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Kevin Murray
University College, Cork, k.murray@ucc.ie

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Genre Construction: The Creation of the *Dinnshenchas*

Kevin Murray
University College Cork

AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT and arguably most frustrating sources at the disposal of scholars dealing with place names in the early literature of Ireland is that known as *dinnshenchas* ('lore of places'), the cultivation of which is as old as written literature in the Irish language (Ó Cuív, 1989-90, 96-7). However, it was probably not until the late Old Irish period that it began to be cultivated as a distinctive genre, one which flourished in the Middle Irish period in particular. *Dinnshenchas* was cultivated in prose, poetry, and in the combination of the two, known as prosimetrum.[1] The corpus is traditionally divided into three constituent parts: "Dinnshenchas A" (the metrical version in the Book of Leinster), "Dinnshenchas B" (the predominantly prose version preserved in the Book of Leinster, Oxford MS. Rawlinson B. 506 and Edinburgh MS. Adv. 72.1.16; Gwynn, 1932; Ó Concheanainn, 1977), and "Dinnshenchas C" the "full" prosimetric form of the *dinnshenchas*, found in many later manuscripts, with "the legend attached to each place-name . . . related first in prose and then in a poem" (Ó Concheanainn, 1981-2, 89).[2] Major parts of the corpus have long been in print, including the Bodleian Dinnshenchas (Stokes, 1892), the Edinburgh Dinnshenchas (Stokes, 1893), parts of the Rennes Dinnshenchas (Stokes, 1894-5), Gwynn's monumental edition of the *Metrical Dinnshenchas* (1906-35), and the relevant texts from the Book of Leinster (Best et al., 1954-83). Important studies of the nature and structure of the corpus have been undertaken by Rudolf Thurneysen (1921, 36-46), Edward Gwynn (1906-35, v, 1-114; 1932),[3] Seán Mac Airt (Arthurs, 1955), Máirín O Daly (1965), Charles Bowen (1975-6), and Tomás Ó Concheanainn (1977; 1981-2; 1982), in particular, and more recently scholars such as Seán Ó Coileáin (1993; 2004), Nollaig Ó Muraíle (1995), Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh (2003), Petra Sabine (Tina) Hellmuth (2004), Francesco Benozzo (2004, 55-83), Ruairí Ó hUiginn (2007), Clodagh Downey (2010; 2013), Dagmar Schlüter (2010, 145-90; 2014), Morgan Davies (2013), Gregory Toner (2014) and Marie-Luise Theuerkauf (forthcoming) have contributed further to our understanding of this material.

My starting point, that the *dinnshenchas* collections from medieval Ireland form a discrete genre, is uncontroversial and has been articulated previously.[4] Ironically enough, this approach may be harmonized with what looks, upon cursory examination, like a diametrically opposing view that would see the *dinnshenchas* as "a considerable mass of undated fragmentary tradition" (Nutt, 1897, 168). What unifies these seemingly contrary opinions is what Clodagh Downey (2013, 45) has referred to as the "chronological and cultural context…[of] its compilation."[5] The formation of the

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[1] With regard to prosimetrum, see Mac Cana (1989, 1997); Parsons (2004); Toner (2005).

[2] Manuscripts containing a copy of "Dinnshenchas C" include Rennes (Bibliothèque Métropole MS 598), The Book of Ballymote, The Book of Lecan, and The Book of Uí Mhaine. The inter-relationships between "A," "B," and "C" have not yet been explicated to everyone's satisfaction.

[3] Containing his "General Introduction to the Dindshenchas" (esp. 91-114, §10: "Origins of the Dindshenchas").

[4] See O'Sullivan (1966, 22): "the later exclusive concept of place-name poetry as a category in itself."

