Maritime Memorates and Contemporary Legends of Storm Apparitions and Storm Making in Folklore Traditions of Ireland and Scotland[1]

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Introduction

In this contribution, we shall start with defining 'maritime memorate' as a folklore genre intrinsic to the Gaelic-speaking communities of Ireland, employing Scottish material as an appropriate comparanda, and will look at specific examples of memorates and contemporary legends that deal with such things as omens, portents and apparitions before the storm. Finally, we will attempt to link them with charms to do with storms and narrative descriptions of such magical practices.

Memorates and Contemporary Legends

In folklore studies memorates are an under-studied area. Defined as personal accounts of supernatural happenings, memorates are centred around various phenomena of human life and constitute an extremely popular and productive folklore category. They include a variety of extraordinary maritime experiences and other accounts, which occur in liminal spatio-temporal contexts, such as the sea-shore, streams, fords and bridges. These stories typically involve encounters with ghosts and other beings, and portents of death symbolised in phantom boats. Initial appraisal of the material suggests that maritime memorates form an important component of the narrative tradition of coastal communities.

The study of memorates was established at the start of the twentieth century by Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1948) who introduced the distinction between memorate and fabulate. 'Memorate' in his view was a first-hand narrative describing a series of events, while 'fabulate' was a similar narrative heard second- or third-hand. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vászonyi (1974) postulate the existence of proto-memorates, that is, memorates concealed behind fabulates.

The dearth of research carried out in the area of memorates in Ireland is in inverse proportion to the exceptionally rich collections recorded there. Over the years, a good deal of attention has been paid to the traditional folklore categories of fairy legend, traditional tale and oral narrative by scholars researching Irish tradition.[2] Frequently, these categories contain quite long narratives. Recently, however, greater attention has been paid to the study of the shorter items which include memorates and contemporary legends (Tangherlini 1990; Bennett & Smith 1993).

The popularity of the fairy legend, the contemporary legend, and the memorate in folk tradition is probably due to their inherent deep cognitive structures. All the three categories give rise to affectively engaged states of mind. Fairy legend brings this aspect to life through the medium of appealing to extreme, liminal metaphors and images asso-

ciated with Otherworld archetypal figures and forces. Contemporary legend expresses subconscious fears and anxieties existing within certain social groups and urbanised locations. Memorate operates on a scale relative to the concepts of fabulation and empirical truth (Honko 1964).

The narrator and his/her audience believe in the truth of the accounts contained in the memorates which belong to the domain of religious numinosity and ethical order, often combined. The efficacy of memorates also depends on the narrator's capacity to fit his/her own extraordinary experience into a contemporary context, enriching the story with both traditional and newly invented metaphors.

AT D1242 Wind: Magical actions believed to produce storms, cause and/or pacify winds

All in all, the magical practice of causing storms should be given at least some attention, and we hope to consider it in this section. On the basis of the Irish folklore data, there are two distinct beliefs according to which the AT 1242 motif can be sub-divided. Firstly, we shall be dealing with legends to do with raising the wind by troubling the vessel of water (AT D1242.1.4). Secondly, we shall also be paying some attention to the practice of untying three knots which was believed to produce wind (AT D1242.1.2).

AT D1242.1.4 Vessel of water (Ir. *tobán/pael uisce*) causes storm

Below we shall look at three accounts, recorded by NFC collectors in counties Mayo and Claire, centred around a theme of magic practice employed to raise the storm.[3] In the first account, collected by S. Ó Catháin from S. Ó hEinirí (John Henry) in Killgalligan, co. Mayo, the description of this practice is very detailed. It is the witch (Ir. *cailleach*) who is practising magic in order to drown her neighbours with whom she is not getting along; two little girls come to visit her and observe everything that she was doing in order to cause the storm. She knows that the neighbours are out at sea collecting the seaweed – and she wants to raise the storm so that they are drowned. She succeeds in raising the storm, but the three persons are saved. However, one of them, named *Lacky* (*sic*) drowns, and by the virtue of this incident a rock is named after him *Staicín Lacky* so that people remember where the drowning took place. As an outcome, the people become very friendly towards the witch as they are now afraid of her:

