ÉIGSE

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EDITED BY LIAM MAC MATHÚNA

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FÓGRA

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IN MEMORIAM

DEMNA AEÓIR 'DEMONS OF THE AIR'

The nature of the inhabitants of Ireland who were supplanted by the arrival of the Gaels was a subject of considerable debate in the Middle Ages; in particular, the relationship between 'native' (i.e. pre-conversion) supernatural beings, collectively referred to as *áes síde* or Túatha Dé Danann, and demons, as conceptualized within a Christian worldview, was a site of enduring interest.[1] The colophon to *Serglige Con Culainn* will be familiar to scholars of medieval Irish literature, and is one of the best-known examples of a medieval Irish author identifying the *áes síde* with demons:

> Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, 7 ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib 7 co taisféntais aíbniusa 7 díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde 7 áes síde.[2]
>
> 'This is the vision of ruin shown to Cú Chulainn by the people of the fairy mounds. So great was the demonic power before Christianity, and such was its extent, that the demons would fight physically with men and would show festivities and wonders to them, as though they were lasting. In this way they were believed in. So that it is by means of these visions that the unlearned name "fairy mounds" and "people of the fairy mounds".'[3]

[1] I am indebted to Richard Cole, Tadhg Morris, and Joseph Nagy for reading and commenting on versions of this article. I am also grateful to the peer-reviewers, for their helpful comments and suggestions. All errors are of course my own.

The body of scholarship on the reception and treatment of pre-Christian deities in Christian Ireland is extensive, and I will only cite a few recent works: Jacqueline Borsje, 'Monotheistic to a certain extent: the "good neighbours" of God in Ireland' in *The boundaries of monotheism: interdisciplinary explorations into the foundations of western monotheism*, ed. Maaike Haardt and Anna Korte (Leiden 2009) 53–82; John Carey, 'The baptism of the gods', in John Carey, *A single ray of the sun: religious speculation in early Ireland* (second ed., Aberystwyth 2011) 1–38; John Carey, 'The old gods of Ireland in the later Middle Ages', in *Understanding Celtic religion: revisiting the pagan past*, ed. Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm (Cardiff 2015) 51–68. On cosmology, see the essays in the recent collection *Celtic cosmology: perspectives from Ireland and Scotland*, ed. Jacqueline Borsje, Ann Dooley, Séamus Mac Mathúna, and Gregory Toner (Toronto 2014).

[2] Myles Dillon, ed., *Serglige Con Culainn*, MMIS 14 (Dublin 1953, repr. 1975) 29.

[3] Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Critics have differed on how they interpret the relationship of the final passage to the rest of the narrative,[4] but the association between demons and *áes síde* is unambiguous, and the repeated and emphatic references to *síde* 'fairy mounds' align these beguiling figures with the terrestrial and subterranean, a spatial position that accommodates both the earth-dwelling supernatural beings of medieval Irish tradition and the wicked spirits of the Christian hell. Alongside frequent references to chthonic beings, the medieval Irish corpus also offers many examples of supernatural creatures, often (though not always) denoted by the phrase *demna aeóir* 'demons of the air', that are depicted travelling through or dwelling in the air. Consideration of the contexts in which *demna aeóir* occur may shed some light on the reception and development of Christian demonology in medieval Ireland, and it is these *demna aeóir* that will be the subject of the following essay.

Before examining the Irish material, it will be helpful to sketch out a brief outline of the concept of demons of the air as it appears in early and medieval Christian thought. Medieval theological discourse did not confine demons to the infernal regions, and the belief that demons dwelled in the air was widespread in the early Middle Ages.[5] Scriptural authority for the idea is found in Ephesians 2: 2, where Satan is called *principem potestatis aeris* ('prince of the power of the air'). Saint Augustine claims that *ad ista caliginosa, id est ad hunc aerem, tamquam ad carcerem, damnatus est diabolus*[6] ('the devil was damned to this gloom, that is, to this air, as if to a prison'), and John Cassian describes an atmosphere swarming with demonic spirits:

> Tanta vero spirituum densitate constipatus est aer iste, qui inter coelum terramque diffunditur, in quo non quieti nec otiosi pervolitant, ut satis utiliter humanis aspectibus eos Providentia divina absconderit atque subtraxerit.[7]
>
> 'Indeed, the very air that is spread between heaven and earth is teeming with a dense crowd of spirits, in which they flit about

[4] See Jacqueline Borsje, 'Omens, ordeals, and oracles: on demons and weapons in early Irish', *Peritia* 13 (1999) 224–48, at 231–3, for a discussion of the colophon and its critical reception.

[5] For a survey of beliefs about the location of demons in the early Middle Ages, see Peter Dendle, *Satan unbound: The Devil in Old English narrative literature* (Toronto 2001) 70–3.

[6] Augustinus Hipponensis, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CPL 283, SL 40, psalmus: 148, par.: 9, linea: 15.

[7] John Cassian, *Collationes* 1.8.12., ed. J. P. Migne, PL 49 (1874).

> neither quietly nor lazily, so that divine Providence has to fully good purpose removed and hidden them from human sight.'

The 'airiness' of demons was not interpreted solely as referring to location. Augustine also speaks of their 'airy' bodies: he describes them as *corpore aeria*[8] ('airy in body') in *de Civitate Dei*, and repeatedly refers to the *aerium corpus* ('airy body') of demons in *de Diuinatione Daemonum*.[9] Peter Abelard claimed that the 'prison of air' into which the fallen angels were confined was not, in fact, the atmosphere, but their bodies themselves:

> demones post lapsum, ut corporaliter etiam pati possint, in quedam deuoluit aeria corpora dicuntur que quasi carcerem acceperunt. Hinc et aerie dicti sunt potestates, quod uidelicet in illo plurimum possint element cui sunt incorporate, sicut et terrene potestates uocantur homines, qui in terris principantur.
>
> '[A]fter their fall the demons are said to have tumbled down into a type of airy bodies, which they were given like prisons, so that they could also be punished bodily. From this they have been called "powers of the air", because they are able to do much in the element in which they are embodied, just as people who have power over areas of the earth are called "powers of the earth".'[10]

The idea that demonic bodies were formed of air is also represented in medieval Irish sources. The seventh-century Hiberno-Latin[11] *Liber de ordine creaturarum* describes the methods by which demons lure humans away from God:

> isti improbi et impuri spiritus, uagi et subtiles, animo passibiles sunt et, aeris corporibus induti, nunquam senescent... fallacesque atque in fraude callidi hominum sensus commouent, terroremque mortalibus inferentes, inquietudinibus somniorum et motibus et distortione membrorum uitam turbant...[12]

[8] Augustinus Hipponensis, *De ciuitate Dei*, CPL 313, SL 47, lib.: 9, cap. 8, linea: 1–3.

[9] Augustinus Hipponensis, *De diuinatione daemonum,* CPL 306, cap. 3, par. 7, 603, et passim.

[10] Peter Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. and trans. John Marenbon and Giovanni Orlandi (Oxford 2001) 194–5.

[11] Marina Smyth, 'The date and origin of *Liber de ordine creaturarum*', *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–2004) 1–39.

[12] *Liber de ordine creaturarum: un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII*, ed. Manuel C. Diaz Y Diaz, Monografias de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10 (Santiago de

> 'These treacherous and impure spirits are inconstant and subtle, their passible souls clothed in bodies of air. They never age… Deceitfully and by skillful fraud they disturb the senses of men and, bringing terror to mortals, they trouble their life by the worries of dreams and by the movements and distortions of their members...'[13]

Similarly, in the Book of Lecan version of recension C of *Lebor gabála Érenn*, the redactor observes that some people claim that the Túatha Dé Danann had been expelled from heaven with Lucifer (a point to which I will return), and that they had taken *chuirp aerda umpu, do millead 7 d'aslach for sil nAdaim*[14] ('an airy body upon themselves to destroy and to tempt the seed of Adam').[15] The *corp aerda* that the Túatha Dé Danann are said to adopt is related etymologically (Oir. *corp* is derived from Latin *corpus*, and *aerda* is an adjective formed from OIr. *aer*, from Latin *aer*) and conceptually to the *corpora aeris* that demons are said to possess in the *Liber de ordine creaturarum*.

DEMONS OF THE AIR AND IRISH SAINTS

In addition to their penchant for deceiving and tempting humankind, demons of the air are often shown attacking or seizing the souls of the dead. The topos of demons lying in wait to snatch the souls of the recently deceased reaches its apotheosis in the late medieval *ars moriendi* tradition, where the deathbed is besieged by demonic influences, but the idea first appears in early Christian vision literature. *Visio Pauli* describes the dying moments of a just man and a wicked man:

Compostela 1972) 142. Here the text is drawing on and adapting a passage in Isidore of Seville's *De differentiis rerum*: *Daemones sunt impuri spiritus, subtiles et vagi, animo passibiles, mente rationabiles, corpore aerie, tempore aeterni, humanitatis inimici, nocendi cupidi, superbia tumidi, fallacia callidi, semper in fraude novi. Commovent sensus, fingunt affectus, vitam turbant, somnos inquietant, morbos inferunt, mentes terrent, membra distorquent, sortes regunt, praestigiis oracula fingunt, cupidinem amoris illiciunt, ardorem cupiditatis infundunt, in consecratis imaginibus delitescunt*. Isidore of Seville, *De differentiis rerum siue differentiae theologicae uel spiritales*, ed. J. P. Migne, PL 83 (1850) 2.14.42.

