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IRISH TRANSLATIONS AND ROMANCES

Aisling Byrne

A curious feature of Irish engagement with the Arthurian legend is that it begins to gain pace at precisely the moment the production of Arthurian romances starts to wane in England. None of the Arthurian romances composed in Ireland can be dated to earlier than the mid-1400s with absolute certainty and at least one seems likely to be from as late as the mid-1600s. In many respects, the fortunes of Arthurian literature in medieval Ireland parallel those of other foreign vernacular literatures – although a good deal of classical material was translated in the central Middle Ages, translation of narrative texts in French or English is exceptionally limited before the fifteenth century. Yet, even then, Arthurian material is by no means as prominent as one might expect. Romance appears to have been one of the most popular genres for translation into Irish. Texts such as *Fierabras*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Octavian* and *William of Palerne* are translated in this period, but only a single Arthurian narrative, the *Quest of the Holy Grail,* was certainly translated into Irish.[1] This lack of translated material makes it all the more surprising when 'indigenous' Arthurian material finally starts to attain any prominence in the Irish literary corpus. Five narratives about Arthur and his knights appear in Irish between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. These have affinities with romances from other European traditions, but do not appear to be translations. The apparent impact of these works is reflected in surviving bardic poetry where references to Arthur and his knights appear with a markedly increased frequency and detail from the fifteenth century onwards.

The Irish translation of the *Quest of the Holy Grail* has been dubbed *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha* (Search for the Holy Vessel) by its modern editor.[2] Dating this text presents some challenges. Its editor felt that it 'it would be hazardous to assign it to a period before the middle of the fifteenth century';[3] however, John Carey has recently reappraised the evidence, particularly the linguistic evidence, and suggests that an earlier date, in the fourteenth or even the thirteenth century, cannot be definitively excluded.[4] Despite being the sole Arthurian text among medieval Irish translations of foreign romance, it seems to have enjoyed some popularity. Today the translation survives in three manuscripts, all of which date from the second half of the fifteenth century. This is quite a healthy rate of survival – of the other translated romances, only the Irish version of *Fierabras* survives in more medieval copies and all the others survive in unique manuscripts only.[5] The work is in prose and follows the narrative of the French Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* very closely.[6] The *Lorgaireacht*'s apparent success in a linguistic environment where Arthurian material was notably absent is not as paradoxical as might at first appear. There is a case to be made for the Grail story being one of the least 'typical' of the narratives associated with Arthur and his knights. In particular, the pronounced religiosity of the text makes it rather different in tone to many other Arthurian stories. It is entirely possible that, as Rachel Bromwich observes, 'it was its devotional character that caused the *Queste* to be the only Arthurian romance that was translated into Irish'.[7] Romances translated into Irish in the Middle Ages are, in general, of a pious kind. *Sir Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, *Fierabras* and *Octavian* are all romances that recount Christian successes against Islamic enemies. Indeed, it is evident that the piety of both *Guy of Warwick* and *Fierabras* has been enhanced in the process of translation into Irish.[8] It is possible that some of this material arrived in Ireland via the international networks of religious orders of various stripes. It is only in the fifteenth century

that these orders begin to become embedded in the Irish-speaking areas of the country, creating conditions for literary transfer that had not existed previously. Indeed, the Irish *Fierabras* may have formed part of a wider programme of translation associated with the Franciscans[9] and there are good reasons to associate the translation of *Bevis of Hampton* (and, possibly, *Guy of Warwick*, which survives in the hand of the same translator in the same manuscript) with the Knights Hospitaller.[10]

The manuscript tradition of the *Lorgaireacht* provides some evidence of fraternal interest in the work. Royal Irish Academy, MS D 4 2 appears to be the earliest of the manuscripts, most likely dating from the third quarter of the fifteenth century.[11] A scribe notes at two points in the manuscript (ff. 54v, 87v) that he is writing in a monastery at Kilcormac in modern-day County Offaly in the south midlands of Ireland. The only monastic foundation at that location was St Mary's Priory, a Carmelite friary established in the early 1400s.[12] Despite its fraternal provenance, the contents of the manuscript are not uniformly religious; indeed, the manuscript has been described as 'encyclopaedic in conception' and sits easily among the large miscellanies of the late Middle Ages in which a good deal of medieval Irish literature is preserved.[13] The two folios of a copy of the *Lorgaireacht* now in University College Dublin, MS A 10 also have connections to the friars, though they cannot be traced right back to the time of the manuscript's composition in the late fifteenth century.[14] The early history of these pages is obscure, but it is evident that the folios containing the *Lorgaireacht* were in Franciscan hands from the early 1600s at the latest. The manuscript features the name of one 'Cathal Ó hEachaidhean', who identifies the book as his own in the margin of f. 6r, one of the folios containing material from the *Lorgaireacht*.[15] This man's name also occurs on f. 2r of another manuscript from the same collection, University College Dublin, MS A 5, where, writing in 1622, he gives his location as Louvain. This links the owner firmly with the

Franciscan community at Louvain, where an Irish College had been founded in 1607. It seems likely that University College Dublin, MS A 10 was also in Louvain at this relatively early point. The third manuscript, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512, appears to be from an entirely lay context. The scribe of the *Lorgaireacht* has left an account of his patrons: Sir John Plunket and his wife Catherine Hussey.[16] Plunket was 3rd Baron Dunsany and a relatively prominent nobleman of Norman descent. His lands were in modern-day County Meath, just outside the Pale.

