THE FIRST STAGE
IN
THE ITINERARY OF UA CLEIRIGH

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THE FIRST STAGE IN THE ITINERARY OF UA CLEIRIGH: A STUDY OF AUSTIN CLARKE'S EARLY POETRY

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Abstract

From _The Vengeance of Fionn_ (1917), written in imitation of Herbert Trench's _Deirdre Wed_, Austin Clarke was to go on to develop his own poetic voice. This thesis, after comparing these two poems, seeks to show the path that Clarke adopts in his early epic poetry. This stage of the young Clarke's poetic journey reveals how he uses the Irish mythological material as private and public symbols and how its use, together with his adaptation of Gaelic prosody and Gaelic genres, places him in a direct line of succession to the Gaelic _fili_.

The thesis traces the change of the poet's focus, from ancient saga to the Celtic-Romanesque period, from the public and private soul-building of the first stage to the public and private soul-searching of the second, from the _fili_ of patriotism to the _fili_ of the satire and the curse. Clarke, however, is constantly a Gaelic poet writing in English verse, a fact which gives a freshness, vividness and natural beauty to his poetry. Clarke's achievement makes him one of the most important influences on Irish verse since Yeats.

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Introduction

> . . . . I grew
> Uncultivated and now the soil
> turns sour,
> Needs to be revived by a power
> not my own.
> Heroes enormous who
> do astounding deeds --
> Out of this world.
>
> Patrick Kavanagh,
> "A Personal Problem"[1]

These lines could well have been written by Austin Clarke to justify the use in his early poetry of Irish mythological material. He, like Kavanagh, wished to revive the Irish national heart. The title of the poem, "A Personal Problem," reflects a second purpose for Clarke's use of this material -- namely, as an objective correlative through which he could explore his own inner conflicts and emotions. These two purposes, the public and the private, can be traced throughout much of Clarke's early poetry as the poet attempts to invigorate the national soul while exploring his own.

Clarke's use of Irish mythology in his early work was no idiosyncratic quirk on his part but a purposeful endeavour to participate in the tradition of Anglo-Irish writers who had attempted to revive the Gaelic past and produce a new Irish literature. Having been educated by Douglas Hyde, noted philologist, translator and ardent Celt, and by the equally ardent

Nationalist, Thomas Macdonagh, the young Clarke, imbued with the spirit of his masters, might inevitably offer his poetic craft in the cause of Celtic literature. Clarke's own work was aided in this regard by the amount of scholarly and poetic work which had already been done on the ancient tales, work which was his to emulate or improve upon. Clarke's early work can then be seen as a product of his time which fitted in to the general trend of the Anglo-Irish literature of his day. It would be helpful here to review briefly the place of Irish mythology in the tradition which Clarke inherited, before proceeding to examine his early work.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Romantic movement began to show an interest in the pre-Christian mythologies and folklore of Northern Europe--the Norse and the Celtic. The appetite for the Celtic myths had been initially whetted by James Macpherson, who claimed his bogus translations of the Fenian tales were authentic poems of the legendary Ossian (the Irish Oisin). As Fallis points out in The Irish Renaissance, Macpherson's work created a great interest in things Celtic despite the fact that scholars had declared Macpherson a hoax.[2] Goethe, and many other Europeans including Napoleon, shared the Romantic "interest in primitivism, the lays of a lost culture, and nostalgic pathos, all of which the Celtic world seemed to offer."[3]

This work from the Celtic past was only the beginning, as many began to seek out more information about this Celtic world. Just as the philologists, the brothers Grimm, did so much work to reacquaint their country with German folklore, so too did their fellow philologist and countryman, Johann Kasper Zeuss, lay the ground work for the translation of Celtic mythology by his work on the Old Irish language, published as Grammatica Celtica (1853).[4] Irish scholars too continued the exploration of the vast wealth of the Celtic literary past. Monumental work was done by Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan in the years 1840-1855. O'Donovan's work included an edition and translation of the Annals of the Four Masters in seven volumes (1848-1851) and a Grammar of the Irish Language (1845), while O'Curry's lectures of the 1850s were published in 1861 as Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History, a work which gave a comprehensive account of the main Irish medieval manuscripts including historical romances, chronicles, poems and tales.[5]

These incunabula studies received a helpful boost from two prominent mid-nineteenth-century figures, when Ernest Renan in his essay "The Poetry of the Celtic Races" (1859) and Matthew Arnold in his lecture "The Study of Celtic Literature" (1867), both non-Irish critics, spoke favourably of Celtic poetry. Such

criticism gave, as Fallis suggests, a type of "imprimatur" to the work of Celtic scholars, for Arnold was "the most influential critic in the English-speaking world."[6]

With this rediscovery of the Gaelic past, the Irish made a conscious attempt to link nineteenth-century Ireland, which had just lost its autonomy with the Act of Union (1801), to the heroic age of Irish legend and myth in what would appear to be an attempt to justify their feelings of nationalism.[7] Irish nationalism, never far from the surface, was at this time, because of the effects of Revolution and Romanticism in Europe, a part of the broader picture of European nationalism.

Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly at a cultural crossroads. As Sean Lucy states,

> Scholars and artists were looking for imaginative release and excitement in national literature as opposed to classical. A new sense of a nation as 'the people' was developing together with an interest in folktale and custom, and -- most important for poetry -- in folk music and folk song. The Irish people, the mere Irish, were struggling to express themselves effectively in a language forced on them by political and economic circumstance, while the best of the Anglo-Irish, setting out to find themselves after the debacle of the Act of Union, resolved to be Irish, and exploring the implications of this resolution, brought into the English language the past in which their new identity was rooted.[8]

One of those Anglo-Irish who "resolved to be Irish" was Sir Samuel Ferguson.

Sir Samuel Ferguson, poet, scholar, and antiquarian, whom Austin Clarke called "the father of the entire revival,"[9] was one of the first to use the Irish sagas as material for his poetry.[10] His purpose seems to have been to furnish a cultural past for a people who had lost their national status so that they might not lose their national identity. In A Short History of Irish Literature, Frank O'Connor quotes Ferguson's assertions concerning the old mythology:

> What we have to do with, and that to which these observations properly point, is the recovery of the mislaid, but not lost, records of the acts and opinions and condition of our ancestors -- the disinterring and bringing back to the light of intellectual day [of] the already recorded facts, by which the people of Ireland will be able to live back in the land they live in, with as ample and as interesting a field of retrospective enjoyment as any nations around us.[11]

This is a bold statement for national identity, one which seems to give credence to Yeats's view, as given by Frayne, that Ferguson, "Whether he knew it or not, was a 'true member of that company / That sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong . . .' and hence was a nationalist whether he wanted to be or not."[12]

Ferguson's use of the ancient literature, in such poems as "The Tain-Quest" (1864) and "The Abdication of Fergus MacRoy" (1864),[13] demonstrated, as Fallis suggests,

that the mythology "could be used by modern writers for something more than evocative exploitation,"[14] the way Davis and the writers of The Nation tended to use it. Ferguson demonstrated that "national" poetry could be written without involving religious or political controversy but simply by writing of rural Ireland and using the Irish legends. Ferguson's intentions, rather than perhaps his poetic achievement,[15] made him an important guide for later poets like Yeats in his work for an Irish Literary Renaissance.

Another major figure in depicting and popularizing Irish mythology was Standish James O'Grady. O'Grady, "departing from the conscientiously scholarly style of the early versions"[16] of the tales, sought "the reconstruction by imaginative forces of the life led by our ancestors in this country,"[17] and hoped "to make this heroic period once again a portion of the imagination of this country, and its chief characters as familiar in the minds of our people as they once were."[18] O'Grady's two-volume History of Ireland (1878-1880) made, according to no less a figure than Yeats, "the old Irish heroes, Fion, and Oisin, and Cuchullan, alive again, taking them, for I think he had no Gaelic, from the dry pages of O'Curry and his school, and condensing and arranging, as he thought Homer would have arranged and condensed."[19] Elsewhere Yeats, seeing these books as a

"motive force," [20] said of them:

> It is probable that no Englishman can love these books as they are loved by the many Irishmen who date their first interest in Irish legends and literature from the History. [21]

O'Grady, it seems, retained his influence until Lady Gregory brought out her versions of the tales, Cuchulain of Muirthemne (1902) and Gods and Fighting Men (1904). Yeats judged Lady Gregory's versions much superior to O'Grady's for she kept "closer to the Gaelic text" and had "greater power of arrangement and a more original style." [22] In his Preface to Cuchulain of Muirthemne, Yeats's praise is of the highest:

> I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time. Perhaps I should say that it is the best book that has ever come out of Ireland; for the stories which it tells are a chief part of Ireland's gift to the imagination of the world -- and it tells them perfectly for the first time. [23]

The Irish sagas and tales, thus so manifoldly wrought in English, became for the Anglo-Irish a veritable mine of material. Besides those mentioned above including the influential Yeats, many Irish writers, both in prose and verse, used the ancient tales as a source for their work. Herbert Trench, John Todhunter, A.E., William Larminie, James Stephens, Katharine Tynan and others, all explored in their own way the world of the Irish sagas. As Clarke states in Poetry in Modern Ireland,

> few of [these writers] knew the Irish language but, in rediscovering for themselves, excitedly,

> the mythology, sagas and oral tradition of their country, they had for stimulus the pioneer work of scholars and neglected poet-translators. In turning to our ancient sources, they broke from the main tradition of English poetry, which has for centuries borrowed its mythology from Greece and Rome.[24]

It was in this way Irish writers were able to quarry for themselves a new and fresh literature out of their own ancient legends in an attempt to place a "Patrick or Columbcille, Oisin or Fion, in Prometheus' stead" [25] in the land of "Cro-Patrick or Ben Bulben." [26] It was this tradition that the young Austin Clarke inherited and within which he worked in his earliest poems.

The poetic inspiration Clarke gained thereby was of the kind he claimed for his predecessors: "In returning to Irish mythology, our poets experienced an emotion which was unknown to English poets, an emotion which gives their work its peculiar intensity." [27] For, as he further states, in words which echo the sentiments of Yeats just quoted, poets like Ferguson and Trench were "not exploring a mythology, but one which belonged to [their] country, survived in its oral tradition, and in the very names of its hills, rivers and plains." [28] With such an awareness of Ireland's mythology, Clarke would, perhaps inevitably, choose that mythology as material for much of his early work. Indeed Clarke describes his early endeavour thus:

> My own early poems were of an epic kind for I had been influenced by Ferguson and Herbert Trench, and it seemed to me that only in a remote way could the primitive forces still in civilization be expressed.[29]

Here, therefore, are the mentors, material and motivation for Clarke's early poetry, which constitutes the subject of this thesis.

Chapter I

In Clarke's autobiographical work, Twice Round the Black Church, he relates that his initial poem The Vengeance of Fionn was written in imitation of Deirdre Wed, a poem by a little known nineteenth-century Irish poet, Herbert Trench.[1] Trench's influence on the young Clarke was strong and shows itself in numerous ways in this early poem. In the first place Trench uses for his theme the tragic love story of the Ulster cycle of tales, The Fate of the Sons of Usna (Longes Mac Nusnig); Clarke chooses for his theme its counterpart in the Fenian cycle, The Pursuit of Diarmuid & Grainne.[2] In plot the one tale echoes the other, as may be seen in Rolleston's version of the story:

> A fair maiden is betrothed to a renowned and mighty suitor much older than herself. She turns from him to seek a younger lover, and fixes her attention on one of his followers, a gallant and beautiful youth, whom she persuades, in spite of his reluctance to fly with her. After evading pursuit they settle down for a while at a distance from the defrauded lover, who bides his time, till at last, under cover of a treacherous reconciliation, he procures the death of his younger rival and retakes possession of the lady.[3]

This synopsis fits both tales in plot outline though both are, as Rolleston points out, quite different: "in tone and temper . . . they are as wide apart as the poles."[4]

Trench's influence is again found in Clarke's unusual use of time in the poem:

> The poem begins in the middle age of Diarmuid and Grainne, and changes rapidly, visionally, to their youth and love, -- so that the reader has an awareness of the past -- ideal in itself, yet further idealized by memory -- in the present. [5]

This lack of linear chronology in the narrative gives the poem, as Kennelly suggests, "a curiously timeless atmosphere" [6] which, in turn, underlines the unchanging quality of the poem's major theme -- the battle of youth with the process of aging.

