

‘THE EVIL EYE’ IN EARLY IRISH LITERATURE AND LAW

THE BELIEF that harm is caused by looking in a certain way at somebody or something is generally known as the belief in ‘the evil eye’. This connection between eyes and a supernatural¹ way of causing harm is well-known in Irish texts. Alexander Haggerty Krappe devoted an essay to the evil eye in Irish folklore;² the present article deals with medieval representations. Part I gives a survey of the diverse terminology and wide-ranging descriptions which reflect the evil eye in early Irish texts; Part II contains an edition, translation and discussion of a section of legal commentary on the evil eye attached to a quotation from an Old Irish law-text.³

PART I: EARLY IRISH EXAMPLES OF THE EVIL EYE⁴

Introduction

In Book XXVIII of his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD) poses a question which he characterises as most important but never to be settled: ‘Have words and formulated incantations any effect?’. He comments that very wise people reject this belief as individuals, whereas people collectively believe it unconsciously.⁵ In order to prove his point, Pliny lists a few rhetorical questions:

¹The term ‘supernatural’ is a modern Western Christian term and concept, which I use in this article as a tool to describe the a-empirical dimension of life: phenomena that are beyond the empirically perceptible world. This a-empirical dimension is the crucial part of religious belief systems and, as such, references to this dimension are found in literary texts. It should be noted that adherents to a certain belief system do not always distinguish between the ‘natural’, or empirical, and ‘supernatural’, or a-empirical, dimensions of life; to them, such a dichotomy would seem artificial. In the case of early Irish texts, however, in which different worldviews are expressed, the term ‘supernatural’ can be a helpful tool to describe elements from these worldviews. ‘The supernatural’ is used here as a neutral term which can be applied to phenomena not only from a Christian context (such as, for instance, ‘miracles’) but also from a pre- or non-Christian context (such as, for instance, ‘magic’ or ‘sorcery’).

²‘The Myth of Balor with the Evil Eye and the Lay of Yonec’, in his collection of essays entitled *Balor with the evil eye. Studies in Celtic and French literature* (Columbia University 1927) 1–43. Krappe (4–5) mentions the medieval version of the tale about Balor (see below), but his main interest is the reconstruction of a kind of original myth based on modern Irish folklore tales and older sources from an internationally widely distributed provenance.

³Jacqueline Borsje is responsible for Part I, Fergus Kelly for Part II.

⁴An earlier version of Part I of this article was read at the 11th International Congress of Celtic Studies in Cork, 1999. I am indebted to John Carey, Proinsias Mac Cana, Micheál Ó Ceartúil, Jan Platvoet, Tom Berger, Gregory Toner and participants in the Congress for their valuable suggestions. Translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

⁵*Naturalis Historia* (henceforth abbreviated as NH), XXVIII.III.10. Books XXVIII–XXXII were edited and translated by W. H. S. Jones, *Pliny. Natural History* viii (London, Cambridge (Mass.) 1963, repr. 1989).

Why on the first day of the year do we wish one another cheerfully a happy and prosperous New Year? ... Why do we meet the evil eye (*effascinationes*) by a special attitude of prayer, some invoking the Greek Nemesis, for which purpose there is at Rome an image of the goddess on the Capitol, although she has no Latin name?⁶ Why on mentioning the dead do we protest that their memory is not being attacked by us? Why do we believe that in all matters the odd numbers are more powerful, as is implied by the attention paid to critical days in fevers? ... Why do we say 'Good health' to those who sneeze?⁷

Pliny adds that it is clear that scrupulous actions, even without words, have their powers.⁸

The practices and beliefs that are Pliny's concern are generally referred to as 'superstitions'. This is a judgmental term for specific acts and words that are based upon belief in a supernatural order of the world. In order to influence life, people exercise not only physical powers; they may also address the metaphysical dimension of life, to bring about good or bad things. The question of truth in this matter is left aside here; this article only describes certain belief systems concerning the evil eye.

Beliefs and practices connected with the evil eye have been found in many countries.⁹ Belief in the evil eye is more than five thousand years old, as it is mentioned in Sumerian texts from the third or fourth millennium BC.¹⁰ It is not only an old but also a persistent belief: for instance, recently (September 1999) I heard about the mother of a friend, who had a squint in one eye in her youth. The pupil of one eye was always in the corner next to her nose. She was believed to have the evil eye: people would make an apotropaic gesture towards her in order to

⁶The translator (W. H. S. Jones) uses the verb 'to meet' in the translation (of Latin *occurro*) in the sense of 'to (seek to) obviate, resist, oppose, counteract' (Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *occurro* II.A). For Nemesis as a protecting deity against the evil eye, see Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *The Evil Eye. An account of this ancient & widespread superstition* (London 1895) 14, 16 n. 35, 21 (henceforth: Elworthy 1). Elworthy has cast his net very widely for his collection of beliefs and practices connected with the evil eye. His book should be read with a critical eye.

⁷NH XXVIII.V.22–23.

⁸*Ibid.*, 24.

⁹See Elworthy 1; Elworthy, 'Evil Eye', in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* v (Edinburgh, New York 1937) 608–15 (henceforth: Elworthy 2); Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye. A Folklore Casebook* (New York, London 1981), and the bibliographies in these works.

¹⁰See Stephen Langdon, 'An Incantation in the "House of Light" against the Evil Eye', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 39–40. See further a recent article by J. N. Ford, 'Ninety-Nine by the Evil Eye and One from Natural Causes': KTU² 1.96 in its Near Eastern Context', *Ugarit-Forschungen* 30 (1998) 201–78. I am grateful to Kevin Cathcart for sending me this article.

ward off the harmful effects of the eye. This happened in the thirties of the twentieth century.

A wide variety of characteristics of beliefs and practices connected with the evil eye can be found. As in the example of my friend's mother, remarkable or abnormal eyes, like squinting or differently coloured eyes, are sometimes said to be evil eyes.¹¹ Specific persons may be thought to possess the evil eye and to bewitch either on purpose — out of malevolence — or inadvertently.¹² For instance, witches are often mentioned as malevolent possessors of this power.¹³ Unfortunate possessors of the evil eye include fathers who are believed to have cast it upon their children¹⁴ and farmers who are held to have bewitched their own cattle.¹⁵ Certain types of animal are said to possess the evil eye.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is also assumed that anyone can cast the evil eye either inadvertently or on purpose, for instance, when one admires a beautiful sight without the right precautions or when someone looks with envy at someone or something.¹⁷ The evil is thought to be caused by a single glance in admiration or envy, with or without accompanying words,¹⁸ or to be done by a fixed gaze, often in envy, or anger.¹⁹ Deities and demons may also cast an evil eye upon humans.²⁰ In general, it is believed that anything desirable, animate or inanimate, can come under the spell of the evil eye, but blooming life, as represented in babies and young cattle, is thought to be especially vulnerable to its harmful glances.²¹ Disease, destruction, and death are attributed to the evil eye.²²

¹¹See, for instance, Elworthy 2, 610; and Michel Meslin, 'Eye', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* v (New York, London 1987) 236–39, at 238; Louis C. Jones, 'The Evil Eye Among European-Americans', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 150–68, at 152.

¹²Elworthy 1, 32–3.

¹³Elworthy 2, 609.

¹⁴Elworthy 1, 9; Elworthy 2, 611; A. Stewart Woodburne, 'The Evil Eye in South Indian Folklore', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 55–65, at 57.

¹⁵See Elworthy 2, 611; Eugene S. McCartney, 'Praise and Dispraise in Folklore', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 9–38, at 24.

¹⁶Elworthy 2, 610; Woodburne, 'The Evil Eye', 56, 62.

¹⁷Elworthy 1, 1–43; Elworthy 2, 608, 611; McCartney, 'Praise and Dispraise', *passim*; Bess Allen Donaldson, 'The Evil Eye in Iran', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 66–77.

¹⁸Donaldson, 'The Evil Eye', 69 (Iran); Thomas Davidson, 'Scoring Aboon the Breath: Defeating the Evil Eye', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 143–9, at 145–6 (Scotland).

¹⁹Rev. D. S. Oyler, 'The Shilluk's Belief in the Evil Eye', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 78–85, at 80, 82 (Sudan); Jones, 'The Evil Eye', 156.

²⁰McCartney, 'Praise and Dispraise', 22; Aaron Brav, 'The Evil Eye Among the Hebrews', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 44–54, at 49; Woodburne, 'The Evil Eye', 56.

²¹Elworthy 1, 10; McCartney, 'Praise and Dispraise', 12–17; Jamal Karam Harfouche, 'The Evil Eye and Infant Health in Lebanon', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 86–106, at 90–91; A. Murgoci, 'The Evil Eye in Roumania, and Its Antidotes', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 124–9, at 125.

²²McCartney, 'Praise and Dispraise', *passim*.

There are several ways in which people try to protect themselves and others from this evil.²³ For example, one can wear amulets, sometimes conspicuously attached on the clothes in order to draw the attention of the evil eye to the amulet instead of to the person wearing it. At other times, the amulet is worn under the clothes as a secret device against harmful looks.²⁴ Sometimes people resort to natural products, such as garlic,²⁵ to banish the danger. Furthermore, verbal expressions are used to ward off dangerous glances: for instance, the endangered person or object is belittled, abused or blessed.²⁶ Incantations²⁷ or prayers²⁸ are spoken in order to shield oneself from the evil eye. Gestures, sometimes obscene, are made to protect oneself.²⁹ Saliva is also used:³⁰ for instance, one spits (thrice) on the person or object that is in danger.

One could spend a lifetime and more working at a subject like the evil eye.³¹ However, my aim is a short survey of early Irish expressions and forms of the evil eye. When relevant, examples from other literatures will be adduced. Dangerous eyes in early Irish literature will be discussed in this part of the article under the following headings: 1. the destructive eye; 2. the angry eye; 3. casting the evil eye; 4. envy and the evil eye, and 5. protection against the evil eye.

1. *The Destructive Eye*

The phenomenon generally known as the ‘evil eye’ may also be indicated by several other designations. Examples include ‘sight’ (Sanskrit),³² ‘the salty eye’, ‘the eye that wounds’, ‘the narrow eye’ (Iranian),³³ and ‘the empty eye’ or ‘the envious eye’ (Lebanese).³⁴ An important designation in Irish is *súil milledach*, ‘a destructive eye’.³⁵ The most famous person with such an eye in early Irish literature is Balor, king of the Fomoire, described in *Cath Maige Tuired* as follows:

²³See furthermore Elworthy 1, *passim*; Elworthy 2, 611–15 and the various contributions to the collection of essays in Dundes, *The evil eye*.

²⁴For descriptions and portrayals of amulets, see Elworthy 1, 121–232.

²⁵McCartney, ‘Praise and Dispraise’, 14–15, 26–7. The examples are Mediterranean.

²⁶McCartney, ‘Praise and Dispraise’, *passim*.

²⁷See, for instance, the Sumerian example referred to above (Langdon, ‘An Incantation’, 40), and Iranian incantations in Donaldson, ‘The Evil Eye’, 74–5.

²⁸There is an invocation for protection against the evil eye in the Jewish morning prayer (Brav, ‘The Evil Eye’, 47).

²⁹Elworthy 1, 233–76.

³⁰McCartney (‘Praise and Dispraise’, 12–16, 19, 25) gives examples from Rome, Turkey, Greece, northern Africa, Scotland and Ireland; Brav, ‘The Evil Eye’, 53, describes this practice in eastern European Jewish communities; Donaldson ‘The Evil Eye’, 71, in Iran; Giuseppe Pitrè (‘The Jettatura and the Evil Eye’, in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 130–142, at 136–7) in Italy.

³¹Compare the parody by Arnold van Gennep, ‘The Research Topic: Or, Folklore without End’ in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 3–8.

³²Woodburne, ‘The Evil Eye’, 57.

³³Donaldson, ‘The Evil Eye’, 67.

³⁴Harfouche, ‘The Evil Eye’, 88.

³⁵Compare Modern Irish *súil mhille*.

*Imma-comairnic de Luc γ di Bolur Birugderc esin cat[h]. Súil milldagach le suide. Ní ho(r)scailtie inn sóul acht i rroí catae nammá. Cetrar turcbaugh a malaig die shól conu drolum omlithi triena malaig. Slúoac[h] do-n-éceud darsan sól, nín-gépís fri hócco, cíe pidis lir ilmíl. Es de boí inn nem-sin fuirri(r) .i. druith a adhar bótar oc fulucht draígechtae. Tánic-seum γ ruderc tarsan fundéoic, co ndechaid dé en foulachtae fuithi gonid forsan súil dodecaid nem an foulachta fer sin.*³⁶

Lug and Balor of the piercing eye met in the battle. The latter had a destructive eye which was never opened except on a battlefield. Four men would raise the lid of the eye by a polished ring in its lid. The host which looked at that eye, even if they were many thousands in number, would offer no resistance to warriors. It had that poisonous power for this reason: once his father's druids were brewing magic. He came and looked over the window, and the fumes of the concoction affected the eye and the venomous power of the brew settled in it.³⁷

This is obviously a case in which an evil eye has remarkable characteristics. Balor has only one eye and it is huge. The text does not explicitly state Balor's one-eyedness, but one can deduce this from the fact that only one eye is poisoned when he looks at what the druids are doing. Moreover, when his opponent in battle, Lug, is talking to him, his eye has to be opened so that he can see who is addressing him.³⁸ The epithet *Birugderc* characterises his eye (*derc*) as 'sharp' (*berach*). The eye is furthermore *milledach*, 'destructive'. It has a Gorgon-like property: Medusa petrifies everybody with her glance just as Balor's eye paralyses people in battle.³⁹ If we believe Isidore of Seville, then they have more in common, because he writes that the Gorgons have only one eye which they use in turn.⁴⁰ This is, however, a characteristic of their sisters, the Graeae.

The symbolism of the motif of being one-eyed is complex. Its full discussion goes beyond the scope of this article; here, only a selected

³⁶Elizabeth A. Gray (ed.), *Cath Maige Tuired. The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, Irish Texts Society LII (London 1982, repr. 1995) 60 (§ 133). The text is an eleventh-century redaction of ninth-century material (*ibid.*, 11).

³⁷*Ibid.*, 61.

³⁸Gray (*Cath Maige Tuired*, 107) overlooks these details when she asserts that only one of Balor's eyes has a malefic power.

³⁹One could compare this with some Jewish examples, in which the evil eye petrifies (Brav, 'The Evil Eye', 48) or cripples people (Sarah's evil eye is said to have made Hagar's son Ishmael lame; cf. *ibid.*, 46).

