BEN IN DAGDA, THE DAGDA'S WOMAN: The Dagda and the Mór Rígain in _Cath Maige Tuired_

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Then the Mór Rígain said ...

So it came to battle at the last.
It came, at last, to red and slaughterous battle as it always has, and it always will.
It came, at the last, to the calling of kings
To the feats of feasting,
The feasts of poetic words,
the talking and taking of honours,
The honour of battle lines.
Host-lines drawn,
And battalions broken,
On the blood-zealous battlefield.

It came at last to the rigours of battle
And a hundred cuts blossomed
As screams were heard;
Screams of fractured metal,
The slicing scream of flesh,
And the breaking of bones.
I saw all who were born to bravery
On the rage raven- blade-scabbard battlefield.

And it came at last to
Recording of bodies,
Reciting of honours,
The poet recognition of valour,
As the Story is told and retold

And The Dagda replied.....

But was there not more to the story, more to the battle, than the wild wielding of blades?
Was there not the weaving of words and quick-silver wits?
Were there not boys, born in beauty to golden fathers, winning wives in secret places.
Was it not a time when the world turned over,

When mountains were laid low and valleys devoured their own rivers,
When the noble man was set to the work of a slave,
When fear and famine ruled?
And yet was not a king's miserly meanness brought down by the words of a satire and the seasons restored by the notes of a harp?
Is it not that, and more?

And the Mór Rígain said ...

Aye, that is so. You speak it and it is a truth.
The lowing of the Glas gowan leads the cattle of Ireland back onto the fertile fields.
And now
The land lies, a cup of honeyed strength, a strength for all
Here there will be a forest point of field fences
The horn counting of many cows
And the encircling of many fields
There will be sheltering trees
So fodderful of beech mast that the trees themselves will be weary with the weight.
In this land will come abundance bringing:
Wealth for our children
But not for ever
The battle is not over for ever.
The land will fail, and justice will fall. The rhythm of your harp will not keep us safe for ever.

The Dagda replied....

Not for ever but for this day,
And is not all time made up of days and nights
Peace for this day then.
So let us go, my woman, you and I
Let us go to the river bed, where we have met before.
To where you loosened your nine tresses over the smoothness of your white thighs.
There let the world be made and unmade and made again.

Is that not a story worth the telling, and retelling?

- Chris Thompson, based on translation by Isolde ÓBrolcháin Carmody

At the heart of Irish tradition lies the great tale of *Cath Maige Tuired,* "The Second Battle of Moytura"[1]. The tale, its characters and incidents are frequently referenced throughout the corpus of early Irish literature, but we have only one early manuscript source for the saga; Harleian 5280. While this version of the saga was compiled around the early 11th century, much of the language reflects a source of the late 8th or early 9th century[2]. Deeply woven into the structure of this story are the Dagda and the Mór Rígain. These figures, and their powerful relationship, are so central to the Irish Tradition that the Mór Rígain is often simply called *in ben,* "The Woman" or *ben in Dagda,* "The Dagda's Woman"[3].
In what follows, we will explore the characters of the Dagda and the Mór Rígain as found in the *Cath Maige Tuired*. We will examine their relationship and what this tells us about their role within the Irish Tradition. There is much more to be found in this monumental text, but alas, that lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

The first mention of the Dagda in *Cath Maige Tuired* comes in section 6, where his cauldron is enumerated among the four treasures brought to Ireland by the Túatha Dé Danann. Its description says that:

> Ní tégedh dám dimdach úadh.
> *No company ever went away from it unsatisfied.*[4]

This treasured item and its description links the Dagda with the role of *Briugu*, "hospitaller", the highest social rank attainable within the farming class. The *Briugu* was obliged to dispense hospitality to all who came to the *bruiden*, was not obliged to provide any military services to the *túath*, and was recognised as an arbiter in disputes[5]. The position was based on the wealth generated by fertile land and good husbandry, counting their cattle in hundreds. The Dagda embodies all these *Briugu* qualities, as we shall see.

