

DEMONIC SÍDHE: THE FABRICATION OF CATHOLIC HELL IN MEDIEVAL
PAGAN IRISH TEXTS

by

Kaitlin Faoileann Connelly

HONORS THESIS

Submitted to Texas State University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
graduation in the Honors College
December 2022

Thesis Supervisor:

Natasha Mikles

Second Reader:

Tricia Boucher

DEDICATION

To Mémère, I thought about you countless times while writing this. You taught me to be a loud, wild woman. You taught me to take big risks and remain calm and collected while doing so. You taught me to have the audacity to believe I was capable of things I am absolutely unqualified for because I know I can figure it out along the way. Your stories, your demeanor, and my memories of you carry me every day.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LU	Lebor na hUidre
LGE	Lebor Gábala Érenn
SC	<i>Serglige con Chulainn</i>
EN	<i>Echtra Nera</i>
CMM	<i>Cath Maige Mucrama</i>
EC	<i>Echtrae Chonnlai</i>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iii
ABSTRACT	v
BODY	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BACKGROUND	3
Clarification of terms	
Origin of writing and Catholicism in Ireland	
III. DEMONIC SÍDHE	5
The colophon	
Demonic magic	
Tuatha Dé Danann	
IV. LIFE AFTER DEATH	10
The Otherworld as Hell	
Tech Duinn	
Nothing	
V. CONCLUSION	15
REFERENCES	16

ABSTRACT

All extant records of Irish pagan beliefs pre-Catholicism were written by Catholic monks, which has led to unreliable and conflicting tales that paint a fuzzy picture of what was believed. This paper aims to clarify this confusion on the topic of hell and the demonization of the *sídhe* (Irish fae) within several original texts including *Lebor Gábala Érenn*, *Lebor na hUidre*, and the Book of Leinster. Through a combination of cultural, textual, and linguistic analysis, I argue these tales were altered, presenting the *sídhe* as demonic, the Otherworld as hellish, and rewriting the *sídhe* as the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, a race of magical humans. The intention behind these alterations was to bring Irish beliefs within the sacred canopy of Catholicism, fitting them into contemporary Catholic history and theology to encourage conversion.

I. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of religions is an area of study that has attracted considerable scholarly attention. When religions meet, the lines between them blur, and each religious tradition changes, often so slowly or with so little record it is hard to retrospectively untangle them. Academics centuries later labor over ancient texts, searching for the tiniest clues as to what the religions were before they met and how they changed each other. Was it on purpose? Did they realize they were changing? Or was it all just a natural progression?

The colonization of Ireland by the Catholic church is a particularly interesting example of this. The pagan Irish had no need for writing, so there are no pre-Catholic records of what they believed. All of their tales and histories were written by Catholic monks. An entire portion of Celtic studies has been dedicated to teasing apart these records to find where Irish paganism merged with Catholicism and to determine precisely what these religions were before they met. Many scholars have ruminated on the intentions of these monks and come to starkly contrasting conclusions.

Regardless of the intentions behind them, these changes follow Peter Berger's theory of the sacred canopy. Berger argues that humans use religion to fit difficult and complicated ideas into a unified worldview through a sacred framework. Fitting everything under a sacred canopy brings order and predictability to a chaotic world. It provides answers to questions we may have otherwise spent our entire lives struggling with. And it tells us how we ought to act and react in a multitude of situations, providing security and peace of mind.

While it is a far more complex theory than this, it has two main implications in

this context. First, people see the world and other religions through the lens of their own religion, which may make it difficult to accurately understand differing beliefs. As a result, Catholic monks may have unwittingly written down Irish tales incorrectly as they tried to understand these beliefs through the framework of their own. Second, when faced with new religions and hoping to convert others, people may use religious syncretism, the blending of different religious beliefs or practices, to bring the beliefs of the other religion into the sacred canopy of their own. “Everything you believe is wrong, here is what is right” is harder to sell than “this part is right, it is just framed differently.”

