

# Acts of *Fingal*

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in Early Irish Literature

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## **Plagiaatverklaring**

Hierbij verklaar ik dat ik bij het schrijven van dit B.A. eindwerkstuk geen plagiaat gepleegd heb.

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## Introduction

Throughout literature, the topic of murder within a family group is often represented covering a wide range of genres from morality tales to simply tales of intrigue. The early Irish tales that include *fingal*, ‘kin-slaying’, are of course no exception to this staple of ancient storytelling. In this thesis, I will explore the legal perspective as it relates to *fingal* and how (if at all) it relates to the stories at hand.

First I will analyze the phenomenon of *fingal* itself, what the law texts say about this crime and how it is punished. After that I will look at the individual stories, the main focus being: (1) determining whether or not the killing could be seen as an act of *fingal*, (2) what might be the motives of the *fingalach* ‘kin-slayer’ and (3) is he punished at all?

For this I have selected the following tales:

- *Cath Maige Tuired* (‘The second battle of Mag Tuired’).
- *Fingal Rónáin* (‘Rónán’s kin-slaying’).
- *Aided Óenfir Aífe* (‘The violent death of Aífe’s only son’).

This selection of texts is based on the fact that in each of them, the *fingal* is that of a father murdering his son.

Finally, I will compare these texts to find out the similarities and differences between the tales and I will examine whether or not the laws indeed correspond with the literature; in other words, if the punishment one might expect from a legal standpoint is meted out in each case.

## *Fingal*

In this chapter the focus will be on the early Irish tradition of *fingal*. What exactly is *fingal*? And how is this phenomenon described in early Irish law texts? Finally, what is the punishment for the slaying of kin in a world where honour played a much larger role than it does in today's (western) society?

The *Dictionary of the Irish Language* explains *fingal* as follows:

“... wounding or slaying a relative; often transl[at]ed. ‘fratricide’ or ‘patricide’, but wider in meaning: in MI 39a6 fi[n]gail (as.) is used of the hypothetical slaying of Saul by David ; in later texts often of killing a tribesman or anyone not an enemy and equivalent to *murder* as opp[osed]. to justifiable homicide...”<sup>1</sup>

This compound consists of the elements *fine*, ‘a group of persons of the same family, kindred’ and *gal*, ‘warlike ardour’, in this context ‘murder’. Thus, the meaning kin-slaying can be derived from these components.

There are many examples of kin-slaying in literature from all over the world. One of the most widely known in the western world is of course the Biblical account of Cain and Abel. This scenario perfectly fits the definition of kin-slaying and in the Irish text *In tenga bithnua* ‘The ever-new tongue’ it is explicitly referred to as *fingal*: *7 a n-aidche do-roni Cain fingal ar Aibel*<sup>2</sup> (“and at midnight Cain performed kin-slaying upon Abel.”)<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon of *fingal* and its laws are described in detail by Fergus Kelly in *A Guide to Early Irish Law*. He mentions that the act of *fingal* ‘strikes at the heart of the kin-based structure of early Irish society’.<sup>4</sup> As early Irish society was based on a system of honour and status, atonement for crimes would usually reflect this system. Generally, if someone committed a crime or offence, the perpetrator would be made to pay a fine<sup>5</sup> to (the family of) the victim. However, in the case of *fingal*, this form of compensation would be at best

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<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of the Irish Language* 2007: 307.

<sup>2</sup> Carey 2009: 214.

<sup>3</sup> Carey 2009: 214.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly 1988: 127.

<sup>5</sup> This could be a part of or even the entire honour-price of the victim, depending on the crime.

redundant, as it would simply be the family paying the family, essentially as if nothing had happened. Even more difficult in this matter would be attempting to avenge such a death by killing the culprit (another manner in which (the family of) the victim could be legally compensated); the family would not be able to avenge the death of one member in this way, since they would commit *fingal* themselves if they would kill the *fingalach*.<sup>6</sup>

There are several surviving medieval Irish legal tracts which include a discussion on *fingal* and its consequences and implications. The first of these examples occurs in *Sechtae* 'Heptads'. This text illustrates for example that there are seven forts which are not entitled to an honour-price, and amongst them is a fort in which the crime of *fingal* was committed: *Dun a ndentar fingal*<sup>7</sup> ("A fort in which kin-slaying is committed").

In *Ancient Laws of Ireland* this part is further explained, by stating what *fingal* exactly is: *Dun a ndentar fingal .i. [gal for in fine, co ro ica 7 co ro penide in fer dogni; mad fingal cin deithbirius is lan-eneclann tesbus aire*<sup>8</sup> ("A fort in which kin-slaying is committed, i.e. violence upon the tribe; till the man who does it atones [for it] and does penance; if it is kin-slaying without necessity, he loses full honour-price.") A gloss is added to this text: *is esbadac uad; 7 dia roib detbirius, is slan*.<sup>9</sup> ("it is lacking by him (he lacks it); and if it be with just cause, he is exempt (non-liable)"). If someone has committed *fingal* without necessity or a just cause, he would lose his whole honour-price,<sup>10</sup> but if he has a just cause he is non-liable. The law texts do not state what exactly 'just cause' would entail; perhaps a son could kill his father without any consequences if the latter was an unjust ruler.

Fergus Kelly discusses in his chapter about punishments in early Irish law how one found guilty of *fingal* would be punished. Incidentally, the punishment for kin-slaying would be the same as one found guilty of arson or breaking into a church. In these cases, the prescribed punishment would be to set the person found guilty adrift.<sup>11</sup> Mary Byrne states that this was initially a punishment reserved as a humane way to punish women: "The punishment in a

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<sup>6</sup> Kelly 1988: 127.

<sup>7</sup> Binchy 1978: 14. CIH 14.16.

<sup>8</sup> Hancock 1865: 170. ll. 14-16.

<sup>9</sup> Hancock 1865: 170.

<sup>10</sup> An example of this can be found in *Corpus Iuris Hibernici: Fingal* is one of the seven reasons for which a king can lose his honour-price: *ri dogne fingal* ("a king who commits kin-slaying"). (Binchy 1978: 15).

