

FIONN IN HELL

An anonymous early sixteenth-century poem in Scots describes Fionn mac Cumhail as having ‘dang þe devill and gart him ʒowle’ (‘struck the Devil and made him yowl’) (Fisher 1999: 36). The poem is known as ‘The Crying of Ane Play.’ Scots literature of the late medieval and early modern period often shows a garbled knowledge of Highland culture; commonly portraying Gaels and their language and traditions negatively. Martin MacGregor notes that Lowland satire of Highlanders can, ‘presuppose some degree of understanding of the language, and of attendant cultural and social practices’ (MacGregor 2007: 32). Indeed Fionn and his band of warriors, collectively *Na Fiantaichean* or *An Fhèinn*¹ in modern Scottish Gaelic, are mentioned a number of times in Lowland literature of the period (MacKillop 1986: 72-74). This article seeks to investigate the fate of Fionn’s soul in late medieval and early modern Gaelic literature, both Irish and Scottish. This is done only in part to consider if the yowling Devil and his encounter with Fionn from the ‘The Crying of Ane Play’ might represent something recognizable from contemporaneous Gaelic literature. Our yowling Devil acts here as something of a prompt for an investigation of Fionn’s potential salvation or damnation in a number of sixteenth-century, and earlier, Gaelic ballads. The monumental late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century (Dooley 2004) text *Acallam na Senórach* (‘The Colloquy of the Ancients’) will also be considered here.²

Firstly, the Scots poem must be briefly investigated in order to determine its understanding of Gaelic conventions. The purpose here is not to try to ‘bag’ this Scots poem for Gaelic (Gillies 2005: 395), but rather to highlight select areas of the poem which might be seen to intersect with, or subvert, the conventions of literature concerning Fionn. This will give us some basis on which to judge this portrayal of Fionn’s seeming victory over the Devil, before beginning our examination of Gaelic Fenian sources. The poem opens with ‘Harry harry hobillschowe’ and is thought to be a poetic banns; inviting the merchants and other worthies of Edinburgh to attend a summer-time pageant play (Fisher 1999). There are two different recensions in two sixteenth-century manuscript sources. The earliest is the early sixteenth-century Asloan Manuscript (NLS MS 16500) where it is introduced with, ‘Heir followis þe manner of þe crying of ane playe.’ The other source is the Bannatyne Manuscript (NLS Adv. MS. 1.1.6), which is dated to 1568 and here the poem is introduced with, ‘Ane littill Interllud of þe droichis pairt of þe play.’ Scholars have variously attributed the poem to William Dunbar (d.1513x1530) or to Sir David Lyndsay (d.1555) (Parkinson 1995: 26). The *droich* (‘dwarf’) of the poem introduces us to his fantastical ancestors:

*Quhilk generit am of gyandis kynd
Fra strang hercules be strynd
Off all þe occident of ynd
My eldaris bair þe crowne*³

‘I am engendered of the race of giants,
descended from strong Hercules.

My elders bore the crown
of all the occident of India’.

(Fisher 1999: 36)

Thus initially we have Hercules and India, although the Bannatyne version has the penultimate line of this stanza as ‘of all þe occident and ynd’, i.e. East and West (Fisher 1999: 36) which may be preferable. The descriptions of the droich’s immediate family appear to suggest that we are to understand him as belonging to Gaelic stock. We learn that his great-grandfather was Fionn mac Cumhaill (fyn m^ckowle). His grandfather, here the son of Fionn, was the ubiquitous Gog Magog. Gog Magog is here one giant, like *Goemagog* in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britannie*, rather than two figures (Fisher 1999: 48-50; Wright & Crick 1984-91: Vol. I, 14). It seems that we are also to imagine Gog Magog here to be of Gaelic stock since he is the son of Fionn and dressed in ‘hieland pladdis of hair’ (‘Highland plaids of hair’). The third generation, the droich’s father, is Goll mac Morna (gow makmorne). Thus, the droich presents us with a lineage populated by characters from Gaelic tradition, a fact surely not lost on an early sixteenth-century Scottish audience. However, we must be alert to the fact that this *Hieland/Ersche* heroic lineage is here intermingled with other non-Gaelic characters and associated with the East.

As regards the Gaelic understanding of these characters, it is of course impossible to understand Goll as the grandson of Fionn. The two heroes and their two families, the Clann Mhorna and Clann Bhaoisgne, traditionally vacillate between cooperation and hostilities. *Macgnímarða Find* (‘The Boyhood Deeds of Fionn’) and *Fotha Catha Cnucha* (‘The Cause of the Battle of Cnucha’), two prose tales thought to date to the eleventh or twelfth centuries, explain that Goll killed Fionn’s father (Hennessey 1873-75; Meyer 1881-8; Nagy 1985: 209-21). The theme of the enmity between the two families is developed further, or at times underplayed, in the *Acallam* and in the later ballads (Parsons 2008: 14-28; Dooley 2012: 97-98). Keely Fisher suggests that the droich could be related to both Fionn and Goll through Cainche since she is ‘Finn’s daughter ... [and] the mother of Goll’s children’ (Fisher 1999: 47). Cainche appears at the end of the text *Bruidhean Chéise Corainn* (‘The Bruidhean of Keshcorran’) (Ní Shéaghdha & Ní Mhuirgheasa 1941: 3-14). In the version of *Bruidhean Chéise Corainn* written into NLS Adv. MS 72.1.36 in December 1690, a manuscript written by a Eoghan Mac Gilleoin for a Colin Campbell (of Kilberry?) (Black 1989: 155).⁴ we read:

*Tug Fionn ’inghean fēin an lā sin do Gholl, .i. Caon chneas-gheal inghean
Fhinn. Agus as ī a rug a[n] mac meanmnach mōr-oirdhearca dhō, .i. Feadh
mac Guill mheic Mhorna.*⁵

Fionn gave his own daughter to Goll that day, that is Caon Chneas-Gheal (‘White-Skinned’) the daughter of Fionn. And it was she who bore him the courageous illustrious son, that is Feadh son of Goll mac Morna.

(Ní Shéaghdha & Ní Mhuirgheasa 1941: 14)

In other manuscript versions of this tale her name appears as *Caemh Chneas-Gheal* (O'Grady 1892: Vol. I, 310; Vol. II, 347), rather than *Caon Chneas-Gheal*. The ballad 'Uathadh damh sa coirthe-so' ('Lone am I on this crag'), thought by Gerard Murphy to belong to the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 76), recounts some of the events of *Bruidhean Chéise Corainn* and indeed ends with mention of the son born to Fionn's daughter and Goll mac Morna (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part I, Lay XXXV). In this ballad she appears as *Cainche Imghile* ('all-bright Cainche'). *Caemh/Caon* and *Cainche* are apparently the same (MacKillop 1998: 70).⁶ Thus, a character who has Goll as his father and Fionn as a grandfather exists in parts of the Gaelic Fenian tradition. However, perhaps we should err on the side of caution here and assume that we are not meant to understand the droich in the poem as Feadha, son of Goll mac Morna and Fionn's daughter Caemh/Cainche; particularly given that the poem seems to suggest that Fionn, Gog Magog, Goll and the droich all belong to one genetic line.