A clear example of religious syncretism is the Catholic St. Brigid, patron saint of livestock, blacksmiths, poetry, wisdom, protection, and healing (Wright, 2009; Ó hÓgáin, 1991). Her feast day is February 1st, and she is connected with several sacred wells, county Kildare, and eternal fires tended by women. She is remarkably similar to the Irish Brigid, goddess of livestock, blacksmithing, poetry, wisdom, protection, and healing. Her feast day is also February 1st, and she is also connected to the same sacred wells, the county Kildare, and eternal fires tended by women. This provides an example of an argument among scholars about intent. Some contend this was purposeful religious syncretism with a clear goal: bring the Irish goddess Brigid into the Catholic sacred canopy. Others argue that Brigid of Kildare was a real saint, and her lore became intertwined with the goddess over time. I suggest that both are likely true. That is, there was likely a purposeful effort to Catholicize the goddess while there was also a natural progression mixing up their lore over time.

An area where the confusing results of syncretism are especially profound is Irish beliefs about death. Pagan Irish tales include a number of possible explanations about life

after death. It should be noted that even after the adoption of Catholicism, the Irish have been historically comfortable with ambiguity surrounding death (O'Connor, 2012). Naturally, with any oral, noncentralized belief system, there is no right answer because beliefs varied greatly from person to person and town to town (Martin, 2013; Nagy, 2013). It is the curse of the mythologist, trying to understand beliefs that constantly change shape. However, at least one answer is often wrong, or at least more wrong. Demonization and hellification of the gods, fae, and their homes are often the wrong answers as they are used as syncretic tools to bring other religious ideas into the sacred canopy while also neutralizing their power (Nagy, 2015). That is seen here in Irish texts. The ideas of hell and demons appear to be awkwardly injected into tales where they do not belong. Through an analysis of these texts and the scholarship around them, I argue that pre-Catholic pagans viewed the *sídhe* and the Otherworld as morally neutral and that Catholic monks, both purposefully and subconsciously, altered their tales to present the *sídhe* as demonic and the Otherworld as hellish.

II. BACKGROUND

1. Clarification of terms

A discussion on Irish pagan beliefs can quickly get confusing. First, there is the Otherworld, a magical place that exists alongside the mortal world. It can be accessed from certain thin places where the veil between the worlds is particularly thin, most commonly through burial or fairy mounds called *sídhe*. It goes by many names, including Tir na nÓg, Mag Mell, and Emain Ablach. It is, however, often unclear whether these terms refer to the Otherworld as a whole or to specific places within it, so I use the term Otherworld for clarity. The Otherworld is inhabited by the *sídhe* (sometimes spelled *síd*

or síde), also known as the Aes Síde, Aos Sí, or Daoine Sídh. Whether they are gods, a race of humans, or fae will be discussed later in this paper. For clarity, this thesis will prefer the term sídh, though some quotations or references may use additional names.

There are also a number of tales and manuscripts mentioned in this text. Tales are specific stories, written in several manuscripts. Manuscripts are physical books, comprised of tales. For example, the tale *Tochmarc Emire* (The Wooing of Emer) has been written all or in part in eight different manuscripts, including Lebor na hUidre, the Book of Fermoy, and the Book of Leinster. Tales are marked with italicized titles while the individual manuscripts are not. One book breaks this rule, Lebor Gabála Éirenn, as it is a collection of numerous stories and poems but is not a manuscript on its own. Portions of it are contained within 19 different manuscripts, including the Books of Leinster, Ballymote, Lecan, and Fermoy. Whether they are written in English or Irish depends on the common preference of scholars, which is largely determined by the accuracy of translations.

Lastly, many of the sources used here refer to the Irish as Celts. It is currently unclear as to whether the Irish were Celts (Ritari and Bergholm, 2015; Webster 2015). Archeological and historical evidence is uncertain, while the idea of the Irish as Celtic is still socially popular in the aftermath of the Indo-Aryan hypothesis. To prevent any issues, I have taken care that all sources using the word Celt do not use non-Irish Celtic sources as evidence of Irish beliefs or as a part of the source's argument.