<sup>11</sup> Kelly 1988: 220.

more humane form is decreed for women who had committed murder or a crime deserving the death-penalty.”<sup>12</sup>

The punishment of a *fingalach* by setting him adrift can be found in the *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*:<sup>13</sup> “*uair fingal indethbiri dogni an duine ann sin; 7 is ann is dilis an cur armuir... 7 ma ina tir fein dotochra doridhis, is foghnam musaine (for mugsaine) uadh .i. foghnam fuidhre*”<sup>14</sup> (“For it is careless kin-slaying that the man commits then; and it is lawful then to put him on the sea (=to set him adrift) ... and if he lands again in his own land, it is service in slavery by him that is, the service of a *fuidir* (‘half-freeman’)”).

Here it is stated that someone who has committed kin-slaying without a just cause will be given to the sea. However, should such a situation arise where the individual who was set adrift would return to his own country alive, the law maintains an assurance that he will not remain unpunished for his deeds. Should the *fingalach* be washed back to the shores of his own territory, said *fingalach* would be condemned to serve as what is known as a *fuidir*,<sup>15</sup> an inferior to the members of the *túath*. According to Kelly, the *fingalach* would then fall under the category of the *fuidircinad o muir*, ‘the inferior of the sea’.<sup>16</sup>

This fate is also mentioned by Thomas Charles-Edwards, who states that by setting the *fingalach* adrift, he would essentially be judged by God:

“In the tract on the *fuidir* we find, apart from the *ambue* and the *cú glas*, a particular type of *muirchuirthe*, the *fuidir cinad o muir*, the *fuidir* cast up by the sea who has committed an offence. This is the man who for his offence – a glossator mentions kin-slaying – has been put in a boat, pushed out to sea and left to the mercy of wind and wave. It was, in the Christian period, a type of Judgment of God related to other forms of the ordeal found in other countries at the same period.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Byrne 1932: 98.

<sup>13</sup> Bretha Echach Maic Luchta (Breatnach 2005: 176).

<sup>14</sup> Binchy 1978: 1301-1302.

<sup>15</sup> Kelly 1988: 220.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly 1988: 128.

<sup>17</sup> Charles-Edwards 1976: 48.

It would be worth noting, that due to the previously mentioned difficulties with regard to determining the fate of a *fingalach* – payment of compensation to the victim(‘s kin) or killing the culprit are in case of *fingal* neither an option – that God would be the only one capable of properly punishing a kin-slayer. Another reason for the origin of this punishment is simply that there was a need for far more humane punishments which were more fitting to the sentiment of Christian morals:

“From the earlier allusions to this punishment it seems clear that it [setting adrift] was originally a penalty inflicted by ecclesiastics, and that it is post-Christian in origin. It shows a certain humane shrinking from deliberately taking life, a desire (as the formula included in it states) to leave the question of guilt and the ultimate decision between life and death in the jurisdiction of God. Afterwards it appears to have become a part of ordinary law to punish offences where there was not full criminal intent,' or as in the case of a child of an incestuous union to remove from the community the guiltless fruit of another's sin.”<sup>18</sup>

The sea would therefore be ideally suited to play the role of the judge and potentially executioner as well. In case the *fingalach* would be washed back to shore he would get the shameful position of servitude. The reality of the situation would be that the *fingalach* would potentially be doomed to live out his life as a person without status in a world where status and honour meant everything. He would in essence be in almost the same situation if he had been a foreigner washed to the shores of Ireland.

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<sup>18</sup> Byrne 1936: 100.



## *Cath Maige Tuired*

An example of *fingal* can be found in *Cath Maige Tuired*, ‘The (second) battle of Mag Tuired’.<sup>19</sup> The tale states that during the first battle of Mag Tuired, Núadu, the king of the Túatha Dé Danann, had lost his arm. This injury meant that, in early Irish society, he was blemished. As kings were to be without blemish, this meant essentially that Núadu was no longer fit to rule. Dían Cécht, the physician of the king, offered a solution in the form of an arm made of silver, which functioned exactly as a normal arm should.<sup>20</sup>

The son of Dían Cécht, Míach, then decided, without consulting anyone else, that it would be best for Núadu to have a real arm, made of flesh, blood and bone; in other words, an arm which could not only function as normal, but one which would result in Núadu being without blemish, which might enable him to be king once more. He did this by performing ritual and incantation.<sup>21</sup> Dían Cécht disagrees completely with the treatment his son has provided and resorts to extreme measures to deal with this display of expertise:

*Ba holc lia Díen Cécht an freapaid-sin. Duleicc claidimh a mullach a meic go rotend a tuidn fri féoil a cinn. Ícais an gillai tre inndeld a eladon. Atcomaic aithurrach go roteind a féoil co rrodic cnáim. Ícais an gilde den indel cétnae. Bissis an tres bém co ránic srebonn a inchinde. Ícais dano an gille don indell cétnae. Bisius dano an cethramad mbém co nderba a n-inchind conid apu[d] Míoch 7 atbert Díen Cécht nach-n-ícfad lieig badesin o[n]t [s]laithie-sin.<sup>22</sup> (ll. 140-146)*

“Dían Cécht did not like that cure. He hurled a sword at the crown of his son’s head and cut his skin to the flesh. The young man healed it by means of his skill. He struck him again and cut his flesh until he reached the bone. The young man healed it by the same means. He struck the third blow and reached the membrane

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<sup>19</sup> For this chapter I will use the edition and translation of Elizabeth Gray 1982.

<sup>20</sup> *Isen cath-sin dano robenad a lámh de Núadad .i. Sregg mac Sengaidn rophen dei hí. Go tarad Díen Cécht an liaigh láim airgid foair co lúth cecai láma 7 Crédhne in cerd ag cunnam fris.* (“Núadu’s hand was cut off in that battle – Sreng mac Sendainn struck it from him. So with Crédne the brazier helping him, Dían Cécht the physician put on him a silver hand that moved as well as any other hand.”) (Gray 1982: 24. ll. 28-30).

<sup>21</sup> *Nír’uo maith dano liaa mac-sium sen .i. le Míach. Atréracht-sim don láim 7 atbert, ault fri halt dí 7 féith fri féth; 7 ícuís fri téorai nómaidhe. In cétna nómaid immuscurid comair a táeib, 7 rotonigestar An dómaid tánisde immas-cuirid aro brundib. An tres nómaid dobidced gelsgothai di bocsibnibh dubhoid ó rodubtis a ten.* (“But his son Míach did not like that. He went to the hand and said “joint to joint of it, and sinew to sinew”; and he healed it in nine days and nights. The first day he carried it against his side, and it became covered with skin. The second day he carried it against his chest. The third day he would wipe white wisps of black bulrushes after they had been blackened in the fire.”) (Gray 1982: 32. ll. 134-139).

