On the Wonders of Ireland: Translation and Adaptation

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THE Latin poem *De mirabilibus Hibernie,* 'On the wonders of Ireland' (henceforth *De mirabilibus*) stands firmly within the broad Christian genre of texts on the significance of 'signs and wonders', but it also addresses specifically Irish aspects of that literary tradition. The purpose of this chapter is to locate *De mirabilibus* more precisely within the history of the 'signs and wonders' genre, both in terms of the earlier sources upon which its author drew and the intellectual contexts within which it was composed, read and transmitted. As edited by Aubrey Gwynn, the poem consists of introductory verses *de signis et prodigiis* (lines 1–30), followed by verses *de rebus Hibernie admirandis* (lines 31–195).[1] The 'signs and wonders' included in the first part of the text, and in other texts of the same genre, would have been deemed by scholastic theologians to have been natural but inexplicable, rather than supernatural and miraculous. By this I mean that these were not *miracula*, which are caused by God alone, but *mirabilia*, which, while they exceed one's knowledge and expectations of nature, are of nature, rather than above or beyond it.[2] Such wonders possess inherent

[1] Aubrey Gwynn, ed. and trans., *The Writings of Bishop Patrick, 1074–1084*, SLH 1 (Dublin, 1955), pp. 56–71.

[2] Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 18–19. For the classical, pre-Christian origins of the genre, see Alexander Giannini,

cosmological significance, and can range from the relatively mundane — earthquakes and solar eclipses, for example — to that which seems to subvert the natural order completely, such as animals which speak, or a man being born of a horse. However, elsewhere in *De mirabilibus*, the poet speaks of describing the 'miracles of our country' (line 32: *patrie miracula nostre*), and includes hagiographical episodes in the poem, which suggests that he does not observe a strict theological divide between 'natural' and 'supernatural' marvels. This is in keeping with what we know with any certainty regarding the date of the text, namely that its earliest manuscript witness pre-dates the end of the twelfth century, which is when the ontological distinction between *mirabilia* and *miracula* began to be defined clearly.[3] The identity of the poem's author and its precise date of composition are, I argue, less certain than has previously been supposed. The text draws on earlier sources — Irish and non-Irish — and adapts them for a number of possible purposes and audiences: although we cannot draw firm conclusions about authorship or historical context, the connections between *De mirabilibus* and a series of other inter-related texts confirm the text's participation in a dynamic process of transmission and adaptation.[4]

<div align="center">MANUSCRIPTS</div>

The poem survives in three manuscripts, which range in date from the late twelfth to the fourteenth century, but there are difficulties in all three manuscripts regarding the integrity of the poem:

London, British Library MS Cotton Titus D. xxiv (Rufford Abbey, Nottinghamshire, s. xii^ex)

Paradoxographorum graecorum reliquae (Milan, 1966); Olivier Bianchi and Olivier Thévenaz, ed., *Mirabilia. Conceptions et representations de l'extraordinaire dans le monde antique. Actes du colloque international, Lausanne 20–22 mars 2003* (Bern, 2004). See also the pertinent remarks by Greg Woolf in his *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West* (Chichester, 2011), p. 84.

[3] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, 2001), p. 49.

[4] As noted several years ago by John Carey, a detailed study of the precise relationships between the various Irish Latin and vernacular 'wonders of Ireland' texts is much needed. It is hoped that the present discussion of *De mirabilibus* will contribute some of the groundwork necessary for such a study, in addition to the contributions already made by Carey: 'The Finding of Arthur's Grave: A Story from Clonmacnoise?', in *Ildánach Ildírech. A Festschrift for Proinsias Mac Cana*, ed. John Carey, John T. Koch and Pierre-Yves Lambert (Andover and Aberystwyth, 1999), pp. 1–14, at 9.

This is a late-twelfth-century Latin miscellany, containing a number of poems attributed to a *sanctus Patricius espiscopus* — a designation probably considered by its twelfth-century English scribe to refer to Saint Patrick — as well as numerous other poems: although some of these are by identifiable authors, including Marbod of Rennes and Hildebert of Lavardin, others are anonymous.[5] *De signis et prodigiis* (fol. 98) is separated from the specifically Irish verses (fols. 74–8), which in the manuscript are headed *de rebus Hibernie admirandis.* The poem, or in this case we should perhaps say poems, are glossed, as are the other poems attributed to Patrick in the manuscript; and, from the layout of text and gloss on the page, we can be fairly certain that the glosses were copied from the exemplar. Other texts in the manuscript are of Insular interest, including what Mozley identified as a 'Northern section under the name of Bede, but for the most part by Laurence of Durham', and excerpts from Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum.*[6] Hagiographical interests are evidenced in the poems on St Werburh (d. 699), daughter of Wulfhere of Mercia, and St Breowa (identified with St Gwenfrewi/Winefrith, fl. c. 650), whose relics were translated to Shrewsbury in 1138.

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS Lat. 11108 (English?, s. xii^{ex}–xiii^{in})[7]

This manuscript, which comprises three volumes, is of uncertain origin and provenance. For our purposes, the first volume is of interest: it is of the late twelfth century, and its contents are all texts with Insular connections, namely, an epitome of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a copy of the 'Vatican Recension' of the *Historia Brittonum*, and on the last three leaves of the volume (fols. 41v–43v) we find the first 133 lines of *De mirabilibus* (including the verses *de signis et prodigiis*). David Dumville has argued, on palaeographical and linguistic grounds, that the volume is English.[8] It is unclear whether or not the second and third volumes, which date from the thirteenth century, were connected with the first at an early date. That *De mirabilibus* is found following on from a copy of

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[5]For a detailed description see J. Mozley, 'The Collection of Mediæval Latin Verse in MS. Cotton Titus D. xxiv', *Medium Ævum* 11 (1942), 1–77.

[6]Mozley, 'The Collection', pp. 2 and 22–4.

[7]A description of the manuscript and what is known of its provenance can be found in David N. Dumville, ed., *The* Historia Brittonum*: 3. The 'Vatican' Recension* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 29–31. Dumville is rightly sceptical of the manuscript's supposed connection with Saint-Yves de Braisne which, as he notes, is based on conjecture rather than evidence.

[8]Dumville, ed., *The* Historia Brittonum, pp. 30–1.

the *Historia Brittonum* is noteworthy: on the one hand, the 'wonders of Britain' contained in the longer versions of the *Historia Brittonum* must surely provide the ultimate model for our 'wonders of Ireland', and yet the 'Vatican Recension' is truncated, and does not include the *mirabilia* section.[9]

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS Lat. 4126 (Hulne? Or Carmelites, York?, s. xiv)[10]

The so-called 'Poppleton Manuscript', which dates from the fourteenth century,[11] contains only the introductory verses *de signis et prodigiis* (fols. 12rb–13vb: *Incipit de diuersis signis et prodigiis mundi que fecit Deus ut tereret* [sic] *homines que descripsit sanctus Patricius Ybernie episcopus*) and does not contain the 'wonders of Ireland' section of the poem; but elsewhere in the manuscript is a copy of Gerald of Wales, *de mirabilibus Hybernie* (fols. 49r–96vb), which perhaps explains the absence of the verses *de rebus Hibernie admirandis*. This is an extremely important and much-studied manuscript, which contains numerous texts pertaining to chronology, history, genealogy and prophecy.[12] There is a focus in the manuscript

[9]Ibid., p. 4.

[10]A thorough description can be found in Julia Crick, *The* Historia Regum Britannie *of Geoffrey of Monmouth. III: A Summary Catalogue of Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 256–61 (no. 164). For discussion of the manuscript and its texts see, for example, Jacob Hammer, 'A Commentary on the *Prophetia Merlini* (Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Book VII)', *Speculum* 10 (1935), 3–30; continued in *Speculum* 15 (1940), 409–31; M. O. Anderson, 'The Scottish Materials in the Paris Manuscript, Bib. Nat. Latin 4126', *SHR* 28 (1949), 31–42; Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985), nos. 1026 and 1038; Louis Faivre d'Arcier, *Histoire et géographie d'un mythe. La circulation des manuscrits du* De excidio Troiae *de Darès le Phrygien (VIIIe-XVe siècles)*, Mémoires et Documents de l'École des Chartes 82 (Paris, 2006).