⁴⁰Wallace Martin Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive origenium*, (Oxford 1911, repr. 1971) XI.III.29. Curiously, Meslin, 'Eye', 237, also ascribes the single eye to the three Gorgons.

number of interpretations are adverted to.⁴¹ Thomas O'Rahilly connects the image of 'one eye' with solar symbolism, and hence, in his view Balor is a Sun God, whose glance is a destructive missile.⁴² Hilda Ellis Davidson, however, argues convincingly against his line of reasoning.⁴³ Alan Dundes explains the singularity of the (evil) eye as symbolising 'the phallus (especially the glans), the vulva, or occasionally the anus'.⁴⁴ According to Mark Scowcroft, 'one-eyedness' stands for (mantic) knowledge or inspiration.⁴⁵ Kim McCone argues that one-eyedness is a symbol of warfare, and that the ferocious glare of a fighter is enhanced if such a warrior has only one, sometimes huge, eye.⁴⁶ Michel Meslin discusses the supernatural power of the one-eyed person and suggests that the reduction of vision to a single eye increases the intensity of the gaze.⁴⁷

Symbolism is always contextual and returning to the context of Balor's eye, it seems that in this case McCone's interpretation is most suitable. As Balor's eye is only opened on a battlefield, the eye specifically serves as a weapon in battle. An interesting detail is that Balor's eye affects multitudes of warriors, and is therefore quite useful in warfare.⁴⁸ Scowcroft notes a possible parallel from Nordic mythology:⁴⁹ the one-eyed God Odin is described as being capable of performing a battle-spell, which put shackles on adversaries.⁵⁰ These supernatural shackles or war-fetters are said to cause a state of momentary paralysis, because of which a warrior could not fight.⁵¹ We have here, therefore, two examples of one-eyed supernatural beings who can paralyse their opponents in a supernatural way, Odin with his spell, Balor with his eye.

The context of Balor's single eye is thus partly to be identified as battle symbolism. As stated above, the evil eye also belongs to a supernatural context: an evil eye is believed to be capable of damaging its

⁴¹ See also my 'Approaching Danger: *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and the Motif of Being One-eyed', in J. F. Nagy (ed.), *CSANA Yearbook 2* (Dublin 2002) 75–99.

⁴² T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin 1946, repr. 1999) 58–60.

⁴³ Hilda Ellis Davidson, *Myths and symbols in pagan Europe. Early Scandinavian and Celtic religions* (Manchester 1988) 196–7.

⁴⁴ Alan Dundes, 'Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview', in Dundes, *The evil eye*, 257–312, at 267.

⁴⁵ Scowcroft, 'Abstract narrative in Ireland', *Ériu* 46 (1995) 121–58, at 155.

⁴⁶ McCone, 'The Cyclops in Celtic, Germanic and Indo-European Myth', *Studia Celtica* 30 (1996) 89–111, at 97, 108.

⁴⁷ Meslin, 'Eye', 237.

⁴⁸ This aspect of a number of victims provides an exception to the definition of the evil eye offered by Dundes, 'Wet and Dry', 258, in which the evil eye's victim is described in the singular: 'The evil eye is a fairly consistent and uniform folk belief complex based upon the idea that an individual, male or female, has the power, voluntarily or involuntarily, to cause harm to another individual or his property merely by looking at or praising that person or property'.

⁴⁹ Scowcroft, 'Abstract narrative', 148, n. 103.

⁵⁰ *Hávamál* 148, quoted by Davidson, *Myths and symbols*, 69.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

target in an invisible way without physical contact. In some cases, we find more details about the supernatural in the same narrative context that describes the evil eye. In Balor's case, there is also the narrative of a supernatural change that his eye underwent. Balor was not born with a destructive eye. His eye acquires this power, called *neim*, 'poison', from the *neim* of the druids' cooking. Two elements in the origin story of Balor's evil eye are noteworthy if one sees them in the wider context of evil eye belief systems. These are, firstly, the notion of poison and, secondly, the context of witchcraft.

With regard to the notion of poison, it is interesting to consider the details given in the narrative of the *neim* of the cooking affecting the eye and thereby passing on the power of *neim* to the eye in the light of traditions collected by Pliny in his *Natural History*. In this work, the evil eye is repeatedly associated with poison. In Book VII, in his discussion of people with the evil eye, Pliny writes that Nature implanted poisons (*venena*) in the human body and that, for that reason, some people have poison in their eyes.⁵² In Book XXVIII, he refers to the evil eye as *veneficus aspectus*, 'a poisonous or magical glance',⁵³ and a little further on,⁵⁴ he discusses people who were poisoned and then became poisonous themselves. A similar line of reasoning could have been the background of the description in *Cath Maige Tuired* about how Balor's eye became destructive: his eye was poisoned and hence became poisonous.

Furthermore, the evil eye is often connected with 'witches' or 'witchcraft'. There is an overlap between the two categories⁵⁵ and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between them.⁵⁶ The issue of how to define 'witches' or 'witchcraft' is beyond the scope of this article. What matters here is that the evil eye belongs to the category 'destructive supernatural arts' and malevolent possessors of the evil eye belong to the category 'persons with destructive supernatural talents'. Another way of referring to these categories is 'magic' and 'magicians or witches' respectively. Especially within Christian ideology, 'magic',

⁵²NH VII.II.18. Books III–VII were edited and translated by H. Rackham, *Pliny. Natural History*, vol. II (London, Cambridge (Mass.) 1961). Pliny discusses 'the evil eye' in NH VII.II.16–18; this passage is quite relevant to the Irish descriptions and will be referred to on several occasions below. Pliny names his sources in NH VII.II.16–18; he draws on the works of Isigonus of Nicæa, Nymphodorus of Syracuse, Apollonides, Phylarchus, Damon and Cicero. Some of these authors are paradoxographers (collectors of marvels).

⁵³NH XXVIII.VI.30.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁵For instance, Pliny refers to people with the evil eye who are believed to be incapable of drowning in NH VII.II.17. The latter characteristic is the basis of a well-known method (trial by water) used as 'evidence' when people were accused of witchcraft during Medieval and Renaissance witch-hunts in Europe.

⁵⁶'To bewitch' might be used to refer to 'to cast the evil eye', but it can also be used for other supernatural practices. Moreover, the supernatural practices postulated by the evil eye belief system can be indicated by implicit references.

‘magicians’ and ‘witches’ have become pejorative terms designating practices and persons connected with evil and the supernatural.

In some of their functions the Irish druids correspond to magicians or wizards. The word *druídecht* means literally ‘the arts of the druids’, and more generally ‘supernatural arts’. The evaluation of druids and *druídecht* may differ, depending on the textual genre in which they are mentioned. For instance, generally speaking they would be characterised as being more evil in saints’ lives more often than in sagas, but one has to study their role and evaluation in each text separately. Returning to the story of how Balor originally acquired his evil eye, we have seen that the druids of Balor’s father were cooking (*fulacht*); however, instead of life-enhancing food, *druídecht* was on the fire. The cooking was poisonous and brought destruction, making an eye harmful. To summarise, Balor’s single eye is a destructive eye that functions as a paralysing weapon in battle affecting many warriors at the same time. It is a poisonous eye that owes its supernatural power to witnessing druids cooking *druídecht*.

The second example of the destructive eye is found in *The [second] Life of St Ciarán of Saighir*.⁵⁷ The story runs as follows:

*Fecht ele tainic Ciaran go Raith Tamnach, ⁊ ro shuidh annsin maille le móran do dáoinibh a ccomairle. Ocus do bí annsin rex Cobranus .i. nech aga raibhe suile millteacha; ⁊ doconnairc se mac meic Aengusa meic Natfraich ’ar ttecht chuca; ⁊ do fhech dona suilibh neimhnecha hé, ⁊ ba marbh an mac accédoir. Mar doconnairc Ciaran sin, fergaighis i nacchaid in righ, ⁊ dallais accédoir an rí. Slechtais an rí do Chiaran, ⁊ tucc a radharc dó, ⁊ tucc he féin cona shíol dó. Ocus aithbheoaghis an maccamh fuair bás le neimh-sula an righ reimhesin; ⁊ ro moradh ainm De ⁊ Ciarain desin.*⁵⁸

Another time Ciarán came to Rathdowney, and sat in council there with a great company of people. And there was there a certain King Cobranus who had destructive⁵⁹ eyes. And he saw that the⁶⁰ grandson of Óengus son of Nad Froich had come to them,⁶¹ and he looked upon him with his poisonous eyes, and the boy died at

⁵⁷ *Betha Ciaráin Saighre*(II), edited and translated by Charles Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn. Lives of Irish Saints* (Oxford 1922, repr. 1968) i 113–24 (text); ii 109–20 (translation); 339–41 (notes). According to Plummer (BNÉ I, xxvii), the Life is late, which he deduces from the language and the fact that it contains a prophecy of the Reformation (§ 73). He adds, however, that it is based upon older materials. Ingrid Sperber (‘The Life of St Ciarán of Saigir’, in William Nolan and Timothy P. O’Neill (ed.), *Offaly: history and society* (Dublin 1998) 131–52, at 133) dates the original Life to the middle of the eighth century.

⁵⁸ Plummer, BNÉ i, 120, chapter xx (§§ 47–8).

⁵⁹ Plummer, *ibid.*, ii, 116, chapter xx (§§ 47–8), translates: ‘deadly’.

⁶⁰ Plummer, *ibid.*, translates: ‘a’.

⁶¹ Plummer, *ibid.*, translates ‘coming towards them’, but *far ttecht chuca* literally means: ‘after coming to them’.

once. And when Ciarán saw that, he was greatly angered against the king; and he rendered the king blind forthwith.⁶² The king prostrated himself before Ciarán, and he restored his sight to him; and he (the king) gave himself and all his seed to him (Ciarán). And he raised to life again the youth who had been previously killed by the poison of the king's eye. And the name of God and of Ciarán was magnified thereby.⁶³

The terms that characterise the king's eyes are basically the same as the words used for the eye of Balor, king of the Fomoire. In both cases, the evil eye is called destructive: Balor's eye is *milledach*; the eyes of the king are *milltech*. Furthermore, the notion of poison is part of both descriptions. There is *neim* in Balor's eye and the king's eyes are *neimnech*. The latter's poisonous eyes actually kill, which is different from what Balor's eye does.

The name Cobranus is preceded by the Latin word for king, *rex*; this Irish Life was indeed based upon a Latin text, which is no longer extant and which was probably also the source of two Latin versions of the *Life of Ciarán*: a long and an abbreviated version.⁶⁴ In these two texts, the story is found as well. The long Latin version describes the episode as follows.⁶⁵

Quodam tempore, cum sanctus Piranus⁶⁶ sederet in magno consilio hominum, erat ibi rex Corbanus, qui oculos nequam et nephandos habebat. Talis enim erat natura sue malicie, ut quem maliciose et perspicaciter aspiceret, statim interficeret.⁶⁷ Cum ergo iuvenis quidam venisset cum Pyrano ad consilium, Corbanus rex eum maliciose diu intuitus est, et iuvenis mortuus cecidit.⁶⁸ Hec autem

⁶²Plummer, *ibid.*, translates: 'the king went blind forthwith'. The subject, however, is Ciarán, who deprives the king of his sight (see *DIL* s.v. *dallaid*).

⁶³Plummer, *BNÉ* ii 116, chapter xx (§§ 47–8); Plummer's translation and spelling of names have been slightly adapted here (see footnotes 59–62).

⁶⁴*De Sancto Pirano episcopo et confessore*; the long Latin version was edited by Paul Grosjean, 'Vita sancti Ciarani episcopi de Saigir ex Codice Hagiographicum Gothano', *Analecta Bollandiana* 59 (1941) 217–71, and the abbreviated version by Carl Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie: As collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave, and others, and first printed, with New Lives, by Wynkyn de Worde a.d. mdxvi* (Oxford 1901) i 320–327. The abbreviated version was written by John of Tynemouth in the early fourteenth century (see Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. An introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford 1991) 294). I am indebted to Ingrid Sperber for drawing my attention to the long Latin version. For more about the relationship between the different versions, see Sperber, 'Life of St Ciarán', 132–3.

⁶⁵The abbreviated version (Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, 325) is more or less the same. I indicate the important differences from the long Latin version in footnotes, without adverting to differences in spelling and word order.

⁶⁶The spelling Piranus is a variation on Kyeranus (see, for instance, § 1 of the long Latin Life: ... *nunc appellatur Pyranus, nunc Pieranus, nunc Kyeranus*).

⁶⁷The abbreviated version reads: *statim solo visu interficeret*.

⁶⁸The abbreviated version reads: *et iuvenis in terram cadens mortuus est*.

*videns Piranus, iratus est contra regem, et statim rex cecus effec-
tus est. Tunc rex prostravit se ad pedes sancti Pirani et dedit se et
generacionem suam sancto Pirano in eternum.⁶⁹ Et orante beato
Pirano, statim aperti sunt oculi eius, mortuusque iuvenis, orante
eo, resuscitatus est.⁷⁰*

Once as St Piran was attending a great council of people, King Corbanus, who had evil and abominable eyes, was present. For the nature of his ill will was such, that he immediately killed⁷¹ whomever he gazed at wickedly and acutely. Therefore, when a young man accompanied Piran to the assembly, King Corbanus watched him wickedly for a long time, and the young man fell down dead.⁷² However, when Piran saw this, he was enraged at the king, and the king at once became blind. Then the king prostrated himself before St Piran’s feet, and offered himself and his progeny to St Piran for ever.⁷³ And when the blessed Piran prayed for him, his eyes were instantly opened, and at his [Piran’s] prayer the dead young man was revived.⁷⁴

A few differences between the Latin and the Irish version deserve some attention. For instance, in the Irish version the king is said to kill by merely looking at his victim; in the Latin version his glance is qualified. It is described as a wicked and acute gaze, which lasts for a while. The dangerous eyes are characterised in Irish as ‘destructive’ (*millteach*) and ‘poisonous’ (*neimnech*); in Latin, they are *nequam*, ‘vile, bad’, and *nefandus*, ‘abominable’, or literally: ‘unmentionable’. *Nequam* is one of the expressions used in the Latin version of the Bible⁷⁵ to translate the Greek ὁφθαλμός πονηρός which means ‘an evil eye, i.e., one that looks with envy or jealousy upon other people’. As mentioned above, envy is often associated with the evil eye and this also occurs in the Irish tradition.⁷⁶

Another notable difference is the absence of the Irish names and the different spelling of the king’s name as Corbanus in the Latin versions.⁷⁷

⁶⁹The abbreviated version reads: *Tunc rex prostravit se ad pedes sancti Pirani, cum magna humilitate veniam precabatur.*

⁷⁰Grosjean, ‘Vita sancti Ciarani’, 249–50.

⁷¹Abbreviated Life: ‘he immediately killed solely with his glance’.

⁷²Abbreviated Life: ‘and the young man fell to the ground and died’.

⁷³Abbreviated Life: ‘Then the king prostrated himself before St Piran’s feet [and] asked for pardon with great humbleness’.

⁷⁴Translated by Ingrid Sperber.

⁷⁵See, for instance, Matthew 6.23; 20.15; Luke 11.34. (The references are to the text of the Vulgate.) For views of the Fathers of the Church on the interpretation of Matthew 20.15, see Matthew W. Dickie, ‘The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye’, in Henry Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine magic* (Washington D.C. 1995) 9–34, at 21–2. I am grateful to Kees Vleenturf for bringing this article to my attention.

⁷⁶See § 4 below.