The chronological pattern which Trench adopts for Deirdre Wed begins in the first century with the voice of Fintan, flows back to the time of Cir -- "a century more remote, but unknown"[7] -- then surges forward to the sixth century with the appearance of Urmael, and finally completes a cycle by returning in the final book to the perspective of the first narrator, Fintan.[8] Clarke imitates this pattern of time to good effect. The change in the chronological order of Clarke's poem lends, as he himself suggests, a greater depth to the passage of time, which is a poignant theme of the poem. This poignancy is revealed in the description of the aged Fionn's first sight of Diarmuid and Grainne in their middle-age:

> . . . he saw the troubled births
> And child-cares in her face, upon her lips
> Langoured as of old, sad autumn light;
> Thereafter, darker, prouder, with his age
> Diarmuid standing near. (pp. 4-5) [9]

The change wrought by time on Grainne and the sadness of

loss and regret in the aged Fionn are clearly marked here with a diction reflecting the condition of both: "troubled," "langoured," "cares," "sad," "old" and "autumn."

As the poem continues, we are carried back in time to view the ecstasy of the young, idealized love of Diarmuid and Grainne, which stands in sharp contrast to the depiction of the lovers encountered at the poem's beginning. Here, with a touch of dramatic irony,[10] Diarmuid draws out once more the constant theme of the poem -- the battle of vital youth with its illusion of immortality against the cold reality of the decay of age:

> What have the old, the tired, to do with love,
> To pilfer pleasure and dote and think they dream?
> O it is for youth, only for arrogant youth,
> To love and love! (p. 33)

This clash of youth and age permeates the poem and is used to great effect to end it. Clarke, like Trench, produces a cyclic effect by ending the poem with words, placed in the mouth of a young girl, describing with pathos the lot of the aging Grainne:

> 'And I saw poor Grainne in the sunlight
> Wrinkled and ugly. I do not think she slept.
> My mother says that she was beautiful
> Proud, white, and a queen's daughter long ago,
> And that they were great lovers in the old days --
> Before she was married -- and lived in hilly woods
> Until they wearied.
> I do not want to grow so old like her.
> O it is best to be young and dance and laugh
> And sing all day and comb my sleepy hair
> In the startime, and never, never, grow old.'
> 'O shiny Dew

O little wild Bird of the air
Youth only is wisdom and it is love.' (p. 40)

Thus the poem ends as it first began, with a focus on the age of Grainne; this time a greater number of the years have passed by her, a passage which gives this description a greater poignancy in a poem with the stress on the vitality of youth. Diarmuid's words of the contrast of age and youth, quoted above, are ironically and tellingly mirrored in the words of this young girl, a parallel which, in turn, gives to the poem the feeling that the mythic couple are types for lovers of all times and in all places.[11]

Clarke's dramatic handling of narrative may also owe something to Trench.[12] In Deirdre Wed Trench presents the action through the voices of the old bards -- Fintan, Urmael, and Cir -- so creating a dramatic effect as their voices weave in and out of the almost constant dialogue of the lovers. The result is to compress the action, allowing the narrative to hasten to its dramatic conclusion.

Clarke for his part also relies on voices and dialogue to push his tale forward, together with a few prose statements at the beginning of some sections of the poem to aid the story line. Indeed, two sections of The Vengeance of Fionn are entirely in dialogue. The first, Section III, is the dialogue of the two young lads

who, on the night of the fated day for Diarmuid, are found near Rath Ghrainne. Their dramatic role seems to have three functions. First, juxtaposed as the section is to that of the description and dialogue of Fionn and Diarmuid on the fatal hunt of the magical boar of Beann Gulbain, the section replays the hunt on a different level -- an "innocent" one, underlining the black nature of the major hunt. Second, the stress on youth is again brought out and the district is seen from their perspective -- an idyllic spot but not without its misty terror. Third, the switch to the dialogue of the boys heightens the suspense built up in the main episode.

The second section (Section VII) is a conversation between the young girl, quoted above, and her lover as they stand in Rath Ghrainne, like, as we have seen, a new Diarmuid and Grainne. This section is juxtaposed to that which ends with the finely staged union of the young mythic lovers, a juxtaposition which adds to the poignancy of the death of Diarmuid and the loss of Grainne's beauty -- the major topic of the dialogue of the young lovers. As Kennelly suggests, the absence of any narrative link in this section increases the dramatic impact and makes Clarke's ending superior to that of Trench.[13] Clarke's telling ability in both sections, however, lies in the ease with which he introduces two

fresh perspectives on the love story without being obstrusive or damaging the dramatic or narrative flow, but adding to both the dramatic impact and the depth of his narrative. The only parallel to be found in Deirdre Wed is the link of the tomb of Cir where, that bard relates, the young lovers pass:

> Then up to the Gap of the Winds, and the far-seen tomb
> White on Slieve Fuad's side. By many a march-land old,
> And cairn of princes -- yea, to mine own bedside --
> They adventured. Think ye, sweet bards, that I could lie cold
> When my chamber of rock fore-knew that impassion'd stride? (p. 25)

Trench's passage does not achieve the same dramatic effect as the two Clarke sections discussed. Clarke's dialogues are more vital and give a sense of immediacy which Trench's passage does not, chiefly because of the indirect way Trench chooses to describe the advent of the lovers. This is one aspect of Clarke's poem which makes it superior dramatically to its acknowledged forerunner.

Yet Clarke follows his model even in choice and use of diction. Incorporated into Clarke's poem are words borrowed directly from Trench's work. In Deirdre Wed, for example, Trench has King Connachar speak of the "scream of his stallions" (p. 13); similarly, as the Fianna muster to follow the fleeing lovers, Clarke notes "The stallions screamed" (p. 24). Another word Clarke borrows is the onomatopoeic word "plash" which both poets

use instead of the more prosaic "splash."

Clarke's borrowing does not stop at single words, however. He also adopts Trench's phrases and ideas, altering them somewhat in the process. Trench, for example, speaks of the way in which "Gloom suck'd in the banqueteers" (p. 10); this notion reappears in a variant form in Clarke's description of Fionn's hall, where light "snatched the host from darkness" (p. 4). In Trench's poem Levarcham, Deirdre's nurse, is described as "like the claw of birds, / Decrepit, bright of eye, and innocent" (p. 12); Clarke adopts the hawk image in describing Levarcham's counterpart Grainne's old nurse, as "a withered crone / A rushlight in her claw-thin fingers" (p. 12). These images seem to have been borrowed by Clarke consciously or otherwise from his predecessor.

Moreover, even some of Clarke's ideas recall those of the earlier poet. In The Vengeance of Fionn, the Fianna's leader, roused by thoughts of the changes in Grainne as he speaks with Diarmuid, is depicted leaning "Fiercely upon his boar spear till it bent / Earthward" (p. 6). This particular description seems to be an echo of Deirdre Wed, where Deirdre, running through the woods, comes upon the old seer Cathva. This meeting is most evocatively described, and the intensity of the lines creates one of the finest poetic passages of the earlier poem. As a result, Clarke's

echo is faint and his words less telling in this instance (I quote the particular passage in full in order to show its poetic power):

> . . . But Deirdre ran
> Like the moon through brakes, and saw where nought had been
> On the vague shore what seem'd a stone that stood;
> Faceless, rough-hewn, it forward seem'd to lean
> Like the worn pillar of Cenn Cruiach the God
> She cried across "If thou with things terrene
> Be number'd, tell me why thy sorrowful blood
> Mourneth, O Cathva, father! " But the stone
> Shiver'd, and broke the staff it lean'd upon,
> Shouting, "What! livst thou yet? Begone, begone!"
> (pp. 51-52)

The action and movement downward of the standing figure are retained by Clarke; the poetic movement, however, is in this instance less vivid in the later work.

Clarke, on the other hand, picks up the image of the heroine's "deathless hair" (p. 19) from Trench's poem and gives it an added vitality in the conversation atop Beann Gulbain, where Fionn says to Diarmuid as he is describing how much Grainne has changed: "Only her hair / Burns arrogant across the black ravine / Of ruinous years" (p. 6). Here Clarke enlivens the "deathless hair" particularly by his use of the word "burns," which suggests the redness of the hair and liveliness and vividness of movement and colour against the dark, abysmal backdrop of the "ravine of ruinous years." This is an example of Clarke's poetic ability where we can see how much he could make of a small hint or passing

phrase his precursor had used.

Clarke's portrayal of the aged, thwarted lover has, as Kennelly points out, its counterpart in Trench's poem. In both poems this figure is portrayed as both impotently senile and darkly treacherous.[14] In Deirdre Wed we find Connachar described in these terms:

> . . . consummate lord of fear,
> Our never-counsell'd lord, the Forest-odour'd
> That kept about his heart a zone of chill,
> Smiled, though within the gateway of his fort
> A surmise crept, as 'neath a load of rushes
> Creeps in the stabber. (p. 12)

And, in The Vengeance of Fionn the Fianna leader is depicted thus:

> . . . Fionn laughed bitterly
> And stared in darkness at the waiting ground
> Unseeing, for his mind groped to his dead love
> And towards the past his heart, a hungered hound,
> Strained at the leash. (p. 8) [15]

The respective images of assassin and hunting dog reflect a sinister and life-threatening aspect of the two thwarted leaders. The choice of such dark images to describe the old men reflects the bias of the two poets towards the young fugitives in their respective tales. (There is more cause for such treatment in the original tale of Deirdre than in that of Grainne.) Clarke outlines the reasons for his bias when he himself speaks of his early epic poems in Poetry in Modern Ireland:

> The first World War and the age-old emotions stirred in our country by the Rebellion gave for a time another significance to our mythology. Those Asiatic stories, changing as they moved westward through obscure centuries,

> seemed to adumbrate the forces stirring so violently again in the human race. My own early poems were of an epic kind for I had been influenced by Ferguson and Herbert Trench, and it seemed to me that only in a remote way could the primitive forces still in civilization be expressed. Life itself was an epic struggle, for I had spent my childhood resisting the mightiest of fallen angels, intent on seizing my small soul. Youth itself, though a transitory possession, seemed as valuable for the Great Powers of the militant world demanded it from the new generation everywhere. In the Toruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne I found what I wanted, for this Gaelic pursuit-tale is about two young lovers who fled from violence, night and day, through the glens and forests of Ireland, wishing only to be happy and to be left alone.[16]

From this passage we see, first, that Fionn represents repressive authority laying waste the already fragile joy and beauty of young love, and, secondly, that Clarke's theme is the flight of the young lovers from such repression to the joyous freedom which should be their natural right. This sensuous relish of freedom occurs frequently in The Vengeance of Fionn. Such a relish is reflected, for example, in Diarmuid's words to Grainne:

> O Grainne, Grainne, wild Love
> Of my heart, we two are free, are free,
> . . . in this land of lonely lakes
> And lush south valleys. Here no hazy blue
> Smoke o' turf rises and no children wake
> The laughter of the rocks. (p. 32)

While Clarke had his own motives, as outlined in the prose statement above, for writing of freedom, none the less this passage seems to have been partially inspired

by a similar passage in Deirdre Wed, where Naois asks Deirdre:

> Wilt thou not dance, daughter of heaven, today
> Free, at last free? For here no moody raindrop
> Can reach thee, nor betrayer overpeer;
> And none the self-delightful measure hear
> That thy soul moves to, quit of mortal ear. (p.40)

Both passages repeat the all-important word "free" and both emphasize the absence of other human beings amid their natural, non-repressive surroundings.

From these many and varied examples we can see that Clarke owes much to the earlier poet and that The Vengeance of Fionn might not have been written without Deirdre Wed. But is The Vengeance of Fionn merely imitative and does it equal its predecessor in poetic merit? We have seen Clarke's dramatic treatment of the young commentators, how his use of these fresh perspectives outshines Trench's efforts. This dramatic quality of Clarke's poem is one example of the superiority of The Vengeance of Fionn, which, as we will see, does in fact surpass the earlier poem and is a good poem in its own right.

Clarke is, for example, superior in his use of diction. There is, in the first instance, nothing in Deirdre Wed which equals the word-pictures of Clarke's poem. Clarke, like an eager artist making full use of his palette, creates an acutely drawn landscape vivid in its varied hues. Hence, he describes Killarney thus:

He looked -- across the silver shining lake
And islets thick with grassgreen trees asleep
Like their long olive shadows in the deep --
Upon the mountain forests, waterfalls
Unravelling white sunlight from the crags
Above, furze yellow slopes and far away
Blue misted summits. (p. 31)

While in another way, Clarke may be guilty, as one critic suggests,[17] of overdoing the long descriptive passages which create a static rather than a flowing narrative and an overripeness of imagery which tends to blur rather than sharpen the poetic effect,[18] his most overwritten passage never reaches the stasis of diction and contortion of syntax of which Trench is capable. Such poetic overzealousness is found in Clarke's compact description of evening and nightfall in the journey of Diarmuid and Grainne:

With the evening time
They saw a tide of sunlight, rising, surge
Through the gloomy loughs among the clouds and
sweep
In dazzling floods along a deepening gorge
Beneath gaunt rocks or on some woodland steep
Or splashed upon a rainworn granite brink,
In saffron pools through banks of shadow flow
And in wild tortuous tree-torn cascades sink
Into the blackness of the glens below.
Once in the green gap of the south there shone
A mist of men and bronze-red spears awhile.
And so for lonely leagues they journeyed on
Through the greyness of a mountainous defile
Cobwebbed with silence.