It might be argued that a number of other themes in 'The Crying of Ane Play' reflect, or perhaps satirize, Fenian material. For instance, one could look to the association between the giants in the poem and the creation of important features of the landscape. In this poem Gog Magog has a wife so large that she personally creates various features of Scotland's physical geography. The bawdy descriptions include her creating Loch Lomond with her spittle, forming the crag of Craigforth (near Stirling) by passing gravel and we are told that she 'pischit þe mekele watter of Forth' (Fisher 1999: 37). One can of course point to all sorts of associations between majestic features of the Scottish (Bateman 2009: 4) and Irish landscapes and the Fenians. Indeed the discussion of places associated with the Fenians is vital to medieval Fenian literature in general, and to the narrative of the *Acallam* in particular (Ó Coileáin 1993; Baumgartner 1986/87). Yet perhaps this is more complex than it first appears. Firstly, the notion that the Fenians were giants at all is an interesting issue. The Irish historian Geoffrey Keating (d. 1644) disputed this at the beginning of the seventeenth century, directly opposing the view of the Scottish historian Hector Boece (d.1536):

Is éagcóir do-bheir Hector Boetius i Stair na h-Alban athach d'ainm ar Fhionn mac Cumhaill, agus fós is bréagach adeir go raibhe cúig cubhaid déag ar airde ann. Óir is follus a seinleabhraibh an tseanchusa nach raibhe ainmhéid ann tar a lucht chomhaimsire.

Hector Boetius, in the History of Alba, unjustly calls Fionn son of Cumhall a giant; and besides he falsely asserts that he was fifteen cubits in height. For it is plain from the old books of the *seanchus* that he was not of abnormal size as compared with his contemporaries.

(Dinneen 1902-14: Volume II, 330-31; MacKillop 1986:74)

Certainly, when St Patrick and his retinue first spot Caoilte and his men at the beginning of the *Acallam* they are filled with fear before 'na feraibh móra cona conaibh

móra leo' ('these great men together with their great dogs') (Stokes 1900: 3; Dooley & Roe 1999: 5; Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, xliii). It is also undeniable that by the early modern period, at least in certain contexts, Fionn 'had gained, by his allegedly prodigious strength and gargantuan feats, the reputation of being a giant.' (Fox and Woolf 2002:20). The legacy of this can be seen now and again in more modern Gaelic literature and folklore; presumably Màiri Mhòr nan Òran (d. 1898) has a giant in mind when she notes that the loch at Creag Shniadhasdail (Creag Sneosdal in Trotternish on today's English-language maps) is murky ever since Fionn washed his feet in the water (Meek 1977: 114). However, the Fenians as giants is certainly not a notion which is to the fore in surviving Gaelic literature of the medieval and early modern period. Perhaps we can choose, if we so wish, to concur with Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, that 'sixteenth-century references to the gigantic size of the Fianna in non-Gaelic documents ... have a false ring about them, but their falseness derives from satiric exaggeration of an existing idea' (Ó hÓgáin 1986/87: 210).

Neither, to my knowledge, is the notion of the Fenians as actual creators of significant features of the landscape particularly prevalent in the Gaelic literature of that period. They are associated with the erection of standing stones in at least one medieval Gaelic ballad (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Lay XLII) but not with the creation of lochs and eminences. Thus, it becomes difficult to find anything contemporaneous in Fenian literature with which to compare this Scots presentation. However, this is not to say that parallels from other Gaelic literature cannot be found for the irrepressible giantess of 'The Crying of Ane Play' whose riotous bodily functions fashion some of Scotland's landmarks. The creation of the Forth by urination is reminiscent of an episode from the end of the second recension of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* in which Meadhbh creates three great trenches known as *Fúal Medba* through menstruation/urination (O' Rahilly 1967: ll. 4824-32; O' Rahilly 1961: LL. 4954-62).⁷ Doris Edel points to Meadhbh also doing something similar in the text from the c. 1500 Glenmasan Manuscript (NLS 72.2.3) known as *Táin Bó Flidais II* (Edel 2006: 97; MacKinnon 1908: 208; Breatnach 1994).

Before consideration of the fate of Fionn's soul we might also highlight that the Scots poem could be seen to respond to Fenian material in at least one other way. The geographical sprawl of countries mentioned is somewhat reminiscent of the later Gaelic ballads which recount adventures in exotic countries. We have already noted the appearance of India in 'The Crying of Ane Play', but the poem also mentions France, Brittany, Spain, Ireland and Norway in conjunction with Gog Magog's wife. The droich also lists a number of countries from which he himself has been banished: the lands of the Ottoman Empire, France, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Hanseatic cities. The poem has the droich desiring to settle in Edinburgh and refusing to live in Ireland since 'For neuer in land quhar erische was vsit to duell had I delyte' (Fisher 1999: 40). Fisher notes that the 'obvious joke' here is that the droich who claims descent from the likes of Fionn and Goll 'cannot abide Gaelic.' (Fisher 1999: 52). One possible reading of this could be that the banishment from far-off lands subverts the occasional practice in Gaelic Fenian ballads of recounting exotic lands to which the Fenians had travelled and been victorious. Ballads, or lays, of the Fionn tradition were, as is well known as a result of the work of Dòmhnall Meek and others, not only sung and transmitted in Gaelic

Scotland but also composed by Scottish Gaels in the later medieval period. The early sixteenth-century Scottish manuscript, the Book of the Dean of Lismore (NLS Adv. 72.1.37) (henceforth *BDL*), contains around 25 Fenian ballads. Our other main source for medieval Fenian ballads is of course *Duanaire Finn* (UCD MS A 20) (henceforth *DF*), composed by the Irish in exile in Flanders at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It contains 70 ballads. Only 4 ballads are shared by these two sources and Meek points to the possibility of different genres being more popular in Scotland than Ireland and *vice versa* (Meek 2003). A ballad on the legendary battle of Gabhair, ‘Mór anocht mo chumha féin’ (‘Great tonight my own sorrow’), attributed to Ailéin mac Ruaidhrí in *BDL*, underlines the practice of associating the Fenians with battles in exotic lands:

*Ní roibh ón Innia anoir
go Fódla, iarthar (?) an domhain,
rí nach roibh fár smacht réir linn,
gus an chath soin, a Tháilginn.*

From India in the east to
to Ireland, the west-land of the world,
there was not a king but was subject to us in our time,
until that fight, O Adzehead.

