The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces

Part Two

FIFTH CONTINENTAL EDITION

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Masterpieces of the Middle Ages

The period of the Middle Ages—approximately A.D. 500–1500—encompasses a thousand years of European history distinguished by the unique fusion of a Heroic-Age society with Greco-Roman culture and Christian religion. The era is fairly well marked off by the emergence and disappearance of certain massive forces. It begins with the collapse of the Roman Empire in Western Europe, a development coincident with and partly occasioned by the settlement of Germanic peoples within the territory of the empire. It ends with the discovery of the Western Hemisphere, the invention of the printing press, the consolidation of strong national states, the break in religious unity brought about by the Protestant Reformation, and the renewal—after a lapse of nearly a thousand years—of direct contact with Greek art, thought, and literature. The medieval centuries created, or at least refashioned, and bequeathed to us such institutional patterns as the Christian church; the monarchical state; the town and village; the traditional European social order—the "lords spiritual," the "lords temporal," with the hierarchy of nobility and gentry ranging from duke to knight, and the third, or bourgeois, estate; the university; the system and logical method of Scholastic philosophy; Romanesque and Gothic architecture; and a rich variety of literary forms.

The literature of the earlier Middle Ages reflects directly and clearly the life and civilization of a Heroic Age. The dominant figure is the fighting king or chieftain; the favorite pursuit is war; the characteristic goals are power, wealth, and glory; and the primary virtues, accordingly, are valor and loyalty. The literary pattern is based on actuality, of which it presents a kind of idealization. In early Germanic and Celtic society the king ruled a small, essentially tribal nation; he and his companions in battle constituted a formal or informal noble class controlling the life of the people. The poems of such a society naturally tell chiefly of the fights of great champions, though also of the druids or other counselors who advised them and of the minstrels who entertained them. The proportions and the emphasis are much the same in the literature of the Irish, the Scandinavians, the French of the twelfth century, the Germans of the thirteenth. The hero of the *Song of Roland*, a twelfth-century French work, combines the fighting chieftain, serving his king, with the devout Crusader; and Archbishop Turpin is both spiritual adviser and fighting champion.

In the literature of the fourteenth century, the warrior plays a smaller rôle and is assimilated to the more extensive pattern of later medieval civiliza-

tion. Thus in Dante's Heaven only one of the nine celestial spheres—Mars—is occupied by great men-at-arms, all devout Christians, of course. Chaucer's Knight and Squire are only two among twenty-nine pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. The Knight is devoted to truth and honor, generosity, and courteous conduct, while his son, along with other virtues appropriate to a young soldier, possesses those of a courtly lover. The fighting champion of the Heroic Age has become the "officer and gentleman" of the modern world.

This gradual assimilation of the Celtic and Germanic hero to a civilization in which Christianity ordered the Greco-Roman culture to new ends was made possible by the religious unity and authority of Western Europe. The medieval millennium was indeed an age of aith, though it was far from being an age of religious passivity or inertia. The first half of the period was occupied in winning the new peoples of Europe to Christianity. When this had been accomplished, the Crusades began—a series of holy wars intended to rescue Palestine from pagan occupation and, in general, to defeat and either destroy or convert the pagans, chiefly Mohammedans. But the Greek and Arabic learning and philosophy which these non-Christian people introduced into Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries demanded an intellectual alertness. The sharpness of the Crusader's sword had to be matched by the acumen of the Scholastic philosopher; one of the chief works of St. Thomas Aquinas is a summation of principles in defense of Christianity "against the pagans" (his *summa contra Gentiles*). Medieval Christianity could never afford to take itself for granted. For the first four centuries after Christ the new religion was aggressively on the defensive; thereafter it had to be actively on the offensive in both the practical and the ideological spheres. Nevertheless, in Western Europe itself the combination of theological unity and ecclesiastical authority was a phenomenon unmatched either before or after the Middle Ages. The Roman Empire had provided political unity, law, and order, to assure the success of secular pursuits. Beyond that, it had left moral and spiritual problems to be handled by the individual, singly or in voluntary or ethnic groups. In medieval Europe political disunity was at something like a maximum; but under the leadership and direction of the Church there was achieved a remarkable unanimity of spiritual, moral, and intellectual attitudes and ideals.