[13] Marina Smyth, 'The seventh-century Hiberno-Latin treatise *Liber de ordine creaturarum.* A translation', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 21 (2011) 186.

[14] R. A. Stewart Macalister, ed. and trans., *Lebor gabála Érenn: The book of the taking of Ireland*, Part 3 (Dublin 1940) 154.

[15] Macalister, *Lebor gabála Érenn*, 3, 155.

et inspexi et uidi quendam hominem moriturum, et dixit mihi angelus: Hunc quem uides iustus est. Et iterum aspexi et uidi omnia opera eius quecunque fecerat propter nomen dei, et omnia studia eius quorum meminit et quorum non meminit, omnia steterunt in conspectum eius in hora necessitatis; et uidi iustum profecisse et inuenisse refectionem et fiduciam, et ante quam exiret de mundo asteterunt sancti angeli simul et impii: et uidi eos omnes, set impii non inuenerunt locum habitacionis in eum, sancti autem dominati sunt anime eius, gubernantes eam quo usque exiret de corpore.[16]

'I looked carefully and saw a certain man about to die, and the angel said to me, "This one whom you see is a just man". And I looked again and saw all his works, whatever he had done for the sake of God's name, and all his desires, both what he remembered, and what he did not remember; they all stood in his sight in the hour of need; and I saw the just man advance and find refreshment and confidence, and before he went out of the world the holy and the impious angels both attended; and I saw them all, but the impious found no place of habitation in him, but the holy angels took possession of his soul, guiding it till it went out of the body.'[17]

Et post haec uenerunt simul sancti angeli et maligni et anima peccatoris, et sancti angeli locum non inuenerunt in ea. Maligni autem angeli comminati sunt ipsius; qui cum educerent eam de corpore commonuerunt eam angeli tercio, dicentes: O misera anima, prospice carnem tuam unde existi: necesse est enim te reuertere in carne tua in diem resurrectionis, ut recipias peccatis tuis condignum, et impietatum tuarum.[18]

'there came at the same time the holy angels and the evil angels, and the soul of the sinner saw both and the holy angels did not find a place in it. Moreover the evil angels cursed it; and when they had drawn it out of the body the angels admonished it a third time, saying, "O wretched soul, look upon your flesh from which you

[16] M. R. James, ed., *Visio Pauli*, in *Apocrypha anecdota, a collection of thirteen apocryphal books and fragments* (Cambridge 1893) 11–42, at 16.

[17] J. K. Elliot, trans., 'The Apocalypse of Paul (*Visio Pauli*)', in *The apocryphal New Testament: a collection of apocryphal Christian literature in an English translation* (Oxford 1993) 616–44, at 624.

[18] *Visio Pauli*, ed. James, 18.

> have come out; for it is necessary that you should return to your flesh in the day of resurrection, that you may receive what is the due for your sins and your impieties".'[19]

Several such visions are attributed to early medieval Irish saints. In *Fís Laisrén*, surviving only in fragmentary form and dating from OIr. period, 'possibly as early as the eight century',[20] Laisrén has a vision in which his soul leaves his body and ascends into the air in the company of angels, who fend off three hosts of air-borne demons seeking to gain control over his soul:

> Acus co n-accatar arbar aile do demnaib 7 tenntide impueib 7 tene as gach ball ro bui inntib. Teora dealba do-arfás do forsna hib demnaib: dealb rodub for alaile dib acus gai boilggi tentidi ina lamaib, 7 dealb ciardub for alaile 7 saigde teintide ina lamaib. Dealb motluch forsin tres lucht 7 ocus find tentidi trethu amal finn n-omthainn 7 goith tentide ina llamaib.
>
> Do-génsat na tri lína-su tra aonergail Catha dib, do chosnam na hanma frisna haingliu.
>
> 'And they saw another host of demons, and fiery…(?) around them, and fire from every limb which there was in them. Three aspects appeared to him on those demons: a very black aspect on some of them, with fiery gapped spears (?) in their hands; and a jet-black appearance on others, with fiery arrows in their hands. There was a shaggy aspect on the third company, and fiery hair [growing] from them like the hair of a thistle, with fiery javelins in their hands.
>
> Then these three troops made of themselves a single battle-formation, to contend for the soul against the angels.'[21]

Fís Laisrén has strong similarities to a vision experienced by Fursa, another Irish saint, and the most recent editor of *Fís Laisrén* states

[19] Elliot, 'The Apocalypse of Paul', 625.
[20] John Carey, ed. and trans., *The vision of Laisrén*, in *The end and beyond: medieval Irish eschatology*, vol. 1, ed. John Carey, Emma Nic Cárthaigh, and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh (Aberystwyth 2014) 417–44, at 422.
[21] Carey, *The vision of Laisrén*, 434–5.

'(t)here would seem, then, to be every reason to believe that the *Vita Fursei* is the principal source' for the surviving sections of *Fís Laisrén*.[22]

Fursa sees angels contending with hosts of demons that are trying to close off the road to Heaven to the saint. Angels reveal vast fires in a dark valley to Fursa, and he can see *daemones per ignem uolantes* ('demons flying among the flames'),[23] attempting to drag the righteous into the fires. In Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, St Columba twice describes angels contending with hostile powers of the air. The saint entreats his monks to pray in aid of Abbot Comgell's monks, because *hoc momento in aere contra aduersarias belligerant potestates, animam alicuius hospitis simul cum eis dimersi eripere conantes* ('at this moment they are fighting in the air against hostile powers that are trying to carry off the soul of a guest who has been drowned along with them').[24] On another occasion, after the death of a monk, Columba observes the aerial battle for his soul: *Nunc sanctos angelos in aere contra aduersarias potestates belligerare uidi* ('Now I have seen holy angels at war in the air against the adversary powers').[25] The MidIr. commentary on *Amra Choluimb Chille* considers the soul's need to evade demons of the air at the time of death: *Rodom-sibsea sech riaga .i. rom.fuca sech dem[n]u ind æeoir ad requiem sanctorum. Nó sech riaga .i. sech ingena Oircc, tres filiae Orcci, quae [vocantur] diuersis nominibus in caelo et in terra et in inferno* ('May he waft me past tortures! i.e. may he bear me past the demons of the air *ad requiem sanctorum*. Or *sech riaga*, i.e. past the daughters of Orcus, three daughters of Orcus, who are called by different names in heaven, on earth, and in hell').[26] The interplay between Latin and MidIr. in the commentary on this passage is interesting, especially the author's choice to use the vernacular *dem[n]u ind æeoir*, but to switch to Latin in the same sentence to describe heaven (*ad requiem sanctorum*).

Saints in vernacular Irish texts frequently demonstrate their authority over airborne demons. Saint Columba disperses a *dreim ndedgair*

[22] Carey, *The vision of Laisrén*, 431.

[23] Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds, *Bede's Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Oxford 1969) 272–3.

[24] Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, ed. and trans., *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, rev. Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford 1991) 200–1.

[25] Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*, 190–1.

[26] Whitley Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluimb Chille*', *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899) 31–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–37:414–17. For a discussion of this passage, see Michael Clarke, 'Demonology, allegory, and translation: the furies and the Morrígan', in *Classical literature and learning in medieval Irish narrative*, ed. Ralph O'Connor (Cambridge 2014) 101–22, at 113–14.

n-ittich / do demnaib[27] ('zealous winged host of demons') by casting into their midst a handful of red clay taken from the grave of Saint Ciarán of Clonmacnoise. In one of the opening scenes of *Acallam na senórach*, Saint Patrick sprinkles holy water over the surviving members of Finn's *fían*, causing the *míle léighionn do dheamhnaibh*[28] ('thousand legions of demons') who had hovered over their heads to disperse. We may compare this to another passage in the commentary on the *Amra*, where it is stated that when companies of bards came to praise Columba, he was so afflicted with pride that *lan in t-aær huas a chind do demnaib* ('the air above his head became full of demons');[29] the demons are driven away, but the incident results in a moratorium on bardic performances in Columba's presence during his lifetime.