(Cameron 1892-94: Vol. I, 43; Ross 1939: 154-55;
Meek 1982: Ballad XXII)

This certainly accords well with the Bannatyne version of the Scots poems and its reference to sovereignty over lands stretching from India to the West. Further, the ballad ‘A Oisín as fada do shúan’ (‘Oisean, your slumber is long’) (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Lay LVII) from *DF*, to which we will return shortly for its discussion of Fionn’s soul, lists a similar range of countries to that in ‘The Crying of Ane Play’. However, in ‘A Oisín as fada do shúan’ Fionn was victorious in battle in the countries listed rather than defeated and banished. The resources of a number of other countries are listed as coming to Fionn’s house. The countries in which battles are fought and tribute gained include France, Ireland, Spain, Norway, Lesser Greece, and India. That ballad is thought to belong to the sixteenth century (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 126). A similar world victory tour is also to be found in the Fenian ballad ‘Fleadh ros fúair Corbmac ó Fhionn’ (‘It was a feast that Fionn made for Cormac’) (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Lay XXIII).

Thus, a number of themes in ‘The Crying of Ane Play’ might be seen to reflect, or indeed subvert, some of the conventions of Gaelic Fenian literature. However, this is a rather mixed picture since while it is undeniable that these are Gaelic heroes one would not have to look very far to find that both landscape-creating giants and far-flung lands feature in all sorts of other European literatures popular in the sixteenth-century. Therefore, a somewhat ambiguous understanding of Fionn and his norms emerges in the Scots poem, which at the same time could after all be deliberate given the comical and satirical nature of the piece. Perhaps Fionn’s striking of the Devil simply portrays

him as a creature even more terrible and formidable than the Devil and has little to do with Gaelic tradition. This reading could be supported by the fact that 'The Crying of Ane Play' also tells us of the landscape-creating wife of Gog Magog that, 'The fende durst nocht offend hir' ('The Devil dared not offend her') (Fisher 1999: 37). We shall see here that it is nonetheless fascinating that Fionn and the Devil should appear together in a sixteenth-century Scots poem, given that Gaelic literature of the time does indeed concern itself with Fionn's exploits in Hell.

It will be recalled that Fionn and his warriors are conventionally imagined to have been at the height of their power sometime around the third century, since a number of tales have them interacting with the legendary third-century Irish king Cormac mac Airt (Ó Cathasaigh 1977) and his daughters Gràinne and Ailbhe. Gaelic literature and folklore maintain that when St Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century he met the last two surviving members of the Fenians: Oisean (the son of Fionn) and Caoilte mac Rònain (Fionn's nephew), now both old men. The implications of this encounter between these pagan Gaelic heroes and the arrival of Christianity were themselves a hugely productive topic for Gaelic literature. One strain of the late-medieval ballad tradition of Scotland and Ireland would at first seem to suggest that Fionn, a pagan who died before the arrival of Christianity in Ireland (unlike Caoilte and Oisean), was not victorious over the Devil and firmly in Hell. However, the ballad tradition was not completely unified on this.

Discussion of the fate of Fionn's soul can be found a number of times in dispute ballads between Oisean and St Patrick (Ó Fiannachta 1986/87; Ní Mhurchú 2012; Ó hÓgáin 1988: 247-49).⁸ Whereas Caoilte largely embraces the incoming new faith brought by St Patrick, Oisean has a more complex relationship to Christianity. The thirteenth-century *Acallam* has Caoilte become a Christian so that in one episode he is described as both 'do muintir Fhind hé ... & is do muintir nóem Patraic fos dó' ('of the retinue of Fionn and also the retinue of holy Patrick') (Stokes 1900: 82; Dooley & Roe 1999: 88). Geraldine Parsons highlights the importance of this description, noting that Caoilte 'as simultaneous inhabitant of past and present worlds, as symbol of pre-Christian culture and of successful conversion' is crucial to the *Acallam* (Parsons 2004/05: 90). Ó Fiannachta noted that with the *Acallam*, 'The Fianna were now within the fold ... The debate or contest between the Christian and the Fenian ideal did not surface in the literature for centuries.' (Ó Fiannachta 1986/87: 189) It might be noted, however, that even in the *Acallam* Oisean appears to have a somewhat cooler relationship with St Patrick and the new faith than Caoilte. Furthermore, the differing reactions of Caoilte and Oisean are further strengthened in the *Acallam Bec* ('The Little Colloquy'), a text on similar subject-matter and thought to be of a roughly similar thirteenth-century date. For instance, the *Acallam Bec* has Oisean incite his followers to burn St Patrick and his Christian retinue and to have their ashes be allowed to wash away with the stream (Kühns 2006: ll. 115-20; Kühns 2012). Caoilte on the other hand is much calmer about the arrival of the new Christians. Ann Dooley notes that the *Acallam* appears to 'cancel at the outset any pre-existing literary effect of a Patrician/Ossianic dialogue tradition' in order to 'clear the Fenian/Patrician decks for a new beginning' (Dooley 2004: 100). Thus, the origins of a tradition which leads to later antagonistic

ballads between St Patrick and Oisean can already be seen as early as the thirteenth century.

In a number of the later ballads Oisean directly questions St Patrick on the fate of Fionn's soul. One instance of this is 'Innis dúinn a Phádraig' ('Tell me O Patrick'), a ballad at least as early as the first quarter of the sixteenth century due to its appearance in *BDL*. Indeed the fate of Fionn's soul starts off this ballad and St Patrick is in no doubt:

*Innis dúinn, a Phádraig,
i n-onóir do léighinn,
an bhfuil neamh go h-áraidh
ag maithibh Fian Éireann?*

*Bhéar-sa dhuit a dheimhin,
a Oiséin na nglonn,
nach bhfuil neamh ag th' athair,
ag Osgar ná ag Goll.*

Tell me O Patrick
in honour of your learning
have the nobles of the Fiana of Ireland,
in particular, won Heaven?

I will tell you certainly,
Oisean of the exploits,
that your father does not have Heaven,
neither does Osgar nor Goll.

(Ross 1939: 124-125; Cameron 1892-94: Vol. I, 10-11; Meek 1982: Ballad XI)

This ballad goes on to compare the values of Oisean's lord Fionn with the Lord of St Patrick. Patrick admonishes Oisean for his tales of the glory days of the Fenians, asking him to remember that 'ní fhuil acht aisling san saoghal' ('This world is but a phantom'). Oisean is so enraged that he wishes the Fenians were once again in their prime so that they could punish Patrick for his insults:

*Dá maireadh agam Conán,
fear míobhlais na Féine,
ní léigfeadh léid mhuinéal
do chumas, a chlérigh.*

If I had Conan here alive,
the bad-mannered one of the Fían,
he would deprive your neck

of strength, O cleric.