<sup>22</sup> Gray 1982: 32.

of his brain. The young man healed this too by the same means. Then he struck the fourth blow and cut out the brain, so that Míach died; and Dían Cécht said that no physician could heal him of that blow.”<sup>23</sup>

At this point the tale of Míach and Dían Cécht ends. Interestingly, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, which has another account of the episode of Níadu’s arm does not contain Dían Cécht’s slaying of Míach. It does speak of how Níadu received his silver arm from the physician and also mentions that Míach made a real arm for him, but Dían Cécht does not bring about his son’s demise and commit *fíngal*.<sup>24</sup>

Although the word *fíngal* is not used in *Cath Maige Tuired*, the killing of Míach fits the definition perfectly: the slaying of one's own kin, a father slaying his own son, no other conclusion can be drawn from the narrative. What is probably most remarkable in this situation is that Dían Cécht is never punished for slaying his son in the text. It almost seems as if he does not care at all. After murdering his son he just states that the healing skills of his daughter, Airmed, are still available to the tribe.<sup>25</sup>

There is no explanation provided for the slaying of Míach in the tale itself, but is clearly an act of jealousy and envy. Elizabeth Gray points out that the behaviour of Míach could also be considered wrong in this situation: “Míach exercises his talent independently, implicitly condemning his father’s skill by surpassing it.”<sup>26</sup> Although the healing of Níadu's arm could be viewed as an act within the greater good of the tribe as a whole, it was performed without approval of Dían Cécht. Míach’s behaviour seems to fly in the face of the respect that a son should have for his father or the professional courtesy which a student should hold for their mentor. His actions could be interpreted as a form of insolence toward Dían Cécht, blemishing his honour. In this particular instance, it would be only right that Dían Cécht would do whatever he could to save his honour in the eyes of the tribe: “Apparently acting from a mixture of parental anger and injured professional pride, Dían Cécht takes his son’s life, proving there are limits even to Míach’s skill.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gray 1982: 33.

<sup>24</sup> “A silver arm with full activity did Dian Ceht set upon him, Credne the wright helping him. Miach son of Dian Ceht set joint to joint and vein to vein of his own hand upon him (Níadu), and in thrice nine days was it healed, and he took the silver arm as a guerdon.” (Macalister 1941: 149).

<sup>25</sup> The healing skills of the daughter would not be of much use: she uses herbs to heal, but Dían Cécht scatters them.

<sup>26</sup> Gray ‘Myth’ 1982: 9.

<sup>27</sup> Gray ‘Myth’ 1982: 9-10.

According to Gray, there is more than a motive of simple jealousy in a situation such as this, as Dían Cécht could potentially be seen as the god of healing. Therefore, it could be that Dían Cécht is illustrating the limits of healing.<sup>28</sup> Like all physicians, Míach can only heal his own body to a certain degree. Physicians know when they are unable to heal someone, and know the limits to which they can push themselves and their patients. The knowledge that Dían Cécht holds in regards to these limits would seem to illustrate his supremacy as a physician, if only from a moral standpoint. However, the consequences of slaying Míach are severe: his skills are forever lost to the Túatha Dé Danann.<sup>29</sup>

To me it seems more likely that this tale is simply an example of a father who sees his son as a threat to his position, and therefore the son must be removed from such a position to ensure self-preservation.<sup>30</sup> By creating Núadu's arm as flesh and blood, Míach shows skill surpassing that displayed by his father. Dían Cécht might have recognized Míach's skill as greater than his own after learning that Míach needed no assistance to create the arm. He may have felt that his position was under threat, as he himself required the assistance of Crédne to create the silver arm.

Whether or not it was within Dían Cécht's right, the fact is that he brutally murdered his own son. This could also be seen as a sadistic action, for Dían Cécht watched his son heal himself in between each beating. Although this is clearly an act of *fingal*, there is no mention of consequence in the text, or of the legal sanctions one might expect after looking at the law tracts. One is left to assume that perhaps there is no mention of punishment because there was no punishment or judgment handed down in this matter. Perhaps Míach's surpassing of his father made this act of *fingal* a just cause, and therefore Dían Cécht would be non-liable. It seems clear, however, that by taking the life of his son, and diminishing the skills of his daughter Dían Cécht is able to maintain his status as the healer of the Túatha Dé Danann. A direct result of this could be that Dían Cécht could not be killed or set adrift for his crime simply because he is so needed for the tribe.

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<sup>28</sup>Gray 'Myth' 1982:12.

<sup>29</sup> Gray 'Myth' 1982:12.

<sup>30</sup>This is a common theme, found in a variety of forms in classical literature. In Greek mythology for example, one of the best known examples of this is the story of the Titan Cronos. He ate his children immediately following their birth, as it was prophesied that one of his children would overthrow him.

## *Fingal Rónáin*

Of the medieval Irish tales which involve an act of *fingal*, *Fingal Rónáin* ‘The kin-slaying of Ronan’ or ‘How Rónán slew his son’<sup>31</sup> is one which is quintessentially Irish in terms of bloodshed and morbid humor. The sheer array of those who die in this tale is staggering, consisting of virtually the entire cast of participants in the royal household.

After the death of his wife, Rónán, the king of Leinster, decides to take a new wife, as his son Máel Fíothartaig advised him. Rónán does act on this advice, but does so unwisely. For instead of seeking a wife closer to his own age, Rónán sets his sights upon the young daughter of the king of Dún Sobairche (Dunseverick). Máel Fíothartaig objects to his father’s choice, but his protests fall on deaf ears. After Rónán marries the girl and brings her back to Leinster, his wife grows interested in her attractive new stepson. She soon orders her maidservant to speak in private to Máel Fíothartaig to establish a tryst with him. The girl relates the problem to Congal, one of Máel Fíothartaig’s foster brothers. As soon as Máel Fíothartaig learns of his stepmother’s intentions, he flees the country in order to avoid the problems that would unfold from such a proposition. But he is forced to return home as the Leinstermen threaten to kill Rónán, and once he returns, the queen redoubles her efforts in attempting to sleep with him. When he keeps rejecting her, the infatuation the queen feels for her stepson turns from love to hatred. She conspires to have her revenge by claiming to Rónán that his son attempted to rape her.<sup>32</sup> Rónán does not believe this claim at first, but she convinces him by manner of a procedure called ‘verse-capping’ - in which Máel Fíothartaig utters a half-quatrain and she supplies the rest.<sup>33</sup> Rónán, enraged with jealousy, believes her. He calls upon his champion, Áedán, and orders him to kill Máel Fíothartaig. As Máel Fíothartaig lays mortally wounded, Rónán reproaches him by saying: *ná fuarais-[s]iu mnaí do guidi acht mo ben-sa.*<sup>34</sup> “(...) you

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<sup>31</sup> For this chapter I will use the edition and translation of David Greene.

