

ELEMENTS OF THE FOLK HERO-TALE  
IN THE FICTION OF PADRAIC COLUM

By

Kay Diviney MacLaine

B.A. (cum laude), Augustana College, 1973  
M.A., Arkansas State University, 1974

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Department of English)

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 1984

© Kay Diviney MacLaine , 1984

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia  
1956 Main Mall  
Vancouver, Canada  
V6T 1Y3

Date October 12, 1984

### Abstract

The fiction of Padraic Colum (1881-1972), although it reflects important concerns of the Irish Revival, has been, like Irish fiction in general (Joyce excepted), almost entirely overlooked. To begin to correct this critical oversight, I have focused in this study on Colum's attempt, beginning with his children's book, The King of Ireland's Son (1916), to derive from the Irish folktale new and distinctive forms and themes for Irish fiction. In The King of Ireland's Son, Colum arranges and alters folktales to form a folktale-like synthesis which, however, expresses literary rather than folktale meanings. In Chapter I, I have identified Colum's folktale sources; in Chapter II, shown how he finds narrative patterns to convey literary meaning by transforming the traditional rhythms of the folktale into the literary rhythms of "deferral," "failure," and "gathering"; and in Chapter III, elucidated the themes--of the primacy of tradition in determining identity and of a new Irish heroism, that of the peasantry--which these rhythms are designed to express.

Folklore continues to influence structure and content in Colum's romantic novel Castle Conquer (1923), the subject of my next two chapters, although the superficial trappings of the folktale are absent. In this novel, Colum's new image of heroism blends romance, the anti-heroism of comic folktales, and the real-life example of Ireland's rebel-poets (Chapter IV); as well, Castle

Conquer's many interpolated stories carry the theme of oral tradition into the structure of the novel (Chapter V). The following two chapters are devoted to The Flying Swans (1957). A great achievement, this novel, with the disillusioned hindsight of the fifties, revises the ideas of heroism (Chapter VI) and of the relevance of folklore to life (Chapter VII). Yet Colum regenerates both ideas, in the process recasting in realistic terms the forms and themes of The King of Ireland's Son, written fifty years before.



## Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract .....	ii
Introduction .....	1
I. <u>The King of Ireland's Son</u> : Adaptations of Folktale Sources .....	19
II. <u>The King of Ireland's Son</u> : Transformations of the Narrative Rhythms of the Folktale .....	56
III. <u>The King of Ireland's Son</u> : Heroism and Politics .....	117
IV. <u>Castle Conquer</u> : From Folk to Literary Heroism .....	170
V. <u>Castle Conquer</u> : Identity and the Transmission of Culture .....	197
VI. <u>The Flying Swans</u> : Heroism, Realism, and Art .....	237
VII. <u>The Flying Swans</u> and Folk Narrative: Garbled Folktales and Irish Archetypes .....	275
Conclusion .....	320
Bibliography .....	329

## INTRODUCTION

Padraic Colum's literary career, which includes works in every genre, extended from one end of the century almost to the other. The sheer volume and diversity of his work make his career difficult to assess, but the fact that his writing life began during a national renaissance and ended sixty or so years later in a personal renaissance means that there is the additional problem of scope. During this time, Colum produced nine books of poetry, collected in three volumes; twenty one-act and full-length plays; two novels; twenty-five children's books; a long narrative poem; scores of short stories; three travel books; two biographies; and enough essays, reviews, introductions, prefaces, and other contributions to periodicals and to other people's books to bring the tally close to four figures, according to one estimate.<sup>1</sup>

A further problem in Colum's career is the fact that in 1914, newly married and struggling against poverty, Colum sailed for New York. What both Colum and his wife Mary expected to be a short stay in America turned into a lifetime of self-imposed exile which separated Colum from his natural audience, while his continuing Irish subject matter prevented him from entering the mainstream of American letters. Colum's personal anguish at separation from his native land, his family and his friends is reflected in his treatment of fellow-exile and namesake, Columcille, in The Legend of Saint Columba (1935). His sense of

artistic loss is represented in The Flying Swans (1957), when Ulick O'Rehill's clairvoyant cousin Michaelleen warns him against going to sea. "'You will have to cut yourself in two,'" she warns him, "'and each of you will be a stranger to the other.'"<sup>2</sup>

"What you love you'll leave behind you.  
 . . . There will be sights and people  
 you'll admire when you're away, and think  
 them the best in the world. But you'll  
 not speak for them--no, Ulick, you'll not  
 speak for them."

"I said you had wisdom, my child, but  
 there's something you don't know, and I'll  
 tell you what it is now. When you love  
 something you don't lose that love by  
 going away. You can keep it in your  
 heart or your mind or someplace." FS, 511-512

Ulick's defense holds true for Colum, who cherished in his heart an intense love for Ireland all his life. Nevertheless, Michaelleen's point is also valid where Colum is concerned. Her fears for Ulick's artistic suicide no doubt express Colum's own regret at the effect of exile on his work. Significantly, he prevents the hero of The Flying Swans from following in his path and possibly from losing the chance for artistic wholeness.

The length, productivity and diversity of Colum's literary life and the effect of his self-imposed exile have conspired to make Colum one of the most neglected writers of the Irish Literary Revival. His work receives comment, usually passing, in the standard histories of the Irish Revival, from Boyd's Ireland's Literary Renaissance (1916) to A. Norman Jeffares' Anglo-Irish Literature (1982). But few are the articles and books dealing with Colum independently, and fewer still those that are helpfully

and intelligently analytical. Some writers and critics seem to regard Colum as a genial and interesting relic of the days of glory, full of entertaining stories about his more famous contemporaries but not artistically important himself. The study of Colum's fiction undertaken here will attempt to demonstrate that this is simply not the case.

Of the work that has been done on Colum, a great proportion consists not of clear-eyed criticism but of reminiscence. In addition to the several personal accounts of Colum, many of the most important aids to Colum research blend critical (or quasi-critical) or bibliographic investigation with biographical sketch. Alan Denson's checklist remains indispensable irrespective of the "appreciation" with which it begins, a little less helpful than his two biographical sketches of Colum.<sup>3</sup> The two other major works on Colum suffer more than Denson's bibliography from critical slackness and preoccupation with the outline of Colum's life. Zack Bowen's study, Padraic Colum: A Biographical-Critical Introduction (1970), includes in its 150 pages, as its title suggests, a brief biography along with its survey of Colum's vast and varied canon. Bowen's book is a useful introduction to Colum studies, sorting out some of the facts of his career and providing a helpful overview, but quite naturally lacking in detail. Ann Adelaide Murphy has more space and less material to cover in her dissertation, "Padraic Colum: A Critical Study of His Plays and Poems" (1980), but this work, most useful in its presentation of relatively inaccessible Colum materials, offers

little in the way of analysis. The autobiographical element in Colum's writing, one of Murphy's interests, is a topic that merits discussion, but it requires a more exhaustive and analytical treatment than either Murphy or Bowen can afford. Indeed, Colum studies need urgently a good critical biography of Colum, as well as a selection of his letters and, possibly, a collection of his many scattered and almost entirely overlooked short stories.

The major studies of Colum, then, are critically insufficient, but more astute criticism of Colum also tends to be marred by the common critical misconceptions about Colum. In spite of a general lack of sympathy for Colum's interest in peasant Ireland, for instance, Richard Loftus's intelligent analysis in "Padraic Colum: The Peasant Nation," a chapter in his book, Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry (1964), is in many ways the ablest piece of writing on Colum. Yet Loftus founders on a misconception which, I fear, is both widely-held and damaging. He mistakenly finds in Colum's presentation of the Irish peasantry, notably in the theme of the heroism of the peasantry, an uncritical, sentimental, even perverse naïveté. In his most strenuous criticism of Colum, Loftus accuses him of exalting every quality of the peasant, no matter how mean or unworthy.

One may accept as virtuous the long-suffering of the peasants through centuries of oppression. But one may well hesitate to accept as virtuous the questionable avariciousness of the peasant for material possessions, especially land; yet clearly enough Colum represents his wandering suiler, who longs for "the good red gold," and his tenant farmers in The Land, who scheme and haggle in order to cut a few

pounds from the purchase price of their holdings, as objects for the reader's admiration.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the fact that "a few pounds" might seem more substantial to a tenant farmer than it does to Loftus, it is naïve of Loftus to suppose that Colum approves of the greed and small-mindedness of some of his characters. Among other things, Loftus neglects to take into account that these are characters and that Colum is writing plays and dramatic lyrics. It is as inappropriate to attribute to Colum the attitudes of the suiler (homeless wanderer) who speaks his poem as it is to ascribe to Robert Browning the sentiments of the Duke in "My Last Duchess." Loftus may be provocatively overstating his case in the above passage, for later he admits that it may be "unfair to say that Colum admires lowliness indiscriminately."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is perplexing and disturbing that such an able critic should so seriously underestimate Colum's subtlety and complexity. I suspect that Colum is commonly tarred with the brush that should be applied to his successors, who have substituted for Colum's original, authentic and intelligently considered insights into the peasantry the notorious "P.Q.": "Peasant Quality."<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, some of Colum's admirers are as guilty as his detractors of ignoring the complexity of Colum's view of the peasantry.

Loftus does offer, partly by default, a good reason for studying Colum's fiction. In the course of deriding Colum's treatment of the Irish peasant, Loftus names perhaps the most characteristic and important theme of Colum's work, the heroism

of the peasantry. "Colum seems to avoid the direct treatment of heroic themes in his verse," writes Loftus, "although in his prose he has done so on numerous occasions."<sup>7</sup> If we are to understand what Colum means by the heroism of the peasantry and go further than Loftus in exploring Colum's view of the peasantry, we must turn to Colum's fiction.

Charles Burgess, on the other hand, presents Colum as a lifetime dramatist manqué in "A Playwright and His Work" (1973), always vainly striving to recapture the fame that was his in the first decade of this century. But Burgess neglects a fact vital to the understanding of Colum's career: Colum stopped writing new plays and started writing fiction at about the same time. The last of Colum's plays for the Irish theater was Thomas Muskerry in 1910, the year in which Colum's dramatization of an ancient Irish story, "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel," was also performed. The first versions of "Theodora of Byzantium" and The Desert were completed in 1912. As Burgess points out, Colum continued to work on these plays for years, but until his return to Irish material for the Noh plays of the Sixties, he produced only two new works, "Grasshopper" (1922), a translation whose manuscript perished in the Abbey Theater fire, and Balloon (1929). In 1913, however, Colum published his first children's book, A Boy in Eirinn. He continued to write stories, both for adults and for children, throughout the decade. Then, in 1916, from America, Colum published The King of Ireland's Son, in which he synthesized folktales and original material. The success of

The King of Ireland's Son led to a long-term contract with Macmillan, which paid Colum \$250 a month for children's books until the Depression. In an interview with Zack Bowen, Colum reflects upon the importance of his work for children.

Yes, I like the children's books. I wrote them with all my imagination. They were commissioned, but I had my own way of getting by the commission. For instance, The King of Ireland's Son is a very important book.<sup>8</sup>

Although Colum produced these books by contract, he nevertheless saw them as an integral part of his literary expression. He goes on to say that, since these books are folklore, they have an interest for adults as well as for children.

Two essays on the course of Irish literature which were written at very important moments for Colum provide evidence of the deliberateness with which Colum changed his literary focus. The first of these, "The Irish Literary Movement," was published in The Forum in January of 1915, in the midst of Colum's physical move to America and literary move away from Irish drama. After surveying the development of modern Irish literature, Colum turns to recent writers, notably James Stephens. Stephens, Colum notes, has not written a play in spite of his "dramatic instincts," but has produced "the first contemporary romances that are distinctively Irish." Colum ends with the rumination that Irish literature may be moving from the drama to the novel.<sup>9</sup> By 1923, the year in which he published Castle Conquer, Colum is surer of the direction of Irish writing.



The great discovery for the last generation of Irish writers was drama; the great discovery for the generation previous was the personal lyric. It seems to me that the discovery for the present generation is the novel and the short story, and that the Irish writers will begin to reveal Ireland in the narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Although Colum, as Charles Burgess says, continued his energetic revisions of the plays that meant the most to him literally until his last days, when he turned his attention to fiction, he quite consciously and, I think, enthusiastically chose the genre wherein he thought the future of Irish literature lay. Yet just as Colum's fascination with drama led him to write dramatic lyrics when he turned to poetry, so it led to one of the characteristic marks of his fiction, the emphasis on orality, whether through the guise of a storyteller-narrator or through the constant tale-telling within his narrative.

Colum's fiction is a key to his career, then; it also includes two masterworks, The King of Ireland's Son and The Flying Swans. Yet Colum's fiction is the least studied part of his canon. As Zack Bowen points out, Colum's reputation was made as a playwright and poet. Readers who knew about him were likely to give his new poems and plays greater attention than his stories or novels.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the neglect of Colum's fiction reflects the tendency of critics of modern Irish literature, until quite recently, to concentrate almost exclusively on drama and poetry. Even so, several writers who have been reluctant to study Colum's novels, stories or children's books have conceded

their importance to a full understanding of Colum's work. In addition to Loftus, Ann Adelaide Murphy makes use of Colum's fiction, mining The Flying Swans for autobiographical insights even though her topic is Colum's plays and poems. In the larger field of Irish studies, Colum's novels sometimes receive mention, although never study. For instance, Benedict Kiely does not include Castle Conquer in the body of his Modern Irish Fiction (1950), yet he finds it sufficiently expressive of some of the concerns of post-revolutionary writers to begin with it in his preface. Loftus, Murphy and Kiely each in his or her own way indicates the interest of Colum's fiction, but the critical treatment of each of the three sub-genres--stories, novels, children's works--is limited to what Bowen can accomplish in Padraic Colum: A Biographical-Critical Introduction. The Flying Swans, reissued by Dublin's Allen Figgis press in 1969, seems to be the most likely of Colum's prose works to receive further critical attention. Bowen regards it highly, and A. Norman Jeffares considers it to be "underrated".<sup>12</sup> Certainly there is a need for some discussion of this novel, most properly in the context of Colum's fiction.

Most of Colum's fiction is an effort to resolve a problem of vital concern to Colum, the relationship between the traditional culture of the Irish people, especially the folktale, and "real life," which can mean, variously, the "folk life" of the Irish peasantry, life as Colum himself knew it, and urgent issues like the political destiny of the Irish nation. Colum's interest in

relating Irish culture to modern life was entirely of his age. Since Standish James O'Grady's invention of the notion of an ancient heroic Ireland in The History of Ireland: Heroic Period (1878) and his popularization of Irish heroic sagas in The Coming of Cuchulain (1894), Irish activists and writers alike had been turning to the early sagas and romances for an image of Ireland that could lift it from its political and literary doldrums. The folklore, particularly heroic tales, collected by Patrick Kennedy, William Larminie, Jeremiah Curtin, Douglas Hyde and others, was seen as a vestigial manifestation of an erstwhile distinctive, glorious and ascendant Irish culture. The revived Irish heritage was instrumental in the evolution of a national consciousness which gave rise to the political activity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as to a resurgence of literary activity. Colum was fascinated with the moment when an individual or a nation achieves a sense of identity, a prerequisite for what might be termed "heroic action." He was particularly interested in the role which traditional heroic images played in the emergence of Ireland's new sense of nationhood.

Colum was, then, deeply impressed with the importance of the rediscovery of an Irish cultural heritage, yet at the same time he came to be deeply suspicious of the stirring but naïvely romantic, even dangerous hero-worship that sent so many young men, during the Land Wars, the revolution, and the Civil War, to early and sometimes all but pointless deaths. The parallels between the superficially quite different worlds of folktale and

real life appeared almost mystically significant to Colum--adventures and quests that embody the experience of a countryside full of ramblers, the heroic struggles, often on behalf of home and family, against villains who were as oppressive as the British government in Ireland. But Colum was also painfully aware of the gap between marvellous folklore and intransigent reality. He held as folly the inclination to apply the easy and natural heroism or the magnificently assured outcomes of the folktale to a modern life whose nature is quite different from what the folktale portrays. As the exhilarating national resurgence of the beginning of the century gave way to a bitter rebellion in the century's teens, a disappointing treaty and devastating Civil War in the twenties, and the dull aftermath of national liberation in the thirties, forties and fifties, Colum's revision of folklore and heroic stories in his fiction became progressively more radical. Yet Colum continued to find value in folklore, and uses it extensively in his last work of fiction, The Flying Swans.

While Colum was not himself a folklorist, and disclaimed the label when others applied it to him, there can be no doubt that he was thoroughly familiar with the subject, perhaps more so than any other writer of the Irish revival, with the exception of the professional folklorists.<sup>13</sup> Colum's introduction to folklore came during his boyhood, when storytellers would stop for a ceilidh at Colum's grandmother's house in County Longford, and when his uncle Micky Burns would place him before the ballad singers at the country fairs. Like many of his contemporaries, among them Yeats and Lady Gregory, Colum was an amateur folklore

collector, taking frequent excursions into the countryside in search of tales, songs and anecdotes. By 1924, Colum's work with folklore and mythology from many countries was so well known that he was commissioned by the government of the state of Hawaii to work with their aboriginal materials. An anecdote told by Mary Colum about their joint trip to isolated Polynesian villages in search of folklore is a good illustration of the spirit with which Colum attacked such projects. Mrs. Colum, exhausted by the rigors of fairly primitive travel, aching for a good bed and a cup of coffee, was sent back to civilization by her husband, who was himself delighted to stay on.

After tramping around all day in the open listening to stories, songs, and watching hulas, he could eat anything and sleep anywhere. As the car drove out of the village with me, I looked back and saw him standing in a group waving to me-- a smallish white man surrounded by very large, very tall, dark-skinned men.<sup>14</sup>

Mary notes that Padraic was "indefatigable in digging into native lore and native life."

As a young man in Ireland he had been conditioned into just such studies, loved them, and developed a strong admiration for the Hawaiian race and its historical characters.<sup>15</sup>

Mary Colum's account indicates that Colum's interest in folklore and "primitive" societies was temperamental as well as intellectual and philosophical. Of all of the many writers of the Irish Revival who turned to folk materials, Colum had probably the most intense and genuine as well as the longest-lasting commitment. In addition

to his field-work, in Ireland and elsewhere, he was an eager and omnivorous reader, so much so that in Orpheus: Myths of the World (1930), he is able to present stories from an astonishing range of cultures, not only Celtic, Greek, Norse and Hawaiian, but also Icelandic, Babylonian and Zuni. His books for older children include books of Irish and Welsh stories as well as Classical and Teutonic.<sup>16</sup> Colum also knew the work of many major and minor students of ancient and traditional culture, for references to folklorists like Alfred Nutt, Jeremiah Curtin and Kuno Meyer are sprinkled through Colum's writings.<sup>17</sup> The knowledge on which Colum draws when he carries folklore into literary fiction, then, is at once detailed and comprehensive. Colum's well-developed and intricate perception of the formal properties of the folktale means that he manipulates with wit and imagination folktale narrative structures demanding of close study.

In initiating serious study of Colum's fiction in the following work, I have focused on the best and most important of Colum's children's books, The King of Ireland's Son (1916), and on both of Colum's novels, Castle Conquer (1923) and The Flying Swans (1957). My theme, Colum's transformations of Irish hero-tales in his prose fiction, includes Colum's treatment of ideas of heroism drawn from folklore as well as his use of the narrative structures of the folktale, which I discuss in separate chapters for each book. The formal and thematic properties of folktale heroism are not entirely discrete, however, and the reader will find considerable overlap in Chapter VI, on Colum's transformation

of heroism in The Flying Swans, and Chapter VII on his transformation of folktale structure, which in that book has important implications for the heroism of the protagonist. Because of the specificity of Colum's use of the folktale in The King of Ireland's Son, the discussion of that book demands a third chapter, an initial careful analysis of the folktale materials in the text. Since we do not know precisely what sources Colum had at his fingertips, we need a special methodology for deducing from the evidence of the text itself the kinds of materials that Colum used. The concepts of "tale type" and "motif," developed and catalogued by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson and extended to Irish tales by Reidar Christiansen and Séan Ó Suilleabháin, are vital to this investigation, making possible the identification of actual folktales and elements of folktales embedded in the text. In addition, the examples of tales in the great collections of Irish folklore facilitate the recognition of Colum's alterations of the tales of the same type as those with which he was working.

Although the discussion centers on the analysis of Colum's uses of folklore in The King of Ireland's Son, Castle Conquer, and The Flying Swans, there are a number of related topics which I shall touch on where I can. I have tried to place each book within the chronology of Colum's career, and I hope that in this way, as well as by relating the particular books under study with those other Colum works which share its concerns, the discussion may be broadened to contribute to the critical understanding of Colum's career as a whole. I have tried as well to keep in mind

the larger question of how Colum's work with folklore and fiction relates to the concerns with heroism and experiments in literary form of other writers of the Irish Revival.

Thomas Flanagan, the major historian of the Irish novel, observes in The Irish Novelists: 1800-1850 (1959) that "the history of the Irish novel is one of continuous attempts to represent the Irish experience within conventions that were not innately suited to it."<sup>18</sup> Like Flanagan, Padraic Colum, writing in "The Promise of Irish Letters", puts Maria Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent (1800) at the beginning of the tradition of the Irish novel. But after the long, unsuccessful struggle of the nineteenth century, during which, Colum says, Sir Walter Scott's transformation of Edgeworth's masterpiece, however well-meaning, effectively ruined Edgeworth as a model for Irish writers, Irish fiction was finally about to come into its own in Free State Ireland, or so Colum predicted. His thesis is that the new Irish novel will have to have a new form if it is to express Irish themes and be "in harmony with the racial genius," and he finds that writers have already begun the work.

The first Irish novel, as I think, whose form is in harmony with the racial genius is James Stephen's "Mary Mary." With something that seems like the spontaneous invention of the folk-tale James Stephens wrote the first story of Dublin life; then there came "The Crock of Gold," in which he wove together a fresh humor and a fresh poetry, making a story as extravagant as the heart of any story-teller might desire. Then came James Joyce with "The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"-- a book that is the equivalent of one of Synge's dramas, with the stories in "Dubliners" that



are equivalent to Synge's short plays, and now with "Ulysses" that is no less than a portent. In the meantime James Stephens publishes a book that has a misnomer for title--"Irish Fairy Tales"--in which, in an astonishing way, he recovers the tradition of tenth-century Irish story-telling.<sup>19</sup>

While Colum's breezy sentence on Joyce, along with his brief survey of other contemporary writers--Brinsley MacNamara, Seumas O'Kelly, and Daniel Corkery--who also created new Irish forms, indicates Colum's awareness of the literary house which he inhabited, what this passage most strongly reveals is Colum's enthusiasm for folklore and storytelling as formal models for the Irish novel. This passage and the passage from "The Irish Literary Movement" quoted above suggest that James Stephens, who expresses his "dramatic impulse" through prose romance, drawing freely on folk and ancient Irish tradition, was an important inspiration for Colum. He compares Mary, Mary, known in Europe as The Charwoman's Daughter (1912), to a spontaneously invented folktale and places The Crock of Gold in the tradition of extravagant storytelling. He finds "astonishing" the duplication of an ancient Irish storytelling tradition in Irish Fairy Tales (1923). Colum, as he wrote this, had half a dozen of his own syntheses of folktales on the shelf behind him and his new prose romance, Castle Conquer, on the table before him. There can be little doubt that, as Colum turned to folktales and storytelling for the forms and the content of his narratives, he hoped to create from them a structure for his novels that would be distinctively Irish. It is the Irish fictional forms that Colum created and some of the Irish themes that he explored that this study will attempt to elucidate.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Zack Bowen and Gordon Henderson, "Introduction: Padraic Colum, 1881-1972," Journal of Irish Literature 2 (January, 1973) 1, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> The Flying Swans (New York: Crown, 1957), p. 501; hereafter cited in the text, as FS.

<sup>3</sup> "Padraic Colum: An Appreciation with a Check-list of His Publications," Dublin Magazine 6 (Spring, 1967) 1, pp. 50-67, was continued in "Padraic Colum: Factual Additions and Corrections to a Checklist of His Publications," Dublin Magazine 6 (Summer, 1967) 2, pp. 83-85. Denson's other articles on Colum are "Padraic Colum at Ninety," Irish Times (December 8, 1971), p. 10, and "Padraic Colum, 1881-1972," The Capuchin Annual (Dublin, 1973), pp. 45-54.

<sup>4</sup> Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> Nationalism, p. 185. A belated objection to Loftus's discussion was lodged by Douglas S. Campbell in "Padraic Colum's Celebration of Littleness," Eire-Ireland 9 (Autumn, 1974) 3, pp. 60-68.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Howarth quotes AE on the Irish stage peasant: "'Mr. Padraic Colum's peasants, in the days when they were seen there, seem to us to have been the only real human beings among the many peasants that have trod the boards of the Abbey Theatre.'" The Irish Writers, 1880-1940 (London: Rockliff, 1958), p. 229. AE's complaint is against the "School of Synge" playwrights who were in reaction to the "sunburstery" of the highly idealized stage versions of Irish peasantry.

<sup>7</sup> Nationalism, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> "Ninety Years in Retrospect," Journal of Irish Literature 2 (January, 1973) 1, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> The Forum 53 (January, 1915) 1, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> "The Promise of Irish Letters," The Nation, October 10, 1923, p. 396.

<sup>11</sup> Padraic Colum: A Biographical-Critical Introduction (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Padraic Colum, p. 98; A. Norman Jeffares, Anglo-Irish Literature (Dublin: Macmillan, 1982), p. 272. In contrast, Charles Burgess

recounts an exchange he had with Colum. To Colum's question, "'If I'm not a poet, what am I,'" Burgess responds, "'No offense to The Flying Swans, but you're certainly not primarily a novelist.'" "A Playwright and His Work," Journal of Irish Literature 2 (January, 1973) 1, p. 43. Recently, The Flying Swans has been the subject of a paper, "Autobiographical Elements in The Flying Swans," delivered by Ann Adelaide Murphy to the May, 1983, conference of the American Committee for Irish Studies.

13 And, according to Alan Denson, Seumas MacManus. "Padraic Colum, 1881-1972," p. 48. It is fitting, then, that Colum has written the introduction to one of MacManus's collections of folktales, Hibernian Nights (1963). Colum disclaims the name of folklorist in "Ninety Years in Retrospect," p. 26.

14 Life and the Dream (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1947), p. 329.

15 Life and the Dream, p. 317.

16 Colum's many Irish books include The King of Ireland's Son, first published in 1916 and reprinted in 1920, 1921, and 1962; The Frenzied Prince, 1940; and The Big Tree of Bunlahy, 1933. He retold Welsh stories from The Mabinogion in The Island of the Mighty: Being Stories of Celtic Britain Retold, 1924. Colum's classical stories include The Adventures of Odysseus, 1918, republished in various forms in 1920, 1946 and 1962; and The Golden Fleece and the Heroes Who Lived before Achilles, 1921, 1957, and 1962. The Children of Odin (1920, 1948 and 1962; London editions in 1922 and 1929) is a version of the Teutonic mythology of the Nibelunglied.

17 Colum indicates as well that his books of folklore often entailed considerable research.

If they asked me to write a book on folklore, why I wrote it. I didn't get it wrong, you know. I looked it up and consulted the authorities in the libraries and so on.

"Ninety Years," p. 27.

18 Flanagan, The Irish Novelists (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 334.

19 "The Promise of Irish Letters," p. 397.

# I: The King of Ireland's Son: Adaptations of Folktale Sources

The King of Ireland's Son (1916) is not Padraic Colum's first children's book; A Boy in Eirinn (1913) precedes it by three years. It is, however, one of the most widely known of all Colum's works, having gone through one German, one Irish and four English editions, and having inspired the German film "Fidelma," named after one of the book's heroines.<sup>1</sup> It is also the true beginning of Colum's career as a children's writer. Its commercial success made possible Colum's future career in children's as well as "adult" literature in a very material way: Macmillan immediately contracted with Colum for two children's books a year, the source of his bread and butter until the Depression. In addition, in The King of Ireland's Son, Colum found the subject matter, style and technique that would characterize his children's books ever after. In The King of Ireland's Son, a clever interlacing of two youths' separate adventures in pursuit of a Sword of Light, a Crystal Egg, and a story, the Unique Tale, which reveals the secret of their own common parentage, Colum achieves his "great synthesis of fireside tales."<sup>2</sup> His narrative is constructed from Irish folktales, parts of folktales, and original material framed in imitation of folktales. The King's Son's narrative frame, furthermore, in which Colum assumes the voice of a storyteller speaking to children, attempts to transfer the essence of folk storytelling to the printed page. This pattern of several traditional stories embedded in a story-

telling frame provides the model for many of Colum's later children's books, among them The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter (1920), The Forge in the Forest (1930), The Big Tree of Bunlahy (1933) and The Frenzied Prince (1943).

My purpose in this chapter is to identify, insofar as possible, the folktale materials in The King of Ireland's Son. While most of the readers of the book would probably recognize its basis in folklore, few would be familiar enough with Irish folktales to recognize all of the tales that Colum uses or to distinguish accurately the folktale content from Colum's folktale-like invention. Yet without knowing where folktale leaves off and literature begins in The King of Ireland's Son, we can hardly assess Colum's craftsmanship. My initial task, then, is to determine the folktale sources for Colum's narrative. My second task follows from the first, since I cannot discuss Colum's sources without discussing his adaptation of folktales--his extraction of parts, his rearrangement of narrative incident, and his method of combining several tales into a larger narrative. These considerations are primarily structural, but since some of the fundamental changes in Colum's sources are designed to introduce into the narrative concerns such as depth of character and thematic meaning that the folktale by its nature excludes, other observations will focus on narrative style. In addition, I mean to examine briefly Colum's re-creation of the context of the folktale, the storytelling situation, in the narrative frame of The King of Ireland's Son. This survey and analysis of folktale sources and their

transformations is a necessary preliminary to the closer study in Chapters II and III of Colum's adaptation of folktale content and structure to his own more literary intent.

Colum's principal comments about the sources for The King of Ireland's Son were made in the course of a series of interviews with Zack Bowen, excerpted in "Ninety Years in Retrospect." Colum recalls how he first began publishing folklore, encouraged by Betsy Brewer, a New York newspaperwoman, and Willy Pogany, the Hungarian illustrator who collaborated with Colum on The King of Ireland's Son, The Children of Odin (1920), The Frenzied Prince and several other books.

I had some books in Irish I was translating just to keep my hand in. Then Willy Pogany said that he would like to do an Irish book, but I hadn't any Irish book written. I had these translations and I suddenly thought that I could put them together. And I did and I made the first part of The King of Ireland's Son. Miss Betsy Brewer paid me eight dollars a week for The King of Ireland's Son.

INTERVIEWER: Was she printing it chapter by chapter?

COLUM: Yes, as I wrote it. They had a column in the Sunday Tribune.<sup>3</sup>

This interesting account is troubling as well as illuminating. What books was Colum translating? Their identity, which would allow a careful comparison of Colum's sources for part of the book and his revisions of them, has remained unfortunately elusive. A more easily resolved problem is the meaning of the phrase "the first part of The King of Ireland's Son." Colum evidently refers here not to the first section of the book, but to the first part

that he wrote, for the series that ran in the New York Tribune for ten weeks in late 1915 and early 1916 was "The Giant and His Servants," which became, with substantial revisions, "The House of Crom Duv," the penultimate section of The King of Ireland's Son.

Colum names another source for the book when he goes on to tell Bowen, "I began by telling the stories from my grandmother's house in The King of Ireland's Son."<sup>4</sup> Like the earlier comments, this remark is too vague to enable the identifications of any particular tales from which Colum was working. In "The Tradition That Existed in My Grandmother's House," the reminiscence in which Colum elaborates on the storytelling milieu in which he found himself as a child, he refers to two memorable stories which undoubtedly did influence The King of Ireland's Son. "I listened to one tell about the Eagle that was the oldest creature in the world," he writes, but he tells us no more about this Eagle (which perhaps was in his mind as he created Laheen the Eagle and the Eagle-Emperor for The King's Son) except to observe that the storyteller seems to perceive such beasts as symbols.<sup>5</sup> Colum goes on to recall another tale told by the same storyteller,

And what was the story? One of a hundred  
of the same pattern--a king's son, an  
enchanter or a king's daughter, a steed  
that had some magical endowment.<sup>6</sup>

King, king's son, enchanter, daughter and steed all appear in The King of Ireland's Son, but as Colum himself points out, these

details are hardly enough to define a specific source, which could be any of a hundred or so of the same genre.

Translations of unnamed books of Irish folktales, stories remembered from childhood, and, as Colum tells Bowen, "all my imagination"<sup>7</sup>: Colum's sources for The King of Ireland's Son are less than accessible to us today. Yet folktales generally do not exist as single examples, notwithstanding a counterexample cited in "The Tradition That Existed in My Grandmother's House," an exception whose rarity proves the rule.<sup>8</sup> They are local examples of tale patterns that have national and often international distribution. Stith Thompson gives this definition of "tale type," distinguishing it from "motif," in his book, The Folktale.

A type is a traditional tale that has an independent existence. It may be told as a complete narrative and does not depend for its meaning on any other tale. It may indeed happen to be told with another tale, but the fact that it may appear alone attests its independence. It may consist of only one motif or of many. Most animal tales and jokes and anecdotes are types of one motif. The ordinary Märchen (tales like Cinderella or Snow White) are types consisting of many of them.<sup>9</sup>

Since no two tellings of a tale are apt to be exactly alike, individual folktales, such as those Colum heard at his grandmother's hearthside or those that make up a volume of tales, are considered to be "variants" of the tale type, with the term "version" reserved for tales with substantial variation from the standard pattern of the tale type. Because individual folktales are related to others



of the same tale type, we can, I think, determine with some accuracy what in The King of Ireland's Son comes from the folktale and what does not, first analyzing the book for the tale types which it includes, consulting Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's catalogue of international tale types, The Types of the Folk-Tale (1928), Reidar Christiansen and Séan Ó Súilleabháin's The Types of the Irish Folk-Tale (1963) and Ó Súilleabháin's A Handbook of Irish Folklore (1942); and then comparing the text of The King's Son to the summaries of the international tale types given in Thompson's The Folktale and to Irish examples of these tales from the collections of Kennedy, Jacobs, Yeats, Hyde, Larminie, Curtin and Ó Súilleabháin. In this way, we can arrive at some conclusions about the principles that governed Colum's assimilation of various folktales to each other and to his overall narrative design--notably, how he opens up the folktale to literary concerns such as character development, theme, allegory and point of view, while preserving the distinctiveness, even strangeness, that makes the folktale an attractive model for Irish literary forms.

Especially where Colum's use of folktale content is concerned, it is convenient to divide The King of Ireland's Son into its three major sections, or "cycles." I mean by "cycle" a complete circle of action; that is, a self-contained, resolved narrative unit. Cycle I, for instance, opens with The King of Ireland's Son's card game with the Enchanter of the Black Backlands and ends when the hero completes the quest that the Enchanter imposes. Similarly, Cycle II takes us from the events that lead to the abduction of

Fedelma to the King's Son's victory over her captor, facilitating her release. Cycle III, being more episodic, is not as clear-cut as its predecessors. However, it concerns a different hero, Gilly of the Goatskin, and includes all of the loosely-related episodes involving this character. (In this case, the term "cycle" recalls its use in phrases like "The Red-Branch Cycle" and "The Finn Cycle," where it designates a collection of separate stories involving a core of heroic characters.) The Unique Tale, which is actually embedded in both Cycle II and Cycle III, is discussed here with Cycle II.

Cycle I, the events centering on the conflict between the King of Ireland's Son and the Enchanter of the Black Backlands, is the most straightforward section of The King of Ireland's Son, relatively untroubled by the narrative complexities that characterize the rest of the book. There is little alteration or rearrangement of the two tales that are its constituents. The principal tale type of Cycle I is "The Girl Helps in the Hero's Flight," Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 313.<sup>10</sup> Séan Ó Súilleabháin's A Handbook of Irish Folklore lists this tale type among those current in Ireland,<sup>11</sup> and there are many examples of it in collections of Irish folktales, among them "The King's Son and the White-Bearded Scolog" in Jeremiah Curtin's Hero-Tales of Ireland and "The Son of the King of Erin and the Giant of Loch Léin" in another of Curtin's collections, Myths and Folk Tales of Ireland. The girl is the ogre's daughter, who first helps the hero by completing for him the impossible tasks imposed by her father, one of which

can only be completed if the hero kills her and restores her to life. Because the hero reassembles her incompletely, he is later able to choose her from among her sisters. The couple make good their escape from the ogre through the girl's magical powers and often with the help of a magical horse. Thompson notes that this tale often begins with the motif of the maidens who transform themselves into swans.<sup>12</sup> Ó Súilleabháin adds that in Irish versions of this tale, the hero engages in a magic card game and is forced to search out his opponent's identity when he loses.<sup>13</sup> The card game, the resultant quest for the ogre's identity, and the Swan Maiden motif all appear in The King of Ireland's Son, in which the ogre is the Enchanter and the helpful maiden is Fedelma. The last and most difficult of the three tasks, the recovery of a ring, is among those Ó Súilleabháin mentions.

Ó Súilleabháin observes that Type 313 is often preceded by Type 222, "The War of the Birds and Quadrupeds."<sup>14</sup> According to Ó Súilleabháin, in Irish tales of this type, the hero commonly resolves the grim struggle by shooting the eagle and freeing his opponent, an eel or a snake. In The King of Ireland's Son, the hero kills the snake and frees the eagle, who becomes his benefactor. We can really only guess whether this reversal was a variation on the tale type in the particular tale which was Colum's source, or whether it is a product of Colum's deliberate revisions. It does result in the preservation of the more heroic of the two animal opponents. The eagle in this sequence, as we shall presently see, can be related to eagles in other parts of the narrative, and is

certainly a better vehicle for Colum's political allegory, discussed in Chapter III, than a snake would be.

These two tales, Types 222 and 313, provide virtually all of the narrative material for Cycle I. Colum quotes the events of the narratives accurately and preserves the arrangement of events of the folktale. While the narrative changes are slight, there are some important alterations of folktale style. Most obviously, the language is simpler and more explanatory than the language of the tales in the collections, no doubt as a concession to the youthfulness of most of the book's readers. But also, Colum initially presents his marvellous imaginative world in combination with a more mundane perspective on reality. Romantic folktales, also called Märchen, wonder-tales, and "chimerat," create a special world in which the most wonderful and strange things happen as a matter of course, as Stith Thompson notes.<sup>15</sup> The characters never show surprise and rarely comment when these extraordinary phenomena occur. But the King of Ireland's Son does find these events extraordinary. Consider, for example, the handling of the card game in "Morraha," from William Larminie's West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances.

And Morraha saluted the young man in words intelligent, intelligible, such as (were spoken) at that time; and the other saluted him in the same fashion, and asked him would he play a game of cards with him; and Morraha said that he had not the wherewithal; and the other answered that he was never without a candle or the making of it; and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a table and two chairs and a pack of cards, and they sat

down on the chairs and went to the card-playing. The first game Morraha won, and the slender red champion bade him make his claim; and he said that the land above him should be filled with stock of sheep in the morning. It was well; and he played no second game, but home he went.<sup>16</sup>

The method of producing the cards, table and chairs, like the magical filling of the field with sheep, may delight the listener with its wonder, but Morraha himself never questions the propriety of the slender red champion's ability to defy the laws of nature. The King of Ireland's Son, however, responds to the similar events with which he is faced quite differently. The game itself is straightforward: "They played, and the King of Ireland's Son won the game."<sup>17</sup> But the King's Son departs rather smugly, and with no expectation that his opponent will make good his pledge.

He mounted his horse, smiling at the foolish old man who played cards with himself and who thought he could bring together fifty white kine, each with a red ear, and a white calf by the side of each cow. KS, 4

The King's Son's attitude, reminiscent in its smugness of the would-be folktale heroes who fail (usually the two older brothers) rather than of the younger brother who succeeds, suggests one of Colum's principal adaptations of the folktale, the development of a moral dimension in his characters. Accordingly, the hero's quests, especially in Cycle II, as we shall see later in this Chapter and in the next one, serve as correctives for the hero's flaws. In addition, the King's Son's perception, more ordinary than that of most folktale heroes, allows him for a time to stand

in for the uninitiated reader; for the King of Ireland's Son ceases to find magical events extraordinary as he gets more deeply involved in them. Colum uses the hero's point of view here to stress the enchantment that characterizes the King's Son's imaginary world. The hero's initial disbelief in the old man's wager, and the impossibility of driving these cattle out of the field, once they have appeared there, show that the events of the book take place against a magical landscape.<sup>18</sup>

In the retelling of tales in Cycle I, then, we see some literary innovations, notably the adaptation of language to suit the child reader, the deepening of the hero's character to allow for as yet unexploited moral overtones, and the orchestration of the hero's and the reader's gradual immersion into the marvellous world of the folktale. There is little change in narrative incident, and no structural transformation of the folktale to speak of. Cycle II, which traces the attempts of the King's Son to release Fedelma from her abductor, the King of the Land of Mist, is far more complicated. It is constructed out of several tales, some of which must be substantially altered, and none of which bears the natural relationship to the others of Cycle I's tales, Types 313 and 222.

Cycle II opens with events borrowed from Type 400, "Man on Quest for Lost Wife," listed by Ó Súilleabháin among Irish Hero Tales.<sup>19</sup> Published versions include "Young Connal of Howth" in O'Sullivan's (Ó Súilleabháin's) Folktales of Ireland and "Saudan Og and Young Conal" in Curtin's Hero-Tales. The hero often loses

his wife when he falls into an enchanted slumber. When he awakes, he sets out to find her, getting advice from an old eagle, the sun, the moon, and wind, and from an old woman.<sup>20</sup> Like Type 313, this tale is often associated with Swan Maidens. According to Alan Bruford, Irish versions derive from the medieval Gaelic romance Eachtra Chonnaill Ghulban, in which the hero loses his Eithne in a slumber episode after abducting her from her gríánán, or sunny chamber. Upon awaking, he discovers that she has been carried away across the sea, and embarks on a sea-voyage to find her. In oral versions of this story, there is an in-tale about whether one of the characters, the Ridere on Ghaisge (the Knight in Arms), has ever been worse off.<sup>21</sup>

Colum's most obvious alteration of this tale is in lifting from it its beginning and end and discarding its middle. In The King of Ireland's Son, the first sequence of the folktale, the abduction of the heroine by the villain, is severed from the usual response, a sea voyage and extended search, so that the loss of Fedelma motivates an entirely different course of events from that in the folktale. A key change is the substitution of a barren plain for the strand from which the folktale heroine is abducted, which prepares the way for the King's Son's overland search for the Sword of Light, a narrative sequence that is adapted from another tale (see below). The middle events of Irish folktales of Type 400, including not only the sea voyage but also a fight against the Turks and the hero's brothers and often a second abduction of the heroine, are entirely eliminated in

Colum's version, but for the final sequence of Cycle II, the hero's struggle with the villain in order to free the young lady. In the middle of Cycle II, motifs associated with Type 400, such as the eagle who gives information and the aged woman, sometimes appear, but the context is, of course, now different. After the hero awakens from his slumber, Colum elaborates on the folktale hero's search for news of the abduction, interposing as a bridge to elements borrowed from another tale type a panicky journey through a magical wood, probably Colum's own invention, the hero's search for Fedelma's blue falcon, which Colum may have adapted from folk or manuscript sources, and the story of the King of Cats, evidently also Colum's own material.

The middle part of Cycle II, and most of its events, is adapted from "Warrior Sent for a Sword and a Tale," listed by Ó'Súilleabháin as one of the Irish tales associated with Finn.<sup>22</sup> It exists in several examples which do not involve Finn, however, including "Art, King of Leinster," in O'Sullivan's Folktales; "Morraha," in Larminie's West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances; "The Scullog's Son from Muskerry," in Kennedy's Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts; and "Art, the King's Son, and Balor Beimanach, Two Sons-in-Law of King Under-the Waves" and "The Cotter's Son and the Half Slim Champion," both in Curtin's Hero-Tales. In this tale, the hero is sent looking for the Sword of Light and the Tale that its owner knows in order either to pay a wager made over cards or to fulfill geasa (bonds). In "Art, King of Leinster," the story is the "One Tale," whereas in "Morraha," it is the



"Story of Anshgayliach," or "the story of the storytelling."<sup>23</sup>

The tale usually recounts the suffering of its teller after his wife tricks him into revealing a magic rod, which she uses to transform him into a wolf. Alan Bruford hypothesizes that this in-tale stems from a Middle Irish romance, no longer extant, known as "The Werewolf's Tale."<sup>24</sup>

Colum's many changes to this tale type are quite significant and distort what must have been his original far more than the "Lost Wife," Type 400. The first alteration, the extraction of the middle part of the tale, is the complement of the extraction of the beginning and end of the "Lost Wife." Colum discards the circumstances which occasion the search in "Warrior Sent for a Sword and a Tale," as well as the usual ending of tales of this pattern, lifting out the narrative sequence of the quest from the motivational frame. The motivation for the quest in Colum's hybrid story is transferred from "Lost Wife," with the new, invented requirement that only the Sword of Light can kill the King of the Land of Mist and release Fedelma functioning as a bridge between the motivation of the two tales.

There is considerable further structural alteration to the part of this tale which Colum does extract. In the folktale, the two things sought, the sword and the story, are equally necessary for fulfilling the geasa, although they are obtained in sequence, the hero stealing the sword and using it to force the tale from its owner. In The King of Ireland's Son, however, Colum separates the Sword of Light from the Unique Tale. Only the Sword of Light is needed to defeat the King of the Land of Mist and to free

Fedelma. Colum invents a mechanism, not found in the folktale, for the darkening of the Sword of Light, that is, the temporary destruction of its special efficacy, and then makes the Unique Tale the means for restoring it to power and brightness. Colum fragments the object of search, then. In addition to separating the Unique Tale from the Sword of Light, Colum splits the Unique Tale itself into two parts, the tale itself and "what went before its beginning and what comes after its end" (KS, 88-89). The King's Son first finds the Unique Tale, but that alone is no good to him without what comes before it and after it. Colum magnifies the complications of the original narrative, creating a series of interdependent tasks. The hapless hero can't free Fedelma until he has the Sword of Light and can't use the Sword of Light until it is brightened. He can't brighten it without the Unique Tale, which is inadequate until he finds its beginning and end. This arrangement represents a layering of tasks, which are embedded in each other rather than following each other serially.

In his rearrangement of elements of "Warrior Sent for a Sword and a Story," Colum fragments the folktale narrative, inserting episodes such as the one which results in the darkening of the Sword of Light. He also complicates the chain of events by embedding quests within other quests. These changes are in the service of a more profound transformation, the development of moral overtones and character depths that would not appear in folktales. When the King of Ireland's Son is searching for the Sword of Light, for instance, Colum has the Gobaun Saor, a character known as the craftsman of the gods in Irish mythology

and represented as a clever builder in some folktales, require that the hero prove "your will, your mind, and your purpose" (KS, 81). The King's Son must guard the Gobaun Saor's forge for three nights against the Fua, whose aggression against the King's Son at first takes the form of temptation. Whereas in the folktale, "moral fiber" is externalized into physical strength, courage, prudence and cleverness,<sup>25</sup> in this invented interpolation in Cycle II, it is fairly clear that it is moral fiber and strength of character that are being tested. When the Fua shrinks into a "small, empty sort of creature" after the King's Son's physical victory over him (KS, 83), there is implied a moral as well as a physical shrinkage. Thus the physical struggle represents the psychological battle of will against fear and the moral battle of good against evil. This symbolism distinguishes this episode from folktale struggles, because the folktale's focus on action generally precludes the development of such psychological and moral dimensions. The encounter with the Swallow People is similarly moral and quasi-allegorical. Like the Fua, this shadowy race is Colum's creation, and the hero's experience with them demonstrates explicitly his own folly and pride. Because the Sword of Light loses its efficacy through a failure of spirit as opposed to a failure of muscle, the subsequent quest for the means to restore it becomes a spiritual quest for purity, moral strength, and atonement. For this reason, the King's Son's quest for the Unique Tale is long and arduous, more involuted and difficult than not only the search for the Sword of Light itself but also the whole of Cycle I. In conditioning the quests in

Cycle II in this way, Colum suggests the tradition of written heroic sagas and romances rather than heroic folktales.

The Unique Tale, Cycle II's embedded story, or in-tale, is itself based on three different folktales. The part called "what went before its beginning and what comes after its ending" is a version of "The Werewolf's Tale," mentioned above as a common in-tale in "Warrior Sent for a Sword and a Story." The style of this episode in The King of Ireland's Son is so similar to its analogue in Larminie's "Morraha" that it seems likely that Colum had "Morraha" in mind. The Unique Tale proper, however, is based on a tale type that usually is independent, rather than embedded in another tale. "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers," Type 451, is represented in published collections by "The Twelve Wild Geese," which first appeared in Kennedy's The Fireside Stories of Ireland (1870) and was later included by Yeats in his Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (1888); it is listed among international tale types found in Ireland in Ó Súilleabháin's Handbook.<sup>26</sup> In this story, the seven or twelve brothers turn into swans, geese or ravens on the birth of a sister and fly away. Devoting herself to finding and restoring them, the sister takes on the task of sewing a shirt for each of them without making a sound or cry. She marries a king and is accused of murdering her children, but remains silently sewing. She finishes the last shirt as she is about to be executed, lifts the enchantment from her brothers, and is rescued by them.<sup>27</sup>

Colum must truncate "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers," first

in order to hold its resolution until later in the book, and secondly to involve in it some of the characters of the other plots. Accordingly, he substitutes for the near-execution of the maiden the expulsion of Sheen, a repudiation that is less drastic and easier to revoke than the punishment threatened in the original tale. Also, Sheen, who though stout-hearted is not quite as imperturbable as her folktale predecessor, must fail at her task. She is reunited with her husband without resolving the problems of the enchanted brothers and the stolen child, so that they may be solved later. Finally, the Spae-Woman prophesies that the enchantment can be lifted by one who truly loves the stolen child, which provides a mechanism for the future resolution of the story's difficulties. These three steps transform the folktale from a self-contained story to an element that fits into the larger narrative of The King of Ireland's Son.

Within "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers," at the point where Sheen meets the Hunter-King, her future husband, Colum inserts another independent folktale, "The Girl Who Follows the Corpse." I cannot find a specific listing for this tale either in The Types of the Folktale or The Types of the Irish Folktale, nor does Ó Súilleabháin mention it in the Handbook, although there are several somewhat similar tales of husbands whose enchantment must be lifted by their wives or lovers. In spite of the absence of a special classification for this tale, Kennedy notes that it was one of the tales that he heard most frequently when he was compiling Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts, in which he

includes an example, entitled "The Corpse Watchers."<sup>28</sup> On two successive nights, two girls watch a corpse, each appearing maimed or deformed, as if by fright, on the next morning. The heroine watches the corpse on the third night and frees it from bonds of enchantment by following it steadfastly through a series of magical obstacles. Colum's version of the tale is very close to Kennedy's, although since Colum is little concerned with the first two girls, he has their part of the tale told very briefly and indirectly. Except for this change, the tale fits into the Unique Tale quite neatly as an entire narrative entity.

In assimilating to each other the various folktales that make up Cycle II, Colum first of all restructures the constituent tales, selecting complementary parts of different tales ("Man on Search for Lost Wife," "Warrior Sent for Sword and Story"), fragmenting and extending narrative incidents (the quest in "Warrior Sent for Sword and Story"), delaying resolution ("Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers"). All of these are literary transformations of the original oral material that combine independent folktales in a narrative whole more complex than any single folktale, even those of complicated design. An important element in the combination of these tales is the conflation of characters. Because "Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers" and "The Werewolf's Tale" both make use of the motif of the stolen child, for instance, Colum can combine them, making them two sides of a single story about the same lost child. When the stolen child is identified with another character, Gilly of the Goatskin, the two in-tales

in Cycle II are linked to Cycle III. In order to integrate the several tales, in other words, characters must assume more than one role. As a result, the quasi-folktale characters of The King of Ireland's Son tend to be more complex than real folktale personages, who are often little more than counters. A folktale stepmother, for example, often the primary source of villainy in a tale, generally remains unrepentant and is punished by humiliation, banishment, or even death. In The King of Ireland's Son, however, Caintigern, the hero's unsympathetic step-mother in Cycle I, turns out to be Sheen, the heroic and afflicted maiden of the Unique Tale. Such a combination, impossible in the folktale, introduces a moral flexibility and depth to Colum's narrative. Colum in effect implies a character psychology, one which would explain Caintigern's crossness by way of Sheen's grief. Similarly, the Hunter-King, the hero's father, is given a spiritual dimension through his identification with the enchanted corpse. Colum doesn't explore either Caintigern or the Hunter-King very deeply by the standards of literary fiction, but he does suggest a complexity that is a step or two away from folktale characterization.

Cycle II, then, contains four separate folktales: "Man on Quest for Lost Wife"; "Warrior Sent for a Sword and a Story" (including the in-tale, based on "The Werewolf's Tale"); "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers"; and "The Girl Who Follows the Corpse." It is interesting that neither Cycle I nor Cycle II contains the folktale that is actually known as "The King of Ireland's Son," an example of which may be found in Douglas Hyde's Beside the Fire (1890). In constructing Cycle II out of these

tales, Colum has elaborated the folktale's mechanism for embedding tales into a system of layers in which each tale envelops the next one. First comes the beginning of Folktale I, the abduction of the maiden from the sleeping hero. This story is suspended when the change in the circumstances of the abduction leads the hero into the quest for the Sword of Light and then the Unique Tale of Folktale II rather than the sea voyage of Folktale I. Folktale III is interposed when the second object of search of Folktale II, that is, the Unique Tale, is "found" (i.e., heard). In turn, Folktale III is interrupted by Folktale IV, watching the corpse. The tales are reassembled in reverse order: Sheen marries the Hunter-King to complete Folktale IV; she gives up her search, to close Folktale III (considerably differently from the original); the King's Son learns of the rest of the Unique Tale to complete the quest extracted from Folktale II; and finally, the battle for the release of Fedelma completes Folktale I. This involution is modelled on the pattern of the folktale, but goes far beyond it in the extent and the symmetry of the layering, making a literary elaboration of a structural feature of oral narrative.

The construction of Cycle III, the part of the action featuring Gilly of the Goatskin, also called Flann, is more difficult to assess than other parts of the narrative because it is created out of a jumble of folktale, folk motif, folk character, and invention. In Cycle II, Colum's inventions, such as the King's Son's encounter with the Swallow People, stand out clearly, largely because the folktale material in Cycle II is so well-defined.



There are whole folktales in Cycle III, but these tend to be separate from the main events, which combine bits of tales with original material, often in a form that mimics folktale form.

The characterization of Gilly of the Goatskin is typical of this cycle in the difficulty one has in analyzing its sources. Gilly of the Goatskin (a gilly is a lad, often a servant lad) occurs in several different contexts in Irish folklore. In Kennedy's "Adventures of Gilla na Chreck an Gour" in Legendary Fictions, Type 650 ("Strong John"), Gilly is a humorous figure, who stirs from the ashes by the hearth-side and takes up a goat skin at age sixteen before finally going out into the world. All of the efforts of the King to destroy him fail, and Gilly finally wins the King's daughter by making her laugh. This Gilly seems to be in the tradition of the Great Fool, or Amadán Mór, whose adventures, Bruford tells us, are recorded in Eachtra an Amadáin Mhoir.<sup>29</sup> A second Gilly of the Goatskin appears in a hero tale, "Gilla na Grakin and Fin MacCumhail," in Curtin's Myths and Folk Tales. A warrior disguises himself in skins and takes service with Finn as a common gilly or servant in order to evade an opponent who has the right to one unresisted blow should the two ever meet. During his service with Fin, he performs extraordinary feats, dies at the hands of his foe and is magically restored to life. Neither this story, related to Eachtra Iollainn Airmdearg,<sup>30</sup> nor Kennedy's story bears a great likeness to the events concerning Colum's Gilly. However, because Colum's Gilly is, at least at first, a lowly, comic fellow, he seems more

akin to Kennedy's Great Fool than to Curtin's heroic Gilly. For the same reason, he seems little related to the Gilly in "Fionn's First Marriage" (Legendary Fictions), who is actually Finn himself, briefly disguised in goatskins. This multiplicity of analogues, though, some comic and anti-heroic, some more traditionally heroic, is appropriate to the changes Gilly undergoes in The King of Ireland's Son. Gilly's adventures begin with the absurdly tardy maturation of Kennedy's Gilly, and like him, Colum's Gilly goes out into the world ignorant of its ways and of his own powers. By the end of the book, however, Gilly has been transformed from a common bumpkin with the lowly, generic name "Gilly," to a King's Son and quasi-hero, with the more heroic name of "Flann."

An important difference between the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin that has a profound effect on the form of their respective narratives stems from the distinction between the folktale's active and passive protagonists, its "seeker-heroes" and "victim-heroes". Vladimir Propp notes that this distinction determines the form of a folktale narrative almost from the outset.

