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The Myths of Cu Chulainn: Uncovering the Trials Beneath the Tales

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The Myths of Cu Chulainn:
Uncovering the Trials Beneath the Tales

A THESIS

The Honors Program

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"

and the Degree Bachelor of Arts

In the Department of Humanities


by

Ethan Bartley Gannaway


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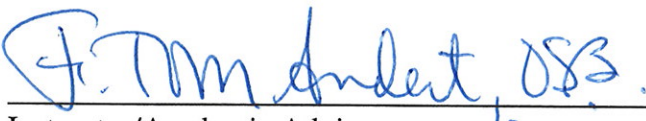
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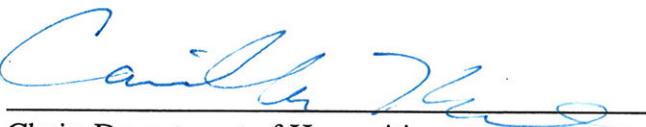
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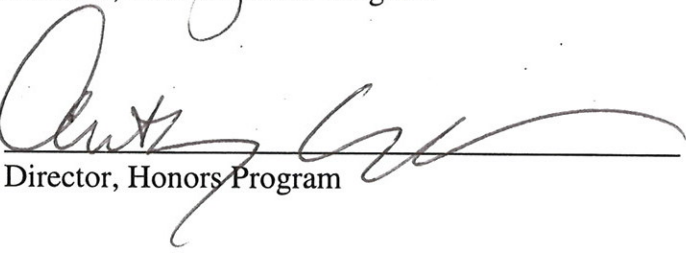
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Acknowledgments

Although the trials of the life quest are essentially faced alone, many individuals aid in the development of the traveler. Often, the greatest adventurers possess some sort of divine parentage. For me, although something less than a hero, this case stands clear. Without the support of my grandparents and especially my supernatural parents, the paths to success would have remained hidden in an overgrowth of mediocrity. When I left the protection of the home, however, certain other individuals arose who helped me to overcome the obstacles thwarting the discovery of my place in the academic world. To you, Father Tom Andert and Ray Larson, I give great thanks not only for the interest in my life as student but especially in my life as a person. Your everlasting excitement and interest are truly intoxicating. I must distinguish, however, my heroic ideal. No language could express my gratitude to you, Scott Richardson, and your assistance during my time with you. Your wisdom, encouragement, and extraordinary passion for the academic world enter into the spirit of all the aspiring heroes of academia, allowing us to defeat any and all monsters of our quests. Thank you for lighting the path to my Golden Fleece.

Introduction

As young children, tales of heroes journeying off in search of adventure and fame tickle our minds, making them smile with ideas of magic and glory. The heroes exclaim what potential each of us possesses, silently begging us to follow their example and daring us to be great. Later, we begin to notice patterns develop among the stories. At this point, the tales call for deeper thought, leading us into new springs of understanding. These heroic stories evolve from merely grey deeds into vibrantly colorful symbols of hidden forces. After discovering these forces, the reader travels beyond the book's cover, removing the cloak of symbol and bringing insight into the secretive soul of the tale.

Mythology, illustrating an inner psyche in symbolic attire, functions much like dream, painting pictures of symbolic ideas. Joseph Campbell writes, "In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dream" (4). In other words, modern mythologies exist in our dreams. When attempting to interpret symbols, the examiner will compare various examples, searching for similarities. For instance, he might compare Theseus' quest to destroy the Minotaur with Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. Through these comparisons, some similarities emerge, but also some differences. At the point of difference, the examiner must then consider the individual tale, asking what that symbol could mean for the tale's character. In both Theseus' and Jason's voyages, they leave and return, carrying back a woman with them. Both of the myths display a common motif in mythology: the separation, initiation, and return of the hero. The difference, however, lies in the actual objects of their quests. Why does Theseus pursue a Minotaur? What is the meaning behind the Golden Fleece? These differences give the myths their own,

individual personality.

The myths of the Irish hero Cu Chulainn require attention to the details and interpretation of the symbols. Campbell explains that “the passage of the mythological hero may be overground, incidentally; fundamentally it is inward--into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world” (29). We must travel into these “depths” of Cu Chulainn, peeling away the illusions, in order to discover the pure messages of the tales. Cu Chulainn’s transformation from child into warrior embodies the initiation rites which are very similar to the rites found in modern society. He must face certain trials and prove himself worthy to receive admittance into the adult world. In addition to exploring Cu Chulainn’s mind, we will enter also into the essence of the myth from a societal angle, glancing at a less personal and more general interpretation. Joseph Campbell’s The Hero With a Thousand Faces, which provides a psychological perspective by comparing common traits of the hero among various mythologies, and Mary Condren’s The Serpent and the Goddess, which supplies a feminist perspective on Celtic mythology in terms of societal values will aid in the interpretations of the tales. We must look at both angles since, as stated above, mythology possesses symbolism particular both to the individual character and the cultural environment in which he lives. The river of hidden themes surges beneath the tales of Cu Chulainn’s rise to the pinnacle of warriorhood and subsequent fall.

The Birth of a Hero

The heroic character's supernatural birth shows immediately that greatness awaits him, fashioning him into someone beyond the average mortal. Often in mythology, both mortal and god join together to beget the hero. The children of these mixed unions often turn out to be fantastic heroes, such as Heracles or Perseus. Although the parentage frequently claims the main focus of their terrific births, other characteristics collaborate and pronounce greatness upon the child. The birth event marks the child's destiny. In Cu Chulainn's case, his birth vaunts several supernatural circumstances that indicate his fated phenomenal life, claiming such features as congenitalness, triplicity, and divine parentage. These details show Cu Chulainn's glorious birth as similar to his Greek counterparts, preparing him for a life which rises above the common human being.

Cu Chulainn's is born at the same moment as the Grey of Macha and the Black of Saingliu, the foals which, when adults, would power Cu Chulainn's chariot. Proinsias Mac Cana writes, "another feature [that marks the birth of the hero] is the motif of the congenital animals: certain animals are born at the same time as the hero" (101). The congenital birth is a symbol of power and, when added to the symbol of the horse, changes into something even stronger. The horse suggests power and fertility, and due to the congenital birth, these characteristics fuse with Cu Chulainn. Furthermore, in Cu Chulainn's death episode, his horses show their symbolic bonds to their congenital master. At the very moment Cu Chulainn receives the fatal blow, the Black of Saingliu runs off, reflecting the departure of Cu Chulainn's life. The Grey of Macha stays as long as Cu Chulainn's soul remains, showing the horse's connection to the inner being of Cu Chulainn. The tale stresses that each horse left with half a yoke, representing the bond

between the animals, like body and soul, and their connection to the master who leads and controls them.

Cu Chulainn's birth also claims the attribute of a triple birth. In Celtic mythology, the number three holds a vast amount of power and any time that number appears, it requires attention and therefore, Cu Chulainn's birth, as a birth of triplicity, denotes potency. Usually, objects external to the main character exist in threesomes, presenting a dynamism in the particular situation. For Cu Chulainn to possess this symbolic number at the very core of his being, at the very origin of his life, suggests his supernatural future. In Cu Chulainn's first birth, Dechtire leaves Emain Macha (with fifty maidens). When she returns, she carries the god Lugh's child. Since the boy is weak and sickly, however, he dies soon. The second birth unfolds when Dechtire swallows a little creature in a glass of water, which turns out to be Lugh himself, and she becomes pregnant. Yet, since she is about to marry, she aborts the fetus, ending Setanta's (later known as Cu Chulainn) second attempt to achieve birth. Finally, Setanta acquires life through the act of Dechtire and Sualtam mac Roich. Georges Dumézil explains how in patterns of three, the first two represent trials where the hero gains essential knowledge, and the third represents the accumulation of that knowledge into perfection. He states, "Cuchulainn is third in relation to himself, having succeeded in being born only after two vain attempts" (85). His birth is a building up of power and knowledge, only taking place once he reaches the limits of his cocoon. Once his incubation secures his brilliance to its furthest point, Cu Chulainn breaks out into the world.