<sup>32</sup> Potifar’s Wife motif. K2111 in Stith Thompson’s ‘Motif Index-Index of Folk-Literature’.

<sup>33</sup> Tomás Ó Cathasaigh explains the meaning of the quatrain: “It will be recalled that Mael Fhothartaig says, ‘It is cold against the whirlwind / for one who herds the cows of Aífe’ (*Is uar fri clóí ngáithe / do neoch in-gair Bú Aífe*), and she replies: ‘It is a vain herding, without cows, without anyone you love’ (*Iss e ingaire mada, / cen bú, cen nech no chara*). (...) We know three things about Bae Aífe: first, the ‘Cows of Aífe’ are not cows, but rocks which look like cows from afar; secondly, one could go hunting there, and this is what Mael Fhothartaig has been doing on the day of his death; thirdly, it is a suitable place for a tryst, and it is the spot chosen for that which was arranged between Mael Fhothartaig and Echaid’s daughter. Since Bae Aífe are rocks, the ‘herding’ of them must be a metaphor for another activity. The two activities which suggest themselves are hunting and trysting. I take it that Mael Fhothartaig is referring to the first of these, and Echaid’s daughter to the second.” (Ó Cathasaigh ‘Rhetoric’ 1985: 141).

<sup>34</sup> Greene 1955: 7.

found no woman to woo but my wife!”<sup>35</sup> After this, the awful truth is made known to Rónán through his son’s final words:

*“Is truag in bréc sin, a Rónán, or in gilla, do-ratad immut, marbad d’oenmaic cen chinaid. Dar th’ordan-su ocus darsin dáil i tiag-sa .i. dál báis, ní mó chin-sa do imrádud comraic frie ol-daas con-rísainn frim máthair.”*<sup>36</sup>

“Wretched is that falsehood, O Ronan,’ said the youth, ‘which has been put on you to kill your only son without guilt. By your rank and by the tryst to which I go, the tryst with death, not greater is my guilt to think of meeting with her than that I should meet with my mother.”<sup>37</sup>

After his final words, Rónán believes his son, and his grief leads him to curse his wife and watch over his son’s body for three days and three nights. Meanwhile Donn, another foster-brother of Máel Fíothartaig and Congal’s brother, goes out to kill the father, mother and brother of the queen and returns to Rónán’s court with their heads. The stepmother commits suicide and Rónán eventually dies as well, after lamenting his wife and son.<sup>38</sup>

The title of the story of *Fingal Rónáin* alone is the only real indication one needs to determine if this is a tale of kin-slaying, as it is displayed immediately in the title.<sup>39</sup> The *fingal* in the title is generally taken to be the death of Máel Fíothartaig at the hands of Rónán’s warrior and at Rónán’s command.<sup>40</sup> But Sheila Boll has pointed out that there are three triads of death in the tale itself: (1) Máel Fíothartaig, Congal and Mac Glass; (2) the father, mother and brother of the queen; and (3) Áedán, the queen and Rónán himself. According to Boll the

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<sup>35</sup> Greene 1968: 166.

<sup>36</sup> Greene 1955: 7.

<sup>37</sup> Meyer 1892:386.

<sup>38</sup> Greene 1968: 163.

<sup>39</sup> When noting the different interpretations of the title, there is more to it than only the killing of Máel Fíothartaig by Rónán. The king himself is in a way a victim of *fingal*. This means that the title could be interpreted as ‘Rónán slaying his kin’ or ‘How Rónán was slain by his kin’. It is very likely that this ambiguity is not accidental.

<sup>40</sup>“Áedán begins this sequence of murders, at Rónán’s command and in his court, by making the three fatal casts which kill Máel Fíothartaig (his foster-brother), Congal, and Mac Glas (the jester). These deaths have received most critical attention and, indeed, the killing of Máel Fíothartaig at Rónán’s command is generally regarded as the kin-slaying, *fingal*, of the narrative’s title.” (Boll 2004: 10).

last three deaths may be seen as *fingal* as well.<sup>41</sup> The first two deaths can certainly be seen in this context. The first death is that of Rónán’s champion, Áedán. In the tale he functions as an extension of Rónán. As such, when the king orders the death of Máel Fíothartaig through Áedán, it would essentially be the same as Rónán performing the deed with his own hands. Since Áedán is killed by Máel Fíothartaig’s son, his death could also be seen as an act of *fingal*: “Rónán kills his own son, but he is also killed by his grandson – both acts clearly occurring through the agency of his alter ego, Áedán.”<sup>42</sup> The second is Rónán’s wife. She takes her own life after Donn throws the heads of her dead family members in her lap. Her suicide would fall under the description of kin-slaying: “Moreover, the means of her death, namely at her own hand, can be interpreted as a form of *fingal*, for legal commentators classify suicide as kin-slaying.”<sup>43</sup> The third death, the death of Rónán himself, I will discuss later.

There are multiple motifs that could have started the whole event. One of them is the Potiphar’s Wife-motif: an old widower takes a young girl as his bride and she finds herself attracted to his son, her stepson. When her advances are not returned she accuses the stepson of rape. The father is pushed into a position of jealousy and anger after believing the accusations and banishes, imprisons or murders his son. Another possibility is that the stepmother’s actions were premeditated: as a new wife, she would want to establish a future for her unborn children.<sup>44</sup> To me it seems more likely that Máel Fíothartaig is the rightful ruler. Throughout the tale, Rónán is described as an old man. His son takes care of the duties of a king towards his people: gatherings, games and contests would be organized by him instead of Rónán.<sup>45</sup> This point is stressed when the Laigin confront Rónán about the absence of his son, they think he sent his son away and threaten to kill Rónán unless he ensures Máel Fíothartaig returns. With his fair looks, organizing of entertainment for his people and potentially good judgment – he avoids damaging his father’s honour by leaving court – Máel Fíothartaig seems to be the right material to become a just ruler.<sup>46</sup> His father is old and, as seen in the tale, no

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<sup>41</sup>“The final set of deaths is that of the stepmother, Áedán (the king’s champion), and Rónán – the three ‘guilty’ parties. (...) despite having different immediate causes, all three deaths may (tentatively) be regarded – in one way or another – as *fingal* kin-slaying. (Boll 2004: 12).