In a MidIr. text possibly dating to the eleventh century, Cairpre Cromm, bishop of Clonmacnoise, is approached while at his prayers by a hideous shape. Questioned by the bishop, the being reveals itself to be the soul of Mael Ṡechnaill, a former king of Ireland. When asked why he has come to Cairpre Cromm, the soul replies:

> 'In tan bá-sa,' or in rig, 'isin æeor o chianaib 7 drong mor do demnaib imum ocum pianad di cech leth, ecmaing ni: co cualamar fogur do gothad-sa oc molad in Choimded. Imeclaigit iarum na demnu in uair-sin 7 scailit fo ardaib in uair. Ar ni chumuing demun feidliugud fri re n-oenuaire i talmain no i n-æor airet ro-soich fogur do gotha-sa oc cantain t'ernaithi.
>
> '"When I was just now in the air," said the king, "with a great throng of demons around me tormenting me on every side, something happened: we heard the sound of your voice praising the Lord. Then the demons were terrified at that time, and scattered throughout the regions of the air. For a demon cannot remain on earth or in the air for the space of one hour, for as far as the sound of your voice reaches when you are reciting your prayers."'[30]

[27] *Coire Breccáin*, in *The metrical Dindsenchas* IV, ed. and trans. E. J. Gwynn (Dublin 1924) 84.
[28] *Acallam na Senórach*, in *Irische Text mit Wörterbuch*, ed. Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch. Series 4, Part 1 (Leipzig 1900), ll 67–8.
[29] Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra*', 180–1.
[30] John Carey, 'The story of Cairpre Cromm and Mael Ṡechnaill son of Mael Ruanaid', in *The end and beyond*, 465–73, at 470–1.

The editor of the text points out a similarity between Mael Ṡechnaill's plight and that of a priest who is rescued from a seven-year stint as a prisoner of demons by the words of Níall Frossach; the demonic host happens to be passing over the assembly at the moment that the king delivers a wise judgment, and the man falls to the earth.[31]

Airborne beings in vernacular heroic literature

While demons that flit through the air are well-represented in medieval Irish religious literature, it is in the vernacular heroic tradition that the specific denomination *demna aeóir* typically occurs, usually in accounts of battles. In *Togail Troí*, *demna aeóir* accompany the Badb before a battle: *Robúrestar 7 robécestar Badb úasv. R[o]gáirset demna aéoir úasv chind*[32] ('The Badb roared and cried over it. Demons of the air called overhead'). *Demna aeóir* appearing at battlefields are most likely to be found in the list of creatures, some supernatural, some bestial, that shriek and cry out before or during combat. *The Chase of Síd na mBan Finn and the Death of Finn* relates that during Finn mac Cumaill's final battle, *ro gáiretar bánánaigh 7 bocánaigh 7 badhba belderga 7 giniti glinne 7 demna aieóir 7 arrachta foluaimnecha na firmamenti hi comórad aigh 7 irgaili ós cinn in rí[g]feínned*[33] ('the pale ones and the goat-men and the red-mouthed *badbs* and the demoniac spectral women of the glen and the demons of the air and the fluttering specters of the firmament shrieked above the head of the ruler of the *fían*, exalting in the strife and battle'). In *Cath Cumair*, it is stated that *gur bho subhach saithech baidbh 7 braineóin a thuil-sechtuibh renn 7 faobhair an*

[31] David Greene, 'The "act of truth" in a Middle-Irish story', *Saga och Sed* (1976) 30–7, at 32. This narrative bears a striking similarity to later folktales describing how individuals being carried through the air by fairies are rescued by the timely invocation of the name of God, the casting of iron nails into the air among the host, or other means; for examples, see Séamas Ó Catháin, Seán Ó hEochaidh, eds, and Máire Mac Neill, trans., *Síscéalta ó Thír Chonaill* / *Fairy legends from Donegal* (Dublin 1977) 55–9.

[32] *Togail Troí*, ed. Whitley Stokes, in *Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch* 2.1, ed. Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch (Leipzig 1884) 1–142: at ll 1897–8. The relationship between *Togail Troí* and the corpus of 'native' Irish heroic epic is debated. For a recent summary of the issue, see Ralph O'Connor, *The destruction of Da Derga's hostel: kingship and narrative artistry in a mediaeval Irish saga* (Oxford 2013) 230–6; see also Brent Miles, *Heroic saga and classical epic in medieval Ireland* (Cambridge 2011) *passim*.

[33] Kuno Meyer, ed. and trans., 'The chase of Síd na mBan Finn and the death of Finn', in *Fianaigecht: being a collection of hitherto inedited Irish poems and tales relating to Finn and his Fíana, with an English translation*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer (Dublin 1910; repr. 1937) 94.

ruathair sin. Ro ghairsad fós bonnain 7 bocnna geilte gleinne 7 demhain aidhir do gach aird 7 do gach airchenn don chath chródha chechtardha sin ('the crows and ravens were merry and full from the traces of point and blade of that onslaught. Also sprites and goblins, madmen of the glens, and demons of the air screamed from every quarter and edge of that redoubtable battle').[34] A similar list occurs in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*:

> Ro erig em, badb díscir, dian, denmnetach, dásachtach dúr duabsech, detcengtach, cruaid, croda, cosáitech, co bai ic screchaid ar luamain os a cennaib. Ro eirgetar am bana[35] naig, ocus boccanaig, ocus geliti glinni, ocus amati adgaill, ocus siabra, ocus seneoin, ocus demna admílti aeoir, ocus firmaminti, ocus síabarslúag debil demnach, co mbatar a comgresacht, ocus i commórad aig ocus irgaili leo.[36]
>
> 'A *badb* ascended, fierce, swift, impatient, furious, merciless, calamitous, toothy, harsh, bloody, contentious, screeching and hovering over their heads. And there arose also the pale ones, and the goat-men, and the wild men of the glen, and the hags of destruction, and the phantoms, and the crows, and the ruinous demons of the air and the firmament, and the foreboding demonic phantom host, and they were inciting and exalting the courage and strife with them.'

The Book of Leinster recension of *Táin bó Cúalnge* includes several examples of this phenomenon, with the additional detail that the supernatural beings are screaming in response to the shouts of mortal heroes; the well-known *Breslech Maige Murthemne* episode is a good example of this phenomenon. It is said of Cú Chulainn that:

> Dofánic ferg 7 luinni mór icá n-aiscin re ilar a bidbad, re immad a námat. Ro gab a dá śleig 7 a scíath 7 a chlaideb. Crothais a scíath 7 cressaigis a ślega 7 bertnaigis a chlaidem, 7 dobert rém curad

[34] Margaret C. Dobbs, ed and trans., '*Cath Cumair*', *Revue Celtique* 43 (1926) 322–5.

[35] In the translation of *bánánaig* I follow Borsje in taking the *bán*-element as a reference to paleness or whiteness. Borsje, 'Omens' 234. Compare also the *badba bánae* ('pale badbs') in *Bruiden da Choca*: Gregory Toner, *Bruiden da Choca* (London 2007) 124.

[36] James Henthorn Todd, ed. and trans., *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or the invasions of Ireland by the Danes and other Norsemen*, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 48 (London 1867) 174.

> asa brágit coro [ḟ]recratar bánanaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinni 7 demna aeóir re úathgráin na gáre dosbertatar ar aird, coro mesc ind Neamain forsin tṡlóg.
>
> 'Anger and rage filled him when he saw the host, because of the multitude of his foes and the great number of his enemies. He seized his two spears and his shield and his sword. He shook his shield and brandished his spears and waved his sword, and he uttered a hero's shout from his throat. And the goblins and sprites and spectres of the glen and demons of the air gave answer for terror of the shout that he had uttered, and Nemain, the war goddess, brought confusion on the host.'[37]

In an elaborate description of the arming of Cú Chulainn, after he takes up sword, spear, and shield,

> ro gab a chírchathbarr catha 7 comlai[n]d 7 comraic imma chend as[a] ṅgáired gáir cét n-óclách do ṡíréigim cecha cúli 7 cecha cerna de, dáig is cumma congáiritis de bánanaig 7 bocánaig 7 geiniti glinne 7 demna aeóir ríam 7 úasu 7 ina thimchuill cach ed immatéiged re tesitin fola na míled 7 na n-aṅglond sechtair.
>
> 'he put on his head his crested war-helmet of battle and strife and conflict, from which was uttered the shout of a hundred warriors with a long-drawn-out cry from every corner and angle of it. For there used to cry from it alike goblins and sprites, spirits of the glen and demons of the air, before him and above him and around him, wherever he went, prophesying the shedding of the blood of warriors and champions.'[38]

[37] Cecile O'Rahilly, ed. and trans., *Táin bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin 1967, repr. 1970, 1984) 58, 197–8 [reading sg. *dobert ar aird*]. Brent Miles interprets this scene typologically: 'Cú Chulainn's appearance to his foes at the beginning of this episode presents a striking visual index to the iconography of the crucifixion… The 'goblins and sprites and spectres of the glen' happen to recall Matthew's description of how the dead rose from their graves following Jesus's last great cry.' *Heroic saga* 197. Ann Dooley has also examined the supernatural cries in this scene: 'Cú Chulainn's power cry, his *srem aurad* which prefaces it, is by this stage no more than a kind of lower-scale reflex of the original effect of his *riastarthae* powers. Its echo produces an eruption of miscellaneous non-human types of terrifying other-worldly responses…. The effect is to reiterate the power of the death goddess at this time.' *Playing the hero: reading the Irish saga Táin bó Cúailnge* (Toronto 2006) 145.

[38] O'Rahilly, *Táin bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, 61, 201.