The departures of seeker-heroes and victim-heroes are . . . different. The departures of the former group have search as their goal, while those of the latter mark the beginning of a journey without searches, on which various adventures await the hero.<sup>31</sup>

Whereas the King's Son is clearly a seeker-hero, whose object is to search out the evil Enchanter and to rescue his abducted sweetheart Fedelma, Gilly is a victim hero. He leaves his dubious home to get away from his none-too-sympathetic guardians, the Hags

of the Long Teeth. Accordingly, Gilly's story falls into a string of loosely related episodes. Although it rambles from incident to incident at first, it gains a vague unity as Gilly becomes increasingly interested in learning his own name and the identity of his parents. These goals, though hazy, distinguish Gilly somewhat from the true victim-hero of the folktale, whose journeys involve no searches at all. But on the other hand, Gilly's search is not at all like the King's Son's quests. It is carried out in a rambling, almost lazy fashion and is plagued by failure. The fact that Cycle III runs along with and is bound by the tightly controlled, end-directed Cycle II, in which it first appears as an in-tale, does more to structure Cycle III than does Gilly's intermittent quest for name and family.

Cycle III is episodic, in contrast to Cycles I and II, flexible, and largely invented. It does, however, contain some important tale types. The first of these is "The Anger Bargain," Type 1000.<sup>32</sup> A man and his servant make a contract that the first one to get angry with the other will be severely penalized. Often, the master bargains double wages against the servant's doing his service without pay. Jacobs reprints a version of this, "Jack and His Master," in Celtic Fairy Tales; it first appeared in Kennedy's Fireside Stories. This version is quite like Colum's, since the loser of the wager must forfeit not only money but a strip of skin from his neck to his heel. The servant manipulates events by taking literally metaphorical instructions like "Come with horses' legs" (that is, come quickly) (Type 1007) or "Keep an eye on the sheep" (Type 1006). Because of the episodic nature of Cycle III's

victim-hero plot, Colum can insert this tale whole into the adventures of Gilly. As with "The Girl Who Watches a Corpse," the tale furthers the conception of character somewhat, transforming Gilly's initial lack of worldly knowledge into a superficial crudeness to hide his essential cleverness and practical cunning. This story does not, however, combine formally with other narrative material to form part of the main plot.

Another folktale that is inserted whole into Cycle III is "The Master-Thief," Type 1525.<sup>33</sup> A youth is apprenticed to thieves and becomes adept. His skill is tested in stealing a well-guarded horse, sheep from a driver and so on. Colum's method of integrating this tale with others in the book by conflating characters is similar to that in Cycle II. Mogue the Robber in this episode later provides gifts for Gilly to give to Flame-of-Wine and exposes the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands to the King of Ireland's Son. The thieves, similarly, just happen to be the very band of robbers who earlier in Gilly's story stole the Spae-Woman's goose and the Crystal Egg along with it. Nevertheless, the episode, which follows the folktale fairly closely, is a diversion that is not really necessary for the main plot. There is an interesting analogy between this little episode and the events in Cycle I. Just as the King of Ireland's Son was forced to perform tasks to uphold his disguise as an enchanter's apprentice, so Gilly performs feats of master thievery as a kind of protective coloration. This symmetry, along with the identification of characters in the episode with characters in other parts of the narrative, integrates "The Master-Thief" into

the book more thoroughly than "The Anger Bargain."

The third folktale in Cycle III provides much of the material for an in-tale, the story that Morag tells Gilly at the House of Crom Duv. "The Three Sisters," or "Cinderella," Type 510, is related to Irish magic tales 29 and 30 in Ó Súilleabháin's Handbook.<sup>34</sup> Both of the Irish tales concern three girls seeking husbands. The youngest at first is ostracized, either for her ugliness or her laziness, but eventually wins husbands for all three. Tale 29 is known as "Assapelt" after the third daughter, who is not only ugly but extremely hairy. Thrown into the fire during a struggle, she emerges with her hairy pelt burned off, the most beautiful of the three girls. The heroine of Tale 30, like Morag in The King of Ireland's Son, must outsmart a hag and her three daughters. Like the heroine of Tale 30, Morag makes an exchange with the hags--pillows with slumber pins in them rather than nightcaps, however--in order to protect her sisters. Although Type 510 is presented as an in-tale, Colum provides links both with Cycle II and with other parts of Cycle III. The young men whom Morag wins as husbands for her sisters are Downal and Dermott, the half-brothers, once churlish, now reformed, of the King of Ireland's Son. Morag eventually follows the lead of the folktale by marrying the third brother, Gilly. The Hags of the Long Teeth, who first appear at the very beginning of Cycle III, appear here as well. Morag handles them much more cleverly than does Gilly, whose earthiness manifests itself in feet of clay and results in failure when he confronts them to discover his parentage.

Curiously, Morag's in-tale is one of the few in The King of Ireland's Son given in the first person. Traditional in-tales, such as the one that the Enchanter tells in the section derived from the "Warrior in Search of a Sword and a Tale," are usually in the first person, and in the manuscript romances, according to Bruford, the narrator of an in-tale always tells of his own experiences.<sup>35</sup> To make the tale of the "Three Sisters" such an in-tale, however, is to change its terms considerably. Although its events originate in folklore, the point of view of Morag's in-tale makes it seem less like a formulaic folktale than the personal reminiscence of a character in a novel. Colum, then, gives this tale a decidedly literary treatment.

Cycle III ends with "The Forgotten Fiancé," Type 313C.<sup>36</sup> After forgetting a warning from the faithful maiden who has helped him, the hero loses all memory of her. She trades magic objects for three successive nights with him, and finally arouses his memory, just as he is about to be married. This tale often follows tale 313A, "Girl Helps in Hero's Flight," as in "The Son of the King of Erin and the Giant of Loch Léin" in Curtin's Myths and Folk Tales. In the same volume, Type 313C also appears subordinated to Type 425, about a husband who is a bear by day and a man by night, in the tale entitled "The Brown Bear of Norway." "The Forgotten Fiancé" appears in The King of Ireland's Son in a fairly unadulterated form. Colum chooses to have the maiden simply meet her young man, not sleep with him, no doubt in consideration for his young audience. He uses the magic gifts to link this tale with "The Three Sisters." The only significant

interpolation is Morag's Little Red Hen as the means for jogging Gilly's memory. Otherwise, this episode closes Cycle III by returning Gilly's episodic, rambling and frequently unfolkloric narrative to the form and content of the folktale.

Colum uses four folktales in constructing Cycle III, then, and many more folktale motifs. But as the following outline of events demonstrates, a great deal of the material is not folktale but invention, although it is frequently disguised by folktale-like form or style.

1. Escape from the Hags of the Long Teeth
2. Rescue of the Weasel (a donor)
3. Recovery of the magic Crystal Egg
4. Life in the forest (a static episode)
5. Theft of the Egg
6. "The Anger Bargain" (Type 1000)
7. Quest for Identity I: counting horns, telling Unique Tale
8. Quest for Identity II: search for the Crystal Egg
9. "The Master-Thief" (Type 1525)
10. Courtship of Flame-of-Wine
11. Quest for Identity III: capture by Hags of Long Teeth
12. Escape from Crom Duv (and return)
13. Morag's story ("Three Sisters," Type 510; Fairy Rowan Tree)
14. Escape from Crom Duv II (with Obstacle Flight)
15. Morag's journey (which completes her story)
16. "The Forgotten Fiancé" (Type 313C)

In actuality, folktale narrative makes up only a small part of Cycle III. The other episodes in Gilly's adventures are designed to imitate folklore events and structures (for instance, the mock

donor-sequence, number 2 in the list) and frequently are stocked with genuine folktale motifs, but they are really original rather than traditional material. The events that Colum creates make Gilly much different from the folktale hero. More than most folktales, the "Adventures of Gilly of the Goatskin" educate their hero, providing him with the opportunity to develop a probity and depth alien to the folktale. There are folktale maidens whom the hero ultimately scorns for their haughtiness, in spite of the attraction of their beauty, but Gilly's misguided courtship of Flame-of-Wine is too full of pining and misjudgement, and the truth forced out of her by the Girdle of Truth too philosophical and too moral, to strike one as folkloric. The episode is a way to teach Gilly about beauty, truth and love. The quest for a name and a family are quite unfolkloric,<sup>37</sup> and more than any other feature of the book indicate that Colum has things to say in this narrative that go quite beyond the folktale. The disorderliness of these events, in which the neat involution of narrative in Cycle II gives way to a rambling linearity, suggests that Colum is purposely working against folktale forms, as Chapter II will show in some detail. Indeed, Gilly's attempts at action often fail, as when he first searches for the Crystal Egg, or falls in love with Flame-of-Wine, or confronts the Hags of the Long Teeth, and conversely, he is often rewarded with information without having earned it. The system of actions and rewards of the folktale, then, is quite disrupted.

The changes that Colum makes in his source material to create The King of Ireland's Son are largely consistent with the intention



of transforming folk material into a unified narrative for children.

Colum elaborates the structure of the folktale, combining many diverse folk narratives into one grand, literary fairy tale.

To create a long, fairly unified narrative out of ten or eleven folktales, a fair amount of original material, and countless folk and mythical characters and motifs, Colum dissects, rearranges and embeds his constituent folktales. To give the work some of the thematic import of written material, Colum transforms the personages of the folktale, hardly more than counters to be pushed through the twisty channels of the plot, into characters with greater psychological and moral complexity than folktale figures but with less individuality and less "inner life" than characters in novels. Colum also makes his characters and his narrative carry quasi-allegorical meanings, as when the King's Son fights with the Fua or encounters the Swallow People, or when Gilly of the Goatskin falls in love with Flame-of-Wine. Along with all of these transformations, Colum also minimizes sex and violence in his sources, to make them more suitable for a youthful audience.

In The King of Ireland's Son, Colum borrows and transforms folktale content, folktale form and folktale style. One of his most noteworthy transformations is of the folktale's orality, from which he fashions a narrative frame that is one of the distinctions of the book. Reminiscing in the Preface to the 1966 collection of some of his own children's stories, The Stone of Victory and Other Tales, Colum indicates that part of his purpose in writing books of tales was "to make stories read as if they were being told,

as a man who was a storyteller told them when storytelling was a vocation."<sup>38</sup> In many places, Colum recalls such a storyteller from his own youth, stressing that it was his technique, specifically his use of his voice, that made his tales especially memorable. In his small book, Story Telling New and Old, reprinted from the preface to The Fountain of Youth; Stories to be Told (1927), Colum describes this storyteller of old.

The story-teller whom I listened to when I was young had many advantages over the story-teller in one of our public libraries. He told his stories in the evening; he told them by the light of a candle and a peat fire--often by the light of a peat fire only. There were shadows upon the walls around. Nothing that he told us had to be visualized in the glare of day or by the flare of electric light. He had a language that had not been written down; he had words that had not been made colorless by constant use in books and newspapers. He was free to make all sorts of rhymes and chimes in the language he used, and to use words that were meaningless except for the overtones of meaning that were in their sounds. And he could make his hero start from the hilltop that was known to all his audience, and he could have his battle fought upon the strand that they had all been upon. His audience was small, no more than a score of people, and so he could be intimate in voice and manner. He had few gestures, this particular story-teller: sometimes he beat his hands together; sometimes he raise a stick that was by him to give solemnity to some happening. And outside was the silence of the night and the silence of a countryside.<sup>39</sup>

In part from his memory of the tales that the storyteller told, Colum drew material for The King of Ireland's Son. But from his experience listening to the storyteller's voice, he fashioned the narrative frame, based on the fiction that the events of the book are being told and heard rather than written and read. As Colum

himself says in his radio memoir, "Vagrant Voices," the storytelling of this shanachie

stayed in my mind as a performance. Afterwards, when I came to write books that were based on legends, this method of oral delivery was in my mind. Here is the opening of my King of Ireland's Son: it does not come out of any particular story that I heard, but the inflexions in the voice of the man by the fireside, the gestures with the staff in his hand are in it.<sup>40</sup>

Colum's storytelling pretense in The King of Ireland's Son is subtly and quietly handled. It is largely conveyed through a language whose vocabulary, syntax, idioms and rhythms are taken from speech, rather than a literary language "made colorless by constant use in books and newspapers." In addition, Colum provides a sprinkling of conversational pointers, including a series of variations on the phrase "I tell you," to establish by implication the existence of a frame narrator. The storytelling frame is a way of conditioning the reader's response to the text. It becomes more effective when Colum provides a vague identity for his listener. "It is with the youth Flann . . . that we will go now if it be pleasing to you, Son of my Heart," Colum has the mysterious frame-storyteller announce (KS, 211). Later, the narrator addresses "my kind foster-child" (KS, 255), invoking the special and traditional relationship of fosterage, the same protective and kindly relationship that the Spae-Woman extends to the children who stay with her. (Both Gilly and Morag call her "fosterer.")<sup>41</sup> Colum uses the fondness of the fostering relationship, indicated by the phrase

"Son of my Heart" and the adjective "kind", to personalize the communication between author and reader. The reader, who in one sense only "overhears" the story, is invited to participate in an intimate encounter, much as a newcomer in the house of Colum's grandmother might have enjoyed from his stool in the corner the sharing of tales taking place around the peat fire.

The narrative frame of The King of Ireland's Son also fulfills a structuring function. It is important in emphasizing the "pattern of events" of the story. In Story Telling New and Old, Colum claims that "the art of the storyteller . . . consists in giving spontaneity to a series of happenings. They have to be in formal series, for the story has to have a distinct pattern."<sup>42</sup> Like the voice of the storyteller in Colum's grandmother's kitchen, the "voice" of Colum's frame narrator helps to marshal the events that are the constituents of this pattern. In doing so, it serves as one of the most Irish of the forms that Colum creates for his fiction. It provides a ready link between modern day literature and its past, a way of embedding the past in the present. In addition, the storytelling pretense includes both the story and the transmission of it. In doing so, it symbolizes the relevance of cultural heritage to modern events, which Chapter III will show to be the foundation of the book.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alan Denson lists New York editions (Macmillan) in 1916, 1921 and 1962 and a London edition (Harrap) in 1920. Denson gives 1935 as the date for the Dublin edition but gives no date for the Stuttgart edition. "Padraic Colum: An Appreciation with a Checklist of His Publications," Dublin Magazine 6 (Spring, 1967) 1, p. 54, item 10. To Denson too we owe the discovery of "Fidelma," whose date he gives as 1967-1968. "Padraic Colum at Ninety," The Irish Times (December 8, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Kiely, "The Core of Colum's Ireland," The Irish Monthly 77 (October, 1949), p. 448.

<sup>3</sup> "Ninety Years in Retrospect," Journal of Irish Literature 2 (January, 1973) 1, pp. 25-26. Although Colum had some contact with the Irish language and Irish speakers as a boy, it was not his mother tongue. Like other literary nationalists of the day, Colum immersed himself in Gaelic as a very young man. He often worked from Gaelic sources in his poetry (often sources also translated or paraphrased by others), but unlike his colleague Padraic Pearse, never himself published in Gaelic. It is, of course, possible that these unspecified "translations" were not Colum's work at all but someone else's, perhaps even published translations.

<sup>4</sup> "Ninety Years," p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> "The Tradition That Existed in My Grandmother's House," The New Yorker (December 23, 1967), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> "The Tradition," p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> "Ninety Years," p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> "The Tradition," p. 31. Colum cites a tale told by his grandmother as the source for his poem, "Dermott Donn MacMorna," and observes that neither he nor the folklorist he consulted on this point knows of another example of the story. The folklorist hypothesizes that it was originally a poem and was "broken down into a fireside story."

<sup>9</sup> The Folktale (1946; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 415.

<sup>10</sup> All tale types are according to the enumeration in Stith Thompson's The Types of the Folktale: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen Translated and Enlarged (1928; 2nd rev. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1964). My source for motifs is Stith Thompson's six-volume, revised and enlarged Motif-Index of Folk Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-58).

<sup>11</sup> A Handbook of Irish Folklore (1942; rpt. Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1963), p. 560.

<sup>12</sup> The Folktale, p. 88.

- 13     A Handbook, p. 560.
- 14     A Handbook, p. 559.
- 15     The Folktale, p. 8.
- 16     West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances (1893; rpt. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), p. 11.
- 17     The King of Ireland's Son (1916; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 4; henceforth cited in the text as KS.
- 18     Another indication is the colouring of the cattle, since "red and white are the colors of animals of the Otherworld in Celtic tradition," according to Patrick K. Ford's headnote to "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed," The Mabinogi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 35. In this tale, Arawn, prince of Annwn, "the Otherworld," has white hounds with red ears. Colum included this story in Orpheus: Myths of the World (1932).
- 19     A Handbook, p. 600.
- 20     This is Thompson's account, The Folktale, pp. 91-92.
- 21     Alan Bruford, Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances (Dublin: The Folklore of Ireland Society, 1969), pp. 72-77. O'Sullivan also refers to Eachtra Chonaill Ghulban, in the notes to "Young Connal of Howth," Folktales of Ireland, p. 266.
- 22     A Handbook, p. 595. Ó Súilleabháin does not give a tale type number, and I have been unable to locate one, either in The Types of the Folktale or The Types of the Irish Folktale, in spite of the many examples of this story in the collections.
- 23     According to Larminie's note, West Irish Folk-Tales, p. 252.
- 24     Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances, p. 158.
- 25     Max Lüthi explains the concept of externalization in Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 124-125.
- 26     p. 563.
- 27     This account is essentially Thompson's from The Folktale, pp. 110-111, but with the Irish example of "The Twelve Wild Geese" firmly in mind. A written romance that shares material with this folktale is the story of Rhiannon in "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed" from The Mabinogion. Rhiannon has no enchanted brothers to worry about, but like the folktale maiden is accused of murdering her newborn babe, "framed" by jealous sisters-in-law.

- 28 Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts (1866; rpt. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968), p. 53.
- 29 Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances, pp. 147-149.
- 30 See Bruford, Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances, pp. 84-85.
- 31 Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, tr. Laurence Scott (1928; first translated, 1958; rev. Austin: University Texas Press, 1968), p. 39.
- 32 Several versions of "The Anger Bargain" are noted by Ó Súilleabháin, A Handbook, p. 579.
- 33 Ó Súilleabháin, A Handbook, p. 583.
- 34 A Handbook, pp. 617-618.
- 35 Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances, p. 10.
- 36 Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen, who have included The King of Ireland's Son among the books that they analyze in The Types of the Irish Folktale, evidently confuse this episode with "The Black and the White Bride," Type 403, which, they indicate, appears with Type 313 ("Girl Helps Hero in His Flight.") They also list The King of Ireland's Son as containing an example of Type 451, "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers." See The Types of the Irish Folktale, Folklore Fellows Communications 188 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1963), pp. 70 (Type 313), 89 (Type 403), and 94 (Type 451).
- 37 Folktale heroes do engage in quests for lost, stolen or departed kin fairly frequently, but Colum has invented rather than adapted Gilly's particular quest, whose principal features are the stars which reveal him as a king's son, the illumination of his history by the telling of the Unique Tale, the unsuccessful attempt to learn more from the Hags of the Long Teeth, and the eventual revelation of the identity of Gilly's parents in a dream that comes to the Spae-woman. (This last is a particularly unfolkloric way to resolve a quest.) The quest for a name does not exist in folktales, or at least, is not listed in Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk-Literature.
- 38 Preface to The Stone of Victory (New York: Macmillan, 1927), p. xi.
- 39 Story Telling New and Old (New York: Macmillan, 1968; rpt. from The Fountain of Youth, 1927), pp. 2-4. Colum also talks about this storyteller in "Vagrant Voices," Journal of Irish Literature II (January, 1973), 1, pp. 63-75; in the Preface to The Stone of Victory; in "The Tradition That Existed in My Grandmother's House"; and in "Ninety Years in Retrospect."

40 "Vagrant Voices," Journal of Irish Literature 2 (January, 1973) 1, p. 65.

41 The concept of fosterage links The King of Ireland's Son to Padraic Pearse's experiment in nationalist education at St. Enda's school, where Colum was an occasional visitor. Colum quotes Pearse thus:

"The word for 'education' among the old Gael  
was the same as the word for 'fostering';  
the teacher was a 'fosterer' and the pupil  
was a 'foster-child.'"

Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1916), pp. xiv-xv.

42 Story Telling New and Old, p. 9.



II: The King of Ireland's Son: Transformations of the  
Narrative Rhythms of the Folktale

Padraic Colum's intimacy with and respect for folk tradition led him to use entire folktales and significant parts of folktales in The King of Ireland's Son, where he adapts them with both care and ingenuity to his literary purposes. His transformation of the folktale, however, goes beyond the selection and rearrangement of folktale episodes or the development of character psychologies. Colum, I hope to show, was especially sensitive to the folktale's narrative rhythms--its repeated incidents, its well-defined, ordered chain of events (what Vladimir Propp calls "functions of dramatis personae," Morphology of the Folktale, 1928, tr. 1958), and particularly its pulse of action: tasks and rewards, searches and reunions, "interdictions" and violations of them, departures and returns, struggles and victories.<sup>1</sup> Colum's concern for these rhythms, as I call them, is evident in the emphasis on pattern in Story Telling New and Old: events in folktales, Colum writes, "have to be in formal series, for the story has to have a distinct pattern."<sup>2</sup> One of the most interesting aspects of Colum's transformation of folklore in The King of Ireland's Son is his treatment of such narrative patterns. He uses them to pattern his own narrative, but transforms them through exaggeration and elaboration into new, literary 'rhythms of action' which, though based on folklore, help Colum to express his literary meanings.

In this chapter, I wish to focus on what I perceive to be the three principal narrative rhythms of The King of Ireland's Son, which I will call deferral, failure and gathering. Since each of these rhythms develops in its own way, I have found it convenient to treat them in separate sections. There are two primary reasons why I feel that a close study of these rhythms is worthwhile. First of all, Colum's narrative rhythms are his way of converting the folktale's forms into vehicles for his political themes. These themes, in fact (the subject of Chapter III) determine the selection and arrangement of materials for the entire book, and the narrative rhythms, formal and folkloric on the one hand, thematic and literary on the other, mediate between the form and content of the book and Colum's political intent. A study of The King of Ireland's Son's narrative rhythms, then, is essential to an understanding of the range and the particularity of Colum's political commentary in the book.

Secondly, the narrative rhythms of The King of Ireland's Son represent one of Colum's most ingenious innovations. By using the patterns of external events (actions) to express literary meaning, rather than conventional literary devices such as moralized description, extended symbolism, interior monologue, meaningful dialogue and direct thematic statement, Colum expresses as well his profound understanding of the forms and the narrative style of the folktale. He deftly transforms folktale structures without violating them, an unusual narrative strategy that illustrates the literary potential of folktale forms, hitherto

unrealized. The study of the narrative forms of The King of Ireland's Son, a much more patterned book than most novels, including Colum's own Castle Conquer and The Flying Swans, has particular value and interest because the book occupies a middle ground between the folktale and the novel.

Colum himself does not apply the term "rhythm" to folktale narratives, but in his introduction to an edition of Grimms' Fairy Tales, he shows that, like the storyteller whom he describes, he is attuned to the rhythms of daily life.

In the place where the storyteller was the coming of night was marked as it was not in towns nor in modern houses. It was so marked that it created in the mind a different rhythm. There had been a rhythm of the day and now there was a rhythm of the night. . . . The storyteller seated on a roughly made chair on a clay floor did not look histrionic. What was in his face showed that he was ready to respond to and make articulate the rhythm of the night. He was a storyteller because he was attuned to this rhythm and had in his memory the often repeated incidents that would fit it. . . .

A rhythm that was compulsive, fitted to daily tasks, waned, and a rhythm that was acquiescent, fitted to wishes, took its place.<sup>3</sup>

In the adventures of The King of Ireland's Son, we find that Colum uses the compulsive rhythms of day and the suggestive rhythms of night as counterpoint in the narratives of the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin. Beyond these, Colum fashions other kinds of rhythms for other narrative sequences, and the contribution which these rhythms make to the structure and the meaning of the book is the central concern of this chapter.

# 1. Deferral

The first of the three rhythmic principles which I believe are important to The King of Ireland's Son is what I call deferral. Deferral, created out of the existing forms of the folktale, is the delay of an essential part of the action. In the folktale, the many sequences of action through which the hero may have to go in order to settle his original problem delay resolution; but in The King of Ireland's Son, this element of delay is accentuated, sometimes extremely. It is the principle of deferral which underlies the striking "two-steps-forward, one-step-back" movement in the book's plot. The King's Son, for instance, wins Fedelma in Cycle I, but scarcely has he done so when she is abducted. Similarly, he finds the Sword of Light, but allows it to be tarnished; he counts the horns of the Old Woman of Beare's "half-years," only to forget the final figure; and when he finally hears the Unique Tale, after much searching, he still must find its beginning and end before it has any efficacy. Gilly of the Goatskin moves through similar patterns. Gilly finds and then loses the Crystal Egg and gives up the search for it only to have the Old Woman of Beare reimpose it. For that matter, the reimposition of the search backtracks in another way, for Gilly has fulfilled his part of the bargain with the Old Woman of Beare and should be given a name without having to meet an additional demand. These examples, far from being the only ones, are only the most obvious instances in a plot composed of ebbs and flows of

incident.

These delays result from innovations of Colum's designed to exploit and accentuate the rudimentary deferral present in the folktale in the alternation of progress and delay, event and obstacle. In order to make such a pattern, the events of the folktale narrative must be discernible units played against formally different and therefore contrasting elements. In the folktale, these are the barriers, mostly various kinds of tests, that the hero circumvents, sometimes with great difficulty. Precisely at these points, the forward narrative movement encounters a resistance; from the struggle of the active impetus of the narrative with this resistance, the pattern of the folktale narrative emerges. When Colum, in The King of Ireland's Son, emphasizes points of resistance, the result is a striking rhythm of deferral which suggests the characters' and the narrator's attitudes toward the action, most notably despair, of which the folktale is for the most part incapable.

In considering further how deferral operates as a rhythm in The King of Ireland's Son, it is perhaps best to concentrate for the moment on the part of the narrative featuring the King's Son, for as shall become clear in the next section, deferral itself becomes exaggerated and operates rather differently where Gilly is involved. By comparing a significant example from the King's Son narrative with its folktale source we can gain a better sense of the specific nature of Colum's transformation of folktale form. The episode in which the hero,

entirely through Fedelma's offices, is completing the tasks assigned by the Enchanter is quite close to an episode in "The Son of the King of Erin and the Giant of Loch Léin."<sup>4</sup> This episode is bound by the classic folktale form of trebling. On each of three successive nights, the giant puts the visiting king's son to bed "into the deep water tank to drown" ("SKE," 7). The giant's daughter, Yellow Lily, rescues the hero as soon as the giant himself retires, spreads a feast before him, finds him a good bed, and returns him to the tank before her father arises in the morning. On each of the three mornings, the giant assigns the hero a task, each more difficult than the last. The king's son always fares badly by himself, but each day Yellow Lily arrives to coach him in the completion of his task and thus to save his life.

Within the form of trebling that governs this episode, further patterns may be discerned. First, each encounter, whether by day or by night, has the same arrangement: the giant endangers the hero's life and purposes, the hero finds his own efforts of no use, and the heroine eventually saves him. In other words, in each case the hero confronts a serious obstacle (and the movement of the plot a resistance) that only the intervention of a beneficent helper can liquidate. Against this pattern, which links the tasks and the nights, there are a number of other patterns that divide them. For instance, the tasks intensify, whereas the night scenes do not. Not only do the tasks get more difficult and occasion a greater reaction from the hero as they progress, but also the last task can only be accomplished in the strangest and most

horrifying way: the hero must kill Yellow Lily, use her bones as steps up the glass tree, and then reassemble and revivify her. But while the tasks progress in this way, the night scenes remain absolutely the same. Another distinction between the daytime and night-time events has to do with their place in the narrative; the daytime tasks are an important function on which the advancement of the plot depends, whereas the night-time danger of drowning in the water tank is strictly tangential to the narrative mechanism.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the peripheral nature of the night scenes, their impotence in terms of the plot's advancement, along with their stasis and lack of progression, indicate a further distinction between them and the day scenes: in spite of the rescue with which they begin, the night episodes contrast the daily effort and action of the tasks with rest and respite. This dichotomy is a traditional one; many hero tales alternate tasks or struggles with nights spent a third in eating and drinking, a third in conversation or storytelling, and a third in slumber.<sup>6</sup> The night scenes in "The Son of the King of Erin" differ from these in including an obstacle--the water tank--which requires an obviation. However, since it is so incidental to the narrative mechanism, the obstacle of the sleeping arrangements is more important as a challenge to the hero's sleep and nourishment than to his life. Once the difficulty in this story is gotten around, the night scenes offer the same safety zone, the same release from the necessity for action, that one finds in other folktales.

Colum begins his version of the trebled nights and tasks of this tale by heightening the division between active day and restful night. On the first night, the King's Son, like the hero of the tale, is shown to his bed in a water tank, but Colum makes it a dry rather than a full one. As there is consequently no longer any question of physical harm to the hero, the night sequences, which no longer share the pattern of danger, initial failure, and successful rescue with the daily tasks, are more clearly differentiated from the day scenes than in the sample tale. As well, there is no longer any distraction from the rest and nourishment that night-time, through Fedelma, brings to the weary hero.

The King's Son now does not absolutely require Fedelma's help each night, so Colum is free to dispense with her on the second and third nights. He interposes his most significant innovation on these subsequent nights, when encounters with Fedelma's unsavory sisters, Aefa and Gilveen, are substituted for the expected encounter with Fedelma. The details of these encounters are wholly Colum's invention; there is nothing similar in the folktale. Formally, this innovation has two notable effects. First, it brings into the narrative an uncertainty which is not characteristic of the folktale. Neither the reader nor the King's Son can tell that the bird who comes for the hero on the second night has not come from Fedelma. Secondly, it significantly alters the pattern of trebling in "The Son of the King of Erin." Instead of the three equally successful night episodes of the folktale, we now have a successful night succeeded



by two that, in terms of procuring the hero's rest, at least, are unsuccessful. Since this pattern does not conform to any of the kinds of trebling that Propp observes in the folktale, it focuses attention on the significance of the contrast between the two kinds of night encounters.<sup>7</sup>

Colum proceeds on the second and third nights to develop a new significance for night-time itself. By invoking so strongly night's associations with rest and rejuvenation on the first night, he makes the new associations of night in the parallel lyrical passages that begin the accounts of the next two nights all the more striking.

Until the white moon rose above the trees;  
until the hounds went out hunting for  
themselves; until the foxes came down  
and hid in the hedges, waiting for the cocks  
and hens to stir out at the first light--so  
long did the King of Ireland's Son stay  
huddled in the dry water tank. KS, 16

Until the white moon went out in the sky;  
until the Secret People began to whisper  
in the woods--so long did the King of  
Ireland's Son remain in the dry water  
tank that night. KS, 22

These passages stress the strange absence of assistance for the King of Ireland's Son, who is left for the first time to fend for himself. But in addition, they specify the character of the night in a way that the folktale does not. The moon, the birds and animals, and especially the "Secret People" whispering among themselves make the night-time world a bloodless, strange, and inhospitable one.

For the King's Son, the rest and comfort of the first night give way to insomnia and unease.

He made his way through woods and thickets,  
and mighty glad he was when he saw the tank  
at the gable-end of the house. . . . He got  
into the tank and waited and waited. No  
message came from Fedelma. He was a long  
time there, stiff and sore and hungry, before  
the sun rose. . . . KS, 18

The verbal frame created here by the phrase "stiff and sore and hungry," which repeats exactly a phrase in the opening of the section, emphasizes the King's Son's discomfort. Whereas the day is a time of physical trial, his night of sleeplessness rather than sleep, of hunger rather than nourishment, and of loneliness rather than companionship becomes a time of spiritual turmoil, with intimations of troubled dream, the spirit, and the lonely vigil. As a consequence, for the King's Son, night-time begins to take on the characteristics of a trial of the moral worth of the inner man.

The element of spiritual trial is particularly evident in the encounters with Aefa and Gilveen on which the nights center. These encounters take the form of temptations. Each sister in turn tempts the King's Son to betray his commitment to Fedelma; each offers to save the hero from the giant if he will promise to marry her. Fortunately, the King's Son always refuses. Fedelma eventually indicates the importance of his resistance.

"I have helped you in everything," said Fedelma,  
"and in the last task I could not have helped you  
if you had not been true to me when Aefa and Gilveen  
brought you to them." KS, 26

The nights with Aefa and Gilveen, this passage reveals, have been crucial tests of the hero's steadfastness.

Temptation is especially interesting here, as are the qualities given to night-time, because its implicit relevance to a figure's inner life and spiritual worth is essentially unfolkloric. The traditional folktale, as Colum himself observed, deals only with "happenings," never with "states of mind."<sup>8</sup> Max Lüthi also notes the folktale's tendency to "externalize" questions of inner worth.

To be sure, the fairy tale likes to portray external happenings. It does not portray feelings, moods, inner conflicts, and thought processes, but strives to translate everything into action. It doesn't tell us that the third son is compassionate and truthful, but shows him as he shares his bread with a beggar and kindly gives him the information he seeks, whereas the older brothers keep their cake for themselves and answer the question with derision and lies.<sup>9</sup>

Lüthi's sample encounter of these young lads with a potential donor demonstrates how the folktale transmutes temptation into a purely formal test. More important to it than moral worth is the identity of the hero as a hero, and the precisely governed formal relationship of the "dramatis personae" is preferred to a group of relationships defined by the good or evil nature of the characters.

Throughout the second and third nights' episodes, Colum displays a greater interest in states of mind than the folk storyteller would. During the daytime, Fedelma's increasing dread as she anticipates the last task is another indication of

this interest, for it alters the folktale form by which the three tasks intensify and emphasizes an essentially moral concern with the heaviness of the sacrifice that Fedelma must make. When Fedelma reveals that her ability to perform the final task depends on the King's Son's resistance to Aefa and Gilveen, she shows that the formal mechanism of the plot, which still seems quite folkloric, itself depends on an unfolkloric moral mechanism that causally precedes it.

In giving the night scenes a new character and in changing them to include the encounters with Aefa and Gilveen, Colum shapes them to literary purposes. Yet Colum avoids emphasizing the literary aspects of his story. Fedelma's revelation, for instance, which is important in establishing the moral and psychological significance of the episode, is placed after the critical action, and so is undercut. Moreover, Colum leaves the folktale forms of his source in place; his alterations of them may sculpt or change patterns, but they do not destroy them. Colum's thematic elements never overwhelm the form. Another writer might be more inclined than Colum to explore the courage and heroism of Fedelma as she faces her sacrificial death, for instance, or to describe the horror of her fate. Another might stress the miracle of her rejuvenation and all but forget the task. Colum, on the other hand, is diffident in his handling of the scene's overtones. With temptation, too, the elements that refer to the King's Son's character receive only the lightest touch, remaining curiously unemphatic, inchoate, and vague. The formal aspects of temptation

are more obvious than its spiritual ones.

In addition to retaining modified folktale forms in this episode, Colum creates a formal equivalent to a major aspect of the temptations, despair. The sisters' temptations of the King's Son are as much invitations to despair as temptations to betray Fedelma.

"My father is preparing a task for you,"  
said [Aefa], "and it will be a terrible  
task, and there will be no one to help you  
with it, so you will lose your head surely.  
And what I would advise you to do is to  
escape out of this country at once."  
KS, 18

This frightful warning occurs in a nightmarish section whose form is increasingly confused and dissolute. There is the unfolkloric uncertainty and unpredictability mentioned above; but also, the King's Son's succesful stalwartness meets with abuse rather than reward.

"But," said he, "if I live at all Fedelma is the  
one I will marry."

No sooner did he say the words than Aefa screamed  
out, "Seize him, my cat-o'-the-mountain. Seize  
him and hold him." Then the cat-o'-the-mountain  
that was under the table sprang across the room  
and fixed himself on his shoulder. He ran out  
of the house. All the time he was running the  
cat-o'-the-mountain was trying to tear his eyes  
out. KS, 18

The King's Son returns to his lonely, uncomfortable water tank,  
where he remains, "stiff and sore and hungry," for the rest of the  
night, denied knowledge of the contribution his behaviour indirectly  
makes to the advancement of his quest until all the nights and all

the daytime tasks are completed. Although he does not succumb to despair entirely, the keynotes of the King's Son's night-time experience are desperation and despondency.

If the sisters' temptations morally represent invitations to despair, formally they are calls to abandon the principle of action on which the narrative depends. Aefa and Gilveen entice the King's Son to give up both the tasks and the quest that has brought him to the Enchanter's to win back his life. Were he to capitulate to temptation, there could be no resolution of the problems already posed, and no further action consistent with the folktale forms that have been invoked. The night scenes, then, threaten a disruption of the principle of action that operates during the day scenes; they carry seeds which, if allowed to sprout, would obstruct the forward impetus of the action altogether. Just as the King's Son resists despair but feels some of its effect, the formal destruction of the narrative is avoided and yet partly present. For the night episodes remain, until Fedelma reveals their narrative significance, formally ambiguous. The reader is at a loss either to interpret them or to fit them into the narrative mechanism until the end of the episode. The night episodes, indeed, seem not to progress but to deny advancement: the hero does not recuperate during them, nor is his life endangered and saved, nor is an evident advancement of the narrative made. They are emblems of the principle of No-Action, of the Anti-Narrative that the temptations represent, a formal version of despair, and their alternation with the daytime and its principle of Action exaggerates and recreates the pulse of folktale narrative, which alternates progress and obstacle, action and respite. This

is Colum's literary version of the folktale process of externalization that Lüthi delineates. Colum couches his concern for such unfolkloric matters as the hero's emotional and moral state in the formal terms of action and its threatening opposite, no-action.

In the task sequence, the long, troubled nights defer the narration of the daytime successes and hence the advancement of the plot; Colum develops, in the space that is thus created, forms that express his interest in the hero's character. Deferral works similarly elsewhere in The King of Ireland's Son. Colum uses it as a tool with which to expand folktale forms, often to express the spiritual trial and spiritual growth which in The King of Ireland's Son, but not in the folktale, must precede narrative advancement. For instance, in the struggle with the Fua noted in the previous chapter, which like the episode just discussed exploits a contrast between night and day, night is quite specifically the appropriate time for a vigil that will test the hero's character, "your will, your mind, and your purpose" (KS, 81). The most exaggerated use of deferral is in the episode during which the story of "When the King of the Cats Came to King Connal's Dominion" is told. This episode shares with the task section an opposition between day and night, an emphasis on despair, and a breakdown in the ability of the narrative to progress. Here, however, where deferral is more important, the new patterns that Colum develops are particularly clear.

In this section, Colum defers narrative progress by extending one of its elements, what Propp would call the function of "mediation,"

or the "connective incident." This function's name, in stressing not action but the connection between the hero and events, suggests its uniqueness. Mediation, which "brings the hero into the tale," is the one juncture in the folktale narrative where the hero's state of mind and degree of knowledge are critical to the narrative movement: the hero must acknowledge and understand villainy if he is to counteract it.<sup>10</sup> These special qualities make the connective incident particularly useful to Colum, with his interest in the hero's psychology.

Here, mediation begins after the heroine's abduction, when the hero finally awakens. Often, in the folktale versions of Colum's material, the hero realizes the heroine's absence only slowly; then he may wander aimlessly for a time before discovering the writing the heroine has left or encountering witnesses to the kidnapping. Such knowledge suffices for the folktale hero, who immediately leaps aboard his sailing ship to confront the villain and rescue the heroine. In The King of Ireland's Son, however, the expansion of the mediation sequence delays the beginning of the hero's quest considerably. For one, Colum adds incidents to the intermezzo between the abduction and the departure of the hero. After reading the name of Fedelma's abductor in the dust, for instance, the King of Ireland's Son strays in bewilderment and despair into the Wood of the Shadows. Furthermore, unlike the folktale hero, he completes his journey home. But Colum, in addition to inventing further events in order to stretch the episode, strikingly fragments the knowledge that the King's Son needs in



order to proceed: the King's Son must learn not only who kidnapped Fedelma but by what means she can be released and how to acquire that means. The search for these separate fragments of vital information consumes a great deal more time and requires a far greater diligence of effort than the search for the sole fact necessary in the folktale. Finding Fedelma's falcon, the custodian of the information that the Sword of Light will release Fedelma, is a small quest in itself. Only after much frantic and futile questioning of visitors to the court, when the King's Son finally learns how to acquire the Sword of Light, is he reconnected to events and able to proceed. In the meantime, the expansion of the moment of knowledge has delayed dramatically the resumption of narrative activity, which folktale versions accomplish in two or three sentences, extending the function over several days of narrative time and thirty pages of text.

In effect, the exaggeration of the "connective incident" traps the hero in a moment of despair and failure. Colum conveys the hero's mental suffering by having him first essentially lose his senses in the Wood of the Shadows and then distractedly ignore the ministrations of the King's Councillor. Only after the King's Son is shown Fedelma's ring on his finger is he "less wild in his thoughts" (KS, 52). His desperation is in part a demonstration of the depth of his commitment to Fedelma. But also, the King's Son is frustrated because he has no means of resuming activity: the heavy emphasis on the narrative obstacle, the need for information, deprives him of the folktale hero's natural ability

to act. As in the task episode, then, the hero's despair accompanies a disruption of narrative progress.

The lengthy in-tale whose episodes, interspersed in the hero's long search for knowledge, stretch the connective incident and delay narrative progress even further, contributes considerably to the effectiveness of Colum's treatment of this part of the plot. Through it, for instance, Colum once again draws a contrast between day and night. As in the task episode, daytime is given over to activity, although the King's Son's daily forays over the countryside for news of Fedelma at first accomplish very little. Night-time devoted to the episodes of "When the King of the Cats Came to King Connal's Dominion," is once again troubled. More clearly than in the task episode, it is also the province of imagination--here, of a distinctly nightmarish sort. The in-tale's grim tone, haughty and fierce protagonist, and vague flavor of myth and mystery echo the hero's desperate uncertainty and make the tale an appropriate night-piece. Even more noteworthy, however, is a crucial formal feature of the tale: it has no ending. The King of Cats and the Eagle, embroiled in such fierce and violent struggle that they threaten to destroy the heroes and the fairies of Ireland with them, are transformed finally by Curoi the Druid.

"If this should go on," said Curoi, "our troops will join in and men and Fairies will be slaughtered. We must end the combat in the air." Saying this he took up the hurling-ball and flung it at the Cat and Eagle. Both came down on the ground. The Cat was about to spring, the Eagle was about to pounce when Curoi darted between them and struck both with his spear. Eagle and Cat became figures of stone. KS, 77

The in-tale is resolved by artificially stabilizing irresolution: the stone into which the combatants are cast ensures the perpetuity of their battle. In terms of the narrative principles of the folktale, nothing could be more night-marish. "And there they are now," concludes Art the King's Steward, emphasizing the irony of essential activity made stable, "a Stone Eagle with his wings outspread and a Stone Cat with his teeth bared and his paws raised" (KS, 77). This image represents an extremity of deferral; its dark paradoxes--frozen motion, eternal becoming, everlasting potentiality--are deferral's logical consequence, extreme versions of the threat to the principle of narrative advancement implicit in the dramatic extension of mediation, a moment of resistance to action, in the enveloping plot.

During the connective incident, in sum, as well as in the task and Fua episodes, an invented element, inserted into the narrative, expands one of the inactive moments of folktale narrative in order to allow exploration, within the moment, of the moral dimensions of the hero's character. At the same time that spiritual difficulty suggests the possibility of the hero's moral failure, disruption of the measured action threatens the idea of narrative progress inherited from the folktale. While the King of Ireland's Son is enduring his spiritual trial, in other words, he is unable to progress. Indeed, in Colum's modification of his folktale sources, the hero's ability to succeed comes to depend not on his physical strength, his magic helpers and donors, or the mechanism of folktale action, but on his personal fortitude. The

accompanying extrapolation of the folktale alternation of obstacle and action into the opposition of Action and No-Action, both in the main plot and in the "King of the Cats" in-tale, makes failure a more real and frightening possibility in The King of Ireland's Son than in the folktale.

After the King's Son acquires the Sword of Light, deferral becomes dominant in the narrative. When the King's Son, in another of Colum's invented insertions, succumbs at last to moral temptation, the consequences are grave. The folly of his arrogance and incontinence allows the Sword of Light to be tarnished, so that what should immediately follow his acquisition of the Sword of Light--an attack on the King of the Land of Mist--must be postponed while the King's Son labors to undo the damage to his magic weapon. The difference here from previous delays is that the folktale narrative, in which deferral has heretofore inserted an invention, is now itself embedded in one of Colum's embedded episodes. The gap in the chain of events, between acquisition of the magic helper and struggle with the villain, becomes the longest, most important section of Cycle II, the pursuit of the Unique Tale and what comes before and after it. Deferral, in this instance, makes narrative progress tremendously more difficult for the King's Son than for most folktale heroes, and helps to transform an essentially folkloric sequence of events, the quest, into a means for the King's Son to regenerate himself spiritually and to prove again his steadfastness.

## 2. Failure

In general, the narrative forms of the adventures of Gilly of the Goatskin and the King of Ireland's Son are distinct. For one, as indicated by Chapter I above, Gilly's narrative has an episodic structure, uses more original material, and depends on a lower kind of tale. In addition, it is characterized by a curious tendency to lose the thread of the story itself. The outlines of the plot are so fuzzy that one cannot, on purely formal grounds, distinguish the "main plot" from the sub-plots, as one can in Cycles I and II; all parts, major and minor, are presented as equally weighted episodes of a loosely-knit action.

One must begin instead with a description based on content: the "main plot" is that part of the action (later merging with the quest to solve the Unique Tale) in which Gilly seeks and acquires knowledge of himself and of his heritage. Such a quest has implications for narrative form. Although Gilly may gain knowledge through action, knowledge itself is an amorphous commodity by folktale standards. Insofar as it suggests an interest in "states of mind" rather than "happenings," it distinguishes the main action of Cycle III from the bright externalization of the main action of Cycles I and II, in which Colum's interest in "states of mind" is largely disguised and subordinate.

In short, Gilly's plot is marked by a slackening of the narrative tension and a partial disengagement of the well-meshed gears of the narrative mechanism which serve to advance the action involving the King of Ireland's Son. Deferral still has an important role to play in Cycle III, but, not surprisingly in view of these differences, it undergoes some significant changes. Here, in fact, deferral occurs as something of a norm. Deferral dons its most exaggerated guise only in interludes in the King's Son plot, such as the "King of Cats" story. Gilly, however, frequently defers action or fails outright when pursuing the most important goals, succeeding unencumbered by deferral in non-essential interludes. For instance, he is clever and intrepid enough when he outwits the Churl of the Townland of Mischance and the Robber Chief in extraneous episodes whose incidents follow their folktale sources closely, but is almost wholly ineffectual when it comes to his main tasks of discovering himself and resolving the Unique Tale. But with Gilly, it is not only that events are delayed and unstable moments stretched. Key episodes end either inconclusively, as when Gilly abandons his attempt to recover the Crystal Egg, or in failure, as when the Hags of the Long Teeth make child's play of casting an obstreperous Gilly back into bondage. Inconclusiveness and failure go far beyond deferral in disturbing the folktale's narrative mechanism. Deferral, in fact, metamorphoses into its logical extreme, failure.

The formal properties of Gilly's action, like the King's Son's, including the role in it of deferral and failure, can best

be delineated with reference to a specific example. The events involving the Crystal Egg are in many ways typical of Cycle III. We readily find in this sequence evidence of the discontinuity which marks the entire narrative. Gilly becomes involved in a long, disjointed series of episodes. In fact, the story of the Crystal Egg begins outside of Gilly's own story with two episodes that occur before Gilly is even introduced. Fedelma mentions the Egg first; she recites the poem entitled "The Sending of the Crystal Egg" while she and the King's Son are crossing their fields. This poem tells how the Crystal Egg, sent to toiling Atlas by the Kings of Murias so that the Swan of Endless Tales due to hatch from it might divert him, was lost by the "fitful crane" who carried it. A bit later, still before Gilly appears in the book, the possibly unreliable Crow of Achill recounts to the King of Ireland's Son a slightly different version of Fedelma's tale: she herself stole the Egg, the Crow says, from the nest where Laheen the Eagle had laid it. The slight divergence of the accounts is curious; it disguises the continuity between them, making them seem like discrete stories. The reader may even doubt whether the Crystal Eggs in these two episodes are really the same.

The Crystal Egg, in this way, is introduced as one of the book's several conundrums, like the tale of the King of the Cats. When Gilly spies it lying in the river and has the Weasel recover it, he brings it more directly and concretely into the story. Still, the story of the Crystal Egg proceeds episodically, and remains

half-embedded in the outer narrative. Rory the Fox, before his lust for the Egg develops, gives yet another account of it. There is no particular reason to believe his story more than the others, yet it does provide a way of reconciling the two previous accounts; apparently the Crow of Achill stole the Egg not from the nest but from the bare rock where the crane left it. Rory soon steals the Egg himself, and puts it under the Spae-Woman's goose, to hatch, as he thinks, into the "toothsome bird" he has dreamt about. But it seems that mortal plans involving the Crystal Egg are bound never to mature. Before Rory's plan can succeed--and before Gilly and the Weasel can foil it--the robbers intervene, making off with goose, nest, eggs, Egg, and all.

The theft at first seems but to defer Gilly's recovery of the Egg, but as it turns out, this deferral is permanent. However, although Gilly eventually drops his attempt to recover the Crystal Egg, the Crystal Egg itself is not dropped from the narrative. The Old Woman of Beare presently sends Gilly to learn the fate of the Egg, at which point Gilly tells of his own experience with the Egg, thus adding a fourth to the string of accounts of it. But before the Old Woman makes her request, the two heroes, as they are tallying her age, have a strange experience.

Just as they were adding the two numbers together they both heard sounds in the air--they were like the sounds that Bards make chanting their verses. And when they looked up they saw a swan flying round and round above them. And the swan chanted the story of the coming of the Milesians to Eirinn, and as the two youths listened they forgot the number of horns they had counted. KS, 129



Once again, the continuity of the story of the Crystal Egg is disrupted; Colum presents this encounter with a storytelling swan as if it had no connection with the Swan of Endless Tales. Considering the Old Woman of Beare's interest in the Crystal Egg and the Swan of Endless Tales, one might expect her to recognize who this swan must be, but she herself, no doubt distracted by the youths' failure to compute her age, ignores the significance of the incident. When Gilly is finally sent to learn what became of the Crystal Egg, he has no further trouble in finding the robbers who earlier eluded him. What he discovers confirms what the above passage implies: the Crystal Egg has indeed hatched, and the Swan of Endless Tales has been born into the World.

The discontinuity of the episodes making up the Crystal Egg story differs from whatever disjuncture characterizes the episodic folktale. Episodic tales--such as "Mor's Sons and the Herder from under the Sea" in Curtin's Hero-Tales of Ireland (pp.36-57)--juggle independent adventures that are either complete moves or large parts of moves, whereas the Crystal Egg episodes are by comparison very small pieces of the action. Furthermore, the repetition of the early history of the Egg is unlike episodes of folktales, which are frequently integrated by such devices as betrothal, mentioned above. Episodes in the Crystal Egg story are often formally ambiguous; the longest and most folkloric of the episodes is the story of Gilly's interaction with the Egg, but it, like some earlier episodes, is left hanging. Other episodes--the first two accounts of the Crystal Egg and the penultimate appearance

of the mysterious swan to Gilly and the King's Son--neglect to define the part's relationship to the whole. Such disjointedness, it seems, is a matter of Colum's deliberate shaping of the narrative in this way rather than a result of imitation of folktale sources.

Having something of the same effect is the preponderance of chance in the narrative. The crane's accidental loss of the Egg, the robbers' unwitting theft of it, and most important, the accident of Gilly's finding it also represent departures from folktale practice; whereas magic objects in folktales--for example, the Sword of Light in Larminie's "Morraha" (West Irish Tales, pp.10-30) and the devil's flail in Kennedy's "The Lad with the Goatskin" (Legendary Fictions, pp.23-31)--usually require a search, a struggle, or a quest, Gilly simply happens on the Crystal Egg. This kind of chance and the deliberate discontinuity among the episodes, like deferral, disturb narrative progress and delay resolution. But the attack on the narrative mechanism is much more thoroughgoing here than in Cycles I and II. Earlier episodes led onward in spite of deferral, sometimes accentuated because of it; the causal basis of the narrative mechanism was suspended and in places superseded by moral concerns but it was not destroyed. In the Crystal Egg sequence, disjuncture and casualness usurp causality's place. It is for this reason that the episodes in the Crystal Egg sequence lie so inertly between interruptions and refuse to rise to the chase as the earlier episodes did. Cycle III no less than Cycles I and II invokes folktale form, but uses it as a disguise for a narrative form in which the forward

impetus of folktale action is baffled.

The Crystal Egg episodes contradict the practice of folk narrative more specifically on two occasions. First, Gilly's donor, the Weasel, deserts him in his hour of need. Previously, the Weasel has indeed invoked the character and the form of the folktale donor: Gilly rescues him and earns his service in the classic folktale manner by freeing him from the claws of a predator (Proppian function D<sup>5</sup>).<sup>11</sup> (The stalwart companionship of the Weasel itself echoes the folktale.) Folktale donors, however, usually appear or volunteer help just when the hero most needs it; indeed, we can well say that that is their entire purpose in the narrative. For this reason, the disappearance of the donor at the critical moment in the Crystal Egg episode is rather shocking. It inverts folktale convention and suggests a more profound denial of the principles of folktale narrative than any instance of deferral in Cycle II accomplished.

The second incident that flies in the face of folktale convention, Gilly's abandonment of his pursuit of the robbers and the Egg, is like the Weasel's abandonment a symptom of an underlying change in narrative form. It is particularly interesting for its parallels with one of the instances of deferral discussed above. Gilly's occasional forays from the Spae-Woman's house in search of the robbers in many ways resemble the King's Son's daytime outings in search of Fedelma's blue falcon; both proceed intermittently and defer success during a series of thwarted attempts to advance. However, with perseverance, the King of

Ireland's Son manages to overcome the obstacles that deferral raises against him, whereas Gilly cannot budge the one obstacle placed in his path. He really has no choice but to abandon his search. Of course, a folktale hero, though delayed or distracted along the way, never gives up his purpose, nor does the narrative ever leave him without an opportunity for successful action. Once again in the Crystal Egg sequence, folktale forms--villainy, mediation, dispatch of the hero--are invoked only to be denied. In this way, Colum extrapolates the kind of deferral attendant on the King's Son's long pursuit of the falcon, itself an exaggeration of folktale pattern, into a downward-turning pattern of failure quite at odds with the rhythms of the folktale.

It is, perhaps, curious to call a story a source for events which are told before it, yet the Unique Tale, reaching back to Gilly's infancy and earlier, is the well-head not only for the rhythm of failure but also, as we shall see, for other narrative structures vital to the Crystal Egg story as well as to Cycle III as a whole. Failure is starker and more obvious in the Unique Tale than elsewhere because this story otherwise follows its folktale source so closely. The adventures of the Crystal Egg, as we have seen, are themselves disjointed, so that Gilly's failure in a way is just another in a long series of puzzlements. But the Unique Tale has the tightly-bound, end-directed structure of the folktale--until grief erupts in Sheen's fatal cry. The increasing pressures on the heroine, which in the source tale increase the drama of her just-in-the-nick-of-time success,

overcome the heroine of the Unique Tale. Sheen's story transforms the kind of irresolution of the King of Cats tale into a darker, more tragic failure. There, the very lack of resolution was magically, paradoxically transfixed, and so became a resolution: since the combatants were petrified, the fight was at a definite end, even if there was no winner. Here, Sheen's dilemma is truly unresolved. Her failure produces a narrative imbalance and an accompanying gloom not dispelled until the end of the book.

Colum underscores Sheen's failure by dwelling on the joy with which she anticipates the success of her task. The picture of her gathering bog-cotton for the "seventh and last shirt" is a kind of negative foreshadowing.

Sheen could hardly keep from her mouth the song that was in her mind. She would sing and laugh and talk when the last thread was spun and woven, when the last stitch was sewn, when the shirts of bog-down she had made in silence would have brought back her brothers to their own human forms. She gathered the scarce heads of the cannavan or bog-down with one hand, while she held the other hand to her lips. KS, 134

The joy of resolution, however, is denied in the Unique Tale. This passage of premature, light-heartedness makes the reality of failure which succeeds it the more significant.

A bitter cry came from her. Then the stitched cloth that was in her hand became bog-down and was blown away on the breeze. When she saw this happen she turned from the King's Castle and ran through the woods crying and crying. KS, 146

Colum accentuates the failure by repeating it. Sheen, unlike her folktale predecessors, makes a second attempt at her long, joyless task.

But when the first thread was spun the  
memory of her child blew against her heart  
and she cried tears down. The thread she  
had spun became bog-down and was blown away.  
For days she wept and wept. KS, 146.

Blowing through both of these passages is a biting wind of despair. But if Sheen's shirts are of a tight and careful weave, so is the narrative. It too is shredded and dispersed at Sheen's outcry. Colum makes clear that for the narrative as well as for Sheen, the action ends in disaster. The narrative equivalent of despair, suggested but suppressed in interludes in Cycles I and II, becomes the keynote here.