<sup>42</sup> Boll 2004: 13.

<sup>43</sup> Boll 2004: 13.

<sup>44</sup>“(...) it is likely that this is a morality tale on the dangers of taking a young second wife: many wives mean many mothers competing for the future of their sons.” (Ní Bhrolcháin 2009: 76).

<sup>45</sup> Meyer 1892: 372.

<sup>46</sup>Máel Fíothartaig might be the right material for a just ruler, but he has made some errors as well. He is said to be loved by all women and it is hardly a surprise that his stepmother would be no exception to this rule: “Mael

longer capable of making the right decisions. This could be another reason why Echaíd's daughter wishes to sleep with Máel Fíothartaig: if he is indeed the rightful ruler, she would function as a kind of sovereignty figure.<sup>47</sup> In that case it was Máel Fíothartaig she meant to marry instead of Rónán.<sup>48</sup> Therefore she threatens his honour to make him do so:

“As Derdriu in *Longes mac nUislenn* and Gráinne in *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* compel Noísiu and Diarmaid to accept their advances by threatening them with shame and disgrace if they do not, so it seems, does the daughter of Echaíd threaten Mael Fíothartaig.”<sup>49</sup>

As seen before, this could mean that aside from the wrong judgment of a jealous old man, it is entirely possible that this situation is similar to the aforementioned theme of a father killing his son because the latter is a threat to his position in society: Rónán is willing to kill his son to maintain his position.

A point worth noting is the behaviour of Máel Fíothartaig when it comes to dealing with his stepmother's advances. He flees from court to save not only his own honour, but also his father's. Rejecting his father's wife would have been an insult for both the woman and Rónán.<sup>50</sup> But since the message is revealed in private, Máel Fíothartaig has the opportunity to avoid this dangerous situation. Something told in private it is of little worth according to Charles-Edwards. To make statement official, it should be said publicly in an assembly:

“The pressure to make things public and well-known was general. Private undertakings were of little worth besides an undertaking in the presence of an assembly of men. Rights and obligations should, in all common sense, be proclaimed and accepted by an assembly.”<sup>51</sup>

When it comes to pointing the finger of blame however, Rónán would stand out as the guiltiest of all in this situation. Not only does his false judgment lead to his own demise, but

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Fíothartaig seems to be an innocent victim in all of this. Yet it is he who unwittingly sets the chain of events in motion by suggesting that his widowed father remarry.” (Ó Cathasaigh ‘Trial’ 1985: 177).

<sup>47</sup> “(...) in order to acquire the seal of legitimacy he [the king] must be ritually sacralized. This took the form of a sacred marriage with the goddess who represented both the abstract sovereignty and the physical substance of his kingdom.” (Mac Cana 1980: 8).

<sup>48</sup> Something similar happens in *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* where Finn wants to marry a young girl, she gives her consent because she thinks she would marry Finn's son Oisín, instead of the old man himself.

<sup>49</sup> Charles-Edwards 1978: 133.

<sup>50</sup> Charles-Edwards 1978: 137-138.

<sup>51</sup> Charles-Edwards 1978: 136.

also to that of his kin. Essentially Rónán has almost single-handedly brought his own house down due to his hasty and angry judgment. Charles-Edwards states that Rónán had no choice but to kill his son. He is publicly insulted and can only save his honour by commanding his son's death.<sup>52</sup>

This is the start of all the bloodshed, which seems to end with the death of Rónán himself. In the tale itself however, it is not entirely clear how Rónán dies. It is suggested by Boll that there are several possibilities, including that it was one of Máel Fíothartaig's sons, Rónán's grandson who puts Ronan to death.<sup>53</sup> A far more likely outcome for this situation however, is that the men of Leinster turned against Rónán. The Laigin punished an unjust ruler, one who judges far too hastily to be entrusted with the wellbeing of the people as a whole. He demonstrates his unsuitability as a ruler not only by killing his son and foster son, but by almost all of his actions, inactions and general errors of judgment which can be witnessed from the very beginning of the tale:

“With the decision to remarry and to marry a much younger girl Rónán makes a false judgment; he fails to balance his private desires and interests against his obligations towards his realm and thus deceives himself about his duties as a just ruler.”<sup>54</sup>

This could be the reason why the people of Leinster would want to overthrow Rónán. An unjust ruler affects all of his subjects, and it would be for the good of the people replace him. “By giving this wrong judgement he commits the ultimate disqualifying sin of a ruler, the *gául flathemon* 'the king's injustice'.”<sup>55</sup> The Laigin would not only want to punish their king for his wrongdoings, but it would also be in their right to do so.

This tale contains (a) clear example(s) of *finjal* as the title suggests; Rónán slays his own son and is responsible for the deaths of members of his household. The kin-slaying of Rónán can also be applied to a wider context: not only does it refer to the killing of his son, it could

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<sup>52</sup> “In Rónán’s case a public ordeal has been employed, and a public decision reached. Rónán has, therefore, been formally shown to have been insulted by his son Mael Fíothartaig. Compensation, however, is out of the question: the feud is intra-familial. Rónán must either forfeit his honour or have his son killed”. (Charles-Edwards 1978: 140).

<sup>53</sup> “Like his wife, Rónán may die out of grief, guilt or shame because of the fate which his behaviour has brought on his biological kinsmen, himself, and his kingdom; alternatively, he may give up his life at this point because his protector (and conspirator), Áedán, has perished. It may be, however, that one of Máel Fíothartaig’s sons kills Rónán – as Áedán was killed – in vengeance for Máel Fíothartaig.” (Boll 2004: 14).

<sup>54</sup> Poppe 1996: 145.