2. Origin of writing and Catholicism in Ireland

Prior to Catholicization, ogam was the only form of writing in Ireland (Johnston, 2013). Ogam was an ancient alphabet originating around 600 BCE predominantly used in

stone inscriptions for memorials and location markers. As Irish religious beliefs at this time were not controlled by a centralized institution and tales were shared orally, literacy was not necessary, and beliefs were less consistent (O'Connor, 2012). Writing is, however, essential to the spread of Catholicism. As an organized religion with an emphasis on conversion, central beliefs, and specific stories, told in specific ways, must be reliably spread across continents. As a result, every record left of pre-Catholic Ireland was written by Catholic monks, centuries after the introduction of Catholicism.

While we can trace back the likely original writing of many tales and poems to centuries earlier than extant manuscripts they currently occur in, the oldest existing manuscript is *Lebor na hUidre*, The Book of the Dun Cow. It was written in the 12th-century CE, seven centuries after the first known signs of Catholicism in Ireland. The surviving manuscripts are largely copies of others, though their compilation, story choice, edits, and author's notes make each writing of each tale slightly different. These changes make it difficult to feel certain they accurately represent the originally copied texts. Even slight changes in word choice or the order of tales can present the same information in an entirely different light.

III. NATURE OF THE SÍDHE

Who were the *sídh*e exactly? Were they simply fae, morally neutral and living their own lives alongside humans? Or were they a race of people who were driven into the Otherworld by new invaders? Perhaps they were demons, sent by the devil to lead people astray. Each tale provides a new perspective on the nature of the *sídh*e and each of these possibilities is explored by them. Here we will dive into the most important stories, teasing them apart to determine which are true and which are syncretic falsehoods.

1. The colophon

Lebor na hUidre (LU), the Book of the Dun Cow, is the oldest existing manuscript written in Irish and contains several stories regarding pagan beliefs on death and journeys to the Otherworld (Bergin and Best, 1992). One of the most important texts within LU is *Serglige Con Culainn* (SC), a tale of the warrior hero Cú Chulainn's vision and journey to the Otherworld. The story includes several *sídhe* who complete both good and bad moral actions. Though they are written with reverence, who they are is not clarified in the text itself. This clarification comes in the form of a colophon that states the *áes síde* were *demna*, demons. A translation of the colophon is as follows:

...And so that is the blighting vision [shown] to Cú Chulainn by the people of the síde. For the diabolical power was great before the Faith, so that demons could wage bodily war against men, and could show them beautiful and secret things, as if they were permanent. And so they were believed in. So that it is those apparitions which the ignorant call síde, and the people of the síde. (Carey, 1994b, p. 78).

John Carey notes that the colophon contrasts starkly with the writing within the actual text (Carey, 1994b). He argues that the author was fascinated with the tale and felt he had written it too compellingly, thus he added the colophon as a perfunctory admittance that this beautiful world he wrote of was created to lead people astray. This interpretation relies heavily on an assumption of the scribe's purpose and state of mind that is, frankly, unsupported. There is no evidence of the first scribe's intentions. The last scribe, who is referred to as H in reference to his homiletic tendencies, erased, changed, and added several other stories, seemingly to make them fall closer in line with Catholic teachings (Mac Eoin, 1994). If H edited other tales in this way, why would he have left a tale that made the Otherworld so compelling? Could there have been another motivation?

Catherine McKenna questions Carey as well, arguing that the tale is presented similarly to contemporary Catholic visions of the afterlife, as eschatological testaments

aiming to convince readers of their truth, and that the colophon works to undermine claims of visions of the Otherworld (McKenna, 2011). By placing the colophon in the context of a tale that romanticized the *sídhe*, the author illustrates how these “demonic visions” can be deceiving, laying the groundwork for the argument that any good seen in the Otherworld and its inhabitants is a dangerous, demonic deception. In addition to these arguments, the colophon allows the tale to remain untouched, the way it had been told for generations before, without it threatening contemporary Catholic ideals. This lack of editing makes *SC* a more useful tool when trying to bring early Irish culture into the Catholic sacred canopy. Simply changing the tale would be too drastic and would risk alienating the intended audience. This small, seemingly insignificant addition draws the audience in with what is perceived to be an unadulterated piece of their culture, while also planting a seed of doubt to ease future conversion.