[5] We need to maintain a distinction, where possible, between the construction of the *dinnshenchas* corpus and *dinnshenchas* elements in the literature outside of the dedicated corpus, though this is not always possible: Downey (2013) uses capital ***D*** for the collections and lower case ***d*** for the individual elements. I wish to thank Dr Downey for providing me with a pre-publication copy of this article.

dinnshenchas corpus thus represents a deliberate fashioning and cohesive structuring of disparate component elements from the late Old Irish period onwards and may be viewed in the words of Ann Dooley (2013, 66) as "a totalising genre project." Consequently, when we look at the *dinnshenchas* collections in all their forms, what we are examining is a corpus which, to a large extent, has deliberate genre origins in medieval Ireland; what might usefully be referred to as "genre codification." It is not a body of material first designated a genre by modern scholarship; this decision pre-dates contemporary scholarly opinion.[6] Such pre-modern classification is not unknown elsewhere in the Irish literary corpus. A further example of genre construction which pre-dates contemporary scholarly opinion is the tale-type known as the *remscél* ('prequel'), a category of narrative that defines itself as a category in relation to *Táin Bó Cúailnge* even if the connections between the stories so designated and the great Ulster Cycle epic are frequently contested. The use of this term dates back to the medieval period and is attested in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster (see Murray, 2001, 22) in a text that has been linguistically dated to the ninth century; the further term, *remremscél* ('pre-prequel'), is a modern coining and reflects scholarly unease in dealing with certain tales designated as *remscéla* (such as *De Gabáil int Shída* ['On the Taking of the *Síd*']) whose connection to the central epic is disputed.[7]

In some ways, these examples help focus our minds on a central aspect of this discussion: what exactly constitutes a medieval Irish literary genre? Many genres within medieval literatures do not recognise linguistic boundaries or national borders. Scholars of medieval Irish literature are aware that this field of enquiry abounds with categories (such as Finn Cycle tales [*fíanaigecht*], hagiography [*náemshenchas*], nature poetry, lays [*laíthe*]), with tale types (such as *aided* ['(violent) death'], *baile* ['frenzy'], *immram* ['voyage'], *echtra* ['adventure']), and with forms of presentation (such as prose, syllabic poetry, *roscad*, prosimetrum);[8] to what degree, however, do these groupings contribute to our understanding and organization of different genres? To what extent should we distinguish between classification, presentation, and (societal) function in our discussion?[9] These questions tie in with the definition of literary genre which I am using here (*OED* s.v. genre): "A particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose."

There is a risk inherent in the invoking of genre which must be acknowledged at the outset. Although, in Burrow's formulation (1982, 56-7), genre helps "establish for the reader, more or less precisely, what kinds of meaning he may expect to find in a text,"[10] the danger is that what we might refer to as "genrification," the superimposition of genre in the modern era upon an earlier body of work,[11] may be mainly for our benefit, and may lead to the artificial construction of coherence,

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[6] For example, *dinnshenchas* is mentioned in a Middle Irish text as one of the subjects to be studied by poets in the eighth year of their training: see Thurneysen (1891, 50).

[7] The terminology is from Chadwin (1997). For discussion, see Backhaus (1990); Fogarty (2011); Maher (forthcoming); Retzlaff (2009).

[8] *Rosc(ad)* is the term for the highly alliterative language, incorporating features of "Archaic Irish," which is categorized as neither poetry nor prose. For discussion, see Breatnach (1984, 452-3; 1991).

[9] For example, with regard to presentation, some text types have distinct manuscript *mises-en-page* which serve to set them apart from other materials. Among the most distinctive manuscript layouts are those associated with legal and annalistic texts, and with the martyrological tradition. In these, the regular manuscript arrangement privileges the text which is deemed linguistically older, visually reinforcing its identity and rendering it distinct from other types of presentations and texts. These represent visual markers for readers and help signal the categories of texts involved.

[10] This of course brings to mind Jauss's concept (1982, 79) of the "horizon of expectations."