When Mary Condren examines the triple birth, she looks beyond the symbolic power for our hero, focusing on its meaning in terms of men suppressing women. She finds that the first

birth shows the freedom of women to roam wherever they choose, and that the child is sick and weak because the paternity is mysterious. The second birth also possesses an uncertain father figure. She relates that the Ulster people could not tolerate questionable paternity. Finally, in the third birth, the paternity rests securely in place. Now that men are firmly in control, Cu Chulainn's birth takes place. This interpretation certainly follows what the birth narratives of Jesus show--that the hero could not be a bastard child. The beliefs of the society, Celtic or Hebrew, require that the child possess both a father and a mother. Yet, the necessity of established male control for Cu Chulainn's birth seems a little less clear. Evidence of male control emerges upon examination, but is it just coincidence? The birth of Jesus does not appear to be suggesting that Joseph represents a need for firm male control, but instead shows the necessary, moral family background. The male figure's role in the scene merely completes the picture, performing no action. Condren views the need for a strong male character to complete the picture as signaling the need for established male control. The male, however, is inconsequential even after the birth in both heroes' cases, showing no evidence for male domination. The reason for the male figure, then, seems to derive more from the need for a complete and perhaps moral picture, than to suggest male dominance. Whether it is the establishment of a patriarch or a reflection of Christian influences, it appears certain that our hero needed to possess an apparent father.

Finally, Cu Chulainn possesses that near prerequisite for heroism: the element of divine parenthood. Although Lugh takes part in Cu Chulainn's birth sequence, Cu Chulainn only procures life when both parents are mortal. At first glance, this feature seems peculiar. Why could not Cu Chulainn simply be known as the son of Lugh and Dechtire? Certainly, heroic

births of this sort are not uncommon in Greek mythology; the sort where the child is actually bastard because the divine parentage cannot be proven. It appears, then, that some Christian aspects might be creeping into the narrative. The birth of Jesus expresses the need for mortal parentage, even though born through the divine instigation. Although God creates Jesus by impregnating Mary with the Holy Spirit, the establishment of clear parentage depends on Joseph staying by her side. Joseph merely acts as a mortal replacement for God, but he still must remain there to complete the family picture. In Cu Chulainn, the power of a god certainly resides, but so does a good, moral family structure. Furthermore, the fact that all the other tales surrounding Cu Chulainn leave Sualtam unmentioned relates the divinity of Cu Chulainn to Jesus in a similar fashion. After his childhood, Jesus recognizes himself only as the Son of God, not the son of Joseph. In fact, those that follow Jesus also see him only as the Son of God. Cu Chulainn never mentions Sualtam, and when others speak in reference to Cu Chulainn, they mention his divine heritage exclusively. The male parental figure looms insubstantial and overshadowed by the divine presence. Perhaps the mortal, surrogate father replacing the divine progenitor suggests something beyond the need for a good family background. Its presence allows mortals to look upon the hero as someone who also walks upon the earth rather than only among the clouds. The divine heritage, then, propels the hero into the air, where those left below may behold him as an ideal. Since the ideal begins life among common humans, he is an ideal that mortals can reach, or come close, if they imitate him properly. As Jesus is the ideal of Christian morality, Cu Chulainn is the ideal of the Celtic warrior.

The birth of the mythological hero signals his future greatness by providing a sound foundation to build upon. The birth of Cu Chulainn prepares a solid base for him on which to

build his superstructure of life in three steps of preparation. First, the births of the Black of Saingliu and the Grey of Macha coinciding with Cu Chulainn's birth locate the best place to build. Next, the triple birth levels off the ground, making it fit to be built upon. And lastly, the divine participation in the birth lays down the first palatial slab of cement in a final signal that this building is ready to aspire to the rank of castle rather than to the simple rank of cottage. The castle of Cu Chulainn, during the next stages of his life, will rise above the cottages of mortals into a warrior ideal.

Early Initiation

Before the aspiring hero may participate in the adult world, he must pass through certain rites of childhood. Through these rites, that individual proves himself worthy to take on greater and greater responsibilities. The early life of the hero runs similar to the first days of school, when the child begins to display an ability to interact with others. Next, as the child matures, he gains knowledge about the world and how to act within it. Finally, the adolescent or young adult decides where to enter the adult world, i.e., what career to follow. The adult world Cu Chulainn attempts to join is a warrior society. In his paths of youth, then, he shows continuously his prowess in warrior ways, exhibiting his readiness for responsibility. His rapid journey down the pathway to warriorhood, however, leaves out one very important concern: the world of women. The warrior society in which Cu Chulainn wishes to enroll does not require knowledge of women for the initiate, a circumstance which will provide problems for Cu Chulainn later in life. Nevertheless, Cu Chulainn travels through the rites of childhood undergone by modern day children with the incredible speed of a hero.

In order for the young Cu Chulainn to become hero, first he needs to leave the comforts of home and dependent life; he does so--at the age of five. For Cu Chulainn, "the familiar life horizon [had] been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold [was] at hand" (Campbell 51). With the passion for new environments and new experiences crying out within Cu Chulainn, he journeys off on the road to school. When he arrives, he notices a large group of other boys, some older and some younger than himself, playing hurley. What could be a more fitting place to showcase his physical abilities than on the game field? As youngsters today show their talents at recess, Cu Chulainn

steps up to give them a taste of his mettle. He immediately joins in the game, taunting the other boys by holding the ball between his legs, then scoring a goal. In this act he appears similar to the new kid in school trying too hard to impress the other individuals. He is new to the group and therefore feels the need to gain attention as quickly as possible.

As when the new kid on the block attempts to show off too much too early, however, the group turns against Cu Chulainn for overstepping unwritten boundaries, beginning his education of the outside world. Follamain mac Conchobar leads the charge, yelling, ““Good now, boys, all together meet this youngster as he deserves, and kill him; because it is taboo to have such a one join himself to you and interfere in your game, without first having had the civility to procure your guarantee that his life should be respected”” (Cross and Slover 138). Unlike the modern day recess period, the Celts retained a formal custom for newcomers. Each individual needed to prove his worth, showing himself as acceptable to join the group. This unwritten rule is the first learned by Cu Chulainn. Until now, he lived in surroundings that were at his mercy. Now, however, he lives at the mercy of the environment, or more specifically, of the environment’s inhabitants and their customs. The present position Cu Chulainn finds himself in is something very different from anything he knew before.

Although the boy corps seeks to deal out justice upon Cu Chulainn, the episode turns into the passageway for Cu Chulainn to obtain not only the boy corps’ recognition as a peer, but as the best among them. The boys chase him for a time, but Cu Chulainn quickly knocks out fifty of them. Even when the boys accept him into their games, he still levels another fifty of them. Then Cu Chulainn announces that he will not stop his violent behavior until they all agree to come under his protection. His first goal in life comes to a completion at this point. Cu

Chulainn, needing acceptance into the group, gains that acceptance. His requirement that his peers depend on him shows two things: that he believes he is the best and, at the same time, that he wants and needs his peers to announce his superiority to the world. For any adult looking upon a mob of youngsters, individuals are easily lost. If Cu Chulainn desires personal recognition, then he must separate himself from the mob in some way. By forcing his peers to acknowledge him as protector, he detaches himself from the group, gaining recognition from the adults. Furthermore, by holding them under his protection, he shows that he is ready for more responsibility. Up until this time, Cu Chulainn was responsible only for himself, but now he requires that all one hundred fifty boys depend on him. This act also suggests Cu Chulainn's confidence in himself. He believes his prowess is so great that managing his own troubles is not difficult enough. He needs the added challenge of protector to absorb some of his budding heroism. With such loud proclamations of strength, power, and responsibility, Cu Chulainn announces his readiness for the next step.

