ (Bloch 1966, 127; 1970, 168; 1976, 21) – Bloch quotes here some bird-motifs from the Ulster Cycle – and even ‘une pénétration du mythe celtique en profondeur et non pas tellement l’emprunt en surface d’un récit mal compris’ (Bloch 1964, 395; 1965, 15; 1966, 131; 1968, 115; 1970, 169; 1976, 24). We would have in this case an account of a real event on the one hand, and, on the other, the recovery of what Bloch calls a myth, and what we might term a mythical motif.

The epic connotations and supernatural aspects of both duels, the similarities in the description of the Gaulish champion’s characteristics, and especially the parallels appearing in the lay-out of each episode (so that Dionysius found little difficulty in fusing the first with the second (cf. note 8)), lead us to try to go further than Bloch and deny that different origins (reality versus myth) lay behind such similar episodes presented jointly by most of the abridgers (cf. note 7). Comparison with the Irish material suggests that the first episode also reflects elements from a Gaulish heroic mythical tradition, which found its way into the hands of Roman annalists who, as we will show below, transformed the motifs for the benefit of Rome. It does not mean that the two cases cited had no basis whatsoever in reality but what we find narrated, even transformed, belongs to the mythic context, which is confirmed by ancient iconography, and not to ‘historical fact’.

In comparing the Roman and Irish data, it is indeed possible to undertake a reconstruction of some common and corresponding elements regarding the characteristics of the Celtic hero ‘of the tribe’. He is a ‘superwarrior’, extraordinary by his strength and his size, abnormally young, and with a body shining under his adornments – golden torque and bracelets, (red? colour of war) mantle – and under his weapons (shield, sword or spear). As regards his method of fighting, he is alone in the middle of the two armies, brandishing his weapons and loudly challenging successive opponents to single

⁸Notice that Dionysius, who does not tell the A-episode, refers to it through the outcome of this one, where he obviously includes some elements of the other. For when the Gaul is ready to strike, with a sword this time (*μάχαιραν*) instead of a spear (Ba and b), he is forced to protect himself against the bird by lifting up his shield (*ἀνέτεινε τὸν θυρεὸν ὡς ἀπελάσων τὸν ὄρνιν*): it is precisely the moment the Roman avails of to slip in under the shield of his opponent to pierce him (*μετεωρίζοντας τὸ ὄπλον ἀκολουθήσας κάτωθεν ὑποφέρει τὸ ξίφος*).

combat, whom after his victory he decapitates and despoils (especially of their torques?).

Of course, all these things could have really happened and might not belong specifically to heroic myth. But there are two motifs which can only be regarded as mythical. The first is the hero's magic contortions which follow his mighty shout: he deforms himself and becomes monstrous – his tongue protruding from his mouth⁹ as a stream of fire – and his power is therefore increased. The second is the intervention of the war-goddess – *Catubodua* as the Gaulish theonym is attested¹⁰ – in the shape of a crow, which appears above the hero and helps him by shrieking and harassing his opponent.

These two motifs are precisely illustrated by ancient iconography. The motif of magic contortions is represented on Gaulish coins (especially Armorican staters) where it is clearly possible to distinguish the face of a contorted hero, with a particularly remarkable distortion of the mouth from which the tongue protrudes like a stream or a flame, as has been shown by Sjøestedt's meticulous analysis (1936, 19 and pl. I, n° 11–12–13). And Cicero (*de Oratore* II, 66, 266) provides us with a description of Marius' Cimbrian shield, where a Gaul was represented 'contorted, with tongue out and cheeks hanging' (*distortum, eiecta lingua, buccis fluentibus*). The second motif – the intervention in the battle of a goddess in the shape of a crow – is represented on third-century BC Etruscan urns with Gaulish themes, where we can see a Greek warrior (i.e. an enemy of the Gauls), curled up with his face attacked by a bird. This has been clearly demonstrated by Bloch (1964, 395–97; 1966, 132–34; 1968, 115–16 and fig. 1; 1976, 24–26) who insists that these Etruscan urns illustrate the Celtic motif 'dans son état pur', 'selon sa teneur originelle', as they do in other ways with Greek mythic themes (there is no transformation as in the case of the introduction of the motif in the annalistic narrative). This motif is also represented on an Iron Age rock engraving from Valcamonica, where a bird interposes itself between two warriors in single combat (cf. Anati 1979, fig. 133) 'comme si l'animal allait les séparer ou décider de leur sort (...) l'oiseau [ayant] semble-t-il pour mission de protéger (...) un guerrier' (Anati 1960, 160 and 182).