[11] However, Jauss (1982, 79-80) would argue that "literary genres are to be understood not as *genera* (classes) in the logical senses, but rather as *groups* or *historical families*. As such, they cannot be deduced or defined, but only historically determined, delimited, and described."

particularly in designing university courses. As Dagenais (1994, 111) has warned, the pursuit of coherence is an occupational hazard for modern academics seeking to restore consistency and intelligibility to literatures and texts "damaged through the hazards of scribal transmission and the inexorable workings of time." However, as a genre established in the medieval period, the extent of the coherence of *dinnshenchas* has rather been established by medieval authors and redactors, though the presence of multiple *dúnada* in some *dinnshenchas* poems,[12] and the existence of multiple versions of *dinnshenchas* items relating to the same place, should alert us to the evolving nature of the corpus over time.[13]

One of the ways in which genres are distinguished is in the use of textual markers, often formulaic expressions, which serve to identify a text as belonging to a particular type of narrative. One need only instance the formulas "There was once a man" ("Es war ein Mann") / "Once upon a time" ("Es war einmal") / "In olden times" ("In den alten Zeiten") employed in the opening of fairy tales, and of those that end happily, many use versions of the phrase "They all lived happily ever after" ("Da lebten sie zusammen in Glückseligkeit bis an ihr Ende") (see Grimm, 1948). A study of the different versions of the similar Irish scene-setting phrase *fecht n-and* ('once upon a time') / *fecht n-óen* ('on one occasion') / *fecht (n-aile) n-aill* ('on another occasion') might also prove instructive, though these are generally used as discourse markers in Irish narrative, often serving to introduce further incidents within a story rather than being utilized exclusively as text openers and possibly as genre markers (see Mac Cana, 1996, 110-13). Similarly, although the formulaic phrase *cid ara n-eperr [X]? ní ansae* ("why is [X] so called? it is not difficult") is used to begin *Críth Gablach* (Binchy, 1941, l. 1), it is also used repeatedly as a discourse marker later in the same text, including for example: *Cid ara n-eperr fer midboth don[d] fhi[u]r so?* ("why is this man called a *fer midboth* [lit. 'a man of middle huts']"); *Aire coisring, cid ara n-eperr?* ("an *aire coisring* [lit. 'a freeman of binding'], why is he so called?"); and *Rói buiden, cid ara n-eperr side?* ("a *rí buiden* [lit. 'a king of bands'], why is the aforementioned so called?") (ll. 30, 277, 457). Such question-and-answer formulations were beloved of medieval Irish jurists and belong to what Thomas Charles-Edwards (1980, 147-53 [147]) has referred to as "standard Old Irish textbook prose"; as its name suggests, such prose was not confined to legal tracts and may have been inspired by the textbooks of Latin grammarians. In contrast, Proinsias Mac Cana (1996, 119) would prefer to see the question and answer form as "the staple of pedagogy in the learned schools of Ireland before the invention and spread of writing in the vernacular," and thus sees its presence in medieval Irish literature as "a remnant of the system of learning and instruction which was current in the native schools before the adoption of writing."

As a distinctive marker used to begin narratives, we might point to the number of medieval Irish tales which begin with variants of the phrase *Boí rí amrae for [X]; [Y] a ainm* ("There was a famous king over [X], [Y] was his name") (see selection in Mac Cana, 1996, 104, 117). Examples include: *Boí rí amrae for Laignib, Mac Dathó a ainm* (Thurneysen, 1935, l. 1); *Rí amra ro boí for Laignib .i. Rónán mac Aeda* (Greene, 1955, l. 1); *Buí ríg amra for Éirinn feachtus and, .i. Domnall mac Áeda mic Ainmirech* (Lehmann, 1964, ll. 1-2); *Boí rí amra for Túathaib Dea i n-Hére. Dagán a ainm* (Hull, 1933, 55); *BAÍ ri amra airegda i nEmain Macha fecht n-aill .i. Conchobur mac Fachtna* (Best and Bergin, 1929, ll. 10114-5); *BAÍ rí amra de Grecaib Salemon a ainm* (Best et al., 1954-83, v, l. 36554); *Bái rí amra for Eirinn .i. [Cormac] ua Cuinn* (O'Grady, 1892, i, 319); and variations thereof such as: *BAÍ fer amra, di Eoganacht Ninussa .i. Ailill Ochair Ága a ainm* (Best and Bergin, 1929, l. 1644). To what extent such phrases might be seen as genre markers, and to what extent they should be viewed as discourse markers and

[12] *Dúnad* (plural *dúnada*) translates as 'closure'. "In Irish syllabic verse, and also often in the older poetry, the last word or syllable of the *íarcomarc* ('final stanza') echoes the first word or syllable of the first line of the poem. A poem in which this echo does not occur is said to lack a *dúnad*" (Murphy, 1961, 43).

