

THE TEXTUAL TRADITION OF *COMPERT CON CULAINN*

1. THE MANUSCRIPTS

Compert Con Culainn (*CCC*), the tale of the conception and birth of Cú Chulainn, has been handed down in two recensions, generally referred to as version I and version II.

(i)

The earliest surviving text of version I occurs in a truncated form in the hand of the principal scribe (M) of *Leabhar na hUidhre* (LU) and is followed by a fragment of a sequel written over an erasure by the reviser (H) of the manuscript.

Six later manuscripts offer a variant of version I, which has an altogether different ending from that represented by scribe H's fragment in LU. These six manuscripts are: British Library, Egerton 88; Royal Irish Academy, 23 N 10; Trinity College, Dublin, 1363 (H.4.22) section iv; BL Eg. 1782; RIA D iv 2; National Library of Ireland, G 7.¹ These are of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century dates and all have connections with the province of Connacht.²

LU's primary text of *CCC* (that written by scribe M) now ends where the birth of the boy is related, *Birt mac*, LU 10611 ('She gave birth to a son'), and from this point scribe M's text has been erased by scribe H in order to make way for his own contribution.³

According to a note in H's hand, added to the title of the primary text, this tale is 'from the Book of Drumsnat' (*a Libur Dromma Snechta*, LU 10557). This was an Old-Irish manuscript which scholars generally believe to have dated from the first half of the eighth century.⁴

The variant of version I offered by the six later manuscripts was introduced into the scribal tradition of Connacht through a now-lost early-twelfth-century compilation into which, as has recently been shown, a number of *Cín Dromma Snechta* (CDS) texts had been redacted directly

¹ Editions of version I are: (1) E. Windisch, 'Die Geburt Cuchulainn's / Compert Conculaind' (separate editions of the texts of *Lebor na hUidre* [facsimile] and Eg. 1782), *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch* (Leipzig 1880) 134–42; (2) R. Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern* II (Berlin 1912), gives two editions, (i) a critical text based on LU and three other manuscripts, with translation, and (ii) the text of D iv 2, with translation; (3) R. I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin 1929) lines 10557–10635; (4) A. G. van Hamel, 'Compert Con Culainn', *Compert Con Culainn and other stories* (Dublin 1933, repr. 1956) 1–8.

² Though D iv 2 was written outside the borders of Connacht, one of its scribes, namely Seán Mac Aedhagáin (probably Seán mac Conchobhair, *ollamh* to Clann Riocaird, who died in 1487), drew on Connacht sources for this and at least one more of his texts: see my article, 'Notes on Togail Bruidne Da Derga', *Celtica* 17 (1985) 73–90, p. 73.

³ LU, lines 10611–35.

⁴ See S. Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain: Bran's voyage to the Land of the Women* (Tübingen 1985) 421–69, for discussion of the literature on the subject and for the author's own views on the dating of the manuscript.

from Leabhar na hUidhre.⁵ The totally different ending presented by the six manuscripts of the Connacht tradition of version I has erroneously been considered to represent the part erased by scribe H from the primary text in LU.⁶

(ii)

Version II survives in two texts contained in Eg. 1782 and D iv 2 respectively and in each manuscript the text occurs immediately after that of version I.⁷ When Windisch published the two versions together,⁸ it was to be seen that the part represented by scribe H's fragment is to be found in full in the final section of version II. Thurneysen considered the two texts of version II to be descendants of an earlier text which he claimed had been drawn on by scribe H for the section added by him to that part of the primary text in LU which he had allowed to stand.⁹

2. THE TWO VERSIONS

Not being readily available in print, version II admittedly is not a well-known text, and as it diverges widely in parts from version I, the simplest introduction to the textual history of this complicated tale is to present summaries of the two versions side by side.¹⁰

⁵See my article, 'A Connacht medieval literary heritage: texts derived from Cín Dromma Snechtai through Leabhar na hUidhre', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 16 (1988) 1-40, pp. 12-16.

⁶The ending of the tale in all six manuscripts of the Connacht tradition is clearly an abridgement of an episode from *Macgnímartha Con Culainn* ('The boyhood deeds of Cú Chulainn') in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, which recounts the killing of Culann's hound by Setanta. In this episode the boy then offers to act as watchdog for Culann and thus acquires the new name 'Cú Chulainn'; cf. C.-J. Guyonvarc'h, 'La conception de Cúchulainn', *Ogam* 17 (1965) 363-91, p. 376.

⁷Editions of version II are: E. Windisch, *Irische Texte* (1880), 143-5, (continued on) 140-42, from Eg. 1782; K. Meyer, 'Feis Tige Becfoltaig' [*sic*], *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 5 (1905) 500-504, from D iv 2.