Now, there were certainly also Gaulish war-*realia* which might have aroused Roman curiosity in such a way that the annalists even borrowed the associated mythic materials.

For the Romans, the strange and 'barbarian' customs were certainly the ritual beheading practised by the Celts and, in their valorization of the individual deed, the warrior *furor*, of which the mythic counterpart is obviously the magic contortions.

In addition to their customs, there were also specific items used as war-adornments, i.e. the famous torques, which constituted prized trophies for the victorious Romans, and the helmets with impressive animals on top, especially with birds as on the famous helmet found in Ciamești (Romania) which was capped by a crow.¹¹ The wearing of this kind of helmet certainly impressed the Roman soldiers.

As for the mechanisms of inclusion in the annalistic narrative, the author's judgements on the Gaul are not very interesting because they constitute Roman clichés (cf. Aulus Gellius: *quantum insolens prouocator*; Ab: *adeo ferox*; Ba: *per contemptum et superbiam circumspectans despiciensque omnia... tam immaniter adrogantem*). More interesting are the transformations affecting in the same way the Gaulish mythic materials borrowed.

In the A-episode, the strange contortions of the Gaul become artificial (Aa: *arte*) and above all entirely vain (Ab: *stolide laetum... agitatio uana... uanum caesim*) in comparison with the intelligence and the agility of the Roman: their effects are even inverted, since they allow the legionary to slip in,

shield against shield, and thrust his sword into the Gaul. There is also an inversion of behaviour since it is the Roman who, being victorious, decapitates his foe and puts the torque around his own neck (the item from which he took the name as *cognomen*), which is in no way a Roman war-custom.

In the B-episode, the intervention of the crow (or raven) is first subject to an *interpretatio* by the Roman according to Livy: it is a 'heaven-sent augury' (*ut augurium caelo missum... accepit*) sent by a deity (the deity is not considered as having herself taken the shape of a bird), and thanks to the *omen* of the soldier (*precatus deinde «si diuus, si diua esset, qui sibi praepetem misisset, uolens propitius adesset»*) the augury becomes a *prodigium* (*dictu mirabile... prodigii*) in his favour (*tam praesentibus ac secundis diis*). The effects of the Gaulish deity's intervention are inverted in favour of the Roman who becomes the winner. Moreover, in this case there is also an inversion of behaviour since, according to Livy, the Roman would have once again decapitated (*obtruncat*) his foe, and, according to Dionysius, from that time on he wore a helmet adorned with a raven (the bird whose name he took as *cognomen*),¹² another typical Gaulish custom.

Aspects of the Celtic hero 'outside' the tribe: Finn and his Gaulish parallels

Unlike the Ulster Cycle, the cycle of Finn, the warrior-hunter 'outside the tribe' (but member of a *fian*), as the specialists agree to define him (since Sjøestedt 1940, 109–21), did not get the honour of being treated as an epic in early Ireland. However, elements of the cycle are literarily attested since the seventh century, and the principal characteristics of the hero are present from the beginning (Murphy 1953, lv–lxi). The reason for this is perhaps that the subject matter did not suit a real epic like *TBC*. For in comparison with the central part of the Ulster Cycle, which offers a conflict suited to 'epic' narrative (a series of scenes of duels or fights between two enemy sides on the same battlefield), the Fenian Cycle belongs to a type more fragmentary (without links of time and place between its episodes) and more 'mobile'. Like the Heracles Cycle in Ancient Greece, it has close relationships with geography, since the hero scours the whole country during his adventures, which explains the particular narrative structure, justified by its specific content, of *Acallam na Senórach*, and the close relations of the cycle with the *dindshenchas* literary genre (cf. Baumgarten 1987, 1–24). Another important reason was the ideological and political (ecclesiastical) incompatibilities in the pre-Norman period (Mac Cana 1987, 88–99; McCone 1990, 203–20) before the official rehabilitation of Fionn Mac Cumhaill as the Gaelic 'national' symbol of resistance against the occupying British.