<sup>55</sup> Poppe 1996: 143.



refer to all the victims of his bad judgment. His unjust behaviour as a ruler in the beginning of the tale triggers the tragic events. The cycle of *fingal* does not end until all the main players are dead. This too would be in support of the opinion that it is not one of Máel Fíothartaig's sons who kills Rónán, but rather the Leinstermen. If it had been one of the sons, the cycle would have continued. As the Laigin kill their king for his behaviour, this would not be an act of *fingal* and that is where the kin-slaying of Rónán ends.

Although the guilty parties are punished in this instance, it seems there is no connection to the punishments for *fingal* as reflected in the law texts, e.g. setting adrift. In fact, Rónán does not appear to be punished for committing *fingal* per se. It seems like his people have decided that his continued errors and the injustices which have been committed simply make him unfit to rule. In other words, Rónán is punished for his wrongdoings as a ruler, as opposed to being brought to justice for the social and ethical wrongdoings involved in the killing of his son and the others. This story might then perhaps be seen to function as an *exemplum*, providing guidelines for a ruler to decide what is right or in this case what is the behaviour that should be avoided.

## *Aided Óenfir Aífe*

*Aided Óenfir*<sup>56</sup> *Aífe* (The Death of Aífe's Only Son)<sup>57</sup> narrates the circumstances surrounding the conception (and death) of the son of Aífe and the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn. The tale begins with an account of Cú Chulainn's martial training under the woman-warrior Scáthach. During his training he meets Aífe, Scáthach's enemy,<sup>58</sup> and he defeats her in combat. She grants him three demands, and one of those is to bear him a son.

Cú Chulainn impregnates Aífe before returning to Ireland and instructs her to name this child Connla, and he leaves a ring for the boy to wear so he might be recognized once he is old enough to visit his father in Ulster. However, Cú Chulainn also appears to place *gessa*<sup>59</sup> on the unborn child; these being that he cannot reveal his name to a warrior, and that he cannot refuse a fight under any circumstances.<sup>60</sup> Connla leaves for Ireland at the age of seven in a boat made of bronze, and displays extraordinary martial feats when he arrives. Conchobar, the king of Ulster, sees this unknown child as a threat, and sends a warrior to meet the boy and discover his identity. Connla (as per his *geis*) refuses to speak his name to the warrior, and a fight ensues. He sends the warrior back to Conchobar in shame and defeat, and Conall Cernach offers to meet the boy. He too is defeated. After that none of the Ulstermen is willing to go and meet the boy, except for Cú Chulainn, who is charged with the protection of Ulster. Before Cú Chulainn departs however, he is warned in private by his wife Emer that the boy is his own son and that he cannot kill him:

*Ná téig sis!' ol sí. 'Mac duit fil tís. Ná fer fingail immot óenmac. (...)Tinta frim!  
Cluinte mo chlois! Fó mo chosc! Bad Cú Chulainn cloadar! Atgén sa cid ainm  
asind ón, maso Conlae óenmac Aífe in mac fil tís,' ol in ben.*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Also spelled *óenfir* in other editions, to avoid confusion I will use the spelling as found in Van Hamel's edition.

<sup>57</sup> For this chapter I will use the edition of the tale by Van Hamel and the translation by Meyer.

<sup>58</sup> In other versions of the tale Aífe is Scáthach's sister.

<sup>59</sup> *Gessa* (sg. *geis*) are prohibitions or injunctions imposed on someone, they are often translated with 'tabu'. In the text itself the word *gessa/geis* is not used, but I believe that these restrictions Cú Chulainn places on Connla are indeed *gessa*.

<sup>60</sup> (...) *luid Aífe ingen Airdgеме cuici 7ba torrach forácaib 7 asbert fria no bérad mac. 'Bíd ind ordnasc n-órdae so acut', ol sé, 'corop coimse don mac. In tan bas coimse dó, táet dom chuindchidsea i nÉre 7 nacham berad óenfer dia chonair 7 nacha sloinded do óenfiur 7 ná fémded comlann óenfir.* (Hamel, van, 1933: 11). "And Aífe daughter of Ardeimm went to him and he left her pregnant. And he said to her that she would bear a son. 'Keep this golden thumb-ring,' said he, 'until it fits the boy. When it fits him, let him come to seek me in Ireland. Let no man put him off his road, let him not make himself known to any one man, nor let him refuse combat to any.'" (Meyer 1904: 115).

<sup>61</sup> Hamel, van, 1933: 14.

“Do not go down!’ said she. ‘It is a son of thine that is down there. Do not murder thy only son (...) Turn to me! Hear my voice! My advice is good! Let Cuchulinn hear it. I know what name he will tell, if the boy down there is Conla, the only son of Aífe,’ said the woman.”<sup>62</sup>

Cú Chulainn ignores her pleas and goes down to fight the boy. Connla remains bound to the *geis* and refuses to reveal his name to Cú Chulainn, which inevitably leads to a fight. Even at his extremely young age, Connla is almost equal in his skill in combat as his father, who can only defeat his son by using the *gáe bolga*.<sup>63</sup> Connla is mortally wounded by the end of this battle and speaks a phrase which reveals his identity: ‘*Is ed ón tra, ’ol sé, ’náro múin Scáthach domsa.*’<sup>64</sup> (“Now, this is what Scathach never taught me.”)<sup>65</sup> It is then confirmed to Cú Chulainn that he has just killed his son, and armed with this knowledge, he carries the dying boy back to the Ulstermen. The story ends shortly after, with the mention of cries of grief being raised and the creation of Connla's grave.

It is quite difficult to determine whether or not the death of Connla constitutes a case of *fingal*. It all seems to depend on interpretation. Ó hUiginn suggests that Cú Chulainn had no choice but to kill his son: “it can be argued that it represents the apex of the heroic ideal in Irish. The great Cú Chulainn is forced to kill his son to save the honour of Ulster, with honour, here as elsewhere, being set above all else.”<sup>66</sup> But aside from the honour of Ulster it seems like Cú Chulainn does not know – or acts like he does not know – that it is his son he is about to fight. If Cú Chulainn indeed did not know that Connla was his son, it could be seen as some sort of unfortunate accident fueled by duty.

If Cú Chulainn was ignorant of his son's identity, killing him would not be an act of *fingal*. However, he was warned by Emer before he moved to meet Connla, and the word *fingal* was even used in her pleas and warnings. On the other hand it could be that her warning was not official, as it was spoken in private.<sup>67</sup> Since Emer warns Cú Chulainn in private, he can disavow knowledge of the boy's identity and maintain that he is in fact innocent.