Identifying the language of the source of *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha* is not completely straightforward. Sheila Falconer, who produced the only modern edition of the work, believed that it derived from a lost English translation of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*.[17] If Falconer's view is correct, then the *Lorgaireacht* would provide the clearest evidence we have for the existence of an English-language version of the Grail quest before Thomas Malory translated the work. Falconer's evidence for asserting an English-language source was primarily linguistic and was challenged in a review of the edition by Rachel Bromwich who considered a French-language source more plausible[18] though, as I have suggested, a source in the French of England may be particularly likely.[19] If the work is from French, the implications are of significance for Malorian studies. As I have noted elsewhere, close examination of the *Lorgaireacht* reveals that it agrees with Malory and against every known version of the *Queste* in numerous small details.[20] There is enough of the Vulgate narrative present in the *Lorgaireacht* and not in Malory to exclude the possibility that Malory's text was the immediate source. Therefore, it is possible that the Irish text is our best witness to the nature of Malory's source, which scholars have long assumed to have been a variant, but lost, version of the *Queste*.

The 'indigenous' Irish narratives that feature Arthur or characters from the Arthurian legend seem to first appear not long after the *Lorgaireacht*. In total, five surviving narratives are set in the world of Arthur: *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* (The Adventure of the Cropped Dog), *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* (The Adventure of the Noble Youth of the Eagle),[21] *Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe* (The Visit of Grey-Thigh),[22] *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* (The Adventure of the Great Fool),[23] and *Eachtra Mhelóra agus Orlando* (The Adventure of Melora and Orlando).[24] Of these only *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* survive in more than a handful of manuscript copies.[25] In addition to these romances, there is an episode with an Arthurian setting in *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh* (The Martial Career of Conghal Cláiringhneach), a text that is almost certainly late medieval, and which survives in two manuscripts from the sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries.[26] These indigenous romances have pronounced affinities with Arthurian texts from other traditions, but only *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* shows clear influence from a specific foreign narrative – a version of *Perceval*. Even then, the correspondence is of a very loose kind and the Irish text differs from *Perceval* in more ways than it recalls it. Five home-grown romances is not a particularly high number of Arthurian narratives by comparison with other European traditions; however, in the case of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* the number of surviving manuscripts is very striking indeed and suggests considerable success for these two stories. At the most recent count, the former survives in 85 manuscripts, while the latter now appears in 29.[27] Most of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*'s surviving manuscripts date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the earliest copy of the text occurs in a manuscript of 1517. This makes it the earliest survival of these texts, though there is strong evidence that a manuscript written in the north west of Ireland a generation earlier once contained a copy of another. London, British Library, MS Egerton 1781 was written by two scribes between 1484 and 1487 and includes a sixteenth-

century contents list on its final folio. This list makes it evident that the volume now lacks around sixteen folios and the missing material includes a text labelled 'Sgél isgaide leithe'.[28] This seems likely to be the same text as *Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe*, which otherwise only survives in two much later manuscripts.[29]

By the standards of most Arthurian writing, these Irish romances have been rather neglected. In part, this is may be due to their late date – they do not fit neatly into the medieval phase of Arthurian literary composition where most scholarly work on the legend tends to be concentrated. The fact that not all the modern editions of these texts are adequate, particularly those of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir*, has also hampered scholarship.[30] However, the most significant reason for their neglect is surely that widely-available modern English translations exist for only two of these works, *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*.[31] Just as Arthurian studies are more vibrant among medievalists than among early modernists, so too is the Arthurian legend a rather more central part of disciplines like French and English studies than Irish studies. This lack of modern translation, then, is a serious impediment to these tales being examined within the wider context of European Arthuriana, both medieval and early modern. Although papers by William Gillies, Bernadette Smelik, Linda Gowans and Joseph Falaky Nagy have gone some way towards opening up these texts for non-Irish-speaking audiences, much work remains to be done.[32]

The picture these romances paint of the world of Arthur is both familiar and unfamiliar. Arthur is typically identified as the king of the Britons, but the Irish writers also often call him *Rí an Domhain* (the king of the world). The latter title is sometimes attached to other great figures in medieval Irish texts, such as Roman Emperors or Alexander the Great

and is, presumably, an allusion to Arthur's conquests.[33] His seat is sometimes identified as Camelot (*Cathair na Camlaoide* – City/Castle of Camelot), but the most typical name for his stronghold in the Irish tradition is *Dún an Halla Dheirg* (the Fortress of the Red Hall). Only a very limited number of Arthurian characters appear with any frequency in the Irish romances. By far the most prominent of the knights of the Round Table named in the Irish romances is Gawain. The Round Table itself is a staple component in the Irish texts. The locations in which Arthurian heroes tend to encounter adventures are the *Foraois Baoghalach* (Dangerous Forest) and *Magh na nIongnadh* (Plain of Wonders).[34] The mixing of conventional Arthurian titles and locations with terms and place names of Irish origin is characteristic of the processes of composition of these texts in general. Their authors also introduce elements from native Irish literature into the Arthurian world; for instance, the protagonist of *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* encounters a member of the Tuatha Dé Danann (People of the Goddess Danu – a pantheon of supernatural beings who feature prominently in Irish myth) in the course of his travels.[35] Similarly, Arthur's well-known refusal to eat before he has seen a wonder is given a 'native' gloss by being described as a *geis*, a form of ritual taboo common in medieval Irish heroic narratives.[36]