[11]Gwynn, *The Writings*, p. 47, dated this manuscript to the thirteenth century, but I follow Crick, *The* Historia Regum, p. 256, in dating it to the fourteenth. Lapidge and Sharpe date the manuscript more specifically to the second half of the fourteenth century (*Bibliography*, no. 1026), but Crick suggests that the man most associated with the manuscript, Robert of Poppleton (Robert Populton), extended a pre-existing early fourteenth-century collection which had been written in a more formal, Gothic script than his own (*The* Historia Regum, p. 261). This older (?) hand is found in fols. 33r–105r and thus includes *de signis et prodigiis*. However, cf. Anderson, 'The Scottish Materials', p. 32, where she observes a scribal note on fol. 13vb which states *Ora pro Popiltoun, qui me fecit scribi* ('Pray for Poppleton, who has caused me to be written'), which would perhaps date this part of the manuscript to the 1360s, when Robert of Poppleton was prior of Hulne, near Alnwick. Given this uncertainty over dating, and the role of Robert of Poppleton in its compilation, it is safest here to consider the manuscript as having been written at some point in the fourteenth century.

[12]In addition to the studies cited above (n. 10), see Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford, 1969) on the

on Scottish, Irish and British history, and it is of particular interest to historians of medieval Scotland due to the inclusion of *de situ Albanie*, a version of the Pictish king-lists, and the 'Chronicle of the Kings of Alba'.[13]   The manuscript also includes works of classical interest, including texts on the destruction of Troy.[14]   However, the verses on 'signs and wonders' have largely been neglected by scholars, being peripheral to the concerns of earlier commentators on the manuscript.

The manuscript transmission is clearly somewhat limited and problematic, in that no extant manuscript presents the entire text as a coherent composition. However, it is likely that the section *de signis et prodigiis* was intended to precede *de rebus Hibernie admirandis*, as evidenced by the opening lines of the specifically Irish section, which state:

> His ita prodigiis signisque per omnia dictis
> Nunc quoque describam patrie miracula nostre,
> Nomine que proprio uocitatur Hibernia cuntis.

> Having thus told of all these signs and wonders
> I shall now describe the marvels of our country,
> Which is known to all men by its true name, Ireland.[15]

Thus the poet explicitly links the general 'signs and wonders' to the 'wonders of Ireland' which follow. This is supported by the evidence of Lat. 11108 which, though incomplete, preserves *de rebus Hibernie admirandis* following directly on from *de signis et prodigiis*. It would seem, then, that we should consider the poem as a unitary composition, despite the separation of *de signis et prodigiis* from the verses *de rebus Hibernie admirandis* in two of our three extant manuscripts. It is also significant that the text is preserved only in manuscripts which display marked interests in Insular history, chronology and/or hagiography.

AUTHORSHIP

In 1955, Aubrey Gwynn published an edition and translation of *De mirabilibus* as part of a corpus of medieval Latin texts, the authorship

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pseudo-Joachimist exposition *Oraculum Cyrilli* (esp. the bibliographical references and index of manuscripts at pp. 522–3).

[13]Anderson, 'The Scottish Materials'.

[14]Faivre d'Arcier, *Histoire et géographie*.

[15]*The Writings*, ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 58–9, lines 31–3.

of which he attributed to Patrick, bishop of Dublin. Patrick, who was consecrated at London as bishop of Dublin by Lanfranc of Canterbury in 1074,[16] drowned while crossing the Irish Sea in 1084.[17] The corpus attributed to him by Gwynn comprises five texts, including four poems: first, *De mirabilibus*; second, *Constet quantus honos*, a poem on the threefold division of the mind into intellect, will and memory;[18] third, *Occidet heu cicius pictor quam pagina picta*, a poem on the transience of life; and fourth, *Mentis in excessu*, an extensive and sophisticated allegorical poem on ecclesiastical learning. The fifth text attributed by Gwynn to Bishop Patrick is the Latin prose treatise, or sermon, *De tribus habitaculis animae*.[19] However, Gwynn's division of the texts could be queried, as the verse 'prologue' to *De tribus habitaculis animae* should probably be regarded as a separate composition, and his identification of the texts as the oeuvre of one author, the eleventh-century bishop of Dublin, is not entirely secure. For example, I have argued elsewhere that *De tribus habitaculis animae* is probably not the work of Patrick of Dublin. I will not rehearse my arguments for this here, but they relate to issues of style, vocabulary, authorial attribution in the earliest manuscripts, and the transmission of the text.[20] Gwynn attributed *De tribus habitaculis animae* to Patrick of Dublin on account of the fact that, in one manuscript-witness, the treatise is preceded by a brief verse invocation beginning *Perge carina*, written in the voice of a certain 'Patrick', and which — on grounds of style and vocabulary — probably

[16] *Canterbury Professions*, ed. Michael Richter, Canterbury and York Society 67 (Torquay, 1973), p. 29 (no. 36); *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford, 1979), nos. IX and X; *The Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin: with the Register of its House at Dunbrody, and Annals of Ireland*, ed. John T. Gilbert, 2 vols., Rolls Series (London, 1884) II, 249–50, s.a. 1074.

[17] AU, s.a. 1084: *Gilla Patraic espoc Atha Cliath do bathadh*, 'Gilla Pátraic, bishop of Dublin, drowned'; cf. Gilbert, ed., *The Chartularies*, II, 250, s.a. 1084: *Patricius, Dublin episcopus, cum sociis in Britannie oceano, vi. Idus Octobris, fuit submersus*, 'Patrick, bishop of Dublin, was drowned with his companions in the ocean of Britain on the sixth day before the Ides of October'.

[18] Elizabeth Boyle, 'The Twelfth-Century English Transmission of a Poem on the Threefold Division of the Mind, attributed to Patrick of Dublin (d. 1084)', in *'A Fantastic and Abstruse Latinity'? Hiberno-Continental Cultural and Literary Interactions in the Middle Ages*, ed. Wolfram R. Keller and Dagmar Schlüter, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie (Münster, forthcoming).

[19] Ead., trans., '*De tribus habitaculis animae*: Concerning the Three Dwelling-Places of the Soul', in *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, ed. John Carey, Emma Nic Cárthaigh and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh (Aberystwyth, forthcoming 2014).

[20] Ead., 'The Authorship and Transmission of *De tribus habitaculis animae*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 22 (2012), 49–65.

can be attributed to an Irish author. Whether that author should be identified with Patrick of Dublin is still problematic. *Perge carina* is found in Cotton Titus D. xxiv as an independent poem, and I have proposed that *De tribus habitaculis animae* itself should, in the absence of further evidence, be considered the work of an anonymous 'pseudo-Patrick'.[21]

The evidence connecting the poems to a certain 'Patrick' who studied at Worcester is somewhat stronger; whether that connection means that he was their author, or simply that he sent a collection of pseudo-Patrician poems to Worcester, is unclear. However, there is nothing to identify the Patrick of the Worcester community with the bishop of Dublin of the same name. Indeed, Martin Brett has argued that the Patrick of the Worcester community cannot be identified with Patrick of Dublin. It is worth briefly setting out Gwynn's arguments, and Brett's objection, here. Gwynn noted that two of the poems attributed to a *sanctus Patricius episcopus* in Cotton Titus D. xxiv, namely the introductory verse to the allegorical poem *Mentis in excessu*, and the verse invocation *Perge carina*, contain interlinear glosses which not only identify their author as 'Patricius', but also make mention of a 'Wulfstan', and identify the recipient of one of the poems as an 'Aldwin'.[22] Gwynn also noted that, in a twelfth-century addition to the Durham *Liber Vitae*, a list of members of the Worcester community includes Saint Wulfstan, abbot and later bishop of Worcester, as well as an Aldwin and a Patrick.[23] Given that the bishops of Dublin following Patrick of Dublin had been trained in English monastic houses, Gwynn argued — not unreasonably — that it was this Patrick who had been trained at Worcester, alongside Aldwin and under Wulfstan, before being made bishop of Dublin. Gwynn argued that he had composed these texts, along with the interlinear glosses, and had dedicated and sent them to his former monastic brothers.[24] However, Brett has argued that all of the other identifiable Worcester monks in the list of names added to the Durham *Liber vitae* — including Aldwin — were alive in c. 1104, when the names were added, and that therefore the Patricius listed, and thus the Patricius mentioned in the Cotton Titus D. xxiv glosses, could not be identified with Patrick of Dublin who, of course,

[21] Boyle, 'The Authorship', p. 65.

[22] Gwynn, *The Writings*, pp. 84, 100, 102 and 104.

[23] British Library MS Cotton Domitian A. VII, fol. 25r: *The Durham Liber Vitae. London, British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A.VII*, ed. David Rollason and Linda Rollason, 3 vols. (London, 2007) I, 104.