The argument above is further supported when added to the context of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* colophon. This colophon appears in the 12th-century manuscript, the Book of Leinster. In the same manner, the author writes an incredible tale with no apparent attempts to fit the tale within the contemporary Catholic sacred canopy (Carey, 1994b). And yet at the end, there is a colophon,

But I who have written this story, or rather this fable, give no credence to the various incidents related in it. For some things in it are the deceptions of demons, other poetic figments; some are probable, others improbable; while still others are intended for the delectation of foolish men (O’Rahilly, 1984, p. 272).

This colophon is remarkably familiar and has the same effect as the colophon of *SC*. It leaves a critical tale intact while also undermining it. Presenting it in a new light that changes its meaning entirely. Again, we cannot accurately guess at the intentions of the author, but we can look to the effects of the colophon on the presentation of the tale,

the demonization of the *sídhe*, and the bringing of an important piece of pagan lore into the contemporary Catholic sacred canopy.

2. Demonic magic

Tales of Irish pagan figures being controlled by the devil were not new in either *SC* or the *Táin*. It appears 300 years earlier in the hagiographies *Vita Columbae* and *Vita Sancti Patricii* (Adomnán, 1991; Macthéni, 2006; Borsje, 2015). In his hagiography, the Irish missionary Columba has numerous interactions with people using demonic magic. They control the weather, milk a bull, and attack him repeatedly. They do the same to St. Patrick. When one of them meets a druid, the same pattern of events occurs. The druid(s) use demonic magic, intending to prevent people from hearing the word of God, there is a power struggle between the druid(s)' magic and the saint's power, and ultimately the saint defeats the druid and converts the people around them with the power of God. It is unsurprising a hagiography paints the stories of these saints in a positive light.

Interestingly, these books outdate the oldest extant records of pagan tales by several centuries. *Vita Columbae* was written roughly around 700 CE and the oldest existing portions of *Vita Sancti Patricii* date to the end of the same century. LU, the oldest extant manuscript written in Irish, which contains the colophon of *SC*, dates to the 12th-century (Borsje, 2015; Carey, 1994b). This timeline supports McKenna's argument and affords a measure of leeway in attempting to interpret the intentions of the scribes. It shows how, prior to both of the colophons, monks in Ireland were purposefully writing books that explicitly demonized paganism and altered the truth to fabricate a story that fit Catholic needs at the time.

3. Tuatha Dé Danann

Lebor Gabála Éirenn (LGE), the Book of Invasions, was a falsified history of Ireland. LGE was written starting in the 11th-century to fit the Irish into Catholic history, connecting them to biblical figures, creation, and ideas of death (Carey, 1994a; Scowcroft, 2009). Any fragment of Irish culture that contradicted contemporary Catholic ideas was woven into the text to fit it within the contemporary Catholic sacred canopy. It worked. As late as the 19th-century, historians regarded it as an accurate recording of events and used it to inform their research and histories (Ó hÓgáin, 1991).

In particular, LGE was frequently used as a source in the 1636 text, *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*, which was long regarded as a keystone historical record (O’Clery et al, 1854). Even in 1906, an author spoke about LGE as a “history of the conquests of Ireland” and spoke about the writers of the annals when saying, “these men took nothing on hearsay” (Joyce, 1906, pp. 212, 224). It is essential to remember that LGE was first written during the Middle Ages, in a time when belief in magic, witches, and demons was commonplace among both Christians and non-Christians alike. Ireland’s last witch trial did not end until 1711, so belief in people with magic was not unique or a difficult sell (Sneddon, 2015).

Today there is significant archeological evidence showing the races of people mentioned exclusively in LGE, including the Milesians, the Tuatha Dé Danann, and the Fomoiri, almost certainly never existed (Carey, 2015, 1994a; Scowcroft 2009). Furthermore, most of the events described in LGE, such as the Irish language being formed by the grandson of a Pharoah from the languages made at the Tower of Babel, did not occur. However, even to this day, disinformation from LGE persists, no longer as a history of Ireland but as a recording of the beliefs of the pagan Irish (Massey, 2004;

Danielle, 2020). This occurs despite the current consensus by scholars that there is so much disinformation within LGE that no substantive part of it should be taken as truth.

