

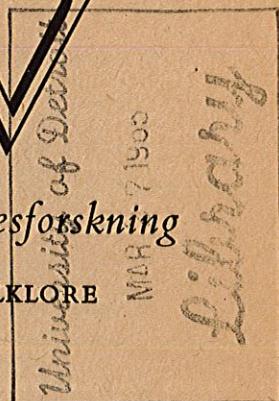
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ALMQVIST & WIKSELLS BOKTRYCKERI AB · UPPSALA
ROSENKILDE AND BAGGER · COPENHAGEN

A Folk-variant of the Táin Bó Cúailnge from Uist

By Calum I. Maclean (Edinburgh)

Angus Macellan, 90, Gearrabhailteas, South Uist narrated, 11/6/1959,
the following tale:

There was a farmer and he had a son. Cù Chulainn was the son's name and he was young at the time. And his father was invited to the wedding of the chief's daughter. And there was a bridge over which they had to cross and they called it the Bridge of the Hundreds. And no one was to get across the bridge after ten o'clock. It was guarded and it was a hound that he had guarding the bridge. What did Cù Chulainn do but follow his father to the wedding. And when he reached the bridge, the time was up. And he could not cross the bridge: the hound barred the way. And he was driving a ball and he had a club driving the ball before him. And Cù Chulainn stood facing the hound. And he struck the ball and the hound caught it. And the ball went down the hound's throat. And he set upon it with the club and killed the hound. And he went on his way until he reached the chief's house. He hid himself around the place until they sat down at table. And Cù Chulainn found his way inside to the tables. And his father raised his head and saw him and said:

"Oh, indeed", said he, "I see something that makes me wonder!" said he.

"What is that?" said the chieftain.

"The little boy I left at home", said he. "O Mary, he is at table along with us", said he.

"Indeed, if that be true", said the chief, "I have lost my hound", said he.

Cù Chulainn was immediately taken to court and he was asked how he crossed the bridge. Cù Chulainn told what he had done—he had slain the hound.

"What shall I do now", said the chief, "since that is the case", said he, for it will be seven years", said he, "before I can rear a hound", said he, "that will guard the bridge", said he, "like the hound that did guard it."

"Oh, well", said his father, "there is no way for it", said he, "but that the person who slew the hound must go to guard the bridge", said he, "until you rear a hound that will guard it."

"Well, good enough", said the chief, "let it be so!" said he.

Cù Chulainn went to guard the bridge. And he spent seven years guarding the Bridge of the Hundreds without dog, without man, without calf, without child, without fire, without colour, without warmth until the chief got a hound to relieve him. And he put it to guard the bridge in his stead.

And when his father died, it was Cù Chulainn who came into his father's place. It was he who got the farm. And Cù Chulainn got a bull, a fairy bull, and it would impregnate a cow by bellowing. And he had another bull as well, but the other farmers envied him very much. All Cù Chulainn's cows had calves but many of their cows had no calves at all.

And at that time there was no law except the law of the strongest. Everyone came to take the bull from Cù Chulainn by force and Cù Chulainn put paid to everyone who came to take it.

And he married the daughter of a person of high rank, and the woman herself was very big, while Cù Chulainn was a very small man. And whom should he see arriving this day but his father-in-law, and he knew well why he came—to get the bull. And he made his wife bake a bannock of bread and put the griddle inside the bannock.

"And go now", said he, "to bed, and I shall go along with you", said he, "and when he comes", said he, "you will say", said he, "that you have given birth to a child", said he.

She went to bed and Cù Chulainn went to bed beside her. And the old man then arrived and the door was open when he came. "The wind blows against the door of the heroes", said the old man. "Oh, it does", said she as she lay in bed, "but if the heroes themselves were at home, they would take the wind out of the door", said she. "How would they take the wind out of the door?" said he. "They would turn the house round", she said.

The old man went out and he began to pull the house. And he could not remove the house from its foundations. He came in:

"It seems that they are indeed heroes!" said he. "And are you alone?"

"I am alone", said she.

"What is wrong with you that you are in bed?" said he.

"I have given birth to a child", said she.

"Is he strong?" said he and—

"He is", said she.

And he went and approached the bed. And he put his hand underneath

the clothes and put his thumb in Cù Chulainn's mouth. Cù Chulainn closed his teeth on the thumb and took it off from the joint.

"Tut! Tut!" said the old man, "he is a sturdy child."

"He is", said she.

"And where is your husband?" said he.

"Truly, he is not at home", said she.

"And have you any food cooked?" said he.

"Oh, no", said she, "I have nothing except a hero's hard bite that is yonder", said she, "if you can manage it."

"Where is it?" said the old man.

The old man got the bannock. And when he took the first bite out of it, he left four of his teeth in the griddle.

"Tut! Tut!" said the old man, "surely and truly it is the hard bite of a hero", said he. "Where is the Brown Bull of Cúailnge?"

"Indeed, I do not know", said she. "I am sure it is along with the cattle."

Away went the old man. And Cù Chulainn got up and went out and shifted the Brown Bull. He put it along with another herd and he himself waited by the first herd. The old man arrived.

"Is this the Brown Bull of Cúailnge?" said he.

Cù Chulainn had another bull in the herd.

"It is", said Cù Chulainn.

"I am going to take it away", said he.

"Oh, you are not!" said Cù Chulainn. "I must not allow it to be taken away", said he, "until my master comes", said he.

"What do I care for yourself and your master?" said the old man.

Over went the old man and caught the bull by a horn. And Cù Chulainn went over and caught the other horn. And they started dragging the bull from one another and they killed it between them. "You are lucky, indeed", said Cù Chulainn, "that my master was not at home", said he, "or you would have to pay dearly for it."

"What would your master do?" said the old man.

"He would do something you cannot do", said he. "And, perhaps, I myself could do it", said he.

Over went Cù Chulainn to a great crag that was there. And he placed his heel on the edge of the rock, and he then put the heel of his other shoe to the toe of that shoe and placed his two fists out from the toe of that shoe again.

"Will you measure two feet and two fists out from the edge of that rock?"

"I will", said the old man.

The old man went over and put his heel on the edge of the rock and he

put the heel of his other shoe over it. Cù Chulainn came behind him and threw him over the rock. And his brains were dashed out.

There was not ... Cù Chulainn kept the Brown Bull of Cúailnge as before.

But there was one stalwart man like Cù Chulainn himself, a man they called Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein. And he was at school with Cù Chulainn. And they pledged each other, when they were at school, that the one would never turn against the other.