[24] Gwynn, *The Writings*, pp. 1–11.

had died some twenty years previously.[25] Gwynn's biography for Patrick of Dublin, and the connection between him and the corpus of Latin texts linked to an unspecified Patrick or Patricks, is not conclusively proven.   But Brett's objection does not conclusively disprove the hypothesis: there are examples of the names of dead people being entered into *libri vitae*.[26] The evidence is far from straightforward.

De mirabilibus Hibernie is, in terms of both style and content, the 'odd man out' of the poetic corpus attributed to Patrick of Dublin. It is also the one text in the corpus which is undoubtedly of Irish origin. Aside from its own intrinsic interest, a better understanding of the poem, and its place within a wider generic tradition, might enable us to illuminate aspects of the other texts in the corpus.

DE SIGNIS ET PRODIGIIS

The 'signs and wonders' section speaks in general terms of various marvels, dislocated from any geographical or chronological context, which are invested with an implicit cosmological significance.   This section sets the theological tone for what follows, as we are told:

> Plurima mira malum signantia signa futurum
> Siue bonum dederat clemens deus arbiter orbis.
>
> Many wondrous signs, that are signs of future ill
> or of good, has God given us in His mercy, Lord of the world.[27]

No moral judgement is made on these marvels: they may be portents of misfortune or signs of good. But they are God-given. What follows is a list of these wonders, with no attempt at interpretation or explanation: we are told that an ox has given birth to a lamb, a horse has given birth to a man,[28] and so on, but we are never explicitly informed about what these portents represent. But the events described in these verses could have had other, perhaps more immediate, resonances for an Irish audience.

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[25]Martin Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective on Church Reform and Ireland, 1070–1115', *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century. Reform and Renewal*, ed. Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin, 2006), pp. 13–35, at 33–5.

[26]See, for example, Harmut Hoffmann, 'Anmerkungen zu den Libri Memoriales', *Deutsches Archiv* 53 (1997), 415–59, at 433–4 and 444. I am grateful to Dr Levi Roach for this reference.

[27]*The Writings*, ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 56–7, lines 1–2.

[28]Ibid., lines 17 and 21.

Here we will consider just one example, namely the birth of conjoined twins, rendered by our poet thus:

> Natus erat dupplex homo uiuens tempore longo,
> Quadrimanus bipes atque biceps et pectore bino,
> Atque duas animas unum uentremque gerebat.

> A double man was born, who lived for a long time,
> Having four hands, two feet, two heads, two trunks,
> Two souls he had, and one belly.[29]

Although found here in the general section on 'signs and wonders', and in this instance probably derived from Augustine *De civitate Dei*, XVI. 8, the idea of conjoined twins is one which seems to have been of some interest to medieval Irish writers working in other genres. For example, the author of the vernacular, eschatological treatise, *Scéla na esérgi* (probably dating to the eleventh century), was concerned with whether conjoined twins would be resurrected in their conjoined form, or whether they would receive separate bodies at the moment of universal resurrection.[30] The author tells us that:

> Na torothair dano techtait da chorp i n-óenaccomol deligfitir sin tall isind eséirgi 7 gébaid cách díb fo leith a chorp ndíles, amail demniges Iob sin ic tairchetul inna libur, intan atbeir na huli daini do esérgi ina corpaib dilsib.

> The deformed who possess two bodies joined as one will be separated there in the resurrection, and each of them will take individually his proper body, as Job attests, prophesying in his book, when he says that all people will arise in their proper bodies.[31]

This interest in conjoined twins was not limited to eschatological speculation or cosmological portents. For medieval Irish writers, the status of conjoined twins was of more mundane interest, particularly in regards to anthropological and historical concerns. We can see this reflected in an early Middle Irish work on natural history, with a

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[29] Ibid., lines 24–6.

[30] For a study of the text, see Elizabeth Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: the Evidence of *Scéla na esérgi*', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 216–30.

[31] *Lebor na hUidre. Book of the Dun Cow*, ed. R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin, 1929), p. 83, lines 2562–5 (my translation).

particular focus on the so-called 'monstrous races', which itself draws on non-Irish anthropological sources.[32]   The poem on *Gnímhradha in ṡeseadh lai láin*, 'The Works of the Sixth Day', composed perhaps c. 1000 or a little later, tells us that:

> Filead daine druim fri druim
> theas isind Afraic imluim
> trat[h] is marb in fer gan eall
> in fear eli nos-coimhreang.
>
> There are people (joined) back to back
> in barren Africa in the south.
> When one man dies — without pain —
> the other man cuts them in two.[33]

Indeed, the existence of conjoined twins was not merely confined to exotic lands. A record (which one would have no reason to consider inaccurate) of conjoined twins born in Ireland is preserved in the Clonmacnoise-group annals for 1103.[34] ATig, for example, tells us that:

> Ben do breith da lenam a n-aenfecht isin bliadain-si, 7 aen-chorp aco otha a mbraghaid corigi a n-imlinn, 7 a mboill co coir cenmotha sin, 7 aigedh cáich dib aracheli.
>
> A woman brought forth two children at the same time in this year, and they had one body from their neck to their navel, and their members were normal with that exception, and the face of each was turned towards the other.[35]

CS and AFM add the detail that the conjoined twins were girls.[36] These annals probably record a genuine event, which was of sufficient interest

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[32] For an overview of these sources see John B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981). Unfortunately, Friedman's brief comments on Irish texts are misleading and inaccurate (pp. 99–100). See Michael Clarke, 'The Lore of the Monstrous Races in the Developing Text of the Irish *Sex Aetates Mundi*', *CMCS* 63 (2012), 15–49, and references therein, for full discussion of the Irish material. The *Pauca Problemata*, §154, cited and discussed by Clarke at p. 26, offers striking similarities with *de signis et prodigiis*, and possibly shares a common source.

[33] Maura Carney, ed. and trans., 'The Works of the Sixth Day', *Ériu* 21 (1969), 148–66, §23.

[34] On this family of annals see David N. Dumville and Kathryn Grabowski, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales: the Clonmacnoise-Group Texts*, Studies in Celtic History 4 (Woodbridge, 1984); Nicholas Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, Studies in Celtic History 27 (Woodbridge, 2010), esp. chapters 2, 3 and 8.

[35] ATig, s.a. 1103.

[36] *CS*, s.a. 1103: '... da ingen iad'; AFM, s.a. 1103: '... di inghin iad-sidhe'.

to warrant inclusion in the historical record: perhaps, in the eyes of the annalist, it might at some point be adjudged to have a portentous significance. The natural history of the 'Works of the Sixth Day' and the theological speculation of *Scéla na esérgi* further embed the conjoined twins of *de signis et prodigiis* within Irish literary culture. However, the interest in conjoined twins is not exclusively Irish, of course: one can see similar interest expressed widely in early Christian texts. Just as the source for the speculation in *Scéla na esérgi* is not Irish (it comes from Augustine), and just as the 'Works of the Sixth Day' reworks non-Irish traditions into a vernacular context, so the 'signs and wonders' section of our text reworks non-Irish sources into a new form, albeit a form which developed other resonances in medieval Irish intellectual culture.

An informed medieval Irish audience might recognise some of the events contained in *de signis et prodigiis* from texts on the apocryphal 'portents at Christ's birth'. There are numerous Irish texts, both Latin and vernacular, which describe a series of portents which supposedly occurred on the night of Christ's birth, although no two texts list precisely the same portents in the same order.[37] If we take one example from our poem: *Maxima pars noctis fulgebat luce diei* (line 8: 'The greater part of the night has shone with the light of day'), we can see this same portent described in similar terms in the vernacular poetic versions of 'the portents at Christ's birth'. The late Middle Irish version preserved in the Book of Uí Mhaine (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy D ii 1), for example, states:

> Ba solus in grīan īar sein
> a medhōn na haidchi sin,
>
> The sun was bright after that
> in the middle of that night,[38]

There are further connections between *De mirabilibus* and the Book of Uí Mhaine, which we shall explore below, but it is clear that, even

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[37] See Vernam Hull, 'The Middle Irish Apocryphal Account of "The Seventeen Miracles at Christ's Birth"', *Modern Philology* 43 (1945), 25–39; Brian Ó Cuív, 'The Seventeen Wonders of the Night of Christ's Birth', *Éigse* 6 (1948–52), 116–26; Martin McNamara et al., ed., *Apocrypha Hiberniae I. Evangelia Infantiae*, CCSA 13–14, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2001) II, 517–617; Sergey Ivanov, 'On the Later Development of the Legend of Portents at Christ's Birth', *CMCS* 63 (2012), 71–89.