Wet winds and seagulls' cries
Arose when to the western capes they crossed.
A sudden redness flashed within their eyes
Against the sunset seas that wildly tossed
And drenched the stormful clouds in crimson
spume,
And sucked the golden rays from mountain peaks

> In gleaming whirlpools down the blackened gloom,
> Then redly ebbed in the cloud-darkened creeks.
> As from the sudden shadow of a hawk
> In the red skies a tumult of black wings
> Broke on the blast, flying from fairy things
> Unseen. The sunset like a scarlet bruise
> Angered. Night slowly sank. (p. 29)

While this passage is an explosion of colour, it contains such an abundance of images that the eager artist seems to have cast discrimination to the wind and thrown a pot of vivid poetic paint over the canvas of the narrative. The plodding aimless movement of this long description is invigorated only with the appearance of the spearmen, an occurrence which connects it to the plot, and two startling images; the first of the "defile / Cob-webbed with silence," which concretely captures the isolation of the lovers, and the second of the "sunset like a scarlet bruise / Angered," which suggests the ever-present danger in the flight. Otherwise, this passage, colourfully descriptive as it is, is but one example of the poem's static overripeness.

The stasis which occurs in The Vengeance of Fionn is a poetic peccadillo compared with the problem of diction which occurs from time to time in Trench's poem. This poetic poverty is seen in the following passage which opens the discourse of the ancient bard Cir:

> As a horseman breaks on a sea-gulf enwomb'd
>   in the amber woods
> Where tide is at ebb, and out on the airy brim

Glass'd upon cloud and azure stand multitudes
Of the flame-white people of gulls -- to the
    sky-line dim

All breast to the sun, -- and his hoofs expand
    the desolate strait
Into fevers of snows and ocean wandering cries:
Even so, chanters divine, in some woman's fate
At coming of him to be loved do her dreams arise.
(p. 16)

Here the simile of the horseman is so entombed in the heavy diction of "a sea-gulf enwomb'd" and "amber woods" that his ponderous gait would hardly disturb the most timorous sea-gull. In the passage we find this diction overlapping that "proper poetic" [19] diction found in words like "airy brim," "azure;" and both abetting what Austin Clarke in his article on Trench called "a lack of fusion between idea and word in his poetry." [20]

Another example of Trench's defective diction is found in the treatment of the potentially intense boar-fight:

He [the boar] crash'd at her; she heaved the
    point embrown'd
In blood of dragons. Heavily the boar
Grazed by the iron, reel'd, leapt, charged
    once more
And thrice in passage her frail vesture tore.

As when a herd-boy lying on the scar
    (Who pipes to flocks below him on the steep
Melodies like their neckbells, scattering far,
    Cool as the running water, soft as sleep)
Hurls out a flint from peril to debar
    And from the boulder'd chasm recall his sheep --
So with a knife Naois leapt and struck.
Strange, in the very fury of a stride
The grey beast like a phantom from his side
Plunged without scathe to thickets undescried.
(p. 38)

In this overblown, ponderous passage, Trench reveals once

more his poetic weakness. Here the contorted syntax ("Hurls out a flint from peril to debar / And from the boulder'd chasm recall his sheep") gives the piece a highly artificial air, while the diction ("embrown'd," "vesture," "scathe," "to thickets undescried") creates stilted and forced verse rather than profound poetry.

Clarke's ability to achieve intensity stands in sharp contrast to Trench's failure. The young poet, through a build-up of images, is able to create a dramatic cumulative effect, as can be seen, for instance, in this description of Fionn's furious discovery of the young lovers' flight:

> 'The chariots! The hounds! Arose uproar
> Of running men and sobs of women cowed
> In shadowy corners -- through tapestries
>   night airs
> Whistled and waned -- outside the torches tore
> The night with windy flame -- the frightened
>   mares
> And foals whinnied -- hounds bayed their
>   hunger -- at last
> With shouts, toss of torchlights, swept in a
>   blast
> Through clouds of stampeded dust, lash-urged
> The stallions screamed, the shuddering chariots
>   creaked
> Madder than mountain oakboughs stormfully
>   wreaked
> And the parched axles rumbling in the naves
> Grew hot as when their hammered bronze was
>   forged
> Loud on the hissing anvils, stripped of flame.
> So down the roads of Temair the Fianna came
> Charioteered in thundering; bloodhounds
> Sniffed, fanged the wind and then in mighty
>   bounds
> Sprang at the throat of night . . . . (pp. 24-25)

Here the whole atmosphere builds on a sense of potential

violence with images like "torches tore," "stallions screamed" and "oakboughs stormfully wreaked" until, in a crescendo, Clarke, demonstrating a dramatic technique which outdoes the Cathva/stone incident of Deirdre Wed cited above, delivers that most potent image of the hunt -- the hound springing at the throat of a victim. The notion of "man-hunt" reflected here exemplifies the poet's depicting of the violent forces loose in the world and in its vivid expression and unexpected delivery he is successful.

Hand in hand with this dramatic quality, Clarke also on occasion draws in his poem images of vigorous earthiness, giving the poem a flavour of the original saga which Trench's work lacks. Such earthiness is present, for example, in the following description of the sultry, turbulent night before Diarmuid faces the boar:

> She listened. Her bedmate
> Muttered from his sleep and started up
> Calling with a loud voice 'The hounds! They race
> And bell down Beann Gulbain. Look! the boar
> Bursts from the blood-wet bushes. Quick, my spear
> With the long silken sling!' She felt his breath
> Burning on her. 'Hush! Diarmuid, you only hear
> The mastiffs baying the moon. It is some dream
> The Druid-dark puts on you. I saw his eyes
> Tonight.' But he muttered. 'I hear a fir
> Talking, talking. There is a little thing
> Gnawing at its roots. It will not stir.
> What is it that is gnawing at the roots
> And talking, talking there?' Then Grainne turned
> And pulled him on her hot breasts until he slept.
> (pp. 5-6)

This passage demonstrates Clarke's skill in giving his subject a touch of realism, and the sensuous quality, particularly in the last line quoted, comes across to the reader in a rush of freshness -- unexpected in its place and highly effective.

It is not only in his dramatic power that he reveals his abilities and superiority to his precursor; Clarke also demonstrates a fine lyrical sense in this first poem. This lyrical quality is seen, for example, in Diarmuid's speech to Grainne, who at this time sits silently, seeming to regret their flight:

> . . . We were pursued
> From sleep to sleep, seacave to flooded glen.
> I have slain things in darkness. I waked and
> went
> Nightly from our hazel sheilings, stood
> Like a hunted stag sniffing the breeze.
> Remember once we heard old sallows, bent
> Like hags crouching to their thin huddled knees
> Over the waters, muttering; we looked
> And all the farther riverbank was sedged
> With spears, and dawn behind, the broad white
> dawn
> That ever tracked our sleep. Had not Fionn
> pledged
> Loudly to loose the ferrets of a thousand spears?
> And I, hunted I thought me poor
> Who had all, friendless and I did not see
> The weary rain-wet face that would make men
> Turn from their dreams outdreamed and poets
> sing no more.
> What have the old, the tired, to do with love,
> To pilfer pleasure and dote and think they dream?
> O it is for youth, only for arrogant youth,
> To love and love! (pp. 32-33)

The combination of images here is most striking as Diarmuid moves from thinking of their plight as that of the hunted

animal -- the motif of hunting aids in the dramatic colouring of the poem as a whole -- to thoughts of how fortunate he is to have Grainne and his youth. The sense of animal/man hunt is brought out well in the phrase "the ferrets of a thousand spears," for while the word "ferret" could literally mean "the long silken sling" (p. 5) used to throw the spears, its other meaning, the hunting animal, reinforces the idea of the lovers as animals hunted by the spear-men. The anxiety of the pursuit seems summed up in the words "I have slain things in darkness," words which reflect Diarmuid's being driven, due to the continuous pursuit by Fionn, to depend on animal instinct. The very indefiniteness of the phrase makes it a most potent image of the lovers' plight -- the sense of fighting with shadows.

This ominous image is juxtaposed with Diarmuid's thoughts of how fortunate he is to have Grainne. These thoughts are expressed in an image which would sound right in any love lyric: "I did not see / The weary rain-wet face that would make men / Turn from their dreams outdreamed and poets sing no more." This image of the beloved is exquisite in its fresh naturalness.

The passage ends with a glimpse of Clarke, the public poet, speaking out, through the mouth of Diarmuid, in a strong indictment against the attempts of the old to harness the young who seek only to love and be loved.

This idea, as we have seen, is a major theme of the poem as Clarke envisioned it. The defiance of Diarmuid in his cry: "O it is for youth, only for arrogant youth, / To love and love" is a completion of the finely wrought lyrical movement of the passage which progresses from Diarmuid in a state of expectant dread, through a recognition of his love for Grainne and thoughts of her beauty and youth, to a roaring defiance of his aged pursuer Fionn. In the compactness and evocative beauty of this passage we see the young poet, Austin Clarke, shed a brighter poetic light than anything found in Deirdre Wed.

Thus, while Clarke undoubtedly owed a debt to Herbert Trench in this first poem, he showed himself in numerous ways a finer poet than his model. Clarke surpassed his predecessor in his more poignant use of the time sequence, in his better dramatic technique, in his word-pictures -- despite his occasional overripeness in imagery -- and in the greater fluidity of his narration. Above all these, however, Clarke's freshness, vitality and vigorous earthiness, attributes he is to use time and time again in his later poems, show him, even at this early stage, to be no mere imitator but a poet of great potential.

Chapter II

Before continuing to explore Clarke's use of Irish mythology in The Sword of the West (1921), we must first investigate the slight detour the poet made in his poetic journey with his experimental, Biblical poem The Fires of Baal (1921).

Clarke's decision to move from Celtic mythology to the Bible for the theme of his second poem was, it seems, motivated by pressure applied by his Jesuit superior at the University where the poet was an assistant professor. In his autobiography Clarke recalls the conversation thus:

> After some desultory conversation he came at last to the point with the slyness which is caused by years of total obedience to others. He suggested that, instead of writing about pagan Ireland, I should attempt a religious theme. It so happened that I had been reading The Death of Adam, a spacious poem, by Lawrence Binyon, and it occurred to me that the lonely death of Moses on Mount Nebo after his vision of the Promised Land would make a complementary theme.[1]

Clarke goes on the explain how the task of writing a poem on a Biblical theme was to be somewhat more difficult than it seemed:

> Unfortunately my imagination was stirred by the various pleasures of polygamy which had been permitted by God to the patriarchs under the Old Law: and, to make matters worse, I was tempted, like the Israelites themselves, by the variety of polytheism and so displayed an undue interest in Baal, Ashtaroth, Dagon and other idolatrous figures.

> The experience was worth while for I had learned that it is very difficult to sell the subconscious self. Moreover, the poem seemed a parable of our lean centuries.[2]

The epic fragment, instead of reflecting a beautifully wrought aspect of "the faith" as the Jesuit would have desired, thus became a vehicle by which he could freely explore the most non-Christian aspects of the pagan world. In this sense the poem may have been a worthwhile experiment; poetically, however, it did not measure up to the earlier Vengeance of Fionn.

The reasons for the poetic regression begin, as Kennelly points out, with the fact that the fragment, an extension of three short verses of Deuteronomy (48-51), is based on a single event -- the death of Moses.[3] This lack of action tends to make the poem almost stagnant and Clarke tries to compensate by giving a long, exotic description of a land with which he is not familiar, attempting to bury his ignorance in flaccid rhetoric like a twentieth-century Milton describing what he cannot in fact see. In a conversation with the poet Joseph Campbell, Clarke is reported to have said that he would "make The Fires of Baal more ornate and coloured than The Vengeance of Fionn" and that he "was trying to load every rift with ore" in the later poem.[4] While the diction of the poem might be said to "glister," it is not poetic "gold." Take Clarke's description of an Oriental city:

> . . . private palaces
> Pannelled with cedar hewn in stately forests
> Long mellowing their resin, rich with sunlight
> On Lebanon, thence diapered with gold
> Or tessellated lapis lazuli;
> Fragrance of rooms withdrawn by pampered damask,
> Red-flowered as the mulberries that fed their
> silk
> Twilled on the loom, tuned as a sounding board
> To sweetness, fashionable with sad tales
> Of sylvan lore and tired hands that pull
> The softer fruit of sleep; . . . (p. 51)

While the passage suggests the sensuousness of the ungodly city, the use of staid poetic diction in words like "diapered," "tessellated," "sylvan" gives the passage a ponderous weight, which contributes to the sense of stasis. The dull, heavy description of the Orient thus drawn stands in sharp contrast to the fresh, light picture of Killarney in The Vengeance of Fionn.

