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*Imtheacht an Dá Nónmhar agus Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile:*

an Early Modern Irish exemplary tale

(short title: An Early Modern Irish exemplary tale)

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ABSTRACT

The Early Modern Irish (EModIr) *fianaigheacht* text known as *Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile* (henceforth *TTT*) has not hitherto been the subject of any lengthy critical comment. The present paper will argue that *TTT* is an exemplary tale concerned with the relationships of vassals to their overlords and to one another. In addition, attention will be drawn to the text's treatment of poets and poetry, in particular with regard to the privileged position of men of art in aristocratic military society and the proper use of praise and satire.

MSS

*TTT* was edited by Máire Ní Mhuirgheasa and published from the three surviving MSS, without translation, notes or indexes, as the sixteenth volume of the *Leabhair ó Láimhsgríbhñibh* series in 1954. All of the MSS are fragmentary and lack a conclusion.

RIA MS B iv 1 (henceforth 'B') is the work of the scribe Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeannáin, written in Sligo, c. 1671. In addition to part of *TTT*, the manuscript contains a number of other EModIr tales, the life of St Lasair, and some (mostly seventeenth-century) poetry.<sup>1</sup>

The text of *TTT* found in RIA MS A v 2 (henceforth 'A') and E iv 1 (henceforth 'E') consists of fragments of the same late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century manuscript.

Vatican Borgianus Hibernicus (henceforth 'V') was compiled by Seán Mhág Gabhráin for Brian Mág Uidhir in 1708.<sup>2</sup>

Ní Mhuirgheasa (*TTT*, xvi) determined that there are few differences between the three MSS, though the texts of AE and V are more similar to one another than to that of B. B, the oldest manuscript, was the basis of Ní Mhuirgheasa's edition to l. 3911, at which point the text in B breaks off. The text of ll. 3912-6825 of the edition is taken from A with some variant readings from V. When the text of A breaks off, the edition resumes with the text of V.

<sup>1</sup>For this scribe, see Walsh 1947, 13-24 and Breatnach 2012.

<sup>2</sup>For Brian Mág Uidhir and his MSS, see Cunningham and Gillespie 1988.

## THE PLOT OF *TTT*

As the text is not widely known<sup>3</sup> and as no translation of the text has yet been published, I offer the following summary of the tale.<sup>4</sup>

(i) The text is headed *Imtheacht an dā nōnmhair* [read *nónmhar*] \*7 *tóraigheacht Thaisi Taoibhghile ann so*, <sup>7</sup> *ainm an sgeóil so*, ‘The expedition of the eighteen and the pursuit of Taise Thaoibhghéal here, and this is the name of the tale’ in B<sup>5</sup> and begins with a laudatory description of Cormac and his reign (ll. 1-15). Fionn is introduced as a figure who rivals Cormac in the extent of his sovereignty and whose prerogatives throughout Ireland are extensive (ll. 16-35); these are then summarised in a poem in *deibhidhe (ógláchas)* (ll. 35-69).<sup>6</sup>

(ii) The tale proper begins with a hunting expedition in Howth,<sup>7</sup> which is interrupted when a beautifully-clad woman arrives by coracle and approaches Fionn (ll.72-130). She declares she is in love with Fionn, who reciprocates her feelings and offers to forsake all other women for her (ll. 130-52). The mysterious stranger, however, declares that she cannot be his before he has travelled as much as she has. She then announces that she is leaving, but places Fionn under taboos (*geasa*

3I am grateful to the anonymous reader of my paper on the EModÍr version of the Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh in *Ériu* 63 (2013) for drawing my attention to *TTT*. The latter text contains several references to the Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh, but these do not refer to the version of the tale discussed by me (see Murphy 1953-5b). Incidentally, in that article (Hoyne 2013, 110 n. 43), I speculated that Balar's wife Ceithleann might be associated with Inis Ceithleann in the lordship of Mág Uidhir. *BC*, p.2 (see also Ó Cróinín 2013, 487-8) mentions that Ceithleann was slain in the Battle of Magh Tuireadh and buried in Dún Ceithleann to the north of Magh Tuireadh.

4Some incidents are only briefly mentioned here or are omitted from the summary altogether, as they are discussed in more detail later in the paper. I have divided the plot into numbered sections for ease of reference. A shorter English summary will be found in Ó hÓgáin 1988, 263-5, but it is inaccurate in some details, including the statement that there is only one MS witness to the tale. All translations of material published without a rendering into English are my own. There is some inconsistency in the text as to whether the band under Fionn's command is a *fian* (sing.) or *fiana* (pl.). When translating, I follow the text, but in the discussion I use sing. *fian* to refer to this particular group. Similarly, where the text has plural *Clanna Baoisgne*, *Clanna Morna* etc. I retain the plural in my translation, but in the discussion I use only singular *Clann Bhaoisgne*, *Clann Mhorna* etc.

5This dual title appears to be an attempt to represent both the genres to which the tale could be considered to belong, the *imtheacht* ‘journey’ or ‘expedition’ and *tóraigheacht* ‘pursuit’: Fionn and the Fian leave Ireland (their *eachtra*) in pursuit (*tóraigheacht*) of Taise Thaoibhghéal. No heading is visible in E. In V, the tale is headed simply *Tóraigheacht Thaisi Táuibhghile*.

6This introductory section of the tale (*Conadh do remhtheacht an sgeíl co n-uige sin. Corp an sgeíl síosana co léig* (ll. 70-1), ‘That was the prologue to the tale; the body of the tale follows now’) can be compared to the opening of *Eachtra an Ghiolla Dheacair* (*SG*, 257-8), which also establishes the chronological and geographical setting through a description of Cormac and his reign and the prerogatives of Fionn, albeit not in the same length. Cf. also *GGG*, 49.

7 This section too begins with a stereotyped introduction: *Ro comóradh sealg & fiadhach & fian-chosgur le Fionn mac Comhail aon do laithibh a mBeinn Éadair mheic Étghaoidh \*7 la ceithre cathaibh gaisgidh na gnáth-Fhéine*, ‘Fionn son of Cumhall and the four battalions of the standing Fian held a hunt and a chase and a slaughter one day in Beann Éadair mheic Étghaoidh’ (ll. 72-5). Cf. Meyer 1910, 57-8 and *Trí bruidhne*, 3.

\*7 *áil* \*7 *airmearta*) that he must follow her to her fortress and take her from those keeping her. She further stipulates Fionn must be accompanied by no more and no less than eighteen *féinnidhe*, the *dá nónmhar* of the tale-title (ll. 152-77). The woman refuses to divulge further information concerning the location of her fortress beyond the observation that she will be found in one of the four quarters in the globe (ceithre *hairde san chruinne*) and on one of the three continents (*trī ranna*; Europe, Africa and Asia) (ll. 178-86).<sup>8</sup> A poem in *deibhidhe (ógláchas)* follows, in which the conversation of Fionn and the maiden is given in versified form (ll. 187-205).

(iii) After the maiden returns to her coracle, Fionn bites into his enchanted thumb to discover the intentions of the woman who has placed him under *geasa* and where she came from (ll. 206-300).<sup>9</sup> The woman, it transpires, is a powerful sorceress named Taise Thaoibhgheal and she is the daughter of the king of Tír na nÍongnadh, the foster-daughter of Rí na bhFear nDorcha and the wife of Cuilleann Cruadharmach, the king of Inis Tile (ll. 301-21). The chain of events which led to her coming to Ireland began with a quarrel between two poets in the house of her husband on Inis Tile, the poet of Asia arguing that Cuilleann was the greatest lord on earth, while the poet of Europe maintained that this distinction properly belonged to Fionn.<sup>10</sup> The European poet's description of Fionn was so impressive that Taise Thaoibhgheal fell in love with the *rífhéinnidh*. Her husband Cuilleann noticed her attraction to Fionn and, out of jealousy, resolved to exact revenge on Fionn and conquer Ireland. Taise Thaoibhgheal managed to dissuade him from this course, suggesting instead that she should go to Ireland to see for herself whether Fionn lives up to his reputation. She swears not to sleep with any other man until she returns home and, if her feelings for Fionn are genuine, to compel him to follow her with a small force through the application of *geasa* (ll. 322-81).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>In *Eachtra Iollainn Iolchrothaigh mheic ríogh na hEaspáine*, an unidentified giant approaches Cormac; when asked where he comes from, he replies, “*Is cumhang mo chuairt [...] re n-a tabhairt, óir, ní fhuil acht trí ranna san domhan, mar atá Eoraip, Asia, \*7 Aifric \*7 is do rann éigin díobh sin mise*” ‘My journey is short to relate, for the world is divided into only three parts, Europe, Asia and Africa, and I come from one of those’ (GGG, 49). (For the origin of the tripartite division, see Bruford 1963, 40, 43 n. 27.) In *CCl*, Beioda, the daughter of the king of Lochlainn, gives a similarly unhelpful answer when asked for the location of her desired dowry: “*Eirccidhsí d’a h-iarraidh sóir [...] \*7 muna bhfagthar thóir í erccidh síar, \*7 muna bhfaghuidh thiar eirccidh ba dheas, \*7 muna bhfagthaoi ba dheas í eirccidh ba thuaidh, \*7 narab mac maith dhaoibh nogo bhfagthaoi d’eólus uaimsi acht sin*” ‘Go east to seek it [...] and if it is not found in the east, go west; and if you find it not in the west, go south; and if you find it not in the south, go north; and may you have no good son till you learn aught save that from me’ (pp. 112-13). Cf. also Laoi's word to Cú Chulainn in *TGG*, 20-1: *ní bhfuil isin gcruinne acht ceithre ranna cudroma ceartchomhthroma, agus sírfe sinne gach rann díobh nó go bhfagham an Garuidh Garbhghlúineach sin agus go ndiogheóla tusa h'anfhorlann air*, ‘there are in the universe but four even divisions, and we shall search every division of these until we find that Garuidh Garbhghlúineach that thou mayst take vengeance on him for the violence he offered thee’.

<sup>9</sup>A version of the story of how Fionn acquired the thumb of knowledge is also recounted (ll. 241-73).

<sup>10</sup>Curiously, in this passage Fionn sometimes employs the 2 pl. adjective *bhur* (e.g. *is aire sin tainic sí dá bhur n-ionnsuighi-sí don turus [s]a*, ‘that is why she came to you on this occasion’; l. 322) when the 1 sg. or pl. would be more appropriate.

<sup>11</sup>Presumably this arrangement is amenable to Cuilleann because it will give him the opportunity to slay Fionn.

Based upon the information he has divined, Fionn then describes the difficulty that lies before the Fian should they choose to fulfil the *geasa*. The Fian must first pass a volcano (*sliabh trom-lasrach tinntighe*) fashioned by magic, whose heat is felt within a thousand mile radius of it.<sup>12</sup> Afterwards, they must cross a viscous stormy sea (*muir thiugh-thonnach throm-anfadhach thécht*) which no ordinary vessel can sail upon in order to reach Inis Tile. There they must do battle with the hosts of the island or their feet will stick to the earth.<sup>13</sup> Afterwards they must face an impassable river (*raibhéar*), the bridge over which is guarded by a fortified tower (*tor comhdhaingean cathrach*) manned by a giant (appropriately named Aitheach an Droichid) who wields an iron flail (*sūisde*). After Aitheach an Droichid, they must defeat his scythe-wielding brother Aitheach an Chorráin.<sup>14</sup> The Fian must then best Ridire an tShlabhraidh in a kind of tug-of-war in which the giant puts his head in one of the links of a chain, his opponent his head in another, and, with their backs to one another, divided by a stone, they each attempt to pull their opponent onto the stone and decapitate him.<sup>15</sup> A further danger is posed by fifty rabid dogs (*cú confaidh*) who breathe fire and, along with other guards, protect Cuilleann's palace, which is itself a heavily fortified castle brimming with warriors (ll. 382-482). Cuilleann Cruadharmach is protected by his foster-mother and sorceress (*buime \*7 ban-chumhachtach*), who hovers in the air above him (*isin aér eadar-bhúasach*) during battles, so that it is a waste of time (*caitheamh aimsire*) to fight him (ll. 483-510).<sup>16</sup> Only a spear and sword made on the night that he was born by the king of Norway (*rí na hÍrúaidhe*), Cuilleann's foster-father, can kill him.<sup>17</sup> As for the king of Norway, he too has many hosts and is married to the daughter of the king of Antioch (*rí na hAntuaithe*; Bruford 1969, 22), the foster-mother of Cuilleann, and has a mighty son, Iollann Airdmhearg, and a household-chief (*taoiseach teaghlaigh*) named Tuireann Tortbhuilleach (ll. 511-37). The greatest threat of all, however, is Rí na bhFear nDorcha, the foster-father of Taise Thaoibhgheal (ll. 537-50). The entire itinerary is then summarised in a poem in *deibhidhe (ógláchas)* (ll. 550-95).

12A volcano also appears in *CCl*, pp. 118-21. Cf. also Cathair an tShrotha Teintighe in *TGG*, 8-9.

13The passage on Inis Tile reads as follows: *is eadh is bás bunaidh don innsi sin, .i. gach aon téid le heasaonta inte a chosa do choimleanmhain d'úir in oiléin muna taosca dheargaid ar shleaghuibh* [read *shluaghaibh*] *na hinnsi inā sleigh* [read *sluaigh*] *na hinnsi orra-somh*, 'it is the custom of that island that the feet of every person who comes in a spirit of hostility to it adhere to the soil of the island unless they draw blood from the hosts of the island before the hosts of the island draw blood from them' (ll. 401-5). Cf. ll. 5517-27. This peculiar feature of the soil of Inis T(u)ile (both *Tile* and *Tuile* are met with in MSS) also features in *BC*, 18, 32-3. For the creative use made of this motif by an anonymous poet in a poem composed c. 1595 to Gill'Easbuig Mac Caillein, Earl of Argyll, see McLeod 2004, 191-2.

14 Aitheach an Chorráin also appears in *DF* poem 68.

15Cf. *CCl*, pp. 124-7 where Anadhal Éachtach must overcome a giant in the same ordeal.

16Cuilleann's foster-mother is described as lying *ar a f(h)oraibh* [read *foradhaibh?*] *fis \*7 fír-eólais* (l. 496) in the air and as catching weapons directed at her foster-son *ina f(h)oraibh* [read *foradhaibh?*] *fis \*7 ina g(h)abhlaibh gliocais* (ll. 501-2). Cf. *a fisig 7 a fireolaig ar cairthib 7 ar foradaib fis ag denam a ndraidechta, a filidh ag aiream a necht \*7 ag scribad a sgel*, 'their seers and wise men stationed themselves on pillars and points of vantage, plying their sorcery, while the poets took count of the feats and wrote down tales of them' (Fraser 1916, 42-3). The phrase *ar a haltóraibh ídhlaidhi* 'on her pagan altars' is also employed in *TTT* (ll. 508-9) in the same sense.

17It is noted that every king of Norway was a smith (*gabha*) (ll. 520-1). See Bruford 1963, 13, 18 n. 12. Note also the character of Aonghabha na hÍoruaidhe in the First Battle of Magh Tuireadh (Fraser 1916).

(iv) Fionn asks which of the assembled nobles (*da bhur n-úaslibh \*7 da bhar n-ard-mhaithibh*) will accompany him on the expedition (*efachtra*). Fourteen volunteer<sup>18</sup> and Conán is reluctantly obliged to join the expedition (ll. 596-965). Fionn is still two persons short of the company of eighteen stipulated by Taise Thaoibhgheal but, unwilling to leave Ireland without the protection of some members of the Fiana, he elects to proceed anyway, hoping that he will encounter two suitable companions on the journey (ll. 966-72). In Almhain, Fionn meets his maternal uncle, the physician Labhra Lámhfhada, the son of Tadhg mac Nuadhad, who offers his services (ll. 973-1034). The Fian arise early the following day and inaugurate Caireall ó Conbhróin as temporary lord of the Fian (*ro hoirneadh \*7 ro honóraigheadh Caireall ó Conbhróin a n-ionadh Finn a fflaitheas na Féine*) (ll. 1035-45). An Bhreacbhárc, Fionn's ship,<sup>19</sup> is brought from the Boyne to Howth and stocked for the journey (ll. 1045-67). Before leaving Ireland, Fionn journeys to Tara to bid farewell to Cormac mac Airt and the kings of the five provinces (*do na cóigeadhachaibh a gcoitchinne*) (ll. 1068-1142). On their return to Howth, the Fian encounter Aonghus Óg mac an Daghdha, who offers to accompany them on their expedition. His arrival brings the company to the eighteen required by Taise Thaoibhgheal (ll. 1143-89). The Fian board An Bhreacbhárc (ll. 1190-1201), and Fionn recites a poem in *aoi fhreislighe* (ll. 1202-26).

(v) After setting sail (ll. 1228-52), the Fian discuss their heading, eventually resolving to go to Norway to retrieve the weapons necessary to kill Cuilleann Cruadharmach (ll. 1207-1327). The Fian plunder and burn the land, killing all they encounter (ll. 1328-44). Fearghus and Conán are sent to the king of Norway to request the weapons from him, but their negotiations are unsuccessful (ll. 1345-1554), and Conán fights the Norwegian hosts until the warriors of the king of Norway refuse to let any more of their number fall in vain (*a n-asgaidh*) to Conán (ll. 1555-1662).<sup>20</sup> When the two emissaries return to the Fian, Fearghus retells their adventures *trē ghlór-shnáithe filidheachta* 'through a verbal thread of verse' in *aoi fhreislighe* to the delight of the Fian (ll. 1685-1725).

Meanwhile, the people of Norway (*sochraide na hÍrúaidhe; treabha \*7 túatha an tíre*), terrified by the prospect of facing the Fian, urge their king to give the Fian the weapons that they seek, but the king refuses to betray his foster-son (ll. 1726-68). Fionn decides to take the weapons by force and the Fian arm themselves and proceed to the king's fortress (ll. 1769-1806). On the first day, three sets of three *féinnidhe* successfully fight three sets of three hundred Norwegian warriors one after the other (ll. 1807-1922). Conán attacks the Norwegian champion Tuireann Tortbhuilleach on the second day, but proves no match for his opponent and must be rescued by his fellow *féinnidhe* (ll. 1923-2022). Oisín defeats and beheads Iollann Airdhearg, while the king meets the

18Oisín, Osgar, Fionn's three sons by Ailbhe Gruaidhbhreac, the daughter of Cormac mac Airt (Caoínche Corcuirdhearg, Ailbhe Arduallach and Roighne Roisgleathan), Fearghus File (another son of Fionn), Mac Lughach, the three sons of Aoincheard Bhéarra and Mac Con mac Maicniadh, king of Munster (Glas, Géar and Gubha), Diarmaid ó Duibhne, Caoilte, Sgiath Breac mac Dathchaoin (Fionn's shield-bearer in battle) and Goll.