The irresolution of the Unique Tale drifts like bog-down into the outer narrative. For one, the terms of the King's Son's quest make clear that the Unique Tale does not exist in isolation: he must find not just the Unique Tale, but also "'what went before its beginning and what comes after its end'" (KS, 88-89). As it turns out, these other parts of the Unique Tale involve it with characters in the main narrative. Unlike the tale of the King of the Cats, the Unique Tale refuses to remain a mere in-tale, but becomes continuous with the narrative that it is initially embedded in. Finally, the Unique Tale occupies a telling position within the Crystal Egg sequence. It is told after Gilly abandons his quest and goes on to other adventures, while the Crystal Egg

seems to have vanished forever from the story, and before Gilly undertakes to discover its fate for the Old Woman of Beare, whose request about it takes Gilly by surprise. The suspended narrative's more vague version of failure borrows some of the force of the example of ur-failure with which it is juxtaposed.

Since the system of narrative advancement invoked in Cycles I and II is revoked in Cycle III, it cannot be responsible for what is, in spite of all of Gilly's failures, a happy, successful outcome. Colum accompanies the fitful folktale action of Cycle III with another, less obvious, but more effective narrative mechanism. If the actions of the hero cannot be counted on to advance the plot--and we must remind ourselves that, in spite of the setbacks, it is nevertheless framed, like the folktale, in terms of functions of dramatis personae, of whom the hero is the most important--then others must intervene. Yet behind the Spae-Woman, Morag, and the King of Ireland's Son, who at various times advise Gilly, provide him with vital information, or facilitate the restoration of Sheen's brothers for him, there moves another hand, one which unifies the seemingly diverse interventions on Gilly's behalf. In the Crystal Egg sequence, this hand can be seen shaping the outcome through the generally unfolkloric chain of happenstance in the narrative. All of the various accidents of the Crystal Egg episode, from the moment Gilly finds the Egg lying in the river to its theft by untraceable robbers who don't even know they've stolen it, may be seen as means of manipulating events to bring about the hatching of the Egg and the fulfillment of its long-delayed

destiny.

Colum presents this mechanism for shaping events from outside the narrative, like the rhythm of failure, most strongly in the Unique Tale, where it is clearly named for the first and only time. After Sheen's double failure, the Spae-Woman advises her to commend her lost child and the fate of her brothers into the care of Diachbha

"Commit the child you have lost to Diachbha--  
that is, to Destiny--and Diachbha may bring  
it about that he shall be the one that will  
restore your seven brothers their human  
forms." KS 146

The Spae-Woman translates Diachbha as Destiny, but as it is a personified and beneficent principle of order, it seems to be a Destiny very close in conception to Providence. At the moment that the breeze scatters the little leafy effigy that Sheen makes (echoing the dissolution of the shirts into bogsgown), Diachbha takes on the care of the narrative as well as of Sheen's many enchanted relatives. Although Diachbha is never again explicitly addressed, it can be seen at work behind the surface of the narrative at many points--in the Spae-Woman's numerous prophetic dreams, for instance. Elsewhere, it works through and hence transforms Gilly's failure, as when the Hags turn him over to Crom Duv and bring about his meeting with Morag; and indeed, the success that eventually comes to the Unique Tale through Sheen's failure is more complete than the goal she fails to reach since it encompasses not only the disenchantment of her brothers but also a reunion with Gilly, her lost son. Perhaps, too, it is



Diachbha who puts the thought of Morag into Gilly's mind after he escapes from Crom Duv, for when he returns to her, he returns to the person whose sacrifice will release Sheen's seven brothers from their spell.

The priorities of Diachbha and those of Gilly are sometimes at loggerheads. For instance, the importance given to the metamorphosis of the Crystal Egg into the Swan of Endless Tales puts this larger action at odds with the direction of Gilly's adventures. Gilly wants to return to his idyllic forest life, his charming house, and his communion with the animals. He cannot, however, accomplish this without recovering the Crystal Egg, and to do that would be to prevent its ever achieving the destiny laid out for it. Because fulfilling this destiny is paramount, Gilly's narrative--the folktale part of the action--has to be subordinated, here and elsewhere, to the workings of Providence. Indeed, Gilly must fail for Providence to succeed. Yet Gilly's instrumentality, to his own detriment, in the fate of the Crystal Egg, is rewarded, for Destiny does for Gilly what Gilly is unable to do for himself; it acquaints him with his identity, restores him to Sheen, and effects the disenchantment of the brothers and the resolution of the Unique Tale. That Gilly acts, willy-nilly, in the service of Providence, or Diachbha, is confirmed by the action immediately following the Unique Tale; whereas the King's Son is required to discover the beginning and ending of the Unique Tale, Gilly is sent to find what we might call "the rest of the story of the Crystal Egg." In learning and repeating the fate of the Crystal

Egg, parallel to the King's Son's learning and telling of the Unique Tale, Gilly in effect completes the story that Fedelma began and confers continuity on the many far-flung Crystal Egg episodes. His reward for this bears concretely on his main quest, the search for identity: he is given a name.

Within Gilly's plot, Colum gives both the Crystal Egg and the Swan of Endless Tales a symbolic, mythical aura that helps distinguish them from magic objects in folktales, which are usually more wholly subordinated to the action. A magic egg with supernatural offspring can easily acquire mystical connotations; Yeats invokes a similar image in the fictional introduction to the first edition of A Vision.

Mary Bell then opened the ivory box and took from it an egg the size of a swan's egg, and standing between us and the dark window-curtains, lifted it up that we might all see its color. "Hyacinthine blue, according to the Greek lyric poet," said Robartes. . . . "I bought this egg from an old man in a green turban in Arabia, or Persia, or India. He told me its history, partly handed down by word of mouth, partly as he had discovered it in ancient manuscripts. . . . Those of you who are learned in the classics will have recognised the lost egg of Leda, its miraculous life still unquenched. I return to the desert in a few days with Owen Aherne and this lady chosen by divine wisdom for its guardian and bearer. When I have found the appointed place, Owen Aherne and I will dig a shallow hole where she must lay it and leave it to be hatched by the sun's heat."<sup>12</sup>

Colum's Egg is of a somewhat less mystical and catastrophic species than Yeats's. Still, the correspondences are striking. Both Eggs have an extraordinary outer appearance, Colum's preserving a folk-tale clarity, Yeats's a romantic luxuriance; both, like dormant

seeds, retain their spark of life through long, infertile years and inhospitable circumstances, until the moment comes to warm them to vitality again. Yeats and Colum alike feel compelled to provide a partial history of their Eggs, each of which has its own fame already, and each history is somewhere incomplete. Both Eggs are sufficiently beyond the dictates of biology to hatch into species other than their parents'; each, furthermore, is associated with a mythical swan, Leda's Egg with Jove incarnate, the Crystal Egg with the Swan of Endless Tales into which it will metamorphose. Finally, and most important, both Eggs will hatch into embodiments of apocalypse. Yeats's Egg, however, will introduce a new cycle in the history of the cosmos. The apocalypse suggested by Colum's Egg, on the other hand, whose Swan is first heard dumbfounding Irish princes with the story of the coming of the Milesians to Ireland, will usher in a new Irish age, the Irish millenium that nationalists have long anticipated.

This kind of symbolism gives the Crystal Egg a life and significance independent of its importance to Gilly, while suggesting as well why its fate might entice the intervention of an Irish Providence. Colum once or twice reinforces the Egg's importance through imagery, as in the description of Rory the Fox's theft of the Egg.

The Weasel was right; it was Rory the Fox who had stolen Gilly's Crystal Egg. One night, just as he was leaving Gilly's house, the moon shone full upon the Crystal Egg. In the turn of a hand Rory the Fox had made a little spring and had taken the Egg in his mouth. Then he slipped out by the door as quick and as quiet as a leaf blown in the wind. KS, 108

Like Rory's dream of the succulent bird that will hatch from the Egg, the sudden illumination of the Egg tempts him to steal it, facilitating the hatching not of the tasty fowl he and his children smack their lips in anticipation of, but the Swan of Endless Tales. The moonlight theatrically foregrounds the Egg, imbuing it with an eerie magic and a desirability beyond even that of magic objects in the folktale.

The inefficacy of folktale action in Cycle III and the subordination of human activity to a larger plan and a more powerful force demonstrate the limitations of the materialistic, mechanistic folktale action as a model for human encounters with the surrounding world. In Cycles I and II, the moral dimension of human conduct intimates the inadequacy of the folktale model; here, however, Colum indicates a way in which these limitations can be transcended when he sketches in Destiny (which, as Chapter III will show, is specifically an Irish Destiny) behind the scenes. This force, which remains inchoate, merely implied except at the end of the Unique Tale, yet more definite than the moral tracery underlying deferral, effects what the human hero cannot: it transform Gilly's failures into success. The inadequate folktale form is edged toward the more profound territory of myth, as the deeply suggestive change in the means of resolving the Unique Tale illustrates. Seven drops of "heart's blood" replace the seven shirts of the folktale--and the original part of the Unique Tale--as the means of restoring the brothers. In other words, the almost mechanical equation of the folktale, whereby a condition

is fulfilled to obviate the magic of the spell, is exchanged for the transcendence of earthly evil through the invocation of superhuman power. The Communion symbolism in the ritual that frees the brothers identifies this power with Christian grace.

Then Caintigern arose and took bread that the Spae-Woman had made. She moistened it in her mouth, and into each bit of moistened bread she put a piece of the handkerchief that had a drop of blood. She held out her hand, giving each the moistened bread. The first that ate it fell forward on the floor of the Spae-Woman's house, his head down on the ground.  
KS, 261

In the earlier parts of the book, Colum begins to put moral concerns, as evidenced in the King's Son's spiritual trials, causally before the folktale's mechanism; the symbolism of this passage confirms the further change of emphasis in Cycle III, from the material, human action of the folktale to the mysterious intervention in human affairs of an immaterial, superhuman power.

In spite of the effectiveness of Providence (Diachbha) in overseeing the success of the narrative, the rhythm of failure leaves an indelible mark on Gilly of the Goatskin. No matter how satisfying the resolution of the enigma of the Crystal Egg or the suspended action of the Unique Tale, the hero's actions, which commonly occasion the greatest interest and sense of immediacy in the folktale's audience, are disappointing. The subordination of the hero's action to anything is unheard of in the folktale, and remains disconcerting here, especially since Gilly is left with an action that proceeds in fits and starts, in which effort

is followed by delay, delay or deferral stretches through inactivity to inaction, and inaction gives way to defeat. If the folktale hero, like the King of Ireland's Son, loses Eden only to have it restored more securely at the end of his action, Gilly is faced with a more permanent Fall. Symbolically, the return to Eden is replaced by a redemption through Grace, at the same time that the form of the narrative leaves the folktale's perimeters and heads towards religious myth. Still, it is debatable whether Gilly's forest idyll is really transcended or whether, when he is eventually given the darker and lonelier part of the kingdom to govern, he is really divested of his rhythm of failure. Even in the end of the book, Gilly is associated with night and the darker aspect of reality, which from time to time intrudes in the sunny, daylight world inhabited for most of Cycles I and II by the King of Ireland's Son. As we shall see in the next chapter, Gilly expresses Colum's essential realism, his refusal, as Loftus notes, to present heroism without qualification.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it may be that in arranging the surface of Cycle III, with its many potholes, blind alleys, and dead ends, Colum is quoting a shadow tradition of the folktale, the tradition of the imperfectly passed-down tale. Even the best-told tales are prone to small errors or inconsistencies, like the anachronistic postman in one of Kennedy's tales.<sup>14</sup> Colum seems to have considered this aspect of oral tradition, for he remarks that the tradition of his grandmother's house was "fragmented," and he calls the story in his poem, "Downal Baun," based on a story his

grandmother told him, a "broken story."<sup>15</sup> Folktales are often imperfect and full of loose ends--forgotten motivations, unmotivated actions, disappearing characters.

"Mediocre storytellers," Colum writes, "confused the pattern [of a tale] by putting incidents in the wrong place, by using unfitting metaphors, by making a hurried beginning or a hurried end, by being unable to use the chiming words that made special--or, as we would say now, featured some passage"<sup>16</sup>

In addition, James Delargy has noted that the quality of long tales diminishes as the storyteller tires.<sup>17</sup> Since the nature of oral tradition is perhaps as much to lose connections as to preserve them, these malformed tales are as legitimate a part of tradition as the unflawed ones. Indeed, the forms that conserve tradition owe their invention to the perception of how easily human memory may fail and important elements may be lost. The roughness of a sequence like the Crystal Egg episodes, with the three conflicting accounts of its dispatch, conveys something of this motley underside of the folktale in oral tradition and serves to remind the reader that not all folktales are crystalline. The garbling of Cycle III, in fact, is another way for Colum to intrude reality into the well-balanced artifice of folktale form.

### 3. Gathering

One important effect of the rhythm of deferral and failure is the disruption of the tight narrative order of the folktale, with which the book begins. By the time that Gilly, having both located the Swan of Endless Tales and received a name from the Old Woman of Beare, rejoins his comrade at the Town of the Red Castle, the elements of The King of Ireland's Son have been spread over a vast narrative terrain. The sheer length of the book, already several times longer than the average folktale, accounts for part of this diffusion. In addition, the multiplicity of heroes, characters, and stories, along with the use of the devices of deferral and failure, exerts an outward pressure on the forms that in the folktale contain the action. Colum, however, has all along been preparing for the ultimate unification of the narrative, by contriving the hidden connections between characters and plot outlined in Chapter I above. Now, Colum responds to the problem of putting the narrative back together again by revealing more and more of these connections at the same time that he moves the various plots towards their individual resolutions. The narrative slowly constricts into a single narrative, and ends with a single celebration of resolution. Colum's particular methods for achieving this, the forms that this movement takes, and the vision inherent in them make up what I call the gathering rhythm. While similar in some ways to the narrative progression



that brings folktales to their conclusions, and in the end quoting the folktale's final wedding feast, Colum's gathering rhythm, like his narrative, is far more complex than its folktale model.

The reunion of the two heroes, the first manifestation of this movement towards unity, introduces the fair at the Town of the Red Castle. The motif of the Irish country fair, which in The King of Ireland's Son becomes the most complete expression of the gathering rhythm, is a standby of Irish accounts of rural life, such as Maurice O'Sullivan's Twenty Years A-Growin', Thomas Ó Crohan's The Islandman, and Patrick Kavanagh's The Green Fool. These writers use the fair to convey a sense of the great, diverse panoply of life, to satirize diverting country character types, and to comment on the general vanity of the human comedy. The chaotic world of the fair, not surprisingly, is a staple of Colum's work. In The Fiddler's House, old Conn Hourican dreams of renewing his fame among the joyous, inebriated crowds of fairgoers; Maelshaughlinn, in Castle Conquer, goes further and actually tests his luck at the fair, returning with the humorous advice, "'Never go into the fair where you have no business.'"<sup>19</sup> There are fairs in A Boy in Eirinn, The White Sparrow, and The Story of Lowry Maen as well. In Colum's poetry, the fair is a backdrop for a sad expression of human greed in "Before the Fair," and for the poignant--because unknowingly final--parting of lovers in "She Moved through the Fair."

The flood of fairgoers whom Gilly watches surge through the gates of the Town of the Red Castle captures the spirit of the

fair that attracts Colum as well as other Irish writers.

Horns were blown outside, and the watchman opened the gates. Flann [Gilly] shook himself and stood up to see the folk that were coming in. First came the men who drove the mountain ponies that had lately fed with the deer in wild places. Then came men in leathern jerkins who led wide-horned bulls--a black bull and a white bull, and a white bull and a black bull, one after the other. Then there were men who brought in high, swift hounds, three to each leash they held. Women in brown cloaks carried cages of birds. Men carried on their shoulders and in their belts tools for working gold and silver, bronze and iron. And there were calves and sheep, and great horses and weighty chariots, and colored cloths, and things closed in packs that merchants carried on their shoulders. The famous bards, and storytellers, and harpists would not come until noontime when the business of the fair would have abated, but with the crowd of beggars came ballad-singers, and the tellers of the stories that were called "Go-by-the-Market-Stake," because they were told around the stake in the market place and were very common. KS, 165-166

The incredible diversity of color and sound, of men, women, beasts, trades, and purposes in this description of the crowd suggests the wonder and exhilaration that Colum associates with the fair. The high and the low, the wild and the tame all mingle at a single event. It is primarily this feature--the wheeling intercourse of the marketplace--that makes the fair a useful device in The King of Ireland's Son. The fair brings together characters who need to meet in order to get a stalled, disjunct plot moving again; in other words, it provides the perfect pretext for the coincidental encounters Colum must arrange to enable further action. Moreover, the fair's rollicking, unrestrained climate encourages these

encounters to produce results that would otherwise seem extraordinary.

The planned meeting of Gilly and the King of Ireland's Son, like the first firecracker in a string, sets off a rapid series of further meetings. These, however, are largely unexpected. Gilly, for instance, is surprised when he recognizes Mogue, the Captain of the Robbers.

Mogue wore a hare-skin cap, his left eye protruded as usual, and he walked limpingly. He had a pack on his back, and he led a small, swift looking horse of a reddish color.  
KS, 166

The reddish horse is also a familiar character; Gilly has never seen it before, but the astute reader might recognize it as the King of Ireland's Son's enchanted horse from earlier in the book, the Slight Red Steed. Soon Downal and Dermott, the King's Son's half-brothers, turn up, exhibiting a change of heart and a resolve to abandon princely aspirations that lay to rest the threat they once posed to the King's Son. The most important and telling encounter, however, occurs when Colum, with characteristic delight in artifice, brings Gilly, the King's Son, the Gobaun Saor, and the Spae-Woman all rather fantastically together at once.

. . . The King's Son and Flann saw two figures--a middle-aged, sturdy man and an old, broken-looking woman--meet before the Bull's Field. "It is the Gobaun Saor," said the King's Son. "It is the Spae-Woman," said Flann. They went to them, each wishing to greet his friend and helper.

There they saw a sturdy, middle-aged man and a broken-looking old woman. But the

woman looking on the man saw one who had full wisdom to plan and full strength to build, whose wisdom and whose strength could neither grow nor diminish. And the man looking on the woman saw one whose brow had all quiet, whose heart had all benignity. "Hail, Gobaun, Builder for the Gods," said the woman. "Hail, Grania Oi, Reconciler for the Gods," said the man. KS, 170

This is a quadruple reunion, for it is just as Gilly and the King's Son are meeting that they each recognize their separate mentors, the Spae-Woman and the Gobaun Saor, themselves in the act of recognizing each other.

This meeting of the young heroes with their benefactors, conditioned by the goodwill of a chance reunion of friends among strangers engenders, affects the actions of both heroes concretely. The Gobaun Saor gives the King of Ireland's Son advice that hinges on further chance meetings.

"If he sees one he knows in this town," said the Gobaun Saor, "let him mount a horse he has mounted before and pursue that one and force him to tell what went before and what comes after the Unique Tale." KS, 171

The King's Son soon recognizes the Enchanter of the Black Backlands masquerading as a conjuror and sees the Slight Red Steed; he follows the rest of the instructions successfully. When he brings the news of the Unique Tale back to the Gobaun Saor, who brightens the Sword of Light and tells the way to the Land of Mist, the last obstacle to his assault on Fedelma's abductor is removed. On the other hand, the encounter that brings the King's Son to the

crisis of his quest clears the way for Gilly to begin his. Following the Spae-Woman's advice, by which he learns Flame-of-Wine's true nature, costs Gilly a great deal of sorrow but saves him a long indenture to Mogue and frees him to pursue his own quest, for knowledge of himself.

The multiple encounter of the King's Son, Gilly, the Gobaun Saor and the Spae-Woman, then, has a notable effect on the progress of these two actions. It advances the narrative more indirectly as well; specifically, what the King's Son learns of the beginning and ending of the Unique Tale begins to bring the different plots together.

The King's Son dismounted, put his arm about Flann and told him that he now had the whole of the Unique Tale. They sat before Mogue's tent, and the King's Son told Flann the whole of the story he had searched for--how a King traveling through the mist had come to where Druids and the Maid of the Green Mantle lived, how the King was enchanted, and how the maiden Sheen released him from the enchantment. He told him, too, how the Enchanter was changed into a wolf, and how the wolf carried away Sheen's child. "And the Unique Tale is in part your own history, Flann," said the King of Ireland's Son, "for the child that was left with the Hags of the Long Teeth was no one else than yourself, for you, Flann, have on your breast the stars that denote the Son of a King." KS, 184

The Enchanter's role as a villain in Cycle I and reluctant donor in Cycle II, and his identification with the wolf of the Unique Tale link these three plots. The further deduction that Gilly and the stolen child of the Unique Tale are one carries the connection into Cycle III. The Unique Tale is shown to occupy

a place in both Cycles II and III, which now begin to dovetail. The new sense of harmonic possibilities among actions that initially seemed separate contributes greatly to the gathering together of the narrative. It accords too with the tenor of the reunion of the Gobaun Saor and the Spae-Woman, which reveals these two benefactors from different plots as kindred servitors of the same gods.

The gathering rhythm involves both kinds of movement that stem from the reunion. First, there is the progression within the various individual actions through obstacles like the King's Son's inability to find the Unique Tale and Gilly's impasse with Flame-of-Wine. This is a movement from complication toward simplification and eventual resolution. Secondly, there is the movement that harmonizes different plots by revealing the connections among them; because characters and events are important in many plots at once, these plots coalesce. This second feature is particularly important to the gathering rhythm and demonstrates the form that Colum places at the gathering movement's core. Colum sees the parts of his narrative, like the spokes of a wheel or the months in the year, as discrete entities unified by the relationships among them that define a whole. He wishes to retain a sense of the individuality of his parts and to unify them. This, rather than the reduction of multiples to an unfactorable One, is Colum's vision of order in The King of Ireland's Son.

The narrative multiplicity-in-unity that Colum begins to invoke in the fair section is echoed in the imagery and the

setting. The crowd that Gilly watches collects an amazing variety of creatures in a single place and time and even gives their movement one direction. This image mirrors the form of the fair itself, which is precisely a mechanism for combining multiplicity and unity; it organizes the greatest possible diversity of people, beasts, and things economically--as vendors and buyers, and as kinds of merchandise--around the single purpose of trade. Similarly, the meetings within the fair bring together different people in a single place. The reunion of the King's Son, Gilly, the Gobaun Saor and the Spae-Woman is a particularly crystalline example, for it intersects four characters, important in several plots, and four events (the individual meetings within the one meeting) in an instant. Since this reunion, in transforming the fair's opportunities into narrative movement, is the formal center of the fair, its simultaneity has special force. It contributes greatly to the sense that, at the fair, everything--fairgoers, characters, and narrative--coalesces.

At the end of the fair, as the characters disperse, Colum abandons the complex illusion of synchronicity for a while and instead turns his attention to all any narrative can accommodate, one action at a time. Now Colum begins the serious business of working out the gathering rhythm introduced in the fair section in real narrative terms. The following sequence, entirely concerned with the King's Son, ends Cycle II effectively enough that, in spite of the deferral of the wedding, the narrator can proclaim firmly at the start of the next section, "This story is

now about Flann," that is, Gilly (KS, 211). "The House of Crom Duv" introduces a new set of complications--Morag, the Rowan Berries, the problems in the Kingdom of Senlabor, not to mention the difficulty of escape--but by the time the characters are reunited at the Spae-Woman's, resolution of some of these new problems plus all of Gilly's old ones is in sight: Gilly knows who his parents are, Morag has the Rowan Berries, Morag and Gilly have tricked Crom Duv's guardian cats, escaped, and fallen in love, and Morag has sacrificed the drops of blood that will restore the brothers of the Unique Tale. Soon, Colum reduces the number of active plots even further, so that he has only one action left: the story of how Morag wins Gilly from the enchantments of Gilveen.

While the several actions are leading one by one to the very brink of resolution, the crisscrossing of characters begun at the fair also continues to bring the plots together. Downal and Dermott, for instance, having absented themselves from Cycle II, now turn up in Morag's story as the princes that her foster-sisters wish to marry; the Spae-Woman reappears too, this time as the fosterer of Morag, as she has previously been the fosterer, at different times, of Sheen and Gilly. More alarmingly, Gilveen, Fedelma's conniving sister from Cycle I, appears in the Queen's retinue, and accompanies her to the Spae-Woman's. The list of those who come together there is itself an indication both of the progress that has been made toward unifying the plots and of the difficulties that remain. The presence of Gilveen (and the absence of Morag) points to the betrayal that will govern the



last action of the book, while the other characters--Caintigern (or Sheen), the King of Ireland's Son, Fedelma, Gilly-of-the-Goatskin, and the Spae-Woman--signify the correspondence that has the greatest effect on narrative unity: the common parentage of Gilly and the King's Son. Together with the link between Gilly and the Unique Tale established at the fair, this revelation brings harmony to four major parts of the plot, Cycles I, II and III, and the Unique Tale. Of these, all but Cycle II are further connected by the common source of the villainy in each, the animosity that the Maiden of the Green Mantle bears toward the King of Ireland.

As Colum reveals the unity of the several actions and narrows his focus from many plots to just one, he moves back from original material to material derived from the folktale. As delineated in Chapter I, the King's Son's long muddled search for the whole of the Unique Tale is Colum's invention; with the account of how the King's Son forces the Enchanter to tell his tale, however, Cycle II turns to the folktale again. Cycle III, too, eventually approaches the folktale, largely through Morag--her story of the ambitions and folly of her foster-sisters, for instance. What is particularly important about this growing dependence on folktale sources is the accompanying emphasis on the overt formalism of folktale narrative. Both the King's Son's struggle with the King of the Land of Mist and Morag's successive evenings with a drugged and enchanted Gilly reproduce the trebling of their folktale sources. The narratives of Cycles II and III, then, and with

Cycle III, the book as a whole, end with highly structured episodes. The movement toward such patterned narrative parallels the movement from many plots to one and from seemingly unrelated to harmonious, complementary plots, which are Colum's main devices for collecting and ordering his complex narrative.

These various aspects of the gathering rhythm constitute a return to the forms of the beginning of the book, where also there is one action, highly patterned and quite folkloric. Yet nothing can restore the uncomplicated state of Cycle I; the other plots, substantially finished though they may be, all hang suspended, awaiting the ultimate completion that the wedding feast will confer. Indeed, Colum takes care to prevent the movement toward unity from foreclosing on the diversity and multiplicity that have been so much a part of his book. Periodically, he invokes all of the plots to remind his reader of the narrative's amplitude. In addition, he partially recapitulates the fair, which explored the tensions of multiplicity-in-unity so thoroughly, at important junctures along the way. Of these, the most prominent is the reunion of characters at the Spae-Woman's, which takes place after the King's Son rescues Fedelma and Gilly escapes with Morag from the house of Crom Duv.

In order to prevent the narrative, which is sorting itself out rapidly, from becoming too unified too soon, Colum makes this episode less complete and less balanced than the fair. Morag and the mysterious King of Ireland are both absent, and the characters are together only a very short time before Caintigern and the Spae-Woman are left alone to attempt the

transformation of the seven geese, Caintigern's brothers, into men. By the time the brothers are disenchanted, Gilveen's trickery has further disrupted the action. Moreover, Caintigern has but a brief visit with her brothers before this group too is split up. Nevertheless, the reunion at the Spae-Woman's, like the fair, brings together many in one moment and place. Indeed, this meeting, or series of meetings, in spite of its imbalance, shows that the narrative has become more controlled, for the characters come together by design rather than chance, however providential. Yet the sense of diversity is never lost, as the passage that opens the section demonstrates:

There are many things to tell you still,  
my kind foster child, but little time have  
I to tell you them, for the barnacle-geese  
are flying over the house, and when they have  
all flown by I shall have no more to say.  
And I have to tell you yet how the King of  
Ireland's Son won home with Fedelma, the  
Enchanter's daughter, and how it came to  
pass that the Seven Wild Geese that were  
Caintigern's brothers were disenchanted and  
became men again. But above all I have to  
tell you the end of the story that was begun  
in the house of the Giant Crom Duv--the story  
of Flann and Morag.

The barnacle-geese are flying over the  
house as I said. And so they were crossing  
and flying on the night the King of Ireland's  
Son and Fedelma whom he had brought from the  
Land of Mist stayed in the house of the Little  
Sage of the Mountain. . . . And he told them  
about the next place they should go to--the  
Spae-Woman's house. There, he said he would  
find people that they knew--Flann, the King's  
Son's comrade, and Caintigern, the wife of  
the King of Ireland, and Fedelma's sister,  
Gilveen. KS, 255-256

The image of the barnacle geese in flight, like the opening of the town's gates on fair day, stresses multiteity-in-unity--many geese, but a single flock in a single formation. The passage also returns a sense of urgency to the narrative, first because the emphasis on transience within the image is made to apply to the story as well, and secondly because it compresses into a few sentences mention of each of the remaining unsolved stories and all of the characters who are to meet at the Spae-Woman's. Especially by sweeping the characters together in the reader's imagination, Colum resurrects, however briefly and indirectly, what has been absent during the King's Son's foray in the Land of Mist and Gilly's long adventure at the house of Crom Duv: the simultaneity of the fair. The reunion itself is a less complete version of the same principle, but it is this which makes it a significant realization of the gathering rhythm.

The wedding at Senlabor is another partial recapitulation of the pervasive gathering of the fair. As at the reunion at the Spae-Woman's, Colum carefully avoids making the gathering at Senlabor too complete. He keeps description brief, the characters minor, and the details (the number of guests, the geometry of the tables) relatively colourless. Colum saves his last wedding runs for the resolution of the book, the wedding of the King of Ireland's Son and Fedelma and of Gilly of the Goatskin and Morag, in which the gathering rhythm culminates. The wedding is certainly the most thoroughgoing expression of the narrative trend toward unity since the fair. The momentary unity of the

fair dissolves at its end, and although the characters, like participants in a dance, continue to move from this configuration to the more permanent one of the end, the problems of narrative and the need to defer more complete harmony keep the reunion at the Spae-Woman's and the wedding at Senlabor from expressing the gathering rhythm more fully. Only now that all narratives are resolved and all revelations have been made does Colum create a moment that expresses harmony fully.

Furthermore, the purposes of the feast are more defined and more clearly beneficent than those of the fair; it is a more orderly event; and its narration is governed by more obvious forms, of which there is a long tradition in folklore. No doubt Colum borrows from this tradition so exuberantly because he sees in it an archetypal combination of diversity and unity. Colum amplifies the form of marriage, which is, after all, precisely a union of separate individuals. Colum's double wedding joins four characters rather than two, and thereby integrates into one family the heroes and heroines of Cycles I and II, the King's Son and Fedelma; Cycle III, Gilly and Morag; and the Unique Tale, the Hunter King and Sheen. In addition, where folktale weddings generally resolve a single plot, the wedding at the end of The King of Ireland's Son superimposes the last, resolving function (Propp's W) of three plots, Cycles I, II and III.

If Colum invokes the wedding run of folklore only briefly and colorlessly at Senlabor, he expands it enthusiastically here.

Then the day came when Fedelma and the King of Ireland's Son and Morag and Flann were married. They were plighted to each other in the Circle of Stones by the Druids who invoked upon them the powers of the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, and the Air. They were married at the height of the day and they feasted at night when the wax candles were lighted round the tables. They had Greek honey and Lochlinn beer; ducks from Achill, apples and plovers' eggs and a boar's head for every King in the company. And these were the Kings who sat down to table with the King of Eirinn: the King of Sorcha, the King of Hispania, the King of Lochlinn, and the King of the Green Island who had Sunbeam for his daughter. And they had there the best heroes of Lochlinn, the best storytellers of Alba, the best bards of Eirinn. They laid sorrow and they raised music, and the harpers played until the great champion Split-the-Shields told a tale of the realm of Greece and how he slew the three lions that guarded the daughter of the King. They feasted for six days and the last day was better than the first, and the laugh they laughed when Witless, the Saxon fool, told how Split-the-Shields' story should have ended, shook the young jackdaws out of every chimney in the Castle and brought them fluttering on the floors. KS, 274-275

Here at last, the narrative has no further importance, and after the first two sentences, the main characters evaporate, so that the account becomes all image and form. In the details of the wedding feast, the nature of the wedding archetype is realized.

The marriage of the couples within a magic druid-circle represents in physical form the spiritual gathering of hearts and the formal gathering of narrative. Other images repeatedly name the different species of common genera, emphasizing likeness and dissimilarity at once. Colum includes both day and night, hitherto strikingly opposed, in the celebration, calls upon the four powers of nature and the cosmos, brings to the feast kings of all nations and food

of all sorts from every part of Ireland and from all over the world. Feasting is augmented by other courtly forms of entertainment; the guests are entertained by bards and harpers and storytellers, and entertain themselves by telling stories to each other, both heroic ones like that of the King of Ireland's Son, and comic ones rather like Gilly's tale. Certain phrases--"They laid sorrow and they raised music"; "They feasted for six days and the last was better than the first"--quote exactly the formulae of folktale wedding runs, while the stories of Split-the-Shields and Witless, little digressions within the more orderly account, break through the forms of the sentences and the descriptions, ensuring with the laugh that brings down the jackdaws that the patterns imposed on the celebration are tempered.

The narrative has been gathered together and the wedding feast has tied it up with a flamboyant bow; all that remains is to sever the strings. The dropping of the main characters from the account of the wedding begins the process of loosening the attachments to the story, though some are brought back in the next paragraph, a short glimpse into the future which confirms closure with a form characteristic of the nineteenth century English novel rather than the folktale. But the last lines of the book duplicate a folktale form designed to complete the process of disengagement.

When I crossed the Ford  
They were turning the Mountain Pass;  
When I stood on the Steppingstones  
They were travelling the Road of Glass.  
KS, 275

The visual aspects of this tag, the indentation and italicization, which immediately set it off from the text, are equivalents of the oral features of folktale runs--changes in tone of voice and in pace--that mark important formal junctures. The change here from the rhythms of prose to those of poetry signals the extreme end of the book. But also, the storyteller here is about to be physically divided from his characters by both a river and a mountain pass; in addition, his path along the lower road, less fantastical than the "Road of Glass," separates him from them symbolically. The sense of the Senlabor wedding's storytelling tag is similar; there, the theft of the storyteller's extraordinary, fragile gifts is a way of preventing him from carrying the delicate, magical trappings of the fairy tale away from their proper milieu.<sup>19</sup> Here, however, the tag is allowed to stand alone. And appropriately, as it divorces storyteller and reader from the folktale world, it verges on nonsense. The words lose some of their easy transparency, and the window for referential meaning that they usually form consequently fogs over.

Further evidence of the nature of Colum's formal apprehension of the folktale comes with this culmination of the gathering rhythm, in the wedding feast and the storytelling tag. The gathering rhythm, like the rhythms of failure and deferral, has roots in folktale forms--most generally in the orderly progression of functions which helps folktales to create a felt sense of closure. Interestingly, whereas deferral, especially as it



becomes failure, diverges more and more from specific folktale forms, the gathering rhythm, conversely, approaches folktale form with increasing specificity as it nears completion. Yet because Colum's material, with its many plots, its divergence from folktale norms, its formal trickery, and its many important inventions, is so largely structured next to the folktale, Colum must expand on his folktale examples. Gathering episodes that Colum invents, like the fair and the meeting of principals at the Spae-Woman's, while modelled to an extent on folktale forms of closure such as the wedding, are also more fluid, and are well adapted, formally and imaginatively, to the particular problems of form and theme that Colum sets out in The King of Ireland's Son.

Colum's construction of the gathering rhythm on the whole is consistent with his manipulations of folktale form in his earlier use of deferral and failure. All three rhythms are founded on similar attitudes toward the folktale, and conspire, to greater and lesser degrees, to convert the folktale's system of physical tests--trials of strength--and tightly linked actions, into a complex of spiritual tests--trials of character--and moral consequences. But just as the rhythm of failure carried the implications of deferral, as Colum used it, to an extreme, so the gathering rhythm extends and transforms failure. The rhythms of failure involved a perception of the limitations of the folktale's materialism and of the transcendence of the folktale mechanism, through failure, by a providential higher power. By the end of the book, Colum arranges matters so that this power,

once "out of synch" with the folktale mechanism, now can work harmoniously with it. The important participation of the Gobaun Saor and the Spae-Woman, who have come to represent emissaries of the vague, kindly principle that oversees the narrative, in the gathering rhythm, encourages the feeling, as the narrative coalesces and the ending assured, that all rests safely in the hands of a benevolent destiny.<sup>20</sup>

Although Colum departs from folktale form to create such meanings, his departure can hardly be called wholesale. Where deferral and gathering are concerned, the deviations that help Colum to develop literary meanings occur with, sometimes within, folktale forms. Failure too depends for its significance on folktale form, but in another way; it creates meaning by denying and hence transcending the expectations that attend the folktale mechanisms with which it is juxtaposed. By means of these three rhythms, Colum deepens the folktale, and directs it towards moral, and as the next chapter will show, political meaning; but at the same time, he leaves much of his folktale source material intact, and retains a folkloric sense of "happenings" which, in the subtlety of its relationship to "states of mind," gives The King of Ireland's Son its most characteristics favor.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tasks, interdictions, violations, departures, returns and struggles are all among Propp's functions, delineated in Morphology of the Folktale. In the course of his discussion, Propp observes the pairing of certain functions--interdiction and violation, for example. The sequence of functions concerning the acquisition of a donor or a magical agent, on the other hand, involves three actions, the testing of the hero (D), the hero's response to the test (E), and his acquisition of the magical agent (F). Propp does not comment on the pulse of action created by such sequences.

<sup>2</sup> Story Telling New and Old, p. 9. In his introduction to The Complete Grimms' Fairy Tales (New York: Random House, 1944; rpt. 1972), Colum expands his comments on pattern in the folktale to include the special skills needed by the folk storyteller. He hypothesizes that the "real gift" of the Grimms' best source of folktales, an elderly woman, "was perception of pattern, and her real accomplishment making it, the pattern, evident" (ix). "The good traditional storyteller," he goes on to say, "had a sense of pattern and prided himself or herself on knowing and keeping to it" (x).

<sup>3</sup> The Complete Grimms' Fairy Tales, p. vii. The second ellipsis is mine.

<sup>4</sup> In Jeremiah's Curtin's Myths and Folktales of Ireland, pp. 1-14. Further references are made, for economy's sake, in the text, with the initials "SKE" preceding the page number.

<sup>5</sup> Propp, significantly, considers such incidents as the rescues as "auxiliary elements in trebling," and does not count them among his functions. Morphology of the Folktale, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, "Céatach," tale 13 in O'Sullivan's Folktales of Ireland, p. 39. Often, the night provides an antidote to the hero's battle wounds as well as his fatigue. In "Art, King of Leinster," also in Folktales of Ireland, the hero's elderly host first prepares a magic, healing bath for the torn and weary fighter, and then offers him a place in the bed with the words, "A man can rid himself of his weariness best while lying down." P. 105.

7 Propp notes on p. 74 of Morphology of the Folktale that "Repetition may appear as a uniform distribution (three tasks, three years' service), as an accumulation (the third task is the most difficult, the third battle the worst), or may twice produce negative results before the third, successful outcome." This last, we may add, may be reversed: where the action demands the hero's failure, as when he plays cards with the villain, he may succeed twice and then fail.

8 Story Telling, New and Old, p. 4. "Things remain real," he comments, "while mental states become doubtful to us." The Complete Grimms, p. x.

9 Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales, p. 124.

10 See Propp, Morphology, p. 36.

11 Morphology, p. 41. Neither D<sup>5</sup> nor any other of the variations on this function that Propp discusses, pp. 39-42, fits Gilly's rescue of the Weasel or the King's Son's rescue of Laheen the Eagle as closely as one could wish. However, Propp was dealing with a limited number of Russian tales, which evidently did not include a donor sequence of this exact form, although there are many examples among Irish folktales.

12 W.B. Yeats, A Vision (1937; rev. ed. 1956; rpt. Collier Books [MacMillan], 1977), p. 51.

13 Richard Loftus, Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry, p. 189.

14 The reference to the postman is on page 20 of "The Bad Stepmother," in Legendary Fictions.

15 "The Tradition That Existed in My Granmother's House," p. 30; "Dermott Donn MacMórna" is in The Poet's Circuits (London: Oxford, 1960) p. 23.

16 The Complete Grimms, p. ix.

17 The Gaelic Story-teller, in Proceedings of the British Academy, 1945, v. 31 (London: G. Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 190.

18 Castle Conquer (New York: Macmillan, 1923), p. 127; hereafter cited in the text as CC.

19 One thinks of the fairy gold given for rent that turns into ginger bread in an unattributed story, "Rent Day," in Yeats's Irish Folk Stories and Fairy Tales (1892, rpt. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974), pp. 186-188.

20 Although Colum associates this principle with Diachbha, we can see it as well as a realization of that spirit of kindness which Colum claims, in Story Telling New and Old, should govern a storyteller's relationship with his characters. P. 14.

### III: The King of Ireland's Son: Heroism and Politics

There is a tale of great popularity among the Irish called by O'Sullivan and Christiansen "The Man Who Had No Story."<sup>1</sup> In the version representing this type in O'Sullivan's Folktales of Ireland, Rory O'Donoghue, on his way to the fair, takes lodging with an old man. The dwelling place is enchanted, and every comfort is magically and freely provided for Rory: the chair moves of its own accord to the fire for him, and a knife and fork carve unaided a roast that has appeared from nowhere, all for his convenience. But when Rory can offer neither a song nor a story to the evening's festivities, his otherwise kindly host drives him from the door. The violence of the old man's response is a measure of the social value that the Irish ascribe to storytelling: it is so integral to Irish life that the man like Rory whose experience has not taught him a story or two to share with his fellows violates the bond of community.

From this point in the tale, Rory's adventures begin. He comes across a man roasting a joint over an open fire and is left alone to tend it. When the roast cries out--"Don't let my wishers burn"--Rory runs off in a fright. The meat on the spit pursues him, beating him all the way, until he is welcomed back by his original host:

"Ah, Rory," said the old man. "If you had a story like that to tell me, when I asked you, you wouldn't have been out until now. Lie in here on the bed now, and sleep the rest of the night."<sup>2</sup>

In the Letitia MacLintock version of this tale that Yeats quotes, the punishment that the hero, Pat Diver, receives is at once more ghastly and more severe. It is a roasting corpse that he must watch, and he is warned by the giants who afflict him that should their meat so much as blister, he must take its place. He is harrassed and harrowed all night long, having first to carry yet another corpse and then to repeatedly dig its grave. Only the crowing of the cock banishes his tormenters. This tale ends more subtly than the O'Sullivan version. Two months later, Pat is greeted by a tellingly tall stranger at the fair.

"How are you, Pat Diver?" said he, bending down to look into the tinker's face.

"You've the advantage of me, sir, for I havna' the pleasure of knowing you," faltered Pat.

"Do you not know me, Pat" Whisper-- "When you go back to Innishowen, you'll have a story to tell."<sup>3</sup>

The last line of this version, like the returning line of action in the O'Sullivan example, discloses how the thematic concern for the value of storytelling generates the form of the narrative. The events stem from the protagonist's lack, so that the relationship between the theme and the form is first of all negative: the absence of the requisite story results in the persecution of Rory and Pat. At the same time that this persecution punishes them for their failure, it has a positive efficacy: it arms them with the story that will re-integrate them into the community.

This kind of formal and thematic reflexivity appears again

and again in the folktale, though not always quite so overtly. In another popular tale, often associated with the hero Conall, the stories that the hero tells save his sons and himself from death. Captured in an attempt to steal the king's horse, which he needs to fulfill cruel geasa, the hero buys one life after another with his accounts of having been once in an even worse situation than the one he is in now. At first, the king's mercy rewards the hero's courage and suffering, but the last story is always the most compelling: it reveals that the hero once risked his life to rescue the king himself from death. This is the tale that ransoms the hero's own life, and which gains for him as well the horse that he needs to complete the events of the enveloping narrative. Thus the story that transmits the most in the way of important knowledge has the greatest formal efficacy in the text.<sup>4</sup>

Encoded in both of these tales' formal distinction of Story and No-Story is a principle vital to folk life: the importance to cultural continuity, meaning and identity of oral communication, of the transmission of folk artifacts and traditions. In these folktales the formal use of in-tales or embedded events refers back to the story itself, commenting on the very process by which it comes to us. The same principle obtains in The King of Ireland's Son, where the Unique Tale is at the heart of the text. That it is the formal center there can be no doubt; abductions, curses, spells, and quests have their origin in it and lead back to it. Without learning it, the King of Ireland's Son cannot clean the



Sword of Light or release Fedelma; nor can Gilly pry his name from the Old Woman of Beare without telling it. But the structural centrality of the Unique Tale depends on the tale's thematic value: the theme of storytelling accentuated in these folktales is also present in the Unique Tale, where it receives its coloration from Colum's omnipresent political awareness. Storytelling, which both reveals a distinctive aspect of rural culture and conducts its participants to a more nebulous past grandeur, expresses much of Colum's particular vision of the past and present of Ireland.

The context of storytelling in the folktale gives special significance to Colum's choice of an object of pursuit, especially since the story sought out is described, quoting a tradition among its sources, as "unique." When Colum puts the Unique Tale in the mouth of the very person who most needs to hear it, Gilly of the Goatskin, he borrows the element of reflexivity from the type of folktale structure explored above. In Gilly's relation to the Unique Tale, we find the crux of the storytelling theme of The King of Ireland's Son. For him, it is a repository not just of knowledge but of identity. The telling of the Unique Tale procures Gilly a real name, but the knowledge of it gives him a heritage, and indeed a nobility. The King of Ireland's Son says as much when he gives Gilly the news that he is the lost child of the Unique Tale. Putting his arm around him as if to draw him into his own heroic world, the King's Son says, "'And the Unique Tale is in part your own history, Flann'" (KS, 184). In this way,

this extremely vital fairy tale links Gilly to Colum's Irish contemporaries, for Gilly's relationship to the Unique Tale parallels exactly the relationship of turn-of-the century Irishmen, including Colum himself, to the great body of national lore with which they were becoming increasingly familiar and by which they were increasingly inspired. By 1916, there were several decades of saga translations and folktale collections in existence, and Colum had observed closely their effect on the morale of his countrymen. Even as early as A Boy in Eirinn (1913), Colum's rural characters, like the men he knew, were being kindled by the knowledge of the former glory of the race.

Colum's imaginative connection of the cultural awareness of the Irish with the telling of stories in the folklife results in the omnipresence of storytelling in The King of Ireland's Son. So many of the book's characters have stories to tell that the sound of storytelling murmurs continually behind the action, at last breaking forth vivaciously and hilariously during the closing wedding celebrations. The only important character who does not tell stories is also the one character so irremediably evil that he must be destroyed: the King of the Land of Mist. The villain of Cycle I, the Enchanter of Black Backlands, regenerates himself by telling the rest of the Unique Tale and is forgiven for his past iniquities. Even Gilveen, in her own devious way more treacherous than the Enchanter, is allowed to tell over events to the King's Son and Fedelma when they reach the Spae-Woman's house late in the book. Indeed, the account of their last night

with the Little Sage of the Mountain before leaving for the Spae-Woman's expresses fairly clearly the sense of storytelling that Colum is developing:

On that night the Little Sage told them from what bird had come the wing that thatched his house. That was a wonderful story. And he told them too about the next place they should go to--the Spae-Woman's house. . . . The Little Sage told them from what people the Spae-Woman came and why she lived amongst the poor and foolish without name or splendor or riches. And that, too, was a wonderful story.  
KS, 225-256.

Because the spoken word transmits some of the bases of culture--knowledge of the strange and the beautiful, and of history and the workings of the world--it is itself a wonder. It has been especially important to the Irish because oral culture could not be as successfully suppressed as written culture. For the benefit of his Irish readers, but also for any reader, Colum suggests the importance of listening to the records of one's own past.

The effectiveness of the Unique Tale as the formal and thematic center of the book hinges on an irony: the King of Ireland's Son clearly finds the telling of tales of crucial interest, but the principal character of the Unique Tale, Sheen, is under bonds that forbid speech. Her inability to give her husband any knowledge of herself or indeed even any sign of her anguish at the loss of her child makes her painfully vulnerable to the incriminating collusion of circumstances and her sisters-in-law. The threat of no-resolution discussed as a formal mechanism in Chapter II above accentuates the fearfulness of Sheen's predicament, which

is nothing less than the obstruction of the human capacity for communication. The denial of resolution creates an important pattern in the narrative, which in fact enables Colum to express more forcefully the importance of passing on knowledge. If telling the Unique Tale as a device which enables the progression of the King's Son's quest has a positive effect on the movement of the narrative, the not-telling within the tale has such a negative one that the problem it engenders requires most of the activity of the book to resolve. Indeed, the silence that the Unique Tale preserves can only be expurgated by the telling of the Unique Tale. Not until this equation is balanced can further progress toward resolution be made.

The last few lines of the book make explicit what has been implicit every time Colum brings forward the narrative frame by making the frame storyteller address the hypothetical "kind" listener: the two heroes are themselves the subjects of stories.

The King of Ireland lived long, but he died while his sons were in their strong manhood, and after he passed away the Island of Destiny came under the equal rule of the two. And one had rule over the courts and cities, the harbors and the military encampments. And the other had rule over the waste places and the villages and the roads where masterless men walked. And the deeds of one are in the histories the shanachies have written in the language of the learned, and the deeds of the other are in the stories the people tell to you and to me. KS, 275

Storytelling in The King of Ireland's Son is at its most reflexive and meaningful when it touches the book's heroes. These two heroes, to whom the learning and repeating of tales have been

matters of physical efficacy and personal identity, are now themselves incorporated into the body of history and story that makes up Irish culture, as it extends itself to the unlettered and the learned alike. The heroes' experience with the Unique Tale has suggested the importance of the traditional means of passing down knowledge, perceptions and values; now the heroes themselves become representatives of these cultural values.

Indeed, Colum reveals himself here at last, pointing beneath the smooth surface of the narrative to suggest that very much attends not just upon the heroes but upon the differences between them. Until now, these differences have been expressed largely as formal ones. The King's Son, for instance, is a seeker-hero whereas Gilly is a victim-hero, with a correspondingly episodic rather than organically constructed plot. Similarly, different folktale genres are associated with each of the two heroes. The King of Ireland's Son belongs to the variety of hero-tale that is also a Märchen.<sup>5</sup> A Märchen, Stith Thompson explains, is

a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvellous. In this never-never land humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms, and marry princesses.<sup>6</sup>

In keeping with the character of the Märchen from which he comes, the King's Son consorts with royal and enchanted characters, and depends on magic objects and formulas for success in his quests. Gilly, on the other hand, belongs more or less to the novella. The

novella, again according to Thompson, though similar in general structure to the Märchen, moves

in a real world with definite time and place,  
and though marvels do appear, they are such  
as apparently call for the hearer's belief in  
a way that the Märchen does not.<sup>7</sup>

Colum's differentiation of the tellers and the audience of each hero's history in the passage quoted above is a way of stating indirectly the generic difference inherent in the relationship of Gilly and the King's Son.

There is some incongruity in the locales invoked in this final passage. The landscape of the King of Ireland's Son is that of the folktale, dotted with dwelling places which, whether grand, lowly, or enchanted, exist essentially in isolation. The exception is the Town of the Red Castle, where Colum exploits a favorite subject, the fair, to create one of the book's rare articulations between folktale setting and the real world. But the King of the Land of Mist, the Enchanter of the Black Backlands, the Spae-Woman, the Little Sage of the Mountain, and even Gilly of the Goatskin for a time, live in dwellings that are like little independent words separated from the rest of society. Yet the "military camps" and "harbors," the roads of "masterless men," even villages and cities, suggest a more realistic setting than that through which the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin have roamed in the course of their adventures. By moving from a marvellous and romantic to a more realistic setting as he divides the kingdom between the two half-brothers, Colum indicates the relevance of

The King of Ireland's Son to the real "Island of Destiny," Ireland, and to its contemporary predicament.

The element of political commentary in The King of Ireland's Son, first noted by Zack Bowen,<sup>8</sup> may seem to run counter to Colum's use of the folktale medium, which initially seems only self-referential. At the same time, the existence of a political vision in The King of Ireland's Son should hardly be surprising, especially in light of Colum's activities and his other writings. He was too involved in Irish politics, had too many friends who had vowed to risk their lives for Ireland, including some of the martyrs of the Easter Rising, and was too cognizant of the special relationship between literature and public life that obtained in Irish affairs to write, in 1916, a book based on Irish materials, folk or not, without political overtones. In fact, The King of Ireland's Son would be a greater anomaly among Colum's works if it were truly devoid of such themes.

The political element that the book's closing passage (p. 123 above) brings to light has actually been a part of The King of Ireland's Son from the start. The two heroes are carefully constructed, complementary symbols of the Irish nation, tellingly woven through the warp of heroism. The tactic of doubling the hero in this book allows Colum to explore and expand the concept of heroism while developing a vision of the Irish character and its predicament. The different rhythms of action explored in Chapter II above also contribute to the expression of Colum's complex vision of Irish character; the rhythm of the King's Son's action depends on a mechanism for success and completion that characterizes him

as active, filled with the kind of potency necessary for the success of the Irish political quest, whereas Gilly's failure rhythm is a manifestation of the defeatism and dispossession of the Irish peasant. The two heroes are two faces of the Irish nation in a dynamic relationship.

Of Colum's two heroes, clearly the King's Son wears the more traditional heroic costume. Coming from the Märchen side of the hero tale and inhabiting that fanciful and romantic world, he is associated with the Märchen kind of action, an action whose formal mechanism is designed to assess and express the character not only of the individual hero of the tale but also of Heroism itself. Because the hero must accordingly exhibit qualities of courage, fidelity, strength, wit and integrity, full use is made of the tests, tasks, struggles, villains and donors that have become synonymous with the fairy tale. When Colum says that the deeds of the King's Son are recorded by the learned shanachies and that he ruled over the courts, cities, harbours and military encampments, he is aligning not just the King of Ireland's Son but also this particular tradition of heroism with these spheres of Irish life. Colum hereby associates this nobly heroic tradition with the lettered and the urbane of an earlier Irish age, with the privileged court or warrior class of a bygone era rather than with the modern peasant.

Colum first suggests the relevance of this tradition of heroism to modern Irish rebels when the King of Ireland's Son meets Laheen the Eagle. The details of the King's Son's acquisition



of a donor are selected and modified from the traditional motif of the folktale hero's intervention in a battle for the kingship of the animals. Here, Laheen vies with the Eel over who should legislate for the animals. When the King's Son rescues Laheen and Laheen becomes de facto ruler (rather than the Eel, who often triumphs in folktale analogues), the King's Son becomes, potentially at least, a symbolic defender of Ireland. Colum gives substance to these intimations when he makes the Sword of Light the object of the King's Son's search. This search, during which the King's Son proves his heroic mettle by guarding the Gobaun Saor's forge against the ravages of the Fua, parallels the process by which the heroes of Irish written romances, like Cuchulainn and Finn, earn their heroic weaponry.<sup>9</sup> The quest for arms itself, in other words, identifies the King of Ireland's Son with the great Irish heroes. But the Sword of Light held a special and quite specific meaning for Colum's compatriots. An Claidheamh Soluis (The Sword of Light) was the title of the Gaelic League weekly, edited for a time by Padraic Pearse, who intended to make it "the organ of militant Gaeldom."<sup>10</sup> To Colum and his contemporaries, the Sword of Light, originally a motif in folktales, had come to mean first of all the intimacy with Gaelic Ireland that gave the modern nationalists a sense of national identity, and secondly the kind of militancy at arms that led Pearse and others into the Easter Rising in hopes of implementing the national destiny. Colum extends this symbolism with the King's Son's failure to preserve the Sword's efficacy, which forces him to embark on a yet more difficult quest for the

means of its restoration, the Unique Tale. Thus Colum causes the King's Son's militant heroism, with its overtones of Irish rebellion, to be chastened and deepened by effort, suffering and intellectual enlightenment. We shall see this qualification of romantic heroism grow into a reassessment of the value of this heroic tradition when we turn to Castle Conquer and The Flying Swans.

Colum seems to be aware of the dangers of crushing such a delicately framed narrative as his with the weight of didacticism, because the political implications of the King's Son's plot remain more or less covert. He is characteristically ambiguous when he has Gilly overhear one of the Hags say (of Gilly), "'Mind what I tell you. His father's son will grow into a powerful champion'" (KS, 98). Whether the subject of this prediction is Gilly or the King's Son or both is never revealed. Colum removes some of his political import from the main plot altogether, and places it instead in his "in-tales." Because in-tales can be short, ambiguous, and diverse--most do not have political content--Colum can conveniently and cautiously touch on his political themes in one or two. The curious little tale of "The Young Cuckoo," for instance, of the four tales that Fedelma and the King's Son tell each other while crossing the fields of flowers is the only one to bear political significance. All of the stories do point outward in some way, however; two contain non-political moral elements and one, "The Sending of the Crystal Egg," mysteriously broaches events relevant to Gilly of the Goatskin. "The Young Cuckoo" shares with the others this exterior relevance, then; and in addition, the surface elements

of all of these tales are so strongly imagined that the themes themselves take second place. The cuckoo, for instance, makes such a peculiar and imaginatively captivating character that the political allegory receives only the lightest touch.