The community of European culture in this period was such that the productions of individual countries look like regional manifestations of a central nuclear force. Generally speaking, students and scholars moved freely from land to land; monks, abbots, and bishops might be sent from the country of their birth to serve or preside in distant places; artists and poets wandered widely either in the train of or in search of patrons. Besides his native tongue, the educated man might be expected to speak and write the common "standard" language of Europe—Latin. In an age when the political state was relatively weak, a man's strongest loyalties were to an individual, a feudal lord, for example; to a code, such as the code of chivalry; to an order—of monks or friars or knights; or simply to the Church itself, if, like so many medieval men of intellectual interests, he was a cleric of some sort.

These ties—except for the feudal, and sometimes including that also—were *international* in nature. In such a cultural atmosphere the themes and

subjects and techniques of art and literature circulated freely throughout Europe. The *Gothic* architecture of a building is a more central aspect of it than the fact that it was designed and built by an English, a French, a German, or an Italian school of builders. Christianity itself furnished a common subject matter for painters, sculptors, and countless others skilled in the graphic and plastic arts; the biblical stories and scenes had the same meaning in every country. The stories of Charlemagne, Roland, and Arthur, of Aeneas, of Troy and Thebes, were European literary property. They were handled and rehandled, copied, translated, adapted, expanded, condensed, and in general appropriated by innumerable authors, writing in various languages, with no thought of property rights or misgivings about plagiarism. There were no copyright regulations and no author's royalties to motivate insistence on individuality of authorship; there was comparatively little concern about the identity of the artist. Many medieval poems and tales are anonymous, including some of the greatest.

The submergence of the artist in his work is accounted for in part, at least, by the medieval system of human values. The dominant hierarchy of values—we have seen that it did not dominate universally, especially in the literature of northern Europe—was based on the Christian view of man. Man, in this conception, is a creature of God, toward whom he is inevitably oriented but from whom he is separated by the world in which he must live his earthly, mortal life. Human civilization under Christian direction may be regarded as ideally designed—even if not actually so functioning—to assist man on his way to union with God. This is the criterion for the ultimate appraisal of all the institutions of society and all the patterns of culture. Hence derive the scale, the order, the hierarchical categories of medieval life and thought. Since the spiritual side of man transcends the material, the saint becomes the ideal. The saint is one whose life is most fully subdued, assimilated, and ordered to the spiritual. On earth he may be a hermit, like Cuthbert; a reformer of monasteries, like Bernard; a philosopher and a theologian, like Aquinas; a king, like Louis IX of France; or a humble man in private life. Since communion with God—the essential aspect of bliss in heaven—is an experience of the soul, the contemplative life, which prepares for the mystical communion, is superior to any form of the active life. Hence the monk—by virtue of his vocation—has an advantage over the secular priest, just as the priest is, other things being equal, in a position spiritually more desirable than that of the layman. As a whole, medieval literature is a study in human life judged according to this scale of values. The scale is represented clearly in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Secular-value patterns are assimilated to it, for instance in the *Song of Roland*; or it may be taken for granted without much emphasis, as in Chaucer's works. But it is always there, whether below or above the surface. For the modern reader it supplies a focus for the adequate reading and understanding of most of the literature of the Middle Ages.

Robert S. Hoyt, *Europe in the Middle Ages* (1957), is a good historical survey. For a view of medieval thought and culture as a whole, the standard older work is H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (1925). A more recent book is F. B. Artz, *The Mind of the Middle Ages*, 2d ed. (1954).