⁸See notes 1 and 7.

⁹R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Halle 1921) 271.

¹⁰For translations of version I see R. I. Best, *Bibliography of Irish philology and of printed Irish literature* (Dublin 1913) 89; and for those of version II see R. Baumgarten, *Bibliography of Irish linguistics and literature 1942-71* (Dublin 1986) § 5011. A rendering given in T. P. Cross and C. H. Slover, *Ancient Irish tales* (London 1937, repr. 1969) 134-6, covers only the first half of version II, with a note supplied within brackets to represent (though it does so only partly) the supposedly original ending (as found in the six manuscripts of the Connacht tradition; cf. note 6 above). The extant second half of version II is not touched on at all.

Version I (LU)

Version II (Eg. 1782)

(i) A flock of marvellous birds¹¹ frequently came to graze on a plain at Emain, destroying all the vegetation. Conchobar and the Ulstermen hitch up their chariots and set out in pursuit of the birds. The hunt proceeds southwards over Sliab Fuait. Conchobar's sister, Deichtine, is his charioteer on this trip.¹²

(ii) Night comes and there is a heavy snowfall. The men of Ulster unhitch their chariots. Conall and Bricriu go to look for a house and they find a small one occupied by a man and a woman, who bid them welcome. There is, however, room in the house for only some of the Ulstermen.

(i) Deichtire and fifty maidens of Ulster departed secretly from Emain and were being sought in vain for three years. They return in the form of a flock of birds and graze on a plain at Emain, destroying all the vegetation. The Ulstermen, as is their custom, set out in pursuit of the birds.

(ii) At nightfall the birds escape from their pursuers. The Ulstermen unhitch their chariots and Fergus goes to reconnoitre. He locates a small house. There, a man and a woman greet him and tell him to bring his companions into the house.¹³ *Bricriu then goes out and he hears strange music. He finds himself at a big house. The man of the house invites him in, addressing him by name. The man's wife also welcomes Bricriu. The man then reveals that his wife and the other women in the house are Deichtire and her fifty maidens. Bricriu returns and tells all this to his companions, but not to Conchobar. When Conchobar asks Bricriu for news, Bricriu again relates his adventure but does not*

¹¹The birds are joined in pairs by ornamental chains on their necks. This motif of magic birds chained in pairs is found also in *Serglige Con Culainn* ('The wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn') – see M. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin 1953, repr. 1975) lines 59–60 – and may have been inspired by this passage in *CCC* (see Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 418 n. 2)

¹²*De(i)chtine* is the form used in the LU primary text, but *Dec[h]tine* in scribe H's text. Variant spellings, *Deicht(e)(i)r*, are found in the two versions in both Eg. 1782 and D iv 2.

¹³The rest of this item, printed in italic, constitutes a major divergence in this version, in which Deichtire is equated with the Otherworld woman who in version I gives birth to a boy, whom the Ulstermen then take back to Emain and who later 'dies' there (only to be reborn as *Sétanta*). In other words, version II simplifies the mythology of the conception and birth of Cú Chulainn from the threefold one recounted in Version I to the single origin in the Otherworld, where he is begotten by a god on a mortal woman.

tell Conchobar that the beautiful woman in the house is Deichtine. Conchobar says that the man is a subject of his and sends for the woman to spend the night with himself. Only Fergus dares go on this errand.

(iii) The man of the house then tells them that his wife is in labour. Deichtine goes to attend the woman, who gives birth to a son. At the same time, a mare in the doorway drops twin foals and the man gives them as a present to the boy.¹⁴

(iv) The Ulstermen adopt the boy and Deichtine takes charge of him. At daybreak the house has vanished and the Ulstermen find only their horses, chariots, the boy and the foals. They return to Emain but some time later the boy dies.

(iii) The woman returns with Fergus but announces that she is about to give birth. Conchobar is told and the woman is granted a respite. They all settle down for the night. When they wake in the morning they see a strange thing – a small child in Conchobar's bosom.¹⁵

[(iv) - (vii) of version I are not represented here.]

¹⁴For examples of the the motif of the 'congenital friendly animal' see T. P. Cross, *Motif-Index of early Irish literature* (Bloomington [1952], repr. 1969) § B311 sqq. On this instance of the motif K. Jackson, *The international popular tale and early Welsh tradition* (Cardiff 1961) 91, writes: 'It is usually held that the very old Irish tale of the Conception of Cú Chulainn contains a corrupt version of this, and that in the uncorrupted original Cú Chulainn was born at the same time as a mare foaled in the house, and the twin foals were given him and grew up to be his famous chariot horses, the Liath Macha and the Dubh Sainghleann'. The touching association of the deaths of these horses with Cú Chulainn's tragic end is described in *Aided Con Culainn* ('The Death of Cú Chulainn'): see 'Aided Con Culainn', §§ 24, 40-41, 44, 46, in van Hamel's *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*.