This connection to the physical land also extends to shaping that land. Our next indication of the Dagda's character comes in section 24, where it is said that he built Dún mBrese[6]. This is the fortress for the new young king, Bres, who has this land granted to him by his Dé Danann mother, Érú, after his election to replace the blemished Núadu. However, Bres' father is

Elatha, king of the Fomoire, who then lay the Dé Danann under heavy tribute. The Dagda's role as earth-shaper appears to become degraded, as in section 25, he is described as a *ráthbhuide*, "rampart-builder", apparently a servile position[7].

Later in the Moytura text[8], we find a reference that links together his role as earth-shaper and as *briugu*:

> Gabol gicca rothach feidm ochtair ina diaid, go mba lór do clod coicríce a slicht 'na degaidh. Gonad dei dogaror Slicht Loirge an Dagdai.
> *He trailed behind him a wheeled fork which was the work of eight men to move, and its track was enough for the boundary ditch of a province. It is called "The Track of the Dagda's Club" for that reason[9].*

Here we have the Dagda creating boundary-ditches as he moves, by dint of a wheeled fork which is also referred to as a club. So as well as husbanding fertile land as a *Briugu*, he also shapes and divides that land. The instrument he uses recalls the *áel*, "fleshfork", used in the serving of food[10]. One of the chief skills of the *Briugu* is to serve each guest the portion or cut of meat appropriate to the status of each[11], and so the correct division of food is closely connected to the sustaining of social rank. The Dagda, then, is concerned with the principles of hospitality and the correct division of land, status and nourishment. He is the prime shaper and guardian of safe and settled fertile land.

His role in correctly dividing and apportioning land can be seen in the opening sections of *Tochmarc Étaíne*, "The Wooing of Étaín"[12], another core text of the so-called mythological cycle of Irish saga. The beginning of this long and convoluted text concerns the conception, birth, and early life of Óengus Mac Ind Óc, who also has a significant role to play in sections 26-32 of *Cath Maige Tuired*.

Because Óengus is born in secret and fostered out to Midir, he does not know of his heritage. When Midir brings the young Óengus to be acknowledged by his natural father, the Dagda, he also wants to know what land he will inherit. The Dagda wants him to have Brug na Bóinne, (Newgrange, Co. Meath), but the current occupant is Elcmar, behind whose back Óengus was conceived. The Dagda devises a scheme whereby

Óengus can take possession of the Brug and Elcmar can be adequately compensated with land of equal value:

> Fogellat iarum an Dagda. Concertasidhe cor & caich amal a indell.
> *They submit then to the Dagda. He equally arrayed everyone's contract according to his circumstance.*[13]

In this episode, the Dagda seems to be the obvious authority concerning the correct division and distribution of land, and his authority seems beyond reproach. This is despite the Dagda's "personal" involvement and interest in the case, and the use of trickery and word-play to gain the desired outcome.

Those elements of seeming deceit and lateral thinking are also found when Óengus and the Dagda work together in *Cath Maige Tuired*[14]. This is an episode describing how the Dagda is reduced in status and stature under Bres and his Fomoire allies. As well as serving Bres with manual labour, the Dagda is threatened with illegal satire by Crídenbél unless the Dagda hands over *na trí mírionn bes dech*, "the three best bits"[15], of his evening meal. As the text comments:

> Mesai de bláth an Dagdhae dinnísin.
> *The Dagda's appearance was the worse for that.*[16]

The solution to this situation is offered by Óengus, in a manner redolent of the Dagda's solution to Óengus' housing problem. Óengus gives his father three bits of gold to hide within his evening meal, making the gold-laced portions the "three best bits". Crídenbél dies from eating them, removing the threat of unlawful satire and restoring the Dagda's calorie intake. But this scheme has further ramifications. It forces the unjust king, Bres, to make a false judgement by accusing the Dagda of murder. The Dagda can point to the truth of his own story when the gold is found in the dead satirist's belly, enabling him to say:

> Ní fíor flathu deit, a rí óc Fénei, a n-udbere.
> *What you say, king of the warriors of the Féni, is not a prince's truth*[17].