And the farmers gathered and began to bribe him to take the bull from Cù Chulainn, until they finally made him swear an oath that he would not return unless he got either the bull or death. Away went Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein. And Cù Chulainn saw him coming and well he knew how matters stood. And he said to his wife:

"Ah well", said he, "I never believed", said he, "until now that the Brown Bull of Cúailnge would go from me", said he. "My comrade is on his way", said he, "and I am certain that it is to seek it he comes", said he.

When his comrade arrived, Cù Chulainn welcomed him and he was brought inside. And next morning Cù Chulainn asked him:

"What, comrade", said he, "will be our sport today?"

"Oh!" said the other, "we will have our backs towards one another and butts of our spears against each other while we bring down the chase."

"Oh, very good!" said Cù Chulainn.

They went to the hunting-hill. Next morning, when they had had breakfast, Cù Chulainn asked him:

"What will be our sport today, comrade?" said he.

"Oh, our backs towards one another and the butts of our spears against each other while we bring down the chase!"

"Oh, nothing could be better!" said Cù Chulainn.

But then on the third day, when they arose and had breakfast, Cù Chulainn asked:

"What will be our sport today, comrade?" said he.

"Oh!" said he, "our faces towards each other and the points of our spears against each other", said he, "and the tale of blood flowing", said he.

"Is it so?" asked Cù Chulainn. "I thought", said he, "that that was not the compact we made with each other", said he, "when we were at school."

"Ah well, it was not", said he, "but I have given my oath", said he, "that I must get it (the bull)", said he, "or meet my death".

"Oh, well then", said Cù Chulainn, "it has not gone yet!" said he.

Off they went. And each of them had a servant. And they took up position on opposite banks of a river that was there. They hurled their spears at

each other and their servants brought the spears back to them. But at this point Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein's servant began to dam the river. And when the river was blocked, he prevailed. And Cù Chulainn's servant began to keep the river open. And when the river was flowing, Cù Chulainn prevailed until Cù Chulainn's servant slew the servant of Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein. And now night was approaching and Cù Chulainn hurled his spear across to the far side of the river and killed him (Fear Diag). And he himself fell on the near side. And he lay shedding his life-blood. And he asked the servant:

"Do you see anything about the river here?" said he as he turned to the servant.

"Oh, there is nothing", said the servant, "except that I see a dog", said he, "drinking the blood", said he, "down yonder."

"Go", said he, "and bring me the spear", said he.

The servant went for the spear.

"Where ... in what place is it?" said Cù Chulainn.

The servant told him where it was. And Cù Chulainn hurled his spear at the hound and killed it.

"Have you seen", said he, "whether I killed the hound?"

"Oh, you have killed it!" said the servant. "You have cut it in two".

"Oh, that is true!" said he. "That was the first feat I ever performed", said he, "and it was the last feat I had to perform.

"And I am undone", said he, "and the Brown Bull of Cúailnge may now go to any man it chooses."

And Cù Chulainn died. And the Brown Bull was there for anyone who chose to take it away.

Gaelic text

Aonghus Beag mac Aonghuis 'ic Eachainn a dh' innis:

Tuathanach a bha seo agus bha gille aige. 'S e Cù Chulainn an t-ainm¹ a bh' air agus cha robh e ach òg a's an ám. Agus gu dé fhuair athair ach

¹ The glide vowels between *lbh*, *lg*, *mch*, *nch*, *nm*, *rbh*, *rg*, *rm* I have not indicated, although they occur in all cases, but, in the case of *rbh* in the word *dearbh*, I have written the glide as *a* and enclosed the silent *bh* in brackets. When the extra syllable appears to be tacked on to the end of the word, I have written *deara(bh)a*. In certain other cases too I have enclosed silent consonants in brackets, e.g. *col(t)ach*. Medial and final *c* becomes *chc* in all cases in this narrator's dialect, but I have merely written *c*, e.g. *fiaclan*. The intrusive *s* between *rd*, *rt* I have not indicated except where it does occur, for in this case there is no consistency. Where *t* drops out after *r* I have written, e.g. *toir'*. I am not competent to give a phonetic transcript of the Gaelic text.

fìadhachadh gu banais nighean an uachdarain. Agus bha drochaid ann a bh' aca ri dhol seachad ora agus 's e Drochaid nan Ceud a chanadh iad rithe. Agus cha robh duine ri faighinn seachad ora an déidh dheich uairean. Bhathar 'ga geàrd agus 's e cù a bha a' geàrd na drochaid aige. Ach gu dé rinn Cù Chulainn ach falbh as déidh athar chun na bainnse. Agus 'n uair a rànaig e an drochaid, bha an uair suas. Agus chan fhaigheadh e a null air an drochaid: bha an cù roimhe. Agus bha e ag iomain ball agus caman aige 'ga iomain roimhe. Agus sheas Cù Chulainn m'a choinneamh. Agus dh' fhàlbh e agus bhual e am ball agus ghlac an cù e. Agus chaidh am ball ann an amhaich a' choin. Agus bha e 'uige leis a' chaman agus mharbh e e. Agus chum e air aghaidh gun a rànaig e taigh an uachdarain. Bha e 'ga fhàlach fhéin mu'n cuairst gus na shuidh iad a seo aig na bùird. Agus fhuair Cù Chulainn a staigh chun nam bord.

Agus thog athair a cheann agus chunnaic e e agus thuirt e:

"A! gu deara(bh)", ors esan, "tha mi a' faicinn rud a tha a' cur iongnaidh orm", ors esan.

"Dé tha sin?" ors an t-uachdaran.

"Tha am balach beag a dh' fhàg mi a staigh", ors esan. "Mhoire, tha e aig a' bhorsd comhla ruinn", ors esan.

"An dà, ma tha sin fior", ors an t-uachdaran, "tha mise gun chù", ors esan.

Cha robh ach thugadh Cù Chulainn gu cùirst a's a' mhineid agus dh' fhàidhneachdad dheth cia mar a thànaig e seachad air an drochaid. Dh' innis Cù Chulainn mar a rinn e—gun a mharbh e an cù.

"Dé nisde a nì mise", ors an t-uachdaran, "ma tha", ors esan, "agus bheir mise seachd bliadhna", ors esan, "mu'm beathaich mi cù", ors esan, "a gheàrdas an drochaid", ors esan, "mar a bha a' fear a bh' ann."

"O, well!" ors athair, "chan 'eil dòigh air a sin", ors esan, "ach a' fear a mharbh an cù gu feum e an drochaid a gheàrd", ors esan, "gus am beathaich sibh-se cù a gheàrdas i."