All these indigenous Arthurian texts fall within the category of story generally dubbed *scéalta rómánsaíochta* or 'romantic tales'.[37] Romantic tales are, broadly speaking, very similar in structure and tone to mainstream European romance, though they only appear in Ireland from the fifteenth century onwards. They continued to be copied and many circulated orally well into the nineteenth century. It is not unlikely that translation of foreign romances might have stimulated the production of the romantic tales.[38] In a similar vein, Joseph Falaky Nagy has speculated that the seeming success of the *Lorgaireacht* might have prompted the production of more Arthurian works in Ireland.[39] Carey has recently noted the similar forms

taken by knights' personal names in the *Lorgaireacht* and in *Eachtra and Mhadra Mhaoil* and suggests the direct influence of the former on the latter.[40] Some degree of influence seems plausible, but quite how much is open to question; after all, the five indigenous romances are dramatically different in substance and tone from the *Lorgaireacht*. Where the *Lorgaireacht* is a religious text of a very serious kind, the indigenous romances are all concerned with largely secular values and some are rather comic. The *Lorgaireacht* is also a very literate and literary work, whereas the indigenous romances have the structure and style of folktales. Therefore, it seems difficult to account for the composition of these texts in Ireland solely by reference to the success of the *Lorgaireacht* and, indeed, it seems unlikely that the same factors that drew readers to the *Lorgaireacht* were responsible for the success of more loosely structured and light-hearted texts like *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*.

Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair provides an indication that not all these Arthurian texts are as 'indigenous' as they appear. This story of a dispossessed heir features numerous motifs conventional to medieval romances composed across Europe. As a baby, the hero is carried away by an eagle and dropped into Arthur's lap. The king raises him as his own. When he grows older and learns he is not Arthur's son, the young man asks to be knighted and sets out to discover his origins. In the course of his travels he finds a wife for himself and for Arthur and discovers his homeland. There, he is reunited his family, kills his uncle and becomes king. The earliest witness to this tale is a manuscript of 1651, Royal Irish Academy MS 24 P 9, by the prolific scribe Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeannáin.[41] A note in this manuscript provides the most comprehensive evidence we have of the background and origins of any indigenous Arthurian romance:

> Bíodh a fhios agad, a léughthoir an sgeóil-si, gurab amhlaidh do fuair misi .i. Brían Ó Corcrán cnámha an sgéil so ag duine úasal a dubhairt gurab as Fraincis do chúalaidh sé féin dá innisin é, agus mur do fúair misi sbéis ann do dheachtaigh mur so é ⁊ do chuirsim na laoithe beaga-sa mur chumáoin air, ⁊ ní raibhe an sgél féin a nGáoidheilg ariamh conuige sin.[42]
>
> (Know, O reader of this story, that it is the case that I, Brian Ó Corcráin, got the bones of this story from a noble person who said that he heard it being told in French, and when I became interested in it he composed it like this and added these little lays to it, and the story had never been in Irish until then.)[43]

Caoimhín Breatnach's translation given here differs from previous translations by Alan Bruford, William Gillies and Joseph Nagy in suggesting that the 'noble person', not Ó Corcráin, was responsible for the composition of the text in Irish. All previous translations have identified Brian Ó Corcráin as the translator responsible for rendering the story into Irish having heard it from a nobleman. This Brian Ó Corcráin has traditionally been identified with a prominent poet of the same name who flourished in the early seventeenth century. However, this assumption was largely conditioned by the identification of him as the translator and as the man who inserted the 'little lays' in the narrative.[44] If Breatnach's reading is correct, Ó Corcráin may not necessarily have been a literary man and it is also possible that he can be identified with another man of this same name, who was vicar of Cleenish in Fermanagh and died in 1487.[45]

The role played by storytelling or oral transmission in Ó Corcráin's account may be of wider significance to our understanding of these romances. In contrast to *Lorgaireacht an*

tSoidigh Naomhtha, which is clearly translated by someone with access to a manuscript copy of the source text, we are here informed that the story was recounted orally before it was written down. The insertion of the 'little lays' suggests that the writer had some literary training and points to how much might have been added to the oral report to produce a coherent text. Indeed, the very length of *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* suggests that a good deal more than the lays must have been contributed by the person who produced the Irish text. In MacAlistair's edition, the Irish text runs to sixty-one printed pages of about thirty lines per page. While the core narrative elements may, in the main, originate in a French-language original, it seems very unlikely that all of the details in a text of this length could have been recounted from memory.