¹⁵MS *ind ulbroig Concobuir*. The reading of D iv 2 (f. 47 v a 2-3) *i mbrollach Concobuir* is confirmed by a reference in the Book of Leinster (see section 6 below). This point is noted by Guyonvarc'h, *Ogam* 17 (1965) 385. For *ulbroc* 'bosom, breast' see *Dictionary of the Irish language [DIL]* U-77.6-10, where the Book of Leinster reading is also noted.

There are two traditions to be found in different texts of *CCC* regarding Cú Chulainn's kinship with Conchobar: the boy is either a nephew or a grandson of the king. It has been argued in a section (pp. 27-30) of the article referred to in note 5 above that some late medieval copyist misinterpreted a certain reading in the LU recension of the tale and thereby initiated the tradition which, in some texts of version I, represents Deichtine as Conchobar's daughter (and not as his sister). On this tradition (generally claimed to be the older one and alleged to derive from Cín Dromma Snechtá) see Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 268 (who is followed by van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, 3 § 1 n. 5). See also the discussion by T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The sister's son in early Irish literature', *Peritia* 5 (1986) 128-60, pp. 136-7.

(v) After lamenting the boy's death, Deichtine feels thirsty and is given a drink in a copper bowl. There is a small magical creature in the drink which tries to jump into her mouth: eventually it does, and goes down with her breath. That night Lug mac Ethnend¹⁶ appears to her in a dream and tells her that she is pregnant by him – that the boy whom she reared was his child and that this child has now entered her womb¹⁷ and [when born again] will be Sētanta.

(vi) The pregnancy of Conchobar's unmarried sister causes some worry to the Ulstermen, who suspect that the king himself, when drunk, has been responsible, since it was with him that she used to sleep. Conchobar then has her married to one of the Ulstermen, Sualdaim mac Róig.

(vii) Deichtine's mysterious pregnancy somehow disappears as she is about to become Sualdaim's wife. In due course she gives birth to a son / [*Here the hand of scribe H begins over an erasure*] and he is given the name Sētanta.

(viii) Conchobar commands his sister Finnchoem to adopt the boy and he himself chants an obscure lay over him, referring to him by name. There is a disputation among the Ulstermen as to who should rear the boy. First Sencha,

(viii) Conchobar commands his sister Finnchoem to adopt Deichtine's child and he himself chants a lay [*as in version I*]. Then a dispute arises among the Ulstermen as to who should rear the boy. Those involved are Sencha, Blai Briuga,

¹⁶Lug mac Céin (his patronymic) or Lug mac Ethnenn/Ethlenn (his matronymic), a leader of Tuatha Dé Danann, is master of all arts. He is the leader of the Tuatha in their preparations for the battle of Mag Tuired against the Fomoir: see E. A. Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (Ir. Texts Soc. LII, [London] 1982) 126–7.

¹⁷On the theme of conception through swallowing a small creature in a drink see A. Rees and B. Rees, *Celtic heritage* (London 1961) 216–9, 228–30, 273; cf. T. P. Cross, *Motif-index*, § T511.5.2; see also F. Le Roux, 'La conception divine', in Ch.–J. Guyonvarc'h, 'La Conception de Cúchulainn', *Ogam* 17 (1965) 363–410 (pp. 401–5 in 'Commentaire du texte par F. Le Roux', 393–410).

and then Blai Briuga, make their claims . . . [*Rest of text is lost in a lacuna*].

Fergus and Amargin. Sencha proposes that Finnchoem take charge of the boy until they return to Emain, when [the judge] Morann should decide the issue. They return to Emain. Morann declares that the warriors and sages of Ulster should all equally apply their talents to the upbringing and education of the boy. He is fostered by Finnchoem and her husband Amargin; and thus Cú Chulainn is Conall Cernach's foster-brother.

3. THE SOURCE OF SCRIBE H'S CONTRIBUTION

The surviving fragment of scribe H's interpolation in the primary text in LU corresponds to the beginning in version II of the dispute which follows the birth of Deichtire's child in the Otherworld, with several of the Ulstermen contending for the honour of rearing the boy. In LU too, it is to be noted, scribe H's text (beginning *7 doberar Setanta fair*, lines 10611–12) follows the statement in M's text that Deichtine gave birth to a son (at Emain).