The possibly allegorical constituents of the story--the raucous cuckoo trapped in the tree where his parents have left him to be brought up by others, the foster-parents who sadly abandon him only after long attempts to get him to emerge from the hole as their own children did, the admonition of the woodpecker that "There's going to be a storm," and the final bolt of lightning that releases the cuckoo--all these are oddly disguised by the texture of the piece, which focuses attention on the highly colorful surface rather than on the inherent symbolism. Colum's meaning is further cloaked by ambiguities in the story's end:

The young cuckoo flung himself out on the grass and went awkwardly amongst the blue bells. "What a world," said he. "All this wet and fire and noise to get me out of the nest. What a world!" The young cuckoo was free, and these were the first words he said when he went into the world. 40-41

The cuckoo's desire for freedom, for a chance to test his wings, his striving "toward the big sky" suggest a link between the cuckoo and emergent Ireland, between his cataclysmic release and the wholly sympathetic and politically much less ambiguous entry into the world of Gilly of the Goatskin. However, the cuckoo is a bizarre choice for a symbol of the Irish nation, especially with the coarseness that Colum gives him and with the unsavory cause of his

predicament (his parents' trickery). It is possible that Colum means to symbolize the recalcitrant Englishman, who can only be spilled from his unsuitable adoptive home by violence (the storm representing, in any case, a projected revolutionary upheaval). More likely, Colum is saying that the Irish character and the Irish nation will be a different bird from the one who has imposed his image on Ireland for so long. If this is indeed Colum's intent, it is interesting that no violence need be done to the birds who somewhat misguidedly try to rear him in their own image. The cuckoo's enemy is really the inanimate tree trunk--not the Anglo-Irish, that is, but the form they have imposed on Ireland, possibly their institutions.

Even more curious are the political overtones of The King of Ireland's Son's greatest conundrum, the tale of the King of the Cats. The King of the Cats himself is an inhabitant of the Celtic Isle of Man, yet paradoxically, it seems that he is a haughty symbol of a decayed imperial England: his customary tribute of boatloads of herring and mackerel and barrelsful of preserved mice from his dominions, like England's colonial income, gradually ceases. Much of the significance of the episode is obscure, and some of it would seem to make the cats of Ireland, in their oppression, representative of the Irish people. However, whatever the difficulty of the allegory later in the tale, the terms are fairly clear at the beginning. Colum equips the King of the Cats with a Prime Minister and a Parliament and puts him to the absurdity of commanding a throne speech from his Prime Minister, in this way situating him among British institutions. Colum's tone is delightfully mocking

when he has the Prime Minister discover that he has forgotten all of the official court language except "Oyez, oyez, oyez" and hang himself "with a measure of tape" (KS, 55). A scene in Castle Conquer helps with the interpretation of this sequence of events. When John Fitzsimmons, a young nationalist lawyer, delivers a scathing satire on the British courts in a polemical set-piece which could have been taken from the pages of Sinn Fein, he picks out this very phrase as an example of the way Norman pageantry was employed to further British hegemony.

It is all byplay to impress the poor agriculturalist. . . . Then a solemn-faced crier cries out three times, "Oyez, oyez, oyez," that the Irish folk may know that still the Norman bids them hear, for the Queen speaks. CC, 312-313

When Colum has the cat Prime Minister hang himself, he is once again scorning the rigid and anachronistic administrative structures of the British presence in Ireland, as he did in "The Young Cuckoo."

There is no such tale as that which Colum tells here in Irish folklore, but there are many cat kings, most of whom are strange, fierce and malevolent. The association between Colum's King of the Cats and British imperialism is consistent with this tradition. Colum's political satire in this story becomes more serious, even prophetic, with the horrendous struggle between the King of the Cats and his rival, the Eagle-Emperor. Both are formidable and tenacious warriors. As we have seen in Chapter II, Colum gives the fight a stunning immediacy when he makes Curoi the Druid literally petrify

the combatants in the middle of their struggle. He refuses to foreclose the outcome of a battle which was only beginning in 1916, and in fact accurately forecasts the length and bitterness of the revolution which eventually led to the 1922 Treaty. The strange ending of the story of the King of the Cats suggests how electrifying Ireland's struggle was to those involved in it, and how Irishmen like Colum suddenly found themselves breathlessly awaiting the resolution of the battle for nationhood which was being so vigorously renewed.

If the frozen confrontation of the King of the Cats and the Eagle-Emperor has immediacy for Colum's readers, it also has an implicit immediacy for the King of Ireland's Son. In My Irish Year (1912), Colum has noted that the folk often collapse historical time, so that Oisín, Saint Patrick, and Daniel O'Connell might all inhabit the same story.<sup>11</sup> He brings the phenomenon of synchronicity into The King of Ireland's Son when he makes the King of the Cat's story roughly contemporary with the main narrative. The connection is in relationship to King Connal: King Connal is ruling Ireland when the King of Cats visits it, and he is also the father of our hero. The temporal proximity of the in-tale and the story of the King's Son himself puts the King of Ireland's Son in an excitingly revolutionary context, while giving the tale of the King of the Cats an import and a relevance to the main narrative that the other intales, even "The Young Cuckoo" (but excepting the Unique Tale), do not. The King of Ireland's Son, in fact, has himself assisted an Eagle in just such a struggle as the Eagle-Emperor faces for

supremacy in the animal kingdom. The two eagles, indeed, one male and one female (Laheen is the mother of the Crystal Egg) can be seen as complementary aspects of the same principle. The fierce and uncompromising Eagle-Emperor is the warlike manifestation of the national spirit; "a brave man would have been glad if he could have seen the Eagle-Emperor," the story goes (KS, 75). Laheen, in contrast, though stern and proud, presents a more domesticated face of the symbolic correspondence between eagle and Ireland. The parallel between the Eagle-Emperor's struggle with the King of Cats and Laheen's battle with the Eel reinforces the intimation that the King of Ireland's Son's defence of Laheen makes him a metaphorical defender of Ireland.

The obscurity of Colum's political allegory, both here and in "The Young Cuckoo," probably owes something to the tradition of Irish protest literature, in particular the tradition of the political ballad. Colum records his interest in political symbolism in My Irish Year,<sup>12</sup> and indeed has collected and edited both political and romantic popular songs, in Broadsheet Ballads (1913). He felt the teeth of censorship himself when the paper in which some of his first poems were printed, as well as reviews and essays, Sinn Fein, was suppressed by Dublin Castle. (Sinn Fein's publisher, Arthur Griffith, immediately began a new paper, The United Irishman.) Still, The King of Ireland's Son came out in America, and censorship in any case was not much of an issue for Colum. The British government ignored Cathleen ni Houlihan, after all, as well as Colum's own political play, The Saxon Shillin' (1903), and both of

these plays are far more incendiary than The King of Ireland's Son. Colum invokes the tradition of political symbolism in The King of Ireland's Son as an artistic stratagem for deepening his themes and ordering his story rather than as a practical measure.

As a consequence of this complex transaction between eagles, in-tales and main-plot quests, the King of Ireland's Son becomes all the more clearly a symbolic protector of the realm, or more accurately, a model of the kind of young man who must learn fighting ways in order to establish the nation through force. Politically, then, the King's Son stands in relationship to the Eagle-Emperor as the string of Irish revolutionaries down to Colum's own time did to Ireland, and one of Colum's main concerns as he establishes the association is to make his hero a paradigm of the active, warlike type. The rest of the action does not make the political element much more explicit, but as the King of Ireland's Son continues to grow in valour, wisdom, and prowess, he develops the virtues that each inexperienced generation of young rebels was concerned to inculcate, as Francis Gillick is in Castle Conquer. Thus Colum develops his allusion to a particular type of political activity in association with a particular mode of heroism--the active, formally efficacious and romantic heroism of the Märchen's seeker-hero.

If the King of Ireland's Son is the noble romantic hero to whom Colum gives sway over the courts and harbours--the center of the social and economic order--then Gilly is the anomalous peasant-hero who will rule the out-of-the-way, country places.



Formally, the stars on Gilly's breast, which show him to be a king's son in spite of the perceived lowliness of his rearing and his character, cast Gilly, according to Colum's view of the Irish peasantry, as high Milesian by lineage, but forced into a humble, oppressed existence. The vignette that opens Gilly's adventures is utterly in keeping with this reading of Colum's characterization of Gilly: he lies in his cradle kidnapped, oppressed, abused, deprived of even the memory of his heritage, led to believe that he is deformed--bodily hunchbacked, mentally deficient--by the superannuated Hags of the Long Teeth. Gilly, whose condition could be said to encapsule the state of the Irish nation in Colum's time, represents the native Irish, who were deprived of liberty, self-knowledge, and self-respect, and who were denigrated for their supposed deficiency in civilization, character and heritage.

The vignette continues, however, to capture symbolically a historical moment that fascinated Colum--the dawning of awareness and political activity in the afflicted peasantry. Colum lingers over "the moment of the peasant's entrance into affairs" in "Eilis: A Woman's Story,"<sup>13</sup> and explores it more fully in his play The Land (1905) as well as in the novel Castle Conquer. Here, Colum captures this moment in Gilly's sudden attack on the Hags and leap into the world. Colum does not, however, give an exact motivation for Gilly's sudden decision to overturn his cradle, whose time seems simply to have come, nor does Colum say how a bow came to be in the roof, from which it fell down to Gilly. In

declining to foreclose this unexpected surge of activity with detailed analysis, Colum mystifies it, perhaps suggesting in it the miraculous intervention of a glorious national destiny.

In Gilly, then, Colum represents the Irish peasantry; and because his conception of the peasantry is complicated by his own assessment of the Irish political predicament, his characterization is accordingly complex. The King of Ireland's Son, who is a spokesman for a genre, a set of conventions, more than for a social class, can be brought almost fully formed from the tradition of romantic heroism, but Gilly, who is made to refer to an aspect of the real world as well as to convention, must be more intricately composed. Specifically, Colum requires Gilly to accommodate the notion of the peasant-hero. "For Colum, the peasant is hero," writes Richard Loftus:

Colum told me in January, 1961, that the underlying motif of his work has always been the heroism of the peasantry. At a seminar at the National University of Ireland, Dublin (U.C.D.) in February, 1961, Colum while talking of heroism used the phrase, "Plutarch lied," by which he meant to suggest that Plutarch was wrong in identifying Heroism with great and noble men.<sup>14</sup>

In his attempt to integrate the peasant in Gilly with notions of heroism, Colum draws on diverse antecedents. Gilly is many characters: the Irish Strong John, the Master Thief, the stolen babe of the Unique Tale, the callow youth unlucky in love, the "natural man" who is intimate with the forest, the river, and the animals, and the resourceful but also forgetful hero. Gilly,

fashioned to include these myriad elements, becomes not only a more original creation than the King's Son but also one closer to the core of Colum's nationalist perceptions.

The most important source for Gilly of the Goatskin's heroism is a matrix of folktale characters from Irish lowlife tales (novelle), in particular, Irish versions of "Strong John," touched on in Chapter I above. How one Strong John tale type can give rise to different Irish folktale characters can be illustrated by comparing two tales that appear in Kennedy's Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts and Fireside Tales of Ireland with Thompson's delineation of Strong John in The Folktale. "Strong John," according to Thompson, is not simply a character but a tale type (Type 650). The opening, which this tale shares with "The Bear's Son" (Type 301), often gives Strong John extraordinary origins--he may be fathered by a bear or struck from iron by a smith--and continues to detail his youth, which usually is characterized both by precocity and by a "long nurturing" (Motif F011.2.3), often meaning that he is suckled until he is a teenager. The opening sequence ends when Strong John, whose great appetite brings ruin on the household, is sent out to seek his fortune. After a preliminary adventure at a smithy, John enters into one of three strange labor contracts. In the one relevant to Gilly of the Goatskin, "The Anger Bargain" (Type 1000) outlined more fully in Chapter I, John and his employer agree that whichever one of them becomes angry and sorry for the contract will lose either wages or some other compensation. The employer sets

physically demanding and treacherous tasks, but Strong John uses his great strength both to accomplish the tasks and to wreak havoc in the process, eventually driving the employer to anger and winning the wager.<sup>15</sup>

The two Kennedy tales most relevant to Colum's Gilly of the Goatskin are "Jack and his Master," in Fireside Stories, and "Adventures of 'Gilla na Chreck an Gour" in Legendary Fictions. (Both are reprinted in Jacobs' Celtic Fairy Tales.) These are the tales that contribute specific elements of plot or character to Colum's construct, but other tales such as "Jack and his Comrades" may be consulted as examples of related characterization. The first two, however, are clearly variants of the tale of Strong John. In "Jack and His Master," we have a clear and explicit instance of Type 650, "The Anger Bargain." The differences between this version of the type and Thompson's outline are as interesting as the similarities. First, the opening sequence is omitted entirely in the Kennedy tale. Jack is the youngest son of a widow and is thought to be rather simple; there is no extraordinary birth, no precocity, and no long nurturing. But even more surprising, Jack has no particular excess of strength in this version. Instead of using his physical strength to frustrate his employer, in this case called the Gray Churl of the Townland of Mischance, Jack foils him with his cleverness: he pretends to be simple, takes his master's metaphoric directions literally, and finally wins the bargain.

It is clear that Colum drew either from this very tale or from one quite like it in contriving the episode of Gilly and the Churl of the Townland of Mischance. The almost exact coincidence of the names of the respective cruel masters--Colum merely drops the adjective "Gray"--illustrates the closeness of the two accounts, and there are as well the memorable stake in the wager (a strip of skin one and a half inches wide from the neck to the heel); the two predecessors who return sore and scarred; the hero's willingness to forego the strip of the Churl's skin in return for double wages for the unfortunate predecessors; and the seeming brutality of the last trick, involving sheep's eyes in Kennedy and horses' legs in Colum, which the hero takes care to reveal to the townspeople as really only a harmless ruse. Of the changes from the tale type in this version, the most important for Colum's purposes, as shall become clear, is the substitution of Jack's cleverness for Strong John's strength.

There are other significant elements of the Strong John tale which are not present in "Jack and His Master." Some of these elements, specifically the "long nurturing" motif, occur in the second Kennedy tale. "The Adventures of 'Gilla na Chreck an Gour,'" or the Lad with the Goatskin, begins with a brief account of the youth of the hero, here called "Tom." He is slow to feel his independence; his mother keeps him and covers him with ashes for warmth until she procures a goatskin for him to wear. He is finally sent out at age nineteen to gather wood for the fire. While doing so, he encounters a giant, the struggle

with whom reveals his great strength. The main events of the tale, irrelevant for Colum, are not one of the strange contracts of the Strong John tale type but concern how Tom wins a serious princess by making her laugh. One further detail of the opening links Kennedy's Tom to the opening of the Strong John tale: the version Thompson mentions in which Strong John is struck from iron by a smith appears to have degenerated into the otherwise gratuitous detail that Tom and his mother live "near the iron forge at Enniscorthy."<sup>16</sup>

In The King of Ireland's Son, not only is the name of the hero the same (the Lad, or Gilly, with the Goatskin), but the wearing of the goatskin is woven into the details of the Long Nurturing. Colum's use of this motif differs significantly from Kennedy's. For the mother and the ash-heap, Colum substitutes the Hags of the Long Teeth and the cradle. As a result, Gilly becomes an oppressed captive rather than a sluggard, a symbolic representation of an Irish people made lethargic through their absence of prospects and livelihood, just prior to their emergence into affairs--Gilly's leap into the world. At the same time, the remnants of the long-nurturing motif link Gilly through Tom to Strong John. But Tom of "The Adventures of 'Gilla na Chreck Gour'" retains very different qualities of the type than the hero of "Jack and His Master." This Strong John is indeed strong--that motif is restored, and he is good-natured but he is also crude and if not stupid then extremely naïve in the ways of the world. Furthermore, Kennedy emphasizes his lowliness of birth and class

by putting his tale into Stage Irish accents which exhibit a lowliness of expression and manner as well. Kennedy's storyteller worries explicitly over Tom's lack of "class":

Well, I suppose, before they were married, Tom got some man, like Pat Mara of Tomenine, to learn him the "principles of politeness", fluxions, gunnery and fortification, decimal fractions, practice, and the rule of three direct, the way he'd be able to keep up a conversation with the royal family. Whether he ever lost his time learning them sciences, I'm not sure, but it's as sure as fate that his mother never saw any want till the end of her days.<sup>17</sup>

The narrator's crude and anachronistic ("royal family") expression of the learning Tom ought to have is of course ironic. But this passage, its supposed humor notwithstanding, indicates this Strong John, like Uriah Heep, is forever humble.

Irish folklore, it seems, has developed from the character and events of the Strong John tale type two quite distinct peasant protagonists, both of whom inform Colum's portrait of Gilly of the Goatskin. Certainly Gilly exhibits some of the slowness of Kennedy's "Gilla na Chreck an Gour," or of such a related folktale character as Jack in Kennedy's "Jack and His Comrades," who without any explicit formal relationship to Strong John is very similar in character and language to the Lad with the Goatskin.<sup>18</sup> Gilly's slowness is established most strongly in the opening vignette--a politicized version of the Long Nurturing motif, as we have already seen. Colum does give to Gilly a decisiveness not common to his folktale antecedents, but the opening also

emphasizes a tardiness of maturity consistent with later episodes--the infatuation with Flame-of-Wine, the susceptibility to Gilveen, the bumbling in the second encounter with the Hags of the Long Teeth, and the inability to recover the Crystal Egg or to sustain the search for it--which Colum extrapolates into Gilly's rhythm of failure.

If Gilly represents Colum's version of the peasant, then the peasant as Colum sees him is quite understandably lacking in the skills necessary for success in the heroic world. This aspect of the peasant in Gilly contrasts him with the King of Ireland's Son. The King's Son, being not only born a prince but raised as one, in the tradition of heroic Märchen, is well equipped for heroic action. Not only does Gilly's narrative rhythm differ from his half-brother's, but in addition, he often fails at what would be a natural accomplishment for the King's Son. The King's Son, in an effort to take Gilly under his wing, gives him advice from time to time. For instance, when Gilly is at a loss about how he is ever to discover who his parents are, the King's Son counsels that he "Go to the Hags of the Long Teeth and force them to tell you" (KS, 185). These plain, bold words accord perfectly well with the King's Son's mode of activity. They mix much less happily with Gilly's mode of activity, unfortunately. For one, Gilly at the moment is wholly consumed by his infatuation with Flame-of-Wine. "'I will do that,'" says Gilly:



. . . but in his own mind he said, "I will first bring the Comb of Magnificence to Flame-of-Wine, and I will tell her that I will have to be away for so many years with Mogue and I shall ask her to remember me until I come back to her. Then I shall go to the Hags of the Long Teeth and force them to tell me what King and Queen were my father and mother. KS, 185

According to this revision of his would-be mentor's plan, Gilly could not freely pursue his own destiny for a full seven years. But even when this complication, through the good offices of the Spae-Woman, is resolved and Gilly confronts the Hags of the Long Teeth, the issue is not happy. The parallel is with the King's Son's pursuit of the Enchanter of the Black Backlands, from whom he wrests the beginning and the end of the Unique Tale at sword point. In decided contrast, when Gilly boldly accosts the treacherous Hags, he is quickly duped, incapacitated, and conveyed into the service of Crom Duv. The kind of direct action the King's Son quite naturally suggests does not accord with Gilly's abilities.

Gilly's ventures do occasionally turn out better, however. At the beginning of his Adventures, he does subdue the Hags, although his prowess with the bow and arrow gets some magical assistance. His Anger Bargain with the Churl of the Townland of Mischance, his adventures with the robbers that earn him the title of Captain of the Robbers, and his escape from the well-guarded house of Crom Duv all demonstrate that the sluggishness of Kennedy's Lad with the Goatskin is not the sole determinant of Gilly's character. Significantly, none of these successes, after

he first escapes from the Hags, is crucial to the main plot. Moreover, they demonstrate an important distinction in the two heroes' modes of success. The sources of Gilly's mode are the Strong John of "Jack and His Master" on the one hand, and on the other "The Master Thief," from Type 1525, represented in Kennedy by "Jack the Cunning Thief" (Fireside Tales). Both of these practical heroes--both peasants--rise above circumstance through their cleverness rather than through brute force or physical skill. This is the same practical cunning behind Gilly's successes. Gilly's cleverness at first wears a disguise that assists the accommodation with his slowness: he wins the Anger Bargain by pretending to be stupid. The familiar tale of "Jack and the Beanstalk" provides a paradigm for this peculiar mixture of slowness and cleverness. This Jack too is rather dim by the world's standards; entrusted with his mother's farm produce, he brings home from the market as payment only a handful of beans. Magic, which also attends Gilly, turns the beans into the great beanstalk, but Jack defeats the giant with his own wit.

Gilly's cleverness derives from peasant characters in the folktale, as Colum's first name for Gilly, Jack, helps to confirm.<sup>19</sup> But Gilly's cunning represents the peasantry in another way as well. Often the only weapon that the real peasant had against oppressive circumstances was his own wit. Colum incorporates an example in Castle Conquer. An old woman recalls how the landlord's agent years ago threatened to fine her because her donkey had brayed.

She enacted the scene. "The donkey knows you have just come back, sir. He was going to welcome you. The donkey knows, sir, how much we missed you." The children by the fire lived the scene that their grandmother acted with such ironic power. CC, 183

Gilly's battle with the Churl is likewise waged underground, in ironic rhetoric rather than direct action. If Gilly's naïveté and earthiness represent the peasant's legacy from years of deprivation, his cleverness, a modified common sense, represents the cunning of the dispossessed, of the man whose perennial disadvantage means that open combat is impossible, and that his only weapon is irony.

The elements of Gilly's peasant heroism thus far discussed are drawn by Colum out of select folklore representations of the peasant. Gilly's qualities, in contrast to those of the King's Son, are not the heroic virtues of the traditional, romantic stereotype, but are part of Colum's attempt to modify traditional concepts of heroism to embrace the experience of his primary subject, the peasantry. In keeping, Colum combines Gilly's special qualities of innocence, naïveté, practicality, and clever resourcefulness--metaphorically the products of centuries of dispossession imposed on the once heroic Celts, now the Irish peasants--with a closeness to nature that characterizes most of Colum's peasant-heroes. It is this association with nature which in the end of the book suits Gilly to rule over "the waste places and the villages and the roads where masterless men walked."

Gilly's exploration of nature begins as soon as he escapes

the Hags of the Long Teeth. The joy of Gilly's newfound freedom is also the joy of nature:

He was out, as I have said, in the width and the height, the length and the breadth, the gloom and the gleam of the world. He fired arrows into the air. He leaped over ditches, he rolled down hillsides, he raced over level places until he came to what surprised him more than all the things in the world--a river. He had never seen such water before and he wondered to see it moving with swiftness. KS, 101

Gilly feels so close to the phenomenon of the river that he personifies it when the Weasel inquires where he's going.

"I'm going the way he's going," said Gilly, nodding toward the river, "and I'll keep beside him till he wants to turn back."  
KS, 102

Gilly still has something to learn about nature at this point. One of the charms of the river that Gilly wants to duplicate in his house is its reflection of his image--self-knowledge on the most physical level.

When Gilly creates a lodging after he acquires the magic Crystal Egg, he incorporates into it not only a mirror but as much of nature as possible.

Gilly of the Goatskin wished for wide windows in his house and he got them. He wished for a light within when there was darkness without, and he got a silver lamp that burned until he wished to sleep. He wished for the songs of birds and he had a blackbird singing upon his half-door, a lark over his chimney, a goldfinch and a green linnet within his window, and a shy wren in

the evening singing from the top of his dresser. Then he wished to hear the conversation of the beasts and all the creatures of the fields and the wood and the mountain top came into his house. KS, 104.

Gilly's house is turned inside out. Its interior extends the outside world inward, into a charmed, magical realm where the usually divergent spheres of humanity and nature overlap. His desires are mainly two: illumination, both day and night, and communication, either musical or verbal, with the various species of animals. He offers his hospitality to many: the skittish hare, the comical hedgehog, the glib and stealthy fox, the crude and majestic boar. Most magical and impressive, however, are the deer.

The deer never came into the house, and Gilly had a shed made for them outside. They would come into it and stay there for many nights and days, and Gilly used to go out and talk with them. They knew about far countries, and strange paths and passes, but they did not know so much about men and about the doings of other creatures as the Fox did. KS, 106

These mentors offer important knowledge and wisdom to Gilly. Their refusal to cross even into Gilly's highly modified human sphere gives them a unique credibility, mystique, and seriousness; consequently, they seem to speak from the heart of the experience of nature. Significantly, the desolate places largely unknown to men that they tell Gilly of are the very places eventually entrusted to him.

Gilly's life in the woods elaborates on the folktale's

treatment of nature and the creatures who inhabit it. Folktales usually confine description of setting to vivid, rhythmic, formulaic "runs," which may be quite extravagant in heroic Märchen or more homely in novelle. The patterns of the homelier kind of run may be heard as Colum tells of "a blackbird singing upon his half-door, a lark over his chimney, a goldfinch and a green linnet within his window, and a shy wren in the evening singing from the top of his dresser," but the description of Gilly's animal visitors overflows the folktale form and becomes more important to the story than is usual in folktales. Folktales are often full of creatures--magic horses, talking rabbits and helpful birds, in addition to hounds and horses that the hero must find and birds and beasts of all sorts who are rendered more or less realistically. Colum's creatures in this episode owe much to folktale creatures, including their general friendliness and their ability to communicate. In making them not only Gilly's comrades but his tutors, Colum elaborates on the role of animals in folktales. Gilly is interested in the conversation and knowledge not just of the deer but of all of the creatures, who have different things to tell him according to their species. By consciously choosing his life in the woods with the animals, wishing it into existence through the agency of the Crystal Egg, Gilly chooses as well the manner of his initiation into the ways of the world. He inserts himself into a folktale-inspired, fanciful version of a folk community, in which knowledge and wisdom, the fruits of experience and observation, are passed on

by word of mouth. This informal tutelage contrasts with the King of Ireland's Son's education at the knee of Marauvan, the King's Councillor, who teaches him from "The Breastplate of Instruction." The King's Son, one could say, has an education--books, tutors, lessons--whereas Gilly has "lore"--a distinction made clear at the end of the book, where Gilly's deeds are remembered by the folk shanachies rather than by the court storytellers who recount the adventures of the King of Ireland's Son.

By putting Gilly in the house in the woods, Colum situates him in the milieu of the Irish peasant, the countryside. Nature as it is presented here is a source of knowledge and wisdom, however, and suggests that the peasant's closeness to nature gives him not only joy and rejuvenation but also a special insight into the world, unattainable by any other means. Gilly's immersion in the natural world is part of his educating progress through the book, which leads him gradually to an understanding of his place both in nature and in human society. But Colum makes the experience of the land, which in Colum's day was sought by many of those who anticipated a role in their country's literary or political destiny, a vital part of the development of all of the primary characters in The King of Ireland's Son. Downal and Dermott, for instance, briefly in competition with the King's Son for the Sword of Light, discover that no character can afford to sever himself either from nature or from the humble life associated with it. Their arrogance when the Little Sage of

the Mountain asks them to help him in his labors derails their quest, while their half-brother, the King of Ireland's Son, reaps corn for the Sage, who rewards him with directions to his next mentor, the Gobaun Saor. Downal and Dermott, however, eventually have a redeeming change of heart, in keeping with the melioristic spirit of the book, which goes beyond the natural meliorism of the folktale in turning bad characters to good account. An important sign of their redemption is their new attitude toward nature.

"We have taken the world for our pillow.  
We are going to leave our grooms asleep one  
fine morning, and go as the salmon goes  
down the river." KS, 168

What is striking in these lines is how Downal and Dermott's intent to follow the river echoes Gilly's journey by the riverside at the beginning of his adventures. In fact, the King's Son, Fedelma and Morag all travel along the river before their fates are resolved.

Although the King of Ireland's Son is a more warrior-like and courtly hero than Gilly of the Goatskin, he spends time in nature refreshing and schooling his faculties as well. Not only does he reap the Little Sage's corn at the beginning of his quest for the means to release Fedelma, but also he and Fedelma return to the Little Sages's curious house--"thatched with one great wing of a bird"--to restore themselves after the rigors with which the quest ends.



The King of Ireland's Son went into the garden and Fedelma sat at the quern-stone that was just outside the door; he dug and she ground while the Little Sage sat at the fire looking into a big book. And when Fedelma and the King's Son were tired with their labor he gave them a drink of buttermilk.

She made cakes out of the wheat she had ground and the King's Son washed the potatoes and the Little Sage boiled them and so they made their supper. KS, 29

The almost religious quiet of this little scene shares something with the devout layman's retreat to a monastery, an Irish experience explored by Colum in A Boy in Eirinn. The King's Son and Fedelma's peaceful excursion into country life, with its boiled potatoes and wheaten cakes, also echoes the experience of the young men and women of Colum's day who went into the country to learn Gaelic and acquaint themselves with peasant life.

The similarity of this scene to many of the episodes involving Gilly of the Goatskin, with their related emphases on labor and humility within the context of a distinctly Irish countryside, indicates a truth that, in the discussion of the differences in two heroes' characters, should not be forgotten. For all that Colum draws an explicit and crucial contrast between the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin, he nevertheless means them to complement each other. Colum's double vision of Irish heroism in The King of Ireland's Son does not insist on the utter isolation of the two heroic modes. The cordial personal relationship of the two heroes demonstrates the principle that each hero and each heroic mode have something to offer to the other. The King's Son offers Gilly the advantages of his own

greater experience and more privileged and active education, while Gilly tenders his more intuitive understanding of the forces of nature and of the human heart. Similarly, the romantic heroism of the King's Son and the peasant heroism of Gilly, each by themselves an insufficient model for the heroism of New Ireland, together form a unifying vision of Irish character as well as of what may be considered heroic in Ireland. The closing passage cited above (p.123) provides a paradigm for this relationship; the heroes will rule different parts of Ireland and appear in the stories of different groups of people, but together they will rule all of Ireland and speak to all of the people.

Because of Colum's double vision of modern heroism, there are in The King of Ireland's Son two heroes inhabiting two kinds of narrative characterized by two distinct, though related, "rhythms of action"--deferral and failure. Because of Colum's emphasis on the symbiosis of his two heroic modes, there are some noteworthy parallels between the King's Son's and Gilly's adventures, in spite of their inherent differences. For instance, the sequences by which each of the heroes in turn acquires a donor are divergent in content but strikingly similar in form. Laheen the Eagle, who becomes the Law-Maker for the animals after the King's Son rescues her from her struggle with the eel, is a venerable and noble figure next to the plain-dealing Weasel, although the Weasel's claim to be "'the lion of these parts'" parodies Laheen's status. More important than this difference in status, the King's Son and Gilly both earn the assistance of

their respective donors by rescuing them forcefully from the death-grip of another animal, in Laheen's case an eel, in the Weasel's a crane. The assistance the donors render differs according to the demands of the different plots--Laheen gives the knowledge and direction characteristic of many folktales of the type, while the Weasel, as befits Gilly's episodic narrative, becomes his companion for a period--and in spite of the Weasel's assertion of a lordly status, his comic, unromantic character helps give Gilly's adventures their lowlife flavor. Nevertheless, the parallel donor sequences reveal the King's Son and Gilly in heroic postures that are structurally identical.

The King's Son and Gilly acquire donors in the same way, and both have preliminary adventures which require them to perform extraordinarily difficult tasks. (The King's Son succeeds at the tasks which the Enchanter of the Black Backlands assigns through the agency of Fedelma, while Gilly must outwit the Churl of the Townland of Mischance himself.) In addition, both Gilly and the King of Ireland's Son are told tales, based on the same incident, which are embedded in the enveloping narrative in structurally similar ways. "The King of the Cats," as we have already seen, is told in episodes on successive nights, and thus is sandwiched between daytime events crucial to the main narrative (with which the in-tale has little to do). Like the tale of "The King of the Cats," the story called "The Fairy Rowan Tree" in Cycle III is embedded in the narration. In fact, it is one layer further embedded; the King's Son hears the first tale directly

from Art, but Gilly gets the second one second-hand, for it is Morag who tells the tale, repeating it as it was told her by the King of Senlabor's Councillor. This extra narrative layer in part compensates for the fact that, while "The Fairy Rowan Tree" occupies successive evenings, it does not occupy so many as "The King of the Cats." Similarly, "The Fairy Rowan Tree" does not come at quite so important a moment as does "The King of the Cats," but it almost makes up for it by occupying a position of importance in two plots, the story of Gilly of the Goatskin and the story of Morag. There still remains a difference in narrative tension, however, which itself corresponds to the difference in the construction of the narratives of the King's Son and Gilly. The slackening of suspense and narrative tension in the story of "The Fairy Rowan Tree" fits the nature of Gilly's plot, with its generally slower rhythms and more episodic structure.

The incident that each of these in-tales shares is the fabled hurling match between the Fianna and the Fairies to determine whether Fergus or the druid Curoi should marry Ainé, daughter of Mananaun. Characteristically, each version of this story in The King of Ireland's Son is independent of the other, making no allusion to the particular events associated with the story in the other in-tale. As with the various versions of the story of the Crystal Egg, it is difficult to reconcile these two accounts of the one event. A hypothetical comprehensive version, in which first the hurlers become involved in the battle between the King of the Cats and the Eagle-Emperor, and then a stray magic

rowan berry, provided by Mananaun to refresh the hurlers, springs into the Fairy Rowan Tree, hardly seems convincing. Once again, Colum seems to be playing with the inconsistencies that are almost necessarily a part of oral lore. He suggests a link between the two in-tales, but by refusing to make them cohesive, makes the nature of the link mysterious, even magical.

A further sign of the parallelism between the two heroes is the poem which Colum gives each as an accompaniment to their journeys. When the King of Ireland's Son sets out at the beginning of his adventures, Colum captures in verse the jauntiness of his outlook as well as the nature of his progress. Colum has him ride out

His hound at his heel,  
His hawk on his wrist;  
A brave steed to carry him whither he list  
And the blue sky over him. KS, 2

Colum gives these lines five times in all, sometimes varying the last line. In addition, he has the King's Son sing a song to himself that also helps to establish the King's Son's heroic mode.

I put the fastenings on my boat  
For a year and for a day,  
And I went where the rowans grow,  
And where the moorhens lay;

And I went over the steppingstones  
And dipped my feet in the ford,  
And came at last to the Swineherd's house--  
The Youth without a Sword.

A swallow sang upon his porch  
 "Glu-ee, glu-ee, glu-ee,"  
 "The wonder of all wandering,  
 The wonder of the sea";  
 A swallow soon to leave ground sang  
 "Glu-ee, glu-ee, glu-ee."  
KS, 3

The fastenings on the boat and the steppingstones and the ford, taken from well-known folktale runs, anticipate the King's Son's coming immersion in a fairy-tale world whose magic, as we have seen, at first surprises him. The "Youth without a Sword" is the King's Son himself, of course, whose search for the Sword of Light is a metaphor for the initiation into arms. The swallow in the last stanza sounds the keynotes of the coming adventures--wonder, wandering and maturation.

The King of Ireland's Son gets his hunting song at the beginning of his adventures; Gilly of the Goatskin has to wait for his bit of verse until relatively late in his story, in keeping with the gradualism with which his heroism is established. Indeed, Colum fits verse to Gilly's progress at the beginning of the most heroic section of his adventures, when he sets out with more purpose and determination than ever before to confront the Hags of the Long Teeth about his parentage. Gilly travels on foot in this journey, in contrast to the King's Son, who like most romantic heroes travels on horseback. The imagery of Gilly's poem, furthermore, invokes the landscape that will be his province, very different from the courtly world suggested by the King Son's travelling poem and the Märchen-like world of the song that he sings.

The blackbird shakes his metal notes  
 Against the edge of day,  
 And I am left upon my road  
 With one star on my way.

. . . . .

The night has told it to the hills,  
 And told the partridge in the nest,  
 And left it on the long white roads,  
 She will give light instead of rest.

. . . .

Behold the sky is covered,  
 As with a mighty shroud:  
 A forlorn light is lying  
 Between the earth and cloud.

. . . .

In the silence of the morning  
 Myself, myself went by,  
 Where lonely trees sway branches  
 Against spaces of the sky.

KS, 211-212

There is much in this poem that typifies Gilly's world. The birds are reminiscent of the birds Gilly invited into his little house, while the illumination that the one star gives recalls Gilly's desire to have light in his house at night. Moreover, the lonely scene described here is a foretaste of the sphere which Gilly is given to rule at the book's end, with the "long white roads" here anticipating "the roads where masterless men walk" there (KS, 275). Colum chooses verses that express the differing characteristics of his two heroes, then, although they have similar functions in their respective narratives. Both sets of verses put into play a consideration that Colum associates very strongly with the folktale: verbal pattern.<sup>20</sup> The rhythm within the poems as well as the rhythm created by the alternation of prose and verse establishes a patterning of sound that Colum associated with the aural experience of a folktale, but which also

was often a feature of early Irish manuscripts.

The narratives of the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin quote each other's donor sequences, tasks, in-tales and interpolated poems. While Colum always observes the differing characters of the heroes within these similar episodes, and in fact uses them in part to extend the distinction between the youths, the broad pattern which nonetheless results brings the heroes under the umbrella of an overarching unity that accommodates their differences to a broadened concept of heroism. The model for the relationship between the King's Son's more romantic and warrior-like heroism--the heroism of the Irish rebel--and Gilly's peasant heroism is the blood-kinship of the two. Gilly and the King's Son are half-brothers, related through their father only. Accordingly, Gilly and the King's Son preserve their separate identities while remaining linked by what we may think of as a family resemblance, the family being Gaeldom. We must remember as well that this kinship is revealed, and thus represents the discovery on the part of the contemporaries of Colum's youth of kinship with the Gaelic peasant. Colum writes of this in his Introduction to Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, published with The King of Ireland's Son in 1916.

The generation that became conscious twenty years ago turned with hope, faith and reverence to Gaelic Ireland. From the remnant of the Gaelic-speaking people they would learn what civilization their country was capable of attaining to. Those who regarded themselves as the historic Irish nation were then rediscovering their origins and their achievements:



they were Celts; they were of the race of Brennus and Vercingetorix, of Cuchullain and Maeve, of Columbanus and Scotus Eirigena; they were of the breed of the warriors who had shaken all empires although they had founded none; of the race of the missionary saints, and of the lovers of learning who had made themselves the patrons and protectors of European culture. The Ireland they willed would not be an autonomous West Britain, but a resurgent Gaelic nationality. And their race-dream was as fantastic perhaps as the race-dream of any other reviving people.<sup>21</sup>

The King of Ireland's Son itself is a fantasy on the theme of the Irish "race-dream," including the emerging consciousness of a generation who would at last accomplish something in the political arena, the link between these people and Gaelic Ireland, and the existence among the Gaelic peasantry of vestiges of an ancient, heroic Ireland. It is the relationship of these themes that the revelation of the kinship of the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin expresses.

Colum also uses blood kinship to symbolize the interrelatedness of the various Celtic sub-races of Ireland. When the King's Son and Gilly, now Flann, whose relationship has yet to be discovered, meet Downal and Dermott, the King's Son's brothers, at the Town of the Red Castle, Colum makes a comparison of the four youths' physical characteristics.

They looked fine youths, Downal and Dermott, in their red cloaks, with their heads held high, and a brag in their walk and their words. . . . They were tall and ruddy; the King's Son was more brown in the hair and more hawklike in the face: the three were different from the dark-haired, dark-eyed, red-lipped lad to whom the Old Woman of Beare had given the name of Flann. KS, 167

The brothers are first of all divided into "red" and "black" Irish. Colum comments on these distinct Irish physiognomies in My Irish Year (1912) and feels moved to repeat his remarks twenty years later in The Road Round Ireland (1926).

Someone once told me that the bright-haired Milesian type was disappearing out of Ireland, and that the surviving Irish type would be Iberian and dark-haired. There were no bright heads [at this dance]. Man after man, girl after girl, was dark of hair and face.<sup>22</sup>

Colum makes a similar racial distinction regarding the four half-brothers of The King of Ireland's Son. There is a suggestion not only of the difference between the Iberian ("black") and more northerly Celts, but the ancient historical and mythical Celtic races as well--the tall, red-haired, aristocratic Milesians, the Firbolgs, "a race dark, short and plebian,"<sup>23</sup> and the Tuatha da Danaan, whose skill at swordcraft Downal and Dermott aspire to. Here Colum extends his optimistic, unifying vision of the Irish nation to include the different races as well as different social milieux and backgrounds and different occupations, a concern of Colum's which becomes evident again in the arrangement of The Poet's Circuits (1960).

The racial component of the symbolism of The King of Ireland's Son, however briefly developed, certainly confirms the nationalism inherent in Colum's exploration of heroism in the book. More than heroism as a general concept, "the heroism of the Irish peasantry" and the heroism of the Irish nation engage him in The King's Son.

Such a theme seems a legitimate concern for an Irish writer, especially one writing in Colum's time. Considering the importance of nationhood to Irish writers, the distaste for "political overtones" expressed by Zack Bowen, Colum's principal critic, seems surprising. Bowen fidgets whenever Colum lights on political themes, and seems almost relieved when he can dismiss a book or parts of it-- A Boy in Eirinn, for example, or even Castle Conquer--because it descends to "propaganda." But Colum's political perceptions are so important to his artistic motivation, as is certainly true of The King of Ireland's Son, that one discounts them at the risk of misunderstanding his work.

Politics is a well-known guest in the house of Irish fiction. The distinction of Colum's treatment of political themes in The King of Ireland's Son lies in the way he binds them to Irish heroic and anti-heroic folktales. In the rhythms of action, deferral, failure and gathering, Colum remains true to the style of the folktale, with its emphasis on externalizing states of mind into happenings; yet at the same time he builds into the story of his heroes' adventures character depths and literary themes that make The King's Son not merely a retelling of Irish folktales but a literary use of them. The King's Son himself, for instance, is based on the romantic heroes of Irish Märchen, but Colum opens up this heroic tradition, with the help of the rhythm of deferral, to give the King's Son the spiritual strength and moral energy to serve as a model for the modern Irish rebel.

Gilly's character, on the other hand, derives from peasant characters in less romantic tales, novelle (or what Kennedy calls "household stories," in his organization of tales in Legendary Fictions). The rhythm of failure helps Colum to extend the record of peasant life contained in this kind of tale to express the frustration and awkwardness of the Gaelic peasant's position during the centuries of subordination to the Normans. Both Gilly's and the King's Son's parts of the narrative are subordinated to Destiny, an Irish Destiny, which is present in the book not so much as a theme as a force. This Destiny, referred to once as "Diachbha," is obscured by the garbling of episodes like the Crystal Egg sequence, but nevertheless remains powerful enough in the narrative to guide the multiple plots to their separate but intricately related resolutions, with overtones of the euphoric, post-revolution future that Colum projects for Ireland. Deriving literature from the Irish folk or manuscript tradition is perhaps the archetypal literary activity of the Irish Literary Revival, but Colum's intimacy with the Irish folktale means that he does not merely extract characters and events from his sources for conventional literary treatment, but that he transforms the folktale from the inside to create forms as well as content for The King of Ireland's Son.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Type No. 2412B. O'Sullivan observes in the note to Tale 31, "The Man Who Had No Story," in Folktales of Ireland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 274, that this tale type escaped the notice of Aarne and Thompson in The Types of the Folktale.

<sup>2</sup> O'Sullivan, Folktales of Ireland, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Letitia MacLintock, "Far Darrig in Donegal," in Irish Folk Stories and Fairy Tales, ed. William Butler Yeats (1892; rpt. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974), p. 87. Another example of this tale, one whose events resemble the MacLintock rather than the O'Sullivan version, is "Andrew Coffey," in Jacobs' Celtic Fairy Tales (1891 and 1894; rpt. London: The Bodley Head, 1970), pp. 129-132. (Note that in this reprint, Jacobs' Celtic Fairy Tales and More Celtic Fairy Tales are reprinted together, under the name of the first volume only.)

<sup>4</sup> Type 953. An example is "Conall Cra Bhuidhe," from Campbell's Popular Tales of the West Highlands, No. v, pp. 105-108; Jacobs has a modified version called "Conall Yellowclaw" in Celtic Fairy Tales (1970), pp. 27-34. Thompson discusses the tale type on p. 172 of The Folktale (1946; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Perhaps the best known story about storytelling is "Scheherezade"; where also the raconteur's life is spared because of the tales she tells. \* 3/

<sup>5</sup> Thompson points out that the term "hero tale," which at first glance seems to define a rather narrow genre of folktale, is in fact more inclusive than either the term "Märchen" or "novella." The Folktale, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Padraic Colum: A Biographical-Critical Introduction, p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Colum himself retells the story of Finn's acquisition of the spear Brigha in the beginning of "How the Harp Came to Tara," The Frenzied Prince (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1943), p. 76. Similar stories tell how Cuchulain won the "Gae Bulga," also a spear. The importance to the young hero of appropriate armaments is stressed in the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, obstructed in his search for arms by his own hostile mother, in "Math, Son of Mathonwy," in The Mabington.

<sup>10</sup> Pearse is quoted by Colum in his introduction to Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, ed. Padraic Colum and Edward J. O'Brien (New York: Small, Maynard and Company, 1916), p. x.

<sup>11</sup> New York: James and Pott and Co., 1912, p. 85. (The date of publication does not appear in the New York version. I have followed Denson in giving 1912, rather than Loftus who uses 1913. See Alan Denson, "Padraic Colum: An Appreciation with a Checklist of His Publication," Dublin Magazine 6 (Spring, 1967) 1, p. 54).

<sup>12</sup> Pp. 72-73. Loftus points out this passage in Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Literature, p. 176, referring in a note (number 22, page 319) to My Irish Year.

<sup>13</sup> Studies, Tower Press Booklets, Second Series, No. 2 (Dublin: Maunsell, 1907), p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry, p. 185 and Note 36, pp. 319-320.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, The Folktale, pp. 85-86.

<sup>16</sup> Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts (1866; rpt. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968), p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Legendary Fictions, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Colum based Six Who Were Left in a Shoe (1924), a tale for very young children, on this tale type.

<sup>19</sup> Jack is the hero of "The Giant and His Servants," New York Herald Tribune, 1915. The events in this series of Colum's, however, do not include Gilly's adventures with the Churl or with the Robbers but appear quite late in The King of Ireland's Son, in "The House of Crom Duv."

<sup>20</sup> See Story Telling New and Old, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>22</sup> My Irish Year, pp. 12-13.

<sup>23</sup> According to Edmund Curtis, A History of Ireland (London: Methuen, 1936; rpt. as University Paperback, 1973), p. 1

Leaves 166, 167, 168 and 169 missed in numbering

#### IV: Castle Conquer: From Folk to Literary Heroism

The very title of Castle Conquer (1923), published seven years after The King of Ireland's Son, indicates that in this novel, Colum tries to insert himself into the tradition of Irish fiction. His title invokes Maria Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent (1800), held by Colum and many others to mark the beginning of the Irish novel.<sup>1</sup> In form and style, Castle Conquer little resembles Edgeworth's masterpiece. Colum, of course, is much closer to the peasantry than Edgeworth. He focuses on the life of the cottage and the field rather than the manor house, although, like Edgeworth, part of his subject-matter is the relationship between the gentry and their retainers. Colum shares with Edgeworth the use of peasant narrators, but here too he departs from Edgeworth's example. Whereas the story of Castle Rackrent is entirely in the voice of Thady Quirk, the Conollys' steward, and whereas Thady's utterance is surrounded by commentary--a Preface, often lengthy footnotes, and an extensive glossary--Colum's story is cast in the third person and has no comparable narrative superstructure. Colum uses his narrators within the main narrative, and the style, form and content of their embedded stories probably owe more to Carleton's Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry (1830-33) than to Castle Rackrent. There is a suggestion of Carleton as well in the situation of Castle Conquer. Like The Black Prophet (1847), Castle Conquer sets the melodrama that embroils its characters against the sharply



realized backdrop of historical upheaval, here the Land Wars, in The Black Prophet the Great Famine. Still, many of Castle Conquer's themes had their first life in Castle Rackrent, where they were treated with a gentler, less political irony and a lighter tone than in Colum's book. Indeed, Castle Conquer announces itself as a transformation of Castle Rackrent. It begins with a malevolent version of the degenerate "Big House" of Edgeworth's Conollys and ends with the return of the manor by force to the Catholic Celts--Thady Quirk's descendants, perhaps, schooled and hardened by their experience of guerrilla warfare. The rackrenting ways of the Anglo-Irish landlords give way before the conquering army of the Irish republicans, and the manor house, for so long the instrument of the oppression of the peasantry, becomes an emblem of its resurgence. Castle Conquer, in other words, gives a revolutionary ending to the story begun in Castle Rackrent.

Irish novels have a habit of appearing at important moments in Irish history--Castle Rackrent in the year that the Protestant Irish Parliament endorsed Union and abolished itself, The Black Prophet in the midst of the Great Famine, Colum's King of Ireland's Son in the year of the Dublin rising--and Castle Conquer is no exception. In 1923, the Treaty had just been signed and the divisive Civil War was burning fiercely. It is hardly surprising, then, that Castle Conquer is more explicitly political than most of Colum's work.<sup>2</sup> The novel ends with the signing of the Treaty, but for the most part takes place during the Land Wars. Indeed, in Castle Conquer, Colum takes as his subject the dawning of political awareness among the Irish peasantry in the last half of the nineteenth

century, when agrarian disturbances of growing violence and popularity in effect forced passage of the reforming Land Act of 1881 and Land Purchase Acts of 1887 and 1891. As Colum wrote earlier, in "Eilis A Woman's Story" (1907), it was

the time of the peasant's entrance into affairs.  
A nation had been born in the shadow of past  
defeats and was beginning to stir. As yet the  
struggle was for a little security, a little  
knowledge, a little toleration. The farmers  
of Ireland were closing up for the bitter struggle  
with feudal privilege. They had not enough  
detachment to realize the nation.<sup>3</sup>

This fledgling struggle has a profound effect on Castle Conquer's hero. Francis Gillick finds himself pulled inexorably toward illicit political activity, pulled by the same forces that transform the sunny pastoralism of the opening pages of the book to the bitter militancy of the end. Castle Conquer's first concern is with the process by which political activism, once associated only with wild radicals like "Whiteboys" and "Ribbonmen," asserts itself as a norm in the lives of the people of the Irish countryside.

The novel's secondary concern, appropriate to Colum's vocation as the poet of the peasantry, is the effect on the domestic drama of the people of their growing politicization. The agrarian activists on whom Colum models his hero were often forced to pose their political commitment against their domestic security and tranquility. In Castle Conquer, the hero's increasing political awareness and involvement inevitably jeopardize his love for Brigid Moynaugh. Francis Gillick first takes to arms (the Irish

rebel's traditional pike) to defend a neighboring tenant farmer, Martin Jordan, against eviction. This courageous undertaking, doomed to fail from the start, never really endangers the local powers, who don't take Francis seriously enough to prosecute him. Nevertheless, Francis has marked himself as a "Whiteboy" in the eyes of some, and the barriers he had hoped to avoid quickly rise between him and Brighid's proud mother. More seriously, as the only known insurrectionist in the district, Francis Gillick is easily framed for conspiracy and murder, for which he must stand trial. Thus Francis Gillick's dedication to the cause of the people occasions bitter sacrifice not only for himself but for Brighid as well. Francis is cleared of murder but convicted of the less serious offense. Like many of Colum's characters, he suffers incarceration. Brighid saves Francis's life, but only at great personal cost. She confesses in court that during the entire night of the murder Francis Gillick was alone with her in a bedroom in her mother's house. For Brighid, Francis's political involvement leads to shame and ~~ignominy~~---notoriety in the community and rejection by the family.

As he must, Colum banishes the surface trappings of the folktale--the talking animals, magic swords and difficult geasa--when he moves from the fantasy of The King of Ireland's Son to the peasant realism of Castle Conquer. Colum does not even venture here the kind of overt reference to the folktale that he includes in his second novel, The Flying Swans. Nevertheless, as Colum's comments on James Stephens' contributions to Irish literature

demonstrate, Colum saw considerable promise in the literary use of Irish folklore. Stephens, writes Colum in 1915, produced "the first contemporary romances that are distinctively Irish"; he elucidates this statement in 1923, the year of Castle Conquer, when he points out that Stephens' use of the folktale in The Charwoman's Daughter (1912) and The Crock of Gold (1912) and his use of storytelling in Irish Fairy Tales (1920) brought new forms to the Irish novel.<sup>4</sup> Like Stephens, Colum turns to Irish folktales for some of the forms for his own prose romance, Castle Conquer. In spite of the absence of some of the most obvious characteristics of the folktale, both the content of the Irish folktale and its context, Irish oral tradition, are profoundly present in Castle Conquer.

In Castle Conquer, the kind of sacrifice exacted from the characters duplicates what Colum, writing in 1944, saw as the central situation of the folktale.

The primary stories--leaving out of account fables and anecdotes--are concerned with subjection, the subjection of the hero or heroine, and this has to be made striking or pathetic; with wisdom from within or without that provides release, and this has to be made transcendent, with compensation that means a return to a human life that is greatly enhanced.<sup>5</sup>

This pattern of subjection, sacrifice and release, ending with an amelioration of the human condition, is exactly the pattern of Castle Conquer. On the larger scale, of course, it is the Irish nation that is subjected, or subjugated, and released into a better

world through the wisdom and sacrifice of political activists. But the interaction on the personal level, between Francis Gillick, Brighid Moynaugh and the local embodiments of British hegemony, manifests the folktale model more particularly. Imprisonment, especially unjustified imprisonment, is the real-life equivalent of the folktale character's incarceration, bewitchment or entrapment at the hands of a villain. Just as Gilly of the Goatskin and the King of Ireland's Son at different times are rescued from without, by Morag and Fedelma, so Francis Gillick must depend on Brighid's courage, intelligence and loyalty to win for him his life. The resumption after the crisis of normal human affairs is more complicated in the politicized, realistic world of Castle Conquer than it was in The King of Ireland's Son, but Francis Gillick ends the book with a vision of the long battle for Irish freedom that has ended in his own lifetime. The central drama of Castle Conquer, in short, translates the core events of the folktale into the terms of literary realism.

If the central events of Castle Conquer are based on the folktale's archetypal conflict, then Francis Gillick (and to a lesser degree, Brighid Moynaugh) exhibits many of the same qualities and performs some of the same functions as the folktale hero. Both the Märchen's romantic hero and the novella's low-life anti-hero--the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin--inform the character of Francis Gillick. But Francis's heroism is not the exclusive product of the folk tradition. Two other Irish heroic types are also important. First, there is the historical tradition, which positions Francis in a family line that has produced

heroic warriors from before the first invasion of the Normans and as late as the parliamentary war of the 1640s. Secondly, there is the type of more complicated heroism of Colum's own day, the traditions of modern Irish political martyrs, many of whom, like Thomas MacDonagh and Padraic Pearse, were also poets and teachers. The invocation of these various heroic types signals Colum's desire to probe the concept of heroism itself. Colum feels that the historical warriors, the folktale Gillies and King's sons, and the modern Thomas MacDonaghs comment crucially on each other. The character of Francis--the modern rebel with legendary forebears and folktale associations--is an effort to order and to assimilate the qualities of these three models.

The link of Francis Gillick to a historical past is made through Francis's discovery that he is not simply an undistinguished member of the peasantry but a descendant of a noble Celtic line. The vagaries of Irish history have rung the same changes on Francis's ancient family, the Clann O'Failey, as on many historical Irish families. The O'Faileys were the descendants of a brother of an Irish High King and held the area in which the story takes place until the wave of invading Normans, led by the de Courceys, broke over it, forced them out, and left a castle--Castle Conquer--on their place of assembly. Before the O'Faileys fell into complete disarray, there was a last emanation of their characteristic valor. Angus O'Failey, a captain with Owen Roe O'Neill, raised the remains of the Clann and expelled the de Courceys from Castle Conquer. This interlude of Irish rule in a long Norman supremacy did not last long, but it too left behind a relic, O'Failey's Tower. Angus O'Failey's is Francis Gillick's ancestor, and in O'Failey's Tower, where he joins a secret "combination," Francis takes his

first step towards revolutionary activity.

Francis Gillick's discovery of a blood connection to a historic Irish hero and before him to an ascendant Milesian clann, like Gilly of the Goatskin's discovery of name, nobility and family, is a fictional realization of one of the archetypes of the Irish renaissance. Colum voices the Irish nationalist's essential position on the noble heritage of the Irish peasant in My Irish Year (1912).

Many peasant families in Ireland can well claim noble descent, as practically all the native aristocracy who did not go over to France, Spain or Austria were, in the phrase of a native historian, "Melted into the peasantry."<sup>6</sup>

Colum was so struck by this last phrase that he repeats it twice in his work. In The Road Round Ireland (1926), in a sketch significantly entitled "Romance from History," Colum traces the rise and fall of the great O'Reilly clann, on whom Castle Conquer's O'Faileys are probably modelled. Like the O'Faileys, the O'Reillys were associated in the early days with the O'Neills. They "'melt into the peasantry"' just as the O'Faileys do<sup>7</sup> (CC, 44), but they too re-enter history, when Andrew O'Reilly, who like Angus O'Failey establishes his clann's Spanish connection, becomes "one of the Cavan leaders of the revolutionary United Irishmen."<sup>8</sup>

Francis Gillick's discovery of his family's heroic past has important consequences for Irish nationalism: it inspires his own militancy. Angus O'Failey is a model for Francis; when he joins the revolutionary Clann Melidh in O'Failey's tower, he feels that "the O'Failey who had once taken the castle and who had built this tower had laid a hand on him" (CC, 47-48). Not only does Angus's

example inspire Francis's defense of the evicted tenant, but also, Francis passes the tradition of Angus O'Failey on to his own son. Named after the family paragon, Failey eventually becomes the effective military leader that Francis Gillick is not and recaptures Castle Conquer. When Francis meets him on the day the treaty is signed, he places his hand on his son's shoulder as he felt O'Failey's on his, to signify that Failey's military skill and his ability to lead men are Angus O'Failey's legacy.