It is a fact that the Fenian Cycle, like the cycle of Heracles, is more deeply steeped in paganism (Mac Cana 1970, 109–10) and describes a mythic world less easily 'historicized' (and thus acceptable) in a Christian context. For the hero Finn, 'sentinelle avancée du monde naturel dans le monde surnaturel' (Sjøestedt 1940, 114), meets and encounters during his adventures, much more than the Ulster Cycle heroes do, various supernatural beings to whom he is himself more closely tied (cf. Ó hÓgáin 1987), even if he remains clearly distinct from them. There is again no reason to regard this hero, obviously mythic and without any historical foundation, as a former 'decayed' god.¹³

In the oldest sources referring to Finn, traces can be found of his kind of half-animal nature, suitable to animal metamorphosis, especially to lycanthropy (Sjøestedt 1940, 114–15). In the poem from Senchán Torpéist's *Cogangab Már* (Campanile 1988, n° 8), reference is made to Finn's 'wolfish rage' (*condafergga*),¹⁴ while the Gilla in Chomded húa Cormaic's twelfth-century poem (LL, f° 145a)

⁹ Cf. the 'protruded tongue' as part of the magic, real or mythic, war-contortions, Köves (1968, 212–39).
¹⁰ Under the form [C]ATHVBODVA, perfect cognate of the Irish *Bodb Catha* ('crow of battle'), cf. Leroux & Guyonvarc'h (1983, 69 and 102–11). The inscription was first analyzed by Adolphe Pictet ('Sur une déesse gauloise de la guerre', in *Revue archéologique* 18 (1868), 1–17, then by W.H. Hennessy ('The ancient Irish goddess of war', *RC* 1, 1870, 32–55).
¹¹ Diodorus (V, 30, 2) mentions such helmets (cf. also Plutarchus, *Marius* 25, 10). The one found in Ciamești and dating from the 3rd century BC, is reproduced and connected with the episode in Livy by Bloch (1970, pl. 1; 1976, fig. 1–3).

¹² Very common Celtic name, cf. Gaulish *Brennos*, Welsh *Brân*, Irish *Brian*.
¹³ Cf. n. 3, *contra* T. F. O'Rahilly (1946, 271–81), Murphy (1953, lxx–lxxxv), Mac Cana (1987, 74–83) and Ó hÓgáin (1987, 208). The parallels between some of his feats and those performed by the former god Lug is better explained in 'paradigmatic' terms, like the relationship between the Indian hero Rāma and the god Indra.
¹⁴ Of course, it is difficult in Irish to know, apart from the context, when *cú* sometimes designates a wolf instead of a dog. Campanile (1988, 28 and 50), who considers the expression as a metaphor, does not translate it literally, but Meyer (1914b, 21) translates by *wölfischer Wut*, and Corthals (1990, 21) by 'doglike wrath'.

refers to a disguise found by Finn ('the fair close-woven hood of Crothrainne') by means of which 'you will be wolf [?], man, or deer as you turn it, as you change it' (*ba cú, ba duine, ba dam ra impúd, ra aitherrach*, cf. Meyer 1910, 50). Similarly, the members of the *fianna* – as a real institution of early Ireland – were constantly assimilated to 'wolves' (McCone 1986; 1990, 213–14). I quote, for example, the charm from the ninth-century *Codex Sancti Pauli* (*Thes.* II, 293; cf. also Oskamp 1978, 387–88; McCone 1990, 207) where it is said that 'if I be not granted good luck, let it be wolves [lit. 'wild dogs'] and deer and traversing of mountains and young warriors of the *fian* that I see' (*manim rothcaither ropat choin altai 7 ois 7 imthecht slébe 7 oaic féne adcear*). And the *fianna* were of course condemned by the Church which had to forbid this 'savage' archaic institution (McCone 1990, 218–20 and 226–27) and the mythic stories referring to it (Mac Cana 1987, 92–97), stories where the hero, like an outlaw, passes most of his time (theoretically half a year) in hunting through the country with his companions, surviving occasionally as a warrior as circumstances require.