[13] For example, see the discussions of the assorted *dinnshenchas* materials for Cnogba in Byrne (1967-8, 385-7); Ó Cathasaigh (1989, 27-30); and Davies (2013, 100-2).

formulaic "scene setters," is very much an open question.

The *dinnshenchas* collections bear witness to the repeated use of distinctive linguistic markers, particularly in the prose, which serve to bind this material together as a genre. Many of these texts begin: *[X]: canas ro ainmniged* ("[X], why is it so called?") or *[X]: cid dia tá* ("[X], whence is it [named]?") or (in Latin) *[X]: unde nominatur* ("[X], whence is [it] named?"), frequently followed by *ní ansae* ('it is not difficult').[14] Many of these same texts then conclude with phrases such as *is de atá [X]* ("it is from that that [X] is [named]") or *conid de gairthir [X]* ("so that it is from that that [X] is called"), or (in Latin) *unde [X]* ("whence [X] [is named]") (see Schlüter, 2010, 152-3, 158-9). This terminology is also regularly utilised for *dinnshenchas* materials which are not preserved within dedicated collections. However, as a counterpoint, we must note that such markers are also absent from many *dinnshenchas* texts, particularly the poetic ones; thus, they act as a general genre guide but are not a necessary part of its construction. Another common genre marker is the *risa ráiter / risa n-abar* ('from which it is said') formulation which is central to how many *dinnshenchas* narratives are structured and "involves stating that places traversed in the course of the itinerary were formerly known by different names" (Ó hUiginn, 2007, 63). Once the mythical origins of the "older" name have been explicated, this is then regularly tied to the physical landscape by saying that A is now known as B; often, however, the "older" name is not to be otherwise found outside of the narrative itself.[15] This ambiguity finds an echo in Francis John Byrne's description (1967-8, 386) of the *dinnshenchas* collections as consisting "of artificial learning rather than genuine traditional mythology: very often one suspects *ad hoc* invention of a myth by a *senchaid* in order to explain an obscure name"; similar *ad hoc* literary invention of place names to reinforce extant narratives would also seem to have played a significant role in the creation and cultivation of *dinnshenchas*.

Genre subversion also plays an important part in medieval Irish narrative. For example, texts such as *Scéla Mucce Meic Da Thó* ("The Tale of Mac Da Thó's Pig") (Thurneysen, 1935) which may or may not be best viewed primarily as an Ulster Cycle tale (Ó Muirigh, 2013, 705-8), and *Fled Bricrenn* ("Bricriu's Feast") (Henderson, 1899; Mac Cana and Slotkin, 2015) which unambiguously belongs to the Ulster Cycle, gain a large part of their literary power by subverting the expectations of heroic literature through parodying many of its conventions. Such tales are most effective when mocking well-established literary genres or other standard aspects of storytelling. For example, parodying of naming practices is a feature of *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* ("The Vision of Mac Con Glinne") (which has as its main focus the lampooning of the monastic *familia* of Cork) with its evocation of comic place names such as Loch Lemnachta ('New Milk Lake') and Bend Grotha ('Peak of Curds') (Jackson, 1990, ll. 1030-2) and amusing personal names such as Mael Saille mac Maíl Imme meic Blongi ('Devotee of Bacon son of Devotee of Butter son of Lard') (Jackson, 1990, ll. 1030-2). The *Aislinge* parodies established literary genres "but never loses sight of its targets in the real universe of church and state in twelfth-century Cork" (Herbert, 2005, 71).