In modelling his actions on the example of his heroic ancestor, Francis conforms to the pattern of the Irish patriots of Colum's day who eventually won freedom for Ireland; yet Colum's admiration for Francis's "romance from history" is equivocal. Colum undercuts the kind of inspiration that Francis Gillick takes from Angus O'Failey's deeds. When, for example, Francis approaches Castle Conquer for the first time, his imagination becomes inflamed with a vision of his heroic ancestor's assault on the Norman holding.

Down that slope had come the young captain with his troop of Irish soldiers when they swept forward and seized the castle of the de Courceys. Down that slope the riders had come. He felt how the company would be ordered, and he saw the riders--one especially in Spanish dress and with Spanish arms; his memoirs, written in Latin, had been left [where Francis had studied] in Salamanca.

And after he had expelled the Norman de Courceys the young chief built a tower here that, in the minds of the people at least, still kept his name. O'Failey's Tower. O'Failey! He cried out the name and it came back to him from the buttressed gate they had now come before him--the gate of Castle Conquer. CC, 38.

nL

n/n



In spite of Francis's ebullience, his shouting match with Judkin de Courcey, the ancient "racial enmity" heating his blood (CC, 42), is only an absurdly debased version of O'Failey's military maneuver. Francis, after all, comes to Castle Conquer not with Spanish arms and Irish soldiers but with a sneer for de Courcey's young wife and with her lost doves carried servilely under his arm. Francis Gillick's heroic instincts are as yet undeveloped, and there is something naïve and childish about Francis's response to the heady imagery of Spanish dress and Spanish arms, Irish soldiers and grand military ventures. Indeed, Colum takes care to disburden the reader of any illusions that Francis Gillick's first move into politics, in imitation of his ancestor, is significant or effective. Francis's premature elation at the thought of "Castle Conquer unmanned!" which, he feels, "could not stand against the resurgency that he felt in himself and that he thought was shared in the secret camps of men," is undercut when Colum reveals that "already the organization" that Francis was joining, the Clann Melidh, "had passed its great moment and that even now it was crumbling at the top" (CC, 48). Whether or not Angus O'Failey really lays his hand on Francis Gillick's shoulder, Francis's political activism loses some of its credibility when Colum tells us this.

The progress of Francis Gillick, the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin indicates that, in Colum's view, the ability to act effectively and heroically develops only gradually. A modern rebel in particular requires a period of initiation into heroic activity, because in all likelihood he has not been born or

bred to it. This, indeed, is one of Francis Gillick's disadvantages: unlike Angus O'Failey or the heroes of the great Ulster and Finn cycles, Francis has had no military training, and the idea that he has an important contribution to make to the good of the people is foreign to him. A further problem is Francis's initial romanticism. Heroes, Colum suggests, must be realists. As long as Francis Gillick is distracted by visions of his ancestor's glory, his own efforts will be futile. Part of Francis Gillick's development is the jettisoning of his romantic outlook. Thus his defense of Martin Jordan's decaying cottage, albeit rash, is intelligent, well-planned and physically courageous next to his pointless wanderings in the countryside on the clandestine business of the Clann Melidh. Francis is clever and practical as he devises his impromptu fortifications, and in the fight itself, he resists stoutly, with scanty assistance. Yet in spite of Francis Gillick's efforts, in spite of his planning and the momentary elevation of his two unlikely comrades-at-arms, a fool and a derelict, this encounter, too, is full of disappointment: the townsmen who disingenuously promised aid fail to appear, and Francis is easily overthrown. Francis Gillick is fighting against an almost overpowering inertia as well as de Courcey's bailiffs, an inertia which seems sure to defeat both Francis and his cause.

The inappropriateness of Francis Gillick's attempt to duplicate the glamorous heroism of his ancestor is evident in the manner of Francis's capitulation (he is hit on his head) in the midst of his battle with the bailiffs on Martin Jordan's steps.

Suddenly he felt he had been struck. He had the sense of an enormous blow on his head. He rose up in defence with the pike held up. Paddy Sharkey cheered for him, and he smiled.

But the smile on Francis Gillick's face became a queer grin. He jumped off the steps to prevent his pitching off; he swayed and fell down. He had been struck on the forehead with a stone; it had been flung from a catapult by "The Knocker." CC, 219

The heroic potential suggested by Francis's cunning as he plans his battle and by his skill and tenacity as he wields the rebel's truncheon fails when "The Knocker" hurls his lucky shot. Suddenly, Francis becomes a ridiculous posturer. Francis's three-man rising against British rule is exposed as naïve. Francis looks foolish, just as Gilly of the Goatskin did after attempting to use the tactics of the King of Ireland's Son on the Hags of the Long Teeth. Francis, in fact, is reproducing Gilly's error of trying to duplicate a heroism that is inherently at odds with his nature, his experience and his time.

The historical Irish heroism that Angus O'Failey represents, an insufficient determinant of Francis Gillick's heroism, is augmented and partially corrected by the tradition of the folktale hero, particularly the novella's low-life hero as Colum himself adapted him in the character of Gilly of the Goatskin. Indeed, a Gilly-like fatuousness manifests itself with the description of Francis Gillick's horse as Francis first rides up the bohereen to Honor Paralon's house. The hero of romance and the historic warrior are both accustomed to having a horse of appropriate power and valour. Colum places the King of Ireland's Son in this

context when he gives him a hunting horse to ride at the beginning of his adventures. If the manner of horse one rides reveals something about one's character, then Francis Gillick's entry is decidedly inauspicious. His "eccentric beast with a smooth dun body, shaggy brown legs, and a shapeless head" immediately locates Francis in the tradition of unlikely heroes (CC, 2). Though this beast's folktale sires are generally summed up with an epithet of just one word, such as "shaggy," or "bony," there can be no mistaking his lineage. One of his forefathers is the horse of the Gruff Gillie, from a well-known Irish folktale, described by Colum himself in this way:

Into the camp came a shambling fellow  
leading a shambling horse. . . . The  
horse's ribs showed through its flea-bitten  
hide. It was a long horse, or, rather, a  
long mare, with a back like the ridge of a  
house.<sup>9</sup>

Colum, in this retelling of the traditional story, embellishes the Gruff Gillie's famous horse to heighten the comedy of the tale, but he preserves the folktale's central irony--the worn-looking animal has magical properties and secret strength. Many are the shaggy beasts in folklore who turn out to have not only the truest of loyalties but also the spark of magic quickening their unshapely breasts. Francis's horse, being a realistic rather than a marvellous horse, does not develop in this way, but the curiousness of its entry is notable enough to suggest the tradition. And the Gruff Gillie is a strikingly appropriate antecedent for

both Francis Gillick and Gilly of the Goatskin because he turns out to be a valiant king's son in disguise.

Francis Gillick as he is first presented is at least as curious as his horse. "He was not what she expected him to be," thinks Brighid, who is watching for him in the lane.

Still he was odd-looking. He wore a wide foreign hat fastened with a strap that went around his chin. He had on a good blue overcoat, and it was belted with another strap. His eyes seemed droll. But they were really as quick as the eyes of a wild creature. His face would not be described as a strange face. Still, if one tried to draw it one would find that there was something extraordinary in it: a stroke could make it a youth's face. And yet there was something virile in the young man's look. He had an eager, friendly gaze, and a half-puzzled smile that meant--"I know I'm foolish, but I have to go on with this." CC, 2-3.

Francis's introduction here is ambiguous and rather comical. His touch of childishness and foolishness suggests the arrested development or "long nurturing" of the folktale's Strong John and of The King of Ireland's Son's Gilly of the Goatskin. Although the realism of Castle Conquer limits how far the characterization of Francis Gillick can go toward the absurdity of some folktale figures, the qualities conveyed by the initial portrait of Francis--simpleness, overgrown innocence and retarded maturity--are those of Strong John and Gilly. But fatuousness is not in the case of either Francis or Gilly--or even Strong John--the whole story. When Brighid finds "something virile" in Francis's expression, she is looking at the heart of the character type, as Colum sees it, as well as of Francis. Gilly of the Goatskin, after all, has

not quite been idle during his extended infancy; he has been practicing with a bow and arrow on the quiet, without ever moving from his bed. Soon after we meet him, he overturns his cradle, semi-magically subdues the poisonous Hags of the Long Teeth, and leaps into the world. These events give Gilly less comedy and more heroic potential than his folktale forebears, but Strong John, Jack, or Tom has his own successes, astounding ridiculing courts with his feats, outwitting villains and sometimes winning princesses, through his immense strength, good will and comic cunning. We get the feeling from Francis too that, although he is at the end of a strange infancy, he is about to embark on a significant manhood, which is indeed the case. The face that hovers between childishness and age suggests a depth of character and perhaps a destiny that surpass the ordinary. Thus Colum transforms Francis's foolishness--what in Gilly represented a lack of sagacity about the world of courts, kings and combats and what in the folktale antecedents was simply dimwittedness. In the process, Colum undercuts the heroic stance of Francis with a two-edged sword. Francis's "foolishness" qualifies his attempt to reproduce Angus O'Failey's heroism but at the same time it gives him an eerie sagacity that in its own way challenges the usual notion of heroism.

The way in which Francis Gillick takes advantage of people's misconception of him to hide his real nature and purpose is again reminiscent of Gilly of the Goatskin, who masked his offensive against the Churl of the Townland of Mischance with a surface

stupidity. When the impudent and brainless Nannie Gilroy comes to size Francis up, for instance, he responds to her teasing enquiries in Spanish, confirming her in her notion of him as witless. An exchange with Brighid, on the other hand, as she brings him a candle, exposes his strategy.

"Gracias," he said. And then he smiled at her. "I needn't set up any foreign words against you," he said. CC, 18

It is important to realize that Francis's supposed foolishness is in some measure a conscious and convenient pose. Francis's need of such a pose signals more than his own vulnerability. Like Gilly, Francis assumes the protective coloration of the would-be rebel, always in danger in a world ordered and owned by his enemies.

Historical heroism, myth or folk heroism, and modern political activity appear together, throughout Colum's prose, beginning with A Boy in Eirinn (1913) and continuing in The King of Ireland's Son and Castle Conquer. A Boy in Eirinn, an episodic account of an important period in the life of its boy-hero, Finn O'Donnell, contains many of the elements of Castle Conquer: representatives of modern political consciousness and activism in Finn's grandfather and his father, imprisoned, like Francis, for land agitation; a grand mythical hero, King Connery, killed in a play within the book, "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel," based on an early Irish romance; and a historical warrior-ancestor, Red Hugh O'Donnell. The identification of the various historic, mythical and modern

personages is brought home by striking coincidences and parallels, such as the death of Finn's grandfather at the same moment as King Connery dies on the stage; and young Finn O'Donnell's interest in the King's son who is saved at the end of the play and in the child who portrays him. In A Boy in Eirinn, however, the implied relationship between the various strata of heroic experience is simply identity: Colum suggests that Finn O'Donnell, with the proper fosterage, will be able to step into the shoes of these heroic models.

Colum's view of heroism in Castle Conquer, in which he discovers a gap between a romanticized version of the historical mode and the heroic potential of modern man, is far more complex. Colum finds inadequate the heroic ideals expressed in legends of great soldiers like Owen Roe O'Neill, especially in the reductive glamorization of them by a young man like Francis Gillick. Colum's interest lies with the possibly heroic actions of ordinary men, men with only human strength and with ordinary human weaknesses. In spite of their noble lineage, men like Francis Gillick are cut off from the historical heroism available to their ancestors. The heroism of Angus O'Failey or Owen Roe O'Neill no less than that of Cuchulain implies a matrix of social conditions, values, and opportunities not applicable to modern life, particularly the life of oppressed rural Ireland. Angus O'Failey is a product of a particular civilization, which places value on courage, honor, leadership and other such warrior-like qualities. Without such a civilization, this heroism is not possible, and in modern Ireland,



two centuries after its warrior class, the "Wild Geese," has flown, the traditional heroic milieu is all but irrelevant. The frustration of the conflict in Ireland as shown in Castle Conquer is that for the last few centuries, the weight of authority has been so great and the Irish people so reduced that such heroism as Angus O'Failey's is but an unattainable goal.

Colum's vision of the incongruity of heroism as it is traditionally conceived and the modern world of the Irish peasant results in the peculiar mixture of qualities and of traditions in Francis Gillick. Colum's vision of the modern world is habitually tinged with grey. The events that should be large are small; the peasant characters, far from having a sentimental glow about them, are almost all knobbed and warty, evidence of Colum's realistic perspective. In spite of the relatively romantic outlook of The King of Ireland's Son, this unsentimental world-view finds expression there, in Gilly's part of the narrative and in the deferral and failure that interrupt the narrative progress. The transformation of Sheen's seven geese-brothers back into their human form is especially noteworthy for its suprising disappointment.

Then Caintigern said, . . . "O Grania Oi, let it be that my brothers be changed back to men!"  
 . . . The Spae-Woman waved her hands over the bent figures. They lifted themselves up as men--as naked, gray men.

. . . They would stand and not sit, and for long they had no speech. Their sister knelt before each and wet his hand with her tears. She thought she should see them as youths or as young men, and they were gray now and past the prime of their lives. KS, 261-262.

Colum passes over Kennedy's version of this event, in which the geese are transformed into "the finest young men that could be collected out of a thousand,"<sup>10</sup> in favor of a version heavily influenced by the fate of the Children of Lir. In this story, part of which Colum made into a one-act play,<sup>11</sup> the four children of the king are disenchanted after 900 years' wandering on the lakes of Ireland. They resume human form as aged men and women and die almost immediately. Colum's brothers return not only old but naked, in a vision of human mortality that introduces a serious tone into The King of Ireland's Son's lively romance.

In Castle Conquer, the disappointment and inertia of the real world manifests itself to Francis at the end of the book, even as the Treaty is being implemented. Winning Castle Conquer back for the Irish has taken a much more dreadful toll than Francis in his initial naïve romanticism foresaw; the hanging of his dashing nineteen-year old grandson, Michael Leonard, has soured much--hardened his son Failey and embittered his granddaughter Brigid.<sup>12</sup> Francis finds himself curiously detached from "all this dramatic proceedings" (CC, 371). Even victory does not taste as sweet as he thought it would have. Gazing at his son, he remembers how his own involvement in Irish politics and freedom-fighting began.

"It was on Martin Jordan's account I went into the fight about the land. Or was it, though? I wanted to fight to make Ireland nobody's but our own--land and flag and all. Things have never the shining end that one dreams they'll have. The day we were rid of landlordism wasn't as shining as I thought

it would be the night I slept on a sack  
 of heather-tops beside Martin Jordan's fire.  
 And it will be the same the day we'll see  
 the English soldiers leave our land. That's  
 how it is: the fight is over while our ears  
 are still dinned with the noise, and our  
 arms are still aching with the weight of  
 what we are holding." CC, 369.

With the same poignancy as the return of Sheen's brothers, this passage also demonstrates once again Colum's ultimate distrust of the applicability of romantic heroic ideals to political action in modern times.

Given this difficulty, the opposite heroic tradition of Strong John attracts Colum as a corrective. One of the most important reasons for its usefulness is that it expresses the kind of heroism available to the peasantry. Strong John, though he may rise to princedom by marrying the king's daughter, begins as a peasant and never really discards his lowly beginnings. If the O'Faileys melted into the peasantry, then Francis Gillick, like Gilly of the Goatskin as well as Strong John, must himself rise from it. In its own turn, however, the Strong John story needs a corrective, one accomplished by Colum in the same manner for Francis Gillick as for Gilly of the Goatskin. Colum gives Francis, like Gilly, a hidden connection to nobility, so that the character may occupy the best part of two worlds. The stars on Gilly's breast that mark him as the son of a king have their analogue in the clue that Francis Gillick's name yields to his connection with the old Milesian nobility. Gillick, Colum tells us, is a degeneration of the heroic name Ulick, or Ulysses, which became the surname of the remnants of

the noble O'Failey clann.

One of the outcomes of this mixing of heroic traditions in the characterization of Francis Gillick is that something of the deferral and failure of The King of Ireland's Son enters into Castle Conquer. Francis, in the most practical sense, fails at the task he takes up--even fails with exaggeration, since not only does his attempt to stave off the evicting agents and rouse the countryside collapse, but also, as a result of the influence of both the malicious and the capricious on the course of events, Francis is forced to defend himself on tremendously more serious charges than his actions warrant. Like lighting a candle and burning the house down, the consequences of the one errant spark seem absurdly and unfairly catastrophic. But in another sense, Francis's success is only deferred. Although Martin Jordan's individual cause is lost, the struggle on his behalf results in the return of Castle Conquer to the Irish. Francis Gillick's internment and trial, a minor version of the martyrdom that is still so much a factor in moving the Irish people toward political action, arouse the local people to the struggle, providing the backing for Failey, Francis's son, that disappointed Francis himself. Thus the shape of the plot, with its forty year hiatus before its resolution, has its basis in a much-altered principle of deferral.

In creating the blend of heroic qualities in Francis Gillick that he does, Colum adapts the concept of heroism to the predicament and status of the much put-upon peasantry. But in addition,

he strives for another kind of mixture, that of the active virtues, usually associated with heroism, and the passive, contemplative virtues, usually associated with the poet and scholar. Colum adds to the medley of historic and folk heroic traditions the tradition of modern political activists, a tradition that begins, arguably, with Thomas Davis and Young Ireland and leads to the political heroes and martyrs contemporary with Colum, notably Castle Conquer's dedicatee, Thomas MacDonagh. MacDonagh and the other leaders of the Easter Rising share the particular kind of temporary failure and deferred success that Colum incorporates into Francis Gillick's progress, for although the Rising failed and they were executed, the failure of the venture and the creation of a new generation of political martyrs eventually gained for the Irish people the Free State. This, in fact, was part of the ideology of the Dublin rising, at least as Patrick Pearse saw it: "Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations."<sup>13</sup> Francis Gillick's story is a predecessor of Thomas MacDonagh's--and while Francis is not called upon to make MacDonagh's sacrifice, his grandson, facing the British hangman, is.

MacDonagh emblemized for Colum the melding of important disparate qualities. Colum, a close associate of MacDonagh before 1914--in 1911, with James Stephens, Mary Maguire (later Colum) and David Houston, they founded the Irish Review--commemorated him years later in a poem called "The Poet Captain: Thomas MacDonagh." The poem, trying to capture MacDonagh's character,

recalls a play of his which presented a new kind of hero, one who marries word and deed, poetry and action--a "poet-captain."

MacDonagh forged this character, Colum contends, not only on the stage but also in his own life. Colum ends the poem with MacDonagh's trial and death:

They judge you by their printed book.  
Then in the barrack-yard you prove  
That your own judgment's unrevoked--  
The Poet-captain; there you tear  
From history the double word,  
The envoi to your poems.<sup>14</sup>

Francis is not a poet, but he is an educated man, the local repository of both Irish language and ancient written heritage. He at first seems quite definitely a displaced scholar rather than a rebel, looking over Brighid's books, teaching her Irish and Latin. His interest in Irish language and lore is much the same as Finn's grandfather's in A Boy in Eirinn. For a man of such inclinations to turn to revolution speaks loudly of the urgency of the times. The resurgence of Irish militancy of Colum's day began, as he writes in his introduction to Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, with an interest in Irish language and culture.

The years that brought maturity to the three poets who were foremost to sign, and foremost to take arms to assert, Ireland's Declaration of Independence, may come to be looked back on as signal days in Irish history. They were days of preparation. The youth of Nationalist Ireland had turned to a task--the task of learning--of learning first the Irish language, of learning then about Irish public affairs, and at the end of learning arms and about the handling of men.<sup>15</sup>

Like the three rebel-poets of whom Colum is writing, Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett, Francis's experience of nationalism begins with the Irish language. Indeed, the episode in which he teaches Brighid to write her name in Irish encodes the way in which a nationalist consciousness arose for many Irish revolutionaries. Francis proceeds from language and literature to political theory. He is particularly inspired by the writings of James Fintan Lalor, the agrarian socialist, who galvanizes his will to take up arms. Francis Gillick, then, expresses a modern archetype of Irish nationalist that leads from scholarship and cultural nationalism to a renewal of the ancient Irish military vigor.

Colum's conception of heroism in Castle Conquer has come a long way from the double heroism of the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin. Much of what was inchoate in the earlier book, such as the significance of Gilly's discovery of the stars on his breast, or the relevance of the characters' failures and successes to contemporary political activity, now becomes quite clear. The development of Francis Gillick's commitment to national affairs both echoes the history of the modern-day Irish rebels and presents a pattern for the growth of militancy in essentially peaceful representatives of the peasantry. Both the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin are present in the process by which Francis Gillick's romanticism and clumsiness give rise to his son Failey MacUlick's competence and his grandson Michael Leonard's military brilliance. Yet heroism, when Francis Gillick's line attains it, is rather different from what he first dreamed it to be, as he

himself realizes. Romantic, fanciful conceptions of heroic action, such as those presented in heroic folktales, have a way of becoming strange, disappointing, terrifying, or poignant when they are appropriated to inspire a modern guerrilla. The kind of adaptation of romantic heroism that Colum attempts in The King of Ireland's Son, where he complements it with a version of peasant heroism, leads to the questioning and qualification of traditional heroic ideals in Castle Conquer. Colum's furthest-reaching revision of the mythology of romantic heroism, however, did not come until thirty years after Castle Conquer, in The Flying Swans.



## Notes

- 1 Padraic Colum, "The Promise of Irish Letters," p. 396. Thomas Flanagan, the foremost critic of earlier Irish fiction, begins with Edgeworth in The Irish Novelists, 1800-1850 (1958).
- 2 Although Castle Conquer was published in 1923, I have seen a notice as early as 1915 of a novel by Colum called The Yoke of Conquest, purportedly just published. No such book was in fact published, but The Yoke of Conquest, revised to accommodate the important political events between 1916 and 1923, may have become Castle Conquer.
- 3 Eilis: A Woman's Story," Studies, Tower Press Booklet Series 2, No. 2 (Dublin: Maunsell, 1907), p. 30.
- 4 "The Irish Literary Movement," p. 148; "The Promise of Irish Letters," p. 397. See p. 16 above for a fuller quotation of Colum's remarks on Stephens.
- 5 The Complete Grimms', p. xi.
- 6 My Irish Year, p. 51.
- 7 The Road Round Ireland (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 62.
- 8 Road Round Ireland, p. 62.
- 9 The Frenzied Prince, pp. 91-92; reprinted in A Treasury of Irish Folklore (New York: Crown, 1954; rev. 1962), p. 104.
- 10 "The Twelve Wild Geese," Fireside Stories of Ireland, rpt. in Irish Fairy and Folk Tales, ed. W.B. Yeats, p. 306.
- 11 "The Children of Lir," Colum's first publication, appeared in the Weekly Independent (Dublin), according to Alan Denson. Denson does not give the date of publication, but indicates that the play was written "circa 1899." "Padraic Colum: An Appreciation with a Check-List of His Publications," Dublin Magazine 6 (Spring, 1967) 1, p. 65. Bowen, who is perhaps less reliable than Denson on bibliographical matters, gives the title of the journal as The Irish Independent and indicates the date of publication (other than composition) as 1901 or 1902.
- 12 Michael Leonard may be based on the real-life case of Kevin Barry, an eighteen year-old who was the first IRA man to be executed by the British in reprisal during the Anglo-Irish war.

<sup>13</sup> From Pearse's 1915 funeral oration for John O'Donovan Rossa, quoted by Peter Costello, The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature from Parnell to the Death of Yeats (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977; New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Poetry (New York) 110 (July, 1967) 4, p. 253, 11.  
67-72.

<sup>15</sup> Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, p. vii.

## V. Castle Conquer: Identity and the Transmission of Culture

Colum's exploration of heroism in Castle Conquer places him among those early twentieth-century Irishmen who were fascinated by the relationship between culture and politics, imagination and insurrection, and who helped to fashion a connection between the new awareness of Irish cultural documents and modern political activity. In Castle Conquer, Colum's careful documentation of Francis Gillick's coming to consciousness, of the gradual awakening of the countryside, and of the link between modern political leaders and various Irish heroic traditions, demonstrates his belief that modern Irish political events were rooted in the change in national consciousness effected by the rediscovery of an Irish heritage. Although Colum is broadly interested in the cultural, social, and political events that changed the face of the nation, he focuses on change within the individual. He shows how the development of a personal sense of identity can integrate individuals in their own minds with the society and the nation of which they are a part. The individual's exploration of his own identity ultimately equips him to participate in events that shape the destiny of the nation.

For Colum, a personal sense of identity characteristically grows out of a complex perception of the layers of history implicit in the present moment. Even more keenly than the antiquary and poet Samuel Ferguson, whose poetry he edited, Colum felt that the recovery of forgotten Irish texts and ignored Irish folklore in the late nineteenth century enabled the Irish for the first time in centuries to come to terms with their history, or in Ferguson's words,

to live back in the land they live in, with as ample  
and as interesting a field of retrospective enjoyment  
as any of the nations around us.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of "living back," however, was not, for Colum, simply a source of "retrospective enjoyment." As early as "The Plougher" (c. 1903), Colum attempts to define a modern individual in terms of the historical past, here represented by the deities of ancient civilizations, who hover almost visibly about his head.

Sunset and silence! A man; around him earth savage,  
earth broken  
Beside him two horses, a plough!

Earth savage, earth broken, the brutes, the dawn-man  
there in the sunset,  
And the plough that is twin to the sword, that is  
founder of cities!

"Brute-tamer, plough-maker, earth-breaker! Canst hear?  
There are ages between us--  
Is it praying you are as you stand there alone in the  
sunset?

Surely our sky-born gods can be nought to you, earth-  
child and earth-master--  
Surely your thoughts are of Pan, or of Wotan or Dana?"<sup>2</sup>

So strongly does Colum identify the modern plougher, standing in a homely field, with an earlier age that, though the scene is sunset, he becomes the "dawn-man" himself. The narrator attempts to position the plougher more exactly by invoking a trilogy of nature-deities from ancient civilizations, moving from the classical Mediterranean to the Teutonic north before alighting, with the Celtic goddess Dana, on Europe's western verge. Although by taming first beasts and then land the plougher prepares for civilization, the narrator initially rejects the relevance of these etherial divinities to the earthward-leaning

plougher. Ultimately, however, the narrator focuses on the "head's breadth" by which the plougher rises above his beasts as the very source of the "sky-born gods" of the great cultures.

Slowly the darkness falls, the broken lands blend  
     with the savage;  
 The brute-tamer stands by the brutes, a head's breadth  
     only above them.

A head's breadth? Aye, but therein is hell's depth  
     and the height up to heaven,  
 And the thrones of the gods and their halls, their  
     chariots, purples and splendours.

"The Plougher" introduces what came to be Colum's characteristic theme of the relevance of history and tradition to modern people and events; yet the attempt to place the plougher in the context of one or another of Europe's great cultural traditions differs significantly from Colum's later treatment of the importance of the past to the present. For one, the effort to identify the plougher with the civilizations of Pan, Wotan, and Dana is an intellectual effort applied to the plougher from without, by the narrator, whereas, in later works, Colum concentrates on how an individual's knowledge of his own past, as well as of cultural and political history, gives rise to a crucial self-consciousness. In addition, with the inception of Colum's prose fiction in Studies (1907) and A Boy in Eirinn (1913), the discrete, undefined, unrelated cultural monoliths which "The Plougher" merely invokes give way to sets of traditions--historical, racial, cultural, familial--delineated in considerable detail and hence far more concrete; these traditions develop increasingly complex relationships in The King of Ireland's Son, Castle Conquer, and The Flying Swans. In these books,

furthermore, Colum's interest always centers on how the past informs and illuminates the present. The plougher, by contrast, is in effect kidnapped from the parish field, and imaginatively transported to the dawn of time, where he is used to illustrate a potent moment in human history: the rise of civilization. In his fiction, Colum begins by establishing historical or legendary forebears for his characters and ends by exploring the divergence between modern personages and the traditions which form and inspire them. Indeed, as we shall see, The Flying Swans completes the process by emancipating its hero from what has become an imprisoning obsession with the past.

Nowhere in Colum's work is the theme of the relationship between one's identity and the traditions from which one emerges more explicitly or more fully explored than in Castle Conquer, where Colum's complex and layered view of the past expresses itself in the inter-relatedness and mutual relevance of many traditions. Thus, as Chapter IV shows, Francis Gillick's heroism is defined by Francis's racial and family history (the Clann O'Failey), by traditions of heroism drawn from Irish folklore (Strong John), and by a contemporary character type (the scholar-rebel). These traditions comment on each other at the same time that they elucidate different parts of Francis's heritage. They are augmented, furthermore, by lesser Irish traditions--the "spoiled priest," for instance, or the European-Celt, the descendent of Ireland's banished chieftains. Such complexes of racial, familial, cultural and sub-cultural traditions underlie not only Francis Gillick's identity, but also the identities of two characters who have heroic significance in their own right, Brighid Moynaugh and Owen Paralon. The complex

vision of how the past informs the present which manifests itself in such characters is the more compelling for being juxtaposed with Castle Conquer's picture of the decline of Irish rural life, its customs and culture the mere shreds and tatters of a vanished civilization. Suggested here is Colum's painful awareness of the tenuousness of Gaelic culture's hold on Ireland: Colum saw clearly and urgently the fragility of the faint causeways that bind a civilization over time and space. He places against the omnipresent threat of dissolution the continuity which awareness of tradition bestows. As I hope this chapter will show, Colum's intense interest in the role of tradition and of people's awareness of tradition in preserving cultural continuity led him to particularize tradition in what I call "private" traditions, traditions shared by such a small number of people--one in each generation--as to be almost idiosyncratic, yet which draw their constituent features from the more public, "general" traditions: history, culture, social forms, religion. These private traditions are the essential interfacing between an individual and the past, a personalization of history which enables the general features of a society or culture to have relevance for a particular man or woman. Ultimately, Colum's sense of the importance of these traditions and his emphatic perception of the role orality plays in the transmission of culture generates Castle Conquer's most interesting and anomalous formal feature, the storytelling interludes or vignettes in which Owen's tradition and Brighid's are related.

Owen Paralon, Brighid's moody but kindly uncle, is a prototype of a version of the peasant-hero, rather different from The King of

Ireland's Son's Gilly of the Goatskin, which Colum advances somewhat tentatively in his earlier work but which he expresses more confidently in his late period of post-revolutionary disillusionment with more romantic images of heroism. Gilly and Owen, to be sure, share important characteristics, of which some, like their closeness to nature or their coming to maturity under a homely kind of fosterage, establish them both as representatives of the Irish peasantry. But Gilly is a symbol, a quasi-folktale figure whose character speaks by analogy of the nature and predicament of the Irish peasantry. The stars on his breast that indicate his royalty, for instance, symbolize the remnants among Irish peasants of the Gael's ancient nobility. Gilly's imprisonment by the Hags of the Long Teeth suggests the subjugation of the Irish by the English, and his abilities and disabilities echo the aptitudes and ineptitudes the Irish Gael has developed through the long centuries of peasant life. Owen Paralon, on the other hand, is drawn from real life, if not modelled on Colum's own uncle, then on some other powerful personality Colum came to know in the countryside. Because Owen is not a symbol but an example of the Irish peasant, he is more difficult to make into a convincing hero; yet the realism of his characterization may make him all the closer to Colum's urgent perception of the heroism of the Irish peasantry.

The Owen Paralon of Castle Conquer, the spiritual heir of the strong and noble peasant types of the earlier poetry ("The Plougher," "The Honey-Seller," "The Sower") and of the grandfather in Colum's first children's book (A Boy in Eirinn), eventually leads to Breasal O'Breasal, the grandfather in The Flying Swans, and fathers a namesake,



the Owen Paralon presented in the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits (1960). Colum makes the two Owen's biographically distinct, the first a peddler, the second a farmer; one a solitary wayfarer, the other a settled man with a wife, a grown daughter, and a cozy country cottage. Yet, as the identity of the characters' names indicates, the nature and importance of the second Owen restates, in clearer and bolder terms, the nature and importance of the first. Just as imagery which first appears in Castle Conquer becomes fully developed and elaborately coherent in the "Fore-Piece," so the stubbornness, seriousness, and energy ("energetic movement," CC, p. 8). of Castle Conquer's Owen Paralon develop into the fortitude, probity, and "fullness of heroic energy" of the Owen Paralon of the "Fore-Piece."<sup>3</sup>

Although, in comparison with Francis Gillick, Owen Paralon plays only a small part in Castle Conquer, he is, however inchoately, a truer peasant hero. Owen's character manifests the best virtues of the peasant who lives in the old way, as opposed to the peasant's son (Francis) whose European education in many ways separates him from the peasant milieu. Because such qualities as the stoical endurance of hardship, the respect for ancient values, and the awareness of one's individual and social identity develop only through years of adversity and solitude, Owen Paralon's heroism, unlike Francis Gillick's, is the heroism not of youth and fame (or notoriety) but of maturity and obscurity.

The action which embroils Owen is at first glance rather commonplace, but it involves him in the central conflict of the Irish countryside. Owen wants to secure the lease of a shop in the local town ("Cahirmoy") so that he can forever lay down his peddler's pack.

The town's owner, Sir John Seagrave, at first agrees to rent to Owen, providing that he pay the exorbitant fine (£ 250) that the law requires of Catholics who would become businessmen, but then reneges, on advice from the local Orange Lodge. The consequent effect of this subplot on the main plot is largely negative: Owen is forced to seek his little shop in a distant city, thus removing a sober and reliable family elder from the scene of the novel's main events. Yet there is a key parallel between Owen's homely economic problems and the Land War in which Francis Gillick participates. Seagrave's casual ruthlessness regarding Owen's slight ambitions illustrates the crude arrogance which, at least in Irish eyes, commonly attended the instrumentation of British policy in Ireland. Conversely, Owen demonstrates a force of character and an ingrained sense of honour in responding to Seagrave and his agents that represent, for Colum, the nobility that yet resides in the best of the peasantry. Furthermore, although Owen's heroism differs from Francis's in being distinctly non-military, Owen demonstrates his support for Irish nationalism by offering refuge and support to Brighid when, on the eve of Francis's trial, she is no longer welcome in her own home. Colum in this way identifies Owen, as all of Colum's heroes and proto-heroes must be identified, with the political cause of the Irish peasantry.

But more important to the character of Owen Paralon than his quiet resistance to British supremacy and his support for younger and more active Irish nationalists is his role as handmaiden to Tradition. Owen's keen and broad peasant-knowledge of nature and the interest in traditional music that leads him to introduce his musically-inclined

niece to every folksong of the countryside, along with other characteristics that mark him as a transmitter of culture, have their roots in the "private" tradition from which Owen Paralon emerges. The fact that the chapter entitled "Owen Paralon" does not present a physical or psychological profile of Owen but instead delineates this private tradition, ending with Owen's own awareness of how the tradition has shaped him, attests to Colum's conviction that tradition can be crucial to the development of personality. Owen's private tradition consists of a very limited chain of relationships, which first of all links Owen to Michael Philabeen of the preceding generation, who harboured Owen between the ages of six and eight, when economic adversity pressed so hard on Owen's family that they could not keep him. Michael Philabeen, in turn, has received the tradition from a still previous generation, for just as he fostered Owen for a time, so his unnamed uncle took him in (along with his destitute mother) when he was a boy. Fosterage, then, is the primary characteristic of this tradition, just as economic hardship seems to be its primary motivating context. (One may surmise that fosterage would necessarily feature in any private tradition, but the instance of Brighid's private tradition will show that this is not always so.) Colum chooses carefully these and other main features of the tradition, not only musical ability and natural lore, but also vagrancy and the profession of weaving, both for their contribution to Owen Paralon's characterization and for their relevance to the idea of tradition that Colum seeks to express.

Fosterage--of princes by foreign kings, druids, or warriors, of fishermen's sons by enchanters, of banished princes or princesses by

kindly peasants, or more specifically, of the young Finn MacCumhail by the robber chief, Fiacal, and of Cuchulain by Fergus--is an Irish tradition that appears throughout Colum's work.<sup>4</sup> The relationship of Sheen, Gilly, and Morag to the Spae-Woman, as well as that of the narrator/storyteller to the reader/listener ("my kind foster-child"), in The King of Ireland's Son are versions of that tradition; in Castle Conquer, both Owen Paralon and Michael Philabeen benefit from a tradition of fostering that Owen, in turn, extends to Brighid. Colum acknowledged explicitly the personal importance of fosterage to him in the dedication to his first volume of verse, Wild Earth (1907): "To AE, Who Fostered Me." His deepest personal experience of fosterage, however, was, as he points out in "Vagrant Voices," in his formative relationship with his uncle, Michael (Micky) Burns. Micky Burns, according to Ann Adelaide Murphy, was the inspiration both for Owen Paralon (especially the Owen Paralon of the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits) and for Breasal O'Breasal, Ulick's grandfather, in The Flying Swans. He was a "ballad-singer and storyteller whose repertoire of songs, legends, and folktales seemed inexhaustible to his nephew Padraic Colum."<sup>5</sup> Like Castle Conquer's Owen Paralon, Micky Burns was a sometime peddler, and Colum himself recalls how the fairs and markets he attended at his uncle's side struck his imagination.<sup>6</sup> Certainly he gave Colum a sense of what the old concept of fosterage could mean in modern life, and Owen Paralon is like him when he initiates his "foster-sister," Brighid Moynagh, into the knowledge of music and of nature that Michael Philabeen (whose first name possibly recalls Michael Burns) shared with him:

Owen became Brighid's foster-brother. He used to carry her in his arms, and when she was more than an infant he used to take her to places far-off; he would show her the squirrels in the wood, or he would sit with her in the nut-dell, or carry her up the stairs of some ruined tower where the jackdaws had their nests. It was he who had brought her the books that she had read and kept, and it was he who had brought her to someone who had taught her the fiddle. She could sing, and when she was eager about songs he brought her to every old man and old woman, to every boy and girl around the place, who had a lovely song that might be taught her. CC, 14

Fosterage is one of two elements of Owen Paralon's private tradition, with strong heroic overtones. As the long list of examples of fosterage in the preceding paragraph suggests, fosterage is an important stage in the development of the hero, whose heroic abilities must be quietly nurtured until the moment destined for his entry into public life. Because of the heroic necessity of fosterage, Padraic Pearse modelled his boys' school, Saint Enda's, where he hoped to nurture Ireland's modern generation of hero-revolutionists, on this concept. (See above, Chapter I, p. 55, n. 4.) The fosterage of Owen gives his portrait a heroic shading, although, unlike Cuchulain or Finn, he has no public destiny.

Vagrancy, like fosterage, is a traditional form of heroic adventure which had great personal meaning for Colum. In "Vagrant Voices," Colum observes that his "interest in vagrancy, in wandering men and women" is a "trait that has been noticed in my literary output"; he goes on to recount how he managed, in spite of Mary Colum's skepticism, to use this theme even where his poetic terrain (the fourteen stations of the cross, for instance) seemed particularly uncongenial.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there are scores of wanderers in Colum's work; in his poems, the honey-seller,

the man with a grinding wheel, the travelling spademen, and the shuiler to name a few; and in his plays, the memorable hero (Conn Hourican) of The Fiddler's House. In Colum's children's books, vagrants, from Columcille, to The Peep-Show Man (1924), to the boy-listener of The Big Tree of Bunlahy (1933) who grows up to become an explorer and adventurer, are especially plentiful. Vagrancy is something that the introspective young Colum, the workhouse master's son, observed in the indigents who came through the workhouse gates and later experienced himself as he accompanied his Uncle Micky on his chicken-selling ventures into the market-towns. It was such a profound and enlivening experience for him that it pervades his writing, embracing lawless tinkers as well as saints, heroes, and kings. Often it is exciting--the "going" of the river in The King of Ireland's Son that Gilly of the Goatskin emulates. And often, as in the case of Columcille in The Legend of Saint Columba, who is not only a saint but also a religious and national hero, it has heroic value because it exposes the hero to the breadth of life, and inculcates in him, if he is like Owen, the fortitude that grows from exile, from homelessness, and from adversity. Thus vagrancy in Colum's writing often projects into a realistic mode the wanderings of the romantic hero of the folktale or of myth--the quest of the seeker-hero and the undirected roaming of the victim-hero. In Castle Conquer, we find both: Michael Philabeen, aimlessly seeking adventure and freedom, very much resembles a victim-hero, while Owen Paralon, with his directed, responsible travelling, is like a seeker-hero.

Within the context of Owen's private tradition, vagrancy becomes opposed to the handed-down occupation of weaving. Weaving and wandering

represent a conflict between, on the one hand, security and responsibility, and, on the other, carefree liberty. For Michael Philabeen, who, inspired by his youthful trip to his uncle's, introduces the conflict into the lineage, rambling means an abandoned but temporary escape from his father's sedentary life at the loom. Yet in spite of the wildness of this part of his life, Michael says that

I know I was not a Rambler out and out, and I often  
used to think of the kindness of the settled life.  
CC, 82

Unlike Michael, Owen rambles for a living, but although the freedom, interest, and unpredictability of life on the open road appeal deeply to him, he too secretly longs for an easier, more settled way of life, which for him means opening a weaving shop. Ironically, both vagrancy and weaving come to suggest the concern for preserving continuity that is the ground of Owen's lineage. Weaving, metaphorically synonymous with synthesis, involves Michael Philabeen in the domestic relationships that are the fabric of society. For Owen, weaving in addition represents refuge, a means of protecting himself from the vicissitudes of a vagrancy that, rather than being a diversion from life's constraints, has become a profession with constraints of its own. Yet travelling as Owen knows it, and as the close of the chapter indicates, perhaps has a greater claim than weaving to the positive value of conserving continuity.

It would be long before he would come to Honor's again after this: the place he was going to was not really far, but for people who did not travel it was a distance that meant separation. CC, 89

This passage suggests that travelling can be an important way of overcoming one kind of human separation, the barrier imposed by distance. It is wandering as a means of connecting isolated human settlements that the key event of Owen's tradition, narrated by Michael Philabeen, emphasizes.

This key event in Colum's depiction of Owen's private tradition is the last emanation of the wandering spirit in Michael, and the first in Owen. Michael's truancy, once a sign of social irresponsibility, here metamorphoses into a quasi-heroic effort to establish social ties across a great geographical distance. Vagrancy here is couched within Colum's dark vision of distance and separation from which stems his interest in the interaction of tradition and personality. Michael's story of his journey with the young Owen to visit the uncle who once profoundly influenced Michael demonstrates the relationship between Colum's sense of all-but-inevitable decay and his passion for tradition. Colum develops a tension between Michael's goal--essentially to compress his tradition into an actual meeting like those meetings at the fair in The King of Ireland's Son--and the desolation the travellers find in a countryside increasingly hungry and wasted as they approach their destination. The famine and poverty that they witness in rural Ireland of course have political overtones (which Colum doesn't particularly stress); indeed, they grow from the inequitable distribution of agricultural resources that gives rise to the main struggle of Castle Conquer. The small success of Michael's journey in such a context parallels the tenuous preservation of Irish culture and national feeling through what many Irishmen regard as seven centuries of systematic attempts



to destroy them. Against such dissolution, which almost deflects the travellers from their purpose, the perseverance which eventually leads to the success of their pilgrimage marks Michael and Owen as heroic keepers of tradition.

In contrast to this early journey, Owen's visit to Michael, which roughly parallels it, is placed against a version of disruption and decay that is non-political, and both more individual and more universal than the hardships of the poverty-stricken rural folk. Here, it is Michael's senility--he no longer recognizes Owen, whom he once fostered--that bespeaks dissolution. Yet even as Owen privately laments the barrier that divides him from Michael, he understands his place in a lineage which has been the well-spring of much of his personality.

Then Owen stepped out of the silent house.

It was in that house he had seen a loom for the first time--that loom that, perhaps, had stayed in his mind, forming his dreams of being a merchant and a manufacturer. And out of the far past he had heard the story of that journey that had made his peddler's going up and down not strange to him.

CC, 88

In spite of the depressing circumstances, in spite of the separation and the silences that attend Michael and Owen's reunion over the old story, Colum ends his description of Owen's private tradition by affirming the importance of the tradition--and of Owen's awareness of it--in giving Owen an identity. If Owen is a handmaiden to such tradition, tradition is something of a nursemaid to Owen. Tradition, then, not only preserves continuity between otherwise isolated communities or individuals; it also fashions personality, and sometimes the personality of a hero.

The characters of Francis Gillick and Owen Paralon reveal somewhat different but complementary sides of Colum's view of heroism. Heroism in these characters modifies Colum's vision of heroism in The King of Ireland's Son and leads to a further important modification in The Flying Swans. But if Colum questioned the idea of heroism throughout his long writing life, and revised again and again his conception of what kind of person truly is a hero, he is much more consistent and certain in his depiction of his heroines. There is less idealism and more realism as he moves from Fedelma and Morag in The King of Ireland's Son to Brighid Moynagh in Castle Conquer and finally to Saba O'Rehill and Michaelleen in The Flying Swans, but the pattern of female sacrifice remains the same. Brighid Moynagh's role in Castle Conquer, however, is far greater than her counterparts' roles in The King's Son and The Flying Swans. Indeed, Colum focuses on Brighid rather than on Francis for much of the novel. Furthermore, it is primarily because Brighid comes to represent the history of feminine sacrifice in Ireland and ultimately to symbolize Ireland itself that the significance of the story is elevated from the level of the individual participants to speak of the nature and suffering of the Irish nation.

In discussing Brighid Moynagh's characterization here, I am principally interested in Colum's intensive use of tradition to create Brighid's character. In this respect, Brighid resembles Francis Gillick and Owen Paralon more than her fellow-heroines Fedelma and Saba. Yet before he brings tradition to bear on Brighid's character--in fact, in the opening two paragraphs of the novel--Colum sets before us the qualities of Brighid Moynagh which will later become symbolic. Her first association

is with the land, not the wild, empty forests but the grassy roadside where an earthen barrier indicates that this is land that has long been settled and cultivated. In this setting, the girl who will one day ransom her imprisoned lover by publicly attesting her own loss of maidenhead is, as she minds the cows, already functioning as a benevolent guardian and a watchful intermediary between individual concerns and the communal welfare.

Where the girl sat was under a whin-bush that grew out of an earth fence by the roadside. The road was empty, and its grassy margins made "the long acre," as the people called it. Her mother's two cows were grazing "the long acre" and the girl under the whin-bush was watching that they entered no man's gaps nor broke no man's fences.

She was neither tall nor short, neither slender nor thick-set, and her age was about eighteen. What was striking about her was her hair: it was redder than chestnut; it was red-gold in places, and in places had gold in it that was like the pale gold of the whin-blossom; it was a head that should be carried well, a head with an oriflamme of hair. CC, 1

If the first of these paragraphs hints at Brighid's protective domesticity, the description in the second highlights the one physical feature which identifies Brighid with the great ancient race of Ireland, the Milesians. Francis's lawyer, John Fitzsimmons, eventually makes the intimation explicit when he calls Brighid's hair "the bright hair that marked her as belonging to the kindly race of Heber" (CC, 323).<sup>8</sup> Colum's comparison of Brighid's hair with the whin-bush under which she sits, furthermore, associates her very closely with the land of Ireland, for elsewhere in Colum's work, it is "gold of whin, / Black cattle and the bog with heather rough" that Colum sees when he sees the Irish countryside.<sup>9</sup> The assertion that Brighid's is "a head that should be carried well" emphasizes the

intrinsic nobility of Brighid's race while also suggesting something heroic or perhaps even queenly in her bearing.

The word "oriflamme" in the above passage is particularly significant because it combines an almost literal illumination of Brighid, making her a kind of incandescent emblem of Ireland, on the order of Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan,<sup>10</sup> with a suggestion of Brighid's saintliness. Colum anticipates here the triple relationship that the novel develops, between, first of all, the "transcendent" wisdom and sacrifice that in the folktale secures the subjected hero's release (see above, Chapter IV, p. 174); secondly, the sacrifice required of Brighid Moynagh in Castle Conquer; and finally, the Christian ideals of sacrifice and redemption. Two Colum works already mentioned in this chapter (the poem on the fourteen stations of the cross and the children's book entitled The Legend of Saint Columba) indicate that Colum, a life-long Roman Catholic, took seriously the relevance of Christian myth and teaching to reality, and even to the vision of reality recorded by the folktale. In Castle Conquer, however, Colum's association of Christian saintliness with Brighid Moynagh is literary rather than religious. It is an association which, like so many others, is developed through tradition: Brighid's halo of bright hair in Castle Conquer's opening lines foreshadows Colum's use of Saint Brighid as the fountainhead of the principal private tradition in which Brighid participates.<sup>11</sup>

The main tradition which Colum uses to define Brighid's character and develop her symbolism emphasizes that Brighid is comfortable (especially relative to her rural contemporaries) with older values, experiences, and ways of life. This is the cultural tradition of the Irish folksong. Brighid's story is full of instances when she sings folksongs or hears

them, or when either she herself or others connect her explicitly with the heroines of Irish folk tradition. Two of the earliest and most important songs in Castle Conquer are traditional songs sung by Brighid at an informal musical gathering.

Now she sang as for some effect; her voice, full and deep, rose and fell thrillingly. She sang a street song: there was a lament in the last lines of it, but before her voice sank to the lament, she had put one scene before all who listened to her--

My sister Mary heard the express;  
She came downstairs in her morning dress:  
Five hundred guineas she would lay down  
To see me liberated in Wexford town.

Then she sang "An Cailin deas cruidhte na m-bo."  
"The pretty girl of the milking of the cows." She sang it as she had often heard her grandmother sing it, rocking Oona's cradle. The melody flowed on and on, turning back on itself, becoming a crooning. As Francis Gillick listened the memory of his exile from Ireland came back to him, for the green valleys and the bright pastures were in this song. The "colleen" was milking her cows in a valley-pasture; she answered the stranger with the tale of her content; the blackthorn hedges were in blossom. CC, 49-50

Significantly, Colum here chooses songs for Brighid that represent what he elsewhere held to be the two main traditions of Irish balladry.

Writing in the introduction to Broadsheet Ballads (1913), Colum differentiates between the lonely countryside songs and the clearer, more dramatic street songs:

This dramatic imagination distinguishes the street-songs from the songs of the country-side, which, in Ireland, are narrative, coming out of reverie and not out of a dramatic confrontation.<sup>12</sup>

Brighid's performance is true to this sense of the traditions, for it is the drama of the first song and the "reverie"--a term that Colum later

applies to folktale as well<sup>13</sup>--the "crooning" of the second that she conveys to her listeners. She resembles the ballad-singer whom Colum imagines in the streets of a town on the day of a fair, who stands "between the country and the city and . . . draws from both traditions,"<sup>14</sup> thus embracing two sides of Irish experience.

Together, the two songs present an emblem of Brighid's conflict between peaceful domesticity and political involvement. The second song is like a sentimental journey back to an all-but-lost Romantic Ireland, which functions as an ideal to the political activists of the first song. Brighid's ignorance of Irish signals that her identification with nationalist causes is as yet deficient, and her evident unawareness of the relevance of either song to herself indicates that she has yet to achieve a satisfactory sense of her own identity. But her crooning style and her sensitivity to the nuances that were in her grandmother's voice indicate her strong intuitive sympathy for the heritage that the song represents. In the second song, Brighid unwittingly portrays her own domestic self, the Brighid who minds the cows along the grassy "long acre." Against this peaceful domesticity Colum poses the political trauma of "The Croppy Boy," that famous lament for the Ninety-Eighter's sacrifice to set "Old Ireland free." The stanza that Brighid sings most movingly, about the sister's willingness to make a sacrifice for her rebel brother, is the one most applicable to Brighid herself, and Colum takes it from the version of the song in which the themes of insurrection and imprisonment are clearly stated: the sister pays "To see me liberated in Wexford town" rather than simply "To see my brother through Wexford town," as in some versions.<sup>15</sup> As with the second song, Brighid is evidently blind to this song's implications. She apparently has little

inkling that she, like Mary, will be called upon to suffer for the sake of an imprisoned Irish patriot. Brighid can hardly be expected to realize that her coming conflict between domesticity and political involvement is disguised in the folksong traditions from which she is singing, but Francis Gillick is somewhat more prescient. Having already learned the lessons of his own heritage, he begins on the evening after the céilidh to help Brighid to repair both the break with the past, toward which she intuitively tends, and the breach between placid country life and political responsibility, by teaching her her first words of Irish: her own name.

Brighid is next associated with folksong when a brash young fellow at a dance invents a verse about a once shy young girl who heartlessly plunders her own home for a dowry when love emboldens her. Once again, Brighid fails to recognize herself.

Oh, mother sell all that you have to your name,  
 To give me a dowry to equal my fame,  
 Sell the cow, and the sow, and the gander that's lame,  
 And the sack of black wool in the corner!<sup>16</sup>  
CC, 60

Brighid is offended by the looseness of this fellow's talk and by his teasing intimations of a similarity between his heroine and Brighid. Nevertheless, Brighid herself will spend the night with Francis during Honor's absence sooner than either she or this rural poet suspects, thereby choosing romance over the sanctity of Honor Paralon's home. Although Brighid cannot see her future tryst with Francis Gillick in the circumstances of this song, any more than she sees that she herself is the heroine of the earlier songs she sings, she later does momentarily feel such a connection between folksong and reality. While dressing for

breakfast in the home of her uncle, a prominent priest who has only recently acknowledged his brother's family, Brighid experiences a girlish elation.

Her own seldom-spoken name was in her mind as she washed, and the name came to her again when she stood before the mirror that could tilt up and down, forward or backward. Brighid Moynaugh! Like the refrain of a song her own name came to her. CC, 222

As with Francis Gillick's Irish lessons, it is the form of Brighid's name that brings awareness to her, showing her something of her character in the same way that the tilting mirror shows her her figure. (The mirror, of course, is itself symbolic, indicating the fluidity that yet remains in Brighid's not wholly formed identity.) Here, the manifestation of Brighid's name as a musical refrain completes the association of Brighid with folk heroines, while at the same time it advances Brighid's own sense of identity. But just as Francis Gillick is naïve in imagining heroism in terms of Angus O'Failey's dashing charge at the walls of Castle Conquer, so Brighid, overwhelmed by the euphoria of her unexpected acceptance into her uncle's prosperous and respected household, departs from her usual probity. As she identifies herself with the romantic heroines of folksong, she forgets that such songs are home not only to carefree or serious beauties, but also to the girls who must redeem their lovers from imprisonment, at Wexford and many another Irish town.

Brighid Moynaugh's experiences recapitulate some of the sad melodies that have been sung on Irish soil for generations, especially among the poor and the oppressed of the countryside. The folksongs with which she becomes identified are songs of young girls forgetting prudence and propriety for love, of proud families casting out prodigal daughters,



and above all of stripling boys and fresh-cheeked girls facing political realities which include imprisonment and execution. For John Fitzsimmons, a nationalist barrister and collector of local Irish legends, Brighid's representation of this particular Irish experience, her appearance, and her quasi-religious attitude make her an Irish heroine.

Brighid Moynaugh embodied for him the poetry of the generation he recalled; it was she who had often come into a story--she with the bright hair that marked her as belonging to the kindly race of Heber, and something of a madonna in her face. CC, 323

Fitzsimmons sees Brighid with a regard strikingly close to Francis Gillick's on the night he hears her sing her songs. It is a far less sympathetic observer, however--the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland--who enunciates most clearly the significance that Colum's use of the tradition of the Irish folksong is meant to convey. "'I should like to have the chance of doing something for her,'" he says idly near the end of the novel. From his carriage window, he has spotted Brighid, absorbed in worry over Francis's fate, where she happens to stand amid a crowd of loyalists. "'That's because she symbolizes Ireland, don't you know'" (CC, 348).

There are, in addition to the tradition of Irish folksongs, three "private" traditions which are relevant to the characterization of Brighid Moynaugh. Since Owen Paralon acts as Brighid's foster-brother, he extends to her something of the tradition which links him to Michael Philabeen and to Michael's uncle. We have already seen Owen's influence on Brighid's appreciation of nature and her knowledge of music (see above, p.206), but the conflict between the settled life and a life of adventure and uncertainty, which Owen and Michael experience

as the conflict between weaving and wandering, is also felt by Brighid, although she is not a weaver, and will never be a vagrant. For Brighid, the dilemma involves the effect of politicization on ordinary people. Long before she is called upon to uphold Francis publicly, she must come to terms with the fact that Francis's fervent devotion to the liberation of Ireland will almost inevitably prevent the couple from enjoying a quiet domesticity. Brighid confronts Francis with her apprehensions shortly before Francis's armed defence of Martin Jordan's holding.

"We're not like the bog-larks, Francis," she said,  
"we two. We can't settle down on the ground and have  
a place of our own."

"No, Bride, no." CC, 186

Unlike Owen Paralon and Michael Philabeen, who are relatively unaffected by the political question, Brighid here must all but abandon her hopes of settling down quietly, like the bog-larks, with her mate.