LGE fit the *sídhe* into contemporary Catholic narratives, creating new arguments and expanding on their prior demonization. It explained the *sídhe*'s existence in tales by construing them as a race of humans with supernatural powers, the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were forced underground, into the Otherworld, by the Milesians, a mythical race that took over Ireland after them and is said to have become the Irish (O'Rahilly, 1946). This explanation allowed the *sídhe* to fit into Catholicism without getting rid of them entirely. Thomas O'Rahilly stated, "One section of [LGE], that relating to the Tuatha Dé Danann, owes its origin to a desire to reduce the deities of pagan Ireland to the level of moral men" (O'Rahilly, 1946, p. 264). It also left room for the *sídhe* as demons, portraying them as men with magical powers that they often use against the Milesians (Carey, 1994a).

IV. LIFE AFTER DEATH

The question of what the pagan Irish believed happened after death is a complicated one. Every tale seems to give a different idea of these beliefs along with the nature of the people and places within Irish tales. Several important locations are tied to these tales and the same themes do appear within them. Unfortunately, a clear answer cannot be obtained as analysis repeatedly shows

1. Oweynagat

Oweynagat, the Cave of the Cats, is one such place whose true nature prior to Catholicism is unknown. It is a real cave located at Cruachan in County Roscommon. In *Echtra Nera (EN)*, a tale dating back to the 10th-century, Oweynagat is the point at which

Nera can move between the mortal world and the Otherworld (Toner, 2013). It holds no connection to death or demons and neither it nor those who live around it have a particular moral leaning. This reference to Oweynagat as a portal without connection to death also occurs in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Táin Bó Fraích*, and *Táin Bó Regamna*, the cattle raids of Cúailnge, Fraích, and Regamna, respectively (Waddell, 1983). Fickle though it may be, in each of these tales it is little more than a doorway between two places. In *Metrical Dindshenchas*, Oweynagat becomes more than a doorway as the home of the Morrigan, a prophetess warrior *sídh*e. However here Oweynagat is still morally neutral with no mention of death or the afterlife.

In contrast to these tellings, *Cath Maige Mucrama* (*CMM*) becomes quite literal in hellifying Oweynagat, calling it “*dorus iffirn na Hérend*”, Ireland’s gates to Hell (Toner, 2013; Waddell 1983). The tale goes on to describe a number of vile, supernatural beasts who come from the gates to kill and destroy in the mortal world, such as a three-headed monster. This tale does not speak of an afterlife, so it is unclear whether the hell it is referring to is a literal afterlife for damned souls or if the word is simply chosen to show how terrible the beasts it spawns are, though Toner argues it was referring to a literal hell, as evidenced in *EN*.

In *EN*, the protagonist Nera must tie a stick around the ankle of a ghost, who is wandering in the mortal world on Samhain, one night a year when the veil between the worlds is thinnest. Toner states these two tales each confirm each other as a thinning of the gates of hell would lead to ghosts wandering the mortal world and vice versa (Toner, 2013). I think this takes a logical leap. It is highly possible they were syncretically altered, separately or together, and neither is true. It is also possible the words in *EN*

shifted over time from discussing spirits as in the *sídhe* to spirits as ghosts and the word hell in *CMM* was referring to the brutality of the beasts within it the entire time.

2. *Echtra Chonnlai*

Echtra Chonnlai (*EC*) presents a unique problem. While the 8th-century tale appears to be set within the context of pagan beliefs, featuring *sídhe*, the hero Chonnlae, and the Otherworld, it feels like a contemporary Catholic story, dressed up to look pagan (McCone, 2000). It ends with the hero getting exactly what they want without having to go through anything terrible or kill anyone in the process, a stark contrast from every other tale mentioned thus far. Most conspicuously, the *sídhe* woman within the tale actively denounces druid magic as the black magic of the devil. She then prophesies that the law and judgments of the Great High King will soon come to them and defeat the devil's magic. As *EC* was set before the coming of Catholicism to Ireland, this appears to be a poorly hidden attempt at retroactively synthesizing a pagan prophecy of Catholicism (Maier, 2013).