19An Bhreacbhárc appears in the possession of Cú Chulainn in *TGG*, an EModIr Ulster Cycle tale, where it is stated that Fionn later acquired the ship (pp. 20-1).

20Apparently, sixty of the king of Norway's men in all were killed by Conán (*seisear \*7 sé nónmhair*; l. 1658), though by my count only the deaths of 48 are recounted in the text (a single combat, combat against two soldiers, against three, four, five, six, nine and eighteen). Either some text is missing or, perhaps more likely, the *seisear* 'six' in l. 1658 should be subtracted rather than added to *sé nónmhair* 'six nines'.



same fate at the hand of Goll (ll. 2023-100). The remaining Norwegians are routed (ll. 2101-09). The Fian occupy the late king's castle (ll. 2110-48), and, before leaving Norway with the weapons needed to kill Cuilleann, Fionn installs the brother of the slain king as ruler of the land (ll. 2149-357). Fearghus then recites a poem in *deibhidhe* (*ógláchas*), summarising their adventures in Norway (ll. 2358-417).

(vi) After an intense argument (discussed below), the Fian set course to Antioch (ll. 2433-3060) and march towards the fortress of its king (ll. 3061-133). Oisín is the first to face the enemy (ll. 3133-200), followed by Osgar (ll. 3201-42), the three sons of Aoincheard Bhéarra (ll. 3243-90), Aonghus (ll. 3291-339), Labhra Lámhfhada (ll. 3340-80) and Diarmaid (ll. 3381-427). After six days of carnage and two hundred dead, the men of Antioch secretly determine not to fight the *féinnidhe* in equally-matched combat (*comhlann cēd nā áoin-fhir*), but instead to rush the Fian's representative, Sgiath Breac, on the seventh day of battle (ll. 3428-65). Goll comes to the rescue of his vassal (gen. *a óglāigh*) (ll. 3466-81), cutting through the enemy hosts as far as the king of Antioch, whom he eventually kills after a fierce fight (ll. 3482-527). The Fian then route the hosts of Antioch (ll. 3528-44). The Fian occupy the king's castle and install a successor as before (ll. 3545-683), and Fearghus recites a poem (in the uncommon metre *ochtfhoclach* (*ógláchas*)) celebrating their deeds and urging them to set off (ll. 3684-763).<sup>21</sup>

(vii) The Fian now set sail for Críoch na bhFear nDorcha (ll. 3764-827). Aware of their coming, Rí na bhFear nDorcha commands the visible and invisible elements (*na dúile aigsidhe \*7 neamh-aigsidhe*) so that the four major winds (*ceithre príomh-gháotha an bheatha do bhunadh*)<sup>22</sup> rage against one another (*do chaitheamh a chiorghaile \*7 a cheannairrge re chéile*). The sea, wind, snow and ice beset An Bhreacbhárc, preventing it from coming ashore and ultimately forcing the Fian to abandon ship (ll. 3828-75). They are rescued by Manannán, whose boat, Sguabadh Tuinne, is, in any event, the only vessel which can reach Críoch na bhFear nDorcha (ll. 3876-994).

Safely on land, Manannán takes his leave (ll. 3995-4013) and the Fian discuss the condition of their company and the daunting challenges ahead before setting up camp (ll. 4014-97). They are then attacked by a hideous giant (*aitheach*), wearing nothing but a 'wax-stiffened bare (?) ugly hooded cloak made of one material and one piece of cloth' (*cona chochall-bhrat ciarrtha clārtha coimhēidigh d'ēin-earradh \*7 d'ēin-édeadh*). He shakes his rag (*a cheirt*) in the vicinity of the camp, covering the Fian with snow and hail, paralysing them (ll. 4098-134). Aonghus uses his magic to move the sun from its fixed orbit (*as a ciorcaill chomh<th>uinighthe*), melting the snow, warming the Fian and returning them to strength (ll. 4135-58).<sup>23</sup> The giant, however, resumes his attack at night. Aonghus and Labhra Lámhfhada spend the night continually re-lighting the campfires put out by the giant (ll. 4159-92). Having ensured that the Fian spent a sleepless night without food, the giant flees at dawn only to be killed by a spear cast by Fionn (ll. 4193-217). Fearghus and

21For two examples of the same metre in another EModIr *fianaigheacht* tale, see Meyer 1912, 82-5.

22These are *an sdefir aníar* (Zephyrus), *in uorobir* (presumably a mistake for *bhoir*) *atúaidh* (Boreas), *an ebhir anoir* (Eurus) and *an aibhistir aneas* (Auster) (ll. 3841-3). Cf. *an Stefir iniar*, in *Voir atúaidh, inn Euir anair* and *inn Auster andes* in *In Cath Catharda* (Stokes 1909, ll. 4336-7). See also Bruford 1963, 40, 43 n. 28.

23For *cearchaill* 'orbit', see *DIL* s.v. *circul*. The word *aisdear* (: *gaisgeadh*) 'journey' is used in the same sense with a figurative sun in *IGT* iii, ex. 723: *abra dub dar giall an gaisgeadh / grian iar sgur dá haisdear é*, 'a dark brow to whom valour is a hostage, he is the sun broken off from its orbit'.

the rest of the Fian congratulate Fionn on this feat and Fearghus recites a poem in *aoi fhreislige* (ll. 4217-63), after which Aonghus reminds the celebrating *fian* of the terrible dangers still awaiting them (ll. 4264-321).

The Fian are then attacked by the grieving widow of the slain giant, the foster-mother of Rí na bhFear nDorcha. Aonghus and Labhra defend against the snow and blizzard (*saobh-dhoinionn*) she conjures up and, in response, she encircles the Fian with ‘a mighty tower of blazing flame without kindling or foundation’ (*tor trén-aidhbh[seach] tineadh trichimhruaidhe gan adhbhar gan fhundament*). The noxious smoke is so unpleasant that ‘it would have been easier for every one of them to keep his head and beautiful face in a disgusting stinking privy and in foul filthy sewers for his whole life’ (*fa husa le gach aon-neach aca a cheann \*7 <a> <chaomh-aghaidh> do chongbhāil i bhfial-tigh throchamhail thul-bhrēan \*7 i ccamraidhibh claona comh<shalacha?> [re a] bheathaidh*) than to breath the toxic smoke for a single moment.<sup>24</sup> Dazed, the Fian, including their two druids, Aonghus and Labhra, succumb to the toxic fumes (ll. 4321-81). Goaded on by Conán, Diarmaid eventually shoots the giant, killing her (ll. 4382-418), a deed which is praised by Fearghus in a poem in *aoi fhreislige* (ll. 4419-54).

Having survived the snow and fire of the giants' attacks, the Fian turn their attention to what role each will play in the coming battles (ll. 4454-512). Goll, Caoilte, Sgiath Breac, Mac Lughach, Conán, Aonghus, Labhra Lámhfhada and Diarmaid overcome the nine vicious hounds sent against them (ll. 4513-666), and Oisín manages with difficulty to kill the fierce lion (ll. 4667-757). The Fian fight a pitched battle with the hosts of Críoch na bhFear nDorcha. Though the king's sons are killed in the battle by three of Fionn's sons, Rí na bhFear nDorcha leads a successful retreat (ll. 4758-843). The following day, the king's two foster-brothers and the chief of his household (*a thao[i]seach teaghlaigh*) are slain by the three sons of Aoincheard Bhéarra (ll. 4843-93). Eager for revenge, the king himself now enters the field. Seeing the terror the king's arrival causes among his fellow *féinnidhe*, Osgar engages him in a fierce one-man conflict (ll. 4894-957). Three times during this battle, nine of the king's retinue attack Osgar, but he manages to kill them (ll. 4958-83). After a long and difficult struggle involving the rest of the Fian, the king is eventually beheaded (ll. 4984-5363).

(viii) Once they have left Críoch na bhFear nDorcha, the Fian sail to Inis Tile (ll. 5380-436), but encounter An Mhuir Théacht:

*As amhlaidh, iomorra, baóí an mhuir sin arna horrdughadh \*7 arna heagar uile a n-aoinfheacht do chrannaibh feōidhe fíor-arsanta \*7 d'omnadhaibh cruaidhe coilg-dhíorgha \*7 d'fhiodhbhaidh iomdhlúith adhbhal-mhōir gan dīon, gan duille, gan deagh-fhasgadh, taobh re taobh \*7 uille fíria huilli*

‘This entire sea was formed of withered, ancient trees and solid, erect tree-trunks and dense, massive trees without leaves, without foliage, without canopies, side by side and next to one another’ (ll. 5437-43).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>One could compare the fire in *BC* (p.14; cf. also Ó Cróinín 2013, 489-90) which is initially sweet-smelling but whose smoke becomes ‘more foul than the privy of the world’ (*bréine [...] ioná fial-teach an domhain*).

<sup>25</sup>Conán quips it should be called *Coill Théacht* ‘Viscous Wood’, rather than *Muir Théacht* ‘Viscous Sea’ (ll. 5444-50).

Aonghus explains that the trees are in fact the masts of ships overwhelmed by mighty storms and that no vessel which contains any bit of metal can traverse the sea (ll. 5451-71).<sup>26</sup> Using *brat Manannáin*, which, among other things, functions as a sort of magic carpet (*le buadhaibh \*7 le buan-bhreachtradh druadh an bhruit sin, dóigh, ámh, éirghidh-s[éin] dorn ós fēr \*7 ós fiodh \*7 ós uisge um gach lucht \*7 um gach lāin-mhurar umā [ccu]rthar é*, ‘through the powers and enduring druidic magic of this cloak, it rises a hand above grass, wood and water, when wrapped around any group of people or company that it is put around’), Aonghus transports the Fian over An Mhuir Théacht and the fiery volcano to Inis Tíle. He obliges the Fian still further by slaying nine of its inhabitants, so that the Fian’s feet will not stick to the ground of the island (ll. 5472-599). The Fian then agree the part each will play in the coming struggles (ll. 5600-78); Oisín defeats Aitheach an Droichid (ll. 5679-757); Osgar slays Aitheach an Chorráin (ll. 5758-834); and Diarmaid dispatches Ridire an tShlabhraidh (ll. 5835-929). Though the Fian are finally in a position to march towards the castle of Cuilleann Cruadharmach (ll. 5930-54), some of their company are wounded by the terrible hounds of Cuilleann, whose wounds cannot be healed by Aonghus and Labhra (ll. 5955-6168).<sup>27</sup> The two druids are themselves injured in the struggle against the hounds and can no longer protect the Fian’s camp at night with their magic mist (*féth fia*) as they have done hitherto.

In anticipation of a treacherous attack from Cuilleann, Goll stands watch at night at the ford that separates the Fian's camp from that of Taise Thaoibhgheal's husband (ll. 6169-259). On the first night, a hundred of Cuilleann’s warriors attack him with no success (ll. 6260-369). Cuilleann arises the following morning and witnesses the dramatic death of the last warrior he had sent against Goll. He then orders his men to pursue Goll and prevent him from rejoining the Fian. Goll meets the pursuit directly, on the lawn (*faithche*) of Cuilleann’s castle. Goll is transfigured with battle-rage: *Agus ro éirgheadar dhā cholamhain thrēna throm-aidhbhle thinntidhe i n-urchomhair [air, conār] fhéad aon-neach a shilleadh nō a shīr-dhēachsain re halt na huair sin re ruamnadh [na roi-fhēire bhí] ’na rīoghnúis, conār fédadh a iomfhosdadh nō a iomfhuireach*, ‘Two mighty enormous fiery columns rose before him, so that no-one could look or stare at him at that time because of the glow of the contortion in his regal countenance, so that it was not possible to stop or delay him’.<sup>28</sup> He charges as far as Cuilleann himself and strikes a blow at his head. Cuilleann is briefly saved by his nine bodyguards (*naonmhar curadh [...] coimhēda*), who are then beheaded by Goll. Cuilleann takes up the shield to defend himself, but it is cut through by Goll’s sword. Goll then slays fifty warriors who come to Cuilleann’s assistance and again attempts to attack the king. Eventually, the champion of Clann Mhorna is overcome by Cuilleann’s noble assemblies (*oireachta*) (ll. 6370-463). At this point, the seven other *féinnidhe* who are still able to fight rescue him and bring him safely from the battle-field (ll. 6464-597).

26For this motif, see *TTT*, xiii.

27The prospect that they will eventually be healed by a chalice (*cuach*) held in Cuilleann's palace is held out later in the tale (ll. 6657-71).

28Cf. the description of Nuadha in *Stair Nuadat Find Femin: muidig Núada futha san mar luas [fh]aindile nó ferbi nó iarainde, \*7 roluathaig a lāma \*7 robrostaigh na béimenna brāthamla, roruithnigh \*7 roderg a gnúis connach féthead nech beith a n-urcomair a aidchi re treisi roimir arna sluagaibh*, 'Nuada sprang unter sie mit der Geschwindigkeit einer Schwalbe oder eines Hirsches oder Wiesels. Und er arbeitete mit seinen Händen und teilte so vernichtende Hiebe aus, und sein Gesicht flammte und leuchtete, so dass es nicht möglich war für irgendeinen, nahe seinem Angesicht zu weilen, so kräftig hieb er nämlich auf die Heldenscharen ein' (Müller-Lisowski 1921, §35).



(ix) Taise Thaoibhgeal has played no part in the adventures of the Fian thus far. A remark by Conán, lamenting the Fian’s needless pursuit of a ‘most proud queen’ (*ríoghna ro-uaibhrighe*) re-introduces her into the tale, and the focus of the narration shifts to ‘the galleries of her tower and mighty citadel’ (*for tá[ibhlibh a] tuir \*7 a trēn-chathrach*), where Taise and her companions have been observing the clashes between Cuilleann’s forces and the invading *fian*, viewing which has deepened Taise’s love for Fionn (ll. 6598-627). She joins her husband and his nobles as they discuss their tribulations and losses. Unabashed she announces that she will visit Fionn. Accompanied by her handmaids (*cona [bantracht] \*7 cona bann-chuire*), she brings the Fian a great meal (*pruinn chēd*), sympathises with the *féinnidhe* wounded by the venomous hounds and urges them to be vigilant. She then returns voluntarily to her husband, saying that she will remain with her husband until she is taken from him by force (ll. 6628-91).<sup>29</sup>

(x) That night, Cuilleann’s foster-mother, disguised as a harpist and musician (*a riocht crutaire \*7 fir fhīor-fhuinn; i riocht oirfidigh*), visits the Fian, hoping to lull them to sleep so that they can be killed. Caoilte, however, outwits the sorceress by thrusting his spear through his feet and is kept awake by the pain of his wounds. He then fights and beheads Cuilleann’s foster-mother and mounts her head on the palisade at the door of Fionn’s tent (ll. 6739-827).<sup>30</sup> Expecting his foster-mother to have succeeded, Cuilleann sends a hundred soldiers to the Fian’s camp to slaughter the sleeping invaders. Caoilte, who is guarding the ford that night, slays all of them. The following morning, Cuilleann’s scout discovers the bodies of the previous night’s soldiers floating down the stream that divides the two camps and spies the severed head of Cuilleann’s foster-mother (ll. 6828-64). Her death enrages Cuilleann and drives him to despair (ll. 6865-898). His trusted counsellors (*a chomhairleacha comhthairisi*) advise him to submit to the Fian or die as had been prophesised, but Cuilleann rejects this advice (ll. 6899-915), while the Fian celebrate the return of Caoilte, and Fearghus recites a poem in *deibhidhe (ógláchas)* on his exploits (ll. 6916-80).<sup>31</sup>

With the number of battle-ready *féinnidhe* steadily diminishing, Mac Lughach keeps watch the next night (ll. 6981-7006). He kills the soldiers sent against him and in single combat manages

<sup>29</sup>This incident exemplifies several of the motifs discussed by McManus (2009, especially 85-98) with regard to Classical Modern Irish verse: the celebrand is loved by married women, which puts strain on their relationships to their husbands; married women watch him in battle and meet him illicitly in his camp.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. *CCl*, pp. 134-7 for a similar incident. Saighead, the daughter of Carrthann Corr, commands three magical birds to sing in the hope of lulling the protagonists to sleep and killing them. Fearghus mac Rosa manages to remain awake, however, by wounding himself in the hands and feet with a gold pin he had in his cloak. He then kills the hag with a cast of a stone.

<sup>31</sup>While viewing the severed head of Cuilleann’s foster-mother before Caoilte’s return to the camp, Fionn and the uninjured members of the Fian are described *ag breith buidhe \*7 buan-alltaighthe fris an Dúile* [read -eamh] *a dhiongbhāil dhióbh*, ‘giving thanks to the Lord, who saved them’ (ll. 6927-8). In Fearghus’s poem on Caoilte’s exploits, God is explicitly mentioned again: *Beannacht an tí do dhealbh neamh, / Tighearna na tTrí Muintear, / is beannacht na ndúl ’mā leith / for láimh chosgraigh [Chaoilte]*, ‘The blessing of he who fashioned heaven, the lord of the three households [= the Church Militant, Penitent and Triumphant?] and the blessing of the elements respectively upon the triumphant hand of Caoilte’ (ll. 6968-71). Pagan belief, at least on the part of Conán, is evinced by “\*7 nār léigid dēi neart-choimseacha nua-ghlana nimhe comhairle ar líth nō ar leas don lucht isa chomhairle í [...]” ‘may the mighty shining gods of heaven not allow those whose counsel that is any prosperity or success’ (ll. 1284-6).

to drown and behead the king's brother, Traoitheadh Teaghlaigh (ll. 7007-196).<sup>32</sup> Despite his wounds, Mac Lughach keeps watch at the ford again a second night and kills another hundred attackers (ll. 7197-257). It is Osgar who volunteers to take the next watch (ll. 7258-85) and he too kills a hundred attackers (ll. 7330-61). On Osgar's second night-watch, Cuilleann orders his entire household (*a theaghlach*) of five hundred to attack the Fian's camp. None of the attackers survive (ll. 7362-438). In the wake of this latest massacre, Cuilleann's noble assembly (*aireacht*) takes fright and again implores their lord to make an accommodation with the Fian. This infuriates Cuilleann, who threatens to execute anyone who mentions capitulation again (ll. 7439-60). Resisting the entreaties of his advisers, Cuilleann sends yet another wave of men against the Fian (ll. 7481-7), but here the text breaks off.