Now that Cu Chulainn has accomplished his initial recognition as the best among his foster-brothers, the time arrives for him to show that he is ready to join the warrior band. Yet, before he travels anywhere in the adult world, he must make a name for himself, showing that he can excel on a higher plain of difficulty than that of the boy corps and can take on greater responsibilities; he achieves this step by killing Culann's dog. Conchobar, impressed with the boy's obvious superiority, invites him to a banquet at Culann's abode. Conchobar later forgets the invitation, so Culann lets out his guard dog, famous for its ferociousness. When Cu Chulainn encounters it, he unhesitatingly proceeds to destroy it. By this event, Cu Chulainn earns his name; he no longer wears the childhood name of Setanta, but Cu Chulainn, which means The

Hound of Culann. H. J. Davidson relates:

As well as more than holding his own with his peers in ball-play and wrestling, and keeping off outsiders who attacked the territory [we shall see this later], he won the right to his name, Hound of Culann, by overcoming the fierce and terrible hound who guarded the cattle and taking his place. This is the equivalent of the solitary contest with a wild beast of which we hear elsewhere as a test of manhood (82).

By conquering the beast, Cu Chulainn shows his readiness for manhood and the responsibilities that come with it. He is similar to Theseus, who, on his road to Athens to meet his father, encounters several different rogues along the way. In order to reach Athens, he must defeat all of them. Defeating them and reaching his father, Theseus leaves the early childhood dependence upon the mother, proves his worth, and finally enters the adult world. Now, for Cu Chulainn, the defeat of the Hound of Culann is only the first step, perhaps the first rogue of Theseus, but it is a large step.

The hound of Culann's defeat not only proves Cu Chulainn to be a young man of physical prowess, but also displays that he has a sense of honor. When Culann complains that his guard dog is dead, Cu Chulainn volunteers to guard his home in place of the slaughtered dog until the next guard dog could be raised. Therefore, he not only defeats a great beast, but he also accepts the responsibility for his actions. Responsibility comes easy when rewards accompany it, such as driving the family car, but when one must take responsibility for mistakes and pay out the consequences, responsibility comes much harder. Cu Chulainn, in this event, shows his understanding of honor and justice and the necessity of answering for his actions.

Through this latest episode, Cu Chulainn moves into the next stage of his initiation into manhood, the stage where he trades in his hurley stick for the game pieces of warriors. The true life of Cu Chulainn as warrior begins when he overhears Cathbad the druid, speaking to his

pupils some distance away, announce “that any stripling who on that day should for the first time assume arms and armor, the name of such an one forever would surpass those of all Ireland’s youths besides. His life, however, must be fleeting, short” (Cross and Slover 142-3). Surely destiny led Cu Chulainn to hear these words! As the childhood of Cu Chulainn displayed above, he wants recognition as the greatest of all. He does not fear intruding upon a large group of boys, even if they are older, and proving himself better than all of them. He fears not terrible beasts. For Cu Chulainn, a short life is a small price for worldwide fame. When Cathbad discovers the youth taking up arms, he worries that Cu Chulainn does not quite understand the whole situation.

“And it is true for me,” said Cathbad; “noble and famous indeed thou shalt be, but transitory, soon gone.”

“Little care I, said Cu Chulainn, nor though I were but one day or one night in being, so long as after me the history of myself and doings may endure” (Cross and Slover 144).

After such a passionate and intelligent defense of his actions, Cathbad bids him to continue on his quest. Furthermore, when Cu Chulainn tests the armor and the chariots, only the king’s armor and chariots are strong enough to withstand his ferocity, even though he is only seven years old. This scene colorfully illustrates that Cu Chulainn transcends ordinary man, since only the king’s armor is durable enough for him. Campbell writes, “Cu Chulainn’s first day under arms was the occasion of his full self-manifestation” (331). Truly, Cu Chulainn attains his “full self-manifestation,” showing that his greatness in strength equals that type found only in kings and that his desire to be great knows no bounds, not even death.

This section also announces an ideal of the budding warrior: a short but glorious life that will survive eternally in the hearts and souls of men for all time. It is a live-for-the-moment lifestyle.

The future is regarded not in terms of an unremitting series of deaths and births, but as though one's present system of ideals, virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure. King Minos retained the divine bull, when the sacrifice would have signified submission to the will of the god of the society, for he preferred what he conceived to be his economic advantage (Campbell 60).

Both Cu Chulainn and King Minos act according to the here and now, what it means for them at the present point in time. Minos enjoys the "economic advantage" of the bull, ignoring the future consequences of the gods' wrath. Cu Chulainn sees this taking up of arms as something that will reward him in life (he will be known as the greatest warrior), but also something that will help create his immortality after his death. He does not see his future as a "series of deaths and births," but as something that is constant; it is still he himself who lives in the future, but simply in another form, the form of people's memories.

The pinnacle of Greek heroes, Homer's Achilles, presents another example of this choice between a short, glorious life or a long, quiet existence. Achilles knows that if he steps out onto the battlefield, he will die, but he will die famously, and his name will survive forever. Unlike Cu Chulainn, however, he also sees the other side of the coin, that he could live a long and peaceful life if he abstains from fighting, but his name most likely will die with his body. In the end, as the story goes, Achilles does go to battle, fights famously, and dies tragically, and his name captures immortality. Perhaps he cannot physically live forever, but his name will. Although the reasons for pursuing fatal actions differ between the two heroes, the fact remains that these men both feel it necessary to go through with them, knowing the consequences they entail. Achilles ventures off in vengeance for Patroclus' death, but Cu Chulainn holds no similar concern for others. Cu Chulainn realizes that claiming arms on that day captures his ultimate desire: to live a glorious life. Therefore, even if Cu Chulainn realized the peaceful shore on the

other side of the river, as Achilles does, he would merely disregard it.

Being the arrogant young man that he is, Cu Chulainn leaves the protection of Ulster to prove that his arrogance is well deserved. He understands his superior abilities and now demands that everyone acknowledge them. Cu Chulainn decides to journey outside Ulster's borders to claim the role as defender of the province in Conall's place. Conall, attempting to accompany the boy, pulls his chariot near to Cu Chulainn's. Cu Chulainn, however, throws a stone and breaks Conall's chariot-yoke. He knows it is a quest that he must complete alone. Cu Chulainn and Iubar (his charioteer) proceed to examine the countryside of Ulster from one point to another. This scenario displays the individual becoming acquainted with a new and larger environment. As we find in young children, they move around the house and yard, looking at everything they see. There is no particular order to it, but simply a curiosity to find out the exact boundaries of their environment. As they get older, they find that the environment in which they live is actually bigger than their backyard, and they begin to search out the corners of their city block. Cu Chulainn asks his older and wiser friend, Iubar, to show him all the topography of Ulster because it is "a country in which I know not my way about" (Cross and Slover 147). The young hero does not even know the boundaries of Ulster, the county which he wishes to protect. Although this stage does not present any real challenges, it still requires attention if Cu Chulainn wishes to move on as protector of the kingdom.

Once Cu Chulainn learns the surrounding environment of his land, the time arrives to prove himself a warrior, which he does by fighting neither a beginner nor an intermediate foe but an enemy from the advanced level. The opponents are the sons of Nechtan, "of whom it is said, that the number of Ulstermen now alive exceeds not the number of them fallen by their hands"

(Cross and Slover 147). If the tale of defeating such men is not a heroic enough feat in itself, at the sons of Nechtan's fortress stands an important glory enhancer for Cu Chulainn's forthcoming deed.

[In the center of the green] stood a pillar stone, encircled with an iron collar, test of heroic accomplishment; for it bore graven writing to the effect that any man (if only he were one that carried arms) who should enter on this green, must hold it taboo to him to depart from it without challenging to single combat some of the dwellers in the stronghold. The little boy read the Ogam, threw his arms around the stone to start it, and eventually pitched it, collar and all, into the water close at hand (Cross and Slover 147).

The significance of this pillar stone, and Cu Chulainn's subsequent uplifting and tossing it aside, is that he does not simply pick a fight because he wants to fight, but because he wants the "heroic accomplishment." Furthermore, he proclaims to the world that he is a man, one who carries arms, and is ready to fight in the event of single combat, the ideal combat of warriorhood. Cu Chulainn is not the type to do something just well enough to do it. He will be the best at everything he attempts; he will graduate first in his class.