In the tale, a *sídhe* woman appears to Chonnlae and tells him he is going to die soon (McCone, 2000). She has come to take him to a paradise across the sea where there is no original sin. Even at first glance, the paradise she speaks of sounds remarkably similar to Catholic heaven and nothing like the pagan Otherworld spoken of in other texts (Maier, 2013). Original sin itself is a distinctly Christian doctrine. Upon closer examination, the language and storyline of the tale are heavily influenced by a number of early Catholic texts and follow the same pattern as the stories from *Vita Columbae* and *Vita Sancti Patricii*. Though she is *sídhe*, the woman's purpose is to bring Chonnlae to Heaven, making her originally some form of Catholic figure, possibly an angel, prior to

being set in this pagan framework. She is able to work magic that defeats the demonic druid by invoking Bóadag, the Great High King.

Though *EC* presents itself as a clear and easy to interpret representation of pre-Catholic pagan beliefs, the syncretism within it is clumsy and undeniable. The writer attempted to fit the Otherworld and the *sídhe* into the sacred canopy too intensely and rapidly and as a result, it reads as false. The tale is so similar to contemporary Catholic stories it feels almost comical, like a satire of other syncretic tales. It cannot be taken as evidence of true pre-Catholic beliefs.

3. Tech Duinn

Another way Catholic monks fit pagan ideas into the contemporary Catholic sacred canopy in LGE was by incorporating Tech Duinn, the House of Donn, as the entrance to hell. Writings about Tech Duinn prior to LGE were sparse, but some did connect it to death. One 9th-century poem speaks of Tech Duinn when it says, “To me, to my house, you shall all come after your deaths,” and some references suggest it was a place for souls to gather before reincarnation (Ó hÓgáin, 1999, pg 58). However, it is never clear exactly what Tech Duinn is or what role Donn, the *sídhe* connected to it, plays.

Until *Lebor Gábala Érenn*. In this text, Donn becomes a Milesian who drowns and is buried on Bull Rock, a large rock island off the west coast of Ireland, which then became Tech Duinn (O’Rahilly, 1946). From then on, Tech Duinn became the place the dead went on their way to hell, which these authors wrote as the Otherworld, while the repentant look on from the shore. It became the gates of hell. Making Donn a Milesian instead of a Tuath Dé was an interesting choice, and it works to separate him from the

other sídhe. This is necessary as his role as the gatekeeper to Tech Duinn made him, in a way, a Catholic figure. So, he could not simply be killed off or pushed into hiding. Making a Tuath Dé into such an important figure would have given them too much power.

Donn is portrayed in LGE as strikingly similar to Manannán Mac Lir, the sídhe in charge of the sun and a charismatic ruler in the Otherworld (O’Rahilly, 1946). This worked effectively to weaken opinions of Mac Lir by fitting him and his character traits into the approved narrative without obviously changing his story or making it apparent that he is being demonized as the Lord of the Dead. Beyond this more tentative connection, this rewriting also creates an idea of hell by simply elaborating on the connections to death that were already present. It seems to suggest that prior stories and beliefs were simply incomplete, and the explanation of Irish history and death is finished by the inclusion of Catholicism.

4. The possibility of nothing

While it is difficult to prove the lack of something, the possibility must be considered that many Irish may not have had a specific belief about life after death. The lack of clarity as shown previously is evidence not only of syncretism, but also that the original tales were nonspecific and unclear. It is possible many Irish had no belief about life after death and were not concerned with finding that explanation. A later portion of sacred canopy theory discusses secularization, stating that as the link between God and man weakens, the values by which people live their lives and the framework through which they see the world is no longer defined by religion (Berger, 1967). This leads to

new values such as success and new frameworks that do not prioritize eschatological explanations.