### INTERPRETING *TTT*

In his study of Fionn mac Cumhaill, Daithí Ó hÓgáin (1988, 263) introduces *TTT* under the heading 'Late Romances':

By the end of the seventeenth century literary men felt free to describe any type of adventure in the Fianna context, entertainment of the readers being the sole consideration. The overseas adventure, of course, was a stock-piece of entertaining narrative, and by this time it had gone far beyond the point of interest to the range of tedium and even triteness. An example of this is the east Ulster text *Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile* [the Pursuit of Taise the bright-sided].

There are several difficulties with this brief analysis. Ó hÓgáin describes *TTT* as an east Ulster text. Similarly, Ó Buachalla (1977, 9) gives it as an Ulster EModIr text and, elsewhere (1988, 55-6), classifies it under 'literary [...] material emanating from south-east Ulster'. The two MS witnesses of the tale whose provenance is known originate from north Connacht and south-west Ulster, and I know of no linguistic or internal evidence that would allow us to localise the tale to east Ulster.<sup>33</sup> In their introduction to *TTT* (pp. xii-xiii), Máire Ní Mhuirgheasa (Maura Carney) and Gearóid Ní Mhurchú (Gerard Murphy) are silent on where the text may have been composed. They tentatively suggested a sixteenth-century date for the composition of the tale, on the grounds that the genre of the romantic tale appears to have become popular in the late fifteenth century and that some of the learned references in *TTT* may have derived from texts known to exist in Irish in the late fifteenth century.<sup>34</sup> The grounds upon which Ó hÓgáin and Ó Buachalla maintained a late seventeenth-century date are not disclosed by either scholar. Bruford (1963, 43 n. 16, 49) too believed that *TTT* was probably a seventeenth-century text, but similarly failed to substantiate this dating. While the earliest MS, B, is, indeed, a late seventeenth-century production (c. 1671), this provides, of course, only the *terminus ante quem* for the composition/redaction of *TTT* and in no way precludes an earlier date.

A further difficulty concerns Ó hÓgáin's remarks on the argument of *TTT*, the topic with which this paper is primarily concerned. Ó hÓgáin invokes the tale as an example of a text whose

<sup>32</sup>Traoitheadh Teaghlaigh is also a sub-king of Inis Tile. It is explained (ll. 7042-51) that Inis Tile is divided in three, each third being ruled by a king, one of whom is the over-king.

<sup>33</sup>Máirtín Ó Briain (1989, 182) believed the localisation to east Ulster in Ó hÓgáin 1988 to be an error.

<sup>34</sup>Linguistic evidence is, of course, of little help in dating an EModIr text. For some literary archaisms in *TTT*, see Ní Mhuirgheasa and Ó Murchú's remarks at p. xiv of their introduction to the text.

sole purpose was entertainment.<sup>35</sup> It is, of course, difficult to reconstruct how a contemporary audience might have received the text, particularly given uncertainties regarding when the tale was composed/redacted and the vagaries of MS transmission. While not denying that *TTT* may have been designed in part as a work of entertainment, I believe that a close reading of the text reveals a far more sophisticated and complicated work than Ó hÓgáin's account would suggest. This paper will argue that *TTT* was fashioned by an author/redactor with considerable skill to serve *inter alia* as an exemplary tale for an aristocratic, military audience.

From the summary of the deeds and travels of the Fian offered above it is no surprise that the edition of the text is 'almost the length of a novel' (Ó hÓgáin 1988, 263). The sheer amount of incidents, the dialogue, the bombastic descriptions of the appearance of characters, their armaments, clothing, the battles, boats and the weather, scholia and background stories, as well as poems of various length, contribute to make *TTT* a text that runs to some 272 printed pages. Not all of these 272 pages are, however, made up of plot-driven narrative or taken up with descriptions and poems. A curious feature of the text is the prominence of the character of Conán. As will be made clear in the discussion below, a significant portion of the narrative is given over to Conán's speeches and actions, which do little, if anything, to advance the plot; indeed, were he deleted from the text, the narrative would hardly change. This paper will argue that the prominence of Conán in *TTT* is no accident and that this character is central to the interpretation of *TTT* and to deciphering the argument of the text. Throughout the text (bearing in mind that the ending is missing), the character Conán acts almost as a villain within the Fian, haranguing his fellow *féinnidhe*, stirring up discontent and dissension and behaving foolishly. It hardly needs to be stated that Conán tends to be presented in EModIr literature as a malicious, comic or buffoonish figure; *TTT* is not innovative or exceptional in this regard.<sup>36</sup> What is of interest here, as I intend to illustrate below, is the systematic use of the Conán character throughout the text to introduce issues into the narrative which were of relevance to late medieval and early modern Gaelic aristocratic society. It will be shown that the character of Conán is consciously presented in such a way as to exemplify traits which the author/redactor wishes to discourage. Through a close analysis of the text and particularly of its treatment of the Conán character, in conjunction with contemporary Bardic poetry and other prose sources, it will be shown that *TTT* is a sophisticated literary work which has as a

35I presume that the 'tedium and even triteness' mentioned in Ó hÓgáin's account of late *fianaigheacht* romances are felt only by modern readers. For another negative assessment of the literary value of *TTT*, see Ó Cuív 1955.

36Conán's dominant characteristics are ably summarised in *Agallamh na Seanórach* with the words *Ba trodach muinntire an macaoimh sin, pa deabhthach dála \*7 ba hiomchasaoidheach aireachtois*, 'That warrior was one who fought with his company, who was contentious at a meeting, who stirred up divisions at an assembly' (ASP i, 259; cf. iii, 144) – a tripartite description that certainly applies to Conán in *TTT*, as will be seen, respectively, from his relationship to Goll, in particular, his interventions during council-scenes and his unsuccessful efforts as a diplomat in our tale. A late fourteenth-century *dán leathaoire* indicates that Fionn and Conán were regarded by that period as occupying opposite ends of the scale of valour and that a comparison to Conán was felt to be insulting: *Mar do-chuaidh d'eineach is d'ágh / Fionn mac Cumhaill tar Chonán / an mhéid oirbhearnach do fhás / téid Toirdhealbhadh tar Thomás*, 'As Fionn mac Cumhaill surpassed Conán in honour and bravery so by a similar margin does Turlough surpass Thomas' (Dooley 1986, quatrain 14). See Bruford 1969, 4, 6 n. 4 for an attempt at a relative chronology of the development of Conán into a comic character.

major theme the relationships of vassals to their overlord and to one another.<sup>37</sup> It will also be demonstrated that the text was a vehicle for a man of letters to emphasise the privileged position of the *file* and his prerogatives in that aristocratic society, in particular with regard to the prerogatives of praise and satire and to the field of diplomacy.

## DISUNITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Conán's first intervention in the text introduces him as a figure whose speech and conduct illustrate characteristics and attitudes which the author/redactor of *TTT* is at pains to discourage. After Fionn has used his power of divination to discover the identity of Taise Thaoibhgheal and the perils which await the Fian should they attempt to rescue her (see (iii) in the plot summary above), a despondent silence descends on the assembled *féinnidhe* (ll. 596-604). This silence is broken in typically abusive fashion by Conán, who accuses the Fian of cowardice and offers to retrieve Taise Thaoibhgheal himself on the condition that he may keep her for himself. On this imagined expedition, Conán would only take members of his own family, Clann Mhorna, traditional enemies of Fionn and Clann Bhaoisgne, with him (ll. 605-23). This proposal is met with unanimous laughter and derision (*aon-ghāir sgige \*7 fhochaidmhe*) from the Fian 'though their sorrow had been great a short while before' (*acht gēr mhōr a ndoilgheas gairid roimhe sin*) (ll. 624-6), and Fionn dismisses Conán's speech, "*uair nī let áitheasg nā let uraghall atāmaid acht re cinneadh \*7 re crīochnughadh ar ccomhthosga feisin*" 'for we are not concerned with your utterance or pronouncement, but with planning and resolving our own common expedition' (ll. 626-30).

Fionn then asks the assembled *féinnidhe* which of their company will accompany him. Goll, Conán's brother, is the last to volunteer, but the Connacht champion explains this apparent reticence with the words "*\*7 is aire nār gheallus do chédneithibh dol lat go ffaicinn cíá do mhaithibh na Féine do anfadh nō do rachadh dībh; ní eile, ionnus go madh mōide do bhuidhechus orm dol lat díá n-anadh roighne na Féine uaibh*" 'the reason that I did not promise to go with you immediately was that I wanted to see which of the nobles of the Fian would stay and which of you would go, and so that you would be all the more grateful to me for going with you, if the best part of the Fian remained' (ll. 670-77).<sup>38</sup> Fionn is particularly pleased at Goll's decision to join him as a guarantee of the mission's success (ll. 678-6). His brother's decision to accompany Fionn, however, enrages Conán. He accuses Goll of falsely promising to serve Fionn in the hope that none of the Fian will return alive from their quest to recover Taise Thaoibhgheal, thus leaving Goll once again in command of the Fian (ll. 687-97). He adds ominously "*\*7 muna cumhain leat féin sin is cumhain le Fionn \*7 le clannibh Báoisgne é*" 'and if you don't remember that [the enmity between Clann Mhorna and Clann Bhaoisgne], [be assured that] Fionn and Clanna Baoisgne do' (ll. 698-9). Conán claims that Clann Bhaoisgne only respect Goll because he leads them into hostile foreign territories and safely out again, as Conall Cearnach did for Clanna Rudhraighe (ll. 700-13).<sup>39</sup> After this

<sup>37</sup> I am using the term vassal here to translate *óglách* (the word occurs only at l. 3479 in our text, but see discussion under 'The difficult vassal' below). I do not necessarily mean to imply a feudal relationship in the traditional sense, merely a relationship in which the subordinate party owes military service to an overlord. This should be understood to include mercenaries such as galloglasses as well as sub-chiefs, etc. See Simms 1987, 85, 90, 101, 111, 113, *DIL* s.vv *óclach* and *óclachas*.

<sup>38</sup>This passage and the use of pronouns will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>39</sup>There is another reference to Clanna Rudhraighe at ll. 952-5, in which Conán rebukes Caireall, who served twice as temporary king of the Fianna during Fionn's absence: "*ní raibhe acht ríoghacht Chinn*

outburst, Conán announces (*ō nach bhfuil ar mo chumus nā ar mo chomhairle d'fhearuibh Éireann acht mé féin* 'as the only man of the men of Ireland whom I control or influence is myself') that he will remain behind and assume the leadership of the Fian after the demise of those who have volunteered to accompany Fionn. He contends that he has as much right to take possession of or seize (*a teachtadh nō 'teann-ghabháil*) the headship of the Fian by heredity as any of those going on the expedition (ll. 714-23). When Fionn enquires whether Conán's speech can be taken as a refusal to join the expedition (*turus*) (ll. 724-26), Conán confirms this and declares "[...] *dob fhearr leam nach deachaidh* [read past subj. *deachadh?*] *aoineach éile don Adhamh-chlainn libh nō go ndeachainn féin libh, ionnus go madh oirbhearnadh dot h'ineach-sa, \*7 go madh baoghal dot bheathaidh, \*7 go madh briseadh dot bhúain-gheasaibh isin uair si é*" 'I would prefer that no-one went with you of the human race than that I should have to go with you, so that it might be a diminution of your honour, a danger to your life and violation of your unbreakable *geasa* then' (ll. 727-33). Fionn responds by denying Conán leave not to join his party, swearing "*\*7 fós dá ttugainn maitheamh slúaghaidh nō éirghe amach d'Fhianaibh Éireann uile nach duit-si budh dóich mē dá tabhairt*" 'and even if I absolved all the Fiana of Ireland from their obligation to muster or rise that I would not absolve you' (ll. 734-40). In a last-ditch attempt to avoid going on the expedition, Conán rushes to the side of the assembled *féinnidhe*, praising them each in turn and appealing to them to grant him protection (*cumairce*) from Fionn. Each refuses to defy Fionn and is met with a torrent of insults (ll. 741-959). Even Goll refuses him protection – not, he insists, out of fear of any man but on account of his brother's loose tongue (*teanga luathlabharthach*), hateful and malicious mind (*th'intinn mhisgneach mhí-rúnach*) and his deceitful and quarrelsome speech (*do chomhrádh cealgach cosaoideach*), which earns him the dislike and hatred of the men of Ireland and of Goll in particular (*ag tabhach miosgaisi \*7 mōr-fhuatha dhuit ó gach aon-duine d'fhearuibh Éireann, \*7 uaim-si fein co háirighthe*) (ll. 857-78). Conán is left with no choice but to participate in the mission to recover Taise Thaoibhgheal "*ós éigean damh é, \*7 nach éittir righe nā ro-imreasain ré haird-rīgh eitir*" 'as I have no choice, and as it is not possible to contend with or challenge a high-king at all'. Nonetheless he promises "[...] *budh doilghe dhao[i]bh-si mo dhul-sa libh don dul sa inā mh'fhuireach, re a ndingén d'ionnlach \*7 d'eadar-chosaoidhibh eattraibh*" 'my going with you now will be harder for you than if I had stayed, in the face of all that I will do to slander you and to set you against one another' (ll. 960-5).

In this scene, as elsewhere in *TTT* and in EModIr *fianaigheacht* literature generally, Conán is the partisan of Clann Mhorna. In *TTT*, he frequently reminds the Fian of the feud between the two families (e.g. ll. 754-6, 4474-79, 6579-97), but though quick to identify anti-Clann Mhorna bias in the actions of Clann Bhaoisgne, he is the sole *féinnidh* in our text who still seems mindful of the dormant feud. Conán's behaviour stands in stark contrast to that of his brother. The two sons of Morna are the last two *féinnidhe* to join Fionn's expedition, but whereas Goll waits to volunteer so that Fionn's gratitude will be greater, Conán has no intention of volunteering and must be compelled to join the expedition. Goll harbours no ill-will towards Fionn or Clann Bhaoisgne, though Conán reminds him of past grievances which could conceivably turn him against the *rífhéinnidh*. Goll furthermore repudiates his brother for sowing discord among the Fian.

*Bhíorraide ar chlannuibh Rudhraighe isin rīghe sin, gan do shūil re a teachtadh nó re' teannghabháil acht ar feadh tosga nō turuis Fhinn feisin*" 'that kingship was only the kingship of Ceann Biorraide over Clanna Rudhraighe, without any expectation on your part of obtaining or seizing it except while Fionn was on a mission or expedition'. For Ceann Bearraide, see the various versions of *Aided Chonchobair* (Meyer 1906, 2-21; Bergin 1930, 5-8). A new critical edition of the Early Irish text is now available (Kobel 2015).



Conán's proposed expedition to recover Taise Thaoibhgheal, consisting as it would only of members of his own family, is a good illustration of his partisan attitude. It will be remembered that the first half of the composite title of the tale in B is *Imtheacht an dá nónmhar* 'the expedition of the eighteen [two nines]'. Taise Thaoibhgheal's stipulation that the force sent to recover her should consist of no more and no less than eighteen may have a symbolic meaning. I know of no other *fianaigheacht* tale in which the number of the company is limited to eighteen. As the normal retinue around a chief (*taoiseach*) in EModIr tales is nine, the very number eighteen suggests a composite force around two leaders.<sup>40</sup> Nor is Conán's bile directed against Clann Bhaoisgne alone in *TTT*; he also refers repeatedly to conflict between Tuatha Dé Danann and the sons of Míl (ll. 3876-96, 4033-46). Yet to fulfil the *geasa* placed upon them by Taise Thaoibhgheal, as the plot summary above should make clear, it proves necessary to form a composite force and to draw upon the strengths of Clann Bhaoisgne, Clann Mhorna and Tuatha Dé Danann. The subsequent travails of the Fian prove just how necessary this combination is for the success of the mission. In other words, Conán's proposal to lead his own force drawn exclusively from his own kin against the armies of Norway, Antioch, Inis Tile and Críoch na bhFear nDorcha could never have succeeded; as Conán was incapable of putting aside old enmities and drawing upon the strength of a united force, his expedition, had it gone ahead, would have been doomed to failure. If my analysis is correct, I hardly think it is coincidental that the theme of unity is symbolically foregrounded in the first part of the composite title of the tale and is brought still sharper into focus through Conán's first major intervention in the tale, a long and involved episode that does nothing to advance the quest sketched immediately prior to this incident by Fionn with the help of his magic thumb (see (iii) in the plot summary above).

Throughout the tale, Conán continues to act as a grudge-bearing individualist imperilling himself and the success of the Fian's quest. On the first day of the battle against the hosts of Norway (see (v) in the plot summary above), three sets of three of the *féinnidhe* face the Norwegian host. On the second day, Conán elects to face the host, but he breaks the pattern of the previous day by fighting alone. He finds himself confronted with the chief of the king's household, the mighty Tuireann Tortbhuilleach, and is incapable of defeating this enemy. He lets out 'his cry of distress and his mighty warrior's roar' (*a osnadh éccomhlainn \*7 a íachtadh árd-churadh*) (ll. 1934-57). Upon perceiving Conán's difficulty, *tuc cróidhail \*7 comhfhúagra go coitchinn don Fhéin cabhair \*7 comhfhurtacht do thabhairt do Chonán do chéd-neithibh, \*7 ēn-aghaidh do thabhairt a n-aoinfheacht ar na hallmharachaibh dā fhóirighthin*, '[Fionn] gave a *cródháil* (?)<sup>41</sup> and an order to the entire *fian* to help and assist Conán immediately and to face the foreigners at once together in order to relieve him' (ll. 1961-5). The Fian respond to Fionn's instruction and proceed to the battlefield *ina n-aon-bhróin armtha ēidighthe \*7 ina ccipe chīochmhar chonfadhach chéim-dhíochra*, 'as a single armed arrayed body and as a broad fierce unwavering phalanx' (ll. 1966-70). They cut through the foreign host to reach Conán (ll. 1970-97). Aonghus tells Conán to withdraw and kills Tuireann Tortbhuilleach himself (ll. 1998-2022), while Oisín and Goll slay the son of the king and the king respectively (ll. 2023-2100). This incident is a well-crafted set-piece on the

<sup>40</sup>The two examples of the phrase *dá nónmhar* cited in *DIL* s.v. *nónbar* refer to a force led by two leaders (Stokes 1900, 2; Müller-Lisowsli 1921, 212).