⁷⁷For Nad Froích and his son Óengus († 490/492) see, for instance, the genealogical table of the Eóganacht kings of Munster in T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne, *A new history of Ireland. IX. Maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history*

The victim is an anonymous young man in the company of the saint. In the Irish Life, his identity is given as the grandson of Óengus son of Nad Froích. It could very well be that its author had Carthach, Ciarán's foster-son, in mind.⁷⁸ Carthach also figures elsewhere in the Lives of Ciarán, and most notably he is the subject of the episode that follows the evil eye narrative.⁷⁹ Here, the story is told how Carthach falls in love with a woman. There is mutual attraction, but as physical love is irreconcilable with the ideal of celibacy, the saint intervenes and both parties are punished.⁸⁰ More important than the identity of the victim is the fact that he is young. This narrative could be an instance of the tradition that young, blooming life is especially vulnerable to the evil eye. Perhaps one should interpret the destructive, poisonous, evil and abominable eyes of the king as envious eyes that were attracted to the young man's appearance and did their destructive work.

The third example of the destructive eye is found in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.⁸¹ It belongs to a man called Nár Túathcháech,⁸² who is described as follows:

*At-chonnarc fer and, túathchoeche co súil milledaig. Cend muicci lais for tenid ossí oc síréigem . . . Nár Thúathchaeche sain. Muccaid Boidb a Síd ar Fhemin. Nach fled oca roibi dodrortad ful oce.*⁸³

I saw a man there, with a sinister eye, with a destructive eye. He had the head of a continually screaming pig on the fire . . . That is Nár Túathcháech (Nár Sinister-Eye), the swineherd of Bodb of Síd ar Femin. Blood has been spilt at every feast at which he was [present].

(Oxford 1984) Part II, 136. The name Corbanus/Cobranus could be a Latinised form of Corbbán, a diminutive form of Corb(b), which may be related to the verb *corbbaid*, 'defiles', and which is a name of legendary persons in early Irish literature (D. Ó Corráin and F. Maguire, *Gaelic personal names* (Dublin 1981) 59). I am indebted to Seán Duffy for this information.

⁷⁸This identification was previously suggested by Grosjean ('Vita sancti Ciarani', 250 n. 1). For more about Carthach, see Plummer (*BNÉ* ii 338, note to § 21).

⁷⁹Irish Life chapter xxi (§ 49); long Latin Life § 26; abbreviated Latin Life, 325, ll. 26–34.

⁸⁰Ciarán renders the woman blind and sends Carthach in exile across the sea for seven years.

⁸¹Edition and translation of § 1 to the first five words of § 21 based upon YBL and the rest upon LU by Whitley Stokes, 'The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901) 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437; edition based upon YBL by Eleanor Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (henceforth abbreviated as *TBDD*), Medieval and Modern Irish Series VIII (Dublin 1936, repr. 1975), which was translated into Dutch by M. Draak and F. de Jong, *Van helden, elfen en dichters. De oudste verhalen uit Ierland* (Amsterdam 1979, repr. 1986) 148–201; and into English by J. Gantz, *Early Irish myths and sagas* (New York 1981, repr. 1985) 61–106.

⁸²For more about the identity of Nár Túathcháech, see my 'Über die Identität von Nár Túathcháech aus der verlorengegangenen Geschichte *Echtrae Chrimthainn Nia Náir*', forthcoming in E. Poppe (ed.), *Keltologie heute. Themen und Fragestellungen. Akten des 3. Deutschen Keltologensymposiums* – Marburg, März 2001 (Münster 2002).

⁸³*TBDD* 42, § 140.

Just as in our first example, the destructive eye is part of a battle and a supernatural context. The supernatural character of the evil-eyed Nár is obvious from his characterisation as a person from a *síd* (fairy mound) and from the supernatural cooking scene at which he is portrayed. The battle context is indicated by the information that his presence at feasts always leads to bloodshed; moreover, immediately after his portrayal, the battle that is the tale’s subject ensues. It is not clear whether bloodshed is due to his destructive eye or whether Nár is seen as an omen of bloodshed. In the light of the previous examples of destructive eyes, it is not unlikely that his eye is supposed to cause bloodshed.

It is possible that *túathcháech*, the term used as epithet and descriptive term for Nár, is another expression for ‘the evil eye’. *Túathcháech* is an ambiguous term; it could mean either ‘blind of the left eye’, ‘one-eyed on the left’, or ‘having one evil eye’. Elsewhere, I have proposed to translate *túathcháech* as ‘with a sinister eye’, which covers the broad meaning of *cáech* as ‘one-eyed’ and hints at the range of meanings of *túath-* as ‘left’, ‘evil’, and ‘supernatural’.⁸⁴ All narrative examples portray situations of mortal danger for the main protagonists who meet *túathcháech* persons. Most of these examples present a context of battle and the supernatural. Some have aspects in common with evil eye traditions, which will be discussed briefly now.

Firstly, in the long version of *Tochmarc Emire*,⁸⁵ an old woman who is *túathcháech* is also designated *caillech*, which could be translated as ‘witch’. Her aim is to destroy — indicated by *aidmillid* — Cú Chulainn. *Aidmillid* sometimes signifies ‘casts an evil eye’ (see below, § 3). Her method, however, is straightforward violence and there is no sign of any supernatural art applied.

Secondly, in *Brislech mór Maige Muirtheimne*,⁸⁶ three witches (*am-maiti*), who are *túathcháech*, perform a ritual in order to destroy (*millid*) Cú Chulainn in a supernatural way.⁸⁷ The casting of an evil eye would

⁸⁴ For more about this translation and information about other examples of *túathcháech*, see my article ‘The meaning of *túathcháech* in early Irish texts’ in *CMCS* 43 (2002) 1–24.

⁸⁵ The long version was edited by A. G. van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*, (Dublin, 1933, repr. 1978) 20–68: see § 77; and translated by K. Meyer, ‘The Wooing of Emer’, *The Archaeological Review. A Journal of historic and pre-historic Antiquities* 1 (1888) 68–75, 150–155, 231–5, 298–307, at 302. The long version is an extended and expanded form of the short version; the earliest recoverable form of *Tochmarc Emire* is Old Irish but was evidently transcribed and modernised in the Middle Irish period (G. Toner, ‘The transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*’, *Ériu* 49 (1998) 71–88, at 87).

⁸⁶ Edition: R. I. Best and M. A. O’Brien, *The Book of Leinster formerly Lebar na Núa-chongbála* (Dublin 1956) ii 442–57; translation: M. Tymoczko, *Two death tales from the Ulster Cycle: the death of Cu Roi and the death of Cu Chulainn* (Dublin, Atlantic Highlands 1981) 37–83; and J. Carey, ‘The Death of Cú Chulainn’, in J. T. Koch and J. Carey, *The Celtic heroic age. Literary sources for ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales* (Andover, Massachusetts 1994, repr. 1997) 124–33; date: eleventh century with older layers (R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle 1921, repr. 1979) 548–9).

⁸⁷ Cú Chulainn announces this in poetry, prior to the events: *Ammiti tuathchaecha taircebat mo milliud* (LL, ll. 13849–50), ‘Witches with a sinister eye will bring about my

be very appropriate in this context, but the text only refers to food prohibitions and the touching of forbidden food. There is no explicit reference to any action involving their eyes. *Millid* is the verb connected with the adjective *milledach*, but there is no evidence that this instance of *millid* should be interpreted as ‘casts an evil eye’ instead of the more general meaning ‘destroys’.

Thirdly, three Túatha Dé Danann in *Acallam na Senórach* attempt to destroy (*millid*) the *fíana* and Ireland.⁸⁸ These *túathcháech* men are also said to be poisonous. Their poisonous bodies could be compared with Pliny’s remark that Nature has implanted poisons in the human body, but again, nothing is said explicitly about poisonous eyes.

Fourthly, a dark, lame, inauspicious woman with a sinister eye prophesies evil to the main protagonist of *Bruiden Da Choca*, Cormac.⁸⁹ She does this while leaning with her shoulder against the doorpost of the hostel in which the king is. In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* a woman called Cailb leans against the doorpost of the hostel in which King Conaire is. She takes this posture while she is said to bewitch him and his retinue, and afterwards she also prophesies about the battle in which the king will die. The similarity in the passages is noteworthy, and more points will be discussed in § 3, below.⁹⁰ For now, it suffices to conclude that these four examples of persons called *túathcháech* might refer to people with an evil eye but we cannot be certain of it, because nothing is said explicitly about casting the evil eye nor is there any other reference to the use of the eye to bring about death and destruction.

To summarise this section on the *súil milledach*: Balor’s single eye has become destructive and poisonous as a result of witnessing the cooking of *druídecht* and it is a weapon in battle, where it causes paralysis to many. Corbanus’s destructive, poisonous eyes kill a young man, perhaps out of envy. Nár Túathcháech with his destructive eye and his screaming pig’s head on the fire either causes slaughter or serves as an omen of bloodshed.

destruction’ (*taircebat*, 3 pl. fut. of *do-áirci*), or: ‘... will come to destroy me’ (3 pl. fut. of *do-airicc*) or: ‘... will cause my destruction’ (3 pl. fut. of *do-furgaib*). Afterwards, his wife Emer laments that the witches have destroyed (*millsit*) Cú Chulainn (LL, l. 14233).

⁸⁸The episode was edited and translated by Stokes, *Irische Texte* IV.i (Leipzig 1900) 169–73, ll. 6146–269 (text); 238–42 (translation); compare the translation by A. Dooley and H. Roe, *Tales of the elders of Ireland. A new translation of Acallam na Senórach* (Oxford 1999) 172–76. This late Middle Irish text was dated about the end of the twelfth century by M. Dillon, *Stories from the Acallam* (Dublin 1970) ix.

⁸⁹Edited and translated by Stokes (‘Da Choca’s Hostel’, *Revue Celtique* 21 (1900) 149–65, 312–27, 388–402). It is dated to the twelfth century by D. Ó Corráin (‘Early Ireland: Directions and Re-directions’, *Bullán. An Irish Studies Journal* 1 (1994) no. 2, 1–15, at 10–11) on historical grounds and by G. Toner, (Bruiden Da Choca, *editions, composition and development*, (PhD. thesis, The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1990), 86) on linguistic grounds. The woman is called *túathcháech* in version A of *Bruiden Da Choca* § 33; version B reads *lethcháech* (alliterating with *losc*) instead of *túathcháech*.

⁹⁰See also my ‘Approaching Danger’.

2. *The Angry Eye*

In his exposé on people with the evil eye, Pliny describes people who bewitch (*effascino*) others by gazing at them for a long time ‘with angry eyes’ (*iratis oculis*). The eyes of these people are said to have double pupils.⁹¹ The expression ‘angry eyes’ is interesting in this context, for in some languages ‘the evil eye’ is called ‘the angry eye’. In Dutch, we know *het boze oog*, ‘the angry eye’; in German, there is *der böse Blick*, ‘the angry glance’.⁹²

The motif of harm being caused by angry glances or an angry eye is also found in early Irish texts. A warrior in *Mesca Ulad*,⁹³ called Triscoth, Driscoth (LU) or Triscatail Trénfher (LL) kills people by looking angrily at them. This act is expressed by *déccain aindíaraid*, ‘an angry or fierce look’,⁹⁴ and by forms of *do-éccai*, ‘looks at, gazes’,⁹⁵ sometimes accompanied by *co handíaraid*, ‘angrily’.⁹⁶ There are a few parallels between Triscoth and Balor. Triscoth also employs his eyes as a weapon in battle, although he kills and probably uses two eyes (as opposed to Balor’s paralysing single eye). Both Balor and Triscoth are called *trénfher*, ‘strong man, warrior’,⁹⁷ and their eyes attack several victims at the same time.⁹⁸ To summarise, Triscoth’s angry eyes fit in a battle context in a manner similar to Balor’s destructive eye (as a weapon that affects several warriors at the same time) and the tradition that Triscoth’s two eyes kill is comparable with what is told about the destructive eyes of King Corbanus.

An angry eye (*súil aindíaraid*) is found in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. It belongs to Ingcel Cáech, the son of the king of the Britons. His epithet *cáech* characterises him as a one-eyed person. His one eye is as broad as an ox-hide and as black as a black-beetle.⁹⁹ It protrudes from his forehead and it has three or seven pupils (§§ 44, 58).¹⁰⁰ The manuscript readings about the number of pupils differ. Ingcel’s eye is qualified (in

⁹¹NH. VII.II.16.

⁹²It should be noted, that *boos* and *böse* may also mean ‘evil’ in Dutch and German respectively.

⁹³Edition: J. C. Watson, *Mesca Ulad* (Dublin 1941, repr. 1983); translation: J. T. Koch, ‘The Intoxication of the Ulstermen’, in Koch and Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age*, 95–117; date: twelfth century (Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 473). The Book of Leinster (LL) gives the beginning of a later version of the tale and *Lebor na hUidre* (LU) the end of an older version.

⁹⁴LL version, ll. 656–7.

⁹⁵LU version, ll. 976, 997.

⁹⁶LU version, ll. 894–5, 987, 993.

⁹⁷For Balor, see Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, § 50.

⁹⁸Triscoth kills three groups of nine men by his furious look (he is characterised thus in § 40; cf. §§ 63–5, where he actually kills two men with his look; he slings the third man around, thereby killing the three groups of nine men that accompany the three men mentioned earlier).

⁹⁹YBL compares the blackness with smoke, because this manuscript always has the variant reading *duibithir dethaig*, ‘as black as smoke’ for *duibithir degaid*, ‘as black as a black-beetle’ (see DIL s.v. 1 *dega*).

¹⁰⁰LU has in § 44 *ina chind*, ‘in his head’, instead of *asa étun*, ‘from his forehead’.

§ 109) as *súil fhéig aindáraid*,¹⁰¹ ‘a keen, angry¹⁰² eye’, when it has an evil influence on the person it looks at: the royal jester who never failed in juggling, now fails because of that eye looking at him. It should be noted that the royal jester felt that he was looked at; he did not see Ingcél.

The version that Ingcél has seven pupils in his eye has a parallel in descriptions of Cormac mac Airt¹⁰³ and Cú Chulainn:¹⁰⁴ they are said to have seven pupils in each eye.¹⁰⁵ In both cases, this is explicitly qualified as a sign of beauty. In *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Recension I, two of Cú Chulainn’s pupils are described as squinting, but the text supplies the comment that this was more an adornment than a disfigurement.¹⁰⁶ The tradition of three pupils in Ingcél’s eye could be compared with another instance in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Recension I: after the description of the poetess and prophetess Fedelm as a beautiful woman, it is said that she carries a weaver’s beam and has three pupils in each eye.¹⁰⁷ There is no explanation offered of this characteristic: it could be a sign of beauty and it could be a sign of her supernatural sight.¹⁰⁸ The latter is more probable, because the characteristic is separated from the description of her looks by the mention of the weaver’s beam. The weaver’s beam has been interpreted as a supernatural tool for prophecy.¹⁰⁹ The triple pupils could, therefore, very well be a symbol of her clairvoyance.

Having multiple pupils in one’s eye(s) obviously is a literary motif, the meaning of which varies. In the case of Ingcél, the significance

¹⁰¹ *TBDD*, I. 1176.