This is a crucial statement. *Fír flathemon*, often translated as "the king's truth", is a core concept in Irish tradition. For as long as a king gives good judgements and rules wisely, the land will flourish and everyone will prosper. But if he gives false judgements, like Bres accusing the Dagda of murder, then the land will fail, disease and famine will run rife, and his

position becomes untenable. *Cath Maige Tuired* revolves around this theme, and widens it to encompass the connection between rightness in society, natural justice and order in the natural world. We have termed this concept "*cóir*", somewhat similar to the Egyptian concept of "*maat*"[18].
The latter part of this episode between the Dagda and Óengus has further connection to *cóir* and its ultimate restoration. When the Dagda returns to his work, now on full rations, Óengus has further advice for him[19]. He tells his father that, as payment for his work, he should ask only for a specific "dark, black-maned, trained, spirited heifer"[20]. After all the action of the battle, this heifer will restore to the Túatha Dé Danann all their cattle taken in tribute by the Fomoire[21], thereby restoring fertility and prosperity.

Throughout this episode, the Dagda is continuously associated with *Briugu* characteristics. His status has been reduced, represented by being underfed. His response to this situation involves a kind of aggressive hospitality by making his enemy consume gold, presented as the "best" of his portion. By taking the heifer as his payment, he sets himself up to claim all the cattle of the Túatha Dé Danann, making him the herdsman of herdsmen, counting his cattle in hundreds of hundreds.
It is also significant that this first denting of Bres' authority comes about through a combination of poor hospitality and satire. The incident that ultimately removes him from his position involves the poet, Cairpre Mac Étaíne[22]. When he visits Bres, he is not accomodated or fed according to his rank and expectation. He composes a legal satire on Bres, declaring afterwards:

> "Ní fil a maín trá Bresi".
> *"Bres' prosperity no longer exists"*[23].

No king can survive having a legal satire performed against him. It is further commented that this was the first satire performed in Ireland, making it clear that Crídenbél's extortionate threat of satire was not a legal action.
By co-ercing Bres into making a false judgement, followed by a legal satire, both based on poor hospitality, the Túatha Dé Danann have overthrown a tyrannical ruler. However, the Dagda, by engineering the breach in *fír flathemon*, has also torn down *cóir*, plunging Ireland into a wasteland. This triggers a time of chaos and strife, including the coming battle. It is only by

the Dagda's possession of the heifer that full restoration of the land and its fertility will be possible, once rightness, justice and truth are re-established.

In order that the coming chaotic disruption leads to the right outcome, the Dagda must ensure the support of the Mór Rígain. Given that the necessary strife in these tales is so often expressed in battle, it is perhaps not surprising that the Mór Rígain is so often referred to as a "battle-goddess". But a closer examination of her role within *Cath Maige Tuired*, and her relationship with the Dagda, may present a different image of this crucial character.

Her first appearance in this tale is as the speaker of a *rosc* or *retoiric*, a non-rhyming, non-metric alliterative poem, addressed to the Dé Danann's new battle-captain, Lug. She speaks four such poems throughout the saga, always at critical points in the prose narrative. The first[24] appears immediately after the first *amrún*, "secret time", where:

> Co n-ocarthai cucau íar sin druíd Érenn & a lege & a n-aruid & a ngoboinn & a nbriugaid & a mbrethemain.
> *Then the druids of Ireland were summoned to them [the Dé Danann], together with their physicians and their charioteers and their smiths and their briugus and their lawyers.*[25]

Each class of persons is asked what they can contribute to the coming battle with the Fomoire, ending with the Dagda's claim that he will perform every kind of service himself[26]. This is followed by the collection of seven years' worth of weapons,[27] and the next statement is:

> Is dei aspert fris, 'Arfolmais cath mbrisi.' Conid dei atpert an Morrígan fri Lug, 'Diuchtrai cein cuild ansaim slaidither truasfidir troich tarret brothlach mbodhmhou indraither túatha do-agath-diuchtra cein .d. c.'[28]
> *Then she said to him, "Undertake a battle of overthrowing." The Morrigan said to Lug,*
> *"Awaken*
> *Banish besides*
> *Unyoked chariots will be destroyed*
> *Doomed men will be beaten*
> *They come upon the cooking-pit of the scald-crows [badba]*

Kingdoms [túatha] are laid waste
They fear awakening forever."[29]

Given the immediate context, this could be read as the Mór Rígain's pledge of assistance at the first *amrún*. However, it is significant that this statement is explicitly separate from the formalised exchange of the *amrún*, which has already been adjourned for three years[30]. It is also worth noting that it is addressed individually to Lug, and is immediately followed by a *rosc* given by the druid, Figol mac Mámois, who is described as "prophesying the battle and strengthening the Túatha Dé"[31]. This seems to provide a deliberate contrast between a private statement by the Mór Rígain and a public oration by Figol mac Mámois. Given the content of the following sections, it indicates that the assistance of the Mór Rígain is by no means assured, and that she has to be sought as an ally.