"Well, cearst gu leòr, ma tha", ors an t-uachdaran, "biodh e mar sin fhéin", ors esan.

Chaidh Cù Chulainn a gheàrd na drochaid. Agus thug e seachd bliadhna air Drochaid nan Ceud gun chù, gun duine, gun laogh, gun leanbh, gun teine, gun tuar, gun teodhadh gus an d' fhuair an t-uachdaran cù a railìobh e agus a chuir e a gheàrd na drochaid 'na àite.

Agus 'n uair a bhàsaich a sin athair, 's e Cù Chulainn a bha an àite athar an uair sin. 'S ann aige a bha an tuathanachas. Agus fhuair Cù Chulainn tarbh, tarbh sitheadh, agus chuireadh e marst a dhàir le geum. Agus bha

tarbh eile aige a bharrachd air, ach bha farmad mór aig na tuathanaich eile ris. Cha robh marst aig Cù Chulainn nach biodh laogh aice agus bhiodh gu leòr aca-san nach biodh laoigh idir aca.

Agus cha robh lagh ann a's an ám ach a' fear bu treasa. Bhiodh a chuile fear a' tighinn a dh' iarraidh an tairbh air Cù Chulainn fiach a faigheadh e a their' bhuaithe agus cha robh fear a thigeadh g'a iarraidh nach robh Cù Chulainn a' cur crìoch air.

Agus phòs e nighean duine mhóir, agus bha am boireannach bha i fhéin fuathasach mór agus cha robh ann an Cù Chulainn ach duine uamhasach beag. Ach gu dé chunnaic e a seo latha ach a chliamhainn a' tighinn, agus thuig e taghta car son a bha e a' tighinn—ag iarraidh an tairbh. Agus thug e air a mhraoi breacag arain a dhèanamh agus a' ghereideal a chur a's a' bhreacaig arain.

“Agus thala a nisde”, ors esan, “dha'n leabaidh agus théid mise comhla riut ann”, ors esan, “agus 'n uair a thig esan”, ors esan, “cana tu”, ors esan, “gu bheil thu air páisde fhaighinn”, ors esan.

Chaidh ise dha leabaidh agus chaidh Cù Chulainn ri taobh a's a' leabaidh. Agus thànaig a seo am bodach agus bha an dorus fosgailte 'n uair a thànaig e a staigh.

“Tha a' ghaoth air dorus nan laoch”, ors am bodach.

“O! tha”, ors ise agus i a's a' leabaidh, “ach nam biodh na laoich fhéin a staigh, chuireadh iad a' ghaoth far an doruis”, ors ise.

“Cia mar a chuireadh iad a' ghaoth far an doruis?” ors ise.

“Chuireadh iad car dha'n taigh”, ors ise.

Dh' fhalbh am bodach a mach agus thòisich e air tarrainn an taighe. Agus chan fhaigheadh e an taigh as a' bhad a's an robh e. Thànaig e a staigh.

“Tha e col(t)ach gur h-e laoich a th' annnta gu deara(bh)”, ors esan.

“Agus a bheil agat ach thu fhéin?”

“Chan 'eil”, ors ise.

“Gu dé th' orst 'n uair a tha thu a's a' leabaidh?” ors esan.

“Tha mi air páisde fhaighinn”, ors ise.

“A bheil e mairsteanach¹?” ors esan agus—

“Tha”, ors ise.

Agus dh' fhalbh e agus ghabh e suas. Agus chuir e a làmh fo'n aodach agus chuir e ordag ann am bial Cù Chulainn. Leag Cù Chulainn an deud air agus thug e dheth an ordag o'n alt.

“Udl ud!” ors am bodach, “deara(bh) 's e páisde mairsteanach a th' ann.”

¹ *mairsteanach*, strong, sturdy (applied to children).

- “A! ’s e”, ors ise.
- “Agus cà ’il do chompanach?” ors esan.
- “Deara(bh), chan ’eil e aig taigh”, ors ise.
- “Is a bheil biadh agat bruich?” ors esan.
- “O! chan ’eil”, ors ise, “ach cruaidh-ghreim curaidh a th’ ann a shin”, ors ise, “ma dheargas sibh air.”
- “Cà bheil e?” ors am bodach.
- Fhuair am bodach am bonnach is a’ chiad ghreim a thug e as, dh’ fhàg e ceithir dha na fiaclan a’s a’ ghreideil.
- “Ud! ud!” ors am bodach, “deara(bh) ’s e cruaidh-ghreim curaidh a th’ ann gu deara(bh)a”, ors esan.
- “Cà ’il an Donn Ghuaileann?” ors esan.
- “An dà, chan ’il fhios agam-sa”, ors ise. “Tha mi cinnteach gu bheil e comhla ris na beothaichean.”
- Dh’ fhalbh am bodach. Is dh’ éirich Cù Chulainn is a mach a ghabh e is dh’ fhalbh e is sheift e an Donn Ghuaileann is dh’ fhan e fhéin timcheall air na beothaichean. Rànaig am bodach.
- “An e seo an Donn Ghuaileann?” ors esan.
- Bha tarbh eile aig Cù Chulainn air a’ chrodh.
- “S e”, orsa Cù Chulainn.
- “Tha mise a’ dol g’ a thoir’ liom”, ors esan.
- “O! chan ’eil”, orsa Cù Chulainn. “Chan ’eil math dhomh-sa e a ligeil air falbh”, ors esan, “gus an tig mo mhaighstir”, ors esan.
- “Dé dhomh-sa thu fhéin ’s do mhaighstir?” ors am bodach.
- Dh’ fhalbh am bodach a null is rugadh air an tarbh air adhairc. Is dh’ fhalbh Cù Chulainn is rugadh air an adhairc eile dheth. Is thòisich iad a’ toir’ an tairbh o chéile is mharbh iad an tarbh eatorra.
- “An dà, tha feum aga’-sa”, orsa Cù Chulainn, “nach robh mo mhaighstir-s’ aig an taigh”, ors esan, “neo bhiodh beag an asgaidh aga’-sa dheth.”
- “Dé rud a dhèanadh do mhaighstir-s?’” ors am bodach.
- “Dhèanadh rud nach dèanadh tusa”, ors esan. “Chan ’il fhios ’m nach dèanainn fhìn e”, ors esan.
- Dh’ fhalbh e is ghabh e null is bha creag mhór ann. Is dh’ fhalbh Cù Chulainn is chuir e a shàil air barr na creige, agus chuir sàil na bròige eile air a barr agus chuir e a dhà dhorn a mach air sròn na bròige.
- “An tomhais thu dà throigh is dà dhorn a mach far barr na sgaladh sin?” ors esan.
- “Tomhaisidh”, ors am bodach.
- Ghabh am bodach a null is chuir e a shàil air barr na creigeadh is chuir e

sàil na bròige eile air a muin. Thànaig Cù Chulainn air a chòlu is thilg e leis a' sgalaidh e is chaith an t-eanchainn as.