THE STORY OF DEIRDRE

Like the Greeks, the Germanic and Celtic peoples had a Heroic Age. For some centuries after about 1000 B.C., the Celts were the dominant people in Europe north of the Mediterranean and south of Scandinavia; their settlements extended from western Asia (Galatia) to Ireland. In medieval and modern times they are represented by the ethnic groups and languages known as Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. As with the epics of Homer, the early Irish literature reflects the civilization and culture of *their* Heroic Age, from approximately the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. It was an era of kings not of all Ireland but of each of the four or five provinces, such as Ulaid [OO-lid] (modern Ulster) and Connachta [Con-NAK-ta] (modern Connaught, in the west); below these were the kings of the many small tribal nations. There were no cities; the political and social capital was the king's court, a compound of wooden buildings dominated by a large hall or room in which the ruler sat in state (more or less), surrounded by liegemen who, along with the women, slept on beds or on the floor at night. Warriors traveled and fought in two-wheeled chariots drawn by a pair of horses and driven by a charioteer. In this preliterate time learning was the prerogative of the druids, a quasi-professional, perhaps quasi-priestly class who transmitted knowledge orally from one generation to the next. According to the early literature, the kings often looked to them for advice, and they were believed to have the gift of prophecy.

Attached to the royal court there was also apt to be a more or less official story-teller (*scelaige*, [skay-lig-eh] in Irish), who entertained the company with traditional tales (*scela*) [skay-lah] of great men and women and their notable deeds. There was a hierarchy of competence among these professional entertainers; a person holding the highest rank, that of *ollave* [ol-lav], was expected, according to one account, to have a repertory of 350 stories. Probably he called on his memory of outlines of the plots, while depending on his creative imagination for narrative detail. This may account for the brevity of some of the early texts, such as *The Story of Deirdre*. The ordinary use of writing—as distinct from Ogham inscriptions using notches scratched originally on stone or wood or horn—came in with the conversion to Christianity, beginning in the fifth century. The oldest texts of the tales of the Ulster Cycle, as they are called, were written in the eighth and ninth centuries (the extant manuscripts date from the twelfth century and later). The writers—and copiers—were, of course, Christian; this, along with the time interval, explains the paucity of information in the stories about the religion of the Irish before the conversion. Besides, the principal characters may originally have been figures of regeneration or fertility myths, and thus gods, or supernatural beings, who in later, Christian tradition became human. This is doubtless why the heroes and heroines are so often supermen and "bionic" women. What would be miracles wrought by saints in Christian legend are reported as powers of magic attributed to superhuman heroes. We can recognize this in the prowess of Noisiu [Noy-shu] and his two brothers in the Deirdre story—together, "they could hold off the entire province of

Ulaid," and they were as swift as hunting dogs. And the strength and skills of Cuchulainn [Cu-húl-in] the central figure of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, greatest and longest work of the Ulster cycle, are nearly always possible only for a Superman. But his character and personality, like those of Deirdre and Noisiu, are fully and attractively human.

The traditional Irish title of our story was *The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu* [Wees-li-u], in allusion to their flight from the court of Conchobur (Con-co-vor] and subsequent sojourn and travel in Scotland and elsewhere. The prose narrative is brief and bare, yet extraordinarily vivid and moving. The poems in clear images bring before us the (partly) happy life of the exiles as they camp in the open forest, and thus vary the deep mood of fatalistic prophecy at the beginning of the story and, later, the unalloyed pathos of Deirdre's grief for the slain Noisiu. Deirdre and Noisiu are as star-crossed lovers as ever were Juliet and Romeo. Their love, indeed, does not begin in the manner of courtly romance; instead, Noisiu must choose between disobedience to Conchobur and the disgrace which will fall upon him if he refuses Deirdre's challenge. But, once the choice is made, the commitment and the devotion of the pair are total and unswerving; and, like Shakespeare's Juliet, Deirdre is the stronger and the more articulate character.

Deirdre has been called the Irish Helen, in allusion to the wife of the Argive king Menelaos, whose abduction by the prince Paris led to the Trojan War. The fatal beauty of one woman caused the destruction of Troy; that of the other woman caused the burning of Emuin Machae [Ev-in Mah-ka], King Conchobur's capital. For more than a millennium Deirdre has haunted the memory and imagination of Irish poets. If Helen's face launched a thousand ships, Deirdre's story inspired a multitude of writers. Among the works of modern Anglo-Irish authors are Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a three-act play first produced in 1910 at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, shorter dramas by Yeats and AE (George William Russell), and a novelistic treatment by James Stephens.