Another minor tradition which helps to set Brighid's actions in a meaningful context is given in the story of the Long Dance. As with the tradition of political balladry, the tradition that this story delineates concerns the necessity of a young woman going to heroic efforts to save the life of an imprisoned young man. "The Long Dance," however, associates such sacrifice with the very place that involves Brighid and Francis, for the dance is a ritual performance by villagers to secure a life from the owner of Castle Conquer. Here, a young woman, Mary Cantillon, organizes this kind of arduous dance on behalf of her imprisoned and soon-to-be-executed lover, Roger Martin. The story represents a tradition not only because the ritual (Rinnce Fada) is a long-standing (if seldom-used) custom in the area, but also because

the young people in the story are encouraged by the precedent of a successful Long Dance in the previous generation, performed before the father of the de Courcey to whom they will make their appeal. Although the tradition of the Long Dance has all but fallen from local memory, and can not be an option, in the time of Brighid and Francis, the de Courcey whose agent Francis is accused of murdering is a descendant of the one who authorizes the liberation of Roger Martin. Brighid, more importantly will be required to be just as bold, fervid, and wise as Mary Cantillon in order to secure Francis Gillick from the same fate that threatened Roger Martin.

The most important private tradition associated with Brighid Moynaugh, however--so important that we may call it "Brighid's tradition"--is one which connects her with two predecessors of the same name, Brighid Gilroy and one of Ireland's patron saints, Saint Brighid. This tradition is in part a modification of the opposition of vagrancy and the settled life that characterize Owen's tradition. For Brighid Moynaugh, Brighid Gilroy, and Saint Brighid--linked by the story that Honor Paralon and Considine Gilroy pass between them, which Brighid, churning butter outside the window, overhears--wandering means homelessness and lonely exile. Domesticity, on the other hand, which for both Michael Philabeen and Owen Paralon carries an element of dull constraint, is rendered here in the joyous terms of welcome, first in the welcome ritually extended to the travel-worn Saint, the protectress of home and byre, and then in the welcome more spontaneously offered to the prodigal daughter, Brighid Gilroy. Because Saint Brighid's feast, the setting both of the story about Brighid Gilroy and of Honor and Considine's retelling of it, is

celebrated when extra minutes of daylight at the end of winter first became noticeable, the hospitality and homecoming in the story are identified with the return of spring, making Brighid's tradition expressive of an archetype of separation (or expulsion) are return.<sup>17</sup>

Brighid's tradition is even more localized in its relevance to Brighid Moynagh than "The Long Dance," for Brighid Gilroy is a former inhabitant of Brighid Moynagh's own house. The primary basis for Brighid Gilroy's connection with Brighid Moynagh is the earlier Brighid's violation, for the sake of love, of the domestic ties of her father's home. Like Brighid Moynagh after her, Brighid Gilroy takes advantage of her parent's absence to entertain her lover in the lonely house, and as with Brighid Moynagh, the wages of Brighid Gilroy's transgression are expulsion. (Brighid Moynagh is quite a bit more decisive than her less-heroic counterpart, however; she proudly leaves the home where she is no longer welcome, whereas Brighid Gilroy crosses to England only after her timid whisper through a crack in her father's barred door goes unheeded.) For her sin, Brighid Gilroy eventually is forgiven, for the rituals of the feast day identify her, first ceremonially, then in heartfelt earnestness, with the blameless Saint. Brighid Moynagh, on the other hand, though a representative of warmth, acceptance, and love of the hearth, is herself denied the beneficence of its glow: her mother never fully forgives her trespass against the family pride, and her reconciliation to her one-time home remains cool and incomplete. Honor Paralon's idiosyncratic pride is partly at fault, but Brighid Moynagh's experience is more significantly altered by its politicization. If the earlier Brighid suffers sorrow and shame from

the exposure of her sin to her stern father, how much greater the anguish of Brighid Moynaugh, who, because of Francis Gillick's political involvement, must confess her illicit congress with him before her mother, her uncle the priest, Francis's defense counsellors, and, in public testimony, before all of the men and women of Eglish and the surrounding districts. The contrast between Brighid's lot and the archetypal return that her tradition to some extent represents underscores the special poignancy and bitterness of her situation.

Brighid Moynaugh senses the element of prophecy in the story no more than in the ballads she sings or in the verse the bold young man sings to her. Hearing the story of the Brighids, however, leads her to an even more intense and immediate moment of self-awareness and identification than that experienced by Owen Paralon upon leaving Michael Philabeen's house.

Always, from the time she was a child, anything that happened in the byre was particularly vivid for that Brighid who was listening at the window. It came home to her what was in this part of the story, how the horse stamped and turned in its stall, and how the two cows breathed. She, too, was with those who went in; with them she felt the deep, hushed life of the beasts. Martin Gilroy went to the manger to hang the cross above it. He prayed that in the year to come that the lives there might be guarded. He hung the cross above the manger. Then, looking down, he saw in the hay a little child sleeping. CC, 262

This passage has an air of sanctity, doubly so because it conveys, in quasi-religious imagery, both the instant in which Martin Gilroy's feelings toward his daughter soften, and the moment in which, as Colum tellingly puts it, the story comes home to Brighid Moynaugh. Brighid Moynaugh, whose closeness to the life in the byre and whose benevolent

empathy for suffering humankind this passage emphatically confirms, hovers protectively over the ending of the story like a reincarnation of the domestic saint, Saint Brighid, with whom this tradition begins, or like a "madonna" (in John Fitzsimmon's word) bending over the manger of the Christ-child. Brighid's warm identification with the people and animals collected in the stables shows once again the vitality of tradition's contribution to the growth of an individual consciousness.

The characterization of Brighid Moynaugh, who, by virtue of her association with Irish pastoral heroines, becomes the carrier of a rich old tradition in a disintegrating social order, indicates the great extent to which Ireland, for Colum, resides in a past that is quickly slipping out of reach. Colum's ambivalence about modern, post-revolutionary Ireland is perhaps most apparent in Brighid's Moynaugh's failure to pass into the post-revolutionary future. Brighid Moynaugh is already dead at the dawning of the Irish Free State with which Castle Conquer ends, but her tradition has passed, with telling alteration, through her daughter, also named Brighid, to her granddaughter, Brighid Leonard-- "Brighid with his own Brighid's bright hair," thinks Francis Gillick (CC, 366). Unfortunately, this Brighid's response to the signing of the inadequate Treaty establishing the Free State is devastatingly prophetic. Francis Gillick meets her on his way from Castle Conquer, which his grandson, Brighid Leonard's eighteen-year-old brother, won for the Irish shortly before he was captured and hanged.

"I was looking at the place that Michael left his mark on," she said to him.

She had the bright and abundant hair of his own Brighid, but hers was a set and a lonely face. Her voice when she spoke was harsh.

"Have you heard, Brighid," he said, "that all the fighting is over?"

"I haven't heard that the fighting is over. Is it because men have put their names to something?" she said bitterly.

"Good men and brave men have put their names to it," he said.

"Let them put what names they like. They won't put away what Michael Leonard died for. There are men in the camp there that will fight for what he fought for, no matter what names were put to a paper. We to take their King and what they'd give us!"

"And would you have the fighting go on, Brighid?"

"It will go on. And let Failey now take his side for fighting there will be as sure as that sky is above us." CC, 374

What Brighid is foreseeing, distressingly to Francis, who hopes that Failey, his son, a commandant in the Irish Republican Army, will now be safe, is the Civil War, and she greets it with the spirit of the warrior-woman Scathach. Colum makes this Brighid the representative of a harsh and vengeful new breed, as angular and graceless as Joyce's Molly Ivors in the eyes of Gabriel Conroy, as bitter and obsessive in enmity as Con Markiewicz in the eyes of Yeats ("On a Political Prisoner"). She makes a comfortless culmination to the tradition of Brighid Moynaugh.

Brighid's tradition, in comparison with Owen Paralon's, tends to be symbolic, rather than literal. The members of Owen's tradition, after all, unlike Brighid Moynaugh, Brighid Gilroy, and Saint Brighid, enjoy real personal contact and pass the elements of their tradition from one generation to the next through fosterage; yet Colum brings the myth of Saint Brighid to bear on Brighid Moynaugh by rendering it, too, in terms of tradition and story. The well-known legend and widely-celebrated ritual of the homeless saint are given, through the experience of Brighid Gilroy, a quite specific, indeed, almost idiosyncratic

association with the expulsion of country girls--in this house, of this name--who violate domestic sanctity for the sake of illicit love. It is this particularized form of the legend of Saint Brighid, filtered as it is by the story of Brighid Gilroy, that has meaning for Brighid Moynagh. The association of each of the Brighids with the same house, the coincidence of their names, the framework of the story, and most of all, the enclosure that Brighid's consciousness makes around the story as Colum reminds us of her presence and describes her response to the narrative, are Colum's means of converting the Brighid-myth from symbolic legend to a tradition that, in the generations after Brighid Moynagh, extends to two of her real descendants.

Colum often uses traditions in his work to help define his characters, but never so amply as in Castle Conquer. In Castle Conquer, there are, as we have seen, three characters who have heroic significance: Francis Gillick, Owen Paralon, and Brighid Moynagh. Each is placed in the context of multiple traditions, and each is led by tradition to a critical sense of identity and of purpose. Colum concentrates with such special intensity in Castle Conquer on tradition's importance to the identity of the individual that he seems to be experimenting with a new method for creating character. Description of cultural, familial, racial, and private traditions to a large extent replaces the usual techniques of fictional characterization, making revelation through dialogue and action, direct and indirect description, and interior monologue subservient to the delineation of the ordered historical continua which are of the first importance in informing character. In other words, by making the description of tradition



the foundation of his portraiture in Castle Conquer, Colum carries his conviction of tradition's importance for individual identity into his techniques of characterization.

One of the most noteworthy features of the defining traditions that we have been examining is their temporal complexity. Colum's traditions help him to layer time, so that Francis Gillick descends from Angus O'Failey of early Norman times and Brighid's association with Brighid Gilroy is deepened to include the ancient, assimilated pagan figure of Saint Brighid. Such interlocking of different layers of time occurs often in Colum's work. The Frenzied Prince (1940), with its complicated time scheme, is a good illustration. Courtly storytellers tell the historical personage, Suivné, tales of earlier times, in an attempt to soothe his frenzied spirits. The arrangement, however, is complicated: the earliest tale comes last, preceded by the most recent of the ancient stories. Since the frame story is invoked six times, there is a constant interplay among time periods, as well as among the various kings and heroes. This scheme has counterparts in children's works like The Forge in the Forest (1925), or in The Big Tree of Bunlahy (1933), in which many of the embedded stories are more local in character and more domestic in flavor than those in The Frenzied Prince. In Colum's Noh-influenced plays, his last dramatic writings, the layering of times is most explicit and the various historical moments are most enmeshed. Moytura (1969), for instance, juxtaposes ancient times (Balor and Nuada), nineteenth-century history (Sir William Wilde, with reference to several periods of his life), and the present (a Young Man, and Oona, Wilde's now-aged daughter).

In Castle Conquer, as in many of these books, the layering of the relevant past is inextricably linked with storytelling. In Castle Conquer, Colum emphasizes storytelling as the vehicle for communicating vital tradition by compressing all of the private traditions of the book into inset tales, the hearing of which brings the listener, Brighid or Owen, to a new sense of self. Owen's connection to Michael Philabeen and to Michael's uncle is revealed only when Michael tells about it; Brighid's tradition is given as a story which Honor Paralon and Considine Gilroy tell to each other; and the story entitled "The Long Dance," though it appears in a newspaper column, is read aloud by Francis Gillick to a listening Brighid. In each case, Colum insists on revealing tradition through the spoken word.

As was the case regarding The King of Ireland's Son, these embedded stories (and another, told by Castle Conquer's "satirical young man," Maelshaughlinn, and originally published in My Irish Year, 1912) have a formal antecedent in the folktale's "in-tale." In The King of Ireland's Son, some in-tales, in the folktale manner, are required by the main action, while some are more or less narratively gratuitous. But as we have seen in Chapter III above, the most important in-tale in The King of Ireland's Son, the Unique Tale, expresses Colum's sense of storytelling's cultural importance by its very centrality to the main narrative, whose various threads originate in and return to this story. In Castle Conquer, however, the embedded stories, while retaining the discrete nature of many in-tales, never have a strong formal relationship to the main narrative. Whereas in folktales, the in-tale is forced out of the teller to fulfill requirements in the main plot such as geasa,

or may be offered by a captive in exchange for the lives of his companions (and ultimately for his own), in Castle Conquer an embedded tale gets told simply because someone feels like telling it. For instance, Michael Philabeen's story is only vaguely a response to Owen's visit, and the only motivation that Honor Paralon and Considine Gilroy have for telling their story is the occasion of Saint Brigid's Day. Maelshaughlinn's story has an even slighter formal connection with the main plot: it tells of no one who appears in the outer narrative except for the wholly incidental figure of Maelshaughlinn. The first two of these stories have great symbolic value, but none of the three is as firmly connected to the main narrative as even the more or less incidental "King of the Cats" story in The King of Ireland's Son, which is neatly distributed among episodes of the main narrative, and which is told to the King's Son, as the stories in The Frenzied Prince are told to Suivn , in order to ease his mind.

The embedded stories also perhaps borrow from the folktale the regularity of their interior form. On the whole, they are more highly structured than the enveloping narrative, for Castle Conquer, as Benedict Kiely says, is a novel written in "a rambling way."<sup>18</sup> Michael Philabeen's story is a journey and a return, and the story of Brigid Gilroy receives its pattern from the rites of Saint Brigid's Day; both of these are further structured by the pattern of tradition they reveal and by the way in which they are connected by tradition to the outer story. Maelshaughlinn's more picaresque tale is bounded by the fair and the perfect arc of his adventures. The first important historian of the Irish Revival, Ernest Boyd, admiring Castle Conquer in a review in The Nation, commented on just this point. He found

### Maelshaughlinn's adventure

one of the most perfect incidents in this book,  
equalled only by the weaver's story of how he  
took to the roads with young Owen Paralon.

Significantly, Boyd goes on to call these episodes "vignettes complete in themselves and having the authentic ring of folk stories."<sup>19</sup> Boyd's sense of "the authentic ring of folk stories" may not be exact, but if Colum's little stories aren't genuine folktales, they do resemble the kind of folk anecdote which fills Peig Sayers' book of reminiscence on her life and times. Colum's stories certainly imitate folk usage, especially in their care for the internal harmonies of the story. Yet the essence of these tales, as they are presented in Castle Conquer, in one way resides in their circumstance--the storytelling situation that gives rise to story, analogous to the gatherings by the smoky peat fire of Colum's youth; and their circumstance, when translated into form, becomes their most notable formal feature: their status as isolated, self-contained islands within the meandering narrative stream.

The narration of these in-set tales is often as complex as the stratified past which they express. The layers of tradition become layers of voices in some of the in-set stories--voice quoting voice quoting voice. All the embedded tales by definition involve layered narration to some extent, but the involution of "The Long Dance" makes Michael Philabeen's, Honor and Considine's, and Maelshaughlinn's stories look formally simple, and even outdoes the most complicated of Colum's short stories, "Eilis A Woman's Story." Should we include every possible mark of quotation, the most remote level of discourse, the dialogue between Eoghan Dermody

and Mary Cantillon, would look like this:

""""Oh, Eugene," she said, 'I waited to hear of my true-lover, Roger Martin.'""""<sup>20</sup> CC, 120

We have indentation for Colum and quotation marks for Francis Gillick, who is reading aloud; for John Fitzsimmons, the writer and narrator of the work from which Francis Gillick reads, whose presence is as minimal as is the tale's teller; for this nameless teller, a friend of John Fitzsimmons; and finally, for Mary Cantillon, the object of Eoghan Dermody's passion. Nor do these five levels of punctuation account for all of the layers in the story, for John Fitzsimmon's friend heard the story from various people, among them Eoghan Dermody himself. Dermody was an old man and Fitzsimmons' friend a mere lad when the latter became aware of the story (like Colum, in his grandmother's house). Dermody was looking back to a misunderstanding and a disappointment in the moment of his passion, adding a further layer of time to all of the layers of narration. As is the case with the other important embedded stories in Castle Conquer (but not, significantly, with Maelshaughlinn's tale), Colum creates and exploits a tension between the subject matter of this story and the listeners, Francis Gillick and Brighid, whose own dilemma in part recapitulates the one that Mary Cantillon and Roger Martin faced.<sup>21</sup>

Curiously, the scheme in these inner stories, in spite of its complication, does not call attention to narrative artifice as much as to the situations in which stories are told and the way in which they emerge in the natural life of the folk. Whereas the in-tales in The King of Ireland's Son, whatever their thematic import, tend to

emphasize the neat artfulness of the narrative technique, in these stories in Castle Conquer, as in some of Colum's short stories, the number of passages which deal with the moment of narration rather than the events narrated indicate a greater interest in a realistic representation of the context. The description of Honor and Considine beginning the tale of Brighid Gilroy, the profound effect the story's crisis has on Brighid Moynagh, the several very brief pictures of storytelling sessions in the chapter on "The Long Dance," make the circumstances of the story crucial both to its presentation and its content.

At the same time, the embedding technique helps Colum to reproduce oral tradition, in so far as the printed page allows. It is not merely that the telling of the stories is imagined and imitated; it is that the levels of real or implied narration are literary vestiges of the many tellings, the many repetitions, that enable one tradition to survive the generations. The historicity of the Long Dance, for instance, as Colum presents it, lies only partly in the fact of its performance in a previous generation or in the assertion of its antiquity as a local custom. This historicity is also represented schematically, by the five levels of narration, representing five voices telling the story to each other, and implying the crucial process by which tradition is handed down. Colum's deep embedding of his tales, his many levels of narration and of time, distill and compress the repeated tellings which give a story life as a tradition into a single narrative moment. Thus the most notable formal feature of Castle Conquer, like the narrative rhythms of The King of Ireland's Son, itself bespeaks one of the novel's most important themes, the nature and necessity of tradition.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Ferguson is quoted by Peter Costello (who does not cite the work itself) in The Heart Grown Brutal, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> "The Plougher" was one of Colum's earliest published poems. Bowen says that it first appeared in The United Irishman, probably in 1903 or 1904. Padraic Colum, p. 6. "The Plougher" was reprinted in Colum's first volume of poetry, Wild Earth (1907). Here I quote from Poems (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> The Poet's Circuits, p. 12. The shared imagery connects the pastoral landscape to a garment or blanket.

The country with its slopes and rises and its varied greens was like a robe that was drawn up into tucks, bright and faded and stained, and crossed here and there with seams that were hedges marking the little fields. CC, 13

This simile puts the landscape vividly before us, but Johanna's red-and-black patchwork quilt in "The Fore-Piece" extends and elaborates this species of comparison, so that rhythmically stitching together squares of fabric--black for the fields, red for the hunt--supported by pages of some forgotten hedge-master's Latin transcriptions, becomes an expressive metaphor for Colum's chosen vocation: making verse out of the fabric of the countryside. The "patchwork quilt with red and black squares upon it" that covers Honor Paralon's bed (CC, 20) suggests that Colum may have been meditating on these images for thirty-seven years or more.

<sup>4</sup> Curtin's "The Fisherman's Son and the Gruagach of Tricks" (Myths and Folk Tales, pp. 85-98) is an example of a tale in which a peasant lad is fostered by an enchanter; Colum based The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter (1920) on this tale type. Many of the tales that Colum retells in The Frenzied Prince (1943) include fosterage: "The Cowherd's Fosterling," pp. 25-34, is a banished princess; and "How the Harp Came to Tara," pp. 76-90, recounts young Finn's relationship with the robber Fiachal. Colum gives a rather unusual version of fosterage, Cuchulain's apprenticeship to Scathach, the warrior woman, in "Cuchulain and the Warrior Woman," also in The Frenzied Prince, pp. 48-56; he refers in explicitly heroic terms to the fostering relationship between Cuchulain and Fergus in the "Fosterage" section of The Flying Swans, pp. 93-94.

<sup>5</sup> "Padraic Colum: A Critical Study of His Poems and Plays" (Ph.D. dissertation: New York University, 1980), p. 31. Bowen also comments on Colum's relationship with Micky Burns, whom Bowen, it seems mistakenly, terms Colum's grand-uncle. Padraic Colum, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> "Vagrant Voices," p. 67.

7 Among those who have noted this are Gordon Henderson and Zack Bowen, in their introduction to the Colum number of the Journal of Irish Literature 2 (January, 1973) 2, p. 7, and Ann Murphy, "Padraic Colum: A Critical Study," p. 266. They point to the large number of Colum titles, in addition to "Vagrant Voices" itself, that imply vagrancy, notably The Road Round Ireland, Cross-Road in Ireland, and The Poet's Circuits.

8 Bright hair appears in Colum's poetry almost as frequently as dim hair in Yeats's. "Come to the well, my own, my bright-haired one," he addresses Mary Colum, in the dedication to The Poet's Circuits, and it is largely this phrase that make this version of the poem more moving than the earlier version, in Poems. The difference between Colum's bright and Yeats's dim tresses illustrates a further division between their poetic purposes, Colum always preferring images of optimistic clarity to his elder's Celtic-Twilight shadowiness.

9 The Poet's Circuits, "Fore-Piece," p. 4, ll. 29-30. The whin-bush is a recurring image in this autobiographical poem, a unifying motif in the exploration of a poet's apprehension of his vocation, which is to write of the land and its people. See also p. 1, l. 10, and p. 15, ll. 19-20.

10 A connection also made by Ernest Boyd in "Romantic Ireland," a review of Castle Conquer, in The Nation 117 (September 19, 1923), p. 300.

11 It is worth observing that a quasi-Christian mythology attends some of Colum's other heroines. In The King of Ireland's Son, Fedelma's sacrifice of her life and Morag's sacrifice of "seven drops of heart's blood" carry overtones of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Saba O'Rehill's religiosity, on the other hand, primarily takes the form of personal piety: she keeps a special, blue-bound book of pictures of the Virgin Mary; she often finds solace sitting in a churchyard beside a holy well; and she is remembered for her "great devotion" to Saint Joseph.

12 Broadsheet Ballads (Dublin: Maunsell, 1913) p. viii.

13 Story Telling New and Old, p. 8.

14 Broadsheet Ballads, p. xiv.

15 Except for the number of guineas in question, the stanza Colum quotes is identical to that in the version of "The Croppy Boy" included in Broadsheet Ballads, pp. 52-53. Another version can be found in An Anthology of Irish Literature, ed. David H. Greene (New York: New York University Press, 1971), v. 2, pp. 316-317. There are interesting differences between the two. Greene's version emphasizes the betrayal of the Croppy Boy by his own family--a popular theme in Irish literature.

My aged father did me deny

And the name he gave me was the Croppy Boy.

Colum substitutes two stanzas of a more sharply political intent for the



one in which these lines are found, ending with a classic rebel posture, echoed in Francis Gillick's choice of weapon for the defence of Martin Jordan's cottage:

And for my brother, he's all alone  
He's pointing pikes on the grinding stone.

16 Unlike some folklore scholars, Colum has no qualms about including verses composed by a nameable individual in the novel's present under the rubric "folksong." "After all, it is only a failure of our information that prevents our naming the maker of every popular song. There is an idea that popular poetry is an impersonal thing, an emanation from the multitude, but I think this is an illusion." Broadsheet Ballads, p. xv. What Colum gives us in the verses of the "satirical young man" is a folksong's nativity. The verses here, however, are from one of Colum's own poems, "The Call for the Bride," which may be found in The Poet's Circuits, pp. 102-103.

17 Colum seems to have been uncommonly taken with the traditions of Saint Brigid's Day, for he relates them many times. A Boy in Eirinn (1913) includes an illustration of four-pointed Saint Brigid's Day crosses, while, in Castle Conquer, the crosses have five points and, in The Flying Swans, three. An additional account, entitled "Saint Brigid's Feast," may be found in Today's Housewife, 8 (February, 1919).

18 Modern Irish Fiction: A Critique (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950), p.v.

19 "Romantic Ireland," p. 300.

20 Colum gets away with only two sets of inverted commas by indenting to signal the first level of quotation, from John Fitzsimmons' book, and by dispensing with inverted commas to signal Francis Gillick's reading voice. Although the layers of narration here reach an extreme in non-parodic prose, John Barth goes further in "The Menelaiad" in Lost in the Funhouse, where we have such rhapsodies of punctuation as

"('')('(('What?'))') )")'

or

""""'why?' I repeated," I repeated,' I repeated,"  
I repeated,' I repeated," I repeat

or, most extravagantly of all

""""	} Why? {	""""
""""		""
""		""
""		''
"""".		'

(Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 152 and 153.

21 Indeed, Eoghan's feelings signal more strongly than the main narrative ever does the anguish facing Brighid's younger sister Oona, who is secretly, unavailingly in love with Francis Gillick. Her predicament is one of Castle Conquer's loose ends.

VI. The Flying Swans: Heroism, Realism and Art

In the second half of The Flying Swans, Ulick O'Rehill unexpectedly encounters his grand-uncle, Virgil O'Rehill, in the capital. Virgil's errand is unusual in a Colum work: he is selling a portrait of an illustrious O'Rehill forebear, the Chevalier de Moylough, in order to buy a chapel organ for the monastery where he is a lay brother. More surprising still, in the context of a novel which makes much of the degeneration of family names--Bonfils to Bondfield, Ulick O'Rehill to Francie Rehill (and back)--is a statement of Virgil's which suggests a startling revaluation of the currency of ancestral heritage that has purchased so much in the way of national and personal identity in Colum's earlier work.

"In New York they're looking for ancestors," Mr. Crombie announced.

"I used to think a lot about all that," said Virgil.  
 "Worldliness! I renounced it. One name is as good to me as another now."<sup>1</sup>

Colum's sympathy for Virgil's position is perhaps not complete; indeed, Colum can't resist making of Virgil something of a backslider, for when Virgil explains that his name (which derives not from the Latin poet but an Irish saint--Feargal) is entirely appropriate to his monastic vocation, Virgil too emphasizes the importance of names and derivations. Yet as The Flying Swans documents the long decline of the O'Rehills, in the successive personages of Robert and his two sons, Ulick and Breasal, Colum stringently criticizes the passion for ancestors, all the rage in New York, which Virgil rejects. It is a romantic allegiance to an illusory heroic grandeur that brings disaster to Robert, that irresponsible

and incompetent dreamer, and suffering to his innocent dependents: his wife and two sons. The notions of a glorious family destiny that bound Francis Gillick to Angus O'Failey and O'Failey's Tower are mildly and comically undercut by references to lowlier folk traditions in Castle Conquer; in The Flying Swans, similar notions bind Robert to ignominy, Saba to destitution, Ulick to despair, and Breasal to abjectness--from which there is very nearly no return. For Ulick, The Flying Swans' hero, the family's bitter descent and the rise of his own consciousness and manhood coincide; ultimately, he must accommodate the sense of family and personal destiny that surround his boyhood to the realities of poverty, hopelessness and grief that mark his adolescence. Colum draws this conflict very much in terms of folklore, tradition and heroism. As he remakes the relationship between the present day and the illustrious, idealized past, and reforms his conception of heroism, with which he has grappled in so many other works, he brings to resolution his own long struggle with the relationship of the bright, enchanted world of folklore, with its kings' sons and magical transformations, and the world of the Irish peasant or country townsman, where, as Ulick finds out, any ameliorations are hard won.

The Flying Swans' painful account of an Irish youth's coming-of-age reflects Colum's own boyhood experience, in Irish towns and cities as well as in the countryside. As various commentators have noted, the pattern of Ulick's youth follows Colum's own life quite closely;<sup>2</sup> in addition, there is ample evidence that many of the details of person, place and event which give to The Flying Swans' landscape its imaginative richness are drawn from youthful impressions, still vivid and intense after the lapse of half a century.<sup>3</sup> (The strong autobiographical nature

of the novel would seem to gainsay the criticism of one reviewer: "This is a serious and unrealistic account of the unhappy boyhood and youth of two Irish boys.")<sup>4</sup> In a novel whose broad outlines and many of whose details are borrowed from the shapes and facts of its author's own early life, one might perhaps expect the notion of heroism to have little place, especially when the author is as habitually modest and discreet as Colum. In the poetic statement of vocation that introduces a thoughtfully-arranged edition of his Irish poems, for instance, Colum says, apparently in his own voice, that his early days were "unlike the heroes"; yet the passage from which these words are taken indicates that this disclaimer is itself a part of Colum's struggle to determine what relationship can exist between the heroism of the old stories and superficially uneventful, unheroic lives like his own.

As in Fenian stories  
 Some man unheard of forcefully comes in,  
 And by demands he makes turns things around  
 And changes someone's history, he came  
 Into my days that were unlike the heroes',  
 And his demand was only that I take  
 His hospitality.<sup>5</sup>

The heroic "he" who enters unexpectedly into Colum's (or "the speaker's") life is Owen Paralon. But in the Fenian stories to which Colum alludes, the heroic warrior who intrudes himself into the Fianna merely leads the real hero, Finn MacCumhail, to his own heroic quest. Similarly, Colum suggests, Owen Paralon's heroism may be subordinate to Colum's own quest for heroic meaning. If so--if part of Colum's interest in heroism involves trying to accommodate it to his own life--then perhaps The Flying Swans' autobiographical impetus itself helps to bring heroism

to the center of the novel, where it is at least as important as it is in Castle Conquer. In The Flying Swans, however, Colum's attempt to find a real-life correlative for the romantic heroism of folktales and sagas takes a new form and yields markedly different results.

Indeed, although The Flying Swans, like Castle Conquer, depicts late nineteenth-century Irish life--specifically, the twenty years before the death of Parnell, near the novel's end--The Flying Swans represents a thoroughgoing revision of the heroic ideas and ideals presented in Castle Conquer. By 1957, after all, the Treaty with which Castle Conquer concludes was in its fourth decade, and the declaration of the Republic in 1949 meant that Ireland (the "southern" counties, that is) had been confirmed in her sovereignty for several years. The nationalist politics which had occupied Irish life in the first decades of the century, and which had found expression in the personage of Francis Gillick in Castle Conquer, were all but irrelevant in 1957. The aftermath of the Treaty had been, as Colum at the end of Castle Conquer already understood, a national paroxysm of violence in the name of the very passions and positions that had been extolled as heroic in the years of revolution. The much-anticipated New Ireland proved to be frustratingly factious. Furthermore, the struggle of men like Francis Gillick had contributed to the demise of the very thing they were trying to liberate and nurture: the best of the old life. In the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits, a work contemporaneous with The Flying Swans, Colum expresses a sense of disappointment, of anti-climax, that in some ways typifies the sentiments of the Irish in the fifties.

A neighbour said, "All we went through in years  
 To win our land will be like stories told  
 Of wars and insurrections long ago.  
 Our children who will listen to such tales  
 Will see the Big House empty as the Castle."  
 "Something is lost in every change that comes,"  
 Owen Paralon replied, "and I can tell you  
 This house had once more life between its walls  
 Than it or house around will show again."<sup>6</sup>

What the neighbour laments is essentially the process by which real events are made into history. "'Something is lost," says Owen Paralon, and one thing that Colum seems to lose in The Flying Swans, at least temporarily, is a romantic attitude toward the past. Castle Conquer might be thought of as Colum's record of the particularity of life between the walls of a rural Irish house and of the breadth of life in the Irish countryside before the loss is complete. The Flying Swans, on the other hand, devoid of sentimental nostalgia, looks back, with something of the perspective of Yeats in "September 1913," on a Romantic Ireland that always co-existed with pettiness and pain.

In the 1950s, in the context of a general sense of the insufficiency of the Irish post-revolutionary present, heroism becomes more problematic than it was when Colum published Castle Conquer in 1923. Without the credibility conferred by the noble cause of establishing political and social justice in Ireland, without the opportunity for heroic action afforded by the Irish agitations, heroism is even more difficult to maintain as a viable model for behavior in the modern world than it was in Castle Conquer. The heroic mélange of Castle Conquer has to be remixed in The Flying Swans, with some elements discarded altogether and others represented in greater proportions. Colum was never inclined to an uncritical romanticism about revolutionaries, and in Castle Conquer

he expresses his reservations in his depiction of a moribund revolutionary society and in his quiet satire of Francis Gillick's youthful revolutionary fervor. In The Flying Swans, however, he is much more suspicious of what motivates leading nationalists and of the extent of their wisdom. On the other hand, as we shall shortly see, Colum turns more and more in The Flying Swans to the heroic virtues that Owen Paralon represented in Castle Conquer. Symptomatic of this significant shift in emphasis is a change in narrative form. Whereas Castle Conquer, in spite of its many realistic trappings, is essentially a romance, The Flying Swans is much more a novel of social realism. As a consequence of a more realistic treatment, the impediments to heroic behavior, which are lightly and schematically drawn in the earlier novel, acquire a new magnitude and complexity in the later one. In The Flying Swans, Colum deals exhaustively and profoundly with the essential conflict between romantic ideas of heroism and the unheroic nature of reality--indeed, between romance and realism themselves.

Colum explores the relationship of fathers and sons in The Flying Swans; Ulick's unfulfilled yearning first for his father's presence and then for a satisfying relationship with him is one of the book's major concerns. Colum's use of this relationship in developing the theme of heroism is a mark of the complexity of Colum's vision of heroism in The Flying Swans. He makes it an important issue for both father and son, dividing between them the traditions that were crucial to Francis Gillick's heroism--the heroism of historical Irish warriors, of comic and romantic folktale heroes, and of modern "poet-captains." Colum settles Francis Gillick's legacy somewhat unequally, however. By giving



to Robert O'Rehill those elements of old-style romantic heroism of which he is most critical, Colum creates a foil for Ulick. On the other hand, Colum bestows on Ulick a realism, a knowledge of country life, and an ability to shoulder responsibility that give him a probity and promise that Robert lacks. But the character of Robert O'Rehill is more than a foil. Robert serves as an example to which Ulick must respond, especially since the son inherits some of his father's flaws. The weaknesses that contribute to Robert's failure, in other words, threaten the son as well, who must purge them. Many of these weaknesses were inherent in Francis Gillick's make-up, although some of them were rendered as strengths in Castle Conquer.

A case in point is the hero's ancestral heritage which, as in Castle Conquer, is valued by certain characters as a determinant of heroic identity. Although the O'Rehill family is Ulick's just as much as it is Robert's, the historical tradition of illustrious Milesian ancestors is developed almost exclusively in terms of Robert. Ulick's Uncle Marcus, having brought Ulick to a ruin near the current O'Rehill home, outlines the family history.

"After the wars long ago," he said, "the O'Rehills kept this place though it could at any time be taken from them. The head of the family was a friend of an English duke; he went to London to have the duke ask the king to have this place secured to them. This might have been done. But the O'Rehill of the time did something that was very wrong--something to do with a young woman. He lost the friendship of the duke; there was no one to speak to the king for the Family of Moylough, and so this place was lost to them. When the O'Rehill came back to it, he was allowed to stay only a day in the house. He walked about looking at the beautiful woods that were there at the time, woods that were afterwards cut down by the strangers who took the house and lands."

FS, 65-66

This cluster of familial and historical events seems rather familiar after Castle Conquer. The juxtaposition of the manor house which the old family's heirs inhabit with an older ruin of greater historical significance, the dispossession of a declining Milesian family by Anglo-Irish Protestants, the power that an illustrious, inspiring ancestor fleetingly holds to re-establish the security of the family holding: out of such a heritage springs the heroic impulse in Robert O'Rehill and Francis Gillick alike. As is his frequent practice, Colum chooses names that are clues to such connections. The similarities of Castle Conquer's O'Faileys and The Flying Swans' O'Rehills--"Downstarts in the truest Milesian sense," Denis Johnston wittily calls the latter<sup>7</sup>--are signalled in the closeness of "O'Rehill" to "O'Reilly," the name of the real-life models for the O'Faileys.<sup>8</sup>

In the O'Rehill line, however, there is a touch of disgrace that the O'Faileys are free of. Indeed, the particular O'Rehill who squanders the chance to secure the family patrimony in Marcus's rather bland version of the family's history, the Chevalier de Moylough, is the very ancestor who fires Robert O'Rehill's imagination the most. (Robert is said to bear a distinct likeness to the Chevalier's portrait.) Just as Francis Gillick's passion was to recapture the tower that Angus O'Failey had once claimed, so Robert tries to complete the Chevalier's quest. He attempts to translate the ancestral dream of a secure and splendid family holding into reality by buying a promising estate, centering on a lovely eighteenth-century house known as The Abbey. But if Robert takes up the Chevalier de Moylough's burden, he is as little able to carry it to its destination as his ancestor was. Robert is a remarkable figure, whose "quickness" and "passion" make others of the gentry seem "commonplace"

beside him (FS, p. 45); his ambitions for leadership and success, however, increasingly take the form of delusions of grandeur. His hold on The Abbey becomes as ephemeral as the Chevalier de Moylough's grasp on the ancient O'Rehill lands. When a hoped-for inheritance does not materialize, Robert is left in exactly the same condition as the Chevalier: dispossessed. All of The Abbey that remains for him is the memory of its grand promise, and his communion with this splendid past is as poignant and futile as the Chevalier's last walk through the serene, soon-to-be-destroyed woods of his lost estate.

A younger Colum, along with some of his predecessors of the "Celtic Twilight," might have found the image of a displaced Milesian like Robert O'Rehill hearkening to the past's fading harmonies quite affecting; certainly in Castle Conquer, Colum outlines with considerable sympathy Francis Gillick's attempts to identify himself with the heroic exploits of Angus O'Failey. By the time of The Flying Swans, however, Colum has outgrown such sympathies. He sabotages the credibility of Robert's venture in two ways. First, the model for Robert's behavior is deeply flawed. The Chevalier de Moylough introduces into the O'Rehill family a ruinous conflict between the sacred obligations of family and honor on the one hand and sexual adventurism on the other. Robert is not the only O'Rehill to recapitulate this theme. His French uncle lives openly with a mistress who, at his death, is able to claim the estate that Robert was counting on, precipitating Robert's financial collapse. Even mild, pious Virgil has experienced his version of ruinous love; his brief marriage to a strong-tempered, unfaithful wife has left him permanently in terror of women. Robert follows the Chevalier all

too closely into sexual folly. The Chevalier's sacrifice of honor and obligation to his loins is more cleanly balanced than Robert's involvement with his wild cousin, Margary Plunkett. Still, Robert's illicit passion undermines his relationship with his ingenuous, countryborn wife. When Robert leaves The Abbey with Margary at his side, the parallel with the Chevalier de Moylough is distinct.

Colum, then, undermines the family tradition to which Robert gives allegiance by incorporating into the heroic model a grave weakness. In this respect, the O'Rehill lineage differs from the pristine tradition of Castle Conquer's Angus O'Failey. The second way in which Colum undermines Robert's credibility is by calling into question the value of the family tradition which the Chevalier and Robert fail to preserve. He deepens the sense of an inadequacy at the family's core by the example of Robert's father. In contrast with Owen Paralon, the bearer of tradition in Castle Conquer, Tiernan O'Rehill is harsh, unreasonable, and overbearing. He seems to think it necessary to be so in order to carry out his intensely felt duty to the O'Rehill line. Colum puts him on top of a haycock, shouting rudely, pointlessly, to his workers; Tiernan even requies Robert's wife, Saba, to come out to the haycock when she wants his permission to stay at Moylough for the birth of her child. His refusal--on the grounds of protecting the O'Rehill tradition--condemns the value of that tradition. "Tiernan O'Rehill is a man who refused me something he should not have refused--never, never, never," Saba says later. "Moylough without any kindness in it--what good is its standing, to themselves or the world?" (FS, 73) Robert's Abbey has a good deal more graciousness than Tiernan's Moylough, but it offers

nothing more in the way of intrinsic merit.

Colum uses Robert's venture at The Abbey to challenge the romantic thesis that the future can be comprehended in the "backward look." In Castle Conquer, Francis Gillick's heady image of Angus O'Failey storming the castle walls, which inspires his imprudent actions, is gently ridiculed; eventually, Francis develops a greater respect for the reality of the present. Colum is less forgiving of Robert's extravagant attempt to recreate the manorial splendor of Ireland's swashbuckling eighteenth century. Beyond the ludicrousness of including a harper and a family historian among his hangers-on and dressing his gardener in "old-fashioned garb" for a garden party, there is something inherently distasteful in Robert's penchant for aristocratic privilege. Even in his political activities (he runs unsuccessfully for Parliament), Robert is thinking of his own aggrandizement rather than any such worthwhile agenda as Francis Gillick's Lalor-inspired agrarian reform. What most damns Robert's romantic quest for the lost past, however, is that it exacts its high price from others. When the venture at The Abbey fails, it is Saba and the children who must suffer poverty and degradation, while Robert slips away to America with Cousin Margary. In Castle Conquer, the repercussions of Francis's actions for others, Brighid Moynagh in particular, are shown as the sad and troubling but almost inevitable consequences of acting in good faith in a practically disordered world. Robert's faith, on the other hand, is not so good. He has let the disapproval of his French uncle and the appearance of Margary Plunkett alienate him from his wife and family. The measure of Robert's delusion is that he is willing to risk what is real and valuable--

his family--for a vaporous and valueless dream. In this context, Robert's persistence in expecting more from reality than reality customarily gives is simply irresponsible.

In delineating the decline in Robert's position, from Master of The Abbey to bankrupt wanderer (or "banished chieftain," in Saba's mind), Colum severely criticizes both the effectiveness and the moral validity of turning to the past for a model for the present. Colum's attitude towards this question has changed considerably in fifty years of writing fiction. The King of Ireland's Son is a complex reworking of traditional Irish tales in the service of Colum's concern for Ireland's political and cultural liberation. Colum's concern with and contribution to the emergence of a new national vitality from the embers of the Irish past in The King of Ireland's Son is entirely consistent with the spirit of the Irish Revival. In Castle Conquer, however, Colum suggests that the example of the past can be misunderstood or misused, although he in no way discounts its ultimate usefulness. Francis Gillick overromanticizes his ancestor's exploits yet in the end a descendant of Angus O'Failey, and a son of Francis, does successfully repeat Angus's charge against the walls of Castle Conquer. The failure of Robert's glorious family tradition as a model for his enterprise in The Flying Swans is in some ways a development of the unexpected disappointment in victory that Francis Gillick experiences. Robert O'Rehill is an anachronism, projecting back into the 1880s and 1890s post-revolutionary, post-Free-State Ireland's disappointment with the quarrelsome, sometimes petty Phoenix that arose from the conflagration of the 1910s and 20s.<sup>9</sup> What is most surprising in Colum's treatment of Robert and his affairs

is how thoroughly he now condemns the sensitivity to family and racial history that he once considered an essential and constructive element in the renaissance of national identity. Not only does Colum here revise his own earlier position, but he also implicitly revises the Irish Revival itself. Colum suggests that the romantically incendiary themes and postures of the Revival conditioned Ireland to a hopeless and sometimes violent pursuit of illusory goals, while inhibiting the development of a constructive realism.

Colum explicitly connects Robert's romantic attitude toward the past with heroism when Robert rejoins his family in the Dublin suburb of Cairnthal (Dun Laoghaire). Robert's four years in America have left him neither materially nor morally better off, and although he comes to an impoverished, sordid world reminiscent of Dubliners, he remains obsessed with his heroic ancestor. The Chevalier's kind of outmoded heroism, however, with its duels and gallantry, produces disastrous results when transplanted to the real world of prostitutes and pawn-shops. Frustrated by his failure to impress an eminent nationalist, a man who, to Robert's mind, exhibits "not the mere superiority of station, but the superiority of achievement" (FS, 192), Robert embarks on his own attempt to answer with action the query of Colum's heroic farce Balloon (1929): "Is a man born a hero, or does he become one through heroic actions?" He begins with a chivalric enquiry on behalf of a prostitute who reminds him of Margary Plunkett. But the hot-blooded green-grocer whom Robert approaches replies to Robert's imitation of the Chevalier's eighteenth-century gallantry with a barrage of cabbage and turnips in an anti-heroic rout reminiscent

of Francis Gillick's fall in the skirmish at Martin Jordan's farm. This embarrassment drives Robert yet more dangerously toward the embrace of romantic heroism. On a business trip to the capital, a "more heroic Robert O'Rehill" than the employee of the Gas Works purchases a pair of swords (FS, 212). His early-morning attack on the market-bound grocer leads to his arrest, which is followed by the absurdity and humiliation of a trial. No matter that Robert's actions, though deranged, are well-meaning and his liaison with the prostitute innocent; he has once again forfeited his family's welfare to the emanations of his own over-heated imagination--and quite consciously, too. His sentence to a month in prison ends his employment and thus his income, condemning his family not only to further privation but also to a previously unknown ignominy.

Colum makes Robert's attempt at heroic action even more clearly an evasion of reality and responsibility than his establishment of The Abbey. Anthony Duineen, a friend of the family and the local realist, angrily compares Robert to the drunken schoolmaster. "'His notions of grandeur--that's what he drinks instead of whiskey and porter. He's no better, no manlier, than Finnbarr Friel'" (FS, 185). Duineen connects Robert's romanticism with unmanliness again when he hears of Robert's sentence. "'Your father hasn't a drop of blood in him--not one drop of real man's blood in his body. . . . Going to gaol, leaving your mother in the state she's in'" (i.e. pregnant; FS, 228). Robert compounds his disgrace upon his release from prison. Rather than face Saba, he follows Ulick, who has been given the mournful task of carrying Saba's stillborn baby to the cemetery. There, he tells his



son that he intends to sail away to some foreign place. In order to excuse his departure, he simultaneously slanders Saba and withdraws paternity from his second son with the invention that Breasal, the child born after the dissolution of The Abbey, is not his child. His bid for freedom works: Ulick casts him away.

It would never do to see his father after this; it would never do for his mother to see him day after day. His father was betraying them. For what? For just this--for what he was not man enough to ask for! The liberty to go on a way that would be apart from them forever. And this had happened to them--to his mother and himself! It had happened. Let it be so! Let him have the liberty that he was giving all his manhood to get! Let him have it and be cursed to him! If Breasal was not his son, he was not their father! In the name of them, his mother and Breasal and himself, he would put him away.

FS, 233

Ulick is driven by the magnitude of Robert's slander to countenance his desertion, but is forced as well to agree with Duineen. Robert's ultimate evasion divests him not only of any heroic attributes that his son formerly ceded to him, but of his manhood as well.

The end of this debacle is a final disavowal of the value of the O'Rehill family tradition, for in his departure, as in his duel, Robert is still faithful to the model of the Chevalier de Moylough. Years later, Robert engages himself in conversation about a book, the Voyage autour du monde of La Perouse, that contains the last information about this ancestor. The Chevalier de Moylough, he explains, voyaged with La Perouse to Easter Island--"the end of the world," as Robert puts it.

It was the end of the world, the very end of the world. The Chevalier de Moylough had come to the end of the world, and there was no more about him. Not even about his

being paid off. There were crevices in the caverns that a man could fall through and drown in the depths of the sea. The mariners went into caverns after women. FS, 419

Robert's plan to ship to some far-off place upon leaving Ulick mimics the Chevalier's course. He slips from the world, at least from the world Ulick inhabits; and, as in the case of the Chevalier de Moylough, the pursuit of a woman (his sea voyage carries him back to Margary Plunkett) is partly responsible. This passage shows very much the tenor of Robert's continuing obsession with the ancestor he depends on for his own identity. The explanation that Robert invents for the Chevalier's disappearance from La Perouse's account--a fall through a crevice--is also a metaphor for the loss of his own soul. Unlike the Chevalier de Moylough, Robert eventually returns from his travels. But since The Flying Swans stops before Robert's sons find him, the question of Robert's regeneration is left open. Robert's evasiveness, then, continues to the end of the book.

"But we all know," Virgil tells Ulick, just before he sells Robert's favorite icon, "that your father slips through everything like a fish slipping through stones in a stream" (FS, 414). Or, as Ulick restates it, "his father went away from what was real like a fish slipping from the clear of the stream" (FS, 449). In The Flying Swans, Colum demands of heroism a manly realism that includes a strong sense of responsibility for others. Robert's evasion of reality and responsibility in the name of heroism itself results in the failure of his heroic quest. Evasiveness, excessive romanticism, a tenuous sense of identity and a deficient heroic purpose are all elements of Robert's

inadequacy which Ulick must deal with. The story of Ulick's youth is the record of how he picks his way through this dangerous moral inheritance, how he is nearly subverted, both by fancifulness and by disappointment, and how he finds his own worth through the discovery of the worthlessness of his father's example. Ulick's coming-of-age encompasses a variety of themes and dichotomies. Not only must he explore sexuality and find a vocation, as is usual in a Bildungsroman, but he must also find a path between utter solitude and sociability, disillusionment and romanticism, responsibility and evasion.

Colum's impressionistic attempt to capture the texture of young Ulick's mental life, especially in the opening pages, owes much to Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Ulick is clearly an imaginative child, especially sensitive to his surroundings, which are vivid and suggestive to him, whether they are the gardens of The Abbey or the streets of Dooard on market day. The sudden great change in his life--loss of father, home and privilege--directs Ulick's imagination into two very different channels. First, there is fantasy. As he waits impatiently for his father's return from exotic places, Ulick builds up a secret stock of dreams, centering on the much-anticipated event. In Ulick's "great dream about his father's return," Robert will redeem the years of privation and humbleness with privilege and comfort.

Like bubbles his future came before Ulick. He would wear a jacket with a pocket at the top, out of which he would draw a watch. He would be so learned that, seated on a bench with them, the band playing (not this one, but a band with gold facings down their uniforms and more shining instruments), he would

discuss with his father and Barry Fitzadlem Crowley the tunes that were being played. And going to what was called a Select School, he would be one of those who wore a cap with the school's name in ornamental letters on it. FS, 167

The "Select School," the school's ornament, his own monogram, the remarkable learning, the distinctive watch: like Robert, Ulick yearns for distinction.<sup>10</sup> Ulick expects that a better day, a brighter band and a more shining reality will arrive with Robert, who if unable to restore the lost Eden of The Abbey, can at least recapture some of the exclusiveness of their life there. Such unrealistic expectations, in one way, are hardly surprising in a child of ten, a natural response to the sudden drop in his family's station and to his father's absence. Yet they suggest as well that Ulick is in some danger of assuming the romantic temperament that played such a major role in his father's downfall.

Secondly, there is despair--stemming both from the nature of the new life and the disappointment of Ulick's dreams. If the family's troubles encourage Ulick's dreaminess, they also expose him to the complexities of reality. Hardship, disappointment and degradation, intensified after Robert's second departure, along with the stigma and loss of self-esteem administered by Robert's flat abandonment of the family, force Ulick to trade fancy for a realism which, though in the end a necessary corrective to fanciful romanticism, at first submerges Ulick in depression. Ulick's increasing despair echoes the unhappiness of Colum's own youth, of which Colum writes feelingly in "Padraic Colum Remembers."

But the melancholy that oppressed me was only partly due to the companionlessness of my situation and the alienness of the place. It came, as melancholy in all cases comes from, hopelessness. That hopelessness was due to penury.<sup>11</sup>

Melancholy, hopelessness and penury are all very much a part of Ulick's youth. His last set of illusory hopes center on Baron Nugent, the eminent but pompous nationalist (Charles Gavan Duffy?) to whom his father paid awkward court, and his niece, Veronica Grace. Ulick secretly imagines attracting the sponsorship of Baron Nugent and of marrying Veronica. When an unexpected encounter with them reveals to him not only the patronizing indifference of the Baron and the insubstantiality of his bond with Veronica, but also the folly of such unlikely dreams, Ulick is driven for a time into the opposite folly of disillusionment. The "sense of unsureness, of isolation" (FS, 242) that accompanies this injury leads him to abandon temporarily all of his hopes, whether fanciful or realistic. This little episode in Ulick's youth encapsules the duality of dreams and disillusionment that Ulick struggles with throughout the book. It also prefigures the ultimate resolution. For the loss of Ulick's illusions about the Nugents allows Ulick to see himself. His self-knowledge as he drives a baker's van on the open road is in distinct contrast to Robert.

He held the reins; he controlled the quick-pacing horse.  
He knew himself to be for the space of the empty road a  
master: himself, no other, not any one dreamed about.  
FS, 242

Although positioned in the middle of the novel, this image, so different from the frequently repeated image of Ulick's dream-plagued father riding

grandly through the gates of The Abbey, represents a state of self-knowledge, revelry in the real world, and firm control of one's own career that Ulick fully achieves only at the end of the novel.

For Ulick, the critical question in the interplay of hope and despair, romanticism and disillusionment, is the nature of ambition. Ulick's heroic purpose will center on art. From his earliest years the elements of his future calling, to make monuments to the common people of the countryside, excite his imagination. Walls and stonework fascinate him; representative country scenes--a hen on a round stone, a leave-taking at a rural cottage, bright in the aftermath of a downpour--impress him so intensely that he fits to them words from the Mass: in saecula saeculorum (world without end). The problem for Ulick, again reminiscent of Joyce's Portrait, is to define his commitment to art. For Ulick, this means, first, distinguishing his artistic ambitions from the fine, deluded, ultimately false aspirations of Robert, who is always throwing his energies into some rickety scheme that is supposed to catapult him into prominence but inevitably collapses around him instead; and secondly, protecting them from the spiritlessness with which he responds to his painful domestic tragedies. Ulick makes many false moves in his attempt to "make something of himself," but Colum shows him gradually refining his idea of his own talents (by leaving leadership of men to others, for instance), developing a capacity for independent action, and committing himself to the arduous process of learning the techniques of working with stone in a long apprenticeship to a stonemason.

"Don't be daunted," a spirited young widow, the mother of two of Ulick's friends, advises Ulick as he recovers from a lonely illness.

Although Ulick seems to develop his own resources for facing his various difficulties and challenges with courage and resolve, behind his convictions lurks the crucial image of his father. By mentally divorcing the man who slandered Saba, disowned Breasal and deserted them all, from the man whose prospective arrival encouraged his son's bright dreams, Ulick preserves his boyish misapprehension of Robert.

The Robert O'Rehill who had separated himself from them in the cemetery he had shrunk from seeing or even from hearing about. But behind that Robert O'Rehill there had always been another, the Robert O'Rehill of The Abbey, of the first days in Cairnthal, handsome and knowledgeable. It was this figure his son had dwelt on in the days of his and his mother's descent in Breasal O'Breasal's and the days of their struggles in Cairnthal. When his Uncle Marcus, his mother, or even Michaelleen or Duineen intimated another degree of living for him, it was his father's appearance that always came before him. He, Ulick O'Rehill, would be all that Robert O'Rehill had it in him to be and that famously. FS, 499-500

Ulick, in other words, has mistakenly consecrated his life's enterprise with devotions to that false icon, his father's erstwhile magnificence. As a result, he unwittingly wanders into his father's errors, as Zack Bowen points out in his useful discussion of The Flying Swans.<sup>12</sup> Yet the dependence for identity on a distorted image of a predecessor is itself a hereditary failing. Just as Robert sought a quasi-mystical source of being in the career of the Chevalier de Moylough, so Ulick looks to a romanticized version of Robert to underwrite his own venture. In fact, Ulick invests so much of his identity in Robert that he comes close to bankrupting himself.

The problem of identity that is to some extent common to Robert and Ulick is an extension of the treatment of identity and tradition in

Castle Conquer. Robert is a rootless person whose obsession with family tradition is a desperate attempt to define himself. His precarious hold on his own identity is demonstrated by his heated, manic ruminations in a Cairnthal pawnshop.

The two men handing the bundles across had rows of pins down the front of their coats; they unpinned a docket and called a name and someone answered it. How curious were names! Robert O'Rehill. Margary Plunkett. The Chevalier de Moylough. Without the names they had, what would they be? The vague, unformulated idea of identity began to oppress him. Might they not, as they hurried away with their bundles, find out that they had not brought their real selves out of the pawn office? Error could be made by the unseen man who flung down the bundles, by the careless pair behind the counter. A name was called out again and again. No one answered it. It was as if a person had become a vanishing wraith. The bundle that should have been claimed by the nonentity was flung back under the chute. Robert O'Rehill had the frightful sense that some identity had fallen into the void. FS, 208

In his near-hallucination, Robert displays a temperament opposite to his uncle Virgil's "what's-in-a-name" stance, a terror of a namelessness and lack of recognition that mean, at least to him, loss of selfhood. Robert mistakenly sees identity as an all-too-easily-detached attribute, a commodity rather than an essential self-knowledge. He is himself a bit like the people he imagines rushing away with the wrong identity; he keeps trading in his dreams for ones that he hopes will suit him better, landowner for parliamentarian, adventurer for statesman. The identity that Robert imagines "fallen into the void" suggests the Chevalier de Moylough's fall into the sea and anticipates Robert's own dizzying abandonment of the world he knows. Robert's inability to determine his own nature is the source of all of his other weaknesses,



including his evasiveness, and makes his rummaging among family history for old bones to make into relics a parody of the discovery of oneself in one's traditions (familial, racial, historical) of thoughtful young men like Francis Gillick.