Berger discusses this in the context of post-Reformation history (16th-century CE), however, if history has taught us anything, it is that people remain the same, repeating the same patterns throughout history. Thus, is it perfectly reasonable to extrapolate this to pre-Catholic Ireland, wondering if they simply were not concerned with fitting everything within the sacred canopy of their beliefs. They possibly had other concerns and values, making beliefs about life after death a low priority.

It should be noted there is no record of a creation myth in pre-Catholic Ireland (Nagy, 2015). Now it may be possible this myth was excluded by monks in favor of LGE to fit the Irish into the Catholic creation myth. Or that every record of it has been lost. But it may also be that it never existed, supporting the notion that at least some of the pagan Irish were more secularized than can be assumed. If not having an idea about the origin of the world was not concerning to them, perhaps not having an idea about death did not concern them either.

V. CONCLUSION

True understanding of the beliefs of ancient peoples hinges on an accurate interpretation of our sources. As the only people to write down these stories at the time they were being told, the scribes held a great responsibility to write them accurately. Our entire understanding of what the ancient Irish believed hinges on those scribes telling the truth. On the part of academics, failure to examine records with care risks taking a synthetic history as truth, as the historians who believed LGE did.

Unfortunately, the monks' biases, whether purposeful or subconscious, are evident in their writing and compromise their credibility as sources of Irish cultural and religious history. The Catholic sacred canopy could not fit pre-Catholic beliefs without alteration, leading to the apparent purposeful writing and rewriting of tales to fit them within the contemporary Catholic belief framework, as in *Echtra Chonnlai*. In addition, the sacred framework becomes the way each monk views the world, including differing religious beliefs. If a belief system is very different or lacks a strong framework, an accurate, objective understanding would require breaking the contemporary Catholic framework in order to fundamentally alter the way each monk thinks.

Instead, monks continued to view these beliefs through their own sacred framework, subconsciously taking part in the misconstruction of Irish religious beliefs by explaining Irish tales through the lens of the Catholic belief system. These alterations fit pagan tales into a contemporary Catholic framework that allowed for easier conversion as they took pieces of both religious traditions and formed something new instead of simply throwing away one tradition in favor of the other. Did the pre-Catholic Irish have beliefs about the afterlife? It is impossible to say for certain. But the tales we have left do give us clues.

REFERENCES

- Adomnán. (1991). *Vita Columbae*. (A. O. Anderson & M. O. Anderson, Eds.) (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Best, R. I., and Bergin, O. (Eds.). (1992) *Lebor na hUidre: book of the dun cow*. School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies.
- Berger, P. L. (1967). *The sacred canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Doubleday and Company.
- Borsje, J. (2015). Celtic spells and counterspells. In K. Ritari & A Bergholm (Eds.), *Understanding Celtic religion: revisiting the pagan past* (Vol. 1, pp. 9-50). University of Wales Press.
- Carey, John. (1994a). *The Irish national origin legend: synthetic pseudohistory (with a memoir of E. C. Quiggin by David N Dumville)*. University of Cambridge.
- Carey, John. (1994b). The uses of tradition in Serglige Con Culainn. In G. Stockman & J. P. Mallory (Eds.), *Ulidia: proceedings of the first International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and emain macha, 8-12 April 1994* (pp. 77–84). December Publications.
- Carey, John. (2015). The old gods of Ireland in the later Middle Ages. In K. Ritari & A Bergholm (Eds.), *Understanding Celtic religion: revisiting the pagan past*, (Vol. 1, pp. 51–68). University of Wales Press.
- Danielle. [@theirishdanielle]. (2020, December 15). *The Tuatha Dé Danann* [Video].

TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@theishdanielle/video/6906672940302028038>

hÓgáin, D. Ó. (1991) *Myth, legend & romance: an encyclopaedia of the Irish folk tradition*. Prentice Hall Press.

hÓgáin, D. Ó. (1999). *The sacred isle: belief and religion in pre-Christian Ireland*. Boydell Press.

Johnston, E. (2013). Irish literacy in a late antique context. In *Literacy and identity in early medieval Ireland* (pp. 1–26). Boydell Press.