A similar process of composition may lie behind *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir*, the only one of these texts that we can connect with an identifiable foreign romance narrative with any degree of certainty. This romance has received the most attention of the indigenous romances, because of its parallels with the *Perceval* story. The eponymous *amadán* (fool) is never given a proper name, but is identified as Arthur's nephew who has been raised away from the court. Arthur had killed the fool's brothers, who were attempting to put their own father on the throne. When the fool finally arrives at Arthur's court he makes no attempt at revenge; rather, he is quite content to play out his role as a fool and undertakes a series of comic adventures, some of which are, perhaps, closer in tone to *fabliaux* than to romance.[46] It seems clear that some version of the *Perceval* story lies in the background of this narrative, albeit at a considerable remove. Linda Gowans has argued that the text constitutes a 'perceptive and witty response' to Chrétien's narrative, though the immediate source seems unlikely to be Chretien's text itself, but, rather, some later reworking of it.[47]

Although its connections to English or continental romance are less evident, *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* merits attention. Not only is it the earliest survivor of the group, but its rate of survival in manuscript far outstrips all the others. Its earliest appearance is in British Library, MS Egerton 1782, a large and miscellaneous compilation of narrative material dating from 1517.[48] Like *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*, *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* is a story of a dispossessed heir from an exotic land, who receives help from Arthur and his court. The story begins with Arthur and his knights being placed under a *geis* that requires them to hunt on the 'Plain of Wonders' for seven years. They are attacked by a supernatural adversary called *Ridire an Lóchrainn,* (The Knight of Light), who binds them and leaves them helpless. Only Gawain escapes, and a helpless Arthur begs him to fetch some water, so they may at least drink. As he searches for water, Gawain encounters the Cropped Dog of the title who turns out to be the Knight of Light's half-brother and his enemy. Much of the remainder of the narrative is taken up with the adventures of Gawain and the Cropped Dog as they hunt the knight across Europe and as far as India. At the end of the story the brothers are reunited and the dog transforms into his true identity, the King of India. This narrative could readily be characterized as a 'Gawain romance'. The central position of that knight might suggest influence by material from Middle English romance, where the figure of Gawain was more virtuous and celebrated than in the French Arthurian tradition. This influence, of course, could have been of a more loose kind than that of direct English or Anglo-French source texts. These Irish romances frequently contain echoes of texts from other linguistic traditions, but few parallels are exact enough to suggest direct influence by specific French or English romances. Whatever the origins of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*, this seemingly highly popular text may have left an impression on other Arthurian romances in Irish. Maartje Draak suggests that an acquaintance with the work would have been enough to provide the authors of three of the other romances with the Arthurian material they deploy. She notes that most of

the personal titles and locations that recur in Irish Arthurian romance appear in this text, that *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* gives Arthur's genealogy in the form it appears elsewhere, that it gives Gawain a significant role and names other knights. This, Draak says, amounts to the 'somewhat meagre stock-in-trade of the authors of Irish Arthuriana as it reveals itself more or less in *Mac an Iolair*, and *Celidhe Iosgaidhe leithe*'.[49] Draak also argues that *Eachtra Orlando and Mélora* is indebted to a seventeenth-century version of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*, meaning that 'only the prose *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* stands apart'.[50]

Draak's theory would place the composition of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* earlier than that of *Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe* which, as we have seen, appears to be attested in the 1480s. Of all these texts, *Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe* will seem the most unfamiliar to anyone well-versed in Arthurian texts from medieval Britain and France. It has been described by Nagy as having a distinctively Irish flavour – he believes the text is 'not as interested in the Arthurian characters or milieu as in a remarkable enchanted, and enchanting, creature of unmistakable Irish make ... [who] wreaks havoc with our Arthurian expectations'.[51] The text recounts how the Son of the King of Gascony goes to Arthur's court with his wife. One day he follows a particularly elusive deer deep into the forest and comes to a fairy dwelling. There he finds that the deer was actually a beautiful girl who is eventually brought to Arthur's court. The fairy's one blemish is a tuft of grey hair in the hollow at the back of her knee. The women of the court try to shame the fairy, but when they do so the defect appears on their own legs and vanishes from hers. At this point the fairy reveals her true name, Aillean, and induces the men to abandon their wives and to come to her land where they will take new spouses. However, the fairy has one more twist in store for Arthur's court. The court takes part in a deer hunt in which all the men, except Arthur and Gawain, die at the hands of savage beasts. Fighting for his life, Gawain attacks an oncoming dog only to be told by Aillean that

the dog is actually his new wife under enchantment. At this point the animals shift into human form and are all revealed to be new wives of members of Arthur's court. The men of the court come back to life and live happily-ever-after. Draak considers the story 'badly constructed', given the prince of Gascony disappears midway through the narrative, and speculates that the narrative may represent two separate tales that have been loosely stitched together.[52] If this is true, it raises the possibility that only one of these narratives was Arthurian; after all, the first half of the narrative featuring a shape-shifting fairy encountered in the forest certainly looks more recognizably 'Arthurian' than the second half recounting the cursing of the wives of the court, the new marriages in fairyland and the encounter with the savage beasts. If the text is indeed a composite one, then the identity of 'Sgél isgaide leithe' in MS Egerton 1781 is open to question. It may be the version of the text that has come down to us, or perhaps an earlier, possibly non-Arthurian, iteration of the story of Aillean.