When Cú Chulainn sets out to meet his foster-brother Fer Diad in single combat,

> Is and sin cininis in cur cetach clessamnach cathbúadach claidebderg, Cú Chulaind mac Sualtaim, ina charpat. Gura gáirsetar imme boccánaig 7 bánanaig 7 geniti glinne 7 demna aeóir, dáig dabertis Túatha Dé Danand a ṅgáriud immi-sium combad móti a gráin 7 a ecla 7 a urúad 7 a urúamain in cach cath 7 in cach cathroí, in cach comlund 7 in cach comruc i téiged.
>
> 'Then Cú Chulainn mac Sualtaim mounted his chariot, the blow-dealing, feat-performing, battle-winning, red-sworded hero, and around him shrieked goblins and sprites and fiends of the glen and demons of the air, for the Túatha Dé Danand used to raise a cry about him so that the fear and terror and horror and fright that he inspired might be all the greater in every battle and field of conflict and in every encounter to which he went.'[39]

Cú Chulainn's battle with Fer Diad extends over several days. At their final meeting, before Cú Chulainn slays his erstwhile companion, the fierceness of their fighting provokes the attendant spirits to cry out once more: *Ba sé dlús n-imaric darónsatar gora gársetar boccánaig 7 bánanaig 7 geniti glinni 7 demna aeóir do bilib a scíath 7 d'imdornaib a claideb 7 d'erlonnaib a sleg* ('Such was the closeness of their encounter that sprites and goblins and spirits of the glen and demons of the air screamed from the rims of their shields and from the hilts of their swords and from the butt-ends of their spears').[40] As can be seen from these examples, *demna aeóir* in these battle-lists have been included in a broad category that primarily consists of 'native' (or seemingly so) pre-Christian Irish supernatural beings. *Demna aeóir* are often described as being in the presence of the Badb (or a *badb*), though the version of the *Táin* in the Book of Leinster typically omits her from the list. How and why did the *demna aeóir* come to be included?

Though it does not use the phrase *demna aeóir*, *Cath Maige Mucrama* describes demons, eager to snatch the souls of the fallen warriors down to hell, that throng in the air so thickly before a battle that they darken the sky.[41] *Cath Maige Mucrama* may represent an important point in the

[39] ibid. 78, 216–17.
[40] *ibid. 92, 228.*
[41] Máirín O'Daly, ed. and trans., *Cath Maige Mucrama: the battle of Mag Mucrama*, ITS 50 (Dublin 1975) 54.

development of the theme of demons hovering over battlefields. The text has been dated to the ninth century by its most recent editor,[42] and in contrast with the more typical airborne demons depicted attending battles in medieval Irish sources, their intent is not to incite the warriors to battle or shriek encouragements, but to capture their souls. The text also relates that two angels accompany Art mac Cuinn in the battle, on account of his being the rightful ruler.[43] It has been argued that the pre-Christian Irish concept of the *badba* and related figures was that they acted as psychopomps conveying the souls of those killed in battle to the afterlife;[44] this argument is of course highly speculative, but if the Irish did have the idea of a 'native' class of avian 'demons' who frequented battlefields, this category of beings have been assimilated to the Christian concept of demons herding souls to eternal torment after the adoption of Christianity in Ireland.

Two other instances might be of interest here, though neither refers specifically to *demna aeóir*. *In Cath Catharda*, the MidIr. translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, contains an elaborate description of the night before the decisive battle that is highly similar to the examples of supernatural creatures crying out discussed above. Earlier Pompey's son had sought out Erictho, greatest of the witches of Thessaly, to prophesy the outcome of the battle. Afterward, the sleep of the men in the two camps is disturbed by howling winds, lightning, tossing seas, and earthquakes. Weapons fall from their racks, and the demonic places of the earth are exposed. The ominous scene concludes:

> Re siangail 7 re sibsanaigh na mbufa 7 na loisccend. Re donalaibh 7 re hamustraig na fael ocus na con ocus na cuanart ocus na mac tire. Re coimhcnedaigh ocus re barann beicedhaigh na n-os ocus na n-alma ocus na n-allta n-eccennais. Re h-ardglaedaig ocus re hardgairmnibh na parti ocus na lleoman ocus na mathgaman. Re got[h]gail graccallaigh na n-en ocus na n-etaide ocus na

[42] ibid. 18.

[43] ibid. 54. We might compare this with a reference in *Culhwch ac Olwen* to two men who survived the battle of Camlan unscathed: Morfran eil Tegid, whom no one struck because he was thought to be a *kythreul canhorthwy* ('accompanying devil') on account of his hideousness, and Sande Pryd Angel ('Sande Angel's Form'), whom no one struck because he was thought to be an *engyl canhorthwy* ('accompanying angel') because of his beauty. Rachel Bromwich and Simon D. Evans, eds, *Culhwch and Olwen: an edition and study of the oldest Arthurian tale* (Cardiff 1992) 8–9.

[44] Most recently by Matthias Egeler, 'Death, wings, and divine devouring: possible Mediterranean affinities of Irish battlefield demons and Norse valkyries', *Studia Celtica Fennica* (2008) 5–26.

> foluaimnech arcena. Ra garbhgortgholgrechaig na ngelt ocus na ngribh n-ingnech, na n-ammaite ocus na n-urtrac[h] ocus na mbadb mbélderg 7 na fantaisi foltscailte ocus na ndrong ndirmann ndemnacdha ocus diabhaliasccaigh inn aeoir arcena os a cinn, nir' leicced lochad no tatham no tinnabrad d'oenduine i cechtar na da mórloggport airet batar na hammaiti for an abairt sin ina timcell.
>
> 'At the croakings and cluckings of the frogs and the toads; at the howls and barking of the wolves, and the hounds and the packs and the "sons of earth"; at the groaning and angry bellowing of the deer and the herds and the savage wild beasts; at the roars and cries of the leopards and the lions and the bears; at the cawing voices of the birds and the fowls and the other flying things; at the rough-bitter, wail-screaming of the madmen, and the taloned griffins, and the witches, and the spectres, and the red-mouthed lamias, and the phantoms with dishevelled hair, and the crowds of demonic multitudes and the other devil-fishes of the air above them, neither slumber nor nap nor sleep was allowed to a single soul in each of the two great camps so long as the witches were at that game around them.'[45]

As Angelique Gulermovich-Epstein points out, this scene is not matched by anything in Lucan's Latin original, and the disturbance of the sleep of the armies is 'reminiscent' of the *Breslech Maige Murthemne* episode in the *Táin*, when Nemain's shouts disturb the assembled warriors.[46] There are two groups in this description that are relevant to the present discussion: *na ndrong ndirmann ndemnacdha* and *diabhaliasccaigh inn aeoir*. Both presumably indicate a similar concept to *demna aeóir*, and given how closely the list of beings in this passage corresponds to the other examples of such set pieces discussed above, the author must have been elaborating on them. The compound *diabhaliasccaigh*, rendered by Meyer as 'devil-fishes', is otherwise unattested. It could denote a piscine appearance (there are numerous depictions of demons with fins and scales in medieval manuscripts), or it could plausibly also refer to their movement: perhaps they were envisioned as darting and diving in concert like a school of fish.

[45] Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., *In Cath catharda, the civil war of the Romans. An Irish version of Lucan's Pharsalia*, in *Irische Texte*, 4th series, part 2, ed. Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch (Leipzig 1909) 324–7, ll 4348–60.

[46] Angelique Gulermovich Epstein 'War goddess: the Morrígan and her Germano-Celtic counterparts' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, UCLA 1998) 250–1. O'Rahilly, *Táin bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, 58.

In an Early Modern Irish Fenian text, *Cath Fionntrágha*, there is another heavily embellished version of the topos:

> Ro freagradar iommorro na dúili uachtaracha a comdáil an chatha leó d'faisnéis na n-olc 7 na n-imneadh budh cinnti do dhéanamh isin ló sin, 7 do merlabhair an muir d'faisnéis na n-easbadh 7 do thógadar na tonna tromgháir truaghadhbal dá sírchaíneadh 7 do bhúiredar na piasta dá piastfhaisnéis 7 do ghéisedar na garbhchnuic le gábhadh na greisi sin 7 do crithnaigh[e]adar na coillti do chaíneadh na curadh 7 ro gáireadar na glaschlocha ó ghnímaibh na ngér-reann 7 do ghuiledar na gaetha ag admháil na n-ardécht 7 do crithnaigh an talamh ac tarrngaire an tromáir 7 do gormbrataigh an grian le gáirfeadhaigh na nglas-sluagh 7 do niamdhubadar na neóill re hathaidh na huaire sin 7 do chomgháireadar coin 7 cuanarta 7 badbha 7 geilide glinne 7 arrachta aieir 7 faelcoin na fidhb[a]idhe dá gach aird 7 dá gach oirchinn ana timcheall 7 sreath deamnaide diabalta do lucht aslaig uilc 7 écórach dá coimgreasacht a ceann a céili.[47]
>
> 'Then the beings of the upper regions responded to the battle, telling the evil and the woe that was destined to be done on that day, and the sea chattered telling the losses, and the waves raised a heavy woeful great moan in wailing them, and the beasts howled telling of them in their bestial way, and the rough hills creaked with the danger of that attack, and the woods trembled in wailing the heroes, and the grey stones cried from the deeds of the heroes, and the winds sighed telling the high deeds, and the earth trembled in prophesying the heavy slaughter, and the sun was covered with a blue mantle by the cries of the grey hosts, and the clouds were shining black at the time of that hour, and the hounds and whelps, and crows, and the demoniac women of the glenn, and the spectres of the air, and the wolves of the forest howled together from every quarter and every corner round about them, and a demoniacal devilish section of the tempters to evil and wrong kept urging them on against each other.'[48]

Here the expected *demna aeóir* are replaced by *arrachta aieir* 'spectres of the air'. The construction of the phrase and its position with the topos

[47] Cecile O'Rahilly, ed., *Cath Finntrágha* (Dublin 1962, repr. 1975) 34, ll 1050–66.
[48] Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *Cath Finntrága or the battle of Ventry*, MMS 1.4 (Oxford 1885) 40–1.

strongly indicate that this is a deliberate substitution. *Cath Fionntrágha* is a late, retrospective narrative, and it is not surprising that earlier conventions would be reworked and expanded. That said, there are a number of points on which *Cath Fionntrágha*'s version corresponds to that found in *In Cath catharda*: not only do wolves and other beasts cry out, but the winds, the waves, and the earth protest the coming battle, embedding the topos within a broader pathetic fallacy. These two examples illustrate that while *demna aeóir* is a fairly stable concept in this topos, some authors felt free to modify the phrase.