Another significant aspect in genre discussions is the concept of "genre overlap." Many texts resist neat categorization and indeed may be reckoned as belonging to more than one genre. This is particularly true of the overlap between *fíanaigecht* and *dinnshenchas*. It has long been recognised that the emergence of Finn Cycle literature into the mainstream of medieval written culture in Ireland was bound up with the growth in importance of *dinnshenchas* in the Middle Irish period and that the boundaries between the two were frequently blurred (see Murray, 2015, 452-3). Elsewhere, I have briefly discussed one such example of genre overlap in an examination of the

[14] The significance of this phrase is treated in detail in Baumgarten (1992, 11-17).

[15] For discussion, see Mac Cana (1988, 338); Ó Coileáin (1993, 59); Ó Muraíle (1995, 124); Ó hUiginn (2007, 64).

dinnshenchas elements of *Bruiden Átha Í* ("The Contention of Áth Í"),[16] one of three very early inter-related Fenian tales where the action is primarily located on the banks of the river Suir around Cathair Dúin Iascaig, present-day Cahir, County Tipperary (Murray, 2015, 455-6); the other two associated texts are *Marbad Cúlduib* ("The Slaying of Cúldub"), and "Finn and the Man in the Tree." These tales set in Déisi territory constitute a mini-cycle of their own and give us an insight into one early branch of *fíanaigecht* tradition. Rolf Baumgarten (1987) has explicated in a nuanced way many aspects of the "literary etymologising" present in *Bruiden Átha Í*. This Old Irish narrative consists of two distinct parts with the opening section presenting the *dinnshenchas* of Cenn Cuirrig, named for Cuirrech Lifi who is beheaded there by Finn mac Cumaill in revenge for Cuirrech's decapitation of Finn's wife, Badamair.[17] Interestingly, this initial section closes with a quatrain, which is later utilized as the first verse of the poetical *dinnshenchas*. This structure, prose concluding with a single verse, brings to mind the description of "Dinnshenchas B" by Ó Concheanainn (1981-2, 88) which, though predominantly a prose version, "contains about a hundred authentic items, each having a quatrain at, or towards, the end"; such quatrains acting "as much for certification as for ornament" (Bowen, 1975-6, 122; cf. Toner, 2005). This perfectly describes the opening part of *Bruiden Átha Í*.

A problem in dealing with individual items in the *dinnshenchas* corpus is that, in its present published format, it can easily lead scholars astray when seeking materials therein, Currently, the only part of "Dinnshenchas C," the "full" prosimetric form of the *dinnshenchas*, in print is that published by Stokes (1894-5) as "The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas." As the title suggests, he omitted the integral poetic sections which this version contains. When one re-examines the entry on Cenn Cuirrig in the manuscript of the Rennes Dinnshenchas, or the version of "Dinnshenchas C" in the Book of Ballymote,[18] one sees immediately that alongside the prose these sources preserve the poem which is very similar to that found in the *Metrical Dindshenchas* (cf. Gwynn, 1906-35, iii, 234-5).

One of the more significant aspects of this analysis is the support it might give to Tomás Ó Concheanainn's understanding of the development of *Dinnshenchas Érenn* ('Lore of Places of Ireland') in contradistinction to the arguments put forward by Gwynn, Thurneysen, and Bowen. Ó Concheanainn (1981-2, 89-91) would give primacy in the tradition to "Dinnshenchas C" (the "full" prosimetric form of the *dinnshenchas*), arguing that "Dinnshenchas A" (the metrical version in the Book of Leinster) "is extracted from an early text of C," and that "Dinnshenchas B" (the predominantly prose version preserved in the Book of Leinster, Oxford MS. Rawlinson B. 506, and Edinburgh MS. Adv. 72.1.16) is "an abridged recension made from the prose of C." The traditional understanding of the development of this corpus, however, is that the metrical *dinnshenchas* (assembled perhaps in the mid-eleventh century) preserved in the Book of Leinster has priority, that the prose version was partially based on this poetry (perhaps compiled in the early twelfth century), and that the full prosimetric *dinnshenchas* represents the final stage of compilation (dating perhaps to the late twelfth / early thirteenth century).