In making Robert O'Rehill derive so much misery from his attempt to locate his identity in the past, Colum partially reneges on his commitment to the connection between history and identity in Castle Conquer. Virgil's castigation of genealogy as mere "worldliness" is a welcome corrective to Robert's point of view. Insofar as Ulick seeks his identity in a limited sort of genealogy (one which takes him no further into the past than his own father's young manhood), he heads towards his own version of Robert's fate. The crisis comes when Robert returns to Ireland a third time. Ulick finds him making harnesses at his hillside retreat, as obsessed now with Manicheanism and a perversely-interpreted Saint Augustine as he formerly was with the Chevalier de Moylough. Ulick is baffled and appalled by Robert's impenetrable cultism, but nevertheless gets Robert to admit that he lied about Breasal and to agree to say so publicly. But Robert runs away again, this time quite literally, destroying as he does so the foundation of the life that Ulick has built.

And then he found that there was nothing for him to succeed to. Nothing. He had come face to face with a man whose life had no substance and whose thought had been formed by a black, denying religion. And so the life he, Ulick O'Rehill, had lived had to be repudiated. He had to go away from it altogether.

FS, 500

His paragon destroyed, Ulick sinks into bitterness and cynicism. In this spell of lassitude, he feels the temptation of unproductive solitude. The symbol of his abandonment of his heroic destiny is once again in names. Robert O'Rehill chose for his first-born son the given-name of his model, the Chevalier de Moylough. The name also has a deeper heroic significance, for as Colum notes in Castle Conquer, it derives from "Ulysses." It also links The Flying Swans' hero with Francis Gillick, whose surname is a degeneration of "MacUlick," a name which is restored to use by Francis's son, Failey (CC, 44).<sup>13</sup> Thoroughly disillusioned by his father's behavior, Ulick abandons his heroic name, "Ulick O'Rehill," with its implicit reminder of Robert's delusions and of Robert's model. Ulick begins instead to use the common variant of his name, "Francie Rehill." (In his despair, Ulick encounters two tutelary examples, first, the intense, committed, self-motivated young men who throng earnestly around the corpse of Parnell, and, secondly, the drunken schoolmaster whose tears at Parnell's death are really "for his own slackness." For the moment, Ulick ignores them both.) Paradoxically, in his intended repudiation of his father, Ulick embraces Robert's pattern all the more fervently. Devastated by what he learns about Robert, but also disillusioned by the failure of a romance and by a quarrel that has ended his apprenticeship, Ulick stubbornly prepares to leave Ireland. Like Robert and the Chevalier de Moylough before him, Ulick arranges to go to sea.

It is a mix-up in his arrangements reminiscent of the intervention of Diachbha in The King of Ireland's Son that prevents Ulick from slipping prematurely into a solitude that, according to his prophetic cousin,

would divide him from himself. When Providence provides Ulick with time to reconsider his resolution, he discovers that the private traditions transmitted to him by various fosterers give him an advantage that Robert did not have in facing the issues before him. Anthony Duineen, for instance, who has lent Ulick a realistic perspective as well as books of literature, art, and travel, initiates Ulick into the tradition of scholarship and intellect among the Irish peasant and middle classes that we have also observed in Castle Conquer. Ulick's Uncle Marcus is also important. He takes Ulick tramping through the countryside; later he comes to Cairnthal to oversee the arrangement of Ulick's indentures. Colum creates a Legend of Good Uncles to account for Marcus, and while explaining it introduces the notion of Ulick's heroic destiny.

And what are the offices, what is the special virtue of a Good Uncle? The virtue is in discerning the heroic destiny of a youth; the offices are in making him accustomed to the idea of that destiny. There should be a widely diffused Legend of Good Uncles, for in the lonely childhood that is the portion of the hero, who is so fitted to give counsel and faith as an uncle? And even if Ulick O'Rehill had not an heroic destiny (until it was accomplished, who could know? And that would be beyond the time of any uncle), Marcus was fitted to be a Good Uncle to him. FS, 261

The "lonely childhood" of the hero, the phrase "heroic destiny," and the category of Good Uncles itself identify Ulick O'Rehill as a hero, in spite of the parenthetical disclaimer.

Marcus, then, is a fosterer in the tradition of heroic tales. But Ulick's primary fosterer, whose relationship with Ulick is elucidated in a section duly entitled "Fosterage," is his grandfather, Breasal O'Breasal. Breasal O'Breasal takes Ulick to his bosom when he is extremely

lonely and vulnerable, having just left The Abbey, and engenders in the sensitive boy a passionate and formative interest in the sights, sounds, occupations and entertainments that make up the rural subculture. Breasal is a direct descendant of Castle Conquer's Owen Paralon, who educated Brighid Moynagh in the ways of rural Ireland, and he is close kin to Colum's own belated fosterer, rendered as the Owen Paralon of the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits. Ulick's experience on the land gives him weight, a substantiality that Robert fervently seeks but never finds. Robert's experience in the country, first as Master, then as hermit, is so colored by his arrogance that he learns nothing from it. Ulick, conversely, is spared the full tyranny of genealogy that subjugates Robert. Ulick is named heroically, but his heroic destiny, through sculpture, is shaped very little by O'Rehill family history, which occupies no place in his imagination; rather, it has an important source in the "private" tradition of Breasal O'Breasal. "Because he had known Breasal O'Breasal," Ulick realizes at the novel's end, "this countryside had people for him, people who would be remembered because he would shape them" (FS, 537). Ultimately, the traditions that have been transmitted by these three mentors are the source both of Ulick's identity and of his heroic potential.

The pre-eminence of sculpture as an art of national, possibly heroic importance is suggested in an interesting passage that occurs during Robert and Ulick's visit to Baron Nugent. The Baron discourses to Robert about the famous statue known as The Dying Gaul, which Robert calls The Dying Gladiator and the Baron The Dying Gael. Baron Nugent observes a lesson in the ancient Celts' destruction of a Greek temple

inscribed "Know Thyself."

"One might fancy a curse then and there fell on the race that destroyed that temple. The Celts have never known themselves. . . . And they have no ability in that great art which is shown in this triumph over the Celts--the art of sculpture. Only the people who know themselves, and consequently have been able to order their social and political lives, can have the great art of sculpture. . . . [F]or me, sculpture means the human figure treated in a worthy and dignified way. Perhaps some day when we have gained our political independence we will have such sculpture--The Living Gael instead of The Dying Gael." FS, 194

The nexus of national identity, social order and great art that the Baron puts forward is represented in miniature in Ulick's life. The success of his struggle for personal identity and the reorganization of his life that he then effects make him fit to pursue art. Ulick is inspired by the Baron's Living Gael, and Colum makes it clear that Ulick, as Colum's self-knowing, post-political version of the Irish peasant-hero, will create it. (Robert, on the other hand, congratulates himself on understanding the Baron's discourse, and then insists that the famous statue will always be The Dying Gladiator to him.) Indeed, at the end of the book, Ulick is beginning to conceive of statues like it, significant poses enlivened by his study of the country people. One is inspired by a story of a smith who "could tame a restive stallion by a whisper":

His mind had dwelt on the human figure bending to whisper--the horse would not be there, only the Whisperer. He had made drawings of the figure. But he had confused and devitalized what conception he had had by mixing it with something alien: he had wanted the Whisperer to stand for one of the patriots mourned by Duineen's confraternity. There

and then the wild, elemental design for the horse tamer got wrecked on the dignified public statue figure. Now he saw in forges men who brought back his first vision of the Whisperer. FS, 536

Since his struggle with his father and his startling apprehension of his own independent identity, Ulick's vision of this statue has been purged of what would make it overworked and overly grandiose. The "wild, elemental design" that he returns to sounds like a blueprint for a Living Gael, which like the Greek statue would capture the unadorned passion of the people. But the sculpture that Baron Nugent speaks of is not only art; it is great art. It will consummate the development of the Celtic nation and give it a great image of itself. In this contribution to the nation from an individual whose personal development coincides with the nation's, Ulick will achieve his heroism.

Colum initiates Ulick into manhood and heroism in a cathartic combat that also seals him in responsibility to his younger brother Breasal. As Bowen writes at the end of his discussion of the parallels between Ulick and his father,

The difference in the two generations lies in the father's complete refusal to acknowledge his responsibility for the paternity of his second son, while Ulick attains manhood by accepting the responsibility for his brother.<sup>14</sup>

A close, protecting relationship between Ulick and Breasal has been encouraged by Saba from Breasal's birth, but Ulick only gradually extends the fosterage that Breasal O'Breasal offered him to his namesake, Breasal O'Rehill. When he misses his chance to go to sea, Ulick turns his thoughts, energies and resolve toward Breasal. Breasal, having

learned of his father's accusation of illegitimacy, and being "not quite lauchy" (i.e., "'a bit touched'"), has gone off on a peddling expedition with Saba's onetime maid, Agnes. A victim of Agnes's poor judgment, Breasal is forced to participate in the horrendous ritual of pig-killing. He runs away when wrongly accused of theft, becomes the captive of a menacing tinker, Lem Grabbitt, and finally escapes to become a ragged vagabond. Ulick's quasi-heroic quest through the countryside in search of Breasal leads him to an early-morning encounter with Lem Grabbitt.

The ensuing fight is a significantly transformed version of Robert's farcical duel with the green-grocer, Jasper Delaney, which also took place in the first hours of the morning. But where Robert chose elegant eighteenth-century swords as his weapons, Ulick faces Lem Grabbitt with his bare fists--and a just grievance. Zack Bowen says that Lem Grabbitt is the "only wholly evil character in the book,"<sup>15</sup> but Jasper Delaney, with his angry red handkerchief and angry temperament, with meanly-supported by-children throughout the district, is his equivalent. When Ulick defeats Grabbitt, he symbolically overthrows Delaney as well. Indeed, since he hears of Delaney's death within the hour, it seems that Ulick has in effect killed the giant by destroying the egg that contains his life. Both Grabbitt and Delaney are physical and moral abusers of children: Grabbitt has forced his companion to smother her newborn baby, while Delaney is a notorious begetter and abandoner of children. Both are grotesque stand-ins for Robert O'Rehill.<sup>16</sup> When Ulick drives Grabbitt to the ground, he completes Robert's duel for him, but also strikes symbolically at Robert himself. In the blow that Ulick thus gives to Robert, he avenges

the unjust suffering his father has caused himself, his mother, and his brother. The manhood which Ulick attains through this battle, a consecration of his commitment to Breasal, is the manhood that Robert cast off when he slandered Breasal and deserted his family.

Ulick's heroism, affirmed in the battle with Lem Grabbitt, is a heroism that has jettisoned many of the most prominent features of the heroic tradition. Colum was already suspicious in Castle Conquer of the effect on rationality of such a bedazzling spectacle as the hero of one's cause and one's nation storming the lost citadel. But the contact with the land and the Irish people who inhabit it that gave Francis Gillick a purpose and an identity, the invocation and transformation of the comic heroic tradition that made him viable as a heroic character in a modern milieu--these checks and corrections are withheld from Robert O'Rehill. As a consequence, Robert's failure is more complete and more reprehensible; with his fall, the swash-buckling ideal of heroism that the Chevalier de Moylough represents for him topples as well. Though in Castle Conquer, Francis Gillick fails to prevent Martin Jordan's eviction, his effort is in part redeemed by the indirect effects of his actions (successful agitation by an aroused public) and by the successes of his descendants (who help to capture Castle Conquer for the Irish rebels). In contrast, Robert O'Rehill's failure is irredeemably dismal, because it ruins his considerable potential, but most of all because it condemns his family to suffer in his place. When Ulick, with great difficulty and after much hardship, at last wins through to the clear space of maturity, he defines himself, unlike Francis's children and grandchildren, against the



tradition of his father. Where Robert chooses dreams, Ulick chooses reality; where Robert styles himself Duine Uasail, "one of the nobility," Ulick, like Colum himself, according to the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits, throws his lot in with the humbler country people.

Ulick discards Robert's crippling obsession with ancestors, taking his identity instead from the tradition of fosterage, at once more ancient, more private, and more contemporary (because the connection with the past is made through a living person) than the out-dated chivalry and useless pride in family of Robert's heroic ideal. The fosterage of Breasal O'Breasal, the private tradition of local lore and rural pursuits that he communicates to Ulick, helps to resurrect heroism from the moribund values of the world's Robert O'Rehills. In other words, the heroic conglomerate that Colum tried to hold together in The King of Ireland's Son and Castle Conquer disintegrates, due to internal pressures, in The Flying Swans. The private traditions developed in Castle Conquer, the homely traditions of the peasantry, supplant history, race, family and romance as the sources of heroic consciousness; the fortitude, integrity, wisdom, and responsibility of Breasal O'Breasal and Owen Paralon replace the grandeur, daring, and flair of the Chevalier de Moylough or Angus O'Failey as the elements of heroic value. Indeed, we can say that The Flying Swans destroys the careful balance of the heroic paradigm of The King of Ireland's Son: now the King's Son must be banished to the hinterlands, and only Gilly of the Goatskin is fit to receive the crown of the true hero.

In The Flying Swans, Colum proclaims the heroic value of the peasantry more loudly than in Castle Conquer, or anywhere else in his

work. In Castle Conquer, he attempts to justify the notion of the heroism of the peasantry, carefully devising for his hero a Milesian pedigree and family greatness. The stars that mark Gilly of the Goatskin as a king's son in The King of Ireland's Son have the same implications. Ulick is a Milesian, as are Francis Gillick and Brighid Moynaugh, but the fact is more important for Robert's failure than for Ulick's success. There is a curious equivalent in The Flying Swans of the stars on Gilly of the Goatskin's breast. Near the end of the book, the irrepressible journalist, Barry Fitzadlem Crowley, tells Ulick about "my miracle."

"I invented a miracle. The stigmata on the shoulder of a widow's son who works--the widow, I mean--in Maryboro. There isn't a paper in Leinster, Ulster, Connacht, or Munster that didn't have a leading article on it; from the Enniskillen Impartial Reporter to the Skibbereen Eagle, from the Donegal Vindicator to the Clare Champion." FS, 530

Barry has made the reports of stigmata, it seems, general all over Ireland. The passage, however, is as ambiguous as that in The King of Ireland's Son that tells of the adventures of the King of Cats. It comes just after Ulick's battle with Lem Grabbitt, adding the labels "vindicator" and "champion" to a string of anti- and quasi-heroic references which, although ironic, ascertain the heroic significance of the fight. Certainly, Barry's miracle, with its poor widow and her son, resembles the opening of a large class of Irish tales, including Strong John. Is Colum creating a sly paradigm for Ulick and disguising it in Barry's miracle, or is he satirizing the very idea of such magical, concocted stories having relevance to real life? "'Do you mean there isn't a miracle at all?'" asks Ulick. There is a

miracle--Ulick's heroism--but it is a miracle in the sense of an outstanding accomplishment rather than a manifestation of divine intervention. It is the note of personal identity and responsibility, even for heroism, that Ulick sounds as he ruminates over his prospects.

All these helpers! But something within one, too!  
 Something that could be summoned up when the challenge came. Yes, after the help and all, what counted most was to be one's own man. FS, 538

Colum thus ends The Flying Swans with the notion of an individual's power and responsibility, regardless of blood or background, to shape himself.

It is the ancient tradition of hospitality and civility of Castle Conquer's Paralons, the private traditions fostered by Michael Philabeen and Owen Paralon in Castle Conquer, that are most important in The Flying Swans. Here as well, Colum puts greater emphasis on the "sorrow that has worth"--the values that the hard life of the peasantry can teach. Yet this does not mean that heroism is reduced to the good, solid, possibly quaintly imaginative homeliness of the peasantry. What makes Colum's new heroism in The Flying Swans an especially convincing development of the heroism in Castle Conquer is the notion of the heroism of the artist. Ulick's artistry is to some degree an extension of Francis Gillick's interest in language and literature, history and political economy. Thomas MacDonagh's notion of the "poet-captain" which impressed Colum so much would seem to be a source. But with Ulick O'Rehill, Colum does not merely add artistry to soldiership. He substitutes the aesthetic passion of the creative artist for the physical passion of the culture or military hero or rebel, and he sees

art as essential to the completion of national identity. So Ulick, in Joyce's phrase, will have a part in the heroic endeavor of forging the conscience of his race.

It is interesting how near to his own doorstep Colum's long journey in search of a new heroism returns him. Colum sets out, inspired by what the countryside and its inhabitants have meant in his own life (according to the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits) to sing of the heroism of the peasantry. The heroism of the peasantry brings Colum to Owen Paralon, a commanding presence both in Castle Conquer and in the "Fore-Piece." Ulick's heroism, on the other hand, is the heroism of the recorder of the peasantry--not so much one who rises out of it with the stars of an ancient royalty on his breast, but one who consciously embraces the country people and their culture. Ulick's youth, I have shown, is a transformation of Colum's, most importantly, as the "Fore-Piece" and the memoir "Padraic Colum Remembers" suggest, in his return from solitude to engagement in the world of men. The parallels between Ulick's artistic purpose and Colum's, on the other hand, hardly need demonstrating. The common people whom Ulick wants to capture in stone are the same people who inhabit Colum's dramatic lyrics and songs. There is even a string of masonry and sculpture imagery in Colum's work, as if from his early days he anticipated rendering himself fictionally as a sculptor.<sup>17</sup> In The Flying Swans, heroism becomes for Colum not only a vital model for dedicated action in the modern world; it is as well Colum's attempt to find a structure to account for the broad outlines and varied details of his own experience as an artist and a man. This, perhaps, is why (as the next chapter will

show) the structures of heroism as found in the folktale are so much more important in The Flying Swans than in Castle Conquer--in spite of The Flying Swans' social realism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Flying Swans (New York: Crown, 1957), p. 413. Further citations will be made in the text, following the letters FS. Parts of The Flying Swans appeared earlier in magazines. See "The Herd's House," Dial 81 (December, 1926), pp. 471-482; "Journey," Dial 86 (June, 1929), pp. 451-462; and "The Opening of The Flying Swans: A Story," Dublin Magazine 30 (October to December, 1954), 4, pp. 40-49. In the first two of these, the hero is called Felim, rather than Ulick. "Journey" contains an episode of tale-telling, but here "The Henwife's Son" and a story about a king and enchanter are only mentioned, not retold, as they are in The Flying Swans.

<sup>2</sup> Colum's first years as the son of the Master of the Longford Workhouse are substantially transformed, the Workhouse becoming Robert O'Rehill's magnificent Abbey. Ulick's move at age six to the rural cottage of his maternal grandparents echoes more strongly a formative event in Colum's early life, although here too there are changes: Colum, unlike Ulick, never knew his own maternal grandfather. The prolonged, semi-disgraceful absence of the father, the move after three years to Cairnthal, and the necessity for Ulick as the oldest child to protect and support his sibling, all follow the pattern of Colum's own youth, and Ulick's mother, father and brother are in part portraits of Colum's own family. Ann Adelaide Murphy identifies many of the autobiographical elements in The Flying Swans. The connections between Colum's boyhood and Ulick's made in "Padraic Colum: A Critical Study of His Poems and Plays," pp. 23-47, have since been presented in a conference paper, "Autobiographical Elements in The Flying Swans." The identity of Cairnthal has been noted by Murphy as well as by several reviewers. In spite of his many interviews with Colum about his life and art, which might have provided further illumination, Zack Bowen does not comment on the autobiographical aspect of The Flying Swans.

<sup>3</sup> Colum's several published memoirs of the fifties and sixties are rife with examples. In "Another World from Mine," Colum recalls a Protestant girl named Flora; details like her riding a hobbyhorse at a fair and the sudden disappointment of her departure confirm her as the model for The Flying Swans' Veronica Grace. See The New Yorker 46 (October 10, 1970), pp. 46, 47, and 49. The remoteness of Colum's own father; a strange scene of lighting railway lamps; Susan Collumb's disdain for Daniel O'Connell's welcome for the Prince of Wales; Colum's boyhood fascination with Thomas Moore's Lalla Rookh; his aspiration to lead the other boys; the "luminous trail" of fireworks, seen in the distance by one who is excluded: these impressions from Colum's early life, recorded in "Padraic Colum Remembers," all find their way into The Flying Swans. See the Irish Times, September 30 to October 4, 1969, pages 12, 12, 13, 10 and 10, respectively. Also of interest are "The Tradition That Existed in My Grandmother's House" and "Vagrant Voices," already cited.

4 Horace Reynolds, "Two Boys in County Dublin," New York Times Book Review (June 16, 1957), p. 5. Three reviews that are somewhat more thoughtful and appreciative are William York Tindall, "An Irish Youth's Questing," New York Herald Tribune Book Review 33 (June 16, 1957) 45, p. 4; Vivian Mercier, "Sinewy Style of the Irish Literary Revival," The Commonweal 66 (July 19, 1957), 404-405; and Denis Johnston, "Gaelic Tradition," Saturday Review 40 (July 13, 1957), 15-16. While Johnston and Mercier share Reynolds' admiration for Colum's language, Mercier and Tindall applaud what Reynolds, through lack of understanding, denigrates: the use of folklore in the book. (Reynolds, yearning for the Colum of such poems as "Cradle Song," seems not to accept Colum's sojourn in the house of fiction.) While Johnston is the most enthusiastic of the reviewers, it is Mercier who likens Colum to an Oisín "not yet fallen from his horse . . . who still miraculously retains his youth and strength." "Sinewy Style," p. 405.

5 "Fore-Piece," The Poet's Circuits, p. 1.

6 The Poet's Circuits, p. 13.

7 "Gaelic Tradition," p. 15.

8 The name "O'Rehill" may be an invention of Colum's, chosen for its similarity to "O'Reilly." O'Rehill is not listed in Edward MacLysaght's Irish Families: Their Names, Arms, and Origins (Dublin: H. Figgis, 1957); nor does MacLysaght include it as a variant of O'Reilly in his discussion of that name, pp. 255-256.

9 According to one account of the Irish drama of the 1970s, every modern Irish play is filled with "'talk about how everyone is victimized by some impossible dream he cannot fulfill.'" Richard Fallis (paraphrasing an unnamed friend), The Irish Renaissance (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. 180.

10 Colum frequently satirizes the secret desire to be one of the elect that so curiously blends a quiet sensitivity to public transactions (culture, politics) with a closely-guarded arrogance--a popular phenomenon in Revival Dublin. The best example is in the short story Three Men, in which a pathetic little coterie, "The Eblana Literary Society," listens raptly to a paper inviting them to become part of "the Illuminati" who will lead Ireland into an idyllic future. Ironically, the reading is repeatedly interrupted by such distasteful emanations of the real world as rebellious drunks and quarrelsome blind men, until the Society ousts them by force and returns to the serenity of the reading. Three Men (London: Elkin, Matthews and Marrot, 1930).

11 The Irish Times (Tuesday, September 30, 1969), p. 12. This memoir is otherwise characterized by a curiously dry, disjointed kind of impressionism.

12 Bowen draws convincing parallels between Ulick's sexual and romantic love affairs and Robert's involvement with Margary Plunkett and a woman his father wants him to marry. In addition, he notes how Ulick, trying to "assert his manhood and identity" in a paper-chase, "can only emulate his father's mistakes by leading the party onto other people's property, being caught trespassing and ignominiously falling into a quarry, breaking his leg." Padraic Colum, p. 107.

13 Both Francis Gillick and Robert O'Rehill, then, bestow names on their offspring that recall an illustrious forebear (Angus O'Failey, the Chevalier de Moylough) and which incorporate the Irish version of Ulysses. The name Ulick suggests as well a relationship between Colum's work and Joyce's, in addition to the similarities between Ulick O'Rehill and the Stephen Dedalus of Portrait and Stephen Hero that many critics (Zack Bowen, William York Tindall) have observed. Ulysses records the urban odyssey of one rather extraordinary common man, Leopold Bloom, and The Flying Swans transfers the relationship between hero and commoner to the countryside. It is important to note in this regard the publishing date of The Flying Swans (one day after Bloomsday), but also that it was dedicated "To the Memory of/James Joyce and James Stephens / Friends of Each Other / And Friends of Mine." (Horace Reynolds, on the other hand, complains that in The Flying Swans, Colum returns to the Irish novel as it existed before Joyce or George Moore. "Two Boys in County Dublin," p. 5.)

14 Padraic Colum, p. 107.

15 Padraic Colum, p. 108.

16 Zack Bown notes Grabbitt's relationship to Robert, observing that "he holds Breasal captive just as Robert does with his denial that he is Breasal's father." Padraic Colum, p. 108.

17 For example, Brighid Moynaugh's testimony in court stands like "a wall of defense for Francis Gillick" (CC, p. 329), whereas the fact of Robert's arrest is "as real as the wall of a fortress" (FS, p. 223). In the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits (p. 5), Owen Paralon's face is likened to a sculpture. Colum's children's book, The Children of Odin (1920), opens with the building of the walls of Valhalla, and both The King of Ireland's Son and The Flying Swans allude to the Gobaun Saor, the master-builder of the gods.



VII. The Flying Swans and Folk Narrative:  
Garbled Folktales and Irish Archetypes

The Flying Swans is a realistic novel, full of naturalistic detail and complex psychologies, which nonetheless resonates with a wide range of non-realistic traditional materials, both written and oral. Colum gives his reader fair warning that his Bildungsroman will be complicated with many-sided references to Irish lore; the initial paragraph establishes his claim for kinship between his own original, involved narrative of the youth of Ulick O'Rehill and traditional narrative.

Time, place and person, our ancient storytellers rule, have to be indicated in the opening of a narrative. The time is as far back as any of us who have survived two generations can remember. The place is Dooard, a town like a hundred other market towns in Ireland. The person is Ulick O'Rehill, six years of age, a Milesian and the son of a Milesian, as his genealogically minded paternal relatives would say. The boy was with his mother. FS, 1

This paragraph functions as a verbal funnel, beginning in generality but quickly narrowing into concrete detail, from "time, place and person," to a specific town representative of a type, to Ulick O'Rehill--this boy, these relatives, this companion. Colum goes on in his next paragraph to further particular description (pigs being driven through the streets, two old men examining a bright new cart, signs with contrasting implications in the wool-buyer's and egg-buyer's shop windows), filtered through the consciousness of his young protagonist. Yet before Colum delivers the reader into this slice of life, he invokes "ancient storytellers," and self-consciously fulfills the rules of their narratives.

The traditional stories of Ireland's storytellers have indeed enormous thematic and formal import in The Flying Swans, supplying Colum with, first, archetypes of Irish life, and, secondly, patterns of Irish narrative, of which The Flying Swans, in spite of its great realism, is the latest variant.

Thematically, the folktale acts as a kind of moral touchstone, measuring the realistic vision and psychological fortitude of key characters; Ulick's developing attitudes toward folk stories are important indicators of his progress toward maturity and heroism. But The Flying Swans shows Colum struggling as well to accommodate the forms of folk narrative to the patterns of real life. The obstacles to assimilating folktale forms to real experience, however, are almost prohibitively great in The Flying Swans. The novel's opening sentence, in which Colum flatly cites the authority of the ancient storytellers and avoids expressing an enthusiasm for or commitment to traditional narrative forms, registers a new caution, a new reserve, about this enterprise. It is no longer possible, after all, to bend life to fit folktale patterns. To do so, however gently, would be to slip into the old romantic, sentimental attitude towards Irish life that Colum takes such pains to purge from The Flying Swans. Rather, when the folktale meets reality in this novel, it is the folktale that must fit itself to life. Colum rearranges, distorts, and frustrates the traditional forms of folk narrative in The Flying Swans, in order to admit into the folktale's narrow confines a broader range of human experience. This formal strategy, as we shall see, allows Colum both to revise the folktale and to preserve its encoded truth. Out of Colum's compelling

perception of this truth comes the motivation for his on-going effort, through several works of fiction, to reconcile folktale and reality.

Colum explores the difficult relationship between the folktale and modern reality primarily through a story that Ulick recalls within the first ten pages of the novel. The story of the Henwife's Son is the formal and thematic paradigm for Ulick's youth and career; it forecasts the major components of Ulick's heroism and the major stages in his struggle to achieve it. Although it appears at the beginning of the novel, "The Henwife's Son," like the Unique Tale in The King of Ireland's Son, is in this way the center of The Flying Swans. Like the Unique Tale, "The Henwife's Son" is incomplete.

Unfinished was the story Agnes had begun there-- maybe he never would hear the finish of it now.

It was the story of the Henwife's Son. Oh, very poor was the boy's mother, and all in the King's Castle despised her. But when he grew up and went abroad and became the greatest soldier in the Western World, he came back to the place she was in. He had a black horse to ride, he had a silver sword by his side and silver spurs on his heels, and the King took him into his Castle and made him Captain over all, and his mother never saw a poor day afterwards, and no one might look down on her any more.

"They banished his mother and himself," he heard Agnes say, gabbling over another story. "They had great hardships, the boy and his mother, and they had to go from place to place."

"What was his name?"

"Finn MacCool or another." . . .

But they were two stories, for in one the Youth went to an Enchanter to learn all arts. Agnes did not tell him what these arts were, but he knew. He would build walls and put on the walls figures of turkeys fighting, a cock with hens behind him, crows and geese, and ducks walking in a straight line, one by one.

FS, 10

This hodge-podge of incomplete folktales, folktale motifs, and unfolkloric accretions is Colum's metaphor for the complex relationship between the folktale and real life, a general problem which he explores for the most part through the particular case of Ulick O'Rehill. Some of the happenings which Agnes narrates will have clear parallels in Ulick's life. Saba, like the Henwife, will be thrown into severe poverty; she also will know what it is to be "despised" (by Robert's unhelpful, ambitious family in Moylough). Ulick and his mother will also share with the Henwife and her son an equivalent of banishment, and certainly hardship and homelessness. The interest in masonry and sculpture which Ulick invents for the Enchanter's apprentice predicts Ulick's desire to capture in stone the common life of the countryside, the goose-girls and horse-quieters, but this element of Agnes's tale as it is presented to us originates with Ulick himself, not with traditional folktale. Other parts of Agnes's tale--the glorious success of the Henwife's Son, for instance--have no real equivalent in Ulick's life at all. These elements only project futile wishes that in the real world must be disappointed. Finally, Agnes's tale as a cracked, distorted concoction has a mysterious significance beyond the truth or falseness of any of its parts.

The importance that "The Henwife's Son" comes to have for the theme of heroism in The Flying Swans derives from the significant errors Ulick makes in interpreting Agnes's story, especially in interpreting the figure of the Henwife's Son mounted on his black steed. As in Castle Conquer, this image of a man on horseback announces the heroic motif, but whereas Francis Gillick's entrance on a shabby, misshapen horse suggests the comic, low-life tradition of Strong John

and Gilly of the Goatskin, the resplendent figure of the Henwife's Son quotes the romantic tradition of heroic wonder-tales such as the King of Ireland's Son would inhabit. Ulick associates the Henwife's Son, in this marvellous incarnation, with his father, although Robert, as we have already seen and as Ulick gradually discovers, is not quite up to the comparison. The process of translating this potent folktale image into real life is begun when an old man tells Ulick and Uncle Marcus about a branch of the family that earned the esteem of the Queen of Hungary.

Once when there was a funeral at the ancient burial place of Moylough, a man who had wonderful horses and much silver about his person appeared amongst the mourners. No one knew who he was. "Tell the O'Rehill that the Governor of Warsaw and General of the Empress-Queen has been at the funeral." He went away and never was seen in Ireland again. FS, 99

The "wonderful horses" and "much silver" recapitulate the "black horse," "silver sword" and "silver spurs" of the Henwife's Son, who, as the King's Captain, occupies a position analogous to this Hungarian O'Rehill. For Ulick, General O'Rehill mediates conveniently between the folktale hero and Robert. Is not his father away from home like the Henwife's Son, sojourning in exotic foreign places like General O'Rehill? Is not Robert a renowned horseman who, as a landowner, took particular delight in his stables, in his own "wonderful horses"? Given these parallels, it is not surprising that when Saba imagines her husband walking down the streets of Cairnthal, Ulick mentally protests:

But it was a man on horseback Ulick saw when he thought of his father. FS, 168

Related to Ulick's injudicious conflation of Robert and the Henwife's Son is his anticipation that, on Robert's return, the family troubles will be as easily and thoroughly resolved as the story of the Henwife's Son. Here Ulick fails to distinguish between the mechanisms of the folktale and the disorderliness and untrustworthiness of human reality. This tendency to critically misjudge the applicability of the folktale to real life is a family failing. Robert, we have seen, is incurably addicted to the romantic legend of the Chevalier de Moylough. In addition, in the early days of his marriage, Robert casts his own life explicitly in terms of story.

It was so beautiful here that Robert could never forget it--how could he? It was like a story, and it was their story. FS, 35

Nor is Saba immune from the attraction of folk story.

After her marriage, after Ulick's birth, she had been happy in a fairy-tale kind of way. FS, 130

It is partly the refusal to give up fairy-tale illusions that makes inevitable the novel's tragedies. Robert's persistence in modelling himself on the Chevalier destroys the beauty of his life with Saba. And Saba, in her dreamy, impractical way, continues to confuse real life with story when her own situation is at its most desperate. "'I declare,'" she says, upon receiving £20 from Virgil to finance her move to a hospice, "'it's like a fairy story to be sitting here with all this money in my hand'" (FS, 329). The cordials, special foods, and extra coal she buys, the debts she repays, are only the luxuries

of the destitute, but they prevent Virgil's money from ransoming her from death. By spending this gratuity as if a happy ending were guaranteed her, she loses her last chance for a real-life recovery from her wasting illness.

The problem of the nature of the fairy tale's relationship to life, of the ways in which one may "come true," if it can at all, preoccupies Ulick's youth. In his younger years, he casts all his hopes unabashedly in the romantic terms of the folktale. In spite of the disappointment of his hopes for Robert's return, Ulick thinks of Veronica Grace, his upper-class mentor, as a marvellous princess. Claire Comyn becomes for him the romantic heroine whom he imagines himself rescuing from captivity. The model for Ulick's dream of Claire is not, however, folk romance but written, literary romance--Thomas Moore's exotic poem, "The Fire Worshippers" from Lalla Rookh. While Ulick blithely escapes into reveries which recapitulate Moore's story, Claire begins to puzzle out the dreary incompatibility of everyday life and story.

"Did it ever puzzle you, the difference between people in stories and people in the world? In the story you might come up to a place like this [a hayloft] and find me here."

"Hinda," he said, for he knew she was recalling the heroine of "The Fire Worshippers."

"Hinda. But the young man has nothing to do but fight and love her. That's the way in the story."

"That's the way," he agreed.

"And she has nothing to do but live in a tower. With a lamp."

"It's like that."

"But if your Hinda was me . . ."

He was embarrassed because in his reveries she was.

". . . I do things all day. And will I have to go on doing the same things always? There is no one to tell me," she said, and her voice became mournful.

. . . "Oh, yes," Claire went on, "there is a difference between people in a story and people in the world. We have to go on doing the same things."<sup>1</sup>

FS, 258-259.

What strikes Claire is the unrealistic easiness of the life which romance presents; her discovery of the difference between the clean lines and economical actions of romantic narrative and the humdrum, meaningless activity of real human life ruins for her the happy delusion that she can somehow turn her own life into a fairy tale. Youthful hardship means a wonderful maturity in such stories; what Claire begins to see is that her own dull, disappointed youth may lead to an adulthood that is no better. She flees from this realization, as well as from the sordidness which attaches itself to her family (her mother becomes the lover and then the wife of the repulsive grocer, Jasper Delaney), and enters a convent. Her sorrow in the above passage, as she struggles to express her perception, is The Flying Swans' lament for the loss of innocence regarding story which Ulick must learn to face and which, it seems, was one of the sorrows of Colum's own youth.<sup>2</sup>

For Ulick, the retreat of his heroine is one of the many disappointments which dim the gleam of romantic reverie. His response to a retelling of "The Henwife's Son," in the time of his mother's illness, shows that Claire's perspective has gradually permeated his own outlook.

"Agnes, it's a long time since you told me a story."

"You're well able to read books, so what do you want with stories?"

"Still, I'd like to hear about the Henwife's Son."

. . . "His mother was the poorest woman . . ." she began.

He waited for the description of the Henwife's Son's return to the King's Castle, mounted on a black horse, with silver stirrups at his heels and a silver sword by his side. Agnes failed to make this description as memorable as he thought it would be.<sup>3</sup> FS, 295

Ulick's request shows how important the story has been to him as an



ideal and how reluctant he is to give it up altogether; his disappointment shows how well-defined his sense of the gap between story and reality has become. Ulick's revaluation of Agnes's story is completed when he encounters a real-life version of the Henwife's Son while watching a band of ragged tinkers drive a herd of asses through a narrow defile.

Before they were through it, a horseman rode into the defile from the other side; the horse came on slowly, the reins slack in the rider's hands. A priest. Facing the tinkers, he looked handsome and cavalierlike: the silver on his riding crop gleamed; his leggings, his stirrups, the reins he held, all shone, as did the horse's skin. He would be on his way to a hunting party. FS, 356

The slackness of the reins and the slowness of the horse are the first signs that there is something wrong here. The details of the rider's appearance--silver or shining decorations, a beautiful horse--echo the story of "The Henwife's Son" almost as clearly as does the description of General O'Rehill. This rider, however, is neither a folktale hero-at-arms nor a real-life general, but a priest. That a priest should outfit himself like a cavalier (a Chevalier?) is one incongruity; the desultory pace is another. Indeed, the priest shows himself to be neither pious nor chivalrous. He speaks arrogantly to the poor tinkers who surround him and refuses their cries for alms, until a hermit (Ulick's father) appears to chastize him. In this scene, the external markings of the Henwife's Son are present, but all of the grandeur of the figure is superficial. In reality he is un-heroic, niggardly and cowardly, a false-hero who further demonstrates the futility of seeking an equivalent of fairy-tale heroism in real life.<sup>4</sup>

Zack Bowen explains "The Henwife's Son" as

a rag to riches story which Ulick demands to hear as a child and which underlies the dilemma of his father's desperate bid for fame and fortune, a sense of misplaced values which Ulick must purge in himself.<sup>5</sup>

The format of the first part of the tale, a classic manifestation of folktale narrative form, is shown to be an inadequate blueprint for Ulick (or for Robert), whose descent from riches to rags inverts the folktale model. Colum does not, however, give Agnes a classic version of the story to tell. Instead, Agnes's narrative is garbled and imperfect--unfinished, abbreviated, impure, injudiciously blending two distinct tales.<sup>6</sup> In creating her story, Colum reaches into that under-tradition of folklore, already mentioned in the discussion of Gilly of the Goatskin (see above, Chapter II, p. 94), which consists of the confused, disorderly tales that a fastidious editor would in all likelihood decline to include in his folktale collections. Although in effect the tales are garbled twice (once through Agnes's artlessness--she is no shanachie--and again through the accretions of Ulick's imagination), the distortions introduced in this way contribute to rather than detract from the "truth-value" of the tale. The truth of Agnes's strangely-concocted narration is on some points bizarrely particular. For instance, Agnes backtracks after telling of the Henwife's Son's return, repeating and expanding the description of the Henwife's time of hardship. This violates the ordinary standards of storytelling decorum and disrupts the essential folktale structure; yet, without Agnes intending it, it also forecasts the outlines of Saba and Ulick's misfortunes: their original hardships because of Robert's

departure are indecorously repeated and intensified after his second flight.

Similarly, Agnes responds to Ulick's query about the name of the hero with a careless "'Finn MacCool or another'" which is more prescient than she knows. Heroic identity is an uncommonly obscure and problematic issue in The Flying Swans, where the "hero" is purposefully and meaningfully distinguished from the traditional heroic type which Finn MacCool represents. More important (and more clearly intentional) than these, Agnes's story, even though its general outlines are marred, does foreshadow the shape of Ulick's future. She clumsily makes failure (banishment, "great hardships," homelessness) follow on the magnificent reappearance of the Henwife's Son; when Robert's long-anticipated return to his family ends in failure, life follows the pattern of Agnes's deficient artifice. In the second part of her tale, however, Agnes presents a lowlier, harder-working and more successful hero, a vision of what Ulick will become. The "success" is one of spirit rather than surface, and Ulick will only gradually learn the lesson clumsily but providentially encoded here: meaning, achievement, and self-worth come from what one can create, with the substantial, common things of life as a foundation, through one's own effort and imagination. By contrast, the warmly-colored, wonderfully well-ordered happenings of the folktale are insubstantial and superficial, and cannot be imposed on intransigent reality. Here Colum revises, rather than discards, his idea of the applicability of the folktale to real life.

Colum's sense of the folktale's vital relevance to Irish life persists, but he is no longer willing to be distracted by the alluring but fanciful game of discerning, or devising, thin correspondences between the

folktale's characters and motifs and real (or realistic) people and happenings. The central truth of the folktale, Colum now indicates, lies well beneath its shining surface, and it is the "deep structure" of the folktale, in Levi-Strauss's phrase, that Colum is trying to expose and explore in The Flying Swans. Ulick's story, the paradigm of the Henwife's Son indicates, will be not so much a folktale as a garbled folktale; Colum implies that when disorderly reality intrudes some of life's chaos into the balanced, rationalized artifice of folktale form, the resulting mutation better reflects human experience. Furthermore, by disrupting folktale form, Colum transforms the narrow room of the folktale into a space wide enough for his own extra-folktale, literary meanings, as demonstrated by his own artful facsimile of a garbled folktale, The King of Ireland's Son.

Indeed, often when Colum reaches back to the folktale in The Flying Swans, he selects the same motifs, incidents even tales as he did in his earlier book. The "swirl of creatures" on Breasal O'Breasal's cottage floor, for instance (FS, 8), is a version of the folktale's curious animal-crowded household, represented in The King's Son first by the house of the Old Woman of Beare, whose cohabitants include a cuckoo, a corncrake and a swallow (KS, 94), and secondly by Gilly's magic house by the river, where he plays host to all manner of birds and beasts. The Flying Swans' rendition of the popular folktale motif of the devastating battle between families of the animal kingdom which appears early in The King of Ireland's Son (p. 9; Motif B260) is both more explicit than the reference to the animal-populated house (because it is named outright, FS, 92) and less

literal (because the emotional devastation following a family argument is substituted for the physical devastation following a folkloric "quarrel of kingdoms"). Ulick O'Rehill and the King of Ireland's Son, furthermore, share a mentor, the Gobaun Saor. The stern but sagacious smith in The King's Son is represented as a mason in The Flying Swans, where he is no longer present as a character in the narrative but is removed to the domain of myth.<sup>7</sup> Such throwbacks to the folktale and myth as these epitomize Colum's conception of the relationship between folktale and peasant life. On the one hand, they support the notion of a real-life foundation for some folktale elements, like the house full of creatures. On the other, they render Colum's outsider's sense of the marvellousness and strangeness inherent in the everyday life of the Irish peasant.<sup>8</sup>

There are additional allusions to folktale motifs and characters in The Flying Swans,<sup>9</sup> but of far greater importance are the larger folktale structures that the novel quotes--tales, important parts of tales, and entire classes of tales. In many cases, Colum's translation of these structures into realistic terms, though frequently twisty and complex, follows the outlines of the source without extravagant distortion. Most broadly, of Colum's ten section headings, four ("Expulsion," "Return," "Fosterage" and "Youthful Exploits") connect Ulick's narrative with traditional narrative, either folktale, myth or manuscript romance.<sup>10</sup> "Expulsion" and "Return" invoke the class of hero-myths and hero-tales known by the rubric, the Aryan Expulsion-and-Return Formula. The expulsion of a mythical hero like Oedipus from his native land and his later return to it become, in the fairy tale, Propp's functions of "departure" and "return."<sup>11</sup> In The Flying Swans,

expulsion is Ulick's departure from his home at The Abbey, near the town of Dooard. "Return" designates his journey to Dooard and the surrounding area in search of his brother and his father and the return of O'Rehill manhood, in Ulick rather than Robert. Finally, because Ulick, as he and Breasal set out, whistles the family tune, "The Return to Moylough," leaving out the failing bars, "return" suggests the regeneration of O'Rehill promise after the purgation of vanity and the humbling of family pride. Expulsion and Return, then, translate into a literary framework, without specific folktale content, but rooted in folktale pattern. In Section Two, "Fosterage," Colum makes the analogue between traditional narrative and the narrative of The Flying Swans quite explicit. He meditates on the need for a Legend of Good Uncles to cover Marcus's interest in Ulick, quotes Cuchulain's testimonial to Fergus to indicate the significance to Ulick, a hero-in-the-making, of the herdsman Breasal O'Breasal's fosterage, and finally comments that "Many's the hero was fostered by a herdsman" (FS, 94). "Youthful Exploits" constitutes another group of actions from traditional narrative. They are the remarkable boy-deeds, like Cuchulain playing hurley with himself on the road to Emain Macha or single-handedly vanquishing (in sport and in combat) the entire Red Branch boys' corp, which are the first signs of the young hero's astonishing strength and skill. Ulick's youthful exploits are hardly such wonderful feats. They are a hodge-podge of events involving primarily his affair with Christine Bondfield and his growing artistic ambitions but also touching on the growing tensions in his aunt's home, where he and Breasal are staying, and the accumulating indications, confirmed at the end of

the section, that Ulick's father has returned to Ireland. If this collection of incidents translates the marvellous boyhood deeds of a Cuchulain into decidedly homely terms, it also brings Ulick to the brink of manhood and the narrative to the brink of catastrophe. In fact, "Expulsion," "Return," "Fosterage" and "Youthful Exploits" all cast important junctures in folk or romantic narrative in a realistic mold. Together, however, they impose the broad outlines of folk narrative on the events of Ulick's life and in this way assert, in spite of the realistic milieu, Ulick's claim to follow the folktale archetype of heroism.

Within the narrative, Colum creates an important pattern for a major part of Ulick's story when, following Agnes's lead (with, however, a bit more self-consciousness), he conflates two folktales into the story that we can designate *The Enchanter's Apprentice*. The first element of this composite, modelled on the folktale known as *The Magician and His Pupil* (Tale Type 329), is presented in the second part of Agnes's story. A poor fisherman's son returns home from his apprenticeship with a magician and occasionally practices the magic he has learned in order to improve his devoted father's material well-being. The magician recaptures the youth through trickery, but is eventually bested by his former pupil in a fabulous chase in which each depends on the magic art of shape-shifting. Agnes mentions only the first part of this tale. When Colum introduces Ulick's cousins, he connects this tale to another.

. . . [I]n her face there was an odd look, and her eyes became more bright and quick as she talked. She was like the daughter of the Enchanter in the story. And the other was like the second daughter, the one who would not help the Youth at all. FS, 84

"Youth" reiterates the language Ulick uses to summarize Agnes's story and consequently identifies the tale referred to here with the one which Agnes told. At the same time, the daughters mentioned here play no role in *The Magician and His Pupil* but come out of an entirely different tale, *The Girl Helps in the Hero's Flight*. Colum seems to have had a liking for both of these tales; the first is the basis for his 1920 children's book, The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter, while the second is the mainstay of Cycle I of The King of Ireland's Son, where, as here, Colum makes the villain, who may be any kind of ogre, specifically a magician--the Enchanter of the Black Backlands. The bare sketch of a tale that results from Colum's conflation of these two distinct folktales helps to incorporate Michaelleen into Ulick's progression toward artistry.

Indeed, Colum designs his hybrid folktale explicitly to correspond to Ulick's mastery of a heroic art. Ulick capitalizes on the age-old, mysterious sympathy between magic and art when he interprets the magical "arts" which the "Youth" in Agnes's tale will learn as masonry and sculpture. To pursue the logic of the paradigm, if Ulick's cousins are Enchanter's daughters, the girls' father--Carthage, the husband of Saba's sister Allie--must be the Enchanter. Carthage MacCabe, in fact, is a stonemason whose very face "was like something that had been built: from chin to cheekbones, from cheekbones to forehead, it looked as if it had been laid in courses" (FS, 85). Because he helps



Ulick to arrange his indentures in a Stone Yard, thus initiating the hero into his art, he stands in the same relationship to Ulick as the Enchanter does to the Henwife's Son, or Youth, in Agnes's tale. There is an interesting further conflation here. For MacGovern, the Master of the Stone Yard, is in several important ways an extension of his kinsman MacCabe. Ulick's uncomfortable, at times adversarial relationships with Carthage and with MacGovern echo the folktale relationships of scholar and enchanter ("The Magician and His Pupil"), of the apprentice and the ogre ("Girl Helps in Hero's Flight"), and of the King of Ireland's Son and the Enchanter of the Black Backlands. The inevitable confrontation with MacCabe and MacGovern, with whom Ulick scuffles serially on the same day, is physical rather than magical, however. The psychic Michaelleen, like the Enchanter's daughter, is the hero's handmaiden in his struggle to achieve greatness. In "The Girl Helps in Hero's Flight," it is the heroine, steeped in her father's magic, who knows the course which the hero must follow and accomplishes the magic tasks which her father imposes. Similarly, Michaelleen serves as a kind of heroic conscience for Ulick. From the time they are small, she has a vision of what is "laid out" for Ulick to do and the difficulty of doing it: "'you have more to do than anyone'" (FS, 266). When Ulick is tempted to become a sailor, it is Michaelleen who understands what he would be abandoning. When Michaelleen seems likely to inherit a large sum of money, Ulick realizes that "she had only one dream of using it, and that was through him," although he, of course, wouldn't think of touching it. Even so, it is an equivalent for the kind of sacrifice which Yellow Lily, the heroine of Curtin's version of "The

Girl Helps in Hero's Flight," and Fedelma from The King's Son make when they direct the hero to kill them so that he can accomplish a crucial task. Although Ulick and Michaelleen are first cousins, the irrepressible journalist Barry Fitzadlem Crowley predicts--and Ulick quickly rejects--that Ulick, like the King's Son and many folktale heroes, will marry his Enchanter's Daughter.

Whereas the folktale apprentice always vanquishes his old master in the end, Ulick's challenge to MacCabe by his own hearth and MacGovern in his own Yard results in nothing better than a draw. When Ulick finds that he has forced himself out of his lodgings and out of his employment, the folktale model is frustrated. This series of fights is part of a larger one, beginning with Ulick's schoolboy brawl with classmate Hoppy Hoadley and ending with the fierce struggle with Lem Grabbitt. Colum incorporates into this series, with its implications for Ulick's heroic ability, the theme of Robert's accusation of Saba's infidelity and Breasal's illegitimacy. Hoppy claims that Ulick and Breasal are both "by-children"; Carthage drunkenly throws up to Breasal the label "bastard"; more obliquely, Lem Grabbitt--the perfect figure of a bastard's father--imprisons and torments Breasal in a symbolic representation and consequence of Robert's repudiation of him. In each case, the misrepresentation of Breasal's paternity (or Saba's honour) goads Ulick into a physical response. The effect of these fights, decisive events in Ulick's life, is the externalization (translation of moods and feelings into action) of a major theme of Ulick's youth, his response to Robert's lies.

In one way, Ulick's confrontations with MacCabe and MacGovern

achieve what the combat between the Enchanter and his Apprentice achieves, liberation from the domination of the "villain" and establishment of an independent identity. Decisive victory in the folktale manner is transferred, however, in something resembling deferral in The King of Ireland's Son, to the fight with Lem Grabbitt, far and away the most important fight of the book. This episode is realistically drawn, in spite of the overtones of folktale struggles. Ulick succeeds, for instance, by shrewdly waiting for Lem Grabbitt's breath to fail, for Grabbitt, though "lean and hard and . . . [with] a long reach of arm," is also afflicted, as no folktale villain ever is, by "the breathing of a man whom cold and rain have been wearing on" (FS, 528). Even so, the almost melodramatically wicked Grabbitt is as much a villain as the King of the Land of Mist or any folktale ogre or enchanter. Like many of them, and like the King of Mist as well, Grabbitt is an abductor. Whereas folktale villains usually abduct the heroine and respond to brothers and other male "helpers" by turning them into stones, Lem Grabbitt holds Breasal captive, substituting an abusive parody of paternity for the grotesque marriage with which folktale villains threaten captive heroines. Although Breasal is no longer in Grabbitt's keeping when he accosts Ulick, and although Ulick's demoralization after the fight differs from the folktale hero's triumph, the episode prepares for the reunion of the seeker and the sought in a moral if not causal equivalent to the results of the folktale struggle.

Denis Johnston credits Colum for refraining from melodramatic detail in describing this fight.<sup>12</sup> He thus calls attention to the

generalization, with the odd specific detail, of the account.

And so they fought. One got in on the other; with head bent, a grip on the other's knees, one tried to throw the other. Tried and was baffled. A minute's or a few minutes' unexpected steadiness threw the attacker off. How often this happened, who could know? Who cared? The fight went on.  
FS, 527-528

Colum, like folk storytellers, has the problem of making the fight seem long and arduous without a blow-by-blow narration; he achieves by means of generalization what the teller of the tale "Céatach" in O'Sullivan's Folktales of Ireland achieves by means of runs.

Out they went. They attacked each other as would two wild bears or two fierce bulls for the length of seven nights and days. They made hard places soft and soft places hard. They drew wells of spring water up through the center of the green stones with the dint of choking, killing, striking, and testing each other.<sup>13</sup>

The folktale analogue is more explicit when the fight reaches its crisis.

In "Céatach," victory is won in this way:

At last, Céatach gave him a twist which buried him to the knees in the ground. A second twist buried him to his waist; and a third to the upper part of his chest.

"Clay over you, churl," shouted Céatach.<sup>14</sup>

Ulick, as he faces Lem Grabbitt, is imagining that he holds in his right hand the stonecutter's hammer which his apprenticeship has taught him to wield forcefully and proficiently.

Swinging his right arm, the imagined hammer in it, O'Rehill struck him between jaw and temple. Lem Grabbitt held his ground; there were exchanges, but O'Rehill hardly felt the tinker's blows. He

was going to punish the man before him, punish him regardless of the wariness he showed. No longer was Lem Grabbitt quick in his motions. Then O'Rehill got in the blow that staggered him; then the blow that knocked him over. FS, 528

Like "Céatach" and many other folktales, victory comes with a set of three especially powerful blows. A few lines later, when Lem Grabbitt refuses to give him information about Breasal, Ulick spits out a venomous retort reminiscent of Céatach's threat: "'Lie there, you dog'" (FS, 528).

One of the most interesting and revealing transformations of folktale elements in the description of Ulick's fight with Grabbitt is Ulick's strategy for striking his enemy, when the opportunity arises, "imaginatively holding the hammer" in his hand. The stonemason's tool in Ulick's imagination substitutes for the real weapon of the romantic or folktale hero--the Henwife's Son's silvery sword, for instance, or the King of Ireland's Son's Sword of Light. This scheme allows Ulick to strike at the same time a blow at Grabbitt and a blow for his art, which is confirmed here as his heroic destiny. Acquiring the skill of stonework becomes equivalent to acquiring suitable heroic weaponry, an important event in a story like "Math, the Son of Mathonwy," one of two stories from The Mabinogion which Colum included in his anthology of myths and myth-like stories, Orpheus: Myths of the World (1929). In Part III of this story, "Gwydion and Arianrhod," Gwydion's foster-son, Lleu Llaw Gyffes, is thwarted in the acquisition of first a name, then heroic arms. Interestingly, The Flying Swans, like The King of Ireland's Son before it, focuses on both of these key heroic attributes, the

potency of the hero's name as well as of his weapons. In The King of Ireland's Son, not only does Gilly of the Goatskin embark on a quest for a name, but also the name of the King's Son, which is withheld from the reader, has in one scene an almost magical efficacy. The King's Son shouts out his own name to quell the dangerous tumult in the Wood of Shadows, where the incessant whispering and confusing activity of the shadow creatures threaten to undermine his sanity. This scene is strikingly similar to an episode in The Flying Swans, in which Ulick O'Rehill, in a similar moment of disorientation, speaks his name out loud. He is also in a noisy wood, the last of the hangers-on of a hunting party, with his ignominious spoils, four dead crows, in his hands.

As he looked down at himself, carrying crows, something perplexed him. Are you Ulick O'Rehill or Francie Rehill? One was the name that belonged to The Abbey, the other, with his second Christian name, was the one he went by in this parish. "I am Ulick O'Rehill," he said as he stood in the silenced wood. FS, 116

Years later, in another wood, Ulick himself explains the significance of this incident.