We now hear that the Dagda has arranged a *bandál*, "woman-meeting", one week before the Samain of the battle to come[32]. The Dagda encounters this woman with one of her feet on either bank of the river Unshin, with *noí trillsi taitbechtai fora ciond*, "nine loosened tresses on her head"[33]. They speak and make love, and at the end of the section the woman is identified, parenthetically, as the Mor Rígain.

It is only after that union that the services of the Mór Rígain are secured for the Túatha Dé Danann. She gives the Dagda information about where the Fomoire will land, and says she will destroy the Fomoire king, Indech Mac Dé Domnann, by taking from him *crú a cride & áirned a gailie*, "the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his ardour[34]". The text even offers proof that she makes good on this promise, saying that she later presents the assembled forces of the Dé Danann with two handfuls of that blood.

John Carey has explored this motif of warriors encountering women by the water in his article, *The Encounter At The Ford*[35]. He notes that this kind of encounter is fraught with danger, and that the appearance of women at such a time diverts a warrior's martial energy into sexual energy, often to his ultimate destruction. However, it is worth remembering that the Dagda is not a warrior, and that this is a source of strength for him. In his encounter, he takes care of his sexual obligations towards the woman before turning the conversation to matters of strategy and war. In this way,

he avoids the mistakes made by career warriors. The most notable of these is Cú Chulainn, who not only rejects the sexual offerings of the Mór Rígain, but goes on to physically and verbally wound her[36].

That encounter between Cú Chulainn and the Mór Rígain in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* has a curious counterpart in *Cath Maige Tuired*. The Dagda, in his non-martial *Briugu* role, has been sent to spy on the Fomoire, and to gain a delay before battle. On his return from this infiltration, he encounters a woman identified as the daughter of the Fomoire king, Indech Mac Dé Domnann[37]. Once again, the Dagda has a sexual encounter with an un-named woman beside the water, but this time, the sexual union itself is not sufficient to gain the woman's allegiance. There is a war of words, in which the woman threatens to prevent the Dagda from getting to the battle by being a stone in the ford of every river the Dagda crosses, by summoning the sons of Tethra from the *síd*, and by standing as an oak in every pass. The Dagda responds by saying that he will step on those stones, leaving the mark of his heel in them, and leave the mark of his axe in every tree. This seems to give him the advantage, and the woman pledges her participation in the battle on the side of the Dé Danann[38].
In the above-mentioned passage from the *Táin*[39], Cú Chulainn is offered first love, then assistance, by a beautiful young woman, who identifies herself as the daughter of Búan, the king. When he scornfully dismisses both offers, she threatens to impede his progress in the shape of an eel to trip him in the ford, a she-wolf to drive cattle to stampede over him, and as a red, hornless heifer who will drive the cattle toward him again. His response is that he will step on the eel to break her ribs, cast a sling-stone at the wolf to injure her eye, and throw a stone at the heifer to break her leg. He further says that none of these injuries can be healed except by a *bráth bennachtan*, "judgement blessing". During the fight that immediately follows, he inflicts all these injuries. In the aftermath of that fight, he encounters a one-eyed old woman milking a cow. She gives him three drinks of milk, for each of which he blesses her, each time healing one of those injuries. It is here that she is finally named outright as the Mór Rígain, taunting him by reminding him that he said he would not heal her. His

immediate response is to say that he would not have done so if he knew it was her[40].