Zimmer was the first to indicate the composite nature of the LU text [= scribe M's part + scribe H's interpolation, as we know the text today] and its correspondence to version II in Eg. 1782 (as published by Windisch some time before).¹⁸ This was followed up by Thurneysen, who claimed that the source of H's text was a redaction of version II of eighth- to ninth-century date,¹⁹ i.e. of somewhat later date than the CDS text (represented by scribe M's text in LU). However, a new thesis is being put forward in this paper: that the source of H's contribution is virtually certain to be the account of Cú Chulainn's education as given in a section of a large interpolation by scribe H himself in *Tochmarc Emire (TE)* ('The Wooing of Emer'), the text which immediately precedes *CCC* in LU.²⁰

One set of extracts will suffice to exemplify the close agreement between, on the one hand, the account (in both versions of *CCC*) of

¹⁸H. Zimmer, 'Keltische Studien 5, Compert Conculaind', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 28 (1887) 419–26, p. 423. See note 7 above.

¹⁹*Heldensage*, 271.

²⁰LU, lines 10113–556. As regards the relationship of *CCC* and *TE*, the traditional view is that the latter has borrowed from the former. This view was formed by H. Hessen in R. Thurneysen, H. Hessen and G. O'Nolan, 'Zu Tochmarc Emire', *ZCP* 8 (1910–12) 498–524 (see pp. 509–514), before R. I. Best published his important article on the scribal hands of Leabhar na hUidhre, 'Notes on the script of Lebor na Huidre', *Ériu* 6 (1912) 161–74 (with plates), and has been accepted by van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*, 29 § 22 n. 8 (see note 21 below); cf. Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 381–2.

the contention of several Ulstermen for the fostering of the boy and, on the other, the account of Cú Chulainn's education as related by himself to Emer in *TE*.

(The verbal agreement between the three extracts is shown in bold type.)

CCC

LU 10626-31

Eg. 1782 (*IT* 141.17-22)

Geib duit in mac ol Conchobar
beos fria flair. Niba si nod n-ebela
em ol **Sencha**. acht is messe nod
n-aillfea. **ar am tren am tre-**
bar. am an am athlom athar-
gaib. am ollom. am gáeth.
nidam dermatach. Adgadur²¹
nech ría rí. Arfochlim a insce
. . . concertaim²² bretha Ulad
7 nis n-insorg.

Gaib duit in mac, a Finnchoem, ol
Concobar fria fhiair. Niba sí nod
n-eblai eim, ol **Sencho**, is misi nod
n-eblae. **Ar am tren, am an, am**
athlum allus atharguib, am oll-
um, am gaeth, nidom dermat-
och. Adgladathur²³ rig ria rig.
Amroichlimm²⁴ a innsni . . .
Concertuim²⁵ bretha hUlad 7
niss n-innsurg.

(LU): 'Take the boy', Conchobar said yet again to his sister. 'It shall not, indeed, be she who will rear him,' said Sencha, 'but it is I who shall rear him, for I am strong and I am wise. I am swift. I am deft in the use of arms. I am a master and I am intelligent. I am not forgetful. I summon a person before his king. I provide for his address. I correct the judgements of the Ulstermen and I do not rouse them [to anger]'.²⁶

²¹OIr. *adgaur* (later form *adgairim*) 'I prosecute, accuse', etc.; see *DIL* A-55.60. On the form *adgadur* (clearly influenced by *adgládur*, 'I address') van Hamel, loc. cit., writes: 'This scribal error is already found in the version of *Compert Con C.* that was the source of this portion of *Tochm. Em.*, cf. *Z.C.P.* 8, 510' (see note 20 above). This scribal error was first pointed out by Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 382 n. 1.

²²When scribe H was writing, in the late Middle Irish period, the first element in the verb *con-certa* was just a nasalizing *co*, as the spelling in his hand in LU 10287 *cocertaim* indicates. Right through the later Middle Ages, however, scribes generally (as in this case) employ the compendium for *con*, i.e. turned *c* (a symbol borrowed from Latin script), to indicate nasalizing *co* (in compounds or as a conjunction) before consonants. The Eg. reading *con facco* cited in the first paragraph of section 5 below shows confusion of *co n-acca* and *co facca*.

²³*Adgládathur* is, more correctly, the 3 sg. form. The expected form here would be *Adgládur* 'I address, speak to', see *DIL* A-57.35.

²⁴The scribal confusion in evidence here (the correct form being *arfhoichlimm*) may be due to the influence of the copula *am* in several preceding sentences. Eg. 1782 was written in 1517 and the impossible form *amroichlimm* clearly derives from an earlier manuscript, for the intruded *m* (between *a* and *r*) must have contributed to the confusion which resulted in the erroneous re-formation *doroich lium* of D iv 2 (f. 47 v a 18), a manuscript which was probably written before 1487 (see note 2 above).