Our ancient narrative begins with the birth of Deirdre at the court of Conchobur, king of the Ulaid, as the people of Ulster were then called. The scene may remind us of situations in Homer; for instance, the company surrounding King Alcinous when Odysseus is invited to tell his story were also eating and drinking. The Greek minstrel has his counterpart in the Irish storyteller; the setting, simpler and cruder than that in Phaeacia, has more ominous elements of wonder and awe. By marvel and by prophecy alike Deirdre is destined for no ordinary life. As in Greek epic and tragedy, the portrayal of major figures may vary from story to story. Creon in *Oedipus the King* is a patient, benign person, unlike the rigid ruler of *Antigone*. In most Irish narratives Conchubur is favorably shown as a beneficent king of the Ulaid and protector of the great Cuchulainn, his nephew. But in the Deirdre story he is the relentless and unscrupulous enemy of the lovers. After promising them a safe return to his court, he plots the assassination of Noisiu and his brothers. They had sworn to eat no food after landing in Ireland until they reached Conchubur's capital. Hence Conchubur first detaches Fergus, the principal "guarantor" on whom Noisiu and Deirdre rely for their safety, from the party of returning travelers. To do this he

makes use of a peculiar Irish custom, known as the *geis* [gaysh]—a kind of tabu to which a person might be subject. Now Fergus has a *geis* which requires him never to refuse an invitation to food or drink. He is thus obliged to remain behind while Noisiu and most of the entourage go on—and fall into the power of Conchubur. Later, Fergus will take spectacular revenge; but by then, of course, the sons of Uisliu have been slain and Deirdre made a helpless captive of the king.

An excellent translation of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* is available in Thomas Kinsella, *The Táin*, translated from the Irish Epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* [Tawn Bo Koo-ling-e] (1970). Several shorter tales of the Ulster cycle are admirably translated in Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (1981). Kenneth H. Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (1964), is the best brief account of Heroic Age civilization and literature in Ireland, (55 pp.). Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (1970), is clear, brief, and handsomely illustrated.

The Story of Deirdre[1]

The Ulaid were drinking at the house of Fedilmid[2] son of Dall, Conchubur's storyteller, and Fedilmid's wife was standing over them and serving, even though she was with child. Drinking horns and portions of food went round, and the house was filled with drunken shouting. When it came time to sleep, Fedilmid's wife rose to go to her bed, but as she crossed the house the child in her womb screamed so that it was heard throughout the court. At that scream the men all rose, and they were standing chin to chin, but Senchae[3] son of Ailill quieted them, saying 'Do not disturb each other! Let the woman be brought to us that we might learn what caused that noise.' So the woman was brought to them, and her husband asked her:

> What is this violent noise that resounds,
> that rages in your roaring womb?
> The outcry between your two sides—mighty its sound—
> crushes the ears of those who hear it.
> My heart is terribly wounded:
> a great fear has seized it.

Then Fedilmid's wife spoke to Cathub,[4] for he was a wise man:

> Listen to Cathub, fair of face,
> a handsome prince, great and powerful his crown,
> exalted by his druid wisdom.
> I myself do not have the white[5] words

1. Translated by Jeffrey Gantz. 2. [Fay-dil-mid]. 3. [Shen-kay]: A wise counselor at the court of King Conchubur. *Ailill* [Al-il]: This is not the same man as Ailill, king of Connachta. 4. A seer or druid endowed with the gift of prophecy. 5. I.e., true, wise.

through which my husband might obtain
an answer to his question,
for, though it cried out in the cradle of my body,
no woman knows
what her womb bears.

And Cathub replied:

In the cradle of your womb there cried out
a woman with twisted yellow hair
and beautiful grey green eyes.
Foxglove her purple pink cheeks,
the colour of snow her flawless teeth,
brilliant her Parthian-red[6] lips.
A woman over whom there will be great slaughter
among the chariot-warriors of Ulaid.
There screams in your roaring womb
a tall, beautiful, long-haired woman
whom champions will contest,
whom high kings will woo;
and to the west of Conchubur's province
there will be a rich harvest of fighting men.
Parthian-red lips will frame
those flawless teeth;
high queens will envy her
her matchless, faultless form.