William Sayers compares the 'demonic host of the air' in medieval Irish texts to the Beasts of Battle topos in their role '(a)s portents of the battle to come'.[49] The Beasts of Battle topos is robust in medieval Germanic (and, to a lesser extent, Welsh) sources,[50] and is typically represented by the trio of the raven, eagle, and wolf. The comparable topos in medieval Irish sources need not necessarily be a native one; indeed, while the Old English, Old Norse, and Middle Welsh examples of the topos all deal with biological animals whose connection to battle derives from their being known carrion eaters, the Irish lists include true scavengers (assuming that the *badba* are to be understood as biological birds) but emphasize supernatural, humanoid beings, and in contrast to the Germanic Beasts of Battle, only a fraction of the figures in the Irish texts should be thought of as attending the battle because they anticipate feasting on the slain.[51] This suggests that the topos as it appears in Ireland did not develop solely out of observation of animals scavenging on the battlefield.

At this juncture I would like to draw attention to two well-known passages in Isaiah that depict groups of beasts and supernatural creatures

[49] William Sayers, '*Airdrech*, *sirite*, and other early Irish battlefield spirits', *Éigse* 25 (1991) 49.

[50] Francis P. Magoun, 'The theme of the beasts of battle in Anglo-Saxon poetry', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 56 (1955) 81–90; Joseph Harris, 'Beasts of battle, south and north', in *Source of wisdom: Old English and early medieval Latin studies in honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. C. D. Wright, F. M. Biggs, Thomas N. Hall (Toronto 2007) 3–25; Judith Jesch, 'Eagles, ravens, and wolves: beasts of battle, symbols of victory and death', in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel period to the tenth century: an ethnographic perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch (Woodbridge 2002) 251–80; David Klausner, 'The topos of the beasts of battle in early Welsh poetry' in *The centre and its compass: studies in medieval literature in honour of Professor John Leyerle,* ed. Robert A. Taylor et al. (Kalamazoo 1993) 247–63.

[51] I am not suggesting that the Beasts of Battle topos never had supernatural associations – that would be inaccurate, particularly in reference to Old Norse texts. However, in the Old Norse sources, ravens and wolves are associated with Óðinn because they eat the battle dead, while he collects the dead warriors' souls for Valhǫll.

crying out after the fall of nations. Isaiah 34: 13–14 relates that following the destruction of Edom, *orientur in domibus eius spinae et urticae et paliurus in munitionibus eius et erit cubile draconum et pascua strutionum et occurrent daemonia onocentauris et pilosus clamabit alter ad alterum ibi cubavit lamia et invenit sibi requiem* ('thorns and nettles shall grow up in its houses, and the thistle in the fortresses thereof; and it shall be the habitation of dragons, and the pasture of ostriches. And demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out one to another, there hath the lamia lain down, and found rest for herself'). Isaiah 13:21–2 describes the future destruction of Babylon: *sed requiescent ibi bestiae et replebuntur domus eorum draconibus et habitabunt ibi strutiones et pilosi saltabunt ibi et respondebunt ibi ululae in aedibus eius et sirenae in delubris voluptatis* ('But wild beasts shall rest there, and their houses shall be filled with serpents, and ostriches shall dwell there, and the hairy ones shall dance there. And owls shall answer one another there, in the houses thereof, and sirens in the temples of pleasure'). These lists of beasts, serpents, birds, *pilosi*, and sirens that inhabit the ruins of fallen kingdoms are reminiscent of the catalogue of creatures who cry out during battle in Irish texts. In a gloss attributed to Johannes Scottus Eriugena, Jerome's *lamia* in Isaiah 34:14 is glossed *monstrum in femine figura, .i. morigain*[52] ('monster in the shape of a woman, i.e. Morrígan'). Eriugena also glosses *pilosi* as *daemonum genera vel geltig* ('species of demons or *geltig*').[53] The *lamia* and *sirenae*, as supernatural female beings found in isolated or desolate locales, may be compared to the *geniti glinni* 'female-creatures of the glen'.[54] *Geniti glinni* is the standard phrase found in the topos, but two texts, *Cath Cumair* and *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, substitute *geilte* for *geniti*; as pointed out above, Eriugena glosses *pilosi* as *geltig*. Another possible parallel for the *pilosi* are the *boccánaig*: the *DIL* translates *bocánach* as 'some kind of (? goat-like) supernatural being usu. associated with battle or battlefield'.[55] *Pilosus* literally means 'hairy' or 'shaggy', and it is often used as a term for a satyr; the goatish *bocánach* would be a very close equivalent.

[52] John J. Contreni and Pádraig P. Ó Néill, eds, *Glossae divinae historiae: the biblical glosses of John Scottus Eriugena*, Millenio medievale 1 (Florence 1997) 146, no. 298.

[53] Contreni and Néill, *Glossae*, 145, no. 290. For discussion of these glosses, see Jacqueline Borsje, 'The 'terror of the night' and the Morrígain: shifting faces of the supernatural', in *Proceedings of the seventh symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, ed. Mícheál Ó Flaithearta, *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Celtica Upsaliensia* 6 (Uppsala 2007) 71–98, at 92–3, and Clarke, 'Demonology', 108–9.

[54] See Borsje, 'Omens', 234–8, and Borsje, 'Terror', 75–6, for a thorough discussion of this term.

[55] *eDIL* s.v. *bocánach*.

Given the Irish glosses that relate the monsters in Isaiah to supernatural figures that also appear in Irish descriptions of battles, it strikes me as not out of the question that the motif of the shrieking creatures of the Irish battlefield may have been influenced by, or perhaps even modelled on, these passages in Isaiah. If the creatures who shriek before or during battles in Irish texts are based in part on these verses in Isaiah, then the fact that the *bocánach* does not appear outside of battle scenes could suggest that *bocánach* is a calque on *pilosus* or *satyrus*, rather than being a creature native to Irish folklore, although of course this cannot be proven.

THE AETIOLOGY OF DEMONS OF THE AIR

How were the demons of the air thought to have arrived there? There are surviving medieval and folkloric traditions about the location of the fallen angels that attempt to harmonize the idea that there were demons of the air with the belief that demons were in hell. The Old English *Prose Solomon and Saturn* asks where the fallen angels went after they were cast down from heaven:

> Saga me hwader gewiton þa engelas þe gode wyðsocon on heofona rice.
> Ic þe secge, hyg todældon on þri dælas; anne dæl he asette on þæs lyftes gedrif; Oðerne dæl on þæs wateres gedryf; þriddan dæl on helle neowelnysse.
>
> 'Tell me where did the angels go who rejected God in the kingdom of heaven.
> I tell you, they divided into three parts; he put one part in the region of the air, the second part in the region of the water, the third part in the abyss of hell.'[56]

Another parallel for the tripartite division of demons occurs in a fragmentary account of a vision related by an unknown monk, who

[56] James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill, ed. and trans., *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus* (Toronto 1982) 30, 97. Charles D. Wright's *The Irish tradition in Old English literature* (Cambridge 1993) remains the standard work on cultural connections between Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Ireland. See also Christopher Jones, 'Furies, monks, and folklore in the earliest *miracula* of Saint Swithun', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 113 (2014) 407–42: 435, 438–40.

> demones in tres turmas ultra modum magnas divisos unam in aere, aliam in terra et in mari tertiam ad penalia loca parare tormenta vidit. Primam namque turmam ad decipiendum homines in hac commoni vita contendere, secundam egredientes de corporali ergastulo animas in aere continuo inhianterque persequi et ad tormenta trahere aspexit.[57]
>
> 'saw demons divided into three troops great beyond measure, one in the air, another on land, and a third in the ocean, preparing torments for the places of punishment. He beheld the first troop contending to deceive men in this shared life, the second troop swiftly and with gaping mouths pursuing the souls through the air as they emerged from the body's prison, and dragging them to torments.'