²⁵See note 22 above.

²⁶In regard to translations throughout I wish to make acknowledgement to van Hamel's edition of *CCC* and to *DIL*.

TE

LU 10285-88

Rom e bail **Sencha** sobérlaid **con-** ‘Sencha the eloquent has reared
idam trén trebar án athlum me, so that I am strong, wise,
athargaib. am gáeth i mbretaib. swift, deft in the use of arms. I
nidam dermatach. Adgadur am intelligent in judgements. I am
nech ria túaith trebair arfochlim not forgetful. I summon a per-
a n-insce. Cocertaim²⁷ bretha son before a wise assembly. I pro-
Ulad uli. 7 nis n-insorg. vide for their address. I correct
the judgements of all the Ulster-
men and I do not rouse them [to
anger].’

The preceding extracts show the close relationship of (a) both scribe H’s fragment and the earlier part of the ending of version II to (b) the earlier part of the *TE* section.

The rest of the ending of version II and the later passages in the *TE* section exhibit an agreement which admits of no doubt that the lost part of H’s text contained the remainder of the dispute, and the decision of the Ulstermen about the rearing of the boy (as given in version II). Three sets of extracts will illustrate this point (with the use of bold type as in the passages cited above):

(i)

*CCC*Eg. 1782 (*IT* 141.28-142.4)

Is anble sin, ol **Fergus** . . . is ‘That is a shame’, said Fergus,
missi nomn-eblo²⁸. . . **Am amnus** ‘. . . it is I who shall rear him . . .
ar gail 7 gaisced . . . **Am** I am impetuous in deeds of val-
tualuing . . . **Am din gach** our and prowess . . . I am capable
dochruiti. Do gniu dochur of . . . I am a protection against
gach triuin, dogniu sochur every ignominy. I inflict injury on
gach lobuir. every warrior. I give advantage to
every wretched person’.

²⁷The spelling in the Middle Irish period; cf. notes 22, 25, above.

²⁸For *no n-elbo* (= *nod n-ebela*, LU 10627-8). The *-m-* is due to scribal confusion; cf. note 24 above.

TE

LU 10293-7

<p>Rom alt Fergus . . . Am amnas ar gail 7 gaisciud conidam túalaing . . . Am dín cach dochraid . . . Dogníu sochor cach thrúaig. Dogniu dochor cach thriúin.</p>	<p>'Fergus has reared me . . . I am impetuous in deeds of valour and prowess and am capable of . . . I am a protection against every ignominy. I give advantage to every wretched person. I inflict injury on every warrior.'</p>
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(ii)

*CCC*Eg. 1782 (*IT* 142.4-9)

<p>. . . ol Amorgení . . . Ro moltar ar gach feib as mo gail 7 as mo gaisced . . . as mo gais . . . ar aine 7 calmatus . . . am fili . . . Arurg gach n-eirrid, ní tuillim buidi di nech acht do Conchobar.</p>	<p>. . . said Amargin . . . 'I am praised in every respect for my val- our and for my prowess, for my wisdom . . . for speed and bold- ness. I am a poet . . . I slay every (chariot-)warrior. I do not owe thanks to anyone but Concho- bar'.</p>
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TE

LU 10298-301

<p>Rosiachtus glún Amargin fíled coro molaim rí as cach feib . . . co ndingbaim oenfer ar gail ar gaisced ar gais ar áine . . . ar calmatus. Dingbaim cach n-errid ní tullim budi do neoch acht do Conchobur cách.</p>	<p>'I came [for instruction] to the knee of Amargin the poet, so that I can praise a king in each of his quali- ties, and am more than a match for any man in valour, in prowess, in wisdom, in speed . . . in boldness. I beat off every (chariot-)warrior. I do not owe thanks to anyone but Conchobar.'</p>
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(iii)

*CCC*Eg. 1782 (*IT* 142.14–21)

<p>Fuigillsit Morann . . . Ba cummo no ndomnaigetar²⁹ huili eter ar(aid) 7 eirrid, eter rig 7 ollum, ol bid caro sochuidi in mac so. Is cuma do fich uar n-inechgreso huili.</p>	<p>Morann pronounced . . . 'It will be equally that he will be instructed by all, by charioteer and (chariot-)warrior, by king and poet, for this boy will be a friend of a multitude. He will avenge equally all affronts to your honour.'</p>
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TE