Now begins the final stage of Cu Chulainn's development. Before the first battle, Iubar speaks with Foill mac Nechtan, saying Cu Chulainn is a rash, young boy. Even Iubar remains unconvinced of Cu Chulainn's warrior prowess. Cu Chulainn, however, hears Iubar and shouts out his challenge to Foill. Then, when Foill leaves to get his battle gear, Iubar, playing the role of the mentor who has been around the block, gives Cu Chulainn advice about the battle strengths of each of the three brothers previous to the clashes. For the first two brothers, Cu Chulainn's plan of attack appears obvious (after the advice of Iubar) and he states his strategies, then accomplishes them. Foill could not be killed by point or spear, so Cu Chulainn kills him with an iron ball. Tuachall must be killed on the first strike, so Cu Chulainn makes sure he does just that.

With the third brother, Fainnle, however, the plan of attack is unclear; Iubar does not give him the key for victory, but simply tells him to beware fighting Fainnle in water. This third and final defeat announces the perfection of his training. In the first two instances, he shows that he can listen to those older and wiser in those subjects in which he does not possess experience. Upon defeating Fainnle, Cu Chulainn displays that he can defeat an opponent without aid. Now he is a warrior.

This series of events lies near the pinnacle of the young Cu Chulainn's life-beginning quest. He exhibits himself capable of listening to the advice of those older and wiser, appropriately acting upon it. Against Foill, he reveals his ability to use various types of weapons. Against Tuachall, he shows his ability to act quickly and accurately. And finally, against Fainnle, he displays his ability to fight well in an environment unfamiliar to him in the field of combat, an ability that will prove life-saving again later in life. Yet, the real power of this episode comes from attaining his victim's heads. As Davidson finds, "The veneration of the human head as the seat of consciousness and wisdom and as the representation of a deity seems to have been important for the Celts from early times" (72). Davidson then explains further the reasons for such a veneration:

This is something distinct from sacrifice, and there is no mention of dedication of the heads to the gods. The customs here described might be seen as an initiation test for young warriors, an attempt to gain power by possessing the head of a courageous enemy, or simply the proud parading of a trophy . . . (71).

In Cu Chulainn's episode, clearly an initiation test presents itself, unveiling that he is not a mere child but a warrior on par with the greatest in Ulster. Secondly, through the gathering of the heads, he gains the power of their reputation before death. The sons of Nechtan acquired renown

as killers of many Ulstermen, but now Cu Chulainn has slain those who killed so many others. He proves more powerful than those accepted throughout as powerful. Therefore, Cu Chulainn gains the power of a reputation, which the adult warrior clan requires as evidence of his valor. This reputation comprises Cu Chulainn's résumé for a position in warriorhood. The parading of his trophy, as proof of his deed, announces his potential. It is the cold, hard proof of his worth. It is what makes his reputational résumé believable.

Yet, although it appears that Cu Chulainn enters into his full potential upon the destruction of Nechtan's sons, only on the journey home does he reveal the complete power of the warrior. Immediately turning for home, Cu Chulainn displays a mastery beyond the realm of humankind, capturing two of the greatest wild deer and twenty-four flying swans all still alive. When he asks Iubar to gather the swans, Iubar refuses, fearing the antlers of the deer which are tied to the back of the chariot. To this refusal, Cu Chulainn says, "No true warrior art thou, Iubar; but come, the horses I will gaze upon with such a look that they shall not break their regulation pace; as for the gaze that I will bend upon the stags, they will stoop their heads for awe" (Cross and Slover 151). When Cu Chulainn utters this quote, he shows his awareness of his battle fervor, or *ferg*, the ultimate state of a warrior.

The *ferg* is a physical state which matches the fury of the Viking berserkr, a man so caught up in the fury of battle that he feels nothing and thinks nothing except for the destruction of an opponent. By entering this battle fury, the warrior attains pure power of warfare, not only in his mighty abilities, but also simply in his appearance.

The condition that the exploit has effected in Cuchulainn, this transfiguring rage, is in itself a good thing. Produced once, it is the state, or rather the faculty of recovering the state along with certain of the "forms" in which it is expressed, that will account for the

incomparable value of the hero and will permit him to conquer his enemies as he first conquered the three sons of Nechta (Dumézil 135).

Cu Chulainn, when possessed by the *ferg*, displays a wide variety of physical states. One feature of his transformed state is his closing of one eye “to the point where it was no larger than the eye of a needle, and he opened the other wide to the point where it was as big as the top of a cup of mead” (Dumézil 162). Cu Chulainn uses this distorted expression to make the stags “stoop their heads for awe” when Iubar fetches the fallen birds. At this point, Cu Chulainn tells Iubar that he is “no true warrior,” and justly so since here Cu Chulainn exhibits his ability to use the ultimate warrior state.

Despite the ability to enter into the *ferg* state, still Cu Chulainn lacks the maturity to control it. Upon returning home, Leborcham, messenger to the king, announces that a powerful warrior is riding towards them. In fact, she prophesies, “Indeed if measures be not taken to receive him prudently, the best of the Ulstermen must fall by his hand” (Cross and Slover 151). Campbell points out that “the abundance of Cu Chulainn’s power was becoming known for the first time to himself, as well as everybody else. It broke out of the depths of his being, and then had to be dealt with impromptu and fast” (331). At this point, young Cu Chulainn experiences a power foreign to him, much like when one drives a car for the first time. The virgin driver does not know how to control the power behind the pedal. Road signs and other cars are invisible as the driving novice focuses all attention on the machine’s force. The power of the battle fury overtakes Cu Chulainn’s complete attention, as Dumézil describes in detail: “this *ferg* is as troublesome as it is precious: the child is not its master; on the contrary, it possesses him. Coming back to his home town, before assuming his new role as its protector, he constitutes a

public menace" (135). Leborcham recognizes the possible danger and therefore calls Conchobar's attention to it. His reaction to her prophecy brings the warrior Cu Chulainn to completion.

The final rite of Cu Chulainn's initiation culminates upon his submersion into three vats of water to cool his uncontrolled battle fervor. Conchobar dispatches all of Emain Macha's women, baring their breasts to greet the little, furious warrior. Cu Chulainn, in shame, turns his face away. At that moment, with a distracted battle fervor, the men put him into the first vat of cold water. When the heat of his fury has blown apart the vat, they immerse him in a second vat of cold water, which boils over. But after they place Cu Chulainn in the third vat, although the water is still too hot to touch, he finally returns to his natural form. In fact, when he climbs out of this final vat, the tale, for the first time, describes his complete appearance. At the same time that the adult society recognizes Cu Chulainn as a peer, the tale itself also displays him as more than a name. Now that his identity is restored, all identify him as a complete human being and notice every detail of his person.

Cu Chulainn's submersion into the vats of water symbolizes a purification. Dumézil points out, "His ardor must be cooled, and it is to this end that the king applies the two 'medications': . . . [and second] the immersion in the vats, which finally calms him" (135). Cu Chulainn does not possess yet the skills necessary to subdue his fury. Dumézil likens him to a young Cannibal (one from the "terrible organization which takes on the leadership of the entire tribe during the winter ceremonies") who proceeds through similar initiation rites. The leaders force him to leave the village for three to four months, allowing him to return only once to carry off a woman to cook his food. Completing his exile, he returns and attacks everyone he meets.

After appeasing him slightly with the killing of slaves, they submerge his head in water over and over until his fury subsides (135-6). The submersion into water vats represents a type of cleansing ritual: a baptism. For both men, this ritual may not be simply the cooling of their fervor, but the washing away of their innocence. No longer will they be able to escape blame for foolish mistakes since they are no longer children. The punishments they will serve now for misbehavior are no longer spankings but imprisonment. No longer is Cu Chulainn one of the boy corps, who runs home to mom and dad when the sun goes down. He is now a warrior and must travel through the symbolic portal to manhood which the vats of water open up for him. But much like the young Cannibal, he is not ready for the challenge of women.