The author of the vision is unknown, but evidence in the text suggests an Anglo-Saxon provenance,[58] and while the details do not precisely match those in the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* (the demons in the vision are in the air, the sea, and on the land, versus in the air, the sea, and hell in the *Prose Solomon and Saturn*), they are fairly close, suggesting the circulation of such schemata in Anglo-Saxon England.

Similar ideas were known across the Irish Sea, and given the influence exerted by Irish clerics on the early Anglo-Saxon church, it seems likely that the idea was brought to Britain by Irish clerics. Among the many locations visited in *Navigatio sancti Brendani* is an island with a fountain, over which grows an enormous tree. A flock of shining white birds perch upon its branches. Weeping, Brendan prays that the meaning of this will be revealed to him. A bird alights near Brendan, and, recognizing God's answer, the saint asks the bird where they come from:

> 'Nos sumus de illa magna ruina antiqui hostis, sed non peccando in eorum consensu fuimus. Sed ubi fuimus creati, per lapsum illius cum suis satellitibus contigit et nostra ruina. Deus autem noster iustus est et uerax. Per suum magnum iudicium misit nos in istum locum. Penas non sustinemus. Hic presenciam Dei possumus uidere, sed tantum alienauit nos a consorcio aliorum qui steterunt. Vagamur per diuersas partes æris et firmament et terrarum, sicut alii spiritus qui mittuntur. Sed in sanctis diebus atque dominicis

[57] Michael Tangl , ed., *Fragmentary vision 757*, in *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Selectae, 1 (Berlin 1955) 248.
[58] Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's purge: purgatory in late antiquity* (Oxford 2010) 131-2.

> accipimus corpora talia qualia nunc uides et commoramur hic laudamusque nostrum creatorem.'[59]
>
> '"We survive from the great destruction of the ancient enemy, but we are not associated with them through any sin of ours. When we were created, Lucifer's fall and that of his followers brought our destruction also. But our God is just and true. In his great judgment he sent us here. We endure no sufferings. Here we can see God's presence. But God has separated us from sharing the lot of the others who were faithful. We wander through various regions of the air and the firmament of the earth, just like the other spirits that travel on their missions. But on holy days and Sundays we are given bodies such as you now see so that we may stay here and praise the Creator."'[60]

Here we have the notion of neutral angels who have been exiled from heaven for refusing to take sides when Lucifer fell, who must now travel through the air and over the earth. The spirits are granted a Sunday respite from their wanderings in the form of white birds.[61]

A medieval Irish glossator's explanation for a reference in *Altus Prosator* to a dragon that *tertiam siderum traxit secum in barathrum* ('dragged a third of the stars with it into the abyss') has been suggested as a possible parallel to the question in the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* by Thomas D. Hill and James Cross, in their commentary on the text. The gloss reads *a tri ernaile forahintinn ... trian dib in aere ocus trian ... maris et terrae ocus trian in barathro .i. in inferno.*[62] ('There are three categories in his view … a third in the air and a third … in the sea and the earth and a third in *barathro*, that is, in the inferno'). Hill and Cross point out that although *Altus Prosator* refers to the great dragon (*draco magnus*) whose tail drags a third of the stars to the earth in Revelations 12:3–4, the glossator offers a different explanation.[63] The phrasing of

[59] Carl Selmer, ed., *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis from early Latin manuscripts* (South Bend, IN 1959; Dublin repr. 1989) 24–5.

[60] John J. O'Meara, trans., *The voyage of Saint Brendan: journey to the promised land* (Dublin 1976, repr. 1982) 21.

[61] For discussion of this passage, see Séamus Mac Mathúna, 'Judas in medieval Irish literature and Irish folklore' *Proceedings of the eighth symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, ed. Jan Erik Rekdal and Ailbhe Ó Corráin, *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Celtica Upsaliensia* 7 (Uppsala 2007) 95–126, 119–22.

[62] J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, ed., *Altus Prosator*, in *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, vol. I (London 1898) 69.

[63] Cross and Hill, *Prose Solomon* 97.

the gloss and the fact that the words for air, earth, sea and hell are given in Latin indicates that the glossator is quoting a Latin text, although to my knowledge no direct source has been found. Jane Stevenson observes that the *Altus Prosator* poet departs here from patristic tradition, which usually depicts only a tenth of the angels rebelling and falling; however, she points out that the idea that a third of the angels fall also occurs in the MidIr. poem *Saltair na rann*:

> Ro rāid trian int ślúaig co glé
> eter angle is archangle,
> ro forgellsat fiad cach thur:
> 'Is fīr fors tā Lucifur.'
>
> 'A third of the host, both angels and archangels, said clearly,
> they affirmed before every host: "What Lucifer says is true."'[64]

This, she argues, 'may be another indication that the poet [of the *Altus Prosator*] was drawing on materials available in an Irish milieu, later also available to the Irish author of the *Saltair*'.[65] As John Carey points out, the motif is also mentioned in *Lebor gabála Érenn*, where Lucifer is put in charge of the nine orders of angels in Heaven, a third of whom fall: *Rothimmarc in Rí é co trian in slúaig angel leis i nIfrinn*' ('The King confined him with a third of the host of angels in his company in Hell').[66] This yields three orders of fallen angels, and placing each of the three fallen orders in a different location is fully in line with the medieval Irish tendency to create triadic divisions. It may be overstating the case to claim that the notion that a third of the angels fall with Satan is widespread in medieval Irish texts, but the idea does appear to have had at least some currency. However, the gloss on *Altus Prosator* does not claim that a third of the angels fell, but rather that a third fell into the air, a third into the earth and sea, and third into the inferno. This is not precisely the same idea as is presented in *Saltair na rann* and *Lebor gabála Érenn*, but it points a certain continuity of thought.

[64] David Greene and Fergus Kelly, eds and trans., *The Irish Adam and Eve story from Saltair na rann*, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Dublin 1976) 80-1, ll. 1837-40.

[65] Jane Stevenson, '*Altus Prosator*' *Celtica* 23 (1999) 332, fn. 35.

[66] John Carey, 'Angelology in *Saltair na rann*' *Celtica* 19 (1987) 2–8; R. A. Stewart Macalister, ed. and trans., *Lebor gabála Érenn*, Part 1 (Dublin 1938) 16–17. This is mentioned again slightly later in the text, where it is stated that *co ro hindarbadh i cinaigh in díumsa sin do Neimi, co triun slúaig aingeal laiss, in nIffrinn* ('he was expelled, for the crime of that haughtiness, out from Heaven, [with a third of the host of angels in his company], into Hell') 26–7.

The tripartite division of the fallen angels is also alluded to in *Dúan in chóicat cest*, where it is asked *Cia hairm fil iffern na n-ed {.i. a trian a n-aeór. 7 a trian hi talmain. 7 a trian hi muir}*[67]('How far does hell extend in terms of distances? {That is, one third in the air, and one third on the earth, and one third in the sea}'. While the fallen angels are not explicitly mentioned, the answer does not make much sense unless we read it in light of the tradition of the fallen angels being confined to these three locations. This question is echoed in TCD MS 1337 (H 3 18), an early sixteenth-century manuscript: *Ca hairm a fuil Iffern? Ni ansa: a trían a muir, a trían i n-aer, a trían i talmuin*[68] ('In what place is hell? Not difficult: a third in the sea, a third in the air, and third in the earth'). Carey compares this question and answer to a Donegal saying about the fairies: *Cuid 'san aer, cuid 'san uisge, cuid i gnuic agus i gcairgeacha, agus cuid i nIfrionn dorcha, salach*[69] ('A part in the air, a part in the water, a part in the hills and the rocks, and a part in dark, foul Hell'). Carey connects both statements to the folkloric belief, recorded after the medieval period, that the Archangel Michael persuaded God to stop the fall of the angels who had aligned themselves with Lucifer. God halted the angels' fall, and they remained wherever they were at the time the fall ceased. Those in the air and on the earth became fairies, and those that fell into the sea became ocean creatures; those that had fallen into hell became demons.[70] As this belief illustrates, in Ireland the fallen angels came to be explicitly associated with 'fairies', a non-native term for the classes of beings known as *áes síde* or Túatha Dé Danann in medieval Ireland. Concerning the question in TCD MS 1337 (H 3 18), Carey states:

[67] Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ed. and trans., *Dúan in chóicat cest* in *Sex aetates mundi: die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen und den Iren. Untersuchungen und Texte* (Heidelberg 1985) 285–93, at 286.

[68] John Carey, 'Where is Hell?', *Béaloideas* 50 (1982) 42–-3, at 42.

[69] ibid. 42–3.