(Ross 1939: 130-31; Cameron 1892-94: Vol. I, 15)

The exact whereabouts of Fionn's soul are not dwelt upon here and there is no explicit discussion of Fionn's wrongdoing. However, other ballads do not shy away from such descriptions. One such ballad is 'A Oisín as fada do shúan', mentioned above for its listing of Fionn's victories in foreign countries (Ó Fiannachta 1986/87: 189-94). Murphy noted of the language of this ballad from *DF* that it is unlikely to have been composed 'before the sixteenth century.' (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 126). In later Scottish tradition parts of this ballad and the previously discussed ballad, 'Innis dúinn a Phádraig', were combined as 'Ùrnaigh Oisein' (Campbell 1872: 40-47; Meek 2003: 35). In 'A Oisín as fada do shúan', as we have it in *DF*, we have Oisean directly beseeching St Patrick to petition on behalf of Fionn's soul:

*Sir a Patraic, dhuinn, ar do Dhía
neamh d'Fionn na bFían is dā chloinn.*

Patrick, ask your God, for me
for Heaven for Fionn of the Fíana and his children.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 208-09)

However, St Patrick is adamant that he will do no such thing and replies:

*Ní iarrfa méisi neamh d'Fionn,
a fhir nach grinn ler eirigh m'fearg;
gurab é a mhian rena linn
beith a nglionn ag síansan sealg.*

I will not request Heaven for Fionn,
O unpleasant man against whom my anger has risen;
what he desired in his day
was to be in the glen amid the noise of the hunt.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 210-11)

St Patrick is particularly forceful in 'A Oisín as fada do shúan' on the whereabouts of Fionn's soul. Patrick has him 'a n-ifreann' ('in Hell'), 'a n-ifrionn a laimh' ('prisoner in Hell') and 'a ttigh na bpian fá brón' ('in sorrow in the House of Torments'). (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 210-11). Oisean opines that if they were present the men of either the Clann Mhorna or the Clann Bhaoisgne would free Fionn. When challenged by Oisean to explain what exactly Fionn had done that merits his damnation, St Patrick replies:

*'S a gheall re meadhair na ccon
is re ríar na sgol gach lá
is gan smáóithiugh ar Dhía
ata Fionn na fFían a láimh.*

Fionn of the Fíana is imprisoned
on account of the joy of the chase
and the attention he devoted to the
learned every day without a thought of God.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 212-13)

Therefore, one strand of Fenian debate-ballads, popular it seems around the time of the composition of 'The Crying of Ane Play', situates Fionn firmly in Hell. In this last instance, Fionn's passion for secular pursuits, including secular learning, and neglect of the Faith earned him damnation. Therefore, if 'The Crying of Ane Play' intends to present Fionn as somehow triumphant over the Devil then it could be argued that this is an attempt to subvert a common theme in the contemporaneous Gaelic ballad tradition.

However, the medieval Gaelic Fenian ballad tradition is large and varied enough to offer alternative prospects for Fionn's soul. We will consider two final ballads here, before turning to the *Acallam*, as these ballads present a more hopeful end for Fionn's soul. One of these is 'A Oisín fuirigh ar Dhía' ('Stay, Oisín, for God's sake') (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 168-73). This ballad is found in *DF* and according to Murphy, 'would seem to belong to the early 15th or perhaps the late 14th century' (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 115). The ballad seems to consist entirely of first person dialogue in which the narrative unfolds. It can at times be difficult to keep a track of the intended speaker however. It begins with a stanza in which Oisín is addressed; the speaker demands recognition and finally says 'Is mise anam t'athar' ('I am your father's soul'). Therefore, we immediately know that the speaker is Fionn. Oisín responds that he does not recognize his father. Fionn details the disfiguration caused by the pain and torture he has suffered in Hell. Where Oisín is imagined to be during this encounter is unclear, if his father's soul has appeared to him on earth then 'Fuirigh air Dhía' could be a warning to attend to God before it is too late. On the other hand we might imagine that Oisín himself is now in Hell and that his father has appeared to him to reassure him that God may come to his aid. Having detailed the tortures Fionn suffers in Hell the ballad then introduces the souls of other members of the Fenians preparing to come to his defence. Conan Maol mac Morna states that he is still willing to descend to Hell despite the possibility that they may not make it out again.

An unidentified speaker, possibly the Devil himself, provides a further dissenting voice, trying to turn Goll against Fionn by reminding him of past enmity between the house of Morna and the house of Baoisgne (Ní Uigín 2009: 247). However, the souls of the other Fenians, do descend. They fight for him but are not successful. Fionn reports as follows:

*Ro íadhsat umam ar gach leth,
anmanna na cceitri rúadhcaith:
sgaoílter íad, ba cruaidh in teidm,
soir síar se<ch>nóin ifeirn*

The souls of the four brave battalions,
gathered round me on each side:
they are scattered east and west throughout Hell,
severe the calamity.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 172-73)

Thus, this earlier ballad actually describes the Fenian warriors attempting to free Fionn from Hell whereas the later ballad 'A Oisín as fada do shúan' merely has Oisean wistfully imagine such a scenario. Fionn laments:

*Uch tri fichid bliadhain búan
ro bhí misi a n-ifreann fhúar,
no go ttainic rígh neimhe
gur fech orm tre trocaire*

'Och, 60 eternal years
I was in cold Hell
until the King of Heaven came
and looked at me mercifully.'

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 172-73)

We are told that an angel of God appears to Finn and proclaims: 'A Finn fagoibhse ifrind' ('Finn leave Hell'). What follows contains some fascinating echoes of other traditions. Finn is told to leave Hell and the next stanza gives us the following:

*Do rugusa leam ar luas
tigim ar bord iffrinn súas.
Míle deamhan don tsluagh gorm
ro lean me ar luas a hifiorn.*

I hurried off and
come up to the edge of hell
A thousand demons of the black host
followed me swiftly out of Hell.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 172-73)