¹⁰² Knott (*TBDD*, Glossary s.v.) translates ‘baleful, baneful’, pointing out (*ibid.*, 91) that the expression is commonly used of a baleful glance.

¹⁰³ See *Tesmolad Cormaic meic Airt* (edition and translation: S. H. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica. A collection of tales in Irish with extracts illustrating persons and places* (London, Edinburgh 1892), i 89–92, at 90; ii 96–9, at 97; cf. K. Meyer, *The Cath Finntrága or Battle of Ventry* (Oxford 1885) 72–6, at 73).

¹⁰⁴ Cú Chulainn is thus described in a prophetic poem in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Recension I, ll. 71–2 (*TBC I*; edited and translated by C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension I* (Dublin 1976), the Book of Leinster version, ll. 238–9 (*TBC LL*; edited and translated by C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin 1967, repr. 1984) and the Stowe version, ll. 242–3 (*TBC St.*; edited and translated by O’Rahilly, *The Stowe version of Táin Bó Cuailnge* (Dublin 1961)) and in a scene in which he shows his beautiful appearance to women and poets: *TBC I*, ll. 2350–2351, *TBC LL*, ll. 2353–54, *TBC St.*, l. 2391. According to O’Rahilly (*TBC LL*, 292), this passage was also put in the Boyhood Deeds in *TBC LL*, ll. 1200–1201, and *TBC St.*, ll. 1236–8. The prophetic poem and the ‘show’ scene use the metaphor of ‘gems’ for ‘pupils’; in the Boyhood Deeds, Cú Chulainn has seven pupils in each eye and there are seven gems sparkling in each pupil.

¹⁰⁵ In the long version of *Tochmarc Emire* § 6, however, Cú Chulainn has three pupils in one and four in the other eye, which makes seven pupils in total.

¹⁰⁶ *TBC I*, ll. 3011–14.

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, ll. 38–9.

¹⁰⁸ When asked, she sees the army red, very red, which foreshadows the battle and slaughter that will happen in due course.

¹⁰⁹ O’Rahilly, *TBC I*, 240. In *TBC LL*, ll. 185–6 and *TBC St.*, ll. 198–200, Fedelm is actually weaving, which is, again, interpreted as a supernatural way of foretelling the future (O’Rahilly, *TBC St.*, 164 and Addendum). In these two later versions, Fedelm comes from a *síd* and does not have triple pupils.

of beauty is excluded, for the man is depicted as rough (*ainmín*) and horrible (*úathmar*).¹¹⁰ The parallel with Fedelm is interesting, because Ingcél too has extraordinarily sharp sight. As mentioned above, his angry eye is *féig*, ‘keen, sharp, penetrating, acute’. He is capable of spying every detail present in the hostel in a rapid glance.¹¹¹ The sharpness could, however, also be associated with the destructive or evil eye: compare, for instance, Balor’s ‘sharp eye’, as expressed in his epithet Birugderc and the detail of the destructive eyes of King Corbanus gazing acutely or penetratingly — *perspicaciter* — at his victim.

In addition to Pliny’s reference to people with double pupils, mentioned above, there are similar examples in Classical literature that are noteworthy in this context. A beautiful woman is described by Ptolemaios Chennos as *δίχορος* ‘with a double pupil’; Kirby Flower Smith interprets this aspect as having supernatural sharpness of vision.¹¹² Ovid portrays an old woman with double pupils,¹¹³ which is interpreted as a sign of the evil eye.¹¹⁴ Pliny mentions several examples of people and specifically women with double pupils; they are to be found in his exposé on the evil eye and explicitly connected with it.¹¹⁵

To conclude this section: both angry eyes and eyes with multiple pupils have been connected with the concept of the evil eye. There is no strict identity between the phenomena: multiple pupils can also be a sign of beauty, sharp sight and clairvoyance. The angry eyes of Triscoth are lethal; he can be categorised as a possessor of the evil eye. Ingcél’s angry eye is capable of sharp sight, which is stated directly and perhaps also indirectly by means of the motif of multiple pupils; this latter motif can also be interpreted as a sign of the evil eye. This is based not only on an association with Classical information about double pupils, but also upon the text of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* itself. Ingcél’s eye exerts a bad influence on the activity of the royal juggler. Moreover, as will be discussed below, Ingcél is one of the two personages in this text who cast the evil eye. Both Triscoth and Ingcél are warriors and the angry eye is obviously part of a battle context. The supernatural context is limited in these two cases to the action performed by their eyes.

¹¹⁰ *TBDD* § 44; LU includes *anaichnid*, ‘uncouth’, in the description of Ingcél.

¹¹¹ *TBDD* § 73.

¹¹² This refers to Nysia, the wife of Kandaules. For more about this, see Kirby Flower Smith, ‘*Pupula duplex*. A comment on Ovid, Amores I, 8, 15’, in *Studies in honor of Basil L. Gildersleeve* (Baltimore 1902) 287-300, at 290-291; *δίχορος* (eyes) ‘of a different colour’, see *ibid.*, p. 292.

¹¹³ *Amores* I.8.15-16: … *oculis quoque pupula duplex / Fulminat et gemino lumen ab orbe micat*, ‘Dans chacun de ses yeux brille une double pupille et des rayons de feu sortent de cette double pupille’ (edition and translation: H. Bornecque, *Ovide. Les amours* (Paris 1961) 24).

¹¹⁴ Bornecque, *ibid.*, 104; Smith, ‘*Pupula duplex*’, 287. Dickie (‘Fathers of the Church’, 20 n. 32), however, puts this example under the more general heading of ‘old women as magic-workers’.

¹¹⁵ NH VII.II.16-18. See also Smith (‘*Pupula duplex*’, 287-90) for more background information on Pliny’s examples.

3. Casting The Evil Eye

Thus far, literary examples of the evil eye — called either destructive or angry — have been described. This part of the article deals with ‘casting an evil eye’, but remains tentative because there is no unambiguous Irish equivalent for this supernatural action. It is possible, however, that some instances of *millid* or *aidmillid* refer to this type of bewitching. Moreover, some instances of the ritual *corruginecht* have been associated with casting an evil eye. This part of the article is therefore devoted to the discussion of these two designations of supernatural acts.

Irish *millid* or *aidmillid* has a general meaning: ‘destroys (completely)’, but it may also signify ‘injures by magic, casts an evil eye’.¹¹⁶ In this sense, *millid* or *aidmillid* could be compared with Greek βασχάνω and Latin *fascino*, verbs with the general meaning of ‘bewitching’, and also used in the specific case of ‘bewitching with the evil eye’.¹¹⁷ Some examples of Irish *millid* or *aidmillid* with a supernatural sense will now be discussed in order to establish whether the literary context gives any grounds to decide whether the specific action of casting the evil eye might have been intended.

As mentioned above, the main protagonist of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, King Conaire, is visited by a supernatural woman, called Cailb (§§ 61–3). When she leans against the doorpost of the house or hostel in which Conaire is (§ 62), she performs the following act:

*oc admilliud ind ríg ⁊ na maccoem ro bátar immi sin tig*¹¹⁸

bewitching (or: casting an evil eye on) the king and the
young men, who were around him in the house.

It is not likely that *aidmilliud* should be translated ‘completely destroying’ in this instance, for although Cailb evidently aims at Conaire’s destruction with her visit to the hostel, this ruin will take place only in the near future. The sentence neither mentions her eye nor refers to her looking at the king, but the subsequent sentences seem to imply this: the king asks her what she sees, because, he says, she is a seer (*fisid*). She replies that she sees that the only parts of the king that will leave the hostel are those that will be carried off by birds. The context therefore shows that this instance of *aidmillid* is a type of bewitching. It is possible in the light of the indirect references to her eyes that this bewitching is an example of casting the evil eye.

This impression is strengthened by the second example: the phrase just quoted is echoed later in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* § 71, in which

¹¹⁶DIL s.vv. *aidmilled* and *milliud* (c).

¹¹⁷Βασχάνω means ‘to bewitch (with the evil eye); to slander (with acc.), to envy (with dat.)’; *fascino* means ‘to bewitch’ and is likewise used to express the idea of ‘casting an evil eye’.

¹¹⁸TBDD, ll. 543–4.

the action is ascribed to Ingcél Cáech. The fact that he is looking is explicitly mentioned and his eye is extensively described in this context.¹¹⁹ Ingcél sets out to spy on Conaire and his company with one of the pupils of the one eye (*óenshúil*) that protrudes from his forehead and to direct his eye (*rosc*) at the house:

*do aidmillead ind ríg γ na maccaem ro bátar immi isin
tig*¹²⁰

in order to bewitch (or: cast an evil eye on) the king and the young men, who were around him in the house.

Ingcél looks at the company to see whether they are a suitable object for marauding; therefore the general meaning of *aidmillid* makes more sense in this instance as compared with the previous one. It should be noted, however, that ‘to destroy’ in the sense of raiding and marauding is mainly indicated by forms of *orgid* in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. The forms of *aidmillid* and *millid* appear to signify supernatural destruction in this text.¹²¹ If we combine the description of Ingcél’s bewitchment of Conaire with the qualification of his eye as an angry eye and the possible meaning of his multiple pupils as another indication of the evil eye, it seems not unlikely that this form of bewitchment is in fact casting the evil eye. If we follow the principle that the two parallel phrases should be translated in the same way,¹²² then Cailb’s action could also be characterised as casting the evil eye. Therefore, at the outset of Conaire’s physical destruction, the doomed king is the target of supernatural attacks, performed by Cailb and Ingcél. Ingcél’s remarkable, angry eye furthermore has a baneful influence upon the royal juggler. Conaire’s death is finally induced by druids who destroy his ardour (*bruth*) and fury (*gal*). This supernatural act is referred to by *millter*, the passive present subjunctive, and *milliud*, the verbal noun of *millid* (§ 144). The result is that Conaire becomes very thirsty and the sources of water that are usually available disappear. Whether this bewitching is a form of casting the evil eye is uncertain.¹²³

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, ll. 640–4.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, ll. 642–3.

¹²¹The verbal noun *aidmilliud* occurs twice; it refers to the actions of Cailb and Ingcél which are central here. Two forms of *millid*, found in § 144, refer to supernatural destructive acts performed by druids (see below).

¹²²Stokes (‘Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel’, 59 and n. 8) translates ‘casting an evil eye’ in the case of Cailb, but he renders the similar action of Ingcél as ‘to destroy’ (*ibid.*, 171).

¹²³The possibility is raised in *DIL* s.v. *milliud* (c). One could compare the desiccating effect of the evil eye, as noted by Dundes, ‘Wet and Dry’, 274. However, a similar supernatural causing of thirst and removal of drink is accomplished by cupbearers in *Cath Maige Tuired* (§§ 79, 110–11), but neither *millid* nor the evil eye are mentioned in this context.

In *Cormac's Glossary*, *milliud* is indeed connected with the evil eye: *Milliud quasi mí-shilliud i. drochshilliud*,¹²⁴ 'Milliud (destruction, or: casting an evil eye) as if *mí-shilliud* (an evil glance/gaze), that is: an evil glance/gaze'. *Milliud* and *silliud* without the particle *mí* occur in a prayer, called 'The Lorica of Colum Cille', in which, among other things, protection is asked:

*Ar torainn an allair, ar galar, ar geinntib,
ar milliud in cennair, ar shilliud, ar teinntib*¹²⁵

Against the thunder of the next world, against disease,
against 'pagans',
Against the destruction of this world, against gazing (or:
the evil eye), against lightnings.

My translation is tentative, but it seems that *milliud* should be translated here in its general sense and *silliud* in the sense of the evil eye.¹²⁶ Two other instances of *milliud* take the form of illnesses. Firstly, in *Immacallam in dá Thuarad*, 'milliuda' is mentioned as one of seven cattle diseases.¹²⁷ The version of this text in Rawlinson B 502 supplies a gloss on *milliuda*, which reads: *mífhilliuda i. a lécun for a seirthib*.¹²⁸ This might mean: 'evil bendings/turnings, that is: its [referring to *milliuda/mífhilliuda*] releasing/casting upon their [referring to the cattle] heels/shanks (?)'.¹²⁹ Some possible hints to the evil eye complex are noticeable in this instance. Cattle are well-established victims of the evil eye; *mí-fhilliud* is an etymologising interpretation (cf. *mí-shilliud* mentioned above) of *milliud*, a possible designation for bewitchment with the evil eye. This instance of *milliud* does not imply destruction by weapons but is accomplished by an invisible force. Disease has often been attributed to supernatural causes (and sometimes still is).¹³⁰

¹²⁴ K. Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic. An Old-Irish Glossary', in O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best and others, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* iv (Halle, Dublin 1912) 73, no. 858. This is the reading of YBL; LB reads: *Millead i. mí shillead i. silled olc* (Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries* (London, Edinburgh 1862) 28, cf. xxxvi), 'Destruction (or: casting an evil eye), that is: an evil gaze/glance, that is: an evil gaze/glance'. (J. O'Donovan and W. Stokes, *Sanas Chormaic. Cormac's glossary* (Calcutta 1868) 107) translate *silled olc* as 'an evil eying'. Cf. O'Clery's Glossary: *Milliudh i. mí shilleadh i. droichshilleadh, no droch amharc*, 'mislooking i.e. evil-looking, or an evil look' (A. W. K. Miller (ed.), 'O'Clery's Irish Glossary', *Revue Celtique* 5 (1881–83) 1–69, at 24).

¹²⁵ K. Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 10 (1915) 346–7, at 346, § 6. The text is edited from Laud 615, p. 27. A fragment of the beginning is found in LB 262b76.

¹²⁶ See *DIL* s.v. *silled, silliud* (c).

¹²⁷ Stokes (ed.), 'The colloquy of the two sages', *Revue Celtique* 26 (1905) 4–64, at 46–7, §233; the text is dated to the tenth century (*ibid.*, 5).

¹²⁸ Stokes, 'Colloquy', 61.

¹²⁹ With thanks to Proinsias Mac Cana for his suggestions about translating this obscure gloss.

¹³⁰ *DIL* s.v. *milliud* (c) suggests translating this instance of *milliuda* as 'overlookings, bewitchments (?')'. Fergus Kelly (*Early Irish Farming: a study based mainly on the law-texts of the 7th and 8th centuries AD* (Dublin 1997) 174–5; cf. pp. 193, 203, 218) also

This example in *Immacallam in dá Thuarad* does not, however, supply enough evidence for a conclusion that illness caused by bewitchment by the evil eye is intended here.

Secondly, a divine punishment is mentioned in *Ríagail Pátraic* § 3:¹³¹ if baptism is not followed by a confirmation by a bishop, people will get diseases and ailments: both *eltrai* and other *milliuda*. Because *eltrai* (meaning unknown) and *milliuda* (lit. ‘destructions’) appear to be specifications of the diseases and ailments, *milliuda* may have the same meaning as in *Immacallam in dá Thuarad*, although this supernaturally induced disease afflicts humans instead of beasts. One of the interpretations possible here is that without ‘the proper blessing of the Church’,¹³² one is vulnerable to bewitchment or the evil eye.¹³³ One needs to know, however, what *eltrai* means to be able to understand the context of this example of *milliuda* better. There is thus no conclusive evidence supplied by *Ríagail Pátraic* for the presence of illness believed to be caused by the evil eye, just as was the case with *milliuda* in *Immacallam in dá Thuarad*.