Cha robh ... Bha an Donn Ghuaileann aig Cù Chulainn mar a bha i roimhe.

Ach bha aon fhear ann de dhuine foghain(t)each mar a bha Cù Chulainn fhéin, fear ris an canadh iad Fear Diag mac Daimhein. Agus bha e a's a' sgoil comhla ri Cù Chulainn. Agus thug iad mionnan air a chéile, 'n uair a bha iad a's a' sgoil, nach tionndadh an darna fear an aghaidh an fhir eile gu bràch aca.

Agus chruinnich na tuathanach eile agus thòisich iad air a phraigeadh fiach a falbhadh e a dh' iarraidh an tairbh air Cù Chulainn, gus an d' thug iad mionnan air mu dheireadh nach robh e ri tilleadh gus a faigheadh e an tarbh air neo am bàs. Dh' fhalbh Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein. Agus chunnaic Cù Chulainn a' tighinn e agus thuig e taghta mar a bha a' chùis. Agus thuirt e ris a' mhraoi:

"Ah, well", ors esan, "cha do chreid mi riamh", ors esan, "gu falbhadh an Donn Ghuaileann gu seo", ors esan. "Tha mo chompanach a' tighinn", ors esan, "agus tha mi cinnteach gur h-ann 'ga iarraidh a tha e", ors esan.

'N uair a rànaig a chompanach, chuir Cù Chulainn failte air agus thugadh a stagh e. Agus là 'r-na-mhàireach dh' fhaidhneachd Cù Chulainn dheth:

"Dé, a chompanaich", ors esan, "a' chluichd a bhios againn an diugh?"

"O! bidh", ors a' fear eile, "ar cùl fhìn ri chéile is cùl nan sleaghan ri chéile agus sinn a' leagail na seilge", ors esan.

"O, glé mhath!" orsa Cù Chulainn.

Dh' fhalbh iad dha'n bheinn sheilge. Là 'r-na-mhàireach 'n uair a ghabh iad am breiceast, dh' fhaidhneachd Cù Chulainn dheth:

"Gu dé a' chluichd a tha gus bhith an diugh againn, a chompanaich?" ors esan.

"O! bidh ar cùl fhìn ri chéile is cùl nan sleaghan ri chéile agus sinn a' leagail na seilge."

"O! cha b' urrainn a bhith na b' fhearr", orsa Cù Chulainn.

Ach a seo a' là 'r-na-n-earair, 'n uair a dh' éirich iad is a ghabh iad am breiceast, dh' fhaidhneachd Cù Chulainn dheth.

"Dé a' chluichd a bhios againn an diugh, a chompanaich?" ors esan.

"O! bidh", ors esan, "ar n-aghaidh fhìn ri chéile is aghaidh nan sleaghan ri chéile", ors esan, "is sgial na faladh a' falbh", ors esan.

"An ann mar seo a tha?" orsa Cù Chulainn. "Shaoil liom", ors esan, "nach e sin an gealltanais a bha eadarainn", ors esan, "'n uair a bha sinn a's a' sgoil."

"Ah, well, cha b'e", ors esan, "ach tha mise fo mhionnan", ors esan, "gu feum mi a faighinn", ors esan, "air neo am bàs."

"Oh, well, ma tha", orsa Cù Chulainn, "cha d' fhalbh i¹ fhathast", ors esan.

Dh' fhalbh iad agus bha gille a' fear aca. Agus chaidh gach fear aca air taobh de dh' abhainn a bh' ann. Agus cha robh iad ach a' seòladh nan sleaghan air a chéile agus gille a' fear aca 'gan toir' 'uca. Ach thòisich a seo an gille a bh' aig Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein air stopadh na h-aibhne agus 'n uair a bhiodh an abhainn stopte, bha e a' gléidheadh. Agus thòisich an gille a bh' aig Cù Chulainn air a cumail fosgailte. Agus 'n uair a bhiodh i fosgailte, bha Cù Chulainn a' gléidheadh gus na mharbh an gille a bh' aig Cù Chulainn an gille a bh' aig Fear Fada Diag mac Daimhein. Agus bha seo an oidhche a' tighinn agus sheòl Cù Chulainn an t-sleagh air an taobh thall dha'n abhainn agus mharbh e e. Agus thuit e fhéin air an taobh a bhos. Agus bha e 'na shìneadh agus e a' sileadh faladh. Agus dh' fhaidhneachd e 'n a' ghille:

"A bheil thu a' faicinn sòn 's a' bith mu'n abhainn a seo?" ors esan 's e a' tionndadh ris a' ghille.

"Ol chan 'eil sòn", ors an gille, "ach a' faicinn cù", ors esan, "ag òl na faladh", ors esan, "shìos an sin."

"Thala", ors esan, "agus thoir 'ugam an t-sleagh", ors esan.

Dh' fhalbh an gille a dh' iarraidh na sleagh.

"Cà ... dé 'n t-à a bheil e?" orsa Cù Chulainn.

Dh' innis an gille dha far a robh e. Dh' fhalbh Cù Chulainn agus sheòl e an t-sleagh air agus mharbh e an cù.

"A fac' thu", ors esan, "na mharbh mi an cù?"

"Ol mharbh", ors an gille. "Rinn sibh dà leth air", ors esan.

"Ol 's fior sin", ors esan. "Sin a' chiad euchd a rinn mise riámh", ors esan, "agus 's e an t-euchd mu dheireadh a bha agam ri dhèanamh. Agus tha mise ullamh", ors esan, "agus faodaidh an Donn Ghuaileann a bhith aig a ragha duine a nisde."

Agus bhàsaich Cù Chulainn. Agus cha robh an Donn Ghuaileann ach aig duine 's a' bith a throgradh a toir' air falbh.

¹ The narrator here changes the sex of the Donn Ghuaileann and makes it feminine, referring to it as *i*, she. I do not know why he does this unless it is because *Guaileann*, *Guaillfhionn* is a name at times given to cows. Strangely enough, Mrs. Macdonald did exactly the same thing.