The *dinnshenchas* material on Cenn Cuirrig seems to offer some non-linguistic support for Ó Concheanainn's position. The basic tradition which underlies the extant texts is to be found in *Bruiden Átha Í*, which predates any other version of the Cenn Cuirrig story by several hundred years. This tradition is best preserved in the prose of "Dinnshenchas C." The poetry found in versions A and C is virtually identical though the compiler of "Dinnshenchas A" preserved in the Book of Leinster has not preserved the original onomastic link with Cenn Cuirrig, County Tipperary, using

[16] Editions: Meyer (1893, 242-5) and Hull (1941, 323-9); partial edition in Baumgarten (1987, 7-10).

[17] For more information on this place name, see Ó Riain et al. (2005, s.n. Bodhamair).

[18] Gwynn (1906-35, v, 56) believed the Rennes Manuscript and the Book of Ballymote to be "the most important authorities" for this form of the *dinnshenchas*.

the poem for the Curragh of Kildare instead (see Gwynn, 1906-35, iii, 519). This points to "Dinnshenchas A" being secondary in this case, and "Dinnshenchas C" being primary (as suggested by Ó Concheanainn); this item is not attested in "Dinnshenchas B." Regular though intermittent perusal of the various *dinnshenchas* texts has led me to believe that, of the published accounts currently available, the version preserved in the Rennes manuscript often seems to be the most linguistically conservative.[19] Of course, in-depth analysis will be required to see whether evidence may be assembled to bear this out.

In addition, the beheading of Cuirrech, the act which underpins the naming act, is also alluded to in various versions of a later Fenian lay concerning Caílte and the animals. This poem, the earliest version of which is dated by Murphy (1953, 17-20, §vii) to the late Middle Irish period, concerns Caílte's efforts to ransom Finn from Cormac. In his boasting concerning his martial prowess, Caílte declaims:

dar cursamar cath ann sin
dia a ttugas liom cionn Cuirrigh

when we fought the battle there
in which I carried off the head of Cuirreach.[20]

Not only does this sever the episode from its onomastic context, but it also invokes an alternate *fíanaigecht* frame of reference for this incident. Such literary re-working and transformation of tradition across a range of texts, tradition most probably preserved both orally and in written format, serves as much to conceal as to reveal its sources; parallels between the extant narratives may be noted but it remains difficult to make inferences regarding the exact nature of the relationships involved.

There are other *fíanaigecht* materials preserved in the *dinnshenchas* corpus, however, which give support to the more traditional picture of its development. For example, the poem known as "Áth Líac Find I" details famous exploits at a ford involving Finn and a stone with a golden chain, whence the origin of the name. This composition, beginning *Áth Liac Find, cid diatá* ("Ath Liac Find—whence comes it?"), is preserved in "Dinnshenchas A" in the Book of Leinster (Gwynn, 1906-35, iv, 36-9) and is attributed therein to Máel Muru Othna (†887). There is a later poem beginning *Áth Líac Find, cía lía diatá* ("Ath Liac Find—from what stone comes the name?"), preserved in "Dinnshenchas C," which reworks much of the original poem (*ibid*., 40-3). It omits many of the verses, adds a few new quatrains, and ultimately reconfigures the entire composition. It is accompanied by a related prose narrative which seems to either derive from this poem, or is drawing on the same underlying tradition (Stokes, 1894-5, §139 [*RC* 16, 147-8]); this item is not attested in "Dinnshenchas B." The inter-relationships of these surviving pieces concerning Áth Líac Finn, alongside a possible oral and unrecoverable stratum, means that we can hope to establish a relative chronology of these extant written texts, with Máel Muru Othna's composition as the linguistic anchor. This example gives support to the traditional interpretation of *Dinnshenchas Érenn* with primacy given to Version A.