Finally, *milliud* in the sense of ‘bewitching’ is used in the legal commentary to the evil eye fragment, edited and translated in Part II of this article. As the agent of the bewitching is here identified as the evil eye, this example is beyond any doubt. There is no specific description of the method of casting the evil eye: the only circumstance mentioned is that the bewitcher leaves his or her own dwelling and bewitches someone else’s property.

Early Irish texts do not give elaborate descriptions of the ritual of casting an evil eye. The literature refers either to looking or gazing.¹³⁴ Two other ritual forms of casting an evil eye have been suggested by Georges Dumézil and Françoise Le Roux. The first form pertains to Cú Chulainn. Dumézil, followed by Le Roux, bases his theory upon Recension I of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and maintains that Cú Chulainn casts an evil eye upon his opponents in his warrior contortion, when he opens one eye widely and makes the other practically disappear and thus becomes virtually one-eyed. Dumézil and Le Roux suggest that one of the effects of

describes this example of *milliuda* under the heading ‘bewitching’. Kelly, moreover, refers to the destruction of tree-fruit (*millead measa*), which is thought to have been brought about in a supernatural way (*ibid.*, 305).

¹³¹J. G. O’Keeffe (ed.), ‘The rule of Patrick’, *Ériu* 1 (1904) 216–24.

¹³²*Ríagail Pátraic* employs the still current formula for confirmation by the bishop, that is literally: ‘to go under the hand of a bishop’.

¹³³It is interesting to note that one of the reasons given in folklore accounts (reported by Lady Gregory, *Visions and beliefs in the West of Ireland* i (New York, London 1920) 129) for the possession of the evil eye is that those people ‘were baptized wrong’. Cf. *cen baithus ndligthech*, ‘without lawful baptism’, in *Ríagail Pátraic* § 3.

¹³⁴Looking: Balor, Cobranus (Irish version), Ingcel, Caib; gazing: Corbanus (Latin version), *Lorica of Colum Cille*; looking or gazing: Triscoth, *Cormac’s Glossary*.

this contortion is inspiring a paralysing fear in his opponent(s).¹³⁵ The second form concerns Lug, who goes on one leg with one eye closed and chants an incantation (*cétal*) in *Cath Maige Tuired* § 129; Le Roux explains the incantation as a *glám dícen* (a metrical form of satire) and interprets the ritual as casting an evil eye which in her view would paralyse his opponents.¹³⁶ These two theories will now be discussed, starting with the example of Cú Chulainn's warrior contortion.

Some early Irish examples of persons with an evil eye are as a matter of fact also said to be one-eyed (i.e. Balor, Nár, and Ingcel). Moreover, the closing of an eye is indeed sometimes connected with casting the evil eye.¹³⁷ One cannot, however, merely equate the motif of being one-eyed with the concept of the evil eye. If there is no direct evidence of the evil eye by way of terminology, then other evidence of characteristics from the evil eye belief system should be supplied, first of all from the text itself, which might be corroborated by parallels from other texts. The descriptions of Cú Chulainn's warrior contortion that Dumézil bases his opinion upon¹³⁸ have no reference whatsoever to the evil eye complex, nor is there any mention of a paralytic effect upon his opponents. Cú Chulainn's warrior contortion has an effect only upon himself: he is able to fight better. There is, however, another example — not mentioned by Dumézil or Le Roux — in Recension I of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* that indeed describes the powerful influence of Cú Chulainn's eye.¹³⁹ A stag does not dare to move because of the way Cú Chulainn looks at him: he bends his head towards the stag and makes an eye at him (literally: *in tsúil dogén-sa fris*, 'the eye I will make to him'). Cú Chulainn's eye constrains the animal, which might be compared with the paralysing effect of Balor's eye. Moreover, Cú Chulainn's eyes have a special characteristic: they have multiple pupils. This instance might be an example of a variation upon the evil eye motif but this statement remains uncertain because the text qualifies the multiple pupils as a sign of beauty.

¹³⁵G. Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna. Essai sur deux représentations indo-européennes de la souveraineté* (Paris 1948) 172–4; F. Le Roux, 'Le guerrier borgne et le druide aveugle. La cécité et la voyance', *Ogam* 13 (1961) 331–42, at 332.

¹³⁶Le Roux, 'Guerrier borgne', 333–5; 'La Mort de Cúchulainn', *Ogam* 18 (1966) 365–99, at 387.

¹³⁷'To cast an evil eye' is expressed by terms derived from the verbs 'to blink' (cf. Modern Irish *caochaim*) and 'to overlook' in twentieth-century north-east Ireland (F. Mac Gabhann, 'The Evil Eye Tradition in North East Ireland', *Sinsear. The Folklore Journal* 8 (1995) 89–100, at 89; with thanks to Fionnuala Carson Williams for sending me this article). To blink may indicate the closing of one eye. Cf. also, for instance, a Jewish tradition on the necessity of closing an eye when casting the evil eye (Brav, 'The Evil Eye', 49).

¹³⁸These are mainly *TBC I*, ll. 428–34, 2245–78, 1651–6, as translated by M.-L. Sjoestedt-Jonval ('Légendes épiques irlandaises et monnaies gauloises. — Recherches sur la constitution de la légende de Cuchulainn', *Études celtiques* 1 (1936) 1–77, at 9, 10, 12, 18).

¹³⁹See *TBC I*, ll. 795–6 (cf. *TBC LL*, ll. 1173–6; I am indebted to Ruairí Ó hUiginn for this reference).

About the second theory concerning Lug’s ritual gestures and words, I note the following. The incantation uttered by Lug is given as a highly alliterative, obscure passage, which is characterised — but not translated — by Gray as both encouragement of his own army and satire of his opponents.¹⁴⁰ Other scholars¹⁴¹ have indeed associated Lug’s ritual and words with *corruginecht* and *glám díċenn*. This is based upon the first of two entries in O’Davoren’s Glossary of the ritual called *corruginecht*, which is there defined as ‘being on one foot, with one hand, with one eye (closed) while making the *glám díċenn*’ (*Corruginecht i. beith for leth-cois 7 for leth-laimh 7 for lethsuil ag denam na glaime díċinn*).¹⁴² This would account for the satire of the enemy; Christian Guyonvarc’h¹⁴³ points out that Lug’s strengthening of his own army may be reflected in the second explanation of *corruginecht* in O’Davoren’s Glossary: a supernatural art,¹⁴⁴ especially performed for good luck.¹⁴⁵

The description of the gestures of Lug, who calls himself a *corruginech*,¹⁴⁶ differs slightly from the first description in O’Davoren’s Glossary: Lug does not use one of his hands. An exact parallel of the phrase that describes Lug’s action — *canaid for lethchois 7 lethshúil* — is found in *Bruiden Da Choca* § 16. A red woman chants a prophecy, while standing on one foot and closing one eye. Like Lug, she does not use one of her hands¹⁴⁷ either, but her ritual appears not to be related to either satire or good luck. Her action can be characterised as divination: she is engaged in the art of revealing knowledge about future events.

¹⁴⁰Gray, ‘*Cath Maige Tuired*: Myth and Structure’, *Éigse* 19 (1982–83) 1–35; 230–62, at 245–6.

¹⁴¹P. W. Joyce, *A social history of ancient Ireland* i (London, New York, Bombay 1903) 241; C. J. Guyonvarc’h, ‘Notes d’étymologie gauloises et celtes. 82. Moyen-irlandais *corruginech* ‘magicien’ et *glám díċinn* ‘malédiction suprême’’, *Ogam* 16 (1964) 441–6, at 441–2; Scowcroft, ‘Abstract narrative’, 142; McCone, ‘*Cyclops* in Celtic’, 95.

¹⁴²Stokes in Stokes and Meyer, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* ii (Halle 1904) 257, no. 383.

¹⁴³Guyonvarc’h, ‘Notes d’étymologie’, 442.

¹⁴⁴The Irish words that I translate as ‘supernatural art’ are *cerd cumain*. *Cerd cumain* is subject of the previous entry in O’Davoren’s Glossary (no. 456), which is a quotation from a gloss in *Uraicecht Becc* (‘*Comail i. doniad in cerd comaind*’; CIH v 1617.14). It is also mentioned in the accusative plural in *Fled Bricrend* § 75 together with *druídecht* as a talent of Úath mac Imomain: ‘*no gniad druidechta ocus certa comain*’ (George Henderson (ed.), *Fled Bricrend. The Feast of Bricriu*, Irish Texts Society II (London 1899) 96, ll. 25–6; date: eleventh century with older layers; G. Mac Eoin, ‘The Dating of Middle Irish Texts’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982) 109–37, at 119, 121, translates ‘he used to perform druids’ arts and supernatural arts’.

¹⁴⁵*Corruin[e]acht* (v.l. *Corrugine no corruginecht*) i. *cerd cumainn, ut est danaib corrugine i. in tidnacul dogniat tre corr tre corrugin[e]acht: dar lat doberar lam inn 7 ni tabarr i. do seon uaire sainnred dognithi . . .*, ‘*corruginecht*, i.e. art of magic, ut est ‘with gifts of magicians’, i.e. the gift that they make by *corr*, (i.e.), by *corruginecht*, it seems to thee that a hand is put in it and it is not put. For *sén uaire* ‘good luck’ especially it used to be performed’ (Stokes, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* ii 269, no. 457).

¹⁴⁶See *Cath Maige Tuired* § 63.

¹⁴⁷She uses one hand previously (see Stokes, ‘*Da Choca’s Hostel*’, § 15), though, in a supernatural act connected with water.

It is significant that a gloss in Codex Bernensis 363 connects *corruginecht* with divination.¹⁴⁸ The gloss is found in the margin of the commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* by Servius. In his comments on *Aeneid* VI.149, Servius distinguishes between two types of divination in which one consults the dead: *necromantia*, here literally meaning 'corpse divination', and *sciomantia*, 'shade divination'. Servius refers to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, in which *necromantia* is described.¹⁴⁹ For this type of divination, one needs a corpse of which the chest must be filled with hot blood. Servius refers to Homer's *Odyssey*¹⁵⁰ for an example of *sciomantia*. Virgil has followed Homer's example, according to Servius. He then explains what is needed for *sciomantia*:

*in sciomantia vero, quia umbrae tantum est evocatio, sufficit solus interitus*¹⁵¹

in shade divination, however, a death alone suffices because it is only the summoning of a shade.

Sciomantia is glossed in the margin 'corrg(ui)nec(ht)',¹⁵² and in this way *corruginecht* is associated with divination.¹⁵³ There is, however, no reference to shades in the description in *Bruiden Da Choca*: the red woman is not said to consult the dead. Her divination is perhaps induced by the ritual posture of being on one leg and having one eye closed; her prophecy takes the form of highly alliterating, obscure words. The text does not inform us about a distinct supernatural source of the revelation; no mention is made of divine or demonic inspiration of the woman. It may very well be that she herself represents the supernatural.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ For more about this Codex, which is dated to the ninth century, see W. Stokes and J. Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii (Dublin 1975; repr. of 1901–3) p. xxv.

¹⁴⁹ *Pharsalia* VI.620–762 (J. D. Duff (ed.), *Lucan. The Civil War (Pharsalia)*, Cambridge (Mass.), London 1928, repr. 1977) describes the ritual of necromancy. Servius quotes from what is line 667 in that edition. The ritual is also described in the Irish adaptation of *Pharsalia*: see the Middle Irish narrative *In Cath Catharda* (edited and translated by Stokes, 'In Cath Catharda. The civil war of the Romans. An Irish version of Lucan's *Pharsalia*', in Stokes and Windisch, *Irische Texte* IV.ii (Leipzig 1909) ll. 4079–207.

¹⁵⁰ *Odyssey* Book XI: shades are here summoned by invocations and prayers, and they are attracted by the blood of sacrificial animals; Elpenor who has died recently and has not been buried yet can be consulted without the use of the fresh blood.

¹⁵¹ G. Thilo and H. Hagen (ed.), *Servii grammatici qui fervntvr in Vergili carmina commentarii* ii (Leipzig 1880–1902, repr. Hildesheim 1961) 32.

¹⁵² Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii 235.18.

¹⁵³ St Colum Cille is enraged when he is said to practise 'corruginecht', according to the preface to *Amra Choluim Cille* (W. Stokes (ed.), 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluimb chille*', *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899) 30–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–437, at 40–41. This reading is from Rawlinson B 502; LU 1. 322 reads 'corraigecht'), whereas St Patrick in fact summons Cú Chulainn from the dead in *Siaburcharpat Con Culainn* (J. O'Beirne Crowe, 'Siabur-charpat Con Culaind. From 'Lebor na hUidre' (Fol. 37, et seqq.), a manuscript of the Royal Irish Academy', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 11 (1870–71) 371–448).

¹⁵⁴ There are some significant parallels between the red woman, the black woman (both from *Bruiden Da Choca*) and Cailb (from *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*). The red woman who

Whatever the original meaning of *corruginecht* may have been,¹⁵⁵ the term appears to have become a generic term for supernatural actions,¹⁵⁶ such as bringing about illusions,¹⁵⁷ certain forms of satirising¹⁵⁸ and divination. One might wonder now whether it also includes casting the evil eye, as Le Roux posits.

There are some similarities between the effect of the evil eye and the effects of satire and *corruginecht*. For instance, in *Cath Maige Tuired* a poet (*fili*) asserts that his satire (*glám díccenn*) will shame the enemy so that because of his incantation (*bricht*) they will offer no resistance to warriors (‘*cona gébat frie hócu*’; §§ 114–15), which can be compared with the effect of Balor’s eye (§ 133; cf. ‘*nín-géptis fri hócco*’). The ‘*corruginidhgh*’ ([sic], plural of *corruginech*) promise that their craft will overthrow the enemies in such a manner that their white soles will be visible (‘*a mbuind bánai forra*’) so that they can easily be killed (§§ 108–9).¹⁵⁹ The same effect is accomplished when Triscoth looks angrily at his opponents in *Mesca Ulad*: the victim falls down with his

perhaps performs *corruginecht* closes one eye and stands on one leg while she prophesies about future evil events. The black woman is one-eyed (specified as sinister-eyed in version A) and lame. She prophesies about evil in the future as well, while she leans against the doorpost of the hostel. Cailb leans against the doorpost of the hostel while she casts the evil eye. She also prophesies about evil to take place and she mentions her names in one breath while she stands on one leg and raises one hand. One of her names is Badb, which connects her with the red and the black woman in Version B of *Bruiden Da Choca*, because this version unifies these two women by identifying them as the Badb.