Then Cathub placed his hand on the woman's womb, and the child murmured, and he said 'Indeed, it is a girl, and her name will be Derdriu,[7] and there will be trouble on her account.' After the girl had been born, Cathub said:

Though you may have fame and beauty,
Derdriu, you will destroy much;
Ulaid will suffer on your account,
fair daughter of Fedilmid.

And after that there will be still more deaths
because of you, woman like a flame.
In your lifetime—hear this—
the three sons of Uisliu will be exiled.

In your lifetime a violent deed
will be done at Emuin;
repented thereafter will be the treachery
that violated the guarantee of mighty Fergus.

6. A deep, rich color, traditionally associated with the Eastern country of Parthia. 7. [Der-dri-oo]. The nominative case form of the name in Irish.

Because of you, woman of fate,
Fergus will be exiled from Ulaid,
and—a deed that will cause much weeping—
Conchubur's son Fiachnae[8] will be slain.

Because of you, woman of fate,
Gerrce[9] son of Illadán will be slain,
and -a crime no less awful—
Éogan[1] son of Durthacht will be destroyed.

You will do a frightful fierce deed[2]
out of anger at Ulaid's high king;
your grave will be everywhere[3]—
yours will be a famous tale, Derdriu.

'Let the child be slain!' said the young warriors. 'No,' said Conchubur, 'I will take her away tomorrow, and I will rear her as I see fit, and she will be my companion.' And none of the Ulaid dared oppose him. Derdriu was reared by Conchubur until she was by far the most beautiful woman in Ériu.[4] She was reared in a court apart, lest any of the Ulaid see her before she was to sleep with Conchubur, and no one was allowed into that court save her foster-father and her foster-mother[5] and a woman named Lebarcham who was a satirist[6] and could not be barred.

One day, in winter, Derdriu's foster-father was outside, in the snow, flaying a weaned calf for her. Derdriu saw a raven drinking the blood on the snow, and she said to Lebarcham 'I could love a man with those three colours: hair like a raven, cheeks like blood and body like snow.' 'Then luck and good fortune are with you,' answered Lebarcham, 'for such a man is not far off. In fact, he is quite near: Noísiu son of Uisliu.' Derdriu replied 'I will be ill, then, until I see him.'[7]

It happened one day that Noísiu was standing alone on the rampart of the stronghold of Emuin, and he was singing. The singing of the sons of Uisliu was very melodious: every cow that heard it gave two thirds more milk, and every man who heard it grew peaceful and sated with music. The sons of Uisliu were also good fighters: when they stood back to back, they could hold off the entire province of

8. [Fee-ak-nay]: He will be killed in revenge for the treacherous attack on Noísiu, as the narrative tells. 9. [Ger-kay]: Nothing further is told of him. *Illadán:* [Il-lah-don] 1. [Yóg-an]. *Durthacht* [Door-thakt]: Éogan will be the actual slayer of Noísiu. The narrative does not tell us how Éogan met death. 2. Perhaps a reference to Deirdre's violent suicide. 3. Many places in Ireland will claim to be Deirdre's grave—an indication of her fame. 4. [A-ri-oo]: The usual name of Ireland in the Irish language. 5. Children of the higher classes were often brought up by foster parents; here the names are not given. 6. Satirists—often female—were a prominent feature of early Irish society and literature. It was believed that their invectives could inflict physical injury (through the magical power of words). *Lebarcham:* [Lay-vor-kam]. 7. Besides love at first sight, familiar elsewhere in the world, love *before* first sight is frequent in early Irish literature—inspired, as here, by report.

Ulaid. Moreover, they were as swift as hunting hounds and could overtake and kill wild animals.

When Noísiu was outside alone, then, Derdriu stole out to him and made as if to go past, and he did not recognize her. 'A fine heifer[8] that that is going by,' he said. 'The heifers are bound to be fine where there are no bulls,' she answered. 'You have the bull of the province: the king of Ulaid,' Noísiu said. 'Between the two of you, I would choose a young bull like yourself,' Derdriu replied. 'No! There is Cathub's prophecy,' said Noísiu. 'Are you rejecting me, then?' she asked. 'I am, indeed,' he answered. At that, Derdriu leapt at him and seized him by the ears, saying 'Two ears of shame and mockery these unless you take me with you!' 'Away from me, woman!' Noísiu said. 'Too late!'[9] answered Derdriu.