'Lem' in the first line of this stanza was edited as the prepositional pronoun 'leam' and the beginning of the stanza translated as 'I hurried off and come up to the edge of Hell'. However, we might emend this to 'léim' ('leap') (Hollo 1998: 17). The verb *beirid* (*do-beir*) was often paired with the noun 'léim'. This line 'Do rugusa lem ar luas' would then mirror exactly the verbal phrase used in various texts which refer to the Harrowing of Hell and the tradition of the Leaps of Christ which included the Harrowing of Hell. For instance, the bardic poem 'Aithrige sunn duid a Dhé' attributed to Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh, uses exactly this phrase to describe what are, in the poem the eight leaps of Christ: 'Rugais ocht léimeanna lúidh' ('Eight great leaps you leapt') (Breeze 1989: 190-93). In the verse-narrative poem on the Harrowing of Hell 'Eséirgi do éirigh Dia', suggested to be pre-thirteenth century (Clancy 2008: 131), the Devil declares that he leapt up in the form of a serpent to deceive Eve 'Da rugus léim suas iar sin' ('I leapt up after that') (Bergin 1910: 112). Wondrous leaps are something of a feature of Fenian literature (Nagy 2009; Ó Riain 198).⁹ Indeed, the notion of Fionn leaping out of Hell may in fact also reflect traditions of his own death. Parsons has recently drawn attention to the use of the 'leap of death' motif in references to the death of Fionn in medieval Fenian literature (Parsons 2012: 85). Therefore, the soul of Fionn leaps out of Hell and in fact where he goes next is intriguing. He is told, by whom is unclear, possibly the angel:

*Eirigh anois go síth truim
ait ar cuireadh cu culainn.
Let fein neamh ó righ neimhe
amach o ló in mesraighthe*

Rise now to Síd Truim
where Cú Chulainn was buried.
Heaven for you from the King of Heaven
from Judgement Day onwards.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part II, 172-73)

This stanza is both fascinating and, to a degree, theologically quite careful. Fionn is released as a result of God's mercy from the tortures of Hell but does not go straight to Heaven since he must await the Day of Reckoning. Not all vernacular literature is as careful to allow for the waiting for Judgement. Further, the mention of his soul going to the *síd* to wait is very interesting. The whole notion of there being a Purgatory, to which the souls of those who had a hope of making Paradise would go, was coming into view and being debated at the end of the twelfth and through the thirteenth centuries (Le Goff 1981: 198). A threefold view of the otherworld, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory is presented in texts such as *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* (Le Goff 1981: 199-200), although the notion of a place of purgation has earlier roots (Dunn 2000). With Hell most commonly viewed as below and Heaven above, then Purgatory was thought to be somewhere on earth. This is expressed most clearly by Dante Alighieri in the *Divina*

Commedia who envisaged Purgatory as a mountain on earth (Le Goff 1981: 334-35). Thus, in ‘A Oisín fuirigh ar Dhía’ an otherworld *síd*-mound associated with Cù Chulainn in a number of medieval texts (Hollo 1998) somehow seems to act as Purgatory for Fionn.¹⁰

The last ballad to be considered briefly here is ‘A bhean labhrus rinn an laoidh’ (‘Woman that speaks to us the lay’) (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part I, 85 and 198-99). *DF* is not the earliest source for the ballad as it is also to be found among a collection of bardic poetry in the second part of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. B. 514 (Fraser *et al.* 1934: 43-44). This manuscript contains the Life of Columba and was written for Maghnas Ó Domhnaill, lord of Tír Conaill, d.1563 (Ó Cuív 2001: Part I, 261-74). *DF*, although later, contains a more complete version of the poem (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 72) and we will therefore use the *DF* text here. Using the language and some internal historical references to date the ballad Murphy concluded that ‘the poem was written either about the middle of the 13th century, with the language perhaps slightly archaized, or at some later date, with decided archaizing of the language’ (Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 73). This ballad is a prophecy put into the mouth of Fionn himself; he foresees the coming of St Patrick along with the coming of the *Gaill* (‘Foreigners’) to Ireland and other historical events. Fionn is quite happy about the coming of the Faith and the ballad ends with two rather enigmatic stanzas which have Fionn state that he will be attaining Heaven:

*Ced salmaire Gaoidheal me;
beraidh Mac Dé me for nemh:
ge do fuarus dibh a lán,
is beg oram cáil na mban.*

*Is mé Fionn mac Cumhaill féil;
creidim féin do rí na nemh:
is mé fáidh is ferr fon ngréin,
gé do rinnes réir na mban.*

First psalmist of the Irish am I;
the Son of God will bear me to Heaven:
though I have had many of them,
I dislike the nature of women.

I am Fionn son of noble Cumhall;
I believe in the King of the Heavens;
I am the best prophet under the sun,
though I have done the will of women.

(Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part I, 85 & 199)

Therefore, this intriguing ballad, addressed to a female ballad-teller, has Fionn foresee that he will be allowed entry to Heaven despite a somewhat checkered past

with the opposite sex. It is clear then, that the medieval Gaelic ballad tradition allows a number of possibilities for the soul of Fionn. But we also appear to see something of a chronological development. In the later, *circa* fifteenth- and sixteenth-century, ballads we have him denied Heaven in ‘Innis dúinn a Phádraig’ and then located in Hell in ‘A Oisín as fada do shúan’. However, an earlier ballad, *circa* fourteenth-century, ‘A Oisín fuirigh ar Dhía’ has God intervene and have Fionn removed from Hell following the unsuccessful attempts by the Fenian battalions to free him. Here he is guaranteed Heaven but is awaiting Judgement in *Síd Truim*. Finally, if the dating of the text is accurate (Carey 2003), the oldest ballad considered here (*circa* thirteenth-century) has Fionn himself confidently prophesy his own future entry into Heaven. In the remainder of this paper we will consider the early thirteenth-century *Acallam*’s attempts to ensure Fionn’s possible salvation and the mechanisms by which this is made possible. It is noteworthy that the ballads closest in date to the *Acallam* reflect that text’s ideological project to make the pagan Fionn acceptable to God.

The *Acallam* is seen to evidence theological concerns of its moment of compilation. Specifically, it has been argued that it reflects something of the ‘cutting edge theology’ of the twelfth-century reform movement (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 154). The *Acallam* does not only concern itself with the conversion of the remaining living Fenians but also attempts to portray Fionn as a ‘proto-Christian’ (Parsons 2008: 28-39; Parsons 2012: 84; Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 152); one who of course died as a pagan before the arrival of the Christian faith to Ireland. It is argued that the *Acallam*’s campaign to Christianize select members of the Fenians reflects the more optimistic compassionate hope for salvation characteristic of the twelfth-century reform movement (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 153). Following his baptism and that of his followers at the beginning of the *Acallam* Caoilte gifts gold to St Patrick ‘do raith mh’anmasa & do raith anma in rígh-feinneda’ (‘for the good of my soul and the soul of the chief of the Fían’) (Stokes 1900: 10; Dooley & Roe 1999: 12). Thus, we have an early indication in the text that the fate of Fionn’s soul is a concern. Then further into the *Acallam* Caoilte requests St Patrick’s intercession for his own sister. We don’t hear of her fate but we have the saint’s intercession for Caoilte’s parents and Fionn:

‘Ocus aiscid rob áil liumsa d’iarraid ort, a naemchleirig,’ ar Cailti. ‘Cá haiscid sin, a m’anam?’ ar Pátraic. ‘Mo deirbtshiur do thabairt a piannaib, uair tarrasa dot muintirus & dot gráda.’ ‘Do máthair & t’athair & do thigerna Find mac Cumhaill do thabairt a piannaib ortsu,’ ar Pátraic, ‘massa maith lé Dia.’