To revert once more to *Bruiden Átha Í* with its integrated *dinnshenchas* materials: we see examples therein of what Rolf Baumgarten (1987, 23) has referred to as "incidental or additive etymology." We read about "Currech of Life of the Leinstermen, from whom there is Ráth

[19] The manuscript dates to the fifteenth century and has been described in Todd (1870) and Dottin (1894).
[20] MacNeill (1908, §VII, 19, 116). See Ross (1939, 40, no. IX, §§3-4); Ní Shéaghdha (1942-5, iii, 73). Cf. Meek (1987, 142-3).

Churrig" (*Currech Lifi do Laignib dia tá Ráith Churrig*) though the opportunity to derive a place name in a similar manner in the text from Téite, wife of Finn mac Regamain, is passed over (*ibid.*, 8). In the Rennes Dinnshenchas (Stokes, 1894-5, §49 [*RC* 15, 443-4]), the Ráth Churrig connection is maintained; however, an onomastic derivation from Téite is added:

Inann dono máthair la Cuirrech 7 la Fothadh Canann 7 la Teidi ingin Meic Níadh, a qua Ænach Teite, ben sein Find meic Ragamna.

Cuirrech's mother was the same as the mother of Fothad Canann and of Teite daughter of Mac Niad, from whom *Oenach Teite* is named. Teite was the wife of Find son of Ragamain.

Such "incidental or additive etymology" is how the oldest tradition concerning the naming of Nenagh, County Tipperary, has come down to us. It is surely the story of the death of Téite which inspired the use of this material in an onomastic environment, particularly in the context of naming the site as an *óenach*, which can refer to a burial site. The oldest references to Nenagh are to Óenach Téite and the majority of these derive from our *dinnshenchas* collections; the shorter form underpinning the modern name (Óenach preceded by the definite article) is not attested in documentary sources until the fourteenth century (Murray, forthcoming). In a later extract, printed as an appendix to the second volume of *Silva Gadelica* (O'Grady, 1892, ii, 483), we read of Téite *a quo aenach Téiti*, where we see Téite understood as a man's name.

The existence of this group of narratives associated with a very specific area of the country points to the literary cultivation of complex inter-woven *fíanaigecht* traditions in the eighth century. That these were not isolated tales is clear from their contexts with their cross-references to other materials as well as their espousal of themes attested elsewhere in Fenian literature. As Rolf Baumgarten (1987, 15) has asserted:

These tales presuppose the existence at the time of other related ones, among other things because of the number of actors and persons introduced without comment, whose status would have been known (thematically or incidentally) from those other contexts.[21]

These stories represent only one localized story nexus among several; together they serve to demonstrate how widespread, even if marginal, was the written cultivation of *fíanaigecht* in the Old Irish period. The onomastic elements contained in the corpus of Finn Cycle literature, which are central to the way these tales (particularly *Bruiden Átha Í*) function as narratives, give substance to Brian Ó Cuív's assertion, noted at the outset, that the cultivation of place-name lore is as old as written literature in the Irish language. This literary cultivation reached its high point in the Middle Irish period with the assembly of *Dinnshenchas Érenn*, a development which played an important part in genre formation in medieval Ireland. The materials preserved in this corpus, though disparate in origin, have been largely harmonized in form, style, and purpose to create a distinctive genre, one famously if inaccurately referred to as "the mythological geography of the country."[22] However, this type of material (with its set presentations) is also found in other genres, most notably *fíanaigecht*. Among the examples examined here, the *dinnshenchas* element in *Bruiden Átha Í* is particularly instructive. It conforms to genre norms for the prose *dinnshenchas*—it contains one of the genre markers (*Is de ata*); has a brief and onomastically charged prose narrative; and this prose is capped by the use of a single evidentiary verse—and all this at a date which precedes the construction of any of

[21] Of course, what Baumgarten is invoking here is the concept of the "immanent cycle": see Clover (1986, 23-7).

[22] The phrase is from Sjoestedt (1949, 1). See the comments of Ó Coileáin (1993, 57-9).

the *dinnshenchas* collections. Even genres may find earlier sources to model themselves upon.[23]

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