[70] ibid. 43. Cross and Hill also suggest that this belief might be related to the question and answer about the location of the fallen angels in *The prose Solomon and Saturn* (97–8). See Seán Ó Súilleabháin, 'Etiological stories in Ireland', in *Medieval literature and folklore studies: essays in honour of Francis Lee Utley*, ed. Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Brunswick 1970) 258. Lady Wilde recounts a version of this belief: 'The islanders, like all the Irish, believe that the fairies are the fallen angels who were cast down by the Lord God out of heaven for their sinful pride. And some fell into the sea, and some on the dry land, and some fell deep down into hell, and the devil gives to these knowledge and power, and sends them on earth where they work much evil. But the fairies of the earth and the sea are mostly gentle and beautiful creatures, who will do no harm if they are let alone, and allowed to dance on the fairy raths in the moonlight to their own sweet music, undisturbed by the presence of mortals'. Lady Speranza Wilde, *Ancient legends, mystic charms, and superstitions of Ireland* (Boston 1887) 169.

> In our text the fairies are not mentioned, and the proverb has been re-cast in the form of a riddle comprehensible only in terms of the underlying tradition. The new interpretation of this tradition – that water, air and earth are rendered infernal by the presence of the fairies–suggests clerical influence … it is intriguing to find a case in which the learned literature has been in turn directly influenced by popular material.[71]

Carey's assessment presumes that some form of the folkloric belief informs the riddle. This is certainly possible; however, the earliest firm evidence for the belief postdates the riddle by several hundred years. Given how early the tripartite division of fallen angels occurs in medieval Irish sources, I am not sure that we can confidently establish the source of the idea for the question in TCD MS 1337 (H 3 18) in the popular tradition. The direction of transmission may as easily have been from learned to popular; this is not to say that the idea that the fallen angels fell into various locations did not circulate outside of learned circles in the Middle Ages, but that the idea that there were demons in the air, as described in the Bible and in patristic sources, may have been the initial impetus for formulating the threefold division of the fallen angels. An awareness of native categories of supernatural beings could have influenced the formation of the tripartite division of the fallen angels, but a medieval reader would be able make sense of the question/answer about how far hell extends without needing to equate the fallen angels with the Túatha Dé Danann – the reader would merely need to be aware of a tradition that the angels who fell were confined to different locations. This tradition is amply supported by the Anglo-Saxon and Irish evidence discussed above. The association between the tripartite division of the fallen angels and the Túatha Dé Danann could have developed at a later date, though there is evidence that things were moving in this direction during the Middle Ages. At what point were the fallen angels enlisted to explain native classes of supernatural beings, and how closely was this development related to the tradition of the tripartite division of the fallen angels?

While I have not come across the use of an explicitly tripartite division of fallen angels to account for the Túatha Dé Danann in medieval texts, there is strong evidence that they were associated with fallen angels more generally. *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* is extant in five manuscripts, the earliest of which is the eleventh- or twelfth-century *Lebor na hUidre*, but Carey suggests dating the text to the latter half of

[71] Carey, 'Where is Hell' 43.

the ninth-century.[72] In the text, Tuán attributes angelic origins to the Túatha Dé Danann, referring to the *Túatha Dé 7 Andé dona fes bunadus lasin n-oes n-eólais. Acht ba dóich leo bith din longis dodeochaid de nim dóib* ('Túatha Dé and Andé, whose origin the men of learning do not know; but they thought it likely that they are some of the exiles who came to them from Heaven').[73] Tuán contradicts this belief, claiming instead that they are actually descended from Beothecht son of Iordanen.

Lebor gabála Érenn contains several references to the Túatha Dé Danann's putative demonic/angelic lineage,[74] but the lengthiest discussion occurs in a summary of conflicting accounts of their origins, occurring only in the Book of Lecan version of recension C of *Lebor gabála Érenn* (quoted in part above):

> Atberaid aroile comad deamna grada ecsamla Túatha Dé Danann, 7 comad iadsiden do deachadar do nim araen risin loinges do deachaid Luitcifear cona deamnaib do nibh; ar faemad chuirp aerda umpu, do millead 7 d'aslach for sil nAdaim. Is he les fris tucadar aes in iarmorachta sin, in diaid demain 7 a muintiri. Tiagaid thra in lucht sin isidaib. Ocus tiagaid fo muirib, 7 tiagaid i conrechtaib, ocus tiagaid co hamaide ocus tiagait co tuaith cingtha. Is as sin is bunadas doib uile, .i. muinter deamain.
>
> 'Others say that the Túatha Dé Danann were demons of a different order, and that it is they who came from heaven along with the expulsion by which Lucifer and his demons came from heaven; having taken an airy body upon themselves to destroy and to tempt the seed of Adam. That is the fortress against which those who made that attempt advanced, in the train of the devil and his followers. So those people go in currents of wind. They go under seas, they go in wolf-shapes, and they go to fools and they go to the powerful. Thence comes it that this is the nature of all of them, to be followers of the devil.'[75]

The redactor firmly rejects the possibility that some of the fallen angels became the Túatha Dé Danann, but the passage offers a glimpse of late-medieval speculation on their origins. Though there is not an explicit tripartite division as found in the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* and the

[72] John Carey, 'Scél Tuáin meic Chairill', *Ériu*, 35 (1984) 93–111, at 97.
[73] ibid. 102, 106.
[74] *Lebor gabála Érenn*, 4, 106, 134, 164, 168, 200, and 202.
[75] *Lebor gabála Érenn*, 3, 154–5.

examples from Irish folklore, the passage does place them in the air, in the ocean, and on the earth – those who go *i conrechtaib* 'in wolf-shapes', and those who attend upon fools and the powerful. It is important to bear in mind that this text only appears in a single, late manuscript, and thus appears to be a relatively addition to the traditions about the Túatha Dé Danann recorded in *Lebor gabála Érenn*.

Demons of the air in a difficult gloss

This tradition may help to elucidate a difficulty in a well-known marginal note in an OIr. legal glossary, *Bretha nemed déidenach*. The relevant lines follow:

> Glaidomuin .i. sindaigh [a]ł mac t*i*re[a]. Gudomhuin .i. fennóga ł bansigaidhe; [b]ut est glaidhomuin .g. .i. na demuin. goacha, na morrigna. ł go conach deamain iat na bansighaidhe, go conach[c] demain iffrin*n* iat s̄ .d.[d] aeoir na fendóga [b]. [e]ł eamnait a nglaedha na sinnaigh, 7 .e. [f] a ngotha na fennoga[e] [76]
> [a-a] *added above line.* [b-b] *in marg. sup.* [c] nach *added under line by different scribe, with caret mark.* [d] *i.e.* demain. [e-e] *in marg. dext.*

Jacqueline Borsje's translation, which she formats to reflect the layout in the manuscript, reads:

> Howlers, that is: foxes [or a wolf].
> *Gudomuin* (*Gúdemain,* false demons), that is: scald crows or women of the *síd*.
> (In the upper margin:)
> *Ut est*: false (?) howlers, that is the false demons, the *morrígna*; or it is a falsehood so that the women of the *síd* are not demons; it is a falsehood so that the scald crows are not demons of hell, but demons of the air.
> (In the right-hand margin:)
> Or: the foxes double their howls and the scald crows double their sounds/vowels.[77]

The glossary entry and related marginalia deserve further study, but that

[76] D. A. Binchy, ed., *Corpus iuris Hibernici ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum* (Dublin 1978) 604.1–4.

[77] Borsje 'Terror', 88–9.

is beyond the scope of the present discussion; I am concerned here with the statement *ł go conach deamain iat na bansighaidhe, go conach*[c] *demain iffrinn iat* $\overline{s}$ *.d.*[d] *aeoir na fendóga.* The note asserts that the *fendóga* 'scald crows' are demons of the air, not demons of hell. Why would the author of the note make this distinction? Borsje speculates that the glossator 'suggest(s) that women of the *síd* are not really demons. Scald crows, furthermore, are demons of the air and – he seems to say – thus not really demons either, because true demons are located in Hell'.[78] I disagree with the assessment that the glossator would not have considered demons of the air to be true demons; rather, I would position the statement that the *fendóga* are demons of the air within the broader theological debate on the cosmological location of demons.

Like the redactors of *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* and the Book of Lecan version of recension C of *Lebor gabála Érenn*, the author of the upper marginal note seems to be saying that while the *bansighaide* are 'false' demons and thus not actually demons, the *fendóga* are, in fact, demons, albeit demons of the air. *Contra* Borsje, I see the contrast between infernal and airy demons not as a matter of true and false demons, but rather as a question of supernatural real estate. The reason that the *bansighaide* are said not to be infernal demons may be connected to the notion that the Túatha Dé Danann were banished from the surface of Ireland upon the arrival of the Sons of Míl, henceforth residing underground. OIr. *ifern*, *ifrenn* is derived from Latin *infernus*,[79] which has hellish connotations but may also refer more broadly to underground regions. An Irish cleric familiar with the semantic range of the Latin adjective may well have drawn a connection between the *síd*-dwelling Túatha Dé and the exiled angels in hell, even if only to refute it.[80]

Is there any evidence that the correlation between *fendóga* and *demna*

[78] Borsje, 'Terror', 89.