[38] 'Die siebzehn Wunder bei Christi Geburt', ed. Kuno Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften', *ZCP* 5 (1905), 21–5, at 24–5, §6 (my translation). I use Meyer's edition from the Book of Uí Mhaine, rather than one of the critical editions listed in the previous note, for reasons which will become clear below (pp. 253–5).

in the opening verses *de signis et prodigiis*, we can observe a tension between strangeness and familiarity: the *mirabilia* are invested with cosmological significance, and yet are found within a range of other textual sources. The familiarity of the 'signs and wonders' is not limited to Ireland: as J. E. Cross demonstrated in an important study, the 'signs and wonders' section of our poem shares five of its fifteen 'wonders' with the ninth-century 'Old English Martyrology', itself based on a Latin exemplar thought to have been composed c. 800.[39] Another of the wonders in our poem is found in two of the Old English Vercelli homilies.[40] Both the Old English 'signs and wonders' and our Irish Latin poem draw on a source which derives ultimately from classical and late antique sources such as Orosius,[41] Jerome's version of the Chronicle of Eusebius, and Julius Obsequens, the latter himself drawing on a now lost work of Livy. Thus, *de signis et prodigiis* is part of an extended textual network of reworking and transmission, and it contains much that was familiar to an English audience. Perhaps the place of this material within a shared textual inheritance might have been a contributing factor in the preservation of the text in our three English manuscripts: indeed, it is the 'signs and wonders' section which has been best preserved in all three of the manuscript witnesses. Much seems to be made in recent scholarship of the very strangeness and unfamiliarity of wondrous things in the Middle Ages, but it is worth considering the familiarity of the 'signs and wonders' material to an English audience as perhaps being a motivating factor behind its preservation. When we turn to the specifically Irish material, we can observe a similar tension between the marvellous and the familiar.

DE MIRABILIBUS HIBERNIE

The portents mentioned in the general 'signs and wonders' section, such as the example of conjoined twins, may have had a rich resonance to an educated Irish audience, being reflected in numerous vernacular textual traditions: annalistic, homiletic and poetic. *De signis et prodigiis* is itself

[39] J. E. Cross, '"De signis et prodigiis" in *Versus Sancti Patricii Episcopi de Mirabilibus Hibernie*', *PRIA* 71C (1971), 247–54.

[40] J. E. Cross, 'Portents and Events at Christ's Birth', *ASE* 2 (1973), 209–20; Thomas N. Hall, 'The Portents at Christ's Birth in Vercelli Homilies V and VI: Some Analogues from Medieval Sermons and Biblical Commentaries', in *New Readings on the Vercelli Book*, ed. Andy Orchard and Samantha Zacher (Toronto, 2009), pp. 62–97.

[41] In this regard, it is perhaps worth noting that Orosius is one of the authors whose works are included in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS Lat. 4126. See above, pp. 236–7.

inextricably linked to a series of Irish and non-Irish 'signs and wonders' texts. Similarly, *de rebus Hibernie admirandis* is connected in a highly complex manner to a series of texts on the 'wonders of Ireland', not all of which are of Irish authorship. I shall discuss three of the specifically Irish marvels described in *De mirabilibus* in order to assess how familiar and recognisable they might have been to an Irish audience, and to consider how they are reworked in this specific context. The first example is the *Lia Fáil*; the second is the idea of Irish werewolves; the third is the motif of the ship in the air.

Lia Fáil

The author of *De mirabilibus* tells us that:

> Antea Temoriam sedem rex quisque tenebat
> Scottorum, fuerant ubi tres res maxime mire.
> Nam lapis atque puer paruus nanique sepulcrum.
> Nam lapis, ut fertur, calcatus rege sonabat
> Iam rugiens.

> Formerly, every king of the Irish held seat in Tara,
> Where three most wondrous things were found:
> A stone, a small boy, and a dwarf's tomb.
> The stone, as it is reported, when trod by a king's foot,
> Cried out loudly.[42]

We might note, incidentally, that the English scribe of Cotton Titus D. xxiv felt the need to gloss the word *Temoria* 'Tara' with the words *proprium nomen*, the only proper name identified as such in the manuscript; but an Irish audience would of course have been familiar with a stone at Tara which cried out when trodden by a king's foot.[43] To give just one example, *Baile in Scáil* ('The Phantom's Frenzy'), is a prophecy text which was reworked into its present form in the early eleventh century, possibly from an Old Irish original, and it reports that:

> In dúa dia ndécad do grés co fúair cloich and ara chiund foa
> chosaib. For-ling in cloich íarum 7 saltrais fuirri 7 géisis an

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[42] *The Writings,* ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 60–1, lines 69–73.

[43] The earliest attestation is in the prose narrative *De Shíl Chonairi Móir*: Lucius Gwynn, ed. and trans., '*De Shíl Chonairi Móir*', *Ériu* 6 (1912), 130–43. See also John Carey, 'Varia I: *Ferp cluche*', *Ériu* 50 (1999), 165–8, for a reading which clarifies Gwynn's misunderstanding of the passage on the *Lia Fáil*.

chloch foa chosaib co closs fon Temraig hule 7 fo Bregmag
[. . .]

On his [i.e. Conn's] arrival on the rampart from which he
usually used to watch, he found a stone there under his feet.
He leapt on the stone then and stamped on it and the stone
cried out under his feet so that it was heard throughout all of
Tara and the plain of Brega [. . .][44]

A study of the *Lia Fáil* by Tomás Ó Broin is useful in its collection of
references to the *Lia Fáil* in Irish vernacular literature, if somewhat
bizarre in its interpretation of those references: Ó Broin concludes
that the stone is an earth goddess, 'Mother Ireland'.[45] Unfortunately,
Ó Broin collects only references to the *Lia Fáil* in vernacular texts,
and does not include Latin examples, such as the present one from
De mirabilibus Hibernie: presumably Latin examples would complicate
his assertion that 'zealous Christians could scarcely be expected to
tolerate anything so explicitly wicked as a vocal pagan demon'.[46]
Not only did 'zealous Christians' tolerate this wicked, noisy 'demon',
they also considered it evidence of God's wondrous power. Indeed,
even in vernacular sources the *Lia Fáil* is cited as evidence of God's
omnipotence. In the late-fourteenth-century Book of Ballymote
(Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 23 P 12), we find a vernacular prose text
which is closely related to *De mirabilibus*, with the title *Do ingantaib Erenn
andso da rer Lebair Glind-da-lacha*, 'On the wonders of Ireland here,
according to the Book of Glendalough'.[47] The Book of Glendalough is
now generally agreed to be lost, although Pádraig Ó Riain has argued
that it should be identified with Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson

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[44]*Baile in Scáil,* ed. and trans. Kevin Murray, ITS 58 (London, 2004), pp. 33 (text) and 50
(trans.), §§2–4. For further discussion of *Baile in Scáil* see Murray, below, pp. 300–1.

[45]Tomás Ó Broin, 'Lia Fáil: Fact and Fiction in the Tradition', *Celtica* 21 (1990), 393–401.
For more nuanced discussion of the *Lia Fáil* see John Carey, 'Tara and the Supernatural',
in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp. 32–48, at
37–40.

[46]Ó Broin, 'Lia Fáil', p. 400.

[47]*Leabhar Breathnach annso sis. The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius*, ed. and
trans. James Henthorn Todd (Dublin, 1848), pp. 193–219. See also Plate 10.1. See above,
pp. 235–6, for further connections between the *Historia Brittonum* and the 'wonders of
Ireland', and also Clarke, 'The Lore', p. 32. *De Shíl Chonairi Móir* is also preserved in the
Book of Ballymote (see above, n. 43). On the Book of Ballymote, see also Deborah Hayden,
above (ch. 2).

B 502.[48] Whatever the merits or otherwise of Ó Riain's argument, there is no 'wonders of Ireland' text in Rawlinson B 502 as it survives.[49]

Our text as we have it in the Book of Ballymote is a prose vernacular version of a text very similar to *De mirabilibus*.[50] For example, it contains the same description of the wonders of Tara: the small boy who, at the age of seven, begot a child; the grave of a dwarf; and:

> In Lia Fáil, .i. in cloc no gessed fa cach righ ar faemfad flata [*recte* flaith] Temrach.