LU 10305–7

<p>Bád chumma rom altsat Ulaid uli eter araid 7 errid. eter rí 7 ollomain conidam cara slúai 7 sochaide conid cumma dofichim a n-enechgressa uli.</p>	<p>'It was equally that all the Ulstermen reared me, both charioteer and (chariot-)warrior, both king and poet, so that I am a friend of host and multitude, so that I avenge equally all affronts to their honour.'</p>
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The obvious conclusion to be drawn from the evidence of the textual agreement revealed in the extracts presented above in (i), (ii), and (iii) is that scribe H in supplying his contribution to *CCC* in LU, which replaces the erased section of scribe M's text, drew on his own interpolation in *TE* containing the description of Cú Chulainn's education, for it would be a far-fetched idea to imagine that H borrowed his contribution to *CCC* from version II and also used that same source for composing, or redacting, the description of Cú Chulainn's education in *TE*.

4. VERSION I'S PRIMARY TEXT AND VERSION II

We now come to the question of the relationship of the primary text in LU (that written by scribe M) and version II, namely, the part of the story up to the birth of Deichtine's child (at Emain, in version I; in the Otherworld, according to version II). The argument put forward in this paper in regard to the relationship of the two versions of *CCC* is the same for both halves of the tale: that the first half of version II is, like the second half (already discussed), derived from the LU text.

One set of extracts will suffice to reveal an agreement which is so close that it must preclude any suggestion of the descent of the first half of version II from any source other than the LU primary text.

²⁹van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, 8, edits as *no ndamnaigfetar* ('for *no-dn-damnaigfetar*') and renders as 'that all will instruct him (?)', p. 164.

(The flock of marvellous birds described in version I (LU) are of unknown provenance, while those in version II (Eg. 1782) are stated to be in reality Deichtire and her fifty maidens, who (as related further on in the tale) have come to lure the Ulstermen thither [into the Bruig].)³⁰

(i)

Version I (primary text)

LU 10559-62

<p>No thathigtis énlaithe mag ar Emuin. Na gelltís conna facabtais cid mecnu na fér ná lossa i talam. Ba tochomracht la hUltu a n-aicsiu oc collud a n-hírend. Imlaat .ix. cairptiu día tofund laa n-and ar ba bás léusom forim en.</p>	<p>Birds frequented a plain at Emain. They grazed it so that they did not leave even roots or grass or herbs in the soil. It was annoying for the Ulstermen to see them destroying their land. One day they hitched up nine chariots in order to hunt them, for it was their custom to go to hunt birds.</p>
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(ii)

Version II

Eg. 1782 (*IT* 143.4-8)

<p>Taitthigtis iaram hi rict enlaithe hi maig ar Emuin, co ngeltis iaram hi mag, cona facbais gid luisni hi talmuin ann. Ba mor soeth dono la hUltu inni sin. Innlit Ulaid dono noi gcairptiu dia toffun ina n-en ar ba bes leosium foram for enlaithe.</p>	<p>They then used to come back in the form of birds to a plain at Emain and they grazed the plain so that they did not leave even a herb in the soil there. That was indeed a great distress to the Ulstermen and they hitched up nine chariots in order to hunt the birds, for it was their custom to go to hunt birds.</p>
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³⁰*Dectire a hainm ocus it e dochotar hi rict na henlaithe do Emuin Macae do thochuiriu d hUlad, gu tuidchidis sunn ille: Irische Texte* (1880) 144 lines 26-7 ('Deichtire is her name and it is they who went in the form of a flock of birds to Emain Macha in order to entice the Ulstermen to come hither'). Bruig (Brug) na Bóinne is one of the locations of the Otherworld: see T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin 1946) 122, 283, 516. The rationalization of the Otherworld birds as Deichtire and her maidens is the starting-point of version II, leading to the simplification of the mythology of the origin of Cú Chulainn and to the elimination of the reference to incest; cf. note 13 above. The motif of incest, however, like that of divine procreation, frequently marks the birth of the hero: cf. P. Mac Cana, *Celtic mythology* (London and New York 1970) 101.