[79] *eDIL*, s.v. *ifern*, *ifrenn*. Liam Mac Mathúna argues that an earlier tripartite view of the cosmos, consisting of *nem*, *talam*, and *muir* 'heaven/sky', 'earth', and 'sea', was replaced with a binary opposition between *ifern* and *nem* in the MidIr. period under the influence of Christianity. See Liam Mac Mathúna, 'The Irish cosmos revisited: further lexical perspectives', in *Celtic cosmology: perspectives from Ireland and Scotland*, ed. Jacqueline Borsje, Ann Dooley, Séamus Mac Mathúna, and Gregory Toner (Toronto 2014) 10–33, at 22–8.

[80] At least one author attempted to have it both ways: in the mid-fourteenth century *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, one of De Clare's men converses with a *badb* who is washing bloody clothes and armour in a stream. When queried about her home, the *badb* tells him that though she currently dwells *i sídib in tíre so* ('in the *síde* of this land'), *is do tuaith iffirnd dam do bunad* ('my origin is from the Tuath of hell'): see Standish Hayes O'Grady, ed., *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* (London 1929, repr. 1988) 141. For further discussion of the blurring between the terrestrial paradise, lands of the dead, 'fairy-lands,' and the Antipodes in medieval texts, see John Carey, 'Ireland and the Antipodes: the heterodoxy of Virgil of Salzburg', *Speculum* 64 (1989) 1–10, and Richard Firth Green, *Elf queens and holy friars* (Philadelphia 2016) 147–93.

aeóir in the gloss was based on a wider association between birds and *demna aeóir*? In a scene found in the *Vita tripartita*, Patrick is surrounded on a mountain by a host of black birds. He banishes the birds, and it is said that no demon came to Ireland for seven years, seven months, and seven days after the banishing, which statement suggests that the black birds may actually have been demons in bird form. Patrick's angel arrives to console him, and brings white birds to sing to him.[81] In the abbreviated MidIr. version from the Lebar Brecc, this scene is modified slightly: here the black birds are explicitly described as demons, *indelbaib en dub* ('in the shapes of black birds'), and the white birds who arrive after Patrick banishes the black birds are themselves angels, rather than a flock of birds summoned by a single angel.[82]

In *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, the *lon craís* (literally, 'blackbird of gluttony') is lured from the belly of the king and then trapped under a cauldron, but escapes by flying onto a roof beam. It taunts Mac Conglinne that were the king not protected, it would bring about his death and have his soul in hell before that night. The *lon craís* then flies into the air among the *muintir iffirnn*[83] ('inhabitants of hell'). Are these *muintir iffirnn* the souls of the damned, or are they other demons? The text does not make this clear, but we may compare Canto 160 of *Saltair na rann*, where the respective *muinter* of heaven, earth, and hell are described as rising in response to the doomsday summons of the archangel; likewise, in *Dá brón Flatha Nime*, the *muinter iffirnd* are souls who have not achieved salvation.[84] As discussed above, is a commonplace in medieval vision literature to depict demons seizing damned souls and carrying them through the air, and this may be the idea underlying the description of the *lon craís*'s dramatic exit.

In Flann Mainistrech's poem on the deaths of the Túatha Dé, he recounts that Bé Chuile and Dianann were killed by the magic (*druidecht*) of the 'dark demons of the air' (*re demnaib odraib aeóir*).[85]

[81] Kathleen Mulchrone, ed., *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin 1939) 71–2.

[82] Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., *Betha Phatraic: on the life of Saint Patrick*, in *Three Middle-Irish homilies on the lives of saints: Patrick, Brigit, and Columba* (Calcutta 1877) 36–7.

[83] Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, ed. and trans., *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin 1990) 41.

[84] Whitley Stokes, ed., *The Saltair na rann* in *Anecdota oxoniensia: texts, documents, and extracts chiefly from manuscripts in the Bodleian and other Oxford Libraries:* MMS 1.3 (Oxford 1883) l. 8255–6. Georges Dottin, '*Da brón Flatha Nime [Les deux chagrins du Royaume du Ciel]*', *Revue Celtique* 21(1900) 349–87, at 378, 382.

[85] *Lebor gabála Érenn*, 4, 230, ll 1953–6.

The word I have translated as 'dark' is *odor*, 'name of a colour, dun, or greyish brown; Of persons, of dark or sallow complexion?'[86] This is a more visual description than we typically get for the demons of the air, and it is tempting to speculate why (aside from the demands of metre) this was introduced to the typical formula. Was the poet drawing on standard depictions of the demonic beings as dark in colour, the association between black birds and demons, or both…?

THE PRINCESS WHO BECAME A DEMON OF THE AIR

Before concluding, I will consider one final example of a medieval Irish 'demon of the air', found in the Early Modern Irish *Oidhe chloinne Lir*. Aoife, daughter of the Túatha Dé king Bodb Derg, turns her stepchildren into swans out of jealousy. As punishment, her father asks her what form she would find the worst to inhabit. She answers that a *deamhan aéóir* ('demon of the air') would be the worst; he strikes her with a wand, transforming her. Aoife flies away, cursed to remain a *deamhan aéóir* forever.[87] After a very long time in swan form, the children of Lir are baptized and die, and their souls are received in heaven at the conclusion of the narrative.

As can be seen, this example is unique in its depiction of a singular demon of the air: the *demna aeóir* are usually presented as a nameless collective. This text is later than the other sources that I have discussed, and, as far as I am aware, it is the only example of someone being transformed into a demon of the air in medieval or early modern Irish sources, apart from the angels who fell with Lucifer. The state of being a demon of the air in the medieval Christian worldview is not a category into which one can transition, save by the intervention of God. Caoimhín Breatnach has analysed the religious themes in the text, drawing attention to the contrast between the transitory, albeit extremely prolonged, suffering of the transformed children, who afterward achieve Christian salvation, and Aoife, who is likewise transformed, but damned for all eternity.[88] The statement that she flies away after being transformed may be significant, in that she, like the children, becomes a flying (perhaps winged?) creature. She is condemned to wander in eternal exile, both from her earthly home and from the Christian heaven

[86] *eDIL*, s.v. *odor*.
[87] Richard J. O'Duffy, ed. and trans., *Oidhe chloinne Lir: the fate of the children of Lir* (Dublin 1883) 14.
[88] Caoimhín Breatnach, 'The religious significance of *Oidheadh chloinne Lir*', *Ériu* 50 (1999) 1–40: 19–20.

which her stepchildren will achieve. It cannot be known what the author imagined would be Aoife's specific fate: would she join other *demna aeóir* in shrieking over battlefields and claiming the souls of the newly dead, or would she suffer the ages in isolation?

Conclusion

What can be said of the phrase *demna aeóir* itself? Like Oir. *aer,* Oir. *demon*, pl. *demna* is a loan-word from Latin. It is not impossible that *demna aeóir* could have been a calque of a native, pre-Christian Irish phrase, but I see no strong evidence suggesting that this is the case. The phrase *demna aeóir* appears to have originated in a need to represent a specific Christian theological concept, one that was readily adapted to the needs of vernacular heroic literature. Of the supernatural creatures associated with battle, the *badba* appear most frequently. Given that *fendóga* are explained as demons of the air in the *Bretha nemed déidenach* glossary, and that one obviously would expect *demna aeóir* to be associated with the air in some way, it is quite possible that that *demna aeóir* were envisioned by at least some of the authors/redactors who used the phrase as being scald crows or other corvids. The frequency with which shapeshifters from the otherworld appear as birds in medieval texts, such as Fand and Lí Ban in *Serglige Con Culainn* or the father of Conaire Mór in *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, may also have played a role in the development of the connection between birds and demons in medieval Irish sources.[89] However, given that the *badba* often appear alongside *demna aeóir* in Irish texts, it is clear that no one-to-one equivalency is taking place: *demna aeóir* may accompany *badba* into battle, but they do not supersede them. It is probably the case that *demna aeóir* had no fixed form in the minds of medieval Irish authors.[90] The description of *fendóga* as *demna aeóir* in the *Bretha nemed déidenach* glossary could be merely descriptive – they are understood here as demonic and they fly, thus they fall into the category of 'demons of the air'. There is no reason to assume that *demna aeóir* were imagined

[89] Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn* 1. Eleanor Knott, ed., *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, MMIS 8 (Dublin 1936, repr. 1975) 3. I am grateful to Joseph Nagy for this suggestion.

[90] Séamus Mac Mathúna, 'Duibheagáin an uafáis i dtraidisiún na Gaeilge: úath, uaimh agus ifreann', in *Atlantic Currents: essays on lore, literature and language. Essays in honour of Séamas Ó Catháin on the occasion of his 70th birthday 31.12.2012 / Sruthanna an Aigéin Thiar: aistí ar sheanchas, ar litríocht agus ar theanga. Aistí in onóir do Shéamas Ó Catháin in aois a 70 bliain dó 31.12.2012*, ed. Bo Almqvist, Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, Liam Mac Mathúna, Séamus Mac Mathúna, and Seosamh Watson (Dublin 2012) 322–43, at 326ff.

exclusively or even primarily as birds, though there is evidence that they were sometimes thought of that way: *fendóga* might belong to the category of *demna aeóir*, but *demna aeóir* are not necessarily *fendóga.* Medieval Irish discourse on supernatural beings is characterized by a certain degree of fluidity, and this applies also to the conceptualization of *demna aeóir*.

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