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<sup>62</sup> Meyer 1904: 119.

<sup>63</sup> A special barbed spear, only Cú Chulainn knows how to use it.

<sup>64</sup> Hamel, van, 1933: 15.

<sup>65</sup> Meyer 1904: 121.

<sup>66</sup> Ó hUiginn 1996: 227.

<sup>67</sup> As discussed above in relation to the maid talking to Máel É othartaig in *Fingal Rónáin*: something said in private is not official and can be disregarded.

Cú Chulainn's motives for killing his son are very unclear. When considering the many themes that fit this tale it shows for example typical motif that appears in Indo-European literature: father-son combat.<sup>68</sup> This fits the pattern as found in *Aided Óenfir Aífe*; however there is a more difficult issue at play in this situation. Cú Chulainn himself made sure that his son was unable to reveal his name. In that case, the son does not refuse to reveal his name, he is prevented from doing so. Some scholars have suggested that there is potentially a description of an initiation rite to prove oneself.<sup>69</sup> Though the idea of this seems likely to me, there could be another option. The main question is; how is it that Cú Chulainn was unable to recognize Connla as his son? There had to be similarities between them, not just in appearance but also in feats and abilities. The seemingly super-human strength of a seven-year-old in itself should have at the very least raised questions in the mind of the hero. Also, there is the previously mentioned token of recognition gifted to Connla before he was even born, the ring.<sup>70</sup> The ring alone could have prevented the death of Connla without any *gessa* being broken. Furthermore, the similarities between their fighting styles could have revealed the identity of the boy.<sup>71</sup>

Another possibility is that this is similar to the situation between Dían Cécht and Míach as mentioned before. Cú Chulainn sees that the boy is capable to perform feats of skill as great as his own. This would make Connla a threat to his position in society that needs to be removed in order to maintain the status quo. This seems the most likely option for Cú Chulainn's motive, but to me it seems that the *gessa* are of great importance as well. In the text *Tochmarc Emire* (The Wooing of Emer), before leaving his intended spouse Emer to train with Scáthach, Cú Chulainn and Emer promise each other to not sleep with other people: *Tingellais cách díb dia chéili coméit a ngenais, acht mani fagbadh nechtar díb bás foí, co*

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<sup>68</sup> Motif N731.2 (Thompson 1957: 127). This motif contains the following pattern: "The hero meets a woman during a trip abroad and has a son by her. He then leaves her after giving her a token of recognition. When the son grows up he seeks his father. He often meets him, without recognizing him, during a combat. The father suspects the identity of the youth, but the latter refuses to tell him his name. They fight and the son eventually dies." (Ranero 1997: 245).

<sup>69</sup> "It has also been suggested that in this motif we may have a form of an initiation rite. Thus, Connla is only too eager to prove his strength. (...) The existence of a series of *geasa* or taboos imposed on the young warrior seems to point to a ritualistic context as well. (...) I find highly significant in this regard that Connla, on seeing his father about to use the *gáe bolga* against him, and knowing that his end is near, exclaims: *náromúin Scáthach dam-sa!* 'that is what Scáthach did not teach me'. Connla is unable to pass the test, and therefore he must die." (Ranero 1997: 249).

<sup>70</sup> Findon states in her summary of the tale that Connla did not take this ring with him to Ireland, this is not mentioned in the editions I have used for this thesis.

<sup>71</sup> "One could easily argue that Connla's boastfulness and bombast, not to mention his superior fighting skill, all mark him as the son of his father. His actions repeat those of Cú Chulainn in the 'Boyhood Deeds' episode of the *Táin* and recall the older hero's development. All evidence points to his identity as Cú Chulainn's son." (Findon 1997: 95).

*comrístais doridisi. Timnais cách díb celebrad di araili 7 imdasóat co hAilpi.*<sup>72</sup> “Each of them promised the other to keep their chastity until they met again, unless either of them should get death thereby. They bade farewell to each other, and he turned towards Alba.”<sup>73</sup>

Cú Chulainn was very well aware of the promises given and broken by him to Emer, and understandably would want to hide his lack of fidelity. His indiscretions could easily destroy the power of his word and as a result, his honour. This could be why Cú Chulainn places the *gessa* on his unborn son. In other words, it would appear that Connla, from the very moment of his conception, was essentially cursed to die. In the final part of the tale, Cú Chulainn seems to have had a change of heart and shows his grief. He literally states that Connla is his son when showing the dying boy to the Ulstermen: *Aso mo macsa dúib, a Ultu.*<sup>74</sup> (“Here is my son for you, men of Ulster”).<sup>75</sup>

The laws on *fingal*, however, do not seem to apply in this story. There is no accusation, conviction or punishment placed on the actions of the hero. Therefore it would seem that this story is more about the tragedy than a mirroring of the situations illustrated in the law-texts.

A different version of the tale is found in a codex that consists mostly of law tracts.<sup>76</sup> It seems to function as an example for a legal discussion about the paying of an honour-price after committing *fingal*. Here Cú Chulainn does get punished for his actions, but he is not found completely guilty; the killing of his son was an accident:<sup>77</sup>

*Rohagrad Cúchulaind annsin ó Ultaib 7 urraid achtaighi hē a n-Ultaib 7 leth corpdíre úad ina mac. Uair a n-imraichni romarbustar é 7 indílsech ar-richt dílsigh é, ciarbo chomracc. Cid fodera leth corpdíre úad ind 7 a marbad a n-imraichne...Uair nī haititin tuaithe nā cineoil dorindé.*<sup>78</sup>

“Cuchulinn was then sued by the men of Ulster; and he was adjudged a native of Ulster, and half the wergild was [exacted] from him for his son. For he had slain him in mistake, and he was an innocent person in the guise of a guilty person, although it was a combat.

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<sup>72</sup> Hamel, van, 1933: 45.

<sup>73</sup> Meyer 1888: 233-234.

<sup>74</sup> Hamel, van, 1933: 15.

<sup>75</sup> Meyer 1904: 121.

<sup>76</sup> Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin: H. 3,17, p. 842.

<sup>77</sup> O’Keeffe 1904: 126-127.

<sup>78</sup> O’Keeffe 1904: 126.