This episode from the *Táin* makes an inter-textual link between the Dagda's civilised encounter with the Mór Rígain at the ford of the Unshin and his more rough-and-tumble encounter with the daughter of Indech Mac Dé Domnann. Cú Chulainn first meets a young woman who identifies herself as the king's daughter, who offers herself sexually to the young man. When he refuses her, she threatens to impede him by taking various shapes as he fights at the ford. He injurs her, but unwittingly heals her in a second encounter where she reveals herself as the Mór Rígain. The Dagda's encounters are reversed in almost every respect. His first meeting is with the woman identified as the Mór Rígain (albeit parenthetically), where he accepts her sexual advances, and she in turn gives him military support. In his second encounter, it is with a young woman identified as the daughter of a king, who offers sexual union to the Dagda. Although he accepts this advance, she nonetheless threatens to impede his progress by taking various shapes in fords and passes. He succeeds in turning aside this threat, gaining a valuable ally in the coming battle. While it is not a straightforward assertion to identify Indech's daughter with the Mór Rígain, the parallels between the encounters, both within *Cath Maige Tuired* and inter-textually with the *Táin*, give us insights into the characters of the Dagda, the Mór Rígain and their relationship.

The Dagda, as we have noted, possesses the attributes of a *Briugu*, deeply concerned with the peace-time dispensing of hospitality. In this regard, it is worth reviewing his visit to the Fomoire camp that comes between his encounters with these two formidable women[41]. His mission is a blend of diplomacy and espionage, and the Fomoire respond in kind. They offer him hospitality, but in excess – a porridge made with 80 gallons of milk, another 80 of meal and the same of fat, boiled up with goats, sheep and pigs. It is served to him poured into a hole in the ground, and he cannot refuse to eat it without satirising the Fomoire and forfeiting his life. He is nonetheless equal to the task, having with him a *líach*, "ladle", large enough for a couple to lie in it.

Having succeeded in winning this round of aggressive diplomatic hospitality, he next encounters the daughter of the Fomoire king, Indech. Although this happens as the Dagda is leaving the enemy camp, it can still be read as a challenge of hospitality. Throughout many Irish stories, including the Táin tradition, the offer of sexual hospitality, often from the daughter of the house, is a regular occurrence[42]. Indech's daughter is by no means easy to seduce, and the Dagda's physical capacity has been severely impaired by his enormous meal:

> Luid menmo an Dagdai díi, acht náruho túaloigg lia a proinn. Gabois an ingen fora cáinedh, gabais an ingen for imtrascrad fris. Fucerd cor de go ráinec go bac a tónai hi tolamh.
> *The Dagda desired her, but he was impotent on account of his belly. The girl began to mock him, then she began wrestling with him. She hurled him so that he sank to the hollow of his rump in the ground[43].*

The "foreplay" in which this woman engages is to beat the Dagda until he has voided the contents of his belly and demand that he carry her on his back. He only does this after she calls him by his full name[44], so that;

> lomortar a caither frithrosc. Gondric íerum ion Dagdae frie a bancharoid, & dogníead cairdene íerum.
> *…her curly pubic hair was revealed. Then the Dagda gained a mistress, and they made love. [45]*

The Dagda's experiences with the Fomoire act as a comically heightened test and inversion of his *Briugu* nature. To uphold the system of universal hospitality, he must accept that which is offered to him, both in food and in sex. He finishes the outlandish portion served to him by the enemy, averting the catastrophic insult that would ensue at his failure to finish – and to praise – the craterful of porridge offered to him. This is despite the Fomoire failing to uphold their side of the hospitality transaction by mocking and threatening their guest. He is then presented with a dangerous offer of sexual hospitality from the host's daughter, who seems to do her utmost to provoke the Dagda to conflict.

The Mór Rígain is presented as his natural companion and counterpart. It even seems as though a contemporary audience would have assumed that

the woman the Dagda has arranged to meet is the Mór Rígain, and only later prose redactors felt the need to name her deliberately[46]. It is perhaps not as clear now why she should be paired with a peace-making husbandman, particularly as she is so often cast as a battle-goddess. Yet in the tale of the Battle of Moytura, she is not described as wielding a weapon or performing feats of military valour.