¹⁵⁵ Brian Ó Cuív (‘Review of *Études Celtiques IX*’, *Éigse* 10 (1961–63) 337–9, at 338), taking *corr* as ‘heron’ or ‘crane’, suggests a connection with a postulated insular Celtic crane cult; Howard Meroney (‘Studies in early Irish satire’, *Journal of Celtic Studies* 1 (1949) 199–226, at 220) explains *corr* as ‘point’; McCone (‘Cyclops in Celtic’, 95), proposes to etymologise *corruginecht* as ‘piercing/slaying by points’. These elements might be combined in the image of a crane or a heron (*corr*), which, when viewed from the side, appears to be one-legged and one-eyed and is sharp-beaked. More study is, however, needed on this subject.

¹⁵⁶ See, for instance, *Cath Maige Tuired* § 63, in which Lug offers his talents as *corruginech* in order to enter Tara, to which he receives the reply that he is not needed: there are already ‘*corruginidh*’ present, and numerous druids and people of power (*cumachtae*). The three different terms seem to cover the same concept: persons with supernatural powers.

¹⁵⁷ See the third explanation of *corruginecht* in the second entry in O’Davoren’s Glossary: *nó is é gnim dogní in fer oga mbí in cerd chumainn, a thaibsin cena a beith and, γ rl.*, ‘Or this is the deed which the man possessing the art of magic (*cerd cumain*) performs, to display it without its being there, etc.’ (Stokes, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* ii 269, no. 457). There seems to be a reference to illusion in the second explanation as well (concerning the act with a hand).

¹⁵⁸ In the law text *Uraicecht na Riar*, *corruginecht* is one of the components of making a satire. A gloss explains *corruginecht* as piercing a clay figure, made in resemblance of the victim, with thorns while chanting a *glám díccenn* (edition and translation: L. Breathnach, *Uraicecht na Riar. The poetic grades in Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1987) 114–15, 140). According to Liam Breathnach (*ibid.*, 140), the entry in O’Davoren’s Glossary that links *corruginecht* with satire (no. 383) is a quotation from *Uraicecht na Riar*.

¹⁵⁹ They also promise to take two-thirds of their strength from the enemy and prevent them from urinating.

white soles visible ('*a dí* (or: *dá*) *bond bána* fair').¹⁶⁰ *Cath Maige Tuired* therefore ascribes a paralysing effect to satire and *corruginecht*; the descriptions have resonances with descriptions of the effects of the destructive and the angry eye.¹⁶¹

Another overlap between *corruginecht* and the effect of the evil eye is the supernatural harming of animals. *Corruginecht* is mentioned in a legal commentary as a form of supernatural attack on horses.¹⁶² Even more interesting in this context are the references to '*corgairech*' and '*corrjhainecht*' in two fragments that precede two versions of the law fragment and its commentary about the evil eye (edited and translated in Part II of this article).

The difficult passage that precedes version A deals with the offence of stealing milk or butter.¹⁶³ It starts with the phrase: *Oghoghal* (=Ógfogal) *dá etlod senmilg*, 'The stealing away of old milk is a full offence'.¹⁶⁴ The stolen milk may be in the form of butter or milk (*gid im gid lom tailtar and*, 'whether it be butter or milk which is taken then'). If it is stolen from the udder of a cow, the thief must pay twice the fine which is due for theft from a vessel. The commentator explains why: *iss e fath fodera mo thic milliudh na bo inna gait asin ud na da ghait asin lestur*, 'the reason is that greater injury to the cow comes from stealing it from the udder than from stealing it from the vessel'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ *Mesca Ulad*, LU version, ll. 987–8, 993–4 (literally: 'his two white soles upon him').

¹⁶¹ Interestingly, there are also some reminiscences in Reginald Scot's discussion of foreign witches (see his *The discoverie of witchcraft*, first published in 1584; London, 1886, repr. Wakefield, 1973, III.XV, 50). He first describes the paralysing powers of German witches and then moves on to Irish witches. In this description, we find references to the belief that these witches cast an evil eye on children and cattle. Moreover, they are supposed to be able to rhyme people and animals to death. This may be a reference to satire. The account goes as follows (to eye-bite means 'to bewitch with the eye'): 'The Irishmen addict themselves wonderfullie to the credit and practise hereof; insomuch as they affirme, that not onelie their children, but their cattell, are (as they call it) eybitten, when they fall suddenly sicke, and terme one sort of their witches eybiters; onelie in that respect: yea and they will not sticke to affirme, that they can rime either man or beast to death'. For more about Elizabethan authors and their references to Irish destructive satire, see Fred Norris Robinson, 'Satirists and Enchanters in Early Irish Literature', *Studies in the history of religions presented to Crawford Howell Toy* (New York 1912) 95–130, at 95–8.

¹⁶² *CIH* ii 383.5; v 1689.13; for more about this, see Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, 174.

¹⁶³ *CIH* i 144.30–33.

¹⁶⁴ The second part of this phrase is quoted in O'Davoren's Glossary no. 1215 *Milc .i. bainne, ut est etlo senmilc*. See fn. 183 below.

¹⁶⁵ A similar explanation is given in commentary at *CIH* i 275.30–34: *Mas asinn uth tallad in lacht, is cetharda 7 eneclann. Mas asin lestar is diablad 7 eneclann. Cid fodera cona mo ina gait asinn uth ina asin lestar, 7 conad mo is nesum he isin lestar? Is e fath fodera: bithbinchi 7 aicbeile leisin nughdar a gait asinn uth inna asin lestar, 7 mo bis i coimitechta seoit cetharda he isinn uth na isin lestar: 'If the milk was stolen from the udder, it is four-fold [restitution] and honour-price. If it is from the vessel, it is double [restitution] and honour-price. What is the reason that there is a greater [fine] for stealing it from the udder than from the vessel, when it is more urgently required in the vessel? This is the reason: the author regards it as more criminal and more dangerous to steal it from the udder than from the vessel, and it is in greater association with an animal of four-fold [restitution] in the udder than in the vessel.'*

The phrase *Oghoghal d̄a etlod senmilg* is followed by the words *in corairech la belltaine*, ‘the *coregarech* at May Day’.¹⁶⁶ The unattested form *coregarech* may possibly be an error for *corruinech*, i.e. a person who practices *corruinecht*. The mention of a person with supernatural power as agent of the theft argues for a belief that dairy products may be stolen in a supernatural way, which explains why theft from the udder is worse than from the vessel. When milk is stolen in a supernatural way from the udder, the cow is supposed to be bewitched and hence the milk production is structurally at danger, whereas thefts from vessels are incidental offences. The charming away of milk from neighbours’ cows seems also to be implied in the fragment that precedes version C.¹⁶⁷ It says: *IN bleogan o durnn t̄ a ndiul t̄ in chorrdhainecht: cetharda 7 eneclann fo lu t̄ fo cleithi isin lacht*, ‘The milking by hand or sucking them or *corruinecht*: fourfold [restitution] and honour-price for small value or considerable value in respect of the milk’.

In order to explain what may be meant in these fragments, I have to resort to later sources. Firstly, there is a description in English colonists’ literature which throws some light upon what is described in these fragments, and secondly, folklore descriptions from the nineteenth and twentieth century clarify several details. Although one has to be careful with applying these later sources, because the former are likely to be prejudiced and the latter are at a considerable distance in time, I believe that in this case they indeed improve our understanding of the medieval texts.

In 1607¹⁶⁸ William Camden described certain beliefs of the Irish which are relevant to the legal fragments about the stealing of dairy products. Under the heading ‘Superstitions’, the following is found:

They take any one for a witch that comes to fetch fire on May-day, and therefore refuse to give any, unless the party asking it be sick; and then it is with an Imprecation: believing, that all their butter will be stole the following summer by this woman. On May-day likewise, if they can find a hare among their herd, they endeavour to kill her, out of a notion, that it is some old witch that has a design upon their butter.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶The structure of this fragment appears to be comparable with the subsequent fragment about the evil eye. First, a law-text is (presumably) quoted, which refers to a form of stealing, then the agent of the stealing is mentioned: the *coregarech* at the beginning of summer and the evil eye respectively (the evil eye is preceded by *i.*), and finally the commentary about the crimes and fines follows.

¹⁶⁷*CH* iii 954.29–30; the interpretation is given in *DIL* s.v. *corruinecht*.

¹⁶⁸See cols. 1416–17 of William Camden, *Britannia or a chorographical description of Great Britain and Ireland, together with the adjacent islands* (London 1722; second ed., revised by Edmund Gibson; Camden lived from 1551 to 1623).

¹⁶⁹Camden, *ibid.*, col. 1420.

This description thus refers to supernatural stealing of butter, which is done by someone who asks for fire. In the second belief described here, the thief is said to be an old woman, who can transform herself into a hare. The supernatural stealing is done on May Day, which is in accordance with the first legal fragment about the stealing of old milk. The *corruginech* (*corgairech*) would correspond with the witch in the English account.

The details supplied by Camden are all confirmed in folklore studies about the supernatural stealing of dairy products. The traditional way of making butter was a complicated process; it could easily happen that instead of butter only froth was produced during the churning. Butter was made of 'old milk' (fresh milk that had been left standing for some time); all of the milk was used for churning, which made the process more at risk of failing than using the cream only. Other problems were inadequate sterilisation and temperature control.¹⁷⁰ When the process failed, it was assumed that someone had interfered in a supernatural way. The butter was said to have been 'stolen', which implied that the victim had no butter at all and the 'thief' would have an extra supply of butter. The same could happen to milk: a cow would not yield milk and a neighbour's cow would yield more milk than usual. Milk 'stolen' from a vessel became foul-smelling or useless for churning. Thus, the milk would 'go' or 'disappear'.¹⁷¹ This way of supernatural stealing was generally referred to as 'blinking' the butter, the milk or the cow. Many rituals and incantations have been collected which represent the beliefs in these practices.¹⁷² Among them, we find narratives about old women who gather dew from the grass with a rope or some other object, while reciting *formulae* such as: 'Come all to me'.¹⁷³ There are, furthermore, stories about old women changing themselves into hares or rabbits, in which form they would suck the cow's udders.¹⁷⁴ It was believed that to lend objects, especially during churning, would lead to the blinking of one's butter or milk.¹⁷⁵ Especially at the beginning of Summer, between

¹⁷⁰ See Richard P. Jenkins, 'Witches and Fairies: Supernatural Aggression and Deviance Among the Irish Peasantry', in Peter Narváez, *The good people. New fairytale essays* (New York & London 1991) 302–35, at 306; cf. Alan Bruford, 'Trolls, Hillfolk, Finns, and Picts: The Identity of the Good Neighbors in Orkney and Shetland', *ibid.*, 116–41, at 133.

¹⁷¹ Mac Gabhann, 'The Evil Eye', 91–3; pp. 98–9 refer to ways of making 'stolen' butter return or retrieving 'blinded' butter.

¹⁷² See, for instance, Mac Gabhann's article; Linda-May Ballard, 'Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai', in Narváez, *Good people*, 47–93, at 74–5; Jenkins, 'Witches and Fairies', 310–312; Patricia Lysaght, 'Bealtaine: Irish Maytime Customs and the Reaffirmation of Boundaries', in Hilda Ellis Davidson (ed.), *Boundaries & thresholds* (Woodchester 1993) 28–43.

¹⁷³ Mac Gabhann, 'The Evil Eye', 91; Ballard, 'Fairies and the Supernatural', 74–5; Jenkins, 'Witches and Fairies', 310–311.

¹⁷⁴ Jenkins, 'Witches and Fairies', 311; Lysaght, 'Bealtaine', 35.

¹⁷⁵ Mac Gabhann ('The Evil Eye', 91) lists some of the objects that were dangerous to lend: pins, needles, milk or salt. A live cinder is mentioned, among other things, by Lysaght ('Bealtaine', 36).

sunset on May Eve and noon on May Day, the milk and butter were at risk of being ‘stolen’ or blinked.¹⁷⁶ Protective measures, among them green vegetation and yellow flowers,¹⁷⁷ were usually taken at May Eve; the stealing was often said to be done at sunrise on May Day.¹⁷⁸

A possible interpretation of the ‘sucking’ mentioned in the fragment that precedes version C might be the supernatural way of stealing through the supposed sucking of the cow’s udder by a woman transformed into a hare or rabbit, which would increase the thief’s own cow’s milk supply. A striking aspect in these later sources is that this kind of theft is mainly ascribed to women. This is not only understandable from the fact that milking and churning were traditionally women’s tasks,¹⁷⁹ but is also confirmed in the following legal fragment:¹⁸⁰

Mas a lestar raghat in ben in lacht, is diabladh uaithi and γ
coibchi γ enecclann, γ nucunn uil a deithbir-sein γ a goit
a sini sed cethardha uaithi ann-sidhe; γ cidh o fir cidh o
neoch eile gattas he amhlaid-sein, ata seinin¹⁸¹ uaithi da fir
budhein ara adeitchi.

If it is from a vessel that a woman has stolen the milk, then it is double [restitution] from her and bride-price and honour-price, and there is not that necessity [for her to go out?];¹⁸² and if its theft is from a teat,¹⁸³ fourfold restitution from her in that case; and whether it be from [her] husband or

¹⁷⁶Mac Gabhann, ‘The Evil Eye’, 93, 96; Ballard, ‘Fairies and the Supernatural’, 74; Jenkins, ‘Witches and Fairies’, 311–12, and especially Lysaght, ‘Bealtaine’, 30–32.

¹⁷⁷Lysaght, ‘Bealtaine’, 38–41.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷⁹Jenkins, ‘Witches and Fairies’, 305; Mac Gabhann, ‘The Evil Eye’, 92; Lysaght, ‘Bealtaine’, 34–5. In medieval literature, milking and dairy production are usually connected with women, although professional milkers could be male or female (Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, 450–451).

¹⁸⁰CIH i 155.36–9.

¹⁸¹Dittography for *sein*; CIH i 155 fn.

¹⁸²The degree of liability associated with the evil eye may depend on whether it was necessary or not for the culprit to leave the house: see discussion in Part II.

¹⁸³In this fragment, the theft is not from the udder (*áth*) but from the teat (*sine*). This is also the case in O’Davoren’s Glossary no. 1215, which quotes from the passage that precedes version A of the evil eye fragment. It reads: *Milc i. bainne, ut est etlo senmilc i. a mile, a luim do etlo asi sinibh; focal gallberla* (Stokes (ed.), ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’, *Archiv für celtische Lexicographie* ii (1904) 411 = CIH iv 1514). Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh’s version of this gloss has *etla simmilc*. I tentatively translate ‘Milk (*milc*, genitive singular of *melc/melg*), that is: milk, as it is [in] ‘the stealing away of *senmilc* (or *simmilc*)’ (=old milk, but here taken as ‘teat-milk’), that is, her milk, the taking away of her milk out of her teats (*sinibh*, dative plural of *sine*); a word from the English language’. The glossator explains *sen-* or *sim-* as ‘teat’, and in this way refers to the theft of ‘teat-milk’. Obviously, only fresh milk is found in teats, therefore the character of the quoted text (i.e. *etlo senmilc*) has been changed: the more serious offence (theft of fresh milk from the udder/teat) has taken the place of the lesser offence (theft of old milk from the vessel). Incidentally, the glossator has apparently taken Irish *melc/melg* to be a borrowing of English ‘milk’. It is in fact cognate: see LEIA s.vv. *mlig-*, *melg*.

from anybody else that she steals it in this manner, that must be given by her to her own husband on account of her loathsomeness.