Using women to sidetrack his *ferg* displays the one thing in life that Cu Chulainn does not understand. Cu Chulainn, leaving his mother at the age of five and not encountering another woman throughout his trials, acquires no knowledge about them. The women baring their breasts illustrate that Cu Chulainn, although master of land and water, man and animal, remains without the final piece to the puzzle. The Cannibal, although he enters the adult society when baptized, also lacks knowledge of women. Despite accessing the adult world, the elders do not allow him to have sexual relations with his wife for one year, allowing time for him to mature. Both learn the ways of the warrior men of society, the specific class that they belong to, and succeed in becoming a recognized part of that society. As we all know, however, life gets more complicated than knowing how to succeed in athletics and receiving recognition by your peers in these areas. Throughout life, one must continue to prove himself over and over. Life will produce new and unlimited challenges for which a single initiation cannot hope to prepare the participant. Cu Chulainn, however, will attempt to use his warrior training when encountering

women because it is all he knows. This attempt to force women into a single paradigm, the warrior paradigm, will cause great problems for Cu Chulainn in the future.

Cu Chulainn, although supernatural, is still human and therefore must travel through certain rites of initiation similar to human beings universally. Cu Chulainn illustrates in detail the trials of the first day of class and the gaining of peer acceptance and respect. He confidently strides the steps which allow his warrior potential to shine above the others, catching the attention of the adult society he desires to join. His acts of responsibility, such as taking his peers under his protection and accepting the guardianship of Culann's house, display his great potential. In the end, when final test time arrives, Cu Chulainn easily triumphs. Getting over initial arrogance, he realizes that he must listen to the advise of those older and wiser and, having reached that conclusion, he functions as warrior without supervision. In the end, however, he appears very much like a young graduate, who possesses the essential tools for basic functioning in the adult world, but because of inexperience, he attempts to manage every situation with the same acquired tools. This misuse will cause great distress for Cu Chulainn in the future.

Cu Chulainn and the World of Women

As we have seen, Cu Chulainn had little difficulty gaining access into the warrior aspect of adult society. This initiation, however, does not mark the completion of his life's adventure, nor will his next initiation be as easy. As Joseph Campbell remarks, "Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known" (116). No matter how great the hero's journeys, nor matter how great his accomplishments, always lurking behind the action awaits a confrontation with women. They are often the driving force for the hero's trials as he attempts to understand their position in his world. Cu Chulainn drifts through his training as a warrior as if he had foreknowledge of the position's requirements. When he arrives at the end of his warrior initiation, however, women still prove to be a challenge for him. As the tales proceed, Cu Chulainn stumbles through several stages in his attempt to understand his connection with the opposite sex but never quite overcomes his true warrior nature and training. Because of his inability to ultimately come to terms with the other sex, his downfall is imminent.

This portion of Cu Chulainn's development requires different treatment from his introduction into the warrior division of society, since it delves further under the surface of the mythology and does not follow a linear structure. It demands a journey into the inner reaches of Cu Chulainn's psyche. With each separate encounter Cu Chulainn experiences, we find him wandering into psychological dimensions. When Cu Chulainn began his quest for acceptance into the warrior society, he acted improperly because of his aggressiveness and inexperience. Cu Chulainn's confronts the opposite sex in a similar fashion. Some fight or struggle always faces Cu Chulainn upon his feminine encounters, wherein rests the psychological dimensions. These conflicts are the folds of the psyche which not only other mythological heroes possess, but also

we ourselves.

In further analysis, Mary Condren proposes that these myths of the Ulster cycle show the changeover from a matrilineal society to a patriarchal one. She finds four basic elements behind this change: the male's discovery of his role in reproduction, his realization of the insecurity of his position in the reproductive universe, his attempt to build a more secure basis for "fatherhood," and his creation of a specifically transcendent or "spiritual" culture achieved through death or death defiance (41). She believes that the myths are not so much a reflection of the main character's psychology, but display a psychological aspect derived from the society as a whole; they are representations of public, rather than private, magnitude. We will discover, however, that Cu Chulainn and the tales that surround him are more than reflections of a societal change: they are very personal showcases that display troubles affecting every male in his quest to understand the opposite sex.

As in many heroic tales, Cu Chulainn chances upon a beautiful damsel, Emer, for whom he must perform certain heroic deeds and prove that he is worthy to possess her. At the beginning of Cu Chulainn's adult life, he seems bound for that monogamously heroic life, so early on the other warriors of Ulster believe it is time for the youthful warrior to find himself a wife. Knowing that Cu Chulainn's destiny is to have a short life, the warriors desire to find him a wife in order to produce an heir. In this respect, Condren's interpretation sounds valid. The wife of Cu Chulainn, at this point, appears merely as a tool used to achieve an end, or in other words, an heir. Cu Chulainn's inexperience in such matters leads him to follow the apparent ideal of his colleagues, which is to find a wife solely in order to procreate. Even before his first personal encounter with a woman, the other warriors implant in Cu Chulainn an incomplete

image of the other sex. The seed of problems with accepting and acknowledging women as more than tools was planted early on in Cu Chulainn's development.

Cu Chulainn, once he finds the woman that suits him, must first prove himself worthy to take her, especially in a style that appeals to his warrior nature. He does not, however, settle for a woman that his warrior brothers suggest, but searches until he finds one who fits his liking: Emer, daughter of Forgall the Wily. Natural for the warrior-hero, Emer is not simply an apple to be picked, but a prize to be won. She provides the warrior with a challenge to his battle mentality which, in turn, begs him to perceive her as an object or a goal. When he first encounters her, Cu Chulainn's repetition of the phrase "Fair is this plain, the plain of the noble yoke," as he examines her breasts displays the influence of his warriorhood upbringing; he views her only in terms of what she has to offer as an instrument for his use in procreation. The answers she gives to each repetition of the phrase appeals further to his warrior nature. After each repetition, she proclaims some new feat of excellence that he must perform before he may become her husband. These feats of excellence are the keys for Cu Chulainn to unlock gates to the mysterious realm of women since they appeal to his warrior nature.

Yet, before Cu Chulainn can perform the deeds announced by Emer, he must deal with the father-figure: this confrontation is the first step of Cu Chulainn into his subconscious. The father-figure, Forgall the Wily, hearing of his daughter's encounter with Cu Chulainn, requests that Conchobar sends Cu Chulainn to Scathach so that he might have training sufficient enough for his daughter, yet all the while hoping and believing that it would be the death of Cu Chulainn. Cu Chulainn, with several of Ulster's greatest heroes, set off to Scotland (Alba). When in Scotland, Cu Chulainn separates from his companions, possibly because of the Forgall's magic,

and roams about the woods alone, looking for the island where Scathach dwells. Forgall, as father-figure, acts here as the object which Cu Chulainn must displace in order to acquire his desire. The father-figure often is the agent who forces the hero upon a subconscious quest. For instance, Polydectes requires Perseus to capture the Gorgon's head, believing that the quest will lead to his death. Similarly, Forgall demands that Cu Chulainn travel to a far-off island and encounter a feminine monster of his own, hoping she will destroy him. Both father-figures thrust the heroes into their subconscious by compelling them to travel into distant, unknown lands where their feminine monsters dwell. For Cu Chulainn and Perseus alike, this quest represents the wrecking ball used to crumble their adolescent wall of inexperience and prepare them for female relationships.

In many mythological tales, a monster appears for the hero to conquer, representing the conquering of a fear of women. Certain fears are difficult subjects for us to deal with and therefore they are shoved into a corner where we will not consciously think about them. Sooner or later, these repressed thoughts surface and demand attention. For the mythological hero, the inability to understand women often becomes repressed. When the thoughts eventually surface, they often appear in the form of terrible monsters. As mentioned above, Polydectes forces Perseus to perform the deed of capturing the Gorgon Medusa's head. Through Perseus' destruction of this initial, feminine beast, he treats the poison lurking in his brain and thereby enables himself to destroy the beast (and other impediments) between him and his first and only love, Andromeda. All walls dissolve between him and the world of women once he remedies his repressed fear, a fear deriving from inexperience.