> The Lia Fáil, i.e. the stone which shouted under every king in whom it recognised the sovereignty of Teamhair.[51]

The relationship between the Book of Ballymote text and *De mirabilibus* is complex but significant. Of the thirty-four wonders included in the Book of Ballymote text, twenty-four of them are found in *De mirabilibus*. The latter also includes a further two miracles — hagiographic in nature — which are not found in the Book of Ballymote. Although the Book of Ballymote is a late-fourteenth-century manuscript, John Carey has argued that the 'wonders of Ireland' text contained therein took its present form at some point between 1054 and 1118.[52] The Book of Ballymote 'wonders of Ireland' text and *De mirabilibus Hibernie* must both draw on a common, or related, source or sources, and it seems

[48]Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Book of Glendalough or Rawlinson B 502', *Éigse* 18 (1981), 161–76; Caoimhín Breatnach, 'Rawlinson B 502, *Leabhar Glinne Dá Locha* and *Saltair na Rann*', *Éigse* 30 (1997), 109–32; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Rawlinson B 502 alias *Lebar Glinne Dá Locha*: a Restatement of the Case', *ZCP* 51 (1999), 130–47; Caoimhín Breatnach, 'Manuscript Sources and Methodology: Rawlinson B 502 and *Lebar Glinne Dá Locha*', *Celtica* 24 (2003), 40–54; id., 'Aspects of the Textual Transmission of *Sex Aetates Mundi* and *Druimm Cetta Céte na noem*', *Éigse* 35 (2005), 9–26; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Book of Glendalough: a Continuing Investigation', *ZCP* 56 (2008), 71–88.

[49]Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries*, 2 vols (Dublin, 2001) I, 163–200.

[50]For a discussion see *The Writings*, ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 126–31.

[51]*Leabhar Breatnach*, ed. and trans. Todd, pp. 200–1. I suggest that Todd's *flata* should be corrected to *flaith* (the manuscript has *fl* with a suspension mark) and his translation, 'in whom it recognised the sovereignty of Teamhair', should be emended to 'whom the sovereignty of Tara would accept'. My proposed translation supposes that Tara is the subject, rather than the object, of *ar-foím*, following a suggestion from an anonymous reader, for which I am very grateful. Therefore the idea being conveyed is that it is Tara which actively bestows sovereignty on true kings. Cf. Murray, ed. and trans., *Baile in Scáil*, p. 17, where the quotation from *De Shíl Conairi Móir* beginning *Inti nad aurimeth flaith Temrach* could be translated as 'The one whom the sovereignty of Tara would not accept'.

[52]Carey, 'The Finding', pp. 9–10.

likely that both were written at some point in the eleventh century, although *De mirabilibus* may be the earlier of the two.

Werewolves

We can observe in some detail the similarities and differences within a complex of related Latin and vernacular texts in their depictions of werewolves. *De mirabilibus* tells us:

> *De hominibus qui se uertunt in lupos*
> Sunt homines quidam Scottorum gentis habentes
> Miram naturam maiorum ab origine ductam,
> Qua cito quando uolunt ipsos se uertere possunt
>   uel more
> Nequiter in formas lacerantum dente luporum.
> Unde uidentur oues occidere sepe gementes:
> Sed cum clamor eos hominum seu cursus eorum
>   i. ut ueri lupi
> Fustibus aut armis terret, fugiendo recurrunt.
>   i. propria
> Cum tamen hec faciunt, sua corpora uera relinquunt
>   i. suis mulieribus
> Atque suis mandant ne quisquam mouerit illa.
> i. ut moueantur   ad propria corpora
> Si sic eueniat, nec ad illa redire ualebunt.
> Si quid eos ledat, penetrent si uulnera queque,
>   i. a persequentibus eos
> Uere in corporibus semper cernuntur eorum.
>   i. ouium quas deuorant
> Sic caro cruda herens in ueri corporis ore
> Cernitur a sociis: quod nos miramur et omnes.

> *Of men who turn themselves into werewolves*
> There are some men of the Irish race,
> Who have this wondrous nature from ancestry and birth:
> Whensoever they will, they can speedily turn themselves
> Into the form of wolves, and rend flesh with wicked teeth:
> Often they are seen slaying sheep that moan in pain.
> But when men raise the hue and cry,
> Or scare them with staves and swords, they take flight [like true wolves].

But whilst they act thus, they leave their true [i.e. their own]
bodies
And give orders [i.e. to their women] not to move them.
If this happens [i.e. that they are moved], they can no longer
return to them [i.e. their own bodies]
If any man harm them or any wound pierce their flesh,
The wounds can be seen plainly in their own bodies:
Thus their companions can see the raw flesh in their jaws
Of their true body: and we all wonder at the sight.[53]

In the Book of Ballymote version of the 'wonders of Ireland' we get
the same information about Irishmen who can turn themselves into
werewolves, except that there it is specified that they come from the
kingdom of Osraige. The narrative ends with the comment that if their
bodies are moved, they will not be able to return to them. However,
another vernacular Irish text on the 'wonders of Ireland', in TCD MS
H 3. 17, gives us the additional information concerning the Ossory
werewolves. This text claims that if they are wounded while in the form
of a wolf, those wounds will be visible when they are in human form, and
that the flesh which they devoured while in the form of wolves is visible
in their teeth.[54] Thus the H 3. 17 version is here closer to our Latin
text than is the Book of Ballymote version, but elsewhere *De mirabilibus*
is closer to the Book of Ballymote, such as with the Tara-related
wonders discussed above.[55] The case of the Ossory werewolves shows
that the concept of Irish werewolves is well established in the various
versions of the 'wonders of Ireland' texts extant in both Latin and
the vernacular. John Carey has written on the diffuse and widespread
allusions to werewolves in vernacular Irish narrative literature, legal
texts, glossaries and homilies.[56] The association (perhaps metaphorical)
of 'wolfing' or 'wolfish behaviour' with the *fían*, or warrior-bands, of
medieval Irish literature has been outlined in an influential article by
Kim McCone.[57] Furthermore, Irish werewolves have been a popular
topic of discussion for scholars beyond the discipline of Irish Studies,

[53] *The Writings*, ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 62–3, lines 96–109 (glosses incorporated in square brackets).

[54] *Leabhar Breatnach*, ed. and trans. Todd, pp. 204–5.

[55] In H 3. 17 the wonders of the *Lia Fáil*, the dwarf's grave, and the boy who begot a child, are not given together in the text: ibid., p. 199.

[56] John Carey, 'Werewolves in Ireland', *CMCS* 44 (2002), 37–72.

[57] Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *CMCS* 12 (1986), 1–22.

particularly on account of the use of the 'wonders of Ireland' texts by two non-Irish authors, namely Gerald of Wales and the Norwegian author of the *Konungs Skuggsjá*.[58]   For example, Caroline Walker Bynum's *Metamorphosis and Identity* takes Gerald's werewolves as its starting point for a wider consideration of concepts of change, hybridity and metamorphosis in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[59]

In *Metamorphosis and Identity*, as in a number of her other works, Bynum briefly alludes to the Irish treatise *Scéla na esérgi*, which we have already encountered in our consideration of conjoined twins.[60]   In *Scéla na esérgi*, the mention of werewolves, or at least of transfiguration into a dog- or wolf-shaped form, comes in the context of an extended apophatic discussion of the nature of resurrection:

> Ind esergi coitchenn tra bias tall i llo brátha, ni hinund 7 ind esergi dianid ainm isind augtartas *prestrigia*, .i. esergi fuathaigthi, amal in pitóndacht. Nó ni inund 7 ind esergi dianid ainm *reuolutio* .i. tathchor na hanma i corpaib ecsamlaib iar ndesmirecht na tathcorthe. Nó ind esérgi dianid ainm *metaformatio* .i. tarmchrutad, iar ndesmirecht na conricht. Nó ni inu[n]d 7 ind esérgi díanid ainm *subductio* .i. fothudchestu .i. amal bíte lucht ind remeca. Nó ind esérgi dianid ainm *suscitatio* .i. todúscud marb tria mírbail, iar ndesmirecht Lazáir.

> The universal resurrection, therefore, that will be there on Judgement Day is not identical with the resurrection which is called in the authority *praestrigia*, i.e. false resurrection like necromancy. Nor is it identical with the resurrection which is called *reuolutio*, i.e. the return of the soul in different bodies following the example of the reincarnated;

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[58]John J. O'Meara, ed., 'Giraldus Cambrensis, *In Topographia Hibernie*. Text of the First Recension', *PRIA* 52C (1948–50), 113–78; id., trans., *Gerald of Wales. The History and Topography of Ireland* (London, 1982); L. Holm-Olsen, ed., *Konungs skuggsjá* (Oslo, 1983); Laurence Marcellus Larson, trans., *The King's Mirror (Speculum Regale — Konungs Skuggsjá)*, Scandinavian Monographs 3 (New York, 1917). On the relationship between the Irish material and *Konungs skuggsjá*, see Kuno Meyer, 'The Irish *mirabilia* in the Norse "Speculum Regale"', *Ériu* 4 (1910), 1–16.