It seems clear, then, from the textual correspondence shown above in 3 (i), (ii), (iii), and the close agreement in 4 (i), (ii), that the Egerton text (regarded as the better representative of version II) is not simply 'a retouched rendering of the Cín Dromma Snechta version'³¹ but, more specifically, is descended from the composite text (by scribes M and H) of LU.³²

5. THE TITLE OF *CCC* IN D IV 2

In this RIA manuscript the title of the tale is *Feis Tige Begfholtaigh*, which has been translated as 'das Übernachten im Haus von Becfholtach'³³ and 'Le festin de la maison à la petite richesse'.³⁴ The title clearly refers to the small bare dwelling which (in both versions) the Ulstermen at first locate. In version II they abandon this small house and spend the night comfortably in a much larger house which Bricriu has come upon: *con facco in tech mor coin cumtachto ar a chinn* (*IT* 144.12–13) 'and he saw a large well-constructed house in front of him'. Thus, the first inconsistency in version II is its title; and other defects in this version might be noted, such as the unexplained presence of Finnchoem in the Otherworld when Deichtire's child is born there. The word *begfholtach* of the title in D iv 2 is clearly a ghost-word, based on a misunderstanding of the adjective *becallach* which occurs in the first line of Conchobar's lay in scribe H's text: *Sochla brec becallach* ('Renowned, speckled, small-jointed'). In version II (Eg. 1782) this line reads *Sochla brig becf[h]oltach* and has been translated as 'Glorieuse est la puissance [de la maison] à la petite richesse'.³⁵

According to the prevailing view of the textual tradition of *CCC* the fragment by scribe H in LU is derived from version II; and accordingly the first line of the lay in H's text is understood to refer to the small bare house, and has been translated as 'Glorieuse est [la maison] bariolée à la petite richesse'.³⁶

In version II the adjective *becfholtach* (as if derived from the old word *becfhola* 'small stock, cattle')³⁷ refers to the poverty of the owner of the small bare house, i.e. 'having little substance'. A more obvious

³¹R. Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum* II (London 1926) 289.

³²The copy of version I in D iv 2 'is a modernized form of the Egerton text with an addition at the end' (Flower, *Catalogue*, 268). This addition, which deals primarily with the name *Sētanta*, or rather *Sédana*, is published by Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern* I (Berlin 1912) 41; see also his translation in *Heldensage*, 270–71. It does not, however, seem that the piece in question was ever intended as part of the text; see MS at f. 47 v b 16 and the text proper as printed by Meyer, *ZCP* 5 (1905) 500–504, p. 504.

³³Thurneysen, e.g. in *Heldensage*, 271; cf. van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn*, 1, 'The passing of the night in Becfholtach's house'.

³⁴Guyonvarc'h, *Ogam* 17 (1965) 378.

³⁵ibid., 379, 391.

³⁶ibid., 368.

³⁷*DIL* B-48.26–7. On the use of the word *becfhola* as a name see M. Bhreathnach, 'A new edition of Tochmarc Becfhola', *Ériu* 35 (1984) 59–91, p. 87 n. 7.

interpretation of the form *becfholtach* would seem to be 'having little hair',³⁸ and in this sense the word would aptly apply to a new-born child. It might be suggested that this interpretation of the word could have formed an intermediate stage in the proposed development of *becaltach* into **becfholtach*, thus: *becaltach* ('small-jointed') > *becfholtach* / *becfhaltach* (? 'having little hair') > **becfholtach* [as if from *becfhola*] ('having little substance').³⁹

6. A POEM IN THE BOOK OF LEINSTER

A form of *CCC* which apparently corresponded in part to version II was known to the author of a long poem, *A rí ríchid réidig dam* ('O king of heaven, clarify for me'), contained in the Book of Leinster (LL). This poem, which recounts some universal and Irish literary history, devotes four quatrains (LL 17983–98) to the tale of the birth of Cú Chulainn. Of these four quatrains, the second refers to the stay of the Ulstermen overnight in the Brug and the finding of a beautiful child 'in fair Conchobar's bosom' in the morning:

Cotlait aidchi i n-oen a mbrug,
frith ar matain, derb in dlug,
i mbrolluch Conchobuir chaim
noedenan bec bulidchain.⁴⁰

In H's interpolation in the LU text Conchobar's lay ends with the line *donnuc for set Sétanta*, LU 10625, which probably is generally understood to mean 'she (Deichtire) has given us, on a journey [*sēt*], Sétanta',⁴¹ the journey in question being that to the Brug, from which the Ulstermen had returned a long time before.

The fourth line of the third quatrain on *CCC* in the LL poem echoes the final line of Conchobar's lay, but in LL the reference is to the journey which they have just made from Emain:

Asbert cách frith sund sét
icnad anta dun glangéc;
atbert Conchobar tren tra
danrat for sét Setanta.

(Everyone said 'a treasure has been found here' / the bright branch could not wait . . . [?]; / mighty Conchobar then said / 'she has given us, on a journey, Sétanta' [?].)

The D iv 2 text of version II reflects LU *donnuc for set Sétanta* more clearly, for it reads (f. 47 v a 12–13) *donfuc for set Sédana* [sic], whereas

³⁸For examples of *bec-* in adjectival compounds (e.g. *bec-cosach*) see *DIL* B–48.39–57.