With that, Noísiu began to sing.[1] When the Ulaid heard his singing they rose up against each other, but the other sons of Uisliu[2] went out to restrain their brother. 'What are you doing?' they asked. 'The Ulaid will be coming to blows on your account.' Then Noísiu told his brothers what had happened. 'Evil will come of this,' they said. 'Even so, you will not be disgraced while we are alive. We will all take her to another land—there is not in Ériu a king who will turn us away.' That was their advice. They departed that night: three fifties of warriors and three fifties of women and three fifties of hounds and three fifties of servants and Derdriu mingled in with them.

For a long time, the brothers found protection with kings throughout Ériu, though through his snares and treacheries Conchubur often attempted to destroy them, from Ess Rúaid[3] to the south-west and then back north-east to Bend Étair. Finally, the Ulaid drove them out of Ériu and into Albu;[4] there, they settled in the wilderness, and, when the game of the mountains ran out, they helped themselves to cattle. One day, the men of Albu gathered to destroy them, so they went to the king of Albu, and he took them into his entourage; they became mercenaries and erected their dwellings on the green. Because of Derdriu, they built their houses so that no one could see her, for they feared there might be killing on her account.

Early one morning, however, the king's steward went out round the house of Derdriu and Noísiu, and he saw the lovers sleeping. At once, he went and awakened the king, saying 'Until now, we have not found a woman worthy of you. But there is with Noísiu son of

8. No disrespect is intended; rather, admiration. Cattle were a principal form of wealth in the Irish Heroic Age. And one might compare our use of "lamb" or "chick" or "fox" to refer to an attractive young person. 9. The challenge ("two ears of shame and mockery") has already been uttered (and is irreversible). 1. The reticent author does not say whether in exultation or dismay; at any rate, the Ulaid are apparently upset by the loudness of the song. 2. Aindle [End-lay] and Arddán [Ard-dahn]; their names are given in a stanza below. 3. [Es-roo-a]: The modern Asseroe, in the county Donegal. *Bend Étair* [A-tare]: the Hill of Howth, in Dublin Bay. 4. Probably Scotland.

Uisliu a woman worthy of the king of the western world. Let Noísiu be slain that the woman might sleep with you.' 'No,' replied the king, 'but go to her each day in secret and woo her for me.'

The steward did that, but everything he said to Derdriu she told Noísiu the same night. Since nothing could be got from her, the sons of Uisliu were sent into battles and hazards and dangerous situations that they might be killed, but they were so hardy that every attempt failed. So the men of Albu gathered to kill them; they told Derdriu, and she told Noísiu, saying 'Depart! Unless you leave tonight, you will be slain tomorrow.' That night, Derdriu and the sons of Uisliu departed and went to an island in the sea.

This news reached the Ulaid, and they said to Conchubur, 'A pity that the sons of Uisliu should die in a strange land because of a bad woman. Better that you should be lenient and not slay them—let them return and take them in.' 'Let them come, then,' said Conchubur, 'or let guarantors[5] be sent to them.' That message was taken to Noísiu and his brothers, and they replied, 'A welcome message that. We will come; we ask for Fergus as a guarantor, and Dubthach,[6] and Conchubur's son Cormac.'

So these men went to Albu and accompanied Derdriu and the sons of Uisliu back to Ériu. On Conchubur's orders, however, the Ulaid all strove to invite Fergus to feasts[7] and banquets, for the sons of Uisliu had sworn that the first food they touched in Ériu would be Conchubur's. Thus, Fergus and Dubthach remained behind, while Fergus's son Fíachu[8] went on with Derdriu and the sons of Uisliu until they reached the green of Emuin Machae. Meanwhile, Éogan son of Durthacht, the king of Fernmag,[9] had made up with Conchubur—the two had long been at odds—and had been charged to kill the sons of Uisliu, who would be kept from Conchubur by the king of Ulaid's mercenaries.