[59]See above, n. 3. In this regard we might think also of the interest in cynocephali, or dog-headed people, in Middle Irish texts: see for example Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, p. 95.

[60]Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 18. See also her *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), p. 129.

nor with the resurrection which is called *metaformatio*, i.e. transfiguration, following the example of the wolf-shaped. Nor is it identical with the resurrection which is called *subductio*, i.e. pulling under, i.e. like the category of the prematurely dead; nor with the resurrection which is called *suscitatio*, i.e. resuscitating the dead through a miracle, following the example of Lazarus.[61]

Scéla na esérgi attests to the sophistication of Irish learned discourse on types of transformation and their theological significance. This is perhaps reflected (to a lesser extent) in the emphasis in *De mirabilibus* on the temporary nature of the transformation from man to wolf, as seen in the repeated references to the human bodies which have been left behind as being the 'real' or 'true' bodies of the wolf-men.

The Ship in the Air

To give one final example from the text of a motif which occurs widely in early Irish literature, we can turn to the reference to the ship in the air:

> *De naui que uisa est in aere*
> Rex fuit in theatro Scottorum tempore quodam
> Turbis cum uariis, cum milibus ordine pulcris.
> Ecce repente uident decurrere in aere nauim,
> De qua post piscem tunc unus iecerat hastam:
> Que ruit in terram, quam natans ille retraxit.
> Ista quis auditurus erit sine laude tonantis?

> *Of a ship that was seen in the air*
> There was once a king of the Irish at a show
> With a great throng, thousands in fair array.
> Suddenly they see a ship sail past in the air,
> And from the ship a man then cast a spear after a fish:
> The spear struck the ground, and he, swimming, plucked it out.

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[61] *Lebor na hUidre*, ed. Best and Bergin, p. 87, lines 2702–2710 (my translation). The interesting vocabulary of transformation and resurrection in *Scéla na esérgi* has been discussed in some detail by Carey, 'Werewolves in Ireland', and Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought'.

> Who can hear this wonder, and not praise the Lord of
> Thunder?[62]

Again this motif has been the subject of a study by John Carey, in which
he showed the range of its occurrences in medieval Irish annals and
narrative texts.[63] Located variously in Tara or Clonmacnoise, the story
is embellished to varying degrees. As Carey has noted, the appearance
of the aerial ship is linked in one Middle Irish text to the beheading of
Ambacuc at Tailtiu, after which he managed to live — headless — for
seven years. A headless man also appears in *De mirabilibus*, again living
for seven years, and begging for food with an open throat.[64] Similarly,
this botched beheading appears in both annalistic and narrative sources,
so again we have a 'wonder' which would be immediately familiar to an
Irish audience.[65] The ship in the air motif, and the man living headless
for seven years, both occur in the Book of Ballymote and the H 3. 17
'wonders of Ireland' texts.[66] It is clear that our poet selects episodes
which are found elsewhere in Irish literature: he draws primarily on
items which are found in other related 'wonders of Ireland' texts, but
they are also deeply embedded in other historical, theological and
literary texts. There is a paradoxical sense of the wonders being familiar,
but it is the manner in which they are juxtaposed and framed which
suggests a number of possible specific contexts and audiences for *De
mirabilibus*.

[62] *The Writings,* ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 64–5, lines 128–33. I suggest emending
Gwynn's translation of *in theatro*, 'at a show', to 'at an assembly'. Cf. Ludwig Bieler, ed.,
The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh, SLH 10 (Dublin, 1979), p. 193, where *in theatrum* is
glossed as *i n-oenach*.

[63] John Carey, 'Aerial Ships and Underwater Monasteries: the Evolution of a Monastic
Marvel', *PHCC* 12 (1992), 16–28. More recently, David Woods, 'On "Ships in the Air" in
749', *Peritia* 14 (2000), 429–30, has argued that Irish annals which refer to a ship seen
in the air in 749 in fact record a sighting of the aurora borealis. However, it requires
an unjustifiable amount of emendation to turn *naues in aere uisae sunt cum suis uiris* into
his suggested *nubes uisae sunt conuirescere*, and it is far more probable that the annals refer
(however unhistorically) to the topos of the ship in the air.

[64] *Decollatus erat quidam languore doloris./Postea septenos fertur uixisse per annos:/Gutture
namque miser poscebat aperto alimentum*; 'A man's head was once struck off, with lingering
pain:/'Tis said that he lived seven years afterwards,/For the unhappy wretch begged food
with an open throat.': *The Writings*, ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 64–5, lines 110–12. See also
Carey, 'The Finding', p. 9.

[65] For example, AT, *CS*, s.a. 548.

[66] *Leabhar Bretnach*, ed. and trans. Todd, pp. 210–13 (Ballymote, ship in the air), 211 (H
3. 17, ship in the air), 206–7 (Ballymote, headless man), 206 (H 3. 17, headless man). In
both cases, *De mirabilibus* is closer in its wording to H 3. 17 than to the Book of Ballymote.

'wonders of ireland' and 'portents at christ's birth'

It was noted above, in the discussion of the opening verses *de signis et prodigiis*, that there is a version of the poetic vernacular text on the 'portents at Christ's birth' preserved in the Book of Uí Mhaine. The poem, beginning *Inn-aidchi geini Crīst cain*, is found on fol. 116v in the hand of the main scribe, Adam Cusin.[67] Although *de signis et prodigiis* and *Inn-aidchi geini Crīst cain* contain some of the same episodes, such as the sun appearing in the middle of the night, as discussed above, they are not particularly closely related in terms of the family of texts pertaining to the 'portents at Christ's birth'.[68] However, in the same quaternion of the Book of Uí Mhaine, in the hand of the same scribe, is a late Middle Irish poem on the 'wonders of Ireland', beginning *Inganta Ēirend uili* (fol. 115v).[69] Like *De mirabilibus*, the poem selects some of the same *mirabilia* found in the other 'wonders of Ireland' texts, and reworks them in poetic form. In this case the poem is in the vernacular, rather than Latin, and there is relatively little overlap in the way that the wonders are recounted: the 'ship in the air' episode is not included here; neither do we find the Ossory werewolves. Of the three Tara-based wonders — the *Lia Fáil*, the boy who begets a child, and the dwarf's grave — only the latter is included in the poem:

> Loigi inn abaic a Temraigh
> findat ūaibh in t-aes teglaigh
> trī troigid and go fāilidh
> d'fir mōr is do maethnāidhin.

> The grave of the dwarf in Tara
> let the people of the household discover
> there are three feet in it, joyfully
> for a grown man and for a tender infant.[70]

As with the 'portents' poem, the poetic 'wonders of Ireland' text in the Book of Uí Mhaine is not particularly closely related to *De mirabilibus* in terms of the wider textual family. Despite this, it is worth considering the juxtaposition of a poem on the 'wonders of Ireland' and a poem on the

[67] William O'Sullivan, 'The Book of Uí Maine formerly the Book of Ó Dubhagáin: Scripts and Structure', *Éigse* 23 (1989), 151–66, at 155 and 165.

[68] Ivanov, 'On the Later Development', pp. 72–3 and 75–6.

[69] 'Irische Mirabilia', ed. Meyer, 'Mitteilungen', pp. 23–4.

[70] Ibid., p. 23, §2 (my translation).

'portents at Christ's birth', in a vernacular context, since it mirrors the juxtaposition of *de signis et prodigiis* and *de rebus Hibernie admirandis* in a Latin context. In the Book of Uí Mhaine, the two vernacular poems do not follow directly one from the other. They are separated by two other poems: the first a metrical glossary beginning *Forus focul* (fol. 116r),[71] and the second a poem on the origins of liturgical chant, beginning *Mac atcuala is domain tair* (fol. 116v).[72]

Brian Ó Cuív noted that the juxtaposition of *Mac atcuala is domain tair* and the poem on the 'portents at Christ's birth' was likely to be due to the two poems' shared interest in Christ's nativity (the poem on the origins of liturgical chant opens with an account of Herod's decision to kill the Christ-child), but that their presence in that particular gathering is incongruous, since it 'otherwise contains secular matter, much of it related to Irish historical tradition'.[73] I would suggest that the presence of *Inn-aidchi geini Crīst cain* in the same quaternion as the poem beginning *Inganta Ēirend uili* is not accidental. I would also suggest that a poem on 'signs and wonders' pertaining to Christ's birth and a poem on the 'wonders of Ireland' cannot be separated so distinctly as being 'religious' and 'secular' respectively. The 'wonders of Ireland', as we shall see, are not simply drawn from secular historical tradition, but rather are brought together to illustrate God's wondrous power. In this regard, we might also recall the manuscript contexts of *De mirabilibus*: we get only *de signis et prodigiis* in Lat. 4126, but elsewhere the manuscript contains Gerald's 'wonders of Ireland' text; we get both *de signis et prodigiis* and *de rebus Hibernie admirandis* in Lat. 11108, but its copy of the *Historia Brittonum* is of the Vatican recension which lacks the sections on *mirabilia*. Through presence and absence in the manuscripts, they preserve balanced offerings of 'signs and wonders' and 'wonders of Ireland'. Similarly, the Book of Uí Mhaine gives us both 'signs and wonders', in the form of *Inn-aidchi geini Crīst cain*, and also 'wonders of Ireland' in the form of *Inganta Ēirend uili*. That both types of texts are transmitted together in English and Irish manuscripts is noteworthy. Furthermore, as with the manuscripts in which *De*

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[71]*Forus focul* has been edited, though not using the Book of Uí Mhaine copy of the text, by Whitley Stokes, 'On the Metrical Glossaries of the Mediaeval Irish', *TPhS* 1891–4 (1893), 1–103.