We noted above that she speaks four *rosc* poems over the course of this tale. Indeed, her only other appearances are in the encounter with the Dagda[47] and at the second mustering of the Dé Danann troops in advance of the battle[48]. When asked by Lug, the Mór Rígain does pledge to play her part, now that her allegiance has been secured by the Dagda:

> "Ar-rosisor; dosifius do-sseladh; ar-roselus, aros-dibu nos-ríastais."
> *"I have stood fast; I shall pursue what was watched; I will be able to kill; I will be able to destroy those who might be subdued.[49]"*

In terms of her contributions to the war effort, it is worth noting that she first gave the Dagda intelligence about where the Fomoire would land, and now refers to standing fast and to watching. If we combine these characteristics with her larger role in this text as speaker of *roscada*, we begin to glimpse an interesting and subtle figure.

Her last three *roscada*[50] are crucial to the outcome of the battle itself. The first of these is at section 137, lines 683-693, and is introduced as follows:

> Tánic in Morrígan ingen Ernmusa anduidhe & boí oc nertad Túath nDéa co fertois an cath co dúr & co dícrai. Conid ann rocachain in laíd-se sís
> *Then the Morrígan the daughter of Ernmas came, and she was strengthening the Túatha Dé to fight the battle resolutely and fiercely. She then chanted the following poem…*[51]

After this *rosc* is spoken, the tide of battle turns in favour of the Túatha Dé Danann:

> Romebhaid íerum in cauth íer sin, & roslechtait na Fomore co muir.
> *Immediately afterwards the battle broke, and the Fomoire were driven to the sea*[52].

The poem itself reads as a present-tense account of a battle, and seems consistent with the image of the Mór Rígain watching the action, and recording it for posterity.

Her other two *roscada*[53] close the saga in its surviving form, giving two contrasting visions of the post-battle world. The voice in these passages is more in line with the description of her *oc taircetul*, “foretelling”, and *oc tairngire*, “promising, prophesying”. Along with watching and recording the present, these further-reaching forms of seeing are central to the character of a poet. The Irish term for poet, still in use today, is *fili*, which literally means “seer”[54]. This role in early Irish society was also concerned with recording and retaining history and law, and the highest grade of *fili*, the *ollam*, had *nemed*-status equivalent to a *ríg túaith*. Further, *filid* had a diplomatic role, and maintained their status while outside their own *túath*. The Mór Rígain fulfils this crucial role of *fili*, witnessing times of strife and change, distilling meaning and order from seeming chaos and using language to reflect and direct the life of the *túath* as a whole.

It is by understanding the poetic role of the Mór Rígain that her connection to the Dagda becomes clear. He is engaged in natural fertility and human sexuality, maintaining a peace-time status quo. Her role is cultural, concerned with history and changes in status, often witnessing the upheavals of war. They hold antithetical yet complimentary positions, standing in for the realms of Nature and Culture.
Yet there is one final clue to the nature of their relationship within *Cath Maige Tuired*. Before the Mór Rígain can finally reset social order with her pair of *roscada*, the Dagda must recover his harp[55]. The names given to this harp are crucial, heard when the Dagda summons it from the wall of the Fomoire hall:

> Tair Daur Dá Bláo,
> Tair Cóir Cethairchuir,
> Tair sam, tair gam,
> Béola crot & bolg & buinne!
> *Come Oak of Two Meadows,*
> *Come Rightness of Four Angles,*
> *Come summer, come winter,*
> *Mouths of harps and bags and pipes!*[56]

It is from the second name of this harp, “Cóir Cethairchuir”, that we derived the term *cóir* in relation to natural rightness and order. In summoning this

harp, the Dagda also summons the seasons. The right order of the seasons was also central to Bres' plea for his life to be spared[57], where his offers of multiple harvests in the year is rejected. *Cóir* is not concerned with over-abundance, but with harmonious management of human endeavour within the natural round of the year. Given the Dagda's role in proper distribution of agricultural wealth, it makes sense that he should be connected with a harp that has the power to set those seasons in motion. While the harp is in the custody of the Fomoire, it is said that:

> Is sí in cruit sin ara nenaisc na céola conarofhograidhsetor tria gairm co ndegart in Dagda
> *That is the harp in which the Dagda had bound the melodies so that they did not make a sound until he summoned them[58]*

This binding of the melodies seems to confirm the notion that while the Fomoire held sovereignty, the land was infertile, a Wasteland.
Quite aside from the symbolic role of this particular harp in regulating the fertility of the land, we should not lose sight of its more "mundane" role. In early Irish society, the harpist was the only musician or entertainer who could aspire to *saor*, "free / noble", status. This may be because of their particular role as accompanist of the poet. And the Mór Rígain, the poet of poets, cannot bring the saga to a close until her man, her harpist, is restored to his proper role.