‘I have a request for you, holy cleric,’ said Caoilte. ‘What is that, dear soul?’ said Patrick. ‘Since I have acquired your fellowship and your love I ask that you bring my sister from torments.’ ‘You may have your mother and father and your lord Fionn mac Cumhaill brought from torments’, said Patrick, ‘if God wills it.’

(Stokes 1900: 117; Dooley & Roe 1999: 122)

However, we have to contrast this careful statement of Fionn's soul being brought from torments only if it accords with the will of God, with Caoilte's more optimistic assertion that, 'Dorighne Find in creidemhsa ann & fuair nemh trit.' ('Finn found belief then and through it Heaven.') (Stokes 1900: 52; Dooley & Roe 1999: 57). Indeed St Patrick himself is not so careful elsewhere and can be almost cavalier in his granting of Heaven in the *Acallam*. For instance, Ann Dooley and Harry Roe note of the granting of Heaven to a man who left behind some treasure that it 'is rather stretching Patrick's power of intercession' (Stokes 1900: 31; Dooley & Roe 1999: 35 & 232-33). It is curious that the *Acallam* has St Patrick be so careful in his pronouncement of Fionn's hope for salvation and yet appear to be less so with others. There could of course be a number of reasons for this. One could be that despite the careful coherence provided by the balance of structured frame and sub-tales, as shown by Parsons (Parsons 2008), the text is simultaneously something of a composite. It could be that the discrepancy here is one instance of where the skill of 'refitting' material from other sources and other genres into the *Acallam* has broken down (Dooley & Roe 1999: xxvi).

St Patrick's statement on Fionn's qualified prospects for salvation and Caoilte's mention of Heaven have been contrasted with the fate of other pagan heroes from Irish literature (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 148). In *Visio Tnugdali* ('The Vision of Tnugdál'), a text written around 1149 among the Irish of the *Schottenklöster*, we read that Fergus mac Róich and Conall Cérnach are in Hell (Flanagan 2010: 188; Dooley 2006: 263). The two Ulster Cycle heroes, introduced as giants in this text, are to be found in superior Hell (Picard & de Pontfarcy 1989: 46, 121). *Síaburcharpát Con Culainn* ('The Spectral Chariot of Cú Chulainn'), the language of which is thought to date to the tenth century, has Cú Chulainn summoned from Hell by St Patrick to describe the fate of the Ulster heroes in Hell to a reluctant convert (Bergin & Best 1929: 278-87; Nagy 1997: 266-78; Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 148; Johnston 2001). However, we should note that the *Síaburcharpát* from the c. 12th-century *Leabhar na h-Uidhre* (RIA MS 23 E 25) ends (in the hand of the interpolator 'H') with a passing reference to Cú Chulainn earning Heaven for his assistance (Best & Bergin 1929: 287). Ní Mhaonaigh compared the more forgiving presentation of the fate of pagans in the *Acallam* with similar depictions of Saracens in the work of Wolfram of Eschenbach, a text shown to have echoes of Anselmian theology (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 153-54). It is remarkable nonetheless that the *Acallam* could propose possible salvation for Fionn who was not just a pagan, but a pagan who died before encountering Christianity. Ní Mhaonaigh notes that a 'direct link' between the *Acallam* and contemporary theological texts is hard to prove (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 154).

I would like here to test one paradigm in which we could consider how the *Acallam* could propose salvation for Fionn. The fate of virtuous pagans who lived before Christ, or the arrival of his teachings, has been a topic of debate from early in the history of Christianity. Perhaps the most famous virtuous pagan of the medieval period was the Roman Emperor Trajan (Marcus Ulpius Traianus). The narrative on St Gregory the Great and his supplication on behalf of the soul of the long-dead Roman emperor Trajan occurs in the early 8th-century Whitby *Vita* of the saint, which comes to us from a 9th-century manuscript from St Gallen, a Swiss monastery with Irish links (Colgrave 1968: 63-64). Traditions and writings linked to Gregory were also popular in medieval Ireland

(Herbert 2011). The narrative concerning Gregory and Trajan was much discussed in the medieval period (Whatley 1984). Indeed, it has been suggested that it may have partly influenced Irish texts such as *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn* which we have seen allowed for the salvation of Cù Chulainn (Johnston 2001: 115; Flower 1947: 6-7). Ó hÓgáin has previously suggested that Trajan and Gregory act as a model for various encounters between St Patrick and a number of dead pagans, including Fionn (Ó hÓgáin 1988: 242; Ó hÓgáin 1990: 113; Ó hÓgáin 1999: 190). We shall consider the notion that Fionn's possible salvation is a reflection of that of Trajan in more detail here. The Trajan narrative related that Gregory came to learn of Trajan's encounter with a mourning widow seeking justice for her murdered son. The saint was so moved by the emperor's compassion that he was brought to tears and interceded with God for the soul of Trajan. The text is particularly clear on the relationship between the tears of the saint and baptism:

Quidam quoque de nostris dicunt narratum a Romanis, sancti Gregorii lacrimis animam Traiani imperatoris refrigeratam vel baptizatam, quod est dictu mirabile et auditu. Quod autem eum dicimus baptizatum, neminem moveat: nemo enim sine baptizamento Deum videbit umquam: cuius tertium genus est lacrimae.

Some of our people tell a story related by the Romans of how the soul of the Emperor Trajan was refreshed and even baptized by St. Gregory's tears, a story marvelous to tell and marvelous to hear. Let no one be surprised that we say he was baptized, for without baptism none will ever see God; and a third kind of baptism is by tears.