> *'An chailleach a bháigh an curach': Fad ó shin, bhí cailleach thiar sa gCill ina cónaí agus bhí Araid an Chrothnaithe aici. Ní raibh aon araid ar thalamh an domhain nach raibh aici... Bhí beirt ghearrchaile beaga ar an mbaile is bhíodh siad ag imeacht... ar a gcuairt. Ach chuaigh siad isteach i dteach na caillí... Ach 'sé an obair a bhí ar an gcaillí, bhí pael uisce i lár an urláir aici, agus báisín istigh ins an bpael leagtha ar an usice ag snámh agus an chailleach ar a dhá glúin ag taobh an phaeil agus í ag tabhairt dó – ní raibh fhios ag na gearrchailí beaga céard a bhí ar siúl aici. Ach thoisigh an t-uisce ag oibriú sa bpael agus bhí sé ag oibriú anonn agus anall agus cuid de ag tíocht amach ar an urlár. Ach thiompaigh an báisín*

ar deireadh agus shéid an lá agus tháinig cuma na hoíche ar an lá agus d'éirigh sé ina stoirm gaothe móire.

    'The witch that drowned the currach': There was once an old hag who lived in Kilgalligan and she knew The Wasting Charm – indeed, there wasn't a charm in the wide world she didn't know... There were two little girls of the village going about visiting... and they entered the hag's house... What was the hag doing – she had a pail of water in the middle of the floor and she had a basin in the pail, floating in the water, and there was the hag on her knees by the pail, hard at it, whatever it was, for the two girls weren't able to say. Then the water began to stir in the pail, and to seethe and some of it began to bubble out on the floor. Finally, the basin capsized and the wind rose, the day became as night and a fierce gale blew.

    The second account is devoted to a similar incident, with a tragic result for the three witches who are performing a similar practice. The legend is called "A water tub" (Ir. *tobán uisce*) and the outcome of the legend is an inversion of the one referred to above (see Ó Floinn 1935:132-3). According to the Co. Clare legend, the captain of a ship and his two shipmates marry three women on one day who turn out to be witches. Once the sailors depart to the sea, the women try to sink their ship by practicing their witchcraft: "There was some form of forecasting to be seen between them that the flakes were put into the water so that the basin was drowned because of such outbursting that at the end the basin went onto the bottom of the tub" (Ir. *Do bhí cómhrthuíocht éigin ar siúl aca insa chás gur chuireadar calaithí insan uisce go raibh an báisín a rachtaibh é bháite, agus i ndeire na mbeart do chuaig a' báisín go tóin a' tobáin*). On performing the witches' trick, one of the witches warns the others that it is still not enough, that "if they [the sailors] could stab the knife into the bow of the ship, the three of us would be dead and they be saved" (Ir. *Dá bhféataidís an scian a sháth a mbogha na luinge, bhíomairne 'dtriúr marbh, agus iad féin sábháltha*), and at the aftermath of the story the captain enters the house where they left them to find out that "the three women and the tub of water was in the middle of the house, the heads of the three drowned in the tub, and they stabbed with a knife" (Ir. *An triúr ban agus a' tobán uisce i lár a' tí 'ca, ceann a dtriúir thíos sa tobán, báite, agus iad sáite le scian*).

    The third account is innocent at the outset and very dramatic at the end. It is also about the sinking of a boat. However, the fishermen play no central part – the sinking of the ship takes place at the background of the story. But the magic (Ir. *diabhluíocht* 'witch-craft') which causes the ship to sink is performed by a little girl rather than by an experienced witch. She and her father are beside the sea, looking at the ship passing by. And all of a sudden, the little girl says:

    "Go deimhn (sic), a dhaid," ar sise, "d'fhéatuin-se an t-árthach san a bháth [d]á mhaith liom é." "D'fhéatha 'n-eadh?" as sisean. "D'fhéatuin," ar sise. "Arú conus?" ar sisean. "Taiseáin dom conus é." Do thóg sí bín a mocainsir agus do chroith sí é. D'éirigh stroim (sic) nách muar ná raibh a' t-árthach á báth. "Sea 'nis," ar sisean, "caifimid

déanamh leis a' méid sin," ar sisean. "Agus cé mhúin a' ceacht san 'uit, a lao?" 'r sisean. "Do mhúin mo mham 'om é," ar sise. "Is maith a' ceacht é sin a mhúin sí dhuit," ar sisean. "Ó," ar sise, "do bhfáfach sí siúd a bhfuil d'árthaí a' snámh [d]á mhaith léi é". "Tá go math," ar sisean, "ná bac aon árthach a bháth a thuile." (Ó Floinn 1935:132).

"Surely, dad", she says, "the boat could get drowned if I wanted." "Could it?" he says. "It could", she says. "Ah, and how?" he says. "I will show you how."

She took the shoe-lace out of her moccasin and she shook it. The storm raised and it went on until the boat was sunk.

"That's it", he says, "that is what should be done. And who taught you this trick, darling?"

"My mom taught me that," she says. "This is a good trick that she taught you [to do]," he says. "Oh," she says, "She can drown the ships that are sailing there if she wants it." "Very well," he says, "do not bother with any ship, drowning or flooding." (the author's translation)

When the father and his daughter safely arrived home, he did not tell a word of what had happened. When the mother and the child went to sleep, the man put the house on fire and burned them! From the present-day point of view, his actions are criminal; however, within the framework of the traditional Irish setting, the story had a practical aspect which could be explained from the point of view of the popular religious conscience: burning with fire was the only action possible to get rid of witches, even if you had witches in your own house![4]

In these accounts persons who cause storms are all female: in the first story it is an old witch, in the second one we are told of three women, and in the third one it is a little girl who was taught by her mother. The outcome of the three stories is altogether different: in the first one, such actions cause local people to be friendlier to the old witch on the account of fear of her; in the second, the three witches cause themselves to be stabbed through their own magic, and in the third one, the man burns both the mother and the child. The negative connotations implied in relation to the females in our stories can be linked with the prohibition associated with the fishermen's profession: the women were not allowed to take part in fishing: it was not lucky to take a woman on board; furthermore, it was unlucky to meet a woman when going out fishing:

Dá mbuaileadh aon bhean leo – rua ná dubh ná fionn – níor mhaith le cuid do sna sean-iascairí dul amach i n-ao' chor an mhaidean san.

If they met a woman – red, black-, or fair-haired – some of the older fishermen would not like to go out [fishing] at all that morning (An Seabhac 1928:135, 139, §19).

And, yet, there was an exception when the fishermen would enter into dealings with female witches by procuring favourable winds from them.

D1242.1.2 Wind produced by loosening certain knots

The method of raising wind by untying three knots in knotted string was very well known among the fishermen of Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia.[5] One of the printed versions available from Scotland links each of the knots with a particular wind and also obtains a distinct name:

> The first knot was called "Come gently" (*Thig gu fòill*) and when he loosened it as he left the shore, a gentle breeze sprang up. The second knot was called "Come better" (*Teann na's fearr*) and on its being untied the breeze became stiffer. As he neared the harbour, he out of curiosity loosened the last knot, the name of which was "Hardship" (*Cruaidh chàs*) (Campbell 1902:17-8).

According to D. Foran (1986:60) who recorded the versions of the Three Wind-Knots legend in Donegal, Antrim and Sligo, its geographic distribution points in a northern direction and a probable spread from Scotland to Ireland:

> I had been told by one of the men at the Rocket house previously... that there was a 'woman on the island could give you a wind, by tying three knots on a woollen thread.' They said they knew her name. She once gave the knotted thread to two brothers going to Islay. They untied the first coming home and breeze started, to get more they unknotted the second, and it grew stronger. To see what would happen, the fellow unloosened the third knot, and they said a gale was supposed to rise that blew them back to Islay. I believe that was true.