In those two final poems[59], the Mór Rígain speaks of the restoration of c*óir,* but warns that this state of justice cannot be guaranteed to last forever. There may come another time when the balance is disturbed, and the wasteland encroaches. The Mór Rígain, it seems, is calling for continuing vigilance.

One curious outcome of this reading of the roles of the Dagda and the Mór Rígain is that we find the Dagda standing for natural fertility and the Mór Rígain standing for cultural and societal flourishing. Most modern interpretations of mythology embody Nature as female, and Culture as male. But here, we find the deeply masculine Dagda embodying Nature, and the relendtlessly feminine Mór Rígain embodying Culture. It is also interesting to note that this central couple do not appear as parents to other

mythological characters. The Dagda has plenty of offspring, reflected in his appellation *Eochaid Ollathair*, “Eochaid All-Father”, but the Mór Rígain is generally not claimed as an ancestor. This may be another reflection of their antithetical bond, where the Dagda’s sexual fertility is not to be found in his counterpart-companion.

The Dagda and the Mor Rígain, Nature and Culture, frame the great edifice of the *Cath Maige Tuired*, like the caryatids that once supported the temples of ancient Greece. Together, they reveal a story concerning the impact of human activity on the natural world, and, in this uncertain age, is this not still a story worth the telling?

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[1] *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Gray, Irish Texts Society. Also available on CELT, the digital texts database at https://celt.ucc.ie//published/G300010/index.html (edition) and https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T300010/index.html (translation). All references to “*Cath Maige Tuired*”, “The Second Battle of Moytura”, “CMT” or “Moytura” are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

[2] *Ibid*, introduction, § IV, p 11 ff.

[3] See e.g. “Odras” v5 l3, Metrical Dindshenchas Vol. IV, poem 49, pp 196-201; Edward Gwynn, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin (1991) (first published 1906), (reprinted 1941): available on CELT at https://celt.ucc.ie/published/G106500D/index.html (edition) and https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T106500D/index.html (translation). There is also a translation with some notes available on StoryArchaeology.com at https://storyarchaeology.com/other-appearances-of-the-morrigan-2/

[4] *CMT*, op. cit.§ 6. For more on the Dagda’s relationship to the cauldron, see *The Cauldron of Abundance*, infra.

[5] *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (eDIL), s.v. *briugu*, http://dil.ie/6874 . See also *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Chapter 1, “Law of Persons I”, p 36 ff; Fergus Kelly, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988

[6] *CMT*, op. cit, § 24

[7] *Ibid*, § 25, line 87

[8] *Ibid*, § 93

[9] *Ibid*, § 93, lines 395-7

[10] *Scéla Mucce Mac Dá Thó*, “The Tale of Mac Dáthó’s Pig”, § 1; ed. and trans., Nora Kershaw Chadwick, *An Early Irish Reader*, Cambridge University Press, 1927 available at http://adminstaff.vassar.edu/sttaylor/MacDatho/

[11] For an extensive discussion of the “*Tech Midchúarta*”, “mead-circling house”, see Downey, Clodagh, “Dindshenchas and the Tech Midchúarta*”,* Ériu, Vol. 60 (2010), pp. 1-35; JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41417578

[12] *Tochmarc Étaíne*, “The Wooing of Étaín”, ed. and trans. Osborne Bergin and R.I. Best, *Ériu*. Volume 12, Dublin, (1938), pp 137–196. Available at https://celt.ucc.ie//published/G300012/index.html (ed.) and https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T300012/index.html (trans.). In particular, cf. §§1-8, 12-14.