Eachtra Orlando agus Mélora seems likely to be the latest of these romances by quite some time. The earliest known copy of *Eachtra Orlando agus Mélora* dates from 1679 and the text itself seems unlikely to be earlier than the 1650s.[53] As both Draak and Bernadette Smelik observe, the plot is a rather elegant one and its relative neglect is particularly unfortunate.[54] The Mélora of the title (a character unique to this text) is the daughter of King Arthur who has a vision one night. Merlin interprets Mélora's vision to mean that she will fall in love with a prince, but that they will not come together without great trials. According to Merlin, Mélora will finally rescue the prince when he is in greatest need. The Orlando of the title is the son of the king of Thessaly who decides to visit Arthur's court. Before departure, he too has a vision predicting his love for a woman, the dangers he will endure for her and her rescue of him. On arrival at Arthur's court, Orlando is made a knight of the Round Table

and falls in love with Mélora, who reciprocates his affection. Sir Mador, who also loves Mélora, becomes jealous of Orlando and plots with Merlin to destroy him. Wandering in the forest, Orlando comes to a castle in which he partakes of food and drink laid by invisible hands. A hag appears to him to tell him he is now magically imprisoned in the castle on account of Merlin and Mador's plot. He will be unable to speak and will only be able to free himself with the aid of three treasures: the spear of Longinus, now owned by the Sultan of Babylon, the carbuncle of the daughter of the King of Narsinga and the oil in the possession of the King of Great Asia. When Mélora discovers what has happened, she puts on armour and rides eastwards. Masquerading as a young man, she obtains the three items through chivalric exploits and through stratagems. Back in Britain, Mélora uses the objects to free Orlando and to restore his voice. She reveals her identity to a delighted Arthur, marries Orlando, and Merlin and Mador are exiled.

The title of *Eachtra Orlando agus Mélora* conjures up associations that are distinctly un-Irish. It has been suggested that this text may owe something to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*; however, as so often with these Irish Arthurian texts, the precise nature of the debt is difficult to pin down.[55] In Ariosto's text the warrior-maiden, Bradamante, frees her love, the Saracen knight Ruggiero, from imprisonment by fighting a duel with the wizard Atlante. She overcomes the wizard by means of a magical ring she has won from the dwarf, Brunello.[56] The correspondence between this narrative and the Irish romance is of a very loose sort. The sum of what both narratives have in common is the story of warrior maiden saving her beloved by use of a magical talisman (or in Mélora's case talismans) that she has obtained. There is a good deal more in these cantos of *Orlando Furioso* that plays no part in the Irish text and in Ariosto's work the rescue of Ruggiero is not the end of the lovers' trials, as they are separated again soon afterwards. Like Mélora, Bradamante has a vision of her destiny in

which Merlin's spirit prophesies illustrious descendants for her.[57] What we seem to have in *Eachtra Orlando agus Mélora* is a deft combination of narrative motifs drawn from the European romance tradition, produced by a writer who probably had encountered the Bradamante and Ruggiero narrative, but used it as just one ingredient in his story.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the Arthurian episode in *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*. A full copy of the text appears in a mid-seventeenth century manuscript from Ireland, but it is clearly much earlier in date and may have been circulating in both Ireland and Scotland at an early point.[58] In one of his many adventures, Conghal aids Arthur in defeating the ruler of the Saxons whose son is called Artur Aoinfhear (Arthur the Solitary One), sometimes referred to as Art Aoinfhear in the text.[59] The author then observes: 'is annso benas tallann sceoil oile do'n chaithreimsi Conghail Clairingnigh' (here belongs a portion of another story in the martial exploits of Conghal Cláiringhneach).[60] At this point, the narrative flashes back to an earlier, entirely Arthurian episode. Many years before, Arthur's queen was killed during a Saxon attack on Arthur's household and her infant son taken and raised by the Saxon king. Arthur meanwhile mourns the loss of his wife and his childlessness. Various men visit Arthur's court claiming to be Arthur's lost son, but all fail a test Arthur has set for them. At this point the narrative returns to Conghal who notes the similarity between Artur/Art Aoinfhear and King Arthur and convinces the Saxon king to reveal the truth. Conghal reunites the youth with his father, Arthur, and peace is made between Briton and Saxons on account of of the bond that this rather unconventional 'fosterage' has created between them. In total this little episode takes up only four of the seventy-two chapters into which *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh* is divided in its modern edition. The intriguing reference to 'sceoil oile' (another story) suggests that the author of

Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh may have integrated a pre-existing Arthurian tale into his narrative about Conghal.

