Joseph Lee

Professor Lisabeth Buchelt

English 3280

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Reading Journals

Entry for *Aided Lugach ocus Debforgaille (Deaths of Lugaid and Derbforgaill)* –

While the title might suggest the story is going to be about the deaths of the two titular characters, to me, the story serves to enhance the legend of Cuchulainn. I think in a vacuum, the reader might not view Cuchulainn's actions in the story as necessarily heroic: he kills 150 women. When I read the story, however, I see a portrait of a noble character whose integrity is unimpeachable. When I read this story, Cuchulainn seems like an Irish Eddard Stark. When we watch the pilot for *Game of Thrones*, it is not the cliff hanger at the end that draws the viewer in to the story. Instead, it is Lord Eddard Stark carrying out the king's justice on the deserter from the Night's Watch. On its own, you would think that someone decapitating what the audience knows is a fairly innocent, young man scared for his life would be viewed in a negative light. But no one watching the pilot episode of *Game of Thrones* comes away with any take away besides Eddard Stark being the hero of the show. I feel like that is what we are meant to take away from this version of the story. Cuchulainn delivers a brutal, yet noble, form of justice. The other aspect of the story that makes Cuchulainn feel like a noble hero is him giving away Debforgaill to Lugaid, as he mentions it would break some sort of rule for him to be with her after having sucked the stone out of her womb. While their customs may not make sense to us, it feels like Cuchulainn's strict adherence to these customs is also noble.

Entry for monastic poetry –

While these are all cute, little musings, I do have a couple of favorites. My favorite is "The Bell." It is a joke similar to what you would see on Twitter. It goes like this: *sex is great and all, but have you ever heard a bell ringing on a windy night*. When you want to hyperbolically praise some mundane thing, you compare it is as something that is better than sex. I would have hit the like button if I was scrolling past this on my feed. My second favorite is "Sell not Heaven for Sin." We have this priest hearing this confession, but also being solicited at the same time, and his response seems both ironic and practical. He basically says, "Hold up, girl. I don't want to go to hell with you." It feels ironic because it does not feel like the priest does not really believe in the absolution he is providing and that the safest, most practical, route is to avoid risking eternal judgement in the first place.

Entry for *Scéla Muicce Meic Dá Thó (Tale of Meic Datho's Pig)* –

This story only has one compelling character, and it also happens to be the only female character, Macc Da Thó's wife. She openly critiques the misogyny of their society, quoting Crumthand Níad Náir who says not to reveal secrets to women, while at the same time providing her husband the solution that he has sought for three days. Of course, Macc Da Thó carries out her cunning plan, but we cannot give him any credit: he would have been stuck in his indecisive stupor without her advice. The long verbal contest between Cet and the other men provides some comedic relief, but besides for the comedy, it only serves to advance the plot toward the conclusion of Macc Da Thó's wife scheme. Even Conall, who drops the mic, err Anlúan's head, at the end of the verbal contest, is not really a compelling character. The only one that does anything for me is the mischievous, cunning, female character.

Entry for *The Táin*, (Intro, pp. 1 – 50) –

We start with these seven tales to prepare us for the Táin, and they all read as self-contained stories. They certainly have important parts that connect them, but these stories seem fully formed on their own. The two that are the most interesting are the two stories that end with a death, "Exile of the Sons

of Uisliu" and "The Death of Aife's One Son." Both of these stories paint the character who dies in the best light. The actions of Conchobor toward Derdrui are reprehensible, so I feel like the reader is cheering for her as she commits suicide in probably the most brutal way imaginable. It does seem like a weird reaction to have about a character committing suicide, but I do think this is my reaction. I guess I could feel sorry for her, but maybe that does not do her justice. She is a character in a terrible situation, with seemingly no power, except in the end, she proves she has all the power. I think I feel fine cheering for Derdrui's heroic final act. Connla's death in the other chapter is not as impactful to me, but it is impactful to the characters who witness it. Like Derdrui, Connla is put in a bad situation, and his blind adherence to Cúchulainn's mandates gets him killed by his father. It is not really satisfying to me, but the men of Ulster salute him. The way they feel toward Connla is how I feel toward Derdrui.

Entry for *The Táin*, (pp. 52 – 114) –

Whereas the tales before *The Táin* were these self-contained stories, I really enjoy the narrative construction of *The Táin* itself. In particular, I love the flashback scene that we get immediately after the Connacht host finds the four heads on spikes. It is interesting how classic this story-telling element is when we see it in this Irish medieval epic. The characters find something completely unexpected, but Fergus is not surprised. His stories explain the young, super-human force that opposes them and sets the stage for the rest of the epic. Without this intermission, I think I would view all the death that comes in the chapter that immediately follows as a boring story of this invincible character. With the setup provided by Fergus and Conall Cernach and Fiache Mac Fir Febe, however, I feel more invested in the story, as do Medb and Ailill. They were warned about Cúchulainn, and they still wanted the smoke, so it makes it so much more rewarding for us to read about Cúchulainn slaughtering their armies.

Entry for *The Táin*, (pp. 114 – 253) –

It was mentioned last week in class that there is some disagreement by the scholars on whether *The Táin* is misogynistic. Upon finishing *The Táin*, I am firmly on the side of *The Táin* being misogyny. Fergus lays all the blame at Medb's feet saying, "We followed the rump of a misguiding woman" (251), which seems like the epithet for the entire story.

I also feel compelled to come back to this journal entry after our class discussion. There was this argument in class that the problem Fergus was citing was this particular woman and not women in general. I could possibly believe this argument if Fergus did not explicitly argue that it is women in general in the succeeding sentence. If there was any doubt about what Fergus meant, he provides a metaphor to explain the situation, continuing, "It is the usual thing for a herd led by a mare to be strayed and destroyed" (251). I was so surprised by this attempt to take Fergus's misogyny out of context, I took my phone out during class to quickly google the word "mare." Admittedly, I am no equine expect, but just from reading Fergus's full quote, I felt I had a pretty good idea that a mare must be a female horse. Of course, Google confirmed my assumed definition. It was the only definition that would make any sense from this man who, pretty clearly to me, hates women.

Entry for *Echtra mac N-Ecach* (*Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon*) –

The fairy tale portion of this story does not do much for me on its own, but I really do enjoy it in the context of providing a mythology for the O'Neills. We learned about Hugh O'Neill in our *Story of Ireland* Part 2 video, but now we get a fantastical origin story. I wonder if this is common for monarchies – to have some sort of mythical story to support their rule. In a democracy, we have our founding figures and founding documents that explain our origin, like the *Declaration of Independence* or the *Federalist Papers*, which are great. Here, instead, we get this fairy tale, which is quite different, but it is fun, too.