Briefly, this is how the above variant of the Táin came to be discovered. On the morning of 29th September 1958 I went by bus from Oban to Easdale village on Seil. There I spent the morning recording lore and traditions about life on Easdale Island from William Dewar. By two o'clock in the afternoon I was back again in Oban and I continued to Connel Ferry. There I went to visit Mrs. Malcolm Macdonald (née Peigi Aonghuis 'ic Eachainn), a native of Loch Eynort, South Uist. I had been told about her a week previously by Mrs. MacColl, Benderloch, herself a native of South Uist. I went to see her immediately and recorded several tales as well as a couple of Ossianic lays. I took her to be about 80 years of age or so. Peigi Aonghuis 'ic Eachainn is a younger sister of Mrs. Neil Campbell, Gearrabbailteas, South Uist and of Angus Maclellan of Loch Eynort and Gearrabbailteas. The old family home is on the southern shore of Loch Eynort. Mrs. Campbell, Mór Aonghuis 'ic Eachainn, is now 93 and Angus, Aonghus Beag Aonghuis 'ic Eachainn, is 90. Both of them I had met earlier that summer and was tremendously impressed by their repertoire of tales, songs and traditions. Although Mrs. Macdonald spent most of her life out of Uist—in Tiree, Fasnacloich, Taynuilt and finally Connel, Argyll—as far as a knowledge of tradition goes, she is not a whit inferior to the two other members of the family. She has not been back to Uist for a very long time. She now lives with a daughter, but the daughter was out when I called; she was at work in Oban. The first afternoon I went to visit Mrs. Macdonald, my first words to her were in Gaelic:

"Do you know a woman called Mór Aonghuis 'ic Eachainn?"

"I do, m' eudail!", said she. "That is my sister. Come in."

On the second afternoon again Peigi recorded another Ossianic lay, *Laoidh a' Choin Duibh*, a very fine variant of Aa.-Th. type 566, a local legend and a tale related to Aa.-Th. type 300. But it was a little fragment that caught my attention most of all:

A man goes to get a bull. The name of the bull is Donn Ghuaileann. His daughter is married to a small man. When the father (giant in one place) is seen arriving, the daughter goes to bed with her small husband. The father-in-law enters saying that the wind blows in the heroes' door. If the heroes were at home they would turn the house round, she suggests. She had prepared a cake with the griddle inside it. Why is she in bed? She has had a child. He puts his finger in the baby's mouth. The baby's teeth almost sever it. He asks for food, is given the cake and leaves his front teeth in the griddle. There is so much evidence of great strength that he is overawed and goes away.

The name Donn Ghuailleann—Donn Cúailnge in ms. versions¹—was enough to suggest that there was a variant of the Táin Bó Cúailnge lurking somewhere in the background. The best place to look for it would be South Uist and the persons most likely to have it would be the brother and sister, Mrs. Campbell and Angus Maclellan. I did not get out to Uist until 3rd June 1959. Two days later, a Friday it was, I went to see Mrs. Campbell. She was then living in Gearraidh h-Eilge with her daughter, Mrs. Archie Macdonald. I told her that I had seen her sister in Connell and that she had a fragment of a tale about a bull, Donn Ghuailleann. Mrs. Campbell did not remember having heard the story—there is hardly anything that she does

¹ There is no vernacular Scottish Gaelic ms. version of the Táin. All versions are in Early, Middle and Early Modern Irish, the classical literary language of the scribes. The mss. are in the libraries of Trinity College, Dublin (T.C.D.); Royal Irish Academy, Dublin (R.I.A.); British Museum (B.M.); Advocates', now National, Library, Edinburgh (Edin.). The ms. versions are grouped by Celtic scholars into three categories, based on similarities and relationships between different texts. They vary from full texts to a couple of pages. I indicate the centuries to which they belong.

A

- L.U. Book of the Dun Cow, R.I.A., 12th.
 Y.B.L. Yellow Book of Lecan, T.C.D., 14th.
 Egerton 1782, B.M., 15–16th.
 Egerton 114, B.M., 19th.
 H.1.14, T.C.D., 18th.
 *MS.XXXII, Edin., 15th(?).

B

- L.L. Book of Leinster, T.C.D., 12th.
 Stowe 984, R.I.A., 17th.
 H.1.13, T.C.D., 18th.
 Additional 18747, B.M., 19th.
 Egerton 106, B.M., 18th.
 MS.LIX, Edin., 17–18th.

C

- H.2.17, T.C.D., 14–15th.
 Egerton 93, B.M., 15th.
 **H.2.12, T.C.D. ?

* This ms. is now lost. From descriptions of its contents Thurneysen *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, p. 101 (footnote), considers that it derives from Group A.

** This text is a mere two pages.

not remember—but she suggested that her brother, Aonghus Beag, might have it, as he knew so much about the Fiann and Fionn. Even at the age of 93 Mrs. Campbell is a terrific old lady, sharp, alert and extremely humorous but almost totally blind. She still sings Ossianic lays; she recorded two that day and much else.

The following Thursday I went down to Gearrabhailteas to see Aonghus Beag. He is now living with his niece, Mrs. Patrick MacPhee. Mrs. MacPhee was away in hospital. There was no one at home but Angus himself. Patrick and his son were out cutting peats. Old Angus brought me in and we sat down on opposite sides of the fire. Not much fire was needed in any case; it was a warm, grey day. I fished a half-bottle of whisky out of my hip-pocket. We assailed it. I told Angus I had been in Connell and had heard his sister tell of a story about the Donn Ghuaileann. I thought Cù Chulainn was one of the characters in the story, although Mrs. Macdonald had not said so.

"I have heard the story", said Angus, "but wait till I study (think about) it."

I changed the conversation at once and let his subconscious mind get to work on the Donn Ghuaileann. We went on to record the legend about the Maclean chief who left his Campbell wife on a tidal rock. His version was very long and detailed, but extremely well-told. In about half-an-hour I asked if the Donn Ghuaileann story had come back to him.

"I have it now", said he.