Now a typical episode of the stories of Finn, attested with narrative variations at various epochs in the growth of the cycle¹⁵, offers the following sequence of events:

- the hero as a hunter pursues a deer;
- the hero commits a 'hunting-fault' by pursuing, killing or appropriating an animal which belongs to a supernatural being (a former deity);
- the hero enters the service of the supernatural character who, alone or with his clan, is in a sovereignty conflict with another (or a group of other) supernatural character(s), without any final victory;
- the hero as a warrior fights, alone or with his supplicant, against the enemy who is finally defeated.

This is also the nucleus of events in the first part of the Welsh *Mabinogi* of Pwyll, and in an Anatolian hagiographic tale (the Placidus-St Eustace legend), which, as I have tried to demonstrate, could represent the Christianization of a Celtic myth transmitted by the Galatians (Vielle 1990).

But the same elements may also be found, in extremely condensed narrative form, in another episode of Roman 'history', more precisely in the *prodigium* that is supposed to have occurred during the battle of Sentinum. This battle took place in 295 BC between the Romans and a coalition of Samnites and Gauls. The Roman victory was total. This memorable episode, celebrated with 'rude military songs' (*inconditis carminibus militaribus*), has been exaggerated by its tellers, as Livy says X, 30, 4–7: 'Great is the glory of that day on which the battle was fought in the district of Sentinum, even if a man hold fast to truth; but some writers have so exaggerated as to over-shoot the credible.'

But even Livy's account seems to be a literary forgery relatively distant from the 'truth', for the historical reality seems to have been rewritten to become a chapter, as glorious as significant, of Roman history such as the third-century BC annalists conceived it.

Following Livy (X, 27, 6–9) here is the account of the prodigious event, assuredly without any historicity (Polybius II, 19, 6, Frontinus, *Strat.* I, 8, 3, and Florus, *Epit.* I, 12, did not mention it), that started the battle.

Thereupon the consuls strove to bring about an engagement (...). For the space of two days they harassed the enemy, but in these two days there was nothing done worth telling: a few were slain on either side and spirits were whetted for a downright battle, but the main issue was not brought to a decision (*discrimen*). On the third day the opposing armies descended in full strength into the field.

As they stood arrayed for battle, a hind, pursued by a wolf that had chased it down from the mountains, fled across the plain and ran between the two lines (*cum instructae acies starent, cerua fugiens lupum e montibus exacta, per campos inter duas acies decurrit*). They then turned in opposite directions, the hind towards the Gauls, the wolf towards the Romans (*inde diuersae ferae, cerua ad Gallos, lupus ad Romanos cursum deflexit*). For the wolf a passage was opened between the ranks, but the hind was killed by the Gauls (*lupo data inter ordines uia; ceruam Galli confixere*).

Then one of the front-rankers on the Roman side called out, 'That way flight and slaughter have shaped their course, where you see the beast lie slain that is sacred to Diana; on this side the victorious wolf of Mars, unhurt and sound, has reminded us of the race of Mars and of our founder' (*Tum ex antesignanis Romanus miles: 'Illac fuga, inquit, et caedes uertit, ubi sacram Dianae feram iacentem uidetis; hinc uictor Martius lupus, integer et intactus, gentis nos Martiae et conditoris nostri admonuit'*).

On the right wing, facing the Gauls, the Roman army was commanded by the consul P. Decius Mus. On the left wing, facing the Samnites, by the consul Q. Fabius Maximus. The battle was at first equal, but, for the final victory, the Romans, still menaced by the Gaulish chariots on the right wing, would need an extra *deuotio* by P. Decius to Tellus, the Earth goddess, and to the Manes, and also an extra *uotum* by Q. Fabius to Jupiter Victor¹⁶ for their left wing encircling the Samnite camp.