This upsurge in interest in Arthuriana from the fifteenth century onwards is reflected in the corpus of surviving bardic poetry. Arthurian allusions are exceptionally rare before this point, but from the end of the Middle Ages onwards there is a striking uptick in both the number of references and the extent to which they are fleshed out within individual poems. For instance, poets sometimes use names from the Arthurian legend in order to draw a flattering comparison with a patron.[61] Two different poets address Pilib, son of Aodh Conallach Ó Raghallaigh, as the 'Gawain of Ireland' in works from the final decades of the sixteenth century.[62] This Pilib was a member of the Uí Raghallaigh (O'Reilly) family of East Bréifne in the north-west of Ireland and died in 1596.[63] Some poets allude to specific events or conventions from Arthurian romance. For instance, Arthurian motifs appear in the works of two of the most prominent poets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn and Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird. Ó Huiginn mentions a maiden who came to the Round Table of 'Cing iongantach Artúr' (the wondrous King Arthur).[64] The allusion is lacking in specifics, but it could well refer to the woman at the centre of *Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe*.[65] In a poem written at Louvain in 1618, Mac an Bhaird makes reference to King Arthur's well-known practice of refusing to eat until he has seen a marvel.[66] One of the most extensive Arthurian passages in surviving bardic poetry seems to owe a very direct debt to the *Lorgaireacht*. It occurs in a late fifteenth-century elegy for James Purcell, baron of Loughmoe, and draws a comparison between Purcell and Galahad.[67] The subject of this poem was alive in the 1460s and was a member of a landowning family in Tipperary.[68] The poet asserts that the connection is particularly apposite, because both James Purcell and Galahad are descended from Remus (ll. 315–16). Between lines 261 and 316, the poet summarizes

material from the beginning of the *Queste* where Galahad proves his worth by extracting the sword from the stone and sitting in the perilous seat at the Round Table. It seems very likely that the poet knew this narrative from the Irish translation.[69]

Given the late date of most of the surviving manuscripts, it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions about the early audiences of the indigenous Irish Arthurian texts and their attitude to the figure of Arthur himself. Smelik has suggested that the often negative or humorous portrayal of Arthur in the indigenous romances might have a political dimension: it might reflect opposition to the English king.[70] This is certainly possible, but it must also be noted that the Arthurian narratives that survive from Ireland do not tend to have any other obvious political dimension. The Irish texts display none of the explicit concern with British history and territorial politics that features so prominently in other Arthurian traditions. The interest of the Irish adaptors typically seems to have been in the world of Arthur as a realm of adventure and of marvels. This lack of interest in the political dimensions of Arthurian narrative may also be reflected in the fact that the *Queste*, a text whose ideals are more spiritual than political, seems to have been the only Arthurian text translated in medieval Ireland.[71]

Although sustained interest in Arthur appears to emerge much later in Ireland than in other parts of Europe, the composition of five indigenous romances, the particularly high rate of manuscript survival of two of them, and the allusions in contemporary poetry suggest a respectable degree of success for this mode of writing from the fifteenth century onwards. The earliest hint of this emerging interest comes in the form of the translation of the *Queste del Saint Graal*. The indigenous romances are notable exceptions to the general decline in Arthurian romance composition across Europe in the same period. The correspondences between the Irish Arthurian romances and English and French romance narratives are close enough to be tantalising, but never close enough to be certain. What we seem to have (to a

greater or lesser extent) in these five works is not straightforward translation from individual source texts, but the sort of recombination of familiar motifs that constituted the standard way of composing romance across medieval western Europe. Romance, after all, is a very derivative genre, albeit often artfully so. Although it is very far from the sort of close translation we see in the *Lorgaireacht*, it could be argued that this process of composition draws these Irish Arthurian romances particularly close to wider European practices of romance composition.

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[1] Aisling Byrne, 'The Circulation of Romances from England in Late Medieval Ireland', in Nicholas Perkins (ed.), *Medieval Romance and Material Culture* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 183–98.

[2] Sheila Falconer (ed.), *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha: An Early Modern Irish Translation of the 'Quest of the Holy Grail'* (Dublin: DIAS, 1953).

[3] Falconer (ed.), *Lorgaireacht*, p. xxxii.

[4] John Carey, 'The Grail and Ireland', in John Carey (ed.), *The Matter of Britain in Medieval Ireland: Reassessments*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 29 (2017), pp. 29–46.

[5] For the manuscripts of these texts, see Byrne 'Circulation of Romances', pp. 197–8.

[6] Falconer (ed.), *Lorgaireacht*, pp. ix–x.

[7] Rachel Bromwich, 'Review of *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha*, ed. Sheila Falconer', *Medium Aevum*, 25 (1956), 92–5 (p. 93).

[8] Byrne, 'Circulation of Romances', pp. 189–90, 193.

[9] Aisling Byrne, 'Language Networks, Literary Translation and the Friars', in Mary Carruthers (ed.), *Language in Medieval Britain: Networks and Exchanges*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 25 (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015), pp. 166–78.

[10] Erich Poppe, 'The Early Modern Irish Version of *Beves of Hampton*', *CMCS*, 23 (1992), 77–98.

[11] Kathleen Mulchrone, Thomas F. O'Rahilly, Elizabeth FitzPatrick, and A. I. Pearson (eds), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 8 vols (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy,1926–70), fasc. xxvi (1943), 3297–307. For more recent comment on this manuscript, see Brent Miles, '*Togail Troí:* The Irish Destruction of Troy on the Cusp of the Renaissance', in Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell (eds), *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004) pp. 81–96 (p. 86).