<sup>41</sup>I do not know the meaning of this word. The term *cró* is used of an offensive and defensive formation in battle, see Herbert 2012, 294-301. Might *cródháil* (MS *croidhail*) mean 'a [summons to?] *cró*-meeting', i.e. 'an order to form a defensive phalanx'?

benefits of cooperation: Conán, by attempting to accomplish alone what his fellow *féinnidhe* performed in groups the previous day, is overpowered and can only be saved by the combined effort of the entire Fian; the choice of language highlights the contrast between Conán and his fellow *féinnidhe*, as does the juxtaposition of the procedure followed on the first day of battle and Conán's solo-run on the second.<sup>42</sup>

A similarly insightful and artfully woven incident occurs aboard An Bhreacbhárc after the Fian have set sail from Norway (see (vi) in the plot summary above). The ship was described in detail at the beginning of the Fian's quest (ll. 1045-60); importantly, it is stated that it brings victory to any expedition it goes on (*Buaidh n-eachtra [\*7] n-imtheachta uirri-sēin ar gach toisg \*7 ar gach turus ar a ttéigheadh*) (ll. 1060-2). When the Fian first board An Bhreacbhárc at Howth at the beginning of their expedition, each takes his proper place and performs his proper function (*gur ghabh gach áon aca a ionadh āirighthe, a fheidhm urdhálta*), a set phrase which occurs elsewhere in the text (l. 2350); Fionn seats himself in the stern of the ship (*i ccuirr ghasda dheiridh na báirce beann-chuirre bith-áirde sin*) with the steering rope (*stíom na stiúire státmhaire*) around his neck, giving orders (ll. 1190-1201). When setting out from Norway, the episode with which we are concerned here, the Fian's preparations to sail are described in unusual detail (ll. 2434-71), beginning *Iar seasmhughadh \*7 iar síor-dhaingniughadh a seól-chrann, iar nglanadh \*7 iar ngleō-thiormughadh a ngeil-éideadh, iar seóladh \*7 iar suidhiughadh a sith-rámh go sár-neartmhar \*7 a n-ancuire go hadhbhal imchubhaidh [...]*, 'having reinforced and fixed its masts and cleaned and dried its bright sails, having extended and positioned its long oars masterfully and its anchors most properly' (cf. briefer accounts of the preparation of the ship at ll. 1228-33, 3068-71 and 5409-13).

After two weeks, Fionn asks Labhra Lámhfhada and Aonghus, two of Tuatha Dé Danann, what course they should set. As one they respond that they should proceed to Antioch, to plunder and kill its people, so that neither the king of Inis Tile nor of Críoch na bhFear nDorcha will have any hope of help from that quarter (ll. 2472-90). Conán *mí-rúnach* 'ill-willed', however, dismisses their recommendation and argues that they should proceed directly to Inis Tile, reasoning that once they defeat Cuilleann Cruadharmach the question of his being supported by the people of Antioch will be a moot one (ll. 2491-7). Conán goes further and accuses Aonghus of misleading the Fian in the hope that they will be defeated before they reach Inis Tile, in revenge for the defeat of Tuatha Dé Danann by the sons of Míl (ll. 2498-537). Though Aonghus is left speechless by these accusations (ll. 2538-46), Goll is so furious at Conán's remarks that he attacks his brother. Conán seeks protection (*a chumairce \*7 a chomhfháosomh*) from Osgar and cowers behind him on the other side of the ship's mast. Goll punches through the mast, but when he attempts to withdraw his arm, Osgar prevents him from doing so. When Goll finally manages to extricate himself from the

<sup>42</sup>Similar rescues occur elsewhere in the text, though these are not presented in such a way as to portray negatively the conduct of the *féinnidhe* rescued: three of Fionn's sons and Goll are rescued when they are overwhelmed by enemy hosts, having already managed to fulfil their portion of the fighting (ll. 4811-43, 6464-597). In the former case, Caoinche, Raighne and Ailbhe were only charged with killing the royal sons (*clann rígh*) of Rí na bhFear nDorcha and were rushed by the hosts of the king; by the time Goll required rescuing, he had already covered himself in glory during his night-watch and still proceeded as far as the lawn of the king's palace the following morning in an attempt to kill him, where he was overwhelmed by the king's nobles and found himself *a n-ionadh a lámhaighthe \*7 a lán-mhaslaighthe* 'at the point of being captured and abused'. In contrast, Conán leaves the battle-field having accomplished no feat. All three incidents reinforce the theme of unity, but the five protagonists are not presented in the same way in each incident.

mast, he tears the skin off his arm in the process. Goll and Osgar then come to blows, half the Fian on either side attempting to break up the fight between the two champions (ll. 2547-641). The ship shakes so violently because of this scrum that no part of it is left undamaged and it begins to take on water, threatening the lives of all on board (ll. 2642-67). As will be discussed in detail later, the *file* Fearghus eventually manages to restore order and ensures that An Bhreacbhárc is repaired.

Conán's malicious remarks against Tuatha Dé Danann on An Bhreacbhárc succeed in turning his own brother against him and Clann Mhorna against Clann Bhaoisgne. An Bhreacbhárc, which is normally governed by hierarchical procedures, on which each has his proper place and duty and is commanded by Fionn, is brought into chaos by his unfounded allegations. The disruption to order brought about by Conán on board is all the more dramatic because the conflict threatens not simply to bring the Fian into disorder and to jeopardise the success of their mission but to bring about all of their deaths. The metaphor of the boat, broken and then repaired, needs little elaboration; the unusually detailed account of the preparation of the Fian for setting off at the beginning of this incident was, I believe, designed to emphasise it. That Osgar and Goll should come to blows is also more than an accident of the narrative. The author/redactor associates Goll and Osgar with one another elsewhere in the text (e.g. ll. 3921-9) and the parity and (fragile) peace between the two great champions of Clann Mhorna and Clann Bhaoisgne respectively functions as a microcosm of the relationship between the two factions. Indeed, the episode on An Bhreacbhárc concludes with a demonstration of their equality, as both champions are praised in the same metre and in a similar fashion by the *file* Fearghus and reward him with the comparable gifts and privileges (ll. 2667-3005).<sup>43</sup> Far from being designed simply to entertain, the squabble aboard An Bhreacbhárc is also, I believe, a well-constructed exemplum on the perils of disunity.

Another telling incident on the same theme occurs when Osgar finds himself overwhelmed by Rí na bhFear nDorcha (see (vii) in the plot summary above). Commanded by Fionn to come to his assistance, nine of the *féinnidhe* attack the king singly or together; all are repelled and two are said to have been injured. Rebuking his comrades for their inability to defeat the king and once again recalling his enmity with Clann Bhaoisgne (ll. 5074-85), Conán enters the fray. He manages to spear the king, but is himself struck with the king's sword and then pierced with his own spear (ll. 5086-103). Unlike the other would-be rescuers, whose wounds are relatively minor, Conán is wounded *conach raibhi re a bheathaidh gan bioth-ainimh, .i. cumhgach clēibh \*7 luas anāla a n-aoinfheacht, maille re cneidh chléibh \*7 maothán imā leith*, 'so that he was maimed for life, that is, with narrowness of chest and shortness of breath together, along with an open chest-wound on either side' (ll. 5103-6). At this point Aonghus laments that his prophecy that the king of Críoch na bhFear nDorcha would prevent the Fian reaching their goal has come to pass, but remarks that no warrior could have withstood him as long as Osgar (ll. 5110-22). Conán (despite his wounds!) takes umbrage at this remark, arguing that his incomparable brother Goll could indeed defeat Rí na bhFear nDorcha (ll. 5123-32). It is, however, Labhra Lámhfhada and Aonghus himself who are the next to seek to relieve Osgar. They are recognised by Rí na bhFear nDorcha, who urges them to betray Fionn:

43Osgar's concluding words to Fearghus are indicative of the symmetry (albeit with some residual tension) between Goll and Osgar that characterises the conclusion of this episode: “*Agus do-bhér duit ar gheall Goll do mháoinibh 7 do mhōr-chomhthaibh ina cheann sin duit, muna ttucar ní bhus aidhbhle nō bhús imarcaíge*” 'And I will give you all the wealth and concessions that Goll promised you in addition to that [the gift of a gold *fearann*, which, as the text explains, was a thong wrapped around the thighs of warriors to prevent them from fleeing in battle; cf. *DIL* s.v. *ferenn*], if I do not give more and greater' (ll. 3001-5).

“Do ba córa \*7 do ba cuibhdhe dhaoibh-si bhar lá bágha \*7 buan-chosanta do thabhairt liom-sa, a dheagh-mhaithe Thuath Dē Danann,” ar sé, “nā teacht do dhēnamh díthe nō dīoghbhāla damh, \*7 méd bhar n-ēccroidhis \*7 bhar n-easccairdis fris an fhianlach fil agā n-imdheaghail agam an uair si; \*7 fós muna bheithdís mōr-chumhachta Manannāin mhic Allōid ag traoitheadh \*7 ag turnamh mo chumacht-sa \*7 mo chomhghliocais, ní bérthaoi baoghail buain-eōlais rem bheathaidh for chrīch nō for mo chaomh-fhearonn. Agus seachnaidh m’ágh \*7 m’iombualadh budhdheasda,” ar sé, “ōir nī horaibh as lainne nō as lāin-éasgaidhe liom m’fhíoch nō m’iomfhorrán d’imbirt an tan sa.”

“It would be more just and proper for you to fight on my side, O nobles of Tuatha Dé Danann,” he said, “than to come to do me harm or injury, given your enmity and hostility against that warrior-band that I am scattering at this time; furthermore, if it were not for the mighty powers of Manannán son of Allód overcoming and undoing my powers and my devices, there would never have been any danger while I was alive of the way to my country or my wonderful land being discovered. And do not fight or wage battle against me now,” he said, “because it is not against you that I wish or would be eager to take out my fury and wrath now.”

(ll. 5145-59)

Aonghus and Labhra are, however, unmoved by this invitation to defect:

“Acht idir,” ar Aonghus, “ní dhiongnaim-ne an chomhairle sin, ōir ní léigfíom eidir Fionn \*7 ēin-neach eile ar druim dhomhain an feadh bhiam ina choimhideacht, \*7 ní fheallfum ar ar ttriath nā ar ar ttighearna \*7 é ar ar n-eineach \*7 ar ar n-ionchaibh.”

“No,” said Aonghus, “we will not follow that counsel, because we would not turn against Fionn or any other person on earth as long as we are in their company, and we will not betray our liege or our lord, while he is under our safeguard and our protection.”

(ll. 5160-5)<sup>44</sup>

Eventually Goll does indeed enter the field to assist the hard-pressed Osgar against Rí na bhFear nDorcha. He and Osgar fight the king together with the assistance of the poet Fearghus.<sup>45</sup> The two champions are then joined by the rest of the Fian, but it is Goll and Osgar who behead the king together (ll. 5362-3). When Conán then attempts to give his brother credit for defeating Rí na bhFear nDorcha (ll. 5365-75), Goll replies: “Léig as idir, a Chonāin [...] ōir nī bhfuil ar n-ūidh ná ar n-aire ar th’ēgnach nā ar th’iomchasaoid budhdheasda, acht ar chinneadh \*7 ar chomhairliughadh ar ttosga \*7 ar tturusa” ‘Stop, Conán, for we are not now concerned with your

44 The phraseology here may echo another concern of the text, namely the duties of a vassal to his lord (discussed below under the heading ‘A difficult vassal’). Neither Aonghus nor Labhra wish to abandon Fionn while they are accompanying him, that is, while they are in the field with him; having volunteered to accompany Fionn on his expedition (see (iv) in the plot summary above), they are bound to see it through to the end. Cf. the EModIr legal commentary concerning *meath slóighidh* or ‘failure to carry out hosting’, where the fact that the penalty on a vassal for withdrawing from the hosting early is greater than that for not going on the hosting in the first place is explained in the following terms: *Cidh fodera conadh mo orra i tiachtain as amuigh no a nemdul ann amach fo cetoir? Is e in fath fodera: aicmeile dul leis amach \*7 a facbail imuigh i crich nembescna no nemdul leis amach fo cetoir*, ‘What brings it about that more is imposed on them [those guilty of *meath slóighidh*] for withdrawing out there than for failure to go there in the first place? This is the reason that causes it: it is more dangerous to go out with him [the king] and leave him out there in ungoverned territory, than to fail to go out with him in the first place’ (Simms 1998, 28-9).

45 The author/redactor is aware that it might seem unfair that Rí na bhFear nDorcha had to face the two heroes and champions of the western world (*dhā anghlonn 7 dhá áirsidhe iartha[i]r an bheatha*), but he states that it was, in fact, a fair fight (ll. 5343-62). It is perhaps significant in this regard that Osgar was unfairly attacked by 27 of the king’s men at the beginning of their battle (ll. 4959-83).

slandering and stirring up of dissension but rather with arranging and discussing our mission and our expedition' (ll. 5376-9).

In the fight against Rí na bhFear nDorcha Goll is again the opposite of his brother: whereas his brother Conán focuses upon his own individual ambitions and grudges, Goll distinguishes himself as a champion in collaboration with his fellow *féinnidhe*; he refuses Conán's partisan praise and redirects attention to the group activity of taking counsel. Similarly, whereas Conán has insisted on the existence of enmity between Tuatha Dé Danann and the rest of the Fian, and between Clann Bhaoisgne and Clann Mhorna, Labhra and Aonghus have proved themselves loyal, while Goll and Osgar have acted in unison to defeat their enemy. Conán's individualism on the other hand has left him marked for life: united the Fian defeat Rí na bhFear nDorcha; singly, Conán suffers a wound inflicted with his own weapon that will not close, and he is left with breathing difficulties for the rest of his life – injuries redolent with symbolism given his grudge-bearing and loud-mouthed character. The Conán character functions, I believe, as far more than comic relief here and in the other incidents described in this section: he is deployed in a number of well-crafted set-pieces to serve a cautionary tale on the perils of disunity.

Conán is the primary vehicle for this theme, but not the only one. Fionn's interaction with his overlord Cormac is also significant in this regard. After Fionn has formed a company of seventeen, consisting of members of Clann Bhaoisgne, Clann Mhorna and Labhra of Tuatha Dé Danann (see (iv) in the plot summary above), he proceeds to Tara to secure Cormac's recognition of Caireall ó Conbhróin's appointment as temporary king of the Fiana (ll. 983-991). The Fian arrive during an assembly (*a n-aonach \*7 a n-árd-oireachtus*) where Cormac 'is establishing and enforcing the peaceful and tranquil tributes of Ireland' (*smacht-chána sídhamhla sochra* [read *socra*] *na hÉireann agā n-ordughadh \*7 agā ndaingean-chongmháil*) (ll. 1068-76). A path is made for Fionn and the Fian through the crowd, and Fionn and the high-king greet each other with tender, loving and affectionate kisses (*do phógaibh míochna mōr-ghradhacha muintearrdha*). Fionn informs Cormac of the circumstances in which he finds himself, and the king is greatly distressed on hearing his tidings (ll. 1077-89). He offers Fionn reinforcements (*congnamh sluagh \*7 sochaidheadh*), but Fionn must decline on account of the restriction placed upon him by Taise Thaoibhgheal (ll. 1090-1101). Fionn then asks Cormac to accept Caireall as his deputy and to accord him the same honour and respect which Fionn received from Cormac and his father Art (ll. 1102-1112). Cormac agrees to respect Caireall and the remaining *féinnidhe* and promises that he will not interfere with their lordship or powers (*a rīghe inā i rro-chumhachta*), except perhaps to add to them. Cormac swears to this effect, as do the provincial kings (dat. pl. *cóigeadhachaibh Éireann*) (ll. 1113-27). Fionn promises that he will return within a year if he is still alive, and then departs (ll. 1128-42). The scene is a picture of unity: the erstwhile enemies, Clann Mhorna, Clann Bhaoisgne and Tuatha Dé Danann, have united into a single force under Fionn; Fionn in turn is the loyal vassal of Cormac; and Cormac rules undisputed over all the provinces of Ireland.

As Conán's ill-fortune on the battlefield illustrates, *TTT* argues for unity and cohesion not merely through a portrayal of an idyllic political landscape or through an account of the difficulties overcome by the Fian through cooperation; the text also contains allusions to or makes explicit mention of the negative consequences of disunity. Two allusions are particularly significant. In the first, which occurs during Conán's refusal to join the Fian on their expedition (see (iv) in the plot summary), Conán refers to the prophecy of the learned men of Ireland (*fāidhe \*7 fisidh \*7 fīor-*



*eōlaigh Éreann*) that Goll will die at the hands of Fionn and Clann Bhaoisgne 'having been bound and isolated on Carraig Guill' (*iar bhfaghbháil áraigh \*7 fhíor-úaigniusa ort a gCarruic Ghuill*) (ll. 888-97). Here we have a reference to Goll's pathetic death on Carraig Guill, the result of the breakdown of relations between Clann Mhorna and the rest of the Fiana (see *ASt*, i, 232-3 and *DF* poems 9, 10, 22 and 35). Similarly, after the battle with Rí na bhFear nDorcha (see (vii) in the plot summary), the narrator remarks that Osgar will never fully recover: *ní mó nā ion-aisdir \*7 ion-imtheachta baoi Osgar d'aithle na haimsire sin, dōigh ad-bhearad aroile nach raibhi a shlāinte féin go hiomlán aige ōn uair si go ham a éga \*7 a oidhidh d'éis comhraic Rīgh na bhFear nDorcha*, 'Osgar was able to do no more than move and travel again after that, for others say that he never entirely recovered his health from that time until the time he died and was killed after the battle with Rí na bhFear nDorcha' (ll. 5395-9). This is presumably an allusion to the Battle of Gabhair, in which Osgar was slain fighting against Cormac's son Cairbre and Clann Mhorna. The author/redactor heavily implies the fatal consequences of the breakdown of these harmonious relations by references not only to past dissensions but to future ones. *TTT* then does not represent an alternative iteration of the *fianaigheacht* cycle in which the various factions within the Fian and within Ireland have permanently resolved their difficulties. Rather an argument concerning the danger of disunity and disloyalty is reinforced both by the incidents unique to this narrative (and the manner in which they are presented) and by the audience's knowledge of the 'future history' of the actors in the narrative.<sup>46</sup>

#### THE DIFFICULT VASSAL

The Conán character allows the author/narrator of *TTT* not only to reflect on the theme of unity and common purpose in a relatively abstract fashion, as outlined in the preceding section of this paper, but also to treat in considerable detail the overlord-vassal relationship and the relations of vassals to one another. In the tale *Eachtra an Ghiolla Dheacair*, the eponymous difficult gilly seeking employment from Fionn is asked to explain the origin of his name. *Is maith an tadbar ar in fer mór. óir ní fhuil isin doman ní as decra liom iná aonní do les mo thigerna ná aonduine agá mbím do dénam*, 'Again the cause was a good one: in the whole world nought find I that comes harder to me than for the benefit of my lord for the time being, or of any man that 'has me' (i.e. retains me), to do any one single thing' (*SG* i, 260; ii, 295). Immediately after An Giolla Deacair has offered this explanation, he turns to Conán and puts in train a motion of events that will ultimately lead to Conán's abduction. Part of the humour of that tale may lie in Conán, the perpetual trouble-maker of the Fian, getting a taste of his own medicine at the hands of An Giolla Deacair. In *TTT*, Conán repeatedly disappoints as a vassal of Fionn. Conán openly wishes his lord ill (ll. 727-33), covets the headship of the Fian (ll. 714-23), must be compelled to fulfil his obligation to host and rise out (*slúaghaidh nō ēirghe amach*; ll. 734-40),<sup>47</sup> attempts to acquire protection from other vassals

<sup>46</sup>Certainly *TTT* is not alone in exploiting this narrative tradition to emphasise the benefits of cooperation and unity. Loyalty and distrust, conflict and reconciliation, particularly between Clann Bhaoisgne and Clann Mhorna, are leitmotifs of *fianaigheacht* literature (Bruford 1963, 26; Ó Briain 2003, 55-6). The argument of the present article is merely that this theme is exploited in a deliberate and sophisticated way by the author/redactor of *TTT*.