What is important to note is that this inaugural (and 'augural') episode has the peculiarity of being concerned with the Romans and the Gauls only, not the Samnites who were also there. And the *prodigium* is totally unique, normally in no way auspicious – the wolf is rather a 'suspicious' animal for the Romans (Bayet 1962, 245, 247–48) – and, like the *prodigium* of the raven, 'stranger' to Rome, in the sense that it does not enter any of the numerous series of *prodigia* admitted in Rome (Bloch 1963, 77 sq.).

Of this 'événement complexe et douteux', Bayet has given a circumstantial analysis and put forward the hypothesis that this narrative had 'une cohérence épique, en laquelle éléments pittoresques et jugements de valeur paraissent trahir l'interférence d'anciennes versions en partie pro-celtiques, sinon celtiques', 'l'influence plus ou moins médiate de versions gauloises (peut-être poétiques) de ces grandioses événements' (Bayet 1962, 246, 256). For, 'que le présage-prodige de Sentinum ait une substance historique ou seulement une signification épique, l'imperfection de l'*omen* correctif romain suppose une préalable interprétation favorable au Gaulois, plus ou moins appuyée (selon toute vraisemblance) sur des réalités religieuses celtiques' (Bayet 1962, 252, cf. also 256) – and Bayet alludes, among others, to the Fenian Cycle.

Without following Bayet in his Celtic ritual hypotheses and psychological interpretations of the Celtic religious consciousness, I think that this episode also reveals elements from the Gaulish heroic mythical tradition, borrowed again by Roman annalists, and similarly transformed for the benefit of Rome and Roman 'history'. For the same elements previously outlined about Finn can be found, in an extremely condensed narrative expression, in the *prodigium* of Sentinum:

Cf. *Acallam na Senórach*, ll. 4997–5264 (ed. W. Stokes and E. Windish 1900) and other later tales (fifteenth century), with pical 'romantic' amplifications, like *Tóraigheacht an Ghiolla Dheacair* (cf. the summary of my paper at the Paris Conference, Lambert, ed. (1992, 498–99)) and *Cath Finntrágha*. The elements which I here outline can be found dispersed in a set of earlier oral tales, whose pattern 'reconstructed' by Murphy (1953, lxx–lxx: episodes of Cúldub and Aed Mac Fidaig) is also strangely parallel.

¹⁶ Cf. Dumézil (1952; 1969, 179–92) for a study of the theological structure *tripartite* which underlies the narration of the battle.

- the wolf as a hunter pursues a hind;
- a Gaul commits a fault by killing the animal 'sacred to Diana';
- the wolf comes to the side of Rome which is in a sovereignty conflict with the Gauls, without any final 'decision';
- the 'Martial' wolf, 'unhurt and sound', is on the side of Rome, 'victorious', while the enemy is finally defeated.

We are thus reasonably secure in ascribing this nucleus of events to a typical episode of a Gaulish heroic cycle concerning a hero-warrior-hunter, with wolfish aspects, and corresponding to the Irish hero Finn.

It is possible, of course, that the existence of a real Gaulish institution consisting of packs of young warriors, such as the archaic Irish *fianna*, for whom corresponding characteristics may be found among the *Γαισάται* described by Polybius (II, 28–30), i.e. a *Männerbund* of young 'wolves' with wild behaviour patterns, could have so impressed the Romans that they stimulated the borrowing of related mythic stories. But what seems more convincing to me, regarding the mechanisms of inclusion in the annalistic tradition are the similar transformations affecting the Gaulish mythic materials. The case of the C-episode is especially close to that of the B in respect of its supernatural aspect.

The *prodigium* is also subject to Roman *interpretatio* by way of what Bayet (1962, 245 and 247–50) has shown to be a 'correcting' *omen* of the Roman soldier: the wolf is related to Mars (it is no longer the personal intervention of an animal-shaped hero)¹⁷ and the effects of its intervention are for the benefit of Rome, whereas the crime by which the hind 'sacred to Diana' is killed, is transferred and assigned to the Gauls.