[13] *Ibid*, § 8

[14] *CMT*, op. cit. §§26-32

[15] *Ibid*, § 26, line 92

[16] *Ibid*, § 26, lines 95-6

[17] *Ibid*, § 29, line 111

[18] See e.g. *Temples, Tombs, and Hieroglyphs: A Popular History of Ancient Egypt*, Barbara Mertz, William Morrow, 2009; pp 151, 218-9

[19] *CMT*, op. cit. § 31

[20] "dairt mongduib nduib ndénta aicentaig": *ibid*, lines 125-6
[21] *Ibid*, § 165
[22] *Ibid*, § 39
[23] *Ibid,* § 39, line 177
[24] *Ibid*, § 83, lines 342-5
[25] *Ibid,* § 77, lines 308-10
[26] *Ibid*, § 81
[27] *Ibid*, § 83
[28] *Ibid*, § 83
[29] Translation by Isolde ÓBrolcháin Carmody
[30] *CMT*, op. cit., § 82: "Then they disbanded the council to meet that day three years later."
[31] *Ibid*, § 83, lines 346-7: "Boí Figol mac Mámais an draí og taircetal an catha & oc nertodh Túath nDéa". The following *rosc*, lines 347-353, is currently untranslated to our knowledge.
[32] *Ibid*, § 84
[33] *Ibid*, § 84, line 359
[34] *Ibid,* § 85, lines 365-6.
[35] Carey John P.; (2004) 'The encounter at the ford: warriors, water and women'. Éigse, 34:10-24
[36] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: Recension I, ed. Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1976), p 57 [Gaeilge] / pp 176-7 [translation]: lines 1845-2054. Available at https://celt.ucc.ie//published/G301012/index.html (ed.) and https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T301012/index.html (trans.)
[37] *CMT*, op. cit., § 93. This is an especially long section of the text, because the section numbers are consistent with the earlier edition and translation by Whitley Stokes (*Revue Celtique*. Volume 12, Paris, (1891) page 52–130, 306–308). He excised most of this section on the grounds of indecency, and we are eternally grateful to Elizabeth Gray for restoring it to us.
[38] *Ibid*, § 93, lines 439-454
[39] See note 36, above
[40] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: Recension I, op. cit, pp 62-3 [Gaeilge], pp 181-2 [translation]
[41] *CMT*, op. cit., §§ 89-91
[42] E.g. cf. *Fled Bricrenn*, "Bricriu's Feast", ed. George Henderson, Irish Texts Society, London, 1899; § 63
[43] *CMT*, op. cit., § 93, lines 401-4
[44] See *"Man of Peaks and Edges",* infra.
[45] *CMT*, op. cit, § 93, lines 435-6
[46] *Ibid*, § 84, lines 360-1: "Is hí an Morrígan an uhen-sin isberur sunn", *The woman mentioned here is the Morrígan.*
[47] *Ibid*, § 84
[48] *Ibid*, § §96-120
[49] *Ibid*, § 107, lines 492-3
[50] *Ibid*, §§ 137, 166-7. For an extensive discussion and analysis of these poems, see *Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis: An examination of three rosc passages from Cath Maige Tuired*, Isolde ÓBrolcháin Carmody, 2005 (Masters thesis from Trinity College, Dublin), available on academia.edu at https://www.academia.edu/10315241/THESIS_ANTITHESIS_SYNTHESIS_An_examination_of_three_rosc_passages_from_Cath_Maige_Tuired. The poems, as edited and translated by Isolde ÓBrolcháin, with translations and short notes, can be read on StoryArchaeology.com, under the title *The Mórrígan Speaks: Her Three Poems,* at https://storyarchaeology.com/the-morrigan-speaks-her-three-poems-2/
[51] *Ibid*, § 137, lines 681-683
[52] *Ibid*, § 138, lines 694-5
[53] *Ibid*, § 166, lines 819–827; § 167, lines 831–840
[54] eDIL s.v. *fili*, http://dil.ie/22070
[55] *Ibid*, §§ 163-4
[56] *Ibid*, § 163, lines 799-802
[57] *Ibid*, §§ 149-161
[58] *Ibid*, § 163, lines 796-7
[59] *Ibid*, §§ 166 / 7, lines 819-841