<sup>47</sup>For the obligation of *sluaghadh* in the EModIr commentaries to the Law Tracts, see Simms 2004. It may be that the obligation to muster in our text refers not only to the individual obligation of the members of the Fian addressed but also to warriors under their command. There are some indications in the text that the eighteen *féinnidhe* of the heading of the tale are not alone but are being supported by hosts. In *Críoch na*

against their common overlord,<sup>48</sup> and promises to be more of a hindrance than a help when eventually obliged to accompany his lord on campaign (ll. 960-5). In contrast to Conán, of course, the other *féinnidhe*, including his brother Goll, the *rífhéinnidh* ousted by Fionn, are obedient and loyal vassals. When asked for the status of their force in Críoch na bhFear nDorcha (see (vii) in the plot summary above), Conán gives a characteristically pessimistic assessment, only to be contradicted by Osgar and later Goll (ll. 4018-84). Fionn remarks happily, “*Ní bhfuil feidhm greasachta nō gér-laoidhidh againn oraibh [...] oir muna bheith bhar n-úmhla \*7 bhar n-urraim damh-sa, do ba ceann slóigh \*7 sochaidhe ar gach n-eachtra \*7 ar gach turus gach aoin-fhear dā oige \*7 dā anfhoirbhthe agaibh*” ‘I do not need to incite or exhort you, for if you were not obedient and submissive to me, each one of you, no matter how young or immature, would be the head of a host and army on every expedition and mission’ (ll. 4068-76).<sup>49</sup>

*TTT*'s concern with the proper conduct of vassals is brought out particularly clearly in the scenes in which Fionn receives the counsel of his *féinnidhe*. When the Fian first set out (see (v) in the plot summary above), Osgar asks what course they should set. Fionn responds, “*Cā hāit ina rachmís [...] acht go hInis Tile, ós innte atá ceann ar ttoisga \*7 ar tturais?*” ‘Where else would we go but to Inis Tile, since the goal of our expedition and our journey lies there?’ (ll. 1256-7). Osgar respectfully disagrees with his grandfather's decision: “*Ní hí sin an chomhairle nā coimhtheagasg do-bhéirinn-si dhaoibh*” ‘That is not the counsel or guidance that I would give to you [pl. = the Fian or Fionn?<sup>50</sup>]’ (ll. 1259-60). Osgar proceeds to justify his decision, sensibly arguing that the king of bhFear nDorcha ((vii) in the summary above), Fionn asks:

“*Cionnus atá aigneadh bhar n-ānradh, a óga [...], nō céadfadha comh<r>amhacha bhar ccuradh nō meanmanna mōr-ghalacha bhar míleadh, nō feadhmanna fīor-neartmhara bhar bhféinneadh nō gaisgeadh garg-bheódha bhar ngalgadh d'aithle a bhfuarabhair d'éigean \*7 d'anbhforlann ar muir \*7 ar mōr-fhairge?*” ‘How is the mood of your fighters, O warriors [...] or the warlike disposition of your champions or the bellicose morale of your soldiers, or the fighting strength of your *féinnidhe* or the fierce valour of your men of arms after the difficulty and plight that they experienced on sea and on the vast ocean’ (ll. 4018-24).

It is unclear who exactly Fionn is addressing here. It is difficult to see how this question could be an inquiry as to the state of mind and fighting strength of only the small band who would appear to have accompanied Fionn. It is possible that these eighteen *féinnidhe* were, at least at some points in the narrative, imagined as having soldiers under them on campaign. Mention is also made of Fionn's *puibleóir*, the officer charged with raising his tent, but he does not appear to be a named member of the company of eighteen (ll. 4099-100).

48For *cumairce* in later medieval and early modern Gaelic Ireland, see Simms 1987, 105-7, 112.

49Cf. *Agas nách córa dá bhfuil in bhar n-aghaidh calma do dhēunamh nā daoibh féin, uair dar leam* [MS *dar lat*] *as ceann slóigh nó sochuidhe gach aoinfhear aguibh*, ‘For it is not more fitting for your adversaries to do brave deeds than for you, for it seems to me that each of you is a leader of armies’ (*EU*, ll. 2923-5) For a similar sentiment from Classical Irish praise-poetry, see *Fiu taoiseach i ngach thuaith eile / gach óglách oiltear n-a tír*, ‘A young warrior reared in its land is a match for a captain in any other’ (McKenna 1947, poem 10.9).

50The use of the 2 pl as a polite form of address would be exceptional in *TTT*; this would be the only example I have noticed. Henceforth, I assume 2 pl. pronouns refer to multiple persons. It is to be noted, however, that sometimes a single referend will be referred to using sing. and pl. pronouns in EModIr. Whether the use of the plural pronoun is to be understood as a ‘plural of respect’ or not is a matter that will require further research. See O’Rahilly 1941, 251-2, and Falconer 1953, xciv. I hope to publish a study of the

Norway should be defeated and the magical weapons necessary to kill Cuilleann acquired before going to Inis Tìle (ll. 1260-77). Aonghus and Labhra Lámhfhada agree with Osgar's counsel (ll. 1278-82), but Conán *mí-rēsúnta* 'unreasonable' disagrees, stating that he would prefer to die sooner rather than later and would therefore sail first to the land in which they are most likely to die (ll. 1283-1299). This ridiculous counsel is met with laughter from the Fian (ll. 1300-1). The language used in this passage is, however, of interest. Note that Labhra and Aonghus avoid speaking of either Fionn or Osgar in the third person: “\*7 do bhērmís-ne an chomhairle sin **díbh** muna bheith a lúas **tucais-[s]i** úaid í, a Osgair” 'and we would have given that same counsel to **you** [pl. = the Fian] had **you** [sg. = Osgar] not given it so quickly, Osgar' (ll. 1281-2).<sup>51</sup> Predictably Conán's contribution is less respectful. It may be significant that he refuses to address his fellow *féinnidhe* directly: “\*7 nār léigid dēi neart-choimseacha nua-ghlana nimhe comhairle ar līth nō ar leas **don lucht** isa chomhairle í [...]” 'may the mighty shining gods of heaven not allow **those** whose counsel that is any prosperity or success' (ll. 1284-6); “\*7 dob urusa dhamh p̄fēin bás d'fhoghbháil a n-Ērinn, dāigh is iomdha \*7 is iolarrdha dom lucht faladh \*7 fīor-easgcairdis inte, \*7 gan teacht d'fhoghbháil bháis a gc̄r̄ochuibh cíana comhaightheacha in domhain mhōir, d'iarraidh mná **don tí agā** bhfuil coill óghachta \*7 áontomha ingheanraidhe na hĒireann a n-aoíneacht ar a ordughadh \*7 ar a fhuráileamh” 'it would be easier for me to die in Ireland, for many are my enemies there, than to come to die in the far distant lands of the world, seeking a woman **for him** who has the right to take the virginity of the maidens of Ireland' (ll. 1292-9).<sup>52</sup> An account of politeness strategies in use of the 'plural of respect' in EModIr in the near future.

51 Aonghus and Labhra Lámhfhada's remark is somewhat ambiguous. It certainly indicates that they were of the same mind as Osgar with regard to the course of An Bhreacbhárc, but it may also be a reference to the carefully regulated privilege of giving counsel. This incident is one of only two in *TTT* in which Fionn receives counsel having been asked a question by one or all of the *féinnidhe* (see also ll. 1356-60). Normally it is Fionn who initiates the consultation process. When Fionn asks for counsel, he sometimes addresses the question directly to Aonghus, sometimes to both Labhra Lámhfhada and Aonghus, and sometimes to the entire Fian. Whether or not one or both of the two members of Tuatha Dé Danann on the expedition are specifically addressed, Aonghus is always the first to respond (ll. 2479-90, 3116-30, 3784-801, 4454-61, 5420-6). Counsel-giving was a carefully regulated privilege in aristocratic Gaelic society. The *ollamh flatha* was entitled to share his patron's confidence and participate in his deliberations, a right which holders of that dignity were eager to maintain and associated with being seated by their patron's side at banquets. Eochaidh Ó hEódhasa, for example, in his *Mór an t-ainm ollamh flatha* claimed the right to be the first to give counsel (Breatnach 1983, 45-9; *ABM* poem 344.8, 18). Eager to avoid conflict with Fear Lí, Fionn sends his messenger Birgad to seek peace in *Sealg Shídhe na mBan bhFionn*. She reminds him *do bīdh tosach coquir \*7 comairle agot ūadh \*7 deireadh comhóil*, 'thou always hadst the first of counsel from him and the last of drink' (Meyer 1910, 78-9). Labhra Lámhfhada and Aonghus' reaction to Osgar's comment may indicate then not only that they were of one mind with regard to the course which the Fian should take; it may also be a reference to their privilege to give counsel first, a privilege circumvented in this instance by Osgar.

52 Fionn's *ius primae noctis* is also mentioned at ll. 29-30 (*coill óghachta \*7 áontomha ingheanradh na hĒireann* 'the taking of the maidenhood and virginity of the maidens of Ireland') and ll. 57-60 (<Ro> *bhí, nīor bheag an chomha, / coll óghachta is áontomha / ag mac Cumhaill ceann a gceann / óigingheanradh na hĒireann*, 'The son of Cumhall had the right to take the maidenhood and virginity of the maidens of Ireland one after the other – the concession was not small'). Christina Cleary draws my attention to the following in *Cath Gabhra*:

*Agas od'chuala Fionn agas Fianna Eireann sin, do chuir siad teachta chum Cairbre d'á fhógradh air an dlíge do dhíol, .i. fithche iona d'ór, nó aon-leaphachas na mná óige roimhe fear féin. Do ghlac Cairbre*

EModIr texts has not yet been undertaken, but it seems likely that both the content of Conán's speech and the manner in which he speaks of Fionn and the other *féinnidhe* in the 3 person in their presence would have been perceived as rude by the audience of *TTT*.<sup>53</sup> Rudeness is, of course, a matter of significance in any society and is no less important in the imagined world of *TTT*: Conán's rudeness at another council led to the fight between Goll and Osgar and the near-destruction of An Bhreacbhárc described above. Conversely, because of the other *féinnidhe*'s loyalty and obedience to Fionn and their respect for one another, the council-session can also be a symbol of the ideal of the overlord-vassal relationship and the unity of the Fian under their rightful leader: \*7 *deiseadar an dā naonmhar sin ina urthimchioll ann, ag ēisde<a>cht re hur<aghall> \*7 le haitheasg fhear oile* [read *ar-oile*] *re cinneadh \*7 re críochnughadh a ccomhairle*, 'those eighteen sat down around him *fearg mhór tríd sin; agus as é a dubhairt, ná díolfadh ceachtar díobh go bráth; agus ann sin do chuir fionn sgéala chuige go g-caithfeadh a dhíol, nó ceann na h-inghine muna n-díolfadh an dlíghe*.

'When Fionn and the Fenians of Ireland heard of this [the betrothal of Cairbre's daughter], they despatched messengers to Cairbre, to remind him to pay the tribute, viz. twenty *ungas* (ingots or ounces) of gold, or the right of cohabiting with the princess [read 'the virgin', Cairbre's daughter] the night previous to her marriage [read 'before her own husband']. Cairbre became very indignant upon hearing this message, and declared he would never submit to either of these conditions. Fionn thereupon sent him word that he should pay either, or that the head of the princess only should satisfy the violation of the privilege' (O'Kearney 1853, 134-7).

I know of no other EModIr reference to *ius primae noctis*, but note the following kennings, all from poems composed by Eochaidh Ó hEódhasa: *céadcholl óighe na n-inghean* 'O one who first takes the virginity of maidens' (Hoynes 2014, poem 6.43d; a poem in praise of Conchobhar Mac Diarmada), *a fhoghlugh óghdachta mná* 'O plunderer of a woman's virginity' (*ABM* 344.40a; from a poem addressed to Aodh Mág Uidhir), and *crechtóir óghachta inghen* 'the plunderer of maidens' virginity' (BOCD, f. 349r; from a poem in praise of Teabóid na Long Burke). (The last line, 49d of the poem *Máthair chogaidh críoch Bhanbha*, is clearly visible in BOCD, but was omitted by Tomás Ó Raghallaigh in his 1938 edition of the poem; cf. McManus 2008, 134-5). Note also Thomas Smyth's observation in 1561 that 'the *Æsdan*, which is to saye in English, the bards, or the rime septe's' mention in their poems to 'anye younge man discended of the septs of *Ose* or *Max* [...] howe many virgins they [the honorand's father and ancestors] have defloured' (Hore 1858). The motif in Bardic poetry is not, of course, evidence for *ius primae noctis* in later medieval and early modern Gaelic Ireland, but it is illustrative of the contemporary attitude of male aristocrats and may help contextualise the motif of *ius primae noctis* in the literature produced for such patrons. For a study of folk accounts of *ius primae noctis*, including accounts of its being levied by Gaelic aristocratic families, see Mac Philip 1988. My thanks to Christina Cleary for this reference. See also McManus 2009, 85-100.

53 Cf. “\*7 *is aire nār gheallus do chédneithibh dol lat go ffaicinn cíá do mhaithibh na Féine do anfadh nō do rachadh dībh; ní eile, ionnus go madh mōide do bhuidhechus orm dol lat díá n-anadh roighne na Fēine uaibh*” ‘the reason that I [Goll] did not promise to go with **you** [Fionn] immediately was that I wanted to see which of the nobles of the Fian would stay and which of **you** would go, and so that **you** [Fionn] would be all the more grateful to me for going with **you**, if the best part of the Fian remained’ (ll. 670-77). I take 2 pl *dībh* to refer to the Fian, while 2 sg *lat* (twice) and *do* refer to Fionn. I have left 2 pl *uaibh* untranslated above. This could refer to Fionn (with Fionn as the prepositional object of the phrase *anaidh ó* 'stays away from'), but I think it would make more sense to interpret *ó* as having a partitive meaning here ('the best of the Fian of you') with the 2 pl referring to the entire Fian. Even Conán engages in person-switching elsewhere so as to address the Fian and the individual conversation-partner directly rather than talk about any person present in the third person: “[...] *dob fhearr leam nach deachaidh* [read past subj. *deachadh?*] *aoineach éile don Adhamh-chlainn libh nō go ndeachainn féin libh, ionnus go madh oirbhearnadh dot h'ineach-sa, \*7 go madh baoghal dot bheathaidh, \*7 go madh briseadh dot bhúain-gheasaibh isin uair si é*” ‘I would prefer that no-one went with **you** [= the Fian] of the human race than that I should have to go with **you** [= the Fian], so that

[Fionn] there [in his tent] listening to each other's speech and utterances in order to decide and finalise their counsel' (ll. 4101-4).<sup>54</sup>

One incident in which Conán's counsel appears to be amenable to the whole Fian requires some elucidation given his role as a foil to the Fian throughout *TTT*. After the Fian have slain the king of Norway (see (v) in the plot summary above), they entertain themselves and recuperate from their wounds for a fortnight with the womenfolk and poets of Norway in the king's castle. As they prepare to leave, Conán proposes that they should destroy the castle:

“Múrthar \*7 mōr-sgaoiltear an chathair linn budhdheasda [...] \*7 nā fágthar cloch ar cóir innte inā clár ar cuibhdheas, conach bía aitreach inā ard-chomhnaidhe ag aon- duine re beathaidh inte ō so amach do chomhartha \*7 do choimhniúghadh ar n-écht \*7 ar n-áitheasa \*7 ar n-imtheachta ō so amach.”

'Let us raze and demolish the fortress now and not leave a stone in place or a board straight, so that it may not be a residence or abode for anyone ever again from this time forth as a sign and remembrance of our deeds and exploits and expedition from this time forth' (ll. 2149-55)

On the surface, Conán's reasoning would appear sound; it would surely be logical to destroy a fortification that could potentially be reoccupied as soon as the Fian leave Norway. Before Fionn or any of the other *féinnidhe* can comment on Conán's proposal, however, the Fian see a youth (*ōglách rīogha rathmhar ro-árrachta* [...] *go móir-mhéid mhíleadh \*7 go ttoichim tréin-fhir \*7 go n-ionnchomhartha aird-rī* 'a royal magisterial mighty youth with the dimensions of a warrior and the gait of a champion and the aspect of a high-king') approaching them with a hundred soldiers (ll. 2156-62). The host approaches the Fian carrying palm-branches (*gésa pailme*) 'as a sign of friendship and peace' (*mur chomhartha ceannsa \*7 caoin-chomhraic*) (ll. 2162-5). It emerges that the youth is named Miodhach and that his brother, Mearcair, was the king of Norway slain by the Fian. Miodhach had been *tánaiste* or deputy under his brother, but was forced into exile by the usurpations of Iollann Airmdearg, his brother's son (ll. 2166-94). Having heard of the exploits of the Fian,

“ [...] *tānag do dhéanamh mo chadaigh \*7 mo charadraidh riot-sa, \*7 do ghabháil mo ríoghe \*7 mo ro-flaithis as do láimh-si, \*7 do thabhairt chíosa \*7 chánachuis na críchi si go coitcheann gacha bliadhna red beathaidh go hÉirinn dot ionnsaighe, maille re hēirghe amach \*7 re furtacht \*7 re sluaghadh re gach éigean-dáil ghábhaidh \*7 re gach gúasacht*

it might be a diminution of **your** [= Fionn's] honour, a danger to **your** [= Fionn's] life and violation of **your** [= Fionn's] unbreakable *geasa* then' (ll. 727-33).