[72]Brian Ó Cuív, 'St Gregory and St Dunstan in a Middle-Irish Poem on the Origins of Liturgical Chant', in *St Dunstan: his Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 273–97, with text and translation at 292–7.

[73]Ibid., p. 273.

mirabilibus is preserved, the Book of Uí Mhaine is a manuscript whose predominant thematic interests are historical and Insular: it contains genealogies of Irish royal dynasties and saints, and synthetic historical texts, and it also contains a copy of the Irish version of the *Historia Brittonum*, namely the *Lebor Bretnach* (fol. 35v), in a form which is very closely related to the copy in H 3. 17.[74] Despite textual and linguistic differences, the thematic similarities and the comparable juxtaposition of texts in the English and Irish manuscripts is striking.

<div align="center">ADAPTATION AND AUDIENCE</div>

The other poems in the corpus attributed to Patrick of Dublin are accomplished poetic works. Unlike *De tribus habitaculis animae*, the prose text also attributed (wrongly, I would argue), to Patrick of Dublin, the corpus of poetry abounds in rich and unusual vocabulary, some of it 'hisperic', some of it Greek or Greek-derived.[75] However, the poems *Mentis in excessu*, *Constet quantos honos* and *Occidet heu cicius pictor quam pagina picta* are all technically accomplished works in terms of metre, rhyme and rhetorical sophistication. *De mirabilibus* is not: indeed, it is stylistically inelegant. For example, the author uses the historical tenses more or less interchangeably in an awkward attempt to make the poem work metrically. Gwynn attempted to explain this stylistic incongruity by suggesting that *De mirabilibus* was a youthful composition by Patrick, and that his Latin style had improved with age. This seems unsatisfactory, to say the least. It is possible that the rough style is a deliberate imitation of the so-called 'Loire school' of poets, including Marbod of Rennes, whose poetry is preserved in Cotton Titus D. xxiv alongside *De mirabilibus*.

It is equally possible that *De mirabilibus* is not written by the same author as the other Latin poems, which in turn are not by the same author as *De tribus habitaculis animae*. There is internal evidence which might hint that the author of *De mirabilibus* was not Patrick of Dublin. One of the wonders included in the poem is that of the incorrupt body of St Cianán. We are told:

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[74]One notable difference, however, is the Book of Uí Mhaine's additional interest in language and grammar (thus *Sanas Cormaic* at fol. 119, *Auraicept na nÉces* at fol. 139, and the metrical glossary, *Forus focul*, mentioned above), which is not evidenced in the English manuscripts.

[75]Boyle, 'The Authorship', pp. 58–60.

Sanctus in hac patria quidam uir nomine Kyenan
Permanet incorruptus, habens nunc integra membra:
Mortuus ante tamen quingentos circiter annos.
Eiusdemque loci defuncti quique putrescunt.

A holy man in this our country named Kyenan
Remains incorrupt, with all his limbs whole,
Though he has lain dead for some five hundred years:
Yet all the dead in the same burial-place rot away.[76]

This gives us some evidence for a rough dating of the text. According to the testimony of medieval Irish annals and martyrologies, St Cianán died on 24th November 489.[77] If he had been dead *circiter* ('about, close to, not far from') five hundred years, that gives us a date of composition somewhere around 990, perhaps a bit earlier or later. On the one hand, five hundred is a round number, so we would not want to take it too literally; on the other, *sescentos* ('six hundred years') would also have worked metrically, so perhaps the figure of five hundred years might suggest that the text was composed before the late-eleventh-century date required by Gwynn's biographical narrative for Patrick of Dublin. The anecdote about St Cianán is not included in the Book of Ballymote version of the 'wonders of Ireland'. It is included in the H 3. 17 version, but without the dating clause,[78] suggesting that the idea that the author is writing c. 500 years after Cianán's death is particular to *De mirabilibus* and not a general convention of these texts.[79]

The 'wonders of Ireland' texts are only one expression of the widespread interest in medieval Ireland in the wondrous as evidence of God's marvellous power. The Irish wonders and miracles were gathered together from the corpus of Latin and vernacular literature: narrative prose, homilies, hagiography, annals, natural history. That corpus of literature itself has a rich and complex inheritance, both Irish and non-Irish, and we have seen how it internalizes and rearticulates ideas from classical and late antique authors. It is likely that *De mirabilibus* draws on one or more pre-existing 'wonders of Ireland' text(s), either

[76] *The Writings,* ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 62–3, lines 92–5.

[77] See for example AU, s.a. 489. Cf. *Félire Oengusso Céli Dé: the Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society 29 (London, 1905), p. 244.

[78] *Leabhar Breathnach*, ed. and trans. Todd, p. 221.

[79] Kuno Meyer, writing before Gwynn's attribution of the poem to Patrick of Dublin, dated *De mirabilibus* to c. 1000 on the basis of the Cianán passage alone, but it might be wise to be a little more cautious: 'The Irish Mirabilia', p. 3.

Latin or vernacular. The subsequent transmission of the source text(s) is also witnessed in our vernacular prose *mirabilia* texts in the Book of Ballymote and H 3. 17 and in the vernacular poem in the Book of Uí Mhaine. Our poem is unique in medieval Ireland — as far as we know — in recasting these elements in Latin verse.[80]

It is significant that — with the exception of Tara and its roaring stone — the poet removes the references to place which characterise the extant vernacular versions of the 'wonders of Ireland'. Our werewolves are no longer of the kingdom of Ossory, but are now merely of the race of the Irish. Our aerial ship no longer appears in Tara or Cloncmacnoise, as with the two traditions which operate in the medieval Irish versions described by John Carey:[81] it appears at an unidentified assembly. We are given the names of saints in the hagiographical miracles — Patrick, Cianán, Colmán — but not their locations. These wonders are shorn of their toponymic resonance. They are dislocated from their specific geographical setting, and are made common to the island of Ireland. One reason for this might be that the text was written for a non-Irish audience, who might be less familiar with, or interested in, the specifics of Irish geography. The idea that the text was written for such an audience is not contingent on acceptance of Gwynn's attribution of the text to Patrick of Dublin, and of Gwynn's biographical narrative of Patrick's career. However, from the evidence of the extant manuscripts, it would seem that *De mirabilibus* was not known in England before the late twelfth century. By that time, of course, Ireland was of immense interest to the English: first, in ecclesiastical circles, through the Cistercians, the Augustinian Canons, and others who had Irish daughter-houses, and connections both formal and informal with Irish religious foundations; and second, through the secular connections established across the Irish Sea by Anglo-Norman families maintaining estates acquired in Ireland through invasion and conquest. At this point, with the concomitant rise of texts on the 'wonders of Ireland', including Gerald's *Topographia*, it is not surprising that *De mirabilibus* finds a ready English audience. Before then, we might find its audience closer to home.

[80]But in the Early Modern period, Roderic O'Flaherty produced a Latin verse rendering of the 'wonders' poem in the Book of Uí Mhaine, in his *Ogygia* (Dublin, 1685), pp. 290–1.

[81]Carey, 'Aerial Ships', p. 18.

In this regard, we might consider the descriptions of Ireland as 'our country'. In the opening lines of the Irish section of the poem, already cited above,[82] the author states:

> Having thus told of all these signs and wonders
> I shall now describe the marvels of our country,
> Which is known to all men by its own name, Hibernia.