(Colgrave 1986: 126-127)

The narrative was emphasized in a number of ways by different writers during the medieval period who all grappled with the complex question of Trajan's salvation (Vitto 1989: 40-43). Emphasis could be placed on the requirement of baptism with reference to the tears of St Gregory, although this was seen as irrelevant by others; emphasis could be placed on the intercession of the saint; emphasis could be placed on Trajan's good and Christian-like humane governance (Whatley 1984: 32-36). There was, however, unease in some quarters and in order to allay this somewhat one version of the narrative, seen for instance in the 12th-century *Pantheon* of Godfrey of Viterbo, had St Gregory being punished with illness in return for daring to seek intercession for any pagan (Colish 1996: 51; Whatley 1984: 35-36). Furthermore, there was another ongoing debate over the ultimate destination of Trajan's soul, and the implications for Saint Gregory of his intercession, and this is perhaps best exemplified by the extended discussion we see in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*:

Some have said that Trajan was restored to life, and in this life obtained grace and merited pardon: thus he attained glory and was not finally committed to hell nor definitively sentenced to eternal punishment. There are others who have said that Trajan's soul was not simply freed from being sentenced to eternal punishment but that his sentence was

suspended for a time, namely, until the day of the Last Judgment. Others have held that Trajan's punishment was assessed to him sub conditione as to place and mode of torment, the condition being that sooner or later Gregory would pray that through the grace of Christ there would be some change of place or mode. Still others, among them John the Deacon who compiled this legend, say that Gregory did not pray, but wept, and often the Lord in his mercy grants what a man, however desirous he might be, would not presume to ask for, and that Trajan's soul was not delivered from hell and given a place in heaven, but was simply freed from the tortures of hell. A soul (he says) can be in hell and yet, through God's mercy, not feel its pains. Then there are those who explain that eternal punishment is two-fold, consisting first in the pain of sense and second in the pain of loss, i.e., being deprived of the vision of God. Thus Trajan's punishment would have been remitted as to the first pain but retained as to the second (de Voragine 1993: Vol. I, 179).

Thus, Trajan had become the renowned virtuous pagan of the Middle Ages and his potential salvation, or at least lessening of pain, was imagined to be possible through a debated combination of the intercession of a saint, good works and baptism. Perhaps Trajan doesn't act as a direct model for Fionn in the *Acallam* but does the text engage with the same concerns which governed the ubiquitous Roman virtuous pagan's salvation? We have already seen that St Patrick promises to intercede for Fionn's soul. Patrick's care, at least where Fionn is concerned, to have him released from torments if it be God's will, is certainly very cautious. That caution has an ongoing and developing theological context in early notions of Purgatory and the kind of discourse we see above, a few decades later from de Voragine in the *Golden Legend*. What of the second strand, that of good works? It has been suggested that Fionn shows good and humane governance in the *Acallam*. Ní Mhaonaigh points out that Fionn is generally 'presented as wise and good, dispensing prudent counsel to his followers, and abounding in humble generosity' (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 152). This notion deserves fuller attention but will not be dealt with here. This leaves us with the requirement of baptism, if we accept the Trajan paradigm for Fionn. I would like to suggest that in fact the *Acallam* could be seen to have Fionn engage in a type of proto-baptism as part of his proto-Christian portrayal.

Fionn's ritual of prophecy in the *Acallam* often includes him applying water to his face from a *loingshíthal bhánóir* 'a basin of bright gold' before putting his thumb to his *dét fios* 'tooth of wisdom'. For instance, he does this full ritual at the beginning of the *Acallam* to discover who had taken his missing hounds (Stokes 1900: 7; Dooley & Roe 1999: 9). Fionn's poetic ritual has been meaningfully read in the context of cross-cultural mantic rituals and for echoes of the 'archaic metaphorical connection between light/brightness and supernatural knowledge' (Nagy 1985: 21-22). It also must be read in the context of references to the 'mystical aspects of filidecht' (Nagy 1985: 21) and Fionn's specific use of its practices, such as *teinm laída*, in other Fenian texts outwith the *Acallam* (Carey 1997; Nagy 1981/82). The application of water from the golden basin is not always mentioned in the *Acallam*, it seems that the tooth and thumb

combination can suffice on other occasions. St Patrick's interaction with a Connacht king, Muiredach mac Fhinnachta, might suggest that the *Acallam* encourages us to see a direct link between the practices of St Patrick and Fionn's prophecy ritual. The king's young son Áed dies following a game of hurling (*imáin*). The child's mother, Aífe ingen rígh Uladh (Aífe daughter of the King of Ulster), seeks assistance from Patrick. We read the following:

Tucadh loingshithal bhánoir chum an chléirig, & a lán d'uisce innti, & coisercaidh in t-uisqi, & tucadh a cuach feta finnaircit an t-uisqi, & éirghis an naemhchleirech & tócbais in chlupait caeim corcordha, & tuc trí bainne don uisqi a mbél Aedha meic Mhuireadhaig, & in treas loim tuc ina bheol ro éirigh óghshlan.

A long golden basin, filled with water, was then brought to Patrick. He blessed the water and placed it in a finely worked cup of white silver. The holy man then went and lifted the fair purple cowl and put three drops of water in the mouth of Áed, son of Muiredach. As the third drop reached his mouth he sat up completely cured.

(Stokes 1900: 34-35; Dooley & Roe 1999: 38)

Therefore, both Fionn and St Patrick use a *loingshithal bhánóir* which surely strengthens the notion of the *Acallam*'s presentation of a 'typological relationship between *fénnid* and saint' (Parsons 2008: 36). The similarities in the descriptions can meaningfully be read as the *Acallam*'s attempt to Christianize a pre-existing pagan ritual through association with Patrick (Parsons 2006: 57). Yet, I would like to tentatively suggest that we might also read the inverse process here and see Fionn's prophetic ritual in the *Acallam* as deliberately echoing the rite of baptism. For instance, it could be noted that *loingshithal* is a compound; the second element *síthal* is a loan of the Latin word *situla* (Nagy 2006/07: 20; Ó Cuív 1980: 141; McManus 1983: 43-44, 68) and was the word used in the medieval period for 'holy water bucket' (McLachlan 2001: 375-77). An oak and bronze decorated bucket found in a river near Clonard may be a surviving Irish *situla* (Whitfield 2007: 510; Hickey 1995: 38; Ó Floinn 1989/90: 52). The word *síthal* is used a number of other times in the *Acallam*, twice in conjunction with water used for healing (Stokes 1900: 23, 33, 199; Dooley and Roe 1999: 26, 37, 200). One of these instances is the particularly enigmatic episode at the Síd of Assaroe in which Bé Binn, daughter of Elmar and wife of Áed Minbrec, heals Caoilte by inducing vomiting using water, herbs and crystals from a *loingshithal bhánóir* (Stokes 1900: 199-200; Dooley & Roe 1999: 200-01; Nagy 2006/07: 29-31). In the *Acallam* three of Fionn's multiple revelations of the Faith involve him applying water to his face from a golden vessel and we might speculatively read this as a pseudo self-baptism. The three full prophetic rituals which involve foreknowledge of Christianity are described as follows:

Doriacht an Fhian co Fídh n-enaig, re n-abar Druim ndiamhair isin tansa, & tucadh loingshithal bánóir do shaigid Fhinn, & do innail a ghehlglaca, & do chuir in t-uisqi eocharghorm im a ghnúis, & tuc a ordain fo a dhét fis, &

do faillsiged fír dhó & do ceiledh gáí fair, & do faillsiged do gu ticfadh in Táilceann tabarthach re dereadh domain, & gu ngébadh tech ar leth Eirenn .i. Ciarán mac an tsaeir.