54 The eighteen of the company, however, includes Fionn himself! Note the contrast in *TTT* between Fionn, who seeks the counsel of his vassals and can even be persuaded to pursue a different course, and Cuilleann, who refuses the advice of his counsellors even when all hope has been lost and even threatens to kill them if they continue to advise surrender (ll. 6899-915, 7439-60). It was considered proper for a king to take counsel and to be selective in whom he confided in. See, for example, from Tadhg Mac Bruaideadha's poem *Mór a-tá ar theagasg flatha: Bíod iomad – éist a bhfuighle - / lucht féachta cás gcomhairle, / gan eagla a sároighthe sin, / lánfhoirfe d'eagna is d'aimsir. Gomadh líonmhar lucht do dhúin; / gomadh uathadh th'aos comhrúin; / mór do lucht gach gealmhúir ghlain / nach lucht deaghrúin do dhéanaimh* 'Without being afraid to contradict them, let there be around you many people [omit 'many' and read simply 'people'] – listen to their words – who examine predicaments [and] who are very mature in wisdom and age. May the occupants of your residence be manifold; may those with whom you share secrets be few; many of the inhabitants of every bright comely castle are not people [who are] good at keeping secrets' (Nic Cárthaigh 2013, quatrains 32 and 33) and *ad chocur ní cuirfidher / acht ollamh nó airdeasbog*, 'only an *ollamh* or an archbishop will be admitted in your council' (*DMU* poem 20.19gh).



chatha \*7 chomhlainn bhías ort ò sonn amach, riasiū do millfidhe ard-chathair, inmhe, \*7 oireachus na hIruaidhe, \*7 riasiú do-bérthaóí a hór \*7 a hairgead \*7 a huile mhaitheas \*7 móir-édála ar aon-rían eiste.”

'[...] I came to make a pact and alliance with you, and to accept my kingship and lordship from your hand, and to send the tribute and rent of this entire land every year that you live to Ireland, to you, as well as rising out and [rendering] assistance and hosting in every emergency and military crisis you have from now on, before the capital fortress, wealth and sovereignty of Norway would be destroyed and before its gold, silver and all its riches and wealth were taken together out of it'

(ll. 2199-210)

Fionn agrees to these terms (*comhadha*) (ll. 2211-15), but Conán does not. He recommends killing Miodhach and preventing any of Miodhach's family from ever succeeding to the kingship, and argues that anything Miodhach offers has already been taken by force by the Fian. Conán even offers to assume the kingship himself and marry the widow of the king of Norway, as he has no kingdom of his own in Ireland (ll. 2216-42). The Fian, as usual, laugh at Conán's proposal, but the narrator adds the interesting note \*7 ro rāidhseat eatarra féin co hinchleithi ós ísiol gurbh oircheas \*7 gurbh imchubhaidh gach comhrádh dār chan Conán, acht namá nár léig eagla nā uromhan Finn dóibh a oirdhearcughadh ós aird, 'and they whispered secretly among themselves that everything Conán had said was right and proper, but their fear and dread of Fionn did not allow them to make it known aloud' (ll. 2243-8). Miodhach responds to Conán directly, stating that he would prefer that the lowliest of the Fian be in a position to request or order something of him (*a impidhe \*7 a fhuráileamh leam*) than anyone in his own land. He adds that, if he were insincere, he would simply have waited until Fionn left and then assumed the lordship without opposition (ll. 2249-68). Fionn tells Conán to stop pranking someone (*ag súa[i]rceas nō ag sīor-áineas ar aoinneach*) unfamiliar with his ways, and confirms again that the Fian will indeed install Miodhach as king, *ō nach dual dūinn féin fuireach dā follamhnughadh* 'since we are not wont to remain to exercise [the lordship]' (ll. 2269-76). Fionn and the Fian then inaugurate Miodhach (*do-radadh gairm rígh \*7 ro-thighearna ar Mhiodhach mac Mortair le Finn \*7 le Fíenn Éireann*). Miodhach swears to abide by the terms agreed, and Fionn divides the wealth of Norway in three – a third as the wages and stipend (*a tuillmhe \*7 a ttúarustal*) for the new king, a third for the women and poets of the land, and a third for himself 'on account of his labour and constant battle' (*a los a shaothair \*7a shīor-chomhraic*) (ll. 2277-94). It is Miodhach who provides Fionn with the weapons he needs to kill Cuilleann and he even offers to accompany the Fian on their expedition (ll. 2295-336).<sup>55</sup>

It would appear that, exceptionally, Conán represents here the views of his fellow *féinnidhe* with regard to Miodhach. Yet no-one else challenges Fionn's unilateral decision to inaugurate Miodhach. Conán's role as the mouthpiece of foolish or malicious positions in *TTT* can hardly be doubted; it seems likely, therefore, that here too the author/redactor of *TTT* intended Conán's behaviour to be viewed negatively. Conán's fault here appears to be that he offered an unsolicited opinion, while the other *féinnidhe* remained silent. Though they agreed with Conán's assessment of the situation, their respect for their lord prevented them from interjecting. Unlike the sorts of consultations with regard to the course that the Fian should take described above, Fionn did not ask for the advice of his vassals, and, as their opinions had not been sought, Conán's fellow *féinnidhe* did not dare contradict their lord in a matter which concerned him (a noble entering into a relationship of vassalage with him personally) rather than the entire Fian (their common

<sup>55</sup>Contrast *CCI*, pp. 144-7, where the wealth of the kingdom is divided in three in a similar fashion to *TTT* but where the castle of Muirn is demolished.

destination).<sup>56</sup> Conán's behaviour is all the more inappropriate, as Fionn hints, because the other party (Míodhach) is unfamiliar with him. As this incident draws to a close, attention is drawn again to the obedience of the Fian to Fionn and the alacrity with which they follow their commander's orders (ll. 2320-39). Furthermore, Conán's objection, containing as it does a bid to get himself inaugurated, betrays his own ambition and self-regard. The Míodhach incident then is, I suggest, another parable concerned with overlord-vassal relations. A real-world parallel to the reticence of the Fian to contradict their overlord with regard to the investiture of a castle is found in the Annals of Loch Cé, in an entry written by Brian Mac Diarmada, a noble loyal to the English government, in 1578: *Bun drobhuis do thabhairt do Uadh Domnaill don giustis, ocus da ced deg marg do buain de uel amplius; ocus adeirmúid gurab olc do fri baile shleachta Briain Luighneigh do reic ris O nDomnaill da leiged inn eglá duinn a indisin*, 'Bun-Drobhais was given to O'Domhnaill by the Justiciary [*recte* 'Lord Deputy'], who exacted twelve hundred marks from him for it, *vel amplius*; and we should say that it was wrong to sell the residence of Brian Luighnech's descendants to O'Domhnaill, if fear allowed us to say it' (*ALC* ii, 422-3). Given that the Annals of Loch Cé were Brian Mac Diarmada's own annals, his use of the word *eagla* 'fear' probably indicates more the appropriately respectful attitude of a vassal to his overlord in matters in which the latter was sovereign than a cowardly refusal to speak one's mind.<sup>57</sup> It is worth comparing here the Míodhach incident in *TTT* with a similar incident in *BC*. In *BC*, Míodhach, son of the king of Lochlainn, is made king by Fionn despite Goll's doubts about his loyalty. Interestingly, Goll's scepticism is vindicated when Míodhach goes on to betray the Fian in *BC*. Míodhach might have been no more than a stock-name for a foreign prince and the similarities between the two tales in this regard a mere coincidence. It seems to me more likely that *TTT* was aware of some version of the Míodhach incident in *BC*. If we do have to do here with a deliberate echo of *BC* in *TTT*, as I suggest we do, the point would hardly be lost on a contemporary audience: regardless of what the vassal's reservations may be and whether they are, indeed, justified, in matters touching the overlord's prerogative it is not his place to second guess his lord. The Conán character was probably not an entirely unsympathetic figure in the eyes of the contemporary audience of vassals at whom this text was directed: he gives voice to the sorts of concerns and frustrations that might actually arise in a real-world vassal-overlord relationship, making *TTT* a more effective exemplary tale; the point of the text is, however, that Conán's example, is not to be followed.<sup>58</sup>

The Míodhach incident is also quite obviously concerned with castellation and king-making. When Fionn refuses Míodhach's offer to accompany the Fian, he adds that 'if he were able to bring

56Note the use of 2 pl. pronouns when giving advice concerning the ship's route, discussed above.

57Cf. (from the EModIr translation of William of Palerne) *Tiaghaid a mhaithe \*7 a mhóruaisle, a ríogha \*7 a ridireadha gus an Impir, \*7 tucc an t-Impir cumas comhairle dóibh iar sin*, 'His nobles and princes, kings and knights, went to the Emperor and he gave them the power to take counsel' (*EU*, ll. 1245-7), i.e. he permitted them to offer their advice. Note also the following proverbial-sounding half-quatrain: *bheith umhal dá thighearna / iseadh dhligheas gach óglách*, 'every vassal should be submissive to his lord' (*EU*, ll. 274-5 = O'Rahilly 1926, poem 56.7).

58 Fionn is by no means himself always an exemplary figure in EModIr literature. If *TTT* presupposes the audience's familiarity with texts such as *Cath Gabhra* (see footnote 49) and *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, which seems very likely, texts in which Fionn behaves unjustly and tyrannically, this further strengthens the effectiveness of the author/redactor's argument with regard to the proper behaviour of vassals: even if Conán is correct that the quest for Taise Thaoibhgheal is ridiculous given Fionn's easy access to women in Ireland, it is the vassal's duty to be obedient to his lord and respectful to him.

[further] companions with him [i.e. were it not for Taise Thaoibhgeal's restriction on the number of his company], that it would be easier for him than for anyone else' (*dá mbeith ar cumus dó féin comhlúadar do bhreith leis nā budh usae do neach eile daóine do bheith aige inā dhó féin*; ll. 2333-6) – a comment, perhaps, on the number of Fionn's vassals. If Conán represents the viewpoint which the audience of *TTT* is meant to reject, then the author/redactor clearly supports a policy whereby the overlord regulates a defeated kingdom, installing a lord amenable to himself, expanding his sphere of influence and sources of revenue. In order to facilitate this, an accommodation must be made with a potential incumbent and the castles of the enemy should not be needlessly destroyed. Had Conán's advice been followed, a potential king amenable to Fionn would have had no foothold in his own country.<sup>59</sup>

Real-world parallels from the early modern period for *TTT*'s concern with castellation and king-making are again identifiable. One can compare *TTT*'s concern with avoiding the unnecessary destruction of castles with Eochaidh Ó hEódhasa's poem *Fód codarsna críoch Bhanbha*. Ó hEódhasa enjoyed the patronage of the rebel leader Aodh Mág Uidhir. He addressed the poem in question, composed some time before 1595,<sup>60</sup> to Conchobhar Mac Diarmada, who had been an adherent of Aodh's since at least 1593 (Hoyne 2014, 351). Ó hEódhasa, presumably acting in the interests of his patron, Aodh, urges Conchobhar Mac Diarmada to practice more self-restraint and not to destroy castles on his campaigns against the English in Connacht, as these will have to be rebuilt (McKenna 1921 = *DiD* poem 92; see also Hoyne 2014, 357, 395-6). Similarly, the installation of the royal exile Miodhach (and later the prince-in-training Ioldánach) in *TTT* reflect not only the political reality of later medieval Gaelic Ireland but also the representation of Gaelic lords in the propaganda produced for them as king-makers. It is a feature of the reign of the just king in Bardic poetry that lesser lords enjoy their patrimony by his grace: *Fáth reachta do ríoghthasa / bláth ar fheadhaibh úrchasa; / sibh ar tí an chláir Chruachna-sa / gach rí i ndáil a dhúthchasa*, 'The bloom on the fresh and branching woods is a prophet of your inauguration; as you approach the plain of Cruachain, every king advances towards his patrimony' (Hoyne 2014, Poem 5.30 = *ABM* poem 427.30); *“Beanfa tú re tionól Bréifneach / Banbha Cuinn do chlannaibh cniocht; / nī rí neach ar a nī fēine / gu ndeach, a rī Fhēile, ar h'íocht.”* 'With the mustering of the men of Bréifne, you will take Ireland from the children of knights [i.e. colonists]; no man is a king of his patrimony until he submits to you, O king of Féil' (Carney 1970, Poem 34.14); and *Dá ró Tadhg i dtréan Bhanbha / biaidh ar-ís 'n-a n-athardha / gach aoinneach san riocht reimhe / do shliocht daoineach Deirgtheine*, 'When Tadhg comes to rule Banbha, of Deirgtheine's numerous race each one shall have his old standing again in his own land' (McKenna 1919 = *DiD* Poem 97.44). *TTT*, then, is fully in tune with the interests of a later medieval Gaelic overlord and, through the Conán character, its author/redactor discourages viewpoints and behaviour contrary to his interests.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup>The arguments of the Miodhach-incident are repeated again when the Fian install Ioldánach Órarmach as king of Antioch rather than destroying the king of Antioch's castle (see (vi) in the plot summary above): Conán again objects and is again rebuked by Fionn for his inappropriate behaviour in front of strangers, and the new king is installed by the Fian under the same conditions as those agreed upon with Miodhach in Norway (ll. 3590-683).

<sup>60</sup>Carney (1967, 27-8) dates this poem to after 1595, but, as Conchobhar Mac Diarmada is not styled 'Mac Diarmada', it must have been composed before he was installed as chief in 1595.

<sup>61</sup>Though Conán plays no part in this part of the tale, the account of Fionn's dealings with Cormac mac Airt are also of interest here, as it describes a harmonious lord-vassal relationship (see (i) and (iv) in the plot

## PRAISE, SATIRE AND DIPLOMACY

Another aspect of *TTT* which deserves comment is its treatment of poets and poetry. Both feature prominently in the tale. The ultimate cause of the chain of events which lead to the Fian's pursuit of Taise Thaoibhgheal is an argument between two poets concerning, among other things, which patron is more generous to men of art. Fionn's son Fearghus's role as the Fian's poet is repeatedly emphasised. He accompanies the Fian, as he says, “*do mhaoídheamh bhur mōr-ghníomh, \*7 d’innisin bhur n-aird-écht, \*7 do laoidheadh bhur láochraidhe*” ‘to praise your great deeds and to tell of your mighty slayings and to incite your warriors’ (ll. 650-51), as well as to fight. For their part, the Fian are in no doubt as to the importance of Fearghus's contribution to their exploits. After a poem celebrating part of their adventures, the Fian remark *go madh éttarbhach a ttoisc \*7 a tturus, \*7 go madh maith gan āireamh gan fhoillsiughadh a ndiongnadís, muna tteagmhadh Fearghus File ina bhfochair*, ‘that their expedition and their mission would be worth nothing, and that all that they accomplished would be a good deed that went unnoticed and unpublicised, if Fearghus File happened not to be in their company’ (ll. 2422-6). Fearghus does not accept gifts from the king of Norway (see (v) in the plot summary); with the Fian, he wants for nothing and receives anything he might desire (ll. 1674-9). When fighting the vicious hounds (see (vii) in the plot summary), Diarmaid kills one hound to fulfil his own obligation to the Fian and that which Fearghus would otherwise have been expected to kill *i lōigheacht h’airceadail \*7 h’ealadhna*, ‘as payment for your composition and your poetry’<sup>62</sup> (ll. 4483-8), and other characters, including villains, seem determined that Fearghus should not have to see action on the battlefield (ll. 7260-77, 7324-7). The respect for poets extends beyond Fearghus. ‘The poets and learned men, the noble master-poets and those who seek alms’ (*d’fhileadhuibh \*7 d’éxibh, d’ard-ollamhnuibh \*7 d’aos íarrata athchuinghe*) share a third of the wealth distributed at the inauguration of a new king with the brides of the kingdom (ll. 2289-92). When the Fian leave a country, the poets, along with the women and entertainers, weep for their parting (ll. 2336-47). Goll, seeking to convey the high summary). The relationship of Fionn to Cormac in *TTT* is more equitable than that of Miodhach or Ioldánach or, indeed, the *féinnidhe* to Fionn. It is nonetheless clear that Fionn holds an office in Cormac's gift (*fria lāimh Cormaic*), and it is Cormac who is sovereign:

*Báoi, dono, aird-fhianaighi ághmhur oirdhearc oireaghda i ndÉrinn fria lāimh Cormaic, .i. Fionn mac Cumhall mheic Shoailt mheic Bháoisgne mheic Núadha Neacht do Laighnibh. Acht cheana, cé do bhí ceannus gacha cóigidh ag Cormac, as beag má bá líonmhaire a fhlaithius ós Érinn inā flaitheus Finn feisin*

‘There was, moreover, a valorous distinguished famous *fianaighe* in Ireland appointed by Cormac, that is, Fionn son of Cumhall son of Soalt son of Baoisgne son of Nuadha Neacht of the Laighin. Be that as it may, though Cormac had lordship over every province, his lordship was hardly more bounteous than that of Fionn’ (ll. 11-18).

Fionn, overlord of the Fian, is portrayed in *TTT* as an assertive vassal in his own right, securing Cormac's agreement to respect the prerogatives of his deputy while he attempts to rescue Taise Thaoibhgheal. His taking leave of Cormac before leaving the country and informing him of the appointment of a deputy chime well with the author/redactor's concern with vassals' conduct towards their lords. In his behaviour towards Fionn, Cormac is also an exemplary figure, acknowledging, as he does, Fionn's prerogatives and offering him assistance. Note also that at Antioch, Goll intervenes to save his vassal Sgiath Breac in battle (see (vi) in the plot summary) – a fitting act for a good lord.