What caused half the wergild [to be exacted] from him for it, and his killing him in mistake... that it was not with consent of tribe or race that he did it.”<sup>79</sup>

In this text Cú Chulainn is found guilty of killing Connla, but it was not done consciously. This text illustrates Cú Chulainn’s feigned ignorance perfectly. Because Emer told him about his son in private, he could simply deny knowledge of the boy, leaving him ‘innocent’.<sup>80</sup> In addition to this innocence the hero could also claim that he has to defend Ulster no matter what. This too would make the death of Connla not an act of *fingal*; he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. As seen before in the law texts if someone had a just cause for committing *fingal*, he would be non-liable. In this case it would only make sense that Cú Chulainn is not punished for his deed, he only did his duty.

It would seem evident that with all these events occurring and plans set in motion, that Cú Chulainn actually wanted Connla dead. Perhaps this entire sequence of events was created in a way to atone for breaking his promise to Emer, erasing the mistakes of the past by killing his son. One cannot be absolutely certain of Cú Chulainn's motives as a whole; although given the context it would not seem impossible that Connla was essentially a mistake that could be undone. Cú Chulainn’s reason for this could be an attempt to hide his infidelity or the fear to lose his position in society to his son. As stated before, however, whether or not we are dealing with *fingal* depends on one’s interpretation of the tales.

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<sup>79</sup> O’Keeffe 1904: 127.

<sup>80</sup> Thurneysen states, however, that even if Cú Chulainn killed Connla to defend Ulster, he still would do this knowingly or at least semi-consciously. “Das Verbot, sich einem Einzelnen zu nennen, das der Sohn, der hier Conlai heißt, auf den Lebensweg mitgegeben wird, scheint darauf abzuzielen, ihn unerkannt mit seinem Vater kämpfen zu lassen; aber Cúchulainn tötet ihn vielmehr wissentlich oder doch halb-wissentlich, um die Ehre von Ulster zu retten, vielleicht – wenn man an das Hildebrandslied denkt – ein halb unverstandener alter Rest.” (Thurneysen 1921: 404).

## Conclusion

After having analyzed the individual tales, I will now look at the similarities and differences between them. To do this I will consider the following points: do the acts of *fingal* fit the definition or can they be seen as accidental murders of one's kin? If it is indeed a case of *fingal*, what are the motives of the *fingalach*? Is punishment involved or not and what could be the reason for this? If the *fingalach* was indeed punished, then what would be the consequences? Finally I will try and answer the main question of this thesis: How do the laws on *fingal* relate to medieval Irish literature?

Although the word *fingal* is not often mentioned, it seems that in all three the stories contain indeed an act of kin-slaying. In *Cath Maige Tuired* Dían Cécht kills his son Míach in a very cruel manner. After failing to kill him with the first few blows, he continues to try until he succeeds. Throughout the whole section, however, there is no mention of the word *fingal* itself. The tale in which the acts of kin-slaying are most unambiguous is *Fingal Rónáin*. The multiple deaths occurring in this tale are almost all acts of *fingal* since they are committed or ordered by family-members. The most significant of those deaths would seem the death of Máel Fíothartaig, for his father orders his death, and it is this death that sets all the other ones (basically revenge for this murder) in motion. Although in this story the concept of kin-slaying appears very often, the word itself is only used in the title and in the last sentence. The death of Connla in *Aided Óenfir Aife* could be classified as *fingal* if Cú Chulainn, as suggested before, indeed knew it was his own son he was fighting. He feigned ignorance, and although this could be used to claim that the death of his son was an accident, this seems too unlikely to be true. In the text itself the word *fingal* is only mentioned in Emer's warning. The only reason why this would not be an act of *fingal* is that this warning was made in private and therefore not official. To me it seems that in all three stories, we are indeed dealing with *fingal*.

On first impression it seems that in *Cath Maige Tuired*, Dían Cécht kills his son out of jealousy. But it is very likely that it is not only jealousy, but also fear. Míach is a better healer than his father and is therefore a threat to his father's position. In *Fingal Rónáin* a similar situation to the one in *Cath Maige Tuired* appears: it seems that Rónán orders Máel Fíothartaig's death out of jealousy. But it is not only the jealousy based on the idea that his son

would have an affair with his wife: Rónán seems to be well aware of the fact that his reign is coming to an end and that his son would be a better ruler.

Although there are many possible motives for Cú Chulainn to slay Connla, it could be that he also fears his position as the great hero of Ulster. At his young age, Connla, almost defeats his father. This seems to indicate that if he stayed in Ulster for a longer period of time he would indeed be able to overthrow his father. Therefore to me it seems safe to say that in all three stories, a father slays his son out of fear of being overthrown, either from a professional or political point of view. This fits the theme of a father killing his son out of fear for his position. A young and better son might force his father to face his own mortality, leaving him unable to let the former glories of youth rest, and jealous of the skills of their own kin.

Of the *fingalach* in all three stories only Rónán is punished, but surprisingly, this seems to be for his continuing ill judgment and bad kingship, instead of being punished for committing *fingal*. He is an unjust ruler and his people punish him for this. In *Cath Maige Tuired* and *Aided Óenfir Aífe* there is no mention of a punishment whatsoever. Both Díán Cécht and Cú Chulainn get away with their horrible deeds. The reason for this could be that they are both needed by the tribe as they are irreplaceable. The Túatha Dé Danann cannot be without their physician, especially with a great battle in the near future. Likewise, Cú Chulainn's great skill is needed to defend Ulster at all times. Another reason why the *fingalach* are not punished could be for dramatic effect in the tale: setting a *fingalach* adrift would be too simple or even anti-climactic.

It would then seem that the legal consequences for committing *fingal* that might be expected in the saga texts discussed are curiously absent; but on further reflection, this is perhaps not as surprising as one might think: as pointed out, punishing the criminals in this manner would leave the tribe in a difficult position, and it would make for a rather anti-climactic development. Furthermore, situations like those depicted in the saga texts are far removed from reality – therefore punishment according to correct legal procedure seems to be a legal exercise. It should be pointed out, however, that even real-life *fingal* (i.e. instances of *fingal* that are found outside of saga literature in for example the annals) was not always punished; there are accounts of kings who came to power as a result of *fingal* and remained king for years without punishment.<sup>81</sup> The punishment hinges on whether the *fingalach* killed

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<sup>81</sup> Kelly 1988: 128.



his kinsman with just cause or not – and what constitutes just cause might be open for interpretation according to the needs of the tribe. Perhaps it is wisest to treat these tales not as reflections of reality, but as a guide for how to, or indeed, how not to live.

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