For Cu Chulainn, Scathach and the events surrounding her are his monster to overcome,

but before he encounters the actual monster, the tale shows his journeys into the subconscious and to the resting place of his inner insecurities. This episode begins by showing a lion-like beast mirroring Cu Chulainn as he wanders through the forest. Cu Chulainn leaps upon its back, letting the beast take him wherever it desires: which, coincidentally, carries him directly to Scathach. This beast is the incarnation of his subconscious; it walks step-for-step with him, never attacking him nor influencing him until Cu Chulainn himself decides to wrestle with it and actually sits on top of it. Now, since Cu Chulainn must alleviate his subconscious confusion concerning women, the beast of his subconscious takes him to the source of his perplexity. By discovering the source, the ability arises to gain harmony in his teenage mind. Furthermore, the text reads that “they journeyed four days, until they came to the uttermost bounds of men” (Cross and Slover 163). This description certainly sounds, once again, similar to a journey into the subconscious. The “uttermost bounds” represent the areas on the very edge of knowledge. The subconscious, especially in regard to men’s thoughts about women, often holds those thoughts as frightful because they are unknown. When one reaches these bounds and gains a familiarity with them, however, they become less terrifying.

Next, Cu Chulainn must cross the Plain of Ill-Luck, for which a certain youth prepares him. Through the first half, he must roll a wheel, only walking along its track, and through the second half, he must roll an apple, again only walking along its path. Campbell explains the event:

The most eloquent and deep-driving of the traits in this colorful adventure of Cuchulainn is that of the unique, invisible path, which was opened to the hero with the rolling of the wheel and the apple. This is to be read as symbolic and instructive of the miracle of destiny. To a man not led astray from himself by sentiments stemming from the surfaces of what he sees, but courageously responding to the dynamics of his own nature--to a man

who is, as Nietzsche phrases it, 'a wheel rolling of itself'--difficulties melt and the unpredictable highway opens as he goes (344-5).

Campbell's vision centers around Cu Chulainn's destiny of fame. Cu Chulainn's success here results from his heroic character; because he is a hero, he will discover a way to accomplish his goals. Now let us apply this episode to a journey into the subconscious as the destined road for the hero. The Plain of Ill-Luck, if one attempts to cross other than the prescribed method, catches the feet of the traverser, holding them planted. What we have, then, is not Cu Chulainn merely resisting quest-ending distractions but truly knowing where he wants to arrive and that he will do anything to get there. No use of force and no great feats are involved in this crossing, nor does he use any cunning; Cu Chulainn simply follows instructions given to him by a youth (not even a wise elder!). Finally, he crosses the Bridge of the Cliff using his salmon-leap. Since the salmon often symbolized wisdom, this bound represents the intellectual prowess necessary to meet with the feminine warrior. In this final act, Cu Chulainn, through his wisdom and strength as well as his desire, reaches the point of confrontation with his inner demon.

The forthcoming confrontation requires violence to play a large part because Cu Chulainn, still unlearned in anything but war, must learn in terms that are conducive to his known military techniques. Cu Chulainn, following the instructions, comes upon Scathach and places his sword between her breasts, demanding that she grant his three demands: that she teach him without neglect, that without the payment of wedding gifts he might wed Uathach, and that she should foretell his future, since Scathach was a prophetess as well as a warrior (Cross and Slover 165). Most powerful in this scene is Cu Chulainn's placement of the sword between Scathach's breasts. The action symbolizes the joining of the warrior side with the procreational

side: the cold steel of the warrior blade meeting the world-renowned fertility symbol of the breasts. Throughout his short life, all goals set and all things learned by Cu Chulainn come through the medium of warfare, and therefore he attempts to achieve this goal by using violence.

In order to complete the journey into the inner reaches of his mind, however, he still needs some type of training. Instructing him in the various arts of warfare, Scathach continues to war with various tribes, one of which the “hardest woman-warrior,” named Aife, leads. Although Scathach attempts to leave Cu Chulainn ignorant of the battles, he discovers the events and involves himself, eventually confronting Aife himself. The completion of his training looms near. At this time, Cu Chulainn is almost ready to fight womankind alone, yet not completely. Before he leaves for battle, he asks Scathach what Aife loves most. We notice two interesting things here. First, Cu Chulainn appears very similar to children on their first day of school. They know what bus they are supposed to take and where to go from there, yet racked by insecurity they ask their parental figures to repeat for them again what they are supposed to do, sometimes even asking them to accompany their adventure. Cu Chulainn shows here that he is still a trifle insecure about his newfound knowledge; he quietly sits afraid to raise his hand with the answer to the question. Secondly, Cu Chulainn displays newly acquired information about women when he asks about Aife’s loves, instead of asking simply for those things which would defeat her. This question reveals a sensitivity toward the deeper emotions of the other sex, recognizing them as people and not as a means to an end.

Cu Chulainn’s new sensitivities, however, do not completely change his preconceived ideas in regard to dealing with women. To begin, he uses the knowledge about Aife’s feelings to defeat her, viewing them as a detriment to her warrior character. But more significantly, upon his

defeat of her, he holds his sword over her and makes three demands: to give hostages to Scathach, to sleep with him, and to bear him a son. Cu Chulainn meets this female figure in the same manner as when he first encountered Scathach. He still uses force to obtain his ends, namely, that the woman should bear him a child. These demands carried out and his training completed (along with accepting the gae bulga, the weapon that virtually gives him invincibility), Cu Chulainn accomplishes the requirements for graduation after receiving his demands of Aife and completing his warrior training. Unfortunately, Cu Chulainn does not pay attention to the classes taught about gender relations, but concentrates only on sexual education. His degree from Scathach's school, however, gives him the ability to return to Ulster, fulfill the tasks set out for him by Emer, and marry her. On the surface level, Cu Chulainn could return to Ulster because through his schooling, he proved to be a strong enough warrior to care for Emer. Underneath the surface, Cu Chulainn's interaction with these female warriors was the confrontation with his fear of women, derived from his inexperience in female relations.

Is it possible that this episode simply shows an adolescent receiving training that would bring about his full potential? As Ellis suggests, "The symbolism is seen as that of the union of an apprentice with this vocation" (72). Mac Cana adds, "From [Scathach] he acquired the warlike strategies which render him invincible" (102). Both of these writers view Cu Chulainn's completion of Scathach's training only as it appeals to his warrior side. Cu Chulainn, in obtaining more combat knowledge, took the next step in becoming the perfect warrior and hero. The interpretation, when restricted to a mere battle-oriented formula, is incomplete. We cannot ignore the signs of a journey into the unconscious: going to a foreign land, wandering through a forest, and finally, being carried to an island on the "outermost bounds of men" by a beast. In the

Odyssey, Odysseus also travels these same heroic paths into the subconscious. Odysseus spends twenty years wandering from foreign land to foreign land, tossed about by the will of the sea, to the furthest reaches of knowledge and beyond. And not until Odysseus comes to terms with those questions deeply hidden in his mind, the middle-aged questions about growing old with his wife, could he return home to Ithaka. Furthermore, for a little more coloration, the name Scathach holds a particular meaning important to the interpretation: the word Scath may mean “shadow” (Davidson 99). Cu Chulainn must go into the shadows of his mind, where the female monster of his subconscious awaits confrontation.

Mary Condren, on the other hand, considers the Celtic hero’s encounters with women in terms of a larger, more societal-oriented picture. What she would see here is the incoming patriarchal society, represented by Cu Chulainn, overcoming and suppressing the matrilineal society, symbolized through Scathach and Aife. These tribal societies, ruled over by women, are not strong enough to withstand the brutal force of the male-dominated society. She suggests that men believed that they no longer needed women, except for procreation. Unfortunately, she does not deal directly with this episode. What she claims seems evident in Cu Chulainn’s travails when on this journey. After he overcomes Scathach, he asks that he may sleep with her daughter. Similarly, when he conquers Aife, he requires that she bear him a child. Yet, Condren writes,

We have seen in the mythological stories that kings had been confirmed in their reigns by the activities of heroes such as Cuchulainn who had to separate from women before they went to battle to avoid weakening their strength. The warriors possessed a form of religious power, based upon their independence from women, that gave them a seeming immunity to death, and their brave acts imparted this power to the king, increasing his prestige in the eyes of the people (145).