Our reading of these lines has implications for our understanding of the text's audience: *I* will describe (*describam*) the miracles of *our* country (*patrie miracula nostre*) might indicate an Irishman speaking to other Irishmen about the wondrous nature of their country. This depends on whether the first person plural should be taken as rhetorical, the '*our* country' of the author being compared to or contrasted with the country of the audience, or whether it indicates a common country for both author and audience, thus contrasting with the author's opening first person singular (*I* will describe our [shared] country). The poet then proceeds to give examples of these marvels which, I have argued, would have been immediately familiar to his audience from numerous other Irish texts, covering a wide span of genres and functions. Why does he strip them of their geographical settings? I can think of four possible explanations, although there may be others. First, I have just alluded to the repeated references to Ireland as 'our country', and to this we might add that the author refers to things 'in this country' (*in hac patria*) and 'within our borders' (*finibus in nostris*); he speaks of the king of the Irish (*rex Scottorum*); of the 'Irish people' (*gens Scottorum*); and the only specific placename he mentions is Tara, seat of the high kings of Ireland, in relation to the *Lia Fáil*, which confers sovereignty on true kings. There is perhaps a political agenda underlying this removal of local concerns and of local or regional identity.

Second, poetic considerations may underlie the absence of geographical specificity. The author might have encountered metrical and linguistic difficulties in incorporating Irish toponyms into Latin verse: the rough style of the poem has already been noted, and the author seems not to have been particularly accomplished. Although much earlier in date, we might note the statement of the author of the *Additamenta* to Tírechán's *Collectanea* about the lack of established Latin forms for Irish names.[83] The choice may, then, have been practical, or

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[82] See above, p. 237.
[83] Ed. and trans. Bieler, *The Patrician Documents*, pp. 178–9: *Finiunt haec pauca per Scotticam inperfecte scripta, non quod ego non potuissem Romana condere lingua, sed quod uix in sua Scoti<c>a*

it may have been aesthetic: to think of the Patrician corpus, one might note that St Patrick himself, surely immersed in Irish placenames, uses none at all, and refers only to *Hiberione*, 'Ireland'.[84] Perhaps in this poem, attributed in Cotton Titus D. xxiv to a *sanctus Patricius episcopus*, there is a conscious imitation of Patrick's style.

A third possibility is that the audience is primarily Hiberno-Scandinavian. Indeed, this could also account for the later dissemination of the 'wonders of Ireland' material into Old Norse literature, as evidenced by the *Konungs Skuggsjá*, which similarly contains relatively few Irish placenames. If we accept the internal dating, which suggests a late-tenth- or eleventh-century date for the composition of the poem, this would fit into a context of the Christianisation of Hiberno-Scandinavian communities, and the possible adoption and adaptation of Irish Christian literary culture within their ecclesiastical foundations. In this regard we might think of other examples of Hiberno-Scandinavians being brought fully, if anachronistically, into the fold of Gaelic ecclesiastical culture, such as the idea that St Patrick converted the Scandinavians of Dublin to Christianity.[85]

A final possibility is that there might be a theological view underpinning the lack of specificity. Examining the concluding passage of the poem, we can detect what is perhaps the ultimate purpose of the composition:

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hae fabulae agnosci possunt; sin autem alias per Latinam degestae fuissent, nontam incertus fuisset aliquis in eis quam imperitus, quid legisset aut quam linguam sonasset pro habundantia Scotaicorum nominum non habentium qualitatem, 'Here end these few pieces, written imperfectly in Irish. Not that I could not have penned them in the Roman language, but these stories are hardly intelligible even in Irish; had they, on the contrary, been told in Latin, one would not so much have been uncertain about them as left in the dark as to what one had read and what language had been used because of the great number of Irish names which have no established forms.'

[84]Ludwig Bieler, ed., *Libri epistolarum sancti Patricii episcopi. Introduction, Text and Commentary*, RIA Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources, Ancillary Publications 4 (Dublin, 1993). Of particular interest for the present discussion is his statement in the Letter to Coroticus that *Hiberionaci sumus*, 'we are Irish' (§17), which raises similar questions to our poem about who is meant by 'we'/'our'. I am grateful to Dr John Carey for this point.

[85]David N. Dumville, 'St Patrick and the Scandinavians of Dublin', in his *Saint Patrick A.D. 493–1993*, Studies in Celtic History 12 (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 259–64, at 260. It has even been suggested that the motif of St Patrick expelling venomous animals from Ireland (as found in Jocelin of Furness's Life of Patrick, and in Gerald's *Topographia*) might originate in an Old Norse etymology of Patrick as *padda* 'toad' + *reka* 'to expel': Meyer, 'The Irish Mirabilia', p. 4.

De admiratione Dei
Qui magis est mirus mirandis omnibus istis
Innumeris non mille modis, quibus omnibus unus
Cunta satis superat certe miracula nostra.
Scilicet angelicis quod tam uideatur acutis
Agminibus mirus deus, ut post milia multa
Non minus annorum mirentur ament et adorent
Quam cum principio ceperunt cernere primo:
Nam secus assiduo posset uilescere uisu.
Quid magis hoc mirum uel mirum equale uidetur?
Gloria sit patri, domino quoque gloria Christo,
Gloria spiritui sancto per secula cunta. Amen.

On the wonder of God
He is more wonderful than all these wonders
In countless ways, more than a thousand: in all of which
He easily surpasses all our marvels.
For God is known to the bright host of angels
As wonderful, so wonderful that after many thousand years
They cease not to marvel, to love, to worship
As when they first gazed on Him at the beginning of time:
For otherwise He might grow common by constant sight.
What can seem equal in wonder or be greater than this?
Let there be glory to the Father, glory to Christ the Lord,
Glory to the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.[86]

This is a versified version of a topos which we also witness in *De tribus habitaculis animae*, where the author tells us that God's

[...] secreta mirabilia uidentibus ea semper noua et mira sunt, et non plus cum incipiunt uideri pariunt stuporem cernentibus quam post mille annos et milies mille, et cum angeli ab initio mundi ea soliti sunt uidere, tamen non minus hodie admirantur ea quam in primo die, alioquin dudum coram angelis assiduo uidendi usu uilescerent.

[...] wondrous secrets are always new and wonderful to those who see them, and they create no more wonder when they begin to be seen than for those who observe them for a thousand years, and a thousand thousand: and while the

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[86] *The Writings,* ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 68–71, lines 185–95.

angels are accustomed to seeing these since the beginning
of the world, nevertheless they admire them no less today
than on the first day — otherwise, from being constantly
accustomed to seeing them, they would long ago have
become base in the sight of the angels.[87]

The underlying message of *De tribus habitaculis animae*, which derives its
world view from Christian-Platonism, is that God is unknowable in this
world, but that we can perceive, as if transfused through narrow cracks,
dim particles of knowledge here on earth, through contemplating his
wonder. One might argue that our author is trying to take familiar
wonders, known to Irish audiences through a wide variety of texts,
and use them to show how God has favoured Ireland with momentary
glimpses of the vast unknowableness of his wonder.[88] Perhaps the
author strips them of their local connections because they are common
to all Irishmen, and are evidence of the universality of God's power.
None of these possibilities is mutually exclusive; neither, in the absence
of further evidence, are any of them provable, although further
investigation of the 'wonders of Ireland' genre will surely yield new
information.

I have argued that *De mirabilibus* encapsulates and expresses the
tension between the marvellous and the familiar; the knowable and the
unknowable; the local and the national; the Latin and the vernacular;
the incorporation of non-Irish sources into Irish literary culture; an
Irish text preserved by English scribes. I also suggest, tentatively, that it
was originally written by an Irish author for an Irish audience, to remind
them not of their otherness, but of their commonality, and of their
shared participation in the wonders of Creation.

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[87] *The Writings*, ed. and trans. Gwynn, pp. 116–18, lines 152–7; here trans. by Boyle, '*De tribus habitaculis*' (forthcoming). As argued by J. W. Gray in a sceptical review of Gwynn, *The Writings*, this single instance of 'quotation' from *De tribus habitaculis* (if indeed it is such and not simply a common topos) cannot be taken as evidence that both texts were written by the same author: *Irish Historical Studies* 10 (1956), 104–6.

[88] A similar point was argued by Kathleen Hughes in her review of Gwynn, *The Writings*, in *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957), 122–8, at 127: 'With all due respect to Father Gwynn's view that Patrick's *Mirabilia* make little or no effort to teach a moral lesson (p. 12), it seems to me that the bishop's purpose in writing was a didactic one: God has provided these signs and wonders *ut terreret eos quos illa videre volebat*, and the final and greatest wonder of all is Himself, *qui magis est mirus mirandis omnibus*'.