He then took off his cap and proceeded to tell the story as he heard it. Angus heard the story about 70 years ago from the late Donald Macdonald of Peninerine, Domhnall mac Dhonnchaidh, a stone-mason who, it appears, built the Maclellan family house in Loch Eynort. Mrs. Macdonald also remembers the time when Donald Macdonald built the house, and says she was about ten years old at the time. Some one in Loch Eynort composed a song about the mason and she remembers having sung it. Donald was the father of the late Duncan Macdonald, a story-teller whose voice is, no doubt, still remembered by all who heard him tell a heroic tale lasting an hour at the International Folklore Conference held in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, in 1953. Donald Macdonald died, if I remember rightly, in the early twenties. He belonged to a line of noted story-tellers and poets to the Macdonalds of Skye, who had lands also in North Uist. The family crossed from North to South Uist. Donald was known as Domhnall mac Dhonnchaidh 'ic Iain 'ic Dhomhnaill 'ic Thormaid. Donald's grandfather, Iain mac Dhomhnaill 'ic Thormaid, was one of the story-tellers who told stories to Donald

MacPhie, who recorded for Campbell of Islay (P.T.W.H. Vol. I, p. 22).¹ There he is referred to as John Macdonald, Aird a Mhachair. Strangely enough, the Donn Ghuallean story did not go further in the family than Donald himself, for his son, Duncan, did not have it, although he inherited a great deal of his father's lore. If the story came down directly in the family—although that cannot be ascertained now—it came, we can assume, from North Uist. If the story did come from North Uist, we thus have two variants of the Táin from that island.

The earliest Scottish folk-version² was collected on 15th August (Là Fhéill Mhoire) 1872 by the late Dr. Alexander Carmichael from Hector MacIsaac (Eachann mac Ruaraidh), a crofter of Ceannlangabhat, Iochdar, South Uist. MacIsaac heard the story about 1812 from a Ruaraidh Ruadh mac Cuithein, a native of North Uist, who travelled in South Uist as a catechist. In the current tradition of South Uist there is mention of An Ceistear Ruadh, the Red-haired Catechist, and he is remembered as being known to an earlier generation for his tremendous knowledge of tales and traditions. No doubt, the Ceistear Ruadh and Eachann Ruadh Mac Cuithein are one and the same.

Mac-Isaac's version of the Táin can be summarised as follows:

A nobleman in Ireland has a son called Cuchullain. Father is invited to a wedding. Son follows, reaches bridge guarded by a hound, kills it—his first feat—plays shinty with the boys around castle and then finds his way in. On being questioned by stewards, tells that he has killed the hound, and he has to guard bridge for a year. He then goes to college in Skye to learn feats of arms. He spends nine years there. His comrade is a Scottish nobleman, Feardag mac Daimbain. They vow never to oppose each other. They are equally skilled but one feat, the *gath-bal*, Feardag does not know. Two brothers are their respective servants. On Cuchullain's return, a calf, multi-coloured and born mysteriously on a sea-girt island and given to Cuchullain prior to leaving for college, has grown into a fine bull, named Donn-Guaillonn. Its bellowing induces desire in cows throughout the five provinces of Ireland. Cuchullain elopes with daughter of Garbh mac Stairn. Two powerful potentates, Maoim Chruachain and Oiriol Fhaolumach marry and compare their respective herds. Oiriol has one bull more than she. Maoim, wondering if there is a bull to surpass it, is told of the Donn-Guaillonn. She sends Fergus Philisteach and thirty champions to get the bull. The first day Cuchullain gives an ambiguous answer, burns the barn where the

¹ J. F. Campbell *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, Vol. 1, p. 22, 2nd ed.

² Transactions of The Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol. 2 pp. 25–39.

champions sleep during the night and flatly refuses the next day. Fergus returns to Maoim, who composes her quarrel with him for some time but it breaks out again. Maoim writes to Ferdiag mac Daimbain, who is reluctant to break his pledge to Cuchullain. He is made drunk and Maoim forges a letter purporting readiness on his part to meet Cuchullain. Next day Feardiag is confronted with the letter. He goes to meet Cuchullain. They fight first with the butts of their spears but later in earnest. Cuchullain is getting the worst of it and his man dams the river, while Feardiag's opens it again until Cuchullain's man kills his brother. The river is blocked again and Cuchullain kills Feardiag with the '*gath-bal*'.

Then follows the disguised child in bed episode right down until the father-in-law is thrown over the cliff. In this version Garbh mac Stairn is the father-in-law. Cuchullain is disguised first as a baby and later as a herdsman.

Next follows an episode that has nothing to do with the theme of the story, the winning of the bull. Cuchullain sees enormous tracks and comes upon a giant leading an enormous bull. He and the giant kill, roast the bull and proceed to eat but they are interrupted by giant's brother, who has been feuding with him for seven years on account of cattle. Cuchullain rounds a bay and attacks the brother-giant from behind. The giant gives a kick backwards, hurls Cuchullain across the bay and he lands on the bull's horn and breaks his sword. He goes to a smithy, but the smith refuses to do any repairs until Cuchullain tells how the sword was broken. The smith's daughter, eavesdropping behind the bellows, remarks at one point, "You were not the Hound of Culann then but the Hound of the Horn."

The embarrassed Cuchullain goes away.

Carmichael indicates a lacuna here.

The daughter of Calladair, a woman with magic powers, advises Maoim to send an army of women against Cuchullain. They meet at a ford, where the hero and his man decimate the women. Maoim upbraids the magic-woman, who lets the entrails of a sparrow full of poison down on Cuchullain's head when his helmet has been removed. The poison enters his brain. His death approaches, for he has thrown a stone at an otter and killed it—his last feat. His faithful servant puts his sword on his shoulder and props him up with his lance, so that the women fear to cross the stream. Cuchullain asks his servant to go to the Fiann, and Goll in particular, and tell the news of his death but warns him to avoid being killed for bringing such news. The servant tells that Cuchullain has built himself a new house; the new house is interpreted by Goll as the grave. Goll goes to avenge Cuchullain and cuts

three withes to carry the heads of the slain. Meanwhile, the magic-woman, Feannag nigheann a Challadair, in the form of a crow, alights on Cuchullain's shoulder and tells the women that he is dead. Laochaire, Cuchullain's servant, allows the heads to slip off the withes three times. Goll warns that the heads of either of them must be put on the withes, if there is one empty. They bury Cuchullain.