The association and overlap between traditions about this supernatural stealing or ‘profit stealing’ of milk and butter with beliefs concerning the evil eye is obvious,¹⁸⁴ and there is the significant fact, mentioned above, that the expression ‘to blink’ is sometimes identical with ‘to cast the evil eye’. Because the legal fragments that deal with supernatural milk and butter stealing precede the evil eye fragment, it appears that this association already existed in the period of the law-texts, i.e. seventh/eighth centuries AD. The milk-producing and butter-making processes were vital for human life,¹⁸⁵ hence, envy will have been part of this belief concerning practices of trying to make one’s own produce increase or in accusing more successful neighbours. Envy as part of the evil eye belief system is discussed in the following section.

To summarise this section: we have two very probable attestations of *aidmilliud* in the sense of casting the evil eye in the actions of Cailb and Ingcéil. Three further examples are *milliud* in Cormac’s Glossary and in the legal evil eye fragment, and *silliud* in Colum Cille’s *Lorica*. Whether Cú Chulainn’s restraining a deer with his eye is another example and whether we can take the two instances of *milliuda* as animal and human diseases caused by bewitchment with the evil eye remains uncertain. Despite the overlap between *corrguinecht* and bewitchments with the evil eye, it is a moot point whether Lug’s ritual performance should be characterised as casting an evil eye. Any qualification of his performance should at least be partially based upon his alliterating, obscure words, of which a reliable translation is needed.

4. Envy And The Evil Eye

Envy is a complex emotion: it is composed of different elements, such as greed, aggression, begrudging and admiration. In the context of the evil eye belief system, envy is closely related to the supposed danger of praise.¹⁸⁶ Three sources from which this danger stems show this interconnection clearly. Eugene McCartney lists them as follows:

¹⁸⁴ See also Mac Gabhann, ‘The Evil Eye’, 91; Jenkins, ‘Witches and Fairies’, 310.

¹⁸⁵ See Lysaght, ‘Bealtaine’, 30, quoting A. T. Lucas: milk and milk products have been a mainstay in the Irish diet, probably from the prehistoric period.

¹⁸⁶ It is interesting to note in the light of the danger of both praise and satire that both varieties of verbal expression are linked in *Bretha Nemed* (for more about this law-text and its date of compilation between 721 and 742, see Liam Breathnach, ‘Canon law and secular law in early Ireland: the significance of *Bretha Nemed*’, *Peritia* 3 (1984) 439–59). According to an abstract from this law-text, the poets possessed the remarkable knowledge of composing satire with the semblance of praise and praise with the semblance of satire (‘*Ata eolus iongnadh lasna fi ledhoibh .i. áor go ndath molta, 7 moladh go ndath n-áoire*’, from the edition by E. J. Gwynn, ‘An Old-Irish tract on the privileges and responsibilities of poets’, *Ériu* 13 (1942) 1–60, 220–232 at 14.17–18 = *CIH* iii 1112.9–10). An example of satire with the semblance of praise is given in ll. 22–5, and of praise with the semblance of satire in ll. 27–31 (*CIH* iii 1112.14–17 and 19–23 respectively). With thanks to John

(1) the inadvertence or the ignorance of well-meaning people who let slip complimentary remarks; (2) the envy and malevolence of those who have the evil eye; and (3) the jealousy of the gods, who permit no mortal to be supremely beautiful or happy or prosperous without paying for his blessings by counterbalancing woes and adversities.¹⁸⁷

The close connection between envy and the evil eye¹⁸⁸ can be seen, for instance, in the meaning of the Latin verb *invideo*, which primarily signifies ‘to look askance at, to look maliciously or spitefully at, to cast an evil eye upon’ but is also used to convey ‘to envy or grudge’. There are three examples in early Irish texts in which envy is also connected with the evil eye belief.

Firstly, Virgil refers to the bewitchment of lambs by the evil eye in his *Eclogae*.¹⁸⁹ This is expressed by a combination of the verb *fascino* and the noun *oculus*. Virgil’s *Eclogae* have been glossed in Irish and in this case *fascinat* has been glossed by *for-moinethar*.¹⁹⁰ *For-moinethar* is therefore a good Irish equivalent of Latin *invideo*, because it is used to express both ‘to bewitch with the evil eye’ and ‘to envy’.¹⁹¹ The gloss in Irish thus subtly connects the act of casting the evil eye with the feeling of envy.

Secondly, the expressions *in drochrosc* and *in drochshúil*, ‘the evil eye’,¹⁹² in the different versions¹⁹³ of the legal commentary on the evil eye fragment (see Part II of this article) are indications of the agent who causes the offence of ‘stealing away through envy (*format*, verbal noun of *for-moinethar*)’. What seems to be meant here, is the event of someone going out and seeing something admirable, which awakens feelings of envy. Envy in this case either leads to, or equals, the casting of the

Carey for bringing this reference to my attention and to Gerald Manning for supplying a translation of the passage.

¹⁸⁷ McCartney, ‘Praise and Dispraise’, 10.

¹⁸⁸ For more about ideas concerning this interconnectedness in the minds of Classical philosophers and Fathers of the Church, see Dickie, ‘Fathers of the Church’, mentioned above.

¹⁸⁹ *Eclogae* III.103: *nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinat agnos* (Henry Rushton Fairclough (ed.), Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, (Cambridge (Mass.), London 1978) vol. i, 26), ‘I have no idea which evil eye is bewitching my tender lambs’.

¹⁹⁰ Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii 46.10; 360 (for more about the manuscripts, see pp. xvii–xviii).

¹⁹¹ An example of *invideo* (in the sense of ‘to envy’) glossed *for-moinethar* is found in the *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* i 20.8, gloss 16.

¹⁹² *Drochshúil* is also used in the seventeenth-century Bible translations; see, for instance, Proverbs 23.6; 28.22; Mark 7.22. These Irish expressions parallel ‘evil eye’ in English and other modern languages: *mal occhio* in Italian, *mauvais oeil* in French, and can be compared with similar expressions in old languages: Hebrew has *ra’ ‘ayin*, ‘one evil of eye’ (Proverbs 23.6; 28.22); Greek has *ὁφθαλμός πονηρὸς* and Latin *oculus malus*.

¹⁹³ *In drochrosc* is found in *CIH* i 144.34 (= version A) and *in drochshúil* in *CIH* ii 673.3 (= version B) and *CIH* iii 1051.17 (= Version D). The expression *in béim súla* is found in *CIH* iii 955.1, 955.2 (= version C).

evil eye. The belief mentioned in the introduction of this article, according to which both specific possessors of the evil eye and anybody in general can cast the evil eye, appears to be reflected in this passage. In both cases, the evil eye may be cast involuntarily or maliciously on purpose. The object is destroyed or bewitched (*millid*) and restitution has to be paid according to the degree of guilt and depending on whether the person involved took precautionary measures against causing damage by blessing the admired object. We find here thus another early Irish attestation of the interconnectedness between envy and casting the evil eye.

Thirdly, a narrative example is found in *Acallam na Senórach*.¹⁹⁴ A young man, called Fer Óc, who excels in beauty and talents, is met by Finn and his *fiana*. His excellence is extensively praised. But when they all go hunting together, this superiority is no longer viewed in a positive light. After the hunt, Fer Óc falls ill with a serious lung disease. This was caused, according to the tale:

*tré tshúilib na sochaide 7 tre fhormat in morsluaig*¹⁹⁵

through the eyes of the multitude and the envy of the large company.

After nine days, Fer Óc dies. This is an example of the supernatural, lethal effect of being looked at by envious eyes. In fact, the narrative gives a reason why Fer Óc became a victim. Excessive praise¹⁹⁶ and excellence are regarded as dangerous: one draws the attention of the evil eye upon oneself. Moreover, Fer Óc is a young man, which is emphasised by his name (which literally means ‘Young Man’), and just as in the first example of this section (concerning lambs), young blooming life is, as elsewhere, especially vulnerable to the envious attack of the evil eye.

5. Protection Against The Evil Eye

There are only a few references in early Irish narratives to ways in which one is supposed to protect oneself against the evil eye. Twice, persons with supernatural powers deal with its danger: Lug throws a stone from his sling, hits the eye which goes through Balor’s head. The eye comes out on the other side of the head and thus makes Balor’s destructive eye look at the army of Balor itself. St Ciarán punishes King Corbanus by blinding the destructive eyes.¹⁹⁷ Colum Cille’s *lorica* is

¹⁹⁴ Stokes, *Irische Texte* IV.i, 157–62, 230–235.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 5849–50.

¹⁹⁶ This narrative mentions the danger of excessive praise. Praise in itself, however, is sometimes considered to be dangerous: the evil eye ‘may blast any person or any thing attractive enough to call forth a compliment, whether spontaneous and sincere or premeditated and malicious’ (McCartney, ‘Praise and Dispraise’, 11).

¹⁹⁷ One could compare this with an anecdote collected by Gregory (*Visions and beliefs*, 130), about an old woman who was believed to ‘throw the evil eye’ because she never

an example of a prayer for protection against the evil eye. If *Ríagail Pátraic* refers to harm done by the evil eye, then baptism followed by a bishop’s confirmation or blessing would be another form of protection.

The legal evil eye fragment refers to blessing as an apotropaic measure. It is possible that the evil eye is also indicated¹⁹⁸ by the expression ‘an eye that does not bless you’, found in the Middle Irish *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*,¹⁹⁹ and which is referred to as the cause of illness.²⁰⁰ Version A of the evil eye fragment also seems to refer to herbs as a means of protection.²⁰¹

So far as I am aware, this exhausts the measures against the evil eye as found in early Irish texts. There is thus no reference to saliva,²⁰² the widespread apotropaic known from other cultures. It is, however, not unlikely that belief in this function of spitting was also present in early Ireland. Saliva is mentioned as an alternative for the protective blessing in Camden’s report:

If one praise a horse, or any other creature, he must cry, God save him, or spit upon him; and if any mischief befalls the horse within three days, they find out the person who commended him, who is to whisper the Lord’s Prayer at his right ear. They believe, that the eyes of some people bewitch their horses; and in such cases, they repair to certain old women, who by muttering a few prayers, set them right again.²⁰³

It is interesting to note that the Modern Irish expression *bail ó Dhia flíuch*²⁰⁴ combines blessing and spitting. Tomás Ó Máille²⁰⁵ describes the custom of adding a blessing when praising someone in order to avoid

blessed what she saw, and who was believed to have become harmless when she had lost her sight.

¹⁹⁸This is suggested by P. W. Joyce (*Social history* i 309).

¹⁹⁹See ll. 1124–5 in the edition by Kenneth H. Jackson (*Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin 1990)): *súil ná-t athbendach*. Cf. K. Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne. The Vision of MacConglinne. A Middle-Irish wonder tale* (London 1892) 92–3, l. 16.

²⁰⁰Blessing as a protective measure is found in numerous instances in folklore reports. See, for instance, W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the elder faiths of Ireland* ii (London 1902) 285–6; Gregory, *Visions and beliefs*, 129–30, 132, 134–5, 137–8, 140.

²⁰¹See Part II of this article. A parallel in folklore was mentioned above in section 3.

²⁰²Saliva is mentioned, however, as an instrument to kill: in the *Annals of Ulster* AD 739 Séán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (ed.), *The Annals of Ulster to A. D. 1131. Part I: Text and translation* (Dublin 1983) 192–3 a Latin phrase refers to the poisonous saliva of wicked men (possibly in the sense of magicians) and in the *Annals of the Four Masters* AD 734 (John O’Donovan (ed.), *Annala Rioghachta Eireann. Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters from the earliest period to the year 1616* i (Dublin 1856) 336–7) an Irish phrase refers to spittle mixed with charms applied by wicked (*olc*), destructive (*aidhmhillte*) people.

²⁰³Camden, *Britannia*, col. 1421.

²⁰⁴This is a variant of the common greeting *cum* blessing *bail ó Dhia ort*, ‘prosperity from God be on you’, with the adjective *flíuch*, ‘wet’ added to it.

²⁰⁵*An Béal Beo* (Dublin 1937) 6.

harm from the evil eye and, after saying the blessing, one spits at the person.²⁰⁶ As mentioned in the introduction, amulets are found among the apotropaics in other cultures. In Ireland, amulets seem to be a Viking introduction; there is, however, no archaeological evidence of evil eye amulets.²⁰⁷ Etienne Rynne describes a late medieval stone altar in Balla, County Mayo. This altar bears a design, inscribed in the stone, which is locally called ‘the evil eye’. The author concludes that he knows no parallel of this design, and he remains in the dark about its meaning or purpose.²⁰⁸ It is possible that this is another protective device against the evil eye.

Conclusions

The connection between the evil eye and envy is well-known in international cross-cultural descriptions of the evil eye belief system, and as such, the Irish examples mentioned above fit in well. The most prominent feature of the evil eye in early Irish texts, however, is the fact that it is so often found in a battle context. Balor, Nár, Triscoth, Ingcéil and Cailb, all figure in tales about battles, and in the cases of Balor and Triscoth, the evil eye is in fact a weapon. This battle context could be a typically Irish characteristic. Damage done to livestock is an international cross-cultural characteristic of the evil eye, which is also found in early Irish texts. Among the agricultural examples, damage to dairy (i.e. products and cattle) is especially prominent. The earliest attestation of harm done to milk and butter is found in legal fragments.

To get a solid grasp on the concept of the evil eye seems to be impossible. It was very much feared once and hence a taboo subject, which could in part explain why many allusions are so ambiguous. On this note, I end this survey of possible examples of the evil eye in early Irish literature.

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²⁰⁶For ‘wetness’ as counteractive against the evil eye, see Dundes, ‘Wet and Dry’, *passim*. George Henderson (*Survivals in belief among the Celts* (Glasgow 1911) 28) notes about Scottish folklore: ‘this act of praising ... might lead accidentally to *gonadh*, or evil eye, or wounding of the cattle, as a preventative it was customary to say to the person making the complimentary remarks: *Fluich do shúil* = ‘wet your eye.’ This wetting of the eye was generally performed by moistening the tip of the finger with saliva, and moistening the eye with it thereafter’. Again, in Irish folklore, saliva as apotropaic is also known and often combined with a blessing (see, for instance, Gregory, *Visions and beliefs*, 135, 137, 140).

²⁰⁷Raghnall Ó Floinn kindly let me know this (letter, 22–6–1999).

²⁰⁸Rynne, ‘The round tower, “evil eye” and holy well at Balla, Co. Mayo’, in Conleth Manning (ed.), *Dublin and beyond the Pale. Studies in honour of Patrick Healy* (Bray 1998) 177–84, at 181. I am indebted to Seán Duffy, who drew my attention to this article.