The sons of Uisliu were waiting in the centre of the green; the women of Emuin were sitting along the ramparts; Éogan was crossing the green with his troops. Fíachu came up to join Noísiu. Éogan, however, greeted Noísiu with the point of his spear and broke his back. At that, Fíachu put his arms round Noísiu and pulled him down and covered him, so that thereafter Noísiu was struck from above through the son of Fergus. The sons of Uisliu were then hunted from one end of the green to the other, and no one escaped save by point of spear and edge of sword. Derdriu was taken to stand beside Conchubur, her hands tied behind her.

This news reached Fergus and Dubthach and Cormac, and at once they went to Emuin and performed great deeds. Dubthach killed

5. Men who would pledge themselves to assure the safety of Noisiu and the rest of the exiles. The guarantors are named a few lines below. 6. [Doov-thak]. 7. Conchubur's strategy is explained in the *Introduction*, above. 8. [Fee-ah-koo]. 9. [Fern-moy].

Conchubur's son Mane[1] and dispatched Fíachnae, the son of Conchubur's daughter Fedelm,[2] with a single blow; Fergus killed Traigthrén[3] son of Traiglethan and his brother. Conchubur was outraged, and a battle ensued: in one day, three hundred Ulaid fell, and Dubthach slew the young women of the province, and Fergus fired Emuin. Afterwards, Fergus and Dubthach and Cormac and their followers went to Connachta, for they knew that Ailill and Medb[4] would maintain them, though Connachta was no refuge of love for men from Ulaid. Three thousand was the number of the exiles, and, for sixteen years, these people saw that there was weeping and trembling in Ulaid every night.

Derdriu spent the year following Noísiu's death with Conchubur, and, during that time, she neither laughed nor smiled, nor did she ever have her fill of food or sleep. She never lifted her head from her knee, and, whenever musicians were brought to her, she recited this poem:

Fair to you the ardent warriors
who march into Emuin after an expedition;
more nobly did they march to their dwelling,
the three very heroic sons of Uisliu.

Noísiu with fine hazel mead
(I would wash him by the fire),
Arddán with a stag or fine pig,
Tall Aindle with a load on his back.

Sweet to you the fine mead
that battle-glorious Conchubur drinks;
but often I had before me, across the ocean,
food that was sweeter.

When modest Noísiu spread out
the cooking hearth on the wild forest floor,
sweeter than any honeyed food
was what the son of Uisliu prepared.

Melodious always to you
your pipers and trumpeters;
yet today I tell you
I have heard music that was sweeter.

Melodious to Conchubur, your king,
his pipers and trumpeters;
sweeter to me—fame of hosts—
the singing of the sons of Uisliu.

1. [Mah-nay]. 2. [Fay-delm]. 3. [Trayg-thrayn]. *Traiglethan* [Trayg-leth-an]. 4. [Mayv]. Ailill and Medb were the king and queen of the province of Connachta.

A wave the sound of Noísiu's voice—
his singing was always sweet;
Arddán's baritone was good,
and Aindle's tenor from his hunting lodge.

Noísiu's grave has now been made,
and the accompaniment was mournful.
For him I poured out—hero of heroes—
the deadly drink that killed him.[5]

Dear his short shining hair,
a handsome man, even very beautiful;
sad that I cannot await him today,
cannot expect the son of Uisliu.

Dear his desire, right and proper,
dear this modest noble warrior;
after his going to the forest's edge,
dear his company in the early morning.

Dear the grey eyes that women loved;
fierce they were to foes.
After a circuit of the forest—a noble union—
dear his tenor through the great dark wood.

I do not sleep now,
nor do I brighten my nails:
there is no joy for me
since the son of Tindell[6] will not come.

I do not sleep
but lie awake half the night;
my thoughts flee from these hosts,
I neither eat nor smile.

I have today no cause for joy
in the assembly of Emuin—throng of chieftains—
no peace, no delight, no comfort,
no great house, no fine adornments.

And when Conchubur tried to comfort her, she would recite this poem to him:

Conchubur, be quiet!
You have brought me grief upon sorrow;
as long as I live, surely,
your love will be of no concern to me.

You have taken from me—a great crime—
the one I thought most beautiful on earth,

5. A figurative expression—she was the cause of his death. 6. The mother of Noisiu and his brothers.