<sup>62</sup>The poem referred to celebrated the cast with which Diarmaid slew the foster-mother of Rí na bhFear nDorcha (ll. 4426-54).

morale of the Fian to Fionn, says *ní bhfuil aon-neach againne*<sup>63</sup> *nach amhlaidh atá a mheanma* \*7 *a mhór-aigneadh amhail do bheith arna laoidheadh* \*7 *arna lán-ghreasacht do chomhrádh caoin-fhileadh* \*7 *d'aitheasgaibh úghdar* \*7 *do ghēr-inntleacht ollamhan re hucht catha* \*7 *comhlainn*, 'there is no-one among us who does not feel as if he has been incited and inspired by the words of noble poets or the utterances of learned men or the sharp artistry of master-poets before battle and strife' (ll. 4079-84). When describing Fearghus's garments on setting out to meet the king of Norway ((v) in the plot summary), the author/redactor does not neglect to mention *a thuidhnigh ēixamhail fileadh* \*7 *ollamhan do shó-mhaisi a earraidh* 'his wonderful poet's and *ollamh*'s tunic which was the beautiful adornment of his armour' which he wears over his military garb (ll. 1387-9).<sup>64</sup> Poets are mentioned as guarantors (*slānta*) of agreements (ll. 615-17).<sup>65</sup>

Conán, whose sharp tongue is a major feature of his identity, is an appropriate vehicle to facilitate treatment of the theme of praise and satire. When seeking protection from his fellow *féinnidhe* (see (iv) in the plot summary), Conán employs *treas trom-aidhbhseach trēn-mholta*, 'a very excessive overly laudatory poem' (ll. 745-6). Each bout of praise is, however, swiftly followed by bitter invective as Conán's request does not meet with the desired outcome. Conán's serial petitioning finally concludes with his brother's condemnation of his vicious tongue. When Fearghus File refuses Conán protection (with the significant words *ní hoircheas* \*7 *nī himchubhaidh do chloinn faosamh nō fiór-chumairci do dhénamh do neamh-thoil a ttighearna d'áoinneach imá adhbhar fhollus nō fhíor-dhleaghtach*, 'it is not right or proper for children to grant protection to anyone in defiance of their lord's will with regard to his [= the lord's?] clear or just cause'; ll. 784-9), Conán harangues him and Fearghus responds saying *nār laoch ar laochdhacht* \*7 *nār fhile ar fhilidheacht, gé do thrēigeastar ceard a shean* \*7 *a shinsir* [= *shinsear*?] *ar an ealadhain nach raibhe aige*, \*7 *nār fhoghluim as a thosach*, 'that [Conán] was not a warrior for valour or a poet for poetry, though he had forsaken the calling of his ancestors for art which he did not possess and which he had not learnt in the first place' (ll. 790-5). This is the first occurrence of a conflict which runs through the text, namely, competition between Fearghus and Conán for the prerogatives of the poet.

The *file* Fearghus seeks to incite members of the Fian in battle, in particular when they are in danger of being defeated. Twice he spurs Oisín to victory when the latter seemed on the brink of destruction (ll. 4706-36, 5700-47), once Oisín (ll. 5795-822), once Diarmaid (ll. 5887-924) and once Mac Lughach (ll. 7219-79).<sup>66</sup> Mention has already been made of the poems which Fearghus utters at various points in the narrative. As will be mentioned below, Fearghus only once threatens to satirise members of the Fian; he gives Goll and Osgar fair warning and demonstrates his familiarity with poetic erudition by mentioning the 'ten divisions of satire'. In the present tale, as

63Note the use of the 1 pl. *nota augens -ne*. Goll is referring to the rest of the Fian, excluding Conán, who prior to this passage in the text had given a characteristically glum assessment of the Fian's prospects.

64For other references to this garment, see Stokes 1905, §8, *DiD* poem 121.9 (= McKenna 1923) and Mhág Craith 1967, poem 39.126.

65 See Breatnach 1983, 56-9, for Bardic poets acting as guarantors of agreements.

66While inciting Oisín for the second time and when he addresses Mac Lughach, Fearghus recites a *riotharg* (ll. 5711-38, 7132-67). Each line ends on a trisyllabic word, most lines being heptasyllabic. For this metre, see Ní Dhomhnaill 1973-4, 89-91 and cf. Watkins 1963 and Breatnach 1996, §3.3.



elsewhere in *fianaigheacht* literature, Conán is liberal with excessive praise and satire.<sup>67</sup> He takes it upon himself to volunteer other *féinnidhe* for battle and to incite them, even when his encouragement is unnecessary (ll. 1809-1831, 3134-46). Unusually, when the smoke of the she-giant's fire threatens to suffocate the Fian (see (vii) in the plot summary), it is Conán, and not Fearghus, who inspires Diarmaid to slay her (albeit after he complains about the inaction of Tuatha Dé Danann) (ll. 4384-418), but it is Fearghus who subsequently praises Diarmaid's actions in verse and is rewarded by him. Diarmaid promises to fight in Fearghus's place as a reward for the latter's praise-poem; earlier, Conán's praise of his fellow *féinnidhe* was insufficient to win him immunity from his obligation to accompany the Fian on their expedition.<sup>68</sup>

The contrast between the true poet and the sharp-tongued Conán is effectively brought out during the negotiations of the Fian with the king of Norway (see (v) in the plot summary). Having devastated the country, Fionn proposes sending ambassadors (*feassa \*7 teachta \*7 taighleóiridhe*) to seek the weapons necessary to kill Cuilleann Cruadharmach. Fionn initially appoints his son, Fearghus Fínbhéal the poet, *\*7 is dóich go bhfuighe na hairm*, 'and it is likely that he will secure the weapons' (ll. 1350-60), but Conán volunteers himself as well (ll. 1361-81). The two dress themselves and the author/redactor notes that Fearghus dons the poet's tunic mentioned above (ll. 1382-1406). Conán is described in quite positive terms here, though even this rather laudatory account draws attention to Conán's failings:

*Maith an tí asa thuaras[g]bháil buí ann sin, .i. Conán mac Morna, óair fa hēsidhein an t-umhal fhaidhittneach do chairdibh \*7 an t-anumhal ain-sheargach d'easgcáirdibh \*7 an fial fosaidh fīor-shuilbhír re fileadhaibh, .i. an tí nār dhiúlt aoín-neach don Ādhamhchlōinn [sic] im aisgidh nō im athchuinghidh dá dhoirbhe ná dá dhocamhla dá n-íarrfaidhe fair, mur gach n-áon dá úaisle \*7 dá onóraighe d'Fhíenaibh Éireann; \*7 fós an tí ag nach raibhe tuilleamh buidhe re beathaidh fria haoineach ar druim dhomhain, dā mhéid d'inmhi nō d'édáil do-ghébhadh, muna budh caraid chomhghaoil nō fhíalghus fīor-thairis dhō budhdhesin; intí, imorra, agā mbuí teanga gacha tíre gan turbhró, \*7 oileamhain gacha hoiléin gan uireasbhaidh, \*7 eólus airheadail \*7 aird-ealadhan a n-aoineacht gan friochnamh gan ro-shaothar, amhail fa bés bunaidh do gach árd-taoiseach nōnmhair isin aimsir sin, \*7 fōs ina raibhe neart céd a lláthair chatha \*7 chomhlainn, \*7 ar nach feas locht nā láin-ainimh a ttrēidhibh ar tuinn talmhan, acht namā a theanga luath labharthach láin-mhillte féin, ag meath \*7 ag milleadh \*7 ag mōr-mhúchadh a mhaitheasa seach cách*

'Excellent was he whose description was there (?) , that is, Conán son of Morna: for he was the model of a patient obliging person to friends and the model of a hateful unobliging person to enemies and the model of a mild, pleasant person generous towards poets, that is, he who never refused a gift or present to any person however difficult or onerous that was asked of him, just like every member of the Fiana of Ireland, no matter how noble or honourable; and furthermore, the one who favoured no-one of the human race in his own lifetime on earth, no matter how much wealth or riches he would have received, if he were not a faithful relative or kinsman of his own; he, moreover, who could speak unbrokenly the language of every island and who had the erudition of every land without exception and who had knowledge of composition and poetry as well without effort, without exertion, as was customary for every noble chief of nine warriors at that time, and moreover who had the strength of a hundred on the battlefield, and of whom no fault

<sup>67</sup>Conán the satirist is certainly to the fore in *BC*, 28-30, where he demands that Diarmaid provide him with food and drink from the enemy hostel, a request that the latter fulfils for fear of satire. In *Tóraigheacht Shaidhbhe*, Fathadh Chonáin (sic) only agrees to board the boat in Críocha na Drólainne when Conán threatens to make a 'blister of satire and insults of him' (*go ndéanfadh sé féin bolg aoire \*7 achmhasán do*) (*GGG*, 37). Indeed, Conán's resemblance to the sharp-tongued Bricriu of the Ulster Cycle has been noted by other writers (Henderson 1899, xi; cf. also Ó Cadhlaigh 1938, 277).

<sup>68</sup>Note that Conán and Diarmaid have a close, if strained, relationship in other EModIr *fianaigheacht* texts (see, in particular, *BC* and Bergin and MacNeill 1901). This may explain why Conán, and not Fearghus, incites Diarmaid to slay the female giant.

or defect in his character was known at all except only his quick talkative maligning tongue, undermining and demoralising and obscuring his worth *vis-à-vis* everyone else'

(ll. 1407-30)

Fionn's two messengers, Fearghus and Conán, arrive at a time of assembly (*a n-áonach* \*7 *a n-árd-oireachtus*), as the Norwegians discuss the attacks of the Fian the previous day (ll. 1431-9). A path is cleared so that they may approach the king. Fearghus proceeds *co fáthach fír-innill friochnomhach*, \*7 *go féigh fuireachair fíor-árrachta* 'prudently, capably and attentively, and keenly, watchfully and resolutely' along this passage to the tent of the king, where he greets him humbly and respectfully (*do-rinne comhairthe umhla* \*7 *uruma don aird-rí*) and is greeted honourably by the king in return (ll. 1439-53). Conán, on the other hand, clambers over the chests, backs and shoulders of the king of Norway's soldiers at the point where his host is thickest and, upon reaching the king's tent, makes no sign of humility or respect (ll. 1454-63). This unprecedented display (*an ní neamh-ghnáthach sin*) angers the king of Norway's men, who would have killed Conán had they not feared their lord (ll. 1464-71). Conán's aggressive address to the king leads him (the king) to remark *nocha leas-ainm duit-si fear díen-áithisc* \*7 *droch-urlabhra na Féine* [...] \*7 *ní híad Fíena Éireann amháin, acht fear droch-áithisc* \*7 *díen-uradhaill ffear ndomhuin uile*, 'to describe you as "the man of the Fian who speaks impetuously and rudely" is no inappropriate title [...] and not only the Fiana but you are "the man of the men of the whole world who speaks impetuously and rudely"' (ll. 1472-1508). When asked why he did not allow the poet Fearghus to speak first, Conán explains that, if the poet's request for the weapons were refused, *nach diognadh sé dīoghbháil nō díen-mhasla duit-si, acht a innisin dá thighearna* 'that he [Fearghus] would do you no harm and give you no harsh insult beyond telling his lord', whereas Conán will seek revenge if refused. Furthermore, he would rather that he enjoy the fame of obtaining the weapons than it be said that they were given as a gift to a poet (ll. 1509-22). When the king instructs Conán to leave his territory, he remarks *nī tugadh dh'onōir nó dh'airmhidin d'aon-duine riemh romhad-sa onóir budh aidhbhle inā gan do thuitim it anghlór* \*7 *it anuradhall*, 'no greater honour or respect was ever given to one person than your not being slain for your improper speech and address' (ll. 1529-31). These parting words of the king, however, lead Conán to start a fight with the Norwegian host, which is described in more detail in the plot summary above (ll. 1532-1670). After the fight has been stopped, Fearghus refuses the gifts offered him by the king and then returns to the Fian, who celebrate Conán's exploits (ll. 1671-1725).

Conán's conduct, while valorous, is crude and undiplomatic. The ridiculous image of Conán clambering over the Norwegian host to reach the king rather than walking, like Fearghus, along the path that was cleared for the purpose clearly casts his conduct in a negative light. Fearghus, who was first nominated by Fionn to meet with the king of Norway, is a far more suitable ambassador (and, indeed, he resumes that role later in the tale with Cuilleann Cruadharmach, with whom he shares some intelligence and whose mental state he reports to the Fian; ll. 6692-738, 7007-37, 7286-329, 7467-80). It is significant that Fionn specifically draws attention to his son's qualification as a poet when he appoints him as ambassador (ll. 1258-60) and that the author/redactor makes a point of mentioning the poet's tunic before he and Conán set out. Conán has some natural poetic ability, as the description of him before his encounter with the king of Norway makes clear, but he cannot claim to be a poet; the narrator expressly excludes Conán from the privileged status which Fearghus legitimately enjoys. This diplomatic incident reflects the author/redactor's concern with the protection of the prerogatives of the poetic order. The poet's role as ambassador is attested in native

and English sources (see Breatnach 1983, 55-9 and McLeod 2004, 98-9), and, more importantly for our purposes, it is a right which at least one poet, Eochaidh Ó hEódhasa, laid claim to as a prerogative of the office of court-poet or *ollamh flatha*: *Dlighidh fós beg an ainbreth / rún flatha fonn comhraighnech / a thogha go toluigh síodh / dola a ccoruibh do coigcríoch*, 'Furthermore he is entitled (minor the exorbitant claim!) to the confidence of [his] prince, to a prize piece of land, to be his nominee to a peace mound, to be a guarantor for a foreign territory' (*ABM* poem 344.9; see also Breatnach 1983, 56). The role of the poet as an ambassador also features prominently in *EModIr* prose texts (for example, *CCI*, 30-3, 154-5; Fraser 1916, 27-31; *GGG*, 28, 31; Ní Mhuirgheasa and Ó Ceithearnaigh 1952, 255). By foregrounding Fearghus's poetic qualifications and Conán's dilettantism, and by contrasting their behaviour more generally, the author/redactor of *TTT* argues that the office of ambassador should be executed exclusively by a *file*.

It will be recalled that Conán's insults led the two great champions of the Fian, Goll and Osgar, to come to blows on An Bhreacbhárc and that the two could not be separated by the rest of the Fian (see (vi) in the plot summary above). I have argued above that this incident is a carefully crafted lesson on the perils of disunity. In this scene too, the poet Fearghus is the diplomat who secures a peaceful resolution; what Conán tears asunder, he repairs. When his fellow *féinnidhe* fail to separate the two warriors, Fearghus File rises and recalls 'the keys of his learning and the mystery of his noble erudition' (*ar eochraibh a éixe \*7 ar dhiamhair a dheagh-fhoghloma*). The author/narrator describes Fearghus as the greatest poet of his time, with the possible exception of Fiontan (nom. *Fionntain mac Bóchna*) or Fítheal and his three sons, though even they, he adds, were devoted to Fearghus, having studied under him (ll. 2668-80). Speaking 'sensibly and eloquently' (*co céillidh caoín-bhríathrach*), Fearghus urges the two warriors to make peace, as they cannot be separated by force and as the Fian have enough enemies without them needing to kill each other (ll. 2681-95). As an incentive, he offers them two poems of praise. If they refuse, he threatens them with 'the ten sharp, keen, piercing categories of the blades of satire' (*na deich fhoghla féighe frithire*

*fíor-neimhneacha fileatt far fháobhraibh na haoíre*)<sup>69</sup> (ll. 2695-708).<sup>70</sup> Fearghus's words have the desired effect and the two champions, eager for praise and dreading satire, set aside their ill-feeling and turn their attention 'to the difficulty and need of the *rífhéinnidh* [Fionn]' (*d'anshógh \*7 d'uireasbhaidh an rígh-fhéinneadh*) and to the perilous situation in which the Fian finds itself (ll. 2737-53). The Fian repair the damaged ship (ll. 2754-68) and Fearghus recites the poems *Goll mear míleata* and *Osgar iolbhúadhach* to the delight of both honorands, who grant him extravagant rewards (ll. 2768-3005).<sup>71</sup> This incident is later referred to as 'the peace and dialogue of Fearghus Fínbhéal son of Fionn between the Fiana' (gen. *síodha \*7 agallmha Fearghusa Fín-bhéil mheic Fhinn eidir na Fíenaibh*; ll. 3054-6).<sup>72</sup>

69The ten forms of satire mentioned by Fearghus are *tár n-aoíre \*7 tár molta, tamhan n-aoíre \*7 tamhan molta, on \*7 aineamh, athais \*7 easbhaidh, nó aoír \*7 ainmheadh \*7 glámh dhíoghainn*, 'insult of satire and insult of praise, stem (?) of satire and stem (?) of praise, blemish and disfigurement, reproach and defect (?) (or satire), blemishing and *glám dícenn*' (ll. 2705-8). (Contrary to the punctuation in Ní Mhuirgheasa's edition, I take *nó aoír* to be connected to *easbhaidh*.) Cf. the ten divisions (*deich fodlai*) of versified satire (*airchetal n-aíre*) in the Early Irish tract *Cis lir fodlai aíre?* (McLaughlin 2008, 41-84): *mac bronn \*7 dallbach \*7 focal i frithshuidiu \*7 tár n-aíre \*7 tár molta \*7 tamall aíre \*7 tamall molta \*7 lánáer \*7 ainmed \*7 glám dícenn*, 'son of womb and innuendo and word in opposition and outrage of satire and outrage of praise and touch of satire and touch of praise and full satire and lampooning and *glám dícenn*' (§4). It will be noted that in *TTT* there is no mention of *mac bronn*, *dallbach* or *focal i frithshuidiu*, but *on* and *aineamh* appear in *TTT*'s list along with *athais*, which appears as *aithis bréthre* 'verbal insult', a form of reproach (*ail*), in the Early Irish tract (§3). The three forms of verbal satire found in the Early Irish list which do not appear in the EModIr could all be described as precursors of explicit satire: *mac bronn* is performed secretly (§5); the object of criticism in *dallbach* is too vaguely described to be surely identified (§§6-9); *focal i frithshuidiu* refers to a panegyric composition with only a hint of satire (§10). (For a later medieval poem on *mac bronn*, see Greene 1945-7.) As for the sequence *on \*7 aineamh, athais \*7 easbhaidh* in the EModIr list, cf. the Early Irish triads *on, anim, esbaid* and *on \*7 ainim \*7 aithis* discussed in Meroney 1950, 218-19 and cf. also *On \*7 Ainimh \*7 Aithis*, three of the six hounds of satire mentioned in the sixteenth-century *croántacht* beginning *Rannam le chéile a chlann Uilliam* (*DiD* poem 111, prose after verse 18 = McKenna 1929). Note also that *tamall* in the Early Irish list has become *tamhan* in *TTT*.

70Fearghus's injunction is summarised in a *rosg*, which, however, contains no mention of the threat of satire (ll. 2709-36). Each line of the *rosg*, except the last, ends on a trisyllabic word, most lines being heptasyllabic. The final line has the syllabic pattern 5<sup>1</sup>. For this metre, see Ní Dhomhnaill 1973-4, 89-91 and cf. Watkins 1963 and Breatnach 1996, §3.3.