³⁹*DIL* B–48.46.

⁴⁰See note 15 above.

⁴¹Contrast Guyonvarc'h, *Ogam* 17 (1965) 368: 'elle nous a donné un trésor, Setanta'.

the allegedly superior text of Eg. 1782 introduces a new verb in the line, *donanic for set Setanta* 'Sētanta has come, on a journey, to us'⁴² (i.e. 'We have, on a journey [*sēt*], acquired Sētanta').

The fourth quatrain on *CCC* in the LL poem recalls the scene from version I (LU 10599–603) in which Lug mac Ethnend appears to Deichtine (at Emain) and tells her

(a) that the departed foster-child has now entered her womb;⁴³

(b) that this child's name will be Sētanta (*γ bid Setanta a ainm*, LU 10602–3).

The author of the LL poem (or the author of his source) appears to have mistakenly connected Lug's statement about the child's name (*γ bid Setanta a ainm* 'and his name will be Sētanta') and the next sentence, in which Lug identifies himself to Deichtine (*γ bá hésse Lug Lug⁴⁴ mac Ethnend*, LU 10603, 'and he [himself] was Lug mac Ethnend'), for this fourth quatrain states that Cú Chulainn was Lug!:

Lug mac Eithlenn do beirn Breg
ra buí i ndeibl na noeden;
ba hé in lórbladach ra raind,
ba Cú comramach Culaind.

(‘Lug mac Eithlenn from the pass of Brega / was in the form of the child / he was the most famous. . . [?] / he was the victorious Cú Chulainn’.)⁴⁵

It would seem, from both the foregoing quatrain and the reference to the child being found ‘in Conchobar’s bosom’ in the morning at the Brug, that a form of *CCC* which corresponded in parts to the two versions was known to the author of the LL poem. This otherwise unrecorded form of *CCC* cannot have been a fully developed recension of the extant version II, for the statement that Cú Chulainn is Lug derives from a misunderstanding of the wording of the part of Lug’s announcement to Deichtine in version I in which he identifies himself, *γ bá hésse Lug mac Ethnend* (LU 10603).

⁴²The redactor of this text of version II understood the word *Setanta* (though separated from the verb) to be the subject in the sentence. If this is the correct syntax, both the LU reading, *donnuc for set Sétanta*, and that of LL, *danrat for set Setanta*, should be translated as ‘he, Sétanta, has brought us on a journey’. The rendering by Guyonvarc’h, p. 379, ‘il nous est venu un trésor, Setanta’, is clearly impossible.

⁴³See note 17 above.

⁴⁴*Sic*, dittography at beginning of line, as indicated in Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre*, 321 n. 5.

⁴⁵In this connection a statement by O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, 271, is of some interest: ‘Cú Chulainn, who in the Táin is assigned the role of defender of the Ulaid against their invaders, can be shown to be in origin Lug or Lugaid, a deity whom we may conveniently call the Hero. . .’. The LL poem is ascribed to Gilla in Choimded ua Cormaic, who is also credited with another poem, which begins *Aimirgin glúingel tuir tend*: see K. Mulchrone, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy XXVI* (Dublin 1942) 3342. This author is otherwise unknown. Cf. Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 270 n. 1.

The nearest inferior limit yet established for the dating of scribe H is AD 1135, viz. the date of the death of another scribe, one Gilla Commáin Ó Congalláin, a lector of Ros Commáin and compiler of a now-lost selection of CDS texts, who used a section of H's interpolation in *TE* as the exemplar of an extract (*Verba Scáthaige*) which he took from a poem addressed by Scáthach to Cú Chulainn (LU 10350–430).⁴⁶ Scribe H's contribution to *CCC* in LU is clearly based on a section of his own interpolation in *TE*, and in this form can date only from the time of its insertion in the manuscript (before 1135).⁴⁷

The compilation of the Book of Leinster was begun about the middle of the twelfth century,⁴⁸ so that the confused version of *CCC* known to the author of this undated poem in that manuscript may already have been in existence in the first half of the century. That rendering of *CCC* could have been the first stage in the development of version II, which is ultimately derived from the composite text in LU.⁴⁹

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⁴⁶See *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 16 (1988) 12–16.

⁴⁷Even before 1106, as I claim in 'The reviser of *Leabhar na hUidhre*', *Éigse* 15 (1973–4) 277–88.

⁴⁸See R. I. Best et al., *The Book of Leinster formerly Leabar na Núachongbála I* (Dublin 1954) xvii.

⁴⁹I wish to express my thanks to Professor P. de Brún for some important corrections and a number of useful suggestions.