This fabulate, containing a version of the legend, was recorded on the island of Rathlin, co. Antrim, which is in close proximity of Scotland and the linkages made between the two countries are obvious in the story. Let us look at the version recorded in the South West Donegal location of Gleann Cholm Cille which has no connection with the maritime setting from a first glance, and occurs in the context of a land-based occupation: saving turf on a hot airless day:

> *D'iarr cuid acu air gáladh a thógáil go raibh siad ro-thé. D'fhiafraigh sé de fhear acu an rabh haincirsean póca aige. Dúirt sé go rabh. Tugadh an haincirsean póca dó. Chuir sé trí shníom ar an haincirsean, agus shín sé ionna ar an fhear arais é. "Anois," arsa seisean, "bain sníom amháin acu sin de, agus mur bhfuil bhur sáith gálaidh agaibh ansin, tig libh an darna ceann a bhaint de, ach bígí cinnte de agus na bainigí ar tríú sníom de!"*
>
> Some of them asked him to raise a wind to cool them. He asked one of them if he had a handkerchief. He said he had, and gave it to him. He put three knots in it and handed it back to the man. "Now," said he, "untie one

of these knots, and if you have not enough breeze, you may untie the second knot, but be sure not to untie the third knot!" (Ó hEochaidh, Ní Néill & Ó Catháin 1977:132-3).

The incident occurs in the story "Magic powers from a red-haired boy" (Ir. *Cumhachtaí draíochta ó bhuachaill rua*) which is telling us the tale of a magic trickster rather than of a witch selling winds. The powers that the protagonist was practising on his opponents had been received from "the red haired boy he had met on the hillside" (Ir. *an fear rua a casadh air fán chnoc*, ibid., 130-1), presumably, of the fairy folk. Hence the magic practice of causing winds by untying three knots was ascribed to the fairies, rather than to the witches, within a variant linked with the land setting. It is intriguing that the reflex of its connection with sea is registered in so far as the main hero performs a trick of bringing the sea in:

> *D'iarr siad ansin air cleas eile a dheanamh, agus thug sé an fharraige isteach i lár an urláir. Thúsaigh siad uilig ag léimní suas ar na ballaí, agus ar na suíocháin, agus tuilleadh ag reathaidh amach ag búirfí agus ag screadaí. Nuair a bhí siad uilig marbh chuir sé an fharraige amach arias.*
>
> They asked him to play another trick, and he brought the sea in on the floor of the house. They started to jump up the walls and on the seats, and others ran out shouting and screaming. When they were all scared to death he put the sea out again (ibid.).

And yet, this episode appears among the other within a longer narrative built upon many motifs. Earlier, we have dealt with such stories that were devoted to only one aspect or one legend. It is difficult to explain why the legend of the untying of three knots recorded in Donegal was devoid of connection with the sea and the fishermen, although legends of the sinking of the ship by means of the water tub occur in the immediate maritime context. The Donegal legend of the three wind-knots is, however, connected with the fairies. It is also the fairies who are practising *tobán an uisce* magical trick in the stories just cited above from the Donegal collection, and the witches in the Clare version. This brings us to concluding remarks and preliminary results.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this short contribution, we have dealt with a number of motifs. Having defined the concepts of memorate and contemporary legend within the context of Gaelic (both Irish and Scottish) maritime tradition, we have looked at appearances of various supernatural beings and objects from the sea (both animate and inanimate) that were indicators of the imminent drownings or storms. Such supernatural creatures included friendly males and repellent females, laughing children and jumping salmon, headless ghosts and phantom-boats. The fishermen who were serious about such apparitions were able to escape the storms or drownings that awaited all those who had no respect for the sea and its creatures. Also, the sea somehow was connected with the

witches who practised various techniques such as the 'drowning of the water-tub' (*tobán uisce a bháthadh*), or selling winds in the form of three knots tied in a string to the land-stranded fishermen. These legends tie together the sea, as both the garden to be cultivated[6] and the element to be afraid of, and the fishermen, as both the cultivators and the devotees, into a close-knit unit of a unique Northern maritime tradition on the periphery of Europe.