PART II: ‘THE EVIL EYE’ IN EARLY IRISH LAW

I reproduce below a section of legal commentary attached to a four-word quotation from an Old Irish law-text. The quotation probably read *no etlae tre ſōmat* ‘or stealing through envy’ in the original version. This passage is found at f. 43a of Rawlinson B 506 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and is transcribed by D. A. Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici (CIH)* i 144.34–145.5. I refer to this version as **A**. Other versions are to be found on pp. 143, 423a and 500 of the composite legal manuscript H 3. 18 (no. 1337 in the Library of Trinity College Dublin) = *CIH* ii 673.3–10, iii 955.1–8 and 1051.17–23. I refer to these versions as **B**, **C** and **D** respectively. There are two minor errors in Binchy’s transcriptions: the word *amach* should be omitted at 673.9 and the words *maro bennach* should be inserted before *islan* at 955.7. The differences between the four versions are mostly minor — significant divergences are noted in the discussion below.

The origin of this four-word quotation is unknown, but it may belong to a *Senchas M/ar* text on marriage and divorce.²⁰⁹ The material in Rawlinson B 506 ff. 43a–45c (*CIH* i 144.17–150.16) deals mainly with offences by a woman against her husband. These include 146.5 *mem n-aíse* ‘a kiss [with another man] by consent’, 146.16 *etlodh treabtha* ‘stealing from the household’, and 149.10 *denughudh con* ‘hastening [the death] of a dog’.²¹⁰ The punishment for such offences is described in great detail in the commentary, and may entitle the husband to divorce (*imscar*) with return of the bride-price (*coibche*) and payment of his honour-price (*eneclann*). In some cases, the offence is evidently not held to be serious enough to warrant a divorce, and only a proportion of the fines is due, e.g. 146.6 half bride-price and half honour-price (*lethchoibhchi* γ *letheneclann*); 146.26 one quarter of the bride-price (*cethraimthi coibchi*). The text also includes situations where a wife is judged to have done no wrong. For example, 149.8 *aurgaire clamhe* ‘the prevention [of intercourse] with a leprous woman’ is explained in the accompanying commentary *nemcomhrac ria i naimsir comperta* ‘failure to have intercourse with her at a time suitable for conception’. The leprous wife is consequently entitled to retain the bride-price. Similarly, if a wife is found not to be a virgin on the wedding-night, she is judged to be free from liability (*slán*) if it can be shown that the hymen was ruptured through unavoidable walking or climbing’ (147.35 *tre deithberus céime no dréime*). If, on the other hand, the hymen was ruptured through walking or climbing which was judged to be unnecessary or improper (*tre indeithberus céime no dréime*), the morning gift (*sicail* ‘shekels’) which a man normally pays to the bride’s father is withheld. If the

²⁰⁹ No. 40 in Liam Breatnach’s tabulation: see his article ‘On the original extent of the *Senchas Már*’, *Ériu* 47 (1996) 1–43, at 35–6.

²¹⁰ For a brief discussion of the offence of *denughudh con*, see Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, 158.

hymen has been previously ruptured through improper lust (*tre indeithberus driúise*), presumably by a man other than the bridegroom, the legal consequences are much more severe. He who knowingly makes such a contract — in normal circumstances the bride's father — must pay double the morning gift (*diablad na sicul*), restore the bride-price (*coibche*) and pay the honour-price (*eneclann*), presumably of the bridegroom.

It is unclear to me why stealing by means of the evil eye should be included in a text dealing mainly with offences by or against women. There may have been a particular association of this offence with women — whether as victim or culprit — because of women's crucial role in milking and dairying. It is noteworthy that two of the other versions of the evil eye passage occur in conjunction with material on offences or failures by or against women, particularly those leading to a divorce. Thus Version B is preceded by a passage on the bruising of a wife (*cétmainter*) or concubine (*adaltrach*) (672.36–7), and by a passage on a wife's barrenness with consequent return of her bride-price (672.38–673.2). This version is followed by a discussion of the legal consequences if a woman has a child by a man other than her husband (673.11–17), and on a husband's infertility (673.23–6). Version C is followed by a discussion of forcible rape (*éigen*) and rape by stealth (*sleth*) (955.12–21). Version D (1051.17–23) is a slip of parchment which has arbitrarily been placed between pp. 500 and 501 in the manuscript.

Not enough of the Old Irish text on marriage and divorce has survived for it to be dated with any degree of precision. The form *denughudh* in Rawlinson B 506 (*CIH* i 140.10) may be for Classical Old Irish *díanugud* (*DIL* s.v.) with archaic é. This would place the text in the first half of the Old Irish period, perhaps seventh century. On the other hand, the spelling of this section of the manuscript is particularly irregular, so too much significance cannot be attached to a single spelling. One can compare the unusual spellings *ormath* (144.34) for *format*, *imairius* (146.10) for *amaires*, *rigul* (147.29) for *riagul*, *nerguinch* (148.11) for *nerguinech*. The commentary dates from around the twelfth century.

No etlod tri ormath .i. in drochrusc, (a) *acht* masa duini dana gnath ni do mhilliudh do gres, gidh re hesba gidh re beccdeithberus gidh re hindeithberus [docuaid amach BD], gidh dabennaigh gidh (=cin) gur bennaigh is lanfiach. (b) Mas re deitberus daeccma, *acht* ma rabennaigh islan, mainir bennaigh is aithghin. (c) Masa duini dunach gnath ni do milliud do gres, mas re beccdeithberus [docuaid amach BD] 7 dabennaigh islan, mainir bennaig is aithghein. (d) Mas re hespa dachuaidh, cia rabennaigh gid gur bennaigh is lethfiach. (e) Mas re hindeithberus foghla dachuaidh, ge dabennaigh gidh gur bennaigh is lanfiach. (f) Mas re deithbirus daeccma dachuaidh, ge dabennaigh gid gur bennaigh islan.

‘Or stealing away through envy’ i.e. the evil eye; (a) if it is a person whose habit it is to bewitch something generally, whether through wantonness or minor necessity or culpability [that he went out], whether he blessed or whether he did not bless, it is full penalty. (b) If it is through unavoidable(?) necessity that it happened, provided that he blessed, it is without liability; if he did not bless, it is restitution. (c) If it is a person whose habit is not generally to bewitch something, if it is through minor necessity [that he went out] and he blessed, it is free from liability; if he did not bless, it is restitution. (d) If it is through wantonness that he went, whether he blessed or did not bless, it is half penalty. (e) If he went out with criminal culpability, whether he blessed or did not bless, it is full penalty. (f) If it is through unavoidable(?) necessity that he went, whether he blessed or whether he did not bless, it is free from liability.

No etlod tri ormath. The other versions have *No etla tria format* (B), *Int etla tre formad im-* (C) and *No etlo tria format* (D). The original text probably read *No etlae tre format*. The form *etla(e)* is vb.n. of *as-tlen* ‘steals away’; spellings with *-ód* are common in later manuscripts (see *DIL* s.v. *etla*). *Format* is vb.n. of *for-muinethar* ‘envies’ — for envy as a form of casting the evil eye, see section 4 of Part I above. It is probable that in the original text the phrase *no etlae tre format* came immediately after 144.30 *Oghoghal dano etlod senmilg* (*Ógfogal dano etlae senmilg*) ‘a full offence, indeed, is the stealing away of old(?) milk’. *No* is likely to be original, as it is present in three of the four versions (ABD against C).

in drochrusc. The normal spelling of the nom. sg. is *rosc* (*DIL* s.v. 1 *rosc* ‘eye’). In Versions B and D, the evil eye is called *in drochsúil*; in C it is *in béim súla* ‘the strike of the eye’.

(a) **acht masa duini.** The other versions do not have *acht* here: *masa duini* (B), *ma duine* (C), *mas duine* (D).

gnáth. The commentary distinguishes between persons who make a habit of inflicting damage through the evil eye and those who do not. The other versions use the word *bés* ‘custom, practice’, e.g. *ma duine dana bes do gres beim sula* ‘if it is a person whose regular practice is the evil eye’ (Version C).

ni do mhilliudh. The verb *millid* ‘ruins, destroys’ (vb.n. *milliud*) can be used of damage, particularly on livestock, caused by the evil eye: see section 3 of Part I above.

esba, beccdeithberus, indeithberus. Irish law regularly takes into account various circumstances in which the liability for an offence may be reduced or cancelled.²¹¹

docuaid amach. It makes better sense to read *docuaid amach* with BD, and assume that this phrase was omitted from A. Version C uses a

²¹¹Fergus Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin 1988) 149–54.

different construction with the verb *imm-tét* (*immthigid*) ‘goes out’ (*CIH* iii 955.2).

gidh dabennaig. As has been shown in section 5 of Part I of this article, the effects of the evil eye can be countered by a blessing. Consequently, if a person who is known to have the evil eye neglects to utter a blessing, his legal liability may be increased.

lánfíach, lethfíach, aithgin, slán. Four legal circumstances are distinguished in relation to destruction caused by the evil eye. The first is *lánfíach* ‘full penalty’, which is due in the case of a person who is a habitual offender. If he or she is not a habitual offender, and has cast the evil eye through wantonness or folly, a half penalty (*lethfíach*) is due. If a person who is not a habitual offender goes out through minor necessity, but fails to utter a blessing, he or she must provide restitution (*aithgin*) for any damage caused by the evil eye. If a blessing is uttered, he or she is without liability (*slán*).

(b) **deitberus daeccma.** I tentatively translate this phrase as ‘unavoidable necessity’, though the range of variants renders the interpretation of the second word uncertain. The variants in the other versions of this commentary are *doecma* (Version B), *došechma* (Version C), and *dechm-* (Version D). The phrase is found elsewhere in legal commentary, with a similar degree of spelling-variation in the second word. Thus commentary on Heptad 23 (*AL* v 206.16) has *dosechmu* (*CIH* i 22.31), *doeachma* (*CIH* ii 548.24) and *doechmu* (*CIH* v 1837.28). Other spellings are *doeagma* (*CIH* i 188.25), *doecma* (280.22) and *dochma* (283.11). It is clear from his footnote at *CIH* v 1837^e that Binchy regarded the best reading as being *došechma*, as in Version C of the evil eye commentary. In addition, Version C uses a verb **sechmaid* in the phrase *in beim sula sechmas*, where *sechmas* seems to be 3 sg. pres. indic. rel. The verb **sechmaid* is possibly a by-form of *sechnaid* ‘avoids’, vb.n. *sechna*; cf. *CIH* i 155.35 *mani raibhi a seachna* ‘if it was not possible to avoid it’.

The forms *doecma*, *daeccma*, etc. could be 3 sg. pres. subj. of *do-ecmaing* ‘happens’, but this does not seem to suit the context.

(c) **beccdeithberus.** An injury may entail no liability on the part of the injurer if it is a case of *deithbir* (also *deithbire*, *deithbires*) ‘necessity, blamelessness’ < *di-* + *aithber* ‘blame, reproach’. For example, if an idle person (*espach*) is injured by a stone thrown up by the hoof of a horse ridden on a journey of necessary business (*ina eirim deithbire torba*), the rider is immune from liability (*CIH* i 242.18 = *AL* v 488.10). A distinction between great necessity (*mórdeithbires*) and small necessity (*beccdeithbires*) is sometimes made in legal commentary. At *CIH* ii 738.21 the distinction is defined as follows: *Is ed is becdethberus ann: ric a leas é 7 conicfad a sechna; is ed is mardethberus ann: ric a les é 7 nocho cumaing a sechna* ‘This is what small necessity is: it is needed and it would be possible to do without it; this is what great necessity is: it is needed and it is not possible to do without it’.

(d) **espa.** The term *espa* covers situations in which the culprit is silly, frivolous or wanton, but does not have malicious intent.

(e) **indeithberus fogla.** In this case the person who casts the evil eye has gone out unnecessarily (*re hindeithberus*) with the result that damage (*fogal*) is caused. He or she must therefore pay the full penalty for any injury. The phrase *indeithbir(es) fogla* is attested elsewhere in legal commentary, e.g. *CIH* i 282.14 = *AL* iii 258.23–4 *re indeithbir fogla*; *CIH* i 283.13 = *AL* iii 262.y *re hindeithberus fogla*.

Trí losa. Version A is followed without any break in the manuscript by a short passage on three herbs (*trí losa*), which is transcribed at *CIH* i 145.5–9. No other version of this passage is known to me, and I have no information on the identity of the plants *ríglus* ‘royal herb’, *tarblus* ‘bull herb’ and *aithechlus* ‘plebeian herb’. It is possible that these herbs were regarded as protection against the evil eye.

Ar ni inun cosc sair 7 dair 7 lethair: tri losa athechthar and: ríglus 7 tarblus 7 aitheclus; ríglus do righaib guna comhgradhaibh 7 tarblus do gradhaibh flatha, aitheclus do gradaibh feine; is edh dleghar a buain maseach, 7 in lus resater is *ed* dleghar a buain cach nuairi do, 7 is *airi* danither sen mada teccmadh a athair do gradhaibh flatha 7 a mathair do gradhaibh feine.

For the prevention of [the evil eye from?] the noble and base and half-noble is not the same: three herbs are recognised here: royal herb and bull herb and plebeian herb; royal herb for kings and those of equal rank to them, bull herb for the grades of lord, and plebeian herb for the grades of commoner; it should be plucked in turn, and the herb —(?), it is that which should be plucked every time for him, and it is for this reason that that is done, if his father should belong to the grades of lord and his mother to the grades of commoner.

cosc sair 7 dair 7 lethair. *Cosc* is vb.n. of *con-secha* ‘reproves’, which may also be used in the sense of ‘prevents, staunches (flow of blood, etc.)’ and so might refer to the use of herbs to deflect the evil eye. As has been noted in the Introduction to Part I above, garlic is believed to have this power in some Mediterranean cultures. I take *sair*, *dair*, *lethair* to be gen. sg. of *sáer* ‘noble’, *dáer* ‘base’ and *lethsáer* ‘half-noble’. The only other possible example of the compound *lethsáer* known to me is in the law-text *Din Techtagud* ‘on legal entry’ (*CIH* i 210.25; v 1861.16; vi 2020.18 = *AL* iv 18.20) and its accompanying gloss (*CIH* i 211.1, 3; v 1861.16, 18; vi 2020.18, 19 = *AL* iv 20.23, 25).

trí losa athechthar and. *Athechthar* is for *ath-féghthar* pres. indic. passive of *aithfégaid* ‘recognises, considers’. This passive is common in legal commentary, see *DIL* s.v. *aithfégaid*. One might expect the *ríglus* ‘royal herb’, *tarblus* ‘bull herb’ and *aithechlus* ‘plebeian herb’ to correspond in some way to the three categories of person listed above.

However, it is difficult to see how the bull herb for the noble grades (*do gradhaibh flatha*) could correspond to the half-noble category.

in lus resater. I have no explanation of *resater*. Possibly a verbal form?

ma da teccmad. For *ma da* (*ma díá*) 'if', see *DIL* s.v. 3 *má* IV. The form *teccmad* is 3 sg. past subj. of *do-ecmaing* 'happens, occurs'. This sentence clearly deals with the case of a person whose father is a noble and whose mother is a commoner. Presumably he must alternately pluck a bull herb and a plebeian herb.

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