The late Dr. Kenneth Macleod, while still a very young man, collected another variant in the Island of Eigg, but the narrator's name is not given. I know nothing about the original Gaelic text, but an English translation is given in the Celtic Magazine of September 1888.¹ I give a précis:

Maoim Chruachan and Cuchullin have a joint stock of cattle which, on division, leaves an odd bull. Cuchullin, on the receipt of a letter asking for the bull, replies that lads may be sent for it. Cuchullin overhears them expressing surprise that the bull is surrendered so easily, but one says that it would be taken by force in any case. In anger Cuchullin goes to the park where the bull is, gets a huge beam, drives it into the ground, writes on it that no one is to get the bull unless able to unearth the beam. He then exchanges clothes with Laoghare, his herd. Maoim's men fail to pull out the beam, but they tear the bull apart in the attempt to wrest it from Cuchullin. Maoim then invites Cuchullin to battle. They fight across a river, the level of which rises mysteriously. Laoghare discovers the reason—the body of Cuchullin's brother stretched across and impeding the flow of water. Cuchullin cuts his brother's body in two. The water flows freely. Across the river they see Maoim with a fairy lover on either side, casting three darts to every two of Cuchullin and Laoghare, who flee and hide in an underground house in a forest. Maoim then enlists the aid of a girl who spent seven years in a school of magic. Laoghare goes for water one day and is turned into a pillar of stone by a crow. The crow assumes Laoghare's form and tells Cuchullin that a battle is in progress on a shore. She returns, strikes the pillar, which becomes the resuscitated Laoghare again, while she herself re-assumes the crow's form. Laoghare returns and Cuchullin, much to the former's surprise, tells him to hurry to the battle. There is no battle. Cuchullin then knows that he is to die when a crow spits thrice in his face, unless nine withes, each bearing the head of a king's or knight's son, are cast at his feet. He has seen an otter, which he has killed with a stone. Cuchullin asks Laoghare to go to his brother, Conall, get the withes and say that he (Cuchullin) has a new house i.e. the grave. Conall assumes that

¹ Celtic Magazine, Vol. XIII, pp. 514-516.

Cuchullin is dying. They fill the withes with heads, but one head is lacking. Laoghare lets a head slip off a withe, tells Conall that he sees a head lying on the ground and that head is put on the empty withe. Conall casts the withes at his brother's feet, but woman in crow-form, Feannag nighean a Chaladair, has already spat thrice on Cuchullin's nose. The dead hero falls down and becomes a green mound.

The MacIsaac variant (A) was collected in 1872, the Eigg variant (B) in 1888 or perhaps slightly earlier, and the Maclellan variant (C) in 1959. The most striking difference between them is the almost complete absence of the magical element in C as opposed to A and B. It must, of course, be remembered that there are at least 71 years of difference in time between C and B and 87 years between C and A. There is, however, a tendency in the story-telling of the Hebrides to discard the chimerical in hero tales as well as the tendency to overlook the märchen in favour of the novella and legendary matter that can still be regarded as true historical fact. There is the further tendency to prefer the jocular type of tale to the wonder-tale, and, in fact, to any type of tale. Much of this is, no doubt, due to the increasing sophistication of the communities, amongst which all types of tales were once popular but which are now, and very markedly in the case of some types, finding it difficult to put up a fight against rationalisation.

In variant C there is only one magical motif, and its presence is, to a certain extent, due to fairy belief, the most persistent of all supernatural beliefs in the communities where the variants were recorded. In variant C the Donn Ghuaileann is a fairy bull, a bull that can impregnate cows by bellowing. I have not come across this motif elsewhere in Scottish Gaelic folk-literature nor even in Irish. There are parallel motifs from the Middle East: the cry of a giant ox impregnates all fish, B741.1;¹ the neighing of a stallion impregnates mares in Egypt, B741.2. In the ms. versions of the Táin the motif was that the bellow of the Donn Cúailnge was heard over an entire province, *roclos fon cōiced nuile*,² B741.4. In variant A the motif is that the bellow of the Donn Ghuailean can induce concupiscence in any cow throughout the five provinces of Ireland, *gu'n cuireadh e marst eir dhàir le geum an Coig Choigeamh na h-Eirinn*.³

I do not consider that there is any evidence that variants B and C are derived from A nor is C from B. They all stem from something much further back and each has motifs not occurring in the other two variants but closely

¹ Numbers according to Stith Thompson *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 1955–8.

² Strachan and O'Keefe *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, p. 122.

³ Transactions of The Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol. 2, p. 28.

paralleled by motifs in the literary Táin. The general belief among Celtsists has been that the traditions of the Fionn cycle almost elbowed the traditions of the Craobh Rua cycle out of oral tradition, but even to this day there is evidence, in Scotland at least, that the process of elbowing out was never completed. The profusion of ms. versions of the literary Táin in Ireland may have induced scholars to disregard any elements still straying in oral tradition, but in Scotland the literary and oral Táin must have run their courses side by side. In variant C the hound guards a bridge called *Drochaid nan Ceud*. The older term *tricha cét*, a cantred—an ancient territorial division, becomes no longer intelligible and is altered to something similar in sound but able to make sense. In the L.L. version of the Táin the hound does guard a *tricha cét*.¹ In the folk-version of the Tale of Deirdre, noted down by Carmichael in the Isle of Barra, the term *tricha cét* is reduced to *drochaid shaor*,² which would not make much sense to a Barra audience. There is no trace of the term in variants A and B. In A the *gath-balga*, *gae bulga* of the ms. versions, still survives, but in C it is Fear Diad's man who dams the river and not Cù Chulainn's servant. In C the blocking of the river ensures victory for Fear Diad by some magical process, we may assume. This, however, is not a case of a new element being introduced. The purpose of blocking the river in order to use the *gae bulga*, as clear in A, does not arise in C, as there is no such weapon. In the recent variant the actors have changed roles. In B also the stream is blocked, presumably to conceal the attackers from Cù Chulainn and his servant, but the combat with Fear Diad is lacking in this variant and also the *gae bulga* ... In a footnote³ to A the *gae bulga* is stated to be a weapon plied on the surface of water, hence the need to dam a flowing stream to facilitate its use. To the mind of the narrator of A the *gath-balga* was a weapon to which a kind of balloon was attached to enable it to float.

The beam motif in B is most interesting but it does not occur in the other two variants. It corresponds closely, however, with the motif in the literary Táin; Cù Chulainn cuts the fork of a tree with one blow and places it in a ford with the message that no chariot is to cross unless it can draw the fork from the river-bed, *bennaid gabail i siuidiu ōenbēm cona c(h)loideb, 7 saidius for medōn na glaissi, conā dichtheth carpat friae disiū nāch anall*.⁴ There is a similar motif in the same variants, a spancel-withe is cast on a

¹ Dunn *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cualnge*, p. 56.

² Transactions of The Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol. XIII, p. 254.

³ Transactions of The Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol. 2, p. 27 (footnote).