[12] On this foundation, see Aubrey Gwynn and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland* (Harlow: Longmans, 1970), pp. 289–90.

[13] Miles, '*Togail Troí*', p. 86.

[14] Myles Dillon, Canice Mooney and Pádraig de Brún, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Franciscan Library, Killiney* (Dublin: DIAS, 1969), p. 21.

[15] Dillon, Mooney and de Brún, 'Catalogue', pp. 21–2.

[16] Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford and Oxford College Libraries*, 2 vols (Dublin: DIAS, 2001–3), vol. 1, p. 234.

[17] Falconer (ed.), *Lorgaireacht*, p. xxxi.

[18] Bromwich, 'Review', p. 93.

[19] Aisling Byrne, 'Malory's sources for the *Tale of the Sankgreal*: Some Overlooked Evidence from *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha*', *Arthurian Literature*, 30 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 87–100. As Carey points out, if the text is from French, it would be the only medieval Irish translation from a language other than Latin or English, 'The Grail and Ireland', p. 36.

[20] Byrne, 'Malory's Sources', pp. 94–100.

[21] These two texts were edited with translations in R. A. S. Macalister (ed.), *Two Irish Arthurian Romances: Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil, Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1908). For an important, and rather critical, review of this edition, see Tomas O Rathaille, 'Two Irish Arthurian Romances,' *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, 19 (1909), 355–64. For a more recent response, see Joseph Falaky Nagy, *A New Introduction to Two Irish Arthurian Romances* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1998). Caoimhín Breatnach offers a critique of and a set of corrections to Macalister's edition as well as some desiderata for a new edition in 'The Language and Manuscript Tradition of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*', in John Carey (ed.), *The Matter of Britain in Medieval Ireland: Reassessments*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 29 (2017), pp. 1–28. There is another (untranslated) edition of *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair* in Iorard de Teiltiún and Seosamh Laoide (eds), *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair mhic Ríogh na Sorcha* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1912).

[22] Máire Mhac an tSaoi (ed.), *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta: mar atá* Eachtra Mhélora agus Orlando *agus* Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe (Dublin: DIAS, 1946).

[23] Tadhg Ó Rabhartaigh and Douglas Hyde (eds), 'An t-Amadán Mór', *Lia Fáil,* 2 (1927), 191–228.

[24] There are two editions of this text: A. M. E. Draak (ed.), 'Orlando agus Melora', *Béaloideas*, 16 (1946–8), 3–48, and in Mhac an tSaoi (ed.), '*Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta*'.

[25] For a summary of manuscripts of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*' see, Breatnach, 'The Language and Manuscript Tradition'. For the surviving manuscripts of the other texts, see Alan Bruford, 'Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediaeval Romances: A Study of the Early Modern Irish 'Romantic Tales' and their Oral Derivatives', *Beáloideas*, 34 (1966), i–v, 1–165, 167–285 (pp. 251, 255, 260).

[26] Patrick M. MacSweeney (ed.), *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh: The Martial Career of Conghal Cláiringhneach* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1904).

[27] Breatnach, 'The Language and Manuscript Tradition', pp. 24–8.

[28] MS Egerton 1781 is described in detail by Robin Flower in *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the British Library [formerly British Museum],* vol. II (repr. Dublin: DIAS, 1992), pp. 526–45. For this contents list, see p. 545.

[29] Maartje Draak, `Sgél Isgaide Léithe', *Celtica*, 3 (1956), 232–40.

[30] Breatnach, 'The Language and Manuscript Tradition'.

[31] The only English translations of all these romances are in Connor P. Hartnett, 'Irish Arthurian Literature' (unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 1973).

[32] Gillies has published an important overview of these texts in 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition, Part II: Romances and Learned Lore', *CMCS*, 3 (1982), 41–75. Smelik has produced helpful explorations of the structure and audiences of some of these texts, including 'The Intended Audience of Irish Arthurian Romances', *Arthuriana*, 17 (2007), 49–69, and 'The Structure of the Irish Arthurian Romance *Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair*', *CMCS*, 45 (2003), 43–57. Linda

Gowans's annotated online Bibliography of Gaelic Arthurian Literature is particularly valuable. It is hosted at: *http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/bibliography-of-gaelic-arthurian-literature*. Also of interest is Gowans's paper on *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir:* 'The *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* as a Response to the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes', Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple (eds), *Comedy in Arthurian Literature. Arthurian Literature,* 19 (2003), 199–230. An up-to-date overview of Arthurian material in medieval Ireland is supplied in Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish'. Smelik has offered valuable literary critical approaches to these texts; for instance, 'Structure and Audience: The Case of the Hybrid *Eachtra Mhelóra agus Orlando*', in Wendy Marie Hoofnagle, and Wolfram R. Keller (eds), *Other Nations: The Hybridization of Insular Mythology and Identity* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011), pp. 227–41 and 'Perception and Anticipation: Their Role in Interpreting *Two Irish Arthurian Romances*', in John Carey (ed.), *The Matter of Britain in Medieval Ireland: Reassessments*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 29 (2017), pp. 76–91.