The myths of Cu Chulainn, then, show how women weaken the warrior and only when the hero

separates himself can he obtain his true heroic potential. Although women attempt to weaken Cu Chulainn's battle power on a couple occasions, only through his understanding of his dependence on women does Cu Chulainn arrive at his full invincible potential. First, a female tells him the secret of how he must treat Scathach in order to receive proper training and, secondly, a woman gives him the training and the weapon which provide invincibility for him. Furthermore, although Cu Chulainn must leave his wife Emer to fight at the Cattle Raid of Cualigne, he takes a break from the fighting to go and see her. Cu Chulainn, by representing the incoming patriarchal society, may display the overpowering of the matrilineal society, but he certainly is not able to do so without the help of the female gender. Cu Chulainn only achieves his complete magnificence through the aid of women. For Cu Chulainn to become completely initiated into society, before he can marry Emer, he must not only prove himself worthy as a warrior, but must learn the position of women in his universe.

Similar to many heroes, Cu Chulainn is not content to be bonded to his wife-prize. At the feast of Samhain, Cu Chulainn strikes one of two birds that are interlocked by a chain of red-gold. Later, in a dream, two women approach him and take turns horsewhipping him, and as a result, Cu Chulainn lies on a sick bed for the next year. The women originate from the Otherworld and one of them, Fann, falls in love with Cu Chulainn, a temptation that Cu Chulainn cannot resist. After enjoying marriage for a time, he starts to wonder what other women are like. Never having had the chance to date but rushing right into marriage, his curiosity grows restless. Furthermore, since actions associated with horses often suggest fertility, not only are other women on his mind, but so are the possible sexual relations with them. Finally, since these women are from the Otherworld, his desire appears very much like a "grass is always greener"

syndrome. Mac Cana furthers the notion that the wishes which we cannot reach are the most desired, writing that the Otherworld represents peace and happiness (126). The Otherworld entices Cu Chulainn further to seek Fann when Labraid the Swift Sword-Wielder offers Fann as a prize for a single day's worth of battle. Not only does this situation appeal to his secret desires but to his warrior and prize-fighting nature as well. Cu Chulainn now reaches that point where he must gain knowledge concerning lasting relationships with women rather than simple flings.

The real test for Cu Chulainn comes when Emer enters into a direct conflict with Fann. Emer, discovering when and where their next meeting will be, storms out to fight for her man. Indecision traps Cu Chulainn when he sees both women before him. Fann, however, making his choice easy, returns to her husband, Manannan mac Lir. After Fann leaves, Cu Chulainn bounds to the south to be alone until his comrades bring him home and give him a drink of forgetfulness. His reaction to leave and sulk alone for his loss seems very much like the spoiled child's tantrum exercised when his wishes are left ungranted. Cu Chulainn remains entangled in his initial view that women are mere tools for his use. Since he cannot have what he wants, he bewails his loss; for Cu Chulainn, the world still revolves around him and exists to serve his needs. Once again, a similarity arises between Cu Chulainn and Odysseus. Odysseus, upon his return, passes the island of the Sirens, temptresses who sing out in melodic strains and seduce the traveler to come to them. The unprepared traveler cannot resist the temptation and winds up crushed upon the rocks. Their songs depict the lure to those other women who, from a distance, sound infinitely better than what one already possesses. Odysseus, tied to his ship's mast, screams in torment as he bids farewell to the life of plentiful women. Cu Chulainn's incomplete training in the world of women leaves him untied upon his passing ship. He learns from his training only how to

capture women, not how to communicate and interact with them, so he is now incapable of staying with or even returning to Emer, only doing so when he no longer remembers Fann. Monogamy and love are still foreign to him.

According to Condren, here Cu Chulainn represents the overcoming of the former idea that women are important members of society, individuals worthy of reverence. The other warriors of the society view his promiscuity as acceptable, and therefore he encounters no punishment for his adultery. Even Emer cares only about his return to her, unconcerned with his sinful deeds. Although Cu Chulainn is able to roam the fields of women without restraint, only true benefits will arrive for him only when he acknowledges the roaming laws.

Instead of helping birds and being helped by them, Cu Chulainn attacks them. Rather than learning from the difficulties that follow these attacks, he pursues the hero's goal of complete self-sufficiency; to gain victory he depends on his tremendous strength and agility. As I have just suggested, the king's son learns that his own prowess is insufficient to gain victory in all the circumstances he will encounter. For Cu Chulainn such an experience would be a lesson in depending on women. But the point seems clear in both tales; only those who accept that dependence can establish lasting relations with the world (Gose 93).

Since birds are often supernatural women, Gose suggests that Cu Chulainn would profit more and live a happier life when understanding his dependence on women, as Cu Chulainn's battles with Medb and the Morrighu will display. Furthermore, in understanding his dependence, he also must realize what lurks behind a relationship. Cu Chulainn is a warrior and so constantly searches for a challenge. If he remains with Fann, or someone like her who is "the incarnation of the promise of perfection" (Campbell 111), he would lack challenge, not even a father to fight with. Emer, because of her imperfect human nature, provides a challenge for the warrior. Cu Chulainn must look again at the puzzle of relationships and discover that they must be dealt with

by thought, not by the sword.

The stages of Cu Chulainn's advancement in his knowledge of women and their position in his world are now evident. First, he recognizes that they exist; then he learns of their biological purpose; next he confronts with the idea that he must depend on them at times; finally, he will confront the idea that not only is he dependent on women, but at their mercy. This final stage begins with the sorceress/queen of Connaught (a neighboring province to Ulster), Medb, who sparks the famous battle in *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*. Cu Chulainn journeys into his subconscious once again, symbolized by another solo adventure. When Medb sends out her attack, all the men of Ulster are affected by Macha's curse, suffering the pains of labor for a certain amount of time (the actual length varies per account, but generally it is five days). Cu Chulainn finds himself again battling alone against a female figure, once again journeying into a subconscious experience. The biggest clue to a subconscious episode is Ferdiad, Cu Chulainn's foster-brother whom he must fight.

This battle between Ferdiad and Cu Chulainn displays the inner, conflicting forces of femininity and masculinity within Cu Chulainn's mind. First, foster-brotherhood occurs when two or more young warriors train under the same teacher, such as Scathach. In their training, they bond to one another and hold a certain oath that they always will stand by each other's side in support (something similar to the name blood-brothers). Furthermore, Cu Chulainn's charioteer, Loeg, describes Ferdiad as "thine own friend and comrade and foster brother, the man thine equal in feats and in skill of arms and in deeds. . ." (Cross and Slover 295). Through their equality in warrior training, the men appear as mirror images of each other. They are, however, champions of two different provinces: Cu Chulainn champions a province dominated by male

figures, and Ferdiad champions a female-ruled province. In addition, the charioteers of the two champions, who are evenly matched brothers, also appear as mirror images.

A solo fight between someone of equal strength on the border between a male/warrior-ruled province and a female-ruled province produces something very interesting: a picture of a man fighting against himself, feminine side versus masculine. As mirror images, they represent one and the same person and their division, a female side versus male, shows a division within Cu Chulainn's mind. This division reaches the point of battle, a battle which affects Cu Chulainn in a way never found before. Cu Chulainn states that he would almost rather Ferdiad slay him than he slay Ferdiad because of his love and affection for him. These are emotions Cu Chulainn never felt before in any other episode. He feels great affection for this man and is unsure about how to deal with the situation. This scene reveals the first time that he feels emotions. In a furious disarray of emotions before the fight, he returns to his wife for a night. This return is a curious act, showing a running away from the turbulence in his subconscious to the comfortable arms of repressive reality. Unfortunately for Cu Chulainn, like the subconscious in us all, the troubles resurface, requiring his undivided attention. He can no longer run away; he must end the turbulence.