The stagnation of the major part of the poem is mirrored in the feeling of stasis. That feeling is created by the sibilance and images of the following lines which introduce the central figure, Moses:

> Silent upon the sacred step
> Like a dead king among his scarlet robes
> Lay Moses. (p. 42) 5

The repeated "s" creates a sense of immobility, while the idea of "sacred" and "dead" reflects an awed stillness, which combine to suggest stasis.

The poem, while disadvantaged by stasis and cloying descriptions, still allows us to see Clarke's real poetic ability. This ability is seen, for example,

in the laconic way the poet depicts God's leading the children of Israel through their wandering in the desert:

> After the fierce-sunned tribes of Israel,
> For generations wandering the desert
> Clouded and pillared by the fire of God, . . .
> (p. 41)

Here Clarke employs a poetic device of which he is particularly fond -- using a noun in the form of a verb. On this occasion, the device, besides giving the poem a freshness, is used as a vehicle of conciseness.

Another positive aspect of the poem is Clarke's ability to create new and striking images. To cite but two examples: first, the poet describes the old men holding on barely to the thread of life as slowly following "The shadows childing round their gathered tents / Till sundown" (p. 44) (the word "childing" here evokes the sense of dependence, like a child holding on to his mother's "gathered" skirts); secondly, the voice, conjuring up an idyllic scene, argues with Moses about his abandoning Israel and remembers ". . . girls / In time of the propped bough danced into wine / The bursting grapes" (p. 44). The grapes being "danced into wine" captures all the festivity of wine-making and wine-drinking in the one image. Both instances illustrate the poet's power even when dealing with a less familiar subject matter.

A third positive aspect of the poem, one which Kennelly discusses, is Clarke's spirited attempt to

depict the solitariness of Moses as he waits alone for the end, still showing his responsibility and compassion for his people:

> He watched with desert-narrowed eyes the sun
> As Dagon, fishing in the west, assailed
> By prayers of Philistine; until the drouth
> And hunger of his peoples wandering
> For generations through the desert sands
> Stormed with their unassuageable pangs
> Upon his heart, and shaken with the grief
> And sudden joy of that far Promised Land,
> Shading his eyes, half blind with aged tears
> He gazed upon the plain. (p. 50)[7]

This passage poignantly depicting the aged patriarch lacks, however, the poetic intensity of The Vengeance of Fionn, a lack reflecting perhaps Clarke's own statement regarding his fellow poets and countrymen Ferguson and Yeats. He said that their intensity came from "not exploring a mythology, but one which belonged to their country, survived in its oral tradition, and in the very names of its hills, rivers, and plains."[8] In choosing to write a poem with an alien mythology entailing description of a foreign land, Clarke seems to have made a great error. Whether or not he realized the problems of The Fires of Baal or simply felt he had done his religious duty, had rendered unto Caesar, in his next poem he judiciously turned from the Biblical theme and returned to the Gaelic cycles of tales, picking up on the most turbulent of them -- the Ulster Cycle -- with his poem The Sword of the West.

With this third volume, Clarke resumes his Irish itinerary. Here he becomes to a greater degree the public poet, using the ancient cycle to explore the Irish situation of his own day and encourage his countrymen with heroism of the past. Here too he places himself more firmly in the Irish tradition by adopting and adapting Gaelic prosody and Gaelic genres. Combining all these Gaelic elements, Clarke in this volume begins to find his own poetic voice, which results in a vivid, fresh and intense poetry, in sharp contrast to The Fires of Baal.

While it is true that Clarke, like his predecessor Trench, used in The Vengeance of Fionn many compound epithets in the Gaelic fashion -- a practice which was itself considered so important that it had its own special section of rules in the Bardic Grammatical Tracts[9] -- in The Sword of the West Clarke employs more fully his knowledge of Gaelic prosody, using its devices on the whole to good effect in his English verse.

One major component of Gaelic prosody Clarke adopts is assonance, which, he claims, "takes the clapper from the bell of rhyme."[10] Clarke's use of this device, together with the alliteration and internal rhyming, two other devices of Gaelic verse, gives to his third volume the musical quality to which Clarke alludes in the Foreword of the earliest version of the poem:

> These verses come from the remote islands and capes of the west where light is still heroic. They are long for reasons of the sun and the slow burning of candles. They are meant to be chanted as music is still heard and not read: for poetry is incantation. [11]

The rich tone of Clarke's "clapper" sounds clearly in these lines of Emer from "The Music Healers" as she tries to soothe the demented Cuchullin:

> Sleep, sleep, little Hound,
> And sleep now, for drowsily under Slieve Fews
> The heavy dews creep on the bough, while I weep,
> While I weep. Let you yawn and grow weary
> And slumber. I would take off my shoes and move
> On bare feet through the house lest he wake,
> Lest he wake. I would lie down beside him and give
> My own sleep. For clearly I see now the morrow,
> Grey dawn on the lake, and sorrow with me, while around
> Every island wings drip. (p. 95)

Here besides a straightforward repetition of phrases, like "while I weep," the one end rhyme ("Hound," "around"), and the half-rhyme ("move," "give"), Clarke fills the verse with internal rhymes: "Fews," "dews;" "creep," "weep;" "I", "lie," "My:" "take," "wake," "lake;" "morrow," "sorrow." Similarly, the passage chimes with assonance like the "ee" sound in "sleep," "Slieve," "creep," "weep," "weary," "clearly;" the "ow" sound in "Hound," "now," "drowsily," "bough," "house;" the "il" sound of "while," "island" and the long "a" of "grey" and "lake." The sound pattern is further enhanced by Clarke's alliteration as in "you", "yawn;" "down," "drip;" and "with," "wings." These sounds blend into a rich

harmony of verse and the lines virtually sing with the varied and repeated notes. The verse is thus well suited for Emer's purpose of soothing the troubled Cuchullin. This short but technically packed passage is taken as a sample of the richness of Clarke's assonance and internal rhyme which give to much of the poem a fine lyrical tone.

While Clarke's use of the Gaelic mode is generally well wrought, there are occasions when the poet is guilty of excess.[12] Perhaps the most acute example of this failing is found in Emer's words to Cuchullin, again from "The Music Healers," "Cuchullin, it is I / Without lie, though I cry. Remember Emer, / How she would dream herself too brave, . . . " (p. 93). Here the internal rhymes, instead of creating harmony and aural pleasure, jar with their jangle and the assonance "Remember Emer," while less jarring, seems in the proximity of the words to be a poetic stutter rather than a controlled reverberation.

Another sin of prosodic over-indulgence which Clarke occasionally commits in The Sword of the West is his coining of new compound epithets in the Gaelic fashion. In what seems, in the best of Irish tradition, a contest against his mentor Sir Samuel Ferguson's "lavish use of epithet" (for example, "loud-lark-carolling May"),[13] Clarke gives us this heavily-laden instance: ". . . That dim-and-grey-cloud-wandering-

wolf: / The moon!" (p. 106). Though it can hardly be denied that we have here a fine metaphor, and while its excessive nature may be deliberate as the speaker has just been described as "crazing with the silence" (p. 106), the epithet is still over-done and would have been more potent if shortened.

In this poem Clarke seems to follow his Gaelic forebears in other ways besides prosody. Gaelic poets of the ninth and tenth centuries often portrayed the world surrounding them in a natural and spontaneous way,[14] as seen in the following exquisite example from the margin of a medieval manuscript:

> Ah, blackbird, it's well for you
> whatever bush holds your nest:
> little hermit who clinks no bell
> your clear, sweet song brings rest.
> (Version: John Montague)[15]

Here the monk expresses his kinship with the blackbird in a way which is as natural as the bird's song. The warmth of the mutual bond shared in nature, through the auspices of a benign Creator, is evident in the way even the bush responds by 'holding' the nest. Clarke describes the Irish landscape in a similar fashion with vivid and fresh language. Here, for example, is a passage taken from the "Concobar" section of the poem, where the "stranger" is describing to Concobar's court his journey in search of Dectora:

Men of the Northern Half, a fiery track
Was on the inland waters as I went down
The granite causeway rutted by old wars
From slumbering Emain Macha and below me
The silent plain was flowing into mist.
Wrapped in a skincoat heavy with pelting rain
Beneath the thorns, I waded, swordless, unknown
Upon my way, but when the sleeting light
Trampled the river and far mountains peeled
Against the racing skies and every stone
Was silver, on the miring plain I saw
The hurlers, sinewed with that sunlight, leap
Into the wind upon the stroke; but soon
Their shouts were smaller than themselves; I
    passed
The furrows of the hills, the gabbling ford
Where men have driven mares beyond the fields
Of greyish barley smoking in the wind
I leaned against the shower-sided days
In many a glen before the women came
To wash beside the river and the clouds
Were steeping their own shadows; and I caught
The bird-cry of a plain where only the wind
Herded the grasses and the rocks grew strange
And deeper in untrodden bracken. (p. 68)

The freshness of this description lies primarily in its concreteness. Here is no pastoral, idyllic scene, but the harsh reality of the Irish climate -- its "pelting rain," "racing skies," -- the rugged, varied terrain of Ireland with its ancient "granite causeway rutted by old wars" and its new, fresh "untrodden bracken." The images Clarke uses are vividly imaginative and portray, as do those of the early Gaelic poets, a sense of the unity of nature as, for example, in the image of the wind as a sheepdog herding the grasses on the moorland. Another image where Clarke combines the keenness of poetic imagination with the discriminating eye of an artist is in the description of the field "Of greyish barley smoking in

the wind." Here Clarke captures the sight of the long, feathery whiskers of the barley being blown hither and thither by the wind, their lightness and colour suggesting smoke. In this freshness and vivid detail, Clarke follows in the tradition of the nature poets of his country.

This passage of nature poetry is followed in "Concobar" by the stranger's recollection of a chance meeting with a "barefoot girl." This meeting enacts another common Irish motif and Clarke's use of it seems to be in imitation of the Gaelic poetic type <u>aisling</u> or "vision poetry." This genre is as old as Irish poetry itself and initially concerned the poet's vision of a beautiful woman with whom he falls in love. Later in the days of the Jacobite wars these vision poems, as used by the Munster bards, became more explicit expressions of nationalism. The vision of a beautiful woman appears to the poet and "reveals herself as Ireland bereaved or unwedded, waiting for the return of her spouse."[16] In this way the <u>aisling</u> became a vehicle for the pains and hopes of the country.

In "Concobar" the "stranger" experiences the vision thus:

> Once
> In a half glen I met a barefoot girl
> That ran beside the daylight-slips of water
> Calling wing-tilted creatures to her hand
> Before she sang:

'O when the air is blowsy
And the pools are blue, the goose-white clouds
gleam out
Across the bogland where the streams can light
Themselves at every rise, and the cold sun
Is heathering. But why do wicked paths
Of forest hide the glen of Lunasa?
Sweetness is there and the warmth of yellow
days,
Speckling of thrushes, murmur of bees
In bramble near the hazel and a browsing wind
Astray in grass.
O to be there,
Without grief, without care, though an hour's
flight beyond,
Lu stride, unclouded, to his fiery seat
And rousing in their underworld the gods
Begin to stretch.'
And as she sang in sorrow
I saw no messenger, no flock of geese --
Only the grey cuttings of the wave
On stone. (pp. 68-69)

On one level this meeting suggests the "stranger's" encounter with a woman of the Sidhe (a common enough occurrence in Irish tales) who recounts past pleasures of the other-world which have now been lost. If this level were all, the passage would be a minor episode of little importance to the poem as a whole. It seems, however, that there is another level of meaning to this passage, which coincides more with the idea of an aisling. A major theme in the poem is war -- on a literal level the war between Concobar's Ulster and Maeve's Connaught. The reason for Clarke's choice of theme lies in his attitude towards the mythology with which he worked. As he remarks in Poetry in Modern Ireland,

> Those Asiatic stories, changing as they moved westward through obscure centuries,

> seemed to adumbrate the forces stirring
> so violently again in the human race.[17]

These violent forces in Ireland at the time of his writing The Sword of the West (1920-1921) were the killings and reprisals of the guerrilla war of 1919-21, commonly known as "The Black-and-Tan War" or "The Troubles."

Clarke's choice of theme suggests, thus, the poet's desire to instil in his readers a national soul, by a retelling of the tales of Ireland's greatest mythic hero -- Cuchullin. With this idea in mind, the "barefoot girl" encountered by the stranger, who seeks, like a western Magus, the mother of the nation's saviour, Cuchullin, takes on the aura of the "beautiful woman" of the aisling. The "glen of Lunasa" suggests Ireland before the coming of the Saxon invader or the flight of the "Wild Geese." The latter term refers to those Irishmen who left for the continent after the defeat of the Jacobite forces in 1690-1, and the event is reflected in the phrase "no flock of geese." The sorrowing girl on a second level would seem to represent the troubled Ireland of Clarke's own day, wandering in the confused pain of war. Clarke again unites himself with the tradition of Irish poetry by his use of the aisling genre.

This idea of vision itself becomes a theme of the poem with Clarke donning the mantle of the Gaelic

fili in his role of priest, seer and poet as well as in his position of official custodian and transmitter of the mythological tradition. Clarke's declaration in the initial Foreword that "poetry is incantation" would support the idea that he saw himself as following the tradition of the _fili_ healing with his music the wounded country.

Clarke's mouthpiece for part of the first section of the poem, "Concobar," is the "stranger" already mentioned. The suggestion that the "stranger" speaks on occasion for the poet is based on Clarke's placing the "stranger" in the ranks of the _fili_. At one point in the "stranger's" narrative he speaks of visionary moments:

> . . . I dreamed of messengers
> Too great for thought that hides itself in time
> And all night heard the murmuring of new waters
> That go within the tide. (p. 69)

The "messengers" here would seem to be the muses who reveal the infinite to the "stranger" as he sleeps. The "waters" are in part symbolic of visions, as Clarke himself explained in describing a personal experience in _Twice Round the Black Church_:

> At night when I closed my eyes, I saw a continual succession of lakes and rivers gleaming beneath shadowy mountain ranges. I was much pleased, as water is a symbol of vision. The Gaelic poets were accustomed to think out their poems beside stream or loch though they perfected the assonantal patterns of them lying on their beds in the dark. [18]

Here we see Clarke's equation of water and vision as well as the link he makes with the symbol and the Gaelic poets.

The "stranger's" status as poet is further confirmed when he tells Concobar's court:

> . . . and I saw
> A crumbling well where nine old hazels swayed
> And in the waters the nine shadows. I
> Flung as a thirsted stag the louder leaves
> Into the darkness and drank where the waters
> Stumbled upon the stones. A river flowed
> Beyond that sacred well into the night
> And with its hazel murmur, dark in wisdom
> I crossed the fiery mearing of the sunset.
> (pp. 70-71)

Here not only does the "stranger-narrator" partake of water, but these waters find their source in the well of Segais into which the knowledge-bearing nuts of the nine hazels of wisdom drop.[19] The hazel-nuts according to tradition dropped into the well, creating bubbles of mystic inspiration to form on the streams that issued from it. Those who drank of this water obtained the gifts of the seer and the poet.

Thus the speaker is a _fili_, able to see the visions, and relate the great mythic events of the past in the present as they are shown to him. That the reader should link the speaker's poetic prowess to that of Clarke and hear Clarke through him is made clear in the speaker's definitive statement to Concobar. Here he explains the _fili_'s power to link the Irish people

with their spiritual essence as symbolized in their "gods:"

> I knew,
> O Concobar, that iron is unwrought
> When the last gods withdraw themselves from earth
> And sky, but those who dream of them again
> Shall be the holders of our darkened mind.
> (p. 71)

Thus the "stranger-narrator," like Clarke, sees himself as bearer of the Gaelic fili tradition with all the power that such a role enjoys -- the power to inspire, to persuade and to crush. Captured in the phrase "the holders of our darkened mind" is the poet's potential as keeper of the nation's lore to aid and inspire the nation in times of need, an aim which is, as suggested earlier, Clarke's own in the re-telling of these segments of the Ulster cycle.

An example of this process can be found in the speaker's recounting of past wars fought by Irish gods and heroes. He creates a sense of timelessness here with his recollection: "Vision hurried me on, vision hurried me back" (p. 76), a sense which underlines Clarke's concern for the Ireland of his own day. The last episode as told by the speaker incorporates what seems the essential meaning of these visions:

> A voice cried:
> 'Where
> Is Mannanaun MacLir?'
> And others clamoured
> That sea-name:
> 'Mannanaun, O Mannanaun!'

> Then dark against the sky a form
> Arose. As when our fishermen are blown
> With the last light of day towards a fiord
> Of Lochlinn, tossed on the billow tops, they
> see
> Between the storm-rents of sails and cordage
> A headland loom from the east, the blue-haired
> god
> Walked through the waves; he held in readiness
> A brace of javelins and on his forearm
> A shield of copper like a blood-red moon
> Clotted in sea-fog. At every stride of his,
> The shore changed to brine and the Fomors
> became
> A raft of tern, a row of rocks. (p. 79)

Here the Celtic sea-god Mannanaun MacLir seems to symbolize the essential Irish spirit neutralizing the effects of the archetypal enemy, the Fomors, the initial gall (foreigner) of Irish mythology. Clarke, like Yeats, associates the sea with the essence of Irishness.[21] Thus the seer/poet in this final vision sees the potential of the Irish spirit in overcoming the foreign invader, which, in turn, would seem Clarke's attempt to instil in his fellow countrymen that same spirit in their struggle against the foreigner of the twentieth century. In light of these findings,Clarke in the "Concobar" section uses the myths of war to encourage the Irish people to stand against their enemy. This cry is not, however, to be seen as "war-mongering." In the next section "The Music Healers," Clarke continues the "war" theme in quite a different way, a way which perhaps reflects his own moral uncertainty concerning the correct path for Ireland to take in her struggle

against Britain.

The ambivalence is drawn out in two ways, first through the lips of the hero Cuchullin, another archetypal figure of the Irish spirit of courage and strength. It is Cuchullin in his demented state who tells Emer of his nightmare:

> 'As I lay in camp
> Last night, I dreamed that a great maggot came
> Out of the river to attack me. But
> The famous strength that has afflicted me
> Because it is not mine, sprang into fury
> That hacked and hacked the monster into pieces:
> But all those pieces were a living brood
> And each one wriggled, hurrying by itself,
> Into the suck beyond. O then I knew
> Man may destroy all things but war. And I,
> Who feared no danger, was afraid.' (p. 98)

The nightmare of war is well depicted here. On one level the passage shows the hero's awareness of the horrors of war and that with his "famous strength" he has no need to warmonger to prove his heroism. But he feels always pressured to fight, for war keeps renewing itself. On a second level, Clarke may be reflecting his own ambivalence to the horror of struggle going on around him and his own fear, perhaps, that the guerilla war would simply continue to escalate with one reprisal after another.

The second sign of the hero's ambivalence is found in the dual-nature of Cuchullin's lover Niav, who is, it would seem, another personification of Ireland. The real Niav, as told in the cycle, is way-laid by

Badb ('scald-crow') one of the destructive female beings who prophesied and delighted in slaughter, and she, in the guise of Niav, appears in a dream to Cuchullin. Clarke, following the tradition, has this Badb/Niav figure cajole the suffering hero into going to war:

> Cuchullin, why do you dream
> In an ill-lighted house where only the smoke
> Of hillside twigs and damp can fight old wars
> In wintertime. This is the melancholy
> Of a lovesick youth who has tied his feverish
> hands
> To the bedpost because of an affliction
> That makes him weak. I hear the men
> Of Connaught marching and the rock-hid spies
> On the stagbeetle's track. (P. 98)

Here Badb in an effort to stir the hero to battle insults his manhood by comparing his behaviour to that of a youth unable to cope with his new-found manliness.

The "real" Niav comes soon after to warn Cuchullin not to go out for "the air is dangerous" (p. 102) but she is too late, for the Badb's work is done and Cuchullin is already in the throes of "battle-frenzy:"

> She could not tell
> The black from the purple pupil standing wide
> Apart, so terrible with sight . . . .
> She could not tell the black
> From purple, who with a cry for help
> Had fled into the night. (p. 103)

Cuchullin, in true epic fashion, must accept in the end his heroic destiny and go out to face his death. Here Clarke may also be indirectly suggesting the Niav/ Badb as an image of Ireland, a mother who calls on her

sons to die for her.

In the last two short sections of <u>The Sword of the West</u>, "The Circuit of Cuchullin" and the fine love lyric "O Love, there is no beauty," the poet continues in this ambivalent attitude. The first, "The Circuit of Cuchullin," deals with an early episode in the Ulster Cycle where the hero procures his famous magical horses -- the Grey of Macha and the Black of Sainglui. In this section Cuchullin rides all over Ireland in order to tame these very special horses described by the Morrigan as "the horses of day and night" (p. 112). This name suggests that Cuchullin's mastery of these horses makes him a master of time -- an immortal. Such an immortality would accordingly allow the mythic hero to return in time of need -- a favourite motif of the Celt, as found, for example in the Arthurian legends -- to aid a harrassed Ireland. This notion seems to be a part of the thrust of the passage where the hero is tempted to Tir-na-n Og (the Land of the Young) but manages to resist the temptation:

> Caressing them, smoothing their haunches, he drove,
> Without rein, into deepening silver and misty voices
> Out of the dubious borders of Tirnanogue
> Flowed to the saddle:
> 'Cuchullin, Cuchullin,'
> They murmured
> About him.

> 'Go with us, go,
> For we know of a brightness beyond the lit
> blade: there, the hazels
> Are nutting, day fades, and we move as the
> lifting gleam
> To the steps of the tide.'
> Shoreward he urged the great horses,
> For he knew the pale foam was enchanted and
> loudly his heart
> Had remembered the north, where men beat out
> the fire on the anvil,
> Cast the spear, ride, leap, and are glad. By
> mountain and field
> Where those hoofs ran, the farmers were turning
> in sleep as they dreamed
> Of new war. (pp. 113-114)

Here the Sidhe offer Cuchullin knowledge of the infinite, as reflected in the symbols of vision ("brightness," "hazels," "gleam," and "foam"), but Cuchullin's heroic spirit resists them for he knows the threat of war to Ulster and shows his willingness to die for his homeland. The link of Cuchullin with vision here prepares us for the merging of poet and hero in the final section of the poem.

Ostensibly the final lyric is a love poem spoken by Cuchullin to his wife Emer shortly before he goes out to die. Upon closer inspection, however, the poem reveals several levels of meaning. On one level, we find Cuchullin adopting the stance of the poet in his very first words:

> O Love, there is no beauty,
> No sorrowful beauty, but I have seen;
> There is no island that gathered sound
> Into dim stone from reeded waters
> But we have known.

Heart of my sorrowful
heart,
Beauty fades out from sleepy pool to pool
And there is a crying of wings about me
And a crying in me lest I lose you . . . . (p. 115)

In this passage, Cuchullin/Clarke cries to the muse of poetry to remain with him so that he may continue to "see" and "know" through the "reeded waters" of vision. The idea of poetic inspiration remains constant throughout the section in images of "water," "dreams," "air", and "fire." For this reason Clarke himself seems to linger not far below the surface, while the heroic Cuchullin is reflected in his Gaelic boast,[22] characteristic of the epic, -- "I have seen" and so forth.

Clarke's presence in this lyric in the role of poet is paralleled by the proximity of his own personal life to the sentiment expressed therein. On December 31, 1920, Clarke had married Lia Cummins, a marriage which ended, unconsummated, a mere ten days later.[23] This shattering event appears to be mirrored in this love lyric and Cuchullin's grief acts as an objective correlative for the poet's own.

This conjecture is based on the description of the beloved in the poem. The choice of images seems to suggest Lia Cummins, Clarke's own lover. The hair, for example, is stressed in the image of "a dark battlemented storm / Of hair" (p. 115), and later the poet again refers to it by saying to the lover "Drag down

your lonely hair / On the breasts no child has ever known" (pp. 115-116). This stress, together with the particular image used to describe the lover's beauty, "her sad beauty that was made / For candlelight and sleep" (p. 116), reflects Clarke's description of Lia in Twice Round the Black Church:

> Soon afterwards I became infatuated with a young woman writer who had come back from the continent at the outbreak of the war. Despite some rivals, I was soon a constant visitor at her flat. She was older than I and secretly I was tantalized by her past for, in one of her poems, she hinted that an Austrian officer had committed suicide because of her. The implication of cruelty made me uneasy at times but, when she lit two candles and let down her hair, I could not resist the pale gleaming of her face. She had ignored the new fashion and her black tresses reached almost to her knees: hidden poetically in their shadow I was well-nigh lost. 24

Here we see the personal enchantress associated with the same images of "hair" and "candle" as found in the description of the beloved in the poem. It is also noteworthy that the real-life enchantress had the dual-aspect of the *femme fatale* which we have seen working as a recurrent motif in the work as a whole, perhaps as a major objective correlative used by Clarke to help him sort out his feelings for his real beloved.

The *femme fatale* motif is also operating at yet another level in this final segment. Here Cuchullin, the national hero, talks to the personified Ireland as

his beloved and again the ambivalent pose is struck. Is it ultimately better to love Ireland but remain at peace hoping for a change to come, or to hate the oppressor and die for the love of her? This dilemma, which runs throughout the poem, as seen in the depiction of the proud heroic figure of Cuchullin, the attitudes expressed to war and the two-faces of Niav, is underlying the final words of the section and the poem:

> I know the steps of love.
> Take hands with me, sad dancers in the glen,
> For autumn leaves dance best when they are dead,
> And we are less than they, O bitter dancers
> That dance with bloodied feet. (p. 116)

Here the resolution of the hero's love of Ireland is, it seems, that such a love had made the "dance of life" painful rather than pleasurable, and yet somehow "the sad dancers," reflecting perhaps those alive who love Ireland, are "less than" those "bitter dancers," those who died for the love of Ireland in the Easter Rising of 1916 and after. It seems that Clarke's ambivalent feelings towards the Irish troubles end in seeing the Irish patriot who "dances with bloodied feet" as having now entered the great company of the mythic gods of Ireland -- the Sidhe, whose image is reflected in the dancing "autumn leaves."[25] Thus, despite its pain, the "bitter dance" for those who die fighting for Ireland's freedom is finally seen by Clarke as a better thing than

the "sad dance" of those who, though they love Ireland, continue to live passively under a foreign rule.

From this analysis we can see that <u>The Sword of the West</u>, despite an occasional unevenness in its prosody, is a worthy poem with its music, its fresh diction, its highly imaginative imagery and vivid detail, all adorning four sections woven together in an intricate pattern of image and theme.

In this poem, Clarke finds his true voice and by placing himself squarely within the Irish Gaelic tradition, produces a fresh and well-wrought poem. In his next book he will turn again to the Ulster cycle for its title poem "The Cattledrive in Connaught" (1925) and his themes from the earlier mythic cycles will both reach their peak and end in this endeavour.

Chapter III

Clarke continued in the Irish mode with his next book _The Cattledrive in Connaught and Other Poems_ (1925). The title poem of this volume he "based on 'The Pillow Talk at Cruachan,' the prologue to the _Táin Bó Cuailgne_, the great prose epic of the wars between the northern and western kingdoms."[1] The epic is the heart of the Ulster Cycle, from which he had drawn the material for _The Sword of the West_. This link with the previous poem is reinforced by the theme of war and the implicit concern with the political Ireland of Clarke's own day.

It is noteworthy, however, that _The Cattledrive in Connaught_ differs somewhat from Clarke's previous works in both form and tone. There is, for example, a new liveliness:

> I have a trick or two of tongue
> May please, for I have been acquainted
> With that most famous juggler, Mannanaun,
> Who runs from lordly fire to fire, ...
> (p. 117)

The almost jocular tone of these lines gives them a buoyant vivacity and the image of the poet as conjurer coincides with this air of animation. Such liveliness permeates the volume.

The title poem, "The Cattledrive in Connaught," likewise, has lively dialogues, earthy songs and brief

descriptions, providing a swifter pace than the often plodding description and lengthy monologues which slow and mar in places the previous poems. Kennelly's comments on the 1925 volume are apt:

> Clarke the dramatist strengthens Clarke the poet, and the earthy dialogue build up an atmosphere of colourful extravagance and boisterous vitality which distinguishes the character of the poems. [2]

The poem's very opening lines suggest a fresh approach in their liveliness and dramatic quality:

> Queen Maeve sat up in bed and shook once more
> Her snoring husband. (p. 135)

The realistic quality here is continued throughout the poem by an earthy diction: we find, for example, Maeve "combing out her dandruff" (p. 140) and MacDara's boasting that his bull "Will stand for fifty cows within a morning / And rage for more" (p. 148). This change of tone adopted by Clarke in this poem brings it nearer to the realistic elements found in the original saga.

The poem's freshness is further enhanced by Clarke's novel use of epic convention. The epic shield's depiction of the heroic world, in deference perhaps to Maeve as protagonist, appears in the description of Maeve's embroideries:

> Unwind the sad embroideries:
> Here are the fancies of young girls, for these
> Many a white thumb has been pricked and eyes
> Grown red . . . . Here the young men follow hounds,

Drive with the javelin into green woods
Of the boar. . . . Now the pale women sprawl
Heavy with rape and the sad tale ends
With the needle. . . . Green offerings are
    sedged
On the steps of an island. . . . Dimming swans
Reach out their necks to a star, the waters
    gloom
In threaded gales, the shining falls
From the loom. (p. 138)

Here is the heroic age depicted in peace and war in the same way as Hephaestus portrayed it on the shield of Achilles.[3]

Similarly, in an mock-epic way, the Homeric convention of cataloguing the armies or the ships is found in a most apt parallel, in part derived from the original, namely, the listing of Maeve's property:

All the brazen hall
Was studded with thick cauldrons that could
    feed
A county, rings, amber, bracelets, golden
    cups
So rounded that, being empty, they might seem
With grape, rich merchandise that had dragged
    down
New shipping to the beak, dapples of the fawn
And sun-white bedding, common wood as turned
Or carven into dragons as the harpwood
Aired with sweet music; . . . . (p. 140)

Clarke, showing a keen wit, enriches these epic conventions by domesticating the normally martial "catalogue" and the "shield."

Despite the "boisterous vitality" created by the liveliness of tone and diction, the poet's purpose in writing this poem was a serious one, as the poet himself

explained:

> . . . I wrote of the cattle war which was the start of the Cuchulain epic, for great miserable droves from the cattle market in Dublin passed our garden gate every Thursday on their way to slaughter in England and affected me in dreams. 4

This statement is augmented by another in Twice Round the Black Church, where Clarke writes of his first sight of a bull:

> Suddenly I stopped in superstitious dread; for there, black and horned against the last light of the west on the lofty bank above the laneway, was a motionless god-like image. By some obscure intuition I recognized the awful mithraic form. The ancient myths still linger even in the Liberties of many a city: and my father had told me so often at night the story of the Brown Bull and of the Horn of Plenty, had told it to me so patiently, each time, that I knew it by heart and in my sleep. The bull in that vestigial story was benevolent despite its supernatural strength. But this black image against the sky never moved in its terrible watchfulness. Such seconds of fear become as valuable to us as years. But for those seconds I do not think that I would have glimpsed that ancient piety and awe hidden in the cattle stories of Connaught and Ulster, the great Táin Bó Cuailgne. 5

In "The Cattledrive in Connaught" Clarke reflects these personal feelings of concern and awe in the description of the brown bull of Ulster, as outlined by MacDara:

> 'Aye, mighty is this Bull,
> This Bull, and he has farmed the mountain-
> lands
> With savage herds, dewlapped, fierce-sinewed,
> herded
> In thunder, and I tell you now that he
> Will stand for fifty cows within a morning
> And rage for more. Only one herdsman can
> Halter him. Boys could play hurley on his back,
> They could.'
>
> . . . .

> 'Aye, mighty is this Bull of mine,
> Where is his fellow? There is not a bull,
> Not one bred to withstand him. He will fling
> Your bullock on a horn. His roar is louder
> Than the lifting wave of Roary when the foam
> Is throning. (pp. 148-149)

Here the potency and greatness of the bull are clearly shown, its majesty being cleverly reflected in the image of the 'throning foam.' The potential danger and ferocity of the bull are also apparent, reflected in the choice of words like "savage," "fierce-sinewed," and "rage."

The possibility of a rampaging bull is thus hinted at, and while war itself is not depicted, it is, like the bull's rampage, never far from the surface. For this reason the bull, being the occasion for the conflict between Ulster and Connaught, aptly becomes a symbol of war:

> Storm crowded in the far sea-mountains
> Of Achill, broken into unploughed purple
> Against the thundering herds of cloud driven
> From the waterish hurdles of the west; by
> darkfall
> Strange voices moved among the desolate peaks
> Of war and the dim running islands gathered
> Their brood of sails for men had seen the Bull
> Of Connaught rage upon the shaken ridge
> Of the world. . . . (p. 143)

In this passage the storm, the war, and the Bull all seem to mingle into one great swell of impending disaster.

In <u>The Sword of the West</u>, Clarke used the mythic war of Connaught and Ulster to comment indirectly upon happenings in his own day; he does so again in "The Cattle-

drive in Connaught." In the latter poem, however, the struggle has changed somewhat. In 1925 the Free State was obliged to recognize the existing border between itself and the Northern counties which had remained under British control. The traditional saga of a war between Ulster and Connaught would seem ready-made to convey this political division, and for this reason Clarke may well have used the war for the Bull of Ulster to comment obliquely on the Irish situation, as it then stood. The disagreement between Maeve and her husband Ailill over the Bull of Ulster parallels the modern disagreement between Republican and Free Stater. Maeve's will, seen in the following passage as she sends MacRoth out to negotiate with Ulster, may suggest DeValera's initial desires as he sent the Irish delegation to London in 1921 to negotiate the Irish nationhood:

> 'Go, go,
> MacRoth, with drovers, stable boys and food,
> Hurry into his lands, and know a queen
> Follows your wind. Promise him what you will
> So that you get the bull, nay fifty bloods
> To stock his field or, if he would, the best
> Of acreage in Connaught that has yielded
> The sea no tribute. We give powers to you
> For peace and war. If he is filled with greed
> As such small farmers are, promise him more
> Than a foolish head can hold and pinch the
> bargain
> In the black o' the nail, or name the dreaded
> will
> And majesty of the west, for empty or full
> I will not sleep until I have that bull.'
> (p. 147)

Like the Irish delegation, MacRoth is a plenipotentiary

in this negotiation and, like them, he fails in his mission to gain the "Bull" by peaceful means. The term "plenipotentiary" is commonly used to describe the Irish delegates and it is noteworthy that Clarke himself uses it in the argument which heads the poem (p. 135). The loss of the "Bull of the North" (modern Ulster) in the Irish struggle was a major cause of the Civil war between the government of the Irish Free State (Ailill), which had settled with the British in the Treaty negotiations of 1921, and the hard-core Republicans (Maeve) who felt Ulster should be part of an undivided Ireland.

This allegorical reading of the poem is supported by the anachronisms which Clarke employs to hint at the idea of timelessness: first, the straightforward reference to a "concertina" (p. 146), secondly, the unobtrusive use of a Scottish dialect by the "bull-headed, blood-eyed" MacDara, the legendary bull's owner, in his determined cry, " 'The Bull / The Bull, / 'They wull na' take the Bull' " (p. 151). If Clarke did intend a different dialect, this phrase implies the speech not of an ancient Irishman but of a modern Ulsterman, duly influenced by the Lallan tongue of the Scottish planters. Thus MacDara may be a type for the loyalist Ulstermen who remain unwilling to join an all-Ireland Republic, and Clarke may be suggesting that this resistance may well result in war, just as MacDara's rebuttal of

MacRoth provokes the threat of war. Thus Clarke uses the mythical saga again on two levels -- the private, with his concern for the cattle and his awe of bulls; and the public, with his implied fear that the "Northern question" will bring war in its wake.

In this poem his vision stops at the brink of war and he offers no resolution to the war, literal or figurative. This treatment of the Ulster Cycle was to be his last attempt at writing an epic poem; he was to leave the project incomplete. Indeed, the incompleteness of the epic material is noted by Clarke himself in a short lyric, "The Tales of Ireland," published sometime later in his Collected Poems (1936):

> The thousand tales of Ireland sink: I leave
> Unfinished what I had begun nor count
> As gain the youthful frenzy of those years;
> For I remember my own passing breath,
> Man's violence and all the despair of brain
> That wind and river took in Glenasmole.
> (p. 179)

The feeling of exhaustion is explicitly stated in this poem. The poet declares categorically that the early poetry, written to help fashion the soul of his country and to alleviate the pain which dogged his own soul, is at an end. His youthful "frenzy," however, which created the early work, does not abate; it merely changes focus.

This change of focus is already apparent in the "other poems" of the volume, The Cattledrive in Connaught

and Other Poems. Here Clarke moves in his journey from the epic poetry of the Ulster and Fenian cycles to short lyrical poems, although he continues to use both the Gaelic poetic tradition and mythological material. These lyrics are not only fine examples of Clarke's poetic ability but also indications of the road Clarke intends to take. The freshness and buoyancy of "Induction," with its theme of poetic "conjuring," has already been noted. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the more subdued mood of "The Lost Heifer" written in "the mode of the Jacobite Songs," with the heifer symbolizing Ireland. Again the delicate beauty of Irish nature poetry is evident:

> Brightness was drenching through the branches
> When she wandered again,
> Turning the silver out of dark grasses
> Where the skylark had lain,
> And her voice coming softly over the meadow
> Was the mist becoming rain. (p. 126)

Here Clarke suggests the return of a "lost" Ireland in the image of the "brightness" breaking through the branches, and the "mist becoming rain" suggests a strengthening of vision, since Clarke associated water with vision. Clarke's ability to depict the natural scene so vividly is once more evident in the image of the heifer moving through the wet grass so that it shines silver in the light -- "Turning the silver out of dark grasses."

Another poem, written in the Gaelic mode, is "The Son of Lir." This poem deals with the happy legend of the magical god of the sea, Mannanaun MacLir, who "was wont . . . to ramble in the character of a prestidigitator, or professor in divers arts, one that on all and sundry played off tricks of wizardry." 7 MacLir, a figure of inspiration, demonstrates his mastery of the arts in the poem, while Clarke demonstrates his mastery of Gaelic prosody, as in this stanza:

> I wakened a land so quiet
> The glens were herded by a horn,
> But I followed far into the south
> The bird-lakes of the morning
> I was awhile on an island
> In a sunning mile of the Shannon
> And in the golden sedge of corn
> The men were rowing about
> And women brought the blue-veined milk
> For they turn the butter out. (p. 127)

Here Clarke, besides using the techniques of alliteration ("herded," "horn;" "followed," "far;" "about," "brought," "blue," "butter") and assonance (the "il" sound in "awhile," "island," "mile;" or the "o" sound in "followed," "golden," "rowing"), uses another Gaelic device, multi-syllabic rhyme ("rowing about," "the butter out"). Clarke adds to this demonstration of technical expertise -- again following the Gaelic mode -- by using a rhyme which falls only on one syllable of the second word ("horn," "morning", "corn"). Clarke's verse is thus made to sing. Here, however, it does so somewhat quietly, as though reflecting the quiet of the land, for the repetition

of the "l" in almost every line liquifies and softens the tone. Clarke's technical skill is once more in evidence as he continues to carry over Gaelic prosody into his English verse.

In these short lyrics Clarke also includes "A Curse," his first attempt in this Gaelic genre. In the days of the _fili_, a poet's curse was a dreadful weapon which men did their utmost to avoid. Having in the first stanza wished bad luck on him while he lives, Clarke in the second desires that the victim's sufferings will continue even after he dies:

> Yet, Seamus of the Bards, when you are dead
> And a curragh carries out the new coffin,
> Heavy with you within, heavy with lead,
> Because you let song go unfed,
> The waves will roughen near Inisbofin
> And moan around your lonely bones. (p. 118)

Here, Clarke, with fine wit, uses the "water," symbol of poetic inspiration, as the agent of revenge, both literally and figuratively, against the man who slighted the poetic profession.

The notion of the curse leads us fittingly to "The Frenzy of Suibhne," a poem about a man driven mad by a curse. This poem more than any of the others seems to point to the path which Clarke will follow in his later work. In fact, "The Frenzy of Suibhne." can be seen as a bridge which leads from one stage to another in the poet's journey. Here Clarke draws out, again at

various levels, the themes with which he had been dealing in the past, while indicating where he intends to go in the future.

"The Frenzy of Suibhne" is "based on Buile Suibhne, a long, tragic, medieval romance of a king, who, cursed by a saint, wandered in madness through Ireland." [8] By adopting in the poem the persona of "the mad king,"[9] Clarke once more follows the Gaelic tradition for, as De Blacam notes, it was "a common thing . . . to compose poems in the name of Suibhne". [10] The tradition of the poet as "mad Suibhne" is most apt for, according to Nora Chadwick, Suibhne was seen as a poet and his madness as inspiration:

> In the preface to an old law tract it is stated that one of the virtues of [the] battle [Mag Rath (Moyra)] was that as a result Sweeny, something of a philosopher, mystic and poet, became geilt (i.e. mad or crazy), 'but the virtue is not in Sweeny's becoming geilt, but in all the stories and poems that he left after him in Ireland.' 11

Thus Suibhne's frenzy or madness can be clearly seen as poetic inspiration. The frenzy is thus used by Clarke as a metaphor for inspiration and the tale itself as a vehicle through which he can express his personal life on three different levels -- emotional, spiritual and poetical.

The idea of poetic inspiration is seen immediately in the first stanza:

> Run, run to the sailmaker --
> While I pluck the torn white hedges
> Of sea to crown my head --
> And tell him to bind hard the canvas
> For the waves are unhorsed to-night;
> I cracked a thought between my nails
> That they will light a candle
> When I swim from the loud grass
> To the holy house of Kieran. (p. 131)

Since Clarke associated water with vision, Suibhne's request to be crowned by the waves would point to a desire for inspiration. This idea is supported by the image of the lighted candle which also reflects inspiration. The inspiration itself is linked with the mental state of the speaker, as suggested in the flea image, "I cracked a thought between my nails," which in turn hints at both the "frenzied" and "poetically inspired" state of the speaker/poet.

The Irish mythic and supernatural world is already implied in the image of the waves being "unhorsed," for the waves in Irish mythology are said to be the "steeds of Mannanaun MacLir," the sea god.[12] The fact that the waves are "unhorsed" also underlines the idea of instability or madness within the speaker's mind. The mention of the Christian saint, Kieran, in this stanza introduces the dual nature of the poem, as the speaker seems caught up in a no-man's land between two different worlds. On the one hand is the world of the Irish gods and heroes, represented by Mannanaun MacLir, while, on the other, the early Christian

church of Ireland, personified in Kieran. The idea of a world not having wholly given up the old pagan ways or having fully accepted the new Christian ones is a theme of the original tale, which includes among its many fine verses attacks on the clerical and monastic ways of life.[13] Clarke's purpose, however, for drawing on it seems to lie elsewhere. On one level, the poetical, Clarke seems to be coming to the decision to leave the epic tales of ancient Ireland, which he has been using for his themes and metaphors, and to move on to another Ireland, the Ireland of Christianity, of the early Celtic church, of Kieran, and of Clonmacnois.

That Clarke was ready to forgo using the saga material for his poetry is mirrored in the flight of the mad Suibhne from what seems the Furies or their Irish equivalent, the Morrigna, the three goddesses of carnage and war, and the Red Swineherd, whose equivalent in the tale, Mongan, is Suibhne's killer, and thus a personification of death:

> O to what household,
> Swineherd, Red Swineherd,
> Do you hurry unbidden
> That men may carouse?
> Breathe on their eye-lids
> And bound to the rafters
> May three naked women drip
> Blood; in their hearing
> Strange laughter and rapine

Of phantoms that tumble
From nothing, till fear
Empty the bladder,
Swineherd, Red Swineherd,
And shadows madden
The heart like a drum.
I hurried to the paddock
While stablemen were brawling
And under the bellies
Of horses I crawled:
. . . .(pp. 132-133)

Here, Clarke, through the mad Suibhne's words, shows a preference for the monastic seclusion of St Kieran to the violence of the pagan cycles, reflecting a desire perhaps to retreat into the quietism of the early church. The preference for St Kieran may also suggest the poet's desire to leave the epic war material and seek out the new poetic material in the saint's era (ca 516-549). Such a movement, on another level, suggests a desire to leave behind the public and private struggles he envisaged while using those sagas, a desire perhaps to have done with the wars which raged outside and inside as he, like a Cuchullin figure, fought to renew his own and his country's soul.

The personal, emotional pain which Clarke suffered over the estrangement from his wife, Lia, which we have noted in The Sword of the West, is brought out also in this poem in the ninth stanza:

Light
Rushed from doors and men singing:
'O she has been wedded
To-night, the true wife of Sweeny,
Of Sweeny the King!'

I saw a pale woman
Half clad for the new bed:
I fought them with talons, I ran
On the oak-wood -- O Horsemen,
Dark Horsemen, I tell ye
That Sweeny is dead! (p. 133)

The loss of the speaker's love leaves him feeling like the "living dead". The Horsemen, who perhaps signify the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse -- the agents of destruction -- are told they need not come for him for he is already "dead" from the grief of losing his wife.

The "mad" king/poet goes on to envision his own burial:

When tides were baying
The moon, in a glen
Of pools, I fed on
Grey cowdung: a hundred
Men hauling a slab
Upon the great dolmen
Of Sweeny the King,
From the shovels and barrow,

Fled. Nailing, I dug up
The gold cup and collar
And hid them in rain. (p. 134)

Again the images of water ("pools" and "rain") suggest the state of vision, while the "moon" reflects both lunacy and, due to its influence on the tides, vision. The fact that the poet/king sees himself buried may symbolize the poet's desire to bury his old self -- the epic poet of the age of the dolmen. Similarly, the "gold cup," which the frenzied poet digs up with his nails, symbolizes perhaps the new poetic material of the Celtic church. The gold "collar," reminiscent of the torque, suggests,

on one level, Suibhne's kingship, while perhaps, simply as a lost or buried treasure, it could reflect Clarke's religious faith. That faith becomes, in conjunction with the Celtic church, material for the fashioning of future poems.

The emotional and spiritual pain which the wandering Suibhne/Clarke has had to endure breaks out in the most poignant of lines:

> But how can mind hurry
> As reeds without feet,
> And why is there pain in
> A mind that is dead? (p. 134)

The question screams its own answer. Suibhne/Clarke, the king/poet, is very much alive and, with his poetic sensibility, feels so intensely.

The final stanza of the poem suggests again the duality in the poet's mind, the destruction of one world of the ancient kings and renewal in the Christian world with St. Kieran:

> I have heard the little music
> Of Midna, I have seen
> Tara in flame and a blooded moon
> Behind the Ridge of Judgment . . .
> But how can they find my name
> Though they are crying like gulls
> That search for the sea?
> Nine years I hurried from mankind
> And yet, O Christ, if I could sail
> To the Island of the Culdees,
> I would sleep, sleep awhile
> By the blessing of the holy Kieran. (p. 134)

Here the poet/king perceives the end of the old era, of Tara, and envisions the Last Judgment of the Christian

faith, hoping prayerfully to be among the blessed. In the original tale Suibhne dies reconciled to the church through the help of St Moling, a fellow poet:

> Suibne arose out of his swoon, and Mo Ling took him by the hand, and they went together to the door of the church. And Suibne leaned against the doorpost and gave a great sigh, and his spirit went to heaven, and he was buried with honor by Mo Ling.[14]

The use of St Kieran, founder of the greatest of Irish monastic schools, Clonmacnois, in the role of Mo Ling, indicates the new material Clarke will proceed to use in subsequent works. The reconciliation of Suibhne with the church may be a reflection of Clarke's own desire for a return to the religious faith he knew in an earlier day, when such faith held solace of hope for an eternal life of bliss reflected here in the image of "the Island of the Culdees." This island was, traditionally, an ascetic retreat; because its inhabitants never died the island symbolizes immortality. Clarke's poetic ability is never more finely shown than in the beautiful image of desolation found in the description of those who search for Suibhne:

> But how can they find my name
> Though they are crying like gulls
> That search for the sea?

With the volume The Cattledrive in Connaught and Other Poems Clarke reveals a greater degree of inventiveness, in his increasingly free experimentation. First in

his final epic, he shows a new liveliness, giving the saga swifter movement; his earthy diction gives the poem more of the spirit of the original, while still making clever use of the ancient tale to express private and contemporary concerns. In the lyric poems he develops even further his private and public role of fili, as he tries his talent in new Gaelic genres. His vivid imagination and fine technical ability shine as he journeys along in the path of his Gaelic masters.

"The Frenzy of Suibhne" takes a special place in this journey for it can be seen as a bridge which crosses from the saga-stage in his poetic development to the new stage of the Celtic-Romanesque period; from the poet's private and public soul-building to poetry which becomes increasingly a private and public examination of the soul so built; and, lastly, from the long epic sweeps to the shorter dramatic lyrics which characterize his verse from here to the end of his life.

Conclusion

"The Itinerary of Ua Cleirigh" (Gaelic for Clarke), another of the shorter lyric poems found in the fourth volume, is a poem which depicts Clarke's journey through the many scenes of Ireland. In the poem the journey is used as a metaphor for the writing of poetry:

> Were I safe in a glen,
> Halfway through the rushes
> When light was fishing the waters,
> I would have good walking
> From dewfall at evening
> Beneath the little trees of Nephin. (p. 121)

The symbolic "waters" and "light" of poetic inspiration help the poet on his journey. This metaphor is also appropriate in describing Clarke's poetic works wherein he journeys from the Irish pre-historic scene of the sagas to the early Celtic Church period, through Ireland of the Middle Ages to the world of modern Ireland, tracing as he goes the many scenes of his vision. The first four volumes of his poetry describe the first stage of his journey and provide glimpses of the second. While Clarke began his poetic itinerary following close behind his Anglo-Irish model, Herbert Trench, it seems fair to say he ended this first stage of his journey, despite the fact that he was writing in English, directly behind the long line of the Gaelic *fili*.

In *The Vengeance of Fionn* with its compound

epithets, we see the Gaelic influence first reflected in Austin Clarke's work. Though he took a detour in The Fires of Baal, with his third volume The Sword of the West Clarke returned to the Gaelic route. Here, he showed his great technical ability with his use of the Gaelic device of assonance, using it so well that his verse sings, becoming "A poetry of incantation." In this volume, Clarke also used two Gaelic genres to good effect. Following first in the footsteps of the ninth- and tenth-century Gaelic nature poets, Clarke created, within the epic frame, descriptive poems of great lyrical beauty and vivid concreteness. Secondly, Clarke adopted the mode of the Jacobite *aisling* through which he was able to give a greater clarity to the modern political implications of his epic poems. Clarke, like the *fili* of the past, sang not only "to sweeten Ireland's wrong"[1] but also to instil in her a national soul to help right that wrong.

In The Cattledrive in Connaught and Other Poems, the young Clarke further adapts Gaelic prosody to English by using multi-syllabic rhymes and cross-rhyming (a one-syllable word to one syllable of a longer word), increasing the music already sounding with the "clapper" of his rhyme, assonance. The result of these prosodic innovations in English is refreshing and revitalising.

In this fourth volume, Clarke also experimented with other Gaelic genres. One such poem is that of the traditional mad man in "The Frenzy of Suibhne." Here the "frenzy" is symbolic of poetic inspiration, a symbol used frequently by the Gaelic poets. Another poem, "The Curse," was traditionally a well-used genre, as, likewise, was "The Itinerary of Ua Cleirigh" which followed a "favourite [form] among the later Gaelic poets."[2]

All these examples show Clarke's desire to participate in the fili tradition, but while the thrust in this early stage of the itinerary was more to the making of a "soul," both public and private, Clarke was to turn to another aspect of the fili's art in an effort to examine the soul. He moves into his second stage, from soul-building to soul-searching.

The notion of an examination of the "soul" is suggested by Clarke himself. In a note to "The Young Woman of Beare," he writes:

> The drama of racial conscience did not attract our elder poets of the Celtic Twilight, though it particularizes that Gaelic poetry with which they were not acquainted at first hand. That drama has become intensified now. The immodesty of present-day female dress is denounced in virile Pastorals, and our Parliament passes law against temptations, the pleasures of dancing and courting. Novels which are liable "to incite passion" are banned and the present writer is among the Irish novelists placed on the condemned list. [3]

On another occasion, noted by Padraic Colum in his

Introduction to The Collected Poems of Austin Clarke (1936), he writes:

> Glancing through Irish poetry we notice that it was a medium in which could be expressed the drama of conscience and of inner conflict.[4]

Here Clarke expresses the need in the first statement for a public conscience and in the latter the idea of poetry as a vehicle for private conscience.

Clarke goes on to use the Celtic-Romanesque period as a foil against the modern, Jansenist Catholic church in Ireland. From building up the soul against the foreign foe, he now begins to examine the soul itself from the inside, placing under scrutiny both his own private soul and the official Jansenist public soul. In the role of public poet, Clarke adopts another poetic tradition of the Gaelic past by turning to that other attribute of the fili, satire. In "Celibacy" he criticizes the Catholic church, whereas in "The Young Woman of Beare" his satire attacks the repressive Ireland of his own day as opposed to the early Ireland with "its gay freedom".[5] Both of these poems are found in his next volume, Pilgrimage and Other Poems (1929).

At a personal level, Clarke uses the setting of the monasticism of the early Celtic Church in the volume Night and Morning (1938) as a vehicle to explore the two elements of flesh and spirit. Here his soul's struggle

continues, as his reason battles with his "tortured but persistent faith" [6] in an anguished examination of conscience. Thus Clarke continues his use of Irish themes in his later poetry to draw out his own soul's continuing struggles, while at the same time remains constant to the Gaelic tradition.

Clarke's method of using Irish mythology, in fact, makes a fine model for Robert O'Driscoll's general comment on myth and literature:

> With myth . . . . and a literature created from myth, modern man is released from the despair of an industrialized Iron age, and is provided with a link between his own age and the heroic age of the past, between his own individual consciousness and the consciousness of his race. [7]

Clarke's own public and private use of the myth seems to fit perfectly with this summation. He uses his material of the Gaelic past in the Gaelic way of the <u>fili</u> for he, like them, often addresses his poems, whether to instil a national soul or to satirize the church or state, to the public sector.

When we place this poetic method beside Clarke's brilliant use of Gaelic prosody, we have a <u>bona-fide</u> poet of the Gaelic tradition in the English tongue. This feat by Clarke would surely have silenced William Larminie who, arguing for a use of Gaelic assonance in English, claimed that,

> . . . Irishmen are indisposed to present their ideas to the world in any but the latest, the most fashionable, English garb. Therefore, perhaps, Englishmen, who have more self-confidence, will make some experiments to encourage them. Should the experiments fail, my countrymen will have been spared the trouble of a fruitless effort; in the event of success, they can then, how much less laboriously, follow in the beaten track. 8

The track, however, was beaten, despite Larminie's doubts, by the work of Austin Clarke, an Irishman, Gaelic scholar and poet, who, in John Montague's judgment and our own, "opened up the Gaelic tradition for Irish writers in English." [9] It is an achievement which has continued to affect Irish poetry down to the present.

NOTES

Introduction

1 Quoted by Barry Cunliffe, The Celtic World (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 205.

2 Richard Fallis, The Irish Renaissance (Syracuse: Syracuse U.P., 1977), p. 47.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 48.

5 For a summary of the work of these two scholars see Henry Boylan, A Dictionary of Irish Biography (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1978), pp. 257 & 261f.

6 Fallis, Irish Renaissance, p. 48.

7 See Kevin Nowlan's comments in "Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion," Myth and Reality in Irish Literature, ed. Joseph Ronsley (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier U.P., 1977), p. 10.

8 Sean Lucy, "What is Anglo-Irish Poetry? " in his Irish Poets in English (Dublin: Mercier, 1973), pp. 16-17.

9 Austin Clarke, "Gaelic Ireland Rediscovered: The Early Period," in Irish Poets in English, ed. Sean Lucy, p. 31.

10 The first Anglo-Irish poet to do so was Thomas Moore. See Patrick C. Power, The Story of Anglo-Irish Poetry 1800-1922 (Cork: Mercier, 1967), pp. 106-107.

11 Frank O'Connor, A Short History of Irish Literature (New York: Capricorn Books, 1967), p. 150.

12 Uncollected Prose By W.B. Yeats, J.P. Frayne ed., Vol I (New York: Columbia U.P., 1970), p. 87.

13 Both of these poems were included in the volume Lays of the Western Gael.

14 Fallis, Irish Renaissance, p. 52.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 48.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (New York: MacMillan, 1927), p. 272.

20 Frayne, Introduction to his edition, Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats, p. 43.

21 W.B. Yeats, "Battles Long Ago, "Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats, ed. Frayne, p. 351.

22 Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 272.

23 Lady Augusta Gregory, Cuchulain of Muirthemne (London: Murray, 1903), p. vii.

24 Austin Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland (Cork: Mercier, 1951), p. 7.

25 Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 240.

26 Ibid.

27 Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland, p. 8. cf. Brendan Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic Poem," Irish University Review, 4 (Spring, 1974), p. 30.

28 Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland, p. 8.

29 Ibid., p. 42.

Chapter I

1 Austin Clarke, Twice Round the Black Church (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 29.

2 Following Brendan Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 27.

3 T.W. Rolleston, Myths & Legends of the Celtic Race (2nd ed.; Montreal: Cambridge Society, n.d.), pp. 296-297.

4 Ibid., p. 297.

5 From the Argument prefixed to The Vengeance of Fionn in Liam Miller ed., Austin Clarke Poems 1917-1938 (Dublin: Dolmen, 1974), p. 3. All quotations from Clarke's poetry will be taken from this edition and all future page references will be given in parentheses in the body of the text. It should be noted that in using this edition I am quoting from poems which Clarke had in fact revised. The changes to the poems in some cases are very slight, in others more significant. The Sword of the West, for example, is rearranged to such a degree that it becomes almost a new poem. To have explored these changes would have altered the course of this thesis in too radical a manner. Therefore I have chosen to work only with the revised editions of all the early poetry.

6 Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 27.

7 Herbert Trench, Deirdre Wed and Other Poems (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 16. All quotations from Trench's poetry are taken from this edition and all future page references will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

8 Based in part on Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 27.

9 This passage used for a somewhat different purpose by Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 27.

10 Ibid.

11 cf. Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic" p. 28.

12 cf. Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 29.

14 Footnote in Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 30.

15 I follow Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 30, in this choice of illustrative passages.

16 Austin Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland, p. 42.

17 Robert F. Garratt, "Austin Clarke in Transition," Irish University Review, 4 (Spring, 1974), pp. 101-102.

18 cf. Garratt, Ibid., p. 102.

19 Austin Clarke, "The Poetry of Herbert Trench," The London Mercury, 10 (May-Oct. 1924), p. 158.

20 Ibid.

Chapter II

1 Austin Clarke, Twice Round the Black Church, p. 88.

2 Ibid., pp. 88-89.

3 Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 31.

4 Joseph Campbell, open letter to Stephen MacKenna, New Ireland, V (March 16, 1918), p. 307.

5 These lines may have been influenced by the opening of Keats's Hyperion.

6 Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic, p. 32.

7 I follow Kennelly in the choice of passage. See "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 32.

8 Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland, p. 8.

9 See Patrick C. Power, The Story of Anglo-Irish Poetry 1800-1922, p. 143.

10 See Clarke's notes in Miller's edition, Austin Clarke Poems 1917-1938 (Dublin: Dolmen, 1974), p. 194.

11 Austin Clarke, The Sword of the West (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts, 1921). No page number given.

12 Here I follow Richard J. Loftus's comment in Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1964), pp. 260-261.

13 Austin Clarke, "Gaelic Ireland Rediscovered: The Early Period," Irish Poets in English, ed. Seán Lucy, p. 34.

14 cf. Susan Halpern, Austin Clarke, his Life and Works (Dublin: Dolmen, 1974), p. 44.

15 Quoted by John Montague in the Introduction to his edition, The Faber Book of Irish Verse (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 23.

16 Eleanor Hull, A Text Book of Irish Literature, Part II (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1908), p. 195.

17 Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland, p. 42.

18 Clarke, Black Church, p. 69.

19 Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage, Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), p. 349.

20 Ibid., p. 161. Standish James O'Grady notes in his essay "Natural Mythology of the Irish," [Standish O'Grady. Selected Essays and Passages, ed. Ernest A. Boyd (Dublin: The Talbot Press, n.d.), p. 78.] that "the nuts that grew on these trees filled with knowledge the mind of any who ate them, so that to him the past and present and future were revealed, ..."

21 Frayne, Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats, p. 162.

22 cf. Yeats, "Fergus and the Druid."

23 Maurice Harmon, "Notes Towards a Biography," Irish University Review, 4 (Spring, 1974), p. 18.

24 Clarke, Black Church, p. 89.

25 cf. Yeats, "The Hosting of the Sidhe."

Chapter III

1 Clarke's note on the poem found in L. Miller ed., Austin Clarke Poems 1917-1938, p. 194.

2 Kennelly, "Austin Clarke and the Epic," p. 38.

3 Homer, Iliad. Book XVIII.

4 Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland, p. 42.

5 Clarke, Black Church, p. 61.

6 Clarke's own explanation in Miller's edition, Poems 1917-1938, p. 194.

7 Austin Clarke, Collected Poems (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936), p. 315.

8 Austin Clarke, The Cattledrive in Connaught and Other Poems (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925), p. 64.

9 cf. Yeats, "The Madness of King Goll."

10 Aodh De Blacam, A First Book of Irish Literature (Dublin: Talbot, n.d.), pp. 70-71.

11 Nora Chadwick, The Celts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 275.

12 Proinsias MacCana, Celtic Mythology (London: Hamlyn, 1970), p. 72.

13 See, for example, The Faber Book of Irish Verse, ed. John Montague, pp. 85-86.

14 Myles Dillon, Early Irish Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1948), p. 100.

Conclusion

1 W.B. Yeats, "To Ireland in the Coming Times," Collected Poems (London: MacMillan, 1958), p. 56.

2 Austin Clarke's note in Miller's edition, Austin Clarke Poems 1917-1938 (Dublin: Dolmen, 1974), p. 193.

3 Austin Clarke's note in Collected Poems. With an Introduction by Padraic Colum. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), p. 313.

4 Ibid., p. 18

5 Halpern, Austin Clarke: His Life and Works, p. 57.

6 Ibid., p. 62.

7 Robert O'Driscoll, "Return to the Hearth-stone: Ideals of the Celtic Literary Revival," Andrew Carpenter, ed., Place, Personality and the Irish Writer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1977), p. 55.

8 William Larminie, "The Development of English Metres," The Contemporary Review, (Nov. 1894), p. 736.

9 Quoted by Martin Dodsworth, "'Jingle-go-Jangle': Feeling and Expression in Austin Clarke's Later Poetry," Irish University Review, 4 (Spring, 1974), p. 120

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