Notes:

1. This contribution is based upon the findings of the research project 'Stories of the Sea: A Typological Study of Maritime Memorates in Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic Folklore Traditions' supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, UK).

2. Among useful works in which various types of folklore texts (and contexts) found in Ireland are Ó Súilleabháin 1947, 1966; Delargy 1945; *Béaloideas* 1928–present. As far as the maritime folklore is concerned, one can recommend the following editions: Ó Catháin 1983; Ó hEochaidh 1965 (1967); in this contribution, the bulk of our examples comes from Ó hEochaidh, Ní Néill & Ó Catháin 1977.

3. B. Almqvist (1978-9: 104.9) listing a number of sources from Ireland, Scotland, Iceland and Faroese Islands suggested that this legend may be of Irish or Scottish origin. Further reading on the topic is contained in Ó Catháin 1983: 50. Most recently the story was analysed by C. Mac Cárthaigh (2010).

4. A similar version of this migratory story of the ship-sinking witch was collected by S. Ó hEochaidh (Ó hEochaidh, Ní Néill & Ó Catháin 1977: 181) in which the mother turns out to be a fairy. The reaction of father is rather different to the story cited above:
    -   "Who taught you to do such a thing?" he asked.
    -   " Who but my mother!" said she. "When you would be out working she would fill the big tub we have in the corner of the house full of water and put the butter dish in it and she would put the dish round about in it until it went to the bottom of the tub, and that is how I learned to sink the ship.
    -   "May the woods and the hills have yourself and your mother and may calamity seize both of you! It was a black day for me when I first met your mother," said Marcas angrily.

5. Foran holds that the wind-raising belief points to Sweden, but "it was in Scotland, however, with its manifold traditions of witchery and magical belief, that a legend took a firm hold" (Foran 1986:57). Accounts are given from Campeltown in North Eastern Scotland, Skye and Banffshire, according to which untying one knot raises the wind, second increases wind, third raises storm (*Revue des Traditions Populaires* 9, 1894, 381-2). And although E. W. Marwick claims that "the smooth-tongued crones who wheedled sailors into buying winds were very different from the solitary and malevolent creatures who went through the ritual of sinking the boat" (Marwick 1975:54), we believe that such difference is virtually non-existent in so far as the

witches could both lure the fishermen to buy the wind and get them drowned through this "purchase".

6. Agus bhí siad ag rá fad ó shin nuair a d'éiríodh seanduine... bhreathnaíodh sé amach ar an bhfarraige agus dá mbeadh an lá séite, d'abraíodh sé mar seo: "Tá bláth bán ar Gharraí Phaddy Lally inniu"*, 'And they said long ago... that there was an old man who used to look out to sea when he got up and if it was a stormy day, this is what he would say: "There's a white blossom on Paddy Lally's Garden today' (Ó Catháin 1983: 44-45). The following apellations for the sea have been recorded throughout Ireland: *Garraí Phaddy Lally* 'Paddy Lally's Garden' (Co. Mayo), *Gáirdín na Maighdine Muire* 'The Virgin Mary's Garden' and *Garraí an iascaire* 'The fisherman's garden' (Co. Clare), *Gáirdín an iascaire* and *Gáirdín cailm* (Co. Galway).

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Ծովային հուշագրերը և փոթորկի տեսիլքների ավանդական նկարագրությունը իռլանդական և շոտլանդական ժամանակակից բանահյուսության մեջ

Սույն հոդվածում հեղինակն անդրադառնում է իռլանդական և շոտլանդական ծագում ունեցող ծովային հուշագրերի բանահյուսական ժանրին: Նկարագրվում են գալլիական ծովային ավանդույթները, երբ ծովի միջից տարատեսակ գերբնական էակներ և անշուն¬ առարկաներ են հայտնվում, անդրադարձ է արվում փոթորիկ առաջ բերող հմայքներին ու կախարդական գործողություններին: Քննության են առնվում նաև ժամանակակից լեգենդներ, որոնցում պատմվում է փոթորկից առաջ ի հայտ եկող վատ նախանշանների, տեսիլքների մասին:

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