The Fian came to the Wood of Fowling, now called the Secluded Ridge, and a basin of light gold was brought to Finn. He washed his white hands, sprinkled the clear water about his face, and put his thumb under his Tooth of Wisdom. Then the truth came to him and the lie was concealed from him. It was also revealed to him that the generous Patrick would come at a later time, and that Ciarán, son of the smith, would found a monastery for half of Ireland.

(Stokes 1900: 52; Dooley & Roe 1999: 56)

Then again later in the text a long revelation begins as follows:

Ocus tucad loingshithal bánóir chum na flatha Find ann sin, & ro indail a láma & tuc uisci ima gnuis rígha roalaind, & tuc a ordain fa déd fis & in tres fis is mó ro faillsiged dó riam issin tan sin ro faillsighed dó hé, & adubairt: ‘Ceithri fáidi toghaide ticfa[t] tarmeissi a nEirinn, & do rig nime & talman dogénat a faistine, & bid annso ticfa in cethramad fer .i. Moling mac Faelain.

An oval basin of white gold was brought to the Lord Fionn at that time. He washed his hands and sprinkled water on his fair, royal face, and put his thumb under his Tooth of Wisdom. One of the three greatest revelations that he had ever had was then revealed to him and he said, ‘Four chosen seers will come to Ireland after me and will make their prophecies for the King of Heaven and Earth. One of the four, Moling the son of Fáelán will come here.

(Stokes 1900: 75; Dooley & Roe 1999: 81)

Then finally:

Tucad sithel banóir chum Find co n-uisci inti, & nighid a gnuis & a láma aisti, & cuirid a ordain fa déd fis, & ro faillsiged fírinde dó, & ro thairrnngair co ticfatais nóim & fíreóin andso, & adubairt:

*Druim os loch bid ceall tshidach cid port rigrad ar sodain,
cadus ar Cluain imdergtha tiucfa re deired domain.*

A basin of white gold was brought to Finn with water in it. He washed his face and hands in it and put his thumb under his Tooth of Wisdom. The truth was revealed to him, and he prophesied that holy and righteous ones would come there, and he recited these lines:

A peaceful church above a lake, afterwards a royal place.
At time's end a sanctuary in the Meadow of Shame.

(Stokes 1900: 183-84; Dooley & Roe 1999: 186)

Perhaps it is also significant that the *Acallam* has Fionn do this ritual with the water from the *síthal/loingshíthal* three times in conjunction with his revelations of a Christian future for Ireland. Threefold baptism appears to have been the norm in medieval Europe and is based on Christ's instruction to the disciples in Matthew 28.19 to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. (Whitfield 2007: 506; Spinks 2006: 136-39). Marie Therese Flanagan has drawn our attention to a number of references to, and other interpretations of, threefold baptism in medieval Irish religious literature (Flanagan 2010: 207). Certainly, the application of water three times is what we have in the baptism rite added to the Irish Stowe Missal sometime around the beginning of the ninth century (Whitfield 2007: 506). The *ordo* instructs that the catechumen be dipped or have water sprinkled on him three times (Warner 1906-15: Vol. II, 31; Whitaker 1970: 220). Therefore, Fionn's prophetic ritual involving water applied to his face from a golden *loingshíthal* mirrors St Patrick's use of an identical vessel when applying three drops of holy water to the mouth of Áed in order to revive him. There are three instances in the *Acallam* in which the use of water from the golden vessel (and thumb/tooth) leads to Fionn's foreknowledge of Christianity, although we must remember that not every instance of Fionn's full ritual leads to Christian prophecy and not every Christian prophecy involves his use of the *loingshíthal*.

The *Acallam's* project to mould Fionn into a proto-Christian is multi-faceted. The Trajan legend has been used here to give us something of a comparable paradigm in which to consider how Fionn's salvation could have been envisaged. The mechanisms used by the *Acallam* include St Patrick's careful intercession and it has been suggested here that the *Acallam* may encourage us to also read a subtle pseudo-baptism or proto-baptism of Fionn in the text. Further, the extent to which Fionn's 'good works' Christianize him deserves more attention. The whole notion of Fionn's prophetic knowledge of the coming of Christianity, which does not fit into the paradigm of Trajan's salvation, also deserves further attention. Exploration of these themes would allow us to build on and test the notion that the *Acallam* evidences something of the theology of the day. Certain ballads composed in the immediate wake of the *Acallam* share its optimism on the ultimate destiny of Fionn's soul. Yet despite the *Acallam's* care at the beginning of the thirteenth century to save Fionn from damnation, one tradition of later medieval ballads was happy to leave him languishing in Hell. Indeed some of the possible 'good works' used to Christianize Fionn in the *Acallam* are specifically cited as reasons for his damnation in the later ballads. This allowed for entertaining dispute between Oisean and St Patrick and for Patrick to provide some moral lessons to the audience. Despite 'The Crying of Ane Play' having Fionn strike the Devil, according to later Gaelic tradition the Devil would have the last laugh.

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NOTES

¹ Modern Scottish Gaelic orthography will be used here for the principal characters of Fenian tradition.

² We will not consider later orally collected folklore or later ballads here although these could significantly add to our understanding. For the Fenians in Hell in later Irish folklore see Mac Neill & Murphy 1908-53: Part III, 116.

³ Fisher provides transcriptions from both of the manuscript sources but declares that the Asloan text is superior. Thus, the text of the poem used here is Fisher's transcription from that earlier source.

⁴ See also Ronald Black's catalogue description and discussion which accompanies the digital images of the manuscript at the *Irish Script On Screen* website <http://www.isos.dias.ie/>

⁵ Quotations from Gaelic texts in this paper appear as they do in the published editions cited. Translations of those same texts also use the published translation cited, however I have silently emended the English translations on occasion.

⁶ It may be worth noting however that the *Acallam* gives Fionn a son named *Caince Corcairderg* (Stokes 1900: 7; Dooley and Roe 1999: 10).

⁷ I am grateful to Dr Geraldine Parsons for this reference.

⁸ This discussion of the ballads builds on that in Ó hÓgáin 1988: 247-49. He brings attention to a number of the same ballads to be discussed here.

⁹ I am grateful to Dr Geraldine Parsons for these references.

¹⁰ Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has pointed out to me that Blathmac has a reference to Heaven as a *síd* in the eighth century (Carney 1964: stanza 183, 62-63).

ABBREVIATIONS

- BDL* Book of the Dean of Lismore
DF Duanaire Finn

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