71Both poems are in *bloghbhairdne* (*brúilingeacht*; often *dán díreach*) (5<sup>3</sup> 5<sup>3</sup>) (see Stern 1895, 18). As noted by Ní Mhuirgheasa (*TTT* pp 102 n. 2, 108 n. 1), both are attested independent of *TTT* in other MSS. A copy of *Goll mear míleata* earlier than B will be found in RIA MS 23 F 16 (The Book of O'Gara), p. 132. At present, I know of no copy of *Osgar iolbhúadhach* earlier than B. Judging by a cursory search of major MS catalogues, *Goll mear míleata* is quite common in MSS; *Osgar iolbhúadhach* less so. Both are often attributed to Fearghus File and described as *ruisg* (*catha*) (see, for example, *RIA Cat.*, pp. 1902-3). *Goll mear míleata* is associated with the Battle of Cnucha in at least one nineteenth-century MS (see *RIA Cat.*, p. 3460), perhaps because of Silvester O'Halloran's 1788 edition of that poem, which asserted that the poem was recited on the occasion of that battle.

72I have argued above that the fight against Rí na bhFear nDorcha, in which Conán is left permanently impaired, is designed to illustrate the advantages of unity and cooperation. Note that Goll, Osgar and Fearghus attack the king together, before Fearghus summons the rest of the Fian to intervene (ll. 5336-42). Given Fearghus's earlier role as a mediator between the two champions on An Bhreacbhárc, this arrangement

In the foregoing discussion, I hope to have demonstrated that *TTT* treats of the relationship of a vassal to his overlord and to his fellow vassals. Conán disrupts the relations of the *féinnidhe* to one another; Fearghus restores them. I have also argued that the author/redactor was concerned with protecting the privilege of the *file* to act as an intermediary with outside powers. The portrayal of Fearghus's conduct on An Bhreacbhárc suggests that the author/redactor also wished to emphasise the *file*'s role as an intermediary between (potential) allies.<sup>73</sup> Bardic poetry too has ample examples of the *filidh*'s pride in their role as peace-makers. A particularly striking exemplification of this is the early seventeenth-century elegy on the poet Tomás (mac Ruaidhrí) Mac Eochadha (Ó Macháin 1993; see also Breatnach 2008). The loss of Mac Eochadha, described as the intermediary (gen. *fhir a n-eadrána*) of the Leinstermen, a man capable of providing sureties (*slána*) for peace, will surely lead to the kindling of hostility in the province (*fadódh a bhfeirge*) (quatrain 16). The elegist has a list of other poets to hand (Torna Éigeas, Mac Coise, Mac Liag, the *ollamh* of Clann Charrthaigh Caisil) whose deaths brought similar devastation (quatrains 19-22). Giolla na Naomh Ruadh Mac Eochadha too invoked Torna Éigeas in his poem *Dia do réiteach ar gcarad*, an appeal for peace between members of the Uí Bhroin and Uí Thuathail families (Mac Airt 1944, poem 40). The penultimate quatrain could easily have been placed in Fearghus's mouth in *TTT*: *Mar sin as cosmhuil don charuid [read cháraid?] / dán cóir carthoin ar gceirde, / bheith réidh go gcead dá n-ollamh, / gan chath, gan fhocal feirge*, 'The pair who should love our art should be peaceful out of deference to their *ollamh*, without battle, without an angry word'. In his portrayal of Fearghus, the author/redactor of *TTT* was very much mindful of the diplomatic and intermediary functions of the contemporary *file* of the early modern Irish period.

The author/redactor of *TTT* makes clear that Conán, unlike Fearghus, never underwent rigorous training in poetry. He has some natural poetic ability, but his ability to compose verse was not arrived at through study – he possesses it *gan friochnamh gan ro-shaothar* 'without effort, without exertion' (ll. 1407-30). *Friochnamh* might better be rendered 'study' here.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, when Fearghus seeks to restore peace between Osgar and Goll, he must rely upon his training as a poet, he must recall 'the keys of his learning and the mystery of his noble erudition' (*ar eochraibh a éixe \*7 ar dhiamhair a dheagh-fhoghloma*),<sup>75</sup> and it is at this point that the author/narrator describes Fearghus as the greatest poet (*file*) of his time and as a teacher of other poets (ll. 2668-80). Conán's lack of poetic qualifications are highlighted again after Fearghus has recited the poems in praise of Goll and Osgar on An Bhreacbhárc and received his rewards. Conán attempts to belittle Osgar's attempt to achieve parity with Goll in lavishing gifts upon the poet. Goll replies, "*Nā bí-si gom* may have symbolic significance.

73Cf. the poem *Ardaigneach Goll*, which describes Fearghus's successful efforts to reconcile Fionn and Goll (Ross 1939, poem 10).

74For *frithgnum* 'study' as one of the three things required of a poet in *Uraicecht na Ríar*, see Breatnach 1987, 96. For another example of the phrase *gan fhriochnamh, gan roshaothar*, see *go nách ccluineadh a chluas \*7 nách bhfaiceadh a shúil cleas nó cluiche nó caomhfhoghlaim nách bíodh aige cco hiomlán gan friochnamh, gan roshaothar*, 'His [William's] ear never heard, nor his eye saw, a feat or game or acquirement but that he possessed it completely, with no care or labour' (*EU*, ll. 158-60).

75Cf. the metaphor of keys used in connection with literacy in *Ogham nach coimhghléighearr colg, / agus an t-oirléigheann ard - / eochracha oslaigthe ghlas / breitheamhan mbras agus mbard*, 'The literary language whose thrust is not self-evident or superficial and the noble reading aloud – for ardent judges and bards, they are the keys which release locks' (Ní Dhonnchadha 1989, quatrain 4).



*chosnamh, a Chonáin, [...] úair do-ghébhúinn ar son do chonganta \*7 do chosanta úait do theanga lúath labharthach \*7 do bhēl cainteach comhghlórach do chosg do chách*” ‘Don't try and defend me, Conán, for in exchange for your defence and protection, I would rid everyone of your swift, talkative tongue and your prattling, noisy mouth’ (ll. 3017-21). Conán responds that Osgar and Goll have benefited from his actions, as he is the reason that they were praised by Fearghus (ll. 3022-30). He continues that he regrets not having been set to study poetry in his youth (*nach re hēixe nō re healadhain rom-cuireadh as mo thosach mé*), for Fearghus is never criticised for cowardice and has his choice of rewards from the nobles of Ireland and foreigners, and though slight his achievements on the battlefield, he enjoys more credit for them than any other person would. Conán contends he has as much right to the gifts that Fearghus received from Goll and Osgar as he gave rise to the events which led to them being bestowed (ll. 3030-49). That Conán should be rewarded for his mischief-making is, of course, laughable – and, indeed, the Fian respond to Conán's speech, as is their wont, with laughter (ll. 3050-56). What is of particular interest is the manner in which the contrast between Conán and Fearghus is once again framed as one connected with poetic qualification, Fearghus being defined as the legitimate, respected man of art and Conán as an unlearned poet. In this respect too, I suspect *TTT* may have been designed to reflect the interests of the poetic order.

The *filidh* of the later medieval and early modern period underwent rigorous training to attain the necessary qualifications to practise the (potentially) lucrative craft of praise-poetry (see McManus 2004). They were naturally suspicious of less well-trained, less prestigious poets and entertainers who might divert patronage away from them. Complaints against the makers of *abhrán*, accentual verse, date back to at least the early fourteenth century, when Giolla na Naomh Ó hUiginn complained *mór goid gach dheighfhir re dán, / goid an einigh don abhrán* ‘great now is the trouble on the genuine poet, hospitality being got by *abhrán*’ (McKenna 1947, poem 27.2). The makers of *abhrán* are not, however, the exclusive focus of Giolla na Naomh's professional anxiety: he mentions *an camdhán fiar fíorlochtach* ‘misshapen crooked faulty poetry’, which can be bought at a cheaper price than the *dán díreach* of the *file* (quatrain 4), with food rather than the gold, horses or cattle proper to *deaghaos dána* (which McKenna renders ‘the genuine poets’) (quatrains 5 and 6). I take the makers of *camdhán* ‘crooked verse’ to be lower class poets, the likes of the *bard* and the *brúiling*. Cf. the use of the term *camdhúain* in *Ní choisgfid cuig cuigidh Eireann / oirecht Cathail in chuil tais. coisgidh camdhúain bhaird nó brúiling, / glanshlúaign an aird chúilfinn chais*, ‘The five provinces of Ireland would not restrain the host of Cathal of the smooth poll [or ‘smooth hair’], a competitive lay of bard or brúiling [read ‘a crooked lay’ in contrast to the *dán díreach* or ‘straight verse’ of the *file*] restrains the bright retinue of the lofty, fair-haired, curly-headed (prince)’ (Quiggin 1912, §15).<sup>76</sup> In later centuries too, the courts of Gaelic Ireland and Scotland were populated not only by *filidh* but by an array of less prestigious and uneducated (or less well educated) poets and entertainers.<sup>77</sup> I suggest that the character of Conán in *TTT* may be a caricature of a less prestigious

<sup>76</sup>For another example of the term *camdhán*, see Ní Dhonnchadha 1989, quatrain 14.

<sup>77</sup>A study of *brúilingeacht* and the poets who produced it will appear as part of my edition of the poems of the fifteenth-century poet Seithfín Mór (currently in preparation), provisional findings of which were presented in my paper ‘A survey of *brúilingeacht* verse’ at the Tionól of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies on 14 November 2014. I have discussed the *bard*, *cáinte* and some other less prestigious poets and entertainers in the period c. 1200-c.1650, as well as the attitude of the *filidh* towards them, in a paper entitled ‘Poets, bards and buffoons: men of letters and entertainers at the later medieval Gaelic court’ delivered on 16 July 2015 at the International Congress of Celtic Studies in Glasgow. A version for publication of that paper

or amateur poet, an unlearned and malicious buffoon jealous of the riches earned by the *file* and his immunity in battle, one whom it is dangerous to indulge and whose art of excessive praise and irresponsible satire threatens the stability and cohesion of society.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, Fearghus is a learned *file*, whose praise is valued because it is not excessive, who is knowledgeable in satire but reluctant to employ it without just cause,<sup>79</sup> a diplomat and counsellor who comports himself appropriately, whose status is recognised by aristocratic society and whose services ensure its cohesion. In addition to using the tale to emphasise the prerogatives and prestige of the *file*, the author/redactor of *TTT* intended to denigrate the *file*'s competitors in the later medieval and early modern literary marketplace.<sup>80</sup>

#### AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

Returning to the question of where *TTT* was composed/redacted, I know of no evidence to substantiate the suggestion that *TTT* is an east Ulster text. Goll is marginally the more prominent hero in *TTT*, a fact which might suggest that the text was composed with a Connacht audience in mind (see Ní Uigín 2009),<sup>81</sup> but, as we have seen, the text emphasises the composite nature of the Fian and stresses Goll's parity with Osgar, a strategy which might suggest a wider, even inter-provincial, audience.<sup>82</sup> It is not difficult to imagine a context in which such a text would have been is in preparation.

**78**If the Conán figure was generally associated with less prestigious entertainers, it may explain some unusual incidents in other texts. For instance, in *Cath Fionntrágha*, Conán becomes so heated in battle that he must leave the battle to pass wind and is rebuked for this by Fearghus (O'Rahilly 1962, ll. 1075-95). It would be tempting to associate this with the professional flatulists who attended the courts of Gaelic lords in the later medieval period and were famously depicted by John Derricke at a feast held by Mac Suibhne (see Breatnach 1997, plate 3 and *DIL* s.vv *braigetóir*, *braigetóracht*, *braigire*).

**79**In Early Irish material, satire is presented as properly the prerogative of the *file*, who was also enjoined from excessive praise or using satire extortionately (Breatnach 2006, 63, 67-8). For a Bardic poem which criticises lax standards among poets and unjustified praise, see Mac Airt 1944, poem 26.

**80**Fearghus and Conán's relationship is, it should be noted, not entirely negative. Conán is severely burnt by one of the fire-breathing hounds of Inis Tile (see (viii) in the plot summary above). After a struggle in the waters of the ford (which Conán uses to good effect when set alight by the hound), Conán eventually manages to drown the creature. Fearghus then praises Conán's valour (though not in verse), cleans the dirt (?) (*an tiaruaisi*; cf. *DIL* s.v. *tiruaisi* 'remains, relics, fragment' and Dinneen *iarmais* 'a relict or remainder') from his arms and armour, and carries the warrior (*gaisgeadhach*) in his arms to the Fian's infirmary (ll. 6081-156). Perhaps this incident too was intended to indicate Conán's subordination to Fearghus.

**81** Goll is explicitly associated with Connacht several times in our text (ll. 883-6, 2851, 2888-90). His genealogy is given at ll. 6236-42, where he is stated to be a member of the Gamhanradh (gen. *Gamhanraighe*) of Iorras Domhnann, on whom see Ó hUiginn 2013.

**82**An analysis of genealogical and literary references in the text may yet provide some clue as to the authorship and audience of the text, though they may do no more than show off the learning of the author/redactor. Fionn's genealogy is given at ll. 13-15 and he is said to be of the Laighin (*do Laighnibh*). At ll. 5900-6, Diarmaid is described as a descendant of Fiacha Suidhe son of Feidhlimidh Reachtmhar son of Tuathal Teachtmhar son of Fiacha Fionnfhóladh *for a bhfuilid fíor-fhlaithe for a shliocht \*7 for a mbeid go bráth*, 'whose descendants are governed by true lords and will always be so' [or 'whose descendants include and always will include true lords?'] – apparently a reference to the Déise. The interesting references to the

of use: given the complex (and often shifting) network of alliances in Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland, prominent lords would have had ample occasion to commission works encouraging cohesion and common purpose among their vassals. It is to be noted, as Katharine Simms has demonstrated, that in their poetry to galloglass families later medieval *filidh* make reference to *fianaigheacht* material and present the contemporary galloglass mercenaries as successors of the *fiana* of old (see Simms 2007, 112-15).<sup>83</sup> The style, language, learned interpolations and the emphasis on the prestigious role of the *file* all suggest that a *file* too composed or redacted *TTT*. As for the date, I can only suggest that *TTT* was most likely composed or redacted some time between the late fifteenth century and the collapse of the Gaelic order in the mid-seventeenth.

I hope that the foregoing discussion has demonstrated that entertainment was not the sole consideration of the author/redactor of *TTT*. The tale is a carefully crafted work which exploits the *fianaigheacht* literary tradition in order to treat of the relationships between overlords and vassals, between vassals themselves, and the role of the *file* in regulating these relations. As such it is a window into Gaelic aristocratic society and further evidence for the influential and highly political role of literature and men of letters in that society. That *TTT* was written in such a way as to capture and hold the attention of its contemporary audience(s) does not detract from the complex arguments woven into the tale by its author/redactor, rather it makes the text a more effective medium for communicating these concerns. It would be a mistake to underestimate the complexity of EModIr prose narratives or to allow modern literary taste to distract from the functions that they were designed to fulfil in the society in which they were produced.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

*ABM* = *A Bardic miscellany*, ed. D. McManus and E. Ó Raghallaigh (2010). Dublin.

Ulster Cycle have already been mentioned above, as have some references to other *fianaigheacht* tales and to the Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh (see footnote 3). Finally, any attempt to identify the audience of the text should bear in mind that two witnesses to *TTT*, B and V, are associated with north Connacht and south-west Ulster respectively. Like many aspects of the text, the question of the text's provenance requires further study.

<sup>83</sup> I very much doubt that *TTT* is the only text that could benefit from further attention with regard to its contemporary argument(s). The EModIr text *Bruighean Bheag na hAlmhan* (Ní Shéaghdha and Ní Mhuirgheasa 1941, ix-xi, 16-39) has much in common with *TTT*. Like *TTT*, it lampoons the internal divisions of the Fian. The tale concludes with an elaborate legal compromise to ensure future cohesion. The Clann Mhorna bias in the tale might lead one to suspect that the text was originally composed/redacted in Connacht, but the earliest MS witness to the text indicates that it was circulating in Scotland at the beginning of the seventeenth century. (This MS also contains the earliest copy of *BC*, two Bardic poems (the religious poem *Slán ar n-a mharbhadh mac Dé* and the rebuke of Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire beginning *Cá hainm atá ar Fhearghal óg?*) and some miscellaneous material.) NLS MS 72.1.34 was written c. 1603 by Eóghan Mac Pháill of Dunstaffnage, Argyllshire. On p. 41 of that MS is a letter written in October 1603 to Eóin Ó Conchobhair, who appears from the letter to have been the owner of the exemplar used by Mac Pháill (see the catalogue of this MS at Irish Script on Screen ([isos.dias.ie](http://isos.dias.ie)) and Bannerman 1986, 105, 112). Both Mac Pháill and Ó Conchobhair were members of professional medical families based in Scotland. Ó Conchobhair was employed by the Meic Dhubhghaill of Dunollie, but his family continued to maintain direct connections with their Leinster homeland and with medical men from Connacht and Ulster (Bannerman 1986, 98-112, 116, 146-7, 150). It would be tempting to connect *fianaigheacht* texts such as *Bruighean Bheag na hAlmhan*, which appear to caution against disunity in a heterogeneous military force, with the widespread use of mercenaries in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (cf. Simms 2007, 112-15).

- ASt* = *Agallamh na Seanórach*, ed. N. Ní Shéaghdha (1942-5). 3 volumes. Dublin.
- BC* = *Bruidhean Chaorthainn: sgéal Fiannaidheachta*, ed. P. Mac Piarais (1908). Dublin.
- CCI* = *Caithréim Congail Cláiringnigh*, ed. P.M. MacSweeney (1904). London.
- DF* = *Duanaire Finn*, ed. E. MacNeill and G. Murphy (1908-53). 3 volumes. London.
- DiD* = *Dioghluim Dána*, ed. L. Mac Cionnaith (1938). Dublin.
- DMU* = *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir*, ed. D. Greene (1972). Dublin.
- EU* = *Eachtra Uilliam*, ed. C. O'Rahilly (1949). Dublin.
- GGG* = *Gadaidhe Géar na Geamh-oidhche*, ed. T. Ó Gallchobhair, P. Ua Cuain, T. Mac Giolla-Fhionnáin (1915). Dublin.
- RIA Cat.* = *Catalogue of manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* (1926-70). Dublin.
- SG* = *Silva Gadelica*, ed. S.H. O'Grady (1892). 2 vols. London/Edinburgh.
- TGG* = *Tóruigheacht Gruaidhe Griansholus: the Pursuit of Gruaidh Ghriansholus*, ed. C. O'Rahilly (1922/24). London.
- TTT* = *Imtheacht an Dá Nónbhar agus Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile*, ed. M. Ní Mhuirgheasa (1954), Dublin.

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