We find additional signs of the masculine versus feminine struggle within Cu Chulainn's psyche. The battle with Ferdiad is equal until Cu Chulainn uses the *gae bulga*, the weapon Scathach gave him that makes him invincible. By the use of this weapon, he destroys Ferdiad, along with the feminine-powered attack. First, the *gae bulga* was a weapon thrown with the foot when standing in water that sank into the lower stomach/bowel section of the enemy and opened up into a thousand spikes which invaded the whole body. Using this type of weapon against a

foe who represents the female kingdom suggests a phallus symbol. This object is the one attribute that the male possesses, and the female does not. It is thrown into the female, ejaculating into thousands of spear points, and finally subdues its object in the pains of childbearing. Condren would have a field day with this interpretation. Here, the men of old still under the matrilineal society are those men of Ulster put under the curse of Macha and left feeling the pains of labor (along with those fighting for Medb in Connaught). Cu Chulainn, however, since he was too young for Macha's curse to affect him, is the champion of the new, patriarchal society. Man and his phallus of warriorhood are changing the character of society and putting women into a position of servitude. Yet, although Medb may have ultimately lost the fight, she still retains draw status when looking at the whole picture. On the surface, she shows the power to make even the closest of individuals enter into conflict with each other. She still exists in a position of power, losing no hold on the possessions she had before; she simply does not gain any ground. In terms of Cu Chulainn's subconscious, then, it shows that his masculinity can hold off the attacks from "getting in touch with his feminine side." This stand does not mean, however, that the feminine side is diminished in any respect; it is simply thwarted for the moment, left simmering and awaiting another chance to boil over.

Cu Chulainn's inability to truly and completely understand the power that women could hold over him resulted in his downfall at the hands of the warrior goddess, the Morrighu. In his battles with Medb, Cu Chulainn arrives at the point of new understanding in relationships but, in the end, his warrior nature takes hold and suppresses any sentiments or feelings that are about to surface. Where Medb represents the possibility for change, the Morrighu represents the feminine power in the universe. The Morrighu is either a single goddess or a trio of goddesses, all of which

are associated with war and fate and are often found in the form of crows. She first appears before Cu Chulainn, waking him from a deep sleep in the middle of the night. Cu Chulainn, feeling slighted in his conversation with her, attacks her. She backs him off with a lie, then vanishes, leaving only a black bird. When Cu Chulainn announces that she cannot harm him, she significantly answers, "Certainly I can . . . I am guarding thy deathbed, and I shall be guarding it henceforth" (Cross and Slover 213). She then proclaims that she will cause his downfall at the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*. Cu Chulainn again displays his naïveté, believing that he can control the female force with his battle fury.

The strength of Cu Chulainn's warrior ferocity proves strong enough once again to stave off the charms of the woman when he encounters the Morrighu at the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*. When the Morrighu attacks him in his battle with Ferdiad, he holds her off. The result of Cu Chulainn shaking off her attack parallels the outcome when defeating Medb's champion, Ferdiad. Cu Chulainn, although winning the battle for the moment, does not actually rid himself of the other sex's presence. He simply shoves the presence back for the time; he wins the battle, but not the war. Another important feature here is that women, as Davidson points out, are used to "render Cu Chulainn helpless at the crucial moment in battle" (97). At this point, one sees for the first time the real power that women hold and the power that men fear: the power to make them less of a warrior. The perfect warrior does not have any attachments, so that he can give his complete attention to his craft. Cu Chulainn discovers, however, that if he wants to have a relationship, to have loves, these attachments and therefore, weaknesses, will emerge whether desired or not. Cu Chulainn fears the power that women might have over him and tries to combat the power and the fear of it by exerting his battle prowess, the only way that he ever

learned to deal with anything. He does not want to understand their power but desires simply to use it and then put it aside. Condren's hypothesis also recognizes Cu Chulainn's apathy toward women: Let women be the incubators for progeny, but other than that, pay them no attention.

Although Cu Chulainn holds off feminine might for a time, in the end it gets the better of him. On the way to the final battle, he encounters three witches, most likely representing the Morrighu, cooking a dog on a rowantree spit. Making him feel guilty not to accept their invitation, they force him to take a piece of the meat which is taboo for him to ingest, causing him to lose strength in his left side. Continuing on, he sees the Washer in the Ford, washing his armor. Whoever's armor that this goddess (Badb, one of the Morrighu) washes, that one perishes next. Once again, a woman weakens our hero at the time of battle. This time, however, Cu Chulainn is unable to persevere. Cu Chulainn, mortally wounded, ties himself to a pillar so that he would die standing. Not until the Morrighu, in the form of a crow, sits upon his shoulder in proof of Cu Chulainn's death does his life truly leave him. Cu Chulainn must come to terms with the feminine power in the cosmos. This power gives him several chances to do so, but his masculine-powered side is too powerful. After thwarting the Morrighu's attempts on his life once, he believes it certain that feminine might is not a force to be reckoned with. In the end, however, that force holds the final laugh.

The Greek hero Jason follows a pattern symmetrical to Cu Chulainn's life. In obtaining the Golden Fleece, he uses Medea as an aid for accomplishing his task. When they return home, she ruins his chances of claiming kingship from his step-father. Banished, they travel to Corinth where she bears him two sons. Everything at this point appears fine. Then Jason discovers another opportunity to gain kingship, this time in Corinth. Ignoring his commitment to Medea

and his sons, he agrees to marry the king's daughter. The feminine force does not accept this type of treatment. Medea proceeds to slay the king and his daughter and then Jason's two sons. Finally, she flies off to Athens without punishment. Her ability to gain vengeance upon Jason and escape unpunished displays the great power of the feminine force. Jason remains now without progeny, without a wife, and without a kingdom; the betrayed feminine force strips the hero Jason of his heroic reputation and leaves him alone among the obsolete. Although Cu Chulainn dies in a heroic battle, his destruction derives from ignorance similar to Jason. Women are not tools for the man's use and if one does not realize this point, doom awaits around the bend.

From the first moment Cu Chulainn encounters the female presence, a problem clearly arises. After training among males for the first seven years of his life, not chancing upon a single representative of the other sex, Cu Chulainn forms detrimental ideas about women. Although at times he seems almost to understand that a greater relationship connects himself with them, he never actually reaches enlightenment. Repeatedly, Cu Chulainn treats women as the means for an end, as tools of procreation. Finally, even though holding off his fate for a time, our hero succumbs to the female force. He could not understand that women might not be as physically strong as their male counterparts, but that they possess another type of power than the warrior ideal. Cu Chulainn's inability to come to terms with this alternative force causes his downfall. The feminine mystique is truly all-powerful; it has the power to train men, to weaken them, and even to cause their destruction.

Conclusion

Beneath the soil of symbolism, Cu Chulainn's psychological trials await discovery. First, our hero's birth plants the seed of greatness in fertile soil. Through the birth's triplicity, congenitalness, and divine origins, the seed receives the proper amounts of rain and soil nutrients to assure a supernatural blooming. As the young Cu Chulainn emerges from his earthly coverings, he must learn to cope with the weather of the outside world. The sun of warriorhood shines upon him and aids the strengthening of his body. Quickly he grows into his potential, developing beyond those of similar age, and strives for adulthood. He acquires his goal of adulthood too soon, however, which results in an incomplete development. This missing piece for complete adulthood later causes the downfall of this glorious creation.

Despite Cu Chulainn's impressive outward appearance, the inner reaches of his mind are twisted in turbulent confusion since he lacks the proper characteristics to survive the feminine tempests. Cu Chulainn attempts to view them as utensils for his own self gain just as the soil nutrients, the rain, and the sun. He discovers, however, that the windstorms of womanhood are not similar to the tools used to acquire warriorhood status but are a force unto themselves. Yet his overdeveloped warrior sense restrains him from understanding his discoveries. Instead of blowing along with the winds in cooperation, he continuously attempts to fight them and bend them to his will. In the end, hurricane Morigu, greatest of all windstorms, rips Cu Chulainn out of the soil and whisks the spirit out of him. Cu Chulainn's death completes Cathbad's prophecy that whoever took up arms upon that particular day would lead a short but heroic life. Through his fantastic rise to warrior prowess and subsequent demise at the hands of the feminine force, Cu Chulainn's epic life exemplifies the supernatural and symbolic life of the mythological hero.

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