⁴ Strachan and O'Keefe, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

pillar of stone.¹ On the fork and withe are messages written in 'ogam' characters, just as Cù Chulainn writes on the beam in variant B.

The bull-tearing episode, although fuller in A and C, is attributed to Medb's men in B. This is preceded by the arrival of the father-in-law, A and C, Garbh mac Stàirn is his name in A, and he attempts to get the bull. Then follows the attempt to turn the house round to put the door to the lee, A and C, the disguising of the hero as baby, K1839.12*,² and as a herd, K1839.11*.² The last two motifs are common in Scottish and Irish tales: Fionn, and sometimes Conan Maol, play the part of the child. The griddle within cake motif has a parallel in Lithuanian tradition: a daughter-in-law bakes burned and underbaked bread to get rid of her father-in-law, S54.1.² In C the caked containing the griddle is referred to as *cruaidh-ghreim curaith*, *greim curaith* in A, and this term may be related to the *curath-mír*, champion's portion, of ms. tradition. This does not occur in B. The bull is then torn between the rival contestants, and the whole interlude ends when the old man is thrown over a cliff, while attempting to perform a difficult task, one of Cù Chulainn's feats. In both variants A and C the difficult task is merely a game common at one time among children in Uist and called *Troigh is dorn-gulban*.³

The late Dr. Alexander MacBain points out that a story⁴ of similar thematic content was collected in Badenoch shortly before 1888, in which Garbh mac Stairn and Fionn are chief actors and the same motives are grouped together as in variants A and C. In the collection of Dr. Irvine of Little Dunkeld, Perthshire, made during the years 1800 to 1808, there is a poem of 82 lines entitled *Fionn is Gara*,⁵ which tells the same story as the Garbh mac Stairn-Cù Chulainn episode in A and C. A bull figures in this story, and that is probably why it got tacked on to The Brown Bull of Cúailnge saga. In A the Fionn and Craobh Rua cycles are definitely mixed up but not in C, although it incorporates the story usually associated with Fionn and Garbh mac Stairn but the name of neither of them, even though Garbh mac Stairn is, according to tradition, apt to flit between the two cycles in any case. Dr. Irvine has a rather illuminating little note⁶ about the poem in which he states that 'a ridiculous story is told which was formed to bring

¹ Strachan and O'Keefe, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

² Numbers according to Cross *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*.

³ Transactions of The Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol. 2, p. 35.

⁴ Celtic Magazine, Vol. XIII, p. 512 *et seq.*

⁵ J.F. Campbell *Leabhar na Feinne*, Vol. 1, pp. 7-8.

⁶ J.F. Campbell *Leabhar na Feinne*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

those ancient heroic poems into disrepute'. The whole story, I imagine, is a foreign body that entered into the stream of tradition surrounding the Brown Bull of Cúailnge and Cù Chulainn, but it is fairly evident that its intrusion dates back to a period earlier than 1800. The comic element both disparaging to the heroes and alien to the true spirit of romantic, epic literature must have affected the versions of the Cù Chulainn saga over a considerable area of the Highlands, and that was adduced by Dr. MacBain as the reason why James Macpherson made so little use of this material in his Ossianic poems.¹ Dr. MacBain is probably right.

The story in variant A that Cù Chulainn intervenes in the fight between two giant brothers, is kicked across a bay, lands on the horn of the slaughtered bull and breaks his sword is a further intrusion of the comic element. Strangely enough, however, one motif here could almost be a re-echo of an incident in the ms. Táin, both Y.B.L. and L.L. recensions, when Cù Chulainn springs on to the boss of Fear Diad's shield and the latter gives his shield a terrific dunt with his left elbow or knee and throws Cù Chulainn to the brink of the ford. Isolated motifs, vaguely remembered, perhaps, as being part of the Táin and occurring in another place and with another group of motifs, could have induced some faltering story-teller to improvise and re-introduce the whole lot into his telling of the tale.

In the ms. tale Tochmarc Emire, the Wooing of Emir, there is an account of Cù Chulainn's sojourn at the school of Scathach in Skye, as described in variant A. There is no mention of this in B, but in C we are told that Cù Chulainn and Fear Diad were at school together. One little detail, however, Angus Maclellan seems to have forgotten in his narration of the story as told by Donald Macdonald seventy years ago. On the 20th July 1959 I was back again in Connel to visit Mrs. Macdonald. I was then able to tell her that her brother Angus had told me the story of the Donn Ghuaileann. I asked her if she thought Cù Chulainn was mentioned in the story. At first she thought he was but later said it was the Donn Ghuaileann that was mentioned. She again told me almost word for word what she had told the previous September. She then went on to tell other stories and one was as follows: Two men in Skye met on a moor and one asked the other what weapons they would use that day. The other replied that they would go back to back and put the butts of their lances against each other. They did the same the second day but, on the third day, they went face to face, point to point, and killed each other.

¹ Celtic Magazine, Vol. XIII, p. 512 ff.

She remembered nothing more about them, but, quite clearly, this was the Fear Diad episode in variant C, but she, unconsciously, added the location of the school, viz. Skye.

In the Cù Chulainn-Fear Diad episode of variant C it is Cù Chulainn who asks the question as to which sport they are to indulge in on each of the three days. In the L.L. version they fight for four days and they alternate the role of the questioner, with Fear Diad asking on the first day.¹ In variant A they meet and fight to the death on the first day, although they start off by casting their spears butt-foremost. The threefold, and sometimes four-fold, repetition is one of the Epic Laws of Folk-literature enunciated by Axel Olrik.²

In variant C there is no location and fewer characters are named. It begins like an ordinary folktale, although Cù Chulainn's name is introduced almost at the very start. Ailill and Medb disappear and only Cù Chulainn and Fear Diad are specifically named. The manner of Cù Chulainn's death, however, constitutes the most important difference between variant C and the two earlier Scottish variants. The killing of the hound—otter in A and B—the last feat, is introduced into the Fear Diad episode in C, although this motif does not belong to the Táin proper at all but occurs in the account of the hero's death in the ms. tale Brislech Mór Maige Muirtheimne, otherwise called Aided Conculainn, Cù Chulainn's Death. The final episode of A and B, the avenging of the hero's death and the heads on the withes, approximates the theme of the ballad Laoidh nan Ceann, the earliest Scottish version of which is in the Book of the Dean of Lismore (1512–26). The ballads, undoubtedly, helped to preserve the oral Táin as well as to introduce extraneous elements into it.

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¹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 243 ff.

² Olrik, *Danske Studier*, 1908, 69–89.

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