[33] Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition', p. 50.

[34] Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition', pp. 50–1.

[35] Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish', p. 124.

[36] Bernadette Smelik, 'Koning Arthur wil niet eten, Van gewoonte tot *geis*', *Madoc*, 15 (2001), 19–27.

[37] The fullest account of this rather underexplored group of texts is Bruford, 'Gaelic Folk-Tales'.

[38] Bruford, 'Gaelic Folk-Tales', p. 11.

[39] Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish', p. 119.

[40] Carey, 'The Grail and Ireland', pp. 31–4

[41] Paul Walsh, 'David O Duigenan, Scribe', in Colm Ó Lochlainn (ed.), *Irish Men of Learning: Studies by Father Paul Walsh* (Dublin: Sign of the Three Candles, 1947), pp. 25–33 (p. 27).

[42] de Teiltiún and Laoide (ed.), *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*, p. xix.

[43] Caoimhín Breatnach, 'Brian Ó Corcráin and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*', *Éigse*, 34 (2004), 44–8 (p. 47).

[44] Breatnach, 'Brian Ó Corcráin', p. 44.

[45] Breatnach, 'Brian Ó Corcráin', p. 46.

[46] Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish', p. 124.

[47] Gowans, 'The *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir*', p. 199.

[48] Flower, 'Catalogue', p. 262.

[49] Draak, p. 12.

[50] Draak, pp. 12–14.

[51] Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish, p. 122.

[52] Draak, 'Sgél Isgaide Léithe', p. 237. Smelik suggests a similar scenario for *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*, where a non-Arthurian text about a dog was ultimately 'grafted' on onto an Arthurian narrative, 'Perception and Anticipation', p. 84.

[53] Draak, 'Orlando', pp. 3–5.

[54] Draak, 'Orlando', p. 10.

[55] Ariosto's work was certainly known in Ireland in this period, see Clare Carroll, 'Ajax in Ulster and Ariosto in Ireland: Translating the *Orlando Furioso*', in Carroll (ed.), *Circe's Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Writing about Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), pp. 69–90 (pp. 69–70).

[56] Guido Waldman (trans.), Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), cantos II–IV.

[57] Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, canto III.

[58] A badly rubbed fragment of this text dating to the early sixteenth century survives in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates' 72.1.31, a manuscript that may have been written in Scotland. Donald Mackinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, and Elsewhere in Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Constable, 1912), pp. 90–1.

[59] The name 'Art Aoinfhear' is not a new one, it is the name given to a prominent heroic king and the son of Conn Cétcathach (Conn of the Hundred Battles) in much older Irish texts.

[60] MacSweeney (ed.), *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, p. 156.

[61] See further, Katharine Simms, 'Foreign Apologues in Bardic Poetry', in Seán Duffy and Susan Foran (eds), *The English Isles: Cultural Transmission and Political Conflict in Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013), pp. 139–50 (p. 139).

[62] James Carney (ed.), *Poems on the O'Reillys* (Dublin: DIAS, 1950) pp. 72, 106.

[63] For an account of Pilib's life, see Carney, *Poems on the O'Reillys*, pp. 182–3.

[64] Eleanor Knott (ed.), *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, vol. 1 (London: Irish Texts Society, 1922), pp. 268–71.

[65] Nagy, ‘Arthur and the Irish’, p. 122.

[66] Pádraig A. Breatnach, ‘The Aesthetics of Irish Bardic Composition: An Analysis of *Fuaras iongnadh, a fhir chumainn* by Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird’, *CMCS*, 42 (2001), 51–72.

[67] Anne O’ Sullivan and Pádraig Ó Riain, (eds), *Poems on Marcher Lords from a Sixteenth-Century Tipperary Manuscript* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1987), pp. 19–43. There is further discussion of this text in Carey, ‘The Grail and Ireland’, pp. 32–3, 39. I am grateful to Professor Erich Poppe for drawing my attention to this text.

[68] O’Sullivan and Ó Riain, ‘Poems on Marcher Lords’, p. 19.

[69] As O’Sullivan and Ó Riain note, the precise details of the two cannot be compared, because this part of the narrative does not survive in any of the three *Lorgaireacht* manuscripts (O’Sullivan and Ó Riain, ‘Poems on Marcher Lords’, p. 20). However, given how closely the surviving sections of the *Lorgaireacht* translate the *Queste*’s narrative, we can assume with some confidence that this material from the opening of the story would have been included in the Irish translation. As Carey notes, proper names in the poem and in the *Lorgaireacht* are rendered very similarly, ‘The Grail and Ireland’, pp. 32–3.

[70] Smelik, ‘The Intended Audience’.

[71] We have some evidence of the circulation of at least one other Arthurian text in Ireland: an English-language text with the rather general title ‘Arthur’ was listed among the books owned by the Earl of Kildare in the 1490s, see Aisling Byrne, ‘The Earls of Kildare and their Books at the End of the Middle Ages’, *The Library* 14 (2013), 129–53. It is striking that this is the only manifestly Arthurian work in this very large library.