However, one should not neglect the differences in the enclosing modalities between this episode and the other two. These differences derive, I suggest, from the distinct types of heroic *gesta* or sub-cycles concerned, and from the different ways in which the characters are placed inside them. The first type is concerned with a single heroic conflict and in the borrowing, once the Roman is placed in front of the Gaulish hero, the magical motifs are simply inverted to favour the Roman instead of the Gaul. As for the other type, where a hero whose own nature is closer to that of the gods intervenes in a *grandiose* divine conflict,¹⁸ the favouring of the 'good' party (here the Roman) works to the detriment of the 'bad', which in this case can only be the Gauls.

Conclusions

The results of this analysis of these three Gaulish episodes from Roman (partly) pseudo-history and their relationship to the mythic heroic cycles from medieval Ireland are two-fold:

From the point of view of Latin studies, the comparison reveals how identical mechanisms have systematically operated to transform and incorporate Gaulish mythic materials into Roman 'tradition'. These hint at how intercultural contacts existed between Roman annalists and Gaulish story-tellers that

permitted the mythic materials of neighbouring but nevertheless hostile nations to be borrowed from an oral tradition to serve the making, i.e. the 'writing', of 'history'.

From the point of view of Celtic studies, the comparison enables us to uncover elements of a Celtic heroic cycle in its Gaulish state (irrespective of its narrative form).¹⁹ These reveal the existence of two types of mythical heroes, well distinguished by their characteristics and their actions, who probably belonged to two different *gesta* or sub-cycles, and who correspond to the two Irish hero-types, one 'of the tribe', the other 'outside the tribe', i.e. Cú Chulainn and Finn, or, if one may go so far, the warrior-dog and the hunter-wolf.

Addendum

Another important phenomenon in Cú Chulainn's contortions are the magical lights which appear around his head (cf. *TBC* I 2266, the 'torches of the Bodb' and the 'sparks of blazing fire', *na háible tened trichemrúaid*, and 2272, the famous *lúan láith*, 'champion's light'). This phenomenon is also attested in ancient Celtic iconography (cf. Sjøestedt 1936, 14–16), but unlike the protruded tongue, it could not easily find a place in the 'realism' of the annalistic narrative. However, as Murphy pointed out (1955, 29, n. 44), 'the Roman centurion, who, according to L. Annaeus Florus (II, 26), struck terror into the [Celto-Dacian] Moesi by carrying a flaming brazier on his helmet [*foculum gerens super cassidem, agitatum motu corporis, flammam uelut ardenti capite funditabat*] was doubtless aware of this barbarian belief [described by Florus as *satis barbarae, efficacis tamen... stoliditatis*]. Moreover, the name given to the centurion is in some manuscripts *Canidius* (*Chonidius* in others). If this is the true form, derived from *canis*, the case would be very similar to that of *Coruinus*, and the name very close to that of our Irish hero!

¹⁷ Of course, in Roman 'history', a hero (in the ancient sense of the word) or a deity, especially a foreign one, is not allowed to come 'in person' on the battlefield but may only intervene indirectly, through the 'prodigious' apparition of an animal or a natural phenomenon which 'represents' him, whereas for the Celts, the animal 'is' a shape taken by the deity or, in this case, by the hero.

¹⁸ And for Florus, the Celtomachy of Sentinum looked like a Gigantomachy, *quasi in terrigenas e caelo ac nubibus tela iacerentur*. Bayet (1962, 246) notes that in comparison with Livy, 'la veine épique [y] est toute différente: mythologique et quasi cosmique, (...) elle révèle un modèle grec littéraire (Celtomachie = Gigantomachie)'. We will add that Florus tells a strange episode which took place before the battle when to come up against the Gauls, the Roman army first had to cross the impassable and terrifying Ciminian forest (*Ciminus interim saltus in medio... inuius plane... adeo tum terrori erat, ut senatus consuli denuntiaret ne tantum periculi ingredi auderet*).

¹⁹ It is indeed out of the question here to speak of a 'Gaulish version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*' (cf. Olmsted 1979) or to say something about a corresponding 'epic', because we have no trace of that. What I refer to here is the persistence of traditional 'contents', on the level of the 'narrated stories' which, I think, constitute the basic data for the comparative research on the historically related 'mythosystems', Celtic in this case (and further, Indo-European).