Joyce, P. W. (1906). *A smaller social history of ancient Ireland: treating of the government, military system, and law; religion, learning, and art; trades, industries, and commerce; manners, customs, and domestic life, of the ancient Irish people*. Longmans, Green, & Co.

Mac Eoin, G. (1994). The interpolator H in Lebor na hUidre. In G. Stockman & J. P. Mallory (Eds.), *Ulidia: proceedings of the first International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8-12 April 1994* (pp. 39–46). December Publications.

Macthéni, M. M. (2006). *Vita Sancti Patricii*. (D. R. Howlett, Ed.). Four Courts Press.

Maier, B. (2013). Dead men don't wear plaid: Celtic myth and Christian creed in medieval Irish concepts of the afterlife. In J. F. Nagy (Ed.), *Writing down the myths* (Vol. 17, Ser. Cursor Mundi, pp. 107–136). Brepols.

Martin, R. (2013). The 'myth before the myth began'. In J. F. Nagy (Ed.), *Writing down the myths* (Vol. 17, Ser. Cursor Mundi, pp. 45-66). Brepols.

Massey, E. (2004). *Legendary Ireland: a journey through Celtic places and myths*. O'Brien Press.

McCone, K. (2000). *Echtrae Chonnlaí and the beginnings of vernacular narrative writing in Ireland: a critical edition with introduction, notes, bibliography, and vocabulary*. Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland.

McKenna, C. (2011). Angels and demons in the pages of Lebor na hUidre. In J. F. ESKA (Ed.), *Narrative in Celtic tradition: essays in honor of Edgar M. Slotkin* (Vol. 8, 9, Ser. CSANA). Colgate University Press.

Nagy, Joseph Falaky. (2013) Are myths inside the text or outside the box? In J. F. Nagy (Ed.), *Writing down the myths* (Vol. 17, Ser. Cursor Mundi, pp. 1–1). Brepols.

Nagy, Joseph Falaky. (2015). Staging the Otherworld in medieval Irish tradition. In K. Ritari & A. Bergholm (Eds.), *Understanding Celtic religion: revisiting the pagan past* (Vol. 1, pp 69-82). University of Wales Press.

O'Clery, M., et al. (1854) *Annals of the kingdom of Ireland: by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*. Translated by John O'Donovan, vol. 1, Hodges, Smith, and Co.

- O'Connor, A. (2012) To hell or to purgatory? Irish folk religion and post-tridentine counter-reformation Catholic teachings. In *Béaloides* (Vol. 80, pp. 115–141). The Folklore of Ireland Society.
- O'Rahilly, T. F. (1946). *Early Irish history and mythology*. School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- O'Rahilly, C. (1984). *Táin Bó Cúalnge: from the Book of Leinster*. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- Ritari, K. & Bergholm, A. (2015). Introduction: 'Celtic religion': is this a valid concept? In K. Ritari & A. Bergholm (Eds.), *Understanding Celtic religion: revisiting the pagan past* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–8). University of Wales Press.
- Scowcroft, M., et al. (2009) *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: textual history and pseudohistory*. (John Carey, Ed.) (Vol. 20). Irish Texts Society.
- Sneddon, A. (2015). *Witchcraft and magic in Ireland*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Toner, G. (2013). Narrative, death, and the Otherworld in Echtra Nera. In Mathúna Séamus Mac (Ed.), *Ulidia 3: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the ulster cycle of tales, University of Ulster, Coleraine, 22-25 June, 2009: In Memoriam Patrick Leo Henry* (Vol. 3, pp. 107–120). Curach Bhán.
- Waddell, J. (1983). Rathcroghan: a royal site in Connacht. In *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* (Vol. 1, pp. 21–46). Wordwell.

Webster, J. (2015). A dirty window on the Iron Age? Recent developments in the archaeology of pre-Roman Celtic religion. In K. Ritari & A. Bergholm (Eds.), *Understanding Celtic religion: revisiting the pagan past* (pp. 121–154). University of Wales Press.

Wright, B. (2009). *Brigid: goddess, druidess, and saint*. History Press.