He knew why he had had to say his name. Here, as in the wood, he was by himself and, for the minute that the shadow was on the dark green of the tree and the crow cawed, a stranger to himself. "I am Ulick O'Rehill," he said softly. FS, 157

The word "silenced" in the first passage, puzzling because the wood should only be "silent," "quiet" rather than "quieted," implies a magical, quasi-folkloric power in Ulick's name; the second passage relates this power to the affirmation of the hero's identity. Identity

and prowess are not only heroic attributes, however, distilled from heroic tales in order to relate Ulick's character to the heroic tradition. They are especially important because they are the culminations of quests. As such, they mark critical junctures in particular heroic stories, like "Gwydion and Arianhod," and thus convey to Ulick's story the pattern of traditional narrative.<sup>15</sup>

Even in the more straightforward uses of folktales and related stories in The Flying Swans, some small violence may be done to the folk narrative. Thus, "The Enchanter's Apprentice" is concocted out of two entirely separate folktales, and the victory which Ulick should have over MacCabe and MacGovern, if he is to follow the folktale paradigm, is deferred until he faces Lem Grabbitt. Such rearrangement of folk materials allows Colum to incorporate into the folktale-like pattern of events important and quite literary themes, like Ulick's angst over Robert's lies, or the heroic value of Ulick's artistic calling. Yet the form and spirit of the folktale are in a dynamic relationship with repugnant, disorderly reality in The Flying Swans, and reality often predominates. Ulick has a just grievance against Hoppy Hoadley, for instance, and he feels his blood mount, possibly a realistic equivalent of the folktale hero's ability to rise out of himself,<sup>16</sup> yet he fails, a victim of a street-fighter's dirty blow known as "the knee." On another occasion, Ulick finds himself in what appears to be a donor sequence. Raucous boys, set on a fight, ask Ulick to act as referee. In many folktales, the hero is called upon to settle a dispute in just this way, by refereeing a fight or dividing disputed property. When he does so wisely and justly, he

acquires a donor or a magic object. At the very least, then, the sparring lads seem to be honouring Ulick's sense of justice. Gullibly, he takes the stick which someone hands him--a mark of the referee's authority?--only to find that it has been coated with tar. Ulick has been the victim of an elaborate ruse, and is left soiled, humiliated, and lonely. In instances such as these, folktale form is invoked only to be frustrated. Ulick tries to make real events conform to the marvellous, effortless pattern of incident of fairy tales at his peril, for Colum rubs Ulick's puppyish nose in reality. Only when Ulick loses his romantic attachment to fairy tale and embarks on action for its own sake, like the search for Breasal and the fight with Lem Grabbitt, does he unconsciously attain heroic action.

In The King of Ireland's Son, deferral and failure become ways of denying the folktale's tight system of narrative causality. In The Flying Swans, incidents such as the fight with Hoppy Hoadley or the attempt to mediate the boys' concocted quarrel disrupt instead the narrative determinism of the realistic novel. In fact, the thwarting of narrative expectation in The Flying Swans can be seen as the fullest development of The King of Ireland's Son's use of rhythms of deferral to transform and transcend folktale form. The Flying Swans' realism allows Colum to extend narrative frustration with loneliness, hopelessness, vagrancy, poverty, disappointment and grief, until the novel is threatened with a complete loss of impetus when Ulick thinks of sailing away from the claims of brotherhood and art. The kinship of the narrative strategies of the two books becomes especially apparent when we examine the story of the courtship and marriage of Saba O'Breasal and Robert



O'Rehill. The outlines of this story are borrowed from the folktale called "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers" (AT 451), the same tale that Colum used as the basis for the Unique Tale in The King of Ireland's Son.

In the original tale, we recall, the heroine undertakes to sew shirts from bogsgown for her enchanted brothers, maintaining silence all the while. Before she completes her task, she marries a king, bears him a son, who is immediately kidnapped, and suffers silently while her sisters-in-law accuse her of murder. Sentenced to burn at the stake, the Maiden at the last moment finishes the final shirt, releases her brothers from enchantment, and regains the liberty to speak. When she reveals the plot against her, her husband punishes his sisters and rejoices with his wife at the sudden reappearance of the child. In The King of Ireland's Son, Colum connects this tale to others in the book by making the mysterious "Hunter-King" whom his heroine (Sheen) marries into King Connal, father of the book's heroes. The lost child is Gilly of the Goatskin. Colum has the Hunter-King banish Sheen rather than execute her, and has him repent and bring her back to his castle. One of the most important changes is in making Sheen, overcome by the loss of her child, unable to complete her task. Colum ends the Unique Tale with Sheen's failure and grief--and only a slight hope that, one day, her brothers' enchantment will be broken and her lost child returned to her. Transformed in this way, "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers" becomes the source of both the book's rhythm of failure and the promise of transcendence of failure.

Saba's story resembles Sheen's from the moment Robert, troubled

by the aftermath of a youthful affair with Margary Plunkett (Colum's Hunter-King is troubled by spells put over him by his sometime-mistress, the Maid of the Green Mantle), discovers her in the countryside. Saba is a herd's daughter, living simply in the countryside, but the legacy of Milesian ancestors, preserved in Breasal O'Breasal's at once lowly and marvellous cottage, gives her a grace and dignity which, along with her simple country ways and the freshness of her beauty, enrapture Robert. (Similarly, Sheen, though a king's daughter, is living humbly with the Spae-Woman when she first encounters the Hunter-King. The Hunter-King comes for Sheen, as Robert comes for Saba, on a big black horse.) When Robert takes her to her new home, Saba is as stunned at the magnificence of The Abbey as any folktale heroine arriving at a splendid castle. Moreover, both Robert and Saba regard their new life as a kind of fairy story. (See above, p. 77.) Yet neither Sheen nor Saba is guaranteed happiness by her promising marriage. Each must face the animosity of her husband's people. The O'Rehills never accept Saba, spurning her before childbirth where Sheen's in-laws betray her immediately after childbirth. Furthermore, Saba is patronized by Robert's servants--like the Henwife, who is "despised" at the castle to which her resplendent son takes her. Saba, Sheen and the Henwife (but not the Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers) are all cast out; the suggestion in the Unique Tale, confirmed by the Hunter-King's repentance, that the Hunter-King incurs guilt by expelling his steadfast Sheen too hastily develops into Robert's much fuller responsibility for Saba's hardships. Robert, in fact, causes Saba to "lose a child" in the medical sense; his arrest and trial in Cairnthal precipitate the

premature birth of her third, lifeless son. Breasal, too, is "lost"--because of Robert's repudiation of him. Saba, finally, like Sheen, is dishonored by a false claim against her, an accusation of adultery rather than murder.

This comparison of incident reveals that Saba O'Rehill's story resembles the Unique Tale more than it resembles the tale that is behind them both, "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers." The Unique Tale's revision of the folktale is extended and elaborated in this part of The Flying Swans. Whereas even Sheen is eventually restored to home, honor and happiness, Saba is trapped forever in the miserable part of the fairy tale; the obstacle which in Sheen's case stretches unhappily over twelve or so years is never overcome in Saba's lifetime. Indeed, her lot only worsens as time goes on, until poverty, degradation, hard work and poor nourishment kill her. She is denied the beneficence of the providence (Diachbha) which mystically intervenes to resolve Sheen's troubles; or squanders it (Virgil's ~~20~~ 20, above, p. 77) when it comes. In the context of Saba's story, the eventual happy ending of the Unique Tale, even after so much suffering and unhappiness, seems like a realization of wishful thinking. Saba's fate, on the other hand, represents the threat of No-Narrative, the logical consequence of The King of Ireland's Son's rhythm of failure, come true in its most final and human form: Death.

Much of Saba O'Breasal's story, like Sheen's story in The King of Ireland's Son, is embedded in the main narrative, although it takes the form of a series of flashbacks rather than a story told by a character. But if the tangential story of Saba's life shares incident, theme and

pattern with The King's Son, so does a much more important part of the main narrative. The vital relationship between Ulick and his brother Breasal in The Flying Swans is in content and structure remarkably similar to the relationship between the King of Ireland's Son and Gilly of the Goatskin, so thoughtfully constructed from a group of folktales in The King of Ireland's Son.

If "Expulsion" and "Return" suggest that the hero tale ("Aryan Expulsion-and-Return Formula") provides one overarching structure for The Flying Swans, then the relationship between Ulick and Breasal provides another. Although Breasal is not yet born when the book opens on Saba and Ulick in the town of Dooard, the expectation of his birth, still a few months away, is responsible for the opening situation: Saba has gone to Dooard to arrange travel to the O'Rehill home at Moylough, where, she vainly hopes, she can escape the curse of bearing a child without its father present by bringing Breasal into the world among his father's people. In light of Saba's premonitions (which include her uneasiness on hearing the lullaby for a cradleless infant sung by a poor wandering woman),<sup>17</sup> the refusal of Robert's father and uncle to find room for Saba is extremely ominous. Indeed, dubious paternity will be the plague of Breasal's youth, eventually forcing him away from human society and into a series of miserable experiences on the road; Ulick's search for him and reunion with him at the novel's close end his isolation and affirm his place in the general human fold as well as in the O'Rehill family. In Ulick's life, the importance of his brother is heralded by the first appearance of the book's predominant symbol, the flying swans. He sees his first swan when he enters a cemetery

whose towers and sculpted monuments, said to have been shaped by the Gobaun Saor, inspire him with the ambition to become a sculptor. He is still meditating among these relics when he hears the beat of wings again--many swans this time--and is summoned by his grandfather with the news of the birth. The swans appear at five significant junctures in Ulick's life, moments of portent or self-knowledge. The final occasion is when the reunited brothers, at the end of the book, set off in search of their father.<sup>18</sup>

In the scene in The Flying Swans when Ulick takes leave of his newly-enlisted friend Clement, just as Colum once parted from his brother Frederick, Colum speculates on the nature of the bond of brotherhood.

Brother! There is something simpler in the relation we imply when we say "my brother" than when we say "my father," "my mother," "my sister." We would stand in our brother's place and share his danger. Only from him can we take defense. He and we are united to protect an image that is within us, an image that is of fairness and consideration. (Not these reflections, but a feeling that had such reflections in it, were Ulick O'Rehill's.) Not all who are born of the same father and mother and live under the same roof are brothers, though indeed it is an aid to brotherhood when the same fire has warmed them, and they have sung the same songs. No, it is those who are ready to stand together for the same sacred things who are brothers.  
FS, 396

Whatever Colum means by "the same sacred things," and he does not specify them, he defines brotherhood in terms of a single identity shared by two different individuals, making them glad to interchange themselves in critical moments. Brotherhood means the paradox of individuality and kinship, otherness and sameness, and this is what

strikes Ulick the first time he sees more in Breasal than a "wrinkled-faced thing" in his mother's arms (FS, 98).

Ulick, seeing him outside the house for the first time, knew him to be more than a shape in the cradle or on his mother's lap. He was Breasal, and, startlingly, he was Breasal O'Rehill.  
FS, 125

Ulick discerns Breasal's uniqueness--"He was Breasal"--but also the bond of common parentage, which Robert later denies. Robert's repudiation of Breasal in this context is an attack on the bond of brotherhood, the most elemental manifestation of community. When Robert makes Ulick the custodian of the grim falsehood that Breasal is a bastard, he subverts Ulick's sense of identity along with Breasal's. The result is a series of efforts on Breasal's behalf which teaches Ulick how much of his own identity lies, not with his father, but with his brother, whose keeper he resolves to be. There is a strong echo of The King of Ireland's Son here. The King's Son searches long and arduously for the whole of the Unique Tale, which turns out to be vital to his own knowledge of himself as well as the key to Gilly's identity. In both books, the older brothers willingly take the younger brothers' sacred quests upon themselves.

Although The King of Ireland's Son encompasses the adventures of two different but equally important heroes and The Flying Swans, in contrast, has but one hero, Ulick O'Rehill, the relationship between the characters in the two books is significant. In the previous chapter, I have shown how Ulick's heroism thoroughly revises the romantic heroic archetype, only mildly transformed in the character of the King of Ireland's Son. The King's Son might be much closer to the folktale

paradigm, but the necessity of arduously questing for his own identity and of moderating the usual heroic arrogance with the spiritual lessons engendered by hard work, simple living and prolonged testing anticipates Ulick's more realistically-drawn trials and the lessons on the way to his own heroic destiny. Ulick and the King's Son are alike in the kindness and protectiveness which they extend to their younger brothers (or half-brothers, literally in Gilly's case; putatively, because of Robert's accusation, in Breasal's). They manifest the spirit of brotherhood, however, in characteristically different ways. Ulick, for instance, introduces Breasal to the ways of Cairnthal and advises him about his prospects in life, whereas the King's Son, in keeping with the more romantic framework of the earlier book, puts an arm on Gilly's shoulder and suggests ways in which he might pursue his quest. Neither is particularly successful in this phase of fraternity, however. Gilly follows the King's Son's advice about confronting the Hags of the Long Teeth only to be taken captive; Breasal, on the other hand, sets out on the road to disaster with Agnes while Ulick stands helplessly by.

Breasal and Gilly are the weaker, more awkward and more dependent brothers. There are important, fruitful contradictions in the characterization of each. Gilly, a composite of several folktale heroes, exhibits such inconsistent behavior that one doesn't know whether he is cowardly or brave, foolish or wise, bumbling or intrepid. In Gilly, Colum baffles the usual notions of heroism to draw from this set of paradoxes a heroism for the peasantry. The confusion about Breasal's character, on the other hand, centers not on heroism but

on his place in human society. Just as bastardy is seen as a symbol of rejection in The Flying Swans, other criticisms of Breasal try to differentiate between him and the bulk of humanity. Breasal's Aunt Allie tells Ulick that "Breasal isn't 'lauchy'--meaning he was open to odd influences" (FS, 440). Johnny Roe, the young tough whom Breasal must assist at the pig-killing, puts it more bluntly.

"Bit touched, wasn't he?" said Johnny Roe coolly.  
 "He's my brother," Ulick said, "and he's not a  
 bit touched." FS, 519

Johnny Roe's completely inappropriate nickname for Breasal, "Rascal," shows that the upshot of his or Aunt Allie's misjudgement of Breasal is to join with those who call him bastard (Robert; Carthage; Mortimer Scully, the inn-keeper) and those who imprison or abuse him (Scully; Lem Grabbitt) in thrusting Breasal to the outskirts of society. Ulick acknowledges a vulnerability in Breasal; when he thinks of Aunt Allie's phrase again, it focuses his concern about the dangers Breasal may be facing on the road. Breasal's naïveté in many ways resembles Gilly's awkwardness in the world, the result of his long gestation in the Hags' cradle. Yet Ulick in the main stands up for Breasal against such claims. "Breasal was intelligent," he thinks, though Allie calls him "not lauchy"; he retorts sharply to Johnny Roe's offhand aspersions, with insight into Breasal's character as well as with brotherly loyalty. He recognizes the unusual sensitivity and empathy in his brother's nature and affirms his value to society, in the face of numerous efforts to reject him. His support against Robert, Carthage, Johnny Roe, Lem Grabbitt, and all the others who repudiate or victimize Breasal is



Anthony Duineen. "'I'm a bastard myself," says Duineen, when Ulick tells him that Carthage has called Breasal a bastard, "'and it didn't do me any good to hear it. Be that as it may, I'd have killed the one who said it about your brother'" (FS, 515).

Beyond their awkwardness and vulnerability in the world and their dependence on their older brothers, Breasal and Gilly of the Goatskin share an uncommon empathy with animal life. Gilly has a mystical ability, at first through the agency of the Crystal Egg, later without it, to communicate with animals. Breasal too is unusually interested in wild things. A walk into the hills around Cairnthal with Ulick as company delights him:

The road ahead had fascination for Breasal. Hedges and blackberries. There were three magpies on the road, birds he had never seen before. Embedded in leaves, he found a tin can, and in it was a bird's nest. It was empty, but it showed what extraordinary things one came on when one went on a far road. FS, 156

As the two enter a nearby graveyard, Breasal moves away from Ulick after "some shy creature"--a hare; later, it is Breasal, rather than Ulick or Robert, who spots the mouse in a bakery-shop window and earns a sweet reward. Ulick, too, is capable of identification with natural creatures. The motif of the water hen is first introduced when Ulick senses a shared loneliness with the bird (FS, p. 94). Breasal's scene with a water hen shares some of this desolation but takes a different form. Breasal first glimpses Lem Grabbitt pelting with stones a water hen with a broken wing. "'The poor water hen,' Breasal thought, for his affections went to creatures of the kind" (FS, 474-475). Breasal's empathy, in

keeping with his tenuous position in the human world, is for victimized creatures. The difference between the two brothers' natures is emphasized in a subsequent parallel scene. Ulick finds Lem Grabbitt exactly as Breasal did, malevolently and, it seems, purposelessly throwing missiles, but it is he himself who is Grabbitt's target. Whereas Breasal simply identifies with Grabbitt's victim, slips into the bushes, and returns to become a victim himself, Ulick--older, stronger and also more combative than Breasal--returns Grabbitt's enmity and puts all of his effort into fighting him.

As was the case with Gilly of the Goatskin, in Breasal an uncommon closeness to the animal kingdom coexists with a subtle spirituality. In The King of Ireland's Son, the mysterious and magical way in which Gilly almost inadvertently brings about the disenchantment of his mother's brothers puts him at the center of the workings of Diachbha--an uncomprehending agent of Diachbha in the human world. In The Flying Swans, Gilly's mystical qualities translate into the omens, superstitions, and intuitions that collect around Breasal. In addition to the signs that worry Saba before Breasal's birth, there is Breasal's strange sleepwalking.

"Breasal!" said Ulick. "Whist!" said his mother to him warningly. And then to Breasal: "Owen!" It was as if they were back again in his grandmother's, and there was fear lest the strange condition of the child meant that he was under enchantment and that the fairies would have more power over him if they knew his name. FS, 169

Colum invokes country superstition about sleepwalking at the same time that he discounts it. No one really believes that he is in danger of becoming the thrall of the fairies, yet there is the suggestion that

he is in an otherworldly state, a kind of trance. Later, when the sleepwalking Breasal startles Robert, Robert at first regards him as possessed, an inexplicable embodiment of his grief for his dead, illegitimate child (by Margary Plunkett). In both scenes, Breasal seems to have contact with a world beyond the real world, a world which is inaccessible to normal people in normal states of mind. (At the same time, Breasal's "strange condition" suggests the tenuousness of his own identity.) The dreaminess which Colum gives Breasal, which prompts Allie to call him "not 'lauchy,'" signals that Breasal, like Gilly, has a special relationship to the supernatural. Gilly, in his role in resolving the Unique Tale and the story of the Crystal Egg, is an instrument of Diachbha, a pagan Providence although, as we have observed, there are Christian overtones as well. Breasal's spirituality is, in the end, more Catholic. His openness to the supernatural dovetails with his compassion for victimized creatures (including, paradoxically, his father, who has victimized him) to inculcate in him the religious feeling which leads him toward the priesthood. Like Diachbha, the supernatural world which Breasal senses interferes in human affairs. Most crucially, when Breasal contemplates suicide, a vision of Ulick brings him back from the edge of the lake. It is this vision that conveys the sense of Fate working behind the surface of the book to make of Breasal and Ulick alike instruments of some grand design.

In both books, Colum explores the dependence of a relatively passive, aimless and dreamy younger brother (a permutation of the folk-tale's "victim-hero") on his more intrepid elder (a revision, in Ulick's case quite radical, of the "seeker-hero"). Not only do the characters, the brotherly bond, and certain events involving them resemble each

other, but the narrative structure of this part of The Flying Swans follows the lead of The King of Ireland's Son. The Flying Swans is, of course, primarily Ulick's story, but in leaving Ulick and his problems aside to follow Breasal down the road with Agnes, Colum repeats the pattern of The King's Son, where he leaves the King of Ireland's Son with Fedelma and declares, "This story is now about Flann" (KS, 211). In content and structure alike, then, "Vagrancy," the section of The Flying Swans that is about Breasal, parallels "The House of Crom Duv"--Gilly's narrative--in the earlier book. Within the section entitled "Vagrancy," Breasal, as lost and as parentless as Gilly of the Goatskin, undergoes a captivity, first at Mortimer Scully's inn, then along the roads with Lem Grabbitt, that echoes Gilly's incarceration with the giant, Crom Duv. The boys are even held captive under similar terms. Both are forced to labor for dictatorial, highly offensive masters who allow enough freedom to work (as well as to escape) but enforce captivity with threats. Breasal's subsequent lonely vagrancy also connects him with Gilly, the loneliness of whose travels is emphasized by the poems which Colum fits to them. (See above, Chapter III, p. 158.) In both books, the separate stories of the two brothers converge again after this section; indeed, as Ulick and Breasal set out to find their father, the narrative of The Flying Swans returns to the pattern of some folktales, in which the plots (or "moves") involving two separate heroes diverge, deal with the adventures of each of the heroes in turn, and reunite for a final, joint quest.<sup>19</sup>

The adventures of Ulick and Breasal in the last part of the book, particularly while they are separated from each other, represent the

last, most difficult phase of the long decline of the O'Rehill fortunes. Ulick, in effect, has taken the baton from Robert; after carrying it down an especially steep incline--he loses his home with Carthage, his apprenticeship, his girlfriend, his last illusions about his father, and a good portion of his faith in mankind, all within the space of a few days--he passes it on to Breasal.

His father had run away again, Christine had fooled him, Michaelleen had betrayed him. Others, too, if he only knew. A world of deceivers! Nobody was near you, you were near nobody. FS, 457

While Ulick is still planning his separation from faithless humanity, Breasal is engaged in a kind of sympathetic exploration of what such separation means. The departure from Cairnthead with Agnes is a deceptively promising first step away from society; when their peddling expedition fails and Agnes shows poor judgement along the road, Breasal's spiritual depression begins. It is cast in terms that reveal the irony in Breasal's earlier observation of "what extraordinary things one came on when one went on a far road".

How empty the road was, and how dreary with its long hedgerows and black cattle looking at them through the gaps! Now that their purpose in setting out was gone from them, listlessness and melancholy took hold of Breasal. FS, 464

Breasal experiences a series of disasters, each one worse than the last. Agnes is bilked of all their money and arranges to leave Breasal as a hostage at the inn where they owe money. Breasal is forced to participate in the terrifying, bloody task of pig-killing and must perform other "prisoner-like" tasks for the choleric inn-keeper. Fear of further

imprisonment--he has mistakenly taken a book belonging to the inn-keeper's daughter--spurs Breasal's flight to the camp of Lem Grabbitt.

The mark of Breasal's descent is the increasing lowliness of the company he must keep. Along the road with Agnes, the unsavory road people who, as Breasal observes, do not dare to approach them so long as Agnes and Breasal have the air of engaging in a respectable enterprise, begin to plague them after their mission fails; then Breasal is "traded" into the company of the pig-jobbers and the disreputable Johnny Rose; from them, he passes into the keeping of tinkers whose trade is below pig-killing and all other trades, and who stand, partly excluded, partly excluding themselves, on the furthest marches of respectable society. Finally, Breasal associates himself with one whose occupation even the tinkers scorn: Barrelman. Barrelman is deprived of the symbols of identity--name and weaponry--which Colum's heroes, from the King of Ireland's Son to Ulick O'Rehill, strive to attain. He has no other name of his own and no weapon, neither sword nor stonemason's hammer; he must borrow a knife from Lem Grabbitt to clean the stinking hedgehog that he roasts, while even the lowly tinkers enjoy decent meat and can afford cakes and all. He makes a living by exposing himself to the missiles thrown at him by others, relying on his quick, jerky movements to avoid them. He is a human counterpart to the water-hen whom Lem Grabbitt pelts with stones and whom Breasal pities. Whereas Grabbitt breaks the wild-fowl's wing, a tricky throw of a stick breaks Barrelman's arm--and his spirit as well, it seems, for while Breasal watches in terror, Barrelman tries to hang himself from a tree. Barrelman is rescued, but the trauma of the incident divides Breasal from his

lowliest human companion. Identifying himself at last with a wild animal rather than any kind of human being whatsoever, Breasal burrows into a hole in a hay rick "that some animal had shaped for itself" (FS, 497).

For Breasal, the despair borne of the rejection that he has inferred even before being named a bastard, comes to mean loss of companionship, loss of a meaningful position in the social tissue, loss of will and, ultimately, loss of selfhood. His experiences on the road explore the tension between two equally unsatisfactory poles. Mortimer Scully, the inn-keeper, calls him a "'condemned bloody bastard'"; on the one hand, Breasal develops a terror of confinement, captivity, imprisonment.<sup>20</sup> On the other, he becomes a victim of the vagrant's rootlessness that soon makes one distrustful of life within four walls and conscious, as Breasal and the tinkers are, of a mark which divides settled people from the outcasts. Just as Gilly needs the Spae-Woman's intuitions and the King's Son's actions to help him resolve his impasse, Breasal needs his vision of Ulick and Ulick's intervention on his behalf.

The nadir of Ulick and Breasal's story, as an embodiment of the principle of despair, parallels the deferral and failure of The King of Ireland's Son, and Colum uses a similar device to extend the moment of crisis. In The King's Son, Colum stretches fluid moments in the narrative (Propp's functions of mediation and return), to translate into the formal terms of No-Action the despair of the characters. In The Flying Swans, he leaves Ulick in a fit of disillusionment after confronting Robert, while he concentrates on Breasal; when he has brought Breasal to the brink of suicide, he suspends his narrative

to return to Ulick. The nadir of Ulick's adventures is artistic and social rather than physical suicide--his decision to ship to sea. For Breasal, it is the temptation of a further, quite literal depth. He has sung a ballad about a boy who drowned in the "'deep and dark water in the lake of Cool-Finn'" (FS, 486). Going barefooted and wretched over the roads, he comes "to a sight that seemed familiar to him in strange places: a deep and dark lake whose water would let a boy sink down, sink down" (FS, 498). With a little help from Providence--Breasal's vision, the accident of Ulick's missed boat--both youths resist the temptation of permanent separation from mankind; both pull themselves back into the world of the living.

Surprising as it in some ways seems, The King of Ireland's Son is present in The Flying Swans like bones in a hand. A great many major episodes in The King's Son, from the "quarrel of kingdoms" near the opening to the lonely travels and tedious incarceration of Gilly of the Goatskin, have equivalents in The Flying Swans. Moreover, the two books exhibit similar themes, such as the search for identity and the relationship of brothers, and some of the same narrative patterns, often folktale structures modified by deferral and failure. The fact that The Flying Swans, in addition to recalling The King of Ireland's Son, has, as we have seen, a partly autobiographical impetus, suggests a previously hidden autobiographical element in The King's Son. Saba O'Breasal, Robert O'Rehill, and Breasal O'Rehill are partly recreations of Colum's own family, and Ulick's pain at his father's absence and moral deficiency, the melancholy and loneliness of his youth, as well as his artistic aspirations, are clearly modelled on the heartache and



ambition of Colum's own youth. (See above, Chapter VI, p. 237 and p. 233, note 2.) The closeness of the two brothers, moreover, is inspired by Colum's companionship with his brother Fred and his economic responsibility for his younger siblings.<sup>21</sup> The similarities between Sheen's ordeal and Saba's, then, between the King's Son and Gilly on the one hand and Ulick and Breasal on the other, indicate that many elements of The King of Ireland's Son, even the most folkloric, have been quite carefully selected by Colum to reflect his experience. Just as Colum's narrative voice is disguised in this book by the storytelling frame, the autobiographical element is rendered in the most discreet manner. Indeed, in The King of Ireland's Son, Colum crystallizes his personal passions in the usually abstract, apparently non-referential forms of the folktale, in the process creating an artistic form upon which he draws throughout his literary career.

The closeness of the two books affirms as well Colum's sense of an ultimate, though hardly simple, compatibility between the folktale and the folk life. The folktale, for him, encodes human experience (no matter how abstractly or marvellously), be it particularities of cottage life or universal problems of human relationships. The kind of folktale that follows two brothers, separates them, and reunites them, for instance, translates the brotherhood bond into narrative form. A tale like "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers," on the other hand, in which the sins of parents and rivals and the enchantment of brothers and sons must be expiated by the sacrifice of the isolated, silenced heroine, encodes the anguish of the female experience. At the same time that tales like these embody human concerns, human life

often falls by itself roughly into the patterns of traditional narrative. Colum structures Ulick's life to reveal this phenomenon: although the rule of fairy tale is often overthrown in The Flying Swans, in the end the shape of Ulick's life resembles the shape of one kind of folktale. It is, however, a garbled folktale pattern that Colum embeds in his story. Ulick's life, broadly speaking, follows the pattern of heroic tales and stories, yet the folktale's automatic, artificial happy-endings are denied. Instead, there is The Flying Swans' version of deferral and failure: Saba's long decline in fortune and health, her death, Ulick's flirtation with self-imposed exile, Breasal's trip to the edge of the lake. These instances are realistically drawn, but references to folklore in the narrative material make them, like instances of deferral and failure in The King's Son, dangerous extensions into death and loss of the moments of frustration and bafflement in genuine folktale narrative. As in both The King of Ireland's Son and Castle Conquer, reality is intransigent, a field so uneven and rocky that it all but defeats the plough. The outcome of events, though promising, is meliorative rather than triumphant. The order which eventually reveals itself is only partial, yet more substantial and more profound for having been so frequently balked.

## Notes

- 1 The last ellipsis is mine.
- 2 I base this inference on Colum's five-part memoir of boyhood, "Padraic Colum Remembers," where Colum's juxtaposition of his own youthful feeling of hopelessness with a romantic enthusiasm for some of the same stories that Ulick reveres (notably "The Fire Dwellers" from Moore's Lalla Rookh) suggests an autobiographical source for Ulick's struggle to move from fantasy to realism.
- 3 The first ellipsis is mine.
- 4 There is a scene very close to this one in The King of Ireland's Son. When the King's Son acquires the Sword of Light, he immediately compromises his achievement by drinking from nine forbidden cups. He then finds himself riding, like the priest, among the noisy rabblement of the Swallow People, to whom he displays an arrogance that is not only uncharacteristic of him but also quite unworthy of his heroic posture. In both scenes, Colum explores the danger of hubris which jeopardizes a figure's claim to heroism. See The King of Ireland's Son, pp. 86-88.
- 5 Padraic Colum: A Biographical-Critical Introduction, p. 105.
- 6 The first part of "The Henwife's Son" is too spare to specify, since no details are given of the hero's activities "abroad." It belongs simply to the group of tales in which a poor lad rises above his station. The second part of the tale is easier to identify. It is a version of "The Magician and His Pupil," Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 325.
- 7 Ann Adelaide Murphy discusses the importance of the Gobaun Saor in The Flying Swans in "Padraic Colum: A Critical Study," p. 31.
- 8 Colum is an outsider in a different way from Yeats and other Irish Revivalists. Whereas Yeats and Lady Gregory were always firmly ensconced in the Anglo-Irish upper classes, from which they occasionally descended into peasant cottages, Colum lived as a peasant among his mother's people for a time during his youth, much like Ulick O'Rehill. As a consequence of having come from a different environment, he looked on peasant life differently from his cousins, for instance, who hardly noticed what had always been a part of their life. Yet Colum had a stake in rural life and an intimacy with its people that many of his contemporaries never had and perhaps never really wanted. See Bowen's "Ninety Years in Retrospect," p. 18.

9 One of the most amusing is the chase after a hare. In Irish folktales and early manuscript romances, this motif is most often associated with the Knight or Gruagach who lost his sons and his laugh after pursuing a rabbit that made free with their food. The hero of the tale often learns the story only by force, but then chases after the rabbit himself and redeems everything. In The Flying Swans, this motif is reduced to Uncle Virgil's comical pursuit of his pet hare, Garry, p. 69. Garry is short for Garryowen, which is also the name of the Citizen's dog in the Cyclops section of Ulysses.

10 Vivian Mercier points out the import of these titles, "Sinewy Style of Irish Revival," p. 404. Zack Bowen indicates that he, too, has noted these titles when he calls The Flying Swans a Bildungsroman influenced by those Irish sagas dealing with expulsion and return of the Irish heroes and by The Mabinogion, the series of Welsh romances concerning the youthful exploits of various Celtic heroes.

Padraic Colum, p. 98.

11 The theory of the "Expulsion and Return Formula" was first introduced by Johann Georg von Hahn in Sagwissenschaftliche Studien, published posthumously in 1876. Alfred Nutt applied von Hahn's formula, consisting of sixteen events often found in heroic tales, to Celtic materials five years later in "The Aryan Expulsion-and-Return Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of the Celts" (1881). The myth-ritualist Lord Raglan developed a related analysis of "The Hero of Tradition," in 1934, expanded to book length in 1936 (The Hero: A Study in Myth, Tradition and Drama). Although Raglan's book, in paperback reprint, enjoyed a vogue in the 1960s, Vladimir Propp's system of the thirty-one functions of the folktale in Morphology of the Folktale (1928; tr. 1958) is, according to the folklorist Alan Dundes, "perhaps the most complete account of the hero's 'life history' as it appears in folktales." Studies in Folklore (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 143.

12 "Gaelic Tradition," page 15.

13 Folktales of Ireland, p. 43.

14 Folktales of Ireland, p. 43.

15 Acquisition of weaponry and names is frequently represented in folklore, but there is some evidence that Colum borrowed more from the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes than the pattern of his progress to manhood. In Part IV of "Math, the Son of Mathonwy," Gwydion goes in search of the wounded Lleu, who has taken the form of an eagle. The scene in which Gwydion lures him into his lap with a series of poems is very like the King's Son's search for Fedelma's falcon, in between episodes of the story of "The King of Cats." See Colum's Orpheus: Myths of the World (New York: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 162-175. But Colum may also have been thinking of the story of the mad bird-king Suibhne, whose story is

the framework for The Frenzied Prince (1945). Here we have an example of the interrelatedness that characterizes Celtic written and oral lore.

16 See, for example, "Blaiman, Son of Apple," where the hero "rose, with the activity of his limbs, out of the joints of his bones over his enemies." Jeremiah Curtin, Hero-Tales of Ireland, p. 400.

17 Compare Colum's "The Beggar's Child," also a lullaby for a wanderer's child, Poems, p. 114.

18 For a fuller discussion of the swan motif, see Zack Bowen, Padraic Colum, pp. 101-104. It seems unlikely that any Irish writer could put a vision of flying swans before an artist-protagonist without invoking Yeats's "Wild Swans at Coole." However, this motif has a predecessor within Colum's canon in The King of Ireland's Son, where the Swan of Endless Tales appears to the two heroes, the King's Son and Gilly, at their first meeting. In that book, the Irish heroic tales with which the swan confounds his listeners make him a symbol of Irish nationalism. There is nothing to connect the flying swans in the novel under discussion with the theme of Irish nationality, other than their sympathetic resonance with the earlier symbol, but in marking the important junctures in a heroic story, they convey the same sense that the Swan of Endless Tales suggests of a Providence at work to order human affairs.

19 See Vladimir Propp's discussion of the different ways of combining moves, in The Morphology of the Folktale, p. 93.

20 Imprisonment, one of the bitterest aspects of British rule, is a theme of Irish discourse that changes, scars, or breaks a rank of good men in Colum's work: Owen Paralon (in "Fore-Piece," The Poet's Circuits), Francis Gillick, and, in The Flying Swans, Robert O'Rehill and Anthony Duineen.

21 Colum lost Fred's companionship when Fred enlisted in the British Army, a circumstance that Colum transfers to Ulick's friend Clement Comyn in The Flying Swans. (Ulick gains admittance to the army barracks to bid Clement adieu by claiming to be his brother.) Fred was a sailor, as Clement, and, for a time, Ulick hope to be, and Colum dedicates his volume of poetry, Old Pastures, to him.

#### IN MEMORY OF MY BROTHER

F.H.C.

You who made no claims and gave no denials,  
soldier and sailor, who could have been  
companion of men who carried the eagles.

Old Pastures (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. v. But as Colum had another brother who had Breasal's interest in the priesthood--one of the several siblings whom Colum helped to support--Breasal may be a composite of more than one of Colum's brothers.

### Conclusion

In the "Fore-Piece" to The Poet's Circuits (1960), a poem that is roughly contemporary with The Flying Swans, Colum reminisces about how he became committed to a poetic vocation. He recalls how a man whom he calls Owen Paralon took him into the countryside, where his attachment to the quickly vanishing life and culture of the country people developed into a resolution to assume the ancient position of poet, long vacant among his host's people. In the course of describing Owen Paralon's importance to him, Colum touches on the complexity of the relationship between life and the collective dream of folklore, sometimes characterized by a disappointing disparity, sometimes by a surprising correspondence.

As in Fenian stories  
Some man unheard of forcefully comes in,  
And by demands he makes turns things round  
And changes someone's history, he came  
Into my days that were unlike the heroes'  
And his demand was only that I take  
His hospitality.<sup>1</sup>

Colum finds echoes of ancient tradition in Owen Paralon's hospitality, hints of Fenian hero tales in the effect of his hero's invitation, and (as he goes on to say) a suggestion of the folktale hero in Owen Paralon's speech, in his character, and in the sculpted lines of his face. Colum's own life, "unlike the heroes'," and so different from Owen Paralon's, is marked by a lassitude that both describes Colum's earliest adulthood and characterizes the modern urban world, particularly in the weary closing months of the nineteenth century. The political subjugation of Ireland in this poem is both a heroic cause and a

further drain on the remnants of the ancient heroic vigor of the race, recorded in heroic tales. Owen Paralon speaks out against the British at a rally with heroic courage and probity, but his consequent, debilitating incarceration robs him of his "fullness of heroic energy." The "Fore-Piece" suggests how difficult and how intensely important Colum found the question of the relevance of lore to life.

In the fictional works that we have been examining, we find Colum constantly evaluating and revising the content and form of the folktale. The King of Ireland's Son uses folktales in ways that a realistic, mimetic novel cannot, and many of Colum's revisions of the real folktales he uses are formal, designed to facilitate the synthesis of many tales into a marvellous whole. Yet Colum also expresses in this work a double vision of Irish heroism. The King's Son represents a traditional romantic heroism, deepened by the spiritual nature of trials that in the folktale would be purely physical. Alongside this kind of heroism is the peasant-heroism of Gilly of the Goatskin, who is less intrepid and warlike than his half-brother, but more responsive to the land, to nature and to the Destiny that mysteriously guides human events. The rhythms of deferral and failure in The King's Son, extensions of the obstacles and delays that are a natural part of folktale action, are devices for exploring "states of mind" in a mode that habitually externalizes them into "happenings." Furthermore, deferral and failure intrude the disorderliness of real life into the great narrative mechanism of the folktale. Colum baffles the folktale principle of action, thus threatening narrative order and substituting the workings of Providence for the narrative causality which in the folktale is the sole and certain means to happy endings.

In Castle Conquer, Colum's first novel, there is much less use of actual folktale, folktale incident and folktale narrative mechanism. There is, however, a strong sense of the relevance of traditional culture, particularly folklore, to the development of modern character types. Indeed, characterization is accomplished in Castle Conquer through the invocation of relevant traditions, rather than through a character's actions, speech, or personal history. Thus Colum creates Francis Gillick's character from three different heroic traditions, historical (Owen Roe O'Neill, Angus O'Failey), folkloric (Strong John, or Gilly of the Goatskin, but also kings' sons) and political (modern Irish "poet-captains," like Thomas MacDonagh). Characters acquire a sense of their own identities by listening to stories that reveal their traditions, which may be racial, genealogical, or "private." One of Castle Conquer's most important formal features results from the intrusion of the stories and poems which help the characters gain a sense of themselves, like the story of Brighid Gilroy and the Irish folksongs that Brighid hears, or Michael Philabeen's tale, which defines Owen Paralon. The vestiges of folktale heroes and heroines in Francis Gillick and Brighid Moynagh, the importance of tradition in creating characters, and the embedding of tales and songs in the novel, in the manner of folktales with in-tales and Irish manuscript romances with embedded poems and stories, mark the forms of Castle Conquer as distinctively Irish.

In The Flying Swans, Colum connects the marvellous world of folktale to the grey imperfect world of the Irish countryside and amalgamates



folktale structures and literary structures more boldly and thoroughly than anywhere else in his canon. Colum's distrust of the folktale's narrative rationalism is at its deepest, as is his criticism of dreamers like Robert O'Rehill who are obsessed with the trappings of romantic heroism--glorious ancestors, beautiful horses, eighteenth-century swords. Colum discards many of the constituents of Irish heroism that were important for Francis Gillick, yet his radical revision rescues the concept of heroism itself. In the process, Colum resolves a problem with heroism that had always troubled him. Heroism traditionally demands action; in Yeats's well-known lines,

The intellect of man is forced to choose  
Perfection of the life, or of the work.<sup>2</sup>

Colum makes Ulick's stonecutting hammer a literal and figurative weapon and his art not contemplative, but itself a species of heroic activity. The combat that proves Ulick's heroism becomes a symbolic form to connect Ulick's artistic vigor with the traditional heroic vigor that the folktale expresses. Indeed, in The Flying Swans, Ulick's heroism cannot be divorced from folktale form. Colum breaks folktales, using deferral and failure not only to baffle but also to destroy the expectations that attend folktale narrative. He synthesizes a garbled tale, significantly like The King of Ireland's Son, which assimilates the folktale to intransigent reality, creating a heroic narrative form that embraces Ulick O'Rehill and Irish heroic tradition alike.

As we look at Colum's progression from The King of Ireland's Son to The Flying Swans, we see a chronological evolution of themes, mostly related to heroism, a development of technique, and a generic movement

from romance to realism that not only mark Colum's development as an artist but also indicate the course of Irish fiction, from the Revival to the 1950s. In the matter of their use of folklore, however, The King of Ireland's Son and Castle Conquer, rather than leading up to The Flying Swans, constitute extremes which the latter book falls between. In The King's Son, source folktales are tailored, augmented, and neatly and expressively fitted together, according to the rules of the folktale itself. The intrusion of real life, or realistic fiction, in the form of character psychology, naturalistic detail, descriptive sociology, or even temporal or geographical specificity, while significant in comparison with the folktale, is minimal in the context of Colum's novels. On the other hand, Castle Conquer borrows less from folktale narrative than either The King's Son or The Flying Swans. Incidents reminiscent of the folktale, for instance, are rare in Castle Conquer, limited for the most part to Francis Gillick's arrival on a shabby, ill-shaped horse, with its suggestion of romantic and comic folktale heroes on horseback. If folktale incident is uncommon in Castle Conquer, folktale character and folksong have an important role to play. Colum draws on the first to create a context for Francis Gillick's attempt at heroism and the second to establish Brigid Moynagh as a symbol for Ireland. The larger matter of oral tradition itself, which Colum sees as a mechanism for conserving culture and history that makes possible the development of an individual and national sense of identity, comprises one of Colum's major themes. But the formal effect of oral tradition is confined to interludes: the stories which Michael Philabeen and Maelshaughlinn tell, and the stories that record

the histories of Brighid Gilroy and of the Long Dance. Because these interpolations interrupt but do not help to comprise the main narrative, and because they are based on folk anecdotes and legends rather than on folktales, the forms of the folktale do not penetrate very far into the narrative structure of Castle Conquer. In contrast, a broad range of folktale elements--character, incident, narrative pattern, language, story-telling voice--have both formal and thematic ramifications in The Flying Swans. Moreover, Colum seems to have The King of Ireland's Son very specifically in mind as he blends folktale and Bildungsroman in The Flying Swans. The similarities of the narrative forms and techniques of the two books reveal The King's Son as Colum's archetypal garbled folktale, the model for Ulick's revised version of heroism.

An important narrative form in all three books is oral storytelling. Castle Conquer has its embedded tales and songs, The King's Son is full of in-tales, and The Flying Swans has "The Henwife's Son," which, however, is not set off from the narrative so completely as the stories in the other books. If embedded tales are less important in The Flying Swans than in The King of Ireland's Son or Castle Conquer, The Flying Swans does share with The King of Ireland's Son a narrative frame designed to suggest that the narration is oral rather than written. Narrative frames and embedded tales alike point to Colum's critical concern for the way that the artifice of folk narrative grows out of real experience. When Colum describes how Honor Paralon and Considine Gilroy tell the story of Brighid Gilroy, he emphasizes the process by which real events are turned into story.

Beside the fire they sat, and their voices, though low, had a vibrant quality, for they were speaking, not of everyday events, but of a drama that was well-remembered. CC, 253

It is the drama, the native excitement, meaningfulness and order of real events (special rather than ordinary occurrences) that make them memorable enough to spawn folk narrative: local legends for domestic melodramas like the story of Brighid Gilroy, ballads for the stories of young girls and boys caught up in the political struggle, and heroic tales (märchen as well as *novelle*) for events, like those of Ulick's life, that exhibit the archetypal heroic patterns. Part of the function of the narrative frames of The King of Ireland's Son and The Flying Swans is to give the sense that the events that are related and in which we willingly suspend disbelief (especially in The Flying Swans) are turning into patterned story before our eyes.

The above passage from Castle Conquer also suggests that Colum wanted the "vibrant quality" of the storytelling voice to give to his books the vividness and immediacy that dramatic elements give to his poetry. Colum regarded himself above all else as a dramatist, and he considered that his principal poetic contribution was the introduction of the dramatic lyric into Irish poetry.<sup>3</sup> The people who speak many of his poems "are really characters in a play that hasn't been written," and even his Noh plays, written at the end of his career, are "an attempt to make poetry dramatic."<sup>4</sup> Storytelling in Colum's fiction, or even ballad-singing, capitalizes on the vibrancy of the human voice. The distinction of Brighid's version of "The Croppy Boy," for instance, is her ability to make the scene live.

She sang a street song: there was a lament in the last lines of it, but before her voice sank to the lament, she had put one scene before all who listened to her. CC, 49

The voice can make what is past or legendary present and alive before us--as Eilis's "care for the good word" makes the story she tells compelling.<sup>5</sup> Part of its effectiveness is in its accentuation of the all-important pattern in a story, which the shanachie emphasizes with folktale runs and speech rhythms.<sup>6</sup> Thus in The King of Ireland's Son, the storyteller addresses "my kind foster-child" at important junctures of the narrative. In Castle Conquer, the characters who tell and retell the embedded stories always reveal the pattern of the stories they tell. And in The Flying Swans, the narrator lapses into a version of the storyteller's rhythmic speech at critical moments in Ulick's life. When Ulick's family leaves the country for Cairnthead, Colum intones formulaically, "Now was the time; other times were over" (FS, 126). When Ulick turns away from The Abbey for the last time, there is a more extravagant version of a folktale "run."

Then, as the story says, he set off, and there was blackening on his soles and holing in his shoes; the little birds were taking their rest in the butts of the bushes and the tops of the trees, but if they were, he was not, and the journey before him is the whole of our story. FS, 11

Such folktale-like linguistic markers remind us that The Flying Swans is not only the story of a boy's journey through his youth but also the story of a story, and that in it, the documentary realism of the novel is ordered by the narrative patterns of the folktale.

## Notes

- 1 The Poet's Circuits, p. 1, ll. 13-19.
- 2 "The Choice," Selected Poetry, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1962, rpt. 1974), p. 153.
- 3 "'I am primarily a man of the theatre and always have been,'" Colum told Charles Burgess: "'If I am not a playwright, I am nothing.'" Charles Burgess, "A Playwright and His Work," p. 43. His comments on his dramatic poetry are in "Ninety Years in Retrospect," p. 17.
- 4 "Ninety Years in Retrospect," pp. 18 and 32 respectively.
- 5 "Ellis: A Woman's Story," Studies, p. 30.
- 6 As Colum observes in Story Telling New and Old, pp. 4-6, 9.

## Bibliography

## Primary Sources

- Campbell, John. Popular Tales of the West Highlands. 3 vols. 1860; new ed., London: Alexander Gardner, 1890-93; rpt. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1969.
- Carleton, William. The Black Prophet: A Tale of the Famine. Belfast: Simms and McIntyre, 1847.
- . Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry. 1830-1833; new ed., New York: Wilson and Hawkins, 1862.
- Colum, Padraic. The Adventures of Odysseus. New York: Macmillan, 1918.
- . "Another World from Mine." The New Yorker, Oct. 10, 1970, pp. 46, 47, 49.
- . Balloon. A Comedy in Four Acts. New York: Macmillan, 1929.
- . The Big Tree of Bunlahy: Stories of My Own Countryside. New York: Macmillan, 1933.
- . The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter. New York: Macmillan, 1920.
- . A Boy in Eirinn. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1913.
- , ed. Broadsheet Ballads. Dublin: Maunsel, 1913.
- . Castle Conquer, (A Novel). New York: Macmillan, 1923.
- . The Children of Lir, A Poetic Tragedy in One Act. Journal of Irish Literature 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), 109-123.
- . The Children of Odin. New York: Macmillan, 1920.
- , introd. The Complete Grimms' Fairy Tales. Trans. Margaret Hunt. Ed. James Sterne. New York: Random House, 1944, rpt. 1972.
- . Cross Roads in Ireland. New York and London: MacMillan, 1930.
- . The Desert. A Play in Three Acts. Dublin: Devereux, 1912.
- . The Fiddler's House. A Play in Three Acts. 1907; rpt. in Three Plays. 1917; rpt. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1963.

- . The Flying Swans. New York: Crown, 1957.
- . The Forge in the Forest. New York: Macmillan, 1938.
- . The Fountain of Youth: Stories to Be Told. New York: Macmillan, 1927.
- . The Frenzied Prince, Being Heroic Stories of Ancient Ireland. Philadelphia: David McKay, 1943.
- . A Half-Day's Ride; or Estates in Corsica, New York and London: Macmillan, 1932.
- . "The Giant and His Servants." New York Tribune, Children's Page, Nov. 28, Dec. 5, 12, 19, 26, 1915; Jan. 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30, 1916.
- . The Golden Fleece and the Heroes Who Lived Before Achilles. New York: Macmillan, 1921.
- . "The Herd's House." Dial 81 (Dec., 1926), 471-482.
- . "The Irish Literary Movement." Forum 53 (1915), 133-148.
- . The Island of the Mighty, Being the Hero Stories of Celtic Britain Retold (from the Mabinogion). New York: Macmillan, 1924.
- . "Journey." Dial 86 (June, 1929), 451-462.
- . The King of Ireland's Son. New York: Macmillan, 1916; rpt. 1962.
- . The Land, An Agrarian Comedy. 1905; rpt. in Three Plays. 1917; rpt. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1963.
- . The Legend of Saint Columba. New York: Macmillan, 1935.
- . Mogu the Wanderer; or The Desert. A Fantastic Comedy in Three Acts. Boston: Little, Brown, 1917.
- . Moytura: A Play for Dancers. Dublin: Dolmen, 1963.
- . My Irish Year. New York: J. Pott, 1912.
- . Old Pastures. New York: Macmillan, 1930.
- . "The Opening of The Flying Swans: A Story." Dublin Magazine 30, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1954), 40-49.
- . Orpheus: Myths of the World. New York: Macmillan, 1930.



- . "Padraic Colum Remembers." The Irish Times, Sept. 30, 1969, p. 12; Oct. 1, 1969, p. 12; Oct. 2, 1969, p. 13; Oct. 3, 1969, p. 10; Oct. 4, 1969, p. 10.
- . The Peep-Show Man. New York: Macmillan, 1924.
- . Poems. New York: Macmillan, 1932.
- , and Edward J. O'Brien, ed. Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood. Boston: Small, Maynard, 1916.
- . "The Poet Captain: Thomas MacDonagh." Poetry (New York) 110, No. 4 (July, 1967), p. 253.
- . The Poet's Circuits. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- . "The Promise of Irish Letters." The Nation (New York) 117 (1923), 396-397.
- . The Road Round Ireland. New York: Macmillan, 1926.
- . "Saint Brigid's Feast." Today's Housewife 8 (February, 1919).
- . Six Who Were Left in a Shoe. London: Brentaus, 1924; rpt. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.
- . The Stone of Victory and Other Tales of Padraic Colum. New York: Macmillan, 1927.
- . Story Telling New and Old. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
- . Studies. Tower Press Booklets, Series 2, No. 2. Dublin: Maunsel, 1907.
- . Thomas Muskerrey. A Play in Three Acts. 1910; rpt. Three Plays. 1917; rpt. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1963.
- . Three Men (A Tale). London: Elkin, Matthews and Marrot, 1930.
- . "The Tradition That Existed in My Grandmother's House." The New Yorker (Dec. 23, 1967), 28-31.
- . A Treasury of Irish Folklore: The Stories, Traditions, Legends, Humor, Wisdom, Ballads and Songs of the Irish People. New York: Crown, 1954, rev. 1962.
- . "Vagrant Voices, A Self-Portrait." Journal of Irish Literature 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), 63-75.
- . Wild Earth and Other Poems. Dublin: Maunsel, 1907.

Curtin, Jeremiah. Hero Tales of Ireland. London: Macmillan, 1894; rpt.  
New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971.

------. Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland. Boston, 1890.

Edgeworth, Maria. Castle Rackrent. Oxford English Novels. 1800; rpt.  
London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964.

Ford, Patrick K., trans. The Mabinog and Other Welsh Tales. Berkeley:  
Univ. of California Press, 1977.

Greene, David H., ed. An Anthology of Irish Literature. 2 vols.  
New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971.

Hyde, Douglas. Beside the Fire: A Collection of Irish Gaelic Folk Stories. Notes by Alfred Nutt. London: David Nutt, 1910.

Jacobs, Joseph, ed. Celtic Fairy Tales. London: The Bodley Head, 1970.  
(Rpt. of Celtic Fairy Tales, 1891, and More Celtic Fairy Tales, 1894.)

Kennedy, Patrick, ed. Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts. 1866;  
rpt. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968.

Larminie, William, ed. and trans. West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances.  
London, 1893; new ed., Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield,  
1973; rpt. 1976.

Ó Súilleabháin, Séan, ed. and trans. Folktales of Ireland. Chicago:  
Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966.

Yeats, William Butler, ed. Irish Fairy and Folk Tales. London:  
T. Fisher Unwin, 1892; rpt., as Irish Folk Stories and Fairy Tales, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974.

------. Selected Poetry. Ed. A. Norman Jeffares. London: Macmillan,  
1962; rpt. 1974.

------. A Vision. 1937; rev. ed. 1956; rpt. London: Macmillan  
(Collier Books), 1977.

#### Secondary Sources

Bowen, Zack. "Ninety Years in Retrospect: Excerpts from Interviews with  
Padraic Colum." Journal of Irish Literature 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1973),  
14-34.

------. Padraic Colum: A Biographical-Critical Introduction. Carbondale,  
Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1970.

- , and Gordon Henderson. "Padraic Colum, 1881-1972." Journal of Irish Literature 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), 3-8.
- Boyd, Ernest. "Romantic Ireland." Rev. of Castle Conquer. The Nation 117 (Sept. 19, 1923), 300-301.
- Bruford, Alan. Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances: A Study of the Early Modern Irish "Romantic Tales" and Their Oral Derivatives. Dublin: The Folklore of Ireland Society, 1969.
- Burgess, Charles. "A Playwright and His Work." Journal of Irish Literature 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), 40-58.
- Campbell, Douglas S. "Padraic Colum's Celebration of Littleness." Eire-Ireland 9, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 60-68.
- Colum, Mary. Life and the Dream. Garden City: Doubleday, 1947.
- Costello, Peter. The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revival in Literature from Parnell to the Death of Yeats. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977; New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978.
- Curtis, Edmund. A History of Ireland. London: Methuen, 1936; Rpt. 1973.
- Delargy, James H. "The Gaelic Story-Teller, with Some Notes on Gaelic Folk-tales." (Sir John Rhys Lecture, November 28, 1945.) Proceedings of the British Academy, V. 31 (1945), pp. 177-221.
- Denson, Alan. "Padraic Colum: An Appreciation with a Check-list of His Publications." Dublin Magazine 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1967), 50-67.
- , "Padraic Colum at Ninety." Irish Times, December 8, 1971, p. 10.
- , "Padraic Colum, 1881-1972." The Capuchin Annual. Dublin, 1973. Pp. 45-54.
- , "Padraic Colum: Factual Additions and Corrections to a Check-list of His Publications." Dublin Magazine 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1967), pp. 83-85.
- Dundes, Alan, ed. The Study of Folklore. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965.
- Fallis, Richard. The Irish Renaissance. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977.
- Flanagan, Thomas. The Irish Novelists 1800-1850. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958 (published 1959).
- Howarth, Herbert. The Irish Writers, 1880-1940. London: Rockcliff, 1958.

- Jeffares, Alexander Norman. Anglo-Irish Literature. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982.
- Johnston, Denis. "Gaelic Tradition." Rev. of The Flying Swans. Saturday Review 40 (July 13, 1957), pp. 15-16.
- Kiely, Benedict. "The Core of Colum's Ireland." Irish Monthly 77 (October, 1949), 448-452.
- . Modern Irish Fiction: A Critique. Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950.
- Loftus, Richard. Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry. Madison, Wis.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964.
- Lüthi, Max. Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales. Trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976.
- MacLysaght, Edward. Irish Families: Their Names, Arms, and Origins. Dublin: H. Figgis, 1957.
- Mercier, Vivian. "Sinewy Style of the Irish Renaissance." Rev. of The Flying Swans. The Commonweal 66 (July 19, 1957), 404-405.
- Murphy, Ann Adelaide. "Autobiographical Elements in The Flying Swans." Conference paper, delivered to the American Committee for Irish Studies. May, 1983.
- . "Padraic Colum: A Critical Study of His Plays and Poems." Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1980.
- Ó Súilleabháin, Seán. A Handbook of Irish Folklore. 1942; rpt. Hatboro, Penn.: Folklore Associates, 1963.
- , and Reidar Christiansen. The Types of the Irish Folktale. Folklore Fellows Communications No. 188. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1963.
- Propp, Vladimir. Morphology of the Folktale. 1928. 2nd. English ed., trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society and the Indiana Univ. Research Center for the Language Sciences, 1968.
- Reynolds, Horace. "Two Boys in County Dublin." Rev. of The Flying Swans. New York Times Book Review, June 16, 1957, p. 5.
- Thompson, Stith. The Folktale. 1946; rpt. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977.

- . Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, and Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest Books and Local Legends. Revised and enlarged. 6 vols. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1955-1958.
- . The Types of the Folk-tale, A Classification and Bibliography: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen Translated and Enlarged. Folklore Fellows Communications, No. 74. 1928; 2nd rev. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1964.
- Tindall, William York. "An Irish Youth's Questing." Review of The Flying Swans. New York Herald Tribune